



Critical Reviews

Exhibitions

Cultural Studies

Interviews

Foreword

This fourth number of C# — the Christie's Education student-led on-line journal — reflects the unique interests, engagements and ambitions of those who have made the issue. As lecturers, tutors and teachers, our aim is to set in motion the conditions necessary for students to begin to gather together critical writing, features, essays and interviews, which map and explore the ecosystem that makes for contemporary art and its varied practices and positions. We offer advice and supervision, but mainly the opportunity to take ownership of the endeavour and shape the experience and outcome as theirs. Before you is the product of those efforts in C#15.

The cohort of students that comprise the class of 2014–15 are now, as I write, finishing up their course work and preparing the transition to forging their own professional practices and positions in the art world. We take pride that they may already appreciate such a shift as akin a move into the grand theatre of objects variously arranged in space and time relative to perceiving subjects that is the *lebenswelt*, or lifeworld. This is ultimately the dynamic horizon against which they will continue to learn and live, laugh, love and labour. We wish them well and thank them for being excellent representatives of Christie's Education.

John Slyce

Senior Tutor

Modern and Contemporary Art and Art world Practice

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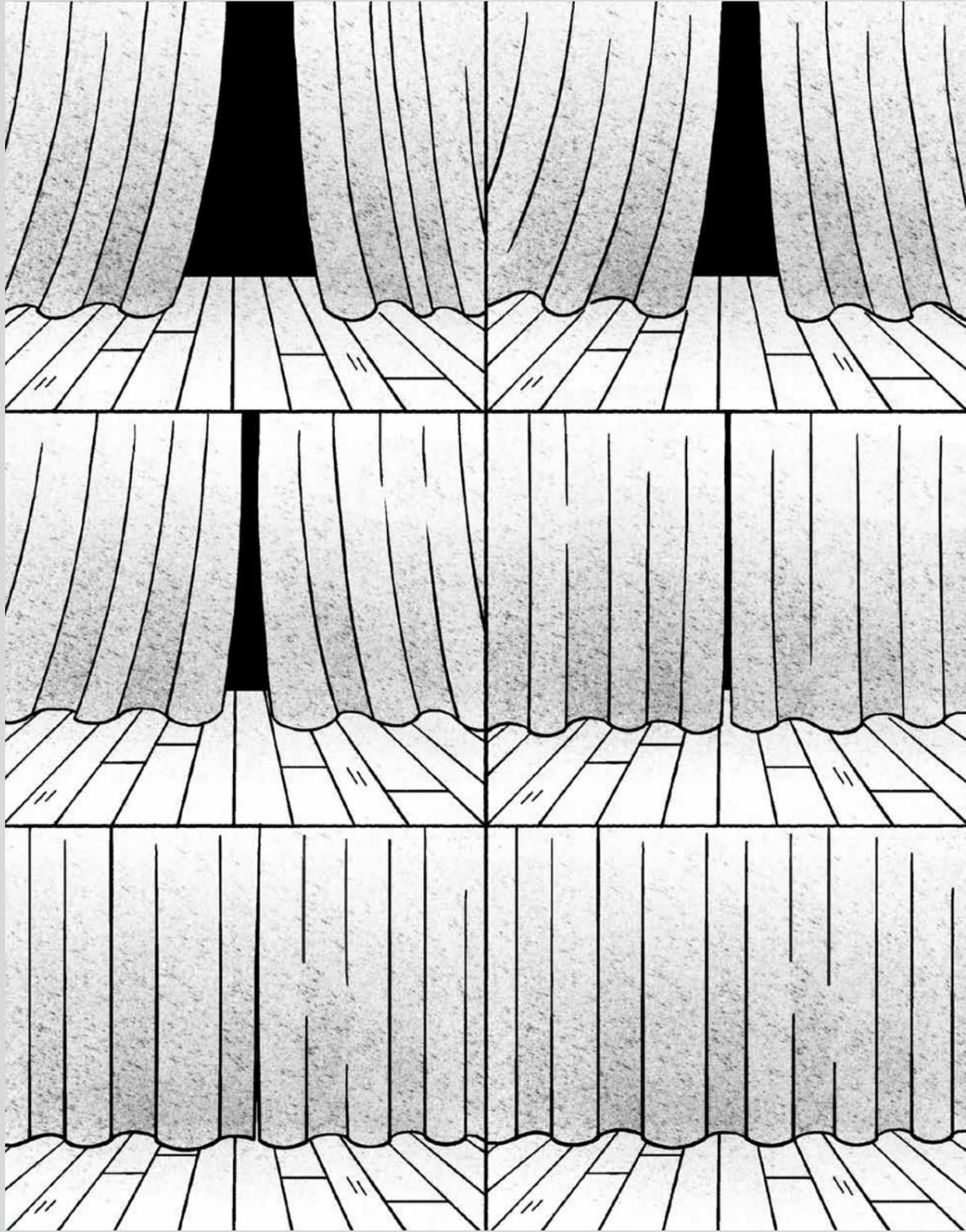
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Features

Guy on the Wall

by Kelsey Zalimeni

If you thought the walls of the art world couldn't talk, think again. The guards and guides of leading museums, art fairs, and biennials see and hear all — it's their primary duty. What's more, they're willing to relay their encounters and own opinions with this writer. Meet four sets of eyes and ears to art institutions, each just a Guy on the Wall.

1

The Guy

Exhibition team member, Australian Council.

The Wall

Australian Pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale.

The Brass

Bearing the official title of exhibition docent, Guy #1 has been selected through an arduous application and interview process conducted by the Australia-Council for the Arts. He is one of twenty-five successful candidates, native to Adelaide (where this year's representative artist Fiona Hall is also from). He also has his own artistic practice, which he describes as whimsical, child friendly and playful. His aim in the art world is to engage people of all ages and backgrounds with the work on display.

The Bull

When asked for candid thoughts on the exhibition, his canned reply contained about six 'incredibles,' each followed by a positive feeling, such as one of excitement, privilege, luck and

overall happiness to be a part of it. Albeit deflecting his true opinion on, well, anything... the peppy bloke provided plenty of useful and interesting information.

2

The Guy

Entryway Security Guard.

The Wall

Art15 Fair, Artistique Design (Qatar) Gallery Booth.

The Brass

Guy #2 approached me, pointing to a small green and red flag on a shiny pot-laden rickshaw piece at the centre of the floor. With a large grin, he told me it was from Bangladesh, his native country. He found work at the fair through Olympia's provided security staff. Throughout the week, he was responsible for working this event, in addition to the London Wine Fair next door — which he joked should be held in the same space, as art people are eternally inbibing and the Chelsea Flower Shop. His take on the art crowd:

'They're just like you and me except they buy things you and me could never dream of today.'

The Bull

To him, most contemporary art is just that — bull. However, when asked to name a piece he actually liked, he motioned to two large-scale 100 Yuan notes rendered in neon. His explanation was simple: 'because everyone likes money.'

3

The Guy

Patrolling Security Guard

The Wall

Art15 Fair, Mezzanine Level

The Brass

A most entertaining conversation resulted from jokingly offering an exhibition flyer to Guy #3, a muscly Welshman, who has been working in security for over twenty years. Immediately after receiving the paper, he crinkled it, saying, 'All art is way over my head; I don't get any of it.' He went on to criticise nearly every work in the building, save a couple of melting lollipop sculptures and a mural featuring David Bowie (even though, according to him, it doesn't look much like the singer.) Bowie is among the many music legends he's had the pleasure to protect and speak with across his career. He told me stories about his encounters

with Michael Jackson, Bono, Axel Rose, and Ringo Starr. The craziest shift he's ever worked involved tackling a murderer at a Jessie J concert, attempting escape after stabbing someone in the neck with a beer bottle. His job at this event was to remain alert for any of twelve notorious art thieves, whose faces he'd memorized, and to follow them around until they became spooked and fled.

The Bull

Like Guy #2, he felt that contemporary art wasn't important to people like him. 'Being from the Welsh valleys, you don't really study art or get any of this. I'm more into music, which is why I enjoy this job.' Looking down from the railing, he noted that the only crowd-worthy work was 'that pile of washing' by Kestutis Svirnelis... if it caught on fire.

4

The Guy

Visitor Services Staff Member

The Wall

Tate Modern, Poetry & Dream Level, Joseph Beuys display

The Brass

The fourth and final Guy was happy to pass his quiet morning shift with a gossip chat. Originally from Argentina, Guy #4 began working for Tate Britain, in Pimlico, through a temp agency

nine years ago. He more than happily moved to Tate Modern, when it opened in 2000. In his words, 'Tate Britain was so serious and stuffy... the art and visitors were both old.' He didn't study art, but estimated that seventy percent of his Tate colleagues did or currently do. Detecting my accent, he shared some juicy information about the true British opinion of Americans. 'What you assume they say is true; they believe all Americans are stupid and complain that too many of you are involved in the London art world.' Does he agree? 'The British are grey and grim like the weather here... Americans are open, friendly and really living life.'

The Bull

Cy Twombly's 'scribble mess' (by this he means a large red *Untitled*) is the bane of his existence. Many works in Tate Modern are displeasing and grotesque to him: 'I cannot see the art in these things.' He left me with a final comment as I thanked him for his time: 'You see, this is the thing... I could never have this conversation with a British person. It just wouldn't happen. They wouldn't think of having it. So, I am the one that should thank you.' ■



Joseph Beuys
Lightning with Stag in its Glare (1958-1985)
Courtesy of Tate Modern, London

Pierre Huyghe: Generating Antagonism Through Appropriation of Public Space

By Elizabeth Atkinson

Chantal Mouffe describes our social realm to be made up of sedimented practices, which conceal the original acts of their contingent political institution, thus being taken for granted as self-grounded.¹ For Mouffe, every social order is predicated upon the exclusion of other possibilities, thus generating a susceptibility to challenge.² She identifies such 'antagonism' within artistic practices, in their ability to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism spreads, bringing to the fore its repressive characters. This contribution to the construction of new subjectivities is not a total break but rather a proposition of an alternative model, crucial in our radical democratic project.³

Claire Bishop furthers this argument by developing a critical reflection on art as the site for a politics of spectatorship. Here, subjectivity is fundamental: 'all art presumes a subject — insofar as it is made by a subject (the

artist) and is received by a subject (the viewer).'⁴ For Bishop, subjectivity, as premised on 'the fictitious whole subject of a harmonious community,' must be replaced with the demand for 'relational antagonism' premised on a 'divided subject of partial identifications open to flux.'⁵ Installation art is thus the ideal model for generating such antagonism, as it 'insists on our presence to subject us to the experience of decentring.'⁶

A decentred subject experiences feelings of division from the public as a whole and is thus able to recognise alternate means of action within society, in order to go against political norms. Both critics emphasise the importance of collaboration — as a means of identifying and exploring alterity — between the artist and viewing public in the experience of installation art in a public space. Pierre Huyghe's appropriation of public space for his installation *Untilled* at Documenta (13) is an artwork that generates such antagonism.

¹ Chantal Mouffe, 'Art and Democracy: Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space' in *open*, (NAi Publishers, 2008), pp. 6–15, p. 9. Mouffe goes on to explain how the frontier between the social and political is unstable and requires constant displacements and renegotiations between social agents.

² *Ibid*, p. 10.

³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁴ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso, 2012), p. 12.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 79.

⁶ *Ibid*.

Huyghe offers up artistic ‘zones of differentiation,’ making visible possibilities for change and displacement in the organisation and presentation of his artworks. I have chosen to explore a piece, in which Huyghe collaborated with non-traditional actors — the non-human other — within the traditionally public space of a park, which he subtly subverts to explore ideas about ‘what could be.’⁷ He therefore challenges our understanding of not only what constitutes art in public space for the public and our means of collaboration, but also what constitutes existence within the universe.

*The place is enclosed. Elements and spaces from different times in history lie next to each other with no chronological order or sign of origin... In the compost of the Karlsau Park, artefacts, inanimate elements, and living organisms... plants, animals, humans, bacteria, are left without culture.*⁸

Huyghe’s work has often been discussed

alongside Object-Oriented philosophy. This mode of thought seeks to ‘discover the meaning which circulates among things, between what they are composed of and what they compose, in us, outside of us, with or without us.’⁹ It identifies all beings as both composite and compound within a natural cycle of relationships, rather than positing them within a hierarchy according to substance-related qualities.¹⁰ For philosopher Graham Harman, inanimate objects should be considered in their own autonomous reality, which always remains just outside of human grasp.¹¹ Within a system of global equality and identical identities, where all are neutral, all that can exist between the different things is a state of indifference.

The set of operations that occurs between them has no script. There are antagonisms, associations, hospitality and hostility, corruption, separation and de-generation or collapse with no encounters...

⁷ Katia Baudin, ‘Director’s Foreword’ in *Pierre Huyghe*, (Exhibition Catalogue for Huyghe’s Retrospective at the Museum Ludwig in 2014), v.

⁸ Pierre Huyghe, ‘Untilled’ in *Documenta (13): The Guidebook*, (Exhibition Catalogue, Hatje Cantz, 2012), p. 262.

⁹ Tristan Garcia, ‘What is Being Intense?’ in *Pierre Huyghe*, (Exhibition Catalogue for Museum Ludwig Retrospective in 2014,) pp. 205–213, p. 208.

¹⁰ In his ‘Response to Critics,’ (2011) Graham Harman contrasts Object-Oriented philosophy to Marxism, in which the exchange-value of entities is caught up in movements of congealed and alienated labour, grounding their use-value in their material properties. ‘Materialism and Speculative Realism: A Response to Critics,’ in *Modern Painters*, (March 2014), pp. 50–51, p. 50.

¹¹ Graham Harman, ‘The Third Table’ in *Documenta (13): The Book of Books*, (Exhibition Catalogue, Hatje Cantz, 2012) pp. 540–542, p. 541

*invisible and continuous transformations, movements and processes but no choreography.*¹²

In his outline of ‘post-humanism,’ Cary Wolfe describes how meaning, during the Renaissance period, became a form of self-referential recursivity used by psychic systems (consciousness) and social systems (communication) to handle overwhelming environmental complexity.¹³ Wolfe’s post-humanism forms a basis for deconstructing the ways we have presumed to master or appropriate the finitude we share with nonhuman animals in ways presumably barred to them — these pre-dominantly being knowledge through language.¹⁴ He attends to our way of being in the world by acknowledging that the human is a prosthetic creature, which has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality — nonhuman forms that have nonetheless made the human what it is.¹⁵ Human nature thus becomes a mutation, which is

ongoing and immanent, a system of ‘processes, which can never be entirely reduced to patterns or standards, codes or information.’¹⁶ This hybridisation of humans and animals in cultural evolution, questions the boundaries between nature and culture. Assuming human ‘culture’ to be an open system that has borrowed so much from nonhuman alterity and nature, the opposition between culture and nature can no longer make sense.

*The head is obscured by a beehive... Her headless body lies in the mud. The man moves through the day as an automaton.*¹⁷

The emergence of ‘theriomorphism’ in contemporary art practices has been seen as a suggestion of the human need for a dialogue with alterity, and simultaneously, the implicit suggestion of the acceptance of a non-self sufficient human condition.¹⁸ These issues concerning ‘the animal question’ (i.e. their importance to the

¹² Pierre Huyghe, ‘Untilled’ in *Documenta (13): The Guidebook*, p. 262.

¹³ Cary Wolfe, *What is Post-Humanism?* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2010,) xx.

¹⁴ Ibid, xxi. Wolfe seeks to remove meaning from consciousness, reason and reflection and recontextualises human experience in terms of the entire sensorium of living beings.

¹⁵ Ibid, xxv.

¹⁶ Ibid, xxviii.

¹⁷ Pierre Huyghe, ‘Untilled’ in *Documenta (13): The Guidebook*, p. 262.



Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled* (2011–2012), Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth
Photo by Pierre Huyghe



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human condition and their rights in society) came to prominence in the 1990s, with the identification that human parameters are not the only measure of the world. Every living being is an intelligent autonomous centre that relates itself to reality in an entirely unique way. Progressive consciousness of being (within) a hybrid ecosystem, hosting bacteria and genes common to different animal species, has made man more inclined to reconsider other animal realities.¹⁹ Alongside this proliferation of theoretical thought, the 1990s also saw a burst in the number of international art biennials.²⁰ Typically held in a public space, for the general viewing public, inviting collaboration between the artist and viewer, these are spaces crucial to the presentation and development of alternate modes of thought and practice within the art world, hopefully extending to life as a whole.

'Pierre Huyghe's work for DOCUMENTA

(13), *Untilled* (2012)' could be found in the composting area of Kassel's Karlsau Park.²¹ As a biotope,²² the piece took its location within the composting area as both its literal and figurative model. An environment created for its inhabiting natural forms — its organic processes drawing nourishment from decomposing matter — it is indifferent to the histories and significations of its participatory objects. It is indifferent to the experience of its viewing subjects, and indifferent to their difference. It enacts a 'destratification' of traditional human categorisation and replaces these with an alternate method of organisation.²³

Huyghe collaborated with nonhuman life — a dog, a swarm of bees, flowers, ants, fungi and bacteria — implicating the importance of all composites within this compound. By replacing logical identity with organic identity, *Untilled* seeks to understand species' aptitudes and constructs a set of possible behavioural

relationships without trying to make non-human forms of life play or perform.²⁴ Rather than creating an artwork that decentres the viewer, so as to transcend the present moment, Huyghe instead recognises the fundamental equality, or neutralisation amongst all beings. Existing within an organic process, indifferent to one another, but living in the present moment regardless.

Traditionally a communal leisure space, Karlsau Park has been appropriated by the artist and nature, creating a place of separation, free from traditional attractions. This is no longer a place for us.²⁵ Despite Huyghe having overseen every step of the site's creation, it appears as though 'ravaged by an earthquake.'²⁶ The dug up ground forms craters and hills that are contaminated by industrial residues, and vegetation is smothered with fragments of asphalt and concrete slabs. Huyghe presents us with a world destroyed by both natural and human actions. The appearance of familiar

objects — a white hound (with a magenta leg), an oak tree, (uprooted and exposed to rot and decay,) a bench (overturned so we can't get comfortable,) and a sculpture (we must stand warily away from to avoid the sting of its beehive-head,) creates a simultaneously destroyed and destroying spectacle. This challenges our expectations and provokes contemplation about the destruction man is capable of causing, not only upon the natural world, but even those spaces he cultivates for himself. The neo-classical bronze nude woman reclining is now cast in concrete, with a swarming beehive installed on her head. The disfigured statue creates a human/animal hybrid.²⁷ Her indeterminate presence is used to unsettle, not affirm, human subjectivity. We see the powers of nature overcoming those of mankind.

The colony pollinates aphrodisiac and psycho-tropic plants... A fluorescent dog in the shade of concrete slabs weans a puppy. A Beuys oak

18 Theriomorphism being the ascription of animal characteristics to humans (anthropomorphism) (OED), p.14.

19 Karin Anderson and Luca Bochicchio, 'The Presence of Animals in Contemporary Art as a Sign of Cultural Change,' in *Revista D'Humanitats*, Vol. 6, (December 2012) pp. 12–23p. 18.

20 This 'Biennial Sprawl' has been attributed to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Barbara Vanderlinder, 'Biennial Sprawl' in (eds.) Brigitte Franzen, Kasper König and Carina Plath, *Sculpture Projects Muenster 07*, (Exhibition Catalogue, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007), p.336.

21 Pierre Huyghe, 'Untilled' in *Documenta (13): The Guidebook*, p. 262. The word 'untilled' describes a piece of land not prepared and cultivated for crops. (OED)

22 An area of uniform environmental conditions providing a living space for the specific assemblage of plants and animals. (OED)

23 Andy Weir, 'Myrmecochory Occurs: Exhibiting Indifference to the Participating Subject in Pierre Huyghe's Untilled (2012) at Documenta 13,' in *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics*, 10, (2013), pp. 29–40, p. 33.

24 Garcia, p. 212.

25 For Robert Smithson, the park can no longer be seen as a 'thing-in-itself' but as a process of ongoing relationships existing in a physical region — the park becoming a 'thing-for-us.' Robert Smithson, 'Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape,' in *Artforum*, (Feb. 1973), pp. 62–68, p. 65.

26 Emma Lavigne, 'The Garden of Forking Paths' in *Pierre Huyghe*, (Exhibition Catalogue for Huyghe's retrospective at the Museum Ludwig in 2014), pp. 214–17, p. 214.

27 This hybridity was extended when *Untilled* was displayed in a gallery environment. Now, the statue was heated, so as to eerily reach human body temperature. The statue itself has also been exhibited alone, being re-named *Untilled (Nude woman reclining)*. Huyghe emphasises how he draws upon art historical traditions and then subverts them.

has been uprooted.²⁸

In contrast to the indeterminate human presence of the sculpture, we see the concrete task of pollination performed by the bees. They have a crucial function within this space. In addition, as typical symbols of wisdom, Huyghe seems to question whether the bees' swarm mentality, collective thinking, and decentralised coordination are possible alternatives to human individualist thought.²⁹ In contrast, the spider, which spins its web from its own excrement, embodies the individualism of the modern, but with a self-sufficiency that we can only envy. The dogs' simple olfactory interactions remain incomprehensible. However, Huyghe creates a space for speculation through his inclusion of conditional elements. The bright pink leg of the dog and the hybrid human form, make

the impossible possible, allowing the imagination of the viewer to run wild in this untameable system of 'what could be.' We can imagine a world not driven by paid labour and product, but one of cyclical equality, neutralization and indifference through collaboration.

*Myrmecochory occurs, ants disperse their seeds. The blind crush them. There is no colour, no odour... It is endless, incessant.*³⁰

What Huyghe presents us with in *Untilled* is the endless growth of uncontrollable elements. This is an on-going process, involving all things within (his) biotope, which happens whether the viewer chooses to view or participate in it, or not. The inherent indifference of Huyghe's work challenges Claire Bishop's claims to a participatory regime of art by actively producing a non-subject dependent reality. The experiencing of

²⁸ Pierre Huyghe, 'Untilled' in *Documenta (13): The Guidebook*, p. 262. This dog is ironically named Human, perfectly complementing Donna Haraway's remark that the naming of animals is done by humans in their acknowledgement that animals are 'lesser humans', and not because they become somebody in their own right. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 205. Huyghe selected several highly particular plants, each of which yields substances used in witches' brews or to make drugs: the extremely toxic foxglove (which contains digitalis) has beautiful pink and white flowers, and soon the deadly nightshade and jimson weed will bear their poisonous fruits as well. Cannabis as well as rye, a harmless grain that is often home to ergot, a fungus, from which LSD can be extracted, also grow here. Coca plants cannot, however, be seen; it's illegal to cultivate them, even in an art context. Achim Drucks, 'Loss of Artistic Control: Pierre Huyghe's Biotope at dOCUMENTA', in *ArtMag (2014)*. Again, Huyghe presents means for the viewer to alter their consciousness, breaking down their ordinary notions of the self and the world through drug ingestion.

²⁹ Since the time of Plato, bees have been identified with the Muses, as symbols of wisdom, in their production of honey and wax – one nourishing, the other enlightening the mind. They present an alternative to the dominant notion of man as thinker and producer. Lavigne, p. 216.

³⁰ Pierre Huyghe, 'Untilled' in *Documenta (13): The Guidebook*, p. 262.

this work never implicates the viewer, who instead watches over the process with no control over it — it has no interest in you as a macro-organism. 'The public enter this space by chance, nothing there is addressed to them, and what happens there is indifferent to their presence.'³¹ Huyghe relinquishes his artistic control to his non-human collaborators, and in this act, we are invited to do the same.³² Just like the compost he uses as his model, this biotope nourishes contemplations on animal perception and relationships, the differences between life and art, and man's position within such systems. He creates an enclosed space of alterity, yet open to the public, where they can go to witness an alternate means of societal organisation, yet remain indifferent to its processes.

On viewing this work, one may experience a 'decentring,' but this is not the work's focus, which continues its complicity with material processes. The work

is not reduced to a stage for experience, activation or tension; rather, it is an extended ecological plane of antagonisms, without addressing the subject to feel, resolve, interpret or be disrupted.³³ However, indifferently sharing specific places or times causes the identities of things and beings contained within to break down and dematerialise. The container becomes a growing medium, where new events and encounters occur, and new art takes root and thrives.³⁴

Huyghe's indifference thus sets to work within and against the regime of participatory practice.³⁵ He presents an environment within a public space, from which the public can come and go, just like our non-human collaborators. This is a space where one can fully detach themselves from all their duties and responsibilities, their relationships, their beliefs and just exist in the present and its intensity.

They are faced with the elements from lost orders

³¹ Huyghe in Robert Storr, 'Pierre Huyghe: Singular Writings' in *Artpress 404*, (2013), pp. 41 – 44, p. 43.

³² Similar to this experience of estrangement the viewer feels from Huyghe's work, the artist describes how *Untilled* developed independently of him. He claimed that he came across its location by chance, and that '*Untilled* wasn't done for dOCUMENTA... but the frame of dOCUMENTA allowed it to occur.' Pierre Huyghe in Sky Goodden, 'Pierre Huyghe Explains His Buzzy Documenta 13 Installation and Why His Work Is Not Performance Art' in *BlouinArtInfo*, (August 30 2012.)

³³ Andy Weir, 'Myrmecochory Occurs,' p. 36.

³⁴ Christopher Mooney, 'Pierre Huyghe' in *ArtReview*, (October 2013.)

³⁵ Andy Weir, 'Myrmecochory Occurs,' p. 33.

coming together. Nothing is written and there is nothing to interpret. Each person sees their own world, like so many separate but juxtaposed Umwelts.³⁶

This radical decentring of the subject — as an indifferent collaborator, autonomous in existence yet as composite within a compound or ecological space — generates humility, self-reflection and the contemplation of new systems that can be practised when we navigate back to public space, as we know it. #

³⁶ An 'umwelt' being an environment world consisting of the set of precepts and determinations that form the specific worlds of all living species and which can remain radically indifferent to one another. Huyghe in Storr, p. 43.

Postmodern Vision and Beyond: the Gaze, Desire and Perversion

By Edward Sheldrick

Peter Osborne writes that Postmodernism was not a rupturing but a continuation of modernism.¹ The notion of vision was a key concept within Postmodernism, and indeed, already in modernism, but a kind of re-vision occurred, especially surrounding the notion of spectatorship.

Theorists make a distinction between the gaze and the look, suggesting that the look is a perceptual mode open to all, whilst the gaze is a mode of viewing reflecting a code of desire and supremacy.² Jonathan Schroeder notes, 'to gaze implies more than to look at — it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze.'³ The gaze can be argued to be a literary term for a kind of looking, but perhaps more pertinent word to describe it would be 'watching.'⁴ A word in everyday use would be 'stare.'⁵ Gaze differs from opticality, as it is a double-sided term. There must be something to gaze at and

there must be something to gaze back. An artwork can perform like a human being and seem to gaze or be gazed at. Therefore, the gaze and how effective it is as a phenomenon is based around a network of relationships between the subject and the other.⁶

Hans Holbein's *Ambassadors* (1533) throws the harmony of vision off balance. When one looks at the painting, it first gives you a sense that you are in control of your look; however, one then notices a blot at the bottom of the canvas. One can only make this out by looking at the painting at an angle, from the side. From this point, one begins to see that the blot is, in fact, a skull staring back. By having the object of our eye's look back at us, we are reminded of our own lack, of the fact that the symbolic order is separated only by a fragile border from the materiality of the Real.⁷ The symbols of power and desire in Holbein's painting (which show wealth, art, science,

¹ Peter Osborne, *Aesthetic Autonomy and the Crisis of Theory: Greenberg, Adorno, and the Problem of Postmodernism in the Visual Arts*, (London, 1989) pp. 31–50.

² Caroline Evans & Lorraine Gamman, *The Gaze Revisited, Or Reviewing Queer Viewing*, (London, 1995), p.16

³ Jonathan E Schroeder, *Consuming Representation: A Visual Approach to Consumer Research*, (London, 1998) p.208. As I will discuss later this is not always the case, the subject who is not gazing can also be in the position of power .

⁴ Robert Nelson & Richard Shiff, *Critical Terms for Art History*, (Chicago, 1996), p. 212

⁵ Such terms and the emergence of theories about the gaze are evident of the ideology of the theorists themselves who in their formal discussions of art try to focus on the visual and the wider social issues rather than an overload of linguistic theory

⁶ Anne D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History* (London, 2012) p. 104

⁷ In Lacanian psychoanalysis this is one of the main orders that structure human existence. It exists beyond the symbolic and is experienced within the context of trauma

ambition) are thus completely undercut. As Lacan puts it, the object 'reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of death's head.'⁸ Therefore, art for Lacan was about a lack, 'a work of art always involves encircling the thing, it helps society bear this void,' it represents the thing's presence as its absence.⁹ For me this is evident in Holbein's painting, as the absence of any straight on form of the skull ultimately gives it more of a presence, as one has to look at it from the side due to the anamorphosis.

Through the gaze the object, the painting, or the device used, has a kind of power, as 'the gaze is now viewed as the property of the object rather than of the subject.'¹⁰ One would assume it was vice versa, with the subject holding all the power over something that is not the subject — the object has connotations of being lower.¹¹ As the subject gazes at the object of its perception, the object gazes back at it from a point that lies outside the field of subjective

perception. Consequently, the inherent nature of the gaze is traumatic due to the irreducible lack of harmony between the 'gaze qua object'¹² and the subject's eye. Far from being the point of self-sufficient self-mirroring, the 'gaze qua object' functions just like a Holbein blot that blurs the transparency of the viewed image.

Slavoj Zizek writes in *'Looking Awry'* about the importance of desire in relation to spectatorship. He posits that when one looks with a perspective that is purely objective, it is a 'disinterested look' and so it has no form. He explains that one has to look with a fascinated look, which is permeated by desire, thus the look is 'from aside.'¹³ It is awry and this is when things can be seen clearly and distinctly.¹⁴ Lacan argues that there is an intimate relationship between the 'objet petit a' which is the object of our desire and what coordinates our desire and the gaze.¹⁵ At the root of desire is misrecognition of fullness, where there

is really nothing but a screen for our own narcissistic projections. Desire is intrinsically a heterogeneous mix of conflicting impulses, which one tries to satisfy biology itself. Again, like with the Holbein, it is the conception of lack, which is at the heart of desire that ensures we continue to desire. One can never be satisfied. However, because the 'objet petit a' is ultimately nothing but a screen for our own narcissistic projections and to come too close to it threatens to give us the experience specifically of the Lacanian Gaze; the realisation that behind our desire is nothing but our lack, as alluded to before, and the materiality of the Real staring back at us. Desire 'takes off' when 'something' (its object-cause) embodies, gives positive existence to its 'nothing,' to its void.¹⁶ What is really underneath is a semblance of something, perhaps an anamorphic object and beneath this is a void. However, through desire, 'something comes from nothing' even though it is a pure semblance that triggers rudiments,

which effect one's life and actions; it triggers, 'a whole chain of consequences which regulate our material, effective life and deeds.'¹⁷ An example cited in Zizek's text was paper credit, which was highlighted in the writings of William Shakespeare. Paper credit was used before standardised bank notes¹⁸ and I think that it is a clear example of semblance, a promise of true value as 'real' money. In this way, 'something comes from nothing,'¹⁹ as it is essentially just a promise outlined on paper.²⁰

The gaze has strong connotations with voyeurism and thus perversion. An example of a kind of filmmaking, which is worthy of note, as it disturbs and distorts the subject and object interrelation in pornography. Firstly, in terms of filming, it is shot objectively as it ultimately shows everything. One is forced to look at the whole and the viewer occupies a perverse and unnatural position. Therefore, according to Zizek there is no gaze back and the antinomy

⁸ Jacques Lacan edited by Jacques Miller, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (London, 2004), p. 92

⁹ David Macey, *Dictionary of Critical Theory*, (London, 2000) p.98

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.155

¹¹ I am loosely reminded of the Hegelian Master and Slave dialectic, as one would assume the master holds power over the slave but ultimately the master is dependent on the slave. The object turns into the subject in this dialectic but the object I am discussing is not human, it is beyond subjective perception.

¹² Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry*, (MIT Press, 1989) p. 39

¹³ Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry*, (MIT Press, 1989) p. 33

¹⁴ Perhaps the example of the anamorphosis of skull is too literal an example when one tries to think how this could relate to artworks in particular.

¹⁵ which threatens to undo all desire through the eruption of the Real

¹⁶ Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry*, (MIT Press, 1989) p.34

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ Such paper credits were often called, 'unsealed bills,' and their status was debated as being the same as a verbal contract, although technically legally binding, the ability to prove beyond any reasonable doubt has obvious difficulties (George Chalmers, *An apology for the believers in the Shakespeare-papers: which were exhibited in Norfolk-Street*, p. 325).

¹⁹ Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry*, (MIT Press, 1989) p.34

²⁰ Money as a concept is paradoxical and can convert anything to the opposite, as Zizek writes it, 'procures legs for a cripple, makes a handsome man out of a freak, etc' (Zizek, *Looking Awry*, p.35). Such writing is in line with Marxist notions, 'the transformation of all human and natural properties into their contraries, the universal confounding and distorting of things: impossibilities are soldered together by it' (Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, The Power of Money*). In excess, there can be a surplus value and thus surplus enjoyment in line with Lacanian thinking.

of eye and gaze is lost because of its inherently perverse nature. This goes beyond the literal and obvious perverseness as it, 'goes all the way and shows us all the dirty details' but the spectator is forced a priori²¹ to occupy a perverse position. Through the watching of a pornographic film intended for a wide but ultimately secret audience, one shares the gaze of the erstwhile watchers, yet one does not know who they are. This is something, which Zizek highlights as extremely unpleasant and obscene, as our gaze has already been the gaze of the other²². Lacanian theory suggests that the coincidence of gazes defines the position of the pervert. Through this overlap and coincidence of our gaze with that of the other, we have a kind of short circuit between the two; instead of being on the side of the viewed object, the gaze falls into ourselves, the spectators. Thus, the image on the screen contains no spot, no sublime mysterious point from which

it gazes at us. It is we who are gazing stupidly. Contrary to the commonplace preconception that in pornography the other (the persons shown on the screen) is degraded to an object of our voyeuristic pleasure, Zizek argues that it is the spectator, who effectively occupies the position of the object. The real subjects are the actors on the screen trying to rouse us sexually, while we, the spectators, are reduced to a paralyzed object-gaze. I want to argue that the gaze is the property of the object, the skull in Holbein's piece gazes at us from aside and through the viewing of pornography the viewer is watching from the periphery and through desublimation, is transformed into an object reliant on the subject in the film to fulfil his or her desires.

Pornography thus misses the point of the object-gaze in the other. As Lacan writes, 'as soon as the gaze appears the subject tries to adapt himself to it,' but how can this be if the actors are the

21 *A priori* knowledge is independent of experience (for example 'All bachelors are unmarried'). Galen Strawson has stated that an a priori argument is one in which 'you can see that it is true just lying on your couch. You don't have to get up off your couch and go outside and examine the way things are in the physical world. You don't have to do any science' (Tamler Sommers 'Galen Strawson Interview: Believer Magazine' p. 1)

22 Slavoj Zizek compares the sharing of the others gaze in pornography to the film 'Manhunter' from 1986 where the detective shares the gaze of the murderer by looking at the same movies he did. Only by sharing the gaze of other by engaging with the perverse sadistic content, the detective is able to arrive at a solution. (Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry*, p. 36–37)

subjects and the spectator is doing the gazing? This has precisely the form of a missed, failed encounter. That is to say, in a 'normal,' non-pornographic film, a love scene is always built around a certain insurmountable limit; at a certain point, the image blurs, the camera moves off or the scene is interrupted. We never directly see the complete sexual act, as we do in pornography. Rather than a sublimation,²³ a desublimation occurs through the act of watching pornography where there is no rechanneling of sexual drives into something creative. Instead, it is expressed in a crude way, such as through raw forms, such as aggression and perversion.

It can be argued that due to the rise in pornography and even due to the persuasions of the media about material sexuality,²⁴ this has had a psychological

impact on some of the proletariat. Perhaps, the darkest manifestation of this is Jacques Lacan's²⁵ concept of the 'jouissance'²⁶ (the French noun meaning enjoyment) that strips down sex to a narcissistic, ego driven act and a material thing.²⁷ Judith Butler relates sex to an, 'ideal construct which is forcibly materialised through time.'²⁸ One goes 'beyond the pleasure principle' which involves 'terrible promises,' which are never kept. It evokes an eroticised death-drive. Lacan used the phrase, 'ce n'est pas ca?' (Is that no it?) to explain why it is such a dark cycle of repetition coined as 'Widerholungszwang' by Sigmund Freud. Failure is a necessary part of this signifying structure and the fantasy created in conjunction with the objet petit a. 'Psychologically,' one is, 'stuck

23 Sexual and aggressive drives are channeled into something creative such as making art. Sigmund Freud wrote about how this was pertinent for Leonardo da Vinci as he converted his sexual curiosities into a spirit of intellectual inquiry. However, it is argued that such a sublimation of libido he was unable to fulfil his sexual aims thus resulting in a stunned adult sexuality.

24 The increase sexualisation in consumer society using sexualised imagery to sell products (both female and male)

25 I know the term was used well before Lacan's usage in his seminars from 1953–4 where it refers to Alexandre Kojève's version of the master-slave dialectic where the work of the slave provides objects for the master's enjoyment. In the 1960s the term has more sexual implications (David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 2000, p. 210).

26 David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 2000, p. 210.

27 I am aware that 'jouissance' has various connotations, which are not just sexual such as intellectual and emotional that revolve around the idea of something intense, overwhelming and in some way meaningful. The spiritual Bernini such as with his representation of St Teresa depicts the moment of 'transverberation' or penetration by the word of God. She was experiencing a female jouissance that went beyond the male jouissance of the phallus. For the purpose of my point related to sexual acts I will explore the sexual implications of the French noun.

28 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London, 1993) p. 32

in [a kind of] abjection,'²⁹ manipulated by society. As Žižek writes, human life is never 'just life,' humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life in excess, passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things.³⁰ Pleasure, in the form of an idealised experience, is described as an obstacle to *jouissance*, in that it leads to a reduction in tension and a return to a stable condition, a kind of 'homeostasis.' *Jouissance*, however, takes the subject to an extreme state, where the erotic can border on death.

Žižek discusses the fact that once the sexual act is shown, the film as some kind of creative work cannot be taken seriously. He says that, 'as soon as we show it... we have gone too far.' If the filmmaker wanted to make a love story, some kind of sublime thing, once the sexual act is shown, in essence, 'we are [just] struck with a vulgar groaning and fornication.' Therefore, we must not 'go to the end'³¹ by

showing the details of the sexual act as the story will no longer be taken seriously. In many cases, a ridiculous story, some kind of hyper reality with a very exaggerated rough plot is played at the beginning of the scene but it is only a matter of time before the sexual act occurs. Consequently, there exists an impossible harmony between the narration and the explicit inverting of the normal subject to objects roles we are so used to. #

²⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London, 1993) p.32

³⁰ Hal Foster, *Postmodern Culture* (London, 1985), p.118

³¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (London, 2006) p.61

Reviews

London

Carsten Höller at Hayward Gallery

by Florence Bell

10 June–6 September 2015
Hayward Gallery

I was greeted at the entrance of the Hayward Gallery and Carsten Höller's exhibition, *Decision*, by a girl being sick. Instantly demonstrating the powerful effects Höller's work can have on the human body — both mentally and physically.

Decision is Höller's largest survey show in the UK to date and features some of his most recognised works. From a distance you are able to see his large, silver, spiral slides, weaving their way down the outside of the gallery. Upon entering the Hayward, you are told to leave bags in the lockers and to only carry things that can fit in your pockets, followed by a health and safety warning. As a first impression it all seems very serious and cautious, which is a huge contrast to what you find inside.

You are instantly immersed into Höller's work (as long as you do not suffer from claustrophobia) by being plunged into darkness and a small metal tunnel. Once within, you have no idea of where you are going, where you are or who else is in there with you. Sight is lost and you have to depend completely on hearing and touch. It is a clever transition from outside reality into the topsy turvy world within. Suddenly, you are stumbling into the open space of the Hayward Gallery and confronted by a large spinning axel with

mushrooms attached — mushrooms are a regular feature in Höller's work, mainly because of his interest in the psychological effects they can have on the brain.

As you begin to walk around the first floor of the gallery you become aware of the long and twisting route you actually took to get into the exhibition and have the amusement of hearing fellow visitors beginning their own hesitant and clumsy journey through its dark passages. From there on out it is just an amalgamation of different and new experiences. Pink and white pills litter the floor and flashing lights consistently catch your eye. A room which consists of *Two Roaming Beds (Grey)* — which are exactly what they say on the tin — lazily roll about the floor just in front of a long bench lined with rows of goggles and headphones. These goggles consume your vision and you are presented with a 3D film of some trees. Of course this is not just what it entails, as with everything Höller, you begin to realise it is not quite what it seems and that the trees are vibrating. Suddenly the screen splits so that each eye is watching the same image but warped in different ways.

The second floor of the exhibition leads you into an even more interactive and immersive experience. As you climb the last few stairs your eyes are

immediately attracted to Höller's *Two Flying Machines* located on the Waterloo Terrace. In order to reach this terrace you must pass through a corridor of TV monitors, all talking constantly at you and then enter a mirrored room where his recognisable *Dice (White Body, Black Dots)* is located. Just off to the right, was my personal favourite experience — the *Upside Down Goggles*. I have always wanted to try these and they did not disappoint. A very friendly woman cheerily tells you before you put them on that you may experience feelings of nausea and dizziness, you must sit down when you put them on, and please ask for help if you feel you cannot cope. Having attached the goggles firmly to my head it is safe to say the feeling is more than disorientating. As you wander tentatively around the Belvedere Terrace of the Hayward, peoples legs and the floor become the sky, while you apparently are walking on clouds. The only thing that can be viewed (seemingly) as the correct way round, is the Hayward Gallery sign, which they have cleverly turned upside-down so it appears normal through the goggles.

The final piece of the exhibition is Höller's *Isomeric Slides*. These two silver slides are used as the exit for the exhibition — a fun filled and childish finish to the show. Although it is hard to pull

yourself away from all the highly entertaining creations within the exhibition, it is also difficult not to want to leave. Although you must ensure you have tried and seen everything you want to, for once you go down the slide you are not allowed back in.

Both adults and children crowded into this show, each having an equally great time. Höller's work, as usual, creates a space of interaction and play. Children grin madly as they run up the stairs to exit via the *Isomeric Slides* whilst parents giggle nervously as they attempt to walk in their *Upside Down Goggles* or dangle from a flying machine. Whether young or old, it really is an exhibition for all the family. #



Carsten Höller, *Flying Mushrooms* (2015)
Installation View *Carsten Höller: Decision* at Hayward Gallery, London (2015)
Courtesy of the artist, Produced with HangarBicocca, Milano
Photo by Linda Nylind

Alexander McQueen at Victoria & Albert Museum

by David Yu & Alex Mteini

14 March–2 August 2015
Victoria & Albert Museum

After a success at the Metropolitan Museum in 2011, *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* has finally arrived in London, hometown of the most influential, innovative and radical fashion designers of his generation. The show, curated by Claire Wilcox, is the first and largest retrospective of the late designer's work to be presented in Europe. It extends from his first 1992 graduate collection up until his unfinished 2010 runway show.

Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty is beautifully set, immediately conveying upon entrance, the notion of fashion as spectacle. The show is arranged thematically rather than chronologically, which has both positive and negative effects on the exhibition. It is successful in creating an artistic approach to viewing McQueen's work and unveiling the nature of his inspiration, but lacks a sense of chronological evolution in his practice. The exhibition focuses on a range of his chosen influences and implementing 'romantic' as a prefix to each one of them, including Romantic Gothicism, Romantic Primitivism, Romantic Nationalism, Romantic Colonialism, and Romantic Naturalism.

What is particularly strong in the show is the importance of content and message in his work, which the curator

reiterated by accompanying each design with a quote. One that comes to mind is McQueen's call for female empowerment, stating, 'I want people to be afraid of the women I dress.'¹ Indeed, the extravaganza of the pieces — the meticulous embroidering, the strict tailoring — is characteristic of McQueen's femme fatale designs, which have become symbolic of power, not vulnerability.

Yet, the most inspiring and magical room is the centrepiece of the exhibition — the 'Cabinet of Curiosities.' Set in a dark cube-like room, with almost a hundred elements, the viewer is completely immersed, left to fully explore McQueen's great mind. It displays key moments and hundreds of accessories, along with TV screens, playing former runway shows, and an interplay of unrelated sound recordings: women panting, water streams, and cracking. The videos document the sensibility and bodily movements of the women who wore his creations, akin to performance art. All of these elements are sequentially organised, making walking through the exhibition feel like a meditational and reflective experience.

Despite the artistic aims of the show's curation, this supposed retrospective fails to portray McQueen's life and cultural inspirations. The first



Alexander McQueen, *The Cabinet of Curiosities* (2015)
 Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London

room starts off with McQueen's earlier designs and intentions of dressing women to make them look fearful. The disconnection is immediately felt as we are then propelled onwards to his later inspirations, rather than experiencing the events that led to his enrolment at Central Saint Martins. The first room of the exhibition, London, entailing his early designs at his school, immediately begins to lose the plot of McQueen's background and inspirations from the transition to the adjacent room — *Romantic Gothic*. Other than mentioning his father as a London cab driver and McQueen's Scottish heritage, *Savage Beauty* lacked biographical information on the designer, omitting information on the abuse his infamous brother-in-law inflicted on the designer's sister and close friends. The V&A also failed to contextualise the general events which were taking place in Britain; at the time when he produced his most innovative designs (e.g. the Highland Rape collection, armadillo shoes, etc.)²

Earning the nicknames, 'l'enfant terrible' and the 'hooligan of English fashion,' Alexander McQueen designed avant-garde yet controversial outfits for the time. McQueen's designs are seen as more than just fashion. They transcend into artworks. Nonetheless, the spontaneity and

edginess of his works are lost in the midst of this overly structured exhibition. At times, the show felt more like an enchanting boutique, perhaps aiming to inspire strollers to window shop. The organisation of the exhibition into romantic themes deprives the show of McQueen's biography and the events occurring in Britain during the 90s.

Rooms within the exhibition bear minimal relationship to one another, preventing a smooth and transitional experience. The exhibition fails to convey the evolution of McQueen's aesthetics over the years. The final room of the show — *Romantic Naturalism* — had no relation to Alexander McQueen's last design before his death, creating an unfinished end to the show.

McQueen's sense of dare was a critical component in his career. His intricate and outlandish designs were the driving force for revolutionising the fashion industry. McQueen's collections were intended to create a statement about the female body. Despite its pitfalls, the V&A's artistic and curatorial approach emphasised that McQueen's creations were not just fashion statements, but artworks in their own right. *Savage Beauty* is a spectacular exhibition, full of emotion, theatricality and intense creativity,

leaving you at a loss for words and a deep sadness, knowing that such an inspiring artist and incredible talent has departed our world. #



Alexander McQueen, Installations at the '*Romantic Naturalism*' gallery room (2015)
Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London



Alexander McQueen
Hologram of Kate Moss in *Pepper's Ghost* Courtesy of Mesmer

References

- 1 'I design clothes because I don't want women to look all innocent and naïve. I want woman to look stronger. I don't like women to be taken advantage of. I don't like men whistling at women in the street. I think they deserve more respect. I like men to keep their distance from women, I like men to be stunned by an entrance. I've seen a woman get nearly beaten to death by her husband. I know what misogyny is, I want people to be afraid of the women I dress.' (Alexander McQueen, 1995).
- 2 McQueen's *Highland Rape* collection in 1995 stirred controversy in the fashion industry. The collection was interpreted as being misogynistic and for glorifying rape. However, the title of the collection makes reference to the Highland Clearance. It is rather a critique of the English's violation of Scottish sovereignty.

Freedom and Truth: Theaster Gates at White Cube

By Laura Yakemchuk

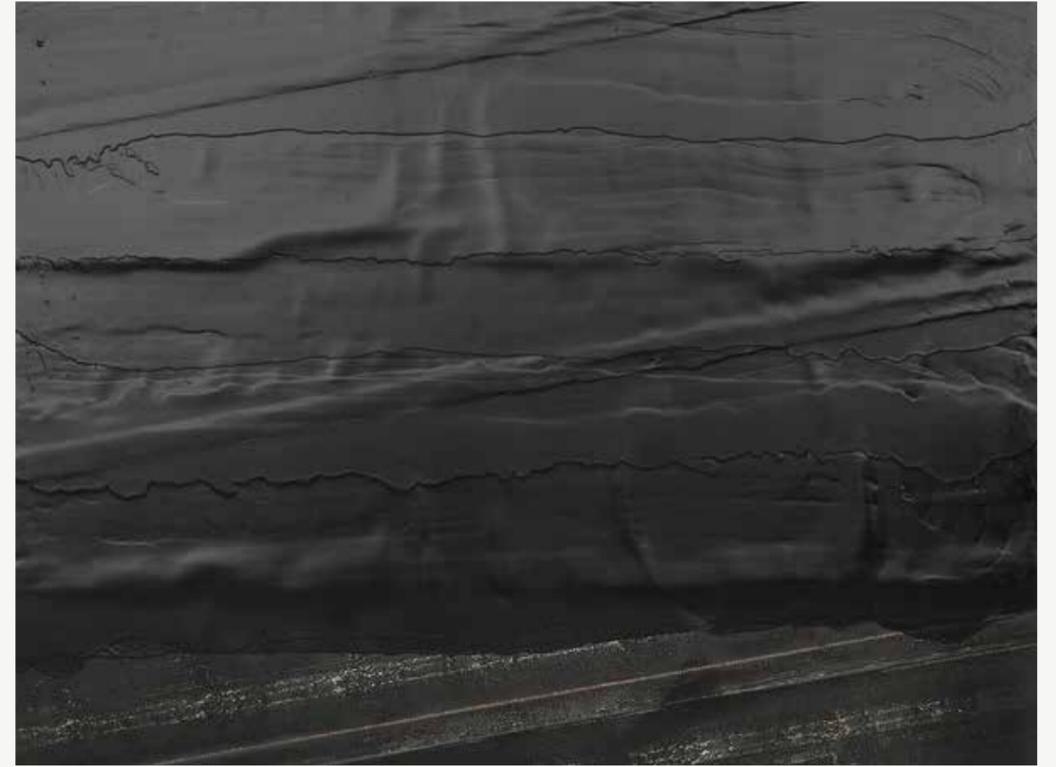
29 April–5 July 2015
White Cube

As a trained potter, producing pots, plates, and other objects that serve basic necessity, Theaster Gates has a well-developed intuitive and creative handling of the humble and the unassuming. His work at the current White Cube exhibition, *Freedom of Assembly*, exemplifies these qualities in both materiality and in context, and yet, this is an artist who has gained some serious star power. The last question of the evening at April's 'Tate Talk' featuring Gates affirmed this. A bedazzled young arts student-type sitting beside me in the front row wanted to put aside the big issues of politics and social reconstruction for a moment, and asked Gates to elaborate on his personal life and daily routines. To a bit of good-natured snickering from both the audience and Gates, we all learned that he drinks tea instead of coffee and does pull-ups. We have become enthralled with Gates' art, his passion, and his purpose. At a lecture in 2014 at the University of Chicago, where he is a professor in the Department of Visual Arts and director of Arts and Public Life, he proposed that his artistically-energised projects of urban revamping in Chicago's South Side (referred to collectively as the Dorchester Projects) are maybe something that the term 'art' just can't encapsulate any longer. This runaway train of cultural and social revolution that he has set in motion is perhaps deserving of classification beyond any linguistic frames that we presently have at hand. For now, however, we need not get hung up on titles, but rather look to the elemental character of many kinds of truth — freedom, labour, and love — in his latest work.

From the pieces made of salvaged gymnasium floors, such as *Ground Rules (Free throw possibility, 2014)*, which bear a striking similarity to Mondrian, to the lithe, Brancusi-esque pillars made of discarded peg-board, Gates razes the hauteur in the art historical canon of modernism to the ground. These artworks do not merely resemble masterpieces, but suggest the possibility that they are just as worthy. For a show with the fairly solemn underpinnings of civic freedom and restoration, the refreshingly simple materiality of the pieces allow us to leave hushed reverence at the door. We are in the face of the quotidian, albeit re-imagined into the quite extraordinary. The honesty of good, solid labour (namely



Theaster Gates, *Ground Rules (Free throw possibility)* (2014)



Theaster Gates, *Diagonal bitumen* (2014)

that of the roofer — Gates' recently retired father, Theaster Gates Sr., was a roofer), as well as the conflation of art and life, run through the show in often poetic form. But unlike the original union of art and life that the avant-garde initiated, the difference here is that real people, real communities, and a real father-son relationship are at the heart of it. And they matter.

In *Cabinet Work* (2015), various odds and ends typical of your average hardware store are encased in glass vitrines that would more likely protect prized artworks of great value. Instead, we find the leftovers of a beloved South Side shop in Gates' own community, now dismembered because bigger companies moved onto the block. In the series of huge, black canvases of tar and rubber, from 2014, the textural and tonal complexity of their visceral, gestural strokes is a product of traditional roofing practices (also the name of one of the works). It's impossible not to think of Abstract Expressionism, and this is arguably one of Gates' points. He created these pieces with his father, and this collaboration between tradesman and artist resulted in many boundaries beginning to blur. A natural solidarity of technique, style, and even aesthetic impact, between the roofer's canvas and the artist's emerge from these painted wood panels. Suddenly the wood of the canvases seems more suitably perceived as tree bark, as some-thing hewn, unadorned, and universal, like the very wooden tiles in *Tiki teak* (2014).

All of the work has this bare and beautiful feel to it. There is poignancy in this show, but it is not affected, nor saccharine. The black tar paintings stand out. A son, now adult, is finally acknowledging and championing the skill and craft of his father, and discovering that his artistic practice began as a kid in moments of effort and heat and work whilst roofing with his dad. This is why the pitch of their darkness is not cold. ^{AW}



Theaster Gates, *Cabinet Work* (2015)

Peter Kennard

by Anne de Geus

14 May 2015–30 May 2016
Imperial War Museum

Peter Kennard himself picks us up at the entrance of the IWM for a private tour of his temporary exhibition. While he leads us the quickest way up, via the back of the museum shop to the elevators, we get a small glimpse of the war machinery on display: canons; tanks; fighter jets, hanging off the ceiling. Not knowing anything about the technicalities of war (nor being very interested in them) I have no clue what most of these items are. However, even I — not being a young high school boy, lost in historical war novels — cannot help but be impressed. It does not take much imagination to hear the sounds of engines or see planes searing through the sky. One can only begin to imagine where these machines have been.

Peter Kennard's exhibition, his first retrospective, is on the third floor. We are first confronted by six large works leaning against the wall. These are digital copies, over which the artist has painted in oil. Kennard tells us that he is not too bothered about the medium. He does not think that using a copier is inferior and, with the oil paint, it makes for a good result. The works are about as tall as a human being and each shows an unglamorous-looking frayed medal, of which the disc is replaced by something else, such as a wounded human head or a soldier's helmet, with his number of kills chalked on it. The works were initially intended to hang on the walls, but Kennard preferred the effect they had when leaning. In this way, they resemble headstones. The message is clear; what are these medals worth? Are they as honourable as they are made out to be? It is an edgy move, juxtaposing these works with the IWM's actual display of medals, just one floor above.

Every room presents a period in Kennard's life. The first room is hung with the prints he made while at the Slate School of Art and immediately after. Produced during the time of the Vietnam War, using layers of available war and protest imagery, Kennard tried to express the distress the war caused at the time. It is this urgency that Kennard has maintained throughout his career.

Following on from these, the next room displays the collages Kennard



Peter Kennard at the exhibition *Peter Kennard: unofficial war artist* at the IWM
Courtesy of John Slyce



created for various newspapers and magazines. There are politicians playing poker with missiles instead of chips — missiles protruding from the mouth of a gasmask and a skeleton body that has the quaint mushroom shaped nuclear explosion for a head. It is hard not to be reminded of the collages made by the German Expressionists. By showing the original, handmade works — clearly cut out, with glue visible — next to the copied press versions, the process of production is clearly highlighted. Collages like these are not used in papers anymore, supposedly because people might mistake them for a non-manipulated picture, or so the reasoning goes.

The next room is filled with prints printed on the financial pages of news-papers and on the wallpapers ripped to shreds, seemingly by hands printed on them. It is however in the last room one comes to the pinnacle of the exhibition; a work especially made for this exhibition. In the small room Kennard has, by means of iron sticks, stuck imagery on the wall, creating a 3-D collage. Numbers on translucent plates leave shadows on the images. On the railing around the collage one recognises these numbers, this time with some text (1.747.000.000.000 as a shadow on the collage; 'In 2013 1.747 trillion dollar was the military expenditure worldwide' as a text on the railing). The numbers are shocking and it is hard to imagine anyone looking at the numbers and thinking 'fair enough, war comes at a reasonable price.' On the top of the collage are protest plates, it is almost like the viewer is invited directly to stand up and start protesting war.

This seems to characterise the whole exhibition. Kennard's work does not pose pacifism; it screams it.

And on my way out via the main hall of the IWM, looking down at all the impressive war materials I cannot help but wonder: 'Is this really necessary?' #

Christopher Williams : The Production Line of Happiness

by Sheelan Atalla

29 April–21 June 2015
Whitechapel Gallery

A retrospective of the work of conceptual photographer Christopher Williams, currently on at the Whitechapel Gallery, sees the traditional construct of an exhibition turned on its head to create one of the most exiting and interesting shows in recent times. Gone are the go-to gallery aids of wall texts, paper literatures explaining the exhibition concept and even the very titles and dates of the works on display. Williams demands something further from the audience, beyond merely looking at the pieces. He requires an in depth interrogation which then allows connections and conclusions to be reached. His work could be described as elusive, probably no coincidence for a conceptual artist. The clues are however provided within the pieces, so depending on preexisting knowledge, each audience member could take something quite different away.

On offer is an array of beautifully shot images, fifty altogether. These photographs are then hung at a significantly lower height than is standard in such an exhibition. This in itself completely changes the viewing experience. Also throughout the exhibition we get a real sense of the gallery as a space, as something which has a life and which has written its own history with the passing of time. The gallery is indeed as much a part of the exhibition as the prints themselves.

We bear witness to the artist's musings on the image as advertisement and within this the manipulability of photography as a medium. Six red apples set against a backdrop of a brilliant blue sky, looking entirely perfect, better than good enough to eat. Then as we move closer and look more intently we see that one of these apples is dented, tarnishing the perfection that once existed in our mind. Why? Here we see Williams articulate his concerns of the manufacturing of images, a harsh reminder of the imperfections that exist on the seemingly perfect models before the interception of Photoshop. The lighting, the use of colour filters and framing are as important here as the image of the apples. This draws our focus to question the medium itself. What is thought of as a truthful representation of its subject matter is something altogether different, almost sinister.

The show has travelled to Whitechapel from MoMA, New York, the last leg

on a three-stop tour. Throughout his illustrious career, Williams has been concerned with how photographs are made and indeed displayed. We are presented with images of the camera itself, deconstructed into its constituent parts, and this then packaged and presented as an artwork.

On first glance, the show is something of a puzzle, both in its display and the images themselves. A handsome rooster in a side on, advertising pose, sunlight gleaming through leaves, an old printing press and a beautiful girl with a Kodak colour chart visible in the image, although missing the yellow that is the colour of the towel she wears, all placed side by side in the vast expanse of the white walls of the gallery space. We start to notice ominous presences in some of the works, a disembodied hand, dark shadows cast by beautiful flowers. Included are tiny scars on the model's hands, usually victim of the airbrush, patches of dirt and visible safety pins on the lingerie in a fashion shoot. The point is starting to become clear, right? And here is the intrinsic beauty in Williams' work, the point is always present, it just requires in depth looking and a level of interpretation in order to find it.

I have mentioned the design of the show as a vitally important feature, although this requires further explanation. Without prior knowledge, it may appear as though you have accidentally entered into the space before the hang was complete, before the finishing touches that make for a glossy art experience had been added. Several walls in the gallery have been painted a vibrant, slightly sickening shade of vivid green referencing here the stripe paintings of Daniel Buren. On other walls are violently sliced sections of wall texts from previous shows, and some of the temporary dividing walls have in fact been brought in from Williams' previous shows and then placed here, their inner structures visible.

The catalogue continues the subversion of the show. There are very few images within it, and of those that are present, none are in fact of anything that actually appears in the show. The bright green colour that has been used to paint some of the walls is also used for the cover of the book. Different colours were used for the show in Chicago and

New York. Within the catalogue curatorial essays are interspersed by reproduced posters for his previous exhibitions as well as photographs by other artists, such as Thomas Struth and an illustration from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, and film stills from works by Jean-Luc Godard. In fact the title of the show is taken from a 1976 documentary by Godard.

The traditional aspects of the gallery show are punctured even further in that Williams has curated it in reverse chronological order. The ground floor is dedicated to newer works whilst the older works are found on the upper floors. One work called *Source* shows four different photographs taken on the same day in 1963 just months before John F. Kennedy was shot. Williams re-photographed these images from archives presenting the image of a man that was always being stalked by the press. We never actually see his face, his back always turned, part of a large crowd of men. There is an ominous presence in these works, a man who is distant, departing and somewhat beyond our reach, yet at the same time close, as he will continue to seem due to his importance in history. It should be said that this is the oldest work in the show, dated 1981.

The Production line of Happiness is a show that is quietly referential, coded with messages, and requires a certain degree of knowledge to be penetrated by the audience. The environment he has created is skewed and peculiar and focuses our attention on the medium of photography itself, the truthfulness of images that we are confronted with in everyday life. One definitely gets the sense that we are embarking on a journey into the mind of Williams himself. We are entering into his conceptual world where nothing is quite as it first appears. ■

Shirazeh Houshiary at Lisson Gallery

by Nivedita Poddar

22 May–4 July 2015
Lisson Gallery

Shirazeh Houshiary's eighth solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery, London, titled *The Smell of the First Snow* runs from the 22nd of May to the 4th of July. The title itself is indicative of the notion of purity, calm and natural beauty, which is linked to the concept of self — an idea that is intrinsic to Houshiary's artistic practice — untied from all social, cultural and political boundaries. Snow, commonly perceived as a visual element, becomes a smell. The title prepares the viewer for a sensory experience that transforms throughout the exhibition.

Iranian artist Shirazeh Hoshiary was born in 1955, and spent her childhood in Shiraz, before moving to London in 1974. She completed her BA at the Chelsea School of Art, and now lives and works in London. She has participated in numerous important exhibitions, such as Magasin-Centre National d'art Contemporain, Grenoble (1995); University of Massachusetts Amherst (1994); Camden Arts Centre, London (1993); Musée Rath, Geneva (1988); and The Venice Biennale, as part of a group exhibition, in 1982. Her work is collected by significant museums, such as the Tate and MOMA, but is not yet as fully commercially recognised by her contemporaries. Her presence in the art world is much like her work — quiet but sure. Nominated for the Turner Prize in 1994, she began her career as a sculptor, and since then, has moved to painting and installation.

For Houshiary, travelling beyond the three-dimensional world we live in, and the sensory experiences it brings with it, is vital. Despite her use of Arabic script, she refuses to be associated with a specific religion or culture, and insists on the independence of her artistic self. Her works vibrate and resonate energy, giving way to a reality that exists beyond the current world.

Lisson Gallery is renowned for representing significant minimal and conceptual artists. The galleries comprises three main rooms, all with natural light and are minimalist in style, with white walls and large expanses of space. This show comprises a combination of paintings, sculptures and drawings. Houshiary treats the walls and windows as essential to her pieces, combining them with the natural light, to add

theatricality to the exhibition.

Two significant works in *The Smell of First Snow* which propel and steer the show, are the steel sculptures: *The Allegory of Sight* and *The Allegory of Sound* (2015). Each sculpture is placed at a pivotal point on the gallery walls and painted in either deep black or stark white. The steel is moulded by Houshiary to form sinewy, flowing lines that create a dramatic effect with the play of light and shadow on the gallery walls. Curators at Lisson Gallery state, 'it is an experiment in synaesthesia.' The lighting on these



Shirazeh Houshiary, *Rend* (2015)
Pencil and pigment on black Acquacryl on aluminium, 50 x 50 cm

pieces creates an effect of two and three-dimensionality, and their resounding energy creates an un-seeable movement across the gallery and out towards the rest of the artworks, traversing between the physical and immaterial worlds.

Chord (2015), an artwork placed directly opposite *The Allegory of Sound*, is made of five individual prongs that weave as they ascend towards the top. When simply looking at the piece, it is difficult for a viewer to realise its connection with music. However, the work's descriptive title and placement transforms it into a piece of music. A mirror inside the piece alongside the multiplying and whirling strands from the top, create a synergy within the whole piece.

Sylph (2014), a twisted tubular pot-like sculpture, made of translucent purple lead glass tiles, invites the viewer to come and experience the artwork by moving around it. Almost mimicking a cyclone, the sculpture then begins to change colour and transform itself into an illusionary shape. *Chord* is not the first of such sculptures in Houshiary's artistic practice. In fact, it represents a gradual development and transformation from her first such sculpture *The Extended Shadow*, created in 1994, which was made of gold leaf. She went on to create a similar piece, *Breath II*, in 2004, which was installed in the Battery Park in New York.

Painting is a central feature of *Smell of the First Snow*, just as it is within her overall practice. She brings immaterial canvases into being by articulating a metaphysical reality. She overlays the canvas with several layers of pigment, before drawing and writing on it with reinforced vigour, creating a halo-like effect that gives the illusion of the presence of another dimension. For twenty years now, Houshiary has been penciling in two Arabic phrases, which translate into 'I am' and 'I am not,' forming the equal of an uninterrupted yin-yang on the canvas. Houshiary says that the words embody the duality of existence: 'the words overlap, the being and not being, life and death, this relationship leads to infinite possibility.'¹

Deluge (2012), a diptych of myriad shapes and colours, still appears as a

subtle, powdery visualisation until one is close to the canvas and notices, minute detailing that encapsulates the entire canvas. Innumerable tiny words — in addition to purple and blue powdered pigment — form the image, which resembles a cloud from far away, while immersing the viewer in its endless structural detail. Its dual panels mirror each other, creating an infinite collection of atoms.

Moreover, *Reverie* and *Rend* (2015) are unique and diverse in their colour palette, when juxtaposed against pieces in the exhibition that use sublime colours. *Reverie* is a bright and luminous turquoise, while *Rend* comprises of bright splashes of red. Houshiary's canvases are reminiscent of other-worldly weather.

In the slightly larger canvases, brilliant blues and stark whites are interrupted. *Zero* (2014) evokes an energy and possesses a numinous quality, as colours merge and explode into purple, while in *Seed* (2014), the cloudy pigmented formations are dissected by streaks of pink. Smudged fingerprints suggest the presence of the artist, again highlighting the importance of the self within the canvas. As the viewer moves closer, it magnifies revealing penciled in words and symbols, and a structure as fluid as language forms a part of the canvas.

Through painting, drawing and sculpture, combined with the minute structure of language, the personal touch of fingerprints and the plethora of colours, Houshiary conveys the energies of the universe through her artwork. 

Jo Baer: Towards the Land of the Giants

by Julia Rudo

10 April–21 June 2015
Camden Arts Centre

As if a portal into another dimension, a spiraling flurry of stones recedes into the abyss of a black hole, propelled by a figure from classical antiquity. This mystical vortex, forming a sort of eye, is layered with the constellation of Orion the Hunter, and grounded by a bowing crow atop a megalith, alongside the artist herself in the painting, *In the Land of the Giants (Spirals and Stars)* (2012).

The central focus of the show is Baer's most recent series, *In The Land of the Giants*, including both paintings and drawings, which she began working on in 2009 and debuted at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 2013. The six paintings from this series are featured in the survey at Camden Arts Centre, all showing the influence of her time spent in the Irish countryside of County Louth in the 1970s. Specifically, the dominant image in the compositions is a megalith in rural Ireland, called the Hurlstone, getting its name from an old folk tale about a giant who threw a smaller stone at the rock and bore a perfect hole in its centre. Now, this mythical setting acts as a sort of threshold between the past and the present, the real and the supernatural.

Within the exhibition, skulls, stones, astrological and classical references are just several relics used which are embroiled in myth. Baer's paintings, presented as nailed canvases directly onto the wall, suggest cave paintings. The work presents mystical illustrations of a simultaneously familiar yet abstracted place, in a time other from our own. Depicting a figurative reference to the green pastures and megalith clusters of the landscape, Baer's thin application of oil and child-like naivety of form suggest a fantastical and imaginative alteration of the real, a sort of nostalgic approach recalling the crayon and construction paper drawings of childhood.

A sense of wandering and discovering has been, and continues to be, integral to Baer's life and artistic practice. Having moved from the west to the east coast of the United States, departing the New York art world in 1975 to live in Ireland, and finally settling in Amsterdam for the past 30 years, Baer's compositions seem brusque and subjective, a



Jo Baer, *In the Land of the Giants (Spirals and Stars)* (2012)
oil on canvas, 1.5 x 1.5 m. Courtesy of Camden Arts Centre and Valerie Bennett

series of collaged fragments to form a sort of abstract within a figurative context. The paintings are not clear; they are figurative and yet also abstracted, and in a way imitate how our own perception functions — a collection of fragments pieced together to make connections among our experiences.

This exhibition attempts a specific survey of Baer's practice, drawing a line from her early works as a pioneer of Minimalist art in New York City in the 1960s, through her figurative experiments of the 80s and 90s, and into the recent bolder and more illustrative aesthetic of *In The Land of the Giants*. Including early minimalist works, with their blankness of form and experimentation of composition, connections can be made with such a work as *Dusk (Bands and End Point)* (2012), a sort of uncharacteristic monochrome, intricate in the detailed fragments of a sunset and flamed megaliths, yet featuring a predominately empty grey void. As with the early minimalist works, experimenting with the peripheries of the composition as a means of creating illusion, Baer demonstrates a continued interest in utilizing abstraction within a figurative context, in order to lead the viewer's gaze across the canvas.

Beginning with the recent series, the show moves into the early minimalist works and ultimately concludes with a room of large-scale compositions from both the 1980s and 2000s. It is a non-linear timeline of Baer's found interest in figuration, and simultaneously, her retention of abstract tendencies. ■



Installation view of Jo Baer's *Towards the Land of the Giants* at Camden Arts Centre (2015)
Courtesy Camden Arts Centre and Valerie Bennett



Inventing Impressionism: Paul Durand-Ruel and Modern Art Market at the National Gallery

by Aurelia Clavien

4 March–31 May 2015
The National Gallery

Rare is a show that manages to transport its viewers back in time with such poetic elegance. After debuting at the Musée du Luxembourg, Paris (9 October 2014–8 February 2015) and before ending at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (June 24–13 September 2015), *Inventing Impressionism: Paul Durand-Ruel and the Modern Art Market* has brought flocks of visitors to the National Gallery, London. The curators of this collaborative exhibition, who each represent one of the three institutions, have successfully transformed themselves into stage designers in this theatrical rendition of renowned Impressionist art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel's life as a modern collector (1831–1922).¹ All that is missing is the man himself to walk us through each chapter of his inspiring story.

The number of previous exhibitions on Impressionism is immeasurable. Some have juxtaposed it against other artistic movements or focused on a geographical manifestation of the movement, such as the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art's *American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life* (10 May–24 July 1994), while others have highlighted the work of specific Impressionist figures, such as *Cézanne & Pissarro: Pioneering Modern Painting*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (26 June–12 September 2005).²

None, however, have managed to recount the captivating tale of the man behind this innovative group of modern artists, who they themselves confessed saved them from starvation.³ Until now, that is. If you're desperate for a fresh new take on Impressionism and a true

- 1 Curators of the show include Sylvie Patry, chief curator at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Chris Riopelle and Anne Robins, curators of the National Gallery, London; and Joseph Rishel and Jennifer Thompson, curators of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- 2 For example, currently, an exhibition at the Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin, presents a comparison between Impressionism and Expressionism. Briefly, *American Impressionism and Realism* adopted a 'revisionist approach' in the study of both movements, placing them as continuities of each other, rather than opposites, and reintegrating them into American art history, wherein both groups sought to 'capture the energy and vitality of a modern America' (Trevor Fairbrother, 'Reviewed Work: American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life, 1885–1915, by Barbara H. Weinberg,' *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 33, no. 4 (1993), 15–16). *Cézanne & Pissarro: Pioneering Modern Painting*, on the other hand, quite straightforwardly traces the artistic interaction between both artists, covering the period between 1863 and 1885 (Richard R. Brettel, 'Pioneering Modern Painting': The Cézanne and Pissarro Exhibition', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 147, no. 1231 (2005), 680).
- 3 Citation loosely translated from French. Speaking of Charles-François Daubigny, Claude Monet stated, 'It is thanks to him, who having met me in London during the Commune and seeing me quite embarrassed, if not enthusiastic about several of my studies of the Thames, that I was introduced to Mr. Durand-Ruel, without whom many of my friends and I would have died of hunger' (Pascal Bonafoux, *Du côté des peintres*, In: Diane de Selliers (ed), *Correspondances impressionistes* (Paris: Editions Diane de Selliers, 2008), 33).

visual feast, then attending *Inventing Impressionism* is a must.

Inventing Impressionism features approximately 85 artworks, including key Impressionist masterpieces, some of which have never been shown before in the UK. Interestingly, the majority of the works have been borrowed from leading European, American and Japanese collections, which Durand-Ruel helped create.⁴ This attests to the extensive research conducted by the curators, notably helped by the Durand-Ruel archives.⁵

The curtain is lifted to reveal the lavish interior of Durand-Ruel's apartment on the rue de Rome in Paris. Two beautifully embroidered Louis XIV chairs and the stunning French Door — which he had commissioned from Claude Monet — function as effective props to help set the domestic scene.⁶ Additionally, a blown-up black and white photograph on the back wall forms a bridge between the past and present, offering a glimpse into how the

dealer displayed works in his own *grand salon*. We not only become aware of the high regard he had for his close family but also his extended one — the many artists he supported. This is beautifully embraced in the several portraits of himself as well as his children, painted by his close friend Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

In the second room of the exhibition, we are taken on a journey through Durand-Ruel's beginnings in the art market, tracing his inspiration from a revelatory encounter with Eugène Delacroix (1855) to a brief stay in London (1870–1), where he uncovered the audacious modern subject matter of Monet and Camille Pissarro. Around the corner, we also stumble upon Edouard Manet's *The Salmon* (1869) and *Moonlight at the Port of Boulogne* (1868), in almost the same manner as Durand-Ruel had in January 1872. We are informed that these two pictures inspired the art dealer to take a major risk in investing in Manet, who did not have an established market at

⁴ 'Press Release: Inventing Impressionism', The National Gallery, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/content/conWebDoc/3560>, accessed 22 June 2015, n.p.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The six Monet paintings — of various flowers, including chrysanthemums and lilies — featured on the French Door demonstrate the artist's main sources of inspiration, namely Japanese prints and the 18th-century French decorative arts. To a large extent, commissioning this door represented a marketing strategy. Durand-Ruel yearned to demonstrate how Impressionist works could be displayed and appreciated within a domestic space. In fact, starting off with a replication of his home cleverly illustrates the extent to which he strived to inspire new clients ('Paul Durand-Ruel: Making the Impressionists', *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/durandruel>, accessed 22 June 2015, n.p.).



Édouard Manet, *The Salmon* (1869)
Shelburne Museum, Vermont/Courtesy of the National Gallery, London

the time. Squinting at these two very different genres, we attempt to comprehend what it was that so ‘dazzled’ him.⁷

The curators’ use of the term ‘New Painting’ to describe the early stages of the Impressionist movement is a bold one. And yet, it cleverly illustrates the key role Durand-Ruel played in the formation of the Impressionist circle. On the one hand, he perceived the talent and heavily invested in the work of future members of the circle, including Alfred Sisley and Edgar Degas, whose work he tended to buy in bulk. On the other hand, he also revolutionarily sponsored his artists by paying them monthly salaries for future work, settling their bills in moments of struggle and even offering moral support, regardless of their political or religious leanings.⁸ This is also communicated through numerous citations by artists declaring their gratitude to Durand-Ruel, which can be observed on the walls throughout the exhibition. The works displayed in the

third room represent his early purchases from 1872, and together, harmoniously demonstrate how he helped nourish, through publications and exhibitions, this leading movement in modern art.

As we move onto the next room, we are confronted with the near-dissolution of the Impressionist circle. Although he was often backed by financier Charles Edwards, Durand-Ruel was forced to stop purchasing additional works by the group, due to a banking crisis and a surplus of unsold stock, in 1874.⁹ He, however, continued to show his support by lending pieces to the First Impressionist Exhibition. Two years later, he was more at ease and able to rent out his galleries, where the group hosted the Second Impressionist Exhibition. It is now hard to imagine — with copies of Monet’s *Water Lilies* constantly seen on the covers of diaries and other merchandise — that Impressionism was once a controversial movement. Yet, reaction and sales at their first two shows were

poor. Despite this, both events solidified the ties between the Impressionists and Durand-Ruel’s gallery.

The curators’ aim to situate Durand-Ruel as not only the father of the modern art market but also modern curating becomes particularly evident in the fifth room, where we are presented with a case study of his monographic exhibitions.¹⁰ Benefitting from Durand-Ruel’s elaborate PR skills, Monet was notably able to present his works together before they were split amongst collectors at the two solo shows of 1883 and 1892. What particularly captures the eye in this room is his *Sequence of Poplars* (1891), consisting of five out of the original fifteen paintings that he initially displayed at Durand-Ruel’s gallery in 1892. We are shown how the works function as a whole and the manner by which this was made possible through Durand-Ruel’s gallery space, as many of the paintings had found purchasers before the exhibition opened. This is again adequately

reflected by the National Gallery, which has taken the works from collections around the world.

After Durand-Ruel was once again economically affected by a crash in the market, in 1884, he decided to move his efforts abroad, starting with New York and later Germany, changing the game not only for himself but for the Impressionists as well. The paintings featured in the sixth room demonstrate the journey he undertook to reach different groups of collectors. For example, Monet’s *Autumn Effect at Argenteuil* (1873) was amongst the huge consignment of paintings he took with him to New York in 1886; Paul Cézanne’s *The Mill on the Coulevre near Pontoise* (c. 1881), sold to the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, was the first work by the artist to enter a public collection; and Renoir’s *Woman Playing a Guitar* (1896–7) was the first work he managed to sell to a French public collection.

Who knew that London, not Paris, was

⁷ The term ‘dazzled’ was used by Durand-Ruel himself to describe his emotional state after purchasing both paintings in January 1872.

⁸ Although Durand-Ruel was a Catholic Monarchist, he did not mix art and political or religious beliefs. As such, he supported both Gustave Courbet, who was a Communist; Monet, who was a Republican and Atheist; and Camille Pissarro, who referred to himself as an Anarchist (Paul Durand-Ruel: *Le pari de l’impressionisme*, 9 October–8 February 2015, Musée du Luxembourg, Paris, France, 8).

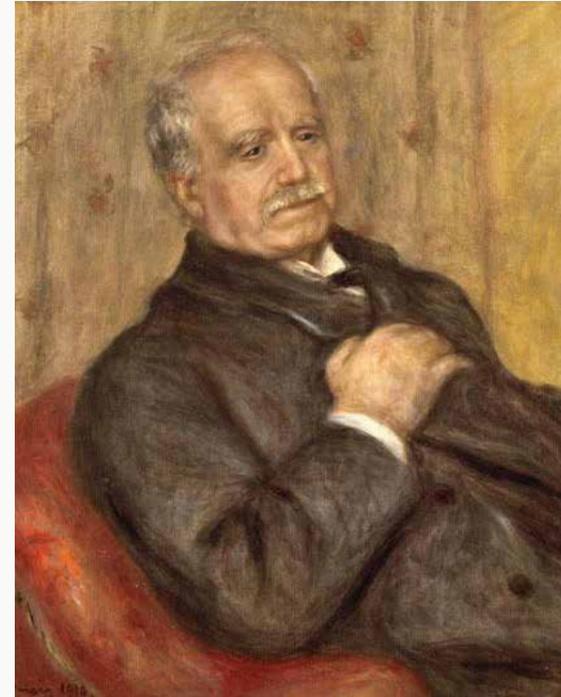
⁹ Stephen F. Eisenman et al., *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History, 2nd ed* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 294.

¹⁰ Rare during the time of the Impressionists, Durand-Ruel’s investment in solo shows notably serves to uphold the claim that he paved the way for modern gallerists.

the true birthplace of Impressionism? The Grafton Galleries, where Durand-Ruel exhibited some of the most renowned Impressionist pieces, including Manet's sketch for *A Bar at the Folies Bergère*, are once again brought to life in the final room. Along with a photograph of the original 1905 exhibition — which sits comfortably at the exit, offering visitors a revelatory moment, when they realise, much like in the first room, that they have just walked through a replica of a scene in Durand-Ruel's life — it marks the perfect ending to a visually exhilarating show.

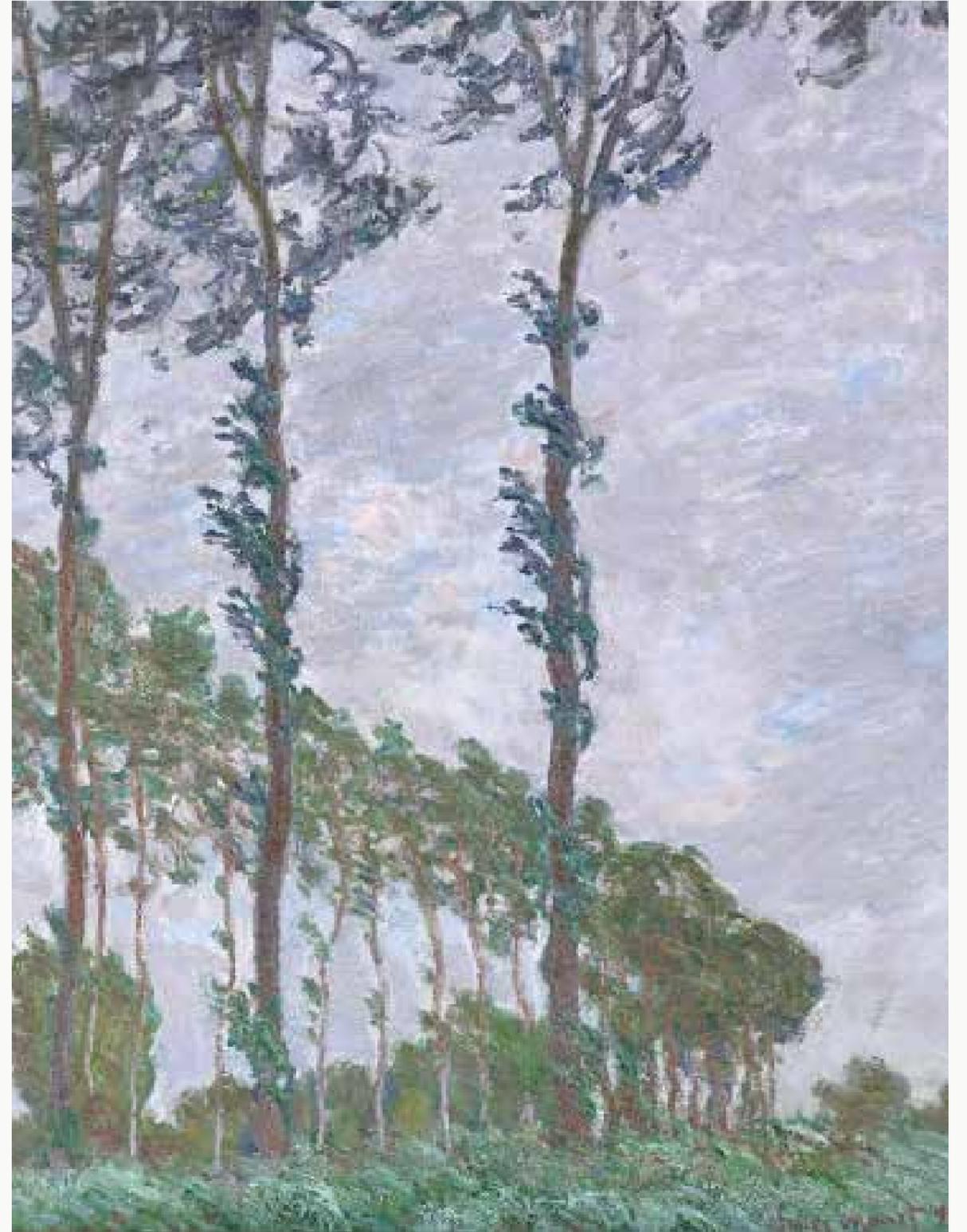
To say that Durand-Ruel 'invented' Impressionism, as the show's title suggests, is quite an exaggeration, as it is the artists themselves, who are at the origin of the movement. However, the curators have clearly demonstrated that it is thanks to Durand-Ruel's unfaltering support that Impressionist works have become so propagated today. As Monet once stated, 'Without him, we wouldn't have survived.'¹¹ We leave with a fresh new look on Impressionism, which is no simple feat. #

¹¹ 'Press Release: *Inventing Impressionism*,' n.p.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Paul Durand-Ruel* (1910)
Private Collection, Paris
Courtesy of the Grand Palais, Paris

Claude Monet, *Wind Effect, Sequence of Poplars* (1891)
Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Courtesy of the National Gallery, London



Zabludowicz Collection: 20 Years

by James Proctor

30 April–16 August 2015
Zabludowicz Collection

Located in a grand old church turned white-walled contemporary art space, *Zabludowicz Collection: 20 Years* is an eclectic survey of the vast contemporary art collection of Anita Zabludowicz and Gregor Muir. All of the work is equally recent, displayed over three rooms (and a mezzanine); thirty-one contemporary artists (apart from the late Sigmar Polke) are presented side by side, covering a wide range of media, including paintings, video and installations, both immersive and site-specific. The church-gallery's mezzanine steps are covered in neon-coloured stripes, named *Zobop (fluorescent)* (2006), by Glaswegian artist Jim Lambie.

As with many top contemporary art collections, many of the usual suspects find their way into the show — Ed Atkins, Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin and Rachel Whiteread all represent the UK, accompanied by German contemporary titans, such as Wolfgang Tillmans, Sigmar Polke, Isa Genzken and Albert Oehlen. The exhibition is difficult to characterize in its content. The work is not arranged chronologically, and is only loosely related in fragments of curatorial arrangements around the themes of 'body,' 'objects,' 'abstraction' and 'display.' These banal terms leave little to the imagination, for what isn't characterized by objects, display, body or abstraction?

Objects on plinths (objects on display?) are numerous in the gallery's nave. Isa Genzken's *Wolkenkratzer für New York* (2014) is complete with a destroyed bust of Queen Nefertiti on a plinth staring at another plinth consisting of a metal fruit bowl and a picture of the real bust, while further along is Rachel Harrison's plinth-sculpture supporting a football and a monkey-coconut facing off (*Cross Fire*, 2006). Generally speaking, the four themes are covered in such blatant visual cues, of which the exhibition has no shortage.

"Body" is demonstrated in an alcove underneath the main room's mezzanine and contains an oil painting of a pink, disturbingly fleshy nude holding a frog by Maria Lassing (*Frog Princess*, 2006) alongside Pamela Rosenkranz' *Firm Being (Touched Surface)* (2009); a Fiji brand bottle containing an eerily pink fluid, placed timidly on the ground. Abstraction and the contemporary language of painting is summed up equally simply in the opposite corner of the room. Abstract works with the appearance of intense reworking and layering, such as those by Oehlen and Polke, are side by side, loomed over by a giant Christopher Wool silkscreen displaying much of the same gestural quality; the works fit together, but there isn't much depth to the comparisons outside of their purely formal qualities.

In the back room, the cream of the crop of the 1990s and early 2000s UK artists

are featured. Perhaps that generation's biggest name, Damien Hirst's pristine *I Love You* (1994–1995), a heart shaped, butterfly-laden red canvas, introduces the viewer to the space. Meanwhile, blatant visual connections continue, as Sarah Lucas' 2004 helmet-wielding stuffed stocking *Spamageddon*, sitting atop a chair over cans of spam, is placed right next to Martin Creed's *Work No. 997* (2009) — a set of five different sized chairs placed on top of one another. Dexter Dalwood's interesting, subconsciously violent and warped painting *Room 100, Chelsea Hotel* (1999), the scene of Nancy Wood's (of Sid Vicious fame) death, is right next to one of Rachel Whiteread's cast beds; *Room 100's* placement is either an interesting take on the possibilities of the bed Whiteread used to make her work, or yet another overt juxtaposition of subject and form. Perhaps, at this point, the visual punning in the display decisions start to coat the show in a redundant atmosphere of simple themes, while offering little more than a survey of the big names contemporary art has been consistently supporting over the last twenty years.

However, one work, also in the back room, stands out; the show's gem is 2002 Turner Prize winner Keith Tyson's *A Tissue Stretched Between Discovery and Invention (21 Cells) (Hexcell)* (2003), a series of large hexagonal 'cells' that flow from one cell to the next through

various iconographical, formal and sensual ways. Tyson's piece fits all of the exhibition's themes in an ambiguous amalgamation of artistic formats, leaving the viewer to constantly look and re-interpret the piece.

Despite some of the obvious visual connections between works that leave something to be desired, Zabludowicz Collection: 20 Years is, after all, a survey exhibition. Even if it features salient highlights from well-known contemporary artists, the show's strength lies in its inclusion of these works alongside newer, emerging artists and other contemporary artists, whose works are rarely publicly shown. This makes it a show well worth going to. 



Keith Tyson, *A Tissue Stretched Between Discovery and Invention (21-Cells) (Hexcell)* (2003)
Mixed media on aluminium with hexagonal steel frames, 300 x 985 x 35



Isa Genzken, *Wolkenkratzer für New York* (detail) (2014)
Photograph by Jens Ziehe

Malachi Farrell: Duck and cover!

By Michael Bouhanna

18 September–3 October 2015
The Crypt Gallery, London



France-based artist, Malachi Farrell, made his start at the École des Beaux Arts in 1987, where he enrolled in a classical curriculum. Afterwards, Farrell studied under the French artist Daniel Buren at the Institut Supérieur des Hautes Études, and then, continued his education at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam (the Rijkakademie), where he found his calling. It was at this prestigious institution, in 1994, that Farrell discovered his interest for electronic art and the infinite possibilities that this medium offered his artistic expression.

Technology and electronics inspired Farrell's Machine-Installations through the use of the linguistic inclusion of sound, light and movement as well as objects from everyday life. This dynamic means of expression facilitates a narrative component to his work that is both eloquent, and above all, engaging. Farrell has no filter, when it comes to denouncing violence, inequality and the absurdities of our contemporary history. His works are in dialogue with both the contemporary and the historical; his Machines Installations are a resounding reflection of our current social context. Consequently, Farrell draws his inspiration from various sources, including

literature, movies and documentaries.

At the Contemporary Art Museum of Val de Marne (MACVAL), Farrell produced *La Génène* (2007), an overwhelming theatrical installation that brought together documentary, technology and robotics. In this work, the spectator is the catalyst, initiating a dialogue between themselves and the artwork. At the centre of this installation is a robot: *Monsieur Media*. This robot has a raw aesthetic that upholds ideas about mechanics and technology, whilst creating a sense of fragility through its impression of instability.

A closer look at the details of the installation allows for Farrell's oeuvre to be better understood. In the work, a robot sits on a chair with his feet in a bucket of water that is connected to a power source. On the robot's torso, a television screen lights up and shows images of torture victims, based on eyewitness accounts from the torture exercised during the war in Algeria. Next, an image of a rapidly beating heart appears on the screen, followed by a group of puppets disguised as members of the Ku Klux Klan. Already, the political charge of Farrell's work is evident through his use of recognisable historical events in his contemporary pieces. Nearby, a lamp on a table is turned on, which lights up various parts of the installation, similar to the spotlights used in prison yards. Unexpectedly, the lamp explodes and leaves the spectator grappling with the impression of an execution by electric shock. Here, through the use of metaphor, Farrell not only denounces the politicisation of xenophobic ideologies, stemming from barbaric practices, but also condemns the media's role in its rendition of such barbaric acts as banal.

Currently, Farrell continues to work in dialogue with both the past and present. He is now preparing his first solo exhibition in London, titled *Duck And Cover!*, which will take place at the Crypt of the Saint-Pancras Parish Church. Historically, the Crypt was designed and used for coffin burials, between 1822 and 1854 (when all the crypts in London churches were closed to burials). However, during both World Wars, the Crypt was used as an air raid shelter. This now peaceful place remains the final

home of 557 people. Suitably, Farrell will exhibit his work at the Crypt to commemorate the 70th anniversary of World War II. The Crypt Gallery is central to his exhibition, as it adds an element of solemnity to his artistic interpretation of World War II.

By directly addressing and creating an ironic image of the current sociopolitical context, Farrell establishes a commentary on conflict and the excessive media exposure it receives. By reflecting on the past and entering it into dialogue with the present, he establishes a visual rhetoric that isn't merely a moralising speech, but rather a reflection left open for interpretation by the viewer. At the heart of this contemporary fable, spectators are relentlessly made aware of their duty to make a personal commitment, faced with the brutality of the world. #

Reviews

World

Ahmet Güneştekin: Million Stone (Paintings and Sculptures)

by Kemal Orta

April 14–September 24 2015
Marlborough Gallery, Venice

Turkish contemporary artist Ahmet Güneştekin, born in 1966, is in La Pietà with his solo show *Million Stone* between May 6 and November 22. *Million Stone* is the artist's second solo show in Venice — his first, *Momentum of Memory*, took place in 2013 — and presents eight recent new works by Güneştekin, placing the emphasis on Istanbul. The exhibition is commissioned by Marlborough Gallery and curated by American writer and independent curator Matthew Drutt.

Born into a Kurdish family in Batman, southeast Turkey, Güneştekin is a self-taught artist known for his distinctive visual language that draws upon historical sources. Oral narratives, myths and legends, particularly from Anatolia and Mesopotamia, are the very central themes of his artistic practice.

The captivating 600 square metre historical church of La Pietà is transformed into an art space through Güneştekin's work. The historical church embraces the cultural and religious connotations, which resonate in the show. I believe that the architectural concept, which was designed by the Turkish architect Emre Arolat, contributes to the quality of the show and allows both the works and space to further communicate with each other. In his interview with Matthew Drutt, published in the exhibition catalogue, Arolat states that he intended to correlate Güneştekin's work with the aura of the space, in an attempt to retain the individual impact of both the church and artworks in balance and harmony, rather than detaching one from the other at the risk of either being overwhelmed.

The show takes its title from Güneştekin's approximately four-metre high marble sculpture, *Million Stone* (2015), which was inspired by an archaeological monument in Istanbul of the same name. The original Million Stone, which is today located in Sultanahmet Meydanı — a famous touristic plaza of Istanbul, surrounded by the Hagia Sophia, Blue Mosque and Topkapı Palace — was built by Emperor Constantine (in what was then Constantinople) in the fourth century, with the aim of measuring the distance from the capital to all other cities in the empire. It was an indication of the emperor's sovereignty and power that confirmed Constan-



Ahmet Güneştekin, *Million Stone* (2015)
 Black marble, 375 x 190 x 165 cm
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photograph by Ş. Yakup Tarhan

tinople as the centre of the world. Akin to the original one, at first glance, Güneştekin's sculpture brings to mind an obelisk, with all the connotations such a monument possesses, such as phallic power and eternity. Yet, upon closer inspection, one realises that the artist's approach differs from the original through his questioning and deconstruction of these traditional associations. When inspected head-on, holes within the stone blocks become apparent. Marble balls are placed into these holes from where they were dug out. The installation has a resonance of a bodily form; two adjacent holes at the bottom represent feet, while two relatively separate ones in the middle symbolise hands, with a particularly large hole at the top resembling a head. The marble balls, lined up through each hole towards the inner part of the structure, suggest the abstracted forms of arms and legs that are absorbed within the body. In numerous interviews Güneştekin states that, with his re-interpretation of the Million Stone, he intended to degenderize the phallic object, in order to deny masculine power, which has dominated history. He states; 'The fact that even all religious functionaries and prophets are men and the way masculine power imposes its dominance in all areas of life, provokes me to question this hegemony.'¹

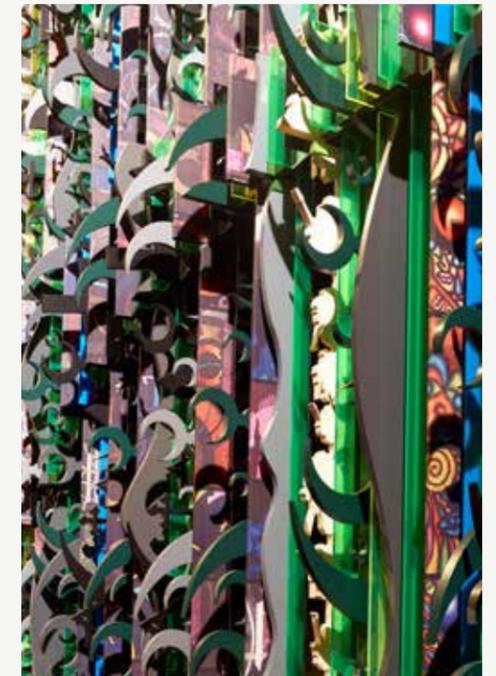
While *Million Stone* is aptly positioned at the centre of the exhibition, in the courtyard of the Pietà, a long, wide corridor hosts three gigantic three-by-three metre relief works that welcome the visitor. These reliefs, made of plexiglass and collages, derive from the artist's *Holy Encounter* series, which embody the region's three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. From a distance, they give the impression of an abstract painting. The first is predominantly blue in colour, with the Jewish Star of David in the background; the second is red with the Christian cross; and, the last is green with the Islamic crescent. When closely looking at the works from one side, it becomes obvious that identical vertical stripes have been repeated on each. Each line is separately composed of the following elements: symbols from the three religions human figures pleading and begging God, petroleum refineries, war weapons (e.g. cannons and tanks), the collages consisting of prints from the artist's previous paintings and a vertical mirror line. These refer to the



Ahmet Güneştekin
La Pietà Exhibition view, central hall
 Courtesy of the artist Photograph by Ş. Yakup Tarhan



Ahmet Güneştekin
 Detail from *Meeting with Lady Lilith* (2015)
 mixed media, 280 x 390 x 15 cm
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photograph by Ferhat Elik



Ahmet Güneştekin
 Detail from *Holy Encounter 3* (2012)
 mixed media, 300 x 300 x 25 cm
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photograph by Ferhat Elik

never-ending conflicts over oil and religion as well as the suffering caused to the people in the region. Güneştekin confronts humanity with the divine, forcing the viewer to witness this encounter. He simultaneously addresses the manner by which the monotheistic religions are alike and possess shared concepts and values. The chronological juxtaposition of the works also suggests that these religions are a continuation of one another. In addition to Güneştekin's statement that masculine power is dominant in these three religions, Drutt, in his introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition, establishes a link between the *Million Stone* and the three religions predicated upon this dominance. The curator elaborates the 'phallic symbolism' in religious architecture, including the minarets of mosques, bell towers of churches and arks in synagogues.

Passing this entrance corridor, the visitor reaches the main hall of La Pietà, in which three large signature paintings accompany the reliefs and *Million Stone*, simultaneously seen in the courtyard. Güneştekin continues to challenge the dominant power of masculinity by deriving inspiration from the story of Lilith, Adam's first wife, who refused to yield to Adam, claiming that they were equal through the means by which they were created.² Lady Lilith becomes the symbol for the artist's oppositional stance against the masculine power that religion and *Million Stone* evoke in the exhibition. In these canvases, Güneştekin's painterly brushstrokes create abstract structures, while also embracing figurative characteristics, in an obvious reference to Op art. His technique requires ultimate patience and devotion; these works are produced, as if he were engraving, in the manner of a goldsmith, the paint onto the canvas. During the creation process, he first paints the detailed images with several tones of colours, before combing the surface with a special pen-like tool, which gives the impression of an embroidered surface. His works, largely monochromatic yet vibrant, are regarded as 'narrative abstraction',³ however, Güneştekin finds this term quite problematic, as he sees his images as deriving from his own imagination, rather than as 'traditional motifs.'⁴ As he states, 'If narrative abstraction means converting some myths into a visual language, my works have no connection with this process. Instead of producing a narrative abstraction I am producing images that recall the story.'⁵

The exhibition wraps up with a new sculptural piece, constructed from massive, colourful, block-like letters, which read 'Kostantiniyye' — the name adopted by the Ottoman Turks after the conquest of the city. The work, which echoes that of Robert Indiana, is created in a style akin to the *Holy Encounter* series (e.g. the same materials and methods have been employed). Within each letter, the various names given to the city, with the exception of Istanbul, have been inscribed. These include Byzantion, Byzantium, Nova Roma, Con-stantinople, Constantinopolis, Dersaadet, Islambol, Asitane, and Dar-ül-Hilafet. These are accompanied by the same religious symbols in the reliefs found in the *Holy Encounter* works. *Kostantiniyye* seems to summarise the show by providing a sense of the rich and exciting historical journey the city has undertaken. With it, Güneştekin points to Istanbul as a city, where three major religions meet, effectively bringing to the fore humanity's political, cultural and historical issues. ■



Ahmet Güneştekin, *Kostantiniyye* (2015)
Mixed media, 420 x 520 x 140 cm
(including the pedestal)
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph by Cemal Emden

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- 1 Drutt, M. Ahmet Güneştekin Million Stone. *Interview with Ahmet Güneştekin*. Published on the occasion of the exhibition Million Stone at La Pietà, Marlborough Gallery, Venice, 6 May–22 November 2015, pp. 15-16.
- 2 According to ancient Judaic myth both Adam and Lilith were created out of clay, as opposed to Eve, who derived from Adam's rib. Güneştekin's interpretation of Lilith is based on this Judaic mythology.
- 3 Drutt, M. Ahmet Güneştekin Million Stone. *Interview with Ahmet Güneştekin*. Published on the occasion of the exhibition Million Stone at La Pietà, Marlborough Gallery, Venice, 6 May–22 November 2015, p. 14.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.

Interplay Site-Specific Art Project at MMCA Korea

by Nicola Guastamacchia

April 14 – September 24, 2015
MMCA, Seoul

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Korea (MMCA), in Seoul, has recently presented an ambitious art project. As the name *INTERPLAY site-specific art project* suggests, it is hard to consider this initiative as an average exhibition. Curated by Mr. Houncheol Choi, *INTERPLAY* features four artists characterised by interestingly diverse backgrounds and practices: the duo *Assume Vivid Astro Focus* (avaf), Ross Manning, Jinnie Seo and Shinji Ohmaki. Thanks to its four site-specific installations, *INTERPLAY* creates a stimulating environment for the public, aiming to 'transform the physical space of the exhibition into an organic work of art.'¹ This is achieved through the various range of environments, which surround the spectator along his visit, and the hapticity of the pieces on display, which seem to investigate the inherent nature of the interactions between an art exhibition and its public, whilst evoking the bright lights and wide spaces of our contemporary cityscapes.

The project takes place in the MMCA's Gallery 6, which is structured on two floors, one connected to the other by a narrow, white, ladder. On the upper floor, the public is welcomed by an untitled installation by Elizier Sudbrack Simoes' and Christophe Hamaide-Pierson's duo (or, avaf). Working at the borders between art and design, avaf contributed to the show with wall-projections, fluorescent lights and vivid wallpapers covering the floor and walls of the room. On the projected wall, semi-abstract figures collide, creating electric visual choreographies. All around the room the eccentric digital motif on the wallpaper seems to blink at the fluorescent and glittering lights of Seoul's streets and clubs.

INTERPLAY continues downstairs with an apparently empty and dark room. At first glance, all that is visible is a member of the museum's staff imperturbably sitting on a chair on the other side of the room. When the eye gets used to the darkness, coloured reflections suddenly become visible on the walls. Ross Manning's *Spectra (double)* discretely reveals itself, as it caresses the public's skin with the light breeze produced by its motorised fans. The piece cannot hide an inherent Olafur Eliasson after-taste. However, Ross Manning is an Australian artist, who is not new to the creation of ready-mades from technological devices, particularly



Shinji Ohmaki, *Liminal Air -Descend-* (2007–2015)
Photo courtesy of the artist

from lights. In fact, *Spectra (double)*'s fans are assembled together with coloured fluorescent lights, becoming a psychedelic device in constant motion. The work disguises itself within the room, incorporating it and being incorporated by it simultaneously.

Leaving Manning's piece behind, we are suddenly made to pass from night to day in just a few steps. Jinnie Seo's installation *Wandering Still* is white of colour and looks back to traditional Korean landscape paintings and drawings of the past. While artificial lighting is not lacking, the whole display might have benefitted from stronger daylight. *Wandering Still* is composed of numerous sheets of *hanji*, the traditional Korean rice paper, and of a draped cloud made of straw hanging from the ceiling. The *hanji* are carefully rolled up one beside the other on the right corner of the room, recalling the hills and the mountains of a countryside panorama. The cloud overlooks the room high enough to not be touched, resembling a big, weightless, origami. The *hanji*'s hills and mountains stand behind a security cord. Considering the interactive nature of avaf's and Ross Manning's works, the lack of an ability to interact with *Wandering Still* other than through sight is slightly disappointing.

This absence is immediately counterbalanced by the last piece on display. The spectator enters a room illuminated by bright, white, fluorescent lights. *Liminal Air -descend-* by Shinji Ohmaki is a huge installation made of thousands of nylon wires descending from a curved surface hanging from the ceiling. Jesús-Rafael Soto's *Penetrables* are explicitly evoked. Walking through the piece (with a thin mask preventing the risk of marring the wires' white surfaces), your body is made to come into contact with the wires through touch. The density of *Liminal Air -descend-* prevents a clear sight of the installation itself. Whoever is inside it is guided to the final wall of the work and back to the entrance of the room by the sense of touch and the shadows of the shimmering wires. A better overall view is offered to those waiting to enter the piece.

To get out of the show, viewers must walk back through the four rooms and installations constituting the exhibition. It is only at this point of the

visit that the connections between the four installations emerge more clearly. While the blazing colours of avaf's wallpapers counterweigh the empty grey walls, illuminated by Ross Manning's transformed fans, the haptic detachment of Jinnie Seo's landscapes is counterbalanced by the strong (but delicate) physical presence of Shingji Ohmaki's *Liminal Air -descend-*. *INTERPLAY* does not seem to be a show, which aims to emphasise the uniqueness and originality of its pieces. After all, most of the works present strong affinities with those by established artists of the recent past. Nevertheless, there is something overwhelming in the flux of the exhibition. As if walking through the lights, signs and doors of an unknown city, the visitor is constantly placed and misplaced in and out of the exhibition's spaces and pieces. The multifaceted relation between the spectators, space and artworks might represent a first step to frame the constitutional elusiveness of this exhibition's provoking nature. Far from suggesting didascalical understandings, *INTERPLAY* invites to concern with every single visitor's personal artistic experience. #

1 From the exhibition's pamphlet.

Finding the Oasis of Matisse

by Elizabeth Atkinson

27 March–16 August 2015
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

17 April 2014–7 September 2014
Tate Modern London

Last year, Tate Modern hit a new record, receiving 562,622 visitors to its exhibition *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*.¹ Dedicated to the final seventeen years of Matisse's extensive artistic career, this show celebrated the bold, exuberant and innovative technique Matisse embraced when he became too unwell to paint. Having travelled onto MoMA in New York, the works have now been returned to their respective collections, a large extent of these belonging to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. From March through August this year, the Stedelijk presents the largest Matisse exhibition ever seen in the Netherlands, *The Oasis of Matisse*. Transforming their permanent collection into an extensive historical survey of his career in its entirety, Matisse's work is placed alongside those of his teachers, pupils and contemporaries. The museum has created a unique exhibition concept, which presents their permanent collection entirely afresh, whilst developing great academic insight into the works of one of the world's most popular and well-researched artists.²

Tate's director Nicholas Serota, attributes the success of *The Cut-Outs* to 'the joyous quality of the works themselves,' alongside the fact that many of these 120 pieces had not been brought together for nearly forty years.³ A photograph of the artist's studio within the exhibition, reveals *The Snail* (1953), *Memory of Oceania* (1953) and *Large Composition with Masks* (1953) to have been originally conceived as a unified whole. Tate's exhibition placed these works within the same space for the first time in over fifty years. In addition, *Blue Nudes* (1952) received their largest grouping together for an exhibition in history. Visitors were made aware of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of this display. For all art lovers, this would be a unique, extensive and truly astounding experience, celebrating Matisse's talent for capturing the essence and movement of forms through colour and line.

The Cut-Outs were spread over Tate's enormous fourteen-gallery exhibition space on their second floor. Opening with Adrien Maeght's film of Matisse working in his studio — portraying the dynamism and exuberance of the artist — one immediately felt a sense of intimacy and insight into the working process behind this body of work. Matisse's first foray

into this new medium was illustrated, as he began to use cut paper shapes to design the composition of his paintings, rearranging the elements pinned to the canvas. The painting *Still Life with Shell* (1940) was displayed beside its cut paper version, demonstrating Matisse's thinking and technical process behind the final production on canvas. The sense of movement within his works could not be overlooked. The development of Matisse's use of this medium could be observed across the rooms' display.

Room three, dedicated solely to the limited edition artist's book *Jazz* (1947), presented the crucial turning point as the cut-outs start to become works in their own right. Tate also explored the interior of the artist's studio in Vence, France. The array of works produced, such as book and periodical designs, exhibition posters and his designs for the Vence Chapel — which included not only stained glass windows but also the vestments worn by priests when celebrating Mass — and the chronology of these works being interrupted by informative insights through film and textual explanation, made this a comprehensive survey of Matisse's final chapter. The vivacity and childlike simplicity of the colourful cut-outs ensured that this survey retained a sense of enjoyment and energy. Closing with the largest scale pieces, such as *The Parakeet and the Mermaid* (1952) and finally my beloved *The Snail* (1953), Matisse's impressive experimentation (when he himself was of such poor health) shines through in these beautifully unique and abstract works, full of colour and vitality.

The dimly lit final room brought to life the *Christmas Eve* design, which had been commissioned for the Time-Life building in New York in 1952. The beautiful stained glass window, encompassing the motifs, colours and styles explored across the exhibition, created a lasting impression of wonderment and awe for this artist and his creative abilities. Seeing the movement from sketchbook to fully realised glass installation, visitors were able to experience the full force of the artist's work in his final years, leaving informed but more importantly, personally engaged with and inspired by the cut-outs.

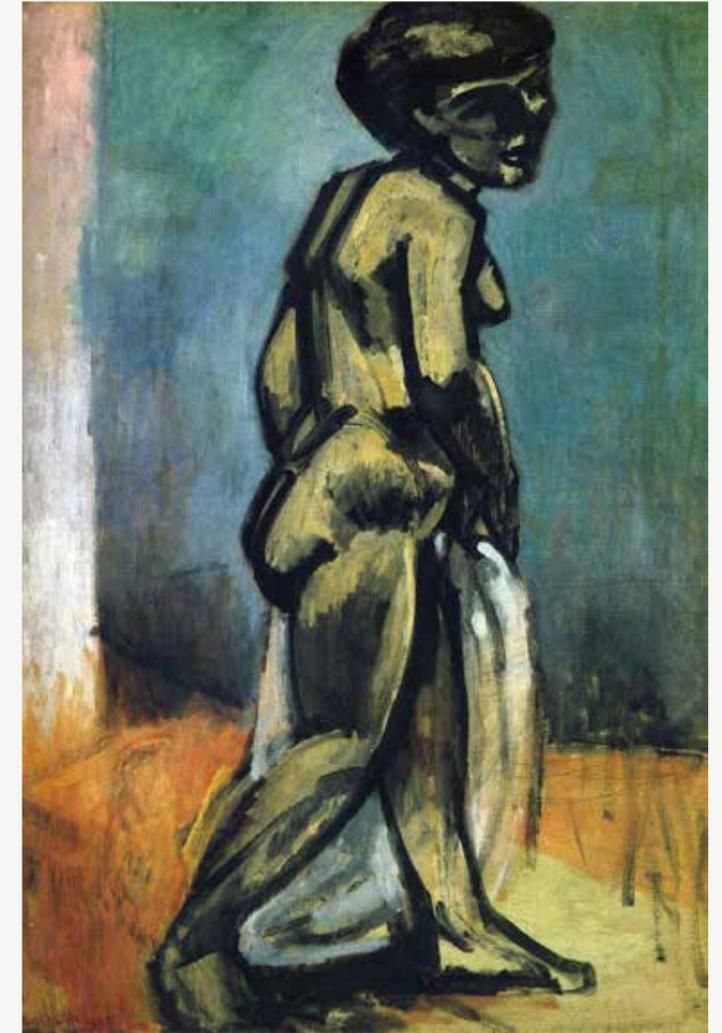
The Oasis of Matisse, creating an hour-long queue outside of the Stedelijk



Henri Matisse, *Blue Nude* (1952)
Courtesy of Tate

museum on a freezing cold day in April, seemed just as popular. This took a very different approach to the artist and his career. Made up of two sections creating a historical and evaluative survey of Matisse, the museum places him alongside other artists for comparison and intellectual provocation. The first section on the ground floor of the museum, with an extensive twelve galleries, displayed a range of painting, sculpture, works on paper, tapestry, sketchbooks and literary publications, enabling visitors to fully familiarise themselves with the breadth of Matisse's oeuvre. Lesser-known facets of his work are revealed through the, at times, surprising comparisons made with other artists. For example, *Standing Nude* (1907) is placed alongside German Expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Dancing Woman* (1911). Carved from a tree-trunk, *Dancing Woman's* characteristic rawness and hard lines draw out similar surprising qualities in Matisse's painting. The exhibition is successful in sparking new considerations and appreciations for Matisse's work and the inspirations he found around him.

Similarly, the museum presents the diverging trajectories into abstraction, pursued by both Matisse and Piet Mondrian. The first room places paintings by these two artists side by side, and the dark palettes and realistic styles of their early still lifes can be compared. However, as you progress through the chronologically arranged room displays, the alternate approaches taken by these artists can be compared. Interestingly too, the cut-outs Olga Rozanova experimented with to arrive at a technique of total abstraction — one rivalling that of Kazimir Malevich — similarly reduced shapes to their most simple physical essence, and yet remained unseen by Matisse during his own development of this medium. These first rooms provide great insight into Matisse's forays with Cubism, Pointillism, Abstraction and Impressionism as well as his lasting relationships with Picasso and Cézanne, amongst others, raising issues and elements often over-looked in favour of his more popular Fauvism and the final cut-outs. While the exhibition's opening also introduces the cut-out method, featuring content from *Jazz*, they focus far more on emphasising Matisse's huge range of medium and style. The celebrated content of the exhibition, with its impressive array of artists covering an extensive



Henri Matisse, *Standing Nude* (1907)
Image courtesy of Tate



period, is informative, thought provoking and even challenging, at times. Yet, it is successful in creating new academic perspectives on Matisse's artistic career.

At the close of these twelve galleries, I then moved upstairs to the much larger gallery space, where four large rooms within the museum's layout had been dedicated to the final years of Matisse's life. I immediately met the large *Parakeet and the Mermaid*, which is accompanied by photos illustrating how another cut-out, *Blue Nude II* (1952), was originally placed in the position of the mermaid. The beautiful tapestries of *Polynesia, the Sea and Polynesia, the Sky* (1946) further emphasise that Matisse was an artist whose work has been translated into a huge array of media. This part of the exhibition focuses on his working processes through the use of photographs, the display of *Acanthuses* (1953) — with its thousands of visible pin holes - maquettes and other artefacts on display in cabinets. Unfortunately, *Christmas Eve* only appears in paper form, the show lacking the spiritual wonderment felt at Tate. In addition, the closing presentation of *The Snail*, alongside the oil painting *The Goldfish* (1912), which is compared to Mark Rothko's *Untitled* (1962), despite being a carefully considered academic observation, does detract somewhat from the lively abstract cut-outs. In the final galleries, I could also not help but be distracted by the operatic song of Tino Sehgal's *This is Propaganda* (2002) travelling across the museum. This was not quite the Matisse oasis advertised. The incorporation of the final works within the museum's contemporary

galleries diminished the focus and effect of some of Matisse's greatest triumphs.

Although *The Oasis of Matisse* provoked exciting considerations and revelations about Matisse's artistic practice, I cannot help but lament the final deflation of emphasis. As Tate Modern's show made evident — with its record-breaking attendance — the cut-outs are Matisse's most beloved works. The Stedelijk's failure to allow these to reach their full potential through their dispersal across the extensive upper floor of the museum left me distracted and slightly dissatisfied when I reached the end of the exhibition, only to stumble into another gallery, where a woman was writhing in uncomfortable contortions across the gallery floor in some kind of performance. Although I appreciated interpreting Matisse from a new standpoint — and seeing works of his, about which I had no idea — I feel that it was Tate, which truly managed to present an oasis, where visitors could fully immerse themselves in an extensive artistic practice that culminated in something so deceptively simple. #

Henri Matisse, *The Parakeet and the Mermaid* (1953)
Image courtesy of Tate



Henri Matisse, *The Snail* (1953)
Image courtesy of Tate

References

- 1 Mark Brown, '*Matisse: The Cut-Outs* becomes Tate's most popular exhibition ever' in *The Guardian*, (Monday 15 September 2014)
- 2 Beatrix Ruf, *The Oasis of Matisse*, exhibition pamphlet (2015)
- 3 Brown.

Never Say Goodbye

By Chi Chen

9 May–22 November 2015
La Biennale di Venezia, Venice

'WU Tien-chang: Never Say Goodbye' — a collateral event of the 56th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale — is a major solo exhibition by leading Taiwanese artist WU Tien-Chang, located at the Palazzo delle Prigioni. *Never Say Goodbye* presents video and light box installations, depicting the dilapidated culture of post-war Taiwan as well as recollections of the faded love between men and women. With this body of work, Wu aims to spark dialogues and let viewers contemplate what it means to live on the margins of society.

Located next to the Palazzo Ducale, or the former residence of the Doge of Venice, the Palazzo delle Prigioni was a prison in the middle ages. After being sentenced in the Palazzo Ducale, prisoners would cross the Bridge of Sighs to the Palazzo delle Prigioni. Wu evokes memories of these regretful crossings through the title of his show. Now, ghosts haunt the former prison, as the spirit of the prisoners continue to reside there, living on alongside Wu's art installations, in order to be remembered along with the exhibition.

Curated by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, the exhibition explores the atmosphere and particular sentiments of westernisation in post-war Taiwan, while also responding to and echoing shifts in historical administration over the past seventy years.

Wu has exhibited three installations that combine virtual and real elements of video, showcasing a diverse range of audio and visual effects. These works are *Farewell, Spring and Autumn Pavilions* (2015), *Beloved* (2013–2015), and *Unforgettable Lover* (2013–2015). He also presents the laser print light box installations *Blind Men Groping Down the Lane* (2008–2015) and *Our Hearts Beat as One* (2001–2015). The performativity of these images appeals directly to the viewer's senses and intuition, using exaggerated tawdriness as a charming disguise — one is able to call up past pains that cannot be shouldered by the individual or the nation.

In Wu's digital video installations, he combines theatrical effects with magic tricks, such as handcrafted properties and rolling scenery, to amaze viewers, witnessing a switch from still photographs to moving video. In the



Wu Tien-Chang, *Blind Men Groping Down the Lane* (2008–2015)
reversal film 240 x 478cm. Courtesy of Wu Tien-Chang



Wu Tien-Chang, *Beloved* (2013–2015)
Single channel video, 3'11", Courtesy of Wu Tien-Chang

newly commissioned work *Farewell, Spring and Autumn Pavilions* (2015), a figure waves goodbye to the viewer with a strange sense of rhythm. Along with a change of scenery and costume, the figure also seems to be saying goodbye to his past. However, while the external environment around him changes, he himself continues turning within an invisible circle, eternally regressing back to the start.

Moreover, *Unforgettable Lover* (2013–2015), filmed with a fixed camera using a single take, harks back to the handicraft period of film. In this film, the male protagonist dances to the rhythm of Taiwanese folk music, while transforming himself into other characters through distinct changes in costume, setting and stage props. In *Beloved* (2013–2015), Wu covered the female character in a delicate latex skin to create an idealistic version of the perfect lover, amorously telling stories of the helplessness and sadness of the people coming into and departing from this world. Both works exude inevitable feelings of anguish and separation, dissolving gender distinctions through the use of androgynous skin membrane costumes.

For the Venice Biennale, Wu has converted two of his two-dimensional photography works into light box installations. *Blind Men Groping Down the Lane* (2008–2015) and *Our Hearts Beat as One* (2001–2015) are key serial works, which illustrate Wu's shift to digital photography. The images present an array of cheerful colours, though the characters depicted are marginal with bizarrely proportioned figures or disabilities. This holds a great sense of contradiction and emphasises how cockeyed the world is.

Behind the vivacious, flamboyant visuals of the exhibition, Wu attempts to present the people of Taiwan as being constantly haunted by memories and nostalgia of past regimes and the changes, which occurred during the post-war westernisation of society. By capturing characters in mask-like artificial skin membranes and garish costumes, Wu attempts to demonstrate the hybrid nature of Taiwanese identity and depicts the life of those in the lower classes of society, who fully experience the joys and sorrows of Taiwanese life.

As Ms. Fang Mei-Ching, Chief Curator of Taipei Fine Arts Museum states: In the show, Wu used the flamboyant and kitsch appearances of the ghostly figures in his photography works and video installation as camouflages of charm to confide in the past pains that cannot be shouldered by an individual or the entire nation. On the one hand, the convoluted history of post-war Taiwan is revealed, and on the other hand, the romantic aspiration for the future is projected. These seemingly parallel and opposing lines have struck a balance on a perfect crossing point at the presentation, by establishing a consequential dialogue within the exhibition space.¹

Born in the trading port of Keelung, WU is known for his oil paintings and digital photography, which have strong Taiwanese identities,² especially focussing on the socio-political aspects of life. Wu's work reveals the internal conflicts of the photographic medium, with its visualisation of supposed reality that is often of an invented and fabricated nature. Since 2000, Wu has incorporated digital retouching and image-collage techniques in his stage-like photographs, such as by painting backdrops, using specific lighting, scripting and directing performers himself, in order to strengthen various contradictory elements into something unique and fascinating. He currently lives and works in Taipei and his work has been shown extensively at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, in addition to being presented at international exhibition venues, including the Hong Kong Art Centre, Hong Kong (2010); the National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2009); the Taipei Cultural Center, New York (2008); and MOMA Contemporary, Fukuoka, Japan (1997). ■



Wu Tien-Chang, *Our Hearts Beat as One* (2001-2015)
reversal film, 240 x 343.2 cm. Courtesy of Wu Tien-Chang

References

- 1 The quote is from Taipei Fine Art Museum press release.
- 2 'Taiwanese identity', we will usually call it 'Tai-Ke Culture' in Taiwan.

Year 2015, 365 days: 3 Times Pollock on show at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection

By Camilla Bin

14 February–6 April 2015
Alchemy by Jackson Pollock. Discovering the Artist at Work

23 April–16 November 2015
Jackson Pollock's Mural: Energy Made Visible

23 April–14 September 2015
Charles Pollock: A Retrospective
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

Three exhibitions in a row, in one year, where the name 'Pollock' resounds three times, do not seem to be a wise curatorial choice. Especially when the artist is Jackson Pollock, on whom plenty of books have already been written and many exhibitions have already taken place in major institutions across the world. This is exactly the challenge that the Peggy Guggenheim Collection's curatorial team is taking this year, showing not only paintings by Jackson Pollock in a very innovative way, but also a wide retrospective about Charles Pollock, his elder brother.

Alchemy by Jackson Pollock: Discovering the Artist at Work is the first of the three exhibitions curated by Luciano Pensabene Buemi and Roberto Bellucci. *Alchemy*, painted on his mother's quilting frame in 1947, has been brought back to life after more than twelve months of conservation at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence. Scientists and conservators, with the aid of technology, revealed the original brightness of colours, different types of paint used and all the materials the artist mixed with. Pebbles, fragments of wooden sticks, sand and other materials are mixed with traditional oil tubes and commercial paint, which Pollock started to get intrigued by during that period. Another exciting discovery was the existence of nineteen tones of colour, where the overall impression before the restoration was a greyish flat surface with a few coloured marks. Enabling the public to catch every single colour and three-dimensional detail, previously hidden beneath a layer of dust and dirt, the painting is exceptionally exposed without being glazed. Moreover, original tools are on display, such as paint cans and brushes, on loan from Jackson Pollock's studio in Long Island, where he lived with his wife Lee Krasner. Beyond painting and tools' display the public approaches a more scientific and technical way of getting in contact with the conservation process. Technical devices such as touch-screens, a 3D print of the surface and a short film shot in the laboratories, allow a stronger perception of the original materiality, one of the *Alchemy's* strongest features.

Mural, the largest work Pollock has ever painted, was commissioned by Peggy Guggenheim in 1943. Covering an entire wall in Palazzo Venier dei Leoni (previously Peggy Guggenheim's house), the painting is one



Alchemy during the cleaning conservation process at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence (1947)
Image courtesy of Peggy Guggenheim Collection

of the protagonists of *Jackson Pollock's Mural: Energy Made Visible*, curated by David Anfam, an authority on Abstract Expressionism. This masterpiece, which went through the same cleaning process as *Alchemy*, can be admired among other murals made by Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell and another one by Pollock himself, providing an idea of what the notion of wide landscapes may have meant for American Expressionist artists. All these paintings convey a real sense of action making vigorously visible the artist's feelings and intention. *Mural* can also be considered a turning point in Pollock's career; in fact, from that work on, he adopted the practice of laying the canvas on the floor, so that he could better control his work both visually and physically. Subsequently, his way of painting changed evolving into a sort of dance around the canvas where the paint could drip directly onto the surface, thanks to a controlled movement of the wrist.

The long process of cleaning, which both *Mural* and *Alchemy* endured, proved that, behind the impulsive gesture generated by his boiling mind, a specific plan was applied in the organization of the various paint layers. This can be seen as a revolution by many specialists who have always believed in the existence of an impulsive-Jackson-Pollock behind all his works.

Charles Pollock: A Retrospective sheds light on both Charles Pollock's art production and his family's relationship with the American art scene of the mid-20th century. More than 120 objects are on show testifying how dense and successful his corpus of works was, and how important was the impact he has had on his brother Jackson. In fact, even if Jackson Pollock is surely the best known among the Pollock brothers, Charles helped him in developing his own career with advice and encouragements throughout an intense correspondence. In 1926, Charles Pollock moved to New York and joined the Works Progress Administration programme that commissioned public artworks to artists. Afterwards, Charles succeeded in convincing Jackson to join him in New York, where he could enhance his artistic talent and take his first steps into the fascinating maze of the art world. At this early stage of his career, Charles's style can be easily defined as figurative, realistic and focussed on rural landscapes, following the path of his mentor, Thomas Hart Benton, an important representative of American



'regionalism.'¹ A wide variety of tones, such as dark blues and greens, can be seen among the *Martha's Vineyard* series in the first room, as a clear example of the wild American panorama. By the 1950s, Charles Pollock's manner evolved into pure abstraction, mirroring a period of artistic and personal crisis, before entering the realm of large colour field canvases, after having spent some time in Mexico in the late fifties. This retrospective is not a pure succession of paintings and documents, but, above all, an alternative way of travelling through the second half of the 20th century of American history and the intimate relationship within Pollock's creative family. History, art and family dynamics walk together from one room to the other, introducing the visitor to the complex liaisons generated by all these three components and underlining what happens when they merge together.

All the three shows — *Alchemy by Jackson Pollock. Discovering the Artist at Work, Jackson Pollock's Mural: Energy Made Visible and Charles Pollock: A Retrospective* — demonstrate how it is possible to retrace the story of a master, such as Jackson Pollock. The shows not only bring the viewer behind

Jackson Pollock, *Alchemy* (1947)
Courtesy of Peggy Guggenheim Collection



Charles Pollock: *A Retrospective*, series of paintings from the 1950s
 Image courtesy of Peggy Guggenheim Collection



Jackson Pollock, *Mural* (1943)
 Image courtesy of Peggy Guggenheim Collection

the scenes of what has always been solely reserved to insiders, such as scientists and conservators, but also explore the historical contexts and his personal relationships and the roles they played in shaping his artistic career. #



- 1 The Works Progress Administration was created as part of the New Deal, a series of domestic programmes developed during the first term presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The WPA could support artists commissioning them the creation of murals and sculpture to decorate public buildings across the United States.

Charles Pollock: A Retrospective, image of the first room
Image courtesy of Peggy Guggenheim Collection

Long Lives Ding Yi!

by Rosalie Fabre

7 June–26 July 2015
Long Museum (West Bund), Shanghai

The solo exhibition *What's Left to Appear* of contemporary abstract painter Ding Yi (b. 1962) at the Long Museum (West Bund) in Shanghai is almost too much to handle, like an overdose of multi-vitamins.

Ding Yi has been using crosses (+, x) in his *Appearance of Crosses* paintings since the late 1980s. With his trademark all-over grid idiom he has literally constructed his own artistic framework. Addition and multiplication form the core of his artistic process. His is almost a performance in endurance, each cross the marker of his determination. He is not alone in the arena. Ding Yi was included in the *Chinese Maximalism* exhibition held in Beijing in 2003. Art critic and curator Gao Minglu coined the concept of Maximalism to define an abstract methodology based on the complexity of cumulative simplicity. One never sees a Ding Yi painting twice the same. The viewer instinctively follows paths within the grids, blinded by an influx of possibilities steps back and sees patterns multiply, forming complex yet coherent grids always in motion, either pulsating or merging. They project a natural yet systematised simplicity onto our minds. Every point of intersection on the grid is a moment of realisation, of which Ding Yi provides an infinity.

The Long Museum is part of a recent trend in constructing public and private museum and gallery buildings in China. Privately founded by one of the biggest art-collecting couple in China, Mr. Liu Yiqian and Ms. Wang Wei, the Long Museum occupies two locations: the Long Museum Pudong in the Pudong New Area and the Long Museum West Bund in Binjiang, Xuhui District, opened in 2012 and 2014 respectively. The later, designed by Atelier Deshaus, covers an expansive area of 33,000 square meters right on the waterfront. The site, at the bank of Huangpu River, was used as a wharf for coal transportation. The post-industrial building was designed around a coal-hopper unloading bridge from the 1950s. The first and second floors above ground are dedicated to showcasing regularly rotating contemporary art exhibitions. The ceiling highlights multiple orientations through the construction of interconnected umbrella-like vaulted forms.

Entering the Long Museum is a humbling experience: large, tall, concrete,



Ding Yi, *Appearance of Crosses* (2009)
220 x 810 cm, acrylic on canvas
Photo by Rosalie Fabre

new, impeccable, the space is cold, almost threatening. But at this time of year Shanghai is hot, and a shiver down the spine is not unpleasant. As one enters the exhibition the nave-like main hall houses Ding Yi's new monumental paintings (almost 5 meters high), made purposefully for the space, which showcase a new technique. Whereas his previous works are on canvas, tartan or paper, here sheets of plywood are covered with layers of paint and lines both painted and incised, such that the various colours underneath emerge. Those late works appear increasingly complex and revealing. Behind the main hall, a promenade through rectangular pocket-like spaces, a long dark corridor, U- and L-shaped turns, walkways, continues upstairs onto a mezzanine and balcony over the exhibition space below.

Ding Yi curates spaces within his paintings. In colour printing the cross is a coordinate which identifies a specific place and signifies precision. The exhibition is a *mise en abyme* of his work: it is a meticulous garden of grids. Every painting a square within the greater grid of the exhibition. The glass walls of the building have pierced grill shading as a grid-like exoskeleton. The building itself is located within the Shanghai city grid. Thematic labels invite the viewer to relate the artworks not only to each other but also to a wider ecosystem: the architecture of the building and the space beyond it, their lights, colours, rhythms and happenings. The paintings are grouped according to size, colour and composition. They are positioned in such a way that they complement or accentuate their immediate environments and vice versa, as well as emphasise transitional spaces and crossings.

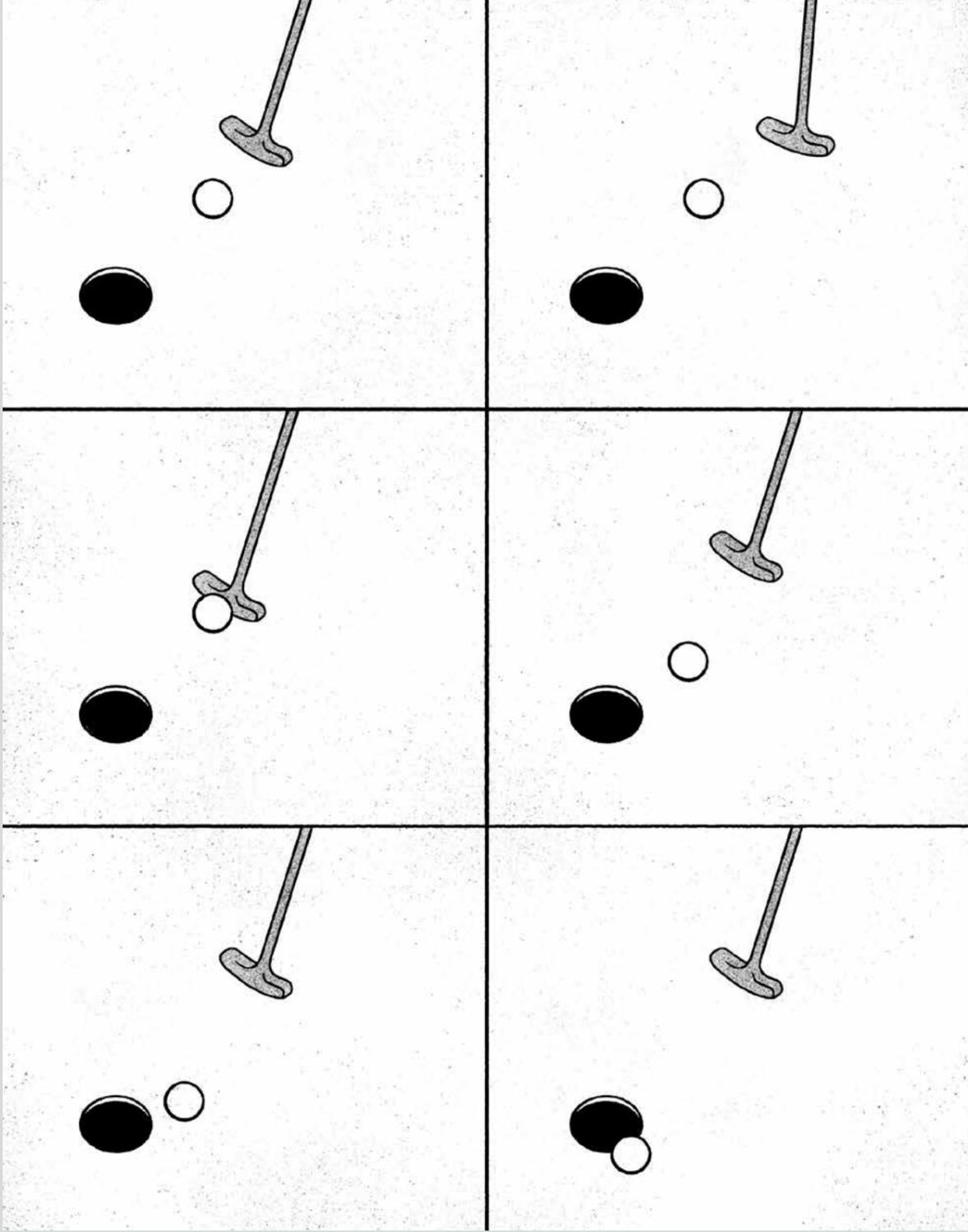
The bright colours and repetitive cross patterns have left a deep imprint onto the retina of visitors by the time they leave the museums, which, as they are projected onto the outside world, stimulate a dialogue between inside and outside spaces. The vibrant coloured paintings are particularly reminiscent of urban neon lights. When you lie down and close your eyes after a day navigating Shanghai, visual surplus and an excess of energy translate into vibrant impressions against closed eyelids. The artificial and the real at play merge. By acting in osmosis with the outside the

exhibition breaks the plasticity of the art world and calls for greater fluidity.

It brings to mind Hong Kong-based artist Tsang Kin-Wah's (b. 1976) pattern and text installations (floral wallpaper or vinyl on floor and glass panels) as well as his digital video and sound installations. In those works phrases are arranged in repetitive patterns and merge with the architecture. A lot incorporate the word 'fuck' in every possible turn of phrase. They are easily transferable: question what you look at, more than that, challenge it. Ding Yi's crosses are also imbued with ideas of negation and a stance of confrontation. He does not appear very agreeable. Abstraction itself as a choice of artistic expression involves the annihilation of forms of representation such as realism or figuration. It was used by Chinese artists in the 1980s as a form of individual expression and dissidence. Repetition for Ding Yi allows for the realisation of a previously articulated intention. He crosses himself out, negating himself because in every piece is embedded his own contradictions. When all is deleted, only truth is left behind.

According to Shane McCausland, curator of the exhibition, the longest painting exhibited, 810 cm of fluorescent 'hot' hues, suffers from uneven lighting. There is a slight optical discolouration as natural light hits the left side of the painting, infusing the border with a bleached fade, which increasingly lessens, giving way to crispier saturated colours towards the right. Far from a drawback, this bestows the painting with an illusory appearance. It allows for fragility and change, and thus makes the artwork more accessible. Upon close inspection one warms up to Ding Yi's humanity, forever more present in his paintings by contrast of a concrete surrounding. Ding Yi's lines are never identical. Straight yet wavering, they flutter to the pulse of his fingertips. That his grids rely upon each single brush stroke is a concern. If one line bends the pattern breaks. Our eyes are constantly checking and ready to correct potential defects in the system. But Ding Yi never fails to perform. It is not by chance that he is the leading figure of Chinese abstract art. He has elaborated and perfected a personal artistic language, which he refers to as 'rational abstract art.' Ding Yi has calculated his way through to the visitor of the Long Museum, has taken decades to seduce. And his devotion

pays off when, just out of curiosity, we immerse ourselves into his proposed paintings. #



Interviews

‘Art is Forever’: A conversation with Edmond Francey

By Nelli Romanovskaya

The head of Christie’s Post-War and Contemporary Art talks about his goals and aspirations, the importance of following current events and why museums are ‘the new churches.’ Last month, the most expensive artwork ever was sold at auction at Christie’s in New York. Pablo Picasso’s cubist oil painting from 1955 *Les Femmes d’Alger (Women of Algiers)* sold for \$179 million (£116 / €160 million).¹

‘It’ll be fascinating to see for how long this Picasso will hold the record for any work of art,’ auctioneer and Christie’s president Jussi Pylkkanen said afterwards. ‘It could be a decade, it could be longer than that. So, we really have witnessed not only a piece of art history, but a piece of cultural history here tonight.’

These days, it seems that every Christie’s post-war and contemporary art sale sets a new world record. In March, Christie’s set 11 world records in Paris, with pieces by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Gerhard Richter and Zao Wou-Ki fetching above a million euros each. And in November of last year, Christie’s held the biggest auction in its history, selling approximately \$775 million (€683 million) worth of contemporary and post-war art. That sale was driven by two iconic works by Andy Warhol — *Triple Elvis* (1963) and *Four Marlons* (1966). As such, there is great anticipation building for Christie’s Evening and Day sale of post-war and contemporary art in London on June 30th and July 1st. Earlier this month we were honoured to meet Christie’s newly installed Head of Department Edmond Francey at Christie’s bustling office on King Street. Francey previously held the same position in Paris, where he led the December 2014 sale that set eleven new world records for pieces by such artists as Henry Darger, Christo, Jim Nutt, Walter Leblanc and Alfonso Ossorio. There was a magical atmosphere at Christie’s on this day, a sense among the specialists and clients who were huddled together that something extraordinary and historical was happening in the art world. Walking past wrapped-up paintings propped against the walls, we managed to find a quiet place to chat about this remarkable time — a convergence of art history and cultural history.

NR On behalf of our student magazine, thank you for speaking with us, and congratulations on the success of the recent Paris auction.

EF Thank you.

NR Please tell us about your move to London from the Paris office.

EF Well, I joined Christie's Paris office in 2013 as a specialist and soon after became a head of the Department. Paris is a major city for modern and contemporary art. It has the Centre Pompidou, the Musée d'Art Moderne, amazing galleries and important collectors. But, Paris is not the centre of contemporary art. That distinction belongs to London and New York. I have always had an international view on the art world and I always wanted to work where contemporary art in Europe was centred. To me, that is Christie's in London.

NR What about the challenges that you face in your new position.

EF Well, there are many. I only arrived to London this spring, so my first challenge is to get rid of my French accent (*laughs*). Seriously, we've sold some amazing pieces in London over the last five years — the masterpiece by Francis Bacon, *Portrait of George Dyer Talking* (1966), comes to mind. The sale of the Essl Collection was also very important to the market for German contemporary art.

Of course, the goal is always to bring the best art pieces and collections to the market. That never changes. But, moving forward, the key question for us: How do we position London? How do we make London a very special place? How do we sell London to our clients? How do we distinguish London from New York? London is a truly global city. Everyone comes here for a different reason, whether it's related to business or culture. It is such an international hub. Christie's in London has to reflect the city's multi-cultural appeal. Our European staff is very insightful, and collectively, I think we will begin to crystallise our strategy. We all share very high standards, when it comes to contemporary art and

how to promote it at auction.

NR What are your expectations from the upcoming auction, and what are some of the works you're most excited about?

EF We have a strong collection of German art led by Gerhard Richter, including his photorealistic and abstract paintings. We also have works by Sigmar Polke, Martin Kippenberger, Neo Rauch and Albert Oehlen. There is a strong group of Italian artists in the sale as well — amazing works by Lucio Fontana, Paolo Scheggi and Alighiero Boetti. There are also impressive works by the YBA group of artists — we have the most celebrated painting by Chris Ofili, *The Holy Virgin Mary*, from 1996. It generated a heated debate when it was showing in New York in 1999. Then we have Zeng Fanzhi, Jenny Saville and Damien Hirst. And we have the American artists: Christopher Wool, Richard Prince and Edward Ruscha. Taken together, I think this reflects how international the art market is. I think it will be a very strong sale. To me, it demonstrates how you can look at art in so many different ways — that every artist invites a special way of looking not only at art, but also at life in general.

NR What role does technology play in auction sales? At the last Christie's sale in Paris, I noticed that the pace of real-time bidding on the Internet was very fast.

EF Indeed. Christie's website, along with Instagram and Twitter, have become invaluable tools for us. But, we still believe, however old-fashioned, that a finely produced catalogue remains a very special thing. We respect the technological march of time and the advances they hold for the future. Yet, we also value the tradition of the Christie's catalogue. It's a very English trait, I think.

NR Can you tell me a bit about your background. You have a degree in finance, but you joined the art world straight after university.

EF I don't have a background in classical art history, but I've always wanted

to be connected to art. And there weren't many specialists in contemporary art when I started. It was a very small world. Looking back, I learned from the art itself and the way it spoke to me. I learned from meetings I took with artists, collectors and critics. The learning process was very natural, very organic. And of course, my financial background helped me to better understand the economics of our business. Perhaps, the most important aspect of my background is that I've always stayed interested in what's going on in the world and in the global economy. I believe that if you want to understand the art world, it's critical to follow current events. History and art are very much interlinked. To understand Richter you need to appreciate the effects of World War Two and the Cold War. The more you understand political, social and cultural history, the better you can understand the context of a painting.

NR Was it difficult to get your first job at the Yvon Lambert gallery in Paris?

EF No, it was quite easy because it was an internship *[laughs]*. I was young and I was fearless! I looked through different magazines to find the best galleries in Paris. One day, I walked into Yvon Lambert and introduced myself. I said that my knowledge was small but that I was passionate about art and I would be honoured to work there. The staff were wonderful to me. Today, I count Yvon as a close friend and a very important person in my life. It's a nice story.

NR What about your experience immediately after, at the Waddington Galleries and then at Helly Nahmad Gallery in London.

EF Well, I had to do my military service after Yvon Lambert. Besides, the mid-90s was a difficult time for the art world. But, as soon as the business recovered, I was fortunate to find a job at the Waddington Galleries. Then, I joined Helly Nahmad, where I spent the next five years. Helly Nahmad is my close friend now. When you experience the right things with the right people, share the same passion for art and remain a trustful person — a reputation I have worked hard to maintain — then you can celebrate your relationships for many years. It was a privilege

to work with the Nahmad family and the collection they built over the years.

NR You organised *Picasso, Artist of the Century* and *Joan Miró: A Retrospective* for Helly Nahmad. I can only imagine how challenging and fulfilling that must have been.

EF Yes, they were two very special experiences. Many of the paintings from the *Miró* show were sold to one of the best museums in the world, the Museo Reina Sofía, in Madrid. When I go there now, I recognise some of those same paintings. It's an amazing feeling knowing that I was once involved with and took care of those works. There's no better feeling than to see 'your' paintings in a museum!

NR Do you have any Picasso or Miró in your personal collection?

EF Hundreds! *(laughs)* Well, no. As much as I cherish and love modern art, my passion lies more with post-war and contemporary art. I was very engaged with contemporary art, when I had my own gallery Baronian-Francey in Brussels, from 2002-2012.

NR How has your experience at Baronian-Francey influenced or prepared you for your current position?

EF Most people work at Christie's and then establish their own gallery. My experience was different. That's the beauty of life, when opportunities present themselves and they're unexpected. It's even more beautiful when it goes in the right direction *(laughs)*. Running a gallery demands constant creativity. You must be filled with ideas. You have to be on fire all the time. At Christie's, I have a team and we share our ideas. That's the great thing about art — the ability to share our experiences and talk about the art.²

NR How do you think art moves people?

EF Art does move people. And we are seeing a growing appetite for it.

New galleries are opening all the time. I think of museums as the new churches. People go there to feel different emotions and inspiration. That is fantastic!

NR Who are your favourite artists?

EF Well, I can be very eclectic, They can be important or unknown artists. I really do love the artists, who changed the rules or transformed the ways we look at art. For instance, I will always have a special place in my heart for Bruce Nauman, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Richard Prince and Christopher Wool.

NR And the artists, to whom you're paying the most attention?

EF At the moment I'm looking at the artists from the 80s. That was a special time for me in my personal life. I was young and I enjoyed looking at art. It's like your first love — it always stays in your heart.

NR Thank you for a very informative conversation. For those, who are interested in a career in the art world, would you be kind enough to share your advice?

EF Dedicate yourself to the art. And remain curious. Everything else changes, in the world, in life. But art... art is forever. And fear not! 🎨

References

- 1 Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, third party financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.
- 2 Essl Collection is one of the most important collections of Post-War & Contemporary Art in Europe. Built upon a true passion for collecting, the Agnes and Karlheinz Essl assembled 7000 works over five decades. The collection includes seminal works by German masters such as Gerhard Richter, Georg Baselitz, Martin Kippenberger, Sigmar Polke and Albert Oehlen. While the sale includes major works by international artists from the USA, to Europe, to the UK including Morris Louis, Frank Stella, Paul McCarthy, Cecily Brown, Louise Bourgeois, Maria Lassnig, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Cindy Sherman and Eduardo Chillida among others, it is the assembly of these German greats that lies at the very heart of this exciting, curated selection of 44 works were offered by Christie's in October 2014 (Christie's website).

Interview with Nicoletta Lambertucci, Curator at DRAF

by Florence Bell

Nicoletta Lambertucci is the current curator responsible for the David Roberts Collection, London. Nicoletta studied her MA Philosophy in Rome, and then went on to Goldsmiths to complete her MA in Contemporary Art Theory, before finally going on to become a Goldsmiths Research Fellow. She regularly writes for *Cura* magazine and previously worked at the Nomas Foundation in Rome, before coming to London. Here, I ask her about her collaborative and personal curatorial approach to the DRAFs' most recent exhibition, *The Violet Crab*.

FB What was your personal curatorial approach for *The Violet Crab* at DRAF and how collaborative was it between yourself and Than Hussein Clark?

NL It was highly collaborative between Than, Vincent Honoré (Director, DRAF) and me. It all started with us, at DRAF, inviting Than to work on a project that would transform the entire space of the Foundation into 'an open script'.

We went through the David Roberts Collection, which has more than 2000 artworks, and looked for moments of friction between the collection as a personification of an individual taste and the fictionalisation of its real story. After several meetings and various proposals, Than suggested cabaret as a possible structure to combine the diverse narratives that interested us.

At that point I had very little idea of what cabaret involved. I imagined that it was some kind of stand-up comedy with loud singing. It took about two months of reading and seeing cabaret shows across London to really get a sense of where we were going. I realised how complicated the world of cabaret is: a parallel universe with its own rules, synergies, interests and tastes and with a very fragile underground history.

The relationship of cabaret with the audience is a one-to-one thing. Whichever act is performing needs to resonate with the individual. Therefore the relationship with the public was extremely important when we were building up the exhibition because the audience had to feel involved and immersed, as if the environment was speaking directly to them.

FB Is that one of the reasons you didn't include wall text?

NL Yes. We had a floor plan on an A3 sheet of violet paper that people could take with them and a very amusing audio guide that Than himself recorded, which described some works in depth. We didn't want to compromise the space itself by using texts on the wall.



Pole dance performance by Ayumi LaNoire (2015)
Photo by Dan Weill



Installation view of the *Shadow Theatre* in The Violet Crab at DRAF (2015)
Photo by Mark Blower

FB How dramatically did you alter the space?

NL Than worked with the space in a very special way, intruding on and altering every aspect of it. The space felt completely different during the show, and questioned the potential of the gallery space by playing with the theatricality of its objects, sophisticated furniture, the wall colours and the light. It was not a theatre, nor an art space, nor a bar, but all of these at once.

We tried to create an image of a cabaret, a representation of cabaret. Each room directly referenced an area in a cabaret — cloakroom, bar, main stage, backstage, VIP room and shadow theatre — and had its own 'ecosystem'. We loaned a crystal from the UCL Geology Department that was in the cloakroom area, in the fireplace. Than is obsessed with Yves Saint Laurent, who had many crystals on display in his houses. Another nod towards Yves Saint Laurent was *the Hippo Bar*, a 1976 masterpiece by Les Lalannes, who were an extraordinary couple of designers that created most of Yves Saint Laurent's furniture.

Than brought to the show an incredible amount of information and references, and structured them in his own grand, romantic approach. In making the show, these mixed with our processes to drive an enormous machine of production. Than really takes pleasure in throwing in amazingly disparate but precise allusions, which become coherent despite their scattered temporalities. They don't just impose their own existence but instead become alive in a new context. This was also how we worked with the David Roberts Collection, with different works, media, temporalities, becoming coherent as they acted together on this stage.

The exhibition was intense in an almost cinematographic sense. We had more than 120 works that ranged from the end of the 1800s to specifically commissioned pieces, like the mural by Shaan Tariq Hassan-Syed, or Allison Katz, or Carter Mull who made veiled buckets of flowers. It was incredible to have all this different material together

in one place. The installation of such a vast environment needed time because it had to be built carefully; we had a form of dialogue with each work selected, and for me it was like listening to a glorious story spoken by a phenomenal storyteller.

We included bizarre collages by Cuban-American cigar roller and artist Felipe Jesus Consalvos — whose works were discovered after his death in 1960, and they are mostly inspired by vernacular tradition of cigar band collage. Another great example of collage is *Il Maggior Consiglio*, from 1976 by Ludovico de Luigi, a Venetian painter, also called 'Venice's venerable old Lion'.

FB Were you influenced by any work in particular?

NL Selecting the artworks is always the most delicate moment. In this show, we never had 'main works', in fact all the works were treated on the same level, there are no hierarchies within the display. No heroes or winners.

FB I noticed that works by Lichtenstein, Warhol and Sherman, weren't made prominent features of the show either.

NL Exactly. But that is also at the core of cabaret because you have these dense, multi-layered situations with ten different tastes in one room. When I first met Than he said, 'You have to be aware that I normally present 60% more works than other people.'

We didn't work around main works but always thinking room by room and seeing what feeling we wanted to create. Our attitude was not didactic, but it was precise. We had a precise attitude, so it was really clear why things were in a specific place. Exhibiting a work is an idea in action, it is an event. But the work can often resist and so you must listen by looking.

FB Did you take the placement of the works into consideration, especially

due to fact that the visitors were made to exit where they entered?

NL Of course. Especially for the long gallery spaces here at DRAF: you have to! I actually tend to do exhibition tours from the back, because it means that visitors can get an idea of the project as a whole and then hear information and details about it from my perspective afterwards. We want everyone to build up their own ideas in relation to what they see, that's why we didn't want wall text. We had the audio guide but the audio guide mainly gives facts, never personal comments or critiques. I think that, especially as a curator, you need to give facts and then let others have their own subjective feeling. With a project like *The Violet Crab* at DRAF, you would often notice something different every time because there is so much material present.

FB Do you usually provide catalogues or is it always short and factual?

NL No we don't, and for various reasons. What was important for us was for people to leave the space and feel like they had just been part of a performance.

FB Was it aimed at a specific type of audience?

NL At DRAF, we work for individuals and we try to be as open as possible to a variety of people. There is not a particular audience that we speak to; instead it's an open invitation to enter a space of prototypes. We want each person that enters the space to appreciate a different aspect of the whole system that we put in place. For *The Violet Crab* at DRAF we worked with absolutely every medium: from video to wall paintings, then fashion, opera, literature, ballet, tarot etc. Much like cabaret; at the end of the day an act of cabaret can be absolutely anything. From a ballet act, to a poetry reading, to a physical fight. During the opening night, Vincent, Than and I were also playing roles: we were characters from the past, the hosts that opened this imaginary space.

FB The music that echoed through the exhibition from the video piece

in the bar did give it a mystical atmosphere.

NL The video-work *Alvorada* from 2014 is very special to me. I saw it at an open studio at Delfina Foundation in London, and I knew it had to be part of this exhibition. It wasn't a commission, but it felt so natural for it to be included that I immediately told Luiz Roque about the project. He is a fantastic Brazilian artist who comes from Cinema and uses pop culture to raise questions concerning depth of vision, usually concentrating on the epidermal aspects of society. I loved *Alvorada* because it was like the trailer for the entire project, and a trailer for magic to happen. Its overdramatic sound that you could hear as you walked through, really made a difference. He is active in the Brazilian underground queer scene and this was an important preoccupation for us. We tried to open up the word queer as a definition for an indefinite situation. So in that sense, it was a queer exhibition.

FB Were there any cabarets or past exhibitions that particularly inspired you?

NL Japanese Kabuki theatre is a big influence for Than, and it was referenced frequently in the exhibition: from the black frames of the doors (alluding to the frame structures of the Kabuki stage), the cushion and shadow theatre colours (taken from the symbolic colours used in Kabuki), to the long table installation in the back room with the laporellos of photographs of Kabuki performances. We presented a programme of more than 21 performances on three nights on 19th–21st of March, and for the Grand Opening of the exhibition we also had several durational performances. For example, we worked with Ayumi LaNoire, who is really incredible: she is a pole dancer, fire-eater, she does bondage, acting, modelling and millions of other things! She used the space in collaboration with other artists, like pianist and musician Fion Pellacini and singer and actress Anja Dieltman. London-based artist Celia Hampton used the project to make a new performance that felt outside her comfort zone.¹ It was about self-indulging and being confident by trying something within a larger, almost hypnotic, structure. And after

all the craziness of the performances had past, I felt you could still feel the ghosts of these people and their acts in the space.

I believe the timing of the show was just really right for an institution like DRAF and really right for London. It shook up the stiffness on how to think about artworks, their identity and their temporalities.

FB Do you have anything that you are working on for the future?

NL On 4 June we opened the exhibition *All of us have a sense of rhythm* curated by Christine Eyene as part of *Curators' Series*. We invite one external, freelance curator every year to present a project at DRAF. The exhibition presents Eyene's original research into rhythmic sources in performative, material and immaterial productions within African tradition and contemporary cultures. This first exploration of this essential lineage encompasses dance, avant-garde composition, popular music and subcultures and rhythmic video editing through the twentieth century to the present day. It is a very delicate and beautiful research. It is combined with two other projects: a new intervention in our Library on the first floor by London-based artist Rebecca Ackroyd, who presents a sculptural intervention that explores the friction between the materiality of an object and its form; and a new *Study*, which is a series of projects where we isolate one or more works from the collection by the same artist in one room. *Monument Stalagmite/ P.T.A.C., 2012* by Sterling Ruby is the eighth in the series of studies of works from the David Roberts Collection, with a new commissioned text by curator Alessandro Rabottini. The five metre high, freestanding sculpture, is shown with other works by Sterling Ruby in the collection.

I am now working on DRAF Autumn exhibition *Albert The Kid Is Ghosting* which will be on display from 25 September to 12 December 2015. It will be a fictionalised crime scene, transforming the space into an unsettling mise-en-scene of defiance. Selected artworks — gems from the David Roberts collection — by Etel Adnan, Ida Applebroog, Philip Guston, Sergej Jensen, Hans Josephsohn, Oscar Murillo, Andreas Slominski and Michael



Installation view of the Main Stage in *The Violet Crab* at DRAF
 Photo by Mark Blower



Installation view of the Main Stage in *The Violet Crab* at DRAF
 Photo by Mark Blower

E. Smith are researched in depth and become accomplices of this uncanny fiction. However, one artist remains unnamed: the ghost. His presence is haunting the space, and traces are visible everywhere. The exhibition will complement works from the collection with new commissions, talks, live acts, and loans. Writers will be commissioned to produce studies of most of the works. Parallel to the opening of the exhibition, DRAF will reveal its new extension, a stunning space dedicated to Education and Performances, unique in London.

FB Big changes! This really is a very performative space then.

NL Yes. This building itself has a character too: it used to be a furniture factory and it was built in the end of the 1800s. It is essential for us to maintain its features and its original identity: DRAF is a production space itself.

FB Bit quirky!

NL It sometimes feels a bit rough! But most importantly, we keep DRAF a house for collaborations, models, and research. A factory of ideas. #

1 Celia Hempton's performance for DZ Hosts The Violet Crab was a short silent vignette where, dressed in motorcycle leathers, she punches a man in the stomach, before walking out).

In The Studio and Beyond with Anne Hardy

By Edward Sheldrick

Anne Hardy's practice is multi-faceted in that it incorporates photography, sculpture, installations and recently sound. Her installations are often rich with fragmentary found objects, and a construction ethos laden with obsessive fastidious detail creating surreal fictions and atmospheres. The studio as a working space and tool has always been essential for the artist. It is located in Bethnal Green in East London where one can see the sheer access the artist has to objects and materials from the street outside or from second-hand and supply stores. Initially, the artist would build her installations inside her studio and then photograph them, thus, leaving only the photograph as a contact point to the external audience. One example is *'Drift'* 2004, which shows the audience an interior, which has been explicitly buried by leaves. A key trope Anne deploys here is the sense of absence; momentary or deserted one can only gage this from the presence of what appears to be dust and cobwebs. This evokes a sense of a lengthy passage of time. What has been buried is some kind of control station, which is now redundant. The extreme white light shining through the partially buried windows blocks our view raising questions about where we are; space as we usually perceive it is neglected and destroyed.

For the artist's solo show at The Common Guild in Glasgow, *'Twin Fields'*, I helped in the deconstruction process readying the work to be moved to Glasgow and then reinstalled. The physical installations were to be shown rather than photographs of their insides. My tasks included numbering and organising carpet segments for her floors and helping create diagrams with numbering systems. I got a sense of the meticulousness detailed planning that is deeply involved in her practice. Her work is often compared to Andrei Tarkovsky's 'obsessive perfectionism' in the detailed creation of his film sets. The notion of a set is important, it is a theatrical concept alluding to the creation of space for an experience. In *'Twin Fields'*, the installations move beyond the limited experiential qualities of the photograph in its limited depth of field and are now, 'illusions that you can enter'.

'Twin Fields' consisted of two rooms, which were modelled on the shape

and volume of the downstairs gallery and were roughly three fourths of its size. The artist used the gallery space itself as the artistic medium and inspiration; as something that she found which was lost; just like one of her found objects in the installation itself. The first included an installation one could look into on a raised platform. A multitude of objects and components are presented, such as cast geometric cement forms, fabrics, lighting strips and unrolled plastic tape moving due to its close proximity to a fan. At first site perhaps one could think that these were placed randomly and freely, but the positions were again planned from an early stage as the artist had been working with the space for four weeks previously. A sense of harmonisation is created by the overarching presence of the blue carpet, which acts as a way of uniting everything into a single work — a 'field'. One can look into the space from various viewpoints, such as through a hole made in a wooden panel by force, one's sense of spatial orientation is confounded and distorted as the blue carpet and the lighting strip create a kind of reflection point and almost creates a kind of alternate realm which we cannot quite pinpoint; we are on the periphery. Her work encompasses a feeling and experience, which is extremely haptic; one can almost feel it, not through touch, but through our other senses too. One can almost imagine feeling the objects and the textures but we do it with our eyes.

In her second installation, which is a completely enclosed space, the audience is invited, in limited numbers, to inspect the wooden structure before entering one of the three doors before it automatically closes behind. There exists a single light source from a bulb with small beams of light coming in from the outside world between the gaps in the wooden panels. One can sit inside the work and listen to the various sounds coming from the speaker, which are an assemblage of the sounds produced in the making of the installation itself. These include the noise of wet cement, wood being split and metal clashing with the pavement. Thus, the sounds are the remnants of making in its extremity, from the studio *and* outside it in the world. The sounds are used as sculptural material and discarded by-products. Again, there is

this recurring notion of finding something, which has been discarded, and using it again in the space. There is an oscillation between the seduction created by some of the sounds and perhaps frustration, as some of the sounds are unfamiliar and thus hard to place. A haptic feeling is again also present as one tries to imagine what made the sounds in their minds and even what that might feel like. It creates an almost out of body experience within this dark immersive space.



Anne Hardy, *Twin Field* (2015)
Exhibition at The Common Guild. Courtesy of the artist and Maureen Paley, London

ES How did you feel moving away from showing the photographic 'artefact' (as it were) to now purely showing the physical installation space?

AH With the sculptural and audio 'field' works what I enjoy is that they are less determined. How you read them is more open and your experience of the work is more bodily, in that you are affected by light and audio, or are simply physically moving in and out of the work.

ES Your practice is heavily involved, perhaps by necessity, in planning and organising. Did you always know where you were going to place the objects within the structures or did the gallery space, being in Glasgow, dictate how you felt?

AH Yes there is a lot of planning it is true, but that allows me to then develop the work in a very process-based way, in that I make initial decisions or pose questions or enquiries to myself which then become a framework to work within. With the exhibition at The Common Guild I began with using the shape and volume of the downstairs gallery space as a kind of found, or lost, object. I made two structures, which were the same shape as that room, but roughly three-fourths of the size. Where these sculptural structures were placed within the gallery was planned from an early stage, the way in which you encounter them and how they interact with the space, but what exactly happened within them came out of the process of making the work, and of working directly in the gallery space for 4 weeks ahead of the exhibition opening.

ES May I ask how you created the sounds, how you make some of them seem so familiar yet others so frustratingly unable to place?

AH The audio is made from sounds that occur as a result of the physical and material processes I engage in when making the sculptures. For example, the sound of wet cement being poured into a mould, wood being split, or metal rebar bouncing on the hard road as I carry it back from the builders yard at the end of my street. I thought of these sounds as being sculptural material objects in some way, but they are

also the discarded parts of the sculptural process, and I am always interested in things, which are generated by accident in this way. The recorded audio is cut and layered up into what you listened to. Some of the sound is quite seductive, for example a roll of tape makes a sound almost like the sea on a beach, until it becomes familiar and very sticky sounding again. I hope that the audio creates an image or series of images for you when you listen. However, it is an interrupted process where you are made aware that that is what you are doing, in that some sounds seduce and lull you into an easy feeling of familiarity and others are more disruptive and hard to place.

ES I have to ask about the vivid blue carpet, for me it created uniformity as it matched the other blue areas in you installation but it was also strange, disorientating and uncomfortable. Notions of the uncanny come to my mind straight away...

AH The blue is called process blue and it is pure cyan. Colour creates space and also a plane of illusion, it unites all the elements of the show into a single work, which I think of as a 'field'. In this instance I wanted a colour that would create a very definite surface plane that everything else could sit on.

ES What first came to mind when I saw your 'Drift' piece was an alien space ship which had crash landed to earth; is this a particularly strange reading of this work?

AH You are not the first person to say that, but when I made this work in 2004, I was thinking much more of defunct technology, such as a control station that was no longer functioning. #



Anne Hardy, *Drift* (2004)
Diasec mounted c-type print, Courtesy Maureen Paley, London



Anne Hardy, *Twin Field* (2015)
Exhibition at The Common Guild. Courtesy of the artist and Maureen Paley, London

Interview with Petronilla Silver and Penny Govett

by James Proctor & Nicola Guastamacchia

As part of the research material needed for an in-depth analysis of Damien Hirst's *Forms Without Life*, we were given the opportunity to interview art collector Penny Govett, a board member of the Contemporary Art Society in 1993 and the director of the Contemporary Art Society until 1993, Petronilla Silver. Petronilla and Penny were both essential to the process that brought *Forms Without Life* to the CAS and subsequently to the Tate collection. *Forms Without Life* led to some interesting and contrasting view-points on the British art scene in the early nineties. We have to thank Penny, Petronilla, senior lecturer John Slyce and the current director of the CAS, Caroline Douglas, without whom these interviews would never have happened.

Penny Govett

NG Lets start from the very beginning. How did you come across Damien Hirst?

PG I was a great friend of Jay Jopling, who was Damien's close friend. At the time, I was the Events Organiser at the Tate and was viewing numerous exhibitions. I went to *Modern Medicine* and *Freeze* — both were exhibitions that Damien had put on because, at that time (you may find this hard to believe) contemporary art was a dirty word. People just did not want to know about it; they didn't want to look at it; and there were very few of us. There were only a hand-ful of people that actually thought that what was important was art now. Damien was fed-up with nobody wanting to put up an exhibition; nobody wanted to look at the work — as he said, 'Well, I'll tell you what — we'll do it ourselves' — and so they found these wonderful venues — amazing places — in the East End. One was a Christmas pudding factory that was redundant. They cleaned it all up as much as they could with all of Damien's mates: Angus Fairhurst, Gillian Wearing, Georgina Starr... Those exhibitions were put on by the artists themselves and they were terrific. They were done like museum shows.

JP What made you decide to buy such an early piece by Damien Hirst?

PG Damien had this amazing piece that was in a little gallery up at the far end of Oxford Street. He got these chrysalises and he glued them to the canvas on four walls.¹ The idea was that the chrysalis would flock onto the wet canvas and that would be the picture. Well, it didn't quite happen like that. It was extraordinary, even though many of the chrysalises didn't hatch.

'This is extraordinary,' I said to Jay.² 'I'm buying for The Contemporary Art Society and I'd really like to buy something of Damien's.' 'Oh, well, there isn't anything,' he answered. 'Well, there must be something,' I replied, and then Jay said, 'Well, actually, I think there is one piece

he's done with some shells.' When I told The Contemporary Art Society that I had bought this piece by an artist called Damien Hirst. They had never heard of him, and it's shells in a vitrine. 'Is that art?' they had asked, 'Well, yes, he says it's art and I think it is art,' I replied, and they said, 'Oh, very nice. I guess it is art.' At the time, I had also bought a Lucian Freud print, a Lisa Milroy, a piece by Ian Davenport and an Anish Kapoor.

NG After Jay's suggestion, when did you see the piece?

PG Jay told me that it was the only thing available, and I just said, 'I'll have it!' I didn't even see it!

NG How did the purchase process work at the time?

PG I was given a budget of fifty or sixty thousand pounds to buy these things. Then I think they liked what I was buying and they gave me a bit more, which was nice! The Contemporary Art Society had this list of museums and every four years had a distribution exhibition, which they usually held at the Camden Arts Centre. Then, all the museums that were on the scheme could send somebody to pick a piece. Tate always had the first choice. It was a wonderful opportunity for museum directors to come to London and choose some new artists to have in their collections. They didn't have to pay for it. You know, in those days, museum curators never left Liverpool, Newcastle or Southampton. They never got to London! There were only very, very few people that looked at new art.

NG What do you think about *Forms Without Life* in relation to the Camden's exhibition, where it was displayed?

PG Well, it was very different in feel from the other things in that exhibition. The others were much more mechanical.

JP Following what you said, someone from Tate came and chose that

piece. Who was he?

PG I can't remember which Tate curator chose that piece. They had just briefly heard about Damien Hirst. They didn't know what he was about. I remember that the girl at the Contemporary Art Society said, 'Oh, we're so thrilled! The Tate hasn't taken anything for years, but they've taken the Damien Hirst!' 'Great!' I said. That was that.

JP What was their reason for getting the piece then? Was it because they'd heard about Damien Hirst's reputation?

PG Yes — the Tate in those days didn't really buy the work of artists until their career was confirmed. It's a very risky thing to buy the work of young artists just out of art school, who may go on to be a ballet dancer or to be a bank manager, or...

JP ... or stop altogether.

PG Not every person, who comes out of art school ends up as a fine artist. But they'd heard about Damien because he was doing wacky things. There was never anybody from the big museums at any of the exhibitions I went to. There was one person, who I did see often - Doris Saatchi. She was Charles Saatchi's first wife and used to live in America. After the marriage, she came over here and must have thought, 'I can't believe it! Nobody is buying the work of these young artists and they seem so good to me!' She could see it; she could see that all the young British artists were actually doing interesting things. There were two or three of us collectors around. There was never a curator to be seen! That's totally changed now I have to say. Now, they're even going to the degree shows at the art schools, but I think the moment has passed. I think they've missed the great time. I remember when Damien did all the squashed flies. Do you remember the dead-fly piece? And the rest is history.

JP After the purchase, what kind of relationship did you have with Damien

Hirst and the YBA in general?

PG At the time you could buy a property for nothing in the East End. I bought this whole building in Hoxton Square, where I spent the next twenty years, and it was such fun! I had a table upstairs for thirty people and I used to have the East and the West, the old and the young, the rich and the poor together — it was fantastic! Richard Patterson, Georgina Starr, Don Brown, Gary Hume were living in the square. Damien was somewhere around, as were Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin, and they all used to come in! I was the *Agony Aunt*, and they would all write to me. It was completely wonderful! We did it for ourselves, really. It never got beyond ... The outer big wide world didn't matter! We were all a very contained little group. I remember once Tracey said, 'Penny, you don't realise. I'm going to be such a famous artist! You've got to buy my work.' And I said, 'Yes, Tracey, yes.' She continued, 'Next week I'm going to do this painting, but I'm going to be naked.' 'Oh, yes, Tracey. I know.'

JP That's self-confidence.

PG It was another world. On Charlotte Road, there were two pubs: The Barley Mow and the other one, whose name I've forgotten and, you know, when I first went there, you couldn't buy a bottle of milk. You couldn't buy a bottle of milk! There was no shop; there was only one little tobacconist, where you could buy a newspaper and cigarettes in Rivington Street.

NG At the moment, on Rivington Street alone, there are something like six or seven pubs at least.

PG I promise you, you could not buy a bottle of milk!

JP What do you think of the YBA in the wider context of the English art scene?

PG I think it's the best thing we've had as a group in our lifetime. Do you feel that there are great things happening in London now?

- JP It could be anywhere in the world.
- PG It could be China; it could be Latin America; it could be anywhere now, couldn't it?
- JP *Forms without Life* was meant to be in the *Internal Affairs* exhibition at the ICA in 1991. Hirst talked about it as his most personal exhibition. What are your thoughts about why he wouldn't include the piece at the end?
- PG I didn't know that. Probably it was too pretty. Anyway, I think that *Internal Affairs* was the one that started him off, really. With the ones he organised by himself in the Christmas pudding factory, he was with his friends. So, I think this was the first one, where he was just him by himself.
- JP And the shells? He collected them himself, apparently.
- PG Yes, absolutely.
- JP They definitely have a personal feel — if not simply for that reason.
- PG I'm sure he went to a shop in the Far East somewhere and thought, 'Gosh, those are beautiful! I'll have that one and that one and that one and that one...' and came back with many shells. In those days, you could take them in your luggage! Or, maybe, he had them sent over. I don't know.
- NG What do you think about Damien Hirst's titles?
- PG He was the first person to do these very elaborate titles. Before Damien, everybody's paintings were always called *Untitled 3* or *Untitled Yellow*. He must have thought, 'Actually, I'm going to give them a really long title.'
- JP The titles are very important in his pieces.
- PG Yes. And I don't think it relates to anything to do with the painting. I think it was just something in his fizzing brain and I'm sure he sat down

with his friends and I'm sure they talked about titles. And now lots of people do it, don't they?

JP The title, *Forms Without Life*, is what makes the piece in my opinion. You see it like a cabinet of curiosities. Then, the one thing that makes it really different from a cabinet of curiosities is that little title.

PG Yes, I think Jay had all these things ready to go to various, specific places, and I knew it was just as a kindness that he let me have that.

JP The piece is on display right now at the Tate.

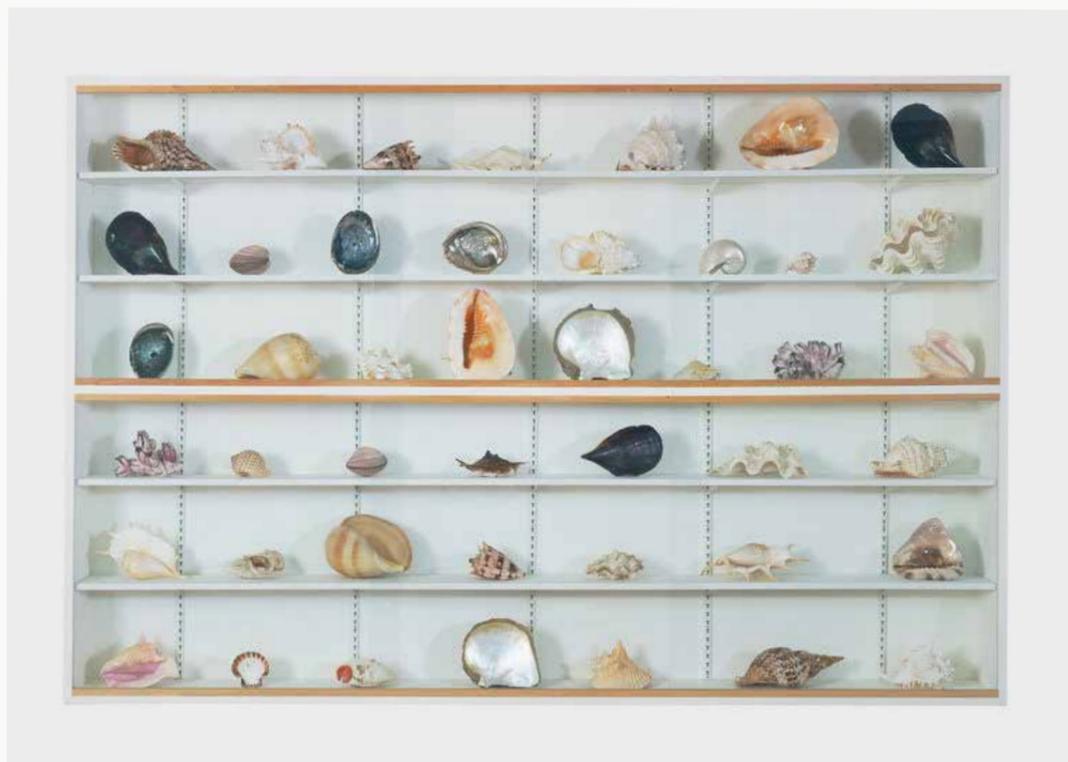
PG Yes, I think I knew that. Once, when I was still an Events Organiser at the Tate, there was a show, called: *A walk around an exhibition of the new acquisitions*, which included *Forms Without Life*. I think Jay must have been thrilled, when it went to the Tate. However, I think he would have given me a very different piece, if he thought it was going to be in the Tate! I always found the responsibility of buying things for somebody else, rather than for myself, really daunting. I thought this is for the future; it was not just because I liked the look of it. I found it really quite challenging to get pieces that I thought actually had any long-term value or interest.

Although, oddly enough, that piece might just be one of the best pieces that could have gone there because of how unique it is...

NG ... and you are part of the story.

References

- 1 Penny Govett is talking about Hirst's piece '*In and out of Love*'.
- 2 Jay Jopling



Damien Hirst, *Forms without Life* (1991)
Photo courtesy of the artist

Petronilla Silver

NG What was the Contemporary Art Society like when you were the director?

PS The Contemporary Art Society was started in 1910 to buy contemporary art to give to museums because museums didn't have enough money to buy their own work. It was a very small group of people like Roger Fry and Ottoline Morrell and was sort of drawing room, friends together sort of thing. It wasn't institutional at all. I left the CAS in 1993. In those days, we used to have three main buyers who used to buy whatever they liked and then the works would be given to museums. These days, they work with particular museums and just buy what has been agreed to.

NG When *Forms Without Life* (1992) was bought, did you already know about Damien Hirst?

PS Only as an artist — as a sort of student, stroke, artist — yes. But, I dealt with hundreds of artists then and he was just one of them. I saw his work and him when he was still at Goldsmiths and saw the dot paintings that he still does. I suppose I was in touch with him because he was very, very good at getting in touch with people whom he thought were useful. He'd ring me and he'd say, '...something, something, Nick Serota, Norman Rosenthal (who was running the Royal Academy)...' He was amazing for an artist of any age, but particularly for somebody who was still a student. He really knew people and he was a very good networker.

JP So, a precocious networker?

PS Well, efficient networker. I don't remember why, but for some reason I remember driving him round London with my chairman who was called Caryl Hubbard, going somewhere because, in those days, I don't think he would have had a car. I suppose the whole group was sort of making a noise — I mean, they did a lot for putting young British artists on the world map really, didn't they?

- JP But, the Hirst itself was an incredible purchase in hindsight.
- PS In hindsight, yes. Penny Govett bought it. She's actually got quite a lot of works by the YBA, including those by Damien Hirst, Fiona Rae, Nicholas May, Ian Davenport. They were all part of that sort of young, up and coming group. And she's bought works by Hamish Fulton, Anish Kapoor, Lisa Milroy and Lucian Freud, who was obviously big in those days.
- NG Do you think that's why Damien Hirst's work was chosen?
- PS It would probably be better to ask Penny Govett that. I know why, but you ask her. He was really drawing attention to his work. A lot of people had noted his work. He still is a very good businessman, isn't he? He's not just an artist. He is very good at promotion and all that.
- JP Right — instead of the story of the artist as...
- PS Well, the recluse. That sort of recluse, and their phone doesn't work... I suppose, computers were still coming in, but I mean, lots of people wouldn't have had emails in those days and I'm not sure whether even he had an email address. I can't remember. Communications in those days were much less speedy than they are now and I think that whole group was much more professional about presenting their work. In those days, if you wanted to look at an artist's work and you didn't want to go to their studio, you used to look at slides. Many of the older artists wouldn't have slides. I know it all sounds very funny, but in a way, given the sort of speed and professionalism of the artists, I think it actually makes a big difference...
- NG You said that Damien Hirst contacted you. Did you visit his studio to see his sculptures?
- PS No, I don't think so... I can't remember actually, whether I ever visited his studio. I know I visited his degree show at Goldsmiths.

- NG And what about *Freeze*?
- PS No. I'm afraid I didn't go to *Freeze*, which was very remiss of me. I no longer remember why I missed it.
- JP That's alright. I didn't either.
- PS But you, probably, were only just born! (*Laughing*)
- NG Who decided to buy a piece by Damien Hirst?
- PS Well, it wouldn't have been The Contemporary Art Society itself. It would have been Penny Govett. The buying was done by individuals.
- NG Was Penny Govett on the board of The Contemporary Art Society at the time?
- PS Yes, she was a committee member. The buyers were always people, who were on the committee of the Contemporary Art Society. They weren't paid. They were just like advisers, I suppose, and then, each year, two of them used to get given an amount of money and they could go off and spend it however they liked. Then, there were certain museums, which were members, who would get one thing from the CAS every three years.
- JP Including the Tate, at the time?
- PS Including the Tate. Since the '20s, the Tate gave the CAS an office, which we still had when I was there. We had a storeroom, so all the art that we bought, and our office, was in the Tate. They could always take first choice, so that they always had exactly what they wanted.
- NG How much can this kind of purchase influence the path of an artist, especially if it is an institution of importance, such as the CAS and the Tate?

PS If you've been bought by the Tate, then you've been bought by the Tate. That's the best art museum in this country. No, it's great credibility; it's a big deal — especially when you're starting off so young. It would have helped immensely.

JP In that case, you never saw *Forms Without Life* before the purchase?

PS No, I didn't.

JP So, it was just Penny, who would have...

PS Yes.

JP Ok, that's very interesting.

The CAS gave money to Penny and she went out and purchased it. So, essentially what happens between the time when the money is given to purchase it and the eventual donation is made to the Tate? What was the process like?

PS We used to buy the works and then we used to have an exhibition, to which the museum directors came. The Damien Hirst was actually shown in the Camden Arts Centre. I think the public could come in. We showed the works to the museum directors on a particular day. It was very different from anything else that was shown that year. Well, I suppose, I was going to say because of what it was about — the subject matter — but maybe quite a lot of artists work around life and death. I suppose it was just a very odd thing really a display case with shells in it. Obviously, his ideas were presented in a different way from anybody else's. But it's not done like that anymore. It's all much more structured towards what the museums want, whereas in those days it was much more The Contemporary Art Society and particular individuals just buying whatever they liked.

NG What kind of contribution did the YBA generation bring to the British

art scene?

PS I think they contributed tremendously, just by drawing attention to their own group. I think it has really helped all British art. I think his group really changed a lot in the art world. They were a much more professional group altogether.

JP How do you see the London art scene nowadays?

PS It seems to me (but I'm probably completely wrong) that a lot of the art world is very much... It's less diverse in a way, than what it was.

JP Less diverse?

PS I think that The Contemporary Art Society was a very small organisation, which was sort of doing its own thing. Now, I think that all those institutions are plugging the same sort of art. It gets much more difficult for something that isn't the status quo to break through.

NG Just one last question — Who curated the exhibition at the Camden Arts Centre, where *Forms Without Life* was exhibited the first time?

PS Well, I would have hung it. In my day, you did all these things. You didn't have all these important-sounding names. I wouldn't have been called a 'curator.' I would have just been the person choosing what to put up and in what place. Now, I'm being funny, but these big titles do seem to make everything sound much more difficult than it really is.

NG Nowadays, the art world seems...

PS It's all job titles. Smoke and mirrors. #

An interview with Nadia Kaabi-Linke

By Nivedita Poddar & Miriam Ambattle

Nadia Kaabi-Linke, born in 1978, is a Tunisian and Ukrainian artist and performer currently working in Berlin. Her practice explores problematics of displacement, loss and assimilation, ingraining her work in socially and geographically relevant contexts. Her investigation has brought her to travel to India, Egypt, Mexico and the United States to experience conflicts first hand.

Nadia Kaabi-Linke next shows will take place at Dallas Contemporary (Texas) until 21st December 2015 and at Experimenter (Calcutta) starting February 2016.

About her new exhibition in Dallas:

My show at Dallas Contemporary in Texas will be my first solo show and will have site-specific installations. I am very interested with the notion of the fence, the separation border between Mexico and the United States. It inspired me to produce, for the first time, a performance-related piece. A performance that I will do myself but I also want to introduce the community in my work and bring in the people for whom the separation means something, something that is very central in their lives. It can be either Americans for whom the separation is a reality they have to deal with everyday or Mexicans who are living in Dallas and have experienced its crossing. We are organising this with the curator Justine Ludwig. I perceive this performance as a sculptural work more than a temporary event. For me, the trace of the performance has to be a sculpture. We are also documenting the event with a film but I am not sure if we are going to show it in the exhibition. However, it will be the occasion to publish my first monograph at the end of the show.

On the unique use of materials in her work:

For every single new work, I like to experience and experiment with new medium because, for me, the medium and the idea have to coincide and you can never separate them. There has to be complete coherence between them and that is why every time I am working on something completely new, ideas gradually flow and it is the medium that seems to impose itself. Sometimes, it is the other way around and the idea comes to me from a new interesting material. For instance, I remember this one time I wanted to work with dust but I did not know what the would theme be. A difficult material like this can be in my mind for months or years before I can identify the theme that can perfectly match with it. This is the reason why I am very experimental with my work and I am not afraid to start something new with a challenging material every time. The idea of the contrast between fragility and solidity or beauty and violence is very present in my work. If I use fragile materials it is not

only for their frailty but also for their resemblance to other things like when I use porcelain to mimic the human skin. I am constantly trying to anchor my pieces in the social context and situations that I experience. I feel like the world that we live in and the locations I have lived in already contain these contrasts. We might feel like we are in a secure world in Europe or the United States but it can explode at any moment, behind the smoke screen there is so much violence going on, a truth in all societies even in Germany where I currently reside.

On working in Berlin, her hometown in Tunis and the rest of the world:

I work all over the world, where I am invited to produce things really. Besides, one of the galleries that represent me is Experimenter Gallery in India, something I would not have expected. Actually, I have never been to India but Ahmad Nasser was my gallerist in London before he closed and it was Ahmad that put me in contact with them.

I do live in Berlin and I have recently created two new works in Tunis but it is not because it's Tunis or Berlin, it could have been any country. I was in London before that for a few months but living in Berlin has added so much to my work, always relating to the history of a place. My approach to new creations is research-based and historical most of the times. It gives my work this continuous line that follows me everywhere I go.

On the artist duty to create some sort of archival work of contemporary life and historical events:

I think each artist has to find his own path and create his own world and develop things according to things that are important to him.

On working in politically charged environments:

I'm sensitive to the issues of immigration because my life is a consequence



Nadia Kaabi-Linke, *Off the wall* (2013)
 Wall prints on paper on canvas, detail of the right part 120 x 240cm
 Courtesy of the artist



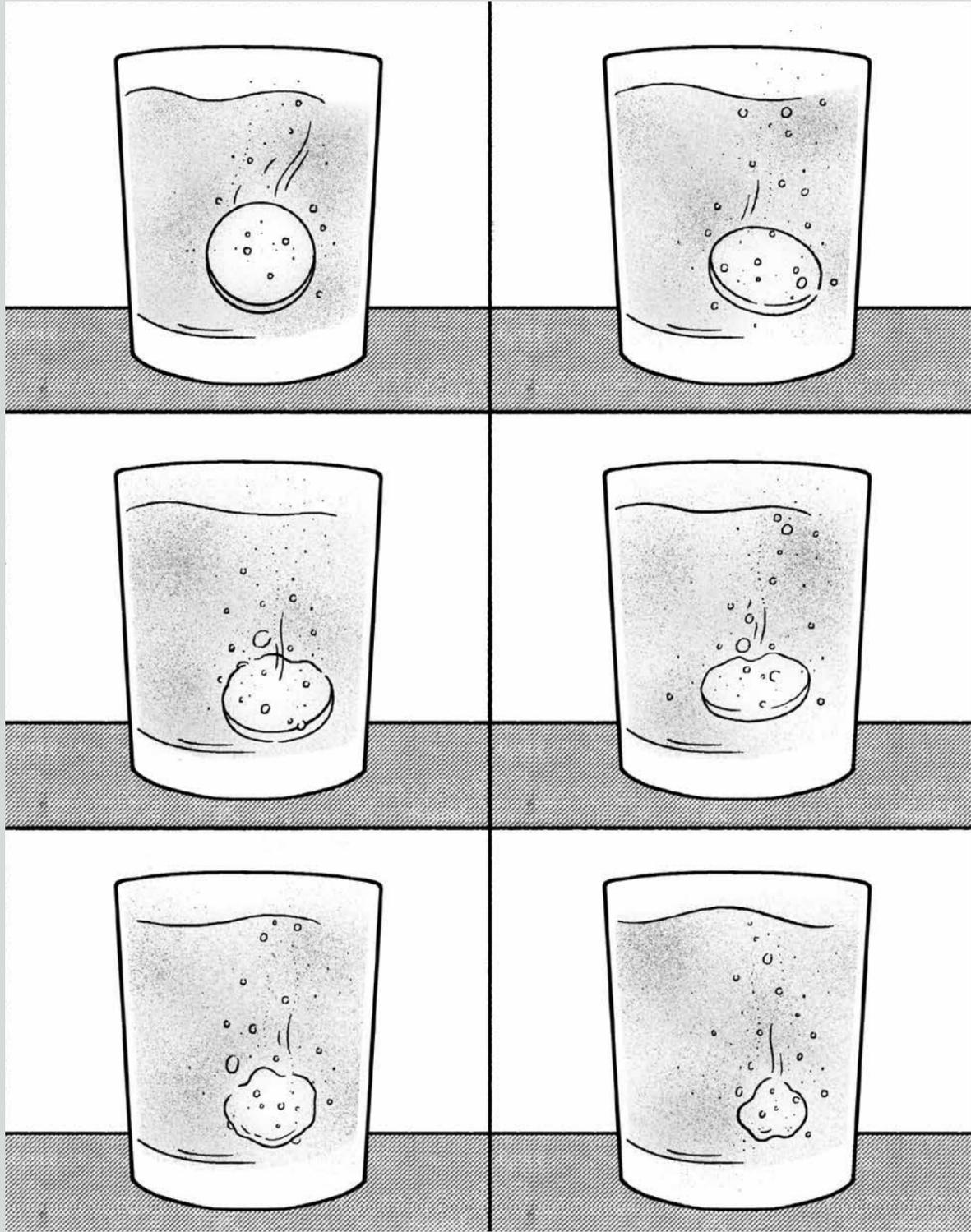
Nadia Kaabi-Linke *A Short Story of Salt and Sun* (2013)
 Wall prints, ink and paper on canvas 230 x 140cm
 Photo by Debanjan Das

of a series of immigrations. I was born already in the idea of separation but I think speaking about politics is a dynamic that exists in any society. You don't have to have a personal struggle to talk about these issues. In the end, any situation can inspire me or not. I don't think things are happening in the places where there is war or conflict. For me, things are happening where conflict is hidden, when dynamics are taking place without media and journalists are trying to get a big scoop. The real changes happen slowly and in time

In my work politics are a result but not necessarily a goal, my intention is much more subtle. It starts with small things that I build up together and because everything is linked to the place I live or work in, politics are eventually part of it. It is only one of the aspects that you can see in the work. I do think it is clearly more related to the people, their sensitivity, social exchanges and, ultimately, life stories.

On her link with printmaking processes:

My work is very much print-based. I studied in a very classical fine arts program and painting was my main speciality. However, I did study historical printing processes like etching but I think printing is definitely something that I feel is closer to my life story. Printing is always about choices and about loss and gain. In order to have a trace, you always have to have a contact at a certain point but it is a contact that is always lost in the end. I was born in the idea of separation and maybe printing reflects this notion. For me, it is something very intimate and it shows, in a way, that I'm linked to the world. I am always looking for new techniques and experimental printing still fascinates me. #



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On the cover: Anne Hardy, *Twin Field* (2015)

Exhibition at The Common Guild. Courtesy of the artist and Maureen Paley, London

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