

C#17



WOLFGANG TILLMANS
“IF ONE THING MATTERS,
EVERYTHING MATTERS.”

Editor's Note

In this, the sixth issue in the series, we expand our coverage and content further to include material produced by students from the postgraduate programmes in London – Modern and Contemporary Art and Art World Practice, Art, Law and Business, Arts of China – and also pieces written by Christie's Education students in New York through a series identifying emerging artists. I would like to thank 2007 alumna Gražina Subelytė who very kindly contributes here an element of her current PhD research conducted at the Courtauld Institute on Kurt Seligmann, Surrealism and the Occult.

My greatest thanks are due the truly remarkable cohort of students from Modern and Contemporary Art who have produced *C#17*. Your energies and enthusiasms, hard work and good cheer helped round off a wonderfully successful period for our postgraduate course with grace and smiles. Thank you does not quite suffice. You may be the cohort I remember best and this will be because of your comradely cohesion and commitment to our project as you made it your own. Hold tight to the dialectic and please remember your Brecht: 'These are days when no one should rely unduly on his competence. Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.' This magazine is entirely your venture and venue and I wish you all the very best in the life, labour and learning to come.

John Slyce

Programme Director

Modern and Contemporary Art and Art World Practice

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QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Sarah Lucas And Gendered Objects

by Natalie Brashear

As Bowie croons, *You've got you're mother in a whirl...* she's not sure if you're a boy or girl, he playfully claws at the sensitive underbelly of a society that is defined by binaries: high and low, good and bad, male and female. In the same vein, Sarah Lucas leers at her audience from behind a skull perched in between her legs, her very regular, and strikingly androgynous bone structure seems to be asking the audience if they too are in a whirl—is she a boy or a girl? She smirks, in on the same joke as David Bowie and any artist that has played around with notions of queering and undefined gender roles.

Sarah Lucas is an artist widely associated with the Young British Artists, or *yBas*—known for their own *rebel, rebel* attitude. In contrast to her contemporaries, Lucas herself remains a somewhat independent and subdued character whose demeanor and work are much more understated than her contemporaries.¹ The punchy, controversial personality of the *yBas* results in Lucas's work being shuffled into the shallow category of “hyper sexual and provocative”. Others have interpreted Lucas's works to be biting Feminist in sensibility—speaking upon the objectification of women and abjection of female sexuality. Both of these interpretations discredit the *cool* quality of Lucas's work born from a keen exploratory distance set between artist and object.² Lucas's work cannot be reduced to one angle or agenda, she is interested in the polarities themselves but also how they mesh together: masculine and feminine, attraction and repulsion.³ This cool attitude suggests that the provocative nature of Lucas's work can be attributed to the assumptions of the viewer as much as the intention of the artist.

Radical feminist, Andrea Dworkin selected one of Lucas's sculptures, *Bitch*, for the cover image of her book *Intercourse*, so present is the imagery of the subjected female form.⁴ *Bitch* serves as an especially distinct example of how viewers have come to assume the sexual and gendered nature of Lucas's objects: the woman being made into sex object by patriarchal societal subversion. *Bitch* is composed of a table, one half of which has been covered by a unisex white tee-shirt with its legs fitted through the sleeves. On the other end of the table is a vacuum sealed fish hanging off the edge of the tabletop. Under the table, two large



Bitch, 1995. Courtesy: Sadie Coles HQ, London

honeydew melons have been tucked into the tee-shirt. Their stemmed tips poke through the shirt out of holes that have been cut into the fabric, they appear at once pert and sagging, askew and inescapably breast-like.

To link this immediately with the sexual subjection of women in society is an interpretation that goes beyond the immediate imagery of Lucas's composition. The title *Bitch* is a suggestion on the part of Lucas, it sets a tone but is too simple and open ended to fully define any specific interpretive slant. After all, the bitch in question is a table in a tee-shirt. More than that, it is a table with odd little wheels on the bottom of its legs, a detail that divorces the sculpture further from any set representational reality. The wheels give the sculpture a sense of mobility that does not align with the image of one being forced into a subverted sexual position. Lucas could have easily removed the wheels to give the sculpture a more grounded sense of body and weight, but instead she declines to muddle the table's status as an object.

According to theories laid out in object-oriented philosophy, objects have their own autonomous

realities, deeper and separate from their context within society.⁵ Think of entering a room you believe to be empty, catching a chair tilted at an unexpected angle and jumping with surprise. Despite the object's lack of life, it does have a presence—separate from our own and distinct from the other objects that may contextualize it. According to some strains of object-oriented philosophical thought, the nature or reality of this chair—or table—is beyond the grasp of human knowledge, it cannot be verified in any way.⁶ The question emerges of why the audience of Lucas's work may feel inclined to project a gender onto an object that is not only unsexed and lifeless but that is of an *essence* that cannot be related to humanity. Lucas's unwillingness to force the object into any kind of representational matrix only reinforces that she is offering a tableaux of items she claims no ownership of in order to trigger in the mind of the viewer an interpretation based upon assumptions.⁷ The uncanny moment to be examined in this exchange is not the societal commentary of Lucas's work—woman as object—but in the implication of the assumption of object as woman.

Beyond this even is the notion that the association of two melons with the female form hints at a greater issue of assumptive gendering in society. An identity is defined as the internal coherence of a person, in the case of objects their gender identity must then result from a sort of projection of the audience's predetermined notions of gender.⁸ *Bitch* is interpreted as a kneeling woman, but the white uni-sex tee-shirt stretched over the table could, for example, suggest a unity of male and female form locked together in embrace or struggle. Perhaps an even stronger example of a work that challenges how its audience may think in a gendered way is *Au Naturel*.

Au Naturel is a sculpture that mostly consists of a yellowed mattress, bent and propped against a wall.



Au naturel, 1994. Courtesy: Sadie Coles HQ, London

Emerging from the mattress are a variety of Lucas's signature *humdrum* objects: on one half a gaping bucket paired with two melons, on the other half a cucumber flanked by two oranges.⁹ The objects are arranged in such a way that is, again, very suggestive of the placement of human genitals. The melons, like the melons in *Bitch*, mimic the natural hang of a woman's breasts and blossom buxomly from the propped upper half of the mattress. The cucumber is very erect, as if proudly saluting the role it fulfills within the mind of the viewer. Unlike *Bitch*, the suggested human forms in *Au Naturel* do not have their own corporeal presence. The reclining nude couple suggested by the title are signified only by Lucas's placement of objects. Now the subjects of the audience's assumption have actually been rendered invisible. This effect, is especially uncanny because it forces the viewer to realize that the nudity of the couple is truly only present in their mind.¹⁰ Now the gendered objects in question are embodied solely as sex-specific body features, the semiotic map of an invisible scene. The lewdness of *Au Naturel* exists in the sculpture's self-awareness of the viewer's discerning eye. The couple knows the viewer is present—they require the viewer to exist—and yet they languish in their unabashed nakedness, making no attempt to clothe. The aesthetic incongruence of the bucket screams at the viewer with a trumpeting mouth, implicating them of the same depravity they stand in judgement of.

Beyond fruits and vegetables, perhaps the most gendered objects Lucas employs in her work are nylon tights.¹¹ Tights are accessories associated with obscuring blemishes, creating the appearance of smooth supple skin—a symbol of female idealization. Referenced repeatedly throughout Lucas's work, nylon tights made their first prominent appearance in her *Bunny* sculptures.¹² Lucas's *Bunny* has been interpreted as a perversion and reversal of idealization, a study of *male* fascination and disgust with *female* sexuality.¹³ *Bunny* sits slumped in a chair, her legs splayed open—her posture suggesting a state of bleak drunken wantonness. The body of the figure is composed of nylon tights: stuffed and tentacle-like. However, to automatically associate *Bunny* with a female identity would equate to assuming that any leg in nylon tights must also be the leg of a *woman*. When Lucas stuffs the tights in question they do not assume the shape of a curvaceous female leg, instead they become limp, crawling limbs that seem—though imbued with life—completely inhuman.

This confusion of gender and humanity is well articulated by a more recent work of Lucas's entitled *Oh! Soldier*. The soldier in question is comprised of

a pair of nude nylons stretched taught; the top half hauled up by grey suspenders looped through a wire hanger and the feet stretched over the toes of two concrete combat boots. The *gendered* presence of *Oh! Soldier* is suggestive of conventional masculinity. The imposing, brutish presence of the boots, heavy and hard on the ground pull the sculpture downward—stretching the tights to their extreme and removing from them any form that might hint at their original feminine association. Nylon tights in *Oh! Soldier* serve as foil to the other objects in the composition that have masculine associations: suspenders and boots. The literal pull of the tights between the two embodies this sense of tension—the discomfort of juxtaposition only made possible through the viewer’s presupposed gendering of the objects. Robbed of their role as symbols of the feminine sphere, the uncanny similarity to human flesh become the tights’ defining trait¹⁴.

The aesthetic evolution of Lucas’s works as they are presented here almost suggests that she is toying with notions of gender ambiguity in order to challenge her audience into thinking about the implications of their assumptions. However, according to Lucas’s own words on her practice, this is not the case. The *cool* attitude that Lucas embodies is not a lack of sympathy and interest in the objects she uses but rather a disinterest in how they will ultimately be received. One gets the impression that Lucas makes her sculptures, for herself more than anyone. The objects in her assemblages are *placed*, not *directed*—she can be as surprised or disarmed by her work as her viewer might be.¹⁵ Lucas and her practice are not interested in being defined, she makes the joke but in no way relies on her audience’s laughter.¹⁶ Sarah Lucas is content to laugh alone with her objects, laughing together as if thinking—*how could they know?*

1. Jeremy Cooper. *Growing up : The Young British Artists at 50*. Munich; London: Prestel, 2012, 115
2. In contrast a *hot* artistic approach would be fueled by personal passions related to political agendas, enacting change, or effecting the viewer in some way. Amna Malik. Sarah Lucas, Au Naturel. London: Afterall, 2009, 3.
3. Sarah Lucas. *Sarah Lucas: Exhibitions and Catalogue Raisonné, 1989-2005* / [Edited by Yilmaz Dziewior and Beatrix Ruf]. London: Tate, 2005, 9.
4. Michele Robecchi, and Sarah Lucas. *Sarah Lucas*. Milano: Electa, 2007, 41.
5. Graham Harman, and Barbara Hess. *The Third Table = Der Dritte Tisch*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012, 7.
6. Harman, and Hess, *The Third Table = Der Dritte Tisch*, 11.
7. Lucas on the autonomy of her sculptures, “You are in a funny relation of mutual respect with the things you use. You are not the dominator of these materials. It’s not a case of ramming your ideas into them.” Jan van Adrichem. Sarah Lucas. 1500 copies. Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 1996, 10.
8. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge, 2007, 23.
9. Robecchi, *Sarah Lucas*, 34.
10. Gilda Williams. “Living Dolls and Ordinary Things: On Sarah Lucas.” In *Sarah Lucas: Ordinary Things* / Edited by Lisa Le Feuvre ; with Essays by Lisa Le Feuvre ... [et Al.], n.d., 28.
11. Lisa Le Feuvre. “Ordinary Things.” In *Sarah Lucas: Ordinary Things* / Edited by Lisa Le Feuvre ; with Essays by Lisa Le Feuvre ... [et Al.]. Leeds: The Henry Moore Institute, 2012, 14.
12. *Bunny* here is a shortened referent for the sculptures featured in Lucas’s 1997 show *Bunny Gets Snookered* as well as the prototype—*Pauline Bunny*.
13. Matthew Collings. *Sarah Lucas SL*. London: Tate Pub., 2002, 14.
14. Lucas on using tights in her work, “Nylon mesh...relates to the elasticity of the human body...from tender tight beginnings to sagging...it can only stand so much push and pull until it gives way”, Anne M. Wagner. “Sarah Lucas: Ordinary Language and Bodily Magic.” In *Sarah Lucas: Ordinary Things* / Edited by Lisa Le Feuvre ; with Essays by Lisa Le Feuvre ... [et Al.], n.d., 51.
15. “Being an artist, for Lucas, has nothing to do with reputation or sales, but is dependent on her own private sense of surprise in what she creates, according to Lucas, ‘I still have that romantic idea of making art being a kind of magical thing’” Cooper, *Growing up*, 117.
16. When asked “Which artworks make you laugh (or smile)?”, Lucas responded “All of mine do. We have a good laugh together.” Sarah Lucas, Olu Michael Odukoya, Penelope Curtis, Julian Assange, and Florence Peake. *Drawing Room Confessions: Issue #8 : Sarah Lucas*. London; Milan: Drawing Room Confessions; Mousse Magazine and Publishing, 2013.

SKULPTUR PROJEKTE MÜNSTER 2017

A Once A Decade Sculpture Show

by Maria Pavlinova



Nicole Eisenman, *Sketch for a Fountain*, © Skulptur Projekte 2017.
Photo: Henning Rogge

Held every ten years in the German city of Münster, Skulptur Projekte Münster presents the works of international artists in a variety of spaces around the city. Its history dates back to the 1970s, when a proposal to install a kinetic sculpture *Three Rotary Squares* by US artist George Rickey in the city's centre caused a public outcry. In response, the sculpture project was initiated in 1977 by curators Klaus Bussman and Kasper König, with the idea of acquainting the public with modern sculptures by placing them in public spaces. Kasper König has been the artistic director ever since, working on each exhibition with rotating curatorial teams. This year, the co-curators are Britta Peters and Marianne Wagner.

The decennial event lasts a hundred days and coincides with Documenta, which takes place every five years in Kassel some 200 km away. Skulptur Projekte Münster examines the relationship between art and the public space through commissioning site-specific works that encourage active public participation. The ten year span not only makes it a rare and highly anticipated event, but allows for reflection of the social, political and artistic tendencies of each decade.

The fifth edition in 2017 revolves around experiences of body, time and space in an era of explosion of digital media. Apart from sculpture, it includes a number of performative and interactive works and video art. A total of thirty five works are exhibited in various locations in Münster and—for the first time this year—in the neighbouring city of Marl.

Perhaps the most ambitious project this year is Pierre Huyghe's *After A Life Ahead* - an entire bio-technical system developed in a disused ice rink. This large-scale installation is a living organism, with all elements inter-dependent. The ground of the hall is transformed into a muddy landscape featuring a mix of concrete and earth, clay, styrofoam, gravel debris and sand. The space is inhabited by algae, bacteria, beehives, a poisonous sea snail species 'conus textile' and even chimera peacocks.

Cables and sensors under the soil capture variations in the conditions of the space—such as temperature, CO₂, humidity. This information feeds an incubator containing HeLa human cancer cells (often used in research), which divide faster or slower depending on these factors. The cell's growth triggers the emergence of augmented reality shapes - which visitors can see through a downloadable app. Variations in a conus textile pattern trigger the opening and shutting of a pyramid-shaped window in the ceiling. In this work, biological life, real and symbolic architecture and landscapes, visible and invisible processes are all fused into a fragile symbiosis.



Dan Graham, *Octagon for Münster*, 1978

Another unusual work is Ayse Erkmen's submerged bridge, *On Water*. The bridge just underneath the water level connects the bustling northern pier and the industrialised southern pier. It creates the impression that visitors are walking on water. The work alludes to problems of a sociological and city-planning nature. Rivers have often been used on political maps to draw borders, while at the same time serving as catalysts for urban development. Thus waterways often represent both possibility and restriction. Erkmen literally bridges this divide by linking two urban spaces previously separated by the harbour basin—using a water bridge rather than a land bridge.

A unique feature of Münster is that a number of works remain in the city. Since 1977, thirty six sculptures have stayed in the city - including works by Bruce Nauman, Donald Judd, Dan Graham, Rachel Whiteread and Thomas Schütte.

Bruce Nauman proposed *Square Depression* for the first Münster project in 1977. Initially rejected, the project was realised for Münster 2007, when Nauman offered his original proposal for the original 1977 price. *Square Depression* is a large walk-in sculpture made of white concrete, its edges extending downwards and crossing at the lowest point in the center. The work resembles an inverted pyramid, sunk into the ground in front of the University of Münster's Department of Nuclear Physics. The title is also a play on the word "depression", which means both a physical indentation and a depression in the psychological sense. When

standing in the middle of the sculpture, viewers may feel exposed and disoriented, or find difficulty when judging distances and heights because, when looking from the bottom, dimensions and proportions are optically distorted.

Dan Graham's *Octagon* created for Münster 1987 is an octagonal pavilion made of two-way mirror glass, metal and wood, measuring 2.4 meters high and 3.6 meters wide. The Octagon alludes to the tradition of the 'pleasure pavilion' that has historically been a feature of parks as a venue for social gatherings. However, unlike historical pavilions, the *Octagon* is windowless and can only be entered from one side through a wall element that acts as a door. Whereas people in classic pavilions are usually exposed to the looks of passers-by, here the reflective material makes visitors inside the pavilion invisible to outside viewers, while their view of the outside is a distorted one. The *Octagon's* placement in the middle of a tree-lined alley, combined with the reflective surface, creates a fascinating illusion of infinity where the pavilion's own architecture gradually disappears from view.

For Münster 1997, Rachel Whiteread installed a wall of books cast in plaster on an inaccessible balcony of the LWL Museum for Art and Culture. The work *Untitled (Books)* represents seven rows of white shelves surrounding the door leading to the balcony, each row the same width as the door. What is visible are not the books themselves but the negative spaces created by the impression of the books' edges and hollow spaces between them. While the books were destroyed in the production process, their impres-

sions allude to their earlier existence, thus evoking a ghostly presence. Whiteread's choice of the museum for placing her work refers to the symbolic value of books as a repository of knowledge.

Over the course of its history, Skulptur Projekte has become much more than an exhibition of sculpture. The ten year intervals, the wide variety of artists involved, the site-specificity of the works and the fact that many of them remain in the city have established Münster as a place of study of the evolution of sculpture as a medium and as a means to interact with the public.

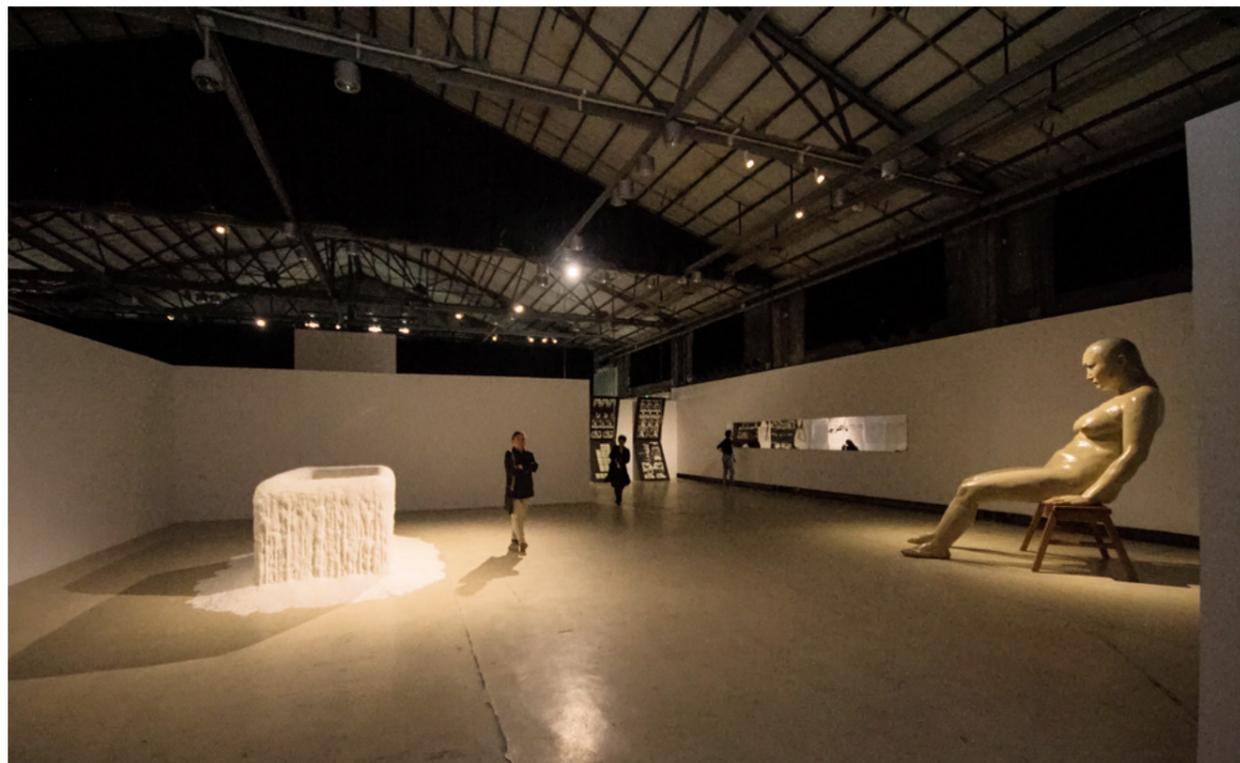


Pierre Huyghe, *After A Life Ahead*, 2017.
Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper gallery, Berlin

DEEP AND DISTURBING

Huang Zhuan's Memorial Exhibition

by Emily Hyde



Installation view: *Metamorphosis*, OCAT Shenzhen Exhibition Hall, 2017. Courtesy: OCAT Shenzhen

The prolific writer and Chinese contemporary art critic, Huang Zhuan (1958–2016) was responsible for curating shows of local and international importance, from his early work at the He Xiangning Art Museums in Shenzhen through to the collaboration on *State Legacy: Research in the Visualisation of Political History* with John Wyatt of the Manchester Institute for Research, Innovation in Art and Design (MIRIAD), while Executive Director of OCAT (OCT (Overseas Chinese Town) Contemporary Art Terminal). These created prime opportunities for contemporary Chinese artists to exhibit their work, and as might be expected, the majority of exhibited works in *Metamorphosis: Huang Zhuan Memorial Invitational Exhibition* have a clear connection with him and his impact on the careers and practices of the participating artists.

Despite the clear request from Huang Zhuan himself that no memorial service should be held for him, prominent contemporary artists Wang Guangyi (b. Harbin, 1957), Zhang Xiaogang (b. Kunming, 1958), Sui Jianguo (b. Qingdao, 1956) and Wang Youshen (b.

Beijing, 1964) felt that the best way to commemorate one of the most influential and important curators and critics of our time was a review of Huang's curatorial career through artists who have felt the impact of his work on their lives, encompassing works Huang had personally selected and supported over the course of his life.

The title of the exhibition, *Metamorphosis*, comes from the alleged final phrase of Huang Zhuan's last will and testament, loosely translatable to: "Death is merely metamorphosis" (Sǐwáng zhǐshì yī zhǒng jīnchántuōké). However, the translation of (Jīnchántuōké) "metamorphosis" does not adequately encompass the epigram's contextual meaning, to indicate a cunning escape. This suggests that Huang's passing was indeed an escape from his suffering as a result of cancer.

The theme of death features within the exhibition, whether intended or not. Upon arriving in the converted warehouse space, the darkness is unsettling, with only the sound of fans whirring above the large

room. The mood created is somewhat quiet and calm, giving way to an assemblage of photographs from his project *Before and After My Grandmother Passed Away*, exhibited in the Hong Kong Arts Centre in 1994 in an exhibition co-curated by Huang Zhuan and Joseph Fung (b. Hong Kong, 1938, photographer, curator and previously professor at Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design), which brought together contemporary photographic works from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Beside it continues the confrontation of the taboo of death with more uncomfortable viewing in Wei Guanqing's (b. Hubei, 1963) *Suicide Plan About Oneness* of 1988, depicting the artist in various scenarios envisaging his own demise along with suspended rope nooses, featured in a solo exhibition curated by Huang at the He Xiangning Art Museum in 2007.

These sombre and disturbing elements give way to downright oddness upon turning into the main floorspace. Facing visitors sits Xiang Jing's (b. Beijing, 1968) larger-than-life fibreglass sculpture *Your Body*, which Huang included in a survey exhibition of Chinese contemporary art in 2006, marking the first time Xiang Jing's work was exhibited in the United States. In a 2007 interview, Huang held the piece in high regard and discussed it at length with the artist through various frameworks of social phenomena, and so it features very fittingly in this memorial exhibition.

The theme of metamorphosis is apparent in the adaptation of some submissions from their original states of exhibition, such as Zhan Wang's (b. Beijing, 1962) originally smooth reflective stainless steel sheets lying end-to-end, covering a large floor space in the 2015 Shanghai Pujiang OCT Ten Year Public Art Project, where he enjoyed considerable attention in a solo exhibition. Here however, they are hung vertically, reflecting the changes and developments in his career and practice thanks in part to Huang Zhuan's considerable influence.

In another interpretation of metamorphosis, Sui Jianguo's (b. Qingdao, 1956) *Gravitational Field-Midnight* was created within a week of the show's opening, and is a clear allusion to *Gravity Field*, part of an exhibition which explored the process of acceptance of

the unexpected changes a sculptor encounters, and was destroyed after its exhibition at Pace gallery in Beijing. Although Huang was not heavily involved in this particular show, the ephemerality of certain works of art and the negotiation of accepting unforeseen circumstances certainly strike a chord with his loss, as well as the present work's uniquely coffin-like shape.

To those uninformed of Huang Zhuan's life work and the relationship history behind himself and the artists, the exhibition is somewhat incoherent and strange. However, with deeper understanding of the man behind these efforts, it is rather a poignant tribute in his remembrance, now at peace after many years of suffering. Whether due to popularity of the show or the inability of OCAT and friends to say goodbye, the extension of the show's dates from June 4th to July 2nd allowed visitors to explore the recent history of Chinese contemporary art through the legacy of Huang Zhuan, who is still listed as the Executive Director on the OCAT website over a year after his passing. What can be said for certain is that Huang, the man who has contributed so much to the Chinese contemporary art scene, will be dearly missed and that his legacy will live on through these artists and every artist who continues their practice thanks to the doors opened by him.

Metamorphosis: Huang Zhuan Memorial Invitational Exhibition

OCAT Shenzhen Exhibition Hall A & B, Building F2, OCT Nanshan, Shenzhen.

13th April 2017 – 2nd July 2017

ROOM 4: 'MADE IN CALIFORNIA: THE WEST COAST EXPERIENCE'

from *The American Dream: Pop to the Present*,
The British Museum, 9 March – 18 June 2017

by Sei Saito

New York may be the center of the art scene in America. After all, Pop Art opens the exhibition introduced by red neon signage condensed with the eminent phrase 'American Dream,' lighting up the doorway. While the line-up continuously piles up with august titles, the artists mentioned throughout the beginning such as Andy Warhol (1928–987), Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) and Jasper Johns each derive their skills from these techniques, making an effort to connect to the audience rather than bombarding them with big names.

The vibrancy of various shades of poppy, primary colours connect the show's flow until the current of colours suddenly branch into a gradation of waterfalls articulated through a series of lithograph prints by Jasper Johns, Figures 0-9 from *Colour Numeral Scales* (1969). While the prints do not have matching colour sequences, the last installment builds up to the East Coast portion of history with the indigo drained at the bottom of the number '9' lithograph. The dawn of Californian weather outshines the indigo colour, breathing life into sunny mode of California artistic output featured in Room Four "Made in California: The West Coast Experience."

Before the illustrations of cracked orange automobiles part featured in Robert Rauschenberg's *Preview* from Hoarfrost Editions (1974)—a print on a field of blackened silk taffeta fabric—come into view the viewer confronts the subtle, translucent, green car of *Profile Airflow*, 1969 by Claes Oldenburg. The deliberate fragility roused through the diaphanous fabric causes the art piece to sway along with the movement of air roused by visitors. This wind and Oldenburg's swimming pool as envisioned through the transparency articulate the course of the exhibition, and ramble on towards the West Coast.



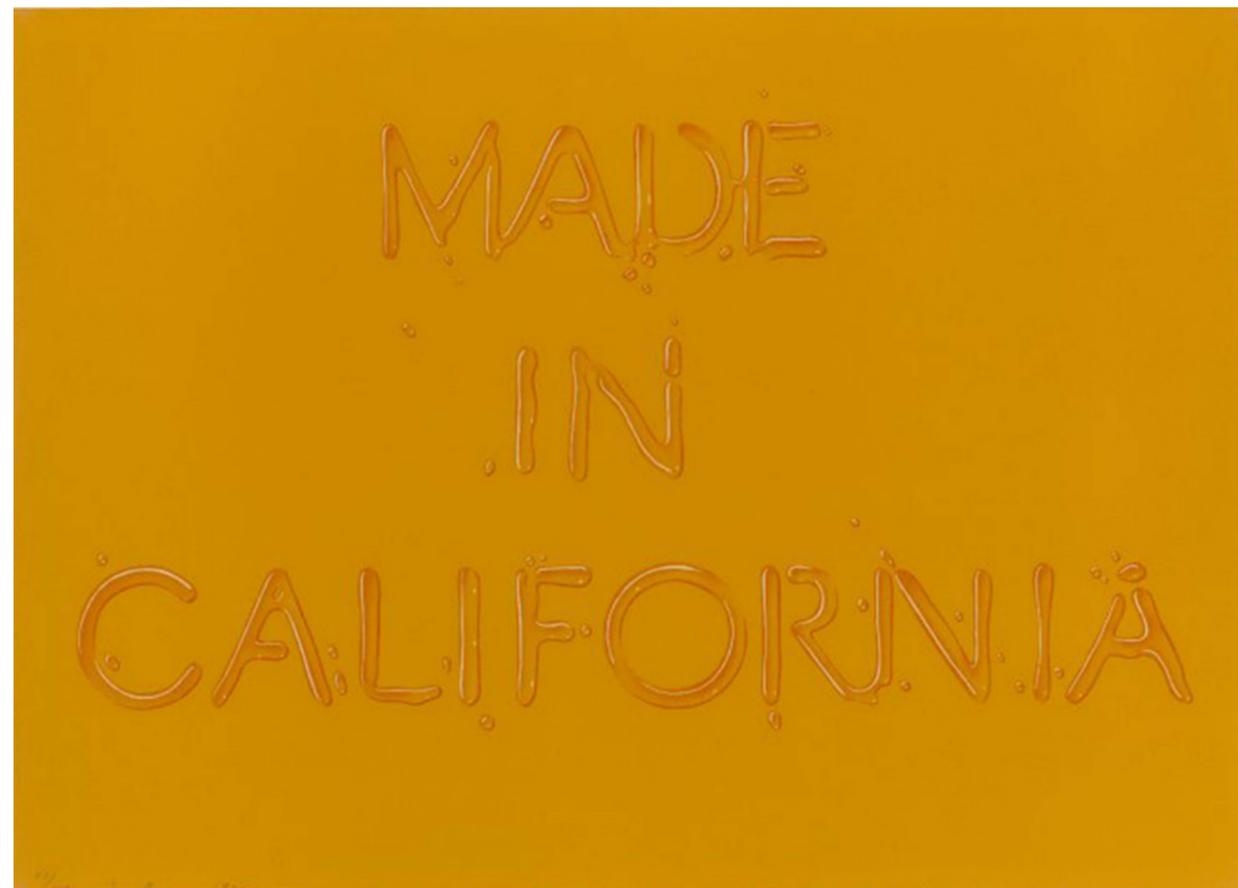
Bruce Nauman, *Clear Vision*, 1973. Courtesy: Christie's

The reversed word 'CLEAR' from the print by Bruce Nauman's *Clear Vision*, 1973 shrieks under a bold, black ink enhanced by traces and flecks scrambled around each letter. The work's presence dominates the entrance, catching the viewer at eye level. The irony of the incorporation of the text "VISION" is emphasized by weighty, black ink that smothers the term to the point of illegibility. The haze from afar depicts fabrication, a characteristic of West Coast art that Nauman explores throughout this work.

The laid-back ambience of the wall colour sets emphasizes different attributes of Ed Ruscha's work. Prints associated with cosmopolitan Californian by Ruscha have been gathered on the left side of the room, perhaps the most recognisable is the colour screen-print *Hollywood*, 1968.

In contrast to the crisp elegance conjured by the sepia colour palette, a hint of light-heartedness is echoed throughout the monochrome and coloured lithographs *OOO* (1969–1970). The bubbly typography is then carried into *Made in California*, 1971, emphasizing the amplified energy of the culture.

The buoyancy is augmented by Ruscha's book, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966 along with the curved wall on the right-hand side of the room. Branching along the extended, vertical landscape of *Hollywood*, 1968 these elements are prolonged in both *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966) and the seven coloured screen-print *Standard Station*, 1966. However, the concertina foldout of the artist's book not only adds a sequential touch to the work, but also creates an ad infinite experience for the viewer that encourages them to walk forward in order to seek out the LA fixed time suggested by Ruscha, one frame after another. This narrative is then paused with *Standard Station*, 1966, aligned with a miniature rectangular-shaped



Ed Ruscha, *Made in California*, 1971. Courtesy: The British Museum

opening on the opposite side. The tranquility coming from a gradational sky is then translated as a universal language in *Big Dipper Over Desert*, 1982. The pitch-black sky with little dots of twinkling stars displayed next to the printed text 'Easy' in *Intersecting Streets*, 1999, exudes a sense of freedom enhanced in part to a small, neighboring window into Room 11—a space that offers a look into racial identity and the inescapable association with a morbid history of slavery.

This irony is dramatized through the neon sign *Malice*, 1980 by Bruce Nauman, which is hung high up on the wall, looking down upon an expanse filled with lithographs and occupied by words that provoke a satire disguised behind the so-called "American Dream." The shaking nerves held within raging black space are then subsided into skinny black lines, illustrating one of America's beloved reinvigorations, food. This is presented as a series of etchings: *Lunch*, 1964 and *Bacon and Eggs*, 1964 by Wayne Thiebaud. Robert Bechtle also executes this mellowed serenity through etched-out images of colloquial cityscapes. The tranquility seen through the emptiness of the pathway in Bechtle's etchings is enhanced by the subject matter of two coloured lithographs from

The Weather series by David Hockney. These prints harken back to the iconic charm of the West Coast—the weather. The equanimity subsides within a room presenting two screens. One loops a series of speeches by former American Presidents about equality, whilst the other displays various prints in relation to the topic also on endless repeat. These shift the cosy West Coast atmosphere towards a feeling triumph and freedom—the seeming essence of America.

ATHENA PAPADOPOULOS

The Smurfette, Emalin Gallery, 28 April – 03 June 2017

by Jana Oberländer



Athena Papadopoulou, *The Smurfette*. Installation view. Courtesy: Emalin Gallery, London

In 'The Smurfette', Athena Papadopoulou's second solo show at Emalin Gallery, eight anthropomorphic, hairy sculptures are trying to stand upright on a white, wine-stained carpet as if they have gone through a long night of debauched festivities.

The artist has covered plain wooden frames and deer antlers with thick layers of glue, self-tanner and wig clippings and transformed them into uncanny, anorexic-looking creatures. They wobbly stamp the ground with kinky high heel boots, while a potpourri of shrivelled G-strings, bras, and all kinds of tat dangles from their skinny arms. Gold chains strung with taxidermy charms and dried insects, make the figures look like hopelessly overdressed fashionistas. The words 'TAPPED, BATTERED, BRUISED, SPIT OUT', alluding to acts of humiliation, are draped across the Smurfettes in the form of colourful resin letters.

Four black and white collages surround the figures and show Papadopoulou's private photographs and doodles recalling an obsessive wall in a teenager's bedroom – the analogue version of a social media feed. The biographical imagery has been flattened against a variety of cultural media, stitched together and chemically transformed into fabric before being stained with wine, cosmetics and medicine, which lends the work a raw and filthy character. An explicit and sexually aggressive vocabulary emanates from these collages—grotesque female characters are overlaid with urban teenage slang, vulgar catcalls and drunken misogynist slurs. A wrinkled woman appears throughout the collages in different guises as an over-sexualized crone: choking her naked, pig-masked husband, drinking and lasciviously smoking a cigarette with shriveled lips, striking a pose in a skimp bikini. Simultaneously a roasted pig cries out the words 'Whore Moan' and doodles of insects, such as worms, spiders and maggots proliferate across the fabrics.

Papadopoulou's work is of a strong performative character. Elements such as the wine-stained carpet or the collages are created by the artist filling her mouth with red wine and medicine and spitting it out onto the surfaces. Both the sculptures and the collages are stained with various cosmetic products as if indicating a feverish act of self-embellishment. Her striking use of cosmetics, a product that aims to temporarily transform one's appearance, and is applied to the artworks through a performative gesture that adds another layer of meaning. A digestive or masticating element pervades Athena Papadopoulou's work. It can be seen in the recurring use of gastric medicines like Pepto-Bismol or milk of magnesia which in contrast to cosmetic products aim to temporarily transform one's intestines.

Papadopoulou, who is strongly inspired by sculptural figures of Greer Lankton and New York's art and literary scene of the 1990s, often uses autobiographical sources as a point of departure for her painterly and sculptural works. Much centres on the debauched life of her diabetic family which she exaggerates and transforms using pop cultural, historical and literary references. Although a narrative sense can be clearly distinguished within the artist's work—Papadopoulou is as a gatherer of stories and memories—there is no one linear or concrete interpretation.

The show 'The Smurfette' plays with female clichés as the title, which refers to the original female Smurf but can also be understood as urban slang for 'slut'. Just like women are supposed to enhance their looks by using a wide range of cosmetics and beauty products, the artist has excessively dolled-up her sculptures with lipstick, hair dye, foundation and freckle concealer and has thus created female consumer archetypes that appear both seductive and abject. The hedonistic, Dionysian vibe evoked by the sculptures on the wine-stained carpet intentionally makes them teeter on a disturbing threshold between woman and object which characterizes patriarchal society. A threshold between being sexy and slutty, seductive and repulsive, between being mature human beings and clothes-hangers for sleazy underwear. By means of equally celebrating and violating the female body, Athena Papadopoulou presents us with a way of thinking about the construction of femininity in a male dominated society.

SOPHIE JUNG

Producing my credentials, Kunstraum Gallery, London,
14 April - 27 May, 2017

by Caroline Mackay



Producing my credentials, 2017.
Courtesy: the artist and Kunstraum gallery, London

'If I say too much, hold up a book and shout "YAP", are the instructions given to the audience by Sophie Jung, clad in a vibrant, dark gold velvet jumpsuit, at the start of her performance of *Producing My Credentials*. Words definitely come at us – tumbling chaotically and audaciously from Jung's mouth, as fast as thoughts. Jung takes us on a journey, amongst entwined ruminations; a voyage of enlightenment that broadens our minds with references to the natural world, inventions, philosophy and travel.

Jung is mesmerising, amusing and confusing; a linguistic warrior, she moves her audience visually around the performance space, amongst the islands created on the floor from black volcanic sand, littered with intriguing props. She intrinsically links together her found objects and words. The artist's black cat paces softly around, eyeing the audience cautiously before moving languorously, like his mistress, and falling asleep, a living symbol of mystery, good fortune and transformation.

Her objects include a tall spiral corkscrew holding black and white photos, metal lampshade holders intertwined with tape which reference Cornish lobster pots. Pearlescent pink shells are scattered; bleached stones act as islands for small ceramic animals; miniature potted cacti adorn the edge of the raised stage. Coiled papier-mâché clad serpents and a bright white porcelain set for afternoon tea, sit amongst rectangles of felt and board. Jung has created an archipelago of references for us to explore and in her performance, she moves from one linguistic island to the next, often pausing, muttering and rephrasing her ideas; her hesitations make us feel nervous and slightly embarrassed for her - people hate silences - but Jung is unabashed.

Jung's performance is an exciting but uncharted journey, roaming the churning seas of language, unsure if she will encounter land. And she takes us with her. *Producing My Credentials* starts with her lounging male assistant Peter (in fact the artist's husband), reclining

in a classical pose, amidst the array of objects. Issuing instructions and 'stage directions' to him, reminds the viewer of the classic 1930's Hollywood duo Oliver Hardy's relationship with his sidekick Stan Laurel – slapstick humour but with a biting edge.

The artist touches on religion in a clever word play – religion being the 'Opi(ate)' of the people links to Opi who was married to Saturn, who ate his children, then on to Mutualism—Jung uses the example of the symbiotic bond between a sea anemone and the hermit crab, explained using various sea creature related props around the space. Then, she leaps verbally from shells as accommodation to alternative housing models and finally a political dig at the so-called UK Conservative Government's 'Bedroom Tax'. Jung draws breath – have we all registered to vote in the forthcoming election?

To remember their speeches, classical orators took advantage of a quirk of the human brain to recall locations to facilitate hunting, and created a 'memory palace'—positioning shapes or symbols for topics in an imaginary space and then walking through it in their minds' eye. Jung has spoken in the past of her use of mental mind maps to anchor her thoughts and the allegory of a memory palace vividly describes the audience's experience.

Music is woven into the story too, referencing seventies and eighties culture—we all sing along karaoke style to 'The Winner Takes It All' by ABBA. Jung uses song and her strong vocals to 'ham' up her performance, and keep her viewers amused. She beguiles us with her story telling and keeps her audience enthralled, yet slightly puzzled by her 'complex narrative mists', as Sally O'Reilly explains in the show's performance publication.

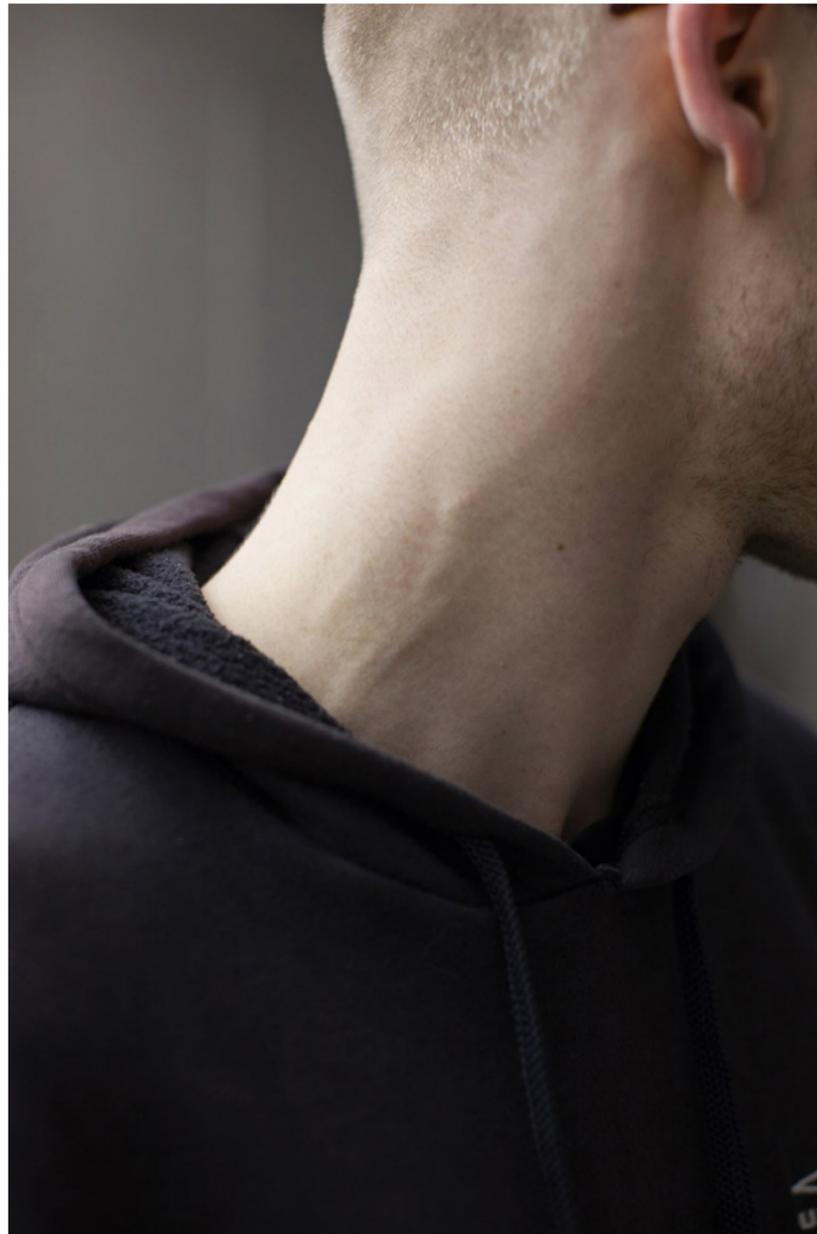
In *Producing My Credentials*, Jung's mastery of references, whether to mythology, history, science or popular culture – Road Runner, Super Mario Bros – challenges and delights the viewer. She takes us, in the words of the Judy Garland song "Over the Rainbow" and back again, leaping from rhyme and humorous asides to drama; constantly deconstructing language and throwing it back together in a consummate performance.

Words direct our attention, our perceptions, and consequently our behavior. Because it shapes the way we think, language also contributes to our psychic ecology. Language can be a great ally or a subversive enemy.' (from an extract from 'Travel the Territory'). For Sophie Jung, it definitely is her best friend.

WOLFGANG TILLMANS

Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017, Tate Modern, London,
15 February 2017 – 11 June 2017

by Katalin Kunderak



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Collum*, 2011
Courtesy: Tate Modern, London

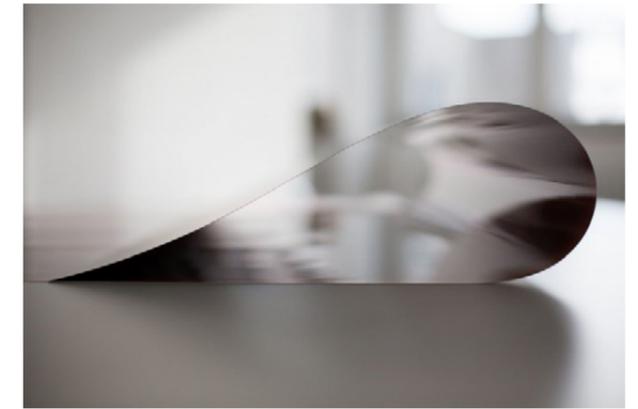
Wolfgang Tillmans's recent 14-room, non-retrospective exhibition in Tate Modern is the artist's personal response to the present moment: a snapshot of a diverse, ever-changing and expanding practice. Tillmans's restless desire to innovate and do things differently makes him one of the most influential artists of his generation. He is one of the few who endures being contemporary by not only perceiving the current events, but unceasingly engaging with them. Chris Dercon, co-curator of the *Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017* exhibition said, "He's not a prophet, but he sees where things might go because he has an eye for the world".

The German photographer became recognized in the 1990s for his provocative and seemingly casual photographs of everyday life and contemporary culture, that introduced alternative concepts of beauty and sexuality. During the past three decades, the form of his self-expression has constantly evolved. Tillmans questions the conventional principals of art and the codes of presentation: he has reinterpreted the genres of portraiture, still life, and landscape. His photographs are difficult to categorise in traditional art historic terms.

Looking at the arrangement of the photographs confirms once again, that Tillmans' practice goes way beyond photography: he has introduced a novel and unique practice and made curatorial activity a fundamental aspect of his routine. Each room of the Tate Modern exhibition has been planned and modelled to detail as a site-specific composition, considering the pictorial and sculptural dimensions of the photographs as well as their relations to the architecture of the venue. The non-hierarchically arranged photographs reach almost from ceiling to floor in order to articulate and control every inch of space. Pinning and taping the predominantly unframed photographs to the walls generates a kind of free layout that invites the visitors to create associations of meaning between the images.

The *Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017* exhibition displays works created predominately after 2003: photographs, almost sculptural pieces, publications, artist's books, performance and recorded music. Through these works the artist expresses his increasingly experimental ways of image-making. The deliberately snapshot-looking portraits and seemingly random images of parties and friends' gatherings are carefully crafted artworks. Tillmans incorporates his own social context into the images and confirms his self-defined role as a photographer and a participant, rather than a distant observer. The artist is noticeably affected by the situations in which the images are taken, far

from the unconscious candidness of Cartier-Bresson's decisive moment. The captured individuals present themselves as social subjects in the eyes of the public, seem vulnerable yet somehow untouchable. The nice balance of chance and control that Tillmans uses when taking his portraits is an essential ingredients of his abstract works as well.



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Paper Drop*, *Prinzessinnenstrasse*, a, 2014,
Courtesy: Tate Modern, London

From the late 1990s he explores the fundamentals of photographic processes and their potential to be used as a form of self-expression. Tillmans' sublime abstract creations are combinations of real darkroom mistakes and the experimentation they inspired. The pieces of *Silver* series reflect the reaction of the photosensitive paper to light and mechanical processes, *Free Swimmers* are created in a darkroom without a camera. The complex manipulation procedures result in images with an almost bodily presence, featuring textures, lines, and contours. *Paper drop* explores the relationship between photography and sculpture by considering a sheet of photographic paper an object, the *Lighter* series represents a fusion of sculpture and picture, turning the photograph into a 3D object by creasing.

Some of the most vivid, colour-rich, and detailed photographs of the exhibition are undoubtedly found in the *Neue Welt* project. These huge works depict people, cars, animals, food from around the globe in a way that was previously impossible. Tillmans lets the visitors witness how he re-discovered the world after switching from analogue to digital technology.



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Oscar Niemeyer*, 2010
 Courtesy: Tate Modern, London

ELGER ESSER

Morgenland, Parasol Unit, London, 29 March 2017 – 21 May 2017

by Yulia Borisenko



Elger Esser, *Saida I, Lebanon*, 2005. Courtesy: the artist and Parasol Unit, London

There is a certain inner luminosity to Elger Esser's photographs, with their subtle gradations of colour, which lends the *Parasol Unit* in northeast London a feeling of being bathed in light which is quite other to the artificial lights themselves. The large-format landscapes, dominated by sea and sky, give the impression of windows to a different time and place.

Esser is known for choosing his titles carefully, and *Morgenland* is no exception: the antiquated German term, literally "morning land", refers to the Orient, with all the overtones of exoticism, escapism and otherness that it historically held. 'Morgen' in the original term simply refers to the East, where the sun rises in the morning, yet many of Esser's photographs are in fact taken at dawn or in the early morning, giving them a magical, almost surreal tranquility. Thus the viewer feels separated from the photographs in both time and space, a key element of Esser's nostalgic idiom.

The photographs in the series, taken between 2004 and 2015 in Lebanon, Israel and Egypt, all share a particular sense of serenity created by the absence of human figures, the low, straight horizon lines and the largely monochrome, sepia hues. If humans themselves are absent from Esser's work, the trace of human presence abounds: boats, houses, telegraph poles. The absence of humanity perhaps lends these objects a sense of abandonment and decay, making the viewer acutely conscious of time.

It is here, then, that Esser seems to share a thematic focus with Bernd and Hilla Becher, under whom he studied at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie: namely that concerning human absence and the effects of time. Other stylistic features familiar from the work of the Bechers include distant vantage points and low horizon lines, but where his teachers chose the scientific form of the typology, focusing on each architectural object as specimen of a 'type', Esser seems to prioritise the



Elger Esser, *El Kab II*, Egypt 2011. Courtesy: the artist and Parasol Unit, London



Elger Esser, *Enfeh I*, Lebanon, 2005. Courtesy: the artist and Parasol Unit, London

landscape itself in its entirety, in which the objects of human agency appear almost incidental. And whilst the Bechers chose as subject the abandoned architecture of twentieth-century industry, Esser infuses his photographs with a sense of awareness of history, or even timelessness.

Esser's concern with time is also evident in the choice of location for the series: arguably few regions have such a rich cultural history as the Middle East. The photographs taken in Israel are modelled on archival works of ruins taken by an unknown photographer in 1948, suggesting a consideration of the recent history of the region in the context of its ancient past. Esser owns a collection of around 25,000 old postcards, and indeed the flat tones of his works have a certain faded quality reminiscent of these. The capture and preservation of a moment in time is of course inherent to the nature of photography, yet Esser seems to particularly emphasise this nostalgic element. Esser has stated that he chooses to live in Germany "in order to retain a sense of longing for the other." Both motifs, then—ruins and postcards - serve to accentuate the viewers sense of temporal otherness, running parallel to that of spatial otherness, the exotic 'other' of the Orient. Esser's interest in postcards also reveals an element of collectorship somewhat more pronounced than in other documentary photography: his works serve as documents preserving scenes and objects, resisting the flow of time like anchors. One might even argue that Esser's works attempt to imitate the vague yet atmospheric quality of places in our memory; that their flat tones and soft palettes reflect the selective process of memory recall, in which details are lost whilst emotional significance is amplified.

Esser is open about the influence of Romanticism on his work, and many of his works take inspiration from a wide range of issues. Some of his photographs are reminiscent of J. M. W. Turner, Caspar David Friedrich and other Romantic landscape painting, yet he has also spoken extensively of his love of literature of the period, predominantly of French writers such as Proust, Maupassant and Flaubert. Esser's attitude to aesthetics and the concept of beauty, hotly disputed in art historical criticism and indeed in a wide range of cultural spheres, runs contrary to the tendencies of much Conceptual art of the past few decades. Esser attributes negative reactions to his work to critics' inability to "handle" beauty when contrasted with their own dull lives. Beauty, he admits, contains an aspect of the unbearable which must nevertheless not be avoided.

However, labelling Esser a Romantic would be reductive; his work searches for, and is inspired by, a certain aesthetic not restricted to a Romantic idiom. His 2010 series "Combray (Giverny)", for example, takes as subject matter both the town of Illiers-Combray, renamed after Proust's imagined town, Combray, in *À la recherche du temps perdu* ("In Search of Lost Time") and Giverny, the location of Monet's famous water lily garden. "Landscapes are like states of mind," Esser says. "Everyone carries a landscape within them, one they naturally idealise." Ultimately, then, it is this idealisation, effected by separation in both time and space, which best encapsulates Esser's idiom. "In Search of Lost Time", therefore, might be a suitable description of Esser's artistic approach.

GORE: WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR? (ABSOLUTELY NOTHING)

Jordan Wolfson, *Real Violence*, Whitney Biennial

by Natalie Brashear

In the middle of the Whitney Biennial, I spotted a throng of people, waiting to access what looked, at first glance, like a display counter at an Apple store. Upon closer inspection, I discovered a cluster of very futuristic looking virtual reality headsets with a piqued and ruffled cue of participants. Why was I so irritated by this oasis of technological escapism? I wandered over to examine the wall text: Jordan Wolfson, *Real Violence* (2017). Ah.

I was somewhat familiar with Wolfson's work having seen his exhibition—*manic/ love/ truth/ love*—at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam last fall. *Colored sculpture* (2016), the center piece of this exhibition was a large animatronic puppet that, in appearance, was like an amalgamation of cartoon caricatures: a Huckleberry Finn-esque visage complete with ginger hair, freckles, and tattered clam-diggers. The puppet was jerked and thrown about like a drunken marionette by heavy chains that clanged as Percy Sledge's "When a Man Loves A Woman" blasted in the background. The boy's blinking eyes begged for sympathy, but I felt nothing but a sort of annoyed antipathy at its plight. Upon recalling this previous foray into Wolfson's world, I realized—with a bit of a shudder—that I must don the VR headset.

I am the kind of person who reads summaries online before watching an episode of *Game of Thrones* so that I can fast-forward through any kind of gratuitous violence. In fact, when viewing any program with a "graphic violence" warning, I am immediately struck with an acute sense of anxious anticipation. So, as the gallery attendant handed me my VR headset and accompanying headphones and warned me that this artwork "contained graphic violence", I felt myself wanting to hand them back to her and walk away.

I will offer a [SPOILER ALERT] for all those interested in watching *Real Violence* for its full raw and shocking effect. As the countdown ends the viewer finds themselves staring at a clear blue sky that begins to sweep down to a street view of a man—Wolfson himself—standing with a complacent look on his face and a baseball bat in his hand. Another man, slightly older, kneels before him in a posture that evokes the highly uncomfortable imagery of beheadings. Through the headphones a Jewish prayer of protection

associated with the lighting of Chanukah candles is chanted in a cold monotone by Wolfson. The chant begins to form a strange ambient drone that feels uncomfortably juxtaposed, despite the pervading motif of Judaism in Wolfson's work.

Suddenly—but not so unexpectedly given the work's title and set up—Wolfson swings the bat into the kneeling man's skull. *Crunch—Thud.* Wolfson proceeds to bash the man repeatedly with the bat—angry, fervid and rhythmic blows. As a dark pool of blood begins to swell in volume around his victim's head, Wolfson glances up between strikes, sneering and smirking—as if checking my reaction. He wants to see what his witness will do—run to the aid of the victim? run away? scream? Of course, the witness does nothing—trapped in a VR world like a horse with blinders on, the witness is paralyzed and forced to see but not act of.

Once again, Wolfson presented me with a subject that pleaded for intense sympathy. Once again, I failed to deliver. Perhaps I should clarify that unlike when I experienced the zombie-eyed, Huckleberry Finn puppet being tossed about at the Stedelijk, there was no perverse or private pleasure in watching the destruction of this seemingly real—but assuredly computer-generated—man. The work is unpleasant to watch. However, my initial reaction was coldly disconcerting: I was *relieved*.

I was relieved that when Wolfson slammed his bat into the side of that man's skull, there wasn't a spray of gore. I was relieved that with every swing and every stomp, the man's head remained more or less intact—very bloodied but not reduced to a pulp. I was relieved, in essence, that the violence I was bearing witness to was not in fact real as the title would suggest. I walked away from the initial encounter with a sense of accomplishment that I had not been so affected or disturbed by the imagery—that I had transcended my own fear and the gallery assistant's warning. This, for me, was when the work became truly disturbing.

While I had approached it through a sensory lens, to say that *Real Violence* is a purely sensory artwork—a malignant trigger, void of message—would be incorrect. The political undertones that Wolfson provides—the Jewish prayer, the white on white male

violence, the imagery of beheading—set up enough discussion fodder to last a lifetime. Wolfson may adopt an impish, antagonistic tone in his work, but the clout of the tools he uses are difficult to dismiss. Despite my annoyance with Wolfson's persona and approach—a message of white patriarchal violence being delivered via a white male artist—the work stuck with me, along with my sickening sense of relief.

When I saw the work again on view at the Sadie Coles Gallery in London, I expected to observe the violence with a cold, discerning eye—especially since my initial anxiety was quelled. However, one eye remained scrunched shut, I felt nauseous as the perspective flipped me upside down, and with every fall of the bat I fidgeted my headset. Without the anticipation, I finally experienced the *real* Wolfson refers to in the title of his work. Real violence is not the multi-million dollar budgets of HBO dramas—not flying vivid carnage. Real violence takes place in shaking iPhone footage of abused power, hate crimes, and genuine terror. Wolfson employs actual footage

of these accounts in another work that was also on display at Sadie Coles: *Riverboat Song* (2017). These disturbing flashes of actual racist beatings stand in stark contrast with Wolfson's high budget CGI-filled virtual reality experience.

Like some character trapped in a Vonnegutian dystopia, I realized that I was blinded by a virtual reality much, much larger than the goggles strapped to my face. I was an ancient Roman high off the frenzied onslaught of gladiatorial combat, numbed by a grand spectacle: the violence the culture industry produces. So much so, the understated and devastating violence of the day-to-day seemed a *relief* by comparison. Turn away from the circus—in a world consumed by violence, one must try to take time to consider what is real.



Jordan Wolfson, *Real Violence*, 2017. Courtesy: Sadie Coles HQ, London

CAI GUO-QIANG

October, The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow,
13 September 2017 – 12 November 2017

by Zhanna Duong

When Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong's second in command, was asked to express his opinion on the riot events of May 1968 in Paris, he famously responded: "It is too soon to say."

The October revolution of 1917 was one of the major socio-political events that shook the world and changed the course of history in the 20th century. Even exactly a century after, historians struggle to come to a unified opinion on the events of October 1917, though undoubtedly, the revolution still agitates people's mind. To mark a centenary of the October Revolution, The Pushkin Museum invited an internationally renowned artist Cai Guo-qiang to make a show. Coming from a communist background himself, the artist is not interested in a political debate or in the grand historical narratives. Cai is only preoccupied with a story about an individual, an ordinary man who both makes part of history and who is affected by it at the same time. This preoccupation with the personal and with the ordinary is very characteristic of Cai's practice. His Golden Lion award winning work *Venice's Rent Courtyard Collection* is an artistic homage to the Socialist Realist sculpture that ennobles the hardship of peasants' life. Similarly, the *October* show is a moving tale of an individual during the tumultuous events, of man's hopes and ideals that stood behind the revolution. The paradox of Cai Guo-qiang's practice lies in the massive size of his works which evokes associations with a vast crowd, masses of people, yet at the same time the artist tries to reach out to each individual in front of his works.

The *October* exhibition takes place at The Pushkin Museum, from the left of which one can clearly see the Kremlin towers – the very heart of Moscow and a witness of many crucial historical events. The choice of the exhibition venue is already revolutionary itself, considering the more traditional nature of the collection and exhibitions housed by the museum. For Cai as a Chinese, the venue carries a personal meaning in his perception of the Russian culture. Pushkin, after whom the museum is named, is a major representative symbol of the Russian literature in China. For the majority of the Chinese growing in the 60s, the Soviet/Russian culture was very present in the upbringing, and for Cai, Russia would always be linked

to his childhood memories. The connection between the October revolution and Cai's personal memories can be found in small sized and gunpowder studies in the show. Leaving personal marks in most of his shows, be it in Qatar or the United States, is a general peculiarity of Cai's cross-cultural practice. Although he has been living in New York and Japan for the past thirty years, the artist would always refer to his hometown, Guangzhou, in his artworks.

Known for large-scale installations, Cai Guo-qiang did not deviate from the favoured size for the *October* exhibition. Just right in front the Pushkin Museum, a huge Constructivist-like installation made of birch trees, prams and cradles, each donated by the residents of Moscow, barricades the entrance. This installation symbolizes a cradle of hope for Utopia which was also verbalized in the socialist hymn "The International". The line from the anthem 'No one will grant us deliverance, not god, not tsar, nor hero' is burnt onto a white silky drape with gunpowder, Cai's signature medium. The drape hangs over the main pink staircase inside the museum, and it paves the way up to the culmination of the show in the White room, just like the "International" hymn paved the way for an agitated part of mankind in the fight for the Utopian dream a century ago.

The White room contains two massive gunpowder paintings, *River* and *Garden*, and an even more massive installation *Land*. *River* work is a black-and-white painting for which Cai spread gunpowder over the collage of photos or ordinary people carried away in the flow of turbulent events in the passage of time. On the opposite side of the room, the painting *Garden* is an explosion of gunpowder and bright colours, appearing as flowers. The work represents a garden of revolutionary sentiments: heroism, ideals, the urge for action and the longing for freedom. In between the canvases lies a two-level installation *Land*. The ground is covered with an enormous golden wheat field made of million stalks. This is a soil that nurtures people and is associated with peasants' labour. Inside the wheat field the artist cut a symbol which can be fully visible only in the mirror on the ceiling. The ceiling, resembling a silver sky, reflects the ultimate communist symbol: the hammer and sickle.



Cai Guo-qiang, *Autumn*, 2017. Courtesy: moskva24, Moscow

Yet, at the same time the image above contains the wheat field and the visitors, the people. The whole mirror image of the hammer and sickle brings into mind Leon Trotsky's, one of the masterminds behind the Bolshevik Revolution, ruminations from his book *Literature and Revolution* (1924) on art. Art is a tool, a hammer that has to create not to reflect, yet in the end Trotsky admits that "even the handling of a hammer is taught with the help of a mirror."

The last large-scale work located opposite to the White room is a video-work that summarises all the ideas expressed in the show: hope, ideals, Utopia and people. The work displays a firework show in the sky over the Red Square, the main square of the country. The exploding symbols and images of golden leaves, white circles and Black Square (homage to Malevich) appear and disappear in the dance to Tchaikovsky's piece 'October'. The musical piece envelopes the whole Pushkin Museum and has a very melancholic sound that emphasises the nostalgic mood of the show. Probably 'nostalgia' is a key word of this show, nostalgia for the past that technically neither Cai nor the visitors of the show have experienced. The artist grew up during the volatile and brutal times of the Cultural Revolution and he extracted the most romantic sentiments out of the harsh events, generally choosing to omit the bloody side of the revolutions, be it in Russia or in his home country.

The *Land* installation nicely visualizes Zhou Enlai's famous quote. In the whirlpool of people and of events, it is hard to grasp the scale of present actions – it is only with the passage of time a man is able to critically reflect on the past events. Similarly, standing on the ground one can see just a wheat field, but looking up, there is a clear image of people standing next to the hammer and sickle, an undeniable symbol of the communist past of Russia and for some, a symbol of idealistic aspirations for Utopia.

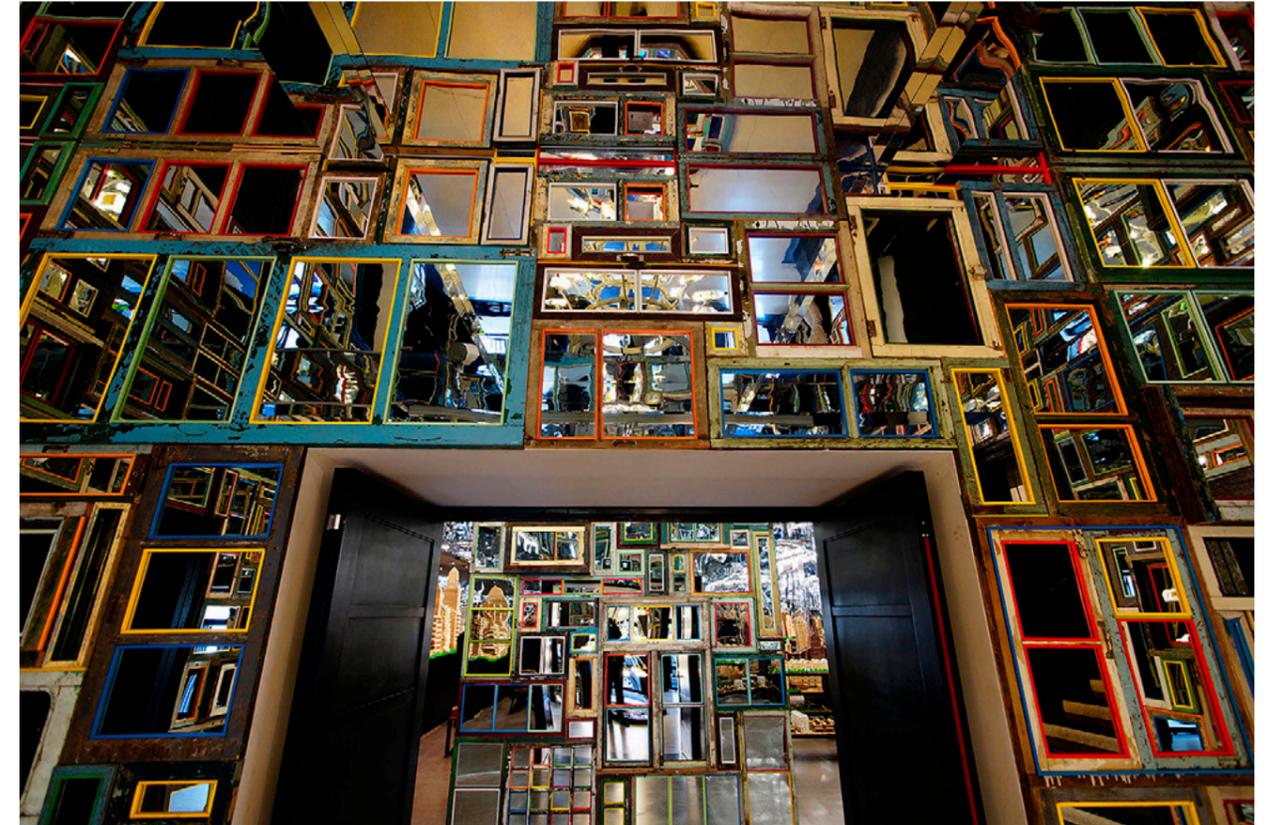
SONG DONG

I Don't Know the Mandate of Heaven, Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, 21
January 2017 - 4 June 2017

by Xinwan Ren



Cai Guo-qiang, *Land*, 2017. Photo: Zhanna Duong



Song Dong, *Mirror Hall*, 2016-2017 Courtesy: Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai

According to the Chinese book *Lunyu*, the analects of Confucius, a man should be established at the age of thirty, not confused at the age of forty and should know the destiny at fifty. However, Song Dong, as one of the well-known contemporary artists from China, named his exhibition *Heaven* at Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai to contradict this traditional idea from *Lunyu* and to trace back to the journey of the artist's work. This exhibition also is the largest solo show for Song Dong held in Mainland China so far.

The exhibition took place both inside and outside the Rockbund Art Museum and it was grouped into seven different themes: mirror, shadow, word, revelation, experience, self and illumination.

Starting with two big installations at the entrance hall, *Mirror Hall* (2016-2017) and *The Use of Uselessness* *Bottle Rock Big Brother* (2016), the first floor's theme relates to the concept of mirror. For a long time mirror has been Song Dong's one of the favourite media. Mirror expressed his perspective on the real

world as he thinks the reality can always be distorted in the illusionistic mirror reflections, so there are no clear distinctions between reality and illusion. Other two recent works relate to mirror, *Mirror City* (2016-2017) and *Eating the City* (2017), have also been displayed on this floor. The latter one was a city model made entirely of biscuits before the opening night and meant to be destroyed by audiences then left under the distorting mirrors to echo the artist's concept.

The topic 'shadow' has a significant meaning in Song Dong's art creation process. As a theme for the second floor, shadow could refer to film, video, drawing and installation work. One of his most recent works, the *Back Images* (2016-2017), which Song Dong made specifically for the Rockbund Museum, is the star piece on this floor. It restores his childhood memories of watching cinema behind the screen (adults often put kids behind the screen so they would not block the screen). This work 'freezes' the projector's light through white fabric to occupy two third of the second

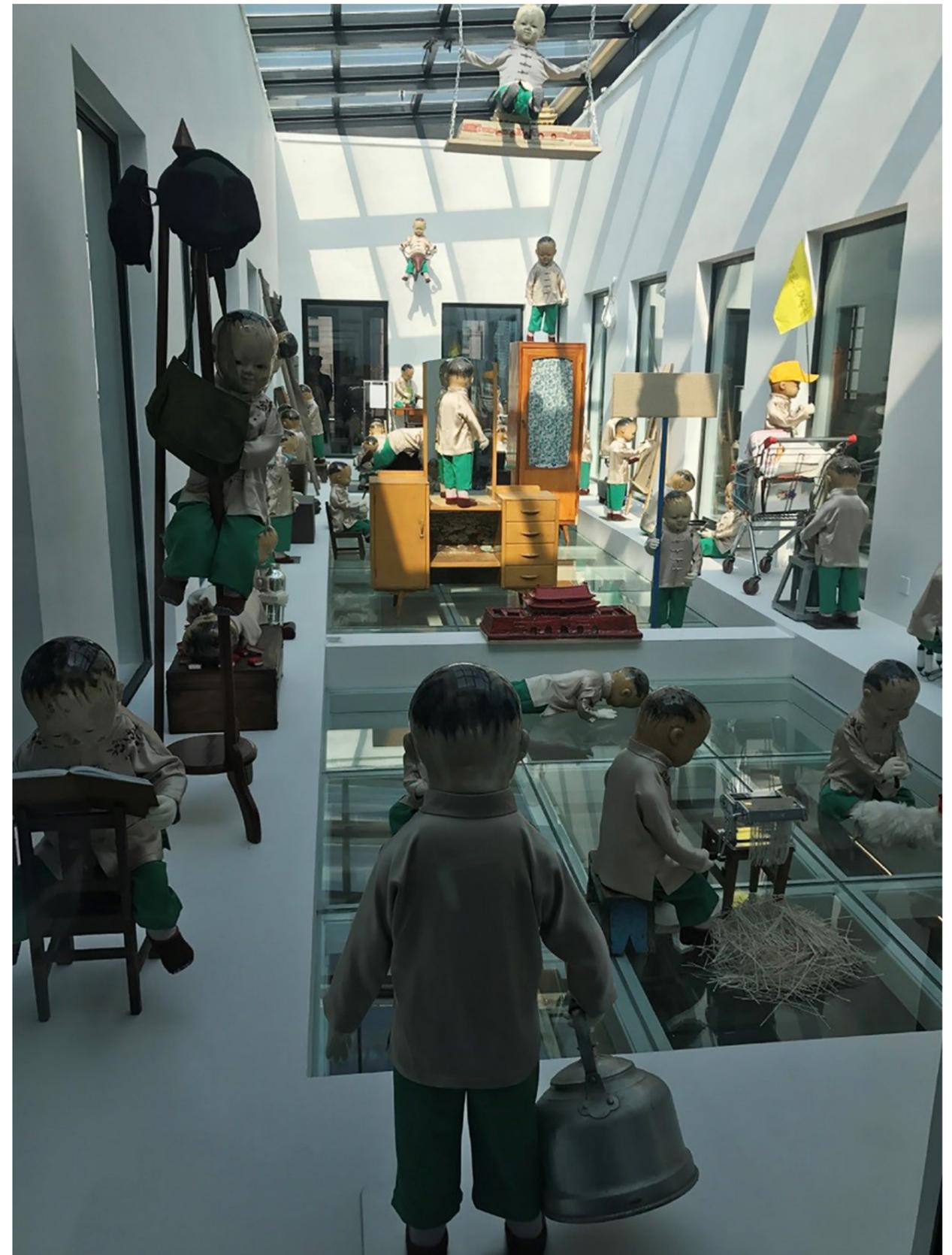
floor's display space, combined with two painting series *No Beginning, No Ending* (2014–2017) and *Black Screen* (2016–2017) on both sides of the wall, brings audiences back to the feeling of nostalgic art salon on this floor. This theme also includes in total sixteen video works made by Song Dong at different periods of his life. The reason behind his interest in video is the characteristic of this medium: it is visible but not tangible. Song Dong also prefers using water as a medium to create dialogue between real and virtual due to the ability of water to flow, reflect and dissolve. So Song Dong has used performance pieces involving water since 1990's. Works displayed this time in Shanghai, such as *Writing Time in Water* (1994), *Chinese Ink* (1995), *River* (2007) and *Abnormal Death* (2014–2016) could be recognised as his representative works in this vein.

The third floor includes three latest work pieces relates to the theme 'word': *Mantra without Words* (2006–2017), *Slogans* (2016–2017) and *Blank Stele* (2016). The first one includes several Tibetan style handmade books without words which placed on the entrance wall of this level. The work *Slogans* shaped into controlled queue, which narrow pass to the third piece *Blank Stele*. So audiences are forced to walk across all these slogans to see the stele without any apparent words on the surface, and then they could write words on the stele using water as the writing material. From a book without any words, to a street bombarded by words, to a stele carrying thousands of invisible characters, what Song Dong tries to create here may relate to his way of thinking about the illusionary of the real world on the first floor: if the word somehow could represent or record the real world, it could also be used to create the illusion like mirror could do to the realistic world. So the term 'word' may be treat as another illusion which created by human.

The curator decided to put various types of materials on the fourth floor to indicate Song Dong's personal understanding of 'revelation'. Some architectural works such as *My First Home* and *Wisdom of the Poor: Song Dong's 'Para Pavilion'* (2011) up most of the space of this area which relates his personal life experience, preserved up to now. Other 'revelations' include his food experience, porcelain made at Jingdezhen ceramics, *Doing Nothing Series* (1998–2017) and performance installation *There is Always One Spot that is Clean* (2008) are also displayed or happen on this floor. Through these works, Song Dong shows his wisdom and philosophy as an ordinary citizen surviving in today's China with a tolerant attitude towards life. So the aim of this floor is to reveal the reality rather than to express the philosophical spirit, and inspire audiences' perceptions of reality.

Even though they have been themed differently (experience and self), but both the fifth and the sixth floors display significant moments of Song Dong's show. Art pieces *At Thirty, I Wasn't Established*, 1996–1997 and *At Forty, I was Perplexed*, 2008 could be seen as two earlier works prefiguring for *At Fifty, I Don't Know the Mandate of Heaven*, commissioned specifically for this exhibition. A big installation work named after this exhibition comprises of 50 puppets which represent Song Dong's performance pieces over the last fifty years, and some of which mimic the works that have never been seen by the public before. All these puppets were placed under the skylight at level six and could be seen directly below on the fifth floor to make the connection between these two floors. On the fifth floor balcony there are also some art pieces made by Song Dong and his family, relatives or friends: *Waste Not* (with his mum), *My Daughter is My Seasons* (with his daughter) and *The Way of Chopsticks: Left Hand and Right Hand* (with his wife). This is an area which designate the artist's summary of his five-decade-life.

Compared to other Chinese contemporary artists, Song Dong took on the stance of being an observer, recorder and translator of life. For the last 30 years he has stuck with the concept 'life is art' and has been focusing more on using the daily life materials to create art works, which makes his art pieces true to life and easy to understand. The memories of retrospective life and art have been naturally attached to his work due to the way he records his daily life, so once viewers understand his original purpose for making one art piece, it could take their back to the old times and show empathy to both the work and the artist.



Song Dong, *At Fifty, I don't know the Mandate of Heaven*, 2016–2017. Mixed media.

Photo: Xinwan Ren

ALBERTO GIACOMETTI

Retrospective exhibition, Tate Modern, 08 May 2017 – 11 September, 2017

by Barbara Rossetti



Alberto Giacometti, *Women of Venice*, 1956. Courtesy: Tate Modern, London

Rows of heads on tall white plinths presented at eye level welcome visitors to Tate Modern's Giacometti retrospective, the second in London since 1965. Each head differs from the other in shape, colour, style and material, showcasing the artist's extraordinarily diverse creativity and providing a preview of the rest of the featured works in the exhibition. The heads were created between 1917 and 1960, and vary from more naturalistic to abstract forms, from bronze busts to plaster, terracotta and clay. They portray his close circle of family and friends, but highlight his greater interest in the contour of the face as opposed to portraying mere representations of those who sat for him.

With over 250 works in total following on from this first impressive visual impact, the exhibition continues in a chronological fashion. The initial rooms show his early experiments with abstract art, his interest in cubism, the strong influence of Egyptian and African art, and his implementation of diverse materials. Giacometti joined the Surrealist movement in 1932, and remained until the outbreak of the second

World War. His works from that period are striking: they exhibit a fascination for the unconscious and express dark eroticism and death. One of the most disturbing examples is *Woman with her Throat Cut* (1932), a brutally abstracted sculpture in bronze placed on a low plinth. The insect-like female form, with open folds and spikes, shows the aggressiveness of a brutal erotic assault in which "she" is at the same time victim and attacker. In the same way, Giacometti's remarkable *Disagreeable Objects*, a series of small sculptures, are sexual and violent in equal measure, like a spiked phallus attached to a sort of head, a metaphor for sexual anxiety and frustrated desire. Alongside his *Disagreeable Objects* in the same cabinet are displayed fine decorative objects, like lamps, vases, jewellery and wall reliefs. Whilst Giacometti produced them in order to earn a living, he nonetheless considered them at the same level as his sculptures, as they influenced him in the development of his art.

During the second World War, Giacometti set up a studio in a hotel room in Geneva and, due to the lack of space, started to produce a series of small sculptures,

mainly heads, some of which were really minuscule. "By doing something a half centimetre high you are more likely to get a sense of the universe than if you try to do the whole sky" he once wrote. A beautifully lit display develops around three of the gallery's four walls and encloses these delicate, moving sculptures, which appear like persons seen from a great distance.

After the war, Giacometti came back to Paris and dedicated his focus on the human figure, producing his most well-known artworks. These characteristic elongated, frail sculptures are highly intense figures expressing an interior life. In the Tate Modern exhibition, alongside his most famous bronze sculptures, such as *Pointing Man* (1947), *Falling Man* (1950), *Woman on a Chariot* (1945), *The Dog* (1951), some figures are presented in their compelling plaster originals. Giacometti was interested in representing the spatial distance between people far away and the eye of the observer in how we relate to one another as isolated and estranged human beings. These sculptures, although delicate and fragile, seem to be animated by an internal force and fierceness, expressed in some of them by their determined forward-leaning stance. These skeletal figures are seen by several critics to represent all that remained of men after surviving the Holocaust, for others they are expression of an existentialist anguish and isolation of the individual, consequent of the war. The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, a great admirer of Giacometti, invited him to join the Existentialist movement, and described his sculptures as "halfway between nothingness and being." Sartre remarked how at first glance Giacometti's works might suggest "the fleshness martyr of Buchenwald.... A moment later these slender natures rise up to heaven, they dance."

Gaunt, fragile female sculptures with small heads and oversized feet, the *Women of Venice*, are one of the highlights of the exhibition. Modelled after the artist's wife, they are the original plasters of the bronze sculptures that can be found in major museums across the world. They were created by Giacometti for the Venice Biennale (1956) and have been restored for this exhibition and reunited for the first time in sixty years. These very stylized figures, each over a metre high, show the artist's direct imprints as he works the plaster material with his hands, shaping forms

but also scraping them and sometimes even attacking them with a knife. He then embellished and graced the figures with dark brown paint, giving them the aspect of antique statues.

Three standing figures in bronze almost reach the roof of the final room, they appear like a restless and silent presence accompanying visitors as they leave the exhibition.

This elegantly and sometimes dramatically curated exhibition gives a complete in-depth look into Giacometti's practice, exhuming the deep and profound emotions of the viewer.

GIACOMETTI'S HUMAN WALKS THROUGH LONDON

Retrospective exhibition at Tate Modern, 10 May 2017 – 11 September, 2017 and
Substance and Shadow: Alberto Giacometti sculptures and their photographs by Peter Lindbergh
at Gagosian, Britannia Street, 19 May 2017 – 22 July, 2017

by Zhanna Duong

It may seem as though there is nothing left to say about Alberto Giacometti one of the most iconic *monstres sacrés* of 20th-century-art. Yet this summer the London public had the opportunity to enjoy Giacometti's art at two major art locations: Tate Modern and Gagosian gallery, Britannia Street.

The show at Tate Modern opens in a felliniesque manner: we encounter a sea of busts, a forest of faces. There are visages done in a traditional, realistic way with recognizable features, there is a 'primitive' style, and there are busts done in Giacometti's signature manner: exhausted elongated faces. In the finale of Fellini's iconic film *Eight and a half* the main character meets in a dream-like way all the people who have mattered to him throughout his life, similarly, the curators, Frances Morris and Catherine Grenier, gathered in a rectangular block all the faces of those who comprised Giacometti's life: his family, friends and colleagues. One may find it difficult to constantly return to the wall labels to look for work's titles, nevertheless the seemingly crammed and even illegible display of Giacometti's works somehow manages to reflect the intense and dramatic nature of his sculptures as well as the overall mode of the exhibition.

After the introductory room, the exhibition takes a chronological approach. Visitors pass through three rooms of Giacometti's practice through the 1920-30s. Sculptures influenced by African and Oceanic cultures are displayed alongside ambiguous *Disagreeable objects* and *Spoon Woman*. This is followed by decorative works and sculpture sketches in room 4, which explore Giacometti's involvement with the Surrealist movement presented through the journalistic mode of magazines and articles. The last room of the Surrealist period contains sculptures of a larger-scale, assembled like pieces on a chess-board and punctuated by the twisting, abstract violence of *Woman with her throat cut*. The show progresses to the 1940s and a period of Giacometti's practice defined by sculptures of a highly meticulous, almost microscopic scale. The size was chosen because of the sculpture's intention to depict a human figure leaving from far away. At the same time,



Substance and Shadow, Gagosian gallery, London.
Installation view. Photo: Zhanna Duong

room 5 also conveys the immensity and tragedy of the war through the reduced, miniature size of sculptures, some of which can be fit into a pocket. Nonetheless, they leave a powerful impact on the viewer.

The drama compressed in the miniatures explodes in size throughout the following rooms housing the work of the post-war period. Here one encounters the most recognizable images of Giacometti's human: the human who walks, the human who can barely stand and the human who falls. Parsing human representation to just an exhausted silhouette with no face, Giacometti famously reflects the post-war state of humanity. Although Giacometti is strongly linked with existentialists such as Sartre, this room, in particular *Falling Man*, evokes the fall from Eden and

Camus's *The Fall*. 'Do not wait for the Last Judgement because it comes every day' – an existential non-hope is very tangible in this room.

The exhibition eccentrically presents the way in which Egyptian culture influenced Giacometti's perception of the female body. Giacometti's reflection and representation of women culminates in his *Women of Venice* series. The eight sculptures that Giacometti first presented at the Venice Biennale in 1956 have not been on display together since their debut. Made of plaster, these sculptures deliver a different mood from his bronze works. Although elongated and slim, these works lack the same anxiety; on the contrary – they convey elegance and stillness.

The adjacent room 8 includes different aspects of Giacometti's practice. The first section of this space conveys his struggle to recognize the people he painted, as seen in the portraits of Isaku Yanaihara. The other contains a cluster of works among which there's *Walking Man* and *Pointing Man* that show Giacometti's ability to capture movement in his sculptures. Another group of works feature parts of the human body: an arm, a nose or a head, and echoes surrealist ideas of dismemberment. Yet, in this case Giacometti displays his fascination with existentialist ideas concerning the living being turning into a still object after death.

Room 9 is mostly dedicated to Giacometti's most intimate relations and favourite models: his wife Anette and his brother Diego. With numerous portraits and busts of the same faces completed in the same manner, one may wander between the works and wonder if Giacometti had an obsessive need for repetition. In fact, the theme started in the previous room, the family portraits show the artist's constant dissatisfaction with achieving 'likeness' in his works, as he simply did not recognize his wife and his brother in his two-dimensional representation.

The very end of the show offers unfinished portraits and large-sized versions of *Walking man*. After 10 rooms filled with detailed studies of Giacometti's inventiveness and the direct influence of his loved ones in his art, the final room appears

a reductive acknowledgement of his extramarital relation which seem to have barely left any impact on the artist's practice. Unfinished portraits of his lover leave a sense of incompleteness in such a rich, intense exhibition that allows one to fully immerse in Giacometti's practice.

A week later than Tate Modern, Gagosian gallery opened an exhibition *Substance and shadow* dedicated to Giacometti's works as well – in tandem with Peter Lindbergh's black and white photographs of the Swiss artist's sculptures. The central concept to explore is the visual tactility of Giacometti's works and corporeal nature of Lindbergh's photographs. If the show at Tate Modern is crammed, intense and feverish, the show at Gagosian evokes opposite associations: tranquility, immobility and minimalism. Located in two spacious pristine rooms of the gallery, the vastness of space visually reduces the size of the sculptures. At the same time, the viewer has every possibility to study the works closely. One can feel more comfortable contemplating the sculptures from afar while having an opportunity to see realistic close-ups of the sculptures in Lindbergh's photographs.

MAURIZIO CATTELAN

Beyond Provocation: Art as a Form of Challenge

by Lorenza Brizzi

*Art inspires us. Art beautifies the world and enhances the beauty of the world that is already around us. But art can also challenge us. Art can motivate us to face issues and concepts we prefer to ignore. While art can bring out the beauty of the world, art can also force us to face the evil of the world. Many of us prefer that art which beautifies the world and elevate us. But art that challenge us and undermines our preconceived notions is also a way to elevate us and to inspire us to a higher level of both aesthetic and morality. Such an artist is Maurizio Cattelan. He uses his art to challenge us. Does he succeed? That each person who views his art must decide for him/herself. But he certainly tries.*¹

Cattelan has always been defined as the clown of the art world, as its trickster because of his way of approaching both the art world itself and the viewers, presenting often ironic and disturbing works.² If this might be true to a certain extent, Cattelan's practice requires us to go beyond the first glance, beyond this apparently pop and accessible façade made of recognizable images. His practice is based on the use of ordinary images, objects and subjects that any person can relate to, which are then placed or treated in a way that make them look slightly off, often wrong.

Once the sculpture or intervention is done, once the image is re-contextualized, then the interpretation is up to the viewer. Even if there is always an intention behind the gesture of the artist, his job is not to impose his interpretation but to stimulate the audience to develop its own judgment, ideas and reactions about the work and the concept within it, which can change depending on all possible and different kinds of connections and circumstances.³ The power of a decontextualized image is what Maurizio Cattelan works on. A recognizable image, slightly reworked or changed, taken out from its own context and placed somewhere else where it does not belong – filling a sort of uncomfortable gap between the art world and our world- has the power to trigger something in the viewer, to challenge him/her to think outside the schemes and to understand the meaning hidden behind the irony, hence forcing them to reason about the reality and truth of what there are looking at.

Two levels have to be recognized in Cattelan's artistic practice and works: the ironic one, which is usually the first one to be encountered when looking

at the piece—and usually also the most disturbing one. Then the second level is the “meaningful” one, the one which holds the true meaning of the work. Cattelan himself explains the reading of his works: “I think that the ironic surface is just the first level of interpretation, a sort of cosy wrapping that makes the audience feel safe in approaching a work, only to be later punched in the stomach by a second level, that is deadly serious”.⁴ This duplicity is what gives these artworks that specific bitter-sweet flavour that always leave the viewers with a sad (or anyway unhappy) smile on their lips: if the image itself can be funny at a first glance, once the real meaning is grasped the fun is destined to leave the way to more serious and “real” thoughts. After all, Cattelan's main inspiration comes from real life itself, which is maybe why sometimes his works are so difficult to accept.

Definitely provocative is *L.O.V.E.* (2010) in Piazza Affari in Milan. Funny in its insolence—it does not happen every day to see a sculpture that gives the finger to the stock exchange building—it definitely wants to provoke a reaction of some sort.⁵ Going beyond the first impression, it is necessary to ask what is behind this very straightforward image. Facing the stock exchange headquarters in THE financial city in Italy, the hand has always been interpreted as a very clear message of anger and frustration to the world of bankers and CEOs and, broadly, as a commentary of the economic crisis in Italy, especially after 2008. But a deeper analysis shows that the other fingers are actually cut and not flexed, and the extended form of the title means ‘Libertà, Odio, Vendetta, Eternità’ (Freedom, Hate, Vengeance, Eternity). So, which the connections? Which the possible meanings? The interpretations have been many.⁶ The only tangible fact is that the artist, as usual, does not provide an answer for the viewer, but leave him in front of an image and a precise historical and social context: the answer will be one's own.

Even though those images are not presented with a specific statement, it is undeniable that many of them could result morbid and disturbing most of the time, which is probably what led Maurizio Cattelan to be labelled also as the “provocateur” of the art world. Too many times his works have been strongly criticized and strongly objected especially by viewers. Probably



Him, 2001. Courtesy: Christie's



Untitled, Piazza XXIV Maggio, Milano, 2004.
Courtesy: Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan

THE most famous and discussed work by Cattelan is *La Nona Ora* (*The Ninth Hour*, 1999), which generated many different reactions among the audience and the critique. The hyper-realist sculpture of Pope John Paul II laying painfully on the floor under a meteorite is certainly a strong image that can be read in many different ways. Exhibited twice, at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw and at the Royal Academy in London it could be easily interpreted as a critique to the Pope himself, but this is not entirely correct.⁷ Cattelan's interest was not to make a statement about a specific person nor to be blasphemous—he was

raised as Catholic. The idea was to show the contrast between power and vulnerability within a person, and also to see how the image of such powerful icon, presented in a format that – in the common way of thinking – is not the “correct” one, would have been received and what kind of responses it would have led to.⁸ The interest was legitimate: while in London the work was accepted as a sculpture, an iconoclast one but an artwork nonetheless, in Warsaw the reactions were quite different and stronger; eventually three gentlemen indignant by the sculpture tried to save the pontiff by removing the meteorite.

Similar ideas about displacement, perceptions and power/vulnerability contrast were behind the creation of *Him* (2001). Approaching it from behind, the visitor encounters a sculpture that looks like a boy kneeling on the floor facing a wall, only to realize later- turning around the sculpture to look at his face- that the “boy” in pray bears Hitler’s face. All the thoughts the viewer may have developed before and while turning around the sculpture are swept away but the recognition of the subject. The ideas at stake here are those concerning evil and its presence in our history and present. In the artist own words “Hitler is everywhere, [...] and yet he is unmentionable, irreproducible, wrapped in a blanket of silence”.⁹ Without any intention to offend, the aim was to take this figure out of this “imposed” silence and let this image “become a territory for negotiation or a test for our psychoses”.¹⁰

Finally, maybe the most provoking and disturbing of them all is *Untitled* (2004), showing three children hanging from a giant oak tree in Piazza XXIV Maggio in Milan. This sculpture has been the centre of many discussions firstly around the artist’s practice but also about the presence (and acceptance) of a certain type of art shown in public spaces. On defence of his work, Maurizio Cattelan explained that even though the children are hung from the tree with a rope around their necks, they are “alive and look down from above, almost like three judges or prophets [...] (the) bodies seem to levitate, or detach themselves from the ground, more than hang [but at the same time] they represent the way in which we are treating our dreams (and are) a signal regarding childhood and violence”.¹¹ Yet they have been seen only as another form of iconoclasm. Commissioned by Fondazione Nicola Trussardi and accepted by the mayor of the city as anti-conformist form of public art, the artwork raised the protests of an indignant public.¹² Parents were afraid about the effect such sculpture might have had on their children; politic parties started arguing about what kind of art has the right to be in public squares and which might be better to be kept inside the art world walls;



The Ninth Hour, 1999. Courtesy: Christie’s

it became the scapegoat for an argument about the Italian inability to give birth, take care and manage the cultural heritage of the country.¹³ But in the end, was it really about hanging children from a tree? It is kind of sad to think that many people get more traumatized and horrified by mannequins (even though hyper-realist) than about our own contemporary history and about real children dying every day. The world can keep defining him as a satirist and a provocateur, but as Cattelan himself said: “I’m not really sure satire is the key to my work. Comedians manipulate and make fun of reality, whereas I actually think that reality is far more provocative than my art.”¹⁴

At this point though it is necessary to clarify what it means to “provoke”: does it simply mean the act of stimulating a reaction in the viewer, to challenge him/her in some way, or does the term have a disturbing factor implied in its very nature? Maurizio Cattelan’s practice is mostly interpreted through the second meaning, as a disturbing, sometimes uncomfortable form of art, and the art works mentioned before can easily show why. But being JUST a trickster, a clown or a provocateur is really not what Maurizio Cattelan’s art is about. Cattelan’s art is about the viewer, the interpretation of an image and the thoughts that this image can awake in relation to one’s society. The artist takes himself out of the process, he let the spectator to draw his/her own conclusion. Irony, provocation, animals and masks are just the tools he uses to awake the public. Not all of his works are overtly provoking in the most disturbing sense; some are morbid, some are sad, some are funny. Let’s think about all the poor animals he has used throughout his career: maybe creepy and sad, but not provoking.

In conclusion, to define Maurizio Cattelan as just provoking, making this term a sort of label for all his works, seems pretty narrow. As (well) said in the introductory quote by Michael Schudrich, he does not offer an art about beauty nor inspiring in the traditional sense of the term, and indeed provocation is an element very much present in his practice, but it

is not the raison d’être of it all. As a clown or a jester though he does his work pretty well, for “the clown’s job, after all, is to hold up a mirror to our pomposities, foibles and fears”.¹⁵ And that is what Maurizio Cattelan does. Through an art based on humour and which makes fun of established “systems of order”,¹⁶ he offers the viewers some hints to develop an awareness about “universal” themes that are common to everyone which also invite to think about our own time. I would not call it provocation, but rather a challenge for inspiration.

1. Michael Schudrich, *Maurizio Cattelan*. Amen, exhibition catalogue, Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 2012, 9.
2. The video “Maurizio Cattelan. Be Right Back. Official Trailer” is a quite clear portrait of how Maurizio Cattelan is perceived by collectors, gallerists and curators. Thought to be (maybe) one of the best artists alive, he cannot be trusted. The moment someone decides to work with him, he/she has to be ready to take risks, because no one can ever know what he will come up with. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYkhp8Bn720>
3. Because of his “invasive” practice, Maurizio Cattelan is numbered among artists such as Huyghe, Parreno, Orozco, Tiravanija as part of the “new” kind of art defined by Bourriaud as “Relational Aesthetic”. Based on “Social transparency”, this practice shows both the finished artwork and its creative process, and how the role of the artist, the object and the subject (the viewer) are interwoven and fundamental in the making of the work itself. Maurizio Cattelan’s practice can be easily grouped under this term for both the role embraced by the artist as a maker of images, and for the role played by the viewer, whom is the addressee of the work but, ultimately, is also the one who gives it meaning. Cattelan is the first one to acknowledge the important role of the public: “an artist must establish some kind of dialogue; otherwise what’s the point? If you don’t have an audience, you’re just talking to yourself” and again about his work: “there may be an element of autobiography, if you wish, but my work is more about the way you reconstruct memory and relive moments of your life in a new way” (M. Cattelan, “Maurizio Cattelan. Free For All.”, 150)
4. Peter Aspden, “Maurizio Cattelan on art and curating is punchy Turin show”, in *Financial Times*, 21-11-2014, accessed 12-03-2017 <https://www.ft.com/content/9f484082-6fdc-11e4-90af-00144feabdc0>
5. In Maurizio Cattelan’s works the term funny and disturbing are likely to be paired: depending on the background of the person who view them, they can rightly describe the work at the same time, depending on the different points of view; as two faces of the same medal.
6. Most of the interpretations are deeply related to the historical background of the stock exchange building itself, which belong to the fascist era, and the fact that the hand, if the fingers were not cut, would have recalled the fascist salutation.
7. At the Royal Academy in London the figure was surrounded by glasses, as if the meteorite had crushed the ceiling in its fall.
8. M. Cattelan, C. Grenier, *Un salto nel Vuoto. La mia Vita Fuori dalle Cornici*. Milano: Rizzoli, 2011. 71
9. Article by Christie’s; ‘Bound to Fail, Auction. 8 May 2016’, New York. <http://www.christies.com/features/Maurizio-Cattelan-on-the-nature-of-evil-7306-3.aspx>
10. Article by Christie’s; ‘Bound to Fail, Auction. 8 May 2016’, New York
11. Flaminia Gennari-Santori, “Images in the Piazza. The Destruction of a Work by Maurizio Cattelan”, *Change Over Time* 5, no.1, 80. *Art & Architecture Source*. EBSCOhost, accessed 07-03-2017
12. Fondazione Nicola Trussardi is a non-profit organization that since 2003 has promoted artistic intervention in non-museum spaces around Milan.
13. Couple of days after the three sculptures were installed, a man climbed on the tree to take cut the ropes and take down the work, falling before he could cut the third one. Put under investigation by the police for damaging a work of art, he acknowledges his act saying that “he had only fulfilled a widespread desire” and that he wanted “only to remove an ugly image from the sight of vulnerable people”. (F. Gennari-Santori, *Images in the Piazza*, 82)
14. Maurizio Cattelan in “Nancy Spector in Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan”, *Maurizio Cattelan*, Phaidon Press, 17. The quote was specifically related to the fact that Cattelan has been compared to Roberto Benigni, a well-known Italian satirist, for the political implications present in some of his works.
15. Tom Morton, “Infinite Jester” *Frieze* 94, October 2005. Accessed 10-03-2017 <https://frieze.com/article/infinite-jester>
16. <http://www.itsliquid.com/featured-artist-maurizio-cattelan.html>

A.J. BOCCHINO

by Ashlyn Gentile

American artist A.J. Bocchino is recognized for his multimedia approach to visually interpreting breaking news headlines from different moments in world history. Through laborious processes of accumulation, archiving, and extraction, he creates mostly text-based works that offer aesthetic and conceptual stimulation. Bocchino's growing oeuvre provides a challenging commentary on the dissemination of mass media, domestic and international politics, as well as a shared history of major historical events.

Born in Virginia in 1974, Bocchino studied art at Tulane University, and received an MFA from the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia in 2000. He soon relocated to New York, where he developed his work in the Artist in the Marketplace Program at the Bronx Museum and other competitive residencies. Bocchino's exhibition history dates back to 2000, and includes 30 group shows and 5 solo presentations, mostly at venues in New York and Washington, D.C.

Bocchino begins most of his work in research mode, poring through major newspapers in both print and microfilm formats. Working within fixed publication dates, he extracts and catalogs the headlines, color-coding them according to their dominant topics. These textual elements are later arranged on sheets of paper, creating legible and colorful compositions. An exemplary early work is *New York Times Headlines (2001)*, completed in 2006, which displays every daily headline printed in that newspaper during the year 2001. These headlines are arranged chronologically, reproduced to scale, and color-coded by subject (those involving war and bloodshed are highlighted in red, domestic disputes are viewed beneath blue, etc.). Given the events of September 11th and the belligerent responses that followed, nearly the entire lower half of this work is shaded red, dramatically contrasting with the chromatic variety seen in the upper register. By following his own set of creative rules, Bocchino

transforms the current events of 2001 into a colorful abstraction that serves as a kaleidoscopic memorial to a widely shared historic event. As the artist has explained, "These projects are monumental works that speak to a common history, memory, institutional power structures, and the passage of time."

In 2007 Bocchino was awarded a workspace residency at the Dieu Donne Papermill in New York. Soon thereafter, Bocchino began to fuse the front pages of various newspapers to sheets of handmade paper. In this later body of work, printed pictures are emphasized more than the surrounding text, which is hidden beneath layers of spray paint. The results of this process can be seen in *New York Times (Crimea/Putin)*, completed in 2014. Here Bocchino depicts Vladimir Putin shortly after his decision to annex Crimea, resulting in the implementation of economic sanctions between Russia and the

United States. When isolated from the surrounding text, the image loses its power to address a major world event and the repercussions that followed. All we see is a man in a suit against a backdrop of curtains, his gaze cast downward with his hand to his mouth.

Bocchino continues to work with printed newspapers and microfilm, two formats that are rapidly becoming outmoded in the 21st century. One might argue that unless he adapts to more digitized methods of gathering and analyzing the information he presents, Bocchino himself will fade into obsolescence. But after spending time with the work in his studio, I disagree. Through his various methods of extraction, highlighting, and isolation, Bocchino delivers the physical newspaper in a piecemeal fashion. When these headlines and photographs are pushed into the viewer's space as material objects, we are made more aware of how fragmented and filtered the news has become in our digital age.



A.J. Bocchino
Courtesy: Dieu donne residency

ZHANNA KADYROVA

by Oksana Chumachenko

Zhanna Kadyrova was born in 1981 in Brovary, Ukraine. She studied sculpture at the Taras Shevchenko State Art School in Kiev, where the conservative training included the production of classical sculptures. Since leaving the academy and embarking on her career, Kadyrova has explored less conventional materials that derive from the contemporary urban environment, including ceramic tiles, concrete, and asphalt. She currently lives and works in Kiev, and has been a member of R.E.P (Revolutionary Experimental Space) for several years. Established in 2004 during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, this group of mostly young artists is known for ironically addressing the political and social realities of their home country.

Data Extraction is an excellent example of Kadyrova's distinctive approach to sculpture. The series was produced between 2011 and 2013, during a period of urban renewal in Kiev in preparation for the Euro 2012 football championship, which included the replacement of many roads. Kadyrova gathered small and large pieces of broken asphalt, cut them into rectangles, and displayed them at the Pinchuk Art Center in Kiev, among other venues. These works extend the tradition of the readymade while also providing commentary on cycles of transformation in urban space. The found compositions include patterns of cracks and remnants of traffic paint, compelling viewers to find aesthetic interest in objects that the state no longer deems valuable.

In another provocative gesture of extraction, Kadyrova removed a portion of a brick wall from a deserted factory. Cut to resemble a map of Ukraine, one side of this large sculpture is covered with Soviet-era wallpaper while the other has been blackened by fire. Created during the politically contentious year of 2014, this truncated map does not include Crimea, the disputed territory that the Russian Federation annexed following an illegal referendum. However, when Kadyrova presented this untitled sculpture in

Kiev, London, and Vienna, the missing part of her country was displayed nearby in a pile of rubble. For some time now, Kadyrova has explored the legacy of materials used for building and decorating public housing in the Soviet era. For her most recent project, *Yours/Mine* (2016), she photographed different examples of public housing during her travels around Ukraine. These photographs are mounted on windows or glass bricks that are stacked into modular sculptures. By contrasting images of exterior facades with interior spaces, Kadyrova investigates the idea of home as one's own castle, and the creation of intimate, personal spaces within the development of communal architectural structures.

As these examples demonstrate, Kadyrova is committed to raising problematic questions about the world around her. The aesthetic pleasures of her sculptures and installations prompt viewers to also

consider pressing social issues and political concerns. For these efforts, she has received the Kasimir Malevich Artist Award, the Sergey Kuryokhin Modern Art Award for Public Art, the Kiev Sculpture Project Grand Prix, and won the Pinchuk Art Center Prize in both 2011 and 2013. In recent years her audience has expanded beyond Ukraine, with works displayed in significant institutions throughout Europe, including the Palais de Tokyo and Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Saatchi Gallery in London, the 5th Moscow Biennial, and the Ukrainian pavilion at both the 55th and 56th Venice Biennials. With her rising profile and numerous accolades, Kadyrova has emerged as a leader of the younger generation of Ukrainian artists.



Zhanna Kadyrova
Courtesy: Art in Ukraine
Photo: Evgeniya Smirnova

TSCHABALALA SELF

by Marie Janssen

Tschabalala Self tells the intimate stories of individual black subjects. “You see an individual and through that individual, you see a community,” she explained during my visit to her studio. The 26-year-old artist grew up in Harlem but moved to Connecticut for a graduate course at Yale, and now splits her time between New Haven and New York. Self plays with racial and sexual stereotypes to create figures who appear comfortable with their physicality. Her confident characters assume kinetic postures; they stretch, contort, and embrace one another without shame or apology. Through her art, Self seeks new ways of understanding the black body, beyond images of trauma or an oppositional relation to whiteness.

Though she refers to them as paintings, most of Self’s works are in fact mixed-media collages. She assembles her figures in a piecemeal fashion, cutting body parts from various materials that include paper, raw or dyed canvas, scraps of clothing, and upholstery fabrics. Working on the ground, she lays these components on unstretched canvases, moving parts around until they make both formal and narrative sense. After sewing the compositions into place, Self adds definition and detail by drawing, painting, and printing around her figures.

Self’s collage technique places glorious emphasis on thighs, buttocks, breasts, and other body parts. These fractured figures are often portrayed mid-gesture, performing some sort of action, allowing us to witness just a moment of their existence. When confronted with these muscular shapes and gestures, the viewer must develop an understanding of the bodies, which is ultimately projected onto the work. In a sense, Self’s composite figures are only fully formed in this moment of recognition, reminding us of how we often impose our feelings onto other people.

Extending this theme of active viewing, disembodied eyes have been a recurring motif in Self’s

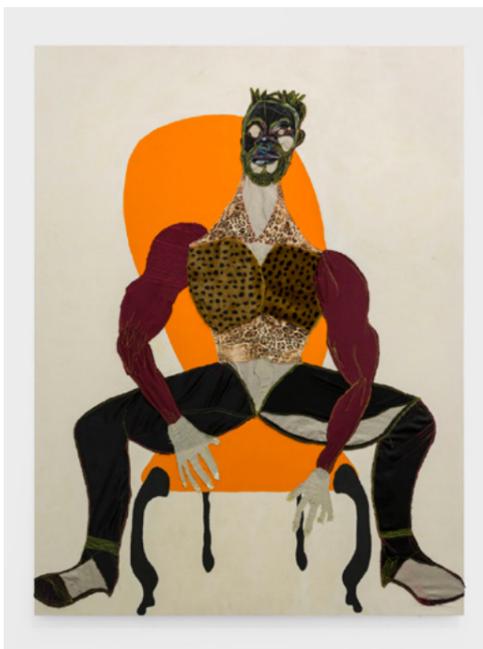
work. They seem to be proxies for varied onlookers with multiple viewpoints, each formulating the black body according to his or her own frame of reference. Often staring back at the viewer, these disembodied eyes are also reminiscent of the early work of Ellen Gallagher. But Self’s celebratory and sensual treatment of black bodies has also won her favorable comparisons

to established artists like Chris Ofili, Wangechi Mutu, and Kerry James Marshall.

The majority of Self’s figures are women. As the artist has explained, “I mostly make female figures because I feel like that is the story I can give most truth to. I can make honest, intimate, accurate depictions.” But at the time of my studio visit in 2016, Self had begun adding male figures to her pictures. While some of these men are depicted alone, most are portrayed in intimate couplings with women. These erotic scenes expand our understanding of her characters’ lives, and allow the artist to play with clichés about hyper-sexualized black

women. When engrossed in moments of intimacy with their male partners, Self’s women are indifferent to the viewer’s gaze, even when floating on a field of disembodied eyes.

Self premiered these multi-figure compositions in October 2016, as part of her second solo show at the Thierry Goldberg Gallery in New York. Titled “Gut Feelings”, the exhibition received positive press from *The New York Times* and *Art in America*. Later that year, Diana Widmaier-Picasso selected Self’s work for “Desire,” an erotically-themed group show that coincided with Art Basel Miami. Self is no doubt gaining traction in the art world and her audience continues to expand. Indeed, the Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art in London gave Self a major solo show in early 2017, drawing upon work she has made over the past five years.



Tschabalala Self, *Swim*, 2016. Courtesy: Thierry Goldberg gallery, New York

ANDY WENTZ

by Emma Laramie

Andy Wentz likes to describe his hometown of Wilmette, Illinois as being “lily white.” Born in 1990 to a multiracial family, Wentz spent his childhood feeling like an outsider in this small suburban town just outside of Chicago. This youthful self-reflection remained with him through adulthood and has become a dominant theme of his early artistic career.

Since receiving his MFA from Parsons, The New School for Design in 2015, Wentz has developed a wide-ranging practice that includes video, sculpture, and the written word. Despite these multiple mediums, Wentz’s work is united by an examination of identity on both personal and universal levels, and an exploration into how

the frailties of memory can distort our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us.

These concerns are perhaps best illustrated in his video works, which feature manipulated footage originally made by others, such as home videos. While his process varies from video to video, Wentz’s ultimate goal is to digitally degrade the footage almost beyond the point of recognition. It is then set to pre-composed music and projected onto multiple walls. The results include videos such as *Choppy Flex* (2014), in which clips of skateboarders, a basketball game, and other scenes of revelry become a pixelated montage of moments. As the imagery dissolves into painterly abstractions, the video feels like the sharpness of memory fading as time moves forward.

Other parts of Wentz’s practice are primarily textual. In his *Drywall* series, for example, Wentz cuts panels of drywall into rectangular shapes, inscribes the top layers with short statements, and fills them in with joint compound. Phrases such as “ACCEPT LOVE” and “BE GENTLE WITH MYSELF” act as affirmative mantras for both the artist and his audience. Yet these idioms live fleetingly in the mind, a notion enforced by the faint legibility of their white-on-white presentation.

Another series, entitled *Brainfart*, is a collection of zines made between 2014 and 2015 that have recently been published as a singular book. Wentz describes their contents as “micro-fictions,” or short musings on various events and experiences. Rapidly fluctuating in tone, from sarcastic to silly to serious, these narratives cohere as loosely as his video works, and suggest an

uncertain self that has been defined by traumas of the past.

To make his newest series, Wentz has turned his studio into a lab of sorts, where he experiments with pigmentation. Working with found scraps of fabric, he removes their dyes using bleach and renders them rigid with stiffening agents, creating forms

with an eerie sheen reminiscent of skin. While the bleaching process extends Wentz’s interest in fleeting and nearly indecipherable imagery, the removal of pigment also suggests the erasure of people of color and their experiences from history. These works seek to engage a broader audience with their address of identity politics, and they carry a decidedly political charge in the era of Donald Trump.

Wentz continues to exhibit his work, having recently taken part in a group show at The Hollows in Brooklyn. But he has also built upon the politics of his recent series by creating an arts organization with some of his fellow Parsons graduates. Their collective labors include community organizing, curatorial efforts, and an online and print publication. Although Wentz has expanded his practice to include broader social engagement, it remains grounded in his beginnings in Wilmette, and the introspective search for identity that began there.



Andy Wentz, *drywall* series #4 (love). Courtesy: the artist

ANNE IMHOF

Faust, German Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale

by Joseph Kong



Anne Imhof, *Faust* at Venice Biennale, 2017. Performance.
Courtesy: the artist and the German Pavilion. Photo: Nadine Frackowski

Germany's venue at the Venice Biennale—the German Pavilion—has long been controversial due to its connections to Nazi history, and faces frequent calls for it to be torn down. Over the years, artists have regularly tackled this issue in attempts to ‘neutralise’ the building, with the most well-known example being Hans Haacke and Nam June Paik’s exhibition in 1993 where the duo won the Biennale’s Golden Lion for Best Pavilion for smashing the building’s floor plates into pieces, leaving them lying around as debris for visitors to wander through.

This year, the German Pavilion has achieved similar success, receiving the same award for German artist and choreographer Anne Imhof’s exhibition: *Faust*. For this piece, the front door of the German pavilion was blocked off, and a raised glass floor was installed across the whole pavilion. Over the duration of the Biennale, for five hours each day, a group of performers dressed all in black, would crawl under and over the structures, whilst interacting with the objects placed around them, in a seven-month long epic choreographed ‘scenario’.

In her accompanying essay, curator Susanne Pfeffer, director of the Fridericianum in Kassel, notes “the transparent glass allows for the dissecting gaze of the audience to be directed at the performer (and vice versa) ... enabling immediate observation as well as direct control”.¹ Here, the glass structure emphasizes barriers, not only between those above and below, but also between the spectators who compete with each other for the perfect viewing position. In another sense, the work is also about power, with Pfeffer describing Imhof’s work as “meditations on contemporary power structures”; the artist being selected due to her concern with “portraying individuals’ relations to society”.²

As described in Pfeffer’s essay, the “glass walls and ceilings permeate the room as if it were one of the centres of financial power. The boundaries of the space

disclose everything, making it both visible and subject to control”, with the bodies of the performers appearing “as a material pervaded by invisible power structures”. With this installation, Imhof depicts her view of reality as one where we as individuals are constrained by physical, economical and other such limitations. To her, the body is the main site of contention in today’s capitalist society, which seeks to manage and control the actions we may choose to perform. Like the work’s



Anne Imhof, *Faust*. Performance. Courtesy: the artist and the German Pavillion 2017. Photo: Nadine Frackowski

namesake, the German legend of Faust, we make a deal with the ‘devil’, “we trade something that does not exist - the soul”, exchanging it for worldly power and pleasures, yet committing it to eternal damnation in the process. As Pfeffer describes “the soul does not exist, the products of the financial sector do not exist and yet - or because of all this, the system functions”.

Yet despite this dystopian view of reality, Imhof provides a suggestion, a means of escape, declaring at the work’s opening: “This performance is about freedom!”³ Here, the title refers not only to the classic German legend, but also to the word’s literal translation from German into English—“fist”, evoking the image of the clenched fist raised in the air as a sign of resistance, rebellion, and revolution. Perhaps it is the audience who is trapped within the confines of the glass structure, with the performers being instead free to move around the pavilion, occasionally climbing up onto its roof, “conquering and occupying the house”, taking unauthorised possession of a space which could be seen as a microcosm of the larger institution, or even possibly, the state.

Moreover, the ideas of freedom and resistance can not only be found in the movement of the performers but also in their clothing and the choreography. For example, several of the performers wear articles of clothing emblazoned with the emblem of the German football club Bayern Munich, which is known for its

history of defiance of and resistance to Nazi Germany due to its Jewish heritage and connections, with its merchandise sometimes used to symbolise an anti-fascist sentiment. Alternatively, the performances are based around rough scripts that are constantly adapting, evolving, and being built upon day after day, ensuring minimal repetition across its seven-month run time. With activities ranging from standing still atop glass ledges, to reportedly, public masturbation, the performers appear to be free to act in whatever manner they please, whilst we the audience are bound by social customs and norms.

In *Faust*, the focus is on the performers. Described by Pfeffer as “post-gender ... peculiar and yet stereotypical”, the performers are, to some extent, meant to stand in for pavilion’s audience, yet not completely, as individuality is key to Imhof’s work. Upon receiving the Golden Lion award, she expressed that her work stood “for the grace of thoughts, for gender nonconformity, for liberty, [and] for the right to be different”.⁴ Each member’s individuality “persists even as they cluster into groups”, because according to Imhof, it is only “by forming an association of bodies, only by occupying space, can resistance take hold”—this collective radicalism is what she suggests allows us an escape from the boundaries and expectations of repressive capitalist society.

Furthermore, the work speaks to an individual’s relation to society today, through Imhof’s employment of professional models as the performers. Today, it is almost mandatory for artists to generate imagery and documentation that can be shared over numerous social media platforms, which affects how an artist is remembered - through the commoditization of their work. When asked about her decision to utilise the material of glass, Imhof replied that it gave her “the possibility to have something that reflects yet works as a surface itself”.⁵ This idea of self-perception, of “being aware of our watching”, is referred to in Pfeffer’s essay, where she states “pleasure does not originate in sexual intercourse, but in the act of seeing and being seen ... In an era characterized by an extreme degree of mediality, images, far from merely depicting reality, create it”.

Watching Imhof’s performers, you realise that they seem to strive to become images themselves - media representation being seen as “innate” to their “bio-techno-bodies”. As Pfeffer notes: “they seem forever on the verge of transforming themselves into pictures, ready for consumption; they aspire to become images, digital commodities”. Again, the body is the main site of contention, fighting against its own commodification and objectification. It seems that the central question Anne Imhof poses to us in this work is “How do we show ourselves today and face up to the other’s gaze? How are we looked at, and how do we look back?”

1. Susanne Pfeffer, ‘In a Solipsistic Choir’, *Deutscher Pavillon*, <http://www.deutscher-pavillon.org>
2. Noemi Smolik, ‘Conversation with Susanne Pfeffer on Anne Imhof “Faust” at German Pavilion, Venice Biennale’, *Mousse Magazine*, <http://mousemagazine.it/anne-imhof-faust-german-pavilion-venice-biennale-2017>
3. U.G. Lambert, ‘Anne Imhof’s Impressive Performance ‘Faust’ in Venice’, *PremierArtScene.com*, <http://premierartscene.com/magazine/anne-imhof-faust>
4. Colleen Barry, ‘Venice Biennale Awards German Artists 2 Golden Lions’, *Associated Press*, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-05-13/venice-biennale-awards-german-artists-2-golden-lions>
5. ‘Anee Imhof’s Dark Provocative Pavilion at Venice Art Biennale 2017’, *DesignBoom*, <https://www.designboom.com/art/anne-imhof-german-pavilion-venice-art-biennale-05-24-2017>



Anne Imhof, *Faust*. Performance. Courtesy: the artist the German Pavillion.
Photo: Nadine Frackowski



Anne Imhof, *Faust*. Performance. Photo: Joseph Kong

THE SPECTRAL IN THE ART OF KURT SELIGMANN

by Gražina Subelytė



Kurt Seligmann, *Sabbath Phantoms (Mythomania)*, c.1945
Courtsey: Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco

Artists, writers and intellectuals associated with surrealism espoused a radical vision of the world that rejected progress, positivism and logic, and advocated their opposites, embracing irrationality, intuition and the otherworldly. The surrealists emphasized the inner and eerie realms and experiences, championing and constantly pushing the boundaries of the mind and the imagination. They rebelled against the established modes of recognition and knowledge, and relentlessly looked beyond them, seeking alternative avenues in a world destabilized by the socio-political tensions and wars. They found solace in elements and schools of thought associated with the past. Their poetic agenda of resistance was defined by a way forward that was backward. In 1952, André Breton (1896-1966), the founder of the surrealist movement, emphasised in an interview with André Parinaud:

A belief in progress [...] is perhaps justified in science, but that in art does not hold up for an instant [...]. Poets and artists I've known seem to have adopted a dissident attitude toward [science] and have deliberately chosen the path of regression.¹

A keen interest in the world of the ghosts, ghostliness and the dead, and of magic and the occult, fit in seamlessly within the quest of the surrealists to bring the past and the otherworldly, in all its conceivable forms and manifestations, to life. These ethereal beings and realms provided the surrealists with a spiritual retreat enveloped in mystery. Katharine Conley argued for the significance that war, and the meaningless loss of life that it brought about, held for the surrealists in embracing ghostliness: "Surrealist ghostliness, which emerged in their creative practice, constitutes a heightened sense of

mortality together with a transposition of spiritualism."² Furthermore, Martine Antle similarly observed:

Whether at the movement's centre starting with [Breton's] *Nadja*, or at its peripheries within the communities of artists who rejuvenate the movement, or with those who continue to redefine surrealism even today, the notion of the ghost is omnipresent in both the writing and the visual art of the avant-garde... Ghostliness is a polysemic and yet unifying concept capable of taking on various forms, from the haunting of history to repressed ghosts.³

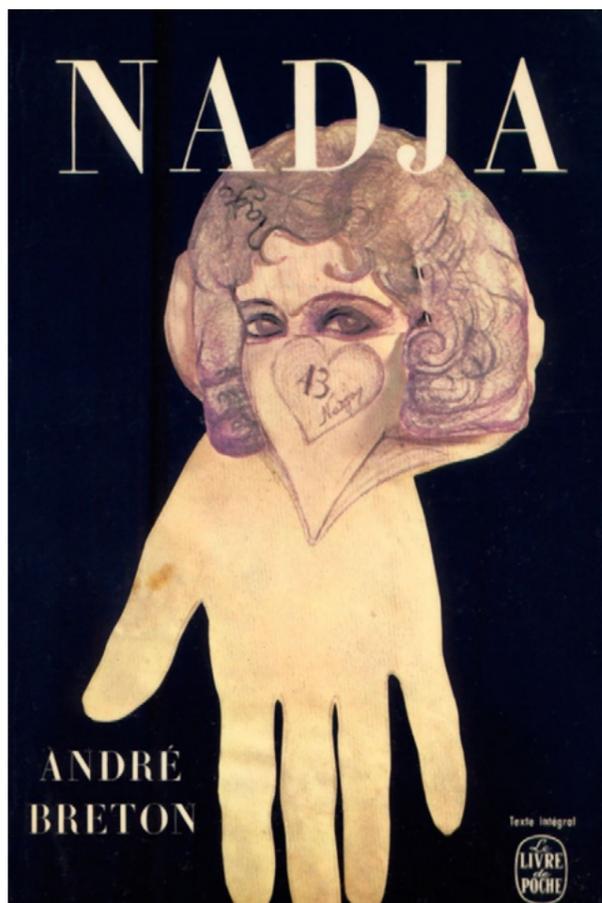
The spectral and the enigmatic, both directly and more subtly, are conspicuously represented in the art of the Swiss-American surrealist artist and scholar Kurt Seligmann (1900-1962), who was celebrated as an expert on magic and the occult in the surrealist movement. The ghostly quality of his work was partially influenced by his childhood surroundings, mainly his native city of Basel renowned for its haunting *danse macabre* (dance of death) scenes. Several of Seligmann's paintings depict clustered ghost-like figures recalling a *danse macabre* procession or a ritualistic gathering. Yet the motif of the *danse macabre* is a vast topic that requires a separate essay to be devoted to it. Generally, Seligmann deployed imagery, themes and ideas in his works that frequently alluded to otherworldly and unfathomable presences, but also domains concealed from and invisible to the human eye, in part stemming from the human psyche, imagination and dreams. In his own words: 'my world is that of dreams, fantasies, apparitions . . . It is the strange, the unheard of, the exquisite which attracts me . . . for nothing in the world would I forgo my day and night dreams. How could I give them up? They are so possessive. Having gone through the surrealist school, I approach these wonders knowingly if not scientifically.'⁴ Subsequently, in this essay I will begin to shed light on the spectral quality of Seligmann's art primarily by analysing *Sabbath Phantoms* (1939), a key painting from the late 1930s, a period when the dark and the ethereal, influenced by the contemporary reality and the conflicts of the past, were at the forefront of his iconography.

Although Seligmann moved permanently to the U.S. in September 1939, while he was living in Europe, just prior to the Second World War, his sombre and foreboding paintings were populated, and continued to be so thereafter, by ghastly, skeletal figures set on dark, gloomy landscapes. As Seligmann explained,

'Around 1937 my painting became crowded with agitated distorted forms, expressing probably the general political and social unrest.'⁵ Seligmann's first exhibition in the U.S., held at the Nierendorf Gallery in New York from 27 September to 15 October 1939, stressed such a ghostly, macabre and cadaverous quality of his figures, alluding to the impending atrocities of the Second World War. The title of the exhibition, *Kurt Seligmann: Spectres 1939 A.D. – 13 Variations on a Macabre Theme*, was also explicitly suggestive of the spectral features being at the heart of the pictures displayed. In particular, the exhibition included his aforementioned seminal work *Sabbath Phantoms*. Painted in France just before the start of the Second World War, it is the last work Seligmann created while he was still living in Europe. In it, he depicted a group of figures, or phantoms as indicated in the title, in a state of sheer confusion, even panic, each about to hurtle in diverse directions, while another larger figure on the left gazes calmly into the distance. While the latter figure might stand for a reassuring and stable presence when compared to the bewildered crowd, it appears to take on a role of the observer that is looking on, as if sensing the upcoming destruction.

When in 1946 Seligmann was interviewed by the curator and writer James Johnson Sweeney (1900-1968), he related *Sabbath Phantoms* to his personal 'political and intellectual reaction,' to the socio-political events of the late 1930s.⁶ The title indicates a supernatural and uncanny presence. In the aforementioned exhibition, the painting appeared under the title *Salut aux Fantômes*, or *Salute to the Phantoms*. Seligmann might have been referring to the ghosts of the past, the dead that had endured the conflicts and wars causing widespread suffering and devastation. In the same interview, Seligmann claimed: 'From my European background I inherited a curiosity about every form of the past . . . The past has given a physiognomy to the European landscape, where civilizations lie buried under every acre.'⁷ He found the American landscape to be the opposite, 'untouched by the ghosts of past cultures.'⁸ The heritage of European and in particular German and his native Swiss cultural and historic legacy, the wars and the political conflicts translated into his phantom-like figures.

However, while, on the one hand, the relation to the past plays a fundamental role in facilitating the understanding of *Sabbath Phantoms*, on the other hand, in it Seligmann must have also been alluding to the phantoms and apparitions of the future, i.e. the ones that will resurface after the widespread death and demolition caused by the Second World War. Katharine Conley had written about the ghostly character of



André Breton's novel *Nadja* (1928)

surrealist works fittingly describing Seligmann's paintings too: 'Retrospective and anticipatory at the same time, this concentration on the present links disparate historical epochs and worldviews in a way that makes visible how the human condition resounds with echoing ghosts—of past history, knowledge, and experience—even as it anticipates in shadowy form what may be to come.'⁹ It appears that the ghosts depicted by Seligmann take on a character as described by Breton in his novel *Nadja*, originally published in 1928. In it, Breton noted that the ghost was 'the finite representation of a torment that may be eternal.'¹⁰ He alluded to a presence that was marked by ceaseless suffering, vestiges of which are discernible in Seligmann's figures. Seligmann was a teenager when the First World War took place, and early on he felt the impending Fascist threat. Even before Hitler came to power in Germany, he commenced to compile a scrapbook of images pertaining to the rising military threat to Europe, commenting in it: 'Systematic distribution of poison. Worse than before the war... How soon will the next war come, for it certainly will?'¹¹

The scrapbook's table of contents included headings such as the following: 'The war has never ceased to exist. . . Keep the memory alive in order not to be too surprised by the next.'¹²

The headings reveal the extent to which Seligmann was affected by the war-tinged climate, as he felt it was pertinent to keep the memory of past wars alive when sensing the impending threat of conflict. The art historian Meyer Schapiro (1904-1996), who was a close friend of Seligmann, posited that Seligmann's primary influence was indeed not medieval, but rather a markedly contemporary one:

[Seligmann] did not start from this heritage of late medieval art... He approached it gradually from a great distance – an attraction induced, one may suppose, by the catastrophes of the late '30s and early '40s... The disasters of war and peace were a discouraging, often terrifying background for his personal anxieties. His art then was an authentic reaction to the state of world, which he lived in feeling and imagination. The old art, too, belonged to a period of turmoil, wars and revolts, a moment of decay of the old and of bitter struggles for the new.¹³

The political backdrop of war thus shaped Seligmann's thought, eventually inciting him to embrace an iconography filled with ghosts and apparitions, and radicalizing his turn to magic and the occult. His embrace of such imagery was reinforced by his reading of books on related subject matter. Seligmann assembled one of the best private libraries of rare books on occultist subjects. Among a plethora of other topics, the library boasted numerous volumes on witchcraft, demonology, vampires, ghosts, apparitions and the invisible world. To name some, the studies in his library included publications on ghosts, spirits, and the invisible world by the Swiss Reformed theologian Lewis Lavater (1527-1586), the French demonologist Pierre Le Loyer (1550-1634), the French Benedictine monk and biblical scholar Antoine Augustin Calmet (1672-1757), the French hermeticist and historian of alchemy Nicolas Lenglet Du Fresnoy (1674-1755), and Daniel Defoe (Andrew Moreton) (1660-1731). The contents of such books must have influenced, whether directly or indirectly, the spectral and ghostly quality of personages populating Seligmann's paintings.

As exemplified by *Sabbath Phantoms*, Seligmann's portrayals of ghosts and apparitions reveal his avid interest in the supernatural and the invisible world.

Furthermore, he studied these subjects with a keen inquisitiveness of an academic. With a wealth of knowledge about the history of writing and depictions of the spectral, Seligmann translated such otherworldly elements seemingly associated with the past into his vision of the present and of the future. His view of the contemporary world at the time was substantially negative, pervaded by angst associated with global conflicts and the Second World War. The phantoms in his works therefore ultimately served to help him conquer the anguish that he felt in the face of doom. Consequently, the ghoulish and macabre figures he painted acquired a cathartic and an apotropaic meaning, which leads to the conclusion that they were magical. He wrote, 'I seek . . . in looking at these strange and irrational draperies and figures, a confirmation from the exterior of my state of mind.'¹⁴ In the end, it is his inner world, the invisible dimension that are at the heart of his paintings. Seligmann's works are the true examples of 'elsewhere', a perfect synthesis in which the realm of the spirits and that of Seligmann's inner, spiritual world, merge.

1. André Breton, interviewed by André Parinaud, *Arts* (March 7, 1952), in Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism*, tr. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1993), 250-251.
2. Katharine Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 227.
3. Martine Antle, 'Surrealist Ghosts and Spectrality' in *Surrealist Ghostliness* by Katharine Conley, University of Nebraska Press, 2013. *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 8.1 (2014), 127.
4. Kurt Seligmann letter to Harvey Arnason, May 16, 1958, Kurt Seligmann Papers. *Yale Collection of American Literature*, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
5. Kurt Seligmann, in 'Twelve Artists in U.S. Exile,' *Fortune Magazine* XXIV (December 1941), 113.
6. Seligmann, interviewed by James Johnson Sweeney, 'Eleven Europeans in America,' *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* XIII. 4-5 (1946), 10-11.
7. *Ibid.*, 11.
8. *Ibid.*, 12.
9. Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, 228.
10. André Breton, *Nadja*, tr. Richard Howard (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 12.
11. Seligmann's scrapbook, Kurt Seligmann Papers, Beinecke.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Meyer Schapiro, *Kurt Seligmann—The Early Years* (New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1964), n.p.
14. Seligmann, untitled typescript, 1944, 1-5, *Kurt Seligmann Papers*, Beinecke.

IMAGINED IDENTITY

Imagining Qianlong: Louis XV's Chinese Emperor Tapestries and Battle Scene Prints at the Imperial Court in Beijing, the University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 15 March 2017 – 28 May 2017

by Yunhan Sun

What does your profile picture look like on social media? What do the 'photos of you' tagged by your friend look like? To a certain degree, these two types of photos show how you want to be seen, and what your friends think about you. Back in the days before the Web and photography, people also portrayed themselves on paintings or prints or other media in the way they desired. The exhibition *Imagining Qianlong: Louis XV's Chinese Emperor Tapestries and Battle Scene Prints at the Imperial Court in Beijing* held at the University Museum and Art Gallery (UMAG) of the University of Hong Kong consists of two parts: one is what the French royals thought about the Qianlong emperor (1735-1796), and the other is how the Qianlong emperor wished to be seen.

This exhibition is part of the *Le French May* cultural event, which follows the mission to showcase the most diversified art forms. This exhibition fits the concept well as it demonstrates the cultural exchange between France and China. It also coincides with the mission of UMAG, which aspires to generate artistic

and cultural experiences about the past and present of Chinese and other cultures. On a larger scale, Hong Kong is a city of encounters among all cultures, and the historical background of modern Hong Kong. Moreover, as on 1 July 1997 Hong Kong was handed over to the People's Republic of China by the United Kingdom adds an extra complexity to their identity.

The first part of the exhibition features a set of ten tapestries known as *tenture chinoise* (Chinese hangings), commissioned by the French King Louis XV (1710-1774) and woven after sketches by François Boucher (1703-1770) at the Beauvais factory around 1759. Most of his designs for tapestries were purchased by royalty and wealthy merchants. Later, in 1766, six out of the ten tapestries were sent as gifts to the Qianlong emperor. At first glance, one would be shocked by the size of these enormous tapestries. Each piece is at least 3.5 meters tall, and viewers would unconsciously look up in order to see the whole picture. When you move closer to observe, viewers would be amazed by the crazy details in-the tapestry.



La Foire (The Fair) Royal Beauvais Manufactory, after François Boucher (1703-1770)
Courtesy: Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis

La Foire (The Fair) is the largest piece among the six tapestries. The tapestries were in the form of rococo style oil painting, with similar golden colour and elaborate designed frame, vibrant and light palette and asymmetric composition. There are more than thirty human figures in the foreground depicted in a variety of activities: some are selecting the Chinese blue and white porcelains, and some are admiring wild birds. Among them, some shown western facial features, some shown Chinese features, but all wearing 'Chinese-looking' robes. The Qianlong emperor is portrayed as a bearded man in plain beige robes, revealing his pale legs and bare feet, standing in front of his throne, posing similar to Napoleon on the famous portrait, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*. In the background is a landscape, including Mongolian yurts, pagodas, and Chinese style archway, *pailou* etc., and some tropical plants. Ironically, Boucher had never been to China. Therefore, what he portrayed on the tapestries were the imagined image of China and its emperor. And indeed, some of the elements, such as the tropical plants could not have been seen at the capital of the Qing dynasty. What makes the case even complicated is that the emperor placed the tapestries in his European palaces designed by French and Italian Jesuits, the Old Summer Palace (*Yuanming Yuan*). Does this mean that the Qianlong emperor thought the tapestries were exotic? Was it because of the non-Chinese medium or the unfamiliar iconographies? Or is it simply because these were gifts from the French King Louis XV?

The second part of this exhibition is a set of sixteen engravings and prints, exhibited in a separate room. On July 13th 1765, the Qianlong emperor ordered the transfer of sketches recording battles against the Mongol Zunghars to the French royal engravers create copperplate engravings. Then the paintings were sent to Paris, and engraved by the royal engraver to the French King Louis XV, Charles- Nicolas Cochin (1715-1790). The original sketches were painted by a group of Jesuit missionaries, including Giuseppe Castiglione, Ignatius Sichelbart, Jean-Denis Attiret and Jean Damascene Sallusti, even before the battles ended. The finished product was shipped back to the Qing court and then distributed to different places within and outside Qing territory as propaganda.



The Emperor Presented with Prisoners from the Pacification of the Muslim Tribes, drawn by Jean-Denis Attiret, engraved by Louis Joseph Masquelier, 1774.
Courtesy: Christie's

The print with the title of *The Emperor Presented with Prisoners from the Pacification of the Muslim Tribes* shows the Qianlong emperor sitting at the tower of the imperial palace and inspecting the soldiers and general who brought the head of the enemy. This print is a bird's-eye view of the yard, and the imperial palace is perfectly fitted into the frame, even with tiny details of tiles on the rooftop. All the soldiers and officials look alike, with uniform heights and gestures and shadows. The Qianlong emperor sits upright on the throne, wearing a formal court robe, unlike the *La Foire (The Fair)* tapestry, in which the Qianlong emperor's clothing is more relaxed and informal. This set of engravings and prints can be treated as the 'profile pictures' of the Qianlong emperor, where he wanted to portray himself as warrior, strategist and the leader and emperor of the Qing dynasty.

What makes this exhibition more intriguing is the fact that what the viewers think about the artworks also reveals their identity. A Chinese viewer who has some knowledge of ancient Chinese history and culture might notice that the emperor would never expose his skin and foot, as depicted in the tapestry. A student of Chinese art history might point out that some of the iconographies on the tapestry, such as the floral robes were not 'Chinese'. French viewers might think this is what ancient China should look like. Personal background would affect the interpretations of each work of art.

So, after this exhibition, how you answer the question: who is the Qianlong emperor? And who are you?

NICCOLÒ MONTESI: THE ART OF PLAYING

by Lorenza Brizzi

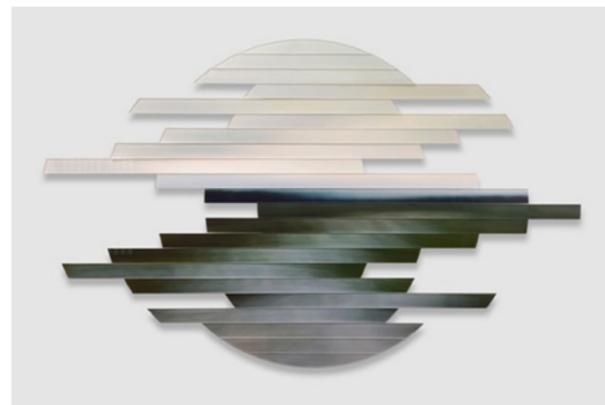
Among the various exhibitions taking place at the Venice Biennale this year, the artworks by artist Niccolò Montesi appear in three different venues: the group exhibition Vitel Tonnè hosted at Palazzo Cesari-Marchesi and curated by The Pool NY; at the Hotel Bauer and at the group exhibition “Porta in Itineris Longissima Asse” at Palazzo Cà Donà, a preview of a bigger project that will be part of the *Praeteritum, Praesens et Futurum International Holy Art Exposition* (International Biennale of Art of Humanity’s Religions). In these occasions Montesi shows his photography-based works which, thanks to a little technical twist, are literally transformed into games with which the viewer can and is asked to participate. Studied to be interactive and playful, these original artworks reach their true goal and essence only when reworked and, in one sense, destroyed – here come the “fun” part.

Emerging Italian artist, Niccolò Montesi (Padova 1977) comes from a background as visual merchandiser (he still works as a consultant in this field), but has decided to put his “fashionable” career aside in order to pursue his dream and become an artist. “I decided to dedicate myself to my art to take control of my life. Wake up in the morning and work for one’s own passion is the biggest gift that someone could have”, he told me during our last conversation. Even though the first projects date back to 2000, only 12 years later he decided to challenge himself and pursue his artistic vocation. GAM (Galleria d’Arte Maggiore) in Bologna hosted his first solo show, “Family Games” in 2015, launching his career. Afterwards, Montesi participated

in The Armory Show, New York (always with GAM) and Scope Basel with The McLoughlin Gallery.

Photography has always been a passion of Montesi, instilled in him when his father gave him his first Leica R4, a gift he still cherishes. Photography is in fact at the very base of his artistic process. Carefully composed images are put together to create pictures that recall his own personal life, memories of childhood or minimalistic landscapes. Colours and forms are beautifully assembled just to be disrupted again through a mobile mechanism, and the viewer is invited to interact with the piece. One is invited to interact, to move the parts around and create new images each time. Printed on Plexiglas, the photographs are mounted on magnetic mechanisms that recreate an enlarged structure of well-known children’s games, such as “Puzzle of 15” and “Connect 4”. When the pieces are moved around, the image loses its integrity and the work becomes the bearer of many different meanings.

Photography has been said to be about capturing a moment, a decisive one, but who said that there is only one perfect instant? This is the aim of these works: to create multiple decisive moments. For Niccolò Montesi movement is the way to allow an image to become many. In his works, the possibility of literally changing the picture and moving pieces around gives the viewer the opportunity to create a series of new original and unique moments. During our conversation Montesi stated: “I always look for the interaction between the artwork and the viewer, because for me photography itself is movement. (Through photography) an instant in a



Niccolò Montesi, *Feelings*, 2017 Baryta photographic paper mounted on plexiglass, 110 x 110 to 150 cm

Courtesy: the artist



Niccolò Montesi, *L'erede (The Heir)*, 2015 Baryta photographic paper mounted on plexiglass, d 155 cm

Courtesy: the artist

three-dimensional space is frozen in a two-dimensional format. By allowing an interaction with the piece, a new physical and temporal three-dimensionality is created each time. Since every moment is unique, an infinite series of new instants follow one another in the creation of endless frames. If art is a moment of reflection, of finding one’s self, why not do this through a game? Using a playful experience to find the child in ourselves and take it as starting point for deeper reflections?”

Games and the act of play within art are the other main features of the artist’s works. Until recently in art history, artworks were supposed to be seen, looked at, but not touched or physically experienced. Proposing a type of art that is based on physical interaction is an approach that erases all the previous restrictions and asks the viewer to be an integral part of the work, to be the creator alongside the artist himself. This also offers a way to forget about all the social constraints that society learns to accept and follow, so as to embrace again for a moment that naivety and innocent curiosity that characterizes the lost temperament of childhood. In fact, thanks to the mechanism hidden behind the photographs, the pieces of each work can be moved in different directions, either sideways, around or in a circular manner; in the case of “Connect 4”, the smaller tokens can be inserted and taken out. Moreover, whenever other objects are applied on the piece, whether metallic magnets or darts, they can be played with as well. The very structure of the works invite the viewer to get involved, to touch and physically use the artwork, asking them to become an active player in the making of history. Finally, the act of playing with the works is

a way to challenge the viewer to produce a personal interpretation, allowing one to reach broader universal and complex meanings through a recreational process.

The connections of art-life-game were already clearly developed in Montesi’s debut solo show at G.A.M. Bologna, *Family Games*, which spoke about family relationships and their sentimental connotations. *L'erede (The Heir)*, built like “Connect 4” game (which becomes 7), features a Teddy Bear raised in a bowl, like a token inserted in the game, symbolizing how children’s lives are different and vary depending on the context in which they grow up; *Famiglia (Family)*, mounted on a support that recalls an archery target, presents objects such as a goblet, cassock, objects used to carry a bouquet in order to speak about marriage in all facets.

Later series the artist has been working on present both a diverse range of themes and different types of optical illusions, but the will to reach deeper and universal meanings still remain. In addition to the show Vitel Tonnè, which focuses on the study of the self, Niccolò Montesi is also working on two other projects, one dealing with alimentation and the other with immigration, and also a work related to religion for the Biennial “Praeteritum, Praesens and Futurum International Holy Art” that will take place in Palermo in 2018. Finally, Montesi is developing a collaboration with Fey in Milan, which could be seen during his residency in Sicily at the Bindana-Pidel Gallery from June 2017.

MATTHEW DARBYSHIRE

Interview by Daria Hassan



Matthew Darbyshire, *Passive Sensor*, installation view at Herald St gallery, London, 2016.
Courtesy: Herald St gallery, London

*“Art for me is about the ineffable – the spaces, tones, tensions, tangents;
it’s the arc between electrodes; it’s the overlapping of me, you and
it is in the Venn diagram; it’s the Bermuda Triangle where meaning,
logic and legitimacy lose sovereignty.”*

Did the background of your studies influence your way of making art?

Yes indeed - my studies and tendencies since seem to oscillate between design and sculpture, however it is my preoccupation with the social throughout that has yoked and unified these concerns. They’re kind of interchangeable anyway of course and of equal social potential, so long as neither camp lets itself fall in to puerile parody of the other.

What does making art mean to you and what is your research?

Art for me is about the ineffable - the spaces, tones, tensions, tangents; it’s the arc between electrodes; it’s the overlapping of *me, you* and *it* is in the Venn diagram; it’s the Bermuda Triangle where meaning, logic and legitimacy lose sovereignty. My research is a clumsy combination of my thoughts, feelings and personality.

Is the personalisation of the work as a work of art a part of your philosophy or do you still believe in the art for art sake?

I’m not even going to dignify that last term.

How do you engage the audience with your works?

I don’t consciously, I make it for me - a human being with a conscience, a neurosis, a need to apprehend and a need to share my speculations, or at least the physical or residual remnants of my inquiries.

Do you want your pieces to communicate with the environment?

Yes there’s always an element of site-specificity/ acknowledgement - hopefully on a sociological phenomenological and poetic level.

What is reproduction for you and appropriation in your works?

Reproduction and appropriation are very key and both intended to jar the viewer and hopefully draw them in beyond symbol and beneath surface. I think its only via representation that you can transcend it - by kind of looking at, in and through the object until you find yourself somewhere the other side, somewhere more profound and somewhere far less literal.

Should your approach to art making be considered as a continuation or a response to ironic anti-commodity art?

I don’t think it’s either and to be honest, assuming you’re referring to Steinback, Koons, Levine, McCollum, maybe even Sturtevant et al, I don’t think their work’s necessarily that united, reductive or straightforward. There’s way more going on than irony and as I said, it’s only through representation that I think they and I can actually get beyond it!

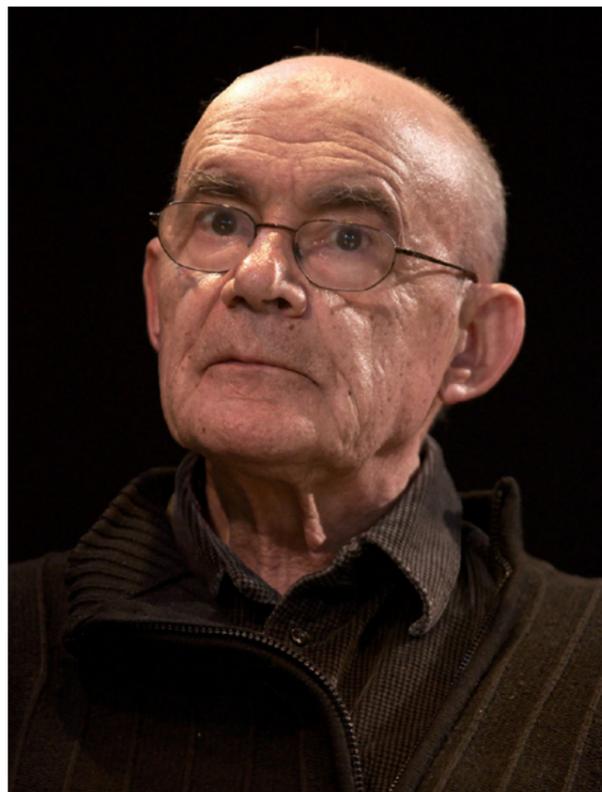
Are you working on a new project?

Yes lots of new experiments in the studio; two bronze public commissions here and in the Netherlands; leading the curriculum at Open School East; a sculpture and film collaboration with Roxman Gatt and the beginnings of a community/sculpture park initiative i’m quietly tinkering with in some nearby woodland!

JEAN-LUC NANCY AND GIORGIO AGAMBEN

Art as Trace and its Potentialities

by Lorenza Brizzi



Jean-Luc Nancy

With his aesthetic theory, Jean-Luc Nancy subsumes and surpasses both Hegelian Idealism and Nietzschean Nihilism¹. In contradistinction to Hegelian theories, the core theme of Nancy's aesthetic is the refusal to define art as representation or the presentation of something else- of nature, of feelings, of Ideas-; he "wants to turn our attention to the forgotten accessibility of meaning as coming to presence rather than a given and prior signification."² Art becomes Presentation itself, coming-into-being, never fixed but always transforming, always changing: it is infinite finishing³. "Art is not seen as being a representational relation to the world, but as offering us nothing less than access to this world"⁴; therefore, it cannot be circumscribed to a definition or a movement, but it has to remain open to fulfill its job. It is a gesture towards a result, not something finished in itself.

Nancy argues that art has lost its nature and ceased to have its function when aesthetic and critique begun, and that is because the very moment something is defined it ends, it is enclosed within a frame that blocks its development and its effect. Hegel's aesthetic made art the vehicle through which the Idea could make itself visible, retrograding it to mere representation, to a tool. Nancy rejects this theory to give art its own standing: what happens in art and through it is not the presentation of something else –representation- but the realization of something, pure creation. The subject matter is created because art shows it, because art is making it appearing from nothing, from the invisible⁵.

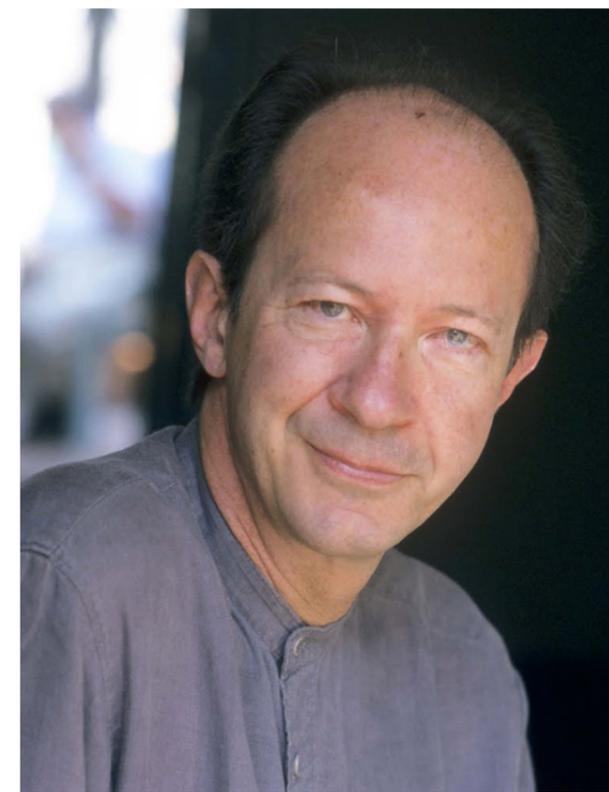
Starting from a Phenomenological structure, Nancy goes further to proclaim that "art could be described as presenting out of sensible relations the genesis or process of meaning"⁶. Rejecting the limit of phenomenology which still wants to maintain a link between "sense –or meaning- and a specific origin, a "pure presence", Nancy thinks that "art can claim to be more originary than truth because it presents the process of presentation."⁷ Art is presentation of pure sense, not because a connection to a bigger Truth beyond what we can see, but because it raises from the various relationships that keeps together our world.⁸

Nancy interprets Art as *Vestige*⁹. Withdrawing the term from theology, vestige is "an effect that represent

only the causality of the cause, but not its form."¹⁰ Art is understood in the same terms: we do not see the idea in the vestige, but only its absence¹¹. Art is representative of something that has happened in a very specific time which is already passed, and what remains – the work of art – is the trace of that moment, of the being that had been brought into presence in that precise instant. Art is the trace of an absence: "A vestige shows that someone is passed by but not who it is."¹² It is the indexical trace of history, like a footprint or a photograph: a frozen instant that is now gone.¹³ The vestige is the reminder of this absence full of presence.¹⁴

Considering art as a vestige does not mean that art is over once the trace is left and the moment passed. On the contrary, this ignorance about the origin of the trace unchains it from strict definitions and allows it to be open to many possible interpretations. Another key theme of Nancy's philosophy is the association of art to the concept of the Singular/Plural, a "dual life". The singularity is found in Art's very existence and function of unveiling, of bringing into presence: art is singular because its role never changes. At the same time, it is plural because, even though the work of art is a trace of a specific moment, it keeps existing in other times, influenced by different societies and interpreted by different people.¹⁵ In his essay "The Vestige of Art" Nancy writes: "One could say: art is each time radically another art (not only another form, another style, but another essence of art), according to its "response" to another world, to another polis; but it is at the same time each time all that it is, all art such as itself finally..."¹⁶.

This state of transition and non-definition that Nancy assigns to art confers to it also openness. Being undefined and undefinable allows possibilities. In the essay "In Media Res" Ginette Michaud writes that Nancy "never fails to challenge such a "conception" of the world or of an art assumed to define these objects as a given formality, an accomplished synthesis, whereas on the contrary it is a question of grasping how, in art as in other "worlds," there is never anything except passages, possible or potential trajectories..."¹⁷. And again in the text *Art Today* "art is there every time to open the world, to open the world to itself, to its possibility



Giorgio Agamben

of world, to its possibility thus to open meaning”¹⁸. This concept of possibility rising from nothingness is what connect Nancy’s aesthetic to philosophical discourses developed by Giorgio Agamben.

With his philosophy Agamben carries on an approach, which is based on the destruction of the philosophical system evolving around the separation of opposite poles: being/non-being, action/non-action, art/product. However, rather than on the definition of different poles, Agamben’s studies focus on the “grey area” that takes form in between these extremities. Usually, any event that happens in this “middle zone”, which is not defined, means almost nothing; this is not true for Agamben. His philosophy revolves around the idea that not belonging to either one of the poles does not mean to worth nothing or being irremediably lost; on the contrary, this loss turns into freedom to become anything. The lack of a label or a name is the necessary requirement so that other and endless potentialities can develop. As in Nancy’s infinite finishing, Agamben’s middle-area permits things to fluctuate without a definition, hence without ever being over and therefore to potentially be anything whatsoever.¹⁹

This concept can be applied in artistic terms and to do so Agamben take as examples Pop Art and the Ready-made. Picking up from Aristotelian philosophy, Agamben’s aesthetic depicts of art as a form of *techné*, which is any item produced from “skill” and not already existing in nature (*arché*). While Aristotle qualified both fine arts and crafts as *techné*, the simplicity of this categorization changed with the industrial revolution and the advent of reproducibility, when “this unitary status of the things not coming from nature...as *techné* is broken.”²⁰ After this historical moment, this differentiation is made by distinguishing between originality and reproducibility: the work of art is original by virtue of its uniqueness but also of its relation of proximity with its origin, its formal principle –either *arché* or *eidos* (image).²¹Oppositely, reproducibility is defined by a relation of non-proximity with the origin, where the *eidos* become just the mold to which the product must conform and where the act of *poesis* (act of creation) can be reproduced indefinitely.²²

Going back to Pop Art and Ready-made, they form the perfect examples of inhabitants of Agamben’s middle-area, since historically their very existence is based on playing between the definition of art and product, originality and reproducibility. These “Hybrid forms” that were based on an “intentional and confusion and perversion of the two sphere of *poesis*”

are the result of a strongest will in contemporary time to find a unitary status between the poles.²³ As new and daring as they can be, still these artistic forms cannot complete the passage or unification between the extremities, for what is original cannot be reproducible and what is reproducible cannot be original. But it is right in this impossibility that all their meaning and power lie: In the effort to reconcile art and product both movements push the spilt to the extreme point so that the “productive activity of man may become reconciled with itself”, even though this can only lead to a crisis since this reconciliation is impossible. What comes into presence through these forms of art then is the “privation of the potentiality that cannot finds its reality anywhere” and which make them the “most alienated (and thus the most extreme) forms of *poesis*, in which privation itself come into presence.”²⁴The impossibility to reach the unity is what at the same time can open the way to other interpretations and “half-way” results never considered before. Deprived of their status, these works are nothing but, at the same time, can also be everything; undefinable but subject to any possible definition. Although Agamben’s philosophy is based on this negative approach grounded on the concept of privation, it does not have to be interpreted as pessimistic, for the lack of definition or belonging is what allow things to unleash their potential and to bring to the surface (thus into presence) other facets of their essence.

Even though through different concepts and approaches, Nancy’s and Agamben’s aesthetics share a common ground. In different ways each reject the idea of art as representation so to assign to acts of representation the primary role of revelation. They both develop a sort of negative process of revelation, whether that of privation in Agamben, or expressed through Nancy’s idea of the vestige as trace of an absence. Each and every object, artwork, or event is opened up to its full range of potentialities and possibilities; art does not conform anymore to a strict structure, but has gained its own fundamental role as “maker” of the Being instead of existing as just a representation of the thing in itself we attempt each attempt to realize as beings-in-the-world.²⁵

1. Since Nancy sees art as the result of an ongoing relationship with the world that surround us, he evaluates contemporary art the result of nihilism: is not that there is nothing more to show, but contemporary art reflects what the world has become: empty concepts (Jaen-Luc Nancy, *The Vestige of Art*, 269)
2. Alison Ross. *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy. Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue- Labarthe and Nancy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007
3. Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Vestige of Art”, in *Philosophers on Art from Kant to the Postmodernists*, 274
4. Michaud Ginette. “Outlining Art: On Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Trop* and *Le Plaisir au dessin*, in *Journal of Visual Culture*, Sage Publications 2010. Translated by Agnès Jacob. Accessed on 27/03/2017. 79 <http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/doi/pdf/10.1177/1470412909354263>
5. Marie-Eve Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*. Cambridge: Polity, 2012. 34
6. Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy*, 153
7. Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy*, 141,153
8. For a further reading on this subject: Ross, Alison. *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy. Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue- Labarthe and Nancy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
9. Nancy make a clear differentiation between Vestige and Image: While the Vestige is the trace, the causality but not the cause, the image represents something specific, the form at the origin of that representation. (Nancy, *The Vestige of the Art*, 271-272)
10. Nancy, *The Vestige of Art*, 271. To clarify this concept of Vestige Nancy uses the example of the smoke: whenever there is smoke, it is assumed that there must be a fire to cause it, but we do not see the fire in the smoke. Smoke is the result of something that is not seen but that has supposedly happened.
11. The concepts of absence and nothingness, as the one of privation in Agamben, does not have to read in a negative way. The absence reminded by the vestige is full of meaning really; it does not speak of nothing, but of something that exists but is not there anymore, of a passage, of something else.
12. Nancy, *The Vestige of Art*, 272
13. The term “Footprint” in not casually used in Nancy, but it recalls the Heideggerian theories about the strong connection of every being to the earth. Nancy’s philosophy shares with Heidegger’s the principle of emergence, of coming into visibility and presence; but where Heidegger poses limits within the beginning of this unveiling process, Nancy leaves it open to infinite possibilities. For further research: Martin Heidegger “The Origin of The Work of Art”
14. Nancy, *The Vestige of Art*, 270
15. Plurality means that even though the artwork was specific for a certain moment for some reasons, it still has the power to inspires in other times for other reasons. Art meaning is not fixed, it has power in the here and now even being a sign of the past.
16. Nancy, *The Vestige of the Art*, 265
17. Michaud, Ginette and Roxanne Lapidus. “In Media Res: Interception of the Work of Art and the Political in Jean-Luc Nancy”, in *SubStance*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2005, 104-128. JSTOR. Accessed 20/03/2017. 106 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3685622>
18. Nancy, Jean-Luc, “Art Today” in *Journal of Visual Culture*, Sage Publications 2007. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. Accessed on 28/03/2017. 93 <http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/doi/pdf/10.1177/1470412909354265>
19. To explain this idea, Agamben uses the example of unbaptized children: Children that die before they have received the baptism are not allowed neither in Heaven nor in Hell, but they are stuck in limbo, since they passed away before any action in their life could defined their faith. The fact of being in limbo means that they are deprived of their identity somehow, of their ticket to access either one of the two poles. But for Agamben it also means that they are free of any pain. Privation in Agamben’s philosophy is not seen as negative, but as “an extreme gift of poetry [...] because in it nothingness itself is called to presence”. As in the example of the unbaptised children, their being lost is not necessarily bad, since they can live in divine abandon”. The same will be for the ready-made and pop art: being in-between, the privation of their status allow them to bring their presence to the fore. (Giorgio Agamben, “Privation is Like a Face”, in *Philosophers on Art from Kant to the Postmodernists*, 2010. 251)
20. Agamben, *Privation is Like A Face*, 253
21. Eidos is the term used to define the “image” which is understood as the “formal principle...which governs and determines the entry into presence” (Agamben, *Privation is Like a Face*, 253)
22. Agamben, *Privation is Like a Face*, 253
23. Pushing further the concept of blurring the line between the two spheres, “the ready-made proceeds from the sphere of the technical product to the sphere of art, pop art moves in the opposite direction: from aesthetic status to of industrial product”. Agamben, *Privation is Like a Face*, 255
24. Agamben, *Privation is Like a Face*, 256
25. Agamben, *Privation is Like a Face*, 256

LESS OIL, MORE COURAGE AND LOVE

Thai Contemporary Art NOW¹

by Margaret Wu

Since 1923 the Thai monarchy has been the key driver in the development of the arts. The intrinsic and extrinsic value of art in Thailand has a long history of being intertwined within political and cultural apparatuses. As the country combined liberal economics with authoritarian regime, an ambiguity is born from the tension in between. Due to the religious dominance of Buddhism in Thailand, combined with the consideration that the founder of the first Fine Arts Department in Thailand is an Italian sculptor: Thai art may be seen as a product of Western ideology and Buddhist self-consciousness. The contemporary art of Thailand has developed its own unique language: meditative, poetic with a subversive undercurrent and phenomenological sensibility. Thai Contemporary artists exemplify Jacques Rancière's definition of politics: "Politics, indeed, is not the exercise of, or struggle for, power. It is the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them."

The reason I have chosen the following three Thai contemporary artists is not only due to their unique artistic practices, but also due to their experimental gestures that consistently test the form and frame of art. The three Thai artists' profiles are Rirkrit Tiravanija (b.1961), Arin Rungjang (b. 1975) and Kawita Vatanjankur (b. 1987). Through the trajectory they might form, art lovers could understand how the dialogue between the western and eastern ideologies manifest and enrich the context of their work, allowing them to attain a broader aesthetic spectrum and to form conversations about the future of contemporary art in Thailand.

Rirkrit Tiravanija (b.1961)

With his long black hair and big warm smile, Rirkrit is never one to shun the limelight. The son of a Thai diplomat, Rirkrit was born in Buenos Aires and grew up living between Thailand, Ethiopia and Canada. His international background shapes his interest in how social structures are built through human interactions in space and time. His grandmother played an important role in his life. She taught cooking lessons on Thai television and owned a restaurant in Bangkok where Rirkrit spent his youth. His culinary-centered background influenced his unique art language: Rirkrit often stages cooking events in an art space in which he invites the audiences to have food together. Rirkrit is interested in how an idea becomes visible through the collaboration—what can be taken away from the collective experiences and what is left?

Rirkrit is often recognized for his role in "relational aesthetics," an art movement that focuses on social interaction and the artist as a catalyst for social exchanges. He often stages a daily activity in a mundane situation: a total event to manifest the value of the collective sharing experiences and collaboration. Rirkrit's works demonstrate performative and phenomenological qualities through temporality and textuality. Rirkrit would like to explore the possibilities opened during collaboration, what lies outside of the frame/structure. Often asking *how* rather than *why*, Rirkrit contemplates and observes how the communal activities that he creates reflect how the behavior of people can change in different times, spaces, and cultures. His belief in Buddhism contributes to his openness to detours, which is an important element in his art. His utopia is not a community without conflicts but a community with a capacity to cope with reality through collaboration in order to reach the true harmony.

In his best-known series *Pad Thai*, 1990 at the Paula Allen Gallery in New York, Rirkrit cooked and served traditional Thai food for exhibition visitors. It was Rirkrit's affirmative public announcement of his Thai identity. In addition to cooking, he created environments, prints, drawings, installations, and text-based works, which often relate to his social initiatives.



Rirkrit Tiravanija. "DO WE DREAM UNDER THE SAME SKY" Art Basel in Basel 2015. Courtesy: Rirkrit Tiravanija, Nikolaus Hirsch, Michel Müller



Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled*, 2002. Courtesy: Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York

He constructs communal environments in the art-related spaces that offer alternative venues for visitors' daily activities, like *Untitled, 2002 (he promised)*, a platform for improvisation and interaction. Rirkrit is interested in the derived shapes of adaptation and mutation in the dematerialization in the physical structure. In the retrospective *tomorrow is another fine day, 2004*, he co-worked with French artist Philippe Parreno and American science fiction author Bruce Sterling to create an objectless space in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam for the viewers to imagine the actual work of art by the theatrical readings related to three artists' memories and the minimal architectural interventions. His engagement with propaganda can be seen in the series of commissioned drawings derived from newspaper images and in *untitled 2006 (fear eats the soul/ November 1–8, 2004)*, in which Tiravanija painted the phrase "fear eats the soul" over the front page of The New York Times.

Although he often makes installation events, Rirkrit started widening his explorative practice through video and film in 2010. The film, *untitled 2012 (a study for Karl's perfect day)* or *(the incomparable Karl Holmqvist)*, is a survey of how Karl Holmqvist's, an artist friend, inspired him with his improvisations with dematerialized forms such as reading poems or staging a performance. Rirkrit's art seeks interaction

with other artists' practices. Rirkrit sometimes intentionally chooses another artist's work as a structural or bodily host in which to insert his own interpretation and contemplation. For example, the exhibition *U.F.O.–Naut JK (Július Koller) Orquestra por Rirkrit Tiravanija, kurimanzutto, 2012* at the Jumex Museum in Mexico. He transfigured the museum from a space of contemplation into a space of social interaction. He reinterpreted and reactivated a 1970 project by Slovakian artist Július Koller (1939–2007) entitled *Ping-Pong Society* by putting seven ping-pong tables bearing the phrase 'TOMORROW IS THE QUESTION' (along with corresponding paddles marked with a question mark), which are installed within a tennis court layout. His exploration of the philosophical implications in ordinary language makes his works easy to access for people.

The ethos that permeates Rirkrit's work, a desire to bring people together, a commitment to collaboration and dialogue, and openness to the unknown, makes Rirkrit a leading figure of his generation. One day he told me, "you know, selling stuff is easy but selling idea is very hard..." Based upon my observation of how Rirkrit integrates his concepts into his artworks in a manner that allows them to stay accessible to the public, I think he sells quite well.



Rirkrit Tiravanija at Neugerriemschneider, Berlin. Photo: Jens Zieche

Arin Rungjang (b. 1975)

"The sound of the airplane was related to my childhood memory. It was a few years my father has gone and every time I heard the sound of the plane I would go out to the front yard jump and shout "Daddy is coming, Daddy is coming" and my mother would cry. My grandmother told me to stop and she said if any son made mother cry, they will go to hell."

– Excerpt from the exhibition material of Arin's installation 'The Scars of your love they leave me breathless, 2011

Arin, a grandson of a Monarchy fighter and son of a man who was beaten almost to death by the German Neo-Nazi when he worked in Germany, became aware of nationalism and transnationalism at a very young age. Raised by his grandmother and mother, two widows who lost their husbands in the early stage of the marriages, Arin's world was veiled in bittersweet memories and harrowing stories. The portraits of his grandfather and father were mainly formed by the oral storytelling of his grandmother and mother. Arin captures the essence of these lost figures through the presence of objects related to his father: photographs, the gifts bought by his father, the clothes his father used to wear. Everything related to his father carries a metaphorical meaning in his life and represent the archival presence of absence. Arin started questioning if the so-called-reality of memory is presented and represented based upon the subjective, what is the truth? This is a point from which Arin began his journey for answers.

Arin develops his unique artistic practice and style based on life experience. He is interested in investigating the lesser-known aspects of things, unnoticeable truths, like the negatives between the spaces. The title of a work is part of Arin's aesthetics, like the thread end of clothes or a clue in a puzzle. Narrative plays an important role in his practice. An object, which can draw together distant events across time and space, is as important as a video. Objects, installations and videos own the metaphorical quality. Due to the prominent dimension of the narrative, which usually bridges the past and presence, a subtle sense of nostalgia unveiled in Arin's works.

In his early works, mainly installations, a story was kept in the background, sometimes even hidden within. It is only after the exhibition *Never Congregate, Never Disregard, 2007* at Bangkok University Gallery Arin started his engagement with video as a medium that



Arin Rungjang, *Mongkut*, 2015. Courtesy: the artist

provides fluidity to his search for the truth, making the practice lyrical and poetic, yet unsettling. Arin's research was further matured in *Golden Teardrop, 2013*, a monumental video installation work exhibited in Thai Pavilion in the 55th Venice Biennale. Arin explored the historical intersections between Thailand and other countries through the video telling the backstory of a venerable Thai dessert, "golden teardrop", that the Siamese of Ayutthaya concocted based on a treat imported by the Portuguese. The video is paired with the installation which utilizes heavy wooden beams from an old Ayutthaya house and iron trusses from a post-war factory to frame a refined sculpted "chandelier" of bronze droplets. Arin dissected materials in a binary way, showing the historical and the present, the oral and the archival. Through the investigation, Arin deftly uncovered the bitter and sweet of the transnational interchanges in the Thai history. *Mongkut, 2015*, a video installation now exhibiting in Kyoto City University of Arts Gallery, shows how Arin located and manifested the transnational relationships in history through an object, mongkut, meaning a crown in Thai. Through overlapping the past, intertwining with the present, Arin tried to negotiate space for the arbitrary in history.

Arin's work *246247596248914102516... And then there were none (Democracy Monument), 2017* comprised of wood and brass sculpture, video, paintings and drawings was exhibited at Neue Neue Galerie at Documenta 14. Based on the oral and archival materials, it highlights the complexity of the ideological conflicts as well as how they can be read or narrated. It reveals the psychological and sociocultural aspects of history.

The video *And then there were none* is the opening of the work, which provides the structure of the whole presentation and reflects upon the artist's preoccupations with memory, loss, mysticism and history. Often using private events to investigate the political issues of the past, Arin continues this practice in video, exploring the narratives of a Thai student riot in 1973 including his grandfather's role as a democracy fighter and his father's tragic accident in Germany.

The bloodshed during the student riot in 1973 in Thailand near the site of Democracy Monument was concealed and lost in the Thai history. However, the ideologies embedded in those statements shape the way in which memory and history are presented. If what we regard history nowadays as programed and constructed, what is left for us to believe? What is the truth? A sculptural installation that references the numerological symbolism of the Democracy Monument, the drawings of the Thai ambassador and his wife, the archival materials of the Thai ambassador's published memoir and the signed guest book, are the symbols of transmitting didactic advice or historical information. 246247596248914102516... *And then there were none (Democracy Monument), 2017* is a critical work because Arin experiments the possibility of blurring the borders between video, performance art, painting, sculpture and installation. 246247596248914102516...

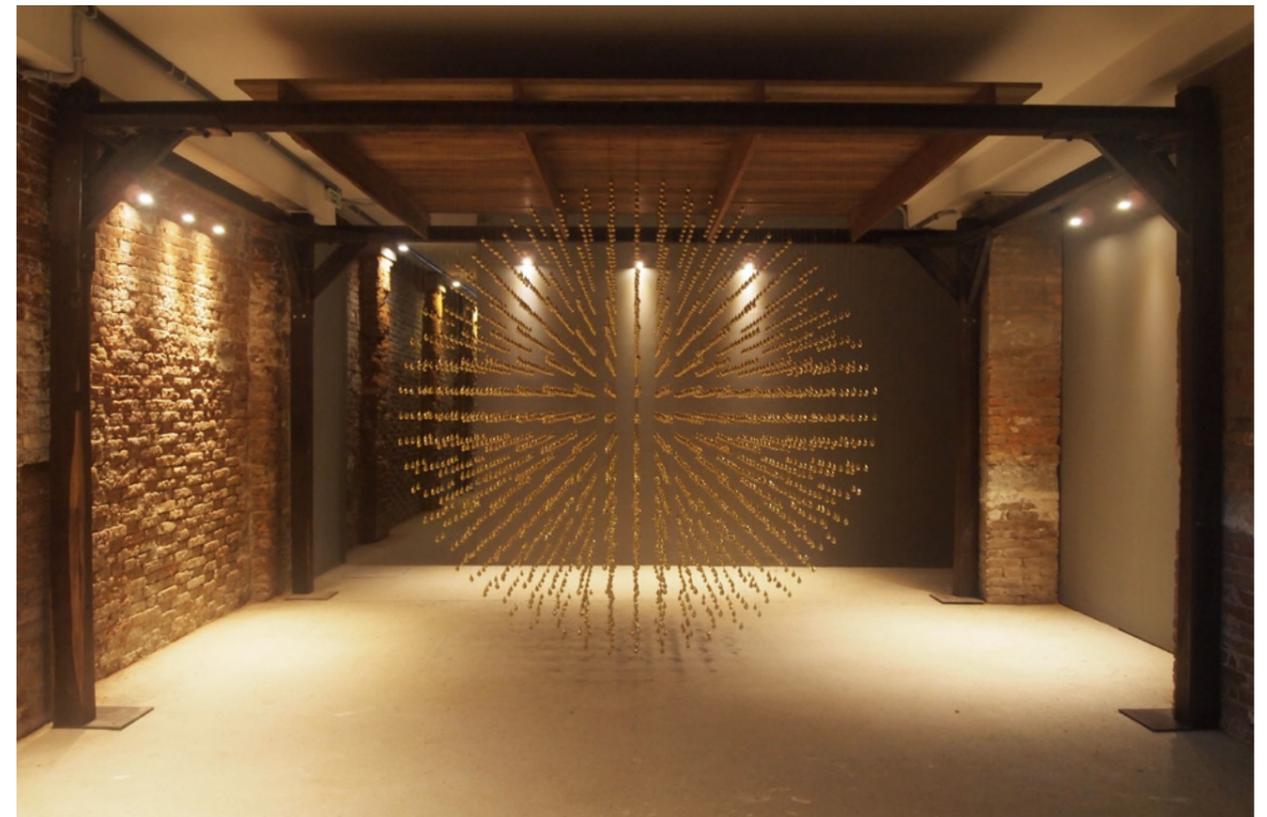
And then there were none (Democracy Monument), 2017 fascinates further with Arin's exploration of the collective phenomenological spheres between the dancers and viewers. Arin investigates how humans of different cultural backgrounds interact and co-exist: an open-ended story that allows the viewers to instill their own interpretations.

Arin constructs the medial well, reintroducing what has been registered in an intimate and dialectical way. Through the decomposition of images and narratives, the enigmatic arises. However, this is where the sublime arrives. This medial sphere is like an invitation for the audience to enter Arin's small-deal-in-big-details sovereign. In this sovereign, there are no answers but questions. In the end, what is left for the audience is their own interpretation. Arin sees this as a political act; an act in the hope of waking a collective conscious by stimulating the audience's accustomed senses and minds.

Arin told me, "246247596248914102516... *And then there were none (Democracy Monument), 2017* is a love story after all." Arin tries to 'fragments the moment and disperses the subject into a plurality of possible positions and function.' He consistently searches the deepest politics of truth through his art. It is indeed because of love, the love of humanity.



Arin Rungjang, 246247596248914102516... *And then there were none (Democracy Monument), 2017*
Courtesy: the artist



Arin Rungjang, *Golden teadrop*, 2013. Courtesy: the artist

Kawita Vatanjyankur (b. 1987)

Kawita is never afraid of being perceived as a feminist artist; however, she identifies as a "bad feminist." Despite being a pioneer in her realm, she adopts a demure and feminine demeanor, with long black hair and a lilting voice.

A graduate of RMIT University in Sydney majoring in fine art in painting, Kawita decided to adopt video as primary medium when she encountered Bill Viola's work in 2007. Kawita's deep training in painting is evident; she incorporates the methodology of painting in her video works in term of the composition of colours and shapes. She purposefully chooses minimal movements with no plot. Her work owns the features of Pop art: everyday subject matters, the consumer goods and vivid colours. At the same time, her work challenged traditional boundaries in the video art through combining the painterly gestures with minimal performance.

Deeply inspired by her mother, who raised her brother and her alone after her father passed away

when she was young, Kawita witnessed her mother's endurance as she bore sorrow within while raising children alone. Kawita decided to speak for Asian women in a meditative way. Her video works are conceptual but figurative. She thinks of her practice a way of meditation. In the performative video, Kawita tests her body's limits in a playful but painful way in front of gaily-coloured backdrops. She tolerates the strains and pains in order to attain self-enlightenment through a void of mindset. The mechanical repetitive movements create the sense of void, inviting the viewer's emotions to flow in. The work also explores the unsettling aspects of human nature, like peeking into personal private affairs, enticing and empathetic. The ambiguity connects the viewer's questions to the meanings underneath.

Kawita often suspends herself in the work. The artist stages the daily labours that Asian woman does for the family by mechanizing body and mind. She questions the self and identity of Asian woman, who use acceptance and tolerance to fight ambivalence. The sense of vulnerability in the suspension and reflective



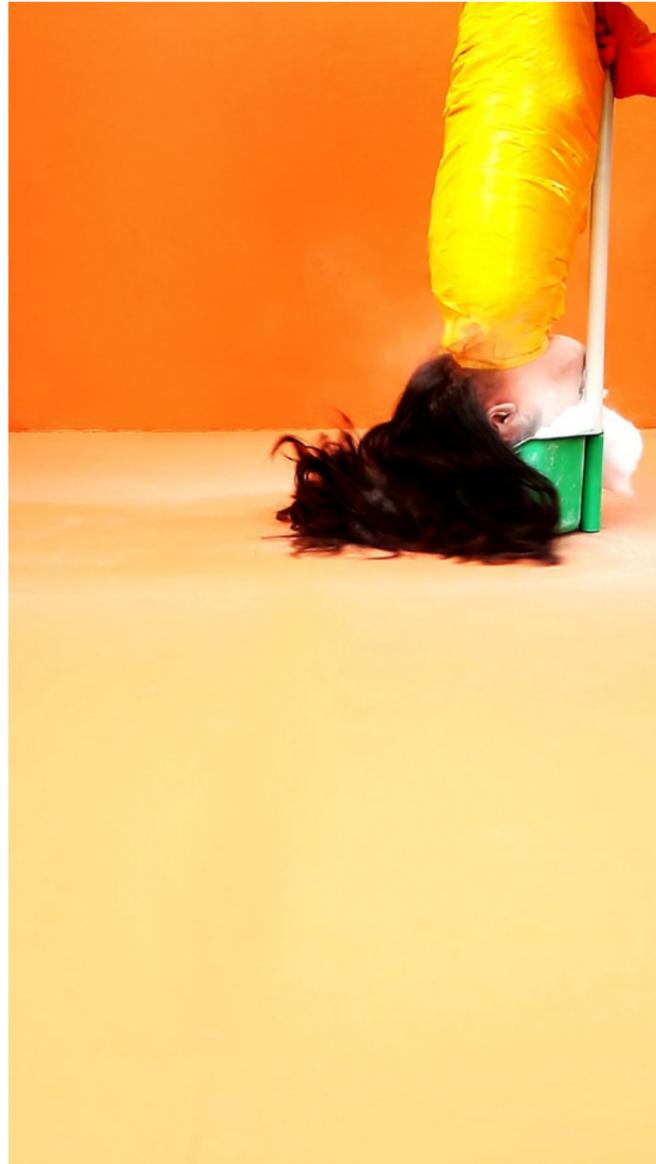
Kawita Vatanajyankur, *Squeezers*, 2015. Video still. Courtesy: the artist

redemption present in her violent video aesthetic, lends her work a strange and unremitting power. She allows the inherent fragility to emanate and explode. Through her works, Kawita tries to discuss the equality in genders and labor and explore the stereotype of the Asian woman in the current society.

Kawita's video works are easily recognizable by her specific artistic language: the quasi-painting quality, the exotic colours, the suggestive nudity of the female performer with her repetitive mechanical movements and the somewhat pornographic. Her works appear to be inviting, playful and appealing, being simultaneously evocative and meditative. The layers of the work can be compared to the flavours in Thai cuisine, which is famous for the balanced mix of sweet, sour and spicy. Yet, sometimes the flavours are too strong so that they bring the viewer to the verge of tears. Kawita's work *The Scale Of Justice* exhibited in 57th Venice Biennale with Alamak! project "Islands In The Stream", a group exhibition curated by Yoichi Nakamuta and Stefano Casciani.

Margaret Wu used to be a director of NOVA Contemporary gallery in Bangkok

1. In Thailand, people name each other by their first name rather than last name in the professional world, because almost every Thai has his/her own nickname, which only called by the family members or close friends. Therefore, I will name every Thai artist with his/her first name in the article.
2. Rirkrit used to say in Studio Banana TV's video interview, "I am interested in making a condition or situation where ... people have to come and stand next to each other and look at something ... and deal with each other. I think it is quite important in the work, for me, that people participate in it or take action in it or are in it... Of course, there is harmony and there is chaos, and that is very true in an existence in the social structure."
3. This idea resonates with John Latham's ideas of Event Structure and Incidental Person, which convey the importance of an event in the history and the socio-political roles of an artist, respectively. However, different from Latham, who regarded language as a flawed medium, Rirkrit embraces the flaws of the medium, the chaos of the system, to find the rhythm within the system through the collaboration. It is a positive dynamic, the acceptance that induces people to the situation he creates.
4. It reminds me Foucault's Heterotopia. Instead of passively running into Western's Utopia, a world that never exists, Rirkrit positively creates an environment to let people recognize the reality. Ultimately, people connect to the detour, the disruptive, the truth, the macrocosm and microcosm, the relationship in between reestablished through disturbance, adaptation and reflection; the system is phenomenologically modified.
5. It seems Rirkrit followed Hal Foster investigation on second neo avant-garde using Freudian's model: repressed → repeated → recollected. In Freudian analogy: repetition = reception = resistance to the unknowing. Rirkrit's art practice corresponds to Hal Foster's analysis that 'the second neo-avant-garde have moved away from grand oppositions to subtle displacements and/or strategic collaborations with different groups.' Therefore, I wonder is it a proof of Hal Foster proposition, 'second avant-garde's testing that is now extended to other institutions and discourses in the ambitious art of the present.'
6. Arin's interrogation reminds me of Foucault's proposition in 'What is an author?' "...It is not enough, however, to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. For the same reason, it is not enough to keep repeating that God and man have died a common death. Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings this disappearance uncovers."
7. In Gadamer's hermeneutics, "If a word is applied to a sphere to which it did not originally belong, the actual "original" meaning emerges quite clearly."
8. Michele Foucault, "What is an author?" 130. <http://artsites.ucsc.edu/faculty/Gustafson/FILM%20162.W10/readings/foucault.author.pdf>
9. A terminology coined by cultural critic, novelist and professor Roxane Gay, which is based on the name of her book. *Bad Feminist* explores being a feminist while loving things that could seem at odds with feminist ideology.
10. As Louise Bourgeois stated, "Hanging and floating are states of ambivalence." In psychology, ambivalence is a state of uncertainty and fluctuation. It is the wanting to do two different things or feeling two opposing ways. It is the conflicting feelings about the two desirable situations.
11. In her study of food etiquette, Margaret Visser observes that in some cultures 'it is considered shameful to be seen eating by outsiders, even guests; people may sit in a corner or facing the wall to eat in some cases, or delicately hide their mouths when masticating'.



Kawita Vatanajyankur, *The Dustpan*, 2014. Video still.
Courtesy: the artist



Kawita Vatanajyankur, *The Scale of Justice*, 2016. Video still.
Courtesy: the artist

C#17

SUPERVISORS

John Slyce
Michele Robecchi

PROJECT MANAGERS

Yulia Borisenko
Natalie Brashear
Zhanna Duong

MANAGING EDITORS

Zhanna Duong
Natalie Brashear

CO-ORDINATOR

Yulia Borisenko

COMMISSIONING EDITOR

Yulia Borisenko

COPY EDITORS

Natalie Brashear
Zhanna Duong

PICTURE EDITOR

Zhanna Duong

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Zhanna Duong
Natalie Brashear
Yulia Borisenko
Sei Saito

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Natalie Brashear
Maria Pavlinova
Emily Hyde
Sei Saito
Jana Oberländer
Caroline Mackay
Katalin Kundrak
Yulia Borisenko
Zhanna Duong
Xinwan Ren
Barbara Rossetti
Lorenza Brizzi
Ashlyn Gentile
Oksana Chumachenko
Marie Janssen
Emma Lamarie
Joseph Kong
Gražina Subelytė
Yunhan Sun
Daria Hassan
Margaret Wu

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