

ART PAPERS

ON SPACE
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TRANSITION
**MIKE KELLEY'S
MOBILE HOMESTEAD**

POTENTIAL
**THEASTER GATES
THERE'S MY RHYTHM**

PERFORMANCE
**XAVIERA SIMMONS
ARCHIVE AS IMPETUS**

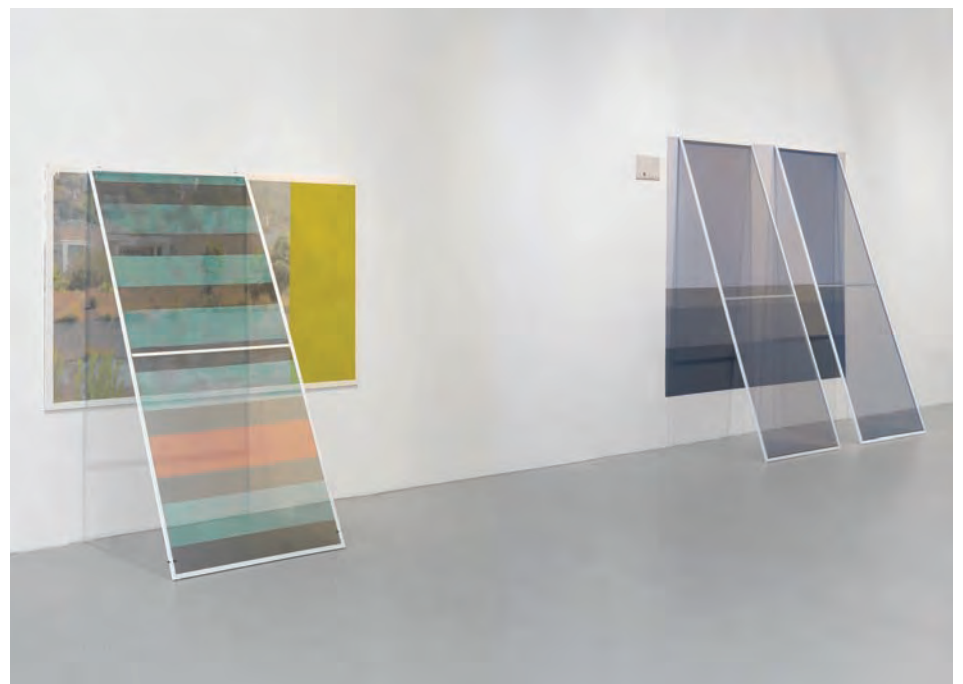
EXILE
**SHIRIN NESHAT'S
COMPLEX GEOGRAPHIES**





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Mike Kelley, *Mobile Homestead* in front of the abandoned Detroit Central Train Station, 2010 (photo: Corine Vermuelen; courtesy of MOCAD, Detroit)

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Bill Viola. *The Quintet of Remembrance*, 2000, color video single-channel rear projection, duration: 15½ min. loop, North Carolina Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the State of North Carolina and the North Carolina State Art Society (Robert F. Phifer Bequest), by exchange, and the Art Endowment Fund, © 2000 Bill Viola

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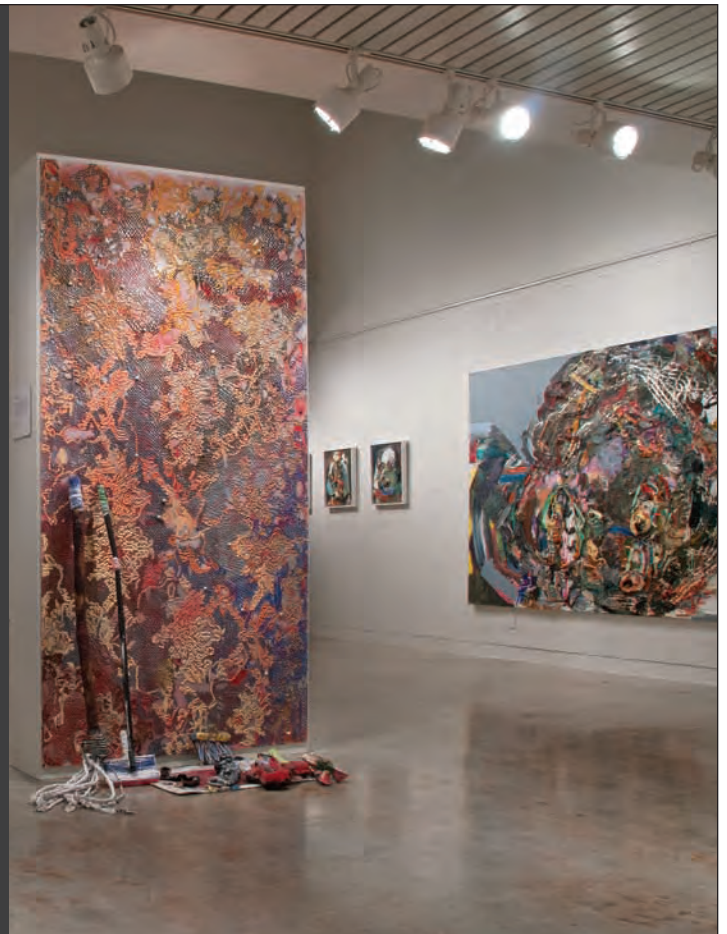
Matthew Deleget OCTOBER 2012
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image: Summer Wheat "Few and Far Between"
2013 exhibition view: (L) Mudroom, 2012 and (R) Hypnotized
2011 courtesy of the artist and Samson Projects, Boston, MA





Lisa Lindvay, *Dinner*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

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Francesca Pastine (image pictured right). Each of

these artists transform various types of literature

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advance of digital media for sources of information—the book's

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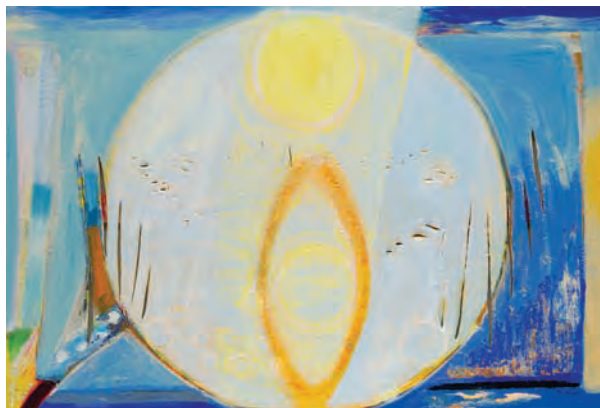
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Su Kwak

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Su Kwak. *Reflection*, 2008
Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 60 in.

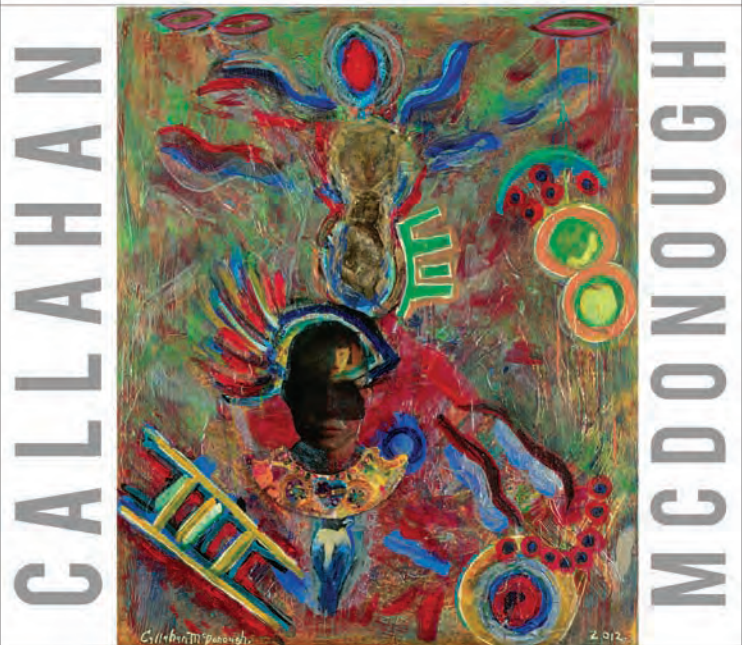
Su Kwak Light Journey: An Odyssey in Paint is organized by the Brauer Museum of Art at Valparaiso University and curated by Dr. Jungsil Lee. The exhibition is made possible with funding from The Farwest Steel Korean Art Endowment.

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Letter from the Guest Editor

“Where is Ana Mendieta?”

This question—first posed in 1992 at the Women’s Action Coalition protests of the Guggenheim’s male-centric inaugural exhibition at the new SoHo location and then again in 1999 as the title of Jane Blocker’s book, which attempted to simultaneously answer and dispel the possibility of answering the inquiry—was intended to prompt the locating of Ana Mendieta’s (1948–1985) work in the canon of art history. The reason the question—Where is Ana Mendieta?—is so important to contemporary art today is because the notion of continuing to contemplate and explore ideas and concepts of space (including place, location, and region among others) is crucial to the ways in which we make, view, present, and contemplate art in the world. The multidisciplinary concepts, practice, and works that encompass Mendieta’s brief, yet deeply prolific artistic career can be thought of in a myriad of ways as the roots of spatial expressions, provocation, and inquiry in the 21st century. This, the fourth in a series of guest-edited issues of ART PAPERS, touches on a multitude of spatial concepts and considerations in contemporary art, with the intention of embracing the fervent energy and forward thinking present in the work of Mendieta.

Ignited by themes of identity, location, and exile (she was Cuban-born and lived in exile in the US), Mendieta’s work correlated with her desire to continue to locate herself through modes of image-making, performance, and sculpture. This impassioned desire to question place amidst a larger sphere of influence is evident in the lively discussion on the pros and problematics of “regionalism” in a discussion with leading museum curators, moderated by Isolde Brielmaier. John J. Corso explores the complexities of navigating identity in an exilic state, in Shirin Neshat’s films, video, and photographic works on view at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Stephanie Bailey identifies the assertion of appropriated models for art fairs and biennials that have resulted largely in Western self-same exhibition formats worldwide, suggesting a shift in this dovetailing structure to enact critical dialog.

The period from the early 1980s until her death in 1985 signaled a transition in Mendieta’s work from personal to universal, and in many ways from private—in nature and focused on her own body—to the public realm—making work in a studio and developing stylistically more universal forms. This shift in art-making from private to public space is evocative of a similar leap in Mike Kelley’s artistic career that Rana Edgar discusses in her essay on Kelley’s first permanent public sculpture and final project, *Mobile Homestead*. Hesse McGraw’s interview with artist Theaster Gates draws on the importance of indeterminable space outside of designated art spaces, while Helena Reckitt’s overview of the recent phenomenon of one-night art events lends perspective on the considerations of audience attendance and participation in public space.

Mendieta’s site-specific earth sculptures and performances remind us of the fleeting nature of space and time. The artist projects in this issue include images of works and installations by New York-based artists Adam Cvijanovic and Xaviera Simmons that lend unique perspectives on the ephemeral outcomes of atmospheric and political spaces respectively. The portability of Cvijanovic’s immersive painting installations enlivens the potential for perpetually rearticulated space. Simmons’ images and performances depict a rich exploration of archival histories that recontextualize historical narrative patterns to reveal the performative in the political.

Finally, this issue culminates with a preview of the much-anticipated 55th Venice Biennale and a series of provocative exhibition reviews, all of which focus on various aspects of space both in the artists’ work and the contexts in which they are shown.

Even though a dedicated text on the work of Ana Mendieta is not present in this issue of ART PAPERS, does it still mean that we have not located her work here? On the contrary, this issue focuses on the potential of expanded space—linking Mendieta’s concepts and practice with the critical language of today—and broadening the ways in which we continue to examine themes of place and space in contemporary art.

—Erin Dziedzic

Mike Kelley's *Mobile Homestead*: a re-envisioning of space in public sculpture

TEXT / RANA EDGAR

Mike Kelley's highly anticipated first permanent public sculpture and final project, *Mobile Homestead*, opened in May 2013 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD).¹ *Mobile Homestead* is a full-scale replica of the 1950s ranch-style home in Westland, Michigan, a metro Detroit suburb, where Kelley was raised. The lot neighboring MOCAD is the permanent home of the installation, which will function as both a public and private space. The project exists in multiple segments; it consists of a mobile home that imitates the façade of Kelley's childhood home and a permanent structure, built on a lot next to the museum, that replicates the floor plan of Kelley's childhood home. Each segment of the project will serve a range of functions. The mobile section of the project will travel within the city and outlying areas of Detroit, providing a transportable space where numerous social services will be offered. A documentary video that Kelley made in the fall of 2010 accompanies the public sculpture and includes footage of the journey taken by the traveling portion of *Mobile Homestead*—from MOCAD's location in downtown Detroit, along Michigan Avenue to the site of Kelley's childhood home, and back to the museum, a pilgrimage of approximately 40 miles round-trip, passing through disparate areas of urban renewal and decay on its way to the blue-collar suburbs of

Detroit.² When it is not mobile, this segment of the project will remain stationary at MOCAD. The permanent portion of the project houses a community gallery on the main floor, an area that will primarily function as a space for artistic and cultural programming and reflects the interests of the greater Detroit community.³ The community gallery sits directly above an ambiguous maze of permanent underground rooms that will remain closed to the public, functioning primarily as an enigmatic space available, on occasion, to artists as a site to realize concealed endeavors.⁴ As envisioned by Kelley, *Mobile Homestead* will provide a place for Detroit community members and artists to push the boundaries of contemporary art practice and address a broad range of social and political issues. Mary Clare Stevens, executive director of the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts, notes that the project will function as a living artwork and is enthusiastic about the potential outcomes to be realized in the space.⁵

The *Mobile Homestead* project has evolved quite drastically in terms of its spatial concept and context since its inception, as Kelley had initially envisioned it as a personal rather than a public project. His earliest concept required the purchase of the actual home where he grew up, but circumstances beyond his control did not allow this acquisition. In 2005 Kelley was approached by London-based arts





organization Artangel,⁶ and from that point the work took a new turn in its journey by transforming into a public project. Once the work had been commissioned, MOCAD came on board to assist in bringing the project to the city of Detroit. Marsha Miro, acting director of MOCAD at the time, regards the project as a means for the community to become involved in a work of art and as a way for an artwork to become part of a community.⁷ It is intriguing that Kelley became so engaged with the *Mobile Homestead* project, as he had expressed an unyielding opinion that public works were unsatisfactory, a view he made clear in his essay on *Mobile Homestead*, stating, “Public art is a pleasure that is forced upon a public that, in most cases, finds no pleasure in it.”⁸ Regardless of Kelley’s initial misgivings about the potential success of the work, a significant accomplishment of *Mobile Homestead* is that it buttresses a new social realm in Kelley’s often privatized oeuvre.

Mobile Homestead represents both an important transition and fulfilling culmination of Kelley’s work, which for more than 35 years traversed drawing, painting, sculpture, installation,

video, and performance. His range of media was varied, yet the implications of Kelley’s personal experiences with coming of age in a working-class family in Detroit resonate deeply and darkly throughout his portfolio. Works such as the architectural model *Educational Complex* (1995) and the film drama *Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #1 (Domestic Scene)* (2000), included in Kelley’s retrospective at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, are prime examples of his investigations into childhood memories and issues of identity. The exhibition encapsulates Kelley’s visual explorations with issues of family, class struggle, and the inner workings of the psyche, which seem to culminate in *Mobile Homestead*, and, like much of his work, challenges viewers to look beyond the popular culture paraphernalia presented and to put aside the feelings of sentimentality typically associated with the innocence of youth, to consider the effects of repression, suffering, and loss that are intimately tied to childhood and adolescence. Kelley’s works resonate universally with one’s own secret inner childhood dreams, nightmares, and desires by presenting the familiar in unex-

pected ways and by articulating the hauntingly veiled visual cues of suppressed memories.

Although Kelley never intended for *Mobile Homestead* to act in any way as a shrine to his upbringing, family, or life, nor to have a resonating sentiment attached to it, one almost can’t avoid experiencing feelings of nostalgia upon viewing this work. Perhaps *Mobile Homestead* would yield different reactions if the fact were not offered as public knowledge that it re-creates the façade and floor plan of Kelley’s childhood home. This knowledge forces us, however, to investigate the work through a set of preconceived notions of what home means to us and ultimately to Kelley, as the specificity of the decision to replicate this particular home suggests a direct correlation between his life and work. *Mobile Homestead* oscillates between familiarity and function to re-envision a site of public and private purpose. Unlike homes featured in living history museums—particularly Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford, a metro Detroit attraction⁹—we are not given a view of what life was like for Kelley through display of objects or historical context. Instead we are presented with

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Mike Kelley, *Mobile Homestead*, 2010–ongoing, mixed media, 13 1/2 x 44 1/2 x 8 feet [courtesy of Kelley Studio and MOCAD, Detroit] / OPPOSITE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Mike Kelley, video still from *Mobile Homestead: Going East on Michigan Avenue from Westland to Downtown Detroit*, 2010–2011, three videos running time approx. 3.5 hours total; video still from *Mobile Homestead: Going West on Michigan Avenue from Downtown Detroit to Westland*, 2010–2011, three videos running time approx. 3.5 hours total / ABOVE: Mike Kelley, *Mobile Homestead* parked in front of the original Kelley home on Palmer Road, Westland, Michigan, 2010 [photo: Corine Vermuelen; courtesy of MOCAD]



empty rooms that imitate the footprint of the Kelley home, and while not meant to function as a homage to the artist, in a unique way the artwork does.

Mobile Homestead contributes significantly to discussions in contemporary art that examine the roles, relationships, and proximity of public art to notions of public and private space. In most instances public sculptures are located on the grounds of a museum or other highly trafficked areas in city centers and function as accessible institutional or civic extensions of these spaces. This is not the case with *Mobile Homestead*. Instead visitors are seeing only part of the larger whole—below the main gallery is a subterranean, multileveled space where select artists will work on projects in secret.¹⁰ This element of mystery is very much in the spirit of Walter De Maria's *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977), where viewer's only see the circular top of a brass rod that lies flush with the earth, and although the work implies that a full kilometer length of the rod continues straight down into the earth, we can't be certain unless we try to dig it up. This element of the unknown perpetuates a mystique similar to Kelley's inclusion of unsettling and unknown domains below the ground in *Mobile Homestead*. Kelley's secret space reveals a sense of the uncanny in that this work invigorates the disparate concepts of a private sphere concealed within a public site. The labyrinth hidden deep below the earth metaphorically takes on the role of the inner psyche; it is an underground area containing various chamberlike structures carved out solely for the purpose of realizing the inner mind's workings and hidden desires. These quarters below the surface may in time, like a basement, contain the remnants of memories and materials stored or left behind by those who once inhabited them. By carefully planning and executing the space himself, Kelley inserted his own psychology, as in many of his works, at the core of this public sculpture.

This monumental installation introduces a new public space specific to Detroit, and significant to Kelley's practice. Ultimately, it prompts a reinvestigation of Kelley's oeuvre and may provide alternative perspectives on the otherwise private discourse that his work conjures.

Rana Edgar holds an MA in art history from the Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah, Georgia, and a BFA in photography from College for Creative Studies, Detroit, Michigan.

NOTES

1. *Mobile Homestead* was commissioned by Artangel and spearheaded by James Lingwood, in association with MOCAD, LUMA Foundation, and the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts with the support of the Artangel International Circle. *Mobile Homestead* is the first project produced by Artangel in the United States. The project was overseen by Kelley's studio and the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts. The public project opened at MOCAD on Saturday, May 11, 2013.
2. Kelley's *Mobile Homestead* documentary was included in the 2012 Whitney Biennial. The documentary is to be shown at MOCAD May 11–July 31, 2013.
3. Kelley addressed his wish for the community gallery in his essay "Mobile Homestead." Kelley envisioned the space to operate independently, not as an extension of MOCAD galleries, and to function as a place where the community would dictate and facilitate the activities.
4. Kelley's original intentions were to use this space as a personal studio and occasionally allow other artists and groups to use the private area for secret projects.
5. Mary Clare Stevens (executive director of the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts), in discussion with the author, March 27, 2013.
6. This project was realized with support and contributions from Artangel.
7. Marsha Miro (president of MOCAD board of directors), in discussion with the author, March 27, 2013.
8. Mike Kelley, "Mobile Homestead," 2011, www.mocadetroit.org/Mobile-HomesteadEssay.html
9. Henry Ford's Greenfield Village is a living museum located in Dearborn, Michigan, consisting of 83 historical homes and structures that housed important figures from American history. In his 2011 essay "Mobile Homestead," Kelley described his structure as having a "parasitic relationship with Henry Ford's collection."
10. The first artists to have access to the underground level will be Jim Shaw and Cary Loren, friends and former Destroy All Monsters bandmates of Kelley's. Shaw, Loren, Kelley, and Niagara formed the proto-punk band in Michigan in 1973. Shaw recently had his first retrospective at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art (BALTIC).

ABOVE: Digital renderings of Mike Kelley's *Mobile Homestead* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Michigan; TOP: Mobile unit with ground level plan; BOTTOM: Ground level and underground sections [images courtesy of Kelley Studio/Escher GuneWardena Architecture]

a discussion on “regionalism”

The term “regionalism” is about site-specificity—it emphasizes the role of place, the specific qualities of particular geographical environments, and the significance of socially embedded or artistic practices. According to an important 1982 essay by Kenneth Frampton, “regionalism” has often been positioned as a response to contemporary art or a presumed “contemporary art world” that privileges a global language free from the idiosyncrasies of a specific geosocial vernacular.

For this discussion, our distinguished contributors have gathered to continue a conversation on this topic that started in March 2013 during a panel at The Armory Show in New York. By posing a few broad questions to the contributors I hope we may continue to examine, critique, clarify, and perhaps shed a bit more light on the seemingly elusive concept of “regionalism” by engaging and debating a myriad of ideas about the definitions, validity, and perceptions of this topic, with specific reference to the United States, and the diverse contexts that exist across the country in relation to contemporary artistic practice.

I welcome these esteemed arts professionals, who represent several institutions around the United States: Stuart Horodner, artistic director of the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, Georgia; Sandra Jackson-Dumont, deputy director of Education and Public Programs/adjunct curator, Modern and Contemporary Art Department, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington; and Dominic Molon, chief curator at the Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri.

ISOLDE BRIELMAIER: First, I wondered if each of you might touch on how you have come to know/appreciate/resist/challenge the regions that each of you work in (since many of you move around and inherit various traditions and histories upon arrival), keeping in mind your respective institutions and practices as they engage both your local vision and audience.

DOMINIC MOLON: I am very much “of” the American Midwest, and my professional career has been centered in this region for nearly two decades. The region has always seemed to possess a weird dichotomy between a strong sense of identification with values of straightforwardness, practicality, and (religious, read as primarily Christian) faith and a deep-seated inferiority complex and defensiveness in cultural matters—particularly in the visual arts. Though many are proud to claim their Midwestern heritage, strongly associating themselves with the heartland’s qualities of earnestness and “authenticity,” it remains a place that many feel a need to escape from—either physically or culturally. As a curator born, raised, educated, and employed within the Midwest, I have increasingly grown to appreciate the regional particularities of the work being made here—both on its own terms but also in the larger context of visual arts practice and discourse. Yet I have also felt an urgent necessity to advocate for and present work from abroad that registers as strikingly “other” in order to expand perspectives and inspire critical dialogue. It is [as] important for the Midwest curator to bring in discordant art and culture as it is to export or redefine the regional and local within a larger national and global context.

featuring
Stuart Horodner,
Sandra Jackson-Dumont
& Dominic Molon
moderated by
Isolde Brielmaier

STUART HORODNER: Yes, I think that it is a question of how we understand our jobs—who are we working for and what needs doing? Curators often move from one region to another, from one institution to another, each with ... unique burdens and blessings. We all establish trust with constituents and colleagues, and try to assert some kind of rationale for what we are going to present. I did not know much about the context of the South, or Atlanta specifically, before I moved here. Once I became aware of exhibition histories and artistic legacies in the area, and the specific goals of the center where I curate, I formed a plan. And it is always evolving. The Atlanta Contemporary Art Center is a 40-year-old noncollecting institution, and, like many grassroots organizations that began in the early 1970s, it grew over time to become more engaged in networks and dialogues beyond the local. I try to generate opportunities for artists and audiences, by choosing people and works that I think are significant—from different generations, expressing a range of philosophical or material sensibilities, and examining various subjects and sites. Often these are practitioners who have not had sufficient exposure in the South, but who are being shown at what I consider to be our peers in the field—The Kitchen, Yerba Buena [Center for the Arts], LAX [LAXART], Mass MoCA, MCA Chicago, ICA Boston, The New Museum, and so on. We've done solo and thematic group exhibitions and commissioned projects with artists from Atlanta and beyond, including Jennie C. Jones, Laura Poitras, Corin Hewitt, Alix Pearlstein, Paul Shambroom, Craig Drennen, Scott Ingram, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, Dave McKenzie, Judy Linn, Amanda Ross-Ho, and Jack Whitten, to name a few.

SANDRA JACKSON-DUMONT: With the experience of moving to Seattle/Pacific Rim/Left Coast from New York City (the perceived center of the art world / universe), I have come to believe that every place has an inherent interest in creating a "moment/movement," irrespective of location. I have also come to understand that while the gravitational pull of NYC is tremendous, the center is a moving target. My curatorial practice looks at the tension that erupts when a set of requirements dressed up as local flavor dictates how one should accept the inheritance of various traditions and histories without question. This is where one comes to know/appreciate/resist/challenge the regions we work in. "What is local?" and "How do we highlight local artists?" are two questions that seem to be ever-present. The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) is one museum with three uniquely different sites—Seattle Art Museum Downtown (international in scope), Seattle Asian Art Museum, and the Olympic Sculpture Park (a 9.5-acre outdoor facility focusing on modern and contemporary art). While many artistic associations with Seattle have been shaped by Northwest Coast Native American art and noted Northwest artists [such as] Mark Tobey and Morris Graves, the contemporary artist community is constantly evolving with the push and pull of being simultaneously local and global. SAM strives to engage, explore, and support the local art scene in all aspects of the museum's practice while placing it in a broader, more global dialogue.

IB What do you think constitute definitions of place; the relationships between the local, [the] regional, and the global; ideas around "critical regionalism"; and connections between the regional and the flows of creativity and capital in contemporary art?

DM I think a regional association—like any other association—is a bit of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there is a great desire to allow a region to define a particular cultural practice for the sake of visibility and association—the way that certain artists' names may individually draw a pause, but saying "Chicago imagism" immediately conjures an image or identification with that specific style and sensibility. Yet those same regional associations have historically and counterproductively constrained recognition of the broader impact of many artists whose wider influence is only realized later. This tendency seems to be changing. The increasing number of institutions focusing on contemporary art in a broader range of regions in the United States has provided greater opportunity for artists' work to be validated alongside that of their international peers. The expanding role of art fairs and the Internet in offering wider commercial potential and visibility for regionally based artists and galleries has been significant in this regard as well. Finally, the growing number of residencies for artists has redistributed talented individuals outside ... what are typically considered the cultural centers, further complicating conventional notions of regional associations.

SH It is always a challenge to try [to] define what is happening locally or regionally while being a part of it, or for that matter, to clearly assess one's place within conditions of creativity and capital that are happening around the globe. There is often an envy of elsewhere, imagining that whatever we seek—freedom, respect, validation, audience, funding, community—is better in other places. You deal with what you have and what you care about. I think the best question is, "What am I doing to make it better?"

- SJD** These days, defining what constitutes or defines place is challenging, given the impact of the web, social media, travel, etc., on bodies of work, discourses, collecting trends, and the economy at large. I am always grappling with the connections between the regional and one's artistic/curatorial practice because they tend to be, at once, mythical, fictional, real, and constructed. As a result, the flow of creativity is often shaped by a host of issues that tend to make people critique and/or celebrate their local scene through filters of other places like NYC, Berlin, LA, Chicago, that are also desiring other locales given their myths and realities.
- IB** While noting that ideas of "regionalism" may be separate from the realm of what is deemed "local," I would like to discuss whether the concept of "regionalism" poses an alternative or whether today it may seem to be an ever-evolving branch of "global" or broader practices/perspectives. Essentially, by continuing to use this term, are we presuming a geographical "center" against which contemporary art and culture is being measured and/or conceived in relation to contemporary artistic practice, presentation, and audience? Or is the notion of a "center" also a part of a regionalist space, practice, orientation, etc.?
- DM** The LA post-punk band Minutemen has a great song title: "Do You Want New Wave or Do You Want the Truth?" I think that as much as many would like to wish away New York's sustained position as the center of the contemporary art world, it still in truth functions as such, at least critically and commercially (although Berlin seems to possess an increasing critical mass of artists who are leading the discourse). I'm not convinced that it's an either/or question but rather arguments for how regional practices, again, balance the establishment of a dialogue between that region and the larger world. Regardless, one must [keep] sight of the immediate local context, if not demonstrate how the local relates to the larger global on a level playing field. It's counterproductive to "circle the wagons" and disproportionately valorize regionally produced work as some sort of "alternative" to a perceived modishness of the centers, but it's equally problematic to disavow regional or locally developed sensibilities as irrelevant or trivial in relationship to a more centralized
- discourse. One of the seeming drawbacks of a more accessible and widely distributed culture is a growing homogeneity of that culture, and a very great virtue of the regions is the maintenance of certain styles and sensibilities that remain impervious to shifts in the larger art world. The challenge would seem to be resisting either a fetishization of those tendencies or allowing them to be relegated to representing a sort of "quirkiness" or "eccentricity" of what happens in the provinces and instead to recognize their sophistication and ingenuity.
- SH** The "center" is a concept of hierarchical agreement, right? A short list of museums, dealers, curators, critics, schools, art magazines, auctions, art fairs, and biennials that are deemed crucial to careerist life on the planet. But these persons and venues, as consequential as they are (And they are!), do not represent the total picture, now or at any time in the past. The top 100 lists of whatever are always partial and can't do justice to the important efforts taking place in unfocused regions/institutions/places. But we all believe in the butterfly effect, right?
- SJD** The center is a psychological, financial, and power narrative. It's slightly colonial in perspective, given the tremendous desire to discover, locate, and convene resources from unknown territory to create a critical mass in another. I would posit that regionalism and the global are ever-evolving extensions of each other, creating good tension and, hopefully, accountability. One question I often ask is, is the center a necessary place of convenience, hierarchy, and power display, or would diffusion of the center ignite and invigorate creative production while fostering varied capital interests? Again, is the center where and when you make it? I really think that this is the key question.

This conversation evolved out of a panel discussion on "regionalism" presented at The 2013 Armory Show in New York. The discussion featured the above contributors as well as Ruba Katrib of SculptureCenter, Long Island City, New York, and was moderated by Isolde Brielmaier, PhD.

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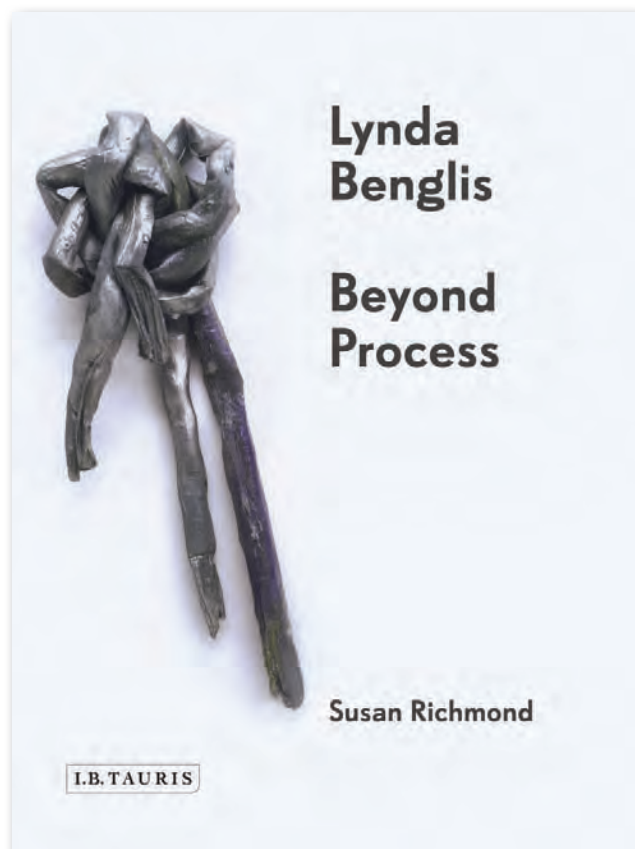
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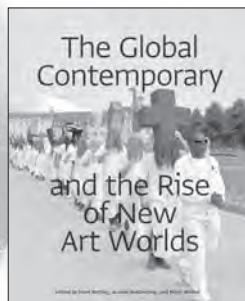
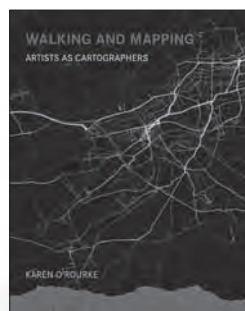
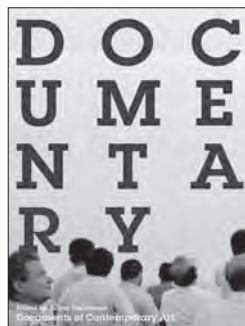
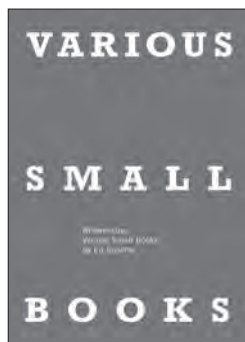
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Artist Project

Xaviera Simmons

Working across disciplines has pushed my practice into a space where the language of each medium falls at times seamlessly and at other times more awkwardly into the others, where the performance practice is in direct conversation with some of the strategies I use in sculpture and photography and I cannot produce a video or film-based work without directly linking text, narrative, archival materials, sound, and performance. In this way, I am allowing the languages of each of these elements to influence, shape, engage, and strengthen the languages of every other one.

A continuous interest in land/landscapes has led me from feelings of desire to those of inspiration in the multitude of literal spaces and places. The works exist in nebulous and enigmatic in-between spaces formed by time and space. These segments or parcels of liminal space, coupled with the literal landscape or place, drive linear and nonlinear narratives that I explore through photographic, sculptural, cinematic, and performative media. I see space as an exploded concept, one in which thousands of narratives can be broken apart and reconstructed infinitely.

I engage directly with this notion of expanded space in my studio practice by unpacking aspects of the political and performative to reconfigure in new ways. Working on a project titled *Archive as Impetus* at The Museum of Modern Art for almost a year now, I have delved into aspects of the museum's archive, collections, and institutional history to reveal historical political angles in the types of works collected by the institution and artists' engagement within this sphere. I aspire to present the notion that political movements are ephemeral; they ebb and flow, perpetually shifting, and are crucial instances in the history of humanity that continue to take shape and change with time.

This conceptual part of my practice has led me to attempt to engage the performative in the political or to try to think of presenting the political as a performative, ephemeral process that will break down over time. It is inevitable—a performance is usually constructed to respond to a moment and to the moods or notions of the day, and politics carries this similar air and weight.

I consider my performance-based works to be ephemeral in nature; they work for a specific time, in a particular place, and usually for a specific audience. When the performance is articulated as a video piece, the original source material breaks down into nuances of space, and then I build it up again (perhaps in another medium), knowing full well that the process is cyclical and will happen again, in a new way, with new results.

—Xaviera Simmons



Xaviera Simmons, video stills from *Number 15 and Number 16*, 2012, digital video, 45 minutes (courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery)



Xavier Simmons, *Untitled*, 2010, color photograph, 40 x 50 inches
(courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery)



Xavier Simmons, *Currents*, 2010, color photograph, 40 x 50 inches
(courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery)



Xaviera Simmons, *Denver*, 2009, color photograph, 30 x 40 inches
(courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery)



Xavier Simmons, *Warm Leatherette*, 2009, color photograph, 30 x 40 inches
(courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery)

The Complex Geographies of Shirin Neshat

TEXT / JOHN J. CORSO

Shirin Neshat's first feature film, *Women Without Men* (2009), premiered at the Venice Film Festival and received widespread critical acclaim for its realistically historical and fabulist approach. By the time of its release, Neshat had already achieved international renown for her photography and video installations that investigate Iranian history, political exile, and gender identity in the Islamic world. *Women Without Men* was initially begun as a series of nonlinear video installations, but Neshat later released the feature film version in hopes that its distribution would reach a broader, more "democratic" audience.¹

The film's story comes from Shahrnush Parsipur's eponymous book, in which the author intertwines the disparate lives of five women in Tehran, Iran. Their stories unfold against the backdrop of the 1953 coup d'état that replaced the democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq, with the autocratic Shah. Neshat concentrates on four of Parsipur's characters, each of whom must wrestle individually with traumatic conflicts instigated by different men. One of the protagonists, Munis (played by Shabnam Tolouei), refuses to obey her brother's attempts to arrange her marriage and ultimately takes her own life in protest. She returns from the dead to fight with the communist counter-resistance against the military regime. Meanwhile, her dear friend Faezeh (Pegah Ferydoni) is brutally raped. In agony, the humiliated Faezeh flees, unable to return home. She is led by Munis to a remote country estate, recently purchased by a middle-aged woman, Farokh Legha (Arita Shahrzad), who has left her unhappy marriage to restore the derelict estate and its neglected orchards. They are then joined by Zarin (Orsi Tóth), an emaciated young woman who escaped from sexual slavery in a Tehran brothel, and came to live with Farokh in the old house. In each of these vignettes, Neshat triumphantly translates the novel's magical realism into haunting cinematic form.

Although Parsipur's original novel remains banned in Iran, underground piracy has enabled Neshat's filmic version to slip past Iranian censors.² Thus, ironically, the film circulates throughout a country from which Neshat herself remains exiled. Neshat acknowledges that the exile she faces exceeds simple characterization. To attend to the multiple layers of her exile, I turn to the spatial differences set forth by English geographer David Harvey in his 1996 book *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. In his treatise, Harvey has developed a manifold approach to understanding place, space, and environment as mutually constitutive concepts. According to Harvey, place establishes perma-

nence in opposition to space's "fluxes and flows"; environment describes how place and space surround living beings.³ It is with these three terms that I herein explore Harvey's aspects of geographic space found throughout the works and in the exhibition spaces of Neshat's monumental midcareer retrospective, a show of work spanning more than 20 years that is currently on view at the Detroit Institute of Arts [April 7–July 7, 2013].

Neshat's personal experiences with exile resound throughout her oeuvre and seem to oscillate between the opposing concepts of origin and diaspora, confinement and release. Exiled from Iran, Neshat convenes with her artistic collaborators by filming in Morocco, Mexico, the United States, and Egypt, among other locations, often staging her films in public places, domestic spaces, and the natural environment. In those varied locations, Neshat approaches exile dynamically, rejecting any effort to reduce exile to expatriation. Rather, in her photography, film, and video, the idea of geographical exile helps to invoke the abstracted processes that more closely relate to an integrated notion of place, space, and environment. Harvey describes place and space as codependent systems, suggesting that "since spaces, times and places are relationally defined by *processes*, they are contingent upon the attributes of processes that simultaneously define and shape what is customarily referred to as 'environment.'"⁴ This work builds upon French philosopher Henri Lefebvre's Marxist deduction that space is produced socially to maintain class inequity and capitalist hegemony.⁵ Harvey expands Lefebvre's deduction to demonstrate that the production of space is an effect of the simultaneous productions of place and environment. Harvey further clarifies that "we cannot talk about the world of 'nature' or of 'environment' without simultaneously revealing how space and time are being constituted within such processes"⁶ Therefore, according to Harvey, place, space, and environment are intrinsic to one another. As Neshat's themes deal with the unstable elements of location and exile, we are presented with her own views on how these three terms function. Her tendency toward ambiguity, both in character and location, helps us understand the destabilized notion of place in her work, which reveals an intertwining of place, space, and environment that reflects Harvey's view.

Women Without Men delivers fictional documentation of the Iranian state's upheavals during the 1953 coup. Harvey regards the "state" as a place that defies the fluidity of space and time, defining itself in terms of geographic stability. In its struggle to

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Shirin Neshat, *Speechless* (from *Women of Allah* series), 1996, 46 3/4 x 33 7/8 inches, RC print and ink / OPPOSITE: Shirin Neshat, *Roja* (from *The Book of Kings* series), 2012, ink on LE silver gelatin print, 60 x 45 inches [© Shirin Neshat; courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels]

establish permanence, Harvey adds, the state enlists the shifting processes that define space. He writes: “States have been carved out as entities historically ... from the flow of multiple intersecting spatial processes. They are bounded and isolated as entities from their environments and acquire a certain permanence through institutions that assure their character and internal integrity.”⁷ Because states rely on an irrefutable claim to place, they promote an image of permanence to maintain the authority of their borders. But Harvey notes the irony of the desire for a well-defined territory. He shows that while the state must establish irrefutable borders, it is “perpetually undermined” by spatial processes marked by instability and flow.⁸ Like Harvey, Neshat shows that place can exist only in relation to space.

In her photographic work, Neshat graphically renders the codependent processes of place, space, and time by conjoining two-, three-, and four-dimensional representations within the same flat frame. At first glance, the coexistence of these four dimensions may go unnoticed. In her series *Women of Allah* (1993–1997), the female sitters dressed in black chadors appear fixed within a shallow depth of field. Given the absence of context, these photographs seem to record a discontinuous, isolated moment. Within this tight visual confine, the subjects are further suspended in a single instance by the artist’s direct approach; each sitter poses with a gun or rifle pointed directly at the camera lens, and by extension, that confrontation reveals the interrelated complexities of time and space within these images.

In the *Women of Allah* images, as in her more recent series *The Book of Kings* (2012), Neshat presents close-up portraits in which her sitters appear to be adorned with henna. In fact, Neshat has hand-scribed Persian calligraphy directly onto the photographs. Its application in *The Book of Kings* is stylistically finer and responds more sympathetically to the bodily contours of each figure than it does in the *Women of Allah* series. The portraits’ severely compressed depth

of field and the “illustrated” surfaces recall the flatness of book illuminations, Persian miniatures, and even the typefaced columns of a newspaper (*The Book of Kings* was created to pay tribute to the pro-democracy participants of the Green Revolution, also known as the Arab Spring). The script further flattens the already shallow space of the photographs and helps to reconnect aspects of space with time, as each handwritten line of text provides a physical record of Neshat’s prolonged interaction with the images. Influenced by Walter Benjamin’s argument that mechanical reproduction destroys the historical specificity of an artwork—a specificity he equated with ritualistic “aura” of the fetish—many photographers have turned to the medium for its ability to transcend historical uniqueness and traceable provenance. Neshat undermines this strategy: she restores an element of uniqueness—as well as a discernible provenance—to her photographs by applying handwritten text to their surfaces. Her multimedia images thus weave together several dimensional representations: the sitters appear in three dimensions, while the photograph flattens their image, and simultaneously the added text introduces the passage of time, a culmination redolent of Harvey’s views on the interdependence of place, space, and time.

By bringing together three different means of representing the multiple dimensions of space-time, Neshat complicates the understanding of place as a product of spatiotemporal terms. Harvey notes that “the process of place formation is a process of carving out ‘permanences’ from the flow of processes creating space.”⁹ Place struggles against the incessant flow of space-time in order to claim a concrete plane or mode of permanence. This dialectical struggle between place and space often manifests in Neshat’s video installations as a struggle between male and female forces. At the Detroit Institute of Arts exhibition, the first installation that visitors encounter is Neshat’s *Turbulent* (1998), a diptych video installation presented laterally along the parallel walls of a darkened corridor. Viewers must engage directly with this piece in order to access sub-





sequent galleries of the exhibition. On the left screen, a male performer appears solo on stage, his back turned to an all-male audience, and sings what Neshat describes as “a traditional, passionate love song with lyrics by the great Iranian mystic Rumi”¹⁰ The performer faces the viewer and the opposing screen rather than his own audience, extending the notion of space outward and into the viewer’s domain. The male’s voice reaches the ears of the men in the audience and is reverberated back to him in a mode of exchange. He remains stationary as the angle of the mostly still camera anchors him to a central place within the *mise-en-scène*.

Subsequently, a female performer on the right screen sings out into the same auditorium, which is now completely empty. The camera slowly pans, tilts, and moves around to completely circle her; she floats through space and is often engulfed in total blackness. The song of the chanteuse follows no discernible time signature, unlike the male’s regimented triple meter. Rather, her guttural vocalizations tremble and stretch throughout an amorphous space-time continuum. In these “dueling” projected videos, the male stands within an enclosed place, whereas the female performer personifies open space. Standing at the interstices of these two projections, the gallery visitor witnesses the place-space dialectic unfold literally in real time and space and metaphorically as conflict between the male and female singers.

In *Turbulent*, Neshat subtly investigates the relations of place and space to capital and commerce. Again, Harvey enhances this discus-

sion by suggesting that place and space are neither neutral nor empirical processes, but rather are political ones deeply entrenched in capitalist ideology. Citing the work of Henri Lefebvre, Harvey indicates that the “commodity world brings in its wake certain attitudes toward space, certain actions upon space, even a certain concept of space.”¹¹ *Turbulent* explores these contradictions by aligning each gender with different socioeconomic conditions. The male performer stands before a well-attended audience. The audience is also male, and as such, ostensibly economically independent; this can be ascertained by the men’s distribution within the audience. As they are irregularly staggered, we may assume that they purchased assigned seating, and thus the concert itself is staged as a capitalist affair. Place, in such a reading, perpetuates the capitalist division of labor and exchange. The female performer, however, sings to an empty auditorium. She is not compensated for her song, but rather sings for herself, for her pleasure. Not alienated from her own labor, she sings in an indeterminate space, free from market constraints. In their theoretical assessments Lefebvre and Harvey help to suggest that the woman’s autonomous, creative space holds the key to emancipation from the capitalist confines of place.¹²

In addition to representations of place and space, Neshat also features visual expanses of the environment in several of her works, using extreme duration shots to capture vast landscapes and seascapes. Recall that Harvey relies not on a binary structure, but on a ternary complex that unifies the processes that define place, space,

OPPOSITE: Shirin Neshat, *Munis*, from the *Women Without Men* series, 2009, video stills, dimensions variable / ABOVE: Shirin Neshat, *Mahdokht*, 2004, three-channel video/audio installation, 13:44 minutes © Shirin Neshat; courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels]



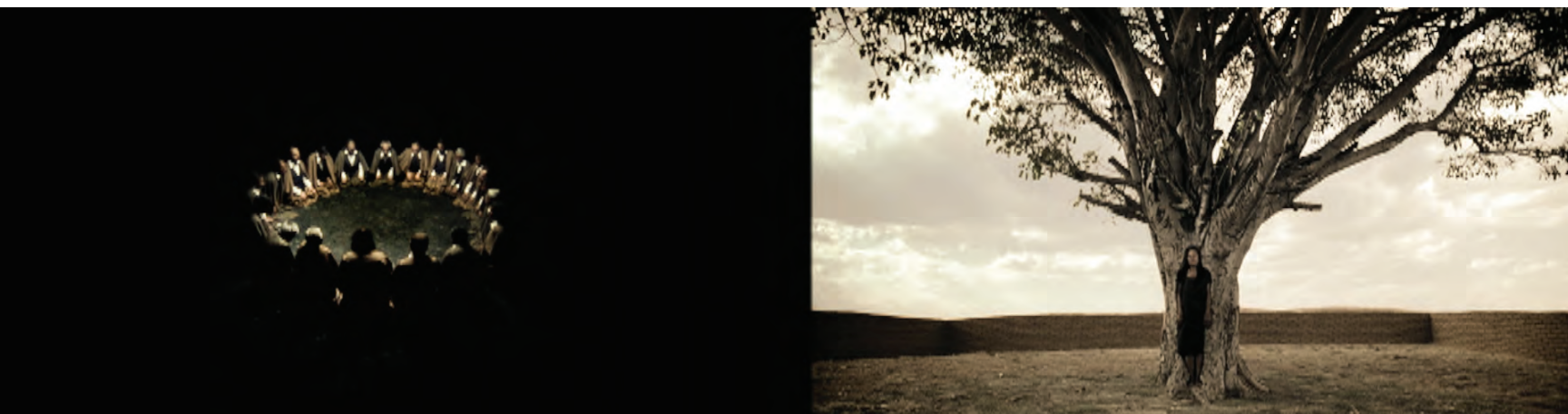
and environment. Harvey wrote that the “‘environment’ is whatever surrounds or, to be more precise, whatever exists in the surroundings of some being that is relevant to the state of that being at a particular moment.”¹³ We customarily assign that “being” an anthropocentric identity, but more generally, “being” refers to an ontological study of surroundings. The processes of place and space, of course, also surround that being. Thus, even as place and space describe processes of formation, environment describes how those formations surround and condition the existence of some being within. Neshat deploys environment in her works in precisely this way, as at the center of her portrayals of place and space there exists—whether human or otherwise—a living being.

Environment as a being surrounded by both place and space finds clear expression in *Tooba*, a two-channel video installation from 2002. The work takes its name from the Tooba tree, a tree believed to grow expansively in heaven in the Muslim tradition and, as Neshat points out, one of the few feminine symbols to figure in the Koran.¹⁴ In a square gallery, two screens oppose each other. The screens do not alternate, as in *Turbulent*, but rather show concurrent narratives. On one screen, a woman with her eyes closed—her body repressed in the crook of a tree’s trunk—breathes gently. A square brick wall sequesters the tree, demarcating place and boundary. Surrounding the brick wall is a desolate landscape undulating outward toward the horizon. Unlike the green tree, this landscape is barren, dotted with dry grasses and cleared crops.

In the opposing sequence, a group of men sits in a circle, chanting against a black background. Their tightly packed adjacent bodies circumscribe the area within and thus define it as a discrete place, recalling the strict geometry of the tree’s brick enclosure. The sequence alternates between this ritualistic circle and shots of its environment. In those environmental shots, the men first appear in the landscape’s distance, but the camera closes in on them as they march toward the tree. As the cinematic sequence unfolds, the men charge and eventually scale the tree’s surrounding walls. Although they surround Tooba, they do not touch it. Tooba lies in a state of exile: the tree-and-woman complex is trapped in place by the circle of men and the perimeter of the wall. These markers of place, in turn, are surrounded by the endless space of the landscape.

Having passed through five rooms of video installations and two rooms of photography, the viewer is eventually guided into the largest room in the retrospective. In that room are the final video installations of the exhibit, which here employ five screens; two of those screens play the looped videos *Munis* and *Zarin*. (These installed, nonlinear versions of *Munis* (2008) and *Zarin* (2005) predate the feature film version; these separate installations are together titled *Women Without Men*, just as the film is.) A final wall shows the triptych video installation *Mahdokht* (2004) (positioned much like an opened altarpiece). Although not represented in Neshat’s feature film version, *Mahdokht* serves as the fifth protagonist in Parsipur’s story.

Seated within an orchard, *Mahdokht* exists in the liminal tangle between place and space (and even life and death). Retrospective curator Rebecca R. Hart reports that *Mahdokht* “suffers from a phobia about sexual intimacy, although she longs to care for and clothe hundreds of children.”¹⁵ *Mahdokht* maniacally knits an immeasur-



able length of yellow yarn that carpets the arboreal environment in which she sits. Hart notes that, “as her obsession progresses, she knits more frantically as her fingers multiply.”¹⁶ Mahdokht is visibly irrational and deeply disturbed by her phobic obsession; she sits at the unstable juncture between place and space. This unstable environment is at the center of the place-space dialectic: Mahdokht remains entangled in a struggle to “plant” herself, though she is lost within an unending grove.

It is at this point that an overwhelmed or disoriented gallery visitor might reflect on his or her own transitional state. Having walked through eight galleries and as many corridors, having seen hours of video, and having been kept in a state of oscillation between fiction and reality, viewers are now carefully triangulated within the place of this final gallery. And yet, they are still caught in the flowing space and time of the convoluted exhibit. This environment initiates in the viewer the ontological crisis that Mahdokht enacts on the screen.

Environment, more than the intersection of the processes of place and space, is itself the heart of existing between those processes. The DIA curator and exhibition designers clearly anticipated this environmental crisis: not only is the exhibition floorplan itself a labyrinth of enclosed places and open spaces, but it even builds a “reflection area” in a central chamber, as if to encourage the viewer to examine the surroundings of his or her own being. Neshat’s work here—as in many works throughout her oeuvre—recasts exile not as an effect of evacuated place or conquered space, but as an environmental problem. As Harvey suggests, place, space, and time are three contributing, ever-changing elements that surround and define a state of being. In her multivalent representations of place and space, environment and exile, Neshat asks us to consider the existential meaning of our own intersection within these complex geographies.

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The “Fairennial” Shift: Art Fairs, Biennials, and the Great Exhibition(s)

Lately it feels like all the world's an art fair.
S. Prickett¹

TEXT / STEPHANIE BAILEY

The Sharjah Biennial began in 1993, when it was conceived along the lines of the Cairo Biennale (modeled on the Venice Biennale, with national pavilions). But it was held in the Expo Centre, and thus had the look and feel of a trade fair, with individual booths rather than pavilions. This story of the Sharjah Biennial's genesis visualizes the relationship between two very different global art events: the conceptually inclined biennial exhibition and the market-driven art fair.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), this relationship is made most apparent as both Art Dubai and the Sharjah Biennial open annually in March. In their time-based and geographical proximity, they have become spaces where the issues and debates around the cultural implications of globally appropriating the art fair and biennial formats are heightened due to a certain regional specificity. In 2011, for instance, Art Dubai and Sharjah Biennial 10 became embroiled in the politics of the Arab revolutions while simultaneously dealing with criticism from the international community over censorship taking place during both the Sharjah Biennial and Art Dubai. As a result, art as a form of cultural diplomacy and issues of cultural relativism that came to the fore in the 2012 Sharjah March Meeting, an annual global conference organized by the Sharjah Art Foundation (which runs the Sharjah Biennial), just as censorship once again ruffled feathers at Art Dubai.

Tellingly, the 2013 iterations of Art Dubai and the Sharjah Biennial enacted a recalibration

based on the lessons of the past, using the art fair and biennial—Western exhibition models—to assert an autonomous, albeit global, identity in a post-colonial, post-crisis, and post-Arab Spring context, and within the 21st-century remit of “globalization.” Through these spaces, a certain “fairennial shift” took place: a reflection of how the proliferation of art fairs and biennials in the last decade, which has taken place predominately outside of the Western world, is producing a new kind of global paradigm. Sharjah Biennial 11, *Re: Emerge, Towards a New Cultural Cartography* [March 13–May 13, 2013], is a case in point. Making a conceptually bold yet aesthetically understated statement, curator Yuko Hasegawa presented a manifesto for a “Global South,” invoking a desire for cultural emancipation from the West that has long gripped regions of Africa, Asia, and the Arab world. The approach took into account the ethnic diversity of the UAE (80% migrant and expatriate) while maintaining an expansive, global outlook.

Meanwhile, at Art Dubai 2013's Global Art Forum, two telling discussions took place. The first, a panel chaired by author Oscar Guardiola-Rivera. It featured Payam Sharifi from the art collective Slavs and Tatars, cultural commentator Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi, and anthropologist Uzma Z. Rizvi, who discussed the viability of the use of the acronyms “Mena” (Middle East and North Africa), “Menasa” (plus South Asia), and “Menasaca” (plus Central Asia) to describe a disparate, geographical area widely known as “the Region.” The second discussion, chaired by

Turi Munthe, founder of “citizen journalist” newswire Demotix, examined “free zones” (Free Trade Zone, Foreign Trade Zone, Special Economic Zone, Export Processing Zone)—a concept that architect Keller Easterling defines as “a highly contagious and globalized urban form” or *extrastatecraft*, a “portmanteau word meaning outside of and in addition to the management of state affairs.”²

Against the backdrop of contemporary Arab modernity (or “Gulf Futurism” as Sophia Al-Maria calls it), discussions taking place via Art Dubai and the Sharjah Biennial around the instrumentalization of art and culture outside the West reflect a 21st-century global condition. It is affected by the historical ideologies around globalism and its neoliberal effects. In Abu Dhabi, the UAE's capital, there is the controversial Saadiyat Cultural District, complete with outposts of The Guggenheim, The Louvre, and New York University currently in development. The project has been the focal point for protests against workers' rights in the UAE and has raised questions over the import of global art institutions—arguably apparatuses of neoliberal globalism—into a region.

In this light, Easterling's notion of the “free zone” is pertinent in the art fair and biennial context. It evokes another idea Easterling introduced: the “spatial product”—a semi-autonomous (often replicable) trade zone like a cruise ship or a holiday resort that similarly operates outside of the state and its jurisdictions. Today, art fairs and biennials could be well defined as “free zones” and “spatial prod-

OPPOSITE: Maryam Jafri, *Malaysia-Ghana-India 1947-1957*, from the photo installation *Independence Day 1936-1967, 2009-present* (courtesy of the artist)





ucts” because they are “highly contagious”³ reproducible exhibition formats—or objects—that operate as microcosms of a much larger global sphere. As Pamela M. Lee notes, this global art world space—including its network of biennials and art fairs—drives both “the homogenizing of culture on the one hand and the radical hybridity on the other.”⁴ In other words, this popular proliferation of art fairs and biennials both reflects and furthers globalization.

Thinking about the origins of the contemporary art fair, there is little difference among the reasons non-Western countries are now adopting these exhibition formats. As Riyas Komu of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale noted in conversation at the 2012 March Meeting in Sharjah, the idea behind such exhibitions is to become part of a global conversation.⁵ Take Art Cologne, “the world’s first modern art fair,”⁶ launched in 1967 by Hein Stünke and Rudolf Zwirner to revive West Germany’s “lacklustre art market”⁷ and promote young German artists internationally. The fair introduced a radical new way of presenting art, and it also made money. At the 1969 art fair, Joseph Beuys’ *Das Rudel* sold for 110,000 DM, the first artwork by a West German artist to sell for more than 100,000 DM.⁸ Then, in 1972, *documenta 5* took place. It was the first large-scale art exhibition that rejected traditional presentations of art formulated along historical (and canonical) lines. Curated by Harald Szeemann, it was dubbed a *Grossausstellung*, or Great Exhibition, in which artworks were “tied

to a central cross-disciplinary theme and reconfigured into startling, often non-chronological juxtaposition.”⁹ It set the groundwork for contemporary curatorial approaches that followed.

Art Cologne and *documenta 5* introduced radically different ways of presenting art. As exhibition models, they proposed new approaches to 20th-century and, subsequently, 21st-century exhibition practice, just as Okwui Enwezor’s 2002 *documenta 11* inspired the Sharjah Biennial’s reconfiguration as an openly social, cultural, and political space. In the case of Art Cologne, other art fairs soon followed. Art Basel (established in 1970) became the most popular art fair in 1973, a success attributed to its international focus. Yet even today the internationalism of art fairs is questionable, particularly when staged in the West. Discussing the ratio of representation at Frieze New York 2012, critic Holland Cotter observed that, like most fairs its size, Frieze New York was “technically international, with a small handful of participants from Asia, and one each from Africa and the United Arab Emirates,” but mostly, the artists were “European and American big guns”¹⁰ This issue of representation raises the question of whether certain hierarchies are inscribed into the art fair and biennial formats, given their Western origins.

Such ideas around social and cultural hierarchies recall an older exhibitionary ancestor to the global art exhibition: the Great Exhibition of Works and Industry of All Nations of 1851 organ-

ized in London at the apex of the British Empire’s power. Regarded as the first World’s Fair exhibition of trade, culture, and commerce, the Great Exhibition was, according to theorist Dan Smith, “the first international exhibition and the largest public visual spectacle then to be staged in the modern world” that “helped forge western modernity’s formations of display, spectacle, surveillance and commodity.”¹¹ It was a formative event, facilitating the establishment of the Venice Biennale in 1895 and arguably leading to two of the contemporary forms and functions of both the art fair and the biennial, constructed from the legacies of industry, post-industry, modernity, postmodernity (and meta-modernity), not to mention colonialism and its aftereffects.

Organized by Prince Albert and other members of the Royal Society for the encouragement of arts, manufactures, and commerce, the 1851 Great Exhibition established a new global paradigm. According to historian Peter Greenhalgh, the aim of the event was “to invite all nations of the world to take part in ‘the friendly competition’ of an international exhibition and to create a potential for market expansion abroad.”¹² Staged in the Crystal Palace,¹³ the event celebrated “progress, invention, and British supremacy in world markets.”¹⁴ More than 6 million visitors and 14,000 exhibitors came from around the world for 5 months and 15 days, the high turnout facilitated by the advances of the Industrial Revolution, including the Great



Western Railway. The exhibition also signified America's position as "an industrial power to be reckoned with."¹⁵ The relationship between Britain and the United States grew closer—Brunel built steamships capable of crossing the Atlantic in nine days, and the Suez Canal opened up faster sea routes to India and the Far East.¹⁶

Sociological historian Tony Bennett describes the 1851 Great Exhibition as the prototypical "exhibitionary complex, an arrangement of institutional forms that are museological, but also encompass modes of public spectacle and sites of commodity arrangement and exchange."¹⁷ The event signaled an entire world system, asserted by an imperial power predicated on trade, affecting the political and physical landscapes of nations around the world. At the time, Prince Albert stated:

We are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end, to which, indeed, all history points—the realization of the unity of mankind The distances which separated the different nations and parts of the globe are rapidly vanishing before the achievements of modern invention, and we can traverse them with incredible ease; ... thought is communicated with the rapidity, and even by the power, of lightning.¹⁸

Albert's observations of the attempted "global unity" of the World's Fair foreshadow the context in which art fairs and biennials replicate them-

selves today, amidst the rapid flows and ruptures produced by globalization. Like Art Cologne and Harald Szeemann's "Great Exhibition," the World's Fair became a popular format in the power centers of the Western world, not only as a way to smooth international trade relations but also as a way to handle the political and social conflicts of globalization (read: colonization) and the assertion of "Globalization" abroad.¹⁹ In this, these events became spaces both of soft power (the use of culture to assert political agendas) and mediatory politics. The 1851 Great Exhibition, for example, was organized after the Chartist movement and the 1848 Communist Manifesto had both precipitated 1848's failed European Revolution. Stateside, the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904 famously celebrated the centennial anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase and recent US colonial exploits in the Philippines. Likewise, documenta was founded by Arnold Bode in 1955 as what writer Bernhard Schulz called "a therapeutic agent to heal the emotional wounds of the Second World War."²⁰

This complex historical DNA is what makes art fairs and biennials such rich and problematic spaces through which to both assess and assert how "the global" is forming in the 21st century. The UAE is a good example, with Art Dubai evolving alongside modernization that has been shaping the country since it gained independence from British colonizers in 1971. The establishment of Art Dubai in 2006 echoes the UAE's growth since its independence and subsequent move to

globalize. In the case of Dubai, the art fair also reflects how a society might become, through the ideology of free trade and relatively liberal business environments, a 21st-century "free zone" much like Hong Kong and Singapore.²¹

In this, the staging of these global art events cannot be read without considering the equally replicable nature of a world city as "global hub," or without regard for the social, economic, and political systems that are likewise replicated in these cities and their respective nations. Consider the UAE, which comprises seven emirates—Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, 'Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah—each with its own ruling family and local government. The UAE's government-sponsored website describes the country's political structure as "a unique amalgamation of traditional and modern political systems."²² This political legacy reveals the heritage of colonial rule and is further exemplified in the physical landscapes of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, replete with glass and steel skyscrapers like those found throughout the world. This replicable global urbanism is reflective of how art fairs and biennials are likewise spaces inscribed with a particular global agenda rooted in the history of industrial imperialism and internationalism.

The multiplication of these exhibition models thus recalls a Duchampian sensibility—one that correlates with an industrial reproducibility. Consider here Maryam Jafri's photographic installation *Independence Day 1936–1967* (2009–



ongoing). The series comprises archival photographs documenting the first independence day ceremonies of various Asian and African nations, including Indonesia, India, Ghana, Senegal, Tunisia, Philippines, Syria, Sudan, Malaysia, and Algeria.²³ It presents a chilling, Identikit formula behind the political autonomy (and consequently “modernity”) introduced to the post-colonial regions. It is a political formula that continues to affect the identities of these regions today. Jafri’s images show how a political system introduced by a colonial power is adopted thereafter by a post-colonial society: when the oppressed speak the language of the oppressor. The same observations have been made by the insertion of the contemporary art market and its exhibitionary complexes in the post-colonial regions.

In thinking about the legacy of the World’s Fair, it is this historical underscoring that makes art fairs and biennials such problematic spaces. They are inherently tied to a certain global system driven by a kind of imperialist, free market ideology proposed in the 1851 Great Exhibition and which has since evolved. And the biennial is also implicated. Charlotte Bydler notes how London’s Great Exhibition of 1851 was a preliminary “to the internationalist dimensions of the modern biennial ... a showcase for the advances of British Industrialist production,”²⁴ while Lee views biennials as representative of a country’s cultural point of entry into this global economy. In this estimation, it is impossible not to look on art fairs and biennials as zones of social, political, and cultural relations mediated by the shared, global language of hypercapitalism. For Lee, this exchange is “signaled by the

[government-sponsored] public relations juggernauts that precede the official openings; by the phenomena of art fairs that seem to trail them; and by the clusters of transnational exhibitions opening within days of each other, as if to appeal to the itineraries of the travelling class.”²⁵

It’s true: these global spaces cater to a specific hierarchy. But they are also spaces in which hierarchy, albeit temporarily, is broken down. As social scientist and geographer Doreen Massey argues in her book *For Space*, the expansion of the art world allows for a reading of global languages and histories from a wider perspective—a respatialization of modernity and its legacies. Through this lens, the proliferation of the biennial and art fair formats is driving a process of reculturalization and repoliticization. At the same time, they are providing platforms in which local and global relations are negotiated and ultimately formed, becoming what critic Lawrence Alloway might have termed negotiated environments²⁶ or what Lee might describe as intersecting worlds²⁷ that facilitate a “shifting, transnational order.”²⁸

But as much as art fairs and biennials are replicable infrastructural elements or apparatuses pertaining to a transnational order, they are also microcosms that shed light on how globalization is being translated in real time and in specific local contexts. Today, the same apparatuses that have been used historically to uphold Western imperialism and its philosophies are being inverted so that they might speak of and for the “outside”—the so-called “global periphery”—from the inside. The proliferation of art fairs and biennials is enacting a

decentralization: a cultural—and by implication historical and political—remapping of the world and its centers of power using the very structures within which power is embedded.²⁹ From a global perspective, this indicates how these “fairennial” formats, though unquestionably implicated in the machinations of global capitalism, are also potential sites for real alteration and subversion. Ultimately, it is how these models are perceived, used, and changed that produces a shift.

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ABOVE: Maryam Jafri, *Syria-India-Congo 1946–1960*, from the photo installation *Independence Day 1936–1967*, 2009–present / OPPOSITE: Maryam Jafri, installation view of *Independence Day 1936–1967*, 2009–present, approx. 24 x 7 feet, at *Communitas: The Unrepresentable Community*, Camera Austria 2011 (images courtesy of the artist)



NOTES

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Artist Project

Adam Cvijanovic



Adam Cvijanovic, installation views of *East, The Sailor, and West*, 2011, from *Prophecy For a Dead Language* (March 24–May 6, 2011, Blindarte Contemporanea, Naples, Italy), Flashe on Tyvek and wood armature, 16 x 4 x 5 feet [images courtesy of the artist]





Adam Cvijanovic, *River*, 2012, Flashe on Tyvek on wood armature, 14 x 40 x 25 feet [image courtesy of the artist]



Adam Cvijanovic, *Stardust*, 2010, Flashe and acrylic on Tyvek, 14 x 24 feet [image courtesy of the artist]



Because the Night: Curating One-Off Nocturnal Events

TEXT / HELENA RECKITT

Since Paris established Nuit Blanche in 2002, the phenomenon of the one-off, late-night or all-night free public art event has spread across the world, from cities including Madrid, Riga, and Reykjavik to Tel Aviv, Santa Monica, and Toronto. Animating landmark districts and extending into marginal neighborhoods, these festive events showcase contemporary art with an emphasis on luminous visual spectacle and audience participation.

Mayor Bertrand Delanoë launched Nuit Blanche as part of a plan to reassert Paris' post-World War II reputation for artistic innovation. Urban centers inspired by the Paris event shared its ambition to brand or rebrand their particular cities. Lisbon's Luzboa festival, established in 2004, reimagines public space and rehabilitates unsafe or undesirable neighborhoods through light. Nuit Blanche in Toronto receives funding from the provincial cultural agency that was established to combat the negative impact of the SARS epidemic on tourism. The UK nationwide program Light Night aims to overcome some of the negative perceptions associated with the nighttime economy in many British city centers.¹ Although a more grassroots effort, Atlanta's Le Flash, from which the current Flux Night grew, has nonetheless played its part in urban rebranding. Launched in Castleberry Hill in 2008, when the neighborhood's identity was shifting from an arts quarter to a late-night bar district, the event has helped to reassert the area's cultural character. Whereas founders Cathy Byrd and Stuart Keeler established Le Flash on a bare-bones budget, Flux Night is now operated by the small but active arts organization Flux Projects. Funding comes from the collector and businessman Louis Corrigan and other private donors who wanted to demonstrate their faith in Atlanta's art scene and artists in the wake of the recession.

In an era of reduced arts funding, the huge audiences generated by these occasions have

attracted government as well as corporate and private support. Flux Night is set to entice some 15,000 people this October—an increase from 13,000 in 2012. Toronto's Nuit Blanche draws a million people, roughly a quarter of the city's population. It is particularly popular with young people and suburbanites, typically considered "hard to reach" art audiences.² As Toronto-based curator Jim Drobnick remarks, "Main-stream art institutions would kill for that kind of audience."³ This dramatic demonstration of public interest in contemporary art was thrown into sharp relief in 2008, shortly after Stephen Harper's election as Canada's prime minister. In contrast to Harper's attack on the arts as "the province of elites" with no resonance for "ordinary people," crowds thronged the streets for Nuit Blanche. Dave Dymont, one of that year's curators, recalls people adding handwritten notes of gratitude and excitement to Yoko Ono's *Wish Tree*: "The messages were really touching and inspiring. Things like, 'I wish Stephen Harper could be here to see this.' The experience reinforced my sense that the arts, without condescension, could communicate to a broad audience."⁴

Not only does the public show up in droves for these nights, they also see themselves as part of the spectacle. They dress up—sometimes flamboyantly—equip themselves for the long night ahead, tweet, blog, and Facebook through the event, sharing recommendations of "must see" works, and post their pictures on Flickr and Instagram. These activities reinforce the sense that the audience is shaping the spectacle as much as consuming it. Guerrilla artworks and unauthorized projects proliferate, taking advantage of the crowds. Artists accompany or participate in their work, creating an informal relationship between themselves and the public. Gallery rules are jettisoned as visitors drink, get high, fall asleep, speak on their phones, and loudly express their opinions.

Audience participation in these events can take art projects in unanticipated directions. Dymont recalls the role reversal between audience and performers in a work he curated in 2008. For Jon Sasaki's *I Promise It Will Always Be This Way*, 26 colorfully costumed mascots danced in a sports arena to the sounds of upbeat pop anthems, attempting to whip the crowds into a frenzy. Both Dymont and Sasaki thought the plan would backfire and that the mascots would "be asleep on the field by 2 am." But the work took on a life of its own. In the absence of a team to support, the crowd chanted for the mascots. "Somehow the mascots mustered the energy to continue for the full 12 hours," Dymont recalls. "It was pretty fucking magical."⁵

While curators often cite the situationist notion of the *dérive*, "drifting" is nigh impossible in these tightly programmed, crowded occasions. With their emphasis on spectacle, luminosity, and interactivity, it is more accurate to discuss them in terms of what Google's Eric Schmidt calls the "attention economy," where "winners will be those who succeed in maximizing the number of 'eyeballs' they can consistently control."⁶ The one-night-only premise creates an atmosphere of drama and urgency, requiring the expenditure of artistic and audience energy.

The festive, after-hours mood can take on carnivalesque dimensions. Curators Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher capitalized on this topsyturvy spirit in their NIGHTSENSE project for Toronto's financial district in 2009. Reflecting on the previous year's global economic crisis, Canadian artist Iain Baxter & led a game of *Monopoly with Real Money* in the Stock Exchange, the Canadian duo Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan installed carnival rides along the financial artery of Bay Street, and Spanish artist Santiago Sierra paraded a flatbed truck carrying the word "NO" in large black 3-D letters. Romanian artist Dan Mihaltianu's contribution

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky, installation view of *All Night Convenience*, 2012, lanterns: acetate, LED lights, tape; structure: acrylic, aluminum, 10 x 12 x 21 feet [image courtesy of the artists] / OPPOSITE, TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, *Wild Ride*, 2009, performance stills of one of two carnival rides installed on Bay Street from NIGHTSENSE (2009), curated by DisplayCult for Zone B of Nuit Blanche, Toronto; Santiago Sierra, *No*, 2009, installation on Temperance Street from NIGHTSENSE (2009), curated by DisplayCult for Zone B of Nuit Blanche, Toronto [photos: Paul Litherlan; courtesy of DisplayCult] / MIDDLE, LEFT AND RIGHT: Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky, installation view of *All Night Convenience*, 2012, lanterns: acetate, LED lights, tape; structure: acrylic, aluminum, 10 x 12 x 21 feet [images courtesy of the artists] / BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: Dan Mihaltianu, *Vodka Pool*, 2009, installation in the CIBC bank atrium at Commerce Court from NIGHTSENSE (2009), curated by DisplayCult for Zone B of Nuit Blanche, Toronto [image courtesy of the artist and DisplayCult]; Center for Tactical Magic, *Witches' Cradles*, 2009, performance stills at Brookfield Place from NIGHTSENSE (2009), curated by DisplayCult for Zone B of Nuit Blanche, Toronto [photo: Paul Litherlan; courtesy of DisplayCult]

was a reflecting pool made from vodka. Intended as a meditative piece, it proved unexpectedly provocative. “Alcoholic fumes may have contributed to the frenzy as people threw in pennies, boats made from paper money, house keys, and even condoms, as if the work were a kind of ersatz wishing well,” Drobnick and Fisher note. “Eventually, dogs and stripped-down individuals hurled themselves through the placid, aqueous pool, and at one point the installation had to be closed by security because of a near riot. By the end of the night, the volume of coins surpassed that of the vodka, oddly mimicking the public money surrendered to banks and corporations during the previous year’s bailout.”⁷

Tapping into ancient rituals, the festival model marks the change of seasons and the community’s survival. Such rhetoric prompts concerns that expressions of celebration and conviviality are promoted over those of criticism and dissent, resulting in safe, sponsor-friendly art. Critics remark on the closeness of “creative city” rhetoric to these once-only or annual time-based events’ emphasis on youth, innovation, and technology. The interests of property developers and urban boosters find expression in projects that animate buildings or transform undesirable nonplaces and districts. Liberal ideas about art’s ability to heal and unite communities are bolstered by the focus on participation and interaction. The very metaphor of illuminating the night invokes dubious arguments about art and moral uplift, connotations that arts policy scholar Max Haiven finds unavoidably colonial. Yet while Haiven criticizes the neoliberal agendas that underscore such endeavors, he accepts the need to take events like Toronto’s Nuit Blanche and Halifax’s Nocturne seriously. “To dismiss the potential of dream-like events like Nocturne is dangerous. To fail to seize it is, unfortunately, all too easy.”⁸

The relatively large budgets commandeered by one-off events have also prompted criticism. Paris-based curator Eva Svennung has attacked Nuit Blanche as consuming “most of the city’s annual budget in an orgiastic one-night stand of art in the streets—a populist intercourse ready-made for live broadcast on public television.”⁹ In less-developed art scenes, questions regularly emerge about whether funds being channeled to ephemeral art projects could be better used to strengthen a city’s cultural infrastructure and sustainability.

These critiques aside, ephemeral civic events have received little in-depth scholarly attention, especially from art critics and academics. Popularity coupled with populist agendas make them subject to art world and academic snobbery. I was advised by an academic colleague not

to include Nuit Blanche in my outputs for the upcoming UK university Research Excellence Framework (REF), as it was only of “local” interest. Drobnick and Fisher responded to the academic neglect of ephemeral urban events by editing a 2012 issue of the journal *PUBLIC* on civic spectacle. Such further analysis is welcome, not least because of the particular challenges and questions that curating such events pose. Will a thematic approach create a sense of curatorial coherence or end up becoming overly prescriptive and limiting (a particularly relevant concern when, as with Atlanta’s Flux Night, most artworks are selected blind, from open-call proposals)? What is gained by presenting an artwork in public, short of making it big, bright, and eye-catching? In addition to paying attention to the weather, crowd control, and community advocacy, curators must consider whether a piece can be experienced by large numbers of people and its meaning grasped without the need for explanatory texts. There are permits and permissions to seek, roads to close, electricity to source, lights to install or arrange to switch off. With little time to install or test-run projects, technical issues must be carefully anticipated.

The popularity of these programs often leads cities to adopt them as annual events. This can lead to a situation in which such occasions become victims of their own success. Crowd management and safety require extra budget and labor, as do the provision of refreshments, toilets, and transport. Inertia or outright hostility can set in amongst arts aficionados who complain that bureaucratic concerns and corporate interests have usurped the initial spirit of experimentation. In Toronto the city organizers attempt to keep Nuit Blanche fresh by inviting several different curators each year, including those working independently and in artist-run spaces, and offering them commissioning budgets and relative creative freedom. Nonetheless, Toronto artist An Te Liu’s neon work *Ennui Blanc*, installed in a storefront gallery during the 2010 event, wittily captured the ambivalence of some residents. Artists who make ostensibly participatory art have started to incorporate elements of critique into their work. Observing artists’ projects in Toronto and Halifax, Haiven identified “the whiff of laconic nonchalance among many would-be ‘public’ artists, as if they want the audience to know that they know no-one believes in art’s transformative power [any more], as if to preempt the presumption of over-earnest effort or intention.”¹⁰ In 2012 Jon Sasaki offered his artist fee to the member of the public who was able to stand all night with their hands resting on a van. *Hands on the Van* queries the terms of participation offered by so much contemporary event-based public art.

When I was invited to curate Nuit Blanche in Toronto in 2012, I was aware of these competing views. Having attended the event since its inception, I missed the first night’s exuberance and adventurousness and had wearied of spending long periods lining up for projects that took only a few minutes to see. I had reached the conclusion that, valuable though Nuit Blanche was, it wasn’t really designed for people like me working in, or with regular access to, contemporary art. Maybe I was just too old. In my zone, *Once More With Feeling*, I wanted to ask how an annual public event could be done again, with a difference. All of the works I featured performed loops of repetition and feedback, highlighting cycles of recurrence and renewal while suggesting the possibility of revolt. I chose them for the insight they offered into what it means to encounter art in large groups of people, how that experience heightens an awareness of our own bodies and identities as well as our being-in-common with others.

The event’s temporal frame provided a context for international musician and artist Susan Stenger’s audio work *The Structures of Everyday Life: Full Circle*. The piece took listeners through a 12-hour cycle that evoked the passage of dusk to dawn as chords swelled and receded, soared and subsided again. Installed in a bandstand in St. James Park, the previous home of Occupy Toronto, it was welcomed by protestors as a tribute to their struggle. *The Structures of Everyday Life* proved unexpectedly interactive. At 3 am a group of performing arts high school students used it to stage an impromptu a cappella recital of Carly Rae Jepsen’s maddeningly contagious pop song “Call Me Maybe.”

With the budget assigned for a “monumental work” that “will make the audience gasp,” I invited the Trisha Brown Dance Company to restage a little-seen work from 1968 called *Planes*.¹¹ Dancers scaled a façade in a corporate courtyard, accompanied by 16 mm film projections of Vietnam War footage by Jud Yalkut and a vacuum cleaner soundtrack by Simone Forti. Satisfying the need for visual impact while resisting the demand for dazzling spectacle that overwhelms the viewer’s subjectivity, this work eschewed virtuosity to celebrate pared-down, everyday movements.

A work by UK-based collaborators Maeve Brennan and Ruth Ewan called *Tremolo* questioned the event’s emphasis on duration and performance. Brennan, an accomplished pianist who suffers from debilitating stage fright, played a series of piano recitals throughout the night. Audiences at the Rainbow Cinema waited attentively, not knowing if they would experience professional playing, faulty playing, or no playing at all. *Tremolo* became an unexpected



hit, perhaps because the artist's struggle against exhaustion and anxiety resonated with the audience's efforts to stay awake.

Beyond the buildings or the site, the unanticipated social interactions at such events are their most exciting aspect for a curator. Experiencing art amongst thousands of other people, one can feel both part of a group while also deeply alienated from it. I am interested in projects that invite, rather than coerce, social participation. For Atlanta's Flux Night I am curating six projects that aim to activate the public in different ways.¹² Having lived in Atlanta, I understand the importance and vulnerability of public space in a car-centric, sprawling city with a history of segregation. So the prospect of mixing and mingling at street level is one that I take seriously.

With the curatorial theme of "Free Association," I want to see what kinds of unexpected encounters can occur at a nocturnal event when our normal habits are overturned. Making art addressed to a broad audience is, as Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky remark, "a risk, and a hopeful thing."¹³ The Canadian duo will remake their 2012 work *All Night Convenience*, a glowing store containing lanterns modeled on everyday packaged goods, which visitors are invited to take home. As the store empties, the public distributes the work, with the lanterns illuminating and spreading out through the streets like fireflies. Adapted for its southern setting, the work will include offerings such as boiled peanuts, rutabaga, and collard greens.

Several planned works will tap into Atlanta's history, staging a conversation with its past to

reimagine its present and future. The London-based Open Music Archive will work with local DJs, MCs, and producers to remix songs recorded in the city between 1929 and 1932. Originally anonymously authored, these tunes and lyrics were privatized in the process of being recorded and subjected to copyright laws. Releasing these songs back into public in a live, open mic event, the artists anticipate their free playback and reuse. Toronto artist Deanna Bowen will work with civil rights-era audio recordings made in Atlanta by ABC's Southern bureau chief, Paul Good, in the mid-1960s. She will provide a platform for the audience to add their memories of those events.

London artist Heather Phillipson is devising a "live" equivalent of a video, a montage of images and sound through which the audience will move. In addition to being excited by the prospect of making work for a city that she has not yet visited and for a site that pushes her to think beyond her gallery practice, Phillipson is intrigued by Flux Night's evocation of festivals and free parties. "Nighttime does something strange and interesting not only to our senses but also to our social engagement," she remarks. "It's the ultimate readymade darkspace—upside-down and intimate: we're here together, after bedtime, for a reason."¹⁴

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NOTES

1. Salim Jiwa, J. Andres Coca-Stefaniak, Martin Blackwell, Toyubur Rahman, "Light Night: an 'enlightening' place marketing experience," *Journal of Place Management and Development* 2, no. 2 (2009): 154–166.
2. Julian Sleuth, "Interview Guide: Business Plan for Nuit Blanche North," undated, unpaginated document sent to the author, April 2013.
3. Jim Drobnick, Skype conversation with the author, April 2013.
4. Dave Dymant, e-mail to the author, April 2013.
5. Ibid.
6. Heather Diack, "Sleepless Nights: Contemporary Art and the Culture of Performance," in "Civic Spectacle," ed. Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher, special issue, *PUBLIC* 45, no. 23 (Spring 2012): 11.
7. Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher, "NIGHTSENSE," in "Civic Spectacle," *ibid.*: 51.
8. Max Haiven, "Halifax's Nocturne Versus (?) the Spectacle of Neoliberal Civics," "Civic Spectacle," *ibid.*: 91.
9. Quoted by Diack in "Sleepless Nights," *ibid.*: 19.
10. Haiven, *ibid.*: 89.
11. Julian Sleuth, *Interview Guide*, *ibid.*
12. The six projects I am curating are by Deanna Bowen, Pablo Bronstein, Oswaldo Maciá, the Open Music Archive, Heather Phillipson, and Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky. In addition, the Flux Projects committee is selecting works submitted via Open Call, a process that I only partly participated in.
13. Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky, e-mail to the author, April 2013.
14. Heather Phillipson, e-mail to the author, April 2013.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Rebecca Belmore, *Gone Indian*, 2009, performance at the Royal Bank Plaza; FASTWÜRMS, *Skry-Pod*, 2009, performance in the courtyard of the Sheraton Centre Hotel; both from NIGHTSENSE (2009), curated by DisplayCult for Zone B of Nuit Blanche, Toronto [photos: Paul Litherland; courtesy of DisplayCult]

Theaster Gates

and Hesse McGraw

in conversation

Theaster Gates: I am spending more time talking about space than anything else.

Hesse McGraw: What else is there?

TG: Ideology, objects, music, clichés. But space feels best.

HM: Much of your work has been about creating space for those other things to come together in orchestrated ways, in places where that coming together might be unexpected. The spaces create torrents of surprise.

TG: The part that feels weird, though, is that there's all of this examining and critique around what's best for an artist to think about. What's most efficient? What pays the most money? What is the ultimate ambition?

How did we get so essential about everything? Artists no longer have the ability to just do the things that [they] want to do or love to do. The idea of space, because I can't imagine it fully, because it escapes me, because it's too big ... it feels like it's the right size.

HM: A larger issue that you're confronting, or that the expanding scope of your practice is confronting, is actually a limiting perspective about who artists are and what artists might do and what artists have access to. From critical and curatorial perspectives, it is easier when, in a sense, we know what we're going to get, but also, in a sense, when an artist's work is identifiable, when the work is legible in a succinct and clear way.

TG: But that's part of the problem.

HM: That is the problem. It's a problem in relationship to other disciplines, even. The kind of fluidity that, let's say, Rem Koolhaas has, or other design practitioners, or that even a filmmaker might have, is amazing. Those individuals are at the helm of a large team, realizing many different kinds of projects in many different kinds of places. We are resistant to artist-polymaths. Why doesn't that latitude extend to contemporary artists?

TG: Because artists have museums and architects have the world. Because artists [make] dots on houses, like the Heidelberg Project, while planners rezone an area. That is, the form that we, as artists, get to play with, the form that we feel power over, the form that we've been given legal, governmental, or cultural agency over, differs. If the only form that we think we have the right to respond to is narrowly contested gestural form, then the world has succeeded at keeping the smartest motherfuckers busy twiddling their thumbs, navel-gazing, making gestural effects while more conventional thinkers are doing the other, more critical, more lucrative work that really needs creative, imaginative people to lead.

It's true that, historically, breakthroughs have occurred in museum spaces and in gallery spaces. But it's also true that some of the greatest contributions that have been made by artists have been made outside of [art] spaces.

HM: I think too often we have been content to understand artists' activities as presaging a bigger thing that will happen at a later time—the things that Gordon Matta-Clark or Chris Burden





or Marina Abramovic did are things that Lady Gaga or others might make legible for a wider audience 35 years later. Something that's been exciting about both the incredible rapidity of your projects and activities, but also in a sense their diversity, is that the work responds directly to the opportunity that is presented, whether that's an opportunity in a museum or gallery or an opportunity on the block, an opportunity in St. Louis, an opportunity in Omaha. The reality in all cases is that each project is inventing its own system and finding ways to deploy that system in a context that is meaningful there.

TG: It's funny that you use the words "responding to opportunity," because I think that some people really believe that I'm going to these Midwestern cities because I'm getting paid. They think that the opportunity for me is similar to the way that a consultant would view an opportunity. The work is actually motivated by the challenges of the postindustrial city and the challenges of what [people may] continue to do when those industries leave. How do people socialize across the tracks? That set of challenges is just compelling enough to make me want to stay in multiple places long enough.

We have such a [limited] sense of what it means to live in a city that we imagine one could only *live* where one lives. There's no radical thought around this idea, especially in this moment where you can be anywhere in the world, there's a kind of conceptual globalism that has nothing to do with how much you've traveled. It has to do with how many places in the world one lives at the same time.

In this moment [when] it seems we could create new ways of imagining what home is, people are super-resistant to it. I'm attempting to open up space for myself. That is, I don't want to live at home in one place. I also don't imagine that my entire artistic career has to be shaped around one material, or one principal outcome, or one set of analytics, or one continued rubric.

It is not that I'm unable to focus on one thing. It's the polyrhythmic, polysyncophonic challenge that gets me excited about dancing. It's only when these things are colliding and clashing at the same time that the rhythm feels right. That is, I can never samba to a waltz.

In order for me to samba, in order for me to want to move my body in that way, I need a certain number of complexities to collide. It's only in that moment when there's Chicago, St. Louis, and Omaha happening or when there's [simultaneously] Hong Kong, São Paulo, and Chicago to think about. Then it's like, "Oh, there's my rhythm. There's my samba." When I'm thinking about the White Cube show at the same time that I'm thinking about the end of *documenta*, and Venice ... it's like, "Oh, this is how these three things become one thing and I can think about this one thing over time."

But it requires a different sensibility around the idea of space. How much social or cultural space can we occupy at one time, how much time do we need to spend in a place in order for that to be a legitimate amount of time? The art feels like, in a way, I have to first wrangle the rhythm-makers together or find the right set of disparate circumstances in order to get to something that would feel like a key, a door, a hasp,

and a lock [have] been fitted together—that there's a thing that needs a key.

I want to live with a certain amount of complexity. It's not until it gets to that place that I feel like there's a there there and that there's a project there.

HM: Is it possible to preserve complexity today?

TG: Or is complexity, by virtue of what it is, a moving target? It may be complex for a while, then it disappears, and then it reappears as something else that's quite simple.

HM: It goes back to this problem—cultural entities, journalists, critics, et cetera, want to know what they're going to get and want to be able to wrap their heads around a thing in advance.

So then, fundamentally, this situation where someone might say, "Theaster, can you come to our city and spread some of your place-making magic on our downtrodden place?" presupposes that the activity is not complex and not challenging and doesn't take a deep risk in terms of trespassing into a place.

TG: Right. I've come to believe that the work ... we write off as a bureaucratic policy, or whatever—that work actually is a sacred work. It is a work that requires belief, not only by the individual charismatic, but also by a community of people who believe in the same thing. The thing that would make me cringe, when people would say, "Theaster, is this scalable?" or "How many cities are you going to do next year?" is that they approach it from a totally secular place, where

ABOVE, AND OPPOSITE, ABOVE: Theaster Gates, Hyde Park Art House, St. Louis, Missouri [photos: Mike Sinclair; images courtesy of Theaster Gates / Rebuild Foundation]
OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Theaster Gates, Archive Library House, Dorchester Projects, Chicago, Illinois [images courtesy of Theaster Gates / Rebuild Foundation]



they think that the rules are governed by [market principles and rationalism].

A big part of this work is that people put their lives on the line, and they put skin in the game. They put their belief systems to the test. They don't just go to work every day and try to rebuild a new community. It's not just that. When it is just that, you end up with ugly cultural districts, contrived, Disneyland-like theme parks that don't capture the heart of a cultural experience. They simply pad the pockets of certain people who brought business as usual, or culture as usual, to another place in the same way they brought it from the last city they were in. They put up their banners, their lampposts, their colored curbs, and their Hollywood foot imprints and other shit.

HM: And you leave your inhibitions in the minivan.

TG: You give your three-year-old a dollar to pass to the black guy playing the piano and say, "Thank you, you look like Little Richard. My mommy said you look like Little Richard."

Can artists have a more strategic role in the way culture works? Could we be more intentional? Could we be trained more, differently, better, to not only think about our studios, but to also think about the rest of the world? Artists have a role if we want it.

HM: Exactly. The possibility that I see, in terms of realignment, is that we've misidentified artists as the extremists. In reality, the extremists are often our politicians, our corporate or sports icons: Donald Trump, Lance Armstrong, Anthony Weiner, on and on. These are the rogue figures in our culture. Artists work from a place of radical normalcy. What does it take for

[artists] to be trusted to bring their pragmatism and ingenuity—core assets of their studio practice—to bear directly on the real challenges of the world, in real space?

TG: I'm wondering the same thing. When does it kick in? Even if we assume it can be taught, when does it kick in? Is it after an artist has attained a certain amount of public notoriety that we can set aside our museum based, meaning making [strategies] and take on [the larger role], as citizen-artists? When does it become okay to actually think about the world? The problem is when the actions cease to be artistic works, they start to fall flat, a politician's act.

I do want to make good art, and good, for me, does include words like "meaningful." Good art doesn't happen without context for me. It's not stripped to the material. It's not stripped to a hand gesture. It's not stripped of the accumulated layers of history that go along with the gesture, and the stroke, and the material.

HM: What's the next project?

TG: I have to restore the Stony Island bank. At first I don't want the bank to have to be anything, but the lending bank that would give me the money to restore the old bank needs the bank to be completely planned in advance of the bank being built. It has to be fully planned because my bank has to pay the lending bank their money back.

HM: They don't trust that the nothing can become something.

TG: They don't trust that the nothing can be something. My two options are, don't finance the bank and celebrate the possibility of noth-

ing, or get shareholders, go public, invite Google, bring in Applebee's.

HM: Or become more persuasive about the nothing.

TG: Yes. The bank is going to be beautiful. Of course, it will have work to do; we'll use the building to make meaning and as a platform. But, initially, I'm just excited that the bank, one of the last great architectural treasures of this neighborhood, which was going to be demolished, is still standing on the south side of Chicago. As a neighbor, I was able to stand up and say, "This building is important." I'm not a historical society, and I'm not a big developer, and I'm not even versed in those languages of a certain kind of bureaucracy.

HM: That's where the real and the symbolic bridge. Maybe it's okay for the bank, or the reclamation of the bank, to be symbolic for a while.

TG: Maybe this is where the fun is for me—the space between the symbolic and the real.

Theaster Gates is an artist and cultural planner based in Chicago, Illinois. His work is represented by White Cube and Kavi Gupta, Chicago. Gates is also the founder of Rebuild Foundation and the director of the Arts and Public Life Initiative at the University of Chicago.

Hesse McGraw is chief curator at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, Nebraska. In partnership with Gates and with Rebuild Foundation, the Bemis Center recently launched Carver Bank in North Omaha.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Theaster Gates, *Exhibition Space, Carver Bank, Omaha, Nebraska* [photo: Larry Gawel]; Theaster Gates, *Carver Bank, March 29, 2013 Opening, Omaha, Nebraska* [photo by Chris Machian; images courtesy of Theaster Gates / Rebuild Foundation and Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts]

The Italian American artist Marino Auriti (1891–1980) conceived of *Il Enciclopedico Palazzo del Mondo* (*The Encyclopedic Palace of the World*), a museum of mankind's greatest achievements in all fields of art, technology, and science, after his retirement as an auto mechanic. The planned 140-story mega-skyscraper, soaring up to the staggering height of 2,300 feet, was designated to be located on the Mall in Washington, DC. Auriti's palace, however, was never built. After having been shelved for decades, the model of the building finally found recognition as a unique utopian vision in the collection of the American Folk Art Museum in New York. Auriti's *Palace* will serve as a conceptual blueprint for Massimiliano Gioni's core exhibition, *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico/ The Encyclopedic Palace*, at this year's 55th Venice Biennale [June 1–November 24, 2013]. Gioni (b. 1973, Busto Arsizio, Italy) is based in New York and is an art critic and curator. He is associate director and director of exhibitions at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and has already realized a number of major exhibitions and biennials. He also has a reputation for assuming a poetic, often explicitly literary stance in his presentations of contemporary art.

In his latest endeavor as the Venice Biennale's youngest artistic director thus far, Gioni intends to remain true to his fondness for collapsing the boundaries between artworks and artifacts, and between cultural contexts, formal genres, and historical eras. He previously employed this method as curator of the 8th Gwangju Biennale in 2010, which centered on the epic poem *Maninbo* (*10,000 Lives*), written by the South Korean author and pro-democracy activist Ko Un after his release from imprisonment. As a method of survival, the poet envisaged all the people who were important to him in his life. Addressing the interrelationships between images and the crucial ways we engage with them, Gioni's Gwangju Biennale featured works of art alongside masks, idols, dolls, figures, and other artifacts.

For his International Art Exhibition at the 55th Venice Biennale, spanning the two venues of the Central Pavilion in the Giardini and the spaces of the Arsenale, Gioni plans to draw upon the cross-cultural notions and interdisciplinary dynamics represented by the baroque concept of the curio cabinet or *Wunderkammer* (chamber of wonders). In fashion in Europe between 1600 and 1800, the *Wunderkammer* transcended the borders of time, space, and aesthetic categorization, representing a "theater of the world" wherein the various spheres of nature



Palace of Propositions

Beyond the boundaries
of space and time:
Massimiliano Gioni's
dual-venue exhibition
The Encyclopedic Palace
at the 55th Venice Biennale, 2013

TEXT / BELINDA GRACE GARDNER

INSIDE FRONT COVER: **Melvin Moti**, *Eigenlicht*, 2012, 35 mm film [courtesy the artist and Meyer Riegger] / ABOVE: **Marino Auriti**, in situ view of the artist with *The Encyclopedic Palace of the World*, c. 1950s, wood, plastic, glass, metal, hair combs, model-kit parts, dimensions unknown [photographer unidentified; collection of the American Folk Art Museum, New York; courtesy of Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte la Biennale di Venezia]

and culture converged in a staged drama of creation. Strikingly, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the artistic director of last year's *documenta* (13) in Kassel, Germany, also embraced the *Wunderkammer* concept for giving shape to her thought processes in the idiosyncratic epicenter of her exhibition referred to as the "brain."

Next to Auriti's utopian model of human knowledge, in itself a kind of world-spanning *Wunderkammer*, one of Gioni's other starting points is *The Red Book* of Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), an illustrated and calligraphically scripted book in the fashion of medieval illuminated manuscripts. Jung's *Red Book* will be the metaphorical heart of the Central Pavilion in the Giardini, where the individual national pavilions will be located. Historically, the Giardini presented the now-outdated notion of assembling the world's most significant art for public appraisal. This practice has become increasingly obsolete, with the German and French pavilions, for example, not only inviting artists from other countries as their representatives, but also swapping their spaces this year. As Gioni remarked in a phone conversation with the author in April 2013, naming his show *The Encyclopedic Palace* was also a self-ironic reference to the absurdity of past attempts to gather "all the world's art in one place" in the framework of the Venice Biennale.

In the Central Pavilion, Gioni will bring together 40 of the approximately 160 artists contributing to his dual-venue exhibition, organizing their works and projects as dialogic encounters rather than in the monographic style typical of many previous shows hosted there to date. He is including figures whose work is located at the fringes or distinctly outside mainstream art practice: for example, Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), the cultural philosopher, architect, and founder of anthroposophy; and the French art brut painter Augustin Lesage (1876–1954), who, as the story goes, was induced by the voices of mystical spirits to create art. Gioni's focus will be on art forms that evade clear-cut definitions while broadening the terrain of art to include manifestations of the visionary, the esoteric, the spiritual, the fantastic, and the subconscious across the media and the ages. *The Red Book*, which will be on display in a glass case next to facsimiles of its individual pages, brings to mind Jung's theories on archetypes and synchronicity, providing a rich, atmospheric underpinning to this presentation that also is to pay homage to the book as a form of art, or, in Gioni's words, an "endangered species." It will set the stage for embarking on journeys into the inner worlds of the mind that will be induced not only by the language of images but also by the pictorial power of words.

This post-surreal, associative approach—conflating various levels of reality, including the realm of dreams and the unconscious—will be continued in the Arsenale, the centuries-old shipyard complex once instrumental in making Venice a superior naval and trade port of Europe. In the Arsenale, Gioni's exhibition will proceed from the natural to the technical and artificial, and from the intuitive spheres of the fantastic to the conceptual fields of invention (including Auriti's model), to the virtual domain of our digital era. The latter is exemplified by the Italian video and film artist Yuri Ancarani (b. 1972), who is exploring realities "beyond the screen" in his recent work. Portraits by

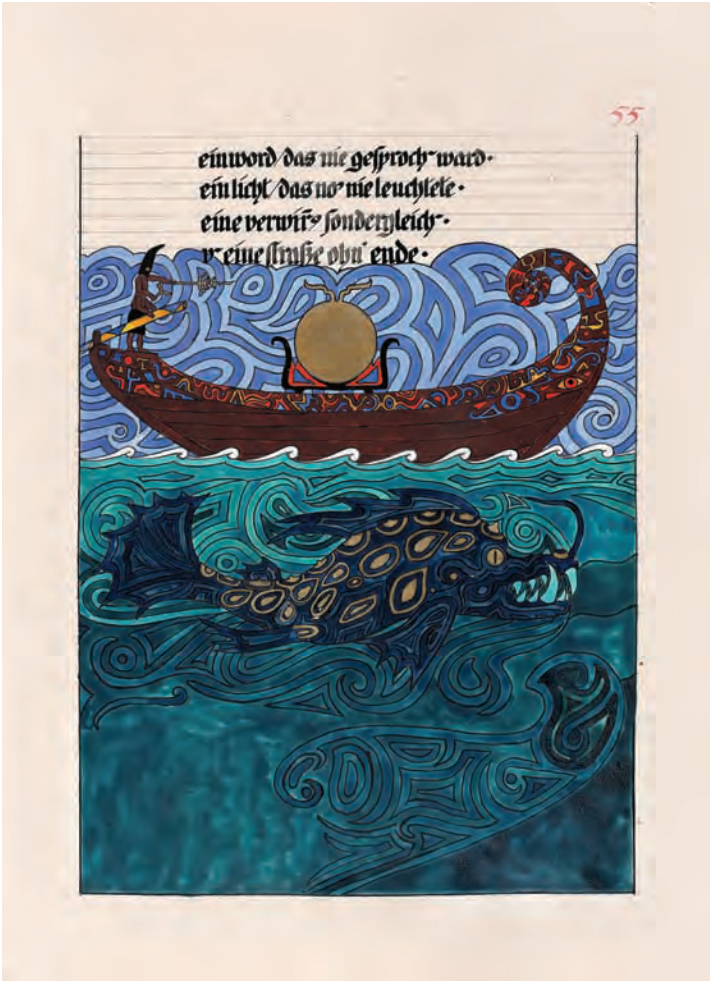
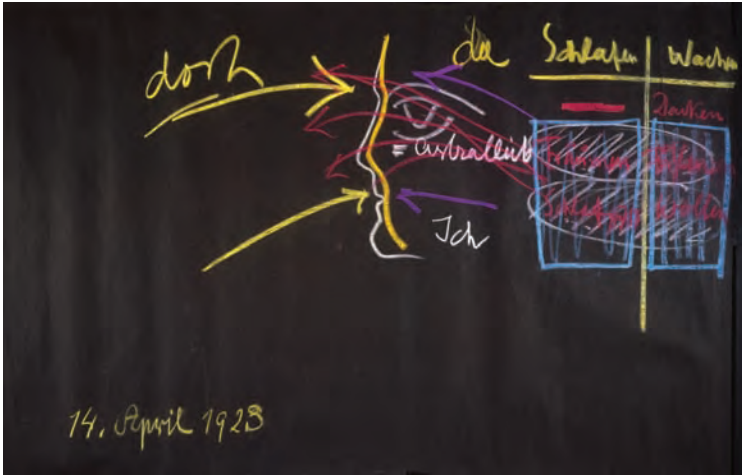
Nigerian photographer J.D. Okhai Ojeikere (b. 1930), concerning the complexities of hair-braiding as art in the artist's home country, will be juxtaposed with a labyrinth of drawings on paper and bed sheets composed by the New York conceptual artist Matt Mullican (b. 1951). The heroine of role-appropriation, Cindy Sherman (b. 1954), is putting together an extensive curio cabinet of her own—with masks, dolls, artworks, and artifacts produced by more than 30 artists—that addresses representations of the body. Danh Vo (b. 1975), known for his works that blur boundaries between public and private space, is relocating an entire church from his native Vietnam to Venice, whereas the exuberant, trashy theatrics of the German performance and installation artist John Bock (b. 1965) will be among the more performative works extending the exhibition into the outside area of the small park adjoining the Arsenale.

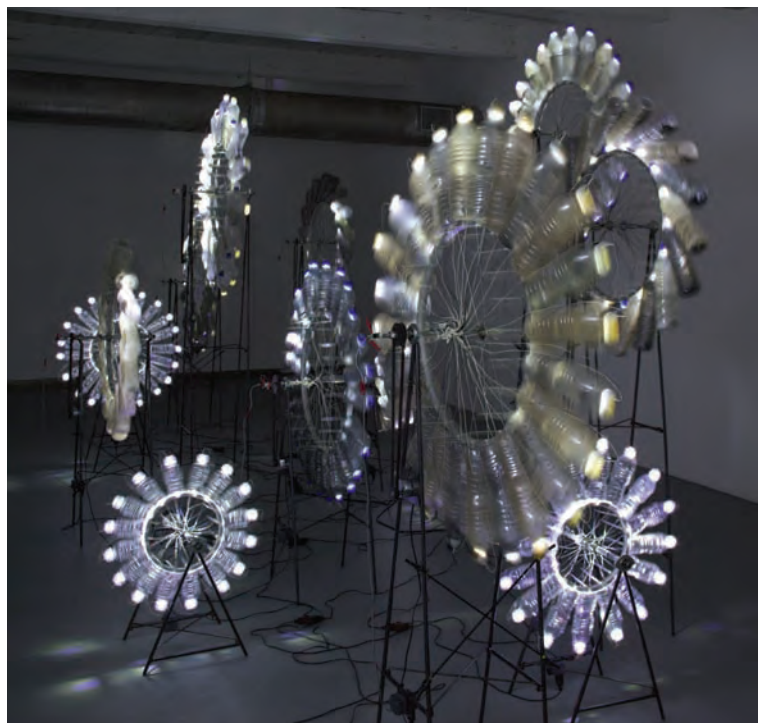
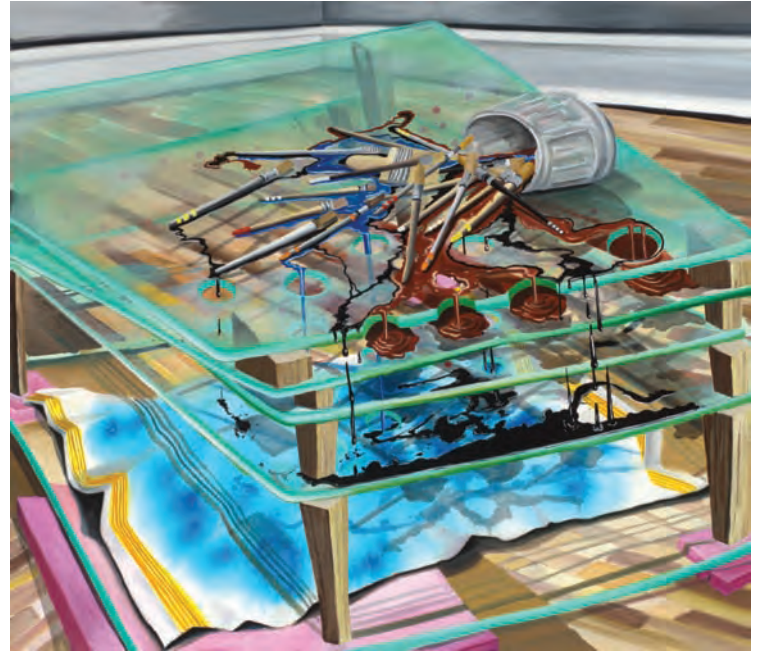
The interflow and overflow of impressions and experiences is intended to trigger feelings of losing one's bearings while expanding a viewer's horizons. Yet Gioni is intent on providing a reduced, museum-like ambience to allow the abundance of works gathered in the spaces, including many expansive installations or sculptural pieces, to affect the space without too great a visual distraction. The art itself will be given ample scope, to further enhance viewers' feelings of being unable ever to fully perceive the exhibition in its entirety. Progressing "deeper and deeper" into the former "factory of the marvelous," as Gioni describes the historical site, "you will see an image wherever you turn." His hope is that "the show will go around the viewer," as opposed to the viewer finding his or her way around the show, and "will open up the spectrum of the 20th century." It remains to be seen just how Gioni plans to develop this concept in the space, and with such an expansive artist list.

Gioni likens the experience he wishes to evoke in both venues of *The Encyclopedic Palace* to Jung's "dialectics between the images in our heart and the world around us," as addressed in the phantasmagorical *Red Book*. In this sense, Gioni claims, the exhibition(s) may serve as "a reflection on the way we use images," both in the spaces of our minds and in the external sphere. In adopting the historical concept of the *Wunderkammer* to create a transnational, transtemporal, and also transmedial "other space" in Michel Foucault's sense, he is also investigating issues of national identity, the globalization of the various worlds through which we are passing today, and the interrelationships informing them. By composing *The Encyclopedic Palace* as an associative, open-ended "theater of the world," Gioni is inviting us to look to the inside after taking in what surrounds us, and, as when reading a book, "to see with our eyes closed."

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OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **Rudolf Steiner**, *Drawings on a Blackboard*, 1923, chalk on paper, 102 x 153 x 3.8 cm [courtesy of the Rudolf Steiner Archive, Dornach, Switzerland]; **Carl Gustav Jung**, *The Red Book* (page 655), 1915–1959, paper, ink, tempera, gold paint, red leather binding, 40 x 31 x 10 cm [© 2009 Foundation of the Works of C.G. Jung, Zürich; first published by W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 2009]; **John Bock**, performance view of *Unzone/Eierloch*, 2012 [© John Bock; courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ, London]; **Guo Fengyi**, *Confucius*, 2007, colored ink on rice paper, 299 x 69 cm [courtesy of Long March Space]; **J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere**, *Aja Nlosa Family*, 1980, gelatin silver print, 60 x 50 cm [© J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere; courtesy of André Magnin (MAGNIN-A), Paris]; **Thierry de Cordier**, *MER MONTEÉ*, 2011, oil paint, enamel, and Chinese ink on canvas, 170 x 270 cm [photo: © 2013 Dirk Pauwels, Gent; private collection, Belgium; courtesy of the artist and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels]





OH, CANADA

at MASS MoCA, NORTH ADAMS, MA

Oh, Canada, at Mass MoCA [May 27, 2012–April 8, 2013], was an overwhelmingly complex and complete survey of contemporary Canadian art. The exhibition featured 62 artists and more than 100 works created mostly in the past two years. Although the exhibition is now closed, a hefty gem of an exhibition catalog stands as a detailed record, not only of the exhibition but also of the many years of research, travel, and conversations that went into a project of this scope. There were many pieces in the exhibition, and it took a while to get the lay of the land, so to speak. The works were not organized thematically, although themes did emerge as one walked through the various spaces: an engagement with the landscape, theatricality, and irony, to name but a few. The following were a few highlights among the many works.

Visitors were welcomed by a flashing white, neon rainbow sculpture, Divya Mehra's *Hollow victory (You gotta learn to hold ya Own They get jealous when They see ya with ya mobile phone)* (2012)—one of the exhibition's many ironic works. Near the rainbow's bottom, the glowing text reads, "We Made It In America." Once through the door, viewers encountered a large, brown bear that stood upright. A bear is a ubiquitous symbol of the Canadian wilderness; Janice Wright Cheney's *Widow* (2012) consists of a taxidermy bear with woolen flowers covering its entire anatomy. From there, viewers' eyes were drawn to Kim Adams' brightly glowing installation *Optic Nerve* (2010), a small delivery van that the artist altered by punching circular holes throughout the car's white body. The center of the cargo compartment was filled with lights that cast beautiful, soft patterns onto the gallery walls.

One of the most outstanding works in the exhibition was *The Mountain* by Graeme Patterson (2012). Part of Patterson's larger series *The Secret Citadel*, this sculptural installation consisted of a central mountainous shape flanked on either side by a domestic structure. Each piece rests atop a reused swivel chair or table legs, so that the three dioramas appear to be floating with cardboard tunnels connecting them. In the miniature house on the left, all of the furniture has been removed and stacked outside the structure on a patch of fake fur grass. Upon peering into this house's window, viewers saw a small video projection of an animated cougar "drawing" the design for the sculpture onto the wall.

Patterson intentionally left gaps in the "snow cover" of the mountain diorama—made of white blankets, plywood, and fake fur trees—so viewers could peer inside at an incredibly detailed world. It looked like an amazing artist's studio or workshop space. Inside, three projection screens showed animated theatrical creatures dancing to electronic music, jumping on a trampoline, and roller-skating. An animation of a cougar and a buffalo activated the space by playing the instruments set up inside the workspace. Mysterious, complex, and utterly engaging, the piece was a memorable centerpiece to the exhibition, touching upon many trends in contemporary Canadian art that the exhibition's curator, Denise Markonish, points to: identity and landscape, a return to craft and making, and everyday objects.

In sharp contrast to this elaborate display of craft and technique was Micah Lexier's simple yet fun, conceptually inconspicuous work *A Coin in the Corner* (2012). Easily overlooked, the piece consisted of a small coin the artist had placed in the corner of the huge main gallery space—apparently only one of 100 such coins installed throughout the museum. A subtle gesture, this work emphasized the sheer immensity of a site as large as Mass MoCA.

On the opposite end of the same gallery hung Kim Morgan's enormous, softly glowing mixed-media installation *Range Light, Borden-Carleton, PEI 2010* (2010). Suspended from the walls and ceiling by rope rigs, the piece is a latex imprint of a historic but decommissioned and neglected light beacon, a structure used to provide safe passage for ferries traveling in and out of Prince Edward Island's harbor. The skin-like surface of the landmark is covered with little bits of paint and wood that came off during the imprinting process. The physical residue adds to the physical texture and also the sensory (think "smell") experience of the piece. Nostalgic and mysterious, the sagging structure serves as an eloquent memorial to past maritime practices and acknowledges the price of progress as these beacons have been replaced with newer technology.

In the shadows of *Range Light*, viewers encountered the hilariously ironic music video *Oh, MASS MoCA* (2012) by the Cedar Tavern Singers (aka Les Phonoréalistes). The singers are the musical duo Mary-Anne McTrowe and Daniel Wong, who, accord-

ing to McTrowe, "form a performance art project that looks and acts like a band." The campy green-screen video features Canadian clichés such as images of flying maple leaves, beavers, curling, igloos, and even the British queen. The lyrics, set to a catchy tune, are about the exhibition *Oh, Canada*, with references such as "Over 400 studio visits were made" and "What exactly is contemporary Canadian art?" Several newly minted, ironic art terms are also introduced: neo-lumberjack abstraction, post-ironic hockey, and beaver dam earthworks. The piece provides a funny yet poignant stab at both the seriousness of the contemporary art world and the place of national Canadian identity within its discourse.

Like most huge survey shows, *Oh, Canada* included both hits and misses. Most importantly, however, curator Markonish introduced a new generation of Canadian artists to an American audience that had probably never heard of many of them. In doing so, Markonish provided a real service, adding to the current discourse on contemporary—and not just Canadian—art.

—Leonie Bradbury

OPPOSITE LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: **Graeme Patterson**, *The Mountain*, 2012, mixed-media installation, 20 x 10 x 10 feet [courtesy of the artist and MASS MoCA]; **The Cedar Tavern Singers (Mary-Anne McTrowe and Daniel Wong)**, video still from *Oh, MASS MoCA*, 2012, CD and video [courtesy of the artists and MASS MoCA]; **Diane Landry**, *Knight of Infinite Resignation*, 2009, mixed media, dark room kinetic with white wall and white ceiling, 10 x 19 x 14 feet [courtesy of the artist; commissioned by L'OEil de Poisson, Quebec City, with funding from the Canada Council for the Arts]; OPPOSITE RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM: **Etienne Zack**, *Spills in Safe Environment (abstraction)*, 2009, acrylic and oil on canvas, 54 x 62 inches [collection of Penny Wright; courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver]; **Sarah Anne Johnson**, *Cheerleading Pyramid*, 2011, unique chromogenic print with acrylic ink, edition 2 of 3, 20 x 30 inches [courtesy of the artist; collection of Max and Lucy Falconer]; **Gisele Amantea**, *Democracy*, 2012, flocking on wall [courtesy of the artist and MASS MoCA]



**THOMAS LANIGAN-SCHMIDT:
TENDER LOVE AMONG THE JUNK**
at MoMA PS1, NEW YORK

Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt's recent exhibition at MoMA PS1, *Tender Love Among the Junk* [November 18, 2012–April 7, 2013], showcased his clear virtuosity in color and surface and material invention (the “junk”). The reuse of refuse and trash in his practice, for which Lanigan-Schmidt is known, has often been dismissed as his gimmick. But the “tender love” is the aspect of Lanigan-Schmidt's work that has escaped art world attention. The show helped rectify this neglect, and it revealed Lanigan-Schmidt as an artist involved with questions of loss and spirituality and as a master of manipulating ideas and senses of space, both physical and psychological. He's often characterized as a trash sculptor, but the association with trash goes beyond just using what he can find to reveal a deeper link between the sacred and the profane, a connection shown clearly in this exhibition.

Lanigan-Schmidt works to remake the space of divinity, using not the everyday but the refused. He creates a spiritual vision, a *jouissance*, born of the denied, the defiled, and the excluded. His use of this material, with imagery that is deeply gay, iconic, and Catholic, affirms the role of transformation in religious and artistic practice. With obsessive precision, Lanigan-Schmidt creates objects, images, dividers, tapestries, walls, and worlds filled with ornamented surfaces and hypnotic colors. One freestanding work in the show, *Iconostasis* (1977–1978), had all of the detail and lurid color of a Siene painting (Duccio immediately comes to mind). The scale and presence of the work are arresting, but upon closer investigation, the raw physical facts of how it is put together, how it is literally assembled out of bits of colored foil and ties, things that are discarded or ignored, hits the viewer full-on. This is not a parodic image: it is beyond sincere. It is Lanigan-Schmidt taking on the role of icon-maker, working diligently to imbue his creation with a certain kind of spiritual life. And working with base materials, with trash, puts him in a truly transformative role. He is making something out of nothing. The trash in his work is no longer trash. Even the rats

that he fabricates out of colored foils and wire have a sense of mystical import to them.

This show made me think more deeply about Lanigan-Schmidt's overall project, which to my eyes involves mining (in terms of digging and bombing) received ideas about the presence of and access to the divine. Digging into these ideas, it is imperative the viewer look at the various kinds of spaces Lanigan-Schmidt invokes, explodes, and explores to convey his ideas. These spaces are physical and psychological, sacred and social.

This was the first time I saw a broad view of Lanigan-Schmidt's work, and indeed a lot of the tropes of the Catholic mass were present. Vitrines, chalices, altarpieces, icons, and kneelers were all there, as was a disembodied voice intoning a ritual that sounded like a rite but on closer listening revealed a strange relational dynamic. It was like listening to someone's confession. This sonic exchange was the audio overlay of the show, so the visitor had the sense of walking in late to church.

It was quite spellbinding to come into a show at PS1 and completely forget about the building itself. The installation of the show had the look of an enthusiastically decorated church basement. Imagery was everywhere. Things that were supposed to be security stanchions were carriers of colored cellophane. Lanigan-Schmidt's often-remarked-on “maximal” aesthetic was on full display. Because PS1 is a fascinating structure on its own, visually and historically, its architecture can overshadow the work shown in its galleries. I have been to shows at PS1 and looked more at the beautifully painted wood floors of the gallery than at the work on the walls. It's not that the exhibitions weren't good, but rather the alteration and repurposing of the space (a former school) creates certain challenges for looking at art there. Decisions were made to preserve elements of the former life of the building. This commitment to have the present spaces contain traces of their past functions results in a complex and complicated visual experience. In a way, a successful exhibition at PS1 should make the

museum visitor unaware of the museum space. The stakes are higher and the attempt is more difficult because of the assertion of the past but Lanigan-Schmidt's exhibition created a situation in which the building melted away and the focus was entirely on the new space created in its place.

With *Tender Love* the work seemed to conscript the building into the exhibit's purposes. The sectioned gallery spaces became alcoves and chapels. The polished floors became additional reflective surfaces for the bouncing light. The exposed vaulted brick ceilings reinforced the feeling of being in the basement of a church, with the holy place *above* the visitor. This affirmed the separation and loss in the work; it became the divine reflection of something denied. The profane became the sacred. Lanigan-Schmidt builds his own church. He creates his own liturgy that is intoned in the space. Makes his own holy books. Gilds his own icons. And there is no irony in his practice. In Lanigan-Schmidt's hands, the tinfoil behaves like leaf made from some precious metal. The work is so beautifully wrought that it produces multiple moments of wonder. In addition to pondering how it was made, the viewer can become transported by color and light. Lanigan-Schmidt constructs and creates his foil and cellophane images with the attention of Sassetta painting the face of the Virgin in egg tempera. In fact I would not call Lanigan-Schmidt's practice obsessive; I would call it devotional.

In this exhibit, placement, formation, and physical position of the works echoed ecclesiastical tropes and idioms so specifically that visitors might have felt compelled to kneel in some places; a kneeler was even provided. Or one's desire to touch could have been frustrated by a stanchion, which quickly revealed itself to be another work by the artist—a barrier that really held nothing back, with golden chains actually made of cellophane and other spray-painted materials and glue. Shiny, crinkled garland prevented viewers from getting too close to foil chalices and pictures of “saints,” such as an ornamented image of James Dean. The fabrication vacillated

ABOVE: Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *Lollipop Knick Knack (Let's Talk About You)*, 1968–1969, foil, printed material, linoleum, glitter, cellophane, plastic wrap, staples, wire, string, and other media [image courtesy of the artist and Pavel Zoubok Gallery]



between overwrought re-presentations and tacky theatrical glamour. The exhibit created an ecclesiastical demi-monde.

Some works probed the poetics of the ornamentation of desire. *Lollipop Knick Knack (Let's Talk About You)* (1968–1969) turns a reclining nude male figure into a conversation piece. This freestanding tabletop sculpture reframes the male body as a site of aesthetic contemplation—in other words, a place of worship. The pole that rises from the figure's genital region (which is covered by a star) ends with an orb of glittering light. To place this work in a site of discussion (knickknacks were conversation pieces in well-tended homes) is to place the notion of a radiant male sexuality in the trope of domestic space. Again, the refused image (gay male sexuality) is coupled with the refused material. The affirmation comes from embracing, reconfiguring, and (re)presenting the negations and thus making them impossible to ignore. In addition, to imbue such images with spiritual and celestial tropes of the cosmos is to make them emblematic of the divine, even when that divinity—in fact, humanity—is denied to the holder of that sexuality.

Loving the gay male body is a fraught experience. Instead of venerating or adoring it, many see this body as a promiscuous carrier of disease. Lanigan-Schmidt's devotional engagement makes this suspect body a surface for decoration, for honor, and for gilding, just as Sassetta uses the intricacies of egg tempera to touch the divine image of the Virgin. Lanigan-Schmidt encrusts images, books, and objects until they embody the visual weight of devotion. The results are visionary experiences of the body's image. These visions can incorporate both the culture of the gay male body (muscle culture, drag culture) and religious culture, as in his *The Infant of Prague as a Personification of Liberation Theology* (1986). Accessing both spaces allows Lanigan-Schmidt to align ideas about adoration of the body. The kneeler is in the chapel and the tearoom (a site for sexual encounters). Glory is an idea and also the hole through which sexual congress can happen. And all of it is blessed and

sanctified by the radiant energy that is the heart of this work. "Tender love among the junk" can describe the men meeting on the trash-strewn piers of old Chelsea or in the littered reeds of the Ramble. These places are holy, sanctified by the presence of the body.

Lanigan-Schmidt links performative religious space with that of the theatrical—the space of layering and personae. Transformation as a tool is used by the psyche in drag. Putting on the clothes is part of the transformation, which is completed by assuming a name and persona. The artist's work manifests new saints for a new faith and homes for a new royalty. *The Gilded Summer Palace of Czarina Tatlina* (1969–1970) embodies all of this transformative energy. Part set for a drag show and part childhood play palace, the work is imagined and rendered with such commitment and force that it is hard to maintain that the material it is made from is garbage. The tendrils and garlands of translucent strips of fabric in the installation glitter, shimmer, and wave like royal standards in an audience room. This installation in the exhibit took complete advantage of the vaulted brick ceilings and the chair rail of the venue. The gossamer and gold are seductive. Moving in and through the work overstimulates the senses. You lose yourself in it. It is an invitation to dream. Upon closer inspection it dislocates. What was sublime at a distance reveals its mundane nature up close and as this happens, the level of craft and engagement with these base materials returns the original sense of wonder. I kept asking, who would do this? Who is this for?

There's an exchange between a man with AIDS (Prior) and a drug-addicted Mormon housewife (Harper) in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches*:

Harper: I'm a Mormon.

Prior: I'm a homosexual.

Harper: Oh! In my church we don't believe in homosexuals.

Prior: In my church we don't believe in Mormons.¹

Lanigan-Schmidt takes us to church. It is not a pop

culture stereotype of a gay church (one cannot imagine a fabulous event taking place); rather, it is a church where the gay tropes of Catholicism, a religion that is about the transformed body, are revealed. There is transformation and ornamentation and mortification of the body. There is the transformation of the bodily into the spiritual through ornament. There is the fantastic body of the angel with the head surrounded by divine light and grace. There are places to kneel to reveal the glory of God. And some of the kneeling places have holes where that glory can come through.

Catholicism features a body stripped and mortified, turned abject, and through this debasement, the body is revealed to be something divine. This basic metaphor of bringing the sacred out of the profane is key in the work. The materials Lanigan-Schmidt uses aren't just humble—they are trash, discarded, ruled no longer useful. One can easily connect the redemption of these materials to the redemption promised in the Catholic church, a redemption denied gay people who act according to their nature.

So while Lanigan-Schmidt takes us to church, he takes us to *his* church. He also takes us to the Ramble in Central Park, to a Russian Orthodox church, to a small neighborhood church, to an overdecorated apartment, to "dirty bookstores," and to cathedrals. He uses all of the forms and figures of religious art not to degrade them or to remove their power. On the contrary, because they *are* the forms through which we understand power, glory, divinity, lamentation, and loss, he remakes them in his own image. His work reveals the sacred that comes from the discarded, the refused, the denied, and the excluded.

—Steve Locke

NOTE

1. Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches*. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993), 30.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *The Gilded Summer Palace of Czarina Tatlina*, 1969–1970/2012, mixed media [image courtesy of the artist and Pavel Zoubok Gallery]; Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, installation view of *Tender Love Among the Junk* at MoMA PS1, 2013 [image courtesy of MoMA]



gloATL
ATLANTA

Prophetically in a 1967 lecture Michel Foucault predicted that profound changes to our concepts of space would result from the emergence of digital culture, stating, “space takes for us the form of relations among sites.” In the book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, first published in 1980, French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari famously defined *rhizome* as a nonlinear model of culture that develops in a new space without beginning or end, but “always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*.” *Hippodrome*, performed at The Goat Farm Arts Center in Atlanta [March 21–25, 2013] by the collaborative dance and performance group gloATL, examined the interiority of urban life, in a new and very old kind of space, created by movement and gesture, light, pigment, reflection, tastes, scent, and sound. As if mirroring new spaces of digital culture, the collaborative elements of dance, music, lighting design, and visual and culinary art in this performance engaged real and imagined space with multiple sensory experiences.

A hippodrome was a long oval stadium in ancient Greece, created for horse and chariot races and ringed with multilevel seating for spectators from all ranks of society. Choreographer and gloATL founder Lauri Stallings chose the name of this ancient stadium for this first piece designed specifically for the historic 19th-century Goodson Yard warehouse at The Goat Farm Arts Center, gloATL’s creative home. Inside the historic industrial space an elevated wooden track planted with grass and live flower beds was built with help from installation artist Gyun Hur to ring the oval dance floor, which was then bounded by mirrors and edged with a fragile dusting of finely shredded green silk flowers. Near the warehouse entrance a circular pit was dug into the floor and filled with more of Hur’s silk flowers. Spectators watched from the risers of the hippodrome space.

Before the house lights seemed to dim, as the last of the audience trickled in, a single dancer began to slowly creep along the flower bed track and down, into the hippodrome space. Then the high-tech chamber music ensemble Sonic Generator, accompanied by four soloists from the Atlanta Opera, performed Estonian composer

Arvo Pärt’s doleful *Stabat Mater*. The solo dancer was joined by her ensemble, and Communication, the first of three sections identified in the program as “Triptychs,” commenced. As the lighting and music changed, the second section began with individual dancers being lifted in *Celebration*, and then at one end of the space a single dancer discovered Hur’s shredded flowers, lifting handfuls in wonder as the soft powder flowed through her fingers. Later, from the opposite end of the hippodrome, scented smoke wafted from beneath the risers as performers offered edible flowers and small vials of liquid (provided by Atlanta restaurant Top FLR) to willing audience members.

At one point the singers moved into the middle of the hippodrome space, giving the aural component corporeal existence, making the music visible. The language of movement vicariously conveyed the sensation of touch to the audience, as one dancer ritually sank into the pit of silk flowers, the hippodrome’s “belly button,” physically dug into the warehouse floor. She spread yellow and white silk flowers onto the floor as she re-emerged. Near the end of the third Triptych, as water began to rain down on the live flowers, the sound of raindrops and blue-green atmosphere evoked a sense of *Loss*, followed by the subtle emergence of clear *Light* (the subject of the last movement of the Triptych). Light played perhaps the least obvious but still essential role in *Hippodrome*, as designer Rebecca Makus focused on the center of the space, neutralizing the surrounding brick walls of the warehouse.

For Hur, the *Hippodrome* landscape is both a continuation of and departure from her explorations of literal and metaphorical space. For example, one of her first installations was composed of shredded silk flowers collected from cemeteries to re-create her memory of her parents’ wedding quilt in Korea. As a small child she imagined floating above and looking down on the quilt laid across her parent’s bed. The work included strips of brightly colored, finely shredded silk arranged carefully in lines on the floor and on a shelf lining a wall. A hole was cut into a wall above the work so that the audience could view it as she had remembered imagining it. For

Hippodrome, Hur continued to expand the physical and metaphorical viewing space by including mirrors that increased the dancers’ realm and dematerialized the viewing space between the real flowers, her silk shreds, and their reflections. To enhance the multisensory nature of the *Hippodrome* performance, for the first time Hur’s flowers were intended to be touched, which for Hur resulted in a cathartic “surrendering” of her work to the audience. This surrender enabled the artists and the audience to fully interact with the hippodrome, a concept that was central to the collaborative nature of the performance. The “belly button” filled with flowers provided a center for these interactions. It also expanded the literal space of *Hippodrome* beneath the historic warehouse floor.

Hippodrome’s expansion of performance beyond sight and sound to include touch, smell, and taste, dimensions even digital culture hasn’t been able to reach, mirrors the expansive space of narrative that resulted from the emergence of hyperlinks and social media. Digital space is truly shaped by relationships among sites. With online media, writing has become nonlinear and collaborative, and narrative occurs in the space between, beneath, and above the text. Similarly *Hippodrome* was necessarily collaborative and nonlinear; within Hur’s environment, gloATL’s narrative existed in real space, reflected space, and imagined space. If *postmodern* really means *in response to modern* rather than *after modern*, then perhaps postdigital is the best way to describe the new space of Hur’s strips of pigment on flat surfaces in real space that links sites of memory with perception, or of *Hippodrome*’s collaborative, sensory experience, for both the performers and the audience, that exists beneath, around, and in the center of Goodson Yard.

—Dinah McClintock

ABOVE, LEFT AND RIGHT: gloATL, performance view of *Hippodrome*, 2013 [photos: Thom Baker; courtesy of gloATL]



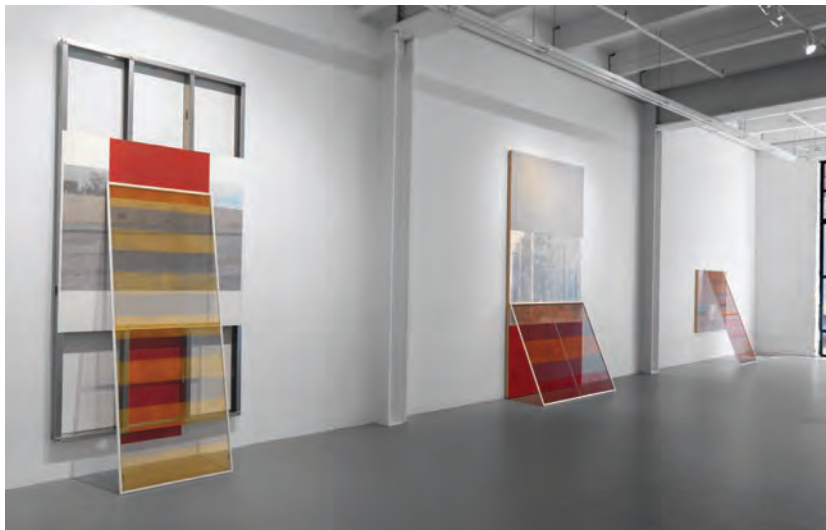
JESSICA RANKIN
ATLANTA

Needlework and fine art have always seemed to exist in separate realms, but they're brought together in an approach that is at once unassuming and intriguingly provocative in Jessica Rankin's solo exhibition *Passages* at the Savannah College of Art and Design's Trois Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia [February 18–May 31, 2013]. In four works of embroidery, Rankin explores the interstices of these disparate realms.

The four large-scale works on view, which Rankin refers to as embroidery paintings, may evoke painterly abstraction, but Rankin's embroidery, stitched onto gossamer organdy fabric, seems to half-exist: delicate, fragile, ghostly, and drained of vivid color in their subtle representative intent. Indeed, the wall behind the works is still visible, enhancing their luminous quality. The threads drip, like paint, from one part of the work to another, often connecting text and images into a weblike network, supporting a richly unique contemporary exploration of materials that defies traditional notions of needlework.

Domestic embroidery was long considered part of the female domain. Before feminist art of the 1960s and 70s this type of private work was difficult to position in the discourse of fine art, given the greater public attention to painting and sculpture. Drifting away from the more traditionally masculine realms of monumentality and overt representation, with focus on the private, intimate, and contemplative spaces—ones of solitary absorption and personal reflections—seems to intrigue Rankin the most. Time is as much her medium as organdy and thread. With a methodical and meditative hand, Rankin makes mental associations permanent, creating maps that loosely chart abstracted memories. The artist doesn't simply replace oil paints with thread, but her work also seems to take into account the vast associative differences between the materials. (The suggested metaphor of a dual inheritance and departure from painting isn't just a broadly historical one: Jessica Rankin is the daughter of famed Australian painter David Rankin.)

The organdy works in the SCAD exhibition are from Rankin's *Skyfolds* series, and the text and images in



LISA SIGAL
BOSTON

For her first solo exhibition in Boston, *Shifting Horizon* at Samsøn [April 5–May 25, 2013], New York-based artist Lisa Sigal engaged in her ongoing dialogue with space, place, material, and landscape. This work in particular responded to the connections between painting and architecture and between measurement and scale, with the paintings directly referencing the architecture in which they dwelled. Ultimately, this show offered a meditation on the range of possibilities available when approaching the contemporary landscape.

Sigal probes the boundaries of landscape through her use of materials and media. This viewer experienced these pieces as a shifting play between interior and exterior, as the assembled forms seamlessly moved between painting and architecture. Sigal's interest in marginal landscapes, their pervasiveness on the periphery, and her fascination with the overlooked was ever-present in the work. Interested in pushing the idea of what a painting can be in its barest form, Sigal employed framing elements that included metal studs, screens, mounted wall sections, and images printed on Tyvek that adhered directly to those demarcated wall sections. The works were firmly rooted in painting but the placement of the screens on the floor—they leaned directly against the works on the wall—created a sculptural element. Through her intent to directly engage with the architecture of the gallery, Sigal created a slippage between the interior space and the spaces referenced in the imagery. This engagement offered a conversation between the materiality and illusion of place; the works acted as windows within the gallery, revealing an ever-expanding definition of landscape. The screens mediated between actual space and the veiled digital landscapes beyond. They acted as frames; the colors painted on the screens reflected onto the floor and the other works at the same time, veiling the images and making them more elusive while also acting as an extension of the site beyond the surface of the art.

The images for this show were generated from sites including Los Angeles and Brooklyn. When I spoke with Sigal after seeing the show, she said that she initiated this particular body of work in LA because she was inter-

them derive from constellatory maps of dates significant to the artist. The guiding visual framework of *Quis Est Iste Qui Venit* is gleaned from the arrangement of stars on the night the artist's mother died. Overlaying the celestial map is vibrant chatter in the form of text, the letters often obscured or connected by loops of thread. Words here have surreal connections in both their colliding meanings and in their substantive lines and patterns, rooted in the artist's interest in surrealist and concrete poetry and likewise reminiscent of random thought patterns. A single, conclusive meaning remains elusive, but the methodical and repetitive process of creation is forefront in these works, often suggesting natural processes, a spider's web-making, and even the pods and tendrils of the organic world. There is an intriguing openness and lack of specificity that keeps us mysteriously removed yet mystifyingly connected at the same time.

The exhibition also includes two large-scale drawings consisting of crosshatched pencil marks that, like the embroidery pieces, draw viewers toward contemplation of the meditative process involved in the making of the works as much as to the finished material object. The intricate constellatory and outrageously detailed patterns are almost impossible to take in as single images, their tangled linear complexity suggesting a larger internal geography, a reflection on the act of perception rather than the object perceived. Although difficulty comes from trying to specify exactly what Rankin's celestial maps and landscapes show us in their investigations of the elusive, misty conscious and subconscious realms, memory, and someplace between legibility and indecipherability, her work suggests that any map of the known world is also as deeply personal.

—Andrew Alexander

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Lisa Sigal, installation view of *Shifting Horizons* at Samsøn, 2013 / ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Jessica Rankin, *Untitled*, 2011, embroidery on organdy, 59 x 59 inches [courtesy of the artist and Trois Gallery SCAD-Atlanta]; Lisa Sigal, installation view of *Shifting Horizons* at Samsøn, 2013 [courtesy of the artist and Samsøn, Boston]



SUMMER WHEAT CHATTANOOGA, TN

ested in the vastness of the place and the idiosyncratic architectural elements found throughout it. She focused on the LA River, a marginalized architectural element butting up against even more marginal architecture as it meanders toward the Pacific. Pursuing the conversation of site with architecture, and architecture in relation to water made her also consider Brooklyn as a source for some of the work included in the show, especially given architecture's relation to the waterfront in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. For Sigal, the contested areas—who builds where and why, investigating marginal spaces, and the specificity of that condition, all while thinking about it as a kind of abstraction—are issues that motivate her work.

While in LA, Sigal returned to plein air painting, something she had not done in more than two decades, and she admits it took her by surprise. She was interested in directly re-engaging with factors of light, time, and place, as well as with the social experience that she encountered on the street while working. Her reinvestigation of this traditional mode of painting helps to expand the dialog in relation to contemporary landscape, as the digital images on Tyvek, which can be read as cool and distanced, also can read as paint because of the Tyvek's texture.

The inclusion of the plein air oil painting, in contrast with the more contemporary materials and processes of the installation, offered a full range of experience. This inclusiveness is the crux of the dialog in Sigal's work between Romantic notions of traditional landscape painting and the cold, removed interactions we have developed with landscape in situ. In this work we saw a hint of the possibilities yet to be explored.

—Gregory Eltringham

Social narrative and extreme impasto painting came together like cake and frosting in Summer Wheat's installation *Few and Far Between* at Chattanooga's Cress Gallery of Art [February 13–March 22, 2013]. Wheat has created a world peopled with characters ranging from zombies to aristocrats and celebrities. Both her paintings and their incorporated three-dimensional objects are made cohesive by encrusting them with heavy, textured paint. The weight of the paint seems to convey the depth of the detritus accumulated over the centuries that her narratives illuminate.

Wheat uses paint like a baker uses icing. The paint is premixed and heavily piped onto the finished canvas background through various extruders, some commercial and some custom made. The depth and sculptural quality of her paint application demands that it be considered three-dimensional, as it shares similarities with relief carvings. In *Wall of Flesh Tones* and *Portraits of Aristocrats and Peasants* (2011) Wheat's examination of the historical absurdity of classifying people as either aristocrats or peasants was enhanced by her appropriation of contemporary product design. The extruded background pattern on the base panel (*Wall of Flesh Tones*) was based on contemporary dollar-store tablecloths, though it had the elegance of 18th-century velvet brocade. The colors, ranging from black and browns to various tans and pinks, were all based on hues found in today's commercial cosmetics. Further augmenting her use of surface, the artist attached smaller, scattered portraits of individual aristocrats and peasants (*Portraits of Aristocrats and Peasants*) to the front of the panel. The portraits depicting "peasants" were minimally defined. The "aristocrats" had thick embellishments of molded paint and garish smears of color. The thick accumulations of paint appeared to be a commentary on the material holdings of the wealthy being vastly greater than those of the poor.

It was the Best of Times (2012) is a collection of objects, shelf sculptures, and three paintings depicting the life of a working-class couple who hold multiple jobs. *Mud Room* (2012), the largest of the three paintings, consists of eight feet of spray-painted and extruded patterns suggesting flocked wallpaper and chain-link

fence; it served as a residential wall for integrating paint-encrusted mops and shoes along its periphery in the manner of stage set design. Additional narrative information was supplied by the paintings *Kiss* (2012) and *Lunchbox* (2012), and by three shelves holding objects. These combs, toothbrushes, mirrors, food, and dishes were encased in both thick coats of paint and clay.

Summer Wheat's figuration is entirely emotive, and the distorted faces depict the internal essences of her subjects. The *Zombie* series is indulgently crude. Muted green paint is broadly smeared like decomposing skin between the extruded lines of the portraits in *Alex Murphy* (2010) and *Moldy Brain Eater* (2010). Surviving teeth are sculpted in singularly defined relief. In *Missing Mandible Melvin* (2010) the encrusted lines of paint and color form a surface design somewhere between one of Leonard Baskin's tortured-face woodcuts and the trashed remains of a banquet.

The concept of a star chamber harkens back to 15th-century England, where Privy Council members would meet in a secret room whose ceiling was painted with gilded stars. The representation of such vastness reminded the members of their place in the cosmos. Wheat's installation *Star Chamber* (2013) jumps ahead 600 years to find 21st-century celebrities considering idiosyncratic style influences for their minions. The wall painting is a monumental assortment of spray-painted gold disks and white star silhouettes backed by endless lines of piped black horizontal squiggles. The painting plane seems to slide from the wall to the floor constructions, built in the reverential manner of church hassocks. Seven paint-encrusted place settings cover these constructions, each devoted to contemporary luminaries such as Chris Rock and Oprah Winfrey. Madonna's place setting includes a plate covered with braided Kabbalah bracelets. Michael Jackson's setting has a white face on a mirror, and Olivia Newton-John's has a TV dinner and a cupcake.

Like a bakery filled with ornately constructed, artificially colored worlds, Wheat's viscous confections pull the medium of paint into a sculptured, spatial dimension.

—Denise Stewart-Sanabria

PAGE ONE: Summer Wheat, *Hypnotized*, 2011, acrylic and oil on canvas, 72 x 96 inches / ABOVE: Summer Wheat, installation view of *Few and Far Between* at Cress Gallery of Art, 2013; foreground: *Mud Room*, 2012, acrylic and oil on plaster and MDF board, 96 x 48 x 24 inches; background: *Star Chamber*, 2013, wall component: mixed media on MDF board, 96 x 192 inches, floor component: 8 x 192 x 24 inches; right: *Hypnotized*, 2011, acrylic and oil on canvas, 72 x 96 inches [courtesy of the artist and Cress Gallery of the Art, Chattanooga, TN]



DETOUCHED DUBLIN

Detouched isn't really a word, but if *touch* involves making contact, then *detouched* proposes a reversal of that action. In the context of *Detouched*, which was guest curated by Anthony Huberman for the Project Arts Centre [January 24–March 30, 2013], this nonword carried a slightly different, or perhaps expanded, meaning. Rather than invoking the idea of de-experiencing tactile sensations, the artworks offered something more complex in that they promoted intimacy and forestalled it. Touch operated at a remove through the provision of simulation and filtered or indirect contact, and through the use of machines. These concepts were effectively introduced by the reproduction of a mechanical hand on the poster used to promote the exhibition. Isolated in a white field, this slightly macabre and attention-grabbing image functioned as an appropriate symbol.

In the text accompanying the exhibition Huberman stated that in today's world touch no longer requires being close to objects. He clarifies this shift, in part, by describing how he surveys the morning newspaper. The process has been reduced to turning pages and skimming. The paper is not held and read. He also referenced our use of the Internet to access a seemingly limitless amount of information. In this example, touch no longer necessitates proximity; instead it brings us close to things that happen to be very far away. A.K. Burns' colorful video series *Touch Parade* (2011) underscored these aspects. The artist's seemingly anonymous re-enactments of fetish videos, sourced from YouTube, provided close-ups of Burns' limbs pumping vehicular pedals, negotiating a muddy pond, crushing vegetables, struggling to burst a large balloon, and putting on multiple pairs of rubber gloves. Revealing the physical properties of a range of materials, these captivating demonstrations were at once investigative, humorous, and nonsensical, if not altogether strange. The artist's contact with the materials being manipulated almost always occurred through other materials and exhibited a degree of inquisitiveness, the intensity of which easily

induced apprehension in the viewer. Presented simultaneously on monitors that ring the entrance to the gallery, the videos were visible from the building's lobby and the street outside. This incongruous set of images caused people to stop and look. It also formed a permeable border or threshold through which visitors had to pass to take in the rest of the predominantly colorless presentation.

Negotiating that space provided visitors with a range of halting experiences. The hiss of compressed air emanated from the soundtrack of Dennis Oppenheim's *Air Pressure (Hand)* (1971), an intimate video that detailed the effect this invisible force has on the skin. Seth Price's eerie *Untitled (Masks)* (2006), consisted of four identical transparent vacuum-formed faces. Set one in front of the other, they projected out from the wall. At the same time the multiple layers of plastic took on a hazy cast, and facial features blurred or dissolved into one another. In *Untitled* (2007), Price juxtaposed ghostly outlines of hands with plastic-laminated veneers to negate any directness of touch, and its sense of honesty. Across the gallery's back wall, Sunah Choi's large-scale rubbings, *Abdrücke (Imprints)* (2011–2013), isolated aspects of the local urban environment through the documentation of floorboards, wire mesh screen, tires, and a manhole cover. Forgoing personal interpretation and narrative, Choi's hands were employed in a very utilitarian fashion to record the textures of materials used for travel or on which Dubliners tread. Their presentation not only caused me to take notice of such unexceptional features upon leaving the gallery, I felt it had altered my relationship to the city.

Space, place, and the body merged in Alice Channer's *Amphibians* (2012), an evocative floor-bound conglomeration of materials that referenced an array of production processes and surface treatments. Configured in an undulating arrangement simultaneously indicative of a serpent's movement and an assembly line, the work also alluded directly to the human form

by including aluminum casts of clothing. Moreover, peering down at the broad strips of polished stainless steel revealed the upper echelons of the gallery as well as the viewers' reflections.

In certain respects *Detouched* came off like a series of pseudoscientific demonstrations surveying the physical properties of materials, spatial relationships, and perception. It explored ways in which we comprehend the environment and interface with the evolving world of technology. Although the exhibition did not limit itself exclusively to an exploration of the hand as the principal instrument through which we experience touch, *Detouched* highlighted the hand's changing role. Huberman's proposition that the hand has now merged with the machine referenced a host of developments, examples of which range from keyhole surgery, wherein the surgeon relies on video images to perform intricate procedures from outside the human body, to the prevalence of text-messaging, which demands extensive use of the fingers' dexterity to contact individuals and corporate bodies across vast distances. This inherently contradictory idea made it difficult to know how to relate to the work in the gallery. At once dispassionate and objective, the selections also surprised and bewildered. Their complex and haunting presence not only unsettled me, but also begat ongoing speculation about this state of affairs.

—John Gayer

ABOVE, LEFT: Alice Channer, installation view of *Amphibians*, 2012, mirror-polished stainless steel, cast aluminum, machined, hand-carved, and polished marble, elastic; ABOVE, RIGHT: foreground: A.K. Burns, installation view of *Touch Parade*, 2011, set of 5 HD videos; background: Sunah Choi, installation view of *Abdrücke (Imprints)* nos. 1, 23, 26, 30, and 38, 2011–2013, frottage, graphite, pastel on paper [images courtesy of Project Arts Centre, Dublin]



MATT CALDERWOOD / DAVID JABLONOWSKI NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE, UK / GATESHEAD, UK

The BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art (BALTIC) is a prominent, well-funded museum with international reach that has been host to both the British Art Show 6 and Turner Prize 2011 exhibitions. Visually dominating the formerly depressed south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, BALTIC is a celebrated regeneration project and major tourist attraction. In 2012, the institution opened BALTIC 39, a mixed-use space across the river on Newcastle-upon-Tyne's hip, central High Bridge. A collaborative venture with Northumbria University, BALTIC 39 comprises classrooms, city council subsidized artist studios, a sponsored professorship (held by British conceptual artist Christine Borland), and a BALTIC-programmed, top-floor project space. The proximity and practices of the two BALTIC galleries both support and challenge each other.

BALTIC 39's position within a merged educational and professional setting distinguishes it from local college galleries such as Newcastle University's Hatton Gallery and low-rent studio-cum-exhibition venues such as the Biscuit Factory in Tyneside's post-industrial Ouseburn Valley. Its combined energy fosters the best characteristics of a scholarly and more business-like environment, and as a meeting place of curatorial experimentation. In practice the BALTIC 39 project space has so far worked in two ways: as a supplementary gallery for BALTIC's large-scale exhibitions and as a site for process-based works that aspire to the type of open-ended investigation that the context calls for.

Paper Over the Cracks [BALTIC 39; March 15–June 23, 2013] is the third exhibition to explore this emblematic vein and the first UK solo show for Northern Ireland-based artist Matt Calderwood, known for his performances, video, and sculpture works. Calderwood's previous installations have included precariously balanced—yet controlled, static—structures. *Paper Over the Cracks* explores the implications of this formula's breakdown by using similarly composed systems of objects. Six modular, isometrical sculptures made of untreated steel and rubber occupy the gallery's screening room and the building's exposed rooftop terrace.

Throughout the exhibition we see Calderwood's reconstructions of his *Exposure Sculptures* (2013): their flypaper-covered blocks sag and rust outdoors, and then are changed indoors as he peels back the paper to reveal the structure's eroded surfaces.

Because of its physical proximity to BALTIC and the precedent set by the deliberate conversation between the two galleries for Jim Shaw's simultaneous exhibitions [*The Rinse Cycle* at BALTIC and *You think you own your stuff but your stuff owns you* at BALTIC 39, both November 9, 2012–February 17, 2013], *Paper Over the Cracks* and *Tools and Orientations* [BALTIC; February 1–June 2, 2013] by German artist David Jablonowski, who shares Calderwood's physical and conceptual concern with systems and their transformation, concurrently enter into dialogue with one another. Calderwood and Jablonowski each present cohesive installations of sculptural, wall-based, and video works; thinking about them in parallel kindles a connection in the critical readings of both exhibitions.

The wall-based works in both exhibitions demand attention in their spatial and conceptual framing of each show. At BALTIC 39, Calderwood's show features bold, monochromatic images on paper—printed using some of the exhibited modular blocks as rubber stamps—that depict orderly systems of linear shapes. Indexical (like photographs), they are ghosts of the sculptures' smooth surfaces, which eventually erode during the exhibition and transition like the careful geometric compositions that Calderwood has rearranged from individually spaced objects into disorderly heaps in the gallery. In Jablonowski's *Volume* (2012) three massive Styrofoam blocks that look like scaled-up biblical stones—or contemporary flat-screen tablets—are arranged into a spiral path that leads around the exhibition. Along the perimeter of the BALTIC gallery there are fairly flat, wall-mounted assemblages of historically disparate communication materials and accessories: clay, wood, photographic film, printing plates, and acetate iPad screen protectors. Like Calderwood, Jablonowski has taken apart and reorganized the basic elements of a system,

abstracting the works and giving them new meaning and perspective in situ.

BALTIC and BALTIC 39 provide different didactic materials for these exhibitions. There are no physical wall labels offering a description of *Paper Over the Cracks*; instead BALTIC 39's website supplies a video in which the artist, filmed in his studio, talks informally about his work. In contrast, BALTIC's *Tools and Orientations* is equipped with wall labels, vinyl introductory text, and an informed gallery assistant, which help orient the viewer quite differently in each gallery. These differences extricate somewhat divergent readings of the two exhibitions. The overwhelming amount of information provided alongside Jablonowski's show suggests that knowledge is key to appreciating his work. The artist's choice to combine fragile, beautifully composed materials that elicit a sensual response yet deny inexpert interpretation suggests that his work engages in a power play: without the right sort of knowledge, the seductive artwork remains mute and inaccessible. In contrast, Calderwood's ostensibly destructive processes, his continual, hands-on redevelopment of the work feels intimate despite there being very little didactic material provided by the gallery. Calderwood's interventions reveal a sense of productiveness in taking apart and manipulating something that has been painstakingly constructed. In staging a studio-like space—focused on process and therefore free from the fixed, textual descriptions (titles, dates) that accompany finished work—BALTIC 39 creates a more forgiving environment for thinking about the work on display.

Indeed, the critical exchanges in difference to the BALTIC and BALTIC 39 spaces lends to the institution's position as a powerful regeneration project with aims to democratize contemporary art and might itself be an innovator in the subject of contemporary art museum and project spaces uniting under the same institution.

—Becky Huff Hunter

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Matt Calderwood, installation view of *Paper Over the Cracks* at BALTIC 39, 2013; David Jablonowski, installation view of *Volume* at BALTIC, 2013 [images courtesy of the artists and BALTIC 39/BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art]



RYAN TRAVIS CHRISTIAN RALEIGH, NC

Ryan Travis Christian's *Well, Here We Aren't Again*, at the Contemporary Art Museum Raleigh [February 22–June 17, 2013], features several excellent examples of the artist's signature comics-style works on paper. The main draw, however, is his installation *Guess You Had to Be There*, which transforms the lower level of the building and gives new context to his drawings. Using newsprint tones and the graphic properties of lines, Christian creates an experiential version of the disorienting and obfuscating world of his drawings.

For the installation *Guess You Had to Be There*, Christian employed the planes of the room as panels of a comic strip, using the walls and floor as platforms for his cartoonish imagery. Wielding long strips of white tape, Christian transformed the gray concrete floor of the gallery into a disorienting scape of diagonal stripes and chevrons. The stripes don't merge with the floor, however; the discolorations of the concrete establish them as a separate layer, which reinforces the op art qualities of the striped strata and gives the illusion of unstable ground. Styrofoam blocks camouflaged to resemble the lined concrete of the building emerge at points where the stripes converge, like mountains formed at tectonic points. These blocks are anthropomorphized with the large, lidless eyes and wide, vacuous smiles of cartoon characters. Innocuous objects—a bottle, a book, and a stone—placed on these heads reinforce their 3-D status but also mark them as intermediaries between the 2-D world of the drawings and the real space of the gallery. The merging of 2-D with 3-D through the use of distinct layers is at the heart of Christian's work.

A 31-foot-long drawing that dominates one wall is the crowning work of *Guess You Had to Be There*. Created over the course of three weeks for this exhibition, the drawing features a decapitated snake of ridiculous length. Its body stretches back and forth across the work, not unlike the classic arcade game *Snake*, in which a long, thin creature travels a perimeter and picks up food while the player tries to avoid having it hit itself. The composition is multilayered: square placards bear-

ing cartoon images and graphic shapes peer out from behind the snake and from atop it. Diagonal lines fill the snake, and radiating lines traverse the space beneath it, but a video documenting the installation reveals there is even more than meets the eye.

A time-lapse video documenting the installation process reveals a hidden drawing of a reclining man beneath what is visible. Christian's decision to completely obscure the original image is typical for the artist. His process involves overlaying images and bold lines and erasing large areas to create thick fogs that provide "cloud-cover" for figures and images to hide behind. Although he utilizes the confined space of the comic strip panel with iconography from early cartoons, Christian expands the spatial potential of the medium through his heavy layering techniques. In doing so, he creates multidimensional drawings that resemble cartoons but extend far below the surface of the image.

By incorporating hidden elements into his drawings, Christian creates ominous worlds in which every shadow contains a boogeyman. Take *Calisthenics* (2012), one of the smaller, framed drawings in this exhibition. A cartoonish figure bends over backward. Its body is composed of wavering sets of parallel lines, which are broken by the patches of cloud shapes covering the work. As a result, the body appears like a vertiginous mountain of strange topographies. Eyes appear among the clouds, like the reflection of the original figure or a new, hidden person. It's possible that no rational, concrete figure is intended; though we may perceive this jumble of two hands, feet, and eyes is a body, we cannot prove this is true. A row of stage lights at the top of the image reminds us that we are viewing an illusion. Christian breaks all the rules of cartoon space and reason and, by doing so, upsets the basic assumptions we use when viewing images.

—Lilly Lampe

MARIAH GARNETT SAN FRANCISCO

In Mariah Garnett's sculptural 16 mm film installation *Encounters I May Or May Not Have Had With Peter Berlin* at 2nd Floor Projects [February 16–March 26, 2013], a film was projected onto a disco ball hanging from the ceiling of the darkened interior, reflecting a kaleidoscope of small images onto the gallery walls. The images from the film were bounced off the surface of the mirrored ball, allowing illuminated glimpses, in miniature, of the filmmaker posing in various outfits as the 1970s gay sex icon Peter Berlin. Each frame of the film was hand-painted by Garnett, creating a textural and colorfully saturated effect. This immersive display looped 100 feet of film, offering an activated and engaged viewing experience rather than the traditional or more passive way in which a film usually is viewed. Inspired by an interaction with Berlin, Garnett's carefully rendered installation was not a conceptual disco but instead a self-reflexive rumination and recasting of identity politics involving a fleeting interaction with a persona that exists exclusively in the artist's own photographs.

Encounters is a project that sheds light on the myriad ways, both conscious and unconscious, in which we can manifest our personal heroes in our own bodies, gestures, and identities. Garnett's total project involves multiple components that have evolved over a period of three years and have been exhibited in various formats. The most recent iteration was as a three-part, single-channel, 16 mm film that was screened in San Francisco at SFMoMA as part of the *Dirty Looks* series, a program offering select film screenings from the queer cinema discourse. In the film version of the project, complex relationships between domestic and public space are explored, especially as they pertain to queer history. Filmed primarily in Berlin's San Francisco apartment, the film's three parts shuttle the viewer between ruminations on the public and the private: the recognizable personas and outfits of a gay sex icon made "public" through his photographs and delicately recaptured through personal interviews and conversations with Garnett. The film narrative commences with Garnett's adoption of Berlin's persona in a spirited way by utilizing

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Ryan Travis Christian, installation view of *Well, Here We Aren't Again*, 2013 [courtesy of CAM Raleigh]; Mariah Garnett, film still from *Encounters I May Or May Not Have Had With Peter Berlin*, 2010, 16 mm installation [courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles]



JACK WHITTEN / ANGEL OTERO SAVANNAH, GA

outfits and stances that closely resemble his in style and attitude. Next, a voiceover details a self-conscious encounter between the two filmmakers that occurred in Berlin's apartment, where their identities temporarily interacted in a somewhat elusive exchange.

In contrast to the film, the installation version of *Encounters* at 2nd Floor Projects offered a view of the work as an exploded diagram that reformatted an often immaterial or theatrical experience of the film. In this instance, visitors moved through an activated experience of the project that related more closely than the cinematic version to Garnett's ecstatic perceptions of Berlin's relationship to images of his own body. Ultimately, this multimedia portrait sensitively depicted a prominent gay figure who helped shape the public images of queer culture and homosexuality with a simultaneous intertwining of Garnett's own personal perspectives and reflections on his life in a compassionate and careful way.

—Emma Tramosch

Side-by-side solo painting exhibitions *Jack Whitten: Erasures* [December 18, 2012–March 31, 2013] and *Angel Otero: Material Discovery* [February 8–May 5, 2013] at the SCAD Museum of Art presented a unique opportunity to view an intergenerational dialog between two significant bodies of work that have impacted process-based abstract painting. Although Whitten and Otero demonstrate distinct processes in their individual practices, their shared desire and propensity to continually investigate paint materials connects these artists—and ultimately displaced the boundaries between the two separate museum gallery spaces.

Erasures presented paintings and works on paper from the mid-to-late 1970s by Whitten, during the period when he was living and working in New York and was one of the first artists to participate in Xerox Corporation's artist-in-residence program. The references and inspiration for the works in *Erasures* were clearly linked to machine printing processes. The mechanical movement of lines of ink across paper surfaces produced the resulting smudged and suspended ink and toner markings that became the beginnings of the very early development of Whitten's signature pull technique—a method of pouring and dragging thick layers of acrylic paint over the canvas with squeegees, rakes, and Afro combs.

Many of the paintings in *Erasures* incorporated a monochromatic palette with thin horizontal or vertical lines of paint that covered the entire surface of the canvases. To remove the subjectivity of gestural marks, Whitten fabricated giant comb-like tools, inspired by a simple experiment using an Afro comb, to pull across layers of poured paint. These tools gave the paintings the look of being made with mechanical precision, and the effect of having been produced by a single operation or gesture, which further distanced the work from any application or gesture by the artist's hand. The comb had the additional effect of revealing hidden information underneath the layers of shapes and lines, embedded and suspended like ghost images that didn't fully print.

The surfaces of these works appear to hover, almost as a reverberating, vibrating noise atop the surface.

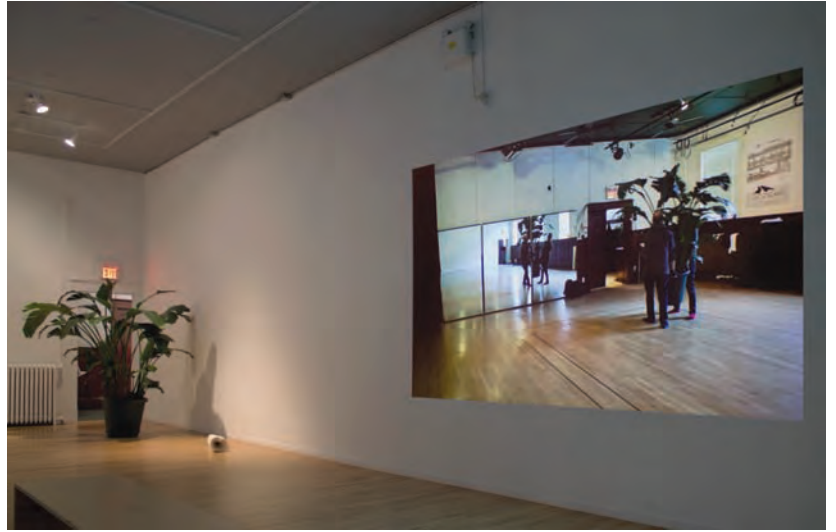
The entryway of the gallery provided a glimpse of historical context by featuring three of Whitten's early experiments on paper for which he used pastel and powdered pigment to create smudged lines and marks across the surface. The traces of pigment were left suspended in swaths of gray horizontal and diagonal lines. These three works revealed some of the artist's earlier techniques and thinking that would inform the later and even more mechanically processed paintings.

Color in Whitten's works is by no means completely erased, and because of his predominant use of black, white, and gray, the subtleties of color that sporadically drag, zip, and streak through the surfaces are even more noticeable. The warm gray and yellow rectangular shapes in *Sigma IV* (1977–1978) are simultaneously revealed and hidden underneath thin horizontal black-and-white lines. Looking at this painting is like looking through window blinds and trying to make sense of a room or space beyond them; the eye's focus oscillates constantly between the blinds themselves and the shapes of things they partly obscure. All of the visual information is clearly on the surface of the canvas in Whitten's paintings, but they carry this strange optical effect of depth and movement. Although the title *Erasures* implied removal, and quelled notions of the gestural hand, these works were anything but absent.

In the adjacent exhibition, *Material Discovery* by New York-based Otero, we were presented with eight new and recent paintings that demonstrated very different methods of handling the effect of gesture and mark-making in painting. Otero's development of a technique and process was, like Whitten's, deeply influenced by his own questioning of material and investigations into the transformative properties of paint through varying processes.

For Otero, denying his own gesture entails first applying multiple, thick layers of oil paint onto glass panels,

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Jack Whitten, *Sigma IV*, 1977–1978, acrylic on canvas, 64 x 63.5 inches [courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates]; Angel Otero, *Untitled*, 2010, oil paint skins collaged on canvas, 78 x 62.5 x 4 inches [collection of Ninah and Michael Lynne; courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York and Hong Kong]



ABBAS AKHAVAN VANCOUVER

peeling up the layers, and re-placing them on a new surface, leaving the “painting” subject to folds, stretching, and alterations for which he has limited control. The skins appear to be simply resting on top of the canvases, not fixed but instead casually suspended with folds and wrinkles that are manipulated to look like draped fabric. This method leaves any initial marks and compositional decisions—which often imply figures and landscape—vulnerable and subject to the process of dislocating the painting from its original surface and placing it literally onto another.

Otero’s gestural use of paint in *Material Discovery* referenced that of the abstract expressionists yet also looked to 17th-century French painter Nicolas Poussin, some of whose compositions directly inspired Otero. The Poussin reference seemed most evident in *SK-EB* (2012). This painting indicates landscape abstractly, rendering any recognizable imagery that may have existed through vertical folds and wrinkles that maintain focus on the surface and paint material.

The proximity of the two exhibitions appeared deliberate and allowed for pointed connections between the two bodies of work and the artists’ respective inquiries into the materials and processes of abstract painting. Despite a difference of more than 30 years in the making of these works by Whitten and Otero, the artists share a dedication to questioning what paint can do.

—Kalin Allen

In common understanding, the greenhouse is a private space for cultivation. Under concentrated conditions, new seedlings are nurtured through a short period of intense dedication in order to mature into independent organisms. The greenhouse is therefore a transitional space for incubation, where seedlings enter, but exit as hardy plants capable of laying down roots and flourishing in the natural world.

The greenhouse as a metaphor is quite apt for the origins of artist-run spaces, especially when the greenhouse in question is Vancouver’s Western Front. As the site and subject of Abbas Akhavan’s recent project *green house* [March 7–April 13, 2013], Western Front’s appearance as a nondescript green building makes it a self-reflexive space of inquiry.

Since taking over the Knights of Pythias Hall 40 years ago, the founders and subsequent landlords and tenants of Western Front have been a cornerstone of artistic husbandry in Vancouver’s cultural landscape. In turn, the physical space and reputation of Western Front as a gallery and performance space has become a model of artist-run culture in Canada, developing from an interdisciplinary foundation to a cross-pollinating hub for local and international artists.

For Toronto-based Akhavan’s solo exhibition, a lushly forest-green bird of paradise, *Consort* (2013), sits in the sparse gallery. Accompanying the plant are two videos, a plaster cast, a wall rubbing, and a voice. In the video *Crew* (2013), Akhavan and Western Front exhibitions curator Jesse Birch are seen carrying *Consort* from room to room, moving and shifting the plant through every corner and crevice, bathroom and stairwell, hallway and apartment, studio and office inside Western Front. Tracing the interior of the artist-run space, as well as showing its hidden hallways and rooms, *Consort* takes on the presence of an illuminating protagonist, driving the narrative action forward as an instigator of movement and change.

In staged tableaux, each scene firmly establishes its setting before the artist, curator, and *Consort* make their entrance. After the trio exits, the camera and viewer are

left to linger upon the deserted scene. There is a sense of completion and satisfaction before each cut, heightening the drama of all unfolding scenes. Anticipating each entry and exit, the camera and viewer become increasingly entrenched in this absurd journey. Enabling their narrative arc, the camera and viewer become active co-conspirators in the cyclical journey of the artist, curator, and “protagonist” as they navigate an artist-run space on a perpetual loop. The annals of Western Front are layered with institutional memories collapsing with mythologized private lives. There is little difference between what lies in the archive of the gallery and what has simply become everyday decor. As a muddy amalgamation of public and private space, from the cellar up to the roof, Western Front transforms into uncharted waters as we watch this trio push and pull, often with difficulty and clumsy care, through these spaces imbued with the traces of accumulated histories. The personal and the public spaces blend into one seamless journey. Washrooms and foyers transition into private hallways and stairwells, the decor of an arts administrative office shifts into the decor of an artist’s apartment, and lines are blurred between what is officially archived and what remains private memory.

Entering its midlife stride, Western Front’s programming has grown self-reflexive, with an increase in examining its own identity and archive. Western Front remains home to two senior artists, whose lives, past and present, remain deeply rooted in its history and consequently its future. Distinguishing the past from the present, new boundaries are forming around conceptions of public and private histories that are intricately linked to a shared space. The past becomes a living archive, and Akhavan’s *green house* directly addresses the lineage and history of space as both a lived and performed routine. Running in parallel to the changing dynamics of artist-run spaces, the past must be acknowledged, but the present appears on loop, moving through a cycle of what we have known and headed toward what we may still discover.

—Amy Fung

ABOVE, LEFT AND RIGHT: Abbas Akhavan, installation views of *green house*, 2013, gallery sitter reading from *The Natural History of a Garden*; *Consort*, bird of paradise plant; *Tame*, plaster cast; *Crew*, video projection [photo: Maegean Hil-Carroll; courtesy of Western Front]

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TOP TO BOTTOM: Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) bus tour *Margins in our Midst: A Journey Into Irwindale*, 2003; CLUI, blank plaque image from the Morgan Cowles Archive (images courtesy of CLUI Archive)



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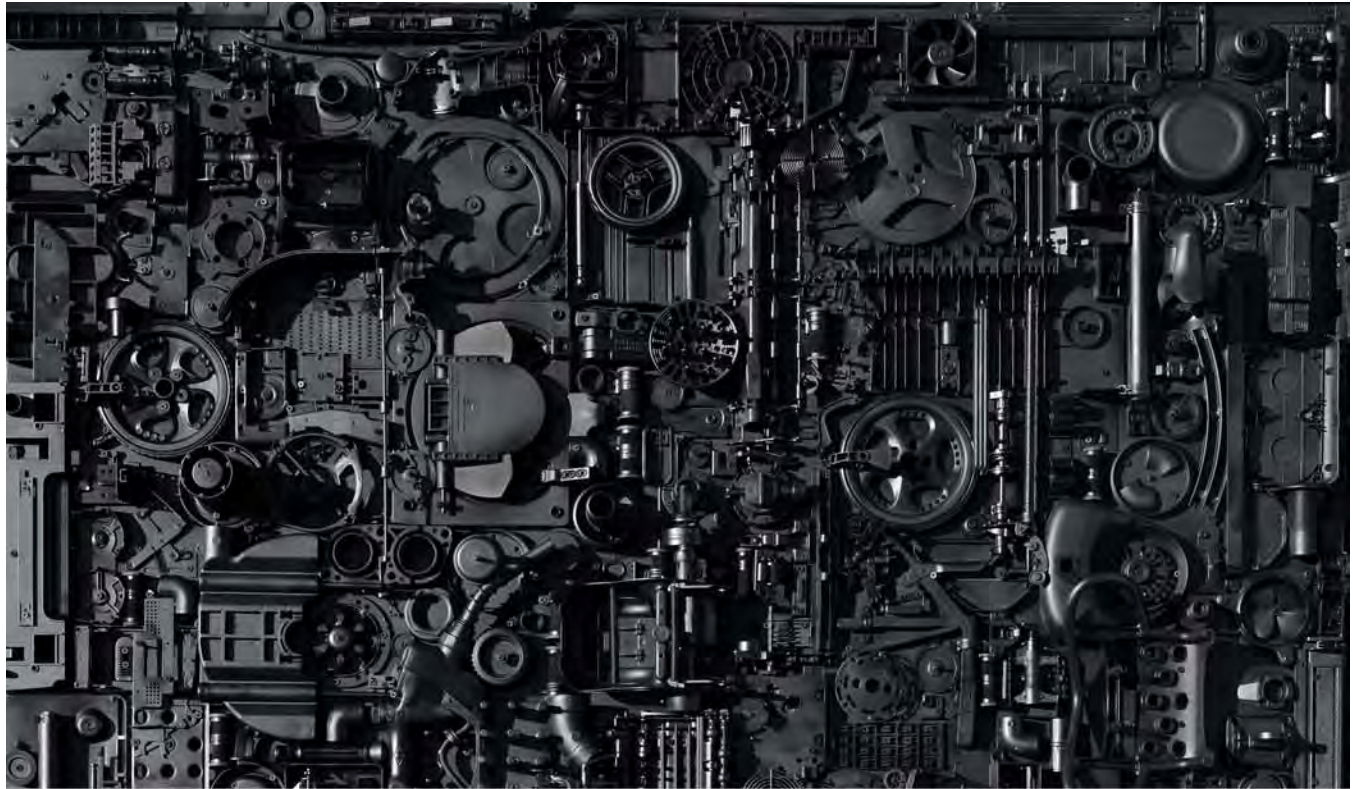
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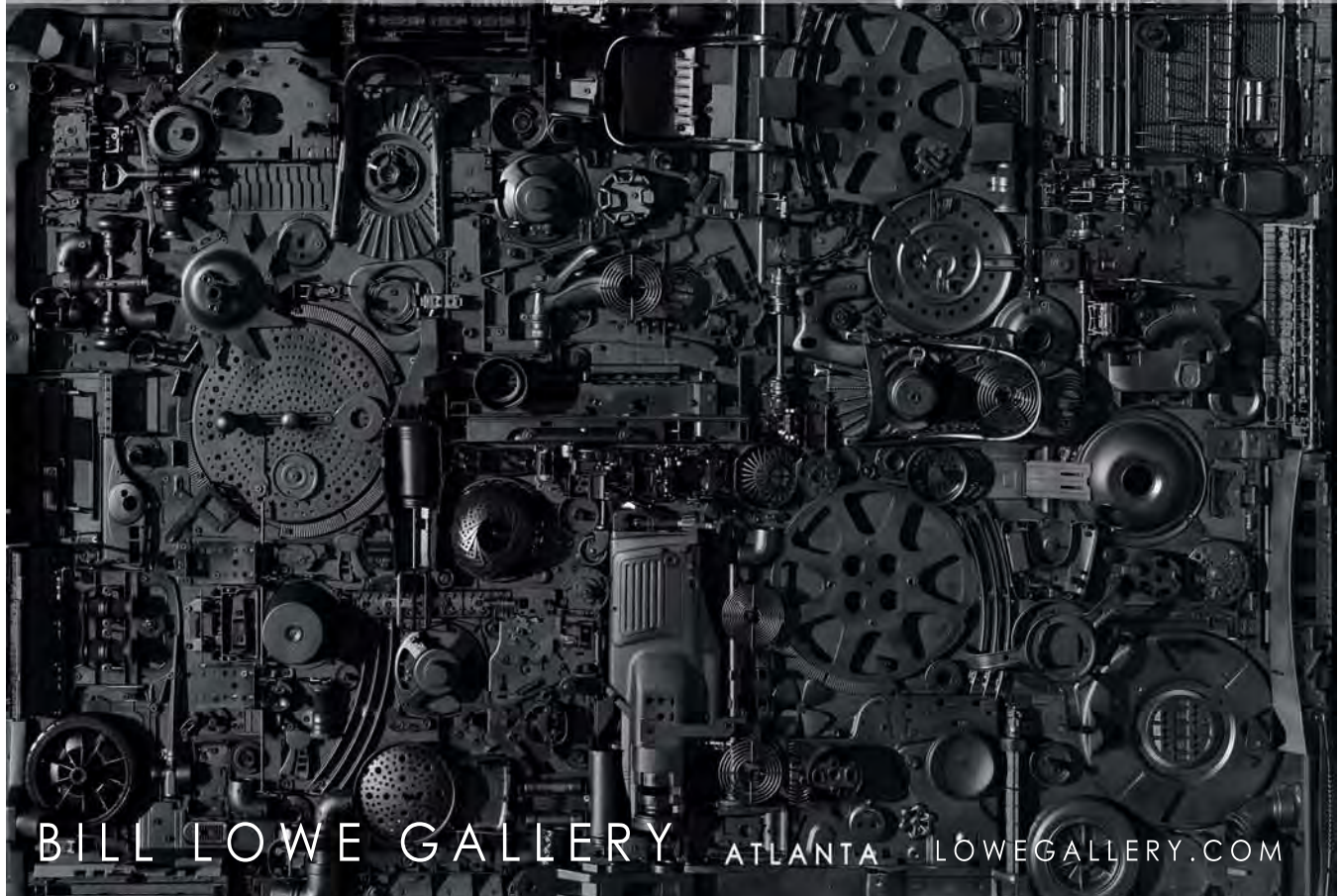
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