

Fridericianum

#speculationsonanonymousmaterials  
 #space #viewerscorporeality  
 #fridericianum #objects #  
 #abstraction #speculative  
 #desubjectivized #surface  
 #transferirrelevant #rapid  
 #reflection #symbolicord  
 #generatedimages #circ  
 #presence #processbase  
 #imagestock #serialrepe

Graphic design: Zak Group.

*Speculations on Anonymous Materials*

September 29, 2013–January 26, 2014

**Opening:** September 28, 17–22h

**Press preview:** September 27, 11h

Fridericianum



GROUP SHOWS  
 hows-of-2013/  
 IONS INTERV



Ed Atkins, Still from "Warm, Warm, Warm Spring Mouths," 2013



Ken Okiishi, gesture/data, 2013 (R) Katja Novitskova, Approximation V, 2013

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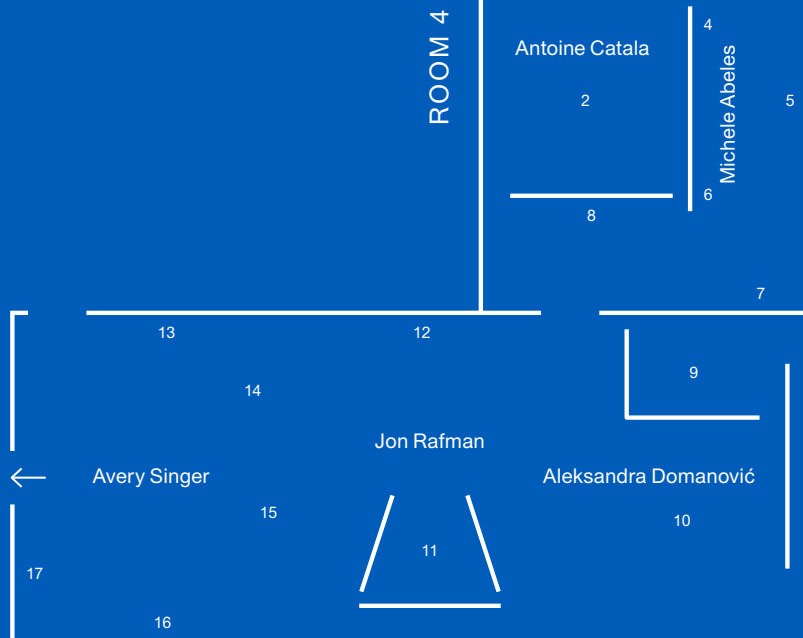
**Anonymous Materials** is a group show at the Fridericianum, Kassel (still running through January 26), featuring works by **Ed Atkins, Imboym, Simon Denny, Aleksandra Domanović, Josh Kline, Oliver Laric, Daniel Keller, Katja Novitskova, Ken Okiishi, Ryan Trecartin**, among many others. The show's central conceit is that digital art and content alike are decentralized, decontextualized and rendered ordinary, and content alike are decentralized, decontextualized and rendered ordinary,

indistinguishable from the output of broader visual culture and brings together approaches in international art that reinterpret the Anonymous Materials created by rapid and incisive technological change.

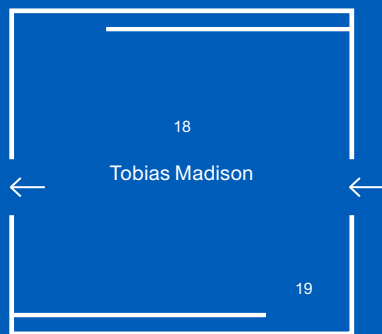
#anonymousmaterials  
#intangibility #presence  
#speculations #surface  
#processbased #rapid  
#subjectandobject  
#kassel #symbolicorder  
#rhythmic #variation  
#imagestock #objects  
#immaterialquality  
#space #serialrepetition  
#reinterpretation  
#abstraction #reflection  
#speculativevariation  
#viewerscorporeality  
#constantcirculation  
#fridericianum #transfer

Michele Abeles, Ed Atkins, Trisha Baga & Jessie Stead,  
Alisa Barenboym, Kerstin Brätsch & Debo Eilers, Antoine Catala,  
Simon Denny, Aleksandra Domanović, GCC, Yngve Holen,  
Sachin Kaeley, Daniel Keller, Josh Kline, Oliver Laric, Tobias Madison,  
Katja Novitskova, Ken Okiishi, Jon Rafman, James Richards,  
Pamela Rosenkranz, Avery Singer, Timur Si-Qin, Ryan Trecartin

Curated by Susanne Pfeffer



ROOM 5



ROOM 6

- 1 *gesture/data*, 2013, Chroma key video paint on Large Format Display LED, BARCO CRT blue screen videoed by HD camera transferred to .mov transferred to .mp4, each 105,78 × 61,7 × 9,45 cm (please see number 19 in room 8 as well)

In Ken Okiishi's work *gesture/data*, the screen surface itself becomes a tension-laden crystallization point. Its dynamic blue spectrum is generated by means of digital hand-video shots, which show the display of a BARCO monitor. With the so-called "blue screen", *gesture/data* documents the visual testimony of a loss of signal, whose glowing blue varies in tone and intensity depending on camera setting and proximity. Brought close to the convex honeycomb of the analog screen, the handheld camera gives the pixelated blue tone a digitally generated depth. This effect is further reinforced through the transcoding of the material into the exhibited .mp4 format: Pixels begin to emerge from the honeycomb structure to subsequently hover above the blue surface. In Okiishi's works, the manipulated emptiness of the "blue screen" meets the "green screen" of his painting. The chroma key color used is otherwise employed in the film industry. As a background that is easily eliminated in postproduction, Ken Okiishi's painterly gestures bring a form of "digital void" to the surface, which can be substituted by any chosen context or action.

Okiishi's works not only stage a collision of digital and analog technologies, but also, and more significantly, constitute the supposedly emptied product of repeated transcoding. As digital artifacts, they embody the clash of various image and signal disruptions – phenomena in which the materiality of modern media manifests itself. These are removed, however, from their peripheral position as exceptions to the rule. Thrust into the focus of the work, they lend an abstract visual form to the hard-to-grasp ruptures in language, the intervening spaces and ambivalences that move on the threshold between virtuality and reality. Their unique aesthetic is the result, not least, of a dynamic interplay between foreground and background, "in screen" and "on screen."

\* 1978 in Ames, USA, lives in New York, USA and Berlin

# Speculations on Anonymous Materials

## nature after nature

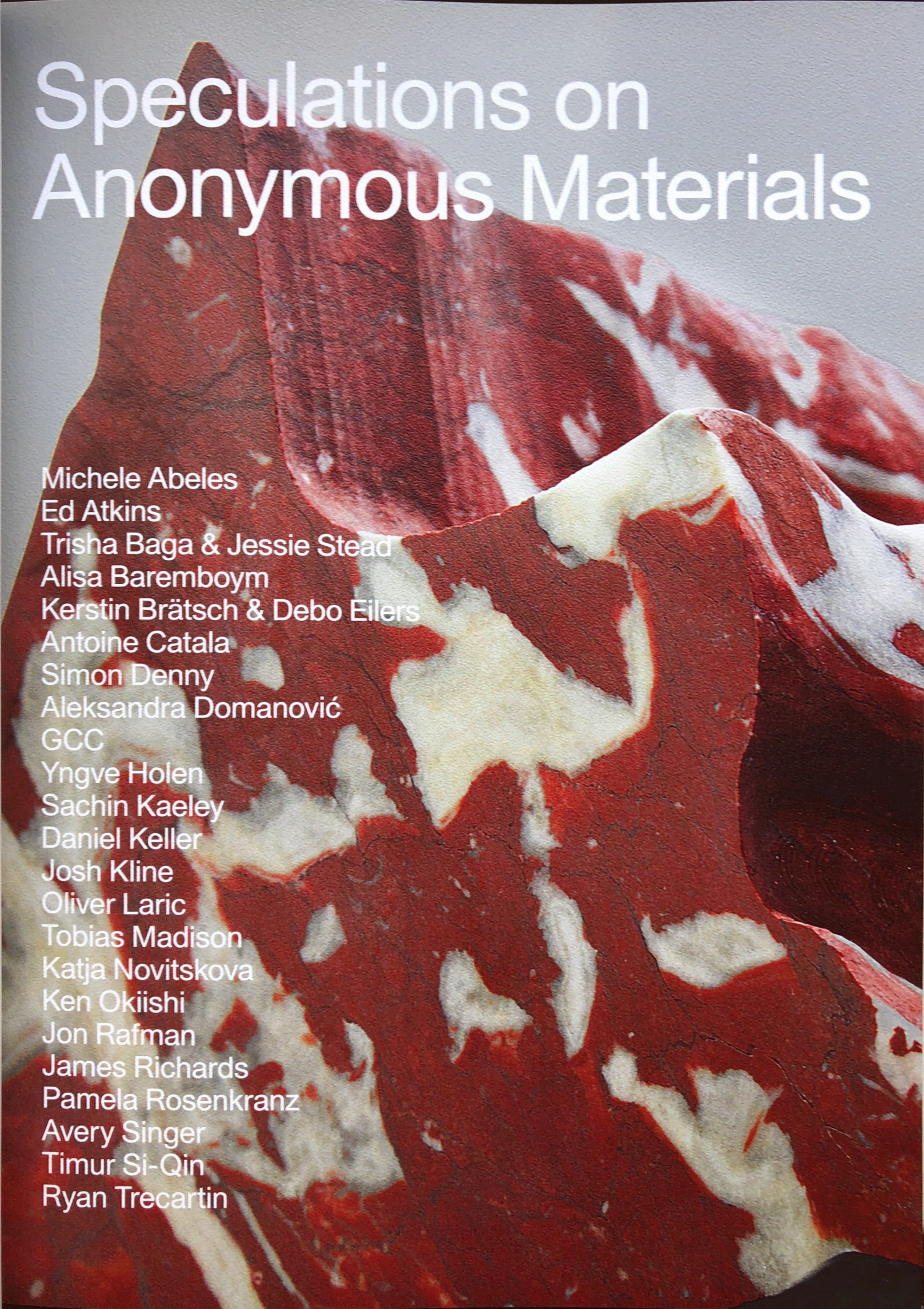
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Trisha Baga  
Alisa Barem  
Kerstin Brät  
Antoine Cat  
Simon Deni  
Aleksandra  
GCC  
Yngve Hole  
Sachin Kae  
Daniel Kelle  
Josh Kline  
Oliver Laric  
Tobias Mad  
Katja Novits  
Ken Okiishi  
Jon Rafmar  
James Rich  
Pamela Ros  
Avery Singe  
Timur Si-Qi  
Ryan Treca

Olga Balem  
Juliette Bon  
Björn Braur  
Nina Canell  
Alice Chanr  
Ajay Kurian  
Sam Lewitt  
Jason Loeb  
Marlie Mul  
Magali Reu  
Nora Schult  
Susanne M

## Inhuman

Julieta Aranda  
Dora Budor  
Andrea Crespo  
Nicolas Deshayes  
Aleksandra Domanović  
David Douard  
Jana Euler  
Cécile B. Evans  
Melanie Gilligan  
Oliver Laric  
Johannes Paul Raether  
Pamela Rosenkranz  
Stewart Uoo  
Lu Yang  
Anicka Yi

# Speculations on Anonymous Materials



Michele Abeles

Ed Atkins

Trisha Baga & Jessie Stead

Alisa Barenboym

Kerstin Brätsch & Debo Eilers

Antoine Catala

Simon Denny

Aleksandra Domanović

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Katja Novitskova

Ken Okiishi

Jon Rafman

James Richards

Pamela Rosenkranz

Avery Singer

Timur Si-Qin

Ryan Trecartin

# Speculations on Anonymous Materials

## Susanne Pfeffer

“I think that it is more interesting to talk about art in terms of the material that determines the work, rather than the artist’s identity...”  
– Pamela Rosenkranz

Art’s task changes in a world suffused with generated images. It is imperative to reflect on what are often highly psychologically charged worlds of images, the ways they are reproduced, and represented. Over the last two decades, the relationships between image and text, language and body, body and space, subject and object have changed rapidly. Art’s brief is no longer to generate unique, original images, but to seek reflection in a de-subjectivized approach to the existing stocks of objects, images, and spaces. The order of the day is to understand the world from the vantage point of abstraction and not to abstract from the world. The element of individual creation takes a back seat and the transfer of images and objects into the world of art becomes irrelevant as such. Today, visual reflection possesses a rhythmic, process-based and serial form. Serial repetition is less a matter of counterpointing sameness and difference and more a matter of weaving a never-ending web of relations; reflection can only occur within speculative variation.

The *Speculations on Anonymous Materials* exhibition for the first time worldwide brings together approaches in international art that reinterpret the anonymous materials created by rapid and incisive technological change.

„Ich denke, es ist interessanter, über das Material zu sprechen, das die Arbeit determiniert, als über die Identität des Künstlers...“  
– Pamela Rosenkranz

In einer Welt voll von generierten Bildern verändert sich der Auftrag der Kunst. Ein Nachdenken über diese oft hoch psychologisierten Bildwelten, die Formen der Bildwiedergabe und Bildrepräsentation ist zwingend. Die Relation von Bild und Sprache, Sprache und Körper, Bild und Raum, Objekt und Subjekt hat sich in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten rasant verändert. Während die originäre Bildgenese als primäre Aufgabe der Kunst entfällt, wird das Arbeiten mit bereits existierenden Bildern, Objekten und Räumen zum entsubjektivierten Ort der Reflexion. Es gilt, die Welt aus der Abstraktion zu begreifen und nicht die Abstraktion aus der Welt. Das Moment des individuellen Schaffens wird nebensächlich, das Moment der Überführung der Bilder und Gegenstände in den Kunstraum als solches irrelevant. Die visuelle Reflexion erfolgt rhythmisch, prozesshaft und seriell. Die Wiederholung im Seriellen vollzieht sich dabei weniger im Spannungsfeld von Differenz und Gleichem als in einer unabschließbaren Vernetzung; allein in der variierenden Spekulation kann gedacht werden.

Die Ausstellung *Speculations on Anonymous Materials* bringt weltweit erstmals internationale künstlerische Positionen zusammen, die die anonymen Materialien des rasanten und eingreifenden technologischen Wandels neu denken lassen.







Ken Okiishi

# Ken Okiishi

## Which technological change influenced your work the most?

All terms, unhinged in vapors of aspiration, cling to onlooking vampire-clones, breathing in data points like e-cigarettes.

## Welche technologische Neuerung hat deine Arbeit am meisten beeinflusst?

Alle Begriffe lösen sich in den Dämpfen der Streberei und docken an die schaulustigen Vampirkclone an, die an Datenpunkten ziehen, als wären sie E-Zigaretten.

## Speculations

The group mind, hosts and parasites enmeshed in larger and larger group bodies, make terms fit the comfort of their own mutual goal-oriented positionings at will.

## Spekulationen

Die Schwarmintelligenz – Wirt und Parasit zugleich –, verstrickt in immer größer werdenden Gruppenkörpern, passt die Begriffe den Bedürfnissen ihrer gegenseitigen, ergebnisorientierten Positionierung an.

## Complicity

In this way, all of these terms are both full of action and empty of meaning.

## Komplizenschaft

Auf diese Art und Weise sind all diese Begriffe zugleich betriebsam und bedeutungsleer.

## Materiality / Immateriality

There is no "personal" meaning, so sharing "my own" take on meaning becomes meaningless; the dictionary is also void.

## Materialität / Immaterialität

Es gibt keinen „persönlichen“ Sinn und darum ist es sinnlos, „meine“ Sicht auf die Sinnfrage mitzuteilen; auch das Wörterbuch ist ungültig.

## Body

But I have the feeling that even this sentence is manufacturing new allegiances and enemies; new forms of agreement through hopeful network-sucking or disagreement by making myself visibly un-useful.

## Körper

Jedoch habe ich das Gefühl, dass selbst dieser Satz neue Allianzen und Feinde produziert: Neue Formen des Einvernehmens durch erwartungsvolle Netzwerk-Saugerei oder Nicht-einvernehmen, da ich mich für alle sichtlich unbrauchbar mache.

## Desubjectivization

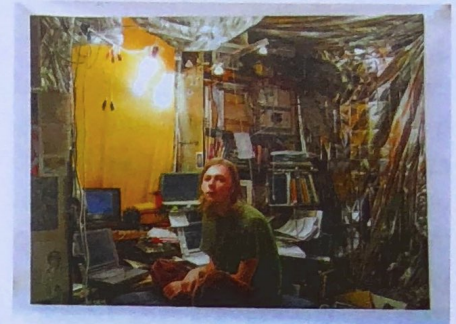
Only useful, shared misuse survives inside this speculative ectoplasm.

## Entsubjektivierung

Nur der brauchbare gemeinsame Missbrauch überlebt in diesem spekulativen Ektoplasma.

# Jon Rafman

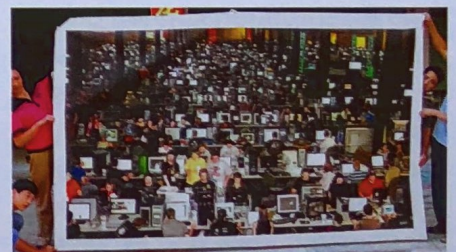
## Labor / Arbeit



## Materiality / Immateriality Materialität / Immaterialität



## Collaboration / Zusammenarbeit



**Ken Okiishi at MATHEW Opening: February 9th**

Tuesday, January 31, 2012 2:17 PM

**From:** "Mathew" <info@mathew-gal.de>

**To:** kenokiishi@yahoo.com

## MATHEW



Ken Okiishi - Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com

09.02.2012 - 17.03.2012

Opening Reception: 09.02.2012 / 19.00 - 22.00 CET

Michael Sanchez has decided to stop writing press releases, so I guess we will have to write our own. There will be umbrellas and they will be spinning.

You may have seen this before at the art fair or on the internet. The presentation of the spinning umbrellas at Mathew\* distills, like an email attachment or annoying gif animation, an essential quality that was perhaps lost in the manufactured glee of the art fair:

This is a plane of trauma that appears as if it could appear anywhere, any time.

Please note:

There may or may not be a performance of Pina Bausch's seminal dance work, Cafe Bravo.

One of the walls of the gallery will be painted in Chroma Green (which can be "knocked out" in digital video editing quite easily). If you would like to use this location for filming, please email the gallery at [info@mathew-gal.de](mailto:info@mathew-gal.de).

Streeteasy.com is a real estate meta-search engine, much like the Berlin favorite, Immobilienscout.de. The screen-shots on view in the gallery are recent real estate ads for a studio that Marcel Duchamp lived and worked in on Manhattan's Upper West Side from 1915 to 1918 in exchange for The Large Glass. That may have seemed like a good deal to him at the time, but it wasn't. You probably won't recognize the apartment from the hand-colored photographs included in the Boîte-en-valise. Photoshop offers hand-coloring possibilities that perfectly emulate the types of weird stains you used to get when the chemicals weren't mixed properly. Photoshop also offers possibilities beyond this.

MD's tiny "artist's studio" was in the back of the building, and the collectors who paid his rent lived in a lavish apartment in the front\*\*: the building, called "The Atelier," had been developed with this sort of fantasia in mind. Artists more financially minded than Duchamp had been developing an entire block of buildings with artists studios on the back and deluxe accommodations on the front, and a few of these artist-developers became quite wealthy selling these lifestyle apartments. Duchamp's letters at the time contain affects that remind us of our lives now, as we also find ourselves, running out of plausible options, stuck in some alien bourgeois subjectivity: "The Picabias are in the catskills"; "I am extremely sorry, after having promised to help you decorate the tea room, to have to withdraw my promise"; and, of a fallout from socializing with artists and collectors, "it has probably been engineered that way by spiteful people." While living there, one evening in 1916 at "Cafe Des Artsites" down the block, MD tried to explain his developing notion of the readymade; perhaps out of frustration, he sprung from the table and signed an "old-fashioned" painting of a battleground that decorated the wall of the cafe, and declared it readymade.

This may have been the worst artwork MD ever made.

Here we go again, on the battleground, stuck in a feedback loop, spinning.

\*This may or may not be misrecognized on this lovely West-Berlin street as a new home decorating store, Chateau Jalousie.

\*\*In case you are interested, this lavish apartment is currently back on the market. After the Arensbergs, the restaurateur, George Lang, who made Cafe Des Artistes iconic in the 1980s, lived there. It is his renovation that could be yours:

<http://streeteasy.com/nyc/sale/637528-coop-33-west-67th-street-lincoln-square-new-york>

"The Picabias are in the catskills."

Grand Opening Pt. II on Contemporary Art Daily

MATHEW

Schaperstrasse 12  
10719 Berlin, Germany  
0049 / 30 / 21021921  
www.mathew-gal.de  
info@mathew-gal.de

Hours: Thu - Sat / 13 - 18 & by Appointment

Artists Represented by MATHEW:

Christine Lemke / Flame / Heike-Karin Foell / Ken Okiishi / Manuel Gnam / Mathew  
Sova / Megan Francis Sullivan / Michaela Eichwald / Nicolas Ceccaldi / Nina  
Koennemann / Robin Bruch / Taslima Ahmed / Viola Klein



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Mathew | Schaperstrasse 12 | 10719 Berlin | Germany

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Documentation of the exhibition *Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com* at Mathew, Berlin,  
February 9 – March 17, 2012:

<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2012/03/ken-okiishi-at-mathew/>

**TEXTE ZUR KUNST**

Ken Okiishi, „Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com“, Mathew Gallery, Berlin, 2012, Ausstellungsansicht



## ROTO-ZEBRA-RELIEFS

**Fiona McGovern über Ken Okiishi in der Mathew Gallery, Berlin**

Nach zwei durchaus heterogenen „Grand Openings“ präsentierte die im Dezember letzten Jahres von Peter Kersten und David Lieske eröffnete Galerie Mathew in Berlin-Wilmersdorf mit Ken Okiishis „Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com“ nun ihre erste Einzelausstellung. Wie der Schrägstrich im Titel bereits andeutet, versucht der halb in Berlin, halb in New York lebende Künstler dabei zwei Dinge zusammenzubringen, die sich auf den ersten Blick nicht so leicht zusammenbringen lassen. Seine erste Referenz ist das Restaurant Gino in der New Yorker Upper East Side, das sowohl für seine Zebras auf der von Nobel-Innenausstatter Scalamandré entworfenen, rot grundierten Tapete als auch für sein immer

gleichbleibendes, simples Menü Berühmtheit erlangte. Von seiner Eröffnung 1945 an war das Lokal ein hochfrequentierter Ort der New Yorker Künstlerboheme und Intellektuellenkreise, bis es 2010 geschlossen und an seiner Stelle eine Filiale der Bäckereikette Sprinkles Cupcakes eröffnet wurde.

Den zweiten Bezugspunkt der Ausstellung bildet ein Eintrag auf der Immobilienwebsite Streeteasy.com, auf der eine Wohnung aus dem Studiokomplex „The Ateliers“ in der West 67th Street komplett möbliert zum Verkauf angeboten wird, in der Marcel Duchamp von 1916 bis 1918 gewohnt hat. Die Hinterhauswohnung, die dem Sammlerpaar Arensberg gehörte, durfte Duchamp im Gegenzug für die Produktion von „Großes Glas (La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même)“ mietfrei bewohnen – aus heutiger Sicht

## Ken Okiishi

*Review of "Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com" by Fiona McGovern in Texte Zur Kunst, 2012*



ein denkbar schlechter Deal für den Künstler und seine Erben.

In Ken Okiishis Ausstellung werden auf der rechten Wand des einzigen Ausstellungsraums nun sechs schwarz-weiße gerahmte und mit einer Fotoshopanwendung nachträglich auf alt getrimmte Screenshots dieser Anzeige auf der – wohlgemerkt kopfüber angebrachten – Zebra Tapete gezeigt. Halb verdeckt wird die Sicht hierauf von fünf sich langsam drehenden schwarzen Golfschirmen mit den ikonischen Scalamantré-Zebras aus dem Sortiment der hier auch als Sponsor auftretenden Designerfirma, die zwischen den Fotos an der Wand in einer Reihe angebracht sind. Der/die Betrachter/in muss daher erst hinter diese Revue von zweckentfremdeten und bearbeiteten Alltagsgegenständen schauen, um die klassisch gerahmte „Kunst“ überhaupt betrachten zu können. Dabei wird die Referenz auf Duchamp neben dieser losen Anlehnung an das Readymade auch in den Titeln der Fotos wieder aufgegriffen. Sätze wie „The Picabias are in the catskills“ entstammen seinerzeit von dem Künstler verfassten Briefen, wodurch ihm eine persönliche Präsenz verschafft wird. Auf der gegenüberliegenden, in Chroma-Grün gestrichenen Wand hängt als Kontrast zu diesem dichten Arrangement nur ein einzelnes Bild der Anzeige. Es zeigt den Wohnungsflur. Die leuchtend grüne Farbe, wie sie in der Regel vor allem als Hintergrund für nachträgliche Bildfreistellungen beim Film eingesetzt wird, reagiert hierbei komplementär auf das flirrende Farb- und Musterspektrum auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite. Zwischen beiden Wänden entspannt sich ein loses Narrativ sozialer Räume der New Yorker Künstlerboheme des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts, denen Ken Okiishi im Vorwege der Ausstellung zwar in einer Art psychogeografischer Studie nachgegangen ist,

deren tatsächliche Beziehungen sich für den/die uneingeweihte/n Betrachter/in jedoch nur schwer erschließen. Indirekt eröffnet dieses höchstheistische Arrangement, dessen Perfektion durch die unterschiedlichen Farbschattierungen der handgedruckten Tapete, die ungeordneten Kabelstränge und die mit der Zeit etwas wackelig gewordenen Schirme durchbrochen wird, einen Einblick in den eklatanten urbanen Wandel einer Künstlermetropole wie New York, in dem Traditionsbetriebe in einem angespannten Immobilienmarkt von Ketten verdrängt werden – eine Entwicklung, die trotz anderer Geschichte zunehmend auch in Berlin zu spüren ist.

Bezeichnenderweise wurde die Arbeit nicht in Berlin zum ersten Mal gezeigt, sondern im Rahmen des Stands des New Yorker Galeristen Alex Zachary auf der Frieze Art Fair im Oktober letzten Jahres. Hier funktionierte die tapezierte Ecke im hinteren Teil der Messehalle als Hingucker mit hohem Wiedererkennungswert beim Publikum, das sich der nostalgischen „Gino!“-Ausrufe kaum enthalten konnte. Bei Mathew geben dem/der Betrachter/in gleich drei mit dem selbst sehr fragmentarisch gehaltenen Presstext mitgelieferte Artikel weiteren Aufschluss über die Zusammenhänge des hier Gezeigten: Ken Okiishis im letzten November in Artforum erschienene Restaurantkritik, die sich der Wiedereröffnung des von Duchamp regelmäßig frequentierten Cafés des Artistes im Frühjahr 2011 widmete, ein Text, der angesichts der Tatsache, dass es diese Rubrik in der Zeitschrift normalerweise gar nicht gibt, selbst als künstlerischer Beitrag erscheint, sowie der darauf wiederum Bezug nehmende Eintrag auf der Website Gallerist NY und schließlich ein Artikel über das Gino aus dem New York Times Magazine. Diese eigentlich supplementären Elemente

Ken Okishi, „Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com“, Mathew Gallery, Berlin, 2012, Ausstellungsansicht



treten somit an eben genau die Stelle des Schrägstrichs im Titel als einer Angabe von verschiedenen Möglichkeiten der Verbindung zwischen Duchamp und einem legendären New Yorker Künstlerrestaurant. Somit wirft dieses Verharren im Potenziellen und gleichzeitig das für das Verständnis der Zusammenhänge Angewiesen-Sein auf diese Quellen zum einen die Frage nach dem eigentlichen „Rahmen“ und zum anderen nach dem idealen Rezeptionszusammenhang eines derart referenziellen und dadurch letztendlich zugleich wiederum in sich geschlossenen künstlerischen Konstrukts auf. Denn auch in anderer Hinsicht ist die Berliner Präsentation mehr als nur ein zweiter Aufguss des Messeauftritts: In der hier um das Chroma-Grün ergänzten Präsentationsform in dem modernistischen Flachbau mit großer Fensterfront erscheint die ganze Ausstellung nun, und das ist für die Gegend von Wilmersdorf durchaus typisch, selbst wie ein etwas obskures Schaufensterdisplay – ein Thema, dessen Ken Okishi sich schon in früheren Arbeiten wie „Depuis“ (2010, gemeinsam mit Nick Mauss) angenommen hat.

Besonders angesichts der Tatsache, dass das Haus Scalamandré zunächst seine Palette um Mer-

chandising-Produkte wie Golfschirme ergänzt hat und statt exklusiv bei Zwischenhändlern bald ihre Artikel auch über ihre Website vertreibt, rücken hier die Vermarktungsstrategien des Ausgestellten auf zweifache Weise selbst in den Blick. Einerseits wird so der Showroom-Charakter der Galerie hervorgekehrt, deren administrativer Bereich sich im Keller befindet. Andererseits erscheint die ausgestellte Kunst ungeachtet ihres skurrilen Erscheinungsbilds als (käuflicher) Dekor, das sich nicht ganz nostalgiefrei und wohldurchdacht über die Duchamp-Referenzen selbst eines bestimmten Künstlermythos bedient. Am Ende drehen sich also die Anspielungen genauso im Kreis wie die rotierenden Schirme.

Ken Okishi, „Gino / Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com“, Mathew Gallery, Berlin, 9. Februar bis 17. März 2012.

**ANNUAL**

Magazine

GO ABOVE THE MOON  
THE MOON

# Ken Okiishi

ROTO-ZEBRA-RELIEFS

FIONA MCGOVERN ON KEN OKIISHI

AT MATHEW, BERLIN

After two rather heterogeneous ‘Grand Openings’, Mathew – opened by Peter Kersten and David Lieske in December of last year in Berlin-Wilmersdorf – is presenting Ken Okiishi’s ‘Gino / Marcel Duchamp on streeteasy.com’ as their first solo exhibition. As the slash in the title indicates, the artist, who splits his time between New York and Berlin, is attempting to bring two things together that at first glance seem difficult to unite. His first reference is the restaurant Gino on the Upper East Side of New York, which is as famous for its consistent and simple menu as for the zebras on the red-primed wallpaper by posh interior designer Scalamandr . Since its opening in 1945, Gino was frequented by New York’s art bohemia until it closed in 2010, when a franchise of the bakery chain Sprinkles Cupcakes was opened in its place.

The exhibition’s second reference point is composed of an entry on the real-estate website Streeteasy.com, in which an apartment in the studio complex ‘The Atelier,’ on West 67<sup>th</sup> Street, where Marcel Duchamp resided from 1916 to 1918, is being put up for sale, fully furnished. Duchamp was allowed to live in an apartment in the rear of the building – with the rent paid by the collector couple, the Arensbergs, who lived in a lavish apartment in the front – in exchange for the *The Large Glass* (*La Mari e mise   nu par ses c libataires, m me*), which from today’s perspective was conceivably a bad deal for the artist and his descendants.

In Ken Okiishi’s exhibition, six black and white framed screenshots of this ad (photoshopped to look old) are mounted on the zebra wallpaper on the right wall of the gallery space. They are half covered by five slowly turning black golf umbrellas, set in a row between the photos and the wall. The umbrellas are also printed with the iconic Scalamandr  zebras; the design firm Scalamandr , which here also acts as a sponsor, provided these products for the exhibition. The viewer must therefore look behind this revue of repurposed,





everyday objects in order to be able to see the classically framed “art.” Besides the slack allusion to the readymade, a second reference to Duchamp is made in the title of the photos. Sentences like “The Picabias are in the Catskills” are drawn from the artist’s letters, which achieves Duchamp’s personal presence there. On the opposing wall (painted chroma green), in contrast to the dense arrangement, hangs a single image of the advertisement. It shows the apartment’s corridor. The bright color, which normally is used to silhouette figures as a green screen for films, reacts here as a compliment to the flitting color and pattern spectrum on the opposite side of the room. Between the two walls a slack narrative concerning social spaces of the New York art bohemia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century emerges, which Ken Okiishi traced as a kind of psycho-geographic study before the exhibition – the actual correlations of which are difficult to unlock for the unversed viewer. This highly aesthetic arrangement, whose perfection through the various hues of the hand-printed wallpaper is penetrated by the disorderly cable strands and the somewhat tottery, spinning umbrellas, indirectly opens a look into the striking urban shift of an art metropolis like New York, in which cherished establishments are displaced by chains in a fierce real-estate market – a development, that in spite of a different history, can also be sensed in Berlin.

Significantly, the work was not shown for the first time in Berlin, but rather at the stand of New York gallerist Alex Zachary at the Frieze Art Fair in October of last year. Here the wallpapered corner in the back part of the convention hall functioned as an eye-catcher with high recognition value for a public that could hardly



resist the nostalgic exclamation “Gino!” At Mathew, three articles provided with the quite fragmentary press text give the viewer further exposure to the context of what’s shown here: Ken Okiishi’s restaurant critique from last November’s *Art Fō um*, which is devoted to the reopening of Café de Artistes – often frequented by Duchamp – in early 2011. The text in itself appears as artistic, given the fact that normally the restaurant review format doesn’t exist in the magazine. It’s similarly the case in a text for the website Gallerist NY, which refers to the *Art Fō um* piece, as well as an article about Gino in *The New York Times Magazine*. These supplementary elements function in exactly the same way as the slash in the title – as an indication of the various possibilities of a connection between Duchamp and a legendary New York artist hangout. Consequently this persistence of potentials and simultaneously the persistence to understanding the context relying on these sources raises the question of the actual “frame” of the exhibition. Additionally, one could ask what the ideal context of reception for such a referential and thus ultimately again closed artistic construct would be. Because, in another respect, the Berlin presentation is more than a second incarnation of what was shown at the fair: Here the presentation, supplemented by the chroma green in a modern building with big, storefront windows, gives the exhibition the appearance – and it’s quite typical for the Wilmersdorf neighborhood – of a somewhat obscure window display, a topic that Ken Okiishi already treated in earlier works such as *Depuis* (2010, together with Nick Mauss).

Considering the fact that the house Scalmandré has supplemented its offerings with merchandising products such as the golf umbrellas, and that instead of selling them exclusively through distributors they will also be available to buy directly on their website, the marketing strategy of the exhibited products comes back into view twofold. On the one hand the showroom character of the gallery is accentuated, whose administrative area is in the cellar. On the other hand, the exhibited art, its whimsical appearance notwithstanding, could be seen as décor for sale, where the deliberate (and not entirely free of nostalgia) references to Duchamp serve a certain artist mythos. In the end, the allusions spin in the same circles as the rotating umbrellas.

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GINO / “THINKING ABOUT MOVING UPTOWN” / MARCEL DUCHAMP ON STREETEASY.COM, 2011 — installation view, Frieze Art Fair, London, October 2011 • Courtesy of the artist and Alex Zachary Peter Currie, New York

GINO / MARCEL DUCHAMP ON STREETEASY.COM, 2012 — installation view, Mathew, Berlin, February 2012 • Courtesy of the artist and Mathew, Berlin.



The New York Times Magazine

## Frieze Frame | Ken Okiishi's Manhattan Transfer

By [KEVIN MCGARRY](#)

October 18, 2011



The [Frame](#) section of the Frieze Art Fair, curated by Cecilia Alemani and Rodrigo Moura, made space for experimentation on the fair's fringes in the form of 25 solo artist presentations presented by a younger batch of international galleries. Among them was [Alex Zachary](#), one of New York's most idiosyncratic galleries both in terms of space and location. (It has been operating out of a multilevel, formerly residential condominium a couple of blocks from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.) Fittingly, the artist Ken Okiishi's project at Zachary's Frame booth was a curious meditation on the psychogeography of Manhattan real estate and mythologies of uptown bohemia. Eulogizing the recently shuttered Lexington Avenue establishment Gino as a point of departure (which over time has hosted luminaries as diverse as Sophia Loren, I. M. Pei and Robin Byrd), Okiishi began by outfitting the booth in the iconic Scalamandré-designed zebra wallpaper that made its debut in the restaurant's dining room circa 1930. He applied the same print to parasols bolted to the walls, whose slow and steady motorized twirling evoked bygone pageantry and ritziness. Faux-antique photographs of an early-20th-century apartment were hung beside the umbrellas; in actuality these were digital images lifted from the present-day [Streeteasy.com](#) listing for a unit on West 67th Street that was once home to Marcel Duchamp, from 1916 to 1918. East Side, West Side, Depression era, recession era: Okiishi's project drew foggy connections between places and times that are factually disparate but psychically proximate. These artifacts repurposed as ready-mades contribute to a meandering mental map of the city that relies on legends like Duchamp (and Gino's) as its compass.

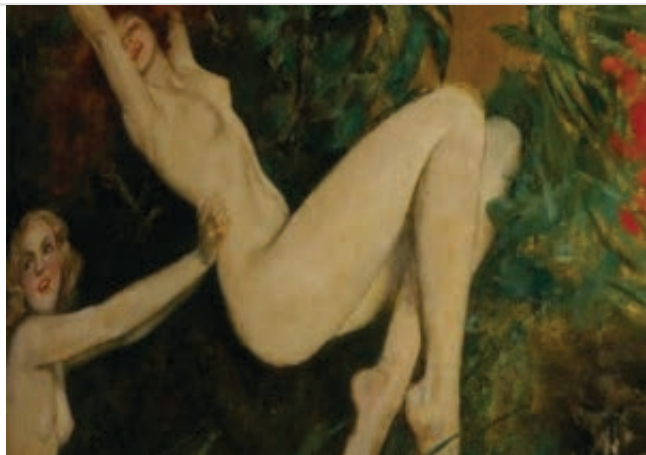
# In Artforum, Artist Ken Okiishi Becomes a Restaurant Critic

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By Andrew Russeth 10/25 9:56am



A detail of the Leopard's Howard Chandler Christy murals.

As we continue to mourn the end of Sam Sifton's tenure as *New York Times* dining critic over here at the *Gallerist* office, we were pleased to see that *Artforum* has entered the restaurant reviewing game, with artist Ken Okiishi penning a superb article in the November issue of the magazine on the Upper West Side's Leopard at Des Artistes, the new Italian restaurant housed in the former home of Café des Artistes, which ran from 1917 through 2009.

Mr. Sifton, **you may recall**, spotted a bevy of art world elites during **his visits to the Leopard**: Museum of Modern Art director Glenn Lowry and Whitney director Adam Weinberg were dining together, not far from former New Jersey governor Jon Corzine. Metropolitan Museum of Art vice president Harold Holzer was in attendance, as well as Sotheby's auctioneer Jamie Niven. He awarded it a solid two stars.

Mr. Okiishi finds less to like in the restaurant, though he does praise its iconic Howard Chandler Christy murals as “[c]risp, clean, flawlessly buffed kitsch.” In slamming the restaurant, the artist breaks not only with Mr. Sifton, but also *The New Yorker's* Lizzie Widdicombe, who, by thrilling coincidence, also **happened to review the restaurant** this week.

“It’s worth a trip just to sit at one of the candle-lit tables, sipping a goblet of Tintore and watching the tastefully blinged-out clientele file past,” Ms. Widdicombe writes. “It’s the kind of convivial, unpretentious place that, in the end, is practically un-hatable.”

Apparently she has not met Mr. Okiishi.

“The overwhelming design nonidentity of the new interior surrounding the murals stages a disjunction in eras that wobbles between novelty and lifelessness,” Mr. Okiishi declares, and he



reports that his dining companion told him, “You could also say the place looks a bit like a pizza parlor trying to be fancy.” Mr. Sifton, on the other hand, was a fan, and declared the Leopard “an airy and cheerful southern Italian clubhouse.”

The food also provokes disagreements. While Mr. Okiishi’s partner’s grilled chicken is “acceptable though unremarkable,” his porchetta “is shockingly dry” and its gravy “almost instantly develops a gloppy, gelatinous crust.” The restaurant, he says, is in “competition with the late grandes dames of spooky cuisine.”

Mr. Sifton had championed the offerings as “a testament to the rustic joys of Sardinia and Sicily: simple food, apparently simply prepared.” Ms. Widdicombe falls somewhere in between the two gentlemen, arguing that, unlike many restaurants of the Leopard’s ilk, “the food . . . is far from an afterthought.” She orders carefully and finds a lot to like: pasta alla Norma, trofie and dorado, among them.

Mr. Okiishi’s review is not yet online, but it is worth a read for the rich history he offers of the restaurant, which involves Marcel Duchamp; his panegyric to the city’s aging restaurants, which feature “freaky food and forgotten décor”; and for his rightful slamming of “the endless feedback loops of social media” that guide our dining habits these days.

At the risk of sounding too boosterish (that has not stopped us before), we would like to lobby for a restaurant review column in *Artforum*, and nominate Mr. Okiishi for the role, since he is clearly a natural. For more of Mr. Okiishi’s restaurant criticism, pick up the Dec. 2010 *Artforum*, in which he highlighted the closing of Upper East Side haunt Gino as one of the best events of the year. “Tradition chokes reality, and now we can move on,” he wrote at the time. “Thank God.”

If you would prefer to see some of Mr. Okiishi’s art, you can watch his very beautiful film (*Goodbye to Manhattan* (2010), which screened at Alex Zachary in 2010, [over on Ubuweb](#)).

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topics: **restaurants**, **ken okiishi**, **lizzie widdicombe**, **new yorker**, **sam sifton**, **art**

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# ARTFORUM

NOVEMBER 1991

INTERNATIONAL

# Fancy Feast

KEN OKIISHI ON THE LEOPARD AT DES ARTISTES

**PART OF THE AESTHETIC SINGULARITY** of dining uptown, until very recently, included zebras prancing on bright red wallpaper, drop ceilings with weird stains, dirty pink carpets and matching tablecloths, fake flowers mixed with real ones, that weird moldy smell, bartenders who were probably actually vampires, a very large display of fresh but unremarkable supermarket vegetables in a basically empty restaurant, and extraordinary prices for terrible food. All of this seemed like it would soon be over when New York's Café des Artistes (located, since it opened in 1917, at One West Sixty-Seventh Street) closed in 2009, followed by Gino (2010), Elaine's (2011), and, the most macabre of them all, Bravo Gianni (2011). For those of us from a generation that thinks it is a culinary revolution to track the itinerary of produce, these realms of freaky food and forgotten decor were as riveting as they were revolting, and the perverse glee felt when entering the private realm of our wealthy, geriatric style icons—of the unknowingly antihip—made us feel alive.

These places offered opportunities to digest our cinematic nostalgia with distaste and delicious laughter, so the news that Café des Artistes was going to be resurrected piqued interest in a way similar to catching wind that a forgotten artist is about to have a big comeback (Gasp! Really?). Would it be awful, wonderful, or, even better, a marvelous disaster?

Would it be everyday Italian? was not the first thought to come to mind, and the current renovation does much to erase middling aesthetic questions. This glistening

**At first I find the restaurant's blahmbiance charming—a semi-nostalgic rendering of a possible future New York. And then our food arrives.**

new restaurant, the Leopard at des Artistes, adheres dutifully to contemporary notions of “modern” good taste: The churchiness of the dark, wood-paneled room has been painstakingly lightened; most of the original Tudor-style detailing has been surgically excised and the rest covered with either white paint, drywall, or touches of unadorned walnut paneling. The floor is now terrazzo, with classic modernist circular metal inlays, and

the old seating has been replaced with Thonet Era Round Armchairs (available at your nearest Design Within Reach). At first I find this blahmbiance charming, like stepping into a virtual, seminostalgic rendering of a possible future New York—one where we don't cling to our secret spots so vehemently and where we are open to general pleasantness. And then our food arrives.

Dinner starts off nicely enough, with a *primo piatto* of pasta prepared as perfectly as the beloved Howard Chandler Christy murals have been restored. Crisp, clean, flawlessly buffed kitsch. But with the main course, the renovation's weaknesses grow more palpable. My dining partner receives an acceptable though unremarkable grilled chicken, served with a vaguely creative corn relish; my porchetta, on the other hand, is shockingly dry and has the kind of gravy I have grown accustomed to in old-school restaurants worldwide—the kind of gravy that almost instantly develops a gloppy, gelatinous crust. (Whether the persistence of this phenomenon is attributable to mistiming in the kitchen or some sort of weird WASP thing, I've never been able to figure out.) This dip into the more arcane eating habits of those ossified by pretense immediately brings the Leopard at des Artistes into competition with the late grandes dames of spooky cuisine. Granted, the restaurant's name is eccentric enough to warrant some praise. But, as my distressed taste buds prompted my eyes to register gruesome detail everywhere, my dining partner, also unhappy with our banal experience so far, said, “You could also say the place looks a bit like a pizza parlor trying to be fancy.”

Strangely, the Leopard's souped-up bland chic makes the Christy murals (1934 and 1942) look out of place; strange, indeed, since we know that the restaurant was painstakingly renovated around them. The overwhelming design nonidentity of the new interior surrounding the

murals stages a disjunction in eras that wobbles between novelty and lifelessness—it is utterly unclear which set of nostalgic frameworks you are to bring to this place and which fantasies you are supposed to leave behind. That the murals hark back to the friskier days of the Upper West Side seems to have been completely eclipsed.

A listing from the *New York Times* in 1919, two years after the Hotel des Artistes (the cooperative apartment building that housed the café and that, while never a real hotel, featured comparable amenities and staff) was completed, captures the spirit of that forgotten scene:

Fifty New York artists are to give a ball on Friday next, the eve of Washington's Birthday, at the Hotel des Artistes, the entertainment including a “A Dream of Fair Women,” in which models for Howard Chandler Christy . . . and others, will pose. Another feature will be hoops of paper upon which six artists will draw sketches of leading actresses, each drawing to be



From top: Interior views of Café des Artistes, New York, ca. 1984. Photos: Mick Hales. Interior of the Leopard at des Artistes, New York, 2011. Photo: Melissa Hom.



Howard Chandler Christy in his studio during the filming of a newsreel, Hotel des Artistes, New York, ca. 1924.  
Photo: Howard Chandler Christy Papers, Skillman Library, Lafayette College.

destroyed by the actress herself, who will step through the hoop. In a large tank, fed from the hotel's swimming pool, Madeline Gildersleeve will appear in a water fantasy, "The Fountain of Youth."

One of the restaurant's frothiest panels bears the same title as this wet and wild *tableau vivant*: Christy's *The Fountain of Youth* features naked women cavorting in what looks more like a wading pool than a mythic pond. In fact, the historical details surrounding the production of the entire set of decorative paintings may help to explain why the nymphs seem so folksy, so real, so much more like models performing for an audience than mythological creatures discovering the mysteries of nature.

Howard Chandler Christy, who was one of the first people to buy an apartment in the building and who lived there until his death in 1952 at the age of 79, is most notable as an illustrator (he created the "Christy Girl") and also as the judge of the first Miss America pageant. In many ways, he typified the kind of visual artists who lived in the Hotel des Artistes when it was first built—those working in kooky simulations of nineteenth-century academic tropes, equally at home producing "fine art" paintings, *Life* magazine covers, or illustrations for US war propaganda. In fact, the entire block had been developed by establishment artists who had realized that, by banding together financially, they could not only build "dream homes" for themselves but also, with their bohemian cachet, make a profit. According to the *New York Times*, the 1920 census listed the initial occupants of the Hotel des Artistes as fourteen artists, musicians, or writers; eleven actors or movie

executives; twenty-two stockbrokers, engineers, or other businesspeople; and twenty-six household servants.

One notable exception is Marcel Duchamp, who lived there from 1915 to 1918. He had been brought to the "artists' block" by collectors Louise and Walter Arensberg, who lived in a lavish apartment in a building called the Atelier, a few doors down from the Hotel des Artistes, and paid for the artist to live and work in a small studio in their building in exchange for the *Large Glass*, 1915–23. The Arensberg home was a legendary meeting point for the Paris and New York avant-gardes, or, as Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia described it, "an inconceivable orgy of sexuality, jazz and alcohol." This is the period during which the readymade was coming into being, and Café des Artistes was not an insignificant backdrop to that development. Before the current murals, other paintings by Christy decorated the walls, in particular a "huge old-fashioned painting" of a battleground, as Duchamp later recalled in an interview with Dore Ashton in the late 1960s. The artist went on to tell how, one evening in 1916, he "jumped up and signed" the grand *tableau*, thereby creating "a ready-made which had everything except taste. And no system." Some years later, *The Battle Scene* (readymade) disappeared under a new Christy painting featuring the frolicking, naked nymphs that undress the walls today.

As the original residents started to pass away in the 1950s, the hotel's largest communal spaces—including its theater and ballroom, where such memorably frilly parties had once been thrown—were leased to commercial tenants (ABC used the ballroom as a television

studio). But the original concept of a "hotel for artists" had already begun to fade in other ways. One of the most spectacular original amenities—an arrangement in which residents could supply the kitchen with ingredients and then receive their "food cooked free," delivered directly into their apartments via electronic dumbwaiters—had been discontinued early on.

In 1975, the remnants of the original kitchen and café space at the front of the building were taken over by restaurateur extraordinaire George Lang, and it is his renovation of Café des Artistes that most of us call to mind when thinking of the "original" today. Reviews at the time, like reviews of the newly opened iteration, tended to focus on the rejuvenated murals, the face-lift aspect, the "reborn classic." But if this venue was already a nostalgia production in 1975—described by journalistic gems such as "Very pink within their very green copses, like peppermint mousse on beds of spinach, [the mural girls] were daring in their youth and are touchingly innocent in their reincarnation"—the tone this summer was quite different. Reviewers now celebrated the "extensive cleaning," the pedigree of the new restaurateurs (Gianfranco and Paula Bolla Sorrentino), the celebrity clientele, the "particular subset of Manhattan society" that reserves its tables nightly—the positionings that make this place "a hit."

In a city where geographies of consumption currently have more to do with the fickleness of Google's PageRank algorithm and endless feedback loops of social media than where we physically live, we have all become tourists of each other's neighborhoods. That this effect could be felt less dramatically in parts of the city with large swaths of very elderly populations—in the land the Internet forgot—was a glitch in the system that I had naively hoped would remain unnoticed and unrepaired. The current version of Café des Artistes (the Leopard @) is what happens when dynamos of yesteryear die, and I hope it is not a blueprint for what's to come. I would much rather take a cab to the Seagram Building's Brasserie and reflect on the "new" Lincoln Center through the lens of "How quaint early-2000s surveillance chic has become!" In some ways, Diller + Scofidio's Y2K take on Brasserie is a model of "renovation"—a destruction of the original that thinks about the past but does not represent or attempt to preserve it; that creates something that can age in unexpected ways for another eighty years. Something that can develop a completely unforced, nostalgic patina.

But where, then, do we go when we happen to crave that special uptown frisson of dying decor and pricey fare? Luckily, there's always Shun Lee. □

KEN OKIISHI IS AN ARTIST WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK AND BERLIN. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)

Numéro

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, tilted slightly upwards. Her eyes are closed, and her hair is blowing in the wind, creating a sense of motion. The background is a solid, vibrant blue. The word "Numéro" is overlaid in a large, gold, sans-serif font across the top half of the image.



Installation de Ken Okishi (2011) sur le stand du galeriste Alex Zachary.

## Happy Galleries par Nicolas Trembley

**La troisième édition de Frame, dont COS est partenaire, a fait souffler un vent de fraîcheur sur la Frieze Art Fair. La section des galeries émergentes de la foire londonienne s'impose comme *the place to be* du renouveau artistique.**

Frame devient incontournable. L'événement créé au sein de la Frieze Art Fair, la foire internationale d'art contemporain, a été lancé en 2009 pour encourager la fréquentation des galeries, soutenir les marchands et donner un regain de créativité au marché. Le concept est simple : les "jeunes" galeries (fondées il y a moins de six ans) présentent des expositions personnelles d'artistes émergents. Les œuvres sont, la plupart du temps, créées pour les lieux et doivent être validées par des critiques et des commissaires d'exposition.

La manifestation connaît un succès grandissant. La marque de vêtements COS vient d'ailleurs de renouveler sa collaboration avec Frame. Jusqu'en 2010, Daniel Baumann, parti rejoindre le Carnegie Museum of Art de Pittsburgh, et Sarah McCrory, commissaire de *Frieze Projects*, sélectionnaient les galeries. Ils ont été remplacés cette année par Cecilia Alemani et Rodrigo Moura. Parmi les intervenants, la galerie Anant & Zoo s'est fait remarquer avec la présentation des dessins de Channa Horwitz – une vieille camarade de Sol LeWitt – tout comme la Revolver Galería de Lima qui y participait pour la première fois, avec une œuvre de Ximena Garrido-Lecca. Aucun prix n'est décerné, mais c'est sans aucun doute l'artiste Ken Okishi, chez Alex Zachary, de New York, qui aurait remporté la palme avec la récréation du restaurant Gino, lieu mythique de Manhattan fermé récemment. Un joli rayonnement d'artistes et de galeristes du monde entier.

# 52

[www.frieze.com](http://www.frieze.com)



**LIEBE IST KÄLTER ALS DAS KAPITAL  
LOVE IS COLDER THAN CAPITAL**

# KEN OKIISHI

\*1978, lebt und arbeitet / lives and works  
in New York und / and Berlin



**Yilmaz Dziewior** Was waren deine ersten spontanen Gedanken, als du den Titel unserer Ausstellung *Liebe ist kälter als das Kapital* gelesen hast?

**Ken Okiishi** Ich wollte mehr darüber herausfinden, da ich den Kern der in dem Titel liegenden Provokation nur schwer fassen konnte, er schien mir zwischen Fassbinder und dem Verhältnis von „Liebe“ zu „Kapital“ hin- und herzuschwingen und beides zu hinterfragen. Den Titel kenne ich als Theaterstück von René Pollesch, obwohl ich dieses bestimmte Stück nicht gesehen hatte. Jedoch war ich in der Aufführung eines seiner älteren Stücke, an dessen Titel erinnere ich mich nicht, aber es war eine Inszenierung in einem Berliner Vorort: Die S-Bahn fuhr in einiger Entfernung vorbei, Jahrmarktzelte waren aufgebaut und all diese in rasanter Abfolge intervenierenden Elemente aus dem Reality-TV, der deutschen Filmgeschichte, Bezüge zu Deleuze und Guattari und anderen waren erlebbar. Was ich sah, war eine geballte, groteske Melange aus zeitgenössischem Theorie-Kitsch – und ich fand es toll. Ich hatte auch eine seiner neuesten Produktionen gesehen, ebenfalls in Berlin: *Kill your Darlings! Streets of Berladelphia*. Das Stück löste, während ich es anschaute, ein unmittelbares Hochgefühl in mir aus (besonders die überlange Szene, in der die jugendlichen Akrobaten im Regen über die Bühne rutschen) – ein Gefühl, das anschließend schnell in Zweifel überging. Es war das Beste, das ich jemals gesehen habe, was das Erleben eines solch jähen Glücksgefühls betrifft, abgelöst von bodenloser Enttäuschung, die die übertrainierten, kapitalisierten Körper in unserem Wohlfühl-„Semiokapitalismus“ in dir auslösen können. Mir gefiel auch der Hauptdarsteller gut, er war ein bisschen wie Woody in *Toy Story 3* – aufrichtig, von allen geliebt und ein total nerviger Typ.

Ich glaube, ich fand den Titel am Anfang deshalb so faszinierend, weil ich wissen wollte, wie alle diese widersprüchlichen Elemente – Liebe, Ökonomie, Pollesch, der Fassbinder-Bezug und die ätherische Zumthor-Architektur des Kunsthauses im Rahmen einer Ausstellung aufeinandertreffen und Reibung produzieren würden.

**YD** Welches sind die Umstände, unter denen dein Werk *The Deleted Scene (We're in the Money)* von 2012, das wir in *Liebe ist kälter als das Kapital* zeigen, produziert wurde. Wenn ich mich recht erinnere, sagtest du, dass du von AP News, einem kollektiv geführten, in einer größtenteils leer stehenden Einkaufspassage liegenden Kino in Zürich, eingeladen wurdest, einen Film zu produzieren.

**KO** Ja, AP News ist ein selbst organisiertes, mehr oder weniger kollektiv geführtes Kino in Zürich und befindet sich in einer brachliegenden Einkaufspassage aus den 1980er Jahren, am Rande eben jenes Viertels, in dem sich die meisten der bekannten Ausstellungshäuser und Galerien für zeitgenössische Kunst angesiedelt haben. Interessant am Scheitern dieser Einkaufspassage ist, dass der

**Yilmaz Dziewior** What were your first spontaneous thoughts on reading the title of our exhibition *Love is Colder than Capital*?

**Ken Okiishi** I was curious to find out more, since it struck me that the provocation of the title included a slippery core, where an oscillation with both the Fassbinder and the relation of “love” to “capital” were being thrown into question. I was also familiar with the title from René Pollesch—although I hadn’t seen that particular piece. I had seen one of his older pieces, I can’t remember the title, which was re-staged on the outskirts of Berlin, with the S-Bahn running way in the distance and these carnival tents set up with intervening, rapid-fire elements taken from reality TV, German film history, Deleuze and Guattari, etc. What I saw was a channeling of this grotesque mélange of contemporary theory-kitsch—and I loved it. I had also seen one of the most recent productions, also in Berlin: *Kill your Darlings! Streets of Berladelphia*, and it had provoked such a rapid feeling of elation while watching it (especially the extended scene where the teenage acrobats slide across the stage in the rain)—and a quick fall into skepticism after. It was the best thing I’d seen related to the rapid joy and furious let-down of the overfit, financialized bodies of feel-good “semicapitalism.” I also loved how the main actor seemed like Woody in *Toy Story 3*—earnest, beloved, and totally annoying.

I think I was initially intrigued by the title because I wondered how all of these conflicting elements—love, economics, Pollesch, ghost-Fassbinder, and the ethereal Zumthor architecture of the Kunsthaus—could meet and produce friction within the frame of an exhibition.

**YD** Tell me about the circumstances under which your work *The Deleted Scene (We're in the Money)* from 2012, which we are presenting in *Love is Colder than Capital*, was produced. I remember that you told me it was the result of an invitation to produce a film from AP News, Zurich, a collective-run cinema space which is located in a more or less abandoned mall.

**KO** Yes, AP News is a self-organized, more or less collectively run cinema space in Zurich in a sort of failed small 80s shopping mall on the edge of the neighborhood that houses most of the well-known contemporary art institutions and galleries. What is interesting about the failure of the shopping mall is the “local” character left in it—that it is not the “fancy” Zurich that we visitors see when we go there. And one of the great things about AP News is that it has become a real meeting place and discourse generator in Zurich; while, as a cinema (and I think this was not necessarily self-conscious by the people who run it), I find it to be refreshingly new in its digital aspects. That, in addition to working on producing new translations or first translations of some experimental films, hosting concerts and readings, etc., they also download things and just show them. Officially and unofficially. And the entire texture





Ken Okiishi,  
*Ohne Titel / Untitled*, 2013,  
Installationsansicht / Installation view

ursprünglich „lokale“ Charakter erhalten blieb – der Ort hat nichts mit dem „Schickimicki-Zürich“ zu tun, das wir als Besucher erleben. Großartig an AP News ist, dass es sich zu einem echten Zürcher Treffpunkt entwickelt hat, an dem ein reger Austausch stattfindet. Und was sein Programm als Kino betrifft (ich glaube, dass das nicht unbedingt eine bewusste Entscheidung der Betreiber war), finde ich es erfrischend neu, wie digitale Aspekte miteinbezogen werden. Dass sie, neben der Produktion von Neuübersetzungen oder Erstübersetzungen von Experimentalfilmen, der Veranstaltung von Konzerten und Lesungen auch Dinge herunterladen und einfach zeigen. Offiziell und inoffiziell. Die gesamte Textur des PR-Materials reibt sich daran, wie andere digitale Gemeinschaften funktionieren – einerseits nutzen sie die Ästhetik sozialer Netzwerke, andererseits richten sie sich dagegen aus, und ich empfind, dass diese Haltung mit vielen Anliegen, die ich in meiner eigenen Arbeit verfolge, übereinstimmt. Als sie mich also baten, einen Film zu machen (sie hatten vor, Filme auch zu produzieren und nicht nur zu „zeigen“), war ich echt begeistert, denn mein Ansatz zum „Film“ war auch immer „pro und contra“ prävalente Produktionsformen. Für mich besteht zwischen der Gestaltung eines „Lebens“ und der Produktion eines „Films“ ein Zusammenhang, oder zumindest hege ich den Wunsch, eine Verbindung zwischen beidem herzustellen. Wobei die filmischen Komponenten – Figuren, Handlung, Regie, Autor, Drehbuch, Audio, Inszenierung, Requisiten – leere Hülsen sind, wie Mäntel vielleicht, die unverbindlich eine Weile getragen werden. Wo das Konzept der Mise en Scène eher wie das Internet zu funktionieren beginnt.

Einer der Künstler, der später in den Mantel des „Produktionsleiters“ schlüpfte, machte für mich ein Video vom Raum und stellte es auf YouTube. Das war keine intendierte konzeptuelle Geste, aber während wir am Projekt weiterarbeiteten – via E-Mail, Skype etc., eben den gängigen Mitteln, mit denen man heutzutage kommuniziert und Dinge über geografische Distanzen und unterschiedliche Zeitzonen hinweg organisieren kann –, kristallisierten sich für mich die konzeptuellen „digitalen“ Elemente immer mehr heraus. Was ursprünglich also als Idee konzipiert worden war, in den Überresten einer kleinen Einkaufspassage aus den 1980er Jahren ein „Musical“ zu filmen, wurde dann, vermittelt banaler digitaler Kommunikation, zu einer Manifestation und einer Dokumentation von „Gruppen-Körpern“ (Busby Berkeley/Kracauer's *Das Ornament der Masse*) im digitalen Finanzkapitalismus. Obwohl man sagen muss, dass das erst im Nachhinein betrachtet so war. Denn dass ein YouTube-Clip der Anfangssequenz von *Goldgräber von 1933*, der Song *We're in the Money*, den wir in das soziale Netzwerk von AP News einspeisten und als Viralclip im Internet verbreiteten, den Produktionsplan des Ganzen bestimmen würde, war uns während der Arbeit an dem Stück keineswegs schon klar.

YD Worauf bezieht sich der Titel *The Deleted Scene* (Die gelöschte Szene)?

of the PR materials jams up against another kind of digital sociality—both for and against aesthetics of “social networking,” and in a way I found something that aligned with many of my own concerns in my work. So, when they asked me to produce a film (they wanted to start producing as well as “showing” films), I was really into it. Since my approach to “film” has also been one of being “for and against” predominant forms of production. For me there is a relationship, or wish to draw a relationship, between the production of “a life” and the production of “a film.” Where filmic elements—character, action, director, writer, script, soundtrack, staging, props—are all inhabited as loose shells or screens. Where the concept of mise-en-scène begins to function more like the Internet.

One of the artists, who eventually fell into the shell of “executive producer,” made a video of the space for me and posted it on YouTube. This wasn't intended as a conceptual gesture, but as we worked, via email, Skype—the general modes we use now to communicate and organize things across geographically and temporally distant locales—the “digital” conceptual elements emerged for me. What started as an idea of filming a “musical” in the contemporary remnants of a small 80s shopping arcade became, through the banality of digital communication, a materialization, and documentation, of aspects of “group bodies” (Busby Berkeley/Kracauer's *Das Ornament der Masse*) in digital financial capitalism. After the fact, you could say, since nothing was this clear while working on the piece, the diagram of production then became this: a YouTube clip of the opening scene of *Gold Diggers of 1933—We're in the Money*, (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJOjTNuuEVw>) was inputted into the social network of AP News and allowed to go viral.

YD What does the title *The Deleted Scene* refer to?

KO *The Deleted Scene* is the title that the people I was working with came up with. As one artist-member who has also had experience working on other artist-run projects in Switzerland has said: “We always end up deleted ourselves from every scene.” I think of what resulted—and I think it is important to point out that the entire production was really allowed to go in any direction, and that ended up happening. Such as the photographer Walter Pfeiffer showing up to do a photo shoot inside of the film production. That the set elements were basically trash from a 70s luxury resort that was featured in a James Bond film, that also happened to be throwing away the stuff in the months before the production. That this vogue-ing session while watching YouTube clips of vogue-ing just sort of happened, after we did a pseudo-situationist action in the café next door. I would input slight directions here and there, and inserted certain floating signifiers (such as the coins, the OWS-style tent, the YouTube clips), but basically just wanted to let what was going on go on.

In this way, *The Deleted Scene* becomes a visualization of what is often deleted from the commodified narratives of

**KO** *The Deleted Scene*, diesen Titel schlugen die Leute, mit denen ich zusammengearbeitet habe, vor. Wie einer der teilnehmenden Künstler meinte, der auch Erfahrung mit anderen Künstlerinitiativen in der Schweiz hatte: „Es läuft in jeder Szene immer wieder darauf hinaus, dass wir am Ende daraus verschwunden sind.“ Wenn ich an das Endergebnis denke, sollte ich betonen, dass wir der gesamten Produktion den Freiraum geben wollten, sich in jede erdenkliche Richtung entwickeln zu können, und so ist es am Ende auch passiert. Dass zum Beispiel der Fotograf Walter Pfeiffer am Drehort auftauchte, um Fotografien zu machen. Dass das Set im Wesentlichen aus Elementen bestand, die in einem James-Bond-Film verwendet worden waren, kitschiges Zeug aus einem Luxuserienort im Stil der 1970er Jahre, das in den Monaten vor unserer Produktion weggeworfen worden war. Oder diese Voguing-Session, die sich irgendwie spontan ergab, nachdem wir im Café nebenan eine pseudo-situationistische Aktion durchgeführt und uns Voguing-Clips auf YouTube angeschaut hatten. Ich gab hier und da leicht die Richtung vor und fügte bestimmte Signifikanten ein, die mit dem, was ablief, nicht verbunden waren (wie die Münzen, das Zelt im Stil der Occupy-Bewegung, die YouTube-Clips), aber im Grunde genommen wollte ich nur das geschehen lassen, was geschah.

*The Deleted Scene* ist also eine Visualisierung dessen, was aus den kommerzialisierten Darstellungen, wie ein Stadtteil zu einem „coolen“ Viertel wird, für gewöhnlich gelöscht ist. In gewisser Weise, und mir ist durchaus bewusst, wie pervers dies klingen mag, haben wir es hier mit einem „Arbeiter-Theater“ zu tun, an der Schnittstelle zwischen Hipstern, Kuratoren, „Kreativen“, Stadtentwicklern und realen Bauunternehmern.

**YD** In Bregenz zeigen wir statt eines einzigen Films eine Installation aus vier Filmen auf übereinander angeordneten Flachbildschirmen. Wie kam es, dass *The Deleted Scene* in mehreren Filmen auftaucht, und weshalb hast du dich dafür entschieden, sie in dieser Form zu präsentieren?

**KO** Es ist ein Vierkanalvideo – und so geschnitten, dass zwischen den Elementen auf allen vier Monitoren kontinuierlich Beziehungen entstehen oder Brüche aufscheinen. Es werden Formate imitiert, wie sie für Werbung in Flughafenterminals üblich sind, häufig sind dort mehrere Flachbildschirme kombiniert, um ein einziges Bild zu erzeugen. Im Fall von *The Deleted Scene* sind es vier Flachbildschirme, die verschiedene Aktionen und Szenarien als komplexe, fragmentierte Darstellung präsentieren – aber ich verstehe es als ein einziges Video. Jemand beschrieb es einmal scherzhaft als „Vierkanal-Facebook“.

**YD** Ein weiteres Thema, das mit der Präsentation des Films zu tun hat, ist der Sound. Wir mischen den Ton aus allen vier Kanälen, bevor er in die Sounddusche kommt, und bündeln so vier Quellen zu einem einzigen Audiokanal. Das Ergebnis ist eher eine Muzak als ein akustisch



Eröffnungssong / Opening song *We're in the Money* aus / from *Goldgräber* von 1933 / *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Filmstill)

how a “cool” neighborhood happens. In some ways, and I’m aware of how perverse this may sound, this became a “worker’s theater” at the interface of hipsters, curators, “creatives,” city planners, and real estate developers.

**YD** Instead of only one film in Bregenz, we are showing an installation of four films on flat screens one above the other. How come *The Deleted Scene* resulted in several films, and why did you decide to present them as you do?

**KO** It is a 4-channel video—edited with specific elements in constant relation/rupture between all four screens. I think of it as aping a sort of format you would see used for advertising in airport terminals, with four flat screens put next to each other to create one image. In the case of *The Deleted Scene*, it is four flat screens producing a fractured, complex image of certain actions and scenarios—but I do think of it as one video. Someone once jokingly described it as “4-channel Facebook.”

**YD** Another issue in presenting the film is sound. We run the sound from all four channels into a mixer before inputting it into a sound shower, thus producing one channel of sound from the four sources. The result is more muzak than one clear source of understandable acoustic information. What are your reasons for presenting the sound like this?

**KO** All four stereo channels were carefully mixed so that certain elements—certain bits of dialog, certain background sounds, certain sounds related to actions happening on the screens—are brought out or pushed into the background. Editing programs let you do this quite easily, since all four channels can be put on one timeline. One thing I do run up against is that the technologies required to play all four channels from one server don’t readily exist in most art institutions. Media players—and now USB stick media players built into most new flat screens—make this much easier. The Kunsthhaus in particular has a difficult situation in terms of sound, with all of the concrete, which bounces sound all over the place—but I think the

klar verständlicher Sound. Weshalb präsentierst du das Audioelement auf diese Weise?

**KO** Alle vier Stereokanäle sind sorgfältig abgemischt, sodass verschiedene Details – bestimmte Dialogfragmente oder Hintergrundgeräusche, bestimmte Geräusche, die mit Aktionen, die man auf den Monitoren sieht, verbunden sind – entweder betont oder in den Hintergrund verschoben werden. Mit Filmbearbeitungsprogrammen ist so etwas leicht möglich, da alle vier Kanäle auf ein und derselben Timeline angeordnet werden können. Ein Problem, mit dem ich häufig konfrontiert werde, ist, dass in Kunstinstitutionen die Technologie, die erforderlich ist, um vier Kanäle von einem einzigen Server aus abzuspielen, oft nicht vorhanden ist. Mediaplayer, oder auch USB-Stick-Mediaplayer, die in die meisten neueren Flachbildschirme eingebaut sind, vereinfachen das Ganze. Insbesondere das Kunsthaus ist in Bezug auf Akustik in einer nicht ganz einfachen Situation, da von den Betonwänden rundum der Sound abprallt. Aber ich denke, die Sounddusche ist eine gute Möglichkeit, das Stück zu zeigen, zum einen, weil dieses Plastikschirm-ding so verrückt aussieht, aber auch, weil sie den Sound auf eine Art fokussiert, dass man den Mix sehr klar hören kann. Ich würde sagen, das Muzak-Element, das du in Teilen des Stücks bemerkst, bezieht sich auf dieses gewisse Flughafenterminal-Gefühl, das die übereinander gestapelten Monitore vermitteln, mit Bildern von jugendlichen Körpern, die ihren „Spaß“ haben.

**YD** Ähnlich wie in deinen früheren Filmen sind auch die Akteure in *The Deleted Scene* überwiegend Menschen, die du kennst. Einige sind Freunde, andere hast du während des Produktionsprozesses kennengelernt. Ich nehme an, neben praktischen Erwägungen gibt es von deiner Seite noch andere Beweggründe, generell Leute in deine Filme zu involvieren, die du kennst?

**KO** Ein maßgeblicher Unterschied bei *The Deleted Scene* ist, dass ich sie nicht als Akteure ansehe, sondern als Körper. Das wurde, während wir das Stück produzierten, viel diskutiert, denn die Zeitschrift *Du* wollte etwas über AP News bringen, worauf einige der beteiligten Künstler eine Fotostrecke mit Stills von *The Deleted Scene* entwarfen. *Du* sollte in das Layout nicht eingreifen. Diese Absprache wurde, weil sie nicht eingehalten wurde, zu einem Desaster – in dem Artikel wurde ich ein „japanischer Filmemacher“, da die Leute bei dieser hochhoffiziellen Kulturzeitschrift versuchten, in dem, was sie da anschauten, einen Sinn zu finden. Ich denke solche Brüche sind auch interessante Phänomene in den Fehldeutungen, die sie generieren. Wie auch immer, eine Sache, die vereinbart und im finalen Druck auch durchgezogen wurde, war, dass wir alle, die an dem Film beteiligt waren, lediglich mit unseren Vornamen genannt werden sollten. Es sollte nicht um uns als Individuen gehen oder um spezifische Identitäten innerhalb der Kulturindustrie,

sound shower was a good way to show the piece, partially because these plastic umbrella things look so insane, and also because it focuses the sound in such a way that you can hear the mix quite clearly. The muzak element you are noticing in parts of the piece I would say is related to this sort of airport terminal feeling of the stacked monitors with images of youthful bodies having “fun.”

**YD** As in your earlier films the actors in *The Deleted Scene* are mainly people you know. Some are friends of yours and some you just met during the production process. I assume that, beside practical reasons, there are also additional reasons for your involving people you know in your films in general?

**KO** One major difference with *The Deleted Scene* is that I don't consider these as actors—but as bodies. This became a discussion while producing the piece, as *Du* magazine wanted to do something on AP News, and what was engineered by some of the artists involved was a multipage spread of photos from the production of *The Deleted Scene*, with an agreement that *Du* could not edit the layout. This ruptured relationship was a bit of a disaster discursively—as I suddenly became a “Japanese filmmaker” in the text of the article, as the people at this very official cultural magazine tried to make sense of what they were looking at—but I also find these kinds of ruptures, as phenomena, interesting in the misrecognitions they produce. Anyway, one thing that was agreed upon, and made it to the final printing, is that the names of all of us who worked on the film would be simply listed by first name. That this wasn't about us as individuals or specific identities within the culture industry—but as a field of names within a cultural/economic field. That this could, in fact, be any group of names. That these were “actions” and “bodies”—or, more precisely, that we, at the cultural node of digital financial capitalism, are disorganized bodies grouped around common, often unconsciously produced, goals. That our “love” of art, of producing certain kinds of “scenes,” of “keeping it real,” has potentially been instrumentalized without our consent. I acknowledge that there is a willful blindness to this.

But, I also take the labor that “cool kids” do very seriously, since these bodies and scenes are the precise nodes at which global financial markets enter the art market; it is the site of the real interaction of these economies with vastly different scales. Showing it in this removed or “other” way is a way to see what is going on in that labor beyond the production of ways of circulating, producing links in the networks, increasing value, etc. Or, maybe, it is something to show what those processes look and “feel” like, in the moment. I think parts of *The Deleted Scene* also feel a bit like a headcam shot in some peripheral scene during an art fair.

**YD** In recent years film has become more and more popular in the field of contemporary art. Not infrequently it is

sondern es sollte deutlich werden, dass es einen Bereich mit Namen in dem Bereich Kultur/Ökonomie gab, dass dieser Bereich der Namen austauschbar war. Dass es sich um „Aktionen“ und „Körper“ handelte – oder, um es präziser auszudrücken, dass wir, die wir am kulturellen Knotenpunkt des digitalen Finanzkapitalismus agieren, desorganisierte Körper sind, die sich um gemeinsame, oft unbewusst entwickelte Ziele gruppieren. Dass wir mit unserer „Liebe“ zur Kunst, unserer Vorliebe, bestimmte Arten von „Szenarien“ zu entwerfen, diese „real zu halten“, potenziell bereits instrumentalisiert worden waren – ohne unser Einverständnis. Ich gebe zu, dass hier etwas von einer wissentlichen Blindheit im Spiel war.

Aber ich nehme die Arbeit, die die „coolen Kids“ leisten, trotzdem sehr ernst, eben weil diese Körper und Szenarien genau die Knotenpunkte sind, an denen die globalen Finanzmärkte in den Kunstmarkt eindringen. Sie sind die Schauplätze realer Interaktionen dieser Ökonomien von enorm unterschiedlichen Dimensionen. Dies auf solch andere oder „alternative“ Art zu zeigen, ist ein Weg zu zeigen, was sich in dieser Arbeit abspielt, über die Entwicklung neuer Distributionswege, die Verlinkung in Netzwerken, die effektive Wertsteigerung etc. hinaus. Oder vielleicht ist es etwas, das aufzeigen kann, wie solche Prozesse im jeweiligen Moment aussehen und sich anfühlen. Ich glaube, Teile von *The Deleted Scene* vermitteln auch den Eindruck, als könnten sie Kopfkamera-Aufnahmen von irgendeiner Ecke am Rande einer Kunstmesse sein.

**YD** In den letzten Jahren ist Film in der zeitgenössischen Kunstszene immer beliebter geworden. Nicht selten sind Filmprojekte mit einem riesigen Produktionsbudget ausgestattet, und manche Künstler versuchen sogar, den ganzen Apparat der Filmindustrie einzubinden. Du hingegen scheinst, was deinen Umgang mit Film angeht, entschlossen, weiterhin mit einfachen Mitteln zu arbeiten.

**KO** Ich denke, das hat vielleicht mit meiner Ausbildung und dem, womit ich vertraut bin, zu tun. Ich komme aus einem Umfeld in New York City, in dem Experimentalfilm und -video stark vertreten sind, insofern ist das nicht mein Anliegen. Ich glaube, es gibt gewisse Dinge in der Kunst, auch in Bezug auf Inhalte, die man auf die eine oder die andere Art handhaben kann, und dies ist eben meine. Es hat nichts mit einem Wunsch nach größeren Budgets zu tun. Ich würde meine Arbeit sowieso eher in einen kunsthistorischen Kontext stellen, nicht zwangsläufig einen filmgeschichtlichen. Zumindest wenn man von einem medien-spezifischen Ansatz der Kategorisierung ausgeht.

Ich denke, dass meine Arbeit auf Künstler zurückgeht, die mit der Videokamera ein neues Medium erfanden. Vielleicht ist es etwas verwirrend in Bezug auf Kategorien, da ich mit filmischen Verweisen gearbeitet habe. Aber auch in der Kategorie des Films würde ich in der Verwendung des Mediums eher eine Verwandtschaft zu jemandem wie Hans Haacke sehen (übrigens einer meiner Professoren), der Diskurse um Grundbesitz und

accompanied by a huge production budget, and some of the artists try to employ the whole apparatus of the movie industry. You seem to stick deliberately to a more low-key approach in dealing with film.

**KO** I think, perhaps, because of the particularities of my education and what I'm familiar with—also, coming out of a strong lineage of experimental film and video in NYC—that this is not really a concern of mine. I think there are certain things, in terms of art but also in terms of content, that are done in a certain way. This is the way that I do it. It has no aspirational relationship to larger budgets. And, actually, I place my work more in relationship to art history than, necessarily, film history. At least in terms of a medium-specific approach to categorization.

I really think that my work comes out of artists who invented a new medium with the video camera. It might be a bit confusing, in terms of categories, since I have worked with filmic references. But, there again, my categorical relationship would be the use of the filmic medium the way that someone like Hans Haacke (who, by the way, was one of my professors) used real estate and legal discourses to discuss relationships between capitalism, culture, and urban “development.” I think that “film”—and television, advertisements, all sorts of moving images—adds narratives of subjectivity-formation into the mix in a particularly potent way.

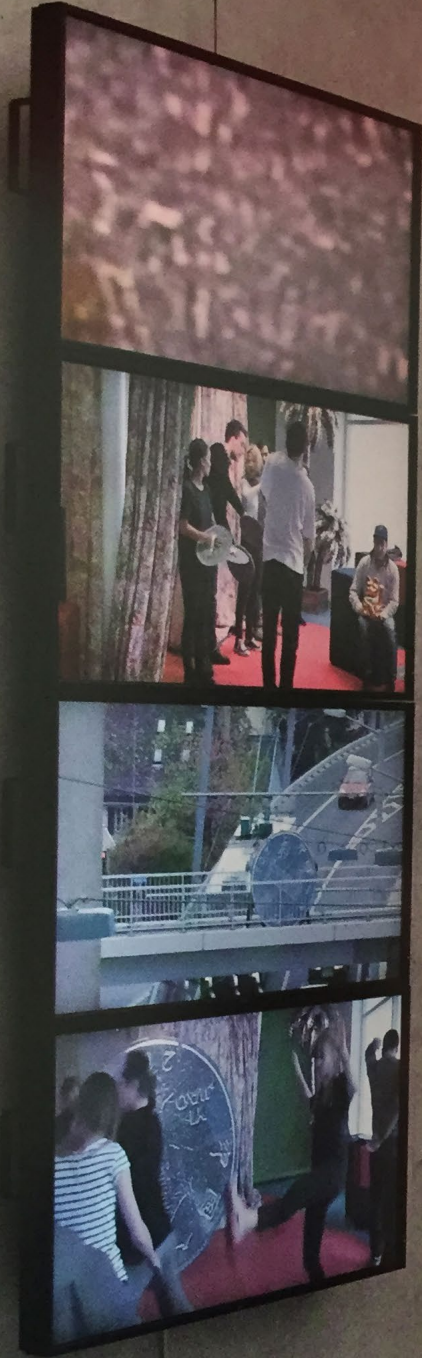
Although, I do watch movies—and actually go to theaters to see them—voraciously. Sometimes three films a day, if there is a particularly good retrospective at MoMA, for example. I also like watching trash on the airplane. Not that this is particular to me, or really original: there is a whole culture of cinephiles in New York. And everyone loves watching movies on airplanes. But, if there is something that relates more exactly to my work in this, it would be that I find that when I haven't been to the movies in a while, I can't see or process the world properly.

**YD** This low-key and low-cost production attitude could in the case of *The Deleted Scene* also be related to one of the obvious topics of this film installation: money.

**KO** I hadn't thought about this—but, again, I think that *The Deleted Scene* has more of a relationship to George Grosz than Steve McQueen. The low-production aspect is “normal” to me, since it's video. Like drawing with a pencil.

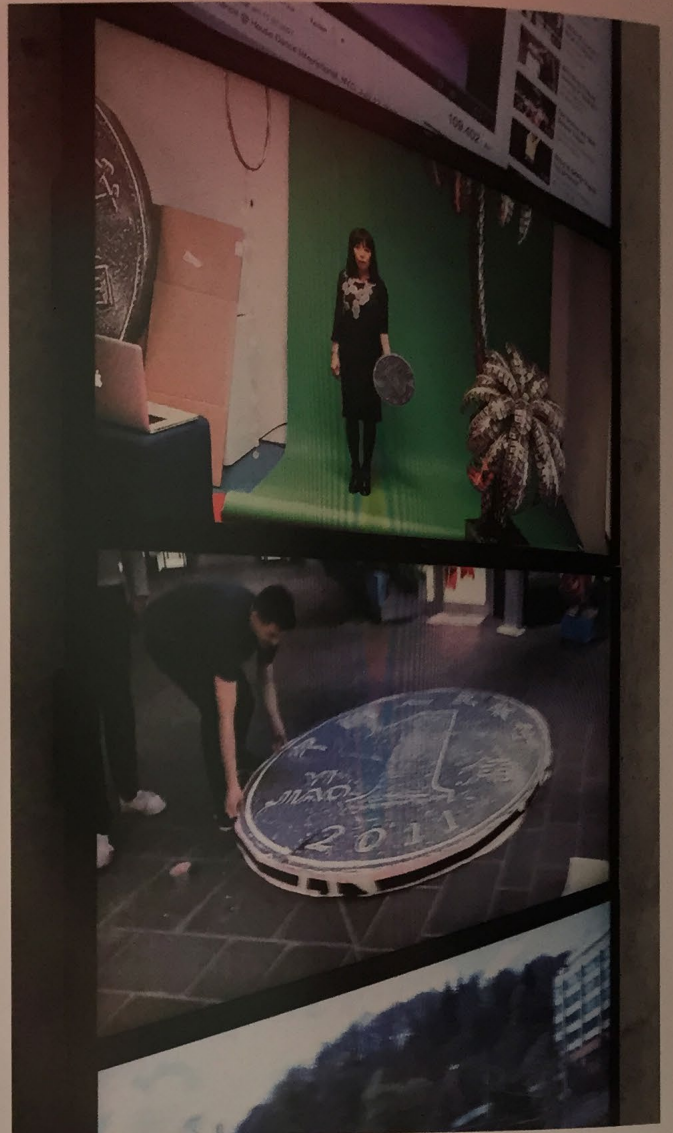
**YD** A main prop in *The Deleted Scene* is a huge Chinese Yuan coin made out of pink extruded polystyrene construction foam, which the “actors” are rolling through the city of Zurich.

In *Love is Colder than Capital* we are showing a second piece by you on the same spot where we are presenting your film installation, but on another floor. It is a giant coin similar to the one in your film and made of the same material. This time, however, the center of the coin is not pink but yellow, and it does not resemble a Yuan, but a









Ken Okiishi,  
*The Deleted Scene (We're in the Money)*, 2012,  
Installationsansicht / Installation view,  
Kunsthau Bregenz, 2013



Rechtsfragen als Anlass nahm, um das Verhältnis von Kapitalismus, Kultur und urbaner „Entwicklung“ zu diskutieren. Ich denke, dass „Film“ – neben Fernsehen und allen Arten bewegter Bilder – Narratives der Subjektivitätsformung dem Mix besonders wirksam hinzufügt.

Trotzdem schaue ich mir Filme an – und gehe, um sie zu sehen, auch tatsächlich ins Kino. Ziemlich unersättlich manchmal, wenn es zum Beispiel eine besonders gute Retrospektive im MoMA gibt, schaue ich drei Filme am Tag. Ich sehe mir auch gern Müll im Flugzeug an. Das ist jetzt nichts Originelles oder Besonderes an mir: In New York herrscht eine ausgesprochen kinobegeisterte Kultur. Und jeder sieht sich gern Filme im Flugzeug an. Aber was daran konkret mit meiner Arbeit zu tun hat, ist, dass ich denke, dass, wenn ich eine Zeit lang nicht im Kino war, ich die Welt nicht richtig sehen oder verarbeiten kann.

**YD** Im Fall der Filminstallation *The Deleted Scene* könnte deine Haltung, die Produktion mit einfachen Mitteln und kleinem Budget zu realisieren, auch als Verweis auf ein Thema betrachtet werden, das im Werk selbst offensichtlich eine Rolle spielt: Geld.

**KO** Der Gedanke war mir noch gar nicht gekommen, aber, wie schon erwähnt, bin ich der Meinung, dass *The Deleted Scene* mehr mit George Grosz zu tun hat als mit Steve McQueen. Mit einfachen Mitteln zu produzieren, ist für mich etwas Normales, da es sich eben um Video handelt. So normal, wie das Zeichnen mit einem Bleistift.

**YD** Ein wichtiges Requisit in *The Deleted Scene* ist ein chinesischer Yuan, eine riesige, aus gepresstem Polystyren-Bauschaum hergestellte rosafarbene Münze, die von „Akteuren“ durch die Stadt Zürich gerollt wird.

In *Liebe ist kälter als das Kapital* zeigen wir an der gleichen Stelle wie deine Filminstallation, jedoch auf einer anderen Etage, ein zweites Werk von dir. Es ist eine ähnlich gigantische, aus denselben Materialien hergestellte Münze wie die in deinem Film, nur dass der Mittelteil diesmal nicht rosafarben, sondern gelb ist, und sie keinen Yuan, sondern einen Euro darstellt. Obwohl sie sich auf die Requisite in deinem Film bezieht, funktioniert sie zugleich auch als autonomes Objekt, das an der Wand hängt. Es handelt sich um eine kinetische Skulptur, die, von einem Motor angetrieben, um die eigene Achse rotiert. Welchen Status – Verweis auf den Film oder autonome Skulptur – hat dieses Werk in deinen Augen?

**KO** Vielleicht erscheint das seltsam, aber in Bezug auf meine Arbeit denke ich nicht in Kategorien wie „autonom“ oder „Verweis“. Die beiden Arbeiten können alternativ als Einheit oder als separate Werke verstanden werden. Wie eine Bildersuche in Google, die Art, wie die Fenster permanent neu arrangiert werden und jedes Mal unterschiedliche Dinge, immer andere Muster auftauchen. Das ist die Richtung, in die ich arbeite – Bezüge zu konstruieren, ähnlich wie Dinge in deinem Gehirn zusammenkommen

Euro. Though it refers to the prop in the film, at the same time it functions as an autonomous object hanging on the wall. It is a kinetic sculpture driven by a motor rotating on its own axis. What status—as a reference to the film or as an autonomous sculpture—does this piece have for you?

**KO** For me, and this may be a bit strange, but I don't really think of "autonomous or not" with my work. The different works can—or not—be thought of together, or separately. Like a Google image-search, the way the windows get rearranged constantly, and you see different things, different patterns emerging. I am working towards this—relationships between works that are like the way things come together in your brain—or are archived on a hard drive or externally on a server.

When I see the coin spinning on the wall—I also think of the work that I did with spinning umbrellas a few years ago. These are all slant-rhymes with Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs* and *Anemic Cinema*. In a currency of images, it could be any currency. That is part of the point, for me, of displacing the Yuan in Zurich. That I am talking about flow—not border/reference/nation. That bundles of cultural affects and styles—or "memes," as people like to say—flow digitally, which is a fluctuating, ricocheting transmission. Not one that clings to certain old-school borders or directions. Of course, the spinning Euro could be read in this heavy way, with the Euro-crisis, etc.—but I also like that, because it also doesn't really add up to very much, in the end. An empty content of weightiness—isn't this a trend worth investigating? Couldn't this also be a way of producing the "emotional content" without actually letting go of our real emotions? These empty shells of seemingly "heavy" content that, upon further reflection, could be anything—or nothing—at all?

**YD** I would like to talk about the event you staged at the Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin in August 2010, because for me it somehow condensed at least three notions which I think are crucial to your work in general.

Ken Okiishi, *Gino/Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com*, 2011/12 (Detail)



oder Dinge, die auf einer Festplatte oder extern auf einem Server archiviert sind. Wenn ich die Münze sehe, die sich an der Wand dreht, fällt mir auch eine andere Arbeit ein, die ich vor zwei Jahren mit drehenden Schirmen gemacht habe – Anspielungen auf Duchamps *Rotoreliefs* und *Anémic Cinéma*. In einer Währung, die aus Bildern besteht, ist jede Währung möglich. Das ist teilweise, worum es mir geht, wenn ich den Yuan in Zürich ausstelle. Dass ich über das Konzept des Fließens nachdenke – und nicht über Grenzen, Verweise, Nationen. Dass die gebündelten kulturellen Affekte und Stile – oder „Meme“, wie gern gesagt wird – digitale Ströme sind, instabile, multidirektionale Übertragungen. Keine, die an Grenzen anhalten oder an Richtungen alter Schule kleben. Der rotierende Euro könnte natürlich auch eine schwergewichtige Art Eurokrise etc. symbolisieren – auch das würde mir gefallen, da am Ende nicht viel dabei herauskommt. Ein leerer Inhalt von gewichtiger Schwere – ist das nicht ein Trend, dem es sich lohnt nachzugehen? Könnte das nicht auch ein Weg sein, „emotionale Inhalte“ zu produzieren, ohne dafür unsere echten Gefühle aufzugeben? Solche leeren Hülsen mit scheinbar „schwerem“ Inhalt, die, denkt man weiter darüber nach, alles Mögliche oder auch rein gar nichts bedeuten könnten?

**YO** Ich möchte gern über ein Event reden, das du im August 2010 im Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin inszeniert hast. Meiner Meinung nach verdichten sich darin mindestens drei Themen, die für dein Werk generell von Bedeutung sind.

Die Einladung zu diesem Abend im Schinkel Pavillon kündigte nichts weiter als ein Event von Ken Okiishi an. Wie sich herausstellte, war dies ein klassisches Konzert, mit dir selbst am Cembalo, nicht mehr, aber auch nicht weniger als das. Obwohl du ausschließlich auf dem Cembalo gespielt hast, waren im Raum noch weitere Instrumente, unter anderem ein Schlagzeug, eine elektrische Gitarre und ein Verstärker. Meiner Ansicht nach drückt dieses Event einerseits dein Interesse an Musik aus und verweist auf deinen persönlichen Hintergrund als ausgebildeter klassischer Musiker. Auf der anderen Seite erzählt es eine Menge über Performance in der zeitgenössischen Kunst, die Erwartungen, die diese Kunstform generiert, das Problem des Spektakels und den Aspekt der Live-Aufführung und ihre Dokumentation. Für mich sind diese Themen – Musik, Performance und die Idee des Live-Events im Verhältnis zu seiner Dokumentation – auch für das Verständnis von *The Deleted Scene* von Bedeutung.

**KO** Ja, absolut richtig. Ich halte mich gern in diesen vielleicht schwierigen oder destabilisierenden – oder sogar schmutzigen – Randzonen auf. Der Gedanke, dass die Leute vermutlich in der Annahme kamen, sie würden einem wahnsinnig „coolen“ Insider-Event an diesem total angesagten Ort in Berlin beiwohnen, und dann stattdessen mit dem aufrichtigen Bemühen konfrontiert wurden, wie jemand Rameau auf dem Cembalo spielte... jemand, der schon immer mal Rameau auf dem Cembalo spielen



Ken Okiishi, Cembalo-Konzert / Harpsichord concert, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, 27. August 2010, Dokumentation der Performance / Performance documentation (Videostill / video still)

The invitation for this evening at the Schinkel Pavillon simply announced an event by Ken Okiishi. You presented a classical concert in which you played a harpsichord, not more, not less. Although you played harpsichord exclusively, there were also other instruments in the space, like a drum set, an electric guitar, and an amplifier. In my view this event on the one hand reflects your interest in music and your personal background as a trained classical musician, and on the other hand it reveals a lot about performance in contemporary art, the expectation this art form generates, the problem of the spectacle and aspects of the live event in relation to its documentation. For me these aspects – music, performance, and the idea of the live event in relation to its documentation – are also important in understanding *The Deleted Scene*.

**KO** Yes, totally. I like to ride these perhaps difficult or destabilizing – or even icky – edges. That people might think they are coming to some super hip secret event at an über-“cool” space in Berlin – and arrive at a sincere effort to play Rameau by someone who has always wanted to play Rameau on the harpsichord. The aesthetic shift there – from gloss to gift – produces this wild intensity. But, I would hope, also a fragilization of the self – that one could start to feel the self becoming other.

The concert was organized by my friend Sergej Jensen, who was using the Schinkel Pavillon as a studio, since there was no exhibition on at the moment and one of his gallerists had access to the space. The drum set, electric guitar, synthesizer, etc., there were the instruments used by his band, which played after I played the harpsichord. These instruments held their potential to make a very different kind of noise, and with a very different cultural valence, in the space – hovering there while the harpsichord concert ruptured the scene. They played this really loud drone music, which was such a shock after this certain kind of “off” intimacy. It was totally crazy.

This unofficial use of the space was important to me and I think Sergej as well – that things could be made dif-

wollte. Die ästhetische Verlagerung, die dort vor sich ging – vom Glanz zur Gabe – produzierte diese wilde Intensität. Aber auch, wie ich hoffe, eine Sensibilisierung des Selbst, dass man anfängt zu fühlen, wie das Selbst sich verändert.

Das Konzert hatte mein Freund Sergej Jensen organisiert, der, da es zu der Zeit keine Ausstellung im Schinkel Pavillon gab und einer seiner Galeristen Zugang hatte, den Raum als Atelier nutzte. Das Schlagzeug, die elektrische Gitarre, der Synthesizer, die sich im Raum befanden, waren Instrumente seiner Band, die auftrat, nachdem ich auf dem Cembalo gespielt hatte. Im Raum verkörperten diese Instrumente ihr Potenzial, völlig andere Geräusche zu erzeugen, mit einer ganz anderen kulturellen Wertigkeit – sie behaupteten ihre Präsenz, während das Cembalo-Konzert innerhalb des Szenarios einen Bruch darstellte. Die Band spielte im Anschluss ihre wahnsinnig laute Drone-Musik, ein Schock nach der vorangegangenen „schrägen“ Intimität. Es war total verrückt.

Für mich, und ich glaube ebenfalls für Sergej, war es auch wichtig, dass wir den Raum inoffiziell nutzten, dass Dinge geändert werden können, indem wir in diesem Ausstellungsraum im Stadtzentrum, der mit der Zeit einen immer „offizielleren“ Status erhalten hatte, etwas Selbst-Organisiertes, Nicht-Autorisiertes durchführten. Eine Art Kollision der Möglichkeiten in diesem „neuen“ Berlin, in dem Profitstreben und Raffgier zunehmend in den Mittelpunkt gerückt sind, während die Stadt im Zuge dessen immer mehr zu versteinern scheint.

Das Thema „Live-Event“ und Dokumentation, denke ich, ist bei *The Deleted Scene* besonders schwierig. Denn auf der einen Seite gibt es die Handlung, die sich im Rahmen bestimmter Diskurse, Netzwerke und Räume vollzieht, und auf der anderen Seite das Vierkanalvideo mit diesen Körpern, Münzen und YouTube-Clips und dem Tanzen und Rollen dieser riesigen Münze durch die Stadt. Aber ich denke wiederum, dass vieles davon Themen sind, die in der „Kunstgeschichte“ bereits behandelt wurden – für mich sind es Bilder, und wie sie produziert wurden, ist wichtig, aber genauso wichtig ist das Sehen an sich und die ästhetische Erfahrung, etwas anzusehen und nicht zu wissen, was es ist. Was die Verarbeitung im Gehirn anbelangt oder die Aufnahme von neuem Wissen oder auch die Veränderung des Sehens und Tuns macht für mich keinen Unterschied, ob ich ein Gemälde, eine Fotografie oder ein Video anschau: Sie alle sind Projektionsflächen. Skulptur und Tanz und Performance (wenn sie live erlebt wird) sind etwas anderes, sie erzeugen in mir eine körperliche Reaktion, die ich bei Projektionsflächen nicht verspüre. Insofern habe ich die Hoffnung, dass die fragmentarische Vierkanal-Ansicht, die Installation des Werks mit vier Monitoren, die den Körper im Raum konfrontiert, den bewegten Bildern auch einen skulpturalen Aspekt verleiht. Wenn ich so darüber nachdenke, könnte die sich drehende Münze in der Ausstellung auch ein Weg sein, den skulpturalen/performativen Aspekt der Filmproduktion in den Ausstellungsraum zu verlagern.

ferent by doing something self-organized and unauthorized in this increasingly “official” exhibition space in the center of the city. A sort of collision of potentialities in this “new” Berlin, which was becoming increasingly ossified along lines of financial aspiration.

In terms of “live event” and documentation—I think that this is particularly difficult with *The Deleted Scene*. Because there is, on the one hand, the act that is happening within certain spaces and networks and spaces; and, on the other hand, there is this 4-channel video with these bodies and coins and YouTube clips and dancing and the rolling of this huge coin around a city. But, again, I think many of these problems have already been dealt with in the field of “art history”—these, for me, are images, and how they are produced is important, but so is looking and the aesthetic experience of not-knowing what you are looking at. I see no difference, in terms of brain-processing and generating new knowledge and also changing how one sees and acts, in looking at a painting, a photograph, or a video; these are all screens. Sculpture and dance and performance (if seen live) are different, for me, because I have this visceral reaction that I don’t have with screen-based works. In this way, I hope the 4-channel fragmentation of the view, and the installation of the work with the four monitors confronting the body in space, generates a sculptural aspect to these moving images. Now that I think about it, the spinning coin that is in the show may also be a way of trying to bring the sculptural/performance aspect of the film production into the exhibition space.

**YD** Maybe we should also talk about the notion of the amateur versus the professional. Though you are a trained classical musician you don’t regularly play in front of an audience, which gave your performance at the Schinkel Pavillon another dimension. This brings us back to *The Deleted Scene*, where the actors and dancers are not professional but amateurs. Are these notions of interest to you?

**KO** With my older video work, which plays more with cinematic narrative elements, I would say the amateurishness of the actors is very important, since you can see the script come to the surface of subjectivity. But with *The Deleted Scene*, I would say that it is the amateurishness of the production itself that is important in that it rubs against the production of “cool” bodies and “hot” networks.

**YD** Let me finish with two more general questions: What do you think about the relation of love and economy?

**KO** I think we need to continue to disturb the “natural” relationships between “love” and “economy”—particularly since what falls into place naturally, these days, aligns with the most destructive aspects of financial engineering. Our feelings, our affects, our Facebook posts, our Vine

**YD** Vielleicht sollten wir auch das Thema Amateur contra Profi anschneiden. Obwohl du ein klassisch ausgebildeter Musiker bist, spielst du nicht regelmäßig vor Publikum, was deinem Auftritt im Schinkel Pavillon eine andere Dimension verlieh. Dies führt uns wiederum zu *The Deleted Scene* zurück, deren Akteure keine professionellen Schauspieler und Tänzer, sondern Amateure sind. Spielen solche Vorstellungen für dich eine Rolle?

**KO** Bei meinen älteren Videoarbeiten, die mehr mit kinematischen, narrativen Elementen spielen, denke ich, dass das Amateurhafte der Akteure sehr wichtig war, da man sehen kann, wie durch das Drehbuch ihre Subjektivität hindurchscheint. Aber bei *The Deleted Scene* ist das Amateurhafte der Produktion an sich wichtig, indem es Produktionen von „coolen“ Körpern und „angesagten“ Netzwerken Widerstand bietet.

**YD** Am Ende zwei allgemeinere Fragen: Was denkst du über das Verhältnis von Liebe und Ökonomie?

**KO** Ich denke, wir müssen damit fortfahren, die „natürlichen“ Beziehungen zwischen „Liebe“ und „Ökonomie“ zu unterminieren – vor allem weil das, was sich heutzutage scheinbar natürlich zusammenfügt, mit den destruktivsten Tendenzen der Finanzsysteme zusammenhängt. Unsere Gefühle, unsere Affekte, unsere Facebook-Einträge, unsere Vine-Videos sind große Datenmengen, mit denen nicht nur viel Geld verdient, sondern auch reale Kontrolle darüber ausgeübt wird, wie wir uns erlauben miteinander umzugehen und wie der andere auszusehen und sich zu verhalten hat. Wie „Liebe“ in diese Mischung hineinpasst, bin ich mir nicht sicher.

**YD** Laut Luc Boltanski und Ève Chiapello ist der Künstler das neue Rollenmodell in unserem neoliberalen Zeitalter, dessen Produzenten hochgradig flexibel sein müssen. Häufig handelt es sich um freiberuflich tätige Individuen, die sich selbst ausbeuten. Meiner Meinung nach kann sich, was diese Definition von Flexibilität und Selbstausbeutung anbelangt, niemand in der Kunstwelt völlig davon ausschließen, aber trotzdem hat jeder seinen oder ihren eigenen Weg, mit dieser Situation umzugehen. Was ist deiner?

**KO** Zu versuchen, auszudrücken – in Kunstwerken auszudrücken –, was vor sich geht. Einzufangen, was in komplexen Momenten des Werdens, die das Potenzial haben, die Produktion von perfekten, effizienten, neoliberalen Cyborgs zu unterwandern, vor sich geht. Falls das misslingen sollte, zumindest zu versuchen, ein Archiv des Moments-im-Werden zu erstellen, das irgendwann in der Zukunft lesbar sein wird.

Wenn ich etwas zur Selbstausbeutung und dem Künstler als neoliberalen Rollenmodell sagen soll, kann ich mich nur hinter einem oft geposteten Bild verstecken: „I'm too sad to tell you.“ (Ich bin zu traurig für Worte.)

videos are big data sets that not only make a lot of people a lot of money, but also perform a real-time regulatory function of how we allow ourselves to interact with each other, and how we want each other to look and behave. I'm not sure where “love” fits into this mix.

**YD** According to Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello the figure of the artist became the new role model for our neoliberalist era, where producers are flexible, very often working as freelance and self-exploiting individuals. In my opinion no one in the art world can absolutely exclude themselves from this definition of flexibility and self-exploitation, still everybody has his or her own way of dealing with this situation. What is yours?

**KO** To try and articulate—in artworks—what is going on, and catch what is going on in moments of complexity and becoming that could, potentially, disturb the production of perfect, efficient neoliberal cyborgs. If this fails, at least try to produce an archive of the moment-in-information that will become legible at some point in the future.

In terms of self-exploitation and the artist as neoliberal role model, I can only hide behind a re-posted image: “I'm too sad to tell you.”





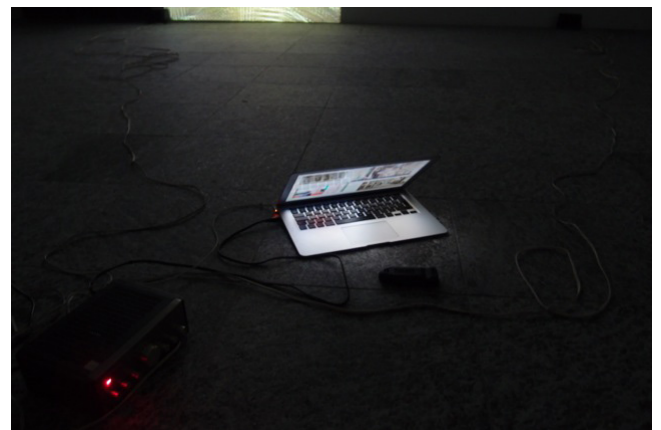
*The Deleted Scene*, 4-channel HD video (color, sound), 27:35 (looped). 2012

Produced by AP News, Zurich.

Exhibited at the Kunsthalle, Bern (August-October 2012); GAMeC, Bergamo, Italy (September-December 2012); Kunsthau, Bregenz (February-April 2013); Artists Space, New York; MIT List Visual Arts Center (2013)

Description, from Artists Space:

The Deleted Scene (2012), Okiishi's most recently completed video, is very much of the current moment of global data streams, fast downloads, YouTube art, and a dominance of financial capitalism built on ever-more sophisticated and dematerializing financial instruments. The particular "scene" of *The Deleted Scene* is the mobilizing of a volunteer army of bodies in tangential industries, such as creatives and hipsters, who are thought to bring vitality and viability to previously dead real and virtual spaces and networks. It is also a reflection on the desires of these bodies to "keep it real": an action which acknowledges the impossibility of escaping the ever-hatching realms of instrumentalization—where even the term instrumentalization itself feels "profitable"—while also not producing the obedient smoothness required of distant financial products. The distance of cut-up data and capital investment begins to be carved out as a place of detour; but it is also not as clear-cut as this, as a YouTube clip of "We're in the Money" from *Gold Diggers* of 1933, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJOjTNuuEVw>, is flowed into this particular network and allowed to go "viral." *The Deleted Scene* was produced in collaboration with, and shot in and around, the collectively run, self-organized cinema space, AP News, in Zurich.



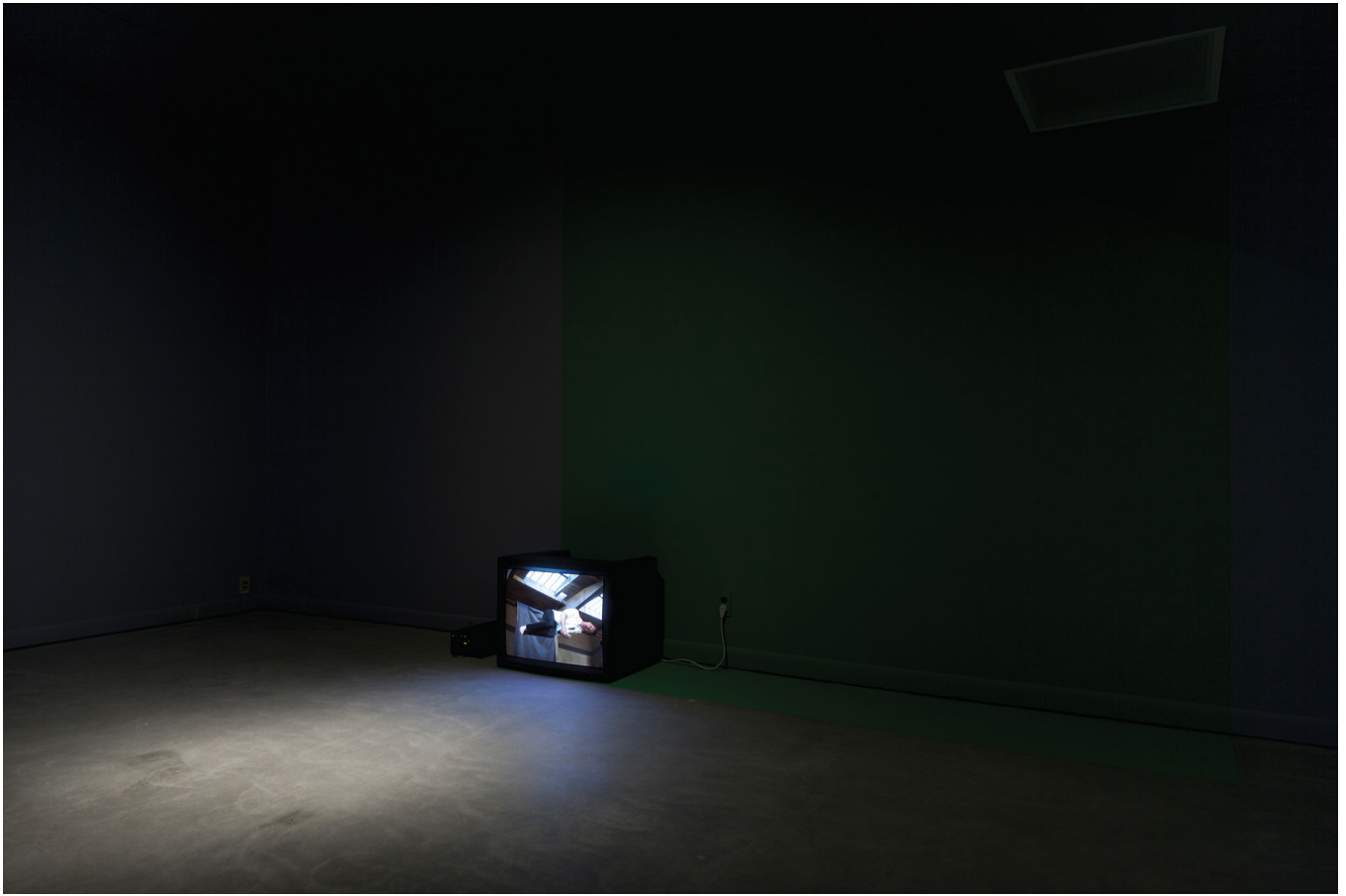
















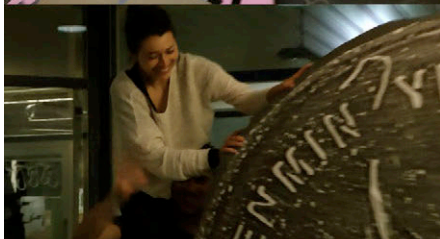
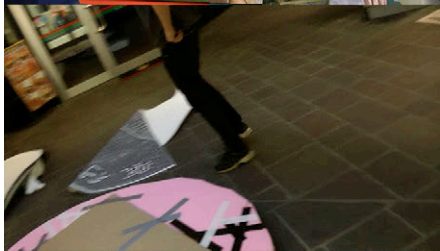
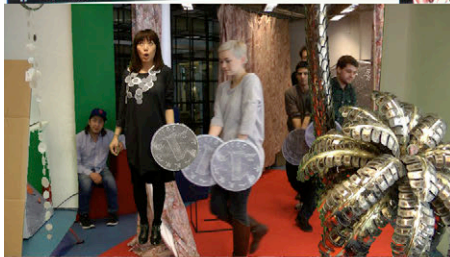
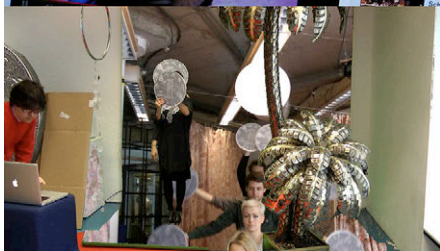
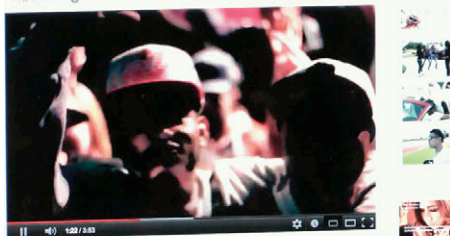
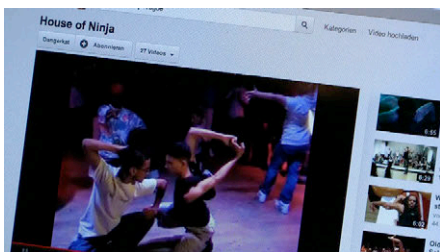




*The Deleted Scene*, 4-channel HD video (color, sound), 27:35 (looped). 2012

Description, from Kunsthalle Bern PR:

The Deleted Scene was filmed at AP News, Zürich, over the course of one week in April, 2012. AP acted as the producer for a filming situation, with Ken Okiishi as the director. Some of the people involved with the collectively run cinema space corresponded with Ken Okiishi via email and skype over a ten month period leading up to the shoot; this correspondence developed, and acted as, a porous screen through which various incitements of action and settings could be constructed in the material space, and environs, of the cinema. The cinema itself was to be turned inside-out: not a place of watching movies, but as a site of activation, and reflection, on the screens we see each other through. At the core, a sort of cracked-out tv studio (“tony duquette for guy debord, neo-zurich godard hipsterism”) was constructed by Alina Clavuot in the cinema space (which is located inside a storefront of a 1980s sort-of defunct small shopping mall) out of trash from a mountain resort hotel in ruins, an art deco palm tree by Maison Jansen that used to be at Longstreet Bar, and various other fragments of set elements; one specific point of reference was the opening song (“We’re in the Money”) of Gold Diggers of 1933 and the “that very odd gallery that leads nowhere” of Cocteau’s *Les Enfants Terribles*. At some point, Emanuel Rossetti and Tobias Madison constructed a giant coin out of construction foam, probably stolen from a nearby construction site, which Alina, Tobias and Vittorio ended up rolling all over neo-Zurich. The Deleted Scene is the film that gets suppressed from most official narratives of urban development: the actions and labor, made visible, that imbue a place with vitality. What kind of life can be constructed out of this vitality remains an open question.



Untitled, 2013. Inkjet print, construction foam, motor.  
Exhibited at Kunsthau Bregenz; Mathew, Berlin.



Untitled, 2013. Inkjet print, construction foam, motor.  
Exhibited at Kunsthaus Bregenz; Mathew, Berlin.



# ARTFORUM

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# Parsons Tale

KEN OKIISHI ON FORREST BESS

**THE CONTINUED** mythic, outsider status of Forrest Bess is a testament to the sheer anxiety he sparks around hierarchies of vision and social organization—hierarchies that are central to how we legitimate works of art. It is no small feat for an artist who showed regularly during the peak years of Betty Parsons Gallery (that epicenter of the development and promotion of Abstract Expressionism) to continually reemerge as a holy grail of glimmering and elusive marginality. Since Bess's death in 1977, his work has made cameo appearances in discourses as varied as an essay in *Art Journal* griping about the global ascendance of curators over artists circa Documenta 10, which claimed Bess's "intensely personal worlds" as an antidote (1997); a lesbian-feminist revisionist history of Parsons's gallery, which put the painter at the forefront of an ostracized queer AbEx (1994); and John Yau's marvelous, poetic writing on Bess, which treats him as an exceptional subjectivity

**Bess's visions were not spaced-out hallucinations projected onto the world, but intimate, experimental physiological phenomena, where images formed in the synaptic mesh of his brain were projected onto the flesh of his eyes.**

emblematic of the ways *all* modernists were disquieting, different, estranged (1984, 1988, 2012). Bess was labeled an "outsider against his will" on the occasion of a show at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, in 1989; he was more recently appropriated as the harbinger of a certain celebrated, kooky mark-making in late-2000s "near-abstract" painting. This year saw a solo show of some forty paintings at Christie's in New York, as well as his crowning as the universal critical favorite of the 2012 Whitney Biennial, where he was given a room to himself, guest-curated by the artist Robert Gober.

That these modest, terrifyingly strange paintings could stand for *so much* to a handful of influential



Forrest Bess, *Untitled (No. 12 A)*, 1957, oil on canvas, 12 x 18".

people and yet be described as "marginal" in almost every iteration of praise could be explained in part by the actual social marginality of Bess's life and by the way, from the start, he promoted himself in the New York art world. In the letter that initiated his nearly thirty-year-long epistolary, confessional relationship with the art historian Meyer Schapiro, written in response to Schapiro's participation in the 1948 *Life* magazine round table "Modern Art: Fifteen Distinguished Critics and Connoisseurs Undertake to Clarify the Strange Art of Today," Bess described himself as follows:

I am a painter—fisherman. I live on Chinquapin Bay on East Matagorda Bay on the Gulf Coast of Texas. I am fairly unknown and desire to remain so but like most painters—when I hear or meet a person with a viewpoint similar in some ways to mine I have the natural inclination to desire to further that acquaintance. My gallery is Parsons at 15 E. 57th in N.Y. My gallery would have been Willard if I had sent my work there. I also know Miller (Dorothy) at the M. of M. Art. The classification of my work is "abstract primitive" and "visionary painter." Sometimes when you're in town go by and look at it and drop me a note.

The simultaneous way in which the artist declares his proud obscurity while claiming, with passive arrogance, the position of being the same, or on the same level, as "most painters" is part of the annoying charm of Bess's personality: his blithe blindness to social hierarchy in a world in which he nevertheless finds himself so alienated. In current writing about Bess, the words *Texas*, *fisherman*, *visionary*, and some version of *hermaphrodite* (more on that later) always form, like a cloud of apologies—or, given the astonishing increase in the value of his work in the past few years, like dollar signs—around his name.

But I don't think it is primarily such outsider-insider marketing that places his work, perennially, just outside the margins of visibility (or awaiting its next rediscovery). The paintings themselves are curious, strange—and, for someone confronted with writing about them, particularly terrifying, as many of his canvases perform that intimidating act of becoming unintelligible. Dense crossings of paralogical sign systems; anachronistic, constantly sliding stylistic modes; and an absolute directness in execution tend to flip out even critical minds that have developed careful procedures for explaining pictures.



Clockwise from top left: Forrest Bess, *Untitled (The Void I)*, 1946–47, oil on canvas, 9½ x 11¼". Forrest Bess, *Untitled #2 (The Penetrated)*, 1966, oil on canvas, 14½ x 18½". Forrest Bess, *Untitled*, 1952, oil on canvas mounted on board, 9 x 10¾". Forrest Bess, *Untitled*, 1952, oil on canvas mounted on board, 8 x 8". Photograph taken by Forrest Bess of his self-surgery, ca. 1958.

This, of course, is part of the pleasure of looking at a painting by Bess, and even the most weathered art pursuer greets such moments with a combination of relief, wonder—and squirming. The words that you might reach for disform as they are confronted with the paintings' stark opacity; as a result, critics are tempted to confront the work with a spray of biographical information. This temptation is egged on by the particularly explosive nature of what, exactly, Bess did to his "uro-genital region." (The story is so overpublicized at the moment that I won't go into detail, but in short: In 1955, as the culmination of his intensive research into discovering an orgasmic, youth-inducing "secret" within hermaphroditism, Bess, with the crude anesthesia of getting "good and drunk," cut an elaborate hole into the base of his penis.)

What I find disappointing with all of the tangential praise around Bess's practice is that it always meets these "difficult" biographical details as stopping points—as if biographical details can be left to float, unattached from the form or development of the artist's work, either used to further mystify a cryptic aura or dismissed as freakish anecdotes that have little to do with the art at hand. This type of dislocated biography is used as an arbitrary—even infantilizing—critical (and curatorial) haze that "protects" us from seeing what is going on. With Bess, these critical blinders are particu-

larly politicized, as this "disturbing" biographical side note is the locus of major artistic and theoretical developments in his work, and any failure to see Bess's production of transsexual sexual difference as significant beyond the limits of his own personal psychology is art-historically feeble, out-of-date, even bigoted.

By now, it should be possible—if not necessary—to think Bess's bodily acts on the same plane as his paintings: to treat them not as biographical tidbits, but as artistic gestures intrinsic to his work. As Gober's lyrical "inhabitation" of the archival body of Bess in the Whitney Biennial emphasizes, Bess insistently tried to have his "thesis" (a dense assembly of image and text, which has unfortunately survived only in fragments) shown as part of his solo exhibitions in the late 1950s. Parsons denied his request, suggesting that the combination of paintings and thesis would be more appropriate in a "medical hospital." The mythology set up by the Whitney is that Gober "realizes Bess's wish," and with its vitrines of archival materials—including three pages of his thesis, shown out of order; a crotch shot of Bess's self-surgery; and a magazine article featuring glamorous photos of Parsons—along with extensively researched, often poignant wall text, the small gallery devoted to Bess's work gestures toward a visual-informational field in which this could happen. I only wish that Gober, himself a master of creating voided objects and spaces,

had pushed the formal aspects of Bess's paintings, writing-collage, and bodily experiments further, past a safe dichotomy between archival material (vitrine, wall text) and art object (paintings on the wall). But the potential is there. And with a certain intensity of attention and reflection, the documentation of the void Bess produced in his urethra can be understood as part of a continuous sequence of voids he painted from the late 1940s through the '50s—and not merely a proximate, personal detail.

An early void (*Untitled [The Void I]*, 1946–47) on view at the Christie's show is particularly interesting, as it features a dense mass of symbols not included in the Jung-inspired charts Bess produced as a kind of decoder key for his own work. The painting holds in its carved-out center a mixture of cosmological, natural, mathematical, and "primitive" doodles, none of which seem to signify anything—and all of which are painted with a fresh, cartoony flair that, like much of Bess's work, would look more at home in the 1980s than in the '40s or '50s. This overflow of signs appears to have fallen into the sinking bottom of a white void. The painting was made *before* Bess began communicating with Schapiro—the great American importer of semiotics into art history—and yet the arbitrariness and the nonmimetic aspects of what Schapiro called the image-sign seem here already pushed to the limit of hermeticism, of unreadability. On the other side of the "world," meanwhile, another clump of junk signifiers has begun to collect—or this could also be a bunch of markings on the roof of the mind, or crude oil spilling from the earth, as blood inside the brain sparks a jolt of overfiring synapses.

It has often been mentioned that Bess was quite literal about the "visionary" aspect of his work; he saw images on the backs of his eyelids, which he copied directly into sketchbooks in a half-dreaming state, and these sketches served as "memory aids" for painting. What I find fascinating about this process is its wayward scientificity. Bess, as self-anointed scientist, mystic, philosopher, and artist in one, could be both the observed object and the subjective (better yet, "psycho-alchemical") producer of experiments on his own body. His visions were not spaced-out hallucinations projected onto the world but intimate, experimental physiological phenomena, where images formed in the synaptic mesh of his brain were projected onto the flesh of his eyes. The materiality of this process gives the paintings what I can best describe as the feeling, but not the look, of microscope slides. There is a certain viscosity





Clockwise from top left: Forrest Bess, *Untitled*, 1965, oil on canvas, 10 x 8".  
Forrest Bess, *The Penetrator*, 1967, oil on canvas, 18 x 24".  
Forrest Bess with his work, Chinquapin, TX, ca. 1960.

or filminess to the paint that reminds me both of the fluid used to keep a biological sample fresh as it is pressed between pieces of glass, and of the weary, glassy tears of watching, and blinking, in the darkness of the lab, with soft light projected through cold glass onto the surface of the eye.

In *Untitled* (No. 5), 1951, the material of the eyeball itself seems to form informational voids on the surface of the canvas. Across a gently rippling plane of golden, dark ocher that passes through a flat blackness, random, squiggling gaps in continuity resemble the way the optical aberrations known as floaters create clusters of interference in vision. Even when the eyes are closed, if the head is tilted toward a light source, these deposits in the clear, jellylike center of the eye flick back and forth across the field of vision, creating a sense that what is seen in the mind also has a potentially motile support surface. Bess, like Goethe before him, poses sight not as transcendent but as irrevocably embodied, gelatinous—yet also charged, even electric.

The voids enlarge and morph in other paintings, and in my personal favorite, *Untitled* (No. 12 A), 1957, we are confronted with two white rectangles, like an empty stereoscope, and a red and pink smear of bubble-gum-like flesh oozing off to the side of this divided field of vision; this is the void of shocks, flashes of light, chutes of semiotic breakdown through which one can fall into an absolute vacuum of words, sounds, breath. In his various explanatory charts of symbols, Bess conveys the visceral and narrative density he gave to white and red voids, with the former representing the female and the “new moon” drawn between “legs of man”; the latter, the male, the sun, and the “golden star” (the anus). If we follow his charts and read *Untitled* (No. 12 A)

as a return to the feminine, we can see that for Bess, the feminine is not a comforting or soft space, but a doubling, intensifying, electrifying set of voids. Two pages from the thesis-fragment on display in the vitrine at the Whitney elaborate Bess’s complex thinking even further:

The alchemists did not know whether the penis could be turned inside out—the red and the white in. Cauldwell says that such is impossible unless the penis be partially severed. However this constitutes the “red stone”—that which is impregnable—cannot be dialated [*sic*] however the spongy section can be dilated. . . . Therefore we have and understand the origin of both the red and the white. . . . Our search however is for the Star—the Quarternity—the Door to the Kingdom of Heaven, etc. In a very early dream we were in a three room house. The middle room contained all the great art treasures of the earth. A door was opened into the third room and the odor of death and the earth came forth. The Woman (Mother) closed it quickly. This dream preceded the perineum incision and the wound closed

very quickly. You remember that Plato would have the hero inter [*sic*] the small passage—outside urethra.

Our analysis of the eyebolt as the symbol of the ankh is in error because of the direction shown in the dream is always complimentary [*sic*—that is 90 degrees from consciousness therefore rather than seeing the eyebolt as it was shown, it in reality is the other way round. . . . The dreams have come forth showing the Star above the breasts. Also it has been shown above the anus using the whole body as the phallic symbol. This is the location verified by Cauldwell and the mika operation—with the exception that the Australians apparently never found the dialating process therefore it was a ritual act only—

What we can also see in this fragment is the peripatetic movement: the rapid shifts in scale and register of Bess’s mostly illogical thought patterns that hang inside straightforward expository gestures. In a way, Bess’s writing, when seen as part of his artwork (and, in many ways, outside his own understanding of his work) pre-figures a textual aesthetic more fully developed by the Language poets. In fact, the deeper one delves into the archival material, the more one sees aesthetic connections with all types of groups that Bess *could have* been part of—ways in which his work *might have* developed.

But it may be this lonely, quarantined quality—as when you have spent all day doing tedious tasks on the computer and then can’t form proper sentences in a social situation—that explains why Bess’s work resonates with us so profoundly today. As I look at the cover of the Christie’s auction catalogue, which features a Polaroid of Bess wearing a certain happy-go-lucky smile that seems alien to the brutality of his work, the artist’s oft-repeated line finally starts to slide into sense: “My painting is tomorrow’s painting. Watch and see.” This phrase (also printed on the cover) reads differently in the present—Bess’s “tomorrow”—than when it was first declared. In 2012, as we “watch and see” his work, we feel an empathy for a crudeness, a technological invasiveness, a desire to cut holes in or redistribute affects on our neocyborgian bodies. Bess’s aggressive rewirings of psychological, artistic, mystical, philosophical, and medical discourses feel prescient. This is the contemporary form of Bess’s work, as if painted on the surface of our eyes and on the synthetic screens of our sociability. □

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# ARTFORUM



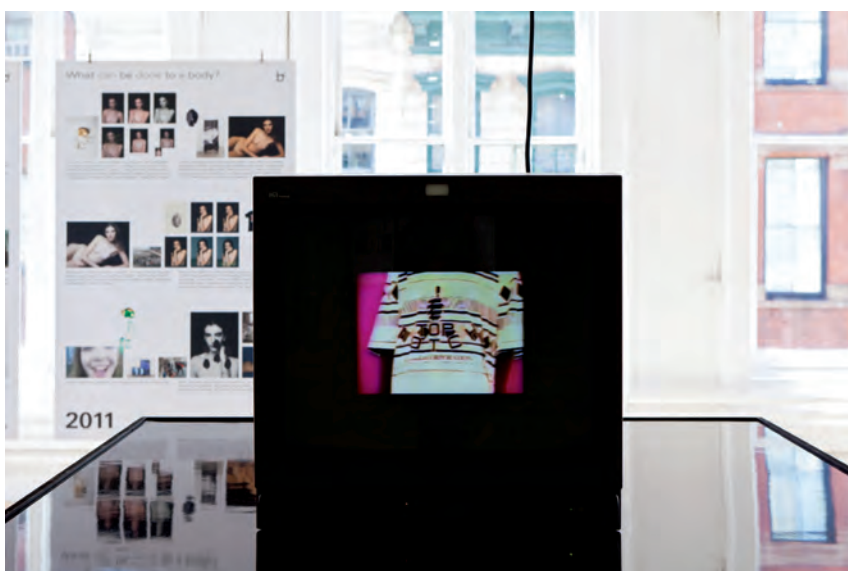


BEST OF 2012

# “Bernadette Corporation: 2000 Wasted Years”

Artists Space, New York

KEN OKIISHI





Opposite and this page: Views of "Bernadette Corporation: 2000 Wasted Years," 2012. Photos: Daniel Perez.

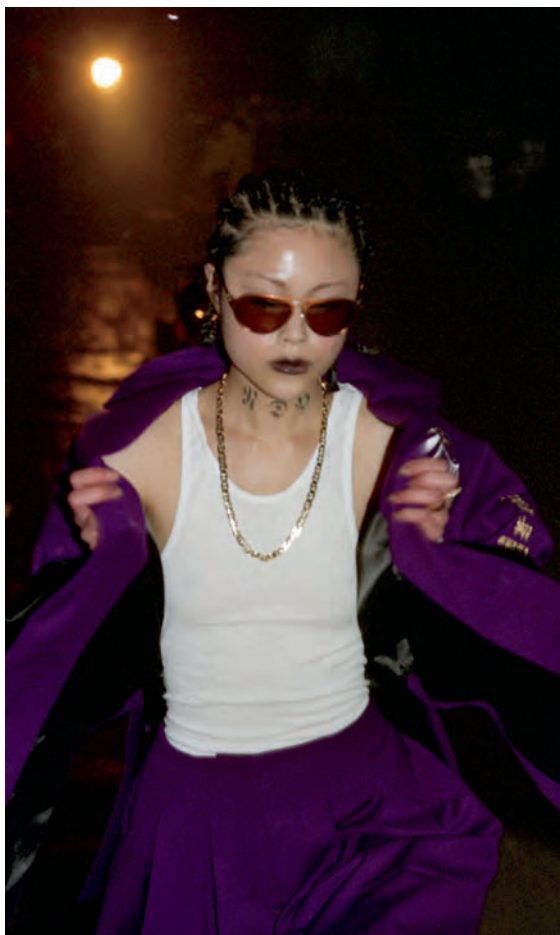
**ONE OF THE MOST PUZZLING THINGS** about Bernadette Corporation is that it never became truly commercially viable in either the fashion or the art system—unlike many of its peers in the 1990s and 2000s, who were able to capitalize on the interface of those very systems. BC's hesitation, or perhaps just disorganization, could be seen as a lived resistance to market permeation, both inside the bodies of its various "corporate" members and within the *networks* of "cool" it activated. And it could also be part of the reason why its work (including its "new" work) continues to look fresh, unlike, say, the current pages of *Purple* magazine. In fact, BC's "old" work, in particular the fashion shows from the late '90s and the magazine *Made in USA* from the turn of the millennium, may look even better now than when it first appeared—when the group's contributors were also heavy presences on the scene, and when its janky couture, not to mention the gossamer schizo-collectivity of designer Susan Cianciolo, had not yet been endlessly

rehashed. Strangely, it is this "originality" that seems most relevant to our climate of ever-hatching niche markets and constantly recycled stylistic detritus—a garbage fashion of microtrends and instant market access, of networked products whose major joy is carefully calibrating an immediate sellout.

As the '90s become confused with the '00s; as the past twenty years are recompressed, repackaged, and remarketed as quickly as possible; as certain strains of ironic fashion that in the '90s were transgressive have reappeared, partially as the look of an earnest hatred of present-day financial capitalism, partially as a way of generating an ecstatic marketability for products and services by savvy magazine and consultancy "collectives"; and as "radical chic" has come to encompass anything that looks fucked-up, a retrospective view of BC also becomes an opportunity to tease out ways in which BC is decisively *not* radical chic. That it is not the purchase of "street cred," or the promise of buying the look of political action,

or a mask of radicality for self-promotional aims—but actual politics at work, radical or otherwise.

Which is not to say that BC's direct political discourse, the stuff that sounds the most like "theory," is where the politics in their work really lives. If there is a real weakness in the reception of BC thus far, it is that the group's nostalgia for French and Italian '68-era left-wing politics and '80s theory—and its '00s reprocessing—is taken at face value. I am reminded of an off-the-cuff half joke by one of its members at a rather depressingly earnest OWS meeting, who startlingly described autoreduction (the Autonomist tactic of collectively reducing prices or production) as being kind of like a Groupon. It is at these fissures, when the ardent political impulse runs wild and dis-joints competing systems of value, thereby short-circuiting otherwise agile circuits of "community" and "ideology," where the politics in BC's work is most effective, and where its sustained interest in "fashion" still holds the most potential. Especially



In this stripped-down floor in SoHo, we are confronted with a monstrous, black, '00s-futuristic carcass of a Dior Homme—*cum*-architectural-info-kiosk display apparatus, complete with faux graffiti.

now, when these styles seem to be returning everywhere—as ghosts of zombie simulations, with no apparent politics, not even an antipolitics.

Which is also why it is so great that Stefan Kalmár and Richard Birkett at Artists Space had the courage to attempt this show. After all, when word got around that this show was happening, everyone wondered: How could you possibly do a BC retrospective? With so much critical and social contingency, so much “fuck you,” so much probably lost or thrown away over the years?

Well, whatever they did, it worked. With a cracking, pseudolackadaisical analytic precision (and a much larger budget than usual), BC went for the forms of display whose borders could be most contaminated, most warped. In this stripped-down full floor in SoHo, which evokes as much nostalgia for “alternative spaces” as it does fantasies of “loft living,” we are confronted with a monstrous, black, '00s-futuristic carcass of a Dior Homme—*cum*-airport-lounge-*cum*-architectural-info-kiosk-dressing-room-pop-up-fast-food-restaurant display apparatus, complete with faux graffiti (AGAINST ALL SYSTEMS) that only makes the enormous object even more ambivalent in meaning; various vitrines, the spawn of said marvelous abomination, where the reliquary is given the texture of the

current trend for displaying objects as if they store Internet data; trashy mannequins, in awful shades of black or white, as hilarious as they are sad, wearing remakes of BC clothes; and, most striking in its unexpected directness, a seemingly straightforward time line of the entire archival history of BC, which is as much *Infoaesthetik* as it is FIT-museum presentation as it is storyboard for a tell-all BC biopic (with K-holes as the primary editing technique).

The retrospective is shocking to many people who were becoming skeptical of BC's work and who were expecting an emptier gesture: It is elaborately detailed and, as a body of work (in its “rebooted” form, to use the artists' quaint term), implicitly critiques much that has come after it. Unlike the MFA-stamped, aspirational youths of today, BC does not confuse the storage device with informational flows, the fetish with the message. They understand that data circulates on and between bodies and objects—not inside USB sticks—and that the true malleability is on the surface of our faces. If there is a metaphor in the current vogue for USB sticks, it would be “dead USB stick”: a fetish for empty information.

And yet there is also something of the touch screen in the way BC parasitically remakes and undoes advertising, the way the bodies look so similar but



Left: Look from Bernadette Corporation's fall/winter 1997 collection, “Hell on Earth.” Photo: Dietmar Busse.

Above: Cover of *Made in USA 2* (1999/2012). Photo: Cris Moor.

“feel” so different in, for example, BC's commission, as part of *The Complete Poem*, of David Vasiljevic's photo shoot based on his 2008 Levi's ad campaign. With “real models” and “real photographers,” the surface of advertising itself takes on the character of the touch screen, like the skin of a person, the beautiful person you love, the skin you touch, which now responds with an automatic sad sexiness to every drag, flick, tap, hold, nudge, pinch, spread, and slide. Tactility is rerouted. No more real fluids—just an incalculable flow of information, a smear inside the screen. Or no information at all: The messages never arrive, even though your in-box is always open, attached to your hand—an openness that is also the transparency of cells, of “transparency” as control, of hand sanitizer. A radically ambivalent affect is injected into the site of desire production. Images that are meant to produce a consumer of branded lifestyles swerve toward other matrices of desire.

Even as this experience seems tied to technology, to a prosthetic body, a much earlier set of photographs demonstrates that this affective mode does not rely on computers and their metaphors. Photographed by Mark Borthwick, with Bernadette Van-Huy listed as “stylist,” this slim, five-page shoot has stuck with



Above: Page from *Made in USA 2* (1999/2012). Photo: Mark Borthwick.

me ever since I first saw it in 2000, in the second issue of *Made in USA*. It features an almost—still—indescribable lack of coherence in every thin, unmade black-and-white image. In one spread, a model who could be anyone, maybe a teenage boy, maybe a girl, leans against the wall, full-length, staring into the fold of the magazine, almost completely covered up by his/her own long hair, a minor lens flare covering up most of the “fashion” that could be for sale here. The heels are much too big. There’s a plastic bag from Domsey’s (“clothes by the pound”) crumpled up against the wall; s/he is standing, leaning against it, but not very hard, and the shadow of the image of the body seems to be holding up the bag.

Only a text that Bernadette wrote herself—or at least that seems to be speaking in her voice, since you never know—does justice to the sheer undecidability of this image. The extraordinary tract is reproduced twice in the retrospective (once as archival material, once as a light box), and it is nearly impossible to excerpt. It reads now like an antimanifesto, on the level of Yvonne Rainer’s “No Manifesto,” in our age of thirteen-year-old fashion bloggers and armies of art school infomaniacs. It also reads with the latent cruelty of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

It begins: “1. I am a first-generation Vietnamese-American, born in Queens, NY. I’ve never been to Asia. 2. I never knew a thing about fashion until I moved to Manhattan after graduating from college with a degree in economics. I had never been cool. I liked the same music as my mother. I never experi-

mented with drugs or alcohol or style. I preferred bowling to rock concerts.” It goes on to tell the story of how BC began, of throwing parties with Cooper Union art students, of “collecting as much fashion data” as she could; of BC’s “volatile” working process, full of “year-long depressions” and “the most productive and inspired moments of our lives”; of realizing a “fiction that we prefer to reality.” With continued, casual charm, it also archives the frustrating states of being an artist in New York at the beginning of the twenty-first century: “Begin a sideline ‘pure’ business venture, no art involved whatsoever, (systems analysis?, pouring concrete?, toothpaste?).” “Sell everything and move to the mountains.” And through these contingencies, the text arrives at BC’s core politics. Unlike the aloofness of modernist strategies of negation or the pluralism of postmodern acceptance, BC unleashes a nonproductive shudder within overproductive, financialized bodies. Not for the market, but not exactly against the market either, BC allows an uneasy supplement to emerge—an ambivalent affect, a stutter, that could, through the precise misuse of the fashion system, come to appear anywhere, anytime: “As much as we love the speed of fashion and information and exchanges in general, we are also interested in putting some slowness back into it. A curious thing happens then. Fashion/information finds some time to ask itself a couple of questions before suddenly speeding off again.” □

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Bernadette Van-Huy (left) at Club USA, New York, 1993.



Bernadette Van-Huy preparing the spring/summer 1997 collection “Streetgangs and Corporations,” 270 Bowery, New York, 1996. Photo: Cris Moor.



**TEXTE ZUR KUNST**



"Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between," 2017, installation view



## REVIEWS

### NEGATIVE CHIC

Ken Okiishi on Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

*"I'm not an artist doing a single painting — a piece that's just meant to be shown on a wall. It's an act of business that's meant to be worn."*

Rei Kawakubo, 1993<sup>1</sup>

The museumification of fashion incites particular problems. Very often when fashion and institutions meet, the fashionable body drops out of the equation — its set of habits and rituals blindly cast into outmoded semantic fields of “art,” while its clothes are thrown onto stiff mannequins, where they occupy an awkward middle ground between “sculpture” (object + pedestal) and shop window display. The Met Costume Institute, however, leads in generating new museological strategies for presenting and archiving fashion, ranging from its integrative approach (e.g., exhibiting objects from other departments and displaying them through fashion’s frame) to developing new scales of press and fundraising, especially the elevation of the Met Gala to the level of the Oscars. In its most successful moments, the Costume Institute catalyzes a new set of pressures (and releases) around the displayed garments so that whatever slippage into clichés of “sculpture” there may be is circumvented by memory flashes of Rihanna walking the red carpet.<sup>2</sup>

When news first started circulating that Rei Kawakubo — infamously never having attended the Met Gala (and purportedly never having been invited)<sup>3</sup> — was being given a full-scale retrospective at the Met Costume Institute and that its opening would be the occasion of this year’s gala, my first thought was, “This is going to be a return-of-the-repressed disaster.” But with this, I hoped that Kawakubo would manage to navigate the byzantine systems of destructive control that have become the norm in New York cultural

institutions, and somehow still end up with an exhibition close to the “truth” of her practice. I would have been perfectly happy with a museumification of Kawakubo’s œuvre that made transparent the tensions revealed in a fascinatingly bitchy interview with the exhibition’s curator, Andrew Bolton (included in the beautifully researched catalogue). Here she states her initial desire for the show’s format: “I wanted all the clothes to be shown on the floor on open displays without barriers, so people could touch them, but the Museum said it wasn’t possible because of security reasons.”<sup>4</sup>

In the realized exhibition, Bolton and Kawakubo conceded to the museum’s no-touching mandate but did take other liberties, generating a display system that hits a note somewhere between what shoppers experience within the inside/outside Mobius strip continuousness of Comme des Garçons’ store design and the thought-space of reluctantly confronting one’s own career after 40 years of vertiginous activity (of intersecting windows of disjointed-memory, where certain images are partially blocked from each other while others intersect on irrational levels of multiplication and difficult layering). As such, “Art of the In-Between,” as the exhibition is titled, features groupings of garments taken from various Kawakubo and CdG collections reorganized around eight macro binary themes — e.g., Fashion/Antifashion, Self/Other, Clothes/Not Clothes, and numerous subcategories, such as Life/Loss, Elite Culture/Popular Culture, and Fact/Fiction, etc., with each set housed by its own display element. Attendant to the installation is a heavy textual component: a free exhibition brochure consisting of 40 pages of black-and-white text that gives an austerity to the show



From Left: Carrie Rebora Barratt, Rei Kawakubo, Andrew Bolton, and Anna Wintour at press event for “Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between,” Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017

commendable both for its curatorial rigor and for the way it authentically treats intellectuality as a kind of air around a fashion practice (as in, the thick brochure that is never read, only clutched while walking through the exhibition). As for the clothes, they are of course absolutely amazing. And the exhibition architecture – clustered and partially hidden/revealed in glaring, bright florescent light – looks particularly good when overfull with visitor bodies in all kinds of other clothing. Anyone familiar with textile conservation will read Kawakubo’s bleached-out lighting scheme as a transgression of the prohibitory regulations; like touch, light is also a primary destroyer.

A simple Google search will reveal review after review praising the exhibition and gushing with descriptions of a wide variety of favorite pieces animated by anecdotal CdG history. While these responses are mostly all fine and warranted, the importance of this exhibition, to my mind, lies in how it mobilizes certain modes of negation. In the aforementioned interview, Kawakubo refers to the show as “a model” for subsequent presentations of her work after she is “gone.”<sup>5</sup> It would therefore seem particularly significant that the clothes are *not* immediately accessible but

rather compel you to first look away, until maybe something about the after-image then leads you to look back again, giving the wearer an ornate privacy; distance increases desire. If there is a central aesthetic principle that runs across all of the forms of Comme des Garçons, it is an insistence on negation as a way of producing generative emptiness.

Perhaps it is this emptiness that produces a desire for multiple other exhibitions – and I do hope that this is not the last word on Comme des Garçons. I would love to see exhibitions emerge that, for example, incorporate Comme des Garçons marketing materials – most notably, the legendary magazine *Six*, and the various, wonderfully oblique items produced to announce new collections throughout the 40 years of CdG’s existence. Also in this category of peripherals could be the styling of the fashion runway shows; menswear (the exhibition limited itself to Kawakubo’s womenswear); fragrances (of which there are now some 75 and counting), including the “box of chocolates” injected with unpalatable scents (such as “mineral carbon”) that was sent as out as PR for the release of the Comme des Garçons “anti-perfumes” in the late ’90s; and the



Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, A/W 2013/14,  
photo: Collier Schorr

CdG diffusion and sportswear lines (the everyday clothes which make up the bulk of what most people affectionately and intimately know as Comme des Garçons).

The list of parts missing from some ideal CdG show of all shows could fill up this entire review, but I'd like to shift to one of the least discussed aspects of the exhibition at hand: its effect on the Met Gala's red carpet. While this may seem a tad rapid, I think it reveals an important aspect of how Kawakubo's mode of negation also sabotages the gloss of institutional appearance. The Met's gala committee, which always comes up with a set of words to signal the dress code, seems to have had a meltdown with this exhibition, and ended up with "avant-garde black tie." They also somehow ended up with a tan-and-blue (not red) carpet. What should have obviously been, in another register of the multiverse, a celebration

full of beautiful people in Comme des Garçons<sup>6</sup> ended up being, instead, a tan-and-blue carpet full of confused celebrities in random attire.<sup>7</sup>

A detail of the gala fundraising structure partially helps to explain this: the protocol is for fashion houses and conglomerates to buy tables, inviting key celebrities and models to attend dressed in their clothes (which the fashion houses supply, along with other sorts of marketing/styling/advertising contracts that become arranged in tandem). This results in certain designers' clothes being worn by certain people and being propelled through the mediascape as such. This would all make sense in the way that our reality always already makes "sense" even when we hate it, but a shockingly bizarre moment of rupture came when Anna Wintour, the chairwoman of the fundraiser, who could presumably wear whatever she desired, showed up in a rather humdrum sparkly Karl Lagerfeld Chanel princess dress, and told reporters that the last time she wore Comme des Garçons was "sometime back in the '80s."<sup>8</sup>

In a cultural *mise-en-scène* bludgeoned by Trump's rise to power and Brexit xenophobia (Wintour, it should be remembered, was supposed to become Hillary Clinton's US ambassador to Britain ...), this should have registered as an especially unconscionable slight. What is notable, in the immediate wake of the Hannah Black/Whitney Biennial/Dana Schutz discursive race wars – which fueled cocktail party conversation in NYC for no less than two entire months – is that there was almost no discussion of the politics of Wintour's brazenly distanced, even xenophobic attitude towards Kawakubo, her honoree. By most "liberal" people's metric, this absence of recognition would be considered a political problem, but the gossip mill suggests that most couldn't even



"Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between," 2017, installation view

see the problem, or at least didn't take it to be of much political significance. I, unfortunately, could not just look away, since it hit a particularly deep panic button. I instantly recognized this trapped, dismissive situation and I couldn't put it out of mind when reading the show, as it is Wintour's and Kawakubo's reactions (or absence of reactions) that are perhaps the most relevant to the aesthetics of Comme des Garçons. A particular poetics of defiant cuteness; a brutally present silence that can flip forms of control around and around, but only when maneuvered with a certain approach and timing; an absence of acknowledgment that generates an emptiness that gains power in deeply and obsessively feeling a lack of visible pain. In public, Kawakubo's main concern was that she was being seen as an "artist" rather than a practitioner of fashion; that she was being seen as the cliché of "unlimited creator" rather than a master of processing financialized

limits into ever-hatching productions of absolute oneness.

The singular rush of a good shopping experience within the multipronged, omnidirectional pressures and fractures of neoliberal globalization is, in fact, one of the most impossible rituals of daily life to maintain. Rei Kawakubo's Comme des Garçons is perhaps the only major fashion house to have managed to instrumentalize some of the most derided structural trends of globalization to stand as its strengths while at the same time maintaining and supporting a fundamentally atelier enmeshing of design/production/marketing/distribution/sales/manufacturing. In fact, one of the most original things about the exhibition, on the level of rethinking museum structures, was that Kawakubo inserted an actual CdG store with real CdG products (some of them "exclusive" to this presentation) at the exit of the show. Kawakubo takes control of overarching

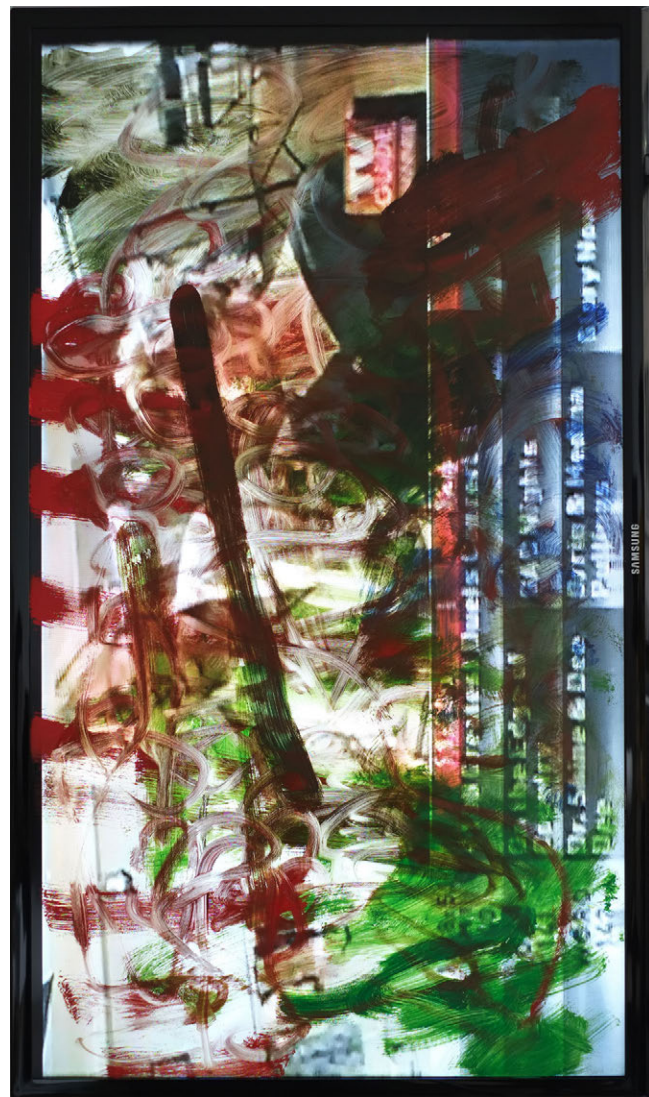
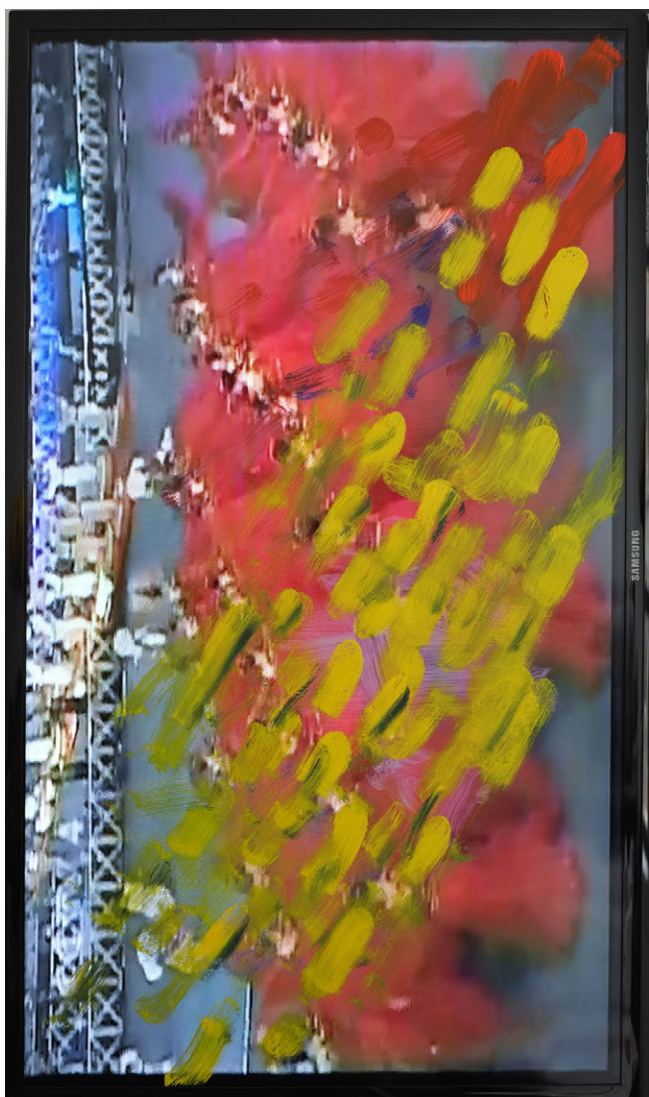
tensions and flows by continuously cutting up, re-mangling, and re-routing dominant forms, flexing the limits of administrative structures that prevent us from seeing what we want to see and doing what we want to do. And she does this in neither the self-reflexive nor confrontational modes of European/American criticality. It is not exactly abjection or “owning one’s own alienation” either. Negation meets love: expressionless, compulsively desirable, black heart.

“Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between,” Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, May 1–September 4, 2017.

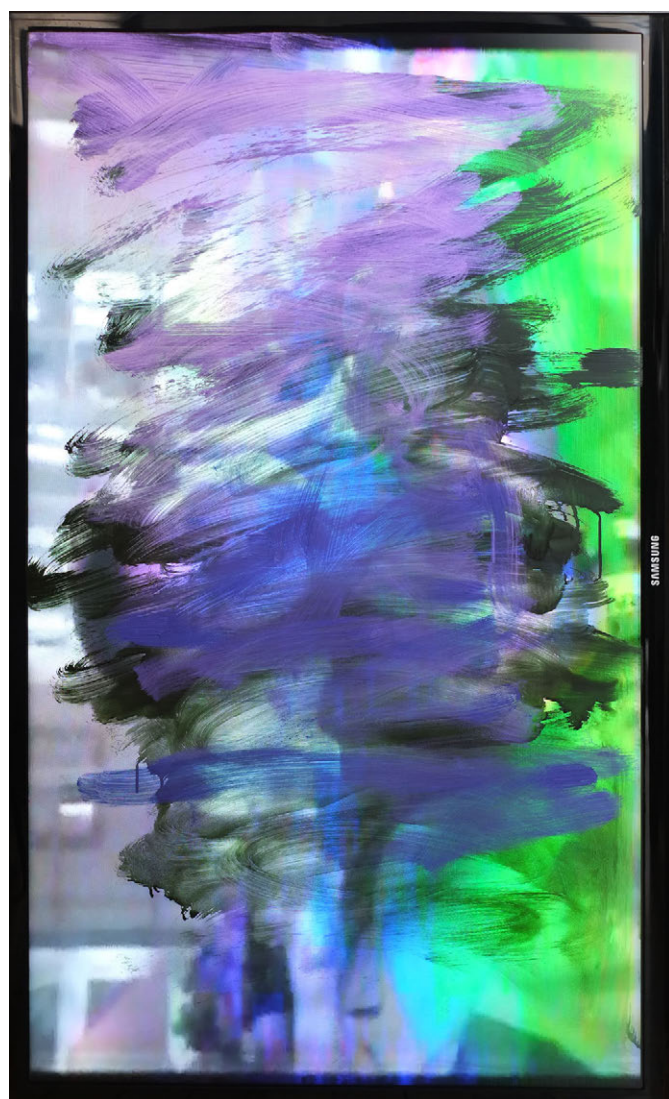
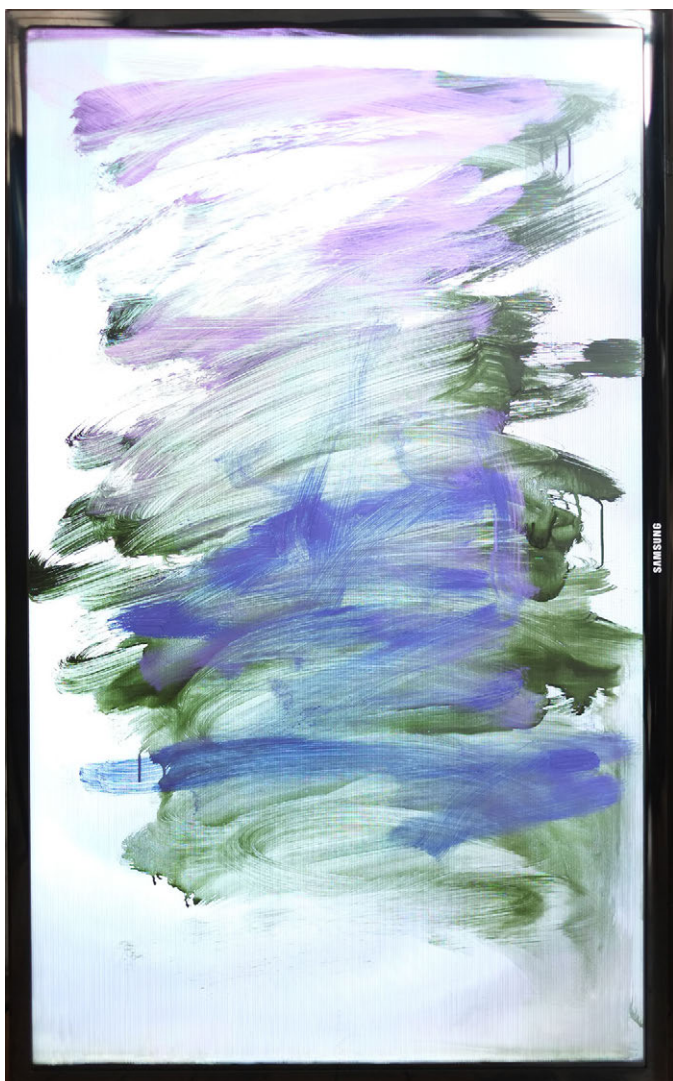
#### Notes

- 1 “Model/Multiple” in *Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between*, exh. cat., ed. by Andrew Bolton, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2017, p. 60.
- 2 It should also be mentioned that Anna Wintour’s prohibition on photography within the Gala in 2015 generated an intensity that I have never experienced within any other fundraising event – a rare public moment where those who live the lives of images can let loose and party with their peers on a level of genuine conviviality.
- 3 <http://observer.com/2016/03/elle-on-earth/>.
- 4 “Kawakubo/Bolton: A Conversation” in *Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between*, op. cit., p. 19.
- 5 *ibid.*, p. 17.
- 6 The only other time the Met has done an exhibition with a living fashion designer, with YSL in 1983, all “those who had them wore Saint Laurent dresses.” Bernadine Morris, “Gala Night at Met Hails Saint Laurent,” in: *New York Times*, December 6, 1983, <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/12/06/style/gala-night-at-met-hails-saint-laurent.html>.
- 7 <https://fashionweekdaily.com/7-comme-des-garcons-met-gala-outfits/>; <https://themuse.jezebel.com/here-is-every-look-from-the-2017-met-gala-celebrating-c-1794816769>.
- 8 Jacob Bernstein, “Freak Flags Fly at Met Gala, but Lips Stay Buttoned,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/01/style/met-gala-costume-institute.html>.

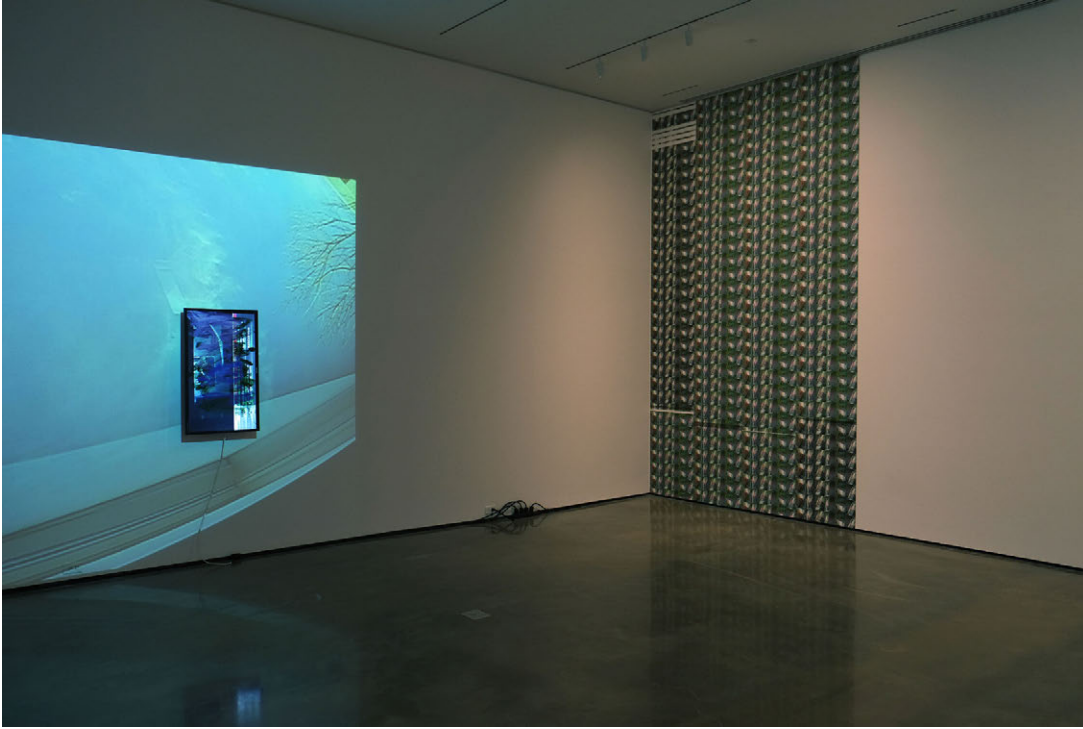
Installation views and details from solo project, *The Very Quick of the Word* (curated by Annie Godfrey Larmon), Hessel Museum of Art, Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. March 24 - May 26, 2013.



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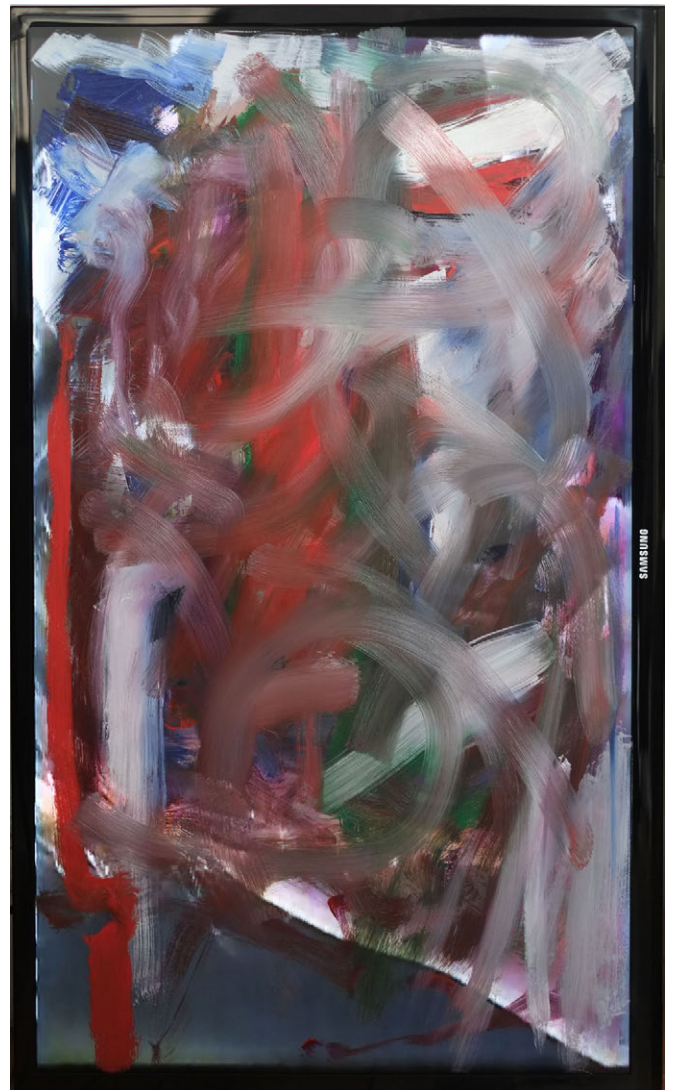


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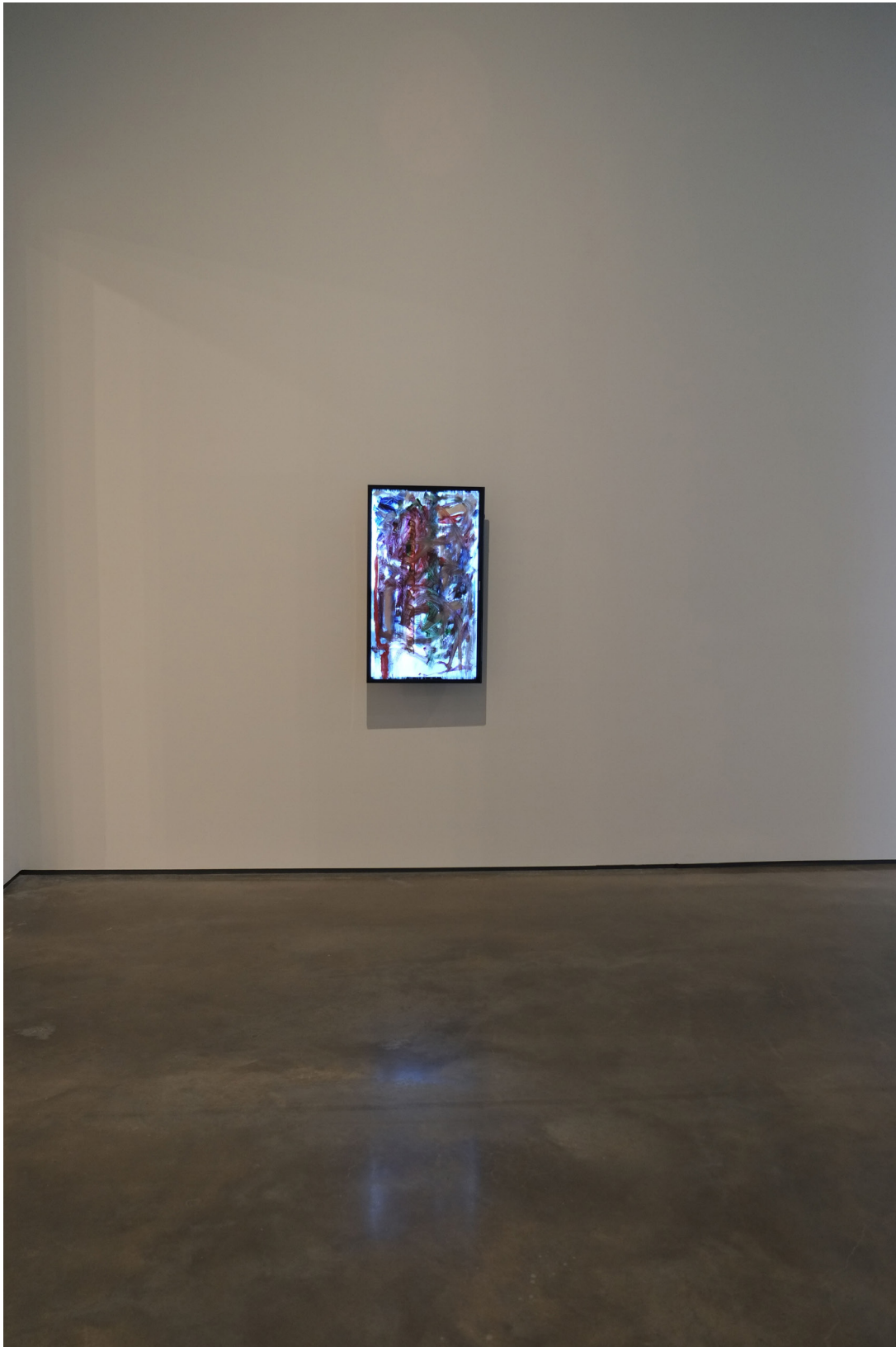




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## KEN OKIISHI

FEBRUARY 17 – MARCH 23, 2014

Reena Spaulings presents eleven new works by Ken Okiishi. Painting directly onto flat screen television monitors, Okiishi instigates a situation whereby painterly gesture is put into immediate relation with media flow: home-recorded TV broadcasts serve here as under-paintings that loop continuously behind expressionist brushwork. Glimpsed through oily passages that may recall Joan Mitchell or even late Monet, digitized fragments of mid-1990s and early 2000s television (*Touched By an Angel*, random cable access transmissions, a presidential debate with loser John Kerry, a Chinese New Year pageant, old Chase bank, Quaker Oats and Frutels commercials, etc.) seem to emanate from an unreachably recent past, now fossilized on the screen and in the work. This degraded techno-cultural content brings its own glitchy action and pixilated, pre-HD palette, which Okiishi responds to while painting, always working in direct interaction with the moving image. So multiple temporalities are now communicating: the archeological time of the original broadcast, the scrambled, non-linear time of the digital edit, the programmed repetition of the loop, and the living, breathing moment of painting. The finished works compose a drifting and unstable time-image while also complicating the act of viewing (or watching). Occasionally, the artist forgoes programmed content and paints against footage of blank video-blue screens, re-entering the Kleinian void. These paintings, each branded with the Samsung logo, also come with sound: playing back simultaneously in the gallery, they produce a chance composition of murmuring broadcast noise.

Using readymade television as his canvas, Okiishi seems to compress video and abstract painting into a single aesthetic channel. He also sets up a tense, comical face-off between mediums, as brushstrokes blot out the TV image and disrupt the communicative function of the screen. A gestural relationship to touchscreens that's evolved via our interfacing with personal data is shifted back into paintjobs where it becomes strangely AbEx, but without giving up any of its everyday automaticity. What these plugged-in paintings foreground is the undecidably active/passive attitude common to every user of contemporary art and information.

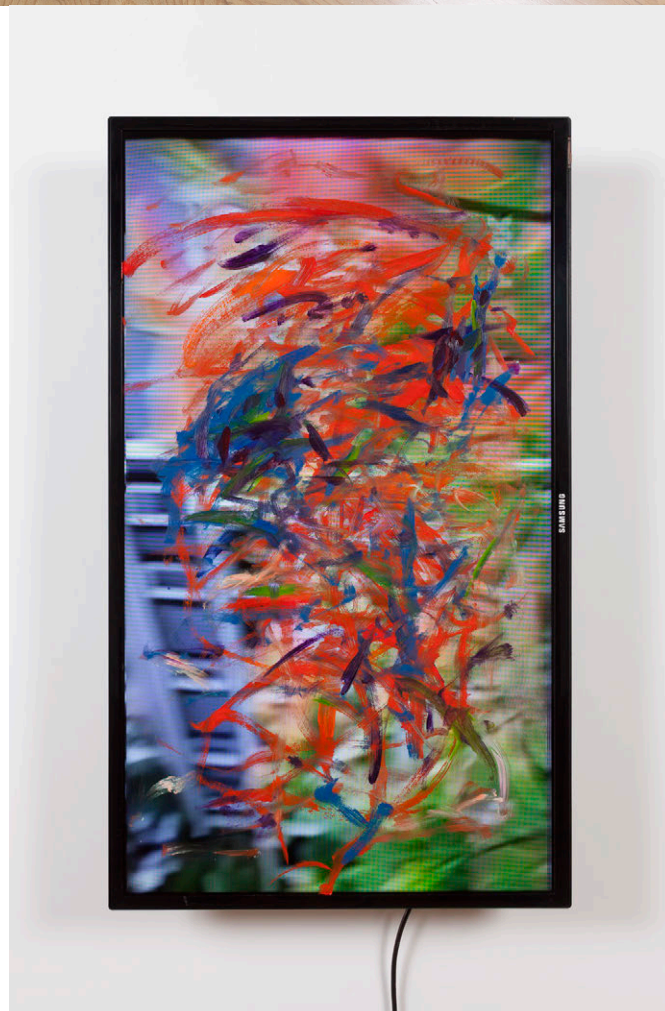
This is Ken Okiishi's first show at Reena Spaulings Fine Art. Recent solo Okiishi exhibitions include *Gino/Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com* at Mathew/Berlin; *Gesture/Data* at Pillar Corrias/London, List Projects: Ken Okiishi at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, and *The Very Quick of the Word* at Bard CCS. He will also be participating in the upcoming Whitney Biennial.

Gallery Hours: Thursday through Sunday, noon to 6pm.

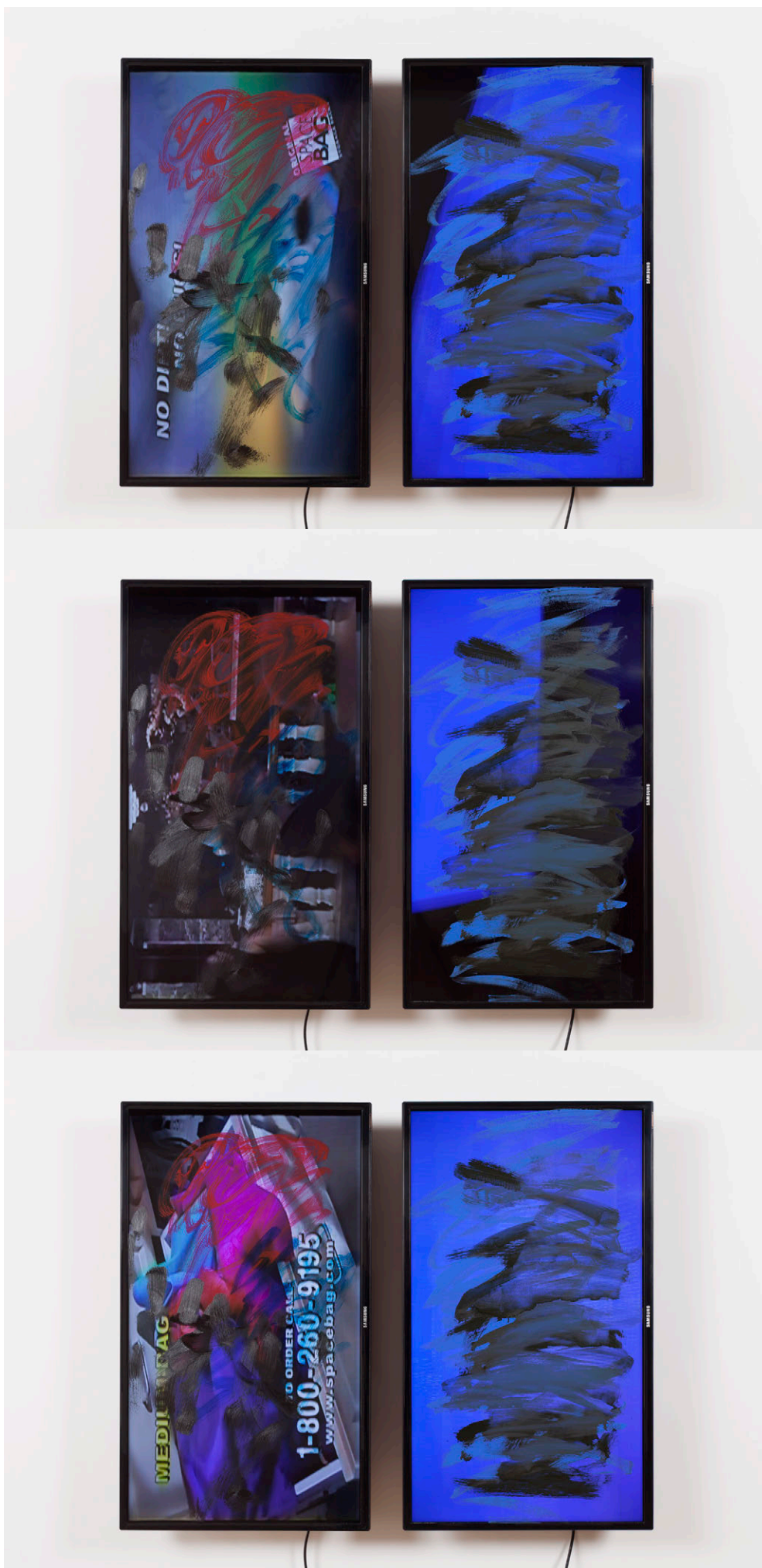
Installation views and details from *Ken Okiishi*, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York, February 16 - March 23, 2014.  
All works from the series *gesture/data*.



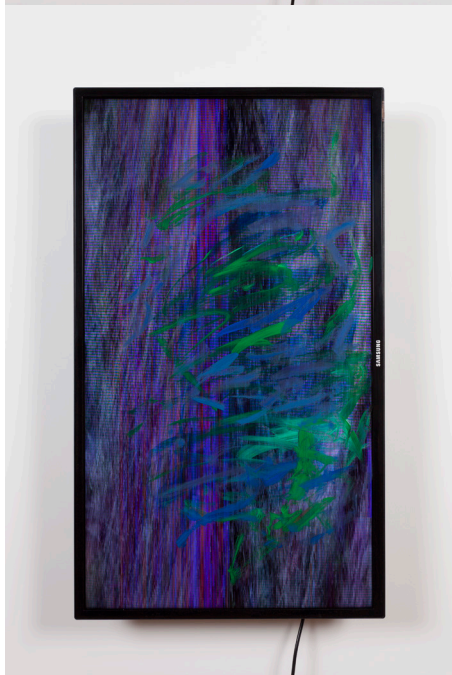
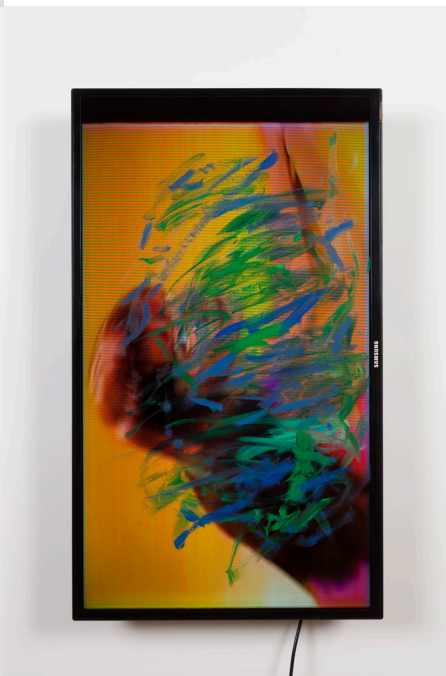
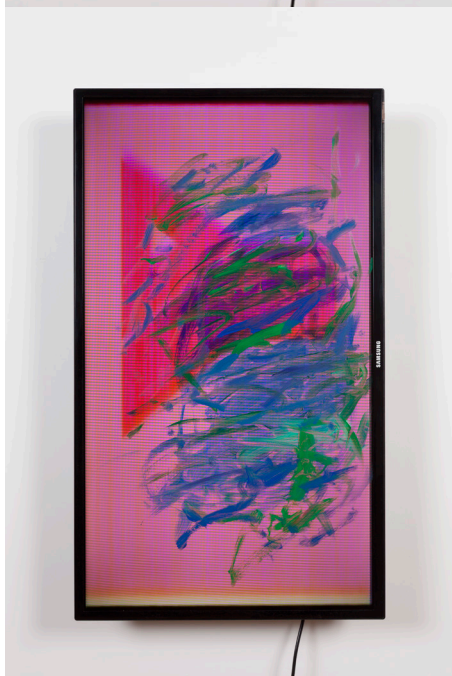
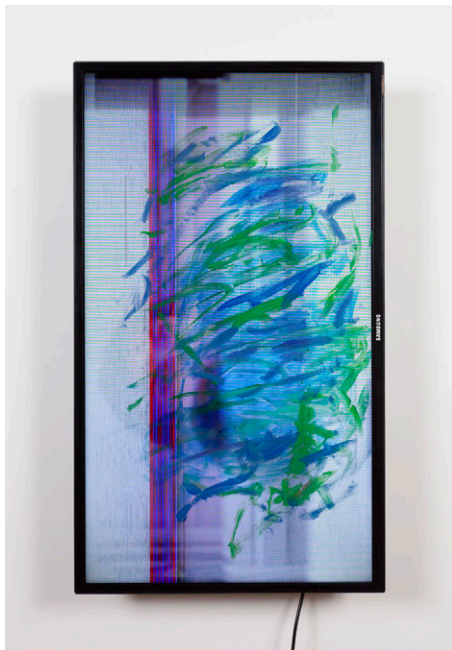
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Installation views from *gesture/data*, 2013 as installed in the Whitney Biennial 2014 (third floor, curated by Stuart Comer). March 7 - May 25, 2014.





ART IN REVIEW

# Ken Okiishi: Reena Spaulings Fine Art

By **Roberta Smith**

March 13, 2014

*165 East Broadway, at Rutgers Street,*

*Lower East Side*

*Through March 23*

For the sake of argument, let's define a successful painting as a (reasonably) flat surface on the wall that commands our attention and ignites a desire to fathom its making and meanings. If so, then Ken Okiishi, in his own sarcastic way, is making successful paintings, at least in part. He is also concocting a hybrid of painting and video with perhaps unprecedented economy and bluntness.

For this show, Mr. Okiishi has used 11 fully operational flat-screen monitors as canvases on which to paint attractive, drippy flurries of brush strokes that recall the work of the Abstract Expressionist painter Joan Mitchell. Playing on these monitors are tired-looking moments from late-1990s and early-aughties cable television. The sound is on.

The tensions between silence and sound, painterly and digital, flickering brushwork and flickering light parody the ideal of "presence" of painting while providing a lively literal substitute. The eye is pulled back and forth between the layers of information and gesture, and among seeing, watching and looking. Adding to the confusion: The screens are turned on their sides, which makes the digital images harder to read while echoing the vertical rectangle that is painting's most conventional (and implicitly human) proportion.

Where, if anywhere, Mr. Okiishi takes this conceit remains to be seen. But, for the moment, his show is among the more uncanny, unexpectedly arresting pictorial experiences to be had in New York. Four more of these pieces stand out in the current Whitney Biennial, where they get the exhibition's relatively quiet third floor off to a rousing start.

A version of this article appears in print on March 14, 2014, Section C, Page 26 of the New York edition with the headline: Ken Okiishi: Reena Spaulings Fine Art

Notes on *gesture/data (feedback)*

Ken Okiishi, July-October 2015, NYC / Annandale-on Hudson / Orient / Venice / Ljubljana / NYC / Tokyo / NYC / London / Vienna /

One of the primary ways of feeling a threshold, in a "connected" world where all boundaries are thought of as surpassed or surpassable, is tapping, dragging, swiping, etc. on the screen. The rhythmic and often unconscious acknowledgement that there is an inside and outside to a primary experience of a supposedly boundary-less, "transparent" globe.

So many images of things in tandem with so many experiences of the material world create a counterpoint--so many people walking around looking at so many images, sometimes crossing over, or feedbacking to or across or next to each other. Messaging with someone, or seeing an Instagram post, and then suddenly bumping into that person. What that feels like. The rupture of this mental and physical boundaryless boundary. What is inside and what is outside feeds back in complex and suddenly shifting mental and haptic rewirings.

"Data" is everything that is behind the screen, meaning everything that can be viewed via a screen as making a representation out of electronic signals. Since we and everything else in the world are often also behind someone or something else's screen, and the so-called internet of things also emerges as all of these things are "talking" in electronic signals to each other. This means that data now includes the entirety of everything that can be viewed on either side of the representational support surface, e.g. the screen, or is connected via this network of signals. Walking around the museum takes on a new character of database meets "aura." But unlike canvas or paper, the screen as support surface has two dramatically different physical sides viewable from the front: a moving array of led lights that can represent anything, and the surface on the front of the led panel--where my finger leaves traces as I'm typing this sentence. It is also enmeshed in a constantly updatable and fallible mesh--a support surface that is always flowing and glitching.

On the level of painting:

When the support surface is filmed and then put on the "other" side of the support surface, re-filmed, and reinserted again; as the support surface becomes porous and the paint-gesture as well as the moving "data" gains multiple levels of visual and material properties; as the scale shifts start to produce multiple similar but also entirely different images across multiple panels. As the work is distributed, via the potential for the work to produce an infinite number of different still image files. Many works start to be painted on top of each

other, if you can describe inside/outside relationships in a constantly shifting network as having an "on top of." These systems come together on incommensurate planes--the network model (data) and the layer model (painting). All of this happens in an "air gap"--as acts made discrete, or built-up disconnected from actual networks (such as the internet) or within a purely personal and carefully shielded network of materials: video tapes from a family storage; idiosyncratic processes of digitization and transcoding and re-filming, involving multiple cameras and decks and formats and ways of giving a certain visual character to the data; paints, brushes, mediums; time in the studio, looking, thinking, approaching, stepping back; remembering, when a flash of a certain TV recording appears; walking around the flower district of New York City (amazingly still on 28th Street in Manhattan) downstairs from my studio, all of these plants and flowers everyday, moving around, constantly replenished and sold, seasons depending on the desires of a certain decoration or holiday, which is not always the same as the weather-appropriate season, but also dueling with local weather; the way the palm trees are too big to fit inside, and are kept on the sidewalk, chained up, and increasingly discounted as the first frost approaches and threatens to make them worthless.

This keeps the work--on a mental and visual level--from reaching any possibility of resolution. From the point of view of painting, it could also be called shifting relationships of "depth" and "flatness" at the same time, of ways of processing and manifesting relationships to and in an anxious world, and the impossibility of experiencing the work through representations of it; from the point of view of data, it could be the potential to generate infinite images and circulations of images as well as infinite permutations of materials.

One significant interpretation in the New York context, by the art historian and critic Michael Sanchez, of *gesture/data* (c. 2014):

"Within the very actual distribution logic of painting since the turn of the decade...painting is already made to look as much like its screen image as possible. But in order to pull off this trick, it cannot be materially identical to the screen. Painting must be separate from it in order to be mediated by it: to appear properly *on* a screen, painting cannot already *be* a screen.

[Okiishi's] crucial move is to conflate these two, fusing painting and screen together on the level of a chemical bond. This conflation unleashes a whole series of paradoxes. Where painting usually generates a single image, an infinite number of images can be taken of these screen-painting hybrids. No one jpeg can capture them. Yet their status as unique objects to be seen in person is achieved precisely by the fact that they are painted onto their medium of distribution. And even this move, perverse as it is, is complicated by the

fact that [Okiishi] retroactively displaces the IPS touchscreen back onto the HDTV, mimicking painting's mimicking of touch-sensitive gestures on a surface that cannot respond to them.

Within an art media system currently tooled for scrolling image distribution, painting that literally takes the form of a screen poses a problem. Although video footage can be taken of these works and distributed through platforms like Vine, the interaction of the paint with the screen beneath is almost impossible to capture on another screen, particularly for a viewer habituated to platforms that privilege the still jpeg. Oscillating between the painted marks on the surface and the video beneath, the eye perceives the moving video as pure information, aggregates of shapes and color, rather than people or objects. The paint changes both in relation to its backlighting and front-lighting, the screen-like fluorescent lights of the gallery complemented by warm spotlights designed to activate the effects of the paint (aptly named "interference").

The emphasis that these works place on irreproducible visual experience registers the current anxiety about a certain distribution logic that renders a visit to the gallery or museum superfluous. As such, they are products of this liminal media-historical moment, circulating in two convergent but fundamentally incommensurate systems. The oddness of these objects results from how, in moving through these systems, they rearrange their terms."

*This is one series of inputs and outputs within a certain configuration. One that I particularly like, since this is a context that I also know very well--and that I share with Michael.*

*But another aspect of the work, which is in fact very important to me, is that it can potentially rearrange terms in a multiplicity of contexts--even ones unknown, in any specificity, to me at the moment of making the work.*

*The primary abstractness and mutability of the work (within potentially shared zones of anxiety) allows it to stretch and be stretched in perhaps unanticipated ways, to become many simultaneously different works as it is plugged into various situations. The work's output is determined by its radically different possibilities of input--as long as such extremely different situations continue to exist. The work does not seek to impose a discourse, but to be constantly re-formed by whatever surrounds it. The feedback pathways are left entirely open.*

Installation views and details from *Cut to Swipe*, an exhibition of recent acquisitions, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Organized by Stuart Comer, Chief Curator, with Erica Papernik, Assistant Curator, and Leora Morinis, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance Art. 11 October 2014 - 22 March 2015.



Ken Okiishi. *gesture/data*. 2014. Oil and Chroma Key Video Paint on flat-screen televisions, VHS and HD video transferred to .mp4 (color, sound). Left screen: 12:21 min. loop Right screen: 75:13 min. loop. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Generosity of Jill and Peter Kraus.



# ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2014

POINT IN MY  
LIFE...

NATIONAL

I'M  
EXACTLY

BUT  
HONEY  
YOU

and participatory sculptures at Documenta 12 in 2007 brought her memory roaring to life. Since then, the late German artist has been exhibited widely in Europe and the United States, celebrated as much for the way in which she married a sculptural practice to “the social” as for her work’s coolly industrial mien. But Posenenske’s sculpture is only part of the story. This small show shifted focus, presenting thirty paintings and drawings made between 1957 and 1965 that preceded her better-known output. The narrow emphasis was helpful, as it encouraged us to take in this body of work on its own merits and on its own terms. Even so, these pieces are mostly interesting insofar as we know what they lead to. Flirting with modes of anti-compositionality and desubjectification, the artist can be seen making attempts to push the mediums of painting and drawing to their limits, cycling through various strategies of mark-making before

abandoning two dimensions altogether.

Of Posenenske’s foremost instruments in this period was the dip pen. Famously deployed by Courbet in defiance of the academic mandate for absolute smoothness, the implement is used by Posenenske to rein in the gestural exuberance of art informel, which flourished in the middle of the last century. Take, for example, a drawing from 1959–60 in which the tool has been used to set rectangular patterns of black and blue acrylic atop a flat white ground. There are no accidents: The result is a cluster of impassive marks, a la Joan Mitchell. Posenenske explored a more gestural mode of abstraction, too, but did so in a way that feels weirdly robotic, nearly to the point of parody. To create two drawings here, she used *Gestische Arbeit* (Gestural Work) and made in 1963 and 1964. In each, Posenenske appears to have coated a dip pen in black ink and brandished it with rapid, violent slashes; among the causes, traces of the implement’s use are visible where its sharp tip nearly lacerated the paper. These febrile marks bring to mind not so much spontaneous expression as something more like mechanical breakdown, as if a stray tine on a malfunctioning machine, dripping with slick grease, had been running berserk next to a drop cloth.

This exhibition also included Posenenske’s experiments with novel materials such as spray paint and felt-tip markers—moves that spoke to her assimilation of consumer culture in the 1960s—but the most prescient works were its earliest: the *Rasterbild* (Grid) series created in 1956 and 1957 and built up from hundreds upon hundreds of small dots and circles, these drawings in ink and casein took on distinct forms. In some, Posenenske disregards the grid almost entirely, making marks that are free-form, almost effervescent. In others, she has a comparatively severe regularity, a rigid adherence to the structure across the full expanse of the ground. Recalling Benday printing punch cards, the latter, more than any of the works here, channel the numb repetitions of machines. In the September 2010 issue of *Artforum*, Christine Mehring notes that the *Rasterbild* pieces evoke the look of pixel arrays, an observation that rings truest with respect to a drawing from 1957. Executed in a gray rather than black casein, that

work is eerily lambent—it seems to glow. In the context of our moment, which sees a generation of artists fusing industrial fabrication to the tropes of modernist abstraction in order to approximate and compete with the screen, these modest works feel at once extraordinarily nuanced and profoundly contemporary.

—Lloyd Wise

## Ken Okiishi

REENA SPAULINGS

In the eleven paintings that were in this show, all equal in size and in identical thin black frames, densely expressionist or allusively calligraphic brushstrokes bunch or stutter across shimmering color fields. You had to dip your head ninety degrees toward your left shoulder to read the name of the Old Master, stamped in silver and running up each frame’s right-hand edge: SAMSUNG.

For his first solo show at Reena Spaulings, Ken Okiishi executed a series of oil paintings on the surfaces of upturned flat-screen televisions. (A group of related works hung concurrently in the 2014 Whitney Biennial.) The idea is so perfectly simple and so monumentally appealing, there ought to be an app for it. And indeed, there is. There are a number of them—from Meritum Paint Pro and Adobe Ideas to FiftyThree’s Paper—all of which allow the movement of your fingertip across your mobile device’s touch screen to mimic the brushing of oil paint on canvas: swiping as painting. Designed to enhance your creative productivity, these apps allow you to capture the inspiration of the moment, on the go, in real time, immediately exportable to Facebook or Instagram.

The works in “gesture/data” dismantle that seamless prosumer immediacy by overlaying strata of disjunctive temporalities in obsolete formats. The portrait-oriented flat-screens play looped footage recorded on VHS by the artist in the late 1990s and early 2000s, transferred to digital video, and converted to .MP4, the preferred encoding standard for Net-streamed mobile video, a lossy codec that bakes in nostalgia by further degrading the originals.

They were painted as they hung, with the video running. The strokes become, like oily fingerprints, the traces of an otherwise fleeting user-screen interaction: from swiping as painting to painting as swiping. One can speculate about the point in the loop a given stroke was made, as when a Dodge minivan materializes directly under a zone of red brushwork keyed to its silhouette, or when a shift in the looped clip to a red wash makes patterns of red strokes disappear while greens darken to near black and a constellation of short white strokes aggressively glow. At some point the activity of painting had to end, though the loops inexorably continue. Okiishi’s show wittily includes airtime missed via oversaturation or disconnection. On one screen, *TV Guide*’s scrolling index registers all of the programming left unpainted while you watch. On others,

Ken Okiishi, *gesture/data*, 2014, oil paint, flat-screen television, VHS transferred to digital video, color, sound, 73 minutes 35 seconds, 36 3/8 x 21 3/8 x 4 3/4".



allover and violently gestural paintings cover the blue screens of death that once told you your cable was out or that your OS met an unhandleable exception.

Floating over all of these differently mediated temporalities is that of your own vision, split between the perception of a stilled vertical painting with active video *collé* and that of a horizontal playback interrupted by oil static, or resting uneasily somewhere between the two. When conditions are right and a moment of darkness on the flat-screen's reflective surface aligns with the gaps between brushstrokes, a painting can return your own furtive gaze, inserting the time of your looking between painted surface and looped background.

The painting bends to its video substrate; the screened images themselves are not so accommodating. A visitor born under the sign of the iPhone's internal accelerometer might find herself fighting off a manic urge to pull the screens off the wall and shake them until the snippet of a Food Network cooking show or an ad for a decade-old Honda or a few seconds of *60 Minutes* automatically rights itself. Despite the paintings' portrait-oriented similarity to comically outsize smartphones, the archive they screen stays landscape. They refuse to respond in the ways we now expect from our media technologies, not only to our desires but even to our sheer physical orientation in the world. In their literal *détournement* of the screens that facilitate our conspicuous consumption of "the present," Okiishi's paintings create a tension played out in the viewer as the wagged dog of an immediately graspable conceptual gesture—a tension that is genuinely moving and feels perversely like relief.

—Jeff Nagy

## Dona Nelson

THOMAS ERBEN

In an interview twenty years ago, Dona Nelson praised the messiness of late Picasso, describing it as evidence of a "total confidence" that allowed him to do whatever without self-questioning, without looking back. And then she went on to point out that "[Sigmar] Polke has that kind of confidence." Even before I'd read that old interview, the affinity between Nelson and Polke, one very American and the other *sehr deutsch*, was nonetheless patent. Granted, Nelson lacks Polke's reach, but both artists tend to throw all caution to the wind in a way that can sometimes induce something close to pure exhilaration. How often is it, really, that you come across a painting that makes you suspect that the person who made it really didn't give a damn about how it would look? Nelson sometimes goes beyond the merely funky to plumb the depths of the truly gnarly. She delights in textures that grate—for instance, the mess of curdled cheesecloth that tangles up the cheery colors of *Orangey*, 2013, and the pocks of matter strewn across its surface like pimples; or the nastily congealed, hard, and shiny floes of opaque color that float atop the stained-in browns and greens of *Top*, 2014.

Also Polke-esque is Nelson's use of both sides of a painting. In 1989, the German artist showed a group of freestanding, two-sided paintings at Mary Boone Gallery (none of them are included in his current retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York); five of the eight paintings that were on view in Nelson's show are similarly bilateral (as are the two she showed in this year's Whitney Biennial). The presentation's odd title, "Phigor," might be an indirect allusion to this: It's not a word, but this sequence of letters does appear in the midst of the word *amphigory*, which means a piece of rigmarole or nonsense and contains the prefix *amphi-*, to which *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* gives the meanings "both, of both kinds, on both sides, about, around." But whereas Polke's duplex paintings were made on translucent material

so that one could see from either side what he had done on the Nelson's are on canvas: Her paint has seeped or been pushed through from one side to the other, but the eye can't pass through the membrane. The paintings often seem to promise more information than they really give—they're tricky that way. For instance, *Phigor*,



is on a canvas with a grid of crossbars on its verso, and the colors reflected in paint on its front. But the similar stained grids that appear in *Red and Green Noses*, 2013, *March Hare*, 2014, and *Orangey and Blue*, 2013, are clues to what's on the other side—there are no corresponding crossbars—whereas *Division Street*, 2013, does have crossbars, but the little trace of them from the front.

In the 1994 interview, Nelson spoke of how touch is more important to her working process than sight. "My hands are leading me as blind. I feel that the room is dark while I'm painting." These days, the double-sidedness of her paintings seems to be a way of upping the ante on her game of blindness. "Soaking paint through the canvas," she explained in a self-interview this past March, "the painting on the other side comes into existence without my seeing it." Each side of the painting functions as something like a picture of the other side, which can be seen not see simultaneously—and the picture always contains both truth and falsehood. She adds, "It's alarming to me that people look at pictures of cornfields as if the pictures are informative, when the pictures have nothing in common with cornfields at all!" No more than one side of a painting has in common with its reverse, probably.

—Barry Schwab

## Arnold Mesches

LIFE ON MARS GALLERY

Arnold Mesches had his first solo show in 1947, and according to the Life on Mars Gallery website, he has by now had 124 of them, and perhaps gives a new meaning to this one's title, "Eternal Return." His current exhibition included selections from three series of paintings, "Coming Attractions," 2003–2007; "SHOCK AND AWE," 2011; and "Eternal Return," 2013–14. As a title, "Coming Attractions" recalls that Mesches, who spent most of his career in Los Angeles before moving to New York in 1984, worked in the film industry in the 1940s and '50s. The first work in the series (not in this show) took a grand old-fashioned movie theater as its setting; projected on the screen was a scene of three waiters in an otherwise empty restaurant set out with white tablecloths, as if its clientele were about to turn up any minute.



# frize



CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

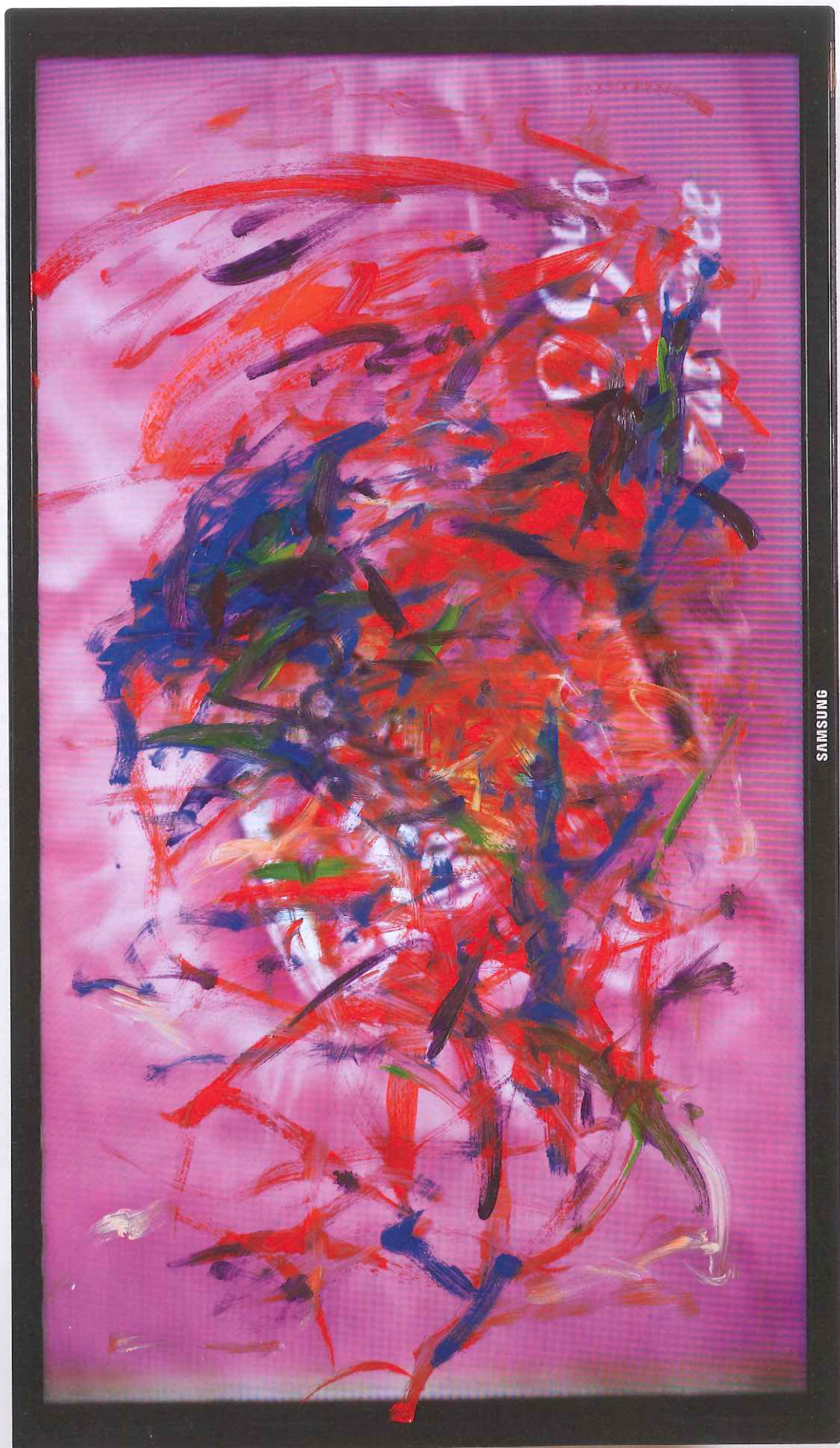
NO. 163 MAY 2014

# EVERYWHERE

# AT

**Ken Okiishi:**  
painting in the age  
of Instagram  
*by David Everitt Howe*

# ONCE



*Gesture/data*, 2014,  
flat-screen television, oil paint and VHS transferred  
to MP4, 91 × 53 × 10 cm

Visiting New York's Museum of Modern Art is rather like going to that creepy Madame Tussauds wax museum on 42nd street, or seeing Times Square's naked strumming cowboy, or visiting anywhere tragically touristy, really. It's to go where the iPhone – formerly that thing called a point-and-shoot camera – is interlocutor for everything around it, and obsessive picture-taking is the name of the game. People pose beside Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889) or, if they're art-historically nerdy, Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907). If you're Ken Okiishi, you stand before a far quieter painting while you're waiting to see a film, one like *Wood, Wind, No Tuba* (1980) by Joan Mitchell, and take a picture like anyone else: a keepsake for your photo archive. Mitchell's paintings, like Jackson Pollock's, are very all-over-y, with a bunch of gooey marks going everywhere with little apparent purpose. Okiishi noticed how, as a picture on a tiny, finger-greased screen, it became small and flat; how its 'screen presence' contrasted with its 'live (or material) presence'.<sup>1</sup> It was an image that could end up anywhere, really, such that its site specificity had little bearing. It could be Tumbled, Instagrammed, posted on Facebook, liked by a hundred strangers, blogged and re-blogged. It is the be-all and end-all of what David Joselit describes as 'saturation through mass-circulation – the status of being everywhere at once rather than belonging to a single place – that now produces value for and through images'.<sup>2</sup> This kind of auratic breakdown at the hands of smartphone technology prompted Okiishi to inspect what disservice all this digital dissemination does to painting, increasingly subject, as it is, to forms that flatten it more than Clement Greenberg could ever have dreamed.

Until recently, Okiishi was primarily known for his videos re-performing tropes of Hollywood cinema. In *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* (2010), he asked a range of other artists to restage scenes from Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979), using the imperfect Google translation of the film's German script; while for *parapluies/paraplyer/nobody can tell the why of it/1857/oslo/2011* (2011) Okiishi asked several local bands and musicians to perform the main theme from Jacques Demy's musical *Les Parapluies des Cherbourg* (The Umbrellas of Cherbourg, 1964) in front of two green screens, in any way they wanted. The artist then edited the video to compress the images and performances.

Literally conflating painting with screen, Okiishi recently began making Mitchell-like (or Albert Oehlen-like or Robert Motherwell-like – take your pick) brush strokes directly onto flat-screen televisions. This pitched battle between high and low culture is perhaps too literally juxtaposed, though the deadpan humour keeps things in check. What this body of work, *gesture/data* (2013–14), implies is that painting is clearly losing out to other forms of image-making. Yet, the effect is pretty comedic, as if Okiishi were kicking painting while it were down; and although the brushstrokes are visible on top of the screens – turned vertical to make them less conventionally TV-like – they only partly obscure the images beneath, such that what's playing on the monitors disturbs the painterly plane constantly. At Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York, in March this year, and currently at the Whitney Biennial, where other works from *gesture/data* are showing, Okiishi's clusters of monitors compete with each other both visually and sonically, so that they become more a babble of incoherent noise and image than anything else. The clips were taken from home VHS recordings of 1990s and early 2000s TV broadcasts, which

were partially taped over by new, digital versions and then transferred to MP4. Mashed together, old and new technologies hardly dovetail. Rather, Okiishi foregrounds the degradation of old VHS footage, such that tones are rendered strangely pink and playback is marked by skittish flickers.

While a few monitors at Reena Spaulings simply played footage of a blue screen, most cycled through Okiishi's clips, which were seemingly plucked from the very deepest depths of terrible TV, where entertainment goes to die: a debate with John Kerry that no one is likely to have watched; old Chase Bank and Quaker Oats commercials; cable-access footage of a Chinese New Year parade. By painting on the flat screens while the clips played, Okiishi allowed interesting relations to pop up between paint and image. The dialectical setup is, therefore, fleetingly not so bipolar: pinkish brush strokes atop the shirtless, young Chinese men; two capricious blobs of red and blue oil paint hovering above the bed in a vacuum-cleaner commercial; a frenzy of blue marks pooling over a static blue screen – an image of nothing going nowhere fast. These moments are rare, though, and only briefly interrupt how decisively painting has to compete with what's happening beneath it – or, in a larger sense, with what's around it; it's increasingly subservient to greater forces of distribution and dissemination. Painting may be popular, and perhaps always will be, but it's not atypical for it to be theoretically framed by its obsolescence.

A case in point was Okiishi's 2013 commission for Frieze Projects London. This took the form of a translucent Perspex room with small canvases hung on the interior walls, in which sat two vaguely anthropomorphic paint guns that could be controlled remotely by viewers. The project was inspired largely by the work of Niki de Saint Phalle, whose *Shooting Pictures* of the 1960s made a very sexy circus of enacting violence against painting, where 'painting was the victim', as she noted at the time. What were the paintings symbolic stand-ins for? 'Daddy,' she continued, 'all men, small men, tall men, big men, fat men, my mother, patriarchy, society.' As a 'terrorist of painting' she struck a sultry figure, posing outdoors in front of rows of spectators, provocatively tousling her blonde hair with her rifle like a charmingly 'radical' daughter-next-door. In a way, she was a willing symbol for all the hegemonies she was railing against, her glamorous *femme fatale* offering both a product and a service to a beguiled, art-hungry public.

Substituting mechanized paint guns for Saint Phalle's female protagonist, Okiishi wanted to update *Shooting Pictures* for the 21st century, in which the terms of labour and production have, if not changed entirely, evolved to such an extreme degree that technology plays an ever-greater part in the way capital, and art, are distributed. Looking in from the outside, art fair visitors could, with the push of a button, summon the two guns to life. Dictated by a randomized algorithm, the drones would rise up, pivot, then loudly shoot a burst of paint onto different parts of the wall. It was a violent act, eliciting surprised jumps from viewers at each ear-piercing 'pop' of the paint ball. Over time, the interior of the structure came to resemble an abstract expressionist massacre, in which primary colours bled into muddy, ugly brown.

Fielding questions about whether the work was a critique of gun violence and gaming culture, Okiishi instead insisted that he meant to make a spectacle *par excellence* of painting,

one created expressly for iPhone capture. Indeed, clips of visitors going to town on Okiishi's paint booth proliferated on YouTube. In an interview published in the Frieze London catalogue, Okiishi claimed that, in contrast to Saint Phalle's model, in which the artist performs for a receptive public, he was 'thinking through other diagrams of cultural production, [in which] products and services become visible and circulate, and also how desire is calculated in complex, decentralized, real-time ways [...] On a technical as well as on a formal level, it's a piece that is designed to be photographed, posted and reposted rapidly and with great enthusiasm [...] These explosions and smears and drips that happen will become very desirable to be photographed, to be videoed, to be sent on Instagram or Vine or whatever.'

This describes a kind of contemporary economy outlined by many, from Gilles Deleuze to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in which Karl Marx's notion of concrete labour is increasingly abstracted. It has less and less to do with objects, though of course they're still there, and more to do with immaterial networks of profit, such as social media; the posting of images, the friending of friends; the way the things I regularly shop online for increasingly show up in banner ads on other websites. This private information is seemingly proprietary and autonomous but, really, it's not. Rather, it structures capital today, wed to our day-to-day living.

Painting, and art in general, is increasingly 'networked', as Joselit would term it, though not just institutionally or performatively within the world of art, as he partly theorized it, but in the way it interacts online, far from the museum. Plucked from that rarefied space, it has to compete with other images as one of many, which Okiishi's *gesture/data* illustrates handily; compressing the *gesture* of painting with the *data* of television – and, by extension, the internet – into one, painting loses its privileged position. It becomes just another byte in the digital ether, one that can be shared and liked at will. ☘

*David Everitt Howe is a writer and curator based in New York, USA, and a contributing editor of ArtReview.*

*Ken Okiishi is based in New York, USA. Recent solo shows include: Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York (2014); 'List Projects: Ken Okiishi' at MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, USA (2013); 'The Very Quick of the Word' at Bard CCS, Amundale on Hudson, USA (2013); and 'Gesture/Data' (2013) at Pilar Corrias, London, UK. His work was also included in the Whitney Biennial (2014).*

1. Email to the author, March 2014

2. David Joselit, *After Art*, 2013, Princeton University Press, p.16

1  
Visitors looking at Ken Okiishi's  
commission for  
Frieze Projects London, 2013

2 & 3  
*parapluies/paraplyer/nobody  
can tell the why of it/1857/oslo/2011*,  
2011, digital video stills

4  
*(Goodbye to) Manhattan*, 2010,  
digital video still

*Painting loses its privileged position — it becomes just another byte in the digital ether, one that can be shared and liked at will.*

1



2



3



4



INSIDE ART

# The 2014 Whitney Biennial Is Taking Shape

By CAROL VOGEL  
Published: November 14, 2013

The Whitney Museum of American Art announced [nearly a year ago](#) that a trio of outside curators would be organizing the 2014 Biennial, each taking a floor of the museum. Each brings a different set of eyes and interests to the show.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Courtesy the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

A work by Ken Okiishi, an artist who will be featured during the 2014 Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

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They are Stuart Comer, the chief curator of media and performance art at the Museum of Modern Art; Anthony Elms, an associate curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia; and Michelle Grabner, a professor in the painting and drawing department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as an artist with an exhibition this month at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland.

Elisabeth Sussman and Jay Sanders — the Whitney curators who put together the highly praised 2012 edition — will act as advisers overseeing the giant survey, which runs from March 7 through May 25 and takes the pulse of what's happening in contemporary art today.

As the biennial — the last in its Marcel Breuer building at Madison Avenue and 75th Street — takes shape, details about its content are finally emerging. For starters, the show will include the work of just over 100 artists and collectives, more than twice the number of the 2012 Biennial. And as with the previous edition there is no overarching theme.

“Each curator chose a floor and divided up the artists v organically,” said Mr. Sanders, adding that these decisions, as well as the content of the biennial itself, have been made by the three curators. “Having three perspectives means you will get a mix of performance and media,” he said. “Visitors will also get an eye into the curatorial process.”

As it has in the past, the selection of artists includes a multigenerational mix, including some whose careers span the decades (Robert Ashley, Sheila Hicks, Louise Fishman,

Sherrie Levine); dead artists (Sarah Charlesworth, Gretchen Bender and Tony Greene); and a hefty dose of emerging artists. There will also be more artist collectives or collaboratives than ever before, a reflection of a growing trend.

While in 2012 the curators devoted one floor solely to performance, this time around performances will pop up in different spaces throughout the entire building. “They chose a different path,” said Mr. Sanders. “Each curator naturally found their own voice.”

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Among the artists involved in dance are Miguel Gutierrez, Taisha Paggett and Yve Laris Cohen, while Kevin Beasley, Charlemagne Palestine and Sergei Tcherepnin are all doing sound pieces. There will also be contemporary “operas” from the 1970s, including one by Mr. Ashley in collaboration with Alex Waterman, and performance pieces by Ei Arakawa, working with Carissa Rodriguez, and the performance group known as My Barbarian.

In selecting the artists, certain trends are inevitably starting to emerge. Among them, Ms. Sussman and Mr. Sanders said, will be a focus on artists involved in a multiplicity of disciplines, for instance writers who paint, painters who are also poets, filmmakers who create sculptures, and photographers who draw.

Craft seems to be part of the equation too. Lisa Anne Auerbach, a conceptual artist based on the West Coast, has knitted sweaters; artists including Shio Kusaka, John Mason and Sterling Ruby have made ceramic works. There will also be textiles by Ms. Hicks; tooled leather wall pieces created by Carol Jackson and woodworking from the sculptor Alma Allen.

As was evident at this year’s Venice Biennale, there will be an emphasis on archival materials. Joseph Grigely, the artist, “got the archive of critic Gregory Battcock and will have vitrines showing all kinds of ephemera from it,” Ms. Sussman said.

Mr. Sanders added, “There’s a definite response to new media.” Triple Canopy, an online journal, will be presenting a project in the gallery and Semiotext(e) will also present a new series of publications.

In years past the Biennial has been criticized for the absence of painting, but Ms. Sussman and Mr. Sanders said there will be lots of it this year, especially works by abstract artists like Rebecca Morris, Molly Zuckerman Hartung, Laura Owens, Jacqueline Humphries, Louise Fishman, Amy Sillman, Suzanne McClelland, Etel Adnan, Dan Walsh and Elijah Burgher.

Frequently there is something outrageous to ogle. (In 2012, the Los Angeles artist Dawn Kasper [moved into the museum](#).) Mr. Sanders said it was still too early to say if there would be any off-the-wall moments because many of the performance projects are still being shaped.

There have also been years when the Biennial has extended beyond its own four walls, striking out into Central Park and once at the Park Avenue Armory. This year the multimedia artist Tony Tasset will be creating out an outdoor sculpture in Hudson River Park.

“Hudson River Park is a place people actually use,” Mr. Sanders said. “It also takes you outside the fray of the city.”

### **A LITTLE COLOR FOR WINTER**

Two public art projects scheduled for February and March will be especially visible in the city’s bleak winter landscape.

In Madison Square Park — that six-acre swath of green between Madison and Fifth Avenues, from 23rd to 26th Streets — the Brooklyn-based Chilean artist Iván Navarro will create a site-specific installation on view from Feb. 20 through March 30. Called “This Land is Your Land,” from the 1940 Woody Guthrie folk song, it will consist of glowing neon words reflected within three water towers installed throughout the park. Seven feet in diameter and resting on eight-foot-tall supports, the water towers, an integral part of New York’s skyline repeat their neon message perpetually.

“It’s our 28th exhibition over the last 10 years,” said Debbie Landau, president of the Madison Square Park Conservancy.

Uptown, at the Doris C. Freedman Plaza at 60th street and Fifth Avenue, the Swiss-born artist Olaf Breuning has created six clouds rendered as childlike drawings and fashioned



# Whitney Biennial 2014



# Ken Okiishi



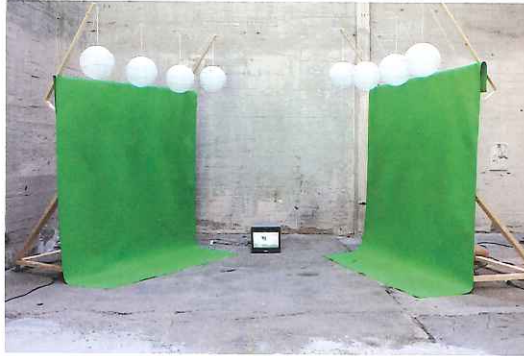
*gesture/data*, 2013. Oil on flat-screen television and video transferred to USB flash drive, color, sound; 35 5/16 × 21 × 3 11/16 in. (89.7 × 53.3 × 9.4 cm)

Born 1978 in  
Ames, IA

Lives in New York, NY/  
Berlin, Germany

# Painting and Screen Otherwise

## *Michael Sanchez*



*paraphysis/paraphyer/nobody can tell the waly of it/1857/oslo/2011, 2011 (installation view, Nobody Can Tell the Why of It, 1857, Oslo, May 27–August 14, 2011). Digital video, production monitors, paper; wood; wheels; lamps; sandbags; and speakers; dimensions variable*

Although painting has always accommodated the technical requirements of different media of distribution, from tapestries to engravings to photographs, the ascendant medium now is the IPS screen produced in various forms by Apple and its competitors. While historical attempts to distribute art through new media like television met with only limited success, the distribution of painting through the touch-screen interface is today largely a fait accompli.

While this shift from print to blog and feed began some time ago, the complex accommodations and counteractions of art in relation to it have only recently become visible. Painting, for example, underwent a series of mutations at about the turn of the current decade. At that time, browsing through one of the major art aggregators would have revealed a profusion of abstract, monochrome, and pattern paintings flowing through the channels of the art market, frequently in diminutive styles and formats. This is, I believe, the result of several factors. A market disproportionately concentrated on young artists demanded that these artists make small, investible works. Compounding this fact were the ways in which the market converged with the portable media technology that gained momentum at the same time.

Since the technology presents images of paintings both in a grid of thumbnails and as high-resolution images, the most successful paintings work equally well in both of these scales. The scalability of monochromes and pattern paintings

make them the most strategic forms: their scalar flexibility means that they can be viewed in any size, from thumbnail to wallpaper. They are low-information forms, which means that they function well as thumbnails. But they also accommodate large-scale viewing through both their all-over informational structure and their incorporation of subtle textural and relief effects that can only be appreciated in high-resolution, pleasantly offsetting the flatness of the touch screen.

Even the new gestural vocabulary that portable devices taught the population at about this time—tiny swipes and taps—migrated into painting. The work of the painter G. is paradigmatic here. His work is made of newspapers affixed to canvas, from which is torn a continuous gestural script of short U-shaped gestures and dots. The paintings come in different sizes but always with the same scalable motif and always in a vertical format, mirroring the default vertical orientation of the phone. The newspapers reverse-remediate the screens onto which they are distributed. Like all old media distributed through a newer medium, they provide a therapeutic visual effect. Their gray tones counteract the brightness of the screens; the layered effect of newspaper on newspaper counteracts their flatness. By staging installation shots with a gray cat roaming around his paintings, G. draws an explicit parallel between the experience of viewing his work and viewing photos of cats online (an activity that accounts for an enormous percentage of internet traffic). Paintings as cats: gray, modest, friendly, and in styles designed to

trigger the instant affective response that keeps the image in circulation; images of paintings to be petted like cats as the fingers of the viewer scroll from one gray image to the next.

In G.'s work, painting and its screen image fuse. Again, the reasons for this are both economic and media-historical. As galleries began to use tablets not only to show their inventory to collectors physically visiting their sites but also to sell works solely on the basis of JPEGs, it has become increasingly necessary that the painting and the JPEG look exactly like each other. Assuming that works are purchased solely for investment purposes on the basis of JPEGs, it is not difficult to imagine an instance in which even their buyer never sees them in person and sends them straight into storage.

The artist's palette



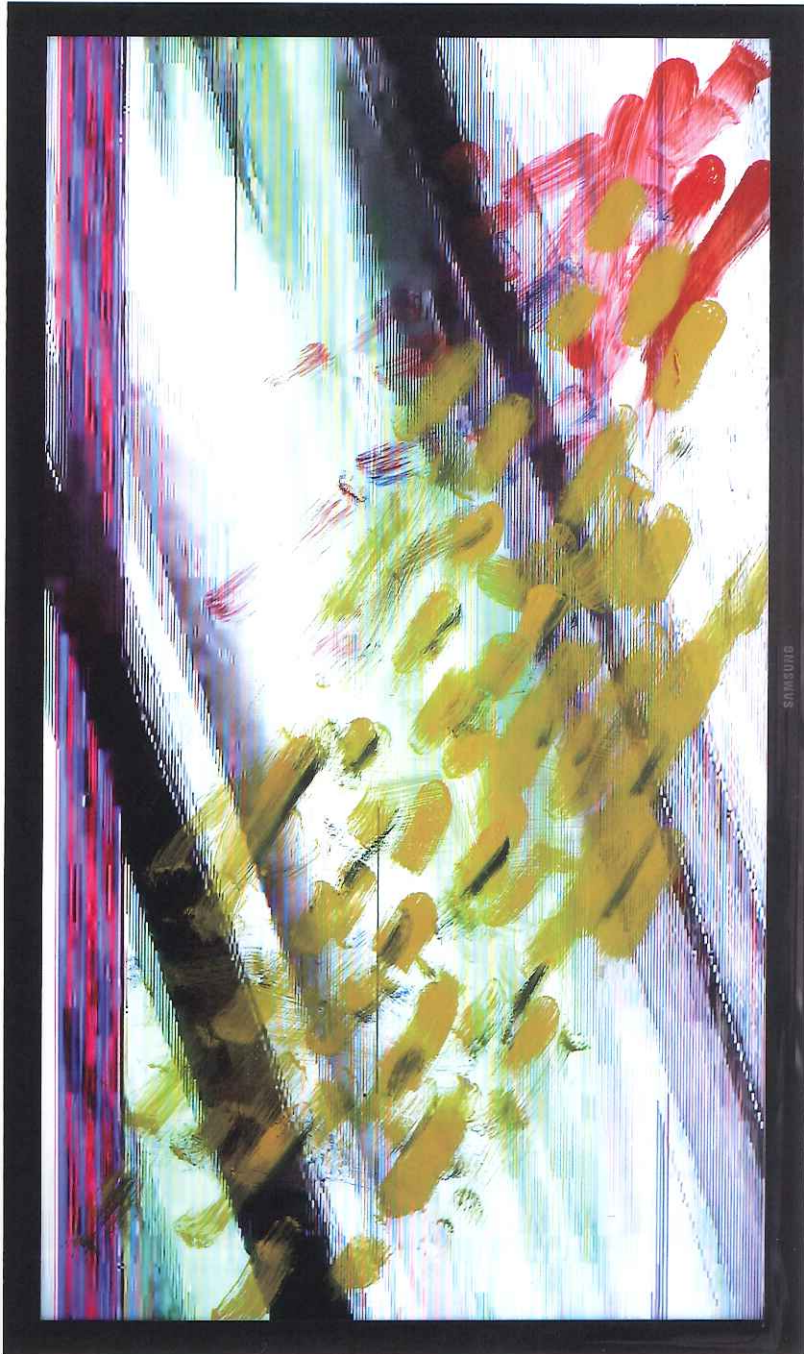
Indeed, for certain segments of the market, it seems likely that rising urban rents and the new ubiquity of internet distribution may transform the gallery in dramatic ways. At this point it is not difficult to imagine a world in which the gallery becomes the off-site digital photo studio of a more flexibly engaged advisor. Video walkthroughs of gallery shows are already becoming more common, perhaps presaging the rise of virtual-reality exhibition views in conjunction with image aggregators. We may soon find ourselves in a situation where *no one* involved in the transaction views an artwork in person. From an artist's offsite fabrication facility to an advisor's photo studio to a collector's storage unit, the object withdraws entirely from human eyes.

This is still largely hypothetical. Within the very actual distribution logic of painting since the turn of the decade, however, painting is already made to look as much like its screen image as possible. But in order to pull off this trick, it cannot be materially identical to the screen. Painting must be separate from it in order to be mediated by it: to appear properly *on* a screen, painting cannot already *be* a screen.

In a series of works on view at the Biennial, O.'s crucial move is to conflate these two, fusing painting and screen on the level of a chemical bond. This conflation unleashes a whole series of paradoxes. Whereas a painting usually generates a single image, an infinite number of images can be taken of these screen-painting hybrids. No one JPEG can capture them. Yet their status as unique objects that must be seen in person is achieved precisely by the fact that they are painted onto their medium of distribution. And even this move, perverse as it is, is complicated by the fact that O. retroactively displaces the IPS touchscreen back onto the HDTV, mimicking painting's mimicking of touch-sensitive gestures on a surface that cannot respond to them.

Within an art media system currently tooled for scrolling image distribution, painting that literally takes the form of a screen poses a problem. Although video footage can be taken of these works and distributed through platforms like Vine, the interaction of the paint with the screen beneath is almost impossible to capture on another screen, particularly for a viewer habituated to platforms that privilege the still JPEG. Oscillating between the painted marks on the surface and the video beneath, the eye perceives the moving video as pure information, aggregates of shapes and color, rather than as people or objects. The paint changes both in relation to its backlighting and frontlighting, the screen-like fluorescent lights of the gallery complemented by warm spotlights designed to activate the effects of the paint (aptly named "interference").

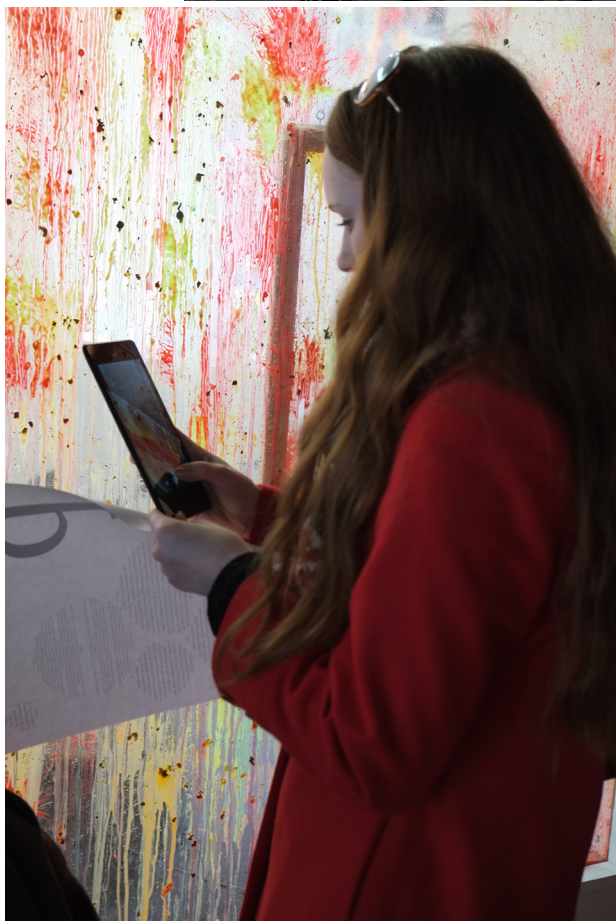
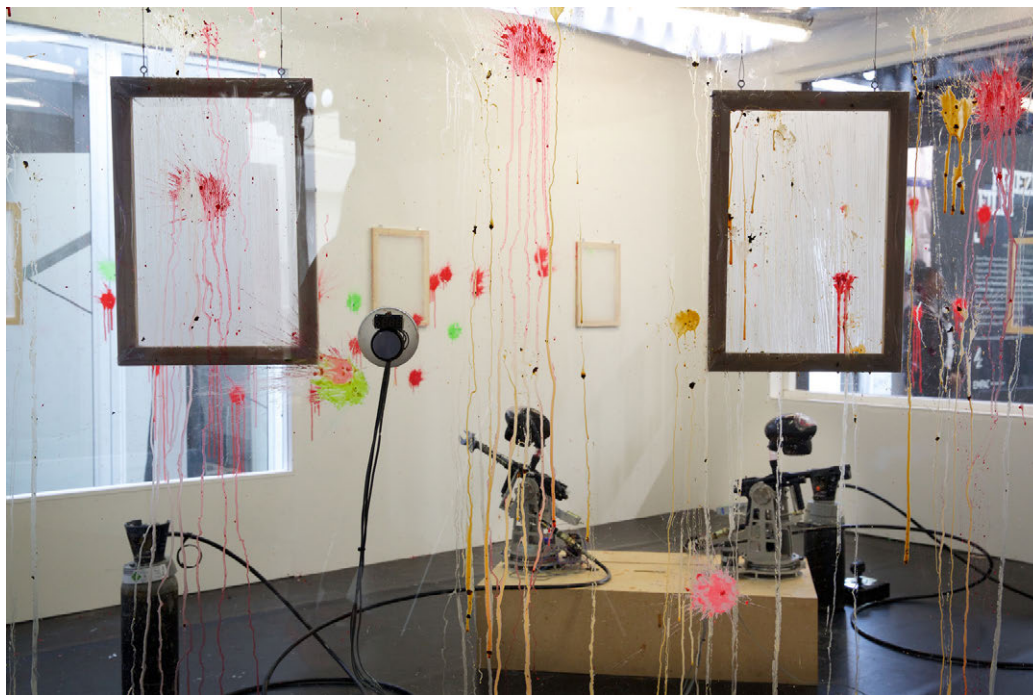
The emphasis that these works place on irreproducible visual experience registers the current anxiety about a certain distribution logic that renders a visit to the gallery or museum superfluous. As such, they are products of this liminal media-historical moment, circulating in two convergent but fundamentally incommensurate systems. The oddness of these objects results from how, in moving through these systems, they rearrange their terms.



*gesture/data*, 2013 (detail). Oil on two flat-screen televisions and video transferred to USB flash drive, color, sound;  
35 3/16 × 21 × 3 1/16 in. (89.7 × 53.3 × 9.4 cm) each. Collection of Pedro Barbosa

Frieze Projects, Frieze Art Fair, London. 16 - 20 October, 2013  
video documentation available here: <http://vimeo.com/77591313>

An “inside-out” of the dynamics of the image in *gesture/data*, this insertion into the Frieze Art Fair via the Frieze Projects section, created a “booth” that was viewed from “behind” the walls via plexiglass. The initial set-up of the booth was the most basic “dummy” of a booth--walls hung with small canvases. With Niki de Saint Phalle’s *Shooting Pictures* of the 1960s as a germination point, two robot-drone paintball guns were programmed to shoot randomly from the center of the booth onto the walls/canvases when the viewer pushed a button attached to the “screen” of the transparent wall; the accumulation of paint over the 5 days of the fair was allowed to ooze everywhere inside the booth. In this way, it became a compression chamber of both the social and economic dynamics of the art fair sector of the art market system, but also created actual art objects that were sold after the fair. A few of the paintings (which basically never completely dry due to the material that is shot out of the paintball gun) were taken dripping wet, packed in the cardboard placards (lined with diapers) that mark the location of the galleries throughout the fair. These ad-hoc packages were smuggled via the Eurostar to Paris, where the paintings were hung above the desk of the Reena Spaulings Fine Art booth at Fiac (since Fiac opens just days after Frieze closes); a gooey mess, the paintings sometimes dripped onto the desk below. Eventually, the paintings were put in plexiglass cases, framed as artifacts.



Installation views and details, Frieze Projects, Frieze Art Fair, London. 16 - 20 October, 2013  
video documentation available here: <http://vimeo.com/77591313>



Installation views and details, some of the paintings produced within Frieze Projects. Booth view from Reena Spaulings Fine Art booth at Fiac, 2013 (where a few of the paintings were hung, dripping wet, above the gallery desk, directly after Frieze, London, closed).



# Ken Okiishi

Ken Okiishi's work for Frieze Projects explores the poetic potential of paintball, as visitors use remote-control robots to shoot acrylic at canvases

*(Goodbye to) Manhattan*  
2010  
Digital video  
72 min.  
Installation view at  
MD 72  
Courtesy of MD 72,  
Mathew and Reena  
Spaulings



**Ken Okiishi** (b. 1978) is an American artist who is based in New York. His recent solo exhibitions include those at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2013), Hessel Museum of Art, Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson (2013), Mathew, Berlin (2012), Take Ninagawa, Tokyo (2012); Alex Zachary, New York (2010), and Mehringdamm 72, Berlin (2010). Recent group exhibitions include Artists Space, New York (2013), Arnolfini, Bristol (2013), Kunsthau Bregenz (2013), Kunsthalle Bern (2012), and White Columns, New York (2012).

**Nicola Lees** How did you arrive at the idea of using paintballing as part of your project for Frieze London?

**Ken Okiishi** As we were discussing aspects of Frieze Projects and your ideas about this section of the fair, I started to think about ways of articulating the dynamics of the images that were appearing in my mind—and the dynamics of the image in the attention economy in general—and I arrived at this image in my head of Niki de Saint Phalle's paintings from the early 1960s that were made by shooting guns at canvases. I initially had mistaken them for paintball. When looking at them again I realised she had shot actual rifles at paint-filled balloons attached to

canvases, which were painted all white—the balloons exploded when the bullet hit them, splattering and oozing colour onto the white surface. I thought that in the context of the fair's atmosphere, something along these lines could come together. I wanted to bring in a robotic element, where the artist's body would be replaced by performing robots.

**Lees** Why did you choose to use robots?

**Okiishi** There's something about how a viewer can develop a weird affection for drones, as if they were these little creatures. When they move around a corner, or navigate around whatever impediment, it looks like they are making autonomous decisions. But we all know, of course, that these things are just moving through a series of programmed commands, reacting to obstacles in a fairly crude way. I'm also drawn to the fact that the same technology is used for both military and housecleaning operations.

**Lees** I see both similarities and differences between your work and that of De Saint Phalle. She chose to be the creator of her paintings, whereas you are one step removed from your project, which relies on audience participation: visitors control the robots, which will shoot paint at canvases in a Plexiglas-walled space. On the other hand, both her work and yours are contingent on chance: whether the bullets will puncture the containers of paint; whether the viewers will participate in the paintballing.

**Okiishi** If there's a diagram of production for De Saint Phalle, it is very clearly the audience watching the artist do something to create her art work, and the meaning of the action stemming from that reposed viewing. In this scenario incited in Frieze Projects, I am thinking through other diagrams of cultural production where it seems that attempts at synching data streams from all over the place have changed how products and services become visible and circulate, and also how desire is calculated in complex, decentralized, real-time ways. Digital technologies facilitate the creation of something that is really something *other* than what has come before, as images circulate around and through different devices and screens, and different channels of simultaneous feedback and transmission.



I think that a decidedly different dynamics of the image emerges in this situation in comparison to the world in which De Saint Phalle was making her work—even if some of her impulses feel prescient.

**Lees** What do you mean when you talk about ‘the dynamic of the image’?

**Okiishi** The term comes from a conversation I had with the artist Sturtevant many years ago—she kept using this word ‘dynamics’ to discuss all sorts of things. And this made a huge impression on me—as an example of what this conceptual thinking, as she would call it, made possible to think and also what that thinking made possible to do in the field of art.

**Lees** Your work involves a process of accumulation, with paint being shot at



the canvases for the duration of the fair. Is that a comment on excess or is it your attempt to create a new form of dynamic image?

**Okiishi** That’s a question I’d like to leave as open as possible.

**Lees** Do you regard the project’s resulting canvases as finished art works or are they the remnants of the performance?

**Okiishi** There are various overlays working at the same time here, the funfair—the carnival situation—being the most obvious. I’m working with this situation both literally and abstractly. With a funfair game, you either get the thing that you’re playing with inside or outside what you’re aiming at. So what I like is that the canvas-as-shooting-range can become an inside or an outside: the paint either hits the canvas or it doesn’t. And while this situation is happening, the viewer/participant probably wonders if the point of this ‘game’ is even to hit the



canvas? As paintball splats increasingly accumulate both inside and outside of the canvas-as-frame, it will be interesting to see whether hitting the canvas remains a goal for the participants, or if it is the crazy, weird fun of pushing buttons and watching things explode that drives the action.

But then, after the fair has closed, when the canvases are removed from this environment, the trace of the inside or the outside, the trace of how this thing has been produced, will also become a trace of the mental image of the situation in which it happened. I was struck that when I saw one of De Saint Phalle’s shooting pictures in a museum recently, I also saw in my mind the images that I’ve seen on YouTube of her shooting the canvases, and the other images that came up when I was Googling around.



So I guess the short answer is, yes, the environment that is producing the work is, in the end, also a way of making paintings that become a way of talking about how images are formed.

**Lees** Paintballs generally only come in four rather garish colours – red, blue, yellow and green. Are you thinking of making them more bespoke, as De Saint Phalle’s were?

**Okiishi** My interest in colour here has two facets. There will be a number of drones filming the whole thing, and while they’re filming they’re also mopping what will eventually become a sort of mud on the floor as the colours come together and mix and mix and mix. The footage of what these little mopping camera robots ‘see’ will be broadcast in the fair itself. At the same time, an image of what is taking place will be formed by fair visitors, snapping and sending around photos or videos with their phones. As the images of what’s happening start to circulate, they initiate and become part of a process of an image-in-formation, among and through different official and unofficial image networks. But the ultimate colour that will appear as these basic, bright colours mix is basically mud.

**Lees** Given that the project could just as easily be realized by visitors throwing paint at the canvases, how important is this symbolism of the gun? Is it a reference to De Saint Phalle’s work or is it more of a comment on a certain genre of computer game?

‘On a technical as well as on a formal level, it’s a piece that is designed to be photographed, posted and reposted rapidly and with great enthusiasm.’



**Okiishi** I don’t think of the gun as a symbol, but as a technology. It has an explosive velocity that affects the viewer and what is shot in particular ways.

**Lees** Are you concerned that the work might be misinterpreted as a glamorization of violence?

**Okiishi** Questions about the glamorisation of violence today seem kind of irrelevant, out-of-date or too simple, given our current situation. Contemporary violence is the simultaneity of data war and drone war and real-dead-bodies war; it is also the violence of the body attempting to cohere to all of these incoherent tracks of being.

On a technical as well as on a formal level, it’s a piece that is designed to be photographed, posted and reposted rapidly and with great enthusiasm. It’s a piece that is designed so that the participation is, of course, pushing the button to activate the paintball firing mechanism, but also these explosions and

Opposite:  
Still s from *The Deleted Scene*  
2012  
Four-channel HD video  
28 min.  
Produced by AP News  
Courtesy of Mathew and Reena Spaulings

Above:  
‘Gino/“thinking about moving uptown”’/  
Marcel Duchamp on StreetEasy.com’  
2011  
Exhibition view at Alex Zachary at Frame,  
Frieze London  
Courtesy of Mathew and Reena Spaulings

smears and drips that happen will become very desirable to be photographed, to be videoed, to be sent on Instagram or Vine or whatever.

This desire to capture and transmit the image is made easier to realize because the screen itself is doubled: for example, you can hold up your phone screen to the Plexiglas and it will look like the gun is shooting directly at the viewer, as the paint accumulates directly on the back of the Plexiglas screen. There will be ‘paintings’ that appear on the canvases on the walls as well as ‘paintings’ that form inside the screen as images-in-formation.



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### [SIGN OF THE TIMES](#)

## Sign of the Times | Look Out, It's Instagram Envy

### [Culture](#)

BY [SARAH NICOLE PRICKETT](#)

November 6, 2013 11:00 am



Gail

Albert Halaban, “Out My Window, Flatiron, Cakes And Balloons,” 2009, courtesy of Edwynn Houk Gallery. Pre-Instagram, this was the main way New Yorkers spied on the lives of their neighbors. The artist Gail Albert Halaban shot this from a nearby apartment window.

*Instagram has created a new kind of voyeurism — in which you can look into the carefully curated windows of the rich, famous and stylish — and a new kind of lifestyle envy.*

“The department store is the last promenade for the flâneur,” wrote Walter Benjamin, the German critic, whose impossible project — “The Arcades Project,” more precisely — documented street life in

## Italy, by Rafael de Cárdenas.

All elements must be carefully staged to look happenstance. Only the crassest Instagrammer snaps a new pair of shoes in a box, or plainly on a floor. The canner, cinematic one will instead make a display of the shoes, arranging her feet on a shabby-chic desk next to a Grolsch bottle of daisies atop a stack of French translations. The writer [Stephanie LaCava](#) snaps her snakeskin Pradas opposite Audrey Gelman's funny bunny slippers at Paris Fashion Week. A few cobblestoned streets away, the swimwear designer [Lisa Marie Fernandez](#) shows off her white Manolo Blahniks next to her friend's yellow pair of Gianvito Rossis. Such Instagrams are mimetic: the contents, the casually rarefied setting, the off-kilter composition. What each says is not "this is a good shoe" or "these shoes look good on me," but "these shoes look good in my life," which is what Benjamin meant when he said goods are sold by flâneurie.

What feels new with Instagram is the mode of photography that feels most akin to the window display. [Rafael de Cárdenas](#), the architect, shows off Biarritz by way of melons and Marlboros on a snowy white cloth. [Jessica Diehl](#), Vanity Fair's style and fashion director, snaps her stay in Claridge's, the five-star hotel in London. The model-slash-writer [Laura Bailey](#) comes home from a trip with — she writes — "Paris in my bag": a strand of Chanel pearls, a Chanel stylo eyeliner, a black diamanté hairpin and a handwritten note, all displayed too well and too brightly to make anyone believe these items have ever seen the inside of a clutch.

These are technically still lifes, but in spirit they are actually the new self-portraiture. It isn't strange to say, or to hear, from an acquaintance run into on the street, "I recognized you" — not by your face or your body, but by your "style." Meaning: a hand with carmine nails holding a copy of Anne Carson's "Red Doc." A pair of Illestevas resting on the edge of a Café Gitane plate, beneath it a new issue of The Journal. "The arrangement was the meaning," Joan Didion writes in "Blue Nights." The same is as true of objects as of words, and the small compositions of personal belongings so recognizable as "Instagram" are, simply, selfies without a face.

Similar compositions can also represent others. One of my favorite recent Instagrams, by the Los Angeles artist [David Kitz](#), is of bandages, Motrin and other supplies for an injury from CVS, all heaped together on a plain white bedspread; the tag is #anklesprain, the caption is "Got the best girl in the world," and the heart melts. This is my kind of lifestyle envy. For the more aspirational, there is [Amanda Brooks](#), the American socialite who now lives in Oxfordshire, England, with two kids and a million horses. In lieu of a family portrait, Brooks will Instagram four pairs of kayaking sandals on a dock. Instead of photographing her scads of friends, she 'grams a plate heaped high with packets of quince paste, which she has made to give as gifts. In the comments, a stranger asks her for the recipe.

"There it was," says the narrator in the Willa Cather story "Paul's Case," looking up at a wonderland of glowing panes, "what he wanted — tangibly before him, like the fairy world of a Christmas pantomime." Close observers of Instagram may have noticed the recent rise of a conscious-or-not homage to Walter Benjamin, a snap of the modern flâneur: taken alone on the street, while looking through a store window — the most reflexive of surfaces — at oneself.

### **Correction: November 24, 2013**

*An article last Sunday about the use of Instagram as a unique form of voyeurism erroneously attributed a passage from the Willa Cather story "Paul's Case." It was the narrator — not one of the story's characters — who observed, "There it was, what he wanted — tangibly before him, like*



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## FRIEZE PROJECT FOCUS: KEN OKIISHI



DALE CHIHULY AND  
BENTLEY'S SANG YUP  
LEE ON FORM...

by Christine Cocotte / 22 October 2013 / [add comments](#)

BAZAAR AT WORK:  
ORIOLE CULLEN,  
CURATOR AT THE  
V&A





### Christine Cocotte speaks to artist Ken Okiishi about his 2013 London Frieze Art Fair installation

*Bringing the fairground fun to [London Frieze](#) last weekend, New York-based artist Ken Okiishi had art editors and punters alike dodging his project's frenzied paintballs. In a nod to 60s action paintings, Okiishi's robots hurled layer after layer of coloured paint within a transparent Perspex-walled booth. From a number of vantage points, Frieze attendees witnessed as the layers of paint gradually accumulated into a series of abstract paintings - or, in Okiishi's words, "a great wet mess". After prepping non-stop for the last five days, he was more than happy to take a well-deserved break and discuss the creative joys of chaos, as well as his motives for "unleashing the monster inside the fair".*

#### What inspired your first Frieze-commissioned project?

We have this strange relationship with screens and devices, and I was trying to think through what that interactive relationship is like. I built a booth, but instead of standing inside it, you're left outside, watching. The activation button is attached to a transparent wall that acts like a crude flatscreen. When



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you press it, the inside of the screen comes to life in a monstrous explosion. You feel like you're in some sort of virtual reality, or game.



### Did you design the robots to “paint” a specific work?

Once activated, they shoot paint all over the space according to a randomised algorithm - it's based on a cycle that repeats every billion years. But the funny thing is that certain people seem to activate it in a weird cosmic way. Some people get shot at. For others, it flies the other way. Of course it's all random, but you start to feel that maybe chaotic forces are converging on that dot - for or against you.

### How have Frieze visitors reacted so far?

Some people screamed. When the robots fire a paintball directly at your head, I guess it's pretty scary. Other people just think it's funny. You can press the button, or just watch on the side. There's also another robotic element that works as a kind of ready-made cleaning device, moving around inside. So it all feels a bit like a robot zoo.

### Did you originally intend for people to enter the paintball booth?



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For me, it was far more interesting to have the action mediated. As I mentioned, you are always left outside of the activated space, but you're so close to it that its physical presence is still very strong and alive. It's supposed to be simultaneously spectacular, and totally alienating!



### **Which artists have influenced you most?**

There was a female artist in the 60s named Eileen Sturdevant who created works made of paint-filled balloons inside the canvas: she'd shoot at them or invite other people to – so this project kind of sprung out of that. The paintballing was a ready-made way of producing this kind of accumulation on the canvas with speed: I like the chaos that it brings.

### **Your Frieze Project reflects our society's growing dependence on technology and artificial intelligence.**

#### **Have robots replaced the artist?**

For me, the interesting thing about devices is like how your phone has become an extension of your hand. That confusion isn't necessarily about a reliance on robots, but how they've become a part of our bodies.



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### What can we expect from you next?

It's been a really intense time for me lately. I'm looking forward to taking it easy, then preparing for my show next spring, at Nina Spaulding's gallery in New York.

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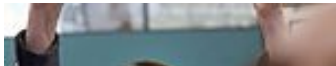


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### YOU MIGHT LIKE

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# Joan Mitchell

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Retrospective  
Her Life and Paintings

Herausgegeben von | Edited by  
Yilmaz Dziewior

Kunsthaus Bregenz

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## Painting Paintings

Ken Okiishi

1 Irving Sandler, «Mitchell Paints a Picture,» in: *ARTnews*, vol. 56, no. 6, October 1957, p. 45.

2 *Joan Mitchell: Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, directed by Marion Cajori, New York: Arthouse Films, 1992, Amazon Instant Video, <http://www.amazon.com/Joan-Mitchell-Portrait-Abstract-Painter/dp/B003ELMR8U>.

It is with jittery hesitation that I put into words my thoughts on the work of Joan Mitchell. She has been, for me, a private moment. The rare occasion of seeing one of her paintings hung at the Metropolitan Museum or MoMA has always been met with a secret, almost embarrassing joy—of being there, in this fugal array of thoughts and colors and affects (the forbidden word, «feelings,» is what really should be said here, if that word can be uttered with the friction of sensation and remembering, and as the opposite of sentimental attachment). It has been a silent transmission—of moving there, in my mind, in a rush of flushed hormonal glee, and sometimes, almost as if an invitation to dance out a relationship to the memories stored inside the body of the painting and my own being. Sadness is a form of ecstatic hyperactivity here as well. And I find myself conducting along, like when listening to Bach alone—like Tatiana Nicolaeva's melodic gravitational pull and articulation of counterpoint as a post-verbal movement of synapses and hormones and muscles freed from the frames of «bodily» being, or the way Glenn Gould can be heard in recordings singing along while playing the piano. A kind of dancing and singing alone—the kind of thing that surpasses being ashamed because it is released in these euphoric jolts of energy

where the thought of another witnessing this is expelled from fright.

When looking at a great painting by Joan Mitchell, in fact, nothing really needs to be said at all. The paintings reach a state of permanent pleasure that has no other meaning than being there with the painting and having that pleasure. But also knowing that that pleasure stays there, in the painting. Like a place that is visited—it stays there, in the brain, with that memory, like you have of a vacation place or a certain walk as a child. That kind of pleasure, that stays there, does not come with you: paradise, if that word can be uttered without sounding overwrought. But here, attached to this painting, this paint and canvas there. You can't bring paradise with you. You can't even look at photos of it, if you've never been there, and experience anything other than longing or dismissal. Mitchell «carries her landscapes with her,» but we cannot.<sup>1</sup>

Isn't that something else about paradise—that it disorganizes your «self» as you become the same thing as, say, a blood red plant next to a bright blue bird next to a piece of dirt and the smell of lavender and manure? That these things all arrive there, somehow, next to or on top of each other and you are also there, as one thing among that composition that happens there, and it's all together, and that it happens is the way it happens and that is how it becomes that feeling of being among rather than in?

In our current hubristically cynical «art world,» where every atom of being seems to be set on constantly repositioning itself in some sort of cyberfeudal order; as everything tries to be in perfect alignment with a constantly shifting screen of infospreads that suggests that art is a purely textual form of data, and that the preferred way of looking at art is with ears peeled to gossip and eyes shut as tightly as possible; Joan Mitchell's work emerges as a counter-discourse of feelings and presence that enters the brain as shocks of color.

Looking at Joan Mitchell now, on Amazon Instant Video even, on that very «screen» that has become the agent of a flattened relationship to producing and experiencing artworks—to all objects in the world, to touch, to «life.» Joan Mitchell, the person, is irresistibly charming with her wildly magnified eyes beneath coke-bottle glasses and sardonic fowl mouth. With gleeful irony, she admits to not being able to see very well, only «from afar,» «not little things.» But then a friend sitting next to her—Joan thinks through her, about her, while walking around. She looks at the landscape and starts to see all of these little potatoes. Rotten potatoes. «Little dead potato.» She looks for that. And she starts to see other things.<sup>2</sup>



*Cercando un Ago*,  
1957

3 I am referring the television series, *Girls*, created by Lena Dunham, as it has come to be emblematic of a «new» kind of heterosexual feminist expression in an era of increased opportunities for women and subjectivities in which being a woman can appear, but that also coincides with a frustrating reemergence of many forms of sexism that second generation feminists had hoped would be gone by now.

4 Patricia Albers, *Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter*, New York, 2011, p. 289.

5 Mitchell's record, set in May 2014, was eclipsed by the sale of a Georgia O'Keeffe painting in November 2014.

6 Letter from Bill Rubin to Joan Mitchell, postmarked May 29, 1952; Joan Mitchell Papers, Joan Mitchell Foundation Archives.

7 Joan Mitchell interviewed by Linda Nochlin, Archives of American Art, April 16, 1986, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-joan-mitchell-12183>.

8 Patricia Albers, see note 4, p. 172.

Mitchell slows down what a feeling looks like, thinks like, remembers, tries to forget — nagging. But she also revs up the velocity of memories clashing. It is slow and fast at the same time, in floods of color thrown into multiversal tension — like simultaneous, multiple big bangs of remembrance, witnessing the core of the creation of multiplicity. The evasion of language. Like our brains attach to our bodies and actions as strands of untwining. At the edge of an undecidable decision. Not a direct registration of «expression» or «action.» Maybe more like a delayed response — to trauma? «Trauma» is too strong — or maybe it isn't. A traumatic response to objects, to the natural landscape, to walking around. Like the way everything that happens in a day can feel on the same painful level; and that way of lying in bed feeling everything at the same time. Or the way the trees and the grass and the water and the sky continue to flow — as clusters of cells without subjective presence — next to and on top of and into each other.

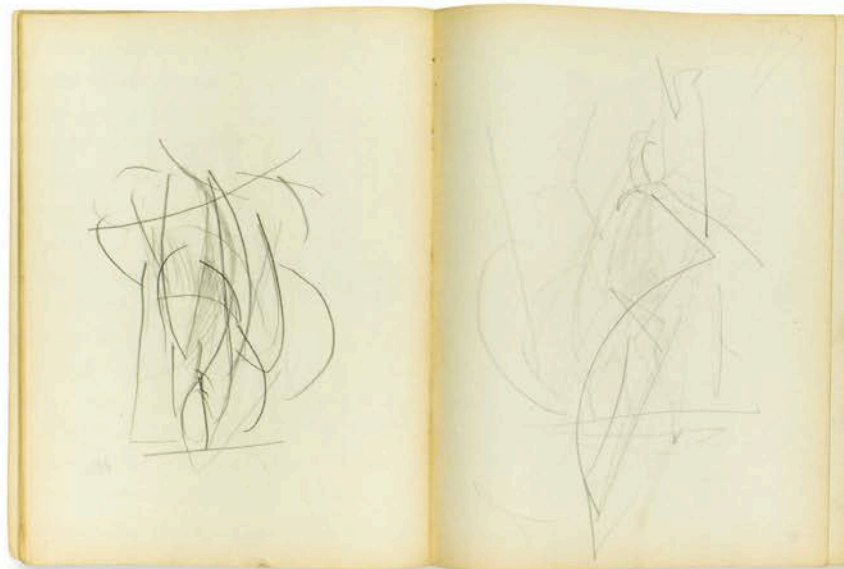
When I've tried to share these thoughts with colleagues who never really thought to spend time with a Mitchell painting, who couldn't tell a good one from a bad one, who probably think she was either overly emotional or maybe just into bright colors and «expression,» I've always tripped over the weird face people make when you say her name. You can tell immediately that she is thought of as one of those, as the horrible combination of words has come shockingly back into fashion, «woman painters.» That she is simply an exemplar of this category that is «celebrated» with no acknowledgement of its relentless categorical self-prescriptions. (It is rather depressing to go

through my mother's era of feminist concerns once again, but it seems necessary, in the age of *Girls* feminism/sexism,<sup>3</sup> to discuss, once again, as if for the first time, a series of historical errors regarding «women» and «art careers.») If we are «honest» with ourselves, the biggest obstacle in looking at Mitchell's paintings is shedding clichés related to «expression,» «women,» and assumed techniques of «gestural abstraction» from the sensorium of the viewer.

It is either disheartening or strangely comforting as an artist (as in, through a genealogy of pain) to know that Clement Greenberg, in a role as art advisor to Lawrence Rubin's gallery in Paris, Galerie Lawrence, had Mitchell booted from the gallery right after her first — and commercially successful — exhibition there in 1962.<sup>4</sup> This was already after she had had six successive solo exhibitions (Cy Twombly had had three) at The Stable Gallery in New York throughout the 1950s and had recently rather ambivalently moved to Paris to live with her boyfriend. She was also making some of the most chaotic and brilliant paintings of her entire oeuvre — works that also travelled to a show in Bern, were stored away for many years until they were exhibited in New York for the first time in 1985, and then ended up reaching her highest auction prices in 2014 (and, as is often repeated in the news, the highest figures for a «female» artist).<sup>5</sup>

For some more texture of the art world in the 1950s: the gallerist's brother, William Rubin, who would eventually become one of the more influential heads of Painting and Sculpture at MoMA during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, had also been a big fan of Mitchell's work in New York. Somehow he had even acquired a work of hers, and, in a bizarre letter from 1952, says how much he and his friends were enjoying the painting in his apartment but that he was very sorry that because he had not successfully pawned off two pre-war Buffet clarinets, that he was unable to pay for the painting. With the letter was enclosed a 50-dollar down payment, unnegotiated and unnegotiable, to be followed up whenever he was able to sell the clarinets for as much as he thought they were really worth.<sup>6</sup> This is within the same set of family relations in which Clement Greenberg advised to «get rid of that gestural horror.»<sup>7</sup> And this is also the same Greenberg who advised New York galleries in the 1950s not to exhibit women since «they'd just get pregnant.»<sup>8</sup>

It is important to point out that it was not only, or even primarily, a nasty mid-century sexism that blocked — or continues to block — Mitchell, but an entire set of art-historical opinions that seem, in the present day, quaint in a way that Joan Mitchell's work does not. For example, in reading Greenberg on the renewed view of «Later Monet»



Doppelseite aus Joan Mitchell's Skizzenbuch | Pages from Joan Mitchell's sketchbook, 1948

9 Clement Greenberg, «Later Monet,» in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance 1957–1969*, ed. by John O'Brian, Chicago, 1993, pp. 3–11.

10 Mitchell, during a filmed interview with Angeliki Haas in Mitchell's studio in Vétheuil, distilled the meaning of one of her «Tree» paintings (a rare occasion for Mitchell to actually state the meaning of a work) by quoting van Gogh: «[Van Gogh writes in a letter that] he gives gratitude to the sunflower because it exists. And I give gratitude to trees because they exist—and that is all that my painting is about.» In: *American Artists in Europe* (Alice Hutchins, Douglas James Johnson, Joan Mitchell), directed and produced by Angeliki Haas, 1976.

11 Irving Sandler, see note 1, p. 45.

12 Patricia Albers, see note 4, for many stories of de Kooning and Mitchell's friendship.

13 *Joan Mitchell: Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, see note 2.

in 1957, after MoMA's acquisition of *Water Lilies* (1915–1925), we arrive at a point of view that seems entirely dated and, even at the time of its writing, probably felt ham-fisted: «It may not account for, but it helps clarify an increasing dissatisfaction with van Gogh, as it helps justify impatience with an uncritical adoration of Cézanne. Van Gogh is a great artist, but Monet's example serves better even than Cézanne's to remind us that he may not have been a master. He lacked not only solidity of breadth of craft; he also lacked a settled largeness of view. In Monet, on the other hand, we enjoy a world of art, not just a vision, and that world had the variety and space, and even some of the ease, a world should have.»<sup>9</sup>

No wonder Mitchell found Greenberg to be so annoying. Not only was she rightfully high on her own success at the time, but the entire art-historical value matrix of «that toilet seat,» as Mitchell would later refer to him, was upside-down to hers. There isn't space in this essay to do it justice, but Mitchell's particular love of van Gogh actually makes van Gogh look new again—if you are willing to go there.<sup>10</sup> She probably also found Greenberg to be a flat out bore, since he was wafting around in art history and trying to build consensus first around Pollock and then around «color field painting,» and she was trying to make paintings that we would now refer to, for better or worse, as «conceptual.» The same year (1957) as Greenberg's musings on *Water Lilies*, Mitchell is quoted in *ARTnews* as saying, in reference to the way in which she paints with a mind full of affectual thoughts about things in the world—and from memory, rather than working from any sort of observation or notion of direct gestural action—and it still sounds fresh in 2015: «I carry my landscapes around with me.»<sup>11</sup> His moment was then and hers is now.

In one of Mitchell's early sketchbooks (1948), from a time when she was living in Brooklyn with her husband-to-be Barney Rosset, one can already see her particular forms emerging as she works out of cubism towards the architectonic of gestures and marks that would amass in her paintings. Drawings of women that resemble Picasso's are followed by lines that bring air into the figure, stretching out the points where lines intersect to represent form, as if loosening the figure itself out of its skin. What is remarkable here is that she does not go for the angular or the jagged—or the glorious abjection of the figure of «women» like what de Kooning would do—but that the body becomes marks hanging on lyrical forms. Like her peers, she moves further and further away from mimetic forms, but in a tangential direction from either geometric abstrac-

tion or what would emerge as the brazen bravado of, say, Pollock. With Mitchell, even this early on, it is as if interstices of lines, rather than snapping to simple geometric grids or exploding out into hysterized grids, stretch the line of the grid like the branch of a tree pushing against a flexible material.

You can imagine, when she moved to New York right after art school and became a «kid» on the scene of the emergent AbEx, what a rush it must have been to talk to de Kooning, sitting on park benches in Washington Square park—or drunk out of their minds in the many opportunities to really go there both in conversation and inebriation.<sup>12</sup>

She had a lot of fun. Drawing oneself out of the limits of a certain expectedness. A certain lyrical gruffness. One of my favorite moments in the Marion Cajori Amazon streaming documentary is when Mitchell says, «I don't paint well out of violence or anger, Hitler doesn't inspire me,» while sitting in the offices of Robert Miller Gallery while her show is opening there wearing a «Robert Miller Gallery» logo sweatshirt and joking that she's trying to be like Jenny Holzer by wearing that sweatshirt. «I also don't like to be manipulated or powered or controlled, and someone telling me what to think ... I don't like work that tells you what to think, rather allows you to feel.»<sup>13</sup>

One of the most difficult aspects of looking at Joan Mitchell, in our very «post-war» inflection of Abjection, German bad-painting (which could also be nicknamed post-Nazi painting), etc., is that we assume that any good painting is a representation of modes of self-hatred, anger, guilt, violence, etc. That overlay onto Mitchell is tempting—a kind of fauvist barf interpretation—but doesn't work.

Frank O'Hara captures the brash peculiarity that was Joan Mitchell on the scene of the New York School in the 1950s in a poem that seems to have been written after saying goodbye to her in Paris, where she settled at the end of the 1950s. It has the mourning tone of celebrating the image of a friendship that can never be lived again:



14 «Far From the Porte des Lilas and the Rue Pergolesse: to Joan Mitchell», in: Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Donald Allen, Berkeley, 1995, p. 311. The poem was first published in 1958.

15 Joan Mitchell: *Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, see note 2.

*Ah Joan! there  
you are  
surrounded by paintings  
as in another century you would be wearing  
lipstick  
(which you wear at night to be old-fashioned,  
of it!  
with it! out!*

*and the danger of being Proustian  
and the danger of being Pasternakesque  
and the cops outside the BALAJO frisking  
Algerians  
who'd been quietly playing «surf» with their  
knuckles*

*gee, if I don't stop being so futuristic Elsa Triolet  
will be after me!*

*a dream of immense sadness peers through me  
as if I were an action poem that couldn't write  
and I am leaving for another continent which  
is the  
same as this one  
goodby!<sup>14</sup>*

[sic. spelling of «goodby» in original]

Rivière, 1990

The body as memory activator or becoming forms/ marks loosened from the space of the body as representation, to hanging in the air, registered on canvas. This process of being and looking over. Close and far. The painting becomes the object of looking. And memory. No longer anything «outside» of the act. The outside world shut out. Blacked out. Glowing in this room in the landscape. Not looking out. But also without an «inside.» The image of Mitchell working alone at night, glowing, in her studio in Paris. The image of the landscape, brightly lit, in the countryside in Vétheuil, in the middle of the day, totally shut out by linen canvas hung over the windows.

From lines as points of connection of the body freed into pure neural pathways, as being mashed and reformed, as new better brain matter becoming there. That being with the painting as a disappearing of the body. Purely thought energy, like the way the landscape is not one thing. But many things. That it is just there. And being there is always a surprise. Every time new. Even if you've been there a thousand times. Not looking at the landscape. Not representing the landscape. But becoming or recording the being of the landscape. In it. And then making that being become something that can be experienced not there. That being in the landscape that is also having thoughts in or with the landscape and sensations — twirling — as they do when you are alone or with a dear friend not speaking. That lyricism is always met with the interruption of a sardonic remark — so no one notices how sensitive or fragile that being is.

Joan Mitchell says, the thought appearing as if out of nowhere: «Matisse has light. He's one of the few painters with light as well as color. He's fabulous — look at it! C'mon ... Kline has light. And I'm not talking about white ... Mondrian has light. I don't think de Kooning has light, even though he is a brilliant painter.»<sup>15</sup>

And as I was walking around the Metropolitan Museum the other day, on my way to visit one of her paintings again, I realized what she was really saying. In *The Three O'Clock Sitting*, a work painted by Matisse in Nice during the winter of 1924, a remarkable light emanates from the canvas. The window overlooking the sea appears as a solid block of dark green, and the light appears miraculously as pink painted on top of this opaque square of color. What appears glowing through the pane of the window is painted on top of a total blackout: this window that is, in its process, first a solid block that arrives as light, as the delicate vibration that happens between pink and green. The winter beach light of three o'clock arrives in paint, producing light through layers of pigment.

This simple, profound lesson from Matisse prismatically thrusts itself into life in Mitchell's work. At her most garish, like in the late painting *Rivière* (1990), streaks of teal, painted after the rest of the painting had dried, rain sparks of light down, as if shocks of after-images from the pink winter afternoon light of Matisse's Nice.

With Matisse's Nice we enter a further fold in Mitchell's peculiarly «conceptual» process. She would refer to places, objects, people—and paintings—as if they were all on the same level of experience and memory. Her obsession with van Gogh is well known, but what I find particular in this often quoted gem from Mitchell—«I don't like fields of sunflowers. I like them alone or, of course, painted by van Gogh,»<sup>16</sup>—is that van Gogh is a type of real sunflower.

One of the more peculiar aspects of Joan Mitchell's working process is that she often painted at night, with «electric light.»<sup>17</sup> And that when she eventually moved to her lush estate in Vétheuil in 1968, where Monet had spent three years working in the gardener's cottage as a studio before his eventual move to Giverny, Mitchell would block out the windows in her painting studio with canvas, so that even during the day, she could make it like the night, where nothing of the landscape outside

could be seen.<sup>18</sup> In a 1986 interview with her favorite theorist of her work, Yves Michaud, she relayed the aporia of this process:

*I often paint during the night but I have nothing to do with night. I like the light. I prefer daylight. I also work in the afternoon, I check what I have done the night before. Certain colors change enormously with electric light. Blue is one of them. Yellow is another. They all change, but some really change. I do a bit of guessing. The next day, I walk up to the studio at noon and I am excited but also afraid: is it what I thought it was in terms of color? A painting which works in electric light does not necessarily work in the daylight. I love daylight.*<sup>19</sup>

In her blacked-out studio box, in the middle of bright Parisian countryside light, these extraordinary color relationships would emerge—to be «checked» against natural light, and then quickly closed off again from the glowing natural world outside the window. In the middle of the blacked-out night, the florescent lights would glow so harshly, and she would produce real light instead. Cut off from any external visual stimulation other than the painting itself, Mitchell would collapse the act of painting into a perfectly hermetic self-reflexive form. When confronted with the question, «But you don't paint in «series,» you paint pictures, each painting is different?» She acerbically insisted, emphasizing that she worked from paintings—such as what she could see going on in Matisse's technique of producing light—into painting: «No, I paint paintings.»<sup>20</sup>

16 Yves Michaud, «Conversation with Joan Mitchell,» in: *Joan Mitchell*, New York, 1986, unpag. The original transcription of this interview, with Mitchell's edits and annotations, is in the Joan Mitchell Papers, Joan Mitchell Foundation Archives. Published in full length in: *Joan Mitchell: New Paintings*, exh. cat. Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York, 1986, in this publication see pp. 55–57.

17 Ibid.

18 *American Artists in Europe* (Alice Hutchins, Douglas James Johnson, Joan Mitchell, see note 9.

19 Yves Michaud, see note 15, here page p. 56.

20 Ibid. The entire passage of the interview reads: «Abstract is not a style. I simply want to make a surface work. This is just a use of space and form: it's an ambivalence of forms and space. Style in paintings has to do with labels. Lots of painters are obsessed with inventing something. When I was young, it never occurred to me to invent. All I wanted to do was paint. I was so and still I am in such adulation of great painters. If you study a Matisse, the way paint is put on and the way he puts on white, that's painting technique. I wanted to put on paint like Matisse. I worked hard at that a very long time ago. Someone said to me recently with surprise: «But you don't paint in «series,» you paint pictures, each painting is different?» And I thought: no, I paint paintings.» See here p. 57.



Untitled, 1961

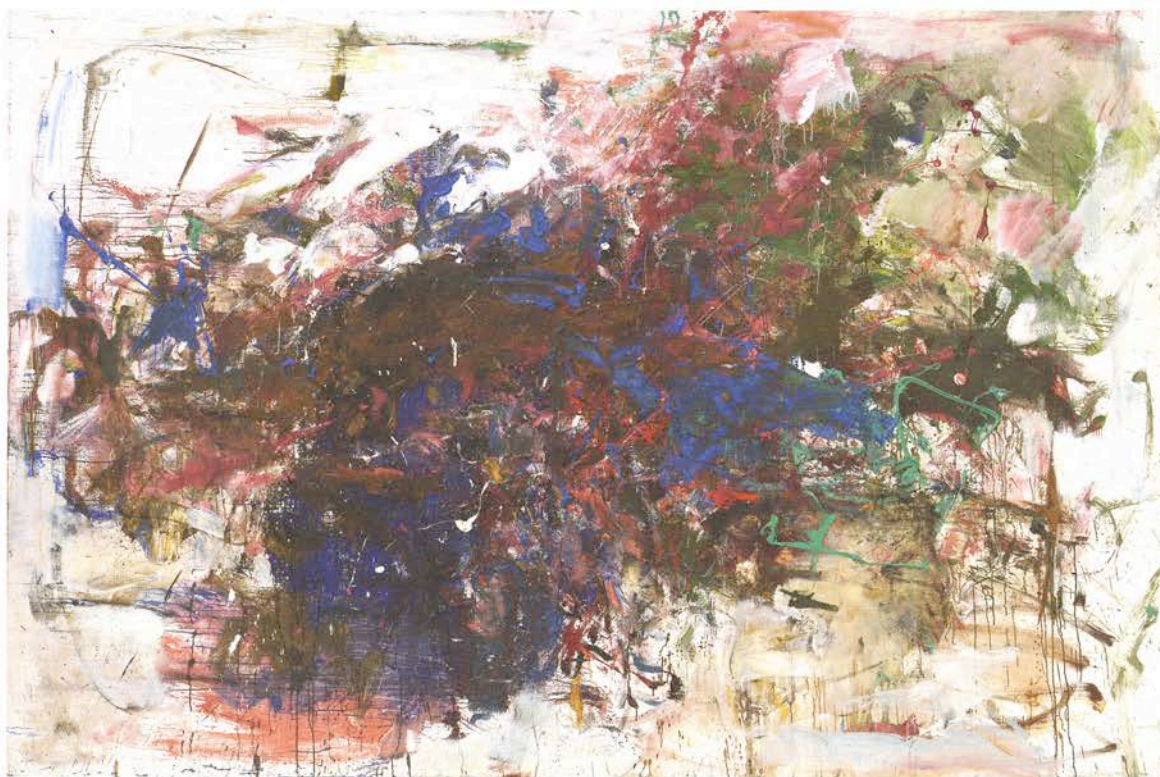


## Gemälde malen

Ken Okiishi

1 Irving Sandler, «Mitchell Paints a Picture», in: *ARTnews*, Bd. 56, Nr. 6, Oktober 1957, S. 45.

*Grandes Carrières*,  
1961-1962



Voll zögernder Nervosität mache ich mich daran, meine Gedanken zum Werk von Joan Mitchell in Worte zu fassen. Seit jeher bedeutet ihre Arbeit für mich ein inniges Erlebnis. Die seltenen Gelegenheiten, einem ihrer Gemälde im Metropolitan Museum oder MoMA in New York zu begegnen, waren stets Momente geheimen, beinahe beschämenden puren Glücks vor dieser fugenartigen Anordnung von Gedanken und Affekten (das verbotene Wort «Gefühle» sollte hier Verwendung finden, ließe es sich mit der Spannung von Empfindung und Erinnern aussprechen, anstatt mit sentimentaler Anhänglichkeit). In stiller Anspannung bewegte ich mich im Geiste dorthin, in einem Ansturm hormongesteuerten Entzückens und wie auf Aufforderung zum Tanz mit den Erinnerungen, die im Körper des Gemäldes und zugleich in meinem eigenen Innersten eingespeichert sind. Schwermut ist hier zugleich eine Form ekstatischer Hyperaktivität. Auch ertappe ich mich dabei mit-zudirigieren, als hörte ich Bach für mich allein – wie Tatjana Nikolajewas melodische Schwerkraft und Artikulation des Kontrapunkts als postverbale Bewegung von Synapsen, Hormonen und Muskeln, befreit aus ihrem Gerüst, als «körperliche» Wesen zu verstehen sind, oder wie man Glenn Gould auf manchen Einspielungen hören kann, wenn er bei seinem eigenen Klavierspiel mitsingt. Eine Art von Tanzen mit sich selbst und ein Singen für sich selbst – etwas, das unser Schamgefühl überschreitet, weil es in diesen euphorischen

Energieschüben freigesetzt wird, bei denen der Gedanke daran, dabei beobachtet zu werden, seinen Schrecken verliert.

Beim Betrachten eines der großartigen Gemälde von Joan Mitchell bedarf es im Grunde keiner Worte. Die Gemälde erreichen ein Stadium andauernder Freude, die keine andere Bedeutung hat als die, dort zu sein, zusammen mit dem Gemälde, und teilzuhaben an dieser Freude. Doch erfahren wir dies in dem Wissen, dass die Freude dort bleibt, in dem Gemälde. Wie ein Ort, den man besucht hat, bleibt die Empfindung zusammen mit der Erinnerung dort, wie Kindheitserinnerungen an einen Ferienort oder an manche Spaziergänge. Die Art der Freude, die dort bleibt, die einen nicht begleitet: das Paradies, falls dieses Wort geäußert werden kann, ohne dass es sich pathetisch anhört. Aber es ist diesem Gemälde beigelegt, genau dieser Farbe und Leinwand dort. Das Paradies kann man nicht mitnehmen. Wenn man niemals dort gewesen ist, kann man nicht einmal Fotografien davon betrachten, ohne etwas anderes als Sehnsucht oder Abweisung zu erfahren. Mitchell «trägt ihre Landschaften in sich» – wir können dies nicht.<sup>1</sup>

Heißt auch das Paradies: dass es das «Ich» desorganisiert, da man zum selben Ding wird, wie etwa eine blutrote Pflanze neben einem leuchtend blauen Vogel neben einem Stück Dreck und dem Geruch von Lavendel und Gülle? Dass all diese Dinge hier irgendwie zusammenkommen, nebeneinander, übereinander, und du bist auch dabei, als ein Ding mitten in dieser Anordnung, die da stattfindet, und alles ist beisammen, und dass es stattfindet ist die Art und Weise, auf die es stattfindet, und so wird es zu diesem Gefühl, eher inmitten als darin zu sein?

In unserer gegenwärtigen, hochmütig zynischen «Kunstwelt», in der jedes Atom des Seins darauf aus ist, sich in einer Art cyberfeudalen Ordnung fortwährend neu zu positionieren; in der alles danach strebt, sich perfekt einem andauernd veränderlichen Bildschirm voller Info-Sprays anzupassen, auf dem suggeriert wird, Kunst sei eine rein textuelle Form von Datenbestand, und in der die bevorzugte Weise der Kunstbetrachtung darin besteht, die Ohren für Klatsch offen zu halten und zugleich die Augen so fest wie möglich zu schließen; in dieser Welt tritt Joan Mitchells Werk als Gegendiskurs von Gefühlen und Präsenz hervor, der in Form von Farberschütterungen in das Gehirn eindringt.

Jetzt, da ich mir Joan Mitchell ansehe, ausgerechnet auf Amazon Instant Video, eben dem «Schirm», dem Agenten verflachter Beziehungen zu Kunst-Produktion und Kunst-Erleben – und überhaupt zu allen Gegenständen in der Welt,

2 Joan Mitchell: *Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, Regie: Marion Cajori, New York: Arthouse Films, 1992, Amazon Instant Video, <http://www.amazon.com/Joan-Mitchell-Portrait-Abstract-Painter/dp/B003ELMR8U>.

3 Ich beziehe mich auf die Fernsehserie *Girls* von Lena Dunham, da diese in einer Ära scheinbar wachsender Chancen und neuer Subjektrollen für Frauen geradezu emblematisch für eine «neue» Art einer heterosexuell feministischen Ausdrucksweise geworden ist, die allerdings ebenfalls eine frustrierende Wiedergeburt zahlreicher Formen von Sexismus beinhaltet, deren Überwindung Feministinnen der zweiten Generation längst erhofft hatten.

4 Patricia Albers, *Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter*, New York 2011, S. 289.

5 Der Rekord vom Mai 2014 wurde im November 2014 durch den Verkauf eines Gemäldes von Georgia O'Keeffe überboten.

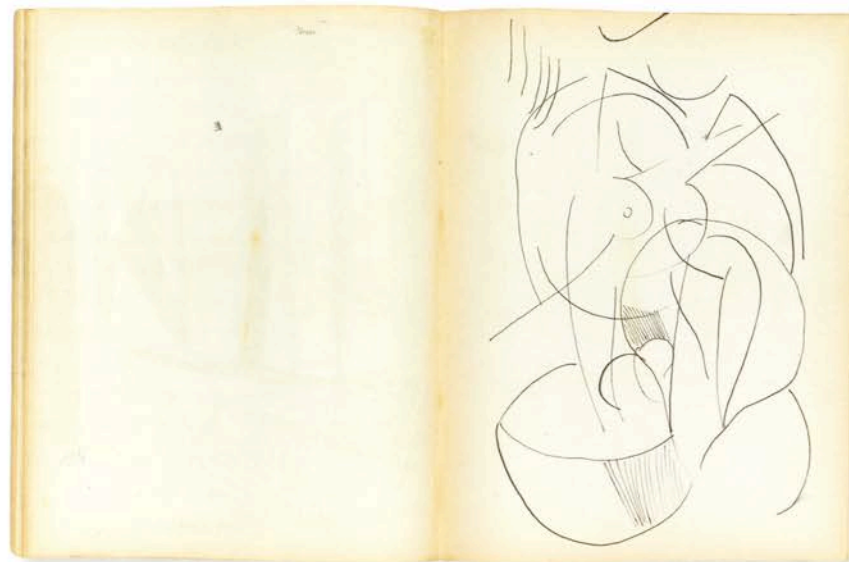
zu Berührung, zum Leben schlechthin. Als Person ist Joan Mitchell unwiderstehlich charmant mit ihren unwahrscheinlich vergrößerten Augen hinter Brillengläsern wie Colaflaschenböden und ihrer mokanten Kodderschmauze. Mit schadenfreudiger Ironie gesteht sie ein, nicht gut sehen zu können, lediglich «von Weitem», «nicht die kleinen Sachen». Es gibt jedoch eine Freundin, die neben ihr sitzt – Joan denkt durch sie und über diese nach, während sie umherläuft. Sie betrachtet die Landschaft und entdeckt nach und nach all die kleinen Kartoffeln. Faulige Kartoffeln. «Eine kleine tote Kartoffel». Danach sucht sie. Auch andere Dinge fallen ihr nach und nach auf.<sup>2</sup>

Mitchell verlangsamt, wie ein Gefühl aussieht, wie es denkt, erinnert, zu vergessen sucht – quälend. Allerdings erhöht sie auch die Geschwindigkeit aufeinanderprallender Erinnerungen. Langsam und schnell zugleich, Farbfluten, die sich zu einer mehrpoligen Spannung aufbauen – wie simultane, multiple Urknalle des Gedenkens, die den Kern der Schöpfung von Vielfältigkeit bezeugen. Die Vermeidung von Sprache. Wie unsere Hirne sich wie Fäden der Entwirrung an unsere Körper und Handlungen heften. Am Rand einer unentscheidbaren Entscheidung. Keine direkte Registrierung von «Ausdruck» oder «Handlung». Vielleicht handelt es sich eher um eine verzögerte Reaktion – auf ein Trauma? «Trauma» ist zu drastisch – vielleicht aber auch nicht. Eine traumatische Reaktion auf Gegenstände, auf die natürliche Landschaft, auf das eigene Umherlaufen. Wie es möglich ist, alle Geschehnisse eines Tages auf dieselbe schmerzhafteste Weise fühlen und, im Bett liegend, alles auf einmal spüren zu können? Oder wie Bäume und Gras und Wasser und Himmel immer weiter strömen wie Schwärme ohne subjektive Gegenwart: neben-, über- und ineinander.

Wann immer ich auch versucht habe, diese Gedanken mit Kollegen zu teilen, die nie ernsthaft Zeit mit einem Gemälde von Mitchell verbracht haben, die ein gutes nicht von einem schlechten unterscheiden können und die wahrscheinlich denken, sie wäre entweder übermäßig emotional oder habe schlicht ein Faible für leuchtende Farben und «Expressivität», so bin ich noch jedes Mal über den sonderbaren Gesichtsausdruck gestolpert, den die Leute aufsetzen, wenn Mitchells Name fällt. Sie gilt ohne Frage als das, was die grausame Doppelbeschreibung, die schockierenderweise wieder in Mode gekommen ist, besagt: als ein «weiblicher Maler». Sie ist schlicht ein Exemplar aus dieser Kategorie, noch dazu ein «gefeiertes», ohne jeden Hinweis auf die unerbittlichen kategorialen Selbst-Vorschriften. (Es ist äußerst deprimierend, die feministischen Themen der Generation meiner Mutter erneut abarbeiten zu müssen. Jedoch scheint es notwendig zu sein, in der gegenwärtigen Ära des *Girl-Feminismus/Sexismus*<sup>3</sup> wieder Debatten über einige historische Irrtümer hinsichtlich der Begriffe «Frau» und «Künstlerkarriere» zu führen, als seien sie nie zuvor geführt worden.) Seien wir «ehrlich»: Das größte Hindernis beim Betrachten von Mitchells Gemälden besteht darin, die Klischees und Vorurteile bezüglich «Expressivität», «Frauen» und unterstellter Techniken wie «gestischer Abstraktion» aus dem Sensorium des Betrachters zu tilgen.

Als Künstler ist es entweder entmutigend oder aber seltsam tröstlich (wie durch eine Genealogie des Schmerzes) zu wissen, dass Clement Greenberg in beratender Funktion für Lawrence Rubins Pariser Galerie Mitchell nach ihrer ersten und kommerziell erfolgreichen Ausstellung in der Galerie Lawrence im Jahr 1962 dort hinauswerfen ließ.<sup>4</sup> Zu diesem Zeitpunkt hatte sie in den 1950er Jahren bereits sechs aufeinanderfolgende Einzelausstellungen (Cy Twombly brachte es auf drei) in der Galerie The Stable in New York und war zunächst eher halbherzig nach Paris gezogen, um dort mit ihrem Freund zusammenzuleben. Auch stand sie im Begriff, einige der chaotischsten und zugleich brilliantesten Gemälde ihres gesamten Œuvres zu schaffen – Werke, die in einer Ausstellung in Bern gezeigt wurden, anschließend für viele Jahre in Magazinen verschwanden, bis sie 1985 in New York erstmals ausgestellt wurden und schließlich im Jahr 2014 Höchstpreise auf Auktionen erzielten (die zugleich, wie häufig in der Presse hervorgehoben wurde, die höchsten jemals von einem «weiblichen» Künstler erzielten Preise waren).<sup>5</sup>

Die Kunstwelt der 1950er Jahre hat noch mehr zu bieten: Der Bruder des Galeristen, William Rubin, der letztlich zu einem der einflussreichsten



Doppelseite aus Joan Mitchells Skizzenbuch | Pages from Joan Mitchell's sketchbook, 1948

6 Brief von William (Bill) Rubin an Joan Mitchell, Poststempel vom 29. Mai 1952; Joan Mitchell Papers, Joan Mitchell Foundation Archives.

7 Joan Mitchell im Interview mit Linda Nochlin, Archives of American Art, 16. April 1986, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-joan-mitchell-12183>.

8 Patricia Albers, wie Anm. 4, S.172.

Untitled,  
1954



Leiter der Abteilung Malerei und Skulptur am MoMA im 20. Jahrhundert wurde, war ebenfalls ein großer Befürworter von Mitchells Arbeit, solange sie noch in New York lebte. Auf unerfindliche Weise hatte er sogar eines ihrer Gemälde erworben. In einem skurrilen Brief aus dem Jahr 1952 berichtet er, wie sehr er und seine Freunde es genossen haben, das Gemälde in seiner Wohnung zu haben, und wie leid es ihm täte, dass es ihm nicht gelungen sei, die zwei Buffet-Klarinetten aus der Vorkriegszeit zu verkaufen, und er deswegen das Bild nicht bezahlen könne. Dem Brief lag eine Anzahlung von 50 Dollar bei, nicht vereinbart und nicht verhandelbar, mehr werde folgen, sobald er die Klarinetten zu dem seiner Meinung nach richtigen Preis veräußert habe.<sup>6</sup> Das spielte sich in demselben Netz von Familienbanden ab, in dem Clement Greenberg den Ratschlag erteilte, «diesen gestischen Horror loszuwerden».<sup>7</sup> Und es handelt sich um denselben Greenberg, der New Yorker Galerien in den 1950er Jahren riet, keine Frauen auszustellen, weil «sie doch nur schwanger werden».<sup>8</sup>

Es war nicht ausschließlich, nicht einmal vorwiegend, ein um die Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts vorherrschender hässlicher Sexismus, der Mitchell im Wege stand (oder noch heute im Weg steht), sondern vielmehr eine komplette Klasse von kunsthistorischen Meinungen, die heute auf eine Weise altertümlich anmuten, wie es Joan Mitchells Werk nicht tut. Liest man zum Beispiel Greenbergs erneuerte Sichtweise auf den «späten Monet» aus dem Jahr 1957, nachdem das MoMA dessen *Seerosen* (1915–1925) erworben hatte, so finden wir eine Perspektive, die vollkommen veraltet erscheint und vermutlich schon zur Zeit ihrer Abfassung ungenau wirkte: «Auch wenn sie die wachsende Unzufriedenheit mit van Gogh nicht begründen kann, trägt sie doch dazu bei, sie zu erklären, und sie trägt auch dazu bei, die Ungeduld angesichts der unkritischen Bewunderung Cézannes zu begründen. Van Gogh war ein großer Künstler, doch das Beispiel Monets kann uns noch besser als dasjenige Cézannes vor Augen führen, dass er nicht unbedingt ein Meister war. Ihm mangelte nicht nur die solide und umfassende handwerkliche Technik, sondern auch eine ruhige Weite des Blicks. Monet dagegen gibt uns nicht nur eine Vision, sondern eine Welt der Kunst, und diese Welt besitzt die Vielfalt und die Geräumigkeit, und auch etwas von der Leichtigkeit, die eine Welt besitzen sollte.»<sup>9</sup>

Es erstaunt nicht, dass Mitchell Greenberg als äußerst ärgerlich empfand. Nicht nur schwebte sie zu Recht auf der Wolke ihres damaligen Erfolgs, auch stand die Wertematrix «dieser Toilettenbrille», wie Mitchell ihn später titulierte, in diametralem Gegensatz zu der ihren. Es führte über den Rahmen dieses Essays hinaus, dem gerecht zu werden, aber Mitchells besondere Liebe zu van Gogh lässt van Gogh in einem neuen Licht erscheinen – so man gewillt ist, sich darauf einzulassen.<sup>10</sup> Wahrscheinlich hielt sie Greenberg auch schlicht für einen Langweiler, weil dieser in der Kunstgeschichte umherschwadronierte und versuchte, einen Konsens für Jackson Pollock und alsbald für die «Farbfeldmalerei» zu stiften, wohingegen sie den Versuch unternahm, Gemälde zu schaffen, die wir heute – wohl oder übel – als «konzeptuell» bezeichnen würden. Ebenfalls 1957, als Greenberg seine Gedankenspiele zu den *Seerosen* veröffentlichte, wird Mitchell in *ARTnews* zitiert, und zwar mit Blick auf ihre Malweise, die darlegt, wie ihr Verstand eher mit affektgesteuerten Gedanken über die Dinge in der Welt und aus der Erinnerung schafft und eben nicht aus der Beobachtung oder Vorstellung direkter, gestischer Ausführung. Ihre Aussage hat bis ins Jahr 2015 nichts von ihrer Frische eingebüßt: «Ich trage meine Landschaften in mir.»<sup>11</sup> Er hatte damals seine Zeit, ihre ist heute gekommen.

9 Clement Greenberg, «Der späte Monet», in: *Die Essenz der Moderne. Ausgewählte Essays und Kritiken*, hg. von Karlheinz Lüdeking, Hamburg 2009, S. 238.

10 Während eines Film-Interviews mit Angeliki Haas in Mitchells Atelier in Vétheuil hat Mitchell die Bedeutung eines ihrer *Tree*-Gemälde (eine der seltenen Gelegenheiten, bei denen sie tatsächlich die Bedeutung einer Arbeit erklärt) auf den Punkt gebracht, indem sie van Gogh zitiert: «[Van Gogh schreibt in einem Brief, dass] er der Sonnenblume Dankbarkeit entgegenbringt, weil sie existiert. Und ich bin den Bäumen dankbar, weil sie existieren – und nur darum geht es in meiner Malerei.» In: *American Artists in Europe* (Alice Hutchins, Douglas James Johnson, Joan Mitchell), Regie und Produktion: Angeliki Haas, 1976.

11 Irving Sandler, wie Anm. 1, S. 45.

12 Siehe Patricia Albers, wie Anm. 4, für zahlreiche Anekdoten zur Freundschaft zwischen de Kooning und Mitchell.

13 *Joan Mitchell: Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, wie Anm. 2.

14 «Far From the Porte des Lilas and the Rue Pergolèse: to Joan Mitchell», in: Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, hg. von Donald Allen, Berkeley 1995, S. 311. Das Gedicht wurde erstmals 1958 veröffentlicht. (Übers. V. E.)

In einem der frühen Skizzenbücher Mitchells, entstanden 1948 zu einer Zeit, zu der sie mit ihrem späteren Ehemann Barney Rosset in Brooklyn lebte, sind bereits die Ansätze der charakteristischen Formen zu erkennen, die sie aus dem Kubismus herausgearbeitet und zu einer Architektonik der Gesten verarbeitet hat. Auf Zeichnungen von Frauen, die denen Picassos ähneln, folgen Linien, die Luft in die Figur bringen, indem die Schnittpunkte der Linien so gestreckt werden, dass sie Formen darstellen – als lösten sie die Figur als solche aus ihrer Haut. Bemerkenswert daran ist, dass sie sich nicht für das Kantige oder das Gezackte entscheidet – oder gar die ruhmreiche Abjektion (Abject art) der Figur der «Frauen», wie sie de Kooning pflegte –, sondern dass die Körper zu Zeichen werden, gehalten von lyrischen Formen. Wie ihre Kollegen entfernt sie sich zusehends von der mimetischen Form, allerdings in eine Richtung, die eher tangential zur geometrischen Abstraktion zu betrachten ist oder zu dem, was sich als dreister Wagemut etwa eines Pollock herausstellen sollte. Bei Mitchell ist bereits zu diesem frühen Zeitpunkt zu erkennen, wie Fügen von Linien, die weder in geometrische Muster einrasten noch in hysterisierte Gitternetze explodieren, die Linien eines Rasters dehnen wie Zweige eines Baums, der gegen ein nachgiebiges Material schlägt.

Man kann sich vorstellen, was für ein Rausch es für die junge Künstlerin gewesen sein muss, die nach abgeschlossener Hochschulausbildung nach New York gezogen war und nun als «kid» die Bühne des aufkommenden Abstrakten Expressionismus betrat, sich mit de Kooning auf einer Parkbank am Washington Square unterhielt oder im Gespräch oder Rausch trunken die Möglichkeiten spürte, an ihre Grenzen und darüber hinaus zu gehen.<sup>12</sup>

Sie hatte jede Menge Spaß. Es ging darum, sich den Grenzen einer gewissen Erwartungshaltung zu entziehen, es ging um eine bestimmte lyrische Ruppigkeit. Eine meiner Lieblingsszenen in der Dokumentation von Marion Cajori auf Amazon Instant Video ist die, in der Mitchell sagt: «Ich male nicht gut aus einer Stimmung der Gewalttätigkeit oder des Zorns heraus; Hitler inspiriert mich nicht.» Dabei sitzt sie anlässlich ihrer Eröffnung ihrer dortigen Ausstellung in einem Büroraum der Robert Miller Gallery in einem Sweatshirt mit einem Robert-Miller-Gallery-Logo und scherzt, dass sie, indem sie das Sweatshirt trägt, versuchte, Jenny Holzer zu sein. «Auch mag ich es nicht, manipuliert, in Machtspiele verwickelt, kontrolliert zu werden oder wenn mir jemand sagt, was ich zu tun und zu lassen habe ... Ich mag keine Kunst,

die einem sagt, was man zu denken hat, sondern eine, die es einem erlaubt zu fühlen.»<sup>13</sup>

Einer der schwierigsten Aspekte bei der Betrachtung von Joan Mitchell – in unserer allzu sehr von der Nachkriegszeit geprägten Abjektion, der schlechten deutschen Malerei (die den Spitznamen Post-Nazi-Malerei führen könnte) usw. – besteht darin, dass wir davon ausgehen, dass gute Malerei immer eine Darstellung möglicher Varianten von Selbsthass, Zorn, Schuld, Gewalt usw. beinhaltet. Wir sind versucht, Mitchell damit zu überlagern – in einer Art fauvistischer Kotz-Interpretation –, doch greift dies nicht.

Frank O'Hara trifft die forsche Eigenart, die Joan Mitchell in der Szene um die New York School in den 1950er Jahren zeigte, bestens in einem Gedicht, das daherkommt, als sei es nach ihrem Abschied aus New York und ihrem Umzug nach Paris Ende der 1950er geschrieben worden. Das Gedicht ist im Ton der Trauer verfasst, der das Bild einer Freundschaft zelebriert, die nie wieder gelebt werden kann:

*Ah, Joan! da bist du  
umgeben von Gemälden  
wie in einem anderen Jahrhundert, in dem du  
Lippenstift trügest  
(den du des Nachts trägst, um altmodisch zu  
sein, davon! dabei! fort!*

*und auf die Gefahr hin, Proustisch zu sein  
und auf die Gefahr hin, Pasternakesk zu sein  
und die Bullen draußen vor dem BALAJO filzen  
Algerier die still vor sich hin mit ihren  
Fingerknöcheln «Surf» spielen*

*jemine, wenn ich weiter so futuristisch bin, ist  
Elsa Triolet  
bald hinter mir her!*

*ein Traum von immenser Traurigkeit durch-  
dringt mich mit seinem Blick  
als sei ich ein Aktionsgedicht das nicht schreiben  
könnte  
und ich mache mich auf den Weg zu einem  
anderen Kontinent der  
derselbe ist wie dieser  
goodby<sup>14</sup>*

[sic. Schreibweise von «goodby» im Original]

15 Joan Mitchell: *Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, wie Anm. 2.

16 Yves Michaud, «Conversation with Joan Mitchell», in: *Joan Mitchell*, New York 1986, unpag. Die originale Transkription dieses Interviews, die auch Mitchells Bearbeitungen und Anmerkungen enthält, befindet sich im Archiv der Joan Mitchell Foundation; Joan Mitchell Papers, Joan Mitchell Foundation Archives. In dieser Publikation erstmals vollständig in deutscher Übersetzung, siehe S. 51–53.

Der Körper in der Rolle, das Gedächtnis in Gang zu setzen oder das Werden von Formen/Zeichen, die aus dem Raum des Körpers als Repräsentation gelöst werden, in der Luft hängend, eingeschrieben, in die Leinwand eingetragen. Es ist der Prozess des Seins und des Prüfens. Nah und fern. Das Gemälde wird zum Objekt des Sehens. Und des Gedächtnisses. Nicht mehr etwas «außerhalb» der Handlung. Die Außenwelt ausgeschlossen. Verdunkelt. Glühend in jenem Zimmer in der Landschaft. Ohne einen Blick nach draußen. Doch auch ohne ein «Innen». Das Bild einer einsam arbeitenden Mitchell, bei Nacht, glühend in ihrem Atelier in Paris. Das Bild der Landschaft, hell erleuchtet, auf dem Land bei Vétheuil, am helllichten Tag, vollkommen ausgesperrt von der über die Fenster gehängten Leinwand.

Von Linien als Anknüpfungspunkten des Körpers, entlassen in die Freiheit reiner, neuraler Pfade, als vermischte und neu gebildete, als neue, bessere Hirnmasse, die dort entsteht. Jenes Zusammensein mit dem Gemalten als ein Verschwinden des Körpers. Rein gedachte Energie, wie eine Landschaft nicht ein einzelnes Ding ist. Sondern viele Dinge. Die einfach da ist. Und das Da-Sein ist immer eine Überraschung. Jedes Mal neu. Auch wenn man schon tausendmal da gewesen ist. Die Landschaft nicht betrachtend. Die Landschaft nicht darstellend. Sondern das Sein der Landschaft werdend oder verzeichnend. In ihr. Und es dann erreichen, dass jenes Sein zu etwas wird, das nicht dort erfahren werden kann. Dass in der Landschaft zu sein heißt, auch Gedanken zu haben in oder mit der Landschaft und Empfindungen – wirbelnd –, wie sie das tun, wenn man allein ist oder

bei einer guten Freundin, die gerade nicht spricht. Jene Lyrik wird stets mit einer mokanten Bemerkung unterbrochen – damit niemand bemerkt, wie empfindlich oder zerbrechlich jenes Sein ist.

Joan Mitchell sagt, der Gedanke taucht wie aus dem Nichts auf: «Matisse hat Licht. Er ist einer der wenigen Maler, die sowohl über Licht als auch über Farbe verfügen. Er ist sagenhaft – schau dir das an! Komm schon ... Kline hat Licht. Und ich spreche nicht vom Weiß ... Mondrian hat Licht. Ich denke nicht, dass de Kooning Licht hat, obwohl er ein ausgezeichnete Maler ist.»<sup>15</sup>

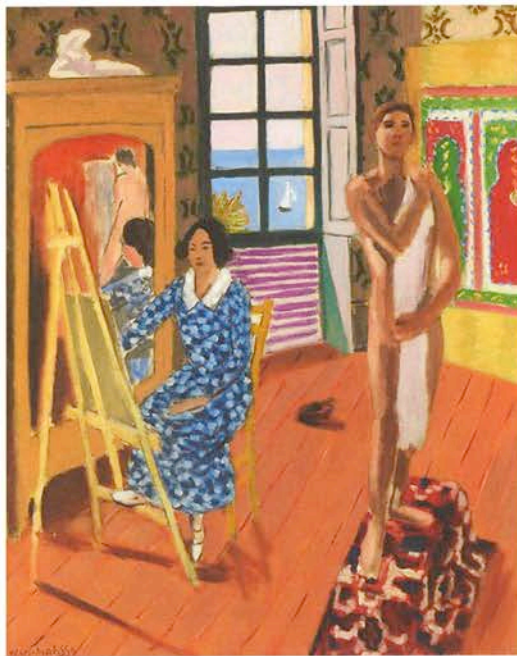
Als ich also durch das Metropolitan Museum schlenderte, unterwegs zu meinem neuerlichen Besuch eines ihrer Gemälde, ging mir auf, was sie da eigentlich gesagt hatte. *Die Drei-Uhr-Sitzung*, ein Gemälde von Matisse, gemalt im Winter 1924 in Nizza, verströmt ein bemerkenswertes Licht. Das Fenster aufs Meer erscheint als ein fester Block aus Dunkelgrün, und das Licht taucht wundersam als Pink auf, das oberhalb dieses undurchsichtigen Rechtecks aus Farbe aufgetragen ist. Was durch die Fensterscheibe zu glühen scheint, ist in Wirklichkeit oberhalb einer kompletten Verdunkelung gemalt worden: das Fenster, welches während dieses Prozesses zunächst ein fester Block ist, der sodann als Licht daherkommt, als die zarte Schwingung, die zwischen Pink und Grün stattfindet. Das winterliche Strandlicht von drei Uhr am Nachmittag kommt in der Farbe an und erzeugt Licht durch Lagen von Pigment hindurch.

Matisse' einfache und doch tief greifende Lektion drängt prismatisch durch das Werk von Joan Mitchell zu neuem Leben. In ihren grellsten Momenten, wie etwa in dem späten Gemälde *Rivière* (1990), regnet es Streifen aus Blaugrün über das ansonsten bereits getrocknete Bild: Lichtfunken, als handelte es sich um Stöße von Nachbildern jenes pinken winterlichen Nachmittagslichts aus Matisse' Nizza.

Mit dem Nizza, in dem Matisse gemalt hat, betreten wir eine weitere Stufe in Mitchells eigenem «konzeptuellem» Prozess. Sie pflegt Verweise auf Orte, Gegenstände und Menschen – aber auch Gemälde – zu geben, als befänden sich diese sämtlich auf derselben Erfahrungs- und Gedächtnisebene. Ihre Obsession mit van Gogh ist bekannt, dennoch finde ich an diesem Kleinod von einem Zitat – «Ich mag keine Sonnenblumenfelder. Ich mag sie einzeln oder, selbstverständlich, wenn sie von van Gogh gemalt sind»<sup>16</sup> – besonders bemerkenswert, dass eine Sonnenblume von van Gogh demnach eine Spezies wirklicher Sonnenblumen ist.

Einer der eigenartigen Aspekte an Mitchells Arbeitsweise ist, dass sie oft nachts und bei

Henri Matisse,  
*Die Drei-Uhr-Sitzung* |  
*The Three O'Clock*  
*Sitting*, 1924



17 Ebda.

18 *American Artists in Europe* (Alice Hutchins, Douglas James Johnson, Joan Mitchell), wie Anm. 9, 1976.

19 Yves Michaud, wie Anm. 16, hier S. 52. (Übers. V.E.)

20 Ebda. Der gesamte Abschnitt aus dem Interview lautet: «Abstraktion ist kein Stil. Ich möchte schlicht eine Oberflächenarbeit schaffen. Das beinhaltet nur die Verwendung von Raum und Form: Es ist eine Ambivalenz von Formen und Raum. Stil in der Malerei hat mit Etiketten zu tun. Viele Maler sind von dem Gedanken besessen, etwas erfinden zu müssen. Als ich jung war, ist es mir nie in den Sinn gekommen zu erfinden. Alles, was ich wollte, war malen. Ich habe die großen Maler so verehrt und tue das noch immer. Wenn man Matisse studiert, die Art und Weise, wie die Farbe aufgetragen wird, und die Art, wie er Weiß aufträgt, das ist Maltechnik. Ich wollte Farbe auftragen wie Matisse. Ich habe hart daran gearbeitet – vor sehr langer Zeit. Vor Kurzem sagte jemand zu mir voller Überraschung: «Aber Sie malen nicht in «Serien», Sie malen Bilder – ist jedes Gemälde anders?» Und ich dachte: Nein, ich male «Gemälde.» Hier S. 53.

«elektrischem Licht» gemalt hat;<sup>17</sup> aber auch, dass sie, als sie schließlich im Jahr 1968 auf ihr Landgut in Vétheuil zog – wo Monet drei Jahre die Gärtnerhütte als Atelier genutzt hatte, bevor er schließlich nach Giverny wechselte –, wiederum ihre Atelierfenster mit Leinwand verhängte, auf dass sie auch bei Tag nächtliche Verhältnisse herstellen konnte und die Landschaft draußen vor den Fenstern nicht zu sehen war.<sup>18</sup> In einem Interview aus dem Jahr 1986 mit dem von ihr bevorzugten Theoretiker ihrer Arbeit, Yves Michaud, hat sie die Aporie dieses Arbeitsprozesses erläutert:

*Ich male häufig nachts, aber um die Nacht als solche geht es mir nicht. Ich mag das Licht. Ich bevorzuge Tageslicht. Ich arbeite auch am Nachmittag, dann prüfe ich, was ich in der Nacht zuvor gemalt habe. Bestimmte Farben ändern sich enorm in elektrischem Licht. Blau ist eine davon. Gelb ist eine andere. Sie wechseln alle, aber manche verändern sich richtiggehend. So muss ich ein bisschen raten. Am Tag darauf laufe ich mittags in mein Atelier, aufgeregt, aber auch ängstlich: Sind die Farben so, wie ich gedacht habe? Ein Gemälde, das bei elektrischem Licht stimmig ist, muss deswegen bei Tageslicht noch lange nicht stimmig sein. Ich liebe Tageslicht.<sup>19</sup>*

In ihrem abgedunkelten Atelierkasten, inmitten des hellen Lichts der Landschaft der Pariser Umgebung, treten diese außerordentlichen Farbbeziehungen zutage, werden bei Tageslicht «geprüft» und sodann rasch wieder von der glühenden natürlichen Außenwelt jenseits des Fensters abgeschottet. Mitten in der abgedunkelten Nacht leuchten die Neonröhren grell, und genau unter diesen Umständen stellte sie immer wieder wirkliches Licht her. Abgeschnitten von jeglichen Reizen von außen faltete Mitchell immer wieder den Malakt zu einer vollendet hermetischen, selbstreflexiven Form zusammen. Auf die Frage: «Aber Sie malen nicht in «Serien», Sie malen Bilder – ist jedes Gemälde anders?», insistierte sie bissig, dass sie nach Gemälden arbeite, verwies auf ihre Erkenntnisse über Matisse' Technik der Lichterzeugung, und wie sie diese in ihren Gemälden verarbeite: «Nein, ich male Gemälde.»<sup>20</sup>

# Camera Austria 134

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in Conversation

Das Auge rekalisieren  
Ken Okiishi und Kirsty Bell  
im Gespräch

**KB** Tell me a bit about the background and context of the “Porous Feedback” project at the Arbeiterkammer in Vienna.

**KO** The Arbeiterkammer is a place where everyone employed in Austria can go if they have problems in their job situation, but they also have a cultural mission and commission artists to make projects. It’s a complicated space, but I wanted to use this as an opportunity. I had just done a solo booth with Pilar Corrias at the Frieze Art Fair in London, and was then going directly into this very different, completely non-commercial context to produce this artwork. I wanted to see how far the different contexts can stretch the perception and reading of the “gesture/data” (2013–ongoing) work. In terms of my personal history, my family are psychologists over three generations, so the specific context of the Arbeiterkammer was interesting to me as a social service, in its relationship to this larger project that I was doing. “gesture/data” had become something like an anthropology of the circulation of images and the changes in our perception to things, as the inside and outside of the screen surfaces we are always tapping and sliding has become a dominant mode. In the art fair context, it’s the financialised circulation of paintings and affects—or something like that—whereas in this Arbeiterkammer frame it’s the psychological state, and also a specific financial precarity.

**KB** Is it in a lobby waiting room area?

**KO** Yes. One of the specific architectural issues of the Arbeiterkammer space is that it’s very compressed. It’s also very difficult because it was the original site of the Rothschild mansion, a Jewish Austrian family—some of them escaped, but some of them were murdered. And—this is the part that is impossible to deal with—it was the site where, during the Nazi time, Jewish families would be processed for sending to concentration camps. Because of the way history is done now, when you walk in into the building, the information is fairly visible—it is not hidden. It’s a subject that I felt I couldn’t really deal with, but on all of its different levels it’s a very charged site. So one of my ideas was to create porosity visually, and formally, and architecturally through using this screen medium that I’ve been working with.

**KB** Am I right in saying that rather than working with found footage or footage that you’d previously accumulated, you generated content specifically for these works?

**KO** The entire series of works that fall into “gesture/data”—the project at the Museum Ludwig in 2014 was also under this umbrella—keep shifting contexts and the potential of what they’re doing. The base form is a bunch of VHS tapes that were in my parents’ basement. They would record TV shows in the 1980s and 90s, but would never watch them. On a formal level, when you play them back twenty years later, these VHS tapes are quite beautiful: the red and green separate and make these beautiful colours, for example. I started looking at them and working on them, and recording over different sections with cable TV in New York. It was a digital recording coming through cable, which had a certain kind of surface quality, very luminescent. So I took the original footage and recorded over it in sections, and basically created these collages while watching television.

**KB** Is it a kind of painterly process for you?

**KO** Exactly, it is watching television as painting! The screens I eventually used—industrial digital display signage—can’t read an enormous file cleanly, so I had to transfer them to DV tape and then

Übersetzt von Wilfried Prantner

**KB** Erzähl mir ein wenig vom Hintergrund und Kontext des Projekts »Porous Feedback«<sup>1</sup> in der Wiener Arbeiterkammer.

**KO** Die Arbeiterkammer ist eine Interessenvertretung und Beratungsstelle für alle Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer in Österreich. Aber sie hat auch eine kulturelle Mission und vergibt Projektaufträge an Künstlerinnen und Künstler. Es ist ein schwieriger Raum, aber ich wollte ihn als Gelegenheit nutzen. Ich hatte gerade einen Solostand bei Pilar Corrias auf der Frieze Art Fair in London gemacht und sollte nun diese Arbeit in diesem ganz anderen, völlig unkommerziellen Kontext zeigen. Ich wollte ausloten, wie weit diese unterschiedlichen Kontexte die Wahrnehmung und Interpretation der Werkgruppe »gesture/data« (seit 2013) erweitern können. Von meiner persönlichen Geschichte her – meine Familie besteht seit drei Generationen aus Psychologen – interessierte mich, wie sich dieser spezifische Kontext einer Sozialberatungsstelle zu diesem größeren Projekt verhält, an dem ich arbeite. »gesture/data« hatte sich zu einer Art Anthropologie der Bildzirkulation und der Veränderung unseres Verhältnisses zu den Dingen entwickelt, da das Innere und Äußere der Bildschirme, auf die wir ständig tippen und über die wir ständig wischen, zur vorherrschenden Wahrnehmungsweise geworden sind. Im Kunstmessenkontext geht es um die finanzialisierte Zirkulation von Gemälden und Affekten oder etwas in der Art, im Arbeiterkammerkontext dagegen eher um den psychologischen Zustand, aber auch um eine bestimmte finanzielle Prekarität.

**KB** War es eine Art Wartebereich?

**KO** Ja. Eines der architektonischen Probleme des Arbeiterkammeraums ist, dass alles sehr nah beisammen liegt. Der Raum ist auch deshalb schwierig, weil sich die Arbeiterkammer an der Stelle befindet, wo früher das Palais des österreichischen Zweigs der Rothschildfamilie stand, die zum Teil fliehen konnte, zum Teil aber auch ermordet wurde. Überdies – und damit einen Umgang zu finden, ist praktisch unmöglich – war es auch der Ort, an dem die Deportation jüdischer Familien in die Konzentrationslager organisiert wurde. Aufgrund der heute üblichen Aufarbeitung von Geschichte bekommt man das schon beim Betreten des Gebäudes ziemlich deutlich mitgeteilt – es wird jedenfalls nicht versteckt. Dieser Aspekt ist etwas, womit ich keinen wirklichen Umgang finden konnte, aber klar ist, es handelt sich um einen auf allen Ebenen ungemein aufgeladenen Ort. Einer meiner Gedanken war daher, mithilfe dieses Mediums Bildschirm, mit dem ich seit längerem arbeite, eine gewisse Porosität zu schaffen – visuell, formal und architektonisch.

**KB** Gehe ich recht in der Annahme, dass du für diese Arbeiten nicht mit Found Footage oder früher gesammeltem Material gearbeitet, sondern Content eigens dafür geschaffen hast?

**KO** Die gesamte Werkserie »gesture/data« – das Projekt am Museum Ludwig 2014 lief ja auch unter diesem Oberbegriff – wechselt immer wieder den Kontext und damit das den Arbeiten inwohnende Potenzial. Grundlage ist eine Reihe von VHS-Kassetten, die ich im Keller meiner Eltern fand. Sie zeichneten in den 1980er und 1990er Jahren immer wieder Fernsehsendungen auf, die sie sich aber nie ansahen. Formal gesehen sind diese VHS-Tapes ziemlich schön, wenn man sie zwanzig Jahre später wieder abspielt: so



werden zum Beispiel Rot und Grün separiert, wodurch diese herrlichen Farben entstehen. Ich begann, sie mir anzusehen und mit ihnen zu arbeiten, verschiedene Teile mit New Yorker Kabel-TV zu überspielen – einer digitalen Aufnahme mit sehr leuchtender Oberflächenqualität. Ich nahm das ursprüngliche Footage und überspielte Teile davon, schuf also quasi beim Fernsehen diese Collagen.

**KB** Ist das für dich eine Art Malprozess?

**KO** Genau. Es ist Fernsehen als Malen! Die Bildschirme, die ich schließlich verwendete – digitale Industriedisplays – können große Dateien nicht sauber lesen, also musste ich sie auf DV transferieren und dann zu kleineren Dateien komprimieren, aber unter Beibehaltung der verschiedenen Oberflächenqualitäten. Was auf diese Weise entstand, ist zwar gepixelt, besitzt aber immer noch die Oberfläche des rohen, beschädigten und überspielten Originalfootage. Dasselbe Material verwendete ich schon 2007 in dieser Performance bei Gavin Brown's. Ich spielte Klavier, eine Schubertsonate – die Art Musik, die zu ihrer Entstehungszeit als Hausmusik aufgeführt worden wäre – in einem kleinen Raum, vor kleinem Publikum. Aber die Rückseite des Klaviers war in einen Fernseher umgewandelt worden, auf dem dieses Material lief. Das war das erste Mal, dass ich es verwendete.

**KB** Es war ein Bildschirm in die Rückseite des Klaviers eingelassen?

**KO** Ja, und ich zeichnete mein Live-Spiel auf und verwendete die Bild- und Tonaufzeichnung dann später im selben Jahr in einem ähnlichen Setup im Künstlerhaus Stuttgart und ein weiteres Mal 2008 im Ludlow 38 in New York. Dort spielte ich dasselbe Stück wieder live am Piano, aber es überschneidet sich mit dem aufgenommenen und verstärkten Sound, der dann – in sich – wieder und wieder aufgenommen wurde. Zu der Zeit benutzte ich auch diese Greenscreen-Farbe für meine Videoarbeiten und experimentierte erstmals damit, sie außen auf den Bildschirm aufzutragen und ein blaues Signal hindurchzuschicken; ich wollte sehen was passiert, weil der blaue Bildschirm und die grüne Farbe vibrieren. Schließlich brachte ich auch das andere Videomaterial ins Spiel und begann in dieser gestischen Malweise damit zu arbeiten.

**KB** Die »gesture/data«-Arbeiten entsprangen also dem Versuch, den Fernsehmonitor in einen Greenscreen zu verwandeln?

**KO** Im Grunde genommen in eine Leinwand. Wobei ich einerseits den Bildschirm zu einem Greenscreen machte, um ihn sozusagen auszuknocken, ihn andererseits aber auch als Bildträger für die Arbeit im Atelier verwendete.

**KB** Das ganze Format ist überaus konzise, es sagt eine Menge über die Zeit, in der wir leben, und über den aktuellen Stand der Kunst: wie sich die Malerei verhält, wie Bildschirme funktionieren. Es ist fast das perfekte Format, und das erscheint zugleich aufregend und beängstigend.

**KO** Es war tatsächlich erschreckend und aufregend, als ich sah, dass es auf der technischen Ebene funktionieren könnte. Denn man weiß ja nie. Mein Malerestudium lag lange zurück, und es war aufregend, die verdrängte Praxis wieder hervorzuholen, die richtigen Farben und Pigmente zu finden und zu mischen, all das eben, was zum Malen gehört und in meiner Videoarbeit verloren gegangen war. Doch als ich die visuelle Interaktion – das Pigment, die Farbe und die Farben, die vom Bildschirm ausgingen – zum ersten Mal sah, war es für mich auch ein Schock. Es war wie eine Rekalibrierung des Auges. So sehr sind wir es gewohnt, das auf Bildschirmen Gesehene für real oder eine reale Repräsentation der Dinge zu halten.

**KB** Das adaptierbare Format der Arbeiten erinnerte mich an Wade Guytons frühe Printer-»Gemälde«. Auch sie waren »zu einfach«.

**KO** Richtig, es ist in vieler Hinsicht zu einfach, aber fundamental. Ich betrachte es heute als ein fundamentales Problem des Sehens und der Erfahrung. Es hebelt die Art und Weise, wie sich unsere Augen und unser Körper auf das Erleben dieser Dinge, dieser verschiedenen Formate einstellen, immer wieder aus und ersetzt sie zugleich.

**KB** Die Erfahrung der Gleichzeitigkeit ist heute überhaupt zum vorherrschenden Erfahrungsmodus geworden. Man kann ihr nicht entkommen.

compress them to make these smaller files, but still maintain the different surface qualities. What was produced is pixelated, but it still has the kind of surface of the original rough, degraded, and taped-over footage. I used the same footage in a performance at Gavin Brown's in 2007. I was playing piano music, a Schubert sonata – the kind of thing that would have been performed in someone's home when the music was written – in a small space, with a small audience. But the back of the upright piano was turned into a television, with this footage playing on it – that was the first time I used it.

**KB** There was a screen inserted into the back of the piano?

**KO** Yes, while I was playing the music live I recorded it and then projected the recorded image/sound in a similar setup at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart later that year, and then at Ludlow 38 in New York in 2008, where I would play the same music live on the piano, but it would go in and out of synch with the recorded amplified sound, which was re-recorded again and again, inside of itself, and then inside of itself again. I was also using this green screen paint to make videos at the time, and I first experimented with putting that on the outside of the television, with a blue signal coming through, to see what would happen visually because the blue screen and green paint vibrate. But then I brought the other footage in and started working on that with this gestural painting mode.

**KB** So the "gesture/data" works came out of trying to turn the TV screen into a green screen?

**KO** Into a canvas, basically – turning the screen into a green screen on the one hand, to kind of knock it out, and on the other hand, working in the studio with these as a support surface.

**KB** The format itself is so concise, it says a lot about a moment we are in and also about the nature of art right now: how painting operates, how screens function. It is almost the perfect format, which seems exciting and scary at the same time.

**KO** There was something terrifying and exciting when I saw that on a technical level it could work, because you never know. I had studied painting a long time ago, so it was exciting to bring out this repressed practice, to find the right paints, and pigments and mixing, all these kind of things that are a painterly process that had been absorbed into my video process. But when I first saw the visual interaction – this pigment, the paint and the colours coming from the screen – it was shocking for me. It was like recalibrating the eye. We are so used to thinking of things we see on screens as real, or as a real representation of the thing.

**KB** The work's adaptable format made me think of Wade Guyton's early printer paintings; they were also "too simple".

**KO** Exactly, because it is in many ways so basic, but fundamental. I see it as a fundamental problem of both vision and experience now, that it constantly displaces and replaces and displaces and replaces the way your eyes and body are attuned to experiencing these things, these different formats.

**KB** The experience of simultaneity has now become the dominant mode of experiencing anything. You can't get away from that.

**KO** For me, the pleasure of looking at the works when I'm working is that I can't believe that both are happening at the same time. It registers in your brain in a very direct way. So you look at certain areas, but the footage is internal and it just plays, like a series of unconscious thoughts. That's why I obsessively work with exactly the same footage over and over again. But to get back to the context of the Arbeiterkammer, I started filming the screen and putting that footage back inside, and filming it and putting it back inside, so the paint or mirror or whatever's on the surface ...

**KB** ... gets sucked into the interior of the screen?

**KO** Exactly. It's put up against its own image of itself. It starts to have a sort of trompe l'oeil feeling: on the one hand, the interior footage stops being either just TV or just abstract or something, but on the other it starts to disappear and reappear and flicker.

**KB** And then the work itself, the object, gets consumed again as an image? The image, after all, is how things are digested and enter the cultural stream today. It makes me think of Mark Leckey and his theory about how three dimensions can only really be comprehended once they become a screen image.

**KO** This is like the upside-down version of that: the screen image can only be consumed when it's seen in three dimensions. You can only properly digest this image in person. You always have to test these things out, experiment. In the Museum Ludwig show I would wander around and see how people were absorbing or interacting, and I saw that the actions and the understanding were quite immediate on some level.

**KB** They were hung amongst the originals—in the same room with the Günther Uecker that they picture?

**KO** Exactly, the work was intended as an intervention into the permanent collection, and one of the works was hung directly across from the Uecker and next to an Yves Klein. Some of the other works in the collection were framed and had reflective surfaces, which of course you're not supposed to see, but it brings out a layer of reflections on top of the artwork. I watched people walk in, and they see the Uecker and then they see the screen which probably first registers as the kind of info-screen you often find in museums, some sort of educational device. They see that it's the same work, and that there are nails on the surface, and this epoxy that looks like finger smears and refracts the RGB into this kind of prism. This whole series of thoughts was happening.

**KB** There's a book about your work with the subtitle *Congestion and Porosity*<sup>2</sup>—it's a great pair of words to apply, not just to the newer works, but to your work in general. You seem to talk a lot about this idea of the “glitch”, of finding ways to harness it and make it a generative, driving component. “Congestion” is a bit like the idea of the glitch, while “porosity” refers to the idea of multiple layers and simultaneity as a contemporary condition. I was thinking that porosity in your work is like some kind of bleed or leakage, but also refers to the nature of experience, even on a very basic everyday level.

**KO** I like to open up these channels of feedback between, for example, the processes of really painting and really making video—so a painting process becomes a recording of watching television. They infect each other in a way where the hybrid process is upside-down or impossible, dense and fully embedded, though materially they seem to have nothing to do with each other. Those grey areas, the glitch and the ... even as we're talking, I'm having too many thoughts at the same time, I'm leaking all over the place! Can I even think through this? There is so much leakage between the two things that I can't form a sentence! Which is great! Actually, in “painting”—if you want to use that category—in that process, leakage is totally necessary in order to do the work.

**KB** Right, but it becomes non-verbal.

**KO** Yeah, exactly. This can also happen with music. I was recently asked to write something on Pierre Boulez. I hadn't actually thought or read anything or looked at the scores since I was a teenager, when I had studied music very seriously. I had forgotten how influential his aesthetics and theories were, these kind of music processes, as I had unconsciously translated them into a visual level. It was fascinating to recognise this musical thinking on a theoretical level. Deleuze and Guattari actually took the idea of smooth space and striated space specifically from Boulez. This idea of the counting or not counting of the beat, in terms of rhythm, is really a musical thing. Boulez was seeking out these tensions, where there would be moments of not counting, or where the music would enter zones of amorphousness.

**KB** That kind of thinking happens in your film “(Goodbye to) Manhattan” (2010).

**KO** Exactly. To me, it had just been absorbed. I'm naturally attracted to these zones where you don't know how time or space or language or any of these things work. There is no beat.

**KB** When I was watching it I experienced this feeling of frustration, because time becomes so amorphous. You don't know what's happening or where it's going, there's no rhythm anymore. But I was also thinking that in that film the composition reads in terms of a musical score with many different parts that may or may not be working harmoniously or even moving in the same direction.

**KO** That's the thing—it's very simple. With a single-channel video,

**KO** Für mich besteht das Schauvergnügen während des Arbeitens darin, dass ich nicht glauben kann, dass beides gleichzeitig geschieht. Das bildet sich im Kopf ganz direkt ab. Man betrachtet gewisse Bereiche, aber das Filmmaterial befindet sich im Inneren und läuft einfach ab wie eine unbewusste Gedankenkette. Darum arbeite ich auch so obsessiv mit dem immer gleichen Material. Um aber auf deine Frage bezüglich des Arbeiterkammerkontexts zurückzukommen – ich begann, den Bildschirm zu filmen und dieses Material wieder einzuspeisen, dann ein weiteres Mal zu filmen und erneut einzuspeisen, so dass die Farbe oder was immer sich an der Oberfläche befindet ...

**KB** ... ins Innere des Bildschirms gelangt?

**KO** Richtig. Es wird gegen sein eigenes Abbild in Stellung gebracht. So stellt sich eine Art Trompe-l'œil-Wirkung ein: Einerseits ist das Filmmaterial im Inneren nicht mehr nur Fernsehen oder nur abstrakt oder so, andererseits beginnt es auch zu verschwinden und wiederaufzutauchen und zu flimmern.

**KB** Und die Arbeit selbst, das Objekt, wird dann erneut als Bild konsumiert? Das Bild ist heute schließlich die Art, wie Dinge verdaut werden, in den Strom der Kultur einfließen. Ich denke hier an Mark Leckey und seine Theorie, dass drei Dimensionen eigentlich erst als Bildschirmbild begreifbar werden.

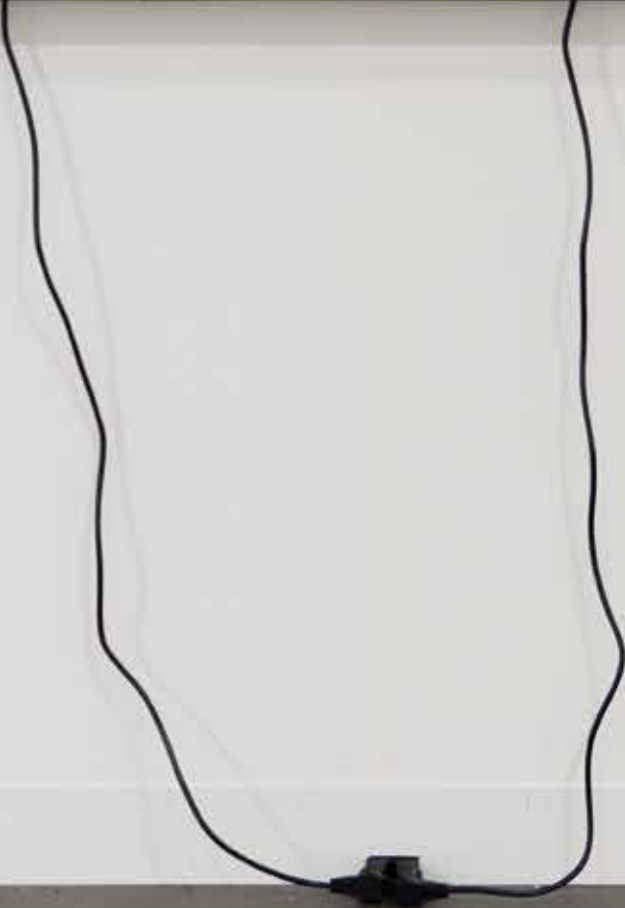
**KO** Es ist wie eine umgekehrte Version davon: Das Bildschirmbild wird erst konsumierbar, wenn man es in drei Dimensionen sieht. Richtig verdauen kann man dieses Bild nur, wenn man persönlich davorsteht. Man muss so was immer austesten, damit experimentieren. Bei der Ausstellung im Museum Ludwig streifte ich häufig herum und beobachtete, wie die Leute aufnehmen oder interagieren, und mir fiel auf, dass ihre Handlungen und ihr Verstehen in gewisser Weise ganz unmittelbar waren.

**KB** Die Arbeiten wurden zwischen die Originale gehängt – im selben Raum wie der Günther Uecker, den sie ins Bild setzen?

**KO** Richtig, die Arbeiten waren als eine Art Intervention in die permanente Sammlung gedacht; eine hing zum Beispiel direkt gegenüber dem Uecker und neben einem Yves Klein. Einige andere Werke der Sammlung waren gerahmt und hatten spiegelnde Oberflächen, was man natürlich nicht sehen sollte, aber das legte eine zusätzliche Reflexionsschicht über sie. Ich beobachtete, wie die Leute hereinkamen und den Uecker sahen, und dann den Bildschirm, den sie vermutlich für eine Art Infoscreen hielten, wie man sie häufig in Museen findet, ein pädagogisches Hilfsmittel. Dann erkennen sie, dass es die gleiche Arbeit ist, und dass sich Nägel auf der Oberfläche befinden, und dieses Epoxy, das wie Wischspuren aussieht und das RGB prismatisch zerlegt. Diese ganze Gedankenkette lief da ab.

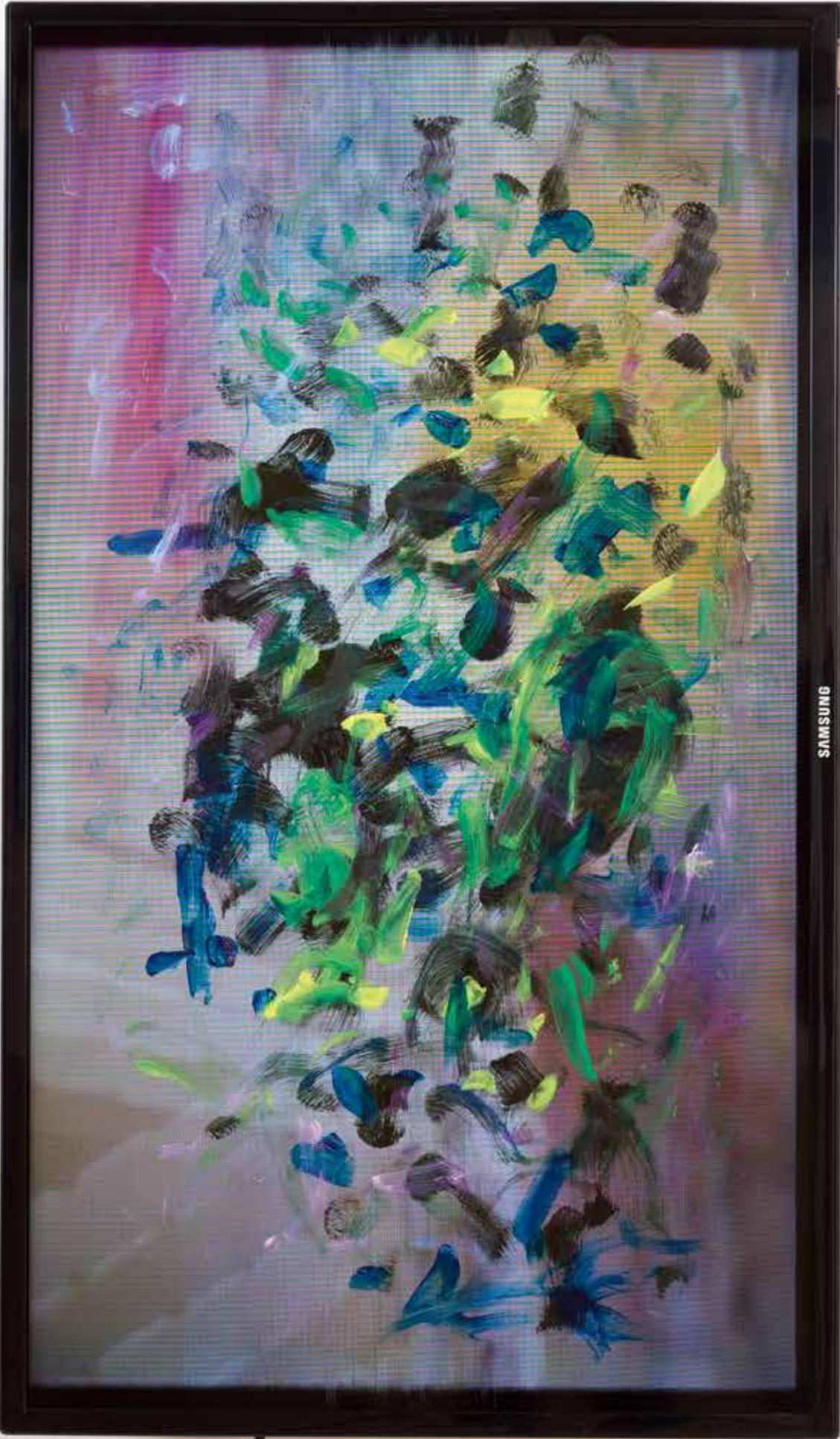
**KB** Es gibt ein Buch über deine Arbeit, in dessen Untertitel von *Congestion and Porosity*<sup>2</sup> die Rede ist. Ich finde, das ist ein großartiges Wortpaar, nicht nur für deine neueren Arbeiten, sondern überhaupt für dein Werk. Dir scheint die Idee des »Glitch« sehr wichtig zu sein, wie du Störungen nutzbar und generativ machen kannst, zu einer treibenden Kraft. Die »congestion«, die Verstopfung, gleicht ein wenig dem Glitch, wogegen »porosity« auf Mehrfachschichten und Gleichzeitigkeit als zeitgenössische *Conditio* verweist. Mir erscheint Porosität in deinem Werk als eine Art undichte Stelle, doch der Begriff verweist auch auf das Wesen der Erfahrung, sogar auf einer ganz simplen Alltagsebene.

**KO** Ich öffne gerne diese Feedbackkanäle – zum Beispiel zwischen den Prozessen des eigentlichen Malens und des eigentlichen Videomachens, so dass etwa das Malen zu einer Aufzeichnung des Fernsehschauens wird. Die beiden Prozesse stecken sich auf eine Weise an, bei der die Hybridisierung verkehrt rum läuft oder unmöglich ist, komprimiert und vollkommen eingebettet, obwohl sie materiell scheinbar nichts miteinander zu tun haben. Diese Grauzonen, der Glitch und die ... selbst während wir hier sprechen, geht mir zu viel auf einmal durch den Kopf, es sprudelt nur so aus mir raus! Kann ich das überhaupt durchdenken? Es sickert so viel durch zwischen den beiden Dingen, dass ich nicht einmal einen Satz zustande bringe! Was großartig ist! In der »Malerei«, wenn man bei dieser Kategorie bleiben will, ist Durchlässigkeit geradezu eine Voraussetzung, um die Arbeit machen zu können.



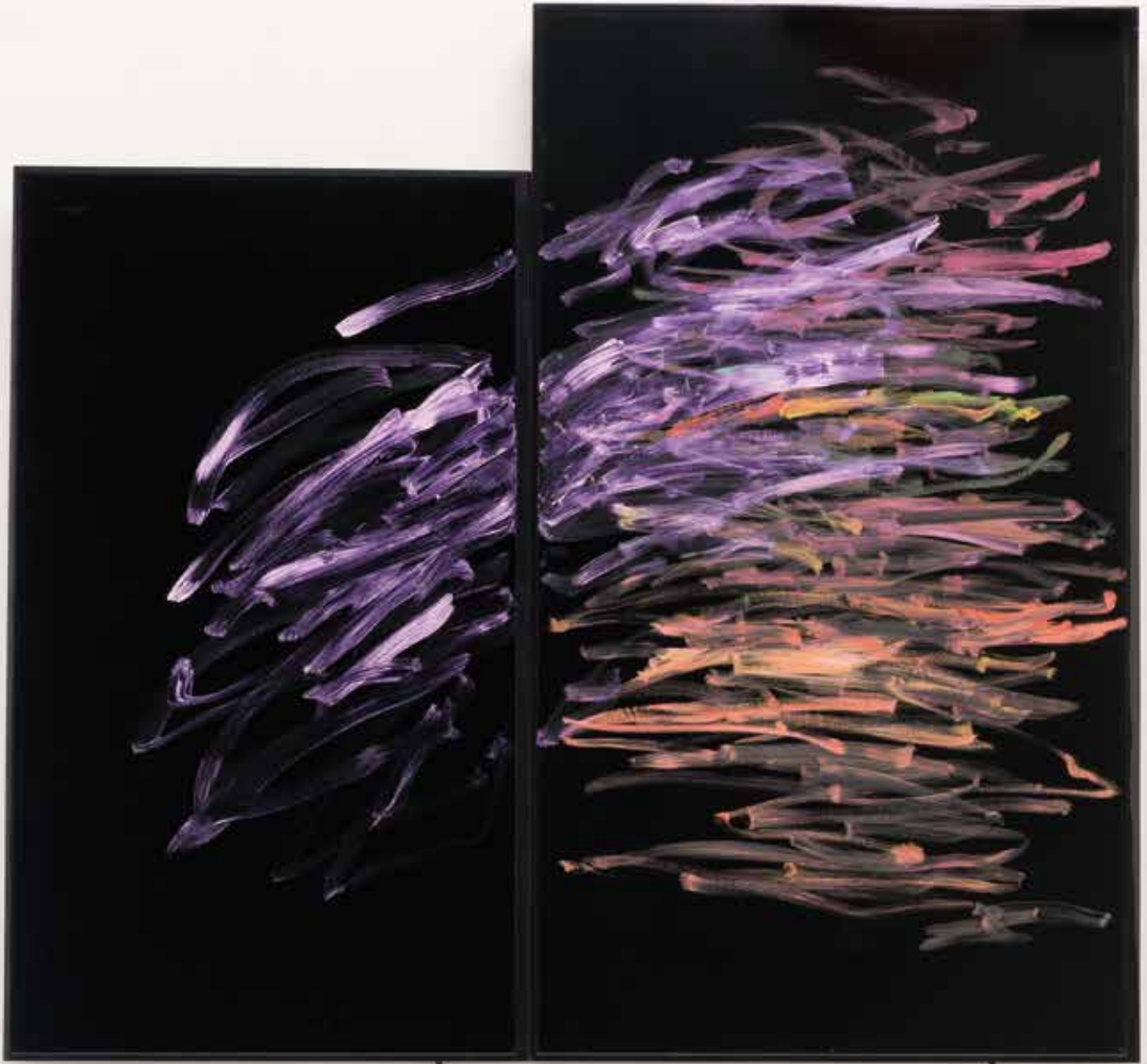


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**KB** Richtig, aber sie wird nonverbal.

**KO** Ganz genau. Und dasselbe passiert auch in der Musik. Ich wurde kürzlich gebeten, etwas über Pierre Boulez zu schreiben. Ich hatte mir seit meiner Teenagerzeit, als ich ernsthaft Musik studierte, nichts mehr dazu überlegt oder darüber gelesen oder mir die Partituren angesehen. Ich hatte vergessen, wie einflussreich seine Ästhetik und seine Theorien waren, diese Musikprozesse, da ich sie unbewusst ins Visuelle übersetzt hatte. Es war faszinierend, dieses musikalische Denken auf einer theoretischen Ebene wiederzufinden. Deleuze und Guattari bezogen speziell die Idee des glatten und gekerbten Raums von Boulez. Diese Idee des Zählens oder Nichtzählens von Takten ist ja etwas Musikalisches. Boulez suchte nach Spannungen, in denen es zu Momenten des Nichtzählens kommt oder die Musik in amorphe Zonen eintritt.

**KB** Dieses Denken findet in deinem Film »(Goodbye to) Manhattan« (2010) statt.

**KO** Richtig. Für mich ist das einfach da eingeflossen. Ich fühle mich natürlich zu diesen Zonen hingezogen, in denen man nicht mehr weiß, wie Zeit, Raum, Sprache oder das alles funktionieren. Es gibt keinen Takt.

**KB** Als ich ihn sah, empfand ich dieses Gefühl der Frustration, weil die Zeit so amorph wird. Man weiß nicht, was abgeht oder worauf es hinausläuft, es gibt keinen Rhythmus mehr. Aber ich dachte mir auch, dass die Komposition des Films als eine Partitur mit vielen Teilen zu lesen ist, die sich nicht harmonisch verbinden oder auch nur in die gleiche Richtung bewegen.

**KO** Genau das ist es, es ist sehr einfach. Bei einem Einkanal-Video ist das Schnittprogramm im Grunde eine Partitur, zu der man immer weitere »Instrumente« hinzufügen kann. Ich war mir dessen nicht bewusst, aber meine natürliche Schnitttechnik neigt zur Schaffung sehr komplexer Zeit-Räume, die hin und wieder voranzuschreiten oder zusammenzuhängen scheinen. Psychologisch gesprochen ähneln sie den Identitätssträngen – Sprache, körperliche Präsenz, soziales Skript, Scripting bestimmter Verhaltensweisen – ich liebe diese Momente, in denen man die alle neben- und gegeneinander treiben sieht. Ich habe diese Vorstellung, wie großartig es wäre, wenn mich jemand ein Drehbuch verfilmen ließe und ich käme zum Set, ohne zu wissen worum es in dem Buch geht, und alle stünden da und warteten, und ich müsste einfach loslegen und schauen was passiert.

**KB** Und aktiv Missverständnisse hervorrufen: Man könnte auch die neueren Arbeiten im Licht dieser Vorstellung sehen.

**KO** Ja, sie sind interessant als Verbindung zu einigen früheren Arbeiten, denn »gesture/data« ist meine erste Arbeit – ich weiß nie, ob ich das sagen soll oder nicht –, die sehr erfolgreich in einen Markt eindringt. Es war nicht wirklich beabsichtigt.

**KB** Du wärst nie darauf gekommen, wenn du es versucht hättest, sie ist zu einfach, und darum geht sie vielen bestimmt auf die Nerven.

**KO** Ich bin der Meinung, dass sie immer noch Missverständnisse hervorrufen.

**KB** Richtig. Und das heißt, dass sie funktioniert! Ging es in »(Goodbye to) Manhattan« speziell um die urbane Erfahrung von Berlin und Manhattan oder eher um den Gegensatz zwischen amerikanischer und europäischer Erfahrung?

**KO** Die wahre, psychologische Antwort ist, dass mein Vater als Japano-Amerikaner in Vietnam diente und dort Woody Allens Film »What's Up Tiger Lily« (1966) sah, bei dem Allen einen japanischen Spionagefilm mit einer Off-Stimme versah, die etwas komplett anderes erzählt. Mein Vater war Soldat, weil seine Eltern kein Geld hatten, auf diese Weise bezahlte er die Uni. Aber er war auch ein Japaner in Amerika zur Zeit des Zweiten Weltkriegs, als all diese Geschichten passierten. Allens Film wurde einer seiner Lieblingsfilme. Worauf ich hinaus will – ich liebe es, die Ästhetik des Missverständnisses und komplizierter Identitäten in andere Kontexte zu übersetzen, und darum hatte meine Gruppe amerikanischer Freunde in Berlin, die ebenfalls aus New York geflohen waren, etwas Faszinierendes für mich. Es war die Zeit nach 9/11, und dieses spezielle Interface, das auf wirklich reizvolle Weise vor Missverständnissen und Fehlübersetzungen strotzte, hatte etwas; diesen komplizierten

the editing programme is basically a score, you can keep on adding "instruments". It wasn't conscious, but my natural way of editing tends towards creating very complex time-spaces that every once in a while have a feeling of moving forward, or cohesion. To talk about it in psychological terms, it's like the tracks of identity – language, physical presence, social script, scripting of certain kinds of behaviour – I really like those moments when you can see them all floating next to and against each other. I have this idea that it would be great if someone told me to direct a script, and I'd walk on the set without knowing what the script was, with all the people there and everything, and I'd just have to start and see what would happen.

**KB** To actively generate misunderstanding ... you can also think about the more recent works in terms of that idea.

**KO** Yes, it's interesting as a connection to some past work, because "gesture/data" is the first work of mine – I never know if I'm supposed to say this or not – but it's the first work of mine that very successfully enters a market. It wasn't really an intention.

**KB** You would never have come up with it if you had tried, it's too simple, and that's why I'm sure it really gets on people's nerves.

**KO** I do find that it continues to generate misunderstandings.

**KB** Right, which means it's working! Was "(Goodbye to) Manhattan" specifically about the urban experience of Berlin and Manhattan, or did it have to do with the American versus European experience?

**KO** The real psychological answer is that my father, as a Japanese American, was a soldier in Vietnam, and he saw Woody Allen's "What's Up Tiger Lily" (1966) there – where Allen takes a Japanese spy movie and dubs it with a voice-over of a completely different thing for the entire movie. My father was a soldier because his parents didn't have any money, and so that's how he paid for college. But he was also a Japanese American at the time of WWII, when all of these things were happening. This became one of his favourite movies. The point is that I love translating the aesthetics of misunderstanding and complicated identity into third contexts, so there was something fascinating about my group of American friends in Berlin who were escaping New York. It was the post-9/11 time. There was something about that specific interface that was full of misunderstanding and mistranslation in a really decorative way, and a lot of the aesthetics that emerged came out of these complicated misunderstandings.

**KB** Sometimes there's a work that occurs quite early on in an artist's career that seems to touch on many subjects that continue as a thread throughout the subsequent work. That really seems to be the case with "David Wojnarowicz in New York" (1999–2001), this idea of mapping urban experience and its relation to history.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Acrylic paint, epoxy, two-way acrylic mirrors on flat-screen televisions, feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), 107.4 × 124 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

← gesture/data, 2014. Oil paint on flat-screen television, .mp4 file (colour, sound), 92.5 × 54.1 × 9.4 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse.

← gesture/data, 2014. Oil paint on flat-screen television, .mp4 file (color, sound), 92.5 × 54.1 × 9.4 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Oil paint on flat-screen televisions, .mp4 files (colour, silent) and feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), 107.4 × 114.6 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Oil paint on flat-screen televisions, .mp4 files (colour, silent) and feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), 107.4 × 114.6 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Oil paint on flat-screen television, .mp4 file (colour, silent) and feedback .mp4 file (colour, sound), 107.4 × 62 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo. Photo: Kei Okano.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Acrylic paint, epoxy, two-way acrylic mirrors on flat-screen televisions, feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), 107.4 × 124 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Acrylic paint and mirrors on flat-screen televisions, .mp4 files (colour, silent), 2 panels, 107.4 × 73.1 × 5.1 cm each. Installation view from "Ken Okiishi: Porous Feedback", Arbeiterkammer Wien, Vienna, 22.11.2015 – 29.4.2016. Courtesy: the artist and Arbeiterkammer Wien Kultur, Vienna.

**KO** I was studying in the East Village, at Cooper Union, and just walking around the city a lot. At that particular moment, which was 1997, everyone was saying NY was over. This was also before the Internet was such a thing. You couldn't search for real estate on the Internet — those rapid ways of reorganising the city were not possible yet. But there was this digital camera which was light and newish; the images that it made were very pixelated, but beautiful; and there was also this machine where you could take the digital image and put it onto negative film, and then print them in the darkroom. There was this paper that was like Cibachrome, but it was a negative process rather than a positive process, called Fujiflex. My favourite thing to do was just walk around the Meatpacking District. In terms of gay history, mine is the worst generation for sexuality — ten years old and you're going through the AIDS crisis, all that Reagan stuff on the negative side, Act Up on the positive side, etc., these were the things that formed sexuality. So the specific history of the cruising areas, this free open zone, was also tinged with the potential for anger and death and exclusion, all these different things. Politically, it was a very loaded topic, but there's also a kind of nostalgia tinged with a lot of fear. I think the anticipation of digitisation was more intuitive; I didn't even have a cell phone. So the Wojnarowicz works were charged with all of these things. I find the photos very melancholy, like huge question marks. It was also a different time in terms of gay identity, it was pre-gay marriage, etc. — before it was even an idea. At that point, the idea was that corporatism was going to destroy the city and turn it into a suburban shopping mall. Little did we know that the Internet and digitisation were the mechanisms for making that happen.

**KB** There's a feeling of belatedness when I look at those pictures.

**KO** Yes, the feeling that you've missed out. The other thing about NY is that I had missed out on the trauma, as well — as a young gay man in NY in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was a different situation, so even the negativity had a positive side, but it still felt weird.

**KB** It is interesting to think about that shift of geography, how those two different things are mapped, the change of mapping through the Internet. I thought that piece had so much to do with a remapping of territory, as did "(Goodbye to) Manhattan", how you can reorient yourself. And now there's this other digital layer ...

**KO** ... yes, there is literally the map, the Google Map.

**KB** Yes, and also the Grindr map, the Social Media Map ...

**KO** ... exactly, which is constantly shifting — live data points, the proximity map. Those different layers of mapping in those particular photographs are right before this other layer started to emerge — or came to dominate us.

Missverständnissen entsprang ein großer Teil der Ästhetik, die sich da herausbildete.

**KB** Manchmal entsteht ziemlich am Anfang einer Künstlerkarriere eine Arbeit, die bereits viele das spätere Werk durchziehende Themen berührt. Das scheint bei dir auf »David Wojnarowicz in New York« (1999–2001) zuzutreffen, dieser Kartierung einer urbanen Erfahrung und ihrer Beziehung zur Geschichte.

**KO** Ich studierte im East Village an der Cooper Union und trieb mich einfach viel in der Stadt herum. Damals, 1997, sagten alle, New York sei gegessen. Es war auch die Zeit, bevor das Internet so ein großes Ding wurde. Man konnte nicht im Internet nach Immobilien suchen, diese raschen Möglichkeiten der Stadtreorganisation gab es noch nicht. Aber es gab diese Digitalkamera, die leicht und neuartig war und deren Bilder zwar gepixelt, aber schön waren. Und es gab diese Maschine, mit der man das digitale Bild auf Negativfilm übertragen konnte, um in der Dunkelkammer Abzüge davon zu fertigen. Und es gab auch dieses cibachrome-artige Papier namens Fujiflex, dem aber kein Positiv- sondern ein Negativprozess zugrunde lag. Meine Lieblingsbeschäftigung war, mich einfach treiben zu lassen, im Meatpacking District. Was die Schwulengeschichte betrifft, war meine Generation sexualitätsmäßig am schlimmsten dran — du bist zehn Jahre alt und durchläufst die Aids-Krise, mitsamt diesem ganzen Reagan-Kram auf der Negativ- und Act Up usw. auf der Positivseite. In diesem Umfeld wurde die Sexualität geformt. Die Geschichte der Cruising Areas, dieser freien, offenen Zonen, hatte also das Potenzial für Ärger, Tod und Ausgrenzung, all diese verschiedenen Dinge. Es war eine politisch hochbrisante Angelegenheit, aber es ist auch eine gewisse, mit viel Angst behaftete Nostalgie damit verbunden. Das Antizipieren der Digitalisierung war, glaube ich, intuitiver; ich besaß nicht einmal ein Handy. Die Wojnarowicz-Arbeiten waren von alldem geprägt. Ich empfinde die Fotos als sehr melancholisch, wie riesige Fragezeichen. Es war auch eine andere Zeit in Bezug auf schwule Identität, die Zeit vor der Schwulenehe usw., bevor sie überhaupt in Betracht gezogen wurde. Damals dachten wir, die Konzerne würden die Stadt zerstören und in eine suburbane Shopping Mall verwandeln. Wir ahnten noch nicht, dass Internet und Digitalisierung die Mechanismen sein würden, die das ermöglichen.

**KB** Beim Betrachten dieser Bilder stellt sich ein Gefühl des Zuspätkommenseins ein.

**KO** Ja, das Gefühl, etwas versäumt zu haben. Dazu kommt, dass ich das Trauma ebenfalls versäumt habe — als junger Schwuler im New York der 1990er und 2000er Jahre war man in einer anderen Situation, insofern hatte auch das Negative seine positive Seite, aber es erschien trotzdem unheimlich.

**KB** Es ist interessant, über diese geografische Verschiebung nachzudenken, wie diese verschiedenen Dinge kartiert werden, die Veränderung des Kartierens durch das Internet. Mir schien diese Arbeit viel mit einer Neukartierung eines Geländes zu tun zu haben, wie bereits »(Goodbye to) Manhattan«, mit der Möglichkeit der Umorientierung. Und nun gibt es diese andere digitale Schicht ...

**KO** ... ja, es ist buchstäblich eine Karte: die Google Map.

**KB** Ja, und auch die Grindr map, die Social Media Map ...

**KO** ... genau, die sich ständig verschiebt — Live-Datenpunkte, die Proximity Map. All die verschiedenen Kartierungsebenen in diesen Fotos sind hier in einem Zustand, unmittelbar bevor diese andere Schicht aufzutauchen — beziehungsweise uns zu beherrschen — begann.

1 "Ken Okiishi: Porous Feedback", Arbeiterkammer Wien, Vienna, 22.11.2015 – 29.4.2016.

2 Ken Okiishi, Annie Godfrey Larmon, Alise Upitis (eds.), *The Very Quick of the Word: [Congestion and Porosity in the Work of Ken Okiishi?]* (Berlin: Sternberg Press 2014).

1 »Ken Okiishi. Porous Feedback«, Arbeiterkammer Wien, 22.11.2015 – 29.4.2016.

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# ARTFORUM

NOVEMBER 2013

ARTS • CULTURE • DESIGN • POLITICS • ECONOMY

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## KEN OKIISHI

A STRANGE TECHNOLOGICAL RUPTURE occurs as one proceeds through the Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona, Italy. In line with contemporary educational efforts, the museum has installed a computer screen that, prompted by an awkward touchscreen mounted below it, displays images of Carlo Scarpa's ravishing, intensely overlaid drawings of the design for the building compound's 1958–75 renovation and newly conceived and realized exhibition display. This, in itself, wouldn't be particularly jarring, but the ad hoc placement of a surveillance monitor next to the first screen, showing deliriously oversaturated live feeds from throughout the museum, provokes a sudden sense of confusion as to why this ghastly thing has happened so visibly in one of the world's most thoughtfully executed museum architectures, interrupting the invigoratingly complex flows through these buildings. A completely unexpected series of thoughts follows—it feels a bit like when an Internet signal suddenly appears and your phone beeps in the middle of a forest.

I'm guessing the awkward proximity of these two monitors has to do with the practicalities of minimizing the intrusion of network cables within the original building structure. But its effect on the viewer—here, marvelously sensitized to the interactions of color, form, weight, diagram, space, and artworks, all simultaneously suspended in multiple discursive and formal fields—is to throw the basic physical experience of walking and seeing into crisis.

Exiting the room after this screenal breach, I stood at the threshold of the outdoor passageway that connects the two main museum buildings. (By chance, I happened to visit during Verona's Bacanal del Gnoco, when the entire city is thrown into a wildly transhistorical costumed frenzy. The sounds of reveling teenagers, who looked like a thousand different castings of a neorave *Romeo and Juliet*, ricocheted through the museum's palimpsest of materials and surfaces.) Standing at that point, where the castle complex is punctured by the grand arch bridge (the longest in the world at the time of its completion in the 1350s, it was destroyed in World War II and reconstructed directly after), you are confronted with a literally folded space. As you descend through substructures of the bridge onto various stairways and landings, any sense of the horizon or street level in relation to the rest of the city is multiplied beyond recognition. Gazing out onto the equestrian statue of Cangrande I della Scala for the second time (the first having been from below), I was struck by how perfectly bizarre its placement seemed—horse and rider half looking away, hovering above garden courtyard, bridge, and other irrational concrete precipices. As

the river started to become visible through the original castle archways, and as I glided across the suspended walkways amid more crisscrossing, floating walkways of inscrutable origin and destination, I realized how absolutely primitive digital screens can look when set in the same material field as Scarpa's remarkably advanced display apparatuses and used, no less, as vehicles for his plans for these very structures.

Institutional buildings today (and I hesitate to use the term *architecture* here, since most of what we live with is not) could be said to present a similarly strange fission of materials and technological interfaces. As has been the case for the past twenty or so years, these structures are designed almost exclusively on computer screens—deemed more efficient platforms for the mediation of construction and code. But as this digitization has mixed with increasing financialization, “architecture” is now commonly seen as the whittled-down sum of grossly general components: the building's “skin,” its atrium, and the general path of circulation dictated by its plan—nothing more. Beyond that framework, detailing is frequently outsourced, and spaces of use are often conceived according to a hierarchy of access to “views” and “naming opportunities.” Not surprisingly, the first question most “end users” ask upon entering any structure, public or private, is: “Do you have WiFi?”

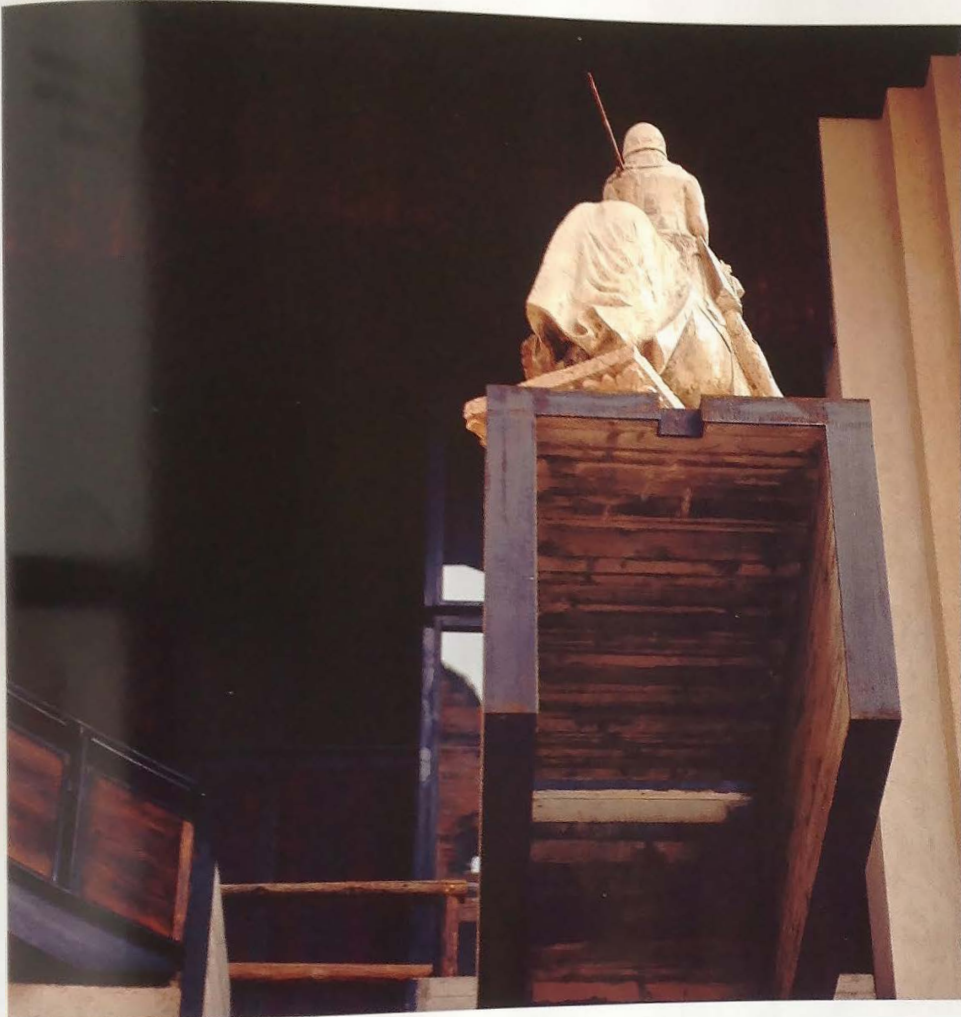
The primary network for Scarpa—both as metaphor and as material—is water. As he would have said, in his peculiarly flat-footed and practical way, this is probably because he was Venetian. But thirty-five

Scarpa created a kind of ornament that seems to emerge naturally but also by surprise, like a barnacle.



Above: Surveillance monitor and touch-screen exhibition display, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, Italy, February 8, 2013. Photo: Ken Okiishi.

Left: Carlo Scarpa, restoration of Museo di Castelvecchio, 1958–75, Verona, Italy. Photo: Farrell Nilton/Flickr.



Above: Statue of Cangrande I della Scala, ca. 1329, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, Italy, November 8, 2005. Photo: Stefan Buzas



Left: Carlo Scarpa, restoration of Museo di Castelvecchio, 1958–75, Verona, Italy. Detail of brass and wooden railing. Photo: Parivscott/Flickr

years after Scarpa's death, the meaning of "being Venetian" in an era when increases in sea level carry apocalyptic portent pierces the core of urgent ideological and formal questions as to how we build in the world. Scarpa's approach to water, if it can be generalized, was to open the built structure to the unpredictable forces of nature, and then to make that porosity into the basis of decoration—a kind of ornament that seems to emerge naturally, but also by surprise, like a barnacle. Unlike Frank Lloyd Wright, whom the Italian architect glossed in his own work and discussed in detail in idiosyncratic lectures to his students, Scarpa designed his structures not for the tops of waterfalls but for the bottoms of canals.

Scarpa sought to explore "the way" or "the path"—as in traditional Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, and specifically, given the Venetian architect's particular fascinations, in the movement of the mind/body through Shinto temple shrine complexes—and invited such forces to invade the Cartesian space of Western architecture. In his complicated and often tortured relationship to traditional Japanese architecture, he fermented gaps of not-knowing into ornate and often cryptically irrational adornments and structural elements. It can sometimes be difficult, for example, to figure out how to open a door designed by Scarpa: The hinge is given so much manufacturing intensity that the eye/hand misses the subdued, frequently recessed apparatus that actually opens the portal.

And this zany quality to Scarpa's work always hits in the middle of a total bliss-out. The poetry that emerges in his built structures, like that of his drawings, cuts many ways at once. But now, in an age of flat buildings and overly pedagogical exhibition design, it is Scarpa's wild sense of humor that speaks most critically. Architecture, in the twenty-first century—at a time when space in institutional buildings is overwhelmingly determined by xXxtreme branding opportunities and by the bodies that fill these structures as props for half-baked, neo-Taylorist ideas—is once again in an ideological and technological stranglehold (google "skip-stop elevator" if you don't know what I'm talking about). Our hypercapitalist cathedrals of wanting produce even more coldness and cruelty than the state socialist architecture against which (however unwittingly) Scarpa's vision emerged as a counterforce. And yet, in that special way in which architecture can skip across time, Scarpa's forms and material processes have the potential to shatter all of this. □

KEN OKIISHI IS AN ARTIST BASED IN NEW YORK

"Venetian Glass by Carlo Scarpa: The Venini Company, 1932–1947," curated by Nicholas Cullman, is on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from Nov. 4, 2013–March 2, 2014; the exhibition is an adaptation of "Carlo Scarpa: Venini 1932–1947," curated by Alarino Baroveri for the Fondazione Giorgio Cini and Pentagram Stiftung, on view at Le Stanze del Vetro, Venice, last year.

**Ken Okiishi**

**Solar/Data/Matter: Sobreteixims i escultures, 1972, 1968, 2016, 1978**

Fundacio Gaspar, Barcelona

June 29-October 2, 2016



Ken Okiishi, *gesture/data (feedback)*, 2015. Oil paint on flat-screen televisions, feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), 42.3" x 24.4" x 2.0" inches. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

For his project at the Fundacio Gaspar, Ken Okiishi intensifies--like the sun through thick glass shining on raw data--his work on how data collides with matter to produce new ways of seeing and thinking.

Working in and out of the hidden atmosphere of the private spaces of the foundation, in particular a space formerly used as an apartment for artists (as well as various people involved with Galerie Maeght, who occupied the early 15th century gothic palace that houses the foundation from 1974-2012), Okiishi produces an intimate response to a fragile, and potentially luminous, set of architectural and historical conditions.

The current state of the apartment--a sort of ruin turned storage space, reactivated for Okiishi's project in exactly the state in which it was found, full of intact historical traces and the kinds of things that happen to spaces when they are forgotten about--serves as a site for the collision between art as a form of data and the raw unresolvable materiality of experiential phenomena. Beginning with his exhibition (*Goodbye to*) *Manhattan* at the legendary Alex Zachary gallery on the Upper East Side of Manhattan (2010), and continuing with his project *Screen Presence* at the Museum Ludwig Cologne (2014) and most recently *Porous*



*Feedback* at the Arbeiterkammer Wien (2015), Okiishi has developed a unique way of interfacing with the material data of a particular situation that brings bodies, objects, languages, histories and psychologies into ontological crises. Okiishi's most well-known series of artworks, *gesture/data*, continues to produce confusion about its most basic categorical data; down to the level of materials, the works produce anxiety about what an art object can and should be. Fundamental questions regarding the policing of identitarian borders, from the basic categorization of art objects and their conservation and installation to the policing of which bodies and objects should and should not be valued, often produce uneasy and even violent impulses to accept or reject this unresolvable hybridity.



Miró y Josep Royo trabajando en 'Sobreteixim', en la Sala Gaspar, en 1972.

For his project within the Fondacio Gaspar, Okiishi makes explicit an internal dialogue with a body of work Miró first produced within the frame of the Sala Gaspar in 1972, the *Sobretexims*; the specific relationship being the development of a psychologically and technologically dense and chaotic support surface that becomes a carrier for painting within a contemporary situation marked by pressurized notions of on-site production, increasingly revved-up systems of image circulation and travel--and the reflective fatigue of trying to inhabit these new norms. Okiishi's work is installed at key pressure points leading from public to private areas of the foundation opened up only for this exhibition.

Ken Okiishi (b. 1978) lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Arbeiterkammer Wien, Austria; Pilar Corrias, London; Take Ninagawa, Tokyo; and Reena Spaulings, New York. Recent group exhibitions at institutions including The Centre Pompidou, Paris; The Museum of Modern Art,

New York; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Artists Space, New York; Serralves Foundation, Porto; M WOODS, Beijing; Fridericianum, Kassel; Kunsthhaus Bregenz, Austria; Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland; Peep-hole, Milan; 1857, Oslo; White Columns, New York. His work is held in the permanent collections of museums including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Museum Ludwig, Cologne. His writing has appeared in Artforum, May, Bidoun, Mousse, The Brooklyn Rail, Triple Canopy and the first book on his work, *The Very Quick of the Word*, was published by Sternberg Press in 2014.







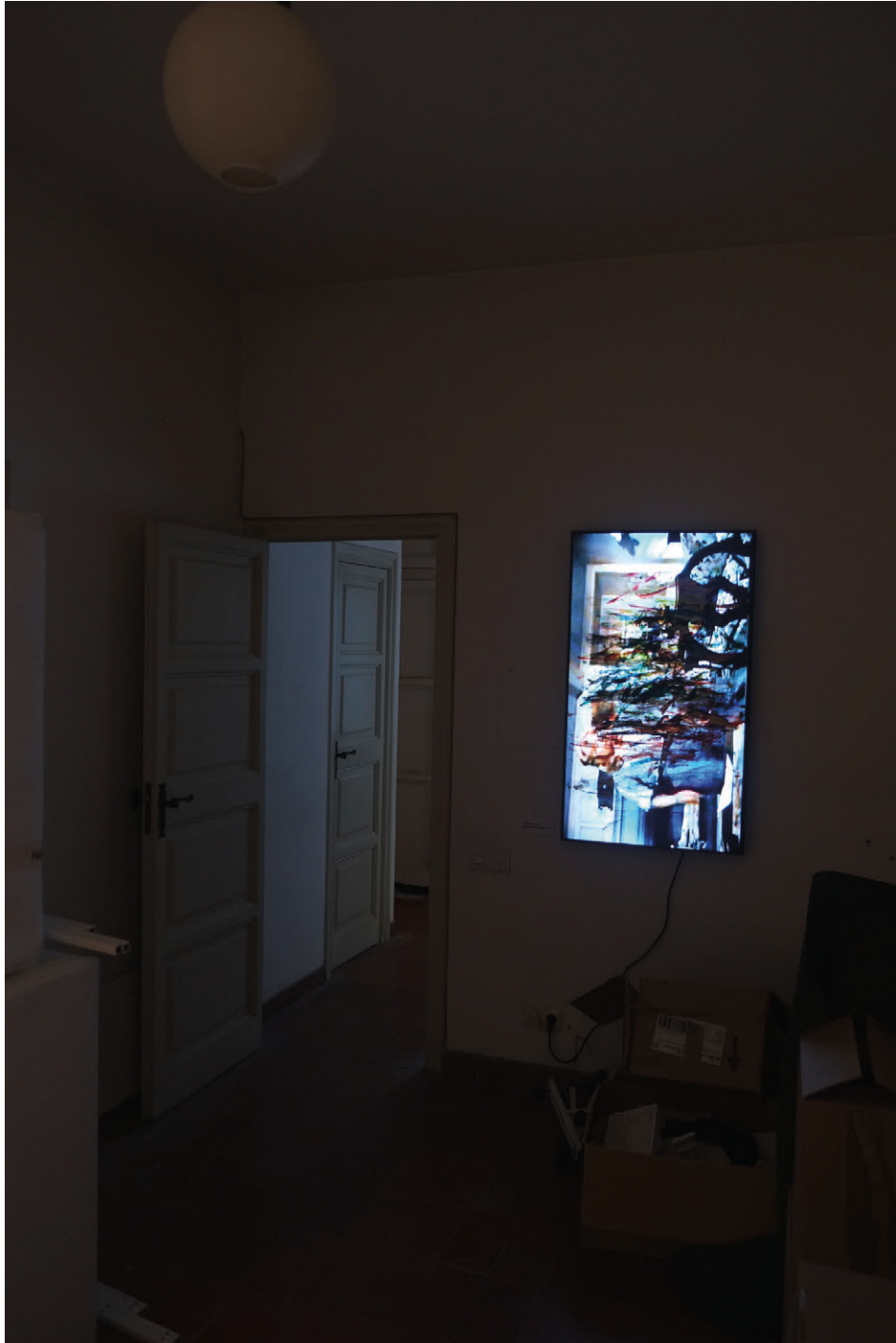












Video documentation of the exhibition:  
<https://vimeo.com/208746124>  
password: miro

Ken Okiishi  
Museum Ludwig, Cologne  
“Screen Presence”

21. Oktober 2014 – 1. Februar 2015

Barbara Engelbach  
Ken Okiishi, ‘Screen Presence’, 2014  
Museum Ludwig, Cologne

When Ken Okiishi was invited to develop a new work for the Museum Ludwig and its collection, his attention focused from the outset on the complexity of the collection, from classic works of modern art to recent contemporary artworks, and the complex structure of the museum building, a low structure that links the cathedral with the Rhine. Okiishi decided on a three-part work on monitors that would be positioned at various points within the museum. The concept was to connect the museum’s architecture and the collection through ‘vision disorders’ — Okiishi’s term for the monitors.

Okiishi achieved this bracketing of architecture and collection with a sophisticated visual feedback effect which connected all the monitors together. He selected Günther Uecker’s ‘Nagelrelief weiß-weiß’ of 1961 as the starting point. This distinctive work consists of a white canvas with dense structures of nails painted white protruding from it. The canvas is mounted on a white panel so that it appears to float on the wall. This enhances the materiality and plasticity of the work. Its material and plastic presence is transformed aesthetically by Okiishi’s video shots of it that show different details in different lighting. His video of the original sized artwork is shown on a flatscreen monitor turned 90° facing Uecker’s work. The new flatness to which the work is consigned in the video, and the nails that he glued to the monitor’s screen, both undermines and highlights this flatness. Yet this obvious difference between original and video image, the comparison of the two, also directs attention to the aesthetic nature of the video image. The whiteness of the original, which has aged to beige, is coloured pink in the video, and the backlight from the monitor makes the nails glued on its screen lose their plastic quality and appear as an abstract black sculpture. In other words, Okiishi’s ‘Screen Presence’ targets the tacit agreement that art viewed on smartphones and tablets is the art itself.<sup>1</sup> Okiishi’s interventions disturb the unquestioned acceptance of the image and at the same time highlight the value of the video image for its own sake.

Okiishi enhances this effect further with a second monitor that shows a video image filmed from the first monitor. Not only the logo of the manufacturer of the monitor appears in this image, but vertical stripes run through the electronic image; interference due to two asynchronous frequencies. In addition, the monitor screen is painted in a gestural manner with colourless oil paint, and in these places the image on the LED screen bursts into its rainbow-coloured component parts. Okiishi positioned this monitor opposite the portrait of Josef Haubrich, who bequeathed his collection of classic modern art to the city of Cologne in 1946. This arrangement he then filmed from various perspectives with a portable camcorder for the third part of his project, which consists of two flatscreen monitors. One shows video images filmed from the second monitor; views of the ‘Nagelrelief weiß-weiß’ under the added nails and coat of clear oil paint, which are again changed and with additional interference because Okiishi used low-resolution video files that disintegrate into large pixels. As a pendant to the white canvas as *tabula rasa*, Okiishi works in this monitor with the shade of the ‘blue screen’ that appears when there is a serious computer error. The second flatscreen shows Otto Freundlich’s ‘Frauenbüste’ of 1910, sculptures coloured monochrome yellow, during a pan shot

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Sanchez examines how the art system has changed since the huge spread of smartphones since 2011. In the meantime art production and reception take place almost simultaneously because of the rapid circulation of images, and Sanchez also describes the recent phenomenon of art being created as digital depictions which are very convincing. At the same time he observes an increasing tendency of curators to put artists’ works together in group exhibitions, the composition of which owes more to algorithmic coincidences than putative digital networks and lacks any correspondence at the social level. Michael Sanchez, 2011. *On Art and Transmission*, in: ‘Artforum International’, summer 2013, pp. 284–301.

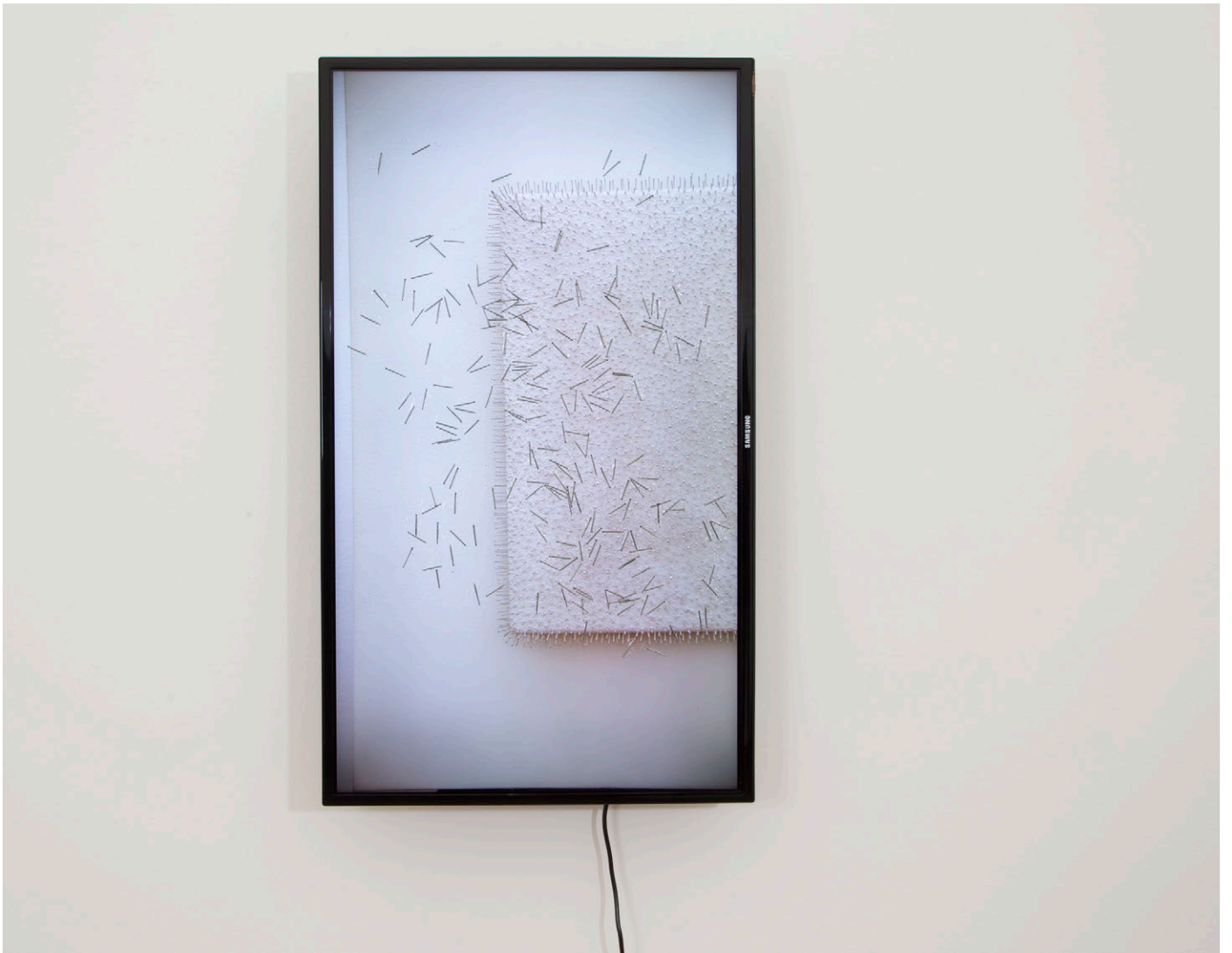
of the Haubrich Collection is animated with stop motion so that a phantom appears to float through the exhibition. In the video it is an aesthetic element, yet in the context of the history of the Haubrich Collection also stands for the issues connected with the Nazis' defamation of 'degenerate art' and the necessity of researching the provenance of artworks.

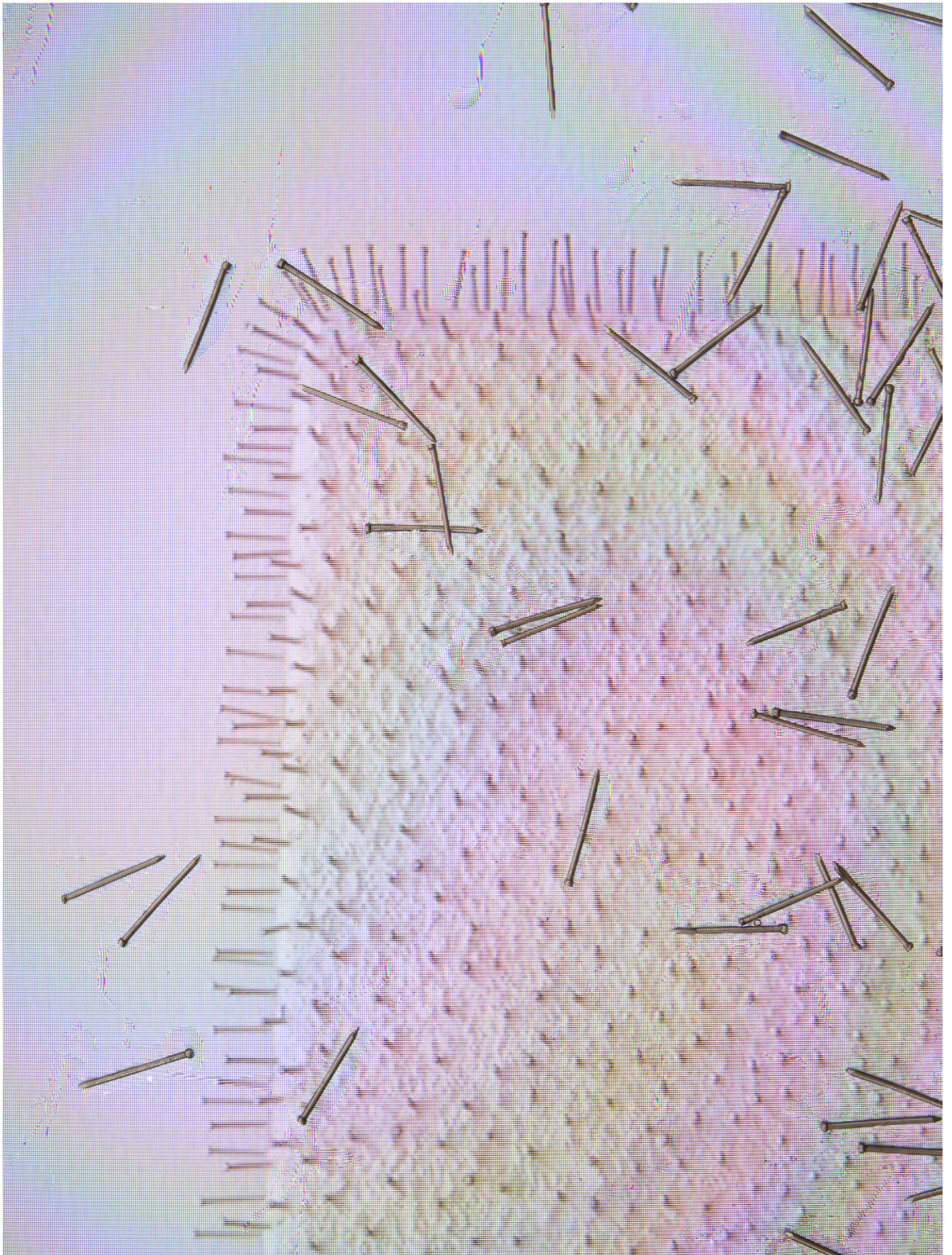
It is truly remarkable how Okiishi processes the foundations of digital electronic images in such a way that the technical 'disorder' he provokes allows the individuality of the video material to be recognised. This method can be seen as belonging to the tradition of the artists, such as Nam June Paik, Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, and Joan Jonas, who after the structural films of the 1960s, began to explore the material foundations of the then new electronic images. Comparisons can also be drawn between Okiishi's 'Screen Presence' and Günther Uecker's generation of European artists, whose work Laszlo Glozer aptly defined as 'exit from the picture', referring to their deliberate expansion (or abolition) of the panel painting with everyday material. Or one could explore Okiishi's references to authorship in painting and technology for their connections with American abstract expressionism. However, none of that explains why Okiishi and his generation of post-Internet artists are again turning to haptic material,<sup>2</sup> and in the process, through technically interfering with what is ostensibly immaterial — as Ken Okiishi does — deriving plastic qualities from digital images.

Seen from this perspective Okiishi's 'Screen Presence' can be understood as the object-like presence of the screen and the material presence of the electronic digital image. The title also refers to the fact that on the displays of smartphones, tablets, and computers everything is equally present via the Internet, historicity is suspended. In a counter move, Okiishi inserts temporal levels of images in his work through visual feedback effects. Further, in the work 'Screen Presence', he installs the monitors at different points in the museum. Within the sameness of the present he re-introduces the difference between here and there, and by specifying the spatial distinctions he also re-introduces the differentiation between before, now, and afterwards. Here Okiishi touches upon the prerequisite for historicity — the relationship between subject and object, and between copy and image, that needs to be defined.

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<sup>2</sup> Annie Godfrey Larmon, *The Very Quick of the Word*, in: 'List: Projects: Ken Okiishi', exhibition catalogue, Hessel Museum of Art, New York, and List Visual Arts Center, MIT Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2014, p. 69.









# Museum Ludwig

**Ken Okiishi**

—  
*Screen Presence*

Köln





Ken Okiishi  
*Screen Presence*, 2014

Als Ken Okiishi eingeladen wurde, für das Museum Ludwig und seine Sammlung eine neue Arbeit zu entwickeln, interessierte er sich von Anfang an für die Komplexität dieser Sammlung von Kunst der Klassischen Moderne bis zur aktuellen Kunst der Gegenwart sowie für die ebenso komplexe Struktur des Museumsgebäudes, die zwischen Dom und Rhein in der Fläche ausgebreitet ist. Er entschied sich für eine dreiteilige Arbeit mit Monitoren, die an verschiedenen Orten über das Haus verteilt zu sehen sein sollte. Die Museumsarchitektur und die Sammlung würden auf diese Weise durch die Monitore als „Sehstörungen“ – so Okiishis Kennzeichnung der Monitore – räumlich vernetzt.

Okiishi erreicht diese Verklammerung der räumlich verteilten Werke mit einem raffinierten visuellen Rückkoppelungseffekt, der alle Monitore untereinander verbindet. Als Ausgangspunkt wählte er sich Günther Ueckers „Nagelrelief weiß-weiß“ von 1961. Dieses markante Werk besteht aus einer weißen Leinwand, aus der in dichter Struktur geweißte Nägel ragen. Die Leinwand ist auf eine weiße Platte montiert, so dass sie vor der Wand zu schweben scheint. Das Werk wird auf diese Weise in seiner Materialität und Plastizität besonders gegenwärtig. Die materiale und plastische Präsenz wird durch Okiishis Videoaufzeichnung des Nagelreliefs in verschiedenen Ausschnitten und Belichtungszeiten ästhetisch transformiert. Er zeigt die Aufnahmen auf einem senkrecht gedrehten Flachbildschirm in Originalgröße gegenüber dem Werk Ueckers – nun die neue Flächigkeit, in die das Werk in der Videoaufnahme gebannt ist, mit Nägeln, die er auf den Bildschirm klebte, konterkarierend und auf diese Weise nochmals betonend. Aber über diesen offensichtlichen Unterschied zwischen Original und Abbild hinaus, lenkt die Gegenüberstellung von beiden die Aufmerksamkeit auf die tatsächliche ästhetische Erscheinung des Videobildes. Das ins Beige verfärbte Weiß des Originals erscheint im Videobild Rosa, und auch die aufgeklebten Nägel verlieren im Gegenlicht des Monitors ihre plastische Wirkung und erscheinen als abstrakte schwarze Struktur. Mit anderen Worten: „Screen Presence“ zielt auf die unausgesprochene Übereinkunft, dass die über Smartphone und Tablets wahrgenommene Kunst die Kunst selbst sei.<sup>1</sup> Okiishis Bearbeitungen stören die nicht hinterfragte Abbildhaftigkeit und machen zugleich das Videobild in seiner materialen Eigenwertigkeit kenntlich.

Okiishi verstärkt diesen Moment im zweiten Mo-

onitor noch, der den abgefilmten ersten Flachbildschirm zeigt. Denn es erscheint nicht nur das Firmenlogo des Bildschirms im Videobild, sondern es laufen vertikale Streifen durch das elektronische Bild als Störung aufgrund zweier asynchron laufender Frequenzen. Zudem ist die Bildschirmoberfläche mit farbloser Ölfarbe in gestischer Manier bemalt, so dass an diesen Stellen das LED-Bild in seine regenbogenfarbigen Komponenten aufspringt. Okiishi entschied sich, diesen Monitor gegenüber dem Porträt Josef Haubrichs, der seine Sammlung Klassischer Moderne 1946 der Stadt Köln schenkte, zu hängen. Diese Ausstellungssituation filmte er mit der Handkamera in verschiedenen Einstellungen für den dritten Teil der Arbeit, der aus zwei Flachbildschirmen besteht. Zum einen sind Aufnahmen des zweiten Monitors zu sehen, nun mit erneut veränderter Erscheinung des „Nagelrelief weiß-weiß“ unter der Nagel- und Ölfarbensicht, und in seiner Abbildhaftigkeit zusätzlich gestört, weil Okiishi niedrig aufgelöste Videodateien verwendete, die in große Pixel zerfallen. Als Pendant zur weißen Leinwand als Tabula rasa arbeitet Okiishi in diesem Monitor auch mit dem Blauton, der bei elektronischen Bildschirmen ohne Datenzugang erscheint. Der zweite Flachbildschirm des dritten Teils zeigt die gelb-monochrom eingefärbte „Frauenbüste“ von Otto Freundlich von 1910 zwischen einem Kameraschwenk durch die Haubrich-Sammlung mit Hilfe von Stop-Motion so animiert, dass sie wie ein Phantom durch den Ausstellungsraum schwebt. Sie wirkt im Video als ästhetisches Moment und steht doch für die Fragen, die sich angesichts der Geschichte der Sammlung Haubrich zwischen Verfemung sogenannter Entarteter Kunst und notwendiger Provenienzforschung stellen.

Es ist bemerkenswert, wie Okiishi die Grundlagen des elektronisch-digitalen Bildes so bearbeitet, dass die provozierten technischen Störungen die Eigenwilligkeit der Videomaterialität kenntlich machen. Man könnte dieses Verfahren in Tradition zu Künstlern wie Nam June Paik, Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci oder Joan Jonas betrachten, die im Anschluss an den strukturellen Film der 1960er Jahre die materialen Grundlagen des damals neuen elektronischen Bildes untersuchten. Man könnte auch die europäische Künstlergeneration Günther Ueckers, deren Werke Laszlo Glozer mit der prägnanten Formel „Ausstieg aus dem Bild“ kennzeichnete, in Bezug auf ihre bewusste Erweiterung (oder Abschaffung) des Tafelbildes durch Alltagsmaterialien mit Okiishis „Screen Presence“ vergleichen. Oder Okiishis Anspielungen auf Autorschaft in Malerei und Technik im Hinblick auf den amerikanischen Abstrakten Expressionismus genauer untersuchen. Aber all das würde nicht die Dringlichkeit erklä-

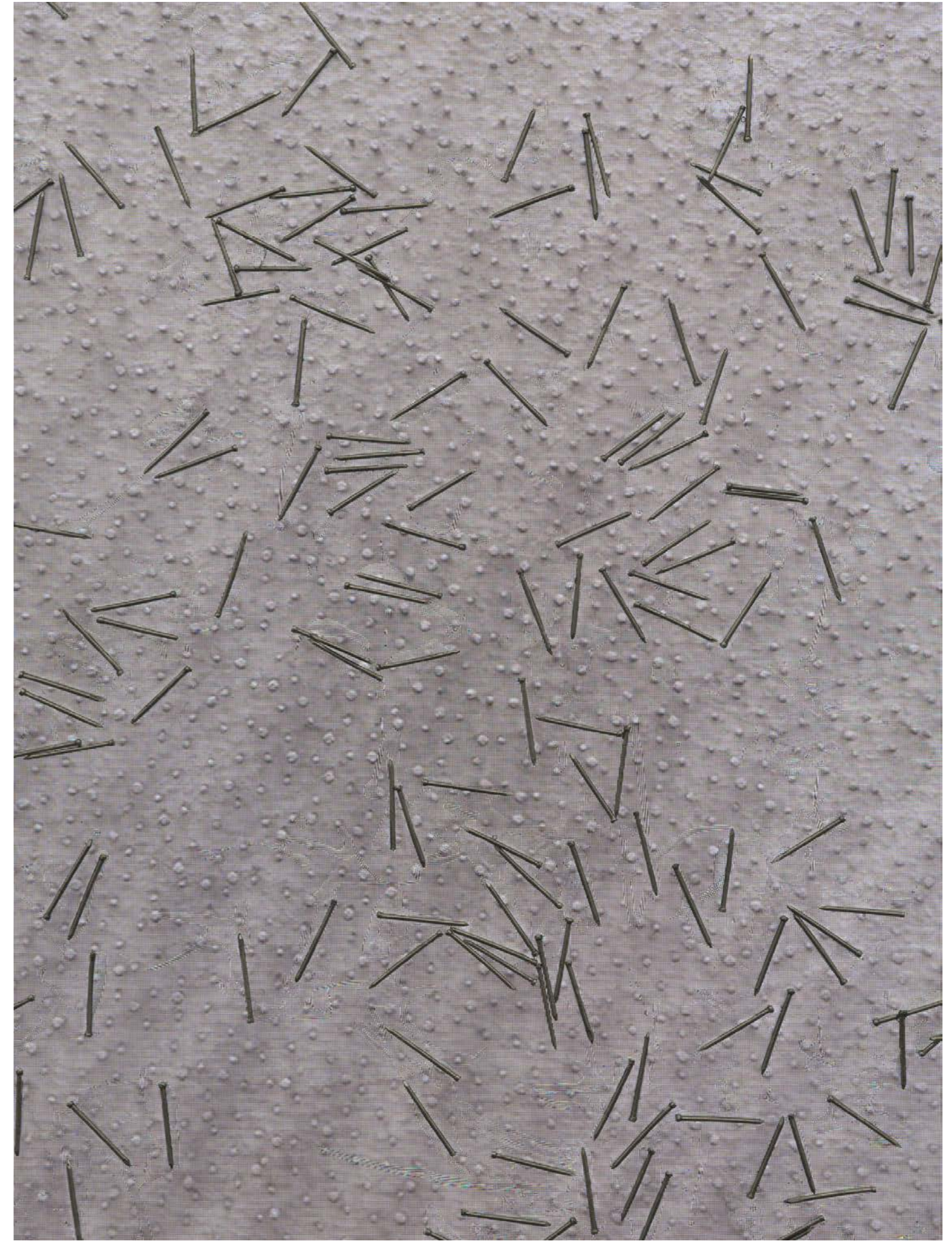


ren, mit der sich Okiishi und seine Künstlergeneration des Post-Internet wieder dem haptischen Material zuwendet<sup>2</sup> und dabei – wie Okiishi es unternimmt – durch Störungen der Technik dem vermeintlich Immateriellen des digitalen Bildes plastische Qualitäten abgewinnt.

„Screen Presence“ kann in diesem Sinne als objekthafte Anwesenheit des Bildschirms und materiale Präsenz des elektronisch-digitalen Bildes verstanden werden. Der Titel der Arbeit spielt aber auch darauf an, dass auf dem Bildschirm des Smartphones, Tablets oder Computers via Internet alles gleichermaßen gegenwärtig ist, Geschichtlichkeit also außer Kraft gesetzt wird. Demgegenüber integriert Okiishi durch den visuellen Rückkoppelungseffekt zeitliche Bildschichten in seine Arbeit. Zusätzlich installiert er die Monitore an verschiedenen Orten im Haus. Im Einerlei des Gegenwärtigen führt er also wieder die Differenz von Hier und Dort, und mit dieser räumlichen Spezifizierung auch die Unterscheidung von Vorhin, Jetzt und Nachher ein. Damit rührt er an das, was Geschichtlichkeit voraussetzt – ein zu klärendes Verhältnis zwischen Subjekt und Objekt und zwischen Abbild und Bild.

Barbara Engelbach  
Museum Ludwig, Köln

- 1 Michael Sanchez untersucht, wie sich das Kunstsystem seit der enormen Verbreitung von iPhones 2011 verändert hat. Nicht nur fallen Kunstproduktion und -rezeption durch die schnelle Zirkulation von Bildern via Smartphones und Tablets mittlerweile annähernd in Echtzeit zusammen, auch beschreibt Sanchez, wie seit einigen Jahren eine Kunst entsteht, die als digitales Abbild überzeugend wirkt. Zugleich beobachtet er, dass vermehrt Kuratoren Werke von Künstlern in Gruppenausstellungen zusammenführen, deren Zusammenstellung sich algorithmischen Koinzidenzen als vermeintliche digitale Netzwerke ohne eine Entsprechung im sozialen Raum verdanken. Michael Sanchez, 2011. *On Art and Transmission*, in: *Artforum International*, Sommer 2013, S. 284-301.
- 2 vgl. Annie Godfrey Larmon, *The Very Quick of the Word*, in: *List: Projects: „Ken Okiishi“*, Ausstellungskatalog Hessel Museum of Art, New York und List Visual Arts Center, MIT Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2014, S. 69.





## Werkangaben

Ken Okiishi

Screen Presence, 2014

Screen Presence: gesture/data (Uecker), 2014, Nägel und Epoxidharz auf Flachbildfernseher, HD-Video übertragen auf .mp4 (Farbe, Ton).

Screen Presence: gesture/data (for Mr. Haubrich), 2014, Öl auf Flachbildfernseher, HD-Video übertragen auf .mp4 (Farbe, Ton).

Screen Presence: gesture/data (feedback channels), 2014, Chroma Key Blue Video Paint auf Flachbildfernseher, HD-Video übertragen auf .mp4 (Farbe, Ton)

## Biografie

Ken Okiishi

\*1978 in Ames, US

lebt und arbeitet in New York, US und Berlin, DE

2014

Eggleston und Andere, "reality bites", Mathew, Berlin, DE (Einzel)

Whitney Biennial 2014, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, US (Gruppe)

Ken Okiishi, Reena Spaulings, New York, US (Einzel)

Nick Mauss & Ken Okiishi, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, BR (Gruppe)

Cut to Swipe, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, US (Gruppe)

The Material Image, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, US (Gruppe)

2013

Speculations on Anonymous Materials, Fridericianum, Kassel, DE (Gruppe)

gesture/data, Pilar Corrias, London, UK (Einzel)

Das Beste vom Besten, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, DE (Gruppe)

[List Projects] Ken Okiishi, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, US (Einzel)

A Way Out As Hovering, Rongwrong, Amsterdam, NL (Einzel)

The Very Quick of the Word, Hessel Museum of Art, Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, US (Einzel)

Love is still colder than capital, Mathew, Berlin, DE (Gruppe)

Version Control, Arnolfini, Bristol, UK (Gruppe)

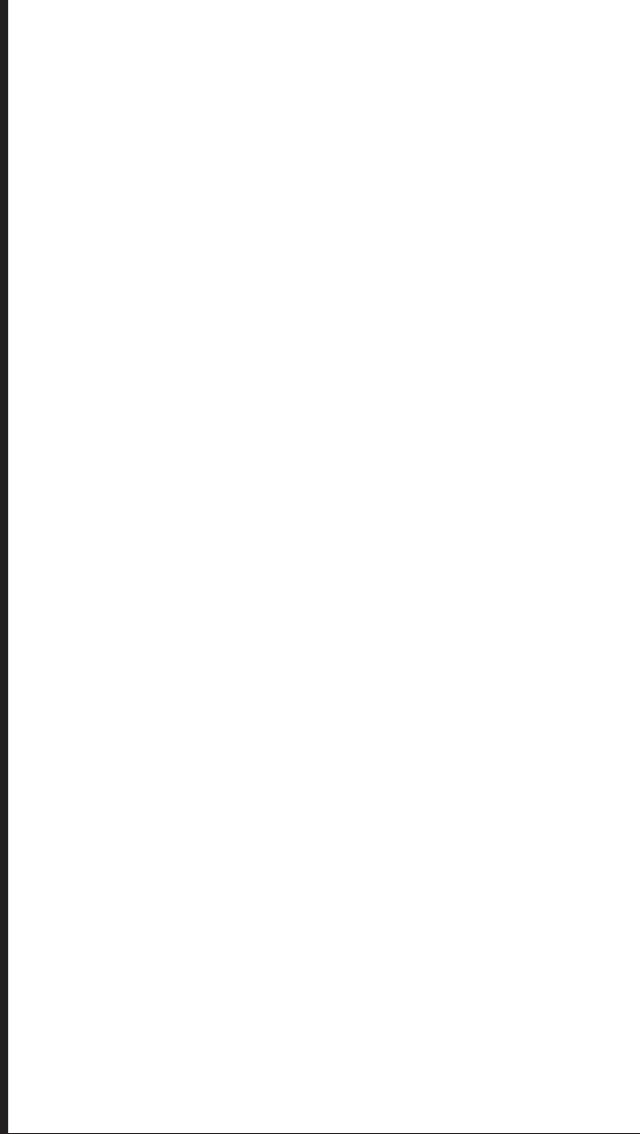
Liebe ist Kälter als das Kapital, Kunsthaus Bregenz, AT (Gruppe)

Frozen Lakes, Artists Space, New York, US (Gruppe)

Museum Ludwig  
21.10.2014 bis 01.02.2015

Ken Okiishi  
»Screen Presence«

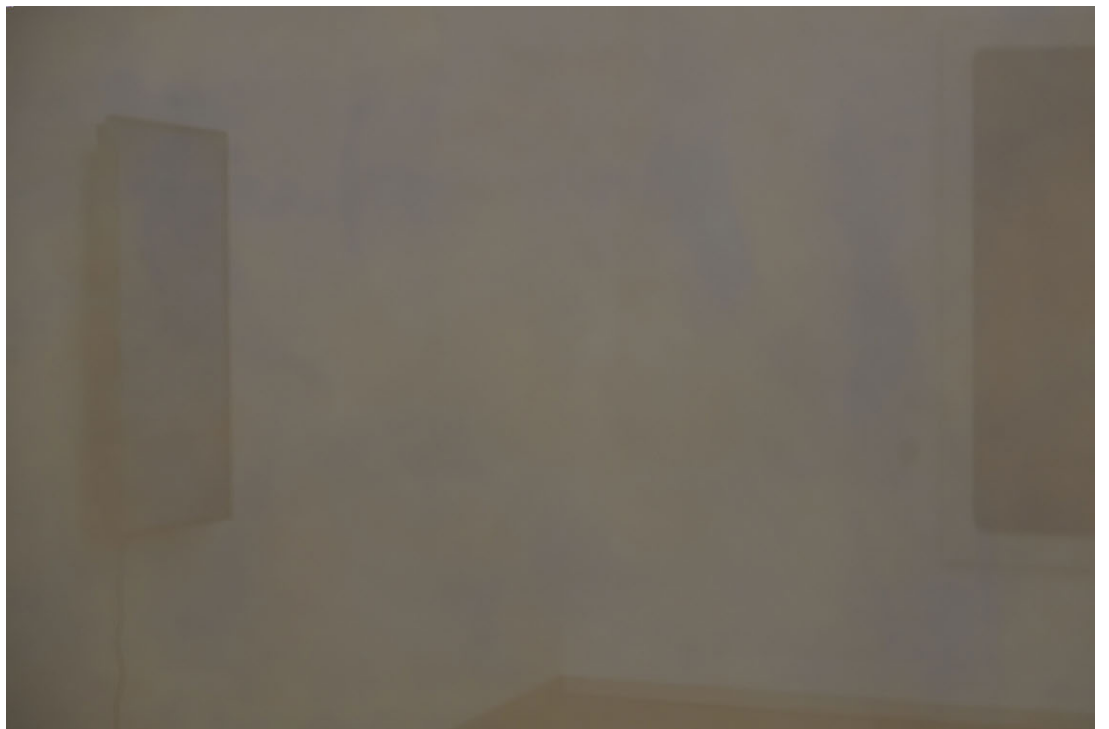
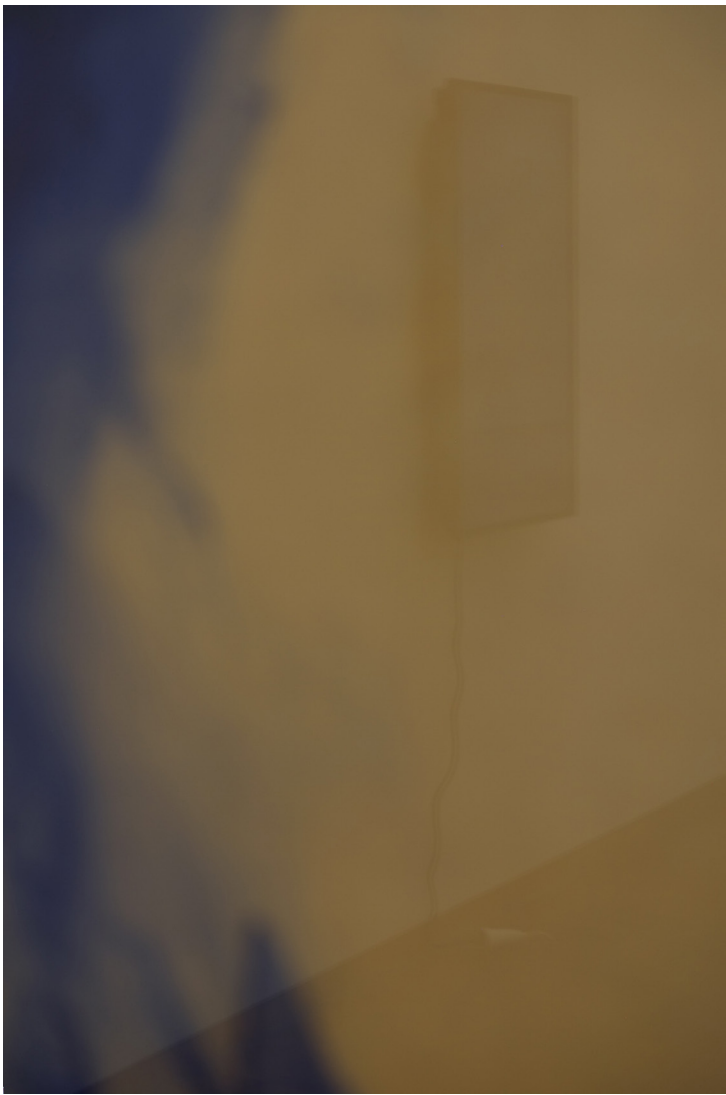
Dienstag bis Sonntag 10–18 Uhr  
Heinrich-Böll-Platz, Köln



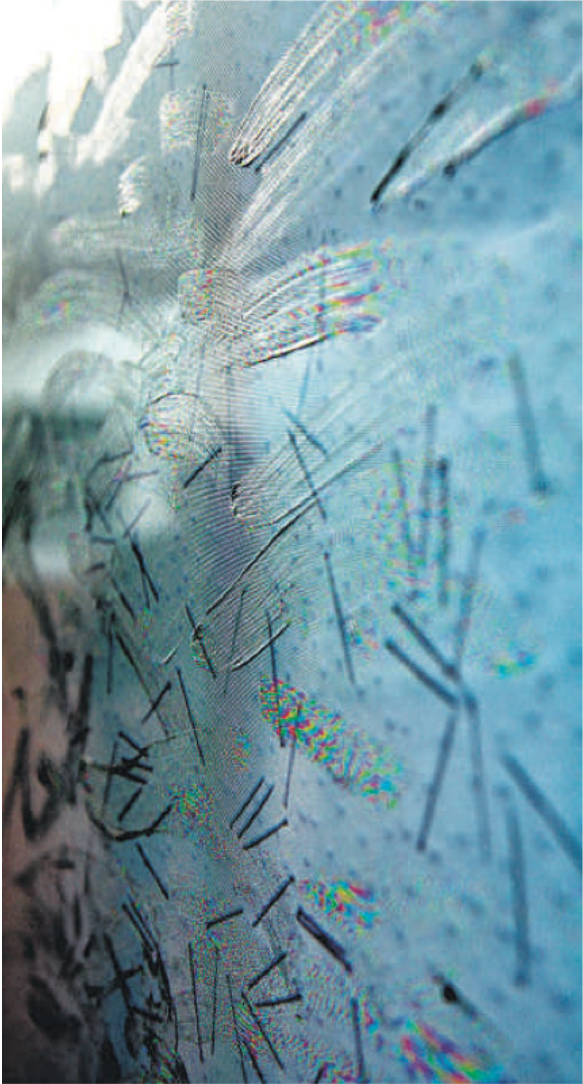
Jahre Künstler Museen

KUNST  
STIFTUNG  
NRW

MUSEUM  
LUDWIG



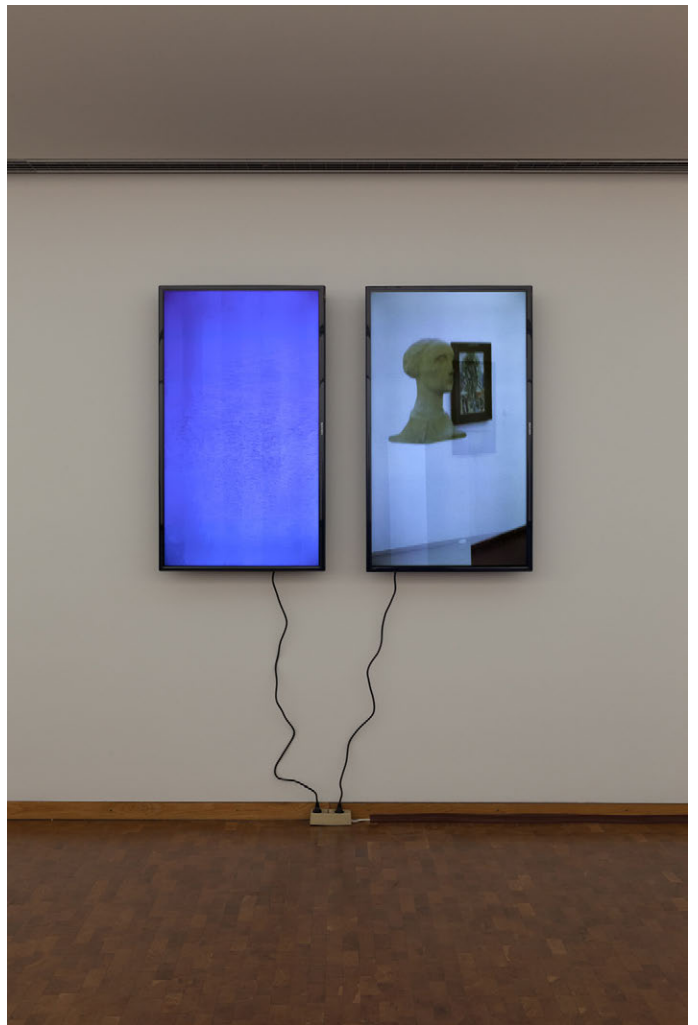












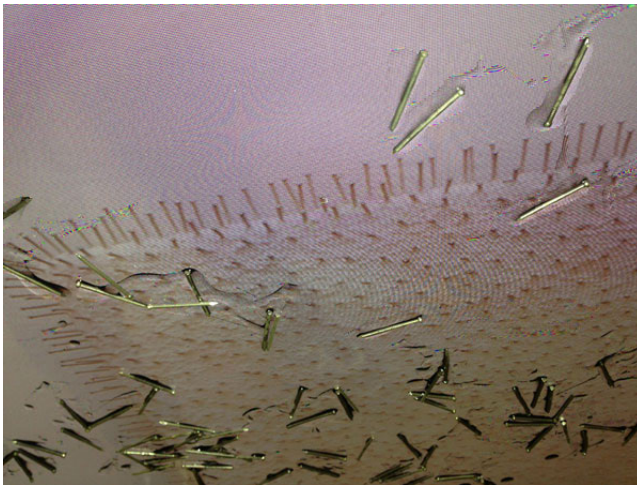


## Ken Okiishi

*What new or old tools are you attached to in your art practice?*

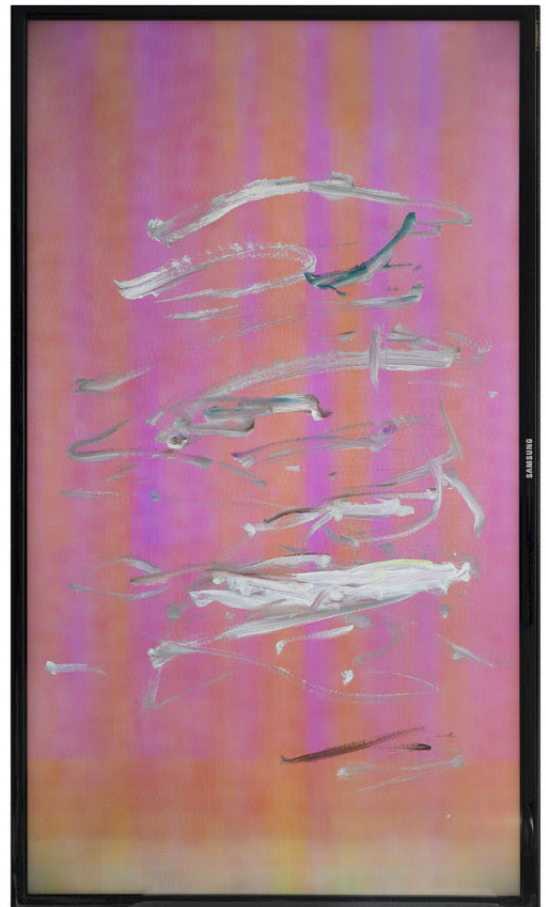
In a world where easily circulatable image files of artworks have become interchangeable with, or even more present as the artwork than the physical work itself, there is often a feeling of seeing an artwork in person as a simple identification within a mentally plugged-in database.

In the art-



Detail of Ken Okiishi, "gesture/data (Uecker)" (2014). Nails and epoxy on flat-screen television, HD video transferred to .mp4 (color, sound). Gift of the Kunststiftung NRW. Collection Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

historical realm of "video art" that is the primary genealogy that my own work works out of, this problem leaps in multiple directions at once. Video, as a medium which intrinsically has a technological material but also distributable container through which it is recorded and viewed, is one of the few art mediums that can have its full presence felt in dramatically different locations and viewing conditions at the same time. While it is true that the best projection from original formats at MoMA



Ken Okiishi. "gesture/data" (2015). Oil and Chroma Key

versus a low-resolution streamed image are visually and aurally different, in a work such as VALIE EXPORT's *Asemie or the Inability of Expressing Oneself Through*

Video Paint on flat-screen televisions, VHS, and HD video transferred to .mp4 (color, sound), 1:04 min. loop. Courtesy of the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York.

*Facial Expressions* (1973), the presence of the artwork rips through all compressions and distributions of the moving image, no matter how low or high the resolution. This cannot be said for Pasolini's films from the 1970s, for example, which are miraculous in the movie theater and basically unwatchable on the computer screen. While the main formal issue here may be scale—but also how light is produced and recorded through film versus video—the transportability of the “presence” of the artwork is what interests me. Through the “envy” of what is behind the multiplicity of screens that we cuddle with and peer through all day long, the “other” side of the screen—the one we live and work on—has started to feel exceedingly flat and deadened. Our minds feel a rush of pleasure as we see one of our friends doing something “epic” or “cool,” but then the finger slides down the screen and maybe there is the most devastating email—and that devastation also feels evacuated of physicality, even when you start crying. It's all of these things that happen on one side of the screen that have the potential to jump onto the other: somehow the directness of the video-art medium allows jumps in physicality between both sides of the screen, of the transmission of “feeling,” in a way that film requires the scale of the movie screen, or a painting requires one to be there in person with the singular object, or Instagram produces a “viewing experience” that is simultaneously immediate and unreachable. Photography, as a medium, is the most disordered in our present moment. It probably requires the most work in order to be seen as different “in person” than in its screen image. Medium-specificity in our current media-system throws the analytical mind into feedback loop hell. But it is worth the work, to become alive.

There is an urgency, at the moment, in our ever-tightening range of feelings in visual experiences, that artworks make us aware of the multiplicity of different modes of seeing and feeling, and that those differences are made distinct and distinctly material.

### *What tools have you rejected?*

I reject all “pure” tools, since those fail to bring the viewer to life. (The viewer, for me, is an automaton that can become a “real human.” I like this old-fashioned image of the robot—the automaton—because it is still so easy to project feeling into its eyes. Have you seen these cheap robot dogs they sell at flower stores, that have these very tender eyes? It's amazing how, no matter how low- or high-tech a robot is, it has to have these basic mechanistic movements on some level, and these tender-looking eyes, or it looks absolutely emotionally impenetrable. The way certain overly-rendered animations have the slickness of the screen they are watched on, as if the skin of everything depicted is impervious to communication—certain machines have that presence in real life. I reject emotionally impenetrable machines as well.)

## *What have the tools done to your art?*

At a certain point video allowed me to re-script my own life, to become something else in relation to the media-systems that organize being. In my recent work, the simultaneous being of unbridgeable media and ways of working has ruptured vision in this particularly satisfying way. I love watching people look at these screen-agglomerations. As the poet Jeff Nagy wrote in a review of one of my recent exhibitions:

A visitor born under the sign of the iPhone's internal accelerometer might find herself fighting off a manic urge to pull the screens off the wall and shake them until the snippet of a Food Network cooking show or an ad for a decade-old Honda or a few seconds of 60 Minutes automatically rights itself. Despite the paintings' portrait-oriented similarity to comically outsize smartphones, the archive they screen stays landscape. They refuse to respond in the ways we now expect from our media technologies. [...] In their literal détournement of the screens that facilitate our conspicuous consumption of "the present," Okiishi's paintings [on flat-screen televisions] create a tension played out in the viewer as the wagged dog of an immediately graspable conceptual gesture—a tension that is genuinely moving and feels perversely like relief.

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### CONTRIBUTOR

#### Ken Okiishi

KEN OKIISHI is an artist who lives in New York.

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### RECOMMENDED ARTICLES

#### INCONVERSATION



## RAINER GANAHL with Sara Roffino

by Sara Roffino

OCT 2015 | ART

For twenty years, Rainer Ganahl has captured images of speakers and their publics during seminars and lectures for his ongoing series "Seminars/Lectures" (S/L). Other presentations of the S/L series include the Venice Biennale (2007), Wallach Gallery at Columbia University (2005), the Generali Foundation (1997), and at Max Protetch Gallery (1999). Sara Roffino caught up with Ganahl several times throughout the run of his current exhibition, *Artists: Recent photographs from my S/L series*, on view at Kai Matsumiya through October 25.

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# Auf dem digitalen Nagelbett

**KUNST** Ken Okiishi sucht im Kölner Museum Ludwig nach der Stofflichkeit der neuen Medien

VON MICHAEL KOHLER

Es sei verdammt schwer gewesen, so Ken Okiishi, diese Nägel zu beschaffen. Nämlich die gleichen, mit denen Günther Uecker vor mehr als 50 Jahren die Leinwand seines im Kölner Museum Ludwig hängenden „Nagelreliefs weiß-weiß“ traktierte. Hätte es ihm Okiishi gleichgetan, wäre von seinem eigenen Kunstwerk nicht viel übrig geblieben: Für „Screen Presence“ filmte er zunächst Ueckers genageltes Relief aus verschiedenen, leicht verschobenen Perspektiven, montierte die Aufnahmen dann aneinander und beklebte zuletzt die Oberfläche des Bildschirms, auf dem sein Film nun läuft, mit Nägeln aus Ueckers großem Handwerksarsenal. Jetzt hängen Original und elektronisches Abbild einander gegenüber – die Luft dazwischen ist eine Art unsichtbare Grenze zwischen analoger und digitaler Kunst.

## Ein Projekt der Kunststiftung NRW

Okiishis dreiteilige Installation gehört zu einem Projekt, mit dem die Kunststiftung NRW ihr 25-jähriges Bestehen feiert. So lange unterstützt die Stiftung nun schon die Landeskultur und hat dabei auch zahlreiche Ausstellungen teilweise finanziert. Zum Jubiläum wurden 25 Künstler aus aller Welt eingeladen, sich mit ausgesuchten Sammlungsstücken aus 25 NRW-Museen zu beschäftigen. Die dabei entstandenen Werke gehen nach Abschluss des feierlichen Reigens in die jeweiligen Sammlungen ein.

Bei seinem Streifzug durch das Kölner Museum Ludwig verguckte sich Okiishi, ein New Yorker Videokünstler, der derzeit in Berlin



Naheinstellung auf einen Monitor aus der dreiteiligen Installation „Screen Presence“ von Ken Okiishi

BILD: MAX GRÖNERT

lebt, nicht zufällig in Ueckers Nagel- und Yves Kleins benachbartes „Blaues Schwammrelief“. Denn Okiishi interessiert sich für die Stofflichkeit des digitalen Filmbilds – oder genauer gesagt dafür, ob es beim digitalen Filmbild überhaupt noch etwas gibt, das an die Materialität eines aus bemalten Nägeln oder Schwämmen bestehenden Reliefs erinnert.

## Die Probe aufs Exempel

Mit seiner an drei Orten im Haus verteilten Installation macht er nun die Probe aufs Exempel: Nachdem er den ersten Monitor mit Nägeln beklebte, filmte er diesen noch einmal ab und ließ die dabei entstandenen Bilder über einen anderen, dieses Mal mit Pinselstrichen bearbeiteten Bildschirm laufen. So legte er Schicht auf Schicht, bis sich tatsächlich so etwas wie ein beständiges Flimmern zwischen Materialität und Immaterialität ergab.

Am schönsten sieht dieses Spiel auf dem letzten Monitor aus. Auch hier taucht noch einmal Ueckers Nagelrelief auf – als Zwischenspiel zu einer verblüffend einfachen Fortschreibung von Yves Kleins Blau-Malerei. Hier nimmt Ken Okiishi das Blau des ruhenden, auf ein Signal wartenden Bildschirms und verfremdet es durch mehrmaliges Umkopieren, bis sich Pixel bilden. Auch Kleins patentiertes Blau war eine Art Industriestandard – und damit gewissermaßen die materielle Grundlage für die Kunst.

„Ken Okiishi – Screen Presence“, Museum Ludwig, Heinrich-Böll-Platz, Köln, Di.-So. 10-18 Uhr, bis 1. Februar 2015.

Installation views and details from *Cut to Swipe*, an exhibition of recent acquisitions, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Organized by Stuart Comer, Chief Curator, with Erica Papernik, Assistant Curator, and Leora Morinis, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance Art. 11 October 2014 - 22 March 2015.



Ken Okiishi. *gesture/data*. 2014. Oil and Chroma Key Video Paint on flat-screen televisions, VHS and HD video transferred to .mp4 (color, sound). Left screen: 12:21 min. loop Right screen: 75:13 min. loop. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Generosity of Jill and Peter Kraus.



**AN EVENING WITH**

**Ken Okiishi**

**MON, DEC 1, 7:00 PM**

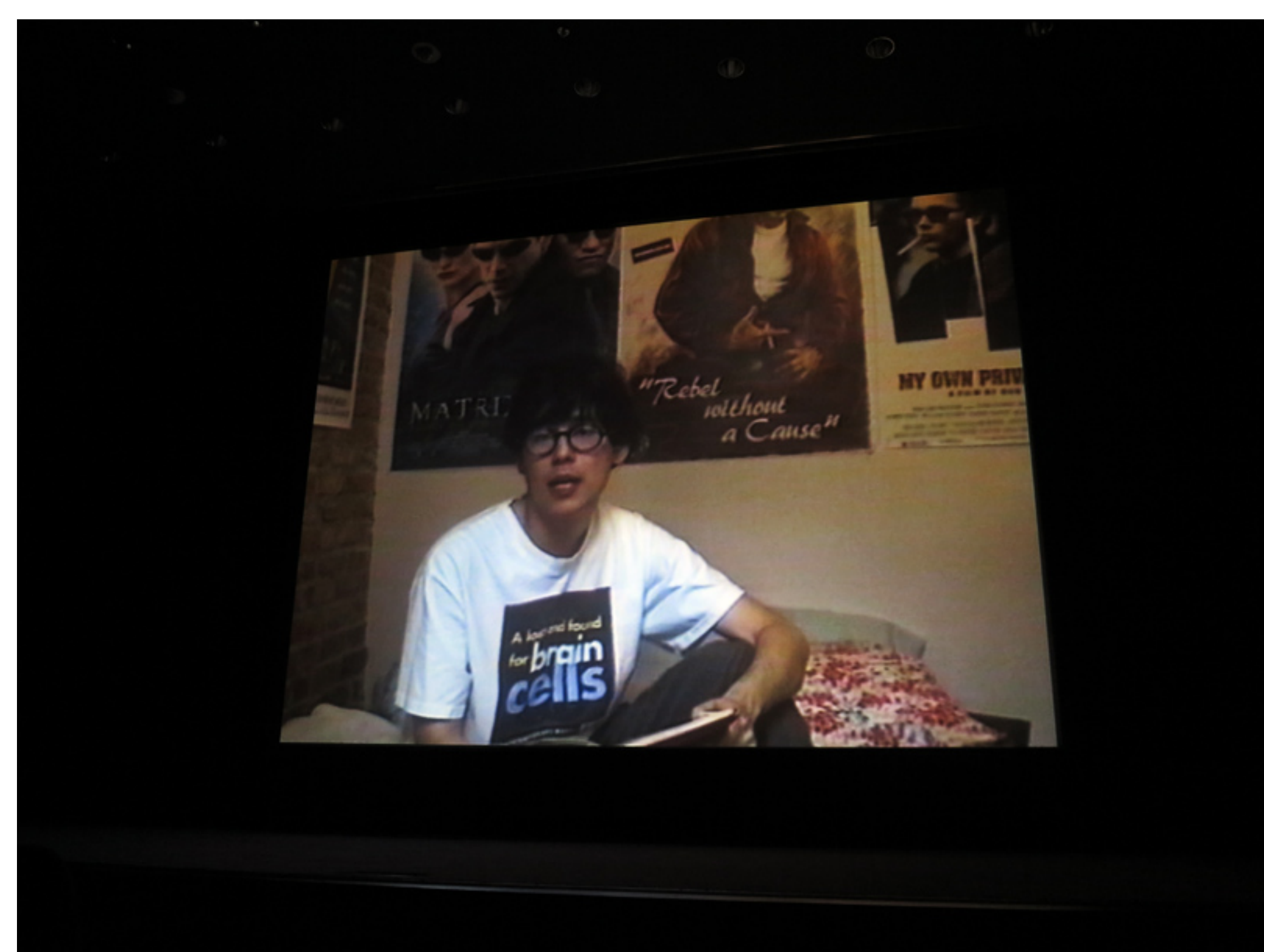


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Seminar/Lecture, Ken Okiishi, Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen, Stuart Comer, Modern Mondays: An Evening with Ken Okiishi, MoMA, New York  
12/1/2014

4 photographs 20 x24 inches, ed. of 4



# Interview

SPRING FASHION ISSUE  
MADISON

When you face a wall of Ken Okiishi's new paintings for the Whitney Biennial, you don't quite know where to look. The works—oil paint on flat-screen TV monitors—present a puzzle: Spectral brushwork gleams on a glass surface while noisy video gibbers and glitches on—or under—the screen. The television monitors are hung vertically, further disorienting a viewer's relationship to the video image.

Okiishi's breakout 2010 film work (*Goodbye to Manhattan*) was a fantastical reimagining of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979) that layered footage from the iconic film with magical green-screen scenes starring Okiishi's closest friends—most notably his partner, the artist Nick Mauss—stuttering through Google-translated German-to-English dialogue like the glamorous bohemian grandchildren of Max Headroom adrift in

Berlin. His latest productions increase that sense of tension and translation. He even exacerbates the contrast between video and paint, applying conventional brushstrokes of traditional oil paints directly over flickering, pinkish video footage digitized from deteriorating VHS tapes. Okiishi, however, manages to pull off harmonies as well as disruptions: green- and blue-screen colors painted over glowing blue screens, fleshy pinks on top of a public-access tape of shirtless young men in a choreographed Chinese New Year dance. Not surprisingly, much of Okiishi's work circulates online: Google his name, and images of his 2013 Frieze Projects commission in London appear, in which robots messily shoot paintballs at canvases, effectively creating a live spectacle for the crowds, who proceeded to catch the act with their camera phones. "My spe-

cific interest is the perception that when you're seeing something on the screen, you're seeing the real thing," Okiishi says. "People considering print media in the past had the same kind of questions about aura," he says. "I had already been making straight video works, and then I asked, 'What if I move even further outside of the screen and work on top of the screen?'"

Born in Iowa in 1978, Okiishi studied art at Cooper Union with Hans Haacke and Doug Ashford, professors for whom, he recalls, the social, theoretical, and formal were inseparable. His Whitney debut takes place simultaneous to his solo show at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, where his impressionistic paintings float over infomercials, celebrity news, and late-night cable TV—an ultimately nostalgic meditation on the strange place of the analog gesture in a digital age. —MAIKA POLLACK

## Ken OKIISHI



KEN OKIISHI IN NEW YORK, JANUARY 2014. JACKET: HUGO BOSS. SHIRT: SANDRO.

# TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Dezember 2015 · 25. Jahrgang · Heft 100  
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25 Jahre  
TEXTE ZUR KUNST

# THE CANON

KEN OKIISHI

CITIZENSHIP



Hans Haacke und / and Wolfgang Thierse bei der Einweihung von / at the inauguration of „Der Bevölkerung“, Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin, 2000

While canon formation is by definition a conservative act, the fight for power over who decides which works are complex enough to be deemed canonical – which is to say able to continually produce new readings over time – is decidedly explosive, even radical, especially as the 20th century has opened up positions of power to multiple “groups” previously given no vote in what qualifies as complexity or even, more generally, what the world should look like. What the frame

of the canon allows, if there is a progressive side to this dusty concept, is the negotiation of an expanded temporality and with it a call to grapple with the kinds of arguments and time frames that would normally be excluded from the obsessive contemporaneity of “contemporary art.”

Within this enlarged view of “the canonical,” a central issue emerges that has otherwise been all but completely eviscerated by the death march of cliché: the critical views towards racism and “other-ed” cultures that emerged, e.g., in various “area studies” within the American, French, English, and then global academic contexts following the mid-century postcolonial and civil rights struggles; a set of questions that, on a discursive level, have been thoroughly over-processed, while their application on a societal level has been more random. In the particular context of *Texte zur Kunst* it must also be mentioned, even if it is not polite, that within the contemporary German art world (i.e., this journal’s habitus and sphere of influence), issues of racism and cultural participation seem to have been so thoroughly ignored that it is only recognized as a problem when raised, and almost never made into an issue with any real significance or effect. Yet somehow the unprecedented froth of recent migration brings streams of 19th and 20th century history back into view, both through the humanitarian affects these images and stories produce and through speculations about what acts these anxieties have and could produce within various fantasies of “the other” – whether “the other” is a refugee from Syria, a photo of “Mama Merkel,” a stranger handing you a chocolate bar in a Munich train station, or a neo-Nazi burning down your home.

We are reminded that our migrant ancestors were sometimes forced, via various forms of

Während das Aufstellen eines Kanons per definitionem ein konservativer Akt ist, ist der Machtkampf um die Frage, wer darüber entscheidet, welche Werke hinreichend komplex sind – also in der Lage, über die Zeit beständig neue Lesarten zu produzieren –, um als kanonisch betrachtet werden zu können, ausgesprochen explosiv, sogar radikal: insbesondere da das 20. Jahrhundert Machtpositionen für zahlreiche „Gruppen“ eröffnet hat, denen zuvor kein Stimmrecht darüber gegeben war, was als Komplexität zu gelten habe oder gar, im allgemeineren Sinn, wie die Welt aussehen solle. Was der Rahmen des Kanons erlaubt, ist, sofern dieses verstaubte Konzept denn eine progressive Seite an sich haben sollte, die Verhandlung einer erweiterten Zeitlichkeit und damit einhergehend die Forderung, sich mit den Arten von Argumenten und Zeitrahmen auseinanderzusetzen, die aus der obsessiven Zeitgenossenschaft der „zeitgenössischen Kunst“ normalerweise ausgeschlossen wären.

In dieser erweiterten Perspektive auf das „Kanonische“ tritt ein zentrales Problem zutage, das anderswo durch den Todesmarsch des Klischees schon praktisch völlig ausgeweidet wurde: die kritische Gesinnung gegenüber dem Rassismus und der Kennzeichnung von Kulturen als „andersartig“, wie sie zum Beispiel in verschiedenen „Regionalwissenschaften“ im amerikanischen, französischen, englischen und schließlich im globalen akademischen Kontext nach den postkolonialen Kämpfen und der Bürgerrechtsbewegung ab der Mitte des Jahrhunderts hervortraten; eine Reihe von Fragen, die auf der diskursiven Ebene mehr als gründlich behandelt, auf der gesellschaftlichen Ebene hingegen eher zufällig geltend gemacht wurden. Im speziellen Kontext von *Texte zur Kunst* muss zudem – so

unhöflich dies auch sein mag – erwähnt werden, dass in der zeitgenössischen deutschen Kunstwelt (das heißt im Habitus und in der Einflussosphäre dieser Zeitschrift) Fragen des Rassismus und der kulturellen Teilhabe offenbar so vollständig ignoriert worden sind, dass sie nur dann als Problem anerkannt wurden, wenn sie offen zur Sprache kamen, und fast nie als Frage mit tatsächlicher Bedeutung oder Wirkung behandelt wurden. Doch in gewisser Weise lassen die eskalierenden Migrationsbewegungen der jüngsten Zeit manche Ströme der Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts wieder ins Blickfeld rücken, sowohl aufgrund der humanitären Affekte, die diese Bilder und Geschichten auslösen, wie durch die Spekulationen darüber, welche Reaktionen diese Ängste im Rahmen diverser Fantasien über das „Andere“ bewirkt haben und bewirken können – sei das „Andere“ ein Flüchtling aus Syrien, ein Foto von „Mutti Merkel“, ein Fremder, der einem auf dem Münchner Bahnhof eine Tafel Schokolade reicht, oder ein Neonazi, der dein Haus abfackelt.

Wir werden daran erinnert, dass unseren Vorfahren mit Migrationshintergrund die allgemeinen Gepflogenheiten der „Globalisierung“ bisweilen durch verschiedene Formen der Sklaverei oder durch die Bedrohung von Völkermord und Krieg aufgezwungen wurden. Gleichzeitig waren es manchmal genau diese Gepflogenheiten, die von unseren Vorfahren gefeiert wurden bei ihrem Versuch, ihre nur zum Teil selbst gewählten Träume von wirtschaftlicher Verbesserung zu verwirklichen – in der Hoffnung auf eine radikale Veränderung der sozialen Mobilität und der genealogischen Entwicklung –, was wiederum dazu beigetragen hat, das 20. Jahrhundert für eine umfassendere Vorstellung des „Wir“ zu öffnen. Doch in vielen deutschen Kontexten ist es trotz all

slavery or the threat of genocide and war, into the general habits of “globalization.” At the same time, it is sometimes precisely these habits that our ancestors celebrated in a pursuit of semi-chosen dreams of economic betterment – of a hope for a radical shift in class-mobility and genealogical path – and that this, in turn, served to open up the 20th century to a broader notion of “us.” Somehow, though all of this, “globalization” has nevertheless failed within many German contexts to produce a permanent breaking down of the concepts and habits of *Inland* and *Ausland*, even though the internal economic benefits of globalization continue to be a “miracle.” That there could be three generations of Turkish ghetto without basic voting rights for the majority of its residents in West and then unified Germany (circa 1961–99) is, to this day, still hard to swallow. The belief that certain permanent “visitors” should have no right to participate in the democratic society in which they live will once again be thrown into the spotlight, as contemporary refugees think they are immigrating to Germany with little knowledge that it is only very recently an *Einwanderungsland* – and that it is still unclear if their migration will be treated as permanent, temporary, or permanently temporary: it must be remembered that until 1999 this major democratic nation got away with limiting the ability to participate in the most basic philosophical and practical act of democracy (voting) to basically only people with German “blood” (voting rights being limited to citizens; citizenship being defined via *Jus sanguinis*). While the obsessively calculated welfare state kept this problem from rupturing the surface in an all-out civil rights movement, the new wave of migrants should put questions of how this past has

affected German society in general – and what can be done to move forward – into overdrive. The 1999 radical legal restructuring of German citizenship incorporating limited *Jus soli*, which gave children born in Germany to parents with no German “blood” (who were legally residing in Germany for 8+ years) a basic possibility of German citizenship, now reaches a significant stress test, as the children born in 2000 are about to become adults in a time of violently fraught discussions of who and what should be “allowed” in Europe. While this demographic is comparatively small, it is the first generation in a global context to grow up with the legal possibility that being “German” could simply mean being born in Germany, and consequently that voting rights are not only defined by mystified concepts of origin.

It is this specific combination of racism, citizenship, and the German art world that I wish to bring up in the enlarged temporal perspective of canon formation. I am not referring to a lack of cultural hybridity (such as “German-Turkish” content) in art but to the problems of a society that (still) so rigorously enforces permanent, genealogical, and even genetic notions of in-group and out-group, and has little practice in more complex paradigms. While individual decisions can be made to highlight certain artistic positions it is still difficult, for example, to immediately come up with a non-white German (citizen) artist considered canonical. The same cannot be said of trying to come up with a canonical German artist who was involved with second-wave feminism; that is, very fortunately, rather easy to do. And so, from my lowly position as an *inländischer Ausländer* (via the German diaspora of my mother’s family; as a spouse of



David Hammons, „Blizzard Ball Sale“, 1983

dieser „Globalisierung“ aus irgendeinem Grund nicht gelungen, die Begriffe und Regeln von *Inland* und *Ausland* dauerhaft aufzulösen, auch wenn der innere wirtschaftliche Nutzen der Globalisierung weiterhin als „Wunder“ bezeichnet wird. Dass es drei Generationen im türkischen Getto geben konnte, dessen Bewohnern und Bewohnerinnen in ihrer Mehrheit im Westen und später im vereinigten Deutschland (von ca. 1961 bis 1999) das elementare Wahlrecht verweigert wurde, ist bis heute schwer zu verdauen. Die Vorstellung, dass bestimmte dauerhafte „Gäste“ kein Recht haben sollten, an der demokratischen Gesellschaft

teilzuhaben, in der sie leben, wird erneut in den Blickpunkt rücken, da die heutigen Flüchtlinge glauben, nach Deutschland zu immigrieren, und sich dabei kaum bewusst sind, dass es erst seit sehr kurzer Zeit ein „Einwanderungsland“ ist – und dass immer noch ungewiss ist, ob ihre Einwanderung als dauerhafte, als temporäre oder als dauerhaft temporäre behandelt werden wird: Man muss sich daran erinnern, dass diese große demokratische Nation es sich bis 1999 erlauben konnte, die Möglichkeit der Teilnahme am philosophisch und praktisch grundlegendsten Akt der Demokratie (den Wahlen) im Wesentlichen auf Menschen mit deutschem „Blut“ zu beschränken. (Das auf Staatsangehörige beschränkte Wahlrecht; die über das *Ius sanguinis* definierte Staatsangehörigkeit.) Während der zwanghaft kalkulierte Sozialstaat verhinderte, dass dieses Problem in einer allgemeinen Bürgerrechtsbewegung durch die Oberfläche bricht, sollte die neue Welle von Migranten und Migrantinnen Fragen über Fragen darüber aufwerfen, wie diese Vergangenheit die deutsche Gesellschaft im Allgemeinen beeinflusst hat – und was getan werden kann, um voranzuschreiten. Die radikale Reform des deutschen Staatsangehörigkeitsrechts im Jahr 1999, mit der ein eingeschränktes *Ius soli* eingeführt wurde, das in Deutschland geborenen Kindern, deren Eltern kein deutsches „Blut“ haben, die grundlegende Möglichkeit gibt (sofern ein Elternteil seit acht Jahren in Deutschland gelebt hat), die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit zu erwerben, wird nun einem hartem Stresstest unterzogen, da die im Jahr 2000 geborenen Kinder kurz vor ihrer Volljährigkeit stehen, und dies in einer Zeit heftig aufgeladener Diskussionen darüber, wer und was in Europa „erlaubt“ sein sollte. Unbeschadet der relativ geringen Größe dieser Bevölkerungsgruppe





Hans Haacke, „Der Bevölkerung“, seit / ongoing since 2000, Foto / photo: 2006

a first-generation American of “pure” German “blood”; as a Japanese-American who is seen as foreign in all contexts, including Japan, but feels at home in many different places; and as a New Yorker who tried living in Berlin, off and on, for more than twelve years at the beginning of the 2000s) ... and also from my position of relative “youth” within the canonical temporality – which, in itself, probably makes me officially unqualified even to enter into this canon-formation discussion ... I can still point out that, on the level of the logic of political agency, it is difficult to imagine even a so-called “white” person who was socialized by these structures – ones that specifically excluded individuals based on ideologies of

“blood” origin well into the multicultural ideologies of the 1980s and '90s – being able to exercise anything but hopelessly dated and/or simulated judgment on a global stage.

handelt es sich um die erste Generation in einem globalen Kontext, die mit der rechtlichen Möglichkeit aufwächst, dass „Deutschsein“ einfach bedeuten könnte, in Deutschland geboren zu sein, und dass das Stimmrecht dementsprechend nicht nur durch mystifizierte Konzepte der Herkunft definiert ist.

Diese spezifische Kombination von Rassismus, Staatsangehörigkeit und deutscher Kunstwelt möchte ich in der umfassenderen zeitlichen Perspektive der Kanonbildung zur Sprache bringen. Ich beziehe mich dabei nicht auf einen Mangel an kultureller Hybridität (wie etwa „deutsch-türkische“ Inhalte) in der Kunst, sondern auf die Probleme einer Gesellschaft, die (immer noch) auf so rigorose Weise dauerhafte, genealogische, sogar genetische Begriffe des „Wir“ und der „Anderen“ geltend macht und die mit komplexeren Paradigmen nur wenig Übung hat. Zwar können individuelle Entscheidungen getroffen werden, um bestimmte künstlerische Positionen herauszustellen, doch es ist zum Beispiel immer noch schwierig, auf Anhieb einen nichtweißen und (im Sinne der Staatsangehörigkeit) deutschen Künstler zu nennen, der als kanonisch betrachtet werden würde. Anders verhält es sich, wenn man versucht, eine kanonische deutsche Künstlerin zu benennen, die an der zweiten Welle des Feminismus beteiligt war; dies ist, erfreulicherweise, relativ einfach. Und so kann ich aus meiner bescheidenen Position als inländischer Ausländer (durch die deutsche Diaspora der Familie meiner Mutter; als Partner eines Amerikaners der ersten Generation mit „reinem“ deutschen „Blut“; als Japano-Amerikaner, der in allen Kontexten als Fremder gesehen wird, auch in Japan, der sich aber an vielen verschiedenen Orten zu Hause fühlt; und als New Yorker, der über mehr als zwölf Jahre

zu Beginn der 2000er Jahre immer mal wieder versucht hat, in Berlin zu leben) ... und auch aus meiner Position der relativen „Jugend“ in der kanonischen Zeitlichkeit – die mich wahrscheinlich offiziell ungeeignet dafür macht, an dieser Diskussion über die Kanonbildung überhaupt teilzunehmen – ... so kann ich dennoch darauf hinweisen, dass man sich auf der Ebene der Logik der politischen Handlungsmacht sogar einen sogenannten Weißen, der durch diese Strukturen sozialisiert wurde, die bis hinein in die multikulturellen Ideologien der 1980er und 1990er Jahre Einzelne auf der Grundlage von Ideologien der „Bluts-Abstammung“ ausschlossen, nur schwer vorstellen kann, der in der Lage wäre, auf globaler Ebene irgendetwas anderes als ein hoffnungslos veraltetes und/oder simuliertes Urteilsvermögen anzuwenden.

Übersetzung: Robert Schlicht