TIME AS A MATERIAL

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN JOAN JONAS, KEN OKIISHI, LUCY RAVEN AND JENNIFER WEST CURATED BY FILIPA RAMOS

US artist **Joan Jonas** (born in 1936, based in New York) is one of the most influential figures in post-war American art, due to pioneering work in performance and video that reinvents the relationship between art and narrative. Alongside video images, props and performance, her pieces incorporate the presence of words as a driving force of the imagination. After her solo show at HangarBicocca in Milan – a gargantuan retrospective that ranges through the forms she has produced in her almost fifty-year career – curated by Andrea Lissoni, Jonas will be featured in the US Pavilion of the next Venice Biennale, in yet another acknowledgement of the seminal importance of her work.

Ken Okiishi's work reveals a fascination for circuits of communication, agency, and the translation of meanings and materials in a digitally networked culture. Born in Iowa in 1978, Okiishi studied art at The Cooper Union with Hans Haacke and Doug Ashford as professors. He now lives and works in New York and his work has been exhibited around the world in settings such as the 2014 Whitney Biennial (New York), Pilar Corrias (London, 2013), the MIT List Visual Arts Center (Massachusetts, 2013), the Hessel Museum of Art (CCS Bard, 2013), Mathew (Berlin, 2012) and Take Ninagawa (Tokyo, 2012). Using video, performance, and installation, Okiishi's work considers – always with a significant degree of humor – how subjects are produced by totalizing concepts such as international real estate, the art world, or the dream of perfect translation.

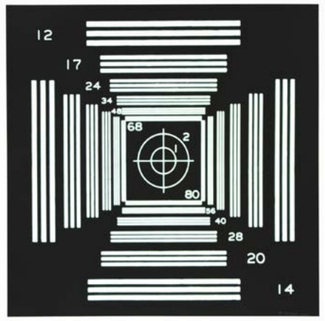
American artist **Lucy Raven** (born in 1977 in Tucson, Arizona) works with the expanded techniques of film. Making use of animation, sculptural installation, performance and live television, Raven explores the relationship of still photography to the moving image. Her projects address issues concerning the new digital movie industry, image production, and how community is created. Wide audiences have seen her works in solo and group exhibitions at the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), MoMA (New York), mumok (Vienna) and in many other galleries and institutions. Raven is also an art writer and curator and has lectured in numerous universities, including UC Berkeley, School of Visual Arts, New York, The Cooper Union, New York and CCA, San Francisco.

The practice of LA-based artist **Jennifer West** combines hypnotic, fast-paced films and performance. Instead of using cameras, her process involves manipulating the celluloid film itself through alchemical transformations using elements such as nail polish, mascara, body glitter, paintballs, and alcohol, or by staging interactive events where people are invited to perform actions on the film strips – like skateboarding directly on them. Performance is as essential to West's practice as material composition – both used to construct the work and to provide a conceptual context. In 2014, she began to make interactive "cinematic filmstrip environments." Her practice also includes performances, sculptures, filmstrip quilts, drawings, photo-based works, zines and lectures. Significant commissions include PICA (2014); High Line Art (2012); Aspen Art Museum (2010) and Tate Modern (2009). Solo exhibitions include Focal Point Gallery, Essex and Marc Foxx, LA in 2013; S1 Artspace, Sheffield in 2012; Vilma Gold, London in 2011; ContemporaryArt Museum, Houston, Western Bridge, Seattle and Kunstverein Nuremberg in 2010.

Lucy Raven, *On Location* (stills), 2014. Courtesy: the artist

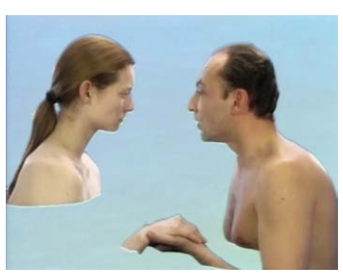
FOUR ARTISTS FROM THREE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, WORKING IN DISPARATE CONTEXTS, MEET ON THE COMMON GROUND OF WORK, LOCATED AT THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN VISUAL ARTS, MOVING IMAGE AND PERFORMANCE. SHARING THEIR IDEAS, PROCESSES, REFERENCES, AND SOURCES OF IMAGERY, THEY ANALYZE AND DISCUSS THEIR PRACTICE, AND ITS RELATION TO TIME, HISTORY, POPULAR CULTURE, THEATRE AND NARRATIVE IN AN OPEN EXCHANGE THAT INTRODUCES FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES ABOUT TIME-BASED PRACTICES AND THEIR CURRENT RE-EVALUATION IN CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC SCENARIOS.

(Introduction by Filipa Ramos)



Lucy Raven, *PR2*, 2012.
Courtesy: the artist

FILIPA RAMOS
There are such a large variety of artworks incorporating film and video. What place do you see your work occupying in this field/area?



Joan Jonas, *Volcano Saga* (still), 1989. © the artist. Courtesy: Electronic Arts Intermix, New York; Wilkinson Gallery, London; Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

JOAN JONAS
Inspired by the Happenings I saw in the 1960s, I decided to step from sculpture into the space of performance. My major references were certain painters and sculptors, poets, novelists, filmmakers, and rituals of other cultures. I wanted to refer to sources outside the scene in New York and other cities at that time. I saw the Hopi Snake Dance in New Mexico. It was an amazing experience. In 1968 I made my first film, *Wind*. In 1970 I visited Japan where I saw Noh Theater. This made a deep impression. I brought a Portapak back from Japan and began to work in front of the camera while watching myself in a monitor. This led to *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), a performance with the same closed-circuit system. The audience saw the live performance simultaneously with a detail of the performance captured by a live camera on the set. There were also prerecorded videos. Single channel works have always been generated by this process. I continue to work with these ideas concerning perception of space, of narrative, altered by a medium.

KEN OKIISHI
My genealogy as an artist traces directly to "video art" as it became distinctly related more to "painting and sculpture" and "performance art" than to narrative and experimental film. But a genealogy, as in all diagrammatic thinking, always contains bits of lies that are necessary to clean up the lines of the diagram or maintain belief in family origins. The lie in my first sentence is this: Robert Breer "discovered" me in 1997, and is the reason I was able to go to art school. But his own positioning within the rather manly world of Visionary Film was also both a true and untrue fit: Carolee Schneemann borrowed his film camera one day in the 1960s and he was pretty unnerved by what she did with it. He mumbled a lot when he spoke. His moving sculptures are much too cool for the proto-slacker "dirtiness" of Anthology Film archives. He always said that Stan Brakhage's films had the world's most pretentious titles.
My genealogy as an artist also traces to things that are not necessarily directly apparent in my current work: the most rigorous being an aesthetic and theoretical study within the frame of "lesbian feminism" and its afterlives, via Laura Cottingham, Leslie Singer and Cecilia Dougherty. Hans Haacke was also the bad dad of institutional critique—and a surprisingly gentle teacher when I studied with him right before his retirement. Doug Ashford made all formal questions into social ones, and the other way round, almost as a mania. Rita Myers took me through every iteration of video history as a performance with a camera in space. I know it is rather "Japanese" (but also "German"—I am both) of me to focus on the masters with whom I studied, but I guess that is also a positioning within specific impossible social relations that are afforded in New York: that of the hybridity of American-ness as an entirely schizophrenic "freedom."
In this way, I see my work occupying multiple positions at once, as the materials of the work (whether they are mental or formal) cross uncrossable boundaries. A concrete example: a recent museum acquisition of a work of mine that is both "painting" (oil paint) and "video" (screen playing an .mp4 file) led to my being approached by multiple museum departments about the possibility of acquiring the work at the same time; eventually, I met with conservators from multiple departments, since no single department could "deal" entirely with the work. The work also had to be installed by multiple departments, in an almost self-parodic display of "union rules," where it became an absurd but real discussion as to which department, Audio-Visual or Art Handling, was allowed

Jennifer West, "Flashlight Filmstrip Projections" installation views at PICA, Portland, 2014. Courtesy: Marc Foxx, Los Angeles and Vilma Gold, London

JW My latest work has shifted focus to a new set of historical examples that include performance-based projection works, "paracinema" such as Malcolm Le Grice's *Horror Film 1* (1971) and Ken Jacobs' *Nervous Magic Lantern* performance works. However, since these new pieces require the viewer to be the projectionist using a flashlight, I also think of the Surrealist exhibition of Duchamp and others, held in nearly total darkness. Man Ray had the idea to give visitors flashlights so they could see the work. I've also been thinking about Joan Jonas' use of the white costume as a projection screen, in relation to Loïe Fuller's *Serpentine Dance* from Paris in the 1890s. In addition, I've been looking at objects in the collection of the Getty Research Institute from the 1600s to the 1900s from pre-cinema, everything from magic lantern slides and ephemera to camera obscuras, to other projection devices and anamorphic cone-lens pieces that created 3D perspectives. I've been thinking about Loïe Fuller's practice of directed lighting and illumination techniques.

LR I've been looking at a lot of old cartoons lately, particularly those of Max Fleischer, Chuck Jones, Ub Iwerks, and the UPA studio. Fleischer's cartoons are simply the most beautiful and haunting I've ever seen. With Jones, and his layout artist Maurice Noble, the direction of action through the landscape, and the landscapes themselves, are funny, inventive, and one of the only visual references to the desert I had growing up, watching them from my TV in the Sonoran desert in Tucson, Arizona. Ub Iwerks started off drawing Mickey Mouse for Walt Disney, but got fed up with his lack of credit at the studio, and went on to start his own studio. It was never anywhere near as successful as Disney's, but the cartoons he made have a dark, adult humor, and Iwerks was an early innovator, using sound and color in his cartoons. UPA (United Productions of America) grew out of the ashes of the 1941 labor strike at Disney's studio, the largest to date, at that point. UPA started off making WWII training films (as did all the major studios at the time), then went on to pioneer a style called "limited animation." This was a simplified style of drawing—exploited decades later to cut costs—which was used as an explicit counterpoint to and argument against the cinematic realism portrayed in the cartoons produced by Disney. I also spend time looking at other sorts of animation from that period. Oskar Fischinger's work with color, music and structural form is important to me. So are the films of John Whitney, and his technical innovations toward computer animation. I recently got turned on to Mary Ellen Bute's animations, and find them truly innovative and remarkable. Recently, I've also been looking a lot at forgotten film ephemera of the 20th century—industrial films, training films, workers' films, engineering tests for projections. These movies are often less about content than form. They trace a different path to the present.

JJ Early Russian and French film, for instance Vertov, Dovchenko, Vigo, Bresson; Japanese film, including the works of Ozu, Mizoguchi and Kurosawa, and many others. I am interested in how forms begin. What are the earliest examples? Silent film, for instance, inspires the work today.

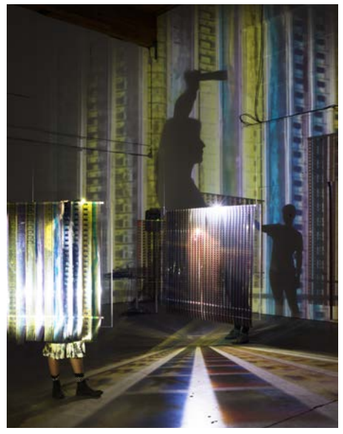
KO Jacques Rozier's *Maine-Ocean* (1985); Leslie Singer and Cecilia Dougherty's *Joe-Joe* (1993); Georges Perec and Bernard Queysanne's—with an astonishing English-language voiceover by Shelly Duvall reading Perec—*Un homme qui dort* (1974); Werner Schroeter's *Goldflocken* (1976).

FR: Can you explain the relationship to time in your work?

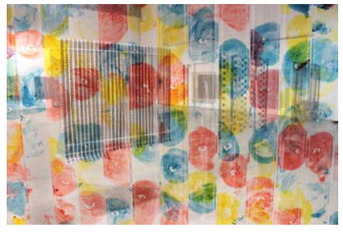
KO In my recent series "gesture/data" (2013-present), conditions of "screenal" vision are taken to limits where the material, mental, gestural and optical are made to touch the work at which time in the installation process.

JENNIFER WEST My latest interactive light projection works take the form of populist pre-cinema spectacles like the Magic Lantern and shadow theater shows of the 1800s, as well as expanded or paracinema and performance. The work uses research, history, language and process-based tactile abstraction. It approaches the translation between the analogue and tactile to the digital. Lastly, it exists alongside other practices that use video, film and the moving image in connection with other media like as drawing, painting, performance, text-based work, etc.

LUCY RAVEN In many of my works, I try to slow down the process of looking. I want to loosen up time so it's not so beholden to production, and unhinge production from its slavery to time. I'm not sure where this places my work in relation to that of other artists, but the work of other artists is important to me. I think a lot about images of work, but also about *how* images work, and how they're circulated. When an image becomes exhausted, how can it stop working, take a break, reorganize its position, or go on strike? While I mostly work with animation, the form of my works varies, and is specific to the ideas and questions in each project. I studied sculpture, and in many ways, I think of my moving image work—groupings of still frames—as Philip Guston once described the objects in one of his still life paintings as chunks of matter floating in uncertain space.



FR What historical examples of film and video work do you think it is important to consider?



Top - Jennifer West, "Flashlight Filmstrip Projections" installation views at PICA, Portland, 2014. Courtesy: Marc Foxx, Los Angeles and Vilma Gold, London. Photo: Evan La Londe

Bottom - Jennifer West, "Flashlight Filmstrip Projections" installation views at PICA, Portland, 2014. Courtesy: Marc Foxx, Los Angeles and Vilma Gold, London

intersect as continuously unstable glitches against the "smooth" time of networked culture (where the term "network" makes you want to barf; where you don't really know what day it is; where it is always a rather

Joan Jonas, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* at Joan Jonas's loft, New York, 1972. © the artist. Courtesy: the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

banal form of "now.") A sigh of relief is a different temporality than cocaine talk; so is a glance at the way the sun makes a certain tiny violet flower on the forest floor in early spring appear and disappear against the viridian green moss. Pushing these irreconcilable forms of time into the same formal field is part of what happens in my recent work.

JW The *Flashlight Filmstrip Projections* use time in multiple ways. The piece contains the historical time of the last 150 years of cinema, film, movies, language, projection, shadows, lenses, magnification, signs. From the recycled Hollywood filmstrips used in the piece, of underwater films or car chases, to text-to-images shot off a computer screen, to hand-printed images. Additionally, the work requires the viewer to be the projectionist—each person projecting a different fragmented "movie" or set of images. The time is simultaneously that of the close-up and of the projected enlargement—the viewer shifting focus between them as they analyze a filmstrip and use their flashlight to project it and bring it in and out of focus. For the last few years, I've thought of time as a spiral and the film roll as a spiral, capable of containing the time of the past and forever replaying that time in the future. I think about this in relation to the filmmaker Chris Marker, who refers to "spirals of time" in his 1983 film *Sans Soleil/Sunless*.

LR Animation is a way of radically shortening or extending the length of time that an image appears onscreen. Duration is no longer tethered to the recording frame rate of a camera. Stillness can be emphasized, or stroboscopic rate of change, both of which are in tension with the idea of the moving image. In terms of time, and how it's spent working on animations, I like the fact that discontinuities—things that happen between the capture of single frames (preparations, distractions, naps, new ideas)—have the potential to present a sort of ghost story in the gap between onscreen images.

JJ I work with time as a material. I make drawings and objects. One takes time to look. But in video and performance time is measured. The time it takes to walk from one side of a room to the other. The time it takes to tell a story. Time is edited. Like music. I consider rhythms. Time is mysterious.

JJ I have always worked with the idea of narrative. Three images together make a fourth. At first it was poetic narrative—based on the structures of poetry—and I was particularly interested in the ideas of the Imagists. I thought of developing a language of images. The film *Wind* is composed of choreographed movements partly driven by the wind. But the figures, some dressed in mirrored costumes, seem to be enacting a mysterious ritual on a snow-covered beach. The video work *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* was concerned with the question of whether or not there is such a thing as female imagery. I played with the idea of an alter ego, a persona, fashioning the character "Organic Honey" with costumes, masks, objects and actions. There was a narrative but it was fragmented—a sequence of moves made for the camera. When I began to work with stories—fairy tales, news stories, sagas, novels, epic poems—I included edited (by me) texts that accompanied the visuals and generated the images and actions. One of my main concerns was, and is, space—the physical space of a room, a landscape, and how to frame this space. Theater is part of life. I work with the theatrical as effect. There is a difference between theater and performance, though in some cases the two forms have increasingly overlapped, since the 1960s.

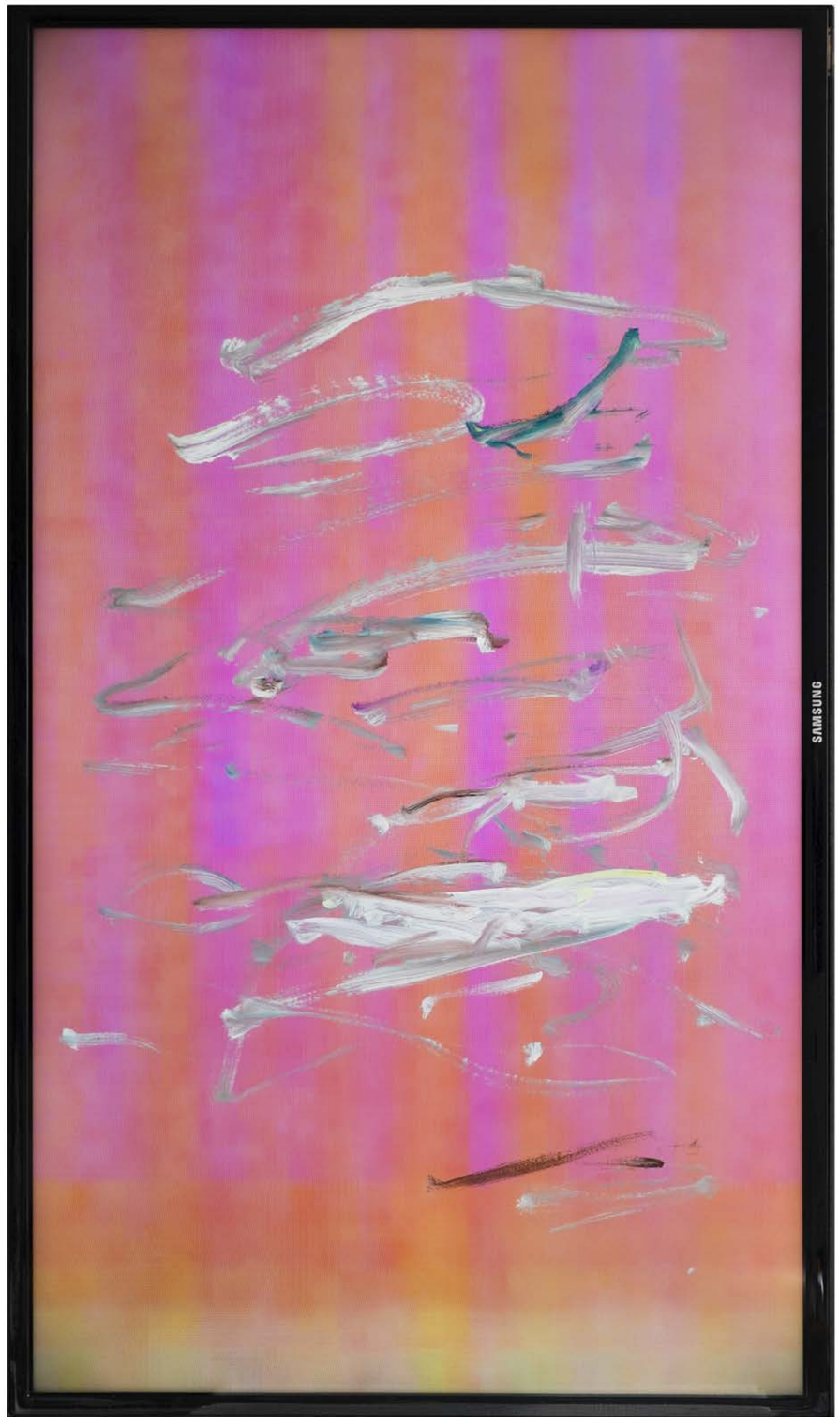
LR I tend to map out the relationships between various ideas and elements that go into a particular work, but narrative is a strategy I use only rarely in the work itself. Theatricality is an important aspect of the work's presentation. Increasingly, the installation of each piece has become a central part of its viewing experience.
With my new 3D anaglyph video *Curtains*, the ideal installation would be to have it looped inside a cinema. We're going to try this at Oberhausen this spring, and later in the year it will be installed in an old single screen cinema in Mumbai, a city that is one of the locations in the movie. *Curtains* has an episodic rather than a narrative structure. I shot it at post-production studios all around the world—Beijing, Chennai, London, Los Angeles, Mumbai, Toronto, Vancouver—that are converting Hollywood films that were shot in 2D into stereoscopic 3D. This is an extremely labor-intensive, frame-by-frame process, which entails creating a synthetic second-eye view for every frame in the film.
A cousin to that work, *Tales of Love and Fear* (2015), is a cinema made for a single film, which only has a single (3D) image, split into two projectors. The audience sits in the theater, facing forward, while the projectors, which are in the middle of the cinema with the audience, slowly spin in counter-rotation around the walls of the theater, converging briefly on the screen. The piece is a commission from the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) in Troy, New York, and will play there as a one-time event next month. Though the piece a movie, it will be presented as something nearer to a single night of theater.

JW I think of larger narratives in my work not as storytelling, but in terms of images, titles, text, traces of materials and actions, and the viewing experience, that produce a narrative. I wouldn't describe my work as theatrical—it's about communal viewership, thought and experience of the simple act of casting light, color and shadow, and a thought-based

Joan Jonas, *Volcano Saga* (still), 1989. © the artist. Courtesy: Electronic Arts Intermix, New York; Wilkinson Gallery, London; Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

FR Does theatricality or narrative play an important role in your work?

Joan Jonas, *Reanimation* at Performa, 2013. Courtesy: Performa, New York and Wilkinson Gallery, London. Photo: © Paula Court



Ken Okiishi, *gesture/data*, 2015. Courtesy: the artist; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York; Pilar Corrias, London; and Mathew, Berlin / New York

interaction with words, symbols, effects, images. However, when I use the installation to perform a live projection light show with the Serpentine dancer to a musical score of theremin and synthesizer, then it is a highly theatrical situation. However, it is not a conventional viewing experience. The performance is done in the center of the room and the audience views the work on the perimeter of the space, as if they were backstage. This flip foregrounds the work of the flashlight projectionists as performers themselves.

KO I've been trying to become more abstract, since when there was a clear narrative in my single-channel video work no one seemed to notice what was actually going on. Time has helped with that—as in the passing of time. People "get it" more now, watching the "early" video work: when reality is no longer the same place that is depicted on screen, many other things can be seen. But a rupture in the current moment has to pretend not to be narrative; it has to seem like an event "outside" of time. It has to heat up time. The present has to feel exceptionally present; the artwork has to extend the feeling of the present moment as entirely alienated from narratives of legitimacy. It has to feel "new," even if that is, of course, impossible. It has to become impossible. It has to mask its own narrative to become immediate.

I have an older brother who is obsessed with theater, who sees absolutely every single Broadway show; I grew up on Barbra Streisand laserdiscs. As a teenager, I read Samuel Beckett and claimed to hate that "other" kind of theater: the kind that is theatrical. (I still cry in secret to "Send in the Clowns.") I think that growing up this way made theatricality a rather alienating concept. But then again I saw early John Waters films for the first time recently (I had avoided them for years), and that is a kind of theatricality I could imagine coming into my work. A friend commented on the iteration of "gesture/data" that I realized at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne a few months ago (my show there was called "Screen Presence"), and he said it was "so camp." It was such a hilarious statement if you had seen the show. A screen showing a work by Günther Uecker in 1:1 scale, across from the physical artwork, at various levels of good and bad lighting on an info screen into which it barely "fits"; with nails that match the Uecker glued to the screen in epoxy that smears light halo rainbows all over the place; appearing in the flow of the museum's collection as a monstrous glitch in material reality; as if the word "nail" had become an info-spray of actual nails that cannot find the correct dimension of the screen (when a finger touches the touchscreen, are we in 3D or 2D?). If this is a kind of theatricality, if this is a kind of "camp" relationship to sad reality, then yes, theatricality plays a role. I also have a dream of directing a film where I don't get to choose the actors, script, set—or any other elements. Where I am simply allowed to show up.

Ken Okiishi, *gesture/data (for Mr. Haubrich)* (detail), 2014. Gift of the Kunststiftung NRW. Collection Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Courtesy: the artist; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York; Pilar Corrias, London; and Mathew, Berlin / New York. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv / Britta Schlier

FR Do you consider popular culture a source of inspiration for your work?

Joan Jonas, "Volcano Saga 1985/1994" installation view at Wilkinson Gallery, London, 2011. Courtesy: Wilkinson Gallery, London. Photo: Peter White

LR Popular (and unpopular) culture informs most of my work in different ways. Perhaps the most direct way can be seen in a recent project called *Bump City*, a series of online videos I made for the Oakland Museum of California with my husband Alex Abramovich, a writer who's writing a nonfiction book about Oakland. We moved back to New York this fall after four years there, and the pieces we made were newsreels, of a sort. They examined what happens in a city when the work goes away, and what an opposition movement looks like in the absence of organized labor. *Bump City*, which is one of Oakland's many nicknames, broaches questions we had about our adopted city in the midst of major changes it was and still is going through. One of the entries, *Portraits from the Occupation*, is a series of 16 video interviews with people involved with or impacted by Occupy Oakland. *Notes from the 1946 General Strike* is another. It's about the last General Strike in America, which took place in Oakland, and its relation to present day struggles. *Notes* is narrated by Oakland rapper Boots Riley, from The Coup, and West Oakland resident Raymond Albert. In Oakland, we found, protest and activism are forms of popular culture.

JJ When I began I was influenced by what I had seen as a child, like Broadway musicals such as *Oklahoma* and *Carousel*, or the circus—and then musical films such as those of Busby Berkeley. I am influenced by the world around me.

JW My work places populist and universal cultural references next to and inside of avant-garde references to art, film, painting, performance, etc. It looks at the relationship between them and uses both as reference points with equal weight. Popular culture has always played a role in my work—it contains and reflects the world we live in—everything from politics to economics, pleasure to paranoia to uncomfortable humor. I pull from all sources of cultural production.

KO I think that because no one I know has a TV anymore—they just download or stream things—the sense of shared "popular" culture has become blurred with personal "recommendations" that appear in the sidebar, or strangely, when you go to any website, just appear out of nowhere. So this tailoring of the portal that hovers around your mind of "choices" becomes increasingly irrelevant to anyone else's taste-portal, except that the feedback loops built into these automatic data aggregators help generate content for the "masses" and also, through recommendations, push likely-to-be-consumed cultural products on you, creating bland affinities for the same things.

I don't know if you can say that "popular culture" exists in this realm; only a bunch of technologically induced narcissists watching exactly the same things alone at home, with no sense that anyone else is watching, since simultaneous viewership also disappears in this realm. So, yes, the changing conditions of the status of popular culture have been important catalysts in my recent work as they relate to changing conditions of being (and "feeling" or "not feeling").

In the past, popular cultural references have appeared in an extremely chaotic way in my work, even as they seemed directly referential. Looking back on this now, one could say that the changing conditions of the possibilities of shared cultural experiences became disfigured in my work at the same time as spectatorship became increasingly focused on the individually optimized "choices" (as "viewers" became "users.").

JJ I am interested in different histories. Art is a dialogue with art. For each project I explore known and unknown territory as well as possibilities in the medium of video. I am interested in the layering of these concerns. I read. I travel to different locations to record landscape. I collect objects and materials when I travel, and from my immediate surroundings. I look at the work of my contemporaries, of my friends and colleagues.
For *Volcano Saga*, based on the Icelandic Laxdaela Saga, I traveled to Iceland to explore and record the amazing landscape. I read as many of the sagas as possible, along with contemporary writing. I traced the story to its origins in the oral tradition of storytelling, with which I have always identified. I spent time and traveled with my friend Steina Vasulka. She told me stories. I have always been interested in the superstitions and beliefs of other cultures, other times. This is part of my work.
For *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*, based on a text Aby Warburg wrote about his journey to the southwest or the region of the Pueblo in New Mexico at the beginning of the 20th century, I visited the Hopi villages, spoke to people there, and read contemporary accounts of the history. I included in the work the image of Melancholia: a woman and a dog superimposed on the landscape of the southwest. This partly represented the tragic memories in the American landscape.
My latest work *Reanimation* is based on the novel *Under the Glacier* by the Icelandic writer Halldór Laxness, whose work I read in the 1980s, while in Iceland. The book was written in the 1960s. Now glaciers are melting. This fact became part of the narrative.

From Top to Bottom - Joan Jonas, *Mirror performance III* and *Mirror performance I*, 1969. Courtesy: the artist and the Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milan

LR History and archival materials are important to the way I think about making. I often find myself working backwards from a situation I find myself in, to find out how we got here. Most recently, I've been spending some time at the Keystone Mast stereoscopic slide collection at the California Museum of Photography in Riverside. The collection spans the heyday of stereo photography, from 1892 to 1963, including decades where it was more popular than single lens photography. I'm browsing, really. The collection is barely archived. This is one of my favorite things to do—browse unlabeled images you can hold, look at closely, and—in this case—see through a stereoscope as various planes receding into space.

JW Lately I have been looking back on history and looking at how a universal or collective "film memory" functions in our culture. This new project uses the list of 100 films that made an impact on me since the very first one I can remember as a child. My research is not only about shared film memory but also communal and personal movie viewing contexts that continually shift. This structure allows me to re-view, re-remember and research the films and movies themselves in relation to memory and time. Additionally, the piece will include the architectures of my personal cinema experiences, such as drive-in movie theaters, art house cinemas, college lecture halls, video rental stores, multiplexes and museum film theaters and exhibition spaces, YouTube, TV re-runs and the computer screen. The research is forged by my personal memory, which I hope can serve as a catalyst for universal film memory. In addition, I've been interested in each movie's history, archives, contexts of its making, reception and circulation. I plan to develop the project into a one hundred screen installation and single-channel video. Although the list of films is personal, it's intended to forge connections to larger social, political and artistic issues and aesthetics.

KO Last year, I was invited to make artworks somehow related to the Museum Ludwig collection in Cologne, which would then enter the collection. I was, of course, completely flattered—and terrified. How could I deal with such an immense and important collection? (A collection that had even helped to form my notion of art, as a child, through publications such as the wonderful plastic-bound *Kunst der sechziger Jahre*.)

As I started to research the collection via an online database, and within our overwhelmingly screen-dominated world, where many museums have been frantically pushing the "online presence" of their own collections, I realized that any museum collection has now become two: the texture of the visual and textual database, and the material experience of being there. I worked on finding moments when these two modes of collection intersected formally and experientially—and on amping up these unbridgeable gaps between data and "liveness." I wanted to create a garland of material "glitches" in the physical experience of

FR What role does research, history or archival materials play in your work?

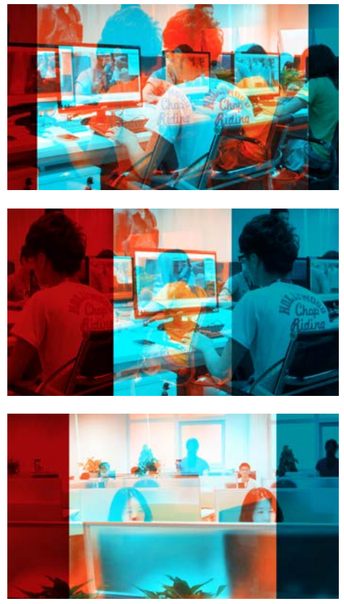
Ken Okiishi, *gesture/data (feedback channels)*, 2014, "Screen Presence" installation view at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2014. Gift of the Kunststiftung NRW. Collection Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Courtesy: the artist; Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York; Pilar Corrias, London; Mathew, Berlin / New York. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv / Britta Schlier

the museum that could confront the viewing public with the flatness of screenal life, and open up the body and brain to entirely different combinations of stimuli and feelings.

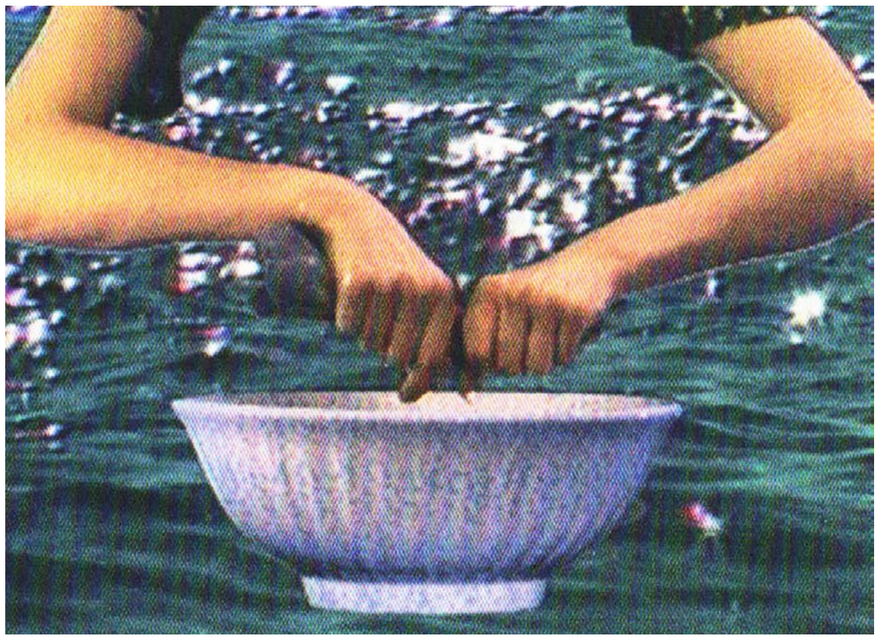
In the second site within what eventually materialized—as I produced artwork within the high-vent chamber of the conservation lab, surrounded by Brillo boxes, a Max Beckmann on its side, and other amazing views of artwork, "configurations in conservation"—I tested out current theories and media-forms of the circulation of contemporary art within art-historical visuality and scenarios in which the old-fashioned theoretical notion of "aura," as developed by Walter Benjamin, had appeared. The Haubrich Collection at Museum Ludwig (1914-1939) is not only from Benjamin's time period and geography in terms of artworks; the transactions of collecting also happened in that particularly violent period, when Germany destroyed its own cultural fabric, both literally, in terms of the Shoah, and in more general terms, by exiling all forms of "sophistication." In this sense, the "aura" of that violence lives on in these rooms.

I inserted a screen, with a view of the screen that houses the Uecker screen tests with the nails on top that I described earlier, smeared with "Olio HD" clear oil paint that holds the "brush mark" and also looks like that fat greasy rainbow-y finger smear on the touchscreen, and hung it directly in front of a postwar portrait of Dr. Josef Haubrich by Otto Dix. It was like a monstrous ahistorical version of an art-collector's iPad—rupturing the presence of the screen itself, like a material glitch in the museum-cum-database, into the presence of the room.

What then happened in this room was a bit uncanny, but also quite beautiful. As I developed the next (and final) site of "glitch" in the museum, I was somehow drawn to a sculpture by Otto Freundlich. I didn't know why, exactly, but it was charged in some way. As I filmed this second screen, hoping to use a video image of it, the camera battery died, and I was left with only a few seconds of footage. A bit frustrated, I threw those clips on the timeline in editing, and a miraculous thing happened as I cut between frames of this supposedly useless footage. The Freundlich sculpture started to move across the room, towards my monstrous screen agglomeration. At a certain point, one of the curators at the museum had expressed concern about certain problematics related to Uecker, the Haubrich collection, and specifically Otto Freundlich, a German painter and sculptor of Jewish origin, who was an important part of the development of abstraction in Paris, but who had been murdered in the Majdanek concentration camp in 1943. While I had not wanted to over-emphasize biographical details—I was simply somehow drawn to this work and wanted to generate glitches within and between sectors of the museum—I could not deny, in the final iteration of the "gesture/data" series at the Museum Ludwig, completed only a day before the opening, that the "aura" of the "angel of history" had appeared within the screen.



Lucy Raven, *Curtains* (stills), 2014. Courtesy: the artist



Joan Jonas, *Volcano Saga* (stills), 1989. © the artist. Courtesy: Electronic Arts Intermix, New York; Wilkinson Gallery, London; Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

Una conversazione fra Joan Jonas, Ken Okiishi, Lucy Raven, e Jennifer West a cura di Filipa Ramos

Quattro artisti di tre diverse generazioni, attivi in contesti altrettanto diversi, si incontrano sul terreno comune di un lavoro posto all'incrocio tra arti visive, immagini in movimento e performance.
Attraverso la condivisione di idee, processi, riferimenti e fonti di ispirazione visiva, analizzano e discutono la loro pratica e il modo in cui essa si rapporta al tempo, alla storia, alla cultura popolare, al teatro e alla narrativa in uno scambio aperto che introduce temi fondamentali per le pratiche di natura temporale e la loro attuale rivalutazione negli scenari culturali e artistici.
(introduzione di Filipa Ramos)

FILIPA RAMOS È talmente vasta la gamma di opere che incorporano film e video. Come pensate si collochi il vostro lavoro in questo ambito?

JOAN JONAS Ispirata dagli happening che ho visto negli anni Sessanta, ho deciso di passare dalla scultura allo spazio della performance. I miei riferimenti principali erano pittori e scultori, poeti, romanzieri, registi cinematografici e i rituali di altre culture. Cercavo ispirazione al di fuori della scena di New York e di altre città del tempo. Ho visto la Danza del Serpente degli Hopi in New Mexico. È stata un'esperienza incredibile. Nel 1968 ho realizzato *Wind*, il mio primo film. Nel 1970 ho visitato il Giappone dove ho visto il teatro Noh, che mi ha impressionato profondamente, e dove ho comprato una portapak [videocamera portatile] con la quale ho cominciato a lavorare davanti all'obiettivo mentre mi guardavo allo specchio. Da lì è nata *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, una performance basata su un sistema a circuito chiuso. Il pubblico vedeva la performance dal vivo e al contempo un dettaglio della stessa ripreso in diretta da una videocamera sul set, oltre a video preregistrati. I video a canale singolo li ho sempre creati con questo processo. Continuo a lavorare su queste idee della percezione dello spazio, della narrativa, alterate da un mezzo espressivo.

KEN OKIISHI La mia genealogia artistica risale direttamente alla "video art", essendosi nel tempo rapportata più alla pittura, alla scultura e alla "performance art" che a un'arte cinematografica di tipo narrativo e sperimentale. Ma, come qualunque pensiero diagrammatico, una genealogia racchiude sempre frammenti di bugie, necessari per mettere ordine tra le fila del diagramma o per conservare la fiducia nelle proprie origini familiari. Ed ecco la bugia della mia prima dichiarazione: Robert Breer mi ha "scoperto" nel 1997, ed è grazie a lui che ho potuto frequentare la scuola d'arte. Ma la sua appartenenza al filone del Visionary Film, ancora prettamente maschile, era allo stesso modo vero e falso: erano gli anni '60 e Carolee Schneeman un giorno gli sfilò la cinepresa, e quello che realizzò lo infastidì. Robert parlava borbottando. Le sue sculture animate sono troppo sofisticate per lo stile sordido e dall'oscenità "basic" dell'Anthology Film Archives. Diceva sempre che i film di Stan Brakhage avevano i titoli più presuntuosi del mondo.

La mia genealogia artistica comprende anche tutto ciò che non traspare necessariamente nei miei lavori attuali, tra cui un rigoroso studio estetico e teorico nell'ambito del "femminismo lesbico" e delle sue posterità, attraverso Laura Cottingham, Leslie Singer e Cecilia Dougherty. Hans Haacke è stato anche il "padre cattivo" della critica istituzionale, e gentilissimo quando l'ho avuto come insegnante, poco prima che andasse in pensione. Doug Ashford aveva l'abitudine di trasformare qualunque questione formale in fatto sociale, e viceversa: una specie di mania. Rita Myers mi ha condotto attraverso ogni ripetizione della storia della video arte come performance di una telecamera nello spazio. Lo so, può sembrare molto "giapponese" (ma anche tedesco – appartengo a entrambe le culture) concentrarsi sui propri maestri, ma forse l'intento è anche quello di inserirsi in una specifica rete di relazioni sociali impossibili, che una città come New York può mettere a disposizione: quella dell'ibridismo dell'americanità come libertà assolutamente schizofrenica.

In questo modo, osservo come il mio lavoro assuma contemporaneamente molteplici posizioni, così come i materiali di un'opera (siano essi mentali o formali) oltrepassano confini invalicabili. Un esempio concreto: la recente acquisizione da parte di un museo di una mia realizzazione che è al contempo un "dipinto" (a olio) e un "video" (un file mp4 su schermo), destinata a essere trattata contemporaneamente da diversi dipartimenti museali e, in ultima analisi, dall'incontro tra i conservatori dei diversi reparti, poiché nessuna singola sezione avrebbe potuto dedicarsi interamente all'opera. Bisognava anche installare il lavoro nelle molteplici sezioni, in uno sfoggio auto-parodico di "norme di unificazione", mentre si intavolava il dibattito assurdo ma reale su quale sezione, audio-visiva o artistica, fosse autorizzata a maneggiare l'opera, e in quale fase del processo di installazione.

JENNIFER WEST Le mie ultime proiezioni luminose interattive hanno la stessa struttura degli spettacoli populisti dell'epoca pre-cinematografica, come la lanterna magica e il teatro delle ombre del XIX secolo, ma anche delle rappresentazioni tipiche del paracinema. È un lavoro che sfrutta la ricerca, la storia, il linguaggio e l'astrazione tattile basata su un processo. Un lavoro che presuppone una traslazione dall'analogico e dal tattile verso il digitale, e che si accompagna a pratiche alternative supportate da video, film e immagini in movimento, legate, a loro volta, ad altri mezzi espressivi come il disegno, la pittura, la rappresentazione, le opere basate su un testo, ecc.

LUCY RAVEN In molti miei lavori tento di rallentare il processo dello sguardo. Voglio allentare il tempo per liberarlo dal vincolo produttivo, e liberare la produzione dal vincolo del tempo.
Penso molto alle immagini del lavoro ma anche a *come* le immagini lavorano, e a come si fanno circolare. Quando un'immagine esaurisce la sua carica, come fa a non lavorare più, a prendersi una pausa, a riorganizzare la propria posizione, o a scioperare?
Io lavoro soprattutto con l'animazione ma la forma della mia produzione varia in relazione alle idee e ai temi di ogni progetto. Ho studiato scultura e per molti versi le immagini in movimento – gruppi di fotogrammi – con le quali lavoro sono per me come gli oggetti di una delle nature morte di Philip Guston, da lui descritti come pezzi di materia che fluttuano in uno spazio incerto.

FR Quali esempi storici di opere cinematografiche o video ritenete riferimenti importanti?

JW Nel mio nuovo lavoro ho spostato l'attenzione su nuovi scenari presi dalla storia, comprese le proiezioni del "paracinema" di Malcolm LeGrice (*Horror Film 1*, del 1971) e di Ken Jacobs (*Nervous Magic Lantern*). Tuttavia, poiché queste nuove rappresentazioni richiedono che lo spettatore sia il proiezionista e utilizzi una torcia, ripenso anche all'esibizione surrealista di Duchamp e colleghi: un'esposizione immersa nella quasi totale oscurità. Man Ray aveva avuto l'idea di fornire le torce ai visitatori, così che potessero vedere il lavoro. Ripenso anche all'uso che fa Joan Jonas del costume di scena bianco, che diventa schermo di proiezione, e rimanda alla "Serpentine Dance" di Loïe Fuller, nella Parigi di fine '800. Inoltre ho visitato la collezione del Getty Research Institute, in particolare i pezzi che risalgono ai secoli del pre-cinema, tra il '600 e il '900, cimeli e diapositive della lanterna magica, camere oscure e ogni altro genere di congegni di proiezione, oltre alle lenti coniche anamorfiche che creavano prospettive in 3D. Ho ripensato a come Loïe Fuller impiegava le tecniche della luce diretta e dell'illuminazione.

LR Ultimamente guardo molto i cartoon, in particolare quelli di Max Fleischer, Chuck Jones, Ub Iwerks, e dello studio UPA. I cartoon di Fleischer sono semplicemente i più belli e indimenticabili che abbia mai visto. Di quelli di Jones, e del suo layout artist Maurice Noble, mi colpisce la direzione dell'azione attraverso il paesaggio, e i paesaggi, così divertenti, inventivi, e tra i rari riferimenti visivi al deserto che ho avuto da ragazzina, quando li guardavo in TV da casa mia, nel deserto di Sonora a Tucson, Arizona. Ub Iwerks è nato come disegnatore di Mickey Mouse per Walt Disney, ma poi si è stancato di non ottenere riconoscimento dallo studio e ha dato vita a uno studio suo che, pur non raggiungendo mai il successo che della Disney, ha prodotto cartoon dallo humour dark, adulto; e poi Iwerks, che è stato tra i primi a usare il suono e il colore nei suoi cartoon. La UPA (United Productions of America) è nata dalle ceneri dello sciopero degli animatori Disney nel 1941, il più grande sciopero mai fatto fino a quel momento. Dopo aver realizzato documentari di propaganda per la seconda guerra mondiale (come facevano tutti i grandi studio dell'epoca), UPA avrebbe inaugurato uno stile chiamato "animazione limitata": uno stile di disegno semplificato — sfruttato decenni più tardi per ridurre i costi — che aveva una specifica ed esplicita funzione di contrappunto e critica al realismo cinematografico tipico dei cartoon di produzione Disney.
Mi piacciono anche altri tipi di animazione di quel periodo. Considero importante il lavoro con il colore, la musica e la forma strutturale di Oskar Fischinger, o i film di John Whitney, e le sue innovazioni tecniche nella direzione dell'animazione al computer. Di recente mi interessano le animazioni di Mary Ellen Bute: le trovo davvero innovative e originali.
Sempre di recente, sto studiando molti prodotti collaterali del cinema del XX secolo — film industriali, film didattici, film di denuncia sociale, test tecnici di proiezione. Spesso sono prodotti interessanti a livello formale più che di contenuto perché rivelano un diverso percorso verso il presente.

JJ La prima cinematografia russa e francese, ad esempio Vertov, Dovchenko, Vigo, Bresson, il cinema giapponese: Ozu, Misoguchi e Kurosawa, e molti altri. Mi interessa il modo in cui nascono le forme. I primissimi esempi.
In questo momento, ad esempio, il mio lavoro si ispira al cinema muto.

KO *Maine-Ocean* di Jacques Rozier (1985); *Joe-Joe* di Leslie Singer e Cecilia Dougherty (1993); *Un homme qui dort* di Georges Perec e Bernard Queysanne, con la sorprendente voce fuori campo in inglese di Shelly Duvall che legge Perec (1974); *Goldflocken* di Werner Schroeter (1976).

FR Potete spiegarmi il rapporto con il tempo nella vostra opera?

KO Nelle serie che ho realizzato dal 2013 ad oggi ("gesture/data"), porto la visione dello schermo fino ai limiti in cui gli elementi materiali, mentali, gestuali e ottici si intersecano come anomalie in condizione di instabilità permanente, contro la scorrevole omogeneità della cultura canalizzata *networked* (dove il termine *networked* ti fa venire voglia di vomitare, dove non sai che ore sono, ed è tutto un continuo e banale "adesso"). Un sospiro di sollievo implica una temporalità diversa dalla parlata

di un cocainomane, così come è diverso lo sguardo fugace al primo sole primaverile, nel momento in cui fa apparire e scomparire sul verde del muschio un piccolo fiore violetto adagiato sopra il manto del bosco. Ciò che realizzo nei miei ultimi lavori è, in parte, costringere queste espressioni inconciliabili di tempo entro uno stesso spazio formale.

JW Le "Flashlight Filmstrip Projections" utilizzano il tempo nei modi più svariati.
Racchiudono la storia degli ultimi 150 anni di cinema, pellicole, film, linguaggi, proiezioni, ombre, obiettivi, ingrandimenti, segni. Dalle filmine riciclate di Hollywood usate nel lavoro, pellicole subacquee e inseguimenti in auto, ai fotogrammi dal monitor di un computer, fino alle immagini stampate a mano. Il mio lavoro, inoltre, richiede che lo spettatore sia anche il proiezionista – ognuno infatti proietta un diverso "frammento di pellicola" o set di immagini. Il tempo è simultaneamente quello del primo piano e quello dell'ingrandimento – il punto focale degli spettatori cambia in continuazione, mentre esaminano una filmina proiettandola con le torce e mettendola continuamente a fuoco e fuori fuoco. In questi ultimi anni ho sempre pensato al tempo come a una spirale, così come il rullino di una pellicola, in grado di contenere il passato e di ripetere per sempre quel passato nel futuro. Questo mi rimanda al regista Chris Marker e al suo riferimento alle "spirali del tempo" in un film del 1983, *Sans Soleil*.

LR L'animazione è un modo di accorciare o allungare radicalmente la durata di un'immagine sullo schermo. La durata si scollega dalla frequenza dei fotogrammi registrati dalla macchina da presa. Si può esaltare l'immobilità o il ritmo stroboscopico del cambiamento, due fattori che sono in tensione con l'idea dell'immagine in movimento. Per quanto riguarda il tempo, e come lo si impiega lavorando alle animazioni, mi piacciono le discontinuità – ciò che accade tra l'acquisizione dei singoli fotogrammi (preparazioni, distrazioni, pisolini, nuove idee) – e la loro capacità di raccontare una sorta di storia fantasma nell'intervallo tra le immagini che scorrono sullo schermo.

JJ Lavoro con il tempo come se fosse un materiale. Faccio disegni e realizzo oggetti. Ci vuole tempo per guardare. Ma nei video e nelle performance il tempo è calcolato. Il tempo che occorre per passare da un lato all'altro della stanza, o per raccontare una storia. Il tempo è editato. Come la musica. Considero i ritmi. Il tempo è misterioso.

FR Teatralità e narrativa svolgono un ruolo importante nel vostro lavoro?

JJ Ho sempre lavorato con l'idea di narrativa. Tre immagini insieme ne fanno una quarta. All'inizio era narrativa poetica – basavo il mio lavoro sulle strutture della poesia – in particolare mi interessavano le idee dell'imagismo. Ho pensato di sviluppare un linguaggio di immagini. Il film *Wind* è composto da movimenti coreografati parzialmente sospinti dal vento. Ma le figure, alcune vestite con consumi a specchio, sembrano inscenare un rituale misterioso su una spiaggia coperta di neve. Il video *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* medita sulla questione dell'esistenza o meno di una cosa come l'immaginario femminile. Creando il personaggio Organic Honey con costumi, maschere, oggetti e azioni, giocavo con l'idea di un alter ego, un'identità. Una narrativa c'era ma era frammentata – una sequenza di movimenti per l'obiettivo. Quando ho cominciato a lavorare con le storie – favole, storie di cronaca, saghe, romanzi, poemi epici – ho aggiunto testi editati (da me) a supporto dell'apparato visivo per generare immagini e azioni. Uno dei temi più interessanti era, è lo spazio – lo spazio fisico di una stanza, di un paesaggio, e come creargli una cornice intorno.

Il teatro è parte della vita. Io lavoro con il teatrale come effetto. C'è una differenza tra teatro e performance, anche se le due forme sono venute a sovrapporsi sempre più spesso dagli anni Sessanta in poi.

LR Tendo a tracciare i rapporti fra le varie idee ed elementi che confluiscono in un determinato lavoro, ma la narrativa è una strategia che uso raramente nel lavoro in sé. La teatralità è un aspetto importante della presentazione del lavoro. L'installazione di un pezzo diventa sempre di più parte centrale dell'esperienza visiva che lo riguarda.

Nel caso di *Curtains*, il mio nuovo video anaglifo 3D, la messa in scena ideale sarebbe la proiezione in loop in una sala cinematografica. Proveremo a realizzarla a Oberhausen in primavera, e successivamente sarà presentato in un vecchio cinema monosala a Mumbai, la città che è una delle location del film. *Curtains* ha una struttura episodica più che narrativa. L'ho girato in vari studi di post-produzione in varie città del mondo – Pechino, Chennai, Londra, Los Angeles, Mumbai, Toronto, Vancouver – dove si stanno convertendo i film hollywoodiani girati in 2D nel formato stereoscopico 3D. Si tratta di un procedimento fotogramma per fotogramma estremamente laborioso che consiste nella creazione della visione sintetica di un secondo occhio per ogni fotogramma del film.

Un lavoro assimilabile a questo è *Tales of Love and Fear* (2015), un cinema fatto per un unico film, con un'unica immagine (in 3D) creata da due proiettori. Il pubblico siede in sala, rivolto verso lo schermo, mentre i proiettori, collocati a metà sala insieme agli spettatori, ruotano lentamente in senso anti-orario proiettando sulle pareti della sala, e convergono brevemente sullo schermo. Il lavoro è stato commissionato dall'Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) di Troy, New York, dove sarà proiettato come un evento unico il mese prossimo. Anche se si tratta di un film, sarà presentato più come una soirée teatrale.

JW Se devo considerare una parte narrativa estesa nei miei lavori, non mi riferisco al racconto di una storia, ma all'esistenza di immagini, titoli, testi, tracce di materiali, di azioni e dell'esperienza del guardare, che danno vita a una narrazione. Non descriverei il mio lavoro come teatrale – riguarda piuttosto l'audience, il pensiero e l'esperienza collettivi, sia nel semplice atto di proiettare luci, ombre e colori, che nell'interazione meditata tra parole, simboli, effetti e immagini. Tuttavia, quando uso un'installazione per eseguire uno spettacolo di luce proiettata dal vivo, con una danzatrice di *Serpentine* su una colonna sonora di theremin e sintetizzatori – creo situazioni altamente teatrali. Questa, però, non è un'esperienza convenzionale per il pubblico. La rappresentazione ha luogo al centro della sala e il pubblico vi assiste rimanendo intorno al perimetro dello spazio occupato, come dietro le quinte. Questo capovolgimento mette in primo piano il lavoro dei proiezionisti in quanto essi stessi artisti.

KO A un certo punto ho cercato di diventare sempre più astratto: da quando, cioè, mi sono accorto che guardando un video su un singolo canale e dalla narrazione chiara, nessuno sembrava fare veramente caso all'azione. Il tempo in questo mi ha aiutato, cioè, il passare del tempo. Ora la gente, guardando i "primi" video a distanza di tempo, riesce a "cogliere" di più: quando la realtà non si trova più nel luogo che era raffigurato sullo schermo, si riescono a vedere molte altre cose. Ma una spaccatura del momento presente deve fingersi necessariamente non narrativa, deve sembrare un evento "fuori" dal tempo. Deve infiammare il tempo. Il presente si deve sentire eccezionalmente presente, l'opera deve espandere il sentimento del momento presente come completamente alienato da narrazioni di legittimità. Deve sentirsi "nuova", anche se questo, ovviamente, è qualcosa di impossibile. Anzi, deve diventare impossibile. Deve mascherare la sua stessa narrazione per diventare immediatezza.

Ho un fratello maggiore che è ossessionato dal teatro, e non si perde un solo spettacolo di Broadway. Io sono cresciuto coi laserdisc di Barbara Streisand. Da ragazzo, leggendo Samuel Beckett, dichiarai di odiare "l'altro" genere di teatro: quello teatrale. (Piango ancora tra me e me sentendo "Che entrino i pagliacci!") Crescere in questo modo, secondo me, ha fatto della teatralità un concetto piuttosto alienante. Ma poi, poco tempo fa, ho visto per la prima volta i primi film di John Waters (li avevo evitati per anni), ed è un tipo di teatralità che ho immaginato di poter inserire nei miei lavori. Un mio amico ha commentato l'iterazione di "gesture/data" che ho realizzato qualche mese fa per il Museo Ludwig di Colonia (lo spettacolo si intitolava "Screen Presence"), definendola "esageratamente teatrale". Dichiarazione davvero divertente per chi ha assistito allo spettacolo: il video metteva in scena un lavoro di Gunter Uecker in scala 1:1 che andava oltre l'opera fisica, con diversi livelli di illuminazione, più o meno buona, su uno schermo a bassa risoluzione, a malapena sufficiente. E poi qualche chiodo sullo Uecker incollato allo schermo con la resina epossidica, che spande tutt'intorno dei pallidi, evanescenti arcobaleni. Così appare, nel flusso delle opere esposte al museo, come un'anomalia mostruosa nella realtà materiale; come se la parola "chiodo" diventasse una spruzzata di chiodi veri che non trovano la giusta dimensione dello schermo (quando il dito tocca il touchscreen, è un 3D o un 2D?) Se questa è teatralità, se questa è una sorta di relazione "esageratamente teatrale" con la triste realtà – allora, sì, la teatralità ha il suo ruolo. Io sogno anche di girare un film in cui non si debbano scegliere attori, copioni, scenari, o qualsiasi altro elemento. Un film che io possa semplicemente mettere in scena.

FR Considerate la cultura popolare una fonte di ispirazione per il vostro lavoro?

LR La cultura popolare (e non) informa gran parte del mio lavoro in modi diversi.

Forse l'esempio di influenza più diretta è un progetto recente, *Bump City*, formato da una serie di video online che ho realizzato per l'Oakland Museum of California con mio marito, Alex Abramovich, che è uno scrittore e sta scrivendo un saggio su Oakland. Siamo tornati a vivere a New York l'autunno scorso dopo quattro anni a Oakland, dove abbiamo girato una serie di video che assomigliano un po' ai cinegiornali: uno sguardo critico su cosa succede in una città quando il lavoro scompare, e come si presenta un movimento di opposizione in assenza di lavoro organizzato. *Bump City*, che è uno dei tanti soprannomi di Oakland, affronta le questioni che ci siamo posti sulla nostra città di adozione nel bel mezzo delle grandi mutazioni che stava e sta ancora attraversando. Uno dei contributi, *Portraits from the Occupation*, è una serie di 16 video interviste con persone che hanno partecipato a Occupy Oakland o ne sono state condizionate. Un altro si intitola *Notes from the 1946 General Strike* e si occupa dell'ultimo sciopero generale organizzato in America, che ha avuto luogo a Oakland, e del suo rapporto con le lotte di oggi. *Notes* è narrato da Boots Riley, un rapper della gruppo The Coup di Oakland, e da Raymond Albert, un cittadino di West Oakland. Abbiamo riscontrato che in questa città protesta e attivismo sono forme di cultura popolare.

JJ All'inizio ero influenzata da cose che avevo visto da bambina come i musical di Broadway tipo *Oklahoma* e *Carousel*, o dal circo – e poi i film musicali come quelli di

Top - Jennifer West, "Flashlight Filmstrip Projections" installation views at PICA, Portland, 2014. Courtesy: Marc Foxx, Los Angeles and Vilma Gold, London

Bottom - Jennifer West, *Serpentine Dance* in "Flashlight Filmstrip Projections" at PICA, Portland, 2014. Courtesy: Marc Foxx, Los Angeles and Vilma Gold, London. Photo: Anastasia Tuazon

Busby Berkeley. Sono influenzata dal mondo intorno a me.

JW Nel mio lavoro ogni riferimento culturale populista e universale è permeato dalle allusioni avanguardiste di arte, cinema, pittura, spettacolo, ecc. Osservo il rapporto tra questi elementi e li uso come punti di riferimento in egual misura. La cultura popolare ha sempre rivestito un ruolo importante nei miei lavori – perché contiene e riflette il mondo in cui viviamo – qualsiasi aspetto dalla politica all'economia, dal piacere alla paranoia, fino all'umorismo più sgradevole. L'intera produzione culturale è una fonte per me.

KO A mio parere, siccome non conosco nessuno che abbia ancora la televisione, ma tutti si limitano a scaricare video o a guardarli in streaming, il significato di cultura "popolare" condivisa ormai si confonde con quei "consigli" personali che compaiono nei banner o, chissà come, quando entri in un qualsiasi sito web spuntano fuori dal nulla. Così questa sorta di personalizzazione del portale che ti ronza intorno con le sue proposte, diventa sempre più irrilevante per chi accede a un portale diverso, se non che la spirale di feedback costruiti intorno a questi aggregatori automatici di informazioni, che al tempo stesso contribuisce a generare i contenuti per le "masse" e spinge verso quei prodotti culturali suggeriti come i più richiesti, crea anche sottili affinità nei confronti degli stessi articoli. Non credo possiamo dire che in questo regno esiste una "cultura popolare", ma nient'altro che un mucchietto di narcisisti tecnologicamente indotti, che guardano esattamente le stesse cose restandosene da soli in casa, dove non sentono la presenza degli altri davanti allo schermo, poiché in questo mondo scompare anche l'audience simultanea. Quindi, sì, le mutate condizioni della cultura popolare sono state dei catalizzatori importanti nei miei ultimi lavori, perché sono legate alle mutate condizioni dell'essere (e del "sentire" o "non sentire").

In passato i riferimenti della cultura popolare sono entrati nelle mie opere in modo estremamente caotico, seppure con la parvenza di essere direttamente referenziali. Adesso, guardandoci indietro, possiamo dire che le mutate condizioni dell'esperienza della cultura condivisa sono apparse come deformate nei miei lavori, via via che il pubblico si è focalizzato sempre più sulle "scelte" personalizzate. Cioè quando lo "spettatore" è diventato "utente".

FR Che ruolo hanno nel vostro lavoro la ricerca, la storia e i materiali d'archivio?

JJ Mi interessano storie diverse. L'arte è un dialogo con l'arte. Ogni mio progetto esplora territori conosciuti e sconosciuti oltre alle possibilità del video. Mi interessa la stratificazione formata da questi interessi. Leggo. Mi reco in luoghi diversi per registrare il paesaggio. Raccolgo oggetti e materiali sia durante i miei viaggi che nei miei dintorni abituali. Osservo il lavoro dei miei contemporanei, dei miei amici e colleghi.
Per la *Volcano Saga* basata sulla Laxdæla Saga islandese, sono andata in Islanda a esplorare e registrare quel paesaggio incredibile. Ho letto quante più saghe potevo oltre a opere letterarie contemporanee per rintracciare le origini della storia nella tradizione narrativa orale con la quale mi identifico da sempre. In questo viaggio mi ha accompagnato la mia amica Steina Vasulka, che mi ha raccontato delle storie. Le superstizioni e le credenze di altre culture, di altre epoche mi hanno sempre interessato. Fanno parte del mio lavoro.
Per preparare "The Shape the Scent the Feel of Things", basato su un testo scritto da Aby Warburg a proposito di un viaggio compiuto ai primi del Novecento nel sud-ovest americano o nella regione dei Pueblo in New Mexico, sono andata a vedere i villaggi degli Hopi, ho parlato con loro, e ho letto resoconti della vicenda risalenti all'epoca. Ho inserito nel lavoro l'immagine della Malinconia: una donna e un cane sovrapposti sul paesaggio del sud-ovest per rappresentare in parte le memorie tragiche del paesaggio americano.
Il mio lavoro più recente, *Reanimation*, si basa sul romanzo "Sotto il ghiacciaio" di Halldor Laxness, lo scrittore islandese che ho letto negli anni Ottanta mentre mi trovavo in Islanda. Ora i ghiacciai si stanno sciogliendo. Questo fatto è diventato parte della narrativa.

LR La storia e i materiali d'archivio sono importanti nella mia modalità di concezione del lavoro. Spesso mi ritrovo a lavorare a ritroso, partendo da una situazione nella quale mi trovo per capire come siamo arrivati a quel punto. Più recentemente mi sto dedicando a consultare la collezione di diapositive stereoscopiche Keystone Mast conservate al California Museum of Photography di Riverside. La collezione comprende materiali a partire dall'epoca d'oro della fotografia stereoscopica, il periodo 1892-1963, compresi i decenni in cui era più diffusa della fotografia a obiettivo unico. La collezione è archiviata in modo sommario, quindi la sto proprio scorrendo: è una delle attività che preferisco – spulciare immagini senza etichetta che posso prendere in mano, osservare da vicino e, in questo caso, guardare attraverso uno stereoscopio per vedere i diversi piani svanire in lontananza.

JW Ultimamente ho riconsiderato la storia osservando come la "memoria cinematografica" universale o collettiva agisca sulla nostra cultura. Questo nuovo progetto si basa su una lista di cento film che mi hanno influenzato fin da piccola, a partire dal primissimo che ricordo. La mia ricerca non è fondata esclusivamente su una memoria cinematografica condivisa, ma anche sui contesti di fruizione di un film, sia pubblici che privati, che cambiano in continuazione. Questa struttura mi permette di ri-vedere, ricordare e ri-cercare film e pellicole in relazione al tempo e alla memoria. Il mio allestimento ricrea anche l'architettura delle mie personali esperienze cinematografiche, quelle di drive-in, cinema d'essai, sale di lettura universitarie, videoteche, cinema multisala, spazi espositivi e cinema all'interno dei musei, youtube, repliche tv, o il monitor del computer. È una ricerca costruita sulla mia memoria personale, che mi auguro possa servire da catalizzatore per una memoria cinematografica universale. E poi, per ciascun film, mi sono avvicinato ad ogni aspetto: la sua storia, gli archivi, i contesti di realizzazione, ricezione e circolazione. Il mio progetto prevede un'installazione fatta di cento schermi con video single-channel. Nonostante la lista dei film sia personale, è intesa a stabilire connessioni con più ampie questioni sociali, politiche, artistiche e di estetica.

KO L'anno scorso mi è stato chiesto di realizzare delle opere legate in qualche modo alla collezione del Museo Ludwig di Colonia, da inserire appunto nella collezione. Mi sono sentito assolutamente lusingato, ovvio, ma anche terrorizzato. Come potevo io confrontarmi con una collezione così immensa e importante? (collezione che, con le sue magnifiche pubblicazioni, come quella rilegata in plastica del *Kunst der Sechziger Jahre*, aveva formato la mia nozione di arte quand'ero piccolo).

Appena ho iniziato a consultare il catalogo on-line (in un mondo dominato dall'onnipresenza dello schermo, dove molti musei stanno affannosamente favorendo la "presenza on-line" delle proprie opere d'arte), mi sono reso conto che ormai le collezioni di qualsiasi museo sono diventate due: da un lato abbiamo la consistenza del database visivo e testuale, dall'altro l'esperienza materiale di entrare nel museo. Ho cercato di individuare i momenti in cui queste due modalità di collezione si incrociavano a livello formale ed esperienziale – amplificando poi i divari incolmabili tra dati inseriti e l'esperienza "dal vivo". Volevo creare una ghirlanda di "anomalie" materiali nell'esperienza fisica del museo, che potessero mettere gli spettatori di fronte alla piattezza della "vita dello schermo" e aprire il corpo e la mente a combinazioni totalmente diverse di stimoli e sensazioni.

Nella seconda postazione, entro i confini dell'opera che si andava materializzando – poiché l'ho creata all'interno della stanza ventilata del laboratorio di conservazione, circondato dalle scatole Brillo, da un Max Beckmann, e da altre straordinarie visioni artistiche – ho testato le attuali teorie e forme mediatiche della circolazione dell'arte contemporanea nell'ambito degli scenari e della visibilità storico-artistica, in cui era presente l'antiquata nozione teorica che era stata sviluppata da Walter Benjamin. La collezione Haubrich esposta al Museo Ludwig (1914-1939) non appartiene, in termini artistici, soltanto all'epoca e alla geografia di Benjamin: le operazioni di raccolta, infatti, avevano toccato anche un periodo storico particolarmente violento, quando la Germania aveva distrutto il proprio tessuto culturale, letteralmente parlando (mi riferisco alla Shoah) ma anche, in termini più generali, mettendo al bando qualsiasi forma di "sofisticazione". In tal senso, l'aura di quella violenza vive tuttora in queste sale.

Ho inserito uno schermo con vista dello schermo che anima i test video di Uecker, e ho applicato i chiodi descritti poco fa, macchiati di pittura a olio luminosa tipo "Olio HD", a suggerire il marchio del pennello ma anche le imbrattature untuose che stendono arcobaleni sul touchscreen, e l'ho appeso proprio di fronte al ritratto postbellico di Josef Haubrich, di Otto Dix. Una mostruosa versione astorica dell'iPad di un collezionista d'arte, a interrompere l'esistenza dello schermo stesso dentro la presenza reale della stanza, come un'anomalia materiale in un database che funge da museo.

Ciò che è successo dopo nella sala è un po' misterioso, ma anche molto bello. Mentre sviluppavo la postazione successiva (e finale) della mia "anomalia", sono stato attratto in qualche modo da una scultura di Otto Freundlich. Non so esattamente il perché. Ma così è stato. Mentre filmavo questa seconda schermata, sperando di ricavarne un'immagine video, si è scaricata la batteria della telecamera, lasciandomi appena pochi secondi di riprese. In fase di montaggio, un po' seccato, ho inserito nella sequenza anche quegli spezzoni, e mentre ritagliavo fotogrammi che mi sembravano inutili, è accaduto qualcosa di miracoloso: la scultura di Freundlich ha iniziato a muoversi attraverso la stanza, verso il mio spaventoso agglomerato video. A un certo punto, uno dei conservatori del museo si era mostrato preoccupato rispetto ad alcune problematiche legate a Uecker, alla collezione Haubrich, e soprattutto a Otto Freundlich, pittore e scultore tedesco di origini ebraiche, che svolse un ruolo importante nello sviluppo dell'arte astratta a Parigi, ma che venne assassinato nel 1943 nel campo di concentramento di Majdanek. Benché non avessi mai voluto enfatizzare troppo i dettagli biografici – ero stato semplicemente attratto da un'opera d'arte e volevo creare anomalie tra le sezioni del museo – ho dovuto riconoscere che, nell'iterazione finale della serie "gesture/data" esposta al Museo Ludwig, e ultimata appena un giorno prima dell'inaugurazione, era apparsa tra gli schermi l'aura dell'"angelo della storia".

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SUMMER 2015

Light Repairs

A ROUNDTABLE ON THE RESTORATION OF MARK ROTHKO'S HARVARD MURALS

WHEN IS A PAINTING not a painting anymore?

In 1962, Mark Rothko created the Harvard Murals, a set of six monumental paintings, five of which were displayed in the penthouse dining room of the university's Holyoke Center, a windowed perch with stunning views. Deeply and delicately hued expanses, the canvases ranged in color from searing orange-red to light pink to dark purple. But in the decade that followed, continual exposure to daylight drastically changed the works, fading them so that some areas lightened to near white while others turned a dull black. Languishing in storage for many years, the works were thought to be beyond repair. But recently, a team of conservators and scientists made a new and unprecedented attempt to restore the pictures—not with pigment or chemicals but with light: For each canvas, they devised a highly complex colored-light projection that, when shone on the work, returns it to its original coloration. What we see is what was meant to be seen, ostensibly. But what are the risks of such an approach? Does the use of light open the door to virtual reality, to smoke and mirrors, turning the paintings into something else altogether? Or does it constitute a brilliant way of making the paintings viewable again, without so much as touching a thread of canvas?

Conservator CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO, who worked on the project; curators HARRY COOPER and JEFFREY WEISS; art historian YVE-ALAIN BOIS; *Artforum* editor MICHELLE KUO; and artists LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON, DAVID REED, KEN OKIISHI, and R. H. QUAYTMAN peer into the void.

View of "Mark Rothko's Harvard Murals," 2014–15, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA. From left: *Panel One (Harvard Mural Triptych)*, 1962; *Panel Two (Harvard Mural Triptych)*, 1962; *Panel Three (Harvard Mural Triptych)*, 1962. As seen with colored digital projection. Photo: Kate Lacey. © Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Rothko's Harvard Murals were installed in 1964, but after suffering differential damage, they were put in storage in 1979. They were included in a few exhibitions, two at Harvard and one traveling exhibition, but basically they hadn't been seen or studied for decades.

The murals are one of only three commissions that Rothko made. Scholars studied the Seagram paintings, and they studied the Rothko Chapel, but they largely skipped the Harvard Murals because hardly anyone had seen them. Most only knew the story about their fading and being removed from view. The works themselves—and their art-historical legacy—were lost.

Given the significance of the work in general, the importance of the work in Rothko's career, and the fact that the murals were in a university where in-depth research was possible, it seemed an appropriate time to take a good look at the murals.

The work had last been examined in 1988, when Harvard mounted an exhibition at the [Arthur M.] Sackler Museum, after carefully studying the paintings' composition, history, and the associated studies on paper. Yet at the time, the focus in the press was on the damage: "Yep, they were once red and now they're blue." Serious reflection was absent.

This time around we wanted to look at the murals and consider what could be done. Are they going to be out of sight forever? Are we never going to study them or write about them, dropping them from the canon of modern art? Or can we do something?

That set of questions was really what gave birth to this project. A team of art historians, conservation scientists, and conservators from the Harvard Art Museums, working with the MIT Media Lab's Camera Culture research group, devised a novel solution. We had a few key goals in mind: to restore the lost color

to the murals, to address the differential fading across the five panels so that they could be seen as a singular work of art, as Rothko intended, and to present the evidence of the artist's hand.

Given the vulnerability of the unvarnished paint surfaces, we could not readily use paint for the correction, as it might interfere with the artist's brushstrokes (which are still visible), and might not be removable. And given the size and abstract nature of these works, as well as the extent of the differential fading, we couldn't attempt a localized treatment. Therefore, we had to develop an approach that was both reversible and an overall solution. These criteria gave birth to the idea of using a projected, computer-generated, colored light system.

HARRY COOPER: Well, I should say that I was the curator of modern art at Harvard from 1998 through 2007, so I was there after that first show but before this project got started. I was in on some of the early discussions, but I have really just been an interested observer from Washington, DC.

MICHELLE KUO: But had you ever thought about pursuing some conservation during your tenure there?

HARRY COOPER: Not really. I had actually seen the 1993 Sackler show, where the panels were presented as a kind of natural-history object or artifact, and the theme of the show was really the striking color change.

And then while I was working at the museum, the paintings lived under extra-heavy-duty garbage-bag plastic wrapping in storage, and occasionally someone would want to see them. We would usually say no.

I didn't think there was anything to be done about them. I would never have thought of projecting light. And I was very skeptical about it. But I am very, very impressed with the results.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: What happens when the work changes—I assume the paintings will continue to change? I guess software and technology change, too.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Well, those are two different things. With the paintings, the scientists were very careful in designing the light projection to ensure that the projected light did not contribute to further fading.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: I am struck by the fact that Rothko was trying to give an impression of light to his painting, and here the light is trying to give an impression of painting. It is an inverse effect. But I wonder why it is necessary to have a canvas at all! Why not just show these as literal—

R. H. QUAYTMAN: As a projection of the painting, you mean?

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: As a projection or some artifact depicting what the work is like. This is a mediated version that's almost like a séance—

JEFFREY WEISS: That's a great image.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Where you have two completely different slices of media in time.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: I certainly see where you're coming from, and all I can say is that, for us, this proposition was an attempt to consider a possibility for conserving the works. We were working within the mind-set of the traditional tenets of art conservation.

The projected light was designed to address only the areas where the paint had faded. A compensation image was created that dictated the nature and specific location of the projected light for localized correction. So the paintings are not indiscriminately flooded with color. But that's not to deny the point you're making about the hybrid nature of this project.

JEFFREY WEISS: The fading is overall, right?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: It's differential overall.

JEFFREY WEISS: But one form of fading or another is at stake in the entire series, throughout all the paintings?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Yes.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: But again, then: Why use the canvas at all?

HARRY COOPER: Why not project onto a blank wall or—

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Or even a blank canvas, if you want that texture.

HARRY COOPER: That gets right to the question of what is left of the paintings in the experience. And Lynn, you're suggesting that maybe very little is left of the original paintings in this séance, as you called it.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Yes. Because it is an approximation from the period photographs of the paintings, right?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Yes. The Ektachrome slides of the murals were made in 1964, and they provided a record of the paintings before the damage. But given the nature of Ektachrome slides, they tend to emphasize red and change over time. So the first step taken by the scientists was to digitally restore the faded slides in collaboration with the Digital Humanities Lab at the University of Basel. And then the second source for the unfaded original color was the sixth panel that Rothko had made for the commission but ultimately rejected. It had remained in the possession of the estate.

HARRY COOPER: But I would still say there are important aspects of the experience left. Even with the compensation image, we're still seeing brushwork.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: And painted edges.

HARRY COOPER: Yes. We see exactly how Rothko fussed with those edges and aspects of texture, although one question is whether a slightly higher level of lighting overall would allow one to see a little more of the texture.

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YVE-ALAIN BOIS: The only problem I have with projected lights, concerning Rothko in particular, is that projected light only lights the surface: The delicate underlayers are lost. If you shine more light, then that surface effect would get even more pronounced. So I thought that the low level of light in the gallery was actually a good idea—to try to approximate the way the work would have been lit, to have some of the underlayers show through.

KEN OKIISHI: I also don't think that a pure projection, without the paintings, would be able to produce the mixture of pigment and light that would approximate what a painting looks like. With a digital projector, the image is always flattened to a greater degree than when you have light reflected off pigment. So I found that mixture very interesting.

But I did notice that, overall, the painting still flattened. The way Rothko worked, it wasn't really glazing, but it was using layers and layers of pigment and paint, and through the brushwork, these halos or this kind of liquid abyss of layers would arise. I got the feeling that these layers were somehow lost. At the same time, we were seeing a kind of pumped-up Rothko. Like the way a Photoshop color correction pumps up an image, or the sense you get of looking at an exhibition catalogue and seeing a pumped-up version of a work, even if the pumped-up version looks good.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: I was fearing that, but then in the adjacent gallery there were several other paintings by Rothko. Two of them looked extremely fiery and actually coloristically more vibrant than the restored ones. So I didn't at all have the feeling that these restored works were pumped up.

DAVID REED: Even with a normal Rothko under normal lighting, it's hard to tell exactly what is the materiality of the paint and what is the inner light emanating from the canvas. Looking at these canvases under the projected light, I had that same kind of confusion. It's typical of Rothko, and I think it's to be expected from his paintings. I like the confusion between "What is the light?" and "What is the materiality?"

JEFFREY WEISS: But to me, these remarks are still based on the idea that we're looking at the paintings through projected, colored light, as opposed to the way they were intended to function, which is to conjure a metaphoric impression of inner light using the material means of paint and canvas alone, in combination with the illumination of the room, of course.

I'm full of admiration for what the Rothko team has done, and the care with which it's been executed. My concern is that the impression we have from this installation is unnervingly real—which makes it easy for us to forget that it's an illusion, for the most part. It's the substitution of one medium for another.

Digital projector used in the color restoration of Mark Rothko's Harvard Murals, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA, 2015. Photo: Kate Lacey. © Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Every day, the projection is turned off at a certain time so you can see the paintings as they are.

JEFFREY WEISS: The lights go on and off.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: "We're off" at four PM—

MICHELLE KUO: When that happened, everyone in the room went, "Ahhh, amazing!"

DAVID REED: I even liked that overtly theatrical aspect of the presentation. That's also a part of Rothko. I have a story that I'm shy about telling: When I was a student at the Studio School in '66, I brought a petition to Rothko to sign. He took a liking to me because, at the time, I was on leave from Reed College in Portland, Oregon, and his niece was thinking of going there.

We had a long talk, and he took me into his studio, where he was working on what would become the Rothko Chapel paintings in Houston. The paintings were on rolling walls with wheels and hung from ropes and pulleys. It was like a stage set, with klieg lights. He pulled the paintings up and down and asked me which height I liked best, and the best relation between the heights. Then he put his arm around my shoulder and whispered—a stage whisper—in my ear: "I have never told this to anyone else, but when I was a child escaping from Russia, there were pogroms, and I saw big open graves. And that's where these forms come from."

In preparing for this conversation today, I read James E. B. Breslin's book [*Mark Rothko: A Biography*, 1993], and it turns out that Rothko actually told this same story to a number of people. But I've kept the secret until now. [*Laughter.*] I played my role.

JEFFREY WEISS: We admire your discretion.

DAVID REED: His words had a powerful effect on me, which I'm sure was intended. They were part of a kind of performance.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Did he say anything about the effect of the skylight on the paintings?

DAVID REED: Oh yes, if I remember correctly, he used a long stick to manipulate a frame under the skylight from which a piece of cloth was suspended. As the cloth opened and closed, he asked when the light was the best on the paintings.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: It's interesting because the entire work is metaphorically about the painting of light, and then the light is leaving.

When I went and saw the Harvard Murals, I didn't see the switch-off at four, but just saw the projection. I did feel that the room was dark, and that was weird to me, because you can't look at paintings in dark rooms.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: That's the way Rothko should always be. You should always be in a dark room. He always switched off the gallery lights whenever there was a show. How Rothkos are lit changes them dramatically: Because, again, if it's very harsh light, you don't see the play of the underlayers, and it's totally different. So they should always be underlit. He himself said so all the time, throughout his life.

JEFFREY WEISS: I think there were some exceptions, but it's true, he often asked for this, even though we almost never do it. All the same, I would say that there is a sharp difference between seeing an actual painting in a darkened room and seeing a painting enhanced by the projection of color in the form of actual light.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: Yes. I just think they're different things.

JEFFREY WEISS: It's one thing to say, as David has, that Rothko is theatrical, and on his own terms that is fine as far as it goes, but it's another thing for us to be creating that idea of theater using these other means.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: I remember when Carol was working on the restoration of the Rothko Chapel paintings with a team inside the chapel itself. And every time a cloud was passing by, everything had to change. You remember that? It was a nightmare because it was so volatile in many ways. In this particular case of the Harvard Murals, the relation to light is fixed. That's what the projection does. You freeze a moment of color variation and that's it. I think I would prefer to have something that is an approximation of a truth of one moment, rather than nothing at all.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: But weren't the works made for a room full of light?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Yes.

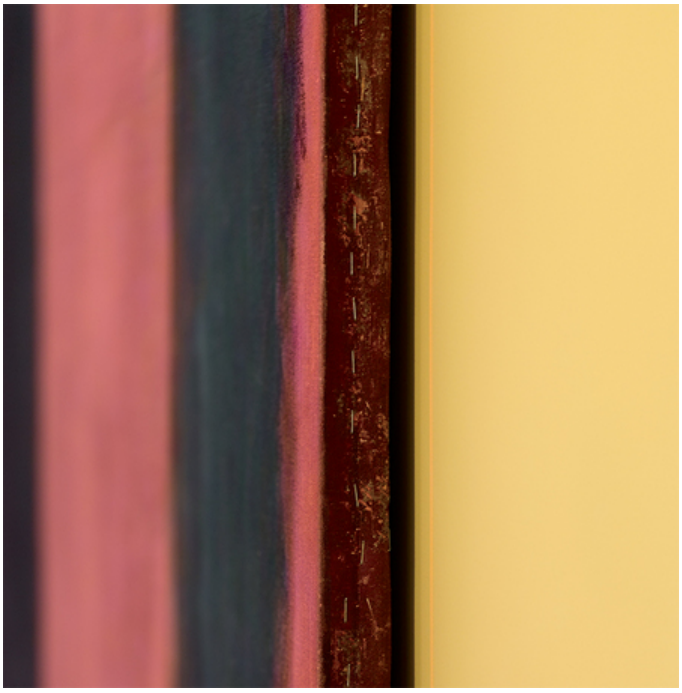
HARRY COOPER: But a room in which the blinds were supposed to be drawn. And yet the views are so nice that people didn't draw the blinds.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Was there any kind of photographic record of the shifts? When did people notice how bad it was getting, the evolution?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: It was noted by the conservators a few years later, but to my knowledge there was no systematic notation of change.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: I also saw the Sackler show in 1993, and at that time I came away thinking that the whole idea behind the show, on which conservators and curators collaborated, was to justify the situation: "It wasn't Harvard's fault." Of course, this was before your time, Carol. If I remember well, the wall text referred to Rothko's pigment as "fugitive," implying that he knowingly used paint that would fade. There were tiny samples of canvas said to have been painted with the same colors that Rothko had used, and to have been submitted to the same harsh light conditions—it looked like the result of a forensic investigation, the gist of which was to blame Rothko himself.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Actually, Rothko was very knowledgeable about his materials, and Lithol Red, which he used, was thought to be a permanent color at the time.



Mark Rothko, *Panel Four (Harvard Mural)* (detail), 1962, egg tempera and distemper on canvas, 8' 9" × 15'. As seen with colored digital projection. © Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

MICHELLE KUO: One more technically minded issue is the difference between analog and digital. When we are working with printing digital images, we have to toggle between CMYK, which is the main model of color printing, and RGB, which is what you see on the screen. So the translation from a digital image to an analog, materially printed image is something we're always wrestling with. It's never commensurate.

The same kind of incommensurabilities exist between the digital color of the projected light and the color of the physical pigment, and that is a difference that will always be there. At the end of the day, we're relying on an implied objectivity of visual perception among all of us, even though we're all probably seeing slightly different colors.

KEN OKIISHI: One thing that I had trouble with is precisely this reduction of color to numbers. There's the kind of color that is produced in a painting, on the one hand, and the kind of color that's produced in a digital image, on the other; the digital is, in its basic form, a reduction of a painting to a set of numbers. And the experience of when they turn off the projection becomes a ritual. First of all, all these people are gathered there.

And then whatever is faded by the sun appears before you, while the numerical, digital color disappears. A certain structure comes to the fore; and you also get a different complexity of the layers of color, even though the color is now totally "wrong." But there is something in that tension between these experiences that I actually really liked. I liked that it created this new kind of ritual.

MICHELLE KUO: Rebecca, you look skeptical.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: No. I mean, I think the way paintings travel through history usually tells the truth. So this is going to be some kind of truth. It's going to keep happening, this kind of technique. This is also the result of big changes in art restoration in general. It's just: Where do we go with it?

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Yes, but if it happens in an artist's lifetime, to their work, they can of course control how the technique will project out, literally. And that's something that artists should think about—how their work will be archived—and take responsibility for its future.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: I know. I think about that a lot. But I would rather err on the side of the painting than technology.

JEFFREY WEISS: This kind of technique is inevitable, is what you're saying. And I agree. Broadly speaking, in our culture today, the distinction between the digital, or technologized, image and the painted image is often easily ignored.

This is a condition of beholding that is very different from the sphere of the Rothko project, but one that the project is nevertheless participating in—in a really fascinating and complex way, but one that should give us pause with respect to what we say about the material and technical terms of painting versus other kinds of imagemaking.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: Again, though: Where is it leading, I wonder, in terms of your work, Carol, and other things that this technology could be used on?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Well, I'm interested in what you all think. This kind of software can theoretically be used on other works of art.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Have you ever considered putting it online?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Jens Stenger, Narayan Khandekar, and other scientists who worked on this will publish an article about the tools we used, including the math, for people who want to do this, and it will soon be available online.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: But Lynn, you mean—like showing online the unrestored and restored paintings to see the difference?

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Yes.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: But you wouldn't be experiencing a painting that way.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: No.

JEFFREY WEISS: And you wouldn't have ambient space and scale and—

HARRY COOPER: I'm a little uncomfortable with this idea that what we're getting in the project when the lights are on is a digital experience. I would say it is *partly* an experience of extremely high-resolution, digitally produced light, but one that is married—through this amazing amount of work, in the most cellular way—to the structure of paint and canvas.

And so I think it's tempting to talk about this as Jeffrey is suggesting, as participating in a society of the spectacle, digital revolution, lights and noise. But I think it's very rare to see the application of digital technology, in such a painstakingly material way, marry itself to a physical substrate.

It's something I certainly have never seen before. Normally, when we go see projections onto one surface or another, the surface never matters. Sometimes it's just a projection into the air. But here the surface was treated with a kind of love. That's the only way I can really describe it.

JEFFREY WEISS: It's still a question of color imposed by projected light. I mean, no matter how good it is, it doesn't change the fact that it's a different medium or an enhanced medium. Nothing you say in defense of the project can alter the fact that we're talking about a basic shift.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: Yes, but you have to compare it to the alternative, which is basically to repaint.

JEFFREY WEISS: Well, no: The third option is to do nothing.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: But with this, you just flip a switch and it *is* nothing.

JEFFREY WEISS: Yes, but before the switch is flipped, we're still creating a set of conditions that we're asking people to encounter as authentic in some way.

KEN OKIISHI: But anyone going to a museum now sees people holding iPads up to objects all the time. So in many ways, people are already seeing images of artworks floating in front of artworks.

I personally don't have such a problem with the fact that there is a different medium used to restore the work. I did think it was weird, though, that in that space, the only thing anyone talked about was the restoration—nobody actually talked about the paintings.

And at the moment when the projector died, when they turned it off, many people said, "Oh, it's much better now!" Which I also think is totally ridiculous. But it raises the question: Is this a mediated experience or an unmediated experience? Does it add to the experience of the artwork in itself?

HARRY COOPER: Maybe I'm staking out an extreme position, but I would be happy with a presentation in which you simply walk into the room, and only on your way out are you told what you have seen. Because there is this problem of what we know and what we see. But of course that raises a lot of the concerns Jeffrey has about deception and honesty to the materials.

All the same, as Ken was saying, the discussion becomes fixated on the technique and the issues, if you're told right up front about this big framing device.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: We could put it in the media part of the label or something.

HARRY COOPER: You could hide it. You could put it in fine print. [*Laughter.*] The stuff nobody ever reads except us.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: I never read wall text!

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Well, the team hoped viewers would begin to think and talk about the paintings themselves. [*Laughter.*] My question is, Why is it that people are not talking about the murals?

DAVID REED: I have a lot of thoughts about these paintings that I think I wouldn't have had if I hadn't seen them in this revived state. To me, the experience drove home the fact that the paintings are meant to function as a group—to become one experience. That's one reason I think the projections *do* work, because they even out all the background colors so the paintings can be seen together.

The fact that they are a group, a set of multiple, modular paintings, is historically important. At the time, Barnett Newman was working on "The Stations of the Cross"[1958–66]. On Kawara made *Title*, the triptych, in 1965, and then there are Lee Lozano's "Wave Series" paintings done between 1967 and 1970. And Jo Baer made twelve paintings for a show at Fischbach Gallery in New York in '66 that could be installed in different configurations but were meant to be seen together, as a group. So seeing the Rothko paintings as one work adds to understanding their historical position.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: I agree. And the Rothko Chapel came next, and they are certainly one experience with fourteen paintings—all with similar grounds.

DAVID REED: Exactly. And another thing: I realized that the Harvard canvases are organized in a very peculiar way. In the set of three canvases installed on one wall touching each other, the width of the canvas on the right is smaller than the width of the canvas on the left. You would think there would be a large central canvas and two canvases of the same size on either side. That's not the case.

Then the image on the canvas to the right is also squeezed, so that there is a strong sense of momentum from left to right in the paintings, in terms of color, proportion, and the forms, that I hadn't realized was there before. It made me wonder about a similar spin that happens at the Rothko Chapel, where you can't stop and look at just one painting. Now, I think that this is very intentional. One wants to keep moving and see all the paintings. There is something very filmic about this experience, and I didn't expect to find that in Rothko's paintings. The projections helped me to see the paintings in a different way.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: I think the consistency of the ground color certainly contributed to your ability to do that.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: How did the digital reconstruction happen? Did they take a particular color and iterate it all over? Was there a particular pattern to what was addressed?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: According to Jens, the compensation images were calculated from a very large data set, addressing each of more than two million locations, or pixels, on each painting. They took into account reflectance, the ambient light that would blend with the projector light, as well as many other variables, and refined the images even further to account for uniformity across the panels, etc.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Essentially pixel by pixel, it seems.

MICHELLE KUO: But without the actual sixth panel, and its undamaged section, it seems this couldn't really have been done—you'd be relying on the color correction of the Ektachromes—

HARRY COOPER: Which is based on a lot of assumptions.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: And, of course, there are several studies on paper that have not faded either.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: In fact, the studies on paper showed exactly what David was talking about in terms of progression and color of the ground.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: Another amusing moment during the ritual of switching off the projection is when the conservators show you how it's done. They bring you a piece of white card and pass it in front of the projection—so it's between the painting and the projection—and you see that the projected coloration is really pixel by pixel.

And you realize that the amount of work that went into this is quite amazing. You also realize that sometimes the colors they have added in order to obtain what you see are very surprising. The color correction is completely unlike what you would expect.

JEFFREY WEISS: There is always a wow factor with any application of science and high technology in conservation. But maybe it also distracts or diverts audiences in a way that we should be wary of. It makes

me think of an apposite story about James Turrell, who claimed that Rothko's work was very important to him when he was taking art classes. But he realized later that he was seeing them as projected slides, and that that was what mattered to him—the paintings themselves were actually disappointing.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: But imagine the case of a Brice Marden wax painting that has been damaged and somehow rubbed so that it is extremely shiny. And the only difference is the sheen, which kills the painting. Would we have the slightest hesitation in killing the sheen by using a projection? No. I think that if that's the best way, if it's the only way, I'd rather have that than a Brice Marden with a mega-sheen in the middle of the work. I mean, that's hideous.

JEFFREY WEISS: Knowing that there are a lot of other Brice Marden paintings out there that are relatively unaffected, I would rather leave your painting alone.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: You are a maximalist.

JEFFREY WEISS: No. I'm distressed that we can't seem to get around the fact that we are still speaking of two different mediums, and that to me is different from most kinds of painting restoration, which do not alter the medium of the work.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: You're not a maximalist. You're a purist.

JEFFREY WEISS: Using words like *maximalist* and *purist* strikes me as a way to avoid unpacking the implications. I think we all on some level—as curators and historians—need to at least traffic in a certain kind of "purism," because nobody else will. So if this kind of restoration is going to happen anyway, it should be done in the context of debate. Taking it for granted as just OK or even an improvement or better than nothing is a mistake.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: But what's interesting in this conversation is that *most* aged paintings have been treated in some way and the restoration materials aren't always consistent with the original materials. So we're just comfortable with the restorer mixing up some kind of synthetic paint that will look like the original paint—and putting it on to imitate the way the artist worked?

JEFFREY WEISS: Well, in fact, we're not always comfortable with that. What's more, this is a difference of kind, I think, not of degree. That's the most important distinction I would make.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Maybe there is no one state for a work of art.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: That's right. Time is not frozen. Things are in a constant state of flux.

JEFFREY WEISS: I am the first to acknowledge the fact that paintings everywhere are changing all the time. One illusion at stake here is the illusion of origin—of authenticity—because it's impossible to claim that anything is still really authentically what it was when it was produced, and it's also wrong to say that we can truly "restore" those qualities. And that is probably an idea that is hard for us to discuss, because it implies that nothing we're looking at is original in the sense that we wish it were. Which goes to the whole question of the discipline of art history, to paraphrase Michael Ann Holly, as intrinsically being a melancholic practice, because it's trying to retrieve and sustain a quality of the experience of the object that's lost.

It is worth considering whether or not this restoration means to do that, to retrieve the irretrievable somehow, to fix our impression of the work in a very specific and permanent—

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: No, not permanent. How is it permanent?

JEFFREY WEISS: Not materially so. But the projection creates a sensation of the work that is fixed, because our impression of it cannot change in the context of the normal variables of ambient experience. In that the conditions of seeing it are, by necessity, hermetic and scrupulously controlled, the effect can be compared to that of a diorama.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: I do think there is something eerie about the fact that this isn't something the average viewer could do themselves. I mean, that's what paintings are. Basically, you could do it yourself. Whereas someone with no technical training can't really do a photograph. You can't do this. You can't do that. But a painting you could do, if you devoted time to it.

And so there is something weird when you're using something you couldn't normally do on your own, or even with a restorer in a shop, to fix a painting. It's like it's invisible.

White card illustrating the projected light used in the restoration of Mark Rothko's *Panel Five (Harvard Mural)*, 1962, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA, 2015. Photo: Kate Lacey. © Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

HARRY COOPER: What about the idea that paintings are always seen under conditions of light that have been imposed and chosen? We know that Rothko often got upset about lighting, but that this restoration is in some way on a continuum with curatorial choices about illumination of paintings. And therefore it does not need to be fenced with quite as many warning signs and with as many worries as one might have.

DAVID REED: Harry, one of my worst experiences with Rothko, one that turned me against him at the time—like a lot of my friends, I've had my ups and downs about Rothko—was the Guggenheim show in '78, where the paintings were lined up around the ramp and floated out from white walls in too much light. It was a terrible situation for the paintings. They looked decorative and arbitrary, repetitive, and as a young artist it made me less interested in his work. The show, done in a conventional way, did him no favors. In fact, it was more damaging to his intentions than this exhibition at Harvard, even with the projected light, since the daylight was more against his wishes than the projections are, in my opinion.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: But besides the danger of further damaging the painting, which we are told is not the case here, I see this as a very gentle—and impermanent—way of correcting something without further alienating the surface of the painting. I remember your anxieties about the Rothko Chapel, Carol, because everything you did, even though it was reversible, was some kind of imposition that nevertheless intruded into the surface—which is essential for Rothko, we all agree.

Whereas this projection process, at least on that level, is completely harmless. It doesn't impinge on the surface itself.

JEFFREY WEISS: I agree with you. It is harmless in the sense that it is reversible.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: And I, unlike some of you, did not perceive that it was a different experience. I did not. It looked to me the way Rothko should look. The paintings were even dimmer than the other undamaged ones in the other room. The paintings were less *boom!*

I remember first seeing a set of Rothkos at the Tate, in the early '70s, I think. It was very dim. In fact, you had to adjust for about five minutes to see the painting. And then the surface would slowly come to you—not unlike the way some of the blackest Reinhardts come to you after a while. I had a similar experience at Harvard. I did not perceive the projectors. In fact, I had to be told where they were. "Where is this projection?"

So I didn't have this allergy that you seem to have, like "Oh my God, the digital!" You know, "Boohoo, we are changing domains and falling into spectacle." I didn't have that sensation at all.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: But the thing is, I didn't know what the damage was, and I think I saw a picture on the Internet in which the canvas was really pale. Were they completely washed out?

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: Some colors are completely changed, from orange to purple, for example. Other colors that were supposed to be brown were blue, and in some areas they actually became almost black.

JEFFREY WEISS: I agree that the level of deception is extremely high.

HARRY COOPER: I had the experience of not being sure if I was having the experience. [*Laughter.*] The works don't look lit.

It was a bit like what David was saying about the undecidability of Rothko's surface. Is that blurry because the compensation image is not quite indexed perfectly, or is it blurry because his edges are soft? Or am I seeing underlayers? It was disturbing, maybe because I knew something was going on but I couldn't get hold of what it was. I was squinting.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: But don't you squint in front of every Rothko?

HARRY COOPER: Yes, that's true! But here I even took out my iPhone and turned on the flashlight.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: Oh my God.

HARRY COOPER: Just for a second.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: You ruined another pixel.

HARRY COOPER: I did feel the need for some kind of—

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Reality check?

HARRY COOPER: Some kind of real pure and blinding clarity about the whole thing.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: And did it do that?

HARRY COOPER: Well, I could suddenly see the surface—but you know, when I go into any museum, I'm the person who's turning the flashlight on. I want to see facture, texture. So it worked for that, but, of course, it cancels out a lot of the real experience you're supposed to have. It did leave me in a queasy state.

MICHELLE KUO: There's also the question of whether this is actually a shift of medium in degree or in kind here. And can we really speak of medium in this way? What we're looking at with the original Rothko work is an object that is itself an aggregate already: You have texture and color and depth, you have fiber and metal-based pigment and stretcher bar, and so on. These are all already very different materials—dissociable, heterogeneous, physical, and phenomenal qualities or properties—in this supposedly unified object. So it does seem strange to object to the addition of yet one more element if it is in the service of restoration.

DAVID REED: I'm very eager to accept the projections, and I'm surprised how much I am. They bring something back to life that was dead. But I'm interested in Jeffrey's wariness about the project and where this comes from. I think we all do have to worry about how technology can alter works in various ways. So is there more you can say about where your worries come from?

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: I can see the worry that, one day, this is going to spell the end of museums, because all you need is a couple of projections. But this kind of thing is already happening. A few days ago, there was a *New York Times* article about the mayor of Tehran installing some fifteen hundred large reproductions of art works in his city, including many Western ones, such as Munch's *Scream*, etc. I don't actually remember if these images are on screens or just printed and pasted on large billboards, but according to the article, this urban campaign is being very well received by most locals—and as a political strategy designed to mollify the mayor's public perception, it seems to be working.

JEFFREY WEISS: Saying that the common use of projections or iPads obviates these concerns seems backward to me: It may mean that the Harvard team's treatment is easier to accept, but can it be used as a justification?

I think it would be unfortunate to reduce this exchange to a pro and con debate. I see the value of what's been done. I also see, as I said, the inevitability of it. So it's brought us a lot of information that we didn't have before, for which I'm grateful. But I just don't see it only that way. And I think that this distinction, this material distinction of medium, is something that is real and should be at stake in the conversation, and not something that gets bracketed out of our consideration of the success or failure of the project.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: Do you think it's complicated by the fact that art itself is made of that material now—digital projections?

JEFFREY WEISS: Absolutely. I think that the technologized observer is at stake here in every way—the way in which we see the restoration and the almost tacit acceptance of it. The fact that we can even take it for granted because we have iPads in museums is fascinating to me but also disconcerting, because, given that it is a form of simulation, what is successful about the Rothko project could also compromise the way in which we understand the material and technical specificity of painting as a medium.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: And the projection in this sense is an artifact that has less chance of shifting, or takes longer to shift, than the condition of the original physical materials.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: What do you mean, Lynn? CDs are basically kaput after ten years—

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Well, this isn't a CD.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: Well, whatever. You know, new technology changes at a far quicker pace than many older materials.

KEN OKIISHI: I think it's fine to put a projection onto a painting. [*Laughter.*]

The phenomenon of it is, of course, interesting to me, since I'm making artwork with this particularly anxious confluence of mediums: paint and video. But that aside, the basic level of restoration here—the sheer ability to show these works now—is pretty amazing.

It's funny that there is this notion that with the lights off, it's a pure thing, and with the lights on, it's not pure—because I think both states are totally impure. In one, you have to imagine what the painting used to look like, and in the other, you have to trust that the restoration is correct. Right? So they both create this situation of doubt, and not only technological doubt.

JEFFREY WEISS: That's an important idea here: doubt.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: What do you think Rothko would have thought about this?

DAVID REED: I think he would have liked it. He liked controversy. He liked going over the edge. I now think that his legacy might not only be in multiple modular paintings but also in video projections and a lot of other installation art. The legacy of Rothko lies in the theatrical, in dematerialized color.

JEFFREY WEISS: But this doesn't give us license to defend colored light. Even so, while I do think we have the responsibility to be as true as we can to the work's terms and its means, what David has described is one way that painting can get away from us in useful, interesting ways, going on to have other

lives that we can't anticipate or control.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: Jeffrey, I want to make sure I understand your position. If I understand correctly, you're saying that you prefer not to show the work rather than to show the work with this restoration, which is trying to restore its visual integrity—its aesthetic integrity, as opposed to material.

You know, there are many times when it's not necessary to restore a work because it's not actually that damaged; it's fine. But there are moments where the work has suddenly fallen into nothing, it just loses all its capacity to move you because it's not there anymore. It's a slow, quantitative evolution that takes a qualitative leap at some point.

JEFFREY WEISS: I'm not arguing against the treatment as an experiment or, as Carol said, a proposition. I want to make that clear. I really think that what we've learned from what you and the Rothko team have done, Carol, has been of great value.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: But . . . ?

JEFFREY WEISS: But conservation practice doesn't exist in a state of innocence. I am trying to introduce into the exchange a consideration of the level of falsification—be it open or covert—that's at stake. And, following from that, a whole other set of questions and problems emerge that concern what it is we do when we treat something, why we can't accept that some things just do die, what it means to look at the same painting from one year to the next, what it is we see when we go to a church in Rome, etc., which is where this topic, I think, also takes us.

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: True.

HARRY COOPER: I was thinking of *The Last Supper* as a possible analogy, where, if I'm not mistaken, there is a question about whether there is any original paint left on the thing at this point. There has been restoration of restoration and so on, and we get to a point where the image we see now may be a total simulacrum, albeit in a similar medium. But still I think it goes to your point; it requires an act of faith, both in the various acts of restoration and in how they might relate to some original. And is there a point at which one might say, "Forget it. We're fooling ourselves. It's gone"?

JEFFREY WEISS: I would add that the ruinous state has its own role to play in the influence of or afterlife of that painting, over the centuries, and that in fact the ruin, as extreme as it is now, has to be useful in some way for reasons that obviously have nothing to do with what's authentic to the work.

So I'm trying to grasp both sides. It's really that there are more than two. For example, there are competing ideas of authenticity here: the so-called original state of the murals, which the Rothko team is trying to recuperate, versus the quasi-ruinous state that the murals are in now—equally real. But there is also a third idea: that the enhanced murals will, going forward, serve as a whole new version of the work.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: Well, as per usual the market may decide everything. [*Laughter.*] In the sense of whether the painting has value—literal monetary value. And insurance companies!

HARRY COOPER: So if a damaged work went to market, you might buy it along with the software that controls the compensation image.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: That's really the next step. Would it be more or less expensive?

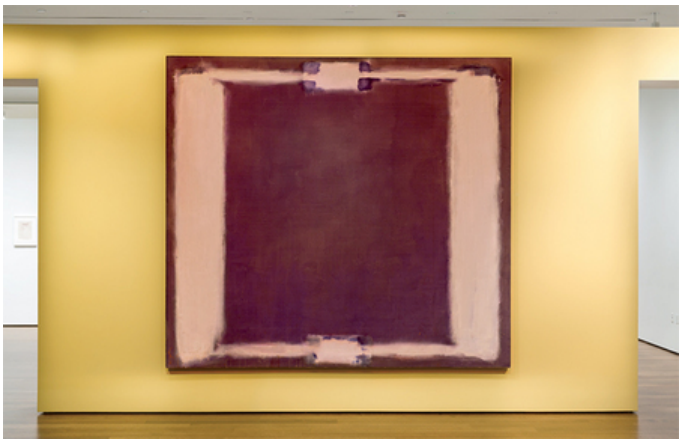
CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: But, Jeffrey, do you think that the Harvard Murals are ruined?

JEFFREY WEISS: In some respects they are, by definition, a ruin. They have changed in irretrievable ways.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: Rather than being so pessimistic, you could imagine artists taking inspiration—

JEFFREY WEISS: I don't understand why what I am saying is pessimistic. I'm trying to hold onto what I thought we all believe is specific to painting as a medium, and I've got to tell you, Yve-Alain, that coming from you, this is pretty shocking! [*Laughter.*]

I'm just saying that we have a different set of responsibilities, at least with respect to self-criticality, with respect to our practice, both as historians and as conservators. And that's the position from which I'm trying to ask these questions.



Mark Rothko, *Panel Five (Harvard Mural)*, 1962, egg tempera and distemper on canvas. Installation view with colored digital projection, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA, 2015. Photo: Kate Lacey. © Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: This makes me think about the Newman painting *Shining Forth (to George)* [1961], which is in a disastrous state in the collection of the Pompidou. This is a painting that is, at present, disgusting to see. The work, which is a masterpiece of Newman's, has been stupidly murdered by those

idiots at the Pompidou; it was badly damaged in an accident in 1990—by large, black motor oil splashes on the middle of the painting. Then the director of the museum at the time, Germain Viatte, forced a poor conservator to do work on it at full speed, even though he wanted to follow the advice of many people who knew better, such as Carol—which was to wait until conservation scientists assessed the real nature of the damage and whether it was at all possible to restore the painting. The consensus of everyone having any knowledge of what was at stake was "Please wait!" But Viatte wanted the painting back in the galleries as soon as possible. Treatments were attempted, alas not reversible ones, which actually made things worse—soap created blue stains next to the black oil ones—yet the painting was quickly reinstalled . . . only to soon be de-installed as a result of public outcry. It remained in storage for years, which paradoxically engendered still another problem: By not being exposed to any light, the cotton and Rivit glue used by Newman darkened in some areas, creating a kind of huge brownish "cloud." Very recently brought out of storage, after further restoration attempts, and reinstalled, the painting is even more of an eyesore now. To sum up, it has three major problems and solving one systematically makes the other one worse. So far, no one has figured out how to treat the problems together. It looks like shit. And they decided to display it again without any shame, and it is really painful to watch.

[Editor's note: After this issue went to press, a new restoration of the painting was unveiled and installed on May 27 as part of the permanent collection at the Centre Pompidou; the latest conservation has, according to Bois, "splendidly addressed the aforementioned damage; it is verging on the miraculous."]

Could this projection process digitally erase the damage?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: It could be investigated.

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: Then I'm all for it. If this technology—which is completely nonintrusive and is not permanent, and which you can switch off at any time—if this technology could restore this Newman to what it was, which is really one of the most beautiful paintings he ever made, I'm all for it. Do it right away. There is no moral problem. I don't have anxieties about all the technological monsters that are going to crawl into my bed.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: What if, for example, there was a very valuable painting under a not-valuable painting, and you could project the X-ray onto the painting?

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Or expose it?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: This is moving away from historical conservation, into the making of art.

JEFFREY WEISS: I'm not a technophobe. But erasing a stain from the surface of an unpainted canvas and imposing an overall wash of color through the projection of actual light are two very different things. There is, I think, an inherent resistance to criticism of the Rothko project, because we badly want this kind of thing to work. And when it's pretty convincing or very convincing, then most of the other criteria fall away.

What I've been saying is that I think illusion is a risky place to be, always: ethically, even politically. And I stand by that.

KEN OKIISHI: Are you against restoration in any way?

JEFFREY WEISS: Of course not. I'm not categorically against any form of restoration, including this. But I am against some restorations, in a case-by-case way—

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: Against bad restoration.

JEFFREY WEISS: I'm not, for example, intrinsically against cleaning a painting, which often results in changing the way it's looked for many decades, if not centuries. That has to do with eliminating the discoloration of varnish or removing an accumulation of grime. But this is different.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: One thing that might clarify this question is if you could say that it's a restoration that only addresses the fading of colors, nothing else. Like does it change a line? Does it change an edge?

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: That is true.

JEFFREY WEISS: We could explain it at great length and with wall text and with books and catalogues and with docents, but it still doesn't change the nature of the experience with respect to the shift in medium. It simply asks you to suspend disbelief, so to speak, on behalf of what the restoration accomplishes, which is absolutely something that, again, as an experiment, is worth asking. But that experiment begs other questions. In any case, what this project has done is brought us, I think, to a kind of crossroads with respect to conservation and technology in the realm of painting.

KEN OKIISHI: I found the whirring of the projector very distracting. So on a sound level, I found the restoration rather unsuccessful.

JEFFREY WEISS: And the projection slightly exceeds the lower margin of the painting—

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: There is a reason for that. Jens had to deal with the fact that a digital projector produces images that have the so-called screen-door effect: Each pixel has a dark square around it. These are very thin dark lines, but unacceptable for a painting restoration tool. To eliminate this problem, he defocused the projector a small amount, which creates a slightly soft edge of the compensation image and a slight overspill.

MICHELLE KUO: That, of course, could one day be overcome. It's interesting, because we're talking about works that were made just a few years before someone like Robert Rauschenberg would start to incorporate machines into some of his sculptures, which he would then completely allow to be technologically updated—radios, for example, were updated later to digital radios, and so on, and the fact that some component of the material itself completely changed was completely fine.

JEFFREY WEISS: Well, this is a form of what we refer to as the migration of medium.

MICHELLE KUO: But this was part of Rauschenberg's brilliance, creating a kind of ever-evolving readymade that would change with, and allow for, the obsolescence of technology. This is a historical moment where you have a real divergence in what artists are thinking about in terms of media and the

hybridity of the object: The reason we're arguing about this at all right now is that we never heard Rothko say, "Oh, one day you can just project something onto this," whether it's film or video or 3-D projection.

It's a question of when: When do you listen to the artist and when do you not listen to the artist? Because obviously their opinion, too, may also change over time—even when they are alive their views might evolve—and certain artists give instructions and others don't.

JEFFREY WEISS: Yes. And is migration as a given always acceptable? With Dan Flavin's sculptures, for example, the fluorescent lights eventually stop working; then you have to decide on new technology versus replacing the lamps with newer versions of vintage equipment. The fluorescent-light industry is becoming obsolescent anyway, and so pretty soon we're going to have to custom-make these lamps, which he used to buy on Canal Street for a buck and a half. What will emerge is some kind of cottage-industry workshop production of these lamps.

In fact, over time Flavin himself preferred slightly later technology to the earlier so-called vintage object. He often approved new versions of work that replace the original fixtures with later ones. Of course, the market right now rewards the vintage object, even if it's in a less functional state than the newer version. I think that will probably change too over time. Yet perhaps that's better than changing the medium to, say, LED. But keep in mind that Flavin is also on record as having said, more or less, "when the lights go out, the work is over."

HARRY COOPER: I think that term *migration* is apropos, in which you go from 2.0 to 3.0, or from film to digital. And the word *migration* suggests a movement, a massive movement that you might not be able to undo easily. But as Carol will tell you, even when you're in the same medium, terrible dilemmas come up in any conservation lab all the time. Are you going too far? Are you guessing here? Are you going to in-paint? Are you going to overpaint? Are you not?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO: That's what's definitely going through my mind as we're talking. I mean, we accept a certain level of aging in works of art. We just do. We accept cracks in oil painting.

HARRY COOPER: Right. But in a way, what you've done here—in the broad context of a field that has become more and more conservative, in what I think is a good and responsible way—you've suddenly done something radical in terms of effect, and yet it's conservative because it's so perfectly reversible, just turn-offable. You've smuggled in something radical under this umbrella of reversibility. And it's got us all worked up.

JEFFREY WEISS: This restoration now belongs to the history of the interpretation of Rothko's work and its dissemination and transmission, which is to say that a lot of people are going to see it, artists in particular, and they're going to draw something from it they would never have taken away from their experience of other works by Rothko that are in perfectly good or acceptable condition.

And what you have done through projected light will now become an aspect of the encounter with the work that will influence the way in which it is engaged by younger artists, which I find extremely interesting.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: And they may think up other works that might employ that technique as part of the medium.

KEN OKIISHI: Can I just say something, because I am one of those younger artists? [*Laughter.*] Why is it specifically younger artists? I think one of the reasons that I am less freaked out by this is that I'm used to seeing video projections on all kinds of objects.

JEFFREY WEISS: That's the point I'm trying to make. I want to emphasize the value of distinguishing between Harvard's means and those that are intrinsic to painting per se.

KEN OKIISHI: But it's not such a big deal.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: Well, it's kind of a big deal. [*Laughter.*]

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Also, it's your work, and you're doing it with your own work. What if somebody else—

KEN OKIISHI: I've actually specified "no projection" in a museum acquisition/conservation report for some of my own work, where the paint is on the surface of the screen, and the light comes from behind the paint, from the monitor. If you were to project on top, the video light would be coming from the wrong side of the paint and screen. It would destroy shifting relationships of color, figure/ground, transparency/opacity, inside/outside, which can only happen when the light is coming from behind. But the instructions were also kept abstract enough that unanticipated technologies could be used. I was simply specifying the direction and visual properties of the video light, not exactly how it is produced.

MICHELLE KUO: Rebecca, would you want this to be done to your paintings?

REBECCA QUAYTMAN: Well, I was just going to ask, how might an artist obtain this technology for their own use? I kind of want to try it. [*Laughter.*]

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: It's easy. You can do all kinds of things today. My archive recently went to Stanford and two of my projects—one a site-specific piece from 1973, another a performance—were digitally converted and put online. Even though it worked remarkably well in terms of documentation, and gave access to ephemera that could not normally be seen, it really didn't work except as a reference point. I think I was less impressed than they were.

DAVID REED: Some of the paintings that I made in the early '80s are falling apart. I used the wrong ground and the power sanding I did on the canvases is causing layers of paint to crack. One of these paintings is owned by the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, and they want to save it. Rather than trying to repair it in some way, I've decided to keep the old painting, let it fall apart—it has a certain feeling in its dilapidated state, I don't know, something you can look at; and then, using a better ground, I'll make a new painting that's as close as I can manage to the first. Viewers can look at the two together and make some kind of decision, as can I.

I don't know whether I'll prefer the old painting in ruins to the new one or vice versa. For me, it's an

ART ASIA
Gallery information in Asia

Ken Okiishi: Pt I

BOOKMARK

Architects/Designers
Artists
Curators
Cultural Critics
Other

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Stephen G Rhodes

16/01/29 08:29
Stephen G Rhodes: The Twelf Hobby

15/12/18 08:30
Slavs and Tatars: Pt II

15/12/11 08:30
Slavs and Tatars: Pt I

15/11/20 08:45
Ken Okiishi: Pt III

15/11/13 08:10
Ken Okiishi: Pt II

15/11/10 09:45
Omer Fast: Pt III

15/11/06 08:30
Ken Okiishi: Pt I

15/11/04 09:01
Omer Fast: Pt II

15/10/28 13:31
Omer Fast: Pt I

15/09/14 15:00
Dinh Q Lê

15/08/17 09:55
An-My Lê: Pt III

15/08/03 16:57
An-My Lê: Pt II

15/07/28 21:33
An-My Lê: Pt I

15/06/08 12:05
Kiri Dalena

15/06/05 10:00
Mark Manders, Pt III

15/05/29 11:00

AB/EX/IN/AMB/OM
By Andrew Maerkle

gesture/data (feedback) (2015), oil paint on flat-screen television, mp4 file (color, silent) and feedback mp4 file (color, sound). **All images**: Unless otherwise specified, © Ken Okiishi; courtesy the artist and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo.

Born in 1978 and currently based in New York, Ken Okiishi draws upon a wide range of cultural and topical references in making his works, which can take the form of anything from more-or-less straightforward videos to multimedia installations and performances, but which each reveal the complex interactions between media and subjectivity. In *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* (2010), for example, Okiishi took the German subtitles for Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979), and retranslated them back into English using Google Translate. This new text then served as the script for a film by Okiishi, which was overcut with Allen's original, as well as new footage. Other works have peered into Marcel Duchamp's former Manhattan studio using the real estate search engine Streeteasy.com, or combined video feedback loops with live piano performances. More recently, Okiishi has explored the expressive implications of the flatscreen digital interface technology that is now omnipresent in developed societies. For the series "gesture/data" (2013–), Okiishi paints directly upon the surfaces of flatscreen monitors, which in turn play back television footage that has gone through several generations of recording, reformatting and reprocessing. The marks left by the paint evoke

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both the characteristic residue left by innumerable finger "swipes" on smartphone and tablet screens, and also reinvent diverse traditions of painting, from Chinese and Japanese calligraphy to Abstract-Expressionism and latter-day gestural abstraction and figuration. In the interaction between paint and monitor, the interference itself becomes the "content."

Okiishi was recently in Tokyo for the opening of his second exhibition at Take Ninagawa gallery, where he showed works from his latest project, "gesture/data (feedback)" (2015), in which an additional layer of distortion is added to the "gesture/data" concept by including, among the original television material, footage that has been shot of the painted work itself. This creates an uncanny doubling effect, by which the paint seems to move between the interior and exterior of the screen. ART iT met with Okiishi prior to the opening of the exhibition to discuss his work, and how it relates to his interest in both language and in music, in greater detail.

"gestures, data, feedback" was on view at Take Ninagawa from September 5 to October 24 of this year.

I.

Still from *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* (2010), video, color/sound, 72 min.

ART iT: I'd like to start with an anecdote you might appreciate: The other day I was at a neighborhood café where the only other customers were an older Western man and a middle-aged Japanese woman doing a language exchange. They must have been discussing current events, when suddenly the man started explaining about how, owing to the ancient Greek settlements there, much of the population in Syria are fair-skinned, and how in North Africa as well, there are many fair-skinned populations that descend from colonies like Carthage. This led him to describe the Punic Wars between Carthage and Rome, and the great warrior Hannibal, after which he brought up the darker-skinned Berbers, so-called from the Greek *barbar*, a pejorative onomatopoeia for babbling or foreign speech--also the root of the English "barbarian." In the meantime, when the conversation turned to Japanese, the topic switched to food.
It was fascinating to encounter this obsolete, racially and gender coded ordering of knowledge in the context of a language exchange in a café in Tokyo. There was a rupture in the supposedly "informal" form of the language exchange, which exaggerated its underlying pedagogic structure. I think in an oblique way these ruptures between language and medium or context, and how we embody knowledge, are something your works touch upon. What do you think?

KO: Rupture is very difficult to talk about, and that's part of what interests me about it. In a rupture, you are approaching something that is also in the process of decomposing or

deforming. I think one of the frames for thinking about rupture in my current work, but also in the past work as well, is very simply to think about what is inside and what is outside. The moment that dynamic becomes confused or starts to feed back into itself, such as in the dialogue you describe, it could start to feel like it's going in one direction, but then it's also flowing back in the other direction. Suddenly it becomes something else, not only as it shifts languages, but also in the sense that people are speaking who don't necessarily understand each other. There's an attempt at communication across a barrier, but the barrier is always present, and can never be fully traversed. In that sense, it's a rupture that is also not a rupture. Nothing actually breaks. No matter how close you get, there is always some kind of separation.

I once had a job teaching English, and teaching how to write it at an academic level, to people who didn't necessarily have a strong background in English going into college. There was a funny thing that some of the other teachers would do, which was to re-mystify concepts by trying to explain them in a way that would be hard to understand even for native speakers. The more they tried to work around the communication gap, the more they would produce distance to the language. Instead of getting more concrete, they would get more abstract. This tendency for the gap to generate more and more abstraction instead of concreteness is really interesting to me.

ART iT: Is that similar to what happens in your film *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* (2010), for which you used Google Translate to bring the German subtitles for Woody Allen's *Manhattan* back into spoken English?

KO: Yes, exactly. Google Translate was particularly extreme because it was so systematized. But it changed. It used to operate as a rule-based, algorithmic translation, and now it is statistically based. A simplification of what happens is that the translating machine chooses the most *likely* translation--not necessarily the correct one--and there are these enormous databases working to get the translation more and more perfect. So the newer translation may seem smoother, but a lot of the time it's incorrect.

I actually had this experience with friends in Germany where, because they spoke so fluently, it seemed like they understood everything you were saying in English, but actually there was a lot of miscommunication happening. I think with Google this translation system became an external way to produce that effect in language or between languages, which also connects to the same systems that are used for the ordering of search results. It's based on figures, but also on who's paying whom to improve the search ranking, or who's a better programmer, because if you can link your site to enough other sites, then your page automatically becomes the top hit.

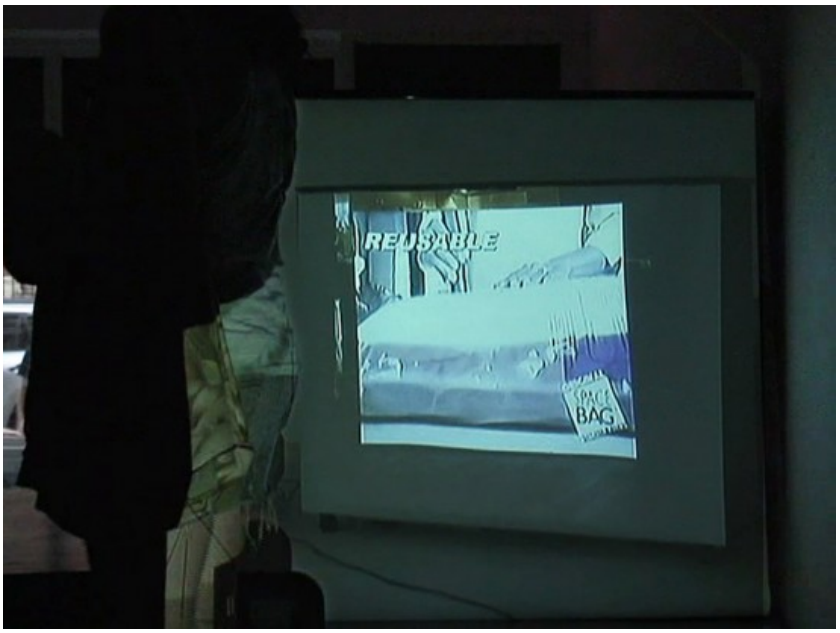
The same kinds of control systems are involved in these different processes, but language is the most intimate of those encounters with another person. The old algorithmically based translation system would make visible these ruptures in language--where it becomes nonsense--but I liked the jokes that could happen there, the new language. One of the things I also liked in language teaching was that you could enter into those mistakes. You can enter into the funny things that happen when you translate too literally, and then when you remove all those parts and explain why the translation doesn't work, it starts to open up how grammar operates, and an understanding of grammar develops out of that. It's not about teaching a set of rules. When you teach a set of rules, you end up with a bad translation.

ART iT: What got you interested in working with language in the first place?

KO: My family was very expressive. We talked all the time. It comes from my mother. She's the kind of person who doesn't change her vocabulary when she talks with children. And then on my father's side, there were always these gaps in language in general, related to his being Japanese-American living in Hawaii before, during and directly after World War II. During the war, when my father was a child, they were basically forbidden from speaking and "acting" Japanese. This bled in all kinds of difficult ways into the immediate postwar period, when my father was a teenager. But, at the same time, because there were so many different cultures there, from native Hawaiian to Portuguese to Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and English as well as Samoan--basically whoever ended up there somehow--there was an amazing pidgin that developed.

Pidgin is fascinating because it doesn't have a logical grammar. It's a way of speaking that emerges naturally between languages and never gets ordered through a grammar or spelling system. My father grew up learning standard American English, but among his friends he would speak pidgin, which they called "Da kine." I can't really do it, but, for example, if you were about to get into a fight, you would say, "You like beef o' what," meaning, "Do you have a beef, do you want to fight?" I guess these were 1950s high-school semi-gangster expressions that occurred between all these people speaking different languages in the same

place, and at a time right before Hawaii became a state.
So if you want to read it psychologically, I think it comes down to that relationship between educated English on my mother's side, and both educated English and repressed Japanese, as well as early-American multi-cultural pidgin, on my father's side. I would say the simultaneity of those different kinds of language in my life--both as presence and absence--is what initially motivated my interest in language.



Performance documentation of *Vorstellungsklavier* (2007-2009) on its third iteration, at Ludlow 38, New York, June 8, 2008.

ART iT: Pidgin is an interesting metaphor, because I think your works explore the ambiguous, undefined space between binary relations. With the "gesture/data" work, for example, it's neither a painting nor a video, it's a. . .

KO: It's hard to find the word. You have to hesitate to find the word, and producing that hesitation is something significant. There's also a lot of rupture in form from one period of time to the next. The original base footage I was working with in these "works"--which I think is the only general category that really applies to them right now--comes from VHS tapes of recorded TV shows that I found in my parents' basement.
I first used the footage for a performance in 2007 at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York, *Vorstellungsklavier*, where I projected it onto the back of a piano as I was playing things such as a Schubert sonata, or classical chamber music, and recording the whole thing on video. Following the first instance, I repeated the performance in different contexts and kept rerecording over the original footage with each iteration. The performance encapsulated this element of the old-fashioned instrument and the different context of chamber music ruptured into the kind of gatherings that happen inside galleries, and then the old TV footage. Gatherings at galleries are always just like being at a bar anyways, and somehow when you're at a bar with the TV on, all you can do is watch the TV. So those two things were happening at the same time.
It's hard to explain. Music is one of those places where the ability to describe things through language really breaks down. A lot of times when you describe music, you end up speaking in clichés--feeling happy, feeling sad, sublime. But this was an interesting situation because it was mixed with the crass form of TV, accentuating the distance between them.
From there, I started using the same footage by playing it back on a television screen and then using the television as a painting surface. I think there's a parallel between the rupture from one mode of live, public performance into another private mode that is based on actions and reflections.

Ken Okiishi: Ab/Ex/In/Amb/Om

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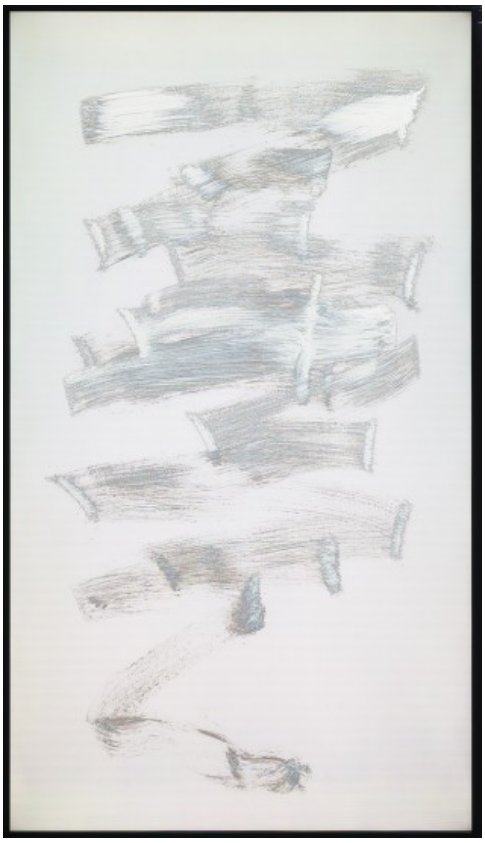
ART ASIA
Gallery information in Asia

Ken Okiishi: Pt II

II.



gesture/data (feedback) (2015), oil paint on flat-screen television, mp4 file (color, silent) and feedback mp4 file (color, sound). **All images**: Unless otherwise specified, © Ken Okiishi; courtesy the artist and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo.

ART iT: The "gesture/data" paintings are gestural, which implies that they were done quickly, but considering the paint marks in relation to the shifting images and patterns on the monitors behind them, you could also imagine that each stroke is the result of long and deliberate contemplation. There is an elasticity in the work between the instant and the durational. How long does it take when you actually make the works?

KO: That's a gap I would prefer to leave open, but the truth is that it happens over a long period of time. The footage is on in the studio everyday. I play it back at different levels of zooming, but where there are discernible images, you start to internalize where different features and things will appear on the screen. For example, someone's face appears, and one of her eyes is covered by the paint, which then flattens her face. So the paintings develop slowly over the course of working with the footage--for I guess two or three years now, or even longer, if you think about the piano performance piece. A lot of times it's about --almost in a classical way--thinking and looking at the work for weeks, looking at the existing

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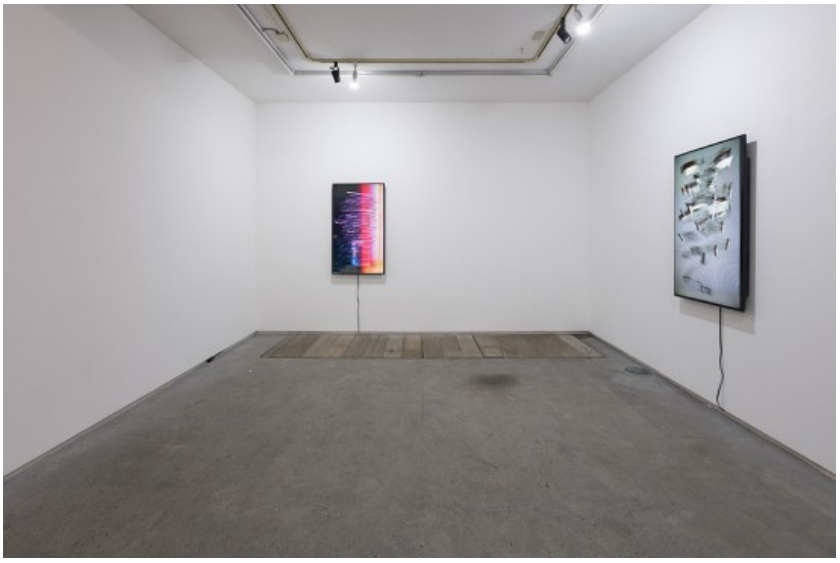
relationships, and then one day more marks happen. But describing the process of working is always an inadequate shorthand; even as I am saying this, it feels severely reduced as a description of what actually happens in the process of working.

ART iT: To me there's also a cliché aspect to the work, winking back at the era of macho artists trying to push the possibilities for art to further and further extremes, a bit like the characters in Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers*.

KO: I think that comes out of performance. It's like when you watch an actor and you can't tell whether the character is supposed to be sympathetic or not--there's that edge. I think it's an amazing thing when someone can ride that edge without resolving it, and I hope that these works do that, so they can go into really disgusting contexts while simultaneously riding into yet another context. This is another way of saying that as an artist working in your studio, your attitude toward the work changes almost every day until you ultimately decide that something is done. It could be seen almost like a parody of an Abstract-Expressionist approach, of knowing when the work is "done"; but at the same time, I feel the process completely, and often without distance. I think this is why some critics have had difficulty placing the work in terms of "painting." I'm playing with multiple levels of ambivalence toward historical and contemporary rhetorics of abstraction and gesture--but also simultaneously approaching the act of painting in the studio with all of its contradictions and "painting" problems. I don't think the work is, for example, "sarcastic," as one critic put it as she struggled to form words for what she was seeing.



Installation view of "gestures, data, feedback" at Take Ninagawa, Tokyo, 2015. Photo Kei Okano.

ART iT: The work also reads provocatively in the context of "Zen." Not the Chinese or Japanese philosophical tradition but--

KO: This over-processed, new-agey Zen--which was actually quite influential on the thinking of many of the Abstract-Expressionist artists--

ART iT: And then came back to Japan in the form of Gutai, among other things. Cliché is another indeterminate field that occupies the space between binaries. At some point a cliché starts off as a unique idea or expression, but then it gets over-processed and loses its originality, even as the over-processing is itself an index of that originality.

KO: And the subtext is amplified through repetition. Even if you're laughing at yourself while you're doing the action, you still believe in it. With "gesture/data," there was an initial shorthand that has metamorphosed through the ideas other people have developed about the work into a literalness equating the paintings with the gestures we make on touch-screen panels, like, Oh, it's the swipe! That was always intended to be abstracted, to open up another gap for thinking about these things simultaneously. For me, the rupture happens between, as you mention, the American reprocessing of Zen and the swipe and the gesture, or the slippage of the "gesture" into these different contexts. It's all of those things at the same

time, and they don't necessarily match up or relate. I think abstraction can function without the need to process it through language. A lot of times when I watch people look at the work, these recognitions seem to happen automatically or unknowingly.

ART iT: Painting on the screen focuses attention on the paint in a way that differs from a big, gestural painting. In some places the application of paint is so minimal that, without the light from the screen, you would almost think it's not there, but then, depending on what's playing across the screen, you realize there are all these miniscule traces that are as equally important as the thickest accretions of marks. Through the interaction of the paint and the screen, you pick up all this additional information that might be obscured by the texture of the canvas.

KO: Exactly. And for the work in this show, I actually tried to lighten the touch even more in comparison with the past work. I wanted to see how light I could go and still have it work. When it's done really lightly, you don't necessarily realize there's paint on the surface of the screen. You think it must be coming from inside the video, or that it's the monitor or something. You don't know whether the paint is inside or outside.
In some works I use interference paint, so depending on the light from the screen, it will either stay the same color, or when the white comes through the paint, it goes from fuchsia/magenta into green, and then flickers between colors. That was interesting to me, because when you describe the work through language it sounds like a gimmick, but when you experience it in person, it isn't. So many artworks circulate now as texts. The text can sound really amazing, but once you see the artwork you realize you didn't really need to see it. I like that every description of these works can even sound a bit off-putting, but once you see the actual thing, it's a different experience--one that is difficult to put into words.

ART iT: In your most recent works, "gesture/data (feedback)," you also videotape the screen itself.

KO: With the first works it was a direct experiment to see what would happen visually, and then also to see what the response would be. Actually, the very first "gesture/data" work didn't even use TV footage. It was just a live blue "no signal" screen, painted with the green paint for working with green-screen technique. I was mainly curious to see how the paint would adhere to the screen and visually interact with it. But there were these two abstract voids next to each other, and somehow the objectness of the screen and all these different media histories that could be encapsulated there disappeared a little bit into the void, so I decided to try it out with TV footage--the pre-existing footage from the piano performance. I noticed with one of the works that it seemed like the paint was going inside and outside of the screen at the same time, and that's when I started to think about fusing the two sides, the video image and the paint, and seeing what could happen. Also, when you film certain colors, like white, they turn gray, and then the gray light shines back through the white paint when you play it on the screen. There's also a clear paint that I mix into the works, which produces that extra RGB light that gets refracted through the brush strokes of the paint on the surface of the screen--where the RGB breaks down, and you see them as individual colors hovering on the surface.
But then in the section that has the feedback, the gray light starts to confuse the inside and outside relationship because the gray light feels like a different paint that's somehow in front or behind depending on the level of transparency of the stroke. All these things sound very formal or even obtuse when they are described; if you actually just sit with the work, your eye registers them, and the questions emerge quite naturally.

Installation view of "gestures, data, feedback" at Take Ninagawa, Tokyo, 2015. Photo Kei Okano.

ART iT: Does your relationship with music continue to inform the work? Not being a piano player myself, I tend to associate the skill of piano playing with reading. You have the sheet music and you interpret it. There's something telling you what to input into the instrument, and that results in a corresponding output. It's like reading and writing at the same time.

KO: Music and language are really tied together for me, but I actually learned Suzuki method, so I didn't start from reading notation. I first learned the notes by ear. The way I experienced it was similar to native language acquisition. You listen and then you try to find the notes, and you learn by listening. My sight-reading ability is often contingent on listening to a piece before hand. I have to have the sound in my ear. But because I was educated that way, there's actually a lot of back-and-forth or feedback between the score and the interpretation and the notes. Also, when you formally perform a musical score, there's always the riding of a line of agreement and disagreement with the composer's markings. And, of course, depending on the composer and the time-period, so much is often left open. So interpretation is often about finding a way to make the piece your own, as an authentic expression of that piece.

ART iT: Do you ever bring music into your work as a kind of methodology? Do you find there's an interpretive aspect to how you make works?

KO: Yes. For me the main thing is the concept of the score. The score is not so strange in the category of music, but when you translate it to visual art, it sounds a bit strange. In music, you talk about certain musicians playing a certain composer, and the "work" is the two of those coming together. So I like to play other artworks or kinds of practices as if they are scores--but in the total sense as a musician, not as a simplification or translation of the concept into an art context, where the score can often be seen as a simple diagram. For musicians, the score is a highly complex and contested diagram.
For example, you could say that with *(Goodbye to) Manhattan*, I ran Woody Allen's movie through 10 different systems to produce a different work, but then you film it live and there are people enacting this fractured language--all these different things are happening at the same time. Another thing is that I was really young when I started studying musical composition, so I had a strange misunderstanding of 12-tone composition. If you're barely a teenager and you're doing 12-tone composition, you're going to develop your own relationship to it. Those kind of fractured systems interest me.

2015/11/13 08:10 | Comment (0) | Trackback (0) |

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ART ASIA
Gallery information in Asia

Ken Okiishi: Pt III

Architects/Designers
Artists
Curators
Cultural Critics
Other

16/01/29 08:30
Stephen G Rhodes

16/01/29 08:29
Stephen G Rhodes: The Twelf Hobby

15/12/18 08:30
Slavs and Tatars: Pt II

15/12/11 08:30
Slavs and Tatars: Pt I

15/11/20 08:45
Ken Okiishi: Pt III

15/11/13 08:10
Ken Okiishi: Pt II

15/11/10 09:45
Omer Fast: Pt III

15/11/06 08:30
Ken Okiishi: Pt I

15/11/04 09:01
Omer Fast: Pt II

15/10/28 13:31
Omer Fast: Pt I

15/09/14 15:00
Dinh Q Lê

15/08/17 09:55
An-My Lê: Pt III

15/08/03 16:57
An-My Lê: Pt II

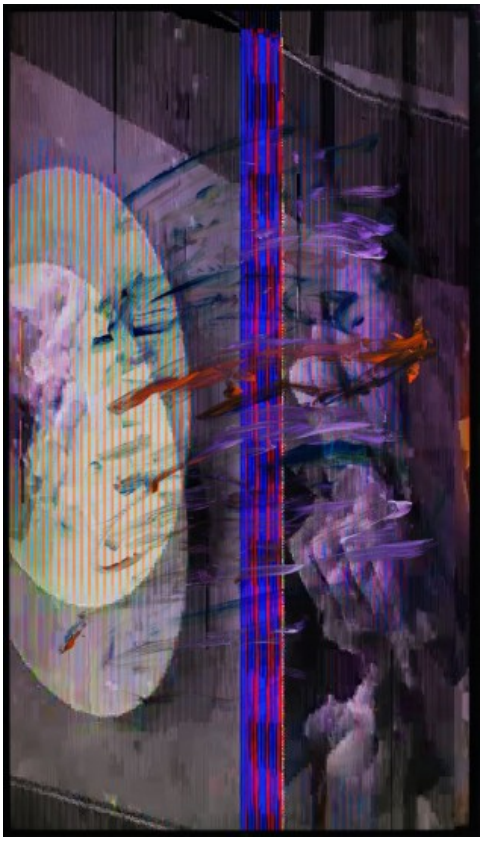
15/07/28 21:33
An-My Lê: Pt I

15/06/08 12:05
Kiri Dalena

15/06/05 10:00
Mark Manders, Pt III

15/05/29 11:00

III.



gesture/data (2015), oil paint on flat-screen television, mp4 file (color, sound). **All images**: © Ken Okiishi; courtesy the artist and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo.

ART iT: In addition to the multimedia piano performance *Vorstellungsklavier*, you also once did a more-or-less straightforward harpsichord recital at the Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin, but as an art performance. In artistic terms, it was a performance but a non-performance at the same time, perhaps in the manner of a readymade. It was an ordinary harpsichord recital, but it wasn't just a harpsichord recital.

KO: It was both simultaneously. I like what you say, that it's almost like a readymade. I think it was difficult for people to understand, but they felt it.

ART iT: This ties in to the idea of occupation in your work--not just how we occupy space or time, but also how we are "occupied" or possessed by the media around us. For example, early works like *Death and the College Student* (1999) and *Telly and Casper* (2000) have these characters whose behavior replicates lines and scenes from iconic movies. Do you think those early works still inform what you're doing now?

Mark Manders, Pt II

15/05/29 10:40

Parasophia 2015: Emiko Kasahara, Pt II

15/05/22 15:30

Mark Manders, Pt I

15/05/19 09:55

Parasophia 2015: Emiko Kasahara, Pt I

2016/1

2015/12

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RSS 1.0

RSS 2.0

KO: Yes. There is a funny anecdotal way of answering this, which is that my mother was a family therapist, and we had this particular, almost technological way of speaking about our feelings in complex systems. My mother had developed an expanded understanding of modern dance (she had been a dancer) and the then-new media as a way of working with clients, and other kinds of mixed systems like that--which of course also made its way into her approach to being a mother.

The other anecdote that helps is that I grew up in a university setting where the kids were used as experimental subjects for new teaching methods, and there was a television camera in our classroom with a live feed to the university, where the researchers would discuss our behavior, and then the teacher would feedback the researchers' impressions to us, so she was talking to both them and us at the same time.

These kinds of feedback systems mixed up with affect and theoretical discussions all coming together were important for me, which is what *Death and the College Student* really enacts. With *Telly and Casper*, it's a bit more removed because I'm playing the director and I have actors, sort of. It may sound conceptual, but it's strange to say that these things came about very intuitively.

ART iT: So has your creative process always leaned more to the intuitive side of things?

KO: I think it's a very writerly process. What does intuition mean when you're writing? Sometimes you try free writing, or you just start writing things down. It really comes down to the question, where do ideas come from? There's always a process of division and making sense and editing and forming, and then something resembling a coherent thought gets output in the end. So the real answer is that the processes for making each of the works are similar, and whether you call it intuitive or self-reflexive or conceptual or performative--to me it's all related because they are different parts of the process. You could call it an extreme self-awareness that can also be not self-aware.

But I would resist saying something like in the current work I am inhabiting a particular character, because I don't think that's the case, whereas *Death and the College Student* really was about putting on different kinds of masks and channeling things through different vessels. I think those levels are less divided now.

Above: Still from *Telly and Casper* (2000), digital video, color/sound, 27 min. **Below**: Still from *Death and the College Student* (1999), Hi8 transfered to digital video, color/sound, 31 min.

ART iT: Most of *Telly and Casper* is shot with a handheld camera, and it's never quite clear whether the camera is just a camera--an objective viewpoint--or in fact represents another person. Toward the end, there is a long, static take of Telly dancing. When Telly finishes dancing, he walks to the camera, picks it up so that now we're seeing things from his viewpoint, continues to the bathroom where Casper is, and tries to enter. At which point, Casper shuts Telly out, and then we cut to a "second" camera inside the bathroom with Casper. It's like the camera has a split personality.

KO What I like when I re-watch the work is that it's almost itinerant or peripatetic--the way both the dialogue and the camera's point of view rove around or start to space out or get lost--because the script was constructed by taking dialogue and locations from Larry Clark's *Kids* and inserting them into this very naturalistic situation where the relationship to the film becomes so oblique that it seems like reality again, and then there are those breaking moments where the camera's point of view suddenly changes.
With the dance scene, we have this five-minute take from a static camera--almost like a Chantal Akerman reality--which is the most "objective" point of view, and then there is a rupture when the character picks up the camera and turns it around. There is a rupture in the tension between acknowledging that this is a film and believing that you are experiencing something happening in real life that's very emotional. And then it brings in the question, what is the point of view of this film at all?

ART iT: Maybe in the way that the actors are playing both Telly and Casper from *Kids* and at the same time "Telly" and "Casper" in a film by Ken Okiishi, you are also simultaneously playing the filmmaker "Larry Clark" and the artist "Ken Okiishi." It's not just that the camera is a character in the film, it's also an embodiment of somebody who is necessarily outside the film. Were you consciously trying to complicate the agency of the camera and, by extension, the viewer, in this way?

KO: I think when I made the work I was responding to things I was encountering in my studies at Cooper Union. At that point, it was post-Marxist theory; structuralism; semiotics; Foucault, etc; historiography; and certain kinds of feminist theory that would now be understood as relating to "performativity," but at the time were hotly debated and fractured. This theoretical study doesn't necessarily appear in a clear way, but that to me is the correct relationship of theory to an artwork. The artwork should not be an illustration. That unresolvability is what makes something an artwork.

ART iT: I saw that at Cooper Union you studied with Hans Haacke and Doug Ashford. What was that like?

KO: I think the work I was making at this time was partially a reaction against the relationship

between the theoretical and the artwork that was sometimes happening in their classes--which often felt deflated and repetitive. So I developed a rather conflicted relationship to the notions of "criticality" that were being debated there. I shared a commitment to the political concerns, but found the forms that were generated within this network of criteria for signifying "criticality" to be boring--in a way that Hans's and Group Material's work, when seen in historical perspective, was decidedly not. I guess I was reading between the lines, and finding the gaps and hesitations in theoretical discussions related to artworks: the places where the artwork exceeded what was being claimed about it; the points where new and perhaps unresolved and contradictory relationships were formed. And, it should be mentioned, they were both supportive of this experimentation, even if it led to some pretty volatile group crits.

ART iT: So do your works start from the idea of challenging the critical or "meta" perspective? Are they attempting to short circuit the idea of the outside perspective?

KO: Yes. It's something that is almost easy to understand now with globalization--that there is no outside. Whereas before, when there was the tension between capitalism and communism or socialism, between East and West, the Berlin Wall--all those boundaries--there were always fantasies of the other side. The idea of another side is difficult to conceptualize now. It feels like there is no outside. But there is no inside either. There is no individual. There is no collective. It cancels out both ways.

ART iT: Is that something the green screen was instrumental in realizing for you?

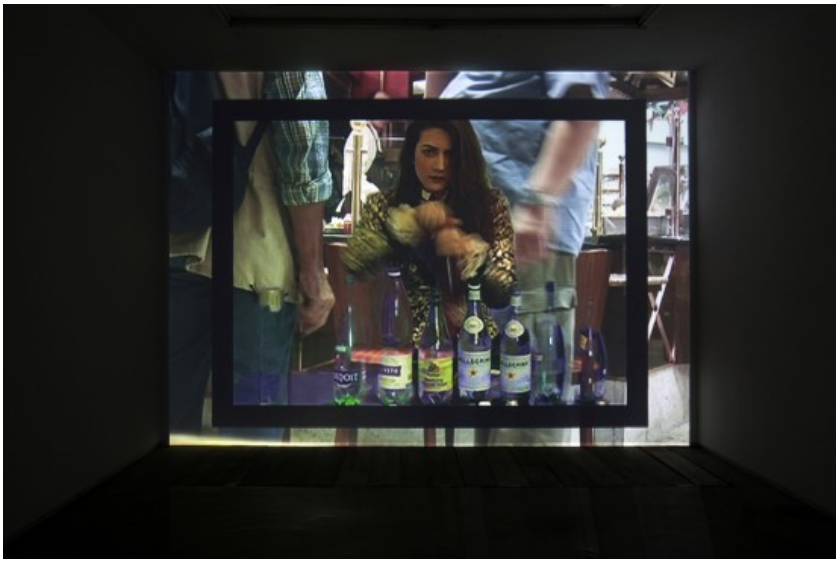
KO: Yes. That seemed to be the place where you could collapse these things. Or it was the actual site of collapse--the screen itself, a void.

ART iT: Do you think your works are anti-utopian in that sense? For example, is *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* showing us the fantasy in order to get us more focused on the real?

KO: I haven't really thought of that. One of the things I like to do is to project displacement onto inappropriate bodies--to project displacement onto people who may not be seen to feel displacement--as another way of creating rupture. So I think that's why it becomes difficult. Because if you made a film about an immigrant in general, or an alienated migrant, specifically, everyone would understand exactly why the characters feel and talk the way they do. I like the rupture that happens when you take a different kind of person and make them act in a totally unexpected way, because it's also displacing the direction of what's happening. You can have one script with the wrong person and the right person at the same time. In this sense the utopian question is interesting because, when that happens, you do find a commonality among sites that ordinarily would not have any commonality or shared ability to relate.

ART iT: You mean the fantasy and the real?

KO: It could be the fantasy and the real, or it could be the entitled subject and the marginalized subject, or the entitled subject and the exploited subject. But this melancholic mode is just part of my work--the aporia of the melancholic, the production of hesitation. I think those go together.



Above: Still from *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* (2010), video, color/sound, 72 min. **Below**: Installation view of *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* at Take Ninagawa, Tokyo, 2012. Photo Kei Okano.

ART iT: Where does the combination of high-tech and low production value in your films come from?

KO: I go to the movies about four times a week, both to see screenings at MoMA and at regular cinemas. Maybe that's why it's all mixed up. Robert Breer is another person I studied with, so I have a hard time understanding why it's necessary to make a distinction between low-tech or low production and high production. We tend to just accept the materials the artist has to work with.
People seem to think that everyone should either have a 10-million dollar budget or a five-dollar budget, but of course that's not true. It's not a decision. Because, really, to make a film look like what people would call "high production" these days, the budgets start from 50 million dollars. So the way I see it, it's not about signifying the personal, or whatever, it's simply that those are the materials I have to work with.

ART iT: People from a generation or two after us probably have a different mentality, but having grown up in the 1980s at the height of blockbuster films by Steven Spielberg and Universal Studios, the idea that you could take a home-video camera, or now a digital camera or iPhone, and make something into a legitimate filmic expression is still pretty new to me.

KO: Yes. Now people are used to seeing all different kinds of formats of production and

accepting all of them. Another thing that is probably uninteresting to younger people is that there was a time when you couldn't post video online. That has made a dramatic difference. There was a time when the only way to see a film was to see it in the cinema, or to wait for it to come out on VHS or DVD, or to go to an art gallery or archive like Electronic Arts Intermix. The idea of people posting videos of themselves for everybody to see didn't exist--except maybe for public access, which was pretty amazing. There was this strange mood that would appear, late at night, watching these truly bizarre shows. Just sitting there, and watching it. That's an experience of shared isolation and limited connection that cannot be reconstructed any more.

ART iT: Your works seem to move in and out of an Internet sensibility. Maybe that awareness of life before the Internet has something to do with it.

KO: I think it is that kind of cusp situation. For me, the really slow image-loading Internet--like dial-up--was in middle school. There was email already, but not so much of the other stuff. It's funny that despite its history, the Internet has recently become talked about again as a new thing, which I think is related to social media producing a different kind of situation. I think when people talk about the Internet now, it's shorthand for the increase of social anxiety and fear of missing out and all these things that are influenced by the emergence of social media. But my work's relationship to that Internet is not so literal.

ART iT: This also dates me, but I think about your work more in terms of the Internet of hyperlinks. That porousness of whatever it is you're interfacing with--that's something I find in your work.

KO: Yes, when hyperlinks were a big deal and you could jump through words as if they were wormholes. It's difficult now because 1990s media theory has reemerged and been recoded in a way that makes it seem like it was just invented two years ago, which is not the case. I read that media theory when it was first current. It was very utopian about bringing the world together, whereas now it's more dystopian. But the specific hyperlink thing is so nerdy and old-fashioned. I guess the hashtag is really the hyperlink now.

Spread from *The Very Quick of the Word* (Sternberg Press, 2014), design by Ken Okiishi, with texts by Annie Godfrey Larmon, Alise Upitis, and Ken Okiishi. Released on the occasion of the exhibitions "The Very Quick of the Word" at the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, and "List Projects: Ken Okiishi" at MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

ART iT: The thing is that the Internet is fundamentally a hierarchical place--anything based on algorithms necessarily will be so.

KO: Ultimately, it sorts. It's also limited to just one screen. The world is not one screen. In

order to present information on one screen, there has to be a hierarchy. It's kind of dumb as an idea--that all the information would come through one page, basically.

ART iT: But isn't that what you were pointing to with the design of your book for Sternberg Press, *The Very Quick of the Word* (2014), with different texts overlapping each other or becoming mirrored across the pages of a spread? It, too, has a website feel to it, only glitched, like when a webpage isn't loading properly and the text and images bunch together.

KO: Yes. The conceptual frame for the book is that physical books are starting to look weird because all you see these days are PDF files, etc. The idea is that the book itself is in crisis. It's as if the book could load files. It has loaded a bunch of files, and then it becomes a book--the paper's quite heavy, so it has the weight of a book--but something's slightly off.

I | II | III

Ken Okiishi: Ab/Ex/In/Amb/Om

2015/11/20 08:45 | Comment (0) | Trackback (0) |

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interesting experiment—an acknowledgement that paintings change and age.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Maybe this reflects an impulse for immortality. But time changes all things. I just had a painting get damaged—it was going to a show at Modern Art Oxford, and the customs people took a razor to the canvas, slicing it and damaging three other works, too.

And I don't want to restore it. I think that this kind of scarring, over time, becomes part of the piece itself. We can restore semblances but never really erase the experiences things have, like light damage or even cuts. The repair is an illusion to cover the scars, and I think we need to show the differences.

R. H. QUAYTMAN: Wow. They must really be uncomfortable with that response of yours. [*Laughter.*]

YVE-ALAIN BOIS: We just hope that, as Jeffrey said, this Rothko project begins to create a debate among conservators around the world, especially concerning works for which everything else has been tried.

HARRY COOPER: And we'll probably reach a point when the projection becomes so powerful that it may not matter what it's being projected onto. If there is so little of the original left, and at that point, you say, "Well, let's just make a facsimile of it." And then you're just screwed, if we're allowed to say that in *Artforum.* [*Laughter.*]

"Mark Rothko's Harvard Murals" is on view through July 26 at the Harvard Art Museums in Cambridge, MA.

The Rothko project team included Narayan Khandekar, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Christina Rosenberger, and Mary Schneider Enriquez, all of the Harvard Art Museums, as well as Jens Stenger of the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, Yale University. Ramesh Raskar of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology collaborated on the camera-projector system and software, and the digital restoration of the Ektachrome transparencies was completed with Rudolf Gschwind of the University of Basel.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro is the Melva Bucksbaum Associate Director for Conservation and Research at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Harry Cooper is curator and head of modern art at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Jeffrey Weiss is senior curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York; Yve-Alain Bois is professor of art history at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton; Lynn Hershman Leeson, David Reed, Ken Okiishi, and R. H. Quaytman are artists based in New York.

PERMALINK COMMENTS

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PASSAGES

PIERRE BOULEZ (1925–2016)

July 08, 2016 • Ken Okiishi

Pierre Boulez, 2008. Photo: Sonja².

A CONVERSATION I HAD about Pierre Boulez right before his death ended with the perplexing question, from an otherwise culturally literate person, "What, exactly, does a conductor do?" At the time, I dismissed this query as further support for the conclusion that I have often drawn in the art world: Never discuss music. But then this invitation came from *Artforum* to write a tribute to Pierre Boulez, and, well, we have to start somewhere—perhaps a discussion of music's relation to contemporary art might be productive after all. Actually, Boulez, who created IRCAM in the 1970s (the legendary institute for research and experimentation in music at the Centre Pompidou in Paris), was continually distressed at how little serious interface there was between visual artists and musicians. With this in mind, an introduction to the art world that does more than gloss over Boulez's early compositional experimentation does in fact seem an appropriate way to memorialize him—by way of an invitation to continue the work that Boulez was not able to see realized in his lifetime.

Boulez was the most rigorously radical composer to emerge within the lineage of European classical music after Schönberg and Debussy; he was the most original composer-conductor since Gustav Mahler; and his career followed a continuously brilliant and generative line that included significant philosophical influences on Gilles Deleuze (more on that later); an affectionate but also discordant friendship with John Cage (documented in a fascinating series of letters); and, for the last forty years of his life, he surprised many by dedicating himself to rewiring the orchestral/choral interpretation of Mahler. Here, he realized an entirely new, late-twentieth-century interpretive performance mode, full of emotional aporia and surgically precise articulations of complex sound-images, with dense layers of thematic development made crystalline in the process of shattering. Those who witnessed Boulez's interpretations of Mahler felt the same otherworldly alien-landing-on-earth rush that accompanies listening to and performing his own musical compositions. For the curious yet untrained ear, learning how to hear Mahler through Boulez and vice versa is a good place to begin understanding his highly

complex relationship between composition and conducting—or, to slide a term over from the visual-art lexicon, his "practice." These sound worlds and compositional processes could not be further apart; it is a bit like if Willem de Kooning were to be seen as "performing" Gustav Klimt, except in music the original score remains intact, and the creative act is located in the complex performative process of interpretation.

A slightly more familiar point of contact between discourses of visual culture and music may be Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation of Boulez's 1960 concept of "smooth [*lisse*] or *amorphous* time and the proportional system to *pulsating*, or *striated*, time," in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980 in French and 1987 in English). Rereading this passage now, with the added emphasis that certain figures and concepts gain in mourning, it occurred to me that it is impossible to fully understand this concept—or gauge its plethora of politicized misreadings—without understanding some basic elements of musical performance and composition. Deleuze and Guattari write, for example, that "Boulez says that in a smooth space-time one occupies without counting, whereas in a striated space-time one counts in order to occupy." Yet one of Boulez's most significant contributions as a conductor-composer is precisely the tension he creates between "counting" and "without counting." *Counting* here refers to the process by which the musician internally counts (or forgoes counting) the beat while playing, conducting, or even composing a piece of music. One of the most basic yet always difficult aspects of interpreting a score is to know when to count and when to stop counting in order to generate the right combination of sensations, affects, and pulses in what is being performed. (In fact, there are moments in performance when one is able to stop consciously feeling the beat, even when its pulse continues to drive a forward momentum, and this is the closest I've ever come to an understanding of "smooth space-time.")

Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique-musique (IRCAM), 2010. Photo: Kristof Verslype.

Boulez famously abandoned the conductor's signature baton (which has its origins in a long staff that was literally pounded on the ground to beat out the time for the seventeenth-century orchestra); he once asserted that he had "ten batons" while glimmering his fingers in front of his face. And what these ten "batons" can do: They articulate a vast range of nuance, from bending his fingers in various directions, to cupping his hand to carve out articulations of orchestral layers, to flicking a finger with one hand to indicate a cue that does not fall within the exact temporality of what the other hand is conducting. In many ways, the hands and body (sans baton) before the orchestra create a form of nonverbal communication between bodies and instruments that approaches zones related to another of Deleuze and Guattari's familiar notions: "becoming-molecular." Watch this clip of Boulez conducting the New York Philharmonic after the recent death of its most televised and glamorous music director (Leonard Bernstein) in the early 1990s.

It is the most next-level account of Debussy's *La Mer* (The Sea) ever documented. Here we can see what has become, on the level of performance, of Boulez's famous insistence that "time cannot be *only* smooth or *only* striated." This is conducting and orchestral performance at its most glorious rhythmic flexibility. By the end of *La Mer*, as Boulez pushes the orchestra to technical and temporal limits, as the shifting shape of his hands and motion of his arms and the timbres and rhythms and musical images the orchestra produces fully froth, we arrive at something like—to translate it into visual terms—the current scientific image of deep-sea thermal vents where mineral-rich fluids and foams incite the evolution of protocells.

Ken Okiishi is an artist based in New York.

ALL IMAGES

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KEN OKIISHI

Being and/or Time

January 29 – March 5, 2017

Stage One:
How have I become this person I only sort of like? ("I," here, being myself projected as a general, publically consumable being in a specific body and set of relationships.)

Stage Two:
What are the implications of my positions in the bubbles and tubes and niches in which I exist?

Stage Three:
Analyze the projections onto your positions against the affects that appear in your soul versus what appears on your face. Continue working on the theory of acting as performing displacements—include here as "actors" in the world anything that acts on the world, which, in this context, means such things as "artwork" and "artist" and "gallery" and "space" and "time." Ask the question: How have our bubbles and tubes, and a culture of image-performance with immediate brain chemical releases (aka "likes" and other "click" data) created zones of blissed-out blindness? How does this configuration lead to linked-together aggregations of masses of actors?

Stage Four:
Give up or move on? Make a film if you can find the energy to go on with it. Find the energy to go on with it.

The gallery is divided into four zones of temporality, beginning with Okiishi's early video works (*keyword: love* (1998), *'David Wojnarowicz' in 'NY'* (1999), *Death and the College Student* (1999), and *Telly & Casper* (2000)) put in confrontation with a new work, *Being and/or Time*, consisting of every image taken with Okiishi's phone from 2013-2016, flickering in chronological order at 24 images per second (25,000 images in total). The 3rd temporal zone stages a painting exhibition at 1 rpm. The 4th zone catches a gorgeous moment of driving into Manhattan via Queens. A Beethoven violin concerto on the radio and the robotic GPS voice provide a soundtrack: this Uber-esque image appears to anticipate driverless road movies.

The gap between these zones of temporality includes the differences between multiple New Yorks. The city before and after iPhone-ization; Giuliani NY and Bloomberg NY and Trump vs. De Blasio NY; *Kids* NY and *Girls* NY; mini DV NY and HD NY and instant feedback-loop NY; walking NY and Google-map NY and FOMO NY. Okiishi's exhibition stages the city itself as a time-image continuously remade by its own resident-users.

This is Ken Okiishi's second exhibition at Reena Spaulings. Recent solo exhibitions at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Arbeiterkammer Wien; Pilar Corrias, London; Fundació Gaspar, Barcelona; Mathew, Berlin; Take Ninagawa, Tokyo; Mehringdamm 72, Berlin; Alex Zachary, 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; Fridericianum, Kassel; Serralves Museum, Porto; Arnolfini, Bristol; White Columns, NY; Frieze Projects, London; Artists Space, New York. His writing has appeared in Artforum, May, Bidoun, Triple Canopy, The Brooklyn Rail and a book on his work was recently published by Sternberg Press (The Very Quick of the Word, 2014).

Documentation of the exhibition *Being and/or Time,* January 29 – March 5, 2017:
https://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2017/03/ken-okiishi-at-reena-spaulings-2/

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, plenty of sunshine, breezy, not as cold, high 42. Tonight, partly cloudy, low 35. Tomorrow, sunshine giving way to clouds, milder, high 58. Weather map appears on Page A21.

VOL. CLXVI ... No. 57,511 © 2017 The New York Times Company NEW YORK, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2017 $2.50

Galleries

KEN OKIISHI

Through March 5. Reena Spaulings, 165 East Broadway, Manhattan; 212-477-5006, reenaspaulings.com.

I have now spent more time looking at Ken Okiishi's iPhone photographs, which are included in the video "Being and/or Time" (2013-16), on view at Reena Spaulings, than I have with my own smartphone photographs — leading to a minor existential quandary. Why do I take so many photographs? What do all of these images say about me? What, exactly, am I doing with this one wild and precious life?

The title of Mr. Okiishi's video and show tweaks Martin Heidegger's philosophical masterpiece "Being and Time" (1927), but also underscores Heidegger's later claim that technology shapes human culture and not the other way around. Most of the works here follow this line of inquiry — from slow-moving nonnarrative videos and glitch photography (that is, technically defective images) to a lo-fi kinetic painting with talk-bubble texts that turns at one rotation per minute.

But there is also a strain of pathos running through this show, driven by the accelerated being and/or time of living in New York and working as an artist at this juncture. One of Mr. Okiishi's five videos tracks a circuitous two-borough car journey led by that GPS guru Siri. An older video, "David Wojnarowicz in New York" (1999-2000), features a young man standing in front of the Chelsea Piers athletic complex, wondering where he can find "Chelsea piers," the now-extinct gay haven. Moments like this course through the show, demonstrating how time, technology and real estate development march on. Artists can't arrest these changes, but they can take philosophical note of them.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; JOERG LOHSE AND REENA SPAULINGS FINE ART, NY/LA

above, a video by Ken Okiishi at Reena Spaulings Gallery

THE
NEW YORKER
MARCH 6, 2017

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Ken Okiishi
"Everyone is the other and no one is himself." What might sound like a gimlet-eyed take on the social-media age is, in fact, a quote from Martin Heidegger. The heart of Okiishi's deceptively cavalier, deeply felt show riffs on the quote's source, with a video titled "Being and/or Time," in which every picture the artist took on his smartphone between 2013 and 2016 flashes onscreen in a cascade of images, uniting art and information, memories and documentation, the meaningful and the banal. Save time to view a selection of the artist's poignantly hilarious videos from the late nineteen-nineties and early aughts, some of them made while he was still an art student at Cooper Union. *Through March 5. (Spaulings, 165 E. Broadway. 212-477-5006.)*

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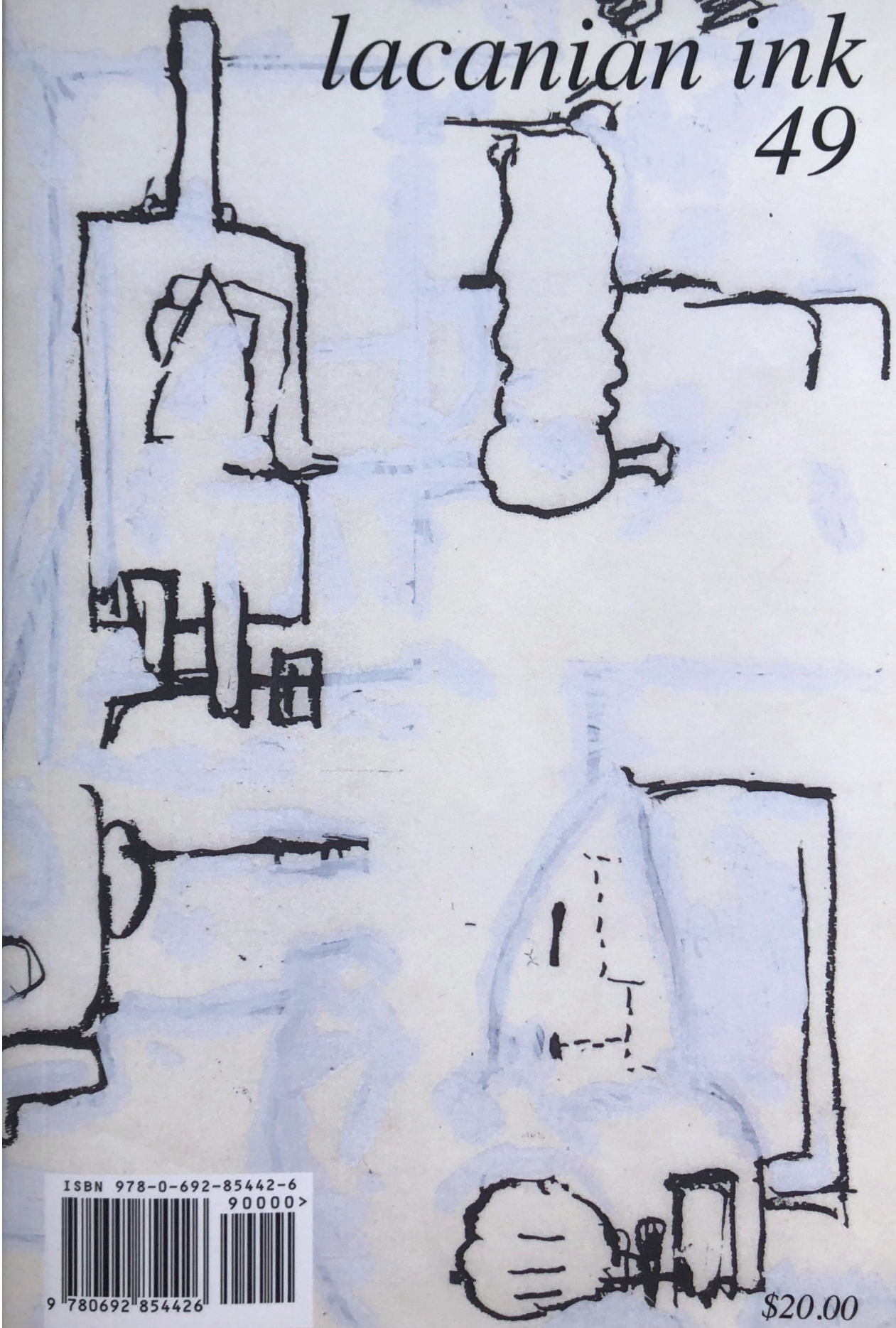

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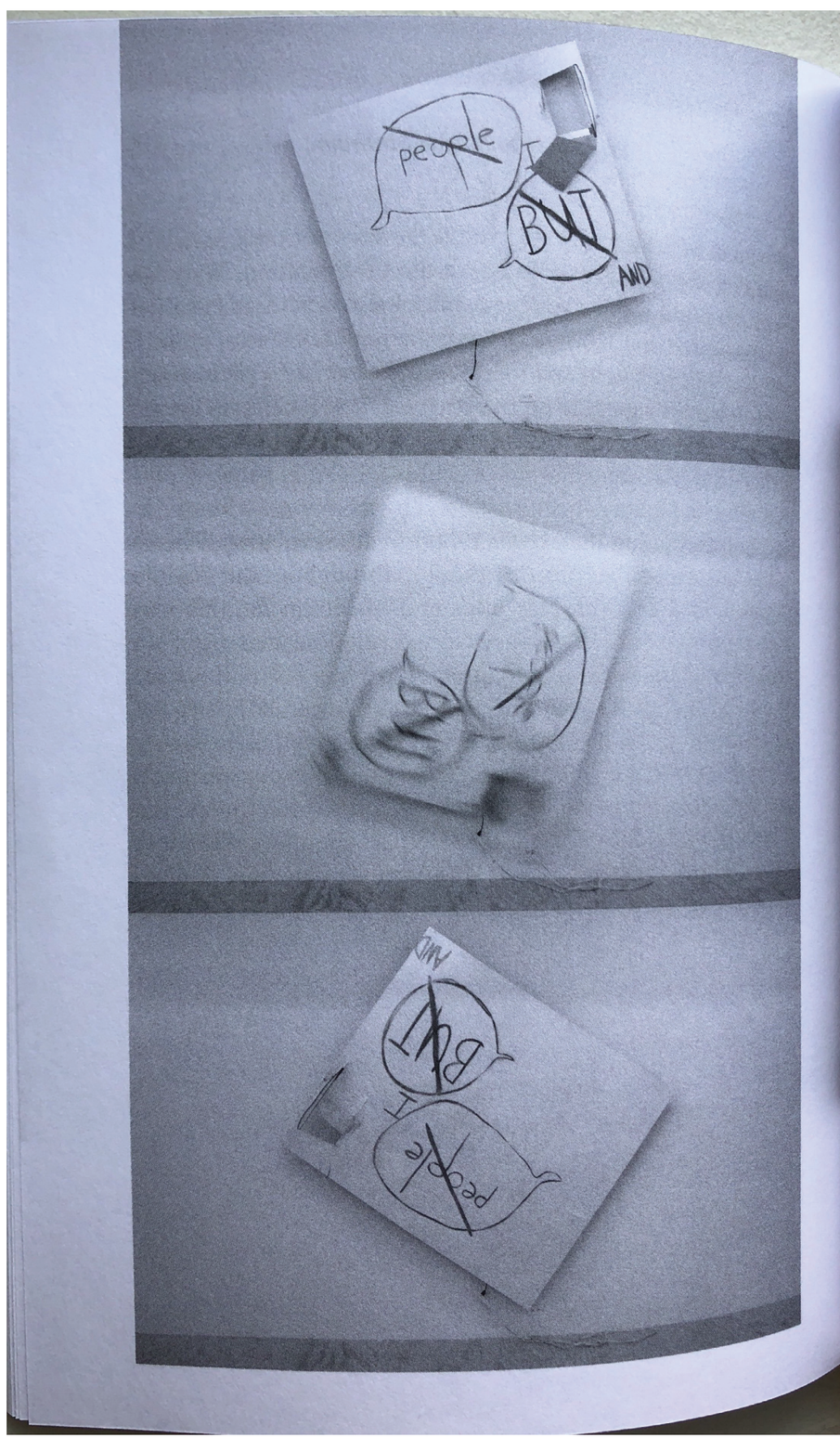
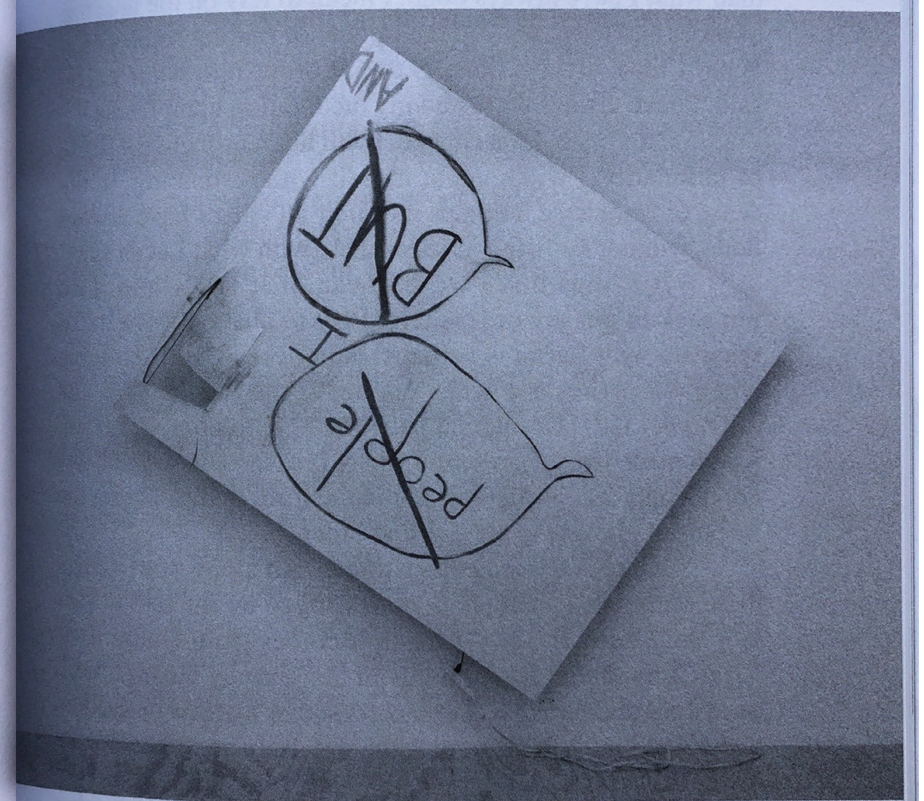
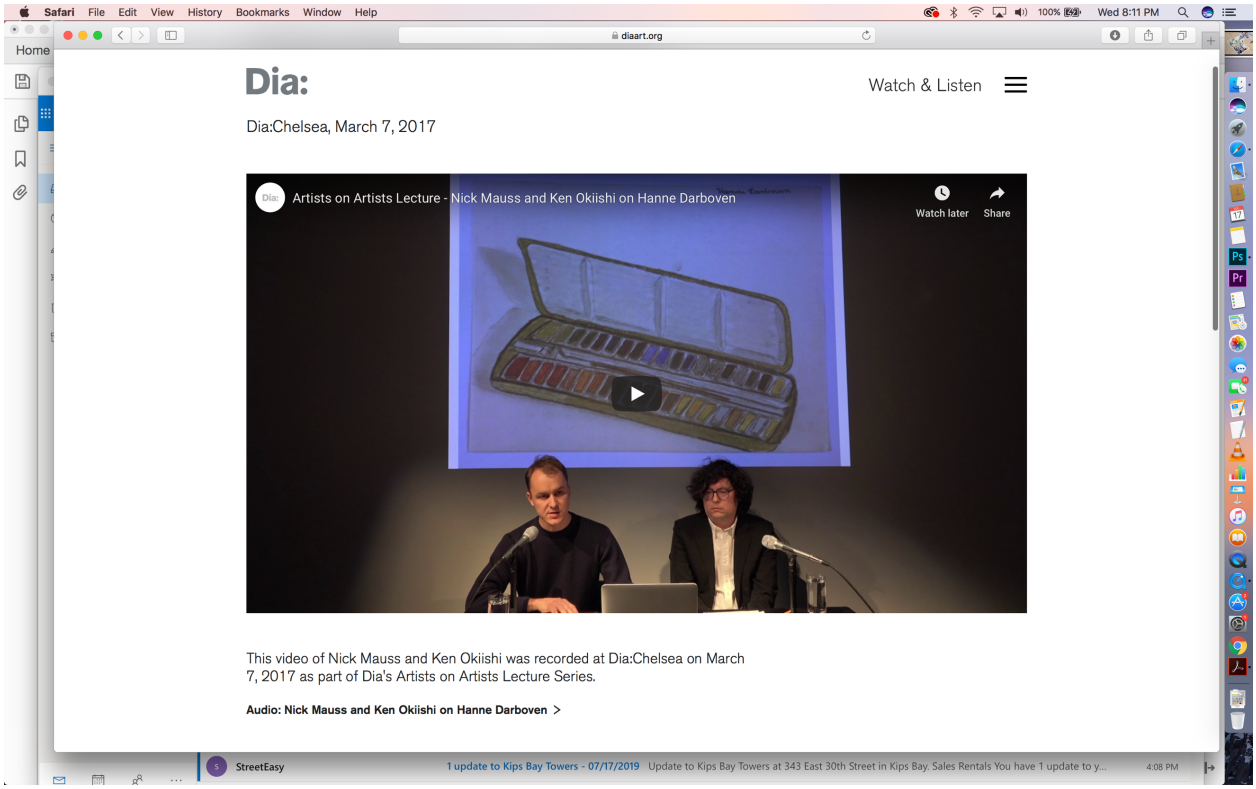




KEN OKIISHI, *photographs*, from the 2017 show at Reena Spauli

Dia Artists on Artists Lecture Series: Ken Okiishi and Nick Mauss on Hanne Darboven. Dia:Chelsea. March 7, 2017:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUCOcaaVAmM



Ken Okiishi's lecture on Andy Warhol, for the conference *Andy Warhol After Pop*, organized in conjunction with the Warhol retrospective, *Andy Warhol—From A to B and Back Again*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

DAY ONE

Session 1: Modes of Abstraction

Benjamin Buchloh, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art, Harvard University
Courtney J. Martin, Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Dia Art Foundation
Adam Pendleton, Artist
R.H. Quaytman, Artist

Moderated by Donna De Salvo, Deputy Director for International Initiatives and Senior Curator, Whitney Museum of American

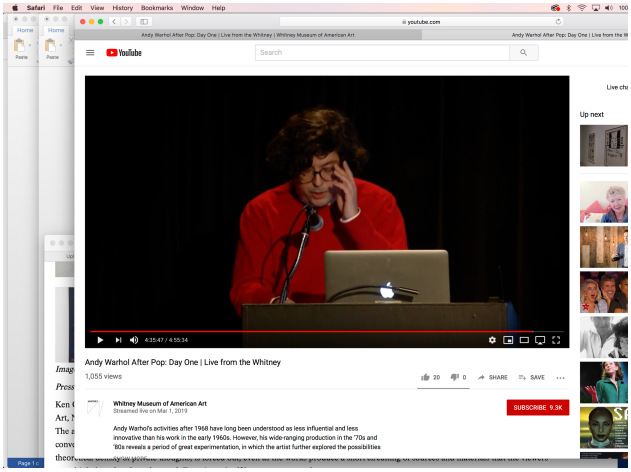
Session 2: Recording Everyday 4 pm

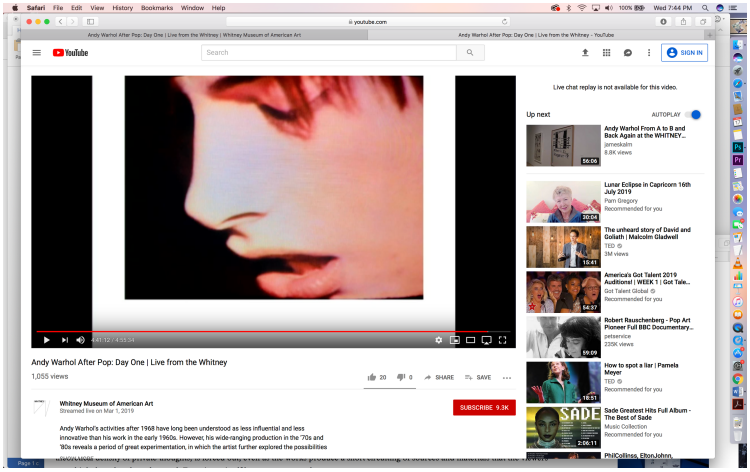
Richard Meyer, Robert and Ruth Halperin Professor in Art History, Stanford University
Neil Printz, Editor, Catalogue Raisonné at The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts Melissa Ragona, Associate Professor of Visual Culture and Critical Theory, Carnegie Mellon University
Ken Okiishi, Artist

Moderated by Alex Kitnick, Brant Family Fellow in Contemporary Arts at Bard College

Okiishi's lecture starts at 4:31:48

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiWkCDUfY9U





REENA SPAULINGS FINE ART
2228 W 7TH ST, 2ND FLOOR
LOS ANGELES, CA 90057

KEN OKIISHI
A Model Childhood
May 12 – June 16, 2018

Works in the exhibition:

--*A Model Childhood, Honolulu, Hawaii, circa 1940*. A photograph showing the first Boys' Day celebration of the artist's father—a rare document of Sansei (3rd generation) Hiroshima-Japanese culture as it migrated further into American geography and overlaid various cultural forms and habits as they occurred before WWII. (Immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, all Japanese-signified objects were thrown into the ocean by the artist's grandfather as a way of overtly demonstrating "loyalty" to the new order by self-enforcing a pure "American" family identity. They were *not* put into "camp" on the mainland, and he was still able to find employment. His wife, who grew up going back and forth between Japan and Hawaii, and who was from a merchant-class family (i.e. pearl necklace and Parisian fashion mixed with kimonos), was now stuck only in America. It should have been "okay" since she was born in Hawaii, but this newly purified enforcement of strict identity narratives led to chronic mental illness. The grandfather once told his grandson that his Boy Scout leader Silver Beaver Award was his Oscar for "best actor." As a teenager: when he was 12, he pretended to be an 18-year old Chinese man and enlisted in the army for WWI, but his mother saw the documents lying on his bed and stopped him just before he got on the boat for his voyage to Europe; at 16, circa 1920, he ran away from home to Los Angeles, where he worked "all kinds of jobs," some of which he wouldn't even tell his "bad boy" grandson about (this reference refers to one of the artist's older brothers.) The grandfather lived in J-Town, at the Hotel Fedora. He seems to have worn a suit, and had some rather suspicious-looking friends. I know, this is getting confusing. The photograph is printed billboard-size, twice, with part of it cut off.

--A "family history video for insurance purposes," made by the artist's mother, starring the artist's father (who is pictured as a baby in the 1940 photograph from Honolulu, Hawaii). This video documents every object in the Okiishi household circa 2009.

--*A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-1997*. The entire contents of the artist's childhood, saved in plastic storage bins and cardboard boxes in the Okiishi basement, 2940 Monroe Drive, Ames, Iowa. Driven to Los Angles in May 2018 by the artist, through a dust storm in Nebraska, the mountains of Colorado and the deserts of Utah, with a stop at the site of the Topaz "relocation camp" (the euphemism used for prison/concentrations camps of American citizen children and their parents of Japanese extraction during WWII). The tradition of pilgrimage to "camp" is not common among Americans of Japanese descent. No one really talks about traumatic history; these things disappear. The artist had the entire basement archive-storage 3D-scanned so that a document of its unadulterated state could be recorded in a point cloud.

--Photographs from the road trip; photographs from the Okiishi basement, taken while walking around in the dark. Thinking about: the potentiality of a truly radical intersectionality (meaning: everything, not just the things that she thinks are significant); how many generations should be tortured by these radical enforcements of new orders before it's time to say goodbye to any American notion of identity; lots of other stuff, such as when I was taught Homer's *Odyssey* as intertext with vision quest narratives in oral tradition in high school, what America looks like when it's not all fucked up, how the food makes bodies become so grotesque, and when my next SoulCycle class will be.

--Frank Ocean, *White Ferrari*, on in the car, both as the end stretching part of exercise class and as what is on in the car when visiting the concentration camp.

This is Ken Okiishi's first exhibition in Los Angeles and his third exhibition at Reena Spaulings Fine Art. Okiishi has had recent solo exhibitions at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Arbeiterkammer Wien, Vienna; Fundació Gaspar, Barcelona; Take Ninagawa, Tokyo; Mehringdamm 72, Berlin; and Alex Zachary, New York. His work has been included in institutional group exhibitions at The Centre Pompidou, Paris; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Fridericianum, Kassel; Serralves Museum, Porto; Arnolfini, Bristol; White Columns, NY; and Artists Space, New York. His writing has appeared in Artforum, May, Bidoun, Triple Canopy, and The Brooklyn Rail, and a book on his work was recently published by Sternberg Press (*The Very Quick of the Word*, 2014). Okiishi is visiting faculty in the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University.

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Ken Okiishi at Reena Spaulings

(link)

By throwing their stuff, themselves, into the ocean they were able to keep a freedom, their lives, a paradox that Okiishi has obvious misgivings over placing current lives back in the desert buried. Stripped of your heritage how free did you remain, the question. Now Okiishi, a new transport of history towards oceans which left the LA Times wondering what was in the puppet head box rather than the seemingly more pertinent question of this displacements of an Ames Iowa basement's catalyst. No one packs up a van without reason, a much less exciting white Ferrari of Okiishi's time vehicle, *precisely one car load*, kept, allowed into the future. The amount one can carry. What can be preserved as our possessions-as-selves eroding in time streamlined against current's abrasion. Which amass more in new homes. What will be the last object of yours finally cast into waste by your children? Objects carry briefly into tomorrow, but the artist is allowed attempts to loft their objects onto the generational ships of museums, while

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entire histories of others are and have been lost. Like Dahn Vo's attempt to carry Martin Wong's possessions, or even Cianciolo's corrugate time vessels, we allow a certain amount of artistic provenance into the future, and all the hope for it.

See: Susan Cianciolo at Modern Art

Labels: Ken Okiishi, Los Angeles, Reena Spaulings, United States

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Los Angeles Times

REVIEW | ARTS & CULTURE | ENTERTAINMENT

The mystery of the puppet-head box: Why an Iowa childhood has been unpacked in an L.A. gallery

By SHARON MIZOTA
MAY 30, 2018 | 7:00 AM

Ken Okiishi, “A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-1997” (detail), 2018. (Ed Mumford / Reena Spaulings)

A closed cardboard box in Ken Okiishi's installation reads, "Ken's puppet head supplies." Among the many containers in Reena Spaulings' cavernous gallery, it's the one that sparks the most curiosity. What kind of puppets? Why just heads? And what might they tell us if we opened the box?

The boxes contain the artifacts of Okiishi's childhood in Ames, Iowa, collected from his parents' basement and driven by him to L.A. The effect is rather like a garage sale: an assortment of tchotkes, toys, books and magazines, inflected with hints of Christianity and piano practice. The artist's future is foreshadowed by several enthusiastic if embryonic paintings, a fantastic homemade tuxedo jacket of clear plastic striated with silvery threads, and of course, the tantalizing suggestion of puppets.

On his way to L.A., Okiishi stopped at the Utah site of the Topaz internment camp during World War II. He shot video of the desolate landscape and the van full of his childhood stuff. This video, spliced with a 3-D rendering he made of his parents' basement, is projected on the wall above the boxes. A statue of a dark-haired choirboy standing amid the bins creates a boy-shaped void in the projection, like Okiishi's former self, bearing witness.

Ken Okiishi, “A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-1997,” 2018. Credit: Courtesy of (Ed Mumford / Reena Spaulings)

Ken Okiishi, detail, “A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-1997,” 2018 (Ed Mumford / Reena Spaulings)

Although his family was not interned, the camps and the racism they represent are clearly on the artist's mind. The fully packed van evokes images of internees allowed to bring only what they could carry. In both cases, the baggage represents the corralling and compression of life into boxes.

In the other room is a 2009 video Okiishi's mother made to document all the objects in the family home. She created it for insurance purposes, but Okiishi reframes it as an inadvertent family history, a snapshot of a given moment that reverberates with what came before.

Reaching further back is a large, mural-sized photograph of his father's first Boy's Day celebration in Hawaii, circa 1940. (Boy's Day, now called Children's Day, is a traditional Japanese holiday celebrating boys and masculinity.) Okiishi's chubby infant father sits at the base of an enormous tiered dais filled with row upon row of male dolls, attired and posed for battle. In an artist's statement, Okiishi relates how after the attack on Pearl Harbor, his grandfather threw all the family's "Japanese" things into the ocean, for fear of being perceived as the enemy. The artist's fascination with his family's surviving artifacts feels like furious mourning for this original erasure.

Ken Okiishi, "A Model Childhood, Honolulu, Hawaii, circa 1940," 2018. (Ed Mumford / Reena Spaulings)

Reena Spaulings Fine Art, 2228 W. 7th St., 2nd floor (entrance on South Grand View Street), L.A. Through June 16; closed Sundays-Tuesdays. (213) 908-5033, www.gagareena.com

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MOCA director Philippe Vergne to depart

Documentation of the exhibition *A Model Childhood,* May 12 – June 16, 2018:
https://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2018/06/ken-okiishi-at-reena-spaulings-3/

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

September 2018 28. Jahrgang Heft 111
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KEN OKIISHI

LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL, NOT US

US Gefangenenlager / US detention facility, McAllen, Texas, 2018

The sight of children separated from their parents at the US border is one that provokes fear and disgust. The image and the reactions to it are symptomatic of a host of responses one can imagine to the current catastrophe that is US politics more generally – outrage, disbelief, emigration? However, working to understand what those responses say about the cultural discourse in the US might help explain why so many seem paralyzed, unable to act.

In the art world in particular, many have reverted to familiar camps and even more familiar critical languages. Artist Ken Okiishi examines the one-dimensional dive that has characterized much of the political discourse around immigration and cultural belonging in the US. What can we learn about ourselves in the face of the political onslaught?

The relentless sequences of eruptive news cycles generate an addictive, painfully banal pattern of "abuse and recovery." It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to track what one is actually thinking, while at the same time, the victimized viewer can't get enough. From any point in the political spectrum, it seems like the other side is always already winning – and I, like so many others, have struggled to find any legitimate point of understanding, even though discussing the news, in the US context, has replaced discussing artworks or any other form of cultural production. We have become as frantically verbose as we are acutely silent.

KEN OKIISHI

FREIHEIT UND GERECHTIGKEIT FÜR JEDEN, NICHT FÜR UNS

Der Anblick von Kindern, die an der mexikanisch-amerikanischen Grenze von ihren Eltern getrennt wurden, ruft Angst und Abscheu hervor. Das Bild und die Reaktionen darauf sind symptomatisch für die Bandbreite der möglichen Antworten auf den katastrophalen politischen Kurs Amerikas insgesamt – Empörung, Fassungslosigkeit, Auswanderung? Der Versuch zu begreifen, was diese Reaktionen über den kulturellen Diskurs in den USA aussagen, könnte allerdings erklären helfen, warum so viele Menschen gelähmt und handlungsunfähig wirken.

Der Künstler Ken Okiishi untersucht die Verflachungen und Vereinfachungen, an denen der amerikanische Diskurs rund um Einwanderung und kulturelle Zugehörigkeit in weiten Teilen krankt. Was können wir im Taumel dieser politischen Angriffe über uns selbst lernen?

Das Trommelfeuer der Schlagzeilen stürzt einen in einen süchtig machenden und zugleich quälend banalen Kreislauf von Dröhnung und Entzug. Es wird schwierig, gar unmöglich, den Überblick zu behalten, was man eigentlich denkt; zugleich kann die malträtierte Zuschauer*in nicht genug kriegen. Ganz gleich, wo man sich im politischen Spektrum verortet, es scheint immer, als gewinne ständig die andere Seite – und wie so viele andere bemühe ich mich seit geraumer Zeit vergeblich, ein tragfähiges Verständnis der Lage zu gewinnen, obwohl die Diskussion über die letzten Nachrichten unter Amerikaner*innen das Gespräch über Kunst oder andere Formen kultureller Produktion ersetzt hat. Wir reden pausenlos und fieberhaft, und doch fehlen uns die Worte.

Aber angesichts der jüngsten Nachrichten[1] hat sich der Nebel der Resignation gelichtet; ein Thema, das man vorher aus Angst vor eingebildeten oder wirklichen Konsequenzen, die das im Zeitalter der sozialen Medien haben kann, nur im privaten Gespräch erörtert hätte, gilt es öffentlich anzusprechen: die Trennung von Kindern von ihren Eltern, Migrant*innen und Geflüchtete, die in der Vergangenheit ein geregeltes Asylverfahren durchlaufen oder aber die mexikanisch-amerikanische Grenze auf dem normalen Weg zur Saisonarbeit überquert hätten. Die nun eingerichteten konzentrationslagerähnlichen Kindergefängnisse und „Schützlingsunterkünfte" für Babys riefen die übliche leere Empörung wach (wie Schreie in einem leeren Gang im Walmart), bei der es in dem Maße konkret wird, wie man zugunsten einer bizarren Vorstellung von Mitgefühl von den wirklichen Opfern ablenkt. Aufseiten der Linken tun Leute, die ein recht behütetes Leben führen, so, als zielten diese Maßnahmen auf sie, als könnten ihnen *ihre eigenen* Kinder weggenommen werden oder als wären sie nach der zum Klischee gewordenen Formel „Als die Nazis, die Kommunisten holten …" die Nächsten. Am rechten Rand dagegen wartet der amerikanische Justizminister Jeff Sessions mit der charakteristisch aberwitzigen Behauptung auf, der Vorwurf, dass das Vorgehen der Einwanderungspolizei ICE faschistisch sei, sei unhaltbar insofern, als „Nazideutschland die Juden an der Ausreise aus Deutschland gehindert hätte"[2].

Die isolationistischen Experimente des Trump-Regimes verwandeln die USA, das „Land der Einwanderer", in eine offen fremdenfeindliche Nation; die Symbole neofaschistischer Macht mischen sich in wachsender Zahl unter die üblichen Werbungen für Strandurlaube, Protestposts und die lustige/coole Sache, die dein Kumpel gerade angestellt hat. Die Normalisierung des Unnormalen führt zu einer erneuten Abschottung von Safe Spaces, die zunehmend verlogen und in ihrer Naivität angreifbar wirken. Identitätssysteme haben sich innerhalb rassisch

But the most recent news cycle[1] has punctured a certain resigned haze, and things that one would once have declined to say publically out of fear of some imagined or real social media-facilitated repercussions are no longer acceptable to keep to private conversations: the separation of parents from children of migrants and refugees who were either going through a previously standard process of asylum seeking or crossing the Mexican/US border in a previously normal process of going to work for the summer. The attendant concentration camp prisons for children and "tender age shelters" for babies produced a typically empty form of outrage (like screaming in a vacant Walmart aisle), where all details were directed away from the actual victims and toward some bizarre personal understanding. On the Left, people who live relatively protected lives act as if they are the target of these acts, as if *their own* children could be taken away, or that they are "next" in the cliché of "first they came for ..." Whereas on the Far Right, the US attorney general Jeff Sessions says, in his consistently deranged fashion, what distinguishes ICE's (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) actions from accusations of fascism is that "in Nazi Germany they were keeping the Jews from leaving Germany."[2]

The experiments in isolationism enacted by the Trump regime reframe the US, the "land of immigrants," as a suddenly xenophobic nation, with the signifiers of a neo-fascist power increasingly speckling the normal feed of beach vacation ads, protest-style speech, and that funny/cool thing your friend just did. The normalization of the un-normal produces a re-bubbling of safe spaces that feel increasingly phony and naively vulnerable. A stabilization of identity systems within racially and economically defined communities of clear insiders and outsiders has increased mostly without criticism – although an uncanny waft of self-reflexivity sparks moments of wondering how, in a social situation, previously "mixed" groupings have become aligned very clearly along standard identity terrains, and common enemies seem to be emerging everywhere at once. I worry that the neo-Schmittian friend/enemy techniques of mobilizing xenophobia by the Trump regime have entered into a system in ways that we don't readily see – or in ways that interface with applications of Schmittian politics within the Left in the 1990s that can no longer be legitimized as is.

What we often forget is that in the American identity system,[3] "culture" is always already replaced by "race," and xenophobia is muddled within racism as somehow being the same thing. The identity system relies on a sleight of hand that erases the specific historical and genealogical traces that form an otherwise complex set of affects, habits, and ways of being, encouraging people to "identify" instead with a core set of identity-expressions that are supposed to wipe clean any conflicting data. Race, in this way, is used as a means to level out enormous swaths of heterogeneous cultural histories and experiences in the name of supposedly celebrating intersections of "difference," and of creating easily interchangeable and manipulatable codes of "self" and "other." For example, an eighth-generation descendent of slaves and slave owners is somehow supposed to identify as the same "race" as a first-generation immigrant from urban Ghana; a fourth-generation descendent of Japanese-Americans with an "internment" concentration camp/cultural-economic-decimation history is supposed to identify as the same "race" as a first-

„Ken Okiishi: A Model Childhood", Reena Spaulings, Los Angeles, 2018, Ausstellungsansicht / installation view

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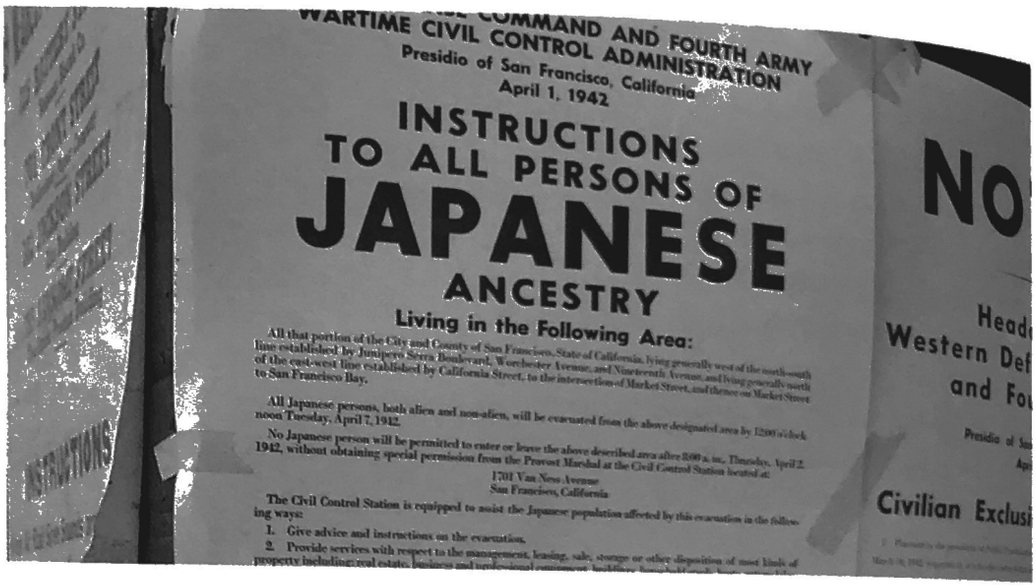
und wirtschaftlich definierter Gemeinschaften mit klaren Einschluss-Ausschluss-Kriterien stabilisiert, ohne dass viel Kritik laut geworden wäre – nur manchmal beschleicht einen die unheimliche und einen selbst betreffende Frage, warum in einer gesellschaftlichen Situation zuvor „gemischte" Gruppierungen sich ganz deutlich entlang üblicher Identitätsterrains sortiert haben und überall gemeinsame Feinde aufzutauchen scheinen. Ich befürchte, die neoschmittianischen Freund-Feind-Techniken der Mobilisierung von Fremdenhass durch das Trump-Regime haben sich zu einem System verdichtet, das wir nicht ohne Weiteres erkennen können – oder das mit dem Einsatz schmittianischer Politik aufseiten der Linken in den 1990ern zusammengeht, was nicht mehr zu rechtfertigen ist.

Der Begriff „Rasse" wurde ersetzt; Fremdenhass wird auf verworrene Weise unter Rassismus subsumiert. Das Identitätssystem beruht auf einem Zaubertrick, bei dem die spezifischen historischen und genealogischen Spuren, die ein übrigens komplexes Ensemble von Affekten, Gewohnheiten und Seinsweisen bilden, ausgestrichen werden, um die Menschen zu ermuntern, sich stattdessen mit einem festen Kern von Identitätsartikulationen zu „identifizieren", die widersprechende Wirklichkeiten zum Verschwinden bringen sollen. So dient „Rasse" als Mittel, enorm vielfältige und verschiedenartige kulturelle Geschichten und Erfahrungen zugunsten einer angeblichen Feier der Schnittpunkte von „Differenz" zu nivellieren und leicht austauschbare und manipulierbare Kodifizierungen von „Selbst" und „Anderem" entstehen zu lassen. Jemand, der in der achten Generation von Sklaven und Sklavenhaltern abstammt, soll sich etwa mit einer „Rasse" identifizieren, zu der auch eine ghanaische Einwander*in gehört; eine Amerikaner*in in der vierten Generation, deren japanischstämmige Vorfahren die „Internierung" in einem Konzentrationslager und eine Geschichte kultureller und wirtschaftlicher Dezimierung überstanden haben, soll sich mit einer „Rasse" identifizieren, zu der auch eine Einwander*in gehört, die in einem koreanischen Eigenheimviertel aufgewachsen ist. Zugleich wird „Differenz" durch eine Vereinnahmung von „Intersektionalität" mobilisiert, die es z. B. einer lesbischen Angehörigen der oberen Mittelklasse, deren Großeltern den Holocaust überlebt haben, erlaubt, „den Schmerz" einer Wanderarbeiterin in der Landwirtschaft aus dem ländlichen Mexiko „zu fühlen, weil beide Mütter sind", oder einem afroamerikanischen Footballspieler, sich als prominenter Fürsprecher von #MeToo zu positionieren und sich unmittelbar mit den weiblichen Opfern von sexueller Belästigung zu identifizieren, weil er selbst strukturell benachteiligt und Schikanen mit sexueller Komponente ausgesetzt war.

So kletterte Patricia Okoumou in einer Aktion, die eines der aufsehenerregendsten Medienspektakel der letzten Jahre hätte werden können, auf die Freiheitsstatue, um zur „Abschaffung von ICE" aufzurufen und sich in einer leidenschaftlichen Rede den universellen politischen Diskurs zu eigen zu machen: „Die drakonische Nulltoleranzpolitik gegenüber Einwander*innen muss aufhören. In einer Demokratie stecken wir Kinder nicht in Käfige [...] Familienzusammenführung jetzt [...] Michelle Obama, unsere geliebte First Lady [...] hat gesagt, ‚When they go low, we go high', und ich bin so hoch hinaufgestiegen, wie ich konnte." Ein wohlmeinender Journalist deutet Okoumou daraufhin in der Zeitschrift *New York* als Ausnahmefall, der die „doppelte Bedrohung"



generation immigrant from suburban Korea. At the same time, "difference" is mobilized by an appropriation of "intersectionality" that allows, for example, an upper-middle-class lesbian from a family that survived the Holocaust to "feel the pain" of a migrant farm worker from rural Mexico, "because they are mothers"; or an African American (male) football player becomes a spokesperson for #MeToo, and directly identifies with the sexual harassment of women, because he also experienced structural harassment of a sexual nature. For example, Patricia Okoumou, an immigrant from the Congo with US citizenship, climbs the Statue of Liberty in one of the most potentially harrowing media spectacles of recent years, to demand that the US "Abolish ICE!" and passionately take hold of universal political discourse, saying "the draconian, zero-tolerance policy on immigration has to go. In a democracy we do not put children in cages … reunite the children now … Michelle Obama, our beloved First Lady … said 'When they go low, we go high,' and I went as high as I could." Okoumou is then interpreted, by a well-intentioned journalist in New York magazine, as a special case that highlights the "dual threat to black immigrants." Okoumou's assertion of a generally political unifying force against an active threat to a highly visible group of Central and South American migrants and refugees – and the potentially shared political power of that united front against this xenophobic treatment of people as sub-human based on citizenship – is made, somehow, to represent only her "own" particular identity, and we are left in a cliché of race where "there are many black faces, whose stories cannot be ignored in the fight for a just and humane immigration system."[4] As New York magazine would have it, even if Okoumou climbs the Statue of Liberty and claims a universal point of view, she is celebrated as a limited representation of her racial identity; her intersections are limited to racialized similarities. As victimhood takes hold, psychological identities become rooted in a system that produces massive cognitive dissonance and endless spirals of enacting a supposedly positive coding of "race" and "gender" that rarely intersects with a lived experience of those categories as fulfilling, while

Internierungsbenachrichtigung für Amerikaner*innen mit japanischen Vorfahren / Japanese American internment notice, San Francisco, 1942

deutlich mache, „der schwarze Einwanderer ausgesetzt sind". Okoumous Bezugnahme auf eine im umfassenden Sinn politisch vereinigende Kraft der Gegenwehr gegen eine akute Gefahr für eine Gruppe mittel- und südamerikanischer Einwander*innen und Geflüchteter, die im Rampenlicht der Öffentlichkeit stehen – und die Bezugnahme auf die politische Stärke, die aus einem solchen Schulterschluss gegen die fremdenfeindliche Behandlung von Menschen anderer Nationalität als Untermenschen erwachsen könnte –, wird zu einem Ausdruck lediglich ihrer „eigenen" besonderen Identität erklärt; am Ende bleibt nur ein klischeehafter Rassendiskurs übrig, nach dem „es viele Schwarze Gesichter gibt, deren Geschichten wir im Kampf für ein gerechtes und humanes Einwanderungssystem nicht überhören dürfen"[3]. Wenn es nach *New York* geht, wird Okoumou, die doch gerade auf die Freiheitsstatue gestiegen ist, um einen universellen Standpunkt einzunehmen, als Vertreterin ihrer beschränkten rassischen Identität gefeiert; die Differenzen, die sich in ihr überschneiden, werden auf rassisch gedachte Ähnlichkeiten reduziert. Das zunehmende Setzen auf die Opferrolle bindet psychologische Identitäten an ein System, das massive kognitive Dissonanzen generiert und in endlosen Spiralbewegungen eine vermeintlich positive Kodierung von „Rasse" und „Geschlecht" aufführt, die kaum Berührungspunkte mit einer selbstbestimmt gelebten Erfahrung dieser Kategorien hat; zugleich erzeugt es über ihre Abgrenzung strikt wachende Pseudogemeinschaften von „Anderen". Insbesondere rufen fremdenfeindliche Angriffe und Versuche, vereinigte Fronten über Identitätsgruppen hinweg zu bilden, die narzisstische Feedbackschleife der Identität auf den Plan, in der die vergleichsweise „behüteten" Opfer-Staatsbürger*innen an einer Vorstellung davon festhalten, was es heißt, Opfer zu sein, die von den spezifischen Erfahrungen von Opfern in rechtlichen Ausnahmezuständen nichts wissen; so wird die Aufmerksamkeit letztlich weg von den Migrant*innen und Geflüchteten, die derzeit an den Grenzen so vieler Länder unerträglich leiden (und sterben), und auf personalisierte „interne" Kategorienfragen und Konflikte um Möglichkeiten gelenkt.

In früheren Jahrhunderten knüpften europäische oder eurozentrische Regimes in der Neuen Welt, die eine Politik der Angst vor dem Anderen ausübten, die binäre Unterscheidung von Selbst und Anderem an stabile kategoriale Rassismen und Klassenpositionen; der Siedler und der Kolonialherr – oder, in den innereuropäischen Propagandaoperationen, der rassisch definierte Nationalstaat – waren die Ankerpunkte der Angstmobilisierung. Wenn die frenetische Dezentrierung, die die Globalisierung des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts bewirkte, ihr Gutes hat, dann wohl, weil die binäre Unterscheidung von Selbst und Anderem zu einer Matrix der Möglichkeiten geworden ist, in der das Selbst zuvor als Andere ausgeschlossene Körper in sich aufnehmen kann, die auf wirtschaftlicher und/oder konzeptueller Ebene zu dem Bewusstsein gelangt sind, sie könnten selbst in Wahrheit das „Selbst" sein. Somit ließ die Bekräftigung von Identitäten unter Obama als Verfahren, Gemeinschaften in Safe Spaces zu sortieren (diese Verfahren wurden von rechter wie linker Seite eingesetzt; Gated Communities war der Schlüsselbegriff bei den Rechten, bis das Trump-Regime in Dukes-of-Hazzard-Manier die Propagandacodes nach nationalsozialistischem Geschmack neu verschaltete), die Möglichkeit einer geradezu radioaktiven Angst-

also creating pseudo-communities of self-policing "others." In particular, acts of xenophobia and attempts to generate united fronts across identity groupings are met with the narcissist feedback loop of identity that makes the relatively "safe" national citizen-victims see victimhood in ways that eliminate the specificity of victims in states of legal exception, effectively refocusing attention to personalized "internal" problems of categories and potentialities rather than the migrants and refugees who are currently experiencing excruciating pain (even death) at the borders of so many countries.

In previous centuries, when European or Eurocentric New-World regimes enacted a fear-of-the-other politics, the self/other binary was affixed to stable categorical racisms and class positions, with some combination of settler, colonizer or in internal European propaganda operations, the racialized nation-state setting the terms of mobilizing fear. If there is a positive side to the frenetic decentering enacted by 20th and 21st-century globalization, it would be that the self/other binary has become a matrix of possibilities, where the self can include previously othered bodies who have attained some sort of economic and/or conceptual sense of actually being "the self." In this way, the shoring up of identity as a method of sorting communities into safe spaces of the Obama years (this method was used by both right and Left, with "gated communities" being the operative term in right-wing contexts previous to the Trump regime's Dukes-of-Hazzard rewiring of propaganda codes in National Socialist styles) created a radioactive possibility for the fear-of-the-other; "the other," in our carefully shielded, Twitter/Facebook/Instagram-regulated "bubbles," is anyone who is not "us," and a politics of fear generates all sorts of authoritarian activators that cannot be located within one stream of identity-based sorting or political spectruming.[5]

The Center Left ("Democrat," "liberal") consistently finds a certain type of "against self-interest" right-wing posturing by members of classically othered identity groups both shocking and somehow irrelevant because uncomfortable. When a radio announcer on Hot 97 is completely baffled at Kanye West's enthusiastic support of Donald Trump, the Center Left agrees to dismiss the phenomenon as simply "crazy." The logic goes like this: Trump is so racist/xenophobic that supporting Trump is "intrinsically" against African Americans' self-interest. The idea that hyphenated Americans of all "races" are still Americans, meaning that a nationalist discourse associated with "race" can also mobilize xenophobia to its advantage, remains obscured, while the Far Right profits by hacking overlooked intersections to its advantage. The victim-perpetrator matrix, in the hacked way of thinking, becomes shielded by the propaganda of "building a border wall"; the political fantasy becomes the idea that the hierarchy of access to traditional self/other strategies of American politics eliminates the "newest" exploited classes in order to demonize all foreign "others" as a threat to those who were "here first," whether they are "black" or "white." Other, more horrific instances, such as when a 91-year-old man in Los Angeles was beaten with a brick by a young African American woman who shouted "Go back to your country!" while bludgeoning him nearly to death, are also sidestepped, in hopes that they are statistically irrelevant because they don't align with a comfortable parsing of categories traditionally associated with crimes of this nature.[6] The fact that media reports

besetzung des Anderen entstehen; in unseren sorgfältig abgeschirmten, von Twitter/Facebook/Instagram reglementierten Blasen ist jeder „der Andere", der nicht „Wir" ist, und eine Politik der Angst bringt eine Vielfalt von Autoritarismus-Treibern hervor, die sich im Rahmen einer identitätsbasierten Sortierung oder einer Auffächerung des politischen Spektrums nicht innerhalb einer Strömung verorten lässt.[4]

Die linke Mitte (die „Demokraten", *liberals*) ist von einer bestimmten Art rechter politischer Pose bei klassisch als Andere ausgeschlossenen Identitätsgruppen, bei der diese gegen ihre eigenen Interessen agitieren, stets aufs Neue schockiert und zugleich so unangenehm berührt, dass sie sie für irrelevant erklärt. Wenn der Radiomoderator von Hot 97 Kanye Wests Begeisterung für Donald Trump absolut unbegreiflich findet, ist sich die linke Mitte einig: Das ist einfach „übergeschnappt". Die Logik dahinter: Trump ist ein solcher Rassist/Fremdenhasser, dass ihn zu unterstützen den „ureigenen" Interessen von Afroamerikaner*innen diametral zuwiderläuft. Das verschleiert die Möglichkeit, dass Bindestrich-Amerikaner*innen aller „Rassen" immer noch Amerikaner*innen sind, dass also ein nationalistischer Diskurs, der an „Rassen" anknüpft, Fremdenfeindlichkeit auch zum eigenen Vorteil mobilisieren könnte, und lässt die extreme Rechte zugleich übersehene Intersektionalitäten zu ihrem Nutzen umprogrammieren. Die Opfer-Täter-Matrix wird in der umprogrammierten Denkweise durch die Propaganda für die „Grenzmauer" abgeschirmt; in der politischen Fantasie schließt der hierarchisch verteilte Zugang zu den traditionellen Selbst-Anderer-Strategien der amerikanischen Politik die „neuesten" ausgebeuteten Klassen aus, um alle fremden „Anderen" als Bedrohung für die zu dämonisieren, die „zuerst hier waren", ob „Schwarz" oder „weiß". Auch noch erschreckendere Beispiele wie die junge Afroamerikanerin, die in Los Angeles einen 91-Jährigen mit einem Ziegelstein fast totprügelte und dabei „Geh in dein eigenes Land zurück!" schrie, blendet man lieber als statistisch irrelevant aus, weil sie nicht mit einem liebgewonnenen Kategorienschema zur Deckung zu bringen sind, das traditionell auf Verbrechen dieser Art angewendet wird.[5] Dass die Medien nicht in der Lage sind, den Fall in der Berichterstattung ein Verbrechen aus Fremdenhass (nicht aus Rassenhass) zu nennen, belegt einmal mehr, wie gefährlich es ist, Fremdenhass unter Rassismus zu subsumieren, sodass ein eigentlich unverkennbar fremdenfeindlicher Akt im trüben Spiegel der Konkurrenz zwischen Minderheiten zu einer wirren Anekdote wird.

Wenn wir uns nicht klarmachen, dass die Ordnung der „Vorherrschaft der weißen Rasse", die das alte Demokraten-Republikaner-System durch ein stabiles Ensemble rassisch definierter „wahrer" Subjektpositionen absicherte, denen es besseren (oder weniger) Zugang zu „Träumen" von gesellschaftlichem Aufstieg zu gewähren galt, längst durch die zunehmend globalisierte „Minderheitenmehrheitsgesellschaft" überrannt wurde, können wir auch nicht begreifen, warum die Abgehängten sich für den Hackerangriff neofaschistischer Regimes auf die gesellschaftliche Ordnung einspannen lassen. Das amerikanische Identitätssystem von heute – in seiner gesamten Bandbreite von der achtsamen Linken bis zur identitären Rechten – vermanscht alles zu einem unverdaulichen Brei, bei dem am Ende immer die Ablehnung radikaler Andersheit im Namen stabiler Identifikation – „als Weiße*r", „als Asiat*in",

can't properly identify the hate crime as xenophobic (not racist) is further evidence of the danger in enveloping xenophobia within racism, where a clear act of hatred of foreigners is muddled by a more subdued frame of competing minority groups.

If we fail to see that the "white supremacist" orders that safeguarded the old Democrat/Republican system in a stable, "true" set of racialized subject positions that need to be given better (or worse) access to aspirational "dreams" has already been overrun by the increasingly globalized "majority minority" society, we will also fail to see how disenfranchised people can be utilized in the neo-fascist regimes' hacks on social order. Anything that enters the current American identity system – in the full spectrum from woke Left to identitarian Right – is immediately chewed up in a chaotic morass where the outcome is the rejection of radical otherness in the name of stable identification – whether it is "as a white person," "as an Asian person," "as a woman," or as any other top-down frame that has become the norm. As American history has shown in other moments when specific immigrants are targeted with economic and physical violence based on racialized policies, and antagonisms between "white" and "non-white" groups are exacerbated to pit people against each other based on racialized mythologies, a new class of right-leaning "model minorities" emerges.[7] As a flood of visibility to other moments of American racist policy emerges, I would like to insert an image that is rarely discussed: one of the only ways out of the "internment" concentration camps for Japanese-Americans during World War II was to demonstrate "loyalty" by signing up for military service. The ultimate victory for racist policies comes when "they" become a weaponized version of "us."

Notes

1 Time of writing July 15, 2018.

2 https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/19/politics/jeff-sessions-immigration-border-separation/index.html.

3 I'm using this neologism "American identity system" to mean not only what is typically referred to as "identity politics" but the entire system of identity, including right-wing political forces; not only the mobilization of identity for political purposes, but the political forces that form identity.

4 http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/07/patricia-okoumou-and-the-threat-to-black-immigrants.html.

5 https://www.vox.com/2016/3/1/11127424/trump-authoritarianism.

6 https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/09/us/mexican-man-beaten-brick-los-angeles/index.html; https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/rodolfo-rodriguez-91-year-old-man-beaten-brick_us_5b44628ee4b07aea75437ce1 https://www.gofundme.com/3ctqm-medical-bills-for-my-grandfather.

7 https://mronline.org/2018/04/11/recasteing-the-model-minority-behind-right-wing-hindu-politics-in-the-u-s/).

„als Frau" oder als eine andere übergestülpte normalisierte Identität – steht. Wie die amerikanische Geschichte verschiedentlich gezeigt hat: Wenn bestimmte Einwander*innen auf Grundlage rassistisch geprägter Politiken zum Ziel ökonomischer und physischer Gewalt werden und Konflikte zwischen „weißen" und „nicht weißen" Gruppen angeheizt werden, um Menschen unter dem Banner rassischer Mythologien gegeneinander auszuspielen, tritt eine neue Klasse rechtsgerichteter „Modellminderheiten" auf den Plan.[6] Heute, da auf allen Kanälen Bilder der jüngsten Form rassistischer amerikanischer Politik laufen, möchte ich ein Bild dazwischenschieben, über das selten gesprochen wird: Einer der wenigen Wege, wie japanischstämmige Amerikaner*innen während des Zweiten Weltkriegs aus den „Internierungs"-Konzentrationslagern entkommen konnten, war, „Loyalität" zu demonstrieren, indem sie sich zum Kriegsdienst meldeten. Erst wenn „die" sich in „unser" militarisiertes Ebenbild verwandelt haben, hat rassistische Politik endgültig gewonnen.

Übersetzung: Gerrit Jackson

Anmerkungen

1 Heute ist der 15. Juli 2018.
2 https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/19/politics/jeff-sessions-immigration-border-separation/index.html.
3 http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/07/patricia-okoumou-and-the-threat-to-black-immigrants.html.
4 https://www.vox.com/2016/3/1/11127424/trump-authoritarianism.
5 https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/09/us/mexican-man-beaten-brick-los-angeles/index.html; https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/rodolfo-rodriguez-91-year-old-man-beaten-brick_us_5b44628ee4b07aea75437ce1; https://www.gofundme.com/3ctqm-medical-bills-for-my-grandfather.
6 https://mronline.org/2018/04/11/recasteing-the-model-minority-behind-right-wing-hindu-politics-in-the-u-s/.

Ken Okiishi: A Model Childhood
13 January 2018 - 9 February 2019
PV: 12 January 2018, 12pm - 6pm

Image: Ken Okiishi, *A Model Childhood*, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-2001, 2018

A Model Childhood is a meditation on the artist's place of birth, the USA, as much as the concept of home itself, that place where one literally, inescapably comes from. For some people from migration backgrounds, a place of birth, in each generation, is insistently demarcated as a place that is not a home.

Against the backdrop of the emergent political orders in the USA, Europe and the UK, *A Model Childhood* brings four generations of migration and immigration histories into contact in the present (from the 1880s floating world of merchant-class Japan in tropical-melancholy Hawaii to Trump's neo-fascist-style experiments in globalization-denial).

Performing a breakdown in historical/psychological chronology and logic that has emerged as a method of analysis on the left as it reacts to the seemingly impossible paradigm shifts enacted by the far right, Okiishi searches for "trans-historical patterns of xenophobia and racism," "intersectional identity" and "intergenerational trauma"—but, as he has consistently approached the live-processing demanded of the contemporary artist, he both over- and under-performs what is required of him. Do you hail the call of interpellation, or do you run away screaming? Or do you do both at the same time?

Works in the exhibition include:

– *A Model Childhood, Honolulu, Hawaii, circa 1940*. A photograph, blown up to billboard size, of the artist's father's first Boys' Day celebration in 1940 in Honolulu, Hawaii, featuring 50 dolls modelling the life of a warrior. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor the next year, the artist's grandfather threw all of the family's relics from Japan into the ocean.

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The artists' grandparents, who were born in Hawaii at the beginning of the 20th century, and had lived a rather free-wheeling continuation of the "floating world" as it developed in new terrains, were suddenly confronted with a demand to rationalize their identities as overtly patriotic "loyal" Americans—to play-act an identity **entirely contingent** on "what is expected".

– A "family history video for insurance purposes," made by the artist's mother, starring the artist's father (who is pictured as a baby in the 1940 photograph from Honolulu, Hawaii). This video documents every object in the Okiishi household circa 2009.

– *A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-2001*. The entire contents of the artist's childhood, saved in plastic storage bins and cardboard boxes in the Okiishi basement, 2940 Monroe Drive, Ames, Iowa. Driven to Los Angles in May 2018 by the artist, through a dust storm in Nebraska, the mountains of Colorado and the deserts of Utah, with a stop at the site of the Topaz "relocation camp" (the euphemism used for prison/concentrations camps of American citizen children and their parents of Japanese extraction during WWII). The tradition of pilgrimage to "camp" is not common among Americans of Japanese descent. No one really talks about traumatic history; these things disappear. Okiishi generated a point-cloud scan, by a company specializing in forensic models of crime scenes, of his childhood home's ever-expanding auto-archive: a basement that invests all objects that have passed through his parents' home with the obsessive potential importance of key-strokes recorded on an NSA data server.

–Photographs taken from the car while driving these childhood objects across the USA—thinking about everything that is crashing in the present moment. The modes of American (USA) landscape and road-trip photography are recoded via an eye that no longer sees the ideological function of those modes of image production as related to "expanse" and "freedom." American vernacular architecture starts to look like prison architecture, the endless landscape crumbles in infrastructural disarray, the sun becomes a void.

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A Model Childhood, 2018

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-2001, 2018
HD video, DV family history video for insurance purposes, data point cloud generated by 3D scan and one car load of personal effects transported from Okiishi family basement, 2940 Monroe Drive, Ames, Iowa
Dimensions variable
(OKII 2018006)

https://vimeo.com/311236059/89585b3254

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Additional view: Ken Okiishi, *A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-2001*, 2018

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Additional view: Ken Okiishi, *A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-2001*, 2018

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Additional view: Ken Okiishi, *A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-2001*, 2018

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Additional view: Ken Okiishi, *A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-2001*, 2018

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #1, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 AP (#1/3)
(OKI 2018001)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #2, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018002)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #3, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #4, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
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(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #5, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
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37 1/2 x 50 in
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(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #6, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #7, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
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(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #8, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #9, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018003)

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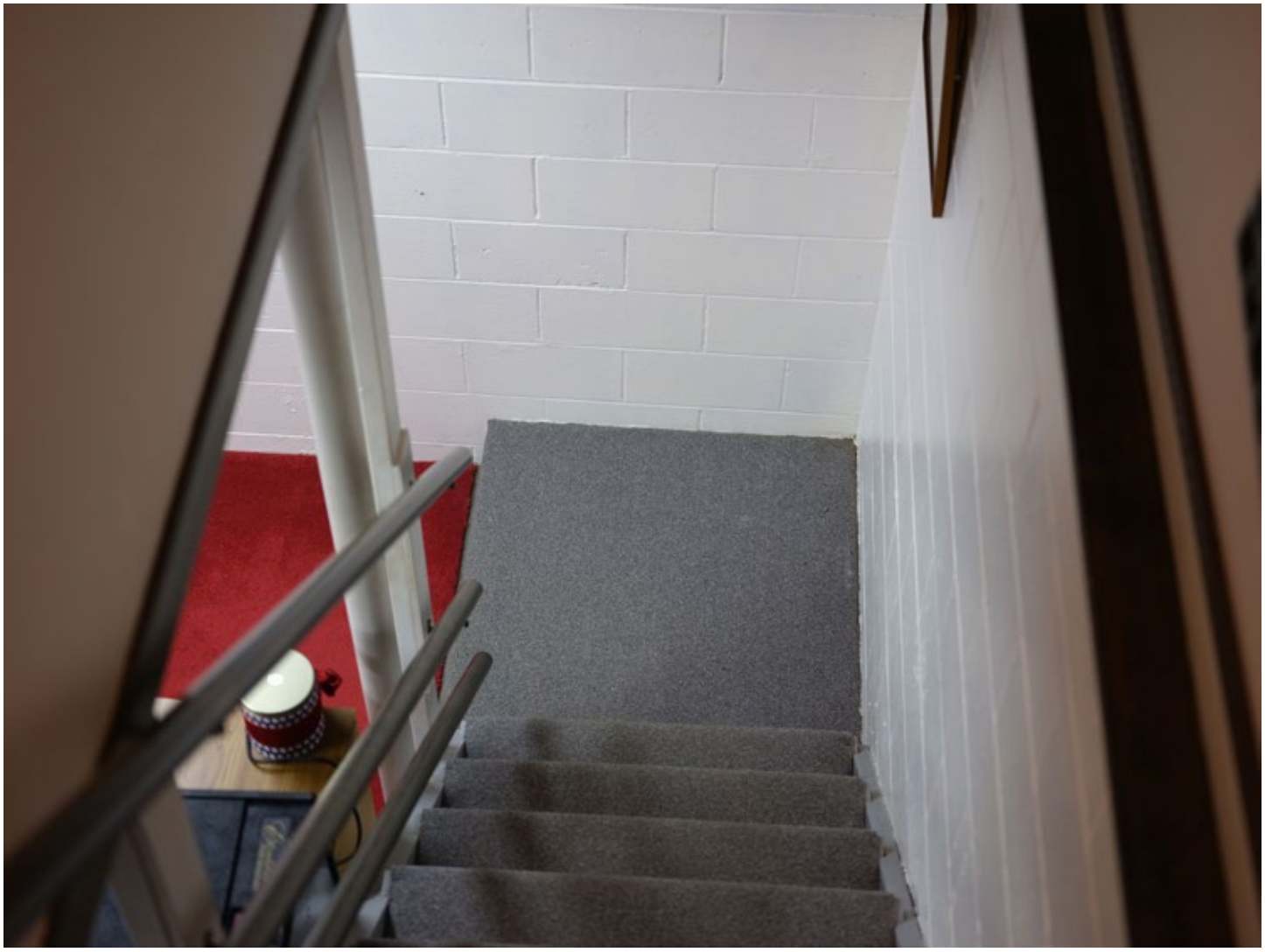

Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #10, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #11, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
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(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #12, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #13, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #14, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
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A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #15, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #16, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #17, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #18, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #19, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #20, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #21, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #22, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #23, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #24, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #25, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #26, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
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A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #27, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
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A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #28, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
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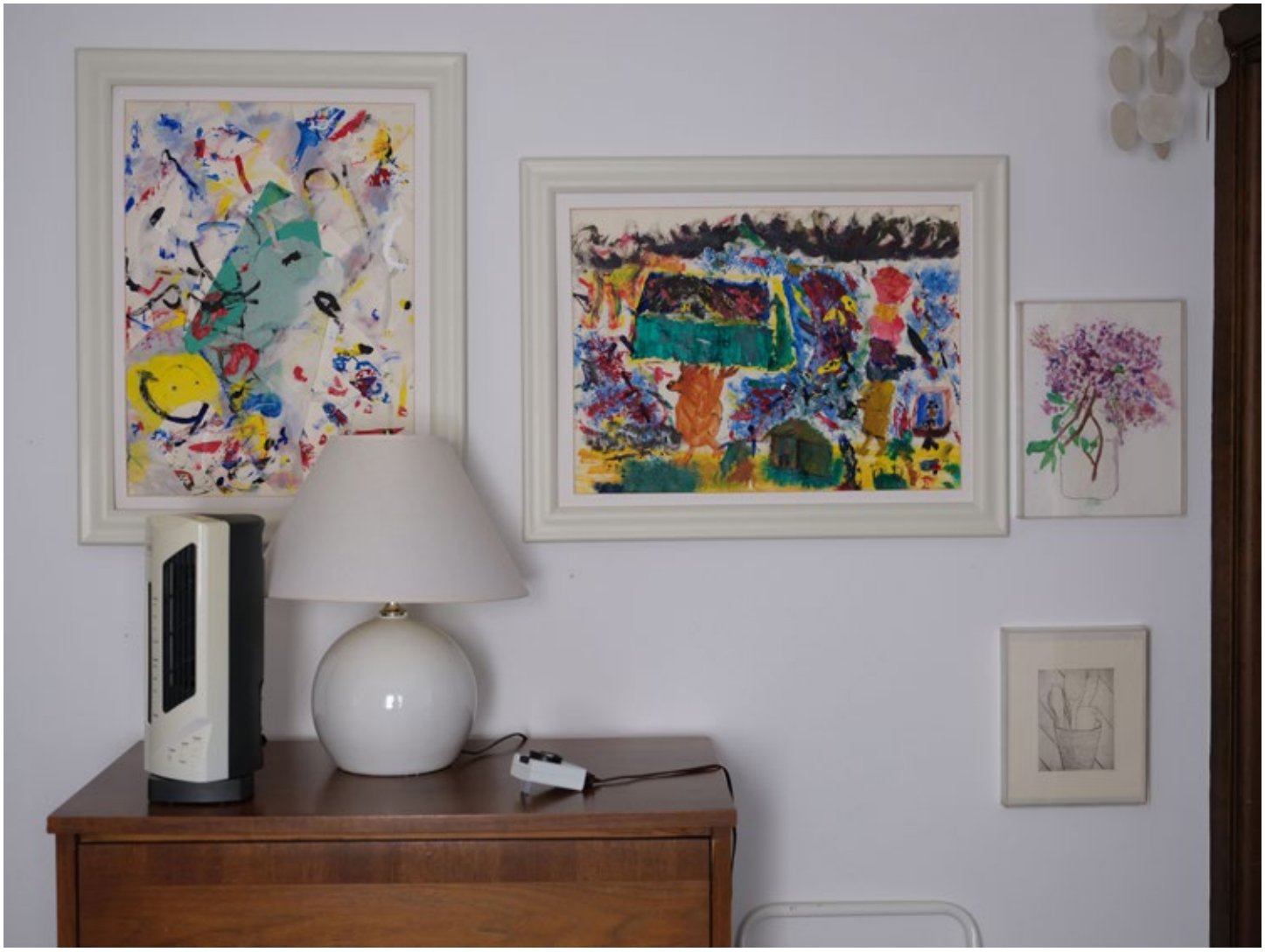

Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #29, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #30, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
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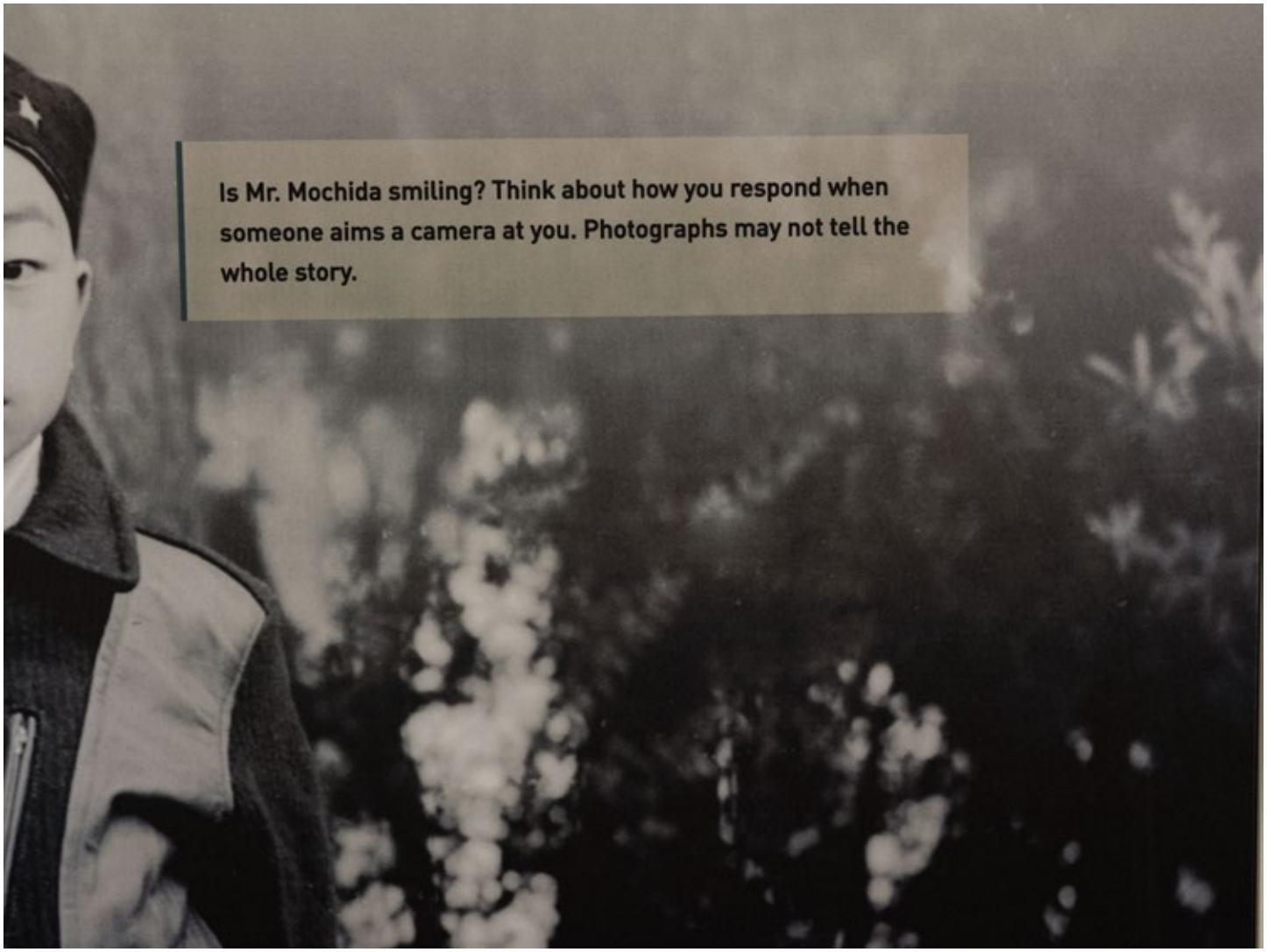

Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #31, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
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(OKII 2018003)

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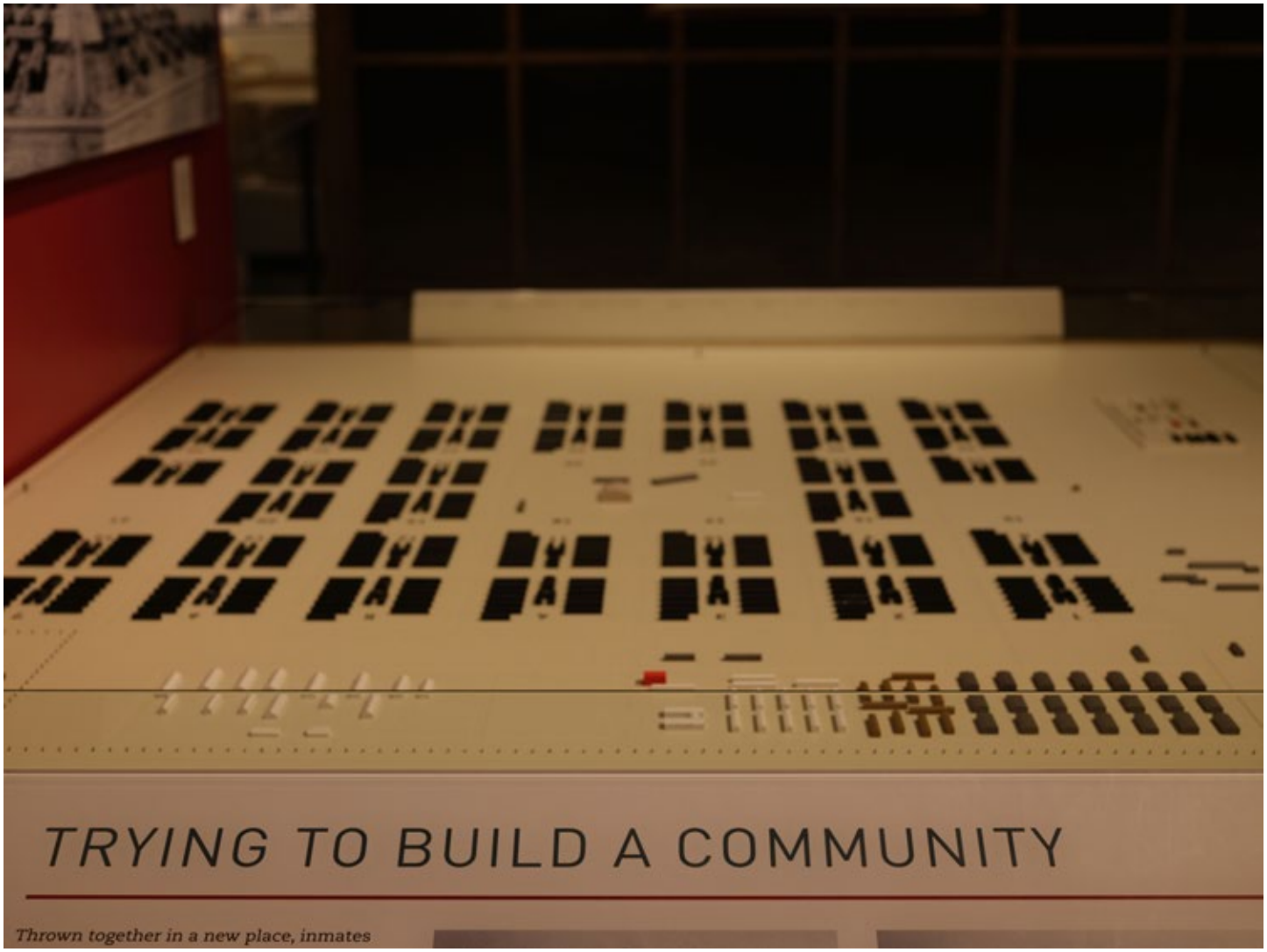

Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #32, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
95.3 x 127 cm
37 1/2 x 50 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018003)

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Ken Okiishi
A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #33, 2018
Dye-sublimation print
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A Model Childhood, the mainland c. 2018 #34, 2018
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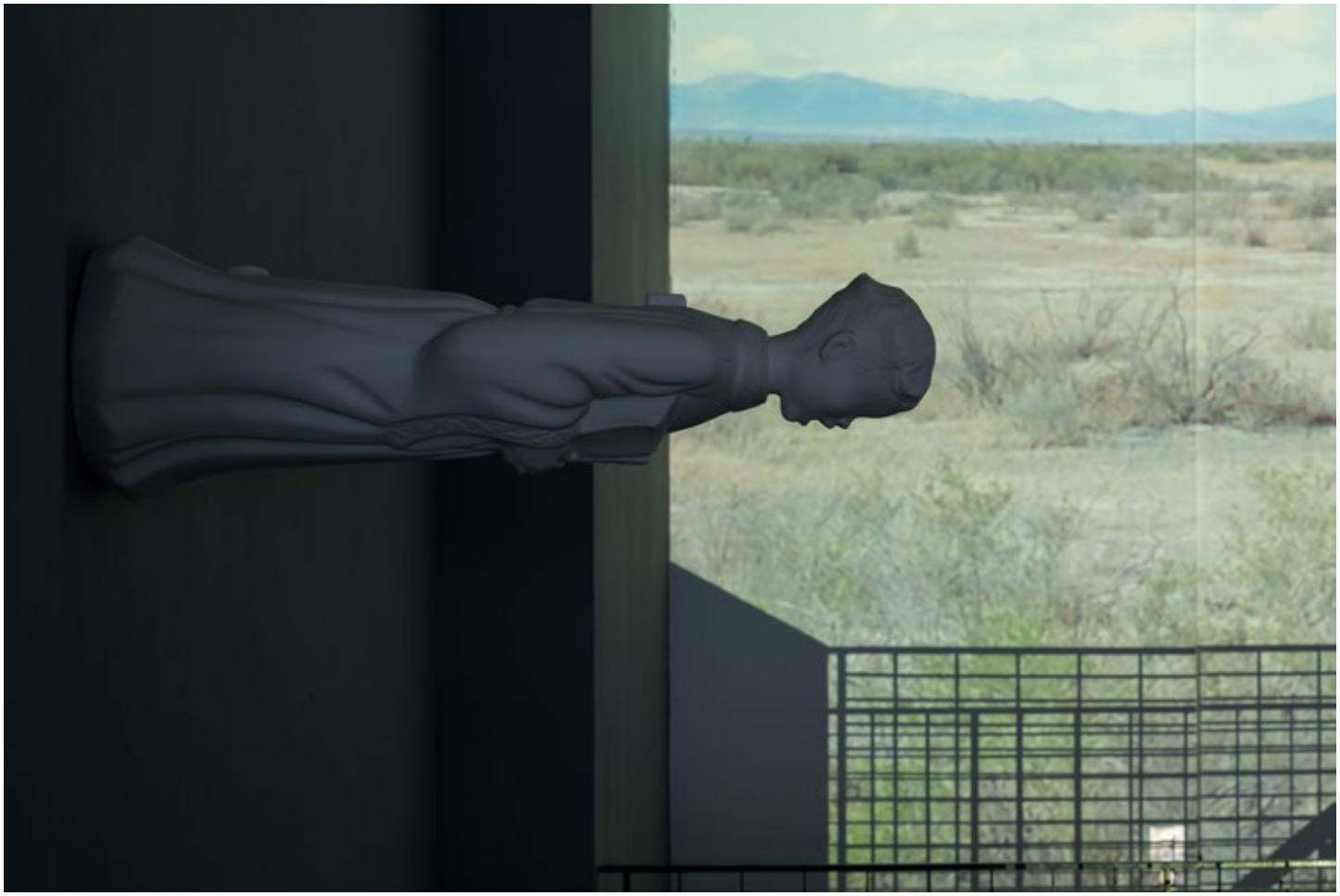

Ken Okiishi
Angel, 2018
PLA 3D Print
76.2 x 29.94 x 22.86 cm
30 x 11 3/4 x 9 in
Edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof (#1/3)
(OKII 2018008)

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ARTFORUM

OCTOBER 2018

INTERNATIONAL

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KEN OKIISHI
JACOLBY SATTERWHITE
PAUL MCCARTHY

Above and right: **Bruce Nauman**, ***Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968**, video, black-and-white, sound, 60 minutes.

OUT OF YOUR HEAD

THERE IS MORE to Bruce Nauman than meets the eye. This month, "Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts," the artist's first comprehensive retrospective in twenty-five years, opens at the Museum of Modern Art and MoMA PS1 in New York. The exhibition is organized by MoMA's Kathy Halbreich with Heidi Naef and Isabel Friedl of the Schaulager in Basel, where it debuted to enthusiastic reviews this past spring.

How did this enigmatic artist from Indiana become one of the great innovators of what came to be known as contemporary art? In search of an answer, *Artforum* invited artists KEN OKIISHI, JACOLBY SATTERWHITE, and PAUL McCARTHY to reflect on Nauman's complex and enduring legacy.

KEN OKIISHI

From left: **Bruce Nauman, *Three Heads Fountain (Three Andrews)* (detail), 2005,** epoxy resin, fiberglass, wire, hoses, immersible pump, rubber-lined basin, water; heads: 10 × 21 × 21". **Bruce Nauman, *Three Heads Fountain (Juliet, Andrew, Rinde)* (detail), 2005,** epoxy resin, fiberglass, wire, hoses, immersible pump, rubber-lined basin, water; heads: 10 × 21 × 21". Photo: Tom Van Eynde.

SOME ARTISTS become more interesting the more you talk about them. Bruce Nauman is not one of those artists. His retrospective, on view earlier this year at the Schaulager in Basel and opening this month at the Museum of Modern Art and MOMA PS1 in New York, is a master class in producing art, and in curating an exhibition, that confounds the impulse to make coherent statements about it. The more you try to explain its force, the more elusive its power becomes. In my case, the task of coming up with cogent propositions is especially daunting: When I was a teenager in the 1990s, Nauman, along with Hélio Oiticica and Adrian Piper, defined my idea of what an artist could become.

Nauman, like many other artists who confronted the then-new technology of video in the late 1960s, found himself collapsing the classical, Romantic, and modernist roles of both artist and model in ways that had nothing to do with self-portraiture, since video allowed the artist to appear in a real-time feedback loop. Trapped "between two machines," per Rosalind Krauss's famous analysis of video art, the artist undergoes a splitting and dissociation in which the interiority of Cartesian consciousness is undermined by an externalized "model" self, a doppelgänger made of electronic signals, glass, and light. It should be remembered that, in the masculinist tradition, the artist's model is not a subject, but is instead an object of sexual subjugation as well as a screen for the projection of philosophical and libidinal desires, literally embodying a set of discourses and offering corporeal promises of potential utopias and heterotopias. When artists such as Piper, VALIE EXPORT, Rita Myers, and Hannah Wilke made themselves into the object of art, the patriarchal gaze was appropriated to activate a new set of subject-object relations that could enmesh and rewire how we see gendered and racialized prejudices—and a new, brilliantly verbose discourse emerged. When Nauman performed a similar set of operations on his own body—that of the "white," "male" artist in the studio—a different set of forces collapsed in on themselves. What happens when the matrix of understanding "the body" moves away from how the gaze sees "others" and into a terrain of self-objectification? What happens when we ask questions of a body that presumably relies on the withholding silence of *whiteness* and *maleness* to exert its force?

A crack appears in one of Nauman's most iconic works, *Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968, and in his recent revisitations, *Contrapposto Studies, i through vii*, 2015–16, and *Contrapposto Split*, 2017. If we work against the grain of the contemporary identitarianism that would have us see all white male bodies as equivalent components of the same patriarchal force, we can begin to understand power's fragility, how freaked out the "straight white male" can be about failing to conform to a compulsively policed

Opposite page: **Bruce Nauman, *Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)*, 1970,** wooden wallboards, water-based paint, three video cameras, scanner, frame, five monitors, video recorder, video player, video (black-and-white, silent, indefinite duration). Installation view, Schaulager, Basel, 2018. Photo: Tom Bisig.

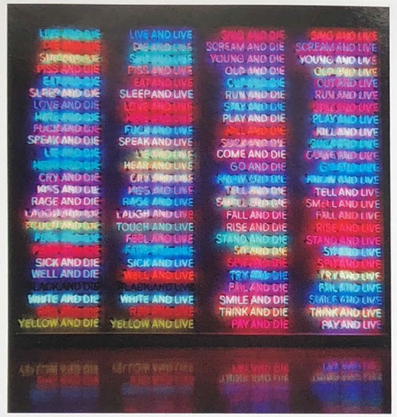
Right: **Bruce Nauman, *Contrapposto Studies, i through vii*, 2015–16,** seven-channel HD video projection, color, sound, indefinite duration. Installation view, Schaulager, Basel, 2018. Photo: Tom Bisig.

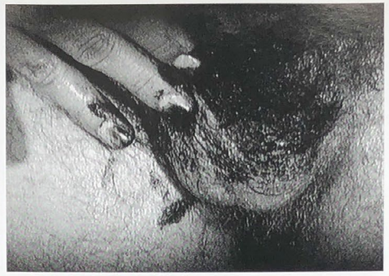
What happens when we ask questions of a body that presumably relies on the withholding silence of *whiteness* and *maleness* to exert its force?

perfection, and how terrifyingly hilarious and libidinal the manifestations of those anxieties can become. A key element of the *Contrapposto* works is that Nauman-as-model is *not* the classically idealized male body: The young man is way too scrawny, the old way too saggy. Another key element is that this static form is forced into the temporality of real time. Over and over again, in Nauman's sculptures, videos, and neon works, we are confronted with an ideal anatomical geometry along the lines of Leonardo's hunky Vitruvian Man or Le Corbusier's diminutive modernist Modulor Man, but oddly segmented. In the 1968 video, Nauman-as-model sashays back and forth in a narrow walled-off passageway, twisting his hips in a relentlessly unsuccessful attempt to inhabit a paradigmatic contrapposto posture for an hour; in *Contrapposto Studies, i through vii*, Nauman pushes the ugly flatness of digital video to monumental extremes, confronting us with a fresco-scale representation of a body marked by age and horizontally sliced—either bisected right at the paunch or slivered into sevenths—by an equal grid of discrete images that break the male anatomy apart without regard to the classical, harmoniously "golden" bodily proportions. The application of digital effects conveys a sense of the uncaring yet avid scrutiny of a surveillance state that watches bodies and reduces them to bits of data to be profitably mined. While a certain linear reading of Nauman's practice would find that *Contrapposto Studies* traces the aging body as a way of elegizing the younger, more limber one in a dialectic of age and youth, the experience of viewing a younger generation's encounter with a related work reframed everything for me. At the Schaulager I happened to see a group of teenagers interacting with *Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)*, 1970, a work I had previously found suffocating. The series of claustrophobically narrow corridors with surveillance cameras and live feedback playing on monitors, modeled after the corridor Nauman used to make *Walk with Contrapposto*, offered no exit. I was surprised to see the teenagers laughing gleefully as they immediately gravitated to a particular misuse of the work. Since photography was not allowed in the exhibition and phones were prohibited, removing a primary visual mediator and disseminator of "live" experience, the teenagers had managed to make this enlarged iteration of Nauman's initial self-objectifying work of video art into an ad hoc Instagram-like apparatus. Part of the group would gather by a monitor in one corridor, while the others would take turns doing their best runway walk through another corridor to giggles and applause. The Instagram effect worked because the combination of liveness met the walled-off corridors of vision in a way that recalled social media's tactic of isolating the insta-live image, blocking off everything else to intensify the impact and encourage an immediate affirmative response.

Contemporary theories of neuroplasticity suggest that the brain is constantly forming and reforming—and that repeated actions and experiences generate the most durable change. I wonder how the repetitions in Nauman's early videos operate within the bubbles and tunnels of our social media–regulated society. Do we believe—as we obey the imperative to use "likes" to connect networks of data into analyzable groupings of identities, markets, voting constituencies, and propaganda-susceptible political subjects—that the images we post of ourselves constitute liberatory subjective content? Or are we, like Nauman, displaying the hysteria that results from inhabiting an objectified body? Are we doomed to continually return to the core geometries of that failure, as though repeating the desired form as screen image will incarnate it in real life? What if we apply the late-twentieth-century proposition that the body is a discursively created set of materials and affects to a body that relies on a preverbal, naturalized position in order to maintain its unitary power? What if the (straight) white male body is not actually impervious?

A grouping of works on the Schaulager's lower level activated a particularly heightened sense of what it's like to dominate and dehumanize via the eye, to weaponize vision as "straight white men" so often





Left: **Bruce Nauman, *One Hundred Live and Die*, 1984**, neon tubing and clear glass tubing on metal, 9' 10" × 11' ¼" × 1' 9".

Above: **Bruce Nauman, *Black Balls*, 1969**, 16 mm, black-and-white, silent, 8 minutes.

Right: **View of "Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts," 2018**, Schaulager, Basel. Background: *Seven Figures*, 1985. Foreground: *Three Heads Fountain (Three Andrews)*, 2005; *Three Heads Fountain (Juliet, Andrew, Rinde)*, 2005. Photo: Georgios Kefalas/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock.

The alien, automated quality of the work's directives seems to increase the longer you look, as if authoritarian control could become an unconscious reflex.

do—only now, the brutalized and sexualized object is that very "straight white man," and the double-voided gaze could belong to anybody. Clusters of decapitated heads cast in resin and fiberglass hung from the ceiling on chains, with streams of water shooting out of multiple puncture wounds, as if the brain itself were pissing and cumming in a constant state of productive elation (*Three Heads Fountain [Juliet, Andrew, Rinde]* and *Three Heads Fountain [Three Andrews]*, both 2005). A large neon work, *Seven Figures*, 1985, in garish red, green, blue, and yellow, activated a frieze of interlocking, mostly male bodies, flashing among states of fucking, sucking, and rimming, like an '80s prefiguration of an animated GIF. As in so much pornography, where men of erotically ambivalent (probably straight IRL) sexuality are hired to perform acts that push all the viewer's buttons at once, the radiant outlines expel any undesired projections, and the desubjectified, real-time phallic bodies are suspended in a state of "whatever" irrelevance. On the facing wall were two black-and-white 1969 films Nauman made with his balls (in *Black Balls* we see them being smeared with dark paint, while *Bouncing Balls* is what it sounds like). The limp cock is held up out of view, and the slow-motion effect intensifies both the abstracting function of the cropping and the lingering, wet pornographic gaze. Just outside of this gallery, *One Hundred Live and Die*, 1984, eroded affective capacities already depleted by the experience of inhabiting a sexual subjectivity in which pleasure is powered by a fragmentation of violated bodies. Commands that recall Samuel Beckett as much as New Age–inflected athleisure advertising (LOVE AND DIE, HATE AND DIE, FUCK AND DIE, SPEAK AND DIE, LIE AND DIE . . . CRY AND LIVE, KISS AND LIVE, RAGE AND LIVE, LAUGH AND LIVE, TOUCH AND LIVE, etc.) turn on and off in various color combinations, the alien, automated quality of the directives seeming to increase the longer you look, as if the circuits that connected language and action had started to bypass the brain's processing of language and following orders had become instinctual; as if authoritarian control could become an unconscious reflex. And of course, it can. The ways Nauman brutally strips himself of agency allow us to see that the constructions of maleness and whiteness make unlivable shells for everyone, including the assumed beneficiaries of that "privilege," and perpetuate a violence that can be visited by and on anyone. □

"Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts," will be on view at MoMA and MoMA PS1 October 21, 2018–February 25, 2019.

KEN OKIISHI IS AN ARTIST BASED IN NEW YORK. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)

ARTFORUM

DECEMBER 2019

INTERNATIONAL

THE YEAR IN FRIENDSHIP

$15.00

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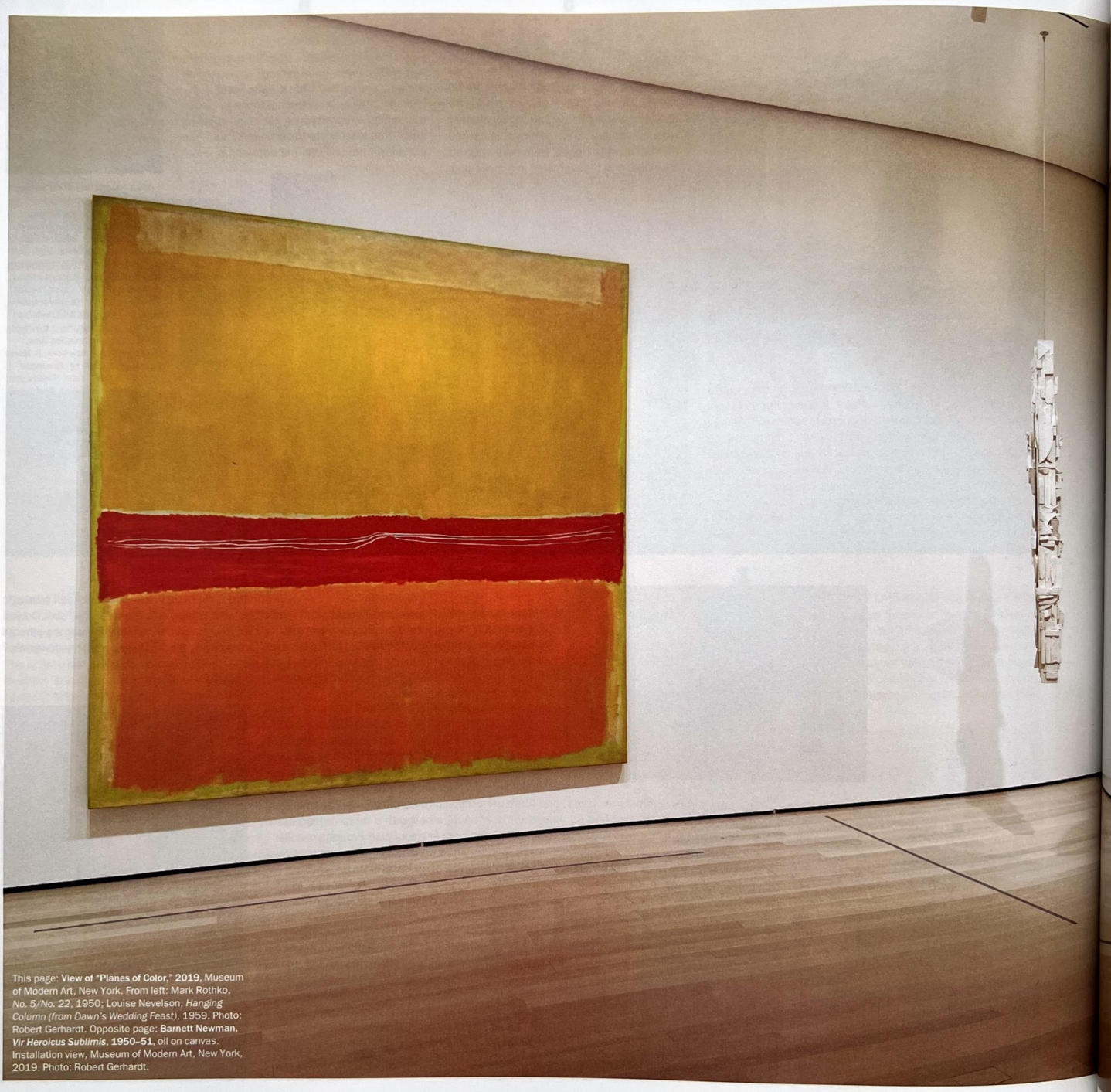
Tony Cokes, *Testament A: MF FKA K-P X KE RIP*, 2019, HD video, color, sound, 35 minutes 22 seconds.

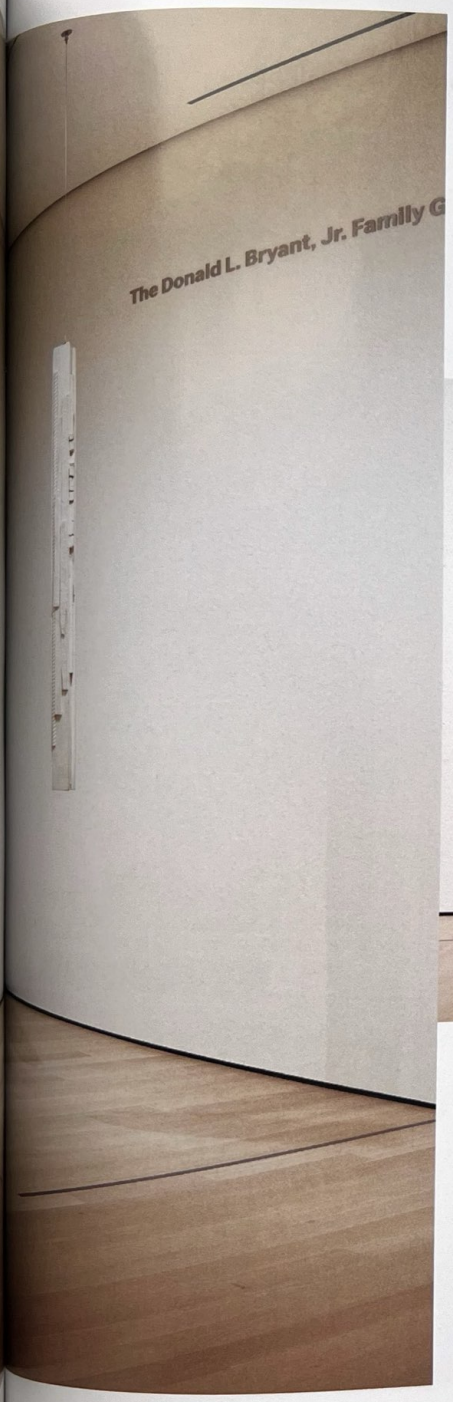
BEST OF 2019

LYNNE COOKE
NICOLE EISENMAN
JACK BANKOWSKY
NAIMA J. KEITH
SUSANNE PFEFFER
ARA OSTWERWEIL
JOHANNA FATEMAN
CHRISTINA LI
CHRISTOPHER GLAZEK
RUTH ESTÉVEZ
SOHRAB MOHEBBI
KEN OKIISHI
MIRIAM KATZEFF
HENRIETTE HULDISCH

EACH DECEMBER, *Artforum* invites a group of distinguished critics, curators, and artists from around the world to consider the year in art. Ten contributors count down their top ten highlights of 2019, while four others select the single exhibition or event that, for them, rose above the rest.



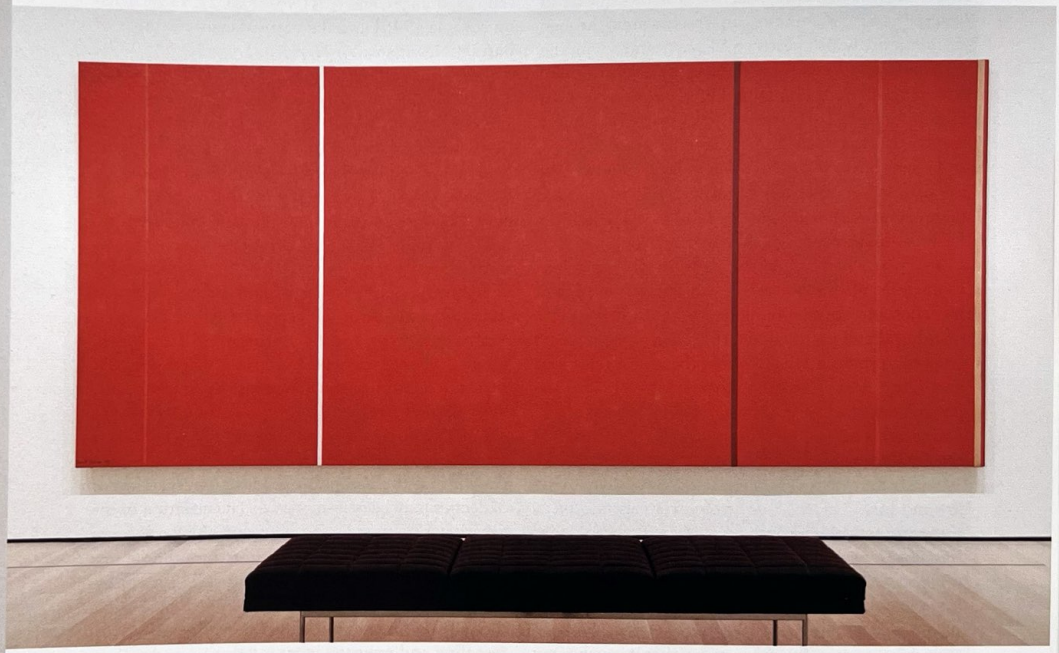
This page: **View of "Planes of Color," 2019**, Museum of Modern Art, New York. From left: Mark Rothko, *No. 5/No. 22*, 1950; Louise Nevelson, *Hanging Column (from Dawn's Wedding Feast)*, 1959. Photo: Robert Gerhardt. Opposite page: **Barnett Newman, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950–51**, oil on canvas. Installation view, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2019. Photo: Robert Gerhardt.



BEST OF 2019

LOGICAL REVOLTS

KEN OKIISHI



IN "GLOBALIZED" PARTS OF THE WORLD where neofascists have gained previously unimaginable levels of mainstream control, many people who hoped to discover effective modes of resistance are finding their cognitive abilities totally blasted out. Others have neoliberalized resistance, drawing fuel from a vision of protest and political struggle as fundraising, advertising, and career-building strategies. These social actors often unconsciously have more to gain from the continued presence of neofascists than from their removal—and only the willfully naive would deny that at least some of these individuals and groups are actually conscious of the fact that their own success is correlated with that of right-wing authoritarianism. For the more morose adherents of a left-inflected social consciousness who are involved in critical aesthetic practices, it has been difficult to find any coherent position from which to evaluate, well, basically anything. If you, like me, have already suffered through decades of "emerging" in a continuous stream of always surprising but never that interesting "gatekeeper" bullshit, then you also have learned to embody clichés in their most frustratingly bleak-like-Beckett forms. "I can't go on, I'll go on." Unlike the Jenny Holzers of the world,

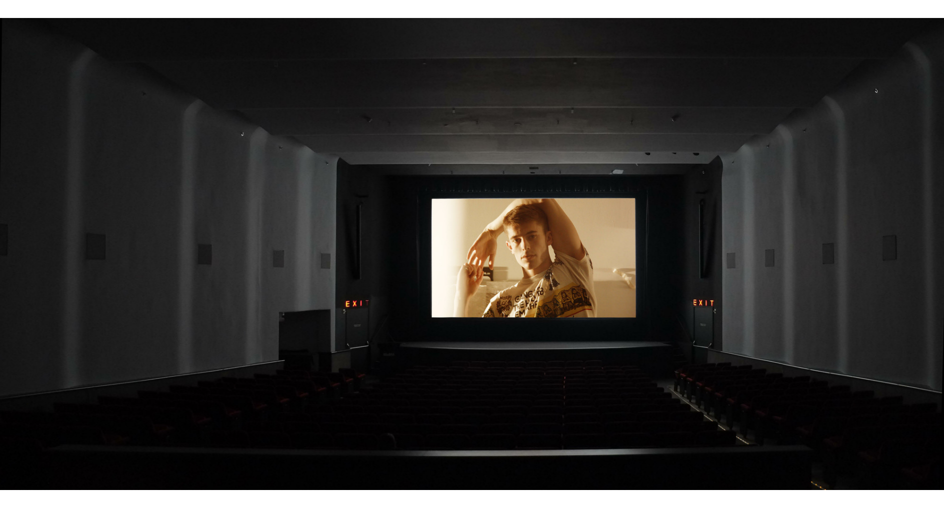
I do have to say that it touches my heart to see a new generation that thinks the existing world is total bullshit.

I am not conditioned to see my victimization as a way to use being #notsurprised to my advantage. A beneficial result of my negative "advantage" has never been actualized. Whether this is specific to the hybridity of my "identity," a unique quality of my weird combination of nihilism and optimism, or just a consequence of being a "good" Asian American who can jump through hoops on fire with a perfect SAT score and a winning personality while seeming to be eternally grateful to have my pain instrumentalized by white supremacists who want to end affirmative action—we may never know. But what we do know is that the world is awful, and it may have always been this awful, but now there are people in power positions everywhere who are manufacturing encouragement (and votes) to literally fry every living thing out of living existence.

In a year when behind-the-scenes processes (backroom deals, off-the-books transactions, classified quid pro quos, etc.) overtook the main stage in all aspects of cultural and political life, this phenomenon in art erupted in volatile debates about the set of conditions and actors and controlling interests that forms the possibilities of what is "shown," what is "not shown," and what is occluded and prevented from forming the conditions of viewing. (One could also see 2019 as a year that witnessed a nascent critique revolving around how "sacred" or not trustees should be in institutions—in and outside of the art world—that have been pressured to come up with millions of dollars a minute.) While naming names could get me blacklisted by the powers that be, and canceled by the powers that are struggling to be, faster than I can type this sentence, I do have to say that it touches my heart to see a new generation that thinks the existing world is total bullshit. The logical revolts (to borrow Rimbaud's phrase via Jacques Rancière) that have been such an important part of politics in any society in which anyone who is not an asshole would ever want to be alive are the most fascinating trend of the past year. At the same time, it also touches my heart to see that the big bad dad of a museum I grew up learning to love to hate has actually managed, in its best rehung moments, to find a brilliantly multivocal set of curatorial tensions that make a strong argument against the tokenizing and/or bland expert-at-nothing pluralizing that some other cultural venues have deployed as a slapdash strategy for appearing relevant. (Highlights of the rehang include: the phenomenological rupture to gravity incited by the out-of-this-world placement of Louise Nevelson's chalky white *Hanging Column [from Dawn's Wedding Feast]*, 1959, between Rothko's veiled blobs and scratches of yellows, oranges, and reds [*No. 5/No. 22*, 1950, dated on reverse 1949] and the vertical echo chamber of Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950–51, which cycles in panoramic pandemonium as the *Hanging Column*'s edges ricochet with the flat zips and deep-orange oceans of color; the next-level sight lines into four other galleries when standing at Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's Taylorist *Frankfurt Kitchen*, 1926–27, where you are allowed to experience, in layers and jump cuts, violently antagonistic modernisms from a time in Europe when no path was a foregone conclusion and utopian visions could suddenly flip into dystopian realities; and the much discussed main event of the rehang, where Ringgold confronts Picasso, and the horrors of the New World future fly in the face of the brutal colonialist erotics of a fractured European imagination.) At the same time, the seemingly irresolvable disputes around questions like *Where does money come from?* and *Who should be associated with things that we love?* have also shown that the feel-good American perversion of dialectics may be over for good. The negation of the negation is supposed to produce something new—not a recoded defense of overvaluing the sublime in a Manifest Destiny, ignore-the-genocidal-processes-of-settler-colonialism kind of way. The best show of the year has been witnessing the real possibility of rescaling and rewiring what is valued—and what is not valued—in artistic production; the possibility of strengthening the faculty of being able to distinguish among aesthetic categories, deciding which ones we want in our sensoriums and even inventing new ones; and the possibility of renegotiating the social and financial relations that form desire and visibility. That those doing the negotiating on all sides made some spectacular blunders yet the conversation never stopped exploding forward is evidence of the transformation from a society that defends its worst aspects by strenuously pointing toward noxious silver linings to one that has a willingness to actualize the failures of change. □

KEN OKIISHI IS AN ARTIST BASED IN NEW YORK

View of "Around *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*," 2019, Museum of Modern Art, New York. From left: Pablo Picasso, *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907; Pablo Picasso, *Woman's Head (Fernande)*, 1909; Pablo Picasso, *Woman with Pears*, 1909; Pablo Picasso, *The Reservoir, Horta de Ebro*, 1909; Faith Ringgold, *American People Series #20: Die*, 1967. Photo: Heidi Bohnenkamp.



Vital Behaviors in a Reopening City

Artist Ken Okiishi talks with curator Sophie Cavoulacos about the premiere of his newest film, social media FOMO, and how going to the movies changes the way we see the world.

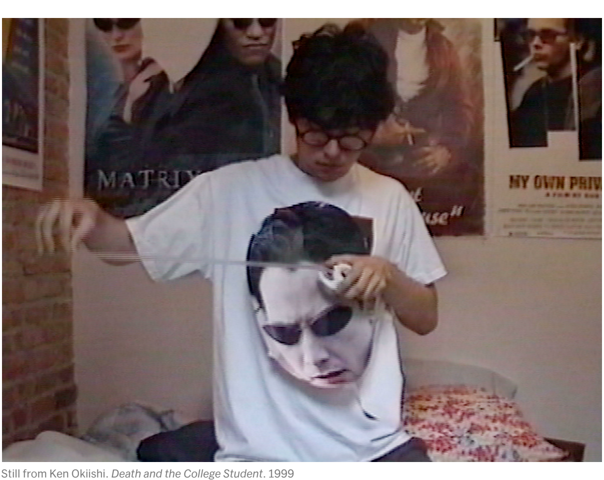
Sophie Cavoulacos, Ken Okiishi
Jul 20, 2021

Sophie Cavoulacos: I'm so glad that we've structured our discussion of your work *Vital Behaviors* like the presentation as a whole: unfolding across different spaces. By the time this is published, we'll have recorded a video Q&A about its making, which will live alongside its streaming in Virtual Cinema from July 22 through August 6. But first, we wanted to share our written exchange that delves into…so much! Your use of cinema, and the way you've activated it to surface ideas of image circulation and viewership, has many layers, and so it's fitting that these screenings, originally planned to premiere in April 2020, offer new ways to engage with the work in person and online. But before we get to that, I wanted to begin with a quite basic question: Could you describe the role that cinema plays in your practice, going back to your artistic training?

Ken Okiishi: I was lucky enough to study at Cooper Union (c. 1999) when it was still tuition free. In the filmmaker Robert Breer's oral-history-based film class, we would watch prints at Anthology Film Archives, since it was a few blocks away and Jonas Mekas was generous in that kind of way—but, at the same time, Breer had this hilarious sense of contradiction, and he would openly make fun of colleagues who fetishized film to the point of refusing video transfers, etc. Breer had this wonderful way of thinking about the possibility of circulation while also taking advantage of possibilities of viewing and making in NYC—it was about paying attention to issues of form in ways that did not foreclose the possibility of a sudden change of mind or all of the subtle shifts that, on a formal level, are light years apart from each other and can become generative, but that dogmatic thinking (or, as we might say now, algorithmic or machine learning) cannot distinguish between. It was about being able to see if something is working rather than relying on the parameters of "essence" or "context" to determine the aesthetic judgment.

A straightforward example of what I am trying to say could be a self-driving car with a beta-test "brain" that thinks that the sun bouncing off a white semi truck is the same thing as the sky because they have the same numerical color/texture/etc., and so the car veers into the truck and causes a fatal car crash. Many 20th-century avant-garde paradigms of thought are basically as crude as a self-driving car crash.

I also started going to MoMA all the time (it was free for Cooper Union students) to watch films and videos, many that were outside of the "Downtown" canon I was being taught. And there was also Kim's Video on Saint Mark's Place—a video rental palace that had everything from multiple film canons as well as tons of films that don't fit in anywhere—and you would also meet people or kind of look at people when you were browsing video tapes. They also had these clerks—mostly NYU film students—who were so terribly mean! They would make fun of anything you rented—but that hazing was part of it. Choosing and renting a movie was an event.



Still from Ken Okiishi. *Death and the College Student*. 1999

What I noticed in the last few years before the pandemic—as opposed to the 10 years before that, when everyone was saying that movie theaters had or were or would completely die out since everyone watches everything "online"—is that in NYC, the number of movie theaters and places where excellent film curators could have constant flows of programs was suddenly actually *increasing*. And there were all kinds of people I had never seen before at the theaters and a real culture of going to the movies was emerging, *and no one had accurately predicted this*. Any day of the week, I could look at the schedule and, quite spontaneously, ride a bike to a theater.

That's how I tend to watch movies—multiple times a week but without a clear schedule in advance. I'll look at Screen Slate or individual programs, depending on what neighborhood I am in at the moment, and just go. Often, I'll even watch movies that I know absolutely nothing about—just to be there in the theater and have something other than myself and my world to interact with and think alongside. In a way, there is an important theoretical aspect to this that is almost so ordinary that it becomes invisible—even this pre-pandemic moviegoing practice (and I would say "practice" rather than "habit," since thinking at the movies is where a lot of the "work" of making artwork for me happens—it's almost the way dancers go to class) shows that these categories of "digital versus IRL" or this kind of polemical posturing in regard to "the digital" often fails to see how these new and old elements are constantly interacting in ways that make new possibilities, that can even amplify the possibility of things that were supposedly "killed" by "the digital" (but were actually killed by things like displacement and gentrification making modes of interaction so much more difficult when geography was the main limiting factor, or overdevelopment facilitated by bad government policy). I can literally sit in Seward Park answering emails and suddenly find out that [Pier Paolo] Pasolini's *Medea* is playing at Metrograph and be there in 30 seconds—or I can be riding my bike down the West Side Highway on the hottest day of the year and check the Lincoln Center schedule because it is just way too hot outside and suddenly be inside of João Pedro Rodrigues's *O Fantasma*—and then, when I leave the icebox of the theater, have rewrapped the experience of steaming trash bags on half-dead rats with an erotically transformed mental frame.

For me, the movies literally transform how I see the world when I leave the theater. Again, it will seem almost ridiculous to point this out, but it is important to say: the Internet (aka "the digital") connects me to information in physical space with a speed and agility that was impossible before. The way the Internet overlays and interacts with geographies and bodies in cities spawned intense vectors of scrutiny, acceleration, protest—and pain—during the last year, when it seemed that the screen of the phone and laptop and a mediation of all life experiences through the sensationalizing algorithms of a for-profit public sphere had gained an unmovable hegemonic position—but then people just started checking out. All of this activity started happening that was a bit odd—glitchy. From all angles, the relationship between distance, proximity, and forms of mediation—and the desire for basic forms of enjoyment and an intuitive sense of what is good for the soul and what is not—reached a level of self-reflection that I have never witnessed outside of myself (LOL). As a hypochondriac who overthinks everything and also loves a good bike ride in the city, my joke is that everyone else, during the pandemic, became me.

Still from Ken Okiishi. *Vital Behaviors*. 2019

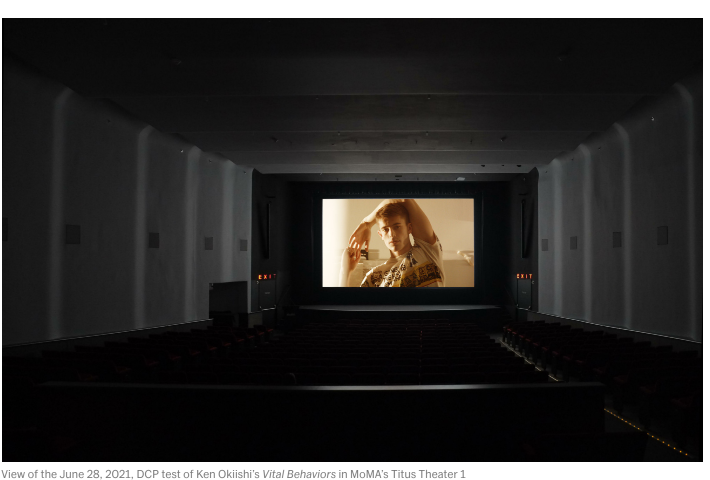
There has been a lot of thinking around how visual culture has shifted with the pandemic, and as we've spent so much time interacting with our computer screens. What makes a digital encounter cinematic, in your eyes?

I think the best way for me to answer this question is to flip the question on its head. What makes a material encounter in the world feel cinematic? Or what gives an aura of the digital to certain experiences and bodies in life? At a certain point last winter, I was basically stuck in Berlin, Germany, waiting for a visa—but like many people in the globalized art world, I was also perversely enjoying that I had a real excuse not to travel or see anyone—and I had somehow found this apartment on the Internet that was across the street from an automobile service station that reminded me of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. That was the last film I had seen in a theater—but not on purpose. There was no news of the virus or any whiff of the danger of breathing the breath of others, and then I immediately stopped going to the movies the first time I heard about the virus, so I never had this self-conscious event at the "end of the world" that so many people have written about. I simply sat in the balcony at Metrograph for three days in a row to watch *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* because this is the kind of thing I did all the time. And so, in this pandemic winter in Berlin, I could walk on the balcony whenever it snowed and look at this service station across the street and it was, in this elegiac way, like being at the movies.

In Germany, there is also this amazing French and German TV channel called Arte, which funds filmmakers right out of film school and shows the films on TV. So I could turn on the TV and watch something without thinking about it too much; and this will, again, sound too obvious to discuss, since it becomes invisible as such an ordinary pleasure, but there is a potential philosophical truth here that is important. Not choosing what I am watching (not browsing a long list of titles in an awkward interface; not pressing play, stop, rewind, save for later, like, add to my playlist, curate my collection, etc.)—but somehow receiving something in front of my eyes, a bit like seeing a stranger on the street who suddenly becomes intriguing, this encounter with absolute otherness that can turn into intimacy or repulsion or distraction or any other complex of affective sensations that enter the brain as a lived experience—this is what feels cinematic to me.

To shift gears a bit: yesterday, we did a preview screening of *Vital Behaviors* to set the sound levels and so on in MoMA's Titus Theater 1, the first time we'd both seen it in over a year, and my first time seeing it on the big screen. It was so special! Can you describe the experience?

I actually didn't sleep very well the night before, I was so anxious about it. I hadn't been in a movie theater in over a year—and, now that I am vaccinated, it wasn't really about fear of receiving or transmitting the virus, but more that something that had been such a significant but also ordinary part of being alive had to be revisited again—like the odd terror of seeing an old friend. What if I had pumped it up in my mind, and it popped in nostalgia and felt unremarkably banal? What if my film hadn't aged well with the mindfuck of the last year? And then the projection started—and I was there. And I could tell you were there—right there with and inside the film. Liftoff. It was instantly *happening*, this thing that happens at the movies that no one can ever explain adequately.



View of the June 28, 2021, DCP test of Ken Okiishi's *Vital Behaviors* in MoMA's Titus Theater 1

I think we had both had a few intense reactions, and one was about how the film, made in 2019, which plays on these ideas of social media, online personae, and the total emeshing of devices and software in our daily lives, felt…unaffected by the elapsed time, at least as we sat in the theater together. It's not that COVID-19 hasn't deeply altered our lives and societies, but those changes that many perceived to be related to the pandemic were, in fact, already there in 2019.

Yes—people hate it when I remind them now, but everyone complained about how NYC was totally played out in 2019. Paradoxically, or more precisely, against the grain of what we are supposed to believe, most people I know are saying that NYC has never felt as alive as it did in the summer of 2020 and right now, in the summer of 2021. There's a difficult relationship to death in the present—and the forms and processes of mourning and survival that have emerged do something to claiming bodily existence in a city that I have not seen in a long time. I think many of the transformations that happen in thinking and being in *Vital Behaviors* between memory and online/offline existence track with the paradigm shifts.

In your work, you've been reflecting and relishing in these ideas for 20 years and more, and I'm curious how you think about timeliness and the idea of zeitgeist as these vectors of self-identity, collective identity, not to mention the identities that are sold and packaged to us onscreen and offline. In no particular order, I'm thinking of late '90s Manhattan, *Kids,* public space under Mayor Giuliani, chat rooms, Keanu Reeves, Occupy Wall Street, the art market, of course social media. Somehow it seems that many of your questions and concerns have stayed the same, but the expression of those ideas in the world is what constantly shifts.

Still from Ken Okiishi. *The Deleted Scene*. 2012

Yes—it will often be, also, that something that I am tracking and thinking about eventually accelerates in a way that a work that was difficult to understand suddenly becomes legible. In a world where the difference between modes of existence accelerated into stark relief in the past year, *Vital Behaviors* has gained a certain intensity.

It also occurred to me that some of your videos that you and I have talked the most about (*Telly and Casper* [2000], which we're showing online; *The Deleted Scene* [2012], and *Vital Behaviors* [2019]) are separated by roughly 10 years. This may be overdetermining things, but that made me curious about how distance might be important in your work.

Early on, when social media (Friendster) was just starting out, I didn't like the way I felt when I was on it, and that it also seemed to put all aspects of life, public and private, on the same level of access, which totally freaked me out. So I didn't do it. Which now sounds, of course, a bit insane—but I continued not to do social media, and then that also became a way of being able to see things in a certain light, almost a classical notion of distance and observation. Which is not to say that I don't suffer from FOMO—there are also moments, of course, when there is the big FOMO of living in a world cut off from a groupthink that can make you feel kind of out of it. But a lot of this kind of information can be felt in conversations or even just walking down the street—it's a way of seeing the effects or the latent aspects before they "blow up" or "go viral" or whatever it is that happens when something gets a lot of likes.

Still from Ken Okiishi. *Telly & Casper*. 2000

The strange thing about the passing of time seen as a kind of "distance" is the tendency to see time in loops, recurrences, cycles—because I think this generates a willful blindness. This is another way of saying that my general methodology of working is walking or riding a bike around and seeing what is going on—and then trying to find a set of mediums/methods/processes that can develop to activate critical frames of vision and thinking, and also, perhaps, activate potentialities other than what systems of optimization would have us all become.

There is another distance too, about cities, and how our interconnectedness in a global-capital-cultural network ebbs and flows. Berlin as a specific place in certain times in your life and work; New York and its enduring reinvention and self-image. Does *Vital Behaviors* denote a specific urban space for you? Or this more amorphous space of social media that is everywhere and nowhere?

It's both at the same time for me. I was noticing the ways in which social media culture was interacting with urban space, and these kind of glowing silvery people would appear—these kind of Instagram creatures. Near my studio, there were these blocks on Broadway that suddenly became all Matcha, CBD, and fast health-food restaurants that had the texture of an app—and signs everywhere, "Order me on an app. Order me on an app." Or I would walk into a store, and they would say, No, you can't buy this thing, but you can order it on an app. And I was like, why on earth would I walk down the street if I can order it on an app? The neighborhood, with one of these typically bad NYC real estate chimeras, NoMad, is also where I did my first Soulcycle class with Brian, the person who became the star of *Vital Behaviors*.

And that's a perfect transition into our next conversation! I'm so delighted to be returning to MoMA's cinemas through your work, in this way that's thinking deeply about what happens when we gather in a theater. Somehow, the social, communal, and also conceptual power of that encounter is felt more strongly than ever, in this still transitional and self-aware moment for the medium. As we used to say as a sign-off…See you at the movies.

Still from Ken Okiishi. *Telly & Casper*. 2000

Sophie Cavoulacos
Associate Curator,
Department of Film

Ken Okiishi
Artist

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ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2022

INTERNATIONAL

BIENNIALS RETURN:
VENICE, WHITNEY, SYDNEY

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SONIA DELAUNAY

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Simone Leigh, ***Brick House*, 2019**, bronze. Installation view, Arsenale, Venice, 2022. From "The Milk of Dreams." Photo: Roberto Marossi.

VENICE 2022

IT'S NO EXAGGERATION to say that the 127-year-old Venice Biennale is the standard against which every major international art exhibition is judged. So when the fifty-ninth edition finally arrived in April, its opening delayed a year by Covid-19, all eyes turned to the ancient City of Masks to see what kind of future the pandemic might engender.

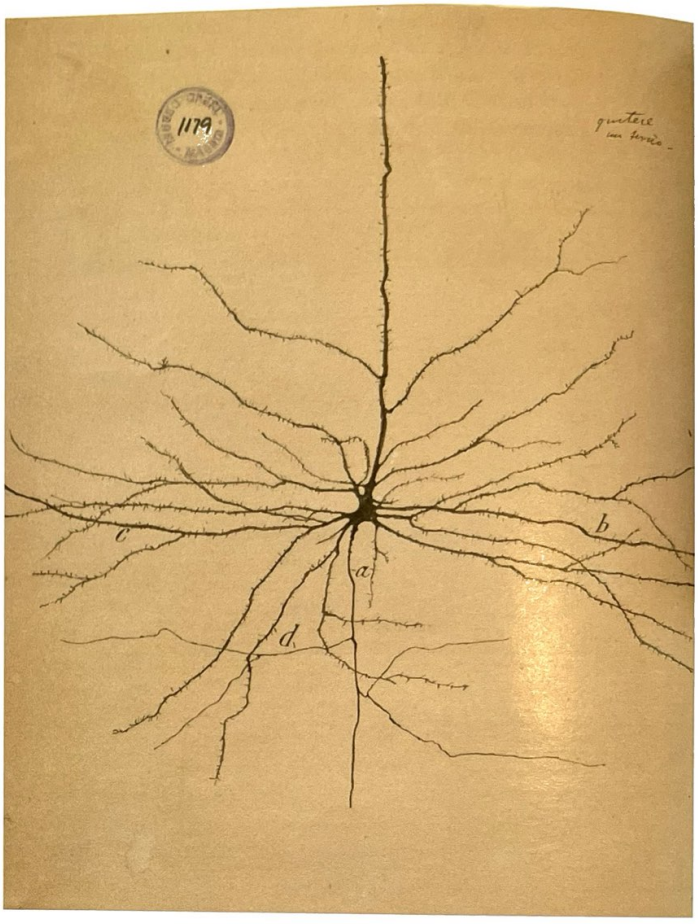
Curator Cecilia Alemani's "The Milk of Dreams," the event's polestar, forcefully yet subtly engages canonical prejudices. In the pages that follow, *Artforum* associate editor **CHLOE WYMA** and contributing editor **DANIEL BIRNBAUM** reckon with Alemani's phantasmagoric show, while artist **KEN OKIISHI** reflects on another of the city's touchstones: Udo Kittelmann and Taryn Simon's coyly cerebral "Human Brains: It Begins with an Idea" at the Fondazione Prada's Venetian headquarters.

The Fifty-Ninth Venice Biennale and "Human Brains: It Begins with an Idea" are on view through November 27.

VENICE

Thought Experiment

KEN OKIISHI ON "HUMAN BRAINS: IT BEGINS WITH AN IDEA" AT FONDAZIONE PRADA



IF THINGS NAMED ARTWORKS exist primarily to stuff the void of being rich with interchangeable forms of reactionary narcissism, then some of us have to look elsewhere if we want to experience or make anything resembling an exhibition. And by *exhibition*, I mean a sequence of material encounters or a set of sequential arrangements that ignite questions in our brains about multiple possibilities of affecting the existing state of things—a category of encounter that things named artworks seem unable to spark, given the current confluence of flimsy vested interests and our reliance on social media's cheap dopamine hits. As the "end of the world" as perceived by humans is made to seem imminent, I am reminded of the brilliant yet still undervalued words of sociologist Colette Guillaumin, writing at a different moment when the reactionary Far Right had made its chaotic practices seem inevitable:

> There is a terrifying mechanism by which obsessional imaginings and fantasies to do with evil, corruption, betrayal, sickness, apocalypse . . . are foisted onto real human beings without their having any power to prevent it. A murderous form of collusion is thus produced which allows one group of people to transfer their worst nightmares onto the bodies of others. . . . In the fragile minds of the dominators, the slightest sigh of impatience by a dominated person triggers visions of the most apocalyptic turmoil—from castration to the end of the earth's rotation.

We are now force-fed apocalypse from all angles, and eating shit is getting old. Making agile and bold yet precise decisions against the grain of endless chaos strikes me as oddly revolutionary. And while the posthuman leanings of a contemporary Left lead to some interesting reading, we will unfortunately have to continue dealing with humans until we become extinct. The decision by the humans in charge of the Fondazione Prada in Venice to commit the resources of a space dedicated to the production, exhibition, and collection of art to the development and exhibition of *thinking*—especially as the institution's main exhibition concurrent with the Biennale Arte—is a welcome antidote to a human brain that can no longer process endless "feasts for the eyes" without getting a migraine.

As a way of counteracting an infinite horizon of burnout generated by the misery of cognitive violence, in 2018 the Fondazione Prada began hosting a series of conferences that counterposed scientific

Opposite page: **Santiago Ramón y Cajal, *Pyramidal cell of the human motor cortex*, 1899**, ink and pencil on paper, 8⅝ × 6⅞".

Left: **View of "Human Brains: It Begins with an Idea," 2022**, Fondazione Prada, Venice. Center: Suzanne S. Stensaas, *Introduction to the Human Brain*, 2015. Photo: Marco Cappelletti.

The central horror is not a human body in process of dissection but scientific and political discourses undergoing formation and deformation.

approaches to the brain—including "neurobiology, philosophy, psychology, neurochemistry, linguistics, artificial intelligence, and robotics"—in a cultural space, and for a cultural audience that does not normally encounter current scientific research in the moment of its production but more likely reads about it in filtered form, years later, via whatever catches the highest amount of controversy, makes the best metaphors, or develops enough consensus or sudden relevance to be popularized through the op-ed or science sections of the news. The institution's nonmetaphorical treatment of hard-science research in the moment of its most experimental "prepublic" phases, though inevitably challenging for audiences, generated significant outcomes. The experimental processes put forward in those four years proved, counterintuitively, much wilder, more infused with rigor and care, than what is ordinarily found in the art-world context, and, as such, they have conditioned some tired art-world brains to take greater risks.

"Human Brains: It Begins with an Idea" is the first successful attempt that I have seen at fully reconfiguring what becomes of the space of exhibition, including its processes of formation, via a nexus of theories rooted in hard-science research. And while each contributor in what appears to be a truly collective endeavor deserves equal acknowledgment, the development of the exhibition's exquisitely intermeshed pathways can be credited to the specific collaboration between curator Udo Kittelmann and artist Taryn Simon. A sequence of enclaves plays host to a selection of more than 110 cultural artifacts spanning thousands of years that chronicle efforts by human brains to understand their own functioning, destruction, and repair. These range from a 3D copy of the 2120–2110 BCE terra-cotta Cylinders of Gudea to a 1772 book of the "complete notes on the dissection of a cadaver" by physician and surgeon Shinnin Kawaguchi to histologist and neuroscientist Santiago Ramón y Cajal's ethereal 1895–1921 drawings of nervous systems, accompanied by descriptions such as "Giant pyramidal cell of the human motor region" and "Granular neurons of the olfactory bulb of 20-days-old cat." The exhibition's display architecture conjures an uncanny aesthetic overlap between the hospital and the natural-history museum: two sites where we confront the emotional pain of death and bodily trauma, the history of ideas of nature, and the psychologically shattering suggestion that the human body, including the brain, is simultaneously utterly mysterious and objectively no more and no less than an assemblage of cells and chemical reactions that can be cut open, like a sausage.

All of this is allowed to flow rather freely within the Venetian Baroque drama of Ca' Corner della Regina, but a few objects in particular underscore the leitmotif of the exhibition's architectonics: an eighteenth-century model of the anatomical theater of the Archiginnasio in Bologna, where, in the sixteenth century, public dissections of human bodies within the context of scientific teaching and research became popular; and a 1932–33 scale model of the anatomical theater of Padua, built in 1595, where the general public gathered to watch such educational spectacles by candlelight. In this 2022 version of scientific research as spectacular theater, the public, as at the dissections of five hundred years ago, is not intended to understand in totality what is being presented, and may be intended to have a spiritual experience. The central horror is not a human body in process of dissection but scientific and political discourses undergoing formation and deformation. In one of the more brilliant, and successful, curatorial decisions I have witnessed in recent years, the hundred-plus objects that "encode centuries of attempts to understand the human brain" are not treated as one-to-one containers of meaning that can flatly transmit information to the brain but instead are mediated by literary texts. These texts, commissioned from authors as different as Katie Kitamura, Alexander Kluge, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀, Maria Stepanova, and McKenzie Wark, are read by the (subconsciously) familiar star audiobook reader George Guidall, filmed by Simon as he stands at a microphone, the video playing adjacent to the objects of inquiry on multiple screens in each room. The effect is astonishing; the comforting grain of Guidall's voice, in combination with the aleatory timing of clips from room to room, gives the sense that the viewer is absorbing in fragments a continuous, collectively written epic text. The brain weaves these words together, and the objects resonate as questions.

The implicit suggestion that agreement and disagreement are simultaneous neurological processes in a world of discordant stimuli becomes explicit in the central "theater" of the exhibition's top floor. Thirty-two screens bring thirty-six simultaneous neuroscientific and philosophical positions into one room. As if at a conference, each person speaks individually, but, thanks to the care of editing, timing, and spacing offerded by the art-exhibition context, we experience multiple fragments of each speaker's talk in rapid succession and get to watch the faces of the others in close-up while they think in frequently conflicted silence. The fragments of speech are edited to

Above: **Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Joan Deyman*, 1656**, oil on canvas, 39⅞ × 52⅜".

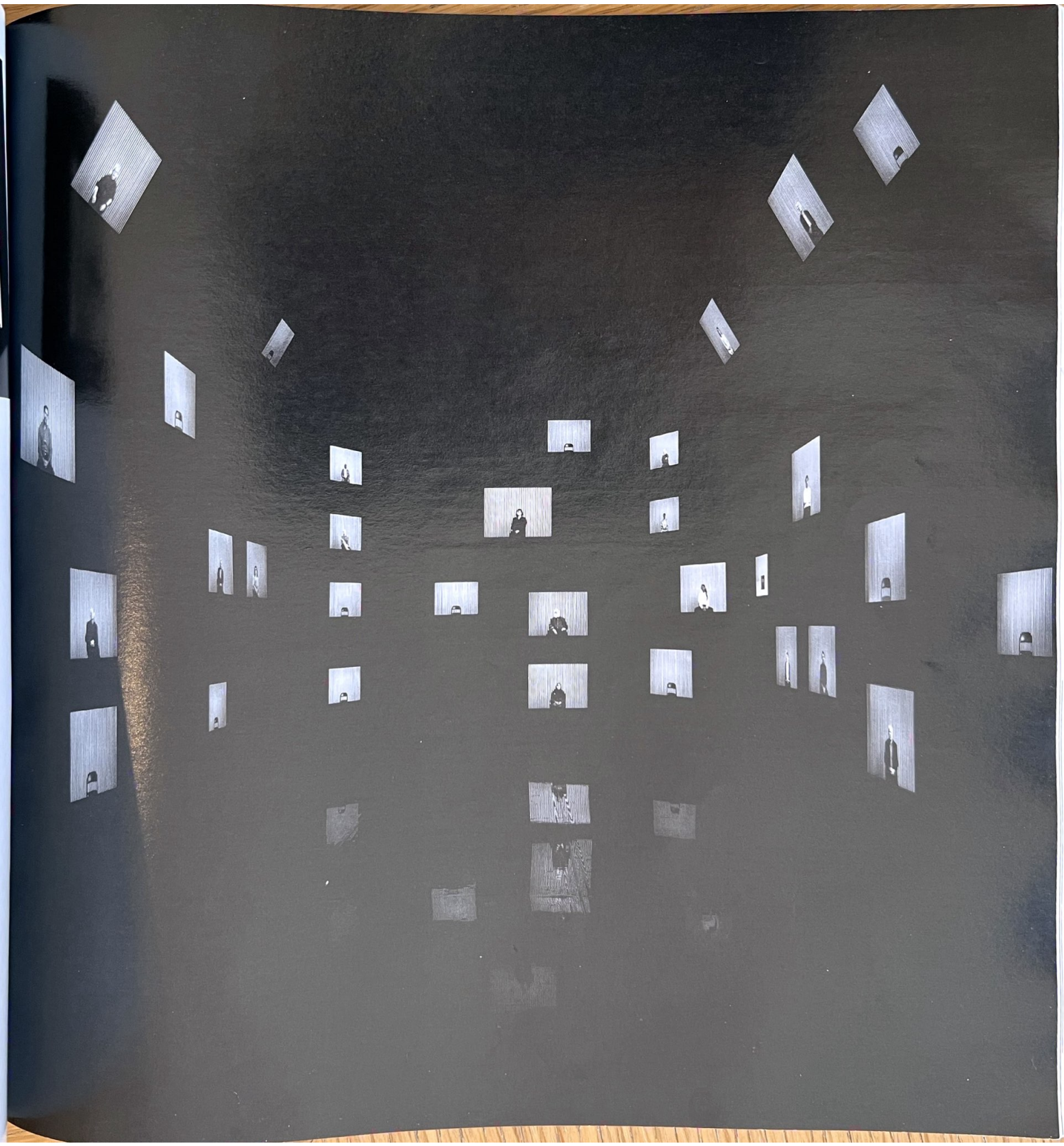
Right: **View of "Human Brains: It Begins with an Idea," 2022**, Fondazione Prada, Venice. From left: George Guidall reading Chloe Aridjis's *Four Topographies*, 2022; model of the University of Padua anatomical theater, 1932–33. Photo: Marco Cappelletti.

Opposite page: **View of "Human Brains: It Begins with an Idea," 2022**, Fondazione Prada, Venice. Photo: Marco Cappelletti.

bring out dissension and aporia, and the multiple and extreme differences among scientific positions push the viewer to think both with and against this prismatic display of "live" thinking. A psychologist asks the philosophical question of how one reconciles the pain of hearing a human dealing with the death of a loved one with the register of language she is required to use, such as "glucose metabolism"; a neuroscientist talks about how certain memories remain encoded in a pure form until they are simplified by the retrieval process of speech; a neurobiologist suggests that her research shows that the effects of social media on the brain are chemically similar to drug addiction and wonders how to treat and repair these effects on a massive scale; a philosopher offers that the brain's radical plasticity is related to moments when it receives demands for too much plasticity and shuts down and that violence must have a biological, chemical relation to action rather than a purely ontological one, since humans do not seem to learn progressively or advance over time in the ways that many philosophers have suggested we do; a different neuroscientist asks what happens when large masses of people, such as a nation, experience stress at the same time and the sources of support that help rewire or repair a brain, that create "countervailing forces of resilience, start to wear thin"; the psychologist chimes in again and proposes that people who are "metabolically encumbered" tend to gravitate in an authoritarian direction because "simple single causes, or even having somebody else telling you what's right and wrong, reduces uncertainty at a time when your brain really needs it"; the second neuroscientist breaks down in tears and can no longer continue when relaying a war case study in which a bomb explodes, a daughter's phone is thrown in the air, and the father catches it and sees that his daughter is dead and he has survived; another neuroscientist asserts that the scientific professions have a blind spot when it comes to certain chemical effects in the brain in relation to addiction and proposes the experimental use of opioids on human subjects; a psychologist who puts ethical value on the reparative duty of her profession to treat patients who are suffering walks out of the discussion. It is a fascinating—but, remarkably, not overwhelming—series of conflicted discursive encounters.

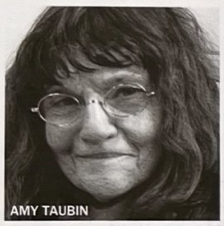
Facing this constellation of screens, a rectangular gap in a wall opens out to a cropped view of a fragment of a 1656 painting by Rembrandt. According to the wall label, the painting, damaged in 1723 by fire, depicts a lecture-autopsy on the body of a tailor "executed for robbing a textile store and threatening those present with a knife. . . . Dr. Deijman is portrayed as he lifts the falx cerebri, showing the pineal gland. . . . considered the seat of the soul, and therefore the event marked a crucial moment in the public spectacle of the dissection." As we view the scene through the aura of the damaged painting's complex historical and material patina, we are asked to wonder critically about claims to enlightenment in relation to science as spectacle, both in the past and in the present, while also calling into question, following Catherine Malabou's thinking, the inherited and persistent poststructural dogma that "science" is a priori involved in legitimating disciplinary power structures in a society of control. We cannot think critically if we refuse to consider that how the brain works might affect what is thought and done in the world; the recent admission by many leading critical theorists that they have no framework for understanding contemporary crises suggests we have been barking up the wrong tree for a very long time. "Human Brains: It Begins with an Idea," as an exhibition-making process, exposed people who act mostly within cultural institutions, in roles such as curator, artist, and writer, to prolonged contact with vanguard scientific-research methods and presentation, and the result is a remarkable combination of clarity and agility, with entirely different paradigms held open to the possibility of activation. □

KEN OKIISHI IS AN ARTIST BASED IN NEW YORK. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)

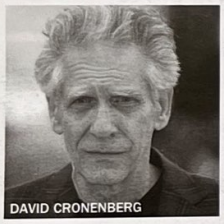


JACE CLAYTON

JACE CLAYTON is an artist and writer based in New York who is known for his work as DJ /rupture. He is the author of *Uproot: Travels in 21st-Century Music and Digital Culture* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016) and was awarded a 2020 Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant to support *Behold the Monkey*, his upcoming book on contemporary art, faith, and social media. Clayton is currently assistant professor of visual arts at Columbia University, where he is interim director of the Sound Art Program. Most recently, he composed an original soundtrack for *Riotsville USA* (2022), a documentary directed by Sierra Pettengill that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. In these pages, Clayton reviews this year's Whitney Biennial, "Quiet as It's Kept."


AMY TAUBIN

A contributing editor of *Artforum* and *Sight & Sound*, AMY TAUBIN teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York. From 1983 to 1987 she served as curator of film and video at the Kitchen, New York, and from 1987 until 2001 as a critic for the *Village Voice*. She is the author of a critical study of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (British Film Institute, 2000) and, with Glenn O'Brien and Ed Halter, the monograph *James Nares* (Rizzoli, 2014). Taubin is a member of the New York Film Critics Circle and the National Society of Film Critics. In 2021, she received an Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. She is currently at work on a collection of her writing since 1978, edited by Halter and Andrew Lampert. Here, Taubin interviews David Cronenberg about his film *Crimes of the Future* (2022). PHOTO: ANDREW LAMPERT


DAVID CRONENBERG

Since 1969's *Stereo*, Canadian director DAVID CRONENBERG has made twenty feature-length films, the best known of which include *Scanners* (1981), *Videodrome* (1983), *Existenz* (1999), and *A Dangerous Method* (2011). *Crimes of the Future*, a body-horror film starring Viggo Mortensen, Léa Seydoux, and Kristen Stewart, premiered in May at the Cannes Film Festival, where it was in the running for the Palme d'Or. For the summer issue, Cronenberg discusses his return to the genre with contributing editor Amy Taubin. PHOTO: ALAMY

CHLOE WYMA

CHLOE WYMA is an associate editor of *Artforum* and a writer living in New York. Her essays and criticism have appeared in publications including *Artforum*, *Architectural Review*, *Dissent*, *New York*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and the *Brooklyn Rail*, where she previously served as a reviews editor. In 2019, she earned an MPhil in art history from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where her research focused on magic realism in the United States around World War II. In this issue, Wyma reviews the Venice Biennale's Fifty-Ninth International Art Exhibition, "The Milk of Dreams." PHOTO: MAX SILVER

KEN OKIISHI

KEN OKIISHI is an artist and writer who lives and works in New York. In 2021, his film *Vital Behaviors* premiered at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. His exhibition "A Model Childhood" traveled from Reena Spaulings, Los Angeles, where it debuted in 2018, to Pilar Corrias, London, the following year and the Art Gallery at University of Hawaii at Mānoa, Honolulu, in 2021. Okiishi's texts have appeared in publications including *Artforum*, *Bidoun*, the *Brooklyn Rail*, *May*, *Texte zur Kunst*, *and Triple Canopy*. Sternberg Press, in conjunction with Okiishi's solo presentations in 2013 at MIT List Visual Arts Center and the Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, published *The Very Quick of the Word* (2014), a consideration of his work to date. Here, Okiishi reviews Fondazione Prada's exhibition "Human Brains: It Begins with an Idea."

NEGAR AZIMI

NEGAR AZIMI is a writer and the editor in chief of *Bidoun*, a publishing and curatorial platform. Her writing has appeared in *Bookforum*, *Harper's*, the *New Yorker*, and the *New York Review of Books*, among other outlets. With Sohrab Mohebbi, Azimi is assembling an exhibition within an exhibition around the collections of the Iranian artist Fereydoun Ave for the Fifty-Eighth Carnegie International. She is working on a book about Iran in the 1960s and '70s, to be published by Penguin, and runs the epistolary series Deadlines and Divine Distractions with Pati Hertling. This month, Azimi considers the art of Lydia Ourahmane.

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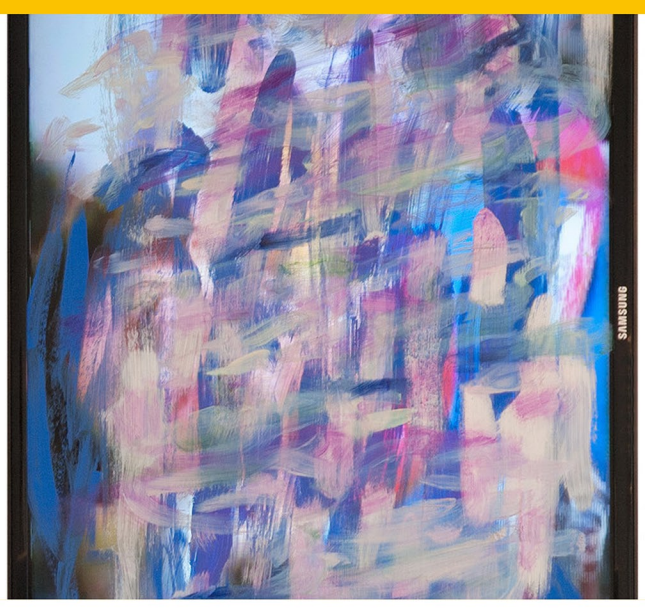

Collection gallery

MoMA, Floor 2, 201

Brushstrokes, glitches, and chromatic webs circulate throughout this gallery, offering a look at how artists across generations have explored and reconsidered the legacies of gestural abstraction, a painterly process that came to prominence in the 1940s. Artists like Ken Okiishi and Naotaka Hiro create works that connect the intensity of feeling suggested in the paintings of art-historical predecessors—such as Joan Mitchell—with the way that images, ideas, and physical traces are shared in the present, often mediated through technology.

In his 2015 essay "Painting Paintings," Okiishi describes his experience of spending time with Mitchell's work as evoking a feedback loop between the mind and the body. He writes of "being with the painting as a disappearing of the body," pointing to the ways that a viewer's shifting physical experience of a painting might ignite their imagination. Spanning decades, and using materials that range from the canvas to the flat screen, artists continue to turn to painting as a portal to expanded ways of thinking, feeling, and being.

Organized by Lanka Tattersall, Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints, with Abby Hermosilla, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Curatorial Affairs.

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New on view
Naotaka Hiro
Untitled (Seeds)
2021

New on view
Joan Mitchell
Ladybug
1957

New on view
Ken Okiishi
gesture/data
2014

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