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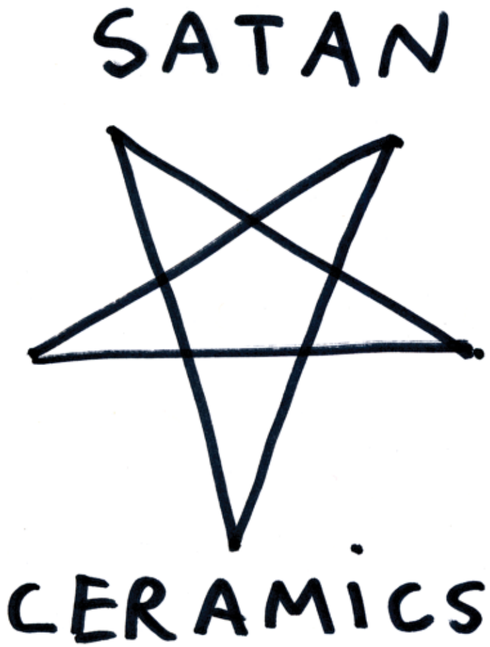

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Screening of *One Man Band*
Monday, October 13

LINDA MARY MONTANO
Friday, October 31

AI WEIWEI + SFAI
SCREENING
Ya Ta Hey! Alcatraz
+ Ai Weiwei: The Fake Case
Friday, November 7

JILL MAGID
Thursday, September 18

MATTHEW GOULISH
Friday, September 26

KATRÍN SIGURDARDÓTTIR
Monday, September 29

BLAKE STIMSON
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JAVIER TÉLLEZ
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OPENING SEPT 11, 7–9 PM

Javier Téllez
Still from *O Rinoceronte de Dürer (Dürer's Rhinoceros)*, 2010
Super 16mm film transferred to HD video, color, and sound; duration 41:10 minutes
Portuguese with English subtitles; courtesy of the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zürich
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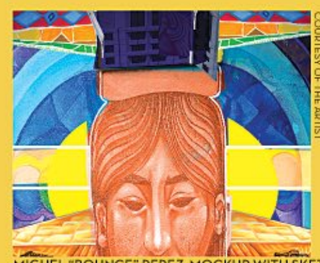

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MIGUEL "BOUNCE" PEREZ, MOCKUP WITH SKETCH FOR *TRUST YOUR STRUGGLE*, 2014.

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JUL 18 - OCT 5

GALLERIES

BAN7: INVASION OF THE CINEMANIACS!

JUL 18 - OCT 5

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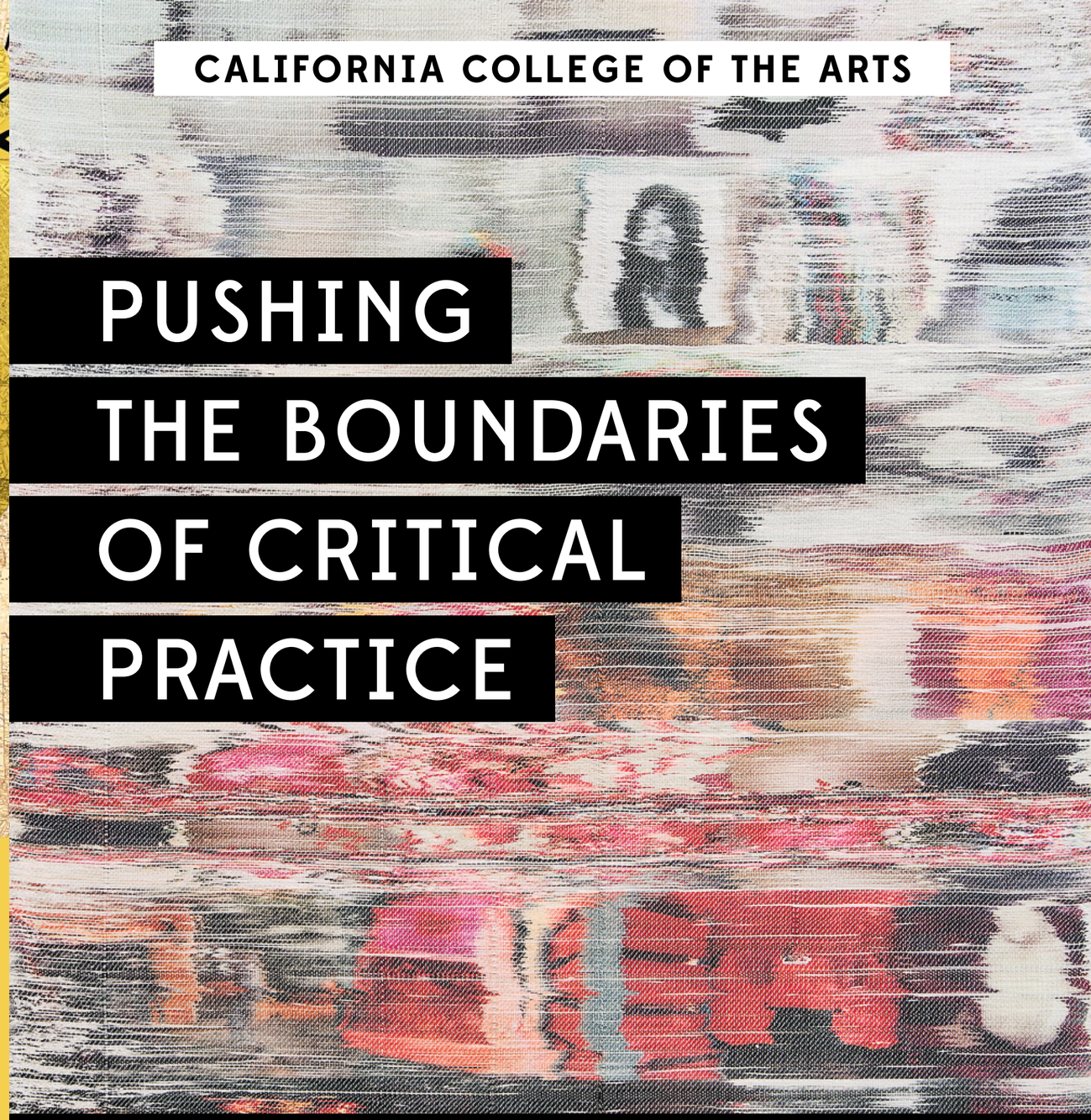

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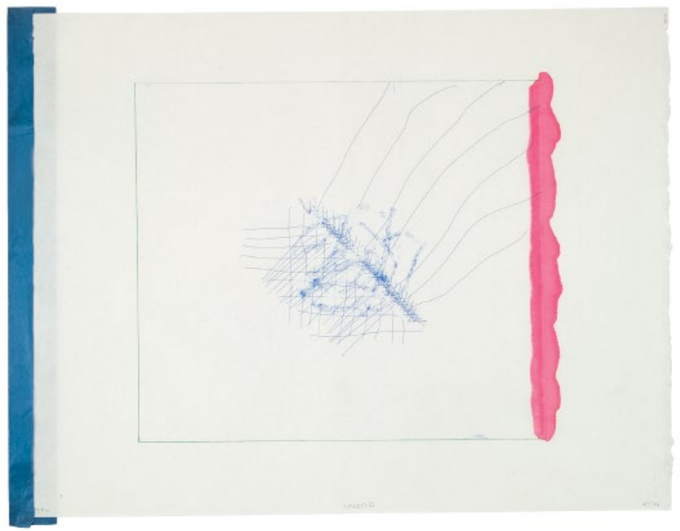

Richard Tuttle, *Naked VI*, 2004. Color soft ground etching with hand staining and attached gampi strip, 21½ x 27½", edition 10.

RICHARD TUTTLE: NAKED

a series of ten etchings from 2004

in celebration of *Richard Tuttle: A Print Retrospective*
Bowdoin College Museum of Art
(accompanying catalog available)

In the Crown Point Gallery
through October 31

SUMMER GROUP SHOW

Prints by Tomma Abts, Robert Bechtle,
Chris Burden, John Chiara, Francesco Clemente,
Sol LeWitt, Tom Marioni, Chris Ofili,
Laura Owens, Ed Ruscha, and William T. Wiley

In the Crown Point Gallery
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Media Room: Andy Diaz Hope & Jon Bernson
Beautification Machine
Through September 6

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The Fluid
September 13 - November 1
Reception: Saturday, September 13, 4-6 pm

jack fischer gallery

311 Potrero Avenue / San Francisco / CA / 94103 / 415-522-1178

Lauren Dicioccio
"Familiars" New Sculptural Abstractions in Fabric
September 6 - October 18
Reception: Saturday, September 13, 4-7pm

Lora Fosberg
New Work
October 25 - December 13

Brian Gross Fine Art

248 Utah Street / San Francisco / CA / 94103 / 415-788-1050

Donald Feasél
Cannery Park Paintings
Through August 23

Ruth Pastine
MIND'S EYE / Sense Certainty Series
September 6 - October 25
Reception: Saturday, September 13, 4-6 pm
Artist Talk: Saturday, September 13, 3 pm

LAURINA PAPERINA

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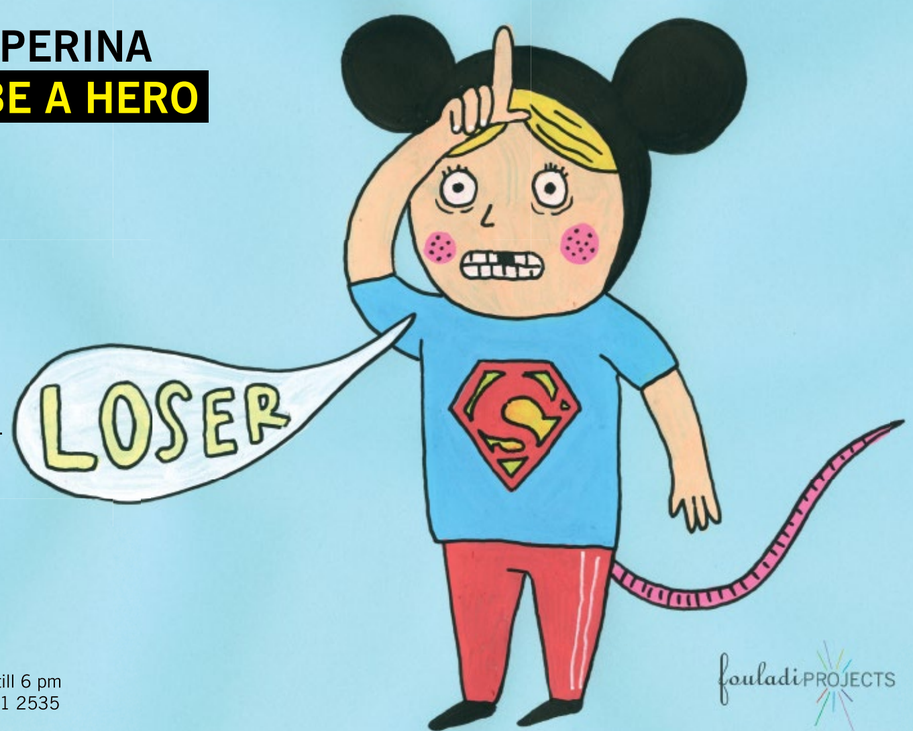

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Botanica: All Things Plant Life
July 12 – September 6, 2015

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CONTRIBUTORS

Arie Amaya-Akkermans is an art critic and writer based in the Middle East, currently living in Beirut, Lebanon. His writing has appeared in *Canvas*, *Artsy*, and *Hyperallergic*. Formerly assistant curator at Albareh Art Gallery in Bahrain, his current research concerns visual culture in Turkey and Lebanon, aesthetics of technology, and representations of political violence.

Corey Andrew Barr is a post-New Yorker and former auction specialist in contemporary art at Phillips. He previously organized exhibition programs between London and New York, working with artists across various mediums including Ai Weiwei, Zaha Hadid, and Annie Leibovitz. He is currently living in Hong Kong and learning 普通话 via the Division for Cooperation in Basic Education of Beijing Normal University, while spending time exploring Asia.

Ingrid Burrington works on an island off the coast of America. More at lifewinning.com.

Chad Calhoun is currently writing a book on the history of the Garamond typeface.

Peter Cochrane is a product of and believer in public education, although the government could totally step it up a notch. He turned out to be a writer, an artist, and an editor. He is probably painting postcards or making books right now. It's all about the combination of art and politics. He is the managing editor of *SFAQ*'s online counterpart, sfaqonline.com, and one of the editors of this magazine you hold in your hands. Long live printed matter.

Terri Cohn is a writer, curator, art historian, and editor. Her research and writings focus on conceptual art, technology, public art, and socially engaged art practices. A contributing editor to *Artweek* magazine for 20 years, she currently writes for various publications including *Public Art Review*, *Art in America*, *SFAQ*, *Squarecylinder*, *Art Practical*, and *caa.reviews*. Terri co-wrote and edited *Pairing of Polarities: The Life and Art of Sonya Rapoport* (Heyday Press, 2012), and curated exhibitions of Rapoport's work for Kala Art Institute and Mills College Art Museum (2011, 2012). She teaches core and interdisciplinary art history courses for the University of California, Berkeley, in their Art and Design Extension program.

Peter Dobey is an artist and Lacanian psychoanalyst raised in the exact epicenter of the Loma Prieta earthquake in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The *SFAQ* foreign correspondent and editor divides his time between the Bay Area, Mexico City, and Paris.

Jarrett Earnest is an artist, writer, and co-director of 1.1, a collaborative that took the form of an art space in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He writes regularly on contemporary art and pursues the interview as a distinct critical form, publishing long, innovative interviews with artists such as Maurizio Cattelan, Richard Tuttle, and Nayland Blake, among others. He is presently at work on a book of writing and drawing, exploring the aesthetics of intimacy. All of his disparate projects engage the intersections of performance, poetry, the visual arts, and politics.

Aaron Harbour is a curator, writer, and artist operating out of Oakland, CA. He is co-director of Et al., a gallery program in San Francisco, and has additionally curated exhibitions at The Popular Workshop, Important Projects, NADA Miami & New York, MacArthur B Arthur, Interface, Liminal Space, and Royal Nonesuch Gallery, among others. He runs Curiously Direct, an art criticism blog on Facebook, and has additionally written for *Art Practical*, *Decoy Magazine*, *Art Cards*, and several small publications/artist catalogues. He also produces art, and would gladly make art for the group show you are organizing.

John Held, Jr. will be presenting a paper in New York City on archiving Japanese mail art during the September 2014 conference, "For a New Wave to Come: Post-1945 Japanese Art History Now," sponsored by PoNJA GenKon, NYU Asian Studies, and Japan House. In October, Held will deliver the keynote address to inaugurate the exhibition *Focus Latin America: Art is Our Last Hope*, at the Phoenix Art Museum. In November, he will travel to Venice, Italy, to complete a one-month residency at the Emily Harvey Foundation. Held has been a staff writer with *SFAQ* since 2011.

Glen Helfand is an independent writer, critic, curator, and educator. His writing has appeared in *Artforum* and at *Artforum.com*, and he's contributed to the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, *Photograph*, and many other periodicals and exhibition catalogs. He's a Senior Adjunct professor at California College of the Arts, where he teaches courses on contemporary art. He also teaches in the graduate and undergraduate art programs at Mills College, and at the San Francisco Art Institute where he organized the Visiting Artists and Scholars Lecture Series. He has curated exhibitions for the De Young Museum, San Francisco, the San Jose Museum of Art; the Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena; Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco; Dust Gallery, Las Vegas; and the Mills College Art Museum, Oakland. His most recent curatorial projects include Temporary Structures, at the Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute; Fabricators, a collaboration with Creativity Explored, at Jack Fischer Gallery, San Francisco; and the Proximities series at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.

Elaine W. Ho works between the realms of time-based art, urban practice, and design, using multiple vocabularies to explore the micro-politics, subjectivities, and alter-possibilities of an intimate, networked production. She is the initiator of Beijing artist-run space HomeShop (2008–2013) and was most recently a fellow during the final semester of the Institut für Raumexperimente in Berlin.

Jackie Im is a curator and writer based in Oakland, CA. She has contributed to exhibitions at the Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art, the Walter and McBean Galleries at SFAI, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Queens Nails, the Mills College Art Museum, and MacArthur B Arthur. She holds a BA in Art History from Mills College and an MA in Curatorial Practice from California College of the Arts. She is currently the co-director of Et al, a gallery in San Francisco's Chinatown, with Facundo Argañaraz and Aaron Harbour.

Constance Lewallen was born and raised in New York City. She received her BA from Mount Holyoke College and her MA from California State University, San Diego. She is currently Adjunct Curator at the University of California, Berkeley, Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. In 1996 she curated *Jay DeFeo: Selected Works 1952-1989* for Moore College of Art in Philadelphia, which traveled to the UC Berkeley Art Museum. As Senior Curator at BAM she curated many major exhibitions including, most recently, *A Rose Has No Teeth: Bruce Nauman in the 1960s* ,all of which were accompanied by catalogues and toured nationally and internationally. Her most recent exhibition, *State of Mind: New California Art circa 1970* co-curated with Karen Moss, premiered and traveled internationally in 2011. Her book on David Ireland's house, published by UC Press, will be released when the house reopens.

Reagan Louie is the Chair of the Photography department at SFAI. His role as an art educator is complimented by a distinguished career as an artist. His photographs have been exhibited and published widely. His work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Fotomuseum Winterthur in Zurich, the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Louie's photographs are in numerous public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MOMA New York, and LACMA. He is the recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Fulbright Fellowship. Louie's book on China *Toward a Truer Life* was named the best photography book of the year by *The New York Times Book Review* and his book *Orientalia* was selected as one of the best photography books of the year by *American Photography Magazine*. His new book, *Let A Thousand Flowers Blossom*, is forthcoming.

Leora Lutz is a Toronto-born writer, artist, and art administrator who grew up in the eastern parts of Los Angeles before relocating to the San Francisco Bay Area in 2011. Lutz's personal ideology stems from the fruition of punk rock reasoning and a lifelong practice with the handmade. Lutz received both an MFA in interdisciplinary sculpture and an MA in visual and critical studies from California College of the Arts. She is a published writer of several art reviews and essays for *Art Practical*, *SF Emerging Arts Professionals* blog, and is a regular contributor to *SFAQ*. Her work has been shown at several galleries and institutions including the Henry Art Gallery, Riverside Art Museum, MOCA Los Angeles, and the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art. Recent projects are *if by sea: sound-poetic walk Angel Island* and *text kilim* for the American Consulate in Belgrade, Serbia.

Courtney Malick lives in Los Angeles where she works as a writer, independent curator, and private art adviser, focusing on video, sculpture, performance, and installation. She received her MA from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in 2011. She has curated exhibitions and performances in both New York and San Francisco. She is a regular contributor to *Artforum*, *SFAQ*, *V Magazine*, and is a founding contributor of *Dis Magazine*. Malick has also worked as Studio Manager for photographer Jane Wattenberg; Curatorial Assistant at LACE for the exhibition *L.A. Goes Live*, part of the Getty's Pacific Standard Time; Assistant Director at Broadway 1602 and Daniel Reich Gallery; as an archivist at Vito Acconci Studio; and as Curatorial Assistant to Larry List for the exhibition *The Art of Chess* at the Reykjavik Museum. In 2013 she was commissioned to write an essay for the scholarly online journal Viralnet.net in association with California Institute of the Arts, as well as contributing text to the catalog for the Palazzo Preckham exhibition at the 55th Venice Biennale.

Shana Beth Mason is an art critic based in Brooklyn. Contributions include *Art in America*, *Artillery Magazine*, *ArtVoices Magazine* (Los Angeles), *FlashArt International*, *Kunstforum.as* (Oslo), *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Miami Rail*, *thisistomorrowinfo*, and *SFAQ*.

Andrew McClintock is the Owner/Publisher/Founder and Editor in Chief of *SFAQ*. He was the Interim Director of Exhibitions at the San Francisco Art Institute from 2012–2013 during which he curated the first West Coast survey on Gutai. He currently lives in Libya where he is doing research for a forthcoming biography on Muammar Gaddafi, published by Yale University Press.

Carlo McCormick is a senior editor at *Paper Magazine* and a critic and curator based in NYC.

Nicholas O'Brien is a net-based artist, curator, and writer. His work has appeared across the US and internationally, including venues in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, Mexico, Berlin, London, and Italy. He has also been featured in several publications including *ARTINFO*, *Art F City*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *Dazed Digital*, *The Creators Project*, *DIS*, *ilikethisart*, *Frieze d/e*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and *The New York Times*. He is currently living in Brooklyn working as a visiting artist professor and gallery director for the Department of Digital Art at Pratt Institute. More info can be found at doubleunderscore.net

Mark Van Proyen is an artist and art critic based in northern California. His writings have appeared in *Art in America*, *Art Issues*, *CAA Reviews*, *New Art Examiner*, *Bad Subjects*, *Art Practical*, and *Square Cylinder*.

John Rapko is a Bay Area-based philosopher whose work is primarily in the fields of philosophy of art, art history, and ethics. He has taught and lectured in several art schools, colleges, and universities in the Bay Area, including UC Berkeley and Stanford, as well as in South America and Europe. Currently he teaches art history at the College of Marin and ethics and the philosophy of art at CCA. He has published academic writing in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, and the *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, and art criticism in *Artweek* and at *artcritical.com*. He disdains the haughtiness of the art world, but finds it increasingly amusing. As for education, he received his Ph.D from the University of California, Berkeley but for his real education he owes his influence to Mark Van Proyen, whose legacy has helped him to realize that he is not the most cynical person on Earth.

Gianni Simone escaped from his home country in 1992 and found refuge in Japan, where he promptly found a job teaching people how to shout HELP! and avoid being robbed on foreign buses. Since 1997 he has been unhealthily active in the mail art network, unleashing on the unsuspecting public, among other things, the "Treatise of Pataphysical Anatomy" and the international fake political campaign poster project. He has recently opened the Stickerman Museum—Tokyo Annex. When not running after his two kids and from his wife, he is usually busy making zines, writing for high- and low-brow magazines, and exploring Tokyo.

V. Vale, publisher of the late seventies zine *Search & Destroy*, helped bring local, national, and international attention to a punk scene every bit as vibrant, weird, and progressive as more highly publicized ones to the south and to the east. The publication was launched with grants from Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg. For Vale, punk became a gateway for a host of cultural obsessions, including industrial music, the writings of J.G. Ballard and William S. Burroughs, feminism, prankisterism, and the more bizarre ends of filmmaking and music, which he has chronicled for over three decades with the RE/Search series that he founded.

Ben Valentine is an independent writer who studies how tech, creativity, and politics intersect. Ben works with The Civic Beat and has written or spoken for SXSW, *Salon*, *Hyperallergic*, YBCA, and *VICE* to name a few. Ben also helped organize the World's First Tumblr Symposium with Hyperallergic, is an Internet Archive's Tumblr resident, and was formerly a Tumblr Fellow for the 2014 Personal Democracy Forum. Ben travels.

Xiaoyu Weng is a curator and writer based in San Francisco. She is the Director and Curator of Asia Programs at the Kadist Art Foundation (Paris/San Francisco) and she directs the Asian Contemporary Arts Consortium in San Francisco. Her recent curatorial projects include *Landscape: the virtual, the actual, the possible?* at Guangdong Times Museum in Guangzhou, China and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2014); *Invisible Hand: the 2nd CAFAM Biennale* at Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum in Beijing, China (2014), *Stories and Situations: Moderation(s) Conference* at Witte de With Contemporary Art Center in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2013), *Mission Afterviews*, a public intervention and presentation on the history of theaters in the Mission District, San Francisco (2012); *Support System* at Luckman Fine Arts Complex, Los Angeles (2011); among others. She is responsible for the launch of the Asian Contemporary Art Week in San Francisco, which has successfully held two editions (2012/2013). Weng contributes regularly for *Artforum* online, *Leap Magazine*, and *Art World Journal*.

Coco Young is a writer based in New York.

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A Note from the Publisher:

For me, *SFAQ* has always been a platform for questioning in the vein of what has been associated with Socrates—that the only true wisdom is knowing one knows nothing. I would like to take this sentiment to heart when thinking about the questions asked in the pages of *SFAQ*.

Many magazines produce themed issues, and I have always been amazed at the authority such publications suppose of their subject, inevitably leading to perspectives skewed towards the magazines editorial or commercial agenda. They say they have all the answers, but they don't. *SFAQ* doesn't pretend to have any answers; we just have questions, and *lots* of them.

The last issue (16) and the current issue (17) were journeys into topics that we ourselves came to with skewed perspectives that we hoped to learn more about. The catchphrase of our last issue, "Art and Technology," holds a specific weight when you say it in the Bay Area; heavy with displacement, gentrification, tax evasion (Twitter (payroll taxes), Airbnb (taking money away from the arts via not paying the hotel tax fund), Apple (paying taxes in Ireland?)) are all topics heavily discussed in the international press.

It was natural then that we wanted to investigate what *art and technology* really was, but from a perspective outside of the technology capital of the world. We stayed away from any judgments of the technology industry as such. That gets old and there are bigger problems in this world.

However, with that said comes a warning: greed and power grabbing is always the same and history repeats itself. Those who "disrupt" will sell out, become the man, and then get "disrupted" again. The mule was disrupted by the horse and cart, which in turn was disrupted by the locomotive, which was disrupted by gas powered cars, who will hopefully get disrupted by green powered vehicles . . . and some CEO or tycoon cleans up.

In this issue you will find another theme or topic so big that it made the *SFAQ* team and myself concerned that we might have bitten off more than we could chew: "Asian art." So we asked all the questions we could to our many friends and colleagues that know about the various aspects of Asian art, and came up with a slice of Asian art from Istanbul to Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, China, New York, L.A., San Francisco, and beyond. There are some amazing stories in this issue, and I hope you enjoy them as much as I have.

In this issue you will also note a new direction—a columns section, focusing on issues of contemporary art making, curating, and the art market, as well as the new technologies that have impact on social and political issues that directly affect us all. You will also find a pullout mini-magazine of a conversation between Jarrett Earnest and Alex Bacon about hyper-contemporary abstraction and the craziness of this new global art market trend. We hope it sparks more conversations around the state of the art market and the quality of art being produced.

Finally, I would like to thank my crack *SFAQ* team of editors that helped make this issue what it is. Peter Cochrane, Peter Dobey, Whit Brayton, Lucy Kasofsky, and all the amazing and hard working writers and contributors that make up the growing *SFAQ* community . . . this issue is for you.

Andrew McClintock

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Korakrit Arunanondchai, *Untitled (Body Painting 2)*, 2013,
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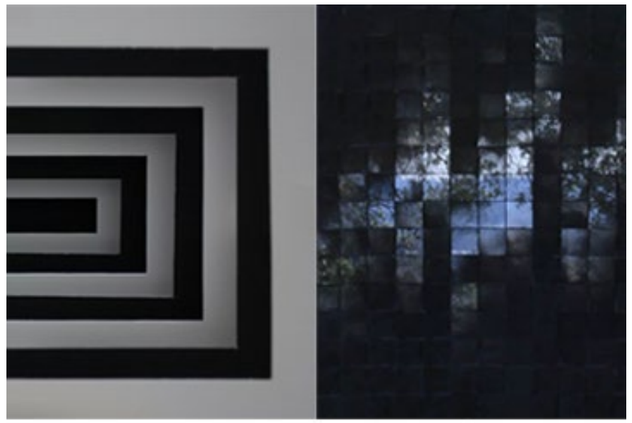

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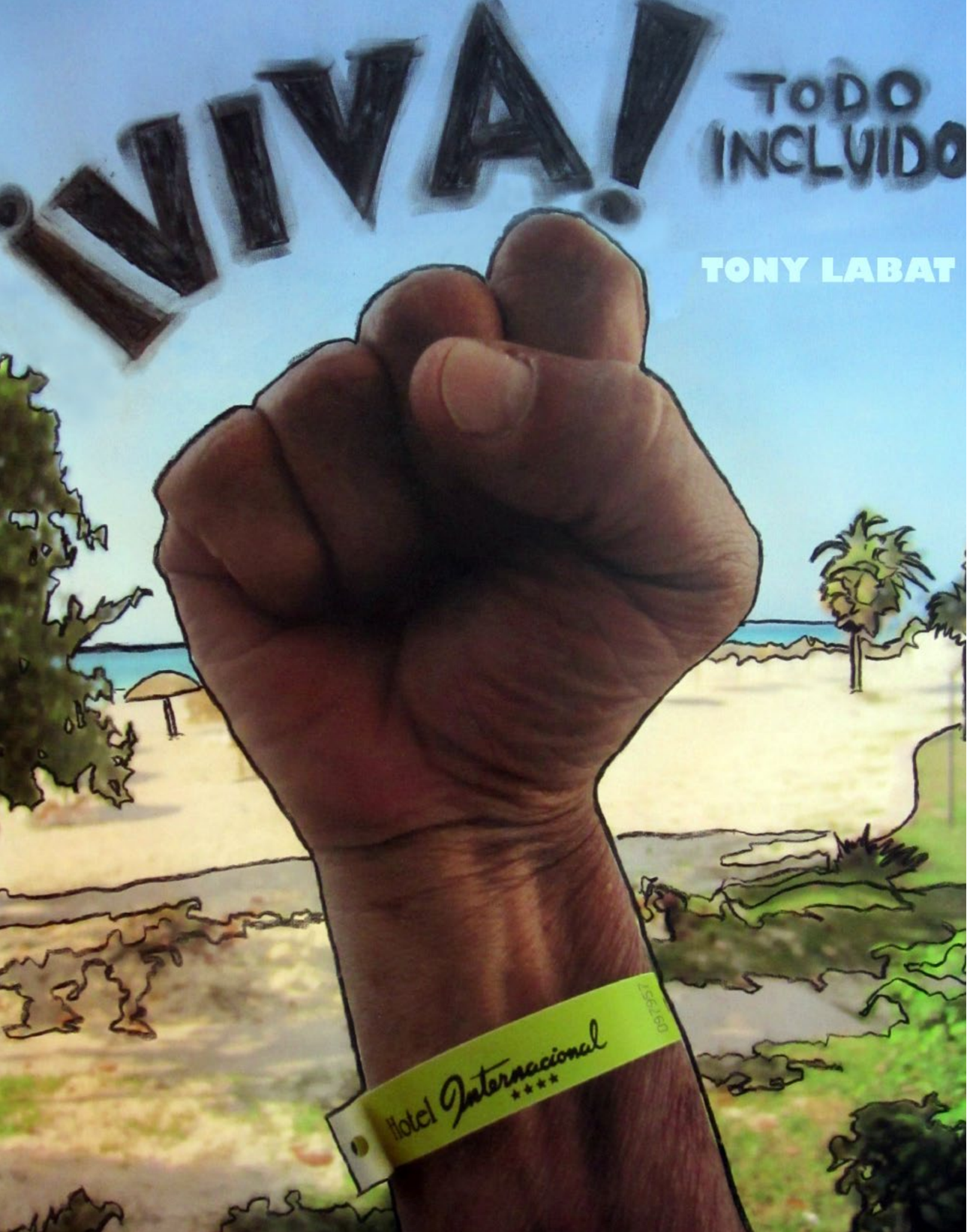

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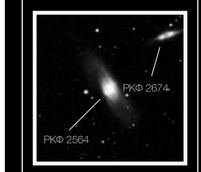

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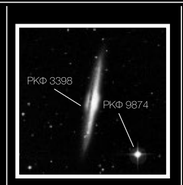

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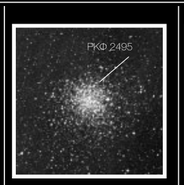

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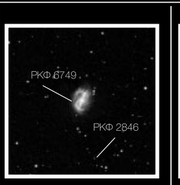

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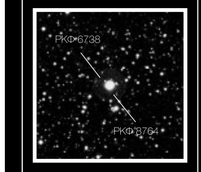

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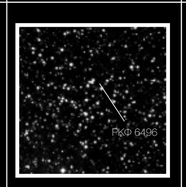

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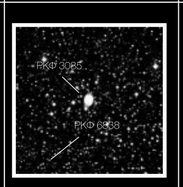

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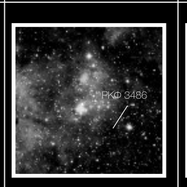

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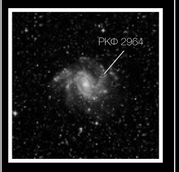

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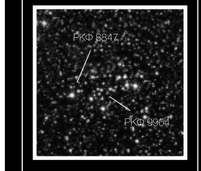

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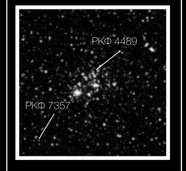

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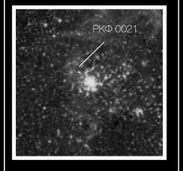

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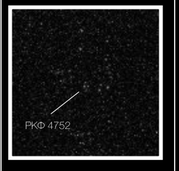

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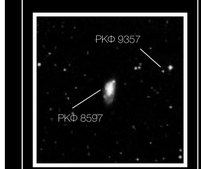

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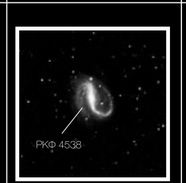

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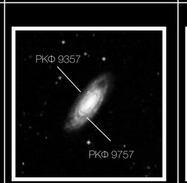

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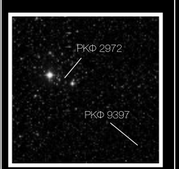

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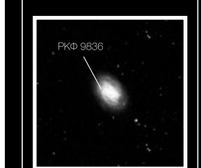

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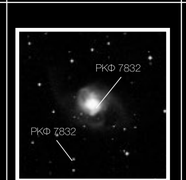

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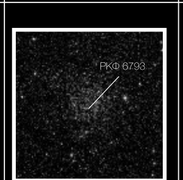

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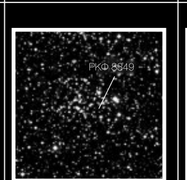

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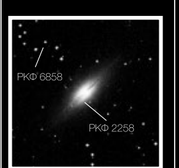

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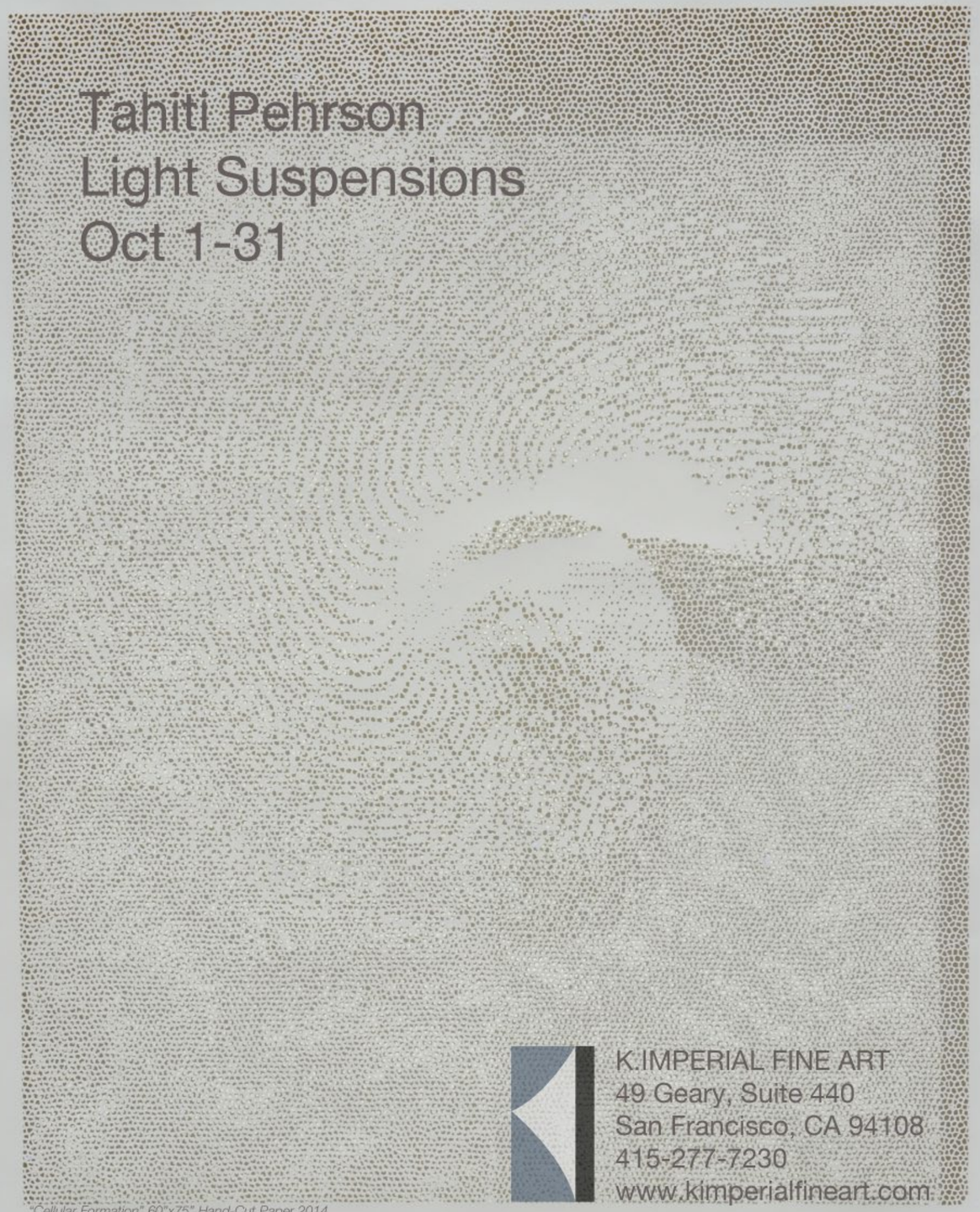

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Toward a Folk Video Game (Part 1)

By Nicholas O'Brien

In his germinal essay, *Without a Goal*, Jesper Juul discusses how contemporary games are reshaping the core definitions and characteristics of a video game. His argument challenges the prerequisite that games require a reward system based on a set goal. By looking at games like *The Sims* and open world titles like *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, Juul contests that the goals are quickly becoming secondary or ancillary mechanics within contemporary titles and that the value of games like *The Sims* comes from an emergent form of *expressive* play. This style of play is not based in collecting points but rather based on creating meaning based on personal agendas and individual play style. Designing a game that is open enough to allow players to engage with their content and mechanics freed from prescription has been the defining difference between games now and goal-based arcade predecessors.

The expressivity that Juul identifies not only affords different styles of gameplay, but also accommodates a new approach to thinking about games as a cultural platform for creative expression. Although not explicitly discussed within Juuls argument—or built upon since then—this new tradition (or expectation) for expressivity has also lent itself to the emergence of a new path for the *development* of video games. This path is what I will call a folk video game. This yet-to-be-realized genre (or subgenre) borrows from historical precedents that have up to now shaped gaming history. But the important departure for the folk video game occurs when the content and mechanic of its gameplay extends outside of the history of the medium and attempts to speak to a larger tradition of play, collage, and storytelling, within and outside of the video game.

Tracing some of the sources that inspire a folk video game requires looking back a bit further than the more immediate history of the arcade console. A starting point can be Johan Huizinga's analysis of play and games as a central and distinguishing role within human civilization. In his treatise, *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga outlines the importance of play for creating lasting meaning within a social environment. This meaning and significance can translate to spiritual ritual practice or toward establishing local/tribal cultural traditions. In these traditions the nuances and uniqueness of ritual practice and gameplay within a community creates cultural difference amongst tribes and communities. The differences within these traditions, over time, can be considered the basis of a community establishing its unique folklore.

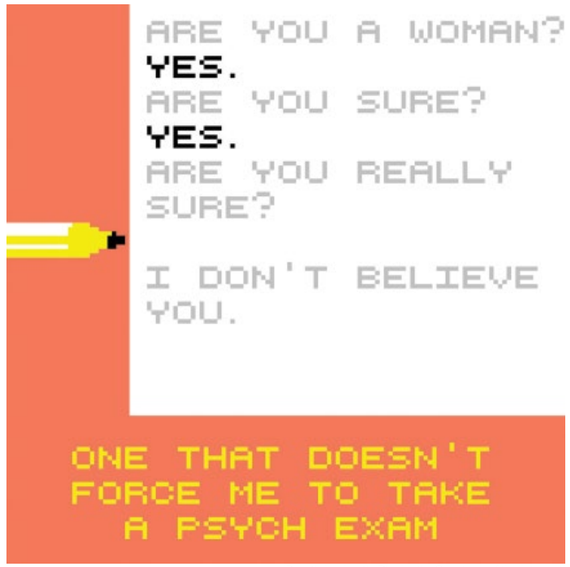
A folk video game is not only influenced by Huizinga's analysis of play and gaming, but it is also looking at a long-standing interactive relationship between humans and machines. Norbert Wiener's theory of cybernetics becomes instructive in building upon the folk tradition that play creates. Wiener speculates that within any given system the input often does not equal the output, and that in order to increase the output of a given machine, more input must be fed into its process. This loop of input/output is called feedback, which one can use to calculate the efficiency of a machine. Wiener speculated, however, that if enough "noise" is reduced in this process of feedback, that a machine could potentially reach maximum efficiency.

Although initially applied to electrical and mechanical engineering, this theory quickly found roots in the humanities and other social sciences. Play and games become a fascinating machine wherein the output has the potential for exceeding maximum efficiency. This process is the basis of developing a folk video games tradition. Within the social system of expressive games, play (as an input) can equate to something larger than the system in which it exists (the output). In other words, when a game's output becomes greater than its input, it veers on becoming a folk tradition.

This mechanism is sometimes hard to identify, since the theoretical basis of its existence is typically based in engineering or electrical systems. But when this mechanic is applied to a social system, the variables of output become a bit more expansive. The input of a social system could have a variety of outputs, and the strength of that system is not exclusively measured on expected outcomes. If a social system like a game environment has the opportunities to generate a variety of outputs (those expected and not), then the game (as a system) is engineered with the intentions of generating a folk videogame tradition.

An example of this expansive social system could be found in something like an MMO or Massive Multiplayer Online Game. When *Eve Online* developers CCP decided to create a physical memorial in Iceland for a battle that took place in the virtual space of New Eden, the social mechanism of the game generated a folk outcome. The output of this sculptural commemoration exceeds the input of player destruction. The only problem with this example is that the output of the statue is not directly created from players. CCP generated this outcome as a response to the social system they developed, but their response is not wholly generated within the social system of the game.

This being said, the movement toward a folk video game is not an inherently new process. Although contemporary games more frequently offer expressive play for players, expressive play manifested as a design principle (or motivation) for many early text-based adventures. Most notably is William Crowther's *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1976), which was developed



Dys4ia by Auntie Pixelantie. Courtesy of the Internet.

with the intention of sharing his love of spelunking with his daughters. Though it is often lauded as a landmark game for being one of the first to be shared over network technology (time-sharing networks based out of university labs), the expressive *development* of this game is another important link in establishing the variety of influences shaping the development of a folk video game. When the intention of the game has expressive goals—separate or secondary to the goals of the actual game itself—then the title creates significance and/or meaning beyond its gameplay.

These precursors for the development of a folk game tradition can also borrow from non-video-based gaming traditions. By looking at Live-Action-Roleplaying (LARPing) and pen and paper games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, the developer of a folk video game must consider how these gaming environments are designed to create a space of shared or mutual empathy. As Shoshana Kessock articulated in her presentation at the Different Games Conference in April of this year, LARPing communities' primary mode of creating a game (or LARP) is based on the creation of systems of empathy and communal affinity. This system of agreement is not solely beneficial for the purposes of creating a collective suspension of disbelieve—it is instead a way of creating a scenario in which all players' imagination, fantasy, experience, and participation are equally valued. Thus all forms of expression and all different types of players are equally encouraged and supported within the community of players.

Favoring a diversity of expressive types of gameplay within a LARP should similarly manifest within a folk video game. As with a LARP, a folk video game can embrace and encourage the creation of affinity networks and decentralized—yet shared—empathy. As opposed to creating a competitive environment—another false prerequisite for games that Juul dispels—the folk video game can be crafted to create collectivity and comradery. The diversity of expressivity from the player's perspective combined with expressive development intentions can potentially create an experience where the input from players can reach beyond maximum output. The feedback between the expressivity of the developer and the player can amplify to a point where noise (a problem typically generated by poor design) is not only minimized, but that the machine begins to generate experiences it either never anticipated, or else never intended (as is the case with the *Eve Online* monument).

A folk video game that can accomplish the combination of these different histories and traditions could contribute a significant and radical platform for experiencing and discussing contemporary media. As it currently stands, few titles come even close to approaching this threshold for the medium. Instead, the insularity of video games as a genre has—regardless of growing popularity—entrenched itself within a rather bleak and hostile conversation that rarely stems beyond its own discipline.

View of Sigurour Guomundsson's *Eve Online* monument. Courtesy of the Internet.

This is not to say that all is lost. To lump all video game communities within mass-market blockbusters (which is what often gets assumed or touted when video games as a genre are discussed) would do a disservice to the diversity of communities that exist within gaming subcultures. That being said, these communities are often pushed to the margins and as a result rarely get opportunities to make significant contributions to games as a genre. Because of that marginalization, the focus of smaller production houses and more independently minded individuals within gaming subcultures should look toward the prospect of a folk tradition. As stated before, the development of a folk video game can be an opportunity to break or disrupt the discipline. In doing so, a folk video game would still mechanically operate within the limitations of the discipline while still garnering interest, praise, and critical attention beyond its immature big-budget peers.

Great video games already spark a multitude of products and forms of expression in other media. Often, games considered groundbreaking within their genre have had multiple translations to other formats: television shows, comics, toys, feature-length films, sculpture, illustration, murals, graffiti, etc. However, these offshoots rarely create meaningful expressions within their respective media, and—perhaps most importantly—are typically only generated for increasing revenue for a developer or publisher. The very definition of video game ephemera emphasizes the fact that they are made and distributed for profit's sake. Thus even a great game like *A Link to the Past*, no matter how much ephemera it might generate, cannot be classified as a folk video game.

Instead, what draws *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* (1991) closer to being a folk video game is the way that its expressivity and feedback have generated critical and meaningful content beyond its discipline. This argument becomes harder to make the close you examine the contributions that *A Link to the Past* has made outside of the video game industry. Though pioneering the output of its gameplay does not exceed its input, and in turn does not create a mechanism or system of sustained (and perpetual) expressivity. Expressivity in *A Link to the Past* is extremely limited and feedback is often one-dimensional: through collecting items, you defeat enemies, gain crystal shards, rescue maidens, and eventually—spoiler—secure the Tri-force.

Thus the creation of a folk video game must have expressivity imbued within it from the onset of its development. With Crowther's *Colossal Cave Adventure* the expressivity of sharing a real world activity with others creates a meaningful bond between author and player before the game even begins. With the knowledge of the intentions of the game, a system of empathy is established which allows for a system of play that has the potential for expressing something meaningful beyond video games as a medium. This is not to say that *Colossal Cave Adventure* is a folk video game, but it is important to distinguish the difference of intentions between it and *A Link to the Past* in order to examine the ways in which expressivity within a game can expand beyond the technical or mechanical boundaries of its discipline.

However, making this comparison between Crowther's early effort and Nintendo's smash hit does not give a clear indication of the current status of the establishment of folk video games tradition. As stated before, small productions and independent video games titles are more immediately approaching the threshold of folk tradition. However, the feedback found within widely celebrated indie games like *Braid* or *Super Meat Boy* do not provide meaningful expressive outlets beyond video games as a discipline. Other so-called indie games like *Flower* begin to broach subject material that addresses environmentalism, ecology, and biodiversity. But the contributions this game makes to those disciplines does not necessarily enhance the already existing discourse.

Darkon directed by Andrew Neel and Luke Meyer. Courtesy of the Internet.

The examination, albeit cursory, of the mentioned indie games presents an interesting paradox within that community. Although these titles are expanding and introducing new narratives, character, mechanics, and forms of expression, they are doing so only to the extent that they are comments on video games as a medium. With that in mind, one might consider how the folk video game might ask these same questions, or present any challenges to the video game medium, but instead uses the medium as a way to employ play and expression as a means to an alternative end.

Games such as *Oil God* come to mind, wherein the goals of the game are not challenging the format of video game play, but the content of the game poses challenging and meaningful contributions to the criticality of manipulating oil markets in global economics. Another game that similarly presents complex subject material without challenging gaming conventions is *Dys4ia*. In this Flash game the developer Auntie Pixelante (Anna Anthropy) employs a mini-game mechanic (similar to *Warioware*) as a way of expressing the emotional complexity of transitioning genders. Though the tone of *Dys4ia* is often humorous, the intensity of the empathy that is created through play creates powerful meaning that transcends the medium. However, as arresting as this game is, the lack of expressive gameplay is not present (though the input and output feedback within *Dys4ia* arguably goes past maximum efficiency).

Thus the problem of establishing a folk video game tradition still poses a vexing challenge for developers and enthusiasts of this medium. I suspect that part of this problem comes from the physical limitations of being grounded to an electronic appliance. Expressivity within LARPing environments is so satisfying and rewarding because the feedback that is input into this system of empathy has physical manifestations that create meaning for players outside of the gaming scenario (as pleasantly suggested by the profile of Kenyon Wells in the documentary *Darkon*). The "liberation" that occurs within this game to reach beyond the limitations of the game as a discipline has meaningful results for players.

However, because of the technical limitation of the video game, one has to abide by the logic of a computer in order to generate output and feedback. Thus the noise of a computer becomes a hindrance toward creating a folk tradition within video games. Remote examples of video games verging into folk territory only occur within expressive gameplay that unintentionally renders a gameplay or mechanic useless or irrelevant. In this way, the logic of the game must be broken in order for a folk video game to emerge. But maybe this isn't necessarily a bad thing, and maybe the rupturing of a video game's logic (or computational processing) allows for an expressivity to emerge. An example of this kind of folk-like expressivity and feedback begins to take shape in intentionally broken games like *Goat Simulator*. Although the commentary and meaningful expressivity of this game is mostly limited to video games as a genre, the emergence of the community of support and enthusiasm around this game (as a joke) begins to inform a kind of outside-the-game expressivity.

The problem is that the folk tradition expressed within *Goat Simulator* is not one that sustains its significance for very long—its bite has already worn off. The expressivity of the development and play of this game does not add up to establishing a folk video game tradition. To that end, one must consider the ways in which the real world, non-insular community efforts of the people that came together to make *Goat Simulator* a reality should be viewed as an important precursor for an emergent folk tradition within video games.

Making it Online

By Ben Valentine

Many hoped that the new connectivity the web offered might radically change the world by elevating everyone's voice, making all information available everywhere, and that software unbridled by geography and atoms would reshape what's possible along the information highway. The decentralized nature of the web meant any information—from artwork to dissenting voices—could spread through the network, unstoppable. Surely this would change everything, especially how we create and share together.

Yet now, 25 years after the invention of the web, the Cyberutopianism of its early years is gone. Left in its wake is big data controlled by big businesses, mass surveillance, and monopolized internet service providers. Still, the web has swept over much of the world and now we have millions of daily social media users trying to have fun, collaborate, share, and create online. What, if anything, are we making that is so different than before? How did we get here and where are we going?

Linux and Wikipedia are often lauded as evidence that the net we dreamt of came to be, and for good reason. Although managed and run by a few people at the Wikimedia Foundation, the premise of the site is an encyclopedia created by input from unpaid, anonymous authors who create Wikipedia's content. As the site says, "There are more than 76,000 active contributors working on more than 31,000,000 articles in 285 languages."[1] Time after time the largely user-generated website has been proven as reliable as many proprietary and professionally produced encyclopedias, and almost always more up-to-date on contemporary issues.[2 3]

Similarly, the free and open-source software Linux is one of the earliest and greatest examples of GitHub-like production. Although most attributed to Linus Torvalds, Linux and the software it has inspired has involved countless unaffiliated programmers adapting it for their specific needs, or contributing to its core, the Linux kernel. Released in 1991 Linux has experienced great success, and now some variant of Linux is run on 95% of the world's fastest supercomputers.

The value of these types of open and collaborative super-projects is hard to articulate, but vast. Their use of open licensing like GNU and Creative Commons allows for us to build off of one another's achievements; to collaborate and share work more easily. Just as the scientific community is reliant on open and verifiable tests from which to build, these types of copyleft licenses and the decentralized nature of the web make the efforts invested into these projects valuable for countless people, nonprofits, and businesses in a way proprietary and offline work never could. Yet, these successes are far from the norm; Wikipedia is the only non-profit website to make it in the top 50 most visited websites in the world.

RageComic, *Know Your Meme*. Courtesy of the Internet.

Although there was an unprecedented number of people and work incorporated into open-source and collaborative projects like Wikipedia and Linux, early users wanted much more. Netizens gravitated towards platforms that allowed them to easily publish their own content for their own purposes; we wanted to tell our own stories, make our own art, and run our own projects. Even as professional news publications slowly migrated online, user-generated content grew exponentially faster. Sites that allowed non-technically savvy users a means to easily publish and share skyrocketed, and the rise of web 2.0 saw a staggering adoption of sites like GeoCities, Blogger, LiveJournal, 4chan, and many more.

Enter the meme. While Wikipedia and Linux are prime examples of the web allowing many to co-create one huge project, memes are co-created by many and are subject to constant remixes and reinventions. Although coined in 1976 by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, the idea of the meme experienced a resurgence on these chaotic and relatively horizontal online publishing platforms. Memes are the citizens' advertising.

While countless memes have been made, and most don't merit any mention, the best and most viral memes are masterful distillations of broad concepts into easily accessible images over a process of remixing. A prime example of this came in 2008, when the seemingly juvenile "Rage Comics" began flooding the image messaging board known as 4chan. While unimpressive at first glance, Rage Comics, as with all successful (viral) memes, are fascinating because of how many people (often strangers) are involved in their making and dissemination, and how quickly they morph into instantly recognizable and precise articulations of complex emotions. While countless were made, the best and most viral Rage Comics remain in wide circulation across many platforms today, six years later.

Memes, unmitigated publishing, forking open code, and wiki-production were the exciting new frontiers of the free web. But with ease of publishing came a reiteration of a very old problem; in an attention economy those who control the systems of production are king. There became so much user-generated content that we *wanted* filters—we wanted sites to tell us what to look at. What we didn't fully realize is that those platforms, professionals, and organizations were going to filter content much as they always had: to optimize their profit, not ours. Furthermore, with so much content being thrown into the web, constantly remixed and added onto, the gatekeepers started using secret algorithms outside of our control or understanding. Hardly a perfect horizontal space for the people's creativity.

Imagine walking into a library looking to find something that really challenges you. You've come to feel you need a deeper or different look at a topic, and want something that will push you. Unbeknownst to you, all the books you find first were filtered out specifically for you, based on what you have already read and what your friends read. This is exactly the opposite of why you came to the library, to only find books that supported your beliefs, and reconfirmed your thinking. After much more persistent and dedicated searching, you find that all the books you were really looking for are in the basement way in back and the librarian helping you had been paid to lead you to different books first.

Though hyperbolic, this metaphor reveals how search engines and social feeds like Facebook's operate, slowly burying or hiding content that might be at odds with your usual reading habits or less profitable to their bottom line. Everything we users are sharing is still *online* (at least in free or uncensored Internets), but people will have to specifically seek it out to *find* it. In the mountain of posts we are making, that makes a world of a difference. The illusion that the places where we find our information are neutral is a fallacy, hidden behind the crisp facades of Silicon Valley monoliths. In this way, automated and machine-learning algorithms have come to dramatically shape our making and the cultural experience of what we've made in our post-digital world.

What this means for artists, hackers, and outsiders wanting to share their work with the world is that they, much like before the web, have to play the marketing game, and rely largely on publishers and gatekeepers for money to sustain their practices. The horizontality of the web created new spaces for people to gain recognition, but the same economic and social barriers have remained largely intact. Perhaps this is why copyleft projects haven't gained strong momentum: they aren't a financially viable option for most people needing to make rent. Even The Commons, Flickr's service that hosts millions of creative commons licensed photographs which are easy to remix, share, use, and build upon as we wish, is rarely celebrated or used.

Copyleft projects like Flickr's are being strongly overshadowed by their more overtly corporate platforms. Instagram's filters can effortlessly improve a snapshot, but always for the benefit of Instagram: each image with a custom filter acts as an ad first to Instagram, then to the photographer. Tumblr, which has done much to encourage net art and virally spread quality photographs through the social web, hasn't been great for artists' careers, with much of the work on Tumblr remaining unattributed. This has become part of the nature of the social web. Net-savvy artists get far more views than their offline counterparts, but when it comes to translating a work's viral success into sustained profit, the difficulties remain. It's still about who you know, paying for expensive grad schools, being able to take unpaid internships, etc. …

Yung Jake, *Embedded*, Youtube screenshot, 2014. Courtesy of the Internet.

Ian Aleksander Adams, *Tumblr Tuesday*, Facebook screenshot, 2012. Courtesy of the Internet.

A growing body of work by net artists like Ian Aleksander Adam,[4] Parker Ito,[5] or Yung Jake,[6] embrace the aesthetics, designed limitations, and metric-focused attributes of these corporate platforms as a driving force and inspiration for their own practices. These artists create fantastic celebrations and carnivals out of these platforms' limitations, yet rarely produce a meaningful critique. The advertising-focused metrics of these platforms become mirrored in their work; likes, follows, shares, retweets, and more all become a prominent judge of quality. Indeed, critique is far from their goal, opting instead to use these platforms to their logical ends: a like-obsessed and corporate aesthetic accessible to as many people as possible.

While playing within the confines of a canvas has always been the burden of the artist, never before has so much control been exerted by the medium of production onto what is produced as when making on social platforms today. Platforms define the size of the canvas artists have to work with, the palette, the environment within which the work is seen, and much more. When the artwork comes to adopt all the traits and values of the platform that hosts it, what happens when these works experience the same fate as those reliant on Second Life or GeoCities?

Mirroring the metrics of value promoted by the advertising industry doesn't represent the type of nuance and freedom of expression that is found in the best art. The permanence of our social media profiles and the visible documentation of every interaction (upvote, like, comment, etc.) has created spaces where interaction is effortless, but not necessarily for the deep and nuanced conversations or artworks we crave. The artworks we see in our Facebook feeds are the ones we're most likely to like, not necessarily the best.

The experience of Context Collapse on these social platforms should be investigated as well. Surveillance from governments, targeted advertising, and of all of our social contexts converging onto one social platform is far from an uninhibited playground for criticality and aesthetic production. Tricia Wang is a tech ethnographer who understands the problems of codifying people through simplistic metrics or finite categories. Wang coined the term *Elastic Self* to talk about a healthy understanding of identity that takes many layers and forms, given the context. Wang writes on her blog, "Companies and institutions often misinterpret the meaning of people's social lives, codifying it in a way that forces people into static relationships that don't reflect the fluid nature of actual relationships."[7]

Social media theorist Nathan Jurgenson also talks about this problem of confined self-representation on social platforms like Facebook, using the term *Liquid Self* instead. "Self-expression, when bundled into permanent category boxes," Jurgenson writes on the Snapchat blog, "has the danger of becoming increasingly constraining and self-restricting."[8] Jurgenson has celebrated social media platforms like Snapchat for allowing users to explore multiple selves and eschewing real-name requirements, all of which allow for more complex representations and understandings of self. Snapchat's impermanence then, Jurgenson writes, "introduces the possibility of a profile not as a collection preserved behind glass but something more living, fluid, and always changing." Can creativity online follow Jurgenson's ideas to allow for more free, critical, and unencumbered expression? I hope so.

As artists and average netizens become more aware of the impact of the networks around them, more agency in their own production will become increasingly desired. Whether the grip of these networks will loosen remains to be seen. Communities that foster creativity online cannot survive without user support or capitalizing off their users' works. The question becomes, how long will we tolerate our creative outlets becoming hindered by commercial interests when we refuse to pay to use them? While Snapchat offers an excitingly free space on which to communicate, surely we can recreate much of that freedom in other ways?

The Internet largely operating as an advertising machine doesn't bode well for a future where anonymous, free, and democratic production can become the norm. While there are many exciting instances of platforms and apps opting out of this model, we need to look at the issue from a macro level, focusing on the infrastructures and laws governing our networked space. Tools like Tor, Whisper, PixelKnot, and many others are made for privacy, but become limited to the users who care. Until we have popular and accessible opportunities that are built with private communication as a side, the alternatives will always be ghost towns.

If they ever move past selling drugs, dark nets could offer an exciting and anonymous community playground, as weird and free as the Internet we wanted. Similarly distributed mesh networks offer an exciting opportunity for community run and owned networks, which could build privacy and localized communication into their core infrastructure. Decentralized peer-to-peer networks such as The Pirate Bay, which is wildly popular, offer a shockingly resilient model to government intervention, and possess many more opportunities outside of pirating music. Social networks like Diaspora and Twister have tried to mimic this distribution model, but have yet to grow in popularity.

Social networks need people to be enjoyable, and much of the exciting productive qualities of a social web are reliant on thousands of users. However, very few users will give up a free network for a secure but paid service. How a functional, free, high quality, secure, and expansive network will take hold in this market remains to be found. We've seen a flurry of engineers working to create alternative models in a post-Snowden world; now we need average users to start demanding and flocking to them. If they don't, we will only see more insidious advertising, more pervasive surveillance, and more hidden control of user experience and production.

1) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About
2) http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v438/n7070/full/438900a.html
3) https://blog.wikimedia.org/2012/08/02/seven-years-after-nature-pilot-study-compares-wikipedia-favorably-to-other-encyclopedias-in-three-languages/
4) http://www.ianaleksanderadams.com/
5) http://www.parkerito.com/
6) http://yungjake.tumblr.com/
7) http://triciawang.com/updates/2014/1/26/new-talk-the-elastic-self-understanding-identity-in-social-m.html
8) http://blog.snapchat.com/post/61770468323/the-liquid-self

Protecting and Promoting the Open Internet

By Ingrid Burrington

As of June 21, 2014, there have been 188,272 public comments filed on the FCC's website for docket 14–28, "Protecting and Promoting the Open Internet." The comments are generally brief, sometimes just one sentence, often expressing frustration at cable companies for exercising too much control over consumers. People really don't like tiers, or fast lanes, and they really, really don't like Comcast. Often, letters in support of net neutrality speak of keeping "the Internet" or, sometimes, "my Internet" free and open. There's a shared assumption about what the Internet is or should be, which generally goes undefined aside from emphasizing that tiered access is fundamentally opposed to it.

The public comment letters are compelling, not only because hundreds of thousands of citizens are engaged on a subject that's been generally the purview of policy wonks for the past decade, but also because they prompt a question that is far more complicated than it first appears: *what do people even mean when they say "the Internet?"*

In a consumer context, the network at stake in net neutrality is what's known as the "last mile" connection—the part of the network-of-networks that actually connects your machine to a network that connects to the other networks. The materials used for last-mile connections—copper, coaxial cable, and wireless towers—often are older, slower, and more prone to damage than the parts of the Internet stored in data centers, the parts your last mile connects to.

Those not-last-mile-parts, the physical cables, server racks, wireless towers, and data centers—the infrastructure of the Internet that takes up more and more postindustrial landscape in the United States—are not really front and center in debates about net neutrality, despite the fact that they are crucial to maintaining what last-mile consumers think of as our open Internet. It is hidden infrastructure, proprietary, remote, neither open nor ours. This physical disconnect, further enabled by misleading metaphors that render servers into clouds, limits one's vision of the Internet as a place (and agency in that place) to a browser window.

For me, it's been useful to think of the Internet as a whole (both its physical network and the content hosted on the network) as infrastructure, because infrastructures aren't metaphors. You can point at infrastructure, you can map it, you can ask how it works and who controls it. The contours of the network have changed dramatically since the coining of the term "net neutrality," and the terms of the current debate have yet to accommodate those changes. The following notes on pieces of infrastructure are not necessarily definitive statements on where net neutrality is or could go, but they are reminders, perhaps, of what is at stake.

1. Dark Fiber

The concept of network neutrality emerged around 2002 as the first tech bubble was more or less crashing. During the first bubble, there was a massive rush by many different companies to build network infrastructure. In non-last-mile cases, this meant fiber optic cables. Optical fiber is, well, what it sounds like: a very thin (something a little larger than a strand of human hair) material (often glass) used to transmit data as pulses of light. (It is useful, humbling a little, to think about how all the rhetorical places and the tangle of bodies and stories and code that we think of as "the Internet" can ultimately be reduced to pulses of light in thin strands of glass buried in dirt and oceans.) Fiber is much faster, and has a longer shelf life, than the copper and coaxial that tends to be in last-mile connections.

The first tech boom led to the construction of lots and lots of fiber lines, sometimes by private network providers and sometimes by utility and telephone companies. A lot of companies added more fiber to their networks they actually needed to use, anticipating future demand and not wanting to have to tear up the earth in a few years' time. This unused fiber is called *dark fiber*—because it isn't "lit" with data pulsing through it.

Building networks is expensive, and a lot of the companies that did it ended up in serious financial trouble when the need for network services abruptly dropped with investment in startups. The sheer volume of available fiber also drove down the price of the product. Many of the companies that had originally laid fiber went bankrupt and ended up acquired by venture capital firms and other Tier 1 networks. ("Tier 1" is a term used to describe really large networks that can connect to every other network on the Internet—they make up what's called the *Internet backbone*, another metaphor that weirdly makes the Internet both corporeal and inchoate, an unfathomable spine of infinitely extending glass ganglia.)

Because the cost of lighting up dark fiber is high, most of it is leased or sold to entities that might need private networks—consortia of academic institutions, public libraries, municipal governments, banks, high-frequency trading firms. It isn't exactly clear how many institutions have private fiber networks, which gives the term "dark fiber" a nice figurative resonance.

Another resonance in dark fiber's name: no one seems to know how much exists. There are estimates of how much money was spent in the 1990s building the networks ($90 billion in 2001, according to the *Wall Street Journal*), but in the alchemical process of seemingly unending mergers, acquisitions, and rebranding, it's hard to know exactly how much dark fiber is out there, who owns it, and where it runs. Companies have recently cited these uncertainties as reasons they're building new fiber networks—while there is dark fiber in some places, not much of it goes into that aforementioned last mile. Verizon's attempt to build a nationwide fiber network, FiOS, has supposedly been stalled mostly by the fact that landlords and homeowners don't want to pay the cost of getting the fiber into the home. Fiber connections can be made in cable boxes that connect to copper and coaxial in the home, but it slows down the connection, which kind of undermines the entire point of having fiber cable. Dark fiber is vast, and it apparently exists, but we don't know where it is, companies aren't going to tell us where it is, and wherever it is, it's not where companies want it to be.

2. Content Networks, Network Geography

So there's an unseen, un/under-mapped network of incredibly valuable strands of glass below the surface of the earth, and a number of private interests control it. That number, apparently, is getting smaller, and it's increasingly including not just traditional telecommunications companies but also content providers associated with the version of "the Internet" that exists in the browser. As Robert McMillan has eloquently argued in *Wired*, companies like Google, Facebook, and Netflix have been effectively constructing and using Internet "fast lanes" for a long time—their private networks directly connect to last-mile Internet Service Providers.[2]

Google has been purchasing dark fiber and building out its own fiber optic network, known as Google Fiber, for nearly a decade, and was involved in the building of a new submarine cable in Asia in 2010. It currently owns over 100,000 miles of cable globally. This is partly for the purposes of better connecting their own data centers to each other, but they also have pilot programs to bring high-speed fiber optic Internet to different cities in the United States.

Facebook has also invested in submarine cables and fiber networks, and in 2013 launched Internet.org, a consortium of mobile hardware manufacturers dedicated to "making affordable Internet access available to the two thirds of the world not yet connected." Reading the website and Zuckerberg's white papers about the initiative, one can easily imagine the original copy describing the two thirds of the world not yet connected *to Facebook*. In his paper *Is Connectivity [to Facebook] A Human Right?*, Zuckerberg frames this as a means to an end:

> *[Even] when they can afford it, many people who have never experienced the Internet don't know what a data plan is or why they'd want one. However, most people have heard of services like Facebook and messaging and they want access to them. If we can provide people with access to these services, then they'll discover other content they want and begin to use and understand the broader Internet.*[3]

Apparently for Internet.org, Facebook is the carrot that woefully ignorant non-Internet users will follow toward greater connectivity.

Internet.org's splashiest proposal for improving connectivity so far has been what for all intents and purposes could be called Skynet: small, solar-powered drones, capable of hovering for extended periods of time, beaming wireless Internet to the earth. To that end, both Google and Facebook have acquired two drone-manufacturing companies—Titan Aerospace by Google and Ascenta by Facebook[4]—the latter of which has become part of Internet.org's Connectivity Lab. Here, network infrastructure is no longer a tangle of dark fiber; it announces itself, it commands the sky.

While I'd love to believe this is an act of pure benevolence on the part of Internet.org, it is difficult to imagine why Facebook would flat-out acquire companies like Titan or Ascenta for this project if its resulting technology isn't meant to be proprietary. Facebook, in many ways, performs the functions of a state: it renders people into legible subjects, translating self-expression and interactions into structured, monetized data. While Zuckerberg and Internet.org assume that connectivity is a human right, being connected while remaining illegible to the network isn't.

3. Smart Cities and Their Discontents

Using the network as an instrument of legibility is, of course, neither inherently evil nor merely the purview of private companies. It's also a popular element of "smart cities," a term that seems to cover a lot of practices but broadly refers to the trend of municipalities employing networked technologies to improve infrastructure. This can range from traffic cameras with automatic license plate readers (ALPRs) and more efficient power grids to predictive policing software and massive centralized surveillance systems.

Level 3 Communications manhole and cable markings, lower Manhattan, 2014. Photograph by Ingrid Burrington.

Anthony Townsend, research fellow at NYU's Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management and author of *Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia*, observed that smart city rhetoric emerged around the same time as the global recession, when companies like IBM and Cisco that previously made money selling IT services and hardware to corporations turned their marketing attentions toward municipalities. That isn't to say that smart cities are pure snake oil—governments absolutely should think of the network as a municipal concern. But with the rise of the smart city comes a particular context, and it means that public services are increasingly reliant on privately owned network infrastructure and technologies.

4. Municipal Networks

Some cities have chosen to take control of their own networks rather than establish public-private partnerships. More probably would, if not for the state-level laws that essentially ban municipal broadband in 19 states. The model cities frequently cited in studies of community-level broadband are often not major metropolitan areas but smaller cities that cable companies have less incentive to dominate. (As Christopher Mitchell at the Institute for Local Self-Reliance has noted, "Comcast and AT&T don't really care about Chattanooga. They care a lot about Philadelphia. That's where they do their best business."[5]). Some of these initiatives received funding from the 2009 economic stimulus program, which allocated $7 billion to improving broadband infrastructure.

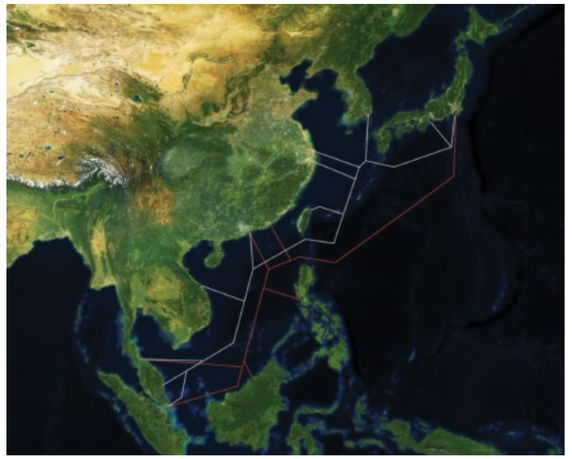
Most of these initiatives have operated through existing utility companies—because, well, who better to operate city infrastructure than infrastructure providers? Chattanooga, TN, home to one of the more famous local fiber networks, actually began the project as an effort by electricity company EPB to improve its existing power grid.

While the FCC has been vilified for "breaking the Internet" with its proposed net neutrality rulemaking, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler has been a champion of municipal broadband.[6] Wheeler's support seems to be more about market forces than loving community-driven infrastructure:

> *The facts speak for themselves: competition works—when it is allowed to. Throughout the country where we have seen competitive broadband providers come in to a market, prices have gone down and broadband speeds have gone up.*[7]

Making infrastructure needs a business decision goes hand-in-hand with smart city rhetoric, and the neoliberal implications of smart cities don't disappear when cities own their own networks. Here's a passage from a 2012 article about Chattanooga's fiber network:

> *For example, [the city] put together a series of initiatives to monitor and control downtown areas. At one downtown park, the police can adjust the lighting to discourage flash mobs from gathering, as well as scan license plates on cars that are parked in the lot. This helps increase the perception of safety, not to mention discourage potential criminals.*[8]



The Southeast Asia Japan Cable (a submarine cable partially owned by Google) and the Asia Pacific Gateway (a submarine cable partially owned by Facebook). Submarine cable data from Telegeography, satellite imagery from Mapbox.

Infrastructure is political, and if the body that controls that infrastructure happens to believe in policing "quality of life" through its smart grid, it doesn't really matter if it's IBM or the city of Chattanooga doing it.

But networks don't necessarily have to be either in the hands of private companies or the hands of the state. In a rural region of the United Kingdom, Broadband for the Rural North (B4RN) has been building a gigabit community broadband network, operating as a not-for-profit cooperative.[9]

5. If Not Infrastructure, Then Territory

A transportation reporter friend once told me that his newsroom has a policy that strongly discourages using the word "infrastructure" in their reporting. The logic, apparently, is that most people don't care about infrastructure the way that, say, a transportation reporter or I care about it. And it's understandable. Infrastructure is designed to be ignored. The word basically breaks down as "built things, below"—and that's where it tends to remain: below. Below our feet and below all the other priorities we have in our day-to-day lives. We care about it when it isn't working, we forget about it when it is.

It's perhaps unreasonable to expect a public to *constantly* think about its infrastructure. I don't recite an explanation of alternating current every time I switch on a light or actively contemplate the wonders of environmental engineering every time I drive on a highway. But the systems that maintain the power grid and maintain highways are, if bureaucratic, at least supposed to be legible to citizens. As artist Julian Oliver has described it, "With every receding seam, from cable to code, comes a techno-political risk. Without edges we cannot know where we are and nor through whom we speak."[10]

What has since 2002 been called *network neutrality* in today's tech landscape might be better understood as a *land grab*. We have a hard time seeing the territory at stake because the lines aren't drawn with flags or railroad spikes, but with glass threads and protocols and code running in the background. But these glass threads run through our cities and our homes, they have never been neutral and they have never been truly *ours*. I'm not sure that the demand for a neutral network corresponds to a demand for a network that belongs to its users. But to even begin to imagine how to create that network, that Internet we seem to think is ours, requires being able to see the network for what it is now.

1) http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303863404577285260615058538
2) http://www.wired.com/2014/06/net_neutrality_missing/
3) https://fbcdn-dragon-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-ash3/851575_228794233937224_51579300_n.pdf
4)http://www.tkostocks.com/google-gets-titan-facebook-acquires-ascenta/
5) http://www.citylab.com/cityfixer/2013/03/why-are-there-no-big-cities-municipal-broadband-networks/4857/
6) https://www.fcc.gov/blog/removing-barriers-competitive-community-broadband
7) http://www.fcc.gov/blog/removing-barriers-competitive-community-broadband
8)http://readwrite.com/2012/08/13/how-chattanooga-transformed-itself-into-americas-first-gig-city#awesm=~oleJwEJ6BTfCzO
9) http://b4rn.org.uk/
10) http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/may/20/stealth-infrastructure/

On Point 2.03

By Mark Van Proyen

I still don't know what identity means, and it is possible that I never will. With that much said, I can now confess that I am at long last starting to get a sense of what other people think it means in relation to contemporary art. Okay, maybe thinking is too generous a verb in this context, but if we substitute the word "believe" we are conceding too much to the narcissism of small differences writ momentarily large. So thinking it is, and like all thinking, it invites more thinking that takes the form of questions. Here is the first question: is it imaginable that the complexity of any human subject can be boiled down to a simplistic demographic cipher (which is what most people are unconsciously pointing to when they use the word "identity")?

Of course not. Even as it is also impossible to ignore the ways in which the conditions of ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation exert powerful influences on the formation of any given person's subjectivity. This does not mean that those things should be assumed to be the equivalent of or a substitute for a fully formed subjectivity, but they are nonetheless undeniable as factors in those formations, but only up to a point. And that point is crossed when the condition of difference embedded in the term "identity" becomes a tautological goal in itself.

Sometimes the avatars of identity art show a few too many cards, and in so doing reveal a kind of opportunism of reverse entitlement that is simply another form of the same thing. The chief one of these is the capitulation to bureaucratic mandates calling for demonstrations of diversity that can be understood in statistically quantifiable terms.

Where did these come from you might ask? There are many answers, but the one that looms largest is the one that got its start in the early 1990s. That was the time when the political controversy over public funding for the arts was highly pitched, and the defenders of that mode of funding were casting about for allies in a battle that it was doomed to lose. That was the moment when the term "multiculturalism" came into common use, and its cynical purpose was to recruit disenfranchised constituencies into the fray by showing that the Art world was actually a big inclusive tent of democratic responsivity. But no one bought that line of reasoning, including the National Endowment for the Arts, which published its own fact-finding in a document titled American Canvas in 1997. (http://arts.gov/publications/american-canvas).

The conclusion? The art world was every bit as elitist as its critics accused it of being, at least according to the focus groups that the Endowment convened around the country who contributed to the report.

Then came the art market, but not the old art market of genteel picture merchants and bloviating art critics ("Ah, the good old days!"). The art market of which I now speak is the current art market, the one overfed on neoliberal steroids, and the one that presumed to let money resolve the tension between the idea of a common history and the multiplicity of disparate histories that is a far more realistic reflection of how Americans live their collective lives. Couched in the barest of over-the-top over-simplifications, it is the difference between those who would proclaim that there is a fundamental universality in art versus those who would proclaim that difference is the only thing art needs to uphold.

Insofar as finding a consensus on this issue is concerned, money succeeded where artists and critics failed. It succeeded because of its power of sheer expansion, which simultaneously erased and amplified the idea of difference by atomizing and diluting it beyond any meaningful recognition. Instead, what we now get is an Art world that is very much like cable TV: thousands of channels of nothing to see: Facebook writ large.

The most recent Whitney Biennial of American Art was a particularly fascinating illustration of how this new Art world wants to present itself. In general, Whitney Biennials come in two types: most frequently, they fall into the category of "business as usual" biennials, which represent something that looks like a consensus opinion of what the "now" is supposed to look like according to some agreed-upon algebra of influence peddling. More rare are those that strategically disrupt the illusion of that consensus. The two examples that come to mind are Elisabeth Sussman's 1993 "politically correct" biennial, which tackled the then-thorny issue of multiculturalism, and Larry Rinder's 2002 "WTF" biennial, which was basically an indoor Burning Man minus the fun. Given this dichotomy, it is clear that the most recent iteration of the exhibition that everybody loves to hate is of the business-as-usual type.

Certainly, it has some novel twists. One of these is that it is really three separate exhibitions on three separate floors organized by three separate curators, all of whom are from outside New York, at least at the time when they were given their tasks. Those curators were Stuart Comer, Anthony Elms, and Michelle Grabner, respectively from London, Philadelphia, and Chicago (soon after being named Whitney co-curator, Comer accepted a position as Curator of Media and Performance Art at MoMA NY).

Everybody and their mother's mother has already reviewed the exhibition, so I will refrain from doing so here except to say that, like almost everybody else, I too thought that Grabner's 5th floor was the best of the three, but that may only be the faint praise of someone who appreciated the several examples of "chickstraction," included therein, especially the piece by Amy Sillman whose title I forgot to write down.

That much said, the dominant impression of all three floors was that of . . . a biennial, which for someone who sees a lot of these kinds of exhibitions, has become a predictably over-stylized curatorial look. I call it the Chinese menu method of curation, where selections are made from column a, b, e, etc—all of which are deployed to placate various perceived needs of topical and stylistic representation so as to represent a quasi-consensus version of "the diversity of current production." After one sees about a dozen international examples of such exhibitions, one can start to see how some of the work of some curators start to resemble the way many film directors work, that is, by retelling the same story over and over by using the same actors over and over to play slightly different version of the same roles.

Because Grabner is an artist-writer whose chief claim to curatorial fame stems from her co-organization of a space called *The Suburban* at her home in Oak Park, Illinois, we can exempt her from the above-mentioned directorial metaphor, mostly because the programming at *The Suburban* has always been explicitly anti-curatorial in nature—that is, it simply is a space in which single artists are invited to use for site-specific projects. It is doubtful that Grabner will ever harbor the desire to organize another large exhibition at a large institution. Why? Well, the answer lies in a Rashomon-like picture of events gleaned from multiple sources, some of which requiring that I honor requests for confidentiality. The media attention that these events have received has come close to overshadowing the actual exhibition.

From left: Manolo Bustamante, Donald Farnsworth, Chuck Close, Sienna Shields, President Barack Obama, and Era Farnsworth. Courtesy of the Internet.

[From left] The 2014 Whitney Biennial Curators; Stuart Comer, Michelle Grabner, and Anthony Elms. Courtesy of the Whitney Museum, NYC.

Soon after Grabner finalized the selections for her part of the biennial, there was some confusion. It seems that Grabner invited an African-American artist named Siena Shields to participate in the film and video screening that has always been an adjunct program to the main exhibition. At some point between the invitation and the opening of the exhibition, Shields organized a group called *The Yams Collective* (derived from "How do You Say I Am [i.e. "Yam"] African American?"), which was then given author's credit for the video, with Shields indicated as director. But when Shields and Co. found out that Grabner's portion of film and video program was slated to take place in May near the end of the show's run, she balked. Last minute arrangements were made to have special screenings of the work take place during the exhibition's openings week (March 3 through 9)—a consideration that was not made available to the other artists presenting in the film and video screening organized by Grabner. It was only after that point that Shields and her collaborators "withdrew" their 54 minute color video titled *Good Stock on the Dimension Floor: An Opera* in explicit protest of the "white supremacist" ideology of the hosting museum. Alarm bells!

To make matters worse, it became widely assumed that this withdrawal was motivated by another of Grabner's inclusions, that being one of Joe Scanlan's Donelle Woolford pieces. Donelle Woolford is a fictitious African American artist created by Scanlan and played off-and-on by two female actors who Scanlan hired and for whom he creates art-props, sometimes taking the form of "self-portrait" photographs. It is easy to see how some might find Scanlan's project offensive, but as it turns out, that was only a part of what was really going on.

The question that needs to be asked is this: where did Shields get the idea that it would be okay for her take such advantage of the situation in the first place? It bears mentioning here that she recently married Chuck Close, the 74-year-old painter of photorealistic portraits who has been chairbound since suffering a severe spinal artery collapse in 1988 (Shields is 38 years old). Close has rightfully earned an estimable position in the history of American art, and he has had a longstanding, mutually beneficial relationship to the Whitney. Clearly, he is one of the very few artists who could get any director, curator or trustee of that museum to return his call in less than a minute, and that leads one to speculate if such calls might have been made in the case of the recent controversy. Maybe they were, or maybe the situation was born of simple miscommunication, but either way, it seems that Shields was a bit quick on the draw insofar as playing the race card was concerned, especially since she benefited from some very special treatment that was not accorded to other late presenters in the Biennial's film and video program.

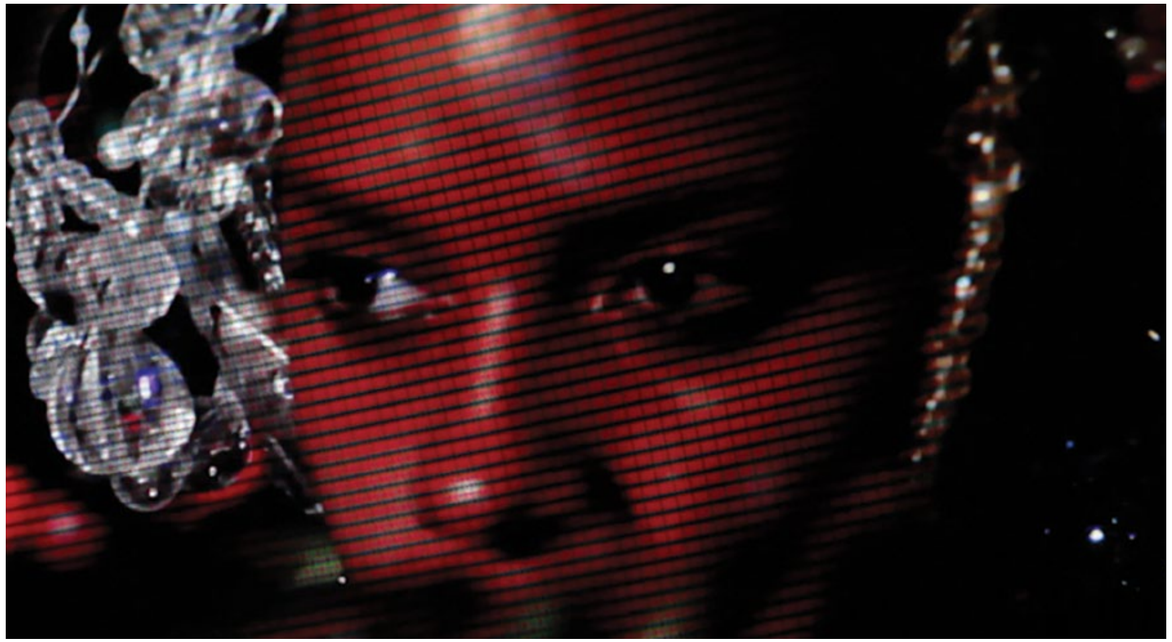
It is not that the Whitney or almost every other U.S. museum has under-represented the contributions of African-American artists as well as those of every other namable non-white male group; of that there is no doubt. It is that making an assumption that one has the right to unilaterally redress that situation without according any of the professional respect that should be due to others, and then covering-up the awkwardness of crying hungry with a loaf of bread under her arm with strident accusations. Bad form to say the least.

We can file this episode under the category of a larger Art world problem. For too long, the discourse *de jure* has focused on the question of who gets to be an artist at the expense of a failure to address another one that grows ever-more pressing as time moves forward, that being how do we identify and describe a successful work of art *as a work of art; that is, as a model organization of experience undertaken for rhetorical purposes?*

The threadbare notion that a work of art can be adequately described as something made by an artist grows less and less tenable as time moves on, especially since we now live in a moment where anybody who takes a Facebook selfie can in theory proclaim themselves to be an artist.

Obviously, there are no easy answers here, which is, no doubt one of the reasons why so few are comfortable with the question, but the need for its asking grows evermore urgent. In any event, in fairness to Shields, I am here including an extract from an interview with Ben Davis that she recently gave on Artnet.com (http://news.artnet.com/art-world/the-yams-on-the-whitney-and-white-supremacy-30364)

SIENNA SHIELDS: Michelle Grabner came and visited my studio last summer. And the work that she saw was collaborative in nature. When she asked me to be a part of the Whitney Biennial, I thought about it for a while and decided it would be more interesting to me—and more true to the nature of the work—to participate as a collective. Also, I was pissed off about the history of the Whitney and its lack of any kind of initiative in changing its white supremacist attitudes. So we formalized our collective and group to not only do this project, the movie, but to use this opportunity to infiltrate an institution and to experience firsthand what happens in the art world in terms of white supremacy, to expose how the doors are closed for the majority.



HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN?, Good Stock on the Dimension Floor: An Opera, 2014. Video, color, sound; 54 minutes. Collection of the artists. © HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN?

Achievement, Failure, Aspiration:
Three Attempts to Understand Contemporary Art (Part 1)

By John Rapko

At the invitation of *SFAQ*'s magnificent publisher Andrew McClintock, I have made the following selection from my little book *Logro, Fracaso, Aspiración: Tres Intentos de Entender el Arte Contemporáneo* [*Achievement, Failure, Aspiration: Three Attempts to Understand Contemporary Art*], published in 2014 by the Universidad de Los Andes. The book is based upon and closely follows a series of lectures I gave at the Universidad in Bogotá in late February, 2008, at the invitation of my friend and former student, Fernando Uhía. This book and the lectures upon which it is based are part of my philosophical project of understanding contemporary art as a kind of *art*, something continuous with the rest of the world's art and something that is not reducible to some other sort of practice or sphere of life, such as economics or politics.

This way of framing the project is polemical. I have always rejected what seems to me to be the two most general assumptions concerning contemporary art. The first of these is that contemporary art is a kind of *sui generis* phenomenon whose paradigms are a set of works by Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, and some conceptual artists. By contrast I consider these works as, so to speak, conceptually parasitic upon more basic works and practices from which they arise and upon which they play; these more basic works include those of Bertolt Brecht, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Smithson, and Eva Hesse. The second assumption I reject concerns artistic meaning: with most prevailing conceptions of the aim of contemporary art, artistic meaning is treated as reducible without remainder to other kinds of meaning, whether political, social, or therapeutic. By contrast I follow philosophers such as Richard Wollheim and Paul Crowther in thinking that before artworks can take on these other kinds of meanings and functions they must already have a life of their own, one that is created in their irreducibly artistic meanings.

To treat contemporary art as *art* implies many things, but first of all it means to understand contemporary works as arising from and articulating the three great roots of artistic meaning: representation, expression, and pleasure. Secondly, it means to see the works as part of an irreducible complex that links artistic making (the marking of surfaces and the creation of appearances) and the viewers' responses. In the first chapter I analyze something of the achievement of William Kentridge as distinctive in contemporary art, and focus, in explicit opposition to what seems to me the most intellectually sophisticated account of this achievement by Rosalind Krauss (as well as implicitly to the standard sub-intellectual, reductivist accounts of the art world's intelligentsia, such as curator Okwui Enwezor), on Kentridge's conception of the creative process. On this explication, the creative process in contemporary art, with Kentridge's conception as one major exemplar, is something bearing multiple powerful and not readily reconcilable imperatives; as marked by contingency, and as expressive of a distinctive political conception. The following is the English language version of pp. 33-37 of the book:

Part 1:

Kentridge makes the creative process central to his account of how his practice gains significance. The work begins with a desire—the desire to draw. This desire is Kentridge's, and must be thought of as both dispositional and episodic. In its dispositional dimension, the desire to draw has a core expression in Kentridge's making successive marks upon a surface. Once in place, the desire is given some content by the registration of some contingent event. Once a drawing is initiated, the desire becomes part of a more complex demand, to maintain responsiveness to the world, but also for Kentridge to respond to what is emerging in the marking, and to mark in such a way that marking has no evident terminus.

Kentridge repeatedly characterizes the process of drawing as a passage from knowing to seeing. At its most general, the phrase "from knowing to seeing" suggests a characteristic movement of the mind from grasping something in light of some classificatory concept to the rendering of the qualitative aspects of the phenomenon that are irrelevant to the classification. At this level, Kentridge sounds as if he's giving a version of Adorno's negative dialectics as a kind of going through and then passing beyond the concept. But Kentridge puts more stress than Adorno typically does on responsiveness to what is emerging in the very act of making. One might think of Kentridge's drawing like this: having begun to draw, one has already marked, and the marked surface is seen as bearing a partial responsiveness to a prior situation, but also as having certain dynamics, and certain expressive potentials. Now the drawer monitors the marked surface, 'knows it as such', but then (or perhaps one should say, 'then', as what follows may be experienced simultaneously in the 'knowing') 'sees something'. What is 'seen' is a potential that needs to be actualized, a dynamism that needs to be extended, or a dissonance that needs resolving, etc. The next mark aims to register that act of seeing. Having been made, the mark alters the immediately prior situation. It now is the sufficient condition of a new situation, with the dynamics of the passage from knowing to seeing ready to be enacted again, monitored by the drawer's gaze.

So far, this drawing of Kentridge's seems simply accumulative. The need for the erasure of what has been made immediately prior to the marking arises from the more basic need for visibility. Contra Krauss, Kentridge's work is not a palimpsest, but something more like Penelope's weaving, with the addition that the undoing remains marked in what is woven. And it is of course the visible erasure, which gives the figures in Kentridge's films the sense that they are tracing their own pasts, now visible, that are so striking to viewers. This process of visible erasure seems to bear three kinds of primary expressiveness. First, it marks a distinction between Kentridge's practice and the typical practice of animation, wherein the gap between one rendering and the next is so slight as to escape perception, or when detectable, appears as a jumpiness in the temporal unfolding of the depicted actions. The image carries the Brechtian aura of something made, with some aspect or aspects of its making made explicit. Second, it introduces a sense of the image as bearing marks of its own temporal movements. After the initial presentation of the drawing, the depicted movements seem to carry trails of their most recent past movements and physiognomies. And third, it heightens one's awareness that the image is something made to some extent by hand. The 'crudeness' of the drawing, together with its evident temporal unfolding, highlights the facture of the image. The image is vividly something made by a human hand, monitored by human eyes, and addressed to like eyes.

It is in this third kind of expressiveness that Kentridge sees one aspect of the political significance of the work. He links this with a Brechtian exposure of the device of making. His particular route to this was through earlier work in the puppet theater, when as in Bunraku, the puppet's handlers were visible. Kentridge refers to this as a double performance—an action is presented, and the making of the action likewise. Unlike Brecht, Kentridge does not make the claim that the exposure of the device somehow 'produces' a distanced, reflective, and critical spectator. The effect is rather an "unwilling suspension of disbelief"—disbelief, that is, in the claim that because the action is exposed as a construct and a fiction, it thereby loses its psychologically gripping quality and blocks the viewer's perceptual and imaginative involvement. The suspension is "unwilling" in the sense that it happens quasi-instinctually in attending to the spectacle. Even though one maintains awareness of the artifactuality of the image, all the same one is drawn into the depicted world.

There are then two ways in which some valuable political dimension might be ascribed to Kentridge's work. Negatively, one might point to an aspect, one that Kentridge values, of exposing contradictions. As Alain Badiou has put it, every age has its illusions, the exposure of which might be thought of as a broadly cultural task. Positively, one might point to the sense of a kind of memory and "working-through" that the films model.

However, this topical dimension seems unlikely to sustain interest across generations, and may be no more important to the artistic effectiveness of the works than Brecht's equation of capitalists with gangsters in *The Three-Penny Opera*. Here it would help to recall something of the claims that have been made for the significance of the fact that artworks are (mostly) embodied in media, and accordingly available to perception. Richard Wollheim has enthusiastically put forth what he unfashionably calls an essentialist account of artistic media. He suggests that there are at least two kinds of judgments made with regard to artworks: judgments of taste, which have to do with whether and to what degree one happens to care for this particular 'type' of work, and judgments of interest, which relate to the artist's uses of the particular medium in which he or she works. One charge that has been made, most notably by Julian Stallabrass, against major strains of contemporary art is the artist's use of a technique of 'one-offs', where some highly unusual and highly marked material is worked in some non-traditional way(s), and one senses in the seeing of it, however striking the work is, that this way of working has no future; once one has, say, made a 'piece' that consists of people running through tires in Central Park, or having oneself dumped on the freeway in a sack, that's all there is to it. Now, if one judges that that way of working has no future, it also has no present, for the unanswerable question arises of whether there are better and worse ways of doing it. If not, or not in a way that anyone could care about, then the activity cannot be thought of as governed by criteria of success (and failure). If it is not possible to fail, it is not possible to succeed.

John Rapko's book *Logro, Fracaso, Aspiración: Tres Intentos de Entender el Arte Contemporáneo* [*Achievement, Failure, Aspiration: Three Attempts to Understand Contemporary Art*], was published by the Universidad de Los Andes in 2014.

William Kentridge, drawing for *Tide Table*, 2003. Charcoal on paper, 48 x 63 in. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York / Paris

Engraved Ochre, From Blombos Cave, South Africa, , 4 in long. C. 75,000 B.C.E. Considered the earliest known act of art making.

Gezi Park: One Year Later

Gregory Buchakjian, photograph of Istanbul's Tarlabaşı neighborhood that was due to be demolished. May 6, 2013, a few weeks before the Gezi Park demonstrations started. Courtesy of the artist.

On the 28th of May last year a number of environmentalists gathered to protest the demolition of Gezi Park in Istanbul. The ensuing events were of a proportion that became impossible for the world to ignore. Everyone was watching Istanbul, for it seemed to address an uncertainty that resonates with our times, a crisis. A crisis is an encounter with something that is not in the past or the future, yet not of the present. The word comes to us from Latin Medicine; a moment of criticality, where a judgment must be made at a junction where it is unclear of the outcome.

A couple of weeks after the Gezi Park protests erupted I travelled to Istanbul on a whim after my original planned itinerary fell through. What I found was a tempestuous city between two places that are themselves momentarily undefined. "Asia" on one side, "Europe" on the other. It was here that I met Arie, an *homme de lettres* if there ever was one. From what I would come to understand, Arie is not really "based" anywhere. His entire life appeared to me to be always transitory. In other words, he was someone decidedly of our times.

As I write these words thousands are being displaced, ripped from their homeland. Closer to home, those who are more fortunate are being evicted from their homes. Perhaps most radical of all however, is that those who are more privileged still are also being displaced; the technology that engenders our age and fuels our economies has not left anyone untouched as it rips us from our bearings, splaying the pieces of our identity across a global field. It is no longer the case that man is not master in its own home, for man no longer knows where home is. Our thoughts are everywhere, and yet nowhere, floating in what is now "the" cloud.

This issue of *SFAQ* is the "Asian art" issue, but more and more such designations have become meaningless. Indeed, it is precisely a crisis of meaning that defines our time. A hall of mirrors with no exit, and for many—no entrance. It is this mode of reflexivity and reflectivity that is so encapsulated by last years protests in Istanbul, a country that projects, as our narrator imparts, "Asia on the walls of Europe, and the other way around, without ever truly arriving."

Peter Dobey
San Francisco, 2014.

Gregory Buchakjian, *Battle of the Hotels, Gardens of the Excelsior Hotel*, from the *Abandoned Dwellings* in *Beirut Series*, 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

By Arie Amaya-Akkermans

It all started with a conversation. Photographer and art historian Gregory Buchakjian had come to Istanbul from Beirut and we walked around the Galata neighborhood, settled since Late Antiquity, taking notice of architectural details in the decaying buildings. What used to be the thriving Jewish and Greek quarters of a once cosmopolitan city, Galata now felt like it was disappearing. It was not that the quarters were empty, on the contrary hordes of tourists filled its corridors and ubiquitous boutique hotels. It was that the old mansions, many turned to squats or vandalized, sat crumbling, sealed, and abandoned. Their presence turned to invisible space that was neither private nor public. For Buchakjian, whose photographic work and research focuses on abandoned houses in post-war Beirut, the process at work in Istanbul was similar to the fate of his hometown, and indeed, much of the region: The obliteration of public spaces spans across much of the Middle East, only to be replaced by liquid and easily malleable commercial venues without memory or history. The model of Gulf architecture is cookie cutter: Vertical spaces heavily guarded behind VIP walls, ground spaces scrubbed of all historical references and virtually no sites for general assembly.

That was in May of 2013, and Istanbul still seemed content. Yet one could feel a certain anxiety, a rush, a sense of delay, a historical "accumulation." Down from Galata, around the port neighborhood of Karaköy, active since Byzantine times, one could observe Istanbul closer to its edges: The industrial warehouses, and once upon a time mansions overlap with cheap hotels, hordes of baristas, art galleries and traditional working-class coffee shops. A different building seems to be disappearing each week, the rents double and triple so that artists need to move further away from the center, and something of an imbalance remains. It doesn't seem a natural development, but a frenzy; lust for aluminum and glass.

"What is a monument?" Asked the Izmir-born artist Hale Tenger to Buchakjian, over lunch in Karaköy, or, how do you immortalize the past? Especially a past of violence? Where is the alchemy of empty spaces, where specters materialize on their own? The grand stone structures of the past centuries, that are now vandalized and politically invisible, serve more as warnings than examples.

Only a few months earlier, Tenger had finished a large scale installation for a group exhibition at ARTER. *I Know People Like This Ill* (2013) was a labyrinthine archive of photographs, printed on medical imaging film and displayed as grids on luminous walls. The images acted as a showcase of political violence in Turkey's public space that spanned from the period of the military coup of the 1980s all the way through to the protests in Diyarbakir (an emblematic Kurdish stronghold), which took place only a few weeks before completing the installation. Although the images were shocking by nature, the most arresting aspect of the installation was the display. There was something surgically neutral and indifferent about it, a sort of anti-memory: Everything that can be exhibited can, all the same, be easily archived and forgotten. Strategically placed at the entrance—and exit—of *ARTER*, the enormous 45 -meter-long installation is practically unavoidable, clearly visible from the pedestrian sidewalk of Istiklal Avenue, the main commercial avenue of central Istanbul. The installation is a mirror of Istanbul's turbulent memory: A collection of public silences. You might as well think it's a historiography, and not necessarily a trace of the present.

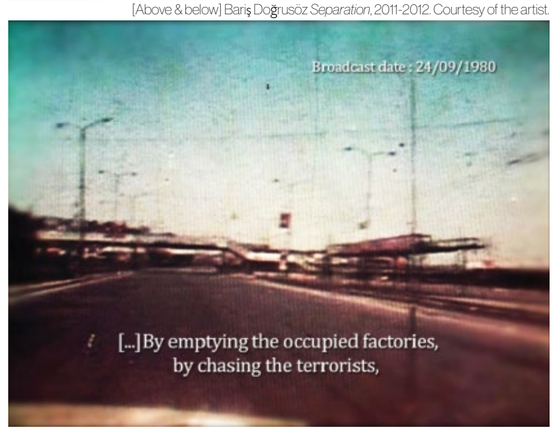
A few weeks later, still in May, during a visit to the studio of French-Turkish video artist Barış Doğrusöz, he introduced me to his unfinished multi-installation project *Heure de Paris*, which is an attempt at a historical indexation of televisual archive materials related to Turkey during the period of the military dictatorship—a procedure in principle similar to Tenger's. It was a glimpse into an apparently remote past, void for latency. My main interest was in Doğrusöz's first two single-channel installations, part of the project: *Separation* (2011-2012), a film in the "road movie" genre, almost fictional, opening the territory of "travel" in Turkey during the 1980s, at a time when it was impossible to obtain real-time images from the country and all the footage was shot almost secretly from a car. Complementarily, *The Map and the Territory* (2012-2013), is a look into the way how geography and cartography shape human narratives, collecting all the maps used in news broadcast in France to explain and provide geo-strategic information about Turkey when images were (quite often) missing, for it was only until 1994 that Turks in Europe received images from Turkish channels.

While the images of political violence (Tenger) or the absence of images in general (Doğrusöz) pointed toward an open-ended archive of the past (the past is "near," "tangible," "fragile," unlike history which is solidly foregone), the gesture turned on its own head: In the early morning of May 28th, a sit-in assembled at the iconic Gezi Park (one of the last remaining green corners in downtown Istanbul), was broken by the Turkish police, which met the activists (at the time not even protesters) with great violence, burning their tents, dispersing crowds with tear gas and forbidding access to the park. What started almost innocently as a demonstration for public space, quickly grew into a nation-wide protest that lasted throughout the entire summer, brought the country to the brink of a political crisis which has by no means been averted, mobilized hundreds of thousands, and further polarized a society still traumatized by years of dictatorship and autocracy. The haunting images of Hale Tenger's *I Know People Like This Ill* would easily leave the condition of 'past' and become seamless with the image-repertoire of present day Istiklal Avenue: Police assaults, armed thugs in civilian clothes, state violence, intimidation of the press, unlawful detentions, and above all, the public silences that have characterized Turkish politics. Public space became here not a metaphor for the old public square, but for the whole arena of political participation in a country struggling with democracy.

While both the size of protests and the scale of police violence increased exponentially, little was known in the outside world as the Turkish media, heavily controlled by the state, broadcasted documentary films and music contests. Not unlike Doğrusöz's *The Map and the Territory*, international media relied on old images from Turkey, maps, and amateur videos and photographs from the protests that provided little more than a snapshot of a territory that had indisputably opened and swallowed the asphyxiating appearance of normalcy. While visiting Barış early in May, we discussed the (political) life cycles of Istanbul, along the fault lines of an earthquake, which historically, has destroyed Istanbul once every century. Prognosticated already in 2006, it was in early 2013 when scientists pinpointed the starting point of Istanbul's next major earthquake on the North Anatolian fault. What if the premonition of crisis is more internal than we expected?

Earlier video works by Doğrusöz confirm this certainty of instability, by exploring architectural surfaces as emotional conditions, presenting Istanbul as a concavity or as quicksand, in spite of its apparent continuous historicity. Similarly, Tenger's installations, re-locating histories of violence in Anatolia; the Kurdish question: the status of women and of missing persons confuse the outside with the inside, and blur the entrance and the exit. It is not that art-

[Above & below] Barış Doğrusöz *Separation*, 2011-2012. Courtesy of the artist.



Hale Tenger, *I Know People Like This III*, 2013, at ARTER, Istanbul, in *Envy, Enmity, Embarrassment*, courtesy of Cem Turgay.

works could possibly open this abysmal breach, but they are inscribed often with the traces of the unresolved, which might awaken at any time.

As the protests raged on, artists took part in the demonstration and voiced their dissatisfaction against the policies of not only the Turkish government, but beyond Turkey, the dissatisfaction is general, almost a condition. All this raises the first order question: is it possible, under the current conditions of capitalism, to reimagine the political? Secondly, what is the possible role of contemporary artists, the ambassadors par excellence of capitalism, free market, globalization and mobility, in such a process?

Art dealer Feza Velicangil, owner of the young Istanbul gallery Sanatorium, noted that "We cannot see any reflection of Gezi in artistic production, with very few exceptions. What happened in Gezi has not been properly understood by society; it is just the beginning of an ongoing period." In agreement with Velicangil is Tankut Aykut (formerly of Dirimart Gallery) who opened his own space in 2014. In his own words: "Gezi was a unique tinder in many senses; but for it to have a substantial impact, a true change of mindset needs to take place within the art community. It was influential and inspiring, but we miss notions and concepts for any profound discussion that may lead to a significant change. And I mean it." Fulya Erdemci, the curator of the much contested 13th Istanbul Biennial, which attempted to tackle public space and "public alchemy," also insisted that there was no relation between Gezi and the biennial which had been planned long in advance. For Erdemci, it is too premature to judge the effect of Gezi on art; it might take ten years or might as well have never happen. Finally, Velicangil remarks: "All sorts of panels, seminars and occasional talks eventually end up with the Gezi issue- the issue of what Gezi is and what it is not is questioned."

While artistic practices were undoubtedly influenced by the present tense, they did not necessarily convene with the public domain, and there is little consolation in calling Gezi Park a living biennial or an artwork, for the destabilizing index of reality, however poetic, is all too omnipresent. Revolutionary fervor, not merely an effect but also an affect, belongs in the politics of the extraordinary and the miraculous, making life under conditions of revolution and war one thousand times more bearable than the lethal inexorability of the everyday. But on a more sober assessment, the end of the protests did not simply wane as a fortuitous event. As with everything in political history, there are no ready-made solutions that do not come in Pandora boxes. Beyond the highly volatile polarization of the country, which had been in the works for a long time, Turks have developed a vocabulary of resistance which is neither elitist nor populist, but deeply embedded in pop culture and lacking the sense of self-pity and helplessness of the Arab uprisings.

A vocabulary of resistance is, nonetheless, not all of what it takes to rebuild a political reality. Such a reconstruction might hold the very last possibility for contemporary art to emerge with an impetus of historical latency before it is swallowed by the technological imagination, a process nearly complete. Yet contemporary art and its relational objects can function beyond mere allegory (or cynicism) and serve as extensions of territory in order to dwell in that breach between what has passed and what is possible, the fragmentary and the architectural. In Hera Büyüktaşçıyan's site specific installation *In Situ* (2013), which opened only a few weeks before the protests began, the artist used soap as the sole material to re-stage the famous Pangaltı Hamamı, a legendary hamam in the neighborhood of the same name, demolished in order to make space for a luxury hotel. Objects can trace human cosmologies and enclose or open spaces. The fact that all of these works were produced during the period immediately prior to the protests signals not foresight, but pregnancy and awareness about existing, no matter how comfortably, at the very edge of a fault line, now broken.

Protocinema's Mari Spirito, formerly the director of New York City's 303 Gallery, mused with us about Istanbul as we were trapped in her Galata apartment for three days when the neighborhood became one gigantic cloud of tear gas. Joining the protests as observers, we acknowledged the following: Some moments of Gezi Park were truly miraculous, like when they used the trees of the park to serve as a memorial for the assassinated in the unresolved mass murders of Diyarbakir and the bombing of Reyhanlı; had it been an art work, it couldn't have been more poetic. And the solidarity was incredible, but as Mari and I knew, this kind of solidarity emerges among people only once they have lost the world, and disappears as soon as they recover it. Located between Asia and Europe, "crossroads" is a term often associated with Istanbul, which Spirito challenged, calling it "not a crossroads, but a liminal space," that is, something like a boundary or an event horizon. Functioning as a hologram of both Europe and Asia, the Middle East and the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Mediterranean, the city functions as a large video-installation in which concave mirrors project Asia on the walls of Europe, and the other way around, without ever truly arriving.

Following the Gezi Park protests, and in the midst of the occasional tear gas events that continued in the city, there was a show that summed up the way we live now; Trevor Paglen's *Prototype for a Nonfunctional Satellite (Design 4; Build 4)* was installed at the pop-up site of Protocinema in Kurtuluş, a once cosmopolitan neighborhood of Armenians, Kurds, Jews, and Greeks, and one of the only corners left in downtown Istanbul that is free of re-landscaping, yet already threatened by demolition. Paglen, being an American artist and geographer whose work deals with surveillance sites and the re-imagining of technology, the association is not obvious. But the artificial satellite-cum-sculpture tells us something about the heart of the cosmology that Gezi attempted to resist: the technological imagination—functioning dually as architecture—is slowly eroding history; unleashing the reality of globalization in which impermanence and displacement will not be singularities, but an entirely new status quo, a structure of life in which the historical self will be but a relic.

While the idea of "place" has been effectively replaced by the ubiquity and mobility of "global citizens," the millions of individuals that exist in a third world to be found in every city below a certain economic marker experience what "place" means when different borders, fences, detention centers, slums, internment camps and invisible division lines appear and prevent them from crossing into the pure spaces of globalization. The place appears as an enclosure, a site of confinement, a boundary. However, what is certain is that a breach has opened up an interstice from which it is possible to see things how they really are; this is not a global revolution, for the concept that may have existed lost its historical force. It is certainly a marker, an incision that reminds us of the difference between political power and pure force, of which Gezi Park is only an example. It translates into the ultimate conviction, of living in a formless and uncertain world. Perhaps artists cannot change this brutal world, but recognizing it as such is the only way to make it home.

Beirut, 2014.

Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, *In Situ*, 2013, PIST/// Interdisciplinary Project Space, Istanbul.

Trevor Paglen, *Prototype for a Nonfunctional Satellite (Design 4; Build 3)*, 2013. Mylar, steel. Courtesy the artist, Altman Siegel, Metro Pictures, Galerie Thomas Zander, and Protocinema.

The Inaccessible Other: The Inside-Out Approach as Curatorial Framework

By Marie Martraire

During the 1990s, contemporary art from China received increased attention outside of the country, principally in the West, through a growing number of exhibitions and publications featuring works by artists from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.[1] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, either small venues or a minor part of larger exhibitions featured contemporary Chinese arts.[2] The 1989 Tiananmen events, the phenomenon of rapid globalization, and numerous economic reforms introducing market principles in China suddenly attracted Western institutions' interests in the early 1990s. These interests rapidly extended into artistic and cultural domains, and curiosity drew the organization of exhibitions and publications of artists from China. In the first half of the 1990s, exhibitions introduced contemporary art from China to Western audiences such as the touring blockbuster *China's New Art, Post-1989*, curated by Chang Tsongzung Johnson and Li Xianting, that initially opened in 1993 in Hong Kong.[3] Most of the accompanying exhibition catalog's texts positioned the featured art practices in terms of political, social, and cultural backgrounds, as well as historical development. Few only included essays about artworks or artists' practices.

In an article published in 2002, Britta Erickson highlighted that since the early 1990s, the reception of Chinese art in the West evolved under the shadows of three main issues, which appeared in Western exhibitions.[4] First, the search for exoticism in "the other," as announced by Edward Said, has been persisting in the West. Then, the violently suppressed Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 dominated the perception of China. Finally, Western art experts struggle seeing beyond the surface of contemporary Chinese art, considering it as mostly plagiaristic of Western art. Some Western exhibitions in the late 1990s distinguished themselves in their approach to contemporary art from China, apparently encouraging a more nuanced and multilayered appreciation of Chinese art. In the late 1990s, some shows introduced new angles or materials about contemporary Chinese art, such as particular themes or focuses on specific medias. For instance, *Die Hälfte des Himmels: Chinesische Künstlerinnen* at the Frauen Museum in Bonn (Germany, 1998) featured the works of numerous female artists, still underrepresented in the field today. *Another Long March: Chinese Conceptual and Installation Art in the Nineties* at the Breda Fundament Foundation (the Netherlands, 1997) also explored the specific medias of installation and performance.

Among these exhibitions, the blockbuster exhibition of the Chinese avant-garde *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* attracted a wide international attention.[5] Traveling from New York City to San Francisco between 1998 and 1999 and then to several other countries, this exhibition was branded as "the first major [show to introduce American audiences to] the dynamic new art being produced by artists in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and by Chinese artists who have emigrated [to the West] since the late 1980s."[6] Guest curated by art critic, curator, and scholar Gao Minglu, the show featured more than 80 new commissions and existing artworks produced between 1984 and 1998, such as paintings, installations, videos, and performance artworks. The core of the selected 58 artists consisted of the major artists of the '85 New Wave such as Geng Jianyi, Gu Wenda, Huang Yong Ping, Liu Wei, Long-Tailed Elephant Group, Qiu Zhijie, Xu Bing but also, to a lesser extent, younger artists such as Zhang Huan, Cao Yong, and Wu Tien-Chang.[7] As numerous group exhibitions featuring contemporary Chinese arts in Europe and North America, *Inside Out* also claimed to be the first and most representative large presentation of the recent art production from China providing a unique space to understand "China."[8] Similar assertions had been formulated before as a common promotional sentence for Western presentations of non-Western artwork. Nonetheless, the exhibition's singularity lied in distinguishing the artists' places of origins: mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong that were (and still are) often considered as a homogenous ensemble despite their differences. Moreover, *Inside Out* not only featured the works by major actors of the avant-garde of '85 New Wave. The exhibition was acclaimed due to the more nuanced understanding of contemporary art from China it provided to its visitors.

Fifteen years later, this article argues that the exhibition perpetuated a vision of contemporary Chinese arts framed by some general assumptions about the cultural particularism of the countries and the superiority of Western art. The local frameworks comprised the rapid modernization of the country through political and economic changes, as well as various conflicting East vs. West identities. This article focuses on and analyzes the content of the exhibition catalog as well as some reviews of the show published in *Frieze* and *SFGate*, to grasp the written art discourses at play. Doing so highlight the exhibition's writing and editorial strategies that framed Chinese artists as the "other" rather than approached individual artists who contributed actively to international exchanges in the field of contemporary art. Finally, investigating the art discourses at play in a supposedly progressive and respectful Western presentation of contemporary Chinese art is crucial today. It allows for assessing and reflecting on current curatorial and editorial strategies implemented in exhibitions of works by so-called non-Western artists in North America and Europe.

Two main and unequal parts divide the 220-page colored catalog of the exhibition *Inside Out*: the writings (about 120 pages) and the full-colored image reproductions of the artworks (about 70 pages). The publication does not include any formal descriptions or in-depth analysis of the works or extensive biographies of the artists in the show. The only given information about these works is located in the images' captions (name of the artist, title of the work, date of creation, medium, dimensions, and the provenance of the work) or the artists' three-line biographies (the artists' dates and places of birth, their current cities of residence, and their educational background). Three chronologies of key events respectively taking place between 1967 and 1998 in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are also included, highlighting the effort of the curatorial team to acknowledge and distinguish the different local contexts. Last but not least, the text section also gathers two introductory texts and nine essays by renowned Chinese art scholars and curators Norman Bryson, Chang Tsong-Zung, David Clarke, Gao Minglu, Hou Hanru, Leo Ou-Fan Lee, Victoria Y. Lu, and Wu Hung. Together, their essays aim at providing readers with some insights into China's local historical, artistic, and socio-cultural contexts of the previous 30 years. For instance, in his essay *Across Trans-Chinese Landscapes: Reflections on Contemporary Chinese Cultures*, writer Leo Ou-Fan Lee discusses the growing multiculturalism of China. He mentions the different experiences of inhabitants of the People's Republic of China (PRC) according to the regions, as well as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Chinese communities overseas.[9] He highlights the recent status of Hong Kong as China's first special administrative region since 1997, after 156 years of British colonial ruling.

As an audience member, being aware of and understanding the specific and unique local contexts in which the artists have been evolving might seem necessary to comprehend the content, idea and formal aspect of some of the works displayed in the exhibition. However, while insisting on their political and socio-economical developments of China, the catalog does not allow audiences to draw direct connection between the artworks and their contexts of production because of the lack of dedicated analysis. Rather, the catalog frames contemporary Chinese arts as "Chinese," "new," and "modern"—as the title of the exhibition also suggests—determined by the recent, singular, local developments of its production contexts. As Rey Chow, cultural critic specializing in 20th-century Chinese fiction and film and postcolonial theory, declared in 1998 in her essay *Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem*:[10]

> *There remains in the West, against the current façade of welcoming non-Western others into putatively interdisciplinary and cross-cultural exchanges, a continual tendency to stigmatize and ghettoize non-Western cultures precisely by way of ethnic, national labels. [...] Authors dealing with non-Western cultures [...] are compulsory required to characterize such issues with* geopolitical realism, *to stabilize and fix their intellectual and theoretical content by way of national, ethnic, or cultural location. Once such a location is named, however, the work associated with it is usually considered too narrow or specialized to warrant general interest.*

As guest curator Gao Minglu highlighted in his curatorial essay, the themes of the exhibition *Inside Out* were identity and modernity, focusing on the socio-politico singularities of contemporary mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Chinese communities overseas. *Geopolitical realism* then occurs through the usage of a specific rhetoric in the catalog, more specifically in the foreword and the introduction. Written respectively by the directors and curators of the organizing venues SFMOMA and Asia Society New York, these two texts indirectly indeed invited readers to recognize the signifiers of what they designate as "Chineseness" in the exhibition.[11] As the Western curators advising Gao Minglu stated in the introduction to describe the works on view: "The complex responses of the artists to political and social changes are discussed in detail in Gao Minglu's essays; here, it is sufficient to emphasize that the 'Chineseness' of these works varies enormously from artist to artist, movement to movement, and even from work to work."[12] In other words, viewers could expect to grasp this so-called "Chineseness" in the formal aspects of the artworks, as a distinguishing trait with "what came from the West." The artworks were *solely* defined as responses to some internal political and social changes, rather than active artistic explorations, for instance. The unique series by the conceptual Tactile Sensation Group, entitled *Tactile Art* (1988) and featured in the show, is a good example. Active in the late 1980s in Beijing, China, the conceptual art group formed by artists Wang Luyan and Gu Dexin explored the possibility of creating a rational language based on diagrams that would symbolically and visually represent some usual information and activities. Such materials included temperatures, sizes of nonspecific spaces, daily and customary situations (e.g. greeting someone by shaking hands), and the corresponding involved material components (e.g. hands). Until today, despite their inclusion in few major exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art,[13] few in-depth studies have been produced about the group's work over the years, either in Chinese, English, or any other language.[14] By selecting them, the major Western exhibition *Inside Out* could be considered as progressive and inclusive of less recognized practices, specifically as the field of conceptual art in China also lacked critical analysis. Yet, what does it mean to analyze their practice through the lens of political and social events here? Is that not reinforcing the initial idea of the artists to meet predetermined expectations of "Chineseness" in art? Here, the context of the United States at the end of the 1990s comes to mind, and more specifically the contemporary studies of racial and ethnic minorities that had emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. This field of studies had addressed the criticism that the role of Asian Americans, Blacks, Mexicans, Latinos, and Native Americans in American history was undervalued and ignored because of Euro-centric bias.[15] At the time of the exhibition *Inside Out*, this field of studies in the United States experienced numerous attacks due to the rise of the conservative movement in the country.[16] In *Inside Out*, this framing process of contemporary Chinese arts through labeling the artworks and art practices as "Chinese" and "new" might also echo the search for an exotic "other," as announced in the seminal essay *Orientalism* (1978), by literary theorist and public intellectual Edward Said. In this text, Said explains that Western writings created a romanticized system of imagery or ideas of "the Orient"—Middle Eastern, Asian, and North African societies. They attributed unalterable cultural "essences" to these societies, inferior to the West's, which had multiple imperial and colonial implications. In these pieces of writings, the use of the term "Chineseness" may echo this notion of "the other" mentioned by Said as it catalyzes and essentializes the cultural differences between China and the West as a distinguishing trait to analyze Chinese contemporary arts.

Yet, strictly speaking, the texts included in the catalog accompanying *Inside Out* do not directly depict mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in a romanticized or inferior way in comparison with Western arts. Rather, the foreword and introduction positioned contemporary Chinese arts from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas communities as a fusion and even direct "multifaceted and long-standing" interconnection with Western art, and their local cultural identities and traditions.[17] The use of the term "long-standing" is worth underlining; it applies differently according to mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, as the word "multifaceted" may have suggested. For example, artists in mainland China only witnessed the introduction of literature, philosophy, and art styles from the West in the 1980s, as one of the many consequences of the end of the Cultural Revolution and the attendant liberal economic and social reforms of the late 1970s.[18] When referring to the "long-standing" connection with the West, the texts of the *Inside Out* catalog mainly positioned the featured works as artistic "borrowings" from the West, stating that featured artists added some new elements to Western arts ("some new twist given").[19] This line of thought perhaps implies that viewers had to consider and evaluate the relation of artworks featured in *Inside Out* to their Western counterparts.

Going further, this perspective may also suggest that the exhibited works could not only be innovative in relation to their own cultural contexts, reaffirming the dominance of Western concepts of modernism (the "norm") in the contemporary art world. Numerous Westerns reviewer of the show, consciously or less so, voiced this so-called superiority of Western art. For instance, the San Francisco Bay Area-based newspaper *SFGate* review entitled "Signs of West in Works From the East" (1999) concluded: "On the evidence of *Inside Out*, [Conceptual and performance work in Western art] is the nearest thing to an international language of contemporary art."[20] Besides attempting to identify signs of "Western modernist or post-modernist influence" in the exhibited works, the reviewer argued for their inaccessibility for Western audiences, even for art professionals. The writer mainly attributed this unreachability to a lack of knowledge about the cultures and arts of the regions. This conclusion may relate back to Rey Chow's essay *Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem*: once the non-Western location (e.g. here "China") is named, numerous Western audiences consider the associated works as narrow or inaccessible. Similarly to the *SFGate* review, *Frieze* published in 1999 an article about the show that read, vis-à-vis Phoebe Man's *Beautiful Flowers* (1996): "what seems most salient to the work is the long-standing Chinese relationship with flowers, impenetrable to Western viewers."[21] The installation consisted of a sculpture decorated with small flowers that revealed to be, upon closer look, by red-stained sanitary pads encircled by white eggshells. . . . Why did the reviewer omit to suggest questions relating to the significance of female biological phenomenon such as birth in China, and rather focused on the status of flowers?

Inside Out: New Chinese Art closed almost 20 years ago, yet the situation of repetitively framing so-called Chinese or other non-Western contemporary art practices according to predetermined, existing narratives based on "regional identity" and/or "Western art's superiority" has remained largely persistent. One example of such practice, among many, is the recent exhibition *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China* (2014) on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. For its first major exhibition of contemporary Chinese art in its history, the museum selected 70 works produced in the last three decades and divided them into four sections—The Written word, New Landscapes, Abstraction, and Beyond the Brush. This exhibition framed featured contemporary artworks through the lens of tradition, emphasizing the visual traits shared between traditional and Chinese contemporary art (e.g., techniques, materials, etc.). The show failed to develop a space for appreciation of these individual artworks for their own contemporary messages and forms.

The question then remains: through exhibition making, how can we challenge preconceived ideas of so-called non-Western contemporary art practices and engage with them without stereotypes in the West? This aspect is linked to the process of translating—the practice of presenting and attempting to render the meaning of a text, an artwork, a cultural reference in another language or socio-cultural context—as it can apply to institutional and curatorial practice.

In the interview published in this issue of *SFAQ*, curator and critic Hou Hanru suggests creating an exhibition structure that would challenge the dominance of Western institutions while encouraging art experimentations and differences.[22] In such regards, the exhibition *Cities on the Move* (1997–2000), which Hou curated with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, might provide a possible model of such structure.[23] The entire project aimed to provide Western audiences with an overview of the urban dynamics of the Asian metropolis, through the lens of artistic projects. The exhibition traveled to six venues in Europe and in the United States[24] over the course of two years (1997–1999), and invited more than 70 Asian and non-Asian artists and architects to exhibit their works. Each iteration varied the final checklist, featured art projects, and exhibition scenographies. Echoing the contexts of the always-changing nature of urban architecture and of identities of Asian cities, the scenography of the exhibition transformed the exhibition space into a living city, or vice versa, as the organizing city became the space of display. Visiting audiences could find a theatre, a train station, the sky train, the city square, the river, a cinema, a university, a church, etc. This evolving exhibition model challenged the Western-established model dominated by the white cube as an ideology and a bureaucratic practice.

Other innovative curatorial models that would challenge local institutional frameworks still are to be invented to present *comprehensively* artworks produced in a different socio-cultural context. An example is the not-for-profit organization Asian Contemporary Art Consortium in San Francisco (ACAC-SF) that organizes the third edition of the Asian Contemporary Art Week San Francisco 2014, from September 20th-28th, 2014. The thematic approach of the ACAW 2014 examine the notions and issues of language, cultural specificities, mis/translations, and their philosophies to actively reexamine notions of cultural and historical specificity in a global context. Such questions are key today to contemporary exhibition practices and different organizations are currently investigating dynamics of mis/translation in exhibition making and art criticism.

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1) Britta Erickson, "The Reception in the West of Experimental mainland Chinese art of the 1990s", 2002, in *Primary Documents: Contemporary Chinese Art* ed. Wu Hung (Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 357. Examples included solo exhibitions of outstanding émigré artists such as Gu Wenda's *Dangerous Chessboard Leaves the Ground* at the Art Gallery of the York University in Toronto in 1997), or group shows such as *Art Chinois, Chine Demain Pour Hier*, curated by Fei Dawei (Pourrieres, France, 1990), *China's New Art, Post 1989* curated by Chang Tsong-zung and Li Xianting (Hong Kong, 1993) or *Cities on the Move* curated by Hou Hanru and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (Europe and United States, 1997-1999).

2) Britta Erickson, "The Reception in the West of Experimental mainland Chinese art of the 1990s", 2002, in *Primary Documents: Contemporary Chinese Art* ed. Wu Hung (Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 357. "In the late 1980s and 1990s, contemporary Chinese art was featured in a few exhibitions in the West, either small exhibitions at minor venues, or as minor elements of a large exhibition. In North America, for example, the first exhibitions of avant-garde Chinese art were held in colleges in the 1980s and were not widely publicized. The include *Painting the Chinese Dream: Chinese Art Thirty Years After the Revolution* [...] at the Smith College Museum of Art (1982) and *Artists from China –New Expressions* at Sarah Lawrence College (1987)."

3) Venues included Hong Kong Arts Centre (Hong Kong), Hong Kong City Hall (Hong Kong), Melbourne Arts Festival (Melbourne, Australia), Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver, Canada), University of Oregon Art Museum (Eugene, United States), Fort Wayne Museum of Art (Fort Wayne, United States), Salina Arts Centre (Salina, United States), Chicago Cultural Centre (Chicago, United States), San Jose Museum of Art (San Jose, United States).

4) Britta Erickson, "The Reception in the West of Experimental mainland Chinese art of the 1990s", 2002, in *Primary Documents: Contemporary Chinese Art* ed. Wu Hung (Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 358.

5) Marjan van Gerwen, "Inside Out: New Chinese Art," *International Institute for Asian Studies*, 1998, accessed on July 7, 2014. http://www.iias.nl/iiasn/18/. *Inside Out* was on view simultaneously at the Asia Society Museum and the PS1 Contemporary Art Center in New York City from September 15, 1998 to January 3, 1999. The show then toured to SFMOMA and the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco from February 26 to June 1st, 1999. New York City and San Francisco are two of the cities with the largest Chinese communities outside of China. Other stops included the Museo De Arte Contemporaneo in Monterrey, Mexico, and the Tacoma Art Museum in Seattle. Beginning in the spring of 2000, the *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (1998) exhibition was installed in a number of prominent locations throughout Asia.

6) Vishakha N. Desai, and David A. Ross, Foreword to *Inside Out: Chinese New Art* (Asia Society Galleries and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 7.

7) Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (MIT Press, 2011), 101-106. Gao Minglu coined the term "'85 New Wave" during a lecture given at the National Oil Painting Conference held by the National Artists Association on 14 April 1986, in which he introduced recent developments in art to China's art community. Between 1984 and 1986, more than two thousand artists, among them Zhang Peili, Geng Jianyi, Gu Wenda, Wu Shanzhuan, and Wang Qiang and many others, mobilized and formed eighty unofficial groups located throughout the country, the period is designated as '85 New Wave.

8) Exhibition catalogue *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 1-8. "*Inside Out: New Chinese Art* is the first major exhibition to explore the impact of [momentous political, economic, and social changes] on artists in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and on those who left the region in the late 1980s. [..] [The partnership between the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Asia Society NY] is crucial to articulating the organizing principle of the show: to understand contemporary Chinese art as simultaneously belonging to the international art community as well as the new "Chinese" culture."

9) Leo Ou-Fan Lee, "Across Trans-Chinese Landscapes: Reflections on Contemporary Chinese Cultures," in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 41-42. "41 "Whereas the term *Chinese* is still used as a conceptual rubric to cover these regions, on the basis of their shared written language and/or ethnic origin, it is also clear that this is no longer a unified world like the Middle Kingdom in the past."

10) Rey Chow, "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," in *boundary 2*, vol. 25, no. 3, Modern Chinese Literacy and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field (Autumn, 19998), 1-14.

11) Foreword and Introduction to *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 1-14.

12) Foreword and Introduction to *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 12.

13) These presentations ranged, among others, from *Exceptional Passage - China Avant-garde Artists Exhibition* at Fukuoka Museum (Japan, 1991) to *China's New Art Post-1989* at Hanart T Z Gallery, Hong Kong Arts Centre and Hong Kong Arts Festival Society (Hong Kong, 1993), and *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* at Haus der Kulturen (Germany, 1993), among others

14) Essays in English that analyzed the Tactile Sensation Group becoming later New Analysts Group's practice included for instance Bing Yi's "On Wang Luyan, Chinese Conceptualism and the New Analyst Group" (2006) and the chapter on Gu Dexin's practice, entitled "Gu Dexin: 1962.02.27" in Karen Smith's *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-Garde in New China, The Updated Edition*, ed. Karen Smith (Timezone 8, 2008). If both texts wrote about the NAG's practice, it is worth noting that they focused on one of the NAG artists, respectively here Wang Luyan and Gu Dexin. Their authors examined the New Analysts Group as a lens through which one might understand Gu and Wang's artistic practices.

15/16) Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Ethnic Studies on its 40th Birthday," 2008, University of California, Berkeley. Last accessed on July 10, 2014. http://ethnicstudies.berkeley.edu/40th/ "Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Women's Studies emerged in 1968, 1969, and 1970, respectively. They are all children of a very important moment in twentieth century history: a historical moment that unfortunately has been disavowed by multiple circles, particularly, but not only, conservative ones, for the last forty years." Today, if considered as an official part of academia, its education still remains optional in most universities in the United States.

17) Foreword to *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 7. "Artists in urban centers in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (now a Special Administrative Region of China) are expanding an artistic vocabulary that reflects the dynamic relationship between their multifaceted and long-standing connections to western forms and norms as well as ties to deeply embedded cultural identities and traditions."

18) Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (MIT Press, 2011), 101-106. A period of liberal economic and social reforms characterized the early 1980s in mainland China and increased openness, especially to capitalism and western culture. "This period was characterized by the most intense discussion of culture since the early twentieth century." In the art sphere, this period led to an increased exposure to Western aesthetics, philosophy, history, and art history through the availability of publications translated from foreign languages into Chinese; art exhibitions in the country; and new experiments in mediums (such as happenings). For instance, one of the most influential books was Herbert Read's *Concise History of Painting*, translated in 1983 into Chinese; the first significant Western art exhibition was a survey of Robert Rauschenberg's work at the National Art Museum of China (Beijing, 1985). Other sources of stimulation came from open education classes in art academies such as the Sichuan Academy of Fine Art in Chongqing or Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art in Hangzhou.

19) Introduction to *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 12. "In virtually every mode or medium borrowed from the West something new has been added, some new twist given."

20) Kenneth Baker, "Signs of West in 'Works From the East," *SFGate*, published on February 25, 1999. Last accessed on July 5, 2014.

21) Jenny Liu, "Inside Out: New Chinese Art," *Frieze*, 1999.

22) See Hou Hanru's interview by Marie Martraire and Xiaoyu Weng, this issue of SFAQ.

23 Venues for *Cities on the Move* included, among others, Vienna Secession in Vienna (Austria, 1997-1998), CAPC Musée in Bordeaux (France, 1998), PS1 in New York City (United States, 19998-1999), Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebaek (Denmark, 1999), Haward Gallery in London, (England, 1999) and Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki (Finland, 1999).

24) Between 1997 and 1999, the exhibition *Cities on the Move* consecutively took place at the Vienna Secession (Vienna, Austria), CAPC Musée (Bordeaux, France), MoMA PS1 (New York, United States), Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Humlebaek, Denmark), Haward Gallery (London, England), and at Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art (Helsinki, Finland).

Sàn Art: Vietnam's Leading Contemporary Art Center

By Courtney Malick

When one thinks of the buzzing interest of Asian contemporary art hot spots, Ho Chi Minh City is rarely at the top of the list. Though Vietnam is today being discussed by some as a direct reflection of what the Chinese contemporary art scene looked and felt like just ten years ago, the differences are staggering on most every level. Nonetheless, it is true that the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture still controls all cultural content for public events and publications within the country, as is also still the case, for the most part, throughout China. It is undeniable that just a bit over five years ago a rumble of modest sorts—by no means the kind of boom made recently by Chinese contemporary art—began to awaken art enthusiasts from various parts of the world to the newly growing commercial gallery-laden areas within Hanoi. It is only within the past few years that within Ho Chi Minh City, and other smaller towns in the center and southern parts of the country, newly initiated artist-run project spaces have sprung up. With their birth, the richness of contemporary art and cultural discourse within the country has drastically increased and continues to shape itself in ways that may prove to have distinct effects on the rest of the Asian contemporary art world and market, not to mention the presence of Vietnamese artists within Western realms. Despite this, visiting Vietnam for contemporary art is still a rather under-the-radar trend.

Regardless of its current place on the Asian art totem pole, young artists and curators in Vietnam continue to unabashedly endure a barrage of obstacles set in place by an apathetic government that has not made investments in cultural institutions such as museums or libraries since 1954. This is due in large part to the aftermath of the Vietnam War in 1975, which begat the establishment of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1976. Not only that, but the entire educational system throughout the country follows a French model that was created in 1924, and as far as the arts are concerned, that means a strict focus on plastic arts, such as painting, silk-screening and drawing, thus disregarding more current methodologies like performance, video, installation, new media and interdisciplinary practices. Such resistance clearly challenges the paths that young artists and cultural producers are forging toward an open and artistically educated community in Vietnam. One of the most ingenuous and clever attempts to thwart the Vietnamese government's lack of support for artistic culture and communication therein is the amazing, non-profit exhibition space and reading room, Sàn Art.

Sàn Art,(which roughly translates to 'platform') was formed in 2007 by four Vietnamese artists: Dinh Q. Lê, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Phu Nam Thuc Ha (known as Phunam), and Tiffany Chung. It is important to note that for many Vietnamese unaware of the intricacies of art it is perhaps difficult to understand what Sàn Art does, as there is no phrase in the Vietnamese language for the term *non-profit*, and there is no public cultural institution in the country that collects contemporary Vietnamese art. In response to this, Sàn Art not only engages local artists from Ho Chi Minh City, but it also allows artists and thinkers from outside the city's capital, where networking and discourse is all the more sparse, to engage with its dynamic workshops, reading room, lecture series, and exhibition programs. Additionally, with Zoe Butt at the organization's helm, serving as both curator and director, Sàn Art has been able to host many of the global art world's most exciting and brilliant cultural producers and academics. She has helped to broaden both their understanding of the direction that young Vietnamese artists' are taking and brought insight to the expansive scope of contemporary art that is often out of reach for artists and students within Vietnam.

Sàn Art provides a rare space within Ho Chi Minh City for artists and other creative people to see work that relates directly to topical issues that resonate both within Vietnam and more broadly throughout the contemporary art world. It has also created several specific programs that act as pedagogical structures through which young artists can discuss the work with their peers and gain a better understanding of the ways in which they connect to a larger discourse of culture, theory, politics and various social issues that inform the work of curators, writers, gallerists, and audiences. One such program is the Sàn Art Laboratory, which was initiated just two years ago. Functioning as both a studio and residency program that spans six-month periods, Sàn Art invites three artists per session to live and work in the Binh Thạnh District, near Sàn Art, and awards them $1,000.00. One of the main tenets of this program is that each artist works closely with a "talking partner," emphasizing the importance of communication. Sàn Art also began a two-pronged, three-year long project called Conscious Realities that encapsulates both public lectures and closed workshops that accompany their exhibition program.

The ideas and issues produced by Conscious Realities continue to examine the specific region of the Global South and, as they describe it, "imagines the primacy of lateral dialogues between South East Asia, South Asia, Latin America, and Africa." This allows participants of Sàn Art to learn more about the necessary historical groundings that inform where we are in theoretical and philosophical narratives today. Such information and education is lacking throughout Vietnam, and Sàn Art aims to address this by inviting scholars, writers, curators, and cultural thinkers in a way that mimics the kinds of educational systems present in other countries.

The upcoming exhibition *Conjuring Capital*, curated by Zoe Butt, opens in August and serves as the fifth installment of Conscious Realities. It presents the work of six artists, only one of whom is Vietnamese. The others are from various countries including Spain, the United States, India, and Cambodia. This show aptly questions the impact and the awareness of our collective consumption, themes that are recurrent in the work that Sàn Art exhibits. This issue rings particularly true within Vietnam, as well as in other Asian countries, where the government promotes the work of certain artists for tourism purposes. However, these artists have been sanctioned, so to speak, through their complicity with the educational systems available to them that are supported by the Fine Arts Association of Vietnam, which mandates a specific, non-contemporary curriculum.

Each of the six artists in *Conjuring Capital*, Adriana Bustos, Christopher Myers, Hank Willis Thomas, Ngoc Nau, Sudarshan Shetty, and Than Sok, take up the visuality of everyday commodities and their relationship to currency in colorful and fluid ways. It is clear that these artists are forging both aesthetic and conceptual relationships between their practices and the regions within which they are currently working, the psychology of consumerism, and non-material qualities such as love and intimacy. It is necessary for both artists and audiences within Vietnam to have spaces such as Sàn Art where these kinds of social tensions and realities can be played out and discussed in honest, if abstracted, form and forums. The work being produced often feels as though the artists producing it are working out of a sense of obligation to be overtly documentarian, reporting in one way or another on the social and political statuses of their countries of origin. While at times this may be the true crux of some of these artists' practices, just as often we find that their interests may lay elsewhere, but through what Butt refers to as "a great exotification of censorship," they turn their work towards explicitly political issues that they feel are necessary to raise within the context of contemporary art and its current fascination with Asia.

Truong Cong Tung, *Journey of a Piece of Soil*, 2013 (video still). From the exhibition, Art Labor, Unconditional Belief, 2014. Courtesy of Sàn Art, Vietnam

Truong Cong Tung, *Journey of a Piece of Soil*, 2014. Termite nest and paint, 38 x 40 x 60 cm. From the exhibition, Unconditional Belief. Courtesy of Sàn Art, Vietnam

New Spaces in Contemporary Art

Interviews by Corey Andrew Barr

Far from the air-conditioned, whitewashed, and priced-out central districts of Asia's super cities, where every square foot is appraised by its shine and sheen, I have come to uncover a different side. It is here, between the abandoned concrete walls and unassuming local storefronts, that the soul of the city resides.

The journey usually begins with convincing a taxi driver through a game of charades, or sometimes a shouting match, to take you there and that it is exactly there that you want to go.

Having left New York for Hong Kong 18 months ago, I've encountered overlooked places all over Asia. These discoveries are startling and stunning, captivating and confusing. In the following interviews you will find the heartbeat of three such spaces, two in Hong Kong and one in Shanghai. These are places that make you feel alive and bring modern Asia into perspective.

Industrial buildings that house the Fotanian Studios. Courtesy of Fotanian Studios.

Cornelia Erdmann, Artist; Vice Chairperson, Fotanian

Fo Tan is an industrial area in the New Territories, about 30 minutes from central Hong Kong, with high-rise warehouses set against a the lush backdrop of Tai Mo Shan (the highest peak in Hong Kong). Fotanian is the name of the organization that has brought together a community of artists who have taken up studios in these buildings. How is it that so many artists came to be working here and how many are there now?
Fo Tan is the closest industrial area to the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which used to be the only major art school in HK. So the art community there began with students from the Chinese University looking for studio spaces. Like you said, it is conveniently situated within Hong Kong and accessible by public transport, so it was a logical setting. This all started in 2000. The first open studio event was in 2001. Today there are about 80 studios, some of which are shared, so we can assume more than 100, maybe about 120 working artists, designers, musicians, and crafters.

I didn't think about musicians, I guess everyone knows when they're working?
Luckily the walls are thick. But I like music and the noise is definitely more agreeable than some of the industrial sounds. There is an art and music studio close to mine, but they usually practice at night and I spend most of my time here during the day.

Fotanian is best known for its annual open studios program. What is the history of this event and how has it evolved over the years?
In the beginning it started out as a group of friends. That grew and grew until we finally formalized into an arts organization. Originally it was all on a volunteer basis. Later we applied for grants from the Arts Development Council. Eventually the event became so big we set up an LLC, which allowed us to get funding from the Home Affairs Bureau, a division of the Hong Kong government that executes Art Capacity Funds. That is around the time I joined to set up a board of directors to advise and run the program. The execution is now taken over by a full-time staff.

What is the mission of Fotanian?
Our mission is to expand opportunities for the artists working in Fo Tan: to show their work to a wide audience, encourage exchange via the open studio event, and to engage in supplementary programming like podium discussions, exhibitions, seminars, and workshops. In addition, we want to open our work to the public, to give "normal" people opportunities to see how this creative industry works.

Fotanian pottery workshop. Courtesy of Fotanian Studios.

You are an artist working mainly in installation. Tell me about your work and how you came to be the vice chairperson of Fotanian. I'm guessing you have a studio here?
I am originally from Germany and came to Hong Kong eight years ago with my husband who is a professor. Coincidentally, we moved to Fo Tan which was where we were given lodging by the university. That is how I discovered the art community here, and I fell in love in with it. It took me about a year and a half to get a shared studio. Before that I was working at 1a Space, which was a great opportunity for me to meet people and understand the art scene in Hong Kong. After a year I left there in order to focus again on my art. Since 2009 I have had my own studio here. My specialty is in public art and commissions. I work with light in combination with other materials. Right now, I work often with stainless steel, which is abundant and integral in the local architecture.

On my last visit to Fo Tan, Chow Chun Fai gave a tour of one of his studios. From that I understood more about the community aspect of the artists working here. Can you describe the rapport among artists? Is there synergy that comes from working in close proximity?
There is a lot of interaction, actually. In the beginning it was a group of friends and everyone knew everyone else. That idea grew, and today there are still many friends working side by side. And obviously many artists do projects together and collaborate, especially in shared studios.

It [socializing] can be a little bit difficult though. Many artists work other jobs during the day so are here only in the evening. I keep studio hours during the day, so I miss those who come later. A lot of interactions are limited to private connections, and bumping into people at the supply shops outside.

Sometimes I wish there would be more interaction. What we are missing is a communal space, which is something we would like to work towards.

I work also with the industrial people around me, so I am in collaboration with my neighbors; most of my industrial contractors are based in the area. It's one of the best things about Fo Tan really, especially for me.

In speaking with some artists who have studios in Fo Tan, I understand it can be rather expensive. For those who cannot rely on art making to support them, there is fear that affordable studio space for artists is dwindling. What are your thoughts about this dilemma? Is there a union for working artists in Hong Kong?
Unfortunately there is not a subsidy to support artists' studios in Hong Kong, where space is so precious. Everything has to be in high-rises, and property values are also high. These industrial areas are really the most reasonable prices you can get. That is why there are so many share studio spaces.

I noticed some pop-up galleries in the warehouses. Is there commercial activity within the industrial complexes? Also, give me your take on the gallery/artist balance in Hong Kong. Too many dealers, too much art?
There are a few galleries within Fo Tan—some of them are more for storage and some are more permanent. A few are annexes for galleries in the central area of Hong Kong and set up shop during the Fotanian Open Studios.

Personally I don't work with galleries as much as consultants but that is because I do public art and installations. But in general there are many galleries in Hong Kong, which is very special. They go crazy for the young artists, especially at the graduation shows. The galleries will come to these shows to pick works and later hold major exhibitions and group shows. In some way maybe young artists are spoiled. Compared to in Berlin for example, where competition is so high, there are a lot of opportunities here.

Earlier you mentioned having worked at 1a Space (a non-profit gallery located within an old, brick-enclosed cattle slaughterhouse). Tell me a little about that experience. What are some other non-profit and grassroots art developments in Hong Kong?
Yes, at 1a Space I was the gallery manager, so I gained a lot of insight into the Hong Kong arts community. Some other places to check out are Videotage, the Asia Art Archive, and Para/Site.

Over the past two years, more arts districts have emerged. For example in the area on Hong Kong Island called Chai Wan they have organized a community of artists that includes many photographers. The Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre is another studio space that is in Shek Kip Mei. Also, in Wong Chuk Hang there are many studios now. The growing needs are the base for the Factory Artists Concern Group, which campaigns for the rights of artists with studios in industrially zoned buildings.

There's a great underground music scene in Kwun Tong. And at the new PMQ (Police Married Quarters) commercial space in SoHo you can find local design.

Wrapping up, back to Fotanian, are there ghosts?
(Laughing) No ghosts, but it is really interesting what you encounter in these buildings. Two floors above me they produce roast duck and pork. So you see the raw ducks and pigs on racks go in and a few hours later the *char siu* is carted out.

It is still a very industrial and working class neighborhood, which makes it very honest. This time of year all the men are shirtless outside. I love walking around and sometimes I take the stairs in the buildings to make discoveries; you never know what you'll find. There is sushi right next to swimsuits.

From sushi to swimwear, perfect. I think we'll end there. It's been a pleasure Cornelia, thank you.

Liu Dao, *Cha-Ching!*, 2014. Neon sign, stainless steel frame, 8-bit microcontroller, 51×23.6×4.7in. Courtesy of Liu Dao.


Liu Dao, *Artisan's Revenge*, 2014. RGB LED display, acrylic painting, paper collage, teakwood frame, 41×41×2 in. Courtesy of Liu Dao.


Liu Dao, *Cai Lun's triumph*, 2013. RGB LED display, paper collage, Chinese papercut (Jian Zhi 剪紙), teakwood frame, 41×41×3.5 in. Courtesy of Liu Dao.

Liu Dao

(Collaborative response given by Liu Dao representatives: Thomas Charvériat (Founder), Jean Le Guyader (Gallery Assistant), Margaret Johnson (Curator), and Daniel Browning (Creative Consultant))

Liu Dao was founded in 2006. How did it begin?
The collective, Liu Dao, is the creative persona, and island6 Arts Center is the machine that powers the art making. The collective was formed as a reactionary move to the boom in the Shanghai art scene. The rapid growth in the city needed an outlet, a creative focus for all that energy, and the collective was established in that context. The idea was to provide a platform for younger artists who were trying to navigate this overnight shift in the local art market. And so Liu Dao was born. One of the strengths of the collective is its fluid and dynamic nature; it can change course and develop along with the eclectic backgrounds of the creative personnel as they join the team. We listen to each other and everyone has a say in how the ideas are incubated, how they grow and the visual form they take. Naturally, what you see on the walls of our spaces reflects that deep collaboration. One of the features of our collaborative way of working is strong cross-cultural dialogue. In 2008 we moved to our current space in the art district M50 and beyond with two other spaces in Shanghai, another in Hong Kong, and most recently in Phuket. Liu Dao continues to evolve as a creative entity and, most significantly, the experimentation and risk-taking continues.

Did the rise in the Chinese contemporary art market around that time impact the early years of Liu Dao, and how?
In certain ways, of course. But more importantly Liu Dao came into being as a reaction to those market trends. The "star system," which was so prevalent at the time, only really served to inflate the egos of individual artists. Liu Dao was formed in opposition to that—instead we wanted to promote the concept of an open platform that draws on the strength of the collective, rather than the individual.

That said, the rise of the contemporary art market also had a great influence on the way the collective grew in the early years. There was an influx of creative minds over that time: collectors, curators, artists. This of course had a great bearing on Liu Dao in the sense that it deepened the collaboration across international borders and cultures. And our message—of collaboration; of bringing a sense of humor and an idiosyncratic even slightly radical way of working—is the one that we have been disseminating through strong contact with the international arts community and collaborations with artists, curators, and galleries across the globe. Even though we are based in Shanghai, Liu Dao is an international concern.

The translation of Liu Dao is "Island 6." What does this mean and what is your mission?
Our first home was a disused flourmill in Moganshan Road. The mill was essentially on old structure in the middle of nowhere, quite literally an island in a sea of urban debris. We set up in warehouse number 6—and so, island6 was born. In 2008 the collective moved down the road to the M50 arts district—a community of independent galleries and artist studios situated within a repurposed textile factory. Quite serendipitously, Liu Dao settled on the 2nd floor of building 6, once again allowing for, the 6 in island6.

In one sense the "island" is an interesting metaphor for the way we work. Collaboration is the key here—not in isolation, but working together in a focused, tightly curated way. As a group we try to focus on collective rather than individual values. That said, we are always paying attention to what is going on in other "islands," other artistic communities, individual and collective. So at some point you have to dispense with the metaphor.

We are not the only collective, but this model is comparatively rare here in China. Some of the great collaborations have informed our practice—think of Warhol's Factory, where the model was based on the simple beauty of a production line. I hasten to add we are not that, our method is much more about teamwork. Gilbert and George also set a standard in close, even interdependent ways of working. Personal anonymity is another aspect of the Liu Dao methodology. You can see echoes of this in another collective based here in Shanghai. MadeIn Company came into being around the same time as Liu Dao, but their way of working is something quite distinct, a corporate brand dedicated to creativity. The collectivist model is elastic enough that it can be adapted. Another point to stress here is that we are all invisible in sense, but for instance, the credits on an artwork include every member of the team from the writer to the animator, the engineer, the painter … the list goes on.

Liu Dao brings together artists from different disciplines and diverse backgrounds who collaborate with one another on a large scale. How do you manage all of this?
The quick answer is, through open, honest, and vigorous communication. At any given point in time the collective might involve up to 30 people from a diverse range of backgrounds—by which I mean cultural, linguistic, professional, and academic. There's a team of practitioners behind every artwork—painters, sculptors, photographers, filmmakers, digital imaging artists, dancers, performers, writers, engineers, and curators. When you bring all of them together under one roof it can be a little overwhelming—but there's a vibrant flow of ideas being exchanged within Liu Dao all the time.

Being able to take a step back and see yourself as part of the larger picture, the collective whole, is essential to what we do. There is no way one person could create our artwork alone, which perhaps is simply the nature of new media artwork in general. If the collective feels that a certain skill or trade could have a stronger presence, then we actively seek talents to fill that void.

In terms of managing the dynamics and workload of the collective, we are unique in that we combine our gallery space and our workshop in our headquarters at M50. The five gallery spaces are managed on a daily basis by members of the collective while artwork is being made in the workshop. You can follow the life of an artwork from conception to manufacture and eventually actual display, all without leaving the main gallery. It's a rare thing.

Given that Liu Dao is an electronic art collective, explain the role of traditional mediums such as painting and photography in your work.
A key principle behind our work is to represent the spirit of contemporary China, with an eye on the historical past but certainly much more clearly focused on what the future holds. The past is an aesthetic as much as a historical category. In another way, we are not as didactic as that. What we try to do is to draw those tangents together; for instance traditional art forms like paper-cutting and LED technology are brought together in our work. We collaborate regularly with two Shanghainese paper-cut (*Jianzhi* 剪紙) artists, which is an art form that was established during the Han dynasty. We also work closely with a classically trained *shan shui* painter from Shandong province. These Chinese art forms are much more traditional than photography and oil painting. The mixture of the two—traditional and contemporary—is our light-hearted comment on the fabric and make-up of present day China. The shuffling of mah-jongg tiles in quiet laneways while illuminated LED signs hang from colossal, new skyscrapers—this is Shanghai. Ultimately, more than anything, we like for our work to be perceived as light and humorous—wistful, nostalgic even. Think of a Rorschach test; you create the meaning. At a deeper level, beyond the surface, the artwork is not weighed down by the burden of representing the past or the future; it's a flight of the imagination.

Tell me about your collaborations on the interactive works. How many people did it take to make* Baguette Jambon Beurre *for example?
Baguette Jambon Beurre was the result of a collaboration between 12 people. Typically, the creative process begins with a curator, who devises the concept. They create a text that is meant to inspire the collective. The overarching concept is then broken down into various facets. For example, the curator explains their vision to the artistic director, who then chooses the model and artists who will work on the project. *Baguette Jambon Beurre* features one model, two filmmakers, two editing artists, and five assistants. This group—curator, artistic director, model, filmmakers, editing artists, and assistants—all collaborated to realize the curator's vision.

There are exhibitionistic and voyeuristic vibes in much of Liu Dao's work. Is this on purpose?
Absolutely! As new media artists we are of course fascinated with new technologies, the Internet, and social media platforms and their power to transform the way we interact. Much of Liu Dao's work is either influenced or driven by new technologies. Being constantly "on," wired and connected through all these different platforms, has fostered an expectation for connection. Some of our work teases or plays on this hope. The unending desire for interactivity, or connection through interactivity is a theme of some of our most popular works. We have a broad, cheeky sense of humor. There are exhibitionists and voyeurs in the collective and we don't shy away from representing that side of our nature. We all have these tendencies but we may feel some residual guilt about expressing them in public. I think that perhaps viewers feel connected with the art of Liu Dao because of this, because we give subtle—sometimes explicit—voice to those buried emotions, the desire for engagement, to be reached.

Your website is very 1997, why so lo-tech?
Our website (island6.org) is over 4000 pages, hosting 974 videos and over 8000 images. It's an archive and a functional working database, the main purpose of which is to assist the collective. In fact, the first island6 exhibitions were financed by some of our creative team who did freelance web design jobs for other people. Unfortunately, with more than 4000 pages (not counting our blog entries) it needs to resemble Wikipedia or a database structure—it may not look cool in terms of presentation, but it is an effective piece of infrastructure. It's a vast compendium of our exhibition history, our many collaborations, a visual catalogue of hundreds of artworks, essays, and other documentation, films, and animations, not to mention a working online gallery. Actually, little by little we've been removing all the design elements to leave only the rough functional side. Every new show requires hours of surfing through our website and every new commission requires us to search through hundreds of pages, so we need a basic structure. On an even more utilitarian note because we are spread widely over five spaces, we collaborate with 10 galleries across the globe, participate in at least 15 exhibitions and up to 10 art fairs every year. We need to know at any given time where each artwork is located, how much it weighs once crated, and other technical specifications as quickly as possible. The website allows us to do that.

There is an extensive narrative behind every exhibition—from the show title, to the work titles, and accompanying descriptions. What's the story behind these stories?

After the collective conceives of a new idea for an exhibition, a curator drafts an inspirational text that shapes the overall concept and theme of the show. These texts can take any form that the curator feels inspired by: fable, stream of consciousness, informative, discursive essay, and so on. The curator may or may not title the show; input from all members of the team is considered. We generally try to name the exhibitions with titles that provoke curiosity. After (or even while) artworks that embody the concept are created, our creative writers compose "blurbs" to accompany them in the gallery. Like the exhibition texts, blurbs may take any form that the writers feel fit the work and pushes viewers to think about what they are seeing or experiencing. We have had blurbs that are short stories, narratives from the figures in the work, poems, and researched essays with footnotes. Blurbs are not meant to only inform the viewer, but also to inspire them to create their own meaning. Again, it's that flight of the imagination principle. The writers also title the individual works, and these are typically associated with the blurb in some way. The whole process is very transparent and is driven by collaboration. Everyone has a voice.

It is not uncommon to hear about artists who are marginalized by political authorities in China. Have you dealt with censorship, interference, or other suppression?
We have never had any problems related to censorship. The goal of Liu Dao has never been to comment on sensitive or political issues, we leave that to other more outspoken artists. We may take inspiration from, for instance, demographic changes in contemporary China, but our take is always humorous and light-hearted. We don't have an agenda, nor do we strive to be political artists. That's simply not what we are about. Most of all we want our viewers to reach their own conclusions, independently. If art dictates, it ceases to be art.

Liu Dao is a collection of international artists working in Asia. To what extent do you identify your work with Asian art, if at all?
As an international collective our philosophy is global. Our members hail from across China, Hong Kong, France, North America, South America, the UK, Poland, and Australia, and our philosophy is based on the individual cultural experiences of all our members. But of course since we are all living in China, we draw a great amount of inspiration from our daily life here. It centers and locates our practice in space and time, but we try to find a universality of human experience in our artwork.

We try to shy away from being tagged as "Chinese art." We feel that once you put a certain country in front of the word "art," it has the potential to become kitsch and to be relegated to the status of souvenir. Most people wouldn't travel to New York, looking to find "New York Art." The link to China in our art is strong, but it is more about our collective personal experiences. The goal of all artists should be to simply create artwork. Liu Dao believes that nationality does not factor in to the equation, you either make art or you do not—the rest shouldn't matter.

Commercially speaking, video art and collaboration works rarely garner as much attention as traditional mediums and solo work. Is this an obstacle? How do you address the sales-sustainability model?
We've never viewed the type of artwork that we create as an obstacle. But it does take more time to be recognized as something "bankable" when you are working within a collective setting, especially in producing time-based video art. At this point we have been working within these mediums for over eight years now and have opened five Liu Dao specific galleries. Having these years and numbers under our belt perhaps allows for collectors to trust us more. As we keep growing and expanding and adding new talents into the mix, we are allowed the opportunity to create unique artworks. We find that as we take risks, so do our buyers and collectors.

In 2012 you made the announcement "Following the 5 Year Plan for world domination, the Liu Dao electronic art collective has sailed across the straits to set up a mini-island6 in the glamorous heart of Hong Kong." That was two years ago, your Hong Kong space is now a thriving gallery and you just opened an outpost on the island of Phuket. What's next?
We hope to always keep growing and expanding. With three spaces in Shanghai (flagship location at M50, ShGarden, and the Bund), island6 HK, and our newest location in Phuket, island6 Marina, we plan on continuing to bring the Liu Dao vision and artwork to the world. We are currently looking into a new space in Istanbul, which has been a city that is very receptive to our artwork as their own contemporary art scene matures and gathers international respect. As a city firmly planted in both Europe and Asia, we feel it encapsulates the international crossroads reflected in the collective.

In addition to our own spaces, we also have representatives in various countries and work with independent galleries on art direction. So far we have representatives in Beijing, Hong Kong, Bangkok, London, Dubai, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, New York, Paris, and Germany. We are always looking to expand to new cities.

When it comes down to it, our hope is more for the welfare of the future of the art world. The collective was formed for a very specific reason, so we really want to continue representing a platform in which collaboration and innovation can provide a new formula for artists to follow.

Mimi Brown, Founder and Director, Spring Workshop

How did you arrive at the name* Spring Workshop*, what does it mean?
The name *Spring* comes from a beloved Sufi poem, and refers to the season, the leap, the coil, and the fresh water that surges from the earth. And *Workshop* means that this is a place for experimenting and getting messy.

What is your mission?
Spring's mission is to experiment with the way that art is created, enjoyed, and supported. We partner with other local and international not-for-profit organizations to offer space and scope to their programs. Our aim is to work with artists and audiences in a bespoke way, trying to find a unique thread for each event that will give both the creators and those of us who enjoy their creations new insights into the artistic process.

For example, Berlin-based Singaporean artist Ming Wong recently completed a two-month research residency (December 2013 to February 2014) at Spring as one of our projects in partnership with Para/Site Art Space. Ming was researching Cantonese operatic cinema, and we organized numerous meetings and meals for him so that he could engage meaningfully with the people and resources of Hong Kong. One day at lunch at Spring, he broke into a smile and said "Eureka!" after a conversation with his lunchtime companion gave a new direction to his project. At the end of the residency, Ming shared his research process with an audience of 140, followed by a rambling evening of drinks and dinner at Spring in which he asked for our feedback on his presentation. He will now go on to create a new work in our fall exhibition and a performance that will premier in Hong Kong during the 2015 New Year holiday.

The unique and exciting part of this project from our vantage point is that so many of us will have been involved with understanding and contributing to the development of this artwork from the start straight through to the finished work.

You are located in Wong Chuk Hang, an industrial neighborhood of car repair shops and warehouses. Does the environment play a role in experiencing Spring Workshop?
Absolutely. I had been in Hong Kong for many years hoping to find a neighborhood like this when one day I finally walked into this industrial building in Wong Chuk Hang. Cupid must have shot an arrow because I instantly fell in love with the neighborhood and the building (where Spring is currently housed)! Beyond car repair shops and warehouses, the neighborhood carries vestiges of old Hong Kong, like sprawling high-ceilinged manufacturing spaces, now used more for storage or offices, as well as the Nam Long Shan Cooked Food Market which serves impeccable Thai food and perfect *nai cha* (milk tea) and the Tai Wong Yeh Temple featuring those enormous, slow-burning incense coils that scent the entire quarter, along with the cinnamon scents from the Po Chai building and candle factories just across the street. In addition to these old-fashioned elements, Wong Chuk Hang also has a dynamic modern edge, with an MTR station due to open across the street from us in 2015, designers, artists, writers, and architects with offices ensconced in many of the warehouse buildings, and new shops, cafes, and galleries springing up every month. To help you find all the hidden gems in our neighborhood, Spring publishes the winning map of our annual Wong Chuk Hang map competition in which young Hong Kong artists are invited to render the area in their own styles.

The Universe of Naming exhibition art student workshop #2, May 2013, at Spring Workshop. Courtesy of Spring Workshop.

To me the rough-and-romantic nature of the neighborhood is crucial for Spring. This is an industrial, dynamic place where people are free to make things, construct things, create things.

The first time I visited the space, it felt like I had snuck into someone's house and was having a look around. Then a woman popped out from behind a wall and asked me if I wanted to see what she was working on, which was a total surprise (it was an artist in residence). Is it part of your mission to disarm visitors like that? How does the architecture of your space facilitate dialogues between artist, audience, and community?
What a perfect visit. Yes, we do hope to do exactly that: to disarm our artists and audience into interacting in unexpected ways! Since the audience and those who are interested in culture in general are a key element of our mission, the layout was carefully thought through in order to avoid the near-total anonymity of some residencies and to create public areas that are sunny and welcoming. Spring is a place of gentle engagement for both artists and audiences. And even when our residents are a bit reluctant to engage or are busy working, they still usually pop out to join us on weekdays at the communal table, disarmed by the fresh food served for lunch.

Our flexible architecture is an intentional part of our mission to produce new experiences for our visitors each time they come to Spring. Qiu Zhijie's *The Universe of Naming* installation took over the entire space; then we held workshops and talks for adults and children throughout the installation. We have used our biggest artist studio, Winter Studio, for public talks, dinners/lunches, a mini concert, and even a theatre performance. On June 14, we held an outdoor concert of Indian protest songs, *Singing Resistance: A Musical Performance with Sumangala Damodaran* in collaboration with Asia Art Archive, welcoming our audience of over 150 people to get comfortable on cushions, carpets, and beanbags across the gently lit terrace. When we host meals and events people disperse into corners of the space and find their own spots to connect and reflect. It is clear from each event that varying the spatial relationships between the creators and their audiences is a useful tool for keeping the energy dynamic for everyone.

I understand there's no expectation for artists in residence to produce work. This must be liberating for them. What has been the outcome of this philosophy?
Yes, our "secret residencies" where no one even has to know that the artist/curator/writer is here have been popular indeed. One artist arrived for a month-long summer residency following a string of commitments and told us that this was the first time in two years she had no immediate production deadline. After three days here, she burst out of her studio and told us with a smile that due to the lack of pressure, she was suffering from a profusion of fresh ideas. This is an ideal outcome.

Tell me more about* Moderation(s)*—where did the idea come from and what have you learned?
A few years ago when Defne Ayas (now the director of the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art) still lived in Shanghai, I used to visit her there and we would sit in our pajamas for hours over a pot of tea, dreaming up projects. *Moderation(s)* is one result of those pajama sessions. Once we had Heman Chong on board as the "moderator," the project unfolded in an ideal, stately way, as a set of programs that created time and space for different people to interact and create, never in a rush, side by side in two cities (HK and Rotterdam), and as part of a longer project that circled back on itself while still moving forward.

This project enabled Spring to make good on its mission to create a platform for exchange. Over the course of the two-year project, we engaged more than 50 local and international artists, curators, and writers in various programs, which engendered a conference, three exhibitions, three residencies, and a book of short stories. We learned from this project the pleasure of working with an open concept and a purposefully slower timeline than usual. We learned to savor process.

Last year I saw the exhibition* The Social Contract*. I was asked to sign a legal document, which legally prohibited me from speaking about it for a while afterwards. Thinking back, there were some live eels in a fish tank, and other curated miscellanea scattered around the walls and floor. It reminded me of a basement I used to hang out in when I was 16. Due to the secrecy element, there was also no literature about the content of the show. Can you help me connect the content with the concept?
The contract has indeed expired, meaning that we now have permission to discuss what we saw. But given that a crucial part of *The Social Contract* was to eliminate discussions about what we see and to locate us in the realm of our own impressions, I would be going a bit against the project's ethos by mapping out the story of the artwork displayed inside. Instead, perhaps the ultimate experience for you as the participant is to revel, even post-contract, in whatever sixteen-year-old basement memories the piece evoked for you in the moment.

I missed Qiu Zhijie's* The Universe of Naming*, which I think was something really big, figuratively and literally. How major was the installation and how did people respond to it?
The installation was indeed physically enormous: Qiu's highly detailed maps on the walls and floors and his collection of 256 engraved wood, glass, and steel spheres took over the whole space at Spring, turning it into a giant universe of diagrams. The audience was encouraged to roll the spheres over the maps as they wished, thus becoming co-creators of the meanings within the installation. Then, in addition to his own work, he managed to fold in the results of a workshop he conducted with 50 Hong Kong students from six different universities who worked with him to create next-iteration maps of this city using debris from the streets. So it was quite a massive artwork.

The exhibition was major because it allowed us key access points to his talent as an iconic artist who draws upon numerous traditions and concepts to create his encyclopedic artworks. He is also an extraordinary teacher and thinker who is working to revolutionize the way that art is taught in China. And the cherry on top to this rare insight was that every sort of viewer could relate to his work. It was truly universal.

International press about art in Hong Kong has been dominated by two major commercial activities: auctions and Art Basel. How do you feel about this?
I imagine that someone who reads about these major art activities in Hong Kong will infer that there are other dynamic players in the art environment that also nourish the city's cultural scene. And if they are curious, as I was on arriving in Hong Kong a decade ago, they will scratch the surface and find an entire deeper layer of arts engagement and activity. I am encouraged by anything that fuels interest in what is happening here.

The opening of M+ and the greater West Kowloon Cultural District in a few years may be an undisputed need for a city like Hong Kong, but do you think it will detract from the work of small venues that have filled the niche for curatorial projects and non-profit arts organizations for so many years?
Hong Kong's arts landscape not only has plenty of room for all of these players, it *needs* all these players. An arts landscape is an ecosystem, and the smaller, subtler non-profit layer is a key underpinning to the more visible layer inhabited by the larger players.

You lived in California before moving to Hong Kong. Have there been any dialogues between these two places?
Although there has not been a structured dialogue, we have had the pleasure of working with a few Californians and California-based talents such as Chris Fitzpatrick, Betti-Sue Hertz, Xiaoyu Weng, and Anthony Marcellini. I suspect that California has played a part in Spring's casual, flip-flop-wearing nature.

I understand Spring Workshop has a self-imposed five-year lifespan. How hard will it be to pull the plug and are there any plans for the afterlife?
There are so many plans for the afterlife that pulling the plug will just be a step into the next.

The Universe of Naming exhibition with 50 art student workshop #1, May 2013, at Spring Workshop. Courtesy of Spring Workshop.

Contemporary Art in Indonesia

From Solo to Mass, Spiritual to Social

A few Notes on the Development of Contemporary Art in Indonesia

Deborah Iskandar and Astri Wright Interviewed by Gianni Simone

Deborah Iskandar was born in the United States but has lived in Indonesia for many years. She established the first Indonesian international auction house for Christies in 1996 before moving to Sotheby's in 2009 to become their managing director. In 2013 she established ISA Art Advisory to provide clients with independent advice on building collections, either via private sale, auction, or directly from artists.

Astri Wright is an associate professor at the University of Victoria in Canada and a long-standing researcher of modern and contemporary Indonesian art. She has written and co-authored many essays and books on the subject, including Hendra Gunawan: A Great Modern Indonesian Painter *and* Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters.

The following article is the result of several email exchanges and chats on Skype. Its title was "stolen" from one of Astri Wright's essays.

Dede Eri Supria, *After Election*, 2014. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

Where would you like to start a discussion on contemporary art in Indonesia?

Iskandar: To understand the subject I think we have to go back a long way to Raden Saleh (1811–1880). He was the only Indonesian artist who was able to travel to Europe at the time. He travelled through the continent and developed a European painting style very much influenced by romanticism. I'm mentioning him because contemporary Indonesia art has developed through a complex exchange with other countries, beginning with the Netherlands.

It seems to me that Indonesian artists have a sort of love/hate relationship with the Netherlands and the way Dutch painters have influenced the local scene in the early times. Can you tell me something about it?

Wright: When the Dutch first came to Indonesia, they were struck by its beauty and only gradually did the economic and bureaucratic-military system come into place, bringing on the European rape of the land. In the wake of Dutch colonial officials, in place by the mid-nineteenth century, came the artists—Dutch painters who travelled the volcanic islands, capturing the dramatic-exotic scenery and influencing in turn local artists. They developed what became known as Mooi Indie (Beautiful Indies) art that for good or bad influenced local artists. This is something that many Indonesian painters perhaps prefer not to stress too much.

Do you think that the recent emergence of Indonesian art is a sign that things are changing?

Wright: Luckily more and more people are realizing that modern and contemporary art cannot be copyright-owned by a few cities in the Western Hemisphere. The reductionist notion that contemporary painting in Haiti, China, Brazil, or Indonesia is merely derivative of western art has as much truth to it as the idea that European civilization originated in China. Many areas of modern western art today owe as much to African and Asian art as areas of non-western art owe to the West.

Can you tell me something about the role played by Affandi, S. Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, and others in the drive to create a truly national art scene?

Iskandar: In 1938 Sudjojono formed PERSAGI (Indonesian Painters Association) which established a contemporary art philosophy against the Mooi Indie art. Their activity was part of a bigger movement to create a national identity. They wanted to show the reality of the Indonesian people through paintings made by Indonesians for Indonesians. It only lasted until the Japanese invasion in 1942, but people like Sudjojono, Affandi, and Hendra Gunawan went on to become internationally famous artists.

How did they differ, stylistically speaking, from the Dutch model?

Iskandar: Affandi, for instance, was a sort of expressionist. In the 1950s he would develop a style called "squeezing the tube" for he applied the paint directly from its tube. He later said he had discovered this method by accident, but the fact remains that this approach—using his hands instead of brushes—gave him more freedom and resulted in paintings full of spontaneity.

You have mentioned the Japanese invasion in 1942. We all know about the bloody trail left by the Japanese army in WWII. With the excuse of creating a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japan replaced the European powers as the new colonial ruler and committed many atrocities. However, it seems Japan's track record in Indonesia has been slightly better, especially as far as art is concerned. Do you agree?

Iskandar: Japan occupied Indonesia from 1942 to 1945, and yes, it's true that it was actually the Japanese who encouraged local painters to develop their talent, first by providing studios and painting supplies, and later by actually exhibiting their works. In March 1943 local leaders created Poetera, a cultural center whose main teachers were future prominent artists S. Sudjojono and Affandi. During this period several Japanese teachers came to Indonesia and showed Japanese art and movies with a revolutionary tone. Among them there were Tsuguharu Fujita, Saburo Miyamoto, and Toshi Shimizu—makers of propaganda and film posters—who had a deep influence on such Indonesian artists as Hendra Gunawan.

Wright: This, of course does not mean that life under the Japanese was easy. Affandi has talked about how hard it was to make a living during the Japanese occupation, the war, and, later, during the struggle for independence.

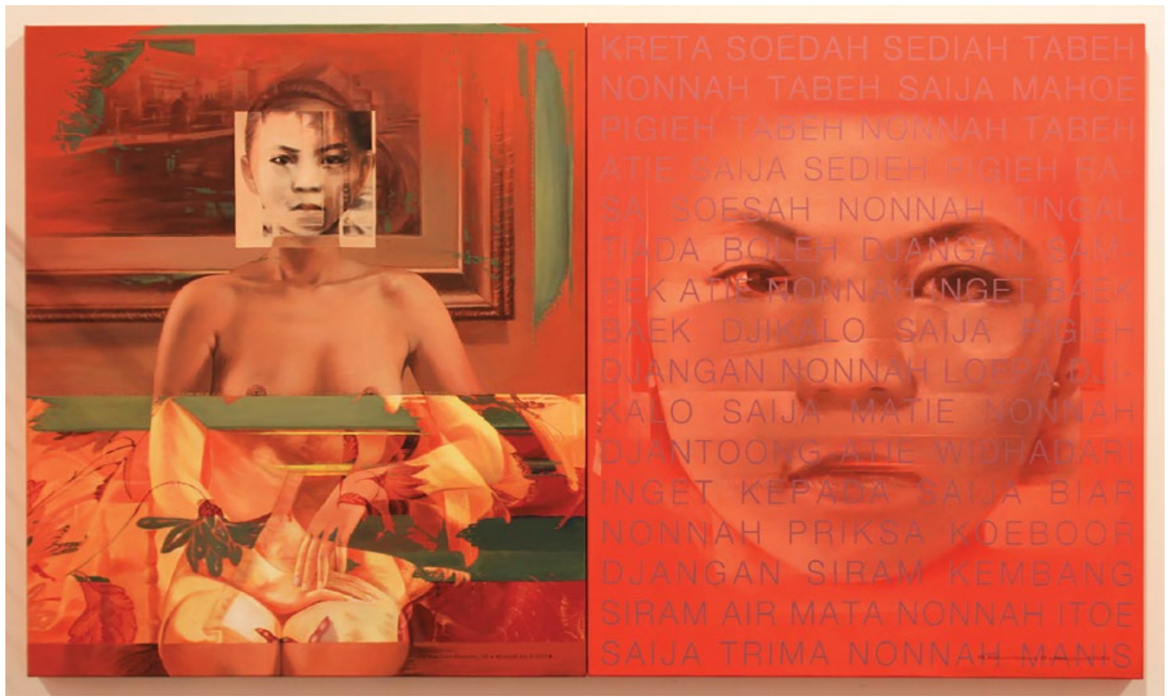
Let's talk about the postwar period. The first twenty years were a tumultuous time for both Indonesian society and the arts.

Iskandar: Yes, at the time future President Sukarno was a young nationalist and encouraged the development of the Seniman Indonesia Muda, or Young Indonesian Artists movement, whose works were strongly influenced by the revolutionary ideas of the time. His support was crucial—mainly psychologically but also at times materially. Unfortunately, after he became president his tastes changed and he reverted to the old Mooi Indie decorative style. He was, by the way, a noted womanizer, which is why his huge collection features many nude portraits. Sukarno was eventually toppled by Suharto, and between 1967 and the late '90s there was a vacuum in the Indonesian art world mainly because the regime only allowed the blandest form of creativity.

Was there some sort of repression of the arts at the time?

Wright: Yes. Hendra Gunawan, for instance, was involved in the Institute of Popular Culture (LEKRA), a cultural organization affiliated with the now-defunct Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). His jazzy, surreal paintings never fail to put me in a trance-like frame of mind. At the same time he had a lot of empathy for all the people who were enduring revolution and hunger, negotiating the relationships of daily life and celebrating its most intense moments, ritually and festively. Unfortunately he was incarcerated in the early '60s and was not released until 1978, only five years before his death.

Iskandar: It was only in the late '80s that things began to change with the establishment of Galeri Cemeti and the emergence of a group of young artists who opposed modern, industrialized society and especially Suharto's regime's political repression and its attempt to eliminate diversity.



F.X. Harsono, *Memories of Njonjah No. 3*, 2014. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

Who are some of your favorite artist of this period?

Wright: First of all, I'd say Nindityo Adipurnomo, a painter and sculptor who works with a variety of media, including wood, copper, and cloth. He exemplifies a certain trend in Indonesian contemporary art. At first his art was steeped in mythology and meditation, and he created his works with as little intent and rational control as possible in an attempt to work directly from the feelings located in the unconscious. But after spending some time in the Netherlands, he somewhat changed his stylistic choices, mixing Javanese spirituality and the traditional idea that color is a way to visualize music, with a new sensibility for such artists as Kandinsky, Schlemmer, and de Kooning. The western influence, though, must not be seen as just copying, but rather as an affinity of "inner mood." After all, many European artists were interested in mysticism, and Kandinsky himself wrote an influential essay in 1912 (*On the Spiritual in Art*).

Iskandar: Nindityo's evolution must be also seen in the context of Suharto's regime. Art for art's sake was the safe realm while any involvement with critical political expression was not. However, in the early '90s installation art began to sweep through the contemporary Indonesian art world, inspired by the first, seminal experiments and exhibitions from the mid-'70s onwards by the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (New Art Movement). Nindityo was among those 30-something painters who joined in the installation fever. At the same time his work began to reflect the spread of discontent with the Suharto regime.

Wright: Another artist I really like is Dede Eri Supria, Indonesia's most important urban painter. He takes photographic images of the metropolis apart and reassembles them into disconcerting but strangely familiar views, at times crossing the border to the surreal. In Dede's landscapes of urban construction, people are the main feature, but instead of the cosmopolitan segments of Jakarta society, he prefers to depict *becak* (cycle rickshaw) drivers, laborers, poor women with children, etc.

I read somewhere that you have defined Dede as a "Paul Gauguin in reverse." What did you mean with that?

Wright: Gauguin was a European who was uninspired by his own culture and gave to the world beautiful, mysterious images of exotic people blending into equally unfamiliar landscapes. In Dede's paintings, on the contrary, easterners can thrill to see their own world, the urban jungle, through the eyes of a tropical man come to "civilization." His work is deceptively accessible to Euro-Americans but it is important to notice a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar.

His works have a very photographic quality.

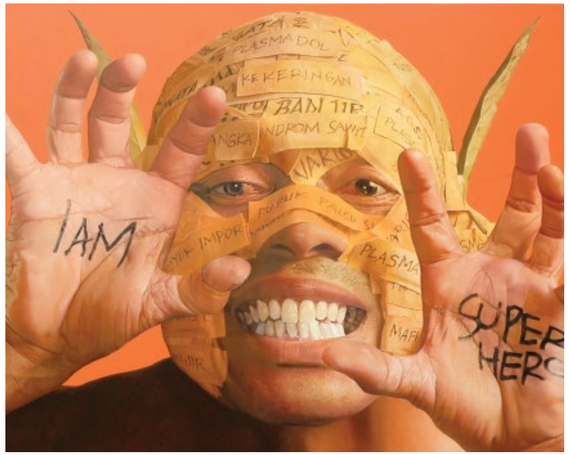
Wright: That's because he first began to work doing cover illustrations for *TEMPO* (Indonesia's *TIME* magazine) and calendars, and because he painted industrial interiors, machinery, and architecture all the time, he became very skilled at depicting objects, materials, and textures of all types. This mode of working, in turn, influenced his painting. He also began to follow news events closely and did his own journalistic research. In this way he came to understand the connection between art and socio-political and economic affairs.

Is this style popular in Indonesia?

Wright: When he started it wasn't popular at all. He studied painting at the Sekolah Seni Rupa Indonesia (SSRI) or Secondary School of Fine Arts in Yogyakarta, but his interest in realism elicited little encouragement or understanding from the teachers; the style was not deemed worthy of anything but a study tool. When a handful of students nonetheless persisted in pursuing it, they were mocked with statements like "realism is a dirty cooking-pot for rice."IT's probably because of this not-too-happy academic experience that he considers himself a self-taught painter.

So it was just a matter of taste, so to speak?

Wright: Actually there was more. Before Dede and the emergence of the New Art Movement, realism had been the special preserve of LEKRA (Institute of People's Culture), a literary and artistic movement associated with the Indonesian Communist Party. LEKRA urged its members to go out in the streets in order to better understand people's conditions, but its forceful brand of patronage was such that for many people social realism became synonymous with party guidance, and hence usually showed no imagination. Dede's art, on the contrary, can be ironic and dreamlike.



Haris Purnomo, *Superhero*, 2013. Acrylic and oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

I know that the past regimes have tried to eliminate diversity in the Indonesian racial and cultural mix and assimilate all minorities.

Iskandar: Yes, even my husband is ethnically Chinese, and his real name was changed to Daniel Faisal Iskandar, where Daniel is a Christian name and Faisal is Islamic. In other words, they tried to hide his Chinese roots as much as possible.

Has any artist addressed this particular aspect of Indonesian history?

Iskandar: Probably the best known is F. X. Harsono who was among the founders of the New Art Movement. Being ethnically Chinese, Harsono has strongly felt the government policy of assimilation. Until the end of the century, for instance, all Chinese had to change their names and were forbidden to speak their language. So the *X* in his name, like the one in Malcolm X, stands for his lost identity. One of my favorite works is an installation from 1994 called *The Voices Controlled by the Powers*. It was made in response to the Indonesian government's banning of *TEMPO* magazine after it published an article exposing corruption in the Suharto regime. On a large black cloth, rows of traditional wayang masks with their bottoms half severed stand upward, looking inward toward their cut jaws that seem to emit silent screams. This work exemplifies Harsono's belief that artists have a social responsibility.

Have things changed with the fall of Suharto?

Iskandar: Yes and no. The ethnic Chinese have always been victims during social and political turmoil in Indonesia. So even after Suharto was forced to step down in May 1998, violence erupted in Jakarta against the Chinese-Indonesian community. This has left a profound imprint on Harsono. A recent video (*Writing in the Rain*) shows him trying to write his old name on a transparent panel while water raining down from the ceiling keeps deleting the Chinese characters.

You have mentioned the relatively recent rise of installation and conceptual art in Indonesia. Is this the result of closer exchanges with the West?

Iskandar: Partly it's because of that. Until the late '70s to '80s, painting, sculpture, and printmaking were the only disciplines officially recognized as fine art in Indonesia. This was changed by the New Art Movement that was established in 1975 by a group of ten art students from Bandung and Yogyakarta. The New Art Movement wrote a manifesto towards a new definition of the concept of art in order to expand the old definition. The group encouraged experimentation in the arts and tried to revitalize socially committed art. One of the best Indonesian artists of this generation is Heri Dono. He once had an exhibition in Atlanta and the Indonesian Ambassador criticized him because he showed a side of Indonesia that the government wanted to keep hidden from the outside.

Wright: The interesting thing about Dono is that he comes from a contemporary art background but later learned the craft of wayang kulit (shadow puppets). The Indonesian government invests in the past and encourages traditional forms of art in order to counter new ones. So he decided to exploit the situation, expressing his own thoughts without really spelling them out. Even in the past the wayang has often been used as means for indirect and allusive suggestion, which is important in Javanese communication and social intercourse. Different kinds of wayang are used as allegorical vehicles to praise or criticize leading figures in the community.

S. Sudjojono, *Rontok*, 1978. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

Iskandar: While in the West we are often very direct in expressing our opinions, many people in Asia—including Indonesians—prefer to criticize the status quo in a more roundabout way. In this sense many artists make use of humor to make their points, and Dono is a perfect example.

How do you judge the latest trends in contemporary art?

Wright: The New Art Movement of the '80s criticized the tendency of many modern Indonesian artists and critics to emphasize feeling and emotion, above all *positive* emotion, in romantic or lyrical visual styles. This has resulted in a new rational approach, which emphasizes *ratio* over *rasa* (intuitive or feeling-based insight, considered superior in Javanese thinking). This attitude may, in part, explain the difficulty of the acceptance of conceptual art in Indonesia as pioneered by the New Art Movement.

Who is in your opinion the most successful Indonesian artist of the last few years?

Iskandar: If you are talking about financial success and market value, I'd say I Nyoman Masriadi who, by the way, was born in 1973, so he fully belongs to the latest generation of artists. He is a real trendsetter and the first Indonesian contemporary artist to be recognized commercially and aesthetically. Fifteen years ago he was selling souvenir paintings to tourists in Bali for $20 each, and now his works sell at galleries for $250,000 to $300,000. He's also the first living Southeast Asian artist whose work has topped $1 million at auction.

Why do you think he's been so successful?

Iskandar: I guess his work is very appealing and deceptively simple at first glance. It's the right mix of avant-garde and pop culture. His style is a cross between DC Comics, which he acknowledges as an inspiration, and the Colombian painter and sculptor Fernando Botero, and features many macho figures often caught in candid moments. Content wise, he covers a lot of ground, from the usual political corruption to the joys and sorrows of modern life. Political cartoons, with their sharp humor and appealing style, are very accessible to the public

Nindityo Adipurnomo, *Post Tolerance #1*, 2012. Gouache on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

and have enjoyed quite a following in Indonesia.

Are there any differences between the art scenes in Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, etc.?

Iskandar: You don't have many artists living in Bali. I think the big city and the expense is not conducive to a creative environment. Yogyakarta, the traditional center of Indonesia art, is in Java, where 70% of the population lives. I find Yogyakarta is more expressive and free. The ideas that are born here are very contemporary, but the atmosphere is also different. ASRI was traditionally focused on thoughts, policy, contemporary expression, and creative ideas. Bandung, on the other side, used to be the Dutch holiday center because it is up a mountain and it is cool, and it was there that western ideas and technique arrived in the country. The focus is more on the technique of creating art, formalization, shapes, and forms. In the past it was more influenced by western ideas such as abstraction. So you have this dichotomy between the traditional school and the western school that according to its detractors was an imitation of foreign ideas. Finally there is Jakarta, the country's capital, where most collectors are based.

I understand there is a lack of infrastructures where one can see contemporary art. Even in the bigger cities there aren't any major public museums where one can actually see all these works. Is that right?

Iskandar: Yes, that's true. Also, differently from other countries, Indonesian artists don't work exclusively with one gallery. We go back to the issue of underdeveloped infrastructure. When you have an exclusivity contract with an artist, you have to invest and make sure you get a return, which means you have to cultivate a group of collectors, place your works in the museums, etc. But because galleries seldom have loyal customers who will buy again and again from them, it doesn't make sense to invest a lot of money in the same artist(s).

Wright: For many years Indonesian art professionals and the public didn't develop clear contractual habits or rules. You could have speculators put "SOLD" tags on as many as thirty paintings at a large, important exhibition, *without* being asked to sign any agreements, or place any deposits. In Indonesia, art auctions and galleries began to multiply quickly in the late '80s before there was any broader understanding of the principles and practice of art history or art criticism. It is still not possible to get a PhD in art history in Indonesia, and only a few have pursued PhD degrees in art history abroad. Historically, the European art market in the so-called pre-modern world came into being just after art history developed as a discipline. So art historical analysis has laid the foundations for the monetary values placed on art. This is the partnership that Indonesia is lacking: here, there is no solid tradition of knowledge and practice in art history and art criticism. As a consequence, unlike older centers for modern art, such as those in Europe and America, Indonesia's art market is the dominant institution in the art world that operates on a basis that combines artistic ignorance and profit-making desire.

Deborah, you have lived in Indonesia for many years now. What major changes have you witnessed, both from an artistic and an economic (i.e. the art market) point of view.

Iskandar: When I started in the art world in Indonesia, there were a handful of collectors

I Nyoman Masradi, *Oknum vs Residivis*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

who attended the auctions and very little in the way of contemporary art. The focus was solely on the masters. It was only after 2000 that we had the first generation of what I would call "contemporary art." Prior to that date, only Heri Dono, Eddie Hara, and perhaps Dede Eri Supria could be considered as contemporary artists. After the fall of Suharto and Reformasi [the reformation], it was like a breath of fresh air in the art world. You had artists like the Jendela Group and Agus Suwage exhibiting, and the establishment of Nadi Gallery, who represented most of these artists. In contrast to the Chinese boom, which was driven largely by foreigners, the demand for Indonesian art has been a mostly homegrown affair. That's changing, now that collectors in Hong Kong, London, and Berlin are training their sights on the country. The problem remains, though, that the Indonesian Association of Art Galleries consists of only 18 dealers, and there are no public contemporary art museums.

I found the Yogyakarta Jogja Biennale mentioned somewhere, but little else. Can you tell me something about this event and the role (big or small) it plays in the local art scene?

Iskandar: I think it has a huge impact on the art scene as all the galleries get involved and host exhibitions wherein each artist only has one work shown during the fair. This attracts a lot of western curators, collectors, and artists because they can view so much contemporary art in one city. This year was one of the strongest I have seen, as I think the artists really pushed themselves to create their best works.

Would you like to add something?

Wright: I would only like to stress once again that contemporary Indonesian art reflects a different set of conditions, challenges, and preoccupations than contemporary western art. This fact is often neglected by western art critics, who usually measure contemporary "non-western" culture by their own Eurocentric standards. In their eyes contemporary Indonesian (or other non-western) art is often labeled either as derivative or decorative (i.e. too traditional). I think we should understand Asian art in its own right. Only in this way will hidden meanings, that would otherwise be overlooked, be grasped. We can't deny that the role of the Dutch influence in this process, through its colonial education systems, has been considerable (a fact that, as I said, many Indonesian painters perhaps prefer not to stress too much). However, the mystical and social aspects that constitute the most important poles inside Indonesian contemporary art today derive from a long intellectual search for an Indonesian identity that started during the '30s and is still going on.

The Losers of Chinese Contemporary Art

何穎雅 Elaine W. Ho

We have become familiar with the psychological condensation of political events and their media representation, with the changing dynamics of social welfare that lead to cuts in funding for culture, and the mainstreamed collusion of corporate capital with artistic economies. Such familiarization is often confused with what is a kind of "naturalization," or the assumption of inevitability, but regardless, it seems to "make sense" that the representation of and systemization of art have become more and more overtly politicized. Of course, every country and every art scene has their own algorithm for taking in and reproducing these relationships, but the Chinese emergence within global contemporary art since the '90s is earmarked by its incredible productive capacities sparking a looming cloud of dust and smog over the rest of the world—both literally and metaphorically.

Call it the "Made in China mystique," because production requires and begets new economies, but honestly, where the hell is all this money coming from? And who cares if what this entails for arts and culture within the mainland is fantastic? Cheap labor means that individual artists can create massive scale productions only accessible to art stars in the West; art becomes legitimized as a respectable career and investment; and artists who choose to politicize their work can make huge waves with international press at the risk of either being ridiculed for kissing white ass or getting trampled upon by authorities.[1] Of course, the latter is what is heard about most in western media, but the irony of the matter is that whether looked at from East or West there is a certain ideological upholding of a concept of purity embedded within these politics. Either one maintains the purity of his/her artistic expression despite any kind of state authority, or one upholds the purity of artistic form without the need to play into the media spectacle of representation. In either case, however, it is the illusion of some artistic whole, either an individual or a collective one, that casts aside the small-scale players in China's art world, because their precarious positions relative to finance and politics means that they have hardly the luxury to act full-on in either arena. As experimental musician and critic Yan Jun recently wrote about for *The Wire* magazine, "Beijing was a wonderful place for underground musicians, unknown artists, punks, neo-hippies and anyone who had no money but had a dream. Suddenly China has started emanating the illusion of being a major, rich country. Beijing was painted to resemble a monster amoeba by real estate developers and the Olympics. Then visa policies became stricter: losers out."[2] The "losers" here insinuate the non-wealthy foreigners who aren't able to handle the authoritarian capitalist, anarcho-fun ride, but it also refers to the swath's of non-Beijingers who face discrimination because of the household registration policy (*hukou*) affecting jobs, education, and healthcare.

What all of this creates the background for is simply another politicized reading of the context for art and culture in China. And maybe our interest in the "losers" is exactly why we have to move away from the art centers of the country, especially when those entail government sanctioned arts districts such as the now Disney-fied 798 Art Zone in Beijing and Shanghai's Moganshan Road gallery area. The losers that don't fit into those globalized treats of iced lattes and ridiculously high rents have to find other spaces and other means, and the result is that the do-it-yourself ethos that characterizes non-institutionalized practices must involve other forms of commerce, either by finding alternative means of funding incorporated into a space, or separate commercial endeavors pushing art to a part-time position. With a lack of government or foundational funding for the arts, there can only be fewer qualms about soiled artistic integrity, and both the winner and loser categories are populated with art and commercial space rental, art and fun products for sale, or fine art and fine dining.

Still, most of China's independent art initiatives seem to face one of only two possible fates: either to expand and reconfigure as commercial galleries, or simply succumb to various pressures and disband.[3] Maintaining a place within the "art scene" is, of course, not only a spatial question but a sociopolitical one. And if this is the case, it is perhaps in greater China—where the "winners" consist of Party members and *tuhao*, slang for the Chinese equivalent of trashy new money types—that there is lot more to be said about the "losers." As noted by artist duo Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, even when individual efforts are collectively mobilized, as seen by the resurgence of collective practices in Chinese contemporary art, such solidarities are typically only made for greater impact within the competitive exhibition market hungry to peg the next big stars. Double Fly Art Center, a collective of young graduates from Hangzhou's renowned China Academy of Fine Arts, are a perfect example, and their flashy, sophomoric antics have provided plenty a spectacle to counter the frustration of individual artists unsure of how to find their place within the art world after graduation.

So just who are the losers of Chinese contemporary art? While increased interest in self-organized practices since 2008 may historicize a certain number of small-scale initiatives, the tongue-in-cheek categorization sympathizes with the fall of most of these practices as a part of their "naturalization" in context. This is also the crux of their sociopolitical significance. Returning to the two destinies of Chinese independent art initiatives, we find practitioners such as Vitamin Creative Space (Guangzhou/Beijing), Long March Space (Beijing), and BizArt (Shanghai) falling into the former category of commercialization, and others like defunct LVXIAO (Beijing), HomeShop (Beijing), and Small Productions (Hangzhou) fading into the latter.[4] As curators Bao Dong and Carol Yinghua Lu both insinuate, measures of economic reactionism occur as both a cause and effect of autonomous practice in China. For Bao, self-organization reacts contextually to the establishment of institutionalized artistic systems in contemporary China, and in the case of Lu and artist Liu Ding's *Little Movements* research, cohesive artistic micro-economies are an inherent quality of independent initiatives. Such context specificity would then imply that it is the instability of modern China that conditions, for better or worse, an equal and reactionary instability of its progressive, critical cultural output.

The politics to be extracted from this broad overview occur as a dualism between majority and minority. If we can generalize further about the tolerance for minority voices, then the reality of China's "anarchist spirit" destabilizing state authority precisely fits the ethos of self-organized and alternative practice. The ironic avant-garde of contemporary culture is to be found in the hackers and the forger-fakers, and perhaps the "copying" of such practices in art is one manner in which another form of multiplicitous, hybrid voicing can occur.[5]

An extremely pertinent example of this can be found in one of the biggest losers facing the fallout of China's rise: Hong Kong. As relations tense and the Hong Kong sociopolitical economy bows to its "mainlandification" after the 1997 handover from the British, artists have been sensitive to the political gravity of the voice, and their reactions have charged everything from direct action in politics to the trend of community-based art engaging in local neighborhoods. Although the trending of terms like "community art" and "artivism" in Hong Kong can be viewed as cheap popularizations, it is exactly the possibilities created by the numerous independent broadsheets/newspapers and documentary works by artists in recent years that maintain a voice amid growing authority. Art space WooferTen's work in the aging neighborhood of Yau Ma Tei on the Kowloon Peninsula of Hong Kong has been central to gathering a number of young activists and artists together with small-business proprietors and old neighbors in the area.[6] Their self-published broadsheet *WooferPost* reported on daily happenings on Yau Ma Tei's streets, announced WooferTen events, and gave space to editorial opinions from locals. Interestingly enough, when WooferTen lost its funding from the government-subsidized Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) in 2013, rallying by members and supporters managed to keep WooferTen afloat, though now under the sarcastic moniker of WooferHui ("Ruins of Revitalization"), insinuating their occupation of the space after the ruin of HKADC condemnation. But no matter if WooferTen has "lost," its role within the resurgence of community discourse in ways that do not exist in the mainland is crucial. It has copied and been copied, influenced and continues to be an influence for its members who are now branching into other areas with the demise of WooferTen on the horizon.[7] But this plethora of versions and voices is exactly part of a contemporary noise that opens up the discussion of what a more ideal politics could be. Initiatives such as artist Thickest Choi's *Lawnmap* of green spaces in the city, and *Guerrilla Gigs* from Kwun Tong-based musicians and collective V-Artivist's work documenting the people and spaces negatively affected by urban regeneration have all emerged from a sense of loss in the environment. And it is this collective loss, for both Hong Kong and its mainland uncle, that makes the voice of the loser one of the most important to listen to today.

All images Courtesy of Elaine W. Ho.

1) The most obvious example of artistic hot-wiring on the precipices of sensationalism and censorship is Ai Wei Wei, who most recently sparked yet another polemic with his retaliation against the Ullens Center of Contemporary Art for withdrawing his name from the press release of a group exhibition. For further reading, see Paul Gladston's text "The (Continuing) Story of Ai—From Tragedy to Farce". *http://www.randian-online.com/np_feature/the-continuing-story-of-ai-from-tragedy-to-farce/*

2) Yan Jun, "Which Hell Do You Prefer?", *The Wire*, May 2014, accessed 23 June 2014, *http://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/columns/yan-jun_which-hell-do-you-prefer_*

3) As noted by Song Yi, managing editor of *Leap* magazine, during an online interview, 29 January 2014.

4) Each of the spaces mentioned has been documented and presented at least once by varied researches on independent practice, including Hou Hanru, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Guo Xiaoyan's special project entitled "Self-Organization" for the Second Guangzhou Triennial (2005); Carol Yinghua Lu and Liu Ding's on-going research *Little Movements: Self Practice in Contemporary Art* (OCT Contemporary Art Terminus, Shenzhen, 2011, and Museion, Bolzano, 2013); curator Bao Dong's continuing focus upon self-organization and collective practice, manifested in 2012 as the exhibition *SEE/SAW: Collective Practice in China Now* (Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing) and in 2014 as the exhibition/symposium *Positive Space* (Times Museum, Guangzhou).

5) As described by author Yu Hua in his colorful recounting of the rise of the *shanzhai* (copycat) phenomenon in contemporary culture. Yu Hua, *China in Ten Words*, translated by Barr, Allan H. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011).

6) WooferTen began in 2009 as a collective effort by ten artists, designers and critics to experiment with the possibilities of community-based art. They were granted a storefront space and funding from the Arts Development Council for four years, with activities ranging from workshops, window exhibitions and freely-distributed publications. The name in English is a romanization from the Cantonese, which translates to "Living Room of Revitalization". *www.wooferten.blogspot.hk*

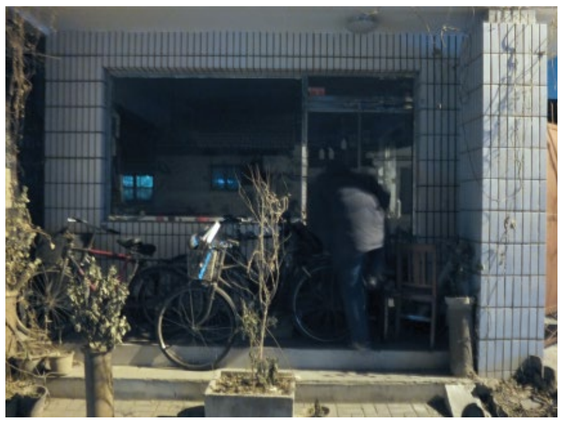
7) WooferTen co-founder Luke Ching Chin-Wai has cited the space-hijacking interventions he saw from artists in the west as inspiration for some of his own work as well as one of the launch points for WooferTen's activity. What may be regarded as simple appropriation, however, cannot be judged merely as such in the face of the specificities of cultural context and the conceptual waning of "the original" in any cultural production today. It could be theoretically argued, even, that all media is a form of appropriation, simply with varying forms of intent.

HomeShop, Beijing.

Some of the grassroots community publications that have popped up in Hong Kong in recent years.

Irene Hui from WooferTen sells artist-made stuff to help raise funds for dockworkers on strike, 2013.

Guerrilla Gigs performance.



Packing up the night that HomeShop closed its doors in December 2013.

Documentary filmmaker collective *V-Artivists* screen their films about urban regeneration in the Sham Shui Po neighborhood of Hong Kong.

TOM MARIONI: On Asian Art

TOM MARIONI, *ART (feather drawing)*. Courtesy of the artist and Crown Point Press.

Excerpt from TOM MARIONI's book *Beer, Art and Philosophy: The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art*, a memoir by TOM MARIONI. Crown Point Press, San Francisco, 2003.

1982

Living on the West Coast exposes you to a subtle Asian influence. After ten years in California, I became influenced by Zen ideas. My meditative line drawings, like *Drawing a Line as Far as I Can Reach*, and my drumming exercises were my way to connect with Japan. By the late '70s I was anxious to go there.

Richard Newlin, a publisher from Houston who was doing a book about prints that Richard Diebenkorn made at Kathan's press, took Kathan and me to the Toppan Printing Company in Tokyo in 1980. Newlin had liked other catalogues that I designed and he hired me to design the book.

We stayed in a monastery and ate fish and pickles and seaweed for breakfast. Kathan got the idea to try to do woodblock printing in Japan. She got in touch with a man named Tadashi Toda in Kyoto. He was an expert woodblock printer in the classic Japanese tradition.

I got a grant in 1982 from the Asian Cultural Council in New York to travel in Japan so I did a project there, some erotic silkscreen prints and ceramic sake cups in small editions. You could drink sake and look at the dirty pictures at the same time.

That same year, Kathan began to invite artists to go to Japan to make woodblock prints. The artist would make a watercolor. Then the watercolor was sent to Japan where the printer would trace it and have the blocks cut. When all that was done, Kathan would take the artist over there. Toda would already have made a proof. The artist might say, "This is wrong," or "This is too heavy, too dark, too light," or "Make a new block for this." That could all be done while the artist was there for a two-week stay. If I liked the artist, I would sometimes go along on those trips.

The Japanese woodblocks are rectangular, with several different ones for each color. Each print has a lot of blocks, usually twenty or more, and Toda registered them by just laying the paper down and lining up a little cut in it with a mark at the corner of the block. The ink is made of water and pigment. If the artist wanted a really bright red, Toda would have to ink the block and print it, and then ink it again and print it. He would do this several times to build up the color. The ink was watery, not tacky and thick.

Later in the '80s, the value of the yen went up against the dollar and it became so expensive to do the prints in Japan that finally it was impossible. So Kathan went to China. In China, I made several prints. One was called *Flying Yen*. The symbol for the yen is a *Y* with two lines across it. My print looks like a bird flying. I drew the strokes with a feather, which is a writing and drawing instrument rather than a painting instrument. When the yen was falling a few years later, I thought you could turn my print sideways and change the title to *Falling Yen*.

Kathan and I made our first trip to China in '87. A China scholar, Soren Edgren, went with us to Beijing. His future wife, Xia Wei, was teaching at the university there. Through them, we met Professor Yong Hua Yang, who had been a Russian teacher when the Russians were friends with China, but was at that time an English professor at Hangzhou University. He ended up being the translator and the manager of the Crown Point China project.

In Beijing, we went to Rong Bao Zhai, a woodblock print shop that was hundreds of years old. I was the guinea pig. I bought a piece of silk from the print shop store, and a big brush, and some ink. Back in the hotel I wet the silk and stuck it to the window glass, then made my ink mark on it, a single long brush stroke. The next day we took the drawing to the shop. The boss told me they couldn't carve the fine lines that the hairs of the brush had made. There was a print on the wall with fine lines in it and I said, "What about this?" He said, "Those aren't lines. Those are dots." We looked at it with a magnifying glass and sure enough, the lines were dots. If you cut wood so thin that it's only as thick as a piece of hair, it wouldn't be strong enough to stand up in the printing. So instead, they cut the detail lines into little dots. They agreed to do mine that way. I asked how they got the background color in an old print hanging on the wall, and they told me it was stained with tea. I said, "Okay, I want mine like that."

The system for making woodblock prints in China is very different from in Japan. What they do in Japan is trace the gradations in a watercolor painting. The tones go from dark to light, so they make maybe two or three separate blocks to show the darkest part, more blocks to show the medium part, and even more to show the lightest tone in an area. Each change in tone is carved into a block. When you look at a print up close, you can see the gradations are carved in steps. There are hard edges. Even though from a distance the print looks like a watercolor painting, the printer has "Japanized" it, as Francesco Clemente said. It has ended up with a Japanese look, very clean and precise.

When the Chinese want to show a gradation, instead of cutting a block for each darker or lighter tone, they imitate the brush strokes while they are inking the block. In a picture of a bird in a tree, for example, the bird is darker on the bottom where it's in shadow. First, they cut out a piece of wood in the shape of the bird; the block is just the bird shape. Then they fasten that block to the table with a piece of wax. In order to get shading in a solid piece of wood, the printer takes a brush and paints the tone, actually imitates the painting, right on the block. Paint the bird and then print the painted bird on the paper.

The size and shape of each block is determined by the image on it, so the registration system does not involve the blocks. All the paper is in a stack fixed to the table, like a telephone book of blank pages. There is a slot in the table next to the paper. After painting the ink on a block, the printer folds a sheet of paper over it, rubs the back, and then pushes the paper down through the slot in the table. Then the printer inks the block again, and takes the next piece of paper and prints it, like turning pages in a book. Print a sheet, and push it down through the slot, then do it again and again until the bird is printed on all the pieces of paper. Then the printer takes away the bird block and puts another block down—maybe that would be the tree branch the bird is standing on. Next, the printer takes all the pieces of paper that are hanging under the table, and pulls them up through the slot to the top of the table, folding them back to their original position. Then she starts all over. (Printers are usually women, and carvers are men.)

In China, they print on very thin paper or on silk, and this is mounted on a scroll or some heavier paper. In Japan, they print on thicker paper that we call rice paper, but it's not made from rice; it's actually made from bamboo or other plants. People in the West think paper is made from rice because it looks like rice and rice is so important there. Most beers are made from rice in Japan.

When the Chinese printers mounted the prints they did for Crown Point, sometimes they would get little bits of hairs and dirt caught in the glue. Because the paper or silk is so thin, you could see the dirt grains between it and the backing sheet. Kathan would send the prints back and tell them there's dirt in them. And the manager would tell her she wasn't supposed to see that. "Nobody sees that," he said. The idea was that it didn't matter about the mounting. You weren't supposed to see the dirt. You were just supposed to look at the image, and they did a great job of printing that.

The Chinese printers had their own ideas about what the image should be. When we took them Robert Bechtle's drawing of an automobile in front of a house, done from a photograph, they said, "Why would you want to make a print of this?" They didn't understand why they should bother making all the blocks and doing all the work needed to make Bob Bechtle's print.

Bechtle's first proof came out well, but they had to completely redo the edition. They had beefed up the colors, made them too bright, and when Bob looked at the prints, he said, "This is terrible." They had sent the whole edition, fifty prints. Crown Point sent them all back to China, and they were surprised. They said, "We improved the print. We made it better. The colors were too dull." They had to do it over.

We learned about the cultures by doing business in China and Japan. Japan is a very refined version of China. China's the old culture, five thousand years old, and Japan is relatively new. Everything in old China is dark. Even the furniture is black-lacquered and heavy and dark. The culture in Japan came out of Chinese culture, but it is much lighter and more elegant.

In Japan, only a few hundred years ago, the first writing was done by women. The men were mainly warriors, samurai soldiers, and the women were involved with the arts, especially writing. Much of Japanese culture is like a female version of China, more refined and smaller in scale. Japanese people can read Chinese. The written character for *tree* is the same in Chinese as it is in Japanese. But modern words in Japan are written according to the sound of their syllables.

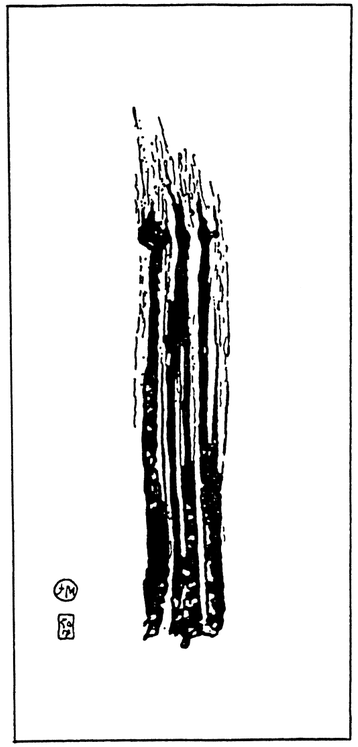
My name, Marioni, is four syllables, so in Japanese it would be four characters: a character for the sound *Ma*, and *ri*, *o*, and then *ni*. In China, they don't do it that way. You wouldn't sound out a name. My Chinese name is Ma Tang. It means "fast running horse." A Chinese person gave me that name because she thought that I look like a fast running horse, and the words have some similarity to the sound of my name. And then the name is reversed. Marioni is first, and Tom second: Ma Tang. Marioni Tom.

After my first trip to China, when I learned that the language is written in a way that explains the meaning of the words, I became interested in learning to write Chinese. The way to write music is with two characters: *sound* and *harmony*. *Museum* is written with three characters: *many*, *things*, and *place*. And the way to write *art* is with *beauty* and *skill*. I had fun writing that word because the character for beauty looks to me like a woman dancing, turning around so that her dress twirls with her, while to her right is the character for skill, a man standing straight and turning his dancing partner.

When I write Chinese, I use the soft end of a seagull feather dipped in ink. The feather holds less ink than a brush. You have to dip it for every stroke, and before the stroke is finished it begins to show gaps. Sometimes the mark takes on the look of a feather. And sometimes the feather skips across the paper and leaves a winglike mark. There is a great name for that kind of dry look in brush calligraphy. It's "flying white."

After the massacre of students in Tiananmen Square in China in 1989, I made an installation piece, a tableau sculpture called *Beijing*. An old bicycle, painted black, sat in front of one of my shadow drawings on a large sheet of yellow paper. It is the suggestion of a figure, but the figure has been taken away. Only the shadow is left. Between the bicycle handlebars I fixed a large traditional Chinese calligraphy brush that I had shaped in the form of a torch with a windblown flame. On the back of the bicycle a flat piece of black wood stuck out like the flatbed of a small truck. In China, almost everything travels on bicycles. There can even be a restaurant on a bicycle, with a little stove on a platform on the back, little dishes that pack inside it, and stools that fit underneath. People sit around the bicycle on the street and have food. Sticking up from the platform on my bicycle was a rod, at an angle, with a white dinner plate balanced (actually glued) on top of it. This referred to the acrobats we saw in circuses in China, who always twirl plates on the ends of sticks. Also on the platform was a small cricket cage with two brass balls inside it, the kind of balls that people roll around in their hands to keep their fingers limber. Nixon once said, "If you have them by the balls, their hearts and minds are sure to follow."

During the '80s most of my work was concerned with places and cultures. In 1982, an artist friend in Japan, Yasu Suzuka, offered to organize a performance for me in Kyoto. I said I'd like to do it in a Shinto shrine. Because he was friends with a Shinto monk, he was able to arrange for me to use a small building in the Ohara Shrine, just outside Kyoto. I called the performance *Studio Kyoto*.



TOM MARIONI, *PEKING (wood block print on silk)*. Courtesy of the artist and Crown Point Press.

The Ohara Shrine is on the side of a hill, among trees, and the performance was at dusk, beginning at 5:30. People arrived while it was still light and stood outside in front of the building. Inside was a woman playing a koto, a stringed instrument that lies horizontally on the floor. In order to play it, you have to bend your body to reach the strings. I had stretched a piece of tracing paper to cover the door opening, so only the woman's shadow would be visible. When people came, they could hear the koto but could not see the shadow because it was still light outside, just starting to get dark. Inside the shrine, behind the woman, I had placed a candle with a little mirror that projected the candlelight onto the paper that covered the door in front of her. As the light outside faded, her shadow slowly appeared and got stronger and stronger.

I stood outside, in front of the doorway, and as it got darker I became a silhouette against the paper. Behind the paper, right up against it, was a microphone. I drew the woman's shadow, and my back and forth motion made a percussive, scratching sound. I provided a kind of Western rhythm for her Eastern music. I used a pencil on a long stick that looked like a conductor's baton. She was inside and I was outside. The performance went from light to dark. It was male/female. The thin membrane of paper separated us.

She wasn't fixed in one position. Her body moved gracefully, and I had to follow her body with my body in order to draw her shadow. There was a marriage of shadows. My pencil was caressing the paper, and her music on the other side of the paper was responding. Because she was moving, the drawing didn't end up looking like a particular form. It was almost like a drawing of smoke. I thought of it as a drawing of a spirit.

Japanese Mail Art, 1956-2014

Mail an Octopus with Stamps on Its Head

By John Held, Jr.

We are constantly adding to the art history of our time by ferreting out forgotten avenues of marginal art and artists. With newly arrived materials added to archives, and a new array of technological research tools to access them, these mislaid artists and their works are fast coming to the fore. Modernist Art can no longer be viewed solely as a European phenomenon, rather a global one, with interconnections glaringly apparent when mislaid lines of communication between the cultures are finally intertwined.

There can be no history of Mail art without an account of the Japanese contribution. mail art in Japan can be directly traced to the 1956 correspondence of Ray Johnson, the oft- acknowledged "Father of mail art", with Jiro Yoshihara, sponsor and artistic coordinator of Gutai. Johnson had been an avid letter writer in high school, his postal encounters increasing after graduation from Black Mountain College amidst attempts to establish a career in design and a reluctance to expose his work in the usual forums. He began using the postal system in a poetic fashion, exposing the commonplace communication conduit as a potent purveyor of artistic practice.

The first act Yoshihara took when establishing the Gutai Art Association in 1954, was the publication of "Gutai" magazine, assigning twenty-six year old Shozo Shimamoto to be its editor. Printed at Shimamoto's home in Nishinomiya, a suburb of Osaka, the magazine was the group's initial outreach to the international art culture that Yoshihara, a wealthy businessman, had been keenly aware of for many years, carrying subscriptions to a variety of foreign journals.

Yoshihara's particular passion after WWII was Jackson Pollock. In the American artist, he sensed the passage of painting beyond figuration and abstraction he sought. Gutai, a name given to the group by Shimamoto, meant "concrete," implying the creation of the artwork through direct physical interaction between the material and the artist. Shimamoto fired containers of colored pigment from a canon onto a canvas. Kazuo Shiraga painted with his feet and crawled through a mixture of concrete and dirt. Atsuko Tanaka painted with sound, her exhibited bells awakened by audience participation. Gutai was this and a great deal more, and only currently recognized for their significant contributions to the Modernist canon.

Recently uncovered communication between Gutai and Pollock surreptitiously led to correspondence with Ray Johnson, initiating new directions in Gutai artistic practice. Moving to New York City after his Black Mountain College years, Johnson began to establish a network of correspondents through the postal system. Shimamoto sent several copies of the magazine to Pollock on February 6, 1956, accompanied by a letter seeking an opinion on the magazine. After Pollock's death on August 11, 1956, his widow asked Bruce Friedman, the artist's biographer, to help sort through the painter's papers. Among the holdings of the collection, were the multiple copies of *Gutai* magazines sent by Shimamoto. Friedman not only wrote to Jiro Yoshihara, expressing interest in receiving further issues of *Gutai*, but passed on copies to his friend Ray Johnson, who contacted the group directly in 1957.

In a letter dated November 7, 1957, published in *Gutai* magazine, Johnson wrote to Yoshihara:

Dear Mr. Yoshihara,

Bob Friedman showed me your very interesting magazines recently and suggested I send you something of my work since you expressed interest in what younger artists are doing. Most of my work is collage which I call MOTICOS. I send out monthly newsletters about the work I am doing which takes the place of a formal exhibition. The works cannot be exhibited in the usual way because they constantly change, like the news in the paper or the images on a movie screen.

The enclosed page shows small black patterns reduced in size, silhouettes of the MOTICOS. The actual MOTICOS are 12 inches in size. Pieces of paper, drawings, words, poems, language, string, each glued on a card. Sometimes the MOTICOS are tied with string to a panel; some of them are used as one group. Those MOTICOS are moved by the wind or by the weather; just like dead leaves, the heat preserves them. A famous artist will visit Japan soon. Her name is Sally Sheeves (?). I think you will meet her and see her works.

Ray Johnson

(Author's note. Sally Sheeves translated incorrectly for the artist Sari Dienes)

Yoshihara replied to Johnson on March 28, 1958.

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I regret my delay in recognizing both your letter and the model of your works.

Due to my illness and the uncertain plans relative to the publication of the next issue of Gutai, I have been delayed in replying to yours.

Your letter made all of us very glad and we would like very much to include that fancy form you sent to s in our next issue.

You are so new and original. We were all surprised and interested in it very much. We would like to insert that in the April issue, which we will send to you as soon as it is in print.

In our next issue we would like to include some of the works from France. Mr. Tapie, a French critic will send us various materials. We want very much to introduce to the Japanese people some American works, so I hope you will be kind enough to send us as many of them as possible.

I regret to say I could not see Madam Sary Siebes.

Thanking you again for your works and for your good interest in what we are doing, I am

Most cordially yours,
Jiro Yoshihara.

In *Gutai* number 6, Yoshihara wrote that Jackson Pollock was, "a master American artist," showed, "keen interest" in Gutai, and that following his death, Pollock's friend B. H. Friedman, had corresponded with the group, providing them with an essay, in which he confronted Pollock's detractors and made a case for his lasting contribution ("It's hard to accept an art in which there can be no tricks, in which every act is visible.").

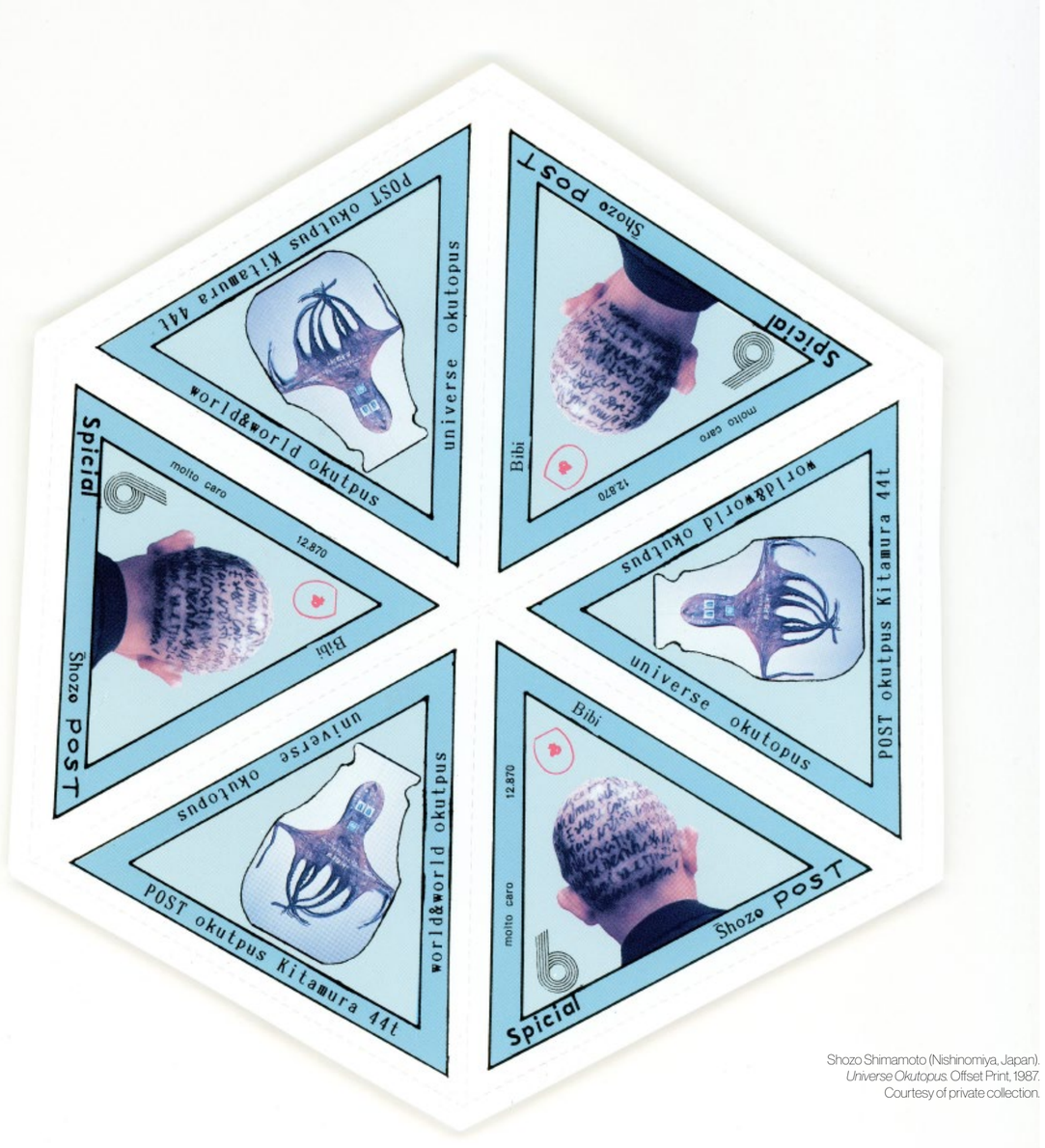
In addition to contributing the essay on Pollock by Friedman, it was mentioned that, "Mr. Friedman introduced us to an unusual artist in New York, Ray Johnson, who presents his works not through exhibitions but in the form of correspondence. Mr. Johnson sent us new forms of paper cutouts, prints, poems, etc. The members of the Gutai group were very excited especially by Mr. Johnson's method of presentation."

After receiving Johnson's missives to the group, Gutai's use of the mails as a creative force sharply increased. Members of the group began using the form of New Year greeting cards, called nengajo, to distribute original works of art. In essence, Gutai members did away with the traditional practice of conveying holiday messages, substituting instead the presence of the artist through performative actions. Nowhere is this more innovative than Saburo Murakami's rubbing of garlic on the inside of an envelope to fellow Gutai member TsurukoYamazaki in 1958.

By 1962, Gutai was sending out sets of nengajo to their international following. Gutai nengajo elicited great excitement from foreign correspondents receiving them. Gordon Bailey Washburn, director of the Carnegie Institute, wrote that, "I have been enchanted to receive the New Year's greetings from the Gutai Group. It is, I think, the most unique message I ever received, and I will keep them all in a portfolio of special Christmas cards as I hope someday to have a little exhibition of such material." David Anderson, son of New York gallerist Martha Jackson, commented that upon receiving his sent of nengajo, "We were so pleased that we mounted all the cards in a small frame, and they are hanging now in our home." (Many of my quotations are taken from Ming Tiampo's, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism*, University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Gutai's distribution of creative nengajo was so successful that they expanded the practice to a wider public at their art exhibitions. The same year they sent out their sets of nengajo to Washburn and Anderson, they installed a plastic and aluminum *Gutai Card Box* during the course of the *11th Gutai Art Exhibition*. Visitors to the exhibition were able to insert modest amounts of coinage into the enlarged mailbox and receive a hand painted postcard by one of the Gutai artists. This was not done mechanically, rather the exchange was made by one of the members, who sat inside the box. The work was a continuation of Gutai policy to include exhibition attendees in participatory actions, a mainstay of Gutai presentations over the years.

Other strategies were employed by Gutai artists to overcome their distance from the perceived centers of art. A discarded proposal by Akira Kanayama for the 1965 *Nul* exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam was a drawing of a mailbox (labeled "post" in English) with an outstretched hand holding a letter. Although similar in conception to the *Gutai Card Box*, Kanayama's proposed work stressed instead the presence of the artist in the act of international communication with an unknown audience.



Shozo Shimamoto (Nishinomiya, Japan).
Universe Okutopus. Offset Print, 1987.
Courtesy of private collection.

Gutai's use of the postal system began with the distribution of *Gutai* magazine, built upon the model of Ray Johnson mailings and incorporated into their participatory exhibition activities. It indicated that the postal system was not only a distribution system for international information, but could be used for the direct transfer of artistic energy from one individual to another, both directly through the mail and by using the postal system as a model representing information transfer in exhibitions. These lessons did not dissipate after the disbanding of Gutai in 1972 following the death of Yoshihara, but continued and expanded, as we will later see in the post-Gutai years of Shozo Shimamoto.

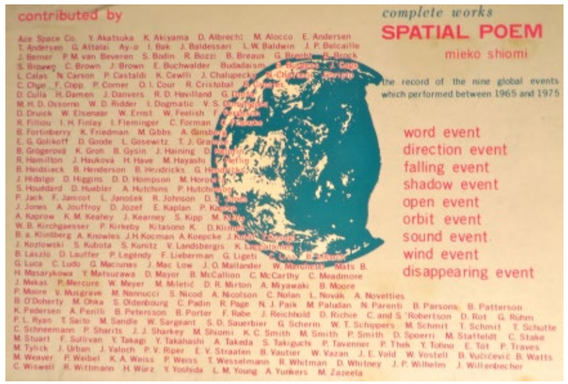
Ray Johnson's impact on the international avant-garde was not confined to Gutai artists. His influence on Fluxus was widespread. Mailings as creative promotion, new artistic genres based on associated postal mediums, such as rubber and postal stamps, and the blending of art within the everyday tasks of life, were just some of the directions Ray Johnson guided Fluxus.

Fluxus was the brainchild of artistic impresario George Maciunas, an architecturally trained Lithuanian residing in New York. The name "Fluxus" was first conceptualized as the title of a magazine (as was Gutai) by Maciunas, who had opened AG Gallery in 1961, one year before the official start of Fluxus.

Tellingly, the first series of performances presented at AG Gallery included an action by Ray Johnson, who in reaction to the current craze of "happenings" sweeping New York, staged a "nothing" on July 30, 1961. The following year, Fluxus, as a group, was initiated with a series of avant-garde concerts in Germany. The cast and crew of Fluxus were decidedly international, the magazines and newsletters produced by Maciunas a necessity in keeping the informal membership informed.

Among the international artists connected with Fluxus were several Japanese artists including Yoko Ono and her first husband musician Toshi Ichiyanagi, composer Takehisa Kosugi, inter-media violinist Yasunao Tone, Ay-O, Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, video artist Shigeko Kubota, and Yoshimasa Wada, who became an assistant to Maciunas in his later years.

Osaka based artist Mieko Shiomi is particularly important as a postal artist. She studied music in Tokyo and came into contact with Nam June Paik, who referred her to George Maci-



Mieko Shiomi (Osaka, Japan). *Spatial Poem (Postcard)*. Offset Print, 1976. Courtesy of private collection.

unas. She traveled to New York, where she secured work with Joe Jonas, a Fluxus musician. Soon after her return to Japan in 1965, she began her *Spatial Poem* project, which was composed of nine international events continued over a decade. She extended an invitation to artists from around the world, through the postal system, requesting they conceptualize and stage an event based on a theme and send her the results. The actions would then be charted on a map and sent out as documentation to the participants.

Over four hundred artists participated in the nine events staged over ten years. Among them are pioneers of mail art, who began their practice in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including Ace Space Co. (USA), Peter van Beveren (Holland), Ken Friedman (USA), Irene Dogmatic (USA), Klaus Groh (Germany), J. H. Kocman (Czechoslovakia), Clemente Padin (Uruguay), Chuck Stake (Canada), Patricia Tavenner (USA). Well known artists also participated in Shiomi's *Spatial Poem*, including John Baldessari, John Cage, Christo, Allen Ginsberg, Allan Kaprow, Jonas Mekas, La Monte Young—and many of the Fluxus artists.

Japanese artists who participated included Y. Akatsuka, Kuniharu Akiyama, Ay-O, Michio Hayashi, K. Kitsono, Kosugi Takehisa, Shigeko Kubota, H. Masarykowa, Yutaka Matsuzawa, A. Miyawaki, M. Ohka, Takako Saito, Y. Takagi, Yuji Takahashi, Akimichi Takeda, Shuzo Takiguchi, Yasunao Tone, and Yoshie Yoshida. Projects of this type proliferated in mail art over the following years. Some would result in exhibitions, others in publications, some solely documented for contributors. All were based on the premise that a communication network could be used as an artistic tool to aid in the completion of an undertaking possessing contemporary currency on an international scale.

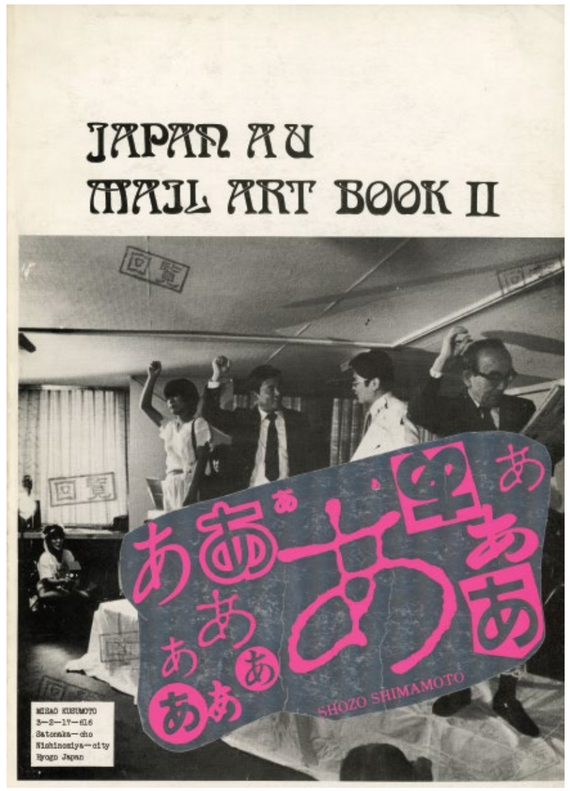
Based on the activities of Ray Johnson and Fluxus, an "eternal network" of artists coming and going, was established and flourished in the post via correspondence, artist periodicals, zines, books using rubber stamps, visual poetry, and other means of artistic mediums marginalized by the mainstream.

One of those "coming and going" was Shozo Shimamoto from the Gutai group. After the demise of Gutai in 1972, Shimamoto joined and then assumed the directorship of an art organization in 1976. Alternatively called "Artists' Union" or "Art Unidentified," but generally referred to as AU, the organization provided exhibition possibilities for emerging artists, as well as fellowship for older more established artists, including several who had been members of Gutai. Shimamoto provided a meeting and exhibition space for the group in the same Nishinomiya studio that housed the Gutai printing press. Like Gutai, AU issued a periodical newsletter.

Although he had known about mail art through his early exposure to Ray Johnson, Shimamoto was reinvigorated by the contemporary manifestation of mail art through Byron Black, a Texas video artist, who had resided previously at Western Front, an alternative space in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, a hotbed of mail art activity in the early to mid-1970s. Black was in Japan to teach English, additionally exposing AU members to the concerns of the international avant-garde, from 1978 through 1984. In a history of AU, it was written that Black had, "an important effect upon mail art and video performance of AU." After their meeting with Byron Black, "AU" newsletter carried more English language text, expanding its readership to a more international audience.

By the end of the 1970s, Shimamoto was writing a "Letter of Appreciation," to the participants of the AU organized *First International mail art Exhibition*.

"We are indeed grateful to you for the trouble you had taken and for the most positive cooperation you had extended to us in mailing your mail art work for the Artists' Union –sponsored *First International mail art Exhibition* held here in September, 1978. Exhibits sent in from a total of 15 countries numbered 380 pieces altogether, giving rise to repercussions in a scale unseen before in Japan.



Misao Kusumoto, Ed. *Japan AU mail art Book II*. Nishinomiya, Japan. 1983. Courtesy of private collection.

Your contributions, which doubtless helped to make the first grand international mail art show to be held in Japan a gig success, marking a page in the art history of Japan, are really appreciated.

In the past, mail art shows held in Japan have all been very much individual-oriented or have failed to go beyond or break the boundary of an individual performance.

In the future, we are determined to strive to keep up our work, playing the role of the cog in the wheel of Japan's mail art works, and therefore, we do hope that you will kindly extend your cooperation in similar exhibitions to be held from now on."

AU went on to organize many more mail art exhibitions, including one that challenged contributors to send unusual items through the post. The 1986 exhibition was written about in the English language *Japan Times*, with the title, "Mail an Octopus with Stamps on It's Head."

By 1982, when AU's, *Mail Art Book 1*, was published, the group had accumulated an archive of three thousand artists from fifty different countries. Two additional mail art books were published, reproducing works from global sources. In a "network manifesto" issued by AU in 1984, they wrote:

"In Japan the supply of information concerning art is awfully limited. Publication, for instance, is nothing but a business deal with a concrete target for the benefit of (the) majority... mail art Network ensures the easy flow of ideas not tied down to economic pursuit beyond the borders of nations… We make sure that Mail ART NETWORK is the only way through which you are able to liberate art from any type of authority with a conviction: there is no room for the authoritative influence here. Mail ART NETWORK could be a Renaissance in the coming twenty first century…"

AU newsletter and membership would serve as the major information source about mail art in Japan for the next several decades, but as Shimamoto noted, there had been prior "individual-orientated" mail artists in Japan, who had failed to go beyond "individual performance." Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi was one such individual. Another was On Kawara.

On Kawara was born in 1933, graduated from high school in 1951 and moved to Tokyo, exhibiting in the Yomiuri Independent Exhibitions, as did many members of Gutai. In 1965, he relocated to New York, but conducted a life of global meandering. For over four decades, he began to record his daily activities in paintings, drawings, books…and postcards. His date paintings (known as the *Today* series) mark the passage of time and the artist's attempt to document and find his place within it. Nowhere is this better exemplified then in various series of postcards and telegrams marking his daily activities. Postcard series in this vein include, *I Went* and *I Met*, accompanied by a telegram series, *I Am Still Alive*.

On Kawara's most prolonged series were the postcard mailings under the rubric, "I Got Up," conducted from 1968 through 1979. Each morning during this time period, On Kawara would mail out two touristic postcards from the city he was staying in, rubber stamping the time he awoke in the morning, the date, the place of residence and the name and address of the receiver. The duration of his correspondence with an individual consisted of a single sending to month long multiple mailings. This provided the artist with some consistency while engaged in international travel. In 1973, he sent postcards from twenty-eight different cities.

His periodically posted postcards ideally documented the mail art experience, each postcard authenticated by a cancellation stamp chronicling date and time. The Japanese artist was not alone in his attempt to mark time and his passage through it through the use of posted cards. California conceptualist, Eleanor Antin, was pursing a similar aim in her *100 Boots*, project, which documented the march of rubber boots in various locations throughout the United States, ending at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. On Kawara's project was a more personal one, tracking his own passage rather than a material object through time and space. The conception of the project precedes the Internet as a social connector. Mail art anticipated digital social media—a global yearning for cheap and efficient international interconnection—decades before the Internet.

mail art in Japan during the 1980s was centered in the activities of AU in Osaka, and no member was more engaged than Ryosuke Cohen. The elementary school teacher had been involved with AU since 1979, when he performed a number of conceptual works, such as his message on the side of a truck, which read, "Help me. This is my art. Tell me where you saw it," accompanied by his address and phone number. At that time the artist was spelling his name Kohen, but Byron Black, jokester par excellence, upon his arrival in 1978, dubbed him Cohen, suggesting a Jewish appellation.

By the mid-eighties, Ryosuke Cohen's conceptual art activities were subsumed into his mail art works. One of the outstanding and longest lasting projects in the mail art network, Ryosuke Cohen began using a common Japanese printing method, Gocco printing, to gather images from an international array of artists involved in the mail art network. Gocco printing is used in Japanese households to make handmade greeting cards and other family announcements. It has the appearance of color photocopy, but the colors achieve a subtle graduation, rarely seen in Western printmaking techniques.

Previous to creating the numbered units in the *Brain Cell* series, Cohen used the Gocco printing method on postcards (often with the word "Cell" incorporated in the design), and then began producing sheets with images, usually of his own design. It was but one step to the more formal *Brain Cell* series, where instead of using his own imagery, Cohen began collaging the graphic work of others received through correspondence. In addition to the Gocco printed sheet of graphic images, a second black and white photocopy sheet listing the names and addresses of contributors, appeared as a second enclosure. This listing of contributors not only stimulated unprecedented interaction between Cohen's correspondents, but has produced the finest road map of international mail art networking activity over a thirty year period. To date (April 2014), Cohen has issued 887 *Brain Cell* units. The latest unit included work of fifty-six contributors from eighteen countries.

In addition to his correspondence, Ryosuke Cohen is also a renowned mail art "tourist," traveling to meet his many correspondents. This has resulted in a new project that has him piecing together his *Brain Cell* units into large rolls that can be transported when meeting correspondents. Once they meet, Ryosuke has his correspondents lie down on the collated *Brain Cell* sheets and then traces around them. Using sumi ink, he paints in the background, allowing the body's silhouette to emerge. This project exemplifies, as well as any, the extension of the mail art experience into real time and space through prior long distance mediated communication. He writes of his penchant for mail art "tourism" in the following:

"I also had opportunities to make tours and meet many mail artists when I visited Europe (1987), North America (1989), and again Europe (1990). Then I was able to sense the trend of mail art and its creators' multiple situations. I had a very different experience, because at home I usually occupy myself at making and arranging art pieces, and learned a lot through fellowship with other artists. Some mail artists live a very natural way of life, others were very sensitive to peace in the world. And there were those who were willing to realize their art pieces to their utmost. All of them were not free from financial and political problems nor to postal communication, but they overcame those problems and remain with a very positive attitude. I found their attitude really different from that of Japanese. Tourism, I discovered through my experience, has the potential to stimulate looking at the world with aesthetic eyes. It is not just for making a trip and sightseeing."

This article has only touched the surface in noting the attempts of Japanese mail artists to bridge their geographical divide. Tohei Horiike, from Shimizu-City, curated the exhibition, *Art Documentation '77*, in Shizuoka Prefecture, presenting it the following year in Nagoya. Twelve Japanese artists participated, with more than thirty-five contributing artists from abroad. Teruyuki Tsubouchi was active during this period distributing stickers of conceptual road signs. Kazunori Murakami is an active mail artist and a frequent contributor on Facebook. Mayumi Handa has done a number of mail art exhibitions on the subject of hair, and was a performance partner with Shozo Shimamoto.

A number of Japanese mail artists have edited periodicals that have been distributed throughout the mail art network. These include Eiichi Matsuhashi (*Great Adventure of Kanzan and Jyuttoku*), Gianni Simone (*Kairan: mail art Forum*), Kazuyoshi Takashi-Tateno (*Mail Art Paper* and *Aerial Print*), Shigeru Nakayama (*Shigeru Magazine*), Yayoi Yoshitome (editor for *AU*).

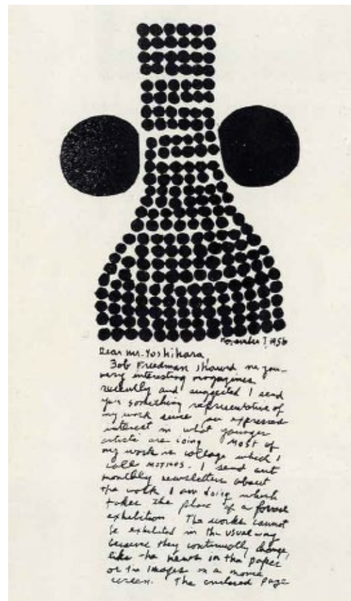
"Collaborations By," edited by Keiichi Nakamura, follows in the mail art tradition of "add and return." His series of collaborative visual poetry booklets, results from his asking fellow mail artists to add to the pages of graphics he distributes. Upon return receipt, the pages are photocopied and made into booklets.

Gianni Simone, hailing from Italy, is a long time resident of Tokyo, wed to a Japanese women. He is a reviewer for international art magazines (including *SFAQ*). The periodical he edits, *Kairan*, is one of the more thoughtful periodicals produced in the network, each issue usually of a thematic nature (*Mail Art and Money Don't Mix*, *Mail Art Interviews*, *Latin America*, *Women and Mail Art*).

Other frequent Japanese contributors to international mail art projects included Kowa Kato, Shigeru Tamaru, Keiko Takeda, Tamosu Watanabe, Dada Kan, Yoshio Takeda, Eiichi Nishimura, Reika Yamamoto, Fumiko Tatematsu, Hiroshi Saga, Shinoh! Nodera, Seiei Nishimura, Seiko Miyzaki, Loco, Toshinori Saito, Yoshiaki Koyayashi, Kazunori Murikami, Jun Karamitsu, and Masami Akita.

mail art remains a means of communicating across vast distances, with Japanese artists, geographically isolated, yet keenly aware of Modernist culture, eager to come into solidarity with their contemporaries from abroad. Japanese mail art began in earnest with the Gutai Art Association, continued with participation in Fluxus, and flourished under the leadership of Shozo Shimamoto in AU (Artists Union, Art Unidentified). Japanese mail artists have organized and contributed to mail art exhibitions, edited and published mail art periodicals, and organized mail art projects. Their participation has expanded the geographic and conceptual boundaries of the medium, exporting a unique sensibility into global culture.

Other cultures have imparted their own distinctive brand on the mail art experience. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Latin America, where political repression in the dark years of dictatorships, disappearances and deportations, spurned subtle and not so subtle political activism through the post, often resulting in imprisonment and torture. We trace this history in the following issue.



From *Gutai* Magazine, No. 6, 1957. Courtesy of private collection.

Makoto Aida, Blender, 2001, Acrylic on canvas, 290 x 210.5 cm. TAKAHASHI collection, Tokyo. Courtesy of the artist.

Building a Monument to Nothing

A Fantastic Interview with Makoto Aida

By Gianni Simone

A while ago I came across Makoto Aida while changing trains at my station in the Yokohama suburbs. He was wearing his trademark green camouflage jacket. His gaze lingered a second longer than usual on my face, probably because I was staring at him. I don't think he remembered me from the last time we had met, at the crowded press conference for his blockbuster exhibition at the Mori Museum of Art. I had heard he lived in this area, so I got ready for our next chance encounter. Luckily I didn't have to wait too long. A few days ago I went to the fake French bakery Vie de France, just outside the station, and there he was, sitting at a small table near the entrance, coffee cup in his hands, sporting his usual half-asleep look and a beard full of bread crumbs. I grabbed something to eat and just sat in front of him, waiting for his WTF reaction. That didn't materialize.

I like Aida because he had to earn his fame. He is known for his depictions of the erotic and grotesque, be it young girls, war, or other controversial subjects. In the past this earned him the reputation of being an artist "too hot to handle." As a consequence he struggled for many years while less engaging Japanese artists became international superstars. Now his time has come, but he seems to take even this newfound success in stride.

Born in 1965, the handsome-looking Aida has always had a knack for going against the flow of artistic coolness, mixing traditional technique and contemporary themes, East and West, while choosing often bizarre and uncomfortable subjects. New Yorkers had a couple of close encounters with his work, first in 2003 at the Whitney Museum of American Art (The American Effect: Global Perspectives on the United States, 1990-2003)*, then in 2011 at the Japan Society (*Bye Bye Kitty!!! Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art*).*

"Do you speak Japanese? Because I can't speak English."

That's the same phrase you opened your recent TEDxTokyo talk with.
Yes, I think among Japanese contemporary artists it's only [photographer] Nobuyoshi Araki and me who can't speak English (laughs) so I was very surprised when TEDx invited me to talk in front of everybody. Language aside, I don't know what TEDx wanted from me. Their slogan is "ideas worth spreading," and I don't have any ideas to spread. This reminds me of when I was interviewed by a newspaper and they asked me to write a motto or something. Now, as an artist I'm very inconsistent, always jumping from one subject or technique to another, so eventually I wrote the word *tekito* which has several meanings, like "random," "whatever works," or "let things work out naturally," which summarizes my life and work quite well.

One of the works you created for the Mori retrospective is the* Non Thinker*, a statue made of FRP which obviously apes Auguste Rodin's* The Thinker*. In typical Japanese fashion, you turned it into Onigiri Man (Rice Ball Man), a sort of slacker superhero. Is this work part of your tekito philosophy?
This is a character that I created to explore my desire to lead an idle life. He actually looks like he is sitting on top of a huge turd (laughs). I think when people go to the toilet they may think about anything. Or maybe not. Maybe they are just living in a state of bliss. I guess I'm more like that. I don't really like the hectic kind of life you can find in Tokyo or New York. I prefer a more relaxed pace of life. That relaxed, idealistic life is inside me.

In* Ash-Colored Mountains *you have gone so far as to paint thousands of dead office workers piled atop one another in mountainous heaps. Is this intended as another comment on modern life?
I guess you are right. Since I was a kid I always doubted that the way people work and live today is the right way. This work came from that doubt and it's also one of the reasons why I'm an artist. This said, I really don't know why they are there. In my imagination they fall from the sky one by one and pile up like sand, forming huge mountains like this.

Now that you are approaching fifty, don't you find it hard to make those huge paintings?
Yes, I guess so. They're all so large in size that they couldn't be shown in a regular gallery. And as I have to climb up and down a ladder all the time to paint these big pictures, they take a toll on my body. I'm actually just one step away now from old age. My body still moves quite well, but I have the premonition this will become too physically demanding before long… It's already quite exhausting, though (laughs). Anyhow, realistically, I'm thinking I may have about ten years more of painting such crazy big pictures.

You keep stressing the fact that people abroad don't necessarily need to understand your works.
Again, I think it's a problem of language. As I don't speak English, unless a foreigner speaks Japanese fluently I have difficulty figuring out what the hell they are thinking. Another problem is that even though I consider myself to be a contemporary artist and have studied the likes of Duchamp, Beuys, Warhol, etc. I've never really been a fan of any foreign contemporary artist. In my college days there wasn't a single one that I respected from the bottom of my heart. So whenever I'm asked about my influences I mention novelist Yukio Mishima or other people who have nothing to do with art. That's why I feel like my work doesn't make much sense to people overseas. This said, I don't really feel the need to improve the situation.

There are times you seem you be obsessed with language. I remember the* Lonely Planet *video you made in 1998.
This is the record of a performance—or minor crime, if you prefer—consisting of silent international calls. I got hold of a few travel guides, looked for phone numbers of hotel and other such places, then changed the last four digits at random. I was always careful to find numbers from the most remote places in the most remote countries because I wanted to experience the purest responses from people not accustomed to such prank calls. This way I thought I could also enjoy a more romantic feeling of traveling. I kept making calls night and day, depending of the time difference, so I wouldn't disturb people too much, and also because I wanted to feel the rotation of the earth. But back to your question, yes, I think it had something to do with my complex about the English language. And international communication. And globalism. I wanted to confirm that English is by no means a global language, so I intentionally avoided English-speaking countries.

You are not afraid of stirring controversy. I remember the x-rated room at your Mori exhibition last year.
There are some among my works that can't be openly exhibited in public art museums, and I've had a number of meetings with the Mori Art Museum team to discuss how best to deal with those. We considered whether to leave such works out altogether but eventually we decided in favor of setting up an "R18 room" for all the works that we thought unsuitable to be seen by children of elementary and middle school age.

I guess other artists would be against this sort of self-censorship.
Well, on one side sex can be a very delicate issue. I am fortunate that the Mizuma Art Gallery, which I belong to, has never issued me guidelines about sexual content. And as long as I'm able to freely exhibit my works in the gallery that I consider my home ground, I don't feel any particular need to set guidelines for an art museum. Also, if you look back to the history of Japanese erotic art like *shunga*, people always enjoyed such things in secret. And because we view them in secret, erotic publications take on an extra level of interest. When I was young I used to peek at such things on the sly, with a touch of guilt and slightly shameful feeling. I have very fond memories of those times. So in a sense it's better not to have these perverted images proudly displayed to everyone. It's better if people have to sneak in to see them like it's a porn shop or a strip bar.

However a group called People Against Pornography and Sexual Violence demanded the removal of your retrospective from the museum claiming your works are misogynistic. Do you consider yourself a misogynist?
You should ask my wife (laughs)! Well, actually this series originated in my graduate school days, back in 1989. Somehow I ended up in the Oil Painting Technique and Material Studio, the stiffest study area in the whole college, just when the genre was falling into oblivion and painters were treated like wimps. One day I went to see the exhibition *Screen Paintings of the Muromachi Period* [1337-1573] at the Tokyo National Museum, and while I was admiring the brushstrokes depicting trunks and branches of pine and Japanese plum trees, I suddenly felt I wanted—no, I had to—express original Japanese eroticism. At the time everybody was talking about Tsutomu Miyazaki, the guy who had just been caught after raping and killing a number of little girls, so I decided to test the psychological effect of such imagery on the viewer.

The same thing could be said about* The Great Member Fuji versus King Ghidorah *which is also the work that put you on the Japanese art map for good, back in 1993.
Oh, that one… It's true it gave me an increase in name recognition, yet at the same time created among people the bias that I was an otaku-type artist. As many people point out, there is a close similarity between Ukiyo-e [a genre of woodblock prints and paintings that were popular from the 17th through 19th centuries] and manga or anime, which are so popular today. Both are closely connected with people's often indecent tastes and therefore can't get acknowledged as art; yet they are the most honest and original form of visual expression for Japanese people. Since my student days it has been a pending question for me to establish a style of painting that could bridge the two genres in an apparent way.

So even this painting has been modeled on an older work of art?
Yeah, I honestly have to thank Hokusai for the inspiration. Actually the whole story goes like

Makoto Aida, *Harakiri School Girls*, 2002. Acrylic on holographic film, print on transparency film, 119 x 84.7 cm. Collection of Watai Yasuyuki.

Makoto Aida. *AZEMICHI (a path between rice fields)*, 1991. Japanese mineral pigment, acrylic on Japanese paper mounted on panel, 73 x 52 cm. Collection of Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, Aichi.
[Previous spread]
(Detail) Makoto Aida. *Ash Color Mountains*, 2009-11. Acrylic on canvas, 300 x 700cm. Taguchi Art Collection of Cooperation: Watanabe Atsushi.

Makoto Aida photographed by Gianni Simone

this: One day they showed the movie *Hokusai manga* (Edo Porn) on TV, and I happened to catch that scene where actress Kanako Higuchi is naked and I was somehow reminded of *Kinoe no Komatsu* (Young Pines), a well-known pornographic work by Katsushika Hokusai depicting a woman diver making love with a giant octopus. I found Hokusai's work harmonized well with the monsters from the series of *Godzilla* movies and the character of the TV drama *Ultraman*, so I replaced the octopus with King Ghidorah and made my work in the style and with materials used in anime so as to make it into a huge celluloid picture.

Do you think manga have been a big inspiration on your work?
In elementary school I was one of those kids who worshipped Osamu Tezuka like a god, but in junior high I lost my interest in both manga and anime. Then when I was in high school I became interested in the so-called *heta-uma* (clumsy but skilled, crude but charming) manga style of *Garo* magazine and, on the other side, Katsuhiro Otomo and the rest of the New Wave of Manga movement. It eventually dawned on me that I might become a different kind of manga artist—a little odd and perverse, if you want, anyway different from the traditional authors a la Tezuka. In other words, I didn't want to become the sort of mainstream artist who is published in *Weekly Shonen Jump* [a best-selling magazine that in the 1980s and '90s had a circulation of six million copies, and even now pushes almost three million every week]. In the end I realized I had no talent for manga, so I became what I am now.

Where does your love for old Japanese art come from?
When I create something, my initial inspiration always comes from things that seem wrong, missing or unbalanced in the current state of affairs. It's a habit of mine to point people to loopholes and make them realize that something's not right. So, for example, I've always thought that too many people in Japan were only focused on Western art as if it was the most natural thing to do. I believe that Japanese traditional style deserves more attention and I don't understand why it's so widely ignored.

Politics is without a doubt one of the things that seem wrong in Japan right now. One of the works I enjoyed the most at your retrospective exhibition was* La Land of Games *(2008) which features a succession of headshots of all of Japan's Prime Ministers since 1965—the year in which you were born—and their respective names, continually morphing from one to the next at extremely high speed on the two screens of a Nintendo DS game console.
Yes, I made this work because the speed at which one leader was being replaced by the next was so frantic, it made me realize that my sense of politics had been completely numbed. Late at night, three days before the opening of the solo show where this piece was first exhibited, Yasuo Fukuda—who had not even been in office for a year—suddenly announced his resignation. I was completely taken aback by this incredible timing. The trend didn't stop there, though. We've already had another five premiers in the six years since. This work has been shown at other exhibitions, and each time I've had to upgrade the system. It's a seemingly never-ending work.

***Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has recently revived Japan's old nationalist crap and this has obviously angered China and Korea with whom Japan shares a contentious past. I remember you have touched upon this subject with* Beautiful Flag.**
Beautiful Flag is more a reflection on the idea of relativity. The idea came to me during a trip to Korea. I'd heard somewhere that many people in Korea considered the Japanese flag uncool, while for us it is, in its simplicity, the epitome of sophisticated design. This in turn reminded me of another episode involving Korea. When I first came to Tokyo to study at a preparatory school, I spotted a girl on the train wearing an unusual school uniform. I commented loudly to my friend, saying "What a funny outfit, it's cute!" My friend's face went blue and he said "Shut up!" I later realized it was a Korean school uniform. I'd never seen something like that back home, and I was puzzled by my friend's squeamish reaction. After all I knew nothing about the difficult relationship between the two countries. Anyway, to make a long story short, I decided to address the problem, even because at the time Japan and Korea were preparing to co-host the 2002 soccer World Cup and there were a lot of recriminations on both sides.

You have devoted a whole series of paintings to war-related topics, haven't you?
Yes, I made *War Picture Returns* in a three-year span. During the Pacific War artists were forced to support the military effort and I was interested in this side of artist creation. At the same time, I wasn't convinced I should comment on war as something good or bad. In fact, when you look at the whole series it's pretty hard to see a unified story. That's because I wasn't trying to convey a single message. I wanted to give the impression of chaos where it's difficult to draw a line between good and evil.

In this series you have mixed acrylic colors, photocopy on holographic paper and collage with more traditional art materials like mineral pigments. Is this another example of your fascination with old Japanese art?
In part it is. On the other side, though, it was just a matter of making do with what materials I had around. For example, the house where I was living at the time was so old it threatened to fall apart, but there were a lot of spare *fusuma* (thick-papered sliding doors) that I was free to use. In those days I had virtually no money, so I used them instead of canvases.

Some of the works in this series are very graphic.* Gateball *(1999), for instance, depicts a group of old men and women playing croquet using the severed heads of children from different Asian countries, while* A Picture of an Air Raid on New York City *(1997) shows a storm of Zero fighters flying over a burning Manhattan.
The idea for these paintings had been spooking around in my head for some time, but it took a while before I started working on them. As a kid I liked those scary documentary programs that NHK [Japanese public broadcaster] aired around August 15 [anniversary of the end of the Pacific War] and in junior high I had a slightly leftish attitude that made me spend hours on end at bookstores reading books on such topics as the Nanjing Massacre. Western contemporary artists, like Anselm Kiefer, often address political or historical themes, but in Japan it's very rare. That's perhaps because Japanese art is based on a "beauty of nature" kind of philosophy, I don't know. The fact is, though, that we Japanese never talk about this even in our daily conversations. So many think it's inappropriate to create artworks that reflect a particular point of view. That's one of the things that stirred me in that direction.

In a sense these pictures are quite shocking.
I guess so, but once again, more than the war, it has to do with my ideas revolving around Japanese-style painting. I had just finished graduate school and I was trying to connect traditional art to contemporary art. Matazo Kayama's *A Thousand Cranes* was based on the Rinpa style of painting. I wanted to make something out of it, and I had this sudden idea of turning the cranes into Zero fighter planes. Now, what could be a suitable target for those planes? New York, of course! The streets of New York are arranged in a grid like those of Kyoto, so I only had to follow Japanese traditional style and add an inferno of flames . . . Perfect!

So it had to be New York, right? This was in 1996 so many people took it like you had predicted 9/11.
It's true it could have been Paris or London . . . But I felt it had to be New York. Actually after 9/11 happened I began to think there might be something in New York's iconic image that prompted Bin Laden to choose it as his target. We may have had the same idea after all. The difference being, of course, that my work was nothing but an attempt at black humor.

You have actually impersonated Bin Laden in one of your videos. That was fun.
Right after 9/11 several friends told me, "You look a little bit like Bin Laden, don't you?" So I made this video as a side job, so to speak, without thinking too much about it, but it turned out to be quite popular and has been included in many exhibitions. I tried to express my sympathy to and sense of disconnection from the Middle East as well as show the mental distance between the tense international situation at the time and my peaceful life in Japan.

How do you relate to other mid-career artists of your generation, like Yoshitomo Nara and The Group 1965, or the younger-generation artists around you, like ChimaPom?
I do take some interest in other artists of my own age group who made their debuts in the early 1990s, though it might be a little inaccurate to describe us as anything like comrades. Well, maybe it could be said that I recognize them as being of the same vintage as me. I suppose you could say there's some sense of comradeship. Even so, I don't know much about the artists who are now active overseas, and I don't go to documenta or the Venice Biennale. As for the younger artists around me, they don't seem to share my tastes. Not only are they not interested in using finely pointed brushes to inscribe painstakingly detailed outlines, if anything they go out of their way to avoid it. About the only thing we seem to have in common, in fact, is that we all like booze (laughs).

Makoto Aida, *Gokikaburi-Soshi* (2009) Lambda Print. Courtesy of the artist.

Compared to other artists of your generation, you have been a sort of late-comer. I guess [gallerist] Takahashi has played an important role in your career.
Yes, for a certain period, Mr. Takahashi was my financial benefactor and he has helped me boost my profile. I wish there were more people like him who buy young artists' works. Not like those "second class" collectors who only invest in risk-free in works of art with s certain value. If there were more people like him, more young artists would be motivated to be more creative instead of following the latest trend.

Speaking of young and old, you have been working quite a lot with students, especially on the* Monument for Nothing II *project, which you're putting together from cardboard.
It came initially out of a request I received from an art college to do a workshop in a large exhibition space. The project emerged from my contemplation of what I might be able to do if I undertook a workshop with students. Actually, it's something that demands a lot of perseverance. At the beginning we started out with a large number of people, but the students who have stuck with it and are still there at the end are very few. Those who've stayed the course are all silent types, who generally get on with their tasks without saying much at all. Deep down, I'm the silent type as well, so as we're nearing the end of the project, we're laboring away dispassionately in a deathly quiet space. There's no need for verbal communication, in a good way. I don't know if the students who've stayed with it to the end will become artists or not, but they're all capable of perseverance so I'm sure they'll succeed at something. They're totally different from the noisy types who like to be the center of attention. I didn't plan it that way, but it's interesting how it's turned out.

I find it interesting that you decided to put* Kawaguchi Lake Mandala *at the very end of your retrospective exhibition. I understand that was the oldest work on display.
Yes, I made it in 1987, when I was in my third year of university.

I read somewhere that you are particularly fond of that work for it helped solidify your artistic perspective.
One of the reasons I became the artist I am right now comes from an experience I had around that time, and this piece came from that. It let me put some things behind me and keep some things with me all the way to today. That's why this is a really important piece of art for me.

Can you tell me about that experience?
It's nothing special in itself. During the summer holidays, I went on a late night drive with a couple of friends. One of them had just got his driver's license and had a poor sense of direction, so we nearly got lost near Lake Kawaguchi at the foot of Mount Fuji. I was in the rear seat, and as we drove up a mountain path that seemed endless, I was looking at the dead darkness outside the window with a vague sense of anxiety. Somehow I suddenly felt I was going to die. For some unknown reason I was having a strange feeling, and finally I realized I understood all about the universe. I hadn't taken any drug nor was I drunk, mind you. It's just that I was grinning like an idiot the whole time, scaring the other two guys in the car. I felt that, if I had died in an accident during that drive, my life would have become a perfect one. But artists are the kind of people who can't just enjoy their experiences, so I started writing down the memory. I ended up with a mostly unintelligible text. It was just about time to start making works for the autumn school festival, and I decided to turn that uncanny experience into a work. But I just didn't know how to turn those elusive thirty minutes into an artwork, especially with the help of my rambling memo. I almost gave up many times, but eventually I came up with the idea of using a mandala, for it is said to show the structure of the universe. For example, one of the phrases I had written said, "The universe is not particularly happy or sad," so I alternated laughing and weeping faces. I knew it was too easy, or just nonsense, but it was always better than expressing nothing. It was also the beginning of my inclination for appropriating traditional styles whenever I meet some difficulty (laughs).

So you ended up displaying your mandala at the school festival?
Yes, and I now think it's the most important work of my student days. Or better yet, this is my best work on an essential level, and my worst on a superficial one. Because of this, I can still now paint a mere "painting" without hesitation and am free of the temptation to incorporate philosophy or other lofty thoughts into my work. I intentionally changed my style after exhibiting this work. Since then I've followed the motto that art doesn't deal with the essence of things, but just their surface. But I still have a special affection for it, perhaps because that night was probably the last moment of my youth.

Korakrit photographed in his NYC studio by Coco Young.

KORAKRIT ARUNANONDCHAI

Performance at MoMA PS1 VW Dome with Korapat Arunanondchai and Boychild, environmental design by Alex Gvojic and music by Harry Bornstein. March 23, 2014. Photograph by Charles Roussel. Courtesy of the artist, MoMA PS1.

Interviewed by Coco Young

Korakrit Arunanondchai is a multi-media artist from Thailand who now lives and works in New York. As I am writing these words, Korakrit is filming a video for his show opening July 18th at The Mistake Room in Los Angeles, which will then turn into a part of a bigger project that he will be throwing himself into in the coming months.

Korakrit's work investigates the structures of one's existence, what is it like to be a human and more specifically, an artist and the spleen and pleasures that come with the job. Parallel to the experience of life, one piece keeps evolving into the next, a realistic rendering of memories and relationships, specifically familial relationships.

Korakrit contemplates the contemplative, whether in a performance or video, his subjects are looking: there is the ocean or screens playing a previous video piece. Older works enter new works, and older characters are connected to the newer ones. Like in Balzac's realist work, everything is interrelated, and keep on evolving as new novels are written. Korakrit's viewer is also his subject and he/she participates actively in the experience of the work itself.

I believe that Korakrit's work is meant to be consumed as an experience and not as an object. The word gesamtkunstwerk is often used by Korakrit and others to describe his work for a reason; upon consumption, the viewer fully enters the world of the artist, visually as well as audibly. The work lies in the energy created by the variety of building blocks; together, they create a whole. The layer of a video will be used in another video, in a performance — such as the one he did in February at PS1 in New York — and, as you will read in the interview below, perhaps in a feature film. I sat down with Korakrit before he flew off to Los Angeles, and let the conversation flow naturally.

In Los Angeles, you'll be working on a high production video for your show at The Mistake Room. For your video work, you have people make original music and actors playing themselves. How did this collaborative system come together and how do you see it developing?
I've always wanted to be able to work with people. When I was growing up, team sports were very important to me. But more importantly, this desire to work with people has to do with my upbringing. Since I was young I enjoyed interacting with living things. I lived alone with my grandparents for a few years as a young child, and I remember being at the beach with them, and the beach was always empty. I felt like this isolation was a byproduct of my grandparents' old age, being retired. As a young person, I wanted to be around many people.

I want to be around many people when I'm old.
Me too. As a child I always wanted energy and I always wanted people around me and I always wanted action. Since kindergarten I was always really interested in interacting with people and playing games with others. It sucks that a lot of children's interactions have to do with competing. Like playing a card games against each other or something. I hate how there are winners and losers. I always wanted to be a part of a school play, but I went to a school where school plays didn't exist. I just really like the idea of people coming together to do something awesome and build up energy. I experienced that for the first time when I joined a band in high school.

But aren't there also hierarchies within bands? I assume everyone finds their own place depending on their personality.
I think in a band the person who wants to work the most ends up working the most, and other people who care less, end up caring less. That's similar to making art with people. When I started art school I was always with a group of people. The students from my printmaking major at RISD and I would always sit together and play an exquisite corpse. I've always valued a fun creative process, I like sharing a studio—I rarely work in isolation.

But when you work with other people, how much freedom do they have? Do you trust that the decisions they make will be right for the project? Or do you just select the people you work with carefully and let the project develop as the collaboration takes place?
It depends on what we're doing. So far, most of the projects that I've done, especially since 2011, have involved me being the ring-leader because they've been about my relationship to my family in Thailand. In a way, it's inherent to the project content that I somehow am the director even if it's a collaboration.

I like how your family holds such an important place in your work. How are you—by talking about something so specific, such as your own family dynamic — able to address issues that your viewer can relate to?

Production still from, *Letters to Chantri #1: The lady at the door/The gift the keeps on giving.* Photograph by Zanzie Addington-White. Courtesy of the artist.

Every person has been surrounded by various relationships. I believe that there are certain vehicles such as music, noises, and certain ways of editing that transfer these emotions. In one of my videos, there is a part when I'm watching another video with my grandparents. Looking at a screen with family members is quite universal.

When you collect footage, do you already have a clear vision of what you are trying to accomplish?
No. For instance, in this trilogy project I'm working on, when I amass footage I am painting different parts with a rough and abstract idea of what the whole will be, you know? And then I have all these parts, and those aren't completely considered, and then when I edit, and I bring them together like words in a story and think about the audience I'm addressing to create my narrative.

Let's talk about the video that you're going to be filming in LA in July. Boychild, who you've collaborated with in previous videos and performances, is going to be dressed as you and playing you in the film. Why?
At this point I use my physical appearance as a medium, so yes, Boychild will be wearing a blonde wig and wearing denim, like me, but Boychild isn't fully "me" in this video. Boychild is just going to embody that specific aspect of me.

That sounds exciting. You are going to get to look at that aspect of yourself from an outside perspective, as you're turning yourself into a controlled character that you get to direct.
So exciting! Especially because this is the first time I will officially be directing a video. So far I've always been in front of the camera in my work, not shooting it.

Many artists use themselves as subjects at first because their own body is what they have easy access to, would you say that's also true in your case?
Yeah, especially because most of my videos up to this point have been pretty low budget and DIY. When you're the subject of your own work you can kind of imagine what you want out of a scene or a piece and then perform it So there's a certain kind of one-to-one in the video where I have a rough idea of what I'm doing even before the video is shot, you know? I think this method I've been using is more immediate and requires less planning, which is perfect for road movies and things on the go.

After this LA video will you go back to being in your own videos?
This video I am doing in LA will be filmed as a commercial, to eventually be a part of the feature length piece I want to direct. So far, not being in it myself is my first logical step. I will be in the narrative and not be an important character physically, but I will still be present somehow because all my works are a continuation of the previous ones.

This video is made in the same universe as the previous ones and the future ones. This future feature will mostly be fiction, but I have been building up and making relationships with it through the semi-documentary project trilogy that I'm currently working on and showing. I think it makes sense, for the character I have been playing to connect these two projects.

I remember after you finished your show at PS1 you said that was the last three years of your life, and now you can move on to something different. Do you still feel that way?
It's actually not so black and white. The main difference is that my work is turning away from being autobiographical, I am no longer the center of the universe I create. The feature film I am going to make will be largely fictional and maybe even take place in the past. Whereas this current project that I am and have been working on — the video trilogy— is about being an artist, trying to process what's happening internally and externally. Whereas, the next one isn't about the artist, it's more about certain parts and facts of life that I have learned.

So you are moving towards a less literal approach, more metaphorical?
Yeah, this video is a metaphor, but also what I'm experiencing. Now that I am almost done with the more autobiographical trilogy I can understand its core significance: an artist trying to create out of things he's experienced in the past three year in a semi-narrative form.

So then the future film that you're starting to work on this summer with the commercial vignette, will be you moving from your own subjective world into this outside world, even though obviously there are going to be traces of you in it?
Yeah but I think the subjectivity will be unavoidable because I am creating it.

Okay, I'm going to change the subject a little bit. When I see your work, I can't help but see something generational; the denim, the fire, reminds me of this youthful desire to mess up the world, something revolutionary and violent, like the anti-Vietnam war movement. But on the other hand, it is visually very pleasing: the Thai and Buddhist iconography, the colorful plastic flowers. But there is something really international about this language of young people and how we all gravitate toward loud noises and saturated colors.
I believe our generation is attracted to intensity, to loud noise. But intensity can also be the most quiet thing; a slow movement can be intense. I don't know if this desire for intensity is an attribute of our generation or just an age thing. Maybe every single human being who's lived has experienced an intense time. I think my mom had a very intense time when she lived in Vietnam during the war and France during the student revolution in 1968. I don't think our generation is necessarily attracted to intensity, I just think intensity is inherent to living.

When I first went to your show at PS1, I wanted to walk in because of the loud catchy music playing in front of the video, the intensity attracted me, maybe because I'm 25 and I like dancing and going out.
I didn't think my work had so many generational qualities about it, but I think I understand why younger people would be attracted to it through its formal qualities, like the loud rap music. And in the end, that might repel certain older people who don't like that kind of sound. But I try and make work that most people, not just my generation, can appreciate. This is how I think of it: if I'm at a dinner party and I sit next to an older person, there's a way in which I'm telling her a story, and I want her to listen to me regardless of if she can relate to the story or not. I think in the PS1 show in particular, I was really thinking about the Sunday families and the high school students that would go. I want to extend my audience as much as possible, maybe, as large as my friends' moms and dads, and maybe like my friends' younger sisters and brothers, and maybe my friends' babies would like a bleached denim pillow, you know?

Can you tell me about some recent art you have been thinking about and really like?
I think about Pierre Huyghe all the time, he's my favorite artist. I just saw a show he did at a place called The Artist Institute here in New York. It's a project funded by Hunter. It's more of a show about him actually. I've been thinking about it a lot. He turned the exhibition space into an eco system.

That's so cool! Does he influence your work?
You know when I was talking about intensity, I like how he creates unique experiences. I am really inspired by the Sydney Opera House piece he did called *A Forest of Lines* where he filled the whole Opera house with plants. Can't really get more intense then that.

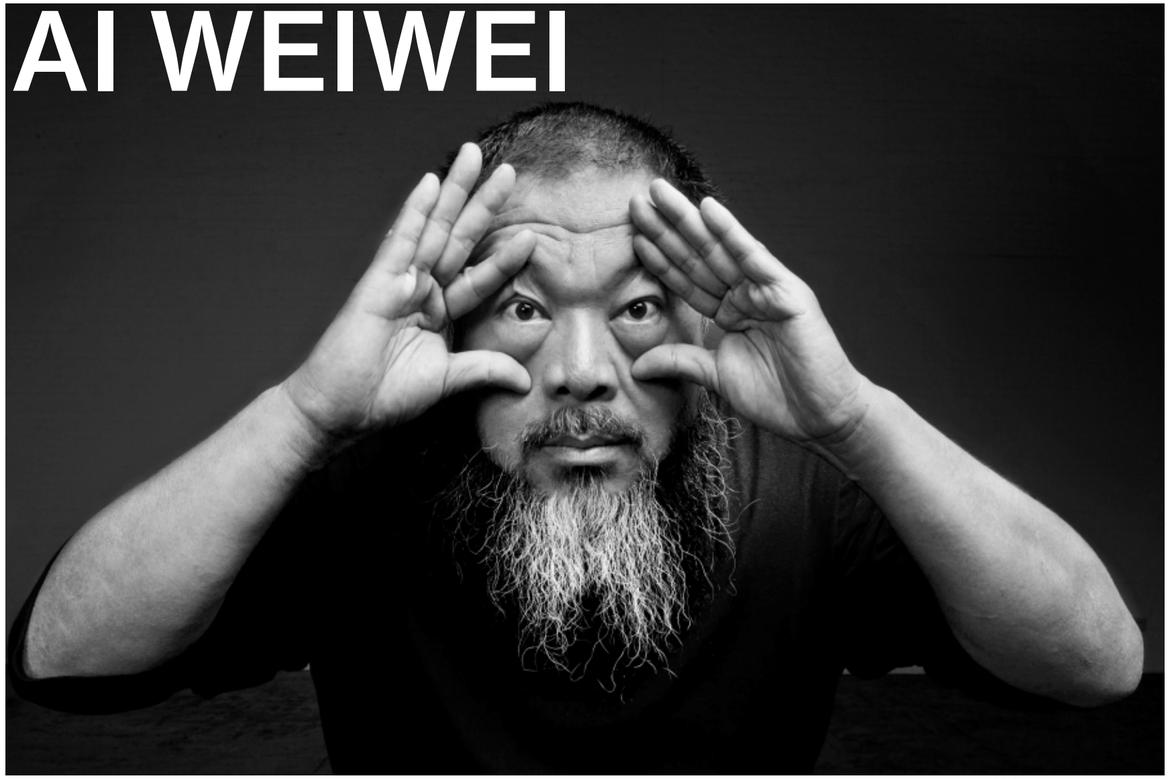
[Above & below] Production still from, *Letters to Chantri #1: The lady at the door/The gift the keeps on giving.* Photograph by Zanzie Addington-White. Courtesy of the artist.

Performance at MoMA PS1 VW Dome with Korapat Arunanondchai and Boychild, environmental design by Alex Gvojic and music by Harry Bornstein. March 23, 2014. Photograph by Charles Roussel. Courtesy of the artist, MoMA PS1.

Installation view of, *Korakrit Arunanondchai*, at MoMA PS1. Photograph by Matthew Septimus. Courtesy of the artist and MoMA PS1.

Performance at MoMA PS1 VW Dome with Korapat Arunanondchai and Boychild, environmental design by Alex Gvojic and music by Harry Bornstein. March 23, 2014. Photograph by Charles Roussel. Courtesy of the artist, MoMA PS1.

Production still from, *Letters to Chantri #1: The lady at the door/The gift the keeps on giving*. Photograph by Zanzie Addington-White. Courtesy of the artist.



Ai Weiwei, 2012. Photograph by Gao Yuan.

Ai Weiwei, *Colored Vases*, 2007–10. Han Dynasty vases and industrial paint, dimensions variable. Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio. Installation view of *Ai Weiwei: According to What?* at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., 2012. Photograph by Cathy Carver.

Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz
By Terri Cohn

"The misconception of totalitarianism is that freedom can be imprisoned. This is not the case. When you constrain freedom, freedom will take flight and land on a windowsill." Ai Weiwei[1]

This September the work of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei will be installed on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. This venue would be remarkable for almost any living artist, based on scale and visibility alone. Yet for Ai, the opportunity to situate his politically charged art in the confines of a former United States federal penitentiary also resonates with his experiences of imprisonment in China as a dissident artist.

The timing for the exhibition of this artist's work on the site of a historic federal prison-cum-national park also speaks volumes about the For-Site Foundation—the project's sponsor, in cooperation with the National Park Service and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy—and their ability to allude to such a highly charged situation on a well-attended government site. Although such ambitious projects involve years of planning and fundraising (in this case done entirely by the For-Site Foundation) the plan to open *@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz* also coincides with escalating economic and political tensions between the two countries. Compounding this has been China's history of human rights violations, which have increased since 2011. As noted in *Human Rights Watch World Report, 2012*, "The government launched the largest crackdown on human rights lawyers, activists, and critics in a decade. The authorities also strengthened Internet and press censorship, put the activities of many dissidents and critics under surveillance, restricted their activities, and took the unprecedented step of rounding up over 30 of the most outspoken critics and 'disappearing' them for weeks."[2]

Ai Weiwei was among those "rounded up" artists, writers, lawyers, critics, and activists, and was incarcerated for 81 days in 2011 on charges of tax evasion. A key member of the first group of avant-garde artists that emerged in China during the late 1970s, Ai has been an outspoken critic of the Chinese government for more than 30 years. His political activism is renowned and has been expressed through his remarkable bodies of artwork and actions. Despite his confinement in China since 2011, he has been well represented in recent museum exhibitions around the world that include *According to What?* organized by the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, which will conclude its multi-venue U.S. tour at the Brooklyn Museum in August 2014. In addition, several books, a play *(#aiww: The Arrest of Ai Weiwei*, Hampstead Theatre, London, 2013), and a film (*Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*, 2013) have reinforced knowledge of Ai's art, life, and renown. With his political activity, arrest, and incarceration at the center of these projects, it follows that the installation of Ai's Alcatraz project would conceivably highlight the related circumstances of his incarceration in China. Or at least on the surface this seems plausible.

Yet, this obvious connection is probably too simplistic for such a complex artist and his state circumstances. Moreover, *According to What?* (which I saw at the Brooklyn Museum of Art) featured an installation of *S.A.C.R.E.D.* (2013), a series of six dioramas, which Ai created in response to his detention. Intended to correspond with the details of his daily life in prison, the acronym for the six sculptures alludes to their content—Supper, Accusers, Cleansing, Ritual, Entropy, and Doubt—as well as ritual and religious ideas. The experience of each diorama is structured to create a voyeuristic relationship between viewer and artist, as we are compelled to stand on a box placed at the base of the steel rectangles in order to look down through a window atop each one to view the sculpturally recreated scenes of Ai's activities within. The scenes are detailed down to his toilet, shower, meals, and ever-present guards, and set the tone for viewers' experiences of the comprehensive show, which filled two upper floors of the museum.

According to What? provides a fine overview of the depth and breadth of Ai's oeuvre, including its sources, as well as insights into the artwork and actions that led to his incarceration. Ai's sculpture--ranging from various handsome wood sculptures (2005–12), repurposed from dismantled Qing Dynasty temples (1604–1911); to his series of *Colored Vases* (2007-10), created by dipping Han Dynasty vessels (206 BCE–220 CE) into bright paint; along with his photographic series *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995-2009)—embody his confrontational relationship with the meanings embedded in Chinese cultural identity and traditions. He also has consistently employed monumental repetition to represent the enormity and gravity of social and cultural situations—here the magnitude and aftermath of the Sichuan earthquake stand out, with works that memorialize the outcome of poor building construction. These include *Straight* (2008–11), comprised of 75 tons of steel rebar collected from collapsed schools and other buildings, straightened and laid out like a minimalist sculpture; *Snake Ceiling* (2009), an unnerving, ceiling mounted serpent created with more than 5000 backpacks to represent students that perished; and *Sichuan Namelist* (2008-11), a gallery where walls are filled, a la Hanne Darboven, with the names of the deceased youth. Ai's stance speaks to fundamental philosophical ideas concerning the rights and safety of individuals and society that are understood in the West, and confront the authoritarian powers that Ai and others have challenged with such work. Case in point: in 2009, during this period of documenting his findings from the Sichuan earthquake, police ostensibly beat Ai, which resulted in a cerebral hemorrhage that required emergency surgery.

So what might the Alcatraz project add to the discussion of Ai's imprisonment and wrongful mistreatment by Chinese government officials? The equation between the history of Alcatraz and the artist's imprisonment, subsequent confinement to Beijing for one year, and passport confiscation (which has made it impossible for him to leave China) has only a symbolic relationship that will be lost on much of the general public. Yet, regardless of what Ai Weiwei creates for this site—which the show's organizers have kept a secret except to state, "(Will) explore urgent questions about human rights and freedom of expression and responds to the potent and layered history of Alcatraz as a place of detainment and protest"[3]—his creative production will be contextualized and immortalized for viewers by its installation on and in this infamous island and prison.

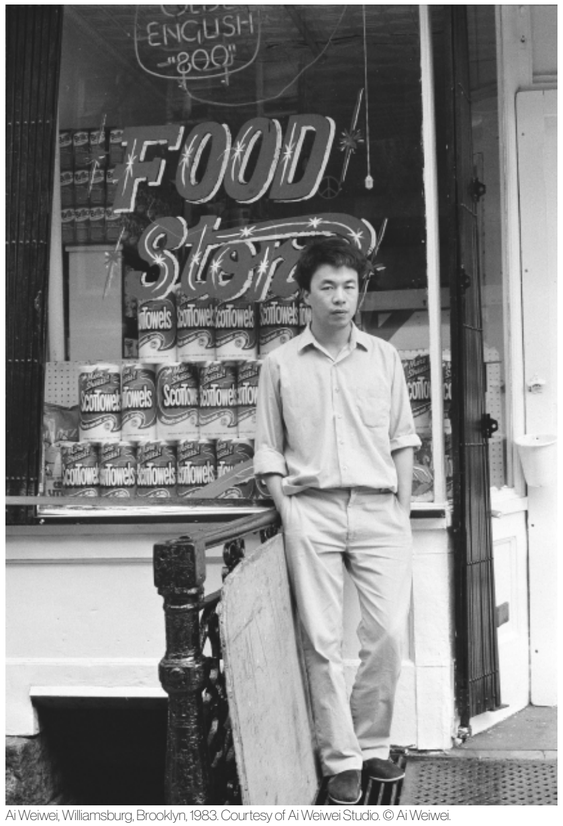
This begs the question of whether the project is solely about Ai Weiwei, who some regard as one of the most powerful contemporary artists alive. Rather, does the artist's tendency to "hold up a mirror both to China's failings and potential"[4] make him a hero representative of the West's contentious relationship with modern China? Will this project become a media spectacle that allows the U.S. to use its stance on artistic freedom to challenge repressive Chinese politics? Or, as Hou Hanru states in his letter to Hans Ulrich Obrist, (in which the two corresponded on the period of turbulence and emergency in spring and summer 2011 regarding various international matters, among them Arab Spring and the arrest of Ai Weiwei), "Under the pretext of defending human rights and freedom, the West regularly supports political dissidents as bargaining chips in negotiating with the autocratic powers over economic and geopolitical interests."[5] Although this may sound cynical, with the support of U.S. government agencies for this project, this possibility must be considered in the speculative mix. Yet, through my reflections on the politics, power, and potential of *@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz*, the "@ with wings" logo that graces For-Site Foundation's press release also evoked more poetic ideas concerning flight, freedom, and incarceration that pertain to Ai Weiwei's life, philosophies, and art. On one level, this logo alludes to Ai's belief that "The Internet is uncontrollable, and if the Internet is uncontrollable freedom will win. It's as simple as that."[6] On a deeper plane, in China the concept that freedom cannot be imprisoned is symbolized by the relationship of men to their birds. Since the Qing Dynasty, men have taken their birds out for morning walks. This practice expresses their concern that birds will lose their song if not kept happy. The argument is that taking a bird for a walk is the best way to keep it healthy and vigorous. As the men arrive at parks and gardens, they hang the cages in trees, allowing the birds to sing and communicate with each other while their owners practice t'ai chi ch'uan, play cards or chess, and talk.

It is likely that this custom is not lost on Ai, as its metaphors speak clearly of his personal situation. While Ai Weiwei is confined to his own "cage," he continues to pursue the many activities of his daily life as an artist, actively "tweeting" via social networking media to reach thousands of people around the world. By extension, while the installations on Alcatraz (trans: the island of the pelicans) will provide a glimpse into the role that imprisonment has played in Ai Weiwei's art and life, as a "caged bird" he also becomes a potent symbol of the indomitability of creativity and the human spirit. The uplifting words of *Caged Bird* come to mind:

The caged bird sings/with a fearful trill/of things unknown/but longed for still/and his tune is heard/on the distant hill/for the caged bird/sings of freedom.[7]

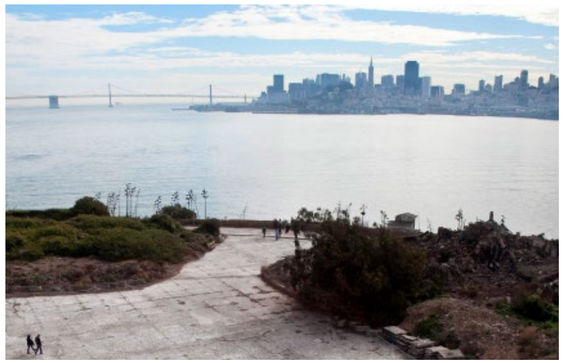
1) From multiple sources, as stated to Cheryl Haines by Ai Weiwei during her visit to China, 2013.
2) http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-china. World Report 2012: China Events of 2011
3) Press Release, Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz, For Site Foundation, 2014.
4) Smithsonian.com, Mark Stevens, "Is Ai Weiwei China's Most Dangerous Man?" www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/is-ai-weiwei-chinas-most-dangerous-man-17989316/?all . September 2012.
5) Hou Hanru, "Urgent is to Take a Distance," Art Practical 2.20, June 29, 2011.
6) Rebecca Huval, "Ai Weiwei Sparks Social Media Flames in China." Independent Lens Blog, http://pbs.org/independentlens/blog/ai-weiwei-sparks-a-social-media-fire-in-china. February 22, 2013.
7) Maya Angelou, "Caged Bird" from *Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?* Copyright © 1983 by Maya Angelou. http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/178948

Ai Weiwei (Chinese, b. 1957). Snake Ceiling, 2009. Back packs, 15 3/4 x 354 5/16 in. (40 x 900 cm). Collection of Larry Warsh. Installation view of Ai Weiwei: According to What? at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., 2012. Photo by Cathy Carver.



Ai Weiwei, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, 1983. Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio. © Ai Weiwei.

Ai Weiwei, *Ritual* (detail), 2011-2013. From the work S.A.C.R.E.D., 2011-13. One of six dioramas in fiberglass and iron, 148 3/8 x 78 x 60 1/5 in. Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio. © Ai Weiwei.



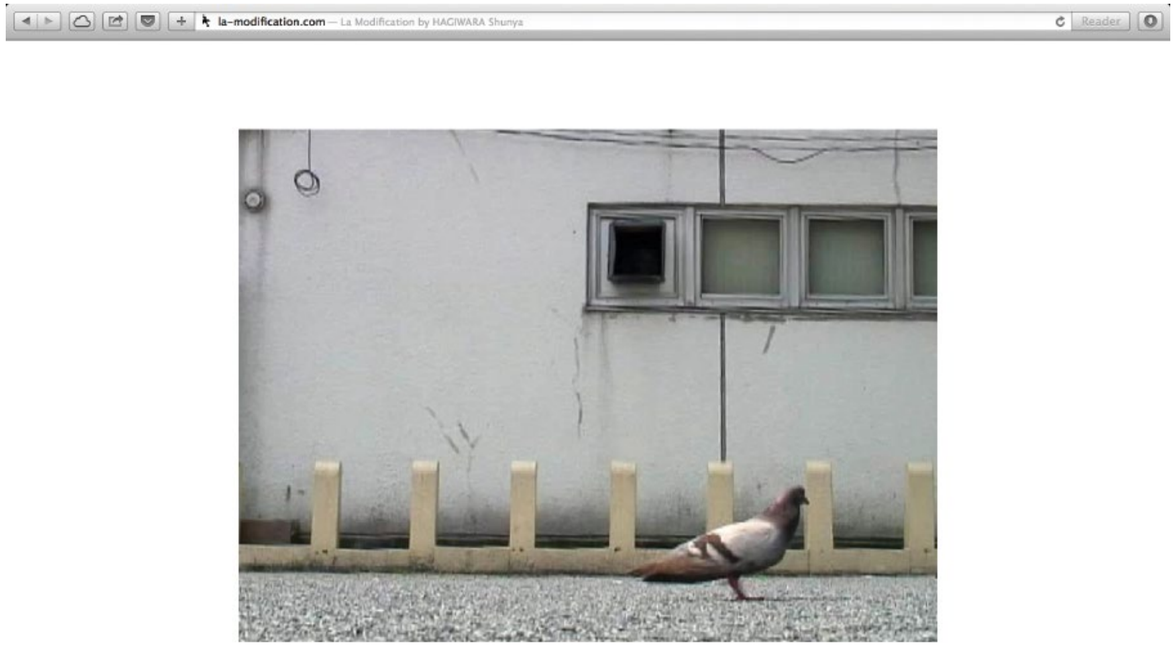
View of San Francisco from Alcatraz Island, site of the exhibition *@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz*. Photograph by Jan Sturmann. Courtesy of FOR-SITE Foundation.

Second and third floors of A Block in the cell house at Alcatraz, site of the exhibition *@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz*. Photograph by Jan Sturmann. Courtesy of FOR-SITE Foundation.

Ai Weiwei, *Straight*, 2008–12. Steel reinforcing bars, dimensions variable. © Ai Weiwei.

Ai Weiwei, *Forever Bicycles*, 2013. 3144 bicycles. Installation at Scotiabank Nuit Blanche 2013, Nathan Philips Square, Toronto, Canada. © Ai Weiwei. Photograph by John Heineman.

Shunya Hagiwara's Facebook page. Courtesy of the artist.



Shunya Hagiwara, "*La Modification*" (2010). Courtesy of the artist.

SHUNYA HAGIWARA

With Aaron Harbor and Jackie Im

We received an email from the Publisher of SFAQ asking if we would like to work on a piece about Shunya Hagiwara. We responded that, yes, in general we were interested in working on another piece but that we were completely unfamiliar with this artist's practice. Not only were we unfamiliar, Hagiwara's work is very difficult to parse via the web despite what appears to be a practice mostly located online by an adept hand at web design. This is mainly due to the mix of language on his site, about ten percent English and the rest Japanese, which resisted making much sense even with the assistance of Google Translate.

But rather than being deterred, we decided to ask a series of fairly general questions based on what we could gather about the artist. He agreed to participate, but had to have our questions translated to Japanese and then his answers translated back to English for us. The resulting interview shows an individual comfortable with pleasantly hazy notions of authorship and art versus design (also readable as art versus craft), someone who we look forward to talking to more in the future.

You are an artist, but maybe your main job is design of some sort? Design for web and print? Your website seems to not make a distinction between the two fields which is interesting. Maybe speak to these aspects of your practice, design and "art making."
I work as a part of several different teams. I am not sure what my main job really is. I basically have two types of work. One is to create good websites for clients and the other is more on the personal side, where I try to discover the interesting side of the Internet, like a strange bot or new way of human communication.

For my clients, I work mostly as a web director, programmer, or a planner. I write code or do the planning. Depending on the job, I play a different role in various team setups.

For my private projects, I often create domain art or produce collaborative works with internet labels. I am also a part of secret society called IDPW. I mainly organize events such as Internet Yami-ichi (a sort of physical black market for the virtual). Apart from that, I am a part of a design team, Cooked.jp, and an audio team called flapper3.

In recent years, there is "Divicracy" (= Divicual Democracy, a term that in English leads almost nowhere via search. This is a new belief that is gaining popularity in Japan. It's a new way of accepting different personalities you have within yourself. Everyone adjust himself depending on whom he is communicating with. I am very intrigued by this. It's like having multiple Twitter accounts to tweet in different personas, but all of them are truly myself. I believe Divicracy fits well with the Internet.

Does making art that is online necessarily make it more similar to your design practice?
Making art and designing are different but I am more involved in the broader web designing and interactive designing field.

Generally speaking, interactive means something like pressing a button and the object changes its color. It usually refers to a direct change. But personally, reading a good novel that moves my heart, or requesting to be a friend to some girl I liked 4 years ago on Facebook feels very interactive, although both are something not so direct or instant. I always like to come up with web design inspired by such indirect interactivity. Regardless of whether I am working on a personal project or client work, I like to imagine the indirect effect in the longer term, rather than a direct reaction.

In* La Modification, *a pigeon performs a choreographed dance of sorts, walking from corn kernel to corn kernel. Can you tell us some more about this work and about the intersection between the analogue and digital worlds?
I created this one back in 2009, when iPhones weren't as popular as they are now. In this work, the pigeon eats the corn kernels, but as you try to point (or to touch) the pigeon using your cursor, the cursor gets pushed away. It is interactive in a way that the cursor icon gets chipped little by little every time it gets snapped away by the pigeon.

At that time, the cursor was considered as the representative of user's self on the monitor. If you want to open up a folder, or close a window, the cursor would do it on behalf of you, whereas today we tend to interact with the screen with our actual finger.

I titled this work *La Modification* from a novel written by a French writer Michel Butor. In this novel, the protagonist is being referred to as "you." When the novel says "You are riding a train right now," it puts you in a very strange place as a reader. The storyteller of the novel forces upon you the idea that you really are riding a train. I liked the idea that the novel decides who you are. That feeling really inspired me to experiment with the idea of the cursor being the protagonist, to see what happens if I destroy the first person perspective.

In this website, I have programmed it in such way that if a cursor touches the pigeon, it gets pushed away and the cursor gets decayed (or chipped) little by little. I wanted the user to experience the feeling of the cursor being taken over by something unknown.

You may ask why I have chosen the pigeon as the character to destroy the user's self. Pigeons are known as a symbol for peace. But if you see them on the streets, they are constantly picking up food like they are addicted to eating. If one pigeon decides to fly away, all of them follow in a reflexive manner. I feel like they are greedy creatures like me when I used to cling to my RSS FEED all day long. I wanted the pigeon to eat away my greediness.

Most design projects, and many of the projects on your website, involve multiple individuals with defined roles and specific skill sets. Does this division of labors crop up in your art practice, if not, why?
There are times I work on my own, and times I chose to work as a team. All the people I work with are whom I can truly trust and they are very talented in their field. I believe I should try to be involved with people who have something I can't offer and we always learn so much from each other. It is really fun to create something we've never imagined in the beginning through such process. In that way, I think I rather enjoy making something "play by ear" rather than following a strict plan I made for myself.

There is always what's called "permission" for every computer file, such as read, write and execute. When it comes to work, I always think of my position as to which permission I am given. The idea of permission helps me understand and organize what sort of role I am expected to play within a team.

In a few of your online pieces, the cursor is implicated through the act of disappearing, being re-represented by another symbol, or delayed or altered in some manner. How does the cursor play a part in your practice?
There are a lot of artists who use cursors as the center of their artworks. My favorites are Exonemo and Rafaël Rozendaal. I suppose they use cursors because it resembles the user's self.

Although a cursor is just another pixelated image on the computer screen, it definitely stands out from the other passive elements such as buttons and text. A cursor is the only active being to operate a computer. I am always very inspired by avatars and mouse cursors that symbolize the human existence. What if you are looking into a mirror and your reflection does something different from what you are doing? It is a type of bizarre interactive experience where something you thought was you does something totally unexpected.

And in a similar note, versus simply being "works on a wall" etc., many of the online works involve interaction, a user-experience. Who do you imagine as the user/viewer of these works?

I don't usually imagine the users too much, but I guess they are sort of Internet surfers passing by who are not expecting anything.

It is intriguing how media such as film presage the confusion/disillusion of the dichotomy of real and virtual that increasingly defines our experience of the world . . .
That's very true. I see fewer walls between real and virtual. It really is intriguing for me when I discover new aesthetic and image objects.

In Japan, there are a lot of users on Twitter who use Anime icons that nobody can identify whether they are spam or a real person (or a group of people.) A famous bot has appeared on a TEDx event to give a presentation. There are events that gather tens of thousands people from a single Internet community on a regular basis. Some industries are trying to link up such online movements to some high-spec marketing activity. I do feel that we are getting closer to a Posthuman era.

As mentioned earlier, my team operates Internet Black Market (Yami Ichi). The market is a place to buy and sell metaphors that are unique in the Internet world. It is exciting to see something that was exclusive in the virtual world become something real for you to buy and take home. As an example, there is a guy who offers "real Follow," where you give him 100yen (1USD) then he literally follows you around and RTs (repeats) what you say. People sell actions besides objects.

Can you describe one or two new art projects you are working on, and one or two design projects?

We are orgainizng Yami Ichi on August 3rd in Hokkaido, Japan, and September 28th in Brussels, Belgium.

http://www.imal.org/en/page/internet-yami-ichi-brussels

My very recent work is this website which helps you find the very authentic Japanese style inns. I was in charge of web direction for this project.

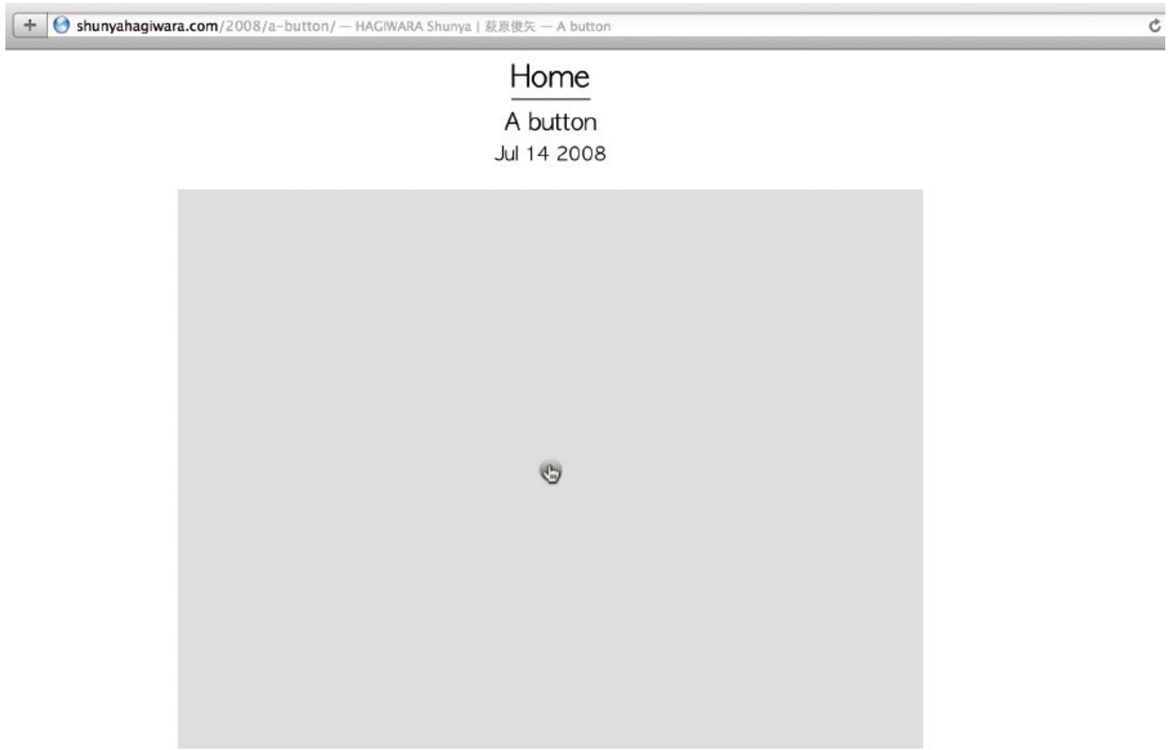
http://yado-resort.com/

Please utilize this website if you ever visit Japan. And please do contact me anytime.

All the best

どうでもいいね！
Nov 27 2012

Shunya Hagiwara "どうでもいいね！" (2012). Courtesy of the artist.



[Above] Shunya Hagiwara, "My Holy Place" (2013). [Below] Shunya Hagiwara "A Button" (2008). Courtesy of the artist.

DANH VŌ

By Sana Beth Mason

Artists of all nationalities, all creeds, and all backgrounds have discussed the continual movements and redevelopments of diasporas in an aesthetic context. Of these practitioners, one who has emerged as a definitive, contemporary voice of the Vietnamese emigrational population, and of those who call themselves "global citizens," is Danh Võ (pronounced "Yaan-Voh"). The history of this 39-year-old multidisciplinary artist, garnered from his highly complex installations and individual projects to his own personal background, may be referred to as a tapestry of events, memories, and finely tuned observations taking shape before an equally cultivated audience.

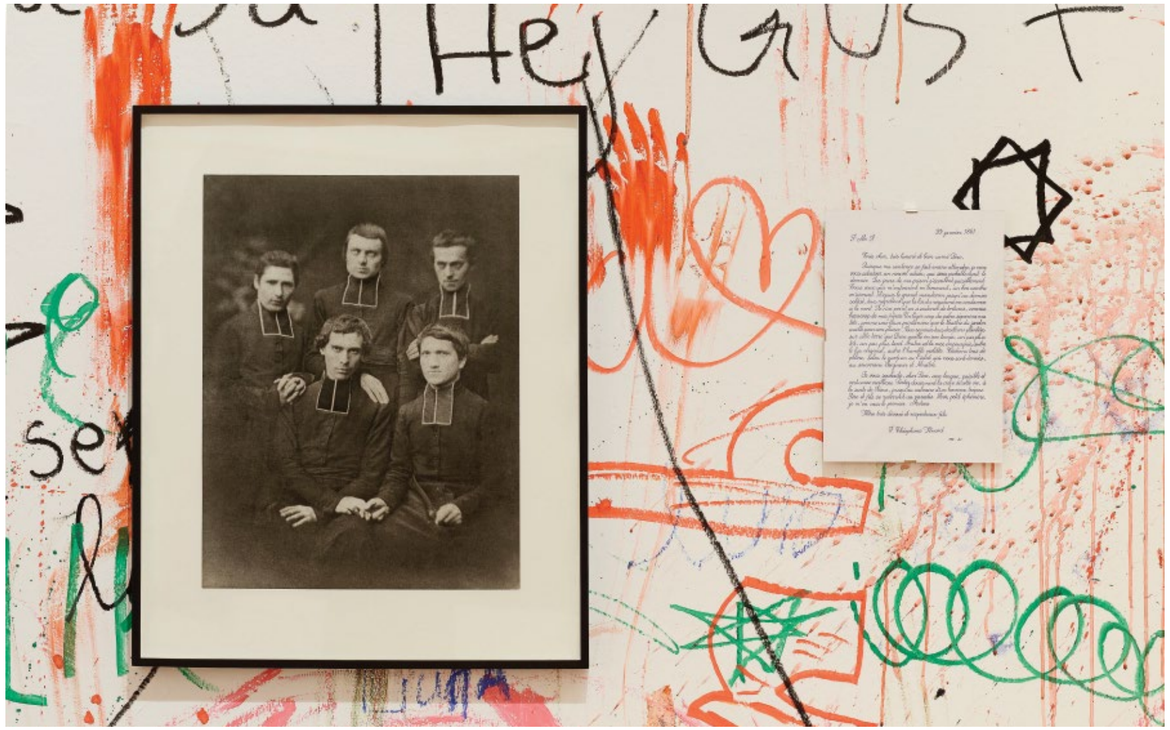
Võ's practice is informed by more than a constant state of migration between politically erected borders, as this would be an all-too-convenient set of circumstances for the artist. He was born in 1975 in the Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu province of Southeastern Vietnam, and was moved with his family (shortly after the fall of Saigon near the end of April that year) to the Mekong Delta island of Phú Quốc. His family became refugees as they escaped the country in a homemade craft, which was picked up by a Danish Maersk freighter. The Võ family settled permanently in Denmark. The artist's own name has, too, experienced varying states of movement from his birth name to one including the surnames of his former spouses (his current legal name is read as Trung Ky Danh Vo Rosaco Rasmussen). Destabilization of the body, of the mind, and the blur between them that somehow composes an individual identity is a recurrent motif in Võ's work, though it is worth noting how his works firmly anchor the viewer into his own backstory. The absence of that biographical fixture would likely result in the viewer having no immediate reference point, no mental springboard from which a meaningful discussion on cultural and psychological migration may be introduced.

Võ began his formal education in painting at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, but ended up completing his studies at Städelschule, Frankfurt, before settling in Berlin in 2005. In 2006, he was a resident at Villa Aurora in Los Angeles, nestled in the Pacific Palisades, alongside Dr. Joseph M. Carrier, Jr. (a distinguished scholar, Marine Corps veteran, and a counterinsurgency specialist who worked for the Rand Corporation during the Vietnam War). Three years later, he was invited to the Kadist Art Foundation in Paris for another four-month residency. His most high-profile public projects have been executed within the last three years: the remnants of a transplanted Vietnamese Catholic church within the Encyclopedic Palace at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 and his mammoth We The People project with the Public Art Fund unveiled earlier this year have catapulted Võ into the contemporary art stratosphere. Yet, even before reaching such critical mass, Võ's smaller, more intimate works have issued profound considerations of class, cultural identity, and freedom in any and every respect.

A particularly heartfelt example of the transmission of legacy and selflessness is found in a letter originally written in 1861 by Saint Théophane Vénard to his father before his execution. At 31 years old, the young Catholic missionary was beheaded by order of a mandarin, during a time when proselytizing was outlawed in northern Vietnam. Võ resurrected the defiant words of the saint (originally written in English, translated into French) by having his own father, Phung Võ (who speaks neither English nor French), transcribe the letter by hand into a near-perfect cursive copy. The project is officially called 02.02.1861, [last letter of Saint Théophane Vénard to his father before he was decapitated] (2009–). This object, at first a historical artifact now sublimated into a creative gesture, is an appropriate exemplar of Võ's significance in a densely populated, competitive industry. An artist reaches beyond their own chronology into a documented series of events informing, disrupting, and shifting a broader, less obvious perception of our current environment. Võ successfully inhabits the roles of archaeologist, cultural anthropologist, archivist, artist, and the casual flâneur: a vigorous cultural chameleon who can simultaneously adapt to and comment on any locale he chooses to visit.

Võ has taken a countless set of conceptual and physical routes since infancy, and it is apparent that his passion is to engage in a perpetual state of travel. It was recently announced that he will again participate in the Venice Biennale in 2015, occupying the Danish Pavilion. What a Vietnamese-born, Danish-raised, Berlin resident artist will offer on the world's largest stage for contemporary art is anyone's guess, but it will surely be another illuminating journey both for him and his viewers.

"A good traveler has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving."
-Lao Tzu



Danh Vo, *Chung ga opla!*, 2013. Installation view, Villa Medici, Rome. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photograph by Roberto Apa.

YOKONORI STONE

Interviewed by Chad Calhoun

It's been almost two years since Chad Calhoun first interviewed Yokonori Stone. She was just about to have her first solo show at Ever Gold Gallery, which caused a bit of an uproar in the SF arts community.

There was some blow-back about your last show. What happened?
I was so excited about my first show in SF, but some people were really upset about a few of my works.

Which ones?
The Barry McGee ones made some people really mad. I worked so hard to be able to do Barry McGee's black lines. I thought of the drawings as homages to him, but the reaction was that I was ripping him off. A lot of people were offended that I would copy someone so important to the SF art community. It actually shook me up quite a bit because I never meant any harm. I was copying his work because I love it. I just wanted to say, "hey, isn't this work great!" It made me happy to copy drawings with such nice lines and colors. But some of the online comments were really nasty.

Yeah, I saw some of them. They got a little personal too.
Someone wrote that not only did they hate all my work but they hated the way I signed my name as well. I haven't been able to sign my name the same way since.

So you weren't trying to steal Barry's work?
Oh, no! It was like when I was a kid and I'd draw pictures of Oprah Winfrey and The Spice Girls. I didn't want to become them or steal from them; I just loved drawing them because I liked them so much!

But what about the other works in the show? You had some really dark stuff about suicide and the pigeons and the Folsom Street crowd.
I had just moved to San Francisco and I was trying to capture everything I was seeing and learning about the city. I wasn't trying to pass judgment on the city; I was just trying to understand this new place I was living in. Moving to San Francisco was a big shift for me, and all this work just kind of came out.

But I'm sure you can see how some people would be offended by your work and think that you are judging them and their city?
I can see that now, and I am sorry if I hurt anyone's feelings. That reaction is a big part of why I decided I needed to quit art and try something else.

What did you decide to do?
It took me a while to find something to replace art. I wanted to be an artist because I wanted to be part of a creative community. I wanted to share my ideas and be a truly positive force, but I failed. So I tried volunteering in a literacy center, but that got complicated because I got too involved in the lives of the people who came for reading instruction. So I had to find something else. Just last week, I finished orientation at a dog shelter. Now I can clean the dirty dog bowls and the cages, and hopefully next month I can start walking the orphaned dogs.

That's really cool. But you've completely stopped making art?
Yes, shortly after my show at Ever Gold, I made some more works dedicated to Barry McGee and all the other artists who I really admire, like KAWS and Dalek and Takashi Murakami. I painted their imagery onto coloring book pages as a way of connecting my childhood practice of drawing things I like. I made those works with the idea that they would be fun and inspire other people to make their own dedications to the things that they love. But after the comments online about my "fake" Barry McGees, I put the work away and completely stopped painting and drawing. I just want to help make people happy, and my art was making people really mad. So I've given it up and decided to dedicate myself to orphaned dogs. It is really great and I think I can make a difference.

Yokonori Stone, Fake Murakami, 2012. Acrylic on coloring book pages, 8x10 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Ever Gold Gallery, San Francisco.

Yokonori Stone, Fake McGee Star Trek version, 2012. Acrylic on coloring book pages, 8x10 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Ever Gold Gallery, San Francisco.

TAKASHI MURAKAMI

Mememe no kurage (Jellyfish Eyes), 2013
By Glen Helfand

Branded delivery systems are Takashi Murakami's stock in trade. He's got his own production company, Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd., and a tiered sales system that involves making artworks that can be bought at various levels, from plastic figurines for the manga/anime aficionado to the high-roller art collector who shops at Gagosian. The genius of Murakami's traveling 2007–8 survey show *© MURAKAMI* was its inclusion of an actual Louis Vuitton boutique that sold an artist-designed bag that was only available within the exhibition. Shopper/viewers flocked to the show from global metropolises far and wide. His work is unabashedly populist and incisively critical. He's the Japanese Jeff Koons, and it would seem no accident that Murakami's first feature film would make a US tour of art venues on the eve of Koons's splashy Whitney retrospective.

Film is clearly a crossover medium that reaches far broader audiences than a museum or gallery show. (Koons made a mythical porno, *Made in Heaven*, though only produced images and objects around it.) There's no guarantee that major art pedigree can translate to success in cinema—Julian Schnabel has the temperament, though Cindy Sherman admitted she's too solitary an artist for the collaborative spirit of filmmaking. Murakami, however, has the built-in affinity for working with teams, an attribute that would bode well for his moviemaking ambitions.

Jellyfish Eyes had a single, sold out screening at the Asian Art Museum, the final stop on its rounds of eight American art venues. The fact that he chose this route over the film festival circuit seemed suspicious, as it raised a question of context: did the film function as cinema or art? But with Murakami, each decision seems considered, and perhaps in this way, there's a cultural component that the artist highlights—if it weren't shown in a museum, its deeper intensions might be overlooked.

Jellyfish Eyes turns out to be a very capable Japanese genre work. It's a kid's fantasy monster movie with impressive CGI effects and serious things on its mind. It's not easy to find out about its Japanese release—is it a box office success or cult item?—but the film would seem to be able to seamlessly enter into mainstream cinemas there, and accepted as pure entertainment, not contemporary art. Its release category is less opaque Matthew Barney opus than current multiplex fare such as the latest *Godzilla* remake.

The latter is particularly apt as the plot of *Jellyfish Eyes*, while of more modest budget, concerns monsters born of technology and thriving on its toxic spirits, as well as trampling on civilization and playing electrical wires like a zither. Whereas the big budget Hollywood film had trouble conveying a troubling message about technology, Murakami's film assuredly folds a cautionary tale into the narrative. The story concerns a young boy relocating to a small town after the death of his scientist father—who in a nightmare sequence is consumed by a tsunami with the rainbow sheen of an oil slick. (The giant ocean wave recalls the shocking YouTube footage of villages decimated after the enormous 2011 temblor that unleashed Fukushima.)
The narrative is fairly standard kid's fare—lonely sixth grader Masashi who, with a distracted, grieving mother, finds himself a seemingly imaginary friend. Only this marshmallow-y creature with a pink mushroom cap of a head and an insatiable appetite for a specific processed cheese snack is definitely an invention that pops out of Murakami's gallery work. The character is cutesy but also kicks ass.

As a species, it's part of something called F.R.I.E.N.D.s, and when the young boy is at school, it appears that they're a trend—his classmates all have them. Whereas he communicates humanly with his, the others are controlled with a spiffy electronic device that looks a lot like an iPhone. There are scenes where the kids are in the classroom, texting frantically on their devices each moment when the teacher has their back turned to the desks. They're conjuring their more aggressive creatures of various stripes, from jewel encrusted bauble heads to snarling, slimy hyena-hybrids, into existence. This conceit is a not-so-veiled spin on culture's overly dependent on technology and social media as an illusory form of connection. Masashi endures the taunts of bullies and relies on his adorable F.R.I.E.N.D. to navigate conflict, as well as find young love. His budding empowerment irresistibly clings to the kid's film genre.

So do the sub-plots involving a diabolical group of young scientists, black-caped Japanese boy band types who have created creatures to steal the souls of school children and to create a monster of Godzilla's proportions. That scenario creates the visual climax of the film, with swarms of F.R.I.E.N.D.s and kaleidoscopic tornado swirls; *The Wizard of Oz* spiffed up with the latest in hallucinogenic imaging technologies. These are the sequences with the most visual panache, ones that can be most associated with Murakami's art pedigree, but more of the film has a prosaic suburban look of a Spielberg movie.

Jellyfish Eyes is not catering to American tastes (though the titles are inserted in English). It is unabashedly Japanese in its tone and setting. One of the more interesting aspects of Murakami's achievements is in notions of export—his work traffics in themes that have more nuanced meaning in Japanese culture, yet he's able to float them in international waters. The ultimate intentions of the film, which has sub-currents of religious extremism, bad parenting, and pacifism, may never quite register with Western audiences. In particular, the nuanced significance of *kawaii*, the Japanese veil of cuteness that covers less savory aspects of modern life is more than just pink tones and a busty French maid (who is the gender-bending, martial arts master avatar of a particularly nerdy young boy). This is also what is so successful about the film; a candy-colored Trojan Horse, using a friendly, familiar medium to address dark themes.

In an interview in *The Wall Street Journal*, Murakami addressed his use of youth in the film: "The message I want to convey to children is you are not the chosen ones, you are not always blessed and the world is dark and dreary. By telling children the harsh truth, some of them will use that energy and create something awesome when they grow up."[1] While it is dressed in tween clothing, *Jellyfish Eyes* is a commanding, and heartily entertaining, mature work.

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1) Hsu, Jenny (2013), *Takashi Murakami Makes Monster Movie to Teach Children a Lesson*, Wall Street Journal (published December 4, 2013)

All images: Stills from film *Jellyfish Eyes*, 2013. ©2013 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd.
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HOU HANRU

With Marie Martaire and Xiaoyu Weng

The September issue of SFAQ comes out a month and a half before the third edition of the Asian Contemporary Art Week 2014 (ACAW) organized by the Asian Contemporary Art Consortium (ACAC) San Francisco from September 20th-28th, 2014. This weeklong series of events gathers various local cultural institutions, artists, scholars, curators, writers, and different audiences around Asian contemporary arts and design. Investigating the relations between geography, cultural production, and art criticism from and about Asia, the ACAW 2014 will specifically focus on notions and issues of cultural mis/translations, language, and their philosophies. In the following interview, curator and critic Hou Hanru shared with Xiaoyu Weng, Director of ACAC-SF and Marie Martraire, Program Assistant of ACAW-SF some of his curatorial projects as well as his thoughts on these concepts and the San Francisco art scene.

Since your move from Beijing to Paris in 1990, you have yourself organized or co-organized multiple exhibitions and programs presenting the works by artists from Asia around the world, such as* Cities on the Move or Les Parisien(ne)s. *How do you approach this process of presenting their works in other socio-cultural contexts? We are particularly interested in the notion of mediation, and translation as the practice of presenting and attempting to render the meaning of a text, an artwork, a cultural reference in another language or socio-cultural context.

First, one needs to understand that Asia is not a unique regional concept, but encompasses different local socio-cultural systems. Each expresses itself through multiple and various ways of engaging with modernity, and hence generating diverse modernities, which are not solely defined by regional, racial, or ethnic considerations. For example, the rapid cultural, economic, political, and urban developments in various Asian countries have provided artists with dynamic and unique contexts for researching, experimentation, and creativity. Numerous Asian artists have investigated this notion of modernity, by re-evoking, revisiting, and reinventing traditions, while struggling against any kind of presumptions of what Asia should be in the West. In most of my work, I am trying to move forward this particular perspective from the point of view of someone struggling against cultural clichés. I insist on the complex history of Asia itself, the unique local contexts and languages, and the different influences that have been excluded by mainstream media and institutions. It's also extremely important to recognize that all the artists are independent individuals who have their own ways of thinking and doing things, always striving against clichéd readings and appropriations imposed by the dominant powers. Like some artists in Asia, I try to bring these aspects back to the exhibition (or art project) to reflect and negotiate some contemporary issues. Chinese artist Huang Yong Ping is a good example of this approach. His works integrate some classical, but often marginalized, religious and cultural references in Asia, not only China, and bring them back to confront and interpret contemporary events in the West, and in the rest of the world, to predict the future, or "destiny," of the world. Embracing the idea of cultural hybridity and the tension between the global trend and the individual resistance is key.

As a curator, how do you negotiate and promote this cultural hybridity in exhibition making?

I think it is our responsibility as curators to encourage differences by exploring truly inventive ways of exhibition making that foster a trajectory of adventure and keep developing risk-taking. When working on a project, I'm not only trying to work with individuals who are, in my eyes, great artists, but also mobilize their talents and energies to challenge all kinds of established institutional models. For example, *Cities on the Move* (1997-1999) turned the exhibition space into a real-live city, a place where people could come live, eat, drink, talk, get married, and so on. This exhibition model was inserted into different kinds of Western institutional framework and hence challenged the established model dominated by the white cube as an ideology and a bureaucratic practice. Actually, upon my arrival at San Francisco Art Institute in 2006, I made the decision to not have a white cube gallery. All the walls had to be re-colored according to different projects of the artists, every time, to challenge the pretended "autonomy" of art objects emphasized by the white cube ideology.

The city life and its impact on creative activities have been the central concern for me in my projects, not only Asia. All these aspects put together provided a way to challenge some fundamental Western ideas related to modernity, for example, nations, states, the division of art and other activities, art and science, art and philosophy, etc. So in the end, "Asia" is a concept, a model of operation, a system of value, an aesthetic model more than simply a kind of textual or imagery narrative. "Asia" brings a proposal for difference and hence actions of emancipation. I think what "Asia" can provide us is an incredible dynamic diversity of experiences.

How does this encouragement of cultural hybridity via exhibitions affect our cultural institutions?

Hou Hanru photographed by Andrew McClintock.

Art is never an academic affair, something that can be framed and defined by any established scholarly system. Asia gathers the most interesting conditions to rethink our cultural institutions and become more subversive by creating different alternative structures to emphasize diversity and variety. This is why I insist so much on using the dynamic of social and economic progress in exhibition making and preventing repetitions. Take, for example, the 2002 Gwangju Biennale in Korea. I decided to invite around thirty independent artist-run organizations to install their spaces in the exhibition spaces, which, in turn, were structured in urban settings including streets and plazas. The invited groups had total freedom to organize different kinds of curatorial projects while their physical architectural structures were reproduced in the city-like exhibition halls. This initiative not only aimed to gather all those organizations together, but it was also a way to tell people that repeating the same models of exhibitions and institutions is not mandatory. The contrary is true…For me, the most interesting artworks and artists are those who are working in the street, who are actually in relation with social reality. They call for deconstructing established models of institutions. Unfortunately, because of the phenomenon of globalization, I am observing that more and more Asian artists of the new generation are producing works similar to what we can see in the mainstream Western institutions, schools, markets, and media, or do very standard and academic paintings and objects. I think this is highly problematic.

This is probably a big question but we are very curious about it. How do you see your own practice evolve under the broader discourses of globalization in the past 15 years? How do the debates and discussion about globalization, migration, and dislocation evolve? Do these topics still have the urgency and relevance compared to twenty years ago? Do you think it will be interesting to revisit some of the issues you explored in the exhibition* Cities on the Move*?

My practice attempts to understand the key issues within an art institution. More specifically how a museum should handle today from the perspective of boundaries between political and intimate spaces, the relation between public and private, and the question of geopolitics, migration, and technology.

For instance, in the case of the National Museum of XXI Century Arts (MAXXI) in Rome, how can it remain a center for democratic culture? I am working on bringing together the two museums housed by MAXXI: the MAXXI Arte and MAXXI Architettura. I envision creating multiple directions in the programs and staff of these two museums to encourage dialogues and interactions between art and architecture, to then create a new, common "city life" for the museums. I want to make the museum a democratic space by reconstructing the idea of a Roman forum, i.e., a public space and sphere in which people debate the question of the society. These programs have to have a strong component of public speech. The

Rigo 23, *Autonomous InterGalactic Space Program*, Mixed media installation, work produced in Mexico in collaboration with local artists,2009-12. Part of Zizhiqu, Autonomous Regions at the GuangDong Times Museum.

program *Open Museum, Open City* will take place next October and November. We will be emptying the whole museum, turning it into a huge empty space, and filling it with sounds. Artists such as Bill Fontana, Ryoji Ikeda, Cevdet Erek, or architects like Philippe Rahm, will develop some performative installations in different parts of the museum. The "show" is invisible but intensive and immersive. The institution will become a city where dialogues amongst different voices unfold over time. A radio will also be broadcasting sound works, including a program of open calls for public participation, both in the space and online. And then, in the afternoons and evenings, the galleries will host various performative events, such as performance, dance, theatre, story-telling, and poem reading, as well as Hyde Park Speaker's Corner style public speeches. Another project is *The Independent*, a three-year project devoted to the promotion of national and international independent groups working in the fields of art, architecture, design, dance, and music as well embracing broader areas such as publishing and town planning. In Italy, there is only one national museum for contemporary arts—our museum, the MAXXI—but there are many small independent institutions, often created and run by independent artists, curators, editors, designers, etc., in different cities. In *The Independent*, we tried to invite those small organizations to come take over the atrium stairways of the museum, the most emblematic part of the iconic building, and to develop experimental programs. So to a great extent we don't need to go to Asia to have an "Asian show:" a certain Asian way of doing things, a non-Western energy, is being brought into the center of this institution.

How do you convey to audiences this idea of challenging institutions, encouraging artists' experimentations through exhibitions?

In terms of making audiences understand what we are doing, first we need to create a context in which they can experience the necessity of change. Then we invite them to be a part of the adventure. Most of the projects I have been doing consist of creating possibilities for public participation while going beyond the institutional model and the cultural context. I not only invite audiences to be a part of the performances, but also, if this is possible, work with the educational and curatorial teams. I try to go into the different suburban communities to generate collaboration projects. For me this is another way to negotiate and break down the borders separating high-culture institutions and diverse members of the society.

Can you give us an example of a project you've realized that created a space to negotiate the borders between audiences and institutions, but also between visitors and artists' works when they are from different socio-cultural contexts?

For example, I worked with Indonesian artist Eko Nugroho for the Lyon Biennale 2009 who was well known for creating spectacular and fantastic graffiti figures. I also knew that he was collaborating with different populations to create shadow theatres, which have a long tradition in Indonesia. I invited Eko to work with kids from the suburbs of Lyon and develop a multimedia theatre piece based on stories by different local families that had immigrated from Africa, North Africa, Europe, and many other different places. After an engagement of six months, the play came to light and was performed in different suburbs. Audiences could see a combination of contemporary technology, music, urban dance, hip-hop, and traditional craft in the shadow puppets' play. I think the play had an effect on the young people involved with the project. They learned a lot, especially because the play was based on their own stories, their own lives, their cultural roots, their contemporary existence. Another example is the 5th Auckland Triennial that I curated in 2013. A section of the Triennial took place in the suburban area in collaboration with people from Asia, Australia, New Zealand, America, and Europe. Together they produced an incredible program for the local community to talk about their own problems, and create a proposal for transforming their community. This approach was brought back to another group project that I did at the Times Museum, Guangzhou, China, entitled *Zizhiqu, Autonomous Regions*. We also invited the San Francisco-based muralist, painter, and political artist Rigo 23 to present his project of working with the Zapatista community in Mexico, along with other artists' projects, to develop a defense of autonomous initiatives to fight against gentrification and the domination of capitalism and political power. Extending his project, Rigo 23 and the museum's team worked with the local people and activist groups in an area of Guangzhou

Installation view, *Cities on the Move*, CAPC in Bordeaux. Curated by Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist.

where gentrification was happening to mount a manifestation. In a general sense, the artistic projects triggered the first step of action, of resistance. Other local art communities adopted the model of the projects to imagine their own. These projects are much more global, but look specifically into a local situations. Similar experiments have carried out in Xinjiang, the Uyghur region of China, the borderline between Israel and Palestine, etc …

The issues of mis/translation, or mediation, between artists and audiences from different socio-cultural contexts might seem key in programs based on social engagement. How do negotiate these aspects?

If we could translate art into other languages, or even into languages, then we wouldn't need art anymore. The real question is, then, whether or not it is possible to translate a language to another *comprehensively*? We all know that the process of translation includes a huge proportion of misunderstanding and missed translation. For example, the question of translating what we call "Asian art" in other parts of the world does not simply come down to understanding the artists' intentions, but rather apprehending and embracing the limits of what art proposes we look at. If not the exact meaning of the work, we can translate a gesture, an action, a process that generates possibilities of sharing various elements, and especially, imaginations and visions, such as what we call "Asia" for example. When looking at artworks by artists from Asia, we are not only grasping the existence of a "different" story behind the work. We are also experiencing a possibility to imagine a world that can only be imagined, shared, and constructed by introducing cultural difference. This process makes us realize that we have been taking for granted the world we usually accept as normal, as the norm. This is why I feel very sad when I see a 25-year-old curator who organizes white cube exhibitions in the most perfect, hence, most closed, way—applying textbook exhibition making *à la lettre*. Curating is something that should be (re)invented every time. For me, "translating Asian art" into a Western context is about challenging some established values and opening up our minds. Translation is about creating a dynamic around both the possibility and impossibility of understanding each other, which generates a potential for imagination and debate. That is the ultimate meaning of translation: to do new things, we have to question and destabilize the meaning and value of the old ones.

Installation view, *Cities on the Move*, Secession, Vienna. Curated by Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist.

Following this thread of thought, what are your thoughts on the role social medias (including platforms such as Weibo, Facebook, Twitter, and Amazon, among others) can play today to challenge institutional models while engaging audiences in art discourses?

Everyone is fantasizing on the role of social media, talking about its potential of developing information. But we are actually facing a new monster, like Godzilla who no one really knows if he is good or bad. Fortunately, their use has become a technological skill to reach some sort of justice and equality. But sometimes, this can also result in a lack of depth of reflection and criticality. Are mediocrity and conformism an inevitable outcome of "democracy?" The worse could be clientelism dominating the model of social communication . . . We are witnessing very complicated consequences of these platforms today, for example in the Arab revolutions in which they played an important role. I believe social medias reflect the fundamental contradiction of the tensions between democracy and populism, which remains an unsolved question despite being discussed since the philosopher Plato. They also create spaces for negotiating these frictions.

How so?

The potential of social media probably allows us to rethink our institutions, their roles and functions, by shaking up boundaries that may exist between audiences and institutions, artists and institutions, or as mentioned between democracy and populism. For example, social media blur the lines between artists and "ordinary" social media users by bringing another aesthetic, another imagery or textual canon in art. Asian populations, especially young people, embrace the culture of entertainment, and new technology, but they have critical point of views. How, and how much, can institutions adapt to this new relation? It is a very open question for me.

Maybe we can talk now about California, and more specifically the San Francisco Bay Area where you used to live from 2006 to 2013. California is a site with deep geographic and historical connections to Asia, and in 2013, the state claimed the biggest Asian population in the United States. Various art institutions, from larger public and educational institutions (such as colleges, universities, museums and culture centers) to smaller art venues (such as alternative space and galleries) present the arts and cultures of Asia in the San Francisco Bay Area. How would you evaluate the current San Francisco art scene and its presentation of Asian artists?

The San Francisco art scene has a long relationship with what was supposed to be coming from Asia: visual art, literature, music, theater and so on. This relationship has developed through some key historical, political, and economic moments, and thanks to trans-pacific migrations, such as artists traveling through or those now living in the Bay. The Asian Art Museum opened in 1966 and is perhaps one of the few art museums outside of Asia that hold such a large collection devoted exclusively to the arts and cultures of Asia. More recently, other art gallery institutions in the San Francisco Bay Area have been paying increased attention to artists of Asian origin. California College of the Arts, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Chinese Culture Center, and many others, including commercial galleries, have been presenting regularly works by Asian Artists. The Kadist Art Foundation San Francisco is perhaps the most active and intellectually consistent institution that engages the Asian contemporary art scenes. They are developing deep and growing programming, starting with a series of artists-in-residence coming from Asia, building their collection of works by Asian artists, and supporting projects in and outside San Francisco, in different parts of Asia, specifically China. Among a group of individuals, local galleries and institutions in the city, the Asian Contemporary Arts Consortium was set up in 2010, a not-for-profit coalition dedicated to increasing awareness and understanding of Asian contemporary arts and design in the San Francisco Bay Area. Another similar entity already existed in New York City. ACAC San Francisco grows rapidly and is having more and more interesting programs and contributing tremendously to the relevant discourses. You have obviously done a lot of work in this regard.

Has this current dynamic situation changed from the time you used to live in San Francisco, from 2006 to 2013? How would you evaluate the San Francisco art scene and the presentation of Asian artists then?

Many changes took place in the last few years. When I arrived in San Francisco in 2006, audiences and institutions had relatively little knowledge about what's happening in Asia, and the presence of Asian artists in the Bay Area. While working at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), my programs were devoted to making this younger generation of Asian artists visible in the San Francisco context, and to deepening the formation of cultural identities in these current specific contexts. One of the main programs, entitled *Pacific Perspectives*, focused on the dynamic scenes of art creation occurring across the Pacific Rim (ranging from the Americas to Asia) and connected San Francisco and its unique geographic, historic, social and cultural connection with Asia. Today, one of the immediate examples is the Kadist Art Foundation San Francisco. The Asian component in their programs has grown so vividly and intensely that it has perhaps become more visible than their San Francisco focus. I even suggested changing the name from San Francisco to simply Pacific! Kadist Pacific sounds great, right?

How would you explain this recent shift of attention to Asia in the San Francisco Bay Area?

I guess for multiple reasons. First, the demographics of San Francisco, with big Asian communities (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, etc.) have influenced this shift. Each community has developed its own support for artists of the same origins. Some groups of individuals, such as the Chinese Cultural Center of San Francisco (CCC), have made remarkable efforts in this field. CCC's contemporary art program does not only involve Chinese artists living in America, but also brings more and more artists from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, etc. to the Bay Area. They also organize public interventions in the Chinatown area. Second, numerous educational institutions where many Asian students are now studying on the West Coast, including in art schools such as California College of the Arts and San Francisco Art Institute, focus on contemporary art. Third, maybe artists from Asian origins who live in the Bay Area have perhaps gained more self-confidence. Their activities have become more sophisticated, in terms of intellectual research, collecting, analysis, discussions, and so on. Opportunities to show their works in cultural centers have also opened. Finally, I believe that this recent change is also linked to the way of living in the Bay Area. Social and cultural values are widely influenced by what we call "modernities," i.e. the complexification of the whole cultural system we are now living in. More and more interactions and exchanges between the San Francisco Bay Area and art scenes in Asia are happening as we are starting to understand the existence of a West Coast identity as part of the Pacific Rim. All of these aspects make us feel that the San Francisco Bay Area is living a really exciting moment. We are really embarking on a much more exciting adventure than in the last decade. So this is the general impression of course.

How do you envision these exchanges across the Pacific Rim—the areas around the rim of the Pacific Ocean?

Today Asia Pacific is perhaps the most dynamic part of the globe from historical, economic, and cultural perspectives. A very interesting relationship exists between different cities across the Pacific, including the entire West Coast of North America, down to Latin America. For example, Vancouver hosts the public gallery Centre A—the Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art—and the magazine *Yishu*, the first English language journal to focus on Chinese contemporary art and culture. Or the magazine *ArtAsiaPacific*, an English-language periodical covering contemporary art and culture from Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East is now based in Hong Kong. But it started in Australia, then traveled to New York, and is now in Hong Kong. This trajectory of art knowledge in the Pacific region reveals a potential redefining of what the contemporary world is, and a way to draw new centers on a global map. Kadist Art Foundation is actually currently developing a special program, entitled Kadist Pacific, in which you and Marie are actually playing an essential role. The idea is to explore the connections between California and San Francisco with the other side of the Pacific, from Japan, China, Hong Kong, all the way down to Southeast Asia.

Issues of translation also apply to institutional (museum and gallery, etc.) practice. For example, although funding sources are different, the booming of art museums and galleries in China gives the signals of the desire to have infrastructures of collecting and displaying art. But many of such efforts are simply copy and paste of Western models of museum practices without the consideration of local contexts. What are your views on the museum fever in China?

The development of museum practices in China is in an initial, immature stage today. Hundreds and even thousands of museums are being built today following economic, political, or private interests, such as urban expansion and real estate development. A lot of these new museums don't even have any curatorial vision or program; they simply have a building, and it then seems immediately natural to copy models they saw in the West or neighboring countries like Japan and Korea. But there are some exceptions, which have been well thought out, prepared and executed. They can be coherent models for the others. The exceptions are interesting for me: you are also witnessing today the emergence of some particular institutions developing interesting models, such as Times Museum in Guangzhou and Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai. These models develop a vision of their institution in relation with the city, architectural and urban conditions, as well as serious considerations on their influences on the local cultural scenes and populations.

How do you see museums evolving in China in the future?

It is difficult to predict the development of art museums in China. Today, there are more and more, bigger and bigger museums, more and more numbers. In a few years, there will be more and more empty buildings. For me, two possibilities exist: build smaller but very well prepared institutions, such as the Rockbund or the Times Museum, or develop gigantic buildings, with crazy design and fancy openings. Because of their non-sustainable model, these latters will have to invent solutions to survive in a nearer future: becoming something else, close down, develop something new out of this condition, and so on. But again, exceptions are possible. One cannot deny there are still some interesting and valuable outcomes to be produced out of this uncontrollable and chaotic commencement. There could be some great museums born out of chaos and the trouble-shooting process. There is always some inspiring stuff being produced out of entropy and monstrousness, like what the Spiral Jetty of Robert Smithson demonstrated . . . this is what I call *post-planning*. *Post-planning* is a practice of development inspired by the energy coming from the urban expansion and its problematic consequences. In Asia, especially China, developers take over unoccupied lands to build buildings without proper infrastructures, speculate on the future urban development of their location, sell them, and only after find money to build the roads to connect these spaces between them. Today, urban planning is also about correcting mistakes generated by these excessive urban expansions. Some highly inventive solutions can be found in this process of urban development. They challenge textbook-type urban planning and social programs. The solutions often seem to be irrational but much more pragmatic and adapted to local needs. They open new perspective for further social experiments in terms of economic, cultural and political restructuring and inventions. For example, the functions of a vacant office building can be entirely reinvented: maybe after being abandoned for ten years, one "mad developer" will jump on the opportunity, buy the building for a very cheap price, and then introduce all kinds of new activities such as hotels, shopping malls, restaurants, smuggling, drugs, arts, everything. From an office building, this edifice will become a whole city inside! Imagine if this new re-development follows an aesthetic inspiration. It can be completely fantastic.

Huang Yong-Ping, *Amerigo Vespucci*, 2003, install view *Wherever We Go: Art, Identity, Cultures in Transit*, 2007, Walter and McBean Galleries. Courtesy of Hou Hanru.

Hamra Abbas *Love Yourself* , 2009, install view *Everyday Miracles (Extended)*, Walter and McBean Galleries. Courtesy of Hou Hanru.

Installation view, *Cities on the Move*, Secession, Vienna. Curated by Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist.

Installation view, *Cities on the Move*, PS1, New York. Curated by Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist.

Installation view, *Cities on the Move*, Bangkok, Thailand . Curated by Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist.

GAO SHIMING

The State of Chinese Art Education and Contemporary Chinese Art
Interviewed by Reagan Louie

On June 18, 2014, I was invited to deliver a lecture at Hangzhou's China Academy of Art, one of China's two premier national art schools. After my lecture I had a wide-ranging conversation with Gao Shiming, an internationally renowned art critic and curator (Guangzhou Triennale, 2008, and Shanghai Biennale, 2014) and the director of CAA's school of Intermedia Art. In the ancient city of Hangzhou, I felt, at times, we were like two Song dynasty literati scholars sipping tea and conversing about art, philosophy, and life. Wu Jialuo and Lin Kaichen graciously translated our conversation.

I am interested in talking about the state of art in China, particularly in light of the international prestige of Chinese artists and the recent increase in Chinese students studying art in the United States.
Let me show you a picture first. Our academy, CAA, was founded in 1928 by Cai Yuanpei, a significant educator in Chinese history. At that time he was the president of the Education Department, and he established two institutes: the National Research Center, and the National Academy of Art. This photo shows the amount of students when CAA first opened to application after reconstruction: 50,000 in total at that time. Now we have 90,000 students apply for our school each year, and we only enroll 1,400 of them. The enrollment system is completely different from when I was a student of CAA. We only had seven students in the calligraphy class, and among them five were already members of the National Calligraphy Institution.

With that background, why did they come to school?
Partly because of their family tradition and reputation. The entrance exam was so hard at that time that it demanded five to eight years for students to get into school. They received fame and recognition during this long time period. The system now is entirely different. Students move directly into the production chain of special art education. It has changed radically.

How has it changed? Did the government want to make the study of art more available to people? To expand the number of art students?
Yes, but most of the students come here to study design. This is another significant difference over time. During my time as a student, people felt inferior as design majors, but now they can live better than those who study fine arts.

It is the same in the United States.
This is not the major problem. The school of Intermedia Art is supposed to be the first organization to teach contemporary art in China, but the term "contemporary art" is controversial itself, as it has been debated a lot in the last ten years. Actually, people seek to overcome the regime of "contemporary art" in many aspects.

We have a similar experience at SFAI (San Francisco Art Institute) where I teach. We have a department called New Genres that has succeeded so well that in many ways it has outlived its usefulness. Now students in every department, whether photography, painting, sculpture, or printmaking employ whatever material and medium best conveys what they want to say. So how do you define inter-media or contemporary art?
Actually, I do not care about the title of contemporary art. In China, the so-called first generation contemporary artists came from the '85 New Wave, which had its center in Hangzhou. Avant-garde artists of that wave include Gu Wenda, Huang Yong Ping, Geng Jianyi, Wu Shanzhuan, and Wang Guangyi—all from Hangzhou. They were the first group of artists that got international recognition. When I decided to found this intermedia department, I went to Paris and asked Huang Yong Ping for his opinion. He just told me two phrases: first, contemporary artists like us all received traditional Chinese art educations. Like Yang Fudong, from the oil painting department here at the China Academy of Art. Therefore, contemporary artists do not necessarily need to receive an education named "contemporary art." Second, truly good artists are not good teachers. You know, the first reader when I came into college was Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* published in the 1980s.

So let me go back to that first generation of Chinese artists at the Academy. They received traditional, classical art educations. How did they make the shift? Did they have access to art magazines and journals? How did they view the Western art world?
They struggled. Actually they had already become famous artists and curators. The motivation of their struggles couldn't be viewed as inspiration from the West. The internal energy of first-generation avant-garde artists was rooted in their experience of the Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966 until 1976.

What is their logic? Was the Cultural Revolution, for example, something to react against?
In the 1980s they first struggled for non-expressionistic art, not what was being taught in the art education system at that time. They wanted to change the conventional definition of painting as a representation of objects, and to emphasize the act of painting. Second, they struggled to destroy any form of regime, authority, and spectatorship in the art world. Then a new art circle appeared, but it didn't replace the previous one. Now we have three art circles coexisting in China.

What are the three art circles?
First is traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, which has its own art market that is far more complete and larger than the market for contemporary art. People from kindergarten kids to presidents all study calligraphy and can appreciate traditional Chinese paintings. Last week I curated an exhibition of calligraphy at the National Museum. Six officials from the central government and three generals from the Chinese military came to the opening. This popular situation is impossible for contemporary art. The second is an official art world led by institutions and associations. And the third one is contemporary art. We can view the first art circle as legacy from pre-modern China. The second as the remains of socialism like works from the Cultural Revolution and political propaganda, although they now serve as promotion. It's important to point out that these three art worlds coexist in China now, so the problem is to define what contemporary Chinese art is.

That's interesting. I'm beginning to understand why contemporary is such a difficult term because all these groups are contemporary.
In January I organized a conference at the Hong Kong Arts Center called "Three Art Worlds." We wanted to unpack the configuration of time and space. We invited artists from all over the world, like Eugene Yuejin Wang from Harvard.

So what about the third group? If you want to designate that group, what will you call it?
In China the term contemporary art appeared at the beginning of 1990s. People preferred to call themselves contemporary artists instead of avant-garde artists. Actually I feel the avant-garde artists first appeared in China in the 1930s, starting with the New Woodcut Movement led by Lu Xun. All avant-garde artists at that time went to Yan'an [at the time a communist prefecture where Lu Xun founded the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts], so probably "propaganda" is a very contemporary conception.

They were more like Russian Constructivists, making art for utopian purposes.
It's very complicated historically and politically. Chinese modern artists are largely influenced by Russian history.

This is heading into deeper waters. It is a fascinating conversation I'd like to continue, but I want to circle back to the question of schooling. How do you teach students now?
Officially to say our school has three levels: first, the media lab; second, the studio; and third, the institution. Undergraduate students learn fundamental techniques from media lab in the first year, and experience elective courses in different studios with special field research the second year. Later they decide their direction and create their own art in studios and institutions in the third and fourth years. BFAs need four years, and MFAs need three years, which are project based. This is our education system, but honestly I think art can only be learned, not taught. So the academy is a place for students to learn, not for teachers to instill knowledge through a spectacle system.

Well we have a very similar attitude at SFAI. We don't teach students techniques that can be learned or mutually learned among students. Earlier you talked about five different areas in your school—can you explain them more?
There is the embodied media studio, which is about interactive relations like mechanical installations and performance art; the open media studio including social media and sound art; the experimental art studio; the studio of narrative environment and spacial art; and the total art studio, which is basically about cultural studies and social interactions.

You said earlier that a lot of MA students choose to be teachers instead of artists. Is that true?
No. Each year the majority of MA students want to be artists.

Which is the most popular major in the study of fine art at CAA, your area or traditional Chinese painting?
Things are changing a lot here at CAA. All those three artistic worlds I just mentioned have their own characteristics to attract students. For SIMA (School of Intermedia Art), contemporary art education is the most radical mission.

Here's the question that leads to a large question: because they are young, are the students who come to SIMA aware of contemporary art? I feel our younger students don't really know what contemporary art is.
So the first year of education is important.

How many fine arts students in total?
Each year we have 50 students in SIMA. There are 200 in another traditional art education area.

That's a pretty high percentage. Are the students in your area influenced by the success of Chinese artists globally, like Yang Fudong? Another question a lot of people have: what's the relationship of artists to the state? Besides Ai Weiwei. Even with all the success of Chinese artists globally, they sometimes do controversial work, so how does the government negotiate with them?
This question is important. Why in the Western art world do people just know Ai Weiwei and Cai Guo-Qiang?

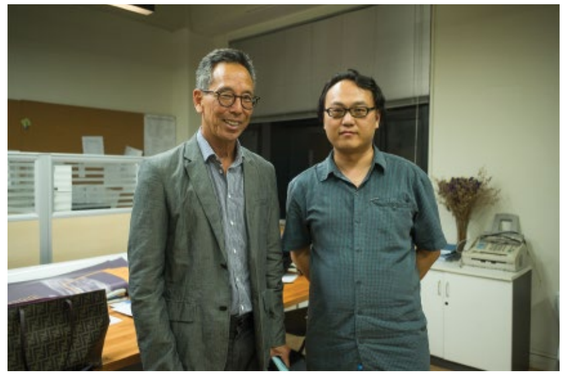
I guess Ai Weiwei is easy because he is a critical, controversial artist that represents Western values, someone standing for free speech, etc. But there are those who feel that Ai Weiwei is problematic; his artwork is predictable.
It's very complicated. People hold different opinions, but in some important situations, they behave the same. For example, I was in an Asian art conference at the Guggenheim museum in 2001 about human liberty. The panel was divided over Ai Weiwei. Some disagreed with Ai Weiwei's democracy of freedom and believed that he's a formalist. His art is predicable.

Can you tell me, from your perspective, why Ai Weiwei is seemingly the only Chinese artist accepted by the West?
Again, some critics see his political thoughts as old fashioned. Or, although he uses social media in the simplest way, like Facebook and Twitter, he doesn't think about it deeply at all, about democracy and freedom. Last semester I invited a philosopher here to give a lecture, called "Equality as Method." I talked to him before the lecture, like what I did with you today, in the same cafe. Did you recognize the text on the interior wall? It's from the first chatper of Zhuangzi's *Xiao Yao You*, which is about freedom. *Xiao Yao You* is based on Qi Wu Lun, so for Zhuangzi, freedom is equality. I told him that we had different routes toward freedom, including equality. This is a crucial problem, whether art is for equality or freedom. I'm interested in emancipated art.

Returning to my original question, it's very radical to teach students this philosophy of art, right? Your students are going to be artists, but in China many artists are forbidden to show their work by the government because of their radical thoughts.
You mean censorship?

Well, it is a conundrum. On the one hand the government allows them to work, and on the other hand it doesn't allow them to show. Do you think the Chinese government allows them to exist because China gains from their international prestige, making a lot of money and getting attention despite the content?
I think the real reason for censorship is not about politics, but policy. The difference between politics and policy is that policy is about regulation and control, but politics is about struggle and discussion. Policy is the technique of management and power, while politics struggles for emancipation.

So the government allows them to work because of some particular policy? How do radical Chinese artists make a living?
China has a large potential art market, but because of the regime of spectatorship, some artists touch the bottom line of censorship. Actually, I don't think we need to fight for freedom. It's not the only reason for us to do art. My friend Martin Ross attended the opening exhibition of the National Museum in Tiananmen Square called *The Art of the Enlightenment*. It was criticized harshly in China. People wondered why we need Western art for enlightenment. Should we let European artists enlighten us? And it received a bad reputation in Germany as well, because right at that time Ai Weiwei was put in jail by the Chinese Government. Martin was criticized because he didn't pay attention to Ai Weiwei. He said, "I spent ten times in China per year in the last three years. China has lots of artists,


Reagan Louie (Left) and Gao Shiming. Courtesy of Regan Louie.

not only Ai Weiwei. I know much better about the Chinese art world, and actually Ai Weiwei is not so popular there." Then he lost his job, but fortunately he moved to London and got a better position.

A more interesting phenomenon is Cai Guo-Qiang, who works for the government in a way.
Yeah, that's a good comparison. There are two poles, one is Ai Weiwei, who is against every policy of the government, and the other is Cai Guo-Qiang, who cooperates with the government completely.

What is interesting, ironically, is that Ai Weiwei needs the government as much as the government needs him. All the successful artists finally become part of the system and lose their original radicalism.
Absolutely. When he becomes part of the system, we can't accept him because he represents the regime now.

Why is Beijing such a center for art? Because artists want to be near the power? I mean, I can't imagine in America artists wanting to move to Washington, DC.
It relies on the political logic of China. Everyone hates Beijing, but they want to move to Beijing. Same situation as New York City. You want to realize yourself there, but you lose yourself in the city.

So your undergraduate students in SIMA—most of them want to be artists, but how can young artists survive in China?
It's getting harder and harder. Ten years ago we were confident. Young artists used to have lots of chances to be accepted by a gallery and to hold exhibitions. Now it's impossible. This is because of the overall environment of the art market.

The market is booming in China, right?
The situation is not as good as it was in the past.

So what attracts the 90,000 students who apply each year to the China Academy of Art?
As art students, CAA is the best option, but after they graduate, they will recognize the problem. That's the gap between dream and reality.

As I told my students, you need passion to make art, because otherwise it's just so hard to make a living. I don't want them to be too romantic.
Romantically, art demands talents, but I partially disagree with this. I believe in emancipated art, which means it is meaningful to everyone. I view artwork as art plus work. Art is not the object hung in the museum. Art should be the energy to open our hearts to everyone. I have the theory of "forthcoming artists" and the art moment. We are temporary artists. I appreciate the moment more than the products of art.

The artists I admire most embody this.

TIM BLUM

Interviewed by Courtney Malick

At this point in time most people familiar with commercial galleries in the U.S. know all about Blum & Poe. The gallery began in Los Angeles in 1994 with a small stable of artists, who at the time were not so well known, but now are among some of the most successful contemporary artists working in Los Angeles and around the world.

Not only were Tim Blum and Jeff Poe in tune with the artists they represented at the gallery's inception, such as Takashi Murakami, Mark Grotjahn, and Sam Durant, but they also, thanks in large part to Blum's extensive work in Tokyo beginning in the 1980s, began to situate themselves as an authority on many Japanese artists.

Some were just emerging, like Murakami and Yoshitomo Nara. Others began their practice in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, alongside movements such as Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism and Arte Povera.

We certainly have Blum & Poe to thank for bringing many such Japanese artists state-side, whose work had rarely been exhibited in the U.S., including many that were originally part of the then little known group, Mono-ha.

Even then in the mid-1990s, it took the gallery nearly a decade to move from their small space in Santa Monica to the now gallery-jammed area of Culver City, where in 2003 they took over a large, pristine new space, and then, six years later, finally moved to their current sprawling location across the street. That was 2009, and three years later they were finally able to install the exhibition they had been preparing for and thinking about for years, Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-Ha.

The important historical exhibition marked the beginning of many American Museums' interest in the work of the Mono-Ha artists. It also began an important partnership for Blum & Poe with Barbara Gladstone Gallery, the New York venue that Requiem *traveled to later in 2012. It was a highly unusual, museum-like transition that is almost never seen from one unaffiliated commercial gallery to another.*

Today, the impact of the Mono-Ha exhibition on Blum & Poe is clear. The gallery is currently opening new spaces in New York and Tokyo, and has helped define the way U.S. audiences see and understand historical and contemporary Asian art, and the links therein. The gallery continues to bridge gaps between the U.S. art market and Asia, Tokyo in particular, which, as I found out from Blum, has a surprising history of non-collecting culture.

Tell me about your initial move to Tokyo and how it later informed the beginning of Blum & Poe?
Well, I moved from Los Angeles to Tokyo in the 1980s where I started out working at galleries. My intention from the very beginning was to learn as much as I could, including the language, and also make connections with artists that I could eventually help to introduce to American audiences. Not only did I learn about Japanese art and culture while living there, I was also able to bring works of certain American artists to Japanese audiences that were relatively unfamiliar at the time. So the exchange definitely went both ways.

Did your experience in Tokyo change or shape your perspective on the new work that you found interesting and artists you wanted to represent when you came back to L.A. and open the gallery?
Oh yes, moving to Tokyo certainly opened up my entire world-view. It also helped me to see the connections between what was happening in Japan and the work of artists like Agnes Martin, Brice Marden, and Richard Tuttle, who, by the way, went to live in Japan when he was in his late-twenties, and you can see the exposure to that culture clearly influenced him and his work.

Today, Japanese artists have more knowledge of well established artists in the U.S. Do you think that effects the kind of work being made, exhibited or collected there?
I can't say for sure really. Japan has always had an extensive knowledge of other countries and the artistic work that has come out of them. But for them, back in the 1950s and '60s, their connections were more with Italy and Arte Povera than with the U.S. So I suppose that has changed to some extent today.

Obviously compared to just ten years ago, the art world today is much more globalized and is broadening into all parts of Asia. I am curious as to whether or not you have detected a difference in the reception, (by collectors, critics, audiences, etc.) of any of the Asian artists that you represent, depending on whether they have a show in their home country, other parts of Asia, or in Europe and the U.S.?
I can't speak to artists other than those I have worked with personally, but in my experience, it has depended on the show and the artist. Like I said, at the time I was first living in Japan, a lot of the artists that I began working with were just starting out, including Murakami. It definitely took a while for people to catch up and begin to understand what Blum & Poe was doing when we first opened in 1994 and started showing the work of someone like him, along with other people audiences were unfamiliar with. That, especially in juxtaposition to the other artists whose work we were exhibiting at the time, did not necessarily make perfect sense to others. But for me, I just always followed my own interests, and now years later, I think they have gelled together.

I can also say that in terms of the reception from collectors here in the U.S., clearly the interest in Japanese artists and artists from other parts of Asia has increased in the last decade. That has to do with the kinds of shows that have just recently been coming to fruition, such as the Mono-ha show, and Gutai shows. All of that work was almost entirely uncelebrated in the 1960s and '70s, so there is definitely a resurgence happening right now.

Yes, that is for sure. We are seeing so many exhibitions recalling work of both high profile and lesser-known American artists from that time period popping up in institutions all over the place.
Yes, true.

Do you think that has to do with social and political issues that are perhaps again feeling resonant in ways that relate to that time in American history? Or is it just a kind of cyclical trend that people, ideas, works often go through?
Probably both to some extent. But yes, I see it as a trend for the most part.

Right. With the rising interest in this kind of work from the 1960s, perhaps you can tell me a bit about your two new gallery spaces in New York and Tokyo. How will they continue to expand upon the work in these areas that the L.A. gallery has already established?
Well, the L.A. gallery will continue to be our main hub, and the New York and Tokyo spaces will act sort of like the two arms of that main body, so all three will work together. But, in Tokyo the space will operate as an office and archive that will help us to consolidate all of the historical work and research that Blum & Poe has continues to do.

And what will the exhibition programming there be like? Will it be very similar to that of the gallery in L.A.?
Not quite. In Tokyo, the exhibition program will also include artists that are not represented by the gallery. It will be very diverse. We are really making a statement by taking our business there and establishing a permanent space, because today the Asian art market is heavily based in Hong Kong, and very little collecting happens in Japan.

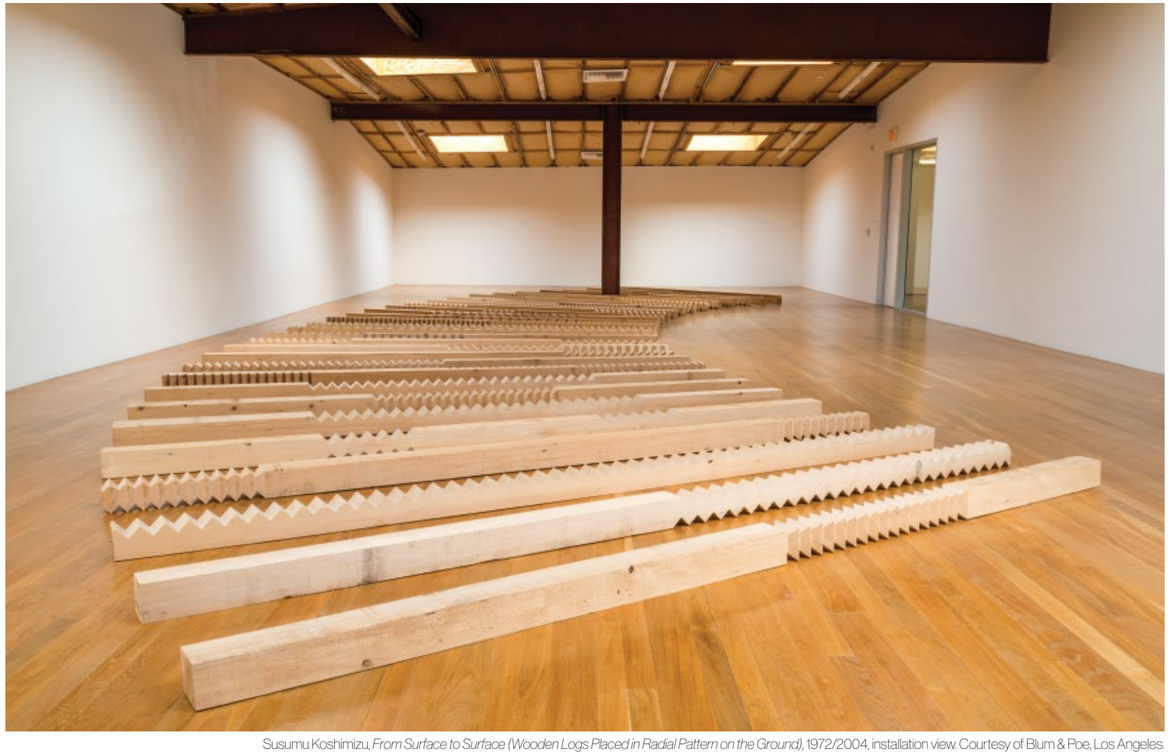
Why is that do you think?
Well the Japanese have really never been a collecting culture actually.

Really?
Yes, they, like many of the concepts that are central to Mono-Ha, are a more ephemeral, meditative kind of culture. Many people there simply do not have the space to invest in large collections like they do in other countries.

Then why do you feel right now, 2014, is nonetheless a good moment to make this move into doing business in Tokyo in such a concentrated way?
Through so many years of working in Japan, I have seen that people in Tokyo right now are hungry for more energy in terms of commercial galleries, exhibition programming and also collecting.

Yoshitomo Nara, *Fountain of Life*, 2001/13. Courtesy of Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

Nobuo Sekine, *Phase of Nothingness*, 1969/2012. Courtesy of Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.



Susumu Koshimizu, *From Surface to Surface (Wooden Logs Placed in Radial Pattern on the Ground)*, 1972/2004, installation view. Courtesy of Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

PHONG BUI

Portrait of Phong Bui by Nicola Delorme.

Interviewed by Constance Lewallen

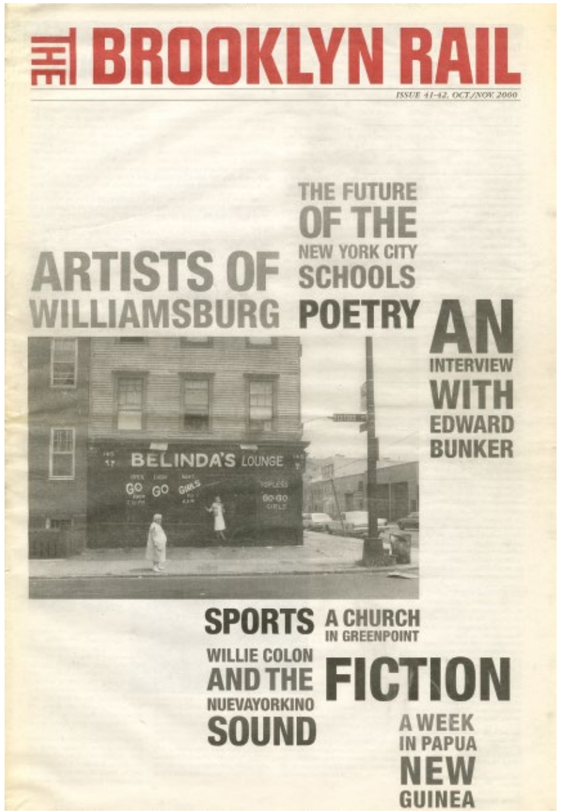
Phong Bui is an artist, independent curator, and educator as well as the founder, publisher, and editor-in-chief of The Brooklyn Rail, *a free monthly journal of arts, culture, and politics throughout New York City and beyond. It has received many awards, most recently the 2014 International Association of Art Critics (AICA) award for Best Art Reporting. Started as a broadsheet in 1998, the Rail became a full-format publication in 2000 under the direction of Phong Bui and former editor Theodore Hamm. Like* SFAQ, the Rail *is distributed free (in print and online) to museums, bookstores, universities, colleges, galleries, cafes, and other cultural venues.*

I want to start by asking you some questions about your background. You were born in Hue, Vietnam, is that right?
Yes, in the imperial capital of the Nguyen dynasty.

Your family was professional and highly educated, but with divided loyalties, in terms of the politics of the time: the nationalists and the communists correct?
Yes.

From what I've read it seems your paternal grandmother had a profound influence on you. Tell me why she was so important to you.
Because she suffered a great deal in her life. She came from a less prominent family than my grandfather's. As the result, when she was married to my grandfather, her in-laws looked down on her. I will never forget all the horrifying stories she told me about how they completely dismissed and abused her. They made it difficult for her to be with my grandfather. I should mention that it was customary in Vietnam in the past—no longer now, thank God—that when a woman married she had to prove she was worthy of marrying into his family. Basically, she had to live with her in-laws for at least two years to serve them, which included washing their feet, fetching their tea, making their dinner, and so on.

To show respect.
Yes, however, she decided to break the cycle. She vowed never to mistreat any of the women who married her eight sons.



First issue of the *Brooklyn Rail*, October 2000.

Oh, good for her.
She eventually became a favorite of everyone in the family, men and women, her children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, endless grandchildren—everyone admired her, and she was regarded as a compassionate and wise woman to whom people in the town came for advice. I was her favorite grandson, partly because I think she appreciated that I was different from her other grandchildren. I was a bit naughty, and I got excited about all kinds of thing very easily. I would draw battle scenes with colored chalk on the floor of the living room, and she would indulge me with the pleasure of showing off my drawings to her friends.

Did your family live together with her?
No, only I did, in the summer.

I read some of her aphorisms, such as, "When you grow up you will suffer like everyone else but make sure you suffer in the right way." This one I like even better, "If one lives in a long tube, be thin. If one lives in a barrel, be round," which is about accommodating yourself to whatever situation you find yourself in, correct?
Yes.

That's useful advice for anybody. In your particular situation, it was extremely appropriate, because of what your family had to go through—being sent into the countryside to a re-education center. How old were you then?
Around twelve. It was at the end of 1976 or the beginning of 1977, and we were there until the beginning of 1979.

You worked in the fields?
The communist party gave us a small piece of land in the middle of nowhere in the deep delta area; the idea was to punish us, forcing us to live off the land. None of us knew how to farm; we had no farming experience. There was no running water or electricity. We had to build a house out of bamboo, dry leaves, and clay.

Did you have to grow your own food?
Yes, but we were fortunate enough to have distant relatives who lived in the countryside who my grandmother called upon to live with us, showing us how to cope with the land until we were stable. It actually turned out to be quite a beneficial situation, because since we were in the middle of nowhere, there was virtually no surveillance by local police.

So, you had a certain freedom.
Exactly. My mother would take the bus to Cai Mau, a nearby city, to look for her ethnic Chinese friends who she used to do business with. The government was ousting ethnic Chinese at the time due to the Sino-Vietnamese Border War in early 1979. We were able to obtain false documents identifying us as Chinese and paid off a family of a local fisherman to transport us, seventy of us in total.

In other words, you traveled as ethnic Chinese?
Yes, we paid off local policemen to allow us to leave in the middle of the night, but once we were in the sea, if the coastguard caught us we would have been sent to prison.

Where did you all go?
We had heard horror stories about Thai pirates killing the men and the children, raping the women, stealing everything, so instead of going to Thailand, we took a longer trip to Malaysia.

And then what happened?
We landed in Malaysia where we were held in an area on the beach enclosed by barbed wire for a good four months.

Were you able to escape?
Not at all! There were guards all around us constantly. The days were very hot and the nights very cold, but they provided us with food and water. There was a girl of my age who one night snuck in and asked us whether we would like to send a telegram to our family so they knew where we were, which we did. We sent a telegram to my aunt and her husband who was a high-raking official at the American Embassy in Bangkok. Luckily, they came with several members of the United Nations Commission for Refugees on a helicopter the very next day, just hours before the Malaysian officials were going to load us on boats and push us back out to sea. In any case, we soon ended up at an official refugee camp where we spent another four months.

Eight months altogether.
Yes.

And then where did you go after that?
To Bucks County.

[Laughs]. ***Pennsylvania? Why?***
Because my aunt and my uncles lived there. One was in Langhorne, and the other in Bensalem, both in Bucks County.

It must have been quite a culture shock, landing in the middle of Bucks County, Pennsylvania.
Yes. I actually did write about this in an essay which was supposed to be titled, *The Restless Artists in the Age of Retirement*, not, *The Retiring Artist*, which was published in the March 2014 issue of *Art in America* in reference to Jonas Mekas and the state of older artists in the art world. The essay is about how this culture consumes and feeds on youth energy and neglects the elderly. When we arrived in Bucks County I was shocked the first time we were taken to a shopping mall, because I saw that old people were dressed like teenagers. You know, with t-shirts, socks, white sneakers, and baseball caps. We were shocked, but my parents were really horrified, because in our culture, you can't wait to get old.

When you will be respected for your wisdom.
It's the opposite here.

Did you study art in Pennsylvania?
Yes, I went to Philadelphia College of Art, now called University of the Arts, because it was in Philadelphia.

I understand that your first ambition was to be an art director or commercial artist.
Yes, I wanted to work for Condé Nast. I was already aware of the legendary Alexander Liberman who I admired, because he seemed to be so worldly and lived such an interesting life. He was the art director for *Vogue* magazine, which I had seen as a kid in Vietnam. I learned later in college that he was also an artist who made large abstract/geometric sculpture. In my freshman year I discovered Liberman's great book, *The Artist in his Studio*, which reconfirmed my ambition. I spent a lot of time in the library looking through all sorts of magazines and journals. However, I took a painting 101 class of with a painter named Jane Piper who was the studio assistant of Arthur B. Carles when she was young.

The American Modernist.
Yes! And his daughter was Mercedes Matter, the founder of the New York Studio School on Eighth Street in Greenwich Village.

So, that became your bridge to New York.
Yes. I remember distinctly when Jane said, "You have set your mind to be an art director, but you have the temperament of an artist. If you ever change your mind, let me know." That's what happened. I had been a very good student and won the first prize in illustration and ideas in the senior thesis show. After graduating, I went to New York and had an appointment with Hallmark Cards. They offered me a job right away and even flew me out to see their headquarters in Kansas City.

You could have ended up in Kansas City working for Hallmark. [Laughs.]
Thank God I didn't do that! But it was at the MoMA that I saw paintings for first time, just alone, that made all the difference.

You must have visited the Philadelphia museum.
I had been to the Philadelphia museum, but at that point I was set on being an art director and nothing else; I was like a horse with blinders. At the MoMA I saw de Kooning's *Woman I*, and it really gave me a shock; I got goose bumps. I had just read James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Joyce talks about epiphany. Not the profound, religious sort, but the kind of awareness and free reception of everyday events, insignificant events, that somehow pushes you to some other direction in your life. I went down to the payphone and called Jane and said, "You're right. I have the temperament of an artist. I want to be an artist. What do I do?" And she said I should go to the New York Studio School.

And you did.
Yes. I was there for two years.

There you studied drawing and painting and—
I studied drawing from life for the first year with Nicolas Carone, who I became close with. In addition to being a painter he also worked for Eleanor Ward at the Stable Gallery. Nic was the one who recommended artists like Joseph Cornell, and Cy Twombly, among others, to her. Nic lived next door to Jackson Pollock in Southampton, and was also very close to the gallerist Alexander Iolas.

Well, I loved hearing you talk about when Mercedes started erasing one of your drawings, [laughter] you said, "Look, we see things differently. You're five feet eleven inches and I'm five foot two inches.
Yes, exactly.

And she didn't respond well to that?
No, she didn't. I knew that I had come to New York to experience the many great things the city has to offer so I ended up spending time, especially on the weekends, going to see contemporary shows at galleries, and museums, as well as reading about art and literature.

You began to educate yourself.
Yes, I had to.

How old were you then?
I had just turned 20.

What an experience! Did you have friends in New York or family?
None. But I was able to create a group of new friends who were very supportive of what I was doing at the time. But deep down inside I had the feeling that the world was bigger than the walls surrounding the school. It took me years to accept my ambition and to understand that I had potential that I needed to fulfill. I needed to be with equally driven people, to be nurtured and to grow along with them. I keep telling all these young people who are working with me at the *Rail* now, "If you ever experience any negative comments among your immediate friends, who might make you feel bad for something that you're excited about, you have to have the courage to move on. Never let them hold you back with guilt."

Poetry Reading at exhibit Blodflames Revisited at Paul Kasmin Gallery, July 17th, 2014.

Editorial meeting at the Rail Editorial Room with Guest Art Editor Joachim Pissarro (March 2014). Dorothea Rockburne, David Carrier, among others, in the audience.

I know you knew Meyer Schapiro, and his wife, Lillian Milgram, with whom you forged a close relationship—Schapiro became your mentor.
Yes, I became their adopted Jewish grandson. [Laughter].

You met him when you had gone to their home to deliver or pick up a package?
Yes, there was a show of founding faculty members at the school that included Nic Carone, George Spaventa, Peter Agostini, George McNeil, Charles Cajori, and few others. Alex Katz was one of them, too, and Philip Guston. Among the lecturers was Meyer Schapiro. Later, Meyer told me that he only gave four lectures there, but his name was associated with the school nonetheless. Meyer would paint, draw, and make sculptures whenever he could, especially when he and Lillian spent summers in Vermont. Anyway, I was told to go to his house to fetch a painting. He asked me where I came from and I said that I was from Hue, and before I knew it, he told me the history of Hue.

And he was accurate?
Oh, yes. There were two people who knew about Vietnam better than I did. One was Meyer and the other was Leon Golub.

I didn't know that Meyer painted.
I think he could have been an artist, but that wasn't his calling.

He made art for his own pleasure?
Yes, for two reasons: one was for pleasure and the other was to inform his writing.

You had a kind of informal and private education from Schapiro.
I visited every Wednesday at 4 pm. We would walk for 15 minutes around two or three blocks and then come back home. By 4:30, dinner was served. Most of the time I would ask about his community of friends, such as Saul Bellow, Delmore Schwartz, Elizabeth Hardwick, Irving Howe, among others from the *Partisan Review* crowd, and also which books I should read, and so on.

Was their home up near Columbia University where he went to school and taught all of his professional life?
No, it was on West 4th Street, between Perry and North 11th in the West Village.

You seemed to have had a wonderful relationship, like father and son, and I know that you briefly considered becoming an art historian.
Yes, I was offered an opportunity to go to graduate school in art history at Columbia, but the same year, 1987, I was offered a grant to travel in Italy where I had never been, and I accepted the grant instead. I stayed with Nic Carone and met Piero Dorazio, Beverly Pepper, Al Held, Barbara Rose, and a whole host of others.

In Todi, in Umbria.
Exactly. And then Nic encouraged me to go to Tarquinia and visit Matta, which I did. Matta had turned a beautiful convent into a studio and living quarters. I stayed with him for a weekend, and he introduced me to other people. It was a great trip; I was there for a good two months.

What an experience!
Yes, it was great. I also met Cy Twombly that summer. That's when I realized I would much prefer being an artist than living a life as a scholar. I knew that Meyer had encouraged many of his students who he knew were not going to be great scholars to make art instead. The list is long—beginning with Ad Reinhardt and Robert Motherwell, then continuing with Lucas Samaras, Allan Kaprow, Donald Judd, and many others. He definitely saw that they didn't possess the monastic temperament to be a great scholar either. I remember calling Meyer long distance as well as writing him a letter, informing him that I wanted to be an artist.

How did the* Rail *start?
It started as and 8 x 11-inch sheet of paper, folded it in half with four columns for four articles. Williamsburg, Brooklyn, was full of excitement then. There were endless openings every weekend, but it lacked a critical voice.

Were you living in Williamsburg?
No, Greenpoint. I've lived here mostly since 1992. At one point I lived in the East Village, and came here to work. But anyway, Connie, it happened so fast, the whole Williamsburg scene. There was a need for a forum, which would allow different voices to be heard, instead of arguing in a bar, which we used to do a lot. I found it very irritating, because students of specific, specialized fields were completely ignorant about other things.

So you saw a need for a vehicle through which there would be an exchange of ideas.
Yes. Things would become habitual very easily if there were no intellectual stimulation.

Where did the name* The Brooklyn Rail *come from?
Emily DeVoti, our theater editor, initially named it, because of the L train. Rail also means to rail against something, which has a leftist connotation. Rail is also the name of a bird, which I wasn't aware of until Henry Luce III, in 2004, wrote me a nice letter after our first meeting and said, "The rail is also a bird; therefore it's fitting since he could be looked at as a successor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*."

That's nice. You started the* Rail *in 1998?
Yes, as a bi-weekly pamphlet with Ted Hamm, Patrick Walsh, Joe Maggio, Emily DeVoti about two weeks before I joined in as an art critic. In those days I would hand it out to people who went to work on the L train, 10 people a day, or so. In the summer of 2000, I sold a painting for 2,000 bucks to support the *Rail* because I thought if I was going to be involved in a serious way it had to be a real paper.

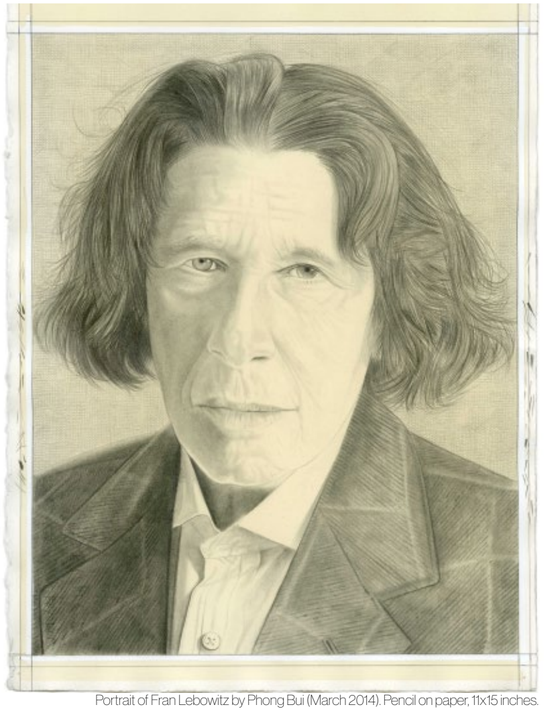
You were making your own art all this time?
I was making my own art, painting and site-specific installation, and I was showing quite regularly.

To summarize, your aim was to create an intellectual community through a publication by inviting people from many different disciplines to contribute criticism, essays, interviews, etc. I am amazed that you can live and work in the same place where the* Rail *is produced.
When I was growing up in Vietnam, I can't remember a dinner with only family. There were always people coming in and out. Our family is extremely sociable.

It felt natural.
Yes. People sometimes even sleep here if they need to.

Do you see the* Rail *as a constantly evolving journal?
Yes. It's challenging to keep it alive as a work of art, a living organism as opposed to operating it as a business entity.

Portrait of Elizabeth C. Baker by Phong Bui (July 2014). Pencil on paper, 11x15 inches.



Portrait of Fran Lebowitz by Phong Bui (March 2014). Pencil on paper, 11x15 inches.

It certainly offers you the freedom to be experimental—perhaps because you didn't know any better.
Well, it's not that I don't know better; it's that I appreciate failure. I know the value of it. I am a close reader of romantic or idealist philosophy. I read Fichte, Schiller, Goethe, Herder, Shelley, Kant—

You just named Western philosophers who are important to you, but, although you are Asian, you haven't mentioned Buddhism or Taoism.
I grew up in Vietnam as a Buddhist. I was raised with a Confucian moral and ethic, but was educated by the French Lycée system, so naturally I was well versed in European culture. I went to the national school Quoc Hoc, where Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, To Huu, and other intellectuals had gone. But in the end it is what you make yourself. I like what Beckett once said, "I preferred to live in France during wartime than Ireland in peace." I think that sense of dislocation, not having a real home can be devastating to some, but it can also be very productive to others who know how to turn that sense of ambivalence—which can be a source of anxiety—into something that can produce serious energy. When I was a kid I asked my grandmother why Buddha left his family because I was sure his wife and children weren't too happy. She said that he did it for other reasons, which were more important than being the prince, and he took a risk doing it. And no one ever accused him of being a bad father.

Or husband.
William Blake thought of the religious figures like Buddha, Christ, and Mohammed as artists.

In your opinion, how does art relate to politics or specific cultural conditions?
The function of art is to open up limitations resulting from social and political conditions. A good example is Ai Weiwei. I truly believed that Weiwei would not have become Ai Weiwei had he not been living in New York [from 1981–92] observing the New York art world, Warhol, the explosion of Neo-Expressionism in the 1980s, among other inflated situations. But it was the Tiananmen Square episode, which was an Old Testament image, I mean David against Goliath that gave him the permission to do what he has done.

Do you admire him?
I do because what he's been doing was born out of inner necessity. It didn't come from the need to survive, which can be an insult to one's dignity—because if I want to have a good life, for example, in a material sense, I would have become a banker or a lawyer.

Or even an art director.
Yeah, even an art director. But, no, I want to experience the life of a Bohemian.

How do you see yourself now? You're publishing The* Brooklyn Rail, *which has recently spawned other* Rail*s in Miami and the Twin Cities. You want to nurture it, to see it grow and change; it's your baby. But, on the other hand, you're a working artist, and you're married to an artist. How do these thing connect?
There are two things that I love about what I do, Connie. One is that it's mysterious. I don't always understand all of it. I love this quote from Kant, "From the crooked timber of humanity, nothing ever comes out straight." Imperfection is something I embrace. Failure, I embrace. I'm not uptight about what people think of me. I have good enough friends, who I talk with about things we care about. My goal is to connect to my inner calling, which I follow wherever it takes me. I'm a conduit of that calling. Sometimes it's very clear. Some other time it's not. In fact I am more excited when it's not clear, because I have to make it clear again. I'd like to think what I do is a Sisyphean labor.

In other words, you don't want to become complacent.
Absolutely. And the second thing that I came to realize—only from having curated *Come Together: Surviving Sandy, Year I* last winter—is that everything, from publishing the *Rail*, curating, sitting on the boards of various foundations where my support can be useful, working with young people at the *Rail*, teaching, or even cleaning the office at night, cooking dinner for friends, and so on, is treated as an equal part of what I do. Recently, I was re-reading Julien Levy's book on Gorky, and at some point he wrote, "There are two kinds of artists in this world. Those that work because the spirit is in them and they can't be silent and those who speak from a conscientious desire to make apparent to others the beauty that has awakened their own admiration." I'm more inclined to be the latter. I am the fox rather than the hedgehog in the Isaiah Berlin sense. The fox is more accepted in our culture only in recent years.

That's true.
In my recent interview with Brian O'Doherty, we talked about the success of the Reinhardt show at the David Zwirner gallery, which would never have happened before—I mean showing all aspects of his work, the severe black abstractions, the political cartoons, the slide lectures, all at once. Now, young people are curious. "Oh, Reinhardt can draw cartoons, paint, and write." I think the bad thing about our globalized culture is that we allow technology to dictate our lives and we have less time for self-reflection. But the good thing is that more boundaries are opened up, even though there will always be some who will resist openness, everything requires new reading, new interpretation. I think this moment is very exciting.

All images courtesy of the Brooklyn Rail.

ERIC NAKAMURA

The Quiet Man Behind the Giant Robot
By Carlo McCormick

For more than twenty years, through galleries, stores, museum shows, public events, a magazine, numerous publications and the myriad forms of social media, Giant Robot has championed Asian and Asian American art with a vigor and vision unmatched by others.

In nurturing and supporting artists early in their careers who have gone on to great success, and in many ways clearing out a space for wholly new kinds of artistic expression and hybrid identity, Giant Robot has been a most remarkable game changer.

When communities coalesce and movements are born, there are far too many individuals involved to ascribe the sum of it to any one figure. But for all that has been witnessed and promoted under the mindful eye of Giant Robot, and for everything that has germinated and flowered within its benevolent aegis, it is simply impossible now to imagine any of it happening without Eric Nakamura.

It all began so humbly, with the publication of a black and white photocopied fanzine in 1994. The magazine became a slick art and popular culture publication of considerable influence and appeal before it finally went under in the market collapse of 2011. But Giant Robot's extensive empire once extended across multiple businesses in Los Angeles, along with stores and galleries in New York and San Francisco.

So much of its charm and integrity has been the consistency of that same abiding humility. Words like nice and kind-hearted are the lamest kind of descriptors we could use for anyone, but with Nakamura they are essential, not merely because he is these things so rare in such a cultural player, but because these qualities are fundamental to the attitude, ethos, and, quite immeasurably, aesthetics of Giant Robot. It is exceptionally uncommon indeed to see this magnitude of style and innovation put forth in so friendly and inclusive a manner.

Today with a gallery and store next door to one another in the Little Tokyo neighborhood of Los Angeles, there is a wonderful symmetry to Nakamura's life. He went to primary school in the area, supplemented by Japanese language classes in the afternoons, then ventured not so much further for his degree in East Asian Studies at UCLA. He worked only briefly as a photographer for the Palisadian Post and at Larry Flint's Video Games and Computer Entertainment magazine before starting up his own.

Utterly homegrown in a way so genuine and ingenuous as to seem practically anachronistic in today's business world, Nakamura has helped to define contemporary globalism as a set of interrelated provincialisms where authenticity is both a matter of idiomatic heritage and far-reaching cross pollinations. Success over time is most often found in the capacity for personal reinvention, in Eric's case I suspect quite the opposite. He's been too busy helping a culture invent itself to worry about being anything but himself. Personally I don't know him all that well, and not liking LA much, I've never checked out his scene there. But over the years I've met him many times in New York, when he'd come to check on his store or gallery in the East Village, and hung out with him in England and Spain as he traveled about to promote the art he cares for and look around the world with an insatiable curiosity that is totally infectious. As with just about everyone else who has ever crossed his path, I really like and respect the guy for all he's done, and feel doubly so now that I had this chance to hear a bit of his story.

Seems the easiest place to start would be to mention that Giant Robot is now twenty years running. Congratulations on that, but it must be kind of freaky for you to imagine.
Who knew that I could last this long, or anyone else for that matter? You start something like this as a hobby and then you just keep going. We haven't published the magazine in three years now, since 2011, and I'm really thankful of that. It frees up my time to work with artists and do a better job for them. The magazine was great in giving early exposure to a lot of artists I care about, but doing the gallery full time and all these other shows I am able to curate and help the artists way more than the magazine could.

Tell me about it. I'm happy to support the people I can as a writer, but I suffer no delusions that whatever it may accomplish, it's not helping them pay their rent.
Without a push from the media, no one gets to see enough. It used to be much more so that way, where you would only catch something when it came to your town, or if you were wealthy enough and could travel to see it. Now a jpeg of a well-photographed work has all the information you need to understand it and have a sense of what is going on. It's much more multifaceted and not just a few people can do it. A re-tweet from a credible person can matter a whole lot. Of course there are a lot of people out there who think their tweets are far more important than they actually are, but working social media is very important. It's fundamental to how you promote what you are doing. Magazines are brutal, the work is relentless and you work so hard for so little. I have an easy life now, with way more time to do much more for people.

I guess you shut down the magazine around the same time you closed your galleries and stores in New York City and San Francisco. Giant Robot had built quite an empire, but these things always tend to skate on thin ice. Would you describe that as a kind of business retrenchment?
Basically what happened was that the economy crashed. Everyone had to figure out how they were going to survive and go forward at that point. But also the neighborhoods changed. I used to love having a store on Haight Street. Now when I go to San Francisco that's the last place I'd want to hang out. It's pretty much the same with the East Village in New York. Now these are neighborhoods that are comfortable for people to live in, but not really places of excitement. For all I gave up, however, it's allowed me to be so much better as a curator—not just with my own gallery, but for bigger shows as well, like the one I just did for the Oakland Museum.

That exhibition,* Super Awesome, *looks as great as its name. It's also how I found out Giant Robot was twenty years old now.
That's how they chose to promote the show, and it makes sense, but it's not about me, it's always about the artists. I've been pushing this cast of characters I'm into for a long time now, for the last eleven years at the gallery and even before that. More museums are doing shows like this and even selling the art, which really helps the artists.

I find that really disturbing. I'm happy when museums choose to do populist shows like you would curate, where it gets packed with kids who would never otherwise walk into a gallery, let alone a museum. But commercial interests compromise the integrity of culture. I like to think that as a critic if I tell people I like an artist there is never doubt about my having a financial stake in that opinion. I'd expect institutions to exercise the same ethics, be they a magazine, non-profit space, museum or academia; they need to resist the compromise of the market.
I respect that, but it is happening all over. It's a total trip, when Murakami had that big show at MoCA, all the work there was from Blum & Poe, so ultimately it was all for sale. It's been going on for a long time. Just because the art is not on a website with a price tag on it, doesn't mean that it is not part of the market.

I remember you telling me that you began Giant Robot because there wasn't really something for Asian or Asian American artists here, so you were filling a void in awareness by creating space for them at the table. But Giant Robot didn't traffic much in identity politics or multiculturalism, it has always celebrated the hybrid. Has culture caught up to that hybridism?
I think it has. Things have changed so much, especially in terms of access. The objects, items, and products that we featured used to be so hard to get and were only in the hands of tastemakers. The web popularized everything, made it all more mainstream and big business. The stuff we used to cover was considered strange or fringe, but now it's pretty mainstream. I do think context is being lost on the web. It's all just out there, but the links of where things come from in popular culture, where and when they first appeared, are not part of the information chain. Consumers don't care about these things now, but the good artists I know, who really care about their place in art, are checking out that history. I've always been curious about what comes from Mickey Mouse or Astro Boy or KAWS, and knowing that helps so people can understand things rather than just ripping them off. I pay attention to the guy who did designs for a clothing company ten years ago, and to what they might be doing today. That all matters. I care and I love knowing about it. And for me it has been about the way these things traveled and transformed, we always used to tell people, "We are interested in hybrid culture." That's why we admired the work of Futura or put someone like KAWS on our cover. They're not Asian, but their art is part of that sensibility.

For most of us who don't follow this like you do, it all seems to come from a single surface effect, somewhere between kawaii or "super-cute" and Murakami's* Superflat. *I wonder if this is still so. And when you think of the designer Hiroshi Fujiwara, who's the godfather of* Harajuku, *and* Rizzoli *(publications) is just putting out this amazing book on him, it's easy to see just how much of this style came directly from him.
I interviewed Fujiwara before. He's the real deal, and the only one of them I would really say that about. I'm not that sure of anyone else.

Not Nigo and Bathing Ape?
Definitely not. He was bling from the start with fancy race cars and diamond studded grills on his teeth, and then he went bankrupt. Fujiwara is so quiet and modest; he's the original gangster. I always look to that moment of *Superflat* in 2000, with Murakami and Nara, as kick-starting a younger culture in art and bringing back the idea of artists making products. I know it had existed before that, when I was in high school I made a trip up to New York City and went to Keith Haring's Pop Shop, but when Murakami came out with a whole line of products suddenly all these other artists followed suit. Today lots of artists are making products and don't have any idea of where it came from, but it was pretty radical at the time.

Is that where all this started for you?
Not really. The first artist that I really responded to was Barry McGee. He showed me how art could be a part of youth culture, and then with the artists I began working with it was great to see art done by young people, that yes, this is art too. David Choe was about nineteen years old when I met him. He and Kozyndan started working together in college. They always tell me that they're not artists, but they're constantly working, doing illustration, murals, clothing, ceramics, just about anything you can imagine. They have a McFetridge kind of existence, doing what they want and commercial gigs, traveling the world, working with cool people and doing cool things.

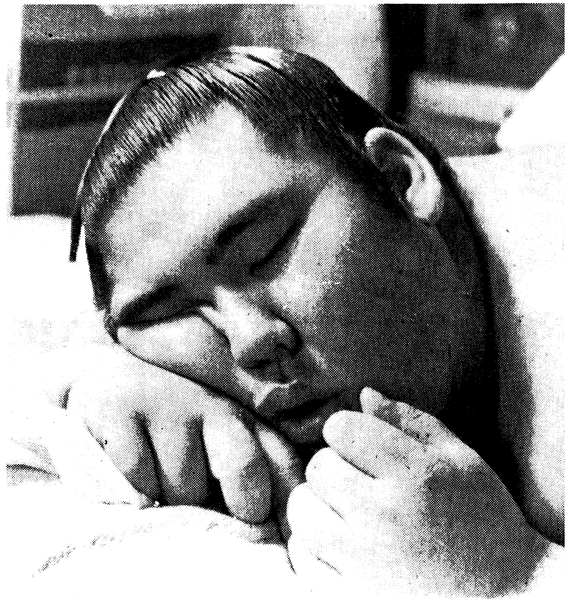
David Horvath and I started about the same time. What I found out only recently was that we had both been up to New York and had each visited the Alife Store on Orchard Street. For both of us it was a transformative experience, seeing all this amazing stuff, but nothing was for sale. I think we both wanted to do something that was just as cool, but to be more accessible, super-friendly and without the attitude. Within sixth months of that David started Ugly Dolls and I started Giant Robot. Coming out of self-publishing it's great to see how Zines are back in a gnarly way and bigger than ever. Deth P. Sun, who I work with, does amazing Zines. They're incredible—you'd love them. And I still do zines, for an art show, for Ugly Doll shows, and it's really fun. I did one of all these photos I took at rock concerts around Southern California twenty years ago.

You do all this stuff with these artists you work with, and they all have pretty big careers outside of just making two-dimensional art that fits in a frame and hangs on the wall. Are you involved with them on some of these other projects, like in a business way?
No, I just do what I do. I don't do Hollywood. I enjoy what I do with the gallery and curating too much to get involved with stuff that makes my smile go away. I hook them up with meetings, but I want them to do their own thing. They are free agents at all times. I just try to hook them up, like with a licensing deal, but I don't to deal with that toy world - it's horrible, all the rules of business were thrown out, any sense of fairness or a handshake deal just goes out the window there. I'm totally into developing culture. For me it's more fun when you're dealing with a movement, and that's what museums want that I have. I think of events that incorporate neighborhoods and involve a community. It's the slack I get to do what I want; the niche I occupy. I may die poor, but at least I won't die young, and that other stuff would kill me.

How do you navigate this still-real difference between high and low? For you what sorts of distinctions exist for you between the product culture of the store and the art world of a gallery?
They are two different things, and they are supposed to be separate. Little by little I'm trying to connect them. Certain aspects of what happens in the store is associated with art, and a lot of the art I show is $50 too, which can be about the same as buying a vinyl figure toy. I'm seeing product fans get into art and starting to buy it, and artists hand-painting their figures now, so as pop culture there is a kind of gradual convergence.

I like that you are interested in the broader culture, but many of these things seem far more of a subculture, like cosplay. Haven't there been some cosplayers getting into Ugly Dolls?
Yeah, there have been some cosplay Ugly Dolls. There is some overlap, but if you did a Venn diagram the overlap would be pretty small, it's all kind of niche. cosplay, anime conventions, all of these things are still going on. For a while there they were kind of in stasis, but now they're reinventing and getting huge again. The art with that stuff used to be so bad, but now it's getting pretty good. It's like all these kids with a manga background and art school training are coming up. And they're playing by different rules. For them no gallery is needed, nor even independent toy companies, they're doing it on their own, making their own products and putting them out on a super-independent level, like on alibaba.com or some other site. It's like anime and cosplay merged with craftsmanship.

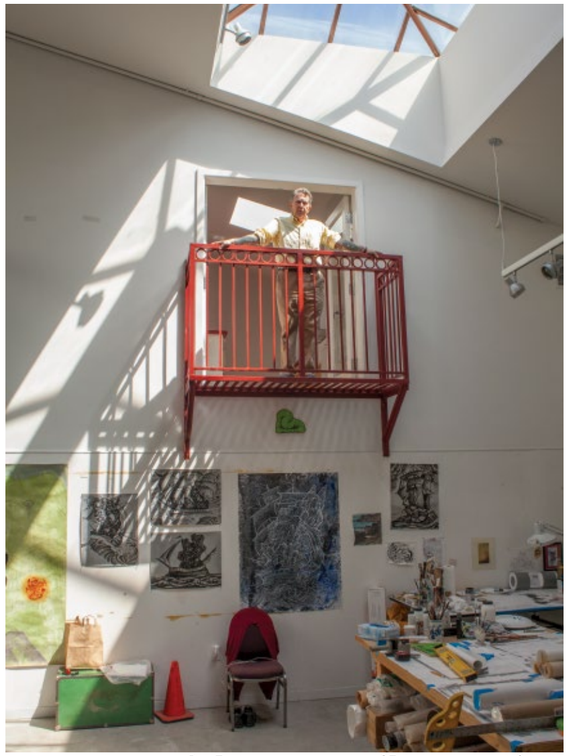
Following this show at the Oakland Museum, do you have other big projects like that coming up?
Yeah, I'm doing another show at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. We've done it for three years now; this will be our fourth show coming up there. For me it's a tremendous opportunity, to have this big beautiful museum to work in instead of my 800 square foot gallery. It expands my mind to see the art in that context. And it's not just 2D art; I bring the whole culture. I want to show everything. Let's go for it, if it's a culture we need to own it.



Sumo wrestlers sleep after a hefty meal

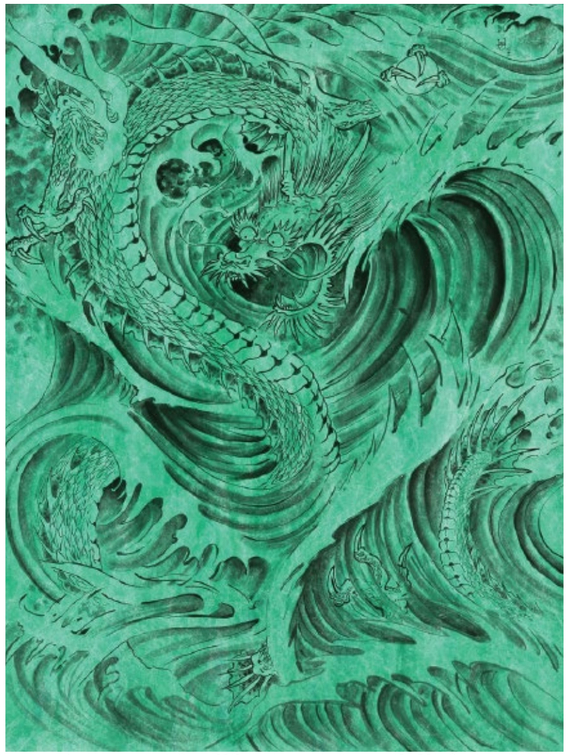
Giant Robot magazine issue #1. Courtesy of Eric Nakamura

DON ED HARDY



Don Ed Hardy photographed in his SF studio by Andrew McClintock.

Don Ed Hardy, *Big Kisser*, 2010. Sumi ink & watercolor on paper. 30x22 in. Courtesy of the artist.



Don Ed Hardy, *North Shore*, 2012. Acrylic on synthetic paper. 48 x 36 in. Courtesy of the artist.

Don Ed Hardy, *Rock of Ages*, 1956. Pencil, 11 x 8 in. Courtesy of the artist.

Part Two*
Interviewed by V. Vale

There was another aspect of life you were privileged to encounter long ago—not just the "carny" side of life that Burroughs talked about (which was associated with the tattoo scene), but also the art of pin-striping cars—that wasn't looked at as "art."
That was the beginning of "Weirdo Art," by LA painters Von Dutch, Dean Jeffries and others. It's a parallel universe. And of course that attracted me to it. That's why I was magnetized instantly and went crazy over Burroughs when I discovered him. Earlier, there was a beatnik bookstore in Laguna Beach six miles from where I lived, and a lot of counter-culture people went there. I bought Corso's poem *Bomb* that was typeset in an atomic cloud design; I got *Howl*, I got other things. I think I vaguely heard about Burroughs but hadn't really read him until my big, great inspiring mentor, my high school art teacher, who would turn me on to so much, who kept urging me to do something besides drawing wave pictures, in my senior year introduced me to all this great art—really set a fire in my head. Her husband taught literature at Long Beach State.

And I was over at their house one time and her husband came home and he had a copy of *Naked Lunch* that came out in '62 or '63 when they finally could publish it here. And he was *appalled* by it. And these were really liberal people; very social-justice people. He said, "This piece of filth," and I went, "Oh, man, can I borrow that" And he said, "You can *have* that thing."

I've since lost it; it was a first edition. And I read that and it was like the scales fell from your eyes—it was so hilarious, and so fucked-up, and on an alternative stream of looking at reality, you know: no apologies. And the humor, the whole thing, that sense of a profound intellectual operating in another dimension—really, in a different kind of world.

And of course the whole idea of the carnivalesque—great books have been written about that, and The Other with a capital O, and that whole thing—obviously, Genet's fascination with it; all sorts of people throughout history have really drawn great—they just dug being around that—Hogarth was down in the street doing all these things. You have all these artists throughout history. Toulouse-Lautrec in the whorehouses, and some of the Japanese artists: the whorehouses, the Floating World, the Ukiyo-e, the whole sense of that; its impermanence.

Pleasure quarters, populist theatre: Kabuki means eccentric and crazy and wild. These things *eventually* become invested as particles of High Culture, especially if they can figure out a way to commodify them and make money off it and get the control of it. But if you're at that raw edge where the fire's coming out of the furnace, and you go, "Man, I'm gonna stand there and I may get burned a little bit, but I can operate in this," and it's just such a powerful human thing. Yeah, Burroughs was, *ohmygod*, I think. You know, his misogyny was really repellent to me from the beginning, but everybody's got their —

I didn't find it so repellent as completely puzzling, like, "I don't get it!"
I guess that's the right word. I just thought, "Wait a minute—why is he saying this? Well, he's sick, that's all." And his routines, and his delivery—that's still a big part of my life; I can slip into Burroughs-esque descriptions and attitudes and I can do the *voice*—that whole Midwest flat Mr.-and-Mrs. Front Porch. I was born in Des Moines, Iowa; my mom took me to California when I was a few months old.

Burroughs was so important, so great, and it's fantastic that you were able to really get close to him and work with him. I was fortunate enough to meet him a few times. What a guy. And the humor—again, about not being hypocritical—sometimes people that are really smart have this terrible stench of sanctity about their mental abilities—let's face it: pride. I hated Christianity so much because I was force-marched through Lutheranism. But it was a great comfort to my mother; the church meant a lot to her—

Well, it was a society.
It was a society. It was a community that defined you. And it had parameters. And it also gave you hope, like, "If I do this, then I'll be good and I'll go sit in the soft chair afterwards." But I was resentful of being taken through that and then realizing that it was just a *con*. Well, the people I was around certainly weren't opening it up to the greater intellectual possibilities of—I wasn't hanging out with *Thomas Merton* or someone like him! I got so disgusted that—I can't even remember why I got on this topic of religion. It took me years and years before I could mention the word Christianity or think about it without feeling a really shitty attitude—like kicking it in the shins. But, religion's good for a lot of people. This was all leading to something I was trying to talk about … I guess it's sanctity—the use of the word "sanctity"—

Well, you rebelled against the church, but the church also gave you something to rebel against.
Exactly.

And just the very act and process of rebellion is, they say, a rite of passage, anyway—
Right.

—as a young man dealing with puberty and all that—
Exactly, to strike out against what was *there*.

Another *positive* thing it did for me: I was hanging out at The Pike in Long Beach, going to those tattoo shops, as often as I could. I wasn't there every *week*, but when I *could*, I made trips and obsessively drew this stuff and was drawing it on my neighborhood kids. And the tattoo flash featured a lot of crosses; a lot of *Christian* imagery. A lot of the big tattoo back pieces, which is the format of so-called "epic" body tattooing available in those days, would be several standard themes. There might be a big dragon that would cover most of your back. There'd be a crucifix. Then there was the "Rock of Ages" theme that was actually a kitsch 19th-century populist design going back to the 1840s. I've got great color lithographs, mainly printed in Germany, of a woman clinging to this "Rock of Ages" cross in the middle of a stormy sea—a cross hewn out of rocks.

"Rock of Ages" was a hymn written by a British reverend in the late 1700s. I'd draw these themes as tattoo designs on kids. I wouldn't put a woman in it; I hadn't even hit puberty yet! I didn't have any drawings of pin-ups or women in my flash—I mean, I knew they were out there and it was cool, but I'd draw this empty cross on a rock. And when I'd go to church—in those days I still had to go to church every Sunday—I'd go to church and I remember requesting *that* as a hymn. Probably the pastor of the church and people thought, "That's so *nice*; little Donny's asking for that as a hymn." But to hear that whole church full of people singing it made me feel like I was where I wish I could be: on the Pike, listening to the tattoos being put on—*not* in this church!

Years later, I hunted the "Rock of Ages" history down. I actually obsessively did a little book on it; invited a lot of artists to draw their versions of it—mainly tattooers. A friend helped me hunt it down. And the English preacher that wrote it was inspired because he hid in a heavy rainstorm in a cleft in a big rock in a very rocky area of England.

It turned out it was about six miles from where my father was born—that was "cosmic," as we used to say. So, Francesca and I made a pilgrimage there and I got a photo of me climbing this rock!

The Christianity "thing": we're all exposed to some kind of thought system by the people that raise us: either formally, or just by—it's inferred. Some of it is useful and some of it you realize you have to drop, or get beyond.

Well, it's there to rebel against—that's how I look at it now.
You're right. It is like a tool, a very useful wedge to open up the possibilities of a different way of approaching life—

—and thinking, and even trying to go beyond thought—a lot of the Asian philosophies try to get you into the realm of intuition. "First thought, best

Don Ed Hardy, *JESUS flash*, 1970. Ink & watercolor on board 14 x 11 in. Courtesy of the artist.

thought" really means "first intuition, first flash, first vision, first visual vision"—
Yeah.

It's not just words, in other words.
No, it isn't. And I think that's the key thing; that's the core of the Asian thing. And actually for art—that's what I'm about. I mean, I get ideas for things, but I always think the subject matter is just something to "get them into the tent" like the old carnies used to say. It's like the cooch dancer out in front, or the alleged crazed gorilla that's inside that tent; if you go in there…anything that's like "The Other." Well, that pulls people in to look at it…

I mean: I'm pretty obsessed with things just being "pure." People look at a picture and go: "Oh, what are you doing? What are you working on?" "Well, it's a painting. It's not really the thing it depicts. It may have representational things in it, but…" In the last twelve, thirteen years, I've become obsessed with more *abstract* work—you know, non-representational things.

My *personal* art that I do—as opposed to the thousands and thousands of tattoos that I did that I had to plan out, design and install very carefully…when I could start doing my *own* art again around '86, '87, when I moved out of San Francisco. I would come back here and tattoo. But I had some free time and made this jump to Honolulu because I started surfing again.

I just would do things with absolutely no idea, just *blank mind*... sit down and load a brush with some watercolor. I was working at mainly *that*.

I would just start making a mark on the paper, and completely just see *where it led to*. And sometimes it would be a recognizable thing, and sometimes not. Mostly, I realized that I had muscle memory for a whole lot of forms and gestures from doing so many images over so many years, but it wasn't an *intentional narrative* that I was dealing with. I still, in my own art, try not to—there is no intentional narrative, I'll just step up and see what happens.

And I might have a dim view, like, "Maybe this is a picture of a wave." But as you get into it, it *draws itself!* And I am intrigued by the Surrealist notion which in a lot of ways got too corny, because in that literal interpretation of dreams, I think…some of it's good art, but a lot of it got way too didactic with Breton's take on it, for my personal outlook. I am more interested in things that. I mean, Ernst is one of my all-time favorites, and these other people…But…being able to open yourself up to *chance*, and open yourself up to what's floating out there. And it is the *intuitive thought*: when that spark happens, *that's* what you want to follow! That's Joseph Campbell, "Follow your bliss." All this stuff becomes corny as it's put into words.

But that's after the fact—
That's after the fact, that's after the fact.

At this stage of my life, my favorite Surrealists have become the Women of Surrealism. I'm reading everything they said, their poetry, looking at all their much-harder-to-find drawings and paintings—
Yes.

—because they're not promoted as much. We live in this weird society that wants to have one man at the top of some pyramid, like André Breton—
Yeah, exactly.

—and I'm more interested in the outsiders, it turns out.
Yeah, not even—

—the ones who wouldn't be the doctrinaire "Yes Men."
Well, anybody that's following a… when you start following a guru, then you're half-lost anyway, and in the control system.

We're against the control system—
That's our whole deal: We're against control systems—*any* control system. Like, if you can use it for something, if you can stand sort of *on the edges* and get a marshmallow out of the fire they got going, then that's okay. You know whom I am crazy about, lately? It's KAY SAGE. Only recently did a book come out of Kay Sage with Tanguy: both their work together.

I think I have it here; I'll show it to you when we've finished. It's really fantastic. You just see little pieces—again, with most of these women Surrealists you'd see little drips and drabs. And then that huge Surrealist drawings show…people were represented there that you had never *heard* of. Not just the Top Ten Hit-makers. You go, "Jesus, what›s this person all about?" For example, Kurt Seligmann: I found out about him. I hunt down these books; you and I are both complete…if we're addicted to any total thing—

We're complete completists!
And we're book addicts. That's another thing we share is this passion for tangible, physical books in the real world that you can handle and you can transmit. It's all that transmission of knowledge and recording—

There's a muscle memory aspect of knowledge immersion and acquisition that's totally lost when you're just reading on an iPad or—
Some electronic toy. Those things are useful. My wife Francesca is really into that, but she reads "paper" books too. She's extremely literate. I had such an aversion to those. But if you're on a trip somewhere, you don't have to carry, like, twelve books, because I always have a lot of reading I have to do. The devices are useful; it's true. But it's that tangibility of the book as an object—

And I mark mine up, too—
I know! And actually, books I've borrowed from you that are marked that way are great, because…a few times I'll do that, but I'm still sort of under that scolding from a second-grade teacher: "Oh, I shouldn't mark this." But of course you want to see those passages. Books are IT for me. If there's any non-living thing in the world that people say, "What CAN'T you do without?"

It's The Book. That's it. Because it's all preserved there. And I've been able to…I do love the Internet for being able to track down these things. I do try to always patronize independent booksellers and small shops, and it's horrible that everything's getting wiped out. In *Manhattan* now there are almost no bookstores—that's insane—and in all these other places.

But I've hunted down books... I was able to find a book that had a great impact on me when I was studying etching in art school. My great, great mentor, Gordon Cook, who I studied with, had a really deep, wacko, non-traditional kind of intellect and was really into great art-historical stuff. He turned me on to these eccentric Northern European engravers and printmakers from the 15th and 16th centuries: people who became some of my favorite artists—

Like Hans Baldung?
Hans Baldung Grien and—I can't even think of a lot of them now, Altdorfer and of course Durer, but also the other, wacky, less-known people around that time. I think this book was probably in the S.F. Art Institute library: about wild men in the Middle Ages. It was about the concept of the wild man, and the wild women, in medieval times, because they personified everything frightening; they personified everything of that *Dark Force* that surrounded your safe city. They were supposedly hybrid people covered with hair, and of course there was a huge dark demonic sexual component to this. It's like: "Don't go out in those woods; the wild man will *get you* (or the wild woman will)." You know, the incubus and succubus thing. It's a terrific book, and I found it online; I got a copy again, and I'm so stoked. I keep it in a bookshelf by my bed.

Those kinds of things; I think there are certain key texts you encounter when your brains were younger and springier and you were first being really bowled over by blasts of light from

thoughts and things that people had written down. It's like your first old skateboard or your first *whatever* from those formative years. Plus, I'm a total pack rat, and I hang onto everything that I can: photos, pictures, drawings, my art, everything else, and books (when I can) from that era.

I let a lot of stuff go, just through idiocy. I got rid of all my hot-rod and car magazines showing great paint jobs. I was never into mechanical things; I'm hopeless mechanically—I didn't care about cars. But I cared about them as physical things: the way they looked. I got rid of all those at one point.

Darn . . .
You lighten up; you move on.

There's another theme I'm interested in: How you can inspire yourself—all the ways—and not run out of ideas. This calls to mind the idea of POSSESSION: like, every time I sit down at a piano, I try to play something I've never played before. Yet I'm limited by muscle memory; I only know so many fingerings and patterns—
You fall back into that—

But still, I manage to come up with new "stuff" practically every time. It might not be "great," but for me, it's "original." And I think you say the same thing, essentially: we "channel" . . .
Absolutely, absolutely. We're definitely *channeling* people who have made things before, whether it's books with those ideas, or painted pictures, or composed music—we channel. I very much feel that we're channeling energy from these people. I spent a lot of time—it's one of my weak points that I probably will never get over: Burroughs would bring up all these strange cultural things like—I think it was the *Iatah* that obsessively mimicked things. That obsessively mimicked people. It's like a psychological condition with a certain tribe, maybe in some deep jungle—

Malaysia, I think—
Malaysia. He'd bring these things up and I'd go, "Wow!" Because I've always been a copyist. I love the physicality of oil paint; In art school I took some painting classes and I literally thought, "I don't know what to paint." I painted a dog painting; I'm sorry I got rid of it—it was *extremely* influenced by Francis Bacon who had a huge impact on me when I discovered his work in '63, '64.

But, all these different people…And of course with tattooing you're copying existing image banks. But I can't help but be influenced and affected by that, and... it's not *bad*…and if you have facility with any medium, that's a *plus*. If you're just—I don't know whether it's "naturally gifted" or just through a helluva lot of practice, you are able to let this stuff flow out of you.

But the point—exactly what you're saying—is trying to do something NEW with it. Because I would sit down when I started doing stuff for myself and I literally had done almost no personal art for twenty years; I'd just been tattooing. I'd tattooed pretty much six days a week, thousands of people, as I segued into this: opening a shop, the first shop to do *commissioned* tattoos. One-of-a-kind things. I would take their ideas and—I was like a police sketch artist! I would make these people's vague notions or semi-concrete notions into something that looked "right" to them, and put it into their skin.

I wouldn't say this was no personal art of your own, because for sure you›re at least a collaborator in this—
Oh, absolutely! But I relied on people for the *content*.

The good thing is, it broke me through into saying, "I could do something…" I mean, I wanted tattooing to not just look like something with a heavy black line and three colors. So I broke it out. I got into doing abstract work and doing all kinds of things because the people wanted it. But, it's "commercial art." Nakedly stating it like that. That was good.

But, when I got my own time, I'm over there in Hawaii, and then I felt like Rip Van Winkle: "Now I've got some time, here. I'm surfing. I'm in a better space, physically; I can *do* my own stuff." And I just didn›t know *what* to do. I realized I was so dependent on somebody feeding me, somebody giving me—putting the food on the table, so to speak—

—at least a generic theme—
—to kick it off. And then I ended up working through a lot of stuff based on forms that I had done in tattooing, because they were *key forms*. I think the appeal of it is that they're *heraldic*, there's the silhouette shape of classic tattoos and the content is very strong, basic human emotions. So I was beginning, using those things, but mixing them up, just trying to break *out* of that. Let my hand follow it; I don't have to follow it this *exact* way; I don't have to make this thing meet *that* thing over here. But it was difficult! Because for that whole twenty years earlier, when I had free time, I wasn't doing my own art, I was mainly—you know, gettin' fucked up! [laughs] So when I was able to quit drinking and everything, it gave me a lot more *time*.

I don't think I was ever around you when you drank—
No, you weren't. It was actually right before we met, because when I quit, I started doing *Tat-*

Don Ed Hardy, *Chicago Flash Sheet*, 1968 Ink & Watercolor on board, 11 x 14. Courtesy of the artist.

tootime. I went, "Wait! We can start publishing," because I've always been obsessed with writing. I wanted to write a history of tattooing when I was about twelve, but I didn't have enough source material. And that's when we started *Tattootime* that kicked off that whole explosion.

But it's true: having to find that. To say, "I have this. I'm competent." Or, "I'm extremely capable of doing *this* with this musical device, or with this brush, or whatever…" but then try to go out into some realm that somebody else *hasn't done*. That's the trick. And I think that really is accessing again that *clear zone* where you just go into some intuitive state where you are channeling *something*. Maybe you finish it and go, "Oh, maybe this resembles something *so-and-so* did." But yet it's *enormously exciting*.

I still find this notion exciting: that each of us has within us this vast-as-the-ocean subconscious. And the Surrealists gave us the idea of automatic drawing, automatic writing, where you try to let something from this vast subconscious percolate up and manifest itself through you—
Yeah.

—onto paper, or some medium whereby some other people can actually see what's inside your head—
Exactly. Yeah. That's the transition: automatic—

—writing, drawing, where the absence of all MORAL censorship exists—
Exactly.

—whatever it is, whether moral or immoral, can still come out. You don't censor it. It can come out and be on the paper.
That really was a huge breakthrough. And it taps into that Asian way of working.

It's congruent with that. And, the Surrealists had the notion that we're all "communicating vessels." We're just conduits!
That's exactly it. I absolutely believe that, from early on—

It's not that we're "geniuses."
No, that's the whole thing: EGO gets in the way. That's where you get screwed up. That's one of those things that really take you down a bad path. Malone said once—he had such great one-liners; I wish I had recorded him more—he's like my brother in business; he was really brilliant. I loved what he said one time about Duchamp. And I admire what Duchamp did, but Malone said one time, "Yeah, it was all right, what he pulled off, but he kinda led all these guys down a box canyon."

It's like when you watch the old Westerns and somebody decoys a posse and all of a sudden they're trapped in a canyon. Because this whole conceptual art thing—I don't want to get into that in this interview, but a lot of that is just such *thin gruel*—kind of what the idea of what "creative" means.

Gordon Cook hated the actual word "creative"—he said, "Creative—everybody's creative, Jesus Christ." It's that thing of trying to ramp yourself up into a more noble position instead of just—again, the Zen thing, of just sweeping the ground because it's *supposed* to be swept, or realizing or doing something for its own sake; doing it to the *utmost*; opening yourself up to other connections via *doing* it.

*Part One of this interview was published in issue 14 of *SFAQ*

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

Paintings from a Gone World:
A Conversation with Lawrence Ferlinghetti (Part Three)
Interviewed by John Held, Jr.

In Part One of the Ferlinghetti interview, we discussed his childhood background, obtaining his doctorate from the Sorbonne, meeting fellow bookseller George Whitman, moving to San Francisco, becoming regional correspondent for Art Digest, offending Jay DeFeo, and defending controversial murals. In Part Two, we continued examining Ferlinghetti's career as a painter, often overshadowed by his sizable reputation as bookseller, poet, publisher, and defender of cultural freedoms.

The one thing that I appreciate about your history is that you've never gone after grants of any kind, either for yourself or City Lights.
For City Lights and myself, we've never applied for a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, because from the Leftist point of view, it's rather hypocritical to attack the government's policies, and on the other hand, take money from them in the form of grants. No matter how you deny it, you're still indebted to them in some way once you take money from them —whoever gave it to you. As far as the publishing part at City Lights, the publishing part of City Lights wouldn't want to be associated with taking grants from the government, because publishers, like any other member of the press—the *New York Times* wouldn't take grants from the government, because it would compromise their objectivity, if they had any to begin with (laughs). In the same way, it would be compromising for City Lights to take government grants, and also I've never applied for—oh, I did apply for a Guggenheim before I had City Lights bookstore? I think I was still at Columbia, and I had a poetry teacher named Babbitt Deutsch. I remember her saying things like, "How can we write the Great Russian Novel in America while things go on so unterribly?" I did send her a manuscript, and I asked her to recommend me for a Guggenheim, but she turned me down. (laughs) As an undergraduate, I went to Journalism School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and my favorite professor there was a man named Phillips Russell, in what they call a creative writing class. And years later I sent him a copy of *Coney Island of the Mind*, and he wrote back a postcard that said, "You are coming up in style and form." (laughs).

It's always good to get positive feedback from an old professor.
Right. We should get back to the art.

I wanted to mention that although you haven't received grants in your lifetime, you have been admitted to prestigious academies—The National Academy of Arts and Letters.
The Academy of Arts and Letters. It must be the most prestigious academy in America. It's different than the Academy of American Poets, for instance. This is called the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and it's got every important novelist and poet—really an extraordinary roster. You can't get in until someone dies. There are only so many places.

There are painters in it as well, I believe.
Of course.

Because I believe Bob Bechtle is in it. You know Bob?
Yeah. Painters and sculptors and writers of all kinds.

And then you're in Italian . . .
Well, I used to be associated with the American Academy in Rome, but there isn't any financial connection anymore. I've stayed at the American Academy in Rome, which is a beautiful villa on top of one of the seven hills. I don't like to stay there, because no one there speaks Italian. You might as well be in graduate school in America.

When were you at the American Academy in Rome?
I was in and out of there a couple of times. I've never stayed there. When I go to Italy, I like to speak the language. That's one reason I go there. I retrieve my father's language.

He was from Brescia.
Brescia is near Verona, just southwest a couple of hours. It's a commercial town. Francesco Conz staged a number of events there. I've been there several times. There are still some Ferlinghettis living there in the outskirts of the town called Chiari, some miles from Brescia. There is a big Ferlinghetti family there. A Ferlinghetti house, and they gave me the keys to the city. Francesco Conz was a great publicist and he arranged the whole thing. We drove up in a big limousine, and we got out in front of the little City Hall. The mayor and all his henchman were lined up with sashes across their chest, the band started playing — a high school band. There's a special name for those bands. They wear medieval costumes. So, we stepped out of the limousine, and the mayor embraced us with a kiss on both cheeks, everybody waved their arms around and shook everybody's hand in sight, and then we went into the City Hall and everybody made a lot of florid speeches, and I made a speech in bad Italian, and then I met this whole family — the Ferlinghetti family — three generations. That was about ten years ago. Since then, Francesco Conz helped me trace down my father's birthplace in the city of Brescia. We went there, and Conz was really a smart publicist. He sent a cameraman with me, because he figured he'd get some publicity out of it. So, we went into this really poor section of town, really old section, and we found the address, but here was no longer a single house there, it was now a four-story apartment building —pretty beat up looking building. We rang a bell, and then another bell, and nobody came. Finally, a guy comes out of the basement, looked like he must have been the superintendent, and he's yelling at us to get the hell out of there. So, we started walking back to the car, and a big police van sirened up and put us up against the wall and asked for our IDs. The cameraman got the whole thing on camera, and he immediately sent it - you can do that these days - to all the newspapers. The next day, all the big papers — *La Repubblica*, *Il Manifesto* — had this big story — "Poet in Search of His Father Arrested." [Laughs]. But I wasn't really arrested. I was stopped. I told Francesco Conz, "Why did you say I was arrested? I wasn't really arrested." He said, "Well, the mayor of the town owes me a favor now, because I told the press that the mayor got you out." [Laughs]. That's the way they do things in Italy. That was only five years ago.

Do you have any other shows lined up in Italy?
Well, I have a show in Naples right now. This is the third stop for this show. It's a show based on Ulysses. I did a lot of drawings when I was visiting Giada Diano, who lives in Reggio Calabria. That's down at the foot of Italy — the toe of Italy, just facing Sicily. Ulysses passed by the foot of Italy. He went between Italy and Sicily in the Straits of Messina. That's where the famous chapter in the *Odyssey* is, where he escapes the monsters Scylla and Charybdis. He escapes the monsters and eventually goes back home where Penelope was still waiting for him beating off the suitors. I added a chapter to the *Odyssey*. I drew all these works on paper of Ulysses escaping the monsters in the Straits of Messina, but then he went ashore to Reggio Calabria, which was then a little town, and he shacked up with a sexy milkmaid and produced a lot of children, which is now quite evident in the profiles of the present inhabitants of Reggio Calabria. They have very Greek profiles, just as in Sicily there is a big Greek influence. I made the drawings to go along with this, and that's what's in the show in Naples right now.

Do you have any plans to bring the show to this country?
I don't know. Giada Diano is setting up the Lawrence Ferlinghetti Cultural Center, and if she succeeds, I intend to give the paintings to that Center.

And that's in Italy?
Yeah.

Here in this country, you have a painting archive at the University of Santa Cruz.
Well, yeah. They don't have many paintings on canvas. They have one big painting on canvas, which I painted in an old hotel, on what is now the mall. It's now condemned, but when I was there in the 1989 earthquake I did a painting, quite large, about seven feet, in this great big old hotel with high ceilings and large French windows. I gave that painting to UC Santa Cruz, because Rita Bottoms, the curator there, had done so much to promote my art. Besides that painting, they have about one hundred works on paper — drawings from way back then — from the eighties, I guess.

Do they just have art from you, or do they have other Ferlinghetti ephemera?
No. I have to stick with the Bancroft Library [UC Berkeley] for the literary works.

Right. And they have your correspondence at the Bancroft?
Oh yeah. It's very extensive.

And they have the City Lights Archive at the Bancroft, as well.
It's a separate archive. It's enormous. There's an interesting story about James Hart, the former director there, who I mentioned to you was a member of the Bohemian Club [San Francisco]. When he wanted money, all he had to do was call up one of the members of the Bohemian Club. But specifically, in my case, at City Lights we were changing the name of twelve streets to literary names. This was about 1989. There was a street just behind where the present Transamerica Building is now, which is where Mark Twain was reputed to have worked in a bar, and so we picked out this alley that we were going to call Mark Twain Alley, or Mark Twain Court. We got a letter from the Transamerica real estate department saying, "You can't have it, because we have plans for this alley. Thank you very much. Goodbye." So, I called up James Hart at the Bancroft Library, and I told him the story, and he said, "Oh, that's old Richard! I'll just call up Richard and put a bug in his ear." He's talking about the President of Transamerica. [Laughs.] So, a week latter, I get a letter from the President's office saying, "Oh, we're so sorry, that dim-witted real estate department didn't know what it was talking about. Of course, you can have that alleyway." [Laughs.] So now it exists, right behind the Transamerica building. It's called Mark Twain Court, I think. It's only half a block long.

We talked before about your painting show at the Meridian Gallery, which was curated by Peter Selz. Peter Selz and you were born three days apart.
Yeah, I'm three days older than he is.

That's pretty amazing.
He was born in Vienna, I believe.

In Berlin, I thought. [We were both wrong. Selz was born in Munich.] He came here to escape the war.
I knew that. Well, you know he's an important person in the art world. You would have thought that show would have received some notice.

That was a show worthy of being traveled.
But there's no art critics here any more, except now that *SFAQ* has sprung up.

It's been pretty dry. There really hasn't been a good art magazine in San Francisco, aside from Artforum in the early sixties.
I know. The art magazines have to be supported by the galleries, and the galleries here aren't big time. They'd liked to be big time, but they don't have the money. They don't deal in money that big, the way the New York dealers do. In a way that's a blessing. Because in New York, it's a system that's so much based on money. For instance, a gallery will take out a full page in *ARTnews*, and then the *ARTnews* critic has to go and review the show. Now, he's free to put the show down, or damn it, or anything he wants. But still, there's a review of the show in *ARTnews*. It's directly related to the fact that the gallery took out a full-page ad. So, the critic has to do his best to make the gallery look good. It just goes around and around in a circle like that.

It's a vicious circle. Have you ever given any consideration to writing art criticism, as you once did?
I don't have time anymore. I was doing that because I didn't have a job. It takes a lot of work even to write a short review. I don't know. It didn't take me a lot of time to write that sentence about Jay DeFeo. [Laughs].

Its' nice to see she's achieved a certain amount of recognition lately. You've been in some great group shows lately the last few years, associated with the Beats—a name you don't care for especially—the Beat Culture show that came out of the Whitney. I think you were included in that.
Yeah, but that's the trouble. As a painter I have a hard time being recognized as a painter, and not just a poet who also paints. It's really a drag to get that all the time, because I was painting before I ever had any poetry published at all, or anything published, as far as writing goes. I was painting in Paris when I wasn't writing. I was just too busy to promote myself as a painter. I didn't hang out with any of those San Francisco painters. They didn't know me, and I didn't know them. The only one of the figurative group that seemed at all interested in the poets was James Weeks. I used to have coffee with him once in awhile in North Beach. But otherwise . . .Well, now I know Charles Campbell quite well. He had a wonderful gallery that was historically important near the Art Institute. He's going strong. I saw him the other day. He was at the opening of my George Krevsky show. I think he's ninety-eight. He was the power behind the figurative painters.

Lawerence Furrlinghetti in his studio, 1982. Photograph by FELVER.

No. 5 from *Pictures of the Gone World: Pocket Poets Series Number 1,* by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, published by City Lights.

Not too long
after the beginning of time
upon a nine o'clock
of a not too hot
summer night
standing in the door
of the NEW PISA
under the forgotten
plaster head of DANTE
waiting for a table
and watching
Everything

was a man with a mirror for a head

which didn't look so abnormal at that
except that
real ears stuck out
and he had a sign
which read

A POEM IS A MIRROR WALKING DOWN A STRANGE STREET

but anyway

as I was saying

not too long after the beginning

of time

this man who was all eyes

had no mouth
All he could do was show people
what he meant
And it turned out
he claimed to be
a painter

But anyway
this painter
who couldn't talk or tell anything
about what he
meant
looked like just about the happiest painter
in all the world
standing there
taking it all 'in'
and reflecting
Everything
in his great big

Hungry Eye

but anyway

so it was I saw reflected there
Four walls covered with pictures
of the leaning tower of Pisa
all of them leaning in different directions

Five booths with tables

Fifteen tables without booths

One bar
with one bartender looking like a
baseball champ
with a lot of naborhood trophies
hung up behind

Three waitresses of various sizes and faces
one as big as a little fox terrier
one as large as a small sperm whale
one as strange as an angei
but all three
with the same eyes
One kitchendoor with one brother cook
standing in it
with the same eyes

and about
one hundredandsixtythree people all talking and waving and laughing and eating and drinking and smiling and frowning and shaking heads and opening mouths and putting forks and spoons in them and chewing and swallowing all kinds of produce and sitting back and relaxing maybe and drinking coffee and lighting cigarettes and getting up and so on
and so off
into the night
without ever noticing
the man with the mirrorhead
below the forgotten
plasterhead of DANTE
looking down
at everyone
with the same eyes
as if he were still searching
Everywhere
for his lost Beatrice
but with just a touch
of devilish lipstick
on the very tip
of his nose

BAY AREA NOW 7

Betti-Sue Hertz and Ceci Moss

Interviewed by Leora Lutz

Thank you for meeting with me today—we are super excited about the brand new Bay Area Now (BAN) 7 at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA). The first question I have on my mind is the concept of "decentralized curating." Can you define that, and tell me a little about your concept of it and how it is playing out in this show?

Bettie-Sue Hertz: Let's start with the phrase—Bay Area Now—which has usually been centered around the visual arts, but a couple of years ago we were thinking about how YBCA fits in with larger issues and organizations, such as leadership, activism, trends, non-profits, academic and also looking at how the arts feed into this creative, innovative, and intellectual community.

To see how YBCA plays a part in the community?

BH: Yes, a few years ago there was an effort to ask how the arts fit into such an innovative culture as San Francisco, and why the art community isn't more strongly connected to some of these other things. But maybe the questions are how those things [such as leadership and activism] connected and how they can become stronger Now the interest is in how YBCA is a leading cultural institution and what that means.

And does that support your mission statement—to be a leader?

BH: I definitely think that leadership has come up with our new director, Deborah M. Cullinan

CM: I think the word "center" has also come up. We are going to be rewriting our mission statement in the coming year. It's like putting art at the center of life. It's a term but also brings to mind what YBCA is capable of, like bringing in partners from all over the city. Another term that has come up in our curatorial conversations is "partnership." What does it mean to partner with people, what conversations can happen here that can't happen elsewhere, and how are we able to bring as many people to the table as possible? Working with these partners and organizations that were selected for BAN7 is an opportunity to reflect the communities and it is also a celebration of those communities.

The word center is in your name, too, so coming back to the concept of decentralized curating. . . .

CM: It goes back to this concept of partnerships. We are decentralizing the curatorial process; we are encouraging more people from these communities in that we are inviting and encouraging curating from these different parts of the city. YBCA is a nexus for these different conversations and communities.

Yes, I see—YBCA is a nexus and decentralizing is a construct of how these things are going to play out.

BH: Curating as a term has been turned in many different directions. We like to say that we are the organizers of this because we didn't make a lot of curatorial decisions. We did drive it by asking the questions to the community when we issued the open call Request for Proposals (RFPs). We posed a couple of criteria, such as artistic quality, a strong curatorial purpose, how their proposed exhibition reflects the mission of the applicant's organization . . . then we had a jury review the 50 proposals based on the criteria that we had generated. So in a sense we had a generative role in getting the ball rolling, but once those proposals were selected, it was amazing to see how close many of the ideas are to the original proposals.

CM: The open call was generated from two open town halls that we had. We invited every organization we could think of and we asked them questions, such as "What would best serve you?" and "How can we create a strong, shared platform for the artists represented?" It was about putting artists at the center, not just about organizational voice. We wanted input on how to best do this so that it is a real partnership.

BH: And we even had some organizations that decided that they were not going to participate after all, so in a sense it was self-selecting on the part of the applicants and whether or not they wanted to be a part of this project. Applicants had the ability to be proactive. It was not like me calling up the hottest artist in town and asking them if they wanted to be in the show [laughs].

It reverses the roles—which is super exciting!

BH: What makes this round so unique is that we are working with organizations who are then working with the artists. There are also many organizations that very few if anyone on

Christina Fong, Room Components in conjunction with Creativity Explored. 2014. Courtesy of YBCA.

the selection committee had even heard of—and there are many new organizations that are only about two years old and even I had not had a chance to catch up with what they are doing and working on.

So let's talk about some of these organizations for a minute. You have some from Oakland and around the Bay—William James Association's Prison Arts Project comes to mind—and I would like to hear more about involving the East Bay and some of these other organizations and non-traditional artists and venues.

BH: BAN has always grappled with the question, "What is the Bay Area?" With BAN 7 we are engaging in different kinds of organizations that are working with, serving, and representing different kinds of populations—be it the queer community, prison populations, site-specific installation artists. This time we are all the way down in Saratoga, and all the way up in Marin, but in a meaningful way, not because we are trying to do a data analysis of the region.

LL: A few of the proposals are from what Ceci referred to as apartment galleries such as Important Projects and n/a in Oakland, and Pied-à-terre here in San Francisco, which are important to talk about because they represent a particular type of venue that is responding to the changing landscape of the city.

CM: It is difficult to have a space with all the changes in the city—there are so many overhead costs—and a lot of artists and curators are starting to do exhibitions in their own homes.

Yes, it's important to look at these kinds of spaces because they decentralize the institution even more than you are attempting to do yourself because their inclusion is showing the potential of the art community. We can acknowledge that we know art can be anywhere, but how can we lift those smaller places to be as reputable as the larger institution such as YBCA? It's shifting now because these smaller places are not seen as lesser than, but just alternative.

BH: I think it is also important to see the value of short-lived organizations. It's hard to say how long these places will last. We are an organization that is 21 years old. Although there is value in the larger institution, this exhibition allows us to show what we value in terms of the support system for artists.

So, really what's happening is that the organizations in BAN7 are really the curators of the exhibition. The organizations have a one-to-one relationship with the artists, and their way of working is not the traditional model of selecting work, or picking it up and hanging it in a space—it's a dialog, it's a conversation.

Gary Harrell and Roy Gilstrap, *The Cell*, mixed media diorama. 12Hx17Wx6D, 2013. Photograph Courtesy Peter Merts.

BH: We are eager to get to the point where we can talk about the art and the artists! There is so much work being created for the exhibition, some of it is still being made as we speak and ideas are still coming to fruition!

And as with smaller galleries, artists are commonly making work up to the last minute, so the process for you is much more fun and dynamic I would image!

BH: We are always getting images of the new work being made for BAN, and to generate that much work is something that as a curator I find incredibly satisfying. For BAN we are to be able to work closely with the organization and deepen the directions that they are already working toward with their artists.

The curating is not only decentralized, it's also distributed. The curatorial process [also involves] being producers and having conversations with other curators, developing the community with them. This is potentially the beginning of something much larger, because both Ceci and I have our own networks, but now it's not just an exhibition but where it can lead all of us going forward.

CM: When we had our big retreat to discuss BAN and this [decentralized] idea was on the table, everyone's light bulbs went off. Each curator from those disciplines also decentralized their methods by doing different things—for example the performance art curators had a nomination process, and for film Joel [Shepard] reached out to local film buffs and invited them to curate their own screenings here. What that means is that what we are doing as a whole is what is really happening in the Bay Area.

What I see is that it is taking a lot of the concerns and busting it open and giving something new a try. Maybe all of the questions can't be answered right now; you have to see how it all plays out. With that said, it is a definite move forward. . . .

BH: By inviting all of these different groups to participate in one space, [we bring] enough variety and enough of us that we can start to look together at this collective art world that we participate in. The other thing is that these places are all over the map, so it is unlikely that the visitors to YBCA would have gone to but a few of them. So it's about visibility and strengthens the sense that we do have a dynamic arts community here. Sometimes the arts feel like they are lacking visibility because it is so spread out. Bringing it all together is like a mall: "one-stop shopping."

Ah! I was wondering what you were getting at by using an art fair analogy on the BAN 7 page of the YBCA website. Art fairs are notorious for being commodity driven art moments in a short amount of time, in this cubby style mall setting and as you say, "one-stop shopping." I'm not convinced that art fair is the best term to use for BAN 7. Does using that term bring up problems that you may not want to address?

CM: One of the organizations that I was looking at was the *No Soul for Sale—A Festival of Independents* event [Tate Modern, 2010] as a model. There were people doing a lot of exciting things, so it made me curious what would happen if we did something like that on a local level. It didn't feel like an art fair at all, it felt like a happening. There was aliveness there, and it wasn't about consumerism it was about visibility.

BH: I use that term because it is commonly understood as a place where you can go and see a lot of things. What I experience when I go to fairs, beyond the market aspect of it, is that I get to see a lot of different things at once from a lot of different parts of the world. I think this is an easily understood idea. And there is a lot to talk about in the art world as fairs become a dominant way to see art. I was at the Art Basel fair in Hong Kong and there were 60,000 people there to see art with very little contextualization, very little interpretation—everything there is clearly for sale, right? But, swarms of diverse people were at this fair—school groups, tons of families—so the potential of taking the popularity of that and turning it toward some very serious art and curatorial practice is something to think about.

Yes, I even saw things happening at artMRKT in San Francisco that I had not seen happen at a fair, and it speaks to the fact that even art fairs are changing, and that people want more than just the consumer experience.

BH: And there is another conversation there about how the art fair is affecting museum culture. I feel that the art fair attracts a broader spectrum of people than who would normally visit a museum because of its mall likeness. This region isn't necessarily dominated by mall culture anyway, but in the end it will open up conversations about coming together.

Yes, that totally makes sense when you explain it that way. Another point I want to bring up is your use of the term site-specific. YBCA is a big institution with its own meaning, so inserting an art fair structure into it and calling it site-specific is a bit confusing. Art fair conjures up cubicles, so how is the space going to be used? And how does one depart from the site-specificity of the museum itself?

CM: In the open call we asked people where they wanted to be within the space, and to be creative and not just think of it as a white cube. For example, Montalvo [Arts Center] is working with Leah Rosenberg who is doing a bunch of interventions throughout the space. Susan O'Malley is doing an experimental tour throughout the space, and Pied-à-terre is showing a small white painting by Teresa Baker and the whole point of it is looking at the light and shadow as it changes over time. People were really thinking about space creatively and turning it on its head.

BH: Perhaps saying that the exhibitions are sited in a specific place is a looser way of saying it.

The organizations are behooved to do exhibitions at their own spaces that coincide with BAN, which is great because it encourages visitors to go seek out these other spaces, reinforcing the whole point of what a cultural center should be doing.

CM: Yes, and there is a shared space in the exhibition called The Commons where people can put flyers and handouts of their other events and visitors can hang out and get take-aways.

That sounds excellent! I'm curious about the idea of now, and is three years between each BAN really highlighting the current trends without considering the previous three years' great achievements? Are there any commissions for BAN7?

BH: Estria Foundation in Oakland, which organizes mural exhibitions, are going to be presenting six works that are from previous exhibitions. We also commissioned one of their artists to create a new mural. The artist is Miguel Perez and his graffiti name is Bounce. It is going to be hung outside where we usually have marketing banners. It is for this exhibition, but currently it will be up until 2015. That was one of the institutionally driven projects because there is a push here to do more public art and to mark our building an art center.

CM: Each organization received a $2500 stipend to produce work.

BH: Each organization has a different relationship with their artists, and they were given a flat fee to distribute how they saw fit.

It's great that you are recognizing the financial need. So, another thing that I noticed about the programming is that each facet of the exhibition is seen as its own art form. There are categories of visual art, performance, film, and engagement, and within each of those are different exhibitions and events. . . .

CM: Every Free Third Thursday Converge event will have a number of organizations doing different things. For example, the Bay Area Art Workers Alliance are going to perform dance pieces in August, Second Floor Projects is going to organize a screening by Johnny Ray Huston and a reading of Curt McDowell's work that is going to be presented by his sister Melinda McDowell. Nicolas Sung will be delivering fresh flowers each week for the installation and Publication Studio from Oakland is bringing their printing press here and Ian Dolton-Thornton will be working in their space. Also, Important Projects is doing a mural with YBCA staff and looking at labor and institutional hierarchies.

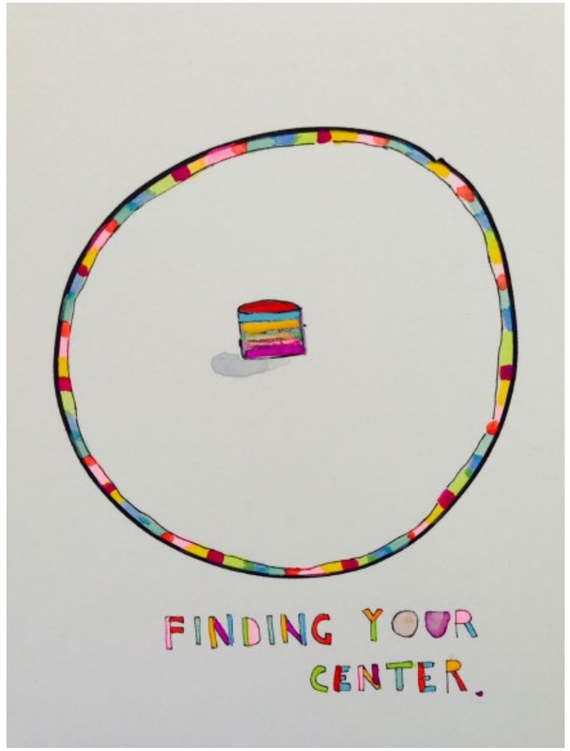
BH: And Bay Area Workers Alliance is also making an institutional critique.

CM: In fact, it was really important for them to list all of the artists affiliated with their organization as a way to recognize and to share ownership with the exhibition even though not all of the members are participating in it.

BH: You know, we can sit and have assumptions about what is important to artists, and those assumptions may not be right. For example, we might think that gentrification or Ellis Act evictions are really on peoples' minds, but what the artwork is doing is much more subtle and very poetic. So if we look across these various visual sectors, it makes a lot of sense that the idea of visibility/invisibility is something to talk about.

CM: This makes me think of the San Quentin Projects is hanging a huge salon-style installation as a political gesture.

BH: And once the shows are up we can make more layers and begin to see all of the connections. A lot of threads started to emerge that we didn't even plan—that is one of my favorite things.



Leah Rosenberg, *Finding Your Center*. Courtesy of the artist.

Adobe Books installation view, 2014.

My view as a writer is to find those threads too, and to gurgle up these concepts of invisibility and visibility—but I also see opened doors and closed doors, coming and going. What I am getting at is the use of the space—others being allowed to occupy the space with the ownership of their identity, their walls, and being able to come in and represent themselves. And these logistical issues are a part of demystifying the museum.

BH: I see this as fifteen shows within the show—I've actually never done anything like this before. It brings up the idea of ownership, and the concept that even people not formally trained in curating can take on the rol e of curator. The term has been opened up to a lot of people and the partner organizations are all really excited and grateful for this opportunity!

BAN 7 is on view at YBCA from July 18th - October 5th, 2014

THEDA'S ISLAND, CHAPTER 7: THE ROAD HOME

By MARK VAN PROYEN

From separate points in the ballroom, three security men with radios started to converge on our position, prompting us to think in terms of quick evasion. Kathy and I bolted out the door and into the hallway, moving quickly in the direction of the same stairwell that we had earlier used to gain entrance to the ballroom. When we entered the stairwell, we ran as quickly as we could down to the ground floor, where I spied an emergency exit. As I reached for the doorknob, she barked out an order: "don't go that way, or you will trip the fire alarm!" Meanwhile, I could hear the approaching footfall of security guards descending the stairs above us, making me wonder if tripping the alarm could be any worse then the imminent likelihood of our being given a tour of the convention center's rent-a-cop detention center. Suddenly, Kathy pointed to another unmarked door, shouting "through here!" It opened on to a room with a long table and some vending machines flanked by metal lockers, with another open door on the opposite side leading out to the loading dock. The dock had been pressed into service as a storage facility for large boat trailers, some of these were stacked two and three deep upon one another. As luck would have it, one of the loading dock's roll-up doors had been snagged on a poorly positioned trailer hitch, allowing enough space for both of us to crawl under it, and out of the building. While she helped me to my feet, she said "don't look up to your left, 'cause there's a security camera up there—make sure to keep your face under the brim of your hat." Looking to my right, I was able to see that an electric jumbotron was already announcing that the Conference of the American Association of Phlebotomists would be the next event booked into the facility.

Walking briskly, we made it to the street that was adjacent to the convention center. Then, three of the green-jacketed guards emerged from the fire exist and spied us. One of them shouted, "hey you, come back here, we need to talk to you!" Since there was no audible fire alarm coming from the fire exit, I assumed that they had deactivated it, but I also knew that once we were past the driveway and off of the property, their ability to detain us would be greatly diminished by the possibility of legal repercussion. But toward us they came, running a fast as they could in their ill-fitting penny loafers even as a uniformed police officer also emerged from the fire exit door clutching a much larger handheld radio. Kathy and I broke into a trot, and then a full-out sprint, arriving at an intersection with a large boulevard where many people were standing in close formation, some holding handmade signs that read "Stop Saddam!" and "Honk If You Love Kuwait!" This was more than a little bit strange, because the first Gulf War had been over for a decade. Even though it was only about an hour after the winter sunset, and we had managed to cross paths with some kind of pro-war anniversary parade that was displaying itself to the evening commute traffic. For that reason, it was being filmed by television news cameras accompanied by bright television news camera lights. These proved to be a perfect deterrent for our pursuers, and a perfect vector for the final phase of our getaway.

Kathy and I worked our way to a position behind the lights as the security men stopped to confer with the policeman holding the radio. Coming down the large boulevard was a parade float built atop a pickup truck, covered with American flags and red, white and blue bunting. It was accompanied by the sound of ghastly accordion and banjo music, which was intended to be both patriotic and festive. But suddenly, both the parade float and the sounds emanating from it came to an abrupt stop. I noticed that several additional police were scurrying about in a manner that suggested a serious concern for public safety. People were being asked to step back and remain calm, while the television people started to move their equipment toward the stalled parade float. Then from out of nowhere the bomb squad appeared, wearing heavy helmets and thick protective garments.

It seemed that someone had left an ominous looking package in the street near where the parade float stalled, rousing the suspicions of some concerned citizens. One of the bomb squad officers moved toward the package, and then motioned for another officer to bring a German Sheppard forward. Carefully, the dog was separated from its leash, and then it was gently encouraged by its handler to sniff the package. It did so dutifully, for what seemed to be a long period of time made longer by the hushed silence of those watching from what they presumed to be a safe distance. After a long minute of olfactory inspection, the dog looked back at its handler, and then returned its attention to the would-be bomb. Lifting a hind leg, it proceeded to urinate on the package, prompting laughter and a celebratory resumption of the hateful accordion music. To complete the canine theme of the moment, a heavy-set woman with short greased-back hair walked up to us. She was holding a large cardboard box, and seemed underdressed for the evening chill. She was wearing a sleeveless T-shirt with dark hair that was slicked back with heavy pomade. Flashing a meth-mouth grin, she revealed a clutch of infant pit bulls sharing the inside of her box with a pink blanket. With a voice of nicotine-tinctured gravel, she asked, "Want puppies?"

Kathy tugged hard on my arm, underscoring her urgent tone of voice, "Let's get out of here." But before we could get away I heard a familiar voice calling my name from a distance. It was Kenworth Bascomb, who was approaching us from across the street. "Jason! Wait! By any chance, are you driving back up to San Francisco? I just missed the last train and I don't want to be stranded."

"Well, that puts both of us in trouble, because I took the train down here earlier this morning. I was also planning to take it back."

Then it was Kathy's turn to speak up, "We can all go back in my car—it's parked about two blocks away, over there."

Turning toward her, I said, "Can we stop in San Rey? That's where I live. It's on the way, but only half way up to San Francisco."

"No problem, but we should get going now."

The three of us crossed the street, and walked past a building that housed what looked to be a rather large Czechoslovakian restaurant, as could be judged from the extra dining room that occupied an adjacent storefront framed by an ornate sign. While walking past it, I stopped to look through its large plate glass window. Inside, the tables and chairs had been cleared to free up the center of the room, where a small bandstand had been positioned. And from there, more horrible accordion music was being played, which accompanied about a dozen septuagenarians in ornate costume, their arms locked at the elbows as they danced in a tight circle. They seemed to having a great deal of fun, and I wondered what special occasion they might be celebrating.

Again, Kathy grabbed my arm. With a voice full of exasperation, she said, "Look into the abyss and the abyss looks into you!" Her message was clear, even if her impatient tone was a bit overdone. For some reason, she was in a hurry, and for that reason, *we* needed to be in a hurry, *her hurry*. Although he said nothing, Bascomb seemed to be in accord with Kathy's desire for quick forward motion. But then, yet another delay came in the form of girlish voices running up to us.

"Professor Fowler? Hi, I'm Kimmy. I'm in your art history class, and I was hoping that we can get a ride from you—this is my friend Helen—we were going to take the train, but the last one already left and we are stuck down here. We don't have any money for a hotel."

I turned to Kathy who suddenly seemed dejected. She said, "Sure, why not. The car is over here."

As the five of us walked up to the car, Kathy saddled up to me to whisper, "Listen, Jay, I don't want to alarm anybody, but I don't think I can drive—my medication is wearing off and I am starting to get dizzy—I think our little adventure getting away from the security goons might have sent me on a spin. Can you drive?"

The thought of driving all of the way up to San Francisco to drop passengers made me apprehensive, and I wondered how I might find my way back to San Rey an hour later—I might be able to get a late bus, or take an expensive cab from the Millbrae Bart station; not exactly convenient, but doable. "I hope that your car is an automatic—I can't drive a stick."

"It's a Honda Accord—here are the keys. It's the grey one by the mailbox on the corner."

The car wasn't new enough to have an electronic lock, so I opened the driver's side door, saying, "Kathy, you should get into the back seat, Kimmy and Helen, you too." Bascomb looked relieved to learn that he would be assigned the more comfortable front passenger seat. Seconds later, there was heard the snapping of seat belts, ignition, and a lurch into traffic, with the freeway on-ramp looming dead ahead. I hadn't driven in months, but Kathy's car was easy to operate, and it had good acceleration. I noticed a small Franciscan cross hanging from the rear-view mirror, and even in the dark I could tell that it was made from finely crafted cherry wood with an inset of delicate enameling and ornate metalwork. It was of the exact type that I remembered from Italian churches in Florence and Rimini, the very same type that was famously painted by Giotto.

When rain started to sprinkle, I activated the windshield wipers and looked in the rearview mirror to see that Kathy's eyes were closed, her head tilted backward. I hoped the she was only taking a quick nap. Kimmy was in the middle, so her face had a prominent place in the mirror. She had dark hair that was teased out, chubby cheeks covered with dark freckles and a prominent overbite that made her look a bit like a chipmunk. Helen had short dark hair that was slicked back in the manner of a 1950s crooner, her eyes being set very close together. Her jaw dangled downward as befitted someone who had grown accustomed to breathing through her mouth. I decided to make some small talk by asking the backseat passengers if they were down for the UAA conference.

Kimmy said, "Yes, because Russett,—mean, Professor Vodavich—gave me her badge and told me I had to go to the conference to make up for missing her test. Boy, was that boring, but least I didn't have to pay. Helen just got off work, at the book show."

Speaking slowly, Helen quietly added, "I work for the security company. I was checking badges at the book event and also at the job interview pavilion." I realized that a security guard's uniform could easily have been stuffed into the small backpack that she held on her lap.

Kimmy's use of the word "boring" implied that she had missed Bascomb and me on the critic's panel, or had at least missed its concluding foray into bottomless polemics enacted by the infamous Ms. Franco. But I was wrong. She went on to ask, "Who was that bitch walking around showing off her bush? What was her deal? And what about that African dude? What was his trip?" Kenworth let go with a nervous laugh, which suggested that he was wondering the same thing, albeit for more esoteric reasons.

I decided to try to explain. "The woman was named Andrea Franco. She is a performance artist who does things that she says are about the critique of institutions. She was doing a performance that was supposed to be a critique of our panel."

"You mean like mental institution? Is she a crazy person? Why couldn't she just say that you were all full of shit? That's what I would say. Especially you." In the rear view mirror, I noticed that Kathy's eyes sprung open to alarmed attention. "You need to just come out and say that you think that artists are there for people to manipulate and use—I mean, that's what your saying, right? Dressing it all up with a lot of bee ess is just stupid."

Keeping one eye on the traffic ahead, I responded by saying, "Maybe I wasn't clear, but what I was trying to say that people should stop manipulating artists, and that artists should stop manipulating each other."

Bascomb quipped, "That's never going to happen."

Kimmy was undeterred by our remarks. "I heard that the school used to be great until you came in. Before that, people were free and could do whatever they wanted, because they were artists. Then you came in, with your snooty sport jackets and fancy brief case, and your fancy talk—we don't need that, and we don't need you, because we're artists and we should be able to do what ever we want! And you want to take that away from us!"

Kenworth seemed respectful of the difficulty of my having to drive and debate at the same time, so he asked, "What about non-artists, don't they get to be free?"

"Fuck all the non-artists, they aren't worth fuck! Especially you—fucking asshole, who do you think you are, some big shot or something? Fuck you!"

Then it was Kathy's turn to speak, and she did so in a loud commanding voice. "Jay, I want these women out of my car now!"

Despite the fact that we were driving on the freeway in the rain, I found myself eager to comply with Kathy's demand. But before I could steer the car toward an off-ramp, I heard someone hiss the word "bitch" as a scuffle broke out in the back seat. Quickly, I veered the car to the far right lane, and then onto a gravel shoulder. When it came to a halt, I got out and opened the back door so that I could intervene in the conflict, first by pulling Helen out of the back seat, and then reaching in to grab Kimmy, who was beating a terror-struck Kathy with the spike heel of a yellow shoe. But before I could pull Kimmy out of the car, Helen attacked me from behind, hitting me on the back of the head. This was combat!

I quickly ducked so that Helen's second punch flew over my head, and then I used her overreaching posture to my advantage by grabbing her at the waist, lifting her up and then throwing her down on to the pavement, which she hit hard. Then I turned left to see Kimmy coming at me in full fury, flailing her purse as if it were some kind of medieval bludgeoning weapon. Purse in one hand, shoe in the other, perched on one leg, she seemed to act out a frenzied pantomime of what a flamingo would look like if cast in a martial arts movie, and I had to be quick on my feet to dodge her attacks. From inside the car, Kathy was yelling, "Jason—think about your job!"

Fortunately for me, Helen was back on her feet, which was surprising given how hard she had hit the pavement a second earlier. She grabed Kimmy from behind so as to restrain her motion. Then she addressed me with the voice of experience, saying, "Get in the car and just go! Go now! Go!"

I was glad to obey her command, and seconds latter, the car was back in the flow of northbound traffic. Kenworth turned to the back seat to ask Kathy if she was alright, and her voice quivered while she answered in the affirmative. His eyes seemed quite enlarged, and I noticed that my hands were still shaking on the steering wheel. For the next several minutes, the three of us were silent.

Finally, Kathy was composed enough to say, "Well, that was certainly a slice of life." The tone of her voice was dry, and this seemed to break the ice, leading Bascomb and I to chuckle. He said, "Don't worry, I will back you up if you get into trouble at school—as far as I am concerned, that was a pure case of unprovoked assault."

Kathy said "right on!" I knew that the testimony of a credentialed newspaper reporter was as good as that of any police officer, meaning that I would be able to dodge any disciplinary bullet pointed at me from the school's administration.

Suddenly, traffic came to a stand still. We were still well south of Palo Alto, and we had a long way to go. I remembered that we had to get to San Francisco before I could go back home to San Rey, and I began to worry about making it on time. I wondered what could be holding up the traffic, so we tuned in the local news on the car's radio. A minute latter, we were listening to a newsreader reporting on what was called a "chemical incident" on the 101 Freeway, with traffic stopped in both directions. This was bad news, but I also noticed some cars exiting the freeway up ahead, and positioned the Honda to follow suit. Forty minutes later, we were finally off of the freeway and moving west on a side street, the plan being to eventually link up with the northbound 280 Freeway at some point west of Palo Alto.

It was well after midnight when we dropped Bascomb off at his house in the Mission district, and ten minutes later, I pulled Kathy's car into the underground garage beneath the apartment building where she lived. After I parked the car, she seemed to sense my concern about missing the last bus back to San Rey, so in a matter of fact voice she asked, "Why don't you just stay here?" It was late on a Friday night, so my odds of finding an affordable hotel room were nil, and the temperature in San Francisco was much lower than it was in San Jose three hours earlier.

I was both enticed and disturbed by her invitation. Some months earlier, I had sworn off having any romantic liaisons with students on the grounds that they always carried the potential for unwelcome grief and career-threatening disaster. On the other hand, Kathy seemed more sensible and mature than most students, and she seemed to have had some real life experience prior to her adventure in graduate school. Most likely, her invitation was for me to sleep on a couch or in a guest room, and even if it wasn't, that's how my newly acquired instinct for self-preservation would insist on taking it.

We entered the apartment and I was surprised and relieved to see that it was quite large by art student standards. At least it had a separate bedroom, so one source of potential awkwardness was resolved. Kathy seemed to have slipped back into a daze. "I need to get to bed right away. There is a pillow and an afghan on the couch by the TV. Sorry I can't be more hospitable, but I really need to lie down before I fall down. Good night."

I didn't get a chance to return her salutation before the bedroom door shut hard, so I went over to the couch and took off my shoes. As I stretched out under the afghan, I pondered the streetlight glare coming through the window. I thought hard about how I might best communicate the evening's events to Dean Alfred, or even if I should. And what about Theda at the Citadel Lyceum meeting? What to make of that? No clear answers were forthcoming, so I dozed off.

It seemed like I had been in a deep sleep for at least a few hours when something woke me. When the momentary panic of not remembering where I was had subsided, I noticed Kathy standing over me, eerily illuminated in the window's raking light. She was dressed as if she was going on a camping trip, wearing a heavy plaid shirt and tall high lace boots that were partially covered by the crisply rolled cuffs of new blue jeans. The look on her face was strange, severe, and a bit angry. Her jaw seemed set far forward and her gaze was focused on a far-off horizon. In an uncharacteristically deep voice, she asked, "What are your intentions with her?"

I thought that I was dreaming, so my response was delayed. She repeated the question, pronouncing the words more deliberately. I answered, "All I want is to get home. I don't have any intentions." I wondered who the "her" was in the question, and then it hit me: the questioner wasn't Kathy, but another very distinct personality that was asking about Kathy. I was witnessing a bona fide instance of split personality, or a very good imitation of it.

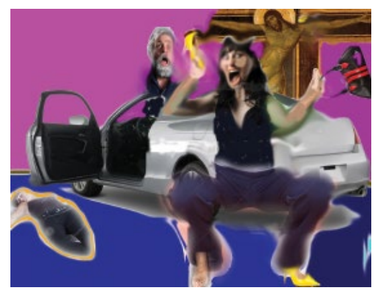
"She thinks that you want her, and she wants you to want her, but you can't have her and she can't have you. She is sick, and she can make you sick. You should leave. And you should stop leading her on."

I know that defending myself on this point would be dangerous, so I tried to change the topic by asking, "Can I wait until the sun comes up? I can catch the first bus."

Plaid shirt Kathy doppelganger said, "OK, you can leave then. But leave. You must leave. It's for your own good." Then she turned and walked back toward the bedroom, and then turned into the bathroom. After the door shut, I could hear the sounds of plaid shirt Kathy doppelganger being very sick to her tummy, but after this was over, there was no sound of toilet flushing, only that of the bathroom door opening, and a second later, the bedroom door closing. Then silence.

Needless to say, I was very disconcerted by this visitation. I checked my watch to find out that it was 5:20 in the morning. Sunrise was still over an hour away. I pulled the afghan over my head and closed my eyes.

The next thing that I remember was bright sunshine pouring in from the east facing window. I heard some movement



in the kitchen leading up to the welcome gurgle of a coffeemaker, and the sound of news being broadcast on a radio or television. Then, Kathy entered the room, clad in a black T-shirt and light grey sweatpants. I noticed a gauze bandage taped around her left arm above the elbow, and peeking from beneath that, I could make out a dark bruise. "Are you up? Coffee is on the way." I was relieved to hear that it was regular Kathy speaking to me, rather than the woodsier version that had visited a few hours earlier. "News said that the 101 was closed because a tanker truck jackknifed and spilled a load of vegetable oil on the freeway. Hard to imagine how that could stop both lanes of traffic for so long."

She walked over carrying a tray, upon which was set two cups and some other crockery. "How do you take it?"

"Usually, with milk and sugar. But let's start with black for now."

"Black it is—did you sleep well?"

"For a few hours. What time is it?"

"Almost eight. Sorry I was so unsociable last night, but I was in a bad state. Feeling much better now."

"Did you take your medicine?"

"Just a few minutes ago, already kicking in."

I thought that asking her about her medical situation would be awkward, but I was more interested in getting to an even more awkward question. "You know, you woke me up last night. You were wearing a plaid shirt and seemed really strange. I'm pretty sure that I wasn't dreaming."

A cloud of apprehension passed over Kathy's face. "Oh, how embarrassing." A long pause followed. "It's been a while since that's happened. I hope that I didn't scare you. Sometimes when I go off my medication schedule, I go into a fugal state—actually, I felt one coming on ever since we walked in on that Citadel Lyceum meeting. Usually, I can concentrate and make it go away, but with all of the excitement . . . I hope that I didn't say anything too embarrassing." When my silence said all that needed to be said, her voice quavered while she gingerly asked, "Did I?"

"You don't remember?"

"Oh no, oh no!—Oh god, I'm so mortified. No really, I don't remember any of it."

"Well, maybe we should just forget it. Or maybe I should just make something up."

"You have to tell me, and don't you dare make anything up!" Clearly, it hadn't occurred to Kathy that teaching assistants should refrain from giving direct orders to their supervising professors.

"Well for starters, it seemed like you were not even you—you walked in dressed like you were headed out on a fishing trip, and you talked about you—like she was another person. It was pretty creepy. I thought it was a good thing that you weren't carrying an axe."

"Did you say anything?"

"I answered a question, and I agreed to leave."

"What was the question?"

"The question was, 'what were my intentions with you?'"

"You mean like a parent asking . . . "

"Yeah, kind of—like I might have had something dishonorable up my sleeve . . . you know, traveling salesman, farmer's daughter, broken heart."

Kathy buried her face in her hands, and it seemed as though she was fighting back tears. After a long moment, she clasped my hand and said, "I guess now would be a good time to explain myself. I think my little alter ego is a function of my health situation. You should take the fact that she was so concerned about your intentions as a compliment, because she knew that if our circumstances were different, I would have happily invited you to sleep with me, because I have a crush on you. Well, kind of a crush. But the fact is, I am HIV positive, and I would never put you or anyone else in danger. How's that for a situation?"

I felt my heart sink, and at that moment, I realized how attracted I had been to Kathy, and how much I had been blocking that fact from my consciousness.

"How long have you known?"

"Little over a year. One of the reasons I decided to go to grad school was so I could get on a group health plan, and the school has a good one. Also, I needed to get out of LA and away from my ex-husband."

"Did he infect you?"

"It had to be him. I'm sure it was, but that's not the reason that I left him. He is an EMT and was exposed to the virus when some dirt bag street person stuck him with a dirty needle. The reason that I left him was because he knew and didn't tell me."

At this point, Kathy lost her struggle with sadness and let go with tears and a long plaintive whimper. Then she collected herself, and went on to say, "The reason that he didn't tell me was that he had been going to these Citadel Lyceum meetings, and from there he got the idea that he only needed to be as honest as he could be, and that if he couldn't be honest enough to tell me about . . . his infection . . . that was somehow okay. So the bastard made me sick, and then said that he was sorry after I found out on my own. So you could say that he chose the Lyceum over me. I actually went to some of those stupid meetings with him, because he was really into it. But as far as I could tell, it was just a group of people giving each other permission to be a bunch of self-serving hypocrites. I told Jesse what I thought, and he was furious. I actually left the Catholic Church in order to get a civil divorce, and then I moved up here. I thought art school could be a good way to find something meaningful to do while I am still alive, and the doctors say I can expect three or four years if I stick to the regimen. The fugal states started soon after I started on the anti-viral regimen, but the real scary thing is that they might have something to do with a brain tumor."

"Have you taken a CAT scan?"

"Yeah, and no sign of a brain tumor. But my doctor says that there is no reason that the anti-viral cocktail should cause fugal states. I guess I am just a medical mystery. Anyway, I'm sorry that I startled you. I hope that you don't think that I am crazy."

Suddenly, I remembered seeing Amy, Alice, and Theda at the Citadel Lyceum meeting, and I remembered what Amy had said about Alice at the *Broken Frame*. Then I realized why Kathy was not at the critic's symposium.

"You weren't in San Jose to go to the UAA conference. You were there for the life coach's event, right?"

Kathy smiled. "Yeah, I heard that Helmut Zyklon was going to be there, and since his little cult of weasels has managed to ruin my life, I wanted to see the king of the vampires face-to-face. As far as I know, he isn't even supposed to be in the country—he lived in France and got kicked out of there, and now he lives on one of those tax-haven Caribbean Islands. He is still wanted here for tax evasion, which is why the old Zest organization was turned into Citadel Lyceum. I think that he is still on the board or something, after walking out with about a zillion dollars they still pay him large consulting fees. While I was sneaking into the convention center, I saw you walk into the book fair. Later, when I learned that Theda was doing something at the Citadel event, I wanted you to see that she was part of it, so I went looking for you—that's when I saw you sitting with that guy at the bar."

"Did you know that the guy at the bar was Burton Donaldson?"

"Burton Donaldson, as in the art critic Burton Donaldson? Wow!"

"We were both on the art critic's panel."

"Was that what those girls were talking about? I kind of nodded off."

"Yeah, they were there. But I'm curious, if you don't mind asking, how did that Citadel Lyceum thing affect your husband?" My memory had grown clear, and I was able to recall the Aimless Amy saga about Alice, and the subsequent baptism ritual that took place earlier that evening.

Kathy paused, and it seemed that she was reluctant to answer the question. "I guess that you could say that it turned him into a kind of zombie with a mechanically positive attitude. It seemed like he suddenly had a canned answer for everything, but the answers weren't really answers, they were only clever evasions and denials, like 'turn your question backward, and you will see the answer,' that kind of thing. I mean, I was only asking him where we were getting the money to pay for his Lyceum seminars, and he accused me of trying to hold him back as part of the marriage racket. Then I found out that those classes had put us deep into debt, really deep. I actually began to think that the reason he got interested in it was because he was unhappy in our marriage, but the truth was, he went because he was unhappy in his life. Right before he got into it, his mother died, and that was a big deal, with lots of fighting between brothers and sisters. He was Latino, and he comes from a very large and devoutly Catholic family. I converted to Catholicism right before I married him, and as I look back, I can now see that part of the reason that I married him had to do with the fact that I envied how close he was with his family. Growing up as an only child of a single father in southern Arizona, I never really had an experience of family, and I always felt that I was missing something that was very important. But after his adventure with Citadel Lyceum, he grew apart from his family, and he finally turned on them if you want to know the real truth. Of course, they were all concerned, and they wanted me to help them convince Jesse to quit the Lyceum. But after I was diagnosed, enough was enough. I filed for a divorce, gave back his ring *and* his name, and moved up here to go to school. I can afford it because my dad and his new wife now have enough money to help me, and she has also been able to help me sell some paintings in a way where I don't have to report the money to the IRS."

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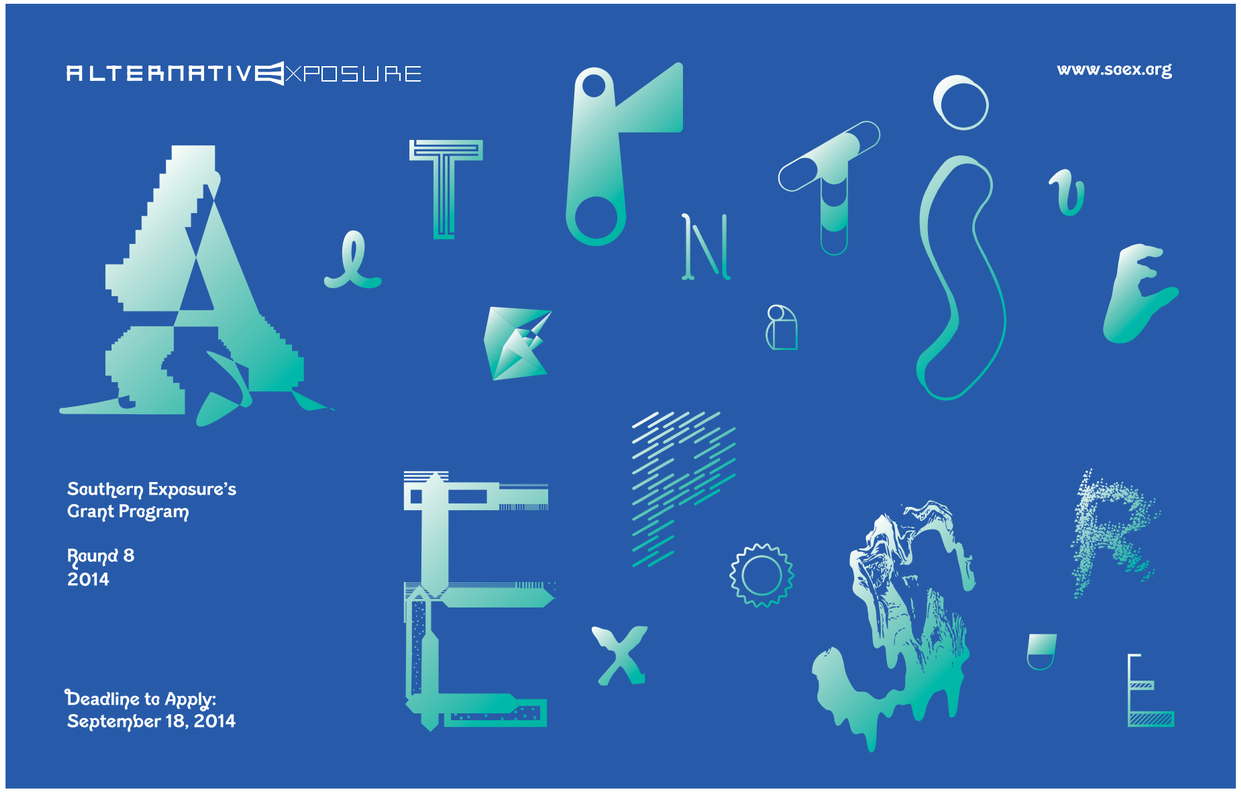
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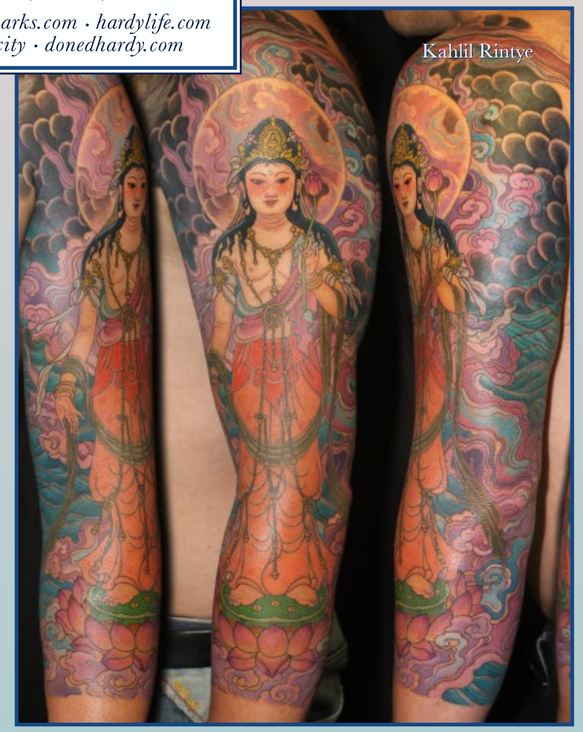
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