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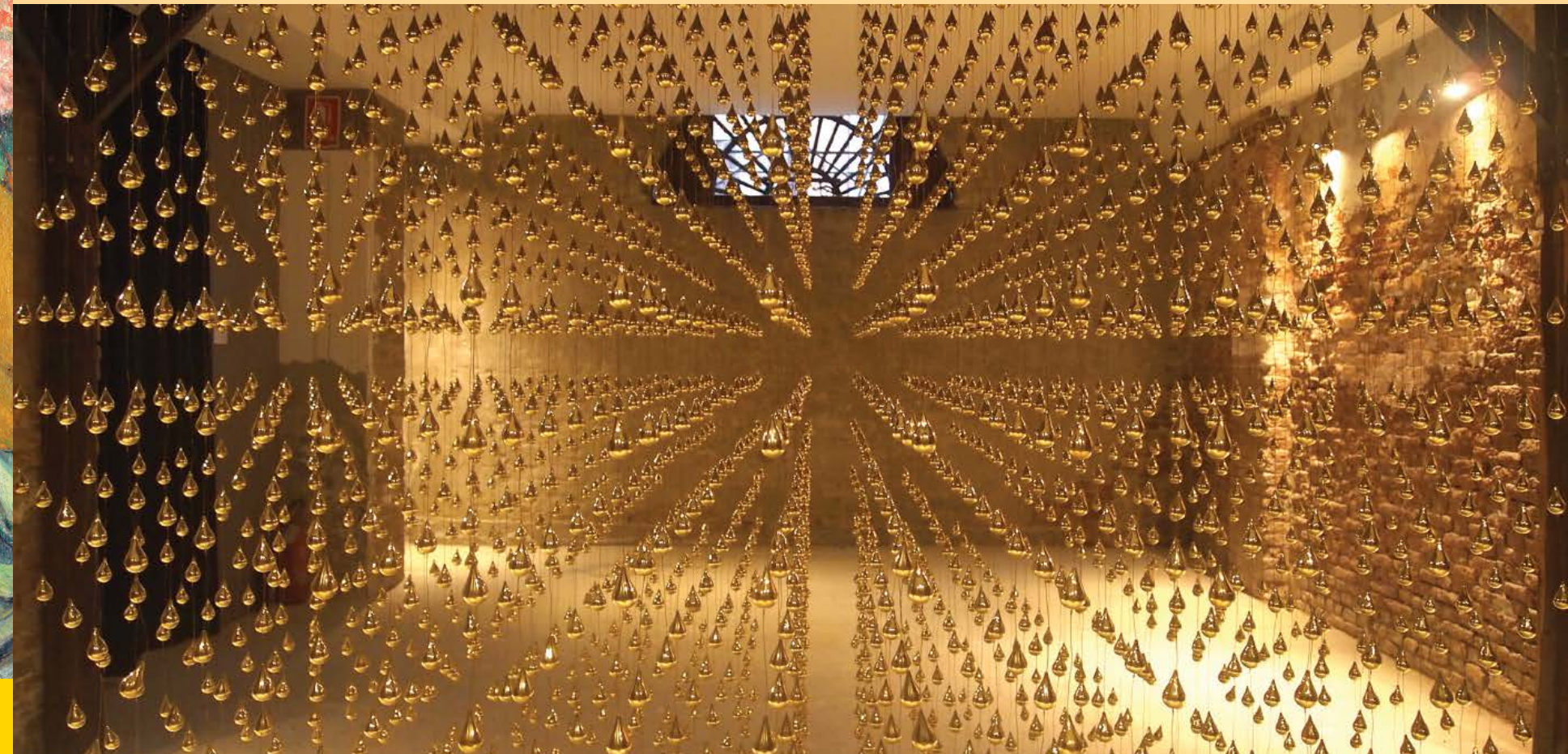
This exhibition is organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and the National Galleries of Scotland. Presenting Sponsors: Cynthia Fry Gunn and John A. Gunn, and Diane B. Wilsey. Director's Circle: The Estate of Merrill and Hedy Thruston. President's Circle: San Francisco Auxiliary of the Fine Arts Museums. Curator's Circle: The Bernard Osher Foundation and the Ednah Root Foundation. Patron's Circle: Phoebe Cowles and Robert Girard, and George and Marie Hecksher. Supporter's Circle: Andy and Carrick McLaughlin and Mrs. George Hopper Fitch. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Paul Gauguin, *Three Tahitians* (detail), 1899. Oil on canvas. Scottish National Gallery

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ybca EXHIBITION

A SPECIAL CURATORIAL PROJECT WITH RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA: THE WAY THINGS GO



Arin Rungjang, *Golden Teardrop* (installation view), 2013. Courtesy of the artist and the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture

ON VIEW FEB 13–MAY 24

YBCA.ORG/RIRKRIT

ybca EXHIBITION



CONTROL: TECHNOLOGY IN CULTURE

NATE BOYCE: POLYSCROLL

ON VIEW JAN 23–APR 5

YBCA.ORG/NATE-BOYCE

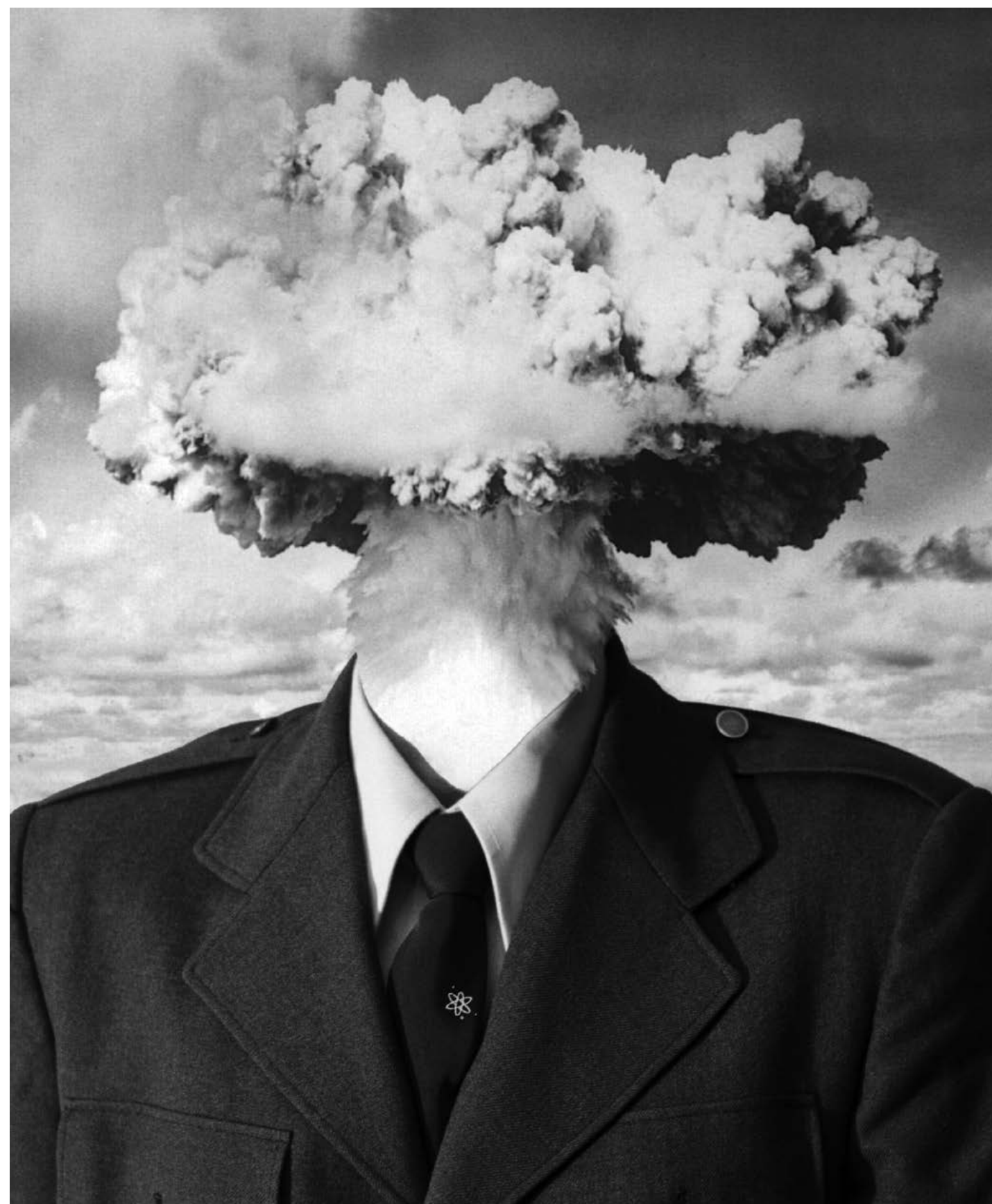
NATE BOYCE, *POLYSCROLL II*, 2015
HD VIDEO, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND ALTMAN SIEGEL GALLERY



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BRUCE CONNER: SOMEBODY ELSE'S PRINTS

FEBRUARY 7 – MAY 16, 2015



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Tom Marioni, *Walking Drawing (Drypoint)*, 2006.

WHAT'S IN A LINE?

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RICHARD DIEBENKORN, JOEL FISHER, AL HELD, ANISH KAPOOR,
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Bruce Conner: Somebody Else's Prints is organized by the Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University. The ICA presentation is generously supported by Applied Materials Foundation, The Mercy and Roger Smullen Family Trust, John Green and Martin Fox, and members of the ICA Directors Circle.

Bombhead, 2002, Pigmented inkjet print on paper, 32 x 25 inches, Courtesy Magnolia Editions, Oakland, CA ©2014 Conner Family Trust, San Francisco / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Tom Sachs

"BOOMBOX RETROSPECTIVE"
1999 - 2015

JANUARY 24 - APRIL 19, 2015



Tom Sachs, *Model One*, 1999. Mixed media. 32 x 41 x 14 inches. Collection of Shelley Fox Aarons and Philip Aarons, New York. Image courtesy Tom Sachs Studio.

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Also on view at the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria:

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John Grade: *Canopy Tower*



Tom Sachs Exhibition Support: Shelley Fox Aarons and Philip Aarons, Tom Healy and Fred P. Hochberg, Hotel Saint Cecilia, Hotel San Jose, Jeffrey's, Nancy and Dr. Robert Magoon, The Moody Foundation, The Nightingale Code Foundation, John and Amy Phelan, Vision Fund Leaders and Contributors
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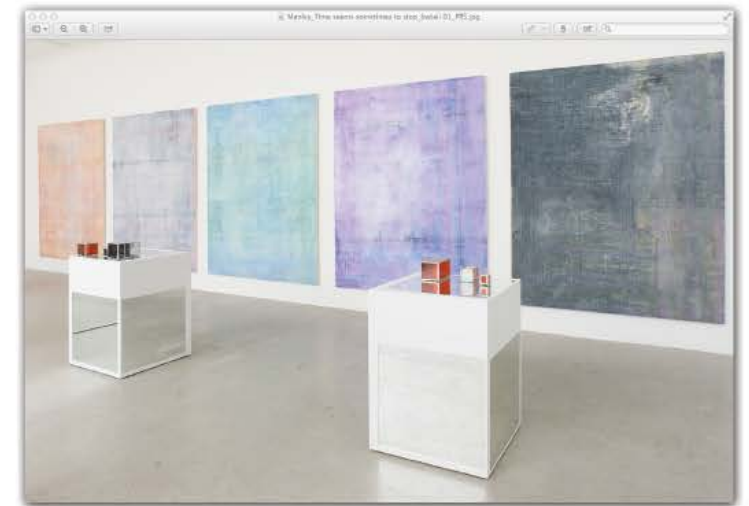
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JESSICA SILVERMAN GALLERY

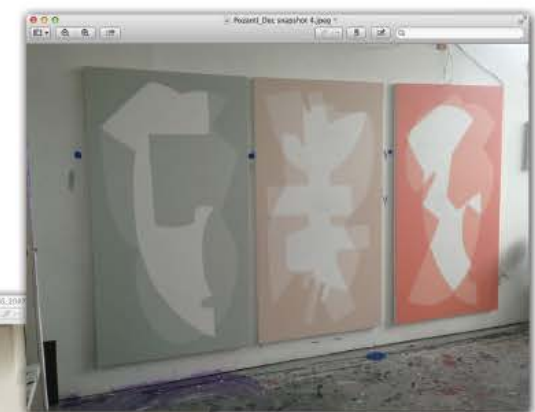
Dashiell Manley

Time seems sometimes to stop
January 9–February 21, 2015



Hayal Pozanti

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February 27–April 18, 2015



Ian Wallace

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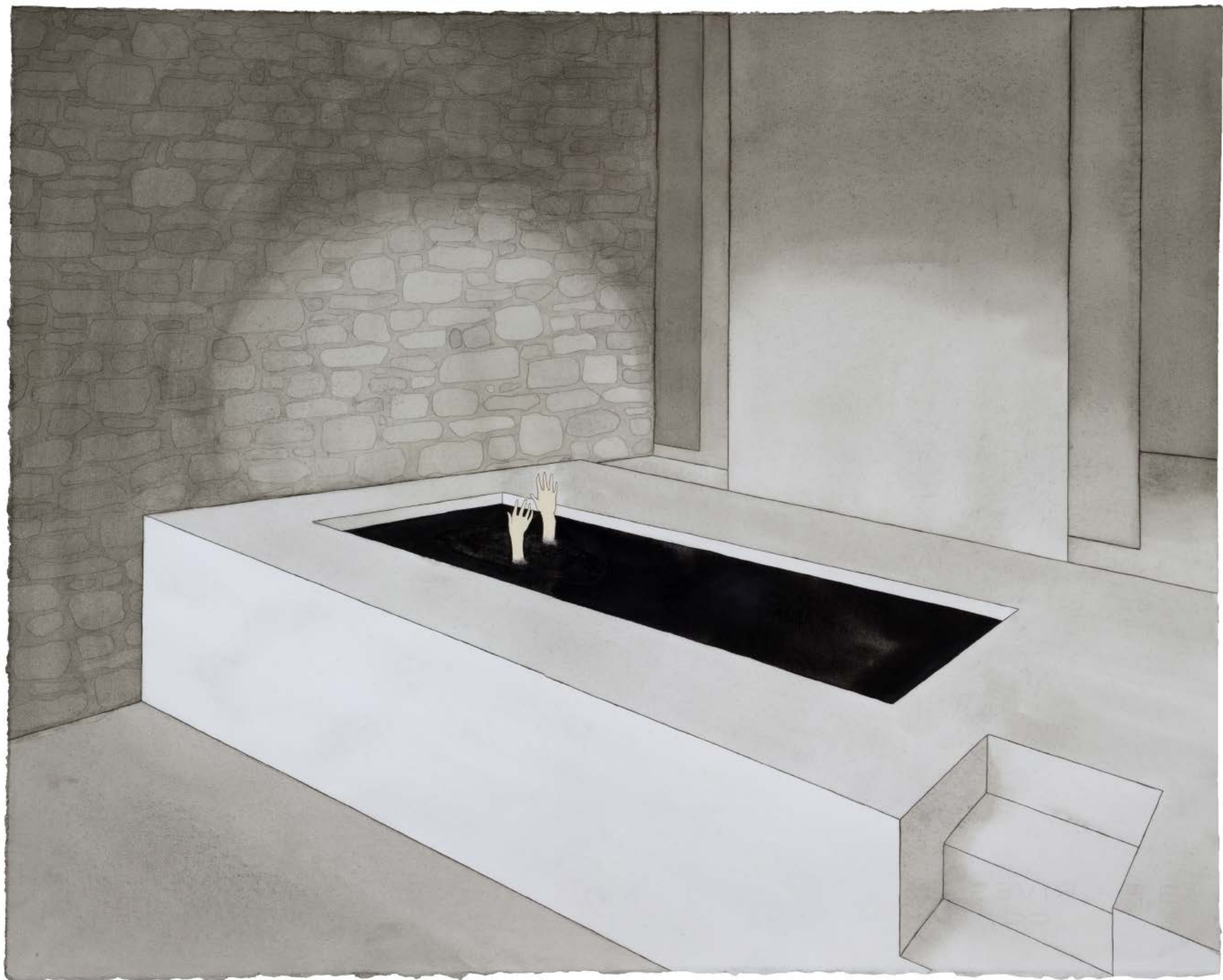


Image: Marci Washington, *From the Tomb*, 2013, watercolor, gouache on paper, 18x13 inches

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SFAQ [PROJECTS] ISSUE 19

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(Pullout poster, for more information visit sfaq.us)

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Willa Köerner

(Print page 32-33 + online)

Kadist Art Foundation + SFAQ

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MASTHEAD

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This issue is dedicated to everyone that has ever lost their lives to unjust police killings
#handsupdontshoot

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A Friendly Note From The Publisher:

This April marks the beginning of the 5th year of *SFAQ* . . . and things are about to get weird.

Because we are an art magazine we've decided to start breaking all the rules we've been pretending to follow the last few years. We hope it confuses you, we hope you get scared, we hope we piss some of you off, too. But we think you will be super stoked on what we are about to do. While we don't really know what that is, we know we're going to blow your minds.

Equality, change, and understanding are in. Hate is out. So is *Artforum* . . . that shit's boring. I mean, who actually reads it these days anyway?

Get with it. It's amazing we can all see each other at all. So why not do some good in the world?

Let's get crazy. *We out here.*

Andrew McClintock

Publisher / Editor in Chief, *SFAQ*

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Cover Image:
Petra Collins photographed
by Ryan McGinley, 2014. From
the *Yearbook* series. Courtesy
of the artist and Team (Gallery,
Inc.), New York.



Dear Max,

What does a diplomat for a country that isn't recognized do when he comes to the office in the morning?

Eric

CONTRIBUTORS

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

Anthony Choice-Diaz is a San Francisco Bay Area-based public intellectual, historical scholar, community organizer, and indigenous activist who researches and writes about social movements in the Americas.

Peter Cochrane values education, particularly of the public sort, but believes every ideology has its limits. When you hit that ceiling, break through. Educate yourself. Watch Youtube videos. Check out technical manuals from the library. Get lost in the hyperlink black hole that is Wikipedia. Read *SFAQ*. Never stop learning. Access to information must always be free. If the road is blocked, find an alternate path. And if you get frustrated, pet a dog for a while.

Dean Dempsey is an artist, writer, and filmmaker based in New York City. Represented by BOSI Contemporary New York, his paintings, photographs, and videos have been exhibited worldwide, including Germany, Italy, England, Pakistan, and throughout North America. He is in the permanent collections of the Kinsey Institute, En Foco, and the Crocker Art Museum. He has also been described as a verbally abusive selfish egotistical drunken maniac, and in high school was voted most likely to contract a venereal disease (citations needed). His debut feature film, *Candy Apple*, will be released later this year.

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.

Jessica Hoffmann is a coeditor/copublisher of *make/shift*. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *ColorLines*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *GOOD*, and *The Scholar and the Feminist*.

John Held, Jr. was recently included in the NY MoMA exhibition *Analog Network*, curated exhibitions in San Francisco and Phoenix, lectured at New York University, traveled to Japan and Italy, published significant essays on Japanese and Latin American Mail Art, and interviewed poet and bookseller Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

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.

Nicholas O'Brien is a net-based artist, curator, and writer. His work has appeared across the U.S. 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*, *ilikehisart*, *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.

Pat McCarthy is a zine maker and sculptor. In Brooklyn, he keeps and flies pigeons from coops on his studio's roof. The adventures of the birds and other projects are articulated in the zines *Born to Kill* and *Skirts*.

Leigh Markopoulos is a writer, arts manager, and the chair of the graduate program in curatorial practice at California College of the Arts. Formerly the director of Rena Bransten Gallery in San Francisco, Markopoulos came to San Francisco to take up the position of deputy director of the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts. Prior to that she was exhibition organizer at the Serpentine Gallery in London and at the Hayward Gallery. She has curated numerous exhibitions, including, most recently, *Love is a Stranger* at Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland, and has organized over 50 exhibitions ranging from solo shows of the work of Richard Artschwager, Dan Flavin, and Brice Marden to major group exhibitions such as *Monuments for the U.S.A.* and *IRREDUCIBLE: Contemporary Short Form Video*.

Paul J. Karlstrom, former west coast regional director of the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, is the editor of *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900–1950* (UC Press) and a co-editor of *Asian American Art: A History, 1860–1970*. He is coauthor of *Turning the Tide: Early Los Angeles Modernists, 1920–1956* and author of *Raimonds Staprans: Art of Tranquility and Turbulence*. Most recently Karlstrom wrote *Peter Selz, Sketches of a Life in Art* (UC Press).

Willa Köerner is an artist, writer, curator, and creative strategist working to bring art and technology together in meaningful ways. Recently, she has worked as a founding member of Gray Area Art + Technology's Cultural Incubator program, and on numerous art-focused, digital engagement projects for organizations such as The Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, Electric Objects, and SFMOMA. In 2014, Willa spoke at SXSW on the Internet and social media's affect on curatorial practice, and she looks forward to exploring this field further in a new curatorial position at Kickstarter. Willa has written for Art21, The Creators Project, *Complex Magazine*, and SFMOMA's Open Space, to name a few. Her work has been noted in *TIME*, Mashable, The Creators Project, *BLOUIN ArtInfo*, and beyond.

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 art philosophy, 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. He currently 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.

Lele Saveri was born in Rome in 1980. He studied photography at the University of Greenwich in London. Besides working as a freelance photographer for various international magazines such as *Vogue*, *l'Uomo Vogue*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vice*, *GQ*, *I-D*, and others, he worked as photo editor for *Vice* magazine from 2007 to 2011. Since 2012 he has been running 8-Ball Zine Fair, a biannual fair dedicated to self-publishing, always happening in different pool-halls in NYC (and recently also in San Francisco). Since 2013, Lele has also run and curated Muddguts, a project space in Brooklyn, NY, where he lives and works.

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.

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.

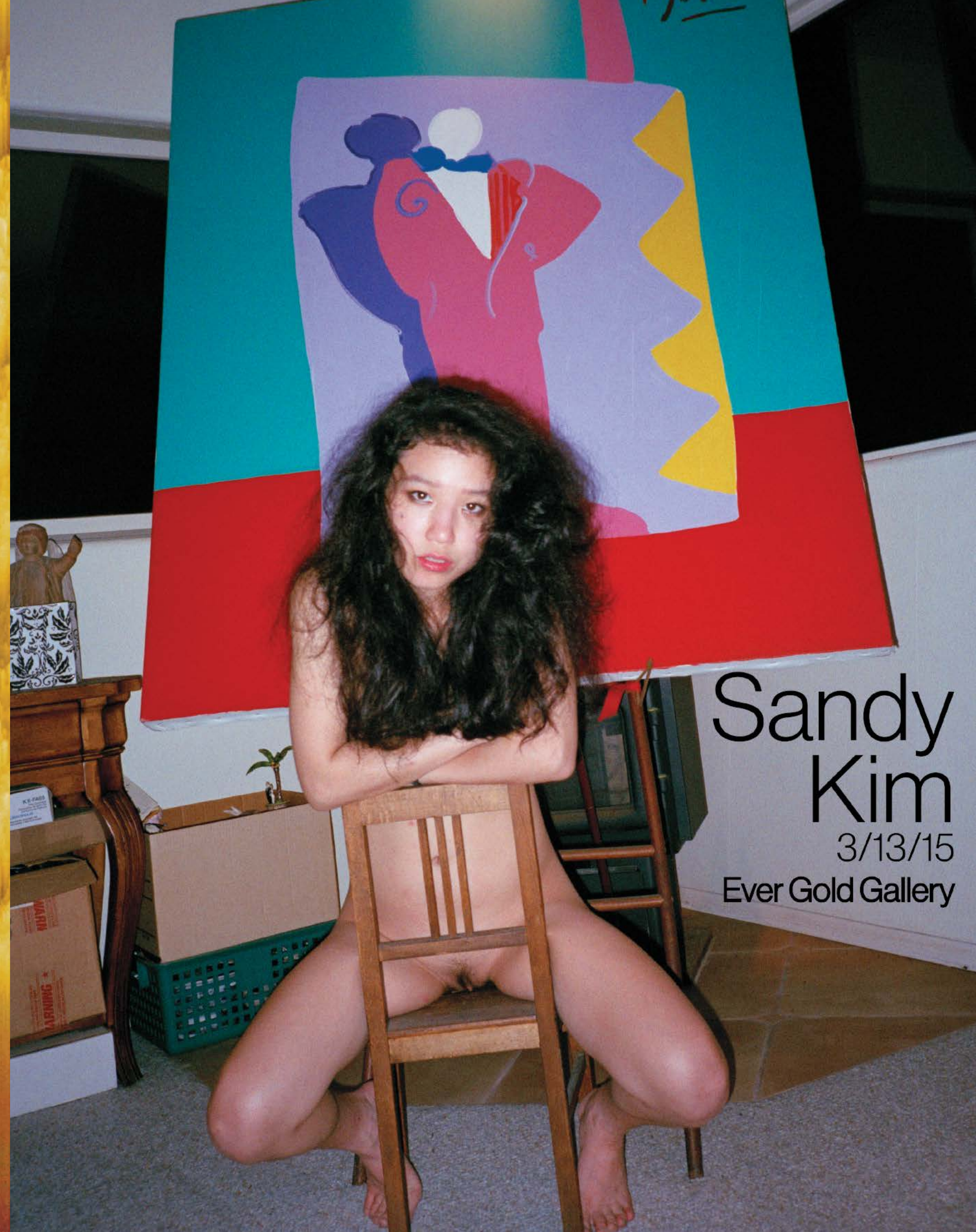
V. Vale is an editor, writer-interviewer, historian, photographer, and pianist. He was the publisher-editor of the 1977–79 zine *SEARCH & DESTROY* launched with \$100 each from Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and published at City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco. For Vale, punk provided a launching pad for cultural-anthropological explorations, including industrial/noise music, the writings of J.G. Ballard and William S. Burroughs, feminism, plus "Incredibly Strange" filmmaking and music, which he has chronicled with the *RE/SEARCH* series of publications founded in 1980. The *RE/SEARCH* series have become the equivalent of a countercultural bible: essential reading not only for punks but artists, musicians, and cultural fire-starters. Vale recently gave a lecture tour in Europe, including a graphic design workshop at Rietveld Academy, which produced a 64-page *SEARCH & DESTROY* 2014 publication in just 3 days.

Jocko Weyland is the author of *The Answer is Never—A Skateboarder's History of the World* (Grove Press, 2002), *The Powder* (Dashwood Books, 2011) and *Eating Glass*, a collection of short stories forthcoming from 1980 Editions. He has written for *The New York Times*, *Apartamento*, *Vice*, *Cabinet*, and other publications. Weyland is represented by Kerry Schuss Gallery in New York and lives in Tucson, Arizona, where he is curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson.

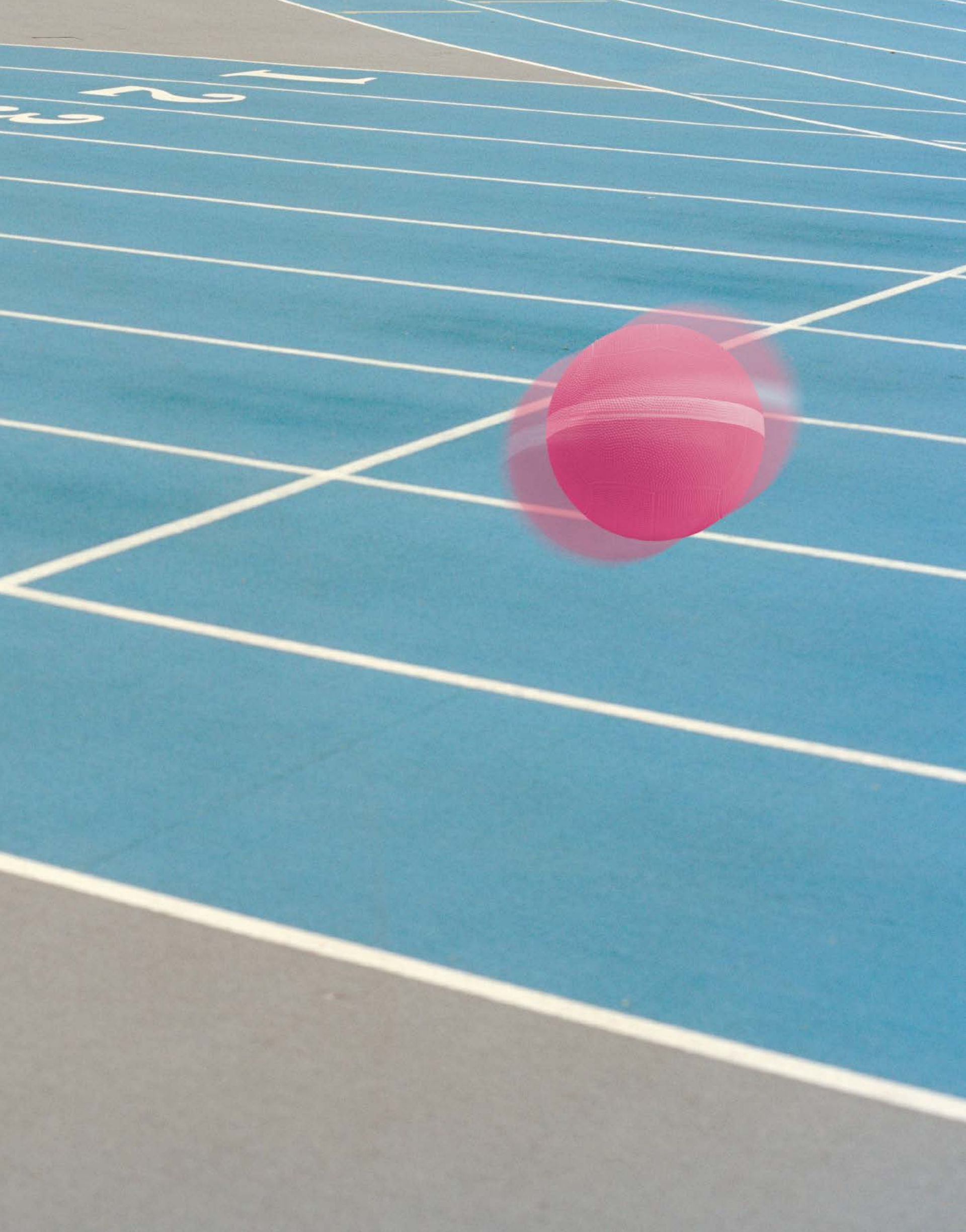
John Zarobell is assistant professor of international studies and program chair of European studies at the University of San Francisco. Formerly, he held the positions of assistant curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and associate curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He is a regular contributor to periodicals, has written for numerous exhibition catalogues, and has published in *Art History*, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, and the *Berkeley Review of Latin-American Studies*. His first book *Empire of Landscape* was published in 2010, and he is currently working on his next: *Art and the Global Economy*.

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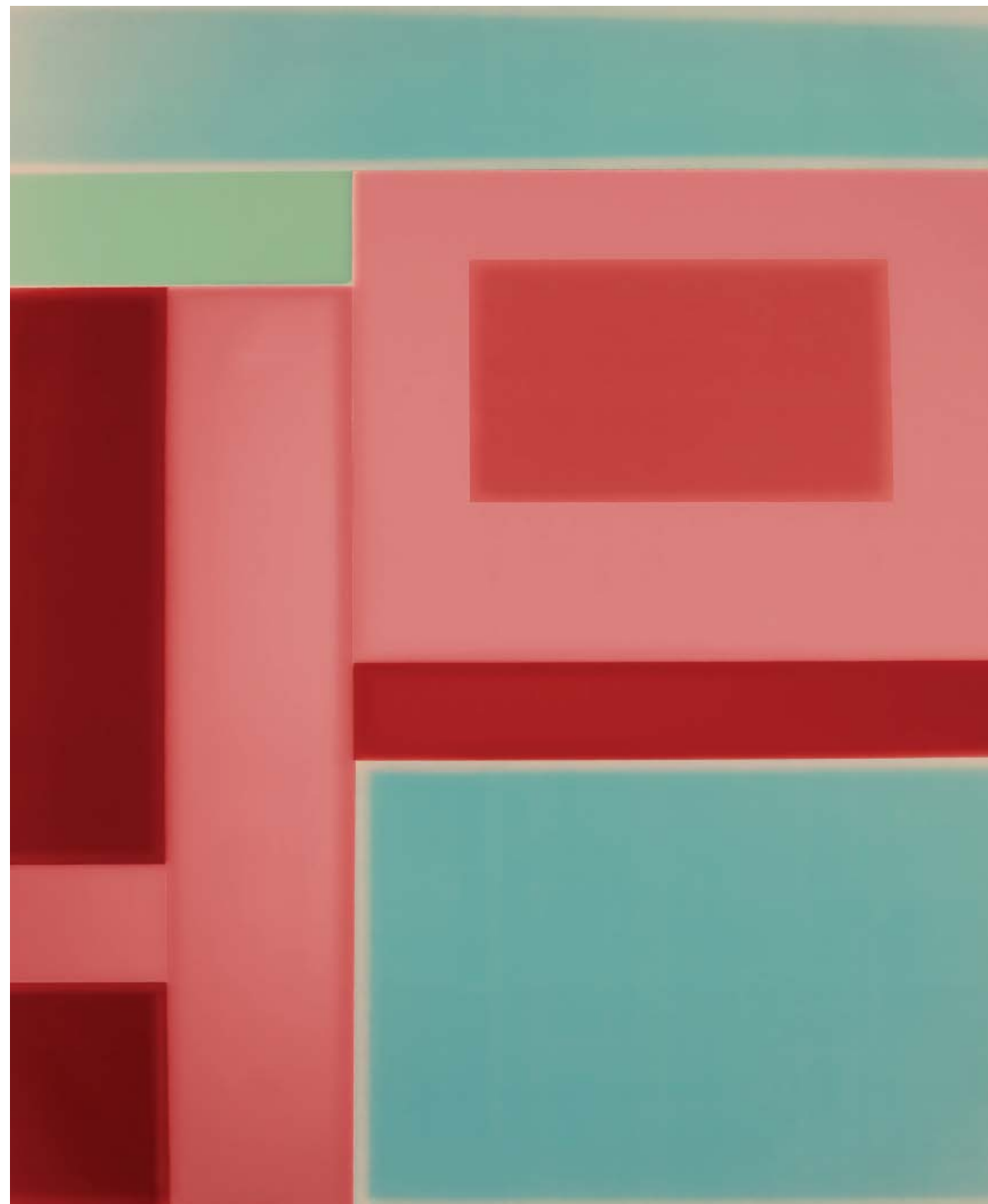
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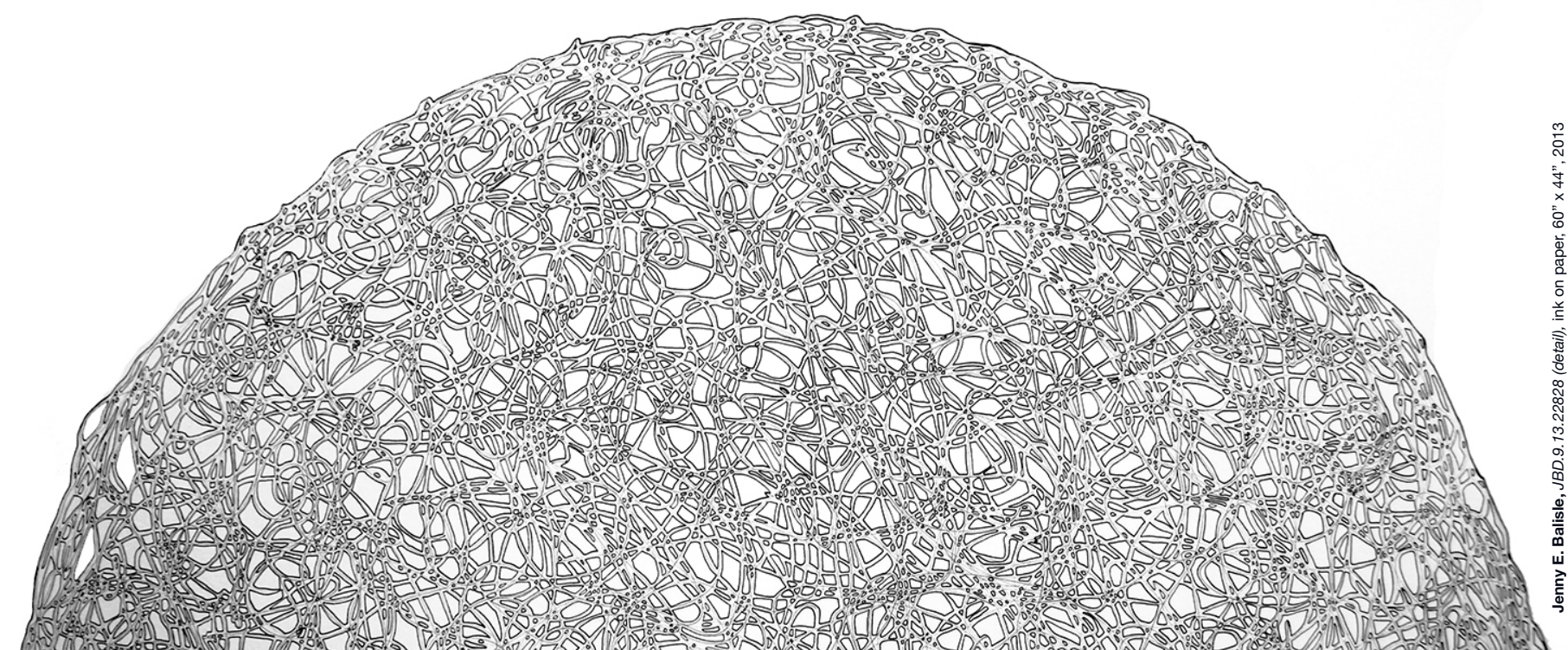
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Jenny E. Balisle, *JBD.9.13.22828 (detail)*, ink on paper, 60" x 44", 2013

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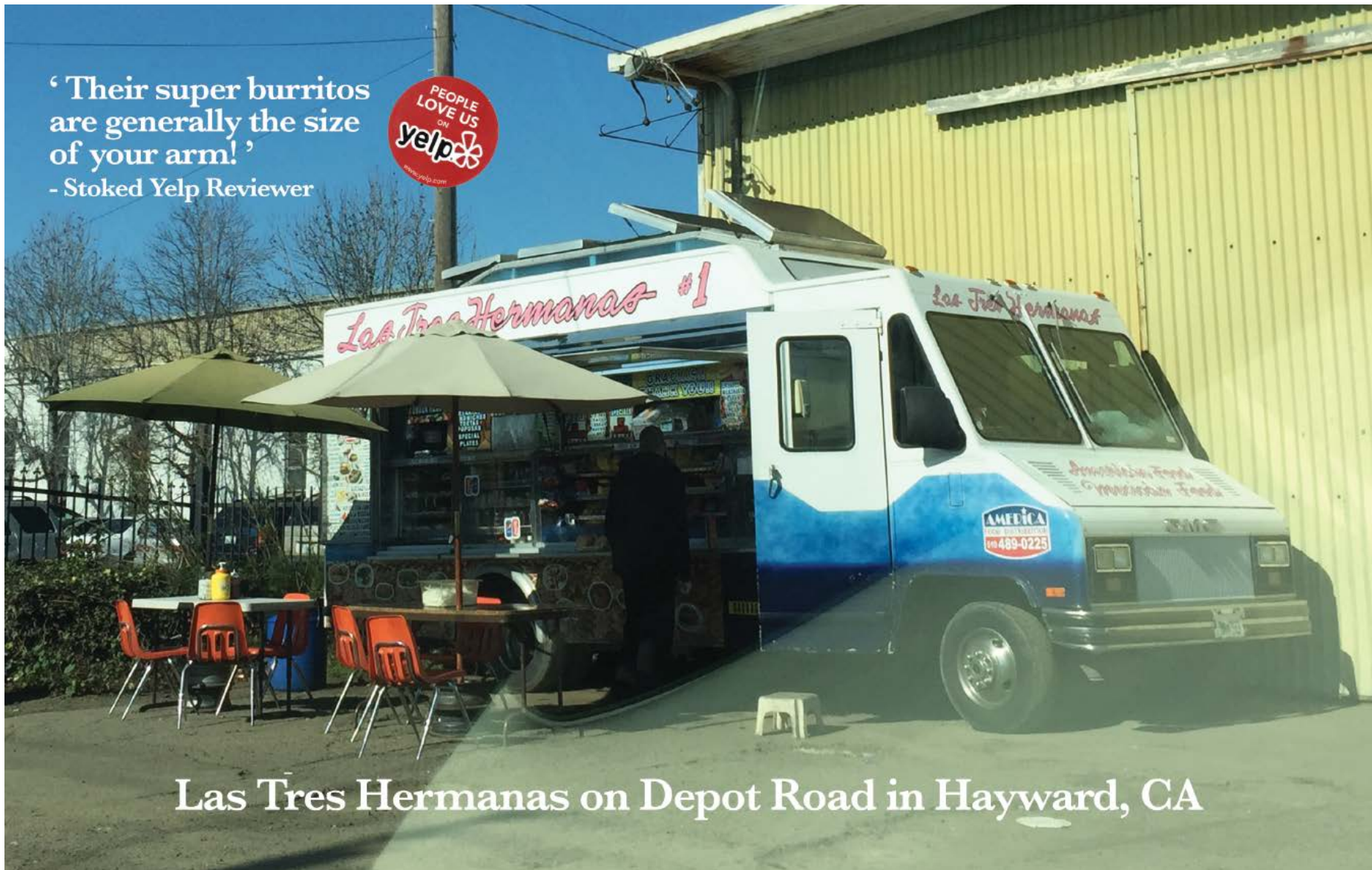


IMAGE // Charles Linder, Ghostang, 2005 - Present // Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery 16, SF and La Casa Del Tunel, Tijuana




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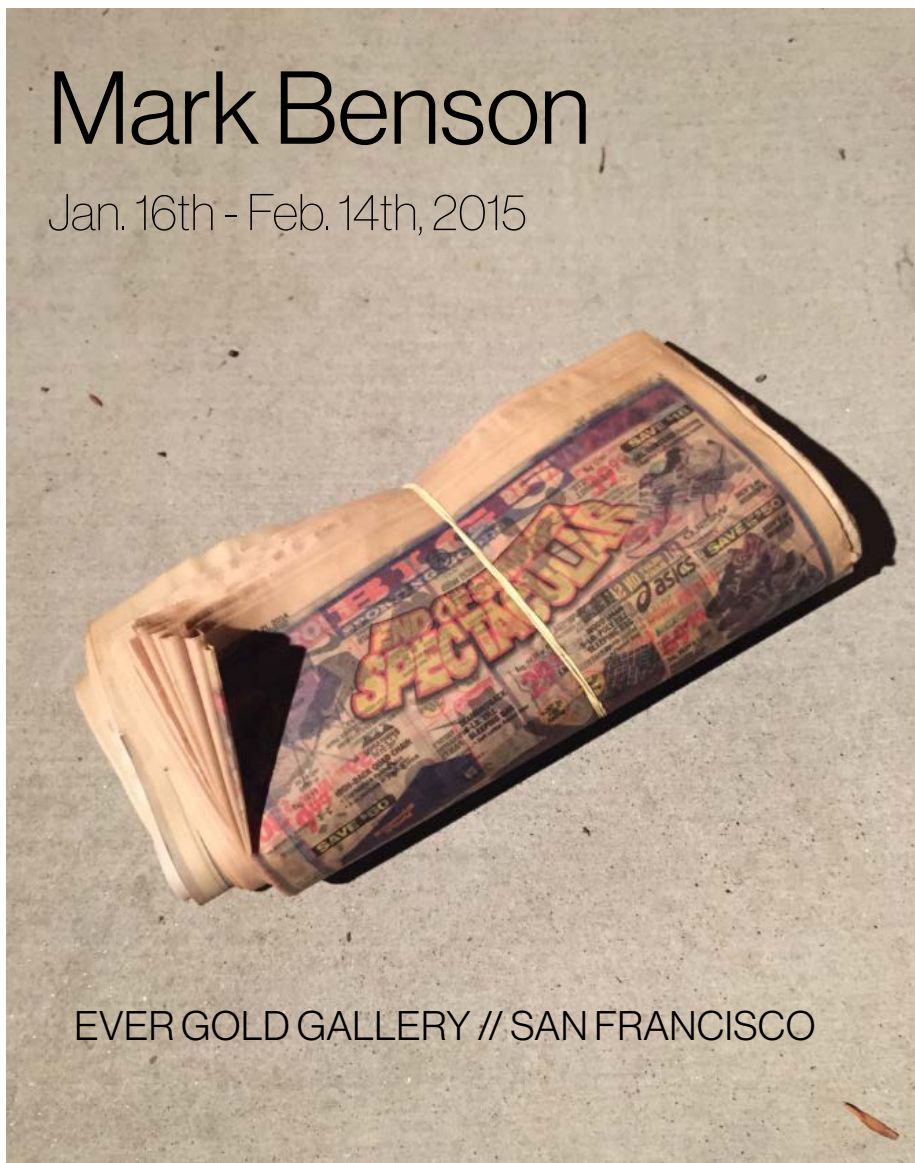


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SFAQ Issue 19 Columns

*An Internet Of Wars:
Military Networks And Network Militarization*
Ingrid Burrington, 36-39

Maps and grids unfurl in the mind when attempting to visualize the Internet—the wires that run through tubes underground and undersea and the snaking pathways from great service hubs dotted around the globe into the walls of our homes. But our Internet may be very different from *their* Internet: the streams of data running between governmental bodies and private contractors. What are the implications when one of these service providers, contracted by a military organization, is complicit in the very real warfare that exists at the long arms of these networks? A distinction can no longer be made between the physical world and the one created by the Internet. How do we negotiate our involvement in the network of perpetual warfare?

WeChat
Ben Valentine, 40-41

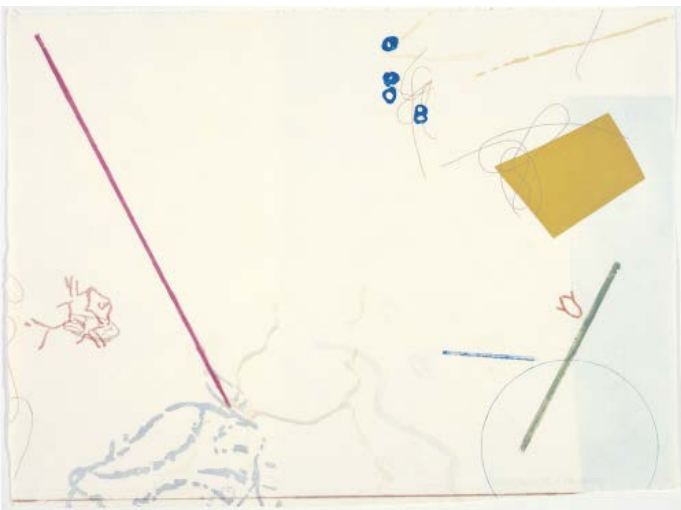
Traveling through Asia, Ben Valentine found nearly every person he spoke with using the Internet in ways the Western world has not much considered. Touted in the West as a restrictive and oppressive space throttled by the chokehold of a communist government, social media in China has boomed through the use of WeChat. Released in 2011, WeChat now boasts over 1.1 billion registered accounts with an average of 65% of Chinese Internet users communicating through WeChat. An estimated 3 billion webpages are shared every day, apps and businesses are created specifically for and within the program, and Tencent's net profit (the parent company of WeChat) clocked in at 3.7 billion yuan (604 million dollars) in 2014. But governmental censorship is still strict: political wordplay has recently been banned, real-name policies akin to Facebook's have been instated, and any language against the government is strictly forbidden. Are social connections through codified messages merely shouting into the void or building an affirming ecosystem of individuality?

Where Is The Risk In Digital Art?
Nicholas O'Brien, 42-43

"A work or product that is confronting something contentious in society or culture can often be considered a risky endeavor for an artist at any level of their career." Nicholas O'Brien begins his column on the risks of making art in an economic system has proven hostile to artists with a career-destroying maxim. Is new abstract painting flying off of gallery walls and creating record sales simply because it's safe? As the National Endowment for the Arts revoked individualized funding due to multiple controversies from artists such as Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe, general institutional funding has by and large become devastatingly competitive and safe. Even the international superstar Marina Abramović recently turned to Kickstarter to fund her institute for art. Are crowd-funding and venture capital—hot words in the start-up tech economy—methods of funding that should apply towards the creation of digital art? Without risk we shift lazily and laterally but never grow.

Eco-Poetics And The Visual Art Of John Cage
John Rapko, 44-45

During his time lecturing at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia, John Rapko made penetrating inquiries attempting to understand contemporary art. These public conversations were collected and recorded into the 2009 book *Logro, Fracaso, Aspiración: Tres Intentos de Entender el Arte Contemporáneo* (*Achievement, Failure, Aspiration: Three Attempts to Understand Contemporary Art*). Using the dogmatism John Cage applied to his sonic masterpieces as a lens to access and unravel the prints he made for over 20 years at Crown Point Press in San Francisco, Rapko seeks to understand the aspirations of contemporary artists that move them to create, to fail, and to push forward. In his words: "Without an appreciation of not just Cage's aims, but also of the motivations for those aims, it would be even more difficult to understand why *Déreaux* failed—that is, failed artistically as a satisfying expression of an eco-poetics... [t]he value of folding in is honored, but not everything is ready just yet to be used in some other configuration."



On Point 2.05 // The Hustle Of Language
Mark Van Proyen, 46-47

The tale of how dudes making idiots of themselves on *Jackass* (and laughing all the way to the bank) made its impact on performance art might go something like this: "I mean, if Chris Burden can get famous by having a guy shoot him in a gallery, then I should be able to get famous by falling off of my skateboard over a bed of hot coals, right?" Theatricality? Absurdist cabaret? The physical incarnation of language? Using examples set by Michael Peppe and the work of the Muistardeaux Collective, Van Proyen looks at opposing uses of language-as-performance through hyper-constructed, timed, physical and vocal movements and the chaos that ensues from manic free association (read: social media). Choreography and spontaneity may have merged in this age of hyperactivity and the performative state of language will continually evolve.

Three Perspectives On The Globalization Of The Art Market
John Zarobell, 48-49

One word will be etched as the epitaph for the 20th century: "globalization." Some will sing its praise and some will denounce it as the keystone for the death of the living wage, local labor, and the epitome of capitalist greed. As the art world rests on the shoulders of big business and big money—now inextricably tied to the web of commerce known as globalization—what aspects of the art market can be considered good, bad, or ineffable? Who has profited from the meteoric expansion of the market? Where would we be without the nearly 200 annual art fairs and 150 biennials that dot every country on the planet? Whether the status quo is or isn't working for an arts economy, what are artists doing to envision actionable alternatives?

Journeys From And To A Destination Nation
Anthony Choice-Diaz, 50-52

Continuing his previous column *The Hidden Story In The U.S. Immigration Debate* found in *SFAQ 18*, Anthony Choice-Diaz unearths the historical and contemporary involvement of the United States in the brutality of Latin American wars, puppet governments, and the institutionalized barriers preventing immigration. As the United States was founded on the principles of Manifest Destiny—that the expansion and domination of the country was both inevitable and justified—total conquest took 19th-century armies west and south to claim massive swaths of Mexican land by force. For a country forged by the domination of other peoples, it appears a trajectory of war was laid with its foundation. "Today, some would argue, based upon the masses in the streets protesting against the flagrant police murders of the nation's Black population, that things haven't changed all that much since 1864. I don't pose this notion here flippantly: to understand the contemporary immigration drama one must understand that perpetual war is a central pillar of U.S. foreign policy, which has created a de facto refugee crisis continent wide."

Your Gaze Hits The Side
Jessica Hoffmann, 53-55

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, by way of Beyoncé's 2014 mega-hit ****Flawless*, cut through the polarized sexes like a hot knife through butter. After Beyoncé tells us that she's not "just his little wife" (and to "bow down bitches, bow, bow down bitches") and before repeating that *what-the-fuck-ever* she and all women are doing is flawless, Adichie ends her 1:24-long spoken clip by defining the most contentious word to divide contemporary society: "*Feminist*: the person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes." This is a simple notion. It is an elegant notion. It is firm and decisive and begs that we stand together. It asks that you please sit down, shut up, and listen to those who have been and are being marginalized, because inequality is insidious and mercurial. In 1982 NY MoMA exhibited a retrospective of Louise Bourgeois's works marking the *first* time a woman was permitted such recognition. In 2014 HOWDOYOU-SAYYAMINAFRICAN? pulled their work from the Whitney Biennial "in protest of the inclusion of Joe Scanlan's Donelle Woolford project, which centers around a fictional black woman artist imagined by Scanlan, a white man." Tracing the ways in which art has relied on the existence of a normative center, Jessica Hoffmann considers 12 ways that women artists continue to exist as "the other."



An Internet Of Wars: Military Networks And Network Militarization

Ingrid Burrington

“There’s no real separation between the real world and the Internet. What we’ve begun to see now is a militarization of that space.” —Jacob Appelbaum, interview with *VICE*, 6 October 2013¹

I’ve been thinking a lot about this quote from Jacob Appelbaum for a few reasons. One is that it succinctly acknowledges that the Internet is a spatial construct as much as it is a social one. For the past year, I’ve been trying to see the Internet—by which I mean I’ve been trying to find, map, and understand its infrastructure and, through that infrastructure, understand the institutions and power systems that govern the network.

Another reason I’ve been thinking about this quote is that I’ve been trying to imagine what a fully militarized network space actually looks like. If an Internet of Things is the series of protocols through which networked objects talk to each other, what is the equivalent for networked defense systems? What defines an Internet of Wars? While trying to envision this network space, I realized that it technically *already exists*. The U.S. Department of Defense has its own networks, and its own network of networks. In trying to understand what an Internet of Wars actually looks like and how it shapes the Internet, you can’t do much better than the history and constituent parts of the Global Information Grid (GIG), the Department of Defense’s system that connects all of the military’s networked systems to each other.

The GIG’s networks span a wide spectrum of DoD agencies. Many of these networks are under the jurisdiction of the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA), a division of the DoD that began in 1960 as the Defense Communications Agency and created the original (and still in use) hotline system that directly connected the Oval Office to the Kremlin in 1963. Two of the networks maintained by DISA are NIPRNet (Non-secure Internet Protocol Router Network) and SIPRNet (Secure Internet Protocol Router Network), networks briefly in the news following Chelsea Manning’s release of thousands of secret documents (downloaded from secure government networks, via SIPRNet) to Wikileaks. SIPRNet, NIPRNet, the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System (JWICS), and several other secure, acronym-heavy networks make up the DISA’s Defense Information Systems Network (DISN). The GIG connects DISN to all the other networked systems that the military operates—satellites, radios, drones. The GIG is network-centric warfare made manifest: a protocol that allows for each constituent dataset, weapon, or communications tool to be used as building blocks in defense systems greater than the sum of their parts.

The idea of a government maintaining a parallel network for internal communications and documents doesn’t sound that staggering (banks do this for high-frequency trading, universities do it for research, cities do it at a much smaller scale) until you realize the scale at which a superpower sovereign military operates, the kind of infrastructure such a scale en-

tails, and how rapidly that infrastructure has grown in the past fifteen years. One way to get a grasp of the scale and scope of the DoD’s network infrastructure is to search through federal DISA contracts—in addition to cloud infrastructure support and operations services, one finds RFPs for pulling fiber and building submarine cables between military bases.

One of those cable contracts was used by human rights organization Reprieve to argue that the company British Telecom (BT) essentially facilitated an extrajudicial murder program. The contract, issued in 2012, is for a cable network connecting RAF Croughton in the U.K. to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti—a military base where the U.S. launched a number of its drone strikes in Yemen. The contract specifies use of KG-340 devices, which use NSA-specified encryption algorithms. The GIG is the means by which drones can talk to base stations, satellites, and the men in distant military bases deciding whether or not to fire on civilians. While a lot of networked objects make up the GIG, cables in the ground are the backbone of this entire system. Essentially, Reprieve made the argument that by providing that backbone, BT was a participant in the maintenance of an illegal, extrajudicial killing program.

The British government rejected Reprieve’s official legal complaint, arguing the contract alone could not “show a specific link between the communications service provided and the impacts of drone operations.” BT argued that it merely builds the cables;

that they are not responsible for the use of communications secured to NSA standards. This attitude is alternatively a show of bad faith or displays a horrifying lack of self-awareness on BT’s part. It also poses the question of how far the line of complicity extends. How much responsibility does any company or individual bear for *merely* laying the cable, *merely* writing the protocol, *merely* making the trains run on time?

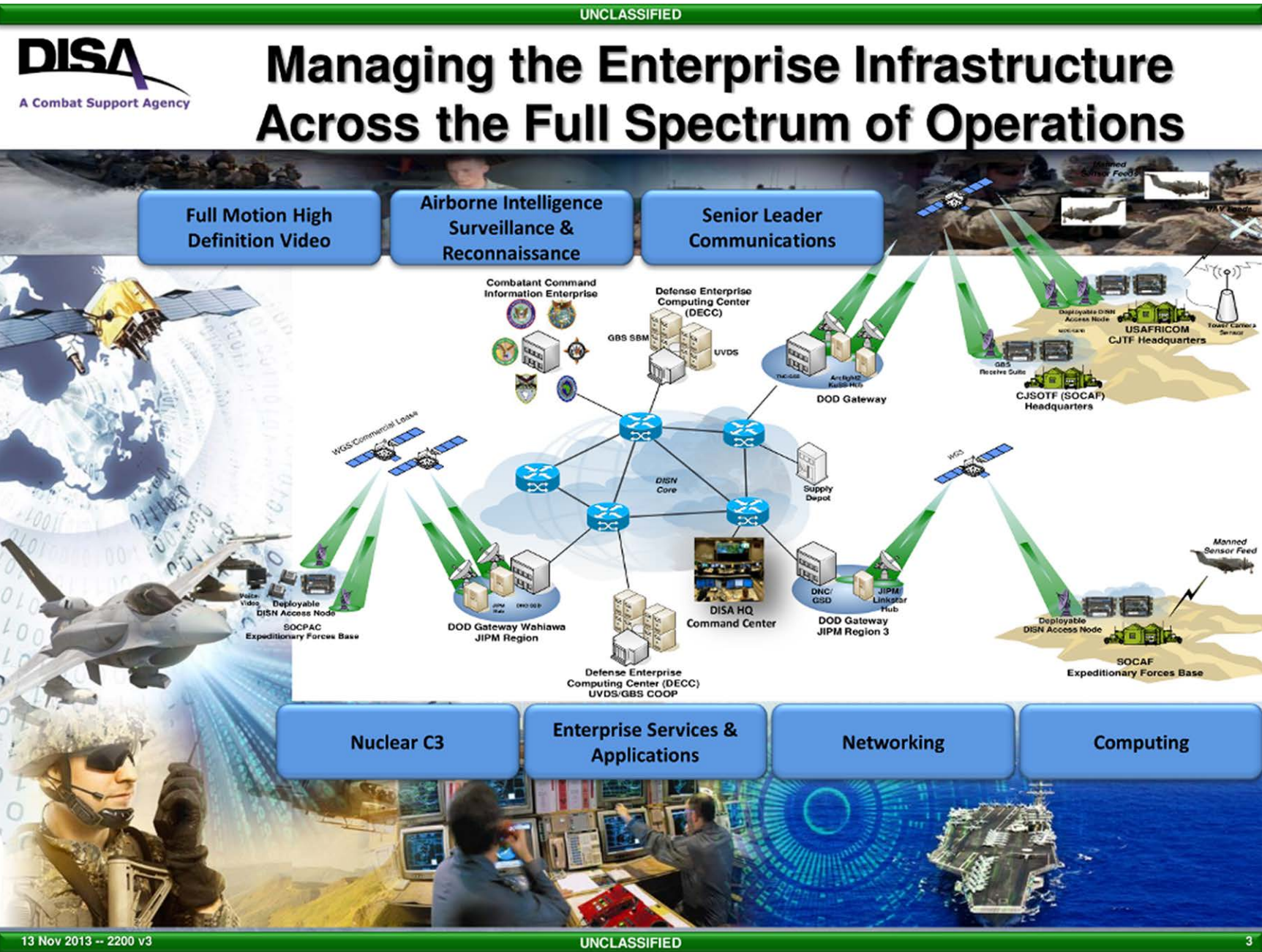
And how exactly can any infrastructure provider not be complicit when the networks it is building have been so explicitly weaponized? In a slide deck from a defense contractor about securing fiber infrastructure, I came across the following quote from a DISA strategic plan written in 2006 (emphasis mine): “Our Command & Control Networks are truly being *transformed into a weapon system* as they get leveraged more and more by our soldiers—and as such, need to be protected from the increasing focus and efforts of our enemies to attack them using any & all means ...” This is to say that cyber war’s doctrine isn’t merely that the network is a means to a weaponized end, but that the DoD apparently views *its own networks as a weapons system*. In this context, the hyperbolic rhetoric of “cyber war” makes a lot more sense. The DoD

views what we call the open Internet as a weapons system and/or potential existential threat because it uses its *own* networks and systems as a weapons system to impose existential threats upon other nations, sectarian groups, and American citizens.

Like the majority of the military-industrial complex, a lot of the DoD’s network infrastructure is built and maintained by contractors—not just telecoms like BT but also software and security companies. The trope of military contractors diversifying to police departments became well worn following the military drawdowns of Iraq and Afghanistan, but the focus is generally on tactical gear and military vehicles, not the infrastructure emerging in the wake of network-centric warfare. The concept of network-centric policing has so far been mainly associated with predictive policing research, but its rise has roots in both the acceleration of network-centric warfare and the emergence of the “smart city” paradigm.

Perhaps few cities were as adept at adopting network-centric law enforcement strategies as New York (which makes sense given that the city is basically the birthplace of data-driven policing and was dra-

matically shaped over 12 years by a billionaire mayor who made his fortune on proprietary data services). In 2010, New York City paid Northrop Grumman \$549 million to build NYCWIN, a citywide public safety broadband wireless network (ironically, the NYPD has been slow to adopt for its own purposes but it’s proven pretty useful for other networked projects by the Department of Environmental Protection and the Parks Department). In 2012, the NYPD unveiled the Domain Awareness System, a massive partnership with Microsoft that centralized surveillance feeds and other networked services in the name of security. In 2014, the NYPD began a \$1.5 million pilot program to implement ShotSpotter, a controversial networked sensor service that’s supposed to rapidly detect gunshots in urban areas (and, as was discovered in an incident in Massachusetts, can also detect and record voices). Most recently, the NYPD has begun to implement pilot programs equipping police officers with networked body cameras. The body camera program has its roots in the *Floyd v. City of New York* verdict that mandated dramatic changes to the NYPD’s stop-and-frisk policies, but its implementation has coincided with increasing demands across the country for police body cameras in the wake of the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown.



Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA). <http://www.disa.mil/>. Courtesy of the Internet.

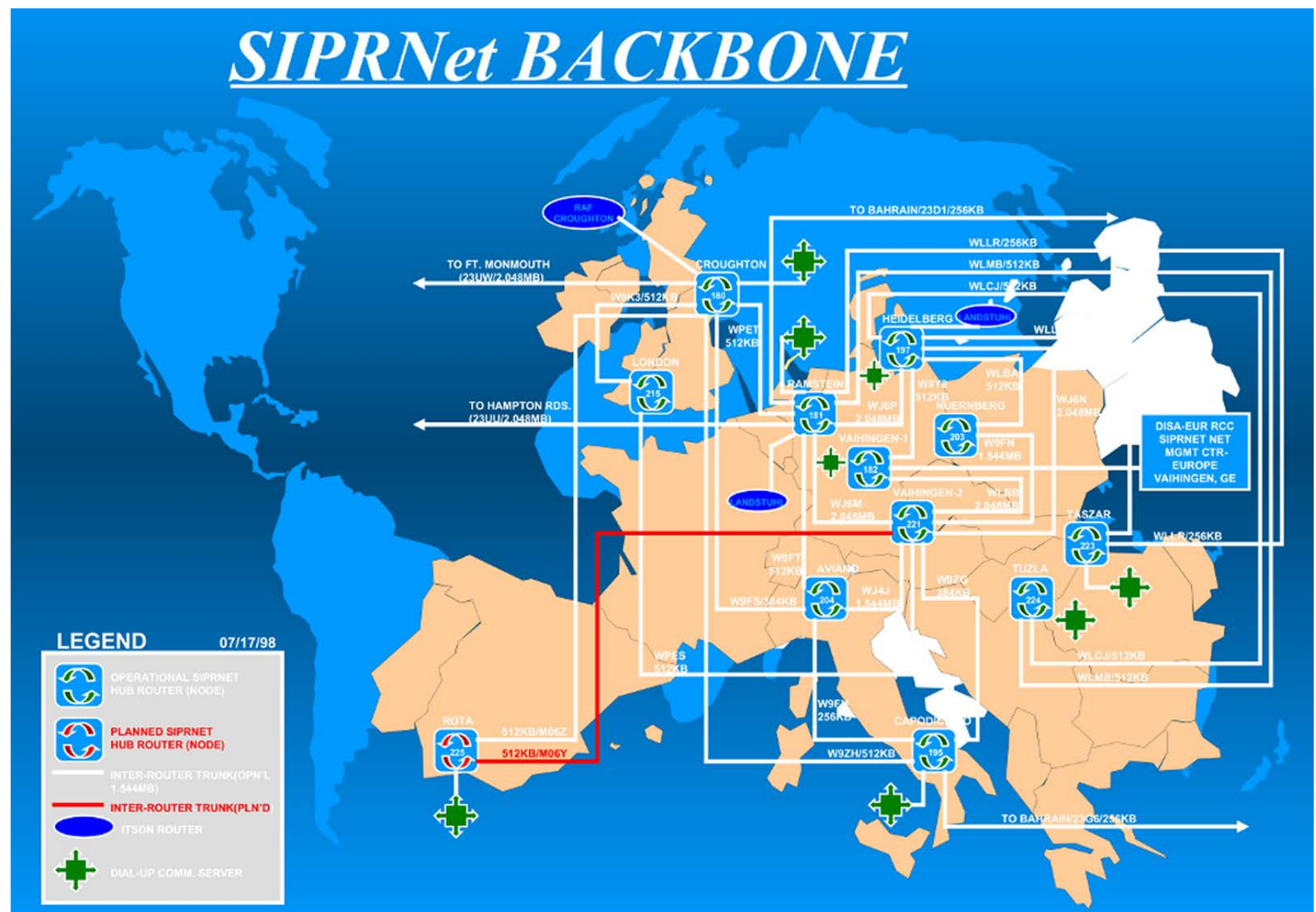
Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA). <http://www.disa.mil/>. Courtesy of the Internet.

Another increasingly popular instrument of network-centric policing is not itself infrastructure but the impersonation of it. Stingrays, a surveillance tool manufactured by military contractor Harris Corporation, capture unique data about cell phones by setting up a fake cell tower that phones connect to while searching for a signal. Combined with other technologies (also manufactured and sold by Harris), Stingrays can be used to eavesdrop on conversations and text messages. Disclosure about police use of Stingrays has been limited and efforts by groups like the ACLU to find out more about their use have hit a number of legal roadblocks. Although technically Stingrays are supposedly used in the service of trying to capture and intercept individuals' communications, the devices aren't designed to capture a single target—they're IMSI (International Mobile Subscriber Identity) catchers, indiscriminately accepting and

There is no separation between the real world and the Internet, and there never has been. As the false boundaries between those spaces blur, similarly imagined boundaries between state and corporate interests, between infrastructure and weapons systems also reveal themselves to be fictitious. To some extent, the emergence of network-centric warfare and network-centric policing reflects a general shift toward a network-centric *everything*. And to an extent, both military and police are correct to perceive the network as a potential existential threat to their methods—not only because that’s how they’re using networks, but also because networks are being used to circumvent them. One of the reasons that recent protests against police violence in cities across America have so successfully shut down cities (blockading traffic, interrupting sporting events, disrupting shopping centers) is that they have been well networked yet still thoroughly decentralized. March routes are contingent, communicated mostly in the moment. Every evening I returned home from one of the protests following the non-indictment of Darren

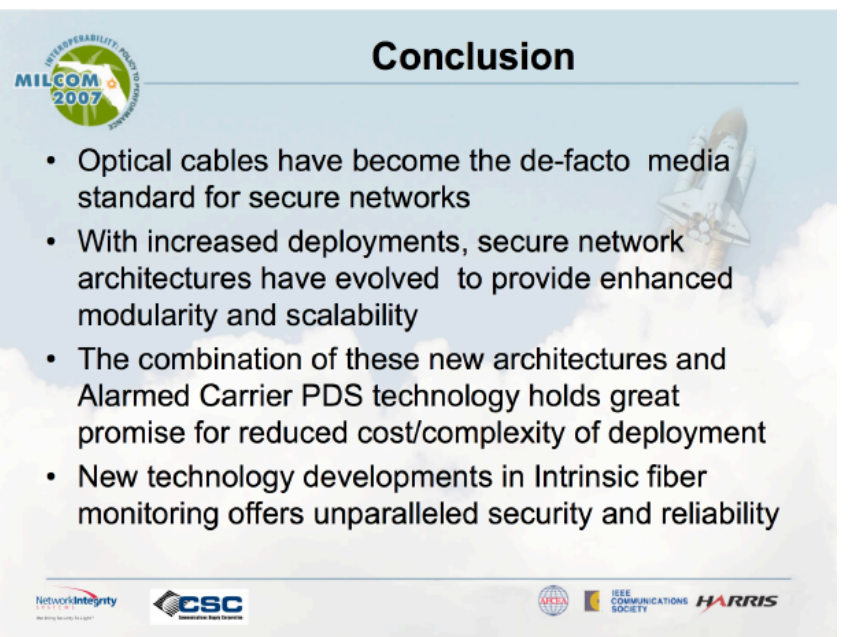
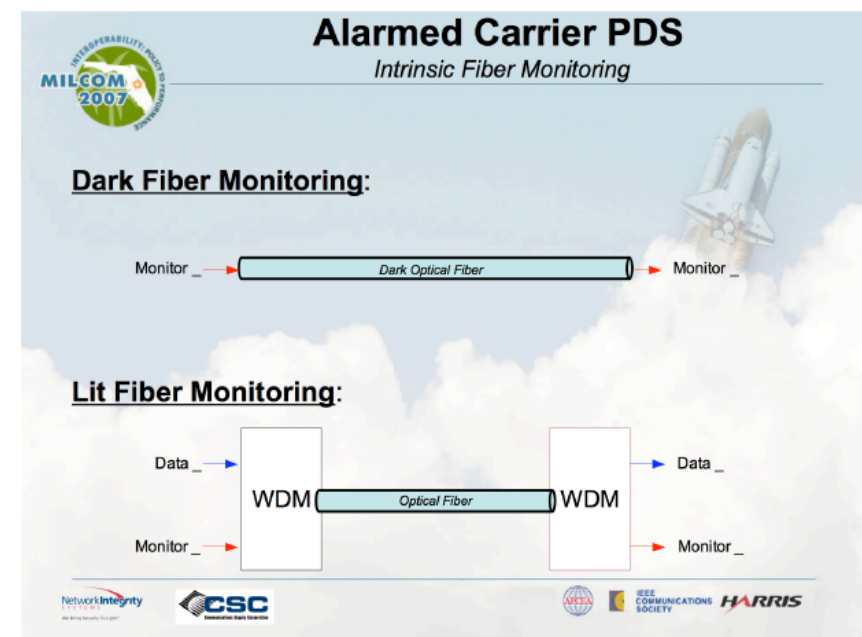
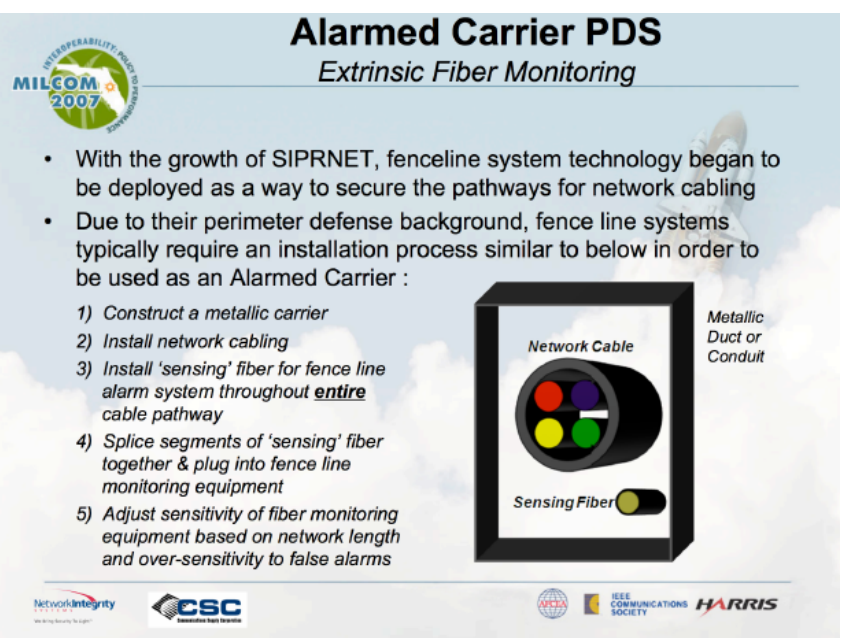
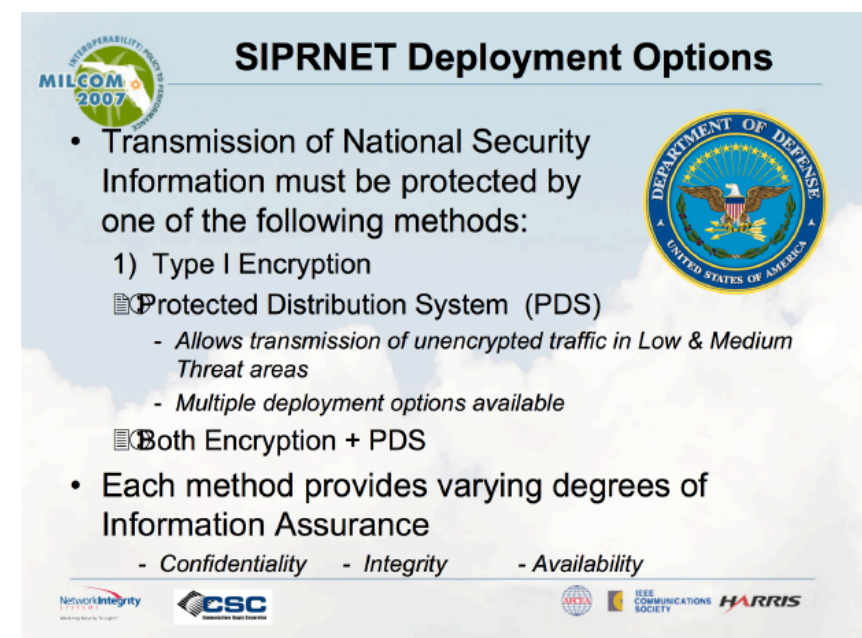
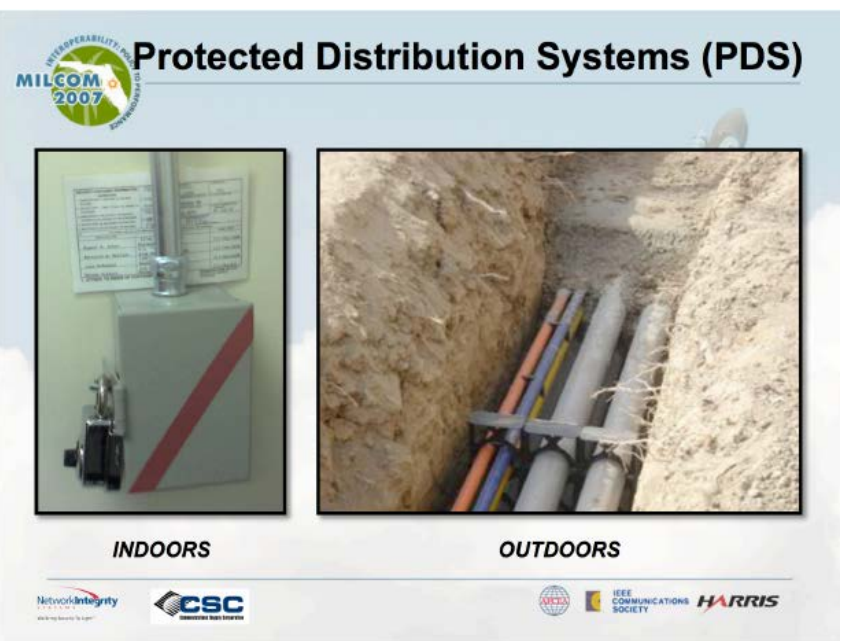
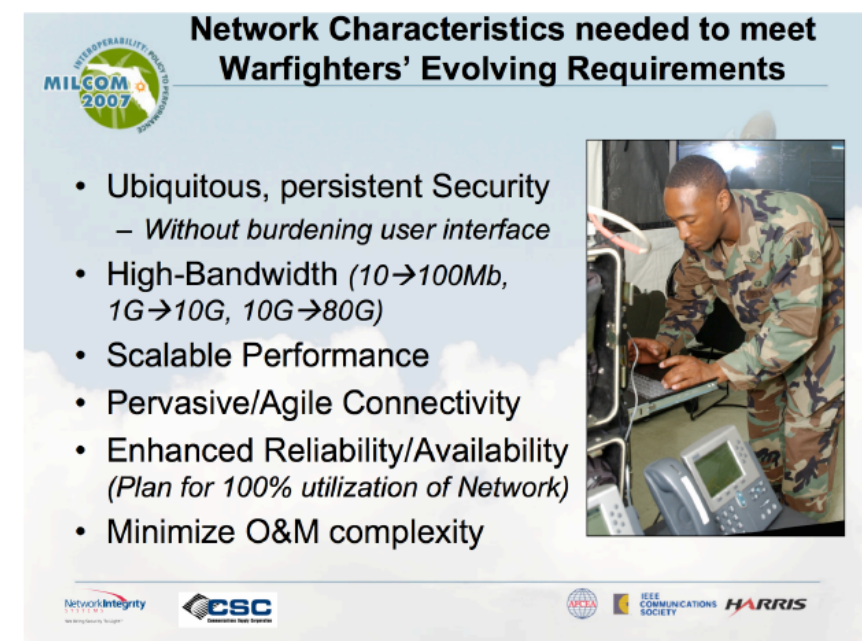
This is where I continue to find hope in the face of an increasingly militarized Internet—in localized models, in the contingency of emergent systems. The way in which activists build and use networks is largely in opposition to the hyper-centralized, panoptic model of network-centric warfare. Part of this is simply a matter of scale. In the face of an increased militarization, policing, and weaponization of networked space, the act of building an entirely separate, global parallel network requires an act of secession—not merely in a figurative John Perry Barlow sense, but a heavy, physical, infrastructural one whose borders, frankly, will never be legitimized. We can't just build a "new Internet" or demand a return to an early 1990s Internet that never was any more than we can wash our hands of or return to a United States of America that's not inextricably tied to structural racism. But we can carve out pockets of opposition and contingency within the networks we have. To conceive of a future beyond a militarized network, one must remain illegible to it.

1) <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/jacob-appelbaum-utopia-interview>



Computer Weekly, *Drone Kill Communications Net Illustrated*, <http://www.computerweekly.com/blogs/public-sector/2014/06/-siprnet-backbone---europe.html>. Courtesy of the Internet.

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{This page} Slides from PDF presentation by Network Integrity Systems, Inc. and Communications Supply Corporation. Courtesy of the Internet.

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WeChat

Ben Valentine

I'm sitting alone in a crowded station waiting to board my next train to carry me across the border from Southern China into Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. Curious about the sole foreigner in the station, and wanting to practice her English, the young woman next to me strikes up a conversation. Before long, it's time for me to board and for us to part ways.

"Can you add me on WeChat?" She asks, with a polite shyness, barely masking her excitement when I agree. I'm the only westerner in the station, and I'm slowly growing accustomed to being gawked at and approached by strangers wherever I go. Almost invariably anyone with any English asks to add me on WeChat within a few minutes of talking. She scans my QR code to add me and we go our separate ways. For the next two weeks I get an occasional message from her checking in on my travels.

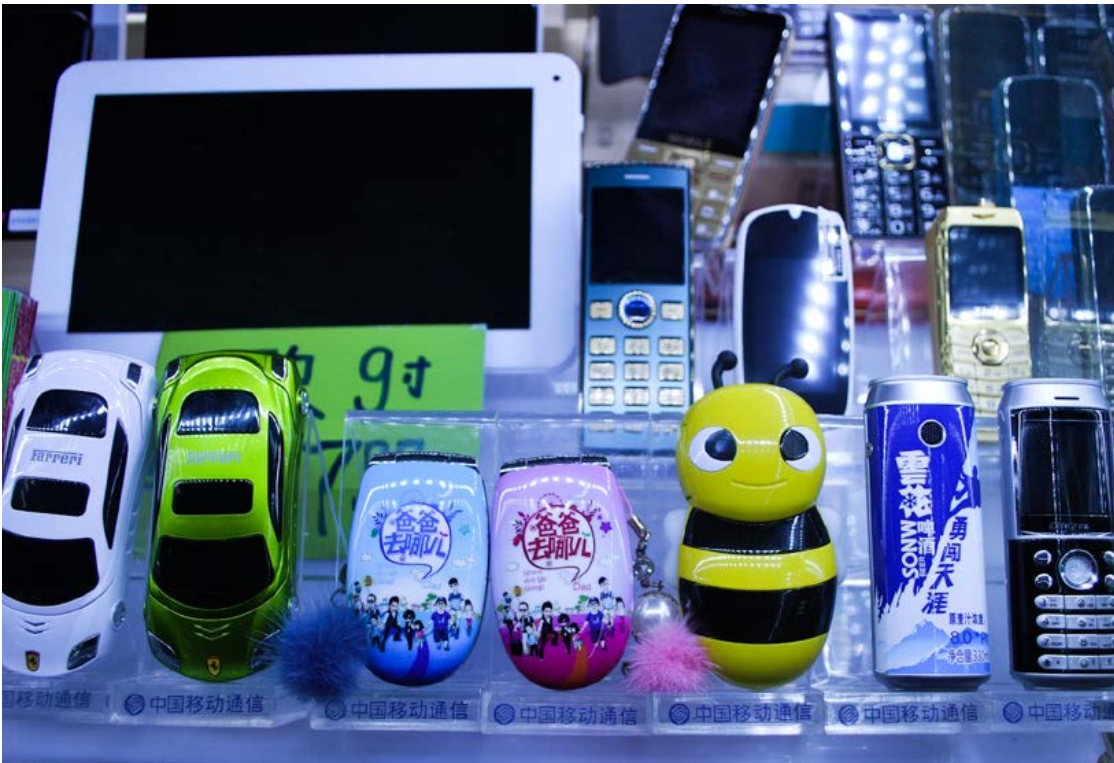
Many in the West haven't heard of WeChat, but I bet they will in the next few years. WeChat—or in Pinyin *Weixin*, meaning "micro message"—launched in the start of 2011 and quickly became the largest messaging app in the world. This would come as no surprise if you had been watching Tencent, the company behind WeChat, which is the fourth largest Internet company in the world¹, after Amazon, Google, and Ebay. In China, a mobile-first country (with well over one billion phones in use²), WeChat is experiencing a meteoric rise. If WhatsApp is worth \$1 billion, WeChat is immeasurable.

The value, however, of WeChat is not solely in its business plan, which is great, but in the kinds of conversations it allows. The multiplicity of uses allows more authentic and free expression—both political and social. At first glance WeChat doesn't look as powerful as an outspoken critic on weibo, but access to a platform for millions to have more authentic, open, and ultimately subversive conversations is more powerful than the loudest broadcast medium.

I had been introduced to WeChat a year earlier to stay in touch with international contacts, so I knew how it worked. Yet as I traveled through China the flexibility and ubiquity of the app was striking. I asked everyone who could speak English—which means those more educated and wealthier than average—what the most popular social media app is and why they liked it. WeChat was the top of every list, but the reasoning varied dramatically.

Some used it to talk with their friends. Some more entrepreneurial kids were starting a business on their WeChat, selling makeup and t-shirts with its blogging service and micropayment system. Companies and groups of friends used it for group conversations. I used it with WiFi to call home for free. A few were more outspoken and loved to blog and share their lives with everyone who followed them. While Line, Viber, WhatsApp, and more all have most of these abilities, WeChat is the leader at putting them all together. In short, WeChat's success rests in how many different functions and audiences it can serve.

In Hong Kong I met with Gabriele de Seta³, a PhD student at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, who is doing research on digital folklore and media practices in mainland China to talk about Chinese Internet culture and in particular WeChat. When dis-



A collection of Shanzhai phones being sold in an underground market in Guilin, China. Courtesy of Ben Valentine.

cutting the migration from more public and broadcast platforms like Sina and Tencent weibo, de Seta told me that many users felt that weibo had too much spam, rumors, context collapse, and were subject to the the contentious political nature by both online personalities and crackdowns. Users felt they could better control their audience and be more authentic in smaller groups or one-on-one communication.

During interviews with de Seta about social media use, many people mentioned a feeling that all public-broadcast social media was becoming boring and filled with content that was *zhuangbi*, which is basically a poser—someone putting on a show to look good. Reflecting on weibo's decline and WeChat's subsequent rise, de Seta writes me over email:

"These personal walls and comments are never visible to people outside your friend list, making sharing and commenting relatively closed and 'safe' from outbursts of trolling, outrage, denunciations, and even human flesh searches that traditionally originated on more broadcast-type social media."

Seta's observations have been echoed in Tricia Wang's idea of the Elastic Self and Nathan Jurgen-son's Liquid Self, as I mentioned in an earlier article⁴ for SFAQ. Real-name and broadcast platforms elicit intense social pressure to perform, a problem compounded in China with government surveillance and a more proscriptive cultural normativity. In Wang's talk⁵ at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Wang said that, "Access to the Internet enabled them [networked youth] to discover and express themselves in ways that were not possible offline."

Wang points out that the Maoist regime broke personal trust through a dictatorship fed on informants. While this is no longer in practice to such an extent, the ramifications are still present in contemporary China, both online and off. But Wang isn't only referring to government surveillance as a barrier to fuller self-expression. Indeed, de Seta and Wang both stress the

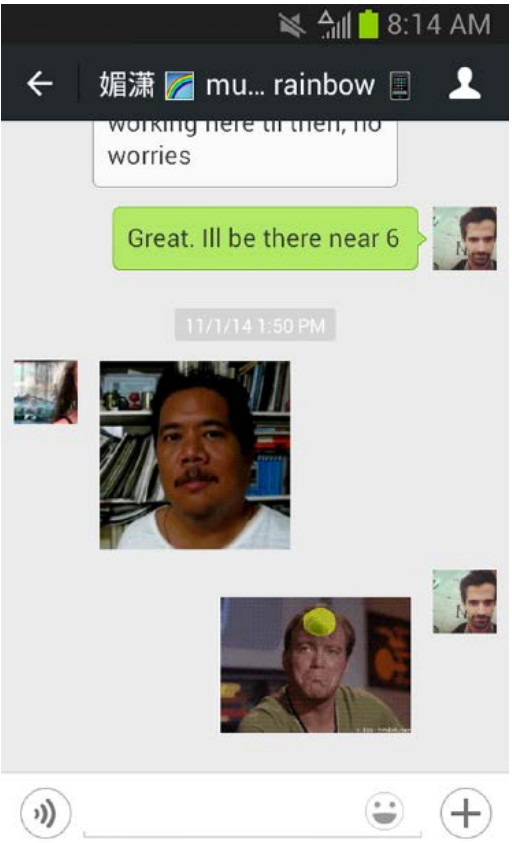
strict social expectations placed on Chinese youth in the family, their community, and by their peers. Constant public messaging caused a great pressure to perform in a specific, less authentic manner. While many users de Seta encountered had multiple weibo accounts for different messaging, WeChat made this desire much easier.

Government surveillance is considered nearly omni-scient in an unencrypted Chinese Internet, but nobody seems to mind unless they're engaging in conversations or plans to organize against the State. Everyone I spoke with during my month in China knew that there were things they could not say, but rarely seemed bothered by such limitations. The web, and especially WeChat, has allowed these networked youths to have more social freedom than their parents and communities had previously allowed—so what if they can't organize a revolution? This went against my strong commitment to free speech, but was echoed in Seta's and Wang's work and by everyone I spoke with.

One exciting way this new freedom of expression has been most obviously seen is through memes. As I wrote for *VICE*⁶, despite many in the West believing the Chinese web to be a surveilled black hole, I've found just the opposite to be true. The Chinese web is a vibrant and active space, full of puns, inside-jokes, and ever-evolving memes that migrate across many social platforms largely unheard of in the West.

Mandarin allows for fun wordplay in a way English does not. Simple shifts in tone and slight variations in written characters can make dramatic differences in meaning only noticeable by creative and fluent speakers. This, coupled with vast variations between local dialects at times only represented in oral communication, makes the audio messaging function even more powerful for native Chinese speakers.

However, many Chinese netizens are using WeChat not for precise and nuanced local dialects but for creative play with the national language. Most infamous-

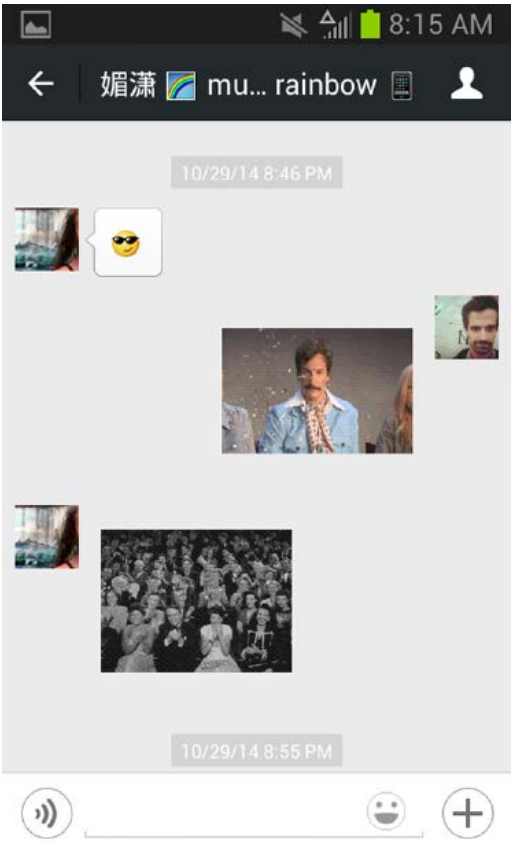


ly is Grass Mud Horse⁷, said *cao ni ma* in Mandarin, which, with a subtle tonal shift, becomes an expletive against a person's mother. In this case, "mother" falls under Chinese censorship, and the overt political nature of the meme is likely what made the Grass Mud Horse the most popular Chinese meme in the West.

Memes are everywhere on the Chinese web, but few are as political as the Grass Mud Horse. Much like the West, most of the memes are childish, funny one-liners, and reaction GIFs. Messaging apps in Asia, the first being Line in Japan, wisely recognized this trend, and made stickers—little animated pictures akin to emojis—to be used in messages. WeChat went further and allowed users to upload their own stickers and GIFs, letting conversations take on a new form of visual and creative dialogue.

While many rural kids I met in China loved using emojis and stickers on WeChat, many of the more networked urban youth used these animations at a dizzying rate. Conversations became a flow of inside jokes, emojis (usually in multiples), animated reaction gifs, and stickers all complementing and flowing around the words. Some I recognized, but many I had never seen and could no more decipher alone than hieroglyphics.

The two things that most caught my attention were the amount of porn passed between users (which is largely censored from public web content in China), and the use of Chinese politicians in memes. While I didn't find many that were overtly political, the very act of animating Chairman Mao's face to make an awkward smiling GIF was startling. As was repeated over and over to me, almost everything is allowed online, unless it's organizing against the State. So while State television is still heavily censored and cleaned, social media platforms like WeChat allow for very different conversations.



Examples of my meme and GIF filled conversations on WeChat while in China. Courtesy of Ben Valentine.

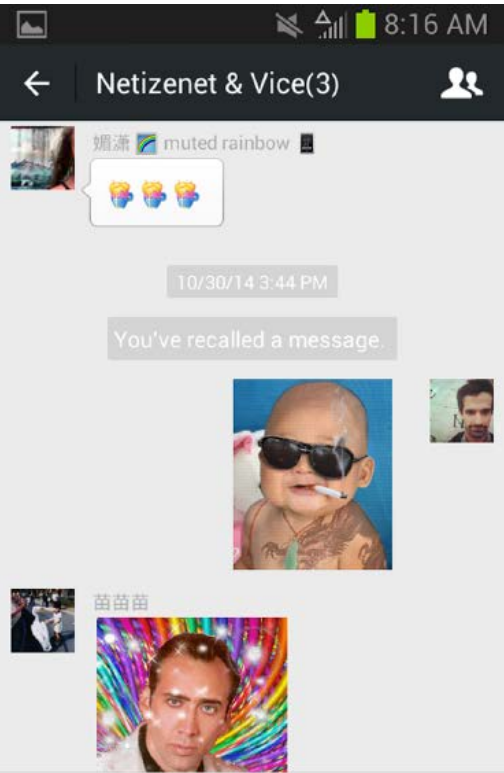
Wang believes the freedom to explore yourself in anonymous online spaces can facilitate more authentic expressions of self and stronger social bonds. During her research Wang found that eventually, albeit in a very small portion of the population, these bonds can lead to deeper civic engagement. However, this notion is heavily debated, especially as China has ramped up censorship, instated real-name policies akin to Facebook's but for the entire web, and other more punitive Internet policies.

Jason Q. Ng, a research fellow at the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab and author of *Blocked on Weibo*, writes "coded language may offer its users a feeling of valiantly fighting the system when they are merely shouting into the void—or, at best, speaking to an inner circle that already shares their views."⁸ Chinese censorship has a powerful grip on social media, which has recently expanded to ban political word-play.⁹

An Xiao Mina, co-founder of *The Civic Beat* (where I also work), has written that we must understand how positive and open expression, online or off, can be understood as internally liberating, even while looking insignificant in the face of systemic oppression.¹⁰ Mina believes that these "micro-affirmations" have become "a key part of building solidarity. The work of social change can start with the tiny changes in our hearts and minds." State-controlled TV and newspapers don't have many micro-affirmations, but WeChat is full of them.

This gets to an idea I'll call a micro-protest, a tiny affront to a cultural norm or law, often at the level of the individual or in communication among a small group.

The micro-protest is a change in how something is discussed; to make a taboo subject become socially acceptable, laughed at, or less serious. While a protest demands a new law, or that society change, the



micro-protest sets or demands a new expectation of interaction if only within a small group of people.

Unlike mass media, broadcast social media, and often real-name social media like Facebook, WeChat allows for micro-protests to easily form. While I don't believe that the micro-protest will necessarily make a net-positive change, without the freedom to communicate in an authentic way where this type of micro-protest is allowed, the opportunities for people-led change remain slim.

I do believe WeChat (and the web in general) is building an ecosystem that could unlock the power of the general public. What we choose to do with that ability remains unclear and is likely reliant on even larger systems such as education and economics. Micro-affirmations and protests, privacy (at least to your general community if not the State), and more free expression and creativity—these are invaluable. These wild animated GIFs, shared in private with strangers or our closest friends, allow us to more fully explore ourselves.

1) <http://www.tencent.com/en-us/content/at/2014/attachments/20140319.pdf>
2) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/20/china-mobilesubscribers-idUSL4NOJ51ZN20131220>
3) <http://paranom.asia/>
4) <http://sfaq.us/2014/08/making-it-online/>
5) cyber.law.harvard.edu/events/luncheon/2014/02/wang
6) <http://www.vice.com/read/chinas-first-net-art-exhibition-113>
7) <http://www.88-bar.com/2012/02/a-curated-history-of-the-grass-mud-horse-song/>
8) <http://www.technologyreview.com/view/528521/the-diminishing-returns-of-tricking-chinas-online-censors/>
9) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/28/china-media-watchdog-bans-wordplay-puns>
10) <http://medium.com/the-civic-beat/snap-snap-snap-3f68a957668e>

Where Is The Risk In Digital Art?

Nicholas O'Brien

When it comes to the creation of digital art or media, risk can be talked about in two different ways. One way is to discuss it through the lens of the danger of the content. A work or product that is confronting something contentious in society or culture can often be considered a risky endeavor for an artist at any level of their career. This kind of risk could partially be the result of creating something contrary to the rest of an established way of working—for example making essayistic videos about war after having been a successful abstract painter. Or this risk could be a constant pursuit of creative alternative or subversive artworks that continually challenge the status quo.

However, the content of an artwork is only one possible way to gauge its risk. The other way is to talk about risk from a financial standpoint: evaluating the worth or value of a work prior to its execution based upon prior success and other market indicators. This type of risk has increasingly been discussed with regard to digital art due to the ways in which artists working in this vein (under a loose network of affinities with post-Internet, netart, or new media communities) have become associated with start-up culture or Silicon Valley innovation. Many of the links between digital art and start-ups are based on the similar channels and infrastructure in which these systems proliferate and are distributed. Yet another shared connection between the two communities and cultures revolves around an entrepreneurial spirit for brand building.

As network technology has become an essential financial institution for the decentralized distribution of goods and services (including labor and media), artists and businessmen alike have found ways of working around old-world regulatory bodies to gain direct access to consumers and audiences. In other words, where businessmen are turning away from standard business models, artists are turning away from traditional gallery models. In doing so, both seek to use the Internet as a shortcut to gain direct access to their "market audience" in order to deliver content in a more immediate way. Although many businesses have thrived in providing more direct services to their audiences and consumers, many artists are still struggling to find a concrete way of capitalizing on adopting new models. This is where looking at risk—from a fiscal perspective—can potentially illuminate the problems of modeling cultural production after so-called innovative business strategies.

In an essay entitled *Startup = Growth*, programmer and investor Paul Graham discussed why venture capitalists interested in incubators and innovation are drawn into these industries. He states that one primary reason is that regardless of high risk in these companies, the potential return of profit or dividends can far exceed initial investment. For high-growth companies like start-ups the return on investment is also becoming easier and easier to guarantee—whether that be through an IPO offering or by company acquisition. For the producers within these industries, the risk of their efforts and labor is mitigated by this increasing guarantee. Also, most start-ups seeking funding that utilize their risk are already generating some kind of profit. According to Graham, the extra funding from venture capitalism is usually

for insurance, or otherwise to maintain and "choose" the growth rate of production.

Understanding that growth determines the risk and valuation of a product is often overlooked within the contemporary digital art marketplace. For start-ups the risk of their company is often offset by investment, but digital artists tend not to get the luxury of this insurance. Instead, the risk of production is allocated to one of two precarious locations: the artist themselves or their audience.

Contemporary artists have turned to crowd-based philanthropy services like Kickstarter and Indiegogo as a way of generating funds that otherwise would come from traditional patronage. One benefit of these platforms is that they can operate as a way of gauging interest in production for an artist seeking new audiences. But because the growth of these campaigns is still determined by consumers, the risk is never fully redistributed away from the producer (as it is with VC funding). Furthermore, when an artist turns to these platforms (as opposed to a gallery or state-run granting organizations) they are placing the burden of risk directly onto their audience. The decentralized patronage of an artist's network (or by the sponsorship of strangers) is only a way of creating temporary insurance against the risk of producing a new work.

Instead of leveraging the power of network technology to reach new audiences, implementing crowd-based funding strategies eventually leaves artists in the same precious state from which they started. The temporary nature of this funding doesn't inherently provide long-term ways of generating revenue, as is the case with start-ups seeking investment. Whereas VC funding creates insurance against risk, crowd-based funding only further entrenches an artist into a risky position. Part of this has to do with the kind of dividends and returns that art production can afford to investors. Part of this also has to do with the responsibility that artists have to their funders. The contract that is formed between artists and their crowd-funders is one that does not mimic the high-growth return on investment found in start-up innovation. To put it another way: an artist's work on Kickstarter will never become an IPO.

That being said, the other option of acquisition for return on investment within high-growth/high-risk investment is still available. However, the potential for that metaphorical "buyout" does not benefit the backers of a project or help an artist manage risk. For the majority of collectors, an artist's risk is only measured at the point of acquisition, since the valuation of their asset is based on market demands and its potential for resale. For artists participating in the marketplace, the prospect of collection often becomes the driving force for production. Collection and acquisition are not insuring the risk or value of an artist based on their growth. Instead, they are exploiting an artist's production for personal profit.

In this way, playing the market or courting collectors is as equally precarious as adopting innovation-based funding strategies. In each methodology the risk for the artist remains high with a low or limited return on investment for patrons. While the fiscal rhetoric of start-ups has infiltrated the vocabulary of contemporary digital artists, the reality of co-opting these strategies to create financial independence is still very far off. An underlying problem with this dis-

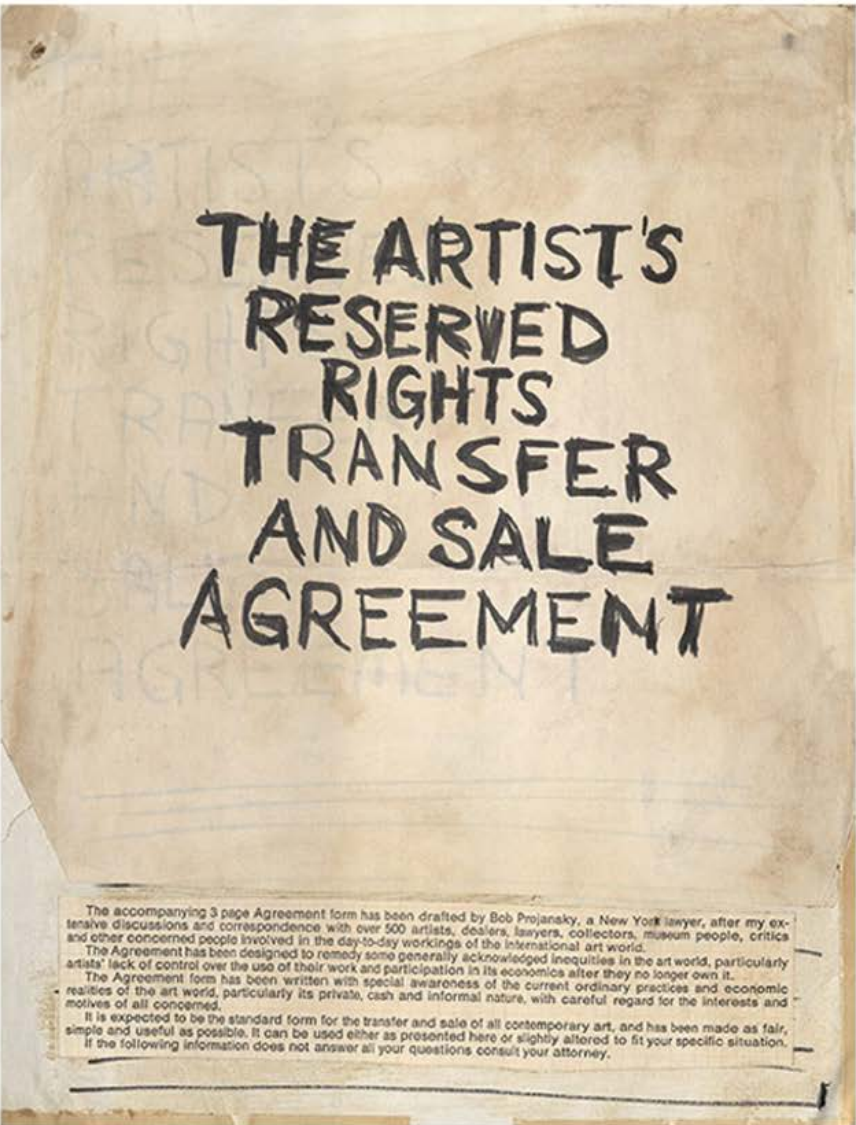
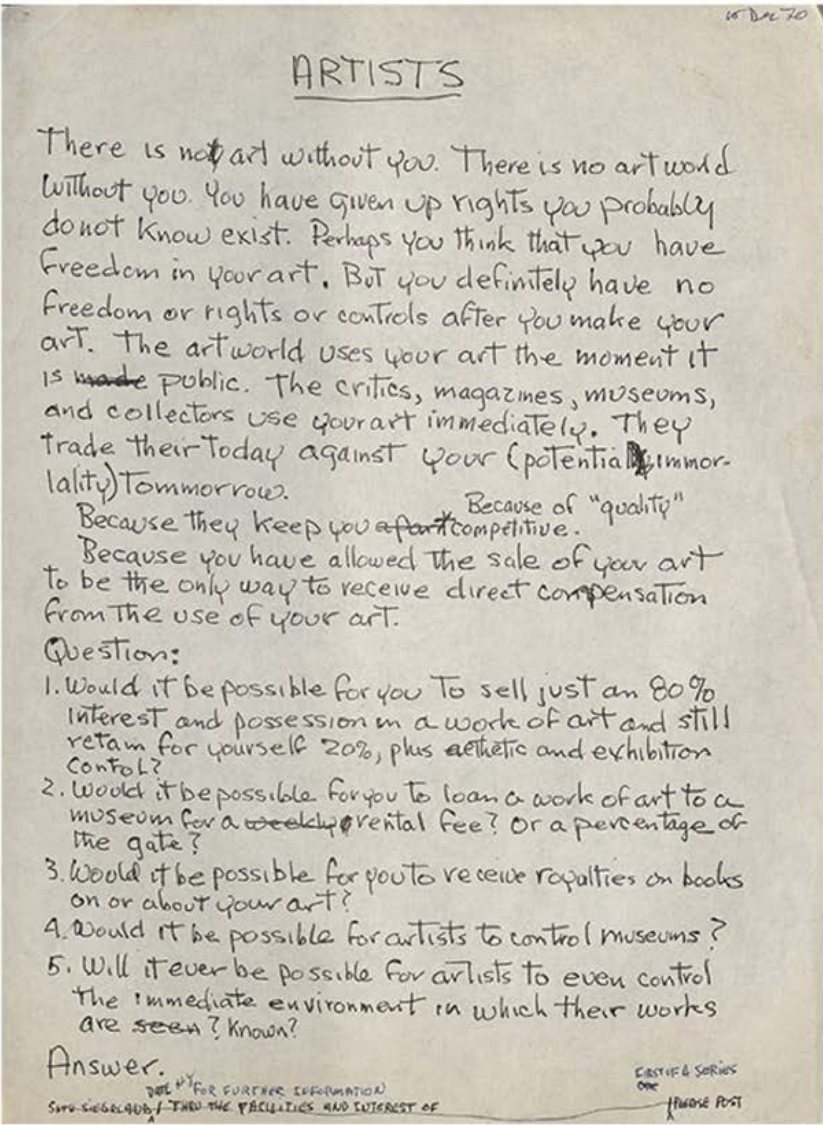
crepancy lies in the different ways that businessmen and artists handle their property. For a start-up, the intellectual property of a company's production is heavily safeguarded. For an artist, intellectual property often gets absorbed and dissipates at the point of distribution. A start-up can release and sell products over and over while maintaining their intellectual property through end user licensing agreements (EULAs). The artist does not have such contracts at their disposal.

Even if a digital artist adopts copyright regulations or releases his or her work through creative commons, the way in which that work circulates is often out of the hands of the producer. The distribution of cultural products is much more nebulous (and at times more prolific) than the intellectual property of innovation incubators. Artworks that traverse many networks often lose their point of origin, and frequently lose author citation or accreditation. It goes without saying that the majority of digital art consumed is in fact under the thumb of regulatory EULAs enforced by social media platforms like Tumblr or YouTube. Even if an artist could accurately oversee and maintain the distribution of their work, finding direct ways to monetize that circulation might go against the EULA of a social media platform.

Again, the problem arises that even in rare moments when an artwork returns a high yield of distribution, the risk of the production of that work remains on the artist. Attention economies do not provide insurance against risk. In some cases it works quite the opposite: works that break into mainstream attention economies can work against the growth of an artist, pigeonholing them into a type of production that might be less risky but also creatively limiting. The success of innovative artworks that reach a wide audience is no substitute for the ways that VCs helps a company manage their growth.

This being said, the prospect that VCs might be able to help an artist manage his or her intellectual property, and as a result assist an artist in choosing how they grow, is a problematic assumption. Where VCs find value is not in determining how effectively their investment will assist in a product to manage its growth. Instead, valuation of start-ups and their intellectual property is based on how quickly production will return high dividends. Art fundamentally does not work this way. Even if a work or an artist grows quickly, the return on investment is never fully guaranteed, and even if it were that value could be flipped for further profit after acquisition.

Although the rhetoric of start-up business practices has taken root in digital art production and distribution, their similarities are only skin deep. Looking at the ways in which risk is measured, mitigated, and leveraged within a start-up model shows stark differences between the ways that each industry attempts to generate funds for sustained production. Where start-ups use funding platforms like venture capital for insuring the long-term maintenance of growth for a company, artists cannot bank on such models. Instead, artists should reconsider how they use a term like risk to identify the value, meaning, and impact of their work within culture. Hopefully in doing so artists working with digital media will find new sources of investment where the financial risk of their work becomes manageable.



Handwritten draft of Artist Contract by Seth Siegelau. Courtesy of the Internet.



Diagram of various digital capital networks assembled by Luma Partners. Courtesy of the Internet.

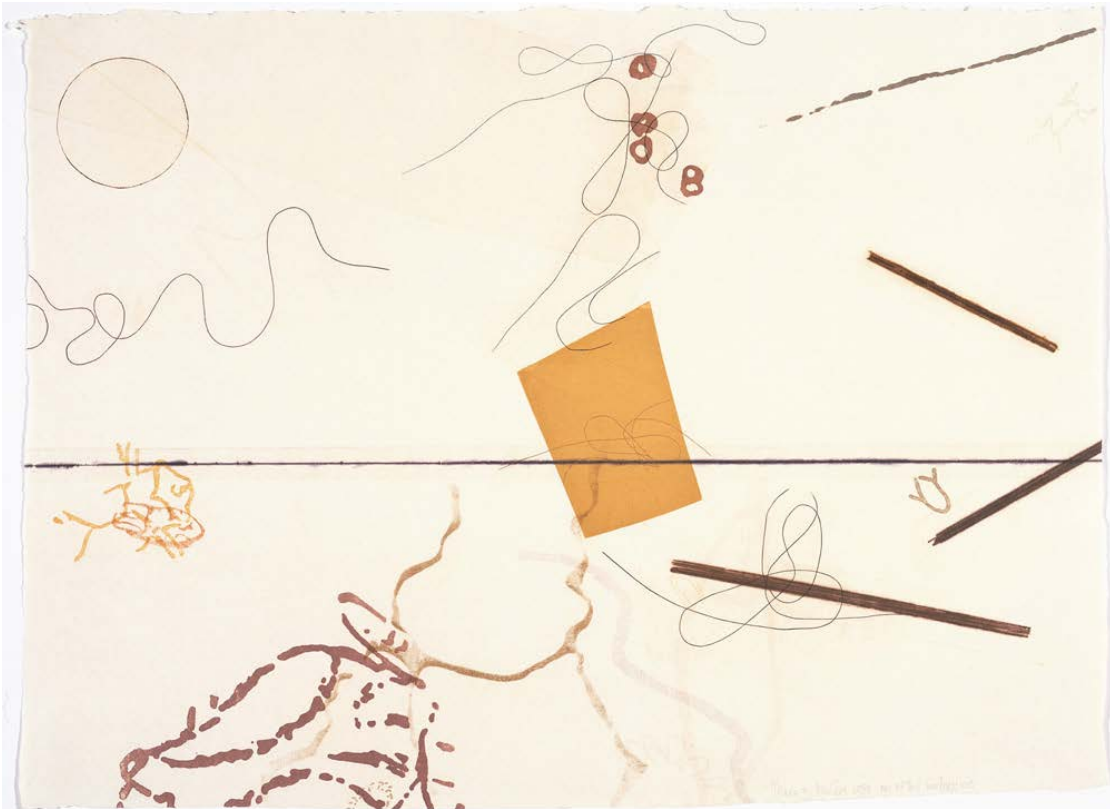
Eco-Poetics And The Visual Art Of John Cage

John Rapko

The following is an excerpt from the third and final chapter of my book *Logro, Fracaso, Aspiración: Tres Intentos de Entender el Arte Contemporáneo* (2014). The book is based on three lectures I gave at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá in the spring of 2009. A major part of the project of the lectures was to sketch some considerations concerning distinctive characteristics of achievement and failure in contemporary art. In the last lecture I turned to the question of what one might hope for from contemporary art, and how the aspiration adopted by an artist shapes and places stringencies upon his or her work. The central analysis I gave was of some of the late work of John Cage, in particular the stunning prints he made yearly at Crown Point Press in San Francisco from the late 1970s until his death in 1992.

I conceived of this selection, and the book generally, as an instance of philosophy whose chief characteristics are diagnostic and aspirational. By “diagnostic” I mean something like what the philosopher Hans Sluga has recently put forth with regard to political philosophy: the work begins with a sense of unease and aims to characterize the source of that unease. No attempt is made to be comprehensive, nor to produce anything relating to alleged timeless or eternally valid aspects of the subject. By “aspirational” I mean that the analysis is oriented to suggest a sense of possibility, of how the existing state of affairs might be opened up, re-thought, re-worked, and re-oriented towards worthwhile ideals. In line with these two characteristics, I tried to show how Cage’s visual works revealed to Cage himself a kind of dogmatism within his earlier celebrated and notorious musical composition, one wherein he had incorporated a poetics still expressive of productivist metaphors and conceptions; in response, and through great personal difficulty, he was able to invent a new conception of an ecological art. Both characteristics of this philosophy, the diagnosis and the sense of possibility, are shown to also be aspects of a contemporary art practice:

One of the most recent and most insistent demands that has arisen within the arts is the demand for a “green” art, which also goes by the name of environmental or ecological art. What is distinctive about this art, which I shall call “ecological”? It seems that a conception of such art has arisen in recent decades and become stabilized. Such an art would (a) involve primarily “local” materials, where local means something like what is available without strenuous use of advanced technologies within an ecological region, or a “place” defined by what is regularly perceived of and used by those who have lived there for more than a generation; (b) the work must be in some sense a response to the place, and to what is distinctive about the place; (c) that the work would thereby carry a symbolic meaning, one of a piece with the sense that it is part of a kind of production or culture that offers an alternative to those kinds of production and culture expressive of capitalism’s sublime powers of destruction, or of the project of mastering nature; (d) the work, as well as the activities involved in making and appreciating the work, must have one or more of a certain highly marked temporal character: (i) something suggestive of evanescence or ephemerality, and often carrying a further quality of fragility; (ii) a sense that the artifact has so to speak a future after



John Cage, *Dereau* #3, 1982. One from 38 related color etchings with aquatint, engraving, photoetching and drypoint. 18½ x 24½ in. Published by Crown Point Press.

its current use; it can be folded into a future use, or recycled; (iii) making and/or appreciating the work have a custodial sense, or conserve something valuable or precious; (e) that the guiding spirit of these works, insofar as they arise in Western culture, is Orpheus (as in Rilke’s “it’s Orpheus when there’s music”), and not Prometheus; (f) and that the fundamental aim of these works is to initiate, foster, maintain, etc., the spirit of “place,” where place is opposed to space, a kind of homogenous continuum of extension. So the function of the model is aspirational: works made in accordance with it aim to provide the viewer or participant an experiential sense of what it is like to inhabit a place, and to foster the sorts of virtuous responses that would be part of the habitual responses of those who live in “places,” as opposed to “spaces” . . .

John Cage was one of the very greatest artists of recent times to have confronted these questions [surrounding the nature of ecological art]. Or so I shall claim. Cage is usually thought of as an experimental composer, though he preferred to be thought of as an inventor, and one might add an inventor of genius. He is of course best known as the “inventor” of techniques for the use of chance in musical composition. In the late 1970s, around the age of 65, he was invited by Kathan Brown, the director of Crown Point Press, to visit the press and use their printmaking facilities to make visual artworks. Cage, recalling one of a few dozen autobiographical stories he used countless times to render his artistic intentions intelligible, claims to have hesitated to accept, because in his early twenties he had promised Arnold Schoenberg that he would dedicate his life to music if Schoenberg would teach him composition. But he also recalled his great regret at having turned down an invitation in the late 1940s from Rita Sarabhai to trek northern India and Nepal. So he decided that he would accept Brown’s invitation, and that if he made visual works with the same techniques he used to compose, he

would also be keeping his promise to Schoenberg. These same techniques would be the use of chance in selecting the elements and their arrangement in his visual works. Brown has provided detailed accounts of Cage’s experimenting with etching and printmaking, and has suggested that the culmination and greatest achievement of his first five years at Crown Point is the series *Dereau*, a portmanteau title from “derive” and “Thoreau.” But Brown has also described how the year after Cage made the *Dereau* series, when he returned to Crown Point Press, he abandoned the ways in which he had worked, and began over with different techniques. He began with attempts to work the paper directly, and in ways that were suggestive of violence: he crumpled it, stained it with tea and coffee, even ran over it (perhaps a reminiscence of the work he had done with Rauschenberg in the early 1950s). Cage fell into despair, characterized by a lengthy depression in which he claimed that his entire life’s work was a failure. Finally, he treated the paper with fire, smoking it and burning it, and applied heated circular brands from salvaged car parts. He declared himself satisfied, his depression lifted, and for the rest of his life enjoyed his yearly trips to the Press . . .

In viewing the complete set of Cage’s *Dereau* a number of times in early 2001 at the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, I was struck by a certain fantasy: that the elements of the work, the various bits of drawing taken from the notebooks of Thoreau, seemed to slide across the paper, as if flowing from upper left to lower right. As one scans the works one notices the recurrence of elements (the little waterbug is particularly striking) and registers quickly their different placements, colors, and saturations of color. One senses that the elements and the paper are of two different pictorial orders (foreground versus background and/or support). One thereby gains a vivid sense of the contingency of the elements’

sheer occurrence, as well as their placement. Now this, I suggest, is what one cannot gain from the performed results of chance procedures in music. For in the unfolding of a piece of music, the occurrence of an element, a sound event, is fused with the moment of its occurrence: it is this-sound-at-this-time. Sound and moment form a qualitative unity. And this is part of the point of the use of chance procedures in music: to defeat the listener’s sense of expectation, that one event or kind of event will follow another or another kind, in order to make the listener’s mind “susceptible to divine influences.”

But the viewer (as opposed to a listener) of a series of works resulting from chance techniques can scan the works, which involves operations of noticing, itself presupposing the operation of short-term memory in noting identities, resemblances, etc. But then the mind of the viewer cannot be thought of as wholly attuned to a (simple) moment. And in a way only perhaps loosely analogous with this, once one notices the difference of order between elements and support, one grasps that the looking solicited by the visual artworks is one that is indefinitely extended temporally, as it involves the perceptual and imaginative exploration of relations among elements and their support, in addition to viewing across works. In the visual works a perceptual sense of contingency is realized, but not, in contrast to the musical works, one which supports the fantasy of an “immediate” or simple present. And this recognition reflects back upon the musical works, wherein the use of chance techniques is revealed as presupposing a similar hidden heterogeneity: between the activity of deciding upon the time-space continuum which will count as (the container of) the work, and the phenomenal events that make up the perceptually available elements of the piece, and which arise out of the application of impersonal chance mechanisms.

Some of you will find this account fanciful. But it helps explain two points that are unintelligible on Brown’s interpretation: why did Cage say in despair that his whole life’s work was a mistake (and not just that he couldn’t make satisfactory visual works), and why did he abandon the conception that resulted in *Dereau* and immediately begin by working the support with elemental forces and with a vehemence that suggests violence upon the support? What is distinctive about the works Cage made, the *Smoked* series, is that it is the very same elemental force, heat, that marks the paper from within or from underneath, causing it to blossom, and from without or above, leaving the circular brands. The use of the same force unifies the treatment of the surface and the application of marks, and so lessens the sense that two separate orders are coming into contact with each other, and in a way that does not allow them to interpenetrate or to share the same substance. Here, then, as [the social philosopher Theodor] Adorno might have put it, is an artwork that non-violently unifies a sensuous manifold. And, finally, in a further series, *Ryoan-ji*, where Cage uses a brush to outline stones, the sense that application of the paint and its inherence in the support are of distinct orders has subsided. It is worth noting that Cage, in his late music of the so-called number pieces, directs that the sounds seem “brushed” into existence. The metaphor forged in the resolution of the fantasy of violence in the visual works is applied now mutatis mutandis to the musical works.



John Cage, *Eninka* #42, 1986. One from a series of 50 smoked paper monotypes with branding on gampi paper chine collé. 24½ x 18½ in. Published by Crown Point Press.

Without an appreciation of not just Cage’s aims, but also of the motivations for those aims, it would be even more difficult to understand why *Dereau* failed—that is, failed artistically as a satisfying expression of an eco-poetics. In the later work Cage has resolved in practice one part of the tension implicit in the multi-faceted model of an eco-poetics. The resultant works are certainly expressive of ephemerality and fragility. The artist and viewer share the stance of a custodian of the moment. But what of the other characteristic of a highly marked temporality, the sense that the work has a future of being folded in or recycled? Here one must search. It is hard to see how the custodial model could be reconciled with folding in. But perhaps one has to look more broadly. One highly marked aspect of the appearance of the works is that they have, after all, been subjected to some great force, even if the sense of the force work-

ing both within and without the paper relieves some of the threat of violence. The work seems to have survived something, and what is left is something that has to that extent passed a test; a test of such severity that it threatened to consume it. A final thought, and one which not everyone will be prepared to follow, is that what has survived has shown itself to be valuable, and therefore worthy of loving custodial care. So what remains is not (yet) to be recycled. The value of folding in is honored, but not everything is ready just yet to be used in some other configuration.

At a very general level, we might expect the ambition of an eco-poetics to be the great demand regulating art in the 21st century, as the great demand in the 20th century was for political art.

On Point 2.05 // The Hustle Of Language



Muistardeaux, 1800SLEEPLQ, 2008. Queens Nails Annex, San Francisco. Courtesy of the artists.



A Jackass performance. Courtesy of the Internet.



Wayne Coyne and Miley Cyrus during Art Basel, Miami Beach, 2014. Courtesy of the Internet.

Mark Van Proyen

Performance art is getting some attention as of late, but maybe not the kind of attention that it needs. What it is getting is a lot of rah rah chatty chat, and what it is not getting is the kind of historically informed analysis that might challenge it to move in a direction of real risk and real accomplishment. This is especially important because of the ephemeral nature of the beast, which lives and then disappears into a haze of documentation, commentary and reliquary memorabilia. In recent years, these things have grown exponentially hazier because of the sheer deluge of such material on YouTube, where it is impossible not to look like you are doing some kind of performance art, however unfortunate such a look might be.

And if this was not bad enough, we have the related phenomena of Jackass. I heard somewhere that it started as a skit in a Toy Machine skateboarding video, but I only know the movies featuring antics and shenanigans played out as a kind of frat boy blood sport. These things start to loom large in the popular imagination, and in so doing they foreclose the other ways in which we might think of performance art as a historical continuum of artistic activities moving from past to present. In this regard, performance art shares something with abstract painting; In both cases, artistic accomplishment is understood in relation to how any given work self-consciously positions itself in relation to the known history of its respective subgenre, and the tropes and idioms that are associated with it. The Jackass phenomenon seeks to erase these kinds of positionings by resorting to acts that appear as gestures of sheer audacity. "I mean, if Chris Burden can get famous by having a guy shoot him in a gallery, then I should be able to get famous by falling off of my skateboard over a bed of hot coals, right?" Once again, subtlety and sophistication lose out, and bozohood reigns supreme, or almost so. To provide a counter-narrative to the recent Jackassification of performance art, I am here offering an abridged version of a conference paper that I presented back in April (2014). The theme of the conference was *Authorship, Citation, and Collaboration in Contemporary Bay Area Performance*, and I chose to take it literally by focusing my remarks on the work of some San Francisco Bay Area-based performance artists who make uncanny use of language as the primary material of their work.

Authorship, citation, and collaboration: these struck me as a set of deviant terms, insofar as they run counter to the dominant cliché of West Coast performance art being about isolated non-verbal bodies gesticulating in para-allegorical spaces. This cliché

bespeaks the somewhat romantic idea that there is some special importance to the way that we understand the body-as-object as opposed to how we understand the body-as-vessel-for-the-subject, and it reaches back to the idea of performance art evolving out of sculpture—think of the work of the Vienna Action Group, Fluxist concerts, or the early works created by the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop under the direction of Anna Halprin. From the vantage of the first generation of performance artists, theatricality was the enemy (even as they created a kind of art world theater out of their avoidance of theatricality) because, in that early era of mass-mediatization, bodies-in-space started to take on their own uncanny dimension.

But by the end of the 1970s, theatricality was no longer seen in such a negative light, because by that time, even performance art could be easily documented and exchanged (originally by way of cheaply produced and distributed VHS tapes, forcing performance art back to its Futurist, Dadist, and Surrealist roots as absurdist cabaret). That moment (and nearly the twenty years that followed) was well documented in the pages of *High Performance Magazine*, a southern California-based journal that was edited by Linda Frye Burnham between 1978 and 1997. From a re-reading of its pages, it became clear that the work of the second generation performance art evolved from and into a great many things, and language, or to be more precise, the materiality of language is one of those things, and over time it may have become the most important of those things.

And so, my title: *The Hustle of Language*. It is a pun, no doubt a bad one. It alludes to a 1986 book by Roland Barthes titled *The Rustle of Language* (*Le Bruissement de Langue*), that being a collection of 45 for-the-most-part short, "occasional" essays written between 1967 and 1980. One of the earliest and most well known of the essays contained in this volume was titled *The Reality Effect* (1968), and even though it harks back to a structuralist mode of analysis that has fallen out of favor in our post-post-structuralist moment, it still bears a belated re-reading amid the newer context of the ways that technology has affected art and indeed, all communication during the past four decades—scratch that, for the past 14 decades. Barthes's self-assigned task was to account for the role that descriptive ornamentation played in relationship to literary texts that purport to participate in something called realism. The essay struggled with its topic, and it never really got to the point of articulating how some kinds of descriptive specification contribute to the creation of a realistic effect, while others were said to gratuitously distract the reader from it. For this and other reasons, the essay was

only partially successful, simply because the task of pinpointing the real to which realism aspired to realistically represent was and no doubt still is impossible. That impossibility may in fact be the only "reality" that something purporting to be "realistic" might aspire to.

Literary scholars tend to work with one definition of realism, while art historians work with several. The former see realism as having to do with an unvarnished view of the sheer totality of contemporary life somehow separated from any metaphysical idealism shrouded in *history*, presumably leading to a clearer view of the linkage between material relations and ideology. There is less of a consensus amongst art historians on this point, and when it falls into the hands of art critics such as myself, riots and sheer chaos ensue. For art historians, the point of distinction tends to see realism in contrast to naturalism, but even here there is still a lot of definitional dissonance, because naturalism itself is a term that is also very hard to pin down.

But the effort continued to be made, over and over, and language had to be perpetually reformulated to make good on this quest. Witness the primary role that language-as-language plays in such diverse intellectual enterprises as Lacanian psychoanalysis or analytic philosophy. As Ludwig Wittgenstein famously wrote at the conclusion of his *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*, "What cannot be spoken of must be passed over in silence," thereby emphasizing the point of privilege to be conferred to what J. L. Austin has called "the constitutive" aspect of language, which is where "truth-value" was supposed to reside. However, this emphasis on truth-value was only important because it invited corroboration and verification, and those things are oftentimes moored in the shifting sands of epistemology rather than the hard granite of physical science. Austin himself seemed aware of this, so he also articulated the countervailing claim on behalf of four "performative" aspects of language that he called the explicit, implicit, primitive, and inexplicit. None of these aspects gestured toward what he called "truth-value claiming," but instead seek to leverage and elaborate on ambiguity and paradox, thereby evading, stalling, and perhaps even undermining the consolidating imperatives of constitutive language practices. Left unchallenged, constitutive language practices will always default to the safe shores of the bureaucratic and the pseudo-scientific: in short, to the mechanical translation of precedent into policy.

Enter technology. Just as maritime colonialism radically expanded the horizons of 17th-century art beyond what could be shoehorned into a perspectival picture plane, so too did the many leapfrogging

advents of communications technology expand the horizons of subsequent centuries. As Marshall McLuhan famously reminded us, the technology of movable type printing drastically enhanced the availability of knowledge, toppling theocratic monopolies on consciousness. Following from McLuhan's insight, we can note similar effects issuing from the advents of photography, cinema, and Marconi's radio, followed by broadcast television, the Internet, and social media. In each of these instances, the mechanisms that delivered content became more and more important in relation to the content that was delivered by them, which was and still is bad news for artists—a condition made all the worse by the fact that artists still seem to think that anything they decide to designate as a work of art is so simply because they can claim the right to call themselves artists. This Duchamp-derived theorem was the original recipe for the dilution of artistic content to the status of reliquary artifact, pulling proxy duty for narcissistic pretense, leading up to the zombie plague that now calls itself contemporary art. My day-trading friends call this peculiar phenomenon "a crowded trade," which is one of their code words that means "sell everything now."

But I digress. The happy news is that the 20th century has given us a rich tradition of performative language projects that work both with and against techno-bureaucratic consolidation, ranging from symbolist poetry to surrealist language games to deconstructive textual analysis; this lineage also includes things such as Charles Olsen's *Theory of Projective Verse* and the chidings of vernacular street poetry. It is always worth remembering that the one thing that we always ask from the artistic imagination is the evocation of a world somehow different from the everyday world that we inhabit. It is always best to make lemonade when we are pelted with lemons, and we always can point out how this has been accomplished in the past. But we can also point to the work of artists in the present who do this by performing spell-binding works that interrogate the fungible materiality of language in uniquely imaginative ways that are all true to the performative disassociation that is built into language itself.

Two vivid examples come to mind, both more-or-less based in the San Francisco Bay Area. The first of these is the work of Michael Peppe, who presented performance works in an idiom that he called *Behaviourmusik* throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (note here that the Germanic "k" at the end of *Behaviourmusik* is a nod to the work of the German avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, who much later became globally famous for proclaiming the 9/11 terrorist attacks as "the greatest work of art that exists for the whole Cosmos.") At this point in time, Peppe may well be better known as the author of two essays that were originally published in *High Performance Magazine*, the first titled "Why Performance Art is So Bad" (1982), and the second "Why Our Art is So Bad" (1983).¹

Both essays are masterpieces of rhapsodic invective, hilarious and insightful in equal measure, and both are world-class examples of career suicide taken to theatrical extreme. No one bothered to rebut the essay's many fine points in the open court of public debate, but suddenly doors started slamming in his face because one of the targets of Peppe's grandiloquent literary wrath was the shabby influence-peddling that, in those days, operated as "public arts funding," which in Peppe's view was nothing more than a scam of mutual self-entitlement enacted by those who had "friends on grant committees." When I first met Peppe many years ago, his reputation had preceded him, and I asked, "Are you the guy who destroyed performance art?" His answer spoke volumes: "I wish."

The ironic fact is that a more circumspect Peppe may well have been deservedly recognized as one of the most important performance artists to ever to work on the west coast. Certainly, his work was far and away the most sophisticated, but sophistication and performance art have always been somewhat at odds with each other, because the art world feels far more comfortable with clowns than with real pioneers. Peppe's *Behaviourmusik* was premised on the idea that all aspects of human behavior could be scored in a manner similar to how the specifics of musical performance might be scripted by a composer. Thus, to see one of Peppe's scores from his early 1980s heyday is to see parallel registers of specific indications for vocalization and bodily movement, each subjected to a scored time signature, and each given a set of para-pictographic prompts for specific performative action to be enacted for a specified duration. Early on (at the very beginning of the availability of personal computers), he made use of multiple typefaces to indicate his cast of close to a hundred intrasubjective characters, facilitating the performative channeling of them as one might channel surf a late night television menu of pathetic possibility.

Peppe's most ambitious performance project was a work from 1984–85 titled *Actmusikspectakle V*, which took Peppe close to an hour to perform. The effect produced by the work was both exhilarating and spellbinding, seeming as if half a dozen lunatics had taken over the performer's personality to compete for the right to stylize a prolonged epileptic seizure. Despite the length of the performance, it was flawlessly executed in a state of breakneck velocity, suggesting the possibility that the early Futurist Sestini might have influenced Peppe's thoughts about language and performance. Indeed, language as subject, topic, and instrument at the core of *Actmusikspectakle V*, in many ways the work was about how a broadly defined notion of speech-act could repeatedly fold back upon those aspects and then out again in the manner of a necktie knot. For example, in one part of it called *Information Whiteout*, the phrase "why what is is why what is is," folds in and out of the work's deluge of elaborate gesticulation and vocalization, vividly dramatizing the collapse of faith between linguistic references and those things to which they might refer.

The second example that I want to call attention to is the work of the Muistardeaux Collective, that being a collaborative group comprised of Tom Borden, Eric Gibbons, and the fictitious Khyssup Muistardeaux who is occasionally played by an actor. The Muistardeaux Collective has engaged a vast variety of media, and have released over a dozen recorded albums from since 2007. Indeed, they do perform music, and in a manner similar to Peppe's work, they do incorporate music into their performances, but these performances often tend to be much more about the radical unscripting of language than its hyper-organized opposite. A typical Muistardeaux performance features Borden and Gibbons standing next to each other in front of an audience, launching into an amiable and chatty conversation that harks back to 1960s comedy duos such as Rowan and Martin or the Smothers Brothers. But in a few short minutes, these conversations start to run awry and off of the rails, verging into outright manias of free association delivered in a state of fevered one-upmanship. They call these performances *Tikalba* and link the term to the idea of an exposition about a topic based on very little knowledge about it—a comic mimic of what happens in that surrealist *gesamtkunstwerk* that we call "social media."

It might be best to think of these polylogical dialogs as exemplifying a reversal of Socratic process that is both sinister and elegant. Whereas the ancient philosopher used the dialogic method to arrive at the core truth of a given topic, the Muistardeaux Collective uses the same process to flee from topic to topic, sometimes lapsing into willful misunderstanding, outright bickering, or abrupt changes of momentary topic. Each makes knowing asides to the audience about the other, and there is no way for the audience to tell when something is choreographed and when it is spontaneous. If it is spontaneous, then I say kudos, because we have not seen that level of linguistic improvisation since the days of Tristan Tzara.

Muistardeaux keeps their performances congenial and folksy, but make no mistake about the sophistication of what they are up to: it has everything to do with the Tower of Babel effect that is bred by social media—at once sad, absurd, and all too close to the everyday experience of depthless content running horribly awry. One might detect a similar, hyper-sophisticated congeniality in the novels of David Foster Wallace—a congeniality that is laced with a canny understanding of theory and philosophy, locating practical applications of both in an absurd and giddy moment of post-historical consciousness that still longs for a lost historical authority. When this longing adopts its more self-infatuated guise, we get something that looks very much like a TED talk that exhorts its listeners to the banal trough of undeserved self-esteem. When it falls into hands of master ironists like Muistardeaux, we see the landscape of dis-course for what it is: a heap of distractions that reveal their sad truths through laying bare the strategies of intentionally failed concealment. It is like a radical reversal of the Freudian idea of parapraxis ("Freudian slips"), which turn out to be every bit as revealing (and a bit more frightening) than their opposite numbers.

It seems that the "reality effect" that Barthes wrote about almost fifty years ago has been turned upside down and inside out, and those turns may in fact be the only things that we have left to us that can still be trusted as the kind of "reality" that something purporting to be "realistic" might use as a touchstone. Of course, this may have been the subtle point of Barthes's essay, and I cannot help but noting that it originally appeared at the same time as Jack Burnham's book *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (1969). Along with Lawrence Alloway, Burnham was the most forward thinking art critic of his time, and in the aforementioned book, he concludes with a prophetic meditation on the way that networks will have to become understandable as objects, something that rings even more true today than it did 45 years ago. The performance artists whose work I have called attention to here differ greatly, but what they both have in common is the recognition that getting to the truth of the moment means fleeing from what it is supposed to be, and in so doing they transform language from an instrument of communication to the state of being an objectified network of possibilities seeking actualization.

¹) The essay was reprinted several times. See Michael Peppe, "Why Our Art is So Bad," in Sumner, Burch and Sumner (eds.), *The Guests Go Into Supper* (Oakland, Burning Books, 1986). 342-361.

Three Perspectives On The Globalization Of The Art Market

John Zarobell

The term “globalization” is ubiquitous and imprecise. Nonetheless, it is high time to think about what it means for the art market and the broader sphere of artistic production. I will venture not just one, but three possible responses to this question: the Good, the Bad, and the Ineffable.

The Good: Globalization equals cross-border exchange of value-added economic activity. What’s not to like? Goods and services change hands across land and sea and people make money as a result; the number attached to the global art market is only \$60 billion so it is a paltry fraction of the economy but it has grown considerably. Clare McAndrew reports that global imports of art grew 280% in the 25 years between 1986 and 2011 and, in the same period, experts grew by 500% worldwide.¹ In the art world, one could hardly have a contemporary art exhibition these days without the cross-border exchange of goods and services that stimulates several industries (shipping, security, artistic production, etc.) and yields immediate and tangible benefits to artists, curators, dealers, critics, and even the general public. For art fairs and biennials, now cornerstones of artistic distribution and consumption, globalization is the *lingua franca*. In fact, as globalization has increased, so have the manifestations of such events. A level estimate is that there are now around 200 art fairs and 150 biennials globally. Surely this has led to some fatigue among jet-setting curators, dealers, and artists, but who are they to complain? They benefit enormously from this expansion of the artistic distribution mechanism and visitors from all over the world flock to their local biennial or art fair to absorb the currency of contemporary art. This is all for the better: more artists are getting paid to make art, more visitors are having the opportunity to experience art from around the globe in person, and more money is changing hands. The art world expands; the market for contemporary art grows.

The Bad: Globalization is a game for the winners because as multinational corporations and other non-state actors steer the expansion of the global economy, the less fortunate are left to fend for themselves, with little support from the state whose role has historically been to defend the interests of its citizens. Instead, states support the interest and expansion of the market and those who profit thereby. Paradoxically, this new role expands these states’ own fragility to market pressures, making them even less able to control their own destinies. Corporations move all of their production facilities to the most advantageous domain to lower labor costs and tax burdens. As more individuals enter the workforce globally, working conditions deteriorate overall and sweatshops and other slave-like work environments become more the norm. In this picture, the arts play a subsidiary role to shore up the legitimacy of the elite who accrue extensive capital through such unseemly means. Thus, the art market is a way to normalize relations between the patrons and the workers, allowing a handful of artists and dealers to prosper enormously at the expense of the masses of artists who toil with little opportunity of compensation. Furthermore, creative content is outsourced from global contemporary artists working in

low-wage environments and dealers sell their works to urban elites in global financial centers. The expansion of the art world under this version of globalization means that freedom of expression among artists is compromised under the pressure to conform to the market in order to succeed financially

The Ineffable: Globalization could also be described as the mash-up of all cultures and forms of economic activity from high-tech industrial production to spear fishing, which together generate the global economy. Every region is connected through transportation and information systems and distribution is more global all the time, so products like art that were once regionally specific are now universally available. Global integration presents a series of conflicts between creators with widely divergent ideas of what constitutes art; nevertheless, globalization allows one to see them as forming a kind of continuum. In this context, globalization is the abstraction through which we come to envision what artistic production all over the world at the same time might look like. We can imagine all the artists of the world somehow working together to produce the art of the present: contemporary art. As any biennial visitor knows, art world globalization does not really add up to any image but is a shifting mass of aspirations, materials, confrontations, limitations, and *regards croisés*. The art market we have today is incredibly diverse but highly decentralized. It is lumpy and bumpy and not coordinated or controlled by any one entity, be it auction house, gallery franchise, or museum brand. This ineffable globalization is both process and metaphor, but its end result is ever changing and its meaning is ever receding. Impossible to master, it may be just as difficult to grasp.

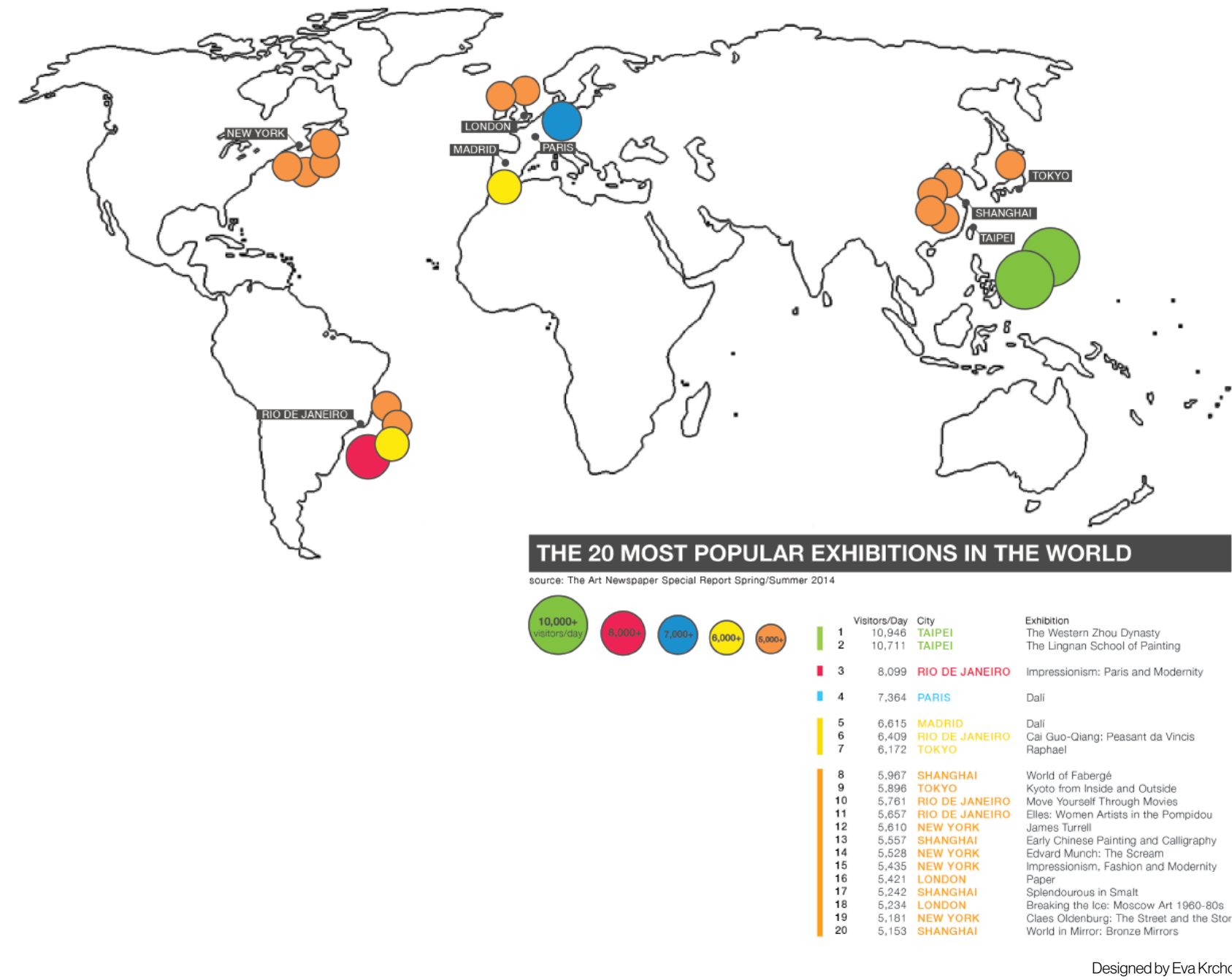
Whether you perceive globalization as good, bad, or ineffable may be based upon whether you are profiting thereby, but it is important to consider that one’s conceptions are informed by what sociologists like to call embedded processes. If you went to art school 20 to 40 years ago in the U.S., you have had the opportunity to learn multiple art making strategies and approaches to media for producing a coherent body of work. You rightly think of yourself as the actor who is uniquely responsible for the development of the work and you recognize that while the best artists are not always the most successful, they stand by what they have done and do not pander to a market. If, on the other hand, you studied during those years in a country with a strong academy system, from France to Mexico to Pakistan, you may have only been introduced to traditional means of making artworks and then had to learn all the radical alternatives on your own, finding ways to subtly bring them into your work. If you graduated from art school in the last 10 years, the market—whether the market for art or for attention—is the arbiter of all and you know you need to find the means to embrace it in such a way as it embraces you in return. Each of these positions represents an embedded perspective because it is informed by the entire social apparatus of art education in your location at the moment you attended. The question of how artists make the most important work is now very similar to how to make the most valuable work. It is no longer only a question of artistic creation but of market innovation. If radical artists of the 1960s attempted to intervene in society, path-breaking art-

ists of the 21st century are attempting to intervene in the economy.

To be fair to all these positions, the transformation we are currently witnessing represents a shift from a focus on advanced industrial society and its numerous ills, to a recognition that such a concept is not universal, but an ideological construct. What we now perceive to be universal is our ability to exchange, or what Adam Smith called our inherent proclivity to “truck and barter.” Since Smith recorded these reflections in the 18th-century opus *Wealth of Nations*, it is hardly accurate to claim that the market is a new model for the 21st, but under the terms of globalization we can see just how important exchange is. It starts to seem universal because only the abstraction of the market can hold all the various participants in the global economy in a single conceptual apparatus. Thus, the market may be the only thing we all have in common and is therefore our most valued metaphor for how all the people on the planet are part of the same game. Whether we are discussing the manufacture of heavy machinery or the production of installation art, the economy could be the only way that divergent approaches and results can be reconciled and compared. It is of no surprise that artists have become more concerned with the economy. And if you have a pile of student debt from attending art school, it is hardly brazen to think about the ways that you might make a profitable living by selling your art.

The real question is: does this mean that artistic work is now alienated labor? In other words, to shift from Smith to Marx: who owns the current economy, and, more to the point, who owns your work? There is a double entendre here too obvious not to point out because, of course, every artist wants their work to be owned by collectors who have paid for it and who value it. This is how professional artists pay the bills as artists, but this is also the validation of artistic practice. Success means your work is desirable to others who will pay money, who will even bid against others, in order to own it. On another level, an artist’s work must remain her own because her creative vision brought it to being and its significance and value rest upon the salience of that vision, its ability to connect to a tradition of art making, and it’s representation of the moment of it’s creation. This might sound like an observation, or even a statement of fact, but it is what social scientists call a *normative claim* and this particular one is key because it undergirds the entire market apparatus. In other words, for art to be valuable it must be supported by the assertion that artistic work is *not* alienated labor, that the art is *not* made to cater to the market, and that it is unique and the product of an artistic process if not a struggle of some sort. To say as much might sound cliché. Most normative claims are clichés; they are clichés because everyone accepts them—if not as truth, exactly, at least as gospel. This principle protects every participant in the art world because it allows us all to believe that we are really generating an alternative to the rough-and-tumble world of business. It provides our *raison d’être* even if we do not believe it entirely.

Can such a normative claim hold given the nuance and complexity of a global artistic workforce and distribution system? As more artists, dealers, curators, and critics enter the world art mechanism at a variety



of levels from divergent points on the globe, the conversation shifts and the norms are not so normal anymore. When the embedded positions multiply and reproduce, what can we agree on? I would assert that it is impossible to say what the normative claim for the contemporary art world is, given the intersection of interests and values that now compose its domain. While art centers still exist—and even continue to dominate certain dimensions of the market—they are now part of a decentralized world in which decisions are made and reputations solidified based on heterogeneous networks of actors whose understanding of fundamental artistic and art market concepts may indeed be incompatible. Globalization allows us to conceptualize this, to package it, and to explain away some of the fundamental disagreements. It is a vast, decentralized structure in which participants of

differing levels of authority and significance come to engage in a similar, if not singular, domain.

Economic questions, including but not limited to those concerning the market for art, change the way that we consider the meaning of art, especially contemporary art. This means that the art world is changing and the normative claims of the modernist avant-garde, for example, do not operate as they once did. Art and money have always fit hand-in-glove, so it is not new that dealers, artists, and even curators have self-interests within to the public sphere of art. What is different is that those of us in the art world can no longer allow ourselves to believe that we dictate the terms of our own productions. This complicates the question of alienated labor. While we may be alienated from the means of production as cogs in some

grand art distribution machine, it also means that we are less alienated from other similar workers (artists, curators, dealers, etc.) because globalization fosters international communication and exchange of ideas, as well as products. Our embedded perspectives may be very distinct indeed, but the terms of our global conversation are dynamic and are right now being reinvented by artists everywhere.

¹ Clare McAndrew, *The International Art Market in 2011. Observations on the Art Trade over 25 Years* (Maastricht: The European Fine Art Foundation, 2011), p. 139.

Journeys From And To A Destination Nation

Anthony Choice-Diaz (Part Two)

On November 20th, 2014, Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States, gave what was touted as his long overdue speech on immigration. In the typical myth-making of a master rhetorician, the president sought to create an image of a pro-immigration nation at the expense of fact. Beginning his speech by espousing a supposed 200-year-old tradition of “welcoming immigrants from around the world,” Obama sought to reframe the discussion just in time for an all-American family chitchat over the nation’s Thanksgiving meal. But as was explained in part one of this column, U.S. policy has been anything but welcoming. It has been highly selective, prejudicial, and used as a mechanism of empire-building both at home and abroad. It has to be understood that the U.S. was and is a settler-colonial nation built upon the displacement and murder of the continent’s indigenous population through famine, pestilence, slavery, and war. Manifest Destiny found its underlying foundations in an ever-expanding war policies and legal slavery.

Today, some would argue, based upon the masses in the streets protesting against the flagrant police murders of the nation’s Black population, that things haven’t changed all that much since 1864. I don’t pose this notion here flippantly: to understand the contemporary immigration drama one must understand that perpetual war is a central pillar of U.S. foreign policy, which has created a de facto refugee crisis continent wide.

U.S interventionism has been a part of wartime posturing throughout the American hemisphere from gunboat diplomacy to banana republics of the 1800s—a response to a period in which independent democratic republics arose throughout the region. This informal disposition on the use of American military power/force abroad was best encapsulated and typified in policy form as the Monroe Doctrine (1823). This was a standing document that made U.S. intervention mandatory should any foreign or sovereign power tinker and dawdle within the Latin American hemisphere, the doctrine legalized war and indemnified U.S. aggression against any form of petulant autonomy should sovereign nations try and seek independence, liberty, or self-determination anywhere on the continent.

By 1848, half of Mexico had been conquered and claimed through open conquest, diplomatic duplicity, and clandestine military operations into sovereign territory in which American citizens were the “illegals” taking up space and expropriating land from the local population. Or perhaps it was the adventurist foreign excursions at the cusp of the new century and the Spanish-American War that solidified the imperialist ambitions of a nation trying to become a global superpower. In short order, major military operations resulted in the U.S. claim over Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines to name but a few. This laid the foundations for the so-called Banana Wars (1898-1934) that additionally took U.S. military interventionism into Panama, Honduras, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Mexico at the behest of U.S. corporate monopolies over an agribusiness kept afloat through real or virtual slave labor. The



Army Col. Guy A. LeMire(left), Marine Gen. John F. Kelly (center) and Army Col. Thomas D. Boccardi (right) inspect soldiers in formation during the change of command ceremony at Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras, June 20, 2013. Courtesy of the Internet.

famed Marine Corps Major General Smedley Butler deemed his tenure during this period accordingly as he later titled his book *War is a Racket*:

“I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902–1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.”

This may seem disconnected from a present in which news stories about half-starved, abandoned children and raped/brutalized women show up at the borders in need of saving by the Red, White, and Blue, but these children are children of broken revolutions and a doctrine of U.S. experimentation in low-intensity warfare throughout the continent. If it wasn’t a CIA-led Operation Condor or PBSUCCESS (1954) to overthrow democratically elected presidents, it was assassinations and the disappearing of key popular movement leaders such as Archbishop Óscar Romero (1980), the use and sponsorship of both private and state-sanctioned terrorism, false flag operations, pseudo gangs, and paramilitary death squads like Mano Blanca (Guatemala), Sombra Negra (El Salvador), Battalion 3-16 (Honduras), or the

“Contras,” paid counter revolutionaries funded by the exchange of arms, drugs, and money—all of which were conveniently facilitated and enabled by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and its regional proxies. Low-intensity warfare, however, wasn’t the only game in town. As popular activist author Arundhati Roy once put it, “these days politics is just as easily done through the checkbook as it is the cruise missile.” Or better yet, the con job.

Cronyism and clientelism, put into motion by the economic hitmen of American corporations, created political dynamics in which the banana republic became an all-too-active monster on steroids, a junkie fueled by structural adjustment programs, maquiladoras, no-bid contracts, sweetheart deals, corruption, bribery, and graft. Violence under these conditions becomes a blunted and messy tool that more often than not interferes with the ability to keep the dollars flowing smoothly. Seemingly, the goals of low-intensity warfare (destabilization) and structural readjustment (stabilization) would seem not only at odds with one another but counterintuitive. Here is where John Perkins, self-confessed whistleblower on the role of economic hitmen, becomes that much more cogent:

“Economic hit men (EHMs) are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other foreign ‘aid’ organizations into the coffers of huge corporations and the pockets of a few wealthy families who control the planet’s natural resources. Their tools include fraudulent financial reports, rigged elections, payoffs, extortion, sex, and murder. They play a game as old as empire, but one that has taken on new and terrifying dimensions . . . [I]f we fail, an even more sinister breed steps in, ones we EHMs refer to as the jackals, men who trace their heritage directly to those earlier empires. The jackals are always there, lurking in the shadows. When they



Children caught in the middle of the immigration crisis. Courtesy of the Internet.

emerge, heads of state are overthrown or die in violent ‘accidents.’ And if by chance the jackals fail, as they failed in Afghanistan and Iraq, then the old models resurface. When the jackals fail, young Americans are sent in to kill and to die . . . [I]f the jackal fails, then the job falls to the military.”

The example of organized crime seems to offer a metaphor. Mafia bosses often start out as street thugs. But over time, the ones who make it to the top transform their appearance. They take to wearing impeccably tailored suits, owning legitimate businesses, and wrapping themselves in the cloak of upstanding society. They support local charities and are respected by their communities. They are quick to lend money to those in desperate straits. Like the John Perkins resume, these men appear to be model citizens. However, beneath this patina is a trail of blood. When the debtors cannot pay, hit men move in to demand their pound of flesh. If this is not granted, the jackals close in with baseball bats. Finally, as a last resort, out come the guns.

EHMs, jackals, and armies flourish for as long as their activities can be shown to generate economic growth—and they almost always demonstrate such growth. Thanks to the biased ‘sciences’ of forecasting, econometrics, and statistics, if you bomb a city and then re-build it, the data shows a huge spike in economic growth . . . The real story is that we are living a lie.”²

Low-intensity warfare, more often than not referred to simply as “conflict,” today’s insurgency/counter insurgency, began its journey to formalization in the late ‘70s, and early ‘80s, following the lessons learned in Vietnam. In 1985, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff authored the following definition:

“Low-intensity conflict is a limited politico-military struggle to achieve political, social, economic, or psychological objectives. It is often protracted and rangles from diplomatic, economic, and psycho-social pressures through terrorism and insurgency. Low-intensity conflict is generally confined to a geographic area *and is often characterized by constraints on the weaponry, tactics, and level of violence*” [emphasis mine].

By 1986 these “definitive” elaborations had grown even more murky and all-encompassing:

“Low-intensity conflict is not an operation or an activity that one or more of the departments of the United States government can conduct. Rather, it is, first, an environment in which conflict occurs and, second, a series of diverse civil-military activities and operations which are conducted in that environment. While low-intensity conflict may be ambiguous, the specific activities are not. Despite their diversity, these activities, which fall outside the realm of conventional conflict, share significant commonalities in their operational environment,” from the final report Army-Air Force Joint Low-Intensity Conflict Project.

Which is to say, in short, *We don’t exactly know what we’re doing, but we’re doing it anyway, and because we don’t know what we’re doing, we’re doing everything, but because we don’t know what we’re doing, we’re not going to tell you what we’re doing. Therefore, you should just trust that we know what we’re doing.* The only problem with these scenarios is that real people have to deal with the consequences, and though this may seem far from the immigration debate, the two are directly related. So when two scholars as far afield as Noam Chomsky, one of America’s premier public intellectuals and “the most cited living author” (1992) on the planet, and the Georgetown University Professor in Foreign Policy and Director of the (U.S.) Army Historical Foundation, Derek Leebaert align, we need to be paying attention. Leebaert anecdotally relates the following in his *To Dare and to Conquer: Special Operations and the Destiny of Nations, from Achilles to Al Qaeda* (2006):

“In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, however, it was most of all a case of back the bad against the worse . . . serving as a sour metaphor for the arc of U.S. third world involvements . . . Green Beret and Delta commandos were offering counterinsurgency training to regimes unsurpassed in the noncommunist world at slaughtering peasants . . . In that terrible morass, it fit . . . Washington, during early 1983, to assign a Delta-led mission to hunt down= and erase a particular, newly formed guerrilla unit that had slipped across the Honduran border from Sandinista-dominated Nicaragua. Command Sergeant Major Eric Haney [headed] ‘a mixed unit of Honduran Special



An El-Salvadorian prison gang. Courtesy of the Internet.

Forces, Black Carib trackers, and two teams from [his] Delta Force troop’ that trapped the guerrillas atop a jungle mountain. The CIA had pushed hard for the infiltrators to be killed, explicitly the guerrilla leader. . . . [Haney] dropped him with a rifle bullet to the neck. As the U.S. operators finished off the work and rolled over that still-warm body, they recognized the dead man as Arturo Baez Cruz of [the] United States Special Forces, Haney’s roommate at Delta Force selection only four years earlier. The idiocy remains unexplained. . . . as Haney concludes, yet another CIA scheme gone awry.”

Chomsky puts to us the architecture of why “we,” the U.S., are there in the first place:

“[I]n Latin America . . . there are very good reasons for it. The commitment to these doctrines is inconsistent with the use of harsh measures to maintain the disparity, to ensure our control . . . and our exploitation of the world. In short, [to insure] what we might call the ‘fifth freedom’: the freedom to rob. That’s really the only one that counts; the others were mostly for show. And in order to maintain the freedom to rob and exploit, *we do* have to consistently oppose democratization, the raising of living standards, and human rights. And we *do* consistently oppose them; that, of course, is in the real world.

[O]ne of the main concerns of U.S. policy is the ‘protection of *our* raw materials.’ Who must we protect *our* materials from? Well, primarily, the domestic populations, the indigenous population, which may have ideas of their own about raising the living standards, democratization, and human rights.

The people who are committed to these dangerous heresies, such as using their resources for their own purposes or believing that the government is committed to the welfare of its own people, may not be [part of a ‘monolithic and ruthless conspiracy’ by the ‘enemies of freedom’] to begin with and, in fact, quite regularly are not. In Latin America they are often members . . . of Bible study groups . . . self-help groups, of church organizations, peasant organizations, and so on and so forth. But by the time we get through with them they will be . . . they will have nowhere else to turn for any minimal form of protection against the terror and the violence that we regularly unleash against them if



The dead, shot by federal soldiers, are laid out on the sanctuary floor of the San Salvador Metro Cathedral after they were dragged inside the sanctuary from the steps of the church where they were shot.

they undertake programs of the kind described.”³

So what do these kind of terrors look like, and what do they produce as a result? Chomsky further elaborates in his descriptions of events in Honduras and El Salvador, citing articles from the *Sunday Times* (London) and the periodical *Foreign Policy* (1981):

“[Reporter] David Blundy . . . spent ten days in the border area . . . interviewing doctors, priests, Honduran soldiers, Salvadoran refugees, and members of church aid groups, who ‘provided overwhelming evidence of atrocities of increasing brutality and repression by the Honduran army as well as the Salvadorans.’ The Salvadoran army is carrying out what can only be described as mass extermination of thousands of peasants living in the area where the guerrillas are based in a ‘co-ordinated military campaign by the Salvadoran military, assisted by the Honduran army with the support of the United States.’ Blundy reports refugee accounts of bombing, napalm attacks, destruction of villages, massacres, rape, torture by the Salvadoran and Honduran army, stories of ‘an existence of almost incomprehensible brutality.’

[T]he brutal killings by the army ‘have succeeded in traumatizing the Salvadoran people in fearful passivity.’ The army ‘is held together by a vast network of corruption. The vast majority of killings occur in sweeps of the countryside by the armed forces or by death squads operating under the formal direction or informal sanction of regional military commanders.’ The general picture is of a shift of power from the tra-

ditional oligarchy to a military oligarchy of extraordinary brutality and corruption.”⁴

The civilian victims and the military men and women pay the deepest price of the so-called “inconsequential” effects of such irresponsible meddling. The gravity of such activities is anything but lost on them, and it is to this that General Butler was referring. The CIA has another term for when things go sour in their aftermath: “blowback”—the unintended, harmful consequences of a covert (or not so covert) operation that are suffered by the aggressor. Cumulatively the “war is hell” metaphor then gives way to a far more apt military term: FUBAR (fucked up beyond all recognition). Which is of course to say it’s all just a SNAFU (situation normal—all fucked up).

The non-rhetorical effects of this are where the marriage between low-intensity war as destabilization or “opportunity making” and structural readjustment or “profit maintenance” creates the cyclical immigration crisis we’re seeing today. The fact is these U.S.-backed antics, not just in Central America but throughout Latin America, are both ongoing and generations old. Butler spoke about his time circa the turn of the century, while Chomsky and Leebaert are talking about incidences that happened only a generation and a half ago that continued well into the 1990s. But as with all generations prior, orphaned children and refugees must eventually grow up. Today’s refugees and surplus children are born out of scenarios straight out of *Lord of the Flies* that have taken over urban neighborhoods and prisons,

filling streets with violence throughout the region by flooding Latin America with waves of gang-initiated deportees recently graduated from the harshest ghettos and penitentiaries the U.S. has to offer. Following coups and yet another ever-ready supply of guns, drugs, and money, places like San Pedro Sula, Honduras have topped the world’s most dangerous city list three years running, putting forth an annual homicide rate of 187 per 100,000 people, second only to cities outside of a war zone. The Honduran capital city of Tegucigalpa, parts of Guatemala, El Salvador, and the Cartel-controlled narco corridors of Mexico are not far behind. The fleeing peasant populace is seeking respite in an American Dream by trying to escape the American Nightmare.

1) Arundhati Roy, *The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile*, 2004. South End Press.
2) John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, 2004. Barrett-Koehler Publishers.
3) Noam Chomsky, *Intervention in Vietnam and Central America: Parallels and Differences*, 1985.
4) Noam Chomsky, *El Salvador*, 1982, citing “The Innocents Caught in Lempa River Massacre,” *Sunday Times* (London), April 26, 1981 by David Blundy and “El Salvador: The Current Danger: American Myths,” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1981 by Leonel Gomez and Bruce Cameron.

Your Gaze Hits The Side

Jessica Hoffmann

1.

“In 1982, Louise Bourgeois became the first woman to be celebrated by a retrospective at the MoMA, and now at the age of 96, is clearly one of the most significant artists, gender notwithstanding, alive today,” wrote *Art Observed* in 2008,¹ to encouraging readers to go see the major Bourgeois show then at the Guggenheim in New York. A few months later, MOCA in Los Angeles promoted its big Bourgeois show with copy that began,

“This comprehensive exhibition is the first major survey of American artist Louise Bourgeois’s (b. 1911, Paris, France) work in more than a decade. Bourgeois’s long and distinguished career reveals a vast oeuvre in dialogue with most of the major international avant-garde artistic movements of the 20th century—from surrealism to conceptual art—but always remaining distinctively separate, as an inventive forerunner.”²

Unmentioned among the “major international avant-garde”³ artistic movements of the 20th century,” of which Bourgeois was an inventive forerunner, is feminist art, which would provoke a seismic shift in art discourse starting in the 1970s, a couple of decades into Bourgeois’s career, which established the context in which Bourgeois became the first woman to get a major retrospective at MoMA; and many of the concerns Bourgeois was already exploring in the 1940s.

Bourgeois’s paintings and drawings of the late ‘40s of naked bodies with houses for heads do of course bear a visual and conceptual relationship to surrealism. That they are women’s bodies under the title *Femme-maison* (housewoman) struck me immediately upon first viewing them at MOCA as clear evidence of Bourgeois’s feminist concerns, whether in the simple sense that there is a major and obvious gaze and subjectivity shift embedded in the representation of women’s bodies *by* women in the context of an art history centered around the representation of women’s bodies by male “masters,” or in a more complicated sense. Maybe she was getting into something about the relationship between women’s prescribed intellectual or perceptual purview and their traditional location in the home, and maybe between that and how women’s bodies in western cultures are always/everywhere as if naked, or maybe (sometimes the figure is on all-fours or on her back and there is not just a house but an entire tenement building covering her head) there is something about class or, in that visually new yet emotionally familiar combination of naked hips, thighs, and pussy and un-see-able, surrounded head, something about so-called public and private spheres and just the whole complicated set of questions about female subjectivity and social/structural relationships that Bourgeois seemed to be getting at a few decades ahead of the intrusion of feminist analysis on the art world, and right around the time du Beauvoir would have been writing *The Second Sex*—but before I had a chance to really think through what might be going on in those images, I was quickly corrected, a little box placed over my head.



Kara Walker, *A Subtlety*, 2014. Domino Sugar Factory in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Courtesy of Creative Time.

In the 300-plus-page catalogue for the MOCA show, the topic of feminism is addressed in a six-page essay entitled “Is She? Or isn’t She?” that documents Bourgeois’s shifting and fruitfully complicated (and relational) identification with the term “feminist” as well as some of the many feminist concerns in her work, but ends up feeling—because of the title and the minor amount of space it occupies in the book—like a perfunctory nod to “the feminists.” Even more dismissively, the Centre Pompidou assured viewers of the *Femme-maison* images in its Bourgeois show that year: “More than mere feminist propaganda denouncing the *overwhelming* burden of the home in a housewife’s life, as the titles might lead us to believe, here we find an immense nucleus of inspiration. The house is the ideal receptacle for all memories and, in particular, those of childhood.”⁴ Those apparently un-feminist, universal concerns.

In a 2012 essay called “Feminism in the Man’s Museum,”⁵ the critic Rebecca Park argues that, though feminist artists are occupying ever more space in major museums, overall the institutions “still don’t know how to deal with” them. Park points to Musée Guimet’s 2011 Rina Banerjee show and the Whitney’s 2011 Sherrie Levine exhibition as examples of shows by artists whose work has clearly feminist content and yet in the institutions’ framing (exhibition catalogues, promotional and wall text, etc.), there is no feminist analysis. About the framing of the Levine show, Park writes,

“[T]he Whitney sidestepped Levine’s sociopolitical commentary to such an extent that it was nearly comical. Take *After Courbet* (2009) as an example. The work, a gridlike display of eighteen postcards of the same mid-nineteenth-century painting, is approached in the same manner as the entirety of her oeuvre: challenges to notions of originality and reproduction, generally limited to our experience of

art and its history. But the composition on display is . . . Gustave Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde* (1866), an image of a woman’s body so sexualized that it is still able to shock today, nearly 150 years after the fact. If it wasn’t so depressing, the institution’s reluctance to tackle the obvious questions Levine is defying us to consider—how the charged space of women’s sexuality mutates depending on the creator’s gendered gaze, how commercial production exploits and banalizes women’s bodies, how large-scale reproduction confronts and exposes these specific ideas—would be laughable.”

At about the same time, on the other side of the country, LACMA presented *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*. It could have been a perspective-altering show, given surrealism’s overwhelmingly male gaze and abundant use of women’s bodies as symbols. Instead, the exhibition text put forth “feminism” as a straightforward colonial narrative:

“North America represented a place free from European traditions for women Surrealists . . . North America offered [women artists] the opportunity for reinvention and individual expression, a place where they could attain their full potential and independence.”

North America: a free new world for white women to shake off the oppressive traditions of European art history, whimsically plucking and dropping into their work sacred indigenous and Mexican signs and symbols.

Unsurprising, then, that Frida Kahlo’s images—more famous than any of the others’—were the primary marketing tools of the show although most of the artists were white and American or European and, in the overcrowded exhibition, there was no real space or invitation to reflect on the complex content of Kahlo’s



Louise Bourgeois photographed with her *Fillette* by Robert Mapplethorpe in 1982.

work. On a wall of artists' bios, the photographic portrait of Kahlo was the only one in which the artist was nude. It's a beautiful image that I have found strong and sexy in many other contexts, but on this wall of portraits of clothed white artists, it told me more about the curatorial and presumed audience gaze than about Frida Kahlo or hers.

2.

When millions of people took to U.S. streets demanding justice for immigrants on May Day 2006, English-language news outlets reported with surprise at the hugeness of this previously "invisible" movement. That they, and most white citizens of this country, had not previously noticed the millions of immigrant workers in their midst who were building toward that moment does not mean that those people or that movement were ever "invisible." It means that some people did not see them.

That a person who, in Claudia Rankine's words in *Citizen*, "has perhaps never seen anyone who is not a reflection of himself" fails to perceive an other does not render the other invisible. It says something, rather, about the one who is doing the gazing—and about the social context in which some people are able to live without ever having "seen anyone who is not a reflection of himself." (*Seeing* being a layered verb not limited to physical sight.)

In "The Whitney Biennial for Angry Women," written in response to the 2014 biennial, Eunsong Kim and Maya Isabella Mackrandilal define "(White)spatiality":

"There is a specter here that haunts this space. It has multiple faces. We'll call one white supremacy: the belief in the universal, a pure idea arrived at by a series of white men who have combed through culture and curated its worth. Another face we'll call visual oppression. We'll call it passing. We'll call it presence without provocation. We'll call it just enough black faces to assuage liberal guilt without the discomfort of challenging anything. We'll call it the fantasy of postracial America. We'll call it visible invisibility."⁶

In their coverage of the current mass movement protesting systemic police violence against Black Americans, many media outlets are addressing the problem of "Why It's So Hard for Whites to Understand Ferguson" (to borrow a headline from *The Atlantic*) by reporting on a 2013 study by the Public Religion Research Institute that found that the close social networks—the circle with whom people discuss important matters in their lives—of white Americans are on average 91 percent white. Robert P. Jones, the writer of the *Atlantic* article and the CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute, reflects, "For me, a white man, hearing accounts of how black parents teach their sons to deal with police is difficult to grasp as reality."

The HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN? collective pulled their work out of the 2014 Whitney Biennial in protest of the inclusion of Joe Scanlan's Donelle Woolford project, which centers around a fictional black woman artist imagined by Scanlan, a white man.

3.

Twenty minutes into an OK Cupid date with a white guy a few years older than me, he gets onto *The New Yorker* and casually says he wishes the fiction writers in the magazine with "foreign" names would write more "universal" stories—"like James Baldwin," he adds, referring to a writer I'd mentioned in my profile. I leave when it's polite to and still find myself concerned about his feelings when, next day, I decline his invitation for a second date.

(Look at this womanly thing I am doing, bringing in a personal scene when I'm meant to be saying something about public discourse. / I trust you know how absurd it was to have invoked Baldwin like that.)

4.

I think violence stems from, or at least is enabled by, the failure to register another as real. I think love is the opposite of that—it entails seeing another as whole and as real.

5.

Art can and should do a lot of different things. One I'll mention in the context of this discussion is to find or offer a different way of seeing from the usual or one's own way. I have doubts about whether simple representation or inclusion have material impact on social systems or people's lives, especially in the context of neoliberalism, which absorbs and thwarts any real challenge to the dominant order, but when I have some space to hope it does seem that narrative and image and shifts of gaze have crucial potential to increase empathy. Even if compassion and understanding are not systemic change, and even if art has many purposes and it's arguable whether contributing to human connection or reckoning with reality should be or are among them, representation and shifting (or sharing) subjectivity and communication just might have some role to play in countering actual, daily violence or creating a world less rife with it.

6.

Here's Claudia Rankine on Kara Walker in a recent interview by Lauren Berlant in *BOMB*.⁷

"In a sense, the scandal of Walker's *A Subtlety* . . . is its refusal to contextualize or educate beyond what can be seen. If you can't or won't do the math, then the space must hold your reactions too. I struggle with wanting to reroute the content I am living, and often its supremacist frame is pushing back, pushing back hard."

and

"I sometimes wonder if Walker's intention is to redirect the black gaze away from the pieces themselves and onto their white consumption?"

7.

There is the persistent problem of what can possibly be received or understood in a neoliberal context in which all subversive or disruptive meaning is assimilated and undermined—a context in which it often feels like nothing means anything anymore. Of what can be received by a viewer whose gaze is circumscribed by the violent construction of its supposed but unreal universality.

Here's how canon-keeper Harold Bloom dealt with Virginia Woolf's feminism: okay, fine, she was a fem-



Virginia Woolf, circa 1912.

inist, but only if we define "feminism as the love of reading," ha ha.

8.

"A feminist art practice . . . is not a term designating a homogeneous group (i.e., the disenfranchised) or a fixed site (the margin) but rather an agency of intervention—an ongoing activity of pluralizing, destabilizing, baffling any centered discourse. This work, like all feminist activity, is a calculated optimistic gesture." —Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contemporary Art*.

9.

"Outsider art." Art by the "insane," the "raw," the "brute," the "untrained," and the "uneducated."

These are words art-historically (and otherwise) applied to women, Black people, poor people, indigenous people, queer people. These are words culturally close to *hysterical, primitive, exotic, wild, unruly, deviant*.

The category of "outsider" presumes an "inside" and reifies the colonial/patriarchal canon of properly trained "masters" or elites at the center. Outsider art is art "created outside the boundaries of official culture," Wikipedia says.⁸

I'm not sure what to make of the fact that the most famous "outsider artists" (e.g., Henry Darger) are white men. White men whose strangeness, whose wildness, whose insanity, whose unpredictability places them in the company of women, people of color, queer people. . .

I don't know, but I can tell you that Terry Castle, a white lesbian, once described by another white lesbian, Susan Sontag, as "the most expressive, most enlightening literary critic at large today," aptly titled a fetishizing 2011 article on so-called outsider art in the *London Review of Books* "Do I Like It?"⁹

After listing a series of "street encounters with lunatics" that she has had ("like most people who live in cities"), Castle goes on to describe her "latest intellectual [and collecting] obsession—the gorgeous,

disorienting, sometimes repellent phenomenon known as outsider art . . . best defined as art produced by those, who if not officially classed as 'insane' or institutionalised, are in some way mentally or socially estranged from, well . . . the rest of us. Yes, to speak colloquially, I mean the *mad*—the nutty, the unhinged, the non compos mentis, the permanently unresponsive, the people known, more politely, as having psychological 'deficits'."

I mentioned some things about Castle's identity as reminders of some key insights of feminist thought: women, or gay people, or people of any particular marginalized identity category, are not essentially free of a violent or normalizing gaze; identity is intersectional, meaning that one's whiteness or class position intersect with one's experience of gender (for example).

Also to say: feminist content is not inherent in women's work, and work that is made by someone who does not identify as a feminist might bear fruit under feminist analysis or even expand feminist discourse, and those whose identity has been constructed as normal or universal might see through a feminist or other non-normative lens. Seeing against the grain of normal/universal is not a simple matter of identity. It is sometimes a matter of life experience, sometimes a matter of analysis, sometimes a matter of listening, or looking with openness, to receive something one might not have noticed or thought about before.

Art can be an opening—to fundamental questions about the nature of existence, to new ways of experiencing a thought or a mood, to beauty, to visionary possibilities, to reworkings of a symbolic or other order. Not-seeing the other, whether by consuming the other for their very other-ness, as in Castle's approach to outsider art, or by erasing other-ness by seeing only what matches one's own reflection and thereby reifying the "universal" or "normal," is a foreclosing. That constriction both reflects the limitations of the viewer's gaze and, cumulatively, affects the social context we are all living in—art, then, both reflects and plays its part in the various violences of an enforced social norm or center.

Steeped in feminist analysis, it is quite clear to me how the idea of "outsider art" relies on a normative center whose borders are policed by identifying slippages of the "universal," and is connected to discourses that other, exclude, and seek to control women, queer people, people of color, poor people, and people perceived as "having psychological 'deficits'" in relation to a patriarchal, white-supremacist notion of psychological health and perception of reality. "Outsider art" defines the center while attempting to grasp (or determine whether one "likes") some peripheral aberration.

10.

These are some things that seem to me to reflect a strange perception of reality:

Joe Scanlan's Donelle Woolford project. The unimpeaked trajectory of Carl Andre's career after Ana Mendieta fell out of the apartment they shared in the midst of an argument (people gossiped that she was "fiery," i.e., the crazy one). The celebration of artists who draw racist caricatures as free-speech heroes while Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning are criminalized for disseminating classified information about the violence of the democratic state of which they are citizens. A song that has been played on the radio for decades now in which an American rock star tells an abuse survivor to chill out and open wide

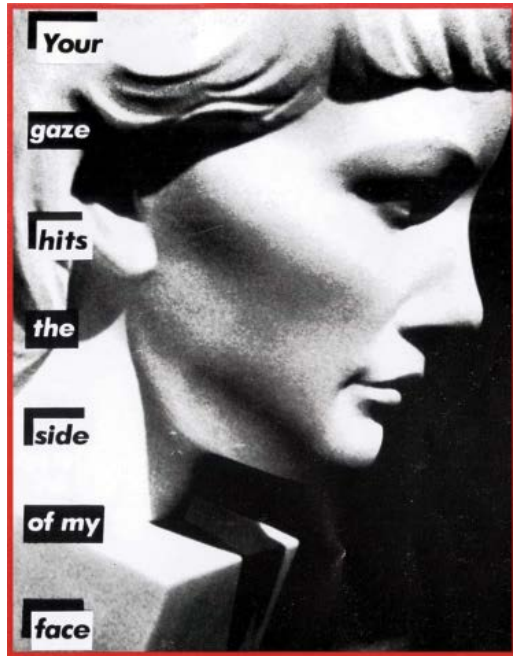
for him instead of acting "like a refugee." News outlets' preoccupation with the "violence" or lack thereof of a social movement aimed at ending hundreds of years of systematic murders of Black bodies.

11.

While it's not important to me to claim Louise Bourgeois (or anyone else) for feminism, it feels important to notice the lack of integration of basic feminist analysis (as just one example) in the main stream of art discourse. Incursions are made, conversations are expanded, and still centers are held. I am interested in the ways a normative gaze is maintained in a field that is concerned with looking. The ways the outside or other gets ignored or included or looked at by a non-porous or absorbing gaze. The ways that cannot stop the "invisible" from being there, hanging on the wall, saying the strange thing. The richness that spills outside "universal."

12.

I have no control over what you register.



Barbara Kruger, *Your gaze hits the side of my face*, 1981.

1) <http://artobserved.com/2008/06/go-see-louise-bourgeois-at-guggenheim-new-york/#sthash.CKMkQ6wM.dpuf>
 2) <http://www.moca.org/museum/exhibitiondetail.php?id=412>
 3) If by avant-garde I can mean what a standard dictionary says it means ("those who create, produce, or apply new, original, or experimental ideas" and "a group [as of writers and artists] that is unorthodox and untraditional in its approach; sometimes: such a group that is extremist, bizarre, or arty and affected"), and not what it has often meant in practice: a group of dudes jerking each other off and announcing how not political their project is.
 4) <http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ens-bourgeois-en/ens-bourgeois-en.html>
 5) Rebecca Park, "Feminism in the Man's Museum," make/shift no. 12
 6) <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/the-whitney-biennial-for-angry-women/>
 7) <http://bombmagazine.org/article/10096/claudia-rankine>
 8) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outsider_art
 9) <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n15/terry-castle/do-i-like-it>

On The Despised Art Of Thomas Kinkade

John Rapko

The painting shows a cottage, every window brightly lit from an otherwise unde-picted interior. Smoke curls from the chimney. A storm runs by, roughly paralleled by an irregular path. The cottage is set near a grove of an oddly mixed species of trees. The path disappears into the trees, and beyond them mountains, only lightly barely indistinct from atmospheric perspective, fill in some of the canvas. All beings may safely graze. Any student of art history can recite precedents from among the masters of pre-twentieth-century European painting for every aspect of the com-position, handling, and contents of the picture. The technical ability displayed here forces the word “competent” to one’s lips. How can such a work induce any strong response, indeed the universal scorn of the art world?

Nearly 50 years ago the anthropologist Mary Douglas argued that a culture can be fruitfully studied by considering how it polices its boundaries. At the edge of a culture stands an indeterminately vast array of monsters: the beings who embody what we don’t do, don’t say, don’t eat, or don’t touch. Monsters at the boundaries arouse disgust in those within the culture. One of Douglas’s distinctive claims is that a monster is something that exhibits a cognitive dissonance, in that the monsters seem simultaneously to exemplify for a culture categories that ought to be kept separate. Douglas’s most spectacular analysis illuminates the system of classifica-tions that underlie the seemingly arbitrary catalog of abominations in Leviticus; for example, the snake is an abomination because that which is on land should walk on legs, not crawl or slither, which are the characteristics of the beasts of the sea.

Besides illuminating something of the classificatory structure of a society, the con-sideration of monsters reveals something about the society’s relative willingness or resistance to re-structuring itself by its attitude towards cognitive dissonance. Douglas extends this kind of analysis into modern institutions, such as the army, which are partially characterized by the degree of internal structuring, hierarchy, and relative porosity of their boundaries. As Douglas later summarized the analy-ses, “each tribe actively construes its particular universe in the course of an internal dialogue about law and order.”¹

On first thought the art world might not seem amenable to such an approach. Even if one can speak of our diffuse, polycentric, and global art world as an institution, its self-conception and the characterization of its contents, structure, and modes of authority would appear peculiarly impervious to analysis; allegedly anything can be a work of art, anyone can make an artwork, and evaluations are individual and ineliminably subjective. Lacking even the most porous boundaries, the art world would also lack the motivation to engage in an internal dialogue about its limits. But there is one great monster among recent artists, someone whose work seems outside of what anyone inside the art world can treat as even a candidate for seri-ousness: the self-described “painter of light,” Thomas Kinkade, whose works, such as the one described above, have allegedly graced one in twenty American homes in the past two decades. No obituary by a prominent art critic following Kinkade’s alcohol-and-drug-induced death two years ago suggested the possibility of a post-humous re-evaluation and rehabilitation of Kinkade’s work, even to the small extent that Norman Rockwell’s has recently undergone. Instead, facts are recited, with the combination of repetition, lack of explication, and lack of evidence suggestive of a social myth being rehearsed: Kinkade was the “most popular” artist of recent time; his work was loved by the common folk; many collectors began and ended their days with a good look at a Kinkade; rejecting modernism and “ugliness,” Kinkade wished to provide beauty and solace. On the other hand the art world condemned the work as either sentimental or kitsch. Perhaps as important as these particular admonitions is the qualification that the works are pure: “pure” kitsch, that is. What one does not find, then or before, is any account of Kinkade’s work as art. It is neither clear what particular qualities are being grouped under these negative terms, nor is there any reflection on why sentimentality and kitsch are uniquely problematic in contemporary art.

There is a history of vices and so too of what counts as monstrous. A central vice in modernist painting was “the decorative.” A painting might be condemned as decorative either by failing to generate a sufficient rich meaningfulness (a constant worry of Kandinsky’s with his abstract painting), or by ‘merely’ illustrating some text, and gaining its meaning only via relations external to the painting. The wither-ing and near-extinction in contemporary art of the term “decorative” as a negative term would then be the result of the developments out of minimalism that treat the external condition of an art work—the architectural environment, the activity of the viewer, the institutional structure, the ideological framing—as constitutive elements of a work. By contrast the terms “sentimental” and “kitsch” maintain their sting from



Thomas Kinkade, *Cobblestone Village*, 1998. Courtesy of the Internet.

the days of modernism when Oscar Wilde lambasted sentimentality as trafficking in unearned affect, and Hermann Broch and Clement Greenberg treated the latter as the mark of ersatz and cliché-ridden cultural products. It is with these abominations that the monster Kinkade is kept outside the gates, and simultaneously the senti-mental and the kitschy provide what little there is in contemporary art as consensual marks of failure.

A further and less secure part of the social myth of Kinkade is that he was Ameri-ca’s “most controversial” artist. One is supposed to think that Kinkade’s work is the very icon of the yearning masses, hungry for beauty, meaning, and solace, and that the power of this work presents a challenge to art world orthodoxy. Now the fact, if it is one, that many people have bought and adore Kinkade’s products (not just or even primarily paintings, but prints, and then endless products festooned with the images or Kinkade’s name: the expected gewgaws, plates, and teapots, but also paddles and watches) might be thought no more of a challenge to the discourse of art than the widespread consumption of fast food is to the practice of cooking. But the works do provide the opportunity for reflecting on the limits of seriousness in contemporary art, and whether too there might be elements in Kinkade’s work that could be taken up and put to uses other than Kinkade’s.

It is startling to learn that as a teenager Kinkade apprenticed himself to his next-door neighbor Glenn Wessels, a former student of Hans Hofmann’s who regaled him with stories of Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound from days of modernist yore. Around the age of twenty, while attending art school in Pasadena, Kinkade rejected modernism, or at least one of its most objectionable yet durable inheritances from romanticism that survives until today as a kind of artistic common sense—namely the idea that a work of art is first of all an instance of an artist’s self-expression, particularly of her mental states, attitudes, moods, and emotions. What replaced this was a conception of art as a “service” to its audience. Kinkade seemed to conceptualize the audience and its needs and interests in ways that largely overlap Immanuel Kant’s views of the moral situation of the run of humanity in the famous opening chapter of *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*. Both think ordinary people are decent, possessed of a secure sense of right and wrong, and have some access to the source and principle of moral values. For both something like the characteristics of modern life trouble, but do not destroy, the moral orientation of ordinary people. For Kant, drawing upon Rousseau’s account of amour-propre, the problem was the tendency to overrate “his majesty the ego,” and to be tempted to except oneself from the demands of morality. The appropriate philosophical response to the temptation was to show that such self-exemption was unsustainable, and that the desire to avoid morality duties could be checked by the sublime view of oneself as the very author of the moral demands that one considered avoiding. For Kinkade, modern life introduced a chaos of ugliness into the world; the remedy would be an art of solace, one which at each point offered the viewer a path out of modern life into a world saturated with the source of goodness. In a venerable Christian tradition stretching back at least to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the early seventh century, Kinkade identified the source of goodness as God, and the this-worldly and visible expression of this goodness as light. The demand for a contemporary painter of light was born out of an insight into the emptiness of a central modernist myth.

Part of the social myth of Kinkade connects the rejection of self-expression in art to a religious vision. While in class with a nude model, Kinkade was struck by a vision



Thomas Kinkade, *Walk of Faith*, 2011. Courtesy of the Internet.

of the face of Jesus and painted it in His guise as Man of Peace. The resultant work looks like a student’s fumbling reminiscence of Titian’s *Ecce Homo*. The narrative staging of the revelation is more telling in its near-repetition of a founding moment of contemporary art, when in the late 1940s the student painter Robert Rauschen-berg turned from a model and covered a canvas with numbers smudged with a dirty white. Leo Steinberg famously diagnosed Rauschenberg’s gesture as part of the beginning of a shift away from the deep-seated conception of a picture-plane as an analogue to the visual field, and towards that of the picture as a kind of work surface, hung vertically but worked horizontally, the “flat-bed” picture plane.² Instead of this typical postmodern and contemporary conception, Kinkade developed a conception of the picture plane as what he called “the envelope.” In this concep-tion the canvas is treated in the all-over manner descended from Monet: no bit is left unworked, and each part seems to have received precisely the same effort of Kinkade’s attention. The envelope provides both the impression of an overall uni-ty, and the even-treatment of details conveys something of sense that God is in all things, from the major motifs to the details.

On the evidence of the major catalog of a retrospective of Kinkade’s work³, Kinkade’s distinctive conception seems to have been in place by the late 1980s, with refinements into a fully achieved state by the late 1990s. *Moonlit Village* of (1989) dis-plays the “envelope” in its plausible rendering of a bright moon casting shadows on the snow, but bizarrely shows the sky a pale blue that reaches towards Tiepolo. The windows on the church’s spire are a-characteristically unlit, a pre-stylistic holdover suggesting spiritual emptiness, and which as such will be eliminated in succeeding works. In a typical later piece, *Twilight Cottage* (1997), the small patch of bluish sky shows a crescent moon and an impossible ten stars of at least second-magnitude, while the ambient light easily distinguishes the blues, reds, purples, and lavenders of flowers. The peculiar mixture of cues indicating direction and intensity of light is matched by the mixture of traditional landscape composition on the model of Claude with some whiffs of a tamed sublime. The landscapes of Claude typically have framing elements of hills, buildings, or especially trees, between which alter-nating light and dark planes organize spatial recession to a distant horizon or light source. The distance between foreground and the most distant background is tra-versed by a path, through which the viewer gains imaginative access to the con-tents of the painting. The Claudian space is fundamentally intelligible and made for human exploration. In the sublime paintings of Salvator Rosa the path is broken or eliminated, and the viewer is confronted with something mightier than herself. With-in a fundamentally Claudian conception, Kinkade introduces just enough of the

sublime mode to block the viewer’s imagined physical access to the far planes; the pointless meanders of the path give out in some middle-distance hedge or copse. Kinkade’s space is not fundamentally traversable, but rather *inhabitable*, and this within strict boundaries.

What finally makes the Kinkades so objectionable, so unredeemable for the con-temporary art world is first of all this compositional strategy that sacrifices every-thing suggestive of exploration, anti-rationalism, contingency, and multiple per-spectives. Then the choice of elements is governed by the implacable criterion that each bit can be seen as exhibiting the *Deus sive Natura* as radiant light, while con-tributing seamlessly to the overall envelope. Despite the Christian context, even the most austere presentation from Paul of the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and char-ity is here mutilated into a placid faith that is indistinguishable from self-satisfaction. Perhaps the alleged attraction of all this for the audience untouched by the art world arises from the induced desire to enter the painting. The Claudian scheme provides multiple points of entry, and the density of detail provides numerous halting points for the gaze. The lack of elements bridging from detail to envelope discourages the gaze from moving and comparing. This is bound to the insistence that all windows be brightly lit: looking at one is just as rewarding as looking at another, and one is not meant to wonder what sort of life requires such unrelieved illumination.

If this be sentimentality and kitsch, can the art world re-structure itself so as to incor-porate something of its attractiveness to those immune to the main lines of contem-porary art? The finer analysis of the elements of sentimentality and kitsch is beyond my scope here, but it is interesting that a number of artists have given students the assignment of altering a Kinkade. The painter Chester Arnold told me that he has tasked students with setting the Kinkade cottages ablaze. Others have stuck in fig-ures, monsters in the trees or ghouls peeking out the window. I imagine an added figure representing something of the mood of the poet Georg Trakl’s *A Winter Eve-ning*: “Wanderer, step silently inside;/pain has petrified the threshold./There in pure radiance/Bread and wine glow upon the table.”⁴

1) Mary Douglas (1975), *Implicit Meanings*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 5, summarizing (1966), *Purity and Danger*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul
2) Leo Steinberg (1972), *Other Criteria*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, and (2000).
3) *Encounters with Rauschenberg*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
4) Jeffrey Vallance (2004), *Thomas Kinkade: Heaven on Earth*, Santa Ana: Grand Central Press
Translation by Jim Doss and Werner Schmidt.

Ulay *Act III*

Leigh Markopoulos

Uwe Frank Laysiepen, known as Ulay, is unarguably one of the foremost photographers and performance artists of our time. However, although critically acclaimed, until recently his pioneering work has remained largely unknown; his forty-five year contribution to art history often reduced to a focused period during which he famously collaborated with Marina Abramović. Today his oeuvre seems finally to be on the verge of garnering more universal recognition with a comprehensive monograph just published¹, his first gallery representation, and a recently premiered, and highly lauded, documentary² of his successful battle against cancer making the rounds of the independent film circuits.

In this documentary Dutch curator Ann Demeester refers to a film by contemporary Norwegian artist Lene Berg, in which the protagonist mispronounces the word charismatic as “charis-mythic,” a term she in turn uses to characterize Ulay. Certainly it relays both his undeniable charm and the many striking turns in his life story, beginning with his birth. Ulay was born in a bomb shelter during a 1943 air raid on the steel-manufacturing town of Solingen, in the populous German region of North-Rhine Westphalia. His father, an officer in the Wehrmacht, served in and survived both world wars, brutally compromising his health and dying prematurely in 1956, when his son was thirteen. Unable to cope with this loss, Ulay’s mother for all intents and purposes abandoned him two years later, effectively orphaning the teenager. Ulay has subsequently claimed this moment was “liberating,” and despite the deeper traces it undoubtedly left, he went on to succeed in his early years, starting a profitable commercial photography lab. At age twenty-one he found himself with a wife and a child, living proof of the German “Wiederaufbau” (or post-war economic boom) — a successful entrepreneur, but not a particularly happy one.

In 1994, Thomas McEvilley published *Ulay: The First Act / Der Erste Akt* — an extended conversation with the artist interspersed by the author’s own musings about and interpretations of Ulay’s solo work to date. His subject’s career as an artist had in fact begun twenty-six years earlier in Amsterdam in 1969 to be precise. A visit there in 1968 had sign-posted a different kind of “liberation.” The city pulsed with the possibility for radical change, fueled by the counter-cultural energy of the Provos and student protests and an active red-light district and drug trade. Unsettled and electrified, Ulay cut the ties to his family and relocated to the Netherlands. Beyond escaping from the suffocation of the bourgeois norms of German society, he was in search of self-knowledge. He began by taking up the camera³, which allowed him to document and access his new environment, its architecture and inhabitants. The pictures he took are remarkable. At the time, much of Amsterdam’s life seemed to be conducted on the streets, and Ulay was there to photograph the students, protesters, sex workers, drag queens, and others who made up its diverse demographic. His portraits and crowd shots exude excitement and empathy, solidarity, and amazement. His architectural images have the determination and ambition of the Bechers’ serial project, but their protagonists — the city’s grimy terraces and dwellings — glower and throb with the intensity of Kippenberger’s Psychobuildings.

Ulay also turned the camera on himself, authoring a complex autobiographical visual essay titled *Renais sense* (re birth). World War II and its aftermath had shattered any sense of German national identity. The revelations of Nazi atrocities, as well as the urban destruction and post-war occupation by the Allied Forces, inflicted grievous psychological damage on individuals, coloring every aspect of the country’s socio-political and cultural life. Enmeshed from birth in this destructive narrative, and unmoored by the dispersal of his family, Ulay’s quest for rebirth was both personal and political. But, it was played out at a remove and in private, in an extraordinarily fertile period of production during the years 1969 to 1975.

The numerous discrete series that comprise this extensive body of work depict the artist in a dizzying variety of situations and scenarios. They can be divided roughly into two genres: in one, Ulay uses props to stage situations; in the other, it is his body that becomes a prop on which situations are staged. At times an energetic cross-dresser capering on the beach (*Dunes*, 1973), at others a Nijinsky-like faun writhing through the woods (*Elf*, 1974), Ulay exudes a sensual, saturnine delight throughout most of the former category. He is perhaps at his most beguiling and disquieting in the images from the series *S/he* (1973–74). Often borrowing techniques and tropes from Amsterdam’s transvestite community, Ulay presents himself here as a vertically divided persona: half bewigged and in drag; half louche and stubbornly male. Throughout the staggering variety of transformations he remains recognizably himself. The characters he presents are expressions of an interior truth, rather



S-he, 1973-74. Auto polaroid. Courtesy of the artist.

than props to catalyze an alternate reality. They appeal because they convincingly seem to represent facets of the artist’s personality, documenting them for analysis at a later stage. They are both mirror and reflection.

Less easy to behold are the photographs that show him cutting, pinning, pulling, and scraping his body mercilessly. Self-mutilation, drunkenness, and hints of bondage characterize the bleaker images and hint at real-life rather than constructed situations. *Bene Agere (In Her Shoes)*(1974), for example, shows Ulay processing the departure of a lover by literally trying to put himself in her shoes. Using a utility knife he traces a bloody outline of her ankle boot onto his foot. Another even more disturbing work is *GEN.E.T.RATION ULTIMA RATIO* (1972), which documents the excision of a tattooed square of skin from the artist’s forearm, and its replacement with skin grafted from his thigh. Recalling Orlan, and later Stelarc, the gesture most clearly portended an ambivalent relationship with pain. Overall these photographs document and establish the terms of use for his body as a medium as well as a vocabulary of endurance and self-exposure.

Individually and in their totality, the images are perplexing; theatrical, yet convincing; tormented, yet uplifting; sexually provocative, yet guileless. Their urgency is conveyed in their volume and their immediacy enhanced by the use of Polaroid. Their formats reflect destabilization; many are collages or composites, while some are further fragmented through the use of mirrors and reflections. Although sharing the prevalent anti-aesthetic approach to photography, formally and conceptually Ulay’s work was quite unlike anything else that was being attempted at the time, a fact of which he was unaware. However, he had by now realized that he identified as an artist.

At an earlier stage when he had felt the need for further theoretical and historical education he had followed his friend, German artist Jürgen Klauke, to Cologne’s Kunstakademie.⁴ It was during his art school years that he began signing himself Ulay, as shorthand for his lengthy name. The moniker stuck. (Interestingly, and pleasingly to the artist, “ulay” is the Hebrew word for “perhaps.”) At the same time as naming his artistic persona, he began laying the groundwork for collaborative practice. Although he remained the photographer and more often than not the director, he shared the stage with Klauke, as well as a number of other friends and lovers. A photo project from 1975 (*Retouching Bruises*) alternately pictures Ulay and his emaciated lover, bruises marking their bodies, and purple thumbprints highlighting the injuries on the prints themselves. The wordplay draws on photographic terminolo-



There is a Criminal Touch to Art, 1976. Film still from the Berlin action. Courtesy of the artist.

gy, but the images are not tampered with; the model was anorexic, the bruises on both bodies real. Occasionally accused of trickery, Ulay is keen to underscore that his effects may be achieved through process, but never post-production manipulation.

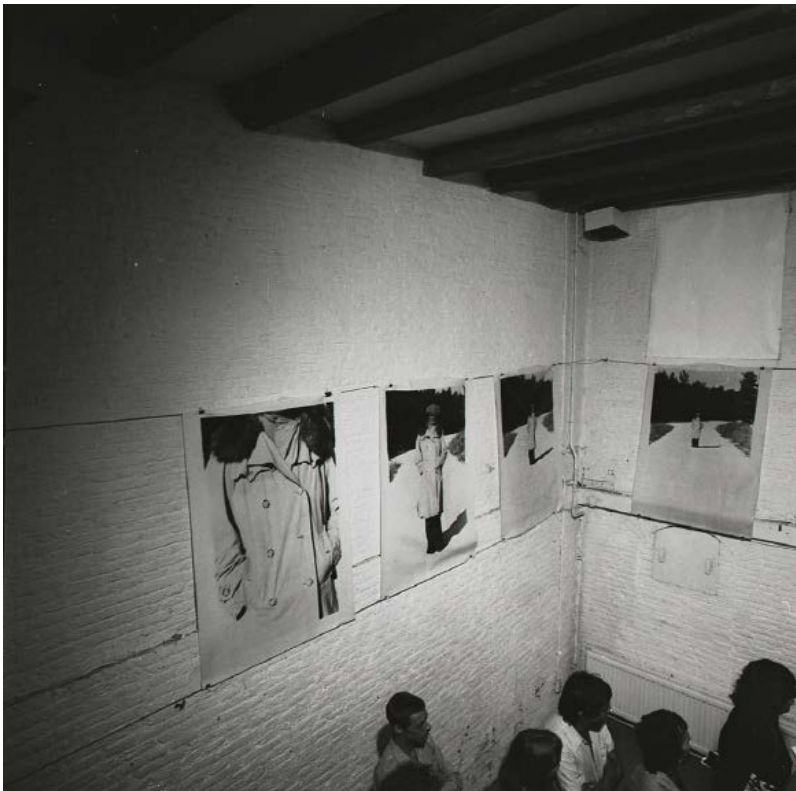
Performance curator RoseLee Goldberg has retroactively coined the term “performative photography” to classify Ulay’s photos from this period, acknowledging his creation of a new category. The term distinguishes them from documents of performance — itself then in its infancy. This distinction is important: Ulay does not consider himself a photographer, but rather an artist who employs photography as a medium.

At the time, however, the images were misunderstood. Or at least, that is how Ulay experienced the response to his first exhibition of the “personal” Polaroids at Galerie Seriaale in Amsterdam in 1974. The installation Ulay conceived for *The Artist is Present* made use of large metal sheets to line the wall of the gallery. Framed and mounted sequentially, Polaroid after Polaroid lined the slabs creating a storyboarded narrative that mimicked the frames in a reel of film. This conceit gave the images substance at the same time as the slabs provided both armor and support for the artist’s revelations. Unfortunately, display and content proved too sensational to allow deeper consideration about artistic intent. Disappointed by the responses he received, Ulay vowed never to exhibit these particular works again. (A promise he maintained for many years, although in recent times persistent curators such as

Maria Rus Bojan have persuaded him otherwise and the images have once again started, thankfully, circulating through his monograph.)

Wrestling with his public presence and artistic career, Ulay became involved with the newly established De Appel. Founded in 1975 by Wies Smalls (collector and owner of Seriaale), the organization set out to offer a platform for the research and presentation of contemporary art. Realizing that if he could not dictate the reception of difficult work he could at least influence its framing and promotion, Ulay became active as a board member and program consultant for the organization. It was at his suggestion, then, that Marina Abramović was invited to appear at De Appel in December of 1975.

Although Ulay had followed Abramović’s career from afar, the artists met in person for the first time at the Amsterdam airport in 1975. It was a determining moment for both of them. Captivated by Abramović’s vitality, Ulay was entranced by her re-performance of *Thomas Lips* in front of a shaken audience on December 5, 1975. Devised for Galerie Krinzinger in Austria earlier that year, this performance has now been performed three times by Abramović and is considered one of her seminal works. The artist eats a kilo of honey, drinks a liter of wine, carves a five-point star on her stomach, and flagellates herself as a prelude to crucifixion on ice. Documenting Abramović’s progress through this inventory of masochism, Ulay realized that he had found the personification of the female other, or anima, he had been exploring in his photographs. The twin-like nature of their physical appearance was further en-



Fototot 1, 1976. Performance documentation from De Appel. Courtesy of the artist.

hanced by the discovery that they were born on the same day, November 30, albeit three years apart.

By all accounts, the meeting was significant for both artists and the times that followed were happy, intense, and productive. Before they could collaborate artistically, however, both had to consider the implications for their solo careers. Ulay had a number of public performances he wanted to undertake, one a series signaling the (as it turned out, temporary) end to his photographic work, and the other a dramatic intervention. Recently re-performed⁵, *Fototot* ("photo-death") was a radical tri-partite action, one of the first to underscore the ephemerality of photography as a medium. For the first part, audiences were invited into the darkened space of De Appel. The lights were turned on revealing nine large photographic portraits of a veiled figure receding up a road. Unfixed and mounted high on the gallery walls, the photos started fading to black 30 seconds after being exposed to the light. The variously bemused and anxious responses to this disappearance were photographed by Ulay and formed the subject of the second part. Entering the same space at a later date, visitors were confronted by a folder, invitingly placed on a table lit by a desk-lamp. As soon as it was opened, the contents of this folder, unfixed images of the first event, also evanesced. For the final part, staged at Beyer Galerie, in Wuppertal, Germany, Ulay kitted himself out with a crash helmet and strapped a large mirror to his front. Video documentation of the performance shows him swaying slightly under the weight of the glass pane, before kipping forward. The mirror shatters and the audience gasps. Ulay, however, is miraculously unharmed. Frustrating audience expectation, denying photography's claim to memorialize, or even to reflect accurately the present, with this work Ulay signaled a new chapter in his practice. Photo was dead, long live the artist.

Once extricated from the shards, he was able to turn his attention to his final solo undertaking for a while—*Action in 14 Predetermined Sequences: There is a Criminal Touch to Art*. This stupendously daring and outrageously provocative action survives as a documentary film (viewable on Ubu.com). As described in the scripted instructions that are part of the piece, in December 1976 the artist entered the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, removed Carl Spitzweg's painting *Der Arme Poet* (The Poor Poet, 1839) from the gallery walls, and, clutching it under his arm, sprinted out of a fire exit with the security guards in pursuit. The theft of this national treasure was not staged; it was as much a surprise to Ulay as to the guards that it succeeded. The work was destined for the wall of a Turkish Gastarbeiter (guest worker) family, in the city's Kreuzberg district. After successfully hanging it there, Ulay called the gallery's director to confess and let him know where he could find the painting. Outraged national media responses and a trial followed, but Ulay again emerged unscathed, despite a court summons and a mild sentence (36 days in prison, which he never served, instead paying a small fine). The grainy black and white documentation of this action—a composite that includes film from a small handheld—is lent menace and a sense of inevitability by the accompanying sound of an unplugged amp. The insistent, low, rhythmic hum heightens the tension and romance of this quixotic gesture. At once personal manifesto and political commentary on Germany's willful



Fototot 1, 1976. Performance documentation from De Appel. Courtesy of the artist.

denial of the rights of its immigrant labor force, this symbolic and actual violation of the boundaries of the art institution, art, and politics set the scene for the period of collaboration with Abramović—or Act II.

Despite the hardships that they endured due to their uncompromising pursuit of an ethical performative and collaborative practice, and their bitter break up, the years together are remembered fondly by both artists. The details of their peripatetic lifestyle during the early days are by now familiar—the five years spent living and traveling in a customized, but ultimately small, van, the struggles for survival: Abramović cooking, knitting, and selling sweaters to make money; Ulay managing mechanical repairs, their accounts, and bookings; and the performances in small venues for small fees and audiences. Their existence blurred the boundaries between art and life, and their practice drew on this ambiguity. The manifesto they devised early on to structure their collaboration enshrined this paradox. Titled "Art Vital," it espoused:

- No fixed living-space
- Permanent movement
- Direct contact
- Local relation
- Self-selection
- Passing limitations
- Taking risks
- Mobile energy
- No rehearsal
- No predicted end
- No repetition

"Permanent movement" and "taking risks" alone meant a continuous raising of the stakes. And while their ideas did not develop in a vacuum—Ulay cites in particular the works of Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Gina Pane as inspiration⁶—they did retain a discipline and specificity to their relationship that was compelling. Undeniably their chemistry was part of the draw.

As word spread of their performances, invitations to present their work multiplied. Their travel itinerary also intensified and they traveled increasingly farther afield. A disorienting but formative trip to the Australian outback lasted for longer than anticipated; Ulay wanted to stay, Abramović to return. Ultimately, their expectations proved irreconcilable and a work that was initially supposed to signal their permanent union instead marked its end. Taking place in 1988, *The Great Wall Walk* involved Ulay and Abramović starting at the east and west ends, respectively, of this monumental structure and walking its length. They met in the middle, on June 28, after three months of arduous trekking, with the sad realization that their partnership had run its course.

While it might not seem productive to attribute responsibility for either the break or the performances to one or other of the partners, it is true that an agreement signed



Diamond Plane, 1974. Auto polaroid. Courtesy of the artist.

by both in 1999 allows for works from 1976–80 to be credited Ulay/Abramović, whereas those from 1981–88 are credited Abramović/Ulay. The distinction is significant, if not always observed. It is true also that the later performances relied increasingly on the use of props and costumes (rather than nudity or everyday clothing) and on one occasion even took the form of an ensemble performance at a theater.

Much remains by way of documentation of the *Relation Works*, as the performances that the artists undertook during this time are collectively known. The early works in particular are indelibly etched in the performance canon. They have been handed down to us as a series of photographic vignettes—Ulay and Marina colliding headlong into each other (*Relation in Space*, 1976), or flanking a narrow doorway through which embarrassed visitors squeeze (*Imponderabilia*, 1977), or locked in an embrace, breathing each other's exhalations to the point of collapse (*Breathing In/ Breathing Out*, 1977). Abstracted from their contexts, these images function as powerful, absurdist metaphors for gender and relationship stereotypes. What is missing of course is everything else that made them so compelling as performances: audience, environment, energy, anticipation, the element of surprise, contemporaneity.

Both documents and the repertoire of the performances raise a number of issues related to ownership and (re)presentation. To quote Abramović, "Each of us brought a certain luggage—I brought a suitcase of performance, in his suitcase was photography." The photographs, accordingly, were generated by Ulay, although they are infrequently credited to him. Using a tripod camera taped in place, a fixed angle, and focus all determined in advance, Ulay relied on an assistant to actually click the shutter at regular intervals. He art directed these shots, even if he did not physically take them himself.⁸ It was Ulay also who preserved the archive of these images, customizing a freezer box and filing cabinet to the interior of their van, for example, to

preserve the films. (The idea came to him after reading about Chaplin's successful preservation of his film reels.) Thus it was Ulay who orchestrated how these works were to live on in our imaginations.

It was also Ulay who scored the performance instructions. "We are standing naked in the entrance of the Museum . . ." begins the score for *Imponderabilia*, evincing an economy of words worthy of Beckett. It was Abramović, however, who resuscitated them, negating the terms of Art Vital ("no repetition") by adapting and re-performing them as part of her personal repertoire. Originally taking place in off-beat locations (from Galerie H-Humanic in Graz to the Studenski Kulturni Center in Belgrade) in front of small audiences, it was shocking to see the works included in her 2010 retrospective at MoMA, New York. Decontextualized (no "local relation") and institutionalized, their simple, potent directives were fulfilled by anonymous youths trained by Abramović ("no rehearsal"). For many, Ulay was present retroactively, through his communion with Abramović during her performance *The Artist is Present* (a title that could be considered an ironic homage in light of Ulay's 1974 solo show). At the time of writing, a 3:38 minute video excerpt of the encounter posted on YouTube a year ago has garnered 8,825,342 views. Though one could attribute the numbers to Abramović's publicity machinery, undoubtedly part of the appeal resides in the palpable tension and emotion flowing between the two artists, a warmer echo of *Night Sea Crossing* (1981–87), one of their seminal durational performances.

It's a problem raised not only by this partnership, or by these performances. We can think of the implications of exhibiting or recreating Fluxus scores, for example, or Kaprow's Happenings, or even the bloody antics of the Vienna Actionists. We imagine the shock value of a headless chicken running across the floor being endured by audiences similarly tolerant and educated in performance norms, but in fact these



Retouching bruises, 1975. Polaroid. Courtesy of the artist.

events were often spontaneous, random, and sparsely attended. Audience responses ranged from boredom to aggression and even on occasion to intervention, changing the nature of the event. If a performance is understood as the synthesis of a number of factors—biography, personality, time, place, audience—then a reenactment can never be anything but an emulation, however distinct or a/effective it becomes in its own right.

While Ulay never completely retired his camera, he began using it again for artistic ends in 1984, co-producing with Abramović parallel bodies of photographic work. These were for the most part staged, individual portraits of the two artists. Appearing as silhouettes, shadows, or even marionette-like figures, they are ciphers rather than believable characters. It doesn't take too great a leap of the imagination to see these as attempts to gain distance and reflect on the disconnect between self and artistic persona, as well as perhaps the status of this self within their artistic relationship.

It's perhaps no surprise that the break up in 1988 was followed by a period of ten years in which neither artist had contact with the other. The beginning of Act III had to be marked by a hiatus. In Ulay's case, equilibrium was provided by another relationship, marriage, and the birth of a daughter. For four years he focused on his new family. An invitation from the Polaroid headquarters in Boston, MA to work with their giant-format (80" x 40") Polagram camera catalyzed the next phase of his career. If his earliest photos could be said to be self-portraits, and his subsequent ones portraits of a relationship, then the more recent ones can be understood as portrait of society, or of life in general, as viewed through the literal and personal lens of the artist. In this way, Ulay's expansive, ongoing inquiry resembles Sigmar Polke's (an artist he admires greatly) project to reflect life. Indeed, Ulay is insistent that art must derive from life, that it gains immediacy and authority purely from engaging with proximate and urgent issues, rather than constructed situations. It's worth considering in this context that he has never had a studio, and that he continues to seek out his subject material in situ, whether out on the street or in the desert.

An unwavering political and ethical commitment and a keen sense of social justice inform this perspective. Espousing a multiplicity of causes, Ulay has used his art to help campaign for women's rights in Morocco, to advocate for clean water in Rammallah, and to help save the elephants in Sri Lanka. An interest in the conservation and preservation of the world's water supplies runs like a stream through the last twenty years of his practice, expressing itself in numerous bodies of work. In *Water*



Molotov cocktail, 1992. Cant beat the Feeling, polaroid/polacolor, Boston. Courtesy of the artist.

for the Dead, 1992, for instance, the light reflecting from a variety of glass containers is impressed on polagram prints. More recently, in 2010, cell-phone imagery from a trek in Patagonia documents a search for water sources. Ulay has even founded an institute called Nastati in Ljubljana with Slovenian graphic designer Lena Pislak (his partner for a number of years and wife since 2012). This is a self-styled "private institute for art projects and creative solutions" with the grand ambition of providing "local solutions to global problems," developing a "universal language," and providing a platform for ideas and education. Whether or not it is able to succeed in its ambitions remains to be seen; its existence, however, underscores his belief in the ability of art and artists to effect change.

Ulay's oft-quoted maxim, "art without ethics is cosmetics," is literalized in photographic projects from the nineties until today that continue to push the boundaries of both medium and content. His subjects primarily comprise the disenfranchised and marginalized, whether the homeless, the aged, African Americans, immigrant groups, the Australian aboriginals, or the mentally ill. To commemorate their centennial, the Vincent Van Gogh Institute for Psychiatry in Venray, the Netherlands, commissioned Ulay, who worked with patients to give workshops on photo report-



Bene Agere [In Her Shoes], 1974. Auto polaroid. Courtesy of the artist.

age and postwar art. He also instructed them in basic photography, set up a studio with a digital camera on a tripod and a variety of props (objects, clothing etc.), and invited patients to create their own environment and take their own portraits over a three-week period. Sixteen participants contributed 260 moving and surreal images to the resulting book *I Am Other. The Delusion: An Event About Art and Psychiatry* (2002). One can see this project as an example of Ulay offering a personal set of tools for establishing identity to his subjects. In this way, and others, many of his projects remain collaborative keeping the boundaries between art and life, Ulay and his subjects, porous.

An appealing example of this blurring can be found in his educational strategies during his years as a professor of new media at the Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe in Germany (1998–2004). The "pedo-patetic" seminars he pioneered there may have been modeled somewhat on Plato's academy, but owed more to his experience of Australian Aboriginal walkabouts and his belief in discipline and endurance. In search of self-knowledge, students and teacher would head off to the Black Forest for a week with nothing other than the clothes on their back, hunting for food and sleeping rough.

Act III, scene I saw Ulay reestablishing the terms of his personal practice. Scene II found him struggling against lymphoma. What happens in scene III, now that he's back, remains to be seen. It's clear that a determining factor will be the overtures that the art establishment is making to him—exhibition offers, gallery shows, an art market presence. In 2015 he plans to take up performance again, with an appearance at

the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Undoubtedly these factors will bring changes. It's to be hoped, however, that the punk side of Ulay's nature which has brought him this far, will never allow him to stop pushing the boundaries of his mediums, whether photography, the body, or life itself.

1) Maria Rus Bojan and Alessandro Cassin, *Whispers: Ulay on Ulay*, (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2014).
 2) *Project Cancer*, 2013, directed by Damjan Kozole.
 3) Ulay's preferred camera remains the polaroid 980. His preference for Polaroid dating from his commercial laboratory days in Germany, resulted in an invitation from the company to function as one of their artists-at-large. This enlightened gesture on the company's part extended to a number of artists who were given equipment and film to test and report back on, in exchange for a certain number of images and collaboration on projects (in Ulay's case, a book of photographs of four cities: Amsterdam, London, New York and Berlin).
 5) November 21, 2012. Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana, Slovenia.
 6) In conversation with the author, Amsterdam, June 8, 2014.
 7) *Project Cancer*, 2013
 8) It is necessary to add that certain aspects of some works were restaged post-event if they were unsuccessfully documentation failed the first time around.



S-he, 1973-74. Auto polaroid. Courtesy of the artist.



SFAQ[Project] by Ulay

Mark McCloud

In Conversation With V. Vale

San Francisco Bay Area, the Mediterranean of the West, has nurtured its own world-changing cultural renaissance always placing a premium on imagination, ideas, innovation, and risk-taking, with practicality, business development, and publicity/marketing/branding left to the likes of New York and London. So it should come as no surprise that the birthplace of the countercultural sixties, San Francisco, has for years boasted the world's first (yet little-known) LSD museum dedicated to archiving any and all material evidences of the effects of this vision-inducing chemical on cultural production. The visionary behind this "Institute of Illegal Images" is one Mark McCloud, a photographer, sculptor, painter, art teacher, amateur comedian, and the preeminent collector of LSD blotter paper art (he owns an estimated 33,000 sheets of paper bearing miniature artworks). His archive also includes a collection of LSD license plates (!), rare periodicals, and books having to do with psychedelia, surgical instruments, apothecary bottles, paintings, posters, antiques—the list goes on and on. He has had several art shows of his LSD blotter art, most recently at Ever Gold Gallery in San Francisco. Sadly, Mr. McCloud has twice (1993, 2001) had to prove to a judge and jury that he collects and makes art, not LSD.

Mark McCloud recently talked to V. Vale, publisher of Search & Destroy (1977–79) and RE/Search (1980–present). In 1980 Vale featured Mr. McCloud in a photo spread for RE/Search #1, shot on the roof of Vale's North Beach apartment building, and he also featured Mr. McCloud in RE/Search #11: Pranks! Visitors come from around the world to visit the LSD museum (email mark@blotterbarn.com. No cost; serious inquiries only). Mark McCloud has a complexly humorous conversational style filled with oblique puns, references, and lateral detours, which makes for a challenging interview. Join us for the ride!

So let's focus on our goal. My goal is to bring maximum respect—that's the first goal of the piece.

I'm ready for tar and feathers! I've seen it come up every which way!

Well, there are probably three parts to everything in life, and one is the unknown background that brought you to where you are now, i.e., the bothersome details of geography and academic institutions.
Still baffling!

Anyway, I know what people want to know about.

That's good, Vale, because I sure don't! What happened to me is pretty standard. Not standard in that it happens to everyone, but every once in a while someone falls through the cracks and has a rapturous moment. That's all that happened to me: your typical everyday rapture! It took me away from wherever I was headed and pointed me in the direction that I'm in now. That's a very complicated thing because it's so fashioned for you alone. And no one goes collectively to rapture. It's always a naked proposition, like you showed up naked and you go naked. The dream that life becomes is pointed out to you as you're going along. I think that that was the biggest influence in my life: having a death/rebirth experience that led to rapture. Not an easy thing to recommend, since you have to die to have a death/rebirth experience! I was lucky.

Luck is very important in life. Luck and chance, I'm convinced.

Absolutely. And I think we all picked the right motive to "volunteer" for coming here, and then we have problems processing it. And it's about getting over those problems and processing them that makes you either a happy, fulfilled person or a frustrated, unhappy person.

I always said everyone is an artist, everyone is a writer, and everyone is a musician, and all that—

Because that's really the only interplay in the *Deus ex machina*; the thing is so well designed that the only interplay is the aesthetic. You can get the engine to hum better if your aesthetics are applied, but that seems to be the only interplay there is.

I would say that I started my publishing with one simple goal: to fight the control process. But I think that we're actually controlled most by our aesthetic.

For sure. That's it. It becomes a matter of style—the way you conduct your investigation here is entirely up to that. So it is very important, the style you settle on, or choose.

Although that can change. Okay, let's go back to Mark McCloud, the artist. Here's my perception of you: I don't think anybody is without a context. Everybody is attached to some kind of so-called aesthetic traditions, even if they're more rebellious and lesser-known ones. I only knew you as an artist in two realms. I thought you could be a great actor and comedian, but at least we got some really nice pictures of you in the tabloid RE/Search Number One, in which you're acting a role.

That's funny! I always tell everyone I'm a reclining comedian. That I'm too laid back to do standup!

They should just bring a psychiatrist couch on stage and then you should do it.

That's it! I looked into the reclining Buddha thing a little bit.

You could be the first psychiatrist on stage. Hire some straight man to play psychiatrist while you're free-associating on a couch.

Yeah, a lot of us are frustrated musicians and stuff, but I'm definitely a frustrated comedian. I really did have that role in school. I was always the class clown. And I spent time working at it. The sense of humor that my mom passed on to me—my dad didn't have much of one, but mom really has a great sense of humor. I think *that's* the stylistic aid that's been most important. Especially when you have problems with the State. If you don't have a sense of humor you're never going to get out of there. So I always retain that. Your sense of humor they can't really take from you.

[Sings] "They can't take that away from you."

Yeah, but you know how hard it is: when you finally have to accept the term, and it's very open-ended, when you become an artist you *declare* yourself an artist, and you may not really fit the bill. But it's the closest word we have for that social role. And I'm very much into the Aristotelian view of art, because I like that arrangement—with a group, with a society, of being a type of pioneer that's on the outer edge of the society, and your responsibility is to get way, way out there. And then to meet the requirements of the group you show them what you're up to every once in a while. That clears your social debt. I think that's a very good arrangement; I've never had a problem with that. I think the less socially tied an artist is, the better his ability to employ his aesthetic, maybe.

That's where the adventure is: it's on the borderland.

Right, but the artist's responsibility to the group is very uncertain nowadays.

It's always Hegelian too sort of—you and I are talking now in just word languages, but there are other languages, all kinds of languages. And artists, I think, expand visual languages or symbolic languages. But then the only way we can process that, or one of the main ways, is through words. And words are always reductionist, and they never totally "nail" anything.

No. That's the gentlemen's agreement that makes the place a good place to meet. And I like the parameters that we've all agreed upon to use here. If we don't have a name for the thing we'll draw a line around it and give it a name, or try to come close to it.

That's why I liked when conceptual art happened. It was kind of a cop-out in a way that it said—well as I understood it—you don't have to make any "real" art anymore, you can just speak an idea.

And I was definitely in a place where Nauman went, and he wasn't there when I showed up, but his trail was very, very evident.

What was that trail? I don't know much about it.

Just the Bruce Nauman conceptual art approach, that Leo Castelli put forward. It was never Bruce Nauman alone. Bruce Nauman always showed with Stephen Kaltenbach, and Stephen Kaltenbach would do a conceptual group of works and then Bruce would do a conceptual group of works, and Castelli would show them both together. People retained Bruce Nauman's name in the registry much more than they did Kaltenbach's. But when you go to UC Davis [where Nauman and Kaltenbach both received master's degrees] and you get your MFA at Davis, the people that have come there before you leave a strong impression. So when I got to Davis it was all about conceptual art. You didn't need to speak or draw. If you could conceptualize you were "in."



Mark McCloud in Paris, early 1970s. Courtesy of the artist.

Usually that involves some speaking, let's face it.

Yeah, but very little. I was always amazed by the lack of written requirements at Davis, but if you wanted a degree from Harvard or Yale you had to mostly write your dissertation and not paint it or sculpt it. But at Davis you could be deaf or mute as long as you were "producing" and you passed the evaluations. If they liked what you were doing, it didn't matter if you could read or write—it really didn't. The great Bob Arneson, when given a couple of pages of his retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art—they held the publication up as long as they could—when he finally turned in his words it just said, "Words." And they had to put that in two pages of the catalog. The aesthetics that I liked a lot were like Henry Moore where he says, "The talk I put into the piece, rather than talk it." So he puts the effort of socializing the artwork right into the artwork, and doesn't have time to talk about it. And I thought: "That's a very refreshing idea."

I guess I don't truly understand what you just said.

Henry Moore wasn't a big talker about his sculpture. Whenever someone asked about his work he would say, "Well, the effort I would put into talking about it I have already put into the piece." I thought that's really great. You know the difference. That's why Bob Arneson sending in . . . what's he trying to do with Words? The words have very little to do with it other than the title. At one point funk art relied upon these comical titles that were usually puns, thus earning the term "funk." That term came out of the Deaf Club; as it turns out, Joan Brown, and our beautiful Bruce Conner, and Manuel Neri came up with the term one night at the old Deaf Club [1979-1980, San Francisco punk rock venue], back in the '50s, and they decided to call it funk art, and Kienholz and all those people were involved. And a lot of the conceptual work I was inundated with in graduate school was mostly about the *titles*. . . of Bruce Nauman's *From Hand to Mouth* casting. A resin casting of his mouth leading down to his hand. A lot of it was based on that—very, very small-word associations to the object. I forget the beautiful guy running UC Berkeley at the time—

Not Peter Selz—

No. You know that Gabrielle, his daughter, has written a book that became a best seller? Did you know her? She was around for a while, a very interesting person, but she's grown up the daughter of Peter, in quite unusual circumstances, and she wrote a good book. She was here about a year ago doing a reading. We all bought the book to see if we were mentioned. Thank God she spared us. But very interesting people. Peter's big artists were the beautiful Niki de Saint-Phalle and Jean Tinguely.

Tinguely is huge in my world.

Me too. When in Basel a few years ago at Albert Hoffman's hundredth birthday, on my day off that's what I did: I went to Jean's museum and hung out.

I went there too.

Oh, good, Vale, what a great place. I bribed the guard and he let me sit in that Formula One car they had. It was a Formula One Lotus that I guess he owned. They had it at the museum and I got to sit in it.

Something symbolic there—

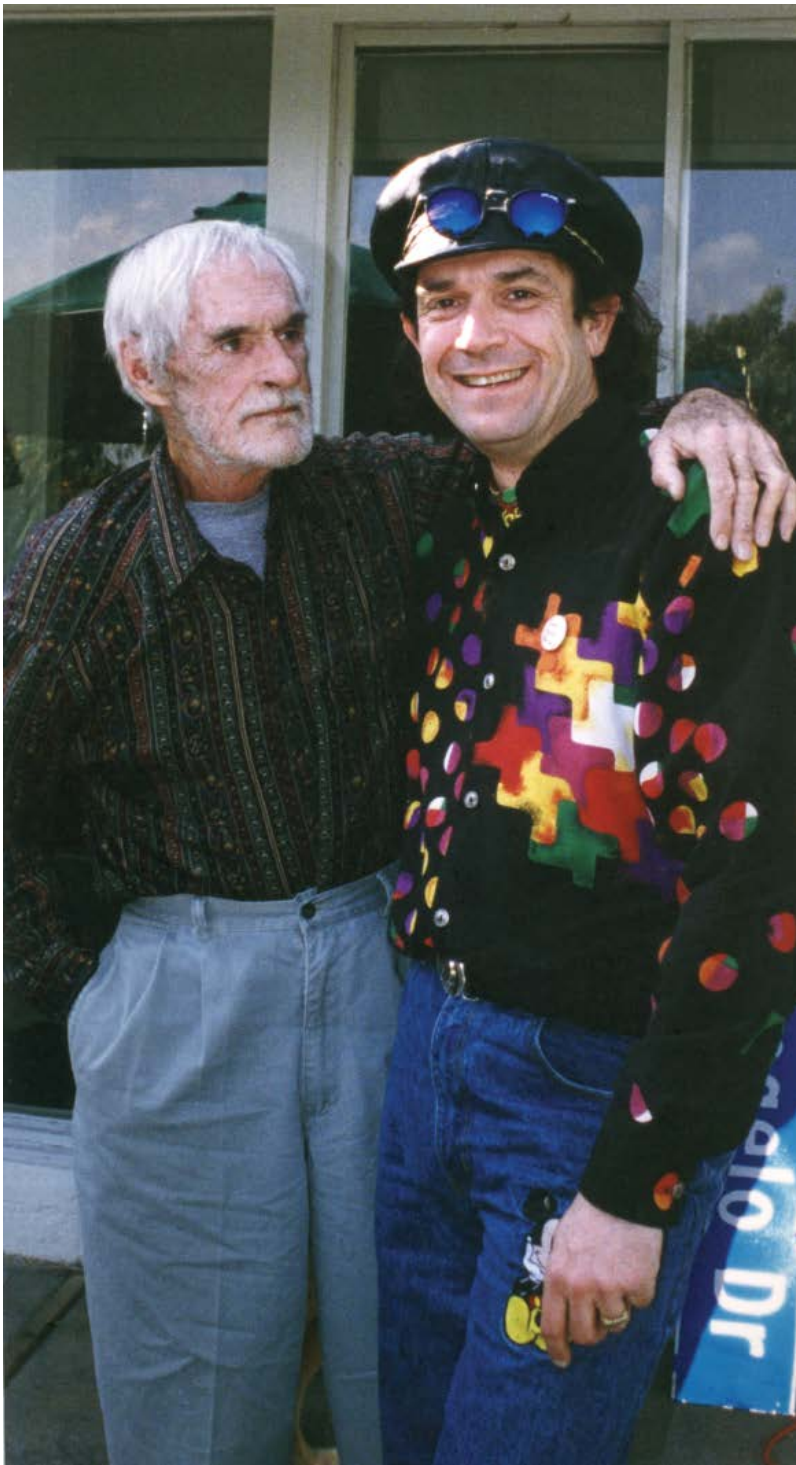
All his friends were Formula One racers, his best friends. He was definitely into that. But I love the Jean Tinguely museum, that whole attitude toward the social group, where you're blacklisted by society for the de Gaulle funeral piece. When de Gaulle died they hired Jean Tinguely to do the Charles de Gaulle funeral piece outside of Notre Dame Cathedral. Inside was the Shah of Iran with Dick Nixon, and Kissinger, and everybody mourning Charles, and Tinguely set up a huge monument outside with the covering on, and as the sun set they pulled off the covering and it was this enormous penis that spewed fireworks and self-incinerated. Of course he was blackballed by all after that, and no one touched him until Disney hired him to do these fountains at Disneyworld in the '70s. But for many years Jean Tinguely was blacklisted by all society for this funeral piece. I'll show it to you when I visit. I've got a very rare book with it in there, this awesome piece.



Japanese Crests, circa 1982. Courtesy of the artist.



Gorby, circa 1988. Courtesy of the artist.



Timothy Leary and Mark McCloud, 1994. Courtesy of the artist.

It's funny because you gave me one of your psychedelic, super bright, Day-Glo-colored sculptures that I called a turtle, and we had a green plant-like sort of Ballardian Drowned World sculpture in the corner for a while that was five feet tall. It was green like some tropical plant, and in my own mind, since I'm of limited knowledge, I had already associated you with the funk art movement, as well as an odd mutant strain of psychedelia, because I don't know—most of the psychedelia, when you think of art you think mostly of those posters that do tricks with your eyes. I don't think so much of any painters or sculptors when I think of the psychedelic hippie era. But still, it seems if you're looking for a cultural continuum, you're coming out of those and now you're telling me that in person. Bruce Conner too was tied in with funk art. I remember seeing a show so long ago at SFMOMA.

Yeah, and the beauty of Bruce is incredible. The range of vision he had. I was always amazed by the quality of the artwork. He was like *Oracle*-tied also, so he couldn't help but have a huge psychedelic side to his work. I think even one of the most cherished acid test publications is one of Bruce's from like '65. And Bruce has this tremendous influence on funk art, on Kienholz, and that's really the art we associate with the Beats. You know, other than *Bucket of Blood*. [Roger Corman film satirizing a Beat "artist."] But even *Bucket of Blood* has that little tinge of Conner in it! Or Kienholz, at least. And you know, artists, when asked what sense they would last give up, I think all agree that their vision, it's the one they'd hang on 'til the end.

George Segal, I suddenly thought of. I don't know whether I'd call him part of funk art.

Right, well there is that definite funky side to his work, especially when you look at someone with a sculpture like Manuel Neri whose main body was in plaster and wood and string and materials that were often discarded and not considered art. Then I think Segal fits that bill at least. Aesthetically, partially.

I never thought of looking at artists as compared to the materials they pioneered using.

Sure. David Ireland, the beautiful, local, truth-to-materials artist who in a minimalist approach made it more about the materials themselves. So we're the lucky ones for getting to come here during a renaissance, and the psychedelics definitely caused a renaissance in the arts. One that you are a big part of, Vale.

But we're talking about you, though. And I don't know how you even got the idea to make art out of blotter acid packaging—what do you call it?

It's from being raised in Argentina. You remember that humanity forgot how to make toys right after the Second World War? You know this very well that the toys were thin after the Second World War. We didn't get any good toys until they remembered, "Hey! We used to make toys!" One of the first little things that caught my attention were these books you would get at the local grocery store. There were these empty books, and then you would buy these gum pieces that came with these pogs. They were like little printed circles of paper or little rectangles and they'd have a general theme to the book like *Weaponry of the Second World War*. And you'd buy the gum and fill the book with these pogs, and if you were able to complete the whole book you would win the bicycle! So then after a few months of filling your book you realized that they had only made *three* of the German submarine pogs, and that that's the one you needed to complete your book, you know?

They rigged the game. What did you call them?

Pogs. It's a term my kid taught me; when they started using them they called them pogs. But we called them *fibras* [sic] when I grew up, and you could gamble with them, you could come to school with your extra ones and then we would stand in front of a wall and, by putting the pog between our top digits, then flick the pog toward the wall. Whichever pog got *closest* to the wall got *all* the pogs. It was like the first gambling. It was all about these little pogs. There was no art and everything was dried blood and gray after the Second World War, and then the first *colored* little things I saw were these pogs. If you completed the collection you got the *bicycle*! The promise of this vehicle that could take you far! Anyway, that's what happened to me. From collecting these little pogs when I first came to California and started seeing first the window pane and then later that developed into blotter—when I saw the first blotters I realized, "Now these are the pogs of our psychedelic group, and if you complete the book you win the bicycle!" But that's really all it was. In my death/rebirth experience, part of the vision was that I was in the environment, kind of like Earth, you know, and I was being observed by Apollo and the rest of the celestial magistrates, and they were commenting on me, saying what I was doing. And part of it was that: about the search for the elements that constituted the total unity of all things. That pattern.

Or at least metaphors for "the unity of all things."

And the overlaying pattern that entails that. Because when you see the total unity of all things visually it makes metaphysical and mathematical sense. They're aligned properly, and that's why the conceptualists, or Castelli, had the vision of containing Bruce Nauman by showing him with Steve Kaltenbach, because Steve Kaltenbach went on to become one of the best psychedelic landscape painters ever. He saw a pattern on nature that he's been trying to paint for many, many years. It's very hard to see his paintings because you can't buy a Steve Kaltenbach. You can only trade time to a blind institution and earn one. He's one of my favorite living artists.

That's weird. He's still alive?

Very much alive, and he's been teaching art for 40 years at Sacramento State College. This incredibly cool artist. He did lots of time pieces that got buried in buildings. He is a very dynamic artist, check him out. The Art Institute brings him in about once every ten years for a lecture. He's a very humble—

SFAI brings him in—

We got to see him locally a little, but he's one of my heroes artistically and personally. I got to spend a couple years with him, tripping with him and studying his views. Very, very interesting, beautiful artist.

Up in Davis?

Up in Sacramento, Davis area.

Your so-called mentors—

Fewer and fewer are alive. Sky dying and then Arthur Lee. All I've got left is Vale and Roky.

Very funny. You mean Sky Saxon? I thought you were his patron.

I was his patron and hugest fan, for sure.

I thought you let him live at your house.

Yes, of course. Just such a great artist, incredible person. But also the type of artist who wouldn't really see himself as an artist, but truly is an exceptional artist and an outstanding person. I still go see Roky ... huge fan still.

Roky Erickson. And Arthur Lee you were a fan of.

Just tremendous, tremendous fan of Arthur's, and so sad to see him die the way he did, but I always was interested in what Arthur was writing and performing. The psychedelics have truly caused a renaissance, something we won't be able to measure properly until we're much farther away from it.

I'm trying to think of other artists that were associated with that, like Peter Max.

Yeah, and Isaac Abrams is still with us, and Peter is still alive, who put the vision on the Slurpee cup. That's what Peter did—he put the psychedelic vision on the 7-11 cup. He's the guy that brought it down to the street level.

Who is Isaac?

Isaac Abrams, a beautiful painter who did the cover of that book, the Masters and Houston's book *Psychedelic Art*, when they dosed those hundred artists and studied their paintings. Isaac is still painting in Woodstock and you see his work everywhere, on album covers mostly, like Mati Klarwein, the father of psychedelic art.

Mati Klarwein is? Is he really?

Absolutely. Yeah, and Mati's church is the church that inspired Alex to make his church, Alex Gray. So it's really Mati who was the Castalia foundation in Mexico, tripping heavily on the mushrooms and painting, and also at Millbrook. He followed the muse around and was there painting it. He's really the first guy to take it—other than like people like Henri Michaux who did mescaline investigation artistically.

Yeah, that book Miserable Miracle got reissued recently.

Yeah, I'm so glad, it was so hard to get and *Miserable Miracle* is such a masterpiece. Our views of mysticism are very, very secluded in our society. The Pope having bought all the evidence and holding it close to his chest in the Vatican. And so then a lot of the mysticism due to our generation has been selected to not be shown to us. The prohibiting of the portrayal of Adam and Eve under the *amanita muscaria* mushroom, as always was portrayed, became illegal in the late 17th century. Punishable by death or excommunication. And the tango wasn't legal in the U.S. until 1932, Vale.

That's amazing.

So the role of society in the arts is something that's always the pull and tug.

So we have to bring things back to your wonderful psychedelic art career.

You hope to get your volunteering cause done, even though it's probably impossible, and you try to work on your project, whatever it is you've come to do, but if you're rewarded on top of that with a rapturous experience then wow—you're very grateful. So that's the big change in my life that led me toward the arts. I was lost and then I was found. And I think all "found" people are artists.

They say you find yourself by making art.

That's it. What better way? You can commit every mistake that leads you to not making mistakes without hurting anybody, in the arts.

Mistakes into art, often.

For sure. That's really what the blotter collection is. One bad idea leads to another!

Are you saying you didn't make the actual physical art that constitutes the blotter acid art that's in the frames?

It's nothing that Duchamp hadn't taught us. Marcel's found objects. To me it's just that. I've put the found object in a frame.

And then if you sign it, it's yours. Duchamp taught us that.

That's true. Tim offered to sign it all; as Tim was dying and he told me he would take the blame for all of it if I wanted to lighten my load!

Oh, nice.

Anyway, but yeah, I love that type of artwork, but it's really that. I was into numismatists also—you know, a coin collector. So I was used to looking at small detailed things and appreciating the way they were made. As the blotter got better I took more notice. Beautiful Nick West, who you will remember, put some hits in *Sluggo Number Three* and I thought that was such a brilliant move that he also inspired me greatly to collect.



VEE, 1985. Luster , glaze, clay 15 inches x 13 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

So you collected this art; you didn't make it.

No—François Truffaut and the other art critic who worked for *Cahiers du Cinéma* for André Bazin: Godard, yeah, and they were both art critics who after a few years, he said to them, "You know, the good art critics *make* movies." And he forced them to make movies. And so then that's what happened to me: after collecting avidly for fifteen years, I decided to learn more by making some. And then one thing led to another.

And you got some notoriety, fame, whatever the word is, and that brought the attention of the flics [French slang for policemen].

Les gendarmes. But no, the first blotter show at the Art Institute was also attended by the FBI. They showed up and they said, "Can we photograph this?" And I said, "Sure, this is for you guys, more so than anyone else," I told them. Because they were the last whores who came to the party!

Whores?

Yeah, the acid party; they're still trying to arrest us. So I told them, when they showed up in '87 at the Art Institute, I said, "Yeah, of course you can photograph it. You're the guys that don't understand it yet." And really, that's what's going on. The *flic* is tormented by his own demented fears.

Yeah, I suppose so.

That's why they're so against it, they think—yeah, and it's still not over yet. It's incredible to me: *the persistence of erroneous information*.

They didn't understand art; you had to educate the jury and everybody on art.

It's not an easy one. My poor attorney, you know? My poor, poor attorney.

You said that one of your attorneys demonstrated to the jury that a lot of money had been made, and that impressed people: "Oh, it must be art if it makes money."

Yeah, they had followed \$24,000 into the house. There's no illegality of receiving money in the mail, and someone had sent me \$24,000 cash. They taped it into a



Traveling Pig, circa 1990. Courtesy of the artist.

magazine and mailed it here. So the DA had opened the packet before it got to me, and they recorded the money, and then sent it in. They couldn't keep it because it was legal. When they got here the next morning they wanted to know where the \$24,000 was. Of course, it wasn't here; I had already given it to Timmy's leg operation, I say! Like when people worry about the future, I always say, "Can we save Weena from the Morlock menu?" Because in *The Time Machine* Weena is served up to the Morlocks as dinner—Dante's fascination of the future. That's her name, the Eloï girl that the *Time Machine* driver falls in love with.

How do you spell that?

W-e-e-n-a. They only have one name in the future. Like a great artist. When an artist signs his work with one name, like "Rene"—I think: he must be a great artist to go by one name! But a lot of people here, you know—we're dead guys. We're what's happening now so we must already be over.

So how many shows of blotter acid art were you involved in?

As many as possible. But really not all of them were received as graciously as in San Francisco!

SFAI especially.

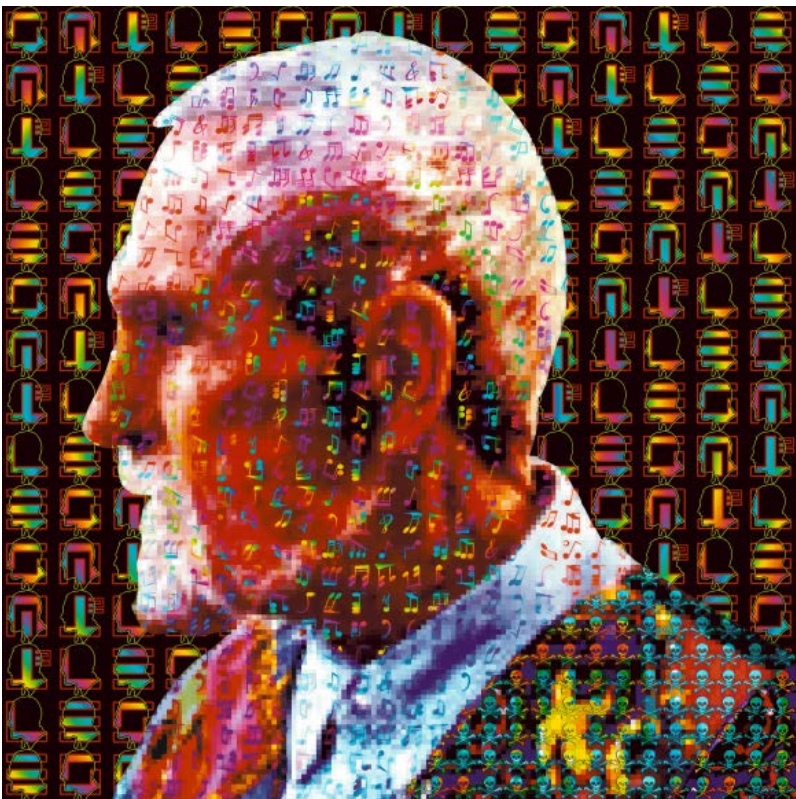
Yeah, that was the perfect place to unveil it; it's an understanding audience.

So the powers that be budgeted a surveillance of you from two apartments for a year and a half. Then they swooped in for the kill after they thought they had enough evidence.

They didn't understand that the C&H sugar cube guy had had the same problem for years before me! And at my first trial I was wondering where the C&H guy was, because it was a chicken-and-egg kind of defense I had. My defense was, "Hey, I raise eggs, okay, some of them grow up to be bad chickens, you know?" But I'm just dealing eggs!" And it was really that: I just made the paper. And I didn't use Albert Speer's slave labor in making the paper. No LSD zombies were used in making the paper! And so then my argument was that: "Hey listen, I'm just the art, you know, art is not LSD, LSD is added later to the art!" And so that's what the good jury of Kansas City, Missouri understood. If they were trying to prove I did the acid they hadn't done that. That wasn't enough of a defense to really satisfy my attorney, but that's all I gave him. You have to give your attorney your defense. I told him it's really a chicken-and-egg problem. The C&H guy should be here with me because he certainly made the sugar cubes that later got—

He should have been a co-defendant.

My only co-defendant was Nicholas Sand. Nick Sand had made the Orange Sunshine that thirty years before had saved my life, because that's what I was on was the Orange Sunshine when I had my death/rebirth. And then thirty years later I end up in court with this man I'd never met. Because I didn't know Nick until the DA in-



Albert Hofmann blotter artwork. Courtesy of the artist.

roduced us at our trial. They had thrown me together on conspiracy charges with this man, not knowing how "close" they were, because this is the man who made the LSD that flipped me, back then, into the collector.

You got to meet him thirty years later.

And be his co-defendant at the trial where we were both facing two consecutive life sentences! Good way to meet your hero! Yeah, really tough. That's how life is: it's full of meaning and irony.

How do you spell Sand?

S-a-n-d, Nicholas Sand. He's a beautiful man, very beautiful guy. Still alive.

He must be 80 or 90.

No, he's a kid. Like you, he's still a kid, Vale! Like you. True, true, wonderful psychedelic pioneer and gentleman. Huge force in the movement, and one of my most admired friends. But he was at Millbrook, he's self-educated, and he was at the Castalia foundation in Mexico before the LSD, and then he was also at Millbrook with the LSD.

Wow, okay, so then you had two trials in Kansas City.

No, one trial, but facing two life sentences. I was going to kill myself the first night in prison and start my second sentence right away. I mean it! You think I'm kidding. I mean it. So it was an "all or nothing" kind of proposition. I'm just glad that the Kansas City people didn't buy it.

The lawyer also must have—

He's the golden one, and his name is Gold, Doran. Doran is the Golden One. If ever in trouble call him and be totally honest and he might take you.

But I thought you told me last time that one of the things that got you off was the fact that you made a bunch of money as an artist.

Well, yeah, we had to answer the DA's claim that they had followed this \$24,000 into the building. And Doran had put the agent in charge at the post office that was in charge of the package [on the stand]: "Is there any law against getting paid in the mail?" And the guy said no. So the jury thought, "Hey cool! This artist does okay."

Oh! He must be a real artist.

Right. My father didn't like me being an artist until I got my second National Endowment grant from Ron Reagan—then Dad started to brag about it. That's how artists are viewed. You don't want to be an artist 'cuz you starve to death, but if you make money then they brag about you. But I'm just glad that the artwork has continued to plow forward, even though our archaic government keeps hanging on to rules that they know are not intelligent.

So let's go back to your art history, so to speak. We all know that there's no separation between your art and your life, we're post-Duchampian in that way, but I'm trying to be an archaeologist here. You've left behind photos. I don't know how many of those crazy, wild psychedelic,

super bright dayglo colored sculpture things you made, but what happened to them all? Where are they?

You show up naked, and you split naked, and that's pretty much all you get, Vale.

But at least they were made.

That's it. To be or not to be remains the question.

Well, you made sculptures—we know you did that.

Yeah, and I recommend that if you're very intellectual and you're thinking about your stills from movies all the time, that you get a job, a *physical* job, like sculpture! You will come home exhausted every night.

It's physical too.

And I love sculpture for that reason.

Yeah, not verbal.

It's just so physical. You've got to try it at least while you're in your body.

Okay, everyone: sculpture must be made by all, is our lesson.

Absolutely.

Okay, let's go back and tell me all the forbidden stuff you never tell anyone, like where were you born?

I was born in Gross Pointe, Michigan. My dad had a really good insurance program at the time that allowed them to move from Detroit, where they lived, to Gross Pointe. So I was born in the hospital in Gross Pointe.

Wait a minute, I thought your parents were Argentinians.

No, no, they were sent there after the Second World War by Edgar Kaiser to put together a car company. But my mom is an Oklahoma Cherokee girl, and my dad is a Golden Glover [boxing prize] from San Francisco. Dad got the golden gloves here in 1941 at the armory there on Mission Street! That's where they gave you the gloves in those days.

And your mom?

A Cherokee princess from Oklahoma. They met during the war effort out here at the shipyard. So then I was raised in Argentina, but I returned here because it is my home, just one generation kind of separate.

Okay, you said you returned to America at age 12. Now did you ever live in Switzerland?

No, but [I was there] for a little intermittent while, not just in 2006 when I went to Albert's 100th birthday party. [Also] as a student in Paris in the early '70s I got around a little—the dream of all artists.

Yeah, it is, to go study in Paris.

In those days it was all about Paris. I really wanted to see the real item, so I signed up at that museum there, École du Louvre, which was just outstanding, and very price-less. The tuition was \$20 per year. And it's one of the finest art history schools in the world; it's where I decided to do all my art history. Yeah, really great. So I had a pass that got me into every museum in Europe for free, but also allowed me 24-hour access to the Louvre. So I could spend the night in there! And often did. That was the best thing, was to go there, study film, and study the Italian Renaissance, which was my area of interest, Giorgioni being my favorite. And actually spending time with the real thing—the actual item. That's magic.

Wow, I'll say.

I insist on that now: the real thing, seeing the actual item, and what that does for you.

Wow, so actually I should have asked you before: surely as a child you drew and—

No. I was a photographer and I was into very little things and close-ups, because everything in Argentina was atrocious then. Every time I looked beyond the immediate periphery or anything further than twelve inches I saw some atrocious thing. I'll tell you, I was driving in a car as a young guy and when I finally got over the window level and could see over the window I remember seeing—it was like early in the morning and we were out in the country, and we drove by this lake, it's pretty cold out, and we drove by a corner where unbeknownst to me there was a bus stop, but instead of a bus stop I just saw this line of people lined up, all wearing clothes that didn't fit them—all dressed at gunpoint obviously—and I didn't know they were waiting for something. I could just tell that none of the clothes fit them and that if they swapped clothes they would be better off, and that things were really bad. So I kept things really close up as a kid. I was very ill and sickly and feverish, and I was really into the little smudge spot that my head left on everything, and that kind of scale. So I had an ant farm, and I wanted to photograph the eight ants, because I knew them personally so well, I could tell their personalities apart, and I wanted to show that. And that got



Exhibition announcement, *Cure of Souls*, curated by Mark McCloud, 1988. Psychedelic Solution Gallery, New York. Courtesy of the artist.

me into the arts—my first love was photography. I never thought of art or anything like that. It was more that I had a *job* to do with this project. I only learned about art when I left high school and entered college. I took a course from the beautiful Paul Kos called Conceptual Sculpture as a premed student in Santa Clara, and it really changed my life. But that's also when I had my death/rebirth experience, showing me that what I thought was called psychology was really called art. So I had to change then.

I don't think you've told me about the death/rebirth experience before.

Yeah, you don't sit down with buddies and really chew that one out unless it's called for—and it's a very intricate thing that involves an infinite amount of time because that's how long it takes for a dumbass to learn what's going on. And then when it's over it was actually a quarter of a second. But no, that's really what happened to me. So then on that December night in 1971 where by all intents and purposes I fell out of a window onto my kisser, I really fell into what we call the State of Oneness. And there's nothing like being One with Everything and the understanding that that gives you!

Richard Hell

In Conversation With Dean Dempsey

I stop into a morning bar to kill time before meeting with Richard Hell at his East Village apartment. I have a couple whiskeys trying to unwind after having spent the previous day rereading his autobiography, I Dreamed I Was a Very Clean Tramp, in preparation to interview him. It's pouring rain, and by 11:45 a.m. I walk a few blocks to meet him at his place.

He's on the phone and I wait for him in the living room. I snap a few secret photos of his black cat and his apartment that I can best term kooky. It's a classic Lower East Side flat, with slanting walls, high ceilings, a bathtub in the kitchen, and a palpable feeling of home. His walls are adorned with shelves of books and artwork, and I try and wrap my head around living in the same place since 1975. But this is New York: when you get something nice you hold on to it.

Throughout his music career he pioneered a sound that I describe as incendiary, sharp, and fucking sexy all at once, and not just because a high school girlfriend and I used to jerk each other off to "I'm Your Man" or "Love Comes in Spurts." His image was innovative and vociferous, his lyrics forward and imaginative. The music he produced has had an immeasurable influence on rock and roll's legacy, offering a no-bullshit sensibility that rivaled the pompous arena rock of that era and continues to rouse musicians today.

Richard Hell moved to New York City at the age of 17 in 1966 to become a poet with ex-band mate Tom Verlaine before being sidetracked by their musical collaborations, Television and Neon Boys. After Hell left Television he was the vocalist, bassist, and lyricist to The Heartbreakers with Johnny Thunders and Jerry Nolan.

With the exception of a brief musical project called Dim Stars in the early '90s, Hell left music for good in 1984 after the release of his second and final studio album, Destiny Street, as Richard Hell and the Voidoids. The Voidoids's 1977 debut album, Blank Generation, is widely considered a punk classic, and its title track the anthem of that decade.

Since leaving the stage Richard Hell has devoted himself almost entirely to writing, including two novels, Go Now (1996) and Godlike (2005), and a collection of short writings and drawings entitled Hot and Cold (2001). Most recently published was his autobiography, two years ago.

I Dreamed I Was a Very Clean Tramp is an unforgivingly honest account of his life from boyhood in Lexington, Kentucky up through when he quit music in the 1980s. From having been a pivotal engineer of punk and the downtown rock and roll scene to his very descriptive and, well, provocative depictions of his sexual encounters with . . . a lot of women. Hell is unapologetically a man who knows how to use his love muscle, and that essence of shamelessness, authenticity, and candor extends into his music and writings.

SPOILER ALERT: He doesn't die in the end.

I love the story behind the title, so I ask him to remind you readers where he got it.

I'm a little bit ambivalent about that title. Sometimes it really seems stupid to me. But I usually like it a lot, and in context I really like it. The context you're talking about, which is where I got it from, how it arose and arrived, is the story of when I was a kid and I just loved to run away from home. It was my favorite thing to do. It was always the most exciting possibility, and not because I had some horrible childhood or terrible home life, not at all, it was very comfortable. But I was just thrilled by the idea of going some place unknown and being someone that wasn't known to anyone and having adventures. Anyway, it's common among kids and I tell a couple of stories about run-away experiences in the book. I did it almost annually until I finally succeeded when I was 17.

My father died when I was seven and one of these stories of running away happened just a month or so before he died. He played a big role in this anecdote about running away. And as it turned out, this specific memory I had of running away, which was really significant to me, wasn't remembered at all by either my mother or my sis-

ter. As I said, my father had died just months after it occurred, so there was no way to confirm exactly what happened. For almost everything in the book I have some way of confirming, somebody else I could consult. But I had no way of checking this story. My wife teased me about it, that I was making it all up, and the way I remembered it was probably wrong. But my mother keeps everything and I happened to come across this story I wrote for school two months after this runaway happened. It told the whole sequence of events. I was able to confirm that the way I remembered it actually was correct. And it was really a triumph. The story was called "Runaway Boy." I had turned eight by the time I wrote it, and it recounts what happened that night and how the runaway feels and having to return home and go to sleep; the last sentence of the eight-year-old's story of how he had run away a couple months before was how he returned home, went to bed, "and I dreamed I was a very clean tramp." So that's where the title comes from.

At the end of your autobiography, you write that one of the reasons why you wrote the book was that you wanted a say in your own reputation.

That's interesting, nobody has ever quite put it that way. Well, but that's not in the context of why I'm writing the book, that's in the context of the book being really frank. Even when it reflects badly on me.

You write, "My life only comes into being by having been written here." Basically, if a tree falls in a forest and nobody is around to hear it, does it make a sound?

Yeah, but it's not even that, because there's a lot on record about things I've been involved with because it's been written about and stuff. You could draw conclusions about certain stuff I've been involved in because there's a record, whether it's books I've written or records I've made or stories that have been told about that era in New York or whatever, but the point of that sentence in the book was that a lot of my motivation in writing the book was to try to grasp what the fuck happened. What it all added up to. I wanted to embody it in this object, which is a book, in order for me to try to have some understanding of it.

It's all so amorphous. You never really have a reality in a certain way. You're always just part of a flux. And you might have a memory for a second, you might have a plan, or you're just reacting to some kind of stimulation you're getting, but it's all just sort of chaos. It's funny, I also realized that in the writing of the book—there were a few people, a few reviewers, who made comments in a kind of skeptical way about how here and there I quoted people from decades and decades ago, or described something in great detail, and they wondered whether I actually could put in quotes faithfully, reliably, two sentences that somebody said to me in 1969—but the fact is, I only ever did that, and the only way that I was capable of doing that was because I kept journals at that time. Those were all things that I actually noted as they happened. Which is another example of the thing I'm talking about, because I wrote it down and I was able to keep it, and that's also true for me, having a life period. It really only comes into being by having been evoked in concrete detail, and just material form. Otherwise, it didn't even happen!

That's also the nature of being an artist for so long and living and working as an artist. You're constantly, even subconsciously, planting seeds for future projects. So things are always in the archives. It might be in the form of journals or in drawings, sketches, and other materials. Even if you're not using it now, you might pick it up again one or ten years later; it's always in the bank, so to speak. So in that sense you have these journals you can go through.

Yeah, I really did feel like if I wanted to have had a life, it needed to be written. I mean, for me, in a certain way books are more real than people anyway!

They have a better smell.

You never actually know what's going on with somebody else. But in a book you can really study it and it doesn't change. You change and so you might be able to derive something new from the book because of some way in which you developed. And so, yeah, I wanted to have a life, so I wrote a book!

in your earlier bands, from the Neon Boys to Television to The Heartbreakers to The Voidoids, how big a part did the way you dressed and presented yourself play in your life and music? You write, "[We] were the positive standards of being, rather than examples of failure, depravity, criminality, and ugliness. . . . The traits and signs of what came to be called punk were the ways that we'd systematically invented or discovered as means for displaying on the outside what was inside us."



Richard Hell in his New York City apartment, 2014. Photograph by Dean Dempsey.

I wanted the clothes to be consistent with how I wanted to be perceived. I was aware that people chose what they wore and that I wanted to dress in a way that created the effects that I wanted to create. But then once I started a rock and roll band, it all sort of blossomed because I became aware right away, and it really turned me on. It really excited me and it was really fun—to this realization that with a band there're all these means of communication besides the songs. And I never really consciously thought of that before. I knew it, but it wasn't conscious, that in a way a band is like a whole subculture—I mean, in itself, when it's done right, when it really exploits all the possibilities. It's a subculture that's expressed in the graphics of their posters and album covers, in their hairdos, in their clothes, in the things they say in their interviews, in the way they behave on stage. All of those things are means for communicating what you want to be saying, how you want to affect the world. So the whole issue of how you dress took on this new force once I started thinking that way consciously. It's not just me on whatever kind of relatively mundane level wondering if I wear madras or not. Without any censorship or convention or hesitation or inhibition, I want the clothes to say the same—to sort of represent on the outside the way I feel inside, you know? And all of the sort of things we were trying to do in the band that were different from what was popular and acceptable and conventional at that time could have an equivalent in the way we appeared. So I sort of methodically thought through what I could do that would represent what I felt like inside. That was about the raggedy, patchy hair and the torn-up clothes with writing on them. I just thought through what means I could come up with to have the clothes be consistent with everything I wanted to be throwing at the world.

Do you feel like there is still a conscious decision as to how you present yourself?

Well, that's definitely built into me but I don't give it anything like that kind of attention anymore. In a way it was almost like an art project.



Richard Hell in his New York City apartment, 1982. Photograph by Roberta Bayley.

So many people that you worked with in music or that you were friends with have died, many from overdose. Did you ever imagine that you'd make it this far? Do you ever look back and say, wow, I really dodged that bullet?

Well, I feel lucky in certain ways. I'm glad I've lived this long, but I'm kind of getting a little bit tired of it! You know, it's always seemed to me that I had a little advantage over people in music who would find themselves kind of at a dead end because they had no other options. And there's a lot about rock and roll that is dangerous. It's all kind of about pure self-indulgence and never growing up, and that covers it pretty much. Never growing up and self-indulgence. You can't stay a teenager for your whole life, and if you try to you're going to start having psychological problems. And the whole self-indulgence thing, which includes drugs, is also really risky. I kind of had other options and interests, but you know, at the same time, I OD'd a few times—I mean, woke up in the hospital without any knowledge of what happened and immediately said, "I want some more of that! That was really good!" So a lot of it is just pure chance. I never had such a death wish that I actually assumed that I was going to die before I was 30 or 40 or whatever. I wonder if you did some kind of statistical study that you'd find the life expectancy is a lot less for the rock and roll demographic. I wonder. I'm not actually sure. A lot of people have lived, too.

What are your thoughts on contemporary rock and roll? Obviously it has changed a lot, but is there anything that stands out now?

You know, I'm not hooked into it. Back in those days rock and roll was everything. It was life and death. My impression now is that it's so diffused because of the advent of digital recording and the web where anybody can disseminate anything and everything is basically free. It's just become kind of Balkanized, all these hundreds and thousands of little pockets. I really just don't know enough. When I try to keep up, it's too overwhelming. Every once in awhile somebody recommends something you know, and I'll listen to something, and sometimes I find something that I like, but I have no idea really what all is out there.

Yeah. I don't either! So you've done acting before. It seems like you haven't acted much since the '90s.

Yeah, I never was serious about acting. I was basically living hand to mouth and sometimes every once in a while somebody would ask me to do something in a movie and if they would pay me I would do it. It was never something I pursued and I don't really feel cut out for it, frankly.

Is there a film that you acted in that you liked more than the others?

That was good? Well, by far the best and my most successful attempt to have a role in a movie was in *Smithereens*, Susan Seidelman's first movie. But I didn't do very many, only four or five.

So you didn't enjoy Ulli Lommel's Blank Generation?

That movie just repels me and makes me shudder and vomit. But the fun thing about that was when they recently re-released it on DVD and they asked me to contribute in bonus interviews at the end of the film and I had them agree in advance I could say what I want. I got to spend 45 minutes completely trashing the movie!

You've been in New York for almost 50 years. In what ways do you feel like it's changed, and what keeps you here?

There's really no vestige of the New York of my youth anymore. New York is a theme park for the smug and arrogant wealthy. But it's kind of been convenient that I aged as that sort of thing developed because I don't play rock and roll anymore, I don't do drugs anymore—all I need from New York are movies and museums and art galleries, the things that still thrive here. I cannot stand going out on weekends when the streets are mobbed with rich people barhopping, Wall Street types and college kids and shit. But I still have my apartment, I'm very lucky. So yeah, I feel for anybody who's like me at that time, now.

That whole culture—it was crime ridden and dirty and there was a lot that was ugly about it in certain ways, but also you had nothing to lose and apartments were cheap, jobs were plentiful. The fact that it was like the Wild West also brought a certain freedom to it.

New York leads the country in both homelessness and luxury rentals. All around my neighborhood these generic posh condominium are popping up, and under their construction scaffolds are almost always five to ten homeless people living in boxes. The rate of poverty and the influx of the wealthy moving in is nuts. It's becoming a third-world country. You're very poor or you're very rich. But anyway, that's my rant. So you were working on a movie in 2007—where is that?

This kid came to me at a reading of mine with a DVD where he shot a chapter of my first novel, and he had done a really good job with it. He put himself at my disposal. He was a film student and just near graduation and he could handle all aspects of making a film. He had a camera and editing software and he just asked me if it was anything I'd like to do. I couldn't resist, so I started toying with this plan for a movie and shot this little experimental piece to see what it would look like. I had some experience messing around with writing film scripts, trying to get something done in the past, and I realized the single-mindedness and persistence and sacrifice it takes to get a first feature made. I mean, you have to do nothing else for like five years. It takes all of your energy and all of your focus, and it's a horrible struggle. And all this money.

So I basically gave up on this years ago, but then this kid came up and I thought why not give it a shot because things had become easier due to digital film making, so I did play around with this thing and shot a few minutes and put it up on YouTube. It exposed how thin my commitment to doing it was because I knew how backbreaking it is. We were shooting in available light, and he told me that it was going to be plenty for the equipment he was using, but it turned out really dark and it wasn't something that would have been usable. That was enough to say, okay, never mind, I'm moving on!

Is it on the back burner or are you just going to move on from it?

It's completely set aside.

Do you ever consider acting again?

No. Every once in awhile I get some kind of little something about doing something, but I've had no trouble resisting. I'm just not cut out for it. I don't like the experience. I liked doing it for a clip I put up on YouTube in 2007.

Which one?

It's called *Melinda's Neck*. I was in my element so it was comfortable. I wasn't having to contort myself into somebody's idea of a role. I really can't do that, I don't have the acting chops. I'm too self-conscious. I can only be confident when I'm actually relating with somebody, and that's the way we made that movie. We were kind of more or less improvising, and we were just relating to each other. We weren't trying to fit into roles.

What was the last movie you watched that you enjoyed?

The new Jean-Luc Godard 3D movie, *Goodbye To Language*. He's over 80 years old now and has been really prolific. This is my favorite period of his, the last ten years or so. I've always loved him, he's just amazingly fertile; he keeps going new places and he's brilliant. He uses different types of cameras, like the cheapest possible \$200 digital video camera you can buy, up to 35 mm; I'm not sure what he used on this particular film, but different kinds of technologies. If I'm not mistaken, he actually even created his 3D camera just by taping together two cameras himself. But it's really effective. It's really good, and it's an amazing movie. I can definitely recommend that.

What is this performance series you're doing, Night Out with Richard Hell?

Well, this agency approached me back in the summer asking me if I would be interested in curating a series of performances at this uptown venue called Symphony Space. The concept was that I would interview the performer and they would do their act. I didn't even understand what they were proposing at first. I thought they were just asking me to do one in a series, but it turned out they wanted me to do five of them across the winter. They were looking to get young musicians. They thought I could bring in who I thought was interesting to do stuff in New York now. But I don't really keep up, I didn't really have five young musicians, and I didn't really relish the prospect of having to go out and cruise nightclubs. So I asked if they would let me present performers in other media, and they agreed. It was really fun and I didn't know what to expect. I'd never done anything like it. Four or five people came to mind that worked in completely different areas who were relatively unknown. There were two bands, a poet, a filmmaker, and then an artist who made his original reputation on YouTube. I'm interested in painting and art, and I have a lot of friends who are artists and I love going to galleries. It was kind of frustrating that I wasn't going to be able to include a visual artist in the series. What was he going to do for his performance? Stand up there and paint something?

It's a little bit stressful, but it's kind of a challenge and an adventure and I'm really getting off on it. I am pleased with the lineup that we've got together. The first one is a 22-year-old Cow Punk. Did you ever hear that? I hadn't. She's like a country musician, but she comes from a background where she's sort of liberated by what punk music was doing. It's very aggressive and frank, and she's a wild child. Her name is Lydia Loveless; she was the first one. The second one is a poet named Ariana Reines, who's this funny picture of sort of bag lady and extremely sophisticated intellectual. She's a genius poet, the real thing—it's like you're talking to Gérard de Nerval or François Villon or something. She lives it. And then in December was Kelly Reichardt, a filmmaker. I interviewed her and then screened her movie. In February will be Donald Cumming who has this band called The Virgins, but it's no longer, and his new record is a solo record, but he also has this real interesting history being a street kid junkie who fell in with Ryan McGinley and was opened up to things by that whole experience, and ended up having a career because he made this little home-recorded set of five songs he had written that he put on CDs for just a few friends. Then within a few months there was a bidding frenzy for them and he found his way into the music business. He's really a talented and interesting guy.

Then the final evening is this artist Jayson Musson, who shows with Salon 94. He's a commenter on the state of the art world. The videos he made for YouTube were wildly popular and funny; really comic and insightful about art making. He did that under the assumed name of Hennessy Youngman. He made this series of videos where he adopted this kind of rock star persona and dissed the art world. They're really hilarious. But this guy is the one person who I hadn't known about before I took on the assignment of doing this series, and he was perfect because he had done this multimedia stuff.

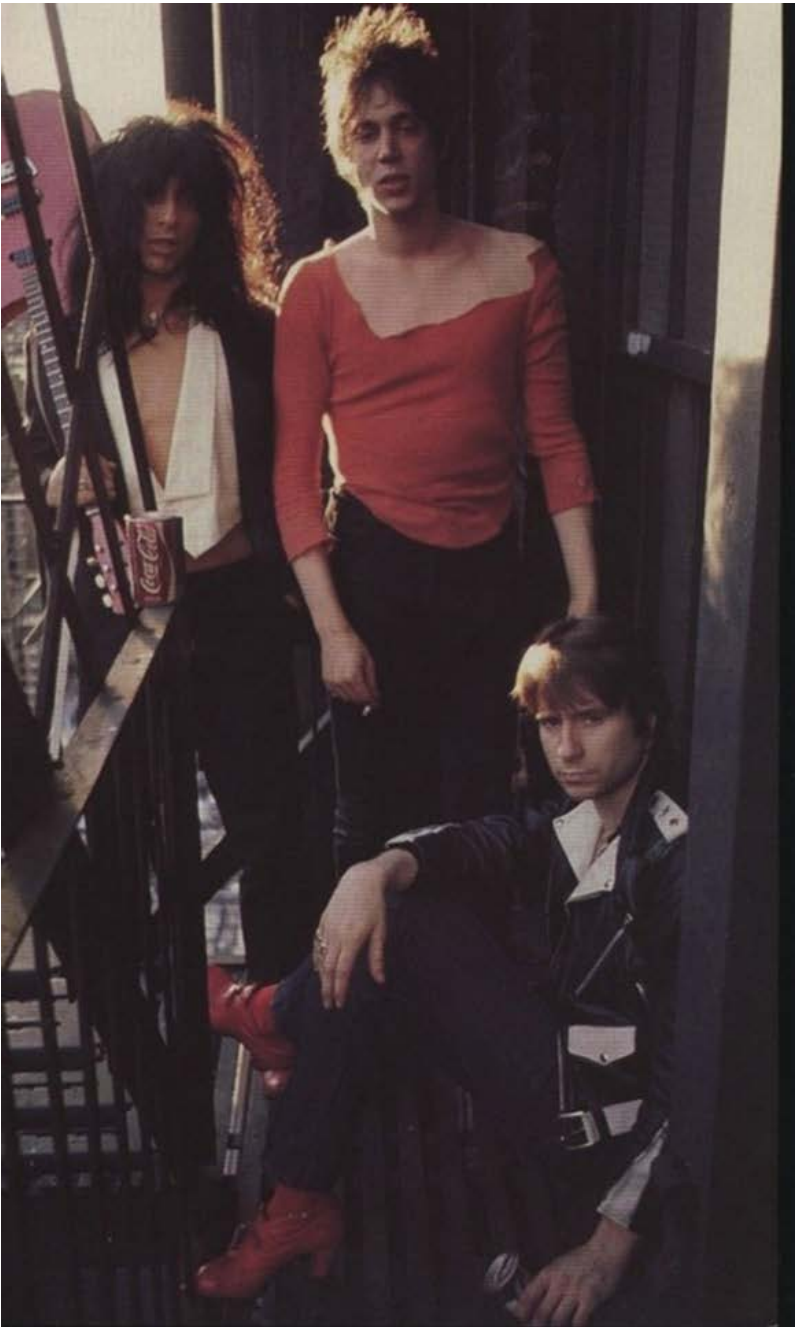
So yeah, it's funny to move from artist to artist like that and have this whole intense relationship going on in sequence with these very different people. It's edifying and it's stimulating. They're all different personalities and all work in different areas, and it requires me to do a lot of research because I have to get familiar with what they have done. It feeds me, I like it. I mean, it is hard work, and I should be writing a book instead.

What's next?

Well, the main thing is a new book. I'm still not sure if I have the stamina, but what I'm trying my hand at is a cold-ass noir novel.



Richard Hell and the Voidoids, *Blank Generation*, 1977. Photograph by Roberta Bayley.



The Heartbreakers, 1975. Photograph by Bob Gruen.



Richard Hell and the Voidoids, 1978. CBGB, NYC. Photograph by David Godlis.



Richard Hell, 1977. Photograph by Kate Simon.



Bill Daniel [left] and Jocko Weyland [right] in Tucson, AZ, Dec. 2014. Photograph by Lila Lee.

In Conversation With Jocko Weyland

Incisively and poetically documenting the crooks and crannies of the American cultural periphery, and tenaciously taking what he has found and crafted out on the road, Bill Daniel has three decades of remarkable creation to show for his tireless efforts. His vivid chronicles of the fevered punk scene in early 1980s Austin, Texas is where it all began, with indelible photographs of everyone from the Butthole Surfers to the Stinky Shits to Toxic Shock featured in the incomparable hand-sewn The Western Roundup. Consequently, he segued into an exploration of the then-disappearing railroad hobo world, the heirs to the denizens of Jack Black's You Can't Win, resulting in Who is Bozo Texino?, which is justifiably known as "the greatest hobo graffiti film ever made." A cultural anthropologist of the elusive underside of our times who employs a hauntingly evocative black and white aesthetic, his accomplishment lies in recorded facts presented with an almost mystical ambiguity. To quote, in his own words, "No matter what the disappointment might be in finding the lonely reality behind a particular myth or graffiti, there is a mystery, or truth, that will always evade the documentarian and the audience." He has carved out an unmistakable domain including his own films, salvaged cinematic artifacts presented in unusual locations (junkyards) projected on unlikely surfaces (sails), and with printed matter, including Mostly True, The Zone System, and Tri-X-Noise, Volume One coming out on Radio Raheem in the spring of 2015. If that wasn't enough, it's Daniel's gung-ho determination to take his artwork to the people—crisscrossing the nation, showing in often off-the-beaten-path and sometimes-improbable venues—that consolidates his achievement into a singular and all-encompassing work of art and life.

Starting here, at the Chaffin Diner in Tucson, let's begin in the present. This tour, the Tri-X Noise tour, you woke up one day and wanted to get on the road again? How long had it been since you'd done that?

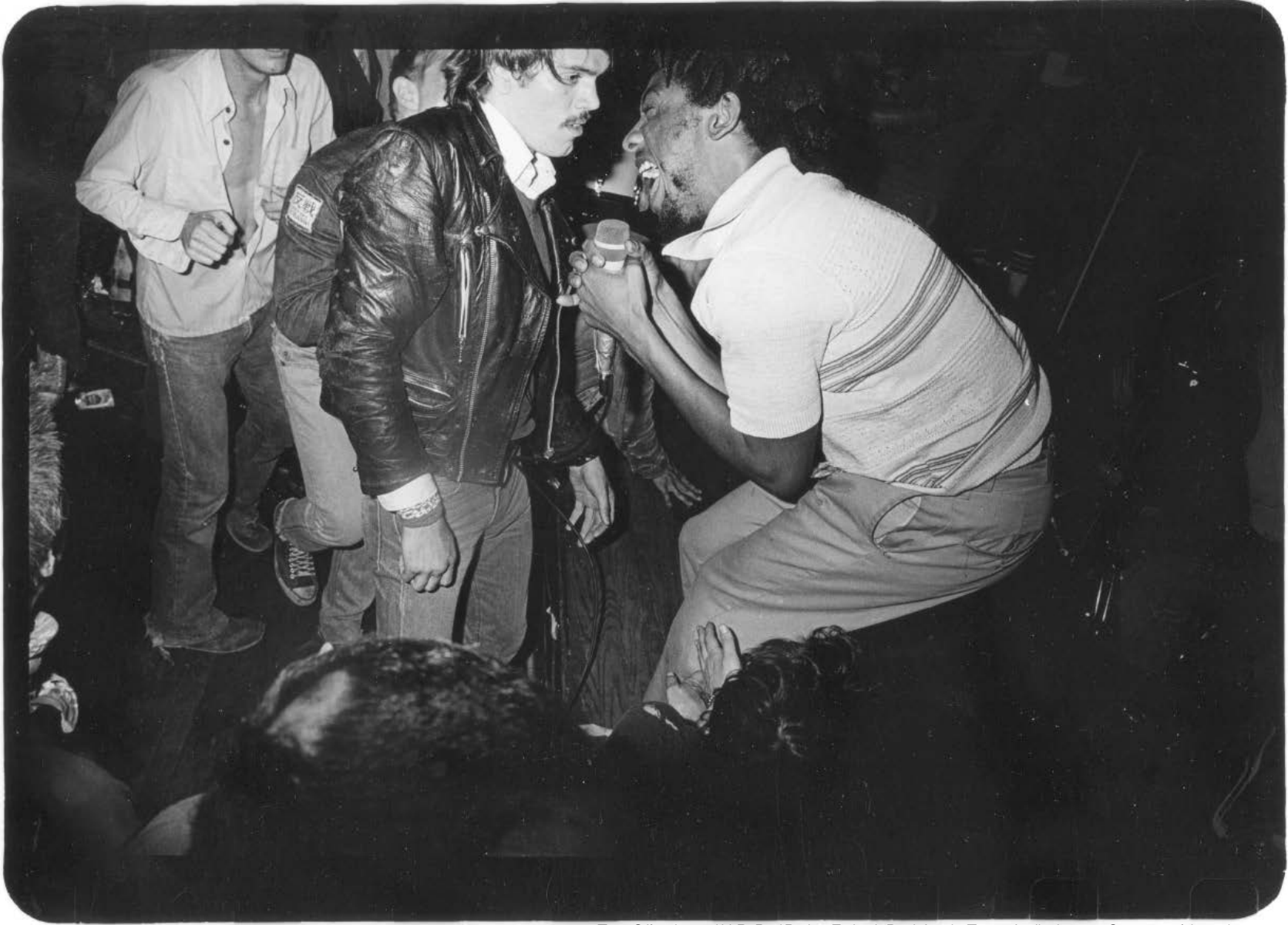
Once I landed in LA in 2011 that was the end of a phase of a lot of touring, though I went out with Ralph White earlier this year for a couple of weeks; a regional thing. Really me just providing A/V backup for my friend Ralph, him playing his tunes, freak folk legend. A quickie. But this is a last minute thing, too, waking up about six weeks ago and going. "God damn, nothing is happening," feeling like it's been a year banging my head against the wall trying to get *The Texas Punk Problem* published. I've travelled with a lot of these photos before, this checkerboard wall thing. The first time I used that was in 1995 and some of the older prints I've got are the ones from then. You can tell because they're really beat-up, but they're going to have to go on the wall because *Tri-X Noise* needs one hundred and twenty-eight photographs. A photo show with live performance. A lot of the recent tours have had photo as one part of their components. The Sonic Orphans tour in 2010 had 16mm films of lost and found music films, and I had these prints, so I put them up too.

The one I saw in Detroit? The day we went to the Packard Plant, with the films of the Avengers and Boy Problems?

Yeah, an early Raul's (Austin) era band, early 1980s. Billy Pringle's first band. As far as the name *Tri-X Noise*, it could be, "Bill, I thought it was a website, I thought it was a Big Cartel store," but it's just a catchall name. The title can apply to a lot of different projects. *Sunset Scavenger* was the same way; I find a title I like and it represents a group of ideas, not necessarily a specific configuration.

Is Tri-X Noise all Austin punk pictures?

No, but we sell the punk, because people want to see pictures of The Misfits, though when they show up they get to see pictures of a house show in Shreveport and that sneaks into the viewer's consciousness. But it's really The Misfits that draw. They're at the top of the marquee.



Tony Offender and H. R., Bad Brains, Esther's Pool, Austin, Texas, April 6th, 1982. Courtesy of the artist.

Tell me about the logistics. The term has been drained of meaning, but it certainly is the definition of DIY.

Well the logistics is really the art of it. You know, if you're poor you wash your own clothes, or mow your own yard, or change your own oil. You could aestheticize it if you want to but it's really a matter of organization. Certainly all visual artists have music that guides them—or most do. With this tour specifically I am trying to do that. At each spot, I am finding somebody local to share the gig, which is the punk DIY touring model that makes sense and continues to work. On the other hand it's experiential. When I look at a picture, I've got some music in my head. There's a soundtrack I'm thinking of or feeling, or using as compositional form, so why not have that when people are looking at the pictures live? And why not have that be different every night?

Which vehicle is it on this tour? The van you were driving in 2010?

No, that was my dear Toyota four-wheel drive. And then the E350 Diesel just became too much to repair.

That's the one you drove from Braddock (Pennsylvania) to Danny's Lot in Brooklyn to do the show at the dumpster pools in 2009?

The diesel was the one I was going to drive, but it blew out the water pump the moment I got on the freeway. So I had to double back and get the orange van, which I hadn't driven in months and had rust in the tank that clogged the fuel filter on the way. It was leaking oil and when I hit the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel they signaled me over to the bomb squad area and those guys were just like, "Are you kidding? No way! You're not getting in the tunnel with this thing, it's going to blow up." It was leaking a lot of oil.

But you made it to Brooklyn eventually.

Late, but I did. I had to.

So now you have the pickup truck. You built the walls, the display device—they go on the roof—and the prints are packed up in the bed of the truck. It's a lot of work and I suppose sometimes you might want to just have them put up on a wall in a gallery and get a check in the mail?

Well the artwork would be better if I didn't spend ninety percent of my time on logistics. Of course, everybody has the same complaint. But when the amount of effort and time that you put into the artwork is about five percent of your total economic output, it's like, wow man, if I could only work at ten percent. An hour and a half a day instead of forty-five minutes.

But how you present it and take it on the road has become inextricably linked with the work. Is that a trap? Would you rather be sitting poolside sipping margaritas?

No! Absolutely not. I'd just like to put more time into the work. But showing it this way is part of it, and I believe that how you show it is part of the work.

And the transition to the white cube can come with a whole new set of problems and nuanced contradictions in the commercial sphere. If you were to show in that kind of environment, would you want it to be presented in a very clean, orderly fashion, prints framed on the wall just so, or replicate what you are doing out on the road?

I like both things. For me the work has to be viable in both contexts. The idea for next year is to take this thing around to cleaner art spaces, but it comes with the same extension cords. No museum extension cords, you know? No museum lights, no wall labels. It comes whole.

Tell me about Garry Winogrand and Texas punk.

I have a theory that goes like this: Texas punk was informed by the presence of Garry Winogrand in the art department at the University of Texas in Austin in the



Twist, Ozol, California, April, 1994. Courtesy of the artist.



Reminisce and environment, SOMA, SF, circa 1993. Courtesy of the artist.

late 1970s, where a whole bunch of the kids were starting bands and studying with him. Tim Kerr (later of The Big Boys), Steve Marsh (who formed Terminal Mind), Tom Huckabee (the drummer of The Huns), and others. I've got a pet curatorial project that is the work of the students of Garry Winogrand from when he taught at U.T.: painters, photographers, script writers. Tom Huckabee became a great storyteller and filmmaker who teaches script writing in Fort Worth. Like The Huns' bust at Raul's.

What was The Huns' bust?

That was the big bang in the universe of Texas punk. The Huns were arrested onstage at Raul's by officer Steve Bridgewater who, we find out years later, was actually a closeted aspiring actor. Tom, a few months before the bust, was making a film called *The Death of Jim Morrison* and they were filming down on Sixth Street, just running with no permits or anything. A cop came up and said, "What the hell are you doing," and they said, "We're shooting a film, the guy in the gutter is not really dead, he's supposed to be Jim Morrison. And we need a cop in the shot, so could you stand over here?" He played along and was in the movie. So at The Huns' show when the same officer Steve Bridgewater walked into Raul's Club, on some level he recognized that this was a performance he was in, and performed the arresting cop role.

What was the supposed crime The Huns were perpetrating?

Might have been a noise complaint but really the Austin police were gunning for Raul's because of full-male nudity on posters on the drag [Guadalupe Street] for punk shows there. I'm sure once they walked in and saw what was going on they thought, "We've got a big fish here, we're going to land this." If you're a cop, and it's just boredom, boredom, boredom, and then you get to bust up a punk show, it's like, "This is heroics, this is a poetic moment in which we can live out our role." Not just stopping kids from driving too fast but really getting to the core.



Bill Daniel installing *Tri-X-Noise*, Fort Houston, Nashville, TN, December, 2014. Photograph by Lila Lee. Courtesy of the artist.

Speaking of that era, describe what was going on at the Pflugerville [skating] ditch circa 1980.

Pflugerville was the spot. It was an example of public infrastructure that was there for the taking where you were going to create your whole deal around it and not be bothered and live as if the ditch was made specifically for you. Generally no hassles. It was out in the country then, but now Dell Computers is there and it's really built up and the ditch is under dirt. We think that they just filled it up and that it's still there.

Like the Buena Vista pool near Santa Cruz that has been filled in with dirt and dug out multiple times over the years. So, where do you get your *Tri-X* film?

Freestyle Photographic Supplies in LA. Kodak reformulated it about twenty years ago and maybe took some chromium out, so possibly it looks a little bit different, but it still acts like it's supposed to.

You started documenting the hobo graffiti train scene more than twenty years ago?

Well Bozo *Texino* started as a still project in 1983, and then I started shooting film in '88.

Going back that far, was part of the impetus to record a subculture that was disappearing?

Salvage ethnography, that's what I'd call it. What's great about the whole subject of American hoboining is that it's a giant plastic myth that you can attach yourself to and spin it out for whatever story you need to tell.

There's a whole new crop of people interested in that, a younger generation of train hoppers, like Brad Westcott, who makes the zine *Never Heard of It*, or Mike Brodie, to use a more notorious example, who are interested in this folkloric tradition. When you started, were there many young guys or girls riding trains?

No. I never saw any. But in the last twenty years there have been multiple new waves. The initial thing started in the early '90s.

Where'd that come from?

It was a cultural inevitability. The trains are there and they beg to be ridden and certain people are begging to get out of the house and not sleep inside. Especially in this country, driving east to west, every motel backs up to the train tracks and every train calls your name. All of it is a continuation and every step along the way is equally legit but also equally legit is building on this falsified myth, and it has been since the get-go. You know, at the turn of the century it was a really popular subject and there was all this mainstream pulp literature about it and it was in the vernacular. But this mechanism of exploitation is part of it.

What about in practical terms? There are a lot fewer wooden boxcars now and there has been the rise of containerization.

That's true, but that turns out to be the least of it. Really the problem is the security state. That's not only a problem for riding trains but for everything. You used to wave at people at crossings and they'd either wave back or shake their fists at you, though they couldn't do anything about it. But now they call on their cell phone or whatever. And once those buildings in New York went down, everybody, citizen and cop alike, wanted to be a hero. Poor rail fans couldn't take pictures of bridges anymore.

Ok, you're a salvage ethnologist, you've got folk art, and then you've, got in the last fifteen years the ascent of what is most often called "street art." Do these two things have anything to do with each other? Monikers and street art?

Yes, graffiti going back to Lascaux, and on trains in New York in the 1970s, and the whole train, ship, or even on a tree kind of expression. On the other end, recently, something else cluttering up the streets, an overabundance of not only illegal but also sanctioned "street" art.

In some districts. Where I live in Pasadena, Texas, there is zero graffiti. I found one, well, some, under a bridge, some swastikas and penises.

Back to the basics.

These kids do not get *Juxtapoz* magazine, but if they get a can of paint, and they get under a bridge, you know what comes out.

What I'm talking about is validated graffiti vs. renegade graffiti. Are they related? Does one come out of another? You've got monikers, and, here I'm quoting from the editorial at the beginning of *Mostly True*, you've got "put-ons and art scene fakery."

Well, you know, that's the "editor." That wasn't me. I was in the role of the editor. And I like that guy, and I mostly agree with him. But yeah, for sure.

So where does genuine, for lack of a better word, mark making and monikering fall in that huge art-money-sanctioned, public projects world out there? Or where doesn't it?

That's the swastikas and penises I found under that bridge in Pasadena. It's going to come out, and when it comes out in a complete vacuum it's probably more interesting and a pure impulse. A destructive, juvenile impulse.

To cite the eminently quotable editor again, "But we have since found ourselves in an era of such suffocating media saturation and heretofore unmatched mindless rapidity of communication that the aggregate effect of the once generous act of information sharing has become like the wind—a hurricane to take refuge from."

Instagram, Facebook, exactly. Too many pictures, make it stop.

But you can't.

Well actually my phone got swamped at what I call Cell Phone Beach at the ship channel, so I didn't have a cell phone for two weeks, and it was fantastic! I saw a lot less images in those two weeks and the image processors in my brain finally got a break.

There are a billion more every day. How do you make one image that stands out? Actually, it's more about the dissemination. That's what has changed. Garry Winogrand took as many pictures as someone on Instagram today, but he didn't print them, or even develop them all. It's not so much that it wasn't possible to take so many pictures before, it's that the one-to-one relationship—a zine, a print, or even the one-to-one of a few of emails—has been supplanted by the one-to-the-rest-of-the-world. Do you have anything profound to say about that?

All day long, when I'm driving, to myself. Sure I think about that and ask hard questions, like why would I burden the world with another picture? Does the world want another picture? No. I think long and hard about that: am I going to ask people to look at another picture?

It devalues the individual photo, obviously, in the digital platforms we're talking about. You see it in a moment, but then it moves down the line and is gone. Do you find yourself out of sync, or think you have to adapt?

Well, they're kind of gratifying, putting them up in a way, but really it's a task I have to do for marketing purposes. It's kind of fun, but I'd rather not do it. It's time consuming and distracting. Really, I have to learn another app? Another password? Is it the right amount of time that's gone by for me to put up another Instagram picture? No, I'm about three days behind on posting. That's commercial suicide, and I'm trying to make a living. So to make a living I have to put up an Instagram every day. It's kind of fun, but I don't have to time to fool around with it. Of all the things to do with the day, that's one that's way low on the list. It's absurd that's what it requires, but I have to do it.

Back to the antediluvian age, were the first pictures you took at Raul's? 1981, then 1982 at The Ritz on Sixth Street.

Why are people so interested in that time now, over thirty years later, including many people that weren't alive then?

Well, one answer to that is it's really sad. "What happened? Why aren't people doing things?" It was an interesting time, sure, but where is the next thing? A lot of stuff did happen after, and I think the most interesting and crucial is the radical environmental movement, and punk/traveler types, and the whole W.T.O., and Occupy, and all of that comes out of the same impetus of the '80s punk thing did. But the punk thing was rock and roll, and rock and roll is inherently sexy and fun, not so much do-gooderism. In some ways punk carried a positive activist message, but essentially it was rock and roll. So what we don't have now is a rock and roll version of fuck the state, fuck capital. Fuck capital now seems like a more serious undertaking and it's not as fun.

But those movements don't have a soundtrack. And Occupy didn't come up with a cultural effusion or produce something like punk and it didn't even have much of a "look."

Which is probably a good thing.

The encrustation is strange to me, the sixteen year-old kid dressed up in the Crass uniform of thirty years ago, to a T, sartorially immaculate but historically and contextually unmoored.

That's just where we are evolutionarily as a species. Our media culture just exploded at that point and the whole thing became much more complex. Before, there was a monolith of corporate rock and that was smashed, in a way, though the power is still there. Culturally, things became much more atomized, which is a good thing. Now it's difficult to know what to rally around; then it seemed like a simple *us* vs. *them*. You're a punk, I'm a punk, and we're on the same team. Now there are a million teams.

You can be a punk one day, a raver the next, then rockabilly on Friday. It's odd, at the very least, this institutionalization of the punk look broken down into highly specific subsets. Crusty jugglers. Why do they all have dogs, Bill? That's what I want to know.

'Cuz it helps you sponge.

I heard you say the other night that you've gone back to being interested in figures—figures in motion. In the photos of skating and punk from the early '80s that's very much there, but now?

Yes. Skateboarding is just a way of creating figurative gestures, and I love board dynamics, too—how boards work mechanically and the physics of skating and the interaction with the human body. You could say that skating is a kind of choreography that is performed to be photographed.

With skating you have published a number of bail shots, which are usually verboten.

Well, partly, I have a lot of bail shots because people were bailing a lot. And bailing shots are the ones that started to look more like the slam dancing pictures.

Like when you first saw the back cover photo by Ed Colver on *Wasted Youth's* Reagan's In LP with the guy flipping off the speakers upside down with Vans on, and it was totally skating. It was a skate trick. Are you taking pictures of skaters now?

No, but about six years ago I started shooting 35mm stills again and got a Nikon with a 28mm lens and a Sunpak flash, which was basically the same thing I was using in '82—same film stock, same developer, same 72-degree water with the film sitting there for eleven minutes. It's amazing how things can still be the same even though technology has changed so much. Like charcoal and a piece of paper. I wanted to get back to that, to shooting some art events, some music shows, but, you know, really unlikely music shows.



Kenny Peyton, Flowmotion Skatepark, South Austin, Texas, 1981. Courtesy of the artist.

As opposed to the likely shows in the likely venues. It's also strange to me how you go to these places, like this show at a squat I went to in Switzerland back in April, and it was packed in this basement and really jolly and there was a band with a good girl singer screaming, but it was like, where's the danger? Everyone is hugging. What's up with that? Everyone's all friends. There wasn't going to be a fight.

Well if you want fights there are plenty of opportunities at the liquor store right around the corner or on the streets of downtown Tucson. Half the people there will oblige you.

True. So, in The Western Roundup, the zine you made in the early 1980s, and much more recently in the Mostly True book, there is a very distinct reliance and incorporation of historical graphic motifs.

That all comes from Mike Nott, who was the designer for *The Western Roundup*. They were my photos, but Mike was the designer. He was a great poster designer too. Hed write "NOXX" on them instead of "Nott."

They're almost seamless. The Western Roundup looks like it could be a real 1950s dude ranch pamphlet, albeit with pictures of the Bad Brains, and Mostly True really does look like it could have been published in 1908.

It's a form of mimicry, but the point is to get an object-metaphor to work from. It's not supposed to be a replication of the original but I have to have a visualization to attach things to; a template. The style came from Mike. We were all on board, for sure, but that was his deal. I can tell you who else I learned how to operate an object metaphor from, and that's Craig Baldwin.

Who you know from living in San Francisco through his film series Other Cinema. You worked on his films?

Tribulation 99—that was the first film I worked on with Craig, and it takes the form of a right-wing paranoid rant, a tract, and a lot of Craig's films are built on an inverted metaphor. They're falling into the ventriloquism of a counter-side. Like, he would tell the history of American interventionism in Central America from a crazy right-wing perspective rather than from a liberal one. You can take a style from an object, and it's also—looking for a voice. The editorial voice of *Mostly True* is a funny guy with a pipe. It's like, "I know that guy!"

Who did all the ads, the make-believe ones?

All of us. The design team was Gary Fogelson, Phil Lubliner, and Rich McIsaac, all in Brooklyn. There was a fortunate like-mindedness at work. Everybody got it and everybody shared in making the voice feel right. The second edition also had some design help from Eric Kneeland and Mike Enron.

All right, so you're stranded on a desert island and you can only bring one movie. Is it Robert Frank and Rudy Wurlitzer's Energy and How to Get It, or Les Blank's Burden of Dreams?

For that it might be something with fewer words involved—Bergman or something. Something that would take on a religious deal. But *Burden of Dreams*, that's something I could watch over and over.

You are obviously interested in peak oil and its aftermath, the Sausalito houseboat scene, the coming breakdown, but at the same time you're driving a truck and putting gas in it.

It's a four-cylinder.



Singalong during a performance by *The Mel Coolies*, Liberty Hall, Dallas, February 26th, 1984.

Point taken, though there's still a contradiction inherent in your work. A good one that shows there's this wasteful advanced capitalist society and, on the other hand, your tools—the camera and the truck—are part of that.

That they're part of civilization? Of course they are. And Al Gore flies in Learjets and lives in giant mansions with climate control.

That's more problematic than you driving a four-cylinder truck.

Maybe.

There are levels, degrees involved.

Yeah, like driving here with a headwind, and the fastest I could go is 62 miles per hour because my truck has roughly the engine displacement of a motorcycle.

There's a very substantial technical foundation to your photography, in the old-fashioned sense. Is that aspect not necessarily something you want to trumpet?

Oh, no, I'll talk all day long about that. But it's both photo technical and just pictorial. And it's crucial that it's both. In the content-and-form-relationship, the form is made with something, and that form is an output of a tool. Photography is of course super geeky and a lot of people in photography are obsessed with just the tools. And that's groovy, I love the tools. But what do they make? Certain tools make certain things and then it's about what these things embody. I feel like tools with a high degree of automation make work that feels disembodied.

To speak plainly, there's often form with no content.

I'm no less obsessed with my tonal scale than Ansel Adams was. I hope at some point to do an interview in which I only talk about the grayscale.

You're immersed in the practical side of your craft, the lenses, the cameras . . .

I know, it's horrendously unfashionable, and I think it's important to recognize that. I mean, look what's in the art world.

Well there's that. But the cameras, the trucks, the vans, there's a very nuts-and-bolts gearhead side to what you do, but it's superlative as art because that's all there but it's not about the zone system or like a Hollywood movie in which the CGI wows you but it's empty. I don't see your photographs and think about what lens you used, though obviously that's critical. Is it important to you that the viewer in the end is not aware of the how it was made? Or should they be aware of the technical prowess?

No, the most important thing is that they should stand in front of it and fall into it and we just see their feet disappear into the picture.

Petra Collins



Jacqueline (Macbook), 2014. Digital archival photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

In Conversation With Pat McCarthy

Petra Collins is committed and crushing it. In 2014 she staged solo exhibitions of photographs and sculptures, routinely curated all-female group shows, put out major editorial and commercial projects, made a monograph, and recently began making her first short films. At 22 years old, this manic output demands recognition as a leader among a generation of young artists who are socially minded and comfortable creating across many platforms at once. Like Kern she attacks present taboos. Like McGinley her work is candid and fantastic. And like Rihanna, if she ain't feelin' it, she ain't doin' it.

I have like a dozen questions, or something. And also thank you for doing this and stuff. Have you read SFAQ?

I was just about to do it, yeah.

It's really the best. It's published in San Francisco, it's completely free, and it goes to like a hundred cities in the world. Yeah, and I'm not really a journalist.

I know, it's really weird interviewing people. I just did it for the first time recently.

Who did you interview? Someone you knew?

I spent like ten days traveling around the U.S. and shot a little documentary about girls who practice dance. My sister and I were interviewing girls, but it was my first time doing that. It was so cool. I did something else like that before on video, so I just started interviewing.

Are you super used to being interviewed yourself at this point?

Yeah, I am. I used to get super nervous, but now I'm used to it. I also really like talking, so it's easy for me.

You've had a super crazy year. At the beginning of the year you curated the PussyPat show at Muddguts, and that's where I (and lots of other people in New York) really first saw the scale of your vision. It felt like a whole scene really declared itself. You organized 24 artists, you had a manifesto, and it seemed like from the onset the community has been an integral ingredient in your work. I'm wondering if that was deliberately cultivated, or did it happen more by circumstance?

I guess it was deliberate because that's kind of what I've been doing my whole life. I guess when I started off really creating, doing photography, and other—I was dancing and did video and stuff before that, but I kind of, like, didn't really see a place or platform for my work so I just kind of wanted to create that for other young—not even young, but other talented female artists like myself. I guess just doing that show was a natural progression. I actually did one before that in September. I forget what month PussyPat was. March or something?

March, around the same time you did your solo show at Capricious 88.

Yeah, yeah, March. But I did this show in September actually. I don't know if you saw it. It was called *Gynolandscape*. Along with my photography, curating is really important to me, and actually I went to school for two years for criticism in curatorial practice, and I guess in my practice I find it really important to collaborate. It's just something I love to do.

I think the Muddguts show seemed more impactful because it was at an underground gallery, more like a show for our immediate generation and artists our age.

Yeah, totally, yeah. I always think that's super important to do, because as an artist you're always kind of preaching to the choir, so I find it important to do. Also, working with brands and doing more mainstream things is necessary if you really want to change things, because if you just stay in your little art world bubble you're just going to, like . . . you're only going to reach wealthy art people. You're not going to reach the public, who my art is actually for. Yeah, doing it at Muddguts was super cool, and those are venues I really like working with.



Hands (Pink Bathroom), 2010. Digital archival photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

How has shooting commercial and fashion work challenged your photography? Like a studio photo shoot for instance?

Something I love to do, but I've always—I mean, I just have to do it for money to live. But I don't know, I'm really lucky now I'm at this point, and I think I was lucky in the beginning, where my creative direction wasn't really challenged, and I do have more space to do what I want. Every kind of job that I've done I've sort of had that, which is cool, which is kind of rare. So I guess I have kind of a unique experience doing it, but even when I do fashion editorial work, it's really on my own terms. I just did this shoot in *i-D* a couple issues ago that I really love which was just of my two of my best friends who did this really awesome clothing line and I shot a bunch of best friends. But it was girls ranging from every different kind of look and size and shape and whatever, and so I'm lucky that I get to do that as opposed to having to stick to normal commercial work. Sometimes it is draining, but then I just have to remember the money goes to making more artwork. So it's totally cool, fine for me.

Does being put into that situation bring out unexpected directions in your work?

Yeah, usually I barely shoot in the studio. When I shot Tavi for the cover of *Nylon*, I got to buy backdrops, which I wouldn't normally buy for myself. I don't know—I don't shoot studio and I also wouldn't spend the extra money on it, but I kind of realized a new work I wanted to do out of it, so I used it as a resource to try out new things.

An obvious change in the commercial work is you're shooting some boys as subjects.

I haven't shot too many boys.

But you have lots of photos of that really dreamy boy, Michael [Bailey-Gates].

Oh yeah, Mike. Mike's a really good friend of mine, and he's also a super talented artist, so I guess I don't even think of—I don't know—I love him so much as a person that I totally overlooked that, but yeah, I shot Mike a bunch of times. I guess it's the same as shooting any girl! Because I'm so close to him—it's natural for me.

He's overwhelmingly pretty so that probably eases the transition.

Yeah, he's insane looking. I met him when I went on Ryan McGinley's road trip with my other best friend, which is cool.

Yeah. You seemingly earned your education through old-fashioned apprenticeship as opposed to art college. Do you feel that kind of mentor/protégé style of learning has been crucial to your fast and super prolific output?

I mean—I don't know—I did go to school for two years, which cost a lot, but I didn't really go for photography. I have been making art since I was little; it's just something I need to do, so nothing ever really stopped me. Having mentors or people to work with is really helpful for me, because working with people is kind of the only way I can do things. I'm really happy that I did get an education. I would love to go back to school; I just don't have time or money. It's unfortunate that school is so expensive, especially in the U.S. I'm from Canada—it's cheaper there—but it's so expensive here that I just, I don't know. And I think it's doing apprenticeships and stuff is the route that some people have to take, but I think learning from other people and working with other people is really important. Does that answer your question kind of?

Totally. Richard Kern and Ryan McGinley are really known for working in the field, like endless travel and constantly working in new locations. Has that strongly influenced your development of a practice?

Yeah. I first modeled for Ryan 2 years ago in May 2013.

Where did you guys go?

We went from New York to Oklahoma. We drove through the Appalachians and down the east coast. But I mean, it was really important for me to experience that kind of work ethic and lifestyle. He's so lucky to be able to do that—to just do what he loves every single day. And when I came back I was like, that's what I need to do and what I would love to do. And I actually kind of just did that. I was away for a month. I went on a little road trip from New Orleans to Las Vegas.



India Drive at Night, 2014. Digital archival photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

How did you travel?

We drove. I didn't drive because I don't have my license, but my sister and I are doing a little documentary about young girls in dance. She is practicing as a dance teacher and I used to — before I did photography I was set on being a dancer, it's what I wanted to do. But I had a really bad injury and have weird things with my kneecaps so I had to stop dancing, but it wasn't my choice. I was told by doctors to stop dancing, which was really intense for me, and I didn't realize how intense until this trip. So I had a film crew filming and I was also taking photos and we were both interviewing girls and it was really amazing. To travel and work is what I love to do.

It seems apprenticing with two artists who are real-deal directors must have rubbed off on you. Is how to be a director not taught in school?

Yeah, it's cool to see, I mean, it's so important to learn how to be in charge of a team.

Leader.

Yeah, to be the leader. I just shot the documentary, but before that I shot this little art film for *Dazed* that is — I don't know if I can talk about it, but I think it's coming out soon. Basically, Aaron Rose was chosen to shoot something about the New York art scene and I was chosen to shoot something about the LA art scene. I don't know if I'm allowed to talk about it yet — when does this interview come out?

I think kind of super soon.

Okay, maybe not.

You'll totally see it before it comes out.

Oh, yeah. So I went from that and then straight into ten days of shooting this documentary and I guess I really — with my photography I'm not always having to boss a big crew around or whatever, because it's just usually me and the model. This was kind of the first time where I really had to be in charge and seeing Ryan and Richard do it kind of helped with that.

Because you very quickly went from being an apprentice to a mentor. Now you're a big figure to many artists, especially young women. What's the most fundamental advice you hope to pass on to younger kids who are around shooting and creating?

Okay, there is this one Ira Glass quote that I really like that goes something like: "It's easy to give up, but don't give up after your first try."

Like, don't give up after failing?

Yeah! Yeah, don't give up after failing. Because failing is the most important thing. How you act after you fail for the first time is what determines what your career will be like. If you stop doing what you do . . . I don't know, you can't give up. But that's kind of cheesy. Do what you want to do! And keep doing it until you can do it for the rest of your life, yeah. It's always weird for me to talk about this because I've been making art since I was really young, so it's hard for me to put in words — it's something that I physically need to do, and I feel like that's what it's like for a lot of people. It's hard for me to separate it as something that you really *try* to do, but I guess that goes with not stopping, and also not letting things stop you. I didn't grow up with a lot of money, so I got a job, I got this shitty retail job, and I spent all my money on film and developing. I did it all the time, until now, where I'm privileged enough to do it as my career.

Do you feel like you have more control or choice over what the direction of your art is now?

Yeah, for sure. I definitely do. Yeah, I think I always have because it's just so much a part of me that it just has to — if it's not my choice then it's not me and then it totally defeats the purpose. So I think I have total control, yeah.

What do you think about the evolution of feminism in art and where do you see it standing now?

I think this year has been really awesome. There's also been a lot of shitty things, but it's been a big year for feminism and civil rights, and I think while filming this, the documentary I just shot — I always knew there was change in the air from all the things I saw — we met with a bunch of girls from all over, from different socioeconomic backgrounds, from whatever, and girls that have different awareness of things. Some girls had no idea who I was and were so removed from art, but the thing that all of them had in common was how empowered they were, which was really cool, and which totally changed the direction of the questions that my sister and I were asking, because my sister and I grew up overthinking our bodies and ultimately hating ourselves and whatever, and seeing all these girls speak so positively about themselves and about other girls just made me realize that things have changed. And I



Jacqueline Text, 2014. Digital archival photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

think a lot of feminism has gone into the mainstream, and I think that's why we see it so much in art. I don't know, I think it's really exciting, and I think a lot of girls are getting a chance to do what they want. So this year has been kind of crazy for that.

Do you see yourself as part of or as contributing to the lineage of feminism?

Oh yeah, I think I grew up in this fourth wave. And my approach, and others' like Tavi, have a different approach than third-wave feminism, so I think it's just natural for that to happen. Yeah, I think so. I also grew up with the Internet and all these different tools, so I think it's definitely a fourth wave, for sure, and I think I'm part of it.

Do you see your work exploring feminist issues politically, socially, aesthetically, or culturally?

It's all kind of one big thing. I mean my work just comes from — I guess the way I see the world is through a feminist lens so whatever I shoot has that. But it doesn't mean I'm always thinking of what radical art thing can I do to make something crazy; it's just the way I think normally. I totally forgot what the question was!

It was if any one of these things are more important in your work—dealing with the issues politically or socially . . .

Yeah, it's just like all one big thing.

So much of your subject matter has to do with a young/teenage aesthetic. As you become more of a woman and less of a teen has it changed your ideas or perspective about the subject matter?

It totally has, I can see it. I just put out a book of the past years of photography after my first show and I could really see the progression of my work. I don't know what that will hold for the future, but I just know as I grow I have a better perspective. I look back on my life and look back on what I was thinking at the time and the work I was creating. But I don't know what will happen in the future. Is that okay?

And you've been making sculpture and curating performance. Do you see yourself doing more of these? And also, what attracts you to neon lights?

Yeah, I definitely want to do more of that. I have always been a multimedia artist. Photography was just the thing that I just did most, so now I'm finally getting a chance to move back into doing more. It has to do with time and space and money to be able to create sculpture. Photography was definitely the easiest and fastest and needed the least amount of space to do. But yeah, I love neon because it's such a weird old medium, and it's usually used to sell things, which is interesting. Neon for me is the store signs or signs for strip clubs or whatever, and what I really like is taking that medium and putting my sort of 21st century girl experience into it. For me it creates this weird, confusing thing when I put a really sad text message or certain Rihanna lyrics into this medium that already has so much meaning behind it. Neon is super weird and romantic. So it's exciting to put my own things in it. I guess it has a lot to do with seeing myself in a landscape, or seeing other girls. I always think of this one — I refer to this so much, but it was just the most impactful for me — this Virginia Woolf essay called *The Three Guineas*, where — have you read it?

No, I haven't.

Well, the essay is about this soldier, this man, who's writing to a woman — I don't know if it's necessarily Virginia Woolf — and he's asking her why we have war and what he can do to stop war. He doesn't understand the purpose of it, and I read this so long ago, but maybe he also felt, like, what can women do? The thing that stuck out most in my mind is when she explains that women don't create war because they were never part of that landscape. They could never vote and they never had human rights or a public voice, so they don't have this nationalistic view of things. There's this other quote that I really love, it's from a documentary called *Miss Representation*, which is from four years ago about women in the media, and this one woman says in it that "you can't be what you can't see." But anyway, back to the neon, and back to creating movies and stuff. It's exciting to see myself in these old things that I would never be a part of. I mean, I kind of did the same thing when I was shooting this documentary. I would always show the girls the monitor to show them what the footage looked like because it's really amazing to see yourself in this medium that you don't really see people like yourself in. Because we shot it with an amazing camera, it was movie quality and whatever. But yeah, long answer for a short question about sculpture and stuff.



Sad Sunset (Anna), 2013. Digital archival photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

Those are the best answers. Yeah, all of your work—the photos, everything—has a really cinematic vision to it. Last night I was o.d.-ing on your photos and in the middle of this really big collection from the first Rookie Yearbook, there was a series of these portraits of a super melancholic girl with pink hair. It must be from four or five years ago, but some of the photos were subtitled and the subtitles really revealed these narratives in the photographs that maybe were hinted at, but were nowhere near as clear without. Do you often have a bigger fictitious story running through your mind when you're shooting?

Not really, but I approach composing the image in a cinematic way. Before I did photography I really wanted to do film, but that's something that, for a young person, is really hard to do because of time and budget and crew.

It's the ultimate art.

Totally, so I guess my approach for each photo is to get the most feeling and emotion and everything in this one take. I don't necessarily have this other fictitious tale, but I really put into them a lot of whatever emotion is in the room, or is in my subject, or is in me, and it really comes out in the photo, and I think it really tells whatever is going on at that time.

What shows or artworks do you feel marked this past year? Were you in Miami a couple weeks ago?

Yeah, I was in Miami. Actually, this is so crazy—I didn't see anything there. I didn't see any of the artworks because I was working the whole time, and I was kind of stuck where I was! I'm just going to be vague here because I can't think of anything specific, but I think the most important thing in art this year was the DIY movement from young female artists. There are so many collectives and shows and art that all these

girls are making that have come up in the past year. I think it's all this—not net art, but girls putting their work out on Tumblr and whatever. It's really exciting because it's this new platform and stage that doesn't necessarily have to be in big money-driven galleries. So I think that's the most important thing.

Do you have anything you want to add on your own? Any questions I should have asked?

I don't know, I think you covered it pretty well, and I'm glad you didn't ask all the questions I always get asked.

What are those?

No, no, no. I know, we always talk about the future.

What does your future look like?

Sometimes I get asked what I think about nudity or what I think about this or that. Such tired, stupid subjects.

Maybe 'cause we're sorta close in age so we have similar perspectives.

Yeah, I think so. The difference between people who are older who interview me and the things that they pick up is so funny. We're all over nudity and over all of it, it's like not a second thought. But yeah, it's really funny.

It's life after Ryan McGinley.

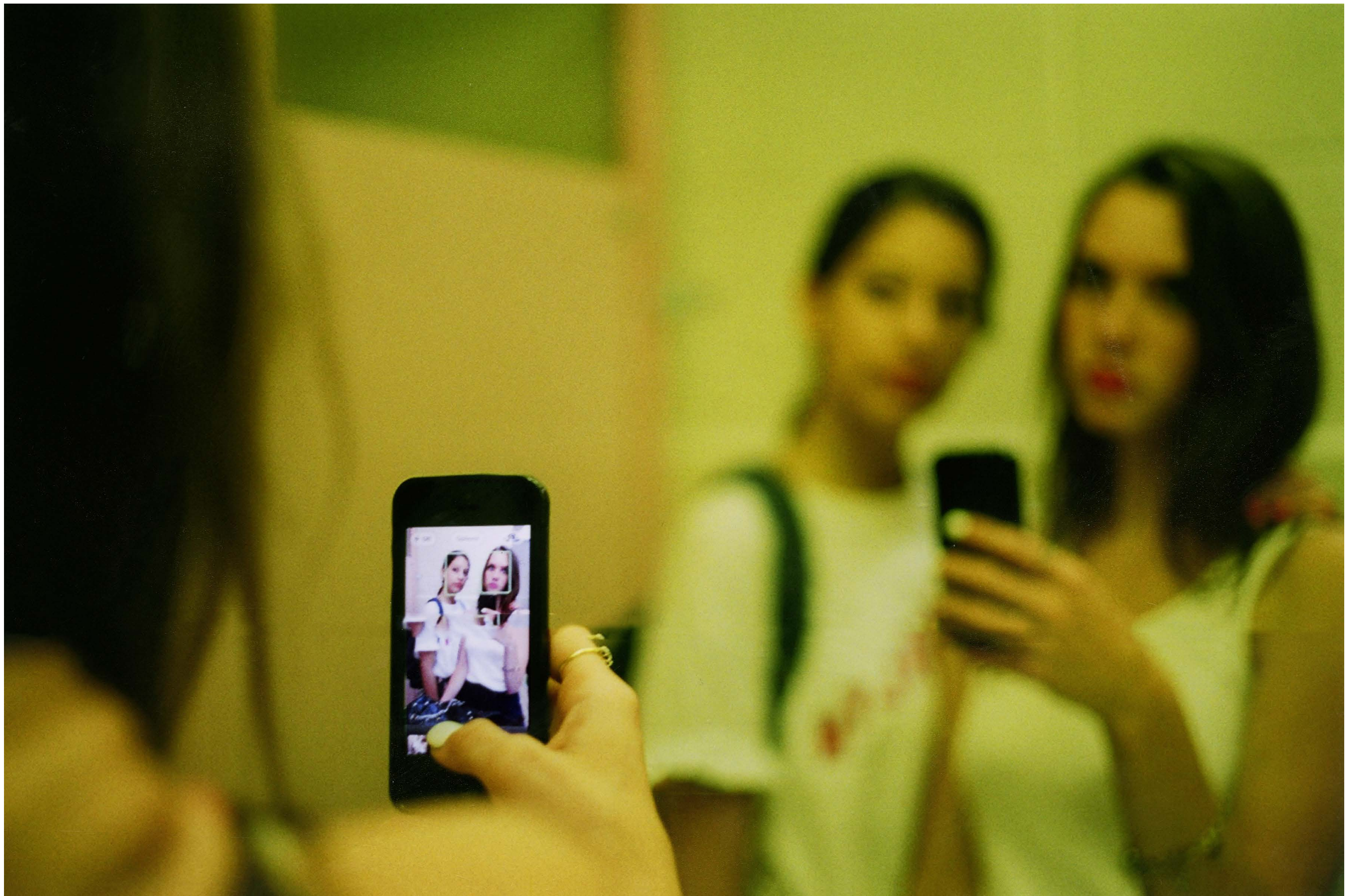
Yeah, exactly. I don't think twice about a naked body, it's just normal. I mean, especially since I spent three weeks, exclusively being naked doing this—sitting in a car naked, or like playing, I don't know, whatever, *Clue*, naked. I don't really care about it at all.



Talvi Bra, 2011. Digital archival photograph. Courtesy of the artist.



Selfie (Aly), 2014. Digital archival photograph. Courtesy of the artist.



Selfie #1, 2014. Digital archival photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

Lee Mingwei

Life, Memories, And The Art Of Participation



The Mending Project, 2009. Installation view, Lombard-Freid Projects, New York. In the collection of Rudy Tseng, Taipei. Photograph by Anita Kan. Courtesy of the Mori Art Museum, Japan.

By Gianni Simone

The essence of Lee Mingwei’s art lies in the relationships between people—family, friends, and complete strangers. Many of his works invite the viewer to take part by following simple instructions. Acts like “giving” and “exchange” give rise to a relation centered on something invisible, prompting us to think about “trust” between ourselves and another person. Indeed, Lee insists on not considering people or things as individual, independent entities, calling instead attention to the liminal space where they are intricately interconnected. Many of Lee’s works make us rethink everyday activities like “walking,” “eating,” and “sleeping.” Zen philosophy, which Lee encountered in his childhood, emphasizes being in the “here and now,” rather than being bound by doctrines and theories. It involves questioning our awareness of the minor actions and actual experiences that make up our daily lives. The Taiwan-born artist was in Tokyo for a big retrospective exhibition at the Mori Art Museum, and he was kind enough to share his thoughts on his art practice. Lee’s family history has been linked to Japan since the 1920s when this country ruled over Taiwan, during which time his grandfather studied law at Meiji University in Tokyo while his grandmother learned Western medicine at Tokyo Women’s Medical School.

The essence of my practice is very simple. It’s based on the idea of hospitality and trust, particularly between strangers. When people come to my exhibitions, they get personally involved in my projects. So it’s not just looking at paintings or sculptures or something else you can’t interact with. Many of my projects are based on your kindness and understanding. Without your participation my works are meaningless.

The Mending Project

In the ancient Chinese creation myth, for example, Nüwa is the goddess who mended the sky when it was in danger of collapse. This said, mending for me is also a very personal thing because in Taiwan in the 1960s, the country was very poor so we usually didn’t replace worn-out things with new ones: we used to repair them. This gesture of mending, and the fact that my mother would do it for me, brings me something emotionally satisfying.

When you think about it, cloth is like a second skin for us, and even if you mend something for a stranger, this is a kind of experience that is understood across the border and naturally creates a human bond that transcends cultural barriers. It is about care and giving a gift to somebody. So I was carrying all these feelings and memories and ideas inside myself that were just waiting to be used somehow, and the spark that gave me the final inspiration for the project was 9/11. My friend John’s office was in one of the towers and all 400 of his colleagues died. Luckily for him he was a little late that day and missed the destruction by just a few minutes. When he returned home he collected a few people while walking to 72nd Street. There were so many people out in the street, looking completely lost, so he invited some of them to stay with us. I remember that evening I did two very unusual things: I went to the supermarket and bought all the cakes I could find and I started mending all the pieces of cloth that I always wanted to mend but never found the time to do. It took me eight years to turn this experience into a project. I realized I could do this mending for myself and for strangers. So this is the origin of the *Mending Project*. When you come to the gallery, you should bring a piece of clothing that you want repaired. You will find me or another person sitting at a table. We will ask your permission to borrow it for the duration of the show because the piece of thread we will use will remain attached to the clothing on one side and the yarn wall on the other. Eventually, all these threads are going to create a big web. This connectivity, or connection with



The Living Room, 2000. Installation view, A Quartet and A Living Room. Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK., 2013. Photograph by Kevin Ho. Courtesy of the Mori Art Museum, Japan.

the community, goes back to before 9/11 to when I was a weaver at California College of the Arts. I truly believe that all my projects, and especially this one, are a way to weave human psychology, social relationship, and memory together.

The Dining Project

This project began when I was studying at Yale for my graduate program. When I first arrived I felt kind of lost as I didn’t know anybody. I was both excited and anxious about my new experience. I put out this message all over the campus inviting people to my place in order to have a conversation over a meal. At the end of the day I had about 45 calls on my machine asking me what it was all about. I ended up cooking quite a few meals that year. I think every other day I had someone at my place and my guests were all strangers. It worked this way: I would call these people ask about their dietary preferences, then go to the supermarket to get the fresh ingredients I needed. By the time this person arrived, the meal would be ready and we would share it together. When I moved this experience to a gallery environment, I took something that is familiar and put it into an unusual context that became a frame to re-examine this experience of dining. The way to participate is to fill out a lottery card with your name and phone number so we can contact you. If your card is picked, all you have to do is arrive at the appointed time and be prepared to enjoy the meal. I know that many people are going to ask if this can be called art and this is exactly what I want everybody to do with my work; to start questioning the idea of art itself. There isn’t any documentation as I feel that any would pollute the experience, so it’s a very ephemeral project. But it’s extremely important that it is a one-on-one experience with a stranger. Imagine if I cook a meal for someone I know. The dynamic is going to be quite different.

The Sleeping Project

The seed for this idea came when I was travelling between Paris and Prague after graduating from high school. I was sharing my sleeper-car train compartment with an elderly gentleman, and he was telling me about his family. They were all put into a concentration camp, including him, and after three years, when the survivors were liberated, he was the only one left. He told me about his life in the camp and his relationship with other people who were there. After a while he said he was tired and went to sleep. But I couldn’t sleep at all because of what I’d heard. I’d never heard anything like that. That was the seed of the *Sleeping Project*. When I conceived the project in 2000, I wanted to create an environment that would be conducive to the same kind of intimacy and human connection I had felt on that train many years before. When installed, I requested that the museum design the sleeping space and the furniture in such a way that the environment would be very comfortable, soothing, and relaxing. One person is chosen, again through a lottery, and invited to share a “bedroom” with me for one night. The person will come around 9:00 pm and, once the gallery door closes, it is interesting to see how two strangers “dance through the night.” Of course, it’s important that there’s no sexual tension in this experience. This experience is not documented, which means the content of the conversations that unfold are not to be recorded or made public, but I ask each person in advance to bring something personal that they keep next to their bed; something like the books they are reading or the glass they are using for water, and leave this object with us for the duration of the show.

The Moving Garden

The Moving Garden was originally commissioned for the Lyon Biennale in 2009. It was the first time I went to Lyon. When I travel I often take two books with me: one is Lewis Hyde’s *The Gift* and the other one is the Japanese classic *The Pillow Book*

by Sei Shōnagon. I was so fascinated with Hyde's idea of gift-giving. I think it's the whole core of my practice. Hyde describes artists as individuals blessed with a gift from heaven who in turn give gifts in the form of experiences that move people. Even before him, the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, who was active from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th, had been interested in the rituals of gift-giving and exchange in ancient civilizations and indigenous cultures that set them apart from the market economies that prioritize competition and profit.

Back in Lyon, I remember sitting and reading *The Gift* along the Rhône River, and I saw hundreds of flowers coming from upstream. The river was just filled with flowers. This poetic image, along with Hyde's ideas about gift-giving that I was reading in that moment, gave me the idea for this project. For *The Moving Garden* set up a very long granite table with a sort of channel in the middle filled with hundreds of fresh flowers. When you leave the venue, I would like you to do two things, for me and for yourself. First, you should make a detour from the museum to your next destination, following a route different from the one you took to arrive. The second and more important thing is that along the detour you give the flower to a complete stranger, as a gift. For me, this is a mutual process. On one side, you are the gift giver. But on the other side, when this person accepts your gift, he or she is giving you a gift as well. In this sense it's extremely important that you give the flower to a complete stranger. Not your mother, your lover, or your friend, because it would be too easy, but someone you have just met in the street. There is a huge crossing into another realm that you need to do. Imagine: when you have this flower in your hand, you already look different from the rest of the crowd. That flower in your hand gives you a special privilege. Other people are going to perceive you quite differently. Should I give it to this gentleman, or maybe to this young lady? Or this child? This way, by giving the flowers you have received from me to a stranger, each visitor contributes to extending a beautiful chain of gifts across the city.

Fabric of Memory

This project was commissioned by the Liverpool Biennial in 2008, but it was born out of not one but two seeds that were planted in me rather unknowingly. One of them was an image of my mother holding my hand. I was four years old; it was the first day of kindergarten and I didn't want to go. So my mom made a set of new clothes for me to wear that day and she said, "If you feel sad, think that mom made these clothes for you and it's like she's hugging you." As for the second, years ago I went to see an exhibition of 5000-year-old objects from Xinjiang province in western China, which is more of a Turkish Muslim area. Among the displays there was a piece of a child's clothing that caught my attention, and the description said that the mother and the child had been buried in the same space. I put these two things together and shaped them into something that could acquire universal meaning. I designed a stage and put a number of boxes on this platform that look like gift packages. Visitors have to take off their shoes, get onto the platform, and open up these boxes that have been wrapped with a ribbon. When you open one of the boxes you'll find the object and, underneath the lid, the story of both the gift giver and the receiver. Each box is a very private little world that deserves respect created by generous people.

The Letter Writing Project

This project was part of my first museum show at the Whitney in New York in 1998, though it really began with my own experience of writing a letter to my grandmother after she died. She is the person who, more than anybody else, has influenced me spiritually, and in this letter I wrote the feelings of gratitude I wished I had expressed to her before she passed away. The project itself is based on a very simple idea involving letter-writing booths. There are three letter-writing booths. Each one refers to a different posture of meditation in Chinese Buddhist practice: one is standing, one is sitting, and one is kneeling. In each, is paper and pencils with which you can hopefully write a letter of gratitude, forgiveness, or an apology that you were previously not able to express to someone. Once you are finished you have to put it into an envelope that you are free to seal or leave open so that other people can read it. Then you must leave it on the rack inside the booth. You may also want to add the address of the person to whom you have written the letter, in which case we put a stamp on and mail it for you. I'm providing an opportunity to change the relation between you and the letter receiver, but more importantly the relationship between you and yourself.

Guernica in Sand

This project deals mainly with the idea of impermanence. My partner and I took a very long trip to Bolivia, and while we were travelling on a highland desert we were suddenly caught in a sand storm that almost engulfed our car. I then realized that though sand is so small, it comes from huge rocks and is a great medium to talk about impermanence. This project is divided into three stages. In the first stage, people can see this very large sand rendition of Picasso's painting *Guernica*. I use this painting and title because it is an iconic painting in Western art history that has so much political weight. There is a tiny area with sand buckets and an unfinished

stool. The second phase begins around the seventh week of the exhibition. At sunrise I start working on the unfinished part. Then one person from the audience will be allowed to walk onto the sand painting. You can see the dynamic between the person who is finishing up the work and the person who is walking on it. I try not to define who is making and who is destroying because, in a sense, we are both doing each. After the first person is done, a second person is allowed to walk on the sand, and then a third one, and so on. At the end of the day I stop the person who happens to be walking on the painting at that time. Each of us takes a broom and brushes all the sand toward the middle of the painting. That's the third and final stage of the project.

This is by far the most performative of all my projects and also a very intense experience for me. The first time I did it in London, when the first person walked on to the sand painting, I could just not stop from crying. It was an emotional experience seeing the painting stepped on after spending all those hours creating the work with my assistants. Then you think about the reason why Picasso originally created this painting; his reaction to the carpet bombing that obliterated the city killing thousands of people in one day.

The Living Room

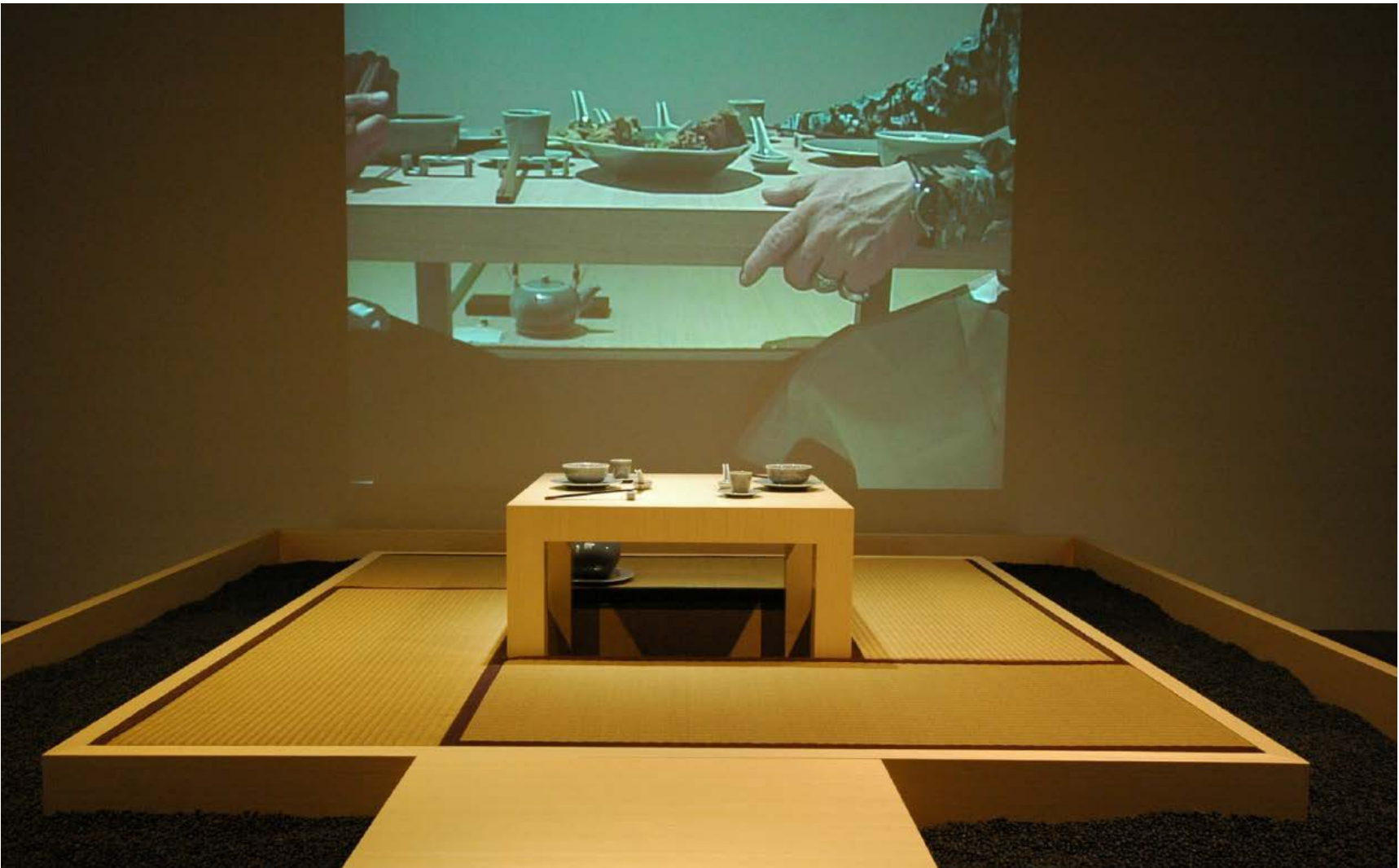
This project was originally created for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston after my residency in 1999. Upon receipt, I was invited to go through the Gardner collection so that I could get a few ideas for my project. I was very naïve because I had just started my practice in 1997 after graduating from Yale and this was my first residency. I thought I could go there, come up with a quick idea, and then spend one month playing around, but all I was able to come up with was a half-baked proposal. But they were very kind to me and told me to take my time. Unfortunately, Ms. Gardner wasn't there at the time, but after one week I noticed that all the people who were working in the museum had all these stories about Ms. Gardner and her collection. I decided to create a living room with a host who would tell people stories about their own collection. For instance, every two days we had a volunteer show his or her personal collection. We all collect things and each of these objects say much about who we are and how we relate to the world. I did this again in Tokyo, though this time around all of the hosts were people who have lived or are still living in Roppongi [the district where the Mori Art Museum is located], and have witnessed how the area has changed and developed, in some cases going back as far as WWII. The collections they showed visitors were made all the more important by their personal memory of things past.



The Moving Garden, 2009. Installation view of The 10th Lyon Biennale, Museum of Contemporary Art, Lyon, France. In the collection of Amy & Leo Shih, Taichung. Photograph by Blaise Adilon. Courtesy of the Mori Art Museum, Japan.



Guernica in Sand, 2007. Performance view of *Impermanence*. Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago. Photograph by Anita Kan. Courtesy of the Mori Art Museum, Japan.



The Dining Project, 1997. Installation view of *Duologue*. Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, Taiwan, 2007. Collection of JUT Museum Pre-Opening Office, Taiwan. Photograph by Lee Studio. Courtesy of the Mori Art Museum, Japan.

Nicolas Lobo

In Conversation With Courtney Malick

Nicolas Lobo is a Miami-based sculptor and installation artist who has been working on conceptual, sometimes site-specific projects since 2006. Recently, however, he has been taking his sensory-imbued practice to new depths by creating work that not only engages in a conversation with itself through its construction, but also relates directly to industries and economies parallel to art discourse that rarely enter into it so distinctly. In his two-week solo exhibition at Gallery Diet in Miami in March 2014, Bad Soda / Soft Drunk, Lobo juxtaposed a grouping of what one might at first glance consider to be relatively formal, even classically contemporary bulbous sculptures that evoke Chinese scholar's stones with a precarious floor installation that created an entirely new "floor" for the space. Installation shots of the show hardly begin to convey the story that is being told within. The lumpy, dimply sculptures that awkwardly rest atop subtly patterned square columns are in fact created through the process of making napalm. Perhaps even more alarming is the relatively simple process through which such a devastating material is conjured, by pouring gasoline over blocks of polystyrene, a common plastic used for mass-product packaging. To further complicate things, these forms that result in the burning away of plastic are then set with one of the most innocent of children's delights: Play-Doh, a staple in family homes since the 1950s. The contradictions set into motion by the marriage of these products, repurposed as artistic materials, brings back those unforgettable words of Marshall McLuhan. It seems as though whether or not the medium here truly is the message, or is at least one of several messages, it is impossible not to consider it as both the forefront and the backbone of such a seemingly unthreatening sculpture.

The newly fabricated floor of the gallery likewise brings ingestible and common yet chemically based products into question—or perhaps an odd celebration. From wall to wall the floor of the gallery was filled with unopened, plastic-wrapped, dead-stock 24-packs of a little-known Swedish energy drink called Nexcite that boasts the bonus property of also being an aphrodisiac, particularly for women. It is also notable that Nexcite was originally named Niagara to rhyme with Viagra, which later lead to a lawsuit. Nexcite's notably Windex-blue coloring warns that there is obviously no telling what has been put into the drink to make you not only energized but exceptionally horny! Visitors had to walk on top of this "flooring" to get from sculpture to sculpture, while in an adjoining minimal room plays a video titled Niagara (2014) of Nexcite being poured on the sculptures, coloring them that bright, artificial blue hue. The absurdity and happenstance that Lobo had even found such a large quantity of Nexcite sitting in a warehouse in an industrial area of Miami is prologue enough to begin the complex and infectious ways that this set of works come together to create this particular and aptly short-lived installation.

Your recent work has utilized materials like cough syrup, perfume, self-made napalm, an outdated Swedish energy/aphrodisiac drink, and Play-Doh, all of which seem to point to an overarching interest in the sensorial—products of various kinds that are made to be ingested or directly engaged with in tactile ways. Do you feel that an investigation of such matter is an underlying aspect of your practice overall or is it something you are just currently interested in?

My interest in those materials has been ongoing. In the last few years I started to think more exclusively about economies radiating from the human body—seeing the body as the fundamental unit of currency, from which all other human economies derived. I think making an object can bring radical awareness of the body. Working through the very old idea that sculpture provides a kind of uncanny physical experience, as opposed to painting, for example, where you might create an opportunity to reflect on the ways images are constructed.

Yes, I have also often used the form and reality of the human body as a productive foil for larger systems at play. Lately I have been noticing more and more contemporary art that takes up materials related to these kinds of sentient ideas in similar ways, particularly food-related

products and imagery. Is this something that you have also detected as becoming more prevalent in art and discourse, and can you discuss your own reasons for beginning this pursuit or why you feel it is becoming more of a "hot topic," so to speak?

Maybe it has to do with the rapid transmission of complex physical qualities. Zoloft and antifreeze: an emotional panacea; Neutrogena skin cream and generic nutritional supplement powder: a body-image crisis, etc. Although materials like these are having a moment I think they really have a lineage that supports their use in historical tradition. I'm thinking of Sigmar Polke, Dieter Roth, and Paul McCarthy, for example. When I look at it this way, the idea of an apocryphal material as a conceptual container is more present in culture as a whole. Maybe this works in counterpoint to the virtual, post-Internet idea that has also been circulating recently; a vague notion caused by viral brand awareness, industrial agriculture, pharmaceutical marketing, and so on that the non-virtual is still here, but it's getting kind of complicated.

Right, and seemingly that complication is at least in part because they are somehow blending, or the differentiation between the non-virtual and the virtual is narrowing significantly. With Bad Soda / Soft Drunk, you filled a Miami gallery with thousands of old, dead stock bottles of Nexcite and created a sculptural "floor" upon which viewers had to carefully walk. You also included sculptures created by making your own DIY napalm, some of which were then colored with the blue Nexcite. I am wondering if this process in and of itself was meant in some way to serve as a kind of narrative that the show as a whole projects?

Process as narrative is something that I'm okay with. There are so many phases to any presentation it would be a shame to underplay the importance of the process. In fact, I'm working on an upcoming project in which the process is even more foregrounded. I think in terms of exhibitions as temporary breaks in ongoing activities.

When I was making the *Bad Soda / Soft Drunk* show I was seeing the elements as temporary states, agglomerations of products designed for the skin, tools for tactile contemplation, extreme physical violence, and sensual awareness. When combined they inform each other but also call attention to the idea that they are made of other products, which are in turn made from other products. Napalm is gasoline and polystyrene—gasoline is refined petroleum, and polystyrene is a collection of various engineered molecules in the styrene family. As you start to look further down the chain these things start to change shape pretty aggressively. I'm thinking of the human body as a kind of hub through which these various commodities pass before moving on to other forms, states, and effects.

Yes, certainly it is clear that a lineage of some kind is being either formed or followed, or in some way is doing both at once. Since there is a drastic dichotomy at the crux of this body of work that simultaneously produces playful, colorful sculptures that are made up of toxic, chemically modified products that are manufactured for less-than-playful, innocent purposes, I am curious as to what story, if any, the marriage of these two extremes may tell?

When I choose to use napalm, I am interested in it because most people know what it is but very few have experienced it first hand. It's a mythologized material designed for the skin, but it also represents certain political agendas. The failed Swedish aphrodisiac drink has some opposing qualities: it's essentially sugar water—a placebo—but it has a very specific mythology ascribed to it in which physiological changes are supposed to take place.

Setting up a dichotomy is very useful since it creates a third field that holds the part I think of as the artwork. I'm interested in finding ways to move outside of language. I try to think in terms of creating displays that elicit non-verbal responses. The blind finger-poke texture and the absurdity of the forms perched on small concrete plinths come from a place of hyper-dumbness that hopefully leads to a state for which language has to be invented rather than chosen.

I definitely like the idea of artwork that demands a new kind of language in order to accurately or appropriately discuss it, rather than sort of mad-libbing of concepts that have already been applied to other types of work. Nonetheless, many of these kinds of ingestible materials that we are discussing, as you said, already have a whole mythology, and therefore a history embedded into them, particularly the politics of napalm. How do you approach the challenge of utilizing such products to say something else?



Niagara, 2014. Stop motion animation and digital file. Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery Diet.

That's a good point. It's rare to get outside of existing ideas and meanings. Especially in a knowledge-economy where everything is named, categorized, and photographed. What do you think about gravitating towards liminal materials? When I say liminal materials I mean things that are on the fringe of collective knowledge—exotic and obscure things. By starting towards the edge is it more possible to slip over from time? While the liminal materials I like to use do have meanings and associations they are more tenuously attached as opposed to the connections of Coca-Cola or Vaseline, for example. It's always a game of trial and error, right?

Yes, I would think so. I also liked what you said about the third, lovechild-like field of thought and representation that comes out of a framework rooted in a blatant dichotomy. I sense that that may very well be where this new mode of language that you mentioned is generated.

Yes, the third place could be some kind of temporary truth-state where one's interpretations are not distorted by the ambiguity of language. The two opposing perceptions wrapped in language are set into motion and with some luck they arrive at a momentary state of perceptual "truth" in which there is no linguistic buffer to cloud the experience. I like the term "lovechild-like field of thought." Being that you work with language often, is this an idea you have encountered in the past?

Not exactly, I don't think I have ever phrased it quite like that, but so many of the most intriguing concepts and works of art represent an inherent kind of hybridity, so I guess that quality is like a lovechild.

I think of the particle accelerators. Giant, highway-sized circular pathways in which existing elements are smashed together at great speed to occasionally produce

exotic new ones for fractions of a second. Of course the new elements are impractical because of their extremely short duration. Similar to when something completely unfamiliar is apprehended, language rushes up to envelop it and fill the void. It's a funny thing, by trying to escape language we are generating it.

That is certainly true. This attempt to move away from verbal responses or configure new ways of using language to discuss the meaning of a work of art also makes me think of something you said in an interview in Blouin from December 2011, which was, "I think obsolescence is the format of progress." I would often tend to agree, but I am curious if you can expand upon how the idea of the obsolete actually begins to generate what we would consider to be new ideas or at least contexts in which to discuss contemporary art. It reminds me of another quote by fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto that I recently read that said, "To be modern is to tear the soul out of everything." Does that resonate with you on a similar level?

It's interesting that you bring up fashion where the "new" is so highly codified through a seasonal mechanism. I was not aware of those words from Mr. Yamamoto but I would not disagree with him. I cannot say that I know what it means to be modern as I am from a different generation. I don't even think I know much about being post-modern. I hesitate to identify something as new or original. I think it's one of the central contradictions of this thing we are participating in—this tradition. One idea does stick with me and it is that what we do must be disruptive, not only outwardly but inwardly as well. The work I admire and am interested in doing is always designed for its own eventual failure.



Bad soda/Soft drunk, 2014. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery Diet.



Carbon T-shirt Panel 4, 2014. Carbon fiber, Kevlar thread, t-Shirt, resin, perfume packaging, Velcro. 50 x 36 in. Image Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.



Carbon T-shirt Panel 5, 2014. Carbon fiber, Kevlar thread, t-Shirt, resin, perfume packaging, Velcro. 50 x 36 in. Image Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.



Napalm Stone (Bronzer Version #1), 2014. Napalm, play-dough, spray bronzer, terrazzo. 69 x 30 x 22 in. Image Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.



Napalm Stone (Graphite Version #1), 2014. Napalm, play-dough, powdered graphite, terrazzo. 67 x 30 x 22 in. Image Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.

Charles Linder

In Conversation With Paul Karlstrom

Well, Charles, here we go. We’ve known one another pretty well for quite a while.

For almost 20 years, going back to around ’94 when your Stanford buddy, Michael Moore, had a show at Refusalon on Natoma Street.

It’s a long time that we’ve interacted in the local art world—we agreed that our theme is being an artist in San Francisco and what that means. The term I would use to introduce you and your artistic identity is conceptualism. We’ll talk about that. But to start out, why don’t you begin with the early events and people in your life that were influential in shaping who and what you have become as man and artist.

I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1967 and really grew up in the south, primarily in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, until I was a teenager. I finished high school and moved to California in ’85, to Los Angeles. I spent a few years there working, going to school—and loving life in LA at the time.

Do you remember when you first became interested in art?

My mom and dad met at art school in Pittsburg. So I think I’m their biological sculpture—and apparently that’s about all they have to show for art school.

Did they encourage you?

I feel really lucky in that. We still look at art together. They helped push me to where I am—specifically my mom.

Do you remember when you first became aware of art as something other than illustrations in magazines?

Yes, I do. Mom was a good representational painter who trained me how to paint like John Singer Sargent—or, at least I thought I could. But my mom was far better at it than I ever was. In fact, that created kind of a schism between what I thought was art and what she was doing. One of the first art things I remember took place when I was only 15. We used to camp out in this old grain silo along the railroad tracks with oval windows all the way up the side. One afternoon we lit a fire and then backed up about 100 yards and took a photo at sunset. It was this internally lit cement silo, a beautiful image—I realized where my work was headed, towards ephemeral events. I look back on that as one of the first real pieces of art that I made. My friend that camped with me that night, she and I realized it was a great fleeting moment. We got that one picture to take away from the event, and sometimes that’s all you have.

Go west, young man. Somehow you got that message. As did earlier Southern Tier artists such as Ed Ruscha—who famously chose LA. Why for you the allure of Los Angeles rather than San Francisco?

My brother moved there after college, and we both wanted to start a new life. I knew I had to leave Alabama. It’s hard to describe why, but I just knew that I couldn’t get what I needed. I couldn’t become what I was trying to become at that time. One of the first things that I did when I moved to Los Angeles was work in a machine shop. I lived in the back of the shop for two and a half months before I found a place, and it was an incredible welcome to what LA really was—this international community of people working, pursuing hybrid dreams. I lived with a handful of illegal workers who were doing just about anything they could to create a new life for themselves. Most of them were from Mexico and Central America. For me, as an 18-year-old, it was about pursuing a life of exploration and adventure. That was what art was to me and I think still is. Moving to LA was the adventure of the unknown, of the west. That was a great time—the three years before I moved to San Francisco set the tone for my art making in California.

That was 1985, correct? And there was quite an active art scene. You haven’t said anything that suggests you knew what was special about LA or San Francisco—either one. Is that true?

Well, I’ve got to admit to being largely naïve about what LA held in the arts. At that time I didn’t think I was pursuing any kind of art career. I thought I was becoming an artist, but I can’t even say that I knew much about contemporary art at that time. I remember seeing a show at L.A. Louver that was a stunner: a whole environment by Ed Kienholz that was like an old bar that you could walk through, that really impacted me. Seeing the scale of shows that were being put on in Los Angeles impacted me, too.

Would you say your real art education began in Los Angeles?

Yeah. I was shunning what I thought was painting—representational art, the making of objects presumably for sale or on commission—for a life of unpaid experimentation and adventure. And that’s what I think I’ve done essentially ever since. After moving north I found what I had perceived the San Francisco scene to be. The undeniable freedom from the sixties, the sense that anything is possible—Tom being one of the first persons I bumped into. That cult of individuality.

Tom Marioni?

Tom Marioni. And then performative rituals that created a kind of conceptual art cult here, if you will. Those were influences on some of the things I did when I first moved here. I think what I’ve done is different than what those predecessors did, but no doubt influenced by them. Some of the first works were Refusalon and the gallery projects through the nineties.

But you talk about this process of becoming an artist, especially the LA time, and the influence of the poets and what you admired about them. And that seems to me a romantic notion of living the art life, of being an artist, which often appears to be mostly self-focused.

I think ultimately art is the most indulgent personal activity one can possibly pursue—really. Does it cross the gap to communicate with people? I don’t know. I admit to being readily absorbed in my personal pursuits. I think occasionally people get my work. I like to think I’m holding up a mirror, but I realize it’s a very narcissistic pursuit. I get better at trying to be on the outside of the bubble so that in a way you’re looking in. But you’re also able to look outside the bubble. That’s what I would hope is my basic position as an artist.

I’m a little puzzled by a position that is so self-absorbed and insular but takes place within a community that tends to be self-congratulatory. Does it get to that point where if you live the art life, no matter what you make or what you do, it’s really all about yourself and your friends?

In that respect, I would have to respond again that it is a private activity. I tried to do a gallery for years and really enjoyed that public activity, but now I’m in a position where I feel like my work is very private. I like working from that position rather than having my doors open to an ostensible public that didn’t get what I was trying to offer anyway. And so I feel like now I can select my audience more. I think the breakthrough comes when you meet that occasional individual who gets the big picture and realizes it isn’t just about a single painting on the wall or one you might be working on that day—being able to give a walk-through of the studio where somebody really gets the big picture of lifestyle and art. I feel great if I can be a conduit, reaching out to others who live similarly or who see art similarly.

Well, I know you get that kind of feedback, which suggests you’re successful.

Success. I don’t know what that is. I certainly couldn’t claim to have had much commercial success. I think success is happiness and whether or not it’s working for you in the big picture. I’ve got a system that works for me, and I think that the product is trying to stay happy, trying to stay positive about what I’m doing. That’s the work, and I think I’ve got to keep it positive to keep doing it. It’s not always easy. But I would agree I make art for myself—100 percent. I don’t do this for the market. I don’t do it for girlfriends.

When I say success, I mean successful in terms of communicating. You’re a social person, and art is a way of communicating. Most of the artists I know who really are serious about their art—that’s important to them.

I know I reach them, but I’m not preoccupied with it. I think there are people out there who get my work. I don’t claim to do it for them, by any means. That would be really narcissistic. But I think admitting that I do it for myself is an honest beginning. When people tell me they get it, I feel like that’s a great sense of acknowledgment. I don’t do it for them. But it’s sometimes heartening to know that people do like the look, like the feel, or get the pathos of the project, if you will. In *Mudslinger*, for instance—which was like an adventure handbook of my life in a funny way, a recent art book I did for my Tijuana show—I felt really good about that piece, but it was a reflection of my travels and times and the ephemera of my work.

But you say that you don’t particularly care. Making things is the source of happiness—this, again, I guess is one way to look at an activity. But on the other hand, I know enough about you to say that you are pretty disappointed when people don’t seem to be paying attention or making the effort to understand you.



Ghostang (at Weldon), 2005 - present. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery 16, San Francisco and La Casa del Tunel, Tijuana.

I guess that’s true. I mean, one can’t derive support entirely from no echo. I think of one artist, an Israeli artist I worked with who spent time in the Bay Area, who after his show came back to me and said, “Charles, I just don’t feel like there was any echo here in the Bay Area.” And I’ve heard that from many artists, especially ones not from here. And I wonder if that is a plague on our scene and our work. You mentioned the possibility that I’m just talking to myself—is it all just about me? I think the *Mudslinger* book was a good example of collaborative art making because Griff Williams gave me some ribbing in a way, not unlike what you’re doing. He said, “Hey, who does this reach, or who are you trying to talk to with this?” One of the images in the book was the lid from a soda cup with two straws in it. It’s in the middle of the book. Griff just goes, “What the hell is this, what’s going on with this? You’ve got to tell me about this.”

Remember, people have to bother to try to understand you. They have to think it’s worthwhile. And many artists say, “Oh, well, the work takes care of that.” Isn’t that something of a modernist romantic notion?

The book is really all about relationships, and specifically my relationship with adventure, sometimes involving girlfriends. There are a number of friends in the book. So the relationship between word, image, and the overall feel that comes from their combination, I think that’s what we tried to wrench out in that book. Something about relationships and how the image reaches its intended audience or ...

Well, what is its intended audience? An intended audience presupposes caring about being understood, having you and your work—and their relationship—understood. Even appreciated. What about Tijuana?

I was humbled to do the show there. When you’re offered a show you want to produce something for the audience that represents you but from a position that offers an access point. I felt like I did that for the TJ show. It came from many visits there trying to figure out who the audience was, the people that would see it, and whittling away at the elements in the story to include only what was necessary. That was tough.

How did you make that decision? Select what was necessary for Tijuana?

Well, the main piece was the bullet-riddled car, the *Ghostang* sculpture, which has gone on many different voyages and seen many different moments and events. The piece had been in Tijuana for a couple years—that was the main way that I was known in Tijuana, as the guy of the *Ghostang*. And we tried to use *Ghostang*, as a point of departure throughout the book *Mudslinger* as a kind of touchstone or hallmark over the years in my work—and a way to approach Tijuana as a border culture. I don’t know how successful it was, but the two night events were great, and I felt like the people that showed up did get it.

What happened in these events?

It came out of this pig roast obsession of mine. My host there, Luis Ituarte, said, “Hey, I saw the video, why don’t you do one of those here?” I thought this was great and it gave me a chance to invite my chef collaborator to come down from Oakland, and then also a band that showed up. So it ended up being a multi-ring affair. It wasn’t just my work. It was a community event ultimately. Being able to serve them wild boar



Sounder of wild pigs at Las Viboras, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and the Sparling Family.

tacos in Tijuana was just nothing short of . . . Anyway, I came back from Tijuana with an incredible respect for that culture.

Well, maybe that's one reason to do it.

In fact, it really was. It was to embrace that whole appreciation of bubbles that I think is what my work really is. I saw Luis's own passion and obsession with his pet project, his gallery, La Casa del Tunel, a redeemed smuggler's house. I just really identified with it and thought, man, I want to seek this guy out, go down there, find out what the scene is about, and I just became really obsessed. I felt maybe a little tired of my local scene, and what it forced me to do is to look elsewhere for inspiration. Community is where the connection comes from, and that's when you realize you're not just participating in a regional circle jerk. That's when it really gets interesting. Your new audience gets your work and the bubbles overlap—a kind of catalytic reaction. That's what was great about meeting Luis and being there.

It sounds as if you two became good friends in a short period of time. But let's now go back to San Francisco and the Art Institute.

Well, I ended up getting this scholarship to come here. I perceived the Art Institute to be a vehicle for why I came to California. I look back on it really fondly. I think of it as a little cauldron. One of my teachers, Tony Labat, used to love to turn up the heat on us to watch us squirm. Tony was a really great influence on me at school. He's there to push you outside the boundaries—to provoke, inspire, challenge. One of the things that stuck with me from the years I spent there with Tony was how he would point out to us that maybe one out of 20 in the group would go on to do something that might get written about or might get put in a newspaper or might get bought by a museum. And I remember it created a bit of a culture of insecurity.

But I remember specifically thinking, "I am going to be one of that 10 percent or less, I'm going to be one of those people." And in that regard, I thank Tony . . . the one individual there who really pushed me. He was constantly fighting to define a position unknown at the time. I think that's what I always really thought art was about, pushing you towards this lifestyle of experimentation and discovery. I found Tony very inspirational in that way.

You were at the Art Institute from 1988 to 1990. Right?

Shortly thereafter I was faced with the predicament of being a young artist—of how to get my work out there, how to take my essentially private activity into the real world. There was a perceived guild system with which this supposedly operated, but from what I could tell it was all based on nepotism and insider trading. I realized it wasn't going to happen unless I started my own entity. Refusalon was a vehicle for my colleagues and me to show what we thought art was, a framework for creating an audience. That was our solution to being art students no one had ever heard of. We were faced with how to get people to look at the work and maybe write about it, get affirmation enough to keep doing it. That for me was about a nine-year-long project that was essentially non-commercial.

What year did you open your doors?

Refusalon started in 1990, in January 1990.

Now, does that include Natoma?

Yeah, the Natoma era really was the beginning. Then we took Refusalon out of the South of Market "wine country"—as we used to call the neighborhood—and moved to Hawthorne Lane next to SFMOMA: our attempt at going commercial or at least integrating market concerns with our otherwise ephemeral lifestyles. I kept



Holding an Anna's, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery 16, San Francisco.

with it until '99 when I essentially turned over the reins to my then co-conspirator, Shmulik Krampf, and he took over the project, bringing to it his own idea of what it was as a temporal, conceptual work. I said, "Hey, I see this as a gift. You've got to maintain it, bring new wrapping to it—you have to fervently present it in the tradition that I've created."

In a short time we've moved to you starting Refusalon—with which in the minds of many you are still associated. I'm still not sure if the Natoma venue was proto-Refusalon or its first iteration.

I feel like the heart of the matter happened in the earlier days on Natoma. That was what Refusalon really was. Once we tried to change that and take it downtown and commercialize it, it wasn't the same anymore. The idealist in me maybe fetishizes some of the earlier projects and really ephemeral events.

For example, one night at a performance event on Natoma Street, perhaps one of the most memorable nights ever at Refusalon—and I know Tony, my old teacher, would say this was the *only* thing that Refusalon was memorable for—we all were out in the backyard watching the performer when out of nowhere this guy comes walking into the backyard and simply sits down right in the middle of this campfire. Before anyone can realize what's happening, he's caught on fire. The other guy's performance, no one even remembers to this day. This guy is seriously injured. You can see that he's got a grizzly burn on his ass and leg; his pants are burned off. I'll never forget, I walked out the back door just as this happened. I run down the stairs and we drag him out of the fire. I remember thinking, "Oh, my God, we've really gone too far. I needed to set some limits here."

Was he a student of Tony Labat?

He was another student of Tony's.

Let's talk about Tony. Obviously he was inspirational for you. He was within what appears to be a protected school framework where the school's noninterference policy has been to let the teachers do whatever they want. Apparently Bruce Conner famously took advantage of that freedom. Or so I've been told.

Well, I've heard the stories, too. I know exactly which ones you're talking about. With respect to Tony though, there were just different styles of doing things. For instance, George Kuchar would pick the star students and nudge them on to do whatever they wanted, but then he'd take credit for it. Tony had a similar but more provocative way of going about it. At the time it was tough for me. Now I think that's the role of the mentor, of the teacher—to provoke. It is to ask you to consider if the pre-existing model is good enough for you anymore. Are you going to have to fucking destroy it, break it down, rebuild it, and then call it something different? Tony encouraged us to create our own individual art worlds, if you will, whatever the cost. Yeah, I think that was inspirational, and it created a competitive environment amongst the students.

What I took away from Harold Bloom's book *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) had to do with art school and the whole idea of the others that have come before: what they did and their influence on you creating anxiety. I remember thinking of that in Tony's class—who went hard on us for knowing our antecedents. It wasn't so much that somebody had already done something, but a lot of people operate in naiveté and don't realize that there have been influences that have impacted their work. There was a whole student subculture that was paranoid about doing art for fear that it had already been done. I just thought that was such a paralyzed position to operate from.

As you say, you look at least foolish—if not stupid—if you think that it all started with you and that your work is somehow . . . uniquely original. I think it touches on what is a culture of privilege, a culture of elitism that art precipitates—and I embrace that. I do believe it's a very personal, selfish path. And I think what I got from Tony, Wally Hedrick, Jason Rhoades—or the tradition of the Art Institute—was kind of a culture of truth, seeking the individual path at the expense of everything else . . . I look back on that time at SFAI as one of the richest of my life, just in terms of experimenting and meeting other artists, the youthful embracing of this ephemeral little scene we had. I think that's what it was really all about—that tradition of the Art Institute. The calling card has perhaps little other value, but it's an elitist cult that those who have been there really identify with and are proud to be part of. I know I am.

You mentioned "truths" several times, and I think it's fair to examine the words we use—you know, the judgment that art is or isn't true in a "culture of truth." What does that mean in the art context?

It just speaks again to whether or not I should have moved to Los Angeles after graduate school like, say, Mark Grotjahn, whose paintings now sell for over a million dollars. Did I do the wrong thing in staying here? I don't think I did. It was a lifestyle choice. But that came at the expense of perhaps selling paintings. Was it worth it? Yes. I guess for me, the pursuit of truth is in knowing and sticking with the path versus being distracted by the temptation of a career, maybe a teaching job, maybe a stable job at the post office. The truth was sticking with the path. There isn't any marked path to follow, to find your way. You have to make it all up. When you start working in some revisionist way it's usually pretty evident, and you think, "Oh, I don't want to do that because so-and-so may have already done that." That pushes you to stay on the quest for your own unique vision. Maybe that's what I mean by truth—to avoid cliché or stating the known.

During our conversation, I've been thinking of Dada and the idea of tearing down, pushing boundaries, and that there's merit in that goal. But do you feel that the Art Institute—maybe aspects of the San Francisco art community, but especially the Art Institute—valorized transgression, perhaps for its own sake?

Undoubtedly. Beyond the sensational. But I found later in my career that I seriously needed some limits. Limitations are bad but you need boundaries within which your art is contained. I think setting those as an individual artist is tricky. How do you integrate yourself into an existing system that promotes art? Or how do you create an entire system that promotes what you think art is? That was the challenge.

Well, in fact, what I feel you're touching on—the kind of truth you're bringing up—is that the better art comes from collaborating. I'm so bored with monomaniacal artists, that one person doing the same thing over and over again. I need others to tell me what's not working, and what stays in. I think that can help you better reach your audience. That's where dialogue and having an art community really inform you and make the work what it is.

Some of the leading visual artists either didn't go to art school or dropped out. Then why go to art school? What do you get—and then maybe don't get? Because in the age of conceptualism, you're no longer primarily learning craft—method, materials, technique.

That's a good question. I guess it goes back to that thing we've talked about several times. We were ostensibly operating in what was perceived as a guild system. One thought that this would lead to being integrated into gallery shows, purchased by museums, written about by magazines, collected avidly by supposed art collectors. In fact, what you're buying into is an elitist system of insider trading. What the schools and galleries are trying to do is commodify once-radical personal narratives by converting them into salient, long-term art market investments.

And you pointed out that the Art Institute at one time took pride in being the only true fine art school in the country—meaning without a commercial program—without that practical side.

Or perhaps even more memorably, without graduates matriculating into the art world, which I think was really the problem of the Art Institute for a while.

How do you mean?

It's like an elite cult of artists that you're part of. Whether or not the art school education amounted to anything, the ones who are still out there on the street doing art and getting shows and making books—it's interesting to be part of that. I think of the Studio 13 jazz band as a metaphor for the Art Institute, or how I envisioned myself fitting in. These idealists chasing truth, in pursuit of pure art at the expense of a career. As younger artists you look at the older artists and watch their demeanor. You try to determine whether they're comfortable with this, do they really believe this? I remember particularly Wally and Richard Shaw, who both were teacher figures of mine. Shaw was a teacher of mine at Berkeley later. Wally was more like a mentor figure. But they were living it. They were really doing it on their terms.



Dixie becoming Bennie, 1996. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery 16, San Francisco.

Another example might be Emerson Woelffer at Chouinard in the 1960s. Many of the younger LA artists—Ed Ruscha, Joe Goode, the Ferus people—looked up to him. Not necessarily for his work but for his example: "He showed us what it was to be an artist."

That's an interesting way of putting it. I think what I took away from Richard and Wally was that both seemed content genuinely pursuing their careers. I remember Richard having a real sense of humility and being a great teacher, being able to talk about your work and never bringing himself into it. I think that's the measure of a good teacher. True, sometimes they're talking about themselves, but they're able to make you divorce yourself from the material. If you can divorce yourself from your agenda and be comfortable in that, it radiates—its power communicates almost without you. I remember thinking that's what was inspirational about Wally. His was a body of work whose infamy preceded it—yet it didn't add up to a commercial entity. What was inspirational was his commitment to this extremely personal body of work.

Well, perhaps that's the truth-in-art we've been looking for.

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Aun Aprendo, 2014. Neon sculpture. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery 16, San Francisco.

Dave Hickey

I DO NOT BELIEVE AND I DO NOT BELONG



Jarrett Earnest and Dave Hickey, Captiva, Florida, 2014. Photograph by Laura Ortman.

In Conversation With Jarrett Earnest

(Part One)

‘I was stuck on a remote island for five weeks with Dave Hickey—’ I started telling my friend when I got back in New York. Her face was dismayed, ‘—and it was paradise,’ I went on. My friend’s disapproval slowly melted as I spoke, until she finally confessed, ‘I picked up his recent book and liked it, but someone saw it and told me, ‘Don’t read that! I know it seems exciting, but he is a misogynist cowboy,’ and I never finished it.’ This is not an uncommon response to the mention of Dave Hickey, an iconoclastic writer eliciting ire and adoration for his belles lettres prose and his crusade against art world iniquity. When I realized we’d be together in residence at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation my mind flashed to his recent talk in LA where he reportedly said, ‘Identity politics broke the art world.’ As a flamboyant gay man intending to spend the entire residency in the shortest possible shorts, and as a writer largely interested in art by people who are not straight white guys, I worried we might not get along. What I found was, like all brilliant and truly worthwhile people, Dave Hickey is complicated and I liked him immensely. Authentic, fun and deeply sensitive—he is all you could want in another person in the world. I ordered his books while I was there and I was struck by how beautifully he fits the precision of his language with the originality of his ideas. During our last week in Captiva we met for three mornings on his sunny porch to record this conversation. The most important missing elements from this transcription are the skinks, the thick sunshine, and the laughter that punctuated our conversations.

MORNING ONE: A Pirate Retirement

In Pirates and Farmers (2013) you describe the personality type of the pirate concluding, “The paradox of a pirate retirement. You can’t do it.” So I lied, and have before. I have a history of quitting things I have not found worthy. Sometimes I’m wrong, but I am still here to write about art that doesn’t come with an excuse or a letter from a doctor.

What was the purpose of proclaiming a retirement, knowing full well it’s impossible for a pirate like you? What are you doing now that is different?

What I’m *not* doing now is interacting with the art world. Every six weeks or so I fly to New York, I stay at the Warwick or somewhere Midtown, get a limo, and go look at art—the art promises not to say I’ve been looking at it—then I go home. I’m an art person; I’m not an “art world person” anymore.

You allude in several places to the work in literature you were doing as a Ph.D. student at the University of Texas; I want to know a little more about what you were working on.

I was figuring out what I would call a grammatical calculus for describing language in a musical sense, incorporating elements of speed and frequency, so that you’re not just counting the repetitions of the word but you’re counting how often and how fast words repeat so you can get a much clearer sense of the prose you’re describing. It’s more like musical notation software. I had a passage from Hemingway, D.H. Lawrence, and Gertrude Stein each in three states of revision. Because I was at UT, they had all the manuscripts. I thought I could encode all these and, since revisions are presumed to be intentional, I could make empirical statements about intention by encoding the changes from version to version. *Nobody* makes empirical statements about intention, but I thought that it could be done, and I think I pretty much did it, although I ran up against a lot of problems with my committee. Most offensively, I took exception to a part of Chomsky that he couldn’t live without but I could—I’ll give you an example: “I” and “you”—personal pronouns? They’re not “pronouns.” They don’t stand for nouns; they stand for gestures, they stand at the portal between the palpable world and the world of language, and that changes the way sentences are generated. It also creates a kind of tiered system so that sentences that use “I” are first level sentences, “you” or “it” are in different categories altogether. Shifting into and out of these modes, especially with D.H. Lawrence, seemed to be a good way of demonstrating that, but I couldn’t do it without dissing Chomsky—and I did severely want to diss Chomsky. They—never let me defend my dissertation, but I wrote it; I learned a whole lot; and I was right.

You reference J. L. Austin. Is that where your thinking about language then goes? Toward his performative speech acts?

I treat literary prose as performative speech, and I’m interested in what they call the “phonotext”—*you hear it as you read it*. If you can’t hear the phonotext, you don’t know what prose is. Many academics don’t deal with the phonotext at all, they just read the words. I’m doing a talk at the College Art Association in February called “Theory and Critique: The Raw and the Cooked” and I come out in favor of the raw theory—no footnotes, so it’s lodged into the world, not lodged into other texts through footnotes.

Your analysis of the phonotext comes out of a lifelong love of music. Yes, and I listen well.

What was the music that preceded your studies, when you were a child?

My dad was a bebop musician and I was a rock and roll person and I could read music, although I can’t write it out very well. I just tend to think of things in musical terms. This puts me in a tradition with Monet, Miro, and Braque—people who were basically musical painters. Duchamp was the alternative and nobody got further on a one-trick pony than he did—a phonotext critique leads you into the tangible world, and for some reason Duchampian critique leads you back into theory. Also, I always thought it was my job to make up jargon and not to use it. I was a serious structuralist in graduate school in the 1960s—I wrote art criticism for nearly twenty years without using “desire,” “deconstruction,” or any of those words. Finally I was forced into using them because people presumed that you had to use those words or you weren’t “serious.” I remember the first thing I did that used those words was a piece on Jim Shaw. It talked about “representation” and “jouissance”—which are a fairly shoddy concepts.

What do you mean?

Is there anything that is not representation? Like “self-expression”—is there any art that is not self-expression? Also, where do you locate the boundary between jouissance and what is not?

After the work you did on literature in Texas, when you went to New York to work at Reese Palley gallery, you started writing about art. How did you approach writing then? Is there a connection between the kind of scholarly analysis you were doing on literature and the process of looking at art and writing about looking?

I was learning how to write by studying linguistics, like a painter learning her palate. There may be a connection since my mother was a painter, but the sequence was interesting. I was doing literature and then I discovered that Ruscha, Rauschenberg, and Johns loved language the way I loved it. I was beguiled by the idea of Ruscha using the incarnate word, which is not the referential word but the word as flesh, and that seemed pretty much to define a particular point of view, which Mapplethorpe and a lot of canonical Catholic artists used. This interested me more than Saul Bellow ever did—I *want the language but I don’t want this shit*. I threw my copy of *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) into the Atlantic—how symbolic.

We talked earlier about that part of Auden where he says that all critics should have to define their Eden. That seems like what you’ve been doing, and your Eden is like Las Vegas.

It’s like Vegas but with good waves. It has Ellsworth Kellys and French food. I think Eden is a good subject because the idea of utopia is a dead turd, some group invention. Seeking the architecture of Eden is my own little search for the sources of the Nile, so I never really feel competitive with anyone. Peter Schjeldahl can write pretty things and I say “that’s pretty.” Peter Plagens and any number of my contemporaries can write nice things—Paul Taylor could, even Craig Owens when he wasn’t in the grip of his professors. The way that I write never became anything in the art world but “the way Dave writes.”

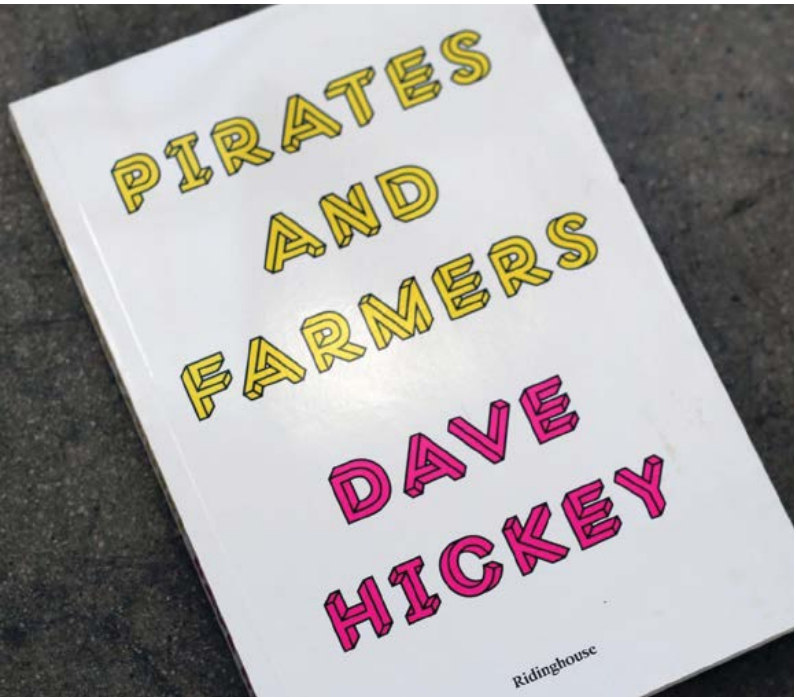
I feel one of the problems in the art world now is the people writing about art and putting on shows are not reading novels or poems, and that’s a big impoverishment of experience.

No shit! They don’t know what a Beethoven quartet is either. Four movies about a St. Bernard, perhaps? I teach a course called “The Sisterhood of the Arts” and it’s about the points where art, music, and drama intersect. That sisterhood—that primal interconnection—that dance of frequencies—is being changed into a primal connection to academic prose, and that is cultural suicide.

After you worked in the New York art world for a period in the ‘70s, you left to be part of the music scene. What precipitated that?

Boredom. I got tired of invitations I couldn’t refuse. I got fired from my gallery job. I got fired from *Art in America*. I started freelancing about music. I describe the moment like this—it was ’72 or ’73—I’m walking out of a Richard Tuttle show where he has glued weird white pieces of paper to the wall. I’m thinking “Richard Tuttle or Keith Richards? Richard Tuttle or Keith Richards?” It was as simple as that—it was more fun to write about Keith Richards. The drugs were better for sure. Also I was really interested in that kind of fame, not in the sense of wanting it, but just in knowing what the mechanics of fame might be.

When I was still running the gallery in SoHo, I was sitting in Max’s. Two people in another booth were talking about me. According to them it turns out I have a trust fund, I’m bisexual, and have an eidetic memory. The last is true but they were describing—there was a whole description of a person who was not me and I was thinking: Jesus, what would it be like to be Rick Derringer or someone like that. So for me the music writing was really focused on the vagaries of fame—what is it like to have an-



other you out there in the world, doing shit, siring children... Eric Clapton told me this story: Cream was playing in the Midwest one night, jamming away; Clapton dropped his pick and bent over to pick it up. The crowd went wild—the whole time the crowd is cheering. They were cheering for him dropping his pick. He said, “I felt like walking off stage and killing myself. What the fuck am I doing here?”

Doesn’t this relate to what was going on with Warhol in New York—this very question of celebrity—but in a more contained sphere?

I thought about that a lot with Andy because he was the fame guy. Finally, I think Andy really believed that there was true fame, or true charisma, and that Marilyn or a number of people had this true charisma. Otherwise Andy was an ad guy. He knew you could make people think anything. So the star-making process of the factory was this enormous bullshit mind-fuck of “I can make you do that.” Warhol was a control freak. He went off the rails in the mid ’60s when he discovered that he could make people do things. He could say “could you take off your pants, fella?” and the fella would take off his pants and show Andy his dick. For Warhol, who wouldn’t do *anything* you told him, this must have been a traumatic disappointment. I think he was angry that all he had built was a bunch of people who would do whatever he told them to. I’ve always regarded fame the way Andy did; I know people who have authentic charisma—Rod Stewart has authentic charisma. If you’re in the room with him, he’s in Technicolor and you’re in black and white. I’ve known a few people like that, but fame is mostly copy and coverage. A lot of the people I know who are famous are like Emmylou Harris, who is an old friend of mine. Emmylou is comfortable one place: on the stage with a guitar behind the microphone. If she’s not there, she’s not comfortable. I’m sure there is some psychological name for that.

When you started to become involved with people who were “real” celebrities in the music world, what did it show you about art?

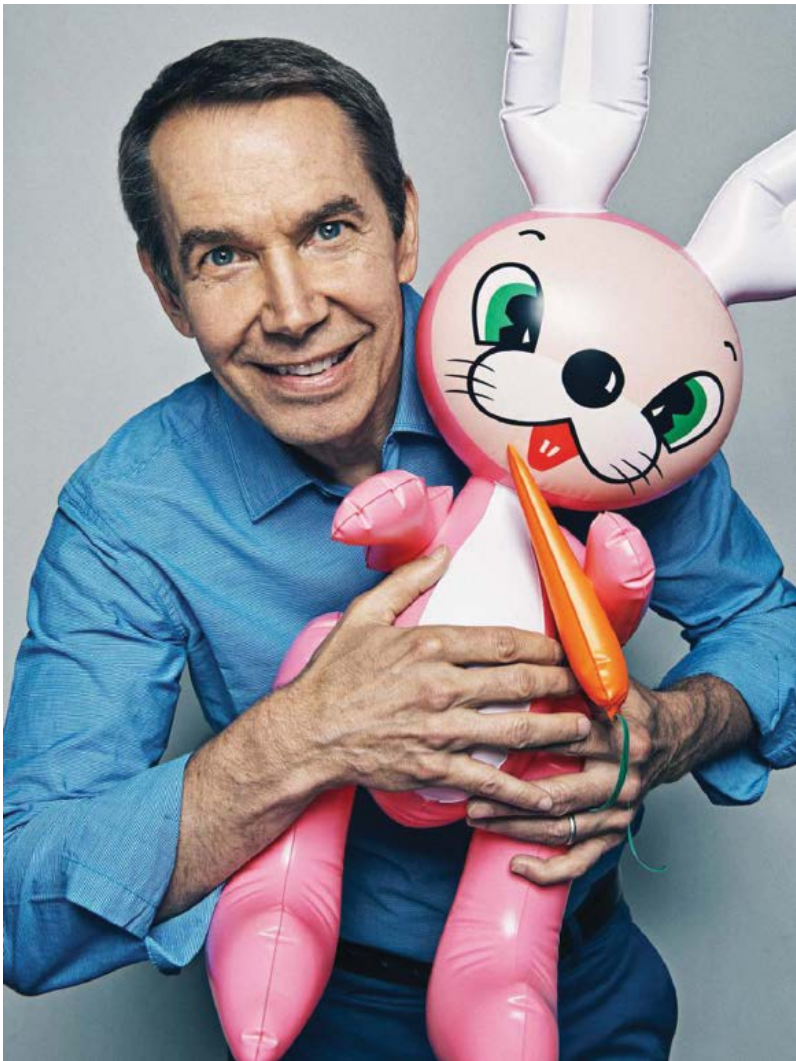
The first thing I learned is that there is no qualitative difference between great pop and great art. Good is good. Second thing I learned was that if you’re going to be in rock and roll, bring a friend, because it can all turn to shit fast. I’ve known the guys from The Eagles over the years and just in passing, and they were really good buddies and that blew up so hysterically. I never would think of writing about an artist the way I wrote about Keith Richards, because the object is there today and there will be another every day—there will be a new day when they’re dead—so that is a liberation.

Do you listen to music when you write?

No. I used to, but I don’t anymore. I hear the words too much.

There seems like an interesting connection to you being a songwriter and traveling with country music people and the way that you dealt with the more recent phase of your life as a critic, which is as a persona an “outlaw,” an oppositional voice.

Well, I named those Nashville guys “The Outlaws” in a magazine article. As for me, I’m a hard core alienated person, although a sweetie pie. I went to grammar school for four years at thirteen grammar schools, and if you do this, *you get good at good-bye*. I’m happy to see people that I haven’t seen in fifteen years, that’s ok. We don’t exchange Christmas cards, that’s ok. I’m always sad when they die, and that is one good thing about digital: the hardest thing to do is to take dead people out of your Rolodex. I remember taking Scott Burton out of my Rolodex and thinking “awe, boo



Jeff Koons. Courtesy of the Internet.

hoo, Scott!" At the same time, this ties in with my feelings about fame: if you would tell me who I'm supposed to be famous *to* or *for*, I could address myself to it, but I'm not really close enough to anybody or any institution to know. Art critics are not supposed to be famous. I have had periods of 40-watt celebrity and they weren't any better than any other time. If you're in a band, you've still got to get up and play. If you're a writer, you have to get up and write, win or lose. If you win, you're in vogue. I know what works: word of mouth and that is all it is — there isn't anything anybody at Columbia might write that is going to make you famous.

I'm interested in this because of the Koons effect: what is this thing that metastasized from Andy Warhol into this pedantic, funless, critically unassailable thing embodied by Koons?

I just finished a book I really like called *The Eloquence of Color* (1993) by Jacqueline Lichtenstein about the 17th-century French academy which was divided between those who believed in line and those who believed in color. The linear people were pedants, and I think Jeff is a pedant. As they would say in the 17th century, "He stinks of the ink pot." He has a terrible penchant for these retro-Fitzcarraldo technological projects that don't do anything. How could Jeff Koons and Robert Gober do the same thing — which is manufacture found objects? Jeff to no end and Robert to what seems like profound ends? I don't understand. I used to work at Reese Palley right across the street from Fanelli's, which is where Jeff always was. From the first, I was amazed by the thud of his wit — it was *not there*. People say "Jeff is so child-like" and I think he is really like a child, and I don't attach any joke or flattery to that remark. You're always asked by people who collect, "What am I paying for?" "Am I paying for Rauschenberg's *elan*?" With Jeff it's clear you're paying for a whole lot of Detroit technology and that is an investment. And Damien Hirst is the same. They both make work that looks like work.

I have a hard time with the fluffy art world. A lot of my opinions have changed over the years and a lot of my contemporaries are not making as good art as they used to. They still do good art but —

Is that because of the climate in which they are making art, or what?
A lot of it is the production demand. To cite a really good Ruscha drawing: "She Sure Knew Her Devotionals." What is that about? It's three graphic locations of the *shush* phoneme: SH / SU / TION. That is all it is. It's cool but not a lot of people know that or care. Is Ed going to go back and do that for two million dollars? Or "Guacamole Airlines," which comes out as "Wacky Molière Lines," acknowledging Edward's French descendants. But no longer. Ed is pretty interesting as an artist — serious in his own way, cagey beyond imagining.

You're working on an autobiographical book. In Pirates and Farmers you said, "My life doesn't have a narrative, it has episodes." What is the importance in that distinction?

I've always used autobiographical stuff as a pendant in criticism — I dangle it out there. Using criticism as a pendant to personal narrative is going to be a little harder. I have fallen upon *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) in the sense that my book will begin something like: "I knew I was coming out wrong. I was going to fall out of my mother's pussy onto my ass with a cord around my neck. My mom was going to be rushed off to the ICU, and I knew she would hate me forever" — *you know*, something *intimate like that*. I'll follow the general tonality of *Tristram Shandy*, of letting it change with my whims.

You put an epigraph from Tristram Shandy at the front of Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty (1993). It seems emblematic of the way you write.

It is, and would that I could write that well. This is one of the reasons my work doesn't have much footing in the art world. Who's read *Tristram Shandy*? My writing comes out of Victorian journalism — Ruskin and Carlyle, Charles Lamb and De Quincey. I was so glad when I found them. I picked up De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) for reasons other than prose. I was a fan of opium, but reading it I thought, "I can do this! I can write this kind of sentence that goes on for three pages and ends with one word, just like *bam! I can do that!*" Then I knew what to do, but it's not a very *fashionable* way to write.

Given that so much of your own writing is grounded in "Dave Hickey" — your anecdotes and personal experiences — what do you think is useful to talk about: an artist's life or what they have to say in relation to the art object? Or about yourself as the writer?

I've never regarded myself as much beyond an example of something, and I've always known that nobody is going to read this because it's about art. They are going to read it because it's good. That puts me and the genre at cross-purposes. I know most of the art criticism out there, and I have no idea why anybody would read that shit.

I think a lot of people are saying that too, and in fact no one is reading it. I almost suspect that there are political forces that do not want any form for real criticism.

I think what has happened is that critique won over theory. Theory died in 1978 or something like that. The whole "kill them all and stand on their tummies" attitude that Deleuze brought to the discourse is what I like about theory. The big problem was that Deleuze and Foucault in particular were translated by Americans who were liberals, and I don't think that either one of them was. They are really too cold hearted to be liberals. I still like *The Order of Things* (1966) where Foucault dismantles sociology as a historical solipsism, but that was a war that Foucault lost. Look at *The Logic of Sense* (1969). It is about the phonotext, and Deleuze lost that one too.

You cultivate this brash cowboy persona but you're actually a sweetheart and you really care; why not just be a little sweeter publicly?

Oh *I'm a sensitive* plant. The world is ablaze to me, and people are kaleidoscopes. I get my feelings hurt, so whatever brashness manifests itself in my manner is to cover that up. I wrote an essay in *Air Guitar* (1997) about going to a jam session with my dad — we went to play jazz. I still don't know what to do about it. The essay made people cry. I wasn't trying to do that, but maybe I'm such a swoony sop I can't help it.

I re-read Invisible Dragon here. After having studied a lot about the culture wars and identity politics art in the 1990s it makes total sense as a culture war text.

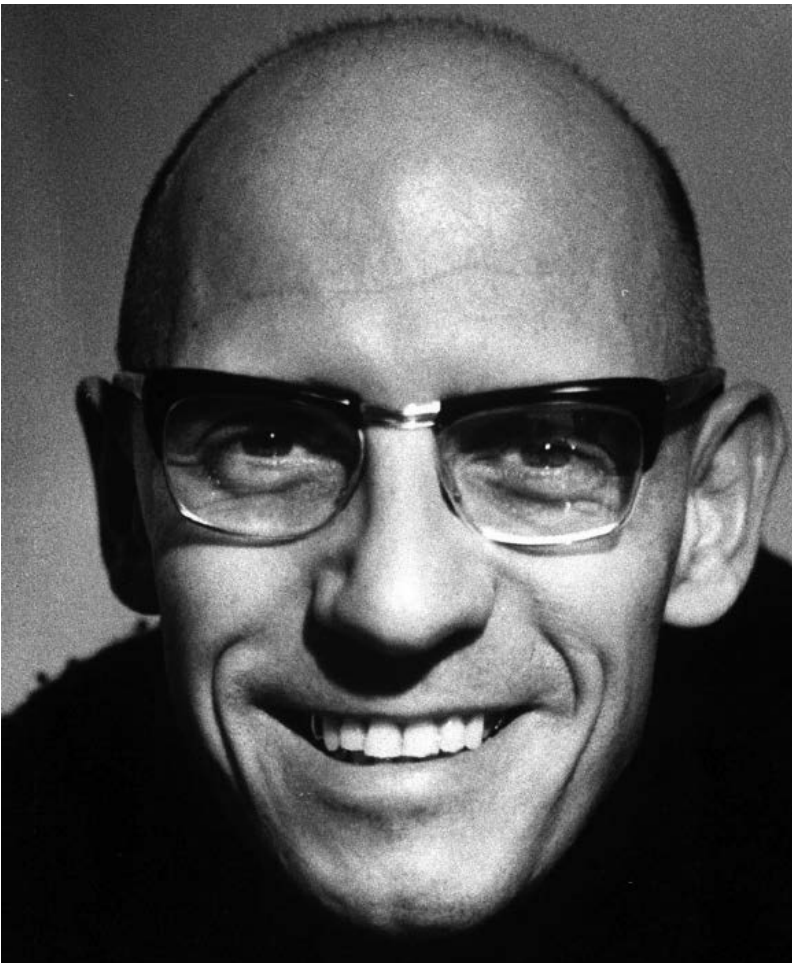
It was intended to be. It was basically the same argument that Jacqueline Lichtenstein makes in *The Eloquence of Color*: there is a point in rhetoric where language stops and art goes on. Cicero said that his ideal orator need not say a word, but simply stand before the crowd to manifest the justice of his case. Out of this premise comes the elegant pantomime of Renaissance painting. That was my argument for beauty. With beauty you're free. You don't have to ask anybody. Why would you have to ask somebody?

You frequently turn to the founding of American democracy in your writing —

— I taught *The Federalist Papers* (1788) regularly for years.

I imagine you are the only art critic who does; when did that interest start?

It's pretty much perpetual since civics in sixth grade, because it's theory, because any country that chooses its masters then dispenses with them with a safe word is a masochistic country in love with threat and fear. More to the point I was talking to Ruscha about the way he works, his process. He said, "First I think up the idea, then I execute it, then I decide if it's any good or not" — Executive, Legislative, Judicial! I know a hell of a lot of artists in this country who think like that. Also it's really



Michel Foucault. Courtesy of the Internet.

important because so many art propositions fall into ashes having failed the judicial. They lose because this is an adversarial culture; it is adversarial but not hierarchal. It's "us against them" or "me versus you" — *it's about argument*. I am not going to bring in some fucking ad guy like Charles Saatchi to tell me what's good — *shouldn't I be arguing with him?* I think we are affected because academia is hierarchal. The only real distinction I can make between the artists who teach and the artists who don't is that artists who don't teach will look you in the eye; the ones who do teach are either looking up to the dean or down to the students — they are comfy in that little place. Where did you go to school?

San Francisco Art Institute. Then I was at the CUNY Graduate Center, but I was a nightmare for everyone there and I dropped out.

Me too. Three times. I do not play well with others, and I do not know why. I like my friends but I hate to ask people for anything. I didn't grow up asking people for things. The hierarchy in which the 1% have all the money is outrageous. The puppy food in the galleries that sells for a million dollars is 98% crap. Walter Robinson had that great line "zombie abstraction" and I can't figure out a way into that work. I could be making five dollars a word if I could find a way into "the new casualism," but there's nothing there for me. Probably this is the consequence of minimalism. It did not change: it started and it ended and that was minimalism; the people who made minimalist art did the same piece over and over in different circumstances. My first art world job was to ration the tequila for Dan Flavin when he was installing in Fort Worth. It was funny because there were these three lighting technicians who were going to help Dan put up the piece. First two days, they thought Dan was crazy. Third day, one of these guys points up the ceiling and says "let's put a yellow one right up there," so you know it's not rocket science.

I wrote a piece on Jasper once to which he actually sent me a note and said he liked it. The premise was "why would Jasper use numbers?" My answer is: because they are stupider than anything but letters, and he uses letters too. So all these stupid ideas are used to drive high interpretation away from John's work, and open the way for something other, and that's reasonable, at least to Jasper.

Have you ever written a review where the artist thought you got it totally wrong?

I wrote an essay about Susan Rothenberg that she tore up and hasn't spoken to me since. I wrote an essay on Pistoletto. I had all these stacks of his diaries in Italian. My Italian is not good, but I read them. I wrote that essay and when I finished I thought, "I'm wrong and this is not good art. I really fucked up." I improved my Italian, though.



Damien Hirst. Courtesy of the Internet.

Have your opinions on works of art changed over time?

Yeah, Pistoletto. I decided that Penone is the real artist in that crowd. There are people I still like, like Patrick Caulfield who ended up not particularly famous, which was good for Sarah Morris.

When you said Penone is a "real artist," what is your definition of that?

Can't not make it. That is my impression with Ruscha — he's just always out there ferreting things out. I like real intellectual artists. I like Steve Prina and I like Josiah McElheny. I don't want to say that art is a *vocation* for them but that's probably what I mean — *art is what they do*. This is so diluted now. I would say that 90% of the artists showing in New York today are part-time adjuncts and sabbatical artists. The only way I can see this getting better is by people throwing in their cards and saying "I don't want to play here anymore." In the past, the great thing about New York was that you could always move to LA — The United States was at least a two-table casino, but they've converged.

It seems like something you hold as a virtue is the ability to bite the hand that feeds you.

That's just business and reputation. You can rent my writing but you can't buy my praise. Try it and I will fuck you up. Also, I was born with a passel of "I don't care."

Why do you think people keep inviting you to do stuff only to be shocked when you transgress?

I have no idea except I'm funny. Every time I get a chance to go to the Midwest it turns out they just wanted to get me up close to yell at me. I've had whole faculties walk out of lectures I've given in Iowa and Illinois. These are institutions of higher education. Big ceramics dudes are bumping me around like Brooklyn goombahs, feminist troglodytes shrieking that I've stolen their safety. It's like a homeless row in Tompkins Park, so what do I do? Do I burst into tears and run sobbing into an empty classroom? Not an option. I just make snarky remarks about academic footwear. I've had students chanting "pig" in the first rows of a lecture at Claremont. I gave a lecture at Guelph — the newspaper the next morning said "Hickey offends Canada" without a thought to the damage inflicted by Justin Bieber and Celine Dion. I gave a lecture in LA and got 40 negative tweets in 40 minutes.

These experiences have hardened my heart. Standing up there you feel like Hannah Arendt after her book came out. I always wanted to be a bad man, but I have never been a "bad boy critic" even when I was a boy. *I do not believe and I do not belong*, and I've done evil deeds just because they are wrong, and I'm ok with that. The thing I loved the most about the art world, when I was running my gallery in Texas, was coming to New York so I could have lunch with Leo Castelli at La Pleiade, or go through the back rooms at Sidney Janis, or go see Lou Reed and Smithson at Max's — I really looked forward to those moments. If I'm going to New York today, who am I going to see, Brooks and Lisa? That is why I don't tell people when I come to town.

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Henry Martin

On Duchamp, Fluxus, Ray Johnson, Arte Povera, Nuclear Art, And The 20th-Century Avant-Garde



Henry Martin and Ray Johnson. 1964. Photographed by William S. Wilson. Courtesy of William S. Wilson.

In Conversation With John Held, Jr.

In the mid-1950s, while yet thirteen years old, Henry Martin haunted the Philadelphia Museum of Art, paying special attention to the Walter C. Arensberg Collection, and in particular, the art of Marcel Duchamp. Fifteen years later, he was in Milan, Italy, assisting Arturo Schwartz in the preparation of the monumental monograph, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp (Abrams, 1969). Between those seminal years, he attended Maine's Bowdoin College, schooled by Ray Johnson scholar William S. Wilson; moved to New York, where he befriended Johnson, as well as members of Fluxus; and relocated to Italy on a permanent basis, initially as a university professor, becoming a foreign correspondent for Art International, Art and Artists, Studio International, and Art News. His subsequent career has been just as significant, meeting artists associated with Arte Povera and Nuclear Art, writing the first English monograph on Nouveau Réaliste, Arman (Abrams, 1973), and several books on the artist George Brecht, conducting an essential interview with Ray Johnson, curating a number of important Fluxus exhibitions, and joining the Emily Harvey Foundation board of directors in continuing the late gallerist's support of contemporary artists, poets and musicians. I interviewed him at the Emily Harvey Gallery (Archivio Emily Harvey) during the course of my residency at the Foundation in Venice, Italy, during November and December 2014.

You've interviewed so many people—Ray Johnson, George Brecht, Francesco Conz, to name a few—but has anyone ever interviewed you?

No, I don't think so. Oh, yes, a friend named Lea Vergine did an interview with me for *Uomo Vogue*—"Vogue for Men." That was very strange. Lea is an Italian art critic. She's married to Enzo Mari, who is sort of the last remaining prince of Italian design. She's been a friend for a long time. She did a series of interviews for *Uomo Vogue*, which became a book called *The Last Eccentrics*, and I was one of the last eccentrics. I don't know if I deserved that.

Did that only appear in Italian? Both the magazine article and the book?
Yes, only in Italian.

You mentioned to me previously that you were a student in the 1950s.
I was at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. I was there from 1959 through 1963. In my sophomore year, 1960–1961, I had the enormous good fortune to study Chaucer with Bill Wilson [William S. Wilson, Ray Johnson scholar and collector].

He had come up from New York to teach?
No. He was teaching there at Bowdoin College. Bill taught there for two years. He taught in both my freshman and sophomore years. I don't know if I knew about Bill, I don't think I could have. But somehow or another, I saw fit to take his Chaucer course. That was important for very many reasons. Chaucer is the reason I learned Italian. So, that's sort of a footnote, for Bill was important in many other ways.

Such as?
Well, he was the most intelligent person I had ever met. He was the strangest person I had ever met. How can I put it? He saw a possible strangeness in me, of which he approved. That's very important if you are nineteen or twenty and don't know who you are, and have only figured out that most of what the world is doing is of no interest to you and fills you with anguish. Bill was the kind of person who could look at you and more or less say, "I know who you are and what you're doing, and please keep it up." That's the way that Bill came to be so important for me. It was through Bill and his wife Ann, who was even crazier—it was through them that I went to New York when I got out of Bowdoin.

That was 1963?
Yes. Because otherwise, you know, they could have shipped me off to some chic Midwestern graduate school.

The Walter C. Arensberg Collection and Duchamp

Did you grow up in Maine?
No. I'm a native of Pennsylvania. I grew up just outside of Philadelphia. I grew up on the Arensberg Collection, really [laughs].

It was at the Philadelphia Museum of Art at that time?
Oh, yes. It's been there ever since Arensberg left it. I was thirteen in 1955, so it could have been 1955, because I remember the Arensberg collection from before the time I could drive.

What drew you to that particular collection?
Well, my mother was always taking me to museums, and what interested me most, I think, at that time, was a huge Rubens, *Prometheus Bound*. I was always very fond of that. Then somehow or another, what first attracted me to the Arensberg collection were the paintings by Dalí. There was one particular painting, *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)*, 1936, one of those things with beautiful light and battle scenes and bodies all over the place, people dying, and the king in miniature in the middle. There was that, and there were the Brancusis. There was a huge wonderful Mayan calendar—this great big circular stone. And then, there was Duchamp. There were all these weird things there, and it was intensely fascinating.

Were you drawn to Duchamp at thirteen?
Oh, absolutely. It was very strange. I have no idea why. I wrote a piece about that once for *Leggere*, an Italian magazine. It's all about taking the bus to get to Fairmount Park and going to the museum to see the Arensberg Collection. For a while, the great mystery for me was how Duchamp managed to break the *Glass* [*Large Glass*, 1915–1923] exactly that way, because it could not have occurred to me at that time that there was anything accidental about anything. So, my question was, how did he manage to break the glass in exactly the way he wanted to? It didn't occur to me that it could possibly be an accident.

Well, that's a fantastic background.
It was very strange, because, you know, I was attracted to these things—the *Large Glass*. I loved the cage with the marble sugar cubes—*Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy*. There was also a very strange *Portrait of Dr. R. Dumouchel*. I didn't know anything about it. I couldn't make sense of anything at all, but it was a place for me of enormous fascination. There were also the Brancusis, his various versions of *Bird in Space*. I had no idea of his relationship with Duchamp at the time. I didn't know anything about it until a little bit later, maybe 1963 or 1965, when I knew Gene Swenson. Gene did this very important exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, in Philadelphia, called *The Other Tradition*. Gene was another person I met because of Bill. I had gone to New York in 1963 because of Bill. He had already introduced me to Ray Johnson, and through Ray I met Gene, and through Gene, and on and on and on.

I've read the first time you met Ray was when you brought some lobsters down from Maine?
That was the lobster trip, yes, in 1961 or 1962 [laughs]. For a long time, he sent me pictures of lobsters. To which I had no idea how to respond, because that was the thing with Ray. Many people don't really understand Ray, because they always sort of reduce him to the level at which they knew him. Ray was solitary, but he also had enormous capacities, enormous capabilities of empathy. Ray could and would meet you wherever you were. He could fly with the angels and run with the wolves, and do babysitting in between. Ray's task with me was more like babysitting, I think. I'm not sure.

You lived near each other.
I had an apartment on East 3rd Street. Way over there between Avenue C and Avenue D, right above Houston Street. Ray lived right below Houston Street on Suffolk Street—76 Suffolk Street. We would often meet at the post office. He'd ask me to come meet him at the post office, which was on a square near 6th Street between Avenue A and Avenue B. It was Tompkins Square Park. Ray did one of the pages for

his *Book about Death* of a statue of somebody in Tompkins Square Park—somebody who was dubbed "the postman's friend." Samuel somebody. Samuel Cox. I'm amazed that I remember all these things. We would meet at the post office at Tompkins Square, and at the corner of Houston Street and Avenue B. There was a Puerto Rican donut shop there, where we would frequently meet. Ray would take me to places, introduce me to people and things. He was very wonderful in that way. I've written about that.

An extremely impressive visit one day—he took me to an eye hospital. He had conjunctivitis. He phoned me up and said, "Henry, let's go to the eye hospital." I said, "Sure, Ray." We took the bus, because the eye hospital was on First Avenue and 14th Street. We took the bus, and Ray was sort of standing erect, his hands in front of him, a cap on his head. There was something strange about him, and I couldn't tell what it was. Then I realized there was something that Ray was *not* looking at. It was as though he wasn't looking at something because he wanted *me* to look at it. He didn't want to tell me to look at it. I looked around and there was an advertisement for a bank with a picture of a very distinguished gentleman with grey hair and a grey suit, who had a silver dollar in his eye, like a monocle. I saw that, and for the rest of the day the whole world was all about eye imagery.

It was Ray's presence, sometimes his attention, sometimes his dis-attention, his instructions—you couldn't tell. It was impossible to tell, but somehow he turned the whole day into a day of optometry. He was going to the eye hospital, and he was taking me to the eye hospital, and it went on starting in the morning and throughout the afternoon.

We ended up at a Spanish restaurant. There were two restaurants we would go to. One was Il Faro, on East 14th Street, which was Italian, and then there was El Faro, on West 14th Street, and that was Spanish. So, we ended up at El Faro, and Ray ordered paella. They took the cover off this thing, and it was a face with two oysters for eyes. That was how the day ended. The whole day had been like that. That's the way it could be with Ray. And then, two days later, he brought me a collage, which I still have, of course. And what is the collage? It is not an eye—e-y-e—it is a black paper cut out in the form of an I—"I" as in "me." That's the way it was with Ray.

How were you supporting yourself at this time?
I was teaching. I was teaching at P. S. 78 on East 5th Street. First I was in graduate school. I went to graduate school at NYU in 1963–64. I got a master's degree there in English Literature. But it was becoming ever more clear to me that I was not an academic. That was one of the routes people would have sent me down, but that wasn't really where I was, and it made me unhappy. So, after my master's degree, I didn't want to continue on to a Ph.D. I thought I'd have to, but I really didn't want to at that time, so I got a job teaching junior high school at P.S. 78. Then there was another one in Bedford-Stuyvesant, and then Italy happened.

How did Italy happen and why?
Italy happened – it's another Bill Wilson connection. One of my friends at Bowdoin College—a lovely person, David Berry—was from Maine, an old name family. His mother was Priscilla Alden something. There were two boys. Bruce, who was one year older than me, and David, who was three years older. They had a lovely farm in Bowdoinham. Priscilla was Bill's friend. David was quite special, because he had accidentally shot himself in the arm when he was fourteen or fifteen. He played the mandolin beautifully even though he had very little mobility in his right hand. David had been my classmate in Bill's Chaucer course. David's home in Bowdoinham was one of the places we went. David graduated a couple of years before I did.

He reappeared in my mail yesterday, because there is a Maine mail artist who is applying for a residency at the Emily Harvey Foundation, and I wrote back, "Do you know Dave Berry, by any chance?" He replied, "Yes, I do. And if I get the fellowship, Dave will pay me a visit." David had graduated from Bowdoin, and he had come to Italy. I don't know why. He taught for two years at the Bocconi University in Milan. At that point, David didn't want to teach for a living, and he wanted to go to India. That didn't happen, and he came back to the States to run his farm. David decided he wasn't going to stay in Italy, so he wrote to me and said, "Henry, one of the things I do here is teach a Chaucer course, and they need somebody who can handle Chaucer and *Beowulf* at the university in Milan. Would you like to do that?" I was kind of undecided, and I wrote a note to Bill, even though we were both in New York City. I told him that David had suggested that I take his job in Milan. Bill wrote back, "Go, go, go to Italy. Romantics always do." [Laughs.]

What year was this?
That would have been 1965. I sailed on a boat from New York harbor in August 1965, and came to Italy, landed in Naples, and headed to Milan, because that was where the job was going to be. Meanwhile, I had begun, again at Bill's suggestion, to write about art, he had suggested that I write an article about his mother's work. So, by the time I left for Italy I had written about May Wilson and also about Lowell Nesbitt.



Henry Martin in the Arensberg Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of art, circa 1975. Photograph by Berty Skuber. Courtesy of Henry Martin.

Where were they published?

I don't know why Lowell asked me to write that piece, and I don't know where, or if, it was published. The piece on May Wilson was a little thing used in a catalog, and it began, "May Wilson has invited us into a crypt to take a look at her doll's house." So, I had written about May and written about Lowell, and Gene Swenson at that point had published a couple of articles in a Sicilian magazine called *Collage*. He told me to send these things to Palermo, so I did just before I left the country. I stayed at an impossible hotel in Rome. I'd been there for a couple of days when a friend who was using the apartment I had left in New York City forwarded me a telegram with an invitation to come to Palermo as the guest of a festival. So, I did. And that's where I began to meet my Italian friends in the art world.

How long did you stay in Milan?

I was in Milan for four years. I left in 1969. Bocconi University was a private university that was run by the Confindustria—the major association of the great Italian corporations, including Fiat—and the university had two departments, economy/commerce, which they were interested in, and modern languages, which they weren't. The law in Italy was such that a university had to have two faculties. So, that's where I was teaching, at the faculty for modern languages. Everything got very hairy in 1968, because the university was occupied by the students. All that was very exciting.

It was especially wonderful, because I was twenty-six by that time. My students were the same age, because things took longer in Europe. They were getting out of high school at nineteen or twenty. University took longer in Europe than it did in the United States. It was a weird situation, because I was, on one hand, faculty, but surrounded by students the same age as myself.

It was a very exciting period, but the reaction of the university to all the student protests was to close down the faculty of modern languages. When that happened, they didn't fire us, but from that point on staying at the university would have been a question of simply doing examinations to get rid of all the students. I didn't want to hang around the university to help close it down. At that point, my grandmother

had just died, and she had left me a little money. It wasn't very much, maybe five or six thousand dollars. I said to myself, "Well, why don't you see if you can live on your typewriter?" and oddly enough, I could.

Who were you writing for?

By then I was writing for *Art International*, and for *Art and Artists*, and also for *Studio International*.

As a foreign correspondent from Italy?

As a correspondent from Milan. I had also written a book about Arman. That was my first book. I did that for Harry Abrams in 1969. That happened because I knew Ileana Sonnabend [among other things, married to Leo Castelli], whom I had met in Palermo, when I first arrived in Italy. In Milan, I was friends with people like [Gian Enzo] Sperone, [Michelangelo] Pistoletto, and all those people who were later Arte Povera. They were connected with Ileana. There's a connection, and I'm not sure how it worked out, but at one point she asked me to do an article on Arman. I think that's how it worked out, probably for *Art International*. Later Harry Abrams was planning to do a book on Arman. Pierre Restany was supposed to do it, but Pierre was utterly unreliable. Pierre would say, "I'm going to do the book," and then give it to you twenty years later. Arman was tired of waiting for him. Harry Abrams was tired of waiting for him. At a certain point, Arman asked me if I would do the book. So, I did the book. It was the first book on Arman.

Was Arman living in New York or Paris, at that time?

Both. He was in New York and Paris, and also had a house in Vence [France] on the Cote d'Azur.

Were you going back and forth between Milan and New York at this time?

No. The first time I went back to New York was when I was working on the book. I was Milan correspondent for *Art and Artists*, *Art International*, *Studio International*, and maybe even *Art News* by then. So, it was a possible life. I was also doing a lot of translating. Teaching English had been a great way to learn Italian. It was a possible life. It wasn't a luxurious life, but it was possible.

Maybe I can take you back to those earlier New York years, for I assume being there in 1963, you were exposed to Fluxus.

Ray took me to . . . I'm not sure if it was Ray, but I remember meeting George Maciunas and Henry Flynt. It was at a place downtown, on Canal Street.

You mentioned earlier that Maciunas scared you.

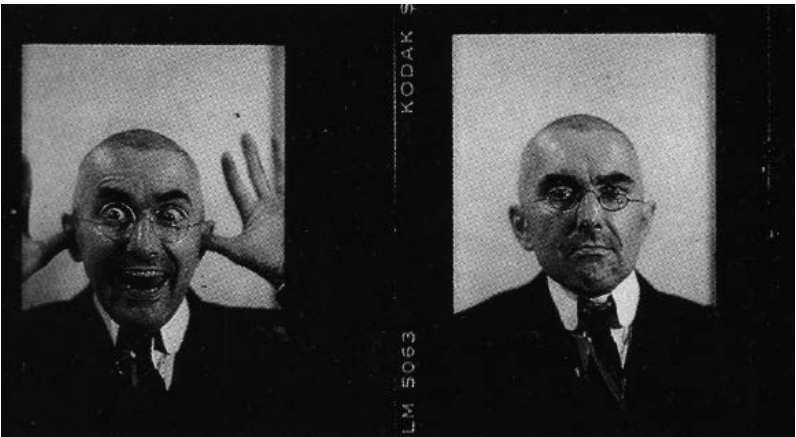
Oh, he frightened me to death. He was a horrible person. First of all, his life was made of his own proselytism. He was a very violent person. He was always colonizing other people's minds. Which is okay, if the people around you are Dick Higgins, Ben Patterson, Alison Knowles, Philip Corner, or La Monte Young, who were grownups. But you don't do that to a boy, and that's what I was. I was just this nice kid—a nice kid that Ray took to places. Ray was the person I needed in my life. I did not need George Maciunas. I mean, he frightened me. During that first visit there was a pair of spectacles that Daniel Spoerri had done. Nails jut forward from the inside surface of the lenses, so to put on the glasses, you would blind yourself. This just occurs to me now, but that's just the opposite of the story I just told you about Ray. Ray was all about opening people's eyes—not necessarily, but Ray for me was all about opening *my* eyes. That visit to Maciunas's was about the spectacles and blindness. I had no interest in that. I was a very delicate person. I was delicate and open to influence. I had no idea who I was, or what I wanted to be—what was right or wrong for me. I just didn't need that kind of violence in my life. But you know, Alison was wonderful. Dick was very kind and nice. I met all kinds of people through Ray and Bill.

When did you meet George Brecht?

Oh, that's a very beautiful story. That again is Ray. That would have been in the spring of 1965. George had already gone to Italy. Ray took me to see a George Brecht show at the Fischbach Gallery. I don't know what kind of impression it made on me, I couldn't say now. But it was just the way George was, or how I later learned him to be. Relaxed and contemplative. Very light and very deep at the same time. The acceptance of superficiality. Bill Wilson often talks about surfaces—the metaphorical importance of surfaces, dealing with surfaces of things, not plumbing too deeply. If you plumb too deeply you can lose your own ability to know things. You can grow ignorant of your own stupidity. So, there is that problem there.

When I left New York, Ray gave me a small sealed bottle that contained the water from a New York ice cube, which I was to deliver to George in Rome, so he could transform it into a Roman ice cube. That didn't work out. George was no longer there. I left the bottle of water with somebody else, to be delivered to him. But it never got to him.

At a certain point, I was working with Arturo Schwarz, because I helped him correct the manuscripts for his book on Duchamp. Arturo is a natural polyglot, but there



George Maciunas. Courtesy of the Internet.

wasn't any language that he wrote with absolute certainty. It was very difficult to work with him, because he was very attached to every word he wrote. You had to explain to him, "You cannot say that, Arturo, it can't be done. It's not English. It doesn't work. Tell me what you want to say, and I will say it for you." I had to work sentence by sentence with him, word by word. I would tell him why a verb had to be where it was. What a direct object was—very cautiously working around this thing that he really believed in, always knowing too that he knew more about it than just about anybody else. George was having a show with Arturo Schwarz, whom I knew quite well because of the intimacy of the work I was doing for him. And Arturo asked me if I'd like to do an interview with George, since Jim Fitzsimmons at *Art International* had expressed an interest in some such sort of article, or maybe an essay.

That was the first interview I did with him. It was 1967. That was the beginning of my whole relationship with George, which lasted until the end of his life. A few years after that interview, I did the book for Gino Di Maggio for Mudima Edizioni's *An Introduction to George Brecht's Book of the Tumbler on Fire*. Then there was a second interview when George had a "hetroerspective" in Berne. A show called *Beyond Events*. The title on one of his very first shows, or maybe of one of his early essays, had been *Toward Events*. By the time of that second interview, I was no longer really an art critic. I could be trusted not to sound like an art critic, by that time.

And what time was that?

By the middle seventies. I was still sort of an art critic, I guess, when I wrote the first book on George, but not all that much. It was a very open book too. I did an essay, republished my first interview with George, but I also republished all the other interviews people had done with George. It was a very open situation. After that, George would turn to me whenever something needed a comment. George would come to me and ask me to write something—like the piece I did on his *Event Glasses* or the one on his *VOID Stones*. It was a relationship that lasted until he died [2008].

He was hanging around with the Rutgers crowd—Allan Kaprow, George Segal, Geoffrey Hendricks—but he was a scientist by profession, at that time.

He was a chemist. That's something he talks about in one of the interviews I did with him. He talked about the way scientists relate to the world in general. George always had this sense of marvel—of wonder—in front of everything. George could look at the shape of an icicle. He wasn't given to ecstasy, but he was given to looking at things with great wonder—with great wonder. Things asked George questions, let's put it that way. Always fundamental questions, and like all fundamental questions, as all fundamental questions always do, they bemused him. That's how that was. What his life had been like in New Jersey, I don't know. He knew those people, because he was in New Jersey. He was living in New Jersey and working at Johnson and Johnson, and he would have been connected with people who were around him in New Jersey, and people respected George.

Robert Watts, for instance.

He and Bob were good friends. George had an aura. He had been to John Cage's composition course [The New School for Social Research, 1958]. He was very impressive, because there was no shit about George. There was no fooling around. George was interested in an ultimate font of things. He had a wonderful philosophical mind. He was very much into Oriental thought. It may have been George who introduced me to the I Ching. All these people were sort of playful—Fluxus playfulness. There was an attitude of play there too in George, but there was a fundamental seriousness. People respected that. You couldn't *not* respect George. It just wasn't possible. I don't know how intimately he connected with other artists.

It was a natural thing to do, but there was also a natural distance. He was in and out of relationships with people. Rather like Ray. George was more solitary, because Ray also had this very frenetic life. Ray knew zillions of people, but basically he was out



George Brecht, *Water Yam* Editions, 1963-1986. Courtesy of private collection.

there alone in Locust Valley. George was basically alone in a wonderful little house he had in Cologne. First he was in the South of France with Robert Filliou. And then he was in Cologne. It was a marvelous house with an attic apartment, which had been built for a painter. There was a huge glass wall with a northern exposure in this bourgeois neighborhood. It looked like a house René Magritte would have lived in.

A Ray Johnson house.

Yes, it was like that.

In the Mail Art world, which is the world I come from, George Brecht and Robert Filliou, and their shop, La Cédille qui Sourit, has gained mythic status, with their development of the concept of an Eternal Network, an international community of artists, cooperating rather than competing.

I knew Filliou, although not tremendously well. But there was also a period when Berty [Skuber, Henry's wife] and I were often in the South of France, and Robert was living in one of those towns in the Var. We visited him a couple of times, and also saw him at the home of mutual friends. And then there was the wonderful time that Berty and I met him in New York.

When would that have been?

Maybe in 1976, that very first time that Berty and I went to New York together. We met him there quite by chance, on what occasion I don't remember. It may have been when I did the interview with Ray.

That was in 1982.

No, it couldn't have been that, because John-Daniel [Henry and Berty's son] was born in 1978, and Johnny wasn't there when we ran into Robert in New York. It must have been some earlier trip. It was Robert who sent Berty to her first New York dealer, Jill Kornblee. That's what happened. He sent her first to . . . I forget who it was, but he was at the beginning of a chain of people which lead to Jill Kornblee. He was very nice. He introduced us to John Gibson, and John Gibson introduced us John Weber, and then John Weber introduced us to Jill Kornblee. That's how that worked.

Robert was doing a show with John Gibson, and it was a show with cards mounted on music stands. He had come to New York with only one music stand and a little box with cards, but it never occurred to him that music stands in America are very different from music stands in Europe. Music stands in Europe have a clip on one side. But not in America.

I remember with Berty, we walked all over New York City with Robert trying to get him the music stands he needed. He thought it would be the easiest thing in the world, but it ended up that he had to have fifty music stands flown in from Paris, or somebody did it for him. So, Berty and I were running around the city with Robert trying to find music stands, and it was then he introduced us to these other people. But the Eternal Network. I don't know. I don't think it had anything to do with networking with other people. It wasn't like a mail art network, or anything like that, at all.

Although Filliou did go to Vancouver and mixed with the Western Front, and a newly emerging mail art network that was a presence there.

His notion of the Eternal Network was very open to everything and anything, but I



Henry Martin & Berty Skuber with Robert Filliou, circa 1985. Photograph by Fabrizio Garghetti.

don't know if he had a sociological idea, as far as I can tell. The Eternal Network was one of those ideas like the Genial Republic. It was an imaginary place in which he lived. Like his concept of the Principal of Equivalence—well made, badly-made, not-made, were all the same thing. To make sense of these ideas you have to realize he was a Tibetan monk. He told me a wonderful story about a meeting with one of his Tibetan teachers. Robert had said something about the tremendous difference between the East and the West to his Tibetan teacher. The teacher responded, "It's not really all that different, because after all, you people in the West think that television is life, and we believe that life is television." [Laughs.]

When did you and Berty move to Bolzano [South Tyrol, Northern Italy]?

We didn't move to Bolzano. She is from that area. Bolzano is up on the road that goes from Verona to Munich. It's a German-speaking area. Bolzano, the capital of the Province, is about fifty miles south of the Brenner Pass. After Milan, I was in Rome for a while. In Rome, I was working on a book. A little book published by Gino DiMaggio. The subject of the book was Gianfranco Baruchello and his work. I created a kind of a dictionary of the cardinal images in Baruchello's work. It's called *Fragments of a Possible Apocalypse*. I worked on that throughout a spring and summer in Rome.

At that point, I had had enough of Rome. It was an art world life in Rome. That was the attraction of Rome, and I didn't find that attractive at all. So, I asked for help from a friend, who has remained a very good friend. He's our oldest friend in Italy, from Bolzano. He'd been a student of mine at Bocconi University. I asked him to find me a place up in the mountains, because that's where he was from. The idea was to spend the winter there and to write a book and ski. It was in the course of this that Berty and I met though another artist friend. I guess we must have met in 1970 or 1971, because I left the university in 1969, and I was in Rome briefly. I moved to the Bolzano area—to the village of Fié allo Sciliar—in 1971, and met Berty shortly after.

You did a Ray Johnson show with the Arturo Schwarz Gallery in Milan in 1972, *Evaporations* by Ray Johnson.

It wasn't the *Evaporations* show. Ray may have done the *Evaporations* show with Arturo. I think he had two shows with Arturo. I'm not sure, but one show was his *Potato Mashers* show. Arturo, Ray, or both, asked me if I would write the essay for the catalog. So, that's what I did.

So, you moved up to Northern Italy, and you met Berty in Bolzano.

We were both friends with an artist named Sergio Dangelo. Dangelo was famous for Nuclear Art. Dangelo was a friend of Berty's, and my last apartment in Milan had been just above his studio. One day when I had to go down from Fié to Bolzano, I ran into another friend who just happened to mention that Sergio would be in Bolzano on the following evening for a small show. So, I went to the show, and Sergio said, "Well, now that you've come to my show, I also want you to see the show of my friend, Berty Skuber." That was the occasion when Berty and I first met.

You've been living in the mountains above Bolzano ever since?

I came to Italy to take a two-year teaching stint as a junior professor, and I stayed in Italy the rest of my life. In 1971 or 1972 I went to a small town in Southern Tyrol intending to stay a winter, and now I've been there for forty years. Johnny was born in 1978. We live in a fabulous place. It can't be believed. Farms up there are not that large by American standards, but it's in the mountains, and we rent an old farmhouse. The farmer is fifty meters up the hill behind us. We don't see their house, but it's a presence. Aside from them, we don't see another house, aside from a group of houses

on the other side of the valley. We see them directly across the valley, but to get to them from where we live would be an hour's trip by car. The place where we live is perfectly isolated.

You've curated shows in the area.

Yes and no. I've never done anything professionally that was serious or constant. My one constant has been as a translator. It's part of me. I'm good at languages. I don't have a lot of imagination, so I use other people's imagination. That's what a translator does—he's a language expert at the service of other people's imagination. I've only curated two or three shows, ever. And always only because somebody asked me to do it.

The first time I did it, there was a show of American graphics at a local museum, and I'm an American and an art critic, so they asked me to do that, and I did it. This also put us more closely in touch with a wonderful man—later the first director of the new Bolzano Museion—named Piero Siena. Piero was very much like my father: very handsome, very urbane, beautifully dressed and always soft-spoken. Women adored him, and he also had a kind of attentive reserve.

What did your father do?

My father ran a type of laundry business. He had concessions in nightclubs, personnel for parking lots, hatchchecks, restrooms. He also did this for racetracks in Philadelphia and New Jersey, and also in Florida. He had the concessions for the two main racetracks in New Jersey. One was in the south in Atlantic City, and the other was in the north in Monmouth. I don't know where I'm getting these words from. You're bringing back memories I didn't know I had. In Florida, he did the concessions for Hialeah.

There was a point at which Piero said, "Do you want to do a Fluxus show? You know all these people. Why don't you do it?" I did, and it was a fabulous show [Museo d'Arte Moderna, Bolzano, 1992]. The point of the show was that I didn't call it "Fluxus." I called it "Fluxers," remembering too that George Brecht always said, "Fluxus was Maciunas." With Maciunas gone, there was nothing left. The Fluxus group for George Brecht was like a man walking his dog in one direction, a lady walking her dog in another direction, the dogs stop and sniff for a while, and it's over and done with.

I've always felt that if there is anything to be said about these people, it's because each of them has an independent life. They are not defined by their relationship to each other. I mean, Philip [Corner] is a musician, and he does the things he does. Alison [Knowles] is Alison. Geoffrey [Hendricks] is Geoffrey. George [Brecht] is George.

It was a great show at the museum in Bolzano. It was great because they had eight large rooms and a huge central room. In the central room, I borrowed the Fluxus collection of Ken Friedman from the Henie Onstad Art Centre in Oslo, Norway. Each of the other rooms showed major works or groups of works by only two or at most three artists. There was a beautiful piece by Alison Knowles, which was a clay circle on the floor with objects on it.

There were both historical works from the Friedman Collection, and newer works?

The other stuff is work they did there. There was a beautiful room with works by Alison and George, and a big installation by Geoffrey. Joe Jones too had a beautiful group of works. Joe died on the day before the show closed. It was a Saturday, and Ben Patterson or Michael Berger phoned us that he had died. On Sunday morning, Berty and I went down to the Museum and turned on all of Joe's music machines, and let them run until the batteries died. That was our tribute to Joe.

Have you given your papers to this same museum?

No. My Ray Johnson papers have gone to MUMOK (Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien) in Vienna. It's a museum of modern and contemporary art.

Why did you decide to deposit them there?

They were interested. Berty is very good friends with Sophie Haaser, who is the Registrar of the Museum, and also with Egidio Marzona. Egidio is an important collector and one of the major donors to that Museum. I don't know how they knew about my Ray Johnson papers, but they did. Maybe we just told them, because I had boxes and boxes full of Ray Johnson correspondence. It began in 1959, and continued until his death [January 13, 1995]. So, what do you do with that stuff? You can burn it. Which would make perfect sense, but you really don't want to do that either. And it's not the kind of thing you can leave to children. I mean, what are they going to do with it? The problem was to find a home for the stuff, and MUMOK was interested, so it went to them.

How many letters are in the collection?

There were hundreds. The things we have left—there are a few pieces of corre-



George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Wolf Vostell, Benjamin Patterson & Emmett Williams performing Philip Corner's Piano Activities at Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik, Weisbaden, 1962. Photograph by Hartmut Rekort. Courtesy of the Internet.

spondence I kept, and the other things we have by Ray are things that he gave or sent to Berty. Very beautiful correspondence. I told you that at the beginning Ray was sending me lobsters, and I was just this dumb kid who didn't know anything about anything. I didn't really know how to respond to his messages. Ray put up with that. He was like that. He was a mentor, in a way. But with Berty, it was different. They were two mature artists, and they could communicate with each other through objects. For a while, they were sending each other pictures and drawings of pieces of twisted wire, and sometimes the actual twisted wires, things they found in the streets. They would find these things and send them to each other. There were other things too. Wonderful things. Two or three of the envelopes that Ray sent or gave to Berty are among the most beautiful things I remember him ever to have done.

Well, thank you very much, Henry.

I hope it proves useful in some way.

We'll see.

I had no idea I could remember all these things.

I really wanted to do this, because as I said at the beginning, I couldn't find an interview with you in English.

Well, there aren't any. Nobody bothers with me.

I had it in my mind to "interview the interviewer," because the one you did with Ray Johnson is by far the most incisive.

That was Gene Swenson's fault. Gene wrote a couple of pieces for *Art News* in the 1960s where as an interviewer, he worked himself out of the piece. That taught me something. If fact, I've done it even more extensively than Gene ever had the chance to do. Gene died in a car crash when he was barely thirty-five.

I've done these two books, one called *How to Imagine* [New Paltz, New York, McPherson, 1983], and the other one, *Why Duchamp* [New Paltz, New York, McPherson, 1985], which began as conversations. Each book began as several hundred hours of conversation, which I then turned into a narrative with only one voice. I learned the importance of that from Gene, even though I developed it myself.

That was the attitude with Ray, and also with the shows that I've done. The Fluxus show that I did was a wonderful show because I just asked people what they wanted to do. I was given the job of organizing it, and I did, but choosing the specific works to include in the show was a task that I largely passed along to the artists. That's how the show worked out. Everybody had a wonderful idea and it all came together. The interviews, especially with Ray, were like that. Let Ray talk. Follow his thoughts. That's the way it's supposed to be.

Name-Dropping Stories Off The Top Of My Head

TOM MARIONI



Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol.

Presented at Ever Gold Gallery, San Francisco, 2013 (Edited)

I'm going to tell some stories off the top of my head—is this thing on? Okay. All right.

Some of these stories are in my book, *Beer, Art and Philosophy*. It's available at Crown Point Press and on Amazon. At the end of the evening, tonight, I will sell this autographed copy for \$20.

There's one more seat up here in front. Let's see. I'll take you. Come up and take this seat up here.

This year is the hundredth anniversary of the famous Armory show in New York City, 1913—it was the first time that the word *avant-garde* was used, and it was the first time Americans had seen modern art. They had Gauguin and Van Gogh, Picasso, Matisse, and Marcel Duchamp. That's where Duchamp showed his famous *Nude Descending a Staircase*, which one critic referred to as “an explosion in a shingle factory,” and it was a big scandal.

A guy named Frederick C. Torrey, who was an art dealer in San Francisco, had a gallery at 550 Sutter Street. He sold antiques and Japanese prints. Torrey went to the Armory show in New York and he bought Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* and brought it back to San Francisco. He paid \$324 for it, which, in today's money, is about \$5,500.

He had that painting for years and showed it in his gallery, and also he loaned it out and it traveled around. And then in the 1970s the Reese Palley Gallery was in the same space. It showed all the conceptual artists, Bruce Nauman, Terry Fox, Paul Kos, me, and other conceptual artists of the period—mostly California artists. I lived in that gallery for a whole week, as a project, and I had my first LSD experience. That was the first and last time I had an LSD experience.

Sometime in the '70s, the Reese Palley Gallery went out of business and another gallery moved in there at 550 Sutter Street. I can't remember the name of it. They had an opening of Andy Warhol's paintings. Warhol came to the opening, and brought Carol Doda with him as his date—she's the topless dancer from North Beach. They arrived in a limousine and all the news media were there out on the sidewalk. Warhol entered the gallery with Carol Doda and then they separated. It was just about his entrance.

Terry Fox got drunk at the opening, and in the back hall there was a line waiting to get in the bathrooms, so he peed into one of the empty paint buckets there and was escorted out by a guard, in front of everybody including Andy Warhol. He went on the wagon for six months after that.

Today, 550 Sutter Street is the Craft and Design Museum. I went in there about a year ago. I told them these stories and they had no idea that the space had a history with Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* or Andy Warhol's opening with Carol Doda.

All those who believe in telekinesis raise my hand.

I don't know if you all know this, but I founded the Museum of Conceptual Art. It was the first alternative art space in the country, and I organized some of the first conceptual art shows and the first video art show in California, the first sound sculpture show anywhere, and a lot of ground-breaking shows. I was in the peace and freedom party, I supported artists, and I am an artist myself. And do you think I'm known for that? You fuck one sheep . . .

In 1970, I went to Los Angeles and there was a dinner at Irving Blum's house for Jasper Johns. I was visiting Larry Bell and Larry had been invited to the dinner. Irving Blum is the guy who had the Ferus Gallery, a famous gallery in Los Angeles at that time. I told a story at the dinner. I said, “The guy I used to work with, Hayward King, who was the director of the Richmond Art Center when I was curator there, had a boyfriend in Paris who was a curator at the Louvre Museum. Hayward used to go to Paris every summer. The Louvre curator told him that the *Mona Lisa* on exhibit was not the real thing. It was a copy, because in 1911 the painting was stolen by an Italian and brought to Italy for three years. It was recovered, but there have been other attempts to steal it or deface it over the years, so they kept the copy on display.”



Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, 1503-1517. Oil on poplar. 30 x 20.5 in.

I told this story to Jasper Johns and everybody at the dinner. Then I asked Johns, “Have there ever been any fakes, any copies of your paintings?” and he said, “Impossible.”

In 1975 I was the founding editor of an art journal called *Vision* published by Crown Point Press. We did five issues: *California*, *Eastern Europe*, *New York City*, *Artists' Talks*, and *Artists' Photographs*. That was the last one, 1981. For the *Eastern Europe* and *New York* issues I went to the places and visited artists in order to collect material. For the New York issue, every artist got six pages. I went to Carl Andre's penthouse apartment—he was living with an art dealer at the time. He was a famous artist and a Marxist, and there he was in his overalls in this penthouse.

I went the next day to meet with Walter De Maria. He did *The Lightning Field* in New Mexico. We went to lunch at an Italian restaurant—I had spinach ravioli and he had veal piccata. He said, “Where are you going next?” I said, “I'm going to see Sol LeWitt.” I already knew Sol but they had never met. Imagine that—and they lived three blocks from each other. It was in the Little Italy part of New York. We went to Sol's studio together, and I happened to have a joint with me. The three of us got stoned in Sol's studio, and that was one of the high experiences of my life.

In 1980 there was a gallery in Naples, Italy, run by Lucio Amelio. It was the hippest gallery in Italy, and he had invited Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys to have a show. At that time Warhol was the most famous American artist, and Beuys was the most famous European artist. Beuys had his usual felt and fat and his organic materials. He did art about generating electricity, power, heat, and light—things like that. Beuys's art was all about curious materials.

Warhol had done portraits of Joseph Beuys in diamond dust, as negatives. They were black on white portraits of his head. The German press referred to Beuys as “the man with the hat.”

Warhol and Beuys were both at the opening, and it turned out to be like a heavyweight championship between the American and the European. But Beuys lost to Warhol because Warhol, clever as he was, appropriated Beuys and made him the subject of his work for the show.

Then Warhol went on Italian television, where the interviewer asked him, “Are there any Italian artists that you’re interested in?” And Warhol replied, “There aren’t any artists in Italy. Maybe Giorgio Armani.” He was insulting to the Italians.

Sometime in the ‘90s, the Goethe Institute in San Francisco organized a music festival, and they asked me to be part of it. I was known as a sound artist as well as a performance artist back in the ‘70s. The Hawthorne Lane restaurant, which was next door to my studio, let me use their space; they had a baby grand piano in there. First, I conducted my *Beer Drinking Sonata for 13 Players*—the players drink beer and blow in the bottles after each swig. After that, at the piano, Steve Goldstein performed John Cage’s famous 4’33”. It’s in three parts, making up four minutes and 33 seconds of silence. About a minute into this piece, I heard a woman whisper, “I still can’t hear anything.”

Something happened to me recently that many artists have experienced. I was included in a group show in a museum dedicated to food, drink, and art that was founded by a big winery in Napa, California. My work, *Golden Rectangle*, was a shelf unit filled with empty beer bottles with yellow labels and designed to be lighted with two yellow spotlights. After I saw the show, I sent the following email message to the curator: “I think you forgot the yellow lights on my work.”

He emailed me back: “We didn’t quite forget the yellow light. In fact, it was a conscious decision not to use it. We felt that *Golden Rectangle* already looked so good and was such a draw to visitors who see it through the gallery door that we would actually lessen the impact with a yellow light. I intended to call you to discuss our thoughts, but I’m afraid my mind moved on to future exhibitions. I do hope you will not feel that we interfered with your concept. Our intention is always to present works of art to their maximum advantage. We are pleased and honored to have your work included in the exhibition, and I hope we will have future opportunities to bring you and your work to our museum.”

I emailed him back with this message: “The yellow light was not an afterthought. Many of my sculptures are lighted with yellow light. It’s a signature with me. Did you light it with yellow light and then decide it looked better without it?”

The work looks good the way it is, but it looks better with the yellow light, the way I intended it. I understand the lighting is usually the job of the installer, but in this case the yellow light is a component of the piece. It’s not the job of the curator to change an artwork to try to improve it. But don’t feel bad, it happens to me all the time.”

In the early ‘70s, I knew Robert Crumb slightly. For the last twenty years he’s lived in the south of France, but in the ‘70s he lived in San Francisco with two women, Kathy Goodell and Dotty Reed. They were sort of the basis for the characters in



R. Crumb.

his cartoons—Kathy always wore boots and she looked just like the main female character. So I’m walking down the street in North Beach and a car drives by and Kathy hollers out the window, “Hey, Tom,” and they wave to me. And Crumb said to them, “Why do you want to wave to that WOP pimp for?” I actually felt flattered later when I heard about that from Kathy, because I thought, “I almost became a character in one of his comics.”

Mickey Mouse hired a psychiatrist to check up on Minnie Mouse, and a week later the psychiatrist says to Mickey Mouse, “You know, I think you’re right. Minnie Mouse is crazy.” And Mickey says, “No, I didn’t say she was crazy. I said she was fucking Goofy.”

Mel Bochner is a conceptual artist of my generation. I’m going to give you an idea about the prejudice that New Yorkers have about California—like when Woody Allen said, “The only advantage to living in California is that you can make a right-hand turn on a red light.”



Miles Davis.

Mel Bochner said to me, “Larry Bell is just Sol LeWitt with color.” Larry Bell was doing beautiful glass boxes that had slight color on them, and Sol LeWitt was doing kind of cubed open space objects. That was a put down, because “California’s just about color.”

In 1968 I went to the Monterey Jazz Festival with Alvie Lersen, a Cincinnati friend. We are driving around late at night—it is midnight and we see a diner. As we’re driving, I see this red Ferrari. And it’s Miles Davis. He is with another guy. I say, “Follow that car.” We stop at the diner, we go in, and Miles Davis is sitting down at the counter. I sit on the next stool. On the other side next to him is the other guy, one of his musicians.

I sat down and thought, “Oh, my God. Here’s my chance to talk to Miles Davis.” And I knew that if I were to talk to him, he would put me down, or he would just say, “So what?” Because that’s what he used to say to fans. He even wrote a song called *So What*.

I said, “Excuse me, do you have a light?” And he handed me a pack of matches without even looking. I lit my cigarette, said “thanks, man,” and I handed him the pack of matches. His friend next to him said, “What do you want to give that honky a light for?” And Miles said, “Shut up.”

I visited Chuck Close one time in New York in his studio and he was working on a painting of April Gornik. She’s a great painter and a great beauty. She’s got big full lips, and she’s just like a movie star, she’s so beautiful. Chuck Close says, “You see those lips? That’s \$60 worth of cadmium red.”

This is a story that I heard Lenny Bruce tell; I saw Lenny Bruce twice back in the ‘60s. This guy’s in a hotel room and it’s late at night and he’s got a friend with him and they’re sharing a room. There’s a sink in the room, and the bathroom’s down the hall. So, the guy gets up in the night and he’s starting to piss in the sink. His friend wakes up and says, “What are you doing? I hope you’re not pissing in the sink.”

The guy says, “Oh no, I was just washing my leg.” So the friend says, “Well, you better not.” The guy still has to pee and he can’t go down the hall—he’s not dressed—so he goes out on the ledge. He’s going to piss outside the window. After he goes out on the ledge of the window, the fire engines pull up and then the police are there with speakers and lights. And they’re saying, “Stay there.” They call a priest, and the priest is on the megaphone and he says, “Don’t do it my son.” And the guy says, “I just

gotta pee.” The guy’s mother is there, and she tells the firemen, “Run the hoses, run the hoses.” Then he says, “I can’t go now, with all of you looking.”

I was in New York and my wife and I were visiting John Cage. I was lucky to know Cage, and we went into this kind of organic restaurant and there’s Teeny Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp’s widow. He introduces us to her and that’s how I met her. I didn’t know at the time that she was from Cincinnati like me, or I would have asked her about that. Then, that night, we went to dinner at Cage’s loft where he was making dinner for Louise Nevelson. It was her birthday, and John says to her, “How old are you today?” Louise Nevelson says, “I’m 80.” He says, “Oh, that’s marvelous. I can’t wait till I’m 80.” John Cage died two weeks before his eightieth birthday, about 10 years later.



Charlie Chaplin.

Charlie Chaplin goes to visit Picasso and he doesn’t speak French, and Picasso doesn’t speak English. Picasso was a big fan of Charlie Chaplin, and vice versa. Picasso pulls out all his paintings to show Chaplin. After that, Chaplin goes into Picasso’s bathroom and takes out Picasso’s shaving cream, soaps up his face, and shaves for Picasso.

The comedian Jonathan Winters was a Sunday painter, and he had a show in a gallery. Somebody came up to him and said, “You know, if you weren’t Jonathan Winters nobody would pay \$10,000 for that painting.” And he says, “But I am Jonathan Winters.”

Bertrand Russell was giving a lecture on the origin of the universe and he said, “Nobody knows the origin.” And a woman puts up her hand and she says, “I know the answer.” And he says, “What is it?” And she says, “The universe is resting on a turtle.” And he says, “Well, what’s the turtle resting on?” And she says, “It’s turtles all the way down.”

An artist comes home and he finds his house has burned down. And he asks the fireman, “What happened?” And the fireman says, “The museum director came to your house, murdered your family, and burned your house down.” And he says, “You mean the museum director came to my house?”

In the ‘70s I was down in LA visiting John Coplans, who had been curator of the Pasadena Museum and was then editor of *Artforum* magazine. He got together with me and Irving Blum, from the Ferus Gallery. We had lunch and they said to me, “We want you to move your Museum of Conceptual Art to Los Angeles.” I went to a party that night at Coplans’s house. He had a fluorescent light tube on his wall, and I said, “Wow. Far out. He’s got a Dan Flavin in his house.” And somebody said, “That’s not a Flavin. It’s just a light he bought.” And everybody was swimming nude in the swimming pool out back. That was LA in the ‘70s.

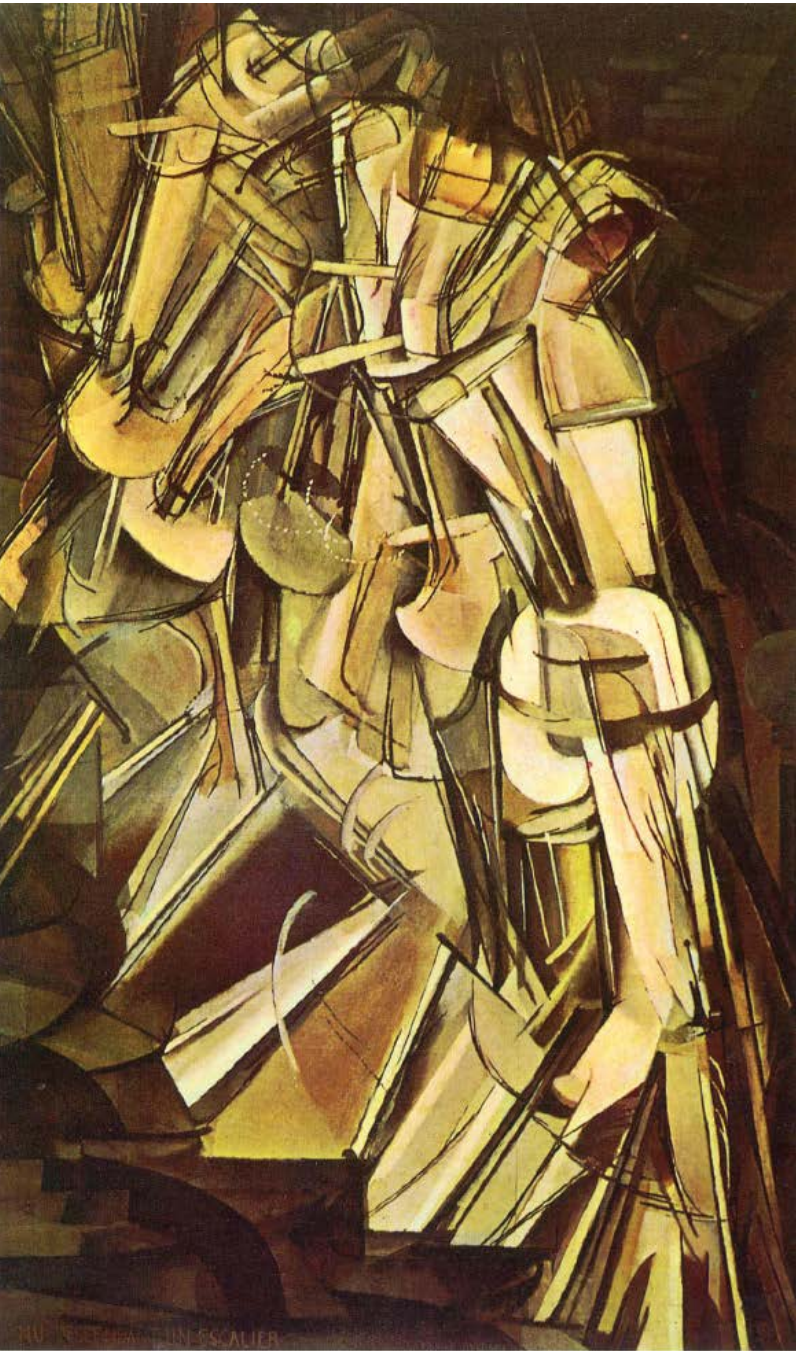
1970 was the first time I did the piece that I’m most known for, *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art*. I proposed it to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and they said, “We’ll do it.” But the president of the board nixed it later, even after it was already announced in their museum newsletter.

Then I went to Gerald Nordland, director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and asked him if I could do the *Beer with Friends* work there, and he said, “We never present anything in this museum until it’s at least five years old.” That was a rule he just made up on the spot.

Then I went to the Oakland Museum and I asked George Neubert, who was the curator, and George couldn’t say no because the year before when I was curator at the Richmond Art Center I had done a show called *Invisible Painting and Sculpture*, and George was in that show. He was a graduate student at Mills College at the time. Later he got the job as curator at the Oakland Museum. That’s how I got to do my *Beer with Friends* in the Oakland Museum in 1970.

Sometime in the ‘70s, a psychologist from Canada who had written a book on architects using the Rorschach test came to San Francisco. She said she wanted to do a book on artists, so she gave me the test and I looked at the cards. They’re really kind of thick, and they have rounded corners. I looked at them and turned them over to see the back, and it said, “Printed in Switzerland.” I was curious, but I wasn’t interpreting. I was supposed to see spiders and vaginas in the images. Instead, I was interested in how the cards were made. It turns out Rorschach made hundreds of inkblots and then selected eleven of them and, the psychologist said, “The seventh one is how you see a woman.” Rorschach had it all figured out. I said, “I’d like to make an exhibition of these cards.” We were sitting in Breen’s Bar, which was downstairs from my Museum of Conceptual Art. “Oh, you could never do that,” she said. “If the images became familiar, then they wouldn’t have their power.”

A guy goes to a doctor and he says, “I have five penises.” The doctor says, “How do your pants fit?” And he says, “Like a glove.”



Marcel Duchamp, *Nu descendant un escalier n° 2*, 1912. Oil on canvas. 57×35 in.

Zine Reviews

By Lele Saveri

Please Come Again
By Camilla Candida Donzella (Italy)

If it wasn't for Camilla Candida Donzella I would probably not be making zines or doing much of what I do now. Multidisciplinary artist and long-time friend and collaborator, Camilla is based in Milan. She's been doing things since before it was cool to do things. Events, zine fairs, pop-up stores, photos, drawings, illustrations—there isn't much she hasn't made into a zine or turned into art. I picked her latest publication (considering her productivity, she's probably already made a few new ones by the time this article comes out), which is a collection of found snapshots, mostly very old, in which Camilla has covered every person with white paint making them look like ghosts. A very simple but funny appropriation of existing images.

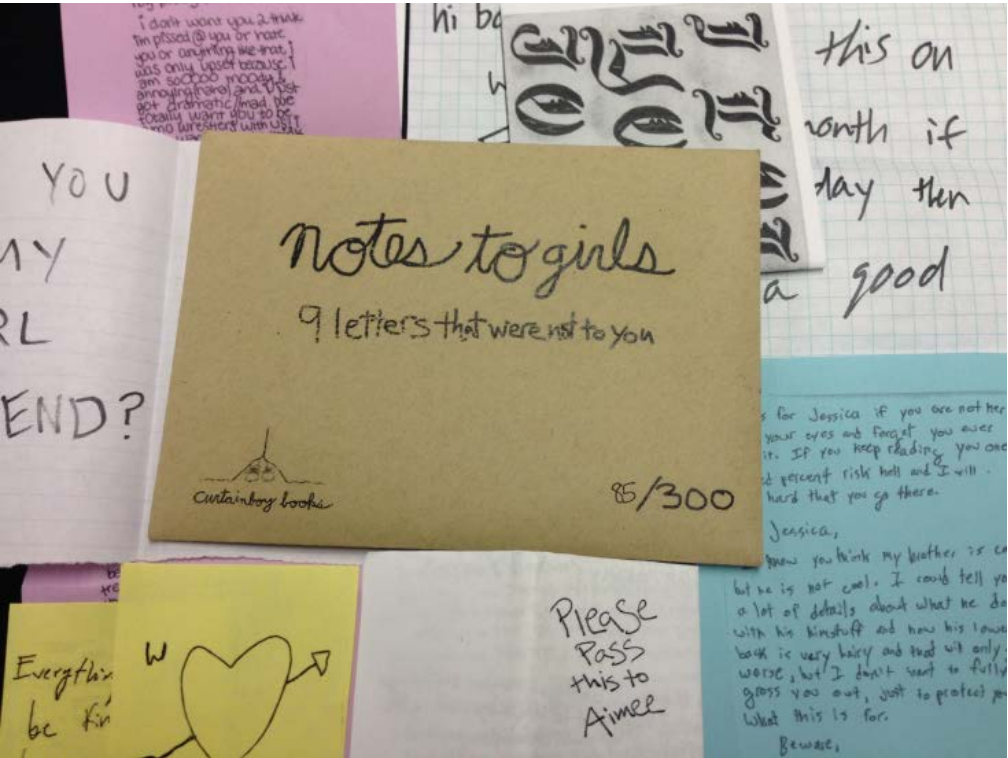
camillacandidadonzella.it



I Only have Eyes for You
By Emma Kohlmann

I only recently found out that illustrator Emma Kohlmann, based in Providence, makes tons of zines. Very good ones, too. Here, a series of quick, spontaneous, dark drawings of contorted body parts, sketched out with black ink. "It's a collection of drawings I made focusing on loneliness and solitude," says Emma, who works and hangs out with some of the most productive and exciting group of young artists. Get into their world.

emmkatko.tumblr.com

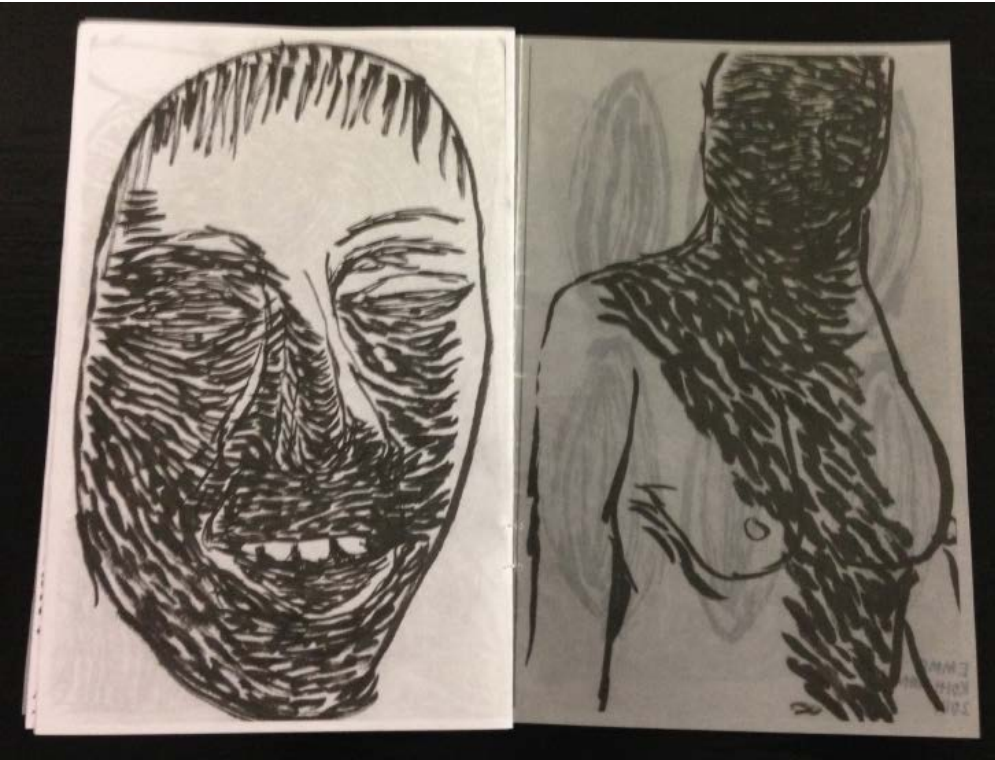


Notes To Girls (9 letters that were not to you)
By Curtainboy Books

Hand-written notes, letters, post-its put together in an envelope by NY-based publisher Curtainboy Books. Dedicated to different girls of different ages probably in different parts of the States, it's a very simple and adorable idea that brought me back to my school years and the many different ways I would find to let all my crushes know my feelings ... something that died with text messages.

Artists included : Eve Ahearn, W.M. Akers, Christina Drill, Joe Koplowitz, Alex Lee, Robert Norman, Joey Pisacane, Travis Watkins, and Ted Watkins.

curtainboybooks.com/shop-zines



#HANDS

UP

DON'T

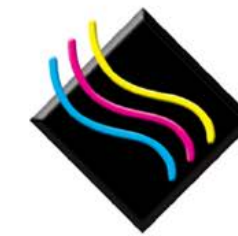
SHOOT

art on paper

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Meg Hitchcock, Shema: Deuteronomy 6:4 (detail), 2014
Letters cut from the Koran on archival paper, 11 x 14 in.
Courtesy of RandallScottProjects.



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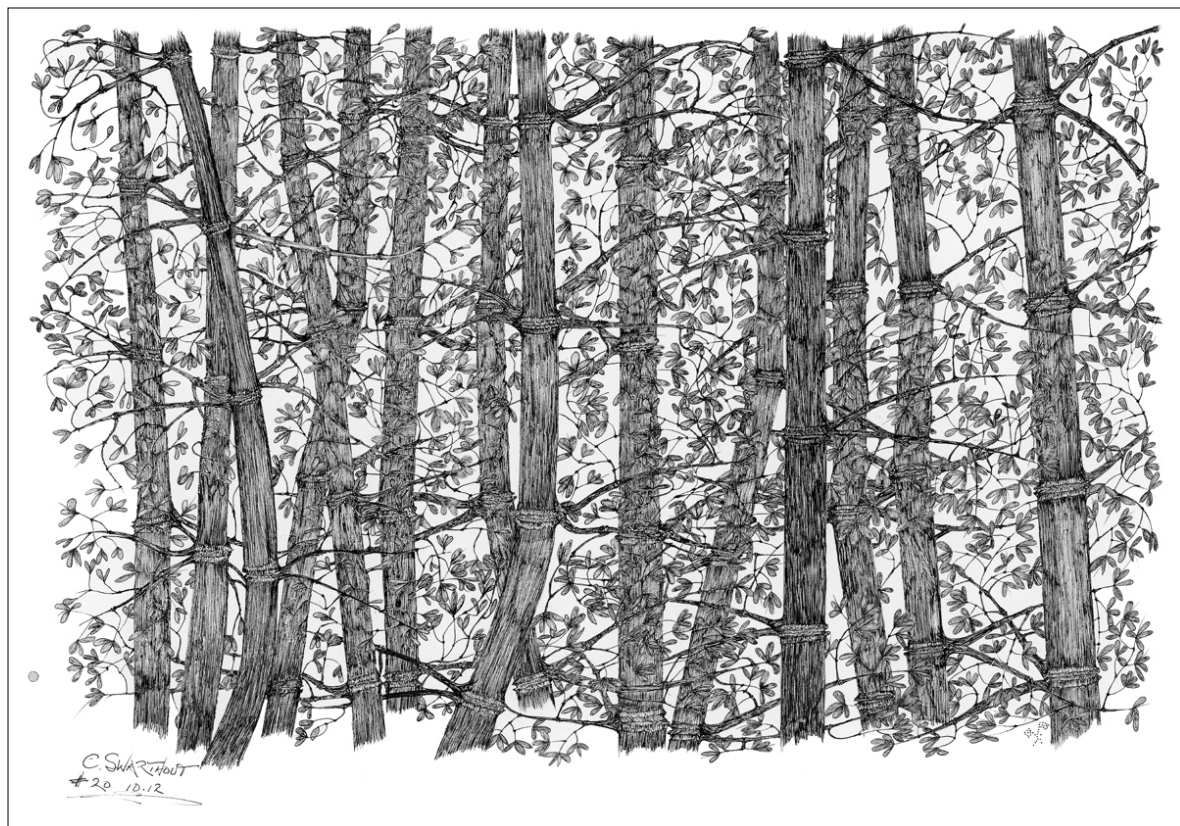
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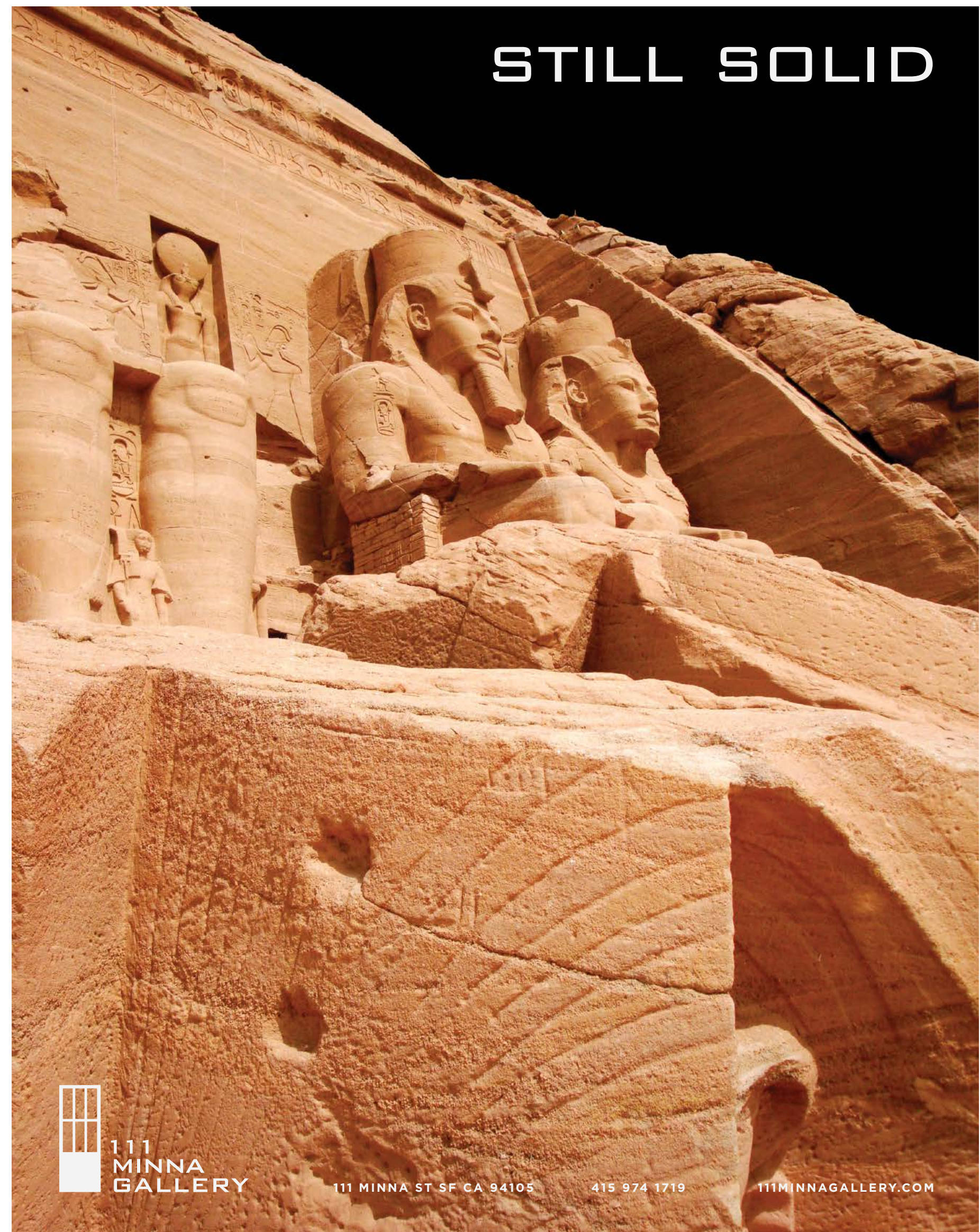
January–March
CLARK SWARTHOUT
On the main wall

January–March
SADIE MELLERIO
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February - March 2015
Pamela Wilson-Ryckman
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March - April 2015
Ruby Neri
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Artists News:::

Dean Byington : American University Museum "Buildings without Shadows"

Bruce Conner Print Survey : San Jose ICA "Somebody Else's Prints"

Bruce Conner & Jean Conner : American University Museum "YES! Glue"

Lynn Hershman Leeson Retrospective : ZKM Karlsruhe "Civic Radar"

Mildred Howard : Lee Krasner Award recipient

David Ireland : UC Press Book Release: 500 Capp Street by Constance Lewallen

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