

SFAQ

Volume 2 | Issue 5 // Free

Ed Ruscha

LA
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ORANGE

DE LONGPRE



Kay Sage, *Third Paragraph*, 1953, Oil on canvas, 38 7/8 x 31 7/8 inches

*Chance Meeting
on a Dissecting Table*
april 28–may 28, 2016

Victor Brauner • André Breton • Alexander Calder
Leonora Carrington • Salvador Dalí • Óscar Domínguez
Enrico Donati • Marcel Duchamp • Jimmy Ernst
Max Ernst • Leonor Fini • Esteban Francés
David Hare • Marcel Jean • Gerome Kamrowski
Leon Kelly • Boris Margo • André Masson
Roberto Matta • Gordon Onslow Ford • Wolfgang Paalen
Kay Sage • Kurt Seligmann • Stella Snead
Yves Tanguy • Dorothea Tanning

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Hung S. Kim, *Kim Julia, Dadu Jelu*, 2013, Courtesy of the artist

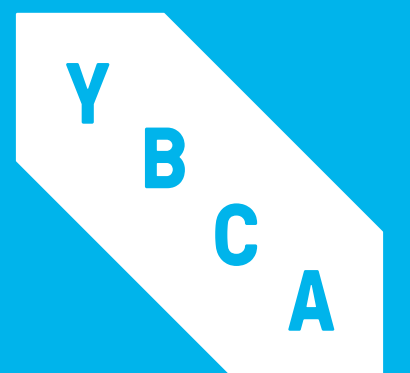
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Ed Ruscha

In Conversation With Andrew McClintock

I know you came out to California, specifically Santa Cruz, from Oklahoma with your family a few times beginning in 1949, but it seems that perhaps when you drove out here in 1956 in your 1950 Ford Club Coupe to go to art school is when California really bit you.

It was a four-door sedan and I came out here with my friend Mason Williams who wanted to be an insurance actuary and go to school out here, and I wanted to go to art school. So that's how it started. I wanted originally to go to Art Center School, but their quota was filled so I had to go to this second choice, Chouinard.

Which is now CalArts.

Yes, and Chouinard turns out to be the bohemian school. Art Center School had a dress code. You couldn't have any facial hair, you couldn't have especially long hair, you couldn't wear sandals or wear a beret, or you know, have any affectations of a beatnik; I think they were trying to snip that in the bud. So then I thought maybe my being forced into this other school is going to do me some good. Art Center School had industrial design and all of that appealed to me, but finally Chouinard turned out to be better.

But didn't Chouinard still have that kind of aspect of being connected with Walt Disney? So your intention was still perhaps to learn about more commercial work in the beginning, but then perhaps the scene kind of took over in your thinking?

Yes, I had this thought that I was going to be a sign painter or something similar to that. Along the trail I took an advertising design course, and I took editing design and fine arts courses, painting, drawing, all that kind of stuff, and I eventually drifted toward fine arts. I had some pretty good instructors there, but I think I learned more from the people I went to school with. There was a competitive spirit going on there; I picked up on that and that seemed to really have an effect on me. So I was lucky to go to school with a bunch of students who were like-minded.

I'm going to pull a quote from your Smithsonian interview with Paul Karlstrom: "I didn't listen to Elvis Presley anymore. I became a serious person. I stopped going to church. The move to California was the big change."

Yes, I'd say that. There was a period of time when I was not keeping tabs on geopolitical events of the day, so you might say I dropped out. I missed a lot of pop culture. I liked Elvis. I just didn't listen to any music. And if I did it was mostly classical music. And I had no TV so I didn't know what *Guns* was—all these programs that were on the air, I never saw them. So I had a period of time, like four years there, where I just was kind of out of public culture.

So a very different cultural experience than your contemporaries. So during this time too you started to get turned on to Duchamp and Jasper Johns, like Target With Four Faces (1958), and you said Rauschenberg, his "combines," and de Kooning—were these some of the artists in this kind of incubator period that really started to turn you on to some new stuff?

Yes, and I saw a couple of exhibits of, like, Kurt Schwitters who did little collages. I really liked his work, he was a Dadaist and that was fascinating to me. As was Giorgio Morandi, the Italian painter. And Duchamp, he had a very mysterious, quizzical, airy type of approach to making art, and a lot of my friends, we all sort of admired Duchamp because he decided *out loud* to quit painting and spend the rest of his life playing chess. We thought: How great could that be? You can't beat that. Because once you're dedicated you're supposed to stick with it, and here was somebody who was not going to stick with it; he finally ended up redeeming himself even though he didn't make much art the rest of his life, but turned out to be quite a fascinating and educational person.

Definitely. It seems like you were looking at both abstract expressionist artists and also this new style that was more impersonal and ambiguous, perhaps more like works like Target With Four Faces by Jasper Johns. Was there an influential battle in your mind, on your work, and then you ended up drifting— Well, the prevailing attitude when I was in school was abstract expressionism, and especially the New York School. It was hot and new things were coming out from these people and we all knew about Jackson Pollock, so it was kind of a new world. It was popping through almost everywhere, this art activity from New York City. We got in at school, and so abstract expressionism was the thing, and action painting, and facing a blind canvas was the deal, and we all respected it and practiced it. So you had these other artists like Jasper Johns, who came through and started making things that were hard-edged and symmetrical and with subject matter, so it was a totally different thing. I was greatly touched by those things. Rauschenberg and a lot of other artists began to emerge on this. So that's really where I got my feeling of it—so I came up with the idea to approach painting as though it were something that needed to be thought out in advance. You conceived the imagery, and then planned it out and executed it. So it was the opposite of action painting, but there were still elements in it that were similar.

After you graduated you took a trip to Europe for about 10 months during which you spent a lot of time in Paris, where you made your first paintings with words . . . or did you start that in school as well?

Yes. I was doing that and I was traveling and I carried a little painting kit with me where I would do these word paintings in hotel rooms, and that kind of moved me, got me going—and being in Europe, I didn't see much beyond classical art and older art. I didn't see too many contemporary things that turned me on, but experiencing Europe was an eye-opener, and I felt like I was really getting some work done at the same time. I came back through New York and I went by Leo Castelli gallery and showed Leo my paintings. He was supportive and said maybe we'll do something together. So about 15 years later I had a show with him. That kind of got me going, and when I got back to L.A. I had to support myself so I worked at an advertising agency doing the layouts and I had to go through a sort of fruitless period doing that so I could get back to painting signs. I wanted to paint signs, not necessarily hamburger signs, not necessarily watermelon signs, but ones that were on canvas, like art signs. And all my friends that were painters, we all wanted to make something that would just blow your hair back, so there was a kind of engine going on. You jump on there, you make your art and that's what it is. That's how it pretty much got going.



Ed Ruscha in front of Ferus Gallery, 1963. © Ed Ruscha.

It seems like you had this moment perhaps, when you were in New York, thinking about staying out there, and then you realized—again an interesting quote that I found—that you "would have been chewed up by the whole machine." So did you consider staying in New York at this point?

No, not really, but every artist really thinks about that at some point and toys with it, and sometimes it becomes impossible, like it was very expensive at that time to live in New York for someone like myself, so I thought well it's a little easier in California. You can move a two-by-four across town very easily, and you can't do that so much in New York.

Yes, I think that's still very true. And also there's—well Castelli showed you a Lichtenstein painting of a tennis shoe that had a very big impact on you. Is that also because it was just a straight painting of a tennis shoe? Would you relate that to wanting to just make sign paintings in a sense?

No, not in that sense. There was something subversive looking about this tennis shoe painting. It was done by Roy Lichtenstein who was basically an unknown artist then, but there was something almost cartoony and disrespectful about it, and something kind of nerdy about it that I really liked. And then finally the thing just became profound because it was like we were laughing at ourselves. This guy and his art for the rest of his life was showing us how to laugh at ourselves. He introduced an element to my way of thinking that was very inspirational.

Got it. So you're back in LA, you're hanging out at Barney's Beanery, you're also hanging out at Ferus Gallery at this time too? That's kind of when it first started—

Yeah, the Ferus Gallery—it was the foremost avant-garde art gallery in the city. There were a couple, or three, other galleries, but they didn't have the magic that this gallery had. They had artists that were very entertaining and constantly coming up with new ideas—they all seemed to be part of a club almost, yet they were all working in different disciplines. You had Ed Kienholz, Billy Al Bengston, Ed Moses, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, John Mason, and all these people were doing completely different types of work, and it was inspiring and it was in this flashy city of Hollywood with all its sparkle and swank. So at that time back then—I almost felt like before I was living in some kind of 1950s scratchy black and white movie. And then enter this guy that I met named Walter Hopp who was almost a legend when I met him. He was a curator, he was part of Ferus Gallery, but he was very erudite and earthy at the same time, and he affected all the artists. All the artists loved him. He gave Duchamp his first one-man show at the Pasadena Art Museum so he was crucial to the kind of transition between the artist and the public. He was able to talk to art collectors and make sense out of things. He was connected and he was erudite, and he was a rascal at the same time. Never showing up on time, being unreliable, but finally delivered what his mission was, you know. So we loved him for that.

You did two shows when he was at Ferus, and then the first show at the Pasadena Art Museum was the pop show?

He did a show called the *New Paintings of Common Objects*, which included myself and about seven or eight other artists. Jim Dine, Joe Goode, Andy Warhol—I wonder why Rosenquist wasn't in there, but he wasn't. Anyway—you know, it was titled that because the word "pop art" wasn't even invented yet. So that was his way of saying pop art: new paintings of common objects.

Let's jump back to your two shows at Ferus. I believe at the first show you showed Box Smashed Flat (1961) and Actual Size (1962)? And for the second one you showed the Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights (1962) and then Standard Station, Amarillo Texas (1963)?

Yes. Those paintings all related to one another and the word paintings were there—those things were kind of based on little noise words, words that related to noise and speed, and things like that. Even the word "spam" sounds like a gun going off, and I was kind of wrapped up in that spirit.

You mean of looking at words as sounds?

Yes. I sort of concentrated on monosyllabic words, utterings, "pow"—things that come from comic books. All those kind of words appeal to me, and other words too. I always like the word "ace", and that was always a humorous sort of thing connected to comics somehow, and I just felt like that was the territory I was working in.

You've mentioned you were looking at a lot of Dick Tracy comics in high school and that your first experience with art was watching someone draw comic book-related drawings. You have this quote about watching the ink dry and how that had a big impact—can you talk about those influences at all? Because comics also show up later in your work, you actually paint the comics as this almost surrealist element, like cheap westerns in your painting.

A lot of those things were afterthoughts or like a coda in musical composition. The comic at the edge of a canvas, like it was just thrown in as the very last thing, at the edge of a canvas, ready to fall out, was my statement about that.

During this time your "lazy zoom" is starting to appear. This forced perspective, cutting the camera in half—it's related to film and CinemaScope, and also related to you driving down the freeway and taking photographs of these gas stations as things whiz by. I'm interested in how you were thinking about "lazy zoom" at this time.

I suppose that I wanted somehow—unconsciously—to combine the idea of speed and a gas station all in the same picture, and those paintings would be lower right hand. The upper left hand zoom factor came from movies where you would see a train coming into the scene and it was always tiny in the distance and then in a matter of three seconds it would fill the screen and roar by. I always liked that. That's that sort of roar that I wanted out of it. It had to have implied noise.

That's also related to the idea of these words having built-in noise or vibrant energy as well.

Yeah, and then I was painting words for so long I wondered, why am I doing this? I didn't know why I was doing it—I had done it for so long I forgot why I was doing it. And I liked that too. But then I thought—am I painting pictures of words or am I painting pictures *with* words? And the question is always out there, and I'm glad I don't understand it.

You've said that words have a temperature . . . I've made these notations about things you've said about words, and it's definitely some interesting stuff. There's a quote from the late '80s that reads, "Words without thoughts never to heaven go," which I find really interesting.

That's from Hamlet. I used that in a library commission I did for a public library in Miami. I thought I could never improve on that combination of words, especially for a library. At the same time, absurdity and enigmas and paradox—all these sort of things that suggest illogic—appeal to me. Somehow it comes out in my work.

Yeah, definitely, like Jar of Olives Falling (1969), this surrealist aspect comes and goes. For the pop art show we were talking about, you dictated the show poster over the phone to a commercial printer?

Our backs were at the wall and we had no time to make a poster and think about it so we were at the Pasadena Museum with Walter and he said, "Why don't we just call them in?" And so that was it. I called up this place called Majestic Poster Press and they did circus posters, boxing posters, that sort of thing, and we just gave them the copy and I told them to make it loud. I liked the idea of remote control creation. You don't often have that opportunity to do that. Sometimes you're given too much time to think about something and you dandle and dawdle with it and never get anything really good, and so in this case it was spontaneous, it was quick, and somebody else made it, and it ended up being a beautiful poster.

So with this idea of being spontaneous and having to put stuff out there very quickly . . . during this whole time, even when you were in college and then in Europe, you were photographing a lot. Photography has always been a big part of your career, but it first shows up as studies and with your artist books, artist publications, before you bring it into other contexts. Obviously first was your 1963 book Twentysix Gasoline Stations. Was that a way for you to do something on the fly without having to spend more time on it, than an actual painting or drawing?

I knew at the time that it was kind of a sideways jump away from painting and I felt like it was a risky thing for me to do and call it my art, but I definitely felt like the book was a piece of art. It was something new for me, but at the same time I had been influenced by book design, and I loved the idea of a book being thought of as a work of art. You look throughout history and it has been considered art, artists painted pages in books for



Actual Size, 1962. Oil on canvas, 71 3/4 x 67 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



Dance?, 1973. Organic substances on raw canvas, 54 x 60 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



Standard Station - Amarillo, Texas, 1963. Oil on canvas, 64.5 x 121.75 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



MOBIL, WILLIAMS, ARIZONA



STANDARD, WILLIAMS, ARIZONA

TWENTY SIX GASOLINE STATIONS, 1962. © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery.

centuries. I felt like, "This is dry, nobody is doing this, nobody is making a book into a piece of art," so that got me going and I thought, "I need to make a book, but I don't know what it's going to be about," and I almost needed an excuse to make a book. So the excuse is, possibly, these photographs I took of gas stations, and it just went from there.

Did you self-publish TWENTY SIX GASOLINE STATIONS? Were you doing all the typesetting too? Or were you working with a printer?

I learned how to set type by hand, and I worked for a printer here—a fine art book printer named Saul Marks—and I got an appreciation for books. I thought, "Well, someday I'll do my own book, but I don't know have an idea for one now." Eventually, doing the photographs and traveling, driving and all that, got me into that groove and I just built on that. I felt like after I did that one book, well, it's not enough, I've got to do another one, and then it just kept happening after that.

Definitely. And then your books THIRTYFOUR PARKING LOTS IN LOS ANGELES (1967) and NINE SWIMMING POOLS AND A BROKEN GLASS (1968), both came from an hour-long helicopter ride, right? In the Smithsonian interview I referenced earlier, you mentioned going to Mexico City in high school and it totally blowing your mind with its architecture. I'm interested in the thought process of that and seeing Los Angeles, which is this crazy grid, from up above . . . seeing the city in this very different way. What about architecture has an influence on you? It seems to show up a lot, not only in your paintings, but in other books, like EVERY BUILDING ON THE SUNSET STRIP (1966) as well.

So the books, the ones that are just architecture, it was the cultural aspect of it, just my take on what LA was like, and I liked LA, I liked the nostalgia of LA. I think that we can kiss that goodbye now because it's quickly changing. If you've never been there you should see it before it gets swallowed up. It's turning into a turbocharged theme park. Back then I was concentrating on having an assignment, a self-assigned assignment, and so doing those books were—I don't know, it was just very fulfilling to do that.

And now those books have influenced zine making, which is all of a sudden back in, and you know, it's just—it's nice to see again. When I was at school at the San Francisco Art Institute in the photo department, seeing those early books really turned me on to thinking about photography in a more conceptual way. These books have had a big influence on a lot of people: at your show in New York, Ed Ruscha Books & Co., it was fascinating to see how these books have influenced other generations of artists.

Maybe along the way there I sort of wound down making books, but I still keep that door open. I might have a few thoughts on the refrigerator, and at some point I'll jump back on it and do something, but I had that run and it was a good run while I was at it.

Let's talk about your use of alternative materials that show up in your paintings, and I believe sometimes in your prints as well. Perhaps the first one you did was the Stains portfolio, from 1969. What turned you onto that?

I think I was becoming fatigued by the idea of putting a skin on canvas with oil paint, and it seemed to me like maybe there are some other things that I could use in place of the oil paint. So I began to play around with these various materials. I could see that they were staining the canvas, so it became a process of staining rather than painting. It was a new frontier, as temporary as it was, and it only lasted a few years, but it was just sort of a side exercise that I wanted to get into.

How does a work like Dance? from 1973 fit in—I mean using cheddar cheese, ketchup and mustard, that's all pretty crazy.

I didn't actually use cheddar cheese to make imagery with, but I did images of cheddar cheese to illustrate cheddar cheese as though they were objects in a picture.

In 1970 at the Venice Biennale you did the Chocolate Room.

That was kind of a spin-off of things I was doing in London, and I did a portfolio of silkscreen prints titled News, Mews, Pews, Brews, Stews, Dues. They're like six different ideas of what I thought England was like. I used various materials, like chocolate and axle grease and caviar and grass clippings—things like that—flowers, anything that would be able to put through a silkscreen and would keep its image and wouldn't bleed to death or something. I was invited to go down there to the Biennale and so I packed up and took one of my ideas down there and out of it came this chocolate room. The Biennale invitation involved working with a printer who had a silkscreen setup so I thought, this is the opportunity to do this, and that's how it came together.

So when one entered the room there was a very heavy chocolate smell?

Oh yeah, you were just absorbed by the fragrance of chocolate, and it was very humid there anyway, so it was even twice as fragrant as you might imagine.

Were people picking at it or trying to eat it or anything?

People would lick their fingers and draw on the shingle-size pieces of paper. They would put peace signs and all number of graffiti and things. I didn't even care, I thought it was fine. It was only going to be up there for a couple of months anyway.

For the Venice Biennale in 1976 you did Vanishing Cream, where you were writing in Vaseline on a black wall?

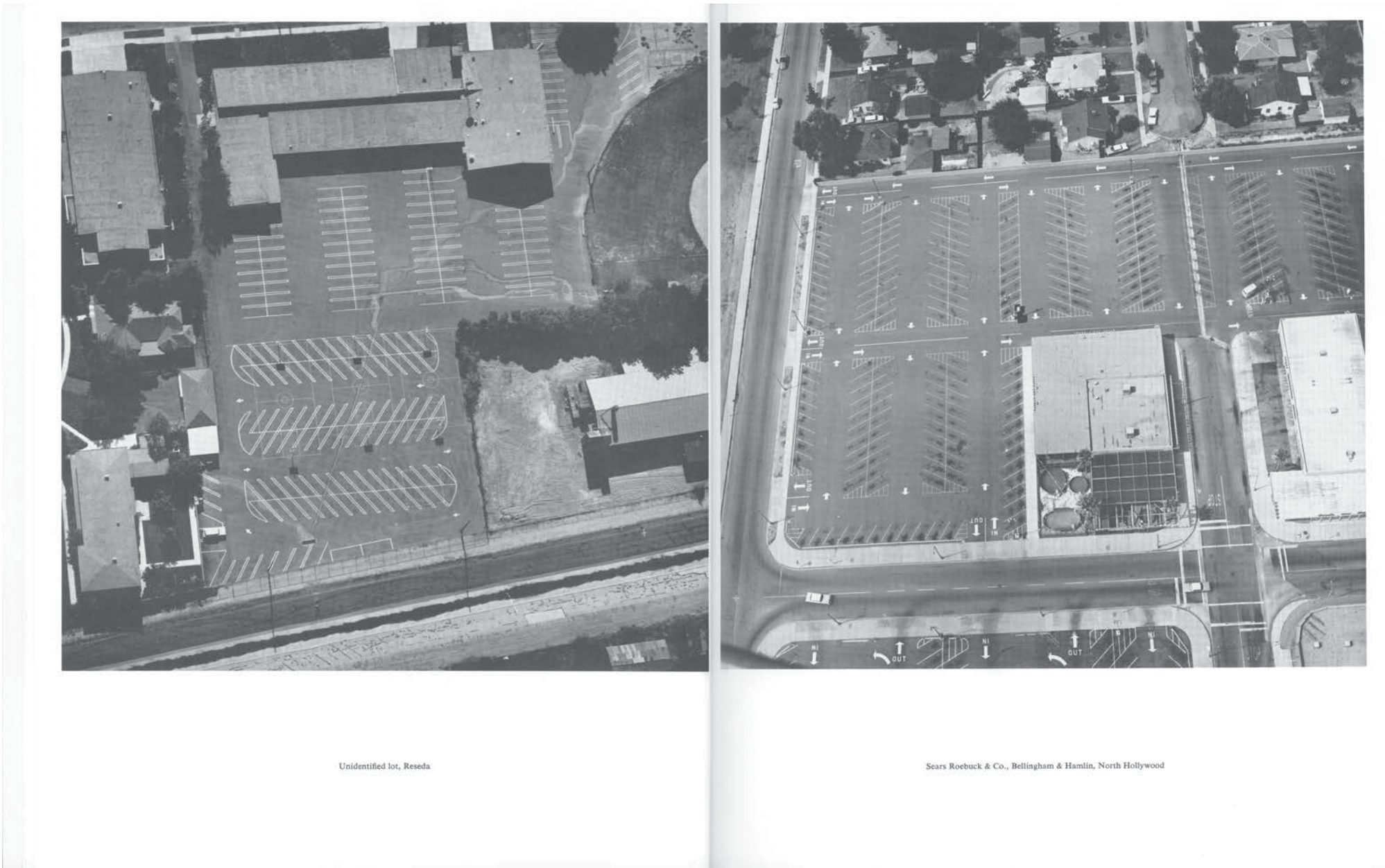
Yeah, that was done with Vaseline. I don't even have a picture of that thing, I can't imagine. I mean, I'm fairly diligent about recording things just for my own observation and interest, and I never got a picture of that, which I'm really sorry for. But it was something that was put up and then when the show was finished it was just dismantled and thrown away.

Something I've got to jump back to about books and photography—can you say a couple things about EVERY BUILDING ON THE SUNSET STRIP? What was your process with that?

I like the idea of recording, which I have for a long time, recording the elevation of a phenomenon: in this case it was a street with stores and buildings. It happened to involve this mythical place they call the Sunset Strip, so the whole thing amounts to a string of buildings, and they began to appear to be as though they were almost like a movie set, or it was all façade. I wanted a sort of demographic approach to it, where there's no agenda, and everything just fits together and you see every building that's on this stretch of land that runs two and a half miles, and then I did the other side of the street, so that they face each other. I began to look at it as though it was a straight facade of all these buildings.

We should talk about the de Young show for a minute. This whole show is about the West. You've said: "I love California style and that's why I came here." I'm interested to hear your thoughts on what California style means to you now and what the West means now, versus what it did back then. There was something I read in the '90s, or maybe it was the early 2000s where you were talking about LA and how much of a circus it's become, and kind of moving away from what made the West so appealing and beautiful to all the artists and freaks and everyone that used to transcend out here. I know that's a very big question.

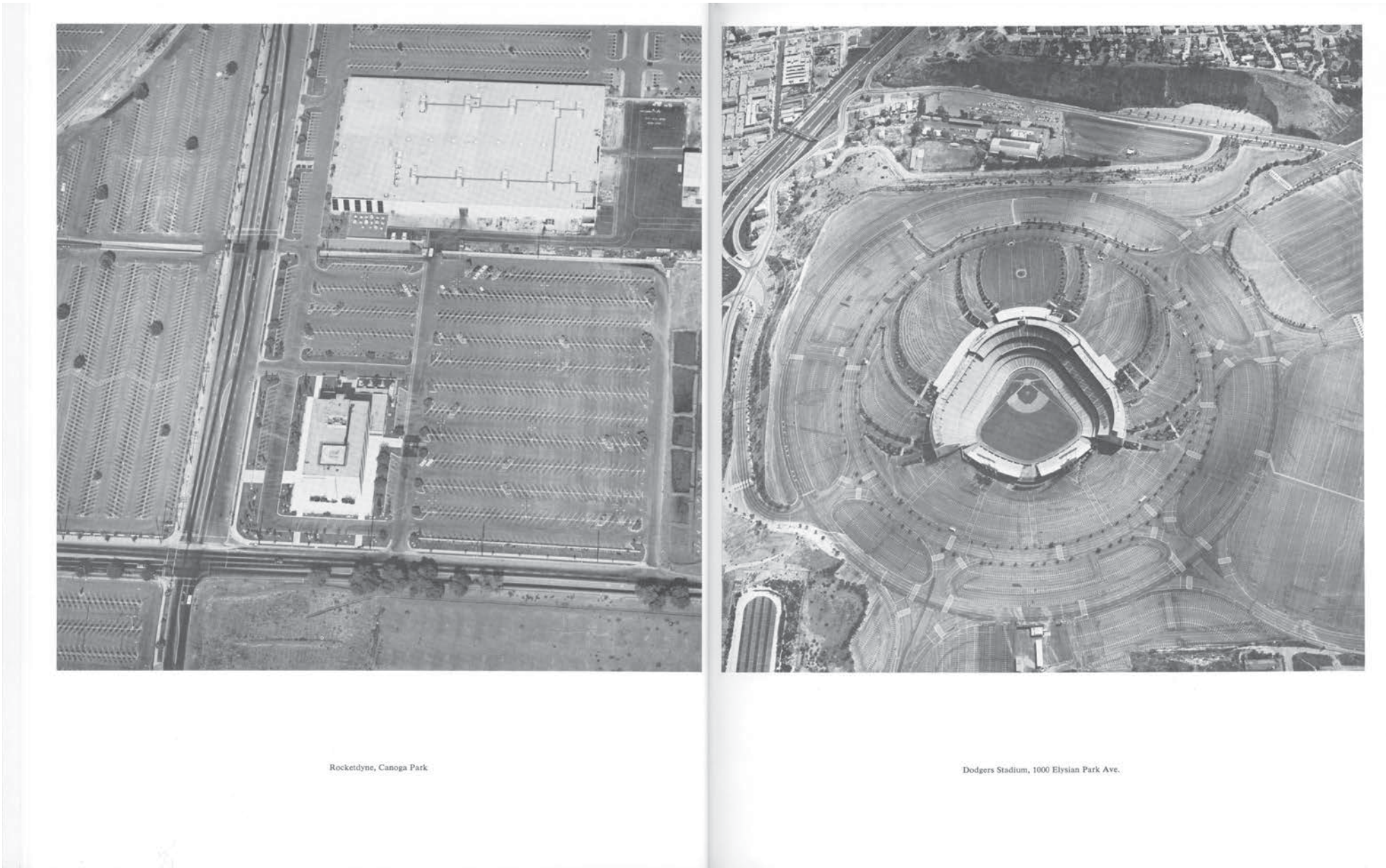
I've been all over the US and I have a particular soft spot and a hopeful frontier idea that maybe the western side of the US has offered more delectable subject matter. There is something that appealed to me in traveling out here. It always involved driving a car, so that's where the gas stations came from, that's where sunsets came from, and it's a combination of all kinds of things crushed into something—it's kind of, I don't know, crunching gravel, it just involves so many things. The western side of the US has—there's something—sunrise, sunset, hope for the future, and you know, it's not only like the eastern side!



Unidentified lot, Reno

Sears Roebuck & Co., Bellingham & Hamilton, North Hollywood

THIRTYFOUR PARKING LOTS, 1967. © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery.



Rocky Mountain, Canoga Park

Dodgers Stadium, 1000 Elysian Park Ave.

THIRTYFOUR PARKING LOTS, 1967. © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery.

In 2013 you joined the SFMOMA board. How did this come about?

When they invited me to be on the board at SFMOMA I jumped at it because I knew I could come and visit, and I've always thought—and I've thought about this carefully—that San Francisco is the most beautiful city in the world. And I can say that because I think it's got a mystery to it that hit me when I was a kid and visited there. It still maintains that mystery. Any time I get an opportunity to go to San Francisco I do. And SFMOMA is opening up pretty soon and I think that's going to be an expansion of the cultural landscape up there.

Even Gagosian is opening up across the street. It seems there's a lot of change happening, which I hope sticks around.

Just in the last week and a half I curated this exhibit that's going to be on at Crown Point Press.

You've been doing your mountain series since 1998, with both paintings and works on paper. It's such powerful imagery—

On these works, I imagine a curtain being opened and a mountain image occupies the space akin to a background. On stage and certainly positioned are words or other objects. This would be the show and tell of this kind of picture.

You've mentioned that you move around your work stations in your studio to keep things fluid and have a studio in LA as well as in the desert... Can you say a few things about your work ritual?

I follow a predictable pattern of spastic, jerky motivations. These are motivations that are puzzling to me to this day. I do not follow astrology but my sign says that I do unimportant things first.

This is also an abstract question in a sense: I know that Walter Hopps, even back in the '60s, was this kind of mythic curator already, and obviously now in the history books he is this very mythic curator... Do you think there can be another figure like Walter? What do you think the West Coast needs?

It sure needs and could use another Walter Hopps, but I don't see one on the horizon. I mean there are a lot of very smart people out there, but a lot of them are not interested in art. He had this vast approach of understanding the hard side of life, and that's where he came from. I think it would be great if we could, even if we invent somebody!

It seems to me that you are both a conceptual artist and a pop artist—if there was one movement that you would relate more to, what would that be? I know labels are strange things and I feel like you have rightfully entered into your own space... but just curious about your thoughts on if there is a movement you feel best fits your practice.

It's amusing to see how so called "movements" evolve and dissipate, and how certain artists eventually evade and fly off from their positions in a given movement. Nothing seems absolute but all art seems to be made out of other art. I don't know where I belong and I'm content that way.



Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights 1962. Oil on canvas, 66.75 x 133 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



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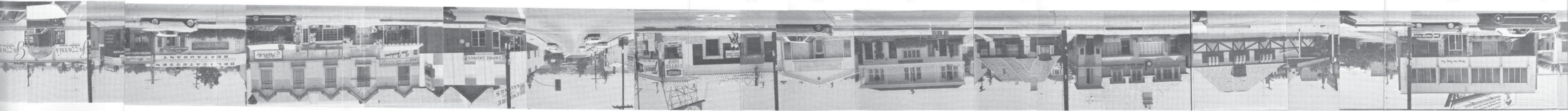
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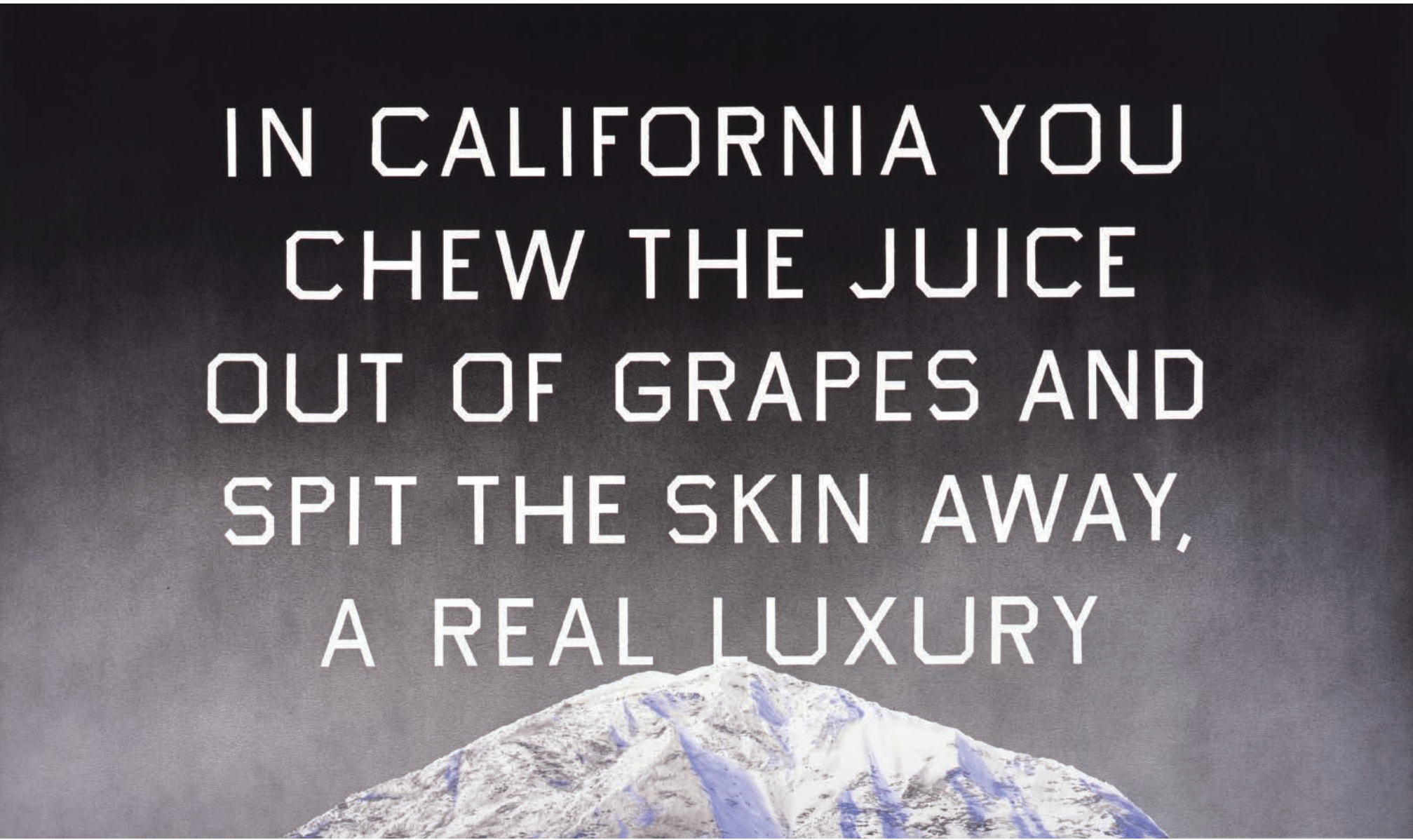
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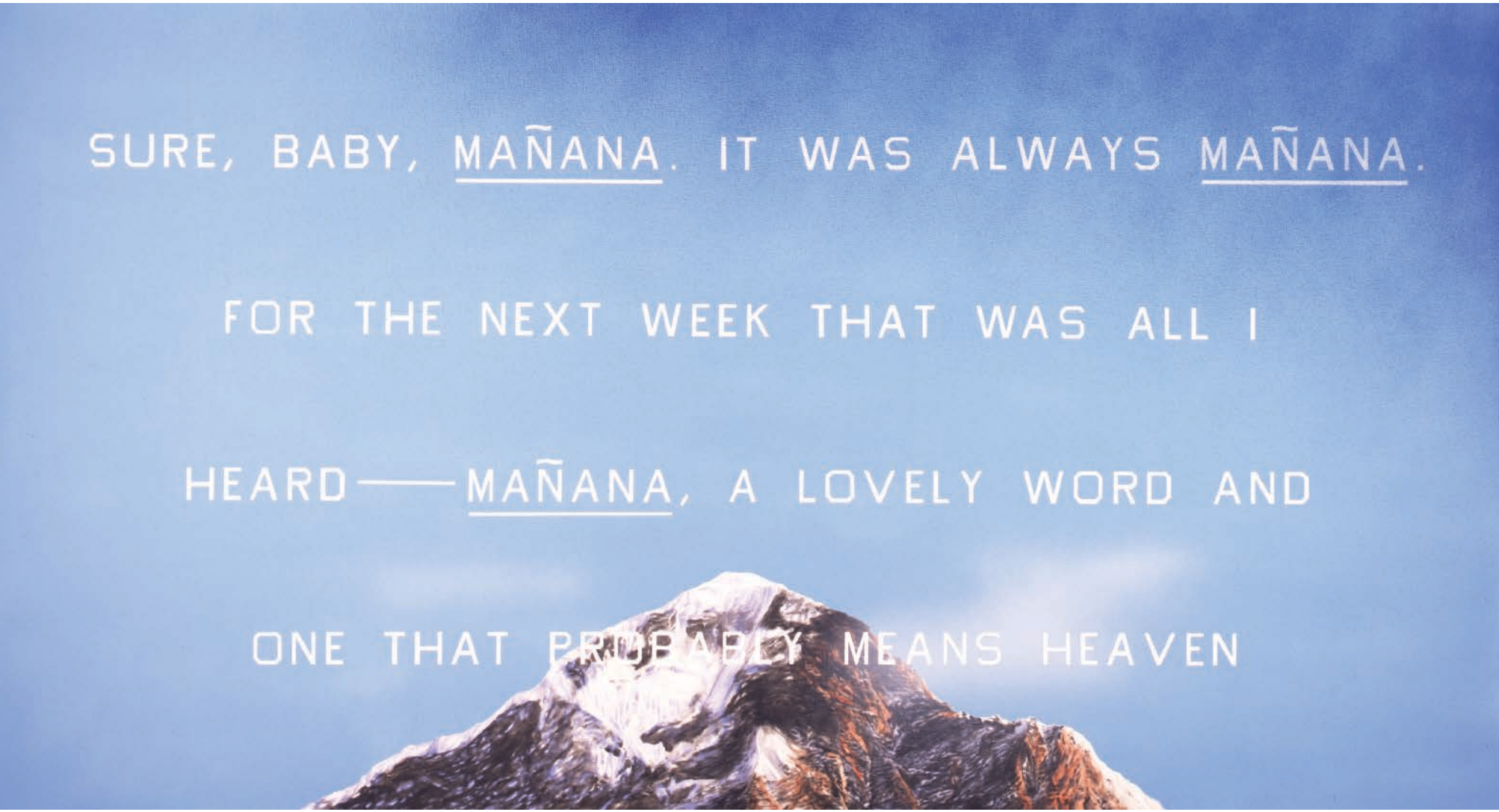
California Grape Skins, 2009. Acrylic on canvas, 38 x 64 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



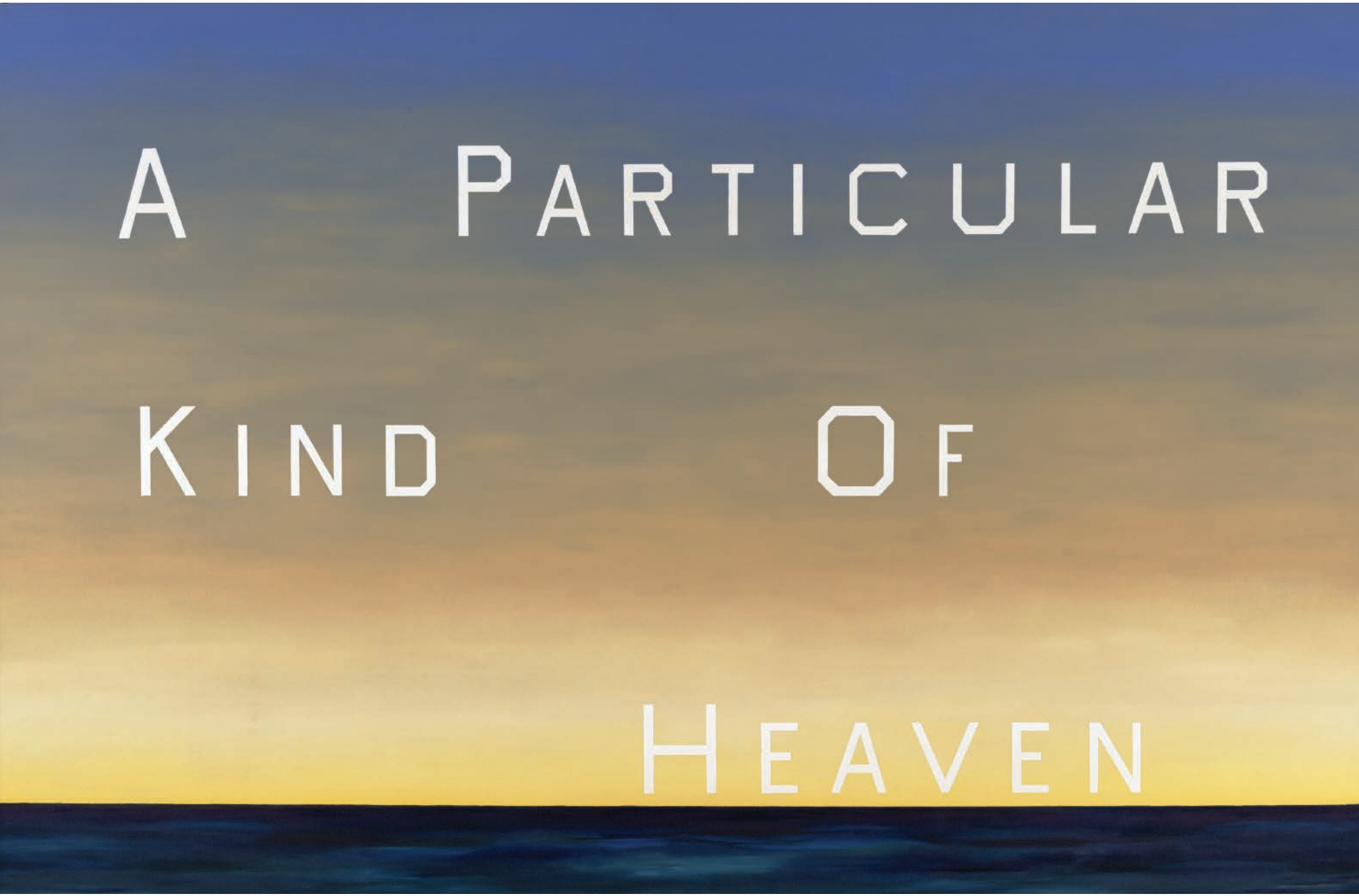
Pay Nothing Until April, 2003. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



Honey... I Twisted Through More Damned Traffic To Get Here, 1984. Oil on canvas, 72 x 72 inches. Private collection. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.



Mañana, 2009. Acrylic on canvas, 38.75 x 72 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



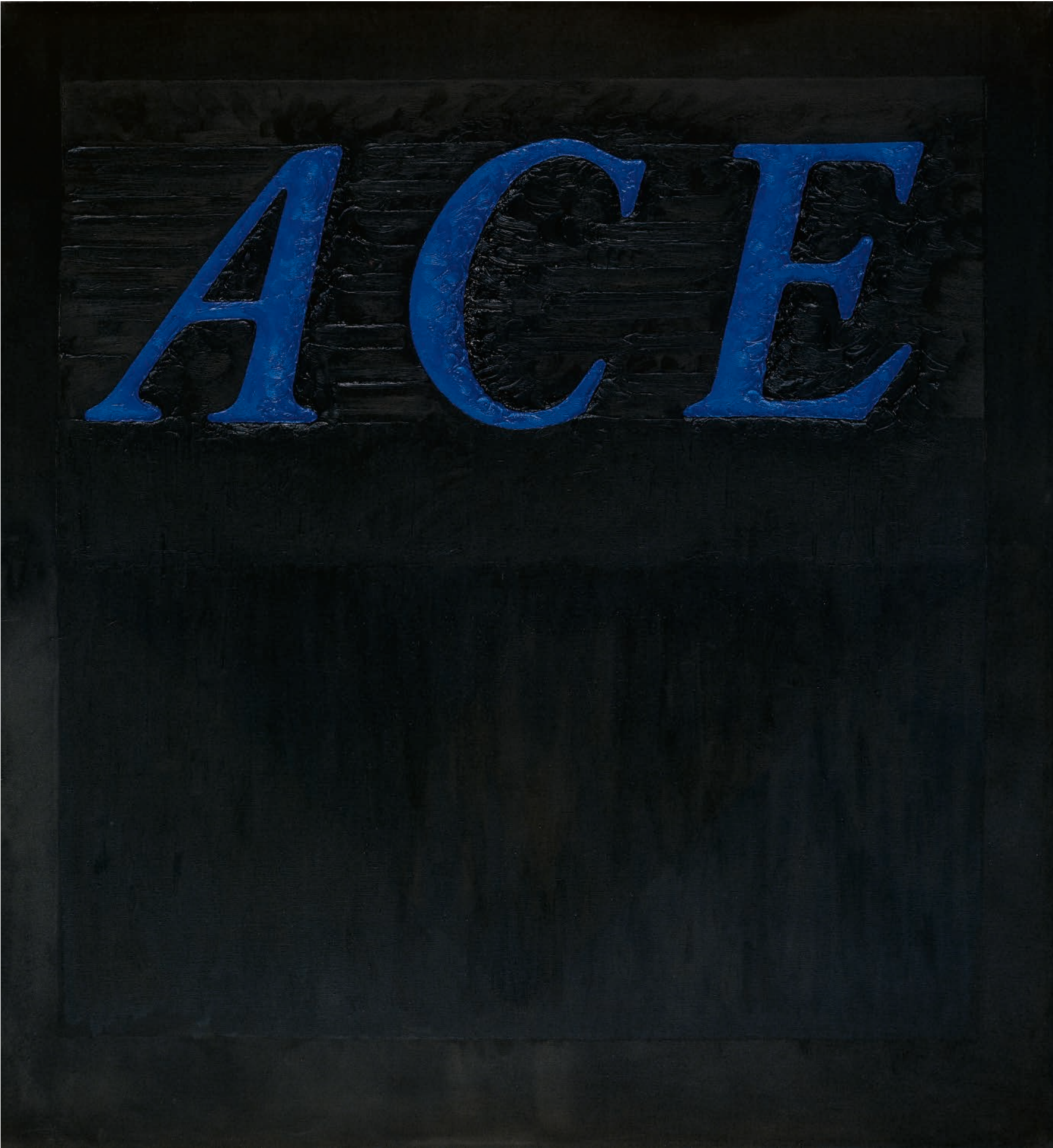
A Particular Kind of Heaven, 1983. Oil on canvas, 90 x 136 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.



Boss, 1961. Oil on canvas, 71 1/8 x 67 1/8 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



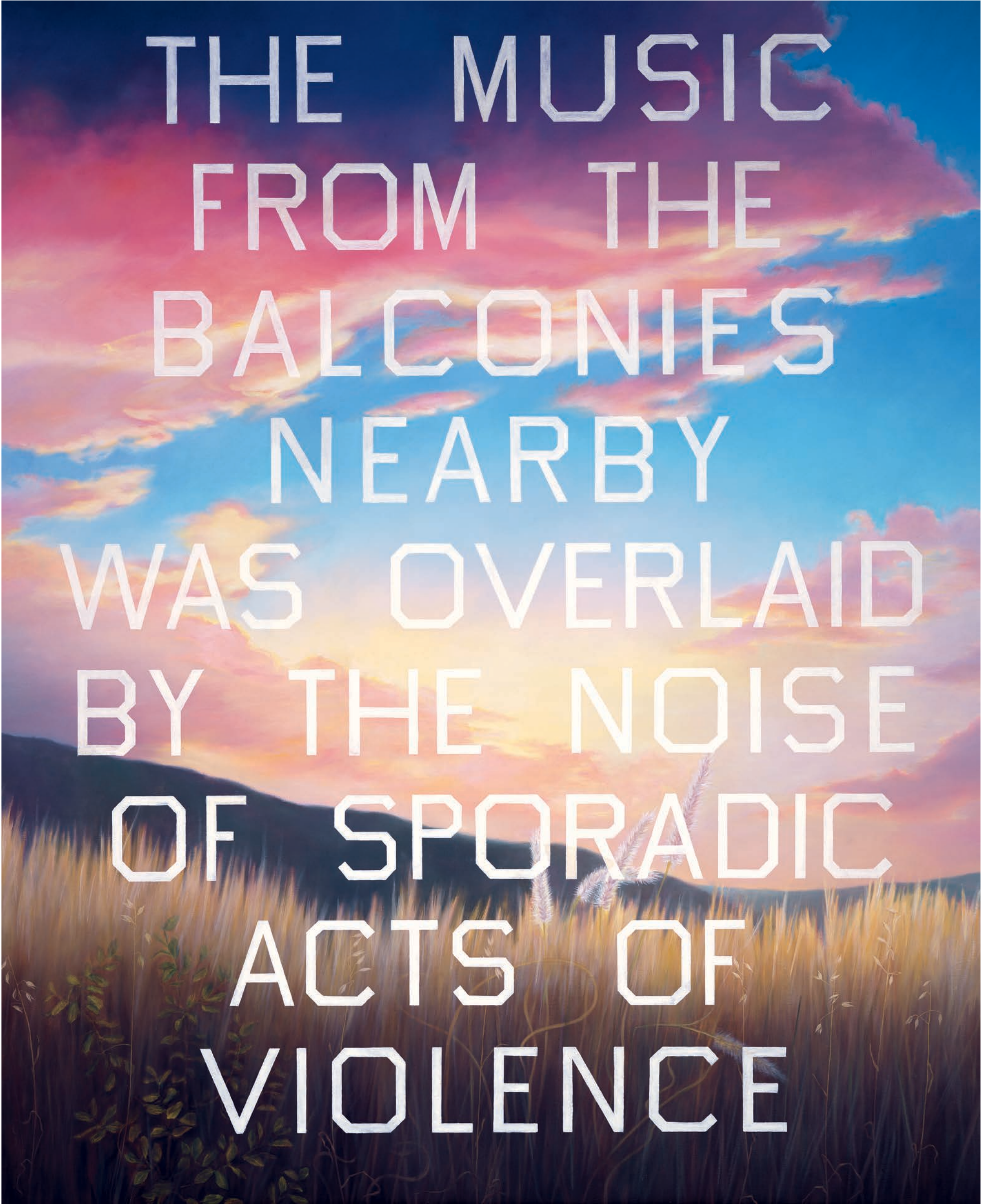
La Brea, Sunset, Orange, De Longpre, 1999. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



Ace, 1962. Oil on canvas, 71 3/8 x 66 3/4 inches. © Ed Ruscha.




The Back of Hollywood, 1977. Oil on canvas, 22 x 80 inches. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Lyon. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco



The Music from the Balconies, 1984. Oil on canvas, 99 x 81 inches. © Ed Ruscha.



The End, 1991. Color lithograph, image and sheet: 26 1/8 x 36 3/4 inches. Published by the artist. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

<p>SFAQ / May-June 2016</p> <p>Publisher & Editor in Chief Andrew McClintock</p> <p>Managing Print Editor Lydia Brawner</p> <p>Senior Editors Lucy Kasofsky and Lauren Marsden</p> <p>Images Courtesy Of: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gagosian Gallery, and Ed Ruscha</p> <p>For full list of contributors (Print + Online) , bios, and more info see the masthead in our AQ section or visit sfaq.us</p> <p>CONTACT: Advertising advertise@sfaq.us</p> <p>Comments / Complaints info@sfaq.us</p>	<p>Advisors: Nion McEvoy, Kevin King, John Sanger, Adam Swig, Sue Kubly, Nick Podell, Maurice Kanbar, Barry McGee, and Tom Sachs.</p> <p>Thanks: Paule Anglim (RIP), David Coffin, Tina Conway, Leigh Cooper, Jeff Gunderson, Peter Kirkeby, Paul Kos, Tony Labat, Lauren Leasure (RIP), Kent Long, Tom Marioni, Jesse McClintock, Red McClintock (RIP), Carlo McCormick, Barry McGee, Austin McManus, Guy Overfelt, Tom Sachs, Jocko Weyland, Pat McCarthy, Adam Parker Smith, SFAQ Contributors, and everyone who supports us through advertising, subscriptions, and donations.</p> <p>BLACK LIVES MATTER STOP THE TPP SUPPORT PLANNED PARENTHOOD SUPPORT SNOWDEN & MANNING BERNIE SANDERS FOR PRESIDENT FREE MUMIA!</p> <p>SFAQ LLC 441 O'Farrell St. San Francisco, CA, 94102</p> <p>All Material © 2016 SFAQ LLC // Designed in the Tenderloin, San Francisco. Printed on 60% post-consumer papers with environmentally friendly soy-based inks in Hunters Point, San Francisco. It's almost organic it's so sweet.</p>	<p>CONTENT:</p> <p>Ed Ruscha In Conversation With Andrew McClintock Page 4-17</p> <div><p>Cover Image: Ed Ruscha, <i>La Brea, Sunset, Orange, De Longpre</i>, 1999. Acrylic on canvas. 60 x 60 inches. © Ed Ruscha.</p></div>
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WHAT'S ON

spring + summer events



EXHIBITIONS

Mariana Castillo Deball Feathered Changes Serpent Disappearances

On view through July 30

Walter and McBean Galleries
800 Chestnut Street, SF



SPECIAL EVENT

2016 Graduate Exhibition

May 12–15

Herbst Pavilion
Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture



ART + IDEAS

Summer Symposium Stimulus Packages Politics, Pleasure, Aesthetics

June 17–18

Lecture Hall
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Images (from top): Installation shot, photo by Stephanie Smith.
Mariana Castillo Deball: *Feathered Changes, Serpent Disappearances*,
Artwork by Flo Pizzarello, photo by Drew Altizer; Zellerbach Quad.

SFAI SAN FRANCISCO
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Tom Marioni, *Drum Brush Drawing*, 1995, steel on sandpaper, 22" x 28"

April 20 - May 28, 2016

Σymmetry
Paul Kos

Birds in Flight

Tom Marioni

June 1 - July 16, 2016

Constellated

Jean Conner

Lynn Hershman Leeson

Gay Outlaw

Anglim Gilbert Gallery at Minnesota Street Project

May 18 - July 2, 2016

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Joan Brown

Gallery News:::

Frieze Art Fair, New York
May 5-8, 2016, Randall's Island Park
Spotlight Booth D32: David Ireland

Civic Radar Book Launch
Lynn Herhman Leeson

Anglim Gilbert Gallery

14 Geary Street, San Francisco, CA 94108 Tel: 415.433.2710 www.anglimgilbertgallery.com
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Question:

Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller
has not denounced President Nixon's
Indochina policy be a reason for you not
to vote for him in November ?

Answer:

If 'yes'
please cast your ballot into the left box
if 'no'
into the right box.

NYAQ

Issue 4 // Free

Hans Haacke

Jacolby Satterwhite





Hans Haacke

In Conversation With Terri Cohn

Why did you come to New York? Where are you originally from?

I got a Fulbright scholarship to continue my postgraduate work at Temple University's Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia for the 1961/62 academic year. From there, I often took the bus to New York, and, as I had done during a prior year in Paris, I went to see exhibitions, made connections with other artists, and took in the vibes. After that year in Philly, I moved to New York to do more of the same, keeping myself afloat by teaching German.

Regarding the second part of your question: I was born in Cologne, Germany. When I was six years old, bombs fell in the street where we lived. I remember walking by a still smoking ruin on my way to school. We then moved to a small town south of Cologne. And that's where I grew up.

It sounds traumatic, experiencing that as a child. It seems that the events of WWII may have influenced your work in some ways, such as your 1967 show at MIT, or the work Sanitation you created for the Whitney Biennial in 2000. Would you please talk about this?

War is traumatic for everybody, no matter where.

I don't think the MIT show made anybody—including myself—think of traumatic experiences. In fact, it was a rather cheerful show, as was its reconstruction at MIT's List Visual Arts Center in 2011. There are, however, a number of my works, which were "inspired" by the ugly history of the country where I was born and where I grew up.

A significant one is *DER BEVÖLKERUNG (To the Population)*, a permanent installation at the Berlin Reichstag (German Parliament building) that was inaugurated in 2000. It cannot be understood without knowledge of the Nazis' racist and deadly interpretation of "das Volk" (the people).

You mentioned my *Sanitation* piece in the 2000 Whitney Biennial. You are right. Connoisseurs of typefaces could recognize my hint to parallels between the Nazis' expurgation of what they called "degenerate art" and the "cleansing" of the National Endowment for the Arts by Senator Jesse Helms's "decency" clause, and to Rudolph Giuliani, the mayor of New York, threatening the Brooklyn Museum over a painting in the *Sensation* exhibition the mayor wanted to have censored.

Can you talk about your involvement in the ZERO group? How did it shape your later work?

In the late 1950s—I was still an art student in Kassel—I saw a group show of ZERO artists in Bonn. It was my first encounter with ideas and practices that differed fundamentally from the Tachism and art informel I had become familiar with during my hitchhiking visits to Paris, which, at the time, was considered to be the art capital of Europe. I then met Otto Piene in Düsseldorf. I was very taken by what I saw in his studio—and we got along very well. Soon after, I also met his ZERO buddies in Düsseldorf. By the time I graduated in 1960, these encounters had left a trace in my paintings and constructions, to the extent that I was invited to participate in a number of exhibitions by the international ZERO/Nul/Gutai et al. artists network. Two of these exhibitions were held at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. I also connected with artists of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, as well as with Soto and Takis in Paris. At the 1965 ZERO exhibition in Amsterdam, I met George Rickey who—like Otto Piene—helped me to get my feet on the ground in New York.

What trace did the encounters with Otto Piene and his ZERO buddies in Düsseldorf leave in your paintings and constructions?

Piene was born in 1928. As a teenager he was drafted and assigned to an anti-aircraft battery. Günther Uecker and Heinz Mack were only a few years younger. They all felt an urge to disassociate themselves from the art and the attitudes of the post-war generation that preceded them. They spoke of a new beginning, and they shared a surprising degree of optimism for the future.

Light, and how it throws shadows and causes reflections, played a major role in their works. These were physical phenomena that I then also began to play with. In 1962, water, with its particular physical behavior and properties, was added to my repertoire.

This brings to mind your Rhinewater Purification Plant from 1972 that was installed at the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, Germany. I appreciate the way in which you created a greywater reclamation project in a museum setting. It seems it was well ahead of its time.

Water, of course, is not always shiny. It is affected by its physical environment, which, in turn, is often shaped by its social environment. The interaction of both was an essential aspect of *Rhinewater Purification Plant*.

Let me explain: Museum Haus Lange, like its parent, the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld, is a municipal institution. The director of both is a civil servant, appointed by the City. His budget is essentially the local taxpayers' money; its size is determined by the elected members of the City Council.

In 1972, the City of Krefeld poured about 11 billion gallons of untreated wastewater into the Rhine. As part of a large triptych in my installation, I listed all contributors to this mess, including the number of gallons of their respective contribution. The largest polluter was a factory situated right on the Rhine that was part of the giant Bayer group of corporations.

Paul Wember, the director of the two museums of Krefeld, was well known, both nationally and internationally as a supporter of "avant-garde" art (that was the word then used for so-called "cutting edge"). Not once did he hint that what I was planning might not meet his criteria for what's fit to exhibit in his museum. In fact, his office connected me with experts in city agencies from whom I got technical help and statistical information on the city's wastewater disposal. In passing, it might be interesting to know that Museum Haus Lange used to be a villa built by Mies van der Rohe for a local industrialist.

I'm also interested to hear more about how George Rickey—and Otto Piene—helped you get going in New York.

Thanks to Otto Piene, I was invited to participate in ZERO-related group shows in Germany and abroad. He introduced me to two established galleries, the Alfred Schmela Gallery in Düsseldorf and New York's Howard Wise Gallery where, respectively, I had my gallery debut in Germany and an exhibition in the US a year later, in 1966.

George Rickey came to my New York exhibition. He wrote recommendations that helped me a lot, and we exchanged works. For a while, my *Large Wave* (1965) was hanging on his porch in upstate New York, where he had his studio and lived. He later donated it to the Neuberger Museum in Purchase, New York. I still have his piece at home.

What prompted your transition from working with "real time" systems and processes—works like Condensation Cube (1963-65) and Condensation Wall (1963-66)—to focusing on institutional critique, art and politics, and demystifying relations between art and the outside world?

Water, enclosed in geometric containers of clear acrylic plastic, evaporates and condenses on their inside walls. It responds to changes in temperature, caused by air drafts, lighting and other external factors. This process occurs even when there is no viewer to provide an interpretation and give it a "meaning." Whether one looks at the *Condensation Cube* as an artwork—there is no definition for art other than one based on a social agreement—or one doesn't, in either case, the object's physical interaction with its environment is an integral part of it. In other words, it is not an autonomous object. Its surroundings belong to this "system" of interdependent relations. Very differently, when paintings and sculptures react to their environment it is usually a cause for panic. A conservator is called to repair the damage, and provisions for the control of temperature, humidity, lighting, and pressure have to be installed or beefed up.

It was Jack Burnham who introduced me to systems theory sometime in the second half of the 1960s. I thought its terminology and concepts were applicable to what I was tinkering with. Reading Ludwig von Bertalanffy's *General System Theory* gave me a deeper understanding and inspired me to continue with my kinetic, process-oriented works, and also to expand into biological and—toward the late 1960s—to deal with social "systems."

It was the time of the cultural revolution that shook Paris and other European cities. In the US, the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. prompted me to write a preface to a lecture that I was scheduled to give. The Vietnam War affected a great number of American families directly. It fired demonstrations on campuses and in the streets of major cities. There were the My Lai and the Kent State massacres. Racial discrimination triggered large public protests. In New York, artists got together and formed what they called the Art Workers' Coalition to challenge the boards of trustees of museums whom they saw as representative of the forces they viewed as allied with the powers they despised. Nobody had the time to worry about the fortunes of the art market.

That's an interesting statement. It seems with all that's going on in the world right now, that it's similar to the late 1960s. How do you think this time has enabled people to worry about the fortunes of the art market?

It was a very different world. Young artists were not faced with huge debt. They could live in downtown Manhattan. When I arrived in New York, I paid \$60 for my one-room apartment on East 6th Street at 2nd Avenue. I used a drill press in a machine shop in Soho to drill holes in acrylic plastic sheets for my rain boxes. Soho wasn't *boutiqueville*. It was a neighborhood of blue-collar workers and artists, and it had some grungy bars. In the '60s and '70s most of the collectors of works by artist activists were not driven to make a fortune, nor were they motivated to surround themselves with bestsellers for social prestige. Investors who buy and flip artworks were yet unknown. And there were no art fairs. All that changed in the 1980s, during the Reagan years, with a little respite when the Wall Street crash of 1987 hit the art market in the early 1990s.

But, in spite of the art market's introduction of money as a powerful guiding principle, today there are also artists and activist artist collectives in the US and other parts of the world who respond critically to their social and political environment, and also challenge art institutions. Some do so even in commercial galleries and, occasionally, in major museums. While self-censorship by institutions—and artists—is a common phenomenon, it is not universal. Although critical works rarely make it into art fairs, they are often represented in biennials. In that context, such works usually address issues in the country where the artists are coming from, rather than troubles they see in the host country. The embrace of an international biennial can serve as a protective shield in the artist's home country.

Is that embrace you describe due to the fact that the positive attention the artist and his/her work receives can make it difficult for an artist's home country to censor them or their work?

Having been embraced by a prestigious, international venue yields cultural capital to an artist. Her/his work can no longer be dismissed as nothing but political propaganda that crosses the line of what's acceptable. It is now surrounded by the halo of art. Censoring it risks it to be noted around the world.

Would you talk about your MoMA Poll (1970)? It seems that museums today are invested in a model for systems art that recalls this 1970 work.

I'm not sure about that. Few institutions readily present a work that makes critical references to donors or members of their boards.



World Poll, 2015. Venice Biennale, Central Pavilion, 2015. Visitors responding to 20 demographic and opinion questions on iPads. Tabulation of answers to question no. 8 at the end of the Biennale's opening week. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph by Hans Haacke. Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



Hans Haacke. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Hans Haacke. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

I agree that many or most institutions are reticent to present work that critiques its donors or board members. But some artists—Martha Rosler, Andrea Fraser, and Fred Wilson, among others—have created works that are related forms of institutional critique. It seems that your work provided a foundation for these artists and others.

At the time of the 1970 *Information* show at the Museum of Modern Art, Nelson Rockefeller, the incumbent Governor of New York State, was on the board of MoMA. His brother David was the chairman (also chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank), and their sister-in-law, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III, was also a board member. I expected the museum would not particularly care for the question of my *MoMA Poll*, therefore I didn't reveal its wording in advance. I brought the panel with the question to the museum only the night before the opening. And, sure enough, the next morning, an emissary of David Rockefeller appeared and told John Hightower, the museum director, to take it down. Hightower, to his credit, didn't comply. Decades later, I found David Rockefeller quoting the question of my *MOMA Poll* in his autobiography and saying that to keep it in the show was one of several things that prompted him to sack Hightower soon thereafter.

This seems an example of hindsight being 20-20! Since donors to MoMA and comparable institutions get a tax deduction for their contributions, in effect, taxpayers substantially support these private institutions. I am not a constitutional expert and cannot say whether this obliges the recipients of such unacknowledged public funding to strictly observe the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech (art). The ruling by a federal judge against Rudolph Giuliani over his attempt to have a painting by Chris Ofili removed from an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, which I mentioned earlier, seems to indicate as much. The judge explicitly referred to the First Amendment.

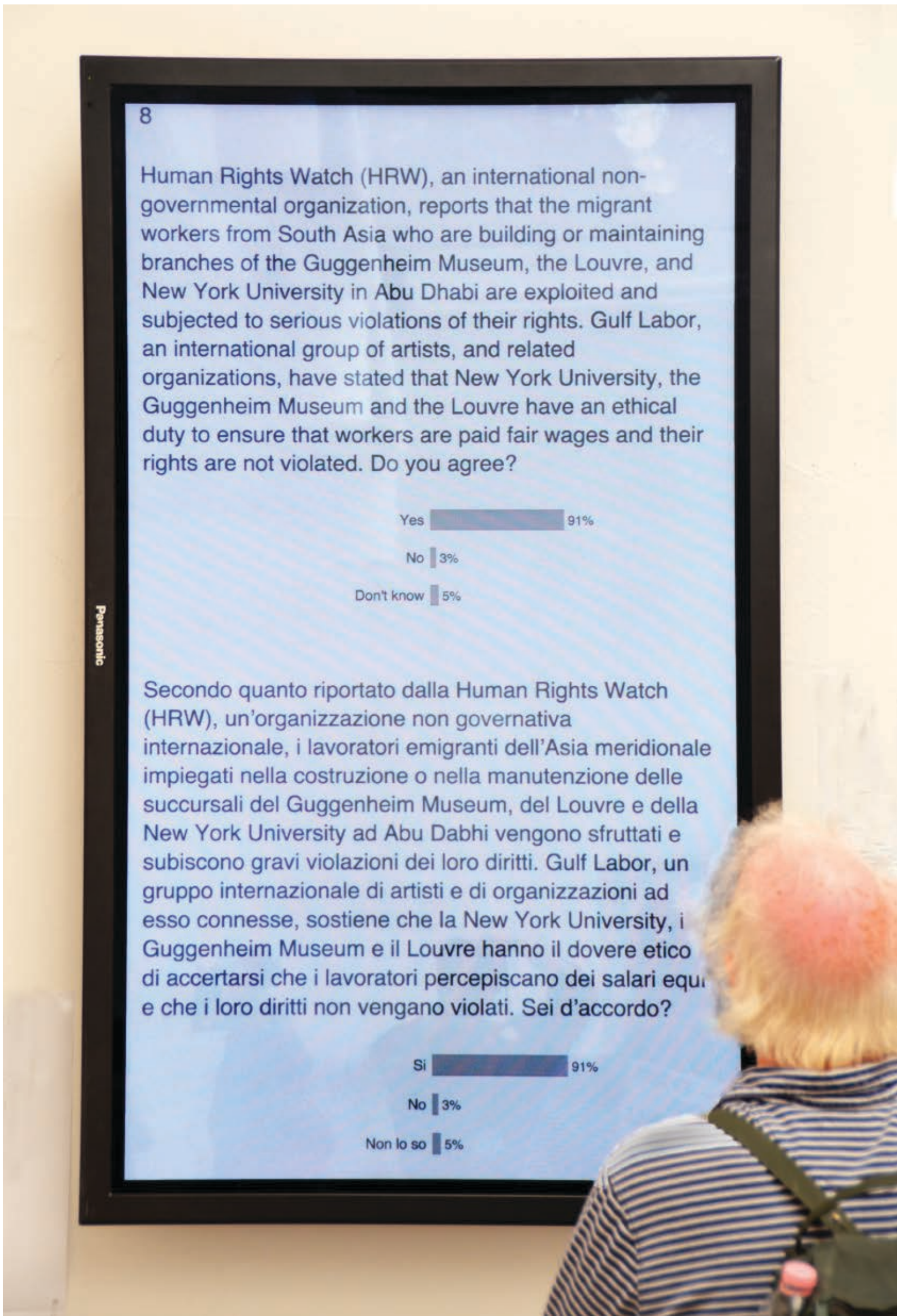
You phrased your question in terms of "systems art" and related it to my *MoMA Poll*. Whether we are looking at so-called systems or a painting does not matter when we are discussing the acceptance, rejection, or outright censorship of artworks. To prohibit asking the visitors of an exhibition called *Information* a topical question gives that title a peculiar twist.

Last year, in Okwui Enwezor's central pavilion of the Venice Biennale, I conducted, via iPads, a poll with 20 multiple-choice questions. 21,000 visitors participated. To the question "Do you live in a country in which authorities censor the works of artists?" 41 percent of visitors who came from "North America" (US and Canada) clicked "Occasional censorship" as their answer.

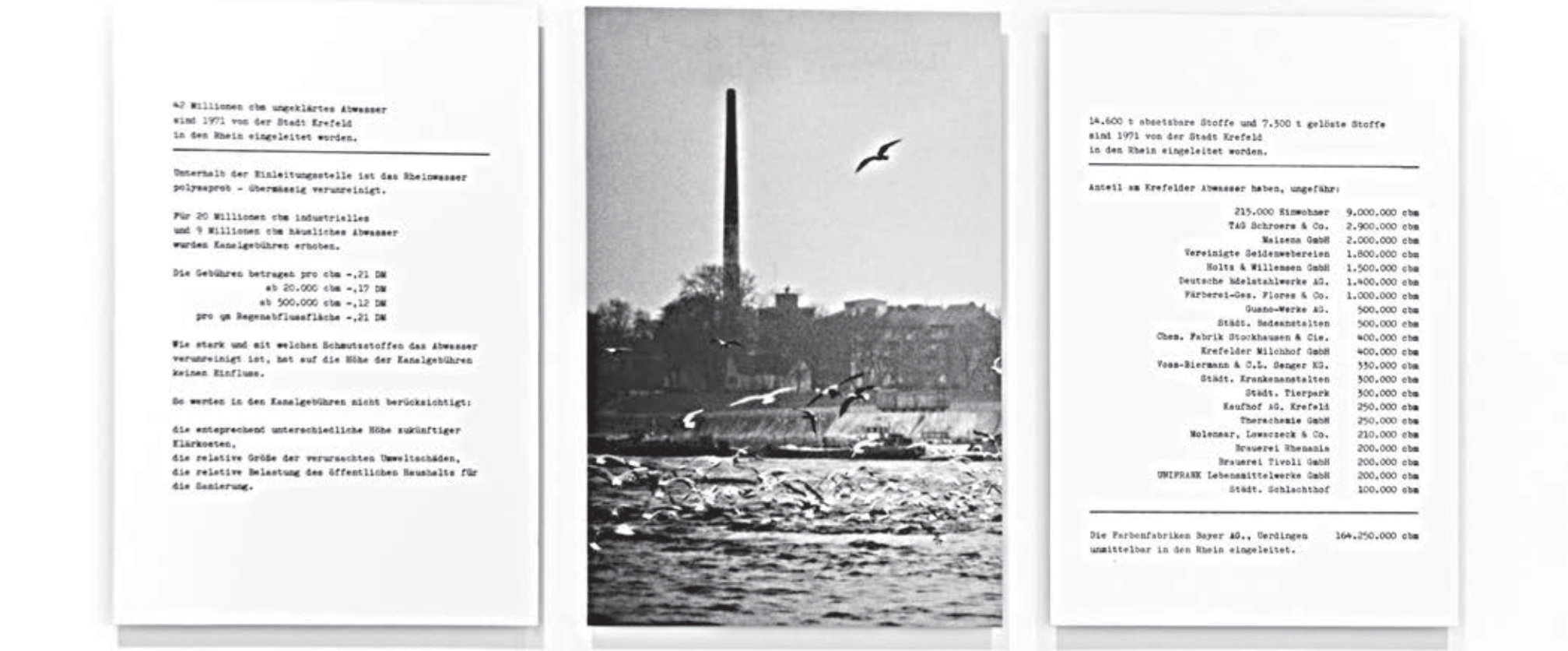
I'm sorry I missed last year's Venice Biennale; I would have really liked to experience that work. As for the US and Canadian visitors who responded to your poll, it seems that some must be aware of the highly publicized censorship of artists who received NEA grants during the 1980s, which directly led to the 1989 amendment to the law that created the National Endowment for the Arts, enabled forms of censorship, and eliminated significant government funding from the NEA's budget.



Gift Horse, 2014-15. Bronze skeleton with LED display of London Stock Exchange ticker on bow. 15 ft 3 in. x 14 ft 11 in. x 5 ft 5 in. Commissioned by the Mayor of London's Forth Plinth Programme, Trafalgar Square, London. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Hans Haacke. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



World Poll, 2015. Venice Biennale, Central Pavilion, 2015. Visitors responding to 20 demographic and opinion questions on iPads. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Hans Haacke. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



Krefeld Sewage Triptich, 1972-2013. 3 Archival inkjet prints, each 12 x 13 5/8 inches. Solo exhibition Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, 1972. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph by Hans Haacke. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York



Rhine Water Purification Plant, 1972-2013. Archival inkjet print, 20 x 30 inches. Solo exhibition Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, 1972. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Hans Haacke. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

But this shift seems particularly remarkable with your installation Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971. Although censored by the Guggenheim Museum in 1971, that work was also prescient relative to gentrification today. Did you feel vindicated after the work was jointly acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona?

In 1971, gentrification was not an issue. New York was a run-down city. The properties of Harry Shapolsky and his family and associates were mostly located in Harlem and on the Lower East Side, making them the largest slumlords of Manhattan. Poor tenants were subjected to the group's notorious rent gouging, and their buildings were known for many violations of the building code. The properties were frequently sold and mortgages were exchanged within the group for the purpose of getting tax advantages and disguising who owned them.

It took 15 years until New Yorkers could finally see *Shapolsky et al.*, and get a sense of what the fuss at the Guggenheim was all about. It was part of my 1986 exhibition at the New Museum. Already in the early 1970s and 1980s it had been widely exhibited in Europe. The joint acquisition you are referring to occurred in 2007. For many, the inclusion of the work in the opening show of the new Whitney Museum last year was their first opportunity to catch up with what had become a legend. I heard this from people who had lived in some of these buildings. Also the gentrification of these neighborhoods became a topic of discussion.

Your fourth plinth project, Gift Horse (2015), seems to have had remarkably positive responses from most people. I wonder if most understand the intentions of the work, which are revealed by its title, but not by its form. Can you talk about this?

It does seem to be quite popular. Most if not all people who see this skeletal occupant of the fourth plinth on Trafalgar Square do not interpret it as a celebration of the London Stock Exchange and its effect on the global economy, particularly when seen in comparison to the imposing equestrian statue of George IV on the opposite side of the Square. The doctrine that an unfettered pursuit of economic self-interest, guided by the "invisible hand of the market," will ultimately promote the public good, is followed only by the Koch brothers and their like. The faithful do not normally congregate in Trafalgar Square.

Do you know how most people do interpret the skeletal horse?

The ticker of the London Stock exchange, of course, makes them think of what it represents. Some relate it to paintings by George Stubbs. Judging by what I read and what people say when they speak with me about the *Gift Horse*, they take it as a sarcastic comment on the capitalist gospel.

I was tickled to see, the other day, that a photo of the *Gift Horse* was chosen by the editors of the Süddeutsche Zeitung (a national German newspaper) to accompany an article about the planned merger of the London Stock Exchange and the Deutsche Börse in Frankfurt.

Since you taught in an art school for a long time, what do you think is the most important piece of advice you'd give an emerging artist?

Making money should not drive what kind of art you produce. You must find a way to be independent of the fortunes of the market and the predilections of collectors. I know that's not easy.

With more platforms for selling art today (the Internet in particular) new markets seem to be emerging for younger artists, which is not necessarily helpful for their independence in this way.

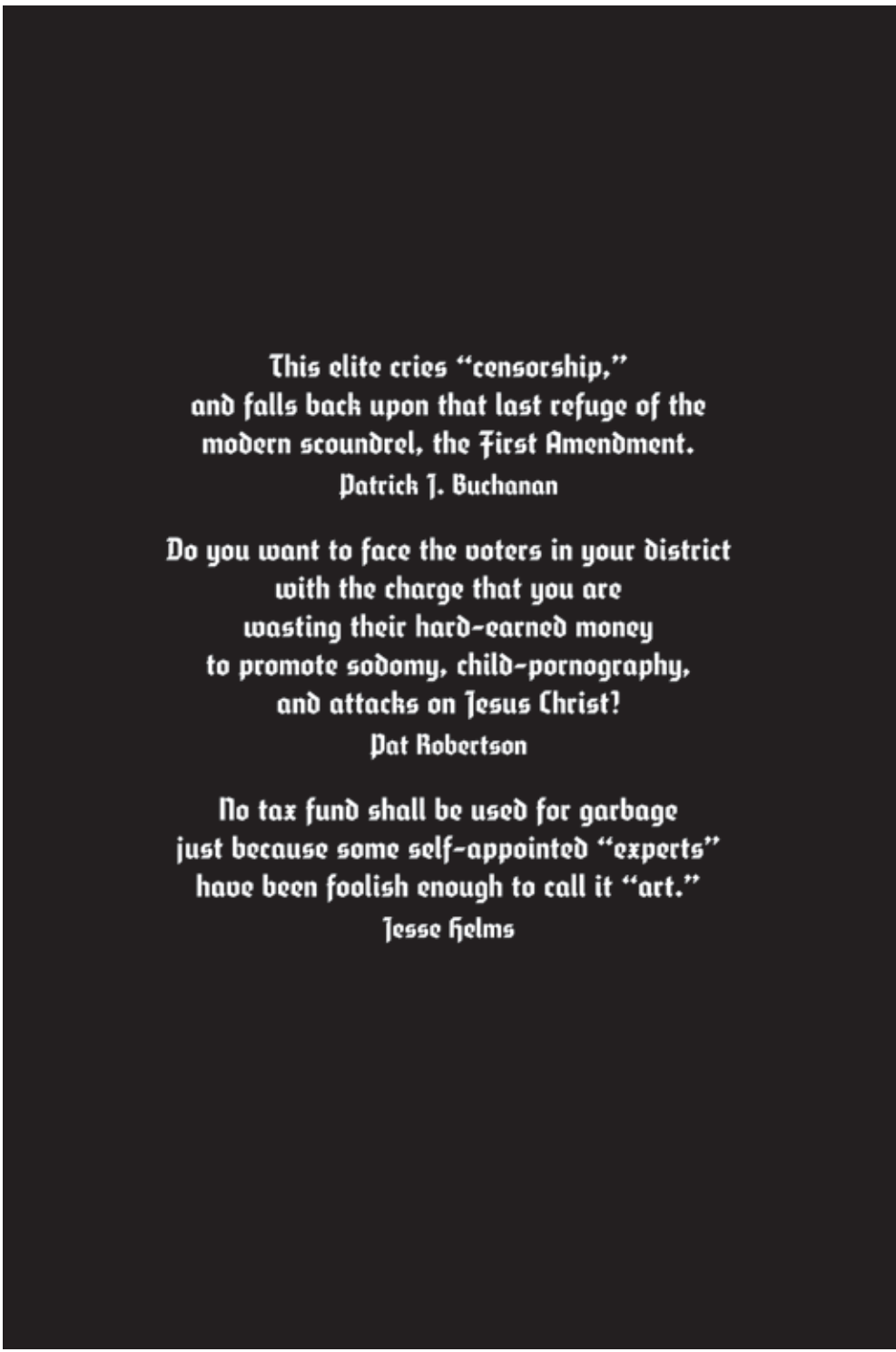
Your 1965 manifesto, which calls for the artist to "make something which the 'spectator' handles, with which he plays and thus animates..." seems to have a relationship to your current work. Although the form of your work has changed, has the concept remained relatively consistent?

I believe the viewer and the works—not only mine—interact in an untraceable way. Artworks affect people's attitudes and thereby a society's consensus—with social and political consequences. That's what animates the censors. Years ago, I spoke of "Museums, Managers of Consciousness."

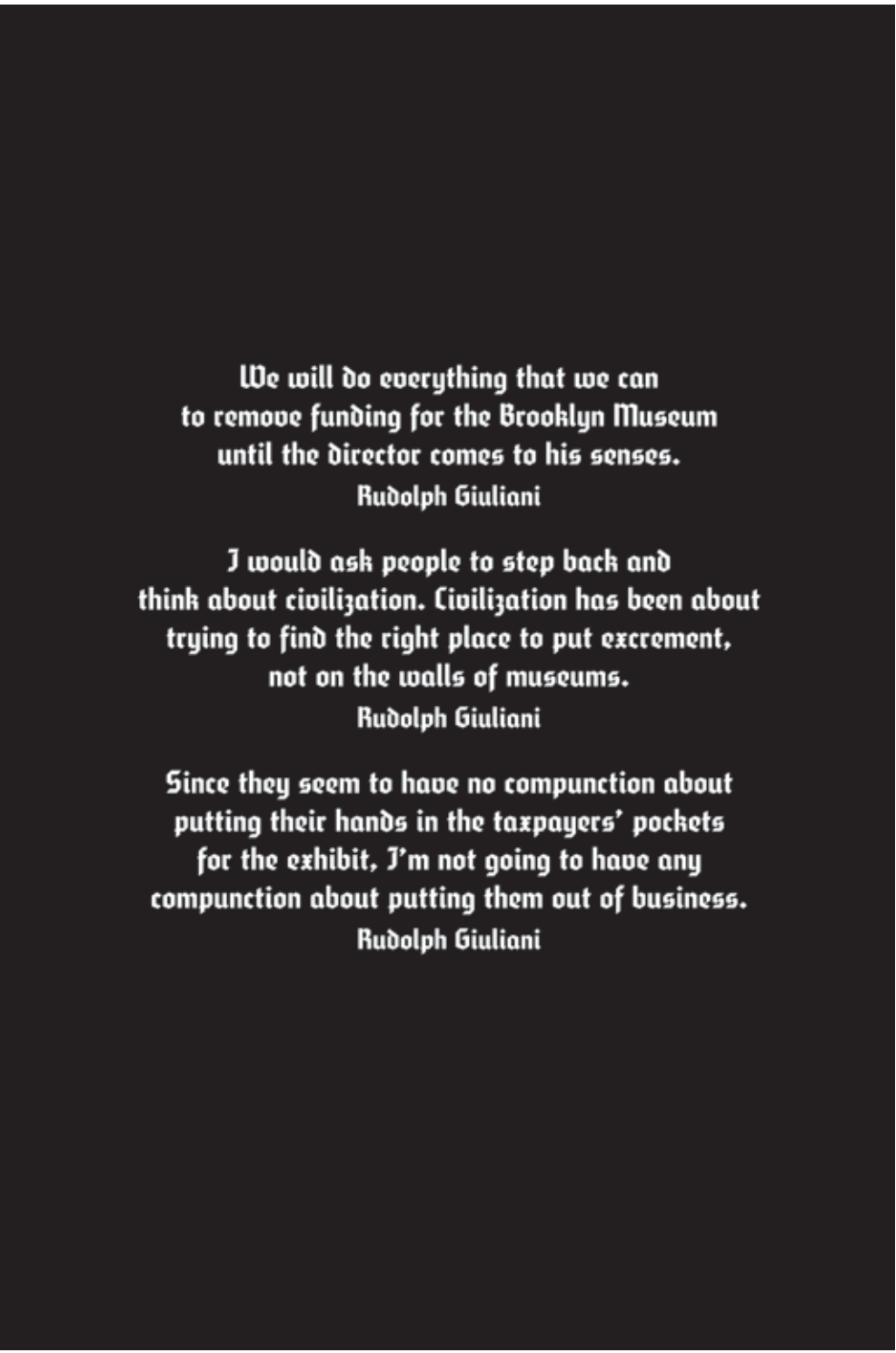
Your vision as an artist over time has encompassed a breadth of critical issues that concern the future of the world. As an artist, what do you feel is the most important issue to be addressed in this contentious period of history?

That's a big question. Let me answer by quoting the battle cry of the French Revolution: "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité." Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood—or the non-gendered: Solidarity.

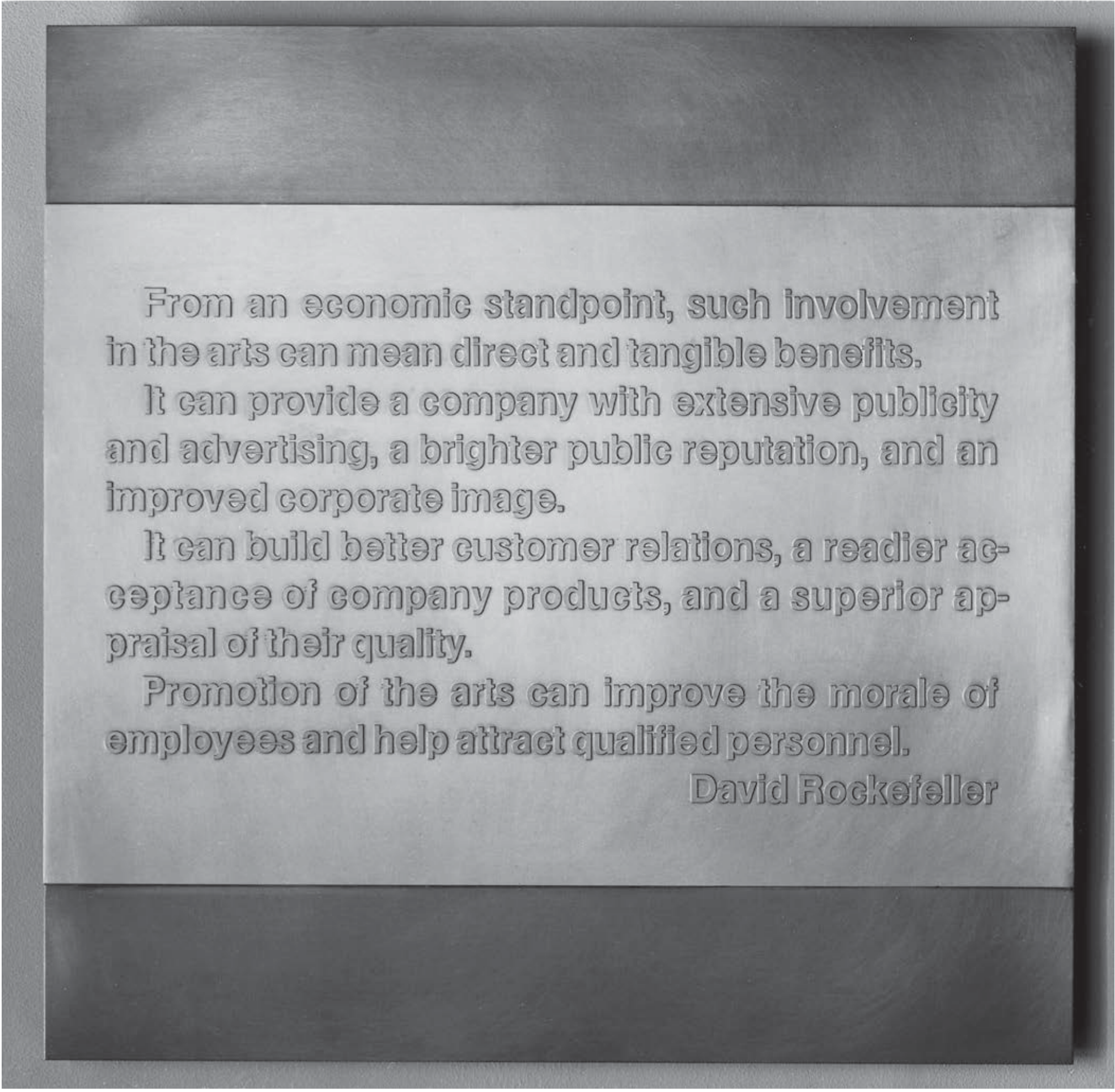
1) Haacke, H. (1983/2006). Art in America (New York) 72, no. 2 (February 1984): 9-17.



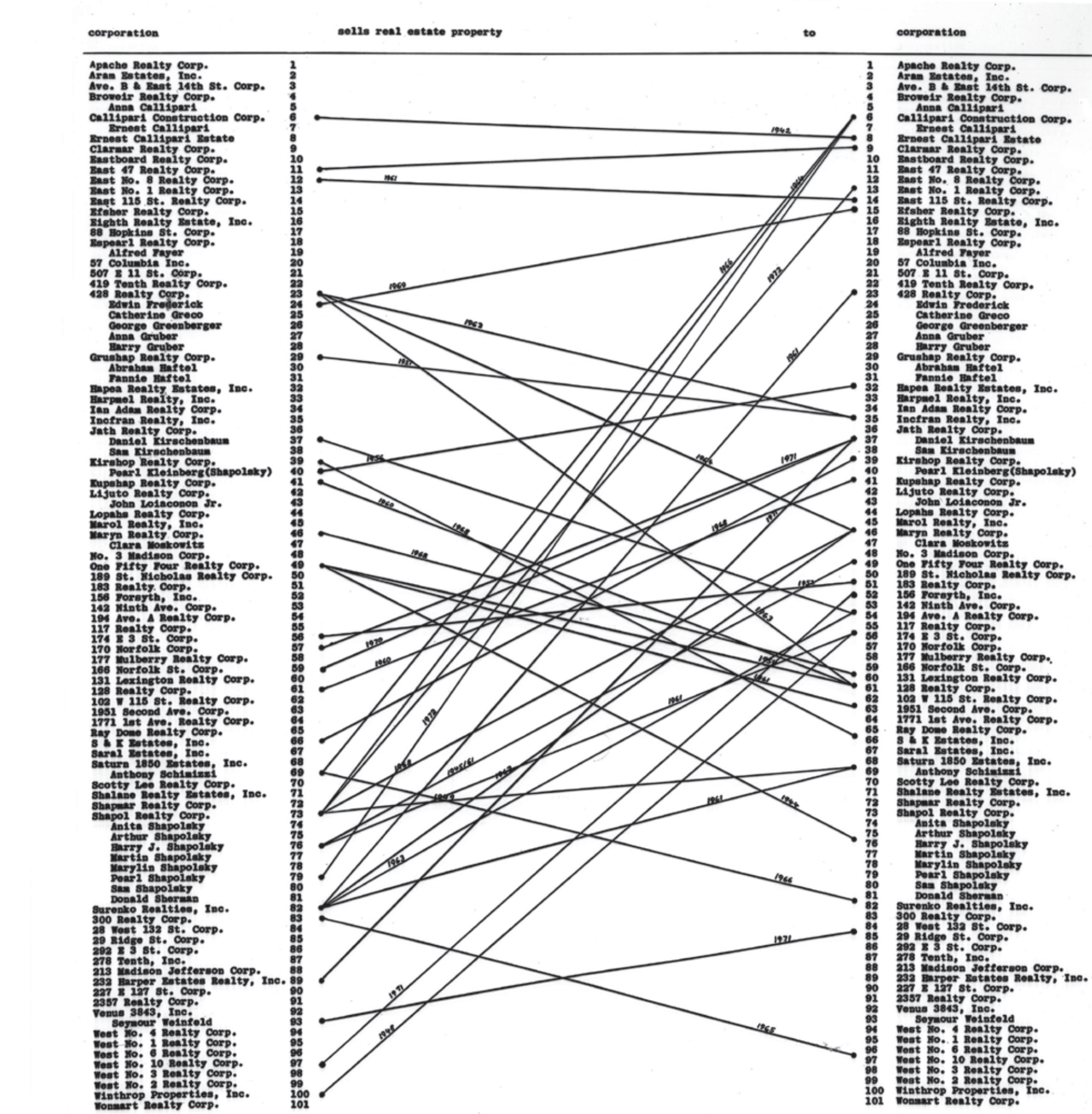
Sanitation, 2000 (detail). © Hans Haacke / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Collection Gilbert and Lila Silverman.



Sanitation, 2000 (detail). © Hans Haacke / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Collection Gilbert and Lila Silverman.



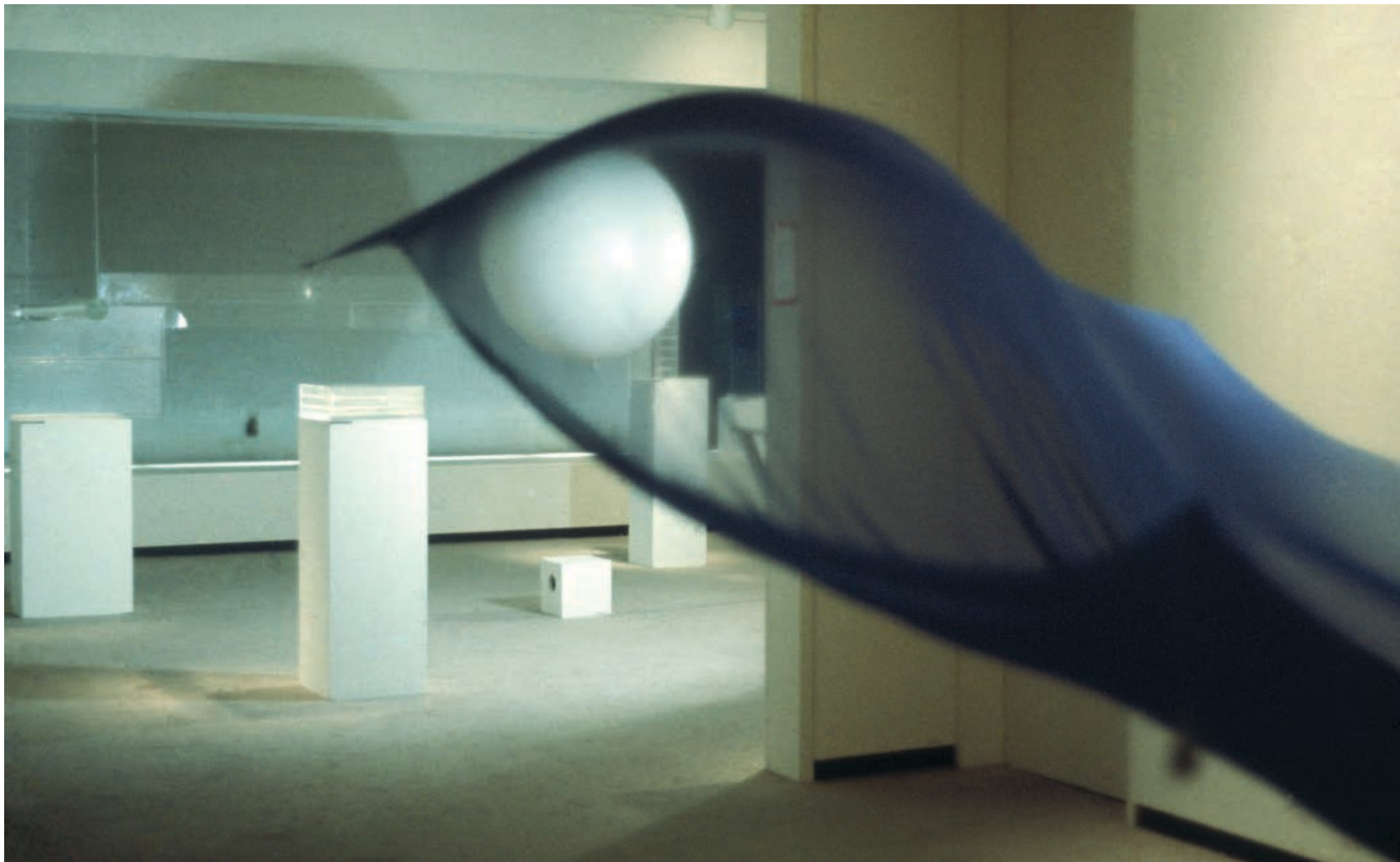
On Social Grease, 1975 (detail). 1 of 6 plaques. © Hans Haacke / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph by Walter Russell. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York Collection Gilbert and Lila Silverman.



Installation view, *NUL*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1965. © Hans Haacke / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



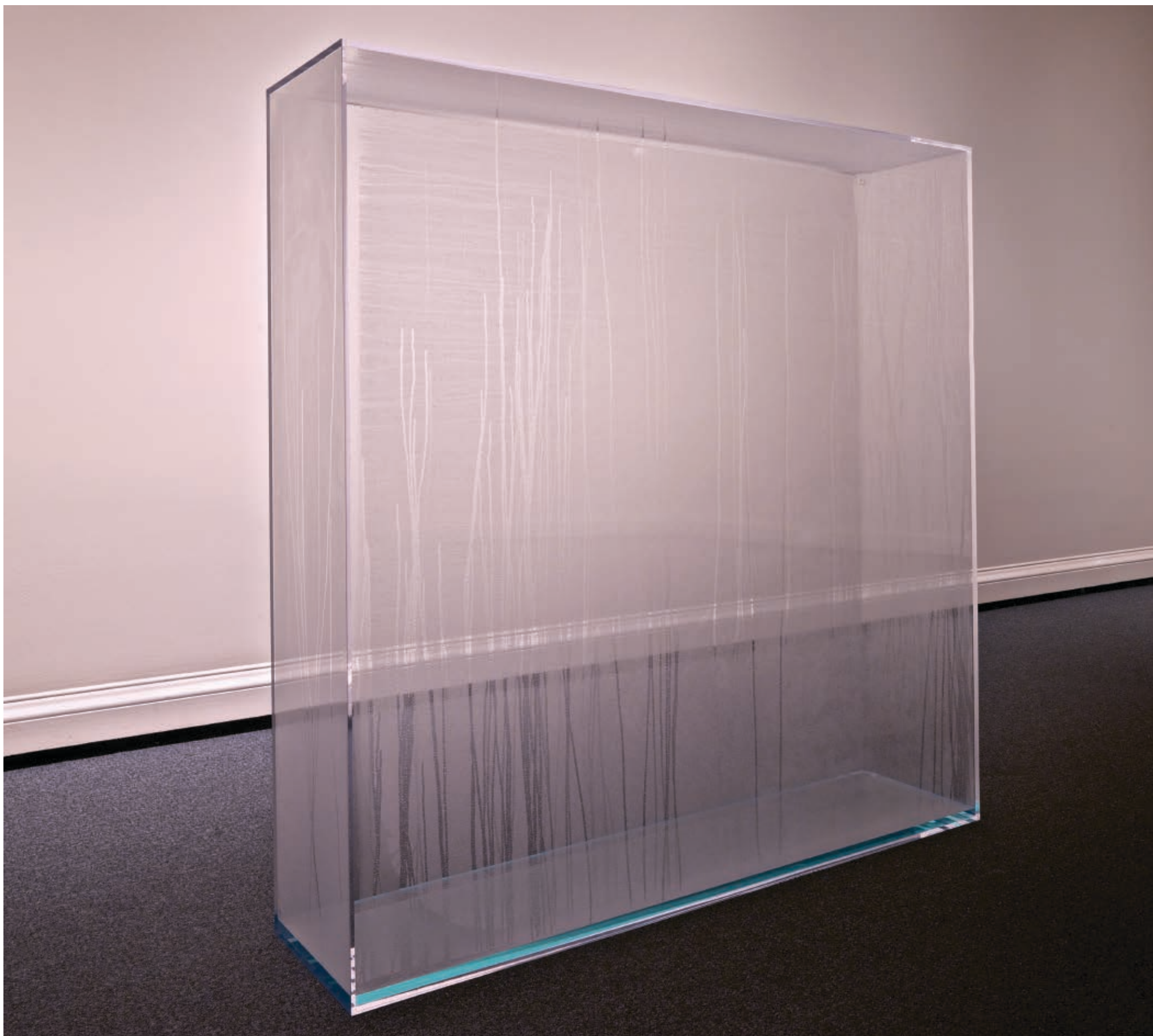
Sky Line, 1967. Solo exhibition, MIT, 1967. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph by Hans Haacke. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



Blue Sail, 1964-65. Chiffon, oscillating fan, fishing weights and thread, dimensions variable. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Hans Haacke. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



Shapolsky et al. *Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System*, as of May 1, 1971, 1971. Two maps (photo enlargements), each 24 x 20 inches, 142 photos and 142 typewritten sheets, each 10 x 8 inches, 6 charts, each 24 x 20 inches, one explanatory panel, 24 x 20 inches. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Edition 1 of 2: Collection of Centre Pompidou, Paris. Edition 2 of 2: Jointly owned by MACBA, Barcelona and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



Condensation Wall, 1963-66. Acrylic plastic, distilled water, 70 x 70 x 16 inches. Edition 1 of 3: Collection Jill and Peter Kraus; Edition 2 of 3: Collection National Gallery, Washington, D.C.; Edition 3 of 3: Collection Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany. © Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo Lee Ewing. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Jacolby
Satterwhite
THIEF OF HEARTS

In Conversation With
Jarrett Earnest

"She's a thief of hearts, someone please arrest her!"

One sweaty summer I saw on Instagram that Jacolby Satterwhite and I were both in Miami, so I sent him a note. A few nights later I picked him up outside a party. As he hopped in the car I suggested we go to a trashy bathhouse in southwest Miami called Club Aqua. He laughed, "Put on Madonna—Thief of Hearts!"

Just like that, I adored Jacolby Satterwhite, in the same way I immediately loved his art. Satterwhite is known for phantasmagoric animated videos in which he uses his own body to create gyrating architectures and mythological narratives—a 3D Hieronymus Bosch. We met back up in New York to discuss his background in figurative painting, his thoughts on digital abstraction, and the difficulties of using bodies as signs.

You came out of painting and drawing: What was your painting like, and what interested you in it?
When I was at the height of my painting investigations I was mostly influenced by New Leipzig school painters like Neo Rauch. And I liked South African painters like Marlene Dumas. I was really into figuration. I was also into classical painting, as well as Phillip Guston. Peter Doig is still one of my favorites. I have an eclectic range of interests. I am a formalist and I was interested in the medium, the viscosity of it—I was romantically involved with the tactility. I had a very romantic approach, but it was too romantic.

I approach my current practice with the mindset of a painter. I still mix a palette, but I no longer grab my palette and my palette knife and get my reds and oranges and just go ham—I don't spend three hours on that anymore. Instead, I spend three hours building a digital palette, literally. Maybe that means changing the color of two thousand figures and sorting them. I build compositions first and write essays and then outsource other bodies, then I Google various random found-footage imagery, and then I work in Maya, a 3D animation program. I use all these variable and methods to generate storylines, to generate composition.

To go back for a second to your pre-digital moment: Were you interested in abstraction in painting?
I've always been interested in abstraction. When I was a teenager, I was deeply into the Bauhaus, and I read about all the corny stuff like Kandinsky. Then I got into Josef Albers and abstract sculpture like Lee Bontecou and Eva Hesse. I was interested in mid-century abstraction and formalism, then somehow segued into still-life paintings and got into Morandi. Then in my early twenties, I wanted to get away from rules and stuff, so I lost interest in the theory behind painting and the politics behind abstraction. I was trying to figure out an autonomous, apolitical voice as a painter so that I would have the freedom to live in my own meta-narrative. Now I don't have to think about anything but my personal mythology. I build up my own lexicon and that is what makes me happy.

How do abstraction and figuration work differently in painting than in the digital work you are making now?
They are physical in different ways—the tactility is different. They are both sexual. Actually, the only difference is that they are different. They are so similar—I don't feel like I'm doing anything different. I'm trying to make the same image I was trying to make as a painter; it just happens to move. My body is involved. Touch is way more involved.

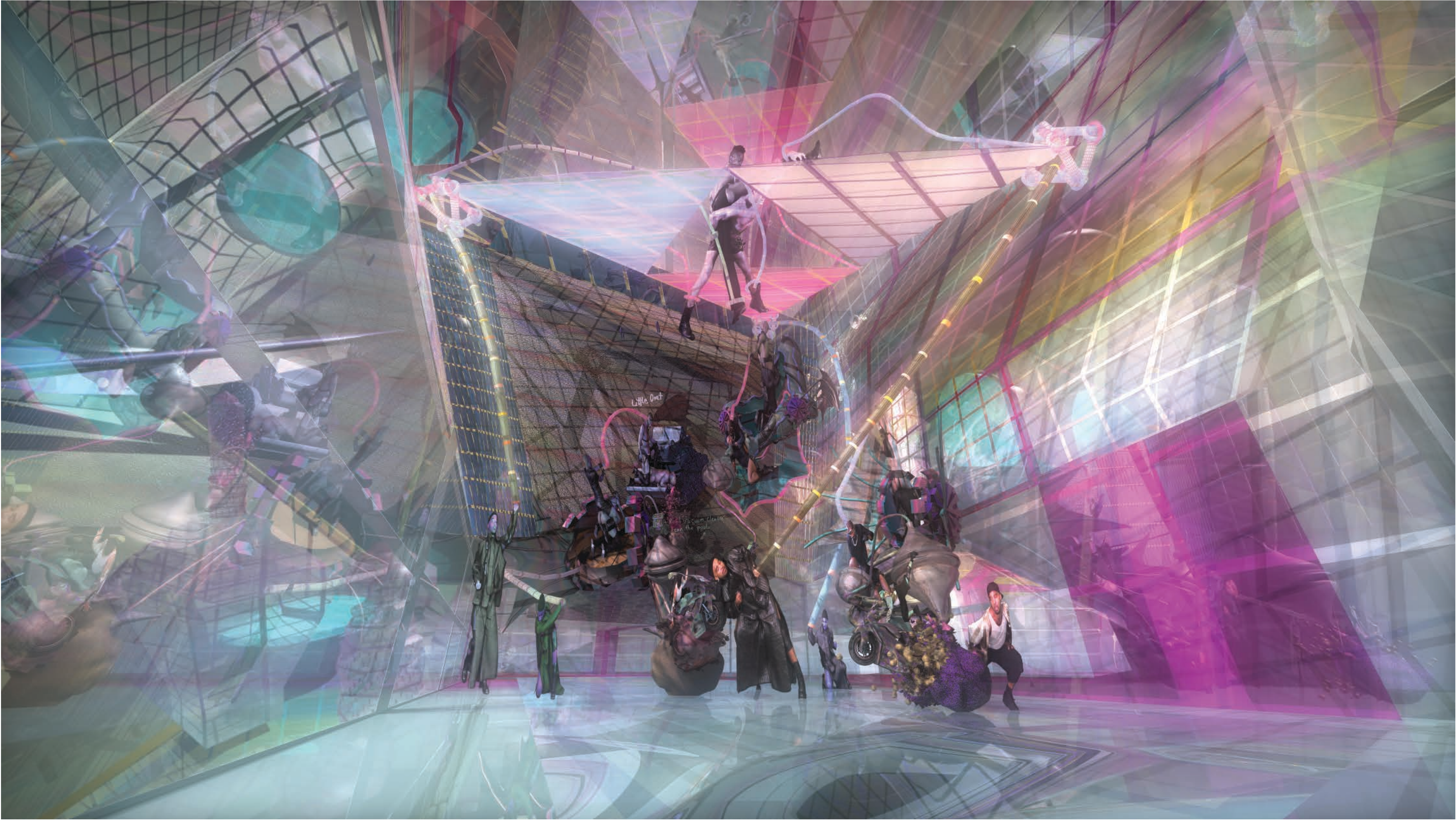
Could you explain how touch works digitally?
When I was painting, I had 600 brushes, so there was a certain kind of physical labor that was immediate. When I make my videos I use a Wacom pad and trace my mother Patricia Satterwhite's drawings in the 3D program. I spend a month building and sculpting her drawings and tracing the lines and zooming in on her graphite, really figuring out how to manifest her vision—it winds up being so analog. It's not like I just insert something into a program and *whoop* it's 3D. It's not a magic

trick; it's very much about drawing, it's very much about making a preliminary sketch. Then, after I've sculpted these drawings, I have to color them and do gradations and figure out what palette I'll use. I might decide, "I don't want tertiaries, I want neutrals," or, "I want to deal with more muddy palettes." So I color every single one of her lines while streaming *Scandal* or *Entourage* on HBO GO because the process is repetitive. Then I'll ride my bike up north to the studio and spend a week with a bad back wearing twenty different leotards in front of my green screen. I have a purple leotard, an ochre one, a cheetah-print one: those are different characters, different colors, different bodies. I think of the leotards as a way to define my palette because of the specific ways color signifies when you see it in a video. Then I go back in Adobe After Effects and abstract the leotards: changing the ochre into a pink, changing the purple into a teal, building two thousand different characters who have different William Forsythe-style movements that emerge in the composition. My movements are based on composition because the way I build geometry is with squats and dips and twirls. If you look at my new compositions, these Boschian, Rubensian situations, they're very *painterly*. They're very much about space and trying to figure out the compositional curiosities I had as a painter—I don't see it any differently.

Your new C-prints are eight by eleven feet. When you make an image at that scale, how does it relate to the person looking at it? When most people think of digital media they think of a computer screen, or maybe an animated film. But this seems to relate to a grander, almost billboard scale.
I'm exploiting Maya's technology for getting crisp images at large scales. Working with this amount of detail is deliberate because it makes the image a time-based experience; there is so much to absorb and take in. The scale being eight foot by eleven feet, your eye has to travel in a certain way that requires time. An Agnes Martin requires your time, but in a different way; with this, you can't consume everything without looking left, right, up, down, and arching your back and zooming in—it's a very bodily experience. Because Maya can print things 84 by 60 inches at 400 dpi, I can really play with those potentialities of detail and space. I was trying to make paintings like this a long time ago—they were simpler than 500 bodies but they definitely had a certain kind of Polly Pocket, *Final Fantasy* aesthetic.



Tropical Cream, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff.



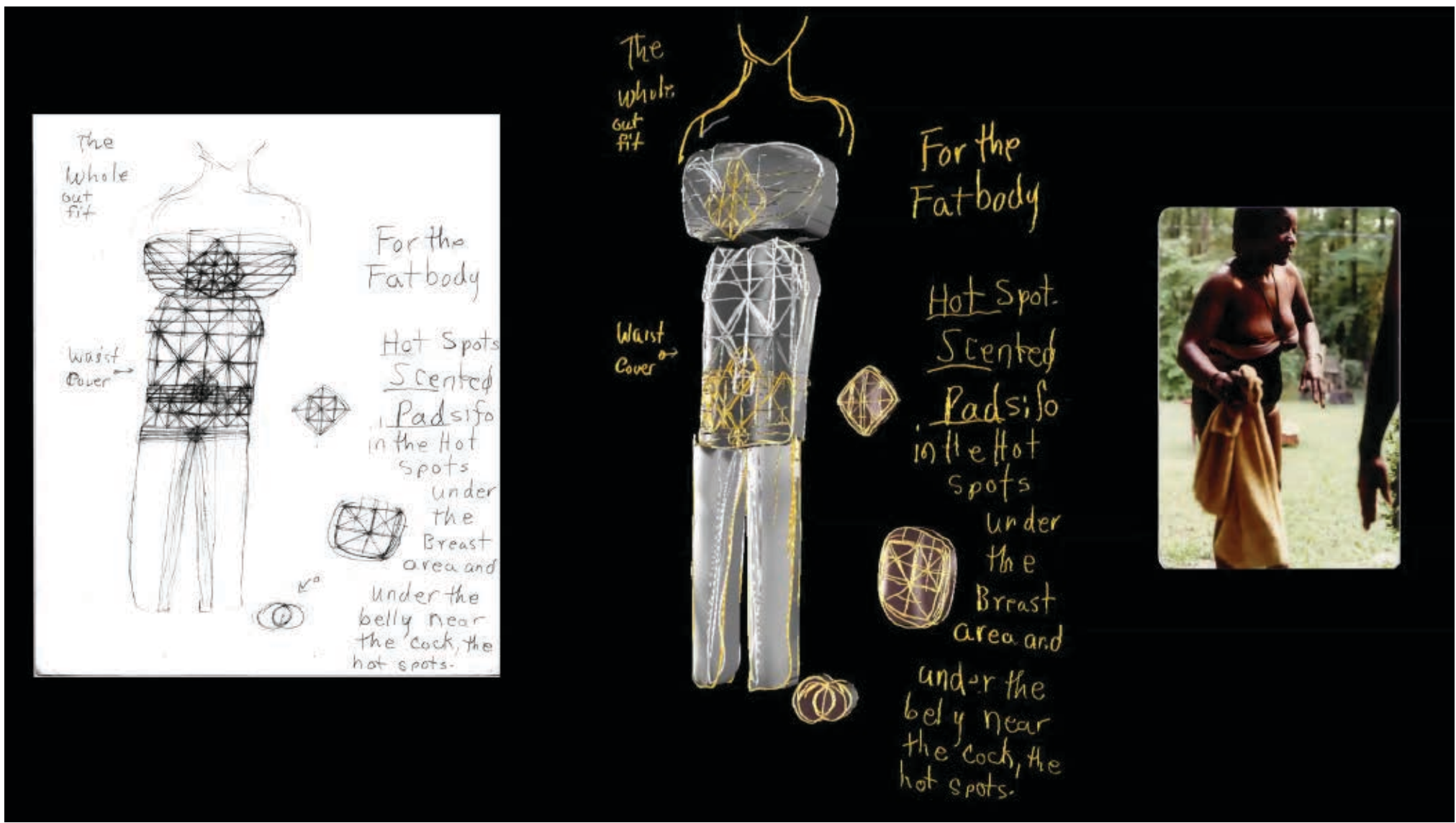
Factory Two, 2015. C-print, 45 × 80 inches. Edition of 2 + 1AP. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff.



Interstate 75, 2015. C-print, 78 × 60 inches. Edition of 2 + 1AP. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff.



Leopard Interstate, 2015. C-print, 45 × 80 × 3 inches. Edition of 2 + 1AP. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff.



The Matriarch's Rhapsody (still), 2012. HD digital video with color 3D animation, 43 minutes 47 seconds. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff.



The Matriarch's Rhapsody (still), 2012. HD digital video with color 3D animation, 43 minutes 47 seconds. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff.



The Matriarch's Rhapsody (still), 2012. HD digital video with color 3D animation, 43 minutes 47 seconds. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff.

I'm interested in your relationship to drawing and what it means to re-draw all of your mother's drawings. How do you learn from drawing as a process or tool?

I'm a colorist. I lose myself in my mother's line and I can use her language as a vessel, as a backdoor strategy to indulge some surrealist tendency. She gives me a means by which to focus on color, texture, and space. I don't like line necessarily, but when dealing with its actual construction, I think formalism is important.

What does formalism mean to you?

I think formalism is the foundation of art; for sculpture and painting and drawing, formalism just means line, color, shape, space, light—it's like focusing on the objective component in order to build more subjectively. I really make sure that I have as many objective variables as possible before I start going into the juicy stuff: the content, the politics, the porn stars, and Trina. I want to build the most beautiful abstract, dense, and explosive space possible before I start to give in to my impulses toward perversion. I think that if you really dedicate yourself to the craft of things, the poetry that lives beneath it can come out, giving everything so much more agency and strength, and it allows you to feel more confident when making quick, honest gestures. I put so much labor in my work so that I can be very honest when I get to the actual idea. You could spend four months researching and re-researching and making up a manifesto about a certain conceptual idea and it could wind up being stuffy and suffocated and dead and dishonest. It's like when you're a dancer and you improvise movement for an hour, building up rhythms—it's very direct and honest. I'm pursuing many ways to be direct.

How does your idea of abstraction relate to being direct?

That is the whole definition of abstract. In the 1950s, it was a very bodily thing: de Kooning with a big brush that slams against the surface and makes an "honest" mark—it's visceral, it's performative. It is what it is: it isn't an illusion. It's flat. I think the flatness in abstraction can yield truth.

Are you interested in truth?

I'm interested in my truth. I'm interested in my pleasure, and my pleasure is my truth. So if I make something that gives me pleasure, it's true because I feel fucking good, therefore if you look at it you're going to get some truth.

How do you think about the identity of "Jacolby Satterwhite" as a character in your work?

I'm a performance artist, so I'm naturally going to be a loaded presence in my work because I'm physically in it. All the metonymy of "Jacolby Satterwhite" is in the work. I use my background as one of the building blocks for my narrative.

How did you start doing performances?

Really randomly, as an undergrad. I used to carry around my mother's drawings. One day an instructor asked us to bring in something that we didn't feel was art. I brought in this work I had made recently: my family photographs next to my mother's drawings. I was interested in the synthesis between her drawings and what was actually happened in the past. She was doing schematics of her memories through objects, like the pocketbook that she hit her husband with in 1988; she made a drawing of the pocketbook and the mason jars that were next to it. So I thought to put family photographs next to those drawings. I was interested in that binary.

Then when I started really looking at the drawings I thought, "These are really interesting, I want to make these into a sculpture." I made a costume based on one of her drawings—I sewed some Leigh Bowery thing. Then I thought, "You know, these drawings are kind of like performance scores from the '60s. They're like Fluxus—they have words, the objects are like memories, and the photographs are like performance relics. Why not find a way to manifest these in the future as performances?" I was trying to physically manifest different aspects of the drawings: dancing in public in Central Park,

Times Square, Philadelphia. I started doing these movement pieces and building installations that referenced the objects in the drawings. There were objectives: I saw the drawings as instructions for tasks. It was a failure but really provocative at the same time—there was something happening by trying to force these disparate ideas together, trying to pressure something that doesn't belong to belong. I'm always trying to merge a cluster of ideas that normally don't belong.

Then I went to grad school and we had more conversations about those videos and I liked the way the conversation was going. I liked that they weren't talking about "history" and "politics"; they were talking about *me*. I liked the immediacy of my own body, which produced a discourse, so I decided to focus on the performances. Then I decided I really missed painting, so I taught myself animation. I bought After Effects with a tax refund check and started playing with footage I had collected of myself performing in the woods. I wanted to draw on top of the footage, basically to make it a digital painting. With rotoscoping and tracing frame-by-frame, I made these performative, animated/live-action videos that I really enjoyed. I love post-production. I love the magic and abstraction of digital media. At some point, through a lot of trial and error in the programs, I discovered I could trace Patricia Satterwhite's drawings into these pipe forms and planes and actually manifest them into a landscape, and within that landscape I could put the figures. This was so important, because I could have my cake and eat it too. I could be the painter I always wanted to be, the performance artist I always wanted to be, and the music video person I always wanted to be—everything just came together. Then I started really going ham on it and studied 3D animation and the potentials of Maya—there are still so many possibilities.

Basically, there is an arsenal of language that I'm trying to intersect with the body, the performance, the painting language, the landscape language, and the idea of combining live-action and mediating it with animation. There is just so much going on and so many networks to negotiate. Putting it out to the public was a way of extending the frame, putting the characters outside of the world that I built and having them manifest a visceral form.

Did you study dance?

My brother was a dancer and I had a very dance-y family. I've gotten much more sophisticated with my dance style. I didn't study it, but I went to a boarding school with a dance program, so I'd go to recitals and look at people. I looked at a lot of dance scores. I hung around with my voguing friends as a kid—they went to balls and stuff. The influence is real, but I didn't start to hone in and become a better dancer, take care of my body, and go to the gym until I started doing these green-screen performances. I'm much better now than I was even a year ago. I've infinitely improved; I have restraint as a performer. When I'm in a green-screen video, I have a specific agenda with my movement; when you limit your movement with an objective, you have to become creative with how you move that arm from left to right. When you start to develop a range within limited movement, you become a better dancer, and that is what's happening. I'm learning how to be a dancer through finding a system for my own style of dancing—it's not voguing, it's not modern—I'm building a style that fits the content of my work.

A lot of your work plays with the relationship between the physical body and the image of the body—e.g. between the aesthetics of online porn and that of actual sex. How do you see that dynamic unfold?

What I like about the physical body is that—whether it's Trina or Antonio Baggio or me or the random guy on the street—we all represent something. Our bodies are like a font; everyone has a specific representation of their identity and it's very reductive: like "white male" or "camp diva wearing sequins and hair weave." I think every body is a loaded essay; if I cast someone in my work, I give it some forethought. Using Antonio Baggio for me was a very deliberate, meta thing. I wanted someone who is famous for breeding and bareback porn to go with the fact

that I was breeding a new language in my work—the whole thing was a world-building video. All these things kept birthing. Landscapes kept manifesting. I knew my work was about to transition to a different place, so I wanted to make a piece where this guy inseminates me with a new language. After he comes in me, an egg comes out, and when it hatches, there are thousands of people inside. The older work was just me and my body in some obscure, eccentric space. But the more I make pieces, the more specific they get; I wanted a bareback porn star to birth that specificity. That is why I used him.

How do you think narrative operates in the films?

I concoct narrative in a surrealist way. An example of one process: I write a list of 30 items in my mother's drawings. I'll write: shopping cart, shoe, roller coasters, teacup, butcher-knife, tampons with robotic digital devices implanted in them—then I put them into Microsoft Word and I try to fill them in and make sentences out of that list, which makes absolutely no sense. Then I try and clean them up and allow that to guide the landscape I'm building in the animation. It's my subconscious, honest space, what it yields. I don't even really understand, but it definitely shows my tendencies, my repetitions. Then I have to negotiate how to make that concrete, to reify it. That is how I build narrative. I'll observe a motif I'm interested in and then think, "You know who would be the perfect person for this particular idea, this particular thing that I'm repeating in this stream-of-consciousness essay?" *Trina*." Then I pursue her and put her in the video. I take risks by trying to stay faithful to nonsense. To make nonsense sensible—that is to put it within a grid and try to sew it together—that process of making abstract video is similar to making an abstract painting; you make a bunch of marks and try and make them have harmony. I feel I'm trying to bring disparate languages together to build harmony in my videos.

The last thing I want to ask you about is sci-fi aesthetics or the conceptual apparatus of science fiction. What does it give you?

My work is futuristic, stylistically, and the medium lends itself to that. I do love fantasy. I've beaten every video game, those nerdy lock-yourself-away-for-300-hours kind of games. I was deeply into those and they shaped my image preferences. Also, the impetus behind fantasy is that you can deal with heavy politics if it's masked in spectacle; everyone will just get lost in the spectacle. It's like a scapegoat for really advanced ideas. Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* was an AIDS movie but everyone thought it was about a wolf running through a landscape biting people's arm and giving them lesions. That is what anime can do—talk about Hiroshima, bombs, and the bad economy. *Spirited Away* was about child prostitution, which you didn't even realize because it was so magical; there were so many dragons. I am talking about a schizophrenic woman who has been homebound for 15 years, and I'm talking about meth heads and bareback porn stars and raunchy ex-stripper rappers, but putting them behind the lens of science fiction aesthetics to allow them to dissolve into something beautiful. I think that is what my science fiction does.

What do you think is being talked about in art right now that makes sense, and what do you feel has nothing to do with you?

I don't think I have anything to do with being "post-Internet." I don't even know what that means. "Post-black" doesn't make any sense either. Both post-Internet and post-black are basically saying: take politics and make something pretty with it—use the aesthetics as a device. But really, put me in any category you want—I think that is what art is about: everybody can be contextualized by each other. We are all living and breathing at the same time in the same city, and we are all drinking the same Kool-Aid whether we want to believe it or not. And when the history books are written there will be a spiderweb between A, B, and C. You can look at all these people who didn't want to identify with each other, but at the end they were all in the same conversation, they were all like: "fuck de Kooning and Elaine—I'm *me*"; "fuck Warhol's faggot ass—I'm *me*"; "fuck Philip Guston's traitor ass—I'm *me*." In the end, they were all drinking the Kool-Aid.



Genesis Region Two, 2015. Wallpaper, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Moran Bondaroff.

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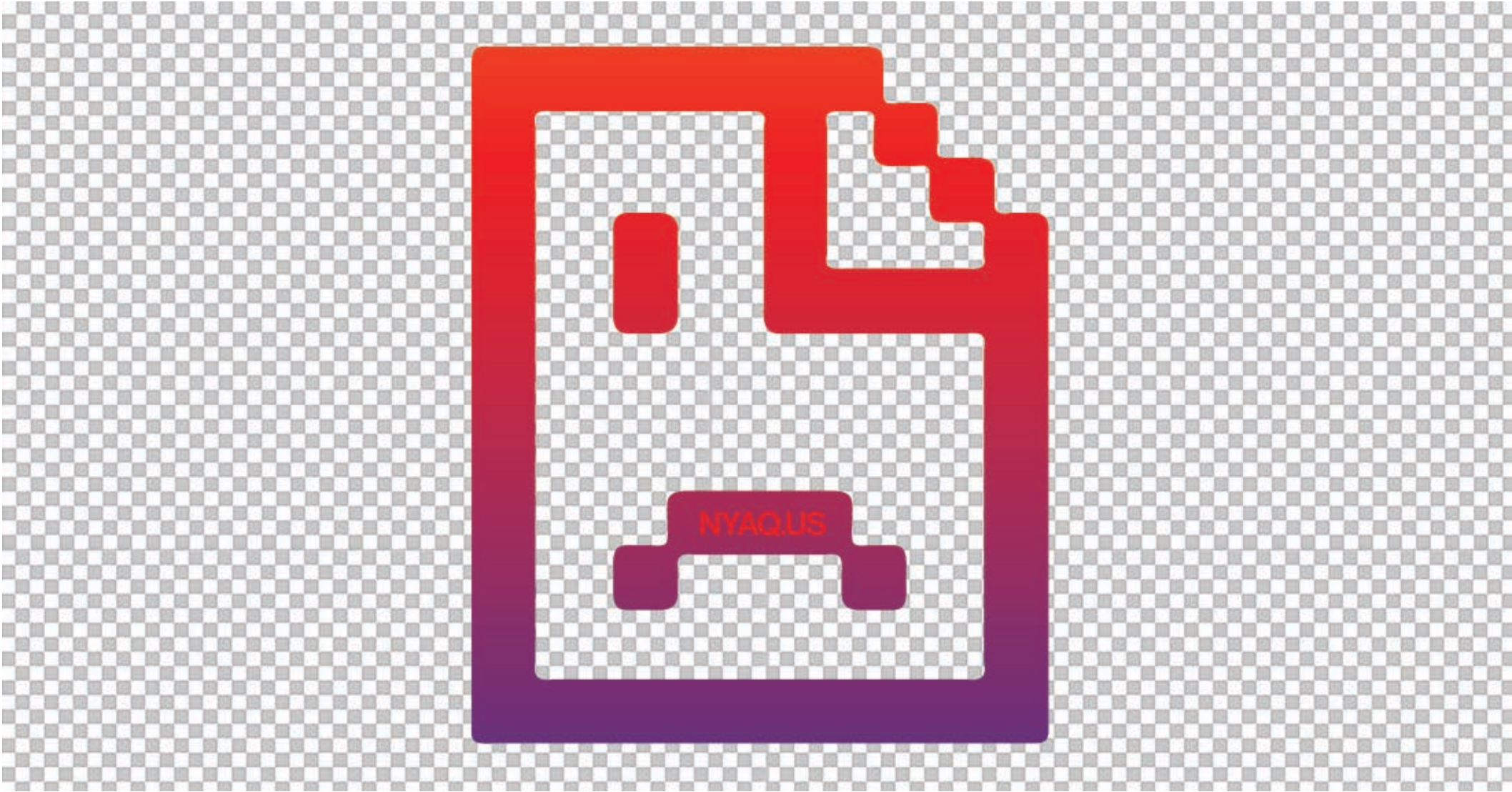
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Cover Image:
HANS HAACKE
MOMA-Poll, 1970. 2 transparent ballot boxes with automatic counters, color-coded ballots, each 40 x 20 x 10 inches, paper ballot: 3 x 2 1/2 inches. © Hans Haacke / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.





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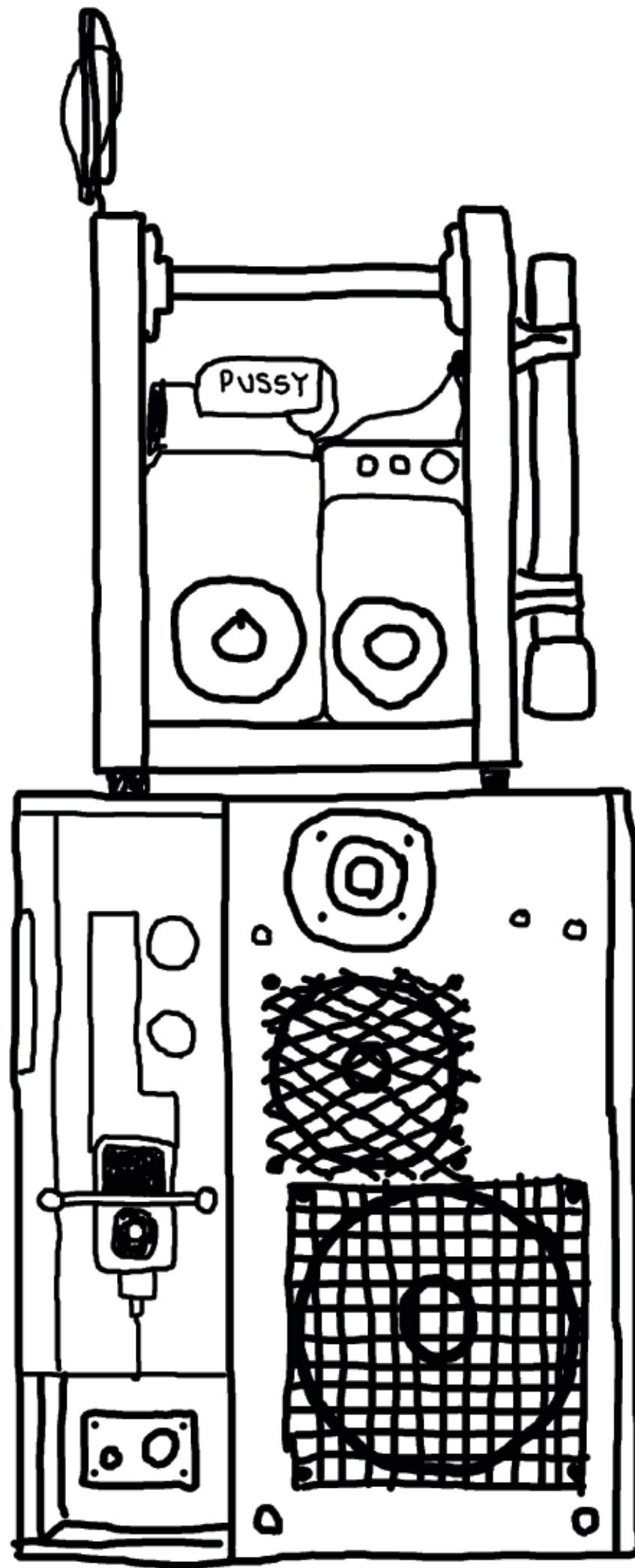
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Tom Sachs

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San Jose, Calif.: Angela Davis, militant on trial for alleged activities in connection with Marin County Court shootout, attends her first news conference since being released on bail, February 24th, 1972. © Bettmann/CORBIS.

Angela Davis *The Meaning of Freedom* • **Jepchumba** *The Rise Of African Digital Art* • **Indira Allegra** *In Conversation With Sarah Biscarra Dilley* • **Sampada Aranke** *Style Wars: Shades Of Cool* • **John Rapko** *Up From Contemporaneity; Or, Why Do Curators Talk Like That? (Part 3)* • **New Contemporary Poetry** • **Mark Van Proyen** *On Point 2.10: Remembering James Albertson* • **John Held, Jr.** *Move Your Archives* **Millennial Collectors:** *Gary Yeh In Conversation With Anna Hygelund* • **Hera Büyüktaşçıyan** *Arie Amaya-Akkermans*

Angela Davis

The Meaning of Freedom

Metropolitan State College, Denver
February 15, 2008

Since the theme of this conference acknowledges the two hundreth anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in 1808, I decided to talk about the meaning of freedom. The conference theme emphasizes two hundred years of freedom. What has that freedom meant for people of African descent? What has that freedom meant for the black world? And what has been the relationship to communities that are differently racialized but which, nonetheless, suffer under cycles of oppression?

I suppose that very few people think about the fact that the institution of the prison has claimed a place at the very core of black history, particularly since the abolition of slavery. It has been a constant theme in the collective lives of black people in this country. It has also been a constant theme in the collective lives of Chicanos. And it is increasingly a major aspect of the lives of people who are racially oppressed in Europe, as well as in Latin America, and when one looks at the continent of Africa, one can readily see the extent to which the institution of the prison is actually beginning to replace institutions like education and health care.

When Carter G. Woodson proposed in 1926 that the nation annually set aside one week for the celebration of Negro History Week, he was confronting a dominant culture that almost totally marginalized black accomplishments, and it was important to transmit the message that we were capable of vastly more than white-supremacist society attributed to black communities.

Then, of course, a half-century later the celebration was extended to the entire month. The month of February offers us a kind of microcosm of the history of the black world. February is the month, as far as the United States of America is concerned, when the Fifteenth Amendment authorized black male suffrage.

February is significant to black history of many other reasons as well. The Freeman's Aid Society was founded in February. W. E. B. DuBois was born on February 23, 1868, and it was on February 23, 1972, that I was released on bail. But it was also during the month of February that W. E. B. DuBois convened the first Pan-African Congress in 1919 to urge people of African descent throughout the world to unite in order to stand up against European imperialism. February was also the month when the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Martin Luther King's organization, was established, and when the students staged sit-ins at the lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina. That was in February of 1960. We could actually continue to do a whole panorama of black history by looking at key events that happened during the month of February.

What I'd like to say now is that Black History Month seems to have become an occasion to generate profit. If you look at the Walmart Web site, Walmart, which is the largest corporation in the world, you will see how they urge you to celebrate black history by buying their products. Wal-Mart, as the largest corporation in the world, demonstrates the impact that global capitalism has had on our lives and the conditions of neoliberalism under which we live and think. Through Walmart's action we see how capitalism has insinuated itself into our desires, our dreams, and our ways of thinking about ourselves. We commodify ourselves when we talk about how we're going to market ourselves. So keep that in mind as we go back and look at some aspects of black history.

We most frequently celebrate Black History Month by evoking a collection of narratives about individual black people who managed to overcome the barriers created by the racism of the past, whereas we should have a broader conception of what

it means to celebrate the legacies of black history, and those legacies should not be confined simply to people of African descent. I'm thinking of someone like Yuri Kochiyama, who is a Japanese American woman who has for the overwhelming majority of her life—and she's about 82 years old now—worked in the civil rights movement, worked to free political prisoners. She was with Malcolm X when he was assassinated, and there is a picture of her cradling Malcolm X's head in her hands as he lay dying. We don't necessarily bring Yuri Kochiyama into our celebrations of Black History Month. Or Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez, who was one of the most amazing activists in the early civil rights movement.

We celebrate individuals, but we also evoke the legislative and court victories that have helped to produce a black subject that putatively enjoys equality before the law. Therefore, we rightly celebrate the abolition of the slave trade in 1808, and we also celebrate the Thirteenth Amendment that we think abolished slavery, and we celebrate the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which one of the candidates insisted could only be the work of a president, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Many of these legislative moments were attempts to confront and eradicate the vestiges of slavery.

I think that all of us, regardless of our racial or ethnic background, feel relieved that we no longer have to deal with the racism and the sexism associated with the system of slavery. But we treat the history of enslavement like we treat the genocidal colonization of indigenous people in North America, as if it was not that important, or worse, as if never really happened. We think of it as a kind of nightmare. And, as is often the case with nightmares, we try not to think about it except in abstract terms, and we assume that it will go away. One of the amazing contributions of a group of black women writers, beginning, say, in the 1980s, was to think about slavery and to imagine the subjectivities of persons who were enslaved and not allow us to continue to think in these abstract categories.

The institution of the prison tells us that the nightmare of slavery continues to haunt us. If we actually learn how to recognize the forms of racism and sexism that are at the structural core of the prison system, that means we'll have to develop a very different idea about the state of democracy in the United States of America, particularly with respect to its victories over racism and sexism. We hear the Bush administration constantly evoking the civil rights movement as the completion of democracy in the United States, American democracy.

The theme of this gathering is how to end cycles of oppression. I want to talk about that by making the connection between slavery and the contemporary prison system. First I want to say that the emancipation that awaited enslaved people in 1863, people whose history under slavery had been primarily a history of striving for freedom, was a constrained emancipation. The joyful noise of freedom to which W. E. B. DuBois refers in *Black Reconstruction* had to fend off the forms of unfreedom that were tenaciously clinging to the emancipation offered to the slaves. What did it mean to be a former slave who was free? What did that freedom mean? DuBois talks about the spectacular dimensions of this newfound freedom, and there were spectacular dimensions, because black people for the first time had the freedom to learn, the freedom to try to get an education, the freedom to create schools, with what meager resources were there, the freedom to travel for the first time. But, of course, this was a gendered freedom, because it was mostly black men who were able to take advantage of the freedom to travel.

They also had the sexual freedom to choose their own sexual partners, which we might minimize today, but considering that there were so many other dimensions of freedom that were not available to the enslaved people who had been "set free," that sexual freedom became so important that it becomes the major theme of the first popular music to be produced in the aftermath of slavery: the blues.

Sexual freedom then becomes a metaphor for other kinds of freedom, for political freedom, for economic freedom. But these

forms of freedom were shrouded in unfreedom. The enslavers whose activity was abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation, and then later by amendment to the Constitution, did not surrender so easily to words. It strikes me to be very strange that over the decades we have assumed that it was possible to abolish slavery simply by proclamation, a few words here, and by a clause in the Constitution, when that proclamation and that constitutional amendment never clearly explain how they understand slavery.

So we don't even clearly know what was supposed to be abolished. Was it chattel slavery? Was it treating human beings as property? Human beings are still bought and sold and still treated as property, including people like Shaquille O'Neal, who just got traded, right? Was it about coerced labor? We know there is so much coerced labor, and we look at ways in which undocumented immigrants are treated and we see a very similar mode of labor. As a result, I don't think that the U.S. Constitution successfully abolished coercive labor. What about the whole scaffolding of racist ideology that was necessary to keep an entire people enslaved? Did that get abolished? So why do we assume that slavery was abolished?

Slavery was a part of the warp and woof of American life, especially in the South, but also in the North. And words alone were not sufficient to make it go away. If slavery was declared dead, it was simultaneously reincarnated through new institutions, new practices, new ideologies. We can think about the ways in which the institutions of punishment have served as receptacles for these structures and ideologies of enslavement that were translated into the terms of freedom—slavery translated into the terms of freedom. What have these generations of "freedom" meant since the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment? Both the prison and the fate of former slaves would be inextricably linked to the struggle for democracy in this country. So when we talk about the relationship between slavery and the prison, we're also talking about the nature of democracy, or what goes under the rubric of democracy in this country.

Prison continues to reflect the closure of the doors of democracy to major sectors of the U.S. population. We can say that one of the major aspects of slavery was social death. That also included civil death. That meant that slaves could not participate in the political arena or in civil life. So what about felon disenfranchisement today? What about the fact that there are 2.2 million people behind bars on any given day? Statistics can be deceptive. Many of us know that figure, 2.2 million, but that only reflects a census survey: It's the average number of people who are in prison on any given day. If you look at the number of people who go in and out of the prison and jail system over the course of a year, that's going to be approximately 13 million people. So that's much more vast than we have the habit of thinking about.

The vast majority of these millions of people come from communities of color. This has to do with the increasingly restrictive and repressive nature of U.S. society. There is a majority of black people in prison throughout the country, but if you look at my state, California, the majority of people in California are Latinos and Chicanos.

The Structural Racism of the Prison

What's very interesting is that people don't get convicted anymore because they are black or because they are Chicano. But there are structures of racism that makes race matter in terms of determining who goes to prison, particularly who gets to go to prison and who gets to go to colleges and universities. How can we think about that structural racism? What is the relationship between the structural racism of slavery and the racism that is inscribed in the very processes that create trajectories that lead inevitably toward incarceration or higher education?

The structural racism of the prison can also be held responsible for the persistence of racism in the so-called free world. We are encouraged to think about racial equality as produced by adopting postures of color-blindness, right? We are told that all



Miguel Angel Ríos, *Piedras Blancas*, 2014, HD video, 5:31 minutes, Edition of 6 + 2AP

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September 11, 2016

Bruce Davidson, *Brooklyn Gang*, 1959, 1959. Mid-vintage gelatin silver print.
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we have to do is not notice race and racism is going to leave, it will go away. So there is a kind of learned ignorance, because we can see race, but we know we are *not supposed to* see race. There is a kind of repression that oftentimes produces these many explosive expressions of racism. I can remember Michael Richards saying, “I’m not a racist. I don’t even know where that came from.” Increasingly, this is what people say. They can’t understand how it is that a racist observator escapes from their lips. There is a whole psychic reservoir of racism in this country. It’s in the structures, it’s in our collective psyche. All of us are affected by it. I’m not only talking about white people as the bearers of racism. I’m talking about ideologies and logics that inform the way all of us relate to the world.

Prisons, of course, thrive on class inequalities, they thrive on racial inequalities, they thrive on gender inequalities. They produce and reproduce those inequalities, because they segregate and isolate the individuals they punish. They also conceal the inequalities that they reproduce. The hidden danger of relying on incarceration as the major solution to behaviors that are often the by-products of poverty is that the solution reproduces the very problem it purports to solve. This is how we might begin to understand why the prison population constantly rises, not only in absolute numbers, but proportionately as well. It has nothing to do with the rise in crime statistics. As the rate of crime goes down, prison populations go up.

Of course, they reproduce these problems because funds almost inevitably migrate away from education and housing and health care toward what they call corrections. Therefore, one generation spawns another. The crime rate has fallen, but the incarceration rate has risen. In the United States, of course, a prison sentence on a felony charge is a life sentence, regardless of how many years one gets. It is a life sentence because of what someone like Marc Mauer calls “collateral consequences”—the collateral consequences of imprisonment that lead to social death, disenfranchisement. We wouldn’t have had to deal with the Bush administration over the last seven years had it not been for the case that due to felony disenfranchisement more than 600,000 people could not vote in Florida. In the 2000 elections there was only a 537-vote difference. So if a tiny minority of those 600,000 had been able to vote, we might have had an entirely different course of history.

If the prison is proposed as a solution to social issues, then other possibilities get excluded. Governor Schwarzenegger, the governor of the state in which I live, changed the name of the California Department of Corrections to the California Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. If we really want rehabilitation, then we have to start talking about decarceration. How is rehabilitation possible under conditions of total confinement? How is rehabilitation possible when there is no way that people can exercise their freedoms? As a matter of fact, that’s the whole point of the punishment as imprisonment: It deprives you of your rights and liberties. That is why the prison is a peculiarly democratic punishment. It is the quintessential democratic institution, because it provides you with the negation of that upon which the whole concept of bourgeois democracy has been developed.

In our society, the assumption is that if you are from a certain racialized community, you will have had some contact with the prison system. There was an interesting study that was conducted by a sociologist who matched black and white pairs of job applicants. Some of them indicated that they had a criminal conviction and some of them didn’t. What was very interesting was that white people who had a felony conviction were called back for interviews at the same rate as black people who had the same credentials but had no criminal record. The point that Marc Mauer makes is that black men are essentially born with the social stigma equivalent to a felony conviction. So we’re talking about an institution that not only affects those it incarcerates; it has an influence on entire communities.

The problem is not limited to black men. Women constitute, and have constituted for a while, the fastest-growing sector of the imprisoned population. And women of color, of course, constitute the largest group of women, therefore the fastest-growing population within the entire imprisoned population. This is not just the case in the United States. It’s true in Canada, it’s increasingly true in Europe, and it’s true in other countries as well.

If we look at who is in prison and why they are there, then it’s clear that race and class have much more to do with the overcrowding of these prison institutions than the existence of crime. Once people have spent time in prison, they are forever haunted by their status as prisoners. They are forever haunted by civil death. They are forever excluded from certain aspects of democratic participation in the society. So this is a way of understanding why black and Latino people are so easily labeled criminal, so easily identified as threats to law and order, and it helps us understand why people from those communities often

see their own sisters and brothers as the criminals, as the menaces and threats. The immigrant, for example, is scapegoated. The undocumented immigrant is seen as the enemy.

And there is a racialization of immigration. The post-colonial, post-Soviet, post-socialist immigration to this country involves people arriving here from all over the world, especially from Russia. But do we ever think about undocumented immigrants as Russian? Do we ever racialize them as white? So we begin to understand how the ideology of racism really infects the very logic of our thought and our relations to one another.

I want to talk for a moment about how this criminalization process, particularly with respect to black people, is anchored in slavery. And I want to make a connection between the democracy we think we now enjoy and the democracy that was offered to people of African descent in the aftermath of slavery. Even during slavery there was a contradiction in the way black people were thought about. We tend to think slavery meant that black people were treated as property, right? That’s chattel slavery. But then black people were punished, they were found guilty of crime. Can property be accountable? Can property be found culpable? There was something wrong there. As a matter of fact, you can say that even though black people were not acknowledged as having legal personality in most senses, when they committed a crime, they were accountable to the law, and therefore they were acknowledged as having legal personality.

This negative affirmation of the legal personality of black people continues to hold sway today. You might say that the proof of participation of black people in U.S. democracy is precisely the fact that they have received due process before being sentenced in such disproportionate numbers to prison. It is precisely as they appear before the law as equal subjects who get due process, precisely because they are considered accountable, or it’s through their culpability—does that make sense?—through their culpability that they participate in the democratic process. That reflects the contradiction of slavery, and that, I think, is an indication of one of the ways in which slavery continues to haunt us.

Before I complete my presentation I have to say something about corporate globalization. I have to say that corporate globalization has become the major threat to democracy in the world. But the problem is that capitalism represents itself as synonymous with democracy. That is what George Bush is talking about when he calls for the defense of democracy against terror. That is the democracy that the U.S. military is fighting to protect in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. It’s not democracy, it’s capitalism, or it’s a democracy that uses capitalism as its model, that sees the free market as the paradigm for freedom and that sees competition as the paradigm for freedom.

Corporations are linked to the global marketing of imprisonment. They reap enormous profits in this area—prisons at the expense of housing and health care and education and other social services. As a matter of fact, the neoliberal conception of economic freedom requires the government to withdraw from virtually all social services. The market is supposed to determine everything. Freedom emerges because the market will determine the distribution of education, the distribution of health care. And according to the Chicago boys, Milton Friedman and those people, it will even itself out. I guess they still believe in Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” that somehow or another freedom will reveal itself.

But when we look at the extent to which countries in the southern region have been devastated by the juggernaut of privatization, a country like South Africa, which is still, I suppose, our hope for a non-racist and non-sexist and non-homophobic society, they’re experiencing enormous problems precisely as a result of privatization that is required by the IMF and other international financial organizations as that which countries must do who wish to get international loans. It’s really scary.

We see that kind of structural adjustment happen in this country. That is why we are confronted with this crisis of health care and why health care has become totally privatized since the 1980s. There was an attempt to totally privatize the prison system as well. It worked in some places; it didn’t quite work in others. But we see the insinuation of private corporations into the prison system all over this country.

I wonder why we do not find it utterly shameful that it is possible now to visit countries in the global South and discover that while their educational systems and housing subsidies and jobs have deteriorated over the last quarter-century under the impact of globalization, it is often possible to discover a shiny new prison that would lead one to believe that one had been teleported back to Colorado or California. Of course, we use the term “prison-industrial complex” to point out that there is this global proliferation of prisons and prisoners that is more clearly linked to economic and political structures and ideologies than to individual criminal conduct and efforts to curb crime.

I wanted to say a few words about this prison-industrial complex that has this increasingly privileged place within the global economy and the way in which it serves to support the persistence of racism, but also how it has become a gendering apparatus. I don’t think we think about the fact that there are prisons for men and there are prisons for women. What about people who are gender-nonconforming? Because I think we’ve learned over the last period that there are more than two genders. So what happens to them? Where do they go? Where does a transgender woman get sent or a transgender man get sent or someone who doesn’t necessarily identify as male or female? Of course, the prisons rely on the old notions of biology, that biology has the answers for everything, so they inspect people’s genitals. It’s based on the genitalia that they get classified as a certain gender and therefore sent to certain prisons.

Then, of course, there are problems with violence. People often argue, well, if you send a transgendered woman to men’s prisons because she has male genitalia, she’s going to be subject to rape, because we know, we think, that rape is something that male prisoners begin to do once they go to prison. We don’t ask ourselves why, where does that come from? We don’t ask ourselves about the extent to which the institution itself promotes that violence, needs that violence, generates that sexual violence in order for the system to work. Then we see it happen in Abu Ghraib and we see it happen in Guantánamo, and we express such shock—this is not the way America is supposed to operate. However, if we look at what happens on a daily basis in the domestic prisons in this country, we see similar coercion and violence.

Of course, women have been especially hurt by these developments. The prison industrial complex has brought in women from the global South, indigenous women in disproportionate numbers. If you go to Australia, who do you think you will discover in disproportionate numbers in the prisons there, in the women’s prisons especially?

The prison-industrial complex has become so big and powerful that it works to perpetuate itself. It’s literally self-perpetuating. The raw materials are immigrant youth and youth of color throughout the world. So if one visits a prison in Australia or France, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden, one sees young people who come from communities that we in the United States designate as communities of color, we see indigenous people. Race continues to matters a great deal throughout the world today.

This is something that the United States has basically offered to the world: a way of managing social problems by refusing to confront them. Instead of solving issues, the system puts people behind bars. We can’t deny that there are people in prison who have done horrible, hurtful things to others. But these aren’t the majority of prisoners. And there are many people in the free world who have done horrible, hurtful things. There are many reasons why people engage in violence, sometimes out of malice, sometimes out of mental illness, sometimes out of self-defense. Many women who are in prison for committing violent acts have killed in desperation in order to extricate themselves from a violent intimate relationship. No matter what a person has been convicted of, does it make sense to house hundreds, sometimes thousands of people together, or separately in isolation cells, deprive them of contact with their families, deprive them of education, and then assume that this is going to help rehabilitate them and help them be a healthy part of society?

I’d like to end with questions. How do we imagine and struggle for a democracy that does not spawn forms of terror, that does not spawn war, that does not need enemies for its sustenance? Because people who are in prison are pointed to as the enemies of society, and that is one of the ways in which we can define our own sense of ourselves as free, by looking at those who are our opposites. How do we imagine a democracy that does not thrive on this racism, that does not thrive on homophobia, that is not based on the rights of capitalist corporations to plunder the world’s economic and social and physical environments?

I suggest we use our imaginations to try to come up with versions of democracy in which, for example, the practice of Islam does not serve as a pretext for incarceration in an immigration detention facility or in a military prison, where torture and sexual coercion are not considered appropriate treatment. We need to use our imaginations to envision versions of democracy that allow for many things: the right to decent, fulfilling employment and a living wage; the right to quality education; the right to live in a world where education is not a commodity, but rather a creative discipline that allows us to understand all the worlds we inhabit, both human and nonhuman, the kind of education that compels us to transcend the limits of nationalist patriotism in order to imagine ourselves as citizens of the globe.

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The Meaning of Freedom (City Lights Books, 2012)

BY THE TIME I ARRIVED
Elaine Kahn

He spent hours
mouthing as he chewed
His hands smelled like ketchup
I wanted to wipe them
on the clean braid
of the beautiful woman
who had sat beside us

Mouthing as he opened up
the packet nursing
folds to tiny noses
he is waiting
for a call
but I
will fuck
the face
of any man
who looks
away

Glove eyes leave you
nothing special

A painting of a tongue
covered in sand
needs no explanation
I will run
my fingers
through your dark
fermenting hair

This is a blank spot
a black fricative slowly repeating
and I do work and he does nothing

From *Woman In Public*, published by City Lights.

The Rise Of African Digital Art

Jepchumba

It is hard to believe that only a few years ago people around the world couldn’t conceive of African digital art. Perhaps it was out of sheer ignorance, or a long history of a continent misunderstood, but there was a widely held assumption that Africa had been left out of digital life. If you Googled “Africa” 10 years ago, you would probably have come across: a map of Africa, *The Lion King*, wilderness and safari photography, and “poverty porn” with its attendant images of hungry children, war, disease, and strife. But inside roadside Internet cafes, or in local stores where you could purchase data bundles, a quiet revolution was taking place.

Internet technology, like everywhere else in the world, was radically transforming culture. Kenyans formed informal communities like #KOT—Kenyans on Twitter—banding together in conversation over the latest scandal. In Nigeria, MP3s were downloaded and shared illegally, creating pop sensations that would soon take the global stage—artists like P-Square and D’Banj. Traversing through the silicon savannas, digital explorers mounted their curated discoveries on sites like Pinterest or Tumblr. Every month, it seemed like a new blog was formed: Africa is A Country, Another Africa, Nigerian Nostalgia, Afro-Punk, Everyday Africa. Catchy phrases like “Africa is Now, Africa is the Future,” developed and solidified within our online consciousness. The rise of an online Africa was also marked with the rise of global exhibitions around the world, from the 2015 Venice Biennale curated by an African, Okwui Enwezor, to the 1-54 Contemporary Art Fair, in New York, and now more recently the Armory Focus: African Perspectives exhibition.

A New Canvas For The African Artists

African artists and designers took note of the sudden push online, and embraced social media platforms. For artists like the Kenyan musical group, Just A Band, digital culture was seductive . . . you could be in touch with anyone, everywhere, all at once, in real time. For Just A Band, the Internet was a distinct way to connect to those of a similar tribe—not bound within geographical restrictions or political affiliations, but rather tech savvy Millennials who had grown up with global media phenomena like Daft Punk, Naruto, and good old Clint Eastwood. Digital technology and Internet accessibility lead to their creation of Kenya’s first viral video “Ha He” in 2009, a music video depicting their Kenyan revision of Dirty Harry’s phrase “Make My Day.”

For culture and tastemakers, Instagram facilitated art directors like Rharha Nembhard (@dronegoddess) and new imaginings of African culture that could be shared, tweeted and liked across the globe; African identity was fusing with other cultures and extending the African diaspora to new territories.

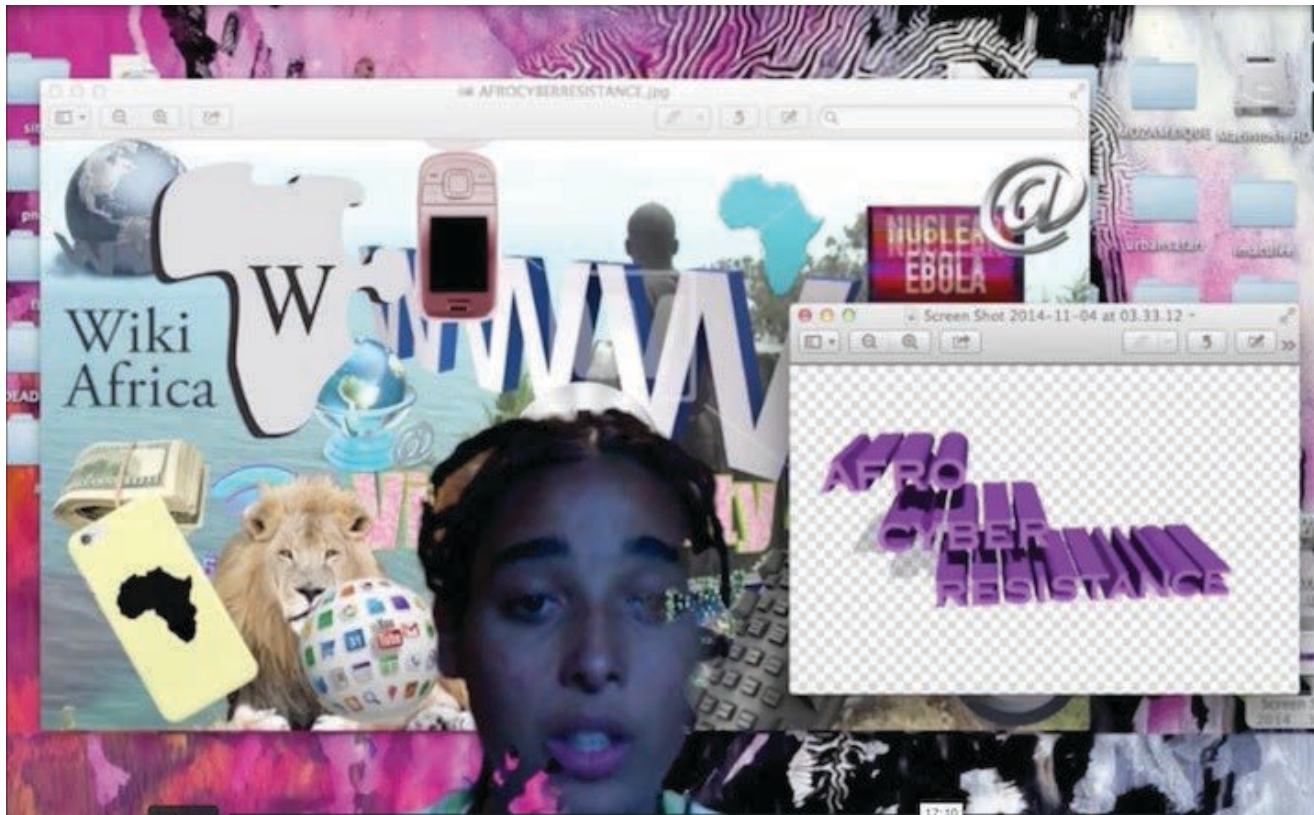
This digital cultural revolution extended past the visual and into political discussions. Artists participated in a new medium by openly criticizing government institutions as well as interrogating the rise of social media platforms in their countries. Khalid Albaih, a Sudanese political cartoonist, rose to prominence during the early stages of the Arab Spring protests in 2011. Albaih predominantly creates his cartoons through digital media and shares them through social media. The Internet affords artists like Albaih a way to speak out against political regimes and openly criticize religious institutions in ways that would have once cost him his life in Sudan. Albaih is just one of the many African digital artists who understand the influence of digital media but are also skeptical of the medium.

The Legacy of Imperialism and Colonialism on the World Wide Web

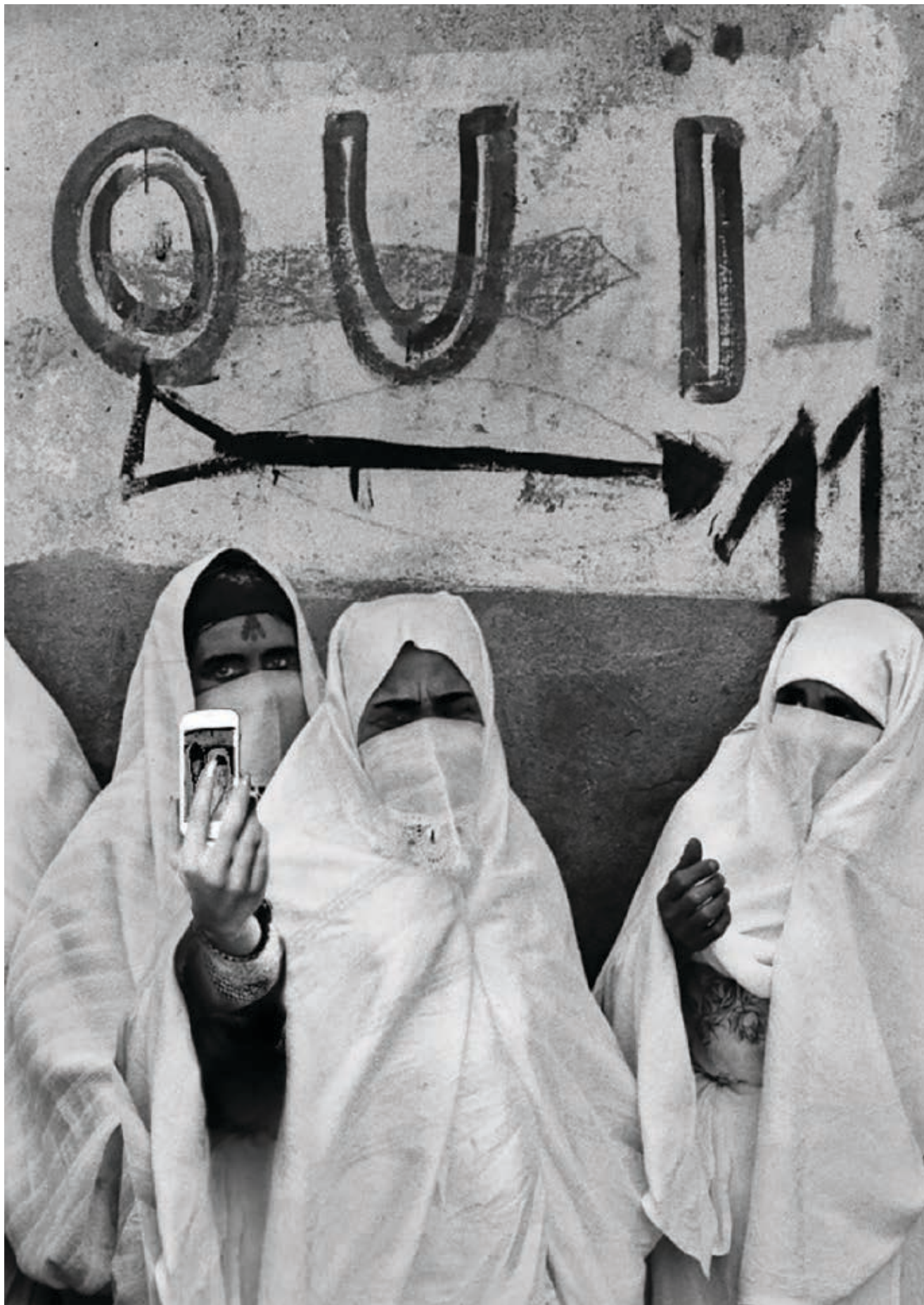
In 2011, the a United Nations report declared “that disconnecting people from the Internet is a human rights violation and against international law.” While the net neutrality debate rages on, Africa is often left out of the discussion. Dubious initiatives from Facebook, like Internet.org, hope to “bridge the digital divide” by providing regulated “free Internet” to everyday Africans. Yet, the Internet in Africa will never be neutral. The historical, social, cultural, and economic implications are felt as digital users pay the high cost of fiber optic undersea cables that reveal the imbalance of power. Sub-Saharan countries dish out high premiums for access to international pipelines.

The true implications of the digital divide is not lost on South African digital art collective NTU. For the collective, the discussion of Internet accessibility goes beyond a more connected Africa. Bogosi Sekhukhuni, Nolan Oswald Dennis, and Tabita Rezaire see the Internet as a highly problematic medium. NTU describes itself as “an agency concerned with the spiritual futures of the Internet,” dedicated to “provide decolonial therapies for the digital age” and to “enhance intersubjective virtual user possibilities.”

In an interview with OkayAfrica, Tabita Rezaire put it bluntly: “The Internet is exploitative, oppressive, exclusionary, classist, patriarchal, racist, homophobic, transphobic, fatphobic, coercive and manipulative. The Internet reproduces IRL fuck ups



Tabita Rezaire, *Afro Cyber Resistance*, 2014.



Yanis Ghanem and Mustapha Sellali, *Algérie Retro-futur*, 2014. Online portfolio of manipulated photographs. Courtesy of the Internet.

ie. western racial, economical, political, and cultural domination, legitimized behind the idea of modernity and technological advancement. It promotes occidental hegemony; brainwashes its users, whitewashes information, and is an active tool of surveillance, propaganda, censorship and control.”³

The Future of African Digital Art

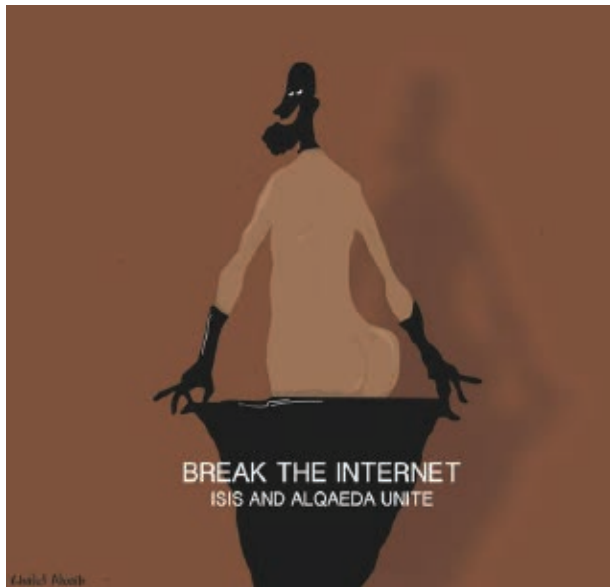
In 2016 there are 120 million Facebook users each month in Africa. The majority of them come from Nigeria (15 million), South Africa (12 million) and Kenya (4 million). South Africans surpass the global average time spent on online social networks with an average of 3.2 hours while the global average is 2.4 hours. These statistics translate to the change in perceptions of Africa. No longer do you just see *The Lion King* while searching for African content. Today, digital art is a highly embraced medium. From software to hardware, digital artists are experimenting with technology. From augmented reality and virtual technology to conceptual art and 3D gaming, the digital revolution continues.



Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga, *Lost*, 2015. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 200 x 200 centimeters. Courtesy of the Internet.



Khalid Albaih, *Charity #Sudan*, 2014. Courtesy of the Internet.



Khalid Albaih, *#BreakTheInternet #ISIS and #AlQaeda Unite*, 2014. Courtesy of the Internet.

Style Wars: Shades Of Cool

Black Radical Aesthetics In The Face Of Heat

Sampada Aranke

The fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent famously quipped that "fashions fade, style is eternal." This enigmatic statement does much to elucidate the powerful place that style holds in many contemporary cultures. In particular, it alerts us to the relationship that exists between notions of style and notions of history. Or, to the idea that "to have style" is to have the means of inserting oneself into history, while "to lack style" is to risk oblivion. This column, Style Wars, suggests that the tracing of style's fluctuating movements across varied social, political, aesthetic, and philosophical terrains is important work, and that this is particularly true within the realms of fine art, design, art history, and visual studies (as many important figures within these fields have long vied to claim and contest the ownership of this term). Style Wars aims to appreciate how thinking about style can offer opportunities to think across sets of subjectivities and cultural practices that are often dissociated or pitted against one another. This installment of Style Wars, written by guest contributor Sampada Aranke, focuses on a question of the cool.

Popular wisdom suggests that "being cool" is a mode of self-possession and comportment that is so utterly singular that it is as undefinable as it is unlocatable: "Coolness" as an ineffable, history-less kind of style.

Aranke critically complicates this commonly held belief. Her essay displays a genealogy of "the cool" that has clear, ancient roots—stemming from the African continent and extending throughout the modern black diaspora. Her essay pays special attention to the way that "being cool" has historically provided a means of resistance and survival. Along the way, it suggests that the acceptance of "the cool" as a definition-less and universal aesthetic is a strategic denial of blackness, orchestrated both explicitly and implicitly in the name of white supremacy.

—Nicole Archer, Column Editor

This October will mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP), a Black radical organization whose revolutionary self-fashioning not only imaged what Black liberation might look like, but also how cool politics could be. From its inception, the BPP dedicated itself to eradicating racial capitalism and its attendant white supremacist policies, practices, and power. Half a century since the Party's founding, it seems clear that the BPP became a target of the state not only because of the Panthers' calls for revolution and community organizing, but also because of their relentless and resistant "coolness." The BPP's Black revolutionary form of self-styling was so intense, such a collective political force, that it was, itself, dangerous to a racist status quo.

The BPP's coolness was forged, not simply in the heat of the moment, but as the art historian Robert Farris Thompson explains in his seminal essay "An Aesthetic of the Cool," through the activation of a venerable Black diasporic practice that was strong enough to survive the extreme violences of the Middle Passage. For Thompson, "cool"—being it, having it, embodying it—is a Black aesthetic or a mode of comportment, or being, retained from the continent of Africa. The power of "being cool" is found in its ability to be traced back to various and varying African continental ancestral practices that transcend cartographic constraints, tribal affiliations, and historical eras. While at first read Thompson's study might present itself as a romantic desire for an "authentic" or "essential" African aesthetic, we might instead embrace Thompson's essay as an articulation of coolness as a Black diasporic practice.

"Coolness" is practiced diasporically as a literal cooling of self (individual or collective) by controlling and relieving heat. These material practices (from funerary rituals in Dahomey that consist of smashing pottery and soothing the land with water to the Gapeoples' understanding that God reveals himself in rain as means of achieving balance and communication) can be "extended metaphorically to include composure under fire."¹ To be under fire and maintain one's cool—to be under the threat of fire and to maintain one's cool—is very much an essential factor of being Black in the U.S. Therefore, being cool manifests a version of the self as tempered, composed, distanced from the actual hot circumstances that enrage, agitate, and make it nearly impossible to live without the heat always being on you. Within that unbearable heat—that unbearable white heat that puts Black life under constant fire—one must maintain their cool, keep cool, be cool, stay cool.

Just Boyd, Mike Brown, Tarika Wilson, Oscar Grant, Sean Bell, Amadou Diallo, Tamir Rice, or any of the other 1140 Black people shot and killed in 2015 alone by police fire in the U.S.² While news sources spin tales that those killed by police were out of control threats to the police, the burden is placed on Black subjects to keep calm in the face of extreme terror and impending murder. This might approximate how cool as a diasporic practice is a means of survival with no guarantee.

Published in 1973, Thompson's essay on the cool appears at the political moment in which Black Power was folded into the national imaginary as a revolutionary possibility for Black Americans on the one hand, and as a viable threat to white sanctity and state power on the other. More recently, the art historian Krista Thompson has worked to take Robert Farris Thompson's notion of the cool to another limit. In "A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History," she suggests that a Black aesthetics of cool is all about throwing shade.³ We can see those "sidelong glances" all over the art historical canon, where Black subjects (if pictured at all) are pictured in the margins, are looking out of the corner of their eyes at the white subject of the scene. While these canonical images of Black subjects were never meant to celebrate the coolness of Blackness, the sidelong glances activated by these subjects exceed the racist logics that trap these figures into a white supremacist image, and instead make available a modality of Black resistance. This sidelong glance—or averted eye or eye roll—is a kind of throwing shade, a way of looking that keeps cool while activating dissent.⁴ Krista Thompson notes how these glances are not limited to those pictured, but also are mobilized by those picturing. Contemporary Black artists also throw shade on an art history that merely delimits Black presence to the maids and minstrels on the margins by centralizing coolness and shade as a primary strategy to image Blackness in ways otherwise unseen. Throwing shade, like cool, is a Black mode of style, a Black aesthetic revolt, a mode of Black being that survives otherwise.



Kathleen Cleaver and Black Panther co-founder Bobby Seale (right) at a "Free Huey" rally in Oakland, California in the summer of 1968. Photograph by Howard Bingham. Courtesy of the Internet.

Chris Ofili's *Blue* paintings deploy coolness and throwing shade as a primary Black aesthetic strategy of resistant visibility. These paintings materialize black and blue hues that flick as if caught in moonlight, ebb and flow like waves and make shadow and figure fold into each other making one indistinguishable from the other. Ofili paints shade as an unwavering ability to keep heat at an approximate distance. In *Iscariot Blues* (2006), deep blues make barely perceptible a blue-black, blacked-blue figure that hangs from a tree as similarly hued musicians play what we can only hear as the blues itself. This canvas embodies the shadow history of lynching. The entire linen canvas is bruised—one giant bruise hanging on a wall, limp and contorted like the figure himself. Artist Peter Doig calls Ofili's depiction of this brutal scene a "nonchalant attitude"—a cool rendering of something enraging.⁵ The "ability to be nonchalant at the right moment" is central to diasporic coolness for Robert Farris Thompson, and it is also central to how shade mobilizes a means of "visual opacity," or "that which is not easily revealed, made visible, transparently present," for Krista Thompson.⁶ For Ofili, this feeling of nonchalance, this cool that Doig feels, conveys a "mood" where the "imagery comes out slowly . . . as a way to subvert the stark imagery."⁷ Not an image of clarity, ready to be consumed, the shade makes it such that the figures are hard to see, not readily available for us to take in. We have to work, squint our eyes, change our glance. This shade is thrown at us at the level of the canvas itself, subsumes us, makes it such that we know someone lives and dies, sings and means in that painting, somewhere in the cool hues of blacks and blues.

In the face of this, I want us to think of coolness and its attendant strategy of throwing shade as a Black diasporic practice that is at once political and aesthetic. Not a conflation of the two—not the aestheticization of politics, the emptying and hollowing out of politics so that it merely becomes an image that one can buy, sell, and co-opt—but rather a simultaneous invocation of how politics can allow us to imagine, and even at times embody, a resistant social image, a revolutionary artistic style, and a transgressive aesthetic modality.⁸

Black radicals in the '60s and '70s turned to every political, economic, and cultural mechanism at hand to mobilize an aesthetics of Blackness that turned its back on white supremacist logics and their attendant racist stereotypes that made it near impossible to image one's Blackness as powerful. While a kind of Black cool had long been in circulation before 1960s Black radicals became highly visible, there are many ways in which their manifestation of cool recalled these diasporic practices and injected them with a new method of performing calmness in the midst of terror—methods including throwing shade.⁹ Born out of a Black radical commitment to revolution and the end of racial capitalism as we know it, we might say that coolness re-emerged in the 1960s as a kind of survival strategy. This model of survival is a self-fashioning that included discipline, distance, and determination in which arms served as but one mechanism for ensuring collective preparation.

This model of self-defense, which necessitated a critical distance where one could reveal "no emotion in situations where excitement and sentimentality are acceptable," was a way to style oneself in the face of insurmountable heat.¹⁰ This critical coolness was crucial for Black radical subjectivity.

Following their founding in fall 1966, the Black Panther Army armed themselves and followed, watched, and patrolled the heat, i.e. the Oakland Police Department. This mode of counter-surveillance tracked and combated police violence locally, and spurred similar initiatives nationally. Panthers would intervene in police brutality by watching police activity at a near distance, standing ready for action, armed for self-defense. These patrols acted as training grounds, where Panthers staged self-defense by presence alone, firing back was always a threat, always a possibility. Their tempered composure—best exemplified by Kathleen Cleaver's shade-wearing crossed arm stance and Bobby Seale's shade throwing lean—was a kind of cool necessary for self-defense.

It's no coincidence that the BPP's first public appearance as an organization was an anti-police violence rally following the April 1967 murder of Denzil Dowell by North Richmond police, who fired multiple rounds, and eventually killed the 22-year-old. The police, as many scholars have charted, are gatekeepers of white supremacist investments, and embody the markings of such investments.¹¹ By 1967, images of the police beating, fire-hosing, and using their dogs to attack Black people were frequently represented in popular media. It was commonplace to see the police mobilize force against Black bodies every day.¹² These images, which pictured the heat uniformed and sealed with their crested badges and holstered guns, made official the extent to which the police protected white supremacist interests at any cost. The BPP image provided a counter-aesthetic—one that relied on the Blackness of the black leather jacket and beret to uniform another self, a collective self that played it cool in the face of such intense heat. The BPP knew what kind of intense, raging violence the cops were capable of, so they patrolled the police from a distance, all the while self-fashioned in an easily identifiable way. We can think of watching the heat, watching the police, as a means of controlling one's own heat. Crucial to this was also an activation of shade. Wearing shades, throwing shade, that sidelong glance that is all too familiar. To throw shade—that sidelong glance, that averted look—is to radically use one's cool. The BPP knew how to work an image, and mobilized their militant collective self-fashioning as a manifestation of everything the police were not—"clear-headed and organized," ultimately a "type of cool-headedness" that countered the hot-headed, reckless, and murderous police.¹³

Perhaps this cool can partially account for why, in 1968, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover called the BPP the "greatest threat to the internal security of the country."¹⁴ In joint effort to discredit and destroy the BPP and other movements for Black liberation, the FBI, in conjunction with local police around the country, started the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) aimed to intimidate, eradicate, and incarcerate Black radicals.¹⁵ Many Black radicals are still looked up due to their political or organizing during the 1960s, and many of them were accused of police murder. Cool-headedness was such a threat to white



Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, Jean-Baptiste Belley, député de Saint-Dominique à la Convention, 1797. Oil on canvas, 158 x 111 centimeters. Collection of the Château de Versailles. Courtesy of the Internet.

supremacy, that those framed for violence against the police continue to serve out inhumane sentences, many of whom have spent the majority of their lives in solitary confinement. Jessica Millward writes that Mumia Abu-Jamal, notable Black radical political prisoner, prison abolitionist, and political philosopher, "comes off cool; a Philly cool; a Black Panther cool; a necessary prison cool."¹⁶ Cool on the outside, but warm on the inside is how Millward goes on to describe Abu-Jamal. The threat of this coolness coupled with this internal warmth—a heat rising, but tempered and leveled as a means of survival—might be precisely why state narratives describe Abu-Jamal as "cold." We might think of the state's rhetoric use of the phrase "cold blooded killer" to fictitiously describe Abu-Jamal as but one strategy in legitimizing his incarceration.¹⁷

But Abu-Jamal represents the opposite of coldness. In fact, his entire life has been dedicated to seeing through the liberatory project of the Black radical vision that led to his incarceration. Maintaining his cool behind bars, embodying that critical distance that makes this particular Black diasporic practice a strategy of survival, Abu-Jamal says, "They haven't stopped me from doing what I want every day. I believe in life, I believe in freedom, so my mind is not consumed with death."¹⁸ This is exactly the kind of cool described by the Gola of Liberia as "to act as though one's mind were in another world . . ."¹⁹ Abu-Jamal embodies a project of Black radical world making to imagine oneself as capable of being free, of a liberation so radical that it can live beyond the scope of this unbearable world.

- 1) Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of Cool," *African Arts*, Volume 7, Number 1, 1973, page 41.
- 2) The Guardian's *The Counted* series documents those killed by police in the U.S. As of February 17th, 2006, 127 Black people have been killed in police custody. See: <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database>
- 3) Thompson, Krista, "A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States," *The Art Journal*, 70(2011): 7-31.
- 4) Ibid, 26.
- 5) Peter Doig and Chris Ofili in *BOMB Magazine*, Fall 2007, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2949/peter-doig-chris-ofili>
- 6) Thompson, Robert Farris, "An Aesthetic of Cool," *African Arts*, Volume 7, Number 1, 1973, page 41 and Thompson, Krista, "A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States," *The Art Journal*, 70(2011): 20. For more on opacity as a central concept in African diasporic modes of survival, see Édouard Glissant, and Betsy Wing, *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- 7) Peter Doig and Chris Ofili in *BOMB Magazine*, Fall 2007, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2949/peter-doig-chris-ofili>
- 8) We have only to think of the 2016 Super Bowl Halftime show (sponsored by Pepsi), where Beyoncé mobilized the image of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense portion of the show. Short-shorts, tight garters, and high heels accompanied Panther style berets and even a gas ammunition belt for Beyoncé herself. This strange amalgamation combined an added layer of unesse, as Beyoncé performed her song *Formation*, lauded by some as an embrace of her Blackness, and critiqued more pointedly by others for her appropriation of Black queer life and culture. This aestheticization of a Black radical image of cool literally transforms the bullet into a belt, and makes it such that the shield that ammunition was meant to be becomes a strange accessory. See: <http://radfag.com/2016/02/10/my-apparently-obligatory-response-to-formation-in-list-form/>
- 9) Coolness extended before and beyond the 1960s. In a sense, coolness is a retained Black diasporic practice evidenced by the work of figures such as Sojourner Truth and Robert Johnson, and movements such as the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition. To say that "an aesthetic of coolness" re-emerges is to account for its cyclical politics of cultural inheritance within Black diasporas.
- 10) Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of Cool," *African Arts*, Volume 7, Number 1, 1973, page 41.
- 11) For more on the historical relationship between police and white supremacy, see Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton, "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy," *Social Identities*, 9:2 (2003): 169-181; Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009; Amy L. Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009; Orisanmi Burton, "To Protect and Serve Whiteness," *North American Dialogue*, 18.2 (2015): 38-50.
- 12) Martin A. Berger, *Seeing Through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- 13) Collective Statement by the Connecticut 9, Political Prisoners, published in *The Black Panther*, May 2, 1970.
- 14) See Ward Churchill and Jim VanderWall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*. Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 2008; and Liz Deras, *Andres B. Alegria*. Lincoln: Bergman, Muhammad Ahmad, Kathleen Cleaver, Ward Churchill, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Elmer G. Pratt, José E. López, Ricardo Romero, Akinyele O. Umoja, and Laura Whitehorn, *Cointelpro 101*, Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011.
- 16) Jessica Millward, "Mumia: Vulnerability and Hope," *The Feminist Wire*, January 23, 2014, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/01/mumia-vulnerability-and-hope/>
- 17) Paul Waldman, "The Mythological Cold-Blooded Killer," *The American Prospect*, March 7, 2014, <http://prospect.org/article/mythological-cold-blooded-killer>.
- 18) Laura Smith, "I spend days preparing for life, not for death," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/oct/25/usa.laursmith>.
- 19) Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of Cool," *African Arts*, Volume 7, Number 1, 1973, page 41.

Indira Allegra

In Conversation With
Sarah Biscarra Dilley

I became familiar with Indira Allegra's work through an interwoven map of relationships: through good friends who are like family, through raffles at powwows, and on the threads of conversation that connected and reconnected me to her varied and dynamic visual works. When my collaborators and I, as Black Salt Collective, were in the earliest stages of planning our first large-scale curatorial project, *Visions into Infinite Archives*, we began by just chatting about the artists close by in our lives and on the periphery, a meandering process that mapped these expanding webs of relationships. It was beautiful, actually—a reminder of so many sparks of connection that anchor and support, inspire, and incite us as artists, as healers, as future ancestors.

Allegra was one of the first artists that came to my mind to be included in the exhibition. Her embodied and visual weavings feel inextricably tied to her work as a wordsmith, as a storyteller and truth-sayer; some even incorporate these writings into the literal warp and weft of the textiles. These deep relationships between mediums make her visual work so conceptually rich; the interdependence of text and textile provides generative ground upon which to challenge the limitations of both. One example of many is *Blackout*, a digital weaving installation which documents ongoing and escalating police violence by creating spatial environments of the testimony from family members of those slain by police and serge twill—the fabric commonly used to make police uniforms—calling grief, silence and embodied legacies of violence to the forefront. The powerful collaboration of narrative elements in her practice create conversations in and between opposing worlds.

I reached out to her to follow threads of conversation in a shared document through the Internet ether, just before the opening reception of *Take This Hammer: Art and Media Activism* at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, where *Black out* will be installed through August 14th, 2016.

At so many Native community events, conversations begin with questions like "What tribe are you from?" and "Who are your parents?", "Where did you grow up?", and "Do you know so-and-so?" These contexts of knowing each other are so foundational to basic conversations; this mapping of relationships is part of everyday work. In this spirit, can you share some of these relationships? Who are your people? Where are you from?

Yes of course. I was born in Detroit, Michigan and grew up in Portland, Oregon before moving to Oakland, California in my mid-20s. My mother's people are from towns scattered throughout Georgia and Biloxi, Mississippi. They are Black—descendants of mixed tribal origin from peoples along the west coast of Africa who were forced into chattel slavery on Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, and Natchez land. They survived by sharecropping, doing domestic work, and working cures when they needed from the land. My father's people are descendant from Cherokees living in Athens, Georgia and Bessemer City, North Carolina (two hours outside of Cherokee, NC)—they survived by mixing with non-Indians and learning how to assimilate into a growing, dominant white culture. My father's people also come from African descendant foremothers raped by Irishmen while working on plantations and caring for white children in white homes. I am ascendant from all this and as such influenced by Rabbit Trickster tales, jazz aesthetics, the sense of animacy in all things, the importance of literacy, blues, decorum, and cornbread.

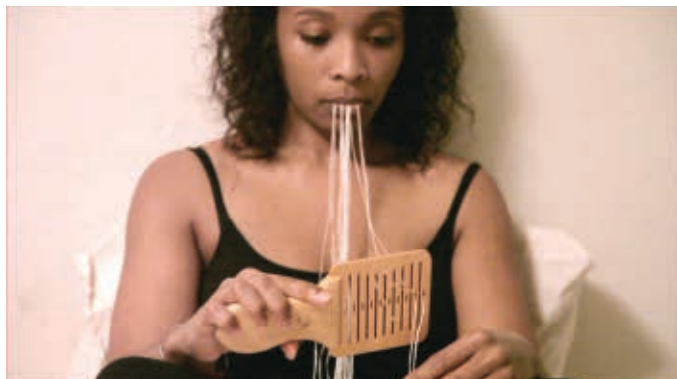
Who are some of your teachers, mentors, and influences? How does this shape or ground your practice?

As for teachers, I have to appreciate Dario Robleto for his work on materialist poetry. Josh Faught for his wealth of knowledge of weaving and queer craft, and Oriana Bolden who introduced me to the basics of video production and editing. I need to thank Tirza Latimer for her support. A big wado to Jacque Archambeau for her knowledge and love of Cherokee culture and people and Kim Shuck for her uncompromising Cherokee poetic. A big wado to Qwo Li-Diskill for his fearless scholarship on Asegi people (Cherokee Queer & Two-Spirit people). A signed and silent thank you to Jeska Duckworth, an activist in the Deaf, Queer community in Portland for teaching me American Sign Language, and Mark Azure (Chippewa-Cree/Dakota and Tsimshian), an elder in the Deaf Native community in Oregon, for supporting me to become the first person of color ever to graduate from my Sign Language interpreting program back in 2005. I would be remiss if I did not also thank Catherine Dubois (Métis) for her overall wisdom and kindness and for teaching me to be of better service to Deaf/Blind people—and thus all people.

Thank you for being so generous with this response! The naming of relationships, of place, of shared knowledge, of guiding spirit is so moving to me; it provides a span of influence, lineage and, as you so beautifully direct us to, ascendancy that extends through time.

The temporal nature of your work, from material to medium to narrative, is really powerful to me. Can you talk a bit about how time influences what you refer to as the performance of your work?

I am not convinced that time is entirely linear. When one experiences the grief of displacement (from your land/home/body/relationship), you don't ever "get over it." There is no getting over it—no redemptive narrative to achieve, only a changing distance from the initial pain of loss from your life. I believe that while we may feel as though we are moving forward, we may actually be spiraling outward orbiting points of grief in our lives from a different perspective. I experience art making in this way wherein my body passes through a point of contact with a material or passes through a point of inquiry repetitively until I begin to notice my changing distance (emotionally, ideologically, physically) from the work.



Blackout (detail), 2015. Digital weaving installation. Variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist.

Wow. That's a moving way of relating to your process. That ethereal motion and shifting intention is definitely palpable in the work of yours I've had the privilege of encountering.

While sitting with the pieces you'd installed during *Visions into Infinite Archives*, I found your work to create a defined yet open space, each weaving speaking to the others like an old friend and inviting you to listen in. But it also was disorienting, with portals to lose yourself through and constellations tracing displacement, migration, home, all of these cartographies of shifting relationships, spatial rupture, and reunion—the textiles in conversation created a place between the present moment and a thousand moments before and after. It felt atmospheric.

Thank you for sharing that. Sometimes, I have this feeling of being pushed and pulled through space with some of my works and I imagine it is a way for me to understand what is threadlike about myself—shifting back and forth over the breast beam of the loom.

Building on what you articulate as that shifting movement, why do you acknowledge the act of weaving as a performance? How does this interact with the other kinds of performance you do?

Performance implies the presence of a witness (even if the only witness is the performer themselves through the lens of a camera). In acknowledging the act of weaving as a performance, I acknowledge the animacy of the cloth that is witness to its weaving and the body of the loom that holds the tension of my exertion. This acknowledgement creates space for the labor of weaving to be elevated as an art itself apart from the typical focus on the object created. Performance art has a long history of investment in art which resists commodification, and it cannot be easily purchased due to its ephemeral nature. Performance art also eschews linear narratives which makes it a useful technology—like poetry—to explore experiences that never fully seem to leave us, but rather shape us though time.

What is the importance of text in your work? How do your practices as a visual artist and as a writer influence each other? Is this a significant collaboration in your process?

The word text is rooted in the Latin verb *texere*, which means "to weave." I am a writer and performance artist thinking through craft, generating texts that exist as material documents and time-based works. Documents legitimize our bodies in face of religious, legal, medical and educational institutions. It is through the intermediary of the document that we stake a claim for authorities to accept or deny us, to sanction our bodies or our claim to our homes, or leave us vulnerable—unsanctioned for the privileges of citizenship, or rights to accommodation, aid or physical sovereignty. I worry about the sole reliance on the production and performance of alphanumeric text when responding to documents when filling them out. I have to ask if an overreliance on alphanumeric text limits what aspects of human experience can be considered in a document and if so, what other kinds of literacy are required to understand more about the unique vulnerabilities each of us have to offer. As someone who has training as a Sign Language interpreter, it makes sense to me to look to the body for alternate modes of text production, to build meaning through repetitive gestures—a process not unlike textile production.

We chatted briefly about your upcoming residency in Berlin this summer. I was floored by your idea to use this performative medium to literally test the tensile strength of a document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the UN, to speak to the dire unliveability of the United States as a Black and Native woman. How did you come to this intersection of art and policy?

I am drawn to Berlin as it has become a laboratory for the impact of an "open door" policy on refugee crisis. I believe that the issue of refugee crisis will be an ongoing one with the presence of Syrian refugees raising complex questions about the role of neighboring nations to provide asylum, to the prospect of climate refugees losing their countries to the rising waters of global warming or global debt. We must all imagine what it could be like to need refugee status.

Thinking broadly, I'm curious about the future of who will qualify for asylum and how this need for asylum could be adequately measured. Might the written word be insufficient to articulate

experiences of trauma in an application for refugee status? How else might a case for refugee status be recorded? As an artist, I seek to question the limits of Germany's open door policy and explore how this could be further stretched conceptually to include an open door to unconventional forms of documentation in asylum cases and unconventional ways of perceiving who needs asylum.

Can you talk more about how you will to engage this work and the document it reimagines? What are its implications?

If a working-class, Queer, Black and Native Femme needed asylum, what documents, or international bodies would be strong enough to act on her behalf? What would she be asked to prove in her application and what resources could she use to stake her claim?

The work I will be developing on residency is *Asylum Application*, a deconstructed asylum application created for exhibition. This site-specific work will consider my past experiences and future fear of being persecuted in the United States on account of "race, religion, nationality, or political opinion; or because of membership in a persecuted social category of persons in America"—this is wording taken directly from the UN Convention of Human Rights describing experiences that would qualify an individual for refugee status.

The institutional, economic, psychological and physical harm that black and Native people have experienced in this country (and in many other places) does not require another word of proof. I need not waste a moment trying to prove certain aspects of my everyday life and the lives of my ancestors. What I can do is explore the representation of those realities on my own terms in an attempt to co-opt the power of formal documents—to respond to them in such a way that seeks to exceed them in an attempt to interrupt rote narratives of acceptance or denial that these forms are often used to determine. I want to see if textile interventions on form documents can allow for that paper to do something beyond the binary of "approve or deny" thus imagining unanticipated outcomes.

During the residency, I will answer German asylum document questions using multiple forms of text production that include textile making processes with the knowledge that textile is a form of text. As such, completed asylum documents will produce written texts and textile interventions that include woven and beaded pages, folded and quilted documents. The latter are strategies that Black and Native people have used to tell stories for a long time, and I want to see how these textile interventions function when interwoven with international laws and policies.

Asylum Application will contend with the legitimacy of harm to a queer Black and Native body, questions about the nature of safety and the methods by which harm can be represented without being forced to rely on alphanumeric performance as the sole avenue by which a claim for help can be made.

Are there any other new or emerging works you are excited to share? Future collaborations?

Look for threadless weavings. What continues to emerge in my work is the understanding of weaving as a methodology—a strategy for creating relationships between seemingly disparate lines of thought or orientations to space. A *praxis texere* need not be confined to the loom or the desire for new objects. It is about the decisions an artist can make when she knows how to work under tension—at times writing for texture, or crossing gestures together at an angle as a form of speech. I welcome collaborations that, as you say, test the tensile strength of existing documents and posit multiple pathways by which official documentation—medical, academic, legal, or financial—can occur. Our trauma, desire, and doubt as human beings frequently exceed what we can express alphanumerically, we often rely on poetics to fill the gap. In short, look for attempts at (im)material poetics.

I welcome transnational collaborations and collaborations with those working in new media—the Jacquard loom is, after all, the ancestor to the computer as we know it today. I'll be working on a project soon to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Watermelon Woman* directed by Cheryl Dunye. What I can say about it now is that I plan to explore relationships between simulations, avatars, and queerness within the frame of the film. Beyond this, I have two manuscripts that are in need of some re-imagining at a future residency. Oh, and if the Black Salt Collective asked me out on a creative collab, I'd say yes.



Documenting Disability, 2013. Three channel installation, 2 minutes 28 seconds. Courtesy of the artist.

Hera Büyüktaşçıyan

Arie Amaya-Akkermans

If there is one constant in the fabric of Istanbul, it's interruption. In this irregular, gigantic mass of over 2000 square kilometers, buildings not only appear and disappear, but with them entire populations, histories, and memories can shift, recede and vanish permanently. On the corner of the intersection between Halaskargazi and Ergenekon streets stands a hotel built in the 1990s on the site of the old Pangalti hammam of which there are no traces or references. The hammam, or Turkish bath house, whose foundation date or history is unclear, was demolished with the promise that it would be eventually restored . . . and then it simply disappeared. The only evidence of it is a small black and white photograph from the 1970s on the Internet where it is possible to see the hammam's vaulted dome. This simple story exemplifies a trend. In the course of Turkey's wars of independence and the transition from the decline of the Ottoman Empire to the birth of the Turkish republic, not only did the names of the streets change in the historical neighborhood of Pangalti, but with them everything else eventually faded from view.

When artist Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, a native of Pangalti, set eyes on the site of the hammam in 2013 to attempt to visualize what has been completely erased, it wasn't just that there were no instructions or legal documents to help make sense of what the building might have looked like or contained, but there was also no site to excavate. Is it possible to reconstruct something out of nothing? At PST/// Interdisciplinary Project Space, down the street from the physical site of the hammam, Büyüktaşçıyan recreated the bath house in a peculiar way. It wasn't an architectural site as much as it was a mental space, and therefore, a function of the imagination coextensive with the uncertainties of deep memory. Without measures or dimensions, the final result was a space of intimacy that, through movements and smells, restaged the hammam as a social space, and therefore, as a site that has to be navigated by the body. In this project of speculative archaeology, aptly titled *In Situ* (2013), the artist proposed the tentative question: How can one reconstruct something in such a way that putting it into position becomes a way to invent, to create, to start, to found?

What is the difference between finding and founding? Or, how is something found if it was never founded? *In Situ*, Büyüktaşçıyan's deceptively simple installation, consisting entirely of soap, became a treasure map for something not locatable except through empathy and sensorial experience, while at the same time, infinitely divisible and movable. Digging out the absent history of Armenians and Greeks in Istanbul, Büyüktaşçıyan is not presenting a finished archaeological site where all the elements have been found, excavated, interpreted, and placed in the specificity of a temporal framework, but rather, she is addressing the methodological impossibility of continuity in history by the absence of references. At the narrative limit of the artifact—the minimal unit of concrete meaning in archaeology—the task is not to found the wholeness of a site without putting an emphasis on the singularity of the object, but instead is to focus on the most general qualities of spatiality and recognize the human function of spaces: a network of both active and passive symbols that, in their totality, overcome the whateness of the earthly object. These symbols found reality as a field of inter-subjective recognition.

Little did Büyüktaşçıyan know that during the course of her exhibition, in the late spring of 2013, a sudden turn of events in Istanbul would lead her—and the entire city—to reconsider the physical and social fabric of the city due to another cycle of interruptions that would draw new internal borders inside the already convoluted topography of the city. Protests in the nearby Gezi Park, a 15-minute walk from Pangalti, escalated into a nation-wide movement and became the first serious crisis of authority in post-dictatorship Turkey. When these protests met with a violent response, a thought process similar to that of *In Situ* became a political reality: makeshift barricades against police violence were erected throughout the country with the raw materials of the urban fabric itself, unleashing new historical disjunctives, that, to this day, remain open-ended and have transformed the country's political arena into a viscous territory of uncertainty. How do repressed streams of thought foam up to the surface and produce a misrecognition between history and subject?

Resistance to a master narrative is an act of political foundation in the form of a pendulum: the void left by a crisis of authority can trail-blaze in any direction, and is often fraught with manifold risks subject to the contingencies of new political cosmologies with different simultaneous starting points and destinations. This primeval void, abysmal and unbound, resembles the surging deep water of the Biblical narrative of creation; it is a world pregnant with possibility but as yet suspended, dangerous, precarious and unpredictable. Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, the dedicated surveyor of Istanbul's unreadable palimpsest, is no stranger to metaphors of water: they have dampened the pillars of her work since the very beginning. For Büyüktaşçıyan, discovering streams of water, real and imagined, subterranean and surface, carrying histories and the abeyance thereof, has been a platform for researching transmission, mediation and movement, but also destruction, disappearance and loss. As the two parts of Istanbul lie in different continents separated by enormous bodies of water, Büyüktaşçıyan's practice is beset by the necessity to translate the anxiety of sea-faring to the drier land of memory.

She is now a resident of Heybeliada, one of the Istanbul's Prince Islands, some 30 km from the mainland. Orthodox Christianity survived here for hundreds of years after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, and in modern times Heybeliada is also a site of displacement and population exchange. Büyüktaşçıyan travels back and forth between territories that are historical, cultural, mythical, and theological. Her 2014 exhibition *The Land Across the Blind* merges the journey of Byzas of Megara—a mythological character credited with the foundation of Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul) in 667 BC when he sailed across the Aegean Sea—with the history of the islands as places of exile where political dissidents were blinded with iron rods and thrown into monasteries for the rest of their lives, and the contemporary anxieties of a city in the eye of the storm. Istanbul sits on a tectonic fault line that has destroyed the city several times in its history, and it is also now the site of a bitter internal conflict between modernization, restoration, and more recently, the intermediate station in a dangerous journey of migration that has seen millions displaced from the ongoing and interminable war in Syria.

Büyüktaşçıyan's *Dock* (2014), set on an old found wooden table doubling as a base, resembles the small docks on the islands, from which travelers make the daily journey between the Prince Islands and the mainland, but it is a dock on which it is not possible to stand. The eerily moving planks reproduce a condition of instability: the journey of Byzas through the Aegean, the impossibility of finding safety on the land today, the perilous journeys of migrants through the ages, life in a collapsing polity during moments of transition, or the constant sense of interruption between the logic of self and story in the shifting emotional landscapes of Istanbul, never at rest. As the work was being shown in 2015 at one of the city's iconic institutions, Turkish nationalists marched in the direction of a ceremony commemorating the centennial of the Armenian genocide. It was a bitter reminder of the many violent chapters of Turkish history that have been repressed and erased, not only from buildings and national monuments, but also from the memory and imagination of the present day. Büyüktaşçıyan's reference to contact with the water is a way to leave these gaps open, and to make them visible.

Aquatic memory, as Turkish curator Başak Şenova phrased it, is a pivotal mechanism in Büyüktaşçıyan's work to let cultural artifacts and specific moments in time not only appear, but also occupy a surface. This surface, however, is not yet an absolute space; its contours are not defined and its mass and volume are not subject to the shape of the container. In this manner, the residual materials of history become invasive and consolidate without solidifying. There are always questions. There are always doubts. There are always new possibilities for memory to appear in unexpected places, to pour over empty rooms and penetrate the walls in between chambers, to turn narratives from fact to a porous truth that spills on itself. Solid structures become dissolved through minor gestures, in particular drawing, affecting their gravity and stability and become floating monads in a conceptual ecosystem where there is no possible closure, not even in symmetrical forms. Finitude and infinity are presented, not as a dichotomy, but as parallel systems of meaning. Familiar objects—photographs, buildings, bridges, balconies—implode and become complex synthetic propositions.

In 2014, when Büyüktaşçıyan traveled to Jerusalem to participate in the Jerusalem Show VII, curated by Şenova, she discovered the Patriarch's Pool, also known as Hezekiah's Pool, in the middle of the Old City—one of the most politically contested territories in the world—an abandoned area which used to hold the city's water supply, part of a complex system of water sewages, cisterns and tunnels dating back to the classical world. In the course of Büyüktaşçıyan's research, she came across the 19th century book *The Recovery of Jerusalem* written by British archaeologists Sir Charles William Wilson and Sir Charles Warren, with extensive source material on the aqueducts of Jerusalem. From there the large installation *The Recovery of an Early Water* (2014) was born, questioning the way in which water can carry and reveal, but also obscure. From a political point of view, the artist's access to the site which has been barred to the local population by the Israeli authorities, reinserted a void, a space which is neither public nor private, into the public domain. From its abeyance, the site of the Patriarch's Pool resurfaced temporarily from the maneuvers of the Israeli occupation.

How does one reactivate a dormant space? Büyüktaşçıyan performed a similar task during the 14th Istanbul Biennial in 2015, when she took over the reading room at the Galata Greek Primary School, one of the schools of Istanbul's Greek community, now no longer in operation. Here she displayed an archive of books and memorabilia from the original students of the school before the Greek exodus, alongside her piece *From the Island of the Day Before* (2015) that consisted of 668 covered notebooks, the exact number of original students, and a number of drawings of islands, both real and imagined. But the true effect came with the reading series *Islands Speaking* that extended throughout the biennial and brought a number of speakers to discuss "islandness" as a metaphor—for the self, for colonialism, for political violence, for poetry, for translation. An aural aspect to the extended gesture was introduced: the acoustic articulation of the Greek language inside the room, bringing back to life traces of something which had been thought extinguished from Istanbul, enabled the concreteness of live speech to penetrate not only psychic but also physical space.

Back at the Patriarch's Pool in Jerusalem, Büyüktaşçıyan was faced with the challenge of how to bring the water back to the pool. During the journey to Jerusalem, she looked into fabrics used in construction sites throughout the city and the type of semi-transparent materials that hung from above crates, which she later incorporated into the installation as a kind of double entendre: we are either sheltered by the tent of the sky or swallowed by the abyss of water, of time, or of oblivion. Are the waters above or below? The artist's research seems to suggest an ambiguous answer. When we operate in territo-



ries so fragmented, it's difficult to discern what history is and whether it isn't a rather reactionary gesture to insist on memory as such omnipresence. Nevertheless, historical reconstruction flows within a horizon of the future, grounding the present through symbols of continuity, linking up change and upheaval of the here and now, not as interruptions or mutations, but as the completion of earlier cycles that have been abetted. Since that point onwards, imagining bodies of water, suspended and in motion, has become codified in Büyüktaşçıyan's work as a mechanism to both interpret and challenge discontinuities.

In her second artist book, *Ayp, Pen, Kim* (a reference to the first three letters of the Armenian alphabet), published for the occasion of her participation in the Armenian pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale, Büyüktaşçıyan draws, in borrowed images and words, a vivid picture of her relationship to the Armenian language as a Greek-Armenian living in Istanbul, a territory which is considered by both communities somehow void, or whose place in the hierarchy of meaning has been eroded. In the book she recounts her arrival as a child to the Pangalti Mkhitarian School, founded by the Mekhitarist monastic order (a congregation of Benedictine monks of the Armenian Catholic Church) in 1825 and through turbulence and extinction, serving the Armenians of Istanbul. The relationship between Hera Büyüktaşçıyan and the 18th century monk Mkhitar of Sebaste, would not be limited to her school years. While conducting research in Venice, and walking around vaporetto stations, she came across the notice for San Lazzaro Island, where the Mekhitarist order was founded, and she began a new journey between Istanbul and San Lazzaro.

The island, a crucial point in the transmission of the Armenian language, became a reference in Büyüktaşçıyan's archivalpelo of unfinished structures. Being a "matasort,"—the remnant of something that has been lost or that has disappeared—as a monk in San Lazzaro pointed out to her, is a direct reference to the Armenian genocide, and calls on her to occupy different temporal frameworks simultaneously.

Büyüktaşçıyan often recalls correcting people when they interrogate her on her life as an Armenian in the "diaspora" or "exile." She insists that being an Armenian in Istanbul is not the diaspora, but is the very center of Armenian life. Her works from Venice, shown at a library San Lazzaro where Lord Byron had once learnt the Armenian language, *Letters from Lost Paradise* (2015) and *The Keepers* (2015), are informed by the poet's work and life, and his role in the liberation of Greece. As a transnational community, it would be difficult to conceive of this multilayered reflection on Armenian life as an ode to nationalism, yet Büyüktaşçıyan is certainly informed by the politics of Romanticism.

So many different types of islands: Heybeliada and the Prince Islands in Istanbul, and inside Istanbul the mysterious island of the Mkhitarian in the center of a triangle between the neighborhoods of Osmanbey, Pangalti and Nişantaşı. Then there is the island of San Lazzaro in Venice with its centuries-long Armenian print and library, or islands inside islands: The monastery of Halki, at the top of Heybeliada, with its theological school closed by the Turkish government in 1971. Then there are the less obvious islands: microcosms of urban violence and gentrification, the unstoppable waves of migration that do not reach their destination island, or the disappearance of minority languages and publications in Istanbul under the weight of Turkification. "There is no world, there are only islands," writes Jacques Derrida, making reference to the difficulties of intersubjectivity and human communication, so that we have lost the world as a common space in which we hear one another. However specters remain, we still vaguely recognize the shadows of the "other" trying to address us from an audible faraway.

This aspect of inhabiting the world spectrally is present in the characters, mythological and otherwise, who inhabit Hera Büyüktaşçıyan's realms of thought and imagination. They are perhaps lost on the Cartesian plane of tangible geography, but they simultaneously occupy other places. Speaking from island to island, digging out what is buried deep below the streams of visible water, they return to the world not as a site of redemption but of endless foundation. Their suspension then becomes the active site of a master narrative that writes out the world from underneath and surfaces up only fragmentarily through leakage and contradiction. In her most recent intervention—*When things find their own cleft* (2016), at the Alt space in the restored Bomonti beer factory in Istanbul, in close geographical proximity to the psychic space of the Pangalti hamam—Büyüktaşçıyan creates a tear through a newly built wall, out of which a stream of red bricks flows from the past and interrupts the seamless flow of the exhibition space, revealing hidden histories of erasure and displacement, trapped in between the mute walls of the new city. This discreet leak, quietly pouring over the new structure, becomes an inefable territory of resistance, always fluid, always in movement, always pointing elsewhere.

Up From Contemporaneity; Or, Why Do Curators Talk Like That? (Part 3)

John Rapko

The philosopher Hegel famously remarked that the owl of Minerva flies at dusk. Minerva is among other things the goddess of wisdom, and Hegel's dictum asserts that knowledge, self-understanding, and wisdom are always retrospective, and that we can gain understanding of ourselves in a comprehensive and stable manner only with regard to our pasts and what we have already lived through. It is only when a period is drawing to a close that one might be in a position to grasp the *shape* of a period: What processes and forces shaped the period? Who were its decisive figures? What assumptions, beliefs, and worldviews did its bitterest adversaries share? Whose work will be seen as setting the terms for seriousness, and which seemingly central figures will vanish without a trace? But correlatively, on Hegel's account, we are blocked from understanding ourselves in our contemporary environment. The problem then, as Kierkegaard remarked, is that we understand our lives backwards, but must live them forwards, without a secure and comprehensive understanding of the situations and problems out of concern for which we act.

In the mid-1980s, the leading intellectual question was the nature of the very period we were in. The easy questions were: Are we in a new artistic era? (Yes.) Is it rightly called "the postmodern"? (Yes, again.) Are there different kinds of postmodernisms . . . Are there different ways of self-clairvoyantly inhabiting this period, and are these ways of different value? (Yes.) et cetera. The problem arose in trying to characterize the different ways of being postmodern, and in offering reasons for preferring one way to another. Generally, the many and the less considered the preferable kind of postmodernism to be "critical," and the less preferable to be "conformist." Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, and other intellectuals offered different versions of this distinction. In the 1990s the questions concerning postmodernism faded without any consensus on their answers in place. The urgency of the questions had appeared to be a product of the Cold War. The need for a practical conception of non-conformist postmodernism had come to seem a recent version of a long-term ideological project: to provide some tangible evidence that the capitalist liberal democracies of the West fostered a kind of artistic freedom, and with it a broad menu of free lifestyles that were suppressed and unavailable in the communist, authoritarian East. So there had to be *something* artistically viable and vibrant and expressive of individual freedom after the end of modernism.

In our current century, the place of the question of postmodernism has been re-occupied by something now called "contemporary art." Attempts to characterize the distinctive features of contemporary art are beset by the same questions, the same sort of alternative conceptions, and the same sense of interminable debates that beset the earlier attempts to characterize postmodernism. There's no consensus on when contemporary art began, but we do imagine we know a thing or two about it. Like the ideological phantasm of postmodernism, it comes after modernism, but unlike modernism or postmodernism, it is "global." That is, it's a kind of art that no longer finds its home only in the major Euro-American or North Atlantic cities, but also in the smaller cities and towns of every continent. Contemporary art inherits the most securely established characteristics of postmodern art: its eclectic and hybrid quality, its easy acceptance of new technologies as artistic media, and indeed its refusal to exclude any perceptible material as a possible vehicle of art.

In previous issues of AQ I attempted an entrée into this new art through one narrow passage: the public speech and writing of its most visible representatives, that small number of curators who roam the earth deciding upon themes and choosing exemplary artists for the world's biennials.¹ Analyzing their opaque manner of speech and mountebank-like presentation, I argued that these characteristics were symptomatic of various cognitive blind spots and deficiencies. In the first column, I argued that this notorious opacity is an inheritance of a good deal of art world obscurantism in the twentieth century, and that the distinctive quality of the curators' discourse was the result, in part, of two factors: first, the curator must meet many, not obviously reconcilable, demands from various constituencies, including museum professionals, critics, academic historians of recent art, local money-bags financing the shows, and of course the millions simply thirsting for the latest in the arts. The curator is like a member of the intelligentsia of the tourist industry, who has to wear the mask of P. T. Barnum pretending to be an intellectual. A second factor is negative: the curators' discourse does not take place in the presence of the works themselves, and is not well placed to initiate a process of collective self-education and self—clarification about the works that are shown. In the second piece, I noted that the curators work with no articulate conception of artistic process, and seem to share unreflectively in the easy relativism of contemporary intellectual life, in particular in its manifestation in the art world as a practical conception of a work of art as whatever any individual artist declares to be such. With this conception, the questions of what makes someone an artist (is it more than declaring oneself one?), and more importantly, why anyone else should accept this stipulation of the honorific term "art" to anything whatsoever, never arise.²

There are signs that the owl of Minerva may be stirring with regard to the curator and these ideologies. Terry Smith, the art historian who has written most extensively in English, attempting overviews of recent art that highlight the role of the curator, has recently lamented that curators are no longer leading the way. In 2011, an ominously named organization called Independent Curators International hosted a conference in New York, with the equally ominous title "The Now Museum." Leading curators and historians of contemporary art gathered for a discussion called "Contemporarizing History/Historicizing the Contemporary." (Discerning readers will recognize that I am not making these titles up in a feeble attempt at mockery. Nor, alas, is it likely that they were produced by some academic-jargon-generating computer program.) The proceedings induced Smith to write a short book in 2012, titled *Thinking Contemporary Curating*.³ In it Smith claims that we have recently entered a new and unhealthy phase of contemporary art wherein "[c]urators are fading as agenda setters." Smith attempts therein to answer the question "What is *contemporary* curatorial thought?"⁴ The italicization of the term "contemporary" is meant to prepare the reader for the claim that the distinctive feature of contemporary curatorial thought is that



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Blind Leading the Blind*, 1568. Tempera and oil paint, 33 x 61 inches. Courtesy of the Internet.



it addresses and orients itself to the exhibition of something called "contemporaneity." The book purports to explicate this term, to distinguish the valuable kind of contemporaneity from its debased kinds, and to survey a range of exhibitions that successfully took up the challenge of exemplifying the valuable kind. This book has been followed recently by the publication of a volume of Smith's interviews with 10 curators and thinkers, *Talking Contemporary Curating*, wherein a number of the interviewees address the question of contemporaneity.⁵ If the owl is roosting after a short flight, perhaps it is on these books. So, what is this contemporaneity that has allegedly shown itself to be the obscure target of a curatorial thought, and so accordingly a central concern of contemporary art?

Smith knows what contemporaneity is *not*: it is not rightly understood as a quality exhibited generally by contemporary art, particularly not a concern to be up to date. The concern to be of our moment is a concern for "the contemporary," whose only virtue seems to be that it is easier to pronounce than contemporaneity. Smith does not so much reason about problems with the contemporary, but rather just seems to inhale and exhale a fashionable academic atmosphere. He writes that "to me, this phrase [the contemporary] conjures a (nervously) conformist—or, at best, a (coolly) complicit—contemporaneity, a mood familiar to the fashion industry . . . It is true that, at the margins, this is a mood scarcely distinguishable from genuinely contemporary *difference*, yet the difference increases as one slopes away from the other until it becomes huge, then total." Presumably with the use of the italicized *difference*, Smith is invoking the once-fashionable thought of Jacques Derrida, wherein the term indicated a quasi-conceptual operation of "differing and deferring" that was allegedly at work within any process of signification, or indeed any ascription of identity to anything whatsoever. To me, however, noting this does not lessen, but rather intensifies the sense that I am reading gibberish. Smith nowhere offers any analysis of conformism or complicity, nor suggests any reason for thinking that they are in every case detrimental to the practice of the arts. At other points, Smith indicates that, in practice, a concern for the contemporary is a kind of classifying operation, again without arguing that this is necessarily problematic, instead of simply being an aspect of everyone's muddling along in life. More pointedly, he suggests that in practice the contemporary is bound to a diffuse ideology of "presentism," wherein phenomena are presented in abstraction from their pasts, and with an impoverished sense of their possible futures. Finally, his use of the term the contemporary somehow secretes the sense that the abstracted phenomena presented under this term are definitive of what is and what might be.

The authentic sense of "contemporaneity" emerges by contrast with its debased sense in "the contemporary." Rightly understood, contemporaneity involves the understanding and presentation of recent phenomena as saturated "with many different kinds of pasts, both as memories and expectations."⁶ Smith repeats this characterization a few times, but offers nothing else by way of theoretical explication. A problem that immediately arises for this characterization of the concept of contemporaneity is that it makes no reference to anything contemporary. Smith seems to acknowledge this, but does not seem to view it as problematic, as he goes on to suggest that an exhibition of even the earliest works of art, such as the 80,000-year-old engraved pebble found in South Africa's Blombos Cave could exhibit contemporaneity, if the pebble were exhibited in such a way as to induce a viewer's awareness of its pasts and the choices made in its production. But then the sense of contemporaneity simply collapses into something like "artistic process." If, in the end, all that Smith is claiming is that a good exhibition shows the process whereby the exhibited artifacts were created, then it's hard to see what all, or indeed any, of the fuss is about. Smith leaves unaddressed the question of why such a concern is the distinctive task of *contemporary* curators.

The only other route that Smith suggests to determine the nature of contemporaneity is through the characterization of it as the object of curatorial thought. So what are the right sort of contemporary curators addressing? Smith writes that "curating is the exercise of curatorial thought within the practical exigencies of making an exhibition."⁷ But since Smith characterizes curatorial thought as the exhibition of contemporaneity, his thought is moving in the smallest of circles: contemporaneity is the object of curatorial thought; the curators' exhibitions display contemporaneity; if someone curates, she is guided by the concern to address contemporaneity. The owl of Minerva has not budged.

Should one look to the curators themselves then for some explication of what is meant by contemporaneity? Smith does claim that it can be exemplified in different ways, and explicitly cites three exemplary ways from exhibitions around the year 2000: Kirk Varnedoe's attempts to link the present with

the modernist past, Okwui Enwezor's attempts to display the post-colonial condition, and Nicolas Bourriaud's attempts to display the genre of contemporary art he influentially termed relational art. In the book of interviews, Smith repeatedly brings up the issue of how the particular curator's work exhibits contemporaneity. In one response, Enwezor declares: "I'm saying that the post-colonial constellation may be understood as one layer of contemporaneity. I think it's hard to define temporal or even spatial boundaries. I believe there is a close relationship between modernity, post-coloniality, and contemporaneity. And this alone can enable us to come to the point where we can have a radical sense of contemporaneity, of real being in the world."⁸ Aside from the use of the word "this" in the last sentence, I cannot see any reason that these sentences are presented in this particular order: they convey as little or as much read in any sequence. Consider, then, the last sentence: a basic problem is the unclarity of the reference of the "this." Most likely it is intended to refer to "a close relationship," but although Enwezor has previously sketched some conception of modernity and post-coloniality, the meaning of contemporaneity is again left wholly unclarified, and so too its relationship to modernity and post-coloniality. The phrase "real being in the world" is used as an explicative apposition to "radical sense of contemporaneity," but evidently this is an attempt to explain the obscure with the even more obscure.

Likewise, in another interview, the hyper-active Hans-Ulrich Obrist is asked: "is the connecting of culture the way you understand the idea of contemporaneity"? If so, how do you actually curate contemporaneity—I mean you, personally?"⁹ Smith's way of phrasing the question pretends that there is some shared understanding of contemporaneity, and allows Obrist to proceed by describing his legendarily frenzied pace of curating and interviewing artists, without addressing the theoretical point. In his curating, Obrist sees himself as simply taking up ideas suggested by artists—in particular their unrealized projects—and facilitating their completion and exhibition. The stylistic effect of this conception is that in Obrist's speech and writing the distinction between thinking and name-dropping is abolished: "I grew up in the studio of artists [sic] Peter Fischli and David Weiss;" "Among them were the curators Marie-Claude Beaud and Jean de Loisy, who subsequently invited me . . ."; "In 2012, on a visit to LA, I had breakfast with the critic Kevin McGarry and the artist Ryan Trecartin. . . ." et cetera.¹⁰ At the end of the interviews, Smith shares his own unrealized project of a creating a worldwide network that will include "a nomadic cohort of graduate students, young artists, curators, and activists" who will roam the earth "work[ing] on projects that explore connectivity, which I see as the biggest challenge to understanding our contemporaneity."¹¹ On the evidence of Smith's writing there are a few other big challenges to understanding it.

Out of this brief consideration of these quite recent writings and interviews from the leading, internally prominent curators and the academics who are most intensively occupied with understanding their activities, one tentative conclusion suggests itself: the phantom term contemporaneity inherits the same charisma and persistent obscurity that the conceptual phantasm of a "critical postmodernism" had in the 1980s. Contemporaneity is a pseudo-concept generated by the cultural pressure upon curators, and members of the art world generally, to claim a specially privileged status by virtue to their intimate access to what's happening right now, and the sense of what's going to happen tomorrow emerging today. So another reason curators "talk like that" is their need to present themselves as the guardians of something that's enormously valuable to experience, but which is too elusive for the public to access independently of the curators. Alas, not only is the owl of Minerva not flying but the talk of contemporaneity has not even awakened it.

1) John Rapko, "The Design Isn't Firm; Or, Why Do Curators Talk Like That?," SFAQ 20
2) The Anti-Genius, Or, Why Do Curators Talk Like That? (Part Two)", SFAQ 21
3) Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 2012. New York: Independent Curators International
4) p144
5) p17, italics in original
6) Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 2015. New York: Independent Curators International
7) p143
8) p144
9) p136
10) p91
11) p115
12) p115, p119, p122
13) pp.137-8

Millennial Collectors

Gary Yeh

In Conversation With

Anna Hygelund

Gary Yeh is currently a junior at Duke University and a young collector of emerging art. He regularly travels to NYC to see shows, visit artist's studios, and attend fairs. I sat down with him during Armory Week to learn his unique story of how he became a Millennial collector.

Let's start with some basic context. You were born in Washington D.C. and aren't from a collecting family, correct? You mentioned one of your first forays in art was organizing a virtual gallery for your fellow high school students to sell their art. What inspired you to do that?

That's right—not from a collecting family. I founded the virtual gallery first and foremost as a way to engage more directly with art. I had taken an art history course my junior year and fell in love right away but I wanted to be more hands-on. It also seemed like a lot of my peers were disinterested in art because it had this notion of being elitist. The gallery's mission was thus to increase access to art for students.

Now you are studying Economics and Art History at Duke University . . . do I detect a budding dealer in the works?

I get that question a lot. After running the virtual gallery, I dreamed of becoming an art dealer—what a rush it would be to own a space or two, curate shows, and sell art for a living. But it's a tough business. The end goal, however, is to collect. Some gallerists have phenomenal collections, but that seems more the exception than the rule. Who knows, I also love Robert Mnuchin's story of working in finance and then "retiring" as a dealer.

When did you buy your first work? What was it? What led you to it? How do you finally know to pull the trigger?

I would say I had two "first" purchases. When I was 17, I bought a small watercolor by Adam Lister—a local D.C. artist at the time. I ended up buying five more watercolors but still didn't consider myself a collector. My second "first" came when I made the conscious decision and said, "I want to collect art." That led to my first painting by Peter Mohall. I first saw Peter's work on Instagram and jumped on it. No real tangible reason—purely a gut feeling. I think in general that speaks a lot to how I collect. Even if you give me a month to decide between several works, I'll end up picking the piece that drew me in initially.

Does your collection have a particular theme or focus?

I have always loved post-Internet art. Fortunately there are many artists that can be considered a part of that movement—my wish list certainly reflects that. What I realized, though, was that I was limiting myself and missing out on a lot of other great artists. Good quality work can always find the right context in the scope of a larger collection. Overall, I focus on work that I believe is a snapshot of today's society or where it might go.

You mentioned that you're on the board at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke. How did you get involved? What is your favorite piece in the collection?

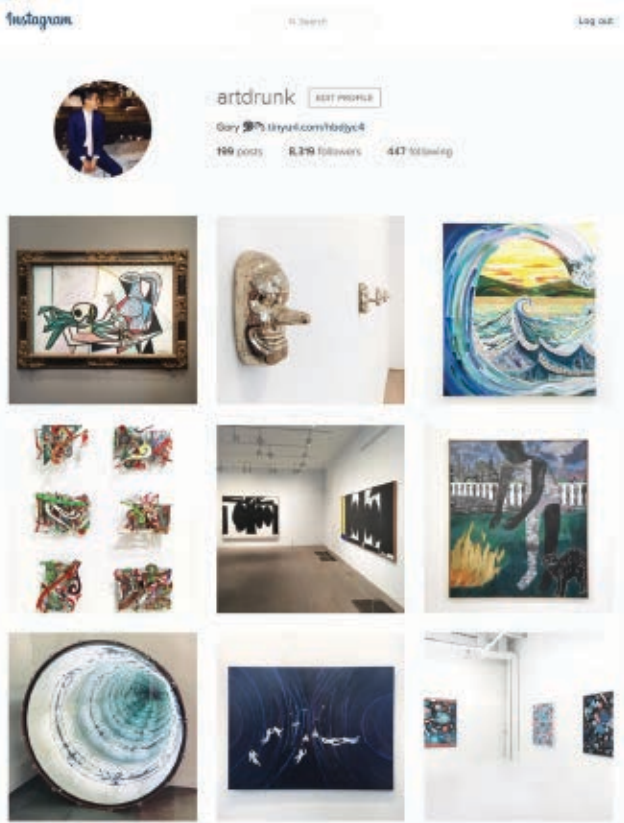
I am serving my third year on the Nasher's student advisory board and have been able to sit on a couple Board of Advisors meetings. While it has been fun getting a behind-the-scenes look at how a museum is run, my greatest takeaway has been meeting prominent members of the art world. Jason Rubell and Paula Cooper sit on the board, for example. Blake Byrne has also been particularly passionate and open in sharing his collecting insights. My favorite piece at the Nasher is a work on paper by Robert Motherwell. I used to work at the Nasher and I would walk by the Motherwell nearly every day—it grew on me.

How do you see your role as a young collector within the larger art world?

I am still trying to figure out where I fit in the larger art world. Long-term, I would love to look back and be recognized as a young collector who had vision in picking the right artists.



Gary Yeh with Mary Weatherford's Casa Reef (2016) at Skarstedt Gallery, New York.



Gary Yeh's Instagram profile (@ArtDrunk).



View of the Mary DB.T. Semans Great Hall at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. Courtesy of Duke University

As the infamous ArtDrunk on Instagram you have developed quite the following for such a young collector. How did that evolve? How do you use social media as an art collector?

[Laughs] "Infamous" is too kind, but thank you. I actually started ArtDrunk strictly as a means to keep track of all the art that I saw and liked. I still wake up every day surprised that so many people follow me—they probably don't even know I'm a student! Instagram has been useful for reaching out to artists for studio visits; once an artist gets picked up by a gallery their contact info is usually impossible to find. Nowadays, it seems like every artist is on Instagram, so it is easier to reach out that way, especially when they are generally responsive and open to having me visit.

Where do you collect—a combination of fairs, galleries, and auction houses?

I collect mainly through galleries and studios after I've made a personal connection with the artist. As a collector, a painting has much greater meaning when I can put a face and story to it. I will definitely start looking at auction houses now as well, since you mentioned some opportunities to pick up good work at great prices.

What are some of your favorite galleries or fairs?

Zieher Smith & Horton is one of my favorites. While I have yet to acquire anything through them, Andrea Zieher happens to be a Duke alum and has been incredibly generous with her time, showing me work and talking to me about the art world. Hauser & Wirth is also up there—I just love their massive Chelsea space, which always has top-notch exhibitions. Their one guard, Andrew, is also so knowledgeable and friendly. As for art fairs, I really enjoyed last year's edition of Frieze Masters. The quality of art across the board was exceptional. A little crazy that there was a small Bruegel painting that was in better condition than any Bruegel I had ever seen in a museum. I also saw Eddie Redmayne from afar—that was pretty cool.

You mentioned that visiting an artist's studio is important to you. Why is that? What studio has been most memorable to you so far?

Studio visits are the greatest reason why I love collecting and staying engaged in the contemporary art scene. They offer a more intimate and relaxed pace, as opposed to the rush of art fairs and gallery hopping. They are also a great way to learn about emerging artists when there is minimal literature on them. The most memorable studio visit was also my first. Back in 2014, I had the opportunity to accompany a friend who was visiting Ai Weiwei's studio. My only interaction with Ai Weiwei was when he asked if I wanted a stroopwafel, so maybe that doesn't really count as a studio visit but it was damn memorable.

We've experienced a lot of speculation in the emerging market. All that aside, which three artists have you most excited right now?

Sofia Leiby, Brent Wadden, and Mary Weatherford.

Realistic or not, what's the top work on your wish list?

Tough question: that changes almost daily. Richter's Betty (1988) has consistently been one of my favorite works of art, even though I have never seen it in person. Lately, I have been thinking of Kon Trubkovich's Sunrise friend (2016)—it's on display at Boesky East right now. I am really into abstract painting, but these two works have an aura that draws you right in.

Any advice for emerging collectors? Mistakes you've made?

Buy with your heart and your eyes, not with your ears. While there is tremendous value in educating yourself by talking to advisors and gallerists, collecting decisions should come down to your own gut. Even if a collector has "bad taste," does it really matter if they love what they are living with? The one mistake I have made so far is going against that advice and buying a painting because the dealer strongly pushed that it was a hot artist. At the end of the day, every dealer believes he or she has the best artists, so it is up to the collector to sift through the noise.

What's next for you after graduation?

The million dollar question. I am interested in investments, consulting, and tech startups—as you can see, it is a bit up in the air right now. But if anyone out there wants to hire me, I am happy to send over my resume!



Peter Mohall, Untitled (Brushstrokes Painting), 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

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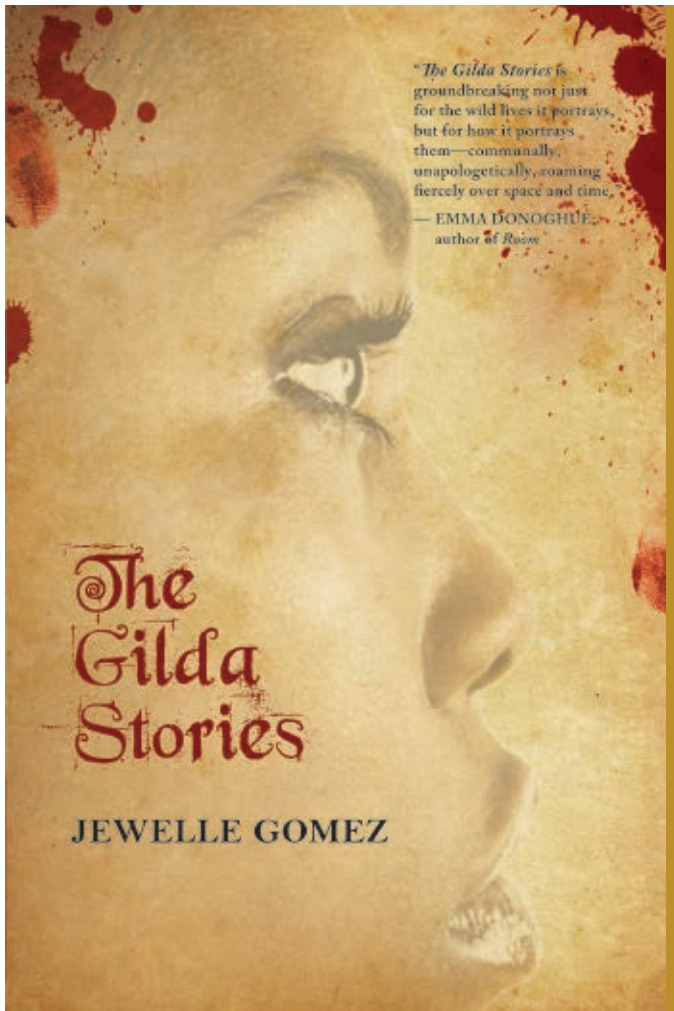
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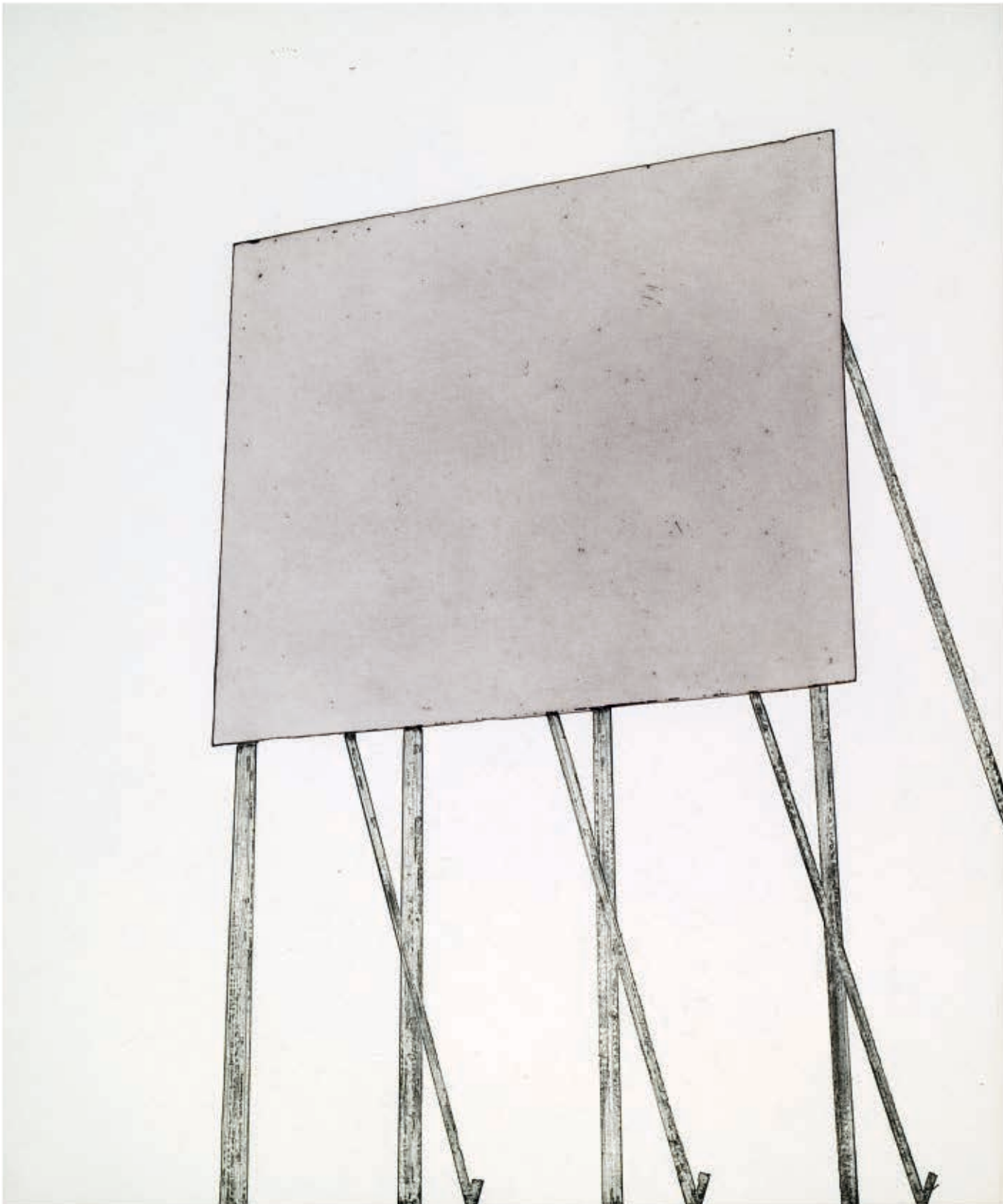
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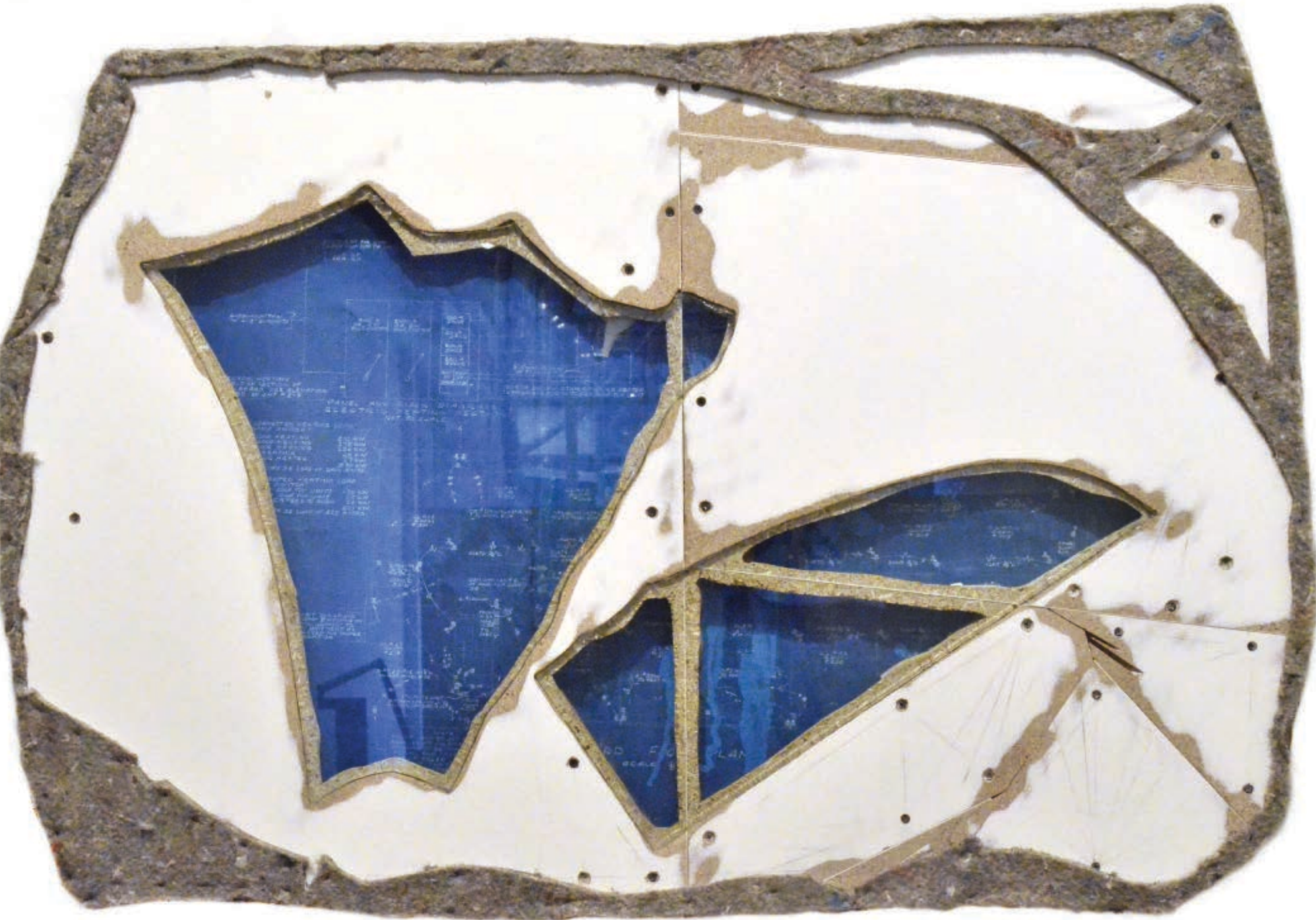
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