NYAQ

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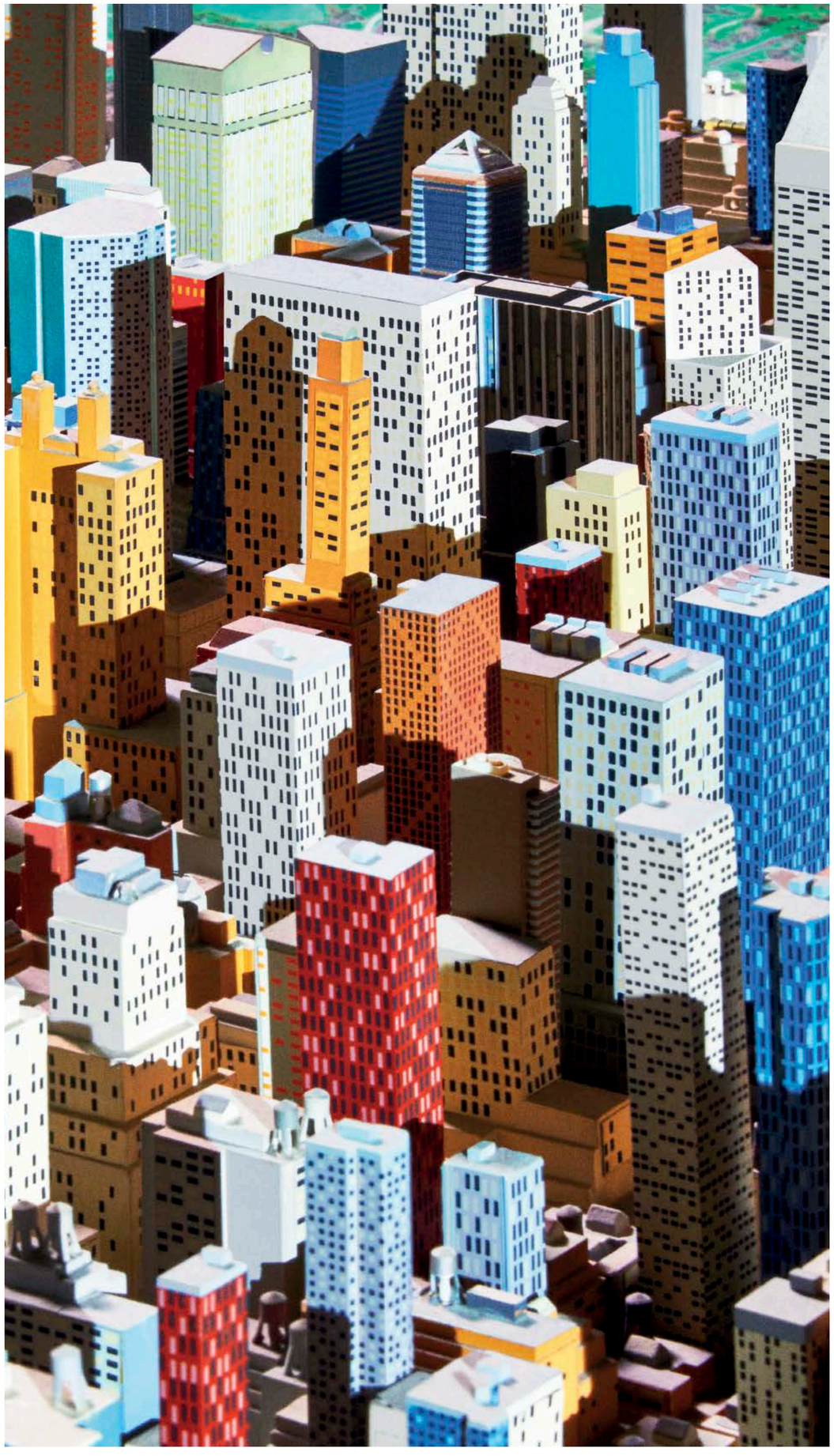
Juliana Huxtable
Jayson Musson
Kapwani Kiwanga
Serge Attukwei Clottey



Panorama of the City of New York, Queens Museum. Photography: Spencer Lowell

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Color inkjet print, 40 x 30 inches.
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@petrafcollins @bellhoox
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Fanzine. Courtesy of the artists.

Gut-Check
Juliana Huxtable

In Conversation With Jarrett Earnest

A fragment on cultural influence: I was sitting with about 10 high school students in an empty taco shop on Avenue A—they were in an after-school program for kids who are into art; they go around to see exhibitions and talk to artists, writers, and curators. The afternoon we met, they had just been to the New Museum Triennial, Surround Audience, and brought writing to share. One young woman started reading hers about how much she loved the green skin and long yellow braids of Juliana Huxtable's photograph Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm) (2015). After describing Huxtable's text-piece UNIVERSAL CROP TOPS FOR ALL THE SELF-CANONIZED SAINTS OF BECOMING, she wrapped up her analysis: "I think what the artist is saying is that you can become whoever you want to be. That you can be free."

That suite of Huxtable text and photographs, coupled with the iconic life-sized sculpture Juliana *(2015) by artist Frank Benson, made her, as Vogue put it, "the star of the New Museum Triennial"—bringing her into the consciousness of everyone from Takashi Murakami to those New York City public school children. I've admired Juliana Huxtable for years and followed her collective the House of LaDosha. I was happy to see her getting the attention she deserves—transcending the perception of her as a nightlife personality and assuming the status of serious cultural contender. I published an interview with her in SFAQ two years ago and wanted to reconnect after this explosion of attention, to talk about blackness and abstraction, art, celebrity, and her belief in the politics of beauty.*

I've been trying to deal with David Getsy's book* Abstract Bodies *and I know you were just on a panel with him at Art Basel Miami, so in that vein I wanted to ask: How do you think about your relationship to representing bodies, and/or of abstraction, in your work?

When you're studying art history, modernism has a specific lineage with authors, critics and theorists that contribute to what it signifies. Most of those artists—at least the ones that are given the space or the authority to suggest that they were the forerunners of abstraction—were explicitly engaging abstraction as a theoretical, art historical practice. The way that abstraction was talked about on that panel was very white to me—as though we could avoiding the trappings of representation by turning toward abstraction as an alternative to dealing with what identity means. That is a privilege. There is a whole history about what abstraction means, and a critical dialog that allows people to receive and interact with it. There is still a lot that hasn't been explored in bodies. There is a lot in bodies that can create new trajectories and end up in abstraction, or opening up new ways of dealing with representation.

No young artist I know values the distinction between abstraction and representation as a binary—so why are academics trying to reclaim a formal construct from a previous generation?

I don't think about abstraction or representation as an antagonism. People just go back and forth—they co-exist. What some people might think of as abstraction might also be the most literal thing that you can do. When you're reading about abstract art, the burden of what is politicized is always placed on the "woman abstract artist"—she's the one that takes on the burden of articulating what femininity is in abstract art, and only in writing about her work do we acknowledge the male signifiers within abstraction that she's responding to. I think it might be interesting to look at historically significant abstract art for the ways that it has always been charged with identity and not look for the ways it could potentially be read through a lens that, as an author, you're acknowledging you're applying, which ultimately serves to validate the idea that it's neutral in the first place.

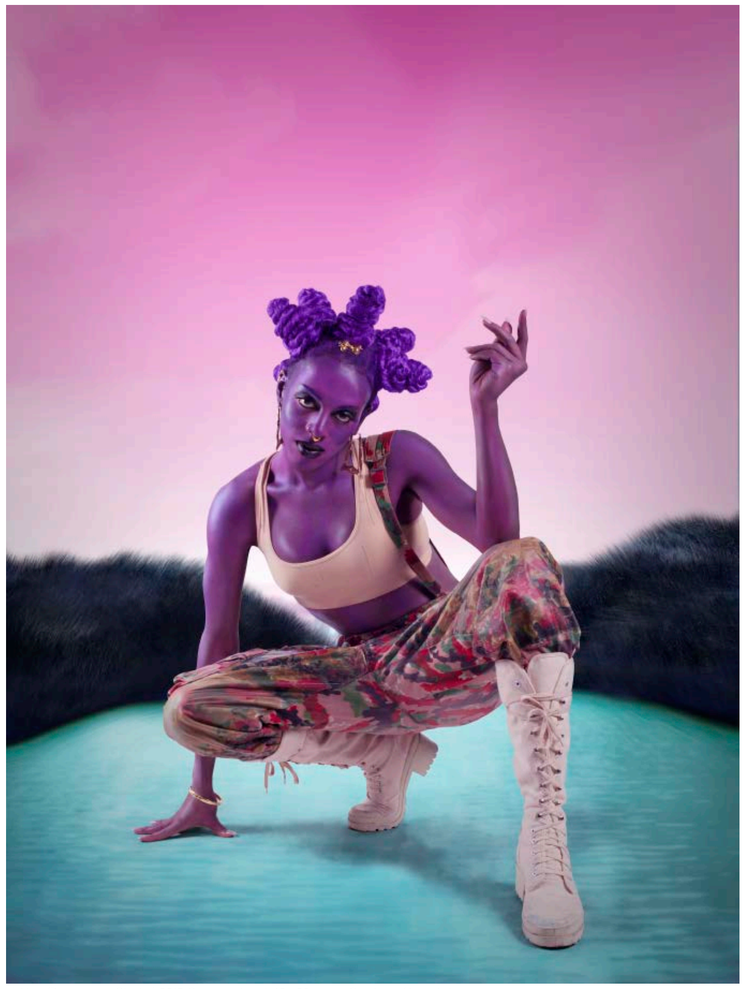
In *There Are Certain Facts That Cannot Be Disputed* (2015), I was thinking about how my voice is present, and how much of my self is given. It's about what performance means for someone like me, who people have access to through wide circulation of images. The idea of performance art from an earlier moment was about provoking presence via the body, and to a certain degree the "cult of youth"—I am really turned off by that idea because of the expectations and the desires people have to consume me. The New Museum's Triennial was the apex of that, where people would come up to me and say: "I saw your body." They would see Frank Benson's sculpture of me and think that they are accessing me. I see performance art as a way for me to engage what presence signifies within this cult of personality. The text, sound, and a lot of the visuals, are a form of abstraction in the sense that, within the performance itself, I do very little. You hear my voice and it's distorted, sometimes it's stripped down to a base element—I've been using more and more devices to manipulate my voice. That is a form of abstraction because it's taking the desire people have of accessing to me, and feeding them an illusion—most of the video, sound, and text is pre-recorded.

I consider my photographic piece *Untitled (Psychosocial Stuntin')* (2015) as dealing in abstraction—even though there is something that resembles "me" in it—that image is based on household black imagery, where you have black women running through a jungle and there is moonlight on her and panthers around. I'm taking these visual motifs that are politically charged, and which are themselves a way of deriving or sublimating a very literal political concept into something visual. I try to take these aesthetics and abstract them even more—to see what remains—to the point where it is almost a test: "Will this be read as black art?" And it wasn't. Most of my art was read as "trans art." To me that is a failure of the way people perceive things as representational or not—these are influenced by, and in dialog with, all of the visual markers of black experience, even though they are simplified into a color language. Black people would see it as "black art," but most of the people in the New Museum instead saw it as "digital" and "trans."

Were they even looking at it and seeing something that signaled a "trans" identity, or were you just labeled a "trans artist" and then that gets mapped onto everything conceptually?

Yes, that is what's always happening, which is why I think it would be interesting to approach a lot of what's considered purely abstract art in that identity framework—from the identities of straight white men.

If we take the Triennial—the conjunction of your text/image wall pieces and Frank Benson's sculpture of you—as representing your coming into a wider public awareness—from the outside it seemed like you were being used as a symbol in the media and by institutions to address a host of issues that they don't actually want to deal with, but they can instead circulate a very attractive picture and feel like, "that did something." You're one of the smartest people I know, and I want to know what that experience was like—being picked up by this machinery that seems to care very little for your actual ideas or work, but a lot for your image?



Untitled (Psychosocial Stuntin'), 2015. Color inkjet print, 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Generally, I share that sentiment. I have a complicated relation to what that sculpture of me signifies because that was not supposed to be in the Triennial. I agreed to do that under a different set of conditions. Agreeing to a sculpture that will be shown in a commercial gallery in London ultimately functions very differently than one appearing in the New Museum's Triennial. Going into the Triennial, I wasn't sure how I felt about it. I thought the fact that this exists is probably better than the alternative—I had no clue that it would become the icon of that show. While that was happening, I appreciated the moments that people did write about my work seriously, but mostly what people were writing about me was as a "muse"—they didn't know I did the images or text myself.

"Muse" is a word that has been used a lot about you. The truth, of course, is that you inspire a lot of people, and they have made work in relation to you and with you, in collaborations; but really, a "muse" is a disempowered position—it always made my skin crawl to read.

To me the idea of a muse is someone who is maybe interesting, or inspiring, but is fundamentally talentless and most of their skills come from social charm, which is so *enchanting* that people with skills, usually men, are the ones to execute the ideas that you suggest by your existence, but maybe don't have the ability to manifest on your own. It's all so sexist. I hadn't dealt with being called a muse before.

Takashi Murakami bought an edition of Benson's sculpture from that show. Murakami's assistant came up to me and said, "He bought this sculpture. He's really obsessed with you. Can he get your contact information?" I was like cool, whatever—that is not a negative interaction, but it shows when people are interacting with a representation, with a sculpture, they feel on some level that they are interacting with me. My existence and what I do will always be linked to this weird object that is already esteemed at this ridiculous monetary value, which will continue to exist, and my work and all of my future labor will, in a way, continue feeding into its value.

I had conflicting feelings watching you blow up during that show—I was happy because I love your work and want people to know about it. And, at the same time it was frustrating because I was reading the press and thinking it was superficial. Not that it was hurtful . . . it just wasn't substantial or insightful.

I saw it as a challenge.

How did you engage that challenge?

I'm more conscious of press things. There is a certain value in visibility. For little black girls on Tumblr, me being in *Vogue* signifies something, and I'm not going to let my jadedness stop me from doing things that might be significant in that way. It's made me more self-aware of my work.

When you came to my class at BHQFU a few years ago you asked everyone to read* Herculine Barbin *(1872), the heartbreaking memoir of a nineteenth century intersex person, and that showed one example of the insane curiosity a trans or intersex body exerts in the Western imagination. How does that relate to the images you produce of your own body? And the images that circulated of the Frank Benson's nude sculpture of you?

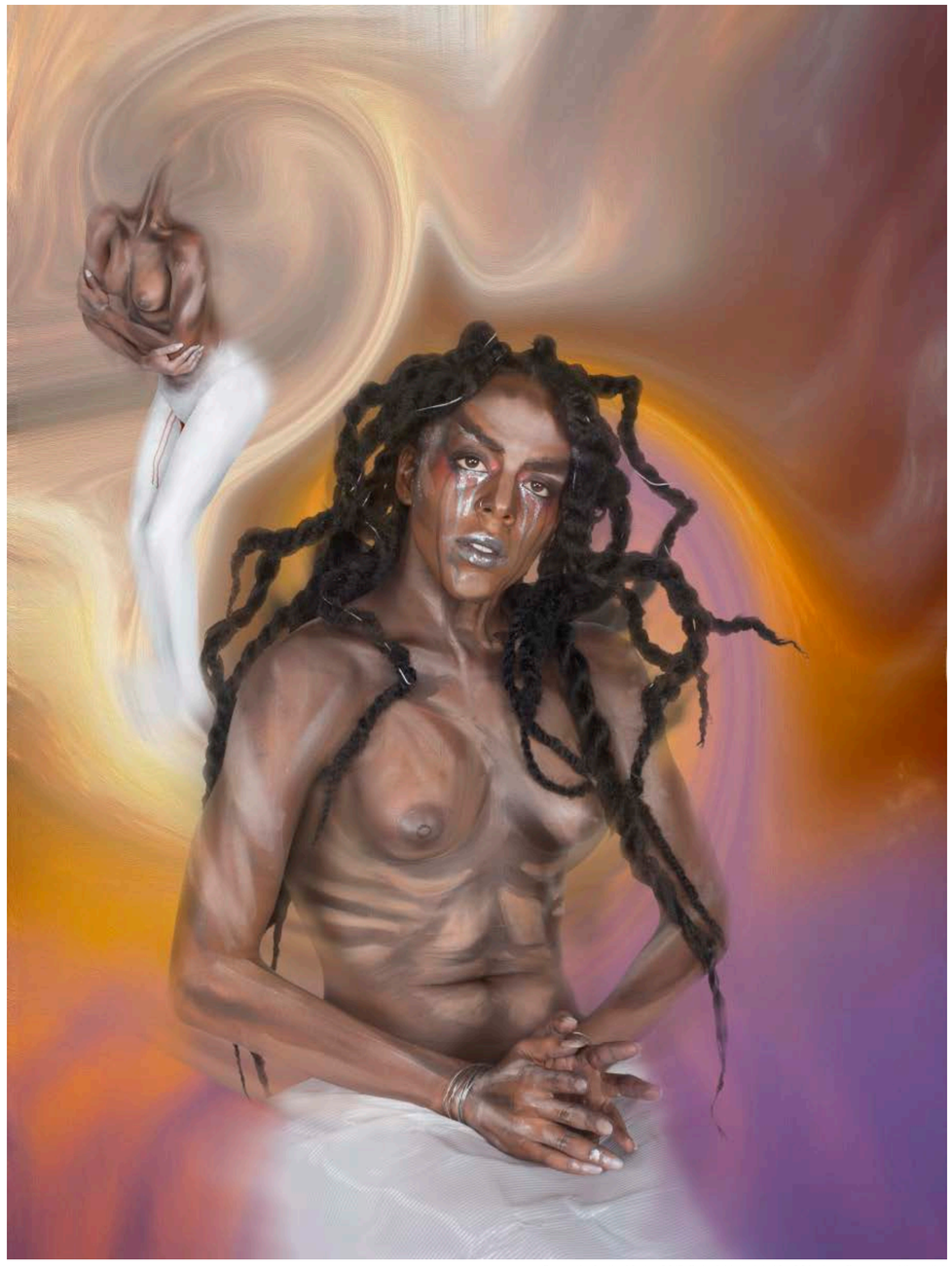
I try to be joyful and playful with it—so often when you are overly politicized you aren't allowed to be playful unless you are dealing with tropes of how black people have been on the losing end of historical imagery. I mean, that is important to do—when I think of Kara Walker I think of that. Those two images for the New Museum were so much about abstracting from a literal idea of blackness. Which is why I love something as simple as changing my skin. It's so funny, a very basic thing to do—change the color of your skin—but it actually affected the way people interacted with the work. People would come up to me, or write to me about the work, saying, "I love those Buddhist references!"—What? Those are Bantu knots! But that is what I wanted to do—see who can access the images, and push the question of authenticity. There is something happening that is really interesting is that the cultural markers of blackness have been completely abstracted from black bodies.

Can you expand on that?

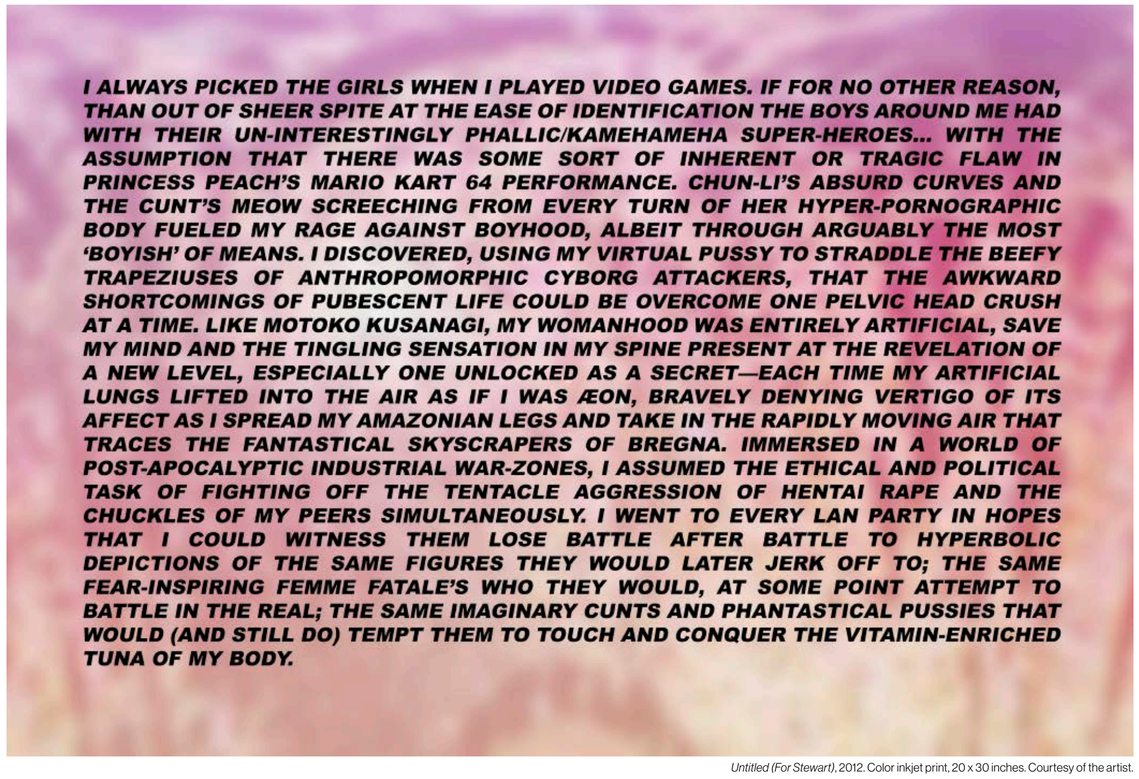
Cornrows: ten years ago white girls were not walking down runways with cornrows. If it did happen, it was solely for shock value—and not anywhere near the rate it is happening now. Because of how gender has played out historically, the idea of the wigger for a long time was a white male figure, because white men are more entitled to colonize culturally, whereas white women maybe had to wait 15 years longer to do it. But in the past five years white women have been having their moment—appropriating the way black people dress, accents, solely in the way that they exist performatively in music. White women modify their body to approximate a thick Latina girl, but ultimately trying to access something that blackness represents. Because of the way markers of black culture have been abstracted from black bodies, our sense of entitlement to them has been totally taken away. My images are about trying to hide enough to see in what ways questions of authenticity can exist, even if it is not perceived explicitly as black.

How does this connect to conversations about gender identity? How do they overlap and then peel back apart?

The question of authenticity with black people is a gut-check. The instincts that you have for living—those instincts cannot be codified. The second you codify them you're going to reach that point where you've said something that is inherently problematic. But with trans culture and the culture surrounding gender variance, it's not perceived as racially specific—I mean there are ways in which racial differences and hierarchies and privileges and violences are played out in that narrative, but essentially "trans" signifies something that is beyond race. I knew it was going to happen with Rachel Dolezal. I knew that immediately people would say: "transracial is the same as transgender." To really get into the specifics of what that means you have to get into the ethical questions, but ultimately there is no real justification for why they are different, outside of a belief that there are some innate qualities attached to gender in ways that we know there are not innate qualities attached to race. But to say that reinforces an idea many people think is problematic: that there is some innate quality of gender, even if it is just a base innateness. You can study things across history, like that there are gender-variant people in every race across history, which is not the same with racism. Femininity, at least the trappings of what that signifies, is a voice, a stance, a set of desires, how you relate to who you desire—and those markers of gender can exist in any cultural context. But, no one who grew up without access to American television and popular culture would wake up and behave in a way that Rachel Dolezal does, because they would have zero way of accessing that. They would have zero perception of what blackness would signify, because they have bled into each other, and I think once you open the floodgates you can't really go back, at this point I'm just like, "okay, let Rachel Dolezal check black". I think that is really stupid, delusional, and insane, but I'm so uninterested in the debates surrounding questions of authenticity when you get to the intersection of race and gender, specifically blackness and transness.



Sympathy for the Martyr, 2015. Color inkjet print, 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Untitled (For Stewart), 2012. Color inkjet print, 20 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

I've started to consciously avoid addressing the trans thing, because it's a slippery slope, and because it is something that, by virtue of the fact that it brings up such a spectrum, to analyze it you need something like a gut-check. There are sadistic cultural impulses that are playing themselves out in the public consumption of trans right now. Putting Caitlyn Jenner on the cover of a magazine, days after she'd gotten surgery, literally months after she decided to transition, is sadistic to me. I think the trans conversation is at a place where some of the darkest cultural impulses are playing out, and you can't actually say anything about it because to say something about it you are categorized with the most toxic, conservative, repressive aspects of society. I went on a Twitter rant about this today.

What did you say?
[Reads tweets]

And how did people respond?
I actually don't have as many followers on Twitter as I do on Instagram, but if I said that on Instagram there would be so many Internet trolls—I would be accused of all sorts of terrible things. No one is allowed to be honest and have real conversations. There are some men who literally think it's funny and entertaining to dress up as a woman and call themselves trans. It's happening. But you're not allowed to say that is happening because if you do you are giving credence to these super conservative feminists who think that all transwomen are rapists masquerading as women so that they can enter into "women only" spaces that have historically served as "spaces of safety." There are so many nuances to how these things exist, which have always been difficult—there has never been the utopia of women only spaces—white women used to have black women raped and murdered just for looking at them. It's never been "easy" or "safe." I'm really disgusted by what's happening right now, and I want to be able to say: they put Caitlyn Jenner on the cover of that magazine because they would get a lot of money and it's kind of crazy. She represents a representation of transwomen that's totally a circus—let's just keep it trill. I think that is sadistic and that it actually hurts transpeople in the end.

It also underscores the importance of images and representations. Images matter and are partly how we present other people's lives as valuable, and aesthetics are the way we do it. It's really scary that otherwise sophisticated self-proclaimed "progressive" people are not able to have disagreements without it becoming immediately incendiary.
And, I refuse to do the "trigger warning" thing—it's the most self-indulgent narcissistic thing you can do. The culture that is emerging is trying to counter the gut-check by putting a trigger warning on anything that doesn't suit every hypothetical intersection of human, which it never will and there is always going to be a battle about that. It's about saying all things are equal—no they are not, and that is a problem, and pretending that is not the case is not helping anyone.

Which is how I feel about beauty: all of the transwomen who are murdered are presenting themselves as very feminine, specifically aspiring to an ideal of beauty. So many people look at them and say: "They are beautiful." The threat that beauty represents is that they are approximating what you might call a "normative idea of gender" and they do that as a form of empowerment. But I'm not supposed to express that, or suggest that the achievement of that beauty signifies something political, because then I'd be exclusionary or whatever—and that is just bullshit. I don't think anyone is being honest about that. But all the same people are obsessed with Lupita—and why? She's an actress, sure, but she is also a pretty woman—one who undermines a more white hegemonic idea of beauty, but who also aspires to and operates within a space of beauty nonetheless. We don't talk about why there is a power in that. I would like to expand ideas of beauty too—let's all get to that point—but not allowing people to get into the difficulty, or to acknowledge what beauty means as a form of empowerment, is crazy.

No small factor of your rise to stardom is that you're extraordinarily beautiful. The way you look is not an accident; it's not something that you haven't considered—
It's not at all. If I was just doing what I was doing when I was in school, which was an academic hoorah, nobody would have paid attention to me. I do it consciously. I love walking in someplace in the skimpiest dress, celebrating my body. It's so funny because I'll go to things with my boyfriend and people will think that he must be a startup dude from San Francisco and I'm his bimbo girlfriend—that happened at Art Basel Miami constantly.

How do you know what they were thinking?
'Cause that is how people treat me. It's so obvious. I know when someone thinks that I'm a hooker. I know when someone thinks that I'm a model or a bimbo. I know when people see me and think, "oh, you're that person that I've seen in a bunch of magazines and you probably do something stupid that gets attention, maybe you're friends with Chloë Sevigny"—those things all come across. It's kind of fun at this point.

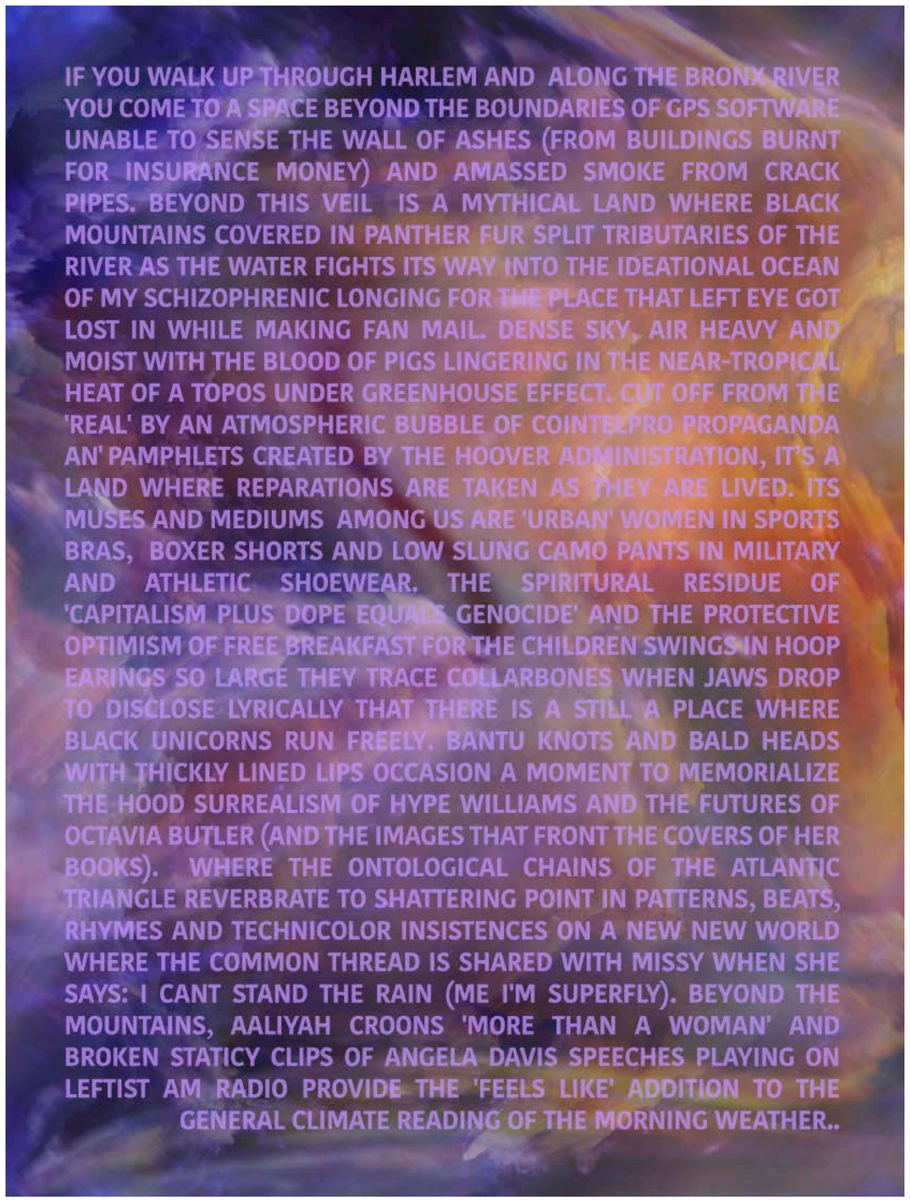
The last time we talked you were primarily in a nightlife context, and you talked about how claiming your space as an artist was extremely politicized, that you were "removing your straightjackets"—how has your relationship to that changed? How do you participate in nightlife as an artistic space, and inversely, how your relation to the art world has changed?
I still do a lot of nightlife. I think my relationship to it has changed in that it is not the sole arena I can explore in. DJing has become my primary thing there; in our last interview I was hosting parties…

You had just quit your job at the ACLU and were taking a leap of faith that the community was going to support you in your creative work.
They allow me to have a much freer relationship to both of them. Generally it's nice because they feed into each other, or they relieve each other. With the art stuff, I have to be aware of navigating the whitest, often wealthiest, people, who at the same time have no real self-critical impulse because they think being a conceptual painter is the same thing as being politically radical—which is crazy. When I feel that way it is so nice to go to a party and just do my thing in a much more dynamic (racially, gendered, etc.) environment. Sometimes when I'm DJing I feel the most free, just taking an idea and having it exist sonically and working through it. I still have some straightjackets on, but way less.

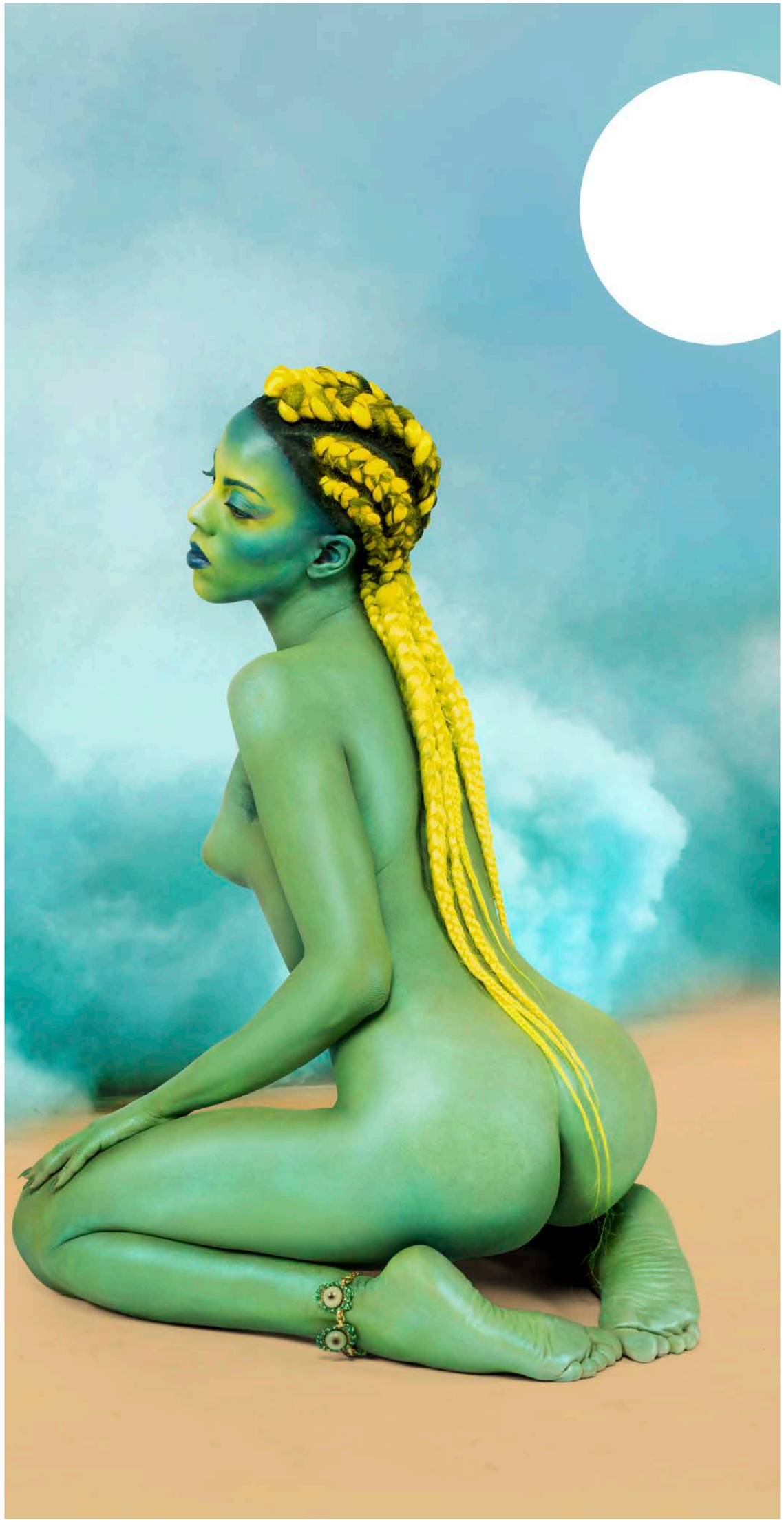
How do you think about the distance between when we talked in 2013 and now—in terms of what you care about, in your life?
I think some of the questions I was dealing with then I've started answering. When we talked last time, my relationship to nightlife was very visual and performative, about character types and ornamentation, and I think I've found ways of dealing with that and I've pushed it over into an artistic practice. Sometimes DJing it's nice to just get people dancing, but I've gotten into playing texts that I've made, or maybe totally getting into a more textured approach to mixing sound.

I think there are new challenges emerging. I feel like I am now navigating the art world, which is really bizarre socially—most of my friends in the art world are conceptually-leaning, ostensibly anti-market, Marxist-critical, kind of artists. When I first started doing debate in college and it was like, "I'm in this new field and people generally respect me as smart, but it's a lot of nerdy white boys. And they appreciated me and there's a community which is great—but I think I need to get the charge to blaze them." It happened again when I did "performance debate"—I had earned all my stripes as a critical debater and got to a place where it was a cult of personality around these tragic, pseudo-nihilistic white boys who were all into each other as white male geniuses—like, they read Nietzsche and watch Dave Chapelle. Maybe the art world equivalent now would be … well. In that circumstance I felt a similar challenge to what I feel right now. I don't know how that will manifest yet, but I'm excited to see how it does.

There are artists making work now who are so white, come from money, half of them are from Germany or some Scandinavian country, and are given this credence of being "punk" based on critical posturing. I'm now a lesser inside/more so outside participant in that world. To translate the questions I am trying to deal with into that world is a challenge, and I think it's important, because there are clusters of the art world given a lot of intellectual weight, paid a lot of critical deference—there is an idea that they are perceived as "progressive," pushing conversations around certain art practices, and in a lot of ways they are. But I'm like: there is not a single person of color here—Not. A. Single. Person. Of. Color! Maybe there are two Asian dudes, one black queen … a single black woman. There is a lot of Marxism being thrown around here. A lot of the white male critic-artists, in some form or another, they write themselves into relevance. People build careers off this, and it's happening in such a cultural vacuum. So I'd like to do something; this can't keep happening—and that is what I hope I can change in some way.



Untitled (Casual Power), 2015. Color inkjet print. 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Juliana Huxtable, *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)*, 2015. Color inkjet print, 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

SFAQ[Projects] Pullout Poster

Jayson Musson, *It's Been Done*, 2015. Tempera on paper, 30x22 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York

Jayson Musson

In Conversation With Fabienne Stephan

I was introduced to Jayson Musson's work by Marilyn Minter who played me the online Hennessy Youngman videos at her studio. She invited him to present his first solo project in New York, Itsa Small, Small World, *at Family Business, a now-defunct space that was run by Maurizio Cattelan and Massimiliano Gioni. It's perhaps still one of the most interesting shows about the Internet and its place between artists and audiences . . . you still might be able to see images online. Soon after, Jeanne and I visited Jayson's studio in Brooklyn and I have texted with him since--four years of it. We don't really meet IRL. This interview was conducted 100% on the Internet.*
- Kyoto, January 2016

Can you talk about your first art encounter that wasn't in the form of a comic book drawing)?
I grew up with a lot of Jamaican folk paintings in my childhood home—market scenes, country scenes. My parents bought them on their trips back to Jamaica, I believe, before I was born. They were the background imagery of my childhood; I always just remember them being there. I think for both of them, as the generation that emigrated to the United States from Jamaica, it was a way of tethering themselves to their home country.

Oh, my parents also had a Joan Miró print as well a few small L'Utrecht reproductions. However, I think my first real encounter with art within a context of art history and institutions was with Van Gogh at the Philadelphia Museum of Art while I was in undergrad. The PMA had like a "Van Gogh's Flowers" exhibition and as corny as it sounds, I think it was the first time the physical presence of a painting really hit me. Also I was high, pretty stoned, like out of my mind, and the impasto flowers were fucking vibrating. [Laughs]

What is your favorite artwork or artist?
I'm not really sure, to be honest. I would have to say Michael Smith is probably my favorite living visual artist. His humor and disposition toward life really resonate with me and how his work exists across various media has always appealed to me as well. But favorite artwork . . . hmmm . . . I don't think I have a favorite artwork, I'm wracking my brain and I can't think of one. Wait, maybe Omer Fast's *5000 Feet is the Best* is my favorite artwork; it's at once political, visually alluring, and cinematically sound. Oh, also Martin Kippenberger's painting of this Bob Ross looking guy in lederhosen with the caption "The person who can't dance says the band can't play," an excellent analogy for many things.

The Outsider. You always seem to take that role, even an outsider to NY where you grew up. (I remember the Plastic Little "ode" to Brooklyn . . .)
[Laughs] The Plastic Little song *Brooklyn* was written at a verifiable low point in my young life. I was living in Philly, PGW (the gas company) had turned my heat off (AGAIN) because I was too poor to pay the insane gas bill, I was showering at an ex's apartment only because her roommate was still friends with me and allowed me to shower there to piss her off. Fucking low, dawg. When you have a few strikes against you like that, you begin to think that maybe things aren't working out for you in Philly. Maybe I should move to that magic city on a hill: Brooklyn.

In terms of being an outsider; I don't think anyone sets out to be an "outsider." As an artist you do what you do, and if certain people dig it, you're possibly embraced, if not, you keep doing what you do because it's what you do. It's intrinsic to your being. For me at least, I make work because I have an interest in seeing whatever the work may be manifesting in the world.

I know your mom used to be a back-up singer for reggae bands in Jamaica. Did you grow up listening to reggae?
My mom briefly sung with Boris Gardiner when they were both in their teens, way before he was a known name. They grew up together and my mom's nickname was "Millie the Model," named for a comic book character from her childhood. Anyway, the singing was a short-lived excursion for her. My father is super into music and had a massive vinyl collection when I was growing up, which naturally included a lot of reggae from the '70s and '80s, but he was into all types of music so long as it banged. So I didn't grow up exclusively on reggae, I honestly heard more American pop of the time—Michael Jackson, Ashford & Simpson, Tina Turner. He really loved the soundtrack to *Endless Love*. New Edition was my favorite artist as a kid.

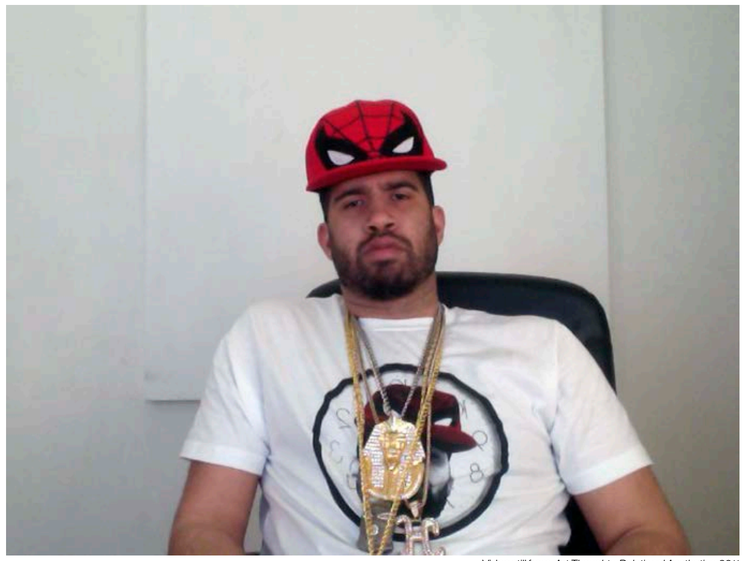
I can't remember my first encounter with hip hop, and I am hoping it was not MC Solaar. What was yours?
I'm not really sure . . . rap music was kind of like the background music of my life. Much like those Jamaican folk paintings, rap music has always been there and it was probably because of my older brother. He'd be bumping either Big Daddy Kane or Biz Markie, and I tried to absorb his interests because to me he was pretty cool and I, unfortunately, was not.

Do you listen to current pop music? It's almost only ladies now, no? Except for Justin Bieber. No one cares about men anymore?
I think the ladies very much care about men. When Zayn, formerly of 1D, drops his album it will be Armageddon. Ragnarök. End times. The rapture. But pop music, I just got *Anti* by Rihanna, the track "Consideration" is so good, "Needed Me" is excellent.

Do you ever think about designing an app? What would it be?
lol, yes. But I can't tell you, or some enterprising programmer will steal my idea.

Was there ever a black superhero? I know I asked you this before, but I am trying to subtly bring in your new show,* The Adventures of Jamel *here. Is he a superhero?
[Laughs] Of course there was: Luke Cage aka Power Man, T'Challa the Black Panther, Cyborg, Storm, Bishop, Falcon, Shadowhawk, Spawn, Steel, Martha Washington, the old Western Lobo, there was a whole black comic imprint in the '90s called Milestone Comics which was a sub-imprint of DC. Shit, Eartha Kitt's Catwoman is iconic. There are a lot more I didn't name here.

I think I see Jamel as a kind of accidental Bruce Wayne or Tony . . . what is his name . . . the superhero played by Robert Downey Jr? . . . the superpower is the time traveling machine paired with his dancing. Am I wrong?
In terms of Jamel, I don't consider him a superhero per se, I'd say he's more of a regular guy pulled into extraordinary circumstances who reacts with the small toolset he has: dancing. If he was a superhero, he'd be one definitely akin to Batman, no real extraordinary and/or miraculous power but is motivated by trauma from the past and interacts with the world based on that pain. I guess dealing with and/or trying to shape the world into a better place despite trauma makes someone a truer hero than any superpower.



Video still from, *Art Thoughtz: Relational Aesthetics*. 2011

You have just finalized a production deal for* The Adventures of Jamel. *How will this change the way you work?
Well, as of this interview, not everything is 100% in place, but me and my collaborators on *The Adventures of Jamel* are close to something. But working in film/video production is innately collaborative, which is quite the opposite of being a studio artist. For instance, I have to take into account various production issues when I'm writing the episodes alone in my cave, in terms of the feasibility of pulling off some of the crazier script elements. I can't really just write anything and assume it can be filmed. I think that's the hardest part really. I'm a bit of a fantasist and have to adjust to my director Scott Ross and producer Ted Passon being like "Um, Jayson . . ." when they receive the scripts. But that input is invaluable and has taught me a lot about creating narrative projects when you're a bit of a loon.

Was Hennessy always filmed in a tiny room?
ART THOUGHTZ could be filmed anywhere as long I had a desk for my laptop and two light sources. It was a pretty portable project, whereas Jamel goes from one iconic setting to the next!

***Will Hennessy make a cameo in* The Adventures of Jamel?**
[Laughs] Nah, Hennessy will not be making a cameo in *Jamel*. The Hennessy canon states that he died in 2012 after a freak accident at a Civil War reenactment.

What is the relationship between these two characters?
There is none between them other than that I authored them both. I'm the baby daddy.

The Coogi paintings came out of your work on the Hennessy series. I can't remember how it happened. Can you remind me and our readers?
The Coogi paintings came out of a joke I made in my first Tumblr post in 2010. (http://jaysonscottmusson.tumblr.com/post/974666324/is-this-thing-on). I used to bartend and I'd come home around 4am and shop online for outfits for the Hennessy project, and one night I came across this Coogi hoodie. Even though I grew up aware of Coogi sweaters thanks to rap, I was for the first time really struck by how painterly the garments were. So I decided to make a post about it to kick off the Hennessy Tumblr. At that time I was making various social media accounts for the character to kind of seed him in the world, a kind of digital "fleshing out" of the character. Eventually, after making serious strides with the material, the work separated itself from its instantiating joke to become a real formal object (said in a Pinocchio voice).

Anticyclonic, 2014. Mercerized cotton stretched on linen. 96 x 75 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.

***Will paintings come out of* The Adventures of Jamel?**
I'm not going to make separate art objects as a corollary to *The Adventures of Jamel*. That project is already a creative endeavor that doesn't need ancillary objects to lend it weight to be considered in a fine art context. It's a massive creative undertaking which contains all if not most of the themes in my previous works, just executed in a manner absent of identifiable art signifiers.

Do you really type everything on your phone? No pen and paper anymore? Do you draw on your phone using a doodle app ever?
Yeah, I do a lot of writing on the phone. My hand cramps up rather quickly when writing by hand, and my phone is always with me, so it functions more as a notebook than a phone. However, I don't draw on my phone, all the drawing apps are shit and my hands are a bit too big to use them properly. It's a bit too unwieldy for me—as a giant creature—and the sketches end up looking like a trash fire.

I have been reading about Gordon Parks, and how he never cared about anything else than reaching an audience as wide as possible. He didn't care to show in art galleries. Who is your audience?
My audience is anyone who fucks with my shit.

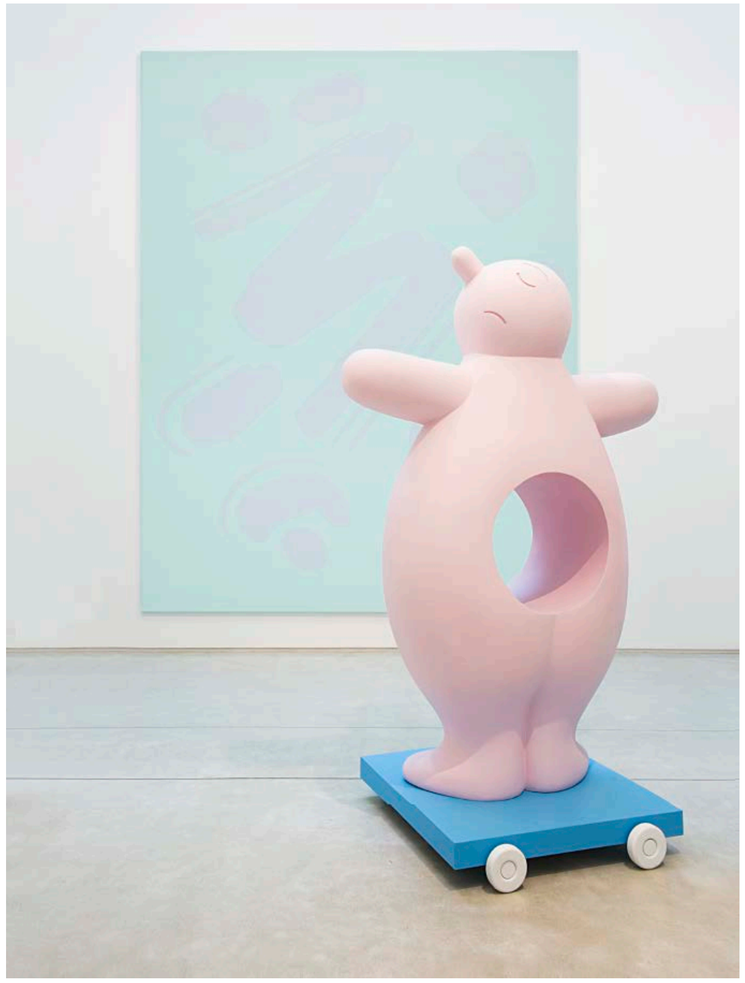
Are you ever going to show in a gallery again? Or, do you prefer the larger public of the Internet?
[Laughs] I don't have any plans to not work in galleries again, even if my current focus is a detour from formal art making. To me it's all art; some of it can be hung on a wall; some of it can be watched online. I actually like both avenues of production, but ideally I enjoy making work that can have dual lives as both a public work and a work of art. Both audiences have boons and drawbacks—the mythical "Internet," that spooky disembodied mob, is a voracious consumer of content, perpetually wanting more, and for more often than not, for free. But sharing directly with people without the co-sign from various gatekeepers is, well, great. The art audience, in comparison to 'general culture,' consumes slowly, is mostly conservative, and is a highly mannered and considered beast. Those aren't necessarily compliments, by the way.

Is it important for you to see the posts and likes and online comments of people about your online projects versus having an exhibition with real life visitors?
Comments online are, in general, garbage. Likes are stamps of approval in the most superficial sense. I think when I first started the Hennessy project, I'd reply to comments, but it's pointless in the end. A good friend of mine once said: "Any monkey with a keyboard can type up an opinion." I'd rather not lose energy to perpetual engagement with chimpanzee trolls. The comments will always come and that's cool; it's the Internet bro. You have your instantaneous sharing, but you just can't have your lollipop with none of the drama.

What is coming up for you?
I have an exhibition in Philadelphia: *The Truth in the Song* at the Fleisher/Ollman Gallery. Possibly showing a short animation with Salon 94 this summer as well. I'm currently working on the character models for it right now.

You mentioned the qualities you enjoy in Omer Fast's* 5000 Feet is the Best. *Are these something you strive for in your work? What does it mean for a work of art to be political today, for you?
A successful work of political art has to engage people who are not artists. If you can't have a conversation with a person outside of the art world bubble, then the work will probably fail in its political efficacy. Now, this is a broad statement, as I'm not advocating for shit like Banksy stencils, which are awful in my opinion. But who knows, maybe that shitty Banksy stencil could set a young mind off on a journey of discovery that will transcend that shitty stencil? [Laughs] I think people need to realize that when they encounter things they don't like or understand, that a work can kick start a trajectory of experiences for someone. Just because it doesn't resonate with you doesn't mean it is bereft of value.

Your Instagram post with the batik painting from your mom reminded me that you do have a little art collection. I think all artists collect . When I first moved to New York I was lucky to be invited to Ellsworth Kelly's studio out in the country. Upon entrance, before getting to his work, he would make one look at a few small works in his personal collection. It was almost an initiation test . . . if I didn't know what was in front of me, next level denied. What if you did that? What would you show your visitors?
I guess I have somewhat of a small collection, but it's primarily work by people I know, Andrew Jeffrey Wright, Ben Woodward, Crystal Stokowski, James Ulmer, Emily Manolo Ruiz, Chris Lawrence—all Philadelphia connected artists. But if I was to pull an Ellsworth Kelly, I'd see if people are drawn to an odd piece from my childhood that my mother gave me. I wouldn't want to spoil it here or folks would know what it is and cheat on my initiation test!



Installation View, *Exhibit of Abstract Art* at Salon 94 Bowery, New York, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

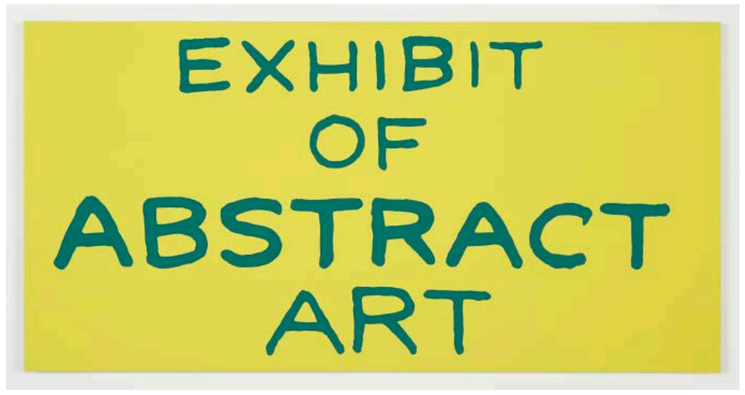
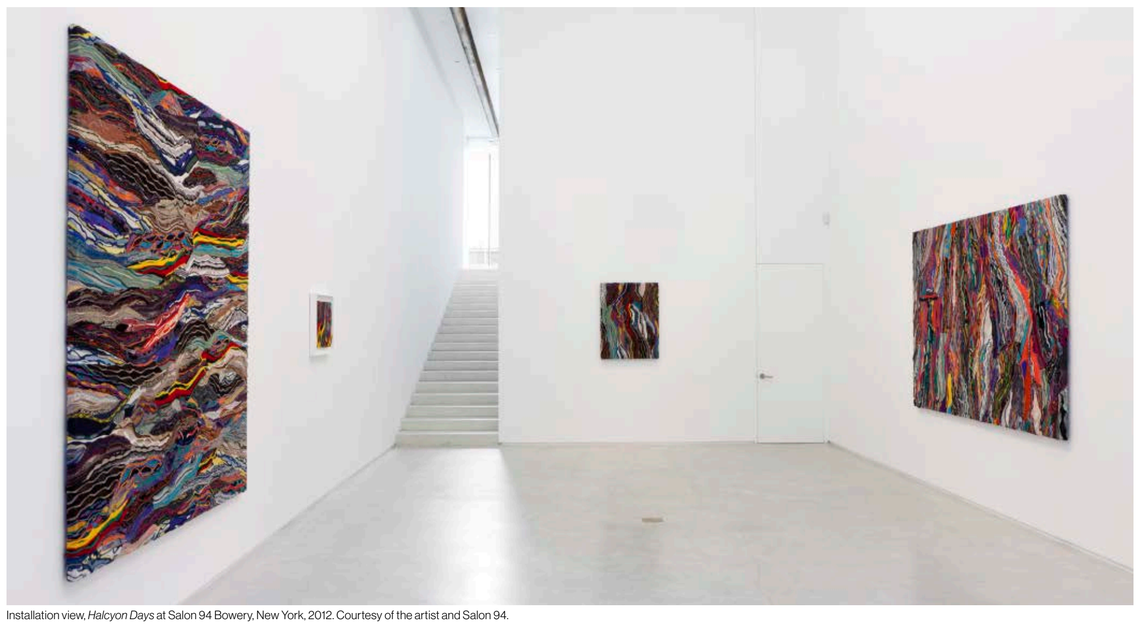


Exhibit of Abstract Art Sign, 2014. Flashe on panel, 18 x 36 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.



Installation view, *Halcyon Days* at Salon 94 Bowery, New York, 2012. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

The Adventures Of Jamel. James III as Jamel with Temporal Navigation Device. Photograph by Zac Rubino. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

The Adventures Of Jamel. James III as Jamel in Sistine Chapel. Photograph byScott Ross. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

The Adventures Of Jamel. James III as Jamel, Kurt Hunte as Slave. Photograph by Zac Rubino. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

Serge Attukwei Clottey

In Conversation With Arielle Bier

Ghanaian artist Serge Attukwei Clottey is eager to galvanize positive social change, and focuses his performance, video and sculptural work on the crucial environmental and political issues that plague his local community. Hoping to alter the awareness and behavior of his audiences, he covers topics such as water conservation, plastic pollution, and exploitative commodity trading.

He is the founder of Afrogallonism, a movement that draws attention to the cultural effects of Ghana's water crisis. Yellow plastic jerrycan (jugs used for storing water in Ghana, also referred to as gallons) are a frequent material in his work. Drawing from Ghanaian history and traditional art, Clottey creates costumes, masks, and sculptures that combine plastics and electronic gadgets with bones, shells, and locally sourced textiles.

As a current resident at the ANO Cultural Research Platform in Accra, Clottey is developing a large installation called River Goddess *built of stitched plastics that will cover the dried up Kpeshie Lagoon, in an attempt to draw attention to pollution in the region, and rekindle relationships with the sea gods of the Ga people. Through his engagement with local communities and use of social media, he is seeking ways to spread his message and broaden its reach to international audiences.*

The art scene in Ghana has been very active in the last few years. What's happening at the moment?
Ghana is an African art center in general, and the last few years have been very productive. The art scene has become really vibrant with emerging artists who are breaking away from traditional art and working more with contemporary art. For example, Ibrahim Mahama was one of the young artists represented at the Venice Biennale this year. His participation put Ghana on the global map and had a lot of impact on young artists as well. There are a lot of new projects that have followed, and more artists are engaging with the international art scene now.

Where is the activity focused? Is that happening in galleries, museums, or project spaces?
The activity is mostly developing in public spaces because there are just a few galleries here, and they only show a particular kind of work. The galleries are into traditional arts, so we need public spaces. There are a few institutional art spaces that we also exhibit with, like ANO, which is run by Nana Oforiatta Ayim, and others we do workshops at.

Your own work focuses on local political and environmental issues. What's your perspective on how artists should relate to the background that they come from? Do you feel like it's the responsibility of an artist to make change or make society better?
I think artists have a role to play in society. Through performance art, I create awareness and point out political issues in my country. A lot of people are afraid to speak out against the political system, but there are many other artists working in different parts of Africa using the arts to criticize politics.

In your recent solo exhibition,* The Displaced *at Feuer/Mesler in New York, you use video, sculpture, and installation, but performance is your main priority. Why choose performance?
Performance was my first encounter as an artist. When I was growing up, all I dreamt about was movement. When I studied in Brazil, I saw a lot of street performers and street art and I realized why I've been dreaming so much about movement. Performance was the easiest and most powerful way for me to express myself as an artist. At the time, I worked as a model for an agency in Ghana doing fashion shoots. I realized that I looked like a puppet in that situation. They told me how to pose, how to walk, and all that. Taking that experience from the fashion industry, I decided to incorporate it in my art because I know that my body is part of my process. I use myself in my work, and I use myself as an object. I always find ways to share the process of my work publicly. I use the process of collecting my materials as part of the performance because it's a dialogue within the space I'm in. When I go to the dump to collect my materials with others in my performance group *GoLokal*, we mostly wear women's costumes because women struggle with these materials in daily life. In Ghana, the women are responsible for taking care of the homes, the cooking, and all of that. We wear women's clothes on the street to go pick up the water gallons and sometimes we carry fifty of them on our backs. People see it and start to speak about it. They ask why we always carry the gallons and what we use them for. Gender and sexuality are key elements in our performance. The process becomes a performance with the public. It creates a wider audience, which also is how I explore the concepts and ideas in public spaces—by interacting with people.

Are the members of* GoLokal *also artists? What are their backgrounds?
Some of my performers are not artists. One is a photographer. Actually, I'm teaching him how to use a camera so that we can have one person who photographs our performances. Most of them work in other fields like electronics, IT, and tailoring. There are even soccer players who want to be part of the group because they are excited about what we are doing.

We also do a lot of costuming, which was influenced by trade on the African coast. We live in a city where we have ports and a long history of trade. It's a place where European costumes and African costumes together. It is just part of how we live. With my group, we focus a lot of attention on costume. Fashion is a part of it, but it also deals with the whole history of our time. For example, we don't have winter here, but we still have winter clothes in the markets, so people just wear them because they are coming from Europe. People don't dress according to the weather, but because of the colonial influences.

A lot of the pieces you create are very craft based. You're collecting materials from the sea, the dumpster, or the streets, and you're anthropomorphizing them. A lot of the materials or objects, like the jerrycan, become human masks, which reference traditional Ghanaian masks. What is your relationship to the tribalism and the ritualistic practices you incorporate into in your work?
My ancestors were traders with other towns; they were warriors and they had a spiritual side, which was used for fighting. I looked into that spiritual aspect; they had a costume they only used for fighting wars. I'm interested in how history and tradition can be used in our time. For me, it's also about telling that history to my generation. What kind of connection can I make between that time and our time? Their stories were not documented, they were just being told from generation to generation. So I put all those stories into the performances I make using costumes and masks. The masks are something that will survive since they are made of plastic.

How did you first start working with issues related to climate change, and how did you decide to focus all of your work and energy on it?
When I completed art school in Ghana, I was still making traditional figurative painting and working with my dad, who is also a painter. Then I received an opportunity to study in Brazil, where I realized that there are more issues to deal with in art. I was working with foreign objects and materials, and I realized that there are a lot of materials in Ghana that I can work with. When I came back to Ghana in 2006, after finishing art school in Brazil, I decided to look into the issues that are relevant to the country. I wanted to look at waste management, and then I began looking at climate change, which is how I first got interested in working with the plastic gallon jugs and developed the concept of Afrogallonism. I'm developing it as a concept and a movement that can be explored globally as a means of changing trash into treasure. It's about the future of globalization and identity.

Aesthetically, many works of yours such as the* Plastic Journey *series, for example, draw similarities to the work of well-known Ghanaian artist El Anatsui. Anatsui uses pressed bottle caps bound with copper wire to create sculptural wall works, whereas you're using plastic and copper wire. What is your relationship to his work?
I first learned about his work in 2010, but even before that, I was trying to find ways to get rid of plastics. I wanted to make paintings without paint. Plastic has a very long life span and we don't know how to get rid of it, so I began cutting it up and layering it, at first in a figurative way, and then as abstract works. My work talks about migration and material value. Copper is one of the most valuable commodities in the markets in Ghana, so combining plastic and copper creates an equal balance in the artwork. Anatsui's work references handwoven Kente, which is a traditional fabric, but mine represents a migration of objects and how we consume so much plastic in our daily lives.

Can you explain the history of the water shortage crisis and why the gallon jugs are so significant to you and your community? I understand they are also called Kufuor gallons.
Between 2002 and 2005 there was a serious water shortage. Sometimes the water would run only once a week. As children we carried these plastic gallons for kilometers to collect water. The name Kufuor gallons came up because water was scarce during the time of John Kufuor's presidency. It was mostly women who were using the Kufuor gallons because they were the ones who woke up early to carry these water gallons for ten kilometers to take care of the house. At one time you would see hundreds of gallons in the queue. On the gallons, people would mark their names and write in different colors. Looking at the queue, you could tell the language and language barriers. It creates a story about people and about religion. You see the gallon and you know whom it belongs to. A color may be used like a red splash, which represent danger, or blue, which represents happiness. Sometimes there are just names. When it's names, it tells you which tribe the person is from, or which religion. You might see a Christian name or an Islamic name on the gallon, for example. It is also political statement. Within the queue for water, you can tell the whole story of where these people are coming from. The water shortage created a very vibrant, colorful community. It's something I photographed and also inspires my collages. It's arranged according to the architecture and it's all over the streets. Every house has about 100 gallons. Because of the water shortage, we're still using them. People even sleep on them. People use them as chairs. They use them as beds. The gallons are used for different purposes in their homes, which makes it part of us.

Your work often deals with local political issues in Ghana and your own local experience with migration. What was your experience like working in Vienna on issues of global migration?
That was my second trip to Europe. I was in residency for three months at the Kunsthalle Exnergasse. I didn't know anybody in Austria, and I had three months to come up with a body of work. I decided to reach out to other Africans in the diaspora. I told them about my interest in collaborating and asked, "What are the issues I can work on?" They gave me the idea of migration. I was already working with migration, but I wanted to interview them about their experience as Africans living

Perfectly Adapted, 2016. Plastic, wire, and oil paints. 64 X 88 inches. Photograph by Nii Odzenma. Courtesy of the artist.

Installation view, *My Mother's Wardrobe* in Labadi, Accra, Ghana, 2016. Photograph by Nii Odzenma. Courtesy of the artist.

All photographs in grid taken in Labadi, Accra, Ghana, by Lisa Marie Pomares and Charles Whitcher. Courtesy of the artist.

in Austria. I ended up collaborating with a number of people including a poet, an artist, a dancer, and a performing artist. I was coming as an African and as an outsider, asking them to share their experience through the arts. Collaborating with them gave me a better understanding of their experience as Africans living in Austria. Within the exhibition, I asked them to give me a message written on tobacco envelopes that I could take back to Ghana and share. I feel like a messenger to Africa, sending stories to Africa, and sharing the messages of people in the diaspora with the continent. When I came back to Africa, I did a performance with those messages. I put the messages in a piece of luggage, went out on the street, and dropped it so the messages just fell out. Then I asked people to read and respond to those messages. Afterwards, when I came back to Austria again, I was able to deliver the messages people shared.

Your project* Gold Coast *critiques the growing Chinese mining industry in Ghana. What's happening between the Chinese communities and the Ghanaian communities?
Chinese corporations are now taking over the illegal mining companies and are hiring locals, including kids, to do the mining. They are invading the local communities. I think it has to do with the government. It's affecting the country because children are losing their lives. They are tearing families apart. Chinese contractors initially came to build our roads and transportation systems. That's how they discovered the illegal mines, by constructing roads from the villages to the countryside. I think they are working with local chiefs because that's the only way they could get access to the mining sites. They invest so much in the production. They bring guns and other heavy ammunition to guard the mining sites they operate, ward off the locals from checking their operations, and use explosives and other poisonous substances in their mining activities. In the end, these poisonous substances are causing environmental and health hazards to the locals. They are also fishing on our coasts with all sorts of chemicals and equipment, using lights to fish and a lot of machines too. The local people who traditionally use manpower to fish are struggling to make a living from fishing. It's affecting the environment and also the people in the country.

What did you do for* Gold Coast*?
The performance was about gold mining. Since the coast was called the Gold Coast before, and it was only called Ghana after 1957, I was curious if there was still gold on the coast. Together with my group, we built all the equipment that was used locally for gold mining. The ocean is just behind one of the biggest art galleries in Ghana called Artists Alliance Gallery. So, we went there and we brought all the local equipment for gold mining. Together with kids, who represented child laborers, we worked for five hours. Automatically, the kids got tired and they started sleeping on the rocks. These filmmakers from Sweden were going around Africa to document artists' work, and I was one of their selected artists so they filmed the whole process. For five hours, we were mining gold and a lot of people from the community came out to see the performance. Everyone was curious and suspicious. Rumors were spread all over town. The message even got to the chief of my town and the chief was very upset because they thought we were actually mining gold. People came looking for me and I had to face the traditional court and all that. That performance was very powerful. People immediately reflected on how mining effects the environment because we were digging the sand into the ocean, and the whole place was polluted. An action like this creates a very strong statement on how the illegal mining is affecting the environment and the economy.

How do you promote your work locally? Do you post on certain blogs? Or do you use social media?
I use Facebook. I sometimes create Facebook events and upload images. Sometimes we just go to perform without an announcement. It depends on the idea of what we're doing. I use a lot of social media to promote my work. I have friends who are photographers, writers, or bloggers. I invite them, and then they put up a review of the performance and share it on their blog. I also have a blog where I post updates of my performances with a brief text about the performance. I use social media to reach international and local audiences.

I'm curious about the scene in Ghana. Are there other artists you'd suggest looking into? Or other people you think are important right now?
I have a few peers I look up to, who are doing very well. Ibrahim Mahama is one of them. There is another performing artist called Bernard Akoi-Jackson. We have quite a vibrant group of artists who have been very productive over the past four or five years. We always look into each other's work and advise each other. We are engaging in conversations and exploring concepts and ideas together. There are a few people like the reknowned journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas, who is undercover right now. Anas has been documenting illegal issues in the country. He's inspired me a lot because of the major role he plays in society. I also have friends who are art historians and architects who inspire my way of thinking, like my friend the art writer, filmmaker and curator Nana Oforiatta-Ayim, who inspired my ideas for building plastic houses.

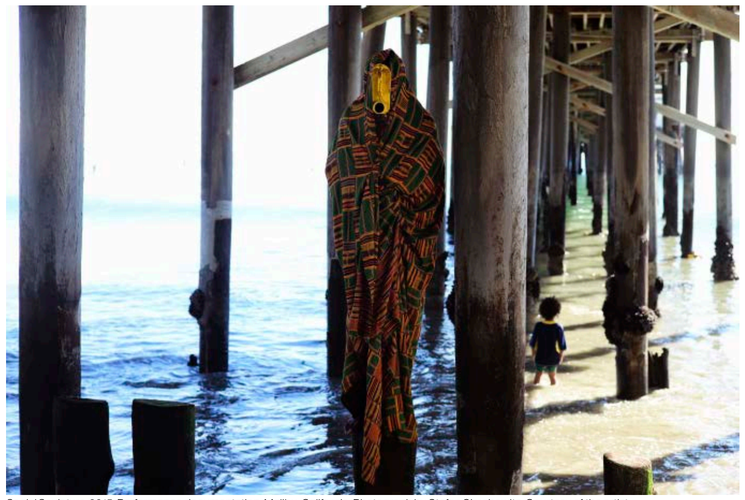
When you're performing in public space, do you ever feel the threat of being arrested or of violence against you or the performers?
Yeah, sometimes I feel threatened when I'm performing because performance art is quite new in Ghana. I think because it's so new, sometimes people don't understand what we do. Many of our performances are very political, and so, when people come around to watch us, sometimes they say things that make us feel threatened. My group and I are beginning to understand the art better ourselves. In that process, the fear disappears. We have also adopted ways of involving audiences who come to see us perform. I also think that when we feel threatened, it means people are getting the message.

It's something that I'm doing, not only for myself, but also for the sake of the people. There are a lot of things that people want to say, but don't feel comfortable speaking out about. If the government is corrupt, it affects every living being in the country. I'm working on a performance for this year's election. It's called *The Museum of Tolerance*. I am looking into how we can address political issues through the performing arts. I am collaborating with writers, filmmakers, and photographers. Also, because I am an artist, and I have this social media strategy for communicating, I am able to speak more freely.

During your travels abroad, were there experiences that affected you negatively?
When I went to the US, I met a lot of artists who were not very curious about what I do. When I was introduced to them, they didn't talk much. When I'm in Ghana and I talk with an artist, they are very curious about what I do, and try to know what I do, and I show them my work. In the US, people that I met were very distanced. They were holding back, and I found it very uncomfortable. Also, in Europe, that's where I really felt my color. In Ghana, we don't talk about color. We don't care. When I went to Austria for the first time, I actually started looking at myself because people were treating me very differently. Any time I went to the shop, I felt like people wouldn't speak to me. Or, when I got lost, people wouldn't help me with directions. I felt very bad at that moment, but I said to myself, well, I'm not from here, so I need to focus on why I'm here. It doesn't matter what color I am. But with all those things, it's a learning process and it's about how people understand what they are doing.


Serge Attukwei Clottey in his studio in Labadi, Accra, Ghana. Photograph by Charles Whitcher. Courtesy of the artist.


The Displaced, 2015, Performance documentation. Labadi , Accra, Ghana. Production still by Charles Whitcher. Courtesy of the artist.


Social Sculpture, 2015. Performance documentation. Malibu, California. Photograph by Stefan Simchowitz. Courtesy of the artist.

Social Sculpture, 2015. Performance documentation. Malibu, California. Photograph by Stefan Simchowitz. Courtesy of the artist.

Constant Movement: Kapwani Kiwanga

In Conversation With Lauren Marsden

It was a serendipitous occasion for me to have a conversation with Kapwani Kiwanga, not just as a function of being an editor at NYAQ, but also from my standpoint as a roving artist. When we spoke, she was nine hours in the future, in Paris and preparing for her upcoming commission for The Armory Show, while I was housesitting at my mentor's apartment in San Francisco on a trip that was sandwiched between Christmas in Canada, a solo show in Vancouver and a return to my ancestral homeland, Trinidad & Tobago. We find the time. Time travelling is not abnormal for us. And aren't we are all becoming accustomed to the requisite time zone gaps, Skype schedules, and increasing connections on a global scale? It seems no longer to be uncommon for us, as artists, to have multiple connections among several geographies, so much so that, perhaps, coincidence is not so surprising anymore as the opportunities and expectations for working become more dispersed across the planet. As it turns out, she too was born in a small city in southern Ontario, went abroad to study, and similarly searches for that slippery place between historical documentation and constructed, fictional delivery systems, oftentimes within a diasporic context. Her use of anthropological research (much more certifiable than my own) is a very useful tool for following her obsessions, no matter which context she finds herself in: be it rural Tanzania, a small village in Poland, an immigration center, an ethnographic museum, or an astronomer's office.

Kiwanga's work will be featured in The Armory Show in March 2016, as part of the program, *Focus: African Perspectives – Spotlighting Artistic Practices of Global Contemporaries*. According to the program's curators Julia Grosse and Yvette Mutumba:

Artists are contemporary AND painters, performers, Senegalese, Nigerian-born and grown up in London, for example. Meaning: many artists have backgrounds defined by multilayered cultural and social contexts. The young generations, especially, move around a lot—doing a residency in Hong Kong, participating in the Sao Paulo bienniale, attending a workshop in Yogjakarta, and being based in Johannesburg. Through this they become part of a constantly growing international or "global" network, which is even emphasized by digital connections such as social media, Skype etc. Of course, this kind of living shapes the artistic practices in various ways and at the same time reflects the so-much-talked-about "global society" of today.

I'll just preface this conversation by saying that it's been interesting for me, personally, to look at the methodology behind your work, because it actually kind of relates to my own work as an artist, being part of a diaspora as well, of Trinidad & Tobago. Especially looking at how you deal with the archive and fiction. It's all very interesting to me. Do you want to talk about your commissioned project for the Armory? Are you ready to talk about it?
I can talk about it, it's still evolving and it's not yet fixed. Basically, the starting point is the idea of gifting, and economies that are established around that, and how relationships are founded around the process of giving and receiving. It's going to be built around archival footage documents of past and present. I will take some more creative liberties and insert fictive elements into that. It's really about looking at objects and historical moments in which objects or things will exchange between different people in order to create relationships and networks, I suppose, outside of just pure commerce or capitalism, although it can also fall into that. It's a broad starting point, but of course, it's something that, in anthropology, has been an important research area. I am always interested in looking at more popular and everyday expressions of this subject, and historical ones too.

Is the project addressing a particular place?
No, it's very global, if you can say it that way. Often in my video and performance work, I look at events or even some patterns which are found in different areas, geographically, but also different time periods, so it's chronologically or temporally quite expansive. Geographically it's not linked to any particular place.

That's interesting because many of your projects in the past are very much based in a place or a historical happening in a place and how that's meaningful in terms of independence and post-colonial development. In light of both approaches, I'm curious how you begin this process of collecting documents to work from.
It's really just setting out some word searches, starting to read, and then one thing leads to another. My starting point is usually reading academic articles or books or chapters of books, based on questions I've already had, I essentially eavesdrop on these conversations that have been happening within academia, or just see how my intuitive questioning has been explored by others. From there, there will be something that presents itself—an object, an event, a person—and that will then set off a chain reaction. So one thing leads to another and makes a network of ideas and interactions.


Afrogalactica: A brief history of the future, Lecture-Performance, 2012-Ongoing Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Emma Haugh

Could you give a cultural example of gift exchange and how that might expand in a community over time?
I'm not sure if it will find itself in the final work, but of course, there's an example in the Pacific around gifting, a classic anthropological example of the Kula ring or Kula exchange. It's the idea that, through giving different gifts, there is a network of relationships and indebtedness, which is held together through geographically distanced spaces, but allows for political and also economic relationships to take place or to be maintained.

It calls to mind Georges Bataille's* The Accursed Share, *which I imagine you're familiar with. That text is really meaningful to me. When I was doing my thesis work in grad school I was thinking a lot about ritual and how there are parallels in anthropological study and contemporary art contexts. There has been so much talk about how the process of a gift, or giving, is integral to a lot of relational art work or social practice, within the turn toward collaborative and publicly engaged work, where exchange is actually at the very core of the concept of the work. I was thinking a lot about how potlatches function in Pacific Northwest indigenous societies and how that might relate to the methods of socially engaged artwork. I'm wondering if there are any threads that you see between what's happening in contemporary art and also in the anthropological perspective around the gift?
There are of course some great examples of people who are very much committed to social practice in their work, but that wasn't my intention when I started thinking about this project. It was just to explore past forms of this phenomenon in different geographical and historical areas. What I will be proposing isn't linked to social practice per se, or participatory practice. It's more of an exercise in narration I suppose, and the reframing of historical moments and forms or objects in order to look back at them. So it's a different intention—what echoes are there in everyday life about people creating alternative economies even outside the realm of contemporary art, in daily life?

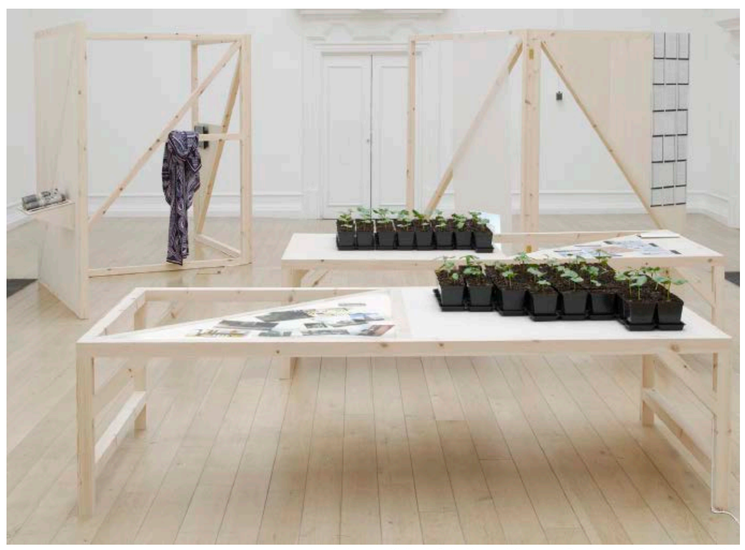
It's an important distinction to make and I agree, that it's more like looking, indexing, and researching, rather than enacting. So, it sounds to me like your Armory project will be more of an installation of archives.
I'll be working with video quite a bit.

How does this all fit, in your mind, into the theme of The Armory Focus program?
What my understanding of the curators' approach to global perspectives, generally, is something that resonates. It seems quite obvious: this idea that wherever we are based, or wherever one may have been based before, is not of ultimate importance, and any artist, thinker, or individual, explores and reacts to their environment or to their interest. I'm someone who is very much interested in the African diaspora, because I think it's an incredibly rich resource, which I don't always find to be represented as much as I think it could be. I see a lot of absence of African or African diasporic exchange in global discourses. I think the fact that my approach is really interested in culture in the larger sense, temporally, but also geographically, probably reflects that idea of global perspectives that the curators are trying to present in their project and also at Contemporary And (C&). We'll see how their entire project is articulated in March.

It's definitely interesting because, here I am coming to this conversation and thinking that the curators are choosing artists who are African or of the African diaspora and who are dealing with African content. That's just my assumption and I think a lot of audiences would assume that because the program is somewhat framed that way. But how fascinating that, then, you might be liberated from the expectation to present African content specifically. Even if that's something you've done in the past, even if that's something you identify with. It's refreshing to hear that you have the latitude not to do that.
And I think it's something that just depends on the project that comes up at that moment. And it could have been that I wanted to continue on with the project that was specifically founded in an African historical moment, but it just didn't come up at this point. For example, I could do a project around Maji Maji, which was a historical event that happened in Tanzania, but it was also a conversation with German and French collections, so it was never a single place. There is always this idea that is not forced: it just comes up naturally, of how, of course, one region relates to another through political, economic, or historic exchange. It's always a space, a particular experience, or a particular moment within a global context. It's not something that can be extracted from international relations and contexts.

I think that's very well said, and I believe that, as an artist, your identity is complex and informed by many places. To be pinned down to one narrative of being of Tanzanian descent, Canadian-born and all of this, really starts to shape the expectations of your work. To be able shake that limitation off is actually in some ways more analogous to the reality of the actual economic and political ties between all of these countries. It's much more complicated than that.
The question of identity doesn't really come up when I'm working, of course. It only comes up with questions of how does one communicate and mediate one's work to a larger audience, and then other people are trying to get an entry point from which they attempt to understand something. That's when I'm reminded that some people are still asking these questions of identity, which for me are not present when I'm thinking about a project. On the other hand, I don't say I'm not going to work on this or that subject because it might be seen as subject matter that people are interested in because of, perhaps, their family background, and that I'm going to pull away from doing work on Tanzania because part of my family is there. I go where I'm interested in exploring, and it might happen that I'm interested in one area in Tanzania because I visited it and saw something that's quite interesting, just as it could be that I go to Korea and I'm in Seoul and I see something that interests me and I want to create a work based on that. So it's really where I happen to be.

I think that's really important, and it comes up a lot, especially for artists who are part of a diaspora and do sometimes confront those topics in their work. It seems, sometimes, to be a real barrier to a productive conversation, because of course, as we all know, the artist's identity isn't the work, even if they might be related in some way. The two are not equivalent and the work has a life of its own, it has a context of its own. I teach critical writing in the arts in university, and one of the things that is so difficult to address


Installation view, Kinjiketile Suite, Kapwani Kiwanga at South London Gallery, London,2015. Photograph by Andy Keate. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Jérôme Poggi.


Flowers for Africa : Uganda, 2014. Protocol written and signed by the artist, iconographic documents. Variable dimensions . Photograph by Aurélien Mole. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Jérôme Poggi, Paris.

in an artist's statement or bio is the priority that is given to one's heritage or pedigree. There is a lot of pressure for artists to self-identify these things, but a lot of it comes down to just the way you might be framed, even beyond your control.
Yeah, but I think that's a tic that we'll eventually get over.

Let's hope so. I think with the kind of work you do, that's more likely to happen, because you will continue to reject those limitations.
It's not even a conscious rejection actually, but I suppose yes, it's not a political statement. I think it's just about being true to oneself and what interests you.

I am curious about your training in anthropology, and the approach that I've seen in your work where you in some ways pose as an anthropologist, but in an art context. Would you call yourself in some ways an unreliable narrator?
No, I think I'm quite reliable! [Laughter]. I think the question rests on how things are read, it always depends on who's looking and so people will come with their assumptions and their knowledge—things they know and things they don't know. I think a lot of the work is done by the person who's receiving and assembling their own narrative. I'm giving a structure, but not telling them how they should interpret and then re-digest what I present.

There are so many variables! You can't necessarily control what privileged knowledge an audience member might have for your work. Could you give a specific example of when you use a particular tactic to this end where you really want to make clear that what you are doing is possibly a subversion of accuracy or where you're actually making it very clear that you're introducing a fictional element to your work?
In most cases it's just a frame, which is fictional, but most of what I say is true. For example, in my *Afrogalactica* series, I'm an anthropologist from the future, so the notion of time travel—I'm someone coming from the future to what would be my past, but the audience's present—has that fictional framework. Most of everything else in that series is true, so my biography or my alter ego is the only fictional part because of what people know or assume. It's quite rare that there's much that's introduced, but usually when it's introduced in terms of fiction; I don't try to pass it off as fact. It's quite obvious because the humor is present and, the absurdity of a situation or of an action is quite transparent.

Time travel is very much something I think about as well and I'm often asking, what are some of the ways we actually use time as a material? I read an interview that you did with Mukami Kuria where you were talking about the* Flowers for Africa *work, and you mentioned the idea of time folding in on itself. That seems to be something that's very consistent throughout your work and you're building up many tactics around that subject. I know you use the term "expanded temporalities" . . .
I work with time, of course, as I mentioned before, as being able to "revisit" the past through documents and archives, but always having this ability to see that no one can ever go back to that time, you can just look back from where we are. So that's why the archive and the document have always been important for me. There is always this attempt or desire to imagine another future, maybe a continuation of where we are now, also to project into the future, and of course, as we are in our present, we have that kind of temporality present too. For example, there is this very simple magazine fold that I did, in an installation for the South London Gallery last year for an installation called *Kinjiketile Suite* and in that there were some ads that were for a North American audience and some news which came from Tanzania, so, geographically, I was putting two places in conversation, which shared the same moment in historical time. I also do sound installations, often with voice narration where my voice is talking about a past experience, which is not one that I have lived, but it's through something I've read or some media from the past. I could then talk about a moment that I've experienced through my research, or yet again talk about a memory which may be from years ago or whenever. So these kinds of narratives also allow for that temporal slippage. I often use space and emptiness, quite simply, just to allow there to be moments for possibilities, and also emptiness allows space for the unframeable, the things which escape us.

You're going to start to have slippages between yourself and the document by collecting something that is external to you, but also, say, historically accurate. It's a document of something, but as soon as you interact with it, it's almost like the observer effect takes place. You start to change it just by looking. It's not necessarily about your personal memories, but rather the necessary sort of translation that happens between you and a document. Things start to mutate.
It's very subjective transmitting experiences. Things are constantly moving and evolving, like in the series called *Flowers for Africa* in which I reconstruct floral arrangements based on archival images related to independence ceremonies. The protocol for that work is that the flowers are arranged, placed in the exhibition space and then allowed to run their natural course, which is to dry up and wilt away. So the question of fleeting moments; not being able to rigidly set something that may be quite monumental is just very much true to the way I see things as constantly in flux. It's minute, but then sometimes an immense mutation. You can observe certain areas in a city that change very rapidly, but then there are other places where things seem not to be changing at all, but of course they are. It always depends on what distance one looks at something. I think there's constant movement.

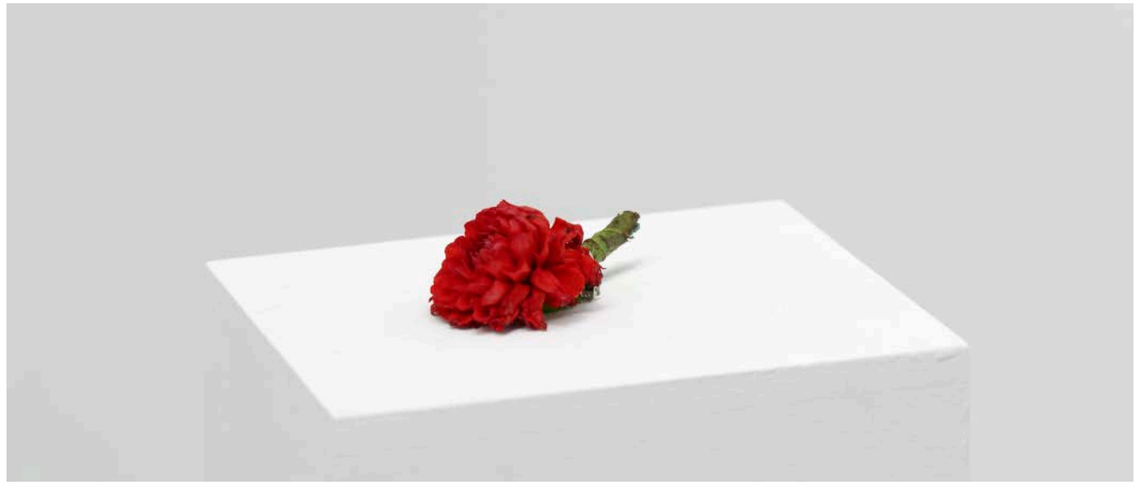

Rumors that Maji was a lie . . . , 2014. Mixed media installation at Jeu de Paume, Paris. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Tanja Wagner.

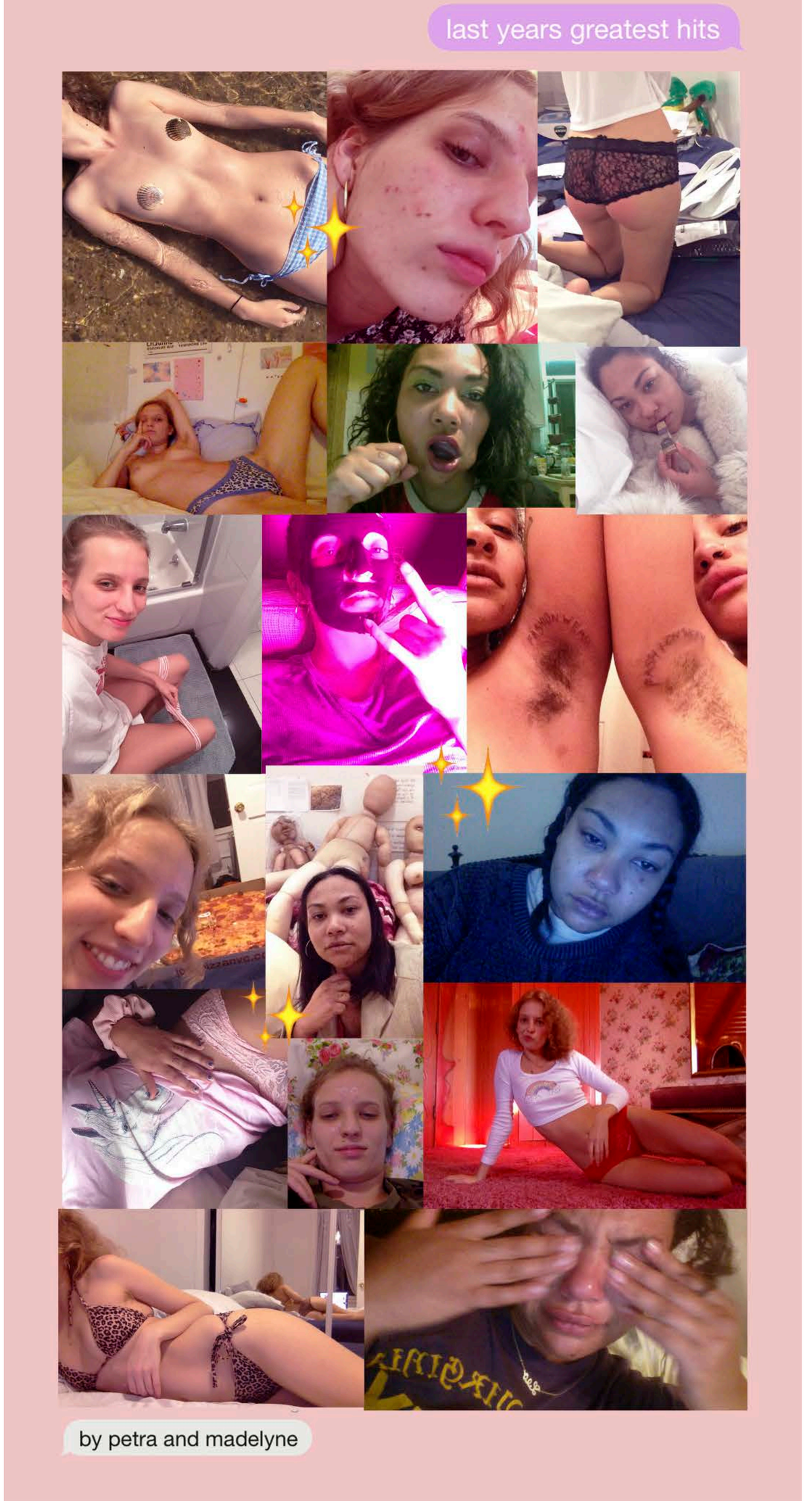
As an artist, it's very challenging to come up with materials that can change over time.
I think that's why performance is so interesting because it never is the same performance, and I also don't document performances in terms of video or sound. Although, there may be some photographic documentation, and that's because I want to foster transmission through people who have seen it and had an experience in the moment. If that was recorded on video or whatever else, something is lost. So, I think performance and actions accept the mutation of the fleetingness of time.

Do you ever actually present your ideas in a non-art context? Would you ever inject anything into an archive? I mean a real, official archive?
There was a project I did last year at the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin, and it was kind of that intention. I asked a simple question when I spoke to people from different sectors of the museum, from the security guard to the store keepers, to the conservators of the museum collections. I asked them, amongst the objects they come in contact with, to describe one of them to me and why it stands out for them. I then went and tried to find those objects in the various exhibition displays. I then made a very simple form based on the same material that the original object was made of. Then I asked the conservators of the appropriate collection to accept my *double*, I called it, into their collection. I made about 10 of these. Three were accepted into different collections. Those are now in the museum's permanent collection. In 10 years time, the objects won't have the same narrative context, things will be forgotten and there will just be these objects made by myself, which have the same name as another object from, lets say, the 13th century. When these objects are in a museum context they are going to be subjected to conservators, and conserving actions, pest control, cataloging and all sorts of things, and my name will be associated with the object as a donor but it is not going to mean much. It will unlikely have any value in terms of art.

I had a feeling you had probably done some work like this, just given the nature of how you work. Did your* doubles *really look like the originals?
No, not at all. For example, there was a sculpture from the Pacific and it was made from a certain kind of wood, and I just roughly cut blocks from the same wood, so it was really just the material. It's kind of like these reflections or shadows of the originals. It should be able to stand in for the original object.

In some ways your work lends itself more to these kinds of project-based initiatives. When you do your project for The Armory Show, do you think it will live on past the event itself?
I've started on something I'm excited about, and then we'll see if it develops right away, or if it's something that I will come back to in six months, a year or two years' time. I don't think The Armory will be its end. As you said, I work in projects and they take on these different forms and expand; those could be a performance, a video, it could be sound, or sculpture, and all of these morph with the opportunities I have or what I feel I need to say at that particular moment.


Flowers for Africa : Tunisia, 2015. Protocol written and signed by the artist and iconographic documents, variable dimensions . Photograph by Aurélien Mole. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Jérôme Poggi.



"I have the simplest tastes.
I am always
satisfied with the best."
Oscar Wilde

DANDY IN NEW YORK

By Nathaniel Matthews & Lele Saveri

Look For Further Issues Of
"Dandy In New York" AKA
"The Peacock"
All The News Fit To Print

History & Reincarnations of Dandyism

Dandyism first appeared in the revolutionary 1790s, both in London and in Paris. Dandies were usually middle-class men who would imitate the aristocratic lifestyle, as a social or political statement.
The linkage of clothing with political protest had started in England characteristic during the 18th century. Given these connotations, dandyism can be seen as a political protestation against the rise of leveling egalitarian principles, often including nostalgic adherence to feudal or pre-industrial values, such as the ideals of "the perfect gentleman" or "the autonomous aristocrat".

The beginnings of dandyism in France were also bound to the politics of the French revolution; the initial stage of dandyism, the gilded youth, was a political statement of dressing in an aristocratic style in order to distinguish its members from the sans-culottes. Muscadin, meaning "wearing musk perfume" were mobs of young men, mostly consisted of the lower middle-classes dressed in a dandyish manner, who were the street fighters of the Thermidorian Reaction in Paris in the French Revolution. Characteristics include tightly-cut coats with extravagantly large lapels, typically in a different bright color, with large and elaborately knotted cravats and perhaps sashes round the waist. Their walking sticks, which were used as clubs or bludgeons, were thick twisted pieces of wood and they are supposed to have referred to these as their "constitution".

A Macaroni in mid-18th-century England was a fashionable fellow who dressed and even spoke in an outlandishly affected and epicene manner. The term pejoratively referred to a man who "exceeded the ordinary bounds of fashion" in terms of clothes, fastidious eating and gambling. The macaronis were precursor to the dandies, who far from their present connotation of effeminacy came as a more masculine reaction to the excesses of the macaroni.

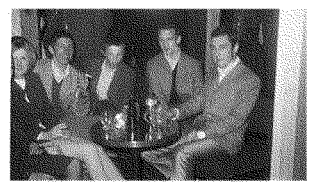
Beau Brummell is credited with introducing, and establishing as fashion, the modern men's suit, worn with a necktie. He claimed he took five hours a day to dress, and recommended that boots be polished with champagne. The style of dress was referred to as dandyism. Beau Brummel who lived between 1778 and 1840, was the model dandy in British society. Brummel was not from an aristocratic background; indeed, his greatness was "based on nothing at all". Never unpowdered, unperfumed, immaculately bathed and shaved, and dressed in a plain dark blue coat, always perfectly brushed, perfectly fitted, showing much perfectly starched linen, all freshly laundered, and composed with an elaborately knotted cravat. He was known to spend five hours every day dressing up and polishing his appearance.

Zoot Suits were exaggerated men's suits mostly worn by African-American, Chicano, Filipino American, and Italian American communities during the 1940s. The amount of fabric required to make a Zoot suit was a rebellious statement of status, worn in defiance of being outlawed due to rationing during war-times.

Mods is a youth culture started in Britain in the early 60s by young working class men and women that would spend their wages on clothes, scooters and records. Obsessed with Italian tailored-suits, Vespas and northern soul music, Mods is the first known example of modern adolescent sub-culture.

Paninari was a youth scene that took its name from a group of youngsters that would meet at the first american fast food in Milan called Burghy (Panino in Italian means Sandwich) in the early 1980s. Obsessed by American movies, Paninari would wear Timberland shoes, Levi's jeans, Monclair's jackets and El Charro leather belt. Unlike most youth movements that deter the attentions of the media in view of keeping their scene underground and exclusive, the Paninari embraced their role in the mainstream.

The Lo-Lifes were a loose group of prodominantely black youth from Brooklyn in the 1980s and 90s, who would shoplift Raulph Lauren Polo brand, which is usually intended and worn by the white upper-class, and wear it excessively defining a new way to wear the brand. "We would get all dressed up just to go out to do dirt. Sometimes we would go to clubs wearing like 5 different Polo shirts each."


Mods


Paninari


Top: Beau Brummell
Left:Macaroni

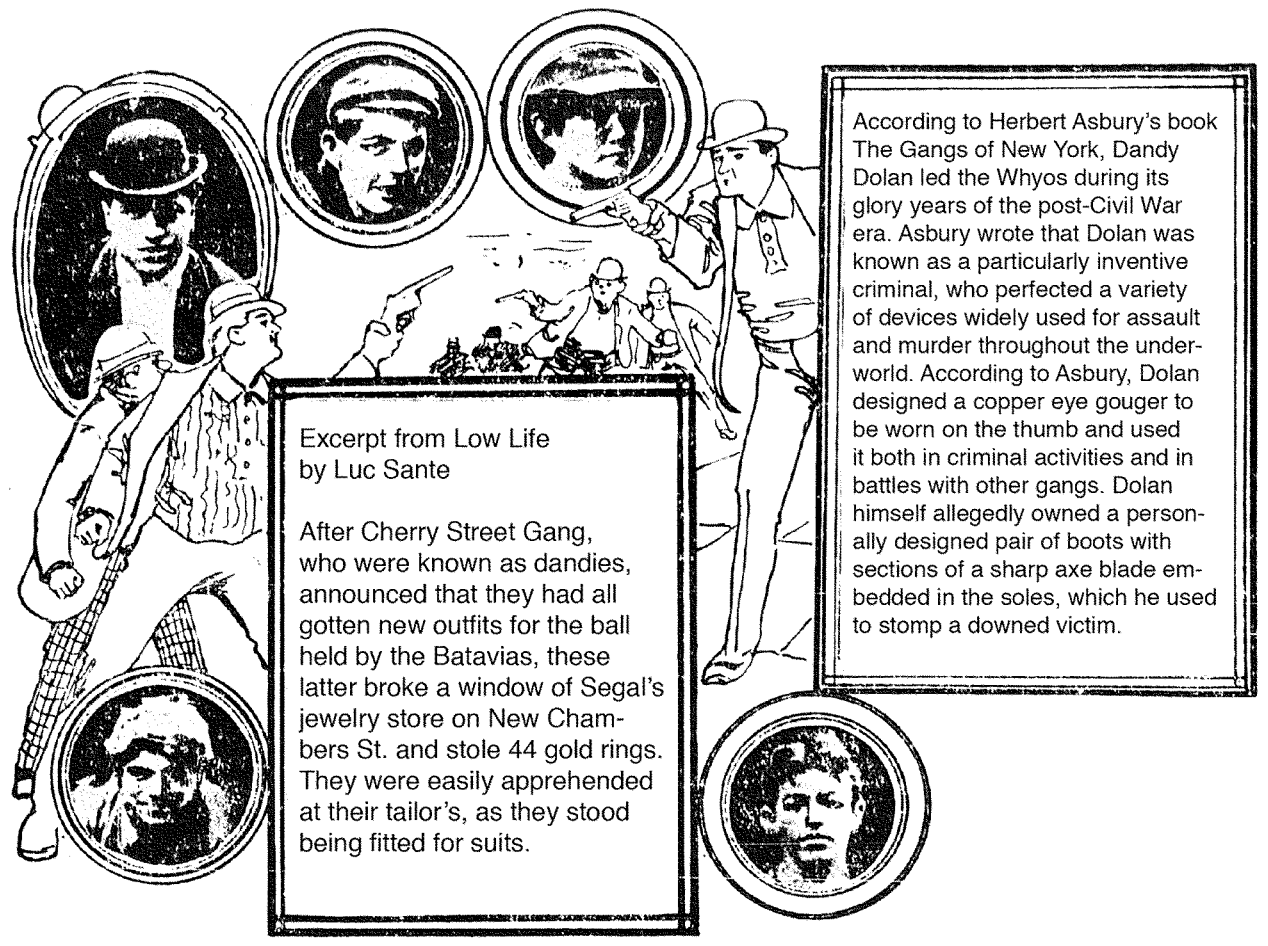

Harlem youth in Zoot Suits

left: Dandy Robert de Montesquiou
right: "King Of The Dudes" New Yorker Evander Berry Wall. From the 1870s to the 1960s, dude primarily meant a person who dressed in an extremely fashionable manner (a dandy) or a citified person who was visiting a rural location but stuck out (a city slicker).

New York Teenage Gangs in the mid-1900's paid close attention to style and their presentation through gang uniforms.

Here are a selected list of gang names that show prestige:
Astoria Gents, The Little Gents, Butler Gents, Egyptian Crowns, Imperial Hoods, Midnight Bachelors, Noble Gents, Diamond Lords, Purple Knights, Black Dukes, Dappers, Guinea Dukes, Social Dukes, Imperial Crowns, Seven Crowns, Cypress Kings, Mystic Knights, Lincoln Lords, Scotchmen Knights, Royal Knighs, Irish Dukes, Highbridge Dukes, Irish Knights, Royal Javlins, Gowanus Dukes, Roman Lords, Royal Knits, Dukes Of Willaimsburg, Phantom Lords, Corsair Lords, Jackson Gents, Dtimas Dukes, Foster Gents, Parkside Gents, Sutter Lords, Hobo Lords, Corona Gents, Park Side Gents, The Viceroys, Lucky Lords, Harlem Lords, Imperial Knights, Noble Englishmen, Royal Ceptors, Imperial Huns and the Italian Dukes.


Dandy patch on an Astoria Gents' jacket



Excerpt from Low Life
by Luc Sante

After Cherry Street Gang, who were known as dandies, announced that they had all gotten new outfits for the ball held by the Batavias, these latter broke a window of Segal's jewelry store on New Chambers St. and stole 44 gold rings. They were easily apprehended at their tailor's, as they stood being fitted for suits.

According to Herbert Asbury's book The Gangs of New York, Dandy Dolan led the Whyos during its glory years of the post-Civil War era. Asbury wrote that Dolan was known as a particularly inventive criminal, who perfected a variety of devices widely used for assault and murder throughout the underworld. According to Asbury, Dolan designed a copper eye gouger to be worn on the thumb and used it both in criminal activities and in battles with other gangs. Dolan himself allegedly owned a personally designed pair of boots with sections of a sharp axe blade embedded in the soles, which he used to stomp a downed victim.

Luxury & Leisure

Here is a list of opportunities for luxurious leisure in New York City that can be schemed for cheap or even free

The Metropolitan Opera
View the Opera from expensive orchestra section seats for as little as $25 by purchasing rush tickets day-of online at metopera.com. You can also get dressed in your evening nines and feel the life of the theatre for free by enjoying the live opera performance via live streaming video in the waiting room in the MET opera house.

Chrysler Building View
Scenic views of the city are romantic but can be expensive, but if you go to "the dentist in the sky" on 69th floor of the Chrysler building, you can enjoy a view even higher than the exclusive "Cloud Club" reserved for only the richest elite, while also experiencing the buildings quintessential Art Deco style.

City Hall Station
The majestic subway station underneath City Hall has been inactive for nearly 69 years, closing for good on December 31, 1945. The station is an underground architectural marvel, with tall arched ceilings covered in antique tile and glass skylights that flood the space with natural light from above. It's been sealed like a time capsule since then, but you can see it with your own eyes (from inside a subway car). Here's how: take the 6 train to the Brooklyn Bridge/City Hall station (the last stop, if you're heading south), but don't get off. The train will turn around the City Hall station loop, which will give you a one-of-a-kind view of the otherwise unreachable location. Of course if you don't mind getting a little dirty, you can also hop down and walk into the station to explore it yourself.

Marjorie Eliot / Free Jazz Concert
Every Sunday at 3:30pm, soft, sympathetic strains of piano begin to mingle with loudmouthed brasses, low-toned basses, and chipper clarinet vibratos. The chords, confident but courteous, flirt in the vestibule and linger at the threshold of apartment 3F. Drifting gently into the hallway, the melodies, rhymes, and rhythms, sometimes melancholy but oftentimes merry, float out through the window and dance high above the Harlem River. For the last 23 years, Marjorie Eliot has delighted audiences with these sonorous socials, better known as parlor jazz concerts, in her home at 555 Edgecombe Avenue.

The Secret Cave In Central Park
The Ramble area in Central Park is a special dense and natural oasis within the park. Featured in this are is the secret steps that lead down to the Ramble Cave, also known as the Indian Cave. It was created from a natural cave discovered during park construction and developed for Lake rowers who could leave their boats to explore the area. Unfortunately, in the early 1900s, the cave was the site of several crimes and at least one suicide. Eventually, the cave became too dangerous to maintain, so it was sealed at both ends and the inlet was filled. Today you can hop over the guardrail and walk down the steps to enjoy a little seclusion from the rest of the park. It's located at the second inlit once you cross Oak Bridge. In a 1869 New York Times article, it states that "persons who have failed to visit it, have deprived themselves of a great deal of pleasure."

Row Boating In Central Park
Central Park has always been a destination for leisure to New Yorkers ever since it was created in 1857. For $12 split between up to 4 people, you can spend an hour leisurely rowing around the second largest pond in Central Park. View the skyscrapers new and old peeking above the tree-lined horizon, and see turtles and other wildlife rarely experienced in New York City. Bring a bottle of wine, fruit, cheese, bread, cold cuts, and have yourself a nice laid back lunch. Bring a oil-marker and write your names under the footbridge.

Staten Island Ferry
Enjoy a free cruise of the New York harbor and see a great view of the Statue Of Liberty on the Staten Island Ferry. Beer can also be purchased and drank on the ferry, and be sure to make your way up to the top "Hurricane Deck" for more privacy and a better view.

Afternoon Tea At The Plaza Hotel
The Plaza being one of the more luxurious hotels in New York, located just south of Central Park, is accessible not only to the rich. You can sip on afternoon tea for as low as $8, the beautiful ambiance of The Palm Court and their fine bone china and silverware included.

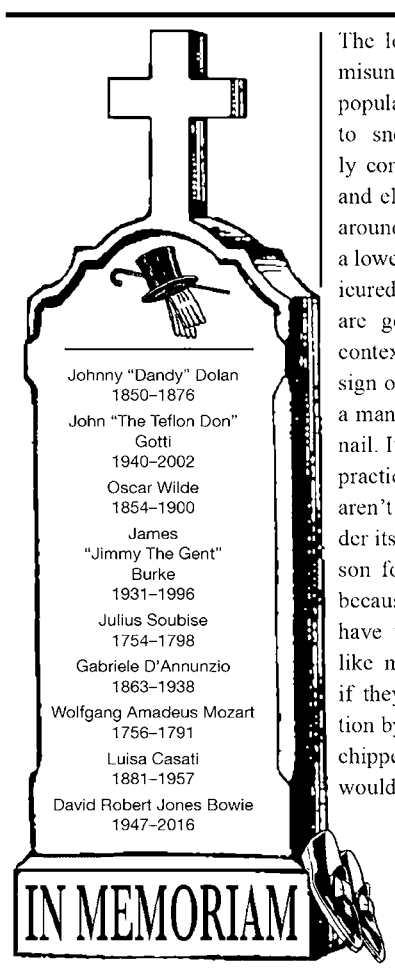
Death At The Opera

Opera began in the last decades of the sixteenth century in Florence, Italy, when a group of music and drama enthusiasts called the Camerata decided that ancient Greek drama must have been sung throughout. While there is evidence that music played a role in the theater of ancient Greece, this surmise of the Camerata involved a leap of the imagination: What if the words were declaimed as song? From this idea sprang opera.

Leonard Warren (1911–1960) was an American opera singer. Warren's last complete performance was in the title role of Simon Boccanegra on March 1, 1960 at the Met. Three days later, in a performance of La forza del destino with Renata Tebaldi, he died on stage. Eyewitnesses including Rudolf Bing report that Warren had completed Don Carlo's Act III aria, which begins Morir, tremenda cosa ("to die, a momentous thing") before launching into the vigorous cabaletta. Bing reports that Warren simply went silent and fell face-forward to the floor, remaining motionless. The cause of death was determined to be a massive cerebral hemorrhage; Warren was only forty-eight years old.

An elderly man plunged to his death from the top balcony of the Metropolitan Opera House yesterday afternoon during an intermission of the Met Opera's performance of "Macbeth." The police last night identified the victim as Bantcho Bantchevsky, an 82-year-old Bulgarian-born singing coach who lived near the opera house, and was a frequent patron of the opera. They said it was unclear if his death was an accident or a suicide. Screams and pandemonium erupted in the ornate, red-and-gold theater in Lincoln Center shortly before 3:30 P.M. as the victim plunged 80 feet from the Family Circle balcony near the crystal-chandeliered roof into the rear of the orchestra. Witnesses said the victim struck a lower balcony rail in the plunge, landed on unoccupied seats near the left center aisle 10 rows from the back of the orchestra and fell into the aisle with a broken seat atop him. A 71-year-old woman seated nearby was grazed but unhurt by the victim, who was pronounced dead at the scene.

'Sitting on the Railing' On July 24, 1980, the naked body of a 30-year-old opera violinist, Helen Hagnes Mintiks, was found at the bottom of a three-story air shaft at the opera house. A stage hand, Craig S. Crimmins, was later arrested, tried and convicted of killing her in an attempted rape, and was sentenced to 20 years to life in prison.



The long pinky nail is largely misunderstood. Contrary to the popular belief that it's grown to snort cocaine, it's actually considered a sign of wealth and elegance. In many cultures around the world, men born into a lower class will use their manicured pinky nail to show they are gentlemen. The historical context is that it's considered a sign of wealth and elegance for a man to have at least one long nail. It tends to be the pinky for practical reasons, because pinks aren't often used so it can render its decorative sign. The reason for it signifying wealth is because it shows that they don't have to do lower class work, like manual labor, particularly if they keep it in good condition by keeping it clean and unchipped, because manual labor would cause the nail to break.

"There is pleasure in the up-keep when it comes to having refined taste and making substantial investments in fine clothes last. Always cleaning and polishing your shoes to retain sharp look and reduce cracking, keeping up with haircuts, shaving daily, never being caught in wrinkled clothes which means ironing, especially to retain sharp creases in your pant and the smooth roll in your collar. Keeping your fingernails manicured, which is a sign of a true gentleman. Properly cleaning your clothes, dry cleaning when necessary or hand washing delicates and soaking whites (especially collars and cuffs). Sitting drinking esspresso and listening to Ravel."

Quintessential List Of Possessions

- Leather with satin lining travel slippers with zip-case
- Kent® tortoise shell handmade pocket comb
- Wristwatch
- Gold signet ring
- Gold cuff links
- Sunglasses
- Handkerchief with initials embroidered
- Leather wallet
- Tootal® smoking robe/jacket
- Tootal® cravat or/and silk scarf
- Toiletry travel case
- Aristocrat® Bank Note playing cards
- Velvet opera slippers
- Leatherbound notebook

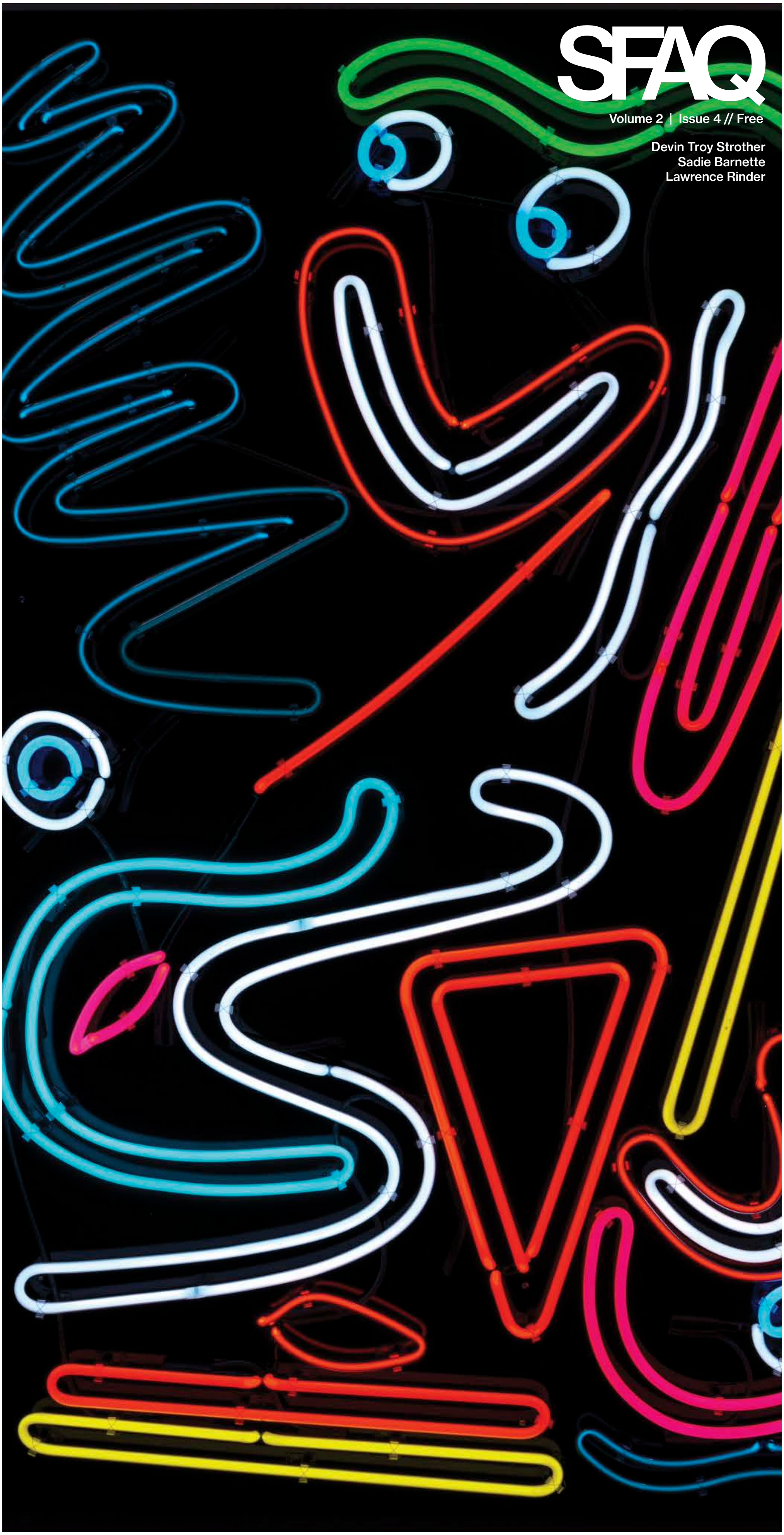
Hi-Diddle-Dee (An Actor's Life For Me)

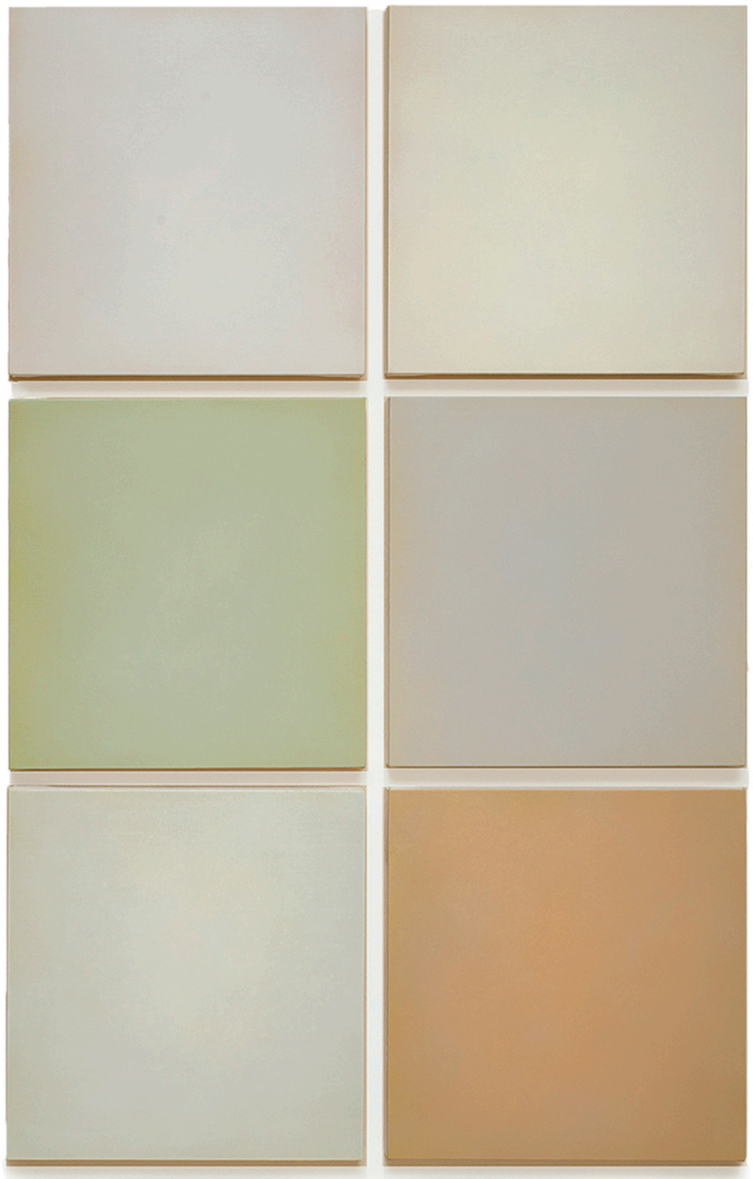
"Hi-diddle-dee-dee
An actor's life for me
A high silk hat and
a silver cane
A watch of gold with a
diamond chain
Hi-diddle-dee-day
An actor's life is gay
It's great to be a celebrity
An actor's life for me
Hi-diddle-dee-dum
An actor's life is fun
Hi-diddle-dee-dee
An actor's life for me
A wax mustache and a
beaver coat
A pony cart and
a billy goat
Hi-diddle-dee-dum
An actor's life is fun
You wear your hair in a
pompadour
You ride around in a coach
and four
You stop and buy out a
candy store
An actor's life for me!
Hi diddle dee dee
An actor's life for me
A high silk hat and a
silver cane
A watch of gold and a
diamond chain
Hi diddle dee dee
You sleep till after two
You promenade a big cigar
You tour the world in a
private car
You dine on chicken and
caviar
An actor's life for me!"
–Honest John

SFAQ

Volume 2 | Issue 4 // Free

Devin Troy Strother
Sadie Barnette
Lawrence Rinder





Anne Appleby, *Winter Fat*, 2015, oil and wax on canvas, 56" x 37"

March 9 - April 16, 2016

Nascent

Anne Appleby

Parenthetically Speaking

Mildred Howard

Anglim Gilbert Gallery at Minnesota Street Project

March 18 - May 14, 2016

Mindful Savage's Guide to Reverse Modernism

Enrique Chagoya

Anglim Gilbert Gallery

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Devin Troy Strother

In Conversation With Lindsay Preston Zappas

Devin Troy Strother knows how his work can be perceived and he's not afraid to talk about it. I joined Strother in his LA studio, where we discussed the unique references in his work, and how he situates himself within the art world, the art market, and the black community.

Devin Troy Strother: Both of my parents worked all day so I was basically raised by television. They would just leave me at home with the television on so I watched a shit ton of TV and a lot of movies all the time.

Lindsay Preston Zappas: ***That's kind of a suburban condition, right, to be a latchkey kid? Do you watch TV a lot in the studio?***
No, at home after I leave the studio. I have this publishing company called Coloured Publishing that my girlfriend Yuri and I started and work on at home. Basically, I watch TV whenever I'm at home, working on a book. I'm kind of hard of hearing so I play shit really loud, which my girlfriend hates. I used to go to a lot of shows when I was younger so I fucked up my ears. I listen to music really loud in the car. I play everything really loud. We started living together and it's usually just me drawing until 4 in the morning, blaring the TV (usually comedy specials) or podcasts hosted by comedians like Marc Maron, Joe Rogan, and Doug Benson, to name a few. I think a lot of my work comes out of that. A lot of the titles have an aspect of me trying to be a comedic storyteller—almost like the title is a one-two punch line to the visual element. The piece is the set up and the title is the punch line.

I'm curious about where the language comes in—the one-two punch—because I feel the humor you're using is a bit subversive. One-liners can be taboo in the art world, right?
Well, one-liners and comedy in general are pretty subjective, so I don't know if they're necessarily taboo within the art world. I think a lot of the language in my titles comes from being a black artist. A lot of times work will go into a serious place or get complex when you talk about race issues and being political. There's always different genres for different black artists to pick. Kara Walker talks a lot about slavery, or Kerry James Marshall has a very particular vernacular about talking about black culture, or Glen Ligon, or David Hammons. They all pick a particular way of talking about being black. I feel that sometimes it becomes a conversation that is heavy at times; it gets a little bit much. I try to make work that celebrates a different vernacular of being black. When I was growing up in the '80s it was cool to be black, whereas when my dad or my grandpa were growing up it was probably different, you know? So I feel like it's just a different take. It's not like everything is a one-liner, but when I'm making the work that's how it is in my head. There's a lot of other shit that's going on in the work, but I guess the way it's presented, you don't have a lot you can really say to the viewer in between the title and the actual piece, so what you're going to do with those two items is very important.

I think your work is coming from this younger perspective where you don't feel the same urge to embed so many strong political views—but I'm wondering if you think about your work as progressing or responding to political and racial issues.
I do think about that a lot; it becomes a burden for me sometimes. Not to put me on the same level as him, but I did an interview recently and we talked about Dave Chappelle and why he stopped doing the Chappelle show. [I think about my work] along those same lines. What am I actually doing for black culture? Am I helping further us or am I holding us back by portraying black people in a certain way, you know? If you think about black culture in the '90s it was very high tension, and it's still high tension now. There's always something, and it's always heavy, and it's always this thing that feels like a burden on black people. If I'm going to have to talk about it, I want to talk about it in a way that's at least going to be fun for me. I'm going to get called out for whatever, but I don't know—I mean, I don't know how to talk about it without—black people, we've always capitalized off of our own struggle, quote/unquote. We struggled so hard and we got here and so I don't know, it's so much shit to have to answer for. You just get bummed out, like fuck, how am I going to talk about race in this piece? Or, do I even want to talk about race? These are always questions that are floating around in my mind while I'm working on a piece.

To go back to talking about the titling, I was looking at a couple pieces in particular where the paintings are more abstract, or have certain shapes being repeated, but then the title adds a racial element that wouldn't have been culled from the aesthetic of the painting.
The titles have always been a way to offset whatever's going on in the painting, like a counter balance in a way. The image may read one way and the titles can take it somewhere totally different. The paintings have a naïve quality/style that I'm comfortable working in, and the titles are a way to try to give the work some criticality or to offset the style I chose to paint in.

What about the paintings feels naïve?
Well, I went to school for illustration, so I do know how to paint, but I just choose to paint this way. I'm not a great figurative painter or anything, I'm no Gerhard Richter, but I do know how to kind of paint. I choose to do this more simple, stripped down way of painting. Recently I've been trying to break out, even getting away from using the blackface motif. I've slowly transitioned out of using that so much, but recently I've transgressed and am overusing it. I've recycled the blackface image so many times and used it so many times. I made carpet using it. It's definitely a thing for me now where it works as signage. For some people it's really loaded, and I've said this so many times. Some people see the blackface and know the reference that it comes from—Golliwog, minstrel shows and all that shit—and some kids have never even actually seen it. Then some people, collect and actually love Golliwogs, or have a fetish for them. So for me, I like using it because it's loaded and I don't really have to inform people about what that means.

I'm curious about the female body, another repeated motif in the work. Can you talk about the female posture and the choice to use the nude female body specifically.
Basically, how I see it, I'm continuing the tradition of depicting the nude female body. It's a classic theme that's always been in every genre of figurative painting. I have no interest in commenting on sexuality, although that will obviously always be talked about by viewers, just like race. When you learn how to draw in school and you do figure drawings, those are

Portrait of Devin Troy Strother via his Instagram account, @devintroy. Courtesy of the artist.

the classical poses that models do for learning how to do gestures and shit like that. So a lot of those poses I did in the very beginning came out of old figure-drawing poses. The one that I do mainly is the girl on her arm. That one is based off of a couple things—when I was growing up, there was always Egyptian art in black homes and shit. My mom had a bunch of Egyptian art and it's just a weird thing that black people always have photos of like Nefertiti or the Sphinx. You know Tupac had the tattoo? So that pose is based a little bit off of the Sphinx. And also kind of the pose in gesture drawings—that one's obviously a little bit more sexualized, so it's a little bit of both of how women have been fetishized, but how it's also iconic at the same time. It's the same thing I do when I do guys. They don't have a penis. It's just a dot that's right there.

What is your relationship to feminism? I don't know if anyone's ever asked you that before.
No one's ever asked me that before. I don't even really know how to answer this question. What's the blanket meaning of feminism—believing women should have equal rights? If so, then automatically, I'm a feminist. All I can say is, being a black male in the art world, I can relate to a certain extent with women, because we're in a space that's dominated by white males. If you look at enough gallery rosters, you'll see a common thread: one or two black artists (two is really uncommon), maybe two or three women artists, and the rest are white males. Why? Do you think my work is exploitative of women? You can be honest with me.

I only ask because I think how you're using women is pretty celebratory, almost similar to Mickalene Thomas—her style of depicting women in this very ornate and adorned way. Yet, the nudity also strips the women from any signifying class discussion.
What Mickalene does with the female form is a different conversation from the one I'm having in my work. It is definitely celebratory of the female body, but it's also, like I said before, a reference to the history of the female nude in figurative painting, especially in the Baroque and Romantic periods. The women have not always been naked. If you look through my work, there are years and years where they're fully clothed. In recent years the clothes have been coming off both men and women. It's just a stylistic period I'm going through right now.

I wanted to talk about the neons in the Richard Heller show. There's something about neon that almost evades color in a way. It becomes sort of a non-color. It becomes something that signifies—
It's a symbol of color.

Right. So then to do the blackface image in that material . . . does the color represent the racial—
The thing with neon, I'm really into using things that are just basic colors. The way I paint, I don't really mix color, I just use color straight out of the tube. And so neons work in a similar way, where there's only twelve colors you can really get. They can add other gases to make other shit, but it's a very limited palette. So when I started using neons it was more me just trying to paint with fucking neon. I would bend weird shapes and then try to replicate that into a neon or whatever. Just picking a color, seeing how it looked and rearranging it, it was really fun, actually . . . like making a painting with colored glass.

Do you resent the fact that people read race into the work, like I just did? You're talking about this use of neon as this playful material, and for me I read, "Oh, he's choosing to distort the coloration of the skin."
Yeah, that's the thing. When you're black and you become an artist you're always going to have to answer for your race. If I painted nothing but white people the question would come up why don't you paint black people? You always have to answer for it. So I figure if I'm going to have to talk about being black I want to do it in a way that at least it's going to be kind of fun for me. So that's why the work is so over the top in so many different ways. But then I have to talk about all this shit that has to do with being black. So this piece, I was trying to not use any figures at all.

Let's talk about these paintings over here that are a bit more abstract.
These are called *Paintings on Top of Paintings on Top of Paintings* because I've been doing a bunch of small paintings. They sell these little hobbyist—

The mini canvases on the little easels!
Right. So they started as a way for me to get kind of loose when I get into the studio. They're ridiculously small canvases and don't feel like anything substantial, so when I started doing them they were sketches for what could be larger paintings that I'd never make. Over time as I amassed a number of these quick little paintings, I started placing them in a sequence, as if they were little paintings on a board, and you could choose which one you want. But when combined, all the little pieces become one big piece. Each one of these could be an actual painting if I wanted to do them at a larger size. But since they're mainly abstract or don't usually depict figures, I don't know how to make them work on their own as individual pieces. It's still something I'm grappling with within my practice.

Is that a way for you to be subversive toward the market? These small scale paintings?
No, because I'm not selling the individual canvases. They're considered one piece. If we want to start talking about the market and working with galleries, that's a whole other monster. Part of that monster is supplying demands, like people requesting work I'm no longer making or work I'm no longer interested in making.

How do you respond to that? Is that okay for you?
It's okay at times, depending on what the collector is requesting of me. People say things like: "I want 1200 niggas in space, but can you do a little abstract paint swoosh across?" I'm like fuck, do you want to just come and make the painting yourself? But I've had that. They'll send me two paintings and be like I want something that's like these two put together. What the fuck? I'm going to just make you whatever the fuck I make but sometimes it gets hard to accommodate certain commissions, because I'm not really into doing—

What they ask?
Yeah, exactly. When you're still an emerging artist, you have to ask yourself, "Do you do the commission exactly the way the collector wants it?" Or do you have some type of conviction to say "No, that's not what I'm making!" But it's hard to say no when you have studio rent to pay.

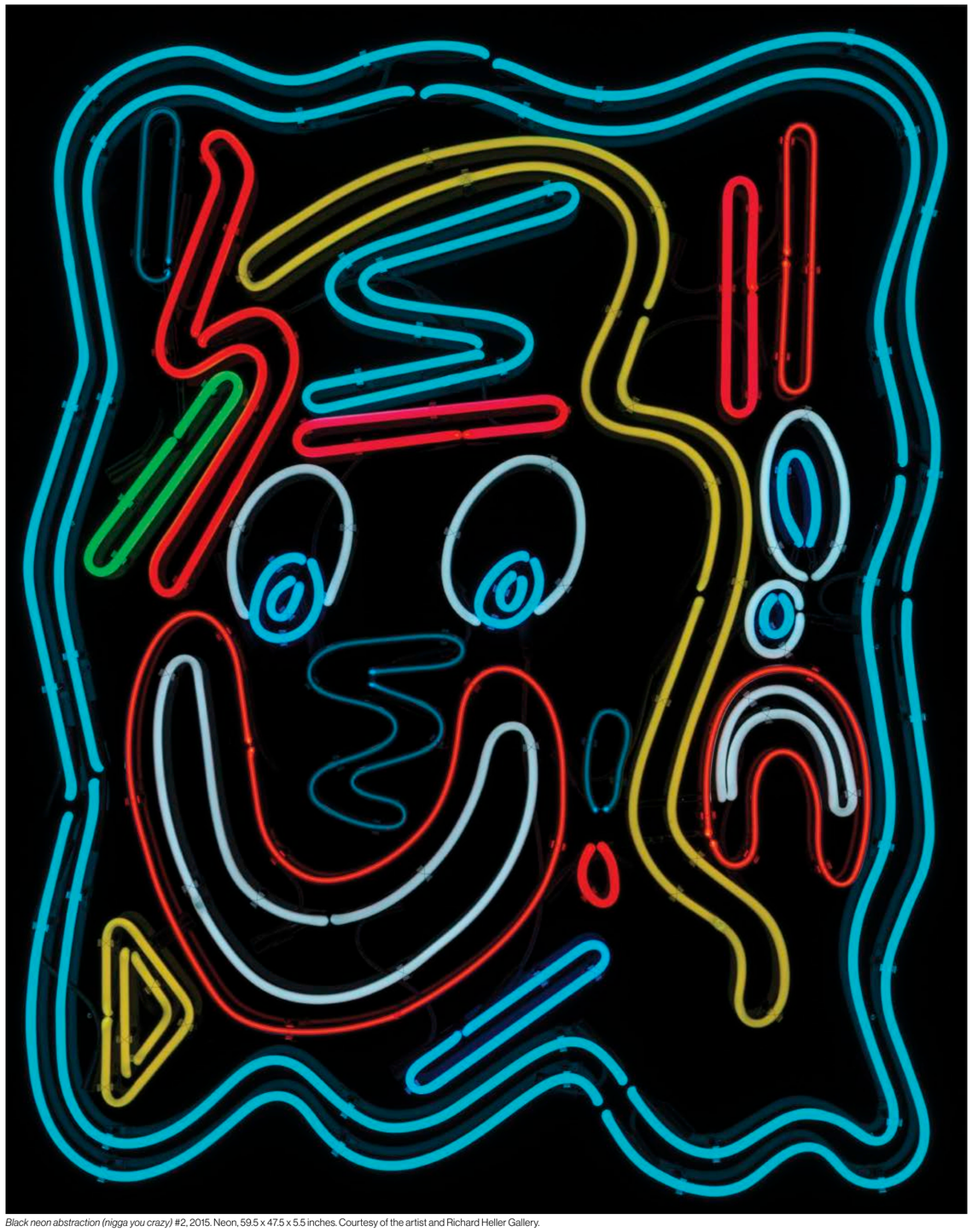
So do you feel you straddle that?
I can now. I've got a little something going so I can be like, "I don't really want to do that, but I'm doing this." Right now I'm going through a transition from doing these narrative-based, very small, intimate paintings, and I'm doing these larger, more abstract or pattern based works. When you change directions in work collectors sometimes get scared and they want to get the old thing before you go on your bad riff—"before you go into performance art let me get—before you kill your career let me get this painting."

I'm wondering if you can discuss your relationship to idol or lineage? You use the sports icon, Michael Jordan, as this recurrent motif, alongside references to famous artists, many of whom are white males. Is this a way for you to collapse the space between cultural icons and canonized artists?
To me, Jordan is this icon of black culture, but then he also sort of supersedes it as being an American icon of sports. I can talk about him and it's about race, but at the same time it's just about a guy who's really great at basketball—it has nothing to do with his face. So it kind of does exactly what I've been trying to do: make work that has black figures in it, but without it being about race or divisions. Just to be as simple about it as possible, you know?

When Roberta Smith reviewed the show she asked why I didn't reference certain artists and why I referenced the ones I did in my titles. How come I didn't reference David Hammons or Ellen Gallagher? Why should I have, because they're both black artists? Because I'm black, should I only be allowed to talk about black artists? The conversation that I was having was about the white artists that I was referencing. I feel like I don't need to talk about Hammons or Gallagher because it's already apparent they influence my work. I wanted to talk about certain white artists that are relevant within the art world right now, and how they dominate visual aesthetic trends.

Is that a way for you to be honest about the state of contemporary art? Where a lot has been done . . .
Everything's been done.

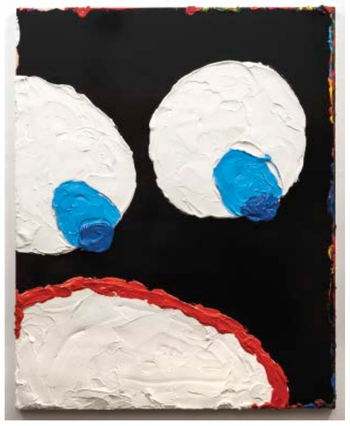
So now our role is to regurgitate and re-appropriate.
But you have to be able to answer for it. You have to know who you're referencing and you have to reference the right people. They want you to validate—like when I talk about neons I should definitely be talking about Dan Flavin, or Tracy Emin or Terence Koh, or everyone else that has used neon— how does the work relate and how have you elevated the usage of neon in work? Which is so hard to really try to do, especially when you're doing it so publicly, showing new work, so quickly.



Black neon abstraction (nigga you crazy) #2, 2015. Neon, 59.5 x 47.5 x 5.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Heller Gallery.

Installation view, *They Should've Never Given You Niggas Money* at Richard Heller Gallery, Los Angeles, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Heller Gallery.

Lazy bitch, 2015. Neon, 42 x 24 x 5.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Heller Gallery.



The big face nigga part 1, 2015. Acrylic on panel, 60 x 48 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Heller Gallery.

And when you say "they", who are "they?" The critics? Collectors?
I would say more critics and institutions want you to validate—like you know, me being black I'm going to have to talk about how I fit in to the whole canon of black art. There's a whole genre of black art and you have to pick and choose who you're going to come after—I don't know how to explain. Like David Hammonds choses to talk about being black in so many different ways, the performance with the basketball, you know what I mean? But that was definitely about being black, you know what I mean? Just by using the basketball, he talked about being black. So he did it in the simplest way with just that. I definitely want to further the conversation of what black artists can do and what's not accepted of a black artist, or what's expected of a black artist. I definitely would love to be a part of that conversation: it doesn't always have to be about the civil rights movement or heavy handed. But like I definitely think about how my work is creating social change and how am I talking to future generations …

But you wouldn't put that on any other young artist in LA, you know what I mean? Someone whose making sort of pop/abstract artwork, you don't ask them how their art is affecting the next generation. As you've said, it seems that the critics will do that for you; they'll put all of this loaded content on your work.
But also, if you don't put it in sometimes they'll ask why it's not there. How come you didn't reference so and so? You're always going to have to answer for who other people think are important and who they see in your practice. Which I get, you do that with everyone, with any artwork, you go, "oh that looks like fucking Donald Judd and a little bit of—it's like four artists all put together." Everyone is an amalgam of a bunch of people now, you know? And I figured why not just be blatant about that as much as possible. It's kind of funny, it's what you're supposed to be thinking about, but instead, just say it in the title or something.

Has anyone criticized this—you're saying it's a little tongue in cheek, right?
Definitely tongue in cheek, definitely.

You're making fun of our system, but in that way you're also kind of like biting the hand that feeds you because the system is paying your fucking rent, right?
I think the art world likes that. They kind of want to be made fun of a little bit, you know what I mean? Like who did that poster that said, "this is not for the rich white pigs" or something like that?

And then a white dude buys it.
It's that whole thing that they want to be called out. I don't know, like we were saying earlier, the art world is so different. There are so many artists who are really amazing and make great work and aren't represented, and struggle and have to teach, and then you can say there are artists like me who maybe, from some other people's standpoint, don't make great work, but then I'm kind of doing okay. You know, a painter told me a long time ago that paintings pay the bills at galleries, and it's a really true statement. That's how you usually pay the rent is through paintings. Your crazy performance where you crawl on the ground reading your mom's diary—you know, that's really hard to sell. But a big black painting of a fucking backwards Nike sign over someone's couch is going to look really nice as opposed to a sculpture of a bunch of bags of concrete on top of an old paint can or something. So galleries always have to have their people on their roster who make work that's a little bit more for the market. That's what keeps galleries able to show the more avant garde shit. So then when you get pinned as a market artist—

Do you think you've been pinned that way?
No, not really—no. I haven't been making work that long I guess. But, you always have to think, am I making this for someone to live with? Or am I just making it for it to be out in the world? Those are two different modes of making. So if you're making things for someone to live with, that's a different way of thinking about what you're going to compose, as opposed to just like if you're just trying to make a statement and like really just like make something that's going to be maybe a little bit—like a Ryan Trecartin piece, that's something hard to place. It's hard to place video and complicated installations—but it's easy to place a giant Rothko or Laura Owens. And I don't want to say that painting is like being an interior decorator, but I think sometimes the modes/motivation of what to put where could be similar. This is definitely something that crosses my mind when I think about what people buy. The work that you feel is good and what people actually buy are always two different things. So there's that whole part of making work too, that once you start to sell shit you have to realize that okay, if I want to keep this going I actually have to be a little more calculated. It goes outside of the criticality of everything sometimes, and so how do I prolong this endeavor to keep going, you know? It's a thing you have to think about.

I've seen a lot of young artists go the wrong way with it. Is that something you worry about?
It's definitely something that's on the forefront of your mind when your whole income comes from art sales. You have to consider the market in some way, shape, or form, whether it's intentional or not.

It's so hard because that paycheck comes in, and you want to go out to dinner. [Laughs]
You definitely want to spend that money on yourself in some kind of way, but what you should do is put that paycheck toward your practice instead of spending, you know, a thousand dollars on Yeezys and a sushi dinner.

Let's shift and talk a little bit about your transition out of school into having gallery representation.
So in 2009 when I graduated, when Tumblr and blogs were really popular, me and my ex-girlfriend, we basically emailed all these Tumblrs that were art and design related and we just were like, "hey, we really love your blog, there's this website we came across the other day of this artist we think fits your aesthetic, you should check him out." And it was me, and we would do that again under another email address. We did that to like 60 Tumblrs and blogs. Maybe 30 of them re-blogged me, so overnight I was on a bunch of Tumblrs and shit. After that, Kanye West blogged about me, and then his agent called me about purchasing some work. Ultimately they didn't get anything, but afterwards I suddenly started getting calls from galleries. It was really crazy.

Because you basically were prank calling blogs?
I don't know if that was prank calling but it was definitely a calculated way of getting free advertisement. If it says contact, refer us anything that you like, why not?

That was the time for blogs.
It was during that time, so I did that. I was working at American Apparel's print shop, overseeing the printing of the "Legalize Gay" campaign, and then like out of nowhere I started getting all these people asking me if I have work available, and then I was just selling out of the studio for a while and then I was contacted by Richard Heller Gallery. He got me into some really good collections right off the bat, which was really cool, and so I've been working with him for about seven years now.

You are pretty active on Instagram. Are you using the same logic? Free publicity?
Yes and no. Instagram is this narcissistic system of constantly putting content into the world. So it works as publicity but it can also be very personal at the same time. It's different for everyone who uses it. I have a lot of young followers. Younger people tend to understand the whole dialogue. When I use the word "nigga" they know I'm not really trying to talk about race, but it's implied. It's just part of the dialogue of using that vernacular in an institutional setting that is characterized by bourgeoisie, affluence, etc.

The venue of Instagram is such a different thing. You're flipping, you're scrolling, you're going from bright image to bright image, versus stepping into a white-walled gallery where the weight of history is always kind of embedded in this space.
Instagram is like a little gallery now though. You can see everything on your phone now. I didn't have to go to any of the fairs that were here. I saw it all on my phone. And, it's showing the work and having a critique, but it's usually a positive because everyone just likes it.

There's no unlike, or thumbs down.
Yeah, so there's that whole thing too of like this automatic gratification of you posted a painting, people like it, and you're like, "Awesome, I made a good painting. I did it, I made a good painting!" 200 people liked it, but then at the same time, like you could do the same thing and put up a painting you totally fucking hate and the same amount of things happen. It's so subjective. You can test your work to see what people like. It's weird, you know? It's a new thing, but it's definitely something you can do: you can see how people are reacting to your work without ever actually having a show.

When does that turn off for you? There's this impulse of constantly being connected.
I mean there's always this kind of need to post something. But I feel like it could definitely be a trap because you can get sucked into this mode of making work and posting it for the instant gratification of getting likes. It's a temporary substitute for having someone come by your studio and exchanging in an actual discussion about the work. I feel like—because I don't have a lot of people come over all the time, you know? Just because, not to get weird, but sometimes the space being so big, I don't want people to—there's been weird like, "How do you afford it?"

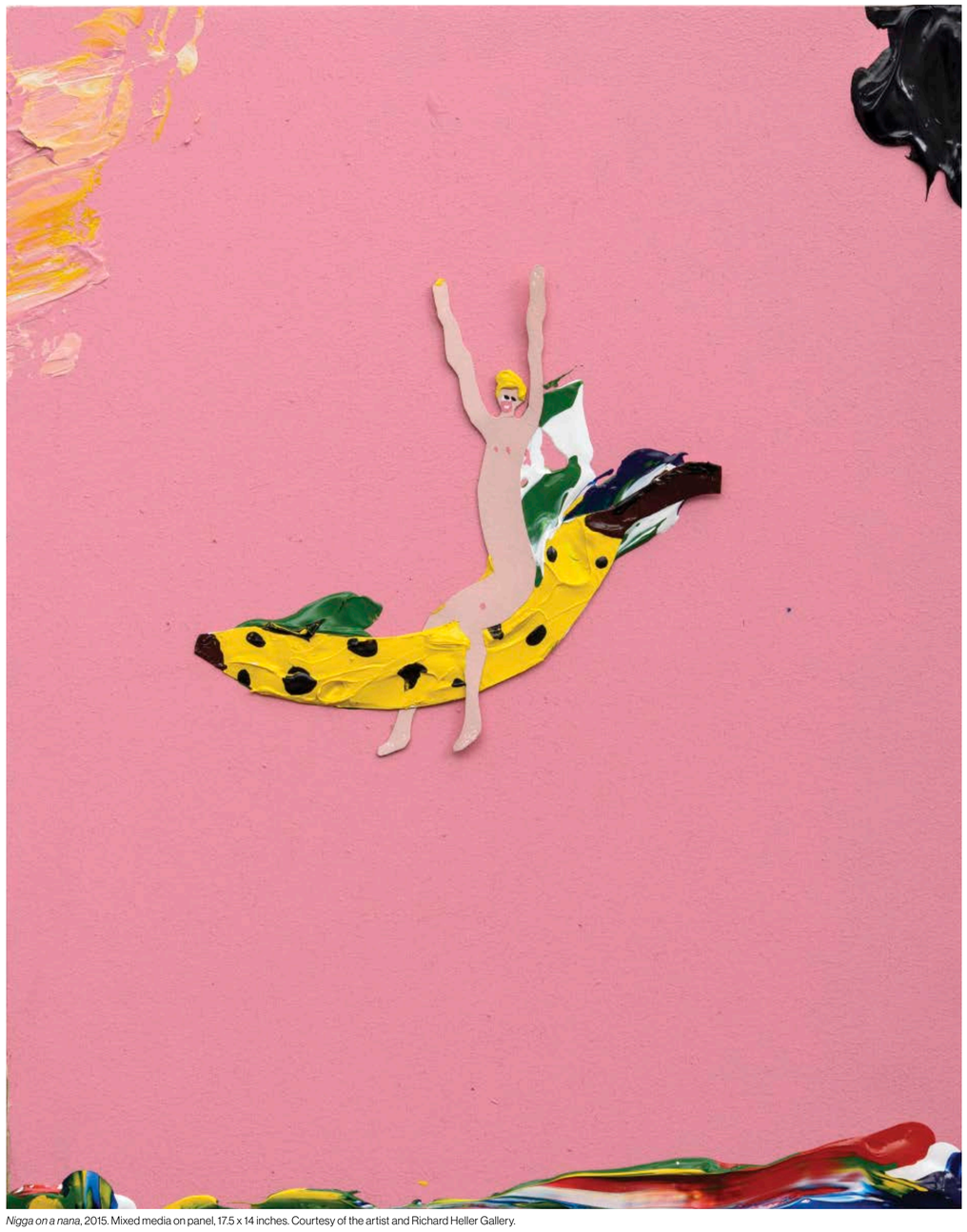
It's funny because mainly—for a lot of artists, their Instagram is all their work and nothing that actually shows anything personal. It's almost superficial and commercial. It's like an advertisement for the work. I feel like how much longer am I going to be on Instagram? How much time am I going to do this for? Because it's so much now and it's so overwhelming.

But, it's working for you.
I'm really fortunate that it's working out for me right now, but it could be a temporary thing, like everything in the art world. I'm just so addicted to Instagram! And there are so many good memes now, it's almost like a new form of artwork! Like the Bernie and Hillary ones, have you seen those? They're really funny. What's your stance on things—Bernie is always really positive and Hillary's like—here, I'll show you.

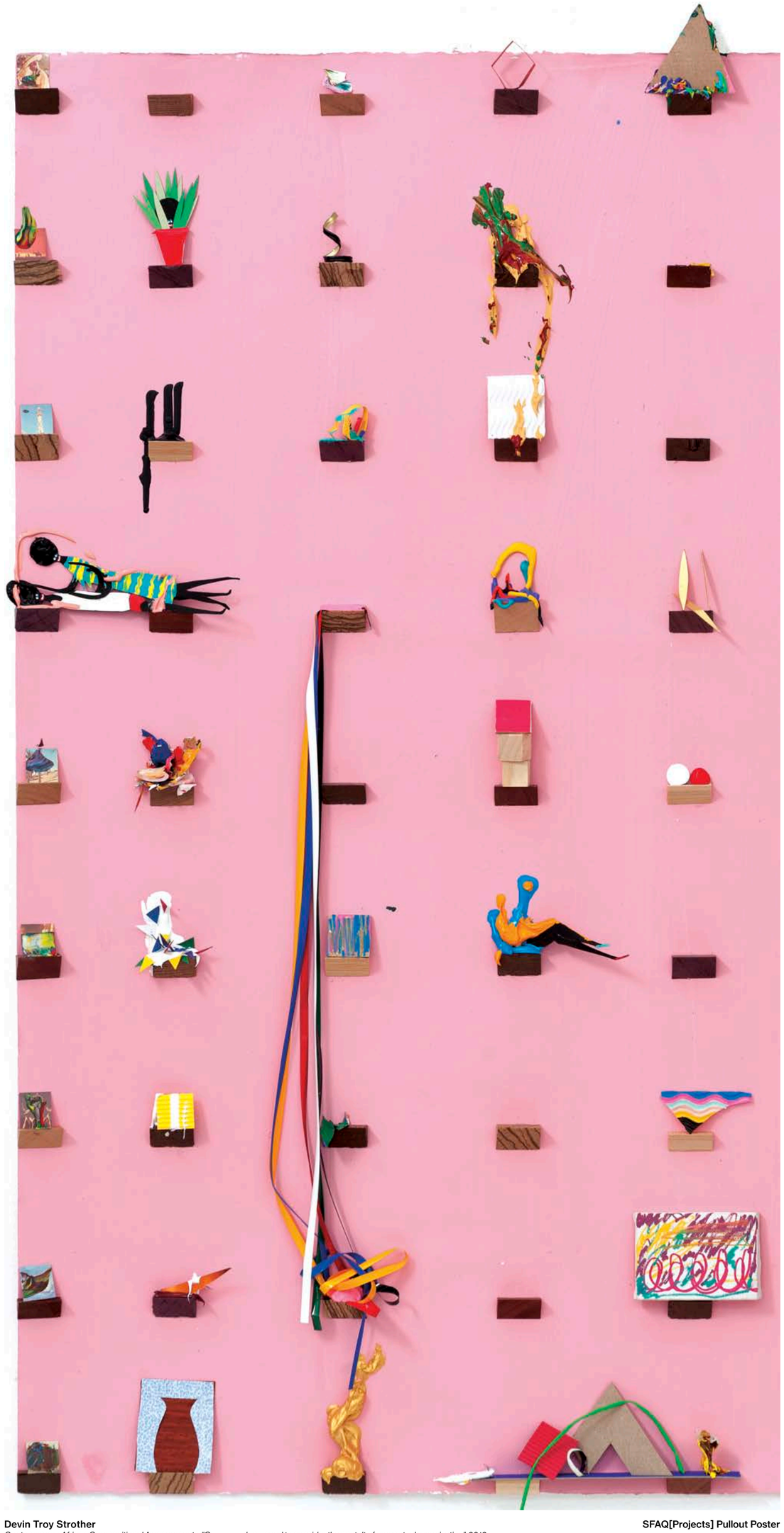
Installation view, *What if Yayoi Kusama had Jungle Fever?* at Richard Heller Gallery, Los Angeles, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Heller Gallery.

Nigga I'm getting light headed, can we stop now? (no nigga this is art), 2015. Acrylic, cut paper, and IKEA frame on panel, 60 x 48 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Heller Gallery.

4 niggas on a plate (where's my abstraction), 2015. Autobody paint and acrylic on aluminum, 66.75 x 16 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Heller Gallery.

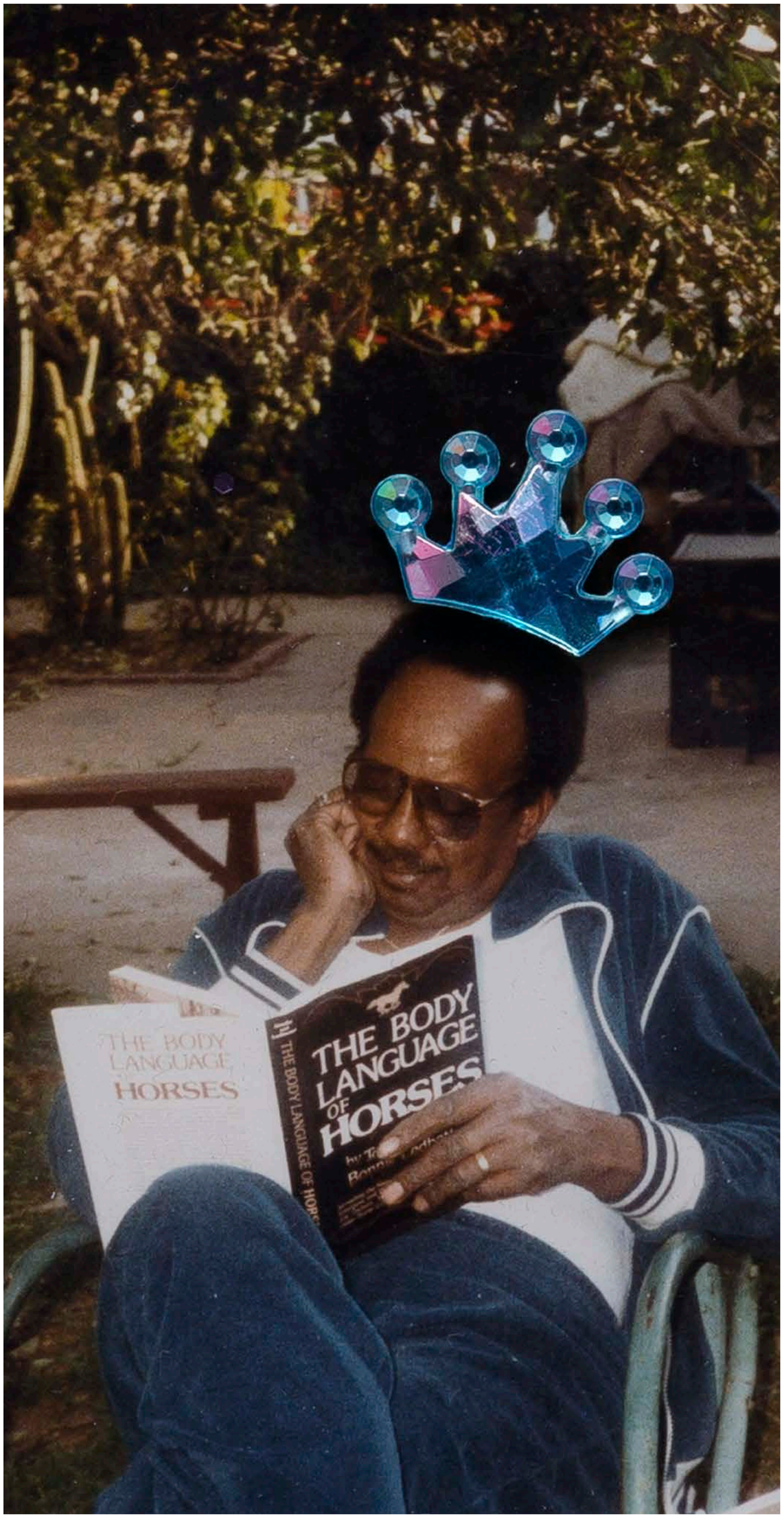


Nigga on a nana, 2015. Mixed media on panel, 17.5 x 14 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Heller Gallery.



Devin Troy Strother
Contemporary African Compositional Arrangements, "Guuuuuuurl you need to consider the gestalt of perceptual organization", 2012
Acrylic, enamel, wood and construction paper on paper, 45 x 30 Inches.

SFAQ[Projects] Pullout Poster



Sadie Barnette, *In loving memory of Ralph "Uncle Alvin" White,* 2016. Digital C-print, 20 x 30 inches. Edition of 3.

SFAQ[Projects] Pullout Poster

Sadie Barnette

In Conversation With Rujeko Hockley

Since meeting poolside in San Diego in 2009, working on our tans in lieu of attending yet another 'Accepted Students' event at the University of California, San Diego, Sadie and I have been in sync. Initially drawn to one another by shared interests/approaches to life, we quickly realized that there was much more to connect us: both only-ish children, 1984 babies, mixed girls, self-evidently fly would-be sophisticates brought up in urban spaces (though to my forever regret, on opposite coasts), and creatively-inclined. From that first meeting, through graduate school, cross country moves, new cities, and new concerns, we have forged ahead in this thing they call 'the art world,'pooling our shared knowledge and expertise in the hopes that this collaborative and love-driven model will allow us to remain true to our work, ourselves, and to the times, places, and people we come from. It makes perfect sense—an artist and a curator—but it is the greatest privilege for both of us to grow together over time, as friends, peers, and co-conspirators. We have had many, many conversations—some of them profound, some of them silly, some of them life-changing, some of them fire-starting. Thus, what follows is really an excerpt or snippet from a much longer and larger conversation, one that we are always having, and always will be.

You've talked before about your work as a way of seeing things, and not a way of making things necessarily, which I think is a really important distinction and idea. You work in all these different registers, but there is always an overall connecting vibe or sensibility.

I think a lot of artists have a ritualistic relationship to their materials. People talk about the paint itself informing their choices and how a lot of ideas come to them through the hours spent in the studio . . . but for me it is more about looking at the world and noticing things as they occur and actually just copying them and editing and putting things together. That's why I use a lot of found text and found objects. It ends up taking many different formats but there is something running through that you can identify as me, my authorship, my perspective.

Can you explain what that perspective is?

Well, I guess it involves my interest in minimalism and conceptualism informing the way I look at my family, our history, the personal as political, West Coast culture etc. . . . My work is very concerned with "the everyday" but is also tethered to the other-worldly or the abstract, or the poetic, and I hope it gives us the space to dream and imagine things being different. Headspace as outer space is a concept I keep coming back to. I'm documenting our lives but also hinting at an escape, a science fiction maybe, and bigger possibilities. I argue that we need abstraction and magic and glitter—that people need poetry.

I wanted to ask you about bookmaking. We went to graduate school together at UC San Diego starting in 2009, and were very fortunate to be there together, and I'm very lucky in that I've been able to watch you grow as an artist and learn and do new things and then see how old things come back and are reconstituted. One of the things that you really learned at UCSD was bookmaking, and I definitely think of it as an important and ongoing part of your practice. Can you talk a little bit about that process and how it happened, but also how it's generative now? What was the first book that you made? And where can we see these books?

Well, meeting you was definitely the most important thing about grad school, but getting into bookmaking was also a big development for my work. The first book I made was called *Plus One,* and it was produced by my friends at Gravity and Trajectory (GR//TR), a publisher in San Diego.[1] They wanted to work with artists who hadn't yet worked in the book format and the idea was for the artist to approach the book like a gallery wall. They had a very strict format/structure for the book and this helped unify all the different elements that I was interested in but never thought would make sense to hang on a gallery wall. All of sudden I got to insert all of my crazy interests from Mexican nail design magazines, to street shots of Oakland, to Lindsay Lohan, to my puppy that I lost in a custody battle—all of these things exist in the same plane in my mind, and the book allowed that to exist outside of my mind and still feel cohesive. So, making that book gave me the freedom of inclusion. The book format acts as an equalizer for disparate types of images that are sourced from different places—reference material or ephemera or little objects that I collected—because once everything is on the same size page and bound together it allows the reader to consider them all collectively, like a remix in a way. That first book is long sold out but some of my newer 'zines are available on my website, like *How To* and *How To Vol 2.*[2]

I remember when you were making* Plus One, *and it was complicated to do it, but that book has one whole page that is just your Sadie Barnette™ shiny sparkle holographic vinyl paper. It's so interesting to see it presented that way because that paper, that image or that pattern, appears throughout your work, whether in a book, drawing, photograph, etc. You use it in a lot of different ways. It's not the easiest material in the world to use in a book, but it nods to all the different scales and spaces that you've used it. Can you talk a little bit about that trademark paper and how you feel about it? Why you are so in love with it?

The element of glitter appears in my work in many forms, sometimes actual piles of loose glitter as part of a sculpture, or little rhinestones in drawings, or yes that hologram material that I love. I created a whole wall out of it for my thesis show and then did a deconstructed version of that in 20 plus individual frames at a solo show at Ever Gold Gallery in 2013. My fascination with glitter has to do with transcendence or ecstasy, escape—it's mesmerizing, it's hypnotizing, we are all drawn to it and it can transport you somewhere. But I also like how fake and cheap it is. It's a performance, not the real thing, like rhinestones vs. diamonds. With the holographic vinyl paper, there's one angle you can look at it and it is just completely shiny and supports the illusion of it being more than paper. It works, and then there's another angle where you look at it where it's pretty, but it's just paper. It's about illusion and I like when it fails just as much as when it works.

Can you talk about photography in your work? You make all sorts of things—drawings, books, photographs, objects, sculptures, installations, murals, etc.—but a lot of it is rooted in the photograph. Were you a photographer first?

I was originally studying photography as an undergrad at CalArts but then I got interested in some of the broader conversations happening in other art departments. I started experimenting with found objects and drawing and other mediums, and never really looked back, and now one of the exciting things about working in so many mediums is that the choice of the medium is itself an element of the work. If I'm using one medium it's because I think that that's the right medium for that idea at that time and context. But photography is definitely what got me—not what got me into looking, but what helped me focus my act of looking into an act of making. So I'm always, always shooting photographs, collecting them and then looking back over thousands of pictures to select what will become a mural, or a framed print, or needs to be cut up and collaged or should appear in a zine. The zine is one place where certain types of photographs that I would be hesitant to put on a gallery wall find their homes. Some of the more personal or emotive or intimate or . . .

Sexy? There are some sexy pictures.

Ha! Yeah, images that are sexy, or even that have a certain subcultural affiliation or "otherness," can be so easy to consume or commodify when they exist as objects on a gallery wall. I am protective of these images. But these same images in a book format feel more like passing a note or letting someone in on a moment, as if you're speaking to one person at a time. Looking at art on a wall can be more of a collective experience, whereas looking at a book is usually a more personal experience.

When I think about your work, I think about specificity. You've talked about specificity as universal—specifics as the universal experiences of things—as opposed to exceptional, which is what happens particularly in relation to "marginal" stories and situations. That is, these stories are somehow perceived as exceptional or different, which assumes that there is some other "real" universal out there. I often feel that you're making a claim for your experience—your life, your family, how you spend your time, what you're interested in—as universal. In keeping with that, location and geography both seem important to you, particularly California. It's the place you are speaking from. But then again, you just finished a residency at The Studio Museum in Harlem in New York, which is another very iconic location. Can you tell me about that year and what being in Harlem was like for your work and your process?

The residency was amazing, and Harlem is amazing and inspiring. I don't think it necessarily changed my work so much as it was just an affirmation of why it matters to make work and what the dialogue around producing culture can be. It did help to get some distance from California. It helped me to isolate what the elements are in my work that are particular to California, so sharing that landscape with a New York viewer and seeing it through their eyes, helped me to realize California architecture is very particular and some of my images announce themselves as being very California.

Speaking of Harlem, in the interview you did with the other two artists-in-residence (Lauren Halsey and Eric Mack) in the brochure for your exhibition* Everything Everyday, *you said "I always think every black child in America should go to Harlem for a week."*[3] ***It's such a beautiful idea. I love imagining such a trip—shout-out to any person or foundation out there that wants to give us money to make it happen! What is so special about Harlem?

I wish we could have that as a rite of passage tradition! As African Americans we are sort of homeless in terms of the idea of a homeland. But Harlem just feels like a homecoming. You can feel the history and spirit in Harlem. People worry that Harlem is changing and it's true that there is a lot of gentrification going on, but Harlem is still the most Harlem of anywhere. Obviously there are amazing communities of black people being brilliant and making art and being fabulous all over the country, but in Harlem it is taking place on a very public stage, has a public square kind of feeling about it, and creativity is on display and people are presenting themselves in very active and considered ways. There are church ladies and punk rock gay kids and dudes on hoverboards and all these different, sometimes contradictory, ways of expressing blackness, but it's all happening at the same time on the same corner.

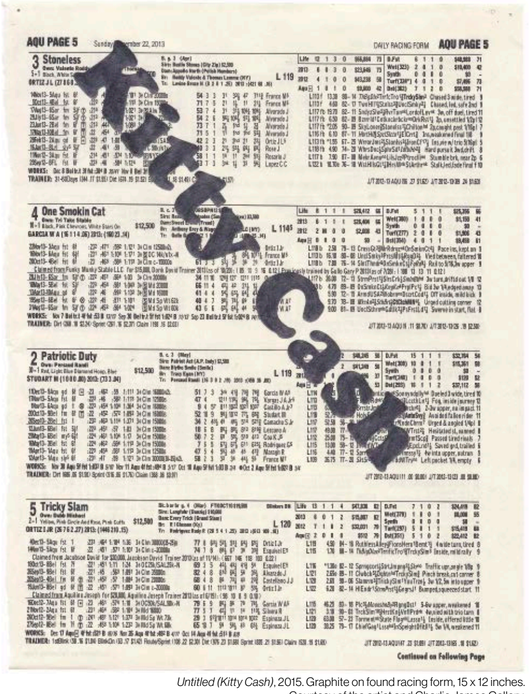
One of the other things about Harlem that is amazing is that it is, as you said, this kind of homeland on both literal and poetic or metaphorical levels, but it's also a space of contemporary migration. There are a huge amount of African immigrants who come to Harlem now. That replenishing is part of what keeps Harlem from being a museum piece, keeps it vibrant and dynamic. Regardless of the changes wrought by development and gentrification, and all these things that pose a threat to it remaining an active space and a black space, it persists and changes. It's not some perfectly preserved sepia-tinted Harlem Renaissance thing. It's like, yeah, there are hoverboards.

So Oakland and Harlem—as you were saying, Harlem is this black mecca, but Oakland is also kind of a black mecca. Maybe not on quite the same scale as Harlem, either in size or reputation, but I think it does function that way, especially for black radicalism and activism. Can you talk a little bit about Oakland, now that you've been back there for a couple months after being away? You're from there, and it's a place that people flock to, like New York, but you're actually from there and grew up there. Tell me about that.

Being from Oakland I have always felt that there is a wonderfully disproportionate amount of political activism and amazing music and dance and trendsetting/slang that comes out of this tiny place. Oakland is just one of those places that has a very strong identity so if you're from Oakland that's a big part of who you are, and when you're living in Oakland your life is engaged with this character of Oakland. Just like people from New York, they're in a relationship with New York itself at all times.

It's so true. Like, "How are you and New York doing?" You're literally in a relationship. And sometimes it's real messy.

Just like Harlem is being gentrified, so is Oakland. The neighborhood that I grew up in gets a new fancy name and then everything is a coffee shop. I saw a statistic that rents have doubled in Oakland since 2009, and obviously no one's wages have doubled. A lot of my friends are no longer living in Oakland because it's just so expensive. There is some conversation and activism around the issue, but I don't know what the answer is. Oakland has always been a very welcoming place, and there's always been a lot of different people living side-by-side, sometimes with hilarious results, so I don't want the issue of gentrification to force us to be territorial and say no new people can come, because that's not what Oakland is about . . . but as Oakland becomes less and less affordable, it won't be the Oakland we know and love.



Untitled (Kitty Cash), 2015. Graphite on found racing form, 15 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery.

Untitled (Soul Cake), 2015. Graphite on found racing form, 15 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery.

I think it's such a hard thing because New York, Oakland, and the Bay in general, are places that people are drawn to and attracted to by all this amazing culture and creativity and history. But it's a double-edged sword—your very presence displaces the people who made it great and made all the culture, and then you can't afford to live there either. It's not even like the people who came and were attracted to it are themselves now able to stay. It's unsustainable for almost everyone; it's a very strange scenario.

Can you talk a little about the show you just opened in LA? Another iconic location!
The show is at Charlie James Gallery in LA's Chinatown and is called *Superfecta*—which is a type of bet that you place at the horse racetrack. I've always been fascinated by the racetrack. I used to go with my dad when I was little and it's a very interesting place because there's a melding of very specific vernacular and very serious betting and statistics and codes, but then also was this fantastical mythic element of the horses themselves and the names that they have, which can be very over the top and showy, but people are also very serious at the race track. It's a serious business. People are trying to make rent and that kind of vibe. But as a little girl I loved the ponies and even now when I go I see other father-daughter pairs, and I think it's a hilarious and unlikely location for father-daughter bonding. For the show, I used the names of the horses as the primary way to investigate the space/culture of the racetrack. There are these amazing poetic names and I think of them as found poetry. Names like Derby Kitten, Blondie's Bling, Soul Cake, Pacific Pride, Hard Sun . . . they run the gamut of referencing old Hollywood, or there are war names, and princess names, and everything in between.

And not necessarily names that have anything to do with the horse's performance. They are fanciful and seem kind of arbitrary. Are they?
Sometimes the name might come from the parents. If the parents are named Endless Fancy and Hollywood Affair the kid might be called Endless Affair or something like that.

So it's familial or genealogical, which also gives the naming practice a literal function as a way of imparting information to bettors about the horses. For people who are very serious about it and doing it for money, it means they can follow the lineage. Though they could do that by assigning numbers or something boring, like Horse Number 7 who is the daughter of Horse Number 3 and Number 4.
That would be boring and no one wants to get behind that. The horses aren't named like people or even boats, which are normally given a humanizing name. They don't give horses names that make them seem more like beings. They're more like brands or slogans, which I think is interesting. I've always been interested in names and nomenclature, and the act of choosing what to call something. I think it says a lot about who we are or what we think about, or who we want to be or hope to be.

It's interesting that you're talking about the naming of the horses having this family tree, lineage element. In your show at the Studio Museum, you made a lot of reference to your specific family tree, more via the relationships between your relatives and you than through individuals' names, children, marriages, etc. Maybe there's a connection between the racetrack work and that work? In any case, the show at Charlie James, is it primarily drawing?
I did a lot of drawing for this show—I wanted the many obsessive hours of my drawing labor to match the obsessive nature of gambling. Most of the drawings are done on pages from the daily racing forms that you find at the racetrack. You can buy this booklet of information, and the pages are just covered in tiny, tiny numbers and stats. I know what some of them mean because my dad has told me, but he totally understands what all of them mean. People use these statistics to create complex equations to handicap the odds. So I drew on these newsprint sheets names of horses and also numbers using really soft pencils and almost covering entire sheets of paper with pencil marks to get a thick shiny metallic coat of graphite on this really thin delicate newsprint. I let information come through the negative space, either the statistics about the horse or some of the advertisements in the program, which could be little stacks of money, or coins, or little horses. And there's a lightboxed photo image that was taken outside my dad's house in Compton, showing a pony ride at a family house party. There's a whole little-known horse culture in Compton, because there are some areas that are zoned for equestrian ownership. You can't just have a horse in your driveway, but Compton is a place where you *can* have a horse. You'll see horses walking down Compton Boulevard. South Central LA is the most car-centered place ever, but there are also horses down at the liquor store sometimes. The photograph is blurred—it's the shot I took right before my camera focused. I chose that one because it's not a portrait of the particular horse, or that exact party, but it's about that phenomenon. It could be somebody else's cousin or a different horse—it's about the idea.

With photography, people have that desire for information, like who are these people, what are their names, where are they going. The blurring lessens that impulse. It also becomes a formal aesthetic choice, though it may have been inadvertent. It gives it such a mood, such a feeling and a vibe—that kind of hazy twilight time of day that's really lovely. It becomes surreal-ish.

How long is the show at Charlie James going to be up?
It will be up until February 20th.

Then what are you doing in 2016?
The next thing I'm doing is an artist residency at the Hermitage Center in Florida. I'm very excited about that. I think it's going to be another interesting experience of taking yourself out of your normal context. My work often has to do with urban dwelling experience, so what happens when I'm on the beach in Florida for a month?

All good things.
Yeah, so I'm looking forward to seeing what experiments I want to do, what I want to think about, what I want to make, what I want to look at, what I want to read. I'll send you a postcard.

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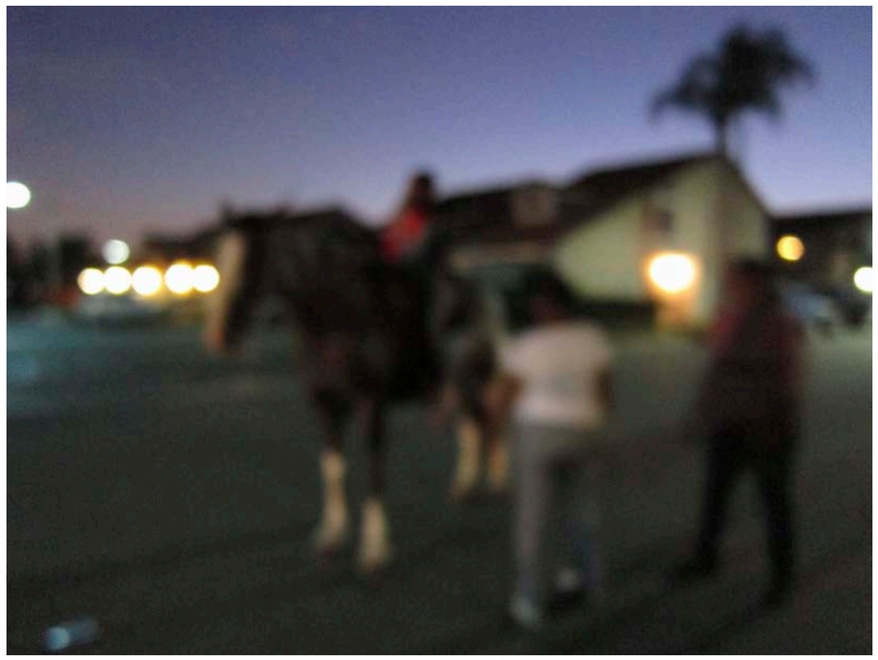
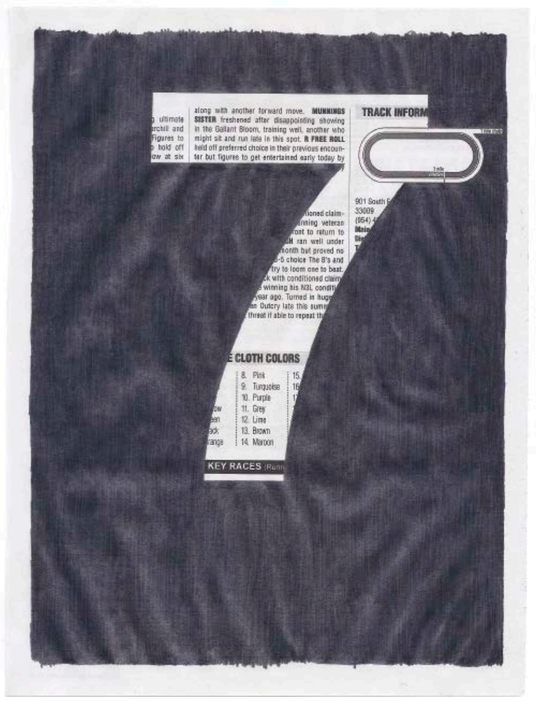
1) GR//TR was founded in 2010 by artists Christopher Kardambikis and Louis M. Schmidt. http://gravityandtrajectory.tumblr.com
2) www.sadiebarnette.com
3) http://www.studiomuseum.org/exhibition/everything-everyday-artists-in-residence-2014-15

Untitled (Racing Form 5), 2015. Graphite on found racing form, 15 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery.

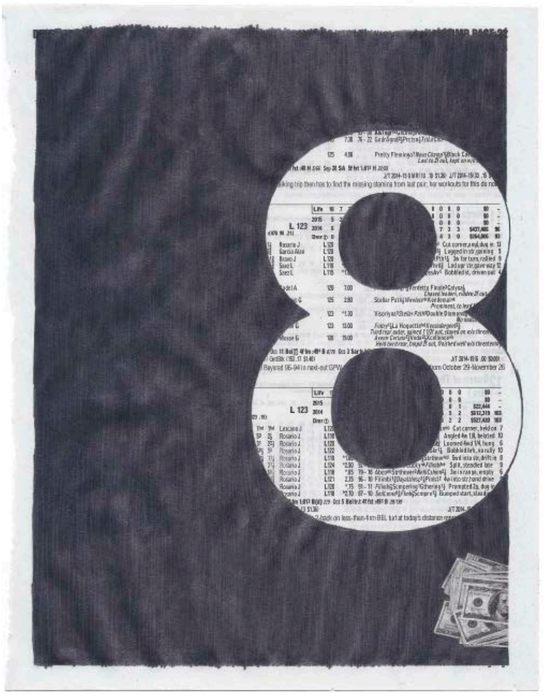
Untitled (Racing Form 6), 2015. Graphite on found racing form, 15 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery.



Untitled (Pony ride, Compton, CA), 2015. Archival pigment print in lightbox, 24 x 32 inches. Edition of 3. Courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery.

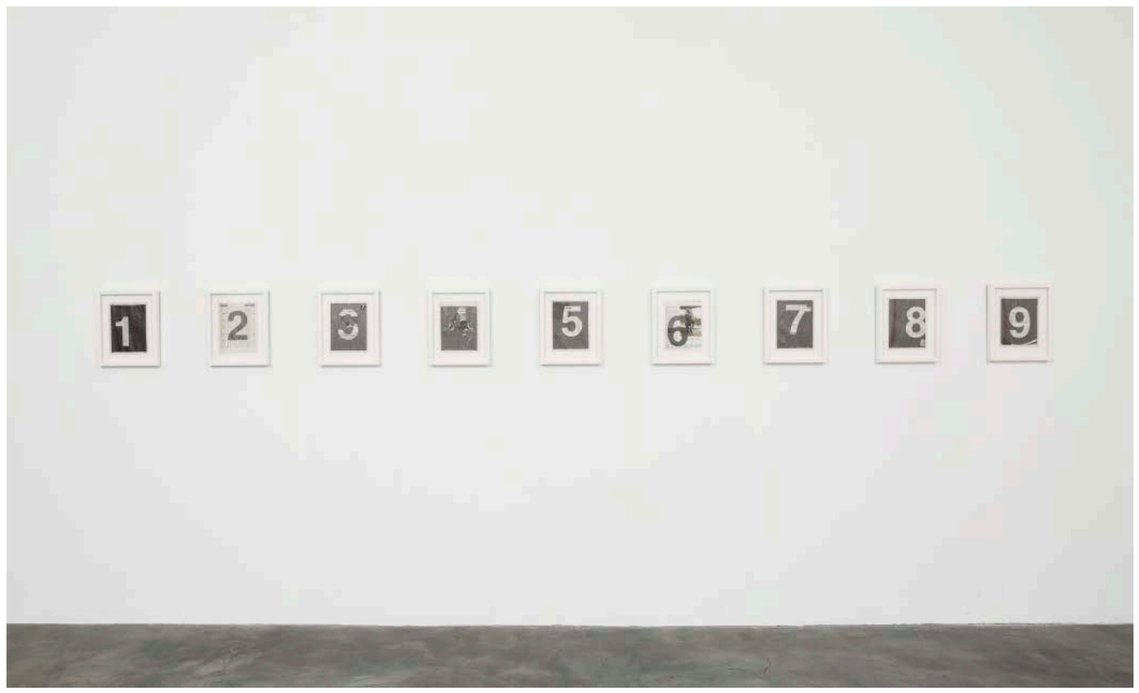


Untitled (Racing Form 7), 2015. Graphite on found racing form, 15 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery.



Untitled (Racing Form 8), 2015. Graphite on found racing form, 15 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery.

Installation view, *Everything, Everyday: Artists in Residence 2014–15* at the Studio Museum in Harlem, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and the Studio Museum in Harlem.



Installation view, Superfecta at Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery.

Lawrence Rinder

In Conversation With Constance Lewallen

The following interview took place January 8, 2016 at the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA). Lawrence Rinder is the Director of BAMPFA, and Constance Lewallen is an Adjunct Curator.

You curated* Architecture of Life, *the exhibition that reopened BAMPFA in its new building. In similar cases, museums ordinarily feature their collections. Why did you decide not to do the same?

We're really seeing all of 2016 as our "Grand Opening Year," and over the course of the year we will have several exhibitions that highlight various areas of our collection. For the opening show, I wanted to do an exhibition that would be bold, original, and breathtaking, and that celebrated the occasion of new architecture. I see it as an opportunity to connect with other institutions around the country and the world. Our new location on Center Street, one block from the Downtown Berkeley BART station and across the street from the main entrance to the UC campus, is so much more accessible and connected. That spirit of connectedness is part of our new reality, and, therefore, pulling together a show that puts us in dialogue with other organizations and other parts of the world is more in the spirit of the new building than a show that looks inward.

That makes perfect sense. I imagine also that a multifaceted exhibition such as* Architecture of Life *reflects BAMPFA's collection and mission, that is, as a comprehensive institution that reaches across cultures and time periods.

Right. Our collection goes back to 3000 BCE in Asia, and to the Renaissance in the West. Jackie Baas's show *Berkeley Eye*, which opens in July [*Berkeley Eye: Perspectives on the Collection*, on view July 13 through December 11], will be a comprehensive collection show. Following that, we will present your show, *Mind over Matter* [*Mind over Matter: Conceptual Art from the Collection*, on view October 19 through December 23], which is focusing on our conceptual collection. Julia White, our senior curator for Asian art, is organizing three consecutive exhibitions beginning in July—one focusing on historical Chinese painting, one focusing on historical Japanese art, and another on historical Indian art. Lucinda Barnes, our Chief Curator and Director of Programs and Collections, is working on a couple of ground-breaking Hans Hofmann exhibitions. The opening year will include other non-collection shows as well. Apsara DiQuinzio, our Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, and Phyllis C. Wattis, MATRIX Curator, has a number of wonderful small-scale MATRIX shows in the works, and we are doing several borrowed solo exhibitions that are emblematic of the kind of art that we love, such as a survey of Ana Mendieta's films [*Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, on view November 9, 2016, through February 12, 2017]. This show is coming from the Katherine E. Nash Gallery at the University of Minnesota, but is very much in the spirit of BAMPFA, not only because Mendieta was a great artist, but because it's very cutting edge work—it's film in a gallery context, and it's work that's never been shown before, at least not so comprehensively. The Martin Wong show [*Martin Wong: Human Instamatic*, exhibition dates tba], was originated by the Bronx Museum of the Arts. This is the first retrospective exhibition of this important Bay Area artist. Also, in February 2017 we will present *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, which we worked on in association with the Walker Art Center. This exhibition is emblematic of who we are in terms of its interdisciplinary nature and also because it digs deeply into an important local history with global resonance. We are not a local or regional museum—we're a global museum with a local perspective, a unique Berkeley point of view.

As you know, BAMPFA has an incredibly rich film program. We will be doing as many of 450 screenings each year in the new building. We are going to a 52-week schedule and will have films every night the museum is open—Wednesday through Sunday—as well as weekend matinees. Some highlights include the inaugural series, *Cinema Mon Amour*, which will present classic films from around the world, many of which have been selected by local art and film celebrities. This year, our film program will also feature several wonderful series including *Documentary Voices*, the annual *African Film Festival*, and a Maurice Pialat retrospective, among many others.

With* Architecture of Life, *were you also intending to broaden the concept of what can be considered art? For example, you have many scientific works like nineteenth-century German physicist Otto Lehmann's microscopic view of liquid crystals and the original Wow! Signal.

Yes, but certainly I am not the first person, nor is this the first institution, to question what art is—this has been going on for quite awhile—but I do think that museums haven't taken as much productive or creative liberty in this regard as they might have. We all know that the boundaries are blurry.

I try to avoid that phrase [laughter].

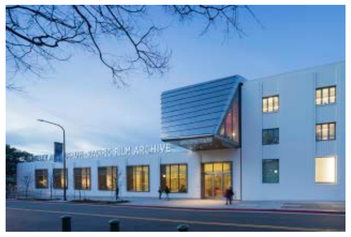
But nonetheless, it's a meaningful phrase. The boundaries are indeed blurry between art and many other things. What if one did allow oneself the latitude to elbow into adjacent territories? I think that's what this show does. Some of the material in this exhibition is categorically not art, such as the Wow! Signal. There are other things that one could say are ostensibly scientific, such as Santiago Ramón y Cajal's neurological drawings, or the Ernst Haeckel drawings—yet both men were artists who also happen to be among the greatest scientists that ever lived. I believe in both cases their scientific achievements were due in part to their artistic proclivities, their way in seeing holistically, and their ability to render detail in a way that I think helped them see the essential nature of the things they were studying. That kind of connection is not well known and is quite underappreciated. In the case of something like the Wow! Signal . . .

Which is?

The Wow! Signal is possibly the first documented extraterrestrial communication. It was a product of the SETI program, which stands for Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, which is a very well-funded and serious scientific effort to turn the antennas of the world out into the universe to search for signals that would suggest the presence of intelligent life. In 1977, Jerry R. Ehman, an amateur astronomer at one of the SETI stations at Ohio State University, was reading the computer output from the radio telescope which at first seemed to be simply the usual random numbers. But then he noticed on the sheet a dozen or so numbers and letters that were not random. It was amazing that he noticed it, because it was like a needle in a haystack. He drew a circle around them and wrote "Wow!" in the margin. Astronomers could tell that the signal came from Sagittarius, that region of the sky, but it was never detected again. I believe there is something about his acuity of vision that allowed Ehman to discern that needle in a haystack; there's also something about the sense of wonder and improbability and the way that that moment of awareness has the potential to reshape our entire understanding of reality that I find is commensurate with the experience of art. It's not art, but it's like art.

Diller Scofidio + Renfro, UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2016. View of the Oxford Street facade, with 1939 Art Deco administrative building at left and new stainless steel–clad theater at right. Photo by Iwan Baan. Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro; EHDD; and UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA).

Diller Scofidio + Renfro, UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2016. View from Oxford and Center Streets. Photography by Iwan Baan. Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro; EHDD; and UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA).



Diller Scofidio + Renfro, UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2016. View of the Center Street façade, with main entrance and cantilevered café above. Photo by Iwan Baan. Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro; EHDD; and BAM/PFA

Also, this is somewhat obvious, your exhibition and catalog affords such a great opportunity to connect with so many parts of the campus. When people ask me about BAMPFA and what distinguishes it, I always say it's the connection with the university's brainpower and amazing material resources.

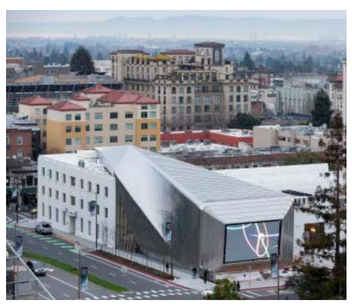
That is true, and I'll get back to that in a minute, but because of our location, our proximity to BART and downtown Berkeley, we are going to have a much larger and more diverse audience than we have ever had. One of my goals for this show is that there be something for everybody. It's a very diverse exhibition and not everyone is going to like everything, but I will guarantee that in this show each visitor will find at least one thing that will blow them away, something—at least one thing—that will change them or spark something profound.

Among my other goals for the show—besides blowing people away—was to embody one of the essential characteristics of BAMPFA, which is that we are quasi-encyclopedic, that is to say our collections are not just modern and contemporary but rather contemporary, historical, and global. I wanted to really underscore in people's minds that we are more than a museum of modern and contemporary art. We include lots of fantastic historical collections and programs.

As far as the campus is concerned, you are absolutely right that one of the things that makes us unique is our connection to UC Berkeley—we are the only visual arts museum at UC Berkeley. Berkeley is one of the greatest universities in the world, with a fantastic faculty across many disciplines, and we are one of the few places where the public can access that intelligence and also the material richness of the university. Now that we're downtown right next to BART and opposite the main entrance to campus, I would love it if we became something like the front porch of UC Berkeley, where people can come and hang out formally and informally with the faculty. It's the nature of the university to be multidisciplinary, if not interdisciplinary, and I want the exhibition to also capture that kind of universality of exploration, inquiry, and curiosity that the university embodies. So, yes, because of the presence of scientific material, also musical scores, and works that relate to literary themes, faculty from different departments will give lunchtime talks in the galleries about individual objects. There's also an undergraduate course, called *Big Ideas*, being offered in conjunction with the exhibition that is open to the public. It's an interdisciplinary course being taught at BAMPFA by Shannon Jackson, UC Berkeley's first Vice Chancellor of Arts and Design, and UC Berkeley Professor of Architecture Nicholas de Monchaux. It's unusual for the public to have access to an actual university course, in this case, one developed around this exhibition.

From the curatorial standpoint, what was the most difficult part of organizing* Architecture of Life*?

Well, there were lots of difficult things. It was difficult to be told 'no' when I asked for loans. That's always hard. There were works of art that I felt would be just really wonderful in this context that I couldn't get them for various reasons, either they were too fragile to travel or for some other reason. No one is going to miss these things except me, but it's a very long and complicated process. You start with your wish list, and then you winnow it down. Sometimes you realize that the thing that you wanted so badly really wasn't that important after all, and the thing that came in at the last minute is the link to the entire exhibition. I've been working on shows for thirty years, you've been working on shows for longer than that, so you know that there's a certain—probably magic is too strong a word—but there's something that happens in the process of putting a show together that can't be preconceived. It happens in the winnowing and in the installation when the show takes on a life of its own, and it starts to tell you things.



Diller Scofidio + Renfro, UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2016. Aerial view from the UC Berkeley campus. Photo by Iwan Baan. Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro; EHDD; and BAMPFA

Lawrence Rinder photographed by Peter Cavagnaro, 2016. Courtesy of BAM/PFA

That is what one hopes for.

Yes, that is what one hopes for. I hope that the things that I'm learning will be legible to other people as well.

Or different things will. A veteran curator once told me when I was lamenting my inability to secure a certain loan that people don't miss what's not in a show.

Right, they don't generally, not in a show like this. If it was a Matisse retrospective and you didn't have his *Red Studio* people might say "hmm." I gave some tours as the show as it was going up, and people have asked, "How did you decide what to put in and what not to put in?" It is a good question. It's a process. The theme, which is architecture, is a metaphor for life experience—the architecture of the mind, the architecture of society and so on. It's a very deep and potent metaphor, and I think that on a certain level it's something that, in a George Lakoffian way of thinking, it's a metaphor that structures our mind, our cognition. The idea of architecture is very deep because it's so essential to our survival. Buildings provide shelter and architecture organizes our lives physically. The metaphors of architecture, of space and connection are just so ingrained in our language and our experience that it's very easy to find that resonance throughout art, art history, across cultures, and in adjacent territories like music, science, what have you. That did make it somewhat daunting initially to say, okay, what is the narrower universe that I'm going to look at? I decided that I would start with the criterion that I mentioned before, that I wanted every single thing in the show to be amazing, and to include a variety of works so that it wasn't all in the same register, not all minimal, not all conceptual, not all representational, but very diverse so that it represented the diversity of what I hope our audience will be.

Also, the design of the building reflects the desire to bring the art and film programs more closely together. I refer to the fact that there is now a single entrance for art and film, which was not the case in the Bancroft building. In addition, the galleries stay open later and it is hoped that the film audience will get more involved in the visual arts and vice versa.

I'm very happy that our galleries will be open until 9 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday. I don't know of another art museum that has late hours every day it is open.

I believe there's never going to be a complete overlap in the film and art audiences, but you can provide for the possibility.

We also don't want to make film and art the same thing. We're not a museum of things that are both film and art, which I think is what some people think. "Oh, you're film and art so it's all going to be video installations." No. We are just as happy to do a gallery show of oil paintings and a fantastic Rossellini retrospective shown in the wonderful new film theater. We try to do the best possible job presenting in whatever medium that we're working with, whether that's performance, painting, prints, or film. We strive for excellence across all media. We are unique, I think in the world, as far as I'm aware, in that our film and visual arts programs are roughly equal in size. We have the same number of curators for film as we do for art. We have the same number of films in our collection as we do art objects. We historically have had about the same number of visitors for the film program as for the art program. So in fact, this duality, which is embedded in our name, the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, is realized in our collections, our programs, and our attendance. I believe that particular balance is unique. There are other museums that have fantastic film programs—MoMA in New York has a great film program and is closest to us in that sense. But at MoMA the film program is relatively small in relation to the art programs, whereas our identity is really about parity between art and film. One of the things in the new building that expresses this architecturally is that we have increased the number of screens. We used to have just one screen. We had many galleries, but one screen. Now we have three screens, two indoor and one outdoor. As you were saying, it's integrated.

Architecture of Life, on view at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, January 31–May 29, 2016. Installation view, with a Dogon ritual altar ladder (left) and a work by Chris Johanson (right). Photograph by Sibila Savage. Courtesy of UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA).

Yuri Ancarani, still from *Il Capo*, 2010; 35mm; color, sound; 15 min.; courtesy of the artist and ZERO..., Milan.

Historically, I think it's always been a bit of a problem that the film program had its own title. In most museums, MoMA being the example that we mentioned, the film program is a department within the museum. Here, for reasons I used to know, but don't remember, Pacific Film Archive had its own name and therefore its own identity, which at times causes confusion.

It is confusing, and it's a historical artifact based on the fact that way back, and I'm talking like 1960s, there was something called the Pacific Film Archive, which very soon after it was created was absorbed by the museum. But it kept that name within the museum. It has not been an autonomous entity since 1970 or something like that. And at this point there is no distinct entity called the Berkeley Art Museum, there is no distinct entity called the Pacific Film Archive, there is just the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. So we are one institution with a dual focus on art and film. BAMPFA has film curators and art curators, a film collection and an art collection. That is how we operate and how we understand our identity.

The film collection is renowned, as we know, an especially distinguished collection of Japanese films, Russian films . . .

Right, the largest collection of Japanese cinema outside of Japan, a very important collection of Soviet cinema, as well as silent film, and Bay Area avant-garde film. It's a fantastically important collection, and not only the films themselves, but also the ancillary materials. We have about a quarter of a million books and periodicals; we have an archive of clippings. Just yesterday I was down in the library visiting the folks down there and seeing how they were getting settled in. They pulled out the file for the film *The Graduate* and there were the original press kit clippings, the first review—all of this great stuff. We have films going back to the very beginnings of cinema, with original scripts, hundreds of thousands of pieces of documentation, most of which, by the way, has been scanned and is available to the public for free on the website. So if people type in BAMPFA CineFiles you can see scanned images of many of the things in our film archive.

How is the scanning of the collection going?

Well, it's a work in progress. It's not scanning per se; generally speaking it's photography, the digitizing. It's a critically important thing now for museums to digitize the images so they can be made accessible to the general public, to scholars and others. It's very expensive. Every single work has to be done very professionally; it has to be color corrected, and then one has to enter all the metadata about the work—all of this information not only needs to be entered, but proofed. So just imagine that for each object it probably takes two days. We have almost 20,000 objects—and that's just art. For the film, it is even worse. It costs about $5,000 to digitize a single film because unlike an art object, which you can hang on the wall, adjust the lighting until it looks right, and then take the photo, with a film someone has to sit there and look at the entire film, make sure there are no scratches. It has to be color corrected, too. Therefore, we had to do triage to decide which of our children do we value the most and which can we afford to scan. Luckily we have a very good curatorial staff that was able to weigh all the variables having to do with rarity and risk to prioritize which films to send out for conservation and digitizing. We've recently acquired a machine that will enable us to do the film digitizing in-house, which will be an incredible help for us. We can build it into the workflow now; it can just be part of what happens in the daily work of the film curators and archivists. One of my goals, once the dust settles on the new building, is to build into the workflow the photography of the collection.

In the past every time a work came into the collection it was professionally photographed, but then at some point that no longer occurred, probably for budgetary reasons. Instead, a preparator took a snapshot.

Snapshots are fine for identification, but that's not what you put on the website. There are probably a couple thousand artworks in the collection that are digitized, so that's a fairly significant number. We have received grants to digitize the conceptual art collection and the nineteenth-century photography collection; Indian miniatures have all been digitized, the Hans Hofmann paintings are all digitized, and many other things. We are looking forward to our new Collection Portal, a digital touch screen that will enable people who come to BAMPFA to access images and information about works in the collection, both still and moving images.

I look forward to that. Is that going to happen soon?

The screen is up now but won't have interactive capacity until July when Jackie Baas's collection show opens.

Do you see BAMPFA as being in competition with other museums?

No, I mean, you know, there are so few museums in our area, how can we be in competition? I'm very grateful for the museums we have, but we do not have enough museums in this region, let alone in San Francisco and Berkeley, to in any way scratch the surface of all the great art that there is to see . . . the more the merrier, as far as I'm concerned. On the other hand, there is a kind of natural ecology that emerges from the balance among different institutions in a particular region. The way that we function in the context of SFMOMA, the Fine Arts Museums, and the Oakland Museum, is probably different from how we would function if none of those institutions existed. We adjust, we probably move more in some directions than in others. There is recognition of this ecology, but I wouldn't call it competition.

One thing that museums are always trying to do is to attract a young audience. Often they do this through parties and singles nights, and yet in general most museum-goers tend to be older, perhaps because they have more time—whatever the reasons. Is there an increased attempt to bring in families? Is that a priority?

Yes, we're excited and prepared to welcome these more diverse audiences. Because we are the only encyclopedic museum that is accessible by BART, people are going to come here. For example, we have hired a new permanent staff person who focuses on programs for school kids and families, mostly for things that happen at BAMPFA, although we are also doing programs in the community. This past fall we did collaborative projects at the Richmond Art Center and the Cerrito Theatre that were meant to introduce BAMPFA to West Contra Costa families. It's one of our goals to tap into those communities in particular. I think the Oakland Museum does an absolutely fantastic job of serving schools and families in Oakland, but in our new location we are now the most proximate museum to the West Contra Costa communities, including Richmond and El Cerrito. We want those communities to know that they can count on us, that we will have programs for them in both art and film.

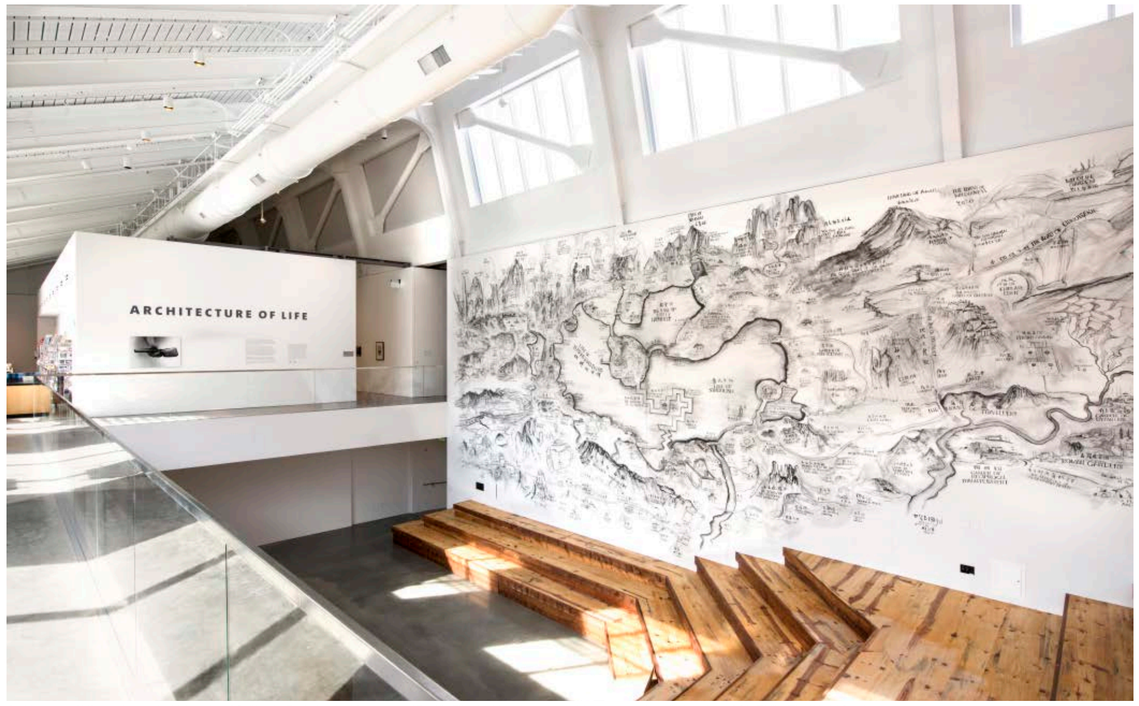
We are planning all kinds of things for families from gallery tours, family days, family gallery guides, and a drop-in art lab for all ages. The Koret reading room, which has a collection of books about our exhibitions, as well as poetry and fiction, is designed for all ages with books for children as well as adults. It will even have child-size furniture. I think both in the Art Lab and the Reading Room, we are really sending the message that this is a place for people of all ages. There is not a separate place in the building for children, so everybody can hang out together and enjoy art together, whether it's in the galleries or in these special spaces. We are free for visitors 18 or younger, and if you're 18 or younger you can bring a guardian with you who comes for free; that is one guardian per young person. These are the multiple ways that we are reducing the barriers to attend and increasing the opportunities.

I know that university museums in general have always struggled to increase their student attendance. I think we are one of the more successful at that, but probably not as successful as we would like to be. Do you think that this location will enhance the student attendance? For one thing, we're physically farther from the art practice and architecture departments. Do you think that will have a negative impact?

Our goal is to impact as many Cal students as we can across as many disciplines as possible. We believe that engagement with art and film transforms young people's lives in a positive way, and has a positive effect on their classroom learning in any discipline, whether they're in engineering, physics, English, or art. So being immediately opposite the main entrance to the campus is the right place for us, because we belong to the entire campus. There are some recent changes in the curriculum at Berkeley that have dramatically changed our relationship, particularly to the undergraduate population, and we have gone from the situation that you described, which I think is, unfortunately, the situation of most college and university museums, that is the struggle to find a student audience. Thanks to a new program at Berkeley called Berkeley Connect, which creates a structure through which freshmen and first-year transfer students are incentivized to discover the cultural resources of the campus and the community. We have gone from being in the same position as all the other college and university museums, struggling to get enough

Mikio Naruse, *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs (Onna ga kaidan o agaru toki)*, Japan, 1960.
Courtesy of UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA).

Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosets Potyomkin)*, USSR, 1925. Restored 35mm Print.
Courtesy of UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA).



Architecture of Life, on view at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, January 31–May 29, 2016. Installation view of Qiu Zhijie, *The World Garden*, 2016.
Photograph by Sibila Savage. Courtesy of UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA).

students, to having almost more than we can handle. We have increased our staffing in the area of student engagement. We hired a new position of collections engagement associate who will add to our academic liaison position in helping to serve individual student and class audiences. We are in a really fantastic position because this new program has really created a structure that is kind of a pipeline that just brings lots of students from all across the campus to the museum for engaging connections with art. It's kind of a dream come true for us.

Well speaking of staff, I know that SFMOMA has increased its staff in the run-up to the opening of their building, but we have actually reduced staff.
We reduced our staff temporarily. When we were closed—the galleries were closed for a year, the film program was closed for six months—we did reduce staff whose job was to interact with the public. We are now hiring in a number of areas that have to do with visitor services and audience engagement in anticipation of an increased attendance. The education department has grown more than any other department. In terms of overall full-time positions, the total number of staff members, once we're fully ramped up will be about the same, if not slightly more than in the former building before the closure. We had a dip in staff because of the move and now we're ramping up, while not a dramatic increase like SFMOMA, which has doubled the size of their building. Our building is 20% smaller than the former building, so our staff increases don't have to do with having to deal with a bigger building. We don't have to hire more technicians to deal with more light fixtures or whatever. It's really just about the people. It's a more efficient building with more versatile galleries that are more strategically located to be accessible to more people.

What do you think is lost in this new building as compared to the former?
The only thing that I'll miss is the opportunity to do large-scale performative events. We had that 7,000 square foot atrium in the Ciampi-designed building that enabled us to do concerts or dance performances with audiences of up to 1,000 people. Because of the architecture you had very unusual vantage points—you could go up above and look down or across. I'll miss that, but you know, we couldn't afford to build a 7,000 square-foot atrium. We had to prioritize.

Also, that atrium was primarily good for performance, not for visual art.
Right. It was a wonderful space when it was filled with hundreds of people. When it was not filled with hundreds of people it was like a wind tunnel or something. It made it feel like the museum was empty even if it wasn't because it was such a vast space. So we have created a kind of miniature version of that atrium in the new building, the Crane Forum, which is right off the main entrance, which has a seating amphitheater designed by Paul Discoe, the Japanese joiner, architect, and designer. We have a small stage area where we can present informal performance events, like we did in the former building, but we won't be able to do programs that have such a huge audience.

Could you use spaces on campus, maybe?
We could, but what we're going to do instead, is develop a performance program that fits within the unique parameters of our new building. I loved the L@TE program that we did for five or six years in the old building, but because this building is different we're doing a different kind of program called *Full*. *Full* will occur every full moon in the evening, whether we're generally open or not. We're open normally Wednesday through Sunday, so if a full moon falls on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, great, but if it falls on Monday or Tuesday we have to open anyway, because the moon dictates. The good thing about this is that we don't have to advertise because the full moon is its own advertisement. If the moon is full, come to BAMPFA! Instead of a single headline act, the kind of thing that we used to do, our approach is going to be more like Sarah Cahill, who has been doing every solstice at the Columbarium in Oakland, where she programs dozens of performers throughout the Julia Morgan Mortuary in Oakland, in all the crypts. They are all playing simultaneously—it's just an incredible, kind of wonderful strange cacophony. One of the great things about our new building is it does have a number of little open spaces that you discover as you're wandering through. We are taking advantage of that, and for *Full* we will have multiple performers performing in different parts of the building on every full moon. Sarah Cahill is programming the first season, this spring we'll have four *Full* nights that Sarah will arrange—multiple, sometimes simultaneous, performance in different little nooks and crannies.

What is your sincerest wish for the new BAMPFA?
My sincerest wish is that it be beloved by the entire community, that it be provocative, and nurturing, if one can be both of those things, and that it really serve, as I said, as a front porch of the university, increasing that connection between campus and community. I guess you could say on the deepest level I hope we change lives for the better, and I believe we can.

How do you feel about the Bay Area as an art center? We all know the problems with gentrification. Can the Bay Area continue to be a vital art center?
Obviously, the Bay Area has some serious problems in regard to gentrification. We're lucky in the sense that because UC Berkeley is a public university the student body is incredibly diverse. Something like 30% of the students at Berkeley qualify for Pell grants, which means they come from families that earn $45,000 a year or less, so while the rest of the Bay Area is losing the diversity of its population in economic terms, we have a semi-guaranteed stability, relatively speaking. We know that we will always have diverse audiences here, at least among the younger student populations: diverse in terms of economic backgrounds, diverse culturally, ethnically, and from place of origin, which is fantastic. I worry about the rest of the Bay Area because the audiences are becoming homogenous, and artists are being forced out.

It seems to me if you're a young person graduating from one of the many art schools, one of the strengths of the Bay Area, as we all know, are the many opportunities for an art education. However, nowadays most art students leave once they graduate. They simply can't afford to stay, unless, for example, they get a teaching job.
Even if they do find a teaching job, how can you afford to live in the Bay Area with a teaching job? It's really terrible. I don't have an answer, I'm afraid.

Do you think the fact that the Bay Area is a center for new technology that will eventually have a positive impact on the art scene? Maybe some of those young entrepreneurs will begin to embrace and support the fine arts?
They might or they might not. I think that's a different question from how artists are going to be able to live here. It could turn out that a substantial amount of the tech wealth becomes engaged with culture, which would be all to the good as far as I'm concerned, and I think that is going to happen. I think it's inevitable that some percentage of that money and that wealth is going to come to cultural institutions like ours, and will support programs and collections, and that's great. But that is not going to solve the problem of the grassroots level creativity. We'll still have art schools here so there will be creativity at that level, but then there will be a gap between the ages of 22 and 45—you probably won't find many artists in that age range left in the Bay Area.

I am optimistic in hoping that because this has always been an area for cultural and social innovation that somehow something positive will evolve that we can't now predict.
I see things happening that I think are positive. Autodesk, for example, has art studios and art making labs right in the middle of their executive offices, but it's not open to the public. Even though there are quite a number of artists are involved in that program, it's infinitesimal on the scale of an entire multimillion-person population. It can't replace the flight of an entire generation of artists.

Also, the Minnesota Street Project developed by Deborah and Andy Rappaport, which will offer galleries and studios at below market rate.
It's a fantastic initiative, but we need a hundred of them.

Exactly, that's what I always say; it's a fantastic addition to the Bay Area, but we need a hundred of them to make a real dent.

SFAQ / March + April 2016

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Devin Troy Strother, *Contemporary African Compositional Arrangements, "Guuuuuuurl you need to consider the gestalt of perceptual organization"*, 2012. Acrylic, enamel, wood and construction paper on paper, 45 x 30 Inches.

Page 8
Sadie Barnette, *In loving memory of Ralph "Uncle Alvin" White*, 2016. Digital C-print, 20 x 30 inches. Edition of 3.

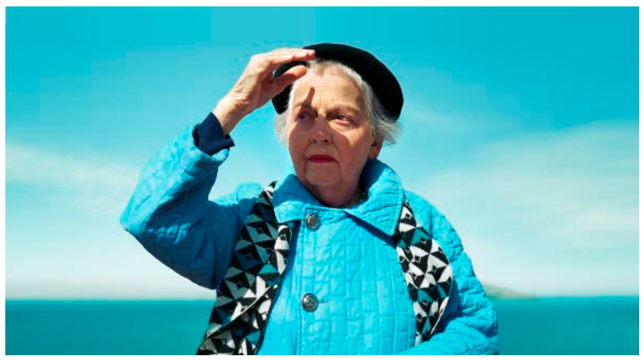
A Note From The Publisher

Ugh, lazy? (nope)
Hater? (nope)
Wanna see a player get paper? (yup)
Traitor? (nope)
Loyal to my soil, not a faker? (yup)
Sleep? (nope)
Bust moves, hella active in the streets? (yup)
Scared of the dark? (nope)
Have money, have heart? (yup)
Narc? (nope)
Shark? (yup)
Slippin'? (nope)
Trippin'? (yup)
Sober as a gopher? (nope)
Higher than a rollercoaster? (yup)
Star Wars? (nope)
Yoda? (yup)
Never leave the house without my strap (nope)
Shoot a muthafucka in his nap (yup)
Never been a sucka (nope)
Blowin' cookie, never coughin' like a rookie (yup)

- Courtesy of E-40, Mayor of Oakland, CA
(Slightly edited… ugh)

Madrone Art Bar is pleased to announce:

YOU AND ME ON A SUNNY DAY by Rocky McCorkle



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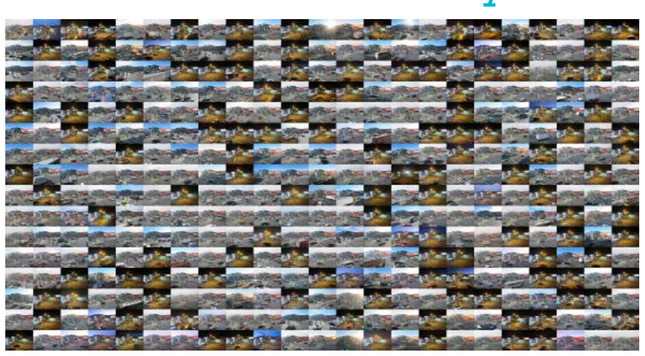

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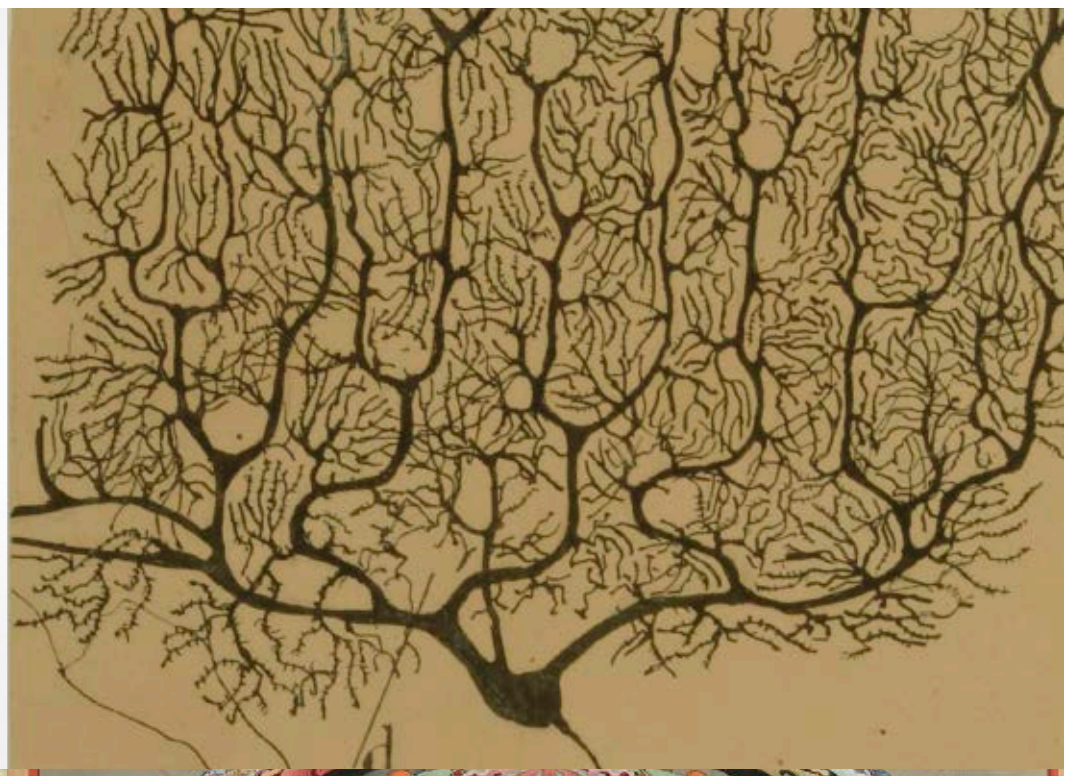

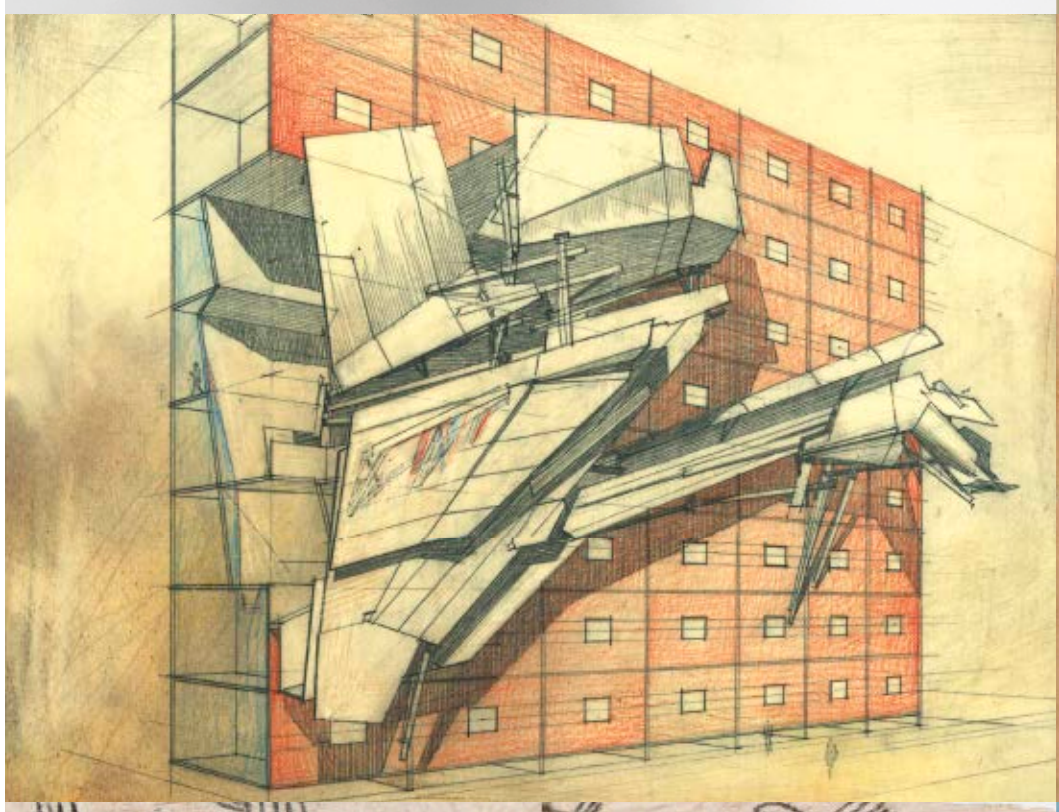

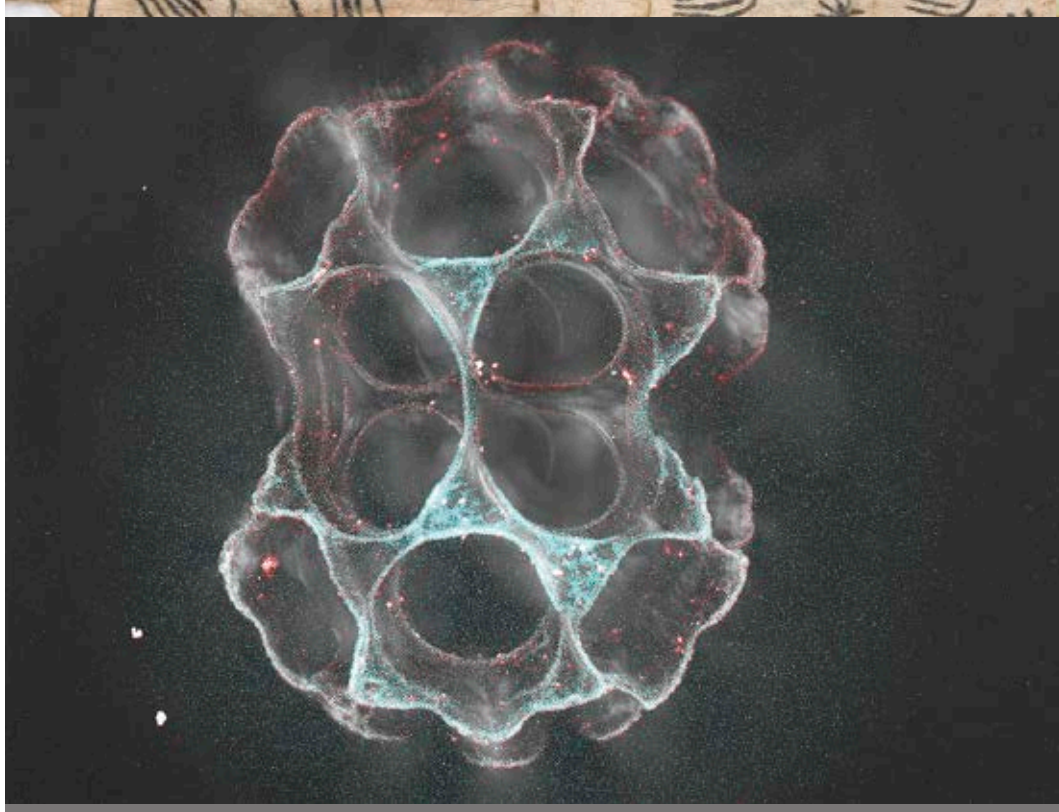

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Diller Scofidio + Renfro: Hand holding a model for BAMPFA, 2012; digital photograph; courtesy Diller Scofidio + Renfro. © Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

Lebbeus Woods: *Sarajevo*, 1993; graphite and colored pencil on board; 10 5/8 × 12 7/8 in.; Estate of Lebbeus Woods. © Estate of Lebbeus Woods.

Mbuti, Congo: Barkcloth drawing, c. 1975–2000; charcoal, fruit juice ink, and mud on barkcloth; 27 1/2 × 23 3/4 in.; BAMPFA, Gift of Cathryn M. Cootner. Photo: Sibila Savage.

Nipam Patel: Radiolarian confocal 6x, 2015; confocal microscope imaging. courtesy of Nipam Patel. © Nipam Patel.

Santiago Ramón y Cajal: Purkinje cell of the human cerebellum, 1899; India ink on paper; 6 3/32 × 4 3/16 in.; Cajal Legacy, Instituto Cajal (CSIC), Madrid.

Mandala of Mahamaya, 19th–20th century; ink on cotton; 15 × 15 in.; Theos Bernard Collection, BAMPFA, Bequest of G. Eleanore Murray. Photo: Sibila Savage.

Gustave Caillebotte: *Le Pont de l'Europe*, 1876; oil on canvas; 49 × 71 in.; Association des Amis du Petit Palais, Geneva. © Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln, Michael Albers.

Rosie Lee Tompkins: *Untitled*, 1987; mixed media, 100 1/2 × 70 1/2 in.; BAMPFA, Purchase: Bequest of Phoebe Apperson Hearst, by exchange. © The heirs of Rosie Lee Tompkins, courtesy of Eli Leon.

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Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, July 1, 1967, San Francisco. © Ted Streshinsky/CORBIS

Repression Breeds Resistance

January 16th, 1970

Huey Newton In Conversation With Sechaba

Mr. Newton, welcome back from jail and thank you for granting us this interview. First we would like you to explain the relationship between the Black Panther Party and the Black Power movement.

The Black Panther Party grew out of the Black Power movement, but the Party transformed the ideology of Black Power into a socialist ideology, a Marxist-Leninist ideology. The Black Power movement has a tendency to have a capitalistic orientation along the lines of Marcus Garvey's program and the kind of organization that Elijah Muhammed has. The Black Panther Party feels that not even the Black bourgeoisie will be able to compete with imperialism, whose central base is here in North America. The United States is the central base of the bourgeoisie, and this is because this country is really not a nation any longer, but an empire that controls the world through economics and physical force—military might. The Black Panther Party has transformed this movement into a socialist movement and we have become not nationalists, like the Black Power movement in the past, but internationalists.

The bourgeoisie that is based here in America has an international character because it exploits the world, it controls the wealth of the world; it has stolen, usurped, the wealth of the people of the world, including the people who are in the Black colony here in America and who were stolen from Africa. We feel that the only way that we can combat an international enemy is through an international strategy of unity of all exploited people who will overthrow the international bourgeoisie and replace it with a dictatorship by the proletariat, the workers of the world. And we feel that after imperialism is destroyed, nationhood will no longer be necessary, for the state will then wither away. Then the whole world will belong to the people and the old national boundary lines will no longer exist. We think that the movement is at this stage; we think that the dialectics are now on the verge of taking socialism, social ideology, to its final goal: communism and the absence of statehood.

Do you want to say a little about the program of action in the immediate future for the Party and for yourself?

Our program is armed struggle. We have hooked up with the people who are rising up all over the world with arms because we feel that only with the power of the gun will the bourgeoisie be destroyed and the world transformed. We feel that the imperialists will not become Buddhists overnight; they will not lay down their butcher knives. Therefore, the people will have to use certain measures to restore peace to the world and to restrain the madmen who are running amuck through-out the world and oppressing people everywhere. The World-Enemy-Number-One is the ruling circle in the United States of America. We view the United States as the "city" of the world and all the other countries as a "countryside."

As one country becomes free, it makes each country stronger because it develops a base of liberated territory so that we'll be in a better strategic position to fight, and also it will be one step toward cutting off the raw materials that imperialism needs to feed its factories here at home. We will slowly strangle imperialism by freeing one country after another. This is why we support the brothers and sisters in Southern and Northern Africa as well as those in Asia and Latin America who are struggling against capitalism and imperialism, for socialistic goals. We support all struggles where people are struggling for freedom, and we also support our European brothers and sisters who are struggling to overthrow the bourgeoisie in their country. While we are not nationalists, we support national wars of independence because this is a step again towards cutting off the international bourgeoisie which is based in the United States. We feel that every country has a right to be nationalistic to a point, as long as they are internationalists at the same time. We feel that Black people in America have a moral right to claim nationhood because we are a colonized people. But history won't allow us to claim nationhood. We must take socialist development to its final stage to rid the world of the imperialist threat—the threat of the capitalist and the warmonger. Once America is destroyed then there will be no need for nationhood because the nations will no longer need to defend themselves against imperialism, for this is the most powerful imperialist country in the world, and other imperialist countries depend on the backing of the U.S. At this point the imperialist is running rampant. Therefore any country has a right to claim nationhood or be nationalist as long as they are internationalists as well.

If they are only nationalist then they are chauvinist. If they are both nationalist and internationalist they realize that they need liberated territory, but they also realize that their interests are the same as every other people's interest who are fighting against imperialism. While we respect your fight for nationhood and independence, and we struggle with you, we feel that we must destroy the very necessity for countries to be nations in the first place. And this is the whole idea of making the world a place where territorial boundaries will no longer be necessary.

The leadership of the Black Panther Party has come under very severe attack during the past year. Can you tell us what effects these attacks have had on the Party?

Repression breeds resistance. We feel that by virtue of the fact that we are being attacked, and the attacks are extremey vicious, that we must be hitting a sensitive spot. We have the fascists disturbed and they are running amuck simply because we are threatening them. We are threatening their very foundation, their very existence. Otherwise they would try to pretend to the world that this is democracy and they would support our right to freedom of speech, our right to freedom of the press, and our right to political activity. But all these so-called democratic civil rights are denied the Black Panther Party, which is the vanguard of the people. So the Party must be hitting a sensitive spot; it must be threatening the bureaucratic imperialistic capitalist. We welcome all attacks. We will overcome all obstacles and advance wave upon wave. We will rid the world of the bourgeoisie and destroy all of the monsters, and the whole world will belong to the people.

Do you believe there are revolutionary possibilities in the United States?

I would like to emphasize that without the people of the world struggling against imperialism, we would have a very weak position here in the United States, which I call the urban area of the world. But because we know we have friends, comrades-in-arms who are fighting the same enemy that we are fighting, we feel that what we have done is to open up a new front. We should say we are attempting to open up a new front because we do not claim anything that we haven't done. But we are advancing the fight, we are strengthening our strategy of resistance and attack. We can do this because we realize the American fascist troops are being divided by the people of the world who are struggling against them. We encourage, we admire, we have great admiration for socialist or communist guerrillas all over the world. We feel we will never be free until many colonized people are free. We notice that in most revolutions where a guerrilla-type tactic was used, the urban area or city was the last area to be covered and bases opened up first in the countryside. Now we see many bases opening up in the countryside. We have advanced to the point where in many areas we have gone from a guerrilla to a kind of people's army that can operate with a face to face, head-on collision with the imperialist. This is only because of the great perseverance and great strength that you have shown, and that the people of the world have shown. While we are being attacked from all sides, we are still trying to follow your examples. We realize that you are also being attacked from all sides by the enemy. Because you are driving on you have given us strength to drive on. So onward to victory. We will someday meet and celebrate our victory because I know we will have that. The guerrilla band is our example.

What has been the most important inspiration for the Black Panthers?

I think that not only Fidel and Che, Ho Chi Minh and Mao and Kim Il Sung, but also all the guerrilla bands that have been operating in Mozambique and Angola, and the Palestinian guerrillas who are fighting for a socialist world. I think they all have been great inspirations for the Black Panther Party. As I've said before, they're examples of all these guerrilla bands. The guerrillas who are operating in South Africa and numerous other countries all have had great influence on us. We study and follow their example. We are very interested in the strategy that's being used in Brazil, which is an urban area, and we plan to draw on that. And we have certainly been influenced by all of the people who are struggling in the world. As far as control is concerned, our Central Committee controls our Party. But I won't deny the influence. We don't consider that question an accusation because I think we all should learn from each other.

Last year there was a United Front, The National Conference to Combat Fascism, which included a number of groups including SDS, the Dubois Club and the Communist Party of the United States. What is the Black Panther Party pol-icy on this kind of relationship?

Our policy is that we are friends with all Marxists and want coalitions and allies within this country and all over the world. We could never have success without a popular movement, and when I speak of "popular" I mean it in the truest sense of the word, in the internationalist sense. We have to have a popular mass in order to achieve victory because victory is not for us, but the people. Therefore the people must be considered and the people must take a part in the struggle at every level.

We view part of our role as a vanguard is educating the people as we go, orientating them and providing an understanding of the social forces that are in operation and the dialectics at the time. We can only do this through involving the people in practical application, and involving them at every level of the struggle. And we do have relationships and coalitions and just comradely love and work with all these groups, and we hope to even expand this to other groups, some we haven't even heard of yet.

Would the Black Panther Party like to set up or establish more direct contacts with the liberation struggles of Africa, Latin America, and Asia?

Yes, we think that we can learn even more from each other if we were to establish better means of communications. One of the chief difficulties is a matter of communications. It is an international struggle. The Black Panther Party even thinks in terms of a new International, an International based upon armed struggle and the socialist ideology. We feel the International that exists now is somewhat deteriorated, as far as the Third World is concerned, especially the Third World countries involved in armed combat. The International has half-stepped and criticized many of the national wars of independence and the armed struggle tactic as being too hasty and without enough orthodox political development. We see the need to overthrow the evil gentry and corrupt officials and we see only one way to do this. We do not believe we can do it through negotiation or electoral politics or any kind of non-violent means. The enemy is a violent man and we must treat him in an appropriate way.

[Continued on page 5]

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Two brass plaques indicating that MOCA was broken into two times in 1975. (Museum of Conceptual Art 1970-1984)

[*Repression Breeds Resistance* Continued]

And more specifically, would you be interested in having contact with the liberation movement of Southern Africa and, if so, in what form?
As you know, we have offered troops to the Vietnamese people to show our international solidarity. At the same time we also made it clear that we would send troops or offer troops to any of our friends who would accept them. We think the ultimate gesture of friendship that we could offer is to send our comrades to shed blood on your soil in the name of freedom, in the interest of the people, and against the imperialist enemy. If there is anything else that we can do other than to struggle to break the chains that shackle us, then let us know about that and we will be willing to consider it.

Is there mass interest in the United States about the struggle in Southern Africa? What can Sechaba do to publicize the South African revolution among the Black people in the United States?
We, the Black Panther Party, are a vanguard group, so necessarily we are more enlightened than the masses and we are very interested in the international scope of things. The people are as people all over the world, so tied up and so involved in their survival from day to day that much of the time they overlook, or they don't understand, the international nature of the struggle. That is why it is our duty—one of our first duties—to raise the consciousness of the people through education. We would like more information about the struggle in Southern Africa. We are familiar with it right now, but we would like more information on your armed struggle and what the guerrillas are doing so that we can spread this information. We would like film footage. We have trucks that we drive around in the community and show films to people that walk in the streets.

For example, we have films of the revolution that took place in Algeria. The community is very impressed with that kind of thing because they can easily see the relationship between the way the French treated the Algerians and how we are treated in this country. There is an old saying: "A picture is worth a thousand words," and the people perhaps don't read as much as they should, so we found in our political education that it is very helpful to show films. If you have any pictures or film footage you can get to us I will assure you that it will be shown inside of the Black community, the Chinese community, the Indian community, the White community. There are poor White people in this country who are now becoming involved in the common struggle, and we are involved with them. We hope this national kind of involvement of many ethnic groups will aid us in relating to the people and help them make that jump to identify with people in other countries who may be from other ethnic backgrounds, other cultural backgrounds.

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* Sechaba is the official organ of the African National Congress of South Africa, a liberation party which, having been banned in South Africa, operates in exile. This interview was arranged by the Africa Research Group with the assistance of Karen Wald, and took place in Berkeley within a week of Huey Newton's release from a three-year jail term.

Reprinted with permission from *TO DIE FOR THE PEOPLE*, published by City Lights Books, 2009

Sincerity, Camp, And How Big Tech Got So Cute

By Monica Westin

This October, communication between the world of VC-backed technology companies and the rest of the Bay Area reached a new low. A number of Airbnb ads posted on billboards and at bus stops around the city proposed different uses for the $12 million dollars in hotel taxes the company trumpeted that it had paid in the last year. Most of the suggestions were flippant and aggressively cute—"if you do spend all $12 million in one place, we suggest burritos"—but one of the bus stop ads in particular, addressed to the public library, largely drove the backlash that caused the company to issue an apology a few days later for its utter tone-deafness. The ads were quickly taken down.

The bus ad in question was formatted as a letter on a monochrome background of Airbnb's signature coral pink. "Dear Public Library System," the ad began, "We hope you use some of the $12 million in hotel taxes to keep the library open later." There was even a valediction at the bottom: "Love, Airbnb." San Francisco State professor Martha Kenney's October 21st Facebook post of the ad went viral, as did her analysis that Airbnb's taxes could, in fact, keep the libraries open only a few minutes later each day. Later that day, the company's apology came.

To be clear: these ads bragging about Airbnb paying its taxes were so ill-conceived that many people (myself included) at first thought they were a joke. Since then, this marketing misfire has been read as a typically clueless and/or condescending and/or abrasive move by an insular and out-of-touch culture. But what this misfire brings to light is something deeper that this one particular failure.

At heart, the Airbnb ads highlight the affective and aesthetic characteristics of contemporary tech culture: camp, cuteness, a particular flavor of sincerity, and an underlying messianism. This culture marks everything from the branding of the new multinational conglomerate that owns Google as "Alphabet" to the recent holiday commercial of Apple employees and Microsoft employees hugging each other. Because this aesthetic is usually deployed more successfully, it's also more invisible in daily rhetoric than the failed letter-to-the-library ad.

Start with "Love, Airbnb." The marketplace platform Airbnb can no more love the public library system than it can eat a burrito. This move can only be described as camp—as per Susan Sontag's definition, an intentional and self-referential theatricality. To paraphrase Sontag, camp is a way of seeing everything in quotation marks, where it lives in the space between pure artifice and some kind of meaning. What makes camp interesting is the tension between its alleged innocence and its winking at itself, its utter failure at being serious.

Camp skates on the surface. Camp dethrones the serious and at its most successful creates conditions where taking things seriously is an embarrassment to those who would try to be serious. To be fair, a lot of advertisement relies on camp in order to operate. What is unique about this particular instance of camp is its attempt at sweetness, caring, cuteness—to create an effect of sincerity that is too playful to be held responsible.

The failed effect of sincerity of the Airbnb ads is deeply reminiscent of the "new sincerity" movement of the last 30 years in which a group of largely poets and musicians have taken an intentionally anti-cynical stance in their writing as an act of revolution against the irony of late capitalism. Critics of new sincerity point to its childishness; the poetry is often insistently, even aggressively simplistic. The new sincerity arguably reached its peak as a movement in the early 2000s. For historical context, think of David Foster Wallace's exonerations about morality in his Kenyon College commencement address as a contemporaneous backdrop for the adoption of Google's slogan "Don't be evil" in the early 2000s. "Don't be evil" is childishly sweet and points to a kind of sincere ethics, but it fails as a meaningful, serious standard for corporate behavior.

So what is sincerity without seriousness? Almost by definition, it's cuteness itself. Cute, as Sianne Ngai expresses it, is a response to the diminutive, the weak, and the subordinate.[1] Cute relaxes us. But it's also a political aesthetic. For Ngai, an affect of cuteness is formed by a relationship that is predicated on an encounter where one subject has more power than another. The object that's cute is usually in the position of less power: helpless, pitiful, in need of our care and protection. For a tech company to present itself as cute is to ask us to see it as less powerful than it actually is.

Cuteness also does something violent to language. The small, simple, soft, pliant thing (a logo that's a coral-pink heart, a pastel blue bird, an apple with a bite out of it) slackens the language available to talk about it, a process which Ngai articulates as "weakening or even dissolving syntax . . . alter[ing] the speech of the subject attempting to manage that difference."[2] Imposing cuteness on an object weakens it. Imposing cuteness on oneself pushes off critique as powerfully as camp, and the two effects combined can seemingly shut down criticism completely. For an example of how insidious this practice is, consider the inverse case of Uber. Part of the reason Uber is largely painted as "evil" (again, that hollow term) is because the company refuses to play the cuteness or the camp game. They cop to their implacable drive to be dominant in the market, and so they bear an arguably disproportionate amount of flak. (This is not to say that Uber is an ethical company in its abuse of the so-called sharing economy; the point is that the general *feeling* we have about Uber in part shows how well its peers, many of whom also mistreat their low-level employees, have managed to stave off a lot of these emotions through their detached-cuteness work.)

When exactly did tech get so cute and anti-critical? My hypothesis here is that the mid-2000s was a turning point, when "new sincerity" was strongest in the air during the recovery from the first dot-com boost. Of course there are many more concrete, practical factors for this aesthetic as well. As just one example, the outward-facing rhetoric of many of these companies is based on design thinking, characterized by user-first simplicity and empathy. But there is a strong relationship between cuteness, anti-criticality, and anti-elitism by the most elite companies in the world that demands careful scrutiny.

Camp, cuteness and sincerity come together at the root in tech rhetoric with a messianistic impulse. Much has been written about how we tend to see tech heroes like Jobs and Gates as messiahs; tech's visionaries are worshiped for their prophetic, future-oriented thinking, which taps deep into our need for contemporary shamans who can tell us what will become of us. But the industry itself runs on the logic of messianism, and the cute affect aids and abets this drive. For Jason Morris, messianism promises the coming of something: "Something that will do good, something that will heal, something that will reverse wrongs."[3] This promise takes the structure of a venture capital pitch, and is made to us by every app that vows to simplify, to streamline, and to instantly gratify. Or take my friend Trevor Strunk's recent explanation over email: "The defining characteristic then is that messianism promises the total resolution of contradictions in a far future that is perpetually put off in an effort to keep the messianic movement relevant and pressing."

This is the deepest rhetoric of tech: we are just around the corner from simpler and better. That the most ruthless companies in tech are able to further their messianistic agenda while appealing to the weak, minor, even childish aesthetics of cuteness and camp is one of the most bizarre and uncanny aspects of contemporary culture; but given the power of these minor aesthetics to insulate from criticism makes the hearts and cartoon birds and twee Google Doodles some of the most hard-working symbols in the new culture wars. Airbnb's only mistake was trying to anchor this abstraction in the economic logic and concrete language that the rest of us operate in.

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1) Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*. Harvard University Press.
2) Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, p. 88.
3) JJason Morris, *The Time Between Time: Messianism & the Promise of a "New Sincerity"*, Jacket 35 (2008).

Illustration by Laura Szumowski.

Reclamation: The Art of Dissent Made Flesh

By Anthony Choice-Diaz

Headed For Extinction

It was 1991, and Marie-Josèphe Rose Tascher de la Pagerie, the French Creole mistress-turned-Empress to a "piggish" upstart Corsican artillery officer better remembered as Napoleon, had just been guillotined in an overdue form of people's justice. The monument to Joséphine Bonaparte erected in 1859 had been standing in La Savane Park, Fort-de-France, Martinique for nearly 150 years. Now it stood as a headless effigy of sculpted stone, complete with faux arterial blood dripping from her cleft neck. In a clandestine act of reclaimed power reminiscent of the French Revolution's Reign of Terror, Joséphine's execution became the ceremonial embodiment of dissent turned to boil; she was sacrificed unto the memory of black suffering and anger. This uprising symbolized the undignified ending of a self-made Empress that had been centuries in the making. What was once a memorial was now an altar in the struggle for historical meaning. A reminder to all those who might, will, and do see it: we are here, and you are mother no more. This moment of reclamation begins with murder, a resounding sentiment that says, "as the Caribbean bleeds, so too shall France." In the poli-tricks of meaning, where cultural and physical domination are paramount, their undermining is both vulgar and nuanced. Is that not the commonsense definition of art itself?

Since her beheading Joséphine has had good company in posthumous execution. Most recently she's been joined by Padre Junípero Serra, an 18th century Californian missionary who was then in the process of being canonized. Protests by indigenous California tribes confronted the call for sainthood, referring to Serra as an arbiter of colonialism, and father to the slavery and genocide of California Indians. In the wake of the activism surrounding Pope Francis's visit to California to finalize Serra's canonization in September of 2015, enterprising dissidents took it upon themselves to clandestinely visit the San Carlos Borroméo de Carmelo Mission in Carmel, California to topple his statue and "decorate" the headstone of Serra's grave with red and green paint. Two weeks later another statue of Serra, built in 1891 and standing in the heart of Monterey's Presidio was beheaded. The head has yet to be recovered.

According to estimates provided by the city of Monterey, the cost to fix the monument is $70,000. Meanwhile, California Indians have been illegally dispossessed of their lands by the state and federal governments, who conveniently failed to ratify any of the 18 treaties negotiated with California tribes by simply leaving the unsigned treaties in a drawer for over 50 years and ignoring them. These treaties remain unratified and the settler population has expropriated 50 million acres of land. The case of the treaties remained in litigation for nearly a hundred years (50 years in a drawer included), only to result in a 1968 settlement offer of 47 cents an acre, and the legal forfeiture of all further awards or future claims in perpetuity should anyone actually cash the checks sent to them. By comparison, $70,000 in damages is a bargain. Try losing 50 million acres of your land, your tribal autonomy, or as with a third of California tribes, the ability to be recognized as a tribe by the very state and federal governments who stole and occupied your land in the first place. What's a can of paint and a headless statue compared to that?

The Architecture of Meaning

In January of 1874 the then-teenaged future head of Hearst Publishing, Solomon Solis Carvalho, described in Harper's Magazine the Fort-de-France public square around Joséphine as being watched over "…by a beautiful statue of the Empress [her] head turned to…the place of her birth…her eyes [trans] fixed as if absorbed in thought." A site that is "a favorite resort for all classes…[that] affords a delightful promenade for lovers who may there breathe their tender thoughts without fear of intrusion."[1] A hundred years prior, slavery had been abolished in all French colonies, except Martinique—under the supposed prodding of Emperor Bonaparte by Joséphine. Never let it be said she didn't reward her slave owning plantation family roots on the isle. Did the slave enjoy tender thoughts, without fear of intrusion?

When she was beheaded in 1991, none other than the father of Négritude, poet, and arch-anticolonialist Aimé Césaire was mayor of Fort-de-France. The audaciousness of symbolic public execution was an act of profound political insight . . . it sent a clear message that there would be no turning back. Today, over 20 years later, the monument remains headless and has become a bit of a pilgrimage site, upon which people urinate, defecate, and leave messages expressing exactly how they feel about Joséphine, French Colonialism, and slavery. At the end of what would have been her sightline is the plantation where Marie grew up, preserved as a museum dedicated to the "Empress of the Caribbean" for tourist consumption; the celebration and its negation coexist simultaneously. No one said that spectacle need be free of irony or absurdity…off with their heads, indeed.

Though Joséphine's end has predated a series of recent events, it's also in tune with a long tradition of toppling and reconfiguring icons for the ever-ravenous audience of the republic. In 1992, a year after the uncrowning of Joséphine in Martinique, indigenous Maya and Zapatista rebels marched into the colonial city of San Cristóbal de Las Casa, Chiapas, Mexico, during the "Day of the Race" demonstration. They reached the baroque temple of Santo Domingo and toppled the life-sized monument to conquistador Diego de Mazariegos, bound it in ropes, dragged it through the streets of San Cristóbal, smashed it to bits with a sledgehammer, and carried off the head to places unknown. The symbol of their colonial oppression was excised like a cancer, and violently reborn as an act of overdue retribution and liberation. This action became a central component in the public outcry and outrage that spread through Mexico.

On New Year's Day of 1992, when the armed wing of the Zapatista movement, the Zapatista Army (EZLN), emerged out of the mists of the Lacandon Jungle and marched into San Cristóbal and took over the city, it sent shockwaves around the world. The official line of Distrito Federal, the capital city of Mexico, had long been one claiming that no such dissent existed in their perfect neoliberal state. With flash and theatrics reminiscent of the Mexican Revolution, an army of masked Mayans and Mestizos led by a council of militarized women and men with *noms de guerre* like Comandanta Ramona, Comandanta Esther, and Subcomandante Marcos sent out a message of self-determination and freedom. The fall of Mazariegos nearly a year later was the natural byproduct of this movement toward resurgent insurgency, and its critique of the "history as we knew it." The new call to arms and action was now: ¡*Para Todos Todo, Para Nosotros Nada*! (Everything for Everyone, Nothing For Ourselves!). Gone was a willingness to accept monuments to entitlement, misery, death, and bondage to a history in which self-definition was eliminated, and amnesia required. The revolutionary was again reborn, and s/he spoke in tongues that predated Columbus and the arrival of predatory European encroachment.

Christopher Columbus statue on the North End waterfront, Boston. 2015. Courtesy of the Internet.


William Walcutt, *Pulling down the statue of King George III in New York*, 1854. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Internet.


A statue of Saddam Hussein being toppled in Firdos Square, downtown Baghdad, on 9 April 2003

Of Vandals, Demagogues, and Toppled Giants

In April of 2003, the U.S. Army's experts in Psychological Operations set the scene by hiring non-Iraqis to participate in the theatrical end of the Battle of Baghdad, and theoretically at least, the second U.S. War with Iraq. Within minutes of the bronze statue of Saddam Hussein being pulled down in Baghdad's Firdos Square, surrounded by a throng of supposedly Iraqi nationals welcoming the symbolic fall of their resident despot, it would be broadcast on every television worldwide. The only problem was, none of it was true. The crowd wasn't Iraqi, the statue didn't come down easily, and it took multiple and varied attempts (and reshoots) to artificially create this seamless media moment.

At first U.S. Marines climbed the statue in order to wrap the head in an American flag, take pictures and start the toppling. Then someone realized that perhaps it was not the best idea, as "it might send the wrong message," so the American Flag was replaced by an Iraqi flag, it was supposed to be a war for *their* freedom after all. But oops, the picture shouldn't be of a U.S. Marine putting up the Iraqi flag, it should be an Iraqi putting up the Iraqi flag—too bad there weren't any Iraqis around willing to do it, or even to participate in the staged affair. The next idea was to tie ropes around the statue, and pull the statue down. Too bad there were eight-foot-long steel support beams running up the hollow legs of the nearly 20 foot tall statue, which itself was made out of an alloy composite of bronze and steel. Pulling the towering figure down by hand was simply impossible. Bright idea, let's tie the ropes to a tank! Nope, bad idea, the ropes snapped. Eventually a chain, attached to a crane, attached to an armored vehicle, was wrapped around the statue, and "American ingenuity" toppled the Scud-dropping scourge of the Middle East. It only took several hours, multiple takes, and several million dollars in wages, bribes, and military equipment to make the magic of perceived "Iraqi freedom" happen. That is until the insurgency that couldn't and never would happen, actually did, and it made it impossible for American troops or Iraqi civilians to walk through central Baghdad without some kind of escort or safety plan. But that's another story.


Venezuelan Demonstrators Topple Columbus Statue, 2004. Courtesy of the Internet.


A giant statue of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (left) on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt. Also depicted; Egyptian Nobel prize winner Ahmed Zewail, the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Egyptian novelist and Nobel Prize Winner Naguib Mahfouz. Courtesy of the Internet.

The Psychological Operation Group of the U.S. Army understood all too well that symbols and perceptions matter, so they should be taken control of and directed before someone else does it. They and their allies in the "Coalition of the Willing" made it a priority in fact. From embedded journalists to pounding heavy metal invasion videos on YouTube, the exhibitionism of shock and awe took center stage. The visuals, like the message of a patriotic war for freedom was a prepackaged affair. Even the British got in on the game, staging photo ops of the victory with the Union Jack, which hadn't flown over an "occupied" Iraq since 1932. Command over image meant either making falling idols, or becoming one. The difference between the spectacle of dissent as controlled entertainment, and reclamation isn't so much a fine line, as it is diametrically opposed to and in direct conflict with one another.

Thus the art of reclamation is an insurgent act by which meaning is transformed, reasserted, and violently juxtaposed upon the symbolic physical and social body of itself by the very people for whom the *objet d'art* is intended to pacify, through the capture, control, and manipulation of their imagination, memory, and present. This toppling of the figurative head, is indeed the toppling of giants. The Colossian comeuppance if you will, this Fanonian retrieval of selfhood, dignity, power, and prank all rolled into one. It's a collaborative psychosocial act that, like the breaking of one's slave shackles, is the apex of renewal, rebirth, and absolute even absurdist potentiality. The lifecycle of public art—its alteration, destruction, and even disappearance—is like the sweat and blood of making the art itself.

Subliminal And Not So Subliminal Revolt

In Caracas, Venezuela on October 12, 2004, what used to be celebrated as Discovery Day was renamed the day of Indigenous Resistance. The next day, the body of Cristóbal Colón was pulled down from the perch where he had stood for a hundred years, and fell 30 feet to the asphalt below. The crowd of protestors wrapped the statue in banners, tied a noose around Colón's neck and dragged his clanging metal body through the streets of central Caracas. Demonstrators said it was an "act of symbolic justice" for a people against whom this monument, "represented [the] invasion and genocide [of] our land." For some, like Mayor of Caracas, Freddy Bernal, this action represented the kind of discordant activity he couldn't condone. He referred to it as an "anarchic action [that does] not accomplish one possible objective. We agree that history has to be rewritten and we are doing it. We reject honoring Columbus, but that is one thing, and anarchy is another."[2] Bernal was wrong: it most definitely accomplished more than one possible objective, not the least of which was catching his own and Hugo Chavez administrations' attention, and the significant applause of the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

In the following decade, a wide variety of monuments to despotism and self-serving historical grandeur were greeted in kind by the social force of a mass historical revisionism driven by the people. During the Arab Spring, an Egyptian monument on the road into Cairo was continually remodeled through use of sledgehammers, explosives, and firearms, so that deposed Egyptian President cum dictator Hosni Mubarak existed on it as a gaping crater where his face used to be. In 2014, waves of spatial and historic reclamation spread through South Africa and Kenya. Monuments to King George, Queen Victoria, Cecil Rhodes, and King Leopold were laid siege. They were covered up, vandalized, painted over, maimed, beheaded, defaced, covered in excrement and piss, and used as the stage for speeches encouraging their removal and demolition. King Leopold's ghost and its brethren were being resurrected and beaten down by the popular anger of a generation intolerant to any further celebration of the Scramble for Africa, or Apartheid-era echoes of European Colonialism.

By 2015, the phrase Black Lives Matter had become the primary slogan by which the growing popular movement against the murder, violence and injustice faced by black people in the U.S. became known. The volume of its militancy and its message grew with every exposure of the daily repression to be found in the experience of blackness in post Civil Rights era America. Never more so than following the massacre of nine black men and women in Charleston, South Carolina by pro-Boer, pro-Apartheid, White Supremacist Dylann Roof. Monuments to the Confederacy and Jim Crow South came under progressive assault by dissident voices calling upon the public to rethink, and reimagine the meaning of what their preservation means. In traditionally Republican strongholds like Texas, statues of Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis were defaced. By the end of the year, cross-racial alliances between black and Indigenous activism became central to reclamation acts nationwide. In October, Detroit residents woke up to a bloodied bust of Christopher Columbus with a hatchet buried in his head.

The New Year started off with a bang, as early in January of 2016 in the U.S. Colony of Puerto Rico, *independentistas* altered the statues that make up the six-year-old, $987,000 *Paseo de los Presidentes* bordering the Puerto Rican Capital Building in San Juan. The monument depicts the nine presidents of the United States, including Barack Obama, who have visited the island nation. The eyes, stomachs, and foreheads of Herbert Hoover, Teddy Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Franklin D. Roosevelt were now painted over in blood red, and the word "Assassins" painted in front of each of them. Puerto Rican Senator, José R. Nadal Power, asserted that acts such as these were an outrage, and that "all protests and expressions must occur within the limits of legality and respect."[3]

That a senator can still say such a thing when the history of Puerto Rican repression and resistance involved the Ponce Massacre of 1937, in which police murdered 19 peaceful protestors and wounded two hundred other demonstrators, boggles the mind. Or, when Puerto Rican hero Pedro Albizu Campos, the first Puerto Rican to attend Harvard Law School (joining a very short list of black firsts at the university), can be executed by slowly being experimented on and irradiated to death while incarcerated in a U.S. controlled prison in 1965. Or when the likes of Lolita Lebrón and her comrades can open fire in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1954, wounding five members of Congress. Or when the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional (FALN), can bomb a U.S. airbase, resulting in the destruction of eight fighter jets and multiple millions of dollars in damages. Or when targeted assassinations of Puerto Rican Nationalists were orchestrated by the FBI throughout the majority of the 20th century, and continued into the present millennium with the open murder of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos of the Machateros in 2005. Exaggerated statements by the likes of Nadal Power are not only ridiculous but also exercises in historical amnesia.

It's only paint, not a mass terror attack. The feud between the rhetorical musings of the latest in trending sound-bytes and the quest for hegemony over popular memory continues. After all, it's an American tradition: following the first reading of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 to the citizens of New York, George Washington and his troops, along with a frenzied mob of soldiers and New Yorkers, rushed to Bowling Green Park in Manhattan and tore down the lead statue of a horse-mounted King George III of England, later melting it down into musket balls for use in the coming Civil War with England. 'Murica, Fuck Yeah!

1) http://harpers.org/archive/1874/01/rambles-in-martinique
2) http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/734
3)http://waragainstallpuertoricans.com/2016/01/13/u-s-presidents-are-vandalized-and-called-assassins-in-puerto-rico/

The Land And Water And Air That We Are:[1]

Some Thoughts On COP 21

By Heather Davis

Protesters during the COP21 Summit in Paris, France, 2016. Courtesy of the Internet.

Every time we breathe, we pull the world into our bodies: water vapor and oxygen and carbon and particulate matter and aerosols. We become the outside through our breath, our food, and our porous skin. We are composed of what surrounds us. We have come into existence with and because of so many others, from carbon to microbes to dogs. And all these creatures and rocks and air molecules and water all exist together, with each other, for each other. To be a human means to be the land and water and air of our surroundings. We are the outside. We are our environment. We are losing, with the increase in aromatic hydrocarbons and methane and carbon, the animals and plants and air and water that compose us. In this time of loss, we need to imagine.

The COP 21 agreement in Paris was, it is said, a victory. An agreement was reached. A political process succeeded. I do not want to diminish these things. They are important. But what went mostly unreported in the barrage of media coverage and the political rhetoric after Paris was the predicted effects on the air and the water and the land that is us. *This* air and *this* water and *this* land will not exist in the temperatures that we are headed towards, even if every one of those signatory states keeps to the agreement. Humans, in the entire history of our species, have never lived in such a warm climate. These temperatures are biologically unprecedented. And, if all goes well, if every country keeps to their nonbinding agreements, we will experience temperatures well above the agreed upon "safe" level of 2 degree Celsius warming by 2100. "As early as the third page of the draft agreement is the acknowledgment that its CO_2 target won't keep the global temperate rise below 2 deg C, the level that was once set as the critical safe limit,"[2] write the signatories of an open letter signed by scientists around the globe. Michael Gerrard, a climate change lawyer and the Chair of Columbia University's Earth Institute, anticipates that the Paris agreement will leave us in a world about 3.5C (6.3F) warmer by the end of the century.[3]

When the low-lying island nations say that a rise of global temperature of 2 degrees Celsius amounts to genocide, they are right. The New York State legislature estimates that there is a 10 percent chance that the oceans will be six feet higher than they are today by 2100. This means that these nations would be completely submerged. It is possible that the people of these islands might be able to leave their homes. They might find refuge elsewhere. But they will not be the same. Literally. They will not be able to breathe in the air and the salt and the water of their island. Their bodies will not be composed of the same molecules, their organs and receptors and sense of self, will all begin to change. It is possible that these epigenetic changes, changes induced by the environment that affect the genomic expression in the body, may be passed on to their descendants. Whole ways of life, of communities and ways of being human, both biologically and culturally, will be transformed.


In Air Force One over devastated New Orleans after Katrina, 2005.

The failure of our political leaders to properly come to terms with climate change and take the radical and necessary actions to drastically reduce fossil fuel emissions means cultural genocide, not just for the people of low-lying islands, but for South Florida and sub-Saharan Africa and the Arctic—where temperatures are rising faster than anywhere else on Earth. Not only does this mean that vast geographical regions will be completely unrecognizable, but also the multiple entangled relationships between the plants, animals and people who inhabit them. It means the end of multiple cultures, cultures that have grown out of and in response to specific environments.

The world will not end in 2100: the end point at which our political imaginations seem to fail and our data seems to evaporate. Temperatures—due to multiple feedback loops built into atmospheric systems—will continue to rise after 2100. So when we speak of a global rise of temperature by 2 degrees Celsius, we are only speaking of the lifetimes of those living now, or those just about to be born. The generations that come after will live in an even hotter world. But *worlds* will end in 2100 if we do not take more drastic action. We must radically change our way of life to prioritize relations over commerce, and locality over universality. The worlds that have been built through the collaboration of people and land and air and water and animals and microbes cannot be disentangled. As useful as it is to employ abstractions and argue about numbers and statistics, safe levels of carbon, and what it will take to "maintain our way of life," we are actually gambling with so many worlds.[4]

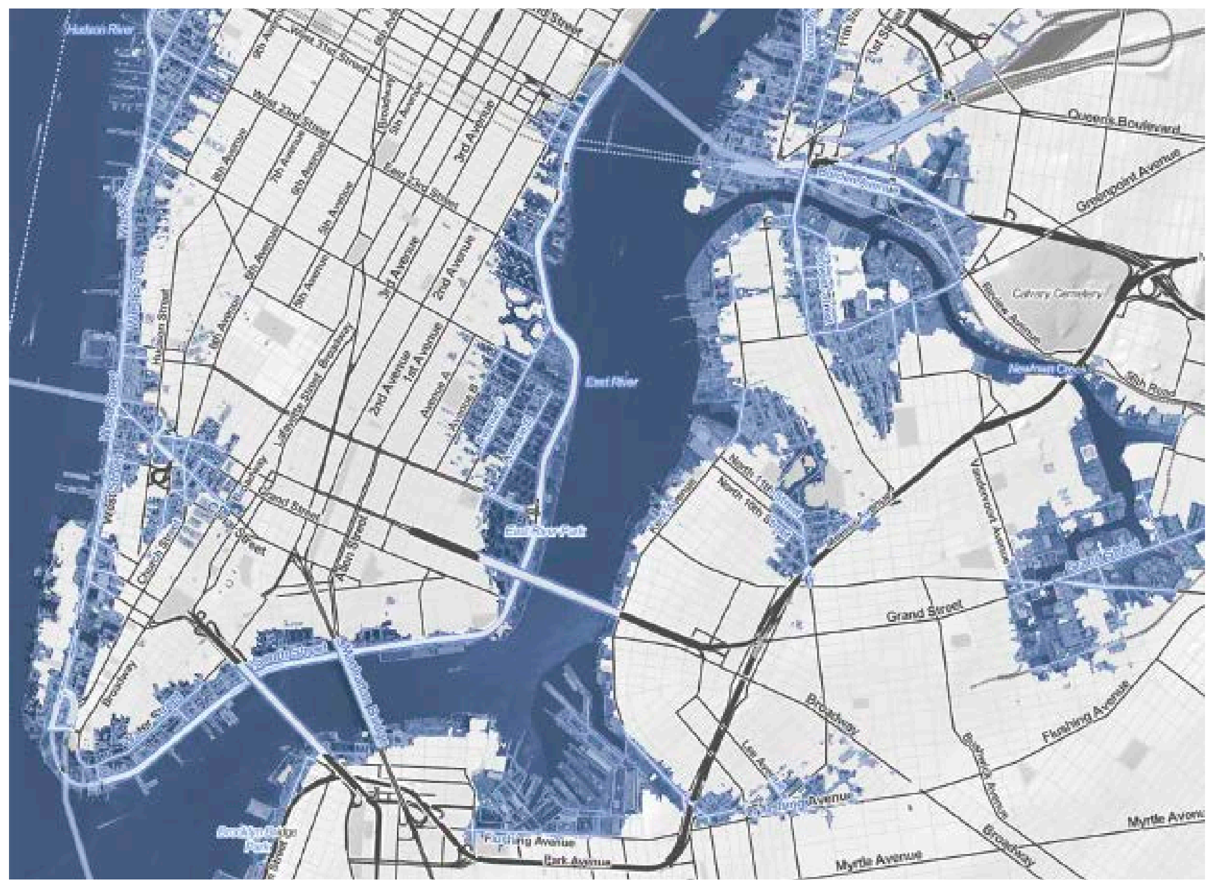
And it is naïve to think that the carbon will simply obey our desires. Or, to believe that political will and negotiation are enough to stop runaway global warming coupled with desertification, ocean acidification, and the largest mass extinction event since the end of the dinosaurs. We cannot trade or numerize or rationalize or render abstract the worlds we are birthed from and are indebted to. The environment is not like the economy. We cannot simply print more air or revalue species stocks. We are so immersed in economic logic, the logic of trade and abstraction, that we forget our relations. We are now breathing in the remains of those dinosaurs that haunt our imaginations, foreshadowing the fate of countless species. As Thom van Dooren has written so beautifully, the loss of a species is the loss of thousands of years of accumulated knowledge. He states, "it is clear that this thing we call a 'species' is an incredible achievement . . . We often do not appreciate—and perhaps we cannot fully grasp—the immensity of this intergenerational work: the skill, commitment, cooperation, and hard work, alongside serendipity, that are required in each generation to carry the species through."[5] The development of a species is also the development of certain kinds of imaginaries, of spaces of imagination. In the midst of this destruction, holding onto to creativity seems vital.


Protesters during the COP21 Summit in Paris, France, 2016. Courtesy of the Internet.


The city of Miyako from the Heigawa estuary in Iwate Prefecture after a 8.9 earthquake struck the area in March 11, 2011. Courtesy of the Internet.


Flooding by the Kinugawa river, caused by typhoon Etau, in Joso, Ibaraki prefecture, Japan, Sept. 10, 2015. Courtesy of the Internet.

New Orleans After Katrina. Courtesy of the Internet.



New York with a 10 foot rise in sea level. Visualizations by Stamen Design in collaboration with Climate Central and New American Media.

Artistic work is one small space for re-imagining the world through loss, beyond loss, and into a future radically different from the present that we now occupy. As David Garneau says, "What art does do—and what is difficult to measure—is that it changes our individual and collective imaginaries by particles, and these new pictures of the world can influence our behavior."[6] One of these particles is offered by Amy Balkin's work *Public Smog* (2004-2012). The piece proposes listing the atmosphere as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As such, the atmosphere would have to be protected with the same degree of stringency that a public building, monument or park would be. Balkin calls attention to the fact that the atmosphere is being re-shaped by advanced petrocapitalism under the auspices of "humanity," and acknowledges that the atmosphere is indeed the legacy of some humans. The piece also simultaneously asserts the ways in which the atmosphere should be regarded as a commons, a commons we all rely upon, and one that needs to be maintained within specific parameters in order for human existence to continue. Or, as Eyal Weizman has recently suggested, we need to decolonize the atmosphere.[7]

This process of decolonization might not be what we expect. As Kim TallBear recently stated, some of what might look like devastation to white bourgeois settler-colonial eyes, might actually be revitalization.[8] At a recent talk at the University of Alberta, TallBear described a devastating flood in her hometown on the Minnesota, South Dakota border that caused so much damage, the farmland had to be abandoned. This meant that the wetlands returned, accompanied by birds and other wildlife. It wasn't until this moment of return that she fully comprehended the damage of European agriculture on that land.[9] In the force and upheaval of the changes to come, there might be more possibilities like this for emergent ecologies within what Anna Tsing has described as "blasted landscapes."

It is not just a matter of "fixing" the climate problem, no matter how justifiably tempting this way of thinking may be. It is a matter of reimagining and recreating our relationship with the components of ourselves that are not of ourselves. We must learn to be responsive to land, to water, and to air. Even if our efforts fail, there may be something to be learned by this *living with*. Living with responsibility. Living with others. Living and composing with the land and water and air, regardless of how it all turns out. There might be something beautiful to be learned, and to be imagined, during our precious time on earth. As the RAQS Media Collective, a group of politically-engaged interdisciplinary artists from India, have said so eloquently,

> "Without a recalibration of the senses, at the level of our global species-being, without at least half a conversation to understand, and then attenuate and nuance our desires and needs, we cannot conceive of another mode of production, another set of social relations, another ethic of husbandry between ourselves and the earth.
>
> That is why we send pictures from deserts and write words on water, that is why we make earthworks that stand on the landscape of the mind. That is why we listen to the whispers of an eccentric planet. So that it can listen to us in turn, and keep wanting us, and our children, and their children, around.
>
> The world is all, that is the case."[10]

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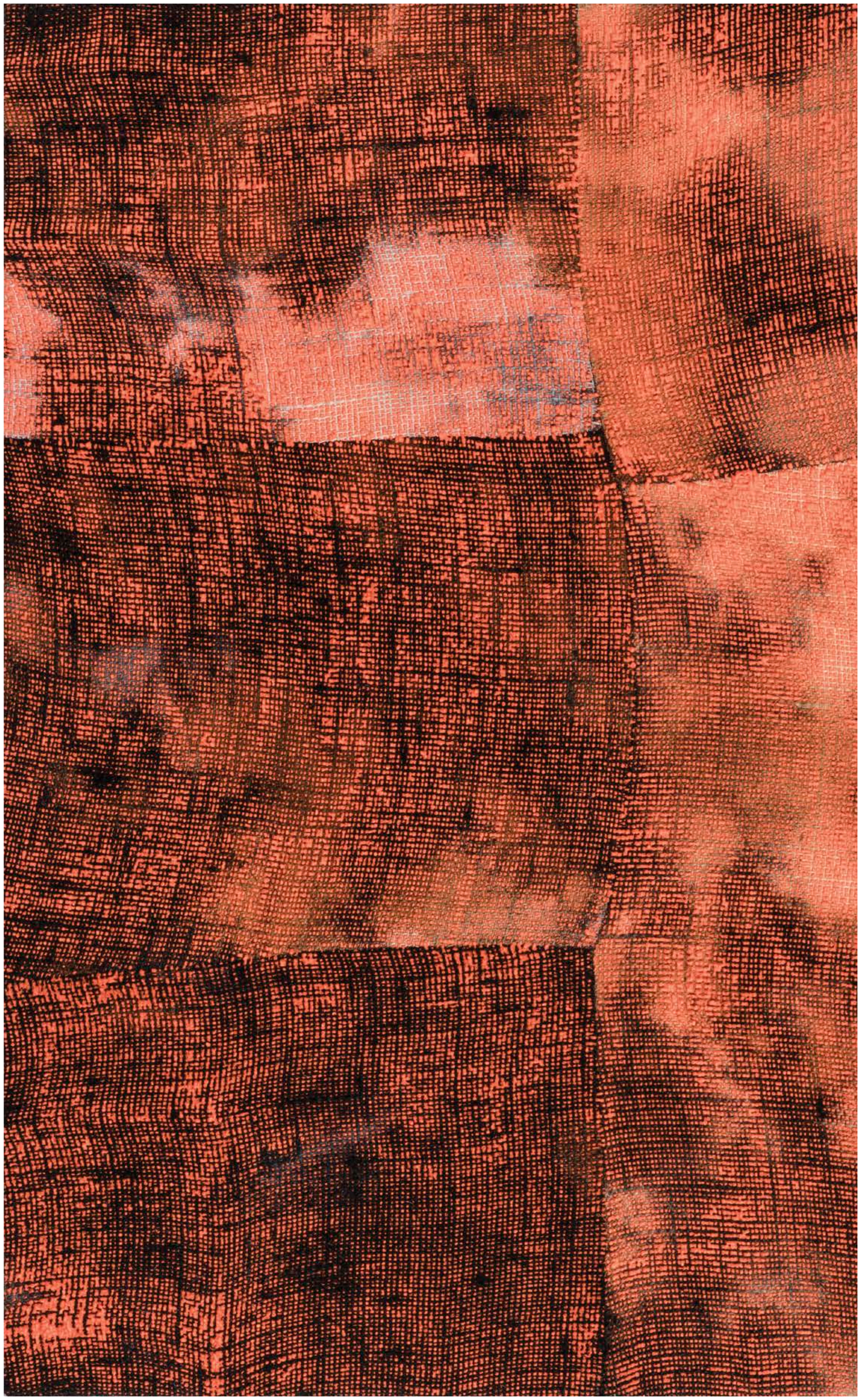
1) This title is an reference to *The Land We Are*, a book on the politics of art and reconciliation in colonial Canada.
2) Tom Bawden, "COP21: Paris deal far too weak to prevent devastating climate change, academics warn," *Independent* (Friday, January 8, 2016) http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change/cop21-paris-deal-far-too-weak-to-prevent-devastating-climate-change-academics-warn-a6803096.html
3) Michael Gerrard, Paper given at the Climate Change and the Scales of the Environment conference, Columbia University (December 4, 2015) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TTjGH6DESw
4) For excellent analysis and research on what needs to be done, see the Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project: http://deepdecarbonization.org/
5) Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 71-72.
6) David Garneau quoted in Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall, "Introduction" in *The Land We Are* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2015), ix.
7) Eyal Weizman and Fazal Sheikh, *The Conflict Shoreline* (Steidl: Steidl, 2015).
8) Joshua LaBare and Kim TallBear, "Anthropocene, Ecology, Pedagogy: The Future in Question" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-jiVcwpBhSc
9) Ibid.
10) Raqs Media Collective, "Three and a Half Conversations with an Eccentric Planet," *Third Text* 27, no. 1 (January 2013): 114.

SFAQ[Projects]
Pullout Poster

Chris Hood
Kill the Father, Save the Sheep
Oil on canvas. 60 x 46 inches
2016

SFAQ[Projects]
Pullout Poster

Evan Nesbit
Porosity (Paint Dredge)
Acrylic, dye and burlap
32 x 26 inches
2016



Style Wars: The Power of Style

By Lydia Brawner

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 disassociated or pitted against one another.

Lydia Brawner's installment of *Style Wars* sets out instead to remind us that not all modes of self-styling are visual by considering how important scent is in the construction of one's identity. Along the way, Brawner's essay conjures the complicated way that smell wafts between the most private and most public aspects of our lives, and it sniffs out how closely the politics of smell map onto histories of bodily containment. By its end, we are haunted by the fantastic odor of the best version of ourselves.

-Nicole Archer, Column Editor

Steven Meisel, CK One campaign, 1994. Courtesy of the Internet.

Chanel No. 9

With hundreds of new fragrances, how do you know which are for you? The secret: Use your style as your guide!" Like fashion, your scent should fit your mood and where you're going," says Sheena Chandran, Sephora's director of fragrance merchandising, "It's the invisible finishing touch.
-From How to Find Your Best New Scent, on harpersbazaare.com

One of my first jobs was working in the fragrance section of an East Alabama department store during the mid-nineties. At the start of a shift I would spray myself with *Carolina Herrera* (1988) or *Trésor* (1990)—thick perfumes full of big white flowers and fat peaches that even then felt slightly out-of-date and way too old for me. They made me feel like I belonged in a nice-ish department store—womanly, cheerful (words I would not generally apply to my fifteen-year-old self). Swathed in syrupy scents, I became a different, saccharine version of myself. Fake smiles came easily, customer service was a breeze; it was a game. This job was frequently an exercise in biting my tongue while older women and college students who might have more naturally worn *Trésor* yelled at me for offering them a sample spray of Calvin Klein's *CK One.* The unisex fragrance had come out the year before, and we were pushing it hard.

We eventually had to stop offering the samples because we got so many complaints. *CK One*, released in 1994 and created by Alberto Morillas and Harry Fremont, is, in and of itself, actually lovely. It's a freshly showered skin smell, citrus with a bit of musk. It's all pleasant soap, good health, and clean living. No matter how much I enjoyed my *Carolina Herrera* disguise, its sweetness is borderline repulsive. *CK One* is not that. If anything, it was a throwback to the previous century and the first mass-produced colognes like Guerlain's *Eau de Cologne du Coq* (1894) or *Impériale* (1853) . . . pleasant lemony smells for first thing in the morning. So what made *CK One* so vehemently objectionable? Why did some people consider its wafting presence to be "nasty," or "pornographic" even?

The year before the *CK One* release, a Steven Meisel-helmed ad campaign for the brand's denim line featured young models being asked to undress by an off-screen male voice in what appeared to be a creepy suburban basement. The women yelling at me in the mall weren't wrong—the ads stunk, badly. Previous Calvin Klein ad campaigns had toyed with the appropriateness of representing teenage sexuality, but these newer ads weren't titillating—instead of young models knowingly delighted by their sexuality, the ads aped the look of '70s pornography and play-acted predation in a (naked) bid to drum up outrage. (As with many things designed exclusively for the reflexive pearl clutching of an older generation, they now just read as flat, or worse, boring.) Yet, for all that, no one objected to free samples of other Calvin Klein offerings like *Eternity* (released in 1988 and created by my beloved Sophia Grojsman, who also did *Trésor* and for what its worth Coty's *Ex`cla-ma`tion!* (1990), which you can still buy for a couple bucks at any drugstore). There was a disconnect between the cutesy, freshly scrubbed smell of the new perfume and the department store customers' horrified reactions to it. The commercials for *CK One* featured black-and-white shots of multigenerational, multiracial, gender fluid hang-outs; a pre-*Foxfire* Jenny Shimizu pulled at her tank top and stared into the camera, while Kate Moss cooed "A fragrance for everyone." The angry women who campaigned against our free samples would have loved the fragrance in Estée Lauder drag—a different bottle and an innocuous femme-y name, but the (now iconic) art direction had turned *CK One* into something that maybe smelled dangerous, queer, and revolutionary. Even if it was just a new *Impériale.*

Byredo's Baudelaire Eau de Parfum, released in 2009. Courtesy of the Internet.

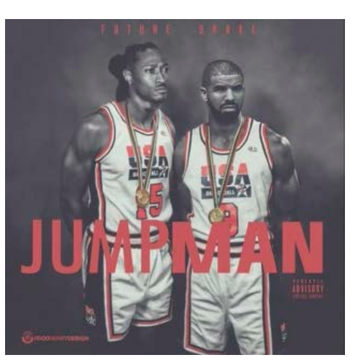
Chanel N. 5 advertisement. Courtesy of the Internet.

The job made me pay attention to contemporary perfumery. I still do. I frequently name-check chemist and fragrance writer Luca Turin as my favorite art critic. His recent takedown of *Miu Miu* (2015) on *style.com/Arabia* moves seamlessly from science lesson to Roland Barthes to matters of the spirit ("I cannot imagine why a woman would want to smell like her soul has been scorched . . .") all in the space of two short paragraphs.[1] It's not just the smell that matters. It's all of it—it's the whole capitalist kit and caboodle of desire, fetish, salesmanship, class, aesthetics, and memory. We are encouraged through advertising copy and received wisdom to add scent to our identities, as "the invisible finishing touch" of our own style in a complex negotiation of consumerism, taste, and fantasy. After he had lost his sight, I saw my grandfather make a woman blush by telling her that he knew she had entered in the room because he had smelled her perfume. It wasn't true of course, but the idea that it could be was so seductive. And again, the nice Christian women screaming at me about *CK One* weren't wrong: everybody gets that perfumes, scents worn on the body and announcing your arrivals and absences, can be, if not pornographic, certainly sexy.

In his 1947 study of the nineteenth-century poet Charles Baudelaire, the twentieth-century existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre claims that:

The smell of the body is the body itself which we breathe in with our nose and mouth, which we suddenly possess as though it were its most secret substance and, to put the matter in a nutshell, its nature. The smell which is in me is the fusion of the body of the other person with my body . . . a vaporized body which has remained completely itself but which has become a volatile spirit.[2]

In this intimacy of Sartre's fusion of bodies and possession of secret substances, there is something so sensual, and on the other hand, almost frightening about it—smell crosses boundaries and crosses membranes, into our bodies through our noses and into our very memories, into the color and texture of our feelings. Commercial perfumes are also, of course, *in* our bodies and not just decorating it. One of the poorly guarded secrets of perfumery is that it is probably terrible for us. Molecules for families of synthetic musks, the building blocks of 20th century European commercial perfumery, have been found



Future and Drake, "Jumpman", single cover. 2015, courtesy of the Internet.

Charles Baudelaire, Portrait of Jeanne Duval, 1850. Courtesy of the Internet.

collecting in our fat, blood, and breast milk. They pool in especially high concentrations in Lake Michigan, slowly poisoning the fish. This somehow, shouldn't be all that surprising. The genesis of modern perfume is violent and literally explosive. After musk deer had been hunted almost to extinction in Europe and Asia, scientist Albert Bauer discovered the first synthetic musks, known as nitro-musks, in 1888. He was looking for a better formula for more explosive dynamite: the pleasant smell was an accident.

These disincarnate bodies are volatile spirits; they do not always behave. Baudelaire himself has actually inspired a perfume, Byredo's *Baudelaire* (2009), which takes its cues from the 1857 poem *Parfum Exotique* in *Les Fleurs du Mal.* Here, Baudelaire compares the smell of his longtime lover Jeanne Duval's body to an island landscape of savory fruits and singular trees, with a welcoming port exhausted by the waves of the sea. Duval was Haitian; Baudelaire smells his fantasy of the island through her skin. The advertising copy for the perfume maintains these colonial fantasies—and at Duval's expense. It's pitched as a more masculine scent, or was when I went to a cosmetics counter to smell it, though, like many newer niche brands, Byredo doesn't divide its fragrances by gender. Duval is left out of her own perfume, but I wonder now, volatile-spirit-style, what she might have enjoyed smelling like. What perfumes she might have worn on her wrists in 1857? *Impériale*?

So what do we do with this volatile, identity-sustaining commodity that we are so frequently encouraged to wear? On *Jumpman*, the hit from Drake and Future's *What a Time to be Alive* mixtape, which was on constant replay in my head and on every car radio for all of November in 2015, Future raps at the end, "*Chanel No. 9*, *Chanel No. 5*, well you got 'em both." This line always plays in my head like Future saying that he is *Chanel No. 9* and Drake is *Chanel No. 5.* I love it. It's perfect. In a song resplendent with luxury goods, commercial fragrance gets a shout out. But not just any: the powdery musky rose of *Chanel No. 5* is probably world's most famous fragrance . . . *Chanel No. 9* is mythical. If it did exist, (and it's not in the Osmotheque fragrance archive at Versailles, so it might never have) it would have been one of the first of Ernest Beaux's perfumes created for Coco Chanel in the 1920s. There is rampant, rapturous speculation online about what *No. 9* might have smelled like. The best sources I have found claim that it was a kind of Chanel-y dirt, masculine, and sparkling. Being *Chanel No. 5* isn't a dis per say, but it is a nod to its ubiquity. Mothers and daughters love it. It is just a little basic. But *Chanel No. 9*? Legendary. Singular. And what better "finishing touch," than to be something so legendary that it doesn't matter if it existed or not? It's all in the imagination of the smell and the invention of its memory. Nothing else will ever smell like it. Nobody else will ever smell like you.

1)http://arabia.style.com/beauty/beauty-guide/fall-winter-2015-perfumes-latest-azzedine-alaia-miu-miu-coty-luca-turin-review/
2) Satre, Jean-Paul, *Baudelaire*, trans. Martin Turnell (New York: New Directions, 1950) 174

On Point 2.09: Shadows in the Musey Rooms

By Mark Van Proyen

By the time that you are reading this, you will have also read much of the hoopla surrounding the recent opening of the new UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA). The rising tide of pre-hoopla pertaining to the May opening of the expanded San Francisco Museum of Modern Art will also have been be on your post-holiday radar. Embedded within all of this hoopla will be the claim, made explicitly or implicitly, that these institutional transformations are the harbingers of an exciting new chapter for the art scene of northern California, presumptuously assuming that the vitality of that scene is little more than a natural epiphenomena of the capital campaigns and square footage expansions of those and other institutional venues. There may some truth to these claims, but not so much as to warrant any excess of over-salesmanship on the part of those votaries of false dawns who want to fire up the crowd. We have seen it before, two decades ago to be exact, and the lessons learned from that moment should sober our enthusiasm for the institutional expansions of our own.

I am referring to SFMOMA's 1994 move into the Mario Botta designed building that is currently undergoing renovation, just two years after the opening of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts across the street. Soon thereafter, the Jewish Contemporary Museum opened half a block away. Supposedly, this concentration of prominent exhibition venues was going to create a "synergy" that would have a positive effect on all aspects of the art scene, creating more collectors, more galleries, and more opportunities for artists. In fact, all of those things did happen, but this expansion lacked the crucial ingredient of real vision, meaning that "more" did not translate to "more interesting" so much as it did to "more bet hedging" and much less risk-taking. What followed was a contemporary art scene that began to resemble cable TV—"300 hundred channels of nothing to watch." Since then, it has perpetually fluctuated between the "pretty good" and the "not so hot," fully in keeping with the dismal tide that earmarks the art scenes of almost all American cities of sufficient size to have cultural pretenses. Even if we were to concede that there may have been some notable exceptions to this characterization (I can't remember any), they were far to few to invalidate it, leaving northern California with an art scene that continues to seem like one vast MFA exhibition, one vast emporium of perpetually half-realized potential stunted by its own mania for self-congratulation.

In fact, the aforementioned "real vision" may not even be possible anymore, so any attempt to define it may only be a matter of antiquarian interest. Since the art world lost the so-called "culture war" over government support for the arts (the final battle being fought in that same year that the Botta-designed SFMOMA opened when the "Contract with America" was put into place by then newly elected House Speaker Gingrich), it became ever-more common for museum directors to be certified by way of MBA degrees, and ever more common for the curators that they hired to be junior league fundraisers. Inevitably, this meant that the professional mythologies of "real vision" would be soon crowded out by marketing incantation, be it of the kind found on gallery press releases or the other kinds that museums use to market themselves to tourists and philanthropic foundations.

In response to this observation, one may simply say "welcome to the future," or more to the point, "welcome to the information age," implying that in a time of constant access to information, the knowledge-basis for testing any truth claim may no longer exist, reducing all utterances to some form of advertisement. On the other hand, it still seems that someone has to ask if all of this promotional chirping is, in a Shakespearian paraphrase, a "chirping too loud"—an over-confident over-compensation for the lingering despair about the real value of those amusing disappointments that we now call art and the various career positions that appertain. Like painters who try to valorize weak paintings with elaborate frames, those who uphold the idea that a massive increase in exhibition space will spark a local renaissance may only be gilding a stillborn lily.

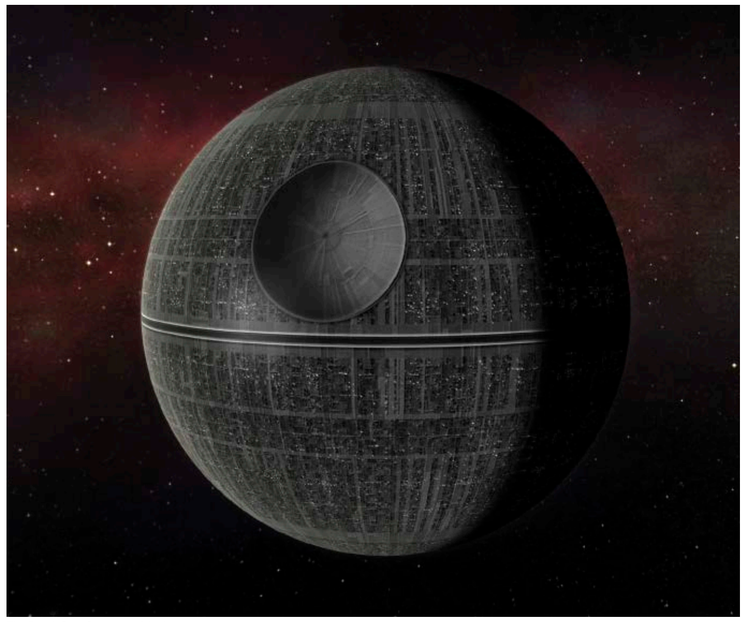
Here is another way to look at the institutional changes that are now afoot. One would think that, since the SFMOMA and BAMPFA have been closed for such long periods of renovation, other institutions would have taken advantage by doing more contemporary arts programing so as to strut their stuff in front of temporarily underserved audiences looking for something to look at. In fact, the Asian Art Museum has done exactly that with last summer's *28 Chinese* exhibition, which interspersed the work of over two dozen contemporary Chinese artists throughout the museum's permanent collection galleries. To call this exhibition the best presentation of contemporary art in the Bay Area for 2015 may sound like faint praise, but the fact was, there were very few other contenders—too few if you asked me.

This leads to another question that is not being considered amidst the festoons and somersaults being staged for the recent and soon-to-be recent re-openings of two of the area's three most important contemporary art venues: What of the Oakland and de Young Museums? The short answer is that both of these museums seem to be falling off of the contemporary art map, after decades of making regular albeit sporadic forays into the area. Granted, the Oakland Museum has recently hosted mid-career survey exhibitions of the work of Squeak Carnwath (2009) and Hung Liu (2013), but one also might note that institution's lack of emerging artist survey exhibitions during the time of Lori Fogarty's post 2006 directorship. In 2010, the Oakland city government hit the museum with a massive financial crisis-related budget cut. The museum, which had inaugurated a capital campaign in 2006 in support of a major renovation project, was forced to undergo a major internal restructuring that emphasized community engagement and internal collaboration between departments.

Actually, the Oakland Museum has always placed community engagement in the foreground of its operation, but the term is taking on different meanings in our age of focus-group dominated decision-making (the museum calls such focus groups "advisory councils"), meaning that challenging and risky contemporary art programs will be given short shrift owing to the lack of a vocal constituency. This too is odd, given that so many artists have been rooted out of San Francisco. Oakland has been and continues to be the inevitable destination for those artists, so maybe a new focus group is in the offing. Just as Brooklyn has become the place where many New York artists have settled after the time that almost all of Manhattan was turned into Mall of America, Oakland seems well on its way to becoming the new center for contemporary art production for northern California. Here's hoping that the Oakland Museum can find its way to recognize this shift with programmatic initiatives that have more artistic substance than their Friday night street and cocktail parties, which are fun as far as they go, which isn't far enough.

Ever since the untimely passing of Director John Buchanan in 2013, The de Young has been in a state of marked disorganization, which was only partially remedied by the short-term appointment of Colin Bailey—who served as the museum's director from June 2013 to April 2015 before decamping for a post at the Morgan Library. During the past three years, there has been a remarkably high turnover of staff, and the museum's operation has been characterized as being in a state of "Orwellian dysfunction" by curator emeritus Robert Flynn Johnson. Amid all of this apparent chaos, the de Young seems to have completely dropped its contemporary arts programing, which was never very robust, but certainly gaining some traction in the years immediately following the 2005 opening of its Herzog and de Meuron building in Golden Gate Park.

In 2013, the City and County of San Francisco conducted an audit of the museum's activities, and found considerable fault with the state of its operations.[1] Since that time, several lawsuits have been filed and are awaiting resolution, but now, the museum seems to have an even bigger problem: it is now being investigated by the office of the California Attorney General Kamala Harris for an allegedly illegal misuse of funds and an even more illegal dismissal of a financial officer for refusing to cover-up said misuse. Most likely, not much will come of this investigation after whatever substance it has evaporates into the vapors of non-disclosure statements and campaign contributions—but in some ways the damage has already been done. Even if the museum can dodge the charge of criminal wrongdoing, it still needs to sustain its accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums, and that organization frowns on both the reality and appearance of professional malfeasance, especially if it seems to be part of a widespread and longstanding pattern. There is no real danger of the de Young losing its accreditation, but amid the language of commendation and recommendation that accreditors use, one can sometimes find veiled threats that generate concern on the part of funders and potential donors. And none of this takes into account how the recent downturn of the global equities market will impact the climate in which local arts institutions operate. I cannot imagine anything positive, but I am sure that there will be no real hope coming from any level of government.



The Death Star. Courtesy of the Internet.

SFMOMA expansion designed by Snøhetta opening May 2016. Courtesy of the Internet.

1) Jillian Steinhaur, *What's Going on at the SF Fine Arts Museums?* http://hyperallergic.com/70126/whats-going-on-at-the-sf-fine-arts-museums/ (accessed December 21, 2015).

A Poem for D.I. by T.M.

He was my friend and the most beloved artist in town.

Voted the most eligible bachelor by San Francisco Magazine. He is a first rate second-generation neo-conceptual artist.

An architect who made sculpture and a sculptor who made architecture.

The Gary Cooper of this town.

His house is an example of folk art in the tradition of the Winchester House in San Jose, and the Forestiere Underground Gardens in Fresno.

Some of his influences were the same as mine.

He could cross over with ease from the artist world to the social class where simplicity is mistaken for profundity.

I like his sense of color. It's a fun house to be in.

An artist curator hired him to restore the back section of a museum gallery that led to restoring his house as a work of art.

Kenny G was his favorite jazz musician.

A patron appropriated his house, and signed it by restoring it.

She became the artist, like Duchamp exhibiting a coat rack.

Walls are shiny to insure they are seen as glazed art.

On the front door are two brass plaques indicating when the house was broken into, "making art out of misfortune."

Ann McDonald said he was the father of us all.

Khmer Instagram

By Ben Valentine

I met Puth Male last year, while volunteering at Sammaki, a community art space in Battambang, Cambodia where I now serve as an advisor. Male is a consistent volunteer with Sammaki, helping lead workshops for kids in Battambang province. Male first introduced me to Khmer Instagram through his own feed, *sokthearith.p*. His "mobile-photography" as he calls it, led me to invite Male to exhibit his Instagram photographs from June to August at Sammaki. Together, we selected the best work from his Instagram, and displayed the photographs, slightly enlarged but still in the (no longer mandated) Instagram square, on the gallery walls. The opening was well attended and Sammaki continues to sell his prints to this day. I believe this exhibition was the first exhibition of social media art in Cambodia, and without Male and Sammaki's support, I wouldn't know about this niche group at all.

My interest in Male's work and Khmer Instagram comes from my interest in media from minoritarian groups. I am passionate about media produced by people international audiences usually ignore, a counter-colonialist gaze. I seek tactics for nourishing this gaze, for sharing it with the world in hopes of building new, more accurate narratives. This is a gaze honest to those so often ignored, because it is of their own making. I thought I found this gaze, a citizens' media in Khmer Instagram. Maybe I was wrong.

As I wrote for SFAQ earlier about searching for empowered social media, sociologist Clemencia Rodriguez names, "'citizens' media" as those media that facilitate the transformation of individuals into "citizens."[1] This isn't to say citizens in the legal sense of the word, but rather persons, "defined by daily political action and engagement."[2] While this can mean bolstering relationships between citizens and politicians, more often, and especially at the beginning, citizens' media focuses on building strong relationships amongst small local communities. It is a community dedicated to producing and sharing media for themselves.

In the West, representations of Cambodia are largely limited to horrific recountings of the Khmer Rouge, corruption and poverty, or at best, Angkor Wat. Cambodia is rapidly changing and far more complex. What's exciting to me about Khmer Instagrammers is that they show a very different Cambodia—one international audiences are rarely privy to. While a very small subset of the Cambodian population, Khmer Instagrammers are capturing a life much like most urban dwelling youth today; we find fashion-keen kids listening to music, skateboarding, enjoying art, and experiencing all the chaotic anxieties and loves of youth everywhere. This is the opposite of poverty porn. After living most of a year in Cambodia, these are my friends, and while systemic differences sharply contrast our lived experiences, as people, there is more that connects us than divides.

While in 2014, only 26% of Cambodia was connected to the net, largely through phones, it was also experiencing the fastest growth in the region.[3] International branding agency We Are Social reports that Cambodia experienced a 414% growth in active net users last year.[4] While nearly half of those connected are on Facebook—as is the same for most of the world—Instagram is lagging behind.[5] However, younger, more tech-savvy users—a small privileged slice of Cambodia—are quickly adopting Instagram. While spending most of my time in Battambang with artists, I'm largely surrounded by members of this small group.

With it's mobile-first, light data-use, and emphasis on original photographs, Instagram is situated at the forefront of photography from Cambodia's newly online population. Through these feeds, Khmer Instagrammers became a means for me to see a thin but exciting window of creative expression at the forefront of this change, and to watch how my friends in Battambang were similar to kids they followed in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, the other two major metropolitan areas.

Upon beginning to scour Khmer Instagram, the photographs looked much like Khmer Facebook; candid photographs from parties; touching moments with partners: sharing meals with friends; vacation shots at tourist sites; and of course, selfies.[6] "It's mostly just selfies," Male reflected with a hint of disdain as he first showed me Khmer Instagram. Cambodia has taken to selfies with a zeal I haven't seen in any other country during my travels over the last two years, spanning three continents. While China certainly came close, and many more people owned phones, I've never watched people, men and women alike, spend more time taking more selfies than in Cambodia.

None of this is surprising; it's standard social media culture wherever there is Internet access (and never forget that still remains a minority of the world). Throughout my travels, I've found people photographing their meals, themselves, their best friends and partners, and important life moments, and sharing them online. While a plethora of cosmetic differences can be found, the subjects remain remarkably similar. Maybe this is the greatest potential of citizens' media; in a world where it's so easy to divide people, citizens' media can stand as a beautiful and comforting reminder of just how similar we are.

Maybe more unique

But of course, Cambodia is unique, and there are fascinating local differences when compared to other countries. Today's urban centers like Phnom Penh, Battambang, and Siem Reap are experiencing rapid growth. While in 1990, the UN Capital Development Fund found that agriculture represented half of Cambodia's entire GDP, the World Bank found that, since 1980, the percentage of urban dwellers has more than doubled.[7] Furthermore, Cambodia's urban areas now produce 60% of the entire country's GDP. Many of my friends here are part of this group. Growing up in villages around Battambang, their proficient English and hard work allowed them to move into crammed apartments and go to university part time while working in the tourist industry to pay rent. Traditionally, a young woman would never be allowed to move out of the parent's house prior to marriage, and women often move together, with sisters or female friends from the same town. This and countless other changes are coming with rapid urbanization.

While life in these urban hubs remain by no means easy, Cambodians there are finding higher levels of access to education, health care, jobs, and a more cosmopolitan worldview. With that newfound disposable income and a better education, Khmer youth are becoming increasingly connected to each other as well as the rest of the world, almost entirely through their phones.

@sokthearith.p

@may.fifth

Documenting this aggressive urbanization is a key thread throughout Khmer Instagram. Photographing urban growth in Cambodia today is as much about architectural achievements as it is about construction sites. With his eye for bold lines and shadow, Oum Sothea, a professional architect in Phnom Penh, using the *may.fifth* handle, beautifully documents new and old buildings in Cambodia and the rate at which they are being built. Construction workers walk the tenuous scaffolding of new buildings few can afford.[8]

Interestingly, Khmer Instagrammers are also looking back, on the villages and nature distant from their urban neighborhoods. They document vacations in areas of natural beauty or visits to villages similar to those their families left behind. These are photographs of a life many of them never experienced. Male likes to go on long bike rides outside of town, searching for natural and pastoral beauty alone or with close friends or family. "These Instagrammers live in mad cities and try to escape from the busy life to find freedom with nature," Male told me.

These are sunglasses-clad hipsters passing by farms only their parents know how to sow. Even still, the chaotic and congested city life draws urban Khmer back to an idealized, filtered, and hashtagged version of a recent agrarian past. Family trips to rural temples and farms are common. This is, however, a life increasingly few in Cambodia will know as many move to cities and forests disappear. Global Forest Watch found that since 2001, Cambodia has the fastest rate of deforestation in the entire world.[9] This is particularly upsetting to many young Khmer I've spoken with. As Male reflected, "this is our land, our environment, our home, our breath."

While both Facebook and Instagram in Cambodia are riddled with emotionally raw posts uncommon in day-to-day public life, Instagram appears to me to be more honest, at least in a few very important ways. Cambodia is a very religious and conservative country, and being openly queer is difficult. Perhaps due to the anxiety caused by Facebook's context collapse—the result of placing your whole family, all of your friends, and a few strangers together in a public conversation—Instagram, with fewer users, less descriptive and deemphasized profile pages, and more easily hidden identities, is where some openly queer Khmer are more freely expressing themselves.

On Instagram, dressing in drag, wearing less normative fashion, and using queer sexual innuendos are common in a way largely foreign to Khmer Facebook. Whether this will remain so as more users come both online and onto Instagram will be interesting to watch. Already many Instagrammers are using private profiles. Studying how use changes between public and private profiles would be fascinating research.

While sharing minoritarian identities is progressive, Khmer Instagram remains largely apolitical in an overt sense. While I've seen hundreds of videos of illegal evictions by police and information about deforestation or corruption on Khmer Facebook, I've seen next to nothing about this on Khmer Instagram. Perhaps this is due to Khmer Instagrammers looking at and documenting from a state of relative privilege. These photographs represent an extremely narrow and selective portrait of Cambodia today.

While lagging behind many of its neighboring countries in terms of access, infrastructure, and education, Cambodia is indeed changing quickly. These photographs represent a few of the Cambodians who are benefiting from, capturing, and sharing that change; both amongst themselves, and with the world. This may be a glimpse of the future of Cambodia for many, but with political turmoil, corruption, and lack of free speech, this version of Cambodia may exist only for a privileged few.

Free Speech

Already, Facebook posts calling for peaceful protest last year have landed several posters in jail, charged with inciting social unrest.[10] The Cambodian People's Party, the ruling party led by Hun Sen for the last 25 years, which solidified its power through a coup, has been violently resistant to critique. They control much of the radio and television, and have been pushing for further surveillance of the Internet, especially social media.[11] Hun Sen has explicitly warned Cambodians that they cannot remain anonymous online, and that he can find posters in seven hours, should he want to.[12]

Furthermore, we must always remember that we are discussing a company: Instagram, or more accurately, Facebook, after the latter purchased Instagram in 2012 for $1 billion. Facebook is a massive foreign business, with an eye on the bottom line. After receiving much bad press for breaking net neutrality and zero-rating, Facebook rebranded Internet.org to Free Basics, as a humanitarian venture seeking to connect the rest of the world to the Internet, albeit a stripped down, walled-garden version. Free Basics, which finally came to Cambodia in the middle of this year, seeks first and foremost to get people onto Facebook. Positive social impacts are advertised, and real, yet the financial realities must always be considered. Free Basics offers just that—free basic services that use zero data from your plan. In general Free Basics includes a few social service websites and government websites, and of course, Facebook, albeit with no images. How can creative posts on a private company's platform become a powerful affront to the dominant narratives inflicted on Khmer, both from local politicians and outside international media? How can Khmer Instagram become more political, a citizens' media?

@may.fifth

@may.fifth

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#BlackLivesMatter offers clues. What began as a Facebook post, turned into a hashtag, and then into a keyword used by protests around the country; #BlackLivesMatter has grown into a national debate. This is about leveraging media affordances to give a platform of those so often ignored in national or international conversations. Later, watching as the presidential debates fielded questions on #BlackLivesMatter stands testament to the power of this tactic. Of course, whether this leads to real legal and systemic changes remains to be seen.

What Rodriguez and #BlackLivesMatters teach us is that, for Khmer Instagram to grow into a true citizens' media, there need to be communities and organizations dedicated to that goal; social media won't become citizens' media without hard work. The intersections of location, community, and sites of production are not only vital to understanding the media produced, but are where the social and political power of that media truly rests. As of now there are very few groups, formal or informal, nourishing this kind of media in Cambodia.

While a handful of great international organizations have done work with citizens' media in Cambodia, there are few dedicated exclusively to Cambodia. The Cambodian Center for Independent Media, Geeks in Cambodia, and the Open Institute seek to develop and promote new technologies and tactics for the empowerment and betterment of Cambodian society. Arts organizations like Sammaki, Sa Sa Art Projects**,** and Cambodia Living Arts are dedicated to empowering local voices through the arts. While as of yet there are no Khmer Instagram meet-ups, Male and Sothea are just beginning to plan the first to take place sometime this spring.

Given Cambodia's poverty and low Internet penetration, looking for more followers or an audience that the Instagrammers could leverage into financial gain means looking beyond their own borders. Accordingly, posts are often excessively hashtagged and almost always in English. Furthermore, the posts are rarely country-specific, focusing instead on international hashtags, reaching for greater recognition. For a citizens' media to emerge from Instagram, this tendency of looking outward, beyond local media and the people who create it, would have to change.

These mobile photographers are a creative elite, a small forefront of Cambodia, and without a larger local user base or industry that can support them through creative industries or even art exhibitions, it is likely they will continue to look outwards, rather than in. Without the help of legal protection for more free speech, and more nourishment of local organizations to leverage this kind of media, citizens will continue trying to skip passed the hard work of building local communities, reaching instead for scholarships, grants, and awards to leave . . . lottery tickets that don't make for much real change for Cambodia.

1) http://sfaq.us/2014/11/searching-for-a-citizens-media-online/
2) *Citizens' Media Against Armed Conflict: Disrupting Violence in Colombia,* (p. 24)
3) http://open.org.kh/research/phones_2014.pdf
4) http://geeksincambodia.com/infographic-digital-trends-cambodia-2015/
5) http://www.socialmediacambodia.com/
6) This essay is the result of observing nearly 100 Khmer Instagram feeds for the better part of a year, three formal interviews, and many conversations with Khmer Instagrammers and Khmer artists. This is not quantitative research. This essay applies six years of writing on networked media, and one year of living in Cambodia, where I am a conversational Khmer speaker
7) http://sea-globe.com/cambodia-working-class-david-hutt-south-east-asia-globe/
http://www.tradingeconomics.com/cambodia/urban-population-percent-of-total-wb-data.html
8) http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jul/17/phnom-penh-empty-skyscraper-vattanac-capital
9) http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/cambodia-logs-top-spot
10) https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/student-dfends-call-for-color-revolution-93954/
11) http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/radio-purchase-tightens-cpp-grip-airwaves (and) http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/05/cambodia-bloggerati-fear-new-internet-law-20145411512715753 4.html
12) http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/hun-sen-warns-facebook-users-hes-watching

From Loneliness To Collaboration

By Steffanie Ling

At the end of my undergrad, I realized that I can't do anything by myself. I don't like to do things by myself; I don't strive for solitude. I began to think that my optimism and friendliness could not lead to true art, but rather happiness. I had no hope as an artist at all. I liked people, for the most part—a bleak asset if I wanted to create something that would transcend as much as human suffering itself! My happiness doesn't *mean* anything. It's not poetic, or interesting, or critical, to like people. And then, suddenly, it was.

What was it exactly that I was not doing on my own? In the midst of the collaborative turn, I *was* making art after all. All my work had an element of conversation, or had presented dialogue in an overt way. My final project was called *Chatting* (2013) because it embodied, as a metaphor, most of my time at school—a daily production, a slow-cooked edification, and an embrace of quotidian potential. Not only could I not do anything by myself, I didn't ever shut the fuck up. I loved how natural it was to feel productive and part of something by virtue of sharing fairly untested words and notions that then turned into maybe-alright artworks. Though I still had the utmost respect for aesthetic value, this process was, to me, sufficiently "art."

However, when I left art school, I passively resisted or declined a number of invitations to join book clubs, reading groups and collectives. There was something vaguely suspicious about getting together under the pretense of learning from each other, and disavowing the potential (or my romanticism?) of a de-professionalized, unstructured existence. I opted for the autodidacticism of my regular life—eating, drinking, smoking, going to the movies. Joining a reading group sounded like a constipated environment where everyone sits with their engaged-face on, listening for their turn to pontificate. "Let's go," they said, but they didn't move. My initial response to pseudo-official peer-to-peer models of youthful posturing seemed a counterintuitive engagement after graduating from an institution. Collectives were more appealing, but no one seemed to have the organizational skills (only the oratory skills) to get any projects, or movements, off the ground. And naturally, life kept getting in the way. I realized that what I considered art when I was in school, was just leading a regular good life. And now that I wasn't in school, I wasn't making art—I was just eating and having interesting conversations with people, as the relatively happy person that I am. I considered spending more time alone OR taking up a serious social practice. But because there is no system of forked roads where one leads down the path to making art that abides by your true principles, I started to write, perhaps because writing is as close as it gets to talking all of the time, while making something of potential, tangible, cultural worth.

Artists must believe that what they're doing is of utmost importance and meaning; this they know, and so they develop the instinct that anything to the contrary is a threat to more than just themselves, but the health of all intellectual and artistically driven forces in the world today. But people are usually getting in the way, invading your mind and timetable with invitations to parties and performances, or their unapologetic opinions. For Jonathan Franzen, "I used to consider it apocalyptically worrisome that Americans watch a lot of TV and don't read much Henry James." Self-imposed solitude is not only a bomb shelter, it's soundproof—so you can't hear the bombs go off. As a novelist writing in an accelerated age of technology, Franzen distinguished "silent heroes" from "gregarious traitors" and wrote that "the writer for whom the printed word is paramount is ipso facto, an untelevisable personality." He goes on to emphasize the anti-social prerequisites—"The essence of fiction is solitary work: the work of writing, the work of reading . . . the social-isolate readers are more likely to become writers . . . reticence is integral to artistic creed." It makes perfect sense that all these passages are quoted from his essay "Why Bother?" (1996) in a collection called *How To Be Alone* (2003).

In her brilliantly thorough book on the history and current conditions of collaborative and participatory art, *Artificial Hells* (2012), Claire Bishop illustrates the present moral compass of the art world, and it is the complete inverse of Franzen's silence and gregarity binary. This compass points away from "bad" singular authorship and towards "good" collective authorship.[1]

The neurotic lone-wolf-self-interested, narcissistic, brooding and caustic, replaced with good hosts and event planners—generous, energetic, vulnerable and imaginative. Bishop identifies one of the main problems with the reception of collaborative, or participatory art, which is that *process* surpasses all results, or lack thereof. She writes, "The urgency of this *social* task has led to a situation in which socially collaborative practices are all perceived to be equally important *artistic* gestures of resistance: there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of participatory art, because all are equally essential to the task of repairing the social bond".[2]

But the collaborative turn is also an *ethical* turn, a social turn, so I can't just throw raves and dinner parties, or open the door for someone, and consider it a collaborative artwork because it doesn't "channel art's symbolic capital towards constructive social change".[3] Although, if you throw a dinner party for your friends, and nobody sees it, did you throw a dinner party at all? There is an obvious answer. But according to the logic of social practice, the answer would be *not really*, but if you did have an audience, does that somehow make it irrefutably worthwhile and artistic? Not necessarily, but what's left over in the wake of elusive *processing* is not exactly artistic, but instead preoccupied with disruption and wake-up calls dialed not into humanity itself, but the sleepy ethics of the contemporary art world, making many of these operations very radical by comparison to plastic arts.

People really do need respite, not from people, but from prattle, from the dispassionate justification of socializing-on-display as an art of the utmost worthy pursuit: to assemble and reassemble under the pretense of edification, and no one even gets fed, or paid. It gives socializing a bad name, at a time when the status of loneliness, as a valid condition for creative production, is more tenuous than ever.

But the impetus for art usually has something to do with people—to position myself in order to live with, or without them. More specifically, to vacillate between whether I want to live among them, or against them. Better to ask, "With and against whom?" Certainly not everyone, on either side of the question. To make art, must we then find people with mutual desires?

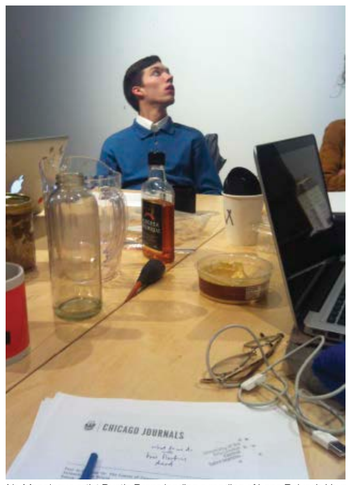
In an interview with Jessica Loudis titled "Should I Go To Grad School?", Sheila Heti said that her post-graduate education came from attending and hosting events, and developing "intimacies" or something closer to love—"Instead of having sex, we have art."[4] There is a inescapably saccharine quality in listening to people talk about having a social life as anything more elevated than satisfying a basic human desire, but what is truly being emphasized is what avant-garde history is built upon: coterie. In other texts, Heti espouses it like a moral occupation. In her 2006 lecture *Why Go Out?* at Trampoline Hall, she unpacks this question by comparing what she identifies as two habitual masochisms: socializing and smoking. She describes her attempt to quit people, the way she quit cigarettes—"The longing for a person is almost identical to the longing for a smoke. It's weird."[5]

She puts a great deal of tension at the threshold of your apartment door, between whether we really believe in "silent heroes" or solitary geniuses or if we should answer the call to have a few drinks, and if something beyond that will be an experience that gives way to connecting with humans better, the way we really want to but won't admit, because a part of us still believes in the solitary genius thing. So when we do (believe in the myth that is) we opt to stay in—"We could be like little Buddhas, meditating and masturbating and watching TV. And we could imagine ourselves to be brilliant, and kind, and good lecturers, and good listeners, and utterly loving—and there'd be no way to *prove* it otherwise"[6] (my italics).

In the text, she also describes something to the effect of participatory art. Her friend had organized a charades workshop, where one's listening skills, and ultimately, their people skills are surreptitiously tested. She writes, "I've come to the conclusion that what my friend is trying to do is organize events that capture and crystallize and *reproduce* the effects of ordinary socializing—which is not quite about fun, or about learning how to be good at *having* fun, but, more distinctly," and discretely, "about learning how to be good at being a person." [7]

Heti's texts often have questions for titles: *Should I Go to Grad School? Why Go Out?* And of course her novel, *How Should a Person Be*? And evidently, she doesn't ever answer them alone ("I am not a stoic") though she is the author. Whereas, in contemporary art, what Bishop describes as social practice seems be how many have elected to "prove" it. In this light, going out to prove what kind of person you are is "gregarious" indeed.

Still from *Husbands*, 1971. Directed by John Cassavettes. © Columbia Pictures.



No Monologue artist Dustin Brons leading a reading of Lane Relyea's *Your Art World: Or, The Limits of Connectivity*, 2015. Photograph by Steffanie Ling

For Franzen, to write is to be alone, to talk to yourself, and for Heti, it is to be alone with the hope or intention of talking to someone else from the past, or future, because of it. I've used writers to talk about a phenomenon in the art world, because there is a limit to collaborating in text, how it can be communicated on the page, in writing, no guaranteed audiences, no potential participants. Yet, writers can opt to observe, stay in, or not bother, be passive spectators, pariahs of the participatory art paradigm. And chiding them for it would be ridiculous. Art should never be the proof of a critical consciousness, it is because of critical consciousness that we strive against loneliness, that Franzen facetiously asks "why bother?" and then writes a five-thousand word essay.

After a meal with a friend who had been abroad for three months, the bill did not come separated. Somehow, the notion of asking the server to return with two separate checks was anathema to the spirit of our reunion. I was responsible for 75% of the bill—I had already said the appetizer was my treat, and in addition to my own meal had ordered some takeout. To detail the separation, *this, this and this, are mine, and this and this was hers* is disturbingly menial, and when I imagined that taking place, I saw my life slipping away. I saw myself dying, the server dying, my friend dying. In these moments, it feels quietly melodramatic, when we are delegating what's mine and yours, we are flirting with death more than smoking a cigarette after a feast of carbohydrates and chocolate. I think I continue going out in pursuit of enlightenment mired in friendship and generosity, towards figuring out how and with whom I want to live, when I need to be alone and who feels right to collaborate with.

From loneliness to collaboration, I ended up re-reading *Cassavetes on Cassavetes* (2001), a printed essay that was brought to my attention while curating a group exhibition, which, at its core, prompted the artists to question or evaluate their collaborative impulses.[8] In the text, the director John Cassavetes writes plainly about how he works with actors: "I just think that you give somebody something they can do, and allow them to be a person." Cassavetes gave his actors the option to do nothing, and reassured them that the consequence of their inaction wouldn't be held against them, and would be accepted by him, and by the film, with gratitude for their naturalness, "Anyone can sit down and have a drink in a natural way if you don't force them to do things they don't really feel . . . what is needed between actor and director is a mutual understanding of human problems." It begs the question, *why should I participate?* (a version of Heti's question on going out) Rarely has my question been satisfied. *I don't even know you. What is my participation worth to you?* Your cultural validation at the cost of my complicity and agreement that your gestures represent a critique of society is hardly a democratic exchange. It's not people or reading groups that I've recoiled from, but rather the institutionalization of sincerity, and the vilification of our right to effective detachment. As a delicate ecosystem of a cast and crew, participation, collaboration, and socializing are needed to function and produce, but are not the congratulatory outcomes of the film itself. While art demands participation, film, an industry that seems to be constructed on "Action!", can embrace the delivery of candor. Marlon Brando is quoted as saying, "Just because they say 'Action', doesn't mean you have to do anything" (while in life he slugged paparazzi and chased after them with broken bottle in hand).[9]

"What we're working on is not a house or anything tangible. It's just something you see up on a screen. And it disappears in a second. And it's only an opinion if you think it's good or not. You must charge the atmosphere constantly, and you must do it honestly," in this sense, Cassavetes's idea of "charging the atmosphere" means that, as an actor, performing a role means being able to access your unadorned self.

1) Claire Bishop, "Introduction" *Artificial Hells*, London and New York: Verso, 2013, p. 8
2) Ibid, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents" p. 13
3) Ibid.
4) See "Should I Go To Grad School: An Interview with Shelia Heti" published on *newyorker.com*, May 24, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/should-i-go-to-grad-school-an-interview-with-sheila-heti.
An excerpt from *Should I Go To Grad School: 41 Answers to An Impossible Question* edited by Jessica Loudis, New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.
5) Shelia Heti, "Why Go Out", 2006, available at http://archive.sheilaheti.com/whygoout.html
6) Ibid.
7) On the poster promoting these game nights, he illustrates a room labeled "Room 101" referring to the torture room in Orwell's *1984*. "It turns out his secret motto for these games nights is: "We torture you with fun!" Which might be the motto of every party *ever* [sic]."
8) This text was introduced to me by Zebulon Zang, who was an artist exhibited in the exhibition *No Monologue* curated at 221A (Vancouver) in 2015. This text by Cassavetes was the first of seven contributed by each artist in the exhibition that formed a reading group between curator and participating artists in the months leading up to the exhibition. My previously cited aversion to reading groups is informed by my experience conducting one even with individuals whom I'd be comfortable "having art" with. It didn't feel right, or natural, to act like classmates.
9) These accounts are cited by notorious Hollywood paparazzo, Ron Galella, who lost five teeth after being punched in the face by Brando.

Millennial Collectors

M WOODS: Michael Xufu Huang

In Conversation With Anna Hygelund

M WOODS is a private contemporary art museum founded by collectors Lin Han, WanWan Lei, and Michael Huang. The museum is located in Beijing's 798 Art District in a 2500-square-meter former munitions factory. M WOODS presents major single-artist and group exhibitions and maintains a studio-style artist residency space. In 2015 M WOODS became the first Beijing art museum in 11 years to receive official not-for-profit status from the government.

Let's start with some basic context. You were born in Beijing, grew up in London and are now studying at University of Pennsylvania, yes? What is your major?
Yes, that's correct. So now Beijing, London, and New York could all be considered my hometown. My major is Art History.

When and why did you, Lin Han, and Wanwan Lei found M WOODS? What are the strengths of the collection, the space?
M WOODS was founded to create a new kind of global non-profit arts platform in China, and to showcase our private collection on an institutional level. While collaborating with major art institutions and collectors worldwide to stage international exhibitions, M WOODS remains fully committed to its mission of supporting young artists and thus sustaining the development of contemporary Chinese art.

Does the collection have a particular theme or focus?
No—we aim to break boundaries in art.

Tell me about your new show* Full of Peril and Weirdness: Painting as a Universalism. *Did you curate the show? What is one of your favorite pieces on view?
The show is curated by Robin Peckham and Wanwan Lei. It is a very thorough presentation of a group of highly influential contemporary artists from 18 countries who are forging new ways of thinking about painting. It showcases different painting styles and techniques in China, Southeast Asia, the United States, Europe, and South America, bringing the most outstanding young artists from each region into a global dialogue. My favorite pieces were by Jack McConville, Austin Lee, Katherine Bernhardt, and Bodu Yang.

What are some upcoming projects from M WOODS? How do you imagine M WOODS in five years?
We deliver two major exhibitions a year. I am spearheading a project, which consists of a prize that provides international artists under the age of 35 a chance to be shown in Asia, as well as promoting them on an international level. I think M WOODS is already the most youthful and experimental art museum in China. I hope in five years it will become the first museum people think about when they talk about contemporary art in China.

When visiting M WOODS, what are the other not-to-be-missed museums/spaces in Beijing?
Faurschou Foundation.

How do you see your role as a young collector within the larger art world? Do you hope to inspire your peers to start engaging with collecting art? Do you hope you will inspire others to take Millennial collectors more seriously?
I see myself as an ambassador of art and the art industry for the younger generation, especially. I am still in university, and more and more students are becoming intrigued by the art industry, seeing what I do. Also UPenn selected six students for this year's promotional video, and I am very happy to be selected to demonstrate my involvement in art and culture. I definitely hope to inspire my peers to start collecting art. I think collecting from a young age really has the advantage . . . you get to know the younger generation of artists really well and grow with them. I have been discriminated against before because of my age, but it only pushes me to work even harder. There are more and more young people doing absolutely amazing things in the art world so Millennial collectors will be taken more seriously.

How do you use social media as an art collector? What does Instagram expose about the art market?
I use Instagram mostly to engage with friends sharing moments in my life and to promote art I like. Instagram gives the public more opportunities to experience art, and the act of taking an Instagram almost becomes a form of art-making.

Where do you collect—a combination of fairs, galleries, and auction houses?
Yes, all of these.

Naturally you collect for your museum, but do you also collect to understand your generation?
To be honest, my role at the museum is to understand my generation more, and the works I collect into the museum collection tend to be representative of my generation.

We've experienced a lot of speculation in the emerging market. All that aside, which three artists have you most excited right now?
Nicolas Party, Austin Lee, and Simon Denny.

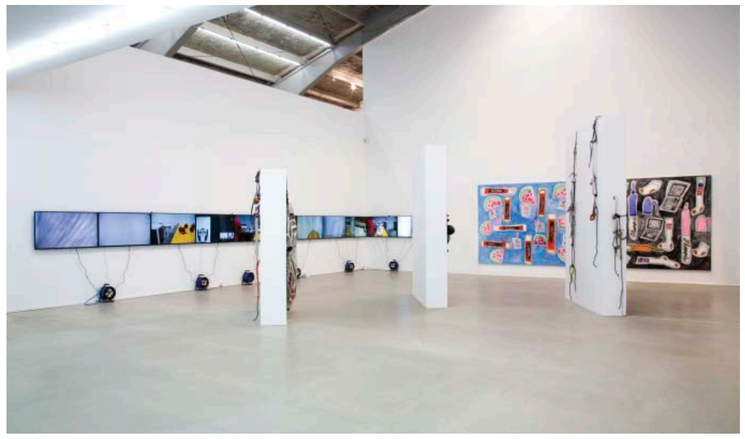
Are there particular movements you are drawn to? post-Internet? The New Abstraction?
I think I am very much a paradox myself. I am a very visual person who appreciates great painting skills. So I am always drawn to the Old Masters, the Dutch period, and the Impressionists. But on the contrary, I also like post-Internet art a lot as I grew up with this culture. Simon Denny and Amalia Ulman are artists I follow closely.

What are some specific collectors and collections that inspire you?
I think my partners Lin Han and Wanwan Lei definitely give me the most inspiration, probably because we talk so much about art and collecting—the best way of learning is through conversations. I really enjoy looking at the Zabludowicz Collection and the Beyeler Foundation, especially at how they form their collection. I am always very impressed by Lenore and Herbert Schorr after I speak to them. They are always up to date with the new artists after so many years of collecting.

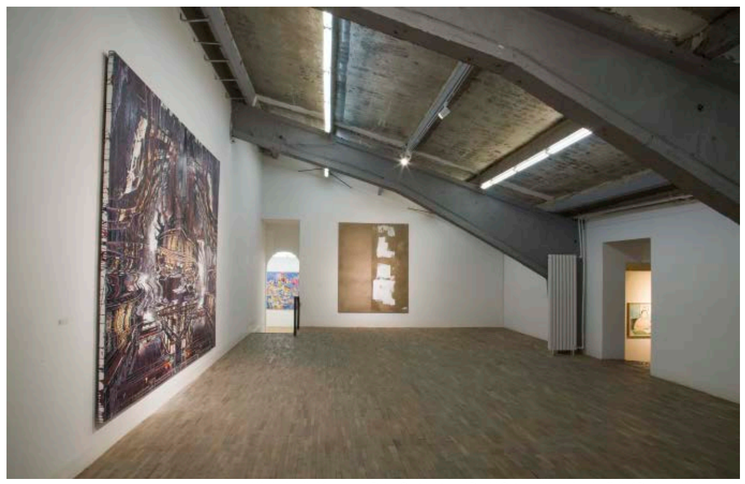
What was your last purchase? And the top three works on your wish list?
My last purchase is a white painting by Jo Baer. I think the top of my wish list is always going to be René Magritte and then Robert Ryman. And in terms of younger artists, I really want a painting by Firenze Lai.

What's next for you after graduation?
I think M WOODS will take up most of my time. But I want to stay in New York for a while after I graduate, so I hope to explore some other opportunities as well.

Works by Austin Lee on view in "Full of Peril and Weirdness": Painting as a Universalism at M WOODS, Beijing, 2015-16. Courtesy of M WOODS.



Works by Oscar Murillo, Katherine Bernhardt, Kerstin Braetsch, and Debo Eilers on view in "Full of Peril and Weirdness": Painting as a Universalism at M WOODS, Beijing, 2015-16. Courtesy of M WOODS.



Works by Jin Meyerson, Petra Cortright, and David Ostrowski on view in "Full of Peril and Weirdness": Painting as a Universalism at M WOODS, Beijing, 2015-16. Courtesy of M WOODS.

Nicolas Party, *Portrait*, 2015. Pastel on canvas, 170 x 150 cm. Courtesy of M WOODS

Michael Xufu Huang with Bodu Yang's B-Side (2015). Oil on board, 170 x 120 cm. Courtesy of M WOODS.


Cara Delevingne
CHANEL
WE AIN'T NO BASIC BITCHES