

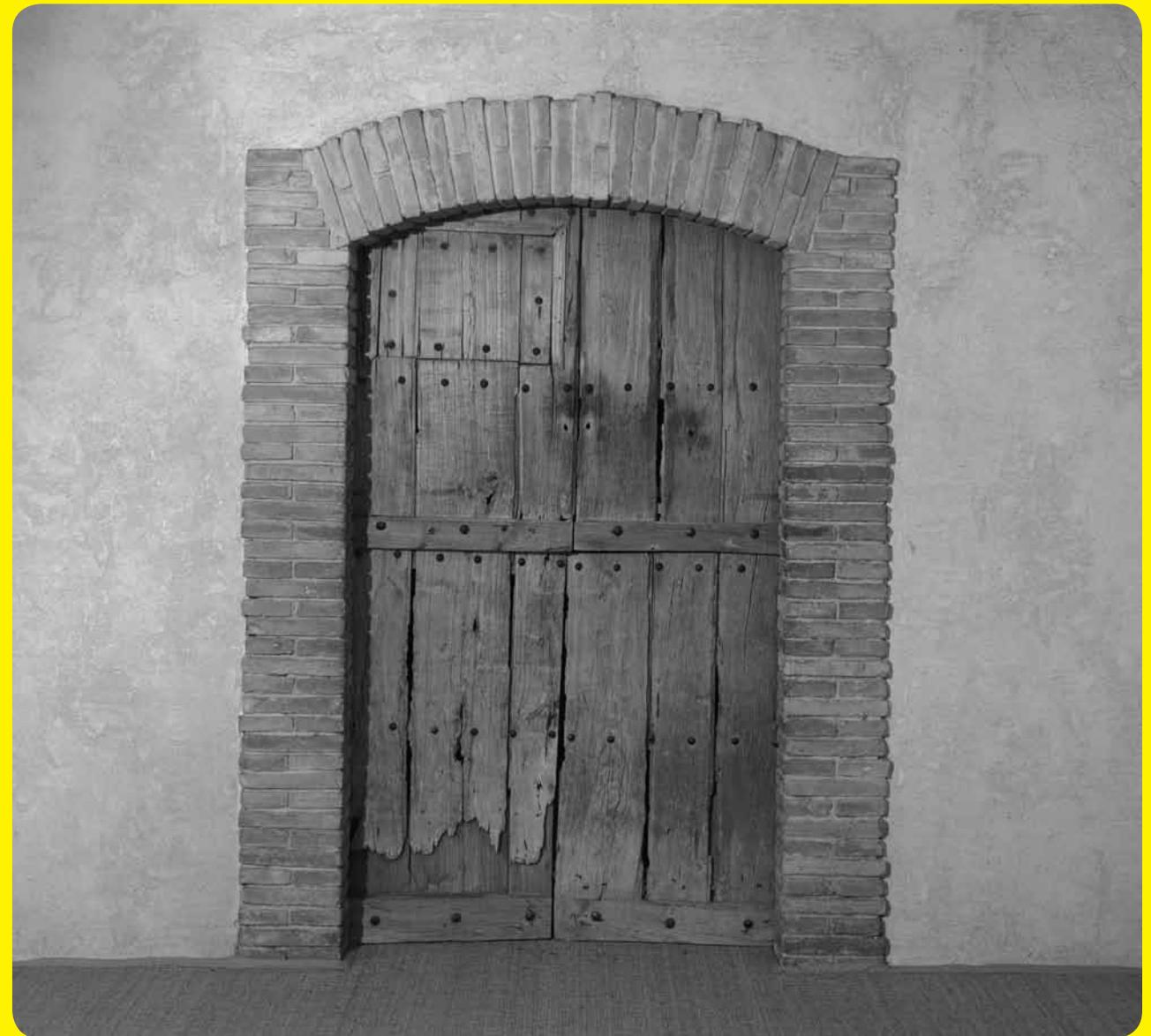
THE EXHIBITIONIST
NO. 1 / JOURNAL ON EXHIBITION MAKING / JANUARY 2010

OVERTURE
CURATORS' FAVORITES
BACK IN THE DAY
ASSESSMENTS
TYOLOGIES
ATTITUDE
REAR MIRROR
ENDNOTE

★

USD 15
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1

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1

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Marcel Duchamp
Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . . (Given: 1. *The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .*), 1946–66
Mixed-media assemblage: (exterior) wooden door, iron nails, bricks, and stucco; (interior) bricks, velvet, wood, parchment over an armature of lead, steel, brass, synthetic putties and adhesives, aluminum sheet, welded steel-wire screen, and wood; Peg-Board, hair, oil paint, plastic, steel binder clips, plastic clothespins, twigs, leaves, glass, plywood, brass piano hinge, nails, screws, cotton, colotype prints, acrylic varnish, chalk, graphite, paper, cardboard, tape, pen ink, electric light fixtures, gas lamp (Bec Auer type), foam rubber, cork, electric motor, cookie tin, and linoleum
95 1/2 x 70 in. (242.6 x 177.8 cm)
Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the Cassandra Foundation, 1969

CONTENTS

Overture

Jens Hoffmann.....3

Curators' Favorites

Jill Dawsey.....History Lessons: On *The Short Century*.....5
Chus Martínez.....*Documenta 12* and the Future of Thinking.....7
Jean-Hubert Martin.....Lebel Rising.....10

Back in the Day

Julian Myers.....Form and Protopolitics: On *Other Ideas*.....15

Assessments: 11th International Istanbul Biennial

Jessica Morgan.....Gang of Four.....21
Ulrike Groos.....Thoroughly Political.....22
Jill Winder.....Conceal and Reveal.....23
Yilmaz Dziewior.....More Than Just Theater.....25

Typologies: The Solo Show

Rob Bowman.....First Person Singular.....35
Beatrix Ruf.....The Kunsthalle Format.....37
Eungie Joo.....Talk Shows.....39

Attitude

Adriano Pedrosa.....Sinking Venice.....43

Rear Mirror

Massimiliano Gioni.....*After After Nature*.....49
Nancy Spector.....*theanyspacewhatever*: After the Fact.....49

Endnote

Tara McDowell.....57



OVERTURE



Jens Hoffmann

Dedicated to the memory of
Éric Rohmer (1920–2010)

One measure of the vitality of a discipline is the intensity of the debate surrounding it. The discussion around curatorial practice has intensified over the last decade—including the founding of numerous academic programs, the creation of conferences, and the publication of an increasing number of specialized books—but the discipline has not, until now, had a consistent platform for more frequent and interconnected conversations that would bring together the many fragments of current dialogue. The creation of *The Exhibitionist* arose directly out of the desire to establish such a forum.

The Exhibitionist does not intend to occupy itself with all forms of curatorial practice. Rather, it is specifically concerned with the act of exhibition making: the creation of a display, within a particular sociopolitical context, based on a carefully formulated argument, presented through the meticulous selection and methodical installation of artworks, related objects from the sphere of art, and objects from other areas of visual culture.

The iconic French journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, especially its early issues, served as our primary inspiration. We were strongly influenced by its radicalism of thought, its critical and skeptical attitude, its excellently written texts, and the way it broke with then-current conventions of thinking and writing about culture. But most importantly, what connects *The Exhibitionist* with *Cahiers du cinéma* is a shared belief in the idea of the author, which applies to exhibition making just as much as it does to filmmaking. The application of the *auteur* theory to curating has been one of the most remarkable developments in our field in recent years, and it finds another level of urgency, intensity, and self-reflection in these pages.

In his paradigm-shifting essay “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema,” published in 1954 in one of the first issues of *Cahiers*, the French film director Francois Truffaut argued almost militantly for the theory of the author in the sphere of cinema. The critical reactions he provoked still reverberate. Roland Barthes famously formulated a rejection of the theory in his 1967 essay “The Death of the Author,” arguing against the belief that the author is the unifying and sole creative source of the meaning and value of a work of art. Michel Foucault in his 1969 essay “What Is an Author?” proposed another redefinition of authorship as “a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses.”

In recognition of the set of operations and frameworks for the production and circulation of meaning that Foucault was keen to foreground, we concur that the curatorial process

is indeed a selection process, an act of choosing from a number of possibilities, an imposition of order within a field of multiple (and multiplying) artistic concerns. A curator's role is precisely to limit, exclude, and create meaning using existing signs, codes, and materials.

Just as *Cahiers* was established by film directors for film directors, *The Exhibitionist* is made by curators for curators. It will be published twice a year and will follow a strict editorial structure that revolves around the analysis of past, present, and future exhibitions. Each issue will begin with the department CURATORS' FAVORITES, in which three curators contribute a personal essay about an exhibition, contemporary or historic, that has especially impacted their thinking. In our inaugural issue, Jill Dawsey revisits P.S.1's *The Short Century*, Chus Martínez explores the continued resonance of *Documenta 12*, and Jean-Hubert Martin writes of the relationship between collecting practices and artistic engagement in the figure of Jean-Jacques Lebel. This section is followed by BACK IN THE DAY, an in-depth look at a historically important exhibition. For our first issue Julian Myers discusses *Other Ideas*, curated by Samuel J. Wagstaff in 1969 at the Detroit Institute of Arts. ASSESSMENTS will comprise the core of each issue, with four curators presenting their individual points of view on the same recent major exhibition. Here we look at the controversial 11th International Istanbul Biennial, organized by the collective What, How, and for Whom. TYPOLOGIES examines specific exhibition formats, beginning here with the most pervasive type of artistic display, the solo exhibition, considered from a range of different approaches, from the full-dress museum show to the commissioned site-specific project. ATTITUDE features a text on the current state of exhibition making by a member of our editorial board. For the inaugural issue Adriano Pedrosa takes a look at the proliferation of events around the Venice Biennale. REAR MIRROR invites one or more curators to reflect upon a recent exhibition of their own. In this issue Nancy Spector reexamines her experience with *theanyspacewhatever* at the Guggenheim Museum, and Massimiliano Gioni reconsiders his New Museum exhibition *After Nature*. Finally, the ENDNOTE is a brief remark on an aspect of curatorial practice that is of interest to the magazine.

In homage to Marcel Duchamp we have chosen an image of his final work, *Étant donnés* (1946–66), for the cover of our first issue. Anyone familiar with the piece knows that what is shown here, an old wooden door with two peepholes, is only a small part of the full experience of the work. Behind the doors there is an illuminated landscape and a naked woman; the exhibitionism of the scene invites us to look but it also exposes us, standing at the door in the midst of our voyeurism, to the gazes of others just entering the room. The pun of this publication's title speaks to that doubling, to the way in which the curator is not only an exhibition maker but also one who publicly exposes his or her arguments and commitments in a vehemently visual fashion. Duchamp's work, and *Étant donnés* in particular, represents radicalism, seriousness, the introduction of disturbance, and a conceptual sense of humor, all of which *The Exhibitionist* would also like to claim for itself. I would personally like to thank you for picking up our inaugural issue and, with the words of Duchamp, set a motto for this and subsequent issues: "I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste."

CURATORS' FAVORITES



Bodys Isek Kingelez
Kinshasa Label, 1989
Mixed media
35 1/2 x 19 1/4 x 27 3/8 in.
(90.2 x 49 x 69.5 cm)
Collection of Bruno van Lierde

Antonio Olé
Margem da Zona Limite (detail),
1994–2002
Mixed-media installation
Dimensions variable

HISTORY LESSONS: ON *THE SHORT CENTURY*

Jill Dawsey

That I was a graduate student when I saw Okwui Enwezor's groundbreaking exhibition *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994* at P.S.1 in 2002 seems significant to me, for the exhibition was on many levels pedagogical in nature. This impression was reinforced by the fact that in its New York iteration, it inhabited an institution that clearly served a past (and present) educational function. The words of key African writers, thinkers, and politicians were interspersed among the artworks, lending historical context and specificity, and asking viewers to read. Encompassing not only painting, sculpture, and photography but also textiles, popular music, film, graphic design, and literature, the show was, for me, particularly instructive for its demonstration of the ways in which seemingly disparate spheres of production—the cultural and the political, fine art and popular culture—came together to upset colonial hegemony in Africa. Furthermore, as Enwezor persuasively argued in the exhibition and the comprehensive accompanying catalogue, these

imbricated spheres produced the most momentous events of the 20th century, from the dramatic sweep of independence gained by African countries in the late 1950s and early 1960s to the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994. Somehow, this not-so-small insight—the centrality of Africa to the revolutions of the 20th century—had been omitted from Western accounts of modern art history, including those that informed my education.

I saw *The Short Century* not long after I had completed the Whitney Independent Study Program, where I was introduced to the work of a number of postcolonialist theorists to whom I'd not been exposed in my graduate or undergraduate studies. I understood, then, at a basic level, the workings of the colonialist project: its premise that "third world" people have no culture of their own, that they are in need of "civilizing" influences. I was interested in how the colonized often performed the culture of the colonizers in imperfect and ambivalent ways. The predicament of "official" colonial subjects seemed not so distant from the inner

Georges Adéagbo
From Colonization to Independence, 2002
 Mixed media
 Dimensions variable



Zwelethu Mthethw
Untitled, 1998
 Color photograph
 20 x 24 in.
 (50.8 x 61 cm)



colonization that occurred in unofficially “colonized” subjects of the first world, namely women. I saw correspondences between different instances of mimicry, staged as a subtle subversion of power in both colonial and patriarchal contexts. This is all to say that despite my awareness of colonialism and its mechanisms—and the ways in which I had taken it to heart vis-à-vis my own interest in feminism—*The Short Century* came as nothing less than a shock to me.

The multidirectionality of modernism, the ways in which its influence flowed along different vectors and on a global scale, was revelatory. Enwezor posited a different model of modernism, one that was neither based on the assimilation of European modernism nor defined by its relationship to a canon, but rather structured around the self-reflexive examination of African culture itself. Further, African art and writing of the post-World War II era could not be located along the lines of a fixed geography. If African sculpture had influenced modernist movements such as Cubism, Enwezor explained, African

American thinkers, including many Harlem Renaissance writers, took inspiration from African culture and history, and this in turn influenced Africans living in Europe. In movements such as Negritude and Pan-Africanism, African subjectivity and culture were revalued and foregrounded as primary means of subverting colonial imperialism. Yet despite the breadth of examples in the expansive exhibition—which covered a period of time spanning from 1945, the “beginning of the end” of colonialism, to 1994, when Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa—the belief that Africa had no true modernism remained deeply entrenched. In contrast, then, to the sanctioned multiculturalism that had become normalized in the West in the 1990s, which required that non-white artists verify their non-white heritage in their work, *The Short Century* rejected such essentialist identity claims, emphasizing the complicated acts of negotiation and appropriation that inform cultural production.

The extent of what I knew about Africa was mostly limited to *The New York Times* reportage: genocide, poverty, so many lost boys streaming into the United States. In terms of contemporary art, certain African artists had become known to Western viewers like myself through exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la terre* (1989, at the Centre Georges Pompidou) and the advent of global biennials. If William Kentridge and Ghada Amer were already familiar to me, their situation within the context of earlier work in *The Short Century* served to complicate and historicize the ambivalent narratives they told. Similarly, it became difficult *not* to read Zwelethu Mthethwa’s portraits of people living in South African townships through the legacy of the studio-based photography of Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibe. Importantly, *The Short Century* told a story that was not so much about suffering (as reported by the Western media) as about a genealogy of heroic acts of resistance, liberation, and transformation. The contemporary works in the exhibition attested to the continuation of this ongoing critical project—again, in sharp contrast to the normalization of “diversity” and “multiculturalism” in the era of corporate globalization, which most often serves to dilute criticality and critique.

For me, *The Short Century* offered a viable and rigorous model for thinking about art and politics in tandem—they are, in reality, inseparable—and within the lived space of an exhibition. Here, art was not reduced to a mere reflection of sociopolitical forces but presented as an instrumental catalyst in bringing

about political change. I remember the exhibition as a vast montage: vitrines housing pamphlets and magazines, video monitors showing films and historical documentary footage, a patchwork of paintings, and installations made of layered fragments. This last was exemplified by George Adéagbo’s *From Colonization to Independence* (2002), a room-size installation of maps, photocopies, magazine covers, record albums, and books, the sum of which amounted to a microcosmic look at the nature and effect of Western popular culture in the artist’s home country of Benin. This montage, this juxtaposition of so many heterogeneous pieces, described a space in which the multiplicity and contradictions of post-colonial society could exist. At the same time, the fragments found a certain coherence in the shared projects of resistance and self-determination.

What I took away from *The Short Century* was not only a crash course in postcolonial African art and history but also an affirmation of my belief that the most compelling exhibitions—like the most compelling works of art—cause us to question what we think we know, to reorganize our knowledge, to

confront the unknown. It’s not necessarily a comfortable process, and it’s one of the reasons why many people are made anxious by contemporary art. The psychologist Jean Piaget, in his work on the development of knowledge in children, posits that when adapting to new information or a new environment, a child may use one of two processes: assimilation (incorporating a new object or idea into a preexisting internal framework) or accommodation (in which the inner world must adapt to the new). The latter process is said to be the more painful, and one that adults fail to use as much. It is in the context of accommodation that one may say “I was wrong,” or “I don’t know.” *The Short Century* required me to accommodate; I lacked a preexisting category into which this radically new model of postwar politics and society could easily fit. But this process is necessary for dislodging narcissism, chauvinism, indeed the colonialist mindset itself. The great achievement of *The Short Century* is that it began to dislodge the ossified narratives that have for so long enabled Western delusions of superiority—at least within the space of the museum.



Ai Weiwei
Fairytale Chairs, 2007
 1001 Qing Dynasty
 (1644–1911) wooden chairs
 spread over various
Documenta 12 exhibition venues
 Dimensions variable

DOCUMENTA 12 AND THE FUTURE OF THINKING

Chus Martínez

The aim of this text is not to “review” an exhibition, but to start a series of conversations around it. My commission was to write about a show that has occupied my mind, and I chose *Documenta 12*, organized by Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack in 2007.

Rather than approach the project—controversial and fascinating in its ambition—as a show, I argue it could be read better as an attempt to study the “state” of exhibition making, in terms of the different temporalities at play in creating an event in a

particular venue, the question of the audience in relationship to reception history in the Western world, and the way a history of ideas (and a history of assumptions) has been constructed through exhibited artistic practice. The presentation of works departed from Documenta's usual exhibition design since its founding in 1955 in order to make clear how this venue has been creating its own hermeneutical history of display. It demonstrated the process of attempting to understand (first) what an exhibition in a museum is, and (second) what a show inside a museum can be or perform when it is not a museum exhibition.

Documenta reappears as an institution every five years, and therefore audiences approach it with different expectations than they do the continually running programming of a museum or Kunsthalle. This tension between a temporary institutionalized exhibition such as Documenta and the exhibition making of a permanent museum is of enormous interest because it addresses the way an audience is structured through ideas that are present in the exercise not only of making art, but of showing it. (Display is already the foundation of an intellectual debate.) In 1941 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, René d'Harnoncourt, himself a fascinating character and far from the conventional picture of a stuffy museum professional, organized the exhibition *Indian Art of the United States*. Along with the standard arrangements of Native American artifacts in vitrines and informative wall labels, the show employed a full-scale re-creation of a wall of Southwestern pictographs, shop-window-type arrangements of contemporary fashion designs featuring Indian handiwork, and live demonstrations by Native American sand painters, dancers, and silversmiths. Such curatorial decisions raised the question of the museum curator as selector and of the museum as ordering and classifying certain material inside History.

The history of exhibition making and display was radically changed with the major involvement of artists. During the mid-1960s there were two very well known examples of artists, rather than curators, assembling materials of a varied nature and creating with them a totalizing exhibition/experience: *La Menesunda*, created by Marta Minujin and Rubén Santantonín (with many collaborators) at the Instituto di Tella in Buenos Aires (May–June 1965), and “*hon-en katedral*” (*SHE-a cathedral*), a large-scale sculptural installation created by Niki de Saint Phalle in collaboration with Jean Tinguely and

Per-Olof Ultvedt at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (1966). *La Menesunda* was an all-encompassing environment that occupied the entire venue. The audience was invited to drift through the art, encountering a variety of different spaces, experiences, and uses of media and materials. It was an experiment under controlled conditions, as in quantum physics, operating under the assumption that the mere presence of an observer/participant alters the object. This is an even more relevant thought given that it all took place in the context of Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorship. *SHE-a cathedral* was constructed in the main gallery of the Moderna Museet and also referred to the polarity of inside/outside, as the audience entered the large female figure through a gate between her spread legs.

By 1970—with some exceptions—exhibition techniques had narrowed to the more formalist mode still familiar today, based on the particular understanding introduced by institutional critique and its aesthetics of the text. The temporary exhibition outside the museum became the opportunity for a curator to perform a different logic—to use the exhibition not only as a way to contribute to an art historical reading of its contents but also to reflect more broadly upon art production and its relationship to intellectual debates concurrent with the moment of being made, shown, and received by an audience.

It would be totally misleading, however, to call *Documenta 12* an exhibition solely about or concerned with exhibition history. Display was foregrounded because it is a key operation in the act of presenting, arranging, positioning, and ordering artworks into a given place during a conventionally set amount of time. “*Documenta 12* conceived of itself as a medium,” read the first sentence in the curators' web text presentation. The display and the manner in which forms, objects, and subjects articulated relationships allowed the project to use the display itself as a potential method—I won't say whether it was successful or not, because this is already irrelevant—to investigate the very premises of public space today and the role that art as part of “culture” plays in it. Versus a consensual choreography of practices, objects, and ideas aimed to stress a certain notion of the political, *Documenta 12* tried to bring attention to the necessity of a new form of empiricism, one that would force us to forget what we already know about good politics and agency in order to create a temporary regime that would escape the show as a communication or information

machine. Mannerism took over as an anachronic form that could allow commentary on social behavior and convey a refined virtuoso quality in our way of rehearsing a certain political and aesthetic vocabulary and, therefore, signify a certain technique in addressing exhibition making today.

The whole project was situated not in political or intellectual debates predicated on defunct forms of socialism and a liberal or social democracy, but on the possibility of resetting all these inherited premises. The problem was that the curators abused too many other defunct modes of thought to make their point. But what really struck me was the ambition to reset the machine—that is, to create a movement, an ethos of permanent becoming that was subject to a kind of chaotic thinking motion and could, potentially, enable new forms of affiliation not based in our old “loves.” I am not addressing the result here, but just trying to outline an ambition that I believe is relevant for the state of culture today. And in saying so, I am already moving away from the review trap of trying to declare whether it was a good show or not. It was something different than a show, as Documenta always should be.

Knowledge is nothing more than an empirical figure, a simple result that continually falls back into experience. A study of time and space can be based in the types of images that define our imagination of the present. *Documenta 12* chose not to be synchronized with the “concerns” of our time, an anti-pedagogical choice that was, at the same time, presented with a quite perverse emphasis on the educational, whatever that meant at the end besides a very particular reading on the German term *Bildung* (formation). On the whole, the notion of difference as predicated by Gilles Deleuze resonated all through the project. There is no more method for finding knowledge than there is for finding treasure on an island. The only choice is movement—a movement that is created by an infinite number of instances and that demands that concepts be set aside (for a while) and replaced with a focus on the singular (what I was calling before a new form of empiricism). In doing so the notion of the “thing in general” disappears (from our view) in favor of a critical experience of the here and now, which is already oriented toward the near future. *Documenta 12* played with the Deleuzian idea of the transformative potential of minoritarian becomings. This does not imply a refusal of democratic politics. Those excluded from the majority as defined by a given set of axioms, no less than those included within it, are



James Coleman
Retake with Evidence, 2007
Projected film with performance by Harvey Keitel

the potential bearers of the potential power to transform that set, whether in the direction of a new set of axioms or an altogether new axiomatic.

I am not in a position to analyze the means the curators used, and even less to enter into a reading of the role artistic research played in their way of articulating their intellectual ambitions. However, as I was invited to write about a project that made me think, here it is; thinking and its future were at the core of it, as this quote by Martin Heidegger explains better than I can (the quote comes from his September 24, 1969, interview with Richard Wisser):

No one knows what the fate of thinking will look like. In a lecture in Paris in 1964, which I did not give myself but was presented in a French translation, I spoke under the title: “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking.” I thus make a *distinction* between philosophy, that is metaphysics, and thinking as I understand it. The thinking that I contrast with philosophy in this lecture—which is principally done by an attempt to clarify the essence of the Greek *aletheia* (unhiddenness)—this thinking is, compared to metaphysical thinking, much simpler than philosophy, but precisely because of its simplicity it is much more difficult to carry out. And it calls for new care with language, not the invention of new terms, as I once thought, but a return to the primordial content of our own language, which is, however, constantly in the process of dying off.

A coming thinker, who will perhaps be faced with the task of really taking over this thinking that I am attempting to *prepare*, will have to obey a sentence Heinrich von Kleist once wrote, and that reads, “I step back before one who is not yet here, and bow, a millennium before him, to his spirit.”

Jean-Jacques Lebel
La tribu des amis, 1985
 Mixed media
 Dimensions variable



LEBEL RISING

Jean-Hubert Martin

Jean-Jacques Lebel: Soulèvements, which opened at La Maison Rouge in Paris in October 2009, mixes together the personal story of Jean-Jacques Lebel, the political and social events of his lifetime, artworks from the past and present, and art from a range of cultures. It is what I have been searching for in an exhibition. It is not a mere grouping of objects belonging to the same category aligned quietly along a wall, like a stamp collection, but a total mixture of works from different periods and different cultures. Some interesting and successful attempts at creating this kind of exhibition have already been made, such as *Artempo* in Venice, but they have been rather intuitive and loosely structured. Even contemporary art can get very boring. It pretends to be able to deal with any issue, but it has its conventions and fashions and fails sometimes to convey the full scope of our mental world.

In *Soulèvements*, however, each work finds its place not only in terms of meaning but also in terms of sensitive spatial presence. The whole space is used, so that the eye is attracted everywhere, even up to the ceiling, while several soundtracks enhance the visual effects.

Lebel had an exceptionally auspicious start in the world of art and culture. During World War II his family emigrated from Paris to New York. His father,

Robert Lebel, was an auctioneer and an enlightened collector, and he was close to the Surrealist group that had settled in New York; he published the first monograph on Marcel Duchamp. Francis Picabia was a good friend of the family. Little Jean-Jacques was often brought home from school by André Breton.

Lebel spent his childhood on the knees of these agitators and celebrities. Then he decided to join the poets of the Beat generation. He became an artist and writer and attended the first “happenings” in New York in 1953. He subsequently brought the idea to Europe and organized the first happening in Paris in 1960. Since then, in addition to his writings and activities as a visual artist, he has continued to organize happenings, performances, and poetry festivals. He is well known as the initiator of the Polyphonix festival, which, thanks to its very loose and libertarian concept, has been performed on a totally irregular schedule, in the most unexpected places, thus far a total of 64 times.

This little detour through Lebel's biography is necessary to understand the exhibition—its different layers of thought and the interwoven objects. It includes works and objects collected throughout his (and his father's) lives, his own works, works by his friends, and testimonies of artists he admires

and who have inspired him. It is impossible to describe the entire exhibition and its subtle dramaturgy, elaborated by Lebel and the curator Jean de Loisy, but I will try to give a feeling of a few of the most striking and characteristic groupings along the route through which the visitor is conveyed.

Alerted by a collage by Lebel, *Parfum grève générale, bonne odeur* (1960), mixing sex and riots, visitors enter a corridor where they are assailed by posters and images (by artists such as Maximilien Luce and Gustave Doré) of the Paris Commune in 1871, the most radical revolution in Western history. A series of photographs of barricades in 1871, 1944, and 1968—seen as collective installations—reminds the viewer how profound this habit is in French culture; the title of the exhibition is *Soulèvements* (“uprisings”). It is remarkable that in France any serious political contestation still has to be performed in the street, very easily followed by barricades, which are intended to stop (once) the cavalry and (today) armored vehicles. An atmosphere of oppression is created by an installation by Lebel hanging from the ceiling with hundreds of hammers, bags, and mallets called *Montée/Descente André Breton* (1996), calling to mind the craftsmen's social class of Paris, which formed the core of the Revolutionary troops.

At the end of the corridor is an extremely violent red-and-black painting by Kazuo Shiraga, which the artist made with his feet in 1959. Its brutality echoes the Parisian uprisings. It is also a statement about the incredible brainwashing operated

by the American-dominated market to obliterate other artistic achievements. It has taken half a century for Shiraga, who died a few months ago, and the Gutai movement of which he was a part to begin to get the recognition they deserve, as they were contemporary with and consequently overpowered by American Abstract Expressionism. Lebel has always fought against market- and media-oriented art in favor of radically engaged creation.

After this visual shock, Lebel drags the visitor into his personal pantheon. Not the one of Raphael or Ingres with its order and levels, but a muddled conglomeration of portraits, drawings, manuscripts, calligrams, “exquisite corpses,” inscribed stones, et cetera: relics of artists and writers that our generation has praised. As it is a system of references and because each piece refers to a whole body of work, this section appeals mostly to visitors who are knowledgeable about, and concur with, this particular aesthetic and worldview. The most remarkable are a drawing by Charles Baudelaire and four watercolors by Victor Hugo whose formal ambiguities lead to exciting enigmas. The names in Lebel's pantheon include Charles Fourier, Louise Michel, Guillaume Apollinaire, André Breton, Antonin Artaud, Henry Miller, René Char, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, William S. Burroughs, John Giorno, Wifredo Lam, Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, Bernard Heidsieck, François Dufrêne, Robert Filliou, and more. This sort of shrine could become another sanctuary and devotional to the “ancestors” if it were not broken

Jean-Jacques Lebel
Montée/Descente André Breton, 1996
 Mixed media
 Dimensions variable

Kazuo Shiraga
Untitled, 1959
 Oil on canvas
 65 x 52 in. (165.1 x 132.1 cm)

right:
 Jean-Jacques Lebel
Travaux de tranchée, 1985
 Mixed media
 Dimensions variable





Jean-Jacques Lebel
Reliquaire pour un culte de Vénus, 1998–2004
 Mixed media
 Dimensions variable

by the insistent sound of poems about despair by Gherasim Luca.

The juxtaposition of *Philosopher* (1987–89), a Jean Tinguely machine made of scrap metal, a *Mécamask* (1959) by Erró, and a leather Janus Ejagham head from Nigeria with four spectacular spiraling horns show that the most archaic methods are still valid, whatever the context may be.

There is no reason to praise the art of the past just because it is old; rather we must question why it is still sometimes so present and worthy for us today. The exhibition includes some stimulating examples of revivals of ancient art. In a light shaft appears a fountain: a three-dimensional, life-size version of *The Pissing Woman* taken from a tiny 1631 etching by Rembrandt. One of the most striking juxtapositions is the *Flora* (ca. 1591) by Giuseppe Arcimboldo, a female portrait made entirely out of flowers, together with a *Dora Maar* (1983) head by Antonio Saura. The two paintings are quite formally different, but their proximity and similar size compels the attention. The dual focus conveyed by Arcimboldo on the general and the detailed requires the viewer to consider the chromatic balance Saura achieves with his violent brushwork. It becomes apparent that *Flora's* beauty is impossible in today's context; rather, it may look almost monstrous, as the accumulation of flowers is more a bouquet than a head. The trick of putting two very different paintings of the same size and subject next to each other is very efficient, as was demonstrated in the traveling 2002–3 exhibition *Matisse Picasso*.

In a room called “The Hallucinatory Perception” one is stared at by dozens of eyes that have

been opened to foreign worlds by all sorts of drugs: the opium of Picabia, the mescaline of Henri Michaux, the psilocybin of Lebel, and more. The eyes dance and twirl around, unexpected shapes pop up, and new horizons open. It is a crucial issue for modern art that has never yet been directly addressed in an exhibition.

Like another barricade, a gigantic wall made entirely of shells from World War I stands in the way at one point. Anyone who is familiar with French flea markets knows these copper shells that were engraved and embossed by soldiers in the trenches during long days of inactivity, then later brought home to be used as vases. It is incredible evidence of the absurdity of that war that soldiers of both sides fabricated these pieces out of the most available material, before and after being forced to hurl them against each other. This mixing of high and low art occurs constantly in the exhibition. Nothing here is part of a specialized category, but rather a conveyor of pure visual feelings, with endless references to popular art, naive art, art brut, advertising, et cetera. It is a world of visual connections where a network of associations always opens up to something else, as in Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the “rhizome.”

Next to these relics of the war, a poster saying “L'irregardable” (“the unlookable,” loosely translated) points to the door to a small room housing two sexually humiliating photographs of the Abu Ghraib prison together with a painting mocking Hitler (*Der Popstar* [1991] by Blalla W. Hallmann), showing that the fight against torture and sadistic impulses must be constant.

As it is usual to connect Dada to World War I, pieces by the agitators of this movement are shown just after the wall of shells. Most of them are represented by drawings. A preeminence is given to Picabia, with major pieces shown next to Lebel's collage *Mon coeur ne bat que pour Picabia* (1962), a woman holding an engine near her cheek. Marcel Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* (1914 / ca. 1921) hangs perpendicular to the wall as if standing on it, and Dada pamphlets and manifestos are hanging crookedly because they don't fit in an orthogonal order.

Not only politics, but also sex, is ever-present in the exhibition. There is an incredible profusion of erotic and pornographic works; the most extreme examples are by George Grosz. Their transgressive power is questionable today, given the profusion of marketed pornography in the media and advertising and contemporary moral conformism. Lebel's answer is in the quantity of sexual images combined in his *Reliquaire pour un culte de Vénus* (1998–2004), where in an Arcimboldeque way thousands of nudes and sexes are building up an image or a word in an ever revived version (there have been 30 already) or in his video films *Les avatars de Vénus* (2007) where nudes—some pornographic, some extracted from artistic masterpieces—are melting and morphing into each other.

None of the usual categories of art or aesthetics apply to this exhibition. It is a personal and biographical—as well as political and aesthetic—narrative statement. The path followed is one of friendship, reflecting a rhizomatic network of artistic creators who have similar aims. Although a few examples exist, like Peter Greenaway's 1992 exhibition *100 Objects to Represent the World* at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Hofburg Imperial Palace Vienna, *Soulèvements* inaugurates a new type of montage show where high and low, past and present, premodern and modern are brought together and assembled into a hybrid visual language that conveys something of the human condition today.



Other Ideas, installation view, showing works by Robert Huot, Neil Jenney, Robert Bücker, Hans Haacke, Walter De Maria, David Prentice, Cecile Abish, Thomas Shannon, Royce Dendler, and Sam Gilliam

BACK IN THE DAY



FORM AND PROTOPOLITICS: ON *OTHER IDEAS*

Julian Myers

Samuel J. Wagstaff's career as a curator lasted just a decade. He was hired by the Wadsworth Atheneum as curator of paintings, prints, and drawings in October 1961, and resigned from his position as curator of contemporary art at the Detroit Institute of Arts in November 1971, when he left, under a dark cloud and with a new inheritance, for New York City.¹ Yet his outsized accomplishments belie the brevity of his career. With the Wadsworth's *American Paintings and Sculpture from Connecticut Collections* (1962), Wagstaff was the first to show American Pop art in a museum. He was the first to show Tony Smith, in the ur-minimalist exhibition *Black, White and Gray*.² And it was Wagstaff's 1967 interview that yielded Smith's inspired riff on taking his students driving on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike.³

Wagstaff's move to Detroit in 1968 offered the buttoned-up Yalie ("He looks like the recruiter for an Eastern prep school," wrote a journalist in 1969) opportunity and context to expand his horizons, and to radicalize.⁴ Over the next three years he shed his "immaculate \$200 suit," grew his hair long, and experimented with drugs and sex.⁵ And he engaged a charged and confrontational run of exhibitions—*Other Ideas* (1969), *Robert Morris* (1970), and *Michael Heizer: Photographic and Actual Work* (1971)⁶—remarkable because it played out not in a private gallery or modern museum, but in a publicly funded city museum with an encyclopedic art collection.

Other Ideas was his first exhibition in Detroit, and his statement of intent. As in Leo Steinberg's 1972 essay "Other Criteria," the "other" of his title is meant to condense an opposition toward a perceived modernist orthodoxy—against which the exhibition aimed nevertheless to measure itself. More than one newspaper described its 34 artists, most of them in their 20s, as anti-traditionalists, an epithet no doubt borrowed from the museum's press release and public service announcements.⁷ Another quoted Wagstaff as saying the show

1. Catherine S. Gaines, "A Finding Aid to the Samuel J. Wagstaff Papers, circa 1932–1985, in the Archives of American Art," Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1989.

2. See James Meyer, "Introduction to the 'Minimal' 1: 'Black, White and Gray,'" *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001: 76–81

3. Samuel Wagstaff, "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum*, December 1966: 18.

4. Robert Kraus, "Clunk! Tap! Dig! The Museum Braces for Modern Art," *Detroit Free Press*, c. September 1969. "Other Ideas" Exhibition Archive, Detroit Institute of Arts. [Henceforth, "Archive."] Thanks to Head Librarian Maria Ketcham and Curator of Contemporary Art Becky Hart for their assistance.

5. *Ibid.*

6. See Robert Morris, *Washington DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, in association with the Detroit Institute of Arts, 1969, and Michael Heizer: Actual Size*, Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1971. For a historical account of the Heizer exhibition, see my dissertation: *No-Places: Earthworks and Urbanism circa 1970*, University of California, Berkeley, 2006.

7. Public Service Announcements, September 1969. Archive, op. cit.

8. Staff Writer, "Women Today," *The Daily Tribune*, September 9, 1969: 6; Charles Manos, "Wonderland of Art Makes You Wonder," *Detroit News*, September 10, 1969; Jean Sprain Wilson, "Or . . . This Is Art? Carnival of Fun at the Institute," *Detroit Free Press*, September 11, 1969. Archive, op. cit.

9. Public Service Announcements. Archive, op. cit.

10. "The visual arts at the moment seem to hover at a crossroad that may well turn out to be two roads to one place, though they appear to have come from two sources: art as idea and art as action." Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International*, February 1968, as quoted in Lippard, ed. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997, 43.

11. The phrase "life-style" originated in early 20th-century psychology, specifically the writings of Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler. I use the word in a sense dating to 1961, when it meant more broadly the habits, tastes, "ideas," and "attitudes" that constitute the mode of living of an individual or group. "Lifestyle," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2009.

12. William Tall, "The New Generation Artist: What's He Doing Now?" *Detroit Free Press*, c. September 1969. Archive, op. cit.

13. Wilson, op. cit.

14. Joy Hakanson, "Youth and Grand-Dada," *Detroit News*, September 21, 1969. Archive, op. cit.

15. Al Blanchard, "Live Art That Crawls," *Detroit News*, October 10, 1969. Archive, op. cit.

16. Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," in Sohnya Sayres, et al., eds. *The 60s Without Apology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984: 190. Jameson describes "the discovery, within a hitherto antagonistic and "transparent" political praxis, of the opacity of the Institution itself as the radically transindividual, with its own inner dynamic and laws, which are not those of human action or intention."

was "a host of destructions as far as traditional uses of traditional art forms and materials are concerned."⁸ One radio promotion went so far as to declare, somewhat comically, "Even the museum predicted outrage. See why."⁹

In the place of those forms and materials would now be "ideas."¹⁰ Something of a period term in 1969, this stood for the irruption of processes, statements, instructions, obsessions, or engagements into a space where works were once merely to be looked at. Harald Szeemann's "attitudes"—as in his 1969 exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*—was a variation on this theme: Art would now be concomitant with a new cultural emphasis on "life-style."¹¹ Yet, to paraphrase *Art-Language's* mischievous response to the notion of a "dematerialized" art, "all the art-works (ideas) were, with few exceptions, art-objects"—albeit art-objects in funky ontic states. In the words of one reviewer, the exhibition presented a "curious self-contradicting array of monotonous and mundane things so indistinct you want to call them non-object object art."¹²

Despite the presence of a few more or less familiar New Yorkers—Carl Andre, Jo Baer, and Dan Flavin among them—the exhibition presents us today with a kind of Burgess Shale of art, a rich and diverse fossil field of dissident, carnivalesque, conceptual, and nihilistic post-minimalisms. William Dutterer's metallic painting *Barrier* (1969) squared modernist color fields with Andy Warhol and Martial Raysse; Georg Ettl poured dirt into transparent acrylic forms, or balanced them atop concrete blocks (*Heptagon with Mound* and *Cube on Concrete*, both 1969). Charles Santon covered expensive marble stairs with a prophylactic wooden frame (*Untitled*, 1969) and placed a 47-foot neon tube in the sculpture court (*Untitled*, 1969), while Susan Deming presented "a black silk curtain strung from the ceiling" with "pockets and pouches" (*Wall Reversible*, 1969) and a "striped sleeve" that could be stretched and tugged by audience members (*40' Reversible*, 1969).¹³ Tinguely-esque sculptor-inventor Thomas Shannon constructed a "marvelous junk airplane that [was] triggered by a fish swimming through an electronic eye."¹⁴ A critic wrote that the fish went belly up just a couple of days into the exhibition, which prematurely stopped the machine's wing from flapping.¹⁵

Photographs of the installation demonstrate the central role of constructions, mounds, hangings, and boxes in the scene of exhibition. One might compare the show's rickety assemblages of quotidian materials to the constructions shown in photographs of the Soviet *Second Spring Exhibition* of the Society of Young Artists in 1921: Here, again, is sculpture trying to jump out of its own skin. And yet in both cases the works hold tight to sculpture's ability to expose and defy the effects of gravity, and to make visible its precarious being-in-the-world. Never has "the opacity of the Institution"¹⁶ been more palpable: Recalling Vladimir Tatlin's counter-reliefs, Sam Gilliam's sagging, unsupported canvases put vivid Expressionist color fields into a "real space"

nevertheless dominated by the cool modernist architecture of the recently expanded South Wing (*Relative*, *Combustion*, and *Swing Sketch III*, all 1969).¹⁷ Rope, rubber, fiberglass, mud, and plywood square off against institutional parquet and marble floors, and track lighting.¹⁸

Staking out floor space beneath Gilliam's paintings is Lynda Benglis's *Planet* (1969). A 40-foot abstract pour of colorful, congealed latex, the work détourned Jackson Pollock's drip technique by resisting his "moment of truth," the resolution of the painting by the shifting of its orientation from horizontal surface to vertical picture. One aspect of the journalistic description of this work strikes a dissonant note: *Planet* is called a "rubber rug,"¹⁹ which, alongside Deming's "curtain" and "sleeve," deftly relegates the women in the exhibition to the domestic sphere. In contrast, female minimalist Jo Baer was mistakenly called "Joe" and included among "men such as Flavin" who are "well known nationally."²⁰



Other Ideas, installation view, showing work by Sam Gilliam in the background

Literalizing their vulnerability, several works were damaged over the exhibition's duration, falling prey to flaws in construction or too-rough "participation." Ettl's plastic heptagon split, spilling dirt on the floor; Royce Dendler's motorized, rideable sculptures (*Jossle* and *Up Down Back and Forth Turning*, both 1969) broke down. Neil Jenney's untitled 1968 wall sculpture, composed of 12 felt-covered aluminum rods twisted to create a drawing in space, held up, but his floor piece—a decaying construction consisting of "newspaper, plaster, apples, cashew nuts, wood, silver foil, plastic containers, light bulbs, [and a] soup bowl"²¹—attracted a "living system," an infestation of cockroaches, to the otherwise antiseptic museum.²²

To be "other," that is, meant dramatizing not only tactile participation, but also the possibility that an artwork might be exhausted in or destroyed by the conditions of its exhibition—that it must be radically, even ruthlessly, disposable. "Impermanence is the one characteristic that comes closest to defining the new aesthetic," acknowledged one critic.²³ Contingency and obsolescence were, in *Other Ideas*, two sides of the same coin: If participation is

17. Designed by architects Harley Ellington, Cowin, and Stirton, with the assistance of Gunnar Birkerts, the South Wing renovation was completed in 1966. See Jeffrey Abt, *A Museum on the Verge: A Socioeconomic History of the Detroit Institute of Arts 1882–2000*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001: 153–66. The renovation, which incorporated a new gallery for African art, was seen by some as "a compensation to Africa and to her displaced people here in the United States." The design, however, iterated a monolithic late modernism.

18. Introduced to the commercial market in 1964, track lighting was by 1969 ubiquitous in both commercial and museum spaces, though not yet in residences; it would have signified publicness, novelty, and modernity.

19. Manos, Archive op. cit.

20. Hakanson, "Here's Mud . . ." Archive op. cit.

22. Blanchard, Archive op. cit.

23. Hakanson, "Here's Mud . . ." Archive op. cit.

24. Fredric Jameson, "Foreword," in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984: xx.

25. Letter to Samuel Wagstaff, dated January 18, 1969; Sam Wagstaff Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

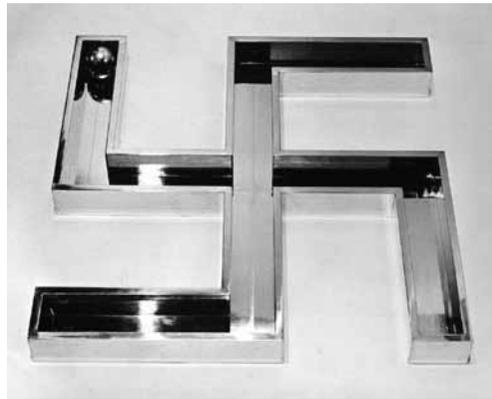
26. De Maria uses this phrase in an undated letter sent to Samuel Wagstaff in 1969. After a long passage regarding the exhibition of *Museum Piece* in Chicago during the protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, De Maria wrote: "I would say that it was a good . . . right coincidence . . . that *Museum Piece* was in Public View [sic] right up to two weeks before the election. I hope that the country never moves that close to Fascism again. I hope that *Museum Piece* can maintain its double identity as symbol and abstract shape." Sam Wagstaff Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

27. Kenneth Anger, quoted in *Canyon Cinema, Catalog 5*. (San Francisco: Canyon Cinema, 1982): 2. In 1966 Roger Corman would stage the famous biker funeral of *Wild Angels* beneath a swastika banner.

sometimes figured in the exhibition as mechanistic afterimage, in leisure, of the forms of Taylorized factory labor—moving objects from place to place, pulling cords and cables, riding machines—changeability was by comparison to be a virtue with an almost ethical force, even as it mirrored logics of consumption in an emergent late capitalism. ("The dynamic of perpetual change is . . . not some alien rhythm within capital," writes Fredric Jameson, "but rather is the very 'permanent revolution' of capitalist production itself.")²⁴ Glued inside an unmarked, folded piece of corrugated cardboard, the catalogue for *Other Ideas* wore this raw disposability, and changeability, on its sleeve.

Walter De Maria's *Museum Piece* (1966) was included in the exhibition—the confrontational work was in Wagstaff's personal collection at the time—and acted out, if critically, an older and more fetishistic form of objecthood. Certainly the artist unambiguously hoped the work would last: "I'm

Walter De Maria
Museum Piece, 1966
Aluminum
4 x 36 x 36 in. (10.2 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York, 73.2034



glad that it is yours," he wrote to the curator. "I hope it has a long history . . . I mean stays alive."²⁵ The work joined the simple geometry and manufactured surfaces of minimalism to a fraught symbol—the Nazi swastika—to create an object with what the artist described as a "double identity," an irresolvable tension between abstract shape and symbol.²⁶ De Maria also intended to create a unity between apparently contradicting elements: not just abstract sculpture versus Nazi insignia, but the control of Minimalist art versus the wildness of biker culture (which had recently adopted Wehrmacht dress and symbolism). With its sexually ambiguous bikers sporting Nazi gear, Kenneth Anger's 1964 film *Scorpio Rising* might have added to the swastika's possible associations; there it stood not only for bikers and Nazis, but also for perversion, homosexuality, and sadism. The gleaming steel of *Museum Piece* might have "read" in this way too, as a reference to the polished metal surfaces of Donald Judd's sculptures and to Anger's "Thanatos in chrome and black leather and bursting jeans."²⁷

Calling for our "participation," the work sets tensions into play—between aesthetic absorption and historical memory, between participation and discomfort, between culture and subculture. The coincidence of form and symbol ensures that neither form nor symbol can be comfortably or exclusively readable as such, and interaction cannot be enjoyed in any uncomplicated way. *Museum Piece*'s title also draws ambiguous attention to the work's context, both consigning its symbol to history and prompting the viewer to consider the kinds of "play" that the museum allows. Setting up an intolerable, disruptive interference among possible readings, meaning lies in the work's negative gesture, in a radical unintelligibility.²⁸

Whether unintelligibility makes for good or effective politics, however, is another question; indeed the show's carnivalesque aspect seems woefully disconnected from its historical moment (not least the paroxysms of deindustrialization in Detroit), except perhaps in a brittle and general elation at a sudden breakup, or at least realignment, of old forms. In this regard perhaps a final case, that of Hans Haacke, will be instructive. *Other Ideas* included three works by the German artist: *Condensation Wall* (1967), *Wave* (1965), and *Blue Sail* (1964–65). From the temperature of the room (as it changed, water condensed inside the clear, airtight Plexiglas of *Condensation Wall*), to the activity of visitors and the effect of gravity (visitors could physically move *Wave*, a long, thin, clear, hanging Plexiglas form partly full of water), to the air stirred by a small fan that held aloft a piece of silk (*Blue Sail* is the blur we see in the installation view), a specific, visible contingency was at the center of each contained "system," and indeed generated that system's form.²⁹ If we measure these pieces against what happened next for Haacke's practice—the move from sensitive, unstable, indeterminate works to the verities of socioeconomic data collection and research, and the embrace of leftist truth-telling—we can see not only that in the 1970s all the old bills came due, but that this romance of participation and "free play" might have been, if not truly resistant, then at least in some way and for some of its actors, protopolitical.

28. The title of the piece may also suggest that De Maria was nervous that, without the context of art, the form might collapse into its "symbolic" function. *Star*, made subsequently to *Museum Piece*, similarly seems like a calculated effort to frame and regulate the first work's meaning after its controversial showings in the late 1960s.

29. See Hans Haacke, untitled statement, in Peter Selz, *Directions in Kinetic Sculpture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966): 37, as reprinted in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 872.

ASSESSMENTS

★

WHAT KEEPS MANKIND ALIVE?

— THE 11TH INTERNATIONAL ISTANBUL BIENNIAL

GANG OF FOUR

Jessica Morgan

Considering that it was curated by four people (albeit a collective that had been working together since 1999), the 11th International Istanbul Biennial had a remarkably cohesive—one could even say individual—voice. The Croatian collective What, How, and for Whom chose a line from Bertolt Brecht’s *Three-penny Opera*—*What Keeps Mankind Alive?*, written with Kurt Weill and Elisabeth Hauptmann—as the defining banner under which to bring together the artists selected. Relatively few of the works explicitly addressed Brecht or Berlin cabaret, but the materialist bent of the theme was clearly prioritized, and the unity of the curatorial voice could in part be explained by the didacticism of the exhibition’s tone. A quick overview suggested several commonalities among the artists selected. Obscurity: many of them were overlooked or relatively unknown. Geography: the vast majority were based in Eastern Europe or the Middle East. Materiality: many of them worked with relatively humble materials, such as paper and collage.

Statistics figured predominantly both in the catalogue and at the extraordinarily flourish-free press conference. The curators broke down and summarized the exhibition in percentages and numbers: 124 works by 70 artists, 26 percent from Eastern Europe, 39 percent from the Middle East, and so on. The four female curators Ivet Curlin, Ana Devic, Natasa Ilic, and Sabina Sabolovic claimed not to have used these statistics as quotas to deter-

mine the exhibition’s content, with the exception of the number of women artists featured: 30, versus 32 men. But there was clearly a correlation between the thematic interest in the effect of the material economy on the human condition and the transparency implied by foregrounding statistics in a manner more commonly associated with economic or social studies. Presumably, since the figures were published by the producers of the material being accounted for, they were satisfying to the curators—numbers they could live with, so to speak. But the manner of their presentation raised questions. Their inclusion in printed form suggested an artistic critique such as that of the Guerrilla Girls, or documentation by an independent NGO, but their self-published status undermined the suggestion of a third-party review. To list the breakdown in such a manner offered, contradictorily, both a spoof of the politically correct questioning of biennial culture and a self-congratulatory pat on the back—neither of which seemed to have been intended by the curators, who, when questioned about it, stated that they were simply aiming to be transparent.

Despite the denial that there had been a quota system, clearly a great deal of research and effort had gone into identifying artists from outside the usual biennial circuit. Many of them, it was safe to say, were unfamiliar even to the most hardworking curator. But while this sort of newness offers an admirable challenge to perceived notions of history and status quo, it does not always make for a winning exhibition, and questions remained as to why these particular artists and regions had been selected, and what the consequent statistics really meant. What lay behind the numbers?

Looking to the prevalent themes, then: One was an emphasis on work us-

ing statistics, graphs, and systems of accounting to make unusual correlations between these dry methodologies and the human condition. Perhaps most striking in this respect was the work of the now-deceased Berlin-based artist KP Brehmer, whose series of drawings calculating the “soul and feelings” of the worker (based on psychologist Rexford B. Hersey’s criteria) made for the unlikely coming-together of austere abstraction in the form of diagrams with the conventionally unattainable accounting of the soul. A sweeping black brushstroke was at once a painterly gesture and a graph of sales and profit. Unfortunately Brehmer’s work was an exception; other examples, such as the maps of Bureau d’études, the geographic studies of Société Réaliste, and even the more personalized charts by Ioana Nemes mapping her daily moods, were about as engrossing as such formulaic numerics and statistics can be. Fatigue set in fairly quickly and after a while, encountering yet another work full of numbers or pie charts elicited exasperation rather than emotional effect or conveyance of information. The curators’ aim, presumably to draw on the quantifiability of emotional as well as economic health, was partially defeated.

Predictably, perhaps, many works referred back to moments of political utopia, change, or tension in the former Eastern Bloc. Several reflected a surprisingly naive nostalgia for eras or doctrines that have subsequently been revealed as anything but the noble causes they appeared to be in their day. Among those dealing with images of the past was the Tashkent, Uzbekistan-based Vyacheslav Akhunov, whose collages revealed part of what appeared to be a massive archive of Soviet imagery. Works from the Middle East focused on the political tensions of past and present. Some of the best artists—Rabih

Mroué, Doa Aly, and Nilbar Gures, for instance—were unfortunately served badly by the selection of their works. But of great interest was the display of posters from Beirut's civil war, an amassing of graphic art that convincingly stretched the borders of what is considered art, especially in the context of an otherwise very conventional exhibition in regard to the nature of the work shown and its display. While the works from the former Eastern Bloc appeared to look back in a manner largely unconnected to the present day, many of those from the Middle East were vigorously engaged with past events through the potential offered by the present and future—an effect perhaps of both the political spotlight on the region and the accompanying interest in art from that area.

Despite the somewhat dry tone of the exhibition, which was exaggerated by the evenly spaced and equally distributed installation, preventing any form of overlap or curatorially produced dialogue, one theme had extraordinary resonance: the complex individual state of being. Each of the three sites (Antrepo, a former tobacco warehouse, and the now-abandoned Feriköy Greek School) contained works by artists of various generations and geographic locations that examined the physical—gendered, performative, behavioral—effects of an economic reality on those subjected to it. In opposition to the didactic, impersonal accounting of the documentary-based works, these pieces presented the bodily, physical, human face of material life. One highlight was the photographic work of Michel Journiac, in particular a Cindy Sherman-esque project in which he examines bourgeois life by adopting the physically loaded being of his parents and others—their dress, their expression, their stances. Also extraordinary was a video piece by the Croatian artist Igor Grubic, who

had worked with choreographers to re-create the movements of the violent attacks by citizens against the first gay pride celebrations in Belgrade (2001) and Zagreb (2002). Located in the dim basement of what was undoubtedly the best venue of the exhibition, the Greek school, one screen showed recordings of the horrific violence, and the adjacent screen showed the public reenactments. Simultaneously suggesting catharsis (some of the dancers had participated in the original celebrations) and bodily suppression, the piece was emblematic of the complex manner in which politics and economics are embedded in physicality and action.

Despite these remarkable works, the biennial as a whole failed to rise to the occasion and left one with the feeling of having seen a small exhibition stretched too far. Perhaps unused to working on this scale, the curators did not create the necessary rhythms—the requisite mixture of showstoppers and quiet gems. Instead, the fairness and equity of their approach suggested compromise and democratic decision making—often a pitfall of a collectively curated exhibition—rather than the inspired authorship of an individual.

THOROUGHLY POLITICAL

Ulrike Groos

My first-ever trip to Istanbul was in September 2009 to attend the 11th International Istanbul Biennial. Istanbul, I can now personally attest, is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and of the vast number of biennials worldwide, this one is among the old-

est and richest in tradition. It has had many notable curators in the past, and the careers of several important artists have taken off from here.

The title of the biennial—*What Keeps Mankind Alive?* (taken from the title of a song Bertolt Brecht wrote with Elisabeth Hauptmann and Kurt Weill in 1928 for *The Threepenny Opera*)—was a surprise. Were we to become witnesses of the German class struggle enacted at a Turkish biennial?

The show's self-promotion on the streets of the city was certainly militant: Posters and flags with black and red retro-revolutionary lettering advertised the three venues. For the first time this year, these included a onetime Greek school in addition to the familiar former customs house at Antrepo 3 on the Bosphorus and a disused tobacco factory.

The four-woman team WHW—What, How, and for Whom—curated the exhibition. A conceptual principle for the organizers seemed to be the posing of questions, and they had invited 70 participating artists, primarily from Eastern Europe, Turkey, and the Near East, to give answers.

I was put off, unfortunately, by the moral zeal and solemnity with which radically political demands were formulated and also by the stress on art's critical potential. Off-putting as well were the curators' idolization of Brecht's political position and their nostalgic idealization of Communism as a basis for the optimal form of government. As I walked around, therefore, I focused on individual works rather than on the didactic and austere curatorial statements that introduced or accompanied the exhibition's various stations and venues.

A highly positive feature of the exhibition was that the artists evidently made do with—perhaps *had* to make do with—relatively slender budgets. The works boasted neither expensive materials nor excessive dimensions, yet

they often achieved extremely impressive effects and communicated substantial content with the most minimal of means.

It was a thoroughly political biennial. Themes such as poverty, war, nationalism, and xenophobia were dealt with more personally and affectively, with more differentiation and urgency, and above all more playfully and with more humor than is possible in the daily overkill of the news media.

Most of the artists were completely new to me, so there was much to discover. The overall choice and presentation of works was convincing. More readily intelligible than the curators' (rather heavy-handed treatment of) political concepts was their linking of different generations of artists, with contributions from the 1960s and 1970s forming a lucid bridge to the present.

The diagrammatic works of the German painter, illustrator, and filmmaker KP Brehmer, who died in Hamburg in 1997, were on view at all three venues and served as a kind of leitmotif. Working in the 1970s from maps and statistics related to the business and social spheres, Brehmer gave visual expression to his own interpretations of political developments. In the context of this biennial he was both a historical rediscovery and an important benchmark, since numbers, statistics, display boards, and wall charts also found their way into numerous works by many younger artists.

Mladen Stilinic's *Nobody Wants to See* (2009) vividly showed how statistics can become tangible objects. He had the number 3 printed 600,000,000 times on white paper, which he stacked in blocks. Minimal and formally severe, the work gave striking visual expression to the unjust distribution of wealth in the world today; the globe's three richest inhabitants own as much as its 600,000,000 poorest.

The conceptual text-picture analyses made in the 1970s by the Turkish artist Cengiz Cekil (born in 1945), on the other hand, addressed the tensions of the 1970s before the military putsch of 1980 and the socioeconomic developments of the subsequent decade.

An outstanding discovery for me was the French artist Michel Journiac (1943–1995), who, in his series of photographs from 1972, *Hommage à Freud*, ran through all the roles a housewife ever plays as well as those of his own mother and father.

Yüksel Arslan (born in 1933 in Istanbul), who has lived in Parisian exile for several decades, received just recognition for the first time with his works from the 1950s, and also with his *Capital* (1973–74) series of paintings and drawings, inspired by the writings of Karl Marx. Works from the latter group were shown both at the biennale and in a big solo retrospective at the Santralistanbul Cultural Center.

The biennial also included numerous films and videos. There is always a risk of overtaxing visitors at big group exhibitions and dulling their receptivity for these supposedly more time-consuming contributions. I appreciated them very much, however, as they were consistently of excellent quality and included many positive surprises. Each artist was much more than a mere chronicler, a simple documenter. Rather, all offered thoughtful analysis and a creative approach to the subject at hand, enhancing and supplementing it through artistic interventions—alienation effects such as song or dance inserts, or maskings. Hence even the longer films invited one to linger. I saw many younger visitors watching the films in their full duration with patience and interest.

A number of artist collectives also took part in the biennale. Notable among them was the activist group Chto delat (which translates to “What

Is to Be Done?”), presenting situations from Russian society as musical comedies. A representative of the group stood nearby as the works were being performed, explaining them to every interested visitor. He was clearly suffering from a shortage of sleep, but it did not diminish his enthusiasm in the least.

The many political and feminist works by women artists were also outstanding. Jumana Emil Abboud's serene, poetic film *Smuggling Lemons* (2006) explored the reality of crossing the border between Jerusalem and Ramallah; the artist smuggled lemons from a large lemon tree and filmed herself making the journey. Canan Senol's cartoon video *Exemplary* (2009), skillfully drawn in the style of Osman miniatures, playfully and humorously described typical situations Turkish women find themselves in today.

Displaying as it did the strengths and potential of art, the Istanbul Biennial could leave no one unmoved. Art here was not some easy-to-consume, entertaining recreational activity, but rather a chance to see and to think differently about political reality, social coldness, and religious defamation—and, hopefully, to take a look at one's own actions and beliefs in a new light.

Translated from the German by Christopher Jenkin-Jones

CONCEAL AND REVEAL

Jill Winder

The 11th International Istanbul Biennial, which took its title *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* from Bertolt Brecht's 1928 *Threepenny Opera*, did something that precious few large-scale contemporary

art exhibitions today do with any sincerity: It offered a serious proposition, in this case about explicit political engagement through artistic practice. The curators, the collective What, How, and for Whom (WHW), composed of Ivet Curlin, Ana Devic, Natasa Ilic, and Sabina Sabolovic, spelled out their proposition in the catalogue text: “Though it shows many different things, the exhibition explicitly states what it desires to ‘show’: that a just world order and distribution of economic goods and services is viable and absolutely vital—and that communism is still the only name for that desirable project.” There are two claims in this statement. The first points to the current globalized order and its inherent inequalities, and the ways they might be countered through creative operations that reveal power structures, inject transparency where elision reigns, and demand an accounting of costs and consequences. The other, far more controversial and abstract, claim insists that another set of conditions is possible. Despite the weaknesses of this biennial undertaking, this effort nonetheless offers both something to think about and a proposition or claim through which the exhibited works can be viewed.

In a 1936 essay on the work of Brecht, Walter Benjamin listed “transparency” as one of the conditions of epic theatre. He went on to explain that “such transparency is the exact opposite of ‘simplicity’; it presupposes genuine artistic intelligence and skill in the producer.”¹ Much has been said about the level of transparency with which WHW tried to infuse its curatorial work. It was an interesting, even provocative, idea to make public the machinations and economics of the exhibition’s organization and related costs through a set of visually engaging charts and diagrams designed by Dejan Krsic, a frequent WHW collaborator, who was also responsible for the arresting catalogue

and visual materials. This information, found in the exhibition catalogue, revealed the remarkable diversity of the participating artists in terms of their geographic distribution (countries of origin were predominantly non-Western), their ages (a mix of generations), and gallery representation (which could be read as a measure of relative prominence). It also listed the curators’ fees, the exhibition expenses, and the amount of corporate money involved. Many interesting relationships were revealed as well as some striking numbers, for instance an almost-equal balance of men and women among the exhibited artists. But transparency is a double-edged sword, and in revealing some things, the absence of other crucial considerations can be exposed. As the saying goes, the devil is in the details, in this case a particular detail: the fact that none of the artists were paid an honorarium or fee for their participation. This seems a striking omission in a project with commitments to, among other things, the creation of a world with a Brechtian sense of economic justice, which most certainly includes artists.

More interesting is how some of the best pieces in the exhibition engaged with the notion of transparency, or making things visible, as a political demand. Take for example the work of KP Brehmer (1938–1997), whose mode of “visualizing statistics” transformed raw data not only to make it visible but also to expose its implications—that is to say, what the statistics meant for the individual living in the world. The clearest example of this method may be *Soul and Feelings of the Worker* (1978/80). Here the artist took inspiration from psychologist Rexford B. Hersey’s studies on the state of mind of assembly-line workers, and created a color chart measuring seemingly impossible-to-quantify things such as shifting emotions. Another approach to a certain demand for transparency is

found in the work of the architectural collective decolonizingps (Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti, and Eyal Weizman), whose installation *Returns* (2009) imagines a scenario in which structures built during the Israeli occupation of Palestine (such as settlements and military installations) might, through a “strategy of subversion,” be transformed upon Israeli withdrawal from remnants of military and disciplinary control into spaces for housing and other basic necessities. The real potential of this approach is that it calls not for reuse but rather for a metamorphosis of the existing structures that does not deny their original designations. Another example worth mentioning is Marko Peljhan’s *Territories 1995* (2006–9), a piece grounded in a remarkable body of research the artist conducted in an attempt to trace the history of troop movements and the role of military communications around the time of the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995. The project, shown in the biennial as a two-room installation with an enormous amount of research documentation on view, is part of an attempt, in the artist’s words, “to understand and reveal the role of tactical and strategic communications and their record in the execution of modern world genocide.”²

The work of Chto delat, a collective of artists, critics, philosophers, and writers based in Russia, is an exemplar of transparency as a mode of laying things bare and revealing their emptiness, while touching upon what remains. This brings us back, then, to the second claim that WHW aimed to advance through their exhibition, that of the possibility of envisioning a different world. Chto delat’s contribution to the show was a multipart installation that included three videos, a wall piece (a kind of visual timeline), and a newspaper. In his newspaper text, Chto delat member Dmitry Vilensky touches upon

the search for a method that would allow the mixing of disparate elements, including “reactionary form and radical content,” an attempt particularly apparent in *Perestroika-Songspiel—The Victory Over the Coup* (2008), where a kind of post-Brechtian mix of the tragic chorus and activist theater gives “voice” to key protagonists in perestroika such as a democrat, a businessman, a nationalist, and a revolutionary. The work parodies the failures of that project of reform but retains fidelity to the idea of communism. If *Perestroika-Songspiel* and *The Chronicles of Perestroika* (2008–9) suggest how a different version of perestroika in the Soviet Union might have played out, the wall drawing goes further, concluding its timeline of key points in the reform experiment with a jarring fictional counter-history. Thus, below a list of “What Has Happened” we find “What Might Have Happened,” chronicling an alternative post-1989 trajectory, which includes: “The West undergoes its own version of perestroika. Inspired by the processes underway in a renewed Soviet Union, Western societies carry out a series of radical social-democratic reforms.”

In a new foreword to the English translation of his essay “Of an Obscure Disaster,” first published in French in 1991, Alain Badiou has the following to say about the impact of the revolutions of 1989: “In no way did this death [the fall of the socialist regimes] signify the failure of communism. . . . The political crisis that these collapses bear witness to is a crisis in the West just as much as in the East. It is a general crisis.”³ It is to this “general crisis,” still unresolved (and to a large extent unacknowledged in the West), that this biennial seems to address its unreconstructed hopes for a better version of the world than we have inherited over the past 20 years. This takes us back to the (possible) future via Brecht, and outlines not a set of

prescriptions that would ask us to reinvest Brecht’s political engagement from his time to ours, but rather argues for the continuity of certain critical strategies and hopes, which can be dusted off and repurposed precisely for the conditions of the now.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, “What Is Epic Theatre?” (second version) in *Understanding Brecht*, translated by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998): 16.

2. Marko Peljhan, in *What, How, and for Whom, 11th International Istanbul Biennial The Guide* (Istanbul: Istanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2009): 223.

3. Alain Badiou, *Of an Obscure Disaster*, edited by Ozren Pupovac and Ivana Momcilovic (Maastricht & Zagreb: Jan van Eyck Academie and Arkzin d.o.o., 2009): 5–6.

MORE THAN JUST THEATER

Yilmaz Dziewior

The very title of the 11th International Istanbul Biennial—*What Keeps Mankind Alive?*, borrowed from Bertolt Brecht’s politically motivated *Threepenny Opera*—set an existential note. The Croatian curatorial team What, How, and for Whom (WHW) explicitly declared its allegiance to the ideal (or ideological) use value of cultural production by referencing the confirmed Communist Brecht, whose epic theater aimed at entertaining, but also at helping people see through social structures with a view to changing them.

Hence it was not surprising that the majority of the artists represented in the exhibition explored concrete so-

cial problems and political themes. In his video installation *Democracies* (2009), for instance, Artur Zmijewski shows pictures of demonstrations and other events, ranging from the funeral of the Austrian right-wing populist Jörg Haider to anti-NATO demonstrations in Strasbourg to a Catholic Mass in Warsaw involving homophobic pronouncements. Presented in parallel on multiple monitors, these videos of extreme actions had an almost unreal atmosphere. Other works investigated the relations between fiction and authenticity. In Isil Egrikavuk’s video *Gül* (2008), for example, a young woman tells of her forced marriage and the ensuing domestic violence. In Rabih Mroué’s performative work *I, the Undersigned* (2007), the artist makes a public apology on camera, but his identity and the veracity of his claims remain uncertain, merging fact and fiction into a surreal hybrid.

Most of the strongest contributions, however, were not by young contemporary artists but by newly discovered or rediscovered (from today’s perspective) historical figures, for instance Yüksel Arslan (born in 1933), whose works stand in a sociocritical tradition of painting and drawing, or Cengiz Cekil (born in 1945). Both live in Turkey, and both explore the radical changes that Turkish society has undergone in the modern era. Cekil devotes himself to the post-1970 period. In *Unwritten* (1977), for example, he garbles the lettering of 12 front pages of a Turkish populist daily paper, thus focusing attention on the illustrations. It is not accidental that the work recalls Hans-Peter Feldmann’s 2000 artistic intervention with the Austrian magazine *Profil*, where he applied the same technique to the entire magazine. Feldmann’s *Profil* piece was not in the biennial, but the show did include his *50 Years of a Woman* (1994), a work using private photographs to

follow a woman's life from the early 1950s through the 1990s. The succinct, documentary quality of the pictures has clear affinities with Cekil's *Visual Tracks* (1979), a series of photos showing the artist on his daily way to work at Ege University in Izmir, Turkey.

One of the most surprising works in the exhibition was the film *Step by Step* (1977) by Mohammed Ossama (born in 1954 in Lattakia, Syria), who today lives in Rotterdam and Damascus. With highly atmospheric images, the film deals with the life of the rural population of Syria, which is steeped in religion, nationalism, and poverty. Vyacheslav Akhunov (born in 1948), who lives in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, was a further discovery. His drawings and collages, for instance those involving Lenin portraits, employ an iconography typical of Socialist propaganda. The question marks ending the sentences in his 1976 watercolor series *Doubts* make clear, however, that this is not simplistic adulation, but a skeptical moment. Akhunov provided an illuminating context for younger artists such as David Malkovic, who occasionally utilize a comparable aesthetic.

Not only in the way it selected and juxtaposed its contributions, shifting the focus from a big multinational show to a themed presentation, was the 11th International Istanbul Biennial a meticulously curated exhibition. As with Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun's 9th International Istanbul Biennial, the city and its geographical location underlay the WHW show. Hence the wealth of Turkish artists and, more importantly, representatives from neighboring regions, the Balkans, and the Near and Middle East. Yet another distinctive feature was that it placed greater value than any of its predecessors on a uniform graphic presentation. As with other WHW publications, all typographical issues—from the catalogue and press kits to the

wall texts—were handed over to the WHW-affiliated designer Dejan Krsic. Notable were Krsic's reduction of the graphics to black and red as well as the formal implementation, which was entirely in the tradition of socially aligned Russian Constructivism, the Bauhaus, and Theo van Doesburg's Dutch De Stijl circle. Thus the print-media design of the biennial underpinned the agitational gesture of WHW's Brechtian stance. This held also for the uniformity of the design, which at the formal level gave the whole undertaking a politically agitational "corporate" identity, no less than for the crumpled red handbills strewn on the floor at all three venues.

The gesture of political enlightenment peaked in the exhibition's "Short Guide." There, ruminatively, the breakdown of the budget and the composition of the artists according to age, sex, and origin are disclosed. On the back of the publication, questions are posed pertaining to the event's political added value as well as possible objections. Thus the curators not only expressed a certain distance from the system in which they were operating, but they also disarmed criticism from the Left by dealing in a preemptive manner with all possible "weak" points such as state and institutional involvement. Asking questions, and hence involving visitors, they on the one hand implemented the procedures of Brecht's epic theater. On the other hand, however, enlightenment in concrete issues was not left to the recipient, for all the necessary background details were provided. In this sense, WHW took Brecht only in part seriously, while transferring the ambivalence inherent in his plays to the exhibition concept. Just as Brecht's work cannot be reduced to its political dimension, since its formal innovations also enriched theater history, so too the WHW biennial convinced because of

the overall coherence of its staging. At its best, social alignment and artistic realization interpenetrated in an exceptionally compelling manner.

Translated from the German by Christopher Jenkin-Jones



Michel Journiac
Hommage à Freud, 1972



Zeina Maasri
*Signs of Conflict: Political Posters of
Lebanon's Civil War 1975-90, 2008*



KP Brehmer
Soul and Feelings of a Worker, 1978/80



Vyacheslav Akhunov
Leniniana, 1977-82



Yüksel Arslan
Capital Series, 1970-73

top left:
 Chto delat / What is to be done?
 Mixed media installation including
Perestroika-Songspiel and *The Chronicles of Perestroika, 2008-9*

bottom left:
 Cengiz Cekil
Energy Plates, 1976
Water Heating Tool, 1976
Unwritten, 1977
Diary, 1976
Territory, 1995, 2006-9



decolonizing.ps (Sandi Hilal,
Alessandro Petti, and Eyal Weizman)
Returns, 2009

TYPOLOGIES



THE SOLO SHOW

FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

Rob Bowman

If you read the texts and statements that accompany contemporary exhibitions, from press releases to catalogue essays, it won't take long to find an artist whose work "resists accurate definition" or even "defies categorization entirely." The cynical might view these as evasive tactics on the part of the writer, signs of an inability to get to grips with the subject. But if the frequency of such a broad-brush strategy tells us anything, it is that the first curatorial urge is precisely to try to locate work within its proper category. If, upon reflection, some careful tiptoeing seems appropriate, the desire to define doesn't go away, but ends up translated into noncommittal nontyping, non-categorization.

In defense of this, hedging bets often feels appropriate when boundaries are shifting and disciplines are being crossed. Overdetermination is unhelpful, the curator may say; it shortcuts a process that might make the viewer or reviewer actually think about the work. But curators are less commitment-shy when it comes to self-analysis, to classifying curatorial practices. Perhaps this is a function of a contrasting desire to pin things down in an arena in which "accurate definition" can be viewed as validation of a particular curatorial approach. What might otherwise feel like being pigeonholed can be worn as a badge of individual style or an organizational brand.

The territory is less distinct where artistic and curatorial practices cross over or merge. We might

look at the work of those such as Marcel Broodthaers to understand the development of these hybrid artist-curator practices, and why a solo exhibition might fail to include any of the exhibiting artist's own works at all, in favor of presenting works by other artists. Or why—the flip side of the same coin, perhaps—it might be possible for a collection of objects and ideas to be presented as the work of a single curator-cum-artist, the curated display aspiring to the status of an artwork.

If these muddied, hybrid waters represent the sharp end of curatorial-cum-artistic practices, then the solo show might be viewed as the opposite. Surely any discussion of curatorship ought to find the group show more stimulating, with its multiple ideas, layers, and voices. The solo show by comparison sounds straightforward and declamatory, a vehicle for the artist's voice in the first person singular, unmediated by an underlying commentary or curatorial metatext. "Soloism," then, might seem an unlikely curatorial focus, an odd candidate to top a list of progressive curatorial methodologies. After all, what scope could possibly be afforded an organization or curator that chooses the solo show as a specialism?

As it turns out, if one were forced to describe the activities of Artangel (the organization for which I work) by type alone, the type would probably be the solo project. And, I would argue, though it may sound like a vehicle for singular expression—



Catherine Yass
High Wire, 2008
Film and video installation

privileging the “I” of the artist’s voice above any other—what can in fact emerge from the solo show is something less clearly individually owned or authored, and curatorially more interesting for it. This is partly due to some distinctions we might draw between a *project* and an *exhibition*. A solo project is not formed independently and imposed upon the work, but rather emerges from the work; its form is exactly that of the art it contains. As a result, it does not feel so easy to talk of a typical solo project. Led by an artist’s own practice and ideas, developed in response to specific circumstances of site or situation, such projects are—or should be—as diverse and differently singular as the combination of all these factors can make them.

Furthermore, while the heavily accented curatorial voice can be an overarching presence in academic, themed group shows, there can be greater scope in the solo project for an absence of trajectories and outcomes stated up front. A project may lead somewhere not defined at the beginning. A key process may fail or objectives may shift. It feels less imperative that the final form should be as rigidly preconceived as, say, that of an exhibition with a thesis to illustrate. Because of this, the relationships between the protagonists in the project-making process—artists, curators, producers, participants, fabricators, audiences, passersby, and even the site itself—can be flexible. As well as being located physically in a shared or public space (as Artangel commissions customarily are), the proj-

ect can occupy a fluid space between the various protagonists involved, like the physical equivalent of conversation. It may be multiply owned, possess its own logic, and be more readily adopted by audience or public. The resulting work may be anything but singularly owned by the artist.

This dis-ownership links to an open-endedness—sometimes generously allowed, sometimes caused by a loss of control—that has asserted itself repeatedly on projects I have organized at Artangel since 2007. Ignoring the rules, or having rules somehow ignore you back, expands the possibilities for making and rereading the work and its context. Catherine Yass’s film *High Wire* (2008), developing upon the artist’s interest in relationships between architecture, space, height, and movement, was to show a high-wire walker crossing a steel rope connecting three 90-meter-tall Brutalist tower blocks in Glasgow. For reasons beyond anyone’s control at the time, however, at a point in the course of filming, a sudden narrative shift occurred. The walker retreated from mid-wire to his starting position, and something that had been about control, progression, isolation, and space became instead about vulnerability, loss of control, and psychological and physical change. Roger Hiorns’s conceptual “loss of control” for *Seizure* (2008) deliberately distanced the artist from responsibility for the work’s final form. The plan—to fill a bedsit flat with 90,000 liters of copper sulphate solution and await its crystallization on the walls, ceiling, and floor—did not specify that crystallization would result, nor what it would look like if it did.

The possibility of failure, at some level, planned or not, played strongly in the making of both of these works. Both also serve as reminders of how such projects conflate in various ways the production of a work and the site of its realization. Situation and reaction were visible layers in Yass’s film, just as the physical aspects of Hiorns’s selected building influenced the sculptural object’s form. Projects with strong relationships to site or situation, like these, continue to feel relevant precisely because external factors can variously inform, shape, pervert, and/or enrich them, providing logic and meaning.

Solo projects are not exclusively the preserve of those working in the public realm; projects and project spaces are familiar aspects of most institutions’ programming. From Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall commissions to strands within commercial art

fairs, they feel essential to dynamism. Every fall, for instance, London’s Frieze Art Fair invites artists to respond to the context of the big, white tent precisely through “curated projects.”

Working in formal project spaces, galleries, or art fairs generally involves dealing with a space, site, or context that others before have addressed, whereas public spaces—particularly overlooked or previously unused public spaces—allow curators and artists to avoid developing habits born of repetition, and to ignore or rewrite the rules. Experimental tactics are the only tactics here. An artist can push ideas beyond areas previously explored, both geographically and in terms of practice, and subvert expectations and categorizations.

Far from identifiable as a particular type, then, solo projects turn out quite often to be singularly unique, typical for being atypical, you might say. And if that makes it difficult—too difficult—to categorize them, or the artists that make them, then perhaps that’s a sign of success. Indeed, under these conditions, we should resist entirely the urge to categorize, especially if the only applicable option is “none of the above.”



Roger Hiorns
Seizure, 2008
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

THE KUNSTHALLE FORMAT

Beatrix Ruf

The exhibition *Non-Solo Show, Non-Group Show*, which arose from an invitation made to Ei Arakawa, Kerstin Brätsch, Klara Liden, Carissa Rodriguez, and Nora Schultz for both individual presentations and a collectively developed exhibition, opened at Kunsthalle Zürich in November 2009. The exhibition owes its title to a project by Arakawa, a Japanese artist who lives and works in New York, at the Franco Soffiantino Galerie in Turin in 2008, which was staged in collaboration with Nora Schultz and Henning Bohl. In the curatorial layout for the exhibition at Kunsthalle Zürich, the individual and collective artistic positionings were arranged in parallel, both temporally and spatially, and the corresponding production and representation formats were used as realizations of the test case, superimposition, the obsolete, and the constructively contradictory. The invitation was issued to the five artists with the knowledge that they would involve other artists.

Arakawa invited Nikolas Gambaroff, Nick Mauss, and Schultz (who had already been invited to present an individual project) to work with him. And Brätsch, through her invitation to Adele Röder, introduced to the mix their collaboration on the DAS INSTITUT project.

In their individual works, all eight artists involved in the exhibition were interested in testing the possibilities of the production and meaning of traditional artistic media such as painting, sculpture, photography, reproductive and printing processes, and installations. They share an experimental and improvisational approach to easily accessible, used and prefabricated materials; they play with ideas concerning the self-organization of the collective and the actionist; and they generally adopt a performative approach to both their own works and the handling of materials and spaces. The testing of different historical models for the meaning

of art and works of art in the tradition of the modern avant-garde also plays a role in their work, as does experimentation with the artistic environment as a situation involving a performative model, the experience of zones of individual positionings as collective developments, and facilitation of the involvement of the audience in a way that takes its direction from the process.

Non-Solo Show, Non-Group Show arose as a collective process among the participating artists, incorporating a few existing individual works along with objects, installations, and spatial ensembles created in-situ, which, again, were both individual works and collective productions. The exhibition was based on ideas of temporary concretizations and realizations (and based on scrutinizing the status of the work and the marketability of works), the exploration of philosophical formulations of new forms of commonality (for example by Giorgio Agamben and Simon Critchley), issues surrounding interdisciplinarity, updatings of the happening, and the instability of the representative reality of an exhibition.

Non-Solo Show, Non-Group Show was part of a series that has been staged at Kunsthalle Zürich over the course of recent years. All of the shows in the series have raised questions concerning collective creativity and individual artistic voices in exhibitions *inter alia* in projects initiated by artists, such as *No Ghost Just a Shell* (by Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe in 2002) and *How to Cook a Wolf* (eight exhibitions over the course of 2007–8 by John Kelsey in cooperation with the Kunsthalle), and in



Installation view of
Philippe Parreno, *May* (2009)

the format of the transformed individual show, for example the projects by Philippe Parreno (2009), Liam Gillick (2008), Wade Guyton / Seth Price / Josh Smith / Kelley Walker (2006), and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster (2004).

In the 1990s, and more recently in the context of criticism of public art institutions, doubt has been expressed regarding the credentials of the Kunsthalle and Kunstverein¹ as relevant institutional models. This doubt was intensified by the fact that, in response to the increased attractiveness of contemporary art, motivated in the main by economic and media factors, traditional art museums were turning their attention to the field of contemporary art. The original purpose of the Kunsthalle and Kunstverein as formulated in the 19th century responded to the lack of exhibition opportunities for contemporary artists, given the nonexistence of a gallery system and a public museum landscape that did not represent contemporary and current artistic activity. They were founded by artists and aimed at enlightened citizens, for whom culture also enabled societal self-representation. They were supposed to both fulfill an educational requirement and close the gaps that existed in relation to the representation and marketing of art.

However, despite the fact that traces of these origins can still be found in the excessive production of artist publications by the Kunstvereine and in the enduring call for the mission of intermediation, these institutions “outgrew” these “expediences.” More notably, they developed into an institutional system characterized by self-reflection and self-organization, which opposes the one-dimensional exhibition of art as representation—which remains almost always the rule in canonical museum practice—through presence and reflection about presence in models and counter-models of exhibition formats. As a result, the Kunsthallen and Kunstvereine are able to present themselves as institutions in a state of permanent constructive conflict with contemporary art production and the contemporary art system. In keeping with the institutional “tradition” of the Kunsthalle and Kunstverein, their practice focuses on the identification of cultural and systemic “errors” and gaps. They also lean toward models of exhibition making that can realize these studies as the identification of artistic practice and definition of institutional practice through artistic production.

The activity of Kunsthalle Zürich, which since its establishment in the mid-1980s has focused pre-

dominantly on the format of the individual exhibition, itself raises the question as to which individual exhibition formats are interesting and how they can be formulated in the current institutional and market-led artistic environment. Unlike in traditional art museum practice, whose apparatuses continue to require the formatting of artistic practice within existing structures, the activity of the Kunsthallen and Kunstvereine can allow multiple formats to become effective as the construction of institutional space through an artistic practice that updates itself—and, moreover, simultaneously as identity and as intrinsic institutional criticism.

A wide range of versions of this format have been implemented for the “individual exhibition” at Kunsthalle Zürich in recent years, ranging from the traditional Kunsthalle format of the introductory exhibition with catalogue (for example the projects by Allora & Calzadilla, Carol Bove, Valentin Carron, Keren Cytter, de Rijke / de Rooij, Trisha Donnelly, Luke Fowler, Christian Holstad, Annette Kelm, Terence Koh, Kitty Krauss, Daria Martin, Scott Myles, Relph/Payne, Seth Price, Anselm Reyle, Eva Rothschild, Wilhelm Sasnal, Catherine Sullivan, Ulla von Brandenburg, Rebecca Warren, and Jordan Wolfson) to process and project-based shows (such as the exhibitions with Tris Vonna-Michell and *How to Cook a Wolf*, which each took place over a period of two years) and thematically focused projects concerned with artistic practice (such as Richard Prince’s first institutional painting exhibition, John Armleder’s exhibition of drawings, Peter Doig’s Trinidad StudioFilmClub in Zürich, Rodney Graham’s exhibition on the musical loop, and Elmgreen & Dragset’s project for the conversion of the Kunsthalle as an exhibition). Curated so-called mid-career exhibitions (such as those by Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Doug Aitken, Kai Althoff, Isa



Installation view of Tris Vonna-Michell,
Auto-Tracking-Auto-Tracking (2009)

Genzken, Sean Landers, Sarah Lucas, John Miller, Laura Owens, and Ian Wallace) do not take place in traditional museums, and the catalogues and catalogues raisonnés (such as those on the work of Genzken, Lucas, Owens, and Althoff) are not produced by museums but by the Kunsthallen. Retrospectives (such as those of the work of Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno) forge a link back to the institution, whose form and formats are defined by artistic works, and to the format of the exhibition, which is identical to and identified through the work.

Notes

1. Traditionally, the Kunsthalle is an art institution that mounts temporary art exhibitions in contrast to the ownership of permanent collections by traditional art museums. A Kunstverein is an art association of local collectors and artists. Some Kunsthallen are run by or supported by a local Kunstverein.

Translated from the German by Susan Cox

TALK SHOWS

Eungie Joo

The emphasis on one-person exhibitions at REDCAT developed from a host of influences, including a consideration of the nature of the venue, the artists’ potential impact on students at CalArts,¹ the artists’ potential to gain something from a residency experience in Los Angeles, and my own

interpretation of the kind of contribution REDCAT might make to an already inspired and complex local art scene.

I had been fortunate to work with students at CalArts as a visiting artist (curator) for the spring 2003 semester, and during that time I had also met

and shared amazing conversations with numerous Los Angeles artists and arts workers through the collective space *Six Months: Crenshaw*. This experience deeply influenced my understanding of how artists with a critical practice based in making had very few opportunities in Los Angeles to develop and exhibit their work. There were very few venues commissioning in the style that I had learned from my early career at the Walker Art Center, where then-director Kathy Halbreich always implored us to remember that the artist comes first, and where a well-designed publication never went underappreciated. So these became major concerns for the program.

The residency/commission/exhibition model primarily involved artists whose work I had been following for five years or more, with whom I had begun productive discussions about art, and who I felt communicated well through their work, practice, and speaking. While some have critiqued and others have praised the program for its so-called diversity, it should be understood that the artists invited for solo exhibitions at REDCAT in the first five seasons (2003–8) were simply artists who seemed to represent a conversation among a generation, in a frequency that I could hear: Superflex, Julie Mehretu, Taro Shinoda, Margaret Kilgallen, Damián Ortega, Renata Lucas, Kara Walker, Mathieu Briand, Andrea Bowers, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Barry McGee, Dave McKenzie, Choi Jeong Hwa, and Haegue Yang. As a number of these artists lacked significant publications to represent their work and practices to a larger audience, we engaged with graphic designers of the same generation—Deb Littlejohn, Santiago Piedrafita, Jon Sueda, Gail Swanlund, and Michael Worthington, among others—to produce publications of approximately 150 to 200 pages, each of which contained a curatorial essay of 3,000 to 5,000 words, represented the artist's voice by way of an interview, and included documentation of both past works and the newly commissioned work/exhibition.

I will admit now that we made a conscious effort to present women artists in solo exhibitions because not enough institutions seemed to be doing this. Such exhibitions included *Julie Mehretu: Drawing Into Painting* (curated by Douglas Fogle for the Walker Art Center), *Margaret Kilgallen: In the Sweet Bye & Bye, Nothing Is Neutral: Andrea Bowers, Renata Lucas: Falha, Kara E. Walker's Song of the South*, and *Asymmetric Equality: Haegue Yang*. We also extend-



Taro Shinoda
Engawa Site Project (ESP), 2004–5
Steel, aluminum, ATV trailers, wood,
paint, fluorescent lights, and vinyl
Dimensions variable

ed the residency/commission/exhibition model through a kind of conversation between two artist colleagues (sometimes across two generations). These included commissions of new works by Mark Bradford and Glenn Kaino, Gimhongsok and Sora Kim, Edgar Arceneaux and Charles Gaines, Song Dong and Yin Xiuzhen, and Geoff McPetridge and Ed Fella.

Because many of the artists we invited lived outside the United States and/or had not had solo exhibitions here, they had until now lacked the opportunity to exhibit new production. Several simply had no means to produce new work without a commission. As a curator, I was interested in working closely with these artists to allow them the chance to execute a major project with support from an institution. By focusing on commissioning and showcasing works by artists in the first 10 to 15 years of their practices, we could do more with less, and I hoped CalArts students might identify with these artists, who were, like themselves, relatively early in their careers but extremely active.

The team at REDCAT was small—basically then-associate curator (now director) Clara Kim, me, and a revolving group of dedicated artists who managed and executed installations on a part-time basis—so production and installation were often incredibly challenging. It required a hands-on approach that is not for everyone as well as intense engagement and stamina that at times seemed absurd. Taro Shinoda's rounded gallery floor (executed by Chris Olivera and Matt Lucero from

dozens and dozens of sheets of flexible plywood) and mobile *engawa* (whose aluminum surface was painted by Lucero at his father's aircraft painting shop at Rialto Municipal Airport, then strapped to my cousin's pickup and driven some 80 miles to be attached to a steel frame meticulously welded by the artist in CalArts's shop in Valencia) come to mind. So does a memory of the entire staff on ladders, hanging and cleaning mirrored Plexiglas for Song Dong's *Restroom M*. There were the days of weeping with Kara Walker in the bar at REDCAT as we learned about the disaster in New Orleans and waited for our government to help. And those three weeks in 2004 when two-thirds of Superflex camped out in my living room and drove my new car (I kicked them out as the remaining third, Jakob, was arriving with his wife Katrina and baby Atlas). I can still hear the street cleaner screaming at me at 1:30 a.m. for allowing Damián Ortega's director of photography, Ron Clark, to throw some water on the grease Ortega was using to play tug-of-war with a 1971 Volkswagen Beetle under Grand Avenue, so Clark could get a nice reflection of the streetlights as he laid down in front of the vehicle, its spinning wheels right by his head. But the resulting works and discussions benefited greatly from that very intensity.

The conversation begun with Haegue Yang for her project at REDCAT yielded an incredible exhibition in June 2008, though I was no longer around to develop and execute it. Yang and I were fortunate to take that conversation beyond an exhibition plan into an open exchange of ideas, which in fact improved my understanding of her practice, work, and person, and eventually led to a project for the Korean Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale. For both of us, working outside of Korea, the decision to work together in the form of national representation meant focusing on an exhibition for an international audience (taking into account the specificity of the site and architecture of the Pavilion) while developing a project that engaged with a Korean audience that might never see the exhibition in Venice (the absent viewers).

Engaging with a local Korean audience was a task Yang required of me as a condition of her participation at the Biennale. Eventually our shared concerns led to a three-part project: *An Offering: Public Resource* in Seoul, a self-organized library and discussion project; the exhibition *Condensation: Haegue Yang* at the Pavilion in Venice, which



Kara Walker
Kara E. Walker's Song of the South, 2005
Cut wood with projections
Dimensions variable

featured three new works; and the 320-page publication *Condensation: Haegue Yang*, which explains our concept of engagement and communication. The publication also incorporates a context for Yang's work in the form of a "curated" section of contributions by curators, artists, and an architect. This "Context/Conversation" section attempts to reveal the influences that have shaped, and continue to impact, the artist's thinking while providing a "Korean" context through which her practice can be considered—an aspect that is sometimes overlooked in favor of her "German" education and (primary) residence.

In our conversation in the publication, Yang explains how she was initially disappointed by the naive comments left by visitors to her 2006 installation in an abandoned house in Incheon called *Sadong 30*. These comments, published as the last section of *Condensation*, reveal an autonomous, sincere, non-art audience with its own expectations and desires, exploring the abandoned house to socialize with friends and family, to follow the recommendation of a friend, to be surprised, to imagine the artist's ideas. Yang's project is a useful example of an attempt to consider the multiple audiences (perhaps all imagined) with whom an artist and curator might aspire to engage: informed, naive, present, absent.

Notes

1. The Roy and Edna Disney / CalArts Theater (REDCAT), the downtown art center of California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), opened in November 2003.



Map of the Artiglierie dell'Arsenale, 50th International Art Exhibition, 2003

1. Clandestine
2. Fault Lines
3. Individual Systems
4. Zone of Urgency
5. The Structure of Survival
6. Contemporary Arab Representations
7. The Everyday Altered
8. Utopia Station

ATTITUDE



SINKING VENICE

Adriano Pedrosa

The geopolitics of the International Art Exhibition, as the Biennale de Venezia is officially known, with its multiple sections and components articulated in many different levels and hierarchies, are complex to navigate. In 2009 there were 90 artists in the central exhibition, and record numbers of national pavilions (77) and collateral events (44). The central exhibition is curated by la Biennale's artistic director, and each national pavilion has its own curatorial team, institutional structure, proper funding, and national (sometimes multi-national) backing. At the bottom of this hierarchy (and the margins of this cartography) are the collateral events, which diffuse and amplify the Venetian range even further and wider, at times with questionable curatorial criteria.¹

In this overpopulated scenario it is puzzling to find a statement such as the following, calling for clarity of vision:

A single curator can take into account the propensities of the very different venues available, and give a unity of direction to the representation; a single curator who feels it is his will be well able to illustrate it and if necessary defend it. Having a single curator, then, seems necessary for a practical reason: the clarity of reading of the complex world now represented by la Biennale and its accompanying events.

The words of Paolo Baratta, president of Fondazione la Biennale di Venezia at the time of the 53rd International Art Exhibition in 2009, are emphatic to the point of redundancy: The expression "single curator" appears not once nor twice, but three times in this passage from his foreword in the exhibition catalogue. The "single curator" in question is the exhibition's artistic director, as well as la Biennale's director of visual art,² Daniel Birnbaum. In Baratta's words one cannot help but read an implied critique of the largest and most polyphonic of the recent incarnations of the central exhibition: Francesco Bonami's *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, presented at the 50th International Art Exhibition in 2003. It occupied the entire stretch of the Artiglierie dell'Arsenale as well as the then-called Padiglione Italia and consisted of 11 distinct group exhibitions curated by different individuals and teams.³

1. In 2003 la Biennale granted institutional status to figures such as Illy coffee and Absolut Vodka, who hosted their own events under enigmatic catalogue entries such as "LINKS" and "EXTRA.50" respectively.

2. The director of visual art is one of seven individuals who compose the scientific committee of la Biennale. The others are the directors of architecture, cinema, dance, music, theater, and the Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, the Biennale's archive.

3. The exhibitions, eight of which were located in the Arsenale (pictured at left), were curated by Bonami and Birnbaum (*Delays and Revolutions*), Massimiliano Gioni (*The Zone*), Bonami (*Clandestine*), Gilane Tawadros (*Fault Lines*), Igor Zabel (*Individual Systems*), Hou Hanru (*Zone of Urgency*), Carlos Basualdo (*The Structure of Survival*), Catherine David (*Contemporary Arab Representations*), Gabriel Orozco (*The Everyday Altered*), and Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Rirkrit Tiravanija (*Utopia Station*).



Map of the Artiglierie dell'Arsenale, 53rd International Art Exhibition, 2009

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Making Worlds, Fari Mondi | 3. Chile |
| 2. Istituto | 4. United Arab Emirates |
| Italo-Latino Americano | 5. Turkey |
| Bolivia | 6. Italy |
| Colombia | 7. China |
| Costa Rica | |
| Cuba | |
| Dominican Republic | |
| Ecuador | |
| El Salvador | |
| Guatemala | |
| Honduras | |
| Peru | |

This is not the place to evaluate Bonami's project, although at least two assessments could be made of it: that it was truly experimental and risk taking in format and structure, and that it was excessive and chaotic with too many competing artists, artworks, and curatorial visions.⁴ The latter is probably the opinion of Baratta, who is no newcomer to the biennale scene and was president of la Biennale in 2001 when the 49th edition was curated by Harald Szeemann.

Birnbaum's *Making Worlds, Fari Mondi* was certainly one of the most coherent showings in recent years. Never mind that it was put together in 14 months with the help of Jochen Volz (who is acknowledged in the exhibition catalogue as "artistic organizer," an expression that could be translated as "curator" but almost certainly was avoided for the sake of the argument for a single curator). The artworks were installed in the Palazzo della Biennale (formerly the Padiglione Italia) located at the Giardini del Castello, sections of the Arsenale and the Giardino Vergini, and some of the outdoor areas of the Giardini surrounding the national pavilions. The curatorial premise was stated in the first couple of sentences of Birnbaum's catalogue introduction: A work of art "embodies a vision of the world, and if taken seriously must be seen as a way of making a world."

My analytical interest here lies not so much in the central exhibition as in its margins, or outskirts, particularly a number of disturbing elements that that could be seen and read in the city of Venice, beyond the strict territory of *Making Worlds, Fari Mondi*. Several of these disturbing elements were in the arm of la Biennale known quite simply as "Countries." In recent years the clear transposition of geography and territory to the practice and production of art has been increasingly questioned, even bluntly rejected, by curators and critics who view modalities of national representation as outdated.⁵ Venice remains the only biennial in the art circuit that still subscribes to the model of national representation in this sense.⁶ In fact, it is in this section that la Biennale (more than any other) reveals its genealogy in the universal exposition and the world's fair. The process of long-term institutional settlement favors an ossification of structures, and this is precisely the case with la Biennale, a 19th-century institution, which, it must be said, is structurally and architecturally condemned to perpetuate the very model it founded. After all, the individual national pavilions were erected in the Giardini by the countries themselves, who in turn own and rule over them. There are 28 permanent national pavilions scattered in the Giardini,⁷ plus two that do not have strict national identities—the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, a territory of the director of visual arts, and the Padiglione Venezia, a territory of the Comune di Venezia and the Provincia di Venezia.⁸

Nations that do not have a building in the Giardini may still participate in the "Countries" section, but they must be accepted by la Biennale and arrange a venue to house their exhibitions. Until recently such countries would

4. The catalogue of the 50th International Art Exhibition is twice as thick and considerably larger in format than the one accompanying the 53rd edition.

5. For example, in the words of Bruce Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg, and Sandy Nairne, "Many artists in the 20th century and especially today have renounced singular national identification. Their ways of working depend increasingly on transnational access and multiple exhibition venues. These factors have altered the internal maps of international exhibitions." See "Mapping International Exhibitions" in Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): 48.

6. The other large-scale biennale that held the same model until recently was São Paulo, the second-oldest biennial in the circuit, and it eliminated the section in its 27th edition, of which I was one of the cocurators alongside Lisette Lagnado, chief curator, Rosa Martinez, Jose Roca, and Cristina Freire, cocurators, and Jochen Volz, guest curator.

7. The national pavilions in chronological order of construction at the Giardini are: Belgium (1907), Hungary (1909), Germany (1909), Great Britain (1909), France (1912), Holland (1912), Russia (1914), Spain (1922), Czechoslovakia (1928), the United States (1930), Denmark (1932), Switzerland (1932), Poland (1932), Austria (1934), Greece (1934), Romania (1938), Yugoslavia (1938), Egypt (1938), Israel (1952), Venezuela (1954), Japan (1956), Finland (1956), Canada (1958), Uruguay (1961), Scandinavia (1962), Brazil (1964), Australia (1988), and South Korea (1995).

8. The city of Venice still enjoys a major role in the organization of la Biennale, and its mayor is automatically appointed vice president of the institution.

9. Bonami's exhibitions in 2003 were the last to occupy the Arsenale completely. In comparison to the 2007 edition, curated by Robert Storr, Birnbaum's exhibition lost the area occupied in 2009 by the Istituto Italo-Latino Americano and the Chile pavilions, yet gained the new areas never before occupied at the Giardino delle Vergini, at the end of the Arsenale.

10. In 2009 the United States expanded beyond its pavilion at the Giardini in an exceptional and substantial manner, with venues at Università IUAV at Tolentini and Università Ca' Foscari.

11. One of the most extravagant appearances in recent years was by Brazil in 2003. That year, the now-defunct non-governmental organization BrasilConnects, a brainchild of the former Brazilian banker and Fundação Bienal de São Paulo president Edemar Cid Ferreira, invited Germano Celant to curate the national representation, occupying the country's pavilion in the Giardini as well as the church of San Giacomo dall'Orto, the Palazzo Fortuny, and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. The logo of BrasilConnects appeared prominently in la Biennale's exhibition catalogue that year above all others, signaling major financial support. An unfortunate turn of events followed suit: BrasilConnects ceased its activities in 2004 in the wake of governmental intervention and the bankruptcy of Banco Santos, which belonged to Ferreira, who was sent to prison in 2006.

12. As quoted in www.abraaj.com/english/art-about-prize.aspx, accessed November 2009.

13. A sign displayed in the exhibition read: "This pavilion assembles different types of grand display, including a showcase for art and art infrastructure, featuring four models, a database, and work by four artists."

seek spaces elsewhere in Venice. On some occasions, la Biennale would provide spaces at the Arsenale. More recently, however, a number of national pavilions have been located in the Arsenale and in 2009 they approached the very edge of *Making Worlds, Fari Mondì*, as if the countries were subtracting territory from the central exhibition curated by the artistic director.⁹ With the prestige and cultural cachet that participation may bring to an artist or a country, la Biennale offers exceptional opportunities for a nation eager for global visibility. Wealthy countries such as Great Britain, the United States,¹⁰ France, Germany, and Japan have sustained well-balanced contributions over the years. A number of emerging countries have had more erratic performances, with humble appearances in one edition and lavish ones in another.¹¹ In 2009 there were six national pavilions along the Arsenale: the Istituto Italo-Latino Americano (an institute that for many years has organized a group exhibition of Latin American countries who do not have individual pavilions), Chile, Turkey, Italy, China, and the United Arab Emirates.

2009 was the first year in which the UAE had a pavilion in Venice. The country has appeared frequently in the international art press in recent years due to its aggressive cultural strategies and policies, for instance its own Sharjah Biennial (which had its ninth edition in 2009), the annual Art Dubai fair (since 2007), and the Abraaj Capital Art Prize (the "world's most generous art prize,"¹² worth a total of U.S. \$1 million). There are also the planned outposts of the Louvre and the Guggenheim museums (designed by Frank Gehry and Jean Nouvel, respectively) in the Saadiyat Island complex in Abu Dhabi, which will exist alongside luxury apartments and boutique hotels. A Venice pavilion seems like a belated phenomenon for a country so eager to promote itself on a grand international scale. Much has been said about the self-reflexive character of the UAE pavilion, specifically with respect to the critical manner in which it acknowledged its function of promoting a country's culture.¹³ Claire Bishop reviewed the pavilion positively in the September 2009 issue of *Artforum*, concluding that Tirdad Zolghadr, its curator, "pulled off the not inconsiderable feat of setting himself at a distance from the goals of his funders while managing to serve them anyways (as evidenced by this article). This is doublespeak at its double-edged finest." Still, the blunt and obvious presence of a vast scale model of the Saadiyat Island complex (the "island of happiness") left no doubt that in the UAE pavilion we were deep in the 19th-century model of the universal exposition and world's fair. This flaunting of such unprecedentedly large projects transformed the Arsenale into a vitrine of real estate development.

Another country entering the Venetian panorama in 2009 was Chile, which is celebrating its bicentennial in 2010 and last featured a solo pavilion in 2001. The new Chilean cultural repositioning included a celebration of its own 1st Trienal de Chile in 2009 (which under a decentralized approach

took place in eight different cities across the country). In Venice, the Chilean pavilion immediately followed the one organized by the Istituto Italo-Latino Americano, which in 2009 gathered artists from Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru. The juxtaposition of the solo appearance of the richest Latin American country with a group presentation that in previous years had included Chile drew attention to the Venetian realpolitik. Chile was able to pay the rental fee of U.S. \$100,000 to la Biennale for its space of 350 square meters, according to sources from Chile's Ministry of Foreign Relations.¹⁴ There is absolutely nothing wrong with a country paying a rental fee for an exhibition space, and many others certainly do so for spaces in the city of Venice. Yet something seems amiss when the fees are clearly more than operational, the landlady is la Biennale itself, and the land was previously occupied by the central exhibition. The "Countries" section, the most anachronistic feature of la Biennale, also brings extra cash to the institution, possibly financing the central exhibition itself.

The most disturbing element of la Biennale in 2009 was not foreign but closer to home: the Padiglione Italia. It is interesting to return to Baratta's foreword and read the passage in which he eloquently clarifies his disconnection from the Italian pavilion, almost as an official disclaimer. As we've seen, Baratta is fond of redundant rhetoric. The Padiglione Italia, he declares, "will house the exhibition organized directly by the Italian Ministry for Cultural Affairs and Activities, of a significant selection of Italian artists made to the wishes expressed by the Ministry, which nominated its curators." The curators in question are Luca Beatrice and Beatrice Buscaroli, whose right-wing credentials have been pointed out elsewhere.¹⁵ Up until this point I have avoided considering the art displayed in la Biennale. But the quality of the Italian pavilion's artworks and the design of the presentation were beyond contempt to anyone even vaguely familiar with contemporary art and exhibitions. They turned the Arsenale into a hall of glittering mall art, full of stereotypical clichés of kitsch where all shone and glowed in semi-darkness, from twisted bodies in hyperrealistic paintings to illuminated figures, crystal-covered sculptures, and an oversize Christmas tree. No wonder Baratta was so careful to detach himself from the official Italian imbroglio.

Disturbing traits also appeared throughout the city, beyond la Biennale, seemingly in tune with the Italian zeitgeist. The "Queen of the Adriatic" and UNESCO world heritage site covered some of its most iconic buildings, from the Doge's Palace to the Bridge of Sighs and the Archeological Museum, in advertisements for brands such as Sisley and Swatch. Also noteworthy was the opening of the Punta della Dogana Art Center, housing the collection of the luxury goods magnate and Christie's owner François Pinault in the boutique-style architecture of Tadao Ando. Despite the latter not being an official col-

14. I wrote to all agencies, including la Biennale, requesting information on Arsenale rental fees, and only the Chilean source chose to disclose.

15. The Milan-based Barbara Casavecchia wrote in the September 2009 issue of *Frieze*, quoting *Il Corriere della Sera* journalist Paolo Conti: "Beatrice writes for the [weekly paper] *Il Domenicale* published by Marcello Dell'Utri [senator and senior adviser to Silvio Berlusconi] and for *Libero* [a right-wing newspaper], and teaches at the Brera Academy of Art. Buscaroli writes for *Il Giornale* [owned by Berlusconi's brother Paolo] and *Il Domenicale* and teaches art at the University of Ravenna-Bologna."

lateral event, it found its way into Baratta's foreword as "an event promoted by high profile figures." In actuality, the Art Center is among the most ostentatious and violent examples of a contemporary art collection predicated on the conspicuous gathering of art trophies. As an eloquent symptom of the detrimental effects of the culture of luxury and glamour in contemporary art, Pinault's "designer handbag" (to borrow a metaphor used by Sarah K. Rich to identify the billionaire's collection), merits a case study in itself.¹⁶ There, even works as poetic and subtle as Felix Gonzalez-Torres's seem to become props for staging of a grand décor.

In Venice's theater of operations, multiple forces struggle for the attentions of the viewer and the press: the central exhibition, the national pavilions inside and outside of la Biennale's official grounds, the collateral events, and more. Quite perversely, it is this very struggle that keeps la Biennale enjoying its central role in the panorama of more than 100 biennials around the world. Yet Venice has become a victim of its own celebrity. Nowhere else are the stakes raised so much higher year after year, the increasingly fierce and expensive competition fueled by escalating production and promotion budgets. Each pavilion and collateral event brings in its army of sponsors, galleries, press agents, collectors, benefactors, diplomats, politicians, curators, and artists, with their exhibition catalogues, dinner parties, and after parties. The cacophony of voices bear a wide range of accents, not solely from many tongues and nationalities, but also from the different institutional platforms: artistic, critical, and curatorial as well as governmental, diplomatic, political, and commercial, not to mention certain "high profile figures." And indeed, the result is more Typhon, the Greek monster of 100 heads, than Babel.

There were expectations that in the wake of the most speculative period of the art market, which ended abruptly in September 2008, ridding the circuit of a multitude of glamour-seeking enterprises and individuals, that a fresh focus on art and ideas would reemerge in the art world. The first Venice Biennale of the new era, however, did not manifest any such thing. Judging by what was seen around the city in the summer of 2009, the commercial and financial presence was stronger than ever before. In an overpopulated and chaotic scenario so distorted by the weight of financial resources, it is ironic to think of Baratta's adamant defense for a single curator in the name of "the clarity of reading of the complex world now represented by la Biennale." Of course no single artistic director can change the rules, especially those of an institution so entrapped by its 19th-century heritage—the only surviving biennale species still truly modeled after the world's fair. La Biennale has become a bloody battlefield where numerous hungry actors fight for public attention. In this overbearing context the central exhibition, although still at center stage, occupies an increasingly smaller, if still dignified, corner.

REAR MIRROR



AFTER AFTER NATURE

Massimiliano Gioni

I began thinking about the *After Nature* exhibition somewhere around the summer of 2007, a year before it opened.

Initially the show had a different title, *Going Native*, borrowed from a novel by Stephen Wright that I had read some 10 years earlier. It seemed to me like the right title for an exhibition aimed at describing the return to a sort of neo-primitive language. But I changed the title later on, at the suggestion of Zoe Leonard, one of the participating artists, who saw problems with using the word "native" in this context. The title *After Nature* was suggested to me by two colleagues at the New Museum. I think it was about four months before the show, and I was chewing over various possibilities—including *Silent Spring*, and other things I don't remember—when as if by magic we all found ourselves thinking of the book *After Nature* by W. G. Sebald.

Actually, however, the exhibition did not grow out of its title or a singular driving concept, but a series of works. I wanted to present Pawel Althamer's sculptures and self-portraits, which had never been seen in America, and Maurizio Cattelan's headless horse. Tino Sehgal's piece *Instead of allowing some thing to rise up to your face . . .* (2000) was another cornerstone of the exhibition, along with a video by Artur Zmijewski. So the show wasn't really developed around a full-fledged theme so much as several pieces that seemed to have similar moods and energies, and which I thought deserved to be seen in America.

THEANYSPEACEWHATEVER: AFTER THE FACT

Nancy Spector

The exhibition *theanyspacewhatever* (2008) at the Guggenheim Museum was a failure—a beautiful, perfect failure—that illuminated the disjunction between the theoretical apparatus associated with the art on view and the actual practices represented. The 10 international artists included in the exhibition—Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Douglas Gordon, Carsten Höller, Pierre Huyghe, Jorge Pardo, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija—had, since the early 1990s, been grouped together under the nomenclature of Relational Aesthetics, a term coined by the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud in his manifesto extolling notions of conviviality and inter-human relations in contemporary art.

Bourriaud featured all of these artists in the sprawling group show *Traffic* that he organized for the CAPC in Bordeaux in 1996. The exhibition was a prelude to the publication of his treatise, which sought to define a utopian, interrelational, temporal art form. The presentation, as I understood it from a number of the artists involved, was largely improvised, free from institutional pressures, and ultimately conducive to collaborative activities. There was, I am sure, an abiding sense of youthful exuberance strengthened by an awareness of being present at the beginning of something unique and significant, and not quite yet defined. Over the ensuing decade, the artists' individual practices evolved along separate trajectories, but they all maintained contact

AFTER
AFTER
NATUREMassimiliano
Gioni

Maurizio Cattelan
Untitled, 2007
Taxidermied horse skin and fiberglass resin
118 1/8 x 66 7/8 x 31 1/2 in. (300 x 169.9 x 80 cm)



Zoe Leonard
Tree, 1997
Wood, steel, and steel cables
Approx. 252 x 60 in. (640.1 x 152.4 cm)

Roger Ballen
Untitled (1069, 1079, 1068, 0799), 2007
Head Inside Shirt, 2001
Selenium-toned gelatin silver prints
19 3/4 x 19 3/4 in. (50.2 x 50.2 cm) and
15 x 15 in. (38.1 x 38.1 cm)

In addition to these pieces, there were other lines of research that I was working on, or had stumbled across, while reading and thinking about possible paths. Usually, in working on a show, I try to read novels and essays that help me expand my field of investigation. I read *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy in the summer of 2007 while I was doing research for the show; at the time I was mostly reading Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, various books on anthropology and mythology, and the poetry of Emily Dickinson. In these texts I was looking for the equivalent of that sense of cosmic wonder, and attraction and fear with regard to nature, that I seemed to find in the works of several artists I was thinking about.

This reading is never truly systematic; perhaps I really just proceed in my research with a sense of panic, trying to learn as much as possible, but on a subject so vast that it's impossible even to get a general notion of it. But it helps me visualize, imagine, and create connections among works that may have nothing to do with one another.

The Road is a very visual novel, and along with *Mythologie des arbres* by Jacques Brosse, it convinced me that the exhibition ought to contain a tree, a tree that would be magical—an archetype or totem. So, soon after we arrived in New York in the fall, we started looking for trees until we found a beautiful one by Zoe Leonard, which we installed along with Cattelan's horse and some small photographic maps by August Strindberg.

I say “we” because Chris Wiley (a young critic and freelance writer) and Jarrett Gregory (a young curator who works with me at the New Museum) collaborated on *After Nature*. Wiley's role was to do research, especially in areas I don't know much about, such as photography; his many contributions included pointing me to the work of William Christenberry, whose photos of vine-engulfed buildings would become another key element in the show. Wiley and Gregory helped me discover things I wasn't familiar with, expanding the scope of the exhibition. They also acted as first consumers and embedded critics, so that every artwork or decision was also criticized or at least debated from the inside.

In the initial phase of research, Werner Herzog's work had also come up: I had begun to watch—or re-watch—all of his films, since I remembered that many of them incorporated a uniquely powerful portrayal of nature. And I also remembered a monologue by Herzog in Wim Wenders's *Tokyo-Ga* (1985), where he spoke of the need to escape the visual pollution of our cities, to rediscover new, pure images. In a sense I wanted *After Nature* to be teeming with images like the ones Herzog described—ultimate images, images that would be visions or be visionary.

When I saw Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness* (1992) again, I immediately thought how wonderful it would be to present it in an exhibition. I was interested in the idea of putting his work

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AFTER
THE FACTNancy
Spector

with one another, coming together in various constellations at random moments to produce memorable collaborations. Connected by a desire to fuse their art with everyday life, they have sought ways to rearticulate the structure and tempo of their projects (albeit to various degrees), and in doing so have transformed the exhibition itself into a malleable medium with which to reshape the conventionally constructed aesthetic experience.

It was this shared sensibility that originally drew me to their work. Inspired by their innovative approaches to show making, I offered them a platform at the Guggenheim with which they could invent a new, more relevant model for a group exhibition than the typical thematic or invitational, biennial-like structure. First I approached Pierre Huyghe and Rirkrit Tiravanija to collaborate with me on a very open-ended assignment—to conceive of a group show that would capture or reflect the energy of work associated with their generation. From this initial discussion, the scope of the endeavor expanded to include the core group of 10 artists, who met on and off for two years to contemplate and debate the merits of formulating such an exhibition project.

The question of history was a pressing one, with heated discussions of how self-reflexive and retrospective the presentation ought to be. Everyone wanted to avoid a strict historical overview of past achievements, although at times they pondered the idea of my making just such an exhibition. Calling this the “dead” scenario—which would entail my acting as if they were no longer alive—the artists were tempted to cede curatorial control. This would have been easier for all involved but would have resulted in an entirely different project, one that would have codified their collective history. They also considered the notion of creating one meta-work for the exhibition that would, in essence, be authorless. From the beginning, as each possible scenario was aired,



Installation view of *theanyspacewhatever* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2008, showing views of Jorge Pardo, *Jorge Pardo Sculpture Ink*, 2008; Douglas Gordon, *prettymucheveryword-written, spoken, heard, overheard from 1989 . . .*, 2006; and Angela Bulloch, *Firmamental Night Sky: Oculus.12*, 2008

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into an artistic context—a context that had often imitated, even plundered, his work—but I was also very fascinated by the mixture of fiction and documentary that is the basis for *Lessons of Darkness*. Herzog shot it in Kuwait in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, when the Iraqi troops had set fire to the oil fields. It captures these incredible, otherworldly images, which document a gigantic environmental disaster, but which also describe the desire to find ultimate, extreme, pure images. *Lessons of Darkness* is also a science-fiction film, in that the images from Kuwait are accompanied by narration that imagines a future civilization on a planet in our solar system. It is as if two separate levels of narration intersect, making it a particularly interesting and confusing experience for the viewer.

From the outset it was pretty clear to me that *After Nature* needed to become a kind of show I had never seen in New York. I thought it was important to spur myself, the artists, and the institution to try out new solutions and do things I wouldn't have done elsewhere; I felt like I had a responsibility to construct something I'd never seen

before. In some sense, *Lessons of Darkness* was my model. I wanted to create a traditional exhibition, one that would contain important works, but I also wanted the experience of it to be a sort of universe unto itself, where it would be impossible to distinguish between different planes of interpretation and communication, different levels of fiction and reality. And, to a certain extent, I wanted to make a show that could be as emotionally engaging as a novel.

One should note that *After Nature* was also the first show that I curated on my own at the New Museum, and actually it was my first show at a museum—that is, in an institutional context. Of course, I had worked on several biennials and on many exhibitions, but I had always preferred sites imbued with history, buildings marked by the passage of time, and places not dedicated to contemporary art. *After Nature* was the first exhibition I had installed in a museum, in an aseptic place, dedicated, for better or for worse, to giving art a canonical interpretation. And so I found myself also thinking a lot about what we expect from museums, and the legitimizing role that institutions can play with regard to the objects exhibited in them. Institutions always put a stamp of authenticity on certain objects, and this authority, it seemed to me, could be stretched to an extreme or at least used in a creative way.

Bit by bit, I also began to think about the forerunner of the modern museum, the Wunderkammer, and the idea that a show in a museum could contain not just works of art but also objects, traces, relics, and scraps of lives and stories. I started playing with the idea of a contemporary art exhibition that would incorporate the spirit of a cabinet of curiosities, offering new potential associations for interpreting the works.

For instance, for some time I had wanted to find a place in an exhibition for the work of certain figures such as Eugene Von Bruenchenhein, an outsider artist—who spent his whole life finger-painting visions of interstellar civilizations. The problem was that I wasn't fully convinced that Von Bruenchenhein's work was really “good art.” Until *After Nature*, I thought my exhibitions had to present works that I believed

were outstanding examples of contemporary art. But with *After Nature* I realized that I could suspend my qualitative judgment and present works that served as narrative elements and objects with a complex ontological status (to use high-flown language)—that is, objects that seemed to be somewhere between works of art and documents. Please don't get me wrong: I'm convinced that Von Bruenchenhein's paintings are extraordinary works of art and deserve a place in our museums, but in the specific context of *After Nature*, his paintings also interested me because of what they told us about the artist's life, and because they opened the door to a whole series of questions about the identity of contemporary artwork. I felt this was particularly important in a city like New York, where, all too often, museum exhibitions seem designed to establish a rigid canon. I wanted *After Nature* to be a show that would not uphold any kind of canon, but rather invite us to think about different ways of being an artist, and to



Reverend Howard Finster
Untitled (Sermon Cards), undated
Ink on paper
Dimensions variable

Thomas Schütte
The Magnificent Seven, 1993
Heads: 7 1/2 x 5 1/2 x 6 3/8 in. (19.1 x 14 x 17.5 cm);
bases 55 1/2 x 11 7/8 in. (141 x 30.2 cm)
Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann Collection

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SPACE-
WHATEVER:
AFTER
THE FACTNancy
Spector

great trepidation was expressed about how it would be perceived. There was, for instance, much apprehension about the Guggenheim's reputation for blockbuster exhibitions and international expansion. Related to this, I think, was the pressure of exhibiting collectively in New York, where visual culture is judged and critiqued as if it were the final word.

Another overriding concern was how to position the exhibition in relation to the theoretical constructs previously associated with the work, which, in recent years, had increasingly come under critical scrutiny. Wanting to avoid any form of categorization, no one wanted to endorse or validate their perceived engagement with Relational Aesthetics (though each artist certainly respected Bourriaud's long-standing support and his intellectual contribution to the discourse surrounding their practices). It was unclear how to escape this critical lens in a generous or elegant way, since there was no appetite for publicly denouncing Bourriaud's important contributions and, as we know, public judgment is ultimately beyond anyone's control.

In the end, the artists decided to create 10 solo presentations that would, they imagined, overlap and cross-inform one another in the museum's spiraling rotunda. Most planned to create new, site-specific work for the space; a few sought to adapt existing pieces to the Guggenheim's eccentric architecture. Three accompanying satellite exhibitions were organized to underscore the collaborative impulse behind the artists' work: a contribution by The Wrong Gallery, an ongoing film program by Anna Sanders Films, and an installation by the graphic design team M/M. Some of the artists—such as Huyghe, Gillick, Pardo, Parreno, and Tiravanija—created installations that acknowledged the premise of this group exhibition by citing or engaging with the work of their peers in the show. Others simply turned inward and occupied their own discrete spatial zones.

Despite its varied components, the exhibition itself was decidedly empty. While I understood the (sometimes yawning) gaps between works to be emblematic of the artists' generally understated and conceptual approach to art making, there was an overall feeling of hesitation, of the partial gesture, of information withheld. The critical reaction to this intentionally vaporous, if not melancholy, *mise-en-scène* was markedly negative. Despite my attempts to distance the entire project from the discourse of Relational Aesthetics in order to provide a space for fresh perspectives, many critics read the show as a perverse inversion of Bourriaud's ideas. Where were all the interactive pieces? Why was Rirkrit not cooking? Why was the installation so spare and somber when it should be lively and participatory? Others focused on what they perceived to be an inept attempt at institutional critique, not recognizing that this generation of artists is working from a post-critical mindset—using the museum by expanding upon it and stretching its limits rather than simply rejecting its tenets.

What lingers for me one year after *theanyspacewhatever* is how tenuous the whole enterprise was, from the artists' inherent suspicion of the project to the remarkable emptiness of the presentation. It proved to me



Rirkrit Tiravanija
CHEW THE FAT, 2008
Video installation

think about a work of art as a much more fluid and complex object than what one finds in Chelsea galleries and contemporary art museums.

That's part of the reason why *After Nature* contained objects that were not works of art and far from contemporary. August Strindberg's celestographs, for instance, date from the late 1800s. The exhibition showed digital copies of the originals. They were presented as documents, but documents that I thought possessed a unique intensity.

Some pieces in *After Nature* were accompanied by long labels compiled by Chris Wiley and edited by Jarrett Gregory and myself. In some cases they appropriated texts from famous authors; in others they told the artists' stories, but using the tone of a novel. At times they illustrated the subject of the work, or provided misleading descriptions. Not all of the works were labeled, because I also wanted to strongly emphasize their intrinsic ambiguity. The idea of the labels was once again a reaction to the idea of the contemporary museum. Exhibit labels—especially in American museums—are generally entrusted with telling the truth or at least giving a legitimate interpretation of the piece. Inspired by Herzog, to some degree, I wanted to try to construct a series of narratives—sometimes fictitious, sometimes realistic—that would add another level of interpretation to the exhibition and make the whole experience both more confusing and richer. In a word, I wanted the labels to be able to lie, or at least make viewers question their legitimacy.

I should add that while I was working on *After Nature*, I was also carefully studying certain exhibitions such as Harald Szeemann's *The Bachelor Machines* (presented in 1976 at the Venice Biennale) and Pontus Hultén's *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* (presented in 1968 at New York's Museum of Modern Art); they were encyclopedic shows, and shows in which the works of art were not simply presented as tautologies. I think that all too often nowadays in galleries, museums, and biennials, works of art are presented only as works of art; there's an almost religious belief in the autonomy of the artwork, which is obviously legitimate, but which I fear is becoming a sort of reflexive attitude that ends up limiting our experience of it. I think that works of art—thank goodness—can be multifaceted, can be many things at once. They shouldn't just be themselves. Exhibitions such as *The Bachelor Machines* and *The Machine as Seen . . .* brought together artworks, documents, and models in a combination that served both to show art in its pure state and also to construct new narratives. I was always impressed by the fact that Szeemann, starting with *The Bachelor Machines*, had the courage to commission artists and craftspeople to reconstruct objects or artworks that had been destroyed. In a certain sense, the Unabomber cabin that Robert Kusmirowski created especially for *After Nature* was heavily inspired by the use of models and reconstructions in Szeemann and Hultén's exhibitions.

I'm also indebted to Szeemann because it was in the 1972 Documenta catalogue that I discovered the work of Nancy Graves. I later found out that she was a favorite artist of Marcia Tucker, founder of the New Museum.

Finally, I'd just like to add that all of these thoughts obviously unfolded in a much more fitful, instinctive way. As always, when I'm working on a show, there are limitations and concepts that must be laid down as rules, but then you also have to put all rules aside to let the work create and claim its own space. And very often, aside from intellectual speculation, there are budgets to comply with and practical problems to be solved. Some of Pawel Althamer's work I literally carried in my suitcase, while Diego Perrone's photographs became another cornerstone of the exhibition, not just because I really like his work, but because they were already in New York and thus didn't require transport.

The installation of the show was a rather long process, but also a simple one. Instead of working on a model, Jarrett Gregory and I traced the outline of each piece on the walls and floor, marking out its exact position with masking tape, once a week over the months preceding the exhibition, during the museum's closed hours. This meant I was also able to invite the artists progressively, adding works when I realized I still had room.

With regard to space, I didn't think it was appropriate for an exhibition so concerned with the end of the world and the disappearance of humankind to be described in a normal catalogue. Like Tino Sehgal's work, which is never documented, I thought that this exhibition needed to find a new way to describe itself, to preserve its own memory. So the catalogue for *After Nature* is recycled: an appropriation of the book by W. G. Sebald, to which we applied a new cover and hand-inserted a series of images of the works on exhibit. Someone called this an "arresting gesture," a book from the end of the world, when works of art are preserved as relics among the pages of an old volume. But to me, it really just seemed like the simplest way to hide my own voice and let Sebald and the artists do the talking.

Translated from the Italian by Johanna Bishop



Philippe Parreno
Marquee, Guggenheim, NY, 2008
Acrylic, steel, LEDs, and incandescent,
fluorescent, and neon lights
Front section: 23 x 198 x 192 in. (58.4 x
502.9 x 487.7 cm); back section: 16 x
188 x 133 in. (40.6 x 477.5 x 337.8 cm)

that collaboration cannot be externally imposed; it must be self-generated. It also brought to the fore the failed promises of Bourriaud's argument for this generation's work, which I believe to be much more sophisticated, complex, and nuanced than expressed in his original treatise. The last thing communicated or generated by this presentation was a utopic sense of community.

In retrospect, I believe Tiravanija's documentary video installation *CHEW THE FAT* (2008) functioned as a cipher for the strengths and failures of the exhibition as a whole. His interviews with each of the artists in the show (except Cattelan, who was noticeably absent) were played on separate monitors in the museum's double-height High Gallery. Gathered together but isolated from one another by virtue of the individual screens (and the discrete interviews), the artists speak at length about their unique practices and their lives. Positioned securely at mid-career and well recognized for their years of effort, they do not convey any overriding sense of interconnectedness other than through their mutual engagement with Tiravanija in the project. For them, the collaborative impulse is a fleeting one. *Theanyspacewhatever* proved just how fragile and beguiling their alliance remains today.

ENDNOTE



Tara McDowell

The inaugural issue of *Cahiers du cinéma*, published in April 1951, sounded the anti-establishment battle cry of the new *journal de combat*: to refuse “the malevolent neutralism that would tolerate a mediocre cinema, a prudential criticism, and a stupefied public.”¹ In the decade that followed, often called “The Yellow Years” for the journal’s distinctive yellow cover, within which a black-and-white still from a favorite film was embedded, *Cahiers du cinéma* became the most influential film journal of its time—arguably of the 20th century.

Founding editor André Bazin and his coterie of Young Turks, including Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, and François Truffaut, programmatically and unapologetically championed American, specifically Hollywood, film; rigorously advanced auteur theory and *mise-en-scène*; and in short order launched the Nouvelle Vague movement. Initially allergic to politics, the journal turned a deaf ear to France’s war with Algeria and the upheavals caused by rapid postwar industrialization—concerns taken up instead by the film critics’ contemporaries, including the Situationists and practitioners of *décollage*. The driving purpose at *Cahiers*, rather, was to elevate film to the status of fine art—the seventh art—and to recognize that the medium’s master practitioners were already in our midst. The first issue put forward the (then-current) cinema it felt did this job best: Robert Bresson’s *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), Edward Dmytryk’s *Give Us This Day* (1949), Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), and Vittorio De Sica’s *Miracle in Milan* (1951).

“All of us at *Cahiers* thought of ourselves as future directors,” Godard later explained. “Frequenting ciné-clubs and the Cinémathèque was already a way of thinking cinema and thinking

about cinema. Writing was already a way of making films. . . .

We were thinking cinema and at a certain moment we felt the need to extend that thought.”² This is the most remarkable turn in the history of *Cahiers*, and explains the indisputable historical importance of the journal: that critics who started out writing about film subsequently made films, and those films—however brief the Nouvelle Vague movement turned out to be—comprise a crucial episode in the history of both film and modernism.

Though inspired by *Cahiers du cinéma* (which itself was an extension of Bazin’s earlier project, *La revue du cinéma*), *The Exhibitionist* reverses its central narrative. Practicing curators—some with decades of experience and dozens of shows under their belts, others earlier in their careers or engaged in activities abutting curatorial practice—have for the first time a recurrent public forum of record to debate, examine, historicize, self-critique, and editorialize the processes and results of exhibition making. Five decades later, the romanticism and odd Hegelianism of the early years of *Cahiers*—its drive to elevate cinema to its proper place among the fine arts—may seem antiquated, but the journal’s unique approach, allowing filmmakers space on the page for the articulation and defense of their commitments, does not.

Notes

1. Emilie Bickerton, *A Short History of Cahiers du cinéma* (London and New York: Verso, 2009): 1.

2. Jim Hillier, “Cahiers du cinéma,” in *The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985): 13.

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