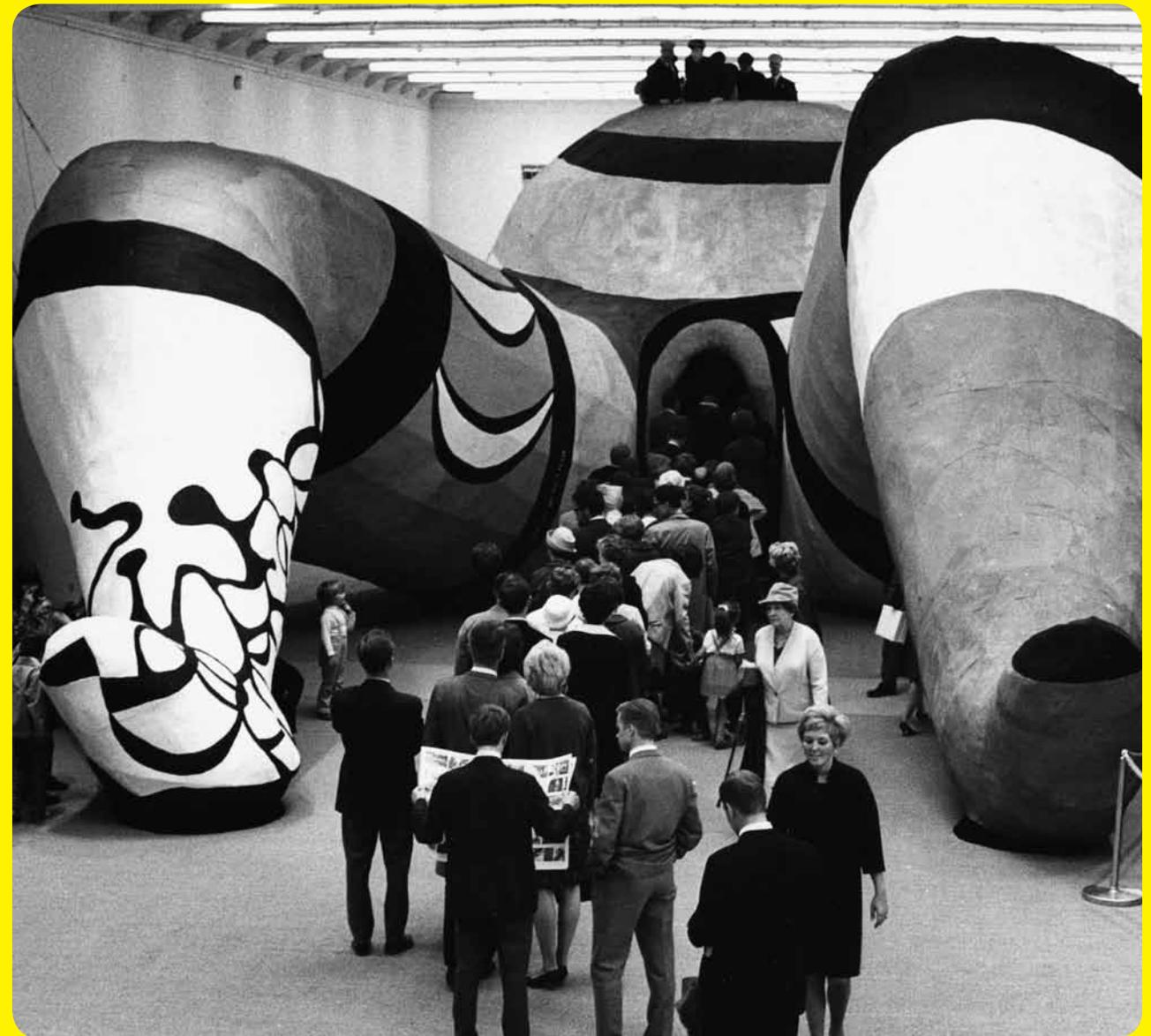

OVERTURE
CURATORS' FAVORITES
BACK IN THE DAY
ASSESSMENTS
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ATTITUDE
REAR MIRROR
ENDNOTE

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THE EXHIBITIONIST



The Exhibitionist

NO. 2

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SHE—A Cathedral installation view, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1966

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OVERTURE

★

Tara McDowell

“We have grown very poor in threshold experiences,” Walter Benjamin laments in Convolute O of *The Arcades Project*, his massive, labyrinthine textual montage of the 19th-century Parisian shopping arcades.¹ For Benjamin these spaces—already considered out of date, decrepit, and old-fashioned from his vantage point of the 1930s—functioned as definitive experiential thresholds. They were at once private and public, interior and exterior, sites for production and consumption, voyeurs and exhibitionists alike. Such were the conditions of modernity.

This issue of *The Exhibitionist* enacts something like a threshold experience, concerned as it is with the issue of art’s publics, a concern that manifests itself throughout as a tension among arguments about the efficacy of the exhibition format. On the one hand, the exhibition can be a site for “a new topography of critical curatorial methodologies, a resonant site of discursive recontextualizations,” to quote Okwui Enwezor, who writes in the section ATTITUDE on the groundbreaking exhibitions of Susan Vogel, founding director of the Museum for African Art in New York. On the other hand, when constituted within the walls of a museum or gallery, the exhibition can be seen as profoundly delimiting our experience of art. “A looming paradox facing museums,” Nato Thompson writes, “is that the discursive framing of an art museum limits the capacity of its art to be effective.” “Art in Public Space” is the topic chosen for TYPOLOGIES, and the three authors—Thompson along with Joshua Decker and Mary Jane Jacob—offer rigorous and at times polemical thinking on this subject, reanimating it as a site of urgency, potential, and problematics.

In some respects this debate as to where art appears, and for whom, is old hat. Beginning in the 1960s certain artists took up the strictures of the art world as a central concern, and they produced work that was, as Sven Lütticken has observed, “capable of probing the structural conditions for the publicness of art.” Although museums, galleries, and art publications function to make art public, these spaces for art, Lütticken contends, are focused, concentrated, as opposed to the “diffuse nature of urban public space.”² In some ways the current reframing of the issue of art’s publics is the result of the professionalization of the curatorial role—something to which this publication is keenly attuned, and which we aim to acknowledge but also to interrogate—and the paradoxical reskilling of art through the introduction of all manner of non-art activities and roles an artist might occupy. Because of these developments, and due to the privileged yet fraught value placed upon information

and its dissemination in contemporary life, art’s publics are now constituted through other avenues: educational events, artistic and curatorial residencies, publications, talks, films, and performances. The para-curatorial shifts to the center, displacing the hallowed space of the exhibition.

And yet, several of the essays in this issue prove the degree to which the binary conception of exhibition space as focused, and public space as diffuse, can be unsettled by innovative curatorial and artistic strategies that take place within four walls. In BACK IN THE DAY, Constance Lewallen recovers the forward-looking impulses of *The Eighties*, organized by Brenda Richardson and Susan Rannells for the Berkeley Art Museum in 1970. Peter Eleey reflects on his unorthodox, process-based approach to Conceptual art in his 2009 exhibition *The Quick and the Dead* at the Walker Art Center. Another example examined in this issue by Matthew Drutt and nodded to in the previous issue by Chus Martínez is that of Pontus Hultén, the legendary curator and museum director who, apropos of the discussion about art’s publics undertaken in these pages, once explained, “A museum director’s first task is to create a public—not just to do great shows, but to create an audience that trusts the institution.”³

The cover of this issue of *The Exhibitionist* reproduces a view of *SHE—A Cathedral*, the 1966 collaborative installation by Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Per Olof Ultvedt, and Hultén himself that unapologetically hijacked the Moderna Museet, where Hultén was then director. Daniel Birnbaum (recently named director of the Moderna Museet) describes the work as “a gigantic, lurid cathedral in the form of a supine woman that viewers could walk into, the entry being between her legs. Inside, visitors found an aquarium full of goldfish, a love seat for couples, a bar, a small cinema showing a Greta Garbo movie, a playground with a slide, and many other surprises. Green and red lights controlled the traffic through the vaginal entrance.”⁴ As Benjamin remarked, to return to the opening gambit of this text, “The threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary. A *Schwelle* [threshold] is a zone.”⁵ Not only did the visitor’s encounter with *SHE—A Cathedral* involve crossing a threshold and entering the sculpture (and here we might recall that Benjamin’s words appear within the context of a discussion about erotics, lovers, and prostitution), but that project also rejected the boundary between artworks and “related programming.”

Such an audacious endeavor feels light years away from our current moment, for salutary and desultory reasons alike, but the provocation to rethink and expand notions of what an exhibition might *be* remains productive. Such rethinking and expansion is the core of the three exhibitions addressed in CURATORS’ FAVORITES. Matthew Drutt writes of the impact of *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, Hultén’s landmark 1968 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Juan A. Gaitan examines the “double refusal” of narrative and the instrumentalization of culture enacted by *Mirror’s Edge*, organized by Okwui Enwezor for the BildMuseet in Umea, Sweden, and seen by Gaitan at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2000. And Aurélie Voltz discusses Jean-Luc Moulène’s rethinking of the Louvre’s collection in his 2005 show *Le Monde, le Louvre*.

Finally, in the spirit of testing boundaries, ASSESSMENTS considers Douglas Eklund’s efforts to prize open a calcified episode of recent art with *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*

at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2009. Four writers—Eva Díaz, Jenelle Porter, Jane Simon, and Robert Storr—take the opportunity provided by Eklund’s curatorial undertaking to revisit, at times from unexpected angles, the *Pictures* moment, legacy, and mythology. The historicizing and revisionist impulses that work upon the near-contemporary (or the recently historical) show the degree to which art’s publics change over time and are rarely, if ever, unanimous.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999): 494.

2. Sven Lütticken, “The Worst Audience” in *Secret Publicity: Essays on Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam and Amsterdam: Nai Publishers and Fonds BKVB, 2005): 57–58.

3. Pontus Hultén as quoted in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich: JRP | Ringier, 2008): 37.

4. Daniel Birnbaum, “Director of Intelligence,” *Artforum* (February 2007): 61–62.

5. Benjamin, *ibid.*

CURATORS’ FAVORITES



The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age installation view, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1968

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

Matthew Drutt

My earliest memories of exhibitions are of people’s legs. My mother, an art dealer in Philadelphia, always took me with her to openings. I remember glimpses of things on pedestals, days spent in repeat visits to specific installations, like the arms and armor collection or the Duchamp room at the Philadelphia Museum, and comical moments like a stalker running through a Robert Morris maze at the ICA. I thought I lived in the most progressive place on earth. But, looking back, there is one show that has had a transformational and recurring presence in my life and transcends all of these other memories.

The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age was a landmark exhibition organized by Pontus Hultén for the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1968. A groundbreaking curator, Hultén became the founding director of Stockholm’s Moderna Museet in 1959, at the

age of 35, and honed his craft there organizing projects that bridged European and American culture, including key surveys of Ed Kienholz, Claes Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol and retrospectives of Joseph Beuys, Jean Fautrier, and Jackson Pollock. In 1966 he shocked audiences with the exhibition *SHE—A Cathedral*, a collaboration by Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Per Olof Ultvedt in which an oversize sculpture of a woman contained an installation of Old Master forgeries, a milk bar, and a screening room; visitors entered the sculpture/exhibition space through the vagina. *The Machine* was Hultén’s first foray into the historical and interdisciplinary survey that would characterize much of his curatorial work henceforth, with exhibitions conceived as vehicles for social and political change and museums used more as public forums than display centers. Indeed, the following year in Stockholm,

he organized *Poetry Must Be Made By All! Transform the World!*, an exhibition with a paucity of actual works of art and a discussion space that was used by supporters of the Black Panthers. As founding director of the Centre Georges Pompidou beginning in 1973, he organized a landmark series of shows devoted to the exchange of ideas between Paris and other cultural capitals—*Paris–New York*, *Paris–Moscow*, and *Paris–Berlin*—which practically came to define the modern-day concept of the interdisciplinary exhibition, with sprawling programs of lectures, theatrical performances, and film screenings orbiting a blockbuster survey of works of art falling within a larger-than-life topic.

In *The Machine*, Hultén traced the celebration and denigration of machines and machine ideas in art from Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer through Modernism, the contemporary incorporation of machines into art, and the aesthetic beauty of utilitarian objects being produced at that time. I'm not going to lie and tell you that I remember all of this clearly; I don't. I was six. It was my first visit to MoMA, maybe to New York. But I do remember distinctly the completely new feeling of utterly non-museological contemporaneity. For as unique as my experiences may have seemed to me by that time, nothing could have prepared me for the epiphany that occurred standing in this modern space of steel, glass, and marble, looking at art, things that were not art, distracted by views through the windows onto the city with cars and people going by, apartment buildings and townhouses on 54th Street looming large on the horizon. It was so unlike my experiences in Philadelphia, where the museum looks like the Parthenon, perched high on a hill away from everything else. Duchamp's bicycle wheel on a stool was cool, but the show also had a racing car hanging on the wall (Anthony Granatelli and Colin Chapman, *Lotus-STP Turbocar*, 1968). From now on, anything was grist for the exhibition mill.

My mother bought the catalogue for the show and gave it to me. Over the years, she would borrow it back more times than I can count, and we argued over possession. She needed it for her work; I needed it for my edification. It was unlike any book I had seen before. It has embossed metal covers, and on the front is the facade of that incredible building I had been in, the Museum

of Modern Art, with people and cars going by, while inside the book, like inside that museum, there were things that were so familiar to me, I felt as if I had known them forever. I've never fetishized anything in this way before or since. The book has been a companion to my interests as they developed; first I was infatuated with Dada and Constructivism—I embraced rebellion and revolution—and then I exploded into Cubism, Futurism, the Bauhaus and industrial design, photography, contemporary architecture, Pop art, and media-based art. All of these areas became focal points of my professional work and my private obsessions, and the *Machine* catalogue has been my Physicians' Desk Reference as I work my way through them.

For a generation raised on art that is routinely informed by the moving image on high-definition flat-screen televisions, broadband technology, and handheld devices that allow us to speak, text, or watch video at our desks, in the backseat of a taxi, sitting in a public toilet, or curled up in bed, it must be hard to imagine just how incredibly revelatory this project was in its time. It was the first museum exhibition to include a work playing on videotape, Nam June Paik's *McLuhan Caged* (1967), at a time when television in the home was still an unsophisticated experience. In its review of the show, *Time* magazine asked, pointedly, "What adult American has not swatted a flickering TV set? Or made an uneasy joke about the day when the computer tries to take over?"¹ The latter observation was more compelling than it might seem today, for while we whine about our reliance on digital devices and their intrusion into our daily lives, Hultén's exhibition opened in the wake of the release of Stanley Kubrick's epic *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in which a psychopathic supercomputer system (not so discreetly inspired by technology giant IBM) runs amok during a manned space mission to Jupiter. The movie came out just as the United States had launched the first of several manned Apollo missions, placing the country safely ahead of Russia in the race for the conquest of space. The film freaked everyone out. Against the backdrop of the war in Vietnam, with the Cold War prospect of mutual nuclear annihilation now inextricably bound up in the competition over intergalactic exploration, ambivalence (if not outright fear and paranoia) toward technology had reached a mass audience that the Fu-

The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1968
Stamped on aluminum, printed in color
9 3/4 x 8 1/2 in. (24.8 x 21.6 cm)



tourists and Dada artists would have lusted after.

Hultén knew this and acknowledged it in his introduction to the show: "All of us have a rather unclear and not very dignified relation to technology. We put hope in the machine and then get frustrated when it deceives us. How the artist in particular looks upon technology is very important—because it is the freest, the most human way of looking at a nonhuman object. Perhaps the artist will show us the way to a better relationship."² Not content to rely solely on preexisting works to make his case, Hultén took the additional and unusual step of inviting the newly formed Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), a collaborative venture founded in 1967 by the engineers Billy Klüver and Fred Waldhauer and the artists Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whitman, to coordinate a competition seeking projects that explored interactions between engineers and artists, not something preconceived by either member of each engineer-artist team. *The New York Times* announced, a year before *The Machine* opened, the selections of the jury of distinguished scientists and technology executives. The 114 selected projects were shown concurrently at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and MoMA as part of the exhibition, with cash awards of \$3,000 going to the best entries.

Sadly, little in the way of coherent visual documentation of the exhibition as installed seems to have survived, but the *Machine* catalogue does include nine projects specially selected by Hultén. They appear at the end of the book, with a bluish chromolithographic cast to distinguish them from the other works in the exhibition. The implication is unmistakable: These are the waves of the future. The pieces look almost commonplace by today's standards, objects that respond to human touch, a heartbeat, or the clapping of hands. I vaguely remember Niels and Lucy Jackson Young's *Fakir in 3/4 Time* (1968), which combines an air blower and a vibrating arm to create a mechanical fountain of textile cord or mechanical tape dancing 40 feet into the air at 100 miles per hour. Even *Time*'s critic was impressed by it, having written off much of the rest of the show as "plenty of jiggling junk and blithely bleeping electronic marvels."³

One of the few surviving official installation shots of the exhibition is reproduced here; it shows what one would expect of an exhibition at MoMA back then. Far from the implied cacophony of chaos described above, it shows a spaciouly installed room of contemporary masterworks by Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Watts, Jean Tinguely, and others residing

comfortably alongside the E.A.T. “science projects.” The fans in Rauschenberg’s painting and one of the Oldenburg sculptures must have seemed nostalgic, even anachronistic, in the modern age of air conditioning. How deceptively calm and dignified it all looks. Out of view, back in the catalogue on my shelf, another, more sinister set of pictures looms larger in my mind as the enduring imagery of this project. The frontispiece and its companion at the end of the book are documentary photographs of Tinguely’s infamous 1960 self-constructing and self-destructing work of art, *Homage to the City of New York*, a piece that had a brief birth and death in MoMA’s sculpture garden, under a Buckminster Fuller dome. Tinguely set the piece in motion on a cold, wet night in front of 250 onlookers. When it failed to destroy itself after 20 or 90 minutes (accounts

of the evening conflict), the artist set it ablaze and finally hacked it with an ax until it stopped working. As John Canaday noted in his review of the evening, “Mr. Tinguely makes fools of machines while the rest of mankind permits machines to make fools of them. Tinguely’s machine wasn’t quite good enough, as a machine, to make his point.”⁴ Perhaps not, but as for art, I can’t imagine more fitting symbolism for Hultén’s project.

Notes

1. Exhibitions: “Love, Hate & the Machine,” *Time*, December 6, 1968.

2. Cited in *Ibid.* This precise remark does not appear in the catalogue, so it must have been a brochure or wall text.

3. *Ibid.*

4. John Canaday, “Homage to City of New York,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 1960.

Mirror’s Edge installation view, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2000, showing works by Yinka Shonibare and Joachim Schönfeldt



FROM THE RIGOR OF THE MODEL TO THE EXACTNESS OF ITS ITERATIONS

Juan A. Gaitan

The request to write a critical essay on an exhibition that has inspired me to reflect upon curatorial practices brought to mind Okwui Enwezor’s *Mirror’s Edge*, which I saw in its iteration at the Vancouver Art Gallery nearly 10 years ago. This was the first exhibition that Enwezor produced after being appointed director of

Documenta XI. In the capricious calendar of what we might call “contemporary art years,” *Mirror’s Edge* is already history. Conversely, there isn’t enough hindsight on this show or the issues it spoke to for it to be considered historically. It might belong to an extra-historical period Walter Benjamin called the “just past,” a past in

which things are suspended when they have no clear position in the present or in our historical consciousness. We are detached from this past in a somewhat willful way, not because it is remote but because it isn’t remote enough. It is a past that confronts the present with its models, which is to say that it forces a reflection on the present state of former potentials. *Mirror’s Edge* has a place in my memory, and thus I must explain (not least to myself) my interest in this show in particular, and how what it was trying to do then makes sense in relation to what we are trying to do now—and by “we” I mean those of us for whom making exhibitions is more than a way of presenting artists or, alternatively, using art to represent curatorial ideas.

By the end of the 1990s, especially in North America, postcolonial critique had gained much ground in academia and in exhibition making toward the dismantling of dominant narratives. Several publications had operated in this direction, for example *Beyond the Fantastic*, which brought together essays directed at disrupting the depoliticized and hypereroticized reading of Latin American art allowed by the category of “the fantastic.” There was also the Queens Museum of Art’s 1999 exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, with its ambitions of decentering the *telos* of late-20th-century art. Yet postcolonial critique was at the time—the 1990s—solidifying as “correct” rather than “critical” discourse, with subjective positions under strict scrutiny.

Mirror’s Edge was refreshingly blasé about grouping together works from entirely different contexts. It included artists from all over the world (Mexico, Cuba, Sweden, the United States, Nigeria, Japan) but without staging a geopolitical drama. Some of the works brought with them cultural references, but these didn’t seem to deflect the show’s aim. At the entrance of the exhibition was an enigmatic mural by Sophie Tottie titled *Kticip Voyager II* (1999). In the lexicon of Greek (and more specifically, Cypriot) antiquity, the word *Kticip* means “founding spirit,” but the work also had esoteric and futurist motifs, and thus the show opened with an artwork whose cultural-historical position was radically unclear. A room on the first floor contained *Cantos Patrioticos* (1998–99) by Francis Alÿs, which is about the raucous nationalist culture expressed by mariachi bands in Mexico. On



Mirror’s Edge installation view, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2000, showing works by Thomas Demand and Bodys Isek Kingelez



Mirror’s Edge installation view, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2000, showing works by Meschac Gaba

a wall toward the back was a series of photographs of cinema interiors by Hiroshi Sugimoto. On the second floor was a large room with Steve McQueen's *Dead Pan* (1997), still one of the most extraordinary treatments of cinematic space and subjectivity. For those who have never seen it, it is a black-and-white looping remake of a famous Buster Keaton scene in which the facade of an A-frame house falls on Keaton (McQueen in the remake), who happens to be standing precisely in the space of the window (there is no glass, only a hole). The upshot: Sometimes life depends on immobility. There was a work titled *LAND*, a device by the neo-utopian Danish collective N55, which was produced in an entirely different spirit: namely the spirit of solving living conditions for imaginary nomads. In a separate space was Carlos Garaicoa's post-utopian installation *City View from the Table of My House* (1998), an amazing commentary on the consumption of social and urban planning. Yinka Shonibare contributed his tableaux titled *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998), in which the artist problematizes the racialization of social roles in African colonial history. A room by Thomas Hirschhorn presented a sort of archaeology of the present through images taken from magazines, television, and other popular media.

What was the aim? The title already suggests it: to point to the segment (the edge) in which the object can't mask itself in its reflections. The mirror is of course the great allegory of the modern episteme in the West. To speak of its "edge" is to exhibit its technological—rather than its phenomenological—side. The show wasn't about the experience of art but, to paraphrase Jean-Luc Godard, about showing the reality of art moving from reality to the artwork.¹

Was this the function of the exhibition or of the artworks? This question still persists, I think, for reasons that I can only outline. In the range of motifs brought up by the works, *Mirror's Edge* was a Nouvelle Vague exhibition. It compelled the viewer to wander through a range of themes rooted in sociopolitical realities. But this assemblage of themes would have been incongruous outside of a difficult encounter between two curatorial models. For the sake of brevity, and somewhat illegitimately, let's just say that these two models were represented in the two versions of Documenta that preceded Enwezor's:

Jan Hoet's in 1992, with its emphasis on the artists (that is, on the producers and their individual genius), and Catherine David's in 1997, with its concept of "retroperspective," a Deleuzian term coined by David that affirms the present as the space where future and past become mutually conditioned constructions. It would be ridiculous to claim that *Mirror's Edge* was actually a conciliation of these two models (it wasn't a show about art and it wasn't a show about historical lessons), but it could not have been inattentive to them. Enwezor, after all, had just been appointed director of *Documenta XI*. In my mind or in my memory, *Mirror's Edge* operated relative to these two models, which it then turned into a double or redoubled refusal.

From *Documenta IX* it rescued an attitude against narrative that was embedded in Hoet's undertaking. It wasn't explicit, and perhaps it wasn't even intended. It was an attitude that is characteristic of contemporary art and potentially distinguishes it from art-historical narration. Narrative is how the subjects of history are ordered and how individuals are categorized, as subjects, in a particular order, in the prose of history. To refuse narratives is to resist the prosaic ways in which subjectivities are distributed along different categories: aesthetic, political, scientific or pseudo-scientific, racial, ethnic, gender, and so on. The autonomy of art is of course a myth, but the word "autonomy" is also a horizon. As Ernst Bloch would have said of utopia, autonomy should be conceived not as a goal but as a principle. When Godard spoke of "the reality of art" he meant precisely this, that the artwork cannot propose solutions, or even conclusions, because its function remains in the space of the statement, of the stating of the problem. And this stating of the problem is already an affirmation of the discourse within which the problem is conceived (cinema, art, exhibition making).

From David's *Documenta X*, Enwezor's show rescued the refusal to give institutions over to the interests of common sense, which in our world means economic interests and cultural diplomacy. Yet while *Mirror's Edge* kept to the then-new principle that exhibitions can be structured on theoretical grounds, it did so without allowing the curatorial thesis to overdetermine the works. As much as self-reflection and doubt have been hailed in postmodern critique, and indeed stylized in a wide range of stroboscopic

writings, when intersecting with narrative they can also become forms of institutional affirmation. The idea that one must look back and formulate histories of the different institutions that one takes part in was at one point an important way of reflecting on their nature and potential (positive or negative), but this retrospective reflection must now also contemplate the fact that self-reflexivity (or at least a histrionics of self-reflexivity, masked as critique) has been incorporated into the repertoire of institutional attitudes.

Whether *Mirror's Edge* is unique or characteristic of its time is beside the point. It is a speculative model whose rigor does not always translate in its contemporary iterations. It has

come to exemplify a form of exhibition making that works between the autonomy of art and the curatorial statement. It is a model from the recent past that can be mobilized in order to ask a series of questions about how this dialectic is conceived today and whether it should be conceived at all. Of course there are more directly political implications that the works in *Mirror's Edge* brought up, but this is a dialogue about exhibitions, not artworks, which means that we are here discussing models for exhibiting rather than giving direction for the making of art.

Notes

1. Godard says: "Cinema is not reality. It is about showing the reality of film moving from reality to the camera." *Los Angeles Free Press*, March 22, 1968.



Le Monde, le Louvre installation view, Louvre Museum, Paris, 2005

MOULÈNE, LE MONDE, THE LOUVRE

Aurélié Voltz

Rummaging through your memory from top to bottom for several days, setting out the results of that search side by side, carrying out a forced pruning, imposing rules on yourself while also letting yourself drift toward a certain emotion, which is distant yet quite present all the same—this process of choosing one particularly memorable show among so many is quite telling. The foundations of the curatorial practice are pres-

ent and already at work in these initial steps. Then comes the question of why. The attempt to provide an answer shapes the memory of the chosen exhibition while reflecting the curator's own research.

For me, the striking thing about Jean-Luc Moulène's 2005 show *Le Monde, le Louvre*, held in the Salle de la Maquette of the Louvre Museum in Paris, is the clear memory of the sculptures.



Le Monde, le Louvre installation view,
Louvre Museum, Paris, 2005

They were palpably in the room and gave you the impression that you might even touch them with your eyes. The texture of the marble and terracotta, the softness of the ivory, the transparency of the alabaster—all of those things bring me back to the warm presence of figurines that were small in size but large in their gaze. Although they are little known, those statuettes appeared to me more familiar than any masterpiece, from the *Mona Lisa* to the *Venus de Milo*. A perceptible coming-together took place, exceptional in the museum context, as if the pieces had swapped their status as artworks for the role of fetishes or knickknacks, objects we more readily become attached to.

In reality, not one physical statuette was on display. And although I was well aware that Moulène had photographed the 24 statuettes one by one, I was no longer quite sure of their actual presence in the gallery. Distorting memories, telling memories, the photographs of the sculptures, like true portraits, had so plumbed their subjects that they themselves became subjects and were personified. A kind of game took shape between the power of photography and the powers attributed to these gods and goddesses, amulet figures of protection, execration, or magic.

But before we pass over into the sacred, let's go back in time. In 2005, Marie-Laure Bernadac, curator in chief and project leader at the Louvre for contemporary art, gave Moulène a carteblanche invitation to put together an exhibition that would take into consideration the museum's own collections. Moulène's response involved a large amount of curatorial work, that is, selecting from the collection, producing a work of art from other works, and arranging in space his exhibition in the Salle de la Maquette, which had been put at his disposal. This work came naturally to an artist who, since the late 1980s, has been questioning not only the production, status, and diffusion of images, but also the nature and significance of the object, be it everyday or artistic.

To create his imaginary collection from among 30,000 works of art, Moulène made use of Atlas, the Louvre's database, entering keywords and pulling up numbers of images with each term. He took the human body as his point of reference, working his way around it by keying in the names of different anatomical parts. One

might note in passing, as Moulène did, that the entry for *sexe*, "genitals," yielded no response, a gap in the database that piqued his curiosity. With Atlas we are of course dealing with a system set up by human beings; Moulène is constantly finding and exploiting meaning in all the incidents, details, and anecdotes—such things are often essential to our understanding of the world—that occur during his work preparing an exhibition.

Flouting strict chronology and the museum's various departmental divisions, cutting across cultures, historical periods, and geographies in his seven-league boots, Moulène traveled the world far and wide with Atlas, focusing specifically on form and sampling this object and that to re-create what he calls "a body" through a combination of choice (the keywords he selected) and chance (the images of objects in the Louvre brought up by the database). He made his way through Eastern antiquities, Greek and Roman antiquities, Egyptian antiquities, the Department of Sculpture, and the Department of Art Objects. The final "body" of his show comprised 24 objects, selected and photographed by Moulène. He exhibited these photographic portraits in the gallery.

The objects were also reproduced as full-page illustrations in a supplement of the French newspaper *Le Monde*. Stacked by the thousands on pallets in the gallery itself and along vestiges of the medieval Louvre, in this case, the ancient moats through which visitors passed to reach the exhibition, the special supplement seemed like the subject of a procession or march. It marked out a certain route and pointed museumgoers to the Salle de la Maquette, where Moulène's personal pantheon was on display. As a true counterpart to the exhibition, the newspaper supplement also contained the labels and other explanatory notices for each of the featured sculptures, as this information was absent from the physical space of the venue.

Visitors' first reading of the show was "clean," then: no dates, no provenance, no references of any kind to be found at the foot of each sculpture. In the end this was the most striking part of the experience: the chance to look at faces and bodies for themselves, in their singularity, this direct visual experience replacing historical context and conditions. The signs and symbols connected with the divinities faded and gave way to the gesture in a kind of dance.



Jean-Luc Moulène
Pazuzu, 2005
 Cibachrome under diasec
 17 3/4 x 14 1/4 in. (45.1 x 36.2 cm)

There they were, photographed straight on, in daylight, eyes in the upper quarter of each image. Whether a Baal brandishing a lightning bolt, a Mesopotamian orant (praying figure), an Attic funerary siren, or a Mary Magdalene in ecstasy, all the figurines offered an unprecedentedly intimate face-to-face encounter in which visitors could look deep into their eyes. It was a ballet of forms, where expression, pauses, and figuration, however varied, converged on one and the same score. A great family brought together: that of the world, of the Louvre.

The number 24, besides being a standard page count in the press, refers to the idea of a day, in this case one that began with a demon (the first statuette) and ended with a toy top (the last). The passing hours were savored, like a journey across time and through the heavens. The backgrounds of the photographs were a clear, uniform color; many were blue, which Christianity associates with the transcendent spirit and Islam with the divine. Sometimes this unfathomable blue gave way to impure backgrounds, like that of the MDF board, whose fibers easily blended in with the irregularities of the marble of that simplified statuette, the Cycladic idol. But whether it was sky-blue bordering on celadon green or

ochre, each background was specially adapted to make viewers forget that it even existed, in order to best convey and reveal the subject of the photo.

Before our eyes, a procession took shape in different ways in the space and in the paper supplement. In the museum, the prints were placed upright on pedestals, lending each figurine the physical presence of a standing sculpture. Moulène was playing with the principles of scale and museum codes simultaneously, enlarging the sculptures, giving the photographic prints a fictional third dimension, and reinventing the status of the objects on display. Thanks to their presentation in the space, curious, little-known objects from the museum became essential things, actors in a story, witnesses that one couldn't do without.

In the *Le Monde* supplement, the processional mode was reinforced, no doubt because the visitor's gaze was more concentrated and sequential. The idea of the body, dear to Moulène, was featured in a variety of ways. One would begin to turn the pages, looking for similarities and secrets from one figure to the next. Of course the figures yielded to the viewer, but they resisted forming a coherent collection, a whole. One

thumbed through the supplement more quickly, like a flipbook, and what then appeared were bodies, in different styles, more or less dressed, vertical, with postures emphasized, against a nondescript background. Not unlike a fashion magazine, oddly enough. Moulène has always explored the classic genres and standardized forms in both the fine arts and mass media. It was a *tour de force* here to suggest fashion photography rather than the documentary kind, the way the objects first came to the artist's attention when he was making his selection. The shift from documentary to fashion was an exemplary step; the sculptures left behind a frozen time and came to life, became contemporary.

The fashion-show mode was confirmed and emphasized by a third aspect, a video screened during the exhibition, featuring the movements of the sculptures as they arrived at and later left Moulène's studio before and after being photographed. Running longer than an hour, *Plus ou moins d'ordre* (Order More or Less) constitutes a ballet complete with stage entrances, the glare of the spotlights, and emotional exits. The process of symbolically leaving the motherhouse, the parent company, from the Louvre's basement to the artist's garret, continued in the gradual unwrapping of these small figurines, each carefully cradled in a wicker basket carried by a museum curator. In other words a series of precautions, a ritual completing of the revelation of a passage from one state to another, that of being "still-born" (to borrow Moulène's expression) to that of being restored to the world, of being brought to light.

A final look at the group. For an instant there emerged—crossed my mind—the mode of museum display that is at work in the Louvre's Cour Marly. There, blocks of immense volumes, perfect rectangles, show off mannerist sculptures. In the Salle de la Maquette, on their own scale, the slender pedestals formed a whole. Their rough, unpolished aspect echoed the surrounding concrete and its warm yellowish hue like stone, dear to Mr. Pei, who designed this space. The pedestals were also well adapted to the volume of the narrow, high, windowless gallery—the space could pass for a small, improvised chapel, like the ones in airports, squeezed in between the restrooms and the departure gates. One small directional light on each of the photos accentuated the image without framing it, putting the fin-

ishing touches on the statuettes' reification. The photography, the display design, all the tricks up a curator's sleeve were called upon to imagine, transform, and move as naturally as possible the figurines from the vast reserves of the Louvre to the confines of the Salle de la Maquette. That shift was a shift of the eye as well as the shift represented by a visit, the visit Jean-Luc Moulène once proposed.



Terry Fox
Defoliation, 1970

BACK IN THE DAY



THE EIGHTIES IN 1970

Constance Lewallen

On the evening of March 16, 1970, the artist Terry Fox took a flamethrower to a bed of jasmine plants outside the Power Plant Gallery on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley, the interim location of the University Art Museum.¹ (The new Brutalist building on Bancroft Way opened six months later.) Fox said subsequently, “This was my first political work. By burning a perfect triangle right in the middle, it would look as though someone had destroyed [the plants] on purpose. It was also a theatrical piece. Everyone likes to watch fires . . . but at a certain point people realized what was going on. Suddenly everyone was quiet. One woman cried for 20 minutes. The next day when people came to have their lunch there, it was just a burned-out plot. . . . It was the same thing they were doing in Vietnam . . . burning flowers [people] like to sit near.”²

Defoliation, as Fox titled his action, inaugurated the exhibition *The Eighties*, the brainstorm of two forward-looking young curators, Brenda Richardson and Susan Rannells. Their letter of invitation sent to 19 artists and designers asked the recipients to make works that envisioned or responded to what the world might be like in the 1980s. The letter said, “It is the responsibility of every individual and every institution to promote an awareness of our present and future environmental conditions and the quality of life as it seems to be evolving. We hope that by taking this first step we can encourage an attitude whereby museums can remain a viable force within the society, rather than continuing toward ultimate self-obsolescence.”³ The artists were given wide latitude; all media were welcome; collaboration was encouraged.

From the beginning, the curators regarded the planning process as integral to the exhibition. In the weeks leading up to the show, four free-wheeling meetings, fueled by beer and marijuana, took place at Richardson’s house with the aim of coming up with a concept all participants could agree upon

1. The museum is now called the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

2. Terry Fox, interview by Willoughby Sharp, *Arts Magazine* (May 1970): 48.

3. Letter to Wayne C. Campbell from Brenda Richardson and Susan Rannells, exhibition file, UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

4. *Free*, exhibition catalogue, unpaginated.

(signaled by a thumbs-up or a crooked finger). By all accounts, these brainstorming sessions were lively and productive—in informal settings where anyone could toss out any idea, however outrageous. They also brought together as equals two generations of artists. William Wiley, Manuel Neri, Jim Melchert, and Mel Henderson were relatively established, all teaching in local university art departments. Some of the younger artists, such as Stephen Laub, Terry Fox, Paul Kos, Howard Fried, John C. Fernie, and Robert Kinmont, were recent graduates or graduate students, meeting here for the first time. They would soon form the core of the nascent Bay Area Conceptual movement, which broke radically with the art of the past.

The meeting on March 4, 1970, was tape recorded and transcribed in the catalogue. For the most part it revolved around the idea of having some kind of free space in the show for audience participation. Wiley thought the space should have a painting or an object in it, which people could remove or change. Laub suggested that a psychiatrist could be on hand to talk with people. The curators proposed that the artists might be in the gallery much of the time to talk with visitors or that a dialogue among artists should continue throughout the show. Someone else proposed that an organ be available for anyone to play; another said that there should be a sauna or a one-person, soundproof meditation center. Fox liked the idea of an invisible “room” made with electric circuitry that would cause a mild shock to anyone who entered. (That didn’t happen, but in Paul Kos’s piece, *Space Allotment 1980s*, visitors who stepped on the “wrong” square triggered an excruciatingly loud alarm.) Jim Melchert thought that artists might donate 15 minutes of their time to exchange services with visitors.

The curators had expected that artists would work together on installations, but this did not occur. As Stephen Laub wrote in a recent email to me, “We discussed some wild and totally improbable ideas, which stimulated collaborative feeling, but even though the idea exchanges were thrilling, we were also such a bunch of individualists that in the end we responded to the idea of an unknown future in our own ways. The pre-show gatherings were utopian in spirit, but the exhibition confronted for the most part a dystopian future.” But there was still a sense of camaraderie in the galleries as the artists worked side by side building their works. In the end, the exhibition did include a free space marked by a neon sign where, on different days, visitors might encounter typewritten statements about the future tacked onto the wall, latex sculptures representing deformed bodies, or even a tombstone etched with images of flowers and the words “Rest Assured.”

Much of the art in the show looked as if it was still in progress, and some of it was. Wayne E. Campbell made a latex room titled *Table the Problem*. Melchert’s piece consisted of a sheet of Plexiglas covered with water drops and, later, money (put there by others) suspended over the heads of viewers “like a clear and flat wishing well.”⁴ One of the most elaborate installations

Howard Fried
Return of the Agrarian Society, 1970
Ironing boards, clamp-on lights, vegetables, fluorescent paint, cans (paint and vegetable), text with airline (Pan Am) timetable, Monopoly tokens, plastic filament fishing line, steel rods, and pipe fittings
216 x 144 x 120 in. (548.6 x 365.8 x 304.8 cm)



was Fried’s *Return of the Agrarian Society*, made of seven ironing boards representing the seven continents and real vegetables dipped in phosphorescent paint, which glowed when a light turned off every 20 minutes. The vegetables were suspended on rods cantilevered off the boards in such a way that their projected shadows made a map of the world on the wall. Fernie made a formal garden of chrysanthemums. Laub constructed a wood and canvas tower that extended to a hole in the roof (a kind of proto-James Turrell sky room). Warner Jepson, anticipating a future in which direct experiences of nature would be rare, provided a blue space in which visitors could listen to bird sounds on headphones. Henderson planned a 16-screen projection showing farm workers, minority communities, and other groups who were beginning to organize, but his ambitions exceeded the available technology. Wiley, ever the optimist, contributed a watercolor depicting a slingshot in the form of a peace symbol and a wooden box from which his faint, tape-recorded voice repeated over and over, “This is the eighties, this is the eighties.”

The simple, spiral-bound catalogue was published after the show opened. In addition to the March 4 conversation (the comments are unattributed in the catalogue version), it contains black-and-white photographs taken at the planning meetings and the opening reception along with a few uncaptioned installation views.

Richardson remembers the show as “a real hodgepodge of concept and ‘object,’ and not the sort of work that’s really subject to critique as art. . . . The experience of the social interaction and the dialogue was more the work of art than the installations themselves.”⁵ This was confirmed by what little press coverage the show received. Jean Jaszi wrote in *Artweek*, a newspaper-

5. From an email to me on March 19, 2010.



Stephen Laub
Tower, 1970
 Canvas and wood
 3 x 3 x 27 in.
 (7.6 x 7.6 x 68.6 cm)

format critical publication widely read at that time throughout California, “First of all, let nobody think that the *Projects for the Eighties* show has anything to do with the future. The show is now, period. It couldn’t relate to any other time except the present moment in Barrow Lane, the University of California at Berkeley, the Art Gallery.”⁶

It was a tumultuous time there, only a few years after the Free Speech Movement had closed down the campus and in the midst of strong anti-war sentiment and frequent protests and strikes. The mood was rebellious, authority was flouted, and the rage for change was almost palpable. So, yes, *The Eighties* was of its time. But, looking back, much of it has a strangely contemporary feel. The spirit of collaboration is echoed by current trends toward collective art making. The decision to elide the distinction between gallery and studio, art and life, spectator/observer and artist/participant is a value shared by artists today. The spirit of exchange emerged afresh in the 1990s under the rubric of Relational Aesthetics and still resonates, as evidenced by the 2008–9 exhibition *theanyspacewhatever* at the Guggenheim Museum. The planning for the two shows was similar. Seeking an alternative model for a group exhibition, curator Nancy Spector called a series of meetings with the 10 invited artists beginning several years in advance of the opening, asking them to join her in developing the concept for the show and hoping to foster a spirit of collaboration, just as Richardson and Rannells had in 1970 (although in the latter case, the meetings were held weeks, not years, in advance).

And, as with *The Eighties*, group decision making did not result in a great amount of collaboration, or in the production of critically acclaimed art. If *The Eighties* had a somewhat unfinished look, *theanyspacewhatever*, according to Spector, was “decidedly empty.”⁷ This is not to say that experimenting with new curatorial models is not worthwhile, even if at times the process trumps the result. It is heartening to see that the spirit of camaraderie and generosity evinced in 1970 still has resonance 40 years later.

6. Jean Jaszi, *Artweek* (March 28, 1970): 1.

7. Nancy Spector, “*theanyspacewhatever: After the Fact*,” *The Exhibitionist* no. 1 (January 2010): 51.

ASSESSMENTS

★

THE PICTURES GENERATION

1974–1984

PICTURES DEGENERATION

Eva Díaz

Thirty-three years have passed since Douglas Crimp curated *Pictures* at Artists Space in New York. The exhibition contained work by just five artists: Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith. In 1979, two years later, Crimp published a revised version of his catalogue essay in the journal *October*, expanding it to incorporate discussion of Louise Lawler and Cindy Sherman.¹ In 2001 Artists Space re-hung the exhibition and included later works by the five original participants as well as new work by four contemporary artists, triggering ripples of critical responses that joined a wave of reevaluations of the art of that earlier period.² And last year, again drawing on the renown, if not notoriety, of the original show, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's photography curator Douglas Eklund presented *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, a large-scale exhibition of more than 250 works by 30 artists. From Crimp's modestly scaled but ambitious show, then, emerges a fascinating *mise en abyme* around how and why *Pictures* can help historicize the art of the 1970s and 1980s.

This mirror play of references suits Crimp's claims for the works he included. *Pictures* argued that its artists staged representation in unresolved circuits of identification and desire, thereby framing subjectivity and our experience of the world as increasingly mediated by images we can never truly possess. Crimp went further in his *October* follow-up, arguing that the appropriation of mass-cultural images—a strategy familiar from Pop and earlier—had en-

tered a crucial new phase in the group he assembled. *Pictures* works challenged the viewer with an uncomfortable ambivalence: "A narrative ambience stated but not fulfilled" enacting a "spiral of fragmentation, excerptation, quotation." The works imparted a sense of anticipation tinged with anxiety; they created a "desire for signification that is known to be absent."³

In a now-familiar formulation, Crimp argued that the works themselves operated as a kind of recursive *mise en abyme*—that they were pictures of pictures: "Those processes of quotation, excerptation, framing, and staging that constitute the strategies of the work I have been discussing necessitate uncovering strata of representation. Needless to say, we are not in search of sources or origins, but of structures of signification: Underneath each picture there is always another picture."⁴ At this early moment of the reception of French Marxist and Post-structural theory in the United States, Crimp was synthesizing Guy Debord's sense of the "society of the spectacle" as a world of images unmoored from history and alienated from their producers, what Jean Baudrillard would soon theorize, and hyperbolize, as the simulacral experience of a copy without an original.⁵

In expanding Crimp's argument to a wider group of artists, the Met exhibition seemed to adopt the apparent pluralism of what Crimp and others were beginning to call postmodernism. Crimp himself was wary of extending such arguments too far; for him the temporal "stratigraphic activity" of *Pictures* artworks related specifically to technologies of mechanical reproduction.⁶ It is important to keep in mind that Crimp's original show concentrated on appropriation strategies in photography and, to a lesser extent, film. The Met show largely maintained this emphasis, understanding as Crimp did that the play between simulation and originality was

a key gambit of much of the work on display.

By broadening the argument to 30 artists, the Met showcase did result in a certain loss of focus. It did an excellent job of historicizing the importance of Cal Arts figures such as John Baldessari, but the move to incorporate a broader range of West Coast practices, including early work by Barbara Bloom, Paul McMahon, Matt Mullican, David Salle, and James Welling as well as New York-based performance work by Dara Birnbaum and Michael Smith, at times overextended the Crimp paradigm, identifying appropriation as any kind of reference to pop culture or advertising, or as any sort of adoption or staging of identity on the part of an artist. Ultimately, the capable Met show held this expansion in productive tension, but it does indicate a tendency toward more fanciful forms of revisionism that has crept into other recent curatorial endeavors.

That is, if the appropriation strategies exemplified in photographic practices of the late 1970s came to define the art of the period, what happened to everything else? Other projects of the 1970s and 1980s—Neo-Geo, Neo-Expressionism, "Bad Painting"—were never critically popular, nor have they been critically redeemed in the years since. If the Met's *The Pictures Generation* extended the parameters of Crimp's original selection to include a wider range of period practices, at what point does this breadth become untenable, a loose claim that *all* the art of the 1970s and 1980s applied appropriation strategies?

To answer that question, consider a show up in spring 2010 in New York at Haunch of Venison Gallery, *Your History Is Not Our History*. Curated by two mega-successful figurative painters, David Salle and Richard Phillips, it juxtaposes works by other mega-prominent male figurative painters of the 1970s and 1980s (Jean-Michel

Basquiat, Francesco Clemente, Carroll Dunham, Eric Fischl, Julian Schnabel, and Terry Winters) with contemporaneous photography and text works by female artists (Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, and Laurie Simmons). This awkward marriage explores, according to Salle and Phillips, the works' shared concern with "the pictorial," whose "real subject is loneliness." These and other claims are strange: How is Holzer's litany of fanatical cultural stereotypes in the aphoristic *Inflammatory Essays* (1979–82) a pictorial project? Why reduce Lawler's photos of artworks seen in the quotidian context of collectors' homes to a mere figuration of loneliness? It is also worth considering just who the "you" of the show's title interpellates. Salle and Phillips say they are laying to rest "one of the most entrenched critical conceits of the last 30 years: that the 1980s are cleaved between painting, which was seen as regressive and market-driven, and the so-called 'critique' strategies, which took the form of photography and/or text."

So "you"—the bad subjects here—are materialist and feminist critics (such as Crimp) who see in these photo- and text-based works a broader criticism of the proprieties of looking, making, and owning inherent in traditional notions of beauty, artistic subjectivity, and, yes, painting. There is little doubt that at the time these two strains of art making coexisted side by side, sometimes under the label of appropriation. And it may be the case that this kind of critique was, or is, still possible through painting. Yet Salle and Phillips cannot sidestep the persuasive histories of the art of that time simply through an act of curatorial wish fulfillment. Nor does the cynicism of trying to spin Feminism's "your history is not our history" as a persecution of painting inject any new evidence that would counter the view of 1980s Expressionism as a commer-

cially driven masculine enterprise. It seems like they're trying to have that ever-elusive treat: the cake of market success eaten with the icing of critical approval.

That poses the questions: Has *The Pictures Generation* spawned a *Pictures* degeneration? Can the project of *Pictures* be revisited without misunderstanding, or, worse yet, casually misrepresenting its argument? The original exhibition, a touchstone of its period, surely deserves continuing reconsiderations. But we must weigh the interests and desires motivating such reevaluations, lest they traffic in ungrounded, anything-goes revisionism. That is precisely the sort of PoMo pastiche Crimp feared.

Notes

1. See Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (spring 1979): 75–88. The *October* essay was subsequently anthologized in Brian Wallis's influential volume *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Boston: David R. Godine, 1984). Crimp would go on to write about Richard Prince, Jenny Holzer, and Laurie Simmons, three artists who were associated with late-1970s and early-1980s appropriation practices and were included in *The Pictures Generation* at the Met.

2. See for example the *October* 2001 *Artforum*, which contained responses to the Artists Space re-hang by Scott Rothkopf and David Rimanelli. See also Howard Singerman's challenge to the *Artforum* series in "The Myth of Criticism in the 1980s," *X-TRA* 8, no. 1 (fall 2005).

3. Crimp, "Pictures," 83.

4. *Ibid.*, 87.

5. The popularization of Baudrillard's "simulacral" in the field of art writing, and his disproportionate influence in the art world, solely requires more research. In particular, Crimp differs from Baudrillard in that he does not lament the lost original, but rather emphasizes "structures of signification" that open up to questions of power in production, reproduction, enunciation, and appropriation (eventually in a more explicitly Foucauldian way in *On the Museum's Ruins*). The later popularity of Baudrillard's notion of the triumph of the simulacral may in fact obscure other possible implications of Crimp's "underneath each picture there

is always another picture" as it leads to questions of power. In particular, Crimp underscores the politics of framing and quotation in the work of Louise Lawler, an artist he seemed to find most relevant as he continued to develop that argument.

6. See Crimp, "Pictures," 87. Interestingly, this is a position from which Crimp began to withdraw by the early 1990s as he moved toward practices that were directly engaged in the social effects of representation. In the introduction to his 1993 collection of essays *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press), Crimp explained that the order of the hierarchy of the two forms of appropriation he had argued for in the early 1980s—a more traditional appropriation of style (argued in Mapplethorpe's mere adoption of Modernism's codes of aesthetic mastery) superseded by the postmodern appropriation of material (embodied in Levine's rephotographing of Edward Weston "original" nudes in the Greek style)—had in actuality become inverted by the politics of AIDS activism in the late 1980s. The homophobic responses to Mapplethorpe's work in and about gay subcultures indicated "that Mapplethorpe's work interrupts tradition in a way that Levine's does not" (p. 7). In an important way, Crimp was arguing that the interpretation of works changes over time.

DOWNTOWN GOES UPTOWN: PICTURES AT THE MET

Robert Storr

There is no denying the importance of Douglas Crimp's 1977 *Pictures* exhibition at Artists Space in New York. A small but pivotal landmark in the history of late-20th-century vanguard art—I will leave it to others to quibble over the absence of the prefix "neo" when applying the label "vanguard" to works or tendencies of that period—the show was Crimp's prescient and persuasive bid to define the turning point at which "modernism" morphed into "post-modernism" and to frame the circumstances prompting that metamorphosis.

So saying, I must also signal the lack of clarity, consistency, and coherent direction in much of downtown Manhattan "art production" during the 1970s. That lack bedeviled criticism and scholarship in circles where mid-century Formalist thinking had previously imposed its order on the longstanding heterogeneity of postwar art. Need I add that we are speaking of North American Formalism, since elsewhere in the world other schools of modernist thought flourished—schools (Formalist and non-Formalist alike) that took for granted few if any of the assumptions Crimp and his cohort considered axiomatic? Among the operative assumptions within numerous New York-centric communities of taste was the notion that aesthetic "pluralism" was a largely 1970s phenomenon, a woeful "falling off" from the glory that was "mainstream modernism" in the 1950s and 1960s, and, as such, something to be loudly lamented.

Crimp's *Pictures* manifesto is exemplary of such a view, though less pessimistic than his roughly contemporaneous texts on the purported death of painting and the death—as he saw it—that is the museum, an assertion partially borne out by the embalmed quality of the recent *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Crimp used the occasion to herald new perspectives on old problems of representation, perspectives reflecting the methodologies of photography and narrative film. It is unnecessary to rehearse those arguments here except to say that he was right in stressing the "the déjà vu, remote, spectral" aspects of the images the artists he championed took as sources and paraphrased in a conditional present tense, thereby simultaneously evoking and contradicting the unconditional "presentness" declared by Michael Fried and others to be the *sine qua non* of high modernist art. Indeed, Crimp maintained, time was of

the essence in the forms of appropriate media work that began to emerge in the late 1970s, parallel to and sometimes overlapping with New Image and Neo-Expressionist painting, but time as it was layered, warped, and suspended between present and past by media.

Of course Crimp was at pains to keep his distance from those alternating 1970s currents. But his very squeamishness about them, and his effort to overturn the basic paradigms of "medium-specific" Formalism as codified by Fried and his mentor Clement Greenberg while framing the new work as nevertheless rigorously "medium mindful," marks his essay as both forward and backward looking, radical in its implications but fundamentally conservative in its logic. It is this ambivalent stance that renders it a period piece of academic fence-tending when holes in the models upon which that logic was based were opening up and down the line, artists pouring through the gaps wherever they could find them.

Thus even as *Pictures* ushered in an important group of artists—Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, and Robert Longo, with Philip Smith being the weakest entry—and a sensibility that would indeed change how people saw and thought about seeing, its rationale served as a critical holding action against the rising tide of new work that threatened to overwhelm the aesthetic and historical paradigms its curator clung to. *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, Douglas Eklund's homage to and fleshing out of Crimp's show, expanded those horizons considerably, adding Cindy Sherman, a crucial figure absent from *Pictures* because she had previously been the subject of an exhibition at Artists Space, and other major and minor exponents of the same diffuse image-scavenging sensibility, among them patriarch John Baldessari and his blasted-allegories-prodigy Barbara Bloom, James Casebere, Sarah Charlesworth,

Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Thomas Lawson, Matt Mullican, Richard Prince, David Salle, Laurie Simmons, and James Welling, with cameo appearances by Allan McCollum, Michael Smith, and a few others. Eklund's casting was basically on target but his mise-en-scène drained the work of most of the tension it once had, rendering the ensemble less than, not more than, the sum of its parts and a demonstration of how "historicizing" the contemporary—especially in a vast, encyclopedic museum like the Metropolitan—can be the unkindest cut of all.

Much of the dispiriting feel of the exhibition was due to unsympathetic spaces at the Met, and to their awkward layout. The opening image clusters, or pictorial "paragraphs," of the show occupied the Joyce and Robert Menschel Hall for Modern Photography, and the fact that modern photography is consigned to a hallway speaks volumes about the ways in which aesthetic priorities hostile to the photo-mechanically generated art are structurally designed into the hosting institution. The grander galleries weren't much better, though the similarly crowded, similarly heavy-handed installation of the 2008 Jasper Johns show at the Met strongly suggests that a house style is the culprit as much as or more than individual curators.

Should such things matter all that much? Absolutely. If anything, new media are more vulnerable to routine museological display than traditional forms and formats, since old-fashioned frames, vitrines, and pedestals are essentially consistent with the moldings and decorative conventions of Beaux Arts buildings. Not the case with small, unconventionally framed, or virtually unframed images or environmental, film, or video works. Without felicitous spaces and a unifying concept of presentation, the disparateness of the works becomes—in a damning term used by former Museum of Modern Art curator Kirk Varnedoe—"a book

on a wall.” Or worse, an “academic journal” all over the floor. Two artists suffered especially: Salle, whose early photo-text works and photo-light room were isolated from each other and from his paintings, and Troy Brauntuch, whose polyptych of Nazi motifs—with Albert Speer’s snapshot of Hitler asleep in his touring car, a key work cited in Crimp’s article—was anticlimactically plunked at the end of the Hall for Photography with one important panel unceremoniously set at a 90-degree angle to the rest on an adjacent wall. Eklund is to be congratulated for having broken the ice at the Met and bringing in such work. Now he and his colleagues must break the Met’s exhibition mold so that it will truly have a place there.

MAKING COPIES

Jenelle Porter

Matt Mullican: *Getting back to Pictures being a marker, it's ironic how, in history, Cindy, you are the star of that exhibition. According to the public, not only were you in it, but you were the most important artist in it!*

Helene Winer: *Although a German curator recently asked me if I had an extra copy of the catalogue, because he's organizing a show that relates to that period, frankly I don't think many people remember the show itself.*

Cindy Sherman: *I don't either. People just blur all of us together into this group of Pictures people.*

Helene Winer: *I've read the term "pictures generation" used as a catchall.¹*

From catchall to the subject of a major, historical exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Exhibitions have a way of catching up with us, but it is the rare one that insinuates itself in the collective consciousness. *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984* is not that show, but its lodestar, *Pictures*, is. The two exhibitions share little in common. The latter was a small, focused show, seen by a relatively small portion of art-world insiders, that took place in 1977 at Artists Space in New York. The former was a ponderous survey that drew thousands to the Met in 2009. The history proposed by the Met show was unconvincing: too many gaps, too many additions, an anemic visual manifestation of complex ideas. But rather than add to the criticism already in print about it, and because the reality of criticism is that it's typically focused through a personal lens, I want to assess the show by complicating this journal's invitation to “consider” *The Pictures Generation*. This text reflects on the ideas proposed in *The Pictures Generation* through another show about *Pictures*, one I organized in 2001.

“*Pictures*” at an Exhibition was a partial re-creation of the 1977 *Pictures* exhibition. With only a few months of lead time, the gambit was to reproduce the original show, object for object, and to situate it alongside the work of an emerging generation of artists whose work, in my opinion, encouraged a consideration of the evolution of appropriation strategies. The impulse to remake a historically critical exhibition emerged from an array of thoughts about exhibition making: Stephanie Barron’s inspired use of re-creation in her great *Degenerate Art* show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1991; the ways exhibitions live through images, specifically installation photographs; and a desire to examine how critically significant exhibitions are historicized, theorized, and, especially, mythologized. In the history of Artists Space, *Pictures* was a touchstone. I

wanted to discern what about it had generated such lasting authority. The only way to do this, I thought, was to re-create the show.

I contacted Douglas Crimp, *Pictures*’s curator, to request his blessing, so to speak. He obliged me, as did the five *Pictures* artists. I wouldn’t have—and as it turned out, I couldn’t have—continued without their input. I pored over the original installation shots, the notes on the show’s organization, and Crimp’s catalogue essay. What was truly revelatory was that the show could not be exactly reproduced. Artworks disappear. The gaps became an unexpected coup, rather than the failure I initially feared. For example, I located only four of the original 36 Sherrie Levine drawings in the series *Sons and Lovers* (1976–77). The re-creation, which situated the four framed works on a large wall in their original locations with a *Pictures* installation photo hung alongside, offered a significant silence about how objects circulate, and vanish. The mostly blank wall prodded at the mythology of *Pictures*.

Anecdotal and written accounts of *Pictures* varied greatly, but I had the archives in front of me. I was compelled to offer a kind of correction, a look at the exhibition itself, and not its manifestation as a revised essay of the same title published in *October* in 1979. Among several significant differences between the exhibition and the *October* essay was the list of included artists. The show included Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith. The *October* essay substituted Cindy Sherman for Smith. These discrepancies are now well rehearsed, but talk of the *Pictures* legacy wasn’t perfuming the air in 2001 as strongly as it does now (considering, for instance, the abundance of graduate theses that have veered in this particular direction since). Crimp’s exclusion of Smith and inclusion of Sherman reflected the evolution of his own theories as well

as the artists’ respective art practices. Regardless, the utterly changed *October* essay, which circulated in a way that the catalogue never did (and it should be noted that the *Pictures* show traveled to three additional venues across the United States), became a proxy for the show. “One nice thing about *Pictures* ... was the catalogue, which I still have,” said Brauntuch. “There’s this object.”² When I worked at Artists Space we had boxes of *Pictures* catalogues in storage. At *The Pictures Generation* terminal gift shop they were suddenly a coveted “limited edition.” Catalogues apparently stick to walls, whereas pictures don’t.

Other histories were occasioned by the re-hang. The October 2001 issue of *Artforum* featured Jack Goldstein’s *Shane* (1975) (part of the *Pictures* show) on the cover, and it published two essays occasioned by my re-hang, by David Rimanelli and Scott Rothkopf, as the inauguration of a new series devoted to “reexamining the unsettled legacy of that era.”³ Astonishingly, both critics wrote about the re-hang as if they’d been magically transported through time to the 1977 manifestation. Neither mentioned the title of my show, nor did they make much of the detail that they were writing about a partial re-creation of an exhibition, 34 years after the fact, organized by a different curator. They posed no questions about the impetus to remake exhibitions, or, even more critically, an exhibition’s unique role as a specific object.

Exhibitions are myth, and essays are fact. “*Pictures*” at an Exhibition problematized both ideas, and questioned whether history can cope with reanimations and rewrites. In fact, my show’s story was manipulated almost immediately. No reviewer mentioned that alongside the *Pictures* reconstitution was the work of four other artists: Santiago Cucullu, Heidie Giannotti, Seth Kelly, and a rock band called Dick Slessig. This was lazy art criticism, but I take some of the blame: my bifurcated in-

stallation unwittingly encouraged the impulse to ignore what was *not* the original *Pictures* show. Somewhat like Philip Smith’s unconscionable absence from the walls of *The Pictures Generation*—a gap that greatly impacted my impression of the show—the presence of four artists in “*Pictures*” at an Exhibition was effectively deleted, in writing. I am compelled to write them back in, if not to retrieve their inclusion, then to restore an authentic history of a show that happened, at a specific time, in a specific place. This is the most essential aspect of exhibitions. They reflect.

One final consideration, from a postcard I received in March 2001. On the front, a picture from the television show *Lost in Space*. On the back, “Jenelle—Sorry for all the interruptions. Am incredibly excited about the possibility of *Pictures*. Forgot to mention that the guy who installed the show, Rags Watkins, is still around. Best of luck, Philip Smith.”

Notes

1. “Helene Winer interviewed by Matt Mullican, Cindy Sherman, and Valerie Smith” in Claudia Gould and Valerie Smith, eds., *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years* (New York: Artists Space, 1998): 61–62.

2. *Ibid.*, 92.

3. *Artforum* (October 2001): 130.

CAN AN EXHIBITION PRESENT A NEW CANON?

Jane Simon

When I was in college in the 1990s, the buzzword was “the canon.” Art historians and English professors alike were obsessed with what defined the canon. What should we look at? What should we read? Anthologies and textbooks

abounded solidifying the classic or forging new ground. Although many of the academics participating in this debate had studied Michelangelo, Fragonard, Manet, and Rothko and had been rigorously trained in methods such as iconography, formalism, or social art history, they surmised that the canon was problematic because it championed a select few male Caucasians at the expense of everyone else. The consensus seemed to be to do away with the canon because no one knew how to make the necessary decisions about what to include or exclude. This was particularly interesting to me since it meant that we did not have to take comprehensive exams in order to graduate.

Now, having survived 15 years without a clear sense of what the canon should be in the 21st century, I believe that we do actually share a common set of images. Taken from our media-saturated world, these new icons diverge dramatically from the lists of paintings and movements that formed the old canon. Enter an exhibition such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, and I see a pervasive contemporary mindset looming large, stemming from a common cadre of works of art made by Richard Prince, James Welling, Dara Birnbaum, Sherrie Levine, and Cindy Sherman, and also from the media sources that inspired them. I am not setting out to construct syllabi around just a few examples, but I do want to call attention to what these artists gave birth to: a sense of critique, affection, and disaffection for the visual world around us. Regardless of the increasingly multicultural and interdisciplinary nature of our inquiries, there are some—it seems to me—common visual “texts” to which we return time and time again.

Douglas Eklund’s exhibition brought together a generation of artists using the tenets of Conceptualism and Minimalism to integrate images from advertising and mass media into their art.

The show received both positive and negative responses. Some saw it as a sign that the hallowed galleries of the Met will, finally, include contemporary artists. Others focused on the failure of the exhibition to include everyone it should have (Philip Smith, for example, who was part of the original *Pictures* exhibition at Artists Space) and to unsubjectively tell the story of this exciting time in Los Angeles and New York. I find more interesting, however, how both the images the artists appropriated and the resulting artworks have become emblematic, and how they engender new discussions about the role of the visual in our complicated relationship to the not-so-distant past.

Think of Richard Prince's many images taken from Marlboro cigarette advertisements. Prince removes the incantations to "Come to where the flavor is. Come to Marlboro country," and focuses our attention on the rough-hewn sexuality of the roaming cowboy. Another Prince image shows our man riding a white horse against the backdrop of the snow-covered Rocky Mountains. He appears romantic, masculine, and in control. James Welling used the same fodder to create collages showing our hero leading horses through the snow, but he retains the large Marlboro logo at the top of the image, just as the ad appeared in magazines. For other works, Welling used a large section of a then-widely known Winston ad showing a man and a woman against the setting sun. The woman holds a small bouquet of flowers. We can read "nston," "cigarettes," and, in large bold letters, "nd should." This conjures up the original message about romance, viability, taste, and justice "as a cigarette should," but more importantly, it makes explicit the connections between television advertisements for cigarette smoking, a particular historical era (Winston aired the last American TV ad for cigarettes in 1970), and the imagery that large, bad, evil corporations flaunt to exploit

our inner desires and complex social longings.

Alongside the tobacco men in the Met galleries were at least three women artists who play with, re-create, and inculcate mass-media images. Dara Birnbaum's video *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978–79) presents Linda Carter's dynamic twirl as she begins her change from regular person to superhero. In the background, the audio intones the words from the theme song, "Get us out from under, Wonder Woman," reminding a particular generation of viewers how we believed in the power of these cartoon characters come to life on TV.

Likewise, when Sherrie Levine (the only one in the Met show who did not hail from the East or the West coast; she had studied at the University of Wisconsin at Madison) borrows and re-presents Walker Evans's photograph of a solemn migrant farmer with a pierced, toothless mouth, we feel that we know this woman, that we have heard a version of her story. Shown in 1981 or today, this image with its stark wooden background says that poverty remains a barrier, that wealth and social stratification still plague us. Perhaps this Marxist narrative is part of our canon?

Cindy Sherman shows us wannabe dancers, good-girl librarians, self-destructive martini-drinking brunettes, and blonde bombshells. We all know the role of curvy physiques in the American consciousness. Sherman confronts us with stereotypes that Feminism feared and rejected, and although many of her formal choices derive from European cinema, I believe that the power of this trope lies in its reminder of these women's ability to seduce, create intrigue, or cause damage.

I was born in 1975. I never heard cigarette jingles and I never saw Marilyn Monroe movies, but I know how our consumer-saturated world works, for instance how Facebook sells our personal information to hungry

capitalists. I've also heard about the impending death of national markets, and the groundswell of niche markets that are beginning to drive our economy. And I know that my critical, cynical, and complicated attachment to anything commercial is influenced and informed by Prince's Marlboro man and Sherman's movie star—both the raw material the artists drew from and the finished artworks they created. I know Birnbaum's *Wonder Woman* and the sitcom that serves as its backdrop, its lineage. I am not sure I wholeheartedly believe in the cohesion of my generation or even the importance of the debate over its cohesion. But we do share this common set of icons, and we must read images carefully and critically. Where does that leave us?



Untitled, from the series *Men in Cities*, 1981
Charcoal, graphite, and dye on paper
Collection Metro Pictures Gallery, New York;
courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures Gallery,
New York; Holzer Family Collection



The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984
 installation view, showing works
 by Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger,
 and David Salle

The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984



David Salle
Bearding the Lion in His Den, 1977
 Gelatin silver prints, programmed light and sound
 Courtesy the artist and Mary Boone Gallery,
 New York

Matt Mullican
World Poster, 1980
 Gouache on paper
 Collection of Patrick J. O'Connell

The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984



The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984
installation view, showing
works by David Salle, Paul
McMahon, Richard Prince,
and Thomas Lawson

The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984

The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984



top left:
The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984 installation view, showing works by Barbara Kruger, Laurie Simons, Richard Prince, and Louise Lawler

top right:
The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984 installation view, showing works by Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine



bottom left:
Allan McCollum
Plaster Surrogates, 1982–84
Enamel on Hydrostone
Dimensions variable
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Robert and Meryl Meltzer and Robert F. and Anna Marie Shapiro funds, 1988

bottom right:
Cindy Sherman
Untitled #87, #96, #88
Chromogenic prints
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase, Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr. bequest, 1995; Skarstedt Collection, New York; Private collection

Richard Prince
Untitled (three women looking in the same direction), 1980
Chromogenic prints
Collection of B. Z. and Michael Schwartz



The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984 installation view, showing works by Jack Goldstein and David Salle

TYPOLOGIES
★
**ART IN
PUBLIC SPACE**

ON PRACTICING IN PUBLIC

Mary Jane Jacob

I have gained several understandings as a curator from practicing in public. One is a greater awareness of the difference between the work of art and the experience of art. Working in institutions I increasingly came to feel that the “museum experience” was overtaking the “art experience.” In museums, the lack of a lived-with, everyday environment and cultural context contributes to art experience’s evaporation. What could art located in life contribute to having an art experience?

In the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, the American philosopher John Dewey called museums an invention of capitalism, and he took exception to their claim to be the proper home for art, set apart from common life.¹ So I find Dewey an important voice for us to return to now, after recent decades of experimenting with and expanding the definitions of public art, public space, and even the public itself.

Dewey claimed that art is a type of experience rather than an entity. The actual work of art is what the object or thing does with, and in, experience. To really, deeply understand these words meant, for me, to take them up as a practice, and to practice them over and over again. And to do so with others—not just artists and colleagues, but every manner of person who could

be engaged or ensnared, because I believed that anyone could have an art experience, and could potentially be part of a public art project.

This brings me to my second point, which concerns a fuller realization of the art audience. Inviting in the “unfashionable audience” (as I termed it in Suzanne Lacy’s 1995 anthology *New Genre Public Art*) was not simply about probing a discourse of institutional critique or cultural representation (though I did that, too). In shifting the nexus of art-and-audience, I came to further consider the central role of the public as an active participant in the art experience. This led to an essential understanding that the direct line between artist and audience, which can be achieved by working in public, is not just a more efficient delivery system. It is the way that art actually *happens*.

More than two decades before Marcel Duchamp’s 1957 essay “The Creative Act” (in which he famously described art as a pact between artist and spectator, not something performed by the artist alone), Dewey set a foundation for understanding the causal nature of art: what causes art to arise in the artist, and hence to be created, and what causes art to affect the viewer, and thus be re-created. Dewey considered the place of the viewer as central: A work of art is a work of art only when it lives in some



Meredith Monk and vocal ensemble performing *Songs of Ascension* by Meredith Monk and Ann Hamilton, Oliver Ranch, Geyserville, California, 2008



Places with a Future collaborative team (Kendra Hamilton, Walter Hood, Mary Jane Jacob, Ernesto Pujol) Phillips Community road design, Charleston, 2006



Magdalena Abakanowicz
Agora (detail), Chicago Park District, 2006
Cast iron

individualized experience, and, as a work of art, it is re-created every time it is esthetically experienced. Without this act of re-creation the object is not perceived as a work of art. We become artists ourselves as we undertake this integration, and in doing so, our own experience is reoriented.

Dewey would have appreciated the changes that occurred in public art in the later 20th century: its more complex and nuanced ways of joining with the audience, and its direct ways of working with the public. He might see in public, participatory, and relational art the expression of his belief that the material of aesthetic experience is widely human, and thus social.

The third and final realization I want share here has to do with the art process and the outcome of that process. For projects in and with the public to come about, the process needs to be open, allow others in, and unfold in its own way. Artists know this. As a curator I am part of the process, nearly always showing work made in dialogue with artists. But the institutions and funding authorities that we curators need to contend with almost always expect to know at the outset what will be the outcome. So we need to defend and protect the art process. We know, and even Dewey noted, that the process *is* the art and that the product, no matter at what stage it is considered, is a work of art. So art can be both the means and the end.

Some assistance in grappling with the demand for final goals before the process has even begun came when I found myself involved in cultivating a program about art experience and Buddhism.² I was able to bring some lessons back to my public practice.

- * Clarify and articulate the aims (the *why* of the project, not the *what*);
- * Settle into the discomfort of the creative process, resisting arriving too soon at production goals;
- * Enter into the process without expectations. If you are not fixed on what the art will be, the work will develop, shift, and find its way;
- * Trust the process;
- * Be fully present in the process and listen to the process itself. Insight comes from being present in those invested moments, in a particular place and circumstances.

wide range of subjects, but art was never far from his mind. For him, art had a wide role in the scheme of things and was essential to living life.

2. The consortium program “Awake: Art, Buddhism, and the Dimensions of Consciousness” took place from 2001 to 2003 and resulted in the book *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, coedited by Jacquelynn Baas and myself (University of California Press, 2004), and a sequel, *Learning Mind: Experience Into Art* (University of California Press, 2009).

3. In 1991 I curated *Places with a Past*, an exhibition of site-specific installations in Charleston at the invitation of the Spoleto Festival USA. Some critics took it to be a “parachuting” venture, exploitive of the locale. Indeed the artists and myself did not see our involvement beyond the show’s timeframe, but the works were sincere and the processes that brought them about invested. And it would have been presumptuous to have plotted it out as a long-range program. Things had to evolve—such is process—and the response of the public was the next step; it’s a call-and-response. In 2000 I was invited back, and I set up an exceedingly open structure, listening (to community), not making (or not obligating the artists to do so). We heard a lot about what people saw and felt over the previous decade, how art activated emotions and thoughts and connected past to present. Working annually, all year, not just at festival time, we made connections and found that the changes afoot in the region—overbuilding and its impact on traffic and the ecology—were real threats to a sustained and shared heritage among blacks and whites, and that some modest yet powerful places, meaningful to certain small sectors of the African American population, faced eradication. These became the places we championed. As a team, composed of the poet Kendra Hamilton, landscape designer Walter Hood, artist Ernesto Pujol, and myself, we considered with those constituencies what change could look like at three sites. And so was born the ongoing, open-ended program *Places with a Future*.

Notes

1. Dewey spent his formative years in Chicago, where I, too, live. He came to Chicago in 1894 to chair the department of philosophy, psychology, and education at the University of Chicago; two years later he started an educational experiment there, a kind of laboratory school. His model of experiential learning—learning by doing, grounded in real life and not just theory—was part of an international movement in education and contributed to the formation of progressive education in the United States. Dewey also viewed this engaged form of education, with its focus on the individual and a consciousness of one’s role in society, as an expression of a participatory democracy. Dewey wrote on a

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE UNKNOWN

Nato Thompson

Contemporary art swirls in a crisis of identity. Since the invention of the camera this crisis has been stewing, and most certainly Modernism’s inherent paradoxes have kept the field interesting. But what was once a compelling quandary has become a tired alibi. Two major forces operating at the center of this decaying imbroglio are the powerful effects of cultural production as industry and the crumbling structures of the Enlightenment. The disintegration of fields once considered discrete (natural history, ecology, the arts, politics, anthropology, sociology) offers up opportunities for peculiar aesthetic investigations that also feed the appetite of an overwhelm-

ing cultural consumption. This quandary of embracing the metaphoric power of art because of its potential for freedom while simultaneously being aware of its complicity in the growing market of cultural desire has greatly influenced my thinking on art, and on methodologies for producing meaning in this complicated information age. For, ultimately, the project of making meaning is a more relevant approach to cultural production than simply the tight frame of “contemporary art.”

An example is certainly necessary. While working on Paul Chan’s project *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* in 2007 with Creative Time, we



Paul Chan
Scene from *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans*, 2007
J. Kyle Manzay and Wendell Pierce

committed to a method based on Chan's principle of the "front end" and the "back end." The front end consisted of the production of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* in the Lower Ninth Ward and Gentilly neighborhoods in post-Katrina New Orleans. The back end grew out of the innovation necessary for working under conditions of spectacle (more on this later). The process ultimately involved a vast, community-wide organizational effort that included school classes, potlucks, a shadow fund for local communities, and countless interpersonal meetings. These organizational structures, operating behind the aesthetic gesture, offered a response to Walter Benjamin's quandary in his 1934 essay "The Author as Producer." We were producing a materialist base in order to ground a metaphor of waiting in actual relations. We could not simply let a gesture that could potentially exploit the condition of a city ravaged by a catastrophic, capitalist-assisted flood operate on its own—that is to say, we could not do the project solely for the purpose of gaining social capital. We had to work toward making material and social changes on the ground. We needed to ground the gesture in the material world. We could not be aesthetic carpetbaggers.

The first thread of my recent thinking—accounting for the powerful effects of cultural production as industry—unwinds out of a simple analysis perpetuated long ago by the famed Situationists, whose novelty in the art world may have expired but whose insights into the altered landscape of culture and politics remain prescient.

What the Situationists described as spectacle in large part remains popularly understood as the rise of visual machines such as cinema, television, and perhaps now the web. Probably due in large part to Guy Debord's cover for *Society of the Spectacle*, that image of a 1950s audience staring at a movie screen wearing 3D glasses, the ubiquitous interpretation has been more in line with what Jean Baudrillard famously described as *simulacrum*. We are a nation living in fake reality. And, if we go further, that fake is the real. But this interpretation remains the tip of the iceberg. A more pointed critique would focus on the fusion of culture and capitalism at the onset of the information age. That is to say, *simulacrum* is only useful when understood via an analysis of political economy. (The same could be said of Jacques Rancière's en vogue aesthetic theories, whose allergies to political economy make them somewhat misleading.)

The emergence of a global industry of cultural production has exploded the category of art into a form of living where culture is simultaneously that which we love and that which we consume and sell. This industry consists not only of movies, advertising, television, radio, painting, photography, and sculpture, but also experiences closer to home such as education, aesthetic dispositions, friends, family, and, ultimately, ourselves. This growing daily condition whereby the things we ordinarily locate outside the realm of capital become suddenly schizophrenic in their complicity is not an exception but the rule. The term *social capital*, developed by the sociologist

Pierre Bourdieu, in many respects is the vehicle through which spectacle navigates the forms of capital. And social capital, this register and latent agent by which a phenomenon sits in the complicated matrix of power and capital, has become the dark shadow that haunts all aspects of contemporary art. Contemporary projects of cultural production must contend with this shadow.

The second thread—accounting for the crumbling structures of the Enlightenment—has become more evident as I continue to produce projects in the public sphere. A looming paradox facing museums is that the discursive framing of an art museum limits the capacity of its art to be effective. That is to say, the qualifying term *art* often poses more of a hindrance than a help. If the general audience could get over the question of why things are or are not art, it would benefit from a more compelling question: In what manner is this phenomenon—of an aesthetic moment temporarily disengaged from its discursive tradition—interesting? This dilemma of framing became evident in New Orleans, where if one were to ask, "Who here is a contemporary artist?" not a single hand would be raised. But if one asked, "Who here is an artist?" the whole city would come forward. In this instance, the framing of artist-versus-contemporary-artist reveals a racialized history that greatly influences reception. In attempting to produce conditions that upset strict categorization of what art experience is, we can more productively produce various points of entry into a work. There is a major schism between the trajectory of art as an idea and the institutional baggage that comes with it. The schizophrenia continues.

Recently the artist Tania Bruguera said to me, "I don't want an art that points at things, I want an art that *is* the thing." Her desire poses numerous complications for a saturated cultural landscape where most gestures are weighed down by their complicity in feeding cultural consumption. What does it mean to produce projects that are the thing? What does it mean to avoid the deleterious effects of spectacle and social capital? Increasingly this form of aesthetic investigation forces cultural producers to take on projects that not only escape the boundaries of specific discursive fields (activism, geography, biology, and, of course, art), but also produce a space in which the audience cannot place the object/engagement in any familiar category,

including the overarching sphere of capitalism.

In 2009 I worked with the New Museum on a road trip across America as part of Jeremy Deller's *It Is What It Is*. On the back of our RV we hitched a car blown up in a marketplace bombing in Baghdad two years before. At each stop along the way, we parked in a public space, and an American soldier and an Iraqi citizen answered questions about their experiences in Iraq. Throughout the project and the following months, our undertaking was criticized as "not art." And because the project would not take a position on the war, activists said it was certainly "not activism." If one considered all of these criticisms, the project, apparently, existed as nothing. If it isn't art and it isn't activism, then it must be something different, which would require a new set of evaluative mechanisms. The roving, peculiar space of speculation that was *It Is What It Is* forced visitors to deal with something outside any familiar realm. If things are what they are, then we must ask: What are they?

Jeremy Deller
It Is What It Is, 2009
Esam Pasha in conversation with Rodney Blake,
a Gulf War veteran, Emancipation Park, Houston



As society becomes more trained to see the power and capitalist desires that operate behind the scenes of aesthetic gestures, the promises of art become dulled. We must acknowledge that the lurking shadow of social capital renders much contemporary art inert. In order to resuscitate the dream of making meaning, we must produce on the back end of material relations as well as on that pleasurable front end of the gesture. And secondly, we must think carefully about

how to liberate aesthetic gestures from the rigid conservative bracket that we so often call “art.” The reputation of the framing device of art must shift, or perhaps, more efficaciously, the confounding gesture must head into the wilderness of the undefined. With both considerations in mind, cultural production can not only resonate, but continue its long tradition of producing more liberating realities.

EVERYWHERENESS

Joshua Decter

Art becomes public, so to speak, when it enters into spaces of ideational and social discourse as well as economic exchange. The cultural and communicative platforms for this “becoming public” include the art school, the studio/bureau, the art space, the gallery, the museum, the street, et cetera. By virtue of art’s capacity to surface anywhere and everywhere, the appearance of art is at the same time an enunciation of its *publicness*.

Since the emergence of bourgeois society in the 19th century, art’s modernity has become indistinguishable from its desire to communicate with publics, or its emancipation into pub-

lic realms, and to find itself situated in places (universal expositions, galleries, museums, biennials, symposia) wherein encounters with the quasi-public domain might be staged. It is, in other words, an entrepreneurial conception wherein the work of art converts space into a cultural place, or venue, for itself, and at the same time a place functions as a frame for art, which establishes the discursive conditions under which art publicizes itself (sometimes promiscuously) as art.

Art—as thing, as language—activates encounters with individuals, audiences, constituencies, publics, and counter-publics. Art’s entry

into the world constitutes its potential to generate public-domain experiences—one example being the possibility that art might somehow deflect our relationship with the built environment. Complications emerge when we endeavor to trace how art, whether as autonomous operation or collective endeavor, generates meaning (or critical consciousness) for/with/in relation to people, whether in terms of passive models of reception or different modes of interaction and participation. I am referring here to the multidecade debate concerning the criteria of evaluation that we formulate and deploy (as putative experts operating as interlocutors within the cultural public sphere) regarding art’s symbolic, material effect (or effectiveness) vis-à-vis audiences, constituencies, and publics. How do we gauge effectivity? Or has this question itself become obsolete?

What space today has not already been converted into a place (or non-place, to invoke Marc Augé)—a location, platform, territory—that functions as a venue for the instantiation of art in one form (or non-form) or another, temporary (time-based, durational, performative, ephemeral) or permanent? Within the discourses of art history, art criticism, curatorial-organizational practices, and discursive platforms (such as symposia, meetings, conversations, and so on), the coding of art practices as interventionist or as social practice is often discussed in relation to art’s engagement with social space and the public realm, whether this is considered literally as outside (i.e., outdoor) or inside (i.e., interior) space. Every act of art—whether guerilla-like or by permission and institutionally supported—that is experienced outside traditional, sanctioned venues for art publicizes its claims of enhanced connectivity to broader constituencies and publics. Historically this has been the claim of so-called public art, but we may be skeptical of such claims.

In democratic societies, the question is not really which type of art making is more or less democratic, or “freedom-generative,” which is sometimes the assumption when referring to collective or participatory practices, perhaps in relation to Herbert Marcuse’s notion of repressive tolerance. The question is rather how we analyze culture’s interrelationship, on historical terms, with the material and symbolic processes of social and political democratization.

Global capitalism, in all of its micro and macro functionalities and dysfunctions, is a space of turbulent economic and social flows (to invoke Manuel Castells). It is within these flows—the liminal zones that invisibly trace the thresholds, imagined and real, between leftover notions of public and private—that art, whether formulated as autonomous practice, collectivist organization, or something else, may still have a chance to apply certain pressure points, if only as a means of generating and maintaining counter-public enclaves (evoking Michael Warner) that might also be defined as constituencies of the subaltern, the subcultural, and perhaps even the *extracultural*. In this regard, we have to take into consideration the resurfacing of DIY art and cultural production, certain forms of collective and participatory work, and various modes of art-as-activism, all of which aspire to more authentically “open” encounters and exchanges with communities, constituencies, and publics. This suggests a reanimation of certain strategies and tactics of 1960s and 1970s countercultural and political activism, and another manifestation of the critique of “autonomous” forms of artistic production (within a privatized system of commerce) as a means of countering the more pernicious effects (such as political alienation) of an unregulated free market, and proposing other ways of social and economic organization (services bartering, edible estates, and so on).

Some will make the argument, or just the assumption, that collectivist, collaborative, and participatory works of art are more politically progressive by virtue of their apparent structural openness. In other words, works that are explicitly contingent upon the literal involvement of the social body for activation, meaning production, and presence (and which, in turn, supposedly awaken the dormant viewer into an active, dis-alienated participant or an extended author) somehow evince a more “democratized” condition, and are therefore intrinsically more “progressive.” I wonder if this is an ideological mirage. Certainly the notion of the autonomy of the work of art is an ideological construction, as is the idea of the temporary autonomous zone. Or perhaps there are broader misunderstandings regarding the imagined interrelationships between the space of art and the space of the political, which is always a relationship of contradiction.

Roman Ondák
Loop, 2009
Installation view of the Czech
and Slovakia pavilion at the
Venice Biennale



What are the criteria, or critical-evaluative tools, that we might utilize to trace the ideological effects of a “participatory” work of art (relative to a “non-participatory” work of art)? And are we really convinced that participation or participatory tactics, as they pertain to the imagined emancipation of individuals, audiences, constituencies, and publics, guarantee an amplified democratization of the art culture? Isn’t this, at least in part, a denial or sublimation of the *violence of participation* (to paraphrase Markus Miessen, in his rethinking of Chantal Mouffe’s agonistic space in regard to a radically democratic public sphere)?

Publics and counter-publics seem to swim together in a politically undifferentiated soup of utterances, iterations, claims, attacks, whisperings, shadowy expressions, shadow movements, and crude ideological eruptions. It is as if the street and the domicile had been collapsed together into some ecstatic zone of interpenetrated interpenetrations. In his 1985 essay “The Fire Next Time,” Paul Virilio reflected on how the nebulae of contemporary media space had produced a hypertemporal condition in which a modernist conception of space as territorial (materially, nation-state) had given way to another order characterized by a profound simultaneity of events (beyond the mere immediacy of the television transmission of events). As Bernard Tschumi suggests in the foreword to Virilio’s collection of writings *A Landscape of Events*, this is

about a notion of temporal space, which I understand in terms of experiential space (or spaces of experience, in which the subject is formed in space and through time), whether such spaces are public, private, or interstitial.

We seem to desire any and all space as potentially available for penetration by some type of art activity, whether or not this activity is recognized as an art activity in a particular situation. Is this a means of instrumentalizing (and functionalizing) art as intervention so as to apply pressures upon the public sphere to remain sufficiently democratic?

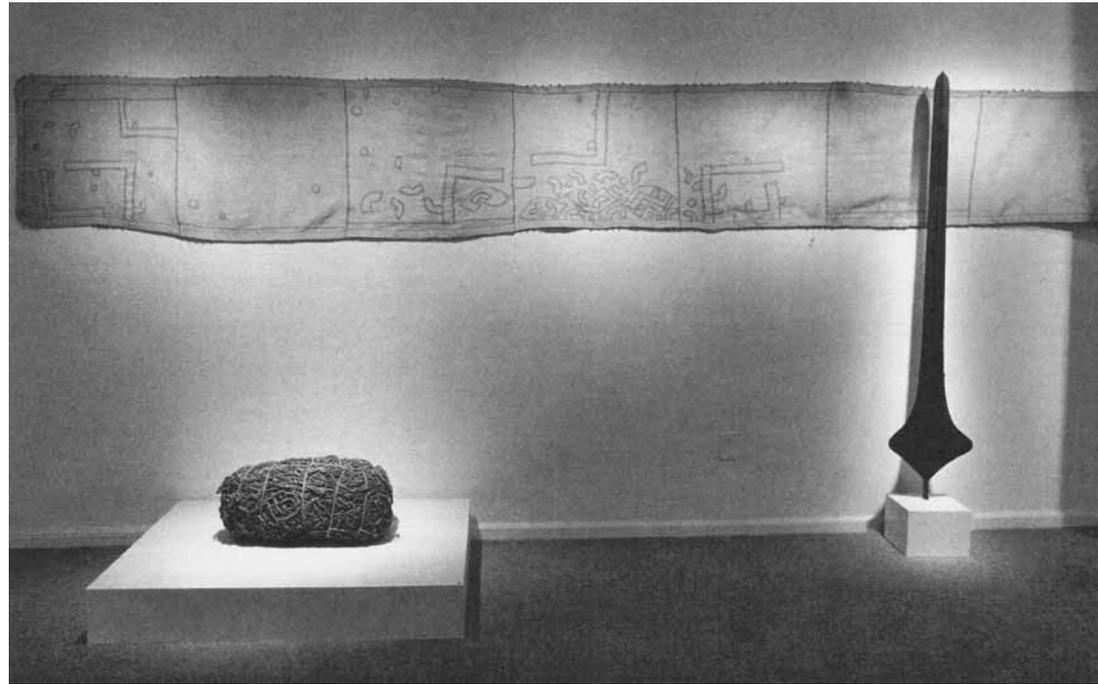
Is there really any space that is more public than the Internet as a cosmos, accommodating hypersimultaneous effusions of being there, nowhere, everywhere, somewhere? In the beginning, there was nothing; out of nothing, information emerged. Isn’t the space of information our creative commons? What isn’t accessible, and therefore somehow public? The explosion of what might have been formerly considered the informational codes of private experience into and onto the seemingly infinitely expandable informational and social (self-)representational systems and networking platforms (Facebook, YouTube), or the informational-visual mapping of Google’s Street View technology, reveals that we have moved beyond quaint modernist dichotomies of private and public into some kind of third or fourth space of experience.

We already seem to be performing our so-called private lives on the public stage of cybernetic social space. This might be considered the hyperbolic expression of what Richard Sennett lamented in his 1977 book *The Fall of Public Man*, wherein those psychological, social, and individual experiences formerly consigned to the private domain, such as sex, have been exteriorized into the discourse of the public domain. Cyberspace, or the architectonic space of information as constituting another social reality, was presciently analyzed in William J. Mitchell’s 1995 book *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn*. Virtual urbanisms, he said, would generate unusual interpenetrations with real (bricks-and-mortar) urban experience, throwing into crisis older, modernist, binary (or even dialectical) oppositions of private versus public.

Finally, with the hyperproliferation of art as intervention, exhibition, discursive platform, and decoration through the temporal or experiential spaces (real, virtual, imaginary, or otherwise) of our cities, engendering the recoding of such zones into venues that frame an art condition, perhaps we’ve arrived at a proverbial tipping point, a paradigmatic threshold wherein art’s promiscuous publicness, its everywhere-ness, verges into its nascent un-differentiation from anything else. Art after art, or art as the publicity of art.

Roman Ondák
Loop, 2009
Installation view of the Czech
and Slovakia pavilion at the
Venice Biennale





ART/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections
installation view, Center for African Art, New York, 1988

ATTITUDE



TOPOGRAPHIES OF CRITICAL PRACTICE: EXHIBITION AS PLACE AND SITE

Okwui Enwezor

The opportunity to engage a range of issues that constitute the vital stakes in the practice, theory, and production of exhibitions is a reminder that every field or discipline requires a frame, or, perhaps, a concatenation of frames within which theoretical reflections and historical analyses can be made. In this essay, my frame of analysis concerns a field generally defined as curatorial practice. I am not sure if the designation naturally fits all that can be said about the intellectual production of exhibitions and the cultural and epistemological assumptions that underpin it.

These queries may not necessarily begin with issues of disciplinary identification, but instead with what at first might be understood as limiting forms of identification that concern the intellectual biography of the curator working in the enlarged geopolitical and global framework of today's contemporary art disciplines. For the purposes of this text, my focus is on contemporary African art and some of the curatorial discourses supporting its public dissemination. This is a field in which a large part of my curatorial energies have been invested, but on a disciplinary and tactical level. Contemporary African art is a fraught disciplinary concept, but it is also, more importantly, a fraught geopolitical concept.

It is a fact of African critical practice that this disciplinary identification occurred for many institutions and curators at a much later stage of curatorial development than it did for the more contextualist perspective of Western art history or for exhibitions in advanced capitalist societies in the West. While Western contemporary art—European and American art specifically—enjoyed robust programmatic contextualizations through disciplinary, stylistic,

and periodizing structures, the wide-scale introduction of contemporary African art to the global public was primarily based on a narrower culturalist viewpoint. In this view, the African aesthetic context was nothing like the high-minded intricacy of Western art, but rather the space of a culturalist conception of art. In other words, a world full of art and no artists. The looming dichotomy in the culturalist idea of African critical practice can be succinctly delineated in the jagged cut that separates our notions of the authentic from the inauthentic: The one is properly African because it reminds viewers of what Africa is supposed to be, and the other is not African because it confuses viewers with its hybrid, Westernized ideas of aesthetics. This is an old issue. The business at hand is far more limited than the generally complex parsing of the “authentic and inauthentic” debate can permit, and I will not take us down that road. Rather, I will use this occasion as an opportunity to reflect on the subdiscipline of exhibition making and curatorial practice as a frame through which to inhabit new geographies of contemporary African art. As a curator whose practice over the last two decades has been resolutely concerned with contemporary art, and more specifically contemporary African art, I think it is essential to understand the remarkable role that exhibitions of contemporary African art have played in developing better knowledge and a more complex understanding of the work of African artists. Exhibitions represent both frames of analysis and topographies of critical practice. Here, I am offering exhibitions of contemporary African art as places of encounter and sites of production—localities where distinct and complex grammars of artistic practice can be found.

By means of a limited survey of some of the exhibitions that I have been engaged with over the last 15 years, I offer a way of understanding an exhibition not only as a place of hospitality for contemporary African artists, but also as a site of critical production, historical analysis, and theoretical reflection. I will begin first with the idea that the field of African art exhibition making is a complicated one. To understand this field, to theorize or analyze it productively, requires specific attention to the typologies of African exhibition practice. These include the ethnographic and anthropological models, the genre model, the hybrid model, and the postcolonial model. Then there is the postmodern model, which combines genres, methodologies, practices, localities. This model shakes things up, leaves the details and specificities in the air, pushing audiences to speculate on the meaning and status of objects, images, and ideas. Susan Vogel, founding director of the Museum for African Art in New York, was during her years at the museum a provocative expert at the postmodern type of African art exhibition, often consciously seeking to violate seemingly settled ideas about the separation of genres, curatorial authority, and connoisseurship.

When done well, such exhibitions offer new possibilities for reading the schemas of African artistic thought, providing insights that help expand the

field. In shows such as *ART/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections* (1988) and *Perspectives: Angles on African Art* (1988) at the old Center for African Art, off Park Avenue in New York, Vogel’s work was boldly theoretical, taking historical and epistemological liberties with exhibition and curatorial models, dramatically rethinking how we stage and understand the function of objects and how the settings/localities of exhibitions are not neutral frames but sites of contending and clashing intellectual ideas. *ART/Artifact* was groundbreaking for the way in which it put forth the notion that African art cannot be understood simply from a culturalist/contextualist perspective (dichotomies of authentic or inauthentic, real or fake, functional or nonfunctional) but that it can be, and should be, explored through theoretical and conceptual frames. Of course, Vogel also learned from the distinct failures and accomplishments of the Museum of Modern Art’s “Primitivism” in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984), curated by William Rubin in collaboration with Kirk Varnedoe, which struggled with its own dichotomy between “tribal” and “modern,” “primitive” and “civilized.”

Vogel’s *ART/Artifact* was not merely about the state and status of African art objects, about whether they can be considered art or not. On that matter her tone was surprisingly cautious and equivocal, most certainly because of her background in anthropology. Rather, it was equally about the setting (the exhibition frame) and the place (the museum) within which these determinations and judgments are made. In this sense, the exhibition becomes a grand theater in which we look to see who sits in the judgment seat of historical designations, and what aesthetic or epistemological lens they use to judge. In fact, as Vogel put it succinctly in the catalogue, the exhibition was motivated by unresolved philosophical, ultimately curatorial, problems surrounding “the way perception of a work of art is conditioned by its presentation.” She continues: “If the public knows one thing about African art, it knows that the *original* African setting was nothing like a Western museum.”¹ This statement is useful for our purposes because it points to the larger framework of my idea of the exhibition as place and site. What can be isolated in Vogel’s statement is the idea of the “African setting” as designating spatial context, whereas the “Western museum” designates the African object’s temporal context. Vogel uses this temporal context to address the larger issue of her exhibition, which in its progressive shift away from the anthropological model and toward the postmodern model was also moving inexorably toward a more suspended, or as they used to say, in-between, albeit reified, state of illumination. This shift can be better understood as a soft war on the atemporal/ahistorical device of the anthropological cage in which African art objects usually tend to be crowded, pell-mell, natural-history-museum style. Using the device of the readymade, Vogel transformed the exhibition space of *ART/Artifact*, if not necessarily into a neutral site, then at least into a site that attempted to neutralize the way that ethnography and anthropology dehistoricize everyday

1. Susan Vogel, “Foreword” in *ART/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections* (New York and Munich: Center for African Art and Prestel Verlag, 1988): 10.

2. Ibid., 11.

3. Ibid., 12.

objects and everyday practices. Her model was the exhibition site as a new topography of critical curatorial methodologies, a resonant site of discursive recontextualizations.

Take one example in the exhibition installation: a rolled-up and bound Zande hunting net, shown both in the exhibition and on the catalogue cover. It is an oblong fiber object, carefully rolled in a tight bundle with a cross-section of sinewy ropes. In the exhibition it was displayed as a readymade on a low, square, white platform. Behind it on the horizontal wall was another object: a long, scroll-like Kuba woman's "wrapper" cloth inscribed with a series of geometric abstract glyphs that gave the surface of the cloth the appearance of a map-like space. This piece clearly looks familiar in the sense of modernist abstraction. It is a piece of highly conceptual abstract painting, very much recalling a Paul Klee painting or drawing. Concluding this curatorial vignette was a slender Kasai metal currency whose flat vertical panel again recalled modernist abstract sculpture. Nothing about these objects and their highly restrained forms and aesthetic resemblance to achromatic minimalist sculptures and abstract painting could ever alert the viewer to the original function of the hunting net, the woman's wrapper, and the metal currency. Instead, one beheld forms which, in their delicate and precise aesthetic states, confounded the notion of African art as purely fetishistic or quotidianly functional. What was being presented was an aesthetic argument highlighted through the device of presentation alone. What Vogel was conveying was the primacy of the objects' visual impact, not their functional materiality. To make her point, Vogel noted that "most visitors are unaware of the degree to which their experience of any art in a museum is conditioned by the way it is installed."² She went further, noting that "museum installations have naturally reflected the philosophies and attitudes of their organizers from the time they first began. One of the first Western settings for African objects was the 'curiosity room.'"³

These statements point to the contextualist issue of how an object is positioned through the process of reframing, a point well made by Marcel



Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art
installation view, Center for African Art,
New York, 1991



Exterior of the Musée du
Quai Branly, Paris

Duchamp when he recontextualized a urinal into a sculptural object. Of course I cannot do justice here to the complex set of issues that Vogel undertook in this project and advanced in her later exhibition *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art* (1991–93). But I believe that these curatorial projects were directed at enabling viewers to develop an awareness of an exhibition's critical context as part of a broader discursive system that is not static, but continually evolving and theoretically unfixed.

Vogel's work owes a great debt to the discursive practices that emerged with postmodernism and postcolonial theory. While postmodernism offered elliptical and fragmentary approaches as alternatives to totalizing ones, postcolonial theory made us aware of the extent to which entanglements with, and contestations of, anthropological and ethnographic discourses reveal historical fissures that surround the exchange between postcolonial cultures and Western museum publics. Both of these constituencies converge to compete in a historical environment that remains disproportionately in favor of the advanced institutions and cultural markets of previous Western powers.

The Musée du Quai Branly in Paris represents a prime example of the current impasse between radical forms of curatorial practice and institutionalized practices designed around political, rather than disciplinary, interests. I want to end with a brief discussion of this museum because its disciplinary model is very much behind the curve of the ecstatically primitivized architecture built for it. So, on both a curatorial and an architectural level, it represents a missed opportunity. Of course the curating can be adjusted, whereas the architecture, which is so expressive as to become an object of display in its own right, cannot be changed. The museum's exhibition methodology is entirely at variance with the issues taken up in Vogel's projects. Designed by the French architect Jean Nouvel as one of the last grand gestures of President Jacques Chirac before his retirement, this mammoth, theatrical museum is a showpiece, a Disneyesque version of a crumbling Roman villa that looks as if it was lifted out of Gabriel García Márquez's Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It was christened the Musée des Arts Premier, a term whose

4. James Clifford, "Quai Branly in Process," *October* (spring 2007): 5.

colonialist and primitivizing condescension is a classic French trope, and the majestic objects to which it is devoted were gathered centuries ago from former territories of French colonial expansion in Africa and Oceania. Beyond academic debates of the appropriateness of the museological language of the displays, which have a neo-science-fiction feel, or the exaggerated facade covered with dense climbing plants, evoking a French fantasy of the jungle, there are the leather-clad interior walls, and the cavelike naves where the terrors of divination are staged in the flickering light of outdated television monitors. We must also respond to certain demands of postcoloniality, including but not limited to the questions of cultural patrimony and heritage that bedevil the history of the objects in the museum. As with all tussles where postcolonial resentment and colonial fantasy meet, the Musée du Quai Branly will continue to raise fresh questions about exhibitions as topographies of critical practice. As James Clifford wrote in the journal *October* in spring 2007:

In the Musée du Quai Branly, "illusion" and the "work of art" coexist uneasily with the realism of ethnography and history. Indeed, since the project's inception under the sign of "arts premiers," the proper balance between aesthetics and anthropology has been hotly debated. A decade of polemics and committees has produced an unstable truce, with the aesthetic agenda in overall control. Nouvel's ecstatic primitivism of spiritual communions in a high-tech sacred forest is an embarrassment for some of the museum staff, who are working to counteract it. Jacques Chirac, the project's founder, now translates neoprimitivism into the language of universal human rights: the museum is . . . "where cultures converse" . . . the new institution's motto. Exactly how "cultures" will be able to "converse"—speaking what languages? supposing what epistemologies? what political agendas? with what degrees of authority? representing whom?—remains to be seen.⁴

I offer this example as a way to prompt us to reflect on more rigorous ways to think about exhibitions of contemporary African art not just as spaces to apprehend the latest preoccupations of African artists, but as theoretical spaces that reflect the changing strategies of artists and the institutions in which they become embedded. If I have advanced the view of the exhibition as a topography of critical practice, it is not only in the interest of what I do curatorially, but also to reflect on the necessity of curatorial work as an important theoretical model, a disciplinary field in which to elaborate the schemes of new artistic models. Perhaps, out of this, a more sophisticated intellectual infrastructure can be developed to analyze, historicize, critique, and exhibit contemporary African art. To insist on exhibitions as topographies of critical practice is to insist on developing a place for, constructing sites for, the advancement of the singular ideas of individual artists and groups of artists who share critical common ground.

REAR MIRROR



THE EXHIBITION FORMERLY KNOWN AS SOLD OUT

Jack Bankowsky on
Pop Life: Art in a Material World

The exhibition formerly known as *Sold Out* opened at Tate Modern last year without its original title but otherwise more or less as my co-curator Alison Ginger and I had first imagined it some five years earlier. It would have been good to see those unlikely words flapping from the prow of Tate's Bankside flagship, and in fact we would have if the art market, like the global economy of which it is a part, had not combusted at just about the moment the show was finding its final form. Everyone at Bankside was steeled to let our provocation fly, but with the economy in crisis, our title, contentious in any climate, was suddenly too hot not to cool a few of the many feet that must step in unison to get a major exhibition off the ground.

Alison and I first met in the summer of 2004 during the preparation of a special issue of *Artforum* that I, having recently stepped down as the magazine's editor, was organizing. The title of the issue was "Pop After Pop"; its subject, the relevance of historical Pop art for work made since the 1960s. I no longer recall who tipped me off that Alison would be a congenial fit, but by the time we sent the issue to press, we were not only talking regularly but completing each other's sentences. What felt important to us, what inspired us to pool our resources and curate a show, was one facet of Pop art's—or, really, Andy Warhol's—example, and one, it seemed to us, that anticipated a tendency in recent art making that includes the mass-branding triumphs of Keith Haring or Takashi Murakami, the performed

FRIDAY¹

Peter Eeley on
The Quick and the Dead

From the opening night in April 2009 until the last review, *The Quick and the Dead* was repeatedly characterized as a "personal" project, which felt oddly embarrassing. I suppose I had thought I was using a historical thesis as cover, but in retrospect I realize that the personal part of the project also served as a decoy for the historical show.

I don't recall which came first. Officially, the exhibition advertised itself as an effort to explore art's relationship to many of life's big questions. I focused upon the preoccupations with mortality, transience, and the unknown that are present in classic Conceptual art of the 1960s and '70s, and I sought to link these interests to a younger generation of artists who continue to explore similar subjects in their work. I have long had a soft spot for Conceptual art, and the historical aspect of the show evolved out of my desire to reframe its metaphysics and legacy, to free a certain strain of it—what one reviewer termed "productive" Conceptualism—from its masquerade of self-reference. I like the combination of modesty and aspiration that characterizes much of this art, and its yearning for a presence far beyond its physical form; I wanted to make the point that this "art about art" is in fact art with a very real purchase on life. Put crassly, I decided to try to sentimentalize this genre that is assumed to be so obdurate, seeking through a series of juxtapositions and framing devices to locate it in a broader field of philosophical, scientific, and religious inquiry. In short, I hoped to make a George Brecht event score into a weeping icon.

**THE
EXHIBITION
FORMERLY
KNOWN AS
SOLD OUT**

Jack
Bankowsky
on *Pop Life:
Art in a
Material World*

personas of Jeff Koons or Martin Kippenberger, and the contextual carnivalesque of Maurizio Cattelan or Reena Spaulings.

The foil of our might-have-been title was, of course, the avant-garde credo that assumes the interpenetration of art and mass culture to be a baseline capitalist evil, and as such the bugbear (and virtual *raison d'être*) of “critical” art making. The cheeky “capitulation” of our title suggests instead that art, if it is to get a bead on life today, cannot simply “resist” the “culture industry”; it cannot merely talk at and about the intermingling of the media machine and the art system. It must enter the fray, commandeer the machinery, even. It must “perform” its passage through this adulterated landscape. The seeds of this move, it seemed to us, were discoverable in Warhol’s late work, in his interlocking endeavors as publisher, paparazzo, TV producer, and model—but also, crucially, painter. It was this expanded network of activity that made good on Warhol’s business-art prophecy, updating his Pop art intuition for the turning millennium, and it is here that *Sold Out*—I mean *Pop Life*—began.

When I say *Pop Life* opened “more or less” as we had conceived it, the “less” had only to do with the necessary refinements that occurred in dialogue with our in-house collaborators, led by Catherine Wood, Tate curator of contemporary art/performance, who challenged us to trim our fantasy for the reality of their plant. Curating Warhol, whose production was massive, in the context of a show in which most of the space was necessarily given over to our primary task—a survey of work that succeeded him—presented our highest hurdle. From the outset we wanted to do two things with Warhol: to exhibit the expansive business-art network (as opposed to the Pop art icons or, alternatively, the avant-garde films) and to make a case for the art and activities of the late, “postlapsarian” period, the years between his shooting in 1968 and his premature death in 1987. But how to realize our two-pronged program with only one room to do the job?

As luck would have it, Eva Meyer-Hermann’s compendious Stedelijk Warhol survey *Other Voices, Other Rooms* traveled to London’s Hayward Gallery in October 2008, just in time to shock us into action. What we saw was a fun house stuffed full of TV footage and movies and ephemera, a mesmerizing and highly useful show in expanding the viewer’s appreciation of the larger Warholian Gesamtkunstwerk. And yet, for all its welcome abundance, it was somehow un-Warholian. What this mostly marvelous exhibition forgot is that it is the paintings that provide a fulcrum for Warhol’s broader movements, and make them legible as art.

Our first move, then, was to restrict our scope to post-1968 work (the core and payoff of our conceit). Next, we offered the late paintings pride of place in our display, even as (and this is key) we strove to show that they could only be properly appreciated as part of a broader network. So our central gallery would be given over to an installation of late, great canvases, while the business-art complex, which can only be teased out via ephemera and audiovisuals, would be housed in an adjoining corridor, sectioned off but in explicit dialogue with the paintings in the main space. To represent the late paintings in our tight quarters, we focused primarily on three of the



Pop Life: Art in a Material World
installation view, Tate Modern,
London, 2009, showing works by
Andy Warhol

FRIDAY

Peter Eeley
on *The Quick
and the Dead*

The exhibition got its start in a handful of different shows, suspicions, and loose ideas that were too insubstantial or silly to amount to much of anything on their own. (I was interested in the history of modern buried art, for example, and at one point toyed with the idea of doing a clever survey that would have taken place underground in the museum’s sculpture garden.) But at a moment of struggle early in the process, a colleague convinced me that these disparate ideas were actually facets of something larger, and challenged me to figure out how and why they were related. As visual arts curator at the Walker Art Center, I was fortunate to have both the time and the institutional support to undertake the sort of reflection this called for, with the freedom not to have to know exactly what I was doing. This was where the “personal” entered most clearly, and it was a key moment in the evolution of the show, because it shifted my working method toward a kind of introspection that I undertook in parallel to my study of the historical material. It became a reflective process of experimenting with myself, trying to understand more deeply my attraction to certain pieces and ideas, and this forced me to continually shift the boundaries of the project in response.

I rather peripatetically went back through writings that felt vaguely connected to the topic, and thumbed my way through bookstores and libraries to see where other things might lead me. I included a number of these texts in the catalogue in the hope that visitors and readers would find similar pleasures and connections among them. They included a beautiful John McPhee piece on geologic time, and passages from Jalal Toufic’s remarkable book about the undead in film, which meanders through various uncanny states of doubling. I knew I had my project long before I could articulate it, when, like a paranoiac, I started seeing it everywhere—in random

top:
Roman Signer
Rad (Wheel), 1996/2008
Bicycle wheel and ice
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth,
Zurich and London

Sturtevant
Beys Fat Chair, 1974–89
Chair, wax, vegetable fat, and wire
26 3/4 x 15 3/8 x 17 1/2 in.
(67.9 x 39.1 x 44.5 cm)
FER Collection

Michael Salistorfer
Untitled (Lohma), 2008
16-millimeter film, color, sound, 5 min.
Courtesy the artist and Johann König, Berlin

bottom:
Kris Martin
Still alive, 2005
Silver-plated bronze, edition of 5, 1 AP
Collection of Andrea Welschof and Volkmar
Kölsch, Bielefeld, Germany

Lygia Clark
Bicha, 1960
Aluminum
15 x 15 x 20 in. (38.1 x 38.1 x 50.8 cm)
Collection of the Walker Art Center,
T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 2007

Jason Dodge
*ABOVE THE WEATHER—In Algeria, Dmidjiga
Meffier has woven a tapestry from string equaling the
distance from the earth to above the weather, she was asked
to choose string the color of night*, 2007
4 3/4 x 13 3/4 x 9 in. (12.1 x 34.9 x 22.9 cm)
Kadist Art Foundation, Paris

Giuseppe Penone
Rovesciare I propri occhi (To Reverse One’s Eyes),
1970
Photograph
23 x 19 x 1 1/2 in. (58.4 x 48.3 x 3.8 cm)
Collection of Robin Wright and Ian Reeves,
San Francisco



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Material World*

dozen-plus bodies of work, two of which (the *Gems* and, to a lesser degree, the *Retrospectives/Reversals*) we felt had not been sufficiently seen or understood, as well as a sampling of the celebrity portrait commissions.

The Warhol problem was our problem with the show as whole. *Pop Life* rests on the proposition that each of the exhibited practices comprises, if not a managed network of activity, then at least a fully performative component, a dimension that can be tough to pin down in the context of an exhibition. If meaning, as we argue, derives from movements outside and around the art object or the white cube as much as from relationships within the frame or atop the pedestal, such transient, situation-specific activity is intrinsically difficult to revisit in the context of a show without robbing it of its theater. What each artist in *Pop Life* fully appreciates—and indeed works and plays with (it is part of the sublime sellout!)—is that the museum and the conventional art object remain the ultimate purveyors of value and significance in the game of art. This is what makes these artists' efforts so very different from those of, say, Fluxus-style performers or old-fashioned autonomous object makers. Like Warhol, who was forever announcing that he was leaving painting behind yet privileged its rule absolutely, artists such as Richard Prince or Murakami or (I think?) Damien Hirst ply convention, “inhabit” the institution, even as they chip away at it from the inside. They traffic, Courbet-like, in multiple and even contradictory ironies, so that what is right in one moment or for one constituency may be as good as giving up the game in another. The curatorial task of teasing out these “other voices” is thus something of a cat-and-mouse affair, pointing, even, to a built-in tension between the curatorial need to map these complex artistic ecologies and the artist's first priority, which must be to keep the ball in play. Take, just as a for-instance, our might-have-been title: As it happened, to tell tales out of school, the cold feet belonged to an artist, and though our preferred branding effort bit the dust, we did not fail to appreciate the poetic justice of an artist second-guessing the mood of the post-crisis art world and regrouping to protect the product.

Warhol was keenly alert to the particulars of exhibition, to the installation, to the “performance” that is the show, and indeed the artist-curated mise-en-scène emerged as both an organizing principle and a leitmotif of our exhibition. When it came to our larger problem—the necessary balancing act between the network and the gallery object, between our mission to map this circuitry and the artists' determination to keep a step ahead of the framing efforts that would domesticate their art—we fared best where we were able to tell our art-historical tale by re-creating the artists' own past gestures as room-size installations. Jeff Koons's *Made in Heaven* (1989), substantially reprised for the first time since its original showings, worked its theatrical magic whereby the artist had originally performed himself into tabloid notoriety and all but single-handedly earned our concept for us. So did Keith Haring's Pop Shop, although re-creating a DIY emporium originally located in downtown Manhattan in a British museum would seem on the surface the most flagrant reification of the endeavor's original spirit.

With other artists, however, it was tougher. How does one, for instance in the case of Maurizio Cattelan,

represent work that includes a biennial that wasn't one, an art-world field trip to a trash dump on Italy's underside, or a coat closet-size Chelsea gallery? My own solution would have been to exhibit *The Wrong Gallery* (really just a glass door labeled with the establishment's name and a few feet of space carved out behind it), perhaps fitted up with a new “exhibition” for the occasion, paired with the artist's iconic portrait bust bursting through the gallery floor. But Cattelan found these options stale and opted for a new intervention—an exciting proposition that we greeted enthusiastically—but one, as it happened, that could not do the labor the well-chosen historical example might have.

Richard Prince, scrupulously alive to the performative dimension of each new excursion in the public realm, was careful to stay a step ahead of our attempts to domesticate his efforts. We had imagined including one of his more recent self-curated outposts



Pop Life: Art in a Material World installation view, Tate Modern, London, 2009, showing works by Jeff Koons

FRIDAY

Peter Eleeey
on *The Quick
and the Dead*

stories in the newspaper, in a conversation overheard at the supermarket. At one point, I stumbled on an article in *Science* magazine by a Swiss neuroscientist named Olaf Blanke, who was using video to provoke out-of-body experiences in an experiment that recalled the Bruce Nauman video corridor I was using. We ended up having some interesting conversations, which I also eventually published in the catalogue.

The show's title arrived in similar fashion, cropping up in numerous sources, from Samuel Beckett to Buckminster Fuller, describing subjects as diverse as the Last Judgment, Marcel Proust, and relativity, all of which bore relation to what felt like my subject. “The quick and the dead” was originally a biblical phrase, and things “quick” and “dead” appeared in literal, if confused, form throughout the show. (One of Maurizio Cattelan's taxidermied dogs, apparently alive in sleep, lay beneath Charles Ray's seemingly motionless circle cut into the gallery wall, which in fact spins at a very high speed.) But the title also served as a looser shorthand for other, seemingly oppositional relationships of interest to me, including the distinctions between objects and events, the still and the moving, the actual and its illusion, the lost and the remembered.



James Lee Byars
The Conscience, 1985
Gilded wood, brass, and glass
72 3/4 x 22 3/4 x 22 3/4 in. (184.8 x 57.8 x 57.8 cm)
Courtesy Michael Werner Gallery, New York and Berlin

While I was arriving at the roughly 100 pieces that comprised the show, I thought a lot about the design and feel of places where I've had certain kinds of powerful experiences, and that aren't museums—caves, books, churches, archaeological sites, cemeteries. Sitting in cinemas, or peering through telescopes and microscopes. I tried to use all the tools available to me to subtly change the tenor of the galleries away from the uniform, well-lighted authority of the modern museum and toward these other environments, whether directly (changing the ceiling height, using a certain font for labels) or more suggestively (graduating the color of the walls, which progressively darkened toward the center of the show).

A few specific exhibitions also shaped my thinking. The *Artempo* show organized by Jean-Hubert Martin, Axel Vervoordt, and Mattijs Visser in 2007 at the Palazzo Fortuny in Venice, with its mustily atmospheric mix of modern, premodern, and non-art objects, had a big impact. Likewise, I had organized a large installation in New York with Mike Nelson around this time, and the way that Mike precisely and cinematically structured our passage through his hermetic rooms of vernacular objects was significant. As he has done in other large works, he deployed a doubled room that profoundly upset visitors' sense of narrative passage through the installation when they came upon it. In a similar play, Trisha Donnelly's

show at Modern Art Oxford, which I encountered shortly thereafter, involved an audio work that repeated (inexact) elsewhere in the exhibition. Both Mike and Trisha drew my attention to the notion that the temporal and spatial experience of moving through an exhibition, along with our memory of that experience, could itself be used as material.

I did this quite plainly in one way, installing a week's worth of On Kawara date paintings as temporal markers through the show. Less obviously, I also doubled the two primary entrances to the show, placing very similar pieces by Louise Lawler and Robert Barry at both ends, and layering atop them a haunting instrumental composition by Arthur Russell that played as a prelude and a coda to the exhibition. The Russell was something I was listening to a lot while working on the show, and for a while I searched for a piece that could provide something like its elegiac grandeur. Once I came across the oddity of the song's history—that it had first been published accidentally at half-speed—it seemed too perfect not to use. I played the song at both speeds, one at each end of the exhibition. It served to set the mood, yet also, like the Lawlers and Barrys it accompanied, distorted that mood when you encountered it again in its slightly different form.

While I included numerous period works by central conceptual figures such as Barry, Douglas Huebler, Stephen Kaltenbach, and Adrian Piper, I didn't make any effort to tell a history of Conceptual art. Moreover, the show also featured many pieces that do not sit comfortably in most definitions of Conceptual practice, such as

**THE
EXHIBITION
FORMERLY
KNOWN AS
SOLD OUT**

Jack
Bankowsky
on *Pop Life:
Art in a
Material World*

(*First House, Second House*, and the Rensselaerville bookstore and library), which resonate so suggestively with, for instance, pack-rat Andy's late-period *Time Capsules*. Indeed, we had fantasized a prefab bungalow, or perhaps a trailer on the lawn at Bankside fitted out with one of his self-curated displays (Prince dubbed the idea "Third Place"), but in the end it did not happen. Perhaps our desire to connect the dots felt to him too much like pedagogical spoon feeding. A brand-new, self-reflexive, site-specific curation would have gone some distance to earn the corrective complexity we were after, but if truth be told, Prince's to-this-day tough-to-pin-down *Spiritual America* did the trick. Alone and unencumbered, it made for a relatively slow, satisfyingly complicated read in our *Sold Out* context, and it bore out Prince's priority even in a sequence that featured the impossible competition that is Koons's *Made in Heaven*.

Our challenge was to coax viewers to look beyond the dollar signs and the sex, to sidestep the "oh-that-stuff" received wisdom that thinks it knows what is at stake when Prince, Koons, and Murakami are herded into one corral. Our fear was that the work we were bringing together would be brushed off as the frivolous excess of a buoyant marketplace—tolerated, but only in the unruffled conviction that the real meat of serious contemporary art making lay elsewhere. We worried that the art of the 1980s and 1990s, the branchings off the roots of Warhol's late, business-art example, would not quite manage to rise above the glitz and glam and wiseacre brinkmanship, the clichés of its reception, when our aim was precisely to rescue this art from too-simple domestications and reveal its status as dangerous carnival.

The range of the artists we included was key to testing the legs of our conceit and coaxing to visibility the under-the-radar currents and subversive ironies of our blue-chip standard bearers. The inclusion of Keith Haring's streetwise intervention did much to break with the commodity-fetish mood of our 1980s sequence, as did Sturtevant's subversive hauntings of artistic fathers. Similarly, Andrea Fraser's literal act of prostitution to the collecting class and the contribution of the metafictional Reena Spaulings helped de-Hirstify the home stretch of our loosely chronological show. Fraser, who was widely seen as the odd woman out in our exhibition, was not easily convinced to show this work—an exceptional gesture in her oeuvre—and indeed her misgivings caused her to disallow its exhibit in the show's final stop at the National Gallery of Canada. But we wanted it precisely because it steps over an unspoken boundary, because it forsakes critical distance and accesses the flow of raw life. Indeed, the fact that Fraser's art led her to a gesture that she could scarcely countenance in her real life convinces me that she is an artist of the first order. Inasmuch as it has a place in the exhibition, the work points to the fact that all the works in the show, contra the standard critical complaint, are less Institutional Critique lite than Institutional Critique dark. Or, more to the point, Institutional Critique "realistic."

In museum exhibitions, as in life, the bumps along the way are also often moments of truth, and our biggest bump occurred when officers from the Obscene Publications unit of the Metropolitan Police showed up the day after the opening advising that Richard Prince's *Spiritual America* had to be taken down and the catalogue (which featured its reproduction) removed from the bookstore. The allegation that this often-exhibited, widely published masterwork could be considered child pornography was frankly ludicrous, and one the museum contested, though the Tate ultimately opted not to take the issue to the mat. Prince, of course, is not a pornographer; he did not take the picture, he found it and "appropriated" it, and he did so precisely because this image of an underage Brooke Shields tarted up to titillate rolled into one endlessly anxious-making fetish so many contradictions around the devil's bargain that is contemporary celebrity and the hypocrisies of the country that invented it. Faced with the Tate's decision, Prince chose not to get on his high horse or take the bully pulpit on behalf of artistic freedoms. Instead he replaced the work with the 2005 photograph *Spiritual America 4*, picturing a grown-up and discreetly bikini'd Shields, and let the art do its artful thing. The art includes, of course, not just Prince's notorious photograph of a photograph, but the dustup that lifted it out of the museum and into the mainstream. One news clip among the very many generated in the hubbub recounts an anecdote in which a cabbie turns to his fare and puckishly demands, "And what about that *Pop Life*, mate?" when one might have expected the British equivalent of "How 'bout them Yankees?"

And how 'bout them Yankees? As far as I'm concerned the adage still holds: You can never be too rich—or art too infrathin.

Pop Life travels to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, June 11 through September 19, 2010.

FRIDAY

Peter Eeley
on *The Quick
and the Dead*

Mark Manders
Life-Size Scene with Revealed Figure, 2009
Brass, wood, iron, sand, hair, dust, epoxy,
and rope
74 3/4 x 66 7/8 x 120 in. (189.9 x 169.9 x
304.8 cm)
Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York,
and Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

Adrian Piper
*A Conceptual Seriation Arrested at Four Points in
Time*, 1968
Photographs and typed text
11 1/2 x 10 x 1 1/2 in. (29.2 x 25.4 x 3.8 cm)
Notebook, 35 pages, 11 x 8 1/2 in. (27.9 x
21.6 cm) each
Adrian Piper Research Archive, Berlin



Catherine Murphy's paintings or Harold Edgerton's photographs. But *characterizing* the exhibition at least in part as a survey of Conceptual art turned out to be a helpful sleight of hand. Those who liked the show seemed to enjoy the experience in the galleries more than whatever they may have learned about Conceptualism. My impression was that they left with a satisfied sense, to paraphrase Clement Greenberg, of knowing without having anything specific to know. Since they liked the show, and they understood it to be one of Conceptual art, many felt they understood—and more importantly, had *enjoyed*—"Conceptual art."

I eventually came to see that another sleight of hand was at work, that the entire project was a kind of decoy. Whatever else it was or claimed to be, I realized, *The Quick and the Dead* served as a way for me to investigate a handful of hypotheses about art's power and its place in our lives. Does Barry's electromagnetic energy field actually exist, for example, and how big is it? (The artist affirms the former, and avoids answering the latter.) To a degree I wasn't aware of when I was organizing the show, I was testing my faith in those powers, small and large. The most personal part of this exhibition, then, may have been the way in which it made me aware of the demands I was placing upon art to prove itself—a superfluous burden of proof, founded in a misconception. The icon, after all, doesn't actually need to weep to work its magic.

Notes

1. My essay in the exhibition catalogue was titled "Thursday," which was derived from a 1963 George Brecht event score of the same name.



ENDNOTE



Jens Hoffmann

Among the many responses to the inaugural issue of *The Exhibitionist*, the first-ever journal solely dedicated to exhibition making, was one that we certainly anticipated: the worry that our journal would advocate approaches that put too much emphasis on the curator, to the detriment of the artist. While I would like to see this conversation play out in more depth in the future, particularly in the upcoming “response” issue, which will appear every fourth issue and include discussions of texts published previously, I am eager now to elaborate a bit on the subject.

This journal’s understanding of curatorial practice as a form of authorship is not a claim that this is the only legitimate form of exhibition making. Rather, it is part of a larger effort to encourage the diversification of exhibition models through a focus on the subjectivity of their creators. *The Exhibitionist* is fully in favor of the exhibition as the central medium of curatorial practice, as opposed to the conferences, publications, educational activities, and other modes of “curating without art” that have proliferated over the last decade as the primary avenue of rethinking what curatorial work could be.

We also believe that exhibitions do not necessarily need to revolve around art—especially contemporary art—but rather that it is highly desirable to widen the scope of curatorial examinations by including objects from the larger cultural sphere. This particular approach allows the creation of a more meaningful relationship between past and present, art and society, cultural and political history.

What is really at the core of this criticism, this fear that the curator is superseding the artist? Interestingly, this critique is voiced less by artists than by curators, mostly those who claim

to be merely the enablers of artists’ visions and understand themselves as administrators, producers, or intermediaries. This position refuses the very rich possibilities of both art making and exhibition making. To romanticize the artist as a creative genius who requires a horde of facilitators to help execute his or her artistic vision seems shortsighted; so does the idea that curatorial endeavors must respond—after the fact, so to speak—to what artists are producing. This mindset carries with it the implication that artists are creatively and intellectually superior not only to curators but to pretty much everyone else, which is of course not the case. There are as many untalented artists as there are untalented curators, untalented writers, or untalented cooks.

I would hope that any artist who participated in an exhibition and felt uncomfortable with or diminished by the curatorial approach would speak up and challenge the curator. In fact, the relationship between artist(s) and curator(s) ought to be complex and varied. It should change from exhibition to exhibition, from curator to curator, from artist to artist. It is too easy (perhaps even cowardly or belittling to artists) to label a strong curatorial voice as automatically overshadowing artistic voices. Both should pull at the same end of the rope, developing arguments in dialogue to create a fruitful and nourishing relationship.

Neither art making nor curating are what they were only two decades ago. And both professions have developed a form of codependency that is undeniable, and to their mutual benefit. To reduce the relationship between artist and curator to a simple antagonistic binary, an enduring conflict and power struggle, is at best outdated and at worst outright reactionary.

CONTRIBUTORS

- Jack Bankowsky
Critic, Curator, and Artforum Editor at Large, New York
- Joshua Decter
Critic, Curator, Editor, and Theorist, New York; Director of the MPAS Program: Art/Curatorial Practices in the Public Sphere, Roski School of Fine Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles
- Eva Díaz
Curator and Assistant Professor of Contemporary Art, Department of the History of Art and Design, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn
- Matthew Drutt
Executive Director, Artpace San Antonio
- Peter Eleey
Curator, MoMA PSI, New York
- Okwui Enwezor
Adjunct Curator, International Center of Photography, New York; Editor, Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art
- Juan A. Gaitan
Curator, Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam
- Jens Hoffmann
Director, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco
- Mary Jane Jacob
Professor and Executive Director of Exhibitions and Exhibition Studies, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- Constance Lewallen
Adjunct Curator, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive
- Tara McDowell
Independent Curator and Doctoral Candidate in the History of Art, University of California, Berkeley
- Jenelle Porter
Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia
- Jane Simon
Curator, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art

- Robert Storr
Artist, Writer, Curator, and Dean of the Yale University School of Art, New Haven
- Nato Thompson
Chief Curator, Creative Time, New York
- Aurélie Voltz
Independent Curator, Berlin

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THE EXHIBITIONIST

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Design:

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Founding Editors:

Jens Hoffmann and Chiara Figone

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info@the-exhibitionist-journal.com
www.the-exhibitionist-journal.com

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Dieffenbachstraße 31, 10967 Berlin
www.archivebooks.org
info@archivebooks.org

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