carla

Issue 1

Los Angeles

Spring 2015

Letter From the Editor

I'm not going to use this space to wax on about how this publication is a love letter to the city or to art, or critical writing. Instead, this is an offering to the magnetic, varied, weird, and pulsing artistic production that is happening in Los Angeles right now. This is not new, yet our art world is currently in a dynamic flux, while still retaining a plasticity and an openness that is appealing. A certain roominess. The space that the city embodies offers a sense of freedom—both physical and conceptual—giving L.A. the unique opportunity to ambitiously take risks, including the risk of failure.

Yet, with all its space, the Los Angeles art world is fractured. Criteria for which social group you belong to seems to be informed by which side of the 405, the 101, or the 5 that you reside on. This publication aims to connect our disparate circles; various venues and artists—both young and established—will receive the same level of discourse. Just as *Carla* will strive to address the multi-faceted condition of our city, our output too will be ambidextrous: Through our website we will cover timely exhibitions and ideas in an accessible and quick format, while the printed quarterly will serve as an archive, the physical page implying a slower pace.

Our contributors are some who you may recognize, and some who you may not. They are writers, artists, curators, and thinkers. Some of them make a living sending their words to publications rooted in other cities; *Carla* offers an opportunity to localize these talented voices in Los Angeles. L.A.'s maniacally active art scene has plenty more to discuss than what fits into one or two 600 word reviews in the back of a New York or London based art magazine.

Carla is a centralized space for writing that is bold, honest, and approachable, while at the same time rigorous and challenging. "Casual criticality," I recall pitching to a raised eyebrow in an early planning meeting. Community and criticality should exist in tandem, balancing and challenging one another. Art criticism has always incited and fueled artistic production, not caused it to stagnate. Cliché as it may be, L.A.—with its proximity to Hollywood and the Pacific—risks being reputed as shallow, glitzy, or surface. Discourse in and about our city is vital to not only producing engaging conversations at home, but also insisting on Los Angeles as a major art presence to those abroad. We welcome your generous support, and are proud to introduce *Carla* to Los Angeles.

Cheers to many more,
Lindsay Preston Zappas
Founder and Editor-in-Chief

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Contemporary Art Review Los Angeles
Carla is an online art journal and quarterly magazine, committed to providing an active source for critical dialogue surrounding L.A.'s art community. *Carla* acts as a centralized space for art writing that is bold, honest, approachable, and focuses on the here and now.

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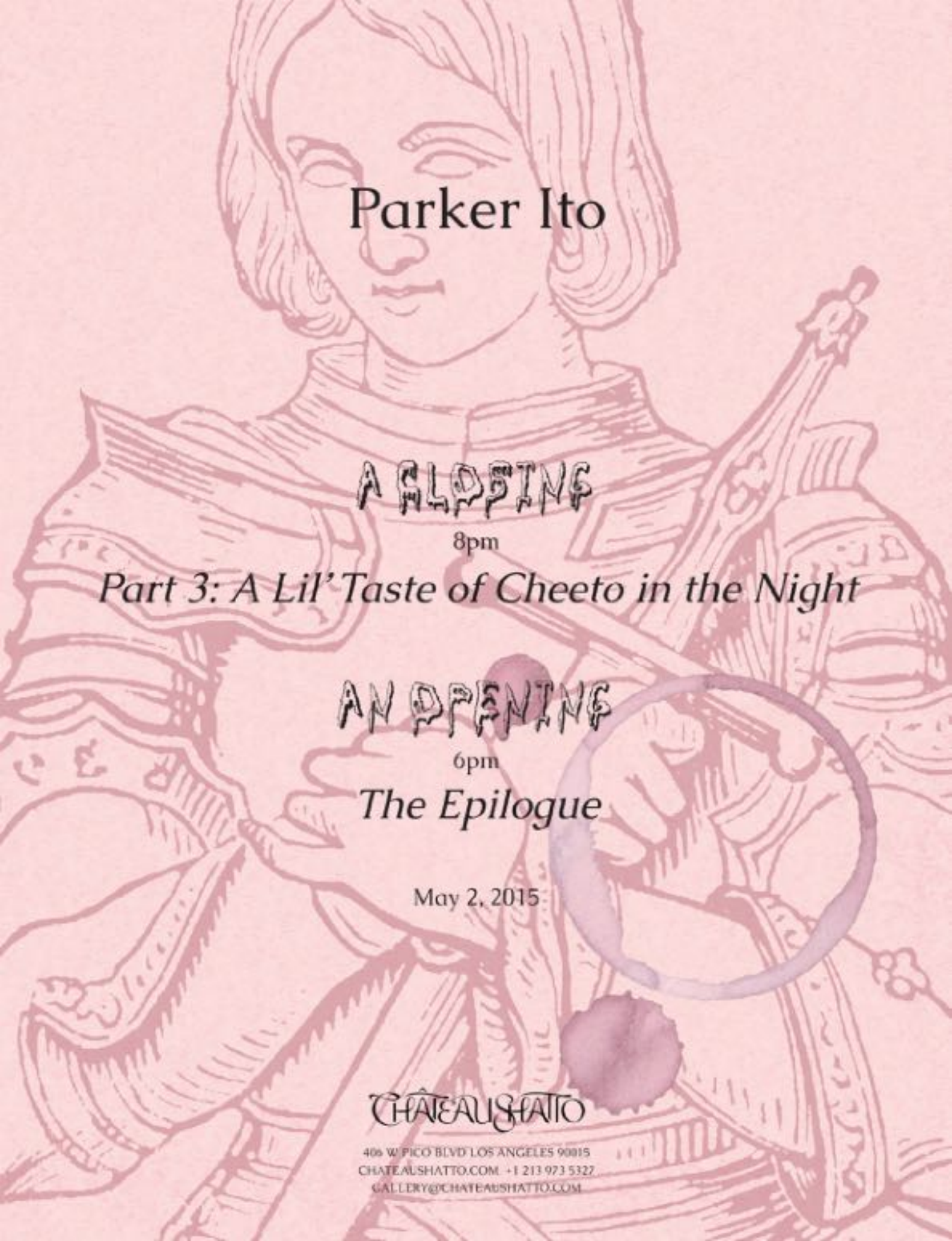

Parker Ito

A CLOSING

8pm

Part 3: A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night

AN OPENING

6pm

The Epilogue

May 2, 2015

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ROSE MARCUS

NIGHT GALLERY

MAY 30, 2015

MEAT PHYSICS/ Metaphysical L.A.

On the bed of a blank canvas, Charles Irvin births his *Cryptic Response* (2014): Mushrooms, some more glanslike than others, sprout from a cave of eyes. Orange rocks morph into the purple folds of a passageway, enveloping a green figure with yellow, humanoid legs. Below this prismacolor vision sit the words CRYPTIC RESPONSE, as if the rectangular spread of white fabric were a question to be answered—a chance to deliver, into the void, some version of a personal metaphysics. Yet when the artist is a painter, this fact triggers the suspicion held in special reserve for the medium—namely, the charge of escapism—as if by making a painting an artist engages in an irresponsible abdication of the shared world in favor of something idiosyncratic and unsharable—the shadows thrown on your own closed eyelids, say. This even when the mystical aspects seem integrated into a given corpus. Still, at its best, an insistence on the human body might root such figments in the physiological—from which, in this life, there is no escape.

Mid-century visionaries apparently took a less ironic approach to contemporary advances in psychoanalysis and psychoactive drugs. Many canonical abstract expressionists started out as Jungian symbolists. Painting, before arriving as an end in itself, served to extract the artist's vision: once fixed, thus interpretable. Under the rubric of "Personal Theory," a recent exhibition curated by Irene Ttatsos at the Pasadena Armory proposed a lineage of "mysticism and metaphysics" between two other Californian artists, together spanning three generations. Jim Shaw (b. 1952) bridged Irvin (b. 1971) and Sara Kathryn Arledge (1911–1998). This show marked the first (posthumous) exhibition of the latter's paintings; the artist was better known for her experimental video work in the '40s and '50s. Arledge's moody visionary watercolors, in which stringy blooms of rainbow color leak into dark fields, read like the intensive, intellectual anchor to Irvin's bright scatology. Rather than stony cartoons, Arledge's swaths of paint read as the transcription of a sub-lingual vision.

Irvin's paintings, while often excessive, are undercut by the "low-seriousness" of his hairy, brushy style. His psychedelic treatises join dozens of works which seem less invested in inward exploration, and more interested in minting hip-nouveau amalgams of druggy images and text. Efforts like Irvin's *Hoop Dawgz* (2013)—a painting of naked yogis and a golden retriever dunking a glowing basketball—or a group of canvases with the phrase WOMB KIDZ implanted in colored bands, seem more calculated, more referential, than the washier styles of past painter-shamans. Yet, despite this meme-like simplicity, Irvin is doubtless invested in metaphysical visions—born in the brain, yet visions, more often than not, of meat. At the Armory, Irvin's work hung alongside Shaw's *Initiation Ritual of the 360 Degrees* (2002) (which title reads like a goofy post-y2k redux of

Travis Diehl is a recipient of the Creative Capital/ Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. He lives in Los Angeles.

Kenneth Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*), a video where a procession of cultists enter an empty silo playing grotesque instruments shaped like body parts; a leg trombone; a hand bass guitar. The exhibition opened by pairing Irvin's 2014 *Figure in Landscape*, and Arledge's 1953 *Angry Man*: two grotesquely rendered, reddish lumps of glands and eyeballs. No accident that Irvin's quick patterns resemble organs—edible and suckable—intestinal mandalas extruded in sudden mystic fits.

On the metaphysical spectrum of contemporary L.A. art, the fecal/bodily Irvin falls on one side, the latticed/cerebral Zach Harris on the other. One critic[1] writes that his work might be mistaken for that of 20th century mystics, but, surprisingly, is the product of a 2006 MFA graduate of Hunter College. Harris proves that visionary work can also be highly constructed—self-aware—and at the same time serious. It is precisely his insistence on the value of otherworldly motifs that grounds his work in an academic tradition. As with the so-called "Zombie Formalists," Harris couches his seductive canvases in the business-savvy axiomatic rhetoric of contemporary painting. Yet the question of authenticity here hinges not on more recent ambivalence, but on the almost classical visionary role of art.

Harris's signature innovation is his wide carved frames, psychedelic topographies in themselves, which border his small canvases. In *Observatory (Dark Rainbow School)* (2012), over a foot of eyelets and waves encase a small diamond-shaped oil painting of a sun ripping through mountainous clouds. The final composite product serves to embody the vision with weight and labor: a physical insistence. Though, like Irvin, playfully engaged with the possibility of "visionary art," Harris's paintings exhibit a more studied/meticulous self-evidence akin to that of Arledge.

It may be fashionable (now, or always, in California) to flirt with the effects of belief. At the recent *Cameron: Songs for the Witch Woman*, at the MOCA Pacific Design Center, wall texts seemed to take for granted metaphysical feats such as Cameron's psychic ability. But it's important to distinguish between the reality of the *effects* of belief in metaphysics, and the reality of metaphysics; sincere belief in which few artists would fess up to without qualification. It's easier, perhaps—and better for business—to retain the plausible deniability of an intellectual stance, without canceling the attractive intimation of magic.

What is valuable, then, in visionary painting—foregoing the escapist "space for reflection" of AbEx—is the exercise of a physical projection of the psyche. This is not to say that the symbols generated in work by Harris, Arledge, Irvin et al. will bear direct interpretation on the order of dreams, but rather that in their fetal and genital imagery they insist on the physiological link between vision and the body. Irvin's symbology, for example, exploits an almost illustrative slippage between the mushroom, the penis, the man, and the trip. Harris's paintings recall a journey taken across the forking patterns of your own blood vessels, or the mountains and valleys of the brain. Arledge's most well known visionary work, the gauzy *Introspection* (1946), takes the form of a dance for film.

Is the inward journey not also an escape? But that it were so easy to disappear into the slow mandala of the self. Without further probing the artistic merits of these practices, we might nonetheless take them as indications that visionary art contains its own fraught territories. The

1
Ken Johnson, "Art in Review," The New York Times, January 30, 2009, p. C31

physiological origins and dangers of these paintings should only attenuate the recurrent theme of "metaphysical art"—especially as concerns California—into something not free-floating or magical, but solidly predicated, before the meta-, on the physical.

1
Zach Harris, *Sanyo Sunset* (2014-2015), water based paint, spray paint, wood 46 ⅞ × 35 ⅛ × ¾ inches. Image courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (Photo: Zach Harris).

Art for Art's Sake: L.A. in the 1990s

When I returned to Los Angeles in 1996 from the Bay Area I was not so aware of the commercial aspect of the art scene. Being that the early '90s was a time of identity art and mediums such as video and performance, I was under the impression that contemporary artists made an income from grant applications and teaching positions. My assumptions were correct, as this was much the case in the early '90s. While I had frequented some galleries in San Francisco such as Paule Anglim, Rena Bransten, Four Walls, Haines Gallery, and The Luggage Store, I mostly thought of contemporary art as existing in the schools, nonprofit spaces and institutions.

Like many other L.A. artists of my age, *Helter Skelter* at MOCA, in 1992, changed my understanding of what was possible in art. I viewed the exhibition at the age of 23 and it was an important experience for me. It became a motivation in becoming an artist. When I returned four years later to attend UCLA as a graduate student, I was returning to the city where I was born. I was your typical L.A. kid of the 1970s and '80s. I grew up on the Westside, my father was theatrical agent, and I participated in the teenage debauchery of the '80s (from the Cathay de Grande to the "Less than Zero" lifestyle). It seemed that everything that was L.A. was inherently ingrained in me. Besides spending time at the UCLA Warner Building and living in Venice Beach, I spent most of my time buying records (to both collect and resell) and going to the 15 or 20 relevant galleries that existed at the time.

It sounds funny to say 15 or 20 relevant galleries, but you truly could count them on your hands and feet. ACME., Angles, Blum & Poe, Christopher Grimes, Dan Bernier, Gagosian, Louver, Margo Leavin, Marc Foxx, Pace, Patrick Painter, Patty Faure, Regen, Richard Telles, Rosamund Felsen, Shoshana Wayne, Thomas Solomon's Garage, and a few others I am forgetting. These were the days before Chinatown. The concept of a commercial gallery was foreign to many of the young artists of Los Angeles. I remember a friend from high school standing in the courtyard of the steel buildings of "Baby Bergamont" (home to ACME., Bernier and Foxx) being thoroughly confused. In an excited and opportunistic voice he exclaimed, "where do I sign up to show here?" I believe he thought of it as the equivalent of a recreation center or some kind of civic-sponsored space where he could simply slot himself in to participate.

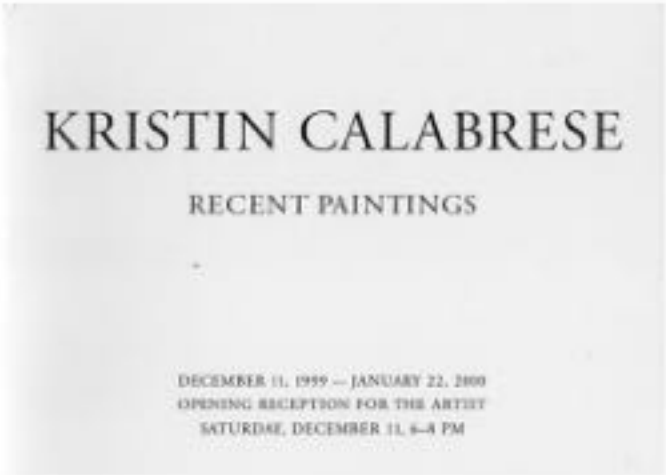
A part of me misses the naïveté of those days where a line between teacher and student existed, and gamesmanship and careerism were not nearly as commonplace. This seemingly changed overnight and

Anthony Pearson has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, and at Midway Contemporary Art (Minneapolis). Recent group exhibitions include *Second Nature: Abstract Photography Then and Now* at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum (Lincoln, Massachusetts), *The Anxiety of Photography* at the Aspen Art Museum, and *Arthouse* at the Jones Center (Austin, Texas). Pearson shows with David Kordansky in L.A., Shane Campbell in Chicago, and Marianne Boesky in N.Y.

by 1997 the rush was on for young art. The promotion of a new group of sculptors out of UCLA would change the face of things, eventually resulting in substantial articles ranging in publications as varied as *Spin* and *Artforum*. Bruce Hainley and Dennis Cooper recognized the group while they were still students. These artists would soon go on to have representation and later participate in the *Mise en Scene* show at the Santa Monica Museum of Art in summer 2000.

One catalyst for this new exceptional sculpture was an artist run space called Room 702. Located on Melrose and Heliotrope, the space was run by UCLA grad Brent Peterson and artist Mark Grotjahn. Early shows by the painter Kristin Calabrese and sculptors Evan Holloway, Jason Meadows, and Pentti Monkkonen, highlighted work that made a huge impression at the time. It was here that Peterson and Grotjahn first sold works by the young artists to the handful of prominent L.A. collectors. This was an exciting event at the time given that this kind of thing was unheard of. As a wider audience was starting to emerge, many of the scene's dynamics shifted. Friendships were both gained and strained and the notion of what it meant to be an artist changed dramatically. Work that was once made for oneself and one's peers was now being presented to a much wider audience. People were paying attention to art students, not only grads but also undergrads. At UCLA, the reception of both Monkkonen and later Eric Wesley highlighted a situation where substantial gallery shows were being given to artists who were in their early 20s.

Another artist-driven space of the time was Dave Muller's Three Day Weekend. Muller would invite large groups of his artist and friends to do temporary exhibitions on three-day



weekends throughout the year. These shows were relaxed and inclusive, and as a result a who's who of the art scene. Grassroots and more non-commercial, the exhibitions would typically take place in Muller's residence and other low-key wayward venues. Both the nonprofit and commercial gallery scene seemed sort of mannered and bureaucratic in the light of Muller's venture. Three Day Weekend was participant-driven and never formalized in such a way as to prevent it from being fluid and primarily centered around artists.

The frenzied promotion of artists both in and out of school culminated in the unlikely event of Calabrese doing a major exhibition at Gagosian, Beverly Hills, in December 1999. Her exceptional black and white paintings of interiors were displayed throughout the exclusive gallery. The artist was a year out of school and many of her peers that evening found the event to be surreal. These were the same paintings that hung in the Warner studio just a year before. Calabrese reflected on the show and the fallout that came from it on Michael Shaw's *The Conversation* podcast in 2012. Calabrese stated, " I sold most of the things and people wrote terrible stuff. It was weird when people said I didn't really deserve it, I felt like there was a lot of career backlash showing at Gagosian so early."

In the coming decade Chinatown would emerge as a more likely place for young artists to show out of school. The first and second generation of galleries included China Art Objects, Goldman Tevis, Black Dragon Society, Daniel Hug and David Kordansky. These gallerists were closer in age and stature to the artists who they represented, allowing for a more synergistic and egalitarian power relationship between artist and dealer.

I would be eight and a half years out of school before I would have my first solo show in Los Angeles with Kordansky in December of 2007. I was 38 at the time. In the prior years, my more subtle work was rejected by most of the galleries in town. I was not a youthful figure and my work was always more conceptually driven and reductive. Still, all that happened in those early years framed both my understanding and sensibility. I feel fortunate to have been in Los Angeles at such an instrumental time. Today I can't really relate to young artist's assumption that the gallery system is readily available to them. I have seen both frothy and dry markets and always feel that art is made for the artist in the most primary sense. Those early days give me inspiration that the mystery and intrigue of art is still the motivation. I derive this inspiration from the innocence of that time.

1
Kristin Calabrese show card from Gagosian Gallery (2000). Image courtesy of Anthony Pearson.

2
Jason Medows/ Jorge Pardo show card from Brent Peterson (1998). Image courtesy of Anthony Pearson.

3
Pentti Monkkonen show card from Room 702 (1999). Image courtesy of Anthony Pearson.

A Dialogue in Two Synchronous Atmospheres

Erik Morse with Alexandra Grant

Much of your art practice is informed by your childhood emigrations and the various countries you have called home. How did these experiences sensitize you to the worlds of the stranger and the outsider?

I attended seven schools during grades 1-12 in five geographies, each one completely different. Every person who migrates knows much is gained or lost in translation. Because I grew up in such an international way, I had both a sense of the fantastic world outside and a complete world of fantasy in my head.

I grew up surrounded by art — folk, modern, contemporary. My mother and father collected African art from their time in Nigeria together, and in Mexico my mother's close friend was the sculptor Helen Escobedo. As a child I found the presence of their art comforting because it didn't speak to be understood. I still associate

X began counting in English...

...but the words unfailingly metamorphosed into French. As long as she could remember, language had always been merciful, employing a farrago of sounds and colors and patois. One, two, three... quatorze, quinze, seize. The boxes of books numbered more than thirty. Trente.

Obsessed with efficiency, the books had been organized by size within the cardboard, and so grouping them again by subject matter and alphabetizing once more gave the unpacking a weight she had only experienced psychically at her Jungian therapist's office. It was the books of fiction that were the heaviest. X pulled out each volume, stacking it first on the ground to get a sense of each letter (K for Kafka, Karon, Kerouac, Kincaid, Kurieshi, et cetera). The small book, bound in green Venetian paper, swirled eddies of pigment, had no identifying title or author on either cover or spine, and so she opened it haphazardly to a central page and read:

"Midway through its voyage across the Atlantic, a piano's keys began to plink dissonant messages in the rocking hull of a cargo liner. The clattering sounded tentatively to begin, lost in all the various creeks and tintinnabulations of its mother vessel, which plowed violently ahead, face à face with the gurgling sea.

"The piano, a simple mahogany vertical built by the firm of Waddington and Sons, London, in the 1920s, spent most of its life along the Massachusetts littoral, nestled inside a Italianate house that was adorned with a Widow's walk; it had listened patiently to family recitations of *Moby Dick* and *The South Sea Tales*; it understood the thingness of the sea, the unknown, the terror, the weather of it. The instrument had made identical journeys from the Old World to the New four times hitherto, gaining with each expedition another layer of salty residuum over the spruce soundboard, the results of which had imparted a warping and funereal timbre to its string articulation:

Bwah-bwah-bumwah.
Bwah-bwah-bumwah.

"The notes chiming through the orlop deck's mossy ether approached the purlieus of melody, something redolent of a sailor's chantey or barroom chanson. Undulating to and fro beyond the ship's steel bulwark, the ocean's metronome accompanied at an esoteric tempo, at moments soft and pliant like a lullaby, and other times savage as if threatening to pitch the horizon permanently onto its side."
In these words, X felt a surfeit of nausea, forming at her center and spreading outward toward her clavicle and hip bones: "Why was this so familiar? Was this Jules Verne?" And then she flipped to the front of the cover and saw the inscription:
CHERE X
___ LOVE, K.

What kind of communication was this between them, and why now? Why had she waited to read the book? She turned past the inscription to the title page, resting for a moment on the quote:

Water engenders skin, it is actually and ultimately the same surface.

Roland Barthes, Michelet

and began to read. Was it K who had introduced her to Barthes? As she sat legs crossed on the concrete floor, the cold seeping in, the piles of books nonetheless surrounded her in a tenderness of being "entre guillemets" as if "under covers," of darkness or a lover's embrace or sunk in the endless integument of the sea between them.

X remembered who she was: an artist, a sculptor, and began rooting around in the depths of her discomfort in the only way she knew how. She made the first drawing, a boat with a piano, just as described in the book, but, as in a dream, with

home with certain objects (rather than specific places), like the Mexican paintings of my grandparents' or my mom's piano, which crossed the Atlantic five times in my childhood. This rootlessness and yet dedication to material culture has no doubt been part of my becoming an artist.

Did your creative fascinations with concepts like "telepathy" and "otherness" lead to a particular interest in French literature?

My Francophone interests preceded my art practice, as I lived in Paris as a child; my mother was in charge of the Fulbright Program between the U.S. and France, a program she had also run in Mexico City. My French was never native, but experiencing the metro and the food and the inclement fall weather as a 12 year old gave me a kind of cultural fluency that led later to a desire to reconnect with that experience. When I went to college, here in the U.S., Derridean theory was *de rigeur*, and I felt quite excluded by it in the classroom.

It wasn't until many years later, in London, when I was looking for an appropriate graduate school that the American artist Jeffrey Gibson introduced me to the writing of Hélène Cixous. It was as though her writing was the magic word, the telepathic message that would both make sense of and open up the worlds of French literary, philosophical, and psychoanalytic thinking. At the same time it provided a grounding context in terms of her Feminism and hybrid

Erik Morse is the author of *Dreamweapon* (2005), and *Bluff City Underground: A Roman Noir of the Deep South* (2012). He is also a lecturer at SCI-Arc and a contributing writer to *Frieze*, *ArtReview*, *The Believer*, *Paris Review*, *LA Review of Books*, *Bookforum* and *The Guardian*.

background as a German, Jewish, North African, and French woman.

I'm struck by this image you mentioned of a piano crisscrossing the ocean as an apt metaphor for how your work details the emotions of "atmosphere."

Yes, in that image the piano is mute but yet we can still hear it in our heads…how it has played, how it will (hopefully) play again. It reminds me of the sadness of the movie *The Piano*—poor Ada McGrath, getting shipped off to the ends of the earth (New Zealand), sold into marriage by her father. The final scene, as she throws the piano overboard, into the sea, to commit suicide, and then changes her mind underwater. Why is it so often in stories that we must go down or underwater to reveal the truth about ourselves?

Do you think artists living on a coastline like L.A. are more attuned to telepathing to the outside?

Do you think it's the ocean's shore that makes us more attune to nature here, or is it the tar bubbling up through the earth, or the sense of the tectonic plates moving under our feet?

Despite being a text-based artist, many of your exhibitions, like *Womb-womb Room* (2011) and *Interior Forest* (2013) take on a strong, experiential dimension.

Much of my early work in drawing was sculptural. I used to weave large-scale webs of language in wire filigree and create what are almost unphotographable masses of this material. Over time, my practice shifted: the wire then moved to the wall, where I traced its shadow, then to paper, and then the work lost the wire altogether.

the piano strapped to its bow. She remembered her father's obsession, at the end of his life, with Atlantis. No, not that he believed in it, but he had been both a geologist and a follower of Rudolph Steiner, an anthroposophist, and struggled to reconcile the two. Not much had been known about the earth in Steiner's days. That its crust moved up and down was accepted, but not side-to-side on plates, as we know them now. She remembered her father explaining the early naval missions from England, plumbing the depths for the first time with piano wire two to three miles in length, astonished at how deep the sea was.

X came to and looked once more at the book in her hands: entire oceans of prose yet to be spanned, an imaginary voyage, a zigzag. But it wasn't hers. She thought to herself that maybe she could perch her ear between the pages, listening to it like a conch shell. Perhaps she would hear K's words beckoning her like a susurrant piano playing against the tide. What things would K share? No doubt, they would arc fitfully between heirlooms of childhood and of their affair. And then she started laughing. Waves of laughter rose up from her belly. She couldn't help it. The book fell to the floor.

1
Alexandra Grant, *Boat and Piano* (2015). Image courtesy of the artist.

With a histrionic flair of her hand, X cleaved the book down its center as though she were parting the Biblical child in half.

She caught her breath...as she sat up and observed that the book's pages, now clustering into distinct bands emerging from the spine, took the shape of the letter K turned upon its side. She closed the text with an air of finality and sealed its green skin with a saltwater kiss.

What was new about the *Womb-womb Room*, which was originally commissioned as a piece to "recreate" or "re-enact" Faith Wilding's *Crocheted Environment* (1972) for a Pacific Standard Time exhibition, was that the source for the idea came from another sculpture. The two things that became essential were the use of color and how I addressed what feminism was today, which I did by asking artist Channing Hansen to collaborate with me. It took us almost a week to install the *Womb-womb Room* at Night Gallery, with up to 11 artists and volunteers all sewing this giant web together, listening to music.

It was that collective hum that made the idea of the collaborative drawing of the *Interior Forest* a possibility. Hélène had given me her book, *Philippines*, in 2009, and for years I had mulled over how to embody the work. As a reader, I immersed myself in the ideas in the text— Jacques Derrida's obsession with Freud's redacted writings on telepathy—but as a maker I knew that the responsibility of giving form to Hélène's text was too great.

I still relate so profoundly to her voice. My real relationship to Hélène grew out of that initial sense of connection and correspondence through reading her texts. When I first met my long-term collaborator, hypertext pioneer Michael Joyce, in person over dinner, he commented about the way that I spoke, that I was a "Cixousian." It's interesting how we recognize each other, isn't it?

Alexandra Grant is a text-based artist who uses language and networks of words as the basis for her work in painting, drawing and sculpture. Grant is known as a 'radical collaborator'—it is collaborating that shapes what she does outside of the studio as much as within it. Grant has worked with writers as diverse as hypertext pioneer Michael Joyce, actor Keanu Reeves, artist Channing Hansen, and philosopher Hélène Cixous.

Alexandra Grant

SOGTFO at François Ghebaly

February 28 –April 11, 2015

First —just to get this out of the way— it feels so good to be writing about an exhibition of big sculptures in a big gallery made by five women. When was the last time *that* happened?

Not that bigger is better. Neither are gender-exclusive shows necessarily the way to go, in this day and age. Doesn't it seem rather anachronistic to organize an exhibition defined by its participants' genitals? Of course it does, and that is what gives artist-curator Charlie White the license to do so in this purportedly post-gender world. All-male group shows raise nary an eyebrow. In the second decade of the 21st century, this feels confounding, not to mention exhausting. A 2015 update of The Guerilla Girls' 1986 Report Card of New York galleries' gender balance, by the Feminist collective Pussy Galore, makes for depressing reading.

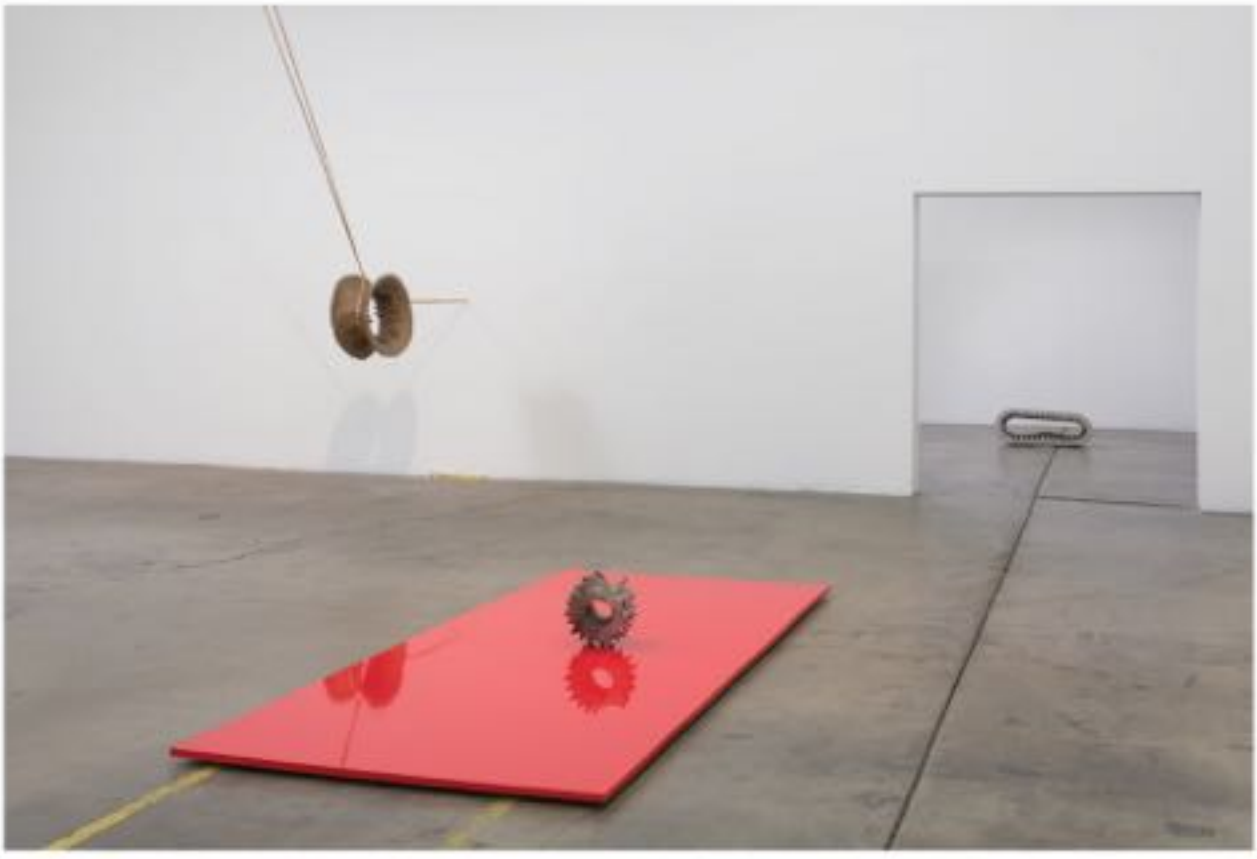
Thankfully, White's exhibition did not simply gesture towards redressing this imbalance, but made an argument (or the start of an argument) about scale, form, and gender within the tradition of sculpture. Even though the show was future facing, the work included was rather traditional: by and large, institutionally scaled sculpture, generously spaced, with a bias towards cast metals and things on plinths. Primary colors and primary forms predominated. I wouldn't even have guessed that it was a women-only show if it hadn't been flagged as such by the press release and the title.

Ah yes, the title. *SOGTFO* standing for "Sculpture or get the fuck out"—a play on the Internet message board acronym TOGTFO ("Tits or get the fuck out"). Maybe this is one of those terms that everyone else has been shrugging off for years, but to me, hearing it here for the first time is dumbfounding. Even subverted, its aggressive tone seems unfitting for the generally measured output of these five artists. None are polemical about their gender, and it is hard to imagine any of them coming up with a title as caustic as *SOGTFO*— which, of course, they didn't.

Andrea Zittel—at 49 years old—was the *grande dame* of the group, and former faculty at USC where White is a professor. Amongst this group of artists, it was Zittel's relationship to space that seemed most influential: whether sculptural or geographical, she approaches it as territory for autonomy, liberty, and difference. Hers is not the impulse to establish dominion over space, but rather to find a corner of the world that is not overlooked or fought over.

For Zittel, grandeur of scale allows for the creation of small things. This is as true of her 35-acre property in Joshua Tree, A-Z West, where she makes knitted garments and handmade paper, as it was of its analog in the exhibition, an installation titled

Jonathan Griffin is a contributing editor for *Frieze* magazine, and also writes for publications including *Art Review*, *Art Agenda*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Cultured*, and *New York Times T Magazine*.



Flat Field Work #1 (2015). In the piece, Zittel arranges rectangular parcels of activity—hand woven rugs, enamel-painted plywood—on a large black carpet. A gorgeous watercolor in muted tones is pinned, low down, onto the back of a tung-oiled freestanding wall.

So space is freedom. Is that what Nevine Mahmoud had in mind when she placed her aluminum objects on large panels of color? In *Tunnel Chunk with Colored Plane* (2015) a small ring of acoustic foam, cast in rough grey metal, seems to float on the glossy red laminate. The plinth-cum-platform insulates the spiky, abrasive object from the world around it. Nearby, another cast metal ring, this time in bronze and made by Kelly Akashi, was slung on a taut rope between the ceiling and the wall. Akashi's *Ring* (2015) is larger than Mahmoud's—perhaps the size of a car tire—and appears inverted, its gloopy, stalactitic surface forming a hairy core.

Do we need to stop here and remark on the symbology of male and female bodies: the phallocentric forms of traditional sculpture (columns, obelisks, stelae, erect statues) and their female antitheses (discs, balls, rings, tunnels, voids and caverns)? It seems impossible not to, although I don't know what it will achieve, except to allow us to do our semiotic due diligence and then move on. Such Freudian readings seem old-fashioned and, to me, only serve to delimit the meanings of works as incommensurably strange as Mahmoud and Akashi's. Or, for that matter, Kathleen Ryan's—most notably a bunch of giant concrete grapes on a granite pedestal titled *Bacchante* (2015). A bacchante, by the way, being a female follower of Bacchus (or in modern, chauvinistic parlance, a lush.)

Figure oO (2015), by Akashi, is a major work that also uses the primary forms of the field and the void. A deep, freestanding white wall has two circular holes cut through it, one bigger than the other. The interior lip where these holes intersect provides a shelf for a grotesque burgundy wax cast of a female hand holding a smooth lump of glass. Like Zittel, Akashi seemed to be clearing space—both actual and metaphorical—for a singular expression that is gendered but which is not principally *about* gender. *Figure oO* is rather elegant, even precious, until you walk around the back of the wall and find that it has been defiled by extravagant splashes of off-white liquid, now crusty and dried, that may or may not be intended to look like so many giant wads of cum.

Thank goodness for Amanda Ross-Ho, who wasted no time in abstract evocations or symbolic allusions. Her main contribution to the show, *Untitled Sculpture (ONCE U GO BLACK)* (2015), was a six-foot high pair of female mannequin legs wearing seven pairs of thong underwear, each pulled down slightly more to display a range of grey-scale fabrics, progressing from white to black. A photograph on the exhibition announcement email, presumably the inspiration for Ross-Ho's sculpture, showed a similarly dressed mannequin in a store, with different slogans on each pair of panties. "DON'T BE A PUSSY / EAT ONE," or "IF YOU THINK I'M A BITCH YOU SHOULD TRY ME IN BED." The image is as graphic an example of the appropriation of women's voices by men, of female culture made by men for men, as you're likely to see.

The unavoidable fact is that this was an exhibition curated by a man, an academic patriarch if you will, in a gallery run by (and named for) another man. In her brilliant, internally conflicted exhibition text,

Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer writes, at one point, about the paranoia "inherited from feminism that always asks who and where the power is in any given situation." "Who's setting the terms of engagement," she asks, "who's making the rules?" Then, a beat later, "Can there be a wrong spokesperson for the right cause?"

White is an intelligent and reflective artist, and these contradictions are not lost on him. That is why he chose that image for the exhibition announcement. Nevertheless, pointing them out is not the same as resolving them. In his essay, bluntly titled "An Argument," White hauls around such terms as "status," "power," "sovereignty," "dominion," and "genius." But the argument itself, though compellingly developed, remains curiously unresolved. He rails against the hegemony of scale, and an art industry which renders exhibitions "tertiary" (behind the "global conferences" of biennials and art fairs) and which reduces once-active viewers to passive spectators. It is the market, he says, that has chiefly benefitted from society's "alpha-object fetish," although he places the responsibility for change at all of our feet. How then, by curating an exhibition of large-scale work in a spacious commercial gallery, is he moving these issues forward? Or rather, by curating an exhibition of work by women, is he making it possible for us to "abolish the internal pattern of imposing specific expectations on either gender," as he says we must?

I suddenly feel like I want to go back in time and see the show all over again, to try and look at this work without thinking about gender, about wombs and phalluses, about misogynist internet trolls. Under the overbearing curatorial conditions of *SOGTFO*, however, that would have been difficult, if not impossible.

Maybe White was deliberately provoking his audience by emulating a defunct model. Was this the single-gender exhibition to end all single-gender exhibitions? Given that it principally drew attention to certain problems by replicating them, perhaps we should hope (with the best will in the world) that this kind of exhibition doesn't happen again anytime soon.

1
Amanda Ross-Ho, *Untitled Sculpture (ONCE U GO BLACK)* (2015), high density foam with urethane coating, latex paint, knit jersey, thread, wood, steel, and formica, 37.5 × 75.5 × 48 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles (Photo: Robert Wedemeyer).

2
Kathleen Ryan, *Bacchante* (2015), concrete, stainless steel, granite, 46 × 50 × 66 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles (Photo: Robert Wedemeyer).

3
SOGTFO, Francois Ghebaly, Installation View. Image courtesy of the artists and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles (Photo: Robert Wedemeyer).

4
Nevine Mahmoud, *Tunnel Chunk with Color Plane* (2015), aluminum, laminate, wood, 49 × 12 × 108 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles (Photo: Robert Wedemeyer).

#studio #visit with #devin #kenny

It's fitting that my conversation with artist Devin Kenny occurred over email. Kenny is constantly utilizing or referencing the internet; through his tumblr Studio Workout, his heavy presence on social media (Facebook/Instagram/Twitter), and through his art practice. His "objects of regard"—otherwise known as sculptures for those who are uninitiated to Kenny's comprehensive mnemonic devices—at his recent show at Aran Cravey, circled back to the computer. His simple wood sculptures, titled *Desktop Widgets*, resemble our collective tools for accessing the internet: i.e. mice, iPads, hard-drives. In our computer-screen-mediated conversation, we began by discussing Kenny's relationship to the internet and wound up touching upon hip hop, comedians, and kicks.

Barnett Cohen: In your interview with the artist Brad Troemel, you said, "the interesting thing about using the internet is that it is a space that in some ways is an analog to the way my mind works." Speak more on that and how the rabbit-hole that is the internet mirrors your mental process?

Devin Kenny: I'm excited by through-lines of connection. I often link things together like a web, point-to-point, from the outside in. From skateboarding and graffiti, and growing up in this beautiful Black body in a very segregated city, I became very aware of my environment. I love hip hop, and its concern with chronicling life at street level; and through it I felt supported in my passion for the visual and auditory culture I would encounter on a day-to-day basis. My subcultural interests were fostered by the internet, whether it was p2p or bulletin boards. There's also the aggressiveness and the detritus of the internet: pop-up ads, banner graphics, spam threats, chain letters, away messages, avatar signatures. All these things seemed rife for the same attention and appreciation that I would give to what I passed on the street or on public transportation.

As a teen online in the early 2000s, I had this painful feeling that all this cool stuff had happened in the past, and that I just missed the boat—and that it would never return because the Patriot Act was killing everything. Maybe this fear was a result of an overexposure to materials; I used to borrow like seven CDs a week from my older friend Dorian. He had a huge library (multiple walls of tapes and CDs, graphic novels, incendiary literature, etc.), but even that paled in comparison to how deep I could plunge online.

BC: How attached are you to the words you employ within your work? So much of our contemporary interaction with language and images is fleeting (i.e. scrolling through Instagram or our FB feeds) and I am curious if/how that interaction or relationship impacts your work?

DK: Was I a man dreaming I was a Snapchat or a Snapchat dreaming I was a man...

Barnett Cohen lives and works in Los Angeles. He received his MFA from the California Institute of the Arts and his BA from Vassar College. He attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2012. His work has been exhibited at The International Center for Photography (New York), Cathouse FUNeral (Brooklyn), Vox Populi (Philadelphia), A Gallery (Seattle), Human Resources (Los Angeles), Venice 6114 (Los Angeles), Cirrus Gallery (Los Angeles), Beverly's (NYC/ Miami/ Mexico City), Galerie SEE Studio (Paris), and Above Second (Hong Kong).

Barnett Cohen

My Instagram is pretty light on text, which is fun for me. The Twitter and Facebook accounts are a different story. I think a lot can be pulled out of a thing meant to be looked at only briefly; that which is discarded can often have a kind value which is not acknowledged or engaged. I like the rapidity that's possible with social networking and I sometimes seek to bring that kind of immediacy into the art I share with people in physical space. I am also interested in the kind of slowed time possible when you're in a space full of "objects of regard".

BC: I find a large chunk of your work to be delightfully tongue-in-cheek and I am wondering if you could speak to your attachment to the objects specifically. Your particular use of humor and your personal investment in the work seem to operate in tandem. For example, the photocopied images that you exhibited at Aran Cravey had a disposable quality to them that struck me as purposefully out-of-place in the setting of a commercial gallery.

DK: The photos were originally part of a double-sided installation in the *Made In LA* show at The Hammer last year. They were 35mm range-finder photos I took in Culver City, Inglewood, and other parts of L.A. They were then scanned and printed on an office copier and pinned to a cubicle wall. They resist some of the restrictions of the curated print while also letting a person take in the image. It's not about fighting 'the precious' as a rule, but it is about giving opportunities [for interaction] that isn't always available to people. A lot of work in the Aran Cravey show can be touched by people (the yoga mat/mouse pad, the masks to wear for risqué selfies, and the widgets), because OPTICAL ZOOM IS NOT ENOUGH!

BC: Does the act of titling function as a kind of finale for you to the act of creation?

DK: I usually name pieces at the end, and I just try to have fun in the ways I know how. I do try to make the titles and the works "rhyme" with each other somehow, even if it's a slant rhyme. It was a long time before I could embody some of Yeezy's teachings.

BC: How did you arrive at the various alternative personas you have created, like Devin KKenny, Darren Krutze, and Ellsworth R. Kelly?

DK: Devin Kenny came from a satire about how there weren't a lot of MCs who used their real name (Kanye West, Erick Sermon, and Mike Jones being the only exceptions at the time, though this has changed). It started as a performance art/music project jumping off of an imagined meeting of the South Bronx (hiphop) and Downtown (art). That and how your name always gets misspelled before you're famous.

Darren Krutze is from a project that was in the show at Aran Cravey: a photo diptych titled, *Slave Name/Stage Name/Ellis Island Snafu*. I was thinking about the given name as an ideological container and the violence

Devin Kenny is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, musician, and independent curator. Hailing from the south side of Chicago, he relocated to New York to begin his studies at Cooper Union. He has since continued his practice through the Bruce High Quality Foundation University, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, SOMA, and through collaborations with DADDY, pooool, Studio Workout, Comotroovaysa, Wild Isle, Adult Contemporary. He has shown at various art and music venues in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, including Recess, Het Roode Bioscoop, Artspace Auckland, Freak City, and Santos Party House. He received his MFA in 2013 from the New Genres department at UCLA and is a recent alumni of the Whitney ISP.

of "making things easier for people." Whether it be a stage name chosen to evade/delay anti-Semitism, or removing diacritical marks, and the cultural mismatches that arise from the legacy of slavery. The photographs are of a wall that was a shared studio space at Cooper Union where I started writing this list of names that were "ethnically consistent" (culled from baby name websites). The caveat was that they all were names that become "D.K." I wrote them with a fat tipped marker (graffiti reference) and eventually people picked up on the pattern and felt entitled to contribute to it so there's a degree of social construction going on too.

And Ellsworth R. Kelly, I mean, you know how you can get real nasty with abstraction, right? My sister went to junior high with Kellz.

BC: I recently saw Jerrod Carmichael perform a set at the Comedy Store. He said that he feels like he is compensating, always compensating. Like he buys boxes of kicks, of sneakers, to compensate for growing up poor. On your tumblr, Studio Workout, you posted a photo of a sneaker (JS Wings 3.0 designed by Jeremy Scott and fabricated by Adidas) with the caption "sculptures on my feet, haters on my heels, emptiness in my heart." It reminded me of Carmichael's bit.

I started Studio Workout in 2010 to unpack why so many people I knew would be blasting Trap music, or Dipset, or other epic music about drug dealing in their studios. Both volumes of the Studio Workout mixtapes deal with the intersections of the heroic white male painter, and the hyper-masculine Machiavellian Black male rapper, who is portrayed as heartless and subhuman. Studio Workout is a performative space and many of the posts are from a figure who's a mix of these two archetypes. In regards to compensating, when you are told from all angles that you aren't worth anything, and that you're unlikely to amount to anything, for generations on end, the desire to stunt on people can become very strong.

BC: LOL on the heartless and subhuman heroic white male painter.

DK: Ha! I didn't actually say that but it's funny you put it that way. The thing about archetypes is one may feel left out if one don't easily fit into them. The other thing about archetypes they can be very lucrative for people. Shout out to George Lucas.

1
Devin Kenny, *Worksheets* (2014), found object, chalkboard paint, chalk. Courtesy of the artist and Aran Cravey.

2
Devin Kenny, *Desktop Widget XVIII* (2015), wood, butcher block conditioner. Image courtesy of the artist and Aran Cravey.

Mateo Tannatt
Photographs
Jibade-Khalil Huffman


Fit
1/2
00:00:09:15
00:00:07:21
Fit
00:07:21
00:00
00:00:04:23
V6
V5
V4
A1
A2
A3
A4
Wipe
Wipe
+0:667
-0:667
"I'm More satisfied."
MENTHOL
FILTER CIGARETTES
120's

Jibade-Khalil Huffman (b. 1981) was born in Detroit and lives in Los Angeles. He is the author of three books of poems, *19 Names For Our Band* (Fence, 2008), *James Brown is Dead* (Future Plan and Program, 2011), and *Sleeper Hold* (Fence, 2015). His art and writing projects, which span photography, video, performance, and poetry, have been exhibited and performed at the Hammer Museum, MoMA/P.S.1, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, among others. In May he will present a new body of work in collaboration with Claudia Rankine and John Lucas at Museum as Retail Space, Los Angeles.

Mateo Tannatt (b. 1979) lives and works in Los Angeles. His work includes the use of sculpture, video, painting, photography, performance, and writing as a means of inquiry; using objects and space to investigate modes of hierarchy and autonomy. He has most recently had solo exhibitions at INOVA (Milwaukee), Gallery Diet (Miami), and Marc Foxx (Los Angeles). He has exhibited in *More Young Americans*, L'Enclos des Bernardins - Hôtel de Miramion (Paris), *When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes*, CCA Wattis (San Francisco), *First Among Equals*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, (Philadelphia), and *All of This and Nothing*, The Hammer Museum (Los Angeles). Tannatt conceived special works for Frieze Projects (2013), *Alan Kaprow Push and Pull, Reinvention*, ArtParcours, Art Basel (2012), and Performa 11 (2011). Tannatt will present a solo exhibition in January 2016 in Los Angeles.

Jibade-Khalil Huffman

Mateo Tannatt

Slow View: Discussion on One Work

Slow View is an interview series centered on a single work. The aim is to generate thoughtful, in-depth conversation, and through this prolonged consideration provide an alternative to the quickness with which work is often viewed in our digital age. Julian Rogers is a Los Angeles/ San Diego based artist who employs still life to explore optical and phenomenological possibilities in painting. Working with a limited palette and 1:1 ratio, his approach to this historic subject matter feels open-ended and exploratory. His painting *Double Positive* (2014) is part of a series of still life paintings depicting fruit on rocky, uneven surfaces.

Anna Breininger: The first thing that strikes me about the work is how the imagery dissolves as the viewer moves around the painting. This physical flicker is reinforced by the almost twilight-like depiction of light in the work. Moving from a straight vantage point to a more peripheral one, the details of the fruit disappear and they instead become iridescent hints of form against a monochromatic surface. Can you speak a little more about this physical/ optical aspect of the work?

Julian Rogers: For a long time I worked in photorealism, and this took me to New York where I was able to make a living painting for other artists. But after years and years of this kind of painting I began to lose interest in illusion; everything became surface. So, I could look at a set of identically painted Jeff Koons paintings and see that Marlene painted this one, Ed painted that one, Corey did this and Pat did that (even though they all looked as if they had been made by machines). I spent a few years trying to break away from this condition, trying to find new ways to make marks, but I found that if I reduced the amount of information in the image there was a new kind of seduction. I came back to realism with this in mind and saw that a darkened scene triggered something in my mind and made realism seem fresh. At times I think of Basquiat crossing out his painted text, and about how this makes people want to see what was written. It's not the same thing, but there is a way in which taking something away makes us hungrier to see it. That seems true across the board.

AB: Do you think of the painting as dealing with the subject of viewing?

JR: Definitely. The first thing that a lot of people notice upon first viewing these paintings is that their eyes have to slowly adjust to them, as if they had just been out on a sunny day and come into a dimly lit room. But once you get used to what you are seeing, you realize that the surface is actually a little reflective here and there. This usually gets people moving around the painting to see how it reflects different points of light. So in this sense the act of viewing is fairly physical.

Anna Breininger was born in the '80s in rural Pennsylvania. In 2013 she received an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art and has attended studio programs at Goldsmiths College and School of Visual Arts. Currently she lives in Los Angeles where she maintains an active studio practice. She has exhibited in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles, and has been featured in *New American Paintings*.

This painting in particular partly mimics how it feels to look at a daguerreotype in person. Daguerreotypes and paintings are unique objects (for the most part), so it's a welcome comparison, or at least a conversation starter. Photorealism and photography have a stuffy relationship—as a couple they are not the life of the party—but there are plenty of contemporary artists who are working to make a fresh start.

AB: I'm curious about the choice of fruit. They are so ubiquitous.

JR: There's a long story about how I came to begin using fruit as a subject, but basically it came from one of my very first drawing lessons when I was probably six or seven: I learned that shape and color both inform an object. Fruit is one of those rare categories of objects whereby recognition of the object can come through either shape or color. For example, a banana can almost always be recognized by its shape alone, but oranges, lemons, limes, and other round fruits can be easily confused if you consider just the shape; color helps us recognize these without hesitation. As the painted fruit scenes are darkened and become harder to see, they slow down these light speed decisions our brains make to help us determine objects. Very often I am painting bananas blue or brown, but we don't read them like that because what's around them is different as well.

So that's where the idea came from, but moving forward I am thinking more about pulling still life painting apart a bit to find new ways that my paintings can function. There's a massive history of realistic painting that has nothing whatsoever to do with photography. I'm not ready to let that history go anytime soon.

AB: I'm thinking about how, in the tradition of still life, fruit becomes psychological on a metaphoric level. Do you view this grouping of fruit as functioning that way as well as being used to explore perception?

JR: Well I think there's a sort of take-it-or-leave-it quality about how the objects in still life paintings function generally, which I think is important because the way paintings operate can bounce around a bit depending on the situation and the needs of the viewer. In other words, I am totally fascinated with how Norman Bryson writes about still life, about how there are varying layers of metaphor and formalism that operate in different levels of reality in paintings of fruit and vegetables throughout the ages. But, I also just want to look at a painting and have it just kinda knock me back a little bit. Sometimes these two things work together, sometimes not.

There's basically a lot I could say about this question in regard to this painting in particular. There's a mountaintop, which is cold, hard, remote, unmoving, massive and fairly timeless, and then there's fruit: small, soft, consumable, moves through your body, etc. So there's something small you have total control over located in a place that totally dominates you. There's plenty of room for metaphor here, but I try not to think about it too much because it's nice when the formal relationships can still surprise me.

Julian Rogers was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1981. Rogers works primarily in oil paint, but has worked in a variety of media, including video art and electronic music. Rogers completed an MFA from the University of California, San Diego in 2015. He has recently shown his paintings in Japan, Spain, and Mexico, as well as Commonwealth and Council, Sonce Alexander Gallery, and ACME. in Los Angeles.

1
Julian Rogers, *Double Positive* (2014), 68 × 54 inches, oil on canvas. Photo courtesy of the artist (Photo: Heather Rasmussen).

Pierre Huyghe at LACMA

November 23, 2014–February 22, 2015

Human isn't. Human, I mean. Famously, Pierre Huyghe's *Human* is an Ibizan hound with a fuchsia front leg. At Huyghe's autarchic LACMA retrospective, a fact sheet assured me that the dog was the proper weight (the breed is thin) and had proper breaks (from playing himself). There was no sheet for the human humans, tasked to traipse gallantly through the space to Michael Jackson's "Thriller," or don a blinding-to-look-at LED mask, or announce my first and surname as if I'd traveled back in time, prepared to celebrate some freshly coroneted sovereign. That the labor and well-being of those performers was left to the neoliberal periphery while Human's comfort got a broadsheet works quite well as prospectus for the exhibition's stakes. We may just need the animal if humanism has any chance at all.

The exhibition observed a kind of circadian rhythm, a macrocosm of the dramatic shifts in light played out in the silly, psychedelic *L'Expédition Scintillante* (2002), (Huyghe doing Light and Space) and the nerdy, roots-and-all lily tanks of *Nymphéas Transplant* (2014), (Huyghe doing Monet doing Giverny doing God). As if by night, Hughye's *Untitled (Human Mask)* (2014) took over a central room. In dark blue tones, a girl inhabits an abandoned restaurant in the abandoned landscape of post-tsunami Fukushima. When she sighs, placing her hand gently on her face, a minor miracle occurs: the hand is covered in fur; the girl is a monkey in a mask. The film languishes in this weird animality. It's the uncanny's purview to take our knowns, chew them strangely and return them to us wronged, but better for it. We know what disaster victims look like, but we haven't seen empathy in ages. Humanism needs a masticating. If only, like the live hermit crabs of Huyghe's *Zoodram 5* (2011), which sport Brancusi masks instead of shells, we could so easily inhabit our own ruins.

That Huyghe's name has been brandished under the banner of Relational Aesthetics is the best thing that could have happened to Bourriaud and perhaps the worst thing that could have happened to Huyghe. Often, this headline distracts from the ethically juicy aspects of his practice for the lame art-worldy ones. The exhibition's "circadian day" revealed an incarnation of *Public Writer* performed at the opening, which read like an unfortunate list of overly fortunate proper nouns, strung together with the banal predicate "was there." And the now-corny *Atari Light* (1999) hung from the ceiling, ready for an eager couple to play a round traced in office overhead lights. At least this time, *Atari* had one busted florescent—in 2015 offices are either warehouses or your own living room; the utopian revolution of unregulated, self-organized systems never came. See Adam Curtis devastate Loren Carpenter's collective Pong experiment, or any metaphoric appropriation of hive-minded bees and ants to justify fascism—two insects of which Hughye makes clever use in *Untilled (Liegender Frauenakt)* (2011-12) and *Umwelt* (2011).

Streamside Day Follies (2004) is Hughye at his most ambivalent best. The work documents a celebration the artist organized in an upstate New York approximate of a would-be pastoral town. The taupe landscape of cheap construction and dirt not yet sod into grass fuses with the settlement rhetoric of speculative community in a perfect index of American culture, marketed as commodity and sold back to itself. A deer enters a freshly painted living room, searching for the forest that was. Then, to the twisted tune of an ice cream truck, residents parade into town, wearing animal heads, cardboard boxes, or silly smiles. They eat donuts organized by primary color and marshmallows staged as pussy willows. They gather sparsely for a speech and a performance of a Streamside theme song (in a minor key). The freaky animal intervention is Hughye's genius once again, transforming their privatized partying into public ritual.

Hughye insists that the repeatable "score" of the town celebration is more

Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal

important than the particular "concert" captured in his 2004 film. This is decent marketing and terrible philosophy. Where the event and its documentation belong in history is not with the good people of Fishkill, NY as a faded memory of an earnest afternoon, but here, with us, as a ballad for a quintessentially American naiveté and its ignored background of environmental harrow and civic heartbreak. It's a better artwork than it is a parade; which is to say, fuck Relational Aesthetics, it's for our judgment, not their participation. Of course, Huyghe saw fit to bust an *Atari* tile, and *Human* is a walking sculpture we can't play fetch with. The phony condescension of "relational" is sheep's clothing for the sticky ethics of the wolf.

At the end of *Streamside*, an enormous round balloon hovers over the matching houses, reflecting the actual moonlight in a wicked simulacrum. Of course, it can't be human without the right amount of cruel.

Mernet Larsen at Various Small Fires

February 28–April 11, 2015

Two perplexed parents with skin the color of Cover Girl's "Warm Beige" makeup lean over an infant with heavy lids and unfocused eyes. The infant's head is shaped like a cube because all Mernet Larsen's figures are geometric in form. The stylization transports her figures into a video game-like alternate reality, only whatever game they're in is more steeped in quirky feelings and understated power dynamics than The Sims ever was. Larsen's exhibition *Chainsawer, Bicyclist and Reading in Bed* at Various Small Fires, her first in Los Angeles, was filled with angular figures and strangely compressed space, although up close the paintings were thicker and more worked-over than you might expect.

One interesting and challenging aspect about the recent success of Florida-based Larsen—who is 75 and has not exhibited very prominently since she began making art in the 1960s—is how well, in theory, her work fits into certain trends at a time when trendiness often gets discussed more intently than actual artworks. She's gaining visibility when putting under-the-radar female artists on the radar seems all the rage. "[A]gain and again I have seen an eerily similar story structure parroted," wrote Ashton Cooper recently, in her wry *Hyperallergic* article, "The Problem of the Overlooked Female Artist." "Overlooked by the establishment for her entire life, she never stopped prodigiously toiling in obscurity and is finally being given her due."[1]

Larsen may have toiled and may well be getting her due. Interestingly, she also works in those spaces between abstraction/figuration and screen-like flatness/ painterly roughness; spaces, that if gallery press releases are to be believed, we are currently obsessed with ("So much of the contemporary painting dialogue is dominated by a reductive abstract formalism," claimed one recent announcement for a show featuring representational painting[2]). Larsen seems of the moment both because she's receiving overdue attention and because she's weirdly in-line with a more youthful zeitgeist. And while contemplating an artist's work in terms of trendiness can be shortsighted, it can also be a rewarding effort.

For instance, it's interesting to think about the recent upswing in attention that the 84-year-old Dorothy Iannone's work has received, given that Iannone's own rebelliousness initially prompted the same institutions now embracing her to reject her. In terms of the flatness/roughness conversation, Laura Owen's recent abstractions—including those big fluorescent-colored paintings that launched the warehouse space 356 Mission two years ago—are worth thinking about in terms of the current marketability of "internet-aware" painting. The paintings she made in the late 1990s had a quirky, hand-drawn quality, but the most expressive marks in this new work looks mediated, like she drew them in Photoshop first.

But even if Larsen's paintings appear surprisingly hip at first glance, they quickly sidestep conversations about their own trendiness, mostly because

Catherine Wagley

1
http://hyperallergic.com/173963/the-problem-of-the-overlooked-female-artist-an-argument-for-enlivening-a-stale-model-of-discussion/

2
http://theproperty.gallery/

thinking about the artist's age or about "painting discourse" distracts from her meticulous portrayals of human behavior. In *Handshake* (2001), an unbelievably tall woman and man shake hands in an institutional hallway. The tension is palpable: maybe they're professors, and one just got tenure while the other resents her for it?

In *Explanation* (2007), six figures sit at folding tables holding a meeting. The institutional green floor tiles appear to be overtaking the ceiling and walls, while a woman with a tight bun addresses the group, her lanky Pinocchio-like arm outstretched. Although the arm appears to be wooden, her hand is creased and plump in convincing places. You get the sense that she hasn't figured out exactly what she means to say yet, and the others wait, listening politely.

Politeness was a pervasive theme in this show. Often Larsen's figures seem to be reining their feelings in or behaving nicely for someone else's sake. That said, politeness seemed to be missing in the exhibition's namesake painting, *Chainsawer and Bicyclist* (2014). The bicyclist, recognizable as such mainly because he wears a helmet—his "bike" consists of an abstracted pole—rides forward towards a woman in a shapeless dress. She holds a chainsaw in her left hand and stares at him in a way that suggests he's wronged her. The woman leans back as if the ground she's on has tilted, muting her otherwise aggressive behavior. Many of the paintings have this kind of twisted De Chirico quality; space collapsing, and perspective twisting back on itself.

There's enough angling, attitude, and playful art historical mimicry in Larsen's world to engulf a viewer. And when you're engulfed you don't usually have the time or desire to ask, "How does this fit into the zeitgeist?"

John Currin at Gagosian, Beverly Hills

February 19–April 11, 2015

Gagosian's annual Oscar Week opening is a big deal. The streets of Beverly Hills are jammed with the nouveau riche, who come out in droves like extras from Cockaigne—the mythical land of libertine excess—to stand among the Hollywood A-listers in attendance. Rightly so, John Currin's opening played into the high spirit of the week: image is everything.

The 11 paintings on view, all made over the last three years, displayed Currin's crass European impulses tempered by his distinctly American manners. Like filmmakers Wes Anderson, who attended the opening, and Woody Allen, who did not, Currin's Europhilia is personal and nostalgic, and a bit cloying at times. Reference points run the gamut from vintage Danish sleaze to the Italian Renaissance. As much is expected from Currin's work, yet this particular grouping of paintings revealed that his interest in surface extends beyond materiality. For Currin, the painted surface is a handsome veneer that ultimately belies his boyish obsessions.

In several of the paintings, polite classical figures are painted in the foreground to shield the explicit sexual content that lurks behind in the underpainting. Currin's self-censorship results in tightly wound compositions and ambiguous spatial schemes.

Though this batch of work was less aggressive than what Currin may be known for, it was as decidedly vexed as ever. Currin's female subjects are prone to sexualization even as they convey tension, mystique, and expectation. They seem weary in their roles as hostesses, showpieces, and gatekeepers, who carry the burden of centuries of controversy and codification. In such proximity to the movie industry elite, it is tempting to read Currin's wanting females as an indictment of pictorial systems that value sexism, misogyny, and restrictive gender roles. Such a read is assuredly too hopeful. Still, it's nice to imagine.

The subject of *Chateau Meyney* (2013) could be posing before the projection of a joyless 1970s porn loop—the viewer assumes the position of having shown up late to a middle-aged and upper-middle class bacchanal. Tones of attraction and imminent

Keith Vaughn

embarrassment abound. With an inebriated blush on her cheeks, she holds a glass of red wine; unaware, or unconcerned, that her blouse has come open. She sits in a totally false, painted space. It is disorienting and confusing, while organized and considered.

Fortune Teller (2015), depicts candles burning upside down; nude female figures are suspended in the background. One has her head bent neatly and unnaturally into the bottom right corner of the picture. In the foreground, an impossibly proportioned odalisque in a turban holds a reflective ball, her placid smile offering no explanations. The composition holds together like a puzzle or a knot: by its own logic. Between the confounding use of illusionistic space and the work's nuanced relationship with painting's history, Currin's depictions are far less literal than Classicism, Pornography, or a tidy mix of the two.

For Currin, among all the veils of reference and experience, any attempt to apply a layer of social critique ultimately fails. This is because his paintings are about painting. Without the shock of pornography, the paintings are hermetic. His restraint reveals that his true guilty pleasure has less do with titillation and everything to do with the painted surface and its capability for expressing the intuitive and indistinct. Per usual, Currin's paintings resist engagement with contemporary art trends, tastes, or discourse. Image making is the primary focus, not narration. If you're going to like it at all, you're going to first like (or appreciate) how it's painted. Currin's historical literacy and Old Master skills are the product of his obsessive pursuit and investment in the traditional business of making a painting.

In *Maenads* (2015), a young girl in a transparent top sits before a scene of indistinct yet obvious carnality. The compact pictorial organizations and rhythms in the painting direct the viewer's time and attention; contrasts of paint handling, perspective, and historical orientation, force the viewer into a state of submission. This involves following an artist you might not totally trust into a world rife with its own perverted terms.

Hollywood is most certainly perverted, yet it is also wonderfully tolerant, even desirous, of the pictorial and lush, the subjective and imaginative. Currin's work addresses a paradox inherent to the red carpet and the white cube: an image is both authentic and false. It's an interesting idea, but set against the local glitz and conspicuous avarice the work risks losing its nuance, instead embodying the conceptual starvation of gorgeous kitsch. The veil of the commercial art gallery is lifted way up. Like Marilyn Monroe's dress in *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), it blows around and, as if by magic, everyone's intentions are revealed.

Pat O'Neill at Cherry and Martin

February 28–March 28, 2015

Pat O'Neill's recent show at Cherry & Martin distilled his prolific career down to a modestly sized gallery exhibition—tricky for an artist checking as many formal (and mostly two-dimensional) boxes as O'Neill. O'Neill's career began to gather steam in the 1970s, an era defined by a pluralism born out of the paucity and exhaustion of existing practices as well as the ascendancy of nascent new media. Regarding the latter, O'Neill worked as an early pioneer of film and video art, earning "possibly the first [MA] in art based on moving-image work"[1] at UCLA.

Opening the exhibition was a slide projection piece, *In Betweens* (2015), in which one slide faded slowly into another as excerpts of text displayed brief, half-formed sentiments alternately hilarious ("you took my fucking parking space"), and clunkily poignant ("she was so sweet and dainty"). The text displays as discrete, durational sentence fragments over the slides, its subject matter culled from dialogues absent a narrative anchor. Equally rambling are the images projected in tandem: graffiti, concrete, the general absence of nature, the general presence of nature,

Aaron Horst

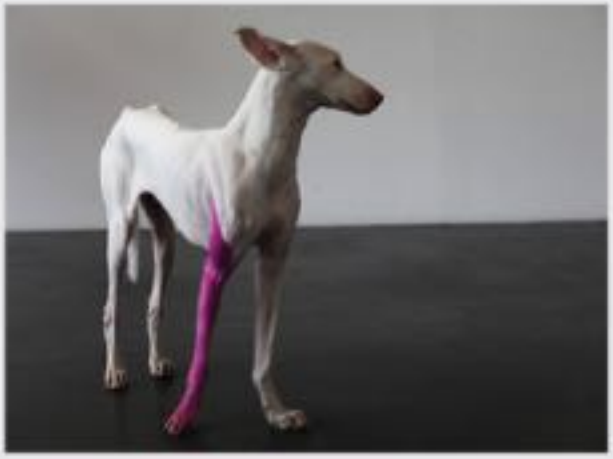
Lauren Cherry & Max Springer

We're in This Together
2015
Approximately the size of your head
Acrylic, cardboard, ceramic, epoxy putty, ink, paper, stone, wire, wood
Edition of 10

Need great advice? Curiosity is rewarded. The greatest tragedy is indifference. Don't just rely on your sense of humor. Let your fingers do the walking. Change your perspective. You speak. Say hello. We have that in common. Change for the better. One bold choice leads to another. How far would you go for love? No such thing? We stopped at nothing to give you everything. Hot stuff. Verrry refreshing! Our research is making a big difference. The next big thing is here. Helping all people live healthy lives. Renewable it's doable. Let's find cleaner sources of energy today. Discover yourself. You are a partner, a friend and a fighter. You are the bullet in the chamber. Take control. Just do it. Take back your freedom. Write the future. Not just words. There are some things you just can't afford to gamble with. There is a better way. Tomorrow brings us all closer. We're in this together.

Editions can be viewed and purchased online at contemporaryartreview.la/editions

1



2

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1
Pierre Huyghe, *Human* (2012). (Photo: Drew Tewksbury).

2
Mernet Larsen, *Aw* (2003), acrylic and tracing paper on canvas, 40 × 66 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Various Small Fires.

3
John Currin, *Maenads* (2015), oil on canvas, 48 × 36 inches. Image courtesy of the artist (Photo: Douglas M. Parker studio).

4
Pat O'Neill, *White Double Sweep* (1966), acrylic, wood, fiberglass, lacquer, 11 × 20.5 × 14 inches. Image courtesy of Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles (Photo: Brian Forrest).

5
A New Rhythm, with Charles Atlas, Benjamin Carlson, Nancy Lupo, and Silke Otto-Knapp, Installation view (2015). Image courtesy of the artists and Park View, Los Angeles (Photo: Jeff McLane).

6
Still from *Janus* (2013), Miljohn Ruperto and Aimée de Jongh. Image courtesy of the artists.

7
Motion: *Trisha Brown Dance, Set #11* (1980–81), color photographs and ink on Strathmore paper, 31 ⅛ × 84 ½ × 2 inches, collection of Dean Valentine and Amy Adelson. Image courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects (Photo: Robert Wedemeyer).

8
Henry Taylor, Installation View (2015), UNTITLED. Image courtesy of the artist and UNTITLED (Photo: Martin Parsekian).

etc. The combination of text and image creates a series of moody set pieces, which evoke at best a peculiar and ultimately unknowable experience of an absent subject, and at worst the un-jelled intensity of an early MFA.

(When I arrived to the exhibition, the projector wasn't working correctly, but who knew? I watched the same slide of concrete rubble act as the source/background for discontinuous text streams for about 5 minutes, thinking it was absurd that someone would go to the trouble to illuminate only one slide with two projectors present; an endearingly durational riff on minimalist and conceptual art.)

O'Neill works as a maker of moving images with width, height, and time. Depth within the moving image is an alluded illusion, like the animation of shadows dancing on a cave wall (instead of just the wall). *In Betweens* celebrates this in a curious manner: slow-fading in of new images as the old recede beneath stable yet fleeting text.

Distinct and parallel was *Saugus Series* (1974), a three-channel video installation created using an optical printer.[2] Rather than the illusory depth and warm nostalgia of *In Betweens*, *Saugus Series* exhibits cold crispness, curious flatness, and a wandering attention span. Memory here is freed from the slides' specificity; basking instead in associative passages of layered imagery and striking, durational sections of flickering colored lines.

With jerky yet cleanly edged—even artificial—figurations in its initial section, later passages of teeming, mesmerizing color become all the more striking. The abstract passages buzz with activity like the whispering static of a television screen. *Saugus Series* achieved something that the overall exhibition otherwise lacked: contrast, of the sort making more vivid that on either side of its absent middle ground.

The remainder of the main room was filled largely by the exhibition's two sculptures, *White Double Sweep* (1966) and *Black Sweep (1012 Pico Series)* (1967): mounded forms heavily glossed, and plastic in appearance. *Black Sweep* was the larger of the two; positioned on the floor, it rose slightly from its low perch, curving gently like a conch pastry from a Mexican bakery. Marooned on a plywood life raft and anemically weighty, *Black Sweep* related loosely and formally to one of the exhibition's handful of drawings (*Accounts Receivable Drawing*, 1990), but otherwise felt out of place. A sister video toward which the sculpture bowed, *Two Sweeps* (1979), consisted of nothing more than the metronomic movement of two color-shifting dots.

Other than playing a useful role in the exhibition's flow of space, both sculptures seemed tentative, even dull. A line may, but needn't, be drawn between the plasticity and streamlined (or neutered) movement of these earlier pieces and O'Neill's later film works; a thin, simply temporal linkage, absent the specificity of intent. *Two Sweeps*, though hypnotic as the hum of a refrigerator, suffers a similar fate, despite its later date.

On the other hand, the evocative and mutually enriching encounters between media and time in the O'Neill show, though occasional, were genuinely striking. More literally, O'Neill creates work that acts both for and against transparency, concerning itself with the face value and the reversal of two key concepts: the transparency of film and the opacity of experience. As experience attempts transparency, and film achieves opacity in O'Neill's hands, a curious and uniquely evocative body of work remains in its wake.

A New Rhythm at Park View

March 1–Apr 5, 2015

It can be hard to know where to look when confronted with the dizzying array of movement found in the choreography of Merce Cunningham. As opposed to the framing devices of classical ballet and early modern dance, which draw the eye to particular points of focus, "unfocus," or simultaneity, is a Cunningham hallmark; as the critic Douglas Crimp writes, this "requires the audience to make choices about the dances presented to them."[1]

Over the course of his four-decade long

Kate Wolf

1
http://creative-capital.org/grantees/view/749/project:809

2
A device enabling the filmmaker to layer opaque imagery while "keying out" all but a specified portion of each individual slide – similar to the green screen technique employed by your local weatherperson.

collaboration with the choreographer Charles Atlas—serving, in some ways, as a proxy audience member—deftly translated this central element of Cunningham's work to both film and video. A good example is the ghostly *Fractions 1* (1978), in which Atlas uses four separate video cameras (three black and white, and one color) to film a dance performed at the Cunningham Company's Westbeth studio in New York. After some initial shots, one camera pulls back to reveal four stacked monitors sharing the floor with eight dancers. With quick cuts, the video alternates between black and white and color. What is seen in the dance space is augmented by what is shown on the monitors: close ups of dancers' faces, divergent perspectives of the featured dance, and accompanying sections of it that are not being featured, ostensibly taking place just out of the frame.

The effect is one of focusing in, but also one of disorientation. With the presence of the monitors in the lower half of the space, the eye splinters. Dancers' bodies become irregularly segmented, with additional limbs and faces. The camera zooms in on one of the black and white feeds and suddenly we are no longer sure where we're situated or what part of the dance—main, or auxiliary, or if such terms even apply—we're being shown.

Throughout his career, Atlas has displayed a similar sensitivity with a diverse group of other choreographers (beyond Cunningham, a few include Michael Clark, Yvonne Rainer, and Karole Armitage), artists, and musicians; one indication of this is the incredible range of his work.

At *A New Rhythm*—a group show that was organized to coincide with a 10-day long festival, generously spearheaded by the artist Paul Pescador, which brought Charles Atlas to Los Angeles for a packed schedule of screenings and talks at locations all over the city—*Fractions 1* was paired with a later dance video, *Jump* (1984), made in collaboration with the French choreographer Philippe Decouflé. Where the former work is spare and conceptually driven, *Jump* is a wild escapade, set to New Wave music, that takes place in a kind of atomic café by the sea; dancers appear as punk mutants, in colorful face paint, pavonine hairdos, and sculpted costumes. Here Atlas is working less to represent the dynamics of dance as it's performed on stage (as in *Fractions 1*) and instead enjoying—with abandon—the full spatial freedom of film. In one exhilarating shot, we're catapulted from the dance floor to a balcony above it, only to follow a young punk down a narrow set of stairs in a tight close-up as he sneers and gestates directly into the camera.

Atlas's work held prominence in *A New Rhythm* (his videos were the first thing one saw walking in the door and the obvious catalyzing force of the show), a compact exhibition set in small gallery that also moonlights as its proprietor's apartment. As a result, dance was the overriding frame of reference for the rest of the works on display; or, more generally, the body in motion.

Across the wall from the videos, and perhaps most explicitly related, was a spectral, erasure-filled, gray-toned watercolor on canvas by Silke Otto-Knapp: *Seascape (third movement)* (2013). The piece depicts Yvonne Rainer in a prone position, performing the dance of its title. With its layers of pentimenti, it seemed to assert—similarly to *Fractions 1*—the impossibility of representing live performance with a single, unified image.

Nestled around the corner in a bedroom, a recent painting (one of two) by Benjamin Carlson presented a more optical choreography. Based off a Memphis Group design, the untitled work is comprised of frieze-like clusters of gessoed triangles and squares, alternating in size and arrangement across the deep blue dye of the canvas. Neon undertones and outlines (which echoed the palette of *Jump*) cause the shapes to leap from their moorings, projecting energy and motion.

By contrast, Nancy Lupo's pet/child-scaled undulating couch sculpture, *Tuxedo Feeder* (2014), was the most weighted thing in the room. Coated in black and white quinoa and epoxy, it includes steel inset animal food dishes and floats somewhere between surrealist oddity and luxury item. Still, the sculpture

1
Douglas Crimp, "Inside the Dance: Charles Atlas's Early Collaborations with Merce Cunningham," Charles Atlas. (Munich: Prestel, 2015)

elicited all forms crouching and bending over from its viewer for inspection and its miniature scale insisted on a somatic awareness.

Surely it's often enough that one is prompted to consider the body when viewing art, but the subtle revelation of this exhibition, and much more so the *Atlas In LA* festival, was encountering variations on the way movement and dance can be depicted across media, apart from live performance. And in the case of Atlas, there are few others who have done so with as much rangy charm and imagination.

Unwatchable Scenes and Other Unreliable Images... at Public Fiction

December 17, 2014–February 10, 2015

I spoke with Miljohn Ruperto a few weeks before his two-person exhibition with Adrià Julià at Public Fiction. Our conversation occurred in a bar where we were both serving as extras in a mutual friend's film. Between takes we discussed his new video work *Mineral Monster 01-08*, as well as *Janus* (2014), the video he presented last year in the Whitney Biennial. While we drank from our props of beer, we discussed our affections for cartoon animation. I was intrigued by the manner of imaging Ruperto had recently chosen to work in. He seemed to have found a successful counter to the current prevalent use of CGI, by embracing the style of contemporary animated cartoons as seen in the films of the great Hayao Miyazaki.

A few weeks later I stepped into the quiet storefront gallery of Public Fiction, a space secretly nestled in the hills of Highland Park. Ruperto's work was presented on a flat screen and Adrià Julià's video projected onto the opposite wall. A soundtrack of dense forest subtly emanated from Ruperto's work; Julià left his to play silently. Both videos, though markedly different, expressed a conflicted attitude towards the medium, while also presenting imagery with powerful symbolic associations.

In Ruperto's work, *Janus*, we are involved in a site of hardcore animation. In his short video there is a clear attempt to make the viewer complicit in engaging with the labor-intensive medium of the animated cartoon. Hand drawn animations—as well as their contemporary computer generated counterparts—are known for their advantages of creating imagined reality: both dramatic and satirical in representation. Animations, of all forms, are now often farmed out to Korean or Indian production offices for cheap and quick turn around. For *Janus* however, Ruperto collaborated with animator Aimée de Jongh, meticulously crafting a genuine microcosm of invented fiction.

Depicted on the screen was a small solitary creature, who has possibly just escaped from some unknown danger. The animal breathes heavily under the shadows of tall trees silhouetted by moonlight overhead. The figure embodies two animals simultaneously: a duck-like bill moves as he breathes, although the bill could easily be viewed as ears to the creature's rabbit-like face. This is a fictive realization of the visual pun of the "duck-rabbit," made famous by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who used it as an emblem to describe the distinction of logic in visual perception. Yet, as hinted by the title of Ruperto's work, we may be looking at a possible mascot or gatekeeper to our present-day conflicts: this creature may mark the coming of peace. Historically the Roman god Janus kept the doors of his temple open during times of war, only to shut them once peace had been realized. However, the frightened creature of Ruperto's work poetically suggests that our present state of conflict is far from over.

Julià's video, *Unwatchable Scenes*, is seductive as an abstraction, deflecting quickly any immediate reading; instead acting as an invitation to read between the lines. The work was difficult to discern, despite displaying footage of sometimes recognizable landscapes. The images are obscured by a muddle of black lines and shifting planes: visual clues of dam-

Mateo Tannatt

aged video media. Slow and meditative, the work is somewhat evocative of the potential beauty of an abstract painting. Yet it also succeeded in pointing to technology's inability to provide a clear record of what is purportedly being evidenced. I later learned that the work had been sourced from a found and edited video on YouTube. The artist had pieced together downlooded video footage of the film sets used for a 1981 Hollywood film called *Inchon*, which primarily depicts the Korean war. *Inchon* is a subject the artist has been obsessed with, and which he has alluded to in his previous works. As a potential meditation on war—or cinema—*Unwatchable Scenes* is difficult to pin down; powerfully evoking the entropic status of the medium of video while leaving the purpose of those visual connotations difficult to define.

Like two sides of a coin—or an animal with two heads—the pair of videos that comprised *Unwatchable Scenes and Other Unreliable Images...* landed on clear opposing sides. Julià's work confounds and asserts a vague fog of war time terror. The found footage related to *Inchon* seemed to provide various entry points into a would-be concept, yet the piece did not engage into a clear dialogue about war or the original film (perhaps a watching of the original Hollywood film would provide an answer). The implied intention of discussing war-time politics is numbed by the abstraction of the work, rendering the content mute.

By contrast, Ruperto succeeded by providing a work that playfully exists in the realm of myth and the imaginary, producing tangible evidence of empathy: of what it is to suffer in moments of conflict, and the struggle to survive towards an ever possible fleeting moment of peace.

Charles Gaines at The Hammer

February 7–May 24, 2015

For fifteen years, Charles Gaines lived his life on the grid. Between 1974 and 1989, Gaines employed the grid as a visual tool to explore the terrain of conceptual art and develop a system of representation purged of subjective expression. This period is also the focus of *Charles Gaines: Gridwork, 1974-1989*, an exhibition which traveled from the Studio Museum Harlem to the Hammer Museum in February, providing much-needed critical insight into these formative years in the artist's career.

Most of the series in the exhibition begin with a set of three images that present a single object in three formats, reminiscent of other pioneering conceptual artworks of the time period—notably Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965) and Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* (1974-75). In Gaines' *Walnut Tree Orchard* (1975-2014), which opens the show, a photograph of a tree is displayed next to a line drawing of the same tree on hand-drawn graph paper. In the third image, the tree's coordinates are meticulously plotted, numbers spreading out in ascending order from a central axis to suggest an underlying symmetry intrinsic in all organic life forms.

This first trio then expands into a matrix of seemingly endless combinatory possibilities: in the next three images below, a second tree is photographed, plotted, and overlaid with the first tree. The second tree is visible through the voids between the branches and leaves of the first, its numbers demarcated in a different color. The series represents 27 trees documented in this format (in a total of 81 panels), so that in the series' final image 27 trees overlap in an autumnal explosion of color, forming a palimpsest that collapses space and time into a single gridded frame. Through the methodical sedimentation of his plots, Gaines acknowledges the inability of pictorial and linguistic systems to render subjects totally comprehensible. His grids obfuscate rather than clarify their subjects.

The grid dominates throughout the exhibition (including its title), and its presence begins to exhaust. Recognizable subjects—trees, flowers, human faces—appear all over the

Evan Moffitt

1
Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 9.

gallery walls only to disappear under the weight of their successive plots. Rosalind Krauss has observed that as a modernist trope, "the grid announces, among other things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse."[1] Although representational, Gaines's grids silence individual narratives in favor of an objectively reproducible system, signaling what Roland Barthes called "the death of the author" (or artist) and the subsequent "birth of the reader" (or viewer). Gaines allows viewers to interpret the images for themselves, unmediated by his subjective expression.[2]

In *Faces* (1978), on display in the exhibition's second gallery alongside the impressive *Motion: Trisha Brown Dance* (1980-81) series, this restoration of agency becomes politically charged in a move toward human subjects. Similar to *Walnut Tree Orchard*, the collection of overlapping and colorblind facial contours—friends and relatives of the artist—resists the typological and ethnological categorization historically used to justify racist criminological and colonialist enterprise. In this regard, the work also questions the presumed objectivity of photographs, linking Gaines with his "Pictures generation" cohorts, such as Sherrie Levine and Louise Lawler. The coordinate plots are themselves insufficient: flattening heterogeneous subjects into a numerical code and layering them until they become unrecognizable. Gaines codes the face, but the face cannot be reassembled from the code. The material logic of the grid falsely promises the viewer an accurate portrait of the subject imprisoned within the austere and silencing aesthetic plane of modernism. Race falls prey to the grid's dissecting logic.

The poetic power of Gaines's work—which is often mischaracterized as a coldly minimalistic conceptualism—is the grid's violent tendency to rupture the identity of the subject, rather than to portray it objectively. Each set of coordinates attempt yet ultimately fail to identify the subjects they code, challenging the common poststructuralist refrain that "everything is discourse" by rendering such discourse illegible.

Gaines has called marginality "a complex co-presence of textual spaces," resisting coherent representation. "It almost begs a simpler form, a diagram perhaps, that will give shape to an impossibly complex machine, a coding that will make the difficult choices for us, to relieve us of the annoying spectacle of its insurmountability."[3] Gaines transforms himself into such a machine to depict the futility of such an enterprise. The resulting work in the exhibition can seem Sisyphean, relentlessly repetitive, and even pointless. But this sense of pointlessness is intentional, reflecting the hard truth that no diagrammatic system in language or art can code the lived complexities of marginalization.

2
Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 143.

3
Basquiat, Gaines, Lord, The Theatre *The Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism* (Santa Monica, California: Delta Graphics, 1993), 20.

Henry Taylor at Blum & Poe/ Untitled (L.A. in N.Y.)

March 1– April 4, 2015

Henry Taylor's is a rare practice to encounter today. I say that not out of lament for the bygone era, which god knows we hear enough of (especially here in New York, where painting's recent history could be written in chest bumps). No, Taylor's is a practice that simultaneously simmers on low and boils over ecstatically—touching every simple object in its wake, endowing each with an artful soul. His paintings and sculptures, which were set up recently in two of New York's more disparate galleries (Untitled and Blum & Poe), addressed both adult and childhood situations with the genuine curiosity of a democratic pair of eyes. The most refreshing part of the practice, for me, is that Taylor is a capital "P" painter with a degree from CalArts. His nuanced painting style belies his theoretical training.

The work at Blum & Poe consisted of small portrait based canvases, hung salon style, and a room dedicated to sculptures. Blum & Poe's top three floors (set in a brownstone on East 66th) owed Taylor's work more vertical wall space and general breathing room than it was afforded. The parallel show

Cal Siegel

at Untitled, a larger-than-most Lower East Side gallery, featured four sculptures (assemblages of junk and refuse that I have heard kicked around his studio for years), and seven large, acrylic paintings. The exhibition was capped off on the back wall with the largest painting of the group: a monster, almost religious, canvas.

Now, I could certainly rattle off a list of strong influences here that refuse to be overlooked, and pay a direct homage to the things Taylor holds as self-evident, but most can be read in other reviews of his work. My affirmation of his place in this lineage would only confute his acute stylistic vision.

To Be Titled—most all of Taylor's work is titled this way, which made for an especially ironic conversation when set in the Lower East Side gallery's name, or lack thereof—a 58 x 69" painting from 2015, portrays a cowboy hatted man, atop a horse, in a flatly bucolic, western landscape. This piece struck me the hardest, and seemed to aptly serve up Taylor's iconic essence. The man's cockeyed face wears a look that is simultaneously indignant and concerned. This plurality is reflected in the half brown/ half white, make-up like quality of the man's complexion: as if color were smeared onto his face by the character himself (which color is natural and which is dabbed on remains a mystery). Matisse surfaces in the conversation here with Taylor's desire to release color from description, and liberate it instead into a force of it's own: both literally and perhaps, racially. This sophisticated and intricate chromic grasp defends the more general notion that a direct unpacking of cultural themes would not do justice to the complicated visual questions Taylor is posing. To put it simply, the work urges a more dialogical reading than can be addressed by quick review.

Similarly puzzling to Taylor's use of color is his spatial rapport. What Taylor has created is oxymoronic: deep flatness. Figures expand and collapse into space using only shape and color as means. This is best exemplified in *To Be Titled* (2014), in which a figure clad in an oversized white shirt at the paintings left side stands in front of a deep, indigo blue horse. The only thing keeping the figure in front of the steed is the color choice, and—as strange as it may sound—it is damn near magical to see in person.

On the paintings right side, two unfinished faces emerge, one in front of the other. A hand stretches out forward from the furthest back, yet somehow still foregrounds the horse. The painterly quality of the figures on the right indicates a disinterest in the trickery of surrealism, urging instead a championing of straightforward painting technique.

This was reiterated in the aforementioned large and figure filled canvas at the very back of Untitled's space. At the paintings apex—where the space begins to breathe—there is a Gober-esque moment in which a small slice of cake floats centrally above the crowd. These strange spatial relations afford Taylor's work an indescribable, emotional flood that buzzes about but is never nailed down.

Henry Taylor, to some is synonymous with the most straightforward of painters, and in my opinion, that is a grand compliment. So much work these days is clouded by superfluous ideas that tend only to water down the essence. It's important to remember that being good at one thing allows one to say everything.

Review Contributors

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Mateo Tannatt (b. 1979) lives and works in Los Angeles. He has most recently had solo exhibitions at INOVA (Milwaukee), Gallery Diet (Miami), and Marc Foxx Gallery (Los Angeles). He has exhibited at the Hôtel de Miramion (Paris), the CCA Wattis (San Francisco), The Institute of Contemporary Arts (Philadelphia) and the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles). Tannatt has conceived special works for Frieze Projects (New York), Alan Kaprow Push and Pull Reinvention, ArtParcours, Art Basel, and Performa (New York).

Evan Moffitt is a writer and native resident of Los Angeles. He is the former editor-in-chief of the Hammer Museum's annual journal, *Graphite*, and is a current editorial assistant and contributor to *Paris, LA* Magazine.

Cal Siegel was born in 1987, and grew up in West Newbury, Massachusetts. He organizes a show in a shed in the woods there every few years. He cares deeply for all Boston sports teams. Cal currently lives and works in Brooklyn, and has shown throughout N.Y., Miami, and L.A., and has written for *Staring At The Wall* and *Carets and Sticks*.

Edition Artists

Lauren Cherry & Max Springer live and work in Los Angeles, California.

Nora Slade grew up in Northern California and lives and works in Los Angeles. She received a BFA from Pratt Institute in 2009. She has participated in group shows at Night Gallery, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, PureO, Queer Thoughts, 321 Gallery, MoMA PS1 Printshop and Terminal Projects. Her art/clothing project Waggy Tee has had exhibition style sales at Bodega, Sax Etc, and in conjunction with an Eckhaus Latta and Faux/Real sample sale. Waggy Tee was most recently exhibited at the Los Angeles book art fair with Night Gallery.

Ben Medansky is a Los Angeles-based artist originally hailing from the blue skies of Scottsdale, Arizona. In 2010, he graduated from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a love for ceramics and a desire to start his own studio. His functional wares and objets d'art are minimalist meditations informed by architectural structures and industrial processes.

Ben Medansky

VESSEL // CINS
2015
8.75 × 8.75 × 2.75 inches
Ceramic
Edition of 4

VESSEL // PERF
2015
8 × 2.5 × 8 inches
Ceramic
Edition of 4

Inspired by minimalist forms, these vessels are handmade geometries that straddle pure formalism and functionality. They incite a connection to the natural world both through their ability to house flora, and with their earthen glazes.

Editions can be viewed and purchased online at contemporaryartreview.la/editions

Nora Slade

I've been a lot of places, seen so many faces

2015
Dimensions variable
Tee shirts, dye, bleach, cardboard hanger
Edition of 8

I've been a lot of places, seen so many faces is an edition of found tee shirts that have been altered with hand made methods and simple materials (bleach, resist and fabric dye). On top of each shirt, Slade has hand painted an image of a face that is derivative of a Matisse line drawing. This image too has been appropriated (from a mysterious hand painted tee shirt that she has had for over a decade). The original face images are taken from a variety of sources, allowing the shirts to become a complex stack of cultural referents: the tie-dyes, logos and imagery on the found shirts acting as the base or, "first" image.

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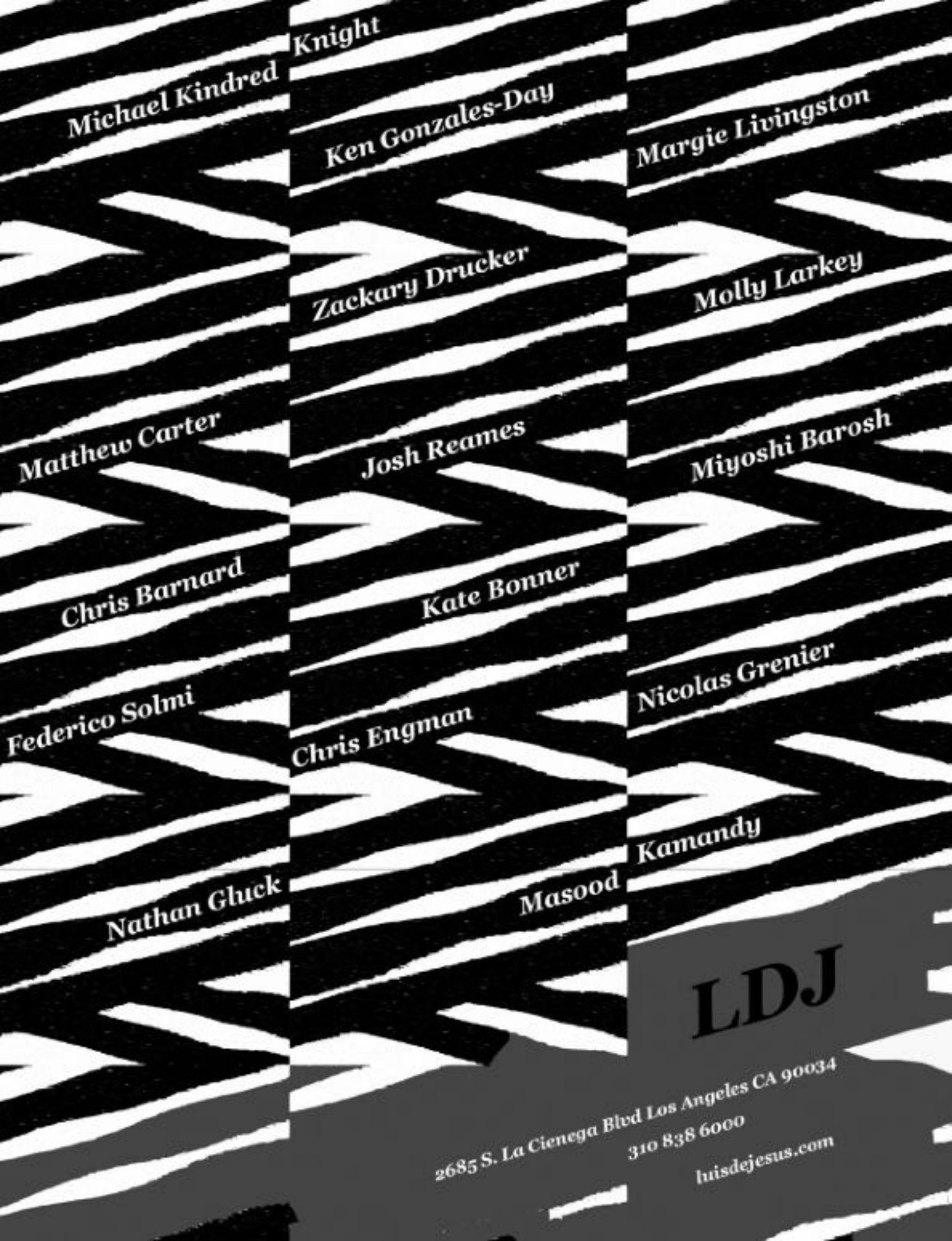
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