NEW ART examiner
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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS
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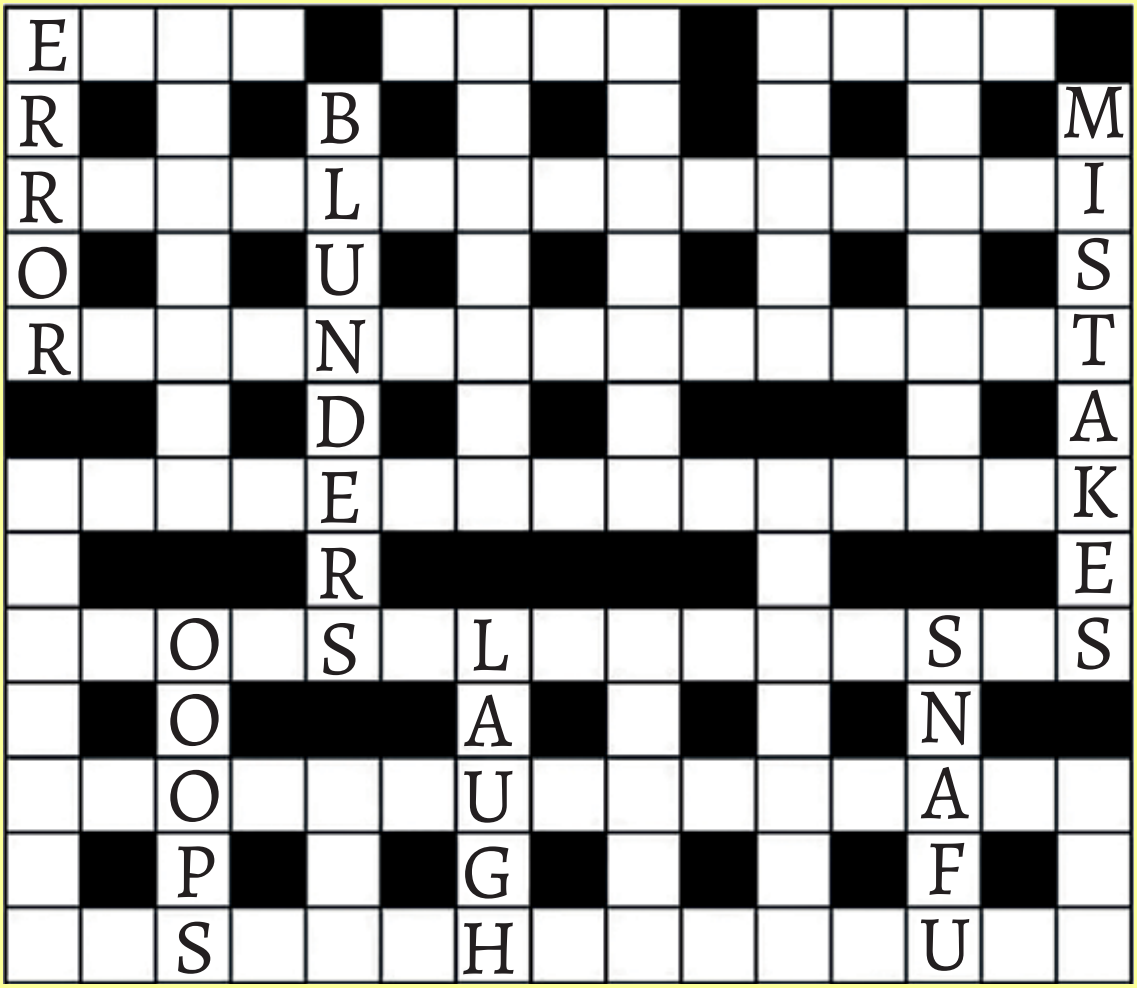
When Experts Forget To Laugh

Pablo Halguera



Inside:

The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading this independent journal of art criticism.
If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private.
The New Art Examiner has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Any art scene, needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, insider trading will determine success in this troubled art world.
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The Attentive Artist

Recently Mary Fletcher was to exhibit a painting '*but I would prefer a republic*' with work by the Taking Space Group, which she set up in 1993 to help women artists in Cornwall organise their own shows free of selection by others.
She had proposed doing this and it was agreed at our meeting, but when those Taking Space members hanging the show at St Ives Arts Club met they decided in her absence to reject the painting on the grounds that it might upset some visitors as Queen Elizabeth II had recently died.
This censorship outrageous and she hopes to show it later in 2023, when she will again appeal to a democratic vote at their meeting, and when the message of the work will be even more relevant as it is now the year of the coronation of Charles III.
The company Vista Print then just before Christmas said my proposed calendar images of two paintings that critically referred to Putin's invasion of Ukraine 'violated' their regulations and refused to include them with my other images.
How widespread is censorship becoming?

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

YOUR CONTRIBUTORS IN THIS ISSUE:

Mark Bloch is the author of the book *Robert Delford Brown: Meat, Maps, and Militant Metaphysics*. An archive of his Mail Art is part of the Downtown Collection at New York University. His artwork has been shown by the Museum of Modern Art and the Frick Museum in New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. His articles and reviews have appeared in publications including *White Hot* and others.

Philippe Deligant is an artist fascinated by art's epic journey onward from its beginnings in prehistory, and by its invaluable gift as a spiritual home whose doors welcome anyone and whose walls hold an infinity of ideas and applications from which to fulfill the human purpose of an awakened consciousness.

Mary Fletcher is a multimedia artist flaneur: *www.axisweb.org/p/maryfletcher* She has an MA in contemporary visual art and writes the blog: *4maryfletcher.blogspot.com*. She is a humanist, feminist and socialist, influenced by psychotherapy. She lives in St Ives, Cornwall, UK.

Pablo Halguera is an artist, performer, author, and educator. From 2007 to 2020 he was Director of Adult and Academic Programs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. He is currently an Assistant Professor at the College of Performing Arts at the New School.

Susan Mogul is an American artist primarily known for her work in video art. She also works in photography, installation art, and performance art. Originally from New York City, she currently lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

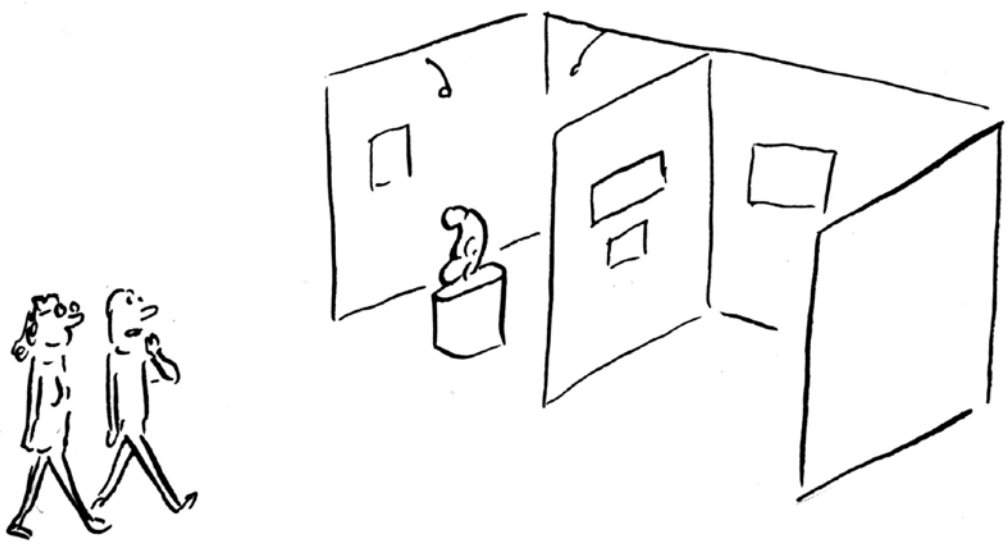
Daniel Nanavati is a writer and children's book author. He lives and works in Cornwall UK.

Nancy Nesvet is Editor in Chief at Art Lantern,art
professional and curator of International art exhibitions, she has published reviews in many international journals in Washington DC.

Sam Vangheluwe is a Belgian painter, art historian (specialising in African arts), critic and translator. He questions preconceived notions in art theory and criticism, and what Samuel Beckett called 'academic dementia'.

Vera Zalutskaya is a contemporary art curator and writer, and an editor of the BLOK Magazine. She has an MA in art history from the faculty of arts, the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, BA in arts from European Humanities University in Vilnius and in cultural studies from Jagiellonian University. She is mainly interested in the art of eastern and central Europe in the context of post-colonial studies. She was curator and co-author of individual and group exhibitions in Poland, Belarus and Serbia.

Kathryn Zazenski is a visual artist/writer/curator/community builder. She received her MFA in Sculpture from the Cranbrook Academy of Art and is a two-time Fulbright Fellow to Poland where she is the managing director of Stroboskop Art Space *https://stroboskop-space.pl*. She is a visiting lecturer in Visual Arts at Dartmouth College (NH, USA) and the School of Form (PL), and currently splits her time between the US and Poland.



"Which gallery should we check out first: the one with the best works by the worst artists or the one with the worst works by the best artists?"

The New Art Examiner welcomes ideas for articles and short reviews in all languages for our web pages.
Please send a sample of your writing (250 words) and any pitch to
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We publish all letters unedited to give artists and readers a fair say. If you would like to start a conversation, or enter one please visit

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letters@newartexaminer.net

QUOTE of the MONTH:

"Painting is easy when you don't know how, but very difficult when you do."
Edgar Degas

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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

Publisher: Annie Markovich
Founder: Derek Guthrie
European Editor: Daniel Nanavati
ukeditor@newartexaminer.net
Editor in Chief Art Lantern Nancy Nesvet
London Editor: Stephen Lee
london@newartexaminer.net

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UK Office: Sunny Corner Lodge Panters Bridge, Mount Bodmin, Cornwall PL30 4DP

Washington Office: 2718, Ontario Road NW, Washington DC 20009
Chicago Office:

Inquiries:
advert@newartexaminer.net
contributor@newartexaminer.net
subscribe@newartexaminer.net
All Letters to the editor are printed without editing.
letters@newartexaminer.net

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Editorial

The most informative and, for the art student, instructive journey in the visual arts is not the hours they will labour over their manifestos. Nor the years they will spend creating their portfolios. It certainly isn't the paragraphs of philosophy they will have written on other people's thinking in art history.

The eye-opening engine of the art world they want to spend their lives within is the journey taken by an art object from the artist's studio to the gallery show. This journey has many complexities, some unexpected twists-and-turns and is not at all what one may anticipate as a young, slightly optimistic and very naive artist.

The first thing to remember in today's artocracy is that no curator is going to enter your studio looking for you. Unless they are our own Darren Jones who does just this all over America. It is the experience of most artists to never have any gallery owner or curator cross their threshold and in community that may be a life-long experience.

With so many artists being churned out by indifferent colleges the art world has become very insular and even incestuous in many respects. Curators follow each other because none of them actually know what new artists will be worth anything to them in the future.

We have seen this in recent years in contemporary art with the puerile race to exhibit paintings by adults that mirror the work of children.

The journey involves the artist in getting to know galleries, going to parties, attending openings and just making friends with no pretence to sell anything but oneself. We all know the artists who have done just this over the past fifty years. There is no workable alternative to face-to-face marketing. Social media works only to a point and most galleries are on social media to promote their existing artists not find new ones.

And this journey needs constant maintenance. It isn't a case of once in you are in forever. You are only as good as your last artwork, or as good as the ones that got you noticed in the past.

The artwork, no matter how much effort and skill you put into it, is a commodity and belongs to the world when it is finished. The journey it takes will be out of your hands for far longer than it is your gift to oversee. The world can easily let it all die with you.

Daniel Benshana

Image of Nancy?

Each issue, the New Art Examiner invites a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest. Nancy Nesvet is Editor in Chief at Art Lantern, A long time art professional she has published reviews in many international journals and been a leading figure in Washington DC.

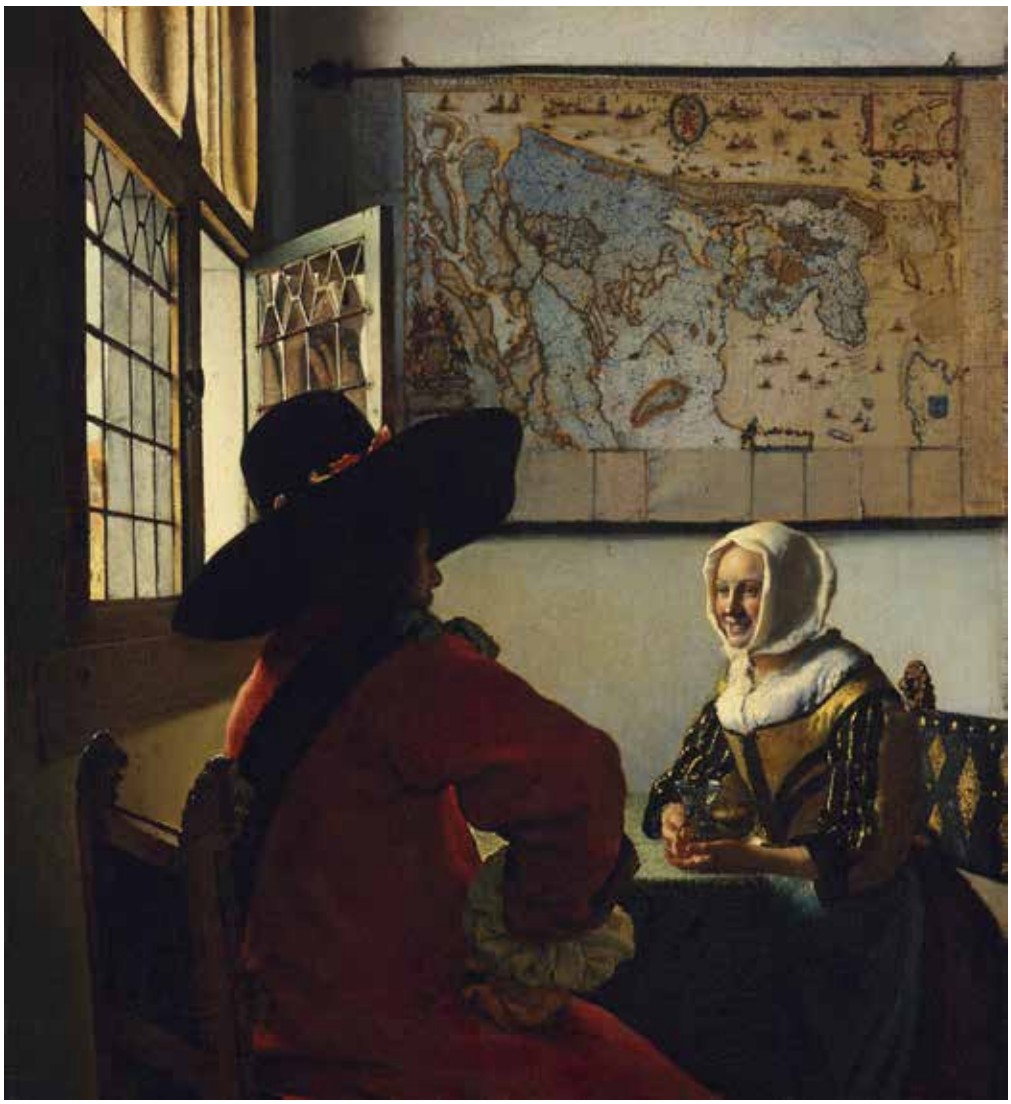
Domestic Interiors and Domestic Exteriors: Vermeer and Alex Katz

Amidst a return to semi-normalcy as Covid restrictions fade, two blockbuster exhibitions on two continents, showing work by Johannes Vermeer at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and Alex Katz at New York's Guggenheim Museum treat domesticity and leisure. 98-year -old Alex Katz's retrospective of his long painting career quite literally casts light on his portraits and social scenes. Reviewed in this issue by Marc Block, a writer new to the New Art Examiner and Art Lantern, Gathering includes many portraits of his wife, Ada, painted during their long marriage since 1958, figures and faces he has painted over the years, and scenes of landscape in New York City, and Maine, where he has summered for many years.

Utilizing the bright sunlight of summer in Maine, often reflected off the water, Katz's shadows are spare, a bit of grey or umber under the eyes, under the chin, an umber slash against the pink skin of his model and muse. His brightly colored landscapes, greens, yellows, pinks, seem almost impossibly bright for Maine, but not for his optimistic view of life in the country communities in which he paints his idyllic models. Katz's study of the visible work inspired by "Salute" by Katz's friend Poet James Schuyler, illustrating the "poetics of everyday" life is a gathering of his models, as was the community of faces on zoom that we saw during the pandemic.

Robert Storr has commented that Katz has created a record of quick things passing, compressing the image into a single optical perception. Yet it does not seem photographic, but rather painterly in its brushed application of shadows onto flat pale skin, or the lack of shadows on his treed landscapes. Inspired by billboards, magazines and movie screens, his canvases expanded with each decade as Katz progressed from painting on wooden boards to covering large canvases, the wide expanse of negative space around a single facial image leaving the model seemingly lonelier. Although those spaces work compositionally and geometrically, creating negative and positive space, the image, often cut off at odd points, like the lip line, in Ada 5 (2020) chin line, (Joan 2, 2020), above the eyebrows (Ada Evening, 2019) or in the screenprint of repetitive views of the same face, with different features cut off, (Vivien X 5, 2018) lack feeling. Often, faces seem too big for the canvas to hold, and for the audience to behold, like the billboards or the movies that inspired him. The Guggenheim Museum's circling white ramps allowing viewing from below or above, seem like seawalls or terraces of a cruise ship or condo on the beach intensifying the sensation of seeing vacationers at the beach, and situating the large canvases in continuous white-walled, innocuous spaces.

In Katz's portrait paintings of suburban women at play, at the beach, at leisure, and men dressed in office clothes or vacation khakis and collared casual shirts, the light is always bright; sunny skies prevail; the grass and full-leaved plants always grow green. The background is subtler, in grey greens, behind the group of women in LBD's, (The Little Black Dress, 1960) as women came into the business world in force, documented by Katz. People in groups do not touch, standing with hands in pockets or folded in front of them, as in Seven People (1993) and later, the flat mounted sculptures show separate people. The later landscapes and genre scenes fill the canvas, as in Buttercup (2009) or Forsythia (1997) recalling the fields of paintings by Mark Rothko and other field painters and the all-over marks of Jackson Pollack



Johannes Vermeer: Soldaat en Lachend Meisje *(The Soldier and the Smiling Girl) (c1657)*

seen by Katz early in his career. The poses of portrait models and the frontal position of trees, as in Tree 10 (2020) and plant life depicted make us believe this is all there is in the world. One portrait, one patch of flowers, strangely reflecting the narcissism of suburbanites, standing alone, concerned with only their patch of land, or personal appearance.

Vermeer's paintings, full of props, could be movies. Many of his models are at domestic work, in the kitchen or the courtyard, attending to their daily chores, showing us a moment in their restricted lives, no less protected than those painted by Katz. Whether playing musical instruments, working in the kitchen, or turned away from us, we witness an activity that will go on. They are caught in the moment, a moment before photography, serving as an introduction to the activity that will go on that day, and be repeated day after day comprising a visual document of the lives of the villagers in Little Street, in Delft. That is the conundrum for me. How did Vermeer achieve the painterly vision experienced during hours of applying paint, and make it seem like one moment caught in the life of the model? Both Vermeer's and Katz's latitudes are the same, but Vermeer's models, indoors with only natural light coming in seems greyed in comparison, with modest, unchanging light. How did he maintain the beam of unchanging light during those hours, continuing the process of applying paint, maintaining the direction and intensity of directed light that marks the paintings as only his, and how does he so well involve us in this northern, unchanging world so far from our own? How does he establish the empathic response of the viewer, the entrance of the audience into this little world so many years ago?

I grew up in the Brooklyn world that Alex Katz grew

up in. My family retreated to summer at a country estate on a lake upstate. My city community literally moved together to Greenwood Lake, (painted by Alex Katz), where they partied together every summer, maintaining a suburban lifestyle unencumbered with household tasks or city concerns. Yet I feel more connection with Vermeer's world.

Vermeer shows us the domestic life that people in his milieu engage in, literally providing a window onto their world, framing the interior and the woman at her task. Whether playing the virginal, the lute, the pianoforte, or putting on a string of pearls, attending to her chore as a milkmaid or accepting a glass of wine from an admirer, she (and it is usually a woman) performs her chores, identifying her and designating her work as that of a woman. This is Vermeer's world, the world of Little Street that he inhabits and his familiarity with the people who inhabit his world. His admiration for them makes it unnecessary to dress them up or embellish them with costumes not their own. This is a Protestant world, with people concerned with simplicity and necessary work, Dutch art. Even his streetscapes, like The Little Street, (1658, Rijksmuseum), features a woman in the doorway mending, and another under an arch, attending to her washing. Those dressed in long coats and hats in View of Delft (c.1660-61, Mauritshuis Museum, The Hague) could be out for a well-earned Sunday stroll, after church. One woman dressed in a robe with ermine cuffs is attended by one of lesser class and means, showing the occupation of the working woman. I wonder at the woman seated in the office of the geographer. But the map is only of Holland. She does not venture far from her home. Yet that painting is so important in the oeuvre of Vermeer. He circumscribes the limits of his world, the domestic world. The median world depicted in "Woman Holding a Balance" (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. constitutes Vermeer's consideration of this world and the otherworldly, as the symbol of Christ, symbolic of the infinite world of God made finite in his son, illustrates the Judgement Day, when all balances, and inequalities between the two realms vanish. Using the scales, a domestic device to weigh produce, Vermeer sticks to his depiction of domesticity. The dark brown backgrounds, layered with paint of varied colors and hues, allow contrast with the bright colors imbued in the dress of his women allowing the concentrated light to beam through. "A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal", (1670-72, National Gallery, London) illustrating intellectual love, sits under the triad of figures, reminiscent of religious paintings, as the central figure, dressed as a Dutch Master artist, stares lovingly at the woman who returns his gaze. In actuality, the painting she sits under is Baburen's "The Procuress", illustrating carnal love, reinstating the domestic world. Curiously, Vermeer's "A Lady Standing at a Virginal" although not in this show, stands under Cupid, a Greek God, encompassing the painting, the scene, within the frame, approaching the infinite within the limits of the finite. Does Vermeer deny the Greek and Roman Catholic iconography in these two paintings, instead drawing attention to his domestic, simple illustrations as true depictions of life as it is and should be lived? Why do I care so about Vermeer's people? Why am I so involved in his depictions of domestic practice? Why do I examine every bit of his interiors and exteriors? It is important to examine the world and question why I care about some art and what makes me care? That is a function of a Curator, one who cares for, not only the artist but the audience and how the art is received and interpreted, and it is the function of an arts writer.

Without caring or involving me, us, in his world, Alex Katz's paintings are mere documents of lives I care nothing about. With no embellishment to the portrait, nor additions of elements to elevate the class of the person depicted, he takes the figurative portrait down to the basics; depicting the woman in a swimsuit or bare-faced, under sunglasses and perhaps a hat, and in so doing makes the portraits and figures, generic, suburbanites and Manhattanites all of upper middle-class America, playing at their summer camps. Vermeer, on the other hand, individualizes his people, gives them purpose and individuality. I do not know them, but want to. Although Katz, encouraged by James Schuyler, may have studied each daisy before it wilted, he saluted the field, filled with pretty flowers, which had no personality and which, only an observer, he could not have loved.

Katz's world is not the normal world we seek return to after the pandemic. It is still the isolated world of the bubbles we joined and endured during the pandemic. Vermeer's world, one of domestic ritual, necessary tasks, and minimal well-earned time for a Sunday walk pre-existed the pandemic, and is a world that ignores time. As we return to our lives, we remember moments of apprehension, relegated to the house, watching ourselves and others for signs of illness, watching for the one beam of light to make our existence brighter, anticipating the sun setting and rising again, returning to domestic tasks and communal gatherings. There is room for both Katz's and Vermeer's visions coloring our world, whoever and whatever world that is.

My Name Is Bob

Pablo Halguera

Joseph Beuys: Grüne Geige (Violino Verde)*, 1974*

A few years back, when I still worked in a museum, I was at a meeting with a prominent chief curator, someone who, while cordial, seldom smiled and generally displayed a rigorously dry, intellectual, seemingly unbreakable stolid demeanor proper to his institutional status.

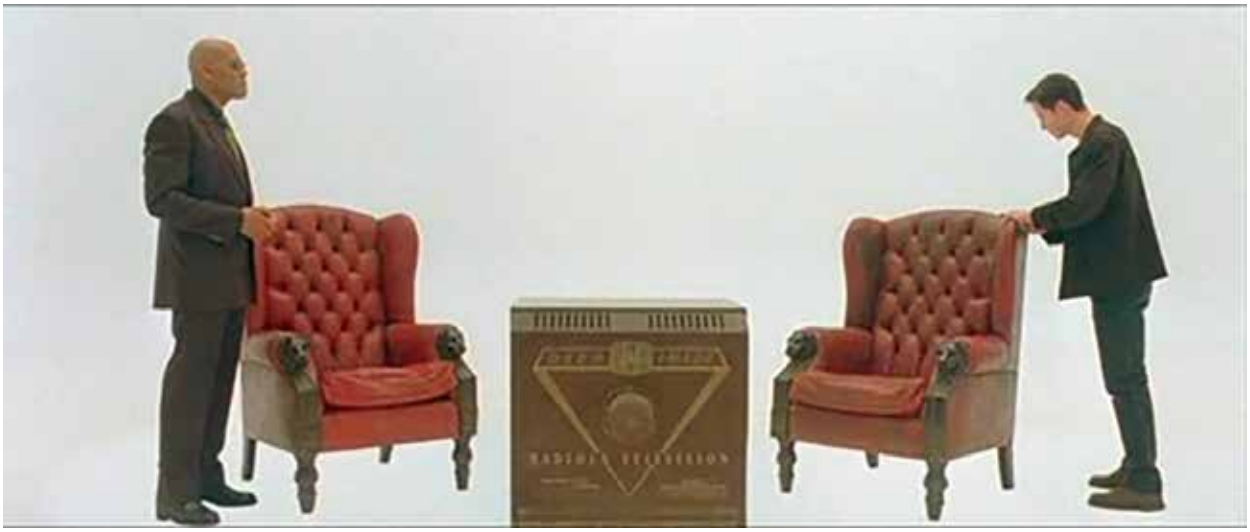
We were discussing a panel discussion that we would put together in conjunction with a show he was curating. A curatorial assistant had drafted a list of possible speakers, but all the names in the list were the usual suspects. Aside from being all-white and on the older side. I asked whether we could diversify the list of speakers a bit, and also maybe include someone from a new generation. The curator agreed and suggested that an emerging scholar named So Young Kim could be a good addition to the panel. 'Because,' he said, and then paused for a moment she is… So Young' Then he started laughing uncontrollably. We laughed too, but his laughter attack, verging on tears, made him almost fall off the table and continued for a while even after we all regained composure and attempted to resume the meeting.

This, I think, was an institutional museum version of what in theater is called corpsing: uncontrollable laughter that an actor or a broadcaster might have while on stage or live TV. The term comes from British theater, referring to an actor who might be playing a corpse and would suddenly break character by laughing. There are many examples online about incidents where news anchors hopelessly struggle to get through a segment but delirious laughter completely takes over. The pressure created by an environment where the stakes are very high (thousands if not millions of viewers) paradoxically makes it harder for the presenter to regain control, and more often than not the laughter becomes contagious amongst others in the set.

I am writing this as I am about to go onstage to present my first off-Broadway show, a stand-up comedy act, one that specifically takes the art world as a subject. As part of the process of putting it together I had to reflect on matters of humor in contemporary art, and in particular the question of which are the systemic platforms that cause the kind of tension that, when poked at, can result in a spectacular deflation and the curatorial corpsing I witnessed at that meeting. Partially it has to do, I believe, with the psychology of the white cube and its construction as an essentially unemotional space.

In encyclopedic museums, it is interesting to pay attention to the design decisions that mark the transition between the 19th and 20th century galleries; the latter which would typically are all-white in contrast to other wings of the building. The whiteness of the

Tony Craig: Red Bottle (1982)



Neo and Morpheus in the Construct. Still from the movie The Matrix
©Warner Bros

galleries, as well as the usual bathing in generous natural light, would give the subliminal impression that the 20th century is more enlightened era of art history. But the prevailing feeling of the white cube was one of cryptic formality, one that could feel intimidating, especially given that the works one would see would be radical departures from traditional aesthetics: conceptual art, installation, and video.

When I think of the first experiences I had with these spaces, as a teenager, the feelings that I draw from those memories are ones of puzzlement and fascination, but also of attraction to the uncanny. Even the objects that appeared to contain humor (in particular Pop Art, like the Claes Oldenburg sculptures of oversized everyday objects and the Roy Lichtenstein paintings after comic strips) caused in me such puzzlement that I would feel more unsettled than amused.

This instinctive feeling I had as a teenager, and which I could not have articulated then, in fact connects very directly with the actual experiences of regular, non- art experts when they visit a contemporary art museum. I explored this dynamic when I was a young educator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, when we started surveying people's responses to the exhibitions and placed a comment form to get their feedback. I distinctly remember a comment from a visitor who wrote that while visiting the collection galleries she had encountered a work that made her laugh out loud; and almost immediately felt embarrassed by her own reaction. She wanted to know if she had done something inappropriate.

This is not unusual. But the question that interests me is not so much why a regular museum visitor would find the white cube to be a sort of alien space governed by rules akin to the ones of a secret society; nor am I too interested in the criticisms of the white cube model (of which I have written in the past). Rather, I am more interested in the social and cultural conditions that made the white cube come into being in the first place. The aspiration, attainable or not, of a completely neutral context eventually made its way to Hollywood by the end of the 20th century, in the postmodernist science-fiction film *The Matrix* (by the way quite a humorless movie), when the captain Morpheus guides the main character, Neo, through a computer program called The Construct. I share the dialogue the two characters have which ends in the famous phrase later borrowed by Slavoj Zizek:

'Morpheus: This is the construct. It's our loading program. We can load anything from clothing, to equipment, weapons, training simulations, anything we need.

Neo: Right now we're inside a computer program?

Morpheus: Is it really so hard to believe? Your clothes are different. The plugs in your arms and head are gone. Your hair is changed. Your appearance now is what we call residual self-image. It is the mental projection of your digital self.

Neo: This...this isn't real?

Morpheus: What is real. How do you define real? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain. This is the world that you know. The world as it was at the end of the twentieth century. It exists now only as part of a neural-interactive simulation that we call

the Matrix. You've been living in a dream world, Neo. This is the world as it exists today ... Welcome to the Desert of the Real.'

If you really think about it, The Construct is nothing but a version of the white cube: a loading program that redefines what is real, that constructs a fiction that displaces reality (as a museum educator I personally love Morpheus inquiry-based learning style reply to Neo's question of whether something is real: How do you define real? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see – similar to what trained educators reply when a visitor asks if something is art).

the white cube or the construct) attempts to present a blank slate where there is theoretically no memory, no historical connections, and no human context, seeks to implicitly enshrine and defend the importance of contemporary art, functioning not just as an empty space but an inheritor of the mausoleum tradition handed down by the classical museum construct and, in the process, nip in the bud any novice's opinion that contemporary art is a joke

In particular – and this is not to question any other contextual and historical aspects around the invention of this modernist exhibition model – I am interested in how as these types of spaces (be it the white cube or the construct) attempts to present a blank slate where there is theoretically no memory, no historical connections, and no human context, seeks to implicitly enshrine and defend the importance of contemporary art, functioning not just as an empty space but an inheritor of the mausoleum tradition handed down by the classical museum construct and, in the process, nip in the bud any novice's opinion that contemporary art is a joke. For that to happen, the strict, pristine, unemotional austerity of the white cube whether in commercial galleries or museums, marks a rupture with the everyday world. And that rupture as a result, inhibits spontaneous forms of human expression, just as medieval churches were constructed with the specific goal to communicate awe, devotion and respect. So laughter in those circumstances naturally feels out of place.

And precisely because of the standard staid, stiff and repressed environment that forms the legacy of the white cube there is a long tradition of institutional critique work that makes fun of it through humor, from Broodthaers through Andrea Fraser and up to and including Maurizio Cattelan, and beyond. For Fluxus artists, the intentional absurdity of many of its compositions was effective because it mimicked the bourgeois solemnity of the classical music concert and bourgeois culture in general, of which the traditional art museum is part of. Equally interesting is, however, how long it took museums to appreciate what Fluxus artists were doing – for the longest time, curators in institutions like MoMA that were so steeped into formalism in the 60s and 70s largely saw those artists as wild and crazy and their work something that was 'not for us'. They only figured out their mistake 40 years later. I confess, as an artist that often traffics in humor, that I am dependent of the boring, academic white cube as a counterpoint to do my work, so I am grateful to their continued existence.

But given that continued existence, the puzzlement if uninformed museum visitors continues, of course, which, seen from the insider angle, is not without its own humor.

As part of another education department initiative at the MCA, led by my then supervisor and mentor Wendy Woon, we worked with other museum staff to construct an automated booth where visitors would be invited to press a button that would activate a video camera and then could record their comments about a particular work on view (the first one was Tony Cragg's *Red Bottle* from 1982). The initiative was titled *Talk Back*. But being as it was the mid 1990s, video equipment not that advanced and our team not being experts in interactive technologies, the analog hookup system had quite a number of flaws; sometimes people would leave the camera running and we would end up with hours and hours of video of an empty booth; sometimes people would just be confused as to what to do inside; other times people would use the camera to expose themselves or do sub-par performances. But we did get a few gems every now and then: most memorable was a middle-aged man who seemed genuinely confounded by contemporary art but dutifully tried to share his thoughts as prompted by the instructions. After a long and rambling series of comments trying to figure out the meaning of the work and acknowledging that he was an art novice, he concluded in the form of an awkward greeting: "I really have no idea what this is, but if this thing is art… my name is Bob."

Not Only Paris Is Worth a Mass. The Louvre-Lens, France

Sam Vangheluwe

The central building of the Louvre-Lens

One advantage of living in a tiny country, is that you are within spitting distance from your neighbours. So, if workaday routine starts to become stifling, you merely have to shift a little - in any of the cardinal directions - and before you know it, the scenery has completely changed and a full dépaysement is afoot. One of my favourite destinations is the north of France. It is only a couple of hours away (for me in Belgium) and 200 km from Paris (from the opposite direction), yet as soon as you cross the border, you know, you feel with all your senses that you're in another country, where things are done differently.

Le Nord was once a flourishing industrialized region. The Great War and the WW II put an end to that. Even as a child, many decades later, I noticed the signs of depression: old buildings, old roads, old cars. Wonderful. In the 1970s, French automobile brands used inferior blue pigment to paint their cars. Due to 'ultramarine disease', the colors soon faded. Nowhere could you see more sallow lilac cars than in northern France. The color of decline.

Of course, things have long since changed. For decades, there has been a policy of decentralization, increasing autonomy of French municipalities and departments. Recently, in 2003, a plan was conceived to build a satellite of the Paris Louvre museum in Lens (Pas-de-Calais), of all places. It was hoped that this would reverse the fate of the depressed mining city of Lens.

Walking or driving through the streets of Lens (31,461 inhabitants), one is starkly reminded of its history. At the end of many a street, a humongous colliery waste heap looms up, like some otherworldly mountain. That, or part of the futuristic Lens soccer stadium. Most of the houses are former miners'

For decades, there has been a policy of decentralization, increasing autonomy of French municipalities and departments. Recently, in 2003, a plan was conceived to build a satellite of the Paris Louvre museum in Lens (Pas-de-Calais), of all places.

dwellings, built by the mining company. Unlike in Lille, or Roubaix, one sees hardly any historic signs of a once wealthy bourgeoisie. The centre of Lens is not very engaging – envisaged benefits of decentralization are hard to detect. As yet.

However, a short walk from downtown Lens is the Louvre-Lens, since 2012 nestled on a 49-acre mining site that was closed down in the 1960s. So this year is its tenth anniversary.

The architects (SANAA Kazuyo Sejima & Ryue Nishizawa, Tokyo + Imrey Culbert, New York), conceived the museum as a sprawling succession of five horizontal structures. You cannot see it from afar. The central square building has glass walls. The long walls of the others structures are of matte aluminum. The main reception area is in the square, central building. It houses several curved glass rooms that contain a cafeteria, media room and museum shop, a.o. At the entrance you pass through a security gate, manned by burly but polite middle-aged men. Ex-miners, I fancied (even though the last colliery closed in the 1980s). An X-ray machine might seem rather out of proportion, but then again, in 2013 someone (supposedly from/for "Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth"), vandalized Delacroix' Liberty Leading the People with a black marker. I had no markers about my person, and was allowed in.

It takes some time to find your bearings among the circular glass structures of the reception area. At last I was directed to the reception desk. There, I found out that entrance was free: I had just missed the previous temporary exhibition Rome, and the coming one: Hieroglyphs. No matter.

The Galerie du Temps, to the east of the entry hall, houses about 200 items from the Paris Louvre collection, in an area of 3,000 m2 (32,000 sq ft). It is a huge, rectangular open hall, with the same aluminum walls as on the exterior, and natural lighting. The collection is simply arranged chronologically, from ca. 3,500 BC to the mid-19th century. As the works are loosely grouped according to cultural origin, the visitors instinctively weave through the exhibition, wend their way from one side to the other – and it doesn't matter in what order. Every visitor weaves his/her personal thread through the warp of art his-

The Galerie du Temps: Antiquity

Rembrandt van Rijn: Portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels *(ca1650-1654)*

AD 62-79 Fragment of Mural Painting Uranie,Muse of Astronomy.
©RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) Hervé Lewandowsk

tory. At a stretch, one could grope one's way along the left wall, straight to the end of the hall, and begin viewing the collection starting from the 19th century. Up to you.

Being in an amenable mood, and with mounting excitement, I started at the proposed beginning. Antiquity is represented by objects from Egypt, Persia, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Greece, Rome: the usual suspects. But interspersed (chronologically), you also encounter objects from pre-Columbian cultures. Not only does the configuration intimate the interaction between the great cultures, but it also allows a glimpse of what unconnected but coeval cultures were up to. Just check what era you're in with the timeline high up on the right wall.

Antiquity flows seamlessly into Medieval art. I cannot remember having seen it so clearly: the cultural/artistic continuation – despite the (supposed) civilizational collapse or paradigm shift. The medieval section comprises not only Christian but also Muslim, and even (pre-)Columbian Mexican art. Early modern period: European, Islamic, Indian, Maori, Polynesian, African art.

The cultures of East and Southeast Asia are the 'only' ones missing. I don't know why.

The summary above – I concede – may do little to arouse enthusiasm. Allow me to drop a few names in stead: meet Gudea, the Louvre Scribe, Gula, Astarte, Assurbanipal, Psamtik II, Pompey, Mithras, Alexander the Great, Jupiter, Marcus Aurelius, Theodosius II, the Virgin and Jesus, Huehueteotl, Anton Fugger, Louis XIV, Hendrickje Stoffels (yes!), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Muhammad Shah Qajar, Cherubini, Napoleon Bonaparte.

That is without mentioning the countless objects that are ordinarily categorized as 'utensils', and the religious, devotional or ritual objects: earthenware, funerary sculpture, architectural fragments, images of unidentified divinities, mummies, metal work, lamps, jewelry, glass work, textiles, porcelain, and so on.

Maybe an effect of the visible remnants of proletarian Lens history, the art-historical tissue of the Galerie du temps presented itself to me as a history from God(s) to secularity, from religious to middle-class art. From works of art inhabited by gods, over art as validation of secular power, to art as identification of the bourgeoisie. An oversimplification, no doubt, but something to ponder. From a less 'literary' perspective, however, the Abbasid bowl, the Dogon statuette and Hendrickje Stoffels, to name but a few, are of course ever inhabited by an unknown god. Napoleon Bonaparte Crossing the Alps at the Pass of Grand-Saint Bernard, perhaps somewhat less so.

I heartily commend the chronological arrangement. It feels natural. It is straightforward, absorbing and engaging, and it does not, for once, involve the unsuspecting museum visitor choking on some farfetched and imposed thematic order. It is genuinely gripping to look up from your chronological perusal and notice, for example, the prospect of an Egyptian faraonic statue, an Archaic kouros and a Roman copy of a Classical Greek discus thrower, all from one aspect – the warp of art history. Museums who champion thematic order often suggest that the chronological approach is outdated, scholarly, and therefore non-inclusive (i.e. elitist). I humbly suggest that this is bunk: you hardly need to be an academic to grasp chronological order. And in the myriad of materials, textures, shapes, dimensions, sensibilities, temperaments and embodiments, literally anyone can find some joy or wonderment. And you do so under your own steam.

The Louvre-Lens might not have the mass appeal of the Louvre-Paris, but if you eschew the masses, yet you wish your senses to be stirred, to be moved, your esthetic, historical, anthropological hunger to be satisfied, in a serene setting, I highly recommend more than one visit to the Louvre-Lens.

Oh, and the pâtisseries in the coffee shop are delectable.

BrazilXIran: Colors and Forms

Nancy Nesvet

Zahra Nazari: Thought Process, *acrylic on wood (2022)*

In an exuberant display of form and color, bright with the optimism of newly attended exhibitions after the isolation of Covid, BrazilXIran: Colors and Forms, curated by Roya Khadjavi and Flavia Tamoyo at High Line 9 Gallery 4 in New York from February 2-15, makes me want to dance among painted flowers, immersed in sunlit skies and flowing water. Expressing cross-cultural form and content by artists who share similar concerns, water imagery, open spaces, plants and light, universal imagery particular to both Iran, Brazil and immigrant voyages coalesce to unite artists' practices and imaginations.

Recognizing Brazil's long history of colonialist influences mixing with indigenous patterns and traditions of art and craft making, and Iran's Persian codes and symbols expressed in textiles and fine art, I saw patterns emerging from varied cultures, overtaking and mixing with the other. Interpreting current events and psychological issues stemming from the stress of politics, the pandemic and perennial

problems in growing up in our stressful world, Brazilian and Iranian artists creatively use visual media's international language to connect with each other and the viewer.

At the white-walled High 9 Gallery, artists exhibiting in BrazilXIran use of saturated bright colors, extensive visualization of plants and light and the flow of water portrays nature survived in its most beautiful forms and the newfound optimism of our hopefully post-covid existence. As in the world's ongoing recovery and the return of gallery goers viewing art, optimistic and brightly dressed, several artworks show the seemingly impossible becoming the possible and real. Yet, there is an undercurrent of hidden angst, in webs of thread encompassing the flowers and ancient Brazilian ritual. Then, we see teddy bears to hold onto, providing security and relieving the tension of the times and voyages.

Luring me to cool waters, Brazilian photographer Maritza Caneca's photographs of swimming pools show specific surroundings amid the universality of gently rippling water created by the swimmer, attesting to the individual's influence on place. The enclosed pool, the tiled wall around it, a demarcated border, similar in all locations, isolates the swimmer from her surroundings, showing the determination of the immigrant successfully swimming with the tide.

In a creative iteration of the movement of the seas, Brazilian Anna Paola Protasio's "No balanceo do mar", (Waving Blue Sea), ingeniously uses tambourines, paint, steel cable and screws to present a panorama of waves, not dissimilar to the discs encompassing water in the work of Olafur Eliasson. Concrete media illustrates the moving waves and ephemerality of water, drawing illusions to seas witnessed by immigrants crossing the waters, tossing and turning as they move far from home to a new place.

Iranian artist Afsaneh Djabbari Aslani's purple web of geometrically displayed thread-like lines disturbs delicate flower shapes backgrounding them. Lines appearing to demarcate borders or fences become three-dimensional cubes. As squares fall, breaking the line, nature and architectural form unite, not unlike the New York City panorama surrounding this show.

Iranian artist Maryam Palizgir's "Epiphany # 0311 shows sunny yellow light illuminating the air and facades of tall buildings, reminiscent of those in New York City. Palizgir's sail-like forms, could be ships sailing on the seas to where you come from or where you want to go, comprising the Epiphany reflected in her title, "Epiphany #0084". Brazilian Sylvia Martins poses her flower-like forms on an empty bed of white, perhaps sand of her native Brazil, or Rock in her "Eden" referring to virgin Eden, a place not yet built on reminding me that immigrants have crossed deserts as well as seas to reach foreign lands. Atieh Sohrabi's Persian Flowers, clearly drawn and colorful bring an organized, planned visualization to the display of flowers, to beautiful effect.

Mana-Sazegara: Henri Stool, *laminated MDF (2021)*

Iranian artist Zahra Nazari's "Thought Process" and "Circle of Life" are controlled chaos, roped in only by the edges of the wood board she paints on. The controlled rib-like linear patterns, resembling the cage of Jonah's whale or ship architecture, again recalls seas and water. The roller-coaster like loops of her "Circle of Life" comprise an almost musical score of interlocking rhythms and harmonies. As I move around this space, I continue to roll with the visual waves, aware of the actual water not far from the gallery.

The awareness of that close water is apparent in painter Dana Nehdaran's "Forough" posed on a bed covered with patterns of his native Isfahan. A living green plant separates her from the outside window-covered wall, with the Hudson River, visible beyond that window. His "Parmida" sits casually crossing her legs, face partially covered by palm fronds against a highly textured, but bare wall, immersing the figure in the natural plantscape that has inspired Persian motifs, but that also exists in his new home, New York.

Mana Sazegara, a designer based in New York shows that distinctive architectural form that sits magically suspended on edge, impossibly leaning back, its

Sylvia Martins: Eden*, mixed media on linen (2019)*

precedent in the Brazilian Embassy building in Washington, DC. relating precarious stance to that of new immigrants.

Bringing identity into the mix, photographer, Vincent Rosenblatt shows us Carnivalesque figures of the Bate-bola cult, Turma Amidia who live in a secret location in Rio de Janeiro. Both magical and frightful, the umbrella carrying figure and the next, Turma Oswaldo Cruz, bring us into a dystopian world of Brazilian fire and myth, with the seemingly impossible again becoming the depiction of reality.

Dariush Nehdaran, a brilliant Iranian photographer produces a psychedelic mosque using and literally showing the tools of photography in this photographic print. Method and result are one, producing a unique self-portrait without the artist present, identified by his tools and the resultant image. His vocation denotes who he is, as he carries his identity from one nation to another.

Iranian Malekeh Nayiny, in the mixed media on canvas with collages, "My Teddy Just Cares for Me" and "Togetherness" treats the transitional object, the Teddy Bear as a source of comfort. Hugging the soft toy, which could be an extension of the mother, provides a soothing presence for children and adults in tumultuous times, as the non-human object, first an American stuffed animal, later worldwide comforter becomes the soothing mother.

Rona Neves' "Jovem Guerreira" Young Warrior looks like a Brazilian version of Picasso's Guernica which used symbols of Spain to illustrate the destruction of the Spanish town of Guernica. Here, Neves uses the eagle, darts, a young woman, ladders, and red blood falling from bowls. Neves encompasses an entire history of Brazil's farmers, again painting the agricultural history of Brazil's farmers in Funcao na Roca (Farm Function). Codes and symbols are employed to illustrate history, ongoing culture, and the plight of people, while glorifying the farmer, nature's protector, and recalling the plantings she has left. Erick Vittorino modernizes and adds a feminist edge to Picasso-like drawings, bringing in beautifully executed line drawings of women with flowers in their hair. His linear paintings, white on black and alternately bright colors on white grounds incorporating flora, fauna and outlined nude figures, often hiding behind trees, seem to portray Eve in her garden, with her future not yet determined.

Elaborating on the flower them, Atieh Sohrabi's paintings of flowers, vine-like patterns and fresh-faced women and Bruno Schmidt's "Multa Cones" (Many colors) bring bright, clear color, addressing the theme of possibility as colors seem to lead into each other in almost subconscious steps, referring again to the path of immigrants figuring out how to proceed as they move through new places and cultures.

Farnaz Zabetian's "Cherry Blossom" shows cherry trees, similar to those that were a gift from Japan to the US. perhaps referring to the friendship of these Brazilian, Global South painters with those originally from Iran, woven together and unified here by strands of Iranian, or Brazilian hair. Like those intertwined strands of hair, histories, plantings, urban land and cityscape, and cultural production intertwine in a show that beautifully combines cultural, historic, architectural and personal themes.

Whether buildings stand on edge, webs shield delicate flowers, brilliant light illuminates beautifully geometrically ordered cityscapes, or mythic dancers enthusiastically perform, water flows or figures appear cognizant of water's peacefulness, I'm thankful for the collaboration. It works.

High Line 9 Gallery 4, 507 W. 27th St., New York, NY, Feb. 2-Feb. 15

Alex Katz, "Gathering" at the Guggenheim

Mark Bloch

Alex Katz: Buttercups oil on linen (2009)

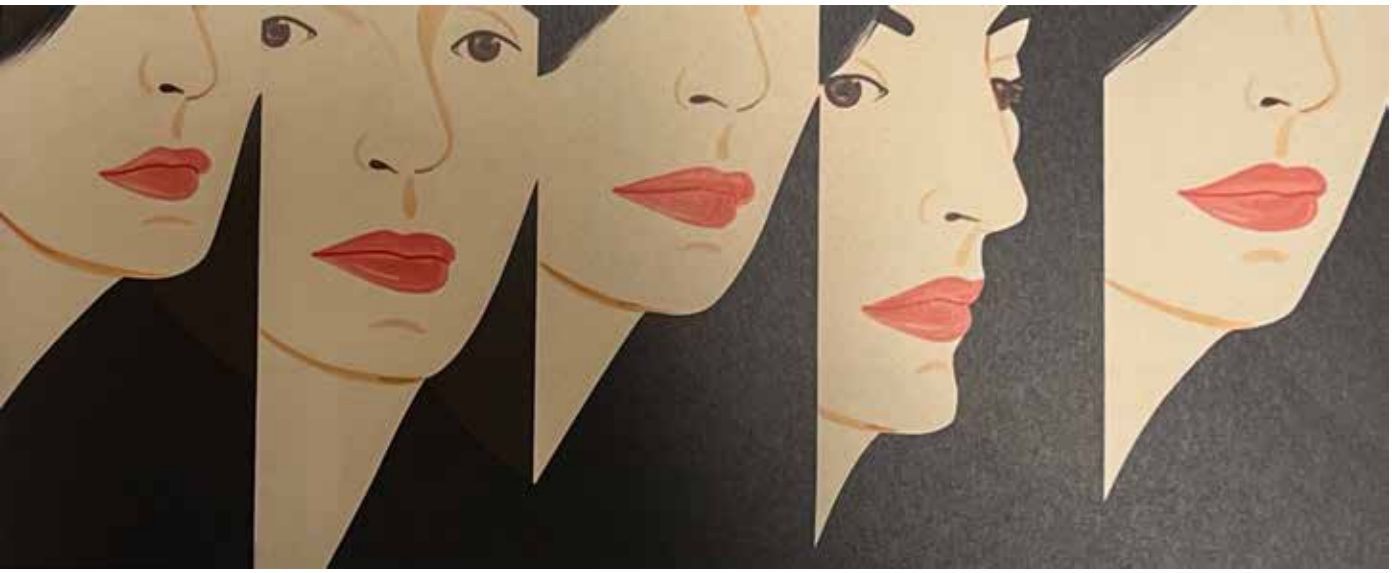
The show, called "Gathering" takes its name from a 1951 poem by Alex Katz's friend James Schuyler who wrote of gathering together beautiful flowers before they die and of gathering together one's creative community.

The curator Katherine Brinson has used the unidirectional architecture of the Guggenheim Museum to convey a visual chronology of an artist who embraces community but wants no part of narrative, preferring isolated arresting images to any depiction of events that added up to a story. Despite the repetitive experience of looking into alcoves where large canvases are presented in groups of 2s and 3s, reminiscent of frames flickering by in film footage or the structure of a script, this artist also has no interest in seriality as a proxy for mass media imagery. He's against it.

Yet, Alex Katz has often positioned the same figure in the same work multiple times, insisting they are not time-based revelations of the personality of the sitter but simply non-sequential images of gestures and expressions that co-exist simultaneously. His friend Edwin Denby, the American writer of dance criticism, poetry, a novel, and a frequent subject of Katz's work, named them "splits." Katz once referred to them as "non-psychological doubling," but later admitted despite his best efforts, "it ended up being a psychological thriller."

But is the thrill gone? Despite a positive experience being immersed in a narrative I was not supposed to have seen I did leave this exhibition wanting more. Recalling my passionate response to the 2021Alice Neel show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, I found myself wondering why the most interesting works in this show seemed to be little forays into post-modern experimentation that Katz had made over the years. Or a few surprising early drawings and collages. All my favorites were anomalies, not the body of work I came to see. This was an exhibition worth visiting but one that ultimately left me a bit numb and disappointed, with the march up Frank Lloyd Wright's famous ramp feeling increasingly tedious.

Katz is so known for his familiar dramatically cropped faces over the past several decades that any consideration of portraits, be they by Lucien Freud, Chuck Close, Francesco Clemente, Jim Torok, Elizabeth Peyton, John Currin, Frida Kahlo or even Cindy Sherman, will eventually invite comparisons to Katz. His iconic effigies are now an art historical given, Katz's trademarked evergreen contribution to the history of 20th and 21st century art and part of the scenery—with scenery K. Enormous landscapes that evolved since he studied plein air painting at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine in the late 1940's are here in abundance and they conclude the exhibit in literally gargantuan abstract displays of color seen best from far away.



*Alex Katz:*S*, oil on linen (2018)*

Smaller oil on linen flowers are also present in the levels below and are resplendent. And let us not forget Katz's master printmaking. Katz is no one trick pony. Of the 150-plus artworks in this exhibition, half are canvases including many portraits, but the other half are prints, drawings, collages, small oil studies and wood and aluminum figurative cutouts. All of it is worth seeing. But how can we re-imagine Katz as a more relevant contributor to life in 2023?

Despite oddities that undermine his stated intentions, Alex Katz is still going strong at age 95 so he deserves the retrospective and the ink. The young Katz, born in 1927, blossomed at a time when it was not fashionable to paint realistically, with the representation of the human figure considered particularly passé, making Katz's most basic choices seem downright heroic. Yet, with the ability to recognize faces so important to our species that every human brain contains a region, the fusiform gyrus, solely devoted to that task, Katz's brand as the master of the human close-up can also be considered, well, a no-brainer. Depicting faces was probably destined to come back into style at some point for an artist at work for 75 years. It did and he certainly helped.

But in addition to settling on a focus that may have seemed to some outmoded, Katz also chose to downplay the language of pop culture. Rather than paying homage, like many of his contemporaries, to a mediated world of pre-existing imagery and repetitive mechanical reproduction, Katz claimed to eschew glossy media uniformity, wanting to hunker down in the homespun world of the painterly. But in doing so he rejected the introspection and subjectivity of the disheveled Abstract Expressionist generation that preceded him. Katz didn't want to capture who his subjects were or what they meant, just paint the way they looked.

It is ironic that Katz's show at the Guggenheim stands in opposition to some of these very aims. Most importantly, Katz has become a pop star brand unto himself, establishing his name and the look of his art as a predictable media image while his pledged devotion to the painterly has left a slick and icy trail, as far as possible from the rumpled and untidy world of Pollock and Rothko. If any connection remains, it would be a thin thread to the early figures of de Kooning—and a connection to it via a dispassionate flatness reminiscent of Color Field Painting.

While attempting to hold media in relation to his art at arms-length, he acknowledges that his paintings are destined to be seen by the same eyes as those that have been trained to absorb movies, fashion magazines and, most of all, billboards. Again, this show is by no means all portraits. In addition to flowers, there are large numbers of landscapes inspired by "initial blasts of light" in the "here and now," and "visual experiences in the present tense," which he sketches in painted studies, then recreates larger and more controlled. Nevertheless, both the size and the original optically inspired glimpses of eternity that catch his eye in moments of what he calls "absolute awareness" might explain Katz's more than occasional references to billboards.

Despite these contradictions, what moved me? When I say Post-modern I am referring to two fragments of faces awkwardly cut off, floating on a sea of bold yellow in "Bill Free" (2017), a double portrait of Bill T. Jones, the conceptual dance innovator since the 1970s, interesting to me because it suggests what

Alex Katz: Tree 10, *oil on linen (2020)*

Katz was capable of had he used his "brand" as a weapon of self- parody. I found its clumsiness refreshing.

A couple of earlier works struck me too. They preceded the '60s through the '80s run when Katz may have peaked. Two spirited, painterly pieces made me wonder what might have happened had he not morphed into depicting the circle of painters, poets, and dancers with whom he was closest in his flat, blemish-free way. "Irving and Lucy" (1958) showed art historian Irving Sandler and his wife Lucy Freeman surrounded by a large white creamy background that matched Sandler's blazer. And a double image of Katz's wife in a blue robe with arms crossed, "Ada Ada" (1959) was also brushy and surrounded by plenty of space. I wondered in what alternative universe this softer, more expansive style by Katz might have continued.

Granted, Katz's portraits of his wife since 1959, Ada Del Moro, once a scientific researcher, are magnificent. Another irony is that not only did Katz turn his own name and art into pop icons, but this show makes it clear he also managed to turn his muse Ada into the stuff consumer archetypes are made of. Un-

fortunately, her psychology is impenetrable. Katz's aversion to such things reveals nothing about a 65 year rom-com. Six older Ada's fading out as they walk away from the viewer with her feet hidden by the green grass of a field bespeckled by light coming through unseen trees made a nice counterbalance to six other Ada's earlier in the show: seated, standing, arms crossed, hand on hip in "The Black Dress" (1960). Once more with no feeling.

Finally, I was struck by "Ada's Back" (2021) consisting only of hair uncharacteristically not cut off at the top, but just brush strokes that taper into a white background. The fact that this constitutes a daring departure in Katz's world (not to mention that it was hung among the final 5 landscapes in the show) speaks volumes. But speak it did because it was different.

Finally, I cannot speak more favorably about Katz's "cut outs." He created his first one of Frank O'Hara on a wood panel in 1959-60, seen here, and has continued the rest of his life. They are exciting because they break convention, between the worlds of painting and sculpture and often fun images of his familiar friends. "Edwin and Rudy" of Denby and Burckhardt is a standout.

Fun is the magic word here. There should be more. Rather than attempting to convince myself to care about Katz's strong detached convictions about art that don't seem to add up anyway, I would like to know more about the ardour of his subjects and how he feels about it. Regretfully, it just is not here. Katz could not be more competent. He is a benchmark for images of cropped faces in that critical era just before post-modernism crept in via Duchamp and Cage in the 1960s, making him a pinnacle of Modernism. But we must ask ourselves—should it continue and if so, why?

In a well-known work, "Cocktail Party" (1965), Denby, Al Held, Joe Fiore, Burckhardt and others gathered at the Katzs' home near Madison Square Park for a party. We know by now, every summer Katz and presumably Ada and their kids went from there or a SoHo loft to a 19th-century clapboard farmhouse about halfway up the coast of Maine. In both spots, Katz has spent his time painting the circle of painters, poets and dancers with whom he has been closest: Denby, Ted Berrigan, who is seen here in a 1967 crudely swabbed-on oil sketch that hangs next to a more idealized "finished" replica, LeRoi Jones in '63 before he became Amiri Baraka, Kynaston McShine of MoMA and then Allen Ginsberg in a six-panel chopped up portrait that did not look much like him. Did that lack of resemblance play a part in Katz chopping things up in the first place? Then a cut-out of Francesco Clemente that looked exactly like him. Performance artist Joan Jonas was pictured in a recent portrait. Katz was the official chronicler of the postwar New York School of Painters and Poets and, yes it was exciting to see each work, of the famous and the not-so-famous, done in Katz's inimitable style.

But like the people in the 1965 cocktail party painting, something barely detectable was missing. When we look closely we see the attendees are not looking at each other. Like ships passing in the night, Katz's party was in danger of collapsing under the weight of its own detachment.

His journey had begun with a small portrait of the artist's mother with a slight twinkle in her eye and progressed toward a dramatic final series of sparse almost abstract landscapes on the top floor of the Guggenheim that looked to be a city block long, enormous examples of Katz's acumen and successful career. Katz had moved from tiny ink sketches in the subway to pastel colors collaged onto a surface to find his way and later to bolder colors and shapes that earned him more popularity while sacrificing some of his own passion and the passion of this community. The twinkle was gone.

We are Floating in Space'

Mary Fletcher

Walking into the Exchange I saw a lot of video screens in a dark room and a lot of explanatory texts. I instantly felt a bit depressed – that I could not be bothered – that artists seem to think a video that bores you to death with it's glacial pace can compete with the snappy speed we are used to in television.
However, something kept me trying and I slowed down enough to look around.
I found a project about involuntary infertility which I wanted to read about although I thought it was approached far too obliquely and symbolically to pack the punch visually that Melanie Stidolph"s written accounts had.
Naomi Frears shows two videos - not too long- one using written memories about her father dying and the other images of men falling off their surf boards in a variety of balletic and amusing ways. She makes a strange connection between the two and it's eloquent.
Then I drove over to Newlyn. Here there's a lot of playful stuff – from a bronze fish finger with its own sound of the sea, by Eleanor Turnbull, to sea shanties with a gay slant by Rhys Morgan and choir, found seashore objects and similarly constructed complex creations by Anna Harris and a beautiful dark stool made from ancient washed up wood that comes from a tree growing at the time Stonehenge was being made, by Alistair and Fleur Mackie.
Oh and a video of synchronised swimmers at the Penzance Lido in aid of environmental improvement.
There's a lot more at both places and curator Blair Todd has chosen and given a chance to exhibit to a variety of artists who aren't the usual suspects.

We are Floating in Space'. Newlyn and Exchange, Penzance. 11 February - 3 June 2023

Alistair and Fleur Mackie's stool

Anna Harris 'Untitled'

Shaping Up

Philippe Deligant

IN THE pre-1912 years of the Paris art scene, the square format was not used much as it imparted a static look to images. But, images freed from the restrictions of perspective challenged the compositional 'rule of thirds' and opened the painter's two-dimensional pictorial space to be depicted as multiple planes. As a simple form suiting minimal compositions where the support resonated with patterning, the square suited constructivist idioms which played with symmetry such as Kenneth Martin's mathematical systems.

In denying the tradition of landscape and portrait Malevich equalised up the picture plane as a square creating the non-sign.

Another change in the transition from classical academicism to Modernism was the artist's play with the edges to stabilise pictorial contents. As the traditional order of paintings moved on from being established by graphic means the canvas edge became as much a compositional tool as part of the new subject.

Although Cézanne used his pictorial contents for compositional strength he also had to put something up against the forms, assigning importance as a device to direct the eye around and about whatever the outer proportions were. That 'something' was often an edge.

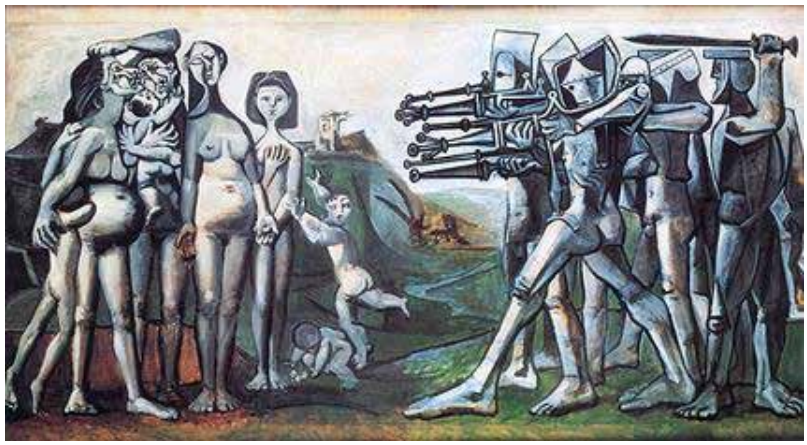
In this work, one of the few square John Wells paintings I have seen, Wells uses the proportion to float his asymmetrical forms on the flattened picture plane.

The overarching inner tension and compositional strength is mirrored back to the forms from the square's outer edges instead of coming from the marks. With the loss of the usual figurative references he drew from Gabo and Nicholson, Wells creates an image which recalls Hoffmann but with an additional dimension, a sense of the painting's logic rising from an unseen mystical centre in the anonymity of his square space rather than the forms.

Wells and Heron were among the few artists who used the three square proportion, preferring the extended square beyond the normal rectangle. In the context of Cornwall the extended rectangle is pertinent to the landscape. As in Lanyon's long murals for universities, the Penwith landscape is characterised by its lack of depth and low hills. The extended format, with the image pulled out to a three square proportion, lengthens the rectangle where the hills are not very high and the sea goes away from you at the bottom of the cliffs.

Compressing the plane was used by artists who wanted to paint the experience of their physical engagement without reverting to an idiom like Goya's where you hear that wolf howling at the moon.

Heron also extended the square upright as a device for keeping a modernist intention showing while he was delving into mixing it with tradition. It was a good move, because few other artists were using those proportions in that specific way. Picasso's use of the extended square is limited to a few works, such as *The massacre in Korea* 1951. Rothko, and Barnett Newman in a very few stripe paintings, used the horizontal format. But the person who exemplified the extended square was Pollock who unrolled the cotton duck or canvas on the floor as far as it went.



Pablo Picasso: Massacre in Korea *(1951)*

Alon Zakain Labours The Point

Daniel Nanavati

The moment you walk into the exhibition you are back into the 1960s and 1970s.This mutates into some dots by Damien Hirst's stable,some Alan Davie before he was overly influenced by Latin America and Terry Frost, who does not deserve his reputation. The Lowry above the desk in front view as you walk through the door is small and and after-thought.

The mismatch of styles looks a little like a patched-up show to offload some stock. If you wanted to pit the UK against the US you might choose more adeptly but as both are ploughing the same furrow there isn't much of an argument between them so I am not at all sure the "VS' is relevant.

However, as an example of the loss of ideas in western art it is a fine example. You only need a Koons to complete the set of ugliness, deformed colour variations and the corrupted themes of artists who don't know how to be abstract with talent. Even the Henry Moore's are lacklustre – and not just because they are small.

This lacks the interest of *If Only These Walls Could Talk* in November 2022, or the sheer fun of Patrick Hughes in 2019 which was Zakaim's show for the British Art Fair.

This gallery will bounce back but this show was badly titled, unnecessary and unimaginative.

UK VS USA: POST-WAR TO PRESENT to 7th April 2023: Alon Zakaim Fine Art, 27 Cork Street, London.

Hans Hofmann: The Eye, *oil on canvas (1952)*

What remains will be our future: Decolonial Ecologies at Riga Art Space

Kathryn Zazenski

Maria Kapajeva, The Enforced Memory, *Two-channel video, 13' on loop (2022)*
Photo: Madara Kuplā Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

Memory is like a rhizome, stretching out in different directions, growing nodes and establishing links each time we recall something in a new context. These reflections become tools, connecting and attaching us in time to places, objects, and people. As we attempt to sever, or at the very least untangle the roots of colonialism, and construct more ethical future relations and systems, we look into the nets of our memories; to that which has been lost or saved, embellished or diminished, to the institutional structures and (im)balances of power that have rendered this current state of (to say the least) friction. The earth has just welcomed its eight billionth human amidst a global climate of Western white supremacy, a war in Europe, institutionalized, systemic violence upheld by archaic, misogynistic systems, toxic rivers and oceans teeming with plastic, rising sea levels and a warming planet, staggering economic inequality, and otherwise rampant, generalized instability and unsustainability. Digital connectivity keeps our switches on 24/7 and has inverted global/local relations: our communities are no longer bound by soil or blood but ideology and access.

The exhibition Decolonial Ecologies at Riga Art Space features the work of 13 artists or artist collectives, which according to curator Ieva Astahovska, is centered on regional (Baltic / East European / post-Soviet) ecological and socio-political change and localized, human-level processes of decoloniza-

Linda Boļ šakova, Staburadze Corallia, *Multimedia installation (2022)*
Photo: Madara Kuplā Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

tion. The exhibition is part of a larger project of the Latvian Center of Contemporary Art called Rethinking Postsocialism through Postcolonialism in the Baltics, which "addresses entangled relations between the past and present in Latvia and the Baltics through the prism of the current ecological crisis and environmental issues." In addition to the exhibition, the project includes a series of online discussions, a public program, and a summer school, creating a multidimensional network of observations, questions, and propositions.

Stepping down into the gallery space, the exhibition unfolds. Various narrative paths are possible. There is a strong sense of architectural harmony amongst the works and a clearly horizontal organization with no one work dominating the aural or visual landscape. The exhibition was designed to be as open, connective, and to create as little waste as possible. Steel armatures typically covered in drywall were left open, their bones forming an unobtrusive net or web-like visual structure allowing sightlines and thoughtlines to flow between sounds and objects. In the physical center of the space there is a large screen with a bench and a few pairs of headphones, staging for the piece rememberMINT (2021) by Olia Mykhailiuk. This work uses the mint plant as its conceptual linchpin; a hearty, biological rhizome that sends out horizontal runners and subterranean rootstalks, whose memory drives its stretching, seeking, and resilient habit through cracks and rubble and all that has remained.

The hour and 20 minute long video stitches together interviews, photographs, recordings of performances, and audio notes from the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk related to the Russian war in Ukraine which began in 2014. The narrative of war, of simultaneous past and present, is woven together with ideas of regeneration and continuation, of memory and remembering, of history told through sensing and the non-human life that shares these burdens. For Mykhailiuk, these threads are woven through the mint plant, which linguistically in Ukrainian (as well in other Slavic languages) is contained within the word пам'ятати (pamyataty: to remember, м'ята: mint).

During one section, an interviewee was asked if the mint from Alchevsk was different. As he recalls his memories of the landscape, he describes a general causation. "All plants that grow in harsh conditions – like in Donbas – are more fragrant. It's the same in the mediterranean: lavender, santolina, rosemary, you can grow them in the same way at home or somewhere near to a forest; but they won't get so much sun there, so much energy, and there won't be that strong, astringent smell…" These moments are a reminder that trauma and colonialism plays out in the landscape, that the wounds of war are not only remembered in the cells and skins of human bodies but are indelibly etched into the entirety of the material world; remembered in a more heavily perfumed wind, a gnarled tree, or the silence of an absent songbird.

Family Connection, Marronage, Installation, 2022. Photo credit Madara Kuplā | Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

Just next to this work, the rootstalk of war emerges again in the work of Maria Kapajeva. Her two-channel video, the enforced memory, negotiates the removal of a monument of a Soviet T-34 tank which was originally placed in 1970 to commemorate fighting on that land in 1944, in her hometown of Narva. This decision by government officials was made in an effort to remove Soviet monuments from public space after the escalation of the Russian war in Ukraine in February 2022. In the videos, Kapajeva brilliantly negotiates the subliminal power and violence that such objects represent. In some of the scenes, Kapajeva recorded herself on-site screaming, using a therapeutic technique for ridding the body of anger, which adds an even greater complexity to the piece. Public space has rules and is not neutral, and on a sunny day in what appears to be summer, we watch as her body folds in on itself, expelling as much rage, confusion, fear and sadness as she can muster, until it is rid or she is empty, whichever comes first. Hanging in one row alongside the videos are her series of poem-like journal entries, Chronicles (2022), printed on white cloth, describing recollections of family, of other monuments, of watching people visiting this monument. In the last entry, Kapajeva pointedly, and chillingly scribes "…it is engraved in my memory…without my permission…". Decolonizing not only public spaces but the mental frameworks by which we operate is perhaps the bigger task. When a building falls or a monument is removed it doesn't simultaneously scrub the mind or muscle memory. Neural pathways continue to flow in the same direction unless they, too, are freed.

In the opposite corner of the space, we read "ACTIVE RESISTANCE, PASSIVE HEALING" printed on a series of stickers as part of the work Marronage by the artist collective Family Connection. The term marronage, referring to runaway slaves who set up new communities in regions like the US and Caribbean, rejecting Western-style colonial subjugation, is used here to describe contemporary practices of emancipation, of alternative labor movements and economies co-existing with dominant colonial structures.

Vika Eksta and Anna Griķe, llotment Garden No. 849*, Installation (2022)*
Photo: Madara Kuplā Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

Sections devoted to the different members are home to paintings, drawings and sculptures, woven bags, video and sound; the works each feature materiality and subject related to their particular maker. As the only work from a majority non-continental European perspective (Curaçao, a colony of the Kingdom of the Netherlands), it was a critical inclusion for dimensionalizing and establishing nuance in this discussion of power and residual domination. A series of woven jute pouches hung from an exposed I beam instantly brought me to Ursula K. Le Guin's Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction, wherein she reimagines the origins of humanity by redefining how we think about technology (human interface with the material world) – as a carrier (net/bag/web) instead of a weapon of domination.

The success of this exhibition lies exactly in its locality, in bringing into the light many of the specific institutions, ideologies, memories, and traumas that we might rather keep underground, with a careful amalgamation of research-based inquiry and speculative fiction. In the work Storks, a Sacred Bird (2022) by Diana Lelonek, the human fantasy of storks – the bringer of luck, health, protection, and from time to time babies – crashes down into a filthy, stinky, mountain of trash (the Getlini Landfill in Riga, to be exact), which these birds have adapted as their home in some sort of post-apocalyptic fairy-tale-cum-reality. In Darja Popolitova's video БАЮ-БАЙ (2022), two pram-bound Nevalyashka (Russian rocking dolls) are rescued from a basement and brought into the light and then ultimately to a rave where they hilariously experience the shock and disappointment of their liberation. And in Deep Sensing (2002, 2022) by Rasa Šmite and Raitis Šmits, we are cautioned not to become too invested in the frontiers that lay beyond our planet for fear of terrestrial abandonment in favor of simply re-performing colonization elsewhere.

How does one find their place in a homeland that has become unrecognizable, when the changes have occurred too quickly for one generation to handle? When the rootstalk has become obsolete or perhaps even severed without consent? Alotment Garden No. 849 (2022) by Vika Eksta and Anna Griķe tackles just this. A tent-like structure is covered by a stitched fabric composed of unused plastic vanity shopping bags, evoking a children's playhouse or some other imaginary of "home". Entering inside we find fake plants, lapel pins, personal journals, lace curtains, collections of objects from another world. A liminal space created from the collections of Eksta's grandparents, amassed over decades, squirreled away for protection against future lean times or perhaps

Family Connection, Marronage*, Installatio (2022)*
Photo: Madara Kuplā Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

more simply, as affirmations of existence in an otherwise irrelevant reality. The title locates us in the space of the pre-war concept of the allotment – plots of land with small, bungalow-style cottages which became a critical source of sustenance and solace especially for the working-class Eastern European, Soviet, Baltic generation born around the second world war. This piece balances the sadness of mortality and capitalist obsolescence with a touch of wonderment, uncomfortably pressing an exposed nerve that we didn't realize was there.

As Journey to Chernitvtsi (2022) by Haralds Matulis reminds us, which through painting and discursive practice interrogates nostalgia and the postcolonial gaze, it is impossible to construct a future without memories of the past, be they regretful, traumatic, longed-for, or proud. The effects of colonial, capitalist, Western, patriarchal structures have scorched, etched, and pillaged, and trace paths of collective adaptations and mutations. Yet in spite of everything, a collective energy emerges, in search of a more nurturing, horizontal, biological rhythm. Mykhailiuk asks her interviewees, "What associations does the verb "remember" arouse in you?" One responds, "I think that all these beautiful things, against a backdrop of ruins, give us a hook to catch onto something more beautiful…Those terrible sounds and noises: they are powerful. I now often miss them…But each of these islands – the flowers or birds – they help. They help me…When you talk to the guys, memories are nightingales and sunflowers." Entangled histories and how we are changed by the people, places, and policies we live with/in/under are told for the sake of radical hope, for a future that will be different, that must be different. These rememberings are the brick and mortar from which the new shoots cling and rootstalks flourish. They are empty plinths and basement treasures, the new memories of collective biological survival.

Decolonial Ecologies, Riga Art Space, November 2, 2022 – January 15, 2023. The exhibition is part of the project Rethinking Postsocialism through Postcolonialism in the Baltics, convened by the Latvian Center for Contemporary Art

Curator: Ieva Astahovska: Artists: Anna Shkodenko + Darja Popolitova + Viktor Gurov + Francisco Martinez, Aurelija Maknytė, Diana Lelonek, Family Connection, Haralds Matulis, Inga Erdmane, Linda Bolšakova, Līga Spunde, Maija Demitere, Maria Kapajeva, Olia Mykhailiuk, Rasa Šmite + Raitis Šmits, Vika Eksta + Anna Griķe

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What becomes a Legend most?

Vera Zalutskaya in conversation with Susan Mogul

Vera Zalutskaya: Your piece (from which the title of the exhibition is taken) What becomes a Legend most? (2022) has a signature claiming that you are anticipating your first solo museum exhibition. Is it true? Was the exhibition at Zachęta in Warsaw your first solo museum exhibition? And why?

Susan Mogul: Yes it was my first solo museum exhibition. I can't give you the exact reason, but the artist isn't the one who decides when they have a solo exhibition. The people in charge of the museum, the gatekeepers, are the ones who make those decisions. But you decided to play with this fact and make it a part of your practice. I find it interesting.

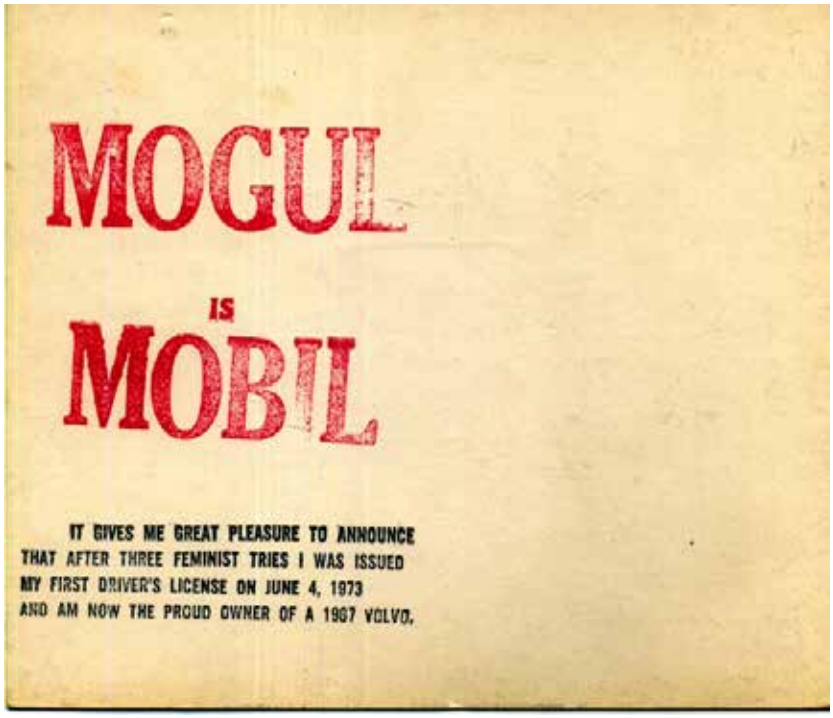
Well, you know, the signature, "Susan Mogul, the septuagenarian…" means someone who's in her seventies. That's very important because in many ways I'm using myself as a stand-in for other women of my generation or older who are getting a solo museum exhibition late in life. I've been in many, many group exhibitions in museums but never a solo exhibition. And there are many deserving women artists all over the world who have never had a solo museum exhibition.

I was an early practitioner of video art. My early videotapes included in this exhibition, Dressing Up (1973) and Take Off (1974), got some attention at the time they were made because I was part of the feminist art movement in Los Angeles. But they got attention on a national and an international level twenty years later, when they were presented in numerous historical exhibitions about video art, feminist art, and Los Angeles art. So I made work at one point in time and then the work became more important at a much later date. This is not useful for an artist. You're pleased about it on one hand, but on the other hand in terms of your career it's not very helpful. As a result people view you as this woman artist who made work in the seventies. In the 2000s I was introduced to an art historian at a party and she responded: "Oh! Susan Mogul! Susan Mogul from the seventies". That really happened. And, when I got my first solo commercial gallery exhibition in 2009, the gallery director only wanted to show my work from the seventies, he wouldn't even look at anything else.

That's how you got the idea for the work which seems to be the key work for this exhibition?

The story continues. Two years ago an artist friend had dinner with a curator from the Hammer Museum, and somehow my name came up and the curator said: "Susan Mogul, she's a legend". And that's when the idea of using the word legend came to my mind. I was reminded of a famous American mid 20th century advertisement for mink coats, "What Becomes a Legend Most".

I told my idea to a friend and she responded, "You know, Susan, I have a mink coat I can lend you for the project. It will fit you perfectly". All the female celebrities in this ad campaign were in their sixties or older. So that's how my Legend project came about. I didn't do this piece specifically for the Zachęta exhibition, but when I showed it to Michał Ja-



Susan Mogul: Mogul is Mobil*, 1974, postcard, courtesy of the artist*

chuła, the curator, he liked it a lot. And then, he ended up naming the exhibition after the work.

Vera Zalutskaya: Coming back to your background story, could you tell a bit more about how your professional artistic life looked in between the present moment and the time when you made your iconic works in the seventies?

Susan Mogul: One of my images, a poster in the Zachęta exhibition, is titled An Artist of a Certain Time (2019). The poster could be described as a satirical resume of my career. It is about making work that doesn't quite fit into the art world – from the seventies to the present.
You know, I came of age in the 1960s. I protested against the war in Vietnam, fought for black civil rights, gay rights, etc. I was an activist in the feminist art movement in Los Angeles in the 1970s. I have an alternative background and I never thought about getting into a gallery. I was thinking more about creating an alternative environment and building alternative spaces to show work. Living in LA in the seventies was very inexpensive, my artist pals each had their own apartment. Now young people in Los Angeles have to share everything, they have two jobs, everything is so expensive. At that time, if you were a single artist you did not have to be as concerned about money.
I never had the goal to be in the art world in a traditional way. I was making video art, which was outside of the art market. Galleries weren't buying and selling videos. CalArts was one of the very few schools in the country where people were making videos. There was no formal video art class, because video art was a new medium. So this atmosphere gave me the freedom to be inventive. I was also doing a lot of documentary photography in the seventies and eighties. And gradually my approach to video art and documentary photography merged in the late eighties – early nineties, and I started making diary films. These first person documentaries allowed me to combine biography, autobiography and performance. Making films was a way to develop and expand storytelling. So fitting into the art market never was my goal.

Vera Zalutskaya: On the other hand, you have works maybe not about the art market itself, but about this will of creating your own artistic name, as the Mogul is Mobil Volume III Redux (1975/2022) for example. From my point of view it resonates with today's situation, when artists are just creating their names, like brands to sell works and just to fit to the market.

Susan Mogul: Well, did you know what was on the other side of the Mogul is Mobil postcard? It is an announcement that I finally learned to drive. I decided to "advertise" that I got a driver's license, which was a big thing for me, because I had been a

Susan Mogul: Marimekko *(2019)*
courtesy of the artist

passenger in a tragic car accident and thought I would never want to be behind the wheel. Mobil was the name of a gas station. But in English, if you add an "e", it is mobile, which means: moving forward. So that card is basically a celebration of life.

In the seventies, I was very engaged by Sheila de Bretteville's ideas – she was my primary mentor at the Woman's Building. Sheila, a graphic designer, was interested in advertising formats. And one of her concepts was to use commercial formats to give women a voice, by injecting our personal and everyday experiences in public spaces. In other words it was a method to give importance to the female experience. So it's not about career, although I can see how you might see it as being career oriented and branding yourself. I've had a couple of recent shows with a Los Angeles gallery and the gallery director has described some of my work as self-promotion – not in a negative way, but as a fact. However, I never saw it that way.

Here in LA, there was a different feminist art movement than the one in New York. We had some different intentions in Los Angeles. Mainly, I think, because the New York feminist artists were more driven to be part of the art market, where in the seventies there wasn't much of an art market or a museum scene in LA. We didn't wait to be discovered, we created our own spaces to show our work.

I have another work which you could say is about promoting myself, it's titled Mogul Celebrates Mogul (2011), you can check it out on my website. When the Getty was doing their citywide exhibition, Pacific Standard Time, about the history of Los Angeles art from 1945 to 1980, two posters were being used to advertise the show. Young male rock stars and actors "celebrated" older male artists, such as John Baldessari and Ed Ruscha. So Mogul Celebrates Mogul poses the question, "Where are the women? Who is celebrating women?" In my poster, Susan Mogul is celebrating herself. It's a critique. It's a satire on women being invisible.

Vera Zalutskaya: You already mentioned the Woman's Building and its role in your practice. Can you tell a bit more about this place and the ideas behind it?

Susan Mogul: The Woman's Building was a non-profit arts and education center located in Los Angeles from 1973 until 1991. I was a member of the Feminist

Susan Mogul: Lingua Franca *(Tales from the Mogul Archive series) (2022) courtesy of the artist*

Studio Workshop, an alternative educational program, for women only, located at the building. There was no degree or anything like that. We had an idea of women mentoring other women as well as a do it yourself mindset. I also learned about making work out of your own experience and inserting a personal voice in public places, and, on everyday objects like shopping bags. The feminist art movement here in Los Angeles and the Woman's Building opened up a space for me to find my own voice. It was a space where you could figure out who you were and what kind of work you wanted to make and be yourself.
We used to do consciousness raising. It was a key part of the women's movement as well as the feminist art movement, where a small group of women, maybe six or eight, would have a meeting and sit in a circle for, let's say, an hour. And then you'd have a topic. Let's say the topic was your relationship to your mother. And then you would divide the time you had, for example, each person gets 5 minutes and nobody is allowed to interrupt you. And it's the idea that each woman has her own voice and gets to be heard. I tried to use this method and present this idea when I was making my film about the Woman's Building.

Vera Zalutskaya: Can we go back to the beginning of your practice? Can you tell a bit more about where your interest in video art comes from?

Susan Mogul: I was raised in New York. I went to the University of Wisconsin for two years in the Midwest. Then I decided to transfer to art school in Boston where I finished my degree. That's when I got interested in the women's movement. I identified as a feminist and an artist, but they were separate identities. I had feminist friends that weren't at the art school. And then I had my art friends who were not feminists. I was doing different projects in different mediums and I hadn't found my voice as an artist yet. And then I read about the Feminist Art Program at CalArts in Time magazine and I decided to be part of that. When I got there, my goal was to discover what this whole feminist art thing was. My mentor was Judy Chicago. She brought the women who were in the Feminist Art Program at CalArts to feminist art exhibitions in LA and took us to women artists' studios. That was her big thing: introducing and connecting women artists, whether you were students or professionals.
At the same time Lynda Benglis, a well-known New York sculptor, came to CalArts for a semester. She was also making video art and she said to me that I should work with video. I have no idea why. CalArts was one of the only schools in the country that had video equipment. You didn't have to be enrolled in a formal class to borrow the video equipment. That's when I made Dressing Up, a video about bargain hunting with my mother. I showed Lynda my first version of it, she made some suggestions and I revised it. Then I showed it to my fellow feminists, and to Judy. And everybody thought I was so funny and that the video was good. That was a big surprise. Humor and storytelling. So that's how that happened.

Vera Zalutskaya: That's true, your humor and irony are absolutely unique, and it's not common for feminist work. Is it a part of your method?

Susan Mogul: I think it's part of my personality. When I was 13 or 14 I would make Mother's Day and birthday cards for my mother. I'm the eldest of six kids. The cards were satirical. I would present mom being torn in 500 different directions by all her children. I always saw my mother as a character. And I also made greeting cards for my great aunt Lea, who I was very close to. They were humorous as well. I was interested in caricature and satire even as a teenager. So that's part of who I am. In the early seventies there wasn't a particular way to be a feminist artist. When you're at the beginning of a movement there aren't any rules, really. And then when feminist art went into academia – then there were all these rules.
Vera Zalutskaya: And how were you managing after school? Here in Poland in the 70s some women, after finishing school, didn't have the possibility to continue to make experimental video because they didn't have access to equipment. And video was considered a man's medium. How was it with you?

Susan Mogul: I never felt any prejudice in terms of like, oh women shouldn't be making video. A lot of women were making videotapes here. Artists in Los Angeles approached the high cost of equipment in different ways. Some people got together and formed a collective so they could purchase the equipment like we did at the Woman's Building. There were institutions, for example a University medical school, that allowed some artists to use their equipment when it wasn't being used. At some point, the Long Beach Museum of Art was giving artists access to video equipment at reduced rates. I didn't have my own video camera until the late 80s when camcorders were relatively affordable.

Vera Zalutskaya: Your mother and the question of maternity plays a huge role in your art. After visiting

your exhibition in Zachęta I had an impression that it somehow transmits this idea that if you are a mother, you cannot be an artist or vice versa. Especially because the two films, Mom's Move (2018) and Sing, O Barren Woman (2000), were shown next to each other. So I'm wondering if these topics (of having/not having children and having/not having an art career) are connected, or was it a coincidence?

Susan Mogul: Oh, I didn't think about it that way, but now I understand that you even see it in the wallpaper that frames the two video projection areas. The wallpaper on one projection area has the birth control pill pattern and the pattern on the other projection area is composed of photos of my mom pregnant and me pretending to be pregnant.
What I always felt about my mother is that her photography was always the last thing that she would do. She would work on her projects after everybody was asleep. She stayed up until one or two in the morning, which I mention in the film Mom's Move. As the eldest child I was aware of all the work involved in raising children. It's not that I felt burdened, but I don't think I ever had a burning desire to have a kid on my own. And when I was in my twenties, I was frustrated that my mother always put the family first. That's how I saw my mother but I don't think she felt this way. This was my own projection. It was a daughter's subjective observation. But if I would be honest, I think that to be an artist and a mother is extraordinarily difficult. And even my mother says towards the end of the film Mom's Move: "You went further than I did". And maybe that's what she meant.

Vera Zalutskaya: In my opinion you did two things: you made yourself an artist and you made your mother an artist, because you saw her as an artist. And I'm wondering how much her interest influenced your choice to study art and to become an artist?

Susan Mogul: She clearly had an influence on me, she's been the topic of a number of works that I made from 1973 to the present. And the exhibition at Zachęta is a culmination or an accumulation of those works. My mother had a very strong personality and she had very definite ways that she dressed, decorated the home, and made photographs. I was engaged with my mother's work. I would hang out in the darkroom with her, she would show me proof sheets and she often asked me my opinion: which was the best photograph to enlarge, which one should she choose to enter into a competition? I also got used to being a subject of my mother's work. All of my brothers and sisters were subjects of her work. So I was comfortable being on camera. Mom certainly introduced me to photography. There were many ways I identified with her, but then there were other ways in which I was and am much more radical than my mother. Obviously, a family member or parent can influence your work. But to make the leap to being an artist yourself and making that commitment to be an artist is something different. That I did on my own.

Vera Zalutskaya: What is the importance of the women in your family beyond your mother?

Susan Mogul: My maternal great aunt Lea, a milliner, was raised in Riga and emigrated to the United States in 1927 when she was twenty-five years old. Lea was the relative I most identified with – after my mother – because she was independent, creative and childless like myself. Lea studied opera in Paris for two years and lived in Manhattan after she emigrated to the USA. She was the only woman in our family who had her own business and supported herself her entire adult life. Lea was an art lover and was friends with many émigré artists in New York. My mother was also extremely close to Lea. I presented a sequence about Lea in my installation, Tales from the Mogul Archive (2022) at the Zachęta.

Vera Zalutskaya: Do you already have some plans for your future work?

Susan Mogul: Recently I've been making contacts with people in Riga because I'm seriously thinking about developing a project about Lea. I have a lot of her documents, photographs, diplomas, citizenship applications and correspondence. I don't know what I'm going to find, but it will be a continuation of my investigation of matrilineal lineage.

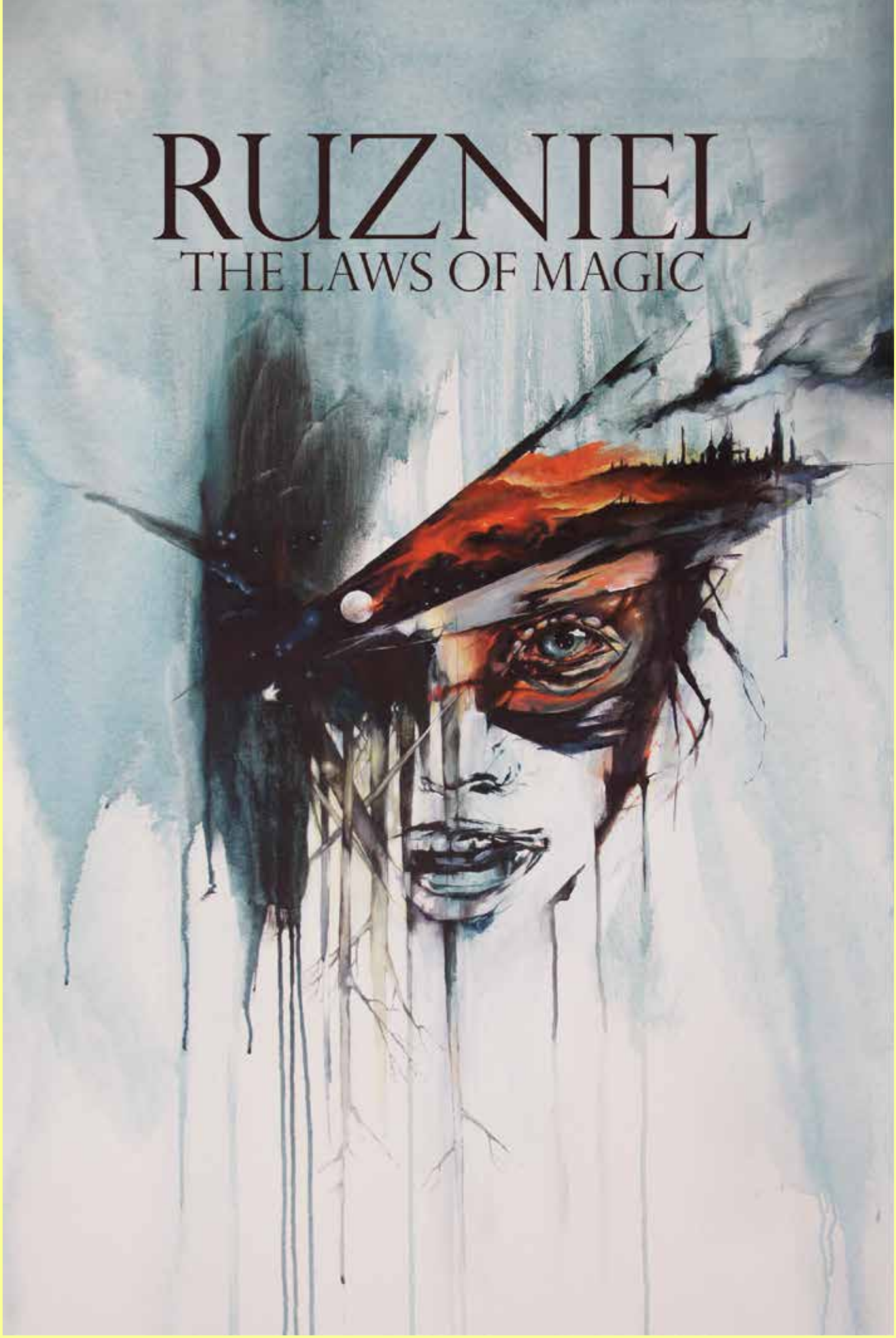
Susan Mogul, What becomes a Legend most? 2022, Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, exhibition view,

Originally published in BLOK magazine: https://blokmagazine.com/what-becomes-a-legend-most/

Johannes Vermeer: Mistress and Maid (*1666–67)*
Frick Collection in New York City (WikiMedia)

RUZNIEL

THE LAWS OF MAGIC



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