

Yoko Ono

Ex It–fallen cherry blossoms

INSIDE:

POLAND:

LOCALIZATION AND ITS
DISCONTENTS

Ewa Borysiewicz in conversation
with Katarzyna Róniak-Szabelska

NEW YORK

INSTAGRAM'S PERFECT LIE

Darren Jones

THE INFLUENCE OF MUSIC IN

ART Elga Wimmer

FAURSCHOU NEW YORK

Elizabeth Ashe

MILAN

BILL VIOLA

Liviana Martin

LONDON

MORE INVENTIVE THAN THE
CURATORS

Daniel Benshana



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.

You can participate directly by commenting on our web site.

All subscription include the digital issue sent via e-mail.

Subscription rates for 6 issues print and digital:

UK	£48.00	postage incl.
Europe	€58.50	postage incl.
USA	\$67	postage incl.
World	\$80	postage incl.

Subscribe at <http://newartexaminer.net/subscribe>

Our offices addresses:

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

D.C. Office: 2718, Ontario Road, Washington DC. 20009

Subscriptions to the New Art Examiner in 2022-23 are £42 (\$67) for six issues
Digital subscription \$5.00 annually (£3.60) - more a donation than a subscription
Individual copies are £4.50 (\$7.00) plus postage £2.50 (\$2) or \$2 each
as a download from www.newartexaminer.net

YOU MAY SUBSCRIBE BY PAYPAL OR CREDIT CARD ON THE WEBSITE WWW.NEWARTEXAMINER.NET

The Attentive Artist



The longest surviving of the Islamic empires, the Ottoman era saw Turkey emerge as a major centre of Islamic art. Its architecture, based on Byzantine models, came to international prominence in the work of Sinan (1489-1588) whose 50-year career included the Seimiye Mosque in Edirne and the Sileiman Mosque in Istanbul, and his apprentices went on to build Istanbul's famous Blue Mosque and the Taj Mahal in Mughai, India.

Sinan started his career as a Christian slave. He participated in several campaigns as a member of the yard cavalry and as a military engineer. The success of his war-related buildings helped him to become the chief architectural authority in the empire. His long life coincided with the golden age of empire.

The conquered areas provided plenty of construction tasks, as well as did the clients, who were aspiring for architectural representation worthy of their rank – among them the monarch and his wider environment. In addition, the empire, not being without financial resources, was also able to realize these plans. He became a symbol of the most glorious era of the Ottoman Empire through his works.

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:

RAFI ABDULLAH is a writer and curator based out of Singapore with close to a decade of experience working in varying capacities across cultural institutions and museums. He has written for artist catalogues and books, as well as for journals, platforms, and institutions such as Yavuz Gallery, Sullivan+Strumpf, National Gallery Singapore, and So Far.

ELIZABETH ASHE is a sculptor and poet. She has received several grants from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, for curating and to support her studio practice. She is a board member of the Washington Sculptors Group. Ashe lives in Washington, D.C., where she has an active studio practice. She is the Exhibit and Event Technician at the Katzen Center, American University.

EWA EWA BORYSIEWICZ is a graduate of art history from the University of Warsaw. She was a member of the curatorial team for *Side by Side: Poland—Germany. A 1000 Years of Art and History* (Martin Gropius Bau, 2011), and co-curated the exhibition *A Few Practical Ways to Prolong One's Life* (Zachęta National Gallery of Art, 2013) revolving around Antoniszczak's ideas about the distribution of knowledge. Most recently, Borysiewicz authored *Rausz kinetyczny* (Kinetic haze, 2013), a book exploring the political and emancipatory aspect of Antoniszczak's artistic practice. She works at the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw as a curator of visual arts.

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 currently is an Assistant Professor at the College of Performing Arts at the New School.

DARREN JONES is an art critic, curator, and educator. His writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *ArtUS*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Artslant* and *Artsy*. He is a contributing editor for the *New Art Examiner*. Curatorial and

artistic projects have been covered in *The Guardian*, *Washington Post*, *Artforum.com*, *Huffington Post*, and *Scotland on Sunday*. Jones' book, *The Contemporary Art Gallery: Display, Power and Privilege*, (co-authored with David Carrier) was published in 2016; in 2018 he was a recipient of an Andy Warhol Foundation Art Writers Grant; d. He currently teaches curatorial studies, at the Maryland Institute College of Art, in Baltimore. Jones lives in Fire Island Pines, New York, and Key West, Florida.

MARGARET LANTERMAN lives in Chicago Illinois, and has taught at the School of the Art Institute, the University of Illinois, and for the last 35 years at DePaul University in Chicago. She received an M.F.A in sculpture from the University of Illinois, Chicago, and an undergraduate B.F.A. in painting from Miami University in Ohio. She also pursued post graduate study in Ethology at Purdue University, Indiana, which she has augmented with extensive research and work in the field of animal behavior, historical research into philosophies such as animism and the observation of the natural world around her.

LIVIANA MARTIN was born in Northern Italy and lives in Milan. She has a degree in Philosophy and she taught for many years. She is keen on ancient and contemporary art, because she is absolutely confident that “the beauty will save the world”.

NANCY NESVET is the Editor in Chief of Art Lantern.

ELGA WIMMER or Excellence in Research and Publication.

The New Art Examiner is an open forum for discussion and publishes unsolicited informed articles and reviews from aspiring and established writers.

contributor@newartexaminer.net

Editorial

WHAT IS ART FOR

?

Enjoying the most beautiful multicolored, burnt orange and pewter grey sun rising above Miami Beach's emerald Atlantic Ocean, I saw why little great art has been produced there; art cannot rival what nature has wrought, and is gone from sight in an instant. The sun quickly rises as intense oranges and pinks disappear into pastel aquas; the ocean taking on a teal coloration. Yet art can maintain the memory of that sunlit intensity of dawn. That blinding light that can be reproduced is the value of art. We see it in Monet's waterlilies and his serial paintings of the bridge on the Seine in varied light. We see it in the paintings of the Hudson River School painters and in the views of the City of Delft, where the light illuminates the city's streets.

Only art can help us understand and remember the power and beauty of the natural landscape. We see in the work of Anish Kapoor in his show in Venice where dark matter retreats to a black hole of nothingness and everything, like the endless night sky, geometric shapes of the blackest black contrasting with the bright walls of Peggy Guggenheim's palazzo. We see it again in the field paintings of Mark Rothko, which quiver in their intense layering of color, again leading down to wells unknown, the layers of earth itself. Like Kapoor, Rothko's Houston chapel shows black to be the most intense admission that we seek deeply to know the power that controls the world but must delve down through layers to even broach the surface.

It is in this witnessing the beauty of our natural world and the revelation that, no matter how deeply we question and explore, we can never know, and quiver in the intensity of the search that keeps us coming back, that makes artists produce, so the image can remind us of the original natural scene and the quest.

I saw reminders that we may face apocalypse at the Bass Museum in Miami Beach. Blocks from the bright beach, a room-filling sculpted body lies on a bed of rock amidst reminders of the classical and recent past and a tribute to an unknown soldier. A show of Danish art at the Metropolitan Museum in New York shows landscape rendered in sepias, umbers and other brown tones, reminders that we and the earth are growing old hidden in the folds of brown, like cracked old paper, or crumbled dirt, after the growing season.

We need art. Especially in dirty, crowded cities, we need to be reminded that natural beauty surrounds us, and that we can and must delve deep into the mysteries of life. We need wide-open spaces, which Elizabeth Ashe writes about in the Faurchau Foundation Museum in Brooklyn, New York, with Yoko Ono's installation full of living trees planted in caskets, reminding us that the living emanates from the dead, with birdsong, uninterpretable by us but comforting nonetheless, and a live performance by Miles Greenberg embracing life. Liviana Martin also notes how embracing and images of water pervade

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 contributor@newartexaminer.net

**Deadline for articles/reviews: Pitch at any time:
December 5th - February 5th - April 5th - June 5th - August 5th - October 5th**

QUOTE of the MONTH:

“Where the material ends, art begins.

Etienne Hajdu



May 2023
Volume 37. No.5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURES:

- 8 **TIO JUAN MANTEL - UNSUNG HERO** Pablo Halguera
31 **INSTAGRAM'S PERFECT LIE** Darren Jones
16 **THE INFLUENCE OF MUSIC ON ART** Elga Wimmer

REVIEWS

NEW YORK

- 11 **FAURSCHOU NEW YORK** Elizabeth Ashe

MILAN

- 18 **BILL VIOLA** Liviana Martin

CHICAGO

- 37 **ART KLEINMANN, STRUCTURE AND CHAOS** Margaret Lanterman

DUBAI

- 35 **ART DUBAI** Rafi Abdullah

DEPARTMENTS:

- 2 **EDITORIAL** Nancy Nesvet
5 **SPEAKEASY – THE FRONTIERS OF ART & PROPAGANDA** George Orwell

INTERVIEW:

- 21 **LOCALIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS** Ewa Borysiewicz in conversation with Katarzyna Róniak-Szabelska

EDITORIAL OFFICES:

Assistant Editor
Josephine Gardiner (Sabbatical)

Chicago, Founded 1973
Editor: Margaret Lanterman

Washington DC, Founded 1980
Editor: TBA

New York, Founded 1985
Editor: Darren Jones

West Coast Editor, Founded 2019
Editor: Alexander Stanfield

Toronto, Founded 2017
Editor: Miklos Legrady

Paris, Founded 2018
Editor: Viktor Witkowski

Milan, Founded 2017
Editor: Liviana Martin

Cornwall, Founded 2015
TBA

Contributing Editors:
George Care, Cornwall

Books Editor:
Frances Oliver

Media Editor:
Dhyano Angius

WEBSITE: www.newartexaminer.net

UK Distributor: Central Books, London

Cover:

NAZAR laser electronic warfare system diverts the missile with a guided laser / Image taken from a video published by Meteksan's official Twitter account

The New Art Examiner is indexed in:
Art Bibliographies Modern, Art Full Text & Art Index Retrospective and Zetoc. It is in the British Library, Bodleian Libraries of the University of Oxford, Cambridge University Library, The National Library of Scotland, The Library of Trinity College, Dublin, The National Library of Wales, The Smithsonian, Washington DC.

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

The New Art Examiner is published from and registered in the UK.

Bill Viola's work. I cannot help but associate the work with the plight of refugees on wild seas and environmental disaster

Elga Wimmer writes about music and the absence of sound, without which there would be no appreciation for the sound that pervades music.

It is the contrast between knowing and not knowing but exploring, the contrast between nature and artist's commitment to let us escape our built environment to revel in images of nature and find order in the chaos. Wimmer asks how we connect visual arts with music and explores the immateriality of sound, realizing, in Theaster Gates' work and in Tamineh Monzavi's films how the international language of film and movement draws empathy from us all, even when spoken in a language not our own.

It is Vija Celmin's methodical drawings of spider webs that allow us to carefully inspect the intricate art of another species, melding the natural world with a true artist-made imitation of it. Perhaps we should look at Tomas Saraceno's metal wire installations made to look like spider webs, encased in plexiglass boxes to see how well imitations stack up to the real thing. We are reminded that Plato wrote that all art is imitation, and cannot approach the real and the good.

Maryanto's charcoal on canvas drawing, Palm Spirit, on view at Art Dubai, seen by writer Rafi Abdullah, shows so well the beauty of indigenous floras as the fair highlights threats to the beauty of the world's environment, also analyzing and correcting the Eurocentric gaze on work and fauna from outside the western canon and environment. An international art fair brings us together to appreciate natural beauty in our world, and the global threat to its and our existence.

This is what keeps me going, keeps me looking for and at art.

It is not enough to see a sunset or mountain or ocean once, or to imagine. Art is concrete. As Plato reminded us, we can only imitate the good, but we must imitate the beauty that we see, so we retain the image, and the search. That is what art is and is for. Joyce Kilmer may have written: "I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree." Especially in cities without easy access to the beauty of the natural landscape, art enables us to see imitations of beautiful nature, and to admire and seek solace in the reproduction and exploration.

Join us as we search and explore, casting the beam of light from Art Lantern to illuminate the world of art. It will be a worthwhile journey.

Nancy Nesvet

SPEAKEASY



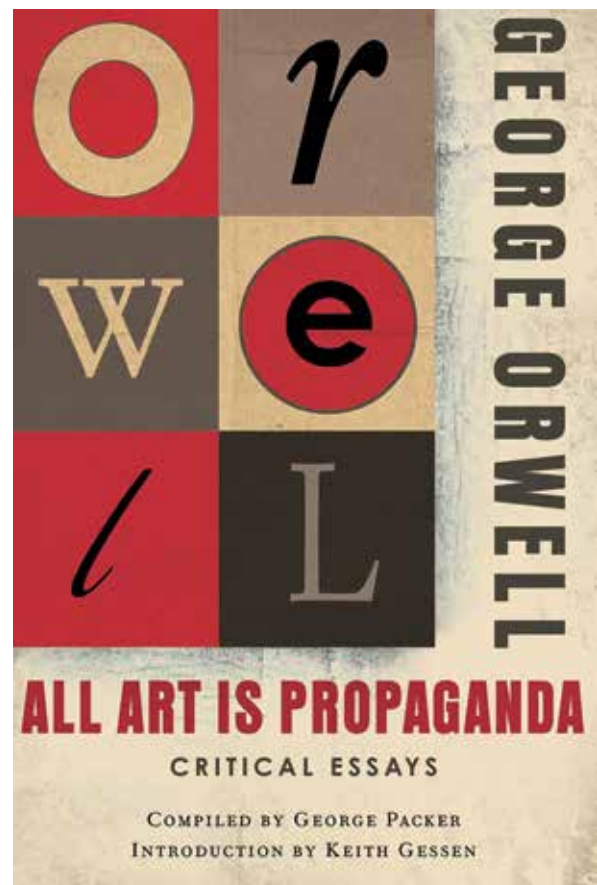
Each issue, the New Art Examiner invites a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest. George Orwell was one of the most influential; writers of the twentieth century with his investigation of Communism and Fascism in *Animal Farm*, and *1984* respectively. A colourful and prolific essayist the following was published in 1941 and as with all excellent writing, still rings true.

The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda

George Orwell

REPRINTED IN PREPARATION FOR A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO CRITIQUE ART.

I am speaking on literary criticism, and in the world in which we are actually living that is almost as unpromising as speaking about peace. This is not a peaceful age, and it is not a critical age. In the Europe of the last ten years literary criticism of the older kind – criticism that is really judicious, scrupulous, fair-minded, treating a work of art as a thing of value in itself – has been next door to impossible. If we look back at the English literature of the last ten years not so much at the literature as at the prevailing literary attitude, the thing that strikes us is that it has almost ceased to be aesthetic. Literature has been swamped by propaganda. I do not mean that all the books written during that period have been bad. But the characteristic writers of the time, people like Auden and Spender and MacNeice, have been didactic, political writers, aesthetically conscious, of course, but more interested in subject-matter than in technique. And the most lively criticism has nearly all of it been the work of Marxist writers, people like Christopher Caudwell and Philip Henderson and Edward Upward, who look on every book virtually as a political pamphlet and are far more interested in digging out its political and social implications than in its literary qualities in the narrow sense. This is all the more striking because it makes a very sharp and sudden contrast with the period immediately before it. The characteristic writers of the nineteen-twenties – T. S. Eliot, for instance, Ezra



Pound, Virginia Woolf – were writers who put the main emphasis on technique. They had their beliefs and prejudices, of course, but they were far more interested in technical innovations than in any moral or meaning or political implication that their work might contain. The best of them all, James Joyce, was a technician and very little else, about as near to being a ‘pure’ artist as a writer can be. Even D. H. Lawrence, though he was more of a ‘writer with a purpose’ than most of the others of his time, had not much of what we should now call social consciousness. And though I have narrowed this down to the nineteen-twenties, it had really been the same from about 1890 onwards. Throughout the whole of that period, the notion that form is more important than subject-matter, the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’, had been taken for granted. There were writers who disagreed, of course – Bernard Shaw was one – but that was the prevailing outlook. The most important critic of the period, George Saintsbury, was a very old man in the nineteen-twenties, but he had a powerful influence up to about 1930, and Saintsbury had always firmly upheld the technical attitude to art.

He claimed that he himself could and did judge any book solely on its execution, its manner, and was very nearly indifferent to the author’s opinions.

Now, how is one to account for this very sudden change of outlook? About the end of the nineteen-twenties you get a book like Edith Sitwell’s book on Pope, with a completely frivolous emphasis on technique, treating literature as a sort of embroidery, almost as though words did not have meanings: and only a few years later you get a Marxist critic like Edward Upward asserting that books can be ‘good’ only when they are Marxist in tendency. In a sense both Edith Sitwell and Edward Upward were representative of their period. The question is why should their outlook be so different?

I think one has got to look for the reason in external circumstances. Both the aesthetic and the political attitude to literature were produced, or at any rate



conditioned by the social atmosphere of a certain period. And now that another period has ended – for Hitler’s attack on Poland in 1939 ended one epoch as surely as the great slump of 1931 ended another – one can link back and see more clearly than was possible a few years ago the way in which literary attitudes are affected by external events. A thing that strikes anyone who looks back over the last hundred years is that literary criticism worth bothering about, and the critical attitude towards literature, barely existed in England between roughly 1830 and 1890. It is not that good books were not produced in that period. Several of the writers of that time, Dickens, Thackeray, Trollop and others, will probably be remembered longer than any that have come after them. But there are not literary figures in Victorian England corresponding to Flaubert, Baudelaire, Gautier and a host of others. What now appears to us

as aesthetic scrupulousness hardly existed. To a mid-Victorian English writer, a book was partly something that brought him money and partly a vehicle for preaching sermons. England was changing very rapidly, a new moneyed class had come up on the ruins of the old aristocracy, contact with Europe had been severed, and a long artistic tradition had been broken. The mid-nineteenth-century English writers were barbarians, even when they happened to be gifted artists, like Dickens.

... propaganda in some form or other lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning and a purpose — a political, social and religious purpose — that our aesthetic judgements are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs. It debunked art for art's sake.

But in the later part of the century contact with Europe was re-established through Matthew Arnold, Pater, Oscar Wilde and various others, and the respect for form and technique in literature came back. It is from then that the notion of 'art for art's sake' – a phrase very much out of fashion, but still, I think, the best available – really dates. And the reason why it could flourish so long, and be so much taken for granted, was that the whole period between 1890 and 1930 was one of exceptional comfort and security. It was what we might call the golden afternoon of the capitalist age. Even the Great War did not really disturb it. The Great War killed ten million men, but it did not shake the world as this war will shake it and has shaken it already. Almost every European between 1890 and 1930 lived in the tacit belief that civilization would last forever. You might be individually fortunate or unfortunate, but you had inside you the feeling that nothing would ever fundamentally change. And in that kind of atmosphere intellectual detachment, and also dilettantism, are possible. It is that feeling of continuity, of security, that could make it possible for a critic like Saintsbury, a real old crusted Tory and High Churchman, to be scrupulously fair to books written by men whose political and moral outlook he detested.

But since 1930 that sense of security has never existed. Hitler and the slump shattered it as the Great War and even the Russian Revolution had failed to shatter it. The writers who have come up since 1930 have been living in a world in which not only one's

life but one's whole scheme of values is constantly menaced. In such circumstances detachment is not possible. You cannot take a purely aesthetic interest in a disease you are dying from; you cannot feel dispassionately about a man who is about to cut your throat. In a world in which Fascism and Socialism were fighting one another, any thinking person had to take sides, and his feelings had to find their way not only into his writing but into his judgements on literature. Literature had to become political, because anything else would have entailed mental dishonesty. One's attachments and hatreds were too near the surface of consciousness to be ignored. What books were about seemed so urgently important that the way they were written seemed almost insignificant.

And this period of ten years or so in which literature, even poetry, was mixed up with pamphleteering, did a great service to literary criticism, because it destroyed the illusion of pure aestheticism. It reminded us that propaganda in some form or other lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning and a purpose – a political, social and religious purpose – that our aesthetic judgements are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs. It debunked art for art's sake. But is also led for the time being into a blind alley, because it caused countless young writers to try to tie their minds to a political discipline which, if they had stuck to it, would have made mental honesty impossible. The only system of thought open to them at that time was official Marxism, which demanded a nationalistic loyalty towards Russia and forced the writer who called himself a Marxist to be mixed up in the dishonesties of power politics. And even if that was desirable, the assumptions that these writers built upon were suddenly shattered by the Russo-German Pact. Just as many writers about 1930 had discovered that you cannot really be detached from contemporary events, so many writers about 1939 were discovering that you cannot really sacrifice your intellectual integrity for the sake of a political creed – or at least you cannot do so and remain a writer. Aesthetic scrupulousness is not enough, but political rectitude is not enough either. The events of the last ten years have left us rather in the air, they have left England for the time being without any discoverable literary trend, but they have helped us to define, better than was possible before, the frontiers of art and propaganda.

Tío Juan Manuel: Unsung Hero

IN PRAISE OF OUR QUIET MENTORS.

Pablo Halguera

Those who have navigated the complex career path of an artist usually keep a long list of individuals who played a key role in their formative years and without whom they could have never become who they are today. I often talk about how I, my parents, my siblings and my aunts, from whom I learned the love of art but also the basics of a work ethic and moral responsibility.

But going beyond immediate main family nucleus, I have also thought about who could be one of my unsung heroes, or, as I would also term it, a quiet mentor – a person who turned out to be very important in my artistic upbringing that almost no one knows about. I have been thinking about one in particular who sadly is no longer with us and who I regret not thanking publicly during his lifetime; one who gave me invaluable early inspiration and moral support: my uncle Juan Manuel Alarcón.

My father, who had to close a large bathroom and tile supply company in the 1970s due to financial struggles, subsequently reopened a new, micro-version of the same business from home, branded ‘Helguera y Compañía’, by retrofitting our home’s garage in Colonia Nápoles in Mexico City and turning it into a small showroom of which I have written about in the past. Of all the employees he once had the only one that faithfully remained with him throughout the closure, transition and reopening was literally family: my mom’s cousin, Juan Manuel.

Juan Manuel’s daily job, as executive business manager, was to produce invoices, estimates, conduct business over the phone, and handle correspondence, while my dad spent all day on the road visiting clients, closing sales and making deliveries. Because the office was at the entrance of our house, I would see him every day as I returned from school. “Hola Abo”, he would say (using the nickname that stuck to me since I was 2, when I could not properly pronounce my own name). Juan Manuel would sit all day at his desk, busily typing invoices making copies with carbon paper on his beloved 1960s Remington typewriter, which was the only professional typewriter we had (and one that my brother, then in college, liked to take to his room during weekends to type his papers, which my uncle did not love; on

Monday mornings he would be forced to come into the house and, tentatively standing by the stairs that led to the hallway next to our bedroom with my brother still fast asleep, start calling his name asking to get his typewriter back).

In 1985 I was 14 years old and fascinated by literature and opera. During the occasional Sunday family reunions I would be bedazzled by my mom’s brothers, my late uncles Enrique and Eduardo Lizalde, who were famous figures in Mexico’s cultural scene (Enrique was a soap opera star and Eduardo a famous poet). The whole Lizalde family were serious opera fans. My uncles and aunts often competed with each other investing in ever-fancier sound systems with the latest inventions of digital reproduction technology from the US (this is the era when CDs first became commercially available, as well as the then very fancy Laserdisc technology which was the precursor to DVDs) and also tried to outdo one another with acquiring the latest versions of opera production recordings featuring stars of the period like Domingo, Pavarotti, Norman, Freni, Caballé, and others.

I think often about the authenticity inherent in that kind of lifelong dedication where the desire to fully experience art is the true goal, and not the compulsion to narrate or flaunt one’s knowledge of it to assert one’s status. It is a quality that at times can make the projectionist, at least in that respect, sometimes stand above the film director.

The weekend gatherings were interminable lunches that would merge into dinners and after-dinner conversations populated by cigar smoke, tequila, wine, and cognac. The gigantic speakers would blast opera at such decibel levels that the house often felt like it was shaking as in a mild version of one of those fearsome Mexico City quakes. I was only a kid, an insignificant and inconsequential audience member,



Salvatore Di Vita (played by Jacques Perrin) and Toto (played by Salvatore Cascio) in Giuseppe Tornatore's Cinema Paradiso (1988)

©-1988-TF1-Studio-Cristaldifilm-TF1-Films-Production

hearing them with their deep and authoritative voices in conversation about politics, culture and of course opera (looking back, I wish Pierre Bourdieu would have been present at those gatherings as they would have really informed his thinking and could have helped him write an interesting epilogue to his 1979 work *Distinction*).

I wanted to learn about opera but I didn't know how to go about it. So I turned to my uncle Juan Manuel in the home office. He shared the same family passion, although he never pursued a professional artistic career. He nonetheless had a group of hard-core opera aficionados who religiously got together one Friday every month to listen to historic recordings.

When I approached Juan Manuel (not without certain hesitation) to ask him about this subject, he was delighted. He would talk to me on and on about opera – evidently a great respite for him from the grueling office work he had to do every day, to the point that I remember worrying that I was distracting him too much from the work he needed to do for my dad. He then started bringing me recordings in cassette tapes he made at home (all of which I still keep) of those operas. The first was *Il Campanello* by Gaetano Donizetti, followed by other operas including some of his favorites, Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Arabella* (which has a famous duet that he loved

and which always reminds me of him). Because he was born in the early 1920s and started collecting opera since he was a teenager, he had a priceless collection of 78 and 45 RPM records. I would listen to those recordings and discuss each version with him. Fascinated, I would hear about the famous singers he heard in his youth at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in the 1940s and 50s, regaling me with anecdotes such as the time when Maria Callas, performing *Aida* at Bellas Artes in June of 1951, surprisingly sang a near-superhuman E Flat toward the close of the Triumphant Scene that completely brought down the house and became one of the most legendary moments in the history of recorded opera.

In 1989, my family moved to Chicago. My father closed his business shortly before that time, and as a result I lost touch with my uncle, even though we spoke over the phone every now and then.

While I never became an opera singer, that teenage exposure to opera and particularly to the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk that opera embodies, likely informed my later interest in performance art and in multi-disciplinarity, narrative, scoring and the use of drama.

In later years, Juan Manuel saw me as if I were a famous artist, which I found ridiculous and made me blush with embarrassment. But even while he had

an oversized image of me, I always appreciated his tireless cheer-leading and enthusiasm. In our brief conversations over the years when I visited Mexico or we spoke over the phone our interactions sometimes reminded me of Alfredo, the projectionist from the film *Cinema Paradiso*, who guides a young teenager Salvatore in the art of film and encourages him to go out into the world to become a professional artist.

In 2012, I had a solo exhibition at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, the very place of which Juan Manuel told me so many stories about going to hear legendary operas. He strenuously insisted on attending the opening, I was told, in spite of the family's concern for his frail health. And attend he did, a 89 year-old man in a wheelchair, negotiating the architectural maze and multiple marble stairs that conform the grand vestibule of Bellas Artes.

The following year, when I was launching *Librería Donceles*, a social practice project in the form non-profit used Spanish language bookstore, and I was asking for used book donations in Mexico City, he called me. He had assembled several boxes of invaluable old books from his personal library that he wanted to donate for the project. They were the books of his youth: Spanish-language translations of novels by Emilio Salgari, Edmondo de Amicis, Rudyard Kipling and other authors who constituted the go-to international literature for young readers in the Spanish-speaking world of the 1940s. I remember telling him "Tío, I can't accept you giving me these books – they are too valuable, they are collector items", and his touching response to me: "I want you to have them for this project: I will not be around much longer and I want to make sure these books go in good hands."

Juan Manuel passed away at 93, in 2016. There were no national news or cultural reportage about his passing. But his impact was deep and lasting for many, and certainly in my case. He never once asked anything of me; yet what I received from him was priceless: most importantly – and something that I only understood many years later, as an adult, an educator and an artist– was the very simple lesson that the love for art is both independent of, and more important than, the pursuit of social or professional status.

I attribute my admiration of the pure, disinterested investment in art exemplified by Juan Manuel to my instinctive scepticism of the cult of connoisseurship. While I am not the first one to advocate for the need for and importance of the engaged and critical study of the arts, we all know that a pitfall of connoisseurship is the tendency toward the formation



Juan Manuel Alarcón (1923-2016)
(photos courtesy of Alarcón family)

of discriminating hierarchies where knowledge becomes a gatekeeping mechanism and a frivolous status symbol. In other words, Bourdieu: "Taste is first and foremost distaste, disgust and visceral intolerance of the taste of others."

In *Cinema Paradiso*, after Alfredo dies and Salvatore, now a film director, returns to his hometown for Alfredo's funeral, he realizes how the professional world he now lives in (and perhaps his very own persona) is riddled with affectation and pretence, the opposite of the authentic world which Alfredo embodied.

All proportion kept, as someone who had left their country to become an artist I recognized that divide all the same. I think often about the authenticity inherent in that kind of lifelong dedication where the desire to fully experience art is the true goal, and not the compulsion to narrate or flaunt one's knowledge of it to assert one's status. It is a quality that at times can make the projectionist, at least in that respect, sometimes stand above the film director.

Faurschou New York, the Space Itself

Elizabeth Ashe

Faurschou New York has such poise it almost feels like it could qualify as its own zip code in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. It's located an easy walk from the metro, with eateries nearby. The façade picture windows are inviting to wonder what is going on inside. For the opening reception, it was bustling, full of visitors and active staff even half-way through the evening. Even with hundreds of visitors it did not feel cramped, and walking around others and the art, was easy. Foundation staff were friendly and didn't interrupt the viewers awe. They hired Cultural Counsel to handle their marketing and be a first face inside the door, which was extra welcoming after e-mail correspondence. There were coat checkers, door security, gallery attendants, caterers, and a videographer covering the performance piece. The gallery attendants were informed and could talk about the work easily for a few minutes. The lobby entrance and side rooms for catering or other prep, coat storage, and individual rest rooms, make it

functional and polished. Extra high ceilings – some warehouse-exposed rafters, and some smoothed out, with modern track lighting, and skylights provide the extra touches to three dominating exhibition rooms. The widest entryway goes from the lobby to the first room, then the entrances to the second and third spaces are wider-than-standard, and reach nearly to the ceiling. Due to the high ceilings, it would be easy to add temporary walls that allow light to travel and still be tall enough to create a well-defined exhibition room. The spaces are polished, modern and with minimal distraction. This successful, visual continuation from one space to the next by way of such open doorways, is a gentle coaxing to keep exploring. Going to an exhibit there is an experience where art, breathing-room, and architectural planning work together. It is, in short, perfect for performances, massive paintings, and installations.

Embrace the World from Within

LOUISE BOURGEOIS, MILES GREENBERG, YOKO ONO

Elizabeth Ashe

The Faurschou Foundation, headed by onetime art dealer Jens Faurschou, opened its 12,000 sq ft. New York museum exhibition space in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, New York in 2019 in a redesigned former shoe factory, continuing in the tradition of its museums in Copenhagen and Beijing of showing the work of contemporary artists and foster cross-cultural exchange, especially between the global east and west. Having shown since 2019 artists including Ai Wei Wei, Cai Guo-Qiang, Tracey Emin, Anselm Kiefer, Ragnar Kjartansson, Liu Wei, Paul McCartney, Shirin Neshat, Gabriel Orozco, Robert Rauchenberg, Bill

Viola, Dan Ho and more, the present show features work by Louise Bourgeois, Yoko Ono and Miles Greenberg does not shy away from politics. Continuing comment on the human condition following the first December 2019 show, "The Red Barn Grows in the South" which included themes of violence, war, olitivs, idealism, escapism, desire, hopes and memory, (from the catalogue essay) this show speaks to the condition of the world and its people.

The one story space with incredible space and high ceilings was chosen to allow for the large installations preferred by the Curators of the foundation..



Yoko Ono: Ex It Fallen Cherry Blossoms

They have taken full advantage of the space, showing work that reflects the environmentally conscious and artistically adventurousness of the foundation. The latest exhibit, open on April 1, *Embrace the World from Within* showcases the work of Yoko Ono, Louise Bourgeois, and Miles Greenberg, each with their own massive room. Each installation embraces the body in a set space, whether the body connects to Classical sculpture, ultimately temporal and in/famous, or to the natural landscape. In the first room is Greenberg's piece, *The Embrace*. It is an endurance performance, where a "tender union of a couple becomes a sculptural form," (entry wall text) – two mid-twenties Black men, nude but for skin-tone underwear, underneath a hot spotlight, sit on a boulder, atop six inches of salt water within a glass open-top cube, a 6' or 8' square. One is Greenberg himself. A drip of fresh water from overhead joins them and their reflection in the pool of saltwater. The room was dark, lit only by the light above the performers, and leaked in from the other rooms. The performers wore white contact lenses, blinding them, making them color blind to each other. The contact lenses reminded me of the uncanniness of Classical sculptures – perfectly muscled bodies, with blank, full eyes, set with elements of nature, standing against time itself. The lenses made them unable to see the viewers filling the room. The inti-

macy of the performers, and how they held one another, was elegant. They communicated through touch, holding one another safe on the boulder. When one needed to shift, they shifted. Towards the end of the evening, one had to tap out for a few minutes. The remaining one, curled up and hugged himself. This brief shift from two to one, changed what 'intimacy' looked like. As one, his body curled up almost like a rock himself, ducked away from the light. Together, they shielded so much of themselves, and the world outside of their rock didn't matter.

The audience could queue up in the far corner for ice cream in paper cups, which made for an interactive, sensory, full-contrast individual hug in comfort-food, extra torture and heightened sensitivity. Enjoy a treat in a dim room, while the performers' sweat collected and dripped down a leg, into the salt water. Greenberg studied under Marina Abramović (who attended part of opening night), and endurance works often include thick white contact lenses for the performers and an element of liquid. The performance of "Embrace" returns Saturdays from 1-7pm.

"One day let's be a pair of trees
Nobody'll know that the trees had
Such a history"
"Dogtown", by Yoko Ono

WATER TALK
You are water
I'm water
We're all water in different containers
That's why it's so easy to meet
Someday we'll evaporate together

But even after the water's gone
We'll probably point out to the containers
And say, "that's me there, that one."
We're container minders

For Half-A-Wind Show, Lisson Gallery, London 1967

The Yoko Ono room has two projects, *Ex It* and *Water Talk*. *Ex It*, realized several times in the last twenty-five years, greets you with row upon row of young trees – cherry trees in full and shedding bloom, pine, and I think ornamental pear and another fruit tree – planted in raw pine coffins. Bird songs play overhead. The coffins have squared, open holes where a face would be for each mature sapling, and contain enough dirt for several years of growth. But one day, they will break through from their roof-bound coffins, exiting in the need for more sustenance. The



Miles Greenberg: The Embrace



Louise Bourgeois: Nature Study

bird songs fade with visitors talking, but the song never stops. The coffins themselves are the meta of trees – pines contain more water than other species, so much so that we consider them an easy and replaceable building material with less commercial value than hardwoods. Pine is harvested and then hidden by construction, pauper coffins, or paper. These young trees have reached a certain value, a certain beauty, but are so much stronger in this art forest where some branches touch, and some coffins are child-sized. In most versions of the installation, there are 100 coffins – ten for children, forty for women, sixty for men, and although I didn't count, it feels like there are more at Faurschou New York. Will the skylights in the distant ceiling provide enough sun? Will they be left to die slowly? How many visitors will sit on the coffins, admiring the trees? Even in coffins, this is a room of hope and dreams for all of our own eventual exits, with one life serving the next. There is a deep-set resilience and life in this installation, as if the dead partner were the pine box, embracing the continued life of the tree within and unseen birds. Even boxed in, life continues. There is a wide sky to grow and sing in. "Ex It" was also exhibited at the Faurschou Foundation in Beijing.

Along the far-left wall is "Water Talk," a row of lidded, glass jars on a white shelf. On each jar is a small, handwritten label in Japanese of the name represented by the water. Directly on the viewer-edge of the white shelf, the name is written in English with white vinyl letters. The names are those of artists, politicians, thinkers, the famous and the infamous. Lennon and Ono, are several jars distant from each other. Vincent van Gogh is beside Ai Weiwei, David Bowie by John Cage, Bill Gates by Osama Bin Laden, and Lao Tzu – who wrote "the best of men is like water," is flanked by Samuel Beckett and Genghis Khan. I hope to imagine the conversations they could have while they slowly evaporate, sipped at by the air. Volumes of human history can be attributed to these names. And if you cannot read English or Japanese, they are all just water, purely the same. They are still, stripped and bared down to nothing but a name and a jar of water. Water can become whatever it needs to be. As the word "vessel" shares a history with "concept," both of Yoko's projects simplify idea and embrace. Basing each identity off our core element, proves that water holds so much potential and sameness across all life.

Louise Bourgeois

Bourgeois' six sculptures are in the final room. After each sculpture, there is a dimly lit pause and several steps – providing plenty of room to examine each in the round, as well as from a distance in an almost

haunting way. They serve as chapters and represent major themes in her work. Of the six, three grab me most in illustrating the "Embrace" theme. Beginning from the left is a definitely pink, six-breasted, pawed and headless Nature Study, 1984-1996. It has been cast in many materials and patinas, and according to the Tate's catalogue, Louise Bourgeois, 2007, the artist considered it "self-portrait, an animal metamorphosis {...} combining fertility symbols {...} with that of a household guardian." For her, pink was femininity and happiness, while the multiple breasts are a nod to a fierce maternity that is both male, female, god, goddess, guardian. The haunches and uprisen pose are vigilant, ready to be mother and ready to launch into a protective role. Like her Maman series, Nature Study hits her core theme of maternity and developing an archetype in her work, based on classical mythological roots. In the middle hangs Fée Couturière, 1963, ("Fairy Dressmaker" or tailorbird) with opposing spotlights, casting two solid shadows on the ground. Painted white, it looks timeless, a cliff dwelling for fairies turned into a wishing star. A giant, multi-caverned bird nest. I don't know if it's the white paint or the number of closed-off caves, the triangular psychology of those caves, or the rough-shaped texture, but it feels lighter than its cast shadows. Like it is full of possibility to be worn and taken on by several individuals in all sizes and needs for dress. In the far corner, The Blind Leading the Blind, 1947-49. I love it for its simplicity and pose directly on the ground, for the many tiptoed, spike-referential bodies connected and leading one another at the arm, waist or head, depending on the viewer. The board connecting them is the weight of the world, the point of their connection, and confined isolation. Their totemic shape feels like it doesn't matter which way they go -- they can go forward, back, upward, be self-reflective – what matters is they embrace one another.

An embrace is so universal across species – it's the first instinct after seeing a friend. It's one of the most important points of connection. The importance of a hug is one of those sincere yet simple lessons across generations. As a form of given communication, hugs can be comfortable, or uneasy, or desperately needed. "Embrace the World from Within" is the perfect, encapsulating title for these works by Ono, Bourgeois, and Greenberg. As projects in and of themselves, they fully embraced their elements. For viewers, each gave a different experience and level of interaction in these spaces.

The Influence of Music in Art

Elga Wimmer

This is a journey through music and the visual arts, from New York to Paris to Dubai and back to New York, investigating artists whose work is based on or influenced by music. Throughout history, music and art have been considered a divine match, but how does that pairing translate into contemporary practice?

Today music is instantly available on everyone's smartphone, creating a sonic atmosphere in every space we move through, from corporate offices to restaurants to gyms. How do visual artists pick and choose from this overload to utilize sound in their sculptures, paintings, videos, films, and performances?

Patrice LeRochereuil, a French artist residing in New York since 1987, manifests an affinity with the Fluxus movement in his performances, drawings, paintings, and sculptures. Sound and music are very prevalent in such works as *Do-mi-do Dominos* (2018), a painting of a piano whose keys correspond to dominos bearing different numbers, each matching a musical note. Much like Fluxus members Dieter Roth and Wolf Vostell, LeRochereuil sometimes destroys instruments. In his performance *Let Me Die...* (2018) he created an aggravating sound by drilling holes into a guitar with an electric tool. The artist started the performance by playing a Bob Dylan song on his guitar, then stopped, started drilling, and repeated the process, until the guitar was no longer functional (Zurich, Cabaret Voltaire, *100 years of Dada*, 2016). Thus, the guitar punctuated with holes, became a sculpture like a Duchampian ready-made. It also recalls a certain violence, but in a poetic and humorous sense, which is the essence of #LeRochereuil's body of work.

On a recent visit to the Sharjah Biennial, I stopped in Dubai, where I discovered Efie Gallery in the Alserkal district – Dubai's version of New York's Chelsea – a contemporary art gallery highlighting work by artists of African origin. After I toured the show of Ethiopian artist Aida Muluneh on the ground floor, gallery director Kwame Mintah led me to the second floor Rekord Gallery, which displays rare vinyl records from around the world. These disks are one of our richest art forms, encompassing the artistry of the cover, the historical specificity of the liner notes,



Phonemophoni: Alphabet Brass Band Armory NY, courtesy Carol Szymanski studio

and the music itself. Rekord Gallery is a Pandora's box of records, including works such as *Ikoyi Blindness* (1975) by Nigerian artist Fela Kuti, *The Word II* (1975) by Japanese artist Shigeo Sekito, and *Prince of Space, Musik der Leere* (1959) by legendary French artist Yves Klein. For the Klein piece, Charles Wilp conducted the Outer Space Philharmonic Orchestra in a no sound recording, the ear detecting only the sound of the needle touching the record. This composition related perfectly to Yves Klein's 1958 show without art, *The Void* at Iris Clert in Paris. The gallery, painted white by the artist, exhibited only an empty display case.

At Marclay's recent show at the Centre Pompidou, a wall was covered with 'body mixes,' record covers that are mixed and stacked to form surrealist bodies (the face of David Bowie, the midriff of a female in jeans, the legs of a woman in lace stockings) – a kind of Exquisite Corpse of iconic, sexy album covers, displayed in a playful installation. The wall felt like a visual memorial to pop legends from Diana Ross to Grace Jones, from Bowie to Prince. Marclay perfectly matches high and low art, pop icons and classical conductors, play and politics.

The work of multi-media artist Christian Marclay, based in New York and London, also has its origin in the realm of sound. Since the late 1970s, he has explored the potential of vinyl records bought mostly in flea markets and manipulated manually on turntables, as well as myriad digital samples. He collages



Rekord Gallery @Effe Gallery

diverse fragmentary tracks to create unique sound objects. Like Yves Klein, Marclay is fascinated by the invisibility and seeming immateriality of sound. At the same time, he takes an interest in physical objects relating to music.

What you cannot hear or see is often a major element of Marclay's work. His installation *Guitar Drag* (2000) features a video shot in Texas, where the artist dragged an electric guitar behind a pickup truck. The resulting cacophony, channeled through an amplifier, evokes noise music and the destruction of instruments at rock concerts. The Fender Stratocaster, dragged like a body behind the truck, evokes a dark history of Southern slavery and the Blues— as well, more specifically, the murder of James Byrd Jr. near Jasper, Texas, in 1998.

Since the late 1980's, New York artist Carol Szymanski has used phonetic symbols, sound, and language to create brass sculptures resembling musical instruments. Szymanski's practice also includes compositions that are then played on her 'instruments' by professional musicians. She points out that the human body and mouth shape the sound

that is then transferred to her sculptures. In October 2022, Szymanski presented the world premiere of the Phonemophonic Alphabet Brass Band, a collaboration between the sculptor and avant-garde trumpeter Jaimie Branch. This performance at the historic Park Avenue Armory in Manhattan, featured an aural animation of 26 brass-horn sculptures, whose shapes are based on the phonetic alphabet.

Tahmineh Monzavi is an Iranian artist working in film and photography. *Past Continues* (2008 -2016) is a series of short films shot in abandoned worn-torn homes and historic buildings in Afghanistan and Iran. There performers dance, sing and recite in their native language, conveying a sense of tragedy. In one of the films on a derelict site – with only a cat wandering through – musician Fazila Zamiri (from Kabul) plays eerie sounds on a rubab (a plucked shell neck lute, the national instrument of Afghanistan). She is a well-known member of the Afghanistan Music Academy. In another film in the series, Iranian artist Ava Darvishi (well known in the theater of Tehran), dances in a ruin to music by her sister, Aftab Darvishi, in a manner reminiscent of the Dance



Tahmineh Monzavi: Past Continues, musician Fazila Zumin

of the Seven Veils (Salome's dance before King Herod, as presented in Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*). The actress and performer, dressed in black veils, expresses profound sorrow and lament. Women in Afghanistan and Iran, despite efforts to make them invisible, have raised their voices to oppose dictatorship and war through what American author Hakim Bey called poetic terrorism, a way to stop people in their tracks by peaceful and poetic demonstration. Theaster Gates uses music as a means of communicating across social and racial borders, part of his multidisciplinary blend of social practice, activism, performance artist, and visionary urban development. At Documenta 13 (2012), he set up residence in an abandoned hotel, the Huguenot House, with his artist friends, who randomly came together for jam sessions. The performances of The Black Monks of Mississippi made the Huguenot House a central hub for the spiritual life of Documenta 13. This perfor-

mance was transferred in part to this year's Sharjah Biennial (February 7 to June 11), with the presentation of the film *Billy Sings Amazing Grace* (2013), chronicling a rehearsal of The Black Monks. Drawing from Blues in his improvisation, singer Billy Forston gives a heart-wrenching gospel-like performance. The rawness of his delivery is captivating, recalling early Blues greats like Bessie Smith and Blind Lemon Jefferson. Theaster Gates's work never ceases to surprise!

The symbiosis of music, visual art, and performance prompts a complex emotional response, stimulating several senses at once, unlocking emotions, triggering memories, and inspiring action. The contemporary artists in 'The Influence of Music in Art' use that power with great effectiveness.

The *New Art Examiner* welcomes reviews on books of visual cultural significance.

Please send you review 500- 800 words per book to:

ukeditor@newartexaminer.net

Subject headed BOOK REVIEW

Please include the full details of the title, author, publisher, date and ISBN.`

Bill Viola in Milan

Liviana Martin



Exhibition view.

Exciting, engaging, a journey inside oneself: for Bill Viola's exhibition, which began in Milan and will end on June 25th, these descriptions are nothing compared to the sensations that the artist's videos made me feel. Imagine dark, muffled rooms, where the only lights come from figures in very slow movement, now far away, now very close, with bright colors or in a milky black and white. Each video speaks to us: depending on our experiences, we think we see our anxieties, joys, hopes, profound themes such as reflection on life and death.

Bill Viola was born in New York in 1951. Pioneer of video art, in over forty years of career, he has explored the possibilities of video, creating a powerful aesthetic language, influenced by his stay in Florence in 1974, as technical director of the experimental center art/ tapes/22 , and by his travels in the East, especially in Japan. The contrasts between Western and Eastern culture harmonize in his work, they complement each other. Viola says that his art is neither cinema nor painting, but an expansion of

the levels of reality. His installations are extraordinary experiences of immersion in space, image and sound. Time is dilated, slowed down, stopped; the movements become very slow, until the irruption of something unexpected that takes us by surprise, as happens in life.

Water is one of the recurring motifs in his work. The artist says that as a child he almost drowned, but cites that episode as one of the best memories of his life. He sat "Buddha-like" on the bottom of the lake and was mesmerized by the beauty of the underwater world. Many of his videos reproduce the motif of water, which pours, submerges, flows, a vital or mortal element.

In the video *The Raft* (2004), a group of people of different ethnic origins and social backgrounds are suddenly hit by a powerful jet of water: the water overwhelms everything, the bodies are thrown to the ground, their faces are devastated from anguish in front of an inexplicable force. Suddenly, the water stops, leaving behind a group of disoriented and



Exhibition view

aching individuals, but aware of their need to collaborate in order to survive unexpected catastrophes.

In *Tristan's Ascension* the body of a dead man is shown in glaring black and white, lying on a block of gray stone. For a long time nothing happens: suddenly, a waterfall pours down on him ever more violently, until the man ascends towards the heavens in a sort of transfiguration, of ascent of the soul into space after death.

During his stays in Tuscany in the 1970s, Viola breathed the Renaissance everywhere: in the churches, in the squares, in the architecture of the palaces. One of his most beautiful works, *The Greeting* (1995), is inspired by the Visitation, a painting by Pontormo, a Tuscan painter from the 1500s. The video, lasting 10 min. 22 sec. in slow motion, shows the meeting of two women, one young and one old, to which a third will be added later. Pontormo's painting refers to an episode of the Gospel which tells of the meeting between Mary, pregnant with Jesus, and Saint Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist. At the beginning of the video, the two women embrace, talk and practically nothing happens. When a third woman appears out of nowhere (perhaps an

angel who has come to protect them), the whole situation changes. The slowing down of the movements creates a before and after with respect to the narrated scene. Every slightest variation and blowing of the wind are examined in the smallest details: the colored dresses that move, the tender gestures of the embrace, the changing of the expressions that bring to light also the unconscious aspects of the characters.

The video projection *Emergence* (2002), lasting 11 min. 40sec, refers to the fresco *Cristo in pietà* (1424) by the Tuscan painter Masolino da Panicale (which depicts Christ rising from the tomb, supported by the Madonna and St. John). Two women watch sitting on either side of a marble well, marked by a cross. Slowly, the very pale body of a young man emerges from the well-sepulchre: first the head appears, then with great effort the body, causing the water to overflow from the well. The two women hold him up and place him on the ground, covering him with a cloth.

The water that flows from the sepulchre is a reference to both the beginning (the amniotic fluid) and the end of life. Christian thought and Eastern spirituality come together in an original syncretism.

As Domenico Piraina, director of Palazzo Reale writes,

"Bill Viola's works invite us to savor life, to reflect on what is truly essential, indispensable, primary, to focus on ourselves, on our thoughts, on our feelings, on our emotions."

Bill Viola, Palazzo Reale, Milan

February 25 - June 25, 2023

Tickets - 15 euro

Localization and Its Discontents

Ewa Borysiewicz in conversation with Katarzyna Róniak-Szabelska

Ewa Borysiewicz: I have been thinking about this a lot myself, and this is one of the reasons I wanted to talk with you, since it's difficult to find an answer alone – the art world is changing, and it seems to me that these changes are not for the better. The Polish art world is becoming more and more ossified, more conservative, there is a huge and painful institutional turn to the right. On the other hand, one can observe a commercialization – to a caricatural degree even – of artistic position. I was wondering how you act and work, in the art field in the face of these processes, is there a way not to give in to these processes. Have you managed to find a path of your own in this situation, or are you still looking for one?

Katarzyna Róziak-Szabelska: It is true that with the takeover of more public institutions by the right-wing government, we have found ourselves in a trap in which the art market and commercial galleries are sometimes presented as the alternative. And it would be a dangerous situation to let the logic of market-driven entities exclusively decide the direction of art. As for me personally, when I started to work in the field of art I had to go through various places. I started in a commercial gallery, knowing however that art dealing won't be a satisfactory path for someone with beliefs like my own. Later, I worked in the Collection Department of the University of Arts in Poznan, where in turn I was surprised by its extremely conservative structure.

For the past three years I have been a curator at the Arsenal Gallery in Bialystok, which is a municipal institution. This position seems to provide opportunities to resist both the commercialization of art and right-wing pressures. Because so far – at least at the level of institutional or municipal decisions – Arsenal remains unaffected by the conservative turn. Which is not to say that we don't face it in a broader context.

EB: I understand that for the institution, exposure to the conservative tendencies is discernible not so much in the administrative spheres, but in the wider field of public debate.



*Kem School in Bialystok within the exhibition
Deschool: Arsenal Gallery in Bialystok
photo Tytus Szabelski.*

KR-S: Yes. That, in any case, is my experience. We are forced to deal with the backlash from the right-wing press and conservative groups. Their actions are calculated to intimidate contemporary art institutions and their employees and are often well organized. My first such experience was working with Matthew Post (as Post Brothers) on the exhibition "In the Beginning was the Deed!" [1]. The project took as its starting point the history of insurrectionary anarchism in Bialystok around the 1905 revolution. With statements both anti-capitalist and allied to the LGBTQ+ movements, and with a focus on radical strategies of struggle, it provoked strong opposition from conservative circles. Right-wing organizations filed notices of possible crime with the prosecutor's office, so we had to testify before the police. The right-wing media waged a long and stressful campaign against the institution. In consequence, the gallery employees received offensive phone calls and faced a serious social media crisis. Fearing physical attacks, we had to hire additional security, and eventually the city sent a police patrol that circled the gallery every hour. Quite an absurd performance for a show dealing with police violence!

KR-S: That's correct. The historical context of this exhibition emerged from the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century, Bialystok – a city of work-



*Asier Mendizábal: Not all that moves is red (Telón) #X, 2012. In the beginning was the deed!
Arsenal Gallery in Bialystok.
Photo Tytus Szabelski.*

ers, undergoing merciless modernization – gave birth to the most radical fractions of anarchism worldwide, including groups like „Chernoje Znamia”, that believed in violence as the only way to fight injustice. Therefore, the need of the oppressed for revenge, as well as their agency, were important dilemmas problematized in the show. That’s why, together with Matthew, we wanted to present “Fag Fighters” by Karol Radziszewski. The project, started in 2007, depicts a fictional gay guerilla in a pink balaclava, humorously embodying right-wing fears and stereotypical perceptions about the transgressions of the gay community, which, according to some right-wing fantasies, carry out sexual assaults on straight men. For the show at Arsenal, the artist – originally from this city – updated the installation with documentation of assaults by both hooligans and city residents that occurred during the first Pride March in Bialystok in 2019. This footage was integrated into the work in a way that suggested that these attackers would be the targets of the Fag Fighters. On the one hand, the work gives a lot of power and agency to the excluded group. On the other hand, in a laboratory space of an art institution, the need for revenge of the oppressed community could

also be worked through without embodying it in real life, allowing difficult emotions to be processed and understood.

Obviously it is difficult to function in a reality that negates leftist values, but it was also a very constructive experience, one that showed that contemporary art spaces can be important not only for artists or a narrow milieu of art professionals, but also for the city and its inhabitants, even more so on the periphery. We received thanks from young people who were afraid to walk around the city on their own since the march. They appreciated our courage for being so blunt about discrimination in Bialystok. It made us realize just how little systemic support is available here, and how big it automatically (and quite unexpectedly) made the role we suddenly occupied in the city’s public debate.

EB: You were able to take a stand as an institution, but I imagine the backlash was also felt personally by the individual members of Arsenal’s team.

KR-S: Yes. It can be said that resisting the conservative turn was a challenge for the whole team in this case, but it is worth noting at the same time that we



*Karol Radziszewski: Fag Fighters in Białystok, 2021. In the beginning was the deed!
Arsenal Gallery in Białystok
Photo Tytus Szabelski.*

were enabled to do so by working from the position of a city institution. However, I also think a lot in this context about the phenomenon of self-censorship. Current debates in Poland or reports, such as those prepared by AICA[2], deal with events that have taken place publicly. Meanwhile, I think every institutional director or curator, after leading a team through such trauma, thinks twice before taking on another “controversial” project, and asks themselves whether they have the strength to go through all these consequences again, or whether they have the right to burden their employees in this way. We are still lacking truly efficient inter-institutional support networks or effective procedures for acting in emergencies like these. I guess we will never know the extent of intimidation and its effects on institutional programming.

But just so we’re clear: I don’t want to idealize public institutions. For sure, they are not free of hierarchy or the problems that result from these structures. But at some point, you have to choose the position from which you’re going to act. Discussions about the non-institutional organization of art spaces may sound attractive, but often overlook the financial aspect of such activities. To be honest, with no other

type of income or economic security, I find it hard to imagine working totally outside the existing system. So, I must choose to believe that public institutions with stable funding and the ability to reach a wide audience still offer opportunities to influence their environment and public debate through art. As long as we remember that their internal practices should be aligned with the declared values.

EB: Looking at the exhibitions you’ve put together – I’m referring to “Deschool!”, the solo show of Alicja Rogalska, or the aforementioned „In the Beginning Was the Deed!” – they are attempts to relate to the place in which they are located, and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, in their very core they have some kind of potential for change outside the gallery space. When you plan an exhibition, do you have any specific expectations about the outcome?

KR-S: I’d like to answer your question about locality first. Indeed, this has been a key reference for my work in Białystok. Podlasie’s peripheral location, in the context of a borderland, of its historical multiculturalism (in opposition to the contemporary popularity of nationalist sentiments in the region),



*Yarema Malashchuk & Roman Khimei: Dedicated to the Youth of the World II
2019 at the exhibition So They Won't Say We Don't Remember
Arsenal Gallery in Białystok
Photo Tytus Szabelski-Różniak.*

revolutionary history or its proximity to the last primeval forest in Europe, makes it a place from which we can learn a lot. I believe an art institution can and should be a place that generates knowledge based on various local experiences.

Constructing local histories and identities has been recently addressed in the exhibition of a Czech photographic duo Lukáš Jasanský and Martin Polák[3]. In 2019, they produced a series of photographs resulting from an accidental visit to the Alfons Karny Sculpture Museum in Białystok, an institution that presents the artistic oeuvre of the portrait sculptor who was born here. The museum features his “Gallery of Great Poles”.

One of the most interesting things I’ve read about the relationship between historical multiculturalism and contemporary nationalism in this city is a text by local sociologist Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska, who used the term “folder multiculturalism”. According to her, though in every tourist folder the statement: “Białystok was and is a multicultural city” appears, the common story of Białystok still lacks specific figures or events that would clearly describe (or represent) this multiculturalism. Both the results of surveys of Białystok residents’, regarding their consciousness and the way official histories of the city are written or depicted in public space, marginalize the stories of the city’s non-Polish residents. The same goes for most public institutions. The exclusive subject of the project entitled “J/P/K Jasanský Polák Karny”, are frontally photographed busts from

the Alfons Karny Museum collection. But while reminiscent of records from a museum inventory, the series maintains an aura of objectivity, while also presenting humorous elements and the artists’ distance from heroic narratives. The presentation of this project in Białystok, however, was also meant to question the construction of local identity and the role that institutions play in this process. How does a city, created by Jews, Poles, Belarussians, Russians, Germans and Ukrainians, decide to set up a museum with a “Gallery of Great Poles”?! And how does this translate into contemporary attitudes towards people of other nationalities?

Art can critique stagnant narratives, but it can also build representations of overlooked histories, pointing to their potential for creating a better future. Within “In the Beginning Was the Deed!” Matt and I had the opportunity to restore the revolutionary history of the city. The beginning of the 20th century is – in the official narrative of the city and the local Historical Museum – a period of prosperity and time of industrial boon. Nowhere is there any mention of the mass multicultural labor movements active in Białystok at the time. For the first time, through the project, local activists were able to combine this history with their present-day struggles. We have initiated research into the as-yet unwritten chapters of the history of Białystok anarchism, calling at the same time for global solidarity. And I can see this from the reception of our exhibitions, that in those moments when we touch upon local problems and



*Public Movement: One Day, 13.05.2022, Bialystok
Photo Tytus Szabelski.*

are not afraid to talk about them, we have the strongest impact on the audience closest to us. Then again, I understand “the local” also in the broader context of Central and Eastern Europe. This is also why I always imagined working here at some point, even before any real opportunity ever came up. Thanks to Monika Szewczyk’s consistent strategy of cooperation with artists from Ukraine and Belarus, Arsenal is a valued and recognized institution in these countries and establishing further relations is easier. Last year I was able to organize an exhibition of the young Ukrainian artists and filmmakers, Yarema Malshchuk and Roman Khimei[4], which was dedicated to relations between different generations of Ukrainian citizens and residents of the various regions of the country. An undertaking even more important in the context of the influx of Ukrainian newcomers, who were forced to flee to Poland after the full-scale Russian invasion commenced.

EB: The courage to address issues present in one’s vicinity reminds me also of one project you organized in the city space, I mean the performance by Public Movement in May 2022[5].

KR-S: I like going back to this day. It consisted of subjects that organize our conversation: locality, the agency of art, and collectivity. In fact, Public Move-

ment call themselves a “collective research body”. Their day-long action was put together by Dana Yahalomi and Nir Shauloff, after their visit to Bialystok, during which we spoke with city guides, local activists and migration researchers. “One Day” was a result of this investigation. Multiple performances activated the city’s historical axis, drawing attention to its existing memorials and proposing new forms of commemoration in public space. At the Monument to the Heroes of the Bialystok Region – a place of importance for right-wing circles, standing on the grounds of the former Jewish cemetery – adorned today with the words “GOD”, “HONOR”, “HOMELAND” and “INDEPENDENCE”, together with the local youth, the performers created the word “FRAGILITY” out of jute, with which they then shared as they traversed the city space. The day ended with it being burned against the backdrop of Bialystok’s main cathedral.

However, the main part of the action was centered around the humanitarian crisis occurring on the Polish-Belarusian border[6] and the welcoming of Ukrainian newcomers on the Polish-Ukrainian border. In the main square of the city, members of Public Movement were recreating choreographies of evacuation: of moving bodies of the strangers, lifting them, dragging, holding, supporting and caring for them. The audience became an integral part of the process, as both the object and the subject of



*Alicja Rogalska: Dark Fibres, 2015-2021
at the exhibition *Instead of Sighing We Turn to Singing*, Arsenal Gallery in Białystok
Photo Tytus Szabelski-Różniak.*

these activities, protecting each other's bodies. The action involved both activists from the Polish-Belarusian border and people from Ukraine who had recently settled in the city. They all brought their own experiences. This event was particularly important because the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border is taking place just 50 kilometers from Białystok, and life in the city is flowing as if nothing has changed. Public Movement's action made the crisis visible in the heart of the city. That day, art became a tool to trigger empathy, flowing from the surprising knowledge about acting together in an emergency that human bodies seemed to possess independently of our awareness. Confronting oneself with these instinctive reactions of one's own body was a very powerful experience, evoking honest and deep responses. The artists wrote that Białystok was performing its alternative political self in the streets that day. Some call that a "pre-enactment". Once again, questions were also raised about existing representations of history and the values they represent in public space, and alternative forms, words, and actions were proposed, linking them to the most acute contemporary crisis, at the core of which are today's reactions to non-European

newcomers.

Operating in the field of art in the context of such a cruel humanitarian crisis is particularly difficult for me. On the one hand, we cannot not talk about it. And on the other hand, each time we take up this subject it too easily raises the risk of capitalizing on suffering, which we try to avoid by focusing on collective processes rather than by producing objects.

EB: Which would not change much eventually, the problem gets „passed on” in an easily consumable, static form. I would like to ask you about how you imagine or define the agency of art in these circumstances? Or the agency of the exhibition as a medium in general?

KR-S: I enjoy working with artists who initiate and engage in communal, collective processes, just like Alicja Rogalska, an artist from the region (born in the village of Wszerzecz near Lomza). In “*Instead of Sighing We Turn to Singing*”[7], her recent exhibition at Arsenal, we have presented her works created within the last decade in cooperation with different communities around the world. Most of them were connected by singing – as a way of telling stories and



*Anna Hulačová: Alienbees, save us, please
exhibition view, Arsenal Gallery in Białystok
photo Tytus Szabelski.*

reclaiming agency. The Georgian Polyphonic Choir, the Women's Choir from the Hungarian village of Kartal, members of the Union of Street Musicians in Jakarta and the folk singing group Broniowianki from Mazovia, who have collaborated with Alicja over the years, sing about the injustices they face today – inequality, economic exploitation, and difficult living conditions. The processes initiated by the artist help in the search for the collective voice of specific communities, often using traditional folk songs with new, modernized lyrics that have been created together. Alicja also took part in the 2022 residency organized by us in cooperation with the House of Culture and Nature in Teremiski[8], near Białowieża, where she met activists working on the Polish-Belarussian border. Together they prepared an evening of caroling performed during the opening of the exhibition. In the context of the humanitarian crisis, we sang regional carols that mention hospitality and exchanged personal stories about Christmas generosity. I felt that again, we managed to create an authentic moment. And this is one possible answer to your first question about ways to avoid the commercialization of art and the role of the artist – to support not only the production of art

objects, but the facilitation of these kinds of collective processes and encounters, forging new bonds, and encouraging commune. Such activities also reinforce the agency of art which then directly affects the participants in the art processes, enabling them to understand that their problems are systemic, and they can take collective action to try to combat them. But I also don't think it's the only right direction for art... I still believe in art's role in storytelling and creating meanings that organize or influence the way we think of the world when we encounter and experience it.

Regarding the exhibition as a medium: I like to consider an exhibition as a kind of process happening over time, where the outcome is not given in advance. As something that is not a closed structure, where everything has already happened at the moment of the official opening.

EB: This was the case of the „Deschool!”[9] exhibition, from what I remember. On the one hand, you outlined a concrete issue and worked on the core subject of the show, that the artists addressed. On the other hand, through the duration of the show, a weekly collective activity took place that proposed



*Martina Smutna's works on the exhibition Deschool!,
Arsenal Gallery in Białystok
photo Tytus Szabelski.*

alternative modes of learning and discussed them together with the public.

KR-S: Exactly. This exhibition presented works based on artistic research on the problems of higher education in the arts in the region. The show featured works by the duo Little Warsaw, Martina Smutná, Lada Nakonechna, R.E.P., and Weronika Zalewska, among others. They talked about conservative, hierarchical structures and ways of teaching, patriarchy, the destructive and exhausting power of competition and individualism among students, the commercialization of art education, its lack of responsiveness to contemporary problems or learning from historical student revolts. At the same time, the exhibition showcased art collectives using alternative educational methods as part of their practices. The Nowolipie Group, Kem Collective, Problem Collective, and Mothers ArtLovers were not only presented in the exhibition, but also activated it on a weekly basis by implementing their experimental alternative educational strategies based on non-hierarchy, collectivity, community processes, fun, and pleasure. Thanks to that we could co-create the whole project with the artists and audience.

Together with Post Brothers we worked in a similar fashion for “In the Beginning Was the Deed!”, where too, in the center of the exhibition, we created a common space named the „revolutionary birzha” („revolutionary exchange”). It was a reference to a historical space on Suraska Street in Białystok, where workers used to meet to exchange literature, discuss ideas and sing revolutionary songs. The „birzha” in the exhibition space was filled with materials we found about Białystok’s anarchist past, which the public could copy and learn from. It was also a meeting space where we could connect historical events with the contemporary political reality. The community created through this process prepared a walk through revolutionary Białystok for the finissage of the show.

But, while I believe that focusing on processes – including from the perspective of the exhibition as medium – strengthens the agency of art, and to some extent, opposes its commercialization, I also still have faith in traditional art media and the exhibition medium itself. Works rooted in artistic research or those that emphasize storytelling within described projects were proof of this. I also remember, for example, that Anna Hulačová’s “Alienbees, save



*J/P/K Jasanský Polák Karny:
exhibition view, Arsenal Gallery in Bialystok*

us please!”[10] was appreciated by the Youth Climate Strike in Bialystok for the complex meanings and concrete ecological narratives it engaged with in the most extraordinary and captivating forms.

KR-S: Yes, moments of establishing authentic relationships within artistic processes are very motivating for me. I believe art is a place for collective conversation, reflection on the state of things and a space where you can discover ways in which the world can be changed. My other source of support comes from the freedom that the institution and its director Monika Szewczyk gives me in creating shows, the engagement of the audience and encouragement from friends who make up this small but very interesting artistic community of Podlasie. I am deeply grateful to my ever-supporting husband and critically-engaged artist Tytus Szabelski-Różniak, who has a highly reliable ethical compass, to Matthew Post, the curator and enthusiast who initiated “In the Beginning Was the Deed!” and invited me to co-create the project, to the great artist and caring person Iza Tarasewicz and perhaps our closest friend, curator Tomek Pawłowski-Jarmołajew. They all genuinely care about both the region and art and are always willing to engage in new ventures. I can

always count on their honest and insightful feedback.

EB: I wanted to ask you about how you see the role of the curator, but I think you’ve already answered that question to a certain degree. It seems to me that the curator for you is not such a separate genius figure who orchestrates from behind the scenes. You talk quite candidly about the fact that you discuss your ideas with friends or people you trust. I understand that in the same way you talk to artists, you treat them as partners.

KR-S: Of course, and for me it has never been any different. An exhibition is a conversation between many people, objects, conditions, discourses and processes, with whom the curator cooperates and mediates. I would be surprised to see a different attitude from curators of my generation. It’s fundamental to work with the artists on an equal basis, and a partnership with the gallery team is also vital. It’s necessary to remember that an exhibition is not made by only the efforts of artists and curators – but that there’s a lot more people involved. If I may, I would like to mention at least some of those whose names rarely appear in public. At Arsenal, it is par-

ticularly important for me to work with the technical department. I have never operated on a budget that would allow me to hire an exhibition architect, so most of the solutions are worked out in long discussions between the artists and technicians Maciej Zaniowski and Kacper Gorysz. I would also like to mention Jarosław Trojan, who recently passed away and is going to be missed by his co-workers for the years to come. He worked at the gallery for 40 years and was not only a guide for the next generation, but part of the spirit of the place. Then there is Ewa Borowska, who works on projects in the publishing department. It is thanks to her efforts that we have just released the Polish edition of a book about Białystok anarchists, after a long and thoughtful translation process[11]. There is Gabriela Owdziej from the PR department, Justyna Kolodko-Bietkal, Iza Liżewska, and Katarzyna Kida from the education department, as well as the drivers, people working as coordinators (I am especially grateful for the help of Ewa Chacianowska), writing grants, accounting, and exhibition guides: all of them co-create or facilitate the creation of exhibitions at Arsenal, and mediate existing ones.

EB: Yes, I agree with you. Physical work is often less valued as compared to, let's say, „creative” activities, or work with ideas. Did you also learn lessons from these exhibitions for yourself personally, did they also affect you in a certain way? How and if working with artists influences you?

KR-S: I learn a great deal with each exhibition. I guess we all work through ourselves in one way or another in the art field and the subjects of exhibitions I work on are usually also personal for me. But if I had to point to one specific example from recent months it would probably be Martina Smutná's criticism of the exhausting competitiveness and overproduction in the art field. Her paintings dealing with the subject, which we presented during “De-school!”, were highly relatable to me at the time. I realized that I needed to work less intensively and spend more time taking care of myself and my human and non-human loved ones (hello to Tytus and to our dog Ściółka!). I am now trying to put that into practice.

EB: What are you working on in 2023? What are you looking forward to?

This year I am mainly working on a group exhibition, which opens on the last day of June in the historic building of the former Power Plant in Białystok.

It will present contemporary works relating to the modernization of the countryside: the industrialization of agriculture, electrification, and the contemporary and future consequences of these processes. It is important that the core narrative of the show will mainly include the perspective of artists originating from the so-called “periphery”, often referring to the microhistories of their own families. We plan to juxtapose these accounts with the official historical narrative that organizes our memory of these processes. These will also be contrasted with contemporary artistic practices seeking inspiration in pre-modern customs in the region. I am also looking forward to the performance program planned as part of this project, which is to be co-created with local artists from the Podlasie region and Białowieża Forest. Performers are going to create a welcoming space for visitors.

In addition, I will also be working on two solo exhibitions of female artists representing minority perspectives in Poland. As part of the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the Białystok Ghetto Uprising, we will open an exhibition by Zuzanna Hertzberg, dedicated to herstories of Jewish women fighters. At the same time, we have scheduled a solo exhibition of Marta Romankiv, who was born in Lviv. Marta has been working on the issue of newcomers' rights in Poland for years. Her work, based on social experiments in the field of art, is, in my opinion, one of the most authentic examples of agency in Polish art in recent years.

This interview was originally published on BLOK magazine April 2023.

<https://blokmagazine.com/localization-and-its-discontents/>

[We would like to thank Ewa Borysiewicz, Katarzyna Różniak-Szabelska and Kathryn Zazenski for permission to republish.](#)

Instagram's Perfect Lie: How The Social Media Platform is Aiding The Extreme Right

Darren Jones

The most recent Pines Conservation Society lecture focused on the ecology, history and culture of the Meat Rack—a bucolic half-mile of dunes and forest on Fire Island, situated between the queer hamlets of Fire Island Pines and Cherry Grove. The Meat Rack is a storied cruising ground, but its tracery of pathways can also be thought of metaphorically—verdant arteries infused with decades of eruptive encounters, cultural traumas, and community celebrations that comprise a collective experience, both local and national. The cataclysm of AIDS, felt so keenly here, has added a wistfulness to the dappled woodland atmospherics.

This writer was a panel member at the event, and spoke about some of the art that has been made in, and about, the Meat Rack.

Slides from the presentation were posted on Instagram, then quickly removed for violating the platform's guidelines on "nudity or sexual activity" (two quite different terms, despite Instagram's dissonant mashing of them). In this case, the images ought to have been permitted under Instagram's own exemptions for educational subject matter and public awareness. It's just one of an increasing number of such deletions that are disproportionately affecting LGBTQ+ artists, while revealing a troubling disparity: Visuals of gay bodies and erotic intimacy which are a fundamental aspect of the queer canon, Instagram considers "harmful" content to be slung out with the bathwater. But discarding such material chips away at a vulnerable cultural edifice that took untold sacrifice to build, and is under renewed attack from a resurgent conservative movement.

Sex was not only about pleasure for gay men: It was a mode of connectivity, empowerment and brother-



Robert Andy Coombs: Untitled 2022

hood in a murderously hostile world. It was a righteous political act—and remains so. Artistic exploration of it was among the limited tools available to record our histories and construct a social architecture. This was in lieu of fundamental rights enjoyed by those in the heterosexual majority, who didn't need to seek each other out in clandestine gathering spots and illicit clubs subject to raid, arrest, personal ruin or death. It is by design that Fire Island, Key West, Provincetown and even Manhattan's Westside Piers, locales of queer congregation, are on geographic peripheries. Their locations are a safety feature.

The banned posts included work by photographer Gabriel Martinez, who also creates installations and



*Tom of Finland: Bruno (1979) for Target Studios
From Lou Thomas' photograph*

objects; textile and combined-media artist Kyle Meyer; architectural interventionists Cruising Pavilion; and electronic music and performance pioneers The Swimming Pools (Daniel Smith and Christophe

Doloire) whose Meat Rack events (2009-2014) are now fabled lore. But it was the removal of an image by photographer Robert Andy Coombs that seems most egregious. Coombs, who is disabled, rawly narrates his life—medical circumstances, friends, strangers, natural and urban environments – in pictures of visceral and gripping emotion. He also documents his appetites as an unapologetically sexual human being. He is enduring an exhausting battle on social media for trying to claim a modicum of the space that able-bodied people can take for granted, and see affirmed in their likenesses everywhere.

However, this image—taken during his 2022 BOFFO Fire Island Residency—is benign. It is a shot of the boardwalk in the Pines, under a dour sky, where it ends at the entrance to the Meat Rack. Most of us just hop unthinkingly onto the sandy road that continues into the forest. But that is as far as Robert could go that day. The work's poignancy is revealed only with the knowledge of who took it. Disseminating the output of queer artists online is a bulwark against their disappearance, a goal pursued relent-

lessly by fascist politicians and religious zealots. LG-BTQ+, women, BIPOC, and Latinx artists often center the body in their work because their bodies have been the target of so much persecution. It is a way to reclaim the flesh which should have been sacrosanct, but was turned into a theater of war. Without digital access to our continuing archives, on the farthest-reaching platforms, entire social cartographies (and the lessons that future generations can learn from them) could be lost. This is one of The Right's principle objectives.

Blanket social media policies that hide behind the feeble certainty that someone somewhere will be offended at something are a cowardly avoidance of meaningful discourse on presenting nakedness, sex and art about them. The late polemicist, Christopher Hitchens, addressed this stance with the disregard that it deserves: "In this country (The United States) I've been told, #That's offensive' as if those two words constitute an argument. Not to me they don't." If a viewer is "sensitive to this type of content" it would take less effort to unfollow it than report it. Furthermore, it's improbable that Instagram would "suggest" the gay channel Logo TV, for example, to the family account of biblical fanatics hunkered inside in a gunpowder keg awaiting Armageddon, or a government snatch of their guns—let alone more explicit feeds. One questions then, the motivations of those who commit time to lodging grievances. The only "harm" is caused by complainants who are searching for and victimizing those they'd otherwise be unlikely to come across on Instagram.

Like any business, Instagram seeks to increase revenue and expand its supremacy which aren't good bedfellows for sexual content in our woefully puritanical America. While Instagram states, in short, "don't post nudity," it goes on to twist itself in knots with the tortured language of its community guidelines which tiptoe around insulting any constituency, while satisfying none. The diction is specific yet cloudy, informational but unclear, declarative and contradictory. For instance, there are two versions of one regulation pertaining to art: "We also allow photographs of paintings, sculptures, and other art that depicts nude figures". Elsewhere we read that "nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is ok, too". The missing "and other art" in the latter phrase sneakily delegitimizes performance, installation and more conceptual (risky?) art forms. With more than a touch of misogyny, female nipples are only allowed in some circumstances – "birth, breast-cancer awareness" (is that worthier than AIDS awareness, no less associated with sexual or reproductive parts?). Interestingly, female nipples are also al-

THE SWIMMING POOLS

DANCING IN THE MEAT RACK

T H E L A S T D A N C E



Image courtesy of The Swimming Pools

lowed in the context of "protest," which again, should apply to much queer bodily art, that motivation being intrinsic to its aesthetics. Male nipples, obviously, are ubiquitous. Of course, a heterosexual, white male artist might also have his nude-art post taken down, but while frustrating to him individually, it cannot be seen as part of a larger erasing of personal safety, that group's collective identity, or a governmental attempt to annihilate it, because there is no such movement underway.

Employing the term "guidelines" is also untruthful. They are not guidelines but a promise that if you disobey them again you will (not "may") forfeit your ac-

count, global audience, allies and colleagues. The resulting confusion from these baffling missives serves Instagram well, creating a grey enough area for its engineers to decide on a post's suitability without consistency and with impunity. You can appeal Instagram's removal of your post "if you believe Instagram's decision is damaging for a group or issue you care about" but its shadowy review panel of "independent experts" issues final decisions with suspiciously robotic speed. META (which owns Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook) includes a misstep in its explanation of how to make an appeal: "Explain how Facebook or Instagram got your deci-

sion wrong". Surely they mean, "our decision". These policies revolve around Instagram's core tenet "community". But, like Facebook's "friends" system it is another con. Communities do exist on Instagram, but this is quite different from Instagram—at

The Far-Right is not far anymore—it is the Republican Party, and Instagram's dithering policies are compounding its tyranny. Until the platform stands against such abuses, it is complicit in them.

1.5 billion users—being a community. No one is loyal to Instagram, it's just today's most effective channel for image-sharing; sooner or later it won't be. Awareness of these corrupted definitions undermines the platform's nudity and sexual activity defense—if Instagram isn't a community, then who are its stakeholders protecting? Of course, it's Instagram's world; Instagram's terms and conditions. Artists who work with themes of sex and the body can remain in compliance as neutered versions of themselves and their art, or choose to leave Instagram and post elsewhere. But this is to miss the point. META is not just a social media juggernaut; it's an exponentially expanding encyclopedia; a propellant of daily life; it owns and controls the most immediate nexus of information and visibility; and it is the principle pop cultural repository—and broadcaster—of our age. It rivals the influence of governments. Until there is an equal alternative, to post on lesser models is to commit digital suicide and disappear oneself, which would be to do META's dirty work for it. These dynamics diminish the company's mission statement: "People deserve to be heard and to have a voice—even when that means defending the right of people we disagree with." What of defending the right of people we do agree with? Instagram's success comes with responsibilities that cannot be shirked by a gutless sanctioning apparatus that pretends fairness to all while perpetuating the shame, displacement and prejudice that have been employed for centuries to oppress queer people. Instagram and its parent company may have to meet financial goals and shareholders expectations, but they exploit the content of posts and reels to do so, plundering our lives as grist for the mill. We're often uncaring of the back-office consequences of posting, but while we may not be able to have it both ways, neither should META. LGBTQ+ citizens are the favored, demonized cudgel with which Republican despots scaremonger votes, and the practice is as virulent today as ever. Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill,

signed into law by crepuscular Governor, Ron DeSantis, and Supreme Court Justice, Clarence Thomas' terrifying comments that the law establishing gay marriage (among others) was "demonstrably erroneous" and should be reconsidered, are just two examples. Tennessee lawmakers' new ban on drag acts is the latest of these attacks. That someone with a heart as dark as DeSantis' leads the Sunshine State is a hideous irony. Freakishly, "Clarence Thomas" can be anagrammatized to read "coalescent harm". It's a hidden truth of this ominous character, and his wife, Ginni Thomas, a feral Trumpist moll who fought tirelessly to overturn the 2020 presidential election results.

If Instagram is to accommodate and protect marginalized artists and the vital commentary they disseminate, then its algorithmic capabilities have to be made sophisticated enough to parse and understand the differences between intentional, authentic artistic expression and more superficial or sinister intentions. That's tricky of course, but difficulty doesn't justify inaction when the status quo that benefits the company damages the most targeted groups. This conversation could be rendered almost moot by applying "sensitive content" banners to posts containing nudity or sexual activity so that viewers can choose whether to see it. Instagram could go further, by accepting that nudity, consenting sex and related art, are a normal aspect of life, denied for too long by bigoted hypocrites in seats of power. In doing so, it might remain relevant, and avoid the fate of Myspace.

The Far-Right is not far anymore—it is the Republican Party, and Instagram's dithering policies are compounding its tyranny. Until the platform stands against such abuses, it is complicit in them. Instagram's lie is perfect because it is so many lies. It nods to care, reason and understanding, while trafficking in manipulation, deceit, and exclusion. But most insidiously, because it knows (and bases its maneuvers on) the probability that users care more about being liked by strangers, than advocating for themselves and catalyzing en-masse to usher progress. By this charter—and to our disgrace—Instagram divides and conquers. As frustrations build, perhaps sufficient momentum will grow, and positive change will come. One hopes that Instagram's operators will heed the current problems, but for now the site has become snagged on a moral hook of its own making. We might ensure that it dangles there until its dangerous precedents are resolved.

Art Dubai 2023

Rafi Abdullah

The annual Art Dubai fair, returning to the iconic Madinat Jumeirah venue for its 16th run, was held from the 1st to 5th March this year and saw the participation of over 130 myriad forms of participants from contemporary, modern and digital galleries; as well as institutions and organizations such as foundations and even decentralised autonomous organizations (DAOs). Fresh off the doldrums brought about by the recent pandemic, the fair made a strong return with its largest and most extensive edition to date. The fair boasted a robust offering of novel global perspectives from the "global south" and an intentional and provocative deviation from western-led discourse and narratives. Similarly to previous editions, the fair was segmented into four distinct sections: contemporary, modern, bawwaba, and digital.

The contemporary section, assembled by a selection committee made up of art dealer Andree Sfeir-Semler, one half of Indian gallerist outfit Experimenter, Priyanka Rajar, and art historian cum gallerist Ursula Krinzinger, gathered galleries from diverse parts of the world and featured both emerging and established presence. The section saw galleries presenting both solo and group shows that offered fresh global outlooks that aimed to foster conversations around exploration and experimentation. In this section, although not necessarily attending to a lexicon of the locale per se, the works of young and emerging Dutch artist Vytautas Kumža presented by The Rooster Gallery stood out starkly. As a solo presentation, the gallery had on display a series of the artists' archival ink-jet photographic prints that depicted an amalgamation of sculptural arrangements with mundane and familiar objects such as forks, glass plates, plushies and kitchen utensils.

These strange compositions by the artists point to a certain state, in between fiction and reality, that is evocative of an undistilled feeling of anxiety and fragility. Elements of the works, such as a snip of hair, a door hatch, keys and even gloves, spill out beyond the confines of the frames, surprising the



*Brendan Dawes: Persian Dreams, 2023.
Courtesy Gazelli Art Hous*

viewer and sharply breaking the humdrum and feeling of monotony from visiting booth after booth in repetition. Accompanying the photographic prints was an installation setup of metal ropes running across the booth at ceiling height, clasped with generic lightbulbs filled with hairs instead of filaments.

If the contemporary section carried an air of ambi-

guity and unfamiliarity, the modern section completely turned the notch the opposite direction. The modern section paid homage to historical artists who played pivotal roles in respective ways and featured familiar and returning names to the region such as Mona Saudi, Helen Khal, Marwan Kassab-Bachi, and more. For the section, mainstay Dubai gallery The Third Line presented a solo presentation of the late Iranian artist Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian who is well known for her works that incorporate traditional geometric patterns married with modern abstracted sensibilities.

Featuring works of an array of mediums - some iconic to her artistic signature - such as drawings, rugs and mirrors, the presentation encapsulated and reflected upon the different facets and materials of her practice that revolved around the beauty of geometry. One leaves the booth assured of the artist's immaculate familiarity with her visual language, medium, craft, as well as the undoubted depth of her conceptual considerations.

Moving to the bawwaba section curated by Thai curator Vipash Purichanont, one is transported to a section that at moments feel like a window to the world, with presentations by galleries and their artists across Indonesia, Philippines, Iran, Kenya and all the way to Brazil. One presentation that particularly spoke to the potentiality of the art fair to move beyond being just a space of exchange of commercial value, and to a space of the exchange of social values as well, was that of the Singaporean gallery Yeo Workshop representing Indonesian artist Maryanto.

For his solo presentation, Maryanto had exhibited an installation and series of works composed of acrylic and charcoal canvases, embroidery patches, a fabric banner, and silkscreen prints, that formed elements of his extended research investigating palm oil and mining industrialism in indigenous areas of Kalimantan, Borneo. His monochromatic landscape paintings are meticulously made by way of carving and etching on layers of black acrylic paint, and are reminiscent of, if not a nod to, linocut and woodcut aesthetics prevalent in the visual language of protest posters. Although his artworks appear at first to depict easy visual tropes surrounding the issue of intrusive environmental degradation - an indigenous mythical creature, natural landscapes, excavators make appearances - one learns that they are in contrary very loaded, nuance and deliberated depictions tethered to the specificities of

the issues at hand.

The last section, regarded in jest by some visitors as the step-sister section owing to its segregation to a separated building from the rest of the sections, is the digital section curated by Singaporean curator Clara Peh. Dressed slightly darker to facilitate for a more immersive experience of digital art, the section displayed a variety of presentations ranging from simple screens on the walls to more complex ones such as a robotic arm installation and an immersive 180 degrees five-senses screen experience. Notably seeing a unique makeup of actors such as crypto foundations, NFT collector groups, and even digital platforms, the section signals to a burgeoning and multi-faceted landscape of digital arts despite the market taking a downturn as of late.

The digital section comprised of several presentations that demystified the common misguided sentiment of digital art being just merely pixels on screens. For instance the new media work of Azerbaijani artist, Orhan Mammadov, presented at as part of the immersive booth by Dubai platform Art in Space, took to orientalist tropes of Middle Eastern pictorial landscapes by European painters as a reference point and a dataset from which the artist churned a meditative and hypnotic piece that not only charted out and visualised the long history of such a problematic gaze, but also gave a sense of material weight to the matter.

Aside from the booth presentations, the fair had also lined up an array of fringe programming that saw four different groupings of talks: including an art and tech focused summit co-programmed by Christie's, as well as the global art forum that is annually curated by writer and curator Shumon Basar, predicated upon the theme of predicting the present and features some of the most interesting thinkers of the current zeitgeist.

With the current iteration, the fair has undoubtedly continued to cement itself as a fair that is constantly reframing the idea of what a fair should and could be. It is also indicative of a fair that is quite cognisant of the ability of the fair format to be a catalyst for new experimentations and a congregation point for great minds. Surprisingly, despite being held in a city-state known - rightfully so or not - for its lack of tolerance for liberal ideas and its bad track record for human rights, it is in fact within the fair that important conversations encompassing the wide spectrum of social issues from colonialism to women's rights emerge. One is inclined to think that the fair will only remain steadfast and unwavering in its approach over the coming years.

Art Kleinman, Structure And Chaos: A Delicate Balance

Margaret Lanterman

This must-see exhibit can be found at the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, Chicago. Seventeen of Kleinman's large abstract acrylic paintings fill the main gallery with a welcoming presence. The first glance is deceptive, in that one might be tempted to think of straight forward color abstractions of a cheerful mien. These preconceptions quickly evaporate upon a closer look, and the layers of subtlety begin to reveal themselves. The exhibit does shout color, but the hues are fluid and not harnessed by any pre-ordained schedule of combinations or systems. There is a robust sense of life in the interacting, jostling forms that are held together by the artist's over-riding understanding of the structural elements of art, and by an ever present but often quiet sense of geometry.

The artist notes that he is influenced by Minimalist Bryce Marden, Cubis. Pablo Picasso and Early Flemish artist Roger Van der Wey Den, but Kleinman's work does not fit into any one stylistic category. Rather, it is a unique personal expression, the language of which is contained in the singular path that the artist projects – his personal style. There are no guerrilla attacks of social comment or alerts to environmental danger, but rather a pure and hearty exploration of some historically unresolved questions that artists have struggled with through the ages. For example, how paint can communicate in its purest sense; how an artist can make a mark that has real significance, and how work can be massively personal and grandly universal at the same moment. In the painting *Tumbleweed*, a static state is overlaid with a sense of vigorous motion in the four spinning discs. There is a sense of systematic structure, but we also see the gesture of the artist's hand in this image that tumbles from flat space to three-dimensional illusion. The symbols chosen by the artist are definitely very personal, but also trigger thoughts and emotions in the viewer as well. Instead of a clear timeline there is



*Art Kleinman, Tumbleweed, Acrylic/canvas
40x40" 2021*

rather a transcendence of time. The colors are pleasing but not predictable.

There may never be a finite answer to any of these metaphysical questions about art, but the paintings of Art Kleinman make inroads towards understandings if you remain thoughtfully in their presence. It is part of our nature as a human being to communicate in many forms, and so we love to speak of and write about art. Yet, there is undeniable satisfaction with art that can make its truest communication in its own contained visual language – like finding a treasure.

*@ Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art
2320 W Chicago Ave, Chicago, IL, 60622 on view until
June 18, 2023.*

THE ART MARKET 2023

A report by Art Basel & UBS. Download now.

