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**AN AMERICAN IN LIMA:  
A MEDITATION ON A  
DIVIDED HEMISPHERE**

**JORGE MIGUEL BENITEZ**

Entangled Pasts 1768 – Now  
Gerhard Richter, Engadin  
Front Seat to a Revolution  
El Greco: His Own Peculiar Style  
From Baires with Love  
Living Forms  
Speakeasy  
Looking at Picasso

DAVID GOLDENBERG  
NANCY NESVET  
VALERIE KABOV  
LIVIANA MARTIN  
ELGA WIMMER  
NANCY NESVET  
MIKLOS LEGRADY  
MARY FLETCHER

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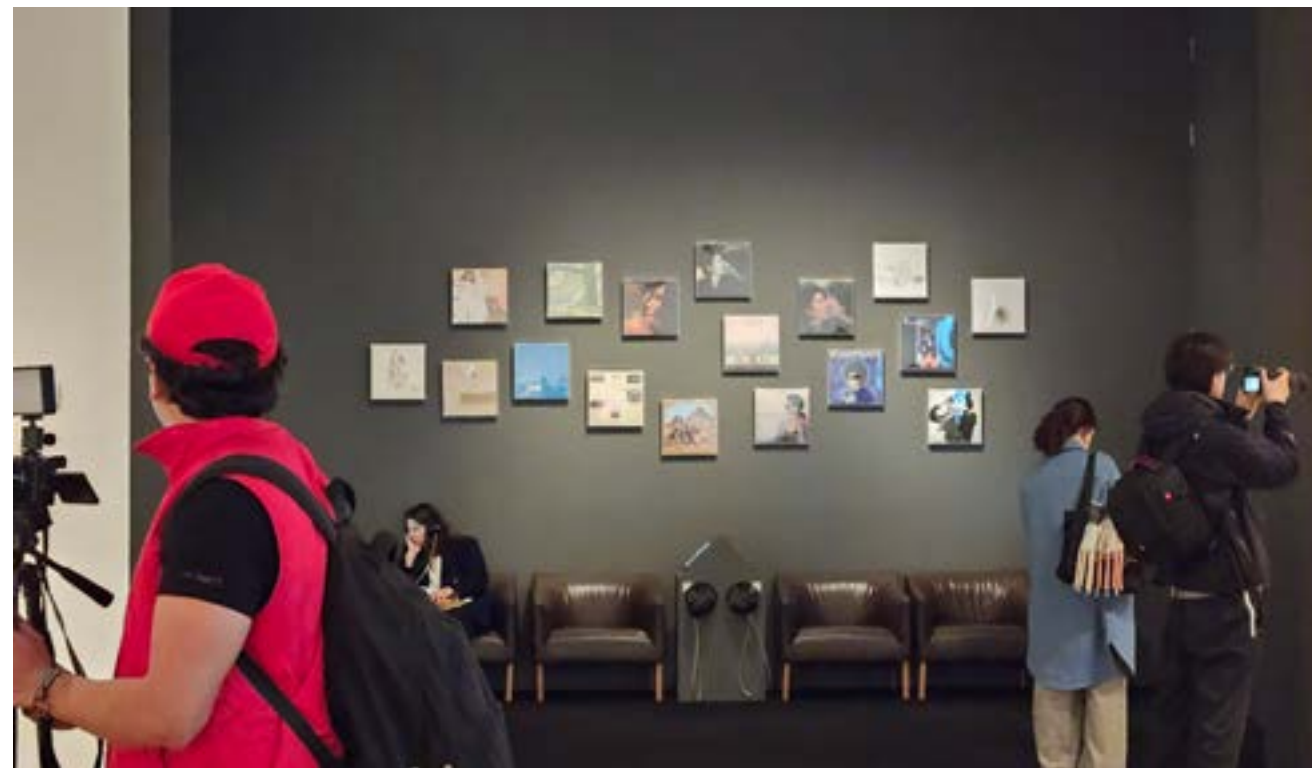
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Yoko Ono: Music

#### 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.

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## Editorial

In his *Speakeasy*, Miklos Legrady asks What is Art? He admits art is not everything, going on to comment that art is not what is said but how it is said. Perhaps art includes what is said, as the artist chooses what topics to expound on and chooses the opinion he produces in their artwork, be it visual art, performance, music, or literature. Art is an individual expression of the artist.

How it is said is, of course, of utmost importance. Artists, opposed to non-artists, have the mastery to create expressions that the public pays attention to, due to the quality of the artwork. Artists featured in the articles in this issue, chosen by prominent galleries and institutions to display their work are all skilled and creative thinkers and producers of art. Their art is created by their minds, hearts, and hands, with enthusiasm for the topic inducing them to create the art necessary to its production, and technical expertise allowing them to create and produce art paid attention to by the art public.

Those minds and hearts and hands express different cultural concerns, attitudes, and ways of making, but all are valid because, as their expertise and skill bring them to the top of their game, they are done well.

Peruvian, African, Argentinian, British, Greek, German/Swiss artists and others of international stature written about in this issue have merged diverse ways of envisioning and producing art, often invent-

ing different processes and media. Gerhard Richter and artists in the Royal Academy and Hayward Gallery shows explore varied media and stretch the boundaries of painting, photography, and sculpture, erasing borders between arts to invent new forms. Liviana Martin writes about El Greco who defied the Italian Renaissance style, choosing to follow the icons of Byzantine culture to arrive at his elongated figures and individual style, proving here, as for Gerhard Richter and artists represented at the RA and Hayward, African, Argentinian, and Peruvian galleries, once an artist is adept at technique in their style and technique, individual style and the founding of new processes with individualized results, follows.

Questioning the status quo of artists represented, as David Goldenberg has noted at the RA is a valid discussion for artists and curators to embark upon. Considering new knowledge and representation of current artists, we must now confront, and incorporate viewpoints expressed by individual artists in their work.

This constant questioning, changing, considering, inventing, and standing up for their viewpoints keeps art and artists current, and as the title of the Hayward exhibit acknowledges “keeps forms alive”.



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### QUOTE of the MONTH:

“The object of art is not to reproduce reality, but to create a reality of the same intensity.”

**Alberto Giacometti**

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## 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.

Miklos is a visual artist, writer, anti-hero and protagonist who's expecting trouble. He steps out of the art world's blind spot, uncovering myths and deconstructing fictions. He has a B.Sc. in visual studies workshop, Rochester, N.Y and an M.F.A from Concordia, Montreal. He is co-founder of N.Y. performance group The Collective Unconscious.

## What Is Art?

Duchamp, Donald Judd, John Cage, and Thierry de Duve (Kant after Duchamp) say that art cannot and should not be defined; art is anything an artist chooses to call by that name. What a gaggle of silly geese! Of course what cannot be defined fades into the background like tears lost in the rain. If art was anything an artist chose to call by that name, such license would corrupt both artist and art world alike. We would be at the mercy of scammers and charlatans.

A walk down history lane tells us art is a value judgment, always an intention, never an accident. Accidents can serve as contrast, accents, or counterpoint, otherwise accidents are simply an occurrence and not art. Denis Dutton, in his Ted Talk *A Darwinian Theory of Beauty*, gives a convincing argument that art is grounded in biology and instinct, art did not emerge as an arbitrary social construct.

Even Sol Lewitt eventually admitted that there is a dramatic difference between having an idea and making a work of art. Everyone has ideas; few can make art. Many have inspirations they lack the skill to realize, a problem serious enough to merit its own paragraph in the dictionary. One can play a musical instrument, paint pictures, dance and sculpt, yet never be an artist. Not if the work isn't good enough. It takes motivated effort to acquire skills that expand one's vocabulary to the breadth of one's vision. Look at the art of painting or the art of poetry. They're better than adequate painting or adequate poems, which are good but not that good. Garden gnomes and the cement angels we find on church steps are sculpture but they're not the art of sculpture. Everyone has ideas. Skills, not so much.

A leading curator wrote on social media that no one knows what art is anymore! Since every other profession knows what they are doing, shouldn't we try to find out? We can ask questions and stuff, that's the art of inquiry.

Common sense tells us the art of persuasion is better than using force; the art of cuisine is a cut above

street food; the art of medicine is healthier than quackery, while the art of logic is sorely lacking these days. Art is mastery reaching a spiritual height, and it is sensory as well as semiotic. Even in literature, it is not the idea nor the explanation which merits that appellation; art is not what is said but how it is said, the non-verbal aspect. The poetry, the sonority, the acoustic language, how it feels to the heart, not to the intellect. Art is primarily expressed in non-verbal language, it requires vision, skill, effort, and dedication.

Now before we proceed any further, we have to consider conceptual artists Lawrence Weiner, Benjamin Buchloh, and others claiming that you do not need skill as an artist, you can hire skilled assistants to do the dirty work. This would be true for commercial advertising. Art, on the other hand, involves much unconscious input as well as non-verbal languages, that require the direct intervention and hands on approach of the artist. Otherwise you could hire a skilled architect and take credit for their vision as your own, or hire a world renowned ballet dancer and take credit for their performance in your name. We know that musicians must learn to play a keyboard, saxophone, violin, their instruments; and writers need to acquire writing skills. So what skills would a conceptual artist such as Buchloh or Weiner need? The skill of sales and networking.

Why would such a person receive acclaim and cash if others have the inspiration, the skill, and done the work? Some people have an exceptional gift; under this regime that could then be bought, their name effaced, so that a clever salesperson could walk out on the stage and bow before the audience. *The Atlantic*, celebrated *The Death of the Artist - and the Birth of the Creative Entrepreneur*. But that is also the death of art. The creative entrepreneur is a charlatan and a scammer. In an effort to clarify this further, we need to decide if such is satisfactory or if it needs revision, correction, perhaps even a revolution.

## An American in Lima:

A MEDITATION ON A DIVIDED HEMISPHERE

Jorge Miguel Benitez



Colonial Architecture Lima  
courtesy Jorge Benitez

I was not born a citizen of the United States, yet I have been an American from birth.

Why does the word American seem to apply exclusively to the people of the United States? Do we not all live in the Americas? The French, Germans, and Spanish are all Europeans. The Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans are all Asians. Yet only in the Western Hemisphere does one country claim a continental-hemispheric title with little to no question from the rest of the world. The issue is far from academic. In fact, it affects every aspect of Anglo-American relations with the rest of the Americas and even the world.

Most Spanish-English dictionaries translate the word *estadounidense* as American. That is not its true meaning. *Estadounidense* means Unitedstian. Of course, there is no such word as Unitedstian in the English language. Although used infrequently, *estadounidense* also exists in French as *états-unien*. With such a differentiation in mind, I went to Lima, Peru, as a Cuban-born *estadounidense*. More importantly, I went without reductive or orientalist expectations.

Who can claim an American identity? How do we even begin to understand the meaning of a label based on the name of an early sixteenth-century Florentine business agent named Amerigo Vespucci? Where do we place the currently fashionable notion of decolonization centuries after the Western acculturation of most of the Peruvian population? Can an artist be Peruvian while finding inspiration in the New York School or in the Italian Renaissance? Should we surrender the Spanish language because it came from Europe? I addressed these questions with my Peruvian interlocutors. They, in turn, provided insights that ran against the current anti-European grain without diminishing any of the Peruvian totality.

Like the rest of Latin America, Peru shares a Western database with Europe, the United States, and Canada. Spanish is a Western Romance language with ancient Latin roots. Roman Catholicism, the dominant religion in Peru and one of the oldest continuous Christian faiths, is Western and has Judeo-Hellenic roots. Even the term Latin America is built on links to the Latin European countries of France, Italy, Por-

tugal, and Spain. My Peruvian hosts made clear that only in a Manichean scheme of absolute good and evil could Peru be decolonized. They informed me that Peruvians, ranging from Mario Vargas Llosa to the person on the street, cannot sever their ties to the Spanish Conquest or to Europe without destroying a crucial part, not of their identity, but of their being, something altogether distinct from a mere label. Only those non-Spanish-speaking Peruvians in the most far-flung hinterlands could break away from Western contamination without losing some part of themselves. This left the problem of the Conquest - the first contact with Europeans. Should all European influences be purged because they arrived with Francisco Pizarro? Without exception, the answer was, **no**.

All conquests are cruel. From the Spanish conquests of Mexico, in 1519, and Peru, in 1532, to the English conquests of Virginia and Massachusetts in 1607 and 1620 respectively, the act of invading and claiming someone else's land is never benign. The greatest difference between the two European imperialist giants lies in the spin of the facts. Spain, founder of the world's empire to circle the globe, called its actions *La Conquista*, the Conquest. By contrast, the English invasions of Virginia and Massachusetts have gone down in history as settlements.

Conquest-versus-settlement is a subject that goes to the heart of a philosophical divide between Anglo-Saxon America and Latin America. We discussed the issue at length in Lima. How do we address the syncretism, however imperfect, of the Latin south with the seemingly endlessly repackaged segregation of the Anglo-Saxon north? Despite its cruelty, the Conquest led to mixed populations and cultures, if for no other reason than necessity. Conversely, the settlement of the North American East Coast involved displacement and segregation from the start. Not only did the English disapprove of intermixing, they invaded with entire families in a process of wholesale replacement - not genocide in the modern sense but an easily rationalized form of passive eradication. The effects of the approach can still be felt in a United States that, to Latin Americans, appears obsessed with labels, categorizations, and systemic separation through the encouragement of af-



Inside the Color Exhibition at MACLima  
Courtesy MACLima



Ramiro Llona: *El Nuevo Testamento*  
oil on canvas, 112" x 185" (284 x 470 cm)

finity groups and notions of purity and authenticity. The approach is essential to denying the Western-ness of Peru and of Spain itself. When combined with the still powerful influence of the Black Legend that depicts anything related to Spain as evil and degenerate, it remains challenging for Latin American artists and intellectuals to break free from the cage of Rousseau-esque innocence and exoticism. We are painfully aware that our links to Spain are used against us as proof of our inadequacy. Throughout my brief stay in Lima, the question of American doubts concerning Peru's Western-ness elicited the following response: "Do they expect us to wear feathers?"

I understood the Peruvian response. On more than one occasion I, too, have been expected to wear feathers. My visit to Lima reinforced the chasm that divides Anglo-Saxon America from Latin America – a chasm I often witness in my life as a Latin American of European descent who moves easily from one language and culture to another. The chasm is contrived and reflects Old World animosities rooted in the Reformation, dynastic struggles, and imperial ambitions. In the late 1990s, during a talk on Latin American art, I heard a respected New York art critic say, "Fortunately, we are witnessing the last vestiges of degenerate Spanish influence in Latin America." She advocated a return to indigenous traditions as

the only authentic expression for the region. In response to her overt contempt, I asked, "As a descendant of those degenerate Spaniards, I would like to know why the United States insists on fighting the Spanish Armada when Great Britain and Spain are no longer enemies?" She apologized and gave no further explanation. I was not surprised.

The anti-Iberian bias usually goes hand-in-hand with a lingering anti-Catholicism that depicts Western-ness as the progressive result of the Protestant emphasis on individuality. It is a cynical fiction that dismisses Southern Europe and half of the Western Hemisphere. While in Lima, I had an opportunity to address the issue with Pedro Pablo Alayza, executive director of MACLima, the Lima Museum of Contemporary Art. He did not mince words. Peru cannot escape its history or the present. As a scholar and museum director with a background in anthropology, he explained the futility of a romantic yearning for a pre-Columbian past. "The contemporary is everywhere. The contemporary is the present," he said with a smile. Then he explained the collusion between the surviving Inca nobility and the Spanish in the aftermath of the Conquest. The event was far from a clear-cut struggle between innocence and cruelty. Few of the players had clean hands. The result was something unforeseen, something that still defies easy answers. Peru, he added, can and should



Ramiro Llona (right) in his studio speaking with Jorge Benitez (left)

celebrate all of its history and its myriad cultures, but it cannot purge the West from its spirit or blood. He then contrasted the Mexican attacks on the cosmopolitanism of Carlos Fuentes with the measured Peruvian acceptance of the equally cosmopolitan Mario Vargas Llosa and his critique of what he calls the "archaic utopia." The point was clear: Peru cannot return to its pre-Columbian past.

Over the course of two meetings with Pedro Pablo Alayza, we discussed what it means to be a Peruvian artist in a global culture. Our consensus was that the answer lies in the hands of the individual artist. In short, there is no obligation to make Peruvian art, which, in any case, is increasingly difficult to define. The issue reminded me of a curator who once told me that my paintings were not "Cuban enough." Why should they be? My birthplace should not be a cultural cage. Do we expect Pollock to paint Wyoming landscapes or De Kooning to paint like Rembrandt? I would later revisit the issue in a meeting with one of Peru's greatest living painters.

As we spoke, Pedro Pablo Alayza and I agreed that national identity is only one aspect of a total human experience. The background to the conversation was

the lingering influence of the *indigenista* movement and its calls for art rooted in native forms, experiences, and aspirations. Is that even possible for a cosmopolitan resident of Lima? Yes, but at the risk of falling into kitsch or a mockery of indigenous people. As Vargas Llosa posits in *The Archaic Utopia (La utopía arcaica)*, the *indigenista* movement played an important role in calling attention to the plight of indigenous peoples, but it can also trap the artist in a kind of revolutionary romanticism that omits the dark truths of pre-Columbian life. To that end, Vargas Llosa stresses that there was never an indigenous utopia free from exploitative hierarchies. Pre-Columbian life was far from benign or idyllic.

A few days after my first meeting with Pedro Pablo Alayza, I raised the issue with the Peruvian writer Carlos Schwab. He smiled when I asked about the question of Peruvian Western-ness as he explained that it was uneven and contextual. His answer made sense given the size of the country and the diversity of its people. We then proceeded to a larger question, namely, what constitutes the West? Urban Peru did indeed possess a Western database, but it did not experience the Enlightenment. My native Cuba had



Ramiro Llona : oil on canvas, 112" x 185" (284 x 470 cm)

also not experienced the Enlightenment. We agreed that the absence of full engagement with the main currents of the Enlightenment had seriously damaged Latin America and Spain itself. Without an early encounter with British empiricism and French skepticism, it became more difficult to enter modernity. Today, the West is inseparable from the Enlightenment. The Spanish unwillingness to participate in the Enlightenment was central to the ongoing Latin American tragedy. The region bypassed the Age of Reason and jumped into the fire of Romanticism and the French Revolution. It experienced the seductively irrational idealism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau without the sobering benefit of John Locke, Voltaire, David Hume, Denis Diderot, or Adam Smith. The names were known, but their ideas remained mysterious and difficult to implement. I had witnessed the damage that Rousseau-inspired Jacobinism had inflicted on my fellow Cubans. Talking about it in Lima with a Peruvian intellectual added weight to the issue.

As the conversation continued, Carlos Schwalb explained his interest in the pre-Socratic philosophers. This led me to ask him about Nietzsche, and he enthusiastically admitted his admiration for both the German philosopher and Albert Camus. He confessed to being a Francophile. Did that make him less Peruvian? Was I less Cuban for speaking English and French? Why did we not play our assigned roles as noble savages? We dove into the questions and ended with a critique of Platonic idealism and the dangers of utopian ideologies. I then realized that our conversation would have been very difficult thirty years earlier. Latin American discourse was changing into something more nuanced and elegant: a far cry from the hysterical nationalism of Cuba and Venezuela and the knee-jerk anti-Americanism of a resentful intelligentsia unable to explain

postcolonial failures without resorting to foreign scapegoats.

My meetings and conversations occurred against the backdrop of a twenty-first-century city immersed in the Digital Age. From skyscrapers near the bluffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean to manicured parks and colonial plazas, I witnessed a city at ease in its historically-culturally-and-technologically-layered skin. The overlap of influences ranging from Spanish Baroque and French Beaux Arts to the International Style reminded me of Madrid and Barcelona. The inside of the *mudéjar* – Islamic patterned – dome within a side chapel in the Basilica of San Francisco drove home the positive power of contradictions. Why should a Catholic Basilica not have a Muslim dome built by indigenous Peruvians? This set the stage for my encounter with a genteel artist and intellectual, the painter Ramiro Llona.

A long colonial courtyard with an equally long pool to its left led to the studio of Ramiro Llona. The approximately twenty-foot-high walls were covered with paintings and books. Bach concerti sounded from the hidden speakers. Javier Tapia, my Peruvian friend, fellow artist, and host, had arranged the meeting. He introduced me to Ramiro. The tall, lean gentleman immediately put me at ease. We sat down and entered into a nearly four-hour-long conversation that covered art, philosophy, politics, and, of course, Latin America.

Ramiro Llona is a true modernist, an artist steeped in the European canon and the New York School. German and Abstract Expressionism and the European avant-garde are in his blood. He also visits Italy yearly and is passionate about Vittore Carpaccio and Piero della Francesca. As he spoke, I listened intently as if the *mudéjar* dome had come to life and said, "You see, I am Peruvian after all. I embody all these contradictions." He studied and worked in New York.



Ramiro Llona : Puzzle oil on canvas, 112" x 185" (284 x 470 cm)

He speaks English fluently. He, too, is a hemispheric American. Yet he is also thoroughly Peruvian and therefore aware of his country's history and challenges. We spoke at length about what it means to be cosmopolitan in a world that seems to be regressing toward provincialism. Is Latin American Eurocentrism a form of treason? Is cosmopolitanism an exclusively Anglo-American privilege? Listening to Ramiro eloquently articulate, in flawless Castilian, the complexities at play once again drove home the absurdity of reductive answers. I left his studio with a gift of two beautiful books about his work and a sense of wonder and hope. Latin America was not a hinterland after all.

My conversations with Carlos Schwalb, Ramiro Llona, Pedro Pablo Alayza, and Peruvians across the social spectrum made me wonder if the United States was still a Western country. Had it become a technologically advanced banana republic? Had it turned its back on the Enlightenment? The ideological neuroses that plague American campuses have led to the export of identity politics with imperialist fervor. These latter-day intellectual conquistadors insist that the rest of humanity must embrace American notions of nationality and race if it wants to be hip, relevant, and socially just. The other choice is American religious fundamentalism and Ayn Rand-inspired capitalism. Neither choice is palatable or useful. What civic or moral lessons could Latin America learn from a country where a disgruntled president had attempted a coup d'état, the civilian population had more guns than most national armies, civil rights were under judicial threat, large segments of the population no longer trusted science, religiosity had become a political litmus test, angry states threatened secession, and infinitely mutable personal identities were more important than the plight of the working class? Contemporary American im-

perialism, from Left to Right, consisted of exporting the poison of identity politics to regions that had outgrown tribalism and post-colonial immaturity. Latin American intellectuals were able to read Foucault in the original French without Anglo-American explanations. Spanish speakers did not need linguistic advice from American identity theorists. Nor did we need lessons in authenticity and race consciousness. We knew who we were without the benefit of Nazi-like notions of purity and authenticity. I had felt and known these things before traveling to Lima. My Peruvian conversations confirmed them.

Would my experience have been more authentically Peruvian had I gone to Cusco or Machu Picchu? Despite their importance, those marvelous sites do not define the totality of the country, its culture, or its people. Lima, the capital, serves as an enriching and sobering introduction to a complex society in a very complex continent. More importantly, my experience in Lima was authentically American, which to say, of the Americas. In less than two weeks, while speaking nothing but Castilian and laughing with my Peruvian hosts as they gently taught me about their amazing country, I learned that I was indeed an American rather than merely an *estadounidense*. I was a citizen of the Americas – a citizen of the entire hemisphere. I was also thoroughly Western, as were my Peruvian hosts. These seemingly disparate cultural threads were as interwoven as the ancient textiles in the Museo Amano. Peru taught me to embrace everything – to appropriate everything – because, in the end, there is only one database ... the Human database. That is the true gold of the Inca Empire, the Viceroyalty of Peru, and its modern descendent, the Republic of Peru.

# Switzerland

## Gerhard Richter, Engadin

Nancy Nesvet

The Segantini Museum, Nietzsche Haus and Hauser and Wirth Gallery in San Moritz, in the Upper Engadin, Switzerland, comprise the three-venue current exhibition of work by Gerhard Richter titled *Gerhard Richter: Engadin*. Photographs, paintings, and photographs overpainted with oil and lacquer paint surround a sphere reflecting the surrounding work and the mountains beyond the gallery. Richter's work in this exhibit continues his long-standing practice of appropriating and making photographs, then expunging, covering up details in the photograph, making clear his denial of his role in the photographed historic documentary moment, while always leaving a vestige or more of the original photograph. In these paintings and overpainted photographs at Engadin he adds joyous color, autumnal linear marks made with a technological squeegee process original to Richter, and fields of white, resembling snow, perhaps unintentionally but definitely illustrating and alluding to current environmental politics impacting this glacial area. Gerhard Richter, born in Dresden in 1932, trained as an artist in the DGR (Democratic German Republic) illustrating East German political dogma. Upon escaping to the west, Dusseldorf, to attend art school, and embarking on a career that attempted to illustrate his disassociation with the identity that people assigned to him based on his childhood and family history, he created work that pointed out and challenged false assumptions about him and questioned fake news. This questioning of propagandist media, his place within it and importantly, others' perception of him, resulted in his producing visual media to portray his truth. A "dialectical self-dissolution of myth", as Adorno wrote in a letter to Walter Benjamin, resulted, in Richter's hands, in deconstructing the history and content that Richter's society viewed in state-supported documentary media, reconstructing and often negating it in his paintings. His refusal to annihilate the photographic image and his insistence on leaving documentary objective origins literally blurring the margins between painting and photography create his hybridization of painting and photography as a formal conceit marking an evolutionary development in the history of painting. Continuing to obfuscate by overpainting, hiding, or eliminating parts of the painting, he combines media documentation, memory, and emotion to ques-



Gerhard Richter in Sils, summer 2006  
Photo: Sabine Moritz

tion society's view of reality and consequently, society's view of him. In the overpainted Sils imagery, the photograph memorializing a mountain or place, then overpainted with Richter's marks births a new language of imagery, describing nature to entice a public but also to warn of impending destruction of that natural landscape. In his reinterpretation of the documentary photographic image into painting or overpainting, including his face confronting the viewer, in *Val Fex* (1992), he manipulates and overpaints the photograph to show his own reality, his view, begging the viewer to see it. By the 1970's, Richter painted landscapes from photographs, conceding that, as noted by Dieter Schwarz in the introductory essay for *Gerhard Richter Engadin*, Richter's landscapes were "not only about beauty, nostalgia, romanticism, or classicism, like some paradise lost." Photographs from hikes in Sils over several years were included in *Dezember*, curated by Alexander Kluge in 2010, featuring variations on a pine motif. An exhibition displayed hundreds of



© Gerhard Richter, *Waterfall*  
courtesy Hauser and Wirth, San Moritz

photos from Richter's *Album* at London's Whitechapel Gallery in 2002. Having faded over time, but therefore marking the photograph as a remnant of the past, as opposed to a painting produced on site in the present, the memories from the *Album* are justifiably blurry, as in *3.04.08*. After 1998, he photographed the Upper Engadin in color, adding impasto and highly textured, colored oil-lacquer paint to the photographs, varying from white and one additional color to multi-colored layers, linking memory with present observation and emotion. *Lake Sils, Silsersee* shows Richter's overpainting using the squeegee or brushing a swath or blob of paint in the image's foreground, never extending it to the painting's edge. Ne©izes form and content, memory, or media document, acknowledging the final and current form more important, more "real", than the blurred and faded memory of past media. By overpainting and eliminating parts of the photograph, Richter has little allegiance to the original photograph, instilling his own meaning. In *Piz Surlej, Piz Rosatsch*, mountains descend from the top of the painting, with peaks at the bottom of the Piz. Others, shown in the exhibition resemble spring flowering plants climbing the hillside (*3.3.08*) or

phantasmagorical aquatic beings floating in photographed water" (*7.4.08*). Greens, oranges, and blues of *12.1.89* are not fire, but rather autumnal magnificence, not overpowering the mountains but blending in with them. *Val Fex, Piz Chaputschin*, (1992) has me skiing across the mountain of horizontal marks along with Richter's brush and squeegee. A cloud of snow overpowers the sunset lit clouds in *Silsersee/Lake Sils, Piz Lunghin*. He knows and records the marks and rhythm of skiing the mountains. The experimentation is remarkable, the sense of humor joyous. He has even included himself in this mountainous scenery, as in *Val Fex* 1992, where a sun-glassed Richter wears a hat of ski marked snow (making him a snow man?). It is a rare auto portrait, with Richter acknowledging his place in these mountains, Richter has clearly found joy in the mountains, manipulating his practice to accommodate and highlight the beauty he has photographed while creating a formal abstraction. Richter has sometimes been included in the Pop Art school of painting, the corroboration of which is in these somewhat commercialized photographic landscapes of Sils, rendering the landscape beautiful and inviting. There is even an allusion to the commercialization of the sport of skiing and to the branding displayed in Pop Art in the clearly marked Burton snowboard in *4.2.92*. Yet there is a dark side. Richter depicts the romantic, endangered beauty of the mountains of the Upper Engadin rather than the propaganda of the travel brochure, by overpainting, questioning the ever-present and future beauty of the Upper Engadin landscape. We could group him with the Romantics, as the overpainted photographs and paintings present beauty but also foreboding, and due to current environmental hazards, illustrate the possibility of impending destruction of the Upper Engadin. Although photographs fade, Richter does not let us forget. He paints the image and overpaints the photograph for all time, Serving as a memory of the past when the photograph was taken, and for the present and future, as a warning of environmental change due to global warming. By overpainting, erasing parts of the Upper Engadin landscape, and appearing as avalanches of white snow bearing down on the land, Richter shows, intentionally or not, that if humankind continues its present environmentally destructive path, the mountains and the beauty of the Upper Engadin may not remain forever. Our present environment challenges and the fragility of glacial mountain ranges have become political issues, but it is Richter's politics, born of the love for these mountains, not politics imposed on him.





Val Fex, 1992. 10 x 15 cm

Val Fedoz, Muott'Öta, 1992. 12.5 x 17.5 cm

Val Fex (1992) (scan from book)



© Gerhard Richter: 4.2.92 (8.9 x 12.6 cms)

In the catalogue to *Gerhard Richter, Engadin* Dieter Schwarz's wrote that Richter's pictures painted from photographs reveal his (Richter's) "yearning", whereas the abstract paintings show my (Richter's) reality. Richter, yearning for the beautiful landscape of the Upper Engadin creates an image memorializing and illustrating that yearned for image. It is not a technological exploration of color and layering of paint as in the abstract squeegee paintings, but rather an emotional, Romantic appreciation for a place he longs for. In Engadin, Richter reveals himself an artist yearning for a place, painting what he loves and yearns for.

We cannot escape noting Richter's location, Sils, where Nietzsche wrote *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, describing the eternal recurrence, historical events and political issues repeating. Hans Ulrich Obrist, in his introduction to *Gerhard Richter Sils*, quotes Nietzsche:

"If we think this thought in its most terrible form: existence such as it is, without meaning and goal, but recurring unavoidable without a finale into nothingness: the eternal recurrence." That eternal recurrence. was written about by Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, while in Sils Maria in the Upper Engadin during warm summers from 1881-8. Obrist continues: "He saw himself as a herald of a new breed of philosophical 'free spirits' who would re-

fuse to prop up comforting dogmas. Instead, they would act as pitiless interrogators of human thought and behavior". Another free spirit, in this same place, having been read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by his erudite mother, is Richter.

Richter has sought to disengage himself from politics over his lifetime, trying to express his point of view, disassociating himself from politics others attached to him. But the environmental politics of our current era has found him, and coalesced his painting and overpainting with politics that he might finally agree with and personalize. The *Hudson River School* artists celebrated the majesty of the Catskill mountains of the Appalachian range as did painters of mountains and vistas of the American West. Emphasizing the power of those who sought to tame that wilderness, ultimately own it, and perhaps ruin it, to recognition of present-day global warming causing glaciers to fall into the sea, raising the ocean's level, endangering all of us, environmental politics is illustrated. Richter can only hope to convince us to pay attention and value what we have and may lose, proclaiming truth against propaganda, using his art to save his beautiful Upper Engadin.

# Africa

## Front Seat to a Revolution

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE TURBO CHARGED DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN AFRICA

Valerie Kabov

The past two decades marked some dramatic changes, movements and upheavals for contemporary art in Africa and its engagement with the global art community, industry and market. Like the rest of Africa, its art scene is young, ancient, dynamic, diverse, and rapidly evolving, undergoing an evolution that art scenes elsewhere would have taken generations if not centuries to develop. An accident of fate privileged me to both participate and reflect on many of these developments as an art historian, art market analyst, art critic, educator, and gallerist. When I first arrived in Zimbabwe in 2009, its art sector, like that of many African countries, was dominated by Western cultural funders and organisations, whose major objective is promotion of their home country and language internationally – British Council, Goethe Institute, Alliance Française, Cervantes Institute, were the major hosts of exhibitions and together with embassies were sponsors of exhibitions with such laudable titles like *Don Quixote* and *The Wall – Zimbabwean emerging artists respond to the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall*.

But things were about to change. Unbeknown to myself, I had a glimpse at the revolution coming, with my first meaningful encounter with contemporary African art at the Venice Biennale in 2007 as part of the controversial African Pavilion in the exhibition curated by Robert Storr. Unaware of the controversy about the provenance of the collection, the African Pavilion was the only one that I remembered as being significant and transformative in the entire exhibition. It was also a recognition on a mainstream global stage of the curatorial and academic activism which had been building for more than a decade. Publications like *Nka Journal* in the USA and *Review Noir* in France and Exhibitions like *Magiciens de la Terre*, Okwui Enwezor's Documenta 11, Johannesburg Biennale and Simon Njami's *Africa Remix* and activism of Sindika Dakolo built up the ground internationally, which was waiting to be catalysed by the market into a movement capable of transforming art sectors on the continent. All publicity is good publicity, as the saying goes, Robert Storr's African Pavilion Venice in 2007 created the noise to enable

the international art market to begin to properly notice contemporary art from Africa with the milestone first edition of 1:54 in London in October 2013. This was accompanied by a 'euphoria of arrival', with art fairs all over the world deciding to put a spotlight on Africa and numerous survey style exhibitions with the word 'Africa' in the title.

This 'arrival' coincided with the rise of emerging contemporary art as a category globally. Overwhelmingly and attractively for the market, African artists were young, new, interesting, and cheap, low risk with high opportunity prospects. Inevitably and similarly to that of the global spotlight on other 'emerging art scenes' the attention from the Global North was a mixed blessing. This new interest served overwhelmingly to reinforce rather than dismantle the Global North as the fulcrum of the art world. Young African artists were being quickly picked up by Western galleries, sometimes literally relocating them to Europe and the USA for ease of access to the new market. For collectors interested in building a profile on a budget this was a boon. In 2015, for under \$200,000 you could build a museum-worthy collection of the finest emerging artists from across Africa. While the injection of capital into emerging markets can and does help build up infrastructure for domestic art scenes, it is undermined by the fact that the North remains pivotal to art interactions and the setting of art agendas. Unlike other art scenes like South America and China previously blessed with market spotlight in earlier decades with meaningful local markets and institutions for contemporary art to leverage new interest, African art scenes did not. In most ways they had to and continue to build up the entire infrastructure and ecology of their art sectors from the foundations across a continent of more than a billion people and 54 countries.

The pre-eminence of Western market influence dovetailed with the domination of foreign NGOs in the cultural funding sector in Africa. Foreign humanitarian organizations focused on developmental, humanitarian, health, social justice and frequently diplomatic and political agendas have stepped in to fill the gap left by government funding. This inevitably has meant that the broader sociolog-



Njedeka Akonyili Crosby: *Cassava Garden* (2015)  
6x5ft. Acrylic transfers, colored pencil, charcoal, commemorative fabri on paper

ical agendas of the funders take precedence over support for economic viability and artistic excellence. Conversely philanthropic efforts to support African contemporary art have also been largely ex-continental, with the largest collection of contemporary African art having been built up by Jean Pigozzi, who is also currently planning to create a museum in Europe to house his collection.

The geo-politics of art economics in African contemporary art are further elaborated through the example of the 2019 Venice Biennale. When Ralph Rugoff was asked in an interview: "Are there Africans?", referring to their participation, he answered "Yes, wonderful African artists, from Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa." His five Africans included New York's Julie Mehretu and L.A.'s Njedeka Akonyili Crosby who enjoy major gallery representation, with their work commanding huge prices at international auctions. Similarly stellar, Ghana's debut pavilion in 2019 was dominated by London and New York as much as Accra, designed by London architect David Adjaye, with John Akomfrah (who

this year is representing UK) with support of these artists' Western gallerists – art world heavyweights – White Cube (London), Lisson Gallery (London), Jack Shainman Gallery (New York) and October Gallery (London) among other international players. Not only are they key funders of these artists but they are also the true financial beneficiaries of Ghana's national pavilion debut in Venice. As Veltuis says: "You are considered to be successful in the art market if your prices are rising quickly... and that is exactly what ... biennale enables an artist and an art dealer to do."

Nonetheless and even as minority players in international fora, independent and internationally active galleries did begin to emerge on the continent in the second decade of the century. With support primarily of international art fairs, which were now proactively seeking out African art and African artists and art fairs on the continent like Joburg Art Fair (now Art Joburg) founded in 2010 and Cape Town Art Fair (now Investec Cape Town Art Fair) founded in 2014 and Art X Lagos, founded in 2016 they managed



Grace Nyahangare: *Blue Magic* (2024)  
oil, printer's ink and monotype on canvas, 38 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 50 $\frac{3}{4}$  in.  
98 x 129 cm.

to gain financial viability and recognition as primary stakeholders in development of local sectors. Recognising this role and its challenges, Emerging African Art Galleries Association was founded in 2016 as a collaboration between galleries like First Floor Gallery Harare, Circle Art Gallery in Nairobi, Movart Luanda, Addis Fine Art in Addis Ababa, Afriart Gallery in Kampala to support galleries, which were usually the only international gallery in their country and whose operations necessitated that they behave as social enterprises not only representing artists but also funding production, education, providing social security and even healthcare depending on circumstances, all with no government support. The Association worked to support the members by sharing know-how, and experience as well as lobbying art fairs for more equitable treatment and recognition of the special challenges that African galleries face, when engaging internationally from shipping costs to currency transfers and visas. The strength in numbers was also an imperative, at times when in addition to the tribulations of

running a gallery in a developing country context it became apparent that Western galleries had no ethical problems poaching talents identified and promoted by African galleries, with ne'er a thought to what this sabotage means for local art sectors. The extractive legacy of colonialism in Africa persisted and as attention to Africa grew in the market so did the concerns about how and where its values and narratives were being established. Even the *Financial Times* took a pause from hyping the African contemporary art market to recognize that despite the euphoria internationally, in Africa, though, the picture is less rosy. Public funding is scarce. With the exception of South Africa and Nigeria, there are almost no commercial galleries to sell artists' work and provide them with a livelihood." As a result, African art sectors trying to compete internationally are at a distinct disadvantage to international counterparts, in trying to build the overall ecology of art sectors on the continent without established and proactive collecting institutions. While galleries were fighting a good fight on the



Wycliffe Mundopa: *Understanding the Assignment Part 2* (2023)  
oil and spray paint on canvas 54 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 43 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. 138.5 x 110 cm



*First Floor Gallery, Harare, Zimbabwe*

ground to build up audiences and nurture artists, their remit was inadequate to build up patrimonial infrastructure that can only be done by museums and this was being recognised rapidly. In his opinion piece on the Sotheby's first auction of African art, for the New York Times in May 2017, Chika Okeke-Agilumay, wrote:

"The sale at Sotheby's...most likely signals the beginning of a more serious interest from Western museums, which may finally start to consider such work worthy of inclusion in their permanent collections." In this inexorable march to the mainstream, I am tempted to think of contemporary African art as akin to an urban neighborhood undergoing gentrification. Now that it is seen as high culture, the art and artists are gaining value, investors are jostling to get a piece of the action, and private collections are growing in Africa and around the world.

This is very good news for the African modernists who will benefit from the increased visibility. They were, some say, the postcolonial avant-garde, who set out to create new art for independent Africa during the mid-20th century. African contemporary artists have also moved beyond nationalism and are more likely to sound off about globalization and complex identities.

But the continent's masses will be the biggest losers. They will be denied access to artworks that define the age of independence and symbolize the slow process of postcolonial recovery."

With such a strong international market and foreign institutional collecting effort directed toward the sector, it is more than foreseeable that the vast majority of the most important works by modern and contemporary African artists will be lost to African audiences and patrimony.

This symbiosis between philanthropy, tourism and patrimony remains the foundation and a model for museums all over the world to this day. Globalisation and expansion of the art market over recent decades, has also made museums part of a foundational structures that establish, determine and preserve value and heritage and interact symbiotically both with the art market as well as the broader social and economic drivers of development.

Art museums, their acquisitions and exhibitions are key signals of value to the market. Inclusion in Tate Modern, MoMA, Guggenheim collection is a badge of establishment, which leads to immediate rise in market price of the artist – dead or alive.

So far market benefit of participation in Venice and inclusion has largely benefited Western galleries representing galleries which pick up the newly elevated artists for representation following Venice. These galleries also stand to benefit from inclusion into the Western museum collection of the African artists they represent and which signify and assure long-term value and price growth. These are the works, which will make it into textbooks and touring international exhibitions, which are sourced by re-



*Troy Makaza: Kingdom of rapidly decaying desires Part 1 (2023)  
silicone infused with pigment 74¾ x 65 in. 190 x 165 cm*

ciprocal arrangements between museums increasingly defining the canon. Where will African audiences be in this?

When commentators complain about African contemporary art being undervalued, one of the things that they are in fact commenting on is that these artists have not been daubed as masters by the powers that be. It is unequivocal that reputations have been built and consolidated by inclusion in museum collections.

While celebrating the not a moment too soon recog-

nition of masters like Ibrahim El-Salahi and El Anatsui by inclusion in the collections of major museums like the Tate and MoMA, Africans should also be mourning that they are ceding authority about the making of the African art canon to third parties.

The momentum and imperative for establishing art institutions crystallised in 2017 with the opening of Zeitz MoCA in Cape Town, which was quickly followed by a number of institutions elsewhere like Macaal in Marrakech, Shyllon Museum in Lagos, Norval Foundation in Cape Town and Palais de

Lome in Togo. Given that Western Europe and North America have more than 30,000 museums to a population of 1 billion and for a similar population base, Africa has just over 800, the challenge of establishing the project establishing authoritative and authentic representation of African art both historically and contemporaneously is immense.

And yet it is a true key to genuine ownership of history, legacy, value creation and retention of cultural heritage for future generations; providing access to Africans to the best examples of contemporary art and the value that this engenders. Only the locally founded collecting institutions are in a position to at least try and assure democracy and plurality of representation.

It is equally unequivocal that building up local institutions of the quality and capacity to adequately address these needs is an enormous challenge. While founding fathers of newly independent African nations like Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure, recognized the importance of cultural nationalism, art could not and has not taken priority above health care, education and core infrastructure like roads and building up industry, the urgent needs of young nations.

Speaking to the African Art Report in 2014 about his collection, Sindika Dokolo said:

“The real added value of an African collection of art is to expose the African audience to its own contemporary creation. It is a moral and political responsibility and an effort must be made so that our continent is more integrated in the art world circuits. Therefore, I decided early on that my collection would always be available for free for any museum around the world who would be interested in hosting an exhibition. However, I have one demand in that the museum has the obligation to organize the same exhibition in an African country of its choice. We cannot just accept that African art will never be seen in Africa because our continent is still poor and focused on its primordial needs.”

However we live at a moment of acceleration of history.

Over the past decade, the art market has been undergoing turbulent changes. Globalisation and emerging art markets, art as an asset class, social media, art fairs, emergence of multi-national gallery models and rise of private museums boom. Examined closed, many of these changes are driven at least in part by collectors and new business-conscious collectors are engaging with the market and artists. While criticisms of the monetisation and productisation of art abound, one development in particular has been emerging as a positive signifier



*Anne Zanele Mutema: Righteous Cords 5 (2023)  
resin, canvas, thread 8¼ x 5¼ in. 21 x 13.5 cm.*

– emergence of activist collectors in a patron capacity.

Reporting for New York Times in 2017, Jennifer Miller reports on:

“a shift in how some arts enthusiasts, from wealthy individuals to grant-making foundations, are relating to creators. They are moving away from merely collecting and consuming art and toward a model reminiscent of the Renaissance, when royal houses provided room, board, materials and important professional connections to talented artists of the day. Patrons of the 21st century are far less politically motivated than the Medici family and their ilk, and they generally don’t house artists in their lavish estates or command them to paint frescoes. But just like the patrons of old, they are giving creators a pathway to success and economic stability, providing living expenses, supplies, pep talks and more.”

Explanations can be many from the drastic cuts in government cultural funding to changes in the way art is produced and the backgrounds of collectors, Rose Lee Goldberg, the South African born founder of Performa, “believes today’s patrons are similar to the “angel investors” of tech. “You see that some-



*Wycliffe Mundopa: Understanding the Assignment Part 2 (2023)  
oil and spray paint on canvas, 54½ x 43¼ in. 38.5 x 110 cm*

thing has potential to grow and you want to support that incubation period,”

While many default to comparisons to the Medici Renaissance patronage, the idea of artist patronage is far from uniquely European.

Speaking about re-emergence of patronage in the context of Chinese and Hong Kong contemporary art Chin Chin Teoh, co-director of the MILL Foundation, a non-profit arts and cultural organisation, qualifies the difference between a collector and a patron: “we like to classify a patron as the sort to have a direct relationship with the artist. There is a direct dialogue between the artist and patron, so the relationship is mutually negotiable,”

In many ways while the impetus to support art at present has been catalysed by international atten-

tion, there is an inevitable transformation that happens, when people look at art that represents them in their own context. The magic of authenticity.

Africa is the youngest continent, with energy and capacity to invent and reinvent, leap-frog and challenge. In art in particular major gaps in infrastructure and lack of established systems and institutions and resourcing is an opportunity for activists and advocates to do things on their own terms.

# Italy

## El Greco: His Own Peculiar Style

Liviana Martin



El Greco: *Christ Healing the Blind* (series) Date (1570s / circa 1577)  
oil on canvas 119.4 cm (47 in) 146.1 cm (57.5 in)

If sometimes the destiny of a person is contained in the name (nomen omen as the Romans said, meaning the destiny is in the name), in this painter there are actually two of them: El concerns his Spanish period, Greco the Italian one. The artist was born in 1541 in Candia, capital of the island of Crete, then under Venetian dominion. His real name, with which he signs himself in many works, is Doménikos Theotokopoulos.

The exhibition ongoing at Palazzo Reale in Milan offers, after more than twenty years of absence from Italy, a vast selection of over 50 of his works, coming from the Prado Museum in Madrid, the Uffizi in Florence, the National Gallery in London, to name just a few, which are compared with the paintings of

the most famous artists of the time, such as Titian, Tintoretto and Bassano.

We are in the mid-1500s, in the midst of the Renaissance, on the threshold of Mannerism. However, the first steps of the young Doménikos follow the traditional icons of Byzantine culture; the artist becomes an icon painter. From here comes his unmistakable trait, the elongated and slightly distorted figures, far from measure and proportion, peculiar qualities of the Italian Renaissance. His first work, *Dormitio Virginis* (1577), is flat, two-dimensional, in the Greek, oriental style. Soon this way of painting will be abandoned, but not forgotten, in favor of the Roman style Western art, when the artist moves to Venice and later to Rome. The ideas and innovations of



El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos): *Laocoön*: (1610 and 1614)  
oil on canvas oil on canvas. 1,375 mm (54.13 in); width: 1,725 mm (67.91 in)

the *Serenissima* seduced the imagination and influenced the choices of young artists. But, even when El Greco in Venice came into contact with painters of the caliber of Titian or Tintoretto, he did not passively absorb the lessons of the masters of color, but always maintained his own peculiar style, enriching it with brightness and perspective. His paintings are, apart from some magnificent portraits, almost all of a religious nature. It is the era of the Counter-Reformation, and the Catholic Church must build a barrier against Protestantism: artists follow its rules of orthodoxy even in the pictorial field. Even if at times El Greco deviates from it, depicting the Madonna breastfeeding her child, an image that the doctrine of the Counter-Reformation did not consider decorous.

A beautiful painting on display, the *Annunciation*, reinterprets elements taken from Titian and Tintoretto in his own style. In a closed environment, which opens onto a sky with extraordinary colours, the Virgin Mary looks towards the Angel portrayed in dazzling colours. The characters' gestures and ex-

pressions convey their feelings: the amazement painted on the young woman's face at the announcement (she will have a son and he will be the Messiah) is contrasted with the firm and reassuring expression of the divine messenger. The two figures speak to each other and to us.

Also in another work on display, the *Last Supper*, El Greco takes up elements typical of Tintoretto: the brightness, the gestures of the characters, the theatrical sense of the representation. The figures of Christ and the Apostles are arranged around a table, where objects stand out, including a knife and a fork (believed to be symbols of the devil) placed near Judas, the traitor. While the other characters have bright, light robes, Judas is depicted from behind, with a darker, almost gloomy robe, to highlight his wickedness. In these paintings every detail is symbolic; everything communicates messages to us. The wonderful play of light, which is reflected on the clothes, seems to come almost from inside; it is a divine light.

El Greco arrived in Rome in 1570 to obtain important



El Greco: *Boy Blowing an Ember* (1570-72)  
oil on canvas. 60.5 cm (23.8 in) 50.5 cm (19.8 in)

commissions, recommended by the powerful Farnese family. In this city, the center of Renaissance culture, where all the most important artists worked in the churches and palaces of the Pope, El Greco discovered Michelangelo, towards whom he felt great admiration and who would influence his painting in the anatomical rendering of the human body, painted in a twisted "serpentine" way.

The *Healing of the Blind* is influenced by the Roman period. In the foreground, painted with soft brushstrokes, Christ puts his fingers in the eyes of a blind man and restores his sight, just as the Church spreads its light against the darkness of the heresies. In the foreground, a string of Roman-style architectural elements.

But the protection of the Farnese family did not last long, his paintings with elongated shapes were no longer popular. Thus, the artist moves again and goes to Spain with the hope of obtaining some prestigious assignment and finally finding a homeland. However, he remains disappointed once again because the innovative power of his art is not fully understood. He then retreats to Toledo, a marginal city deeply rooted in Orthodox Catholicism. Here he paints a series of masterpieces in which the figures are increasingly elongated; the colors become unnatural. After creating small paintings, he works on colossal works. An example of this is the beautiful *Saint Martin and the Beggar*, where the saint, according to tradition a Roman soldier from the 4th century, is dressed in typical 17th century clothing with armor and gorget. Martin towers on a white horse, intent on cutting off his cloak to give it to the poor, almost naked beggar. The figures are monumental; the facial expressions express sweetness. El Greco fits perfectly into the narrative of the Church of the Counter-Reformation, which sees the poor as the suffering people and the saint as the warrior of faith. The background, which will be repeated in many of his other works, is Toledo. The same city, illuminated by lights that seem to be flashes coming from the sky, almost ghostly, is the background of another work, the agonizing Christ, where the whiteness of Christ's body stands out against the black of the sky with fringed clouds that interrupt the darkness.

In the last part of his life the artist increasingly accentuated this anti-realistic way of painting: the *Baptism of Christ* is a perfect example. Here, the style is almost expressionist, El Greco abandons all naturalism to represent his subjective reality, where bodies, sky and earth merge with supernatural effects. The exhibition ends with the only work painted by the artist on a mythological subject. It represents

the end of Laocoön narrated by Greek myths. Laocoön is a Trojan priest who warns his fellow citizens of the danger they will face if they let the horse created by the Greeks enter the city walls to conquer it. The goddess Athena, protector of the Greeks, sends snakes to kill Laocoön and his sons. In the painting, the priest, in a disjointed pose, collapsed on the ground, tries to kill the snake. A son on his right appears to dance with the reptile, creating a sort of circle that encloses the city of Toledo. Three enigmatic figures (the Three Fates?) observe the death of those who wanted to challenge the divinity and were punished. Frayed clouds appear in an eerie sky. It is a mysterious work, full of messages yet to be interpreted, which seals the painter's greatness. After a long oblivion, El Greco's painting was rediscovered in the 19th century. Painters such as Cezanne, Delacroix and Sargent admired him and drew inspiration from him. Picasso himself, in his most revolutionary painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, was partly inspired by the contortions of El Greco. Perhaps also due to its modernity, the exhibition has attracted a great number of spectators since its opening.

*El Greco, Palazzo Reale di Milano from 11/10/2023 to 11/02/2024, tickets - 15 euro*



El Greco: *Presumed self-portrait*

# Argentina

## From Baires with Love

Elga Wimmer

Buenos Aires, called Baires colloquially, a vibrant city excelling in art, music and architecture, with a largely European rooted population, is much more than the current news headlines of economic doom and political chaos.

My trip in early September of 2023 – included a visit to the ArteBA art fair, as well as art exhibitions, museums and galleries, tango presentations, even an estancia (polo farm) outside of the capital, discovering amazing and surprisingly affordable restaurants for a foreigner due to the collapsing Argentinian currency.

While leaving much to be desired on the economic front, Argentina is rich in art and culture. Art collectors from neighboring countries and around the world flock here to discover emerging talents, and acquire tomorrow's important artworks at a fraction of the American and European market. To be sure, that could change soon, given the renewed interest in Latin American masters from past and present – note the extraordinary Retrospective of Leon Ferrari at the Pompidou Center in Paris last year, and the excitement around Latin American artists shown at the Bass Museum in Miami — in collaboration with the Ama Amoedo Foundation, Argentina/Uruguay, a non-profit focused on developing the contemporary Latin American art ecosystem.

Galleries across Buenos Aires held art receptions coordinated with ArteBA

VIP events causing all of Buenos Aires, unlike art capitals where the art scene is often concentrated in a small area, to buzz with art.

Gallery highlights included Herlitzka & Co (located in Recoleta) featuring Deliah Cancela's Catwalk, an exhibition of works on paper and a video documentation of a performance at Theatre Le Palace in Paris, 1979, in collaboration with her then partner Pablo Mesejean, which was accompanied by 76 drawings of her fashion creations. She was one of the first artists in the 1970's to combine art and fashion.

Ruth Benzacar Gallery, founded in 1965 by Ruth Benzacar, now run by her daughter Orly Benzacar, is located in the fashionable Palermo district, the SoHo of Buenos Aires. The artist couple Chiachio & Giannone presented Juntos Somos Mejores (Together We are Better) in October 2023, celebrating twenty years of art, life, and the bonds of a shared identity they have built together. Perhaps not surprisingly,



Alfredo Hlito: *Efigie observada*, (1992)

the exhibition is about love and art saving the world. MCMC Gallery, located in the elegant Recoleta district close to the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, had a booth in ArteBA and showed Eduardo Costa, a prominent Argentinian artist who lived, for an extended period in New York, before returning to Buenos Aires over a decade ago. Costa is a multidisciplinary artist noted for his video works (Names of Friends: Poem for the Deaf-Mute, 1969, shown at MOMA, New York 2015/2016) and three-dimensional paintings made entirely of acrylic, a post-minimal answer to body and performance art.

Edgardo Gimenez, showing in Buenos Aires at MALBA (Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires), had an installation of his colorful pop sculptures at MCMC Gallery's booth at ArteBA.

Nora Fisch Gallery is located in a historic townhouse in the heart of San Telmo, a center for antiquities,



Alfredo Hlito: *Iconostasis en rojo*, (1987)

markets, and Sunday afternoon tango dancers on the main square. Always on the lookout for new, promising talent, Nora Fisch presented the Uruguayan artist Guzman Pas (b. 1988). Pas builds small-scale scenes in pieces that combine painting and detailed, laboriously handmade sculptural elements, a visual language at the crossroads of pop culture and a playfully baroque sensibility. Mid-career artist Ana Tiscornia, also from Uruguay (b. 1951) but residing in New York, presented cardboard constructions, paintings and collages derived from architectural plans for domestic spaces, and designs by both classical and modernist architects.

Argentinian curator Maria Jose Herrera showed artist and architect Edgardo Gimenez at MALBA, No Habra Ninguno Igual (August thru November 2023) while at the same time presenting painter Alfredo Hlito, at MNBA (National Museum of Fine Arts), Una Terca Permanencia (July thru October 2023). Both notable contemporary Argentinian artists, Gimenez (b. 1942) and Hlito (1923 – 1993) could not be further apart in their artistic trajectories. Edgardo Gimenez started out in graphic design, before he branched into painting, sculpture, design, scenography for films and architecture. His first sculpture, as you enter the show, is a portrait of Divine, the underground film actress in drag and cult figure (1945 to 1988), in a red, skintight dress, and excessive Kabuki make-up, pointing a gun at the viewer.

This image which served as inspiration for Gimenez' sculpture once adorned the cover of a Time Magazine special edition profiling the 100 most influential people, and was featured in a movie poster for John Water's cult classic film, Pink Flamingos in the 1980's. The sculpture brings a cinematic tone to the exhibition, No Habra Niguno Igual (One of a Kind). This playful mix of installation, live performance, sculpture and architecture, explores obsessions in daily life, mixed with a dose of humor. In one installation we see a huge, cracked egg, performers playing with pink balloons, clad in pink and blue bodysuits. Is it the battle of the sperms or germs?

In another part of the show, brightly colored geometric sculptures, blending art deco with pop art, recall the Italian Memphis group design from the 1980's. More installations with an oversized rabbit in a teacup, Daliesque furniture and mirror-like surfaces covered with flowers and phantasmagorical creatures invite the viewer to take a deep dive into the often bizarre world of Gimenez' Gesamt-kunstwerk (total work of art). As per the French apt expression, ca fait rever (it makes you dream), what better sentiment then, to leave this exhibition in a dreamlike state.



Alfredo Hlito: *Ciudad lejana*, (1992)

At MNBA, curator Maria Jose Herrera staged the first retrospective of Alfredo Hlito since his death in 1993, titled Alredo Hlito: A Stubborn Presence. Hlito was one of the founders of the avantgarde of Argentine concrete art in the 1940's.

Abstract in the early years, Hlito's paintings started including an effigy, a sort of counter image or self-reflection, that the artist talked to, wrote to, and that accompanied the artist in his work to the end. In a late work, Ciudad Lejana (Far Away City), 1992, a figure sits in a closed space looking out onto what looks like a Cityscape. In Efigie Observada (Effigy Observed), the protagonist lies flat on the ground, with two figures hovering, observing. The feeling in these paintings recall Dubuffet's figures, becoming darker and darker towards the end of the artist's life, until they almost disappear into the background. Hlito's work, like Dubuffet, has a poetic, melancholic ambience.

Art, culture, fashion, architecture — today's Buenos Aires beckons the free spirit. For those chasing the endless summer, the four seasons are reversed. When harsh winter settles in, in other parts of the world, the sunny cultural splendor of Baires offers the adventurous a mecca of art discovery.



# London

## Entangled Pasts: Art, Colonialism, Change

David Goldenberg

Although the title is *Entangled Pasts: Art, Colonialism, Change*, the actual theme of the show currently at the Royal Academy of Art (RA) is the history of the RA and how socio-political issues are refracted through mainstream western art, history, knowledge, and the creation of environments where past and recent time coexist. To what I know about my culture, The British Empire, colonialism and its crimes, and its contributions, the exhibition added to what I knew of how the Royal Academy filtered these narratives and its function as an institution today. It asked how do we then understand the function of an institution fronting the Conservative revolution in art in the UK?

What does it mean for the Royal Academy to stage an exhibition in 2024 that reflects on its role in helping to establish a canon of Western art history within the contexts of British colonialism, empire, and enslavement? Why now, and why does it matter? What were the conditions that led the Royal Academy, along with many other nationally significant cultural institutions (including the National Trust, English Heritage, Fitzwilliam Museum, Tate, and the National Gallery), to recently investigate their own entanglements with Britain's colonial pasts? What can art bring to the wider public conversation about history?

The Royal Academy of Art is central to the reinvention of Modernism, staging shows such as *Sensation*, and securing the Modern arts canon with shows of Munch, Bacon and Baselitz. The new large-scale exhibition at the Royal Academy can be linked to similar recent revisions and changes to the role of art in the UK, and for that reason shares similar methodologies and objectives, although this is far more ambitious and systematic, with the appearance of wanting to engage with the history of the British Empire and its legacy. The title appears to suggest a broad analysis of key problems facing us today – art, colonialism, and change. As such it suggests a decolonisation of the museum and a form of Institutional critique. However, what we get is something entirely different.

To piece together the message the RA show communicates it is necessary to understand the works that are met leading into the show, the structure and sequence of the rooms that make up the exhibition, the mixing of works in each room, and the overall



*indian image*

design of the exhibition. As well, we should understand the implication of its wider collaboration with the Courtauld, Oxford University, Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, and J. A. Projects, led by Jayden Ali with Abby Bird and Brian Yue, who designed the exhibition and constructed the look and narrative projected by the exhibition on the history of the Royal Academy.

The exhibition traces colonialism, slavery, and the Atlantic slave trade through the history of the RA and art works by RA members. They highlight its beginning as the foundation of the Autonomy of Art at the height of colonialism and the slave trade. But the



*Central Sculpture*

principal story is race, the story of the RA in relationship to race, slavery, especially from Africa, the Negro and blackness. The exhibition links recent history, from the death of George Floyd, the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and the restructuring and social engineering that visibly took place during the pandemic, to the bodies and politics of blackness.

Argentinian scholar Walter D. Mignolo has argued, decoloniality 'calls for both civil and epistemic disobedience', through which his readers are urged to delink from the colonial order so that they can strive for re-existence'. Mignolo identifies 'the Colonial Matrix of Power' as one that 'controls and touches upon all aspects and trajectories of our lives'. His analysis of the necessity for civil and epistemic disobedience has been central to rethinking the relationships between modernity and coloniality. Mignolo's writing seeks methods for delinking from the formations of knowledge and power that structure contemporary society as an inheritance of colonial pasts.

Structurally, institutions like the Royal Academy are closely entwined with matrices of colonial power, but individual, independent artists operating under its auspices also have the capacity for epistemic disobedience through artworks that interrogate, subvert, and nuance the prevailing order and whose meanings shift over time and in different viewing contexts.

So, the principal curators knit together a simple narrative that link the overarching themes and issues, starting with RA artists' engagement with symbols of colonialism and Walter Magnolio's definition of post colonialism and decolonisation, while acknowledging that they are unable to provide an overview and complete story of colonialism and related issues, the difficulties and contradiction of an institution decolonising itself, yet offering space for its artists to rupture colonialism and white Eurocentric epistemology.

Whilst the exhibition looks at the invention of whiteness and blackness, and the role the RA played in the revolt against the avant-garde in the 1930's, the exhibition doesn't provide a concrete and precise definition of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, power, the role of art, nor the correct terms and definitions and contexts by which to reach an understanding of colonialism and how it can be ruptured. Not rupturing and reconfiguring the global capitalist and imperial system and its religion, that firmly locates everyone and everything within its system of meaning, hierarchical organisation and values leaves us without the tools to recognise the visible traces of these mechanisms today. Instead, it rewrites and imagines another history, where people of colour or peoples of the British Empire, had a role in the RA from its inception, painted iconic works or held seats of power.

The show continues the reinvention of Western art institutions from approximately 2015, when mainstream western art institutions designated themselves safe places to depict issues of history, colonialism, and slavery, while guarding at the same time, art, its institutions and history against criticism and questioning. At the RA, we can see the reinvention and expansion of western global art with the "world filtered through art", that became apparent from 2010.

The exhibition defines power, colonialism, and imperialism in Modernist terms, of presence, the dichotomy of black & white, embodied in mainstream art forms, such as paintings & sculpture, exhibited in a gallery or museum. No work or methodology ruptures the comfortable coexistence of traditional forms, but instead challenges this configuration in



KKK

the constellation of works through situating in the same space time, past and recent work. Although the exhibition starts at the time of the establishment of the RA, with the mixture of contemporary and historical works, there is a sense of *ahistoricism* and rupturing genealogy, flatlining the work, where both traditional forms and recent forms sit comfortably in the visitor's space, so that there is no disruption between the forms. There is something similar going on that we find in Goshka Macuga's curatorial methodology of dehistoricising, depoliticising and reinventing all works through remixing an institution's archives and collection to rupture a white Eurocentric colonial and imperial art history. The encounter with the exhibition starts with Tavares Strachan's remake of Leonardo's *Last Supper* in the RA courtyard. Then, entering the exhibition through a small side door, a confrontation in the first room of portraits and sculptures of Africans followed by a sequence of rooms which evoke different places, such as the British Museum. Each room is

constructed in a similar way, with a central work or focal point, small works on the walls, including paintings of British kings, generals who died in colonial wars, colonial wars in North America and India, the exchange of cultural forms, paintings by William Hodges who accompanied Cook's voyage of discovery in the Pacific Ocean and Australia.

What comes through is both resistance to realism and militant works challenging the organisation of the exhibition and its logic, so that colonialism, and the interpretation of events are filtered through mainstream Eurocentric art, in an ambiguous semi-poetic language of work by Hew Locke, Isaac Julien, John Akomfrah and Yinka Shonibare. Can a language break and undermine Eurocentric Western mainstream language by using a Eurocentric mainstream art language? Maybe there is a hint, but I am not convinced. The most convincing approach is Areen's appropriation of mainstream art signs, emptying out the art as no one single work convincingly engages with the issues set out by the exhibition. Although the selected works and display are impeccable, of the very highest order and highest ambition, there is something intentionally missing; difficult conceptual and contemporary art. The curators have instead opted for familiar work, an accessible language, and close link between past and recent art forms, which is why you find classical art merging into the space of recent art forms and those from different cultures.

Despite the intricate exhibition designs of each room, quite often the design is intended to use works as background for the show's stars, and to lead the viewer into large spectacular installations or the two rooms set aside for the cut-out painted figures at the end of the exhibition. Although the last room is more sober, a sculpture asking for global justice and a remake of the empty fourth plinth seeking environmental justice is admirable but tokenistic. In reviews of recent exhibitions, New York based critic Mostafa Heddaya, has provided the most insightful analysis of contemporary art at this stage of western art history citing fundamental flaws in recent contemporary art and exhibitions. In his review of the PS1 show *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991–2011* at MoMA PS1, New York, 2020, titled "Recolonise this place", Heddaya pointed out the fundamental error of using only western artists, western mainstream art forms and a western narrative to depict the Iraq war. His review showed the unwillingness of Western museums to confront colonial wars and the link between colonial wars and the museum whose director was also the director of Blackwater's private army operating in Iraq. In his



*The right-wing idyll*

2016 review of the Berlin Biennial, he identified seemingly irreconcilable contradictions between appropriation art and political, appropriationists projects that expose art institutions' hidden mechanisms, modernism's ideology and politics, and the concept of progression time leading to a lack of art forms to engage and reveal existing conditions. A better synthesis of appropriation and political art was exhibited in the Prado Foundation's Venice show in 2017: *The Boat Is Sinking, The Captain Lied*. It is a grave mistake to look to the past to resuscitate previous theoretical and philosophical positions and models to look for insights into existing conditions or to look to Oliver Ressler's political art practice or political art as Colonialism. The RA shows registering of important concepts, authors, artists, pooling them together, appropriates and reverses their meaning.

In light of Mignolo's statement we can therefore understand the RA show as a celebration of this event, a celebration of the British Empire and its commonwealth and peoples, with London at the centre of the British Empire and the centre of the art market, advertising, selling and promoting the brand, London. This is borne out by Labaina Hamid's introduction to the show, comparing experiencing the show to something equivalent to walking through the mag-



*Fountain*

nificent city of London, where the art works are so many multiple voices and debates. "Culture is the domain of neocolonialism, "it is the colonized world of the twentieth century", says De Certeau, since it is here that the multinationals install their empires, in the same way that the European nations launched military occupations of unarmed continents in the nineteenth century." If we break down the argument into its constituent parts, we find that we have building blocks for Neoliberal policies and right-wing aesthetic. Promoting the use of the language to radicalise and revolutionise the art of the past, western art history and canon. The use of identity politics, politics of mainstream western epistemology and categories and atomisation of culture and peoples. The promotion of reactionary figurative pictorial language, and the active impoverishing of visual language and concepts, along with the overt destruction of different languages and concepts. Where mainstream western institutions are used to order and give meaning to these fragments and atomisation of peoples and cultures, so enhancing and consolidating both mainstream art and its neocolonial role. Where the use of fiction or narrative, rather than conceptualisation and argument, is used to knit together threads of information, what is it the conservative art institutions want to build? At what other time in



*scientific racism*

recent history have we witnessed the destruction of contemporary art to promote Classicism, to rid art of complexity and the deliberate locating of a visual language for mass communication?

If you ask the obvious question, is it possible to gain insights offered by the show to comprehend today's conditions, the answer must be no. The next question is why not? Because the show uses familiar Neo-liberal strategies of pointing people to the past to show that problems and crimes of the Empire and Colonialism are firmly part of the past, using reductive selected history, blocking off other histories and narratives, and fixing history and its conceptualisation. While creating the same crimes and obscuring crimes and problems taking place today. As we saw in the 2023 Whitechapel gallery show *Life Is More Important Than Art* only artists of a particular culture can picture events and histories of that culture through mainstream art, so the representation is limited and fragmented and we basically do not access actual depictions of current problems and issues.

Neoliberal art doesn't provide information about the world, but instead blocks off what is happening in the world and obstructing any capacity to articulate and think about those conditions. For instance the instrumentalization of black lives matters blocks off other conditions and colonial crimes today. A clear example is that I came across a video online of an indigenous Native American who was killed in exactly the same way as George Floyd, but didn't receive media exposure. What I mean by selective history and memory are figures of casualties from the West's colonial wars in recent times which have remained hidden – 150,000 deaths from austerity measures in the UK, the estimated 100 million indigenous peoples' deaths since the 1800s, the holocaust blocking off other catastrophies, concentration camps, mass killings in other parts of the world and today, such as the Mau Mau, Guantanamo Bay, use of black sites, 1 million Iraqi deaths during the

Iraq war, an estimated 30 million deaths from the West's wars since the end of World War II.

You just need to think about the deliberate use of confusion, non-linear war and information wars, the inaccessibility to usable information and knowledge to be able to understand what is taking place, as class and culture wars, the delegitimization of different and alternative knowledge as forms of apartheid of who has knowledge and information and who doesn't.

Shifting the strategy of critiquing colonialism as postcolonialism, to accessing and gaining power and assimilation into Western power structures. If we think carefully about the consequences of Okwui Enwezor's 2002 Documenta, filtering global art and the world through main stream western art, within the context of Germany, whitewashing German history, expanding the global reach of Germany through art, and the deliberate manoeuvring of African artists into the mainstream, then there is only one conclusion, and this is what we see being played out in the RA show.

So different logics are at play, multiple overlapping logics that expand the logic of assimilation, the Commonwealth, Rhodes scholarship, and the British Empire, whose conceptualisation is a crystal clear embodiment of Mignolo's 2021 statement, neo-liberal and right-wing governments conquest of concepts and positions where only dominant narratives is available.

So, this article's purpose is to rebuild concepts and language, which starts through recognising how neoliberal mechanisms function, whether neoliberal institutions or neoliberal art, and specifically neoliberal effects.

Recognising the consequence of not having the available language and concepts to recognise right wing aesthetics, the inability to recognise new forms of colonialism and the inability to register existing forms of empire. The inability to register new forms of slavery, the breakdown in civil rights, widespread censorship, new forms of apartheid, widespread witch hunts and imprisoning of peoples who have different ideas to Neoliberal governments.

*Entangled Pasts, 1768–now; Art, Colonialism and Change*  
3 February - 28 April 2024. Main Galleries | Burlington House

## When Forms Come Alive

By Nancy Nesvet

When Forms Come Alive, currently at the Hayward Gallery in Southbank Centre, London, features artists of the last sixty years revolutionizing the definition of sculpture by introducing non-rigid geometries, liquidity, and buoyancy of materials, ambiguous, often uncanny, sometimes repulsive, forms that beg touch, and repulse, incorporate movement, both real and implied, including the formless, foam and bubbles, erasing and confusing boundaries and borders, incorporating materials to produce new artwork. The exhibited work questions the meaning of form, especially challenging and obliterating straight, non-mobile, defined form that respects boundaries, and architecture deriving from rectilinear form. Experimenting with new materials leads to discovery and enhanced practice, often ceding control to materials and natural forces acting upon and with them.

Recalling organic, biomorphic forms like those of Henry Moore, Hans Arp and Barbara Hepworth, Matthew Ronay's biological, botanical, and anatomic shapes shows patterns recurring, connecting minute elements with larger systems. His *Globules* (2023) and *Crawl*, (2023) shows what I see as a plant on the floor underlying conversing heads and a separate figure's unsupported arms outstretched. Uniting botanical with singular figure, here emitting balls from the side, perhaps the hip, and a conversation of two heads, illustrates attempts to connect.

As Leonardo DaVinci's Sfumato obfuscated the perimeters of the painted outline, and Michelangelo questioned the outline of the stone sculpture, leaving parts rough and unfinished, Lynda Benglis' sculptures are unstable, with blurred parameters, like *Quartered Meteor* (1969, cast 1975) showing process reflected in her malleable form. Her former practice incorporated poured latex, limited by walls encountered by the flow. Recalling earlier experimentation mimicking knots-like form, *Quartered Meteor* adapts her polyethylene corner piece, *King of Flot* (1969). Now cast in lead, still literally cornered, melted lead layers stopped by the walls they are placed against, *Quartered Meteor* appears defeated, relegated to a corner. Benglis' reflective, bronze *Paper Tower* (2019) looks triumphant and blazing, forging ahead – its upmost form reaching. Walking around it, we see positive and negative images of our



*Installation view of Tara Donovan*  
Photo Jo Underhill. Courtesy the Hayward Gallery

bodies joined within the sculpture. From digitally enlarged ceramics, Paloma Basque's *Two Stones* (2017) of wool with ball and wool runner stretching upward and *Snake*, (2020) curving up from its black base, continuing with mixed stone, cotton and lead sheet seems to approach, seeking a relationship as in her *One Other Night*. (2020) appearing a woven knotted blanket, or ball of wool overflowing onto a rug on the floor, but then reaching up.

Jean Luc Moulene's gorgeous blown glass *Blown Knot 6 3 2 -Variation 06* (2012) transforms the topological Borromean knot into physical form, as colors and physical planes flow into each other. Moulene writes, "My objects are surfaces, with no inside or outside, only holes. Through the holes are other surfaces". Air going through Jean Luc Moulene's glass and metal spheres is defined by surrounding shapes,



*Installation view of Marguerite Humeau  
Photo\_Jo Underhill. Courtesy the Hayward Gallery*

that surrounding air, stops air-flow. Moulene's surrounding sphere is transparent; air has no visible substance; outside surrounds the indefinable inside. His glass and bronze *Plongement I* shows a possibly marine "creature" slightly tilted, floating in blue "water". *Plonger* means to dive in Moulene's native French. *Plongement* is the mathematical term for structures embedded within each other, revealing inside and outside, both visible at the same time. Similarly, Ruth Asawa's metal wire sculptures, make inside and outside, at the same time, visible, allowing us to see process and adaptation of her drawings in sculpture. With her two-dimensional drawings sculpted in wire; completed globular forms become three-dimensional, uniting drawing and sculpture. We wonder what is real when we cannot see it, or feel it, or define it. The artist's allowing the material to control, partnering with the artist, continues the 1950's and 60's exploration of material and process here illustrating the nature of Asawa's air encapsulated in her globes, or the nature of the foam in Michel Blazy's installation, where foam overflows its holding pans, and aerator pumps create scented bubbles below, encapsulating air that overflows its holding pans, bubbling over the water and floor underneath. Like Benglis, Blazy allows material to control process and outcome as his overflowing, twisting foam, looking like ice, melting into a pool of

clouds, condensing into water on the floor shows the stages of forms of water. Martin Puryear, a master woodworker uses solid yellow cedar to make sinuous, curving shapes, manipulating materials to create sensuous, flexible form, gently coaxing as not to break his material. His *Question* (2016), heavy wooden sphere on the ground causes the supporting wooden limb, now curved, to bend. Barlow's *girl ii*, 2019 both architectural and anthropomorphic, a poured megalithic-like monument with a truncated torso, placed on and connected to truncated haunches, recalls Easter Island statues. Uniting sculpture and architecture, its rectilinear bases supporting figurative sculptures, each tapering to a point at the bottom, Barlow's *Untitled: Modern Sculpture* (2022) is a close-knit group of figures, with "heads" of steel half-circles, looking conversant. Senga Nengudi's nylon elongated, stretched stockings of various skin tones, pinned to the wall, tied into knots, change the shape of manufactured nylon, creating linear sculptural "drawings". Nengudi justifies her use of nylon tights, "If you felt them, it was really quite sensual, and it had this sense of body, because it was pliable – a material of considerable elasticity which can be filled, stretched and splayed...bearing the strain of hard work and labor, operating as used skin." Dutch Art Collective, headed by Lonneke Gordijn



*Installation view of Eva Fàbregas,  
Photo Jo Underhill. Courtesy the Hayward Gallery*

and Ralph Nauta, *Drift's Skylight* installation (2006-14), a performative dance-like sculpture, relies on ceiling-hung silken steel forms mimicking opening and closing flowers. DRIFT's *Fragile Future*, inspired by dandelions, shows 3D bronze electrical circuits, connected to light-emitting dandelions, freely floating. Continuing a show about transformation of forms. Eve Fabrega's *Pumping*, a series of tangled mesh tubes stuffed with massage balls, resemble entangled snakes, who might have swallowed a small creature, creating a parasitic, combined being of two life forms. The electronic, vibrating soundtrack, like a strange heartbeat, lends credence to the swallowed, trapped, struggling, echoing being I imagine inhabiting the "snake's" body. Fabrega is quoted in the catalogue to the exhibition (pg. 6) "I see my work as creatures that can help us imagine other possible bodies." Holly Hendry connects the industrial with the architectural, commenting on environmental nemesis with her *Deep Soil Thrombosis*. (2019) Stuffing and clogging pipes with plaster, jesmonite, foam, marble, and concrete, stopping the flow of air or liquid, she alludes to our world clogged with chemicals, CO2, sand, smog, stopping air and water flow. Hendry's *Slackwater*, (2023) a geometric network of steel

ducts mimics interconnecting, crossed tidal lines and flowing river water, creating a woven pattern. Environmentally aware, Choi Jeong Hwa transforms cheap objects into botanical forms, creating beauty from cheap throwaways. He describes his pagoda like tall columns called "stupas" as holobiont; systems of organisms living together. They present as flower or plant-like repeated forms of varying colors and variegated sizes on vertical columns, creating, for me, trees. In Marguerite Humeau's *The Guardian of Ancient Yeast*, (2023), shapes inspired by mound-building termites, architecture housing some of the smallest inhabitants of the natural world (with the titular yeast even smaller) are made of natural material; wax, and wood partly consumed by worms and fungi. Humeau's installation proves that beauty resides in that left by minute, organic beings, and materials. Enhanced by saxophone sound, "voice" enlivens it. Two of Humeau's glass handblown shapes derive from fungal structures: *The Brewer*, with solidified formerly syrupy liquid sliding vertically down transparent grooves seems like honey or brewer's yeast. Holly Hendry's industrial ductwork installations are big enough to hold a human, resembling children's play structures, but here, as one person fits at a time,



Installation view of Michel Blazy  
Photo, Jo Underhill. Courtesy the Hayward Gallery

I could see a human chain resulting, with one pushing the other in front, and waiting for one to emerge before the one behind can move. With a humorous wink, this is another sculpture that resembles play, but here, it could also allude to the bearing of a child through the birth canal, as the little human is pushed into the world. Although the sculptures are metal, they are round, not rough. The birth canal is surrounded by the bony structure that contains it, much like the ribbed metal used here. Similarly, Nairy Baghramian's "Chin Up (First Fitting)" aluminum sculpture looks to me like Jonah's whale. Jonah is aware that he is in the whale, co-dependent on a creature of the natural world and merged with it, like Eve Fabrega's Snake. Baghramian's Stay Downers (Slowpoke) 2017, seems a humorous, prehistoric creature, maybe an ancestral walrus, whose tusk reaches down to the floor supporting it. In Franz West's "Kain naht Abel (Kain approaching Abel)", vastly oversized, pastel colored, drippily painted figures seem intent on a dance rather than a battle. West's Epiphanie Au Stuhlen (Epiphany on Chairs) asks the viewer to sit on a chair, positioned to contemplate the pink, bulbous form, oddly looking like a covid 19 virus, or Sputnik, hanging from the ceiling above. What thoughts or sensations result? This



Installation view of Olaf Brzeski  
Photo Jo Underhill. Courtesy the Hayward Gallery

combined sculpture/performance art is no different than the seat-bound theatre or film watcher trying to make sense of what he or she confronts. The exhibition gets even more interesting when it connects natural to engineered form, as in Teresa Solar Abboud's Tunnel Boring Machines, its parts resembling bones and breasts with nipples extended. It's as if technology is imitating a human, but has parts mixed up, as the machine is used for boring. The joints, of mineral and rock act as bases supporting blue and yellow "limbs" of resin on metal skeletons. Like the surrealist paintings of Yves Tanguy, with bones sticking up through the sand, these conjure prehistoric but also possibly future human appendages. Still, breasts do not bore. What is this machine's purpose or is there is none. What is the purpose of the human parts the machine resembles? Does form dictate purpose? Does a multiplicity of forms dictate associations? Does material control flow and presence until stopped by nonhuman force? Does shared location or associative form dictate mandatory associations of nature and human? These sculptures indicate a positive response. In his A Subsequent Offering (2017) E.J. Hill's infatuation with roller coasters looms large. A full-size rollercoaster, lacking riders, induces viewers to ex-



Installation view of Matthew Ronay,  
Photo Jo Underhill. Courtesy the Hayward Gallery

perience static form and the science behind it. Olaf Brzeski's Smoke shows his curvilinear, fluid forms slinkering down from hard edged chairs, like those in a waiting room who have exhausted their patience waiting. Brzeski's Dream-Spontaneous Combustion shows char on the gallery floor, the wall behind it scorched black, with smoke creating a cloud of soot reaching toward the ceiling and into the gallery space. This black cloud, resulting from conflagration of burning is even more threatening as it hangs there, with unknown origin or demise. In Brzeski's "Little Orphans", snakelike, slothlike, worn-out cast steel bars of iron alloy with coal, flow and drape languidly over industrial looking steel framed, wooden seated and backed chairs, their cracked backs indicating much use, referencing bodies finally relaxed, while fusing humanity with industrial material. Ernesto Neto crochets hanging bundles. His ceiling-hung Sun, Ocean, Life invites visitors to walk under the labyrinth of crocheted textiles holding small plastic balls, like a colorful planetary system. In Jaia Kui Dau Ara Naia (2021) Neto crochets a huge, spiral structure; bundles of polyamide fabric stuffed with natural and manmade substances, sand, shells, spices, Styrofoam balls, weighted with stones and spices, cloves, cumin, pepper, and ginger with tur-

meric's golden aura make cotton string holding the forms glow. A giant, beautiful, sweet-smelling galaxy is above us. The sculptures in this show refuse to respect boundaries, spilling out, making inside as visible as outside, trapping us, confusing us, erasing borders, tying into inescapable and non-releasable knots, smoothing form, begging us to touch, repelling us, surprising us with texture, alluding to content but refusing to define it. Choi Chang Wa's reverence of everyday materials to create art is like Tara Donovan's use of Styrofoam cups in Untitled (Styrofoam Cups) (2004/2008) Matthew Roney's botanical forms invade the space of the viewer. As material and sculpture invades the gallery viewer's space, incorporating the viewer into the sculptural installation, the art becomes a polylogue. As this work overflows, uncontainable, growing, invading, challenging, pushing, pulling, running into boundaries, holding, suspending, reaching, supporting, impossibly attaching, curving, dancing, playing, detaching, moving, shaping, and defying shape, forming, and defying form, smoking, imploding, expanding, forming ephemeral blurs of light and smoke and shadow, it involves us all.



*Installation view of Ernesto Neto  
Photo Jo Underhill. Courtesy the Hayward Gallery*

In this age when the art public invests time and money in experiences rather than stationary physical objects hung on walls in permanent homes, this work creates experiences that are as Natalie Rudd writes in the catalogue “animated, energized and engaging...forms full of life.” In the catalogue essay, Lucy Lippard is quoted from her essay, *Eccentric Abstraction* that the process art of the 1960's was a “heady fusion of the allusiveness of surrealism, the vulgar humor of pop art...all topped off with a visceral sensuality” later writing of the women in this new movement, “In their hands, abstraction turned suggestive, messy, witty, slippery and dangerous.” The work at the Hayward is body-centered and abstract, suggestive of life and experiences. It is unpredictable, and often uncontrollable. We cannot predict what will happen when lead pours, what it will look like and be like. Natalie Rudd's again quotes Phyllida Barlow in her catalogue essay, “No More the need for permanency, weightiness, handicraft...In-

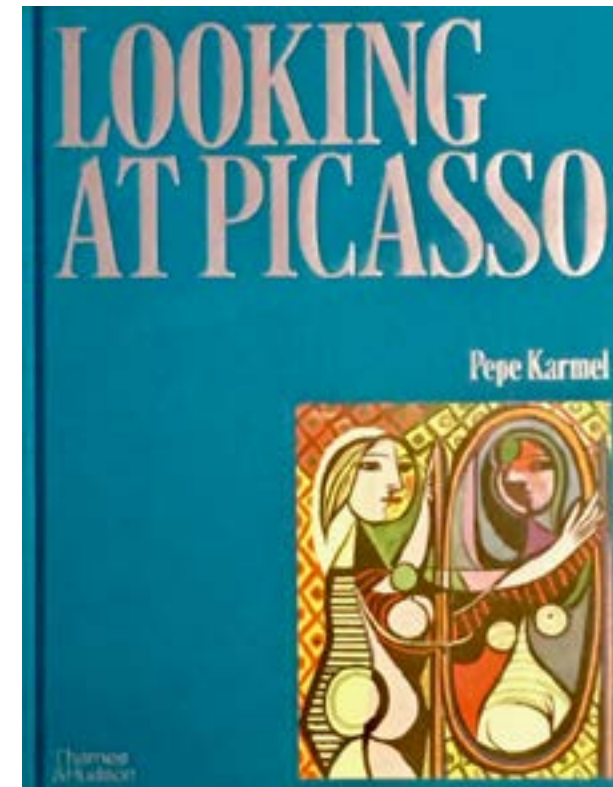
stead, in with impermanence, temporariness, dematerialization, the fugitive, the ephemeral, the here and now.” Reflecting our current situation, the work in this show draws us in with fleshly colors, then shows us what these forms reference. The work is not always ephemeral, nor pretty. Smoke created by Olaf Brzeski is black, sooty, and dirty, a cloud of polluting air like those from the coal plants in nineteenth century Birmingham or Manchester. The flowers are dying, the foam is melting and falling, speaking to earth's warming, environmental challenge, descriptions of processes that we make. Pastel colors recall the insides of the body, intestines pulsating as they absorb food and send it on its way, skin sagging under pressure of age. This is about materiality, experimenting with what an artist can do with materials, and they have done; plastics overflowing into our oceans, invading our bodies, industrial smoke of creosote and soot darkening our skies and lungs, huge machines with limb-like appendages taking over tasks formerly assigned to people. This is about the challenge of technology to take over our world, and the craft processes making sculptures of nylon stockings, wire, poured lead, and crocheted string, of wire and stone and steel. Form and especially material is challenged, as are artists who bravely experimented with new materials, and created revolutionary practices to change the very definition of sculpture. The show shows connections; artists to each other, to their forerunners, to their audience who formed a community of explored perspectives.

Claire Goodman, who visited the show for *New Art Examiner* and *Art Lantern*, captured the humor in the show, the diversity of audience expressions and communal glances and interactions with the work and other viewers, young and old, of all genders and attitudes come together to view these new art forms come alive.

*When Forms Come Alive*  
7 Feb 2024 – 6 May 2024  
Hayward Gallery, London  
£18 – £19, Free for Members & under-12s

## Looking at Picasso

Mary Fletcher



This new book is well designed with many good quality illustrations on substantial matte paper and each chapter defined by double page differently coloured paper so that it's a pleasure to navigate it.

Karmel begins with an account of Picasso's life, mentioning his dealers and his relationships with women and pointing out that he was famous by 1918, when he was 37. That he visited his lover Eva Gouel daily as she died of cancer in 1915 was new to me. Under 'symbolism' Karmel deals mostly with 'Les Femmes d'Alger' (O.J. version O), giving the views of different critics who see in it virility, domination of women, savagery, anti-colonialism, and sexuality. Surprisingly he ignores the story of Picasso's friend Casagemas who killed himself because of an unhappy love affair, which I thought was relevant. I can see the picture as depicting that women in a brothel are made into monsters by their exploitation and I think the point here is that symbols have many possible interpretations.

In 'Cubism' Karmel explains carefully the workings of this new phenomenon with its inventiveness, par-

alleled in the writings of Joyce and Woolf. This encourages the reader to re-examine the compositions. Under 'Surrealism' he gives his personal interpretations of particular paintings in some detail such as seeing a key in a Dinard Beach picture as 'a symbol for the artist's hidden self, waiting to be unlocked by a woman bearing the right key.'

He tends to find obscenity and brutality where I could describe a playful freedom. I hadn't previously been aware of depiction of oral sex performed on a woman by a man in some Picassos.

Chapter five is about Picasso's varied use of classicism and again a parallel use of Greek myth in a modern setting in Joyce's writing.

Lastly Karmel attends to politics, telling us that before 1936 Picasso was not involved and also that *Guernica* was not at first admired although Herbert Read called it 'a modern Calvary.'

He refers also to Orwell's use of animal allegory. The book then ends abruptly, saying that the late works need future evaluation but calling them pornographic and deliberately crude, whilst I might have spoken of wry humour and self satire.

I found this book interesting, getting me to take a new look at familiar images, and to notice my reactions where they differed from the author's.

It was not a revelatory clearly unified analysis nor was it unmasking Picasso as a misogynist. I liked the contextual comparisons to contemporary writing which counteract the usual story of an isolated genius.

Picasso remains in his complexity which in its various forms reflects whatever one brings to it.

However, Pepe Karmel provides a well researched and thoughtful commentary.

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Pepe Karmel.  
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