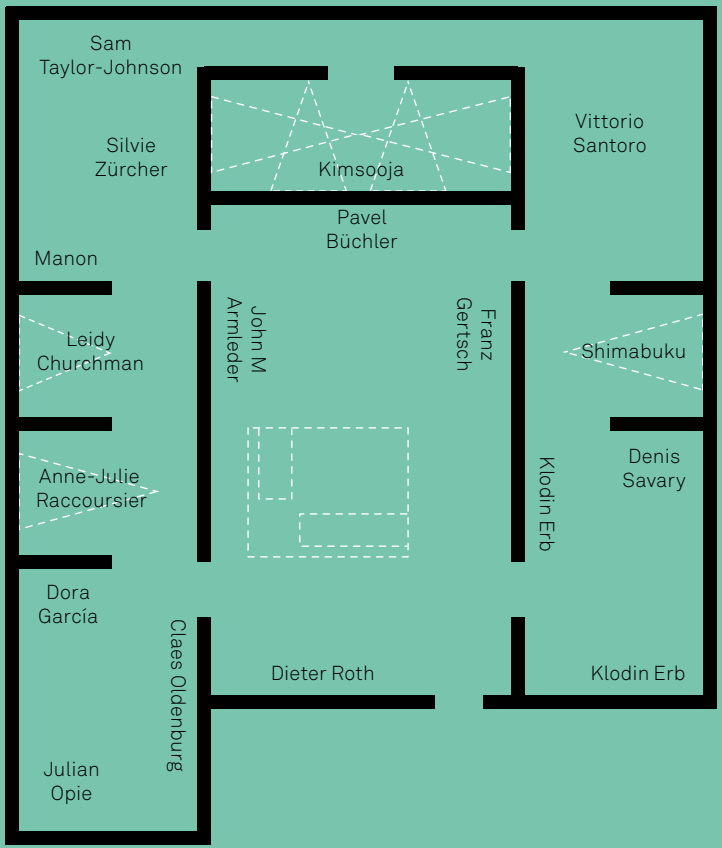
The Show Must Go On

From the Museum's Collection of Contemporary Art

Kunstmuseum Bern


Sam
Taylor-Johnson
Silvie
Zürcher
Kimsooja
Vittorio
Santoro
Pavel
Büchler
Manon
Leidy
Churchman
John M
Armleder
Franz
Gertsch
Shimabuku
Anne-Julie
Raccoursier
Klodin Erb
Denis
Savary
Dora
García
Claes Oldenburg
Dieter Roth
Klodin Erb
Julian
Opie

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Edited by
Kathleen Bühler
Nina Zimmer
Kunstmuseum Bern

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Foreword and Acknowledgments

Ephemeral activities and process-oriented art forms such as performances and actions have been the trend for several years. Hence none of this year's large-scale art events, such as documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel, the Sculpture Projects Münster, or the Biennale in Venice, could get by without them. Besides the annual performance festivals, like the BONE–Performance Art Festival Bern—with whom we are collaborating for our supporting program—or the International Performance Art Giswil, this summer the Kunsthaus Zürich presented a large-scale exhibition entitled *Action!*, and in 2014 the last Swiss Sculpture Exhibition Biel/Bienne took place under the motto *Le Mouvement: Performing the City*.
After the golden age of performance art in the politically agitated sixties and seventies and the collaborative activities of relational aesthetics in the nineties, which emerged as reactions to the excesses of the art market, a renewed interest in the performative has become visible since the beginning of the new millennium. At first glance it seems to contradict any of the collection activity of a classical art museum, since performance art also evolved within the framework of a dematerialization of art and thus of moving away from the object. However, the Kunstmuseum Bern has been interested in this art form from the beginning and collected it within the scope of its means. Hence in the eighties it acquired works by the American performance artists Terry Fox and James Lee Byars, both of whom were linked with our museum by friendly exchange and their interest in our collection. Both used the relatively new medium of performance to poetically yet decidedly address life and current events, and were interested in making appearances, in language, and in the voice. The large-scale retrospective of the performance artist Marina Abramović at the

Kunstmuseum followed in the late nineties. It was accompanied by the publication *Marina Abramović : Artist Body* (1998), which assembled and documented all of her performances from 1969 to 1998 for the first time. This presence of performance art in exhibitions and in collection activity, which was unusual for Swiss art museums, continued throughout the years. However, performance art not only became "collectable" due to its vestiges or documentations; it also left its traces in other ways in international artistic work. Kathleen Bühler, curator of contemporary art at the Kunstmuseum Bern, pursued them. *The Show Must Go On: From the Museum's Collection of Contemporary Art* combs through the collection of contemporary art for traces of the performative turn. The coquettish call—freely adapted from the song by Freddie Mercury/Queen—assembles works that deal with theater, cinema, performance, role-play, and staging. They manifest as performance documentations, were used as props for performances, or constitute interactive installations with image, sound, or texts that challenge visitors to actively decipher or experience the work of art. The exhibition makes an important contribution to the investigation of our collection, not only because it simply acknowledges performance art, but because it reflects on their contribution to all media in general as well as on the reshaping of the relationship between artists and art recipients.

Our thanks therefore go first of all to the artists for their patience in supplying us with information while exploring their works. We thank the curator for her attentive screening of the collection for relevant questions as well as her research assistant, Sarah Merten, for her energetic support in every department, in particular in the realization of the new collection publication (printed in German and digital in German and English). Our appreciation goes out to Sibylle Omlin and

Marina Porobic from the BONE–Performance Art Festival Bern for their collegial and committed cooperation as well as to all of the authors for their inspiring and inspired contributions. And once again, neither the scholarly development nor curatorial appraisal of the art collection would be possible without the generous financial support of the Stiftung GegenwART and its patron Dr. h.c. Hansjörg Wyss, for which we likewise express our gratitude.

And now it's time for the show to go on!

Nina Zimmer

The Show Must Go On—
Contemporary Performative Art

A boom in performance art has become apparent in recent years, be it in public space, at large-scale art events and biennials, or in the "white cubes" of classical art museums. Today, no one can allow him- or herself to minify or even ignore this fragile medium of fleeting gestures, as was the case at the beginning of the movement in the sixties and seventies. The question concerning how performance art can be collected has long belonged to the classics of pertinent symposiums, and what was once the central attitude of denial toward performance art has had to come up with strategies of collectability.[1]

The decisive factor for the reinvigorated interest in performance could be that the temporary quality of artistic positing has taken on a convincing form for the current cultural situation. Thus art is liberated from being required to make statements that maintain their validity for decades or even centuries, which in times of information and sensory overload is tantamount to excessive demand. What is evidently likewise interesting is transferring a theatrical or cultic performance practice as such into a space previously reserved for pictures and objects. Because existing buildings or museum collections can be effectively interpreted by means of performances and temporarily populated by previously hidden contents, unknown (hi)stories become visible and audible for a short time.[2] Moreover, a new fascination with the human body is breaking ground in this way. Hence everything indicates that the virtuality and transience of the digital age has found an artistically valid form in the immaterial performance that focuses on the body of the performer as well as the spectator. In times of "fake news" and "alternative facts," perceiving is unmistakably shifting into the center of attention more strongly than drafting any kind of truth.

Performative Turn

Since the sixties, art as well as cultural science have seen a "performance thrust" take place.[3] At the time, it was considered a rejection of the commercial artifact, a turn away from the work and toward fleeting performances that cannot be either pinned or passed down. Since the sixties, the practice of performance art has been characterized by the negotiation of relationships between the participants—the audience and the artist—as well as by the question concerning the status of body, material, or signifiers. The performance character of what is being represented enables a transformation of the spectators into actors and creates the basis for involving those in attendance.[4] The areas of art, social lifeworld, and politics are interwoven through the formation of a community in experiencing aesthetic performances.[5] This may also be an explanation for the fact that performance art developed concurrent with political and social emancipation movements in Europe and America, such as, for example, the student, women's, and gay movements, as well as postcolonial independent movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and from the very beginning was charged with political meaning, because increasing participation and equality was an aesthetic as well as a political aspiration.[6] In performance art, the aesthetic event is simultaneously a social event and causes what was formerly the apparent dichotomy between the aesthetic and the political to collapse.[7] However, the performative character of a presentation has no specific materiality. It can be documented in the form of photographs, sound, writing, or moving image, yet the experience itself eludes materiality. This necessarily causes the entire genre to contradict a museum's mission to collect and exhibit.

In cultural science and art, the performative turn is derived from the linguistic philosophy of John Langshaw Austin. The British philosopher identified the performative character of language as self-referential and constitutive of reality, because the reality of which is being spoken is produced with performative utterances in the first place.[8] The American philosopher Judith Butler differentiated this model of performativity in terms of cultural and social theory by, for example, setting forth in her texts how not only social, but due to the power of conventions biological gender as well as their associated heteronormativity are spawned and perpetuated as reality.[9] This expansion provided the foundation for the differentiation of this thinking in cultural and social fields. In the nineties, the performative turn therefore left its traces in the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern. Many of the works of art acquired since the eighties deal with performance art and are therefore already performative because they document presentations, display props from performances, are part of a theatrical staging, play with roles, or frame instructions for action by means of which a performance is required from visitors. This classic division of tasks between the object and the subject of consideration is increasingly abandoned in favor of a gradual inclusion of the audience to become the actor. However, besides these aspects, which concern the performative as presentation, there is still the important aspect of creating reality or, as the art theorist Dorothea von Hantelmann defines it: "The performative character of a work of art is the reality that it—by virtue of its existence at a place, in a situation; by virtue of its having been reproduced, received, and having survived—is capable of engendering. Performative denotes a positing force to create power, reality."[10]

Theatricality and Staging

This characteristic is not new but was always part of any work of art that conceives its own reality. In the sixties, for example, Minimal Art was accused of "theatricality"—that is, the sensational but ultimately empty addressing of the viewer—because of its auratic staging of objects.[11] The main criticism was that the theatrical work also theatricalizes its viewers and thus alienates it from itself.[12] As a result, while performance art leads to a dehierarchization of the relationship between viewer and art, the performative character of art objects is reputed to alienate viewers and rob them of their sovereign experience of art. According to the philosopher Juliane Rebentisch, however, the theatricalization of the viewer can also be seen as a "figure of aesthetic self-reflection."[13] Rebentisch offsets Michael Fried's criticism of Minimal Art and its suggestion that an object exists for a viewer alone by pointing out that "any aesthetic object reference [...] is a constitutively individual one" that causes the viewer to "reflect on his or her part, his or her role in this relationship."[14] This is nothing other than the essence of aesthetic experience, which always involves a form of aesthetic self-reflection as well. The performative reference therefore finds expression on three levels: as a reference to the original presentation by the artist; as a test arrangement for viewers to surrender to an aesthetically produced reality; and as a mental constellation to rethink one's own role in the triangle of artwork, art reception, and self-perception.

The exhibition *The Show Must Go On* addresses this complex theme and places the different figures of performance in a multilayered dialogue. The title of the exhibition is taken from the classic scope of performance, the concert or theater stage. It makes reference to the famous song by the British pop group Queen recorded in 1991 by lead singer and performer Freddie

Mercury on his last studio album. In retrospect, the song seems on the one hand like a bitter commentary on Mercury's hopeless situation—he was terminally ill with AIDS and died shortly after the recording was made—and on the other, like a call for perseverance to the other members of the band.[15] As an exhibition title and coquettish call, the phrase makes reference to the performativity of the contemporary production of art and under this aspect assembles a range of works from the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern that have to do with theater, film, performance, role-play, and staging. In doing so, it reflects on the influence that the performative turn has exercised on contemporary works of art of various genres. Yet what is being focused on is not the frequently still unsolved archiving of performance art but rather the dazzling ambiguity of the concept of performance, which can embrace everything from the stage and economic performance to considerations in terms of linguistic philosophy and at the same time has a bearing on photographs, videos, installations, as well as painting. Focus is also placed on the concept of staging, which has been prominent since the nineties.[16] Like the performance, it is initially common in the area of the performing arts and only gradually has found its way in the area of the visual arts. Martin Seel characterizes the meanwhile inflationarily used concept as "processes that have been deliberately brought about, carried out, or set in motion."[17] The present is staged. Artistic stagings "do not merely create a specific presence and do not merely expose a specific reality—they showcase presences. [...] They do not merely *produce* presence, they *present* presence."[18]

Interpretations of the Performative

Thus the videos *Noodling* by Anne-Julie Raccoursier, *Flying Me* by Shimabuku, *A Needle Woman* by Kimsooja, and *Painting*

Treatments by Leidy Churchman present performances recorded by means of a camera. However, Anne-Julie Raccoursier shot footage of an air guitar contest, Leidy Churchman filmed performers who acted for him in front of the camera, Shimabuku flew a kite with his whole-body likeness, and a camera operator filmed Kimsooja during a public performance. The photographs of the public performance by Claes Oldenburg in his *Placid Civic Monument* (1967), during which he had an imaginary grave dug in Central Park and thus a monument for New York City that was immediately filled in again, are virtually classic documentary images. What is normally a permanent war memorial became a temporary performance that was only captured on film and thus for the first time in art history framed the question concerning the permanence of public remembrance sites.

The monumental photographs by Manon, on the other hand, stage the physical absence of the performance artist in the abandoned and bare hotel rooms of a former spa. Like the once splendid hotel rooms, the artist has also aged and evokes her melancholy resignation with mementos and metaphors. Sam Taylor-Johnson, however, scrutinizes the authenticity of played emotions and portrays famous movie actors crying. While with her photo collages, Silvie Zürcher presents social constructions of gender on a folding screen and thus calls into question the binary separation into female and male.

Forty-six years before that, Franz Gertsch used photographic snapshots as sources for painting and staged the spontaneous in a monumental way. His picture of a group of young men taking a break celebrates the coolness of the seventies as well as their openness to new forms of male (self-)presentation.

If the performative is considered to be producing reality, then painting is one of the oldest performative media. This is testified

to not only by John M Armleder's glamorous, abstract color flows, but also by Klodin Erb's seemingly geological layers of color. Her painted, ten-part *Ahnen* (Ancestors) series demonstrates the gradual transformation of faces into skulls and performatively suggests impermanence as the driving force of all representation.
Painting becomes sound in Dieter Roth's audio installation, as something performative is in general inherent in every installation. In the cases of Julian Opie and Vittorio Santoro, however, buildings become narrative, while Pavel Büchler's installation documents the almost-performance of Lou Reed and at the same time seems to elicit the rock musician in the viewer. Dora García's texts on the wall and on the book cover demand taking action, while as props, Denis Savary's works make reference to art historical models and thus a new, performative reading of art history.

Kathleen Bühler

1 This ranges from collecting leftover props as, for example, in the case of Joseph Beuys, the production of documentary photographs with Carolee Schneemann, to Marina Abramović's revivals of her own earlier performances.

2 In a critical reading one could also understand this as the encouragement of a "postmodern fragmented dissociated" (Rosalind Krauss) subject that no longer finds his or her field of experience in history, but is subjected to the spectacle. See Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art: Zur Bedeutsamkeit der Performativität von Kunst* (Zurich, 2007), 54.

3 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 22, 24, 29ff.

4 Ibid., 19.

5 Ibid., 82. This reading is also suggested by the exhibition *Action!* (Kunsthaus Zürich, 2017).

6 Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen,* 28ff (see note 3).

7 Ibid., 68.

8 Ibid., 32, 34.

9 *Gender Trouble,* 1990; *Bodies That Matter,* 1993; *Excitable Speech*, 1997.

10 Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art,* 11 (see note 2).

11 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5 (June 1967): 12–23.

12 Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art,* 52 (see note 2).

13 Juliane Rebentisch, *Ästhetik der Installation* (Frankfurt am Main, 2003), 70.

14 Ibid.

15 The last verse reads: "The show must go on / I'll face it with a grin / I'm never giving in / On with the show / I'll top the bill, I'll overkill / I have to find the will to carry on / On with the show / The show must go on," which is why the song is the last track on the album *Innuendo.*

16 "[A] staging takes place [...] in an isolated space, deliberately, is intended for an audience, and is intent on conspicuousness or effect." Josef Früchtl and Jörg Zimmermann, "Ästhetik der Inszenierung: Dimensionen eines gesellschaftlichen, individuellen und kulturellen Phänomens," in *Ästhetik der Inszenierung: Dimensionen eines künstlerischen, kulturellen und gesellschaftlichen Phänomens,* ed. Josef Früchtl and Jörg Zimmermann (Frankfurt am Main, 2001), 21.

17 Martin Seel, "Inszenieren als Erscheinenlassen: Thesen über die Reichweite eines Begriffs," in Früchtl and Zimmermann, *Ästhetik der Inszenierung,* 49 (see note 16).

18 Ibid., 58 (emphasis in the original) and 60.

John M Armleder

Born 1948 in Geneva, CH. Trained at the École des beaux-arts in Geneva and at the Glamorgan Summer School in Wales. Cofounder of the Écart group in 1969. Participated at the Biennale di Venezia in 1986 as well as at documenta 8 in Kassel in 1987. Lives in Geneva and New York, US.

Philosophie, U 50, 1993
Mixed media on canvas, 430 × 300 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Donation of the Kunst Heute Foundation

The title is a false trail that the artist, as he explained in an interview with Suzanne Pagé, surely deliberately laid in his "playful cynicism."[1] The irregular and dissimilarly transparent swaths of color in the so-called color flow painting almost automatically open up the painting's surface to become a diffuse depth space, much like Mark Rothko celebrated in his paintings. Yet Rothko's "mysticism" is far from his sensibility, John M Armleder goes on to say.[2] Just as little as his painting wants to communicate a "spiritual experience" is the title a guidepost for an epistemological breakdown of the picture. Because the relationship between painting and title is a purely subjective association of the artist that viewers can only acknowledge: "[F]or an exhibition that I had at the Vienna Secession, I used formats based on the paintings by Gustav Klimt that were being presented there. My paintings also have the same titles as those by Klimt: *Philosophy* and *Jurisprudence*."[3] Picture and title are two completely different things. Thus the connection is as absurd as that between René Magritte's picture of a pipe and its corresponding title: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe.* According to Maurice Denis's famous definition from 1890, the picture is therefore identical with the material evidence of its actual existence: "Remember that a picture, before being

a battle-horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote or other, is essentially a flat surface covered in colors arranged in a certain order."[4] The painting *Philosophie, U 50* (1993) consists of vertical, irregular swaths of color that were produced by pouring industrial paints and lacquers over an upright canvas. Depending on the viscosity of paint, its downward flow took place in transparent to opaque layers and wide to thin trickles. However, in some places the colors flowed together, sometimes blending or diverting one another. The overall painting is one of chance in which the slightly irregular character of the relatively rough canvas influenced the course of the paint. The picture was "painted" solely by gravity. It alone showed the paint the direction in which to flow. The artist deliberately went about his work nonchalantly; he probably would not have had any objections to using the adverb *amateurishly.* Because each time he plunged the roller into the can, it absorbed a different amount of paint. And he always placed the roller at a different height on the canvas, permanently varying the distance between the individual placements. He worked like a bad house painter. The result is the quality that Oliver Hardy and Stan Laurel would have yielded as journeyman painters. If the painting were to be named after an Austrian, Johann Nestroy would have been the more obvious choice with his farce *He Wants to Make a Joke*.[5] Armleder or his fellow Austrian artist Franz West later practiced what in 1843 was called a farce as performance, Actionism, or happening. The circumstances are different, but the fact that irony and cynicism play just as much a role in the improvised actions as do persiflage and subversion makes the bad Biedermeier buffoons and the cool postmodernists brothers. Like Nestroy, Armleder is not concerned with creating pictures that in a creative act enrich the art world by an absolute masterpiece. Innovation was not

his goal, but appropriation, the emptying of content, and re-staging in a performative style. He never denied having stolen the idea for the color flow paintings from a colleague; in fact Larry Poons, a "second-rate artist from the American postwar neo-avant-garde,"[6] provided the model for the colorful representatives of Neo-Geo and Neo-Informel of the eighties in Switzerland. Back then, Armleder staged his appropriations, which also included his scruffy readymade furniture sculptures, in provocative exhibition installations that bubbled over with sassy wit and jazzy irony.

Matthias Frehner

1 Suzanne Pagé, "Gespräch mit John M Armleder," in *John M Armleder,* exh. cat. Kunstmuseum Winterthur (Winterthur, 1987), 63.

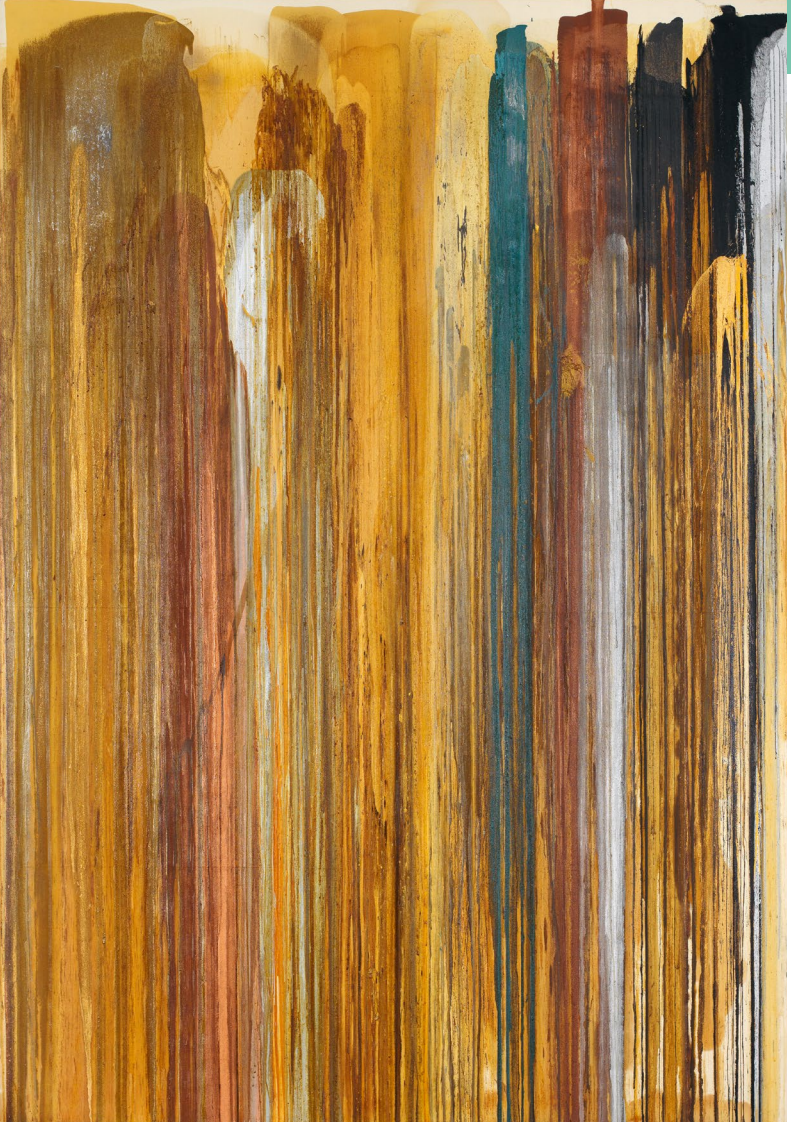
2 Ibid., 60.

3 Parker Williams, "Interview mit John M Armleder," in *Ohne Titel: Eine Sammlung zeitgenössischer Schweizer Kunst: Stiftung Kunst Heute,* exh. cat. Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau (Baden, 1995), 31.

4 Maurice Denis, quoted in John Golding, *Visions of the Modern* (Berkeley, 1994), 29.

5 See "Einen_Jux_will_er_sich_machen," *Wikipedia,* accessed July 31, 2017, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Einen_Jux_will_er_sich_machen.

6 Dieter Schwarz, "Un point peut en cacher un autre," in *John M Armleder,* 104 (see note 1).



Philosophie, U 50, 1993

Pavel Büchler

Born in 1952 in Prague, CZ. Trained at the School of Graphic Arts and at the Academy of Applied Arts in Prague. From 1992 to 1996 he directed the department of visual arts at the Glasgow School of Art, and between 1997 and 2016 he was active as a research professor in art at Manchester Metropolitan University. Lives and works in Manchester, GB.

Lou Reed Live, 2008
Sound installation, Akai 1721L tape recorder, microphone stand, microphone, cassette tape (endless loop), audio CD
160 × 90 × 90 cm, Ed. 3/3
Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthalle Bern Foundation

The installation *Lou Reed Live* (2008) by Pavel Büchler is reminiscent of a concert stage setting. It seems as if the performance is just about to commence. The microphone on the tripod as well as the tape recorder placed at its feet are ready; the performance can begin and be recorded. However, Lou Reed, the enigmatic lead singer of the New York band Velvet Underground, will never come onstage. The work does not make good on the live presence promised in its title. The mise-en-scène has been created solely for the exhibition and will not be played on for its entire run.
Lou Reed's presence can only be heard. At thirty-second intervals, one perceives the hiss of a match being lit and an inhaled breath, followed by a "hello" out of the singer's mouth. The recordings stem from Lou Reed's 1978 live album *Take No Prisoners*. Büchler assembled them into a loop, and they feature the corresponding redundancy. Lou Reed lights a cigarette and greets his audience, lights a cigarette and… The concert does not go beyond its preamble; it never starts. Waiting for the singer's appearance is perpetuated. Büchler also converts the

loop into visual form. The source of the sound is a continuous reel-to-reel tape. Unprotected, it runs from the tape recorder via the microphone tripod and back again. Because it renders visible the circular character of what is heard as well as the duration of the recording correspondent to its length, it can be referred to as the actual protagonist in the work *Lou Reed Live*. The term *live* in the title does not relate to the upcoming concert but to the playback instead, hence the fact that the sound carrier will be played back before the eyes and ears of the viewers. In this case, live—and thus original and authentic—is the reproduction on tape. This announces itself as such. Lengthy pauses occur between the sounds that can be attributed to Reed. The crackling and scratching of the original carrier medium, a vinyl record, can be heard during these sound gaps.[1]
"It is in your life experience and in your mind that the short circuit occurs. I just create the conditions—like an incompetent electrician," says Büchler about his work as an artist.[2] A short circuit also takes place in *Lou Reed Live*. The microphone is connected with the tape recorder via the phone hookup and not via the mic socket, as one would expect. Thus it does not—as a first glance at the installation might suggest—fulfill its customary function, meaning the conversion of sound waves into electronic signals. Instead, the microphone serves as a speaker. Hence Reed's presence resonates through the same medium with which it was recorded. This reversal of functions was made possible by a special type of so-called dynamic microphones, which are similar to speakers.[3]
By getting the microphone to speak, Büchler enquires into the basic function of the sound converter. It is designed to record the physical proximity of the mouth, the hands, and the breath to the diaphragm. It is an indicator of presence. However, as *Lou Reed Live* suggests, it is incapable of generating presence of

its own accord. The playback of Reed's gestures, his words, and his breath through the narrow microphone does not evoke his fictional presence, but rather his manifest absence. The musician's performance is only perceptible as a faint echo of itself captured on magnetic tape. Due to the recurring greeting, the presence evoked by the microphone stand and the stage setting becomes a farce. *Lou Reed Live* can be described less as a stage for a fictional concert than as a large-format playback device. The recorder reads the tape, which is drawn around the tripod, and the microphone amplifies.[4] The installation comes across as a mimesis of the content it quotes.

"Art is very simply about noticing things that already exist and trying to point them out to others," Büchler has stated.[5] *Lou Reed Live* develops out of the manipulation and reassembly of objets trouvés. The open examination therefore deals with visual means in a highly economical way, which underscores Büchler's affinity with conceptual languages. Questions concerning the creation of presence, of being present, and aura permeate the work. They are dealt with based on the example of a fictional rock concert stage. *Lou Reed Live* conjures up the legendary singer's presence and at the same time ironically causes this flight of fancy to come to nothing. Instead of the musician, it is the sound carrier that takes center stage. The playback itself becomes a staging. The show goes on, if only on the level of reproduction.

Etienne Wismer

1 This aspect of the work is part of a broader involvement with gaps on sound carriers in Pavel Büchler's oeuvre. *Live* (1999), for instance, consists of a compilation of live concerts taking only the applause into account. On this, see Paul O'Neill, "Some Sketchy Observations on Pavel Büchler Which Should, One Way or the Other, Open Up Some Ideas of Usefulness in 'Being an Artist,'" in *Pavel Büchler: Absentmindedwindowgazing,* ed. Esra Sarigedik Öktem, exh. cat. Kunsthalle Bern; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (Rotterdam, 2007), 138–40, esp. 139.

2 Pavel Büchler, Charles Esch, and Philippe Pirotte, "Conversation," in *Pavel Büchler,* 154–65, esp. 157 (see note 1).

3 Conversely, it is also possible to repurpose speakers of this type as microphones.

4 In a second work with an Akai recorder—*You don't love me* (2007)—the tape is drawn around a half-empty whiskey bottle.

5 Barbara Casavecchia, "Pavel Büchler," in *Under Destruction,* ed. Gianni Jetzer and Chris Sharp, exh. cat. Tinguely Museum, Basel; Swiss Institute, New York (Berlin, 2010), 50.

Lou Reed Live, 2008

Leidy Churchman

Born in 1979 in Villanova, PA, US. Master of Fine Arts at Columbia University, New York. With his painting, which is frequently based on existing images, he recently participated in much-discussed thematic exhibitions such as *Painting 2.0: Malerei im Informationszeitalter* at the Museum Brandhorst in Munich (2015/16) as well as at the mumok—Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (2016). Lives and works in New York, US.

Painting Treatments, nos. 2 + 3, 2010
2-channel video projection, color, sound, 25 min.
Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthalle Bern Foundation

I recently repaired to a spa in Bavaria where "treatment" is more like handling, and kneading is called "slapping." In this place where they specialize in mudpacks, however, you can also have yourself massaged with chocolate. This culinary indulgence aspect suits Bavaria's Catholic character, and after all that pale wheat beer and veal sausage, it's time for something darker. While I was lying there in the mustiness of the mud and the snazzy lady "slapped" me, I thought about how the people in the videos *Painting Treatments* (2010) by Leidy Churchman must have felt while they underwent their painting treatment. Not everyone is capable of relaxing on command or when something happens to them willy-nilly. In this state of being at someone's mercy, not only can cramps in one's body drain away, but amazing thoughts can also start occurring.

In the video, bodies are lying on the floor, some of them half-undressed and covered with only towels, others naked. You never see a face but only details of the arranged bodies that fill the image space. The people let themselves be doused

with and painted and covered with paint, liquids, and objects by others. Potatoes are dropped onto a sheet-covered back, white flakes are distributed over it with a fan, and it is subsequently provided with an airbrush effect comprised of finely ground flour. The composition is completed with a bunch of chili peppers that gloved hands grind with a stone on the person's back. In another image we see how a naked thigh is coated with paint. Paint is applied to an arm still in the sleeve of a sweater. The figure sits there without underwear. His/Her pubic hair is visible. Yet the gender of the faceless creature is indefinite. Another shot: two people, rolled up in green and beige towels, respectively, are lying closely alongside one another and holding hands; a white powder is heaped up in the crack between their bodies. And this is how it continues. We trace how image for image, composition for composition develops in projected juxtaposition. In his work, Leidy Churchman, who did the performance in collaboration with the artist Anna Rosen (∗1984 in Arlington, Virginia, US), makes unmistakable reference to art historical precursors: Body Art performances, Abstract Expressionism, Viennese Actionism, artistic forms of expression whose cursory actions are recorded on and transmitted by film and photographs. Repeating these historical art movements more than half a century later can quickly seem kitschy, if not conservative. Body Art color mess has congealed into a cliché of performance art; and it is not for nothing that historical Abstract Expressionism and its discourse are criticized for their phallocentric mentality. Churchman takes the risk of making himself ridiculous. It is baffling how naturally he does this and how relaxed he is while circumnavigating the cliffs of possible embarrassment without losing suspense in the process. The ambiguity in the title *Painting Treatments* leaves open

whether painting is treated or whether painting is used as a treatment. In the videos, however, bodies are clearly being treated by means of painting. And yet it is inconsistent with any popular ideals, either physical or painterly. Like at a spa, the concrete actions should result in relaxation. It seems so, even if one cannot establish with certainty whether those being treated enjoyed being doused with colored sauce. But the concentrated atmosphere and the calm bodies convey anything but uneasiness. One individual is smoking a cigarette, quite as if s/he wanted to heighten the pleasure even further. Churchman creates a loosened situation in which the question can arise as to what is still, especially today, interesting about the aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism, which involves the handcrafted, the soiled, flecks and drops, improvisation, a choreography of coincidence and control. The slow pace in the video hardly corresponds with the notions of the nervousness of gestural painting. There are other distinctions as well: it involves something that developed in a collaborative process and not in the secluded act of an individual. It is an open, almost therapeutic group situation in which no one needs to be embarrassed for taking pleasure in getting dirty like children do. This clearly distinguishes it from the gestural painting of the lone postwar cowboys who wanted to become like nature.[1] The *Painting Treatments* take their touchy-feely, pathetic depth somewhat to task by exaggerating being touched by art and taking it literally. But the parody only appears as a side effect. In working with the material, it is above all about the images that develop and the reinterpretation of what painting can be. The artist Amy Sillman, one of the participants in the performance, wrote the following about it in *Artforum:* "[I]t was nice being prodded, touched, stroked, and dribbled on with the warmish liquidity of paint. And meanwhile, the supposedly

manly, authoritative, and triumphant discourse of AbEx had been displaced, not by a parodic emasculation or a cynical recapitulation, but with a newly enthusiastic form of painting as a nudie activity."[2] What Sillman describes as an enthusiastic form of painting is how a younger generation of artists deals with the ambivalences of artistic methods, which are steeped in history. Abstract Expressionism is not only a specific aesthetic, but also a technique. In the context of the gestural erasing of Willem de Kooning, Sillman also refers to it as a "praxis of doubt" on which the works are based.[3] However, the way the material is handled and the interest in this aesthetic also go far beyond the Abstract Expressionism of Jackson Pollock and de Kooning; it is an open field.

Churchman draws on means and materials we are familiar with, and yet the videos are surprising in many respects: for instance, how naturally the genders of transsexual or intersexual bodies merge.

A low radio voice can occasionally be heard in the background. It may more unconsciously emphasize that one is not just engaging in self-referential formalism by turning to an aesthetic practice with a difficult past history, and hence Churchman does not turn away from social topicalities.

Valérie Knoll

1 During an encounter between Hans Hofmann and the Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock, the latter responded to Hofmann's question of whether he did not orient himself toward nature in his painting with "I am nature." Jackson Pollock, quoted in Lee Krasner, "Oral History Interview with Lee Krasner," November 2, 1964–April 11, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, accessed August 7, 2017, aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-lee-krasner-12507.

2 Amy Sillman, "AbEx and Disco Balls: In Defense of Abstract Expressionism II," *Artforum* (Summer 2011): 321–25, esp. 325.

3 Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing,* 1953.

Painting Treatments, nos. 2 + 3, 2010

Painting Treatments, nos. 2 + 3, 2010 (Installation view, Kunsthalle Bern)

Klodin Erb

Born in 1963 in Winterthur, CH. Studied visual art at the School of Design in Zurich (now the Zurich University of the Arts). Her works are represented in various institutional and private national and international collections. Lives and works in Zurich, CH.

Ahnen, 2011
Acrylic on canvas, 10-part series, each 40 × 30 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern

Nach der Landschaft I, 2014
Lacquer on canvas, 237 × 627 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

Nach der Landschaft IV, 2014
Lacquer on canvas, 267 × 310 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

The force of nature seems unpredictable. The trees have just cast off their greenery in amorphous agglomerations. The sky wants to empty itself again above the swell in the middle ground. With soft marbling, the paint offers resistance to the concretion of objects and concepts. It keeps any possible blend in reserve as a continuation, while its skin tautens or contracts in small wrinkles. For Klodin Erb, landscape is neither a backdrop nor a panorama that surveys an existing topography for the purpose of assigning names to individual peaks and meadows. Landscape is an event. Impetuous, shaped by internal forces, in the field of tension between viscous forces and the acute influence of the momentary weather, the painting does not cease to express its own development: the weight and aggregate state of the material are there to capture the first day of creation.

The five-part series *Nach der Landschaft* (After the landscape, 2014) was produced within the scope of a guest appearance at the Aargauer Kunsthaus. In *Docking Station*, works from the museum's own collection as well as the collection of the Nationale Suisse challenged contemporary art to enter into a dialogue.[1] A stroke of luck for Klodin Erb, who got the chance to pair skate with Caspar Wolf (1735–1783), that painter and topographer who saw more than a sublime mise-en-scène in the Swiss Alps. His inhospitable surfaces consisting of glaciers, rocks, and chasms are permeated by an insight, according to which scrutiny would also have to record the geological growth of the mountains. Klodin Erb pays her full respect to this stance. Responding to Wolf's record-keeping tectonics of the landscape, Erb relies on a creative process that causes the observation of nature to retreat behind the inherent dynamics of the color gradation. The artist built massive stretcher frames as shaped canvases, and in doing so embraced a second art historical reference: Caspar Wolf's view of rocky caves forfeited its framing and is crossed with postwar American art formats.[2] The figurative entrenchment in eighteenth-century landscape painting flirts with dimensions of the all over. And the industrially manufactured synthetic resin varnish that Klodin Erb spreads over the canvas, in part with the deliberate gestures of an elongated brush while leaving other areas blank, develops in part opaque, in part iridescent films. The wonderland from under which the eighteenth century pulled the rug has returned.

Today, can one place the brush on the canvas without invoking a chapter of art history? Are there new panel paintings that do not render their own ancestors visible? In view of Klodin Erb's creative work, the answer has to be "no." For materials of all kinds, as well as every conceivable motif, have contributed

to the continuance and development of painting. Photography, film, and sources from popular culture time and again stir up Erb's palette. Many a quote is blurred in its seemingly baroque reenactment, as she does not see her invention bound to an iconography in the sense of pictorial traditions motivated by content. Remembering is the subject of her painting, whereby the memory of the paintings seeks its own order. The desire to blend fragments of the past one above the other and cause them to blossom again in the present germinates a movable tradition.[3]

Klodin Erb resolutely turns to material; she is not gingerly about focusing on the frontality of the skull; she wrests, almost in protest, the last remaining portraits from decay. The paint renders the head, shapes a mask nearly of its own accord, and digs dark cavities into the cranial bones for eyes that no longer exist. The *Ahnen* (Ancestors, 2011) are quickly produced, without pictorial models and without any subsequent, corrective glossing over: in her ten-part cycle, five heads still bear the features of individual portraits. More than a selfie, the serious faces seem to have been assigned the prototypical quality of a photograph on an ID card or in a passport. One is compelled to think of persons presumed dead or of those who powerlessly saw the twentieth century vanish only to commemorate them much later in archived images. Painting not only advocates the living, it also celebrates departure. In a comparatively old-fashioned characteristic style, it takes a stand against the policies of the beauty industry and disease prevention and furnishes proof in the almost impatiently dashed-off portrait: in the end, everyone is equal. Yet the painting continues to adhere to a vigor that is out and out inventive. Decomposition relentlessly surrounds the cranial bone. In their summary arrangement, the teeth impose us with a wide grin or an unintentionally

biting expression. Klodin Erb overpaints the memory of the images and preserves the memento mori by ingesting and disfiguring it.[4] She was already ruthless in her treatment of Rembrandt's self-portrait, from which she wrested all kinds of emotions in her sprint through art history. In this case, she indignantly hurls her ancestral gallery into a present that is immune to death—and pays tribute in a small format to the fictional deceased intimately, silently.

Isabel Zürcher

1 See *Docking Station,* Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau (August 23–November 11, 2014), accessed July 12, 2017, www.aargauerkunsthaus.ch/ausstellungen/archiv/2014.

2 Here, Klodin Erb plays with the topos of Romantic landscape painting that contemporaries of Caspar David Friedrich experienced as a shock when viewing *The Monk by the Sea*: "It is as though one's eyelids had been cut away," Heinrich von Kleist wrote in a review published in the *Berliner Abendblätter* on October 13, 1810.

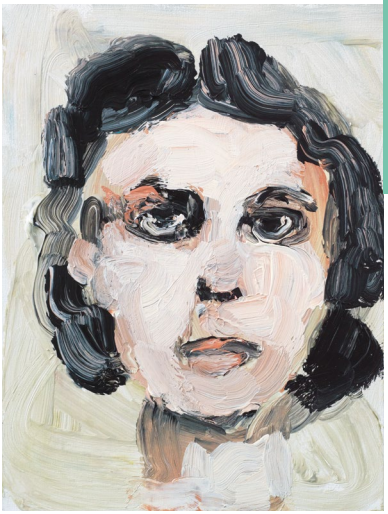
3 The word *blossom* calls to mind the lovely title of the text by Natalia Huser: "Im Treibhaus der Malerei" (In the greenhouse of painting) in *Klodin Erb: REM,* ed. Natalia Huser (Lucerne, 2012).

4 See Beate Söntgen, "Behind the Figure's Back: The Afterlife of Romanticism in Contemporary Art," trans. Steven Lindberg, in *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art,* ed. Max Hollein and Martina Weinhart, exh. cat. Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (Ostfildern, 2005), 76–83, esp. 81. "The pointing to the act of painting as something that evokes secondhand images [...] shows, with postmodern clearheadedness, art's ability to mediate images and thereby preserve them in a redemptive disfigurement."

Nach der Landschaft I, 2014

Klodin Erb

Nach der Landschaft IV, 2014



Ahnen, 2011

Ahnen, 2011

Ahnen, 2011

Dora García

Born in 1965 in Valladolid, ES. Studied visual art at the university in Salamanca as well as at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. Represented Spain at the Biennale di Venezia in 2011. Various other biennale participations in Istanbul (2003), Sydney (2008), Lyon (2009), São Paulo (2010), as well as at documenta 13 (2012). Lives in Barcelona, ES.

Soy un juez / I Am a Judge, 1996–2009
Wall text, adhesive foil, dimensions variable
Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthalle Bern Foundation

Steal This Book (III), 2009
5,000 books, 132 pages each, Ed. A/P
Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthalle Bern Foundation

There are simple sentences that, at bottom, drill their way into one's consciousness, that occasion scrutinizing one's conscience because they are perturbing. "I am a judge." This alone would already be such a sentence. Is not every small decision an invisible court decision against a thousand possibilities? Is not all activity based on the profanely or religiously motivated agreement on what is useful or senseless, what gets us something or involves loss? "I have been educated to discern between good and evil"—this is how Dora García introduces her protagonist. Surely everyone can say that, and we are familiar with it: our alleged misconduct provoked restrictions early on. And even after one's upbringing, finding out why we are right remains part of a social regulation that—depending on how skillfully we are able to judge facts and situations—ranks us among the winners or the losers.
Justice and injustice, norm and deviation supply the material for Dora García's instructions, performances, installations, and narratives. The basic rules of language assert facts and

opens up mental spaces. In the case of *Soy un juez / I Am a Judge* (1996–2009), a text has been applied to the wall and thus inscribes itself in the museum—in the institution that also has an eye on our power of judgment. Said judge sees himself called on to decide the guilt or innocence of a woman who accuses herself of a serious crime. He infers the truth from his knowledge of plants and therefore stares at an almond tree, which dries up under his gaze. "The message is clear," it says in the reliable order of the typography, "although I just cannot remember if desiccation means innocence or guilt."

Regardless of how clearly she argues, the language of nature denies the judge its translation services. He has difficulty standing on his own two feet. The system fails in his exhaustion. Powerlessness is blind to guilt or innocence; the text—an open-ended fable, an allegory without a moral point—also releases us into conjectures about what the "terrible crime" of the woman might be. In any case, desiccation cannot mean anything good; it destroys any vital regenerative potential. An allusion to the global warning that is fatal for Mother Earth? A totalitarian court ruling fails to materialize; what is not finalized will continue to move collective and individual memory: Is anyone going to throw the first stone?

Fiction is Dora García's tool. She pulls the rug out from under what is apparently solid reality in invented or revisited narratives, or smuggles additional actors and narratives into public space. In doing so, the observing and reenacting of what are also historical situations change, barely noticeably, into its invention. The Spanish artist time and again draws her subjects and her personnel from a concrete social environment, brings in amateurs or actors, or stages her work in the minds of the viewers for the purpose of making the unremarkable but powerful difference between reality and representation palpable.

"[T]o affect reality," "to create an interesting situation": that is what drives her creative work.[1] García does not proceed from advantage, and not even from an advance in knowledge. Loss of control is part of her method, and she shares the responsibility with all of those involved, including us viewers, in her subtle interventions in and updates of the familiar.[2] After all, it is always about responsibility: the artist is as interested in what the art scene allows as legitimate, while the civil court insists on punishment,[3] as she is in the sensitivity and revolt of public morals, whose criteria we define ourselves.[4]
With *Steal This Book* (2009), Dora García incites theft in the exhibition space, though the title of her display at the Kunsthalle Bern is already a quote and was therefore not her own idea.[5] The American political and social activist Abbie Hoffman incited an attack against institutions in a publication bearing this title. "SURVIVE!"; "FIGHT!"; and "LIBERATE!" are the chapter headings that bring together the correspondence from García's collaborative practice in the slim brochure. The work lies in discussion and in shared experience; in communicating about how the small, social loss of control creates a productive element, goes beyond the boundary between intimate experience and public consensus. The truth is invisible. Conventional orders are not set in stone. And what is real is possibly just a rumor.

Isabel Zürcher

1 See Dora García, "The Beggar," in *Steal This Book,* ed. François Piron, exh. cat. Aubette, Strasbourg (Paris, 2009), 2–31, esp. 3.

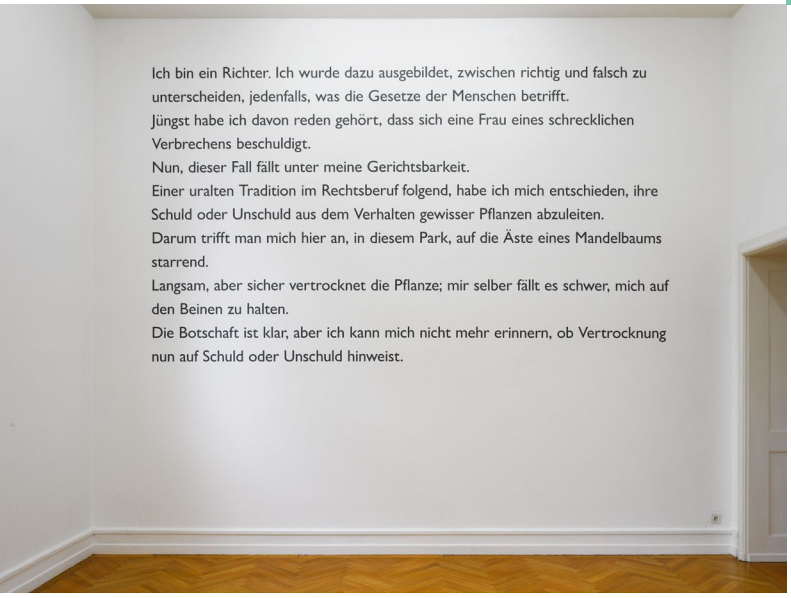
2 Characteristic of this attitude is, for instance, an e-mail written by García to an actor whom, with "Romeo," she had entrusted the role of a gentleman seeking contact during the Frieze Art Fair: "The whole thing is based on a 'gentleman's agreement,' a trust by which I believe you will be excellent actors, a trust by which your interlocutors will decide to believe you, or, upon not believing you, will still play along. [… E]ven more than this, it is unavoidable that a part of truth enters the play, and this is what is interesting about it." Dora García, "The Romeos," in Piron, *Steal This Book,* 32–41, esp. 36 (see note 1).

3 At documenta 13 (2012) Dora García initiated, among other things, a talk show that reopened the court case involving Rainer Langhans and Fritz Teufel: in 1967 the two German nationals won acquittals for having called for the arson of department stores in a flyer: it was acknowledged as art.

4 The video *Just because everything is different, it does not mean that anything has changed* (2008) revives the story of the comedian Lenny Bruce. In 1962 he was called to account for an obscene choice of words.

5 At the Kunsthalle Bern, *Steal This Book* was displayed on a low platform in such a way that the removal of a single book would have left behind a visible gap. See *Dora García: I Am a Judge,* Kunsthalle Bern (August 21–October 10, 2010), accessed July 14, 2017, https://kunsthalle-bern.ch/ausstellungen/2010/dora-garcia.

Steal This Book (III), 2009 (Installation view, Kunsthalle Bern)



Soy un juez / I Am a Judge, 1996–2009 (Installation view, Kunsthalle Bern)

Franz Gertsch

Born in 1930 in Mörigen, CH. Trained at Max von Mühlenen's school of painting in Bern. International breakthrough in 1972 at documenta 5 in Kassel. In 2002 he opened the Museum Franz Gertsch in the Swiss town of Burgdorf, which is devoted to his oeuvre. Lives and works in Rüschegg, CH.

Aelggi Alp, 1971
Dispersion on non-gessoed half-linen, 350 × 525 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, loan from a private collection, Switzerland

Forty-six years after painting the extremely large-format *Aelggi Alp*, the artist said: "The reference for this picture was a selfie."[1] Selfies are an invention of the digital age. With the use of a selfie stick, they allow incessant self-reflection from any angle conceivable. This self-observation and self-staging has given rise to a new culture of narcissism that would have been utterly unimaginable in the days of Woodstock and global turmoil. In the early summer of 1971, when the reference photograph for *Aelggi Alp* was produced, taking pictures of oneself was an awkward procedure. The photo features five people: the artist Luciano Castelli (second from the right), future cardiologist Ludwig K. von Segesser (at the far left), and their friends Franz Marfurt, Ueli Vollenweider, and Vannia Palmer are sitting on a steep path covered with scree.[2] One of the five had to position the camera in front of the group, probably on a rock, determine the field of view through the finder, adjust the exposure and depth of focus, direct the group's attention to the camera, activate the delayed-action shutter release, and then quickly take his designated place within the field of view and wait for the click at the end signaling the release of the shutter. In 1971 the Polaroid was all the rage. However, such an instant camera was not used for the reference for the *Aelggi Alp* painting.

Rather, when he learned about the group's outing and the photographs from his fellow artist Luciano Castelli, Franz Gertsch selected the image from among the small picture slides that interested him most.

Franz Gertsch was himself not part of the scene of friends shown in the photograph. "Don't trust anyone over thirty," the credo of the 1968 generation, was a limit beyond which there was at best an exchange. The forty-one-year-old Gertsch might have been accepted by his younger colleagues, but on motorcycle tours like the one the group undertook on the Älggi Alp, they preferred to be among themselves. That same year, Gertsch painted his wife, Maria, and their four children as an idyll on a picnic blanket, with a baby carriage.[3] The family portrait demonstrates the wide gap between their lifeworlds. The young men with long hair taking a break from their tour on the Älggi Alp are hippies who only sneer at middle-class family values.[4] They are squatting on the ground and not bothering about anything. It is not apparent whether they have alcohol with them; the brown leather overnighter is zipped shut, and what kind of beverages they otherwise have in the beige motorcycle bag in the foreground or in the paper grocery bag from Migros supermarket likewise remains a secret. But they probably do not even require any shots to catapult themselves out of everyday life. Rather, the laid-back posture, the cool nonchalance, the complete carefreeness indicate other sources of inspiration, the beating rhythms from *Easy Rider:* "You know I've smoked a lot of grass / O'Lord, I've popped a lot of pills. [...]"[5]

Franz Gertsch captured the young rebels of the 1968 generation without any idealization or exaggeration. The painting is the manifesto of a sense of life, an attitude demonstrated outwardly. It reflects the group's view of itself. Like Gustave

Courbet for his sociocritical realism, Franz Gertsch chose monumental formats for the purpose of getting to the heart of the sentiments of that generation. And like Courbet, Gertsch also developed his own technique and style. Courbet used a palette knife to apply dirty paint directly to the canvas in order to lend credible expression to the everyday life of exploited individuals; Gertsch transfers the objectivity of photography into the picture with his own photorealism. He projected the slide that Luciano Castelli supplied him with directly onto the ungrounded canvas in his enormous studio in a former beer brewery. To be able to see the colors, he had to darken the room, which forced him to paint "blindly" or "seismographically."[6] Franz Gertsch permanently saw the projected image in front of him. Because he painted it in the dark using luminous colors, it is, strictly speaking, a memory picture or the vision of reality. This approach may explain its unique magic, which achieves the reproduction of the real in its painterly realization.[7] The fact that his figural group became a real allegory of the 1968 generation in the spirit of Courbet lies in its compositional coherence.[8] This refers to his favorite artist during his youth, Ferdinand Hodler: "The Sunday morning visits to the Kunstmuseum Bern with my father belonged to the most impressive and distinct memories of my childhood."[9] He selected photographs as references for his best-known paintings from the early seventies, *Aelggi Alp* and *Medici* (1971/72), which repeat the compositional schemes of famous paintings by Hodler at the Kunstmuseum Bern.[10] The hippies are sitting in a semicircle like the nudes in Hodler's *Tag* (The day), and while the five yet-to-be-successful art enthusiasts leaning against the Medici barrier may be standing, they likewise express a sense of weariness such as in Hodler's seated *Die Lebensmüden* (Tired of life). Gertsch is similarly concerned with an existential

feeling that he perceives to be typical of his day and age, lending universal validity to what is typical of the time—Gertsch learned this from Hodler early on.

Matthias Frehner

1 Communication from Franz Gertsch, July 17, 2017.

2 Ibid.

3 Franz Gertsch, *Maria mit Kindern* (Maria with children), 1971, illustrated in *Franz Gertsch: Retrospective,* ed. Reinhard Spieler, exh. cat. Museum Franz Gertsch, Burgdorf; Kunstmuseum Bern (Ostfildern, 2005), 104–5.

4 Communication from Franz Gertsch, July 17, 2017.

5 *Easy Rider* is an American road movie that was shown in Swiss cinemas in the summer of 1969 and, alongside reports about Woodstock, defined the attitude toward life of the generation of 1968.

6 Ulrich Loock, "Die Grossformate 1971/72," in *Franz Gertsch: Retrospective,* 100 (see note 3).

7 Angelika Affentranger-Kirchrath coined the phrase "die Magie des Realen" (the magic of the real). See Angelika Affentranger-Kirchrath, *Franz Gertsch: Die Magie des Realen* (Bern, 2004).

8 On the concept of real allegory (*allégorie réelle*), see "*Atelier du peintre,*" *Wikipedia*, accessed August 13, 2017, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Atelier_du_peintre.

9 Franz Gertsch, "Meine Sonntagsvormittage bei Hodler," in *Zeitmaschine: Oder das Museum in Bewegung,* ed. Ralf Beil, exh. cat. Kunstmuseum Bern (Ostfildern, 2002), 49.

10 Affentranger-Kirchrath, *Franz Gertsch*, 108–9 (see note 7).

Franz Gertsch

Aelggi Alp, 1971

Kimsooja

Born in 1957 in Daegu, KR. Completed her artistic training at Hong-IK University in Seoul. In 2013 she represented South Korea at the 55th Biennale di Venezia. Lives in New York, US, and Seoul, KR.

A Needle Woman (Performed in Tokyo, Shanghai, Delhi and New York), 1999/2000
4-channel video projection, color, 6:33 min., Ed. 3/4
Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthalle Bern Foundation

The multichannel video projection *A Needle Woman* (1999/2000) is one of the most well known works by the New York–based South Korean artist and can be interpreted against the background of various fields of meaning. One can view the work within a transcultural context as a performance by Kimsooja in different metropolises around the world and construe it as a confrontation with people from varied cultures and global everyday realities. In this case, the focus is on her physical interaction with the anonymous crowd and her inside view thereof.[1] However, because of its iconographic qualities, one can understand the work as a further station within the artist's media-specific examination. Then the image, divorced from the performance as a symbolic inner image, focuses on formal and conceptual connections to earlier textile-based works as well as to Kimsooja's guiding metaphor, the needle. The needle became defining for Kimsooja as it is one of the oldest tools in the world and is used universally. Piercing textile surfaces as well as joining previously unrelated things lends the simple instrument great symbolic power. By sewing together various pieces of fabric and combining a wide variety of colors and patterns, the artist has been producing simple compositions made of verticals and horizontals and wrapped sculptural

bundles in the traditional Korean style of the *bottari* since the eighties.[2] She used her body performatively as a needle for the first time for her video projection.[3]

The four simultaneous projections of *A Needle Woman*, of equal size and placed at regular intervals from one another, show the video of a performance. A rear-view figure—the artist herself—wearing dark clothing and with a black ponytail is standing upright and immobile in the midst of a lively crowd of people that is veritably washing around her. The camera is stable, and all four videos are shot from the same medium distance, so that only the motionless upper body of the artist is visible, which, however, fills nearly the entire frame. The people come toward her or move up to her from behind. Kimsooja disappears in the crowd and suddenly becomes visible again. The reactions to the silent woman vary depending on the cultural, religious, or socioeconomic background of the persons filmed.[4] Yet the performer is nonetheless a rock in a surge of waves, as it were.

The origin of the multichannel video projection was the documentation of a performance of walking. The artist was in Tokyo with a camera crew looking for a suitable site when a fast-approaching crowd of people overwhelmed them in the district of Shibuya. She stood still in the middle of the street and experienced a transcendental moment.[5] This surprising physical and mental experience prompted her to repeat what had happened to her as a performance with her back to the camera: "During the performance, there were moments I was conscious of my presence, but with the passage of time, I was able to liberate myself from the tension between the crowd and my body. Furthermore, I felt such a peaceful, fulfilling, and enlightened moment, growing with white light, brightening over the waves of people walking toward me."[6] Without being

able to deduce her inner experience from her face, for instance, this is conveyed solely by the formal tension between movement and rest, multitude and individual, facial expression and a lack thereof. Identification with the artist is encouraged by the life-sized projection format of *A Needle Woman.* A sense of spatial dissolution is evoked owing to the symmetrical placement of the video projections, the synchronous presence of the different sites, as well as the identical figure. This signifies a further step in the logic of Kimsooja's works, which aims at overcoming surfaces and spaces. A trained painter, her textile work was initially important for the purpose of piercing through the two-dimensionality of paintings. The leap into the third dimension acquired a pronounced metaphorical touch through these methods, which belong to women's traditional area of activity. It was understood as the upgrading of typically female handcraft techniques—and hence as a feminist statement. However, for Kimsooja it was more crucial that she herself became a needle in her videos and made her body available as the penetrable eye of a needle for connecting the people at these places.[7] The crowds become comparable with one another based on the identical image composition as well as the uniform initial situation in Tokyo, Shanghai, Delhi, and New York. Irrespective of the location, the synchronous projection of the four performances makes a universal statement on the relationship between individual and crowd in a globalized world. People are conceived as abstract energy that surrounds the artist and incites her to take refuge in her inner world. At the same time, this activates the affectionate encounter with the individuals and constitutes a peaceful contribution to the world.[8]

Kathleen Bühler

1 The work from the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern was presented as a four-channel version at the Kunsthalle Bern in 2001 and purchased for the collection. It stems from the first *A Needle Woman* work cycle, which was shot between 1999 and 2001 in the cities of Tokyo, Shanghai, Delhi, New York, Mexico City, Cairo, Lagos, and London. These are normally presented as an eight-channel projection. The second cycle was produced on the occasion of the 2005 Venice Biennale and was shot in Patan (Nepal), Havana, Rio de Janeiro, N'Djamena (Chad), Sanaa (Yemen), and Jerusalem. Here the accent was placed on cities that suffered from poverty, violence, postcolonialism, civil war, or religious conflicts.

2 Suh Young-Hee, "Contemplating a System of Horizontals and Verticals," in *Kimsooja: Unfolding,* exh. cat. Vancouver Art Gallery (Ostfildern, 2013), 27.

3 In 1994 Kimsooja translated the concept of sewing ("sewing stitch by stitch") into walking ("walking step by step"); see Sunjung Kim, "Interview with Kimsooja [2008]," in *Kimsooja,* ed. Lóránd Hegyi, exh. cat. Musée d'art moderne et contemporaine de Saint-Etienne Métropole (Milan, 2012), 39.

4 Ibid., 36.

5 "[M]y body and mind gradually transcended to another state. In other words, as I accelerated the state of my isolation, the presence of my body seemed to be gradually erased by the crowd." Ibid., 35.

6 Oliva María Rubio, "Interview with Kimsooja [2006]," in *Kimsooja,* 71 (see note 3).

7 Kim, "Interview with Kimsooja," 41 (see note 3).

8 Ibid., 35. In later works, Kimsooja switches to mirrored spaces in which any site-related reference seems to dissolve, and the artist's breath is all that one can hear, as in *To Breathe—A Mirror Woman* (2006–8) at the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid.

A Needle Woman (Performed in Tokyo, Shanghai, Delhi and New York), 1999/2000

A Needle Woman (Performed in Tokyo, Shanghai, Delhi and New York), 1999/2000

A Needle Woman (Performed in Tokyo, Shanghai, Delhi and New York), 1999/2000

Kimsooja

A Needle Woman (Performed in Tokyo, Shanghai, Delhi and New York), 1999/2000

Manon

Born in 1946 in Bern, CH. Attended the School of Arts and Crafts in St. Gallen, and then the Theatre and Acting Academy in Zurich; subsequently worked as a stylist, graphic designer, window dresser, and fashion illustrator. Assumed the pseudonym Manon in 1966. Extended stay in Paris from 1977 to 1980, and between 1994 and 1996 in Rome and Genoa. Exhibitions include the retrospective *Manon—Eine Person/Manon—A Person* (2008) at the Helmhaus Zürich and at the Swiss Institute, New York; and *Manon: Hotel Dolores* (2011) at the Kunsthaus Aarau. Lives and works in Zurich and Glarus, CH.

from the series **Hotel Dolores,** 2008–2011

Zugemauerte Türe
C-print, mounted on aluminum, 189 × 126 cm, Ed. 2/3
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

Rotes Kleid
C-print, mounted on aluminum, 189 × 126 cm, Ed. 2/3
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

Pins über Heizung
C-print, mounted on aluminum, 189 × 126 cm, Ed. 2/3
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

Since the beginning of her artistic activity, Manon has opted to be the subject of her work and created an artificial character out of herself. The early environments are associated with her live performances, in which she sensually stages herself but exaggerates it to such an extent that the staging exposes the voyeuristic desire of the audience. In the performance *Das Ende der Lola Montez* (The end of Lola Montez, Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1975) she sits in an animal cage wearing a low-cut

black cat suit and is shackled at her neck, hands, and feet. On display as an object of desire in the style of sadomasochism, she fixes her gaze on the audience through her eye mask. In 1979 she says farewell to live performance with *Sentimental Journey* (Galerie de Appel, Amsterdam; later variation *Traps*, 1979, Galerie Ecart, Geneva).

Manon produces her first photographs around 1973/74 in Zurich, creating her first important series, *La Dame au crâne rasé* (Lady with a shaved head, 1977/78), during a stay in Paris. It consists of forty-eight black-and-white photographs—ambivalent erotic self-stagings in which she makes reference to her models from Surrealist photography, such as, for example, Man Ray's pictures of Meret Oppenheim or Claude Cahun's self-portraits.[1] In subsequent photo series up to 1980, she continues to be the sole protagonist, increasingly in roles that do not stage the perfect, covetable body, but in roles such as a cleaning woman or an ill person with an intravenous pole in which she parades the clichés of low social status and affliction (*Die graue Wand oder 36 schlaflose Nächte* [The gray wall or 36 sleepless nights], 1979; *Ball der Einsamkeiten* [The Ball of Loneliness], 1980). In her later photo series, Manon heightens the impression of physical and emotional fragility; impermanence and failure become her preferred themes (*Einst war sie Miss Rimini* [She was once Miss Rimini], 2003, *Borderline*, 2007). Manon's work is to be seen in the context of Body Art as well as in the photographic self-staging of the seventies and eighties (including Cindy Sherman, Hannah Wilke, Urs Lüthi, Jürgen Klauke), in which the construction of the self is inquired into, in particular with respect to sexual and gender identity.[2]

Zugemauerte Türe (Bricked-up door) stems from the series *Hotel Dolores* (2008–11), which comprises around 170 works.

The beginning of her fascination with hotels may be the fact that Manon moved away from home when she was fifteen and substituted a hotel for her familiar parental home as her place of residence.[3] In terms of cultural sociology, the hotel is a well-studied object. The hotel has been a site of social transgression since the outset, one in which, for instance, the bourgeoisie and aristocracy can meet on equal footing.[4] Hence a site that is almost predestined to reconstruct existing identities. For Manon, the abandoned bathing hotels in the city of Baden in Aargau served as a backdrop "in which the artist traced the volatility of our existence with a camera. In the photo series, the derelict premises merge with the artistic staging to become open narratives. The former Verenahof, Ochsen, and Bären hotel buildings in the bathing district in Baden have been vacant for several years due to a lack of demand. The in part dilapidated buildings testify to the times when Baden was known internationally as a spa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prominent personalities such as William Turner, Gottfried Keller, or Hermann Hesse were counted among the spa guests. In the past decades, its importance as a bathing town increasingly diminished, and some of the hotels closed overnight. Fascinated by the faded grandeur of past times and the special radiance of what are now defunct bathing hotels, Manon chose the buildings as a source of inspiration."[5]
The artist stayed in the bathing hotels once a week over the course of two years—despite the cold, dust, filth, and lack of electricity—which is why the lighting also presented a challenge. *Zugemauerte Türe* is one of several motifs that focus on nonfunctional architectural elements: cut doorframes, damp masonry, chipped wall paint, yellowed floral wallpaper, dirty floors. *Pins über Heizung* (Pins above radiator) likewise connects grimy installations with a reproduction of Karl

Stauffer-Bern's *Sitzender Akt* (Seated nude, 1879) pinned to the wall from the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern.[6] In *Rotes Kleid* (Red dress), a cabaret dress contrasts with the corner of a room full of debris. Hence what links the motifs selected for the collection in Bern is the fact that the artist does not appear herself. However, the state of the architecture and the references to the female body via visual quote and dress may be read as representative self-portraits: the past splendor of the establishment, the ruinous structures, the contrast between a glamorous then and a today marked by the traces of time that is pointedly staged.

Nina Zimmer

1 The only artistic video to date of the same title was made to accompany the photo series and is likewise in the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern.

2 See Christina Horisberger, "Manon" [1998, 2011], in *SIKART: Lexikon zur Kunst in der Schweiz,* accessed July 7, 2017, www.sikart.ch/KuenstlerInnen.aspx?id=4001020&lng=de.

3 See *Manon, a Person: A Swiss Pioneer of Body and Performance Art,* exh. cat. Helmhaus Zürich and the Swiss Institute, New York (Zurich, 2008), 262.

4 Habbo Knoch, *"Grandhotels": Luxusräume und Gesellschaftswandel in New York, London und Berlin um 1900* (Göttingen, 2016). See also Ralf Nestmeyer, *Hotelwelten: Luxus, Liftboys, Literaten* (Stuttgart, 2015).

5 *Jahrbuch 9: Aargauer Kunsthaus, Jahresbericht 2011,* Aargauer Kunsthaus and Aargauischer Kunstverein, retrospective *Manon: Hotel Dolores,* curated by Madeleine Schuppli, 18.

6 It was simultaneously the invitation to the exhibition *"Verfluchter Kerl!" Karl Stauffer-Bern: Maler, Radierer, Plastiker,* Kunstmuseum Bern, August 17–December 2, 2007.

Pins über Heizung, from the series **Hotel Dolores,** 2008–2011

Rotes Kleid, from the series **Hotel Dolores,** 2008–2011

Zugemauerte Türe, from the series **Hotel Dolores,** 2008–2011

Claes Oldenburg

Born in 1929 in Stockholm, SE. Studied art and English literature in Yale as well as at the Art Institute of Chicago. Is one of the most important representatives of Pop Art. Lives in New York, US.

Placid Civic Monument, 1967
Documentation of the performance
(Photographer: Fred W. McDarrah)
Silver gelatin print, 10-part series, each 50.9 × 40.3 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

The ten-part photo series *Placid Civic Monument* (1967) essentially represents a simple and not exactly expressive event: besides the artist Claes Oldenburg, one encounters two workers digging a hole in the ground in New York's Central Park only to neatly close it again a short time later with the dirt they removed from it. Children group around the artist and curiously look into the hole being dug—a "monument" as a reduced course of action, digging and filling assigned to workers as a work-determining idea? Its interpretation as an immaterial and performative sculpture suggests itself to the extent that in his personal notes on *Placid Civic Monument*, Oldenburg speaks of an "aesthetic event" whose phases—the preparatory activities, the two hours of actually digging, a lunch break, as well as filling in and trimming—he divided up, accurately captures, and provides with exact time designations.[1] For the understanding of art at the time, such notions of a public sculpture—it is furthermore the first monument that Oldenburg would realize—are not a matter of course. Only several months prior to that, Sol LeWitt published what is today considered his paradigmatic "Sentences on Conceptual Art" in the thematic edition "American Sculpture" of the

American art journal *Artforum*. They prominently note for the first time that mere ideas can also already be artistic works and that these do not necessarily have to be bound to a lasting, stable form.[2]

Placid Civic Monument is produced in October 1967 at the behest of the New York City Administration of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs, and its *Cultural Showcase Festival*, for which twenty-four artists develop large-format sculptures for public space for the first time in the history of the city. Despite, or precisely because of, this official context, Oldenburg's work stands out due to a particularly radical stance. The approval of those responsible required a lot of persuading, and in his foreword for the catalogue accompanying the festival, August Heckscher, Administrator of Cultural Affairs, points out that certain works "undoubtedly provoke some howls of shock and scattered grumblings of discontent."[3] Although Oldenburg's sculptural activity consists in creating oversized reproductions of simple motifs such as cigarettes, paper clips, or other commercial products, besides the conceptual, performative principle, the other coordinates of the *Monument* engender a cryptic work that is critical of representation: not only the fact that the workers are gravediggers, but measuring 180 by 90 centimeters and 180 centimeters deep, the hole that was dug also has the dimensions of a grave—to which the remaining visual signature in the park testifies. The artist comments on the morbid connotation by saying that he wanted to create a contrast to the pomposity that "'civic' sculpture[s]" otherwise always involve.[4] It is not unimportant to mention that in spring that same year, the first mass protest against the Vietnam War took place in Central Park with several hundreds of thousands of participants, and that Oldenburg's examination of the alternative manifestations of a monument plays out in an extremely politicized day and age.

There are additional qualities inherent in *Monument* that one might refer to as performativity, as the impact of an artistic work. On the first level, Oldenburg's monument stands out due to its clear course of action and a dematerialized concept of a public sculpture. However, these actions are accompanied by transcending effects that characterize the actual work not merely as a clearly marked-out, defined undertaking—the acts of digging and filling in as well as the grave as a visual mark—but rather as a kind of dispositif within whose scope various perceptions and reactions intensify.

Thus the responsible municipal authorities made little effort to disseminate the realization of the work, to almost keep it secret, but due to a blunder by the mayor during the opening ceremony of the *Cultural Showcase Festival*, news of the existence of the work reached the press, which occasionally resulted in derisive comments in the pertinent media.[5] Hence in its impact, the monument as a dispositif touches the opportunities for action of an artist, the role of art, as well as the demands on and expectations of them. The highly associative device of the grave convincingly fits in with this. In his notes on the monument, Oldenburg lists conjectures about what might be buried in it: "Some say it was a body," "I heard it was a gold bicycle stuffed with hundred-dollar bills," or "The hopes of a city lie buried here."[6] Anecdotes, speculations, and a lack of knowledge therefore become a constitutive yet not entirely controllable part of the monument, and the grave is the procurator of social and memory-political dynamics. This performativity of the dispositif manifests itself in particular in art historical renarration and social testimony, yet individual photographs in the ten-part series by Fred W. McDarrah (∗1926 in New York, US) bespeak an impact that cannot simply be reduced to the procedure but which operate especially at the level of

iconic urgency: in the third photograph, Oldenburg, kneeling in front of the grave, comes across as if he were paying homage to something full of humility. Perhaps the work is in part more powerful than the artist himself.

Gabriel Flückiger

1 "Placid Civic Monument (Hole ...) (1967)," in Achim Hochdörfer et al., eds., *Claes Oldenburg: Writing on the Side: 1956–1969* (New York, 2013), 294–99, esp. 295.

2 Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 79–83. See in particular "10. Ideas can be works of art; ... All ideas need not be made physical."

3 Quoted in Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley, 2002), 2.

4 Hochdörfer et al., *Claes Oldenburg,* 297 (see note 1).

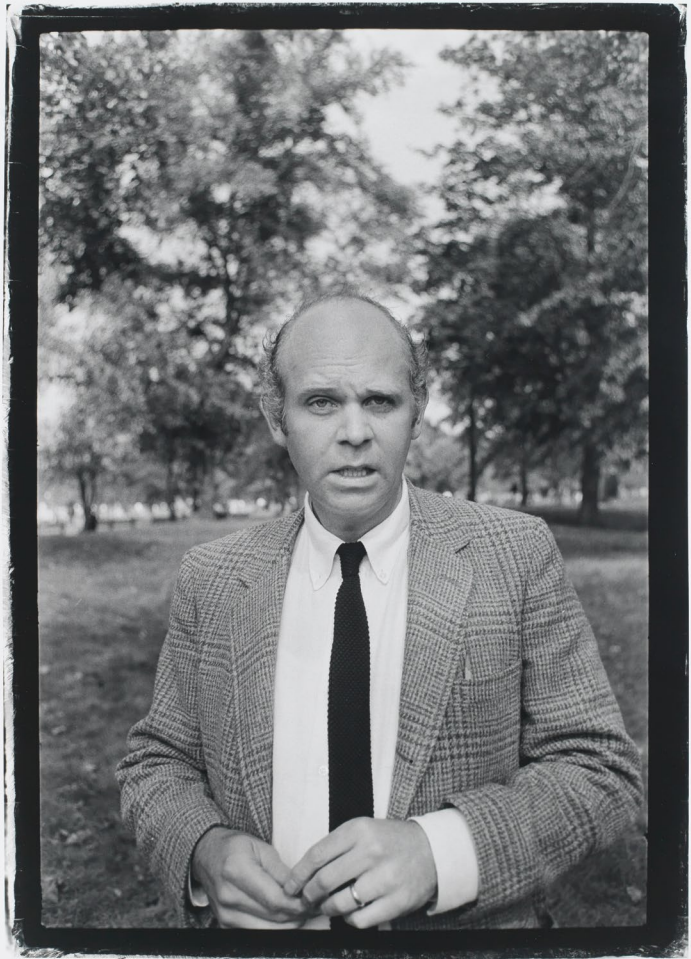
5 Quoted in Boettger, *Earthworks,* 7 (see note 3).

6 Hochdörfer et al., *Claes Oldenburg,* 294 (see note 1).

Placid Civic Monument, 1967

Placid Civic Monument, 1967

Placid Civic Monument, 1967



Placid Civic Monument, 1967

Julian Opie

Born in 1958 in London, GB. Attended Goldsmiths College in London, and in 1987 he gained international attention at documenta 8 with painted steel sculptures. Opie achieved further prominence as a contemporary artist following Pop Art with comic-like, computer-generated portraits, in particular for the cover design of the album *Best of Blur* for the British rock band Blur. Lives and works in London.

HA.45-11, 1990
Wood, white lacquer, glass, 198 × 290 × 208 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthalle Bern Foundation

In the second half of the eighties, Julian Opie (∗1958 in London, GB) produces an ensemble of sculptures whose vocabulary makes reference to ventilation shafts, light boxes, display cases, or deep freezers. It is a category of industrially mass-produced things situated between object and architecture. It exists slightly below our attention threshold—somewhere in the intermediate ground between everyday life and the infrastructures of late capitalistic spheres of production. Of a dimension similar to their real-life templates, these sculptures directly occupy the floor or the wall of the exhibition space. It is conceivable that the artist turned to this realm of forms because it is free of symbolism and transports a certain semantic void. As a viewer, I do not associate anything overly specific with it and can nevertheless use it as a projection surface.
These works directly precede the sculptures *HA.45-11* and *D/889* (both 1990)—also referred to as "houses." However, the reference has now slightly shifted in the direction of cubicle and compartment architecture. In lifeworldly terms, one encounters them in offices (above all open-plan offices), in lobbies, supermarkets, and in comparable walk-through spaces

that originated in the sixties. The French anthropologist Marc Augé calls them "nonplaces," spaces characterized by alternating functions, mobility, and transit. Jacques Tati captured them on film in a famous sequence from the movie *Playtime* (1967), in which the theater of late-modern cubicle offices is reduced to absurdity.

HA.45-11—like the "house" *D/889* produced at the same time—is a glass-and-wood construction enclosed on all sides, a nearly two-meter-tall white sculptural body with a floor area of approximately two by two meters and an interior structure comprised of further vertical surfaces. Open at the top and the bottom, transparent rectangular panes of glass have been inserted at different heights of the exterior and interior walls that permit a mutable alternation of looking into and looking through. The artist explores different versions of these structures with their mutable relationships of open and closed areas in small cardboard models as well as in computer simulations of the period. Black-and-white or colorful backgrounds and sometimes dramatized shadow plays in these test arrangements of photographed cardboard models and computer simulations release the structures from a white cube setting and place them in art-immanent contexts. In this sense, one falls short when one reads the "houses" merely as an sculptural re-examination of Minimal Art. Unlike in the phenomenological protocols of Minimal Art, the focus is no longer on the literal movement of the body in so-called real space. Instead, emphasis is placed above all on a mental dimension. It is now about imagining how bodies walk around in these structures, how they behave, measure the space; how, in other words, the "house" is experienced in one's imagination. Opie intensifies this imaginary, virtual movement in his sculptures by freely modifying the position of windows and walls and thus deliber-

ately obscures the coordinates of top and bottom or front and back. It is a question of an imaginary movement in an alienated house.

One could therefore say that in this case, sculpture targets the question of what a picture is. What kind of experience is in the term *picture*, and what can sculpture contribute to the clarification of this question? In this respect, Opie's sculptures do not simply aim at a mental idea that is generated by a three-dimensional physical object (sculpture). They go beyond this. Because their characteristics, which they derive from a world of things with a lack of metaphors and symbols, also means that in their narrative quality is neutralized and hence memory as well. In this sense, the sculptures scan the boundary between imagination and subjective dissociation, a type of dissociation that, for example, also plays a major role in cases of amnesia or hypnosis.

The aspect of a quasi-amnesic, quasi-hypnotic mindscape intensified in Opie's late oeuvre, beginning approximately in the late nineties, namely in an almost exclusive artistic use of computer-generated imagery. Opie has since augmented his visual worlds with all sorts of media that underscore a certain temporality—duration: with animations, image sequences, soundtracks with noises and voices, as well as texts written in a stylistically factual tenor that transport personal experiences into the image space.[1]

Julian Opie's sculptures are therefore not mere references to a specific category of impersonal and generic objects and structures. Neither are they simply places in which experiences are generated in a positive sense—ones that would lead to narratives. Rather, they examine the distance that can open up between imagination and world. They focus on that individual process during which emotions and affectivity become

detached from the lifeworld. As Opie once went on record as saying: "The only explanation I can think of for wanting to eat bland food [is] a desire to match the sense of [the] distance you feel between the way you understand the external world and your emotional response to it."[2]

Daniel Kurjaković

1 See, for instance, the various extended captions that can assume the form of short prose, in *Julian Opie,* exh. cat. Neues Museum/Staatliches Museum für Kunst und Design (Nuremberg: Verlag für modern Kunst Nürnberg, 2003).

2 Julian Opie, quoted in Lynne Cooke, "Rehearsing Realities: Julian Opie's Scaled Buildings," in ibid., 64–75, esp. 68. Originally in James Roberts, "Tunnel Vision," *Frieze* (May 1993): 33.

HA.45-11, 1990 (Installation view, Kunsthalle Bern)

Anne-Julie Raccoursier

Born in 1974 in Bussigny-sur-Oron, CH. Received her diploma in 1993 from the École supérieure d'art visuel in Geneva. Master program at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles, US. Lives and works in Geneva and Lausanne, CH.

Noodling, 2006
1-channel video projection, color, 7:20 min., loop, Ed. 2/5
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

Anne-Julie Raccoursier produces objects and videos that can be understood as concentrated commentaries on our time. Her videos are characterized by an original language in which her statements, by means of perspective and editing, become visualizations that point far beyond the documentary and unveil the surprising foreignness in what seem to be familiar views.[1] The Swiss artist presents intriguing views of what is apparently commonplace in artful succinctness. At the same time, her work revolves around "mechanisms of representation, the senseless rituals of daily life, and our tacit cultural conventions."[2] In doing so, Raccoursier prefers to concentrate on government demonstrations of power, gigantic sports events, and mass cultural presentations. She sees these spectacles as the careful staging of authority in which the contradictory and the paradoxical unintentionally shine out. In order to bring this to the surface and, in its exaggerated portrayal, to expose what lies beneath it in the sense of criticism, she approaches the object under examination with an ironic attitude and intensifies what she has observed. "In her videos, photographs, sculptural objects, and installations, Anne-Julie Raccoursier uses irony as an agent to counter doctrinarian notions of reality, not in the sense of the ironic laughter of postmodernism, which left open

whether 'everything' is radically called into question here or whether ignorance simply prevailed, but rather as a deliberate artistic strategy to subvert established notions."[3] This is also the initial situation in her video *Noodling* (2006),[4] a compilation of footage shot at the Air Guitar World Championship in Oulu, Finland.[5] The artist shows five young men imitating their idols in ecstatic abandon: Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Frank Zappa, Jim Morrison, Angus Young, and Billy Idol rise in the mind's eye of the viewers. Their tongues sticking out, their eyes rolled back, their upper bodies tense, wildly tossing their hair, the young men embody great moments in the history of rock. They dance in front of a backdrop of smoke irradiated by colored light and wear close-fitting clothing. The camera films from the fans' perspective from below and stylizes them to become enraptured heroes. At first glance, the images resemble a random video recording of a concert. Only gradually do those watching it develop an awareness of the considerable deviations. For one thing, the artist leaves out any sound, meaning that all that is shown is the air guitar players' actual performance, and for another, she slows the film down so that it even becomes possible to analyze the pageant of facial expressions and gestures. Raccoursier furthermore taped it using a static camera, which is why her rock stars sometimes fall out of the (image) frame, which underscores their convulsive fidgeting even more. It seems as if the grotesquely exaggerated movements were solely responsible for the sudden shifts off camera. All of the stylistic devices ultimately serve to emphasize the absurdity of the initial situation. Because it is robbed of any sound, the air guitar spectacle is only a ballet of empty gestures. However, what is particularly impressive is the would-be rock stars' inner approximation to their idols: their euphoric attempt to briefly borrow the identity of their role models

in their emulation of the appearances they have repeatedly watched and imitated for the purpose of becoming like them. In the fictional reality of their performance, "they are prepared to give up their own identity in order to construct a new one. The illusion of being someone else at least lets them get away from it all for a while."[6] On a political level, Raccoursier's video articulates criticism of the star system, which makes every effort to encourage identifying with rock stars with the aim of selling products. What this reveals is not only the capitalistic appropriation of artistic identities, but in particular a specific male disposition. A strange and at once touching spectacle unfolds before our very eyes that parades the rock star as the ultimate embodiment of male potency in silent yet impulsive poses. The artist skillfully causes the staging of this show of masculinity to implode—blanking out the parodist aspects of the air guitar performance for this purpose—and exposes it in all of its extravagant futility. It creates the impression that this literally drives the young men to exhaustion without their really being able to fulfill their aspiration to express virility. Because manliness can apparently only be maintained as a theatrical presentation, not as a serious stance. Anne-Julie Raccoursier sees through the masturbatory spectacle of the air guitarists with a sympathizing, almost caring eye. In their quest for artistic and manly expression they evidently do not light on any other solution than to recycle familiar media set pieces and to perform them—albeit only as a silent emulation.

Kathleen Bühler

1 Oliver Zybok, "Anne-Julie Raccoursier—Zwischen Ironie und gesundem Menschenverstand," *Kunstbulletin* 3 (2011): 49.

2 Konrad Bitterli, "Blind Spot: Non Stop Fun," in *Anne-Julie Raccoursier,* Collections Cahiers d'artistes (Lucerne, 2010), 35.

3 Zybok, "Anne-Julie Raccoursier," 44 (see note 1).

4 The title embraces both an American slang expression for "goofing off" as well as an old term for fishing with one's bare hands. In a metaphorical sense, "noodling" stands for the yearning for primitiveness as well as for aimless drifting in the hope of suddenly happening on something meaningful or valuable.

5 The Air Guitar World Championship has taken place in Oulu since 1996. "What started as a joke in Oulu, Northern Finland, in the late '90s is nowadays an international event concept of entertainment and showmanship with a flavor of rock parody. The contest has gone worldwide with massive international press coverage, several official national championships as well as tons of devoted fans in social media"; see "Info," accessed June 28, 2017, www.airguitarworldchampionships.com/en/info/info.

6 Zybok, "Anne-Julie Raccoursier," 49 (see note 1).

Anne-Julie Raccoursier

Noodling, 2006

Anne-Julie Raccoursier

Noodling, 2006

Anne-Julie Raccoursier

Noodling, 2006

Anne-Julie Raccoursier

Noodling, 2006

Dieter Roth

Born in 1930 in Hannover, DE; died in 1998 in Basel, CH. From 1947 to 1951 trained as a graphic designer in Bern. Taught at Yale University, the Philadelphia Museum School of Art, and the Rhode Island School of Design (US) between 1964 and 1967.

Chicago Wall: Hommage to Ira and Glorye Wool,
1976–1984
12-part tableau, mixed media, 7 parts on canvas, 5 parts on cardboard, 33 cassette recorders, 33 tapes and loudspeakers, wiring, 2 ring binders, 230 × 598 × 18 cm
Property of the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Swiss Confederation/Swiss Federal Office of Culture

Chicago Wall: Hommage to Ira and Glorye Wool by Dieter Roth was produced over the course of eight years. In it, Roth, one of the last universal artists of the late twentieth century, experiments over a large area using a wide variety of different materials and media. The eponymous "wall" is comprised of twelve rectangular canvas and cardboard panels of the same format. An assemblage consisting of diverse objects—disposable tableware, cardboard fragments, recipes, sweets, brushes, or tubes of paint—decorates the pictorial surface and has been overpainted with a gesturally applied layer of paint. Roth creates hands, bodies, and sprawling forms in round, wide movements. The subjects painted in oil develop in part as an interior structure within individual panels; in some places the pictorial compositions appear over several panels.[1] They do not end at the boundaries of the canvas: the impasto extends to the cassette recorders vertically attached to the wall at the right. Yet not only does the color and with it the painting take possession of the objects. A tangle of cables leads from the thirty-three

numbered devices, presented one above the other in several rows, to the canvases. Each cable connects a playback device with one of the speakers attached to the panels, emitting a cacophony of voices, tones, and sounds. The pictures literally begin to speak and sound. The recordings stem from Roth himself, as well as from his singing and music-making children Karl, Björn, and Vera.[2] *Chicago Wall* is one of Roth's earliest music assemblages. Viewing the monumental and multimedia work constitutes a fascinating experience.

Two ring binders hung on strings document the origination process of *Chicago Wall* from the artist's perspective. They are situated between the canvases and the cassette recorders. In them, Roth, who at this time already designed all of the books about him himself—first and foremost all of his exhibition catalogues—collects notes, sketches, and design drawings. Consulting this "making-of" gives viewers the opportunity to take a look behind the scenes of the wall painting. Hence *Chicago Wall* possesses two completely different levels: a colorful, resounding one that is turned outward, as well as a self-reflecting, introspective one that does not open itself up until the viewer has read the contents of the binder. As an open collection of documents, the ring binder explains and annotates. It is a cicerone. As such it competes with the institutional framing of the artwork, for instance the label or art education. *Chicago Wall* is self-explanatory.

The avalanche-like collection of objects, techniques, and layers of paint can be read as a likeness of the obsessively collecting and preserving artist, the jarring colorfulness as the translation of Roth's ambition to make bad and ugly art.[3] However, *Chicago Wall* should also be viewed under the aspect of the performative. The work was produced in the Chicago apartment of Ira G. Wool, a professor of biochemistry as well as a close friend

and collector of the artist. Roth returned to Chicago several times between 1976 and 1984 to continue working on his *Wall*, to complete, overpaint, or correct it. *Chicago Wall* exemplifies Roth's stance of maintaining sovereignty over his works by means of keeping them alive, so to speak, through the work-in-progress method. The work hung in Wool's kitchen until its presentation and completion at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1984—Roth's first solo exhibition in the United States and his last, until MoMA paid tribute to him posthumously in a retrospective in 2004.[4] The story of its development, which lasted a number of years, in which its appearance repeatedly changed, ended with its presentation at the museum. Yet its transfer into a museum collection was not tantamount to its passage to the graveyard.[5] The material-specific state of the *Wall* progressively changes to this day. Whereas the chocolate parts have already fallen off, the pieces of candy have survived surprisingly well. The painting still comes across as powerful and fresh. The polyurethane foam animal figures, on the other hand, crumble into dust at the slightest vibration. *Chicago Wall* performs itself through its signs of disintegration. It always carries around with itself the conditions of collecting, preserving, decaying, maintaining, and presenting. If the *Wall* had been produced as a site-specific wall painting in the tradition of a mural, as the artist originally intended, it would presumably no longer exist today. However, as a mobile work of art it has to be maintained, restored, and in part replicated. The performance of the work is carried out by the performance of the museum.

Etienne Wismer

1 Roth initially worked on only two panels each in conjunction with the other. He later attached the different pairs of pictures to the wall and reworked them. See Patrick Becker and Dirk Dobke, "Ira G. Wool," in *Dieter Roth in America* (London, 2004), 124–38, esp. 129.

2 See Judith Russi Kirshner, "Dieter Roth, Museum of Contemporary Art," *Artforum* 23, no. 1 (September 1984): 117–18, esp. 117.

3 Becker and Dobke, "Ira G. Wool," 125 (see note 1).

4 See *Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, exh. cat. Schaulager, Basel, et al. (Baden, 2004), 220.

5 See Boris Groys, *Logik der Sammlung: Am Ende des musealen Zeitalters* (Munich, 1997), 27.

Dieter Roth

Chicago Wall: Hommage to Ira and Glorye Wool, 1976–1984

Vittorio Santoro

Born in 1962 in Zurich, CH. Cofounder of the Zurich-based art publishing house Memory/Cage Editions. Since the mid-nineties numerous study trips and residences, including at the Watermill Center, Long Island, New York (1996); in Berlin (2004); at the Cité internationale des arts, Paris (2006, 2008); and at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2011, 2014). Lives and works in Paris, FR, and Zurich.

Untitled (Mask), 2007
Wooden walls, white paint, one-way mirror, 3 fluorescent tubes with switchgear, DXG-48-Box, MP3-player (iPod), vintage radio, audio file (voice: James Lord), wooden board, fragment of a newspaper, Dimensions variable, Ed. 1/3
Kunstmuseum Bern

For Vittorio Santoro, *Untitled (Mask)* (2007) is written into that category of works that take on the form of a multilayered, extensive installation.[1] In this case, it is the scene of a special intrigue that connects different strands.
First of all it is a freestanding architectural structure that, except for a window-like opening, seems to be closed when one enters the exhibition space. The specific arrangement of three white walls of different lengths and abutting at right angles produces this slight illusion. Once one is "in" the structure, it proves to be a spatially ambivalent construct. Interior and exterior are not clearly separated from one another. Neither is the window-like opening what it appears to be at first glance. It consists of a two-way mirror, which is activated by fluorescent tubes installed on both sides of the mirror. The light cycle causes them to light up and go out again. Hence the two-way mirror is sometimes a mirror that reflects one's own image, and sometimes a window that enables viewing into the space. Because of the irregular light cycle, it can never be anticipated

exactly when the shift from a window to a mirror—and vice versa—will take place.

And then one hears a sonorous male voice. Its well-articulated pronunciation brings to mind a BBC or Voice of America speaker.[2] It is coming from a radio of the "world receiver" type resting on a wooden table. Does all the world cohere here and now? Or is this space merely the transit site for signals from afar? The voice recites historical sources with in part highly metaphorical, in part soberly protocular descriptions of a specific African mask. Altogether, the passages range the period between the 1930s and 1980s. It is only these many and varied attempts at description and interpretation by art historians, ethnographers, travelers, art dealers, and collectors that evoke the absent mask in the installation: "Plate XXVII, Kono Mask (cf. page 19). It represents an elephant (symbol of the intelligence but also of the 'volume' of the body of a human being) and also a bird (symbol of thought and spirit). Provenance: Mali Republic – Dimensions: – . Material: wood. Collection: Musée de l'Homme. Photographed by R. Pasquino. Source unknown, page 29; – 7a: forehead mask, Kono, Bamana, Mali, wood with encrusted patina and traces of ochre paint, plant fibers, height 93 cm, inventory 1004-31, formerly collection of Joseph Müller. – This mask belongs to the Kono, the fourth of a total of six initiation societies, which promulgates a deeper insight into the group's ethical values. This knowledge is communicated to neophytes through the songs that accompany the mask-dancers' performance. With the aid of the reed pipe the singer uses a nasal tone to imitate the voice of conscience and to point out the path to proper behavior. [....]" The transcriptions, which are rich in imagery, develop a narrative pull that indicates the subtleties of an initiation rite on which the mask is based. At the same time, the biographical references

mark the convoluted paths of sources, the mutable contexts, shifts, and appropriations of the mask by the (Western) discourse.

However, as the artist emphasizes: "The Central African mask should operate as an instrument, not only for the purpose of thinking about how Western culture deals with the "other" or the "unknown," but also in order to test accesses to such phenomena in a broader sense (in an idiosyncratic way?). Thus the installation would be a specific spatial arrangement, a contraption for the purpose of triggering the experience of a confrontation (with oneself)."[3] The focus of the experience of *Untitled (Mask)* is therefore an art of self-inquiry. The "know thyself" may be older than the inscription on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi; it also articulates itself in the African initiation rite. The initiation is bound to a specific procedure and discipline if the subjective transition is to succeed (which the voice in Santoro's installation is addressing). The initiation transforms the individual, but not only with respect to his potential. It also requires insight into one's limitations and one's own mortality (a newspaper clip carefully hidden in the installation supplies a somber indication of this: "'I never get used to seeing a vulture sitting complacently on my roof as I come home,' he writes from Sierra Leone."[4]).

As in other works by Santoro—in performances, films, sound works, or sculptures—in *Untitled (Mask)* bodies, not least those of the viewers, are set in motion. Multiple levels of experience are choreographed and assume the form of a path with indirect stations. The path is not straight but radiates in several directions. In the space of *Untitled (Mask)* unfolded in this way, there hangs an invisible mask that, depending on our perspective, discloses a different face.

Daniel Kurjaković

1 There is a work from the same year that complements *Untitled (Mask): Untitled (Mask) II*, a projection of 17 slides (illustrations on www.vittoriosantoro.info/01_works/works-18-1.html, accessed July 24, 2017). Santoro also made the installation *Untitled (Mask)* the point of departure for a photo essay in which he mapped the concept for and the genesis of the work in texts and images. See Vittorio Santoro, "Schauplatz, Lichtzyklus, Erfahrung: Zur Entstehung der Installation *Untitled (Mask)*," in Daniel Kurjaković, Franziska Koch, and Lea Pfäffli, eds., *The Air Will Not Deny You: Zürich im Zeichen einer anderen Globalität* (Zurich, 2016), 33–44.

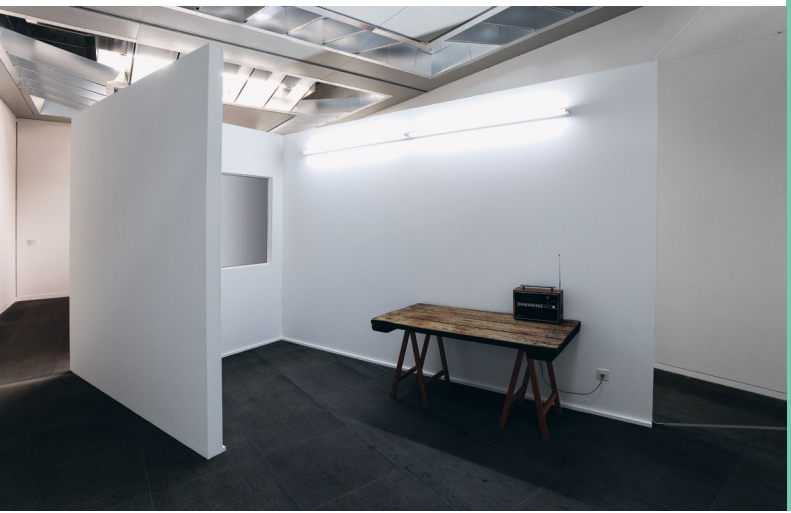
2 The choice of the speaker is important, if not primary, as it is James Lord, Giacometti's biographer, who has also published many texts on Picasso. The artist explains his choice: "James Lord would perhaps [due to his person and the historical references to the historical avant-garde, in particular to Primitivism] open that space in which different people and milieus came into contact with African art. His participation, I thought, would make it possible to reflect on how the African mask was investigated, interpreted, highlighted, but also abused, excluded, or ignored in the twentieth century." Santoro, "Schauplatz, Lichtzyklus, Erfahrung," 43 (see note 1).

3 Ibid., 39.

4 The line is an excerpt from a review of Graham Greene's *Letters,* quoted in Terry Eagleton, "Adventures in Green-land: *Graham Green: A Life in Letters,*" *The Guardian,* September 22, 2007.

Untitled (Mask), 2007 (Installation view, Kunstmuseum Bern)

Vittorio Santoro



Untitled (Mask), 2007 (Installation view, Kunstmuseum Bern)

Denis Savary

Born in 1981 in Granges-près-Marnand, CH. Studied visual art at the École cantonale d'art de Lausanne (ECAL), diploma in 2004. Has since actively participated in exhibitions and performance festivals both at home and abroad. Lives and works in Geneva, CH.

Intimités, d'après Félix Vallotton, 2007
Serigraph on Japan paper
10-part series, each 30 × 36 cm, Ed. 4/30
Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthalle Bern Foundation

Ostende, d'après James Ensor, 2011
Wood, textile, elastomer, 67 × 153.5 × 76 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthalle Bern Foundation

Denis Savary works with various media, such as sculpture, drawing, and film as well as performance and installation, whereby his works adopt complex systems of reference from the history of art and literature. Savary draws on fact and fiction while weaving in references to his own works, and in doing so constructs new realities out of old stories. In the works at the Kunstmuseum Bern, purchased by the Stiftung Kunsthalle Bern, distinguished names from art history, such as Félix Vallotton or James Ensor, are brought up to date in the lobby of the present and related to today.
The artist drew his inspiration for the ten-part series *Intimités, d'après Félix Vallotton* (2007) from the woodcut cycle of the same name by Félix Vallotton produced in 1898. Vallotton's extensive oeuvre of paintings and prints includes numerous pictures of middle-class interiors in which he masterfully contrives scenarios of amorous trials and tribulations that suggest a narrative sequence and hence open up a space of

imagination for speculation. Vallotton's *Intimités* feature domestic and erotic scenes between a man and a woman. With telling titles like *Le mensonge* (The lie) or *Le triomphe* (Triumph) as well as what seems to be theatrical staging, Vallotton makes light of the middle-class morals propagated in his day and stages the relationship between the genders as a shrewd struggle for positions of power.

An unsupported story has it that the artist's close friends, the married couple Misia and Thadée Natanson, who were active as patrons of the arts, served as models for these feigned affectionate gestures and that Vallotton furthermore coveted the wife of his benefactor for many years. Denis Savary now takes advantage of this anecdote, and in his version of the *Intimités* he relates a tale of unrequited love.[1] The artist reprinted the series, whereby he omitted those parts that Vallotton had cut out as proof of the destruction of the printing plates—which was quite common for the purpose guaranteeing the limited edition.[2] All of these fragments include the parts of the face of the muse that Vallotton purportedly coveted. In Savary's *Intimités* the head of the protagonist is therefore cut out; what is allegedly the most important person is absent, and a gaping void illustrates an unfilled love.

At the same time, Savary quotes the middle-class charm of Parisian patronage. He rekindles the visual world of the belle époque and evokes a moribund social habitus that is always played around by an idyllic longing in his portrayal. By excluding the protagonist's head, Savary, surely in the spirit of Vallotton, intensifies the uncovering of the intellectual bourgeoisie as a gigantic staging that—focused completely on itself—disregards the tension-laden social and economic reality in major industrial cities.

Ostende, d'après James Ensor (2011) is the reproduction of an arrangement that Denis Savary saw in the studio of James Ensor (1860–1949) in the latter's hometown of Ostende. The historical space, itself a reconstruction, housed several papier-mâché masks that are depicted in paintings by the Belgian artist. Starting in 1888, the mask motif began to play a major role in Ensor's oeuvre. Thus a large number of paintings feature grotesque masks and spectral figures in which Ensor's studio is transformed into a spooky, imaginary space, into a kind of stage "on which—under the direction of the painter, who oversaw the production—masks [...] make their appearance."[3] The mask repeatedly appears in paintings produced in the West as a symbol of hypocrisy or deceit, and according to Herwig Todts, Ensor uses the motif "almost systematically as an instrument of unmasking."[4] Much like Félix Vallotton, Ensor also employs staging as a stylistic device of exposure and of criticism of the human habitus of the dishonest, the dubious, and the immoral.

Denis Savary now draws on the props in this painting and recasts one of these masks in elastomer, an elastic synthetic. The skin-like color of the peculiar material lends the mask an uncanny presence, and on the sofa—a piece of furniture that ever since Sigmund Freud has been extremely heavy with meaning—it is reminiscent of an unsettling dream. The oriental style of the sofa furthermore alludes to a flair for aesthetic exoticism in middle-class milieus during Ensor's lifetime, especially in Belgium, that was engendered by colonialism. The widespread interior decoration in colonial style is in turn a façade and represents what is not here, making use of diffuse longings for the foreign. At the same time, however, as projections of longing, the interiors drastically suppress the living conditions in colonized countries, which are characterized by violent oppression.

Hence with *Intimités, d'après Félix Vallotton* and *Ostende, d'après James Ensor,* Denis Savary restages the stagings by Vallotton and Ensor from a contemporary perspective and, using the method of the historical quote, exposes problem areas such as colonialism, social inequality, or scheming intrigues in interpersonal relationships as blind spots of the past.

Sarah Merten

1 The reference to the unhappy amorous connection between Félix Vallotton and Misia Natanson is primarily mentioned in this clarity in connection with Denis Savary's reproductions, for example in the press release on the occasion of Savary's exhibition *Baltiques* at the Kunsthalle Bern, where the series was presented in 2012. The inclusion of unsupported knowledge as fact is part of Denis Savary's artistic strategy.

2 The *Intimités* were published in 1898 as a portfolio in an edition of thirty by the well-known literary and artistic Parisian journal *La Revue blanche.* Moreover, a print with the ten pictorial fragments was included as proof of the destruction of the printing plates. See Christian Ramekin, "'Les Intimités,' 1897/98," in *Félix Vallotton: Von der Druckgrafik zur Malerei,* exh. cat. Cabinet d'arts graphiques des Musées d'art et d'histoire Genève (Bern, 2010), 88.

3 Xavier Tricot, "James Ensor, der Maler des Grotesken," in *Satire—Ironie—Groteske: Daumier, Ensor, Feininger, Klee, Kubin*, exh. cat. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (Bielefeld, 2013), 145.

4 Herwig Todts, "James Ensor (1860–1949): Eine Einführung," in *James Ensor: Aus dem Königlichen Museum für Schöne Künste Antwerpen und Schweizer Sammlungen,* exh. cat. Kunstmuseum Basel; Ordrupgaard, Kopenhagen (Ostfildern, 2013), 16.

Denis Savary

Ostende, d'après James Ensor, 2011

Denis Savary

Intimités, d'après Félix Vallotton, 2007

Denis Savary

Intimités, d'après Félix Vallotton, 2007

Intimités, d'après Félix Vallotton, 2007

Denis Savary

Intimités, d'après Félix Vallotton, 2007

Shimabuku

Born in 1969 in Kobe, JP. Artistic training at the Osaka College of Art as well as at the San Francisco Art Institute. Visiting professorships and lectureships, including at the Braunschweig University of Art and the Zurich University of the Arts. Lives and works in Naha, Okinawa, JP.

Flying Me, 2006
Video, color, sound, 3:20 min., Ed. 3/5
Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunsthalle Bern Foundation

The Japanese artist Shimabuku travels around the world, strikes up conversations with people he does not know, carries on dialogues with nature, and experiences all kinds of surprising poetic and humorous moments that become the subject matter of his art.[1] As is the rule in Japanese, his name consists of two ideograms that seemed "surrealistic" to him even as a child and prompted him to call what is supposedly taken for granted into question.[2] In his creative work he therefore connects his interest in form with his appreciation for the ordinary and the accidental. By means of his original perspective he transforms the ordinary into the fantastic, which the artist captures as a performance on video, in a photograph, or as an accumulation of objects. Shimabuku is therefore primarily concerned with encountering and discovering the everyday, which he reexamines and calls into question. His basic attitude is: "I am interested in the back side."[3] In order to reach the back side, he cultivates an approach that is situated at the intersection of performance, exhibition, and experience.[4] He carries out activities as performances, presents them as videos, photographs, or collections of objects, and occasionally invites visitors themselves to carry out specific activities. Some of his discoveries, which he dresses in absurd performances and

stories, lead to projects that extend over years. By allowing himself to slip into certain roles and in doing so breaking with established perceptual habits, Shimabuku also enables his public to see what is being shown in a new way and to reexperience what is familiar for what seems to be the first time. The creative play with conventions as well as his interpretation of the trivial in an unfamiliar way are his true artistic contributions.[5] In the process, he lets himself be guided by chance encounters and experiences during his travels and cultivates a participatory approach. This also becomes apparent in the video *Flying Me*, which is based on a performance in Barcelona from November 17, 2005.[6] The artist releases his full-body portrait painted on cardboard and paper into the air as a kite. Like the artist himself, the cardboard figure is dressed in black. The string is attached to its nose. On the first attempt, the kite falls to the ground headfirst. The artist calmly picks it up and lets it fly again. Only after several attempts does it hover in the air, elegantly swaying back and forth as a black cardboard silhouette next to the sun in the sky. However, the elegance does not last long, because the thin paper legs flutter grotesquely in the wind, and the image of the artist time and again threatens to plummet abruptly. The voices of the people at the beach, who are amazed by the unusual flying object, become audible and convey a childlike delight in discovery and joy. Neither does the artist seem exempt from it, even though he maintains stoic calmness while carrying out this performance. The artist's unconventional full-body portrait, which Shimabuku controls himself, seems to be an allegory of the efforts that an artist has to make today in order to survive near the sun or in the sky in general. It points to the discrepancy between expectation and failure, because the viewers know what to expect with respect to flying a kite and at the same time see

with their own eyes how the artist struggles with the forces of the wind. The work makes reference to several levels of meaning of the term *performance*, on the one hand as an artistic act on the beach of Barcelona, of which the video represents a document, and on the other as the stance of an artist within a ranking list that determines the criteria of importance, hence exhibition presence and salability, in the operating system of art. The former—namely the challenging of formats in general as well as the lofty impermanence of Shimabuku's artistic activity—are a reason for the lack of recognition in the latter. Shimabuku is not one of today's most visible artists either, and despite his presence in international exhibitions he only makes selected appearances. Yet the video *Flying Me* as well as his performances correspond with an initial situation in which scenarios are determined in advance for the purpose of allowing them to "chafe at the requirements of reality or even be broken by them."[7]

Kathleen Bühler

1 "Art makes people happy. Art makes me happy. And therefore I hope I can make people feel better," "Shimabuku—Liverpool Biennial 2006," accessed June 28, 2017, www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/shimabuku-liverpool-biennial-2006.

2 "Have you ever seen a tortoise yawn? Conversation between Shimabuku and Chiara Parisi," in *Shimabuku: 2011,* exh. cat. Centre international d'art et du paysage de l'île de Vassivière (Milan, 2011), 59. "Shimabuku is my family name. And it is a very particular family name. Japanese people understand immediately that my family comes from the southern island of Okinawa, where I live now. [...] Also we mostly call each other by the family name in Japan. [...] And Shimabuku is a bit similar to the pronunciation of "merci beaucoup." French people can remember my name quickly. It is also similar to Giotto's teacher name Cimabue," Shimabuku in an e-mail to the author, July 7, 2017.

3 Washida Meruro, "A Respect for the Making of Things," in *Shimabuku: Noto,* exh. cat. 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art (Kanazawa, 2014), 141.

4 "I think seeing an exhibition is not only about understanding the artist's intention. More than that, I think that seeing an exhibition is a chance to feel and think by or for yourself. This is not only a place to see but also a place for experience." Parisi, "Have you ever seen a tortoise yawn?," 60 (see note 2).

5 "I'm doing quite normal things. What I'm doing is [pointing] it out." "Shimabuku—Liverpool Biennial 2006" (see note 1).

6 The production originated in collaboration with the gallery Nogueras Blanchard. It took place in Sant Sebastià section of Barceloneta city beach. The sculpture *L'estel ferit* (The wounded comet) by Rebecca Horn is visible in the background. See *Shimabuku: Opening the Door* (Tokyo, 2010), n.p.

7 Daniel Baumann, "Sunrise at Mt. Bern," *Spike* 40 (Summer 2014): 148–49.

Flying Me, 2006

Flying Me, 2006

Flying Me, 2006

Sam Taylor-Johnson

Born in 1967 in London, GB. Studied art at the Hastings School of Art and at Goldsmiths College, London. Has participated in numerous international exhibitions since the early nineties. Made her debut as a director in 2009 with her first feature film, *Nowhere Boy.* Lives and works in London and Los Angeles, CA, US.

from the series **Crying Men,** 2002–2004

Steve Buscemi, 2004
C-print, 99.2 × 99.2 cm, Ed. 1/6
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

Philip Seymour Hoffman, 2004
C-print, 131.7 × 131.7 cm, Ed. 2/6
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

Forest Whitaker, 2004
C-print, 100 × 100 cm, Ed. 3/6
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

Sam Taylor-Johnson (formerly Taylor-Wood) has been making public appearances with her video installations, videos, and photographs since the nineties. They address complex and contradictory states of mind. To this end, she creates portraits and self-portraits or intimate scenes in which individuals endure extreme conditions, the relationship between the genders is dealt with, and in which a contemporary attitude toward urban life is expressed. Also active as a movie director in Hollywood, Taylor-Johnson likes to work with actors from whom she exacts a precise performance. One of her most famous works is the *Soliloquy* (1998/99) series of large-format photographs, in which the artist stages a 360-degree-panorama

with several *tableaux vivants*.[1] She creates emotionally charged scenes that reflect the emotional snares of a luxurious, urbane life. Taylor-Johnson's cinematic sensitivity and affinity is accompanied by art historical references as well as a marked painterly sense of composition and coloration. Her photographs are composed like altarpieces: large-format portraits are underlaid with a panorama that acts like a retable. Her figures are caught in a moment of introspection or daydream while scenes unfold in the panorama that can be seen as actual experiences or as something dreamed or imagined. Pleasure in staging exceptional emotional situations also characterizes the *Crying Men* (2002–4) series of portraits, which comprises twenty-two color and six black-and-white photographs of famous actors who, at the request of Sam Taylor-Johnson, cry in front of the camera. "The idea was to fight against the cliché of pointing a camera at someone and saying 'smile.' I thought about early paintings of martyred saints with tears in their eyes. I wanted to take these icons of our era and make them more human, more vulnerable."[2] Taylor-Johnson needed three years for the preparation and completion of the series, and it was not until Paul Newman accepted in 2002 that other acting greats such as Steve Buscemi, Benicio Del Toro, Ed Harris, Ryan Gosling, Woody Harrelson, Kris Kristofferson, Willem Dafoe, Daniel Craig, Dustin Hoffman, Forest Whitaker, or Sean Penn were willing to cooperate.[3] What had priority for the artist was the appeal of presenting the famous and unassailable idols of the screen in a more human light as well as having them performing something "effeminate" at her bidding.[4] Because the attractive thespians often play the role of virile swashbucklers or action heroes in their films and embody projection surfaces for erotic fantasies, this ultimate test of dramatic art, namely crying on demand, is included in a discourse on masculinity.

In this constellation—a master of staged photography working with famous actors—the emotional outburst immediately raises the question of authenticity. Especially since the photographs suggest a vulnerable moment of sadness and hence, supported by the special image detail, intimacy and privacy. As viewers we know that this is an illusion—nearly all of the pictures of the actors were taken in a hotel—and likewise that the tears are presumably spurious.[5] Yet even though all that is being presented in the photographs is the craft of acting, they seem like genuine emotions in a moment of true familiarity.[6] Thus Sam Taylor-Johnson plays with the conventional distinctions between real/mock, played/experienced, public/private, fiction/reality.

The portraits of Steve Buscemi, Forest Whitaker, and Philip Seymour Hoffman were produced in 2004 and present three outstanding character actors. Steve Buscemi has embodied numerous neurotic and paranoid characters as well as loser types. His pose with eyes closed and his hand supporting his forehead fits into this iconography of portrayal; however, he is also reminiscent of depictions of the apostles at the Last Supper. Forest Whitaker, on the other hand, gesticulates heavily while he cries. He is sitting on a red wicker chair wearing a dark pink shirt, his face twisted in pain. The scene is dominated by the bright red and the precise composition, in which the shaft of a floor lamp accentuates Whitaker's posture. Philip Seymour Hoffman, however, is lit from the side in a dark room at the Chelsea Hotel. He is sitting, lost in thought and doubled up, on a gold-colored bedspread, which causes him to seem like the contemporary version of a picture of a saint painted by an Old Master. As a matter of fact, Sam Taylor-Johnson consciously orients herself toward classic paintings of saints and heroes, for instances scenes of the Lamentation of Christ,

the Deposition from the Cross, and portrayals of the apostles at the Last Supper, whose range of expression she extends by the contemporary emotionalism. She ennobles the vulnerability being shown by making reference to a tradition of sensitive men with the use of famous role models, which she takes up and at the same time renews.

Kathleen Bühler

1 "*Tableaux vivants* [...] are physical reenactments or recreations of painterly and sculptural works of art. [...] This physically interpretive treatment of images is concrete evidence of visual memory that incarnates as imitation." Sabine Folie and Michael Glasmeier, "Atmende Bilder: Tableau vivant und Attitüde zwischen Wirklichkeit und Imagination," in *Tableaux vivants: Lebende Bilder und Attitüden in Fotografie, Film und Video,* exh. cat. Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna, 2002), 9.

2 Richard Cork, "Sam Taylor-Wood: Laughing Woman," *The Times Magazine,* October 23, 2004, 30.

3 Elton John and Sam Taylor-Wood, "Elton John: When I Met Sam Taylor-Wood, I Fell in Love with Her," *The Telegraph*, November 13, 2008, accessed June 26, 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3563174/Elton-John-When-I-met-Sam-Taylor-Wood-I-fell-in-love-with-her.html#mm_hash.

4 Linda Nochlin, "When the Stars Weep," in *Sam Taylor-Wood: Crying Men* (Göttingen, 2004), n.p.

5 Kathy Brewis, "Sob Stories: How Sam Taylor-Wood Reduced Hollywood's Leading Men to Tears," *The Sunday Times Magazine*, August 22, 2004, 30.

6 Because according to certain acting methods, such as, for example, Method Acting, the convincing display of feelings can only be successful if one recollects and reexperiences actual feelings.

Steve Buscemi, from the series **Crying Men,** 2004

Sam Taylor-Johnson

Philip Seymour Hoffman, from the series **Crying Men,** 2004

Forest Whitaker, from the series **Crying Men,** 2004

Silvie Zürcher

Born in 1977 in Zurich, CH. Received her diploma in visual art from the Zurich University of the Arts. Lives and works in Zurich.

Paravent, 2008
5-part room divider, wood, C-prints on MDF
200 × 500 × 100 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Collection Stiftung GegenwART

Gender Trouble, the first book by the American philosopher Judith Butler, was published in 1990.[1] It throws light on the relation between sex and gender, between body and identity, naming and criticizing biological as well as social gender as constructions formed by society that are based on a heteronormative gender system.[2] In connection with Simone de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* and its key assertion that being a "woman" or a "man" is not the result of biology—hence not innate—but is learned as social gender, Butler goes on to explain that an individual's sex, based on his or her anatomical features, is generated discursively and is a constructed category.[3] This theory implies that an individual should be able to select and (per)form gender identities freely based on the countless possibilities of gender attributions and codes. Nearly thirty years later, with *Paravent* (2008) Silvie Zürcher submits these writings, which are so influential for feminist theory, to a critical examination. As a classic partition, it alludes metaphorically to the still predominant binarism of the genders, the exclusive separation of gender into male and female. Various scenes in it deal with effects, challenges, and conflicts that result from the perpetuation of this gender dichotomy and with which the artist sees herself

confronted—also with respect to her position in the art system. The artist pictures herself placed in different poses, dressed in loose shrouds of fabric on one side of the partition. Without making reference to one another, the gaze and posture of the artist's ego tell of resignation, disinclination, and melancholy. In view of the burden of gender and art history it transports, it seems as if the surrounding interiors veritably press her into the heavy pieces of furniture. While on the left side various nude images of female bodies and the artist point out how a "real woman" should look and carry herself—namely slender, buxom, and sexually arousing—the opulent pantheon in the central panel likewise clearly assigns her the female role in art history as muse and model. The classic allocation of roles is also reflected in the narrow side panels: nature embodies the female principle; culture and technology, the male. The climbing flowers at the lower edge moreover refer to the naturalization of this relationship, that female and male naturally and unalterably differ in this way.

The reverse side of the partition is covered with symbols of today's consumer society in which gender roles and—especially in the fashion industry—body images are continuously staged and codified in public. Headless models on hangers stand immobile in space, while in the lower panel a horde of young, dynamic men—also in part without a head—move through the dismal landscape. Based on this juxtaposition, one can also gather what position men and women (still) have to orient themselves despite increasing efforts toward equality: women, exaggeratedly reduced to a body incapable of thinking, since lacking a head, stand there as decorative objects. Men, on the other hand, are actively on the move: they conquer the world and, sure of victory, stride through the terrain, whose desolation they are possibly even responsible for due to

their mindless actions. The portrayals reveal the invalidity of outdated role models as ironically as they do seriously. Hence the modern knight no longer sits on a white horse but on a misshapen stuffed pony, and instead of valiant armor wears not much more than a pathetic cardboard mask—and has a hard-on.

In view of Silvie Zürcher's earlier works, *Paravent* is not simply an unreflected assertion, but the result of her examination of the social construction of gender based on visual codes. In the photo series *Floyd (Selbstporträts)* from 2006, one follows Zürcher's alter ago of the same name in social interaction with his cool boy clique. Silvie is Floyd, Floyd is Silvie. Yet Silvie remains Silvie. "Why is it that a friend of mine can simply flop into an armchair in sweatpants with a beer in his hand without hearing a weird remark from anyone about his behavior? When I encounter other people in the same situation, I supposedly act like a guy. Do I now have to assume that laxness, nonchalance, and relaxedly loafing around on an upholstered suite is exclusively coded as male? Why is a gesture, posture, or movement interpreted as female or male?"[4] Under these circumstances, what clings to *Paravent* is the artist's disillusioning experience of the impossibility of forcing open and transforming the role of "woman" attributed to her in private as well as public life—unlike what she would want if she had her way.

Sarah Merten

1 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990).

2 Heteronormativity is a key concept of queer theory and serves the analysis and criticism of the entanglement as well as naturalization of (monogamous) heterosexuality and gender norms, which are accompanied by relations of power, inequality, and dominance. See Bettina Kleiner, "Heteronormativität," in Gender Glossar, open access journal, accessed July 10, 2017, http://gender-glossar.de/glossar/item/55-heteronormativitaet.

3 Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris, 1949). The first English translation was published in 1953. A second, unabridged, translation appeared in 2009 (New York, 2009).

4 Silvie Zürcher in an interview; see "Kostüme, Masken und Kulissen," in *Die Letzte: Diplompublikation 2008, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, Studienbereich Bildende Kunst* (Zurich, 2008), unpaginated.

Silvie Zürcher

Paravent, 2008 (Installation view, Diploma exhibition, Zurich University of the Arts)

Paravent, 2008 (Installation view, Diploma exhibition, Zurich University of the Arts)

Authors' Biographies

Kathleen Bühler
Art historian and film scholar. Curator in the department of contemporary art at the Kunstmuseum Bern since 2008. Received her PhD with a study on the creative experimental film work of Carolee Schneemann (*Autobiografie als Performance: Die Experimentalfilme Carolee Schneemanns* [Marburg, 2009]) and regularly writes contributions on international contemporary art for newspapers, journals, and catalogues. At the Kunstmuseum Bern, she has worked with the artists Tracey Emin (2009), Yves Netzhammer (2010), Thomas Hirschhorn (2011), Berlinde De Bruyckere (2011), Zarina Bhimji (2012), Bill Viola (2014), and Bethan Huws (2014), among others. In 2018 she will curate the *Robert Walser-Sculpture* with Thomas Hirschhorn at the Swiss Sculpture Exhibition Biel/Bienne.

Gabriel Flückiger
Art scholar and artist. Studied art history and social anthropology in Bern as well as fine arts and photography in Zurich. He is a research associate at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and was a visiting lecturer at the Zurich University of the Arts as well as at the Schule für Gestaltung Bern und Biel. Current coeditorships include: *(New) Institution(alism) (OnCurating 21)* (Zurich, 2014); *Norbert Klassen—"Warum applaudiert ihr nicht?"* (Bern, 2015); and *Bern 70* (Bern, 2017). His artistic focuses are performance and video.

Matthias Frehner
Studied German literature and classical archaeology at the University of Zurich. From 1986 to 1988 he was an assistant in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Zurich. Received his PhD with a dissertation on the history of Swiss iron sculpture.

Conservator of the Oskar Reinhart Collection "Am Römerplatz" in Winterthur from 1988 to 1996, and from 1990 to 1996, secretary of the Gottfried Keller Foundation. Art editor for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* between 1996 and 2002. Director of the Kunstmuseum Bern from 2002 to 2016, and director of collections of the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Zentrum Paul Klee since.

Valérie Knoll
Art historian and German philologist; director of the Kunsthalle Bern since 2015.

Daniel Kurjaković
Art scholar. Has been the curator of programs at the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2017. He has curated projects in the areas of sculpture, installation, sound, film, and performance, including with Louise Bourgeois, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Nalini Malani, Vittorio Santoro, Annie Lai-kuen Wan, and Lawrence Weiner. He was the editor of *The Air Will Not Deny You: Zürich im Zeichen einer anderen Globalität* (Zurich, 2016), the publication of the interinstitutional cooperation platform DeNeutralize. His extensive dossier on the British writer John Berger was published in 2017 in *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, Centre Pompidou, Paris.

Sarah Merten
Studied art history, history, and education at the University of Zurich. In 2011–12 she was a research trainee at the Museum zu Allerheiligen Schaffhausen, and beginning in 2012 research assistant in the department of contemporary art at the Kunstmuseum Bern. Since 2015 she is a doctoral candidate at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig as well as a research assistant

PhD at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, where she is working on a dissertation on the political dimension of text production in an exhibition context. She regularly writes art reviews and texts on contemporary art for various journals and catalogues.

Etienne Wismer
Art historian. Has been working since 2013 in the SNF research project *Les artistes et les livres (1880–2015): La Suisse comme plateforme culturelle* at the Swiss National Library and at the University of Lausanne. Also active as an art educator at, among others, the Kunstmuseum Bern.

Nina Zimmer
Studied art history, Romance philology, and media sciences in Bordeaux and Göttingen. In 1998 research assistant at the Nationalgalerie Berlin, and in 1999 at the Guggenheim Museum, New York. Direct doctorate at the University of Göttingen in 2001 (*SPUR und andere Künstlergruppen: Gemeinschaftsarbeit in der Kunst um 1960 zwischen Moskau und New York* [Berlin, 2002]). From 2003 to 2006 research assistant at the Hamburger Kunsthalle. Curator for art of the nineteenth century and the classical modern period and codirector of the Kunstmuseum Basel between 2006 and 2016. Since August 2016 director of the Kunstmuseum Bern–Zentrum Paul Klee.

Isabel Zürcher
Art scholar. Has published numerous texts and publications on contemporary art, including *Kunst und Religion im Zeitalter des Postsäkularen* (with Silvia Henke and Nika Spalinger [Bielefeld, 2012]); *Monika Dillier* (St. Gallen, 2012); *Christa Ziegler: Polis: Bilder von Städten* (Zurich, 2013); and *Maria*

Magdalena Z'Graggen (Vienna, 2016). She regularly writes contributions on contemporary art and culture in journalistic formats for professional media, in particular the adequate verbal response to processes and works in the visual arts.

Colophon
Exhibition

The Show Must Go On:
From the Museum's Collection of Contemporary Art
22.09.2017–21.01.2018

Kunstmuseum Bern
Hodlerstrasse 8–12, 3011 Bern, Schweiz
www.kunstmuseumbern.ch

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