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July 29, 2013 Written by [Liena Vayzman](#)

#Hashtags: Photographing the Invisible: LaToya Ruby Frazier at Brooklyn Museum

#visibility #labor #institutions #class #race #access

Photographer [LaToya Ruby Frazier](#) makes her New York solo debut with *A Haunted Capital*, a tightly crafted, personal-is-political installation at the [Brooklyn Museum](#). The artist's hometown of [Braddock](#), a forgotten steel mill town in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, is marked by a geography of postindustrial degradation. An outsider might take a social documentary approach to Braddock's history and current woes. As an insider, Frazier documents that history's tangible impact on her own and her family's lives—an impact characterized by environmental illness, institutionalized racism, and disparity in access to health care—and her community's pride and tenacity. Documentary-style photographs of the demolition of Braddock Hospital, the only hospital in the area, are juxtaposed with intimate portraits of Frazier's mother and grandmother, both of whom learned they had cancer in 2008. (A link is implied between Braddock's environment and these illnesses, as well as Frazier's lupus.) Framed gelatin silver prints of Frazier, her mother, grandmother, grandfather, and family friends, taken in Braddock at various points between 2002 and 2011, line the two white walls of the installation space along with carefully selected cityscapes. The end walls are wallpapered with dozens of images, a visual archive Frazier has gathered of Braddock's history, one that is inclusive of African Americans. This was done in response to her realization that African Americans were excluded from a 2008 history of the town, *Braddock, Allegheny County*. "In the face of this and other exclusions, I have a strong sense of duty to visually write my family and community into the history of Braddock," she says. [1]



LaToya Ruby Frazier. Momme Portrait Series (Shadow), 2008. Gelatin silver photograph, 15 1/2 x 19 1/2 in. Brooklyn Museum, Emily Winthrop Miles Fund; © LaToya Ruby Frazier

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Frazier's portraits hover between staged and intimate. In *Shadow* (2008), the artist's profile overlaps with her mother's body; together they cast an ominous shadow that acts as a third persona that, the artist reveals, "foreshadows the loss of Grandma Ruby." *Grandma Ruby, Mom, and Me* (2009) was taken at Frazier's grandmother's open casket. Frazier's photographs, including some that are part of this show, are arrayed around the casket, while the artist looks out at the camera with a mixture of loss, self-assurance, and defiance. The snapshot *Mr. Jim Kidd* (2011), which shows a man protesting the hospital's destruction, is overshadowed by the finality of a photograph of the destroyed hospital and its empty parking lot dusted with snow. The man's handwritten sign reads: "UPMC is race-based, class-based health care."

Frazier's influences range from Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, and Farm Security Administration photographers to self-portraitists Frida Kahlo and Claude Cahun, as well as cultural theorists bell hooks and Michele Wallace and urban geographer David Harvey, all of whom she cites as part of her "artistic family lineage." Indeed, her show reads at times like a self-representation of a *social* self rather than a psychic one. "Grandma Ruby, Mom, and I have all been shaped by external forces," the artist reflects. "On the micro level, we are three women from an abandoned community, but on the macro level, I see us as symbolic of state oppression and neglect," she is quoted as saying in the exhibition brochure. Frazier credits the Community Art Practice class she took with Carrie Mae Weems at Syracuse University as having propelled her to investigate class, race, and capitalism. Her distinction is in how she demonstrates the imprint of these forces on herself and her close family members, allowing observer and observed to merge. In this melding of oppression and self-investigation—particularly in her attention to environmental illness—Frazier's work recalls that of British photographer *Jo Spence*, who charted her own position within a rigid class system and, later, her status as a cancer patient. Spence's self-representation emerged from Marxist class analysis into a technique she called "photo therapy," which she developed with collaborators, thereby demystifying her auteur status as photographer.



LaToya Ruby Frazier. *Grandma Ruby and Me*, 2005. Gelatin silver photograph, 15 1/2 x 18 1/2 in. Brooklyn Museum, Emily Winthrop Miles Fund © LaToya Ruby Frazier

Collaboration is key to Frazier's practice, as well. In a self-portrait with her mother, *Huxtables, Mom and Me* (2009), Frazier wears an old *Cosby Show* T-shirt. She describes how her mother set up the camera "in the bedroom doorway, facing a mirror reflecting part of her image. Both the mirror and T-shirt are scratched, dusty, and fading." The promise of the idealized African American TV family pales in comparison to the reality of Frazier's family life. In a lecture she performed at the museum, with her images projected in the background, she said, "Between my background and my foreground, I am not sure where I stand." This hovering between real and imagined, background and foreground, in both the spatial and the social senses, marks Frazier's work.

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LaToya Ruby Frazier. Huxtables, Mom and Me, 2009. Gelatin silver photograph, 15 x 19 1/4 in. Brooklyn Museum, Emily Winthrop Miles Fund, 2011.63.3.© LaToya Ruby Frazier

LaToya Ruby Frazier’s photographs function as evidence of her refusal to remain invisible. Avoiding digital manipulation or technical flourishes, she marshals photography’s innate ability to create visibility—an indelible visual record—for the marginalized and oppressed, in the service of critiquing social welfare institutions.

LaToya Ruby Frazier: A Haunted Capital is on view at the Brooklyn Museum of Art through Aug. 11, 2013.

[1] LaToya Ruby Frazier, interview with Rujeko Hockley, assistant curator of contemporary art, Brooklyn Museum, from exhibition brochure.

Liena Vayzman is an art historian, critic, and curator based in New York. She earned her PhD in the History of Art at Yale University, completing a dissertation on French Surrealist photographer Claude Cahun. Recent publications include “I’d Rather Be Here and Now: The Performative Verb of Painting – An Interview with Anoka Farooqee” in *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly*, and “Farm Fresh Art: Food, Art, Politics, and the Blossoming of Social Practice” in *Art Practical*.

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England's governmental art funding body will **require the organizations it finances to measure and improve their energy use** — a first in arts funding policy.

In Kansas, the House has approved a plan to allow taxpayers to dedicate a portion of their annual returns as a donation for arts programs. The plan is intended to offset governor Sam Brownback's decision to **eliminate funding for the arts in the state**.

2.5 / The Food Issue

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Farm Fresh Art: Food, Art, Politics, and the Blossoming of Social Practice

by Liena Vayzman

Image: Fritz Haeg, *Edible Estates Project*, regional prototype garden #6: BALTIMORE, Maryland, 2008; commissioned by the The Contemporary Museum - Baltimore for the exhibit *Cottage Industry*, planted April 11 to 13, 2008. Courtesy of Clarence and Rudine Ridgley. Photo: Leslie Furlong.

At the start of my talk for the “Artist as Citizen” panel at the 2010 [College Art Association](#) conference, I invited the audience to break out of their passive role and walk to the front of the room to taste slices of lemon. I’d brought the lemons, from my tree in Oakland, to the conference hotel during a Chicago winter. Witnessing the audience’s visceral reaction to the taste sensation—the range of responses and memories it immediately elicited—I became convinced of the capacity of human-scale, food-based interactive practice to break down barriers and penetrate the mind-body split.

Food offers a tangible, tasty vehicle into dialogue on issues of power, place, sustainability, and community. Today, many emerging and established artists choose to work with food as process, subject, metaphor, and praxis. Often classified as relational aesthetics, these civically and socially engaged practices transgress both disciplinary divides and the boundary between art and everyday life. Many elevate collaboration and negotiation among multiple stakeholders above the former ideal of a single artist’s making an expressive or self-aggrandizing statement.

Feeding the new crop of art is a richly mineralized history with roots in eco-aesthetics and eco-art (as in projects by artist [Mel Chin](#)). The collaborative, socially engaged practices of today have more in common with works like [Bonnie Ora Sherk’s](#) *Crossroads Community (The Farm)* (1974–1980) than they do with the large-scale environmental *Earthworks* of Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer. An environmental piece with multiple stakeholders whose educational initiatives continue today, *The Farm* was one of the first

their garden observations on a chalkboard for visitors to see, tasks all related to their science curriculum.⁷ Such a leveling situates this project both in the history of conceptual art and *Earthworks*; however, *Edible Estates* possesses a community-minded and solution-driven resonance those earlier projects did not always possess.

Haeg and his volunteers succinctly transform the aesthetically pleasing into the utilitarian and socially motivated. One particular garden in Los Angeles (2008) was made up of half conventional lawn and half edible garden. Such an arrangement displayed the evolution from one into the other and invited visitors to consider the relationship between the two. In this example, the “before” and “after” coexist, providing proof of the possibility of transforming the decorative into the productive. The act of replacing a lawn—the very symbol of the control of nature for aesthetic ends—with a productive landscape embodies a larger shift from art for art’s sake to art as cultural and social transformation.



WORKac (Work Architecture Company). *Public Farm 1: Sur les pavés la ferme! (Above the Pavement, the Farm!)*, 2009; installation view, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY. Courtesy of the Artists.

Activist Alliances

Implicit or explicit in many of these projects is a critique of corporate agriculture, one that is shared by urban agriculture projects like [City Slicker Farms](#), in Oakland, and grassroots activist groups such as [Milwaukee’s Growing Power](#), and is expressed in nationwide educational initiatives.⁸ Food in art has parallels with a vibrant tradition of food-justice activism, including [Food Not Bombs](#). This group has been cooking meals and distributing them to those in need since 1980, as well as providing food in support of activist events and utilizing donated food that would otherwise be wasted. Socially engaged art projects involving food also have affinities with some forms of protest and street theater, such as the naked protests and performances staged by [Genewise](#) and [T.H.O.N.G.](#) (Topless Humans Organized for Natural Genetics) against the 12th World Congress on Food Science and Technology and the Institute of Food Technologists Annual Meeting, two pro-biotech conferences



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brownfield projects by the [Trust for Public Land](#). It involved the transformation of seven acres of public land in San Francisco that was considered to be derelict into a new city “farm park.”¹ Notable for its organizer’s interdisciplinary training and the reach of its garden-based projects, the project is a direct predecessor to much of the food- and gardening-based artworks being made today.²

From projects like Amy Franceschini’s [FutureFarmers’ Victory Gardens](#) (2006–ongoing), to Bay Area artist [Jesse Schlesinger](#)’s taking visitors on overnight trips to the organic farm where he works, to [Matthew Moore](#)’s *Farmstand* at Sundance Film Festival, to internationally scaled initiatives like [Fritz Haeg](#)’s *Edible Estates* (2005–ongoing), artists are sowing seeds for further critical thinking about the food we eat. In this article, I survey a range of practices and strategies currently blossoming around the use of food and gardening, and provide cultural context for the freshest crop of artists working in this way. My methodology combines appetizer aesthetics—whetting the reader’s appetite for more by appealing to the theoretically underprivileged sense of taste—with a smorgasbord structuralism that offers an array of options for pleasure.

“Unprecedented Urgency”

Public attention has increasingly been drawn to the politics of food production and distribution. Although the subject is gaining currency nationally, it resonates particularly on the West Coast. This regional concentration is in alignment with the agricultural industries of California and the Pacific Northwest, the local and sustainable food movement, and the area’s history of environmental awareness. Gaining pungency from the threats of chemically and genetically modified corporate agriculture, artists’ actions exist in the context of a rise in sustainability imperatives, an awareness of climate change, and the pressing inequality between global hunger and American overabundance. Empowered by postmodernism and precedents in performance and conceptual art to transgress disciplinary boundaries, artists function as key contributors to this larger discourse.

Berin Golonu, co-curator of *The Gatherers: Greening Our Urban Spheres*, an exhibition at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) from October 2008 to January 2009, has rightly pointed out that today’s artists routinely create public awareness of environmental concerns.³ But they don’t stop there. Contemporary practitioners, Golonu writes, “turn such awareness into direct and immediate public action...As we face the very real threats of devastating climate change, a global food crisis, and oil shortages, they address environmental concerns with an unprecedented urgency.”⁴



FutureFarmers (Amy Franceschini and Paul Cesewski). *Bikebarrow*, 2007, 6 x 4 x 2 ft; installation view, San Francisco

that took place in Chicago in 2003.⁹

These activist projects coexist with artist-initiated and interdisciplinary activities that acknowledge the intersection of economic, racialized, gendered, and cultural identity formations with the politics of food access. Queer activists have been active and visible in creating new dialogues and formations around food, performance, and art. [Dirtstar’s Night Soil](#) is an open-air night market of artists’ farm stands, performance, and collaboration organized around the intersection of food politics and queer politics. The event was a vital part of the [National Queer Arts Festival](#) in 2009 and 2010.¹⁰ The collaborative’s name intersects gay slang with the celebration of farming—conflating dirt with dirtiness. In the Bay Area, the cooking collaborative [Queer Food for Love](#) prepares gourmet meals for the community, while the [Queer Farmers Film Project](#) is a documentary film project investigating back-to-the land farmers.



Laura Parker. *Taste of Place*, 2001–ongoing. Courtesy of the Artist. Photo: David Matheson.

Locally Made

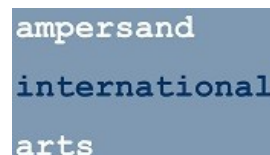
Artists working with food and gardening raise questions about the artist’s political role in a timely and necessary global perspective. They function as local—witness the extreme geographic specificity of [Laura Parker](#)’s soil tastings—and global citizens (consider [Michael Rakowitz](#)’s *Enemy Kitchen* [2004–ongoing]). Food is inextricably tied to global economic structures, globalized corporations, increasingly internationally reaching patents, and constantly moving food commodities (think of the ships that daily glide in and out of the port of Oakland, or the cross-country trucks that carry California produce thousands of miles away, or the multitude of ingredient origins in a single fast-food burger).

As artists working with food claim the local as an antidote to increasingly alienated food and experience, they are equally claiming a space within global discourse. Hence, artists function as global citizens and local citizens—food ties us both to a geographically specific locale and to a globally aware network.

Laura Parker’s *Taste of Place* (2001–ongoing) installations literally give us a taste of a specific place as they draw attention to soil health. Parker’s work applies conceptual art strategies to *terroir*—the idea of place-based taste honed over centuries in the French cultural patrimony and transposed to Northern Californian food and wine culture.¹¹ At a tasting (which does not include ingesting soil), participants smell soils and “develop an impression” from various locations, tasting the food grown in it to develop an appreciation of regional differences.

The artist’s quasi-conceptual instructions—referencing those of prominent conceptual art projects like Yoko Ono’s instruction pieces—direct the participant’s experience:

You will be served soils from the local farms. First the scent of the soil will be stimulated by adding a small amount of water and stirring to release the earth’s aromas as if from a fresh rain. Then you will smell, identify the scents you recognize, and note their properties. You will then be served food grown in the same soil you have just smelled. See if you can taste in the food the same



Going Outside

How do artists participate in and activate dialogue on the cultural politics of food and agriculture? A main strategy is to leave the confines of the gallery and museum in favor of creating gardens and farms. Projects that seem like utopic agrarian visions—such as transforming the area in front of a major US city's city hall into a food-producing garden, or turning a major museum's entrance area into a farm—have actually come to fruition.

In collaboration with [Slow Food Nation](#) and volunteers, artist and architect John Bela built a functioning, productive urban farm on the Civic Center lawns in front of San Francisco City Hall in 2008. The project, part of FutureFarmers' revival of WWII-era victory gardens in backyards, combined dispersed backyard gardens with a large demonstration garden in front of city hall. The plot was once the site of a victory garden, or "war garden," which the U.S. government encouraged Americans to plant in their yards during wartime to provide their own produce.

This WWII-era impetus toward localization was reenacted in San Francisco between January 2007 and September 2008, during which eighteen pilot plots were planted in the backyards of fifteen families who represented the cultural, geographic, and economic diversity of San Francisco. Starter kits were delivered to the houses by a *Victory Garden* gardener upon a tricycle and included "a lesson on how to build a raised bed, planting, drip irrigation system installation, water- and time-saving timer set up and one follow up harvest and seed saving lesson."⁵ It is a sign of this project's social efficacy that the city hall farm yielded one hundred pounds of fresh, organic produce each week during the summer of 2008, all of which was donated to the [San Francisco Food Bank](#).⁶

But what other criteria should critics use to evaluate this work? A tension between usefulness and aesthetics underlies a project such as *Victory Gardens*, leading one to question the ways social practice is able to interface with the established institutions of museum and gallery. When interactions and natural cycles are reduced to objects for exhibition, one must ask what constitutes the finished piece—the process, its formal beauty, the ripple effects of others' actions, or the artifacts? Viewed in a white cube-gallery, items such as FutureFarmers' *Bikebarrow* (2007) (a bike-wheelbarrow hybrid) and *Pogo Stick Shovel* (2007) (a combination of the two devices) are in danger of being read as conceptually witty, yet ultimately hollow, sculptural forms. They long to be activated by interaction, shared lived experience, community engagement, and the cycles of preparing, planting, growing, and harvesting that form the work's content. An item such as FutureFarmers' *Victory Garden Trike* (2007), a custom-built adult tricycle that was used to deliver gardening materials, is a more vibrant artifact, possessing a history of usefulness that *Pogo Stick Shovel* lacks.

For Fritz Haeg's *Edible Estates*, the Los Angeles artist works in collaboration with local volunteers to turn water-wasting urban and suburban lawns into vegetable gardens. Located at sites across the United States and in England, the gardens demonstrate land-use strategies for small-scale food production and advocate for the replacement of chemically polluting lawns with productive and socially interactive gardens. From the first prototype garden in Salina, Kansas (a geographical location near the center of the United States), *Edible Estates* has created gardens from lawns in numerous regions of the United States and the UK.

Haeg's gardens also include an educational linkage, one of several components that work to level hierarchies between participants and artists, and between art and non-art. A recent iteration of *Edible Estates* involved students from a local fourth-grade class who regularly measured the plants' growth, took soil samples, weeded, harvested, and recorded

properties you smelled in the soil. Please note your reactions and experiences.

While *Taste of Place* is earnest, I enjoy interpreting it as sly commentary on the fetishization of *terroir*. As Amy Trubek shows in her book *Taste of Place*, even in France, regional foods are not based on the natural environment (i.e., the geographical specificity of a particular climate and geology), but on a region's cultural domain. That is, the cultural domain, rather than the physical characteristics of a place, creates its "foodview." A similar thing is taking place today, I believe, as artistic producers are actively working to reshape Americans' foodview.

Projects such as *Temescal Amity Works* (2004–2007), a collaborative project by Ted Purves and Susanne Cockrell, also pivot on the notion of the local. The artists encouraged residents of Oakland's Temescal neighborhood to harvest from their backyard fruit trees and redistribute the excess produce. In addition, they coordinated numerous events that positioned the neighborhood as a community established around shared backyard agricultural history and production.

The sense of civic engagement exhibited in projects such as theirs is in direct opposition to the formalist tradition and "art for art's sake." Thus, this new art is often far beyond disciplinary boundaries—a move keeping with the fresh thinking in art that has been followed by the dissolution of disciplinary silos in art schools. As a revitalized space of freedom—reinvigorated through the possibilities for cultural change afforded by social practices—art reclaims its right to engage, be touched and tasted, and to get out of the kitchen and into the streets.



Bonnie Ora Sherk. Boys mow lawn on *The Farm* (View south toward Army Street Freeway Interchange), 1976 from *CROSSROADS COMMUNITY (The Farm)*, 1974–1980. Courtesy of [A Living Library](#).

Going Back Inside?

The sweetness of utopian promise mixes with a possibly bitter aftertaste in the tension between art's ability to effect change and its always-imminent institutionalization. We witness this negotiation as leading museums provide space for artist-driven projects focused on food and farming. The Museum of Modern Art's commissioning of the young architectural team [WORKac](#) (Work Architecture Company) to temporarily redesign the courtyard of PS1 Museum into an interactive, functioning farm during the summer of 2009 points to a shift in the zeitgeist. *Public Farm 1: Sur les pavés la ferme! [Above the Pavement, the Farm!]* required organizers to work with a diverse group of experts, from structural engineers to soil experts, to create a canopy of cardboard tubes that served as growing vessels for vegetables and other plants.^{1 2} This environment also served as a socially interactive space appropriate for concerts and outdoor interaction. Artist collaborative [Fallen Fruit](#) recently curated EATLACMA, a yearlong investigation into food, art, culture and politics at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The endeavor culminated in a day of performances on Nov. 7, 2010, with the participation of fifty artists and collectives. In many ways, this event marked both the blossoming and institutional celebration of this artistic

Ed. Note: For more on Temescal Amity Works, see "Serving, Cooking, Giving It Away: Food, Art, and the Places In Between." For more on Laura Parker, see "Interview with Terri Cohn." For more on Enemy Kitchen, see "The Other Senses." All articles appear in this issue.

NOTES:

1. *Crossroads Community (The Farm)* is documented and continues as "[A Living Library](#)."
2. Sherk is a landscape architect, planner, educator, and artist.
3. *The Gatherers: Greening Our Urban Spheres*. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, Oct. 31, 2008-Jan. 11, 2009. Co-curated by Veronica Wiman, the exhibition included practitioners who combine art with cultural activism around sustainability and reflected an international perspective, with artists from Turkey, Sweden, and USA.
4. Berin Golonu, "Revolution: (Sub)Urban Gardening," *Art Papers*, November/December 2008.
5. Amy Franceschini and [Garden for the Environment](#). *Victory Garden 2008+*.
6. "City Hall Victory Garden." *Victory Garden 2008+*. See also: Amy Franceschini, Daniel Tucker, Anne Hamersky, and Courtney Moran, *Farm Together Now*.
7. A strong educational component and involvement of local knowledge is also evident in the [Manhattan iteration of Edible Estates](#), which takes a historical approach to the Native American and natural history of Manhattan Island.
8. On the community gardening and urban farming movement, see "Vacant Lot Gardeners," in Chris Carlsson's *Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists, and Vacant-Lot Gardeners Are Inventing the Future Today!* (Oakland: AK Press, 2008).
9. For an account and documentation of Genewise and T.H.O.N.G. (Topless Humans Organized for Natural Genetics), see the Site of Big Shoulders: Brian Murray, "[Genetic Counter-Strikes](#)."
10. Disclosure: Liena Vayzman participated in [Dirtstar 2010](#), presenting lemonade and improvised tea as part of *The Lemon Tree Project: Abundance and Decay*.
11. Amy B. Trubek. *A Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey Into Terroir* (University of California Press, 2008).
12. For photographs of the growing plants and a stop-motion animation of the last month of the architectural construction at *Public Farm 1: Sur les pavés la ferme!*, see ArchDaily: David Basuto, "[Public Farm 1 at PS1 finished in stop motion / Work AC](#)," July 9, 2008.

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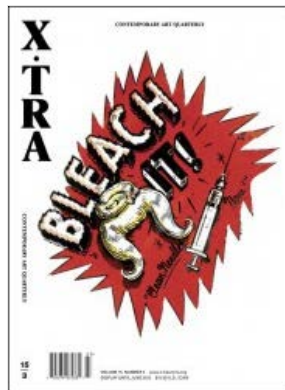
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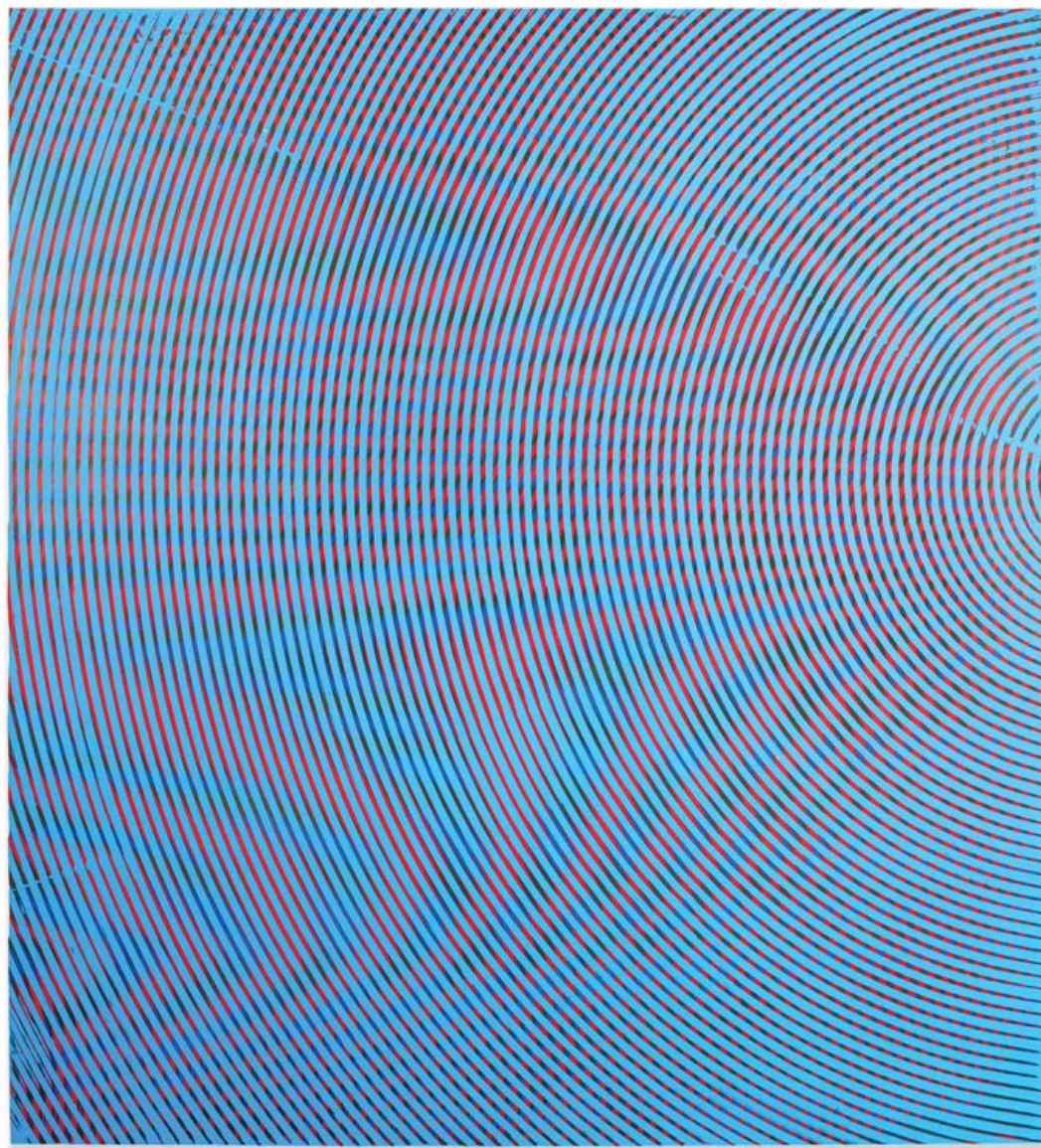


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COLUMN

I'd Rather Be Here and Now: The Performative Verb of Painting

—Liena Vayzman



Anoka Faruqee, *2012P-46*, 2012. Acrylic on linen on panel, 22½ × 20½ inches.

Liena Vayzman: Your new series of paintings based on moiré patterns is insistently optical, yet making the paintings requires a sustained and physical process, one prone to unpredictability. What does physicality look like for you as a painter?

Anoka Faruqee: Physicality exists in the work, but at a remove. I rake thick wet paint with custom-made notched trowels, like raking sand in a Zen garden. Then I sand down the dry surface. Slips of the hand, drips, uneven pressure on the tools, the paint itself being too thick or too thin in places, these are all key elements. Sanding it down, these slips are reduced to a flattened and graphic image that is the trace of a physical process.

LV: Historians of Op art often regard opticality and physicality as opposites, as if the emphasis on optical illusion needed to mute the physicality of paint as a material.

AF: I want to be an optical painter who affirms the physical in a way that Bridget Riley or Victor Vasarely did not. This physicality comes not just from the materiality of the paint, but also from my intersection with it, from the physical actions of my body in making the gestural pull with the trowel. These physicalities differentiate my paintings from Op art, from magic eye, screensavers,

codegenerated fractal patterns. I am seduced by these things—but once I see the trick or the algorithm perform once or twice, I get bored, like eating too much candy. So my work needs to unravel in the moment to stay alive.

LV: The human touch, the tactile qualities of paint application and removal—and the mistakes that happen in that process—inflect your paintings away from something that a machine can make.

AF: A machine, or an overly diligent human, maybe? I don't want to associate perfection with machines and failure with humans. In my work, the body is trying to be machinelike, but not succeeding. I aim for perfection in order to fail.

LV: The moiré effect, a visual interference resulting from the overlay of two or more patterns in printing or imaging, marks a failure of the machine.

AF: Moiré patterns are a common and unwanted effect of digital and print imagery: when the pixelation or banding in printing misregisters, moirés result. I find them to be beautiful and unpredictable, which is why I've been spending much of this year figuring out how to paint them. I create moirés by layering patterns; this superimposition produces an image that is more complex and quite unlike any of the underlying patterns.

LV: The question becomes: What is the relation of the part to the whole, and the process to the product? In the first glance at least, I did not realize that they are not simply made all at once. Because the finished surfaces of these new paintings end up ultra smooth, there is a real sense of mystery about how they were made.

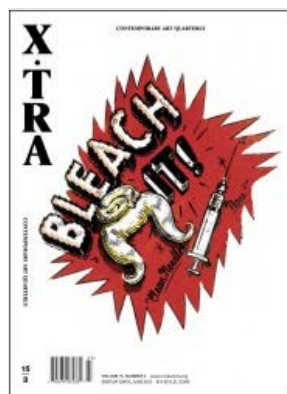
AF: Some clues about the process can be found in the finished works, but yes, I realize now that most viewers have no idea how these objects are made. At a certain point, I stopped taping the sides of the painting, in order to reveal the intense ooze of paint dripping from the gestural pulls, in contradiction to the glass smooth surfaces, as a way to let people into the messiness of the process. The peripheries are becoming more and more significant, because I want my paintings to be read, at least partially, as a residue of the performance of painting it.

LV: You bring up performativity as applied to painting, which has to do with being in a body, in a moment in time. This relates to performance art, but I'm thinking more of finished paintings that tell the story of their own making.

AF: A performative painting invites the viewer to mentally reenact the physical, material, and bodily processes of its making. In my early diptychs and triptychs (2000–2006), where I painted copies of my own paintings, the hand-painted asterisks were marked on predetermined grids. Decisions about color and composition were made ahead of time, so assistants could paint the asterisks by following the grid. When the work became more freehand in the fade paintings (from 2006–11), I began making decisions in the process of painting.

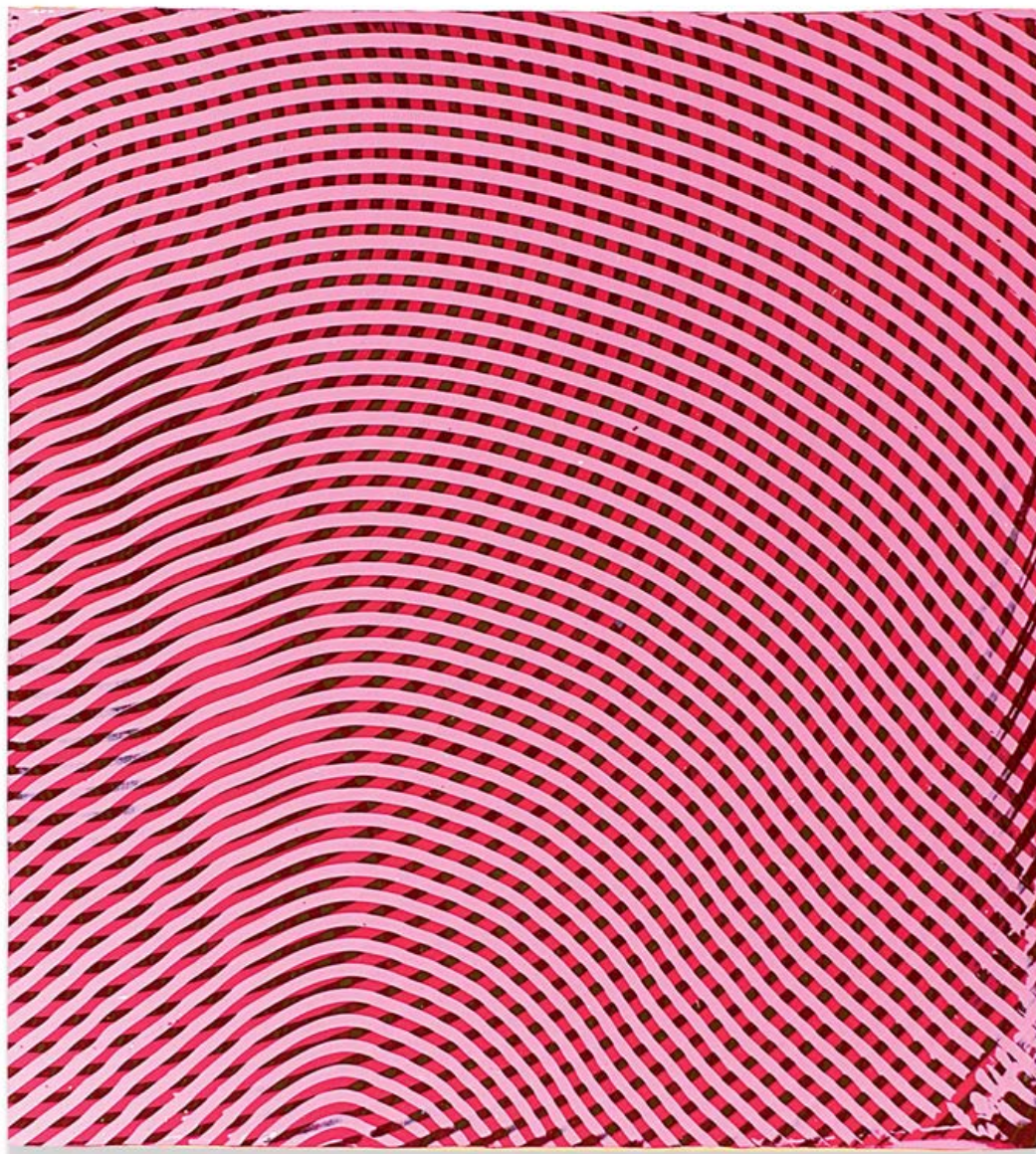
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Anoka Faruquee, *2012P-18*, 2012. Acrylic on linen on panel, 11¼ × 10¼ inches.

LV: By elongating the shapes as you move across the surface of the canvas, you build the narrative of the painting module by module.

AF: Yes, distorting the size, direction, and shape of each module creates spatial illusions. So then I had to paint everything myself, because those paintings are improvisational, about me creating space

with the curves in the moment of painting. These new moiré paintings continue the improvisational aspect through gestural pulls.

LV: We've hit upon two themes in your paintings. The first is chance, aleatory processes such as those used by John Cage, and the second is the conceptual decision making of Duchamp and everyone since who follows in a conceptual vein.

AF: What you are talking about is a questioning of subjectivity by using a system, a grid, chance, or accident as "anticompositional" structures. Sol LeWitt wanted to get away from the caprice and arbitrariness of subjectivity, but the systems he used were equally capricious, arbitrary, and subjective.

LV: Still, in painting, there's an almost mythological connection between the gesture of the hand and authorship.

AF: Peter Halley makes a distinction between painters who build paintings and painters who paint paintings. He put himself in the category of builder and likened himself to a sculptor in that way. I think of painters who build as architects, they do all the design work—and then the execution follows faithfully. Painters who paint make decisions during and through the process of painting. This distinction is related to the contradictions we talked about between the optical and the physical in my work. In all of the moiré paintings, there is some optical plan that is going to be built, yet this plan gets interrupted and augmented as it gets painted.

LV: So are you a builder or a painter?

AF: I was a builder, now I'm a painter. My first major body of work, the diptychs and triptychs, were built. I was critiquing the impossible romanticism of expressionist painting, as was Halley. With the freehand fade paintings, I became a painter. With these moiré paintings, I've added a visceral physicality to the process. I've accepted the centrality of gesture in painting, because the hand and the body are making conceptual decisions in the moment of the movement of the paint. I am resisting the idea of a fundamental division or distinction between mind and body, idea and movement.

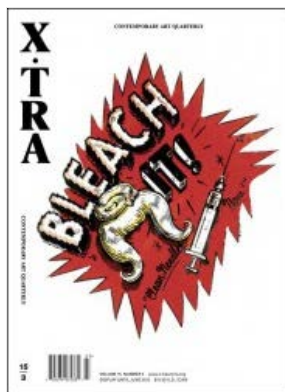
LV: A preconceived optical plan is the modus operandi in both the moiré paintings and the freehand fade paintings, yet you are not simply fulfilling a plan to the letter, since choices inflect the outcome along the way in all your work.

AF: No mark is solely an expressive Pollock mark or a conceptual LeWitt mark. When I heard Sol LeWitt talk, he said that he started out his work to be a critique of mark making as a representation of the artist's "essence." He wanted anyone to make his works by following his instructions. But he soon realized that skill, or at least craft, was important, and he had to train and authorize people to make his marks, and many of them became more skilled at making his marks than he was.

LV: I first heard you speak about your mark making in relationship to Buddhist meditation at the Feminist Art Project panel [Artist, Woman, Human, 2012]. In meditation, repetition and seriality are vehicles to cultivate awareness of the present moment.

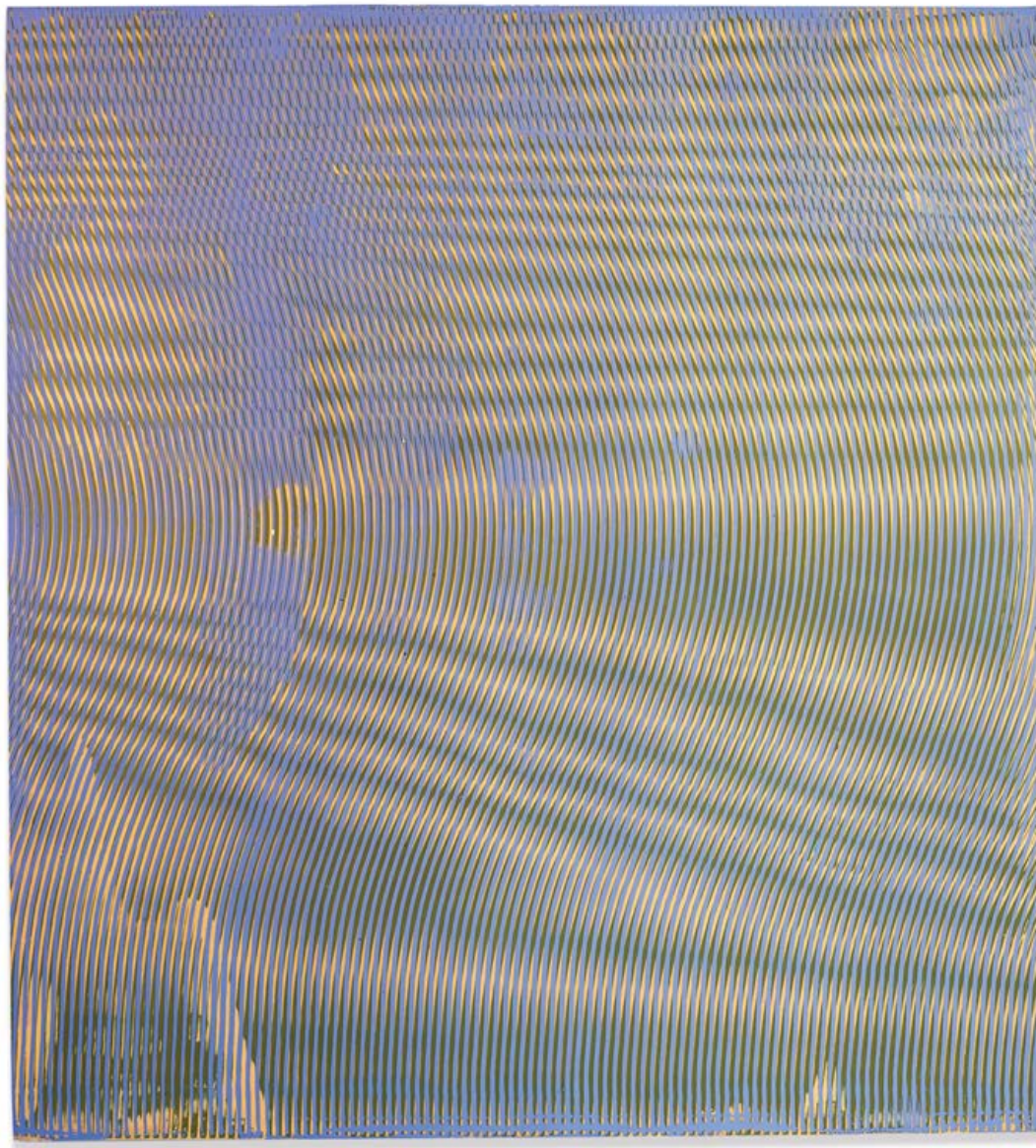
AF: Recently, I've been relating the ideas of Buddhist presence to Roland Barthes's theories of authorship. In "Death of the Author" [1967], Barthes talks about a rare form, the performative verb, where speech in the first person, present tense, itself fulfills its own action, such as saying, "I apologize." Speech and action become one and the same thing. In Barthes's new site of non-authorship, each text comes alive in its making and its reading. Describing this new writing as enunciation, he says: "Every text is eternally rewritten here and now."

LV: How do you apply this concept to painting? Are your paintings indexes, traces, residues of the performative tense? One of the clear references for me in your earlier fade paintings is breathing, as in paying attention to each breath in meditation. Each module is a breath, and the painting repeats the module over and over, building a world over time. Paying attention to the breath and embodying each one unites mind and body. Each gesture calls your attention in its execution. I also see it in the relation of the part to the whole—each breath or moment metonymically becomes the entire whole: all of the universe, all of time. But in the recent moiré work, the Buddhist influence exists not in the repetition of a module, but in the necessity to be very present in doing the all-atonce trowel pull.



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Anoka Faruquee, *2012P-47*, 2012. Acrylic on linen on panel, 22½ × 20½ inches.

AF: Yes, exactly. I'm interested in reading more about traditions of Zen painting, and how they bridged control with accident, as a way to talk about mindfulness and acceptance. From what I understand, the preparation through training, repetition, and discipline ultimately makes way for the moment of improvisation. It becomes a way to understand what it means to be in a body in a moment

in time.

LV: The last line of a Theodore Roethke poem comes to mind: “I measure time by how a body sways.” In “dematerialized” works, such as conceptual, site-specific and performance art, authorship is removed from the object itself and re-sited within the performativity of the author, thus circling back in the body of the artist. Miwon Kwon calls it the “return of the author,” in her book *One Place After Another: Site- Specific Art and Locational Identity* [2004]. Your paintings also deal with time.

AF: Painting is one way to make time material or physical, a way to slow down our everyday experience of time, both in the act of making it and in looking at it.

LV: You have spoken about color as being part of pre-planned optical systems, and materiality and gesture as part of a performative process. How do you think about color in perception in relation to this concept of the momentary?

AF: Good question. Color changes so dramatically in context, depending on what’s next to it, or how it’s lit. It’s constantly fluid in perception. I am a huge devotee of Josef Albers. Color is always striving. My work dissects perception, in order to get a fictional hold on it, to lock it down.

LV: But don’t you think color also reads as cultural code?

AF: I did have a painting that I realized was red, white, and blue. I nixed it and changed it to a greenish blue.

LV: It was too patriotic, or too obvious?

AF: I was hoping that the painting would transcend the reference point. But it didn’t.

LV: Certain color combinations are set in people’s minds.

AF: Color is so affecting emotionally, it has been a useful tool for culture to codify it for certain things—like red, white and blue, Christmas colors, or pink as the representation of femininity. Color is both purely phenomenological and iconic in culture. I’ve always thought that these two different ways to read color were at odds with one another. But now I think they function simultaneously. Culture assigns a color to stand for patriotism or femininity, it’s naturalized and internalized in an unconscious way, and that’s why it sticks.

LV: Naturalizing color to trigger emotive reaction is also tied to capitalism’s reliance on consumerism as the engine. So we have marketing to women: a whole pink ribbon campaign, with pink standing for a woman’s issue. Pink of course also codes for homosexuality; the pink triangle was used to persecute gays, and then it was reclaimed by queer activism. Its meaning shifted. Color is not natural, it is cultural!

AF: Yes, but it’s also phenomenological. I love pink, actually. Unlike red, white, and blue, or Christmas, that’s the one that I feel like I can own.

LV: You can own pink?

AF: I’m not afraid to own pink! And now, in thinking about it, there are good reasons I don’t feel I can own U.S.A. or Christmas. So, yes, I’m always trying to make the colors interact with one another in the moment so that they become something else, so that they don’t stay in one easy place. My

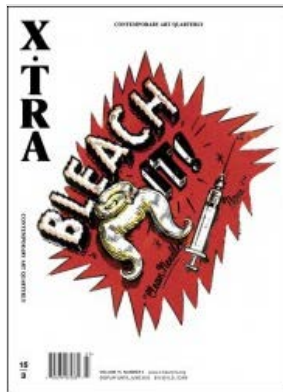
paintings both affirm pink's association with femininity and divorce it at the same time.

LV: How does our discussion of the cultural and phenomenological aspects of color relate to shades of skin tones and discussions about people of color and racism in this country? What do you think about the term “person of color,” for instance?

AF: I don't address the issues of skin color directly, though I have written about how Byron Kim and Glenn Ligon have dealt with the intersection of identity, skin tone, and monochrome painting. For me as a painter, though, the more pertinent issue is seeing color as cultural. My parents emigrated from Bangladesh and we would go back to visit every other year. I remember flying back to the United States on one such trip, getting delayed, and spending the night in New York. I helped translate for a young Bangladeshi woman, a stranger, who had never left her country before. I remember looking at her in JFK, and she had the most intense mustard sweater on. It was the dead of winter: everything around her was black and grey, the airport decor, the other passengers' clothing, the landscape through the window. She looked outside and asked me what types of tree these were, trees that had no leaves. The color saturation of her sweater was so striking, and it was a metaphor for her being out of place.

X·TRA

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LV: Color, then, is in part geographically determined, and relates to your identity as an author.

AF: If you go to South Asia, to India, to Bangladesh, walls will be painted a bright turquoise color. There is no holding back, no fear of saturation. In Bangladesh, the word “gaudy” is a compliment. Women are competing to have the gaudiest sari. My parents decorated their house with rugs and wallpaper. It was full of color and patterns of all kinds, including the psychedelic patterns of the ’70s that had been influenced by South Asia.

LV: In the West there is both skepticism about color and a simultaneous attraction to its perceived decadence and superficiality.

AF: That is something I’ve always been interested in: reaffirming the place of color in painting—fighting the chromophobic impulse. I’ve had a similar feeling about the decorative. Color has always been associated with the decorative, as has pattern, and I hope my work undoes some of these binaries: superficial vs. deep, decorative vs. conceptual, rigor vs. pleasure, etc.

LV: We started out speaking of material and bodily accidents, imperfections that assert the unpredictability of your process and challenge your authority and authorship. Yet your role as an author, your cultural background and biography, have clearly entered the work as well.

AF: You are yourself. But making art both affirms and challenges your origins and your biases.

LV: What is the relation of the present tense performative verb *paint*, and the finished painting as object? Isn’t there a contradiction?

AF: This contradiction is at the heart of my work. We’ve spoken about the present tense and the momentary, and the connections with chance procedures and dematerialized artworks. Yet I’m giving my viewers finished, seamless, sometimes impenetrable objects! Still, these paintings are a trace or residue of a bodily, material, and momentary act, and I hope they come alive again and again, as a viewer questions and wonders about what he or she is looking at and how it came to be. For me, a painting is finished when it asserts a presence that I can only describe as the right balance of discipline and unruliness, when its structure unravels in the act of looking. That balance might make enough perfection for you to see an enigmatic illusion, and enough imperfection to make it open, approachable and complex: real and material, human.

Anoka Faruquee is a painter who lives and works in New Haven, CT. She has exhibited her work in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and in Asia. Group and solo exhibitions include Max Protetch, Monya Rowe, Thomas Erben Galleries and Hosfelt Gallery (New York), PS1 Museum (Queens), Albright-Knox Gallery (Buffalo), Angles Gallery (Los Angeles), Chicago Cultural Center, and June Lee (Seoul, Korea). She received her MFA from Tyler School of Art in 1997 and her BA

from Yale University in 1994. She attended the Whitney Independent Study Program, the Skowhegan School of Art, and the PS1 National Studio Program. Grants include the Pollock Krasner Foundation and Artadia. Faruqee is currently an associate professor at the Yale School of Art, where she is also acting director of graduate studies of the Painting and Printmaking Department. She has also taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and CalArts, where she was co-director of the Art Program for a number of years.

Liena Vayzman is an art historian, curator, and photographer. Recent publications include “Feminist Film Noir: Sally Potter’s *Thriller* Unpacks Misogyny” for *Dirty Looks: Queer Experimental Film and Video* (New York) and “Farm Fresh Art: Food, Art, Politics, and the Blossoming of Social Practice” in *Art Practical* (San Francisco). In 2012, she curated the Crystal Palace: 1st ArtSpace Experimental Film and Video Festival, based in New Haven, CT, and traveling internationally.

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October 15, 2013

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Art as Response to Attacks on LGBT Rights in Russia on the Eve of the Sochi Olympics

Posted: 09/28/2013 4:25 pm

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The upcoming 2014 Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Sochi, Russia, have shined a light on a host of environmental, migrant, labor and civil rights concerns in Russia. International observers and Russian organizations indicate that the situation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Russia has recently deteriorated. An emergent "traditional values" ideology propagated by the state and church -- that falsely posits homosexuality as being anti-Russian, a Western import, and dangerous to children -- is leading to increased violence against LGBT people, penalty and fines for "homosexual propaganda," hate speech in the media, and intimidation of LGBT activists by extremist organizations, soccer hooligans and neo-Nazis.



Against the backdrop of increasing, institutionalized homophobia in Russia, I looked for positive and realistic images of LGBT Russians. As a photography historian and film curator, I am aware of the potency of visual representation -- the affirming power of self-representation in particular. My PhD dissertation on queer surrealist photographer and activist Claude Cahun argued for the power of photographic self-representation in both affirming and crafting identity in the face of rising fascism. The images I was seeing of LGBT Russians were either of frontline activists fighting for their right to public assembly or misrepresentations, painted in words, by the virulently homophobic invective of politicians, neo-Nazis and Russian Orthodox Church leaders. American and British LGBT civil rights movements have been represented, documented and dramatized in film (*Milk*), photographs (Catherine Opie), Conceptual art (Gilbert & George), political art and design (Gran Fury) and public assembly and protest (as documented in the

exhibition *AIDS in New York: The First Five Years*). As LGBT Russians are fighting for the basic right to declare their very existence, as well as for the rights to assemble as a community and to raise children, this battle is playing out on the turf of visual imagery.



Russian photographer Anastasia Korosteleva protects the identity of her subjects in the series *Girls* (2013) by literally burning their faces in the photographs. The burned-out faces of women embracing literally and metaphorically show the scars of homophobia.

Film festivals are being organized to bring the experience of LGBT people and filmmakers to new audiences in Russia. The LGBT Film Festival "Bok O Bok" ("Side By Side") was the first international LGBT film festival in Russia. After experiencing censorship in its first year (2008), it has operated for the past five years at various sites in Russia. The festival was most recently found guilty and fined for violating the new "foreign agents" law.

The Swedish photographer duo Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg's "State of Mind" (2006-8) consists of personal stories and group video portraits of Russian lesbian and bisexual women and their friends and family discussing issues of LGBT identity and East/West dynamics. The subjects, casually posed in places of significance to them in the city, such as



along the banks of the Neva River in St. Petersburg, project a mix of emotions -- joy, exuberance, hope, pride, comfort. The video portion presents filmed conversations with the subjects, viewed simultaneously to create an approximation of the community as a congregation of voices. The installation has been shown in St. Petersburg, as well as in Ukraine, Sweden, and the United States at UC Berkeley's Worth Ryder Art Gallery [1].

A June 2013 Russian federal law banning "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations," broad in its implications, is now being used to censor film. Russia's federal oversight organization recently issued a warning to a popular movie channel for airing a French musical, *Les Chansons d'Amour* (2007), for its alleged "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations." Local and federal laws banning "homosexual propaganda" have been enacted from 2006 to 2013, sparking fears that they could be used against visiting Olympic athletes and tourists. For foreign citizens found guilty of "homosexual

propaganda," there is a penalty of fifteen days in prison followed by an entry ban. Transgender Russians and LGBT teens are particularly vulnerable. For example, one Russian neo-Nazi group hunts for gay teens to abuse and humiliate, disseminating video of the attacks through social networks on the Internet.

President Obama's meeting with LGBT activists during his trip to St. Petersburg, Russia, for the G20 summit this month, was a step toward acknowledging the problem of discrimination and furthering international debate (although Russian President Putin denies that discrimination against LGBT people exists). Obama said he is "very proud" of the activists' work, pointing to Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement in the United States as precedents. The controversy over free speech in Russia has already gained attention via the internationally publicized plight of the all-female punk band Pussy Riot, two of whose members remain in prison after a brutal crackdown. Significantly, activists point out that the rise of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, as well as feminists and atheists, is tied to xenophobia and violence against ethnic minorities. In all cases, "others" are set up as foils to advance the state's ideology of purity.

See the original article at Daily Serving.

Street

Womb

Condo

Shelter

Unaffordable

HOME

Nest

Contested

Nomadic

Sweet

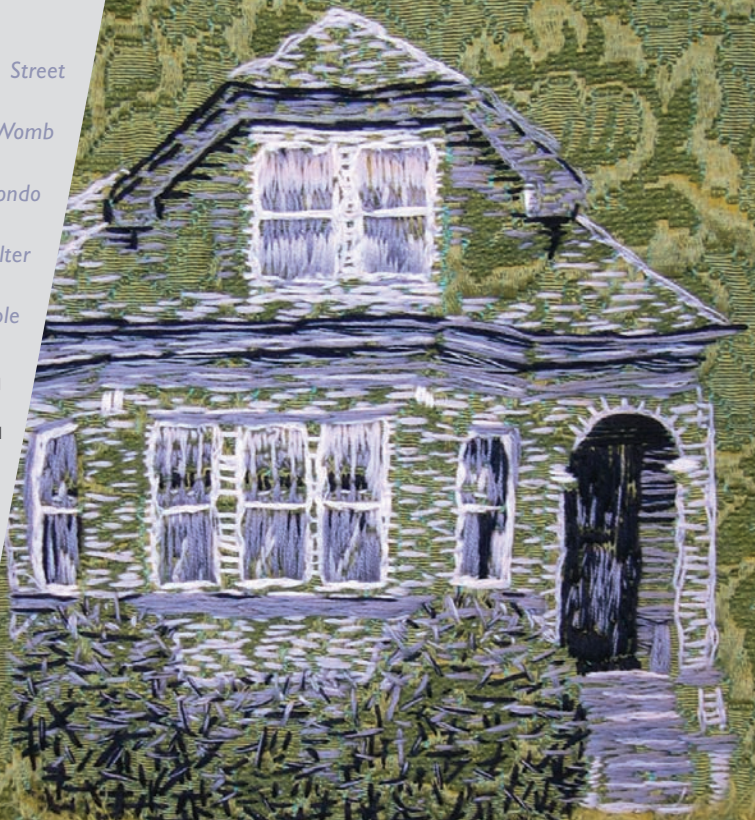
Imagined

Sanctuary

Public Housing

Foreclosure

Refuge



ROOT division



Moira Murdock

HOME

Curated by Liena Vayzman

Featuring work by:

Cover Image: Derek Haverland

Verda Alexander
Eric Araujo
Mr. Ben Venom
Ronit Bezalel
Mark Blaisdell
Jan Blythe
Alexander Cheves
Elizabeth Chiles
Teri Claude
Torreya Cummings
Derek Haverland
Jessica Hayes
Sarah Talia Himmelfarb
Rachael Jablo*
Ian Kimmerly
Sarah Klein
Michael Krouse*

Seth Lower
Moira Murdock
Sasha Petrenko
Meghann Riepenhoff
Dan Rule
Jana Rumberger
Nadim Sabella
Brian Stinemetz
Chris Thorson
Liena Vayzman
Sanjay Vora
Hannah Pearl Walcott*
Donna Wan
Serena Wellen

**Root Division Resident Artist*



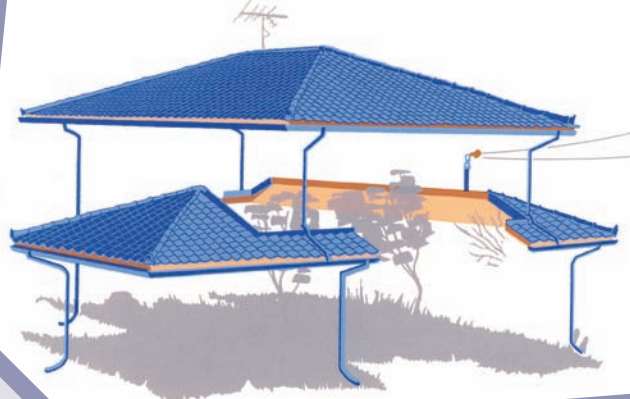
Ian Kimmerly

The Aesthetics and Politics of Home in Contemporary Art

Liena Vayzman

Is home a fleeting dwelling place? A memory? Luxury for the rich? Site of regional identity? Domestic heaven or hell? Nostalgic marker for lost history? Who can lay claim to the white-picket-fenced symbol of the American dream?

This exhibition taps into a resonant theme in contemporary society: the aesthetics and politics of home. Thirty-one artists interpret the concept of home in innovative works of sculpture, video installation, photography, design, painting, and documentary film. “Home” shows the elusive resonance of houses, homes, and dwellings, from the anonymity of the built environment to the promise of bliss and identity in the domestic interior. While attentive to the poetics of lived-in space, the curatorial intention was to raise questions around the political, economic, and social implications of access to home. In an era of instant communications across continents, computer-created realities, contested national borders, and immigration debate, artists pinpoint a zeitgeist of displacement and continual reconstruction of home.



Dan Rule

Residential architecture is the springboard for Alexander Cheves' works. Two sculptural forms – a towering skyscraper and a tiny A-frame house – contrast the idealized notion of home in children's' drawings (and adults' minds) as a white-painted single family house with the reality of urban high rise living, here imagined as an anonymous beehive of hundreds of individual domestic cells. Verda Alexander's *Lakeshore Apartments* superimposes an inverted, negative cutout of a skyscraper onto a paper form resembling an interior window treatment. The comingling of a postindustrial architectural icon with domestic decoration advances the conversation on the possibility of human scale experience in the urban landscape.

Alexander Cheves



Jana Rumberger

Transition, rootlessness, and movement are characteristic of the 21st century, particularly for artists, whose need for community and inspiration lead to big cities, with concomitant high rents and landlord woes. The constant process of uprooting, relocating, and rerooting is transmuted into sculptural form in Jana Rumberger's *The Cage Project (Personal History)*. The large-scale installation is a suspended accretion of cages made from pages of the artist's journals from 1987 to 1998, which she tired of moving from place to place with each move in a transitional life. Written thoughts, hopes, reflections, and projects are given a permanent home; text turns into sculpture; and ideas are transformed into an evocative form that concretizes the passage of time. Rachael Jablo revisits the process of moving in a series of photographs of seven places she inhabited in San Francisco, a city known for both its high rents and continual turnover of residents. Each image features the pile of newsprint she used to pack her belongings when moving from apartment to apartment over a period of several years. In Ian Kimmerly's painting *Toy Houses*, blur and painterly mark-making disrupt the visual plane and connote continual transition, pointing to the constant buying, selling, renting, and subleasing of houses and condos and the resulting instability in the cultural landscape.

Transforming domestic detritus into art, Mark Blaisdell's photographs document semi-annual trash throw-outs in Melbourne, Australia, when furniture and large household items are discarded on the curb for disposal. While the objects in the photographs appear purposefully arranged, the assemblages of personal belongings left on the street are photographed as found. The transposition of inside and outside is expressed in different photographic terms by Talia Himmelfarb, who re-photographs a slide projection of an image of the interior of a house projected onto its exterior. Inside and outside are thus both flipped and conflated. Sarah Klein's video *Dirty Work* shows the dark side of the enforced domestic role culturally attributed to women. In a series of short animations, simply drawn female characters shift from cleaning house to creating explosions and other disasters, undoing the traditional coding of the domestic realm in the feminine.

Elizabeth Chiles

Nadim Sabella



Jan Blythe

87

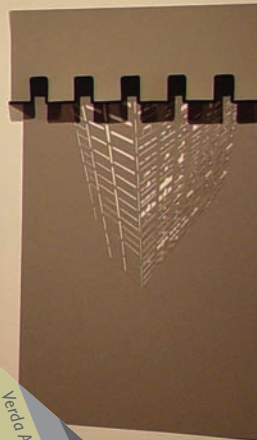


Jessica Hoyes

Mr. Ben Venom

Verdo Alexander

Sanjay Vora





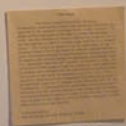
Teri

Claude's *Inside*

Bernal Hill is a collaborative project

made with the artist's rabbit, Dusty, investigating the layers of history of the artist's Victorian house in the Bernal Heights area of San Francisco. In the process of constructing a burrow, the rabbit has been excavating artifacts in the backyard. Claude presents an installation of objects unearthed in the animal's instinctual home-making -- such as pieces of crockery, toy soldiers, rusty hardware -- highlighting making and remaking home as human, animal, and cultural processes. The past lives of homes and their inhabitants are also explored in the work of German-born Nadim Sabella. The artist makes large-scale color photographs of the interiors of abandoned houses across the United States. He has constructed a single miniature house based on the various photographs. Sabella's photograph of a room containing a fallen piano covered in years of dust is here paired with the dollhouse-like reconstruction; close scrutiny of the miniature house reveals a room replete with a tiny piano. Thus, photographic fact and constructed fiction mingle in dynamic tension, evoking an imagined narrative. Eric Araujo's *HOUSE (if you lived here you'd be home by now)* is also a constructed object, but in a scale that allows inhabitation. The artist built a small, useable wooden shelter in the shape of a classic A-frame home, placed it in a public space under a freeway in San Francisco, California, and documented the process in photographs and video. The house was used as a sleeping space for one night, then disappeared.

Teri Claude



Meghann Ripenhoff

Eric Araujo



Mark Blaisdell



Michael Krouse



Sarah Klein



Liena Vayzman



Today, artists work in a context of government-produced fear around “homeland security,” skyrocketing real estate prices, housing crises in US cities, migration and population displacement, and gentrification. Increasingly, residents of the San Francisco Bay metropolitan area cannot afford the price of a median single-family home here, which in 2006 was \$749,400, according to the National Association of Realtors. Michael Krouse’s painting of a San Francisco house, emblazoned with the word “Unaffordable” in neon light, points to the lack of affordable housing in cities. Investigating the alarming divide between rich and poor, Donna Wan photographs lavish California estates in the *Dream Homes* series. Isolated against the background and installed as light box transparency, Wan’s untitled image suggests the isolation, gaudiness, and lack of social connectedness of home-as-conspicuous consumption. My own artistic work included in this exhibition, from the series *Shelter*, presents photographic portraits of individuals experiencing homelessness and health care challenges. I photographed people I met at Matthew House, a daytime shelter providing supportive services on the South Side of Chicago. The portraits make visible individuals experiencing homelessness. The title *Shelter* refers to both the location and to the process of sheltering individual voices through photography. Ronit Bezalet’s documentary *Voices of Cabrini* addresses the disparities in access to housing in Chicago. The 30-minute film documents the organizing of community members in response to the dismantling of the Cabrini Green public housing project, raising issues of economics, racism, and politics.

Ronit Bezalet



Unapologetically regional, Ben Venom's suspended banner *Georgia Politics* refers to speedway racing flags in the South as well as to the controversy about the redesign of the state flag in his native state of Georgia. Similarly making work about a distant home is Hannah Pearl Walcott, a native New Yorker now living in San Francisco. Walcott's collages piece together historic imagery of New York City architecture with vintage photographs of her relatives in vibrant celebration of growing up in the urban center.

In a panel discussion in conjunction with this exhibition, "Home" artists articulated the paradox of the city as crucible of inspiration. Artists are pushed out of workspaces by development catering to economically privileged classes drawn to cities for its cultural vibrancy. The lack of stable affordable housing for artists in

the very cities that claim art as cultural

capital – like New York, San Francisco, and Los

Angeles -- creates damaging effects. What happens

to artistic communities when warehouse studio spaces are

converted to multimillion-dollar condos? Is Moira Murdock's idyllic *Houseberg* slowly melting? This exhibition showcases a

range of responses to this paradox by artists, who both are used as agents of gentrification and particularly vulnerable to its effects.

Hannah Pearl Walcott



Donna Wan





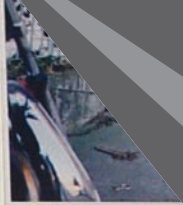
While most of the exhibition artists reside in the San Francisco area, many speak of distant homelands, real or imagined. Originally from Scotland, Jan Blythe uses a lace tablecloth as a template to create a poetic floor sculpture from fireplace ash (*Yer Tea's Oot*) – a ghostly remnant of the past. Blythe's melancholy, subtle work denotes the fragility of memory. Putting the sculpture in conversation with Sanjay Vora's painting, with its gauzy pale tones obfuscating an images of the artist's childhood home, opens up vectors into the tenuous hold we have on memories. Derek Haverland's 6322, reproduced on the cover of this catalog, refers to the address of his grandmother's house. The artist uses needlework as a kind of drawing to depict the house on chair fabric from the home's interior, unearthing layers of memory. The use of thread as medium further resonates with the passage of time.



Brian Stinemetz

Originally from Kansas, Brian Stinemetz constructs geographical and cultural landscapes in simplified forms: yellow blocks and green felt connote the flatlands of the Midwest and mountains of California. Isolated under glass cake display domes, the pixelated fabric landscapes remind us that every region on the Earth is constantly monitored by satellite imaging, broken down into a grid, and increasingly accessible through the interface of the computer screen. Geographically distinct regions become the flattened into the same data stream. This is the crisis of regional specificity in the face of Google Earth's all-encompassing scopic regime.

For some artists, home is not encapsulated by a house or residential dwelling but by more intangible feelings of safety, security, and personal boundary akin to Gaston Bachelard's meditations on nests and shells in *The Poetics of Space*. Chris Thorson's large-scale painting depicts a camping tent, flap open in welcome, in a bucolic natural setting. However, the painting's jarring high key hues and uncanny lack of human presence undercut the initial assurance of safe harbor. Similarly unsettling, Meghann Riepenhoff's photograph *Night Light* depicts an eerie nighttime scene of a bathroom in a domestic interior. The nightlight's symbolic promise of protection from imaginary nighttime horrors symbolized is subverted by the photograph's unnatural color and asymmetrical composition.



Rachael Jablo



Liena Vayzman

The disruption of safety in childhood permeates Serena Wellen's video *Goodnight Nobody*, here installed as a projection in a darkened space. A voice-over intones the text of the classic children's bedtime story *Goodnight Moon* in an ominous amplified hush over a sequence of still images including illustrations from the book and a crumpled-up drawing of house fading in and out. The video refers to the disturbance of a child's carefully constructed sense of safe home by abuse. Similarly menacing, Torrey Cummings' *Security Blanket* is a functional object designed to swaddle the body in warmth and security. At the same time, the fact that the work is made from an army blanket suggests being far from home and in peril. The bindings on the blanket threaten to immobilize, heightening the work's disquieting edge. Constructing a mobile personal space is the goal of Sasha Petrenko's *Pocket House*, a design prototype of a portable pod for living, filled with cozy sleeping bag, pillows, and a green plant. The pod invites inhabitation and offers a haven of rest, comfort, and refuge. The project is utopian in nature, yet practical in imagining a portable housing solution.



Sasha Petrenko

"Home" artists explore the concept as structure and lived experience. From architectural motif to idealized arena for subversion, the concept of home resonates for emerging artists: as object of memory, site of identity, and marker of domestic (in)security.

HOME

July 13 - 28, 2007

- Verda Alexander**, *Lakeshore Apartments*, colored paper, pipe cleaner, cardboard, 30" x 20" x 2", 2007
- Eric Araujo**, *HOUSE (if you lived here you'd be home by now)*, DVD, photos, dimensions vary, 2005
- Ronit Bezalel**, *Voices of Cabrini: Remaking Chicago's Public Housing*, digital video, 30 minutes, 1999
- Mark Blaisdell**, *Untitled #1, #2 and #3*, c-prints, 20" x 24" each, 2005 and 2006
- Jan Blythe**, *Yer tea's oot!*, ash and spray paint, 77" x 60", 2007
- Alexander Cheves**, *Gone With and Away With*, acrylic and wood, 8.5' x 2.25' x 1.5' House: 2'2" x 10" x 1'2", 2007
- Elizabeth Chiles**, *Everyday Portal and Pleasures*, c-prints, 4" x 4" each, 2004-2005
- Teri Claude**, *Inside Bernal Hill*, photographs and found objects, 4' x 5', 2007
- Torrey Cummings**, (*Homeland Security Device*) *Security Blanket*, wool army blanket, thread, hardware, 5' x 6' (variable), 2005-2006
- Derek Haverland**, *6322*, needlework on cloth, 24" x 36", 2004
- Jessica Hayes**, *John and Aaron*, inkjet prints, 77" x 60", 2007
- Sarah Talia Himmelfarb**, *Untitled (from the Uncertainty Principle Series)*, ink jet prints, 28" x 36", 2007
- Rachael Jablo**, *Domestic Disturbance (Home, 2002-2003)*, c-prints, 9.5" x 11" each, 2002-2007
- Ian Kimmerly**, *Toy Houses*, oil on canvas, 38" x 48", 2007
- Sarah Klein**, *Dirty Work*, video, 2005
- Michael Krouse**, *My American Dream*, oil on panel with neon, 48" x 36", 2006
- Seth Lower**, *White Towels*, c-print, 30" x 40", 2006 and *Notes From 111 W. Reardon Street*, Post-It Notes, 19" x 10" 2007
- Moir Murdock**, *Houseberg II*, foam, joint compound and acrylic polymer, 23" x 30" x 14.5", 2007
- Sasha Petrenko**, *Pocket House*, mixed media, 7' x 5' x 5', 2006-2007
- Meghann Riepenhoff**, *Night Light*, c-print (1/5), 24" x 30", 2007
- Dan Rule**, *Belly of the Snake*, screen print, 18" x 16", 2006
- Jana Rumberger**, *The Cage Project (Personal History)*, calendar/journals from 1987-1998. scotch tape, dimensions vary, 2007
- Nadim Sabella**, *Piano*, c-print, 30" x 45", 2005 and *Miniature I*, wood, plastic, paper, 7" x 10.5" x 9.5", 2006
- Brian Stinemetz**, *The Four Continents*, mixed media, 40" x 40", 2007

Chris Thorson, *Tent*, oil on canvas, 72" x 84", 2006-2007

Liena Vayzman, *Untitled Series from Shelter*, digital light jet photographic prints, edition of 5, 2006 and #1, #2, #3, #4 and #5 from *Shelter*, digital light jet photographic prints, edition of 5, 20" x 16", 2006

Mr. Ben Venom, *Georgia Politics*, fabric, thread, rope grommets, 5' x 7', 2007

Sanjay Vora, *Yard Work*, acrylic, paper and pencil (on canvas), 45" x 55", 2006

Hannah Pearl Walcott, *Mimi and the Ladies*, artist photos, family photos, collage on masonite, 8" x 8", 2006

Donna Wan, *Untitled #1 (Dream Homes)*, digital photograph in light-box, 30" x 30", 2006

Serena Wellen, *Goodnight Nobody*, digital video, dimensions vary, 2006



Guest Curator: **Liena Vayzman**

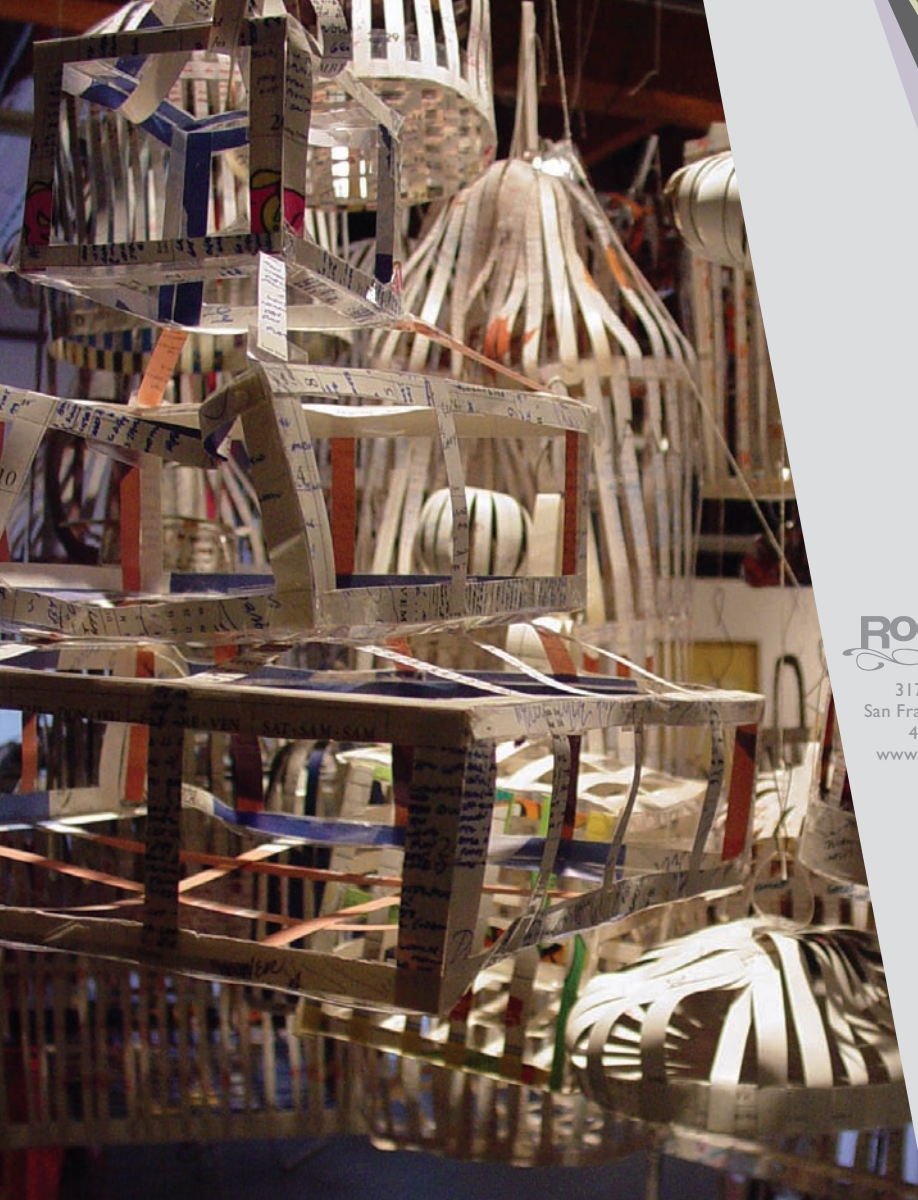
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SWITCH

Online Journal of New Media



In Fall 2008, I co-curated a one-night exhibition and performance event on the theme of chance. In this essay, I describe the projects in the show and present documentation, focusing on the innovative use of media and approaches to chance as structure. The project took place at the Climate Theater in San Francisco's SOMA neighborhood and was organized by the Climate Curatorial Collective, which for this project included co-curators Victoria Heilweil, G. Cole Allee, Jen Cohen, Brendan Leonard, Kaliisa Conlon, and Liena Vayzman. "Chance Operations" presented 14 projects that engage the theme of chance in practice, process, motif, presentation or execution. As we approached the US presidential election, the artists in this one-night exhibition and performance event interrogated the line between the random and predetermined through video projection, interactive sculpture, multi-media performance and visual art.

Chance as a structural operation in art spans a renowned modernist history including the Surrealists' passion for the 'chance encounter of an umbrella and sewing machine on a dissection table' and love of randomly generated works such as the exquisite corpse and automatic writing, Dada linguistic games, Marcel Duchamp's found objects, John Cage's sound compositions and the postmodern dances of Merce Cunningham and Yvonne Rainer. The Chance Operations exhibition injected a technological update into this history by creating a space and time for 21st century work to unfold in the intersecting arenas of digital video, live human movement, social interaction, cell phone divination, live capture video loop, and other innovative permutations of human-technological chance encounters. The fact that the event took place for one night only intensified the ephemeral and unrepeatable nature of the projects and social interactions. An atmosphere of excitement and chance interaction permeated the various rooms of the Climate Theater and adjoining Gallery Nine spaces.

Chance Operations artists' raw materials spanned from the low-tech stuff of daily life — recycled paper, social rituals, physical interactions, card games — to the high-tech — multimedia digital processing and manipulation using the latest in digital technology. From Luis Delgado's loteria card performance and Double Vision's randomly generated dance to Victor Cartagena's interactive video and Lynne Marie Kirby's chance-spurred "Meltdown," the artists in the show played with elements of chance, probability, or divination

Double Vision's "Veritable Vicissitude" performance used chance elements to enable the audience to create a dance work in real time. One performer lead a game of Connect Four for attendees. By playing the game, attendees were given a winning card to apply to the dancers. Audience members with winning cards were be able to move individual dancers to a certain cell (i.e. A3) and then present them with a game card marked with a symbol for the phrase the dancer then performed. In this way, audience members collaboratively or independently create new choreographic works by directing location and phrasing of all the dancers. Both the audience and the dancers thus engaged in chance operations.

Similarly engaging visitors as active participants in the creation of experience, Kathleen Quillian and Gilbert Guerrero's "Open Composition for an Indeterminate Social Ensemble" imbued an element of chance into the social ritual of drinking wine at art gallery events. Prior to the event, the artists placed stickers containing one word each from an undisclosed body of text onto the plastic beverage cups used to serve wine at the Chance Operations event. Throughout the night, as beverages were served and people moved around the galleries, the words on the cups took on new linguistic and social meanings in response to the random configuration of the words and the changing contexts of the word possessors.

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In Tim Thompson's "Captured Accidents," a handheld security camera was attached to a game controller, which let the artist start and stop the recording of video and allowed the overlay of up to four video loops, which are processed and projected live. Moving among the Double Vision dancers and audience members, Thompson captured, overlaid, and digitally processed video of chance images and movements. The video post-processing was affected in random ways by pressing buttons on the game controller, resulting in a live interactive fusion of chance and choice. Marguerite Harris and Louis Rawlins' immersive video environment, installed in the stairway where visitors entered the space, pivoted on a time-lapse delay between video input and output, allowing a playful interaction with the technology and chance immersion in the resulting projection.

Mary Franck's "Anomaly" is an interactive adaptive sculpture/installation that acts as a sound generator and controller. The sculptural component is large tree made of welded and bolted scrap bicycle parts and pipe. Bike wheels in the horizontal plane, suggesting branches, are fitted with magnets and sensors, allowing them to act as the giant knobs of a huge electronic instrument. The sensors on the wheels connect to a MIDI controller, which connects to a computer. Max/MSP patches manipulate sounds entirely sampled live at the event, responding to the aural texture of the sampled environment and controlled in a complex way by individuals' voices and physical manipulation of the bike wheel 'branches'.

Kirkman Amyx explored the mathematical dichotomy between chance and predictability in "10,000 Dice Rolls." The artist photographed the outcome of 10,000 individual rolls of a single dice. Each dice was allowed to fall from a predetermined height, landing randomly. Utilizing the 10,000 resulting digital images as data, Amyx compiles various photographic composites and a 6-minute video as visual manifestations of the experiment. The result is an engaged metaphorical inquiry into chance and probability in all aspects of life, from the prosaic to the cosmic. Working with the chance elements and interruptions of the sleep cycle, Valerie Mendoza's photographic installation "Insomnia: 279 Days" presents flat bed scans of the artist's face and body parts, reenacting sleepless nights. Each image is numbered sequentially, as if imposing a numerical order and control on an otherwise disordered system of logic. Besides each number appears a word or phrase from the artist's journal.

Alan Disparte's "Stenograft" sculptural/video installation with sound documented the motion of a three-dimensional wire armature holding a stick of graphite and driven by a series of sounds to create a two-dimensional drawing. As the sounds deepen, the resulting drawn line becomes symmetrically replicated. The evolution of image and sound create visual and auditory complexity, referencing cell division and time compression.

In the recycled paper installation "the air we breathe.. a prelude to FREE " Niki Shapiro invoked chance through strict parameters following string theory model to transform pages of colorful consumer catalogs into airy abstract sculptural forms. The resulting cluster of air balls and wall of paper shapes appears biomorphic at a distance, but reveals traces of the source media on closer inspection. In addition, Shapiro made and distributed recycled catalog-page flower boutonnieres, functioning as time capsules and fortunetellers at once. Beth Lilly's "Oracle @ Wifi" (the title is a pun on the ancient Greek Oracle at Delphi) intersects fortunetelling with the ubiquity of cell phone cameras. Lilly has created a system of visual divination using her cell phone to create images in response to anyone who calls in and requests a reading for a particular question – on the seventh day of every month. Instead of shuffling a deck of Tarot cards, chance imagery is created by the artist's constant shifting of location. Callers keep their question secret until after the artist takes three photographs and emails them to the asker, who then reveals their question.

- Liena Vayzman

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Chance Operations

Written by **dsiembieda**.

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