

Pierre Huyghe at LACMA

November 23, 2014–
February 22, 2015

Human isn't. Human, I mean. Famously, Pierre Huyghe's *Human* is an Ibiza hound with a fuchsia front leg. At Huyghe's autarchic LACMA retrospective, a fact sheet assured me that the dog was the proper weight (the breed is thin) and had proper breaks (from playing himself). There was no sheet for the human humans, tasked to traipse gallantly through the space to Michael Jackson's "Thriller," or don a blinding-to-look-at LED mask, or announce my first and surname as if I'd traveled back in time, prepared to celebrate some freshly coroneted sovereign. That the labor and well-being of those performers was left to the neoliberal periphery while *Human*'s comfort got a broadsheet works quite well as prospectus for the exhibition's stakes. We may just need the animal if humanism has any chance at all.

The exhibition observed a kind of circadian rhythm, a macrocosm of the dramatic shifts in light played out in the silly, psychedelic *L'Expédition Scintillante* (2002), (Huyghe doing Light and Space) and the nerdy, roots-and-all lily tanks of *Nymphéas Transplant* (2014), (Huyghe doing Monet doing Giverny doing God). As if by night, Huyghe's *Untitled (Human*

Mask) (2014) took over a central room. In dark blue tones, a girl inhabits an abandoned restaurant in the abandoned landscape of post-tsunami Fukushima. When she sighs, placing her hand gently on her face, a minor miracle occurs: the hand is covered in fur; the girl is a monkey in a mask. The film languishes in this weird animality. It's the uncanny's purview to take our knowns, chew them strangely and return them to us wronged, but better for it. We know what disaster victims look like, but we haven't seen empathy in ages. Humanism needs a masticating. If only, like the live hermit crabs of Huyghe's *Zoodram 5* (2011), which sport Brancusi masks instead of shells, we could so easily inhabit our own ruins.

That Huyghe's name has been brandished under the banner of Relational Aesthetics is the best thing that could have happened to Bourriaud and perhaps the worst thing that could have happened to Huyghe. Often, this headline distracts from the ethically juicy aspects of his practice for the lame art-worldy ones. The exhibition's "circadian day" revealed an incarnation of *Public Writer* performed at the opening, which read like an unfortunate list of overly fortunate proper nouns, strung together with the banal predicate "was there." And the now-corny *Atari Light* (1999) hung from the ceiling, ready for an eager couple to play a round traced in office overhead lights. At least this time, *Atari* had one busted florescent—

in 2015 offices are either warehouses or your own living room; the utopian revolution of unregulated, self-organized systems never came. See Adam Curtis devastate Loren Carpen-ter's collective Pong experiment, or any metaphoric appropriation of hive-minded bees and ants to justify fascism—two insects of which Huyghe makes clever use in *Untilled (Liegender Frauenakt)* (2011-12) and *Umwelt* (2011).

Streamside Day Follies (2004) is Huyghe at his most ambivalent best. The work documents a celebration the artist organized in an upstate New York approximate of a would-be pastoral town. The taupe landscape of cheap construction and dirt not yet sod into grass fuses with the settlement rhetoric of speculative community in a perfect index of American culture, marketed as commodity and sold back to itself. A deer enters a freshly painted living room, searching for the forest that was. Then, to the twisted tune of an ice cream truck, residents parade into town, wearing animal heads, cardboard boxes, or silly smiles. They eat donuts organized by primary color and marshmallows staged as pussy willows. They gather sparsely for a speech and a performance of a Streamside theme song (in a minor key). The freaky animal intervention is Huyghe's genius once again, transforming their privatized partying into public ritual.

Huyghe insists that the repeatable "score" of the town celebration is more

important than the particular “concert” captured in his 2004 film. This is decent marketing and terrible philosophy. Where the event and its documentation belong in history is not with the good people of Fishkill, NY as a faded memory of an earnest afternoon, but here, with us, as a ballad for a quintessentially American naiveté and its ignored background of environmental harrow and civic heartbreak. It’s a better artwork than it is a parade; which is to say, fuck Relational Aesthetics, it’s for our judgment, not their participation. Of course, Huyghe saw fit to bust an *Atari* tile, and *Human* is a walking sculpture we can’t play fetch with. The phony condescension of “relational” is sheep’s clothing for the sticky ethics of the wolf.

At the end of *Streamside*, an enormous round balloon hovers over the matching houses, reflecting the actual moonlight in a wicked simulacrum. Of course, it can’t be human without the right amount of cruel.

Mernet Larsen at Various Small Fires

February 28–
April 11, 2015

Two perplexed parents with skin the color of Cover Girl’s “Warm Beige” make-up lean over an infant with heavy lids and unfocused eyes. The infant’s head is shaped like a cube because

all Mernet Larsen’s figures are geometric in form. The stylization transports her figures into a video game-like alternate reality, only whatever game they’re in is more steeped in quirky feelings and understated power dynamics than *The Sims* ever was. Larsen’s exhibition *Chainsawer, Bicyclist and Reading in Bed* at Various Small Fires, her first in Los Angeles, was filled with angular figures and strangely compressed space, although up close the paintings were thicker and more worked-over than you might expect.

One interesting and challenging aspect about the recent success of Florida-based Larsen—who is 75 and has not exhibited very prominently since she began making art in the 1960s—is how well, in theory, her work fits into certain trends at a time when trendiness often gets discussed more intently than actual artworks. She’s gaining visibility when putting under-the-radar female artists on the radar seems all the rage.

“[A]gain and again I have seen an eerily similar story structure parroted,” wrote Ashton Cooper recently, in her wry *Hyperallergic* article, “The Problem of the Overlooked Female Artist.” “Overlooked by the establishment for her entire life, she never stopped prodigiously toiling in obscurity and is finally being given her due.”¹

Larsen may have toiled and may well be getting her due. Interestingly, she also works in those spaces between abstraction/figuration and screen-like

flatness/ painterly roughness; spaces, that if gallery press releases are to be believed, we are currently obsessed with (“So much of the contemporary painting dialogue is dominated by a reductive abstract formalism,” claimed one recent announcement for a show featuring representational painting²). Larsen seems of the moment both because she’s receiving overdue attention and because she’s weirdly in-line with a more youthful zeitgeist. And while contemplating an artist’s work in terms of trendiness can be short-sighted, it can also be a rewarding effort.

For instance, it’s interesting to think about the recent upswing in attention that the 84-year-old Dorothy Lannone’s work has received, given that Lannone’s own rebelliousness initially prompted the same institutions now embracing her to reject her. In terms of the flatness/roughness conversation, Laura Owen’s recent abstractions—including those big fluorescent-colored paintings that launched the warehouse space 356 Mission two years ago—are worth thinking about in terms of the current marketability of “internet-aware” painting. The paintings she made in the late 1990s had a quirky, hand-drawn quality, but the most expressive marks in this new work looks mediated, like she drew them in Photoshop first.

But even if Larsen’s paintings appear surprisingly hip at first glance, they quickly sidestep conversations about their own trendiness, mostly because

thinking about the artist's age or about "painting discourse" distracts from her meticulous portrayals of human behavior. In *Handshake* (2001), an unbelievably tall woman and man shake hands in an institutional hallway. The tension is palpable: maybe they're professors, and one just got tenure while the other resents her for it?

In *Explanation* (2007), six figures sit at folding tables holding a meeting. The institutional green floor tiles appear to be overtaking the ceiling and walls, while a woman with a tight bun addresses the group, her lanky Pinocchio-like arm outstretched. Although the arm appears to be wooden, her hand is creased and plump in convincing places. You get the sense that she hasn't figured out exactly what she means to say yet, and the others wait, listening politely.

Politeness was a pervasive theme in this show. Often Larsen's figures seem to be reining their feelings in or behaving nicely for someone else's sake. That said, politeness seemed to be missing in the exhibition's namesake painting, *Chainsawer and Bicyclist* (2014). The bicyclist, recognizable as such mainly because he wears a helmet—his "bike" consists of an abstracted pole—rides forward towards a woman in a shapeless dress. She holds a chainsaw in her left hand and stares at him in a way that suggests he's wronged her. The woman leans back as if the ground she's on has tilted, muting her otherwise aggressive

behavior. Many of the paintings have this kind of twisted De Chirico quality; space collapsing, and perspective twisting back on itself.

There's enough angling, attitude, and playful art historical mimicry in Larsen's world to engulf a viewer. And when you're engulfed you don't usually have the time or desire to ask, "How does this fit into the zeitgeist?"

John Currin at Gagosian, Beverly Hills

February 19–
April 11, 2015

Gagosian's annual Oscar Week opening is a big deal. The streets of Beverly Hills are jammed with the nouveau riche, who come out in droves like extras from Cockaigne—the mythical land of libertine excess—to stand among the Hollywood A-listers in attendance. Rightly so, John Currin's opening played into the high spirit of the week: image is everything.

The 11 paintings on view, all made over the last three years, displayed Currin's crass European impulses tempered by his distinctly American manners. Like filmmakers Wes Anderson, who attended the opening, and Woody Allen, who did not, Currin's Europhilia is personal and nostalgic, and a bit cloying at times. Reference points run the gamut from vintage Danish

sleaze to the Italian Renaissance. As much is expected from Currin's work, yet this particular grouping of paintings revealed that his interest in surface extends beyond materiality. For Currin, the painted surface is a handsome veneer that ultimately belies his boyish obsessions.

In several of the paintings, polite classical figures are painted in the foreground to shield the explicit sexual content that lurks behind in the underpainting. Currin's self-censorship results in tightly wound compositions and ambiguous spatial schemes.

Though this batch of work was less aggressive than what Currin may be known for, it was as decidedly vexed as ever. Currin's female subjects are prone to sexualization even as they convey tension, mystique, and expectation. They seem weary in their roles as hostesses, showpieces, and gatekeepers, who carry the burden of centuries of controversy and codification. In such proximity to the movie industry elite, it is tempting to read Currin's wanting females as an indictment of pictorial systems that value sexism, misogyny, and restrictive gender roles. Such a read is assuredly too hopeful. Still, it's nice to imagine.

The subject of *Chateau Meyney* (2013) could be posing before the projection of a joyless 1970s porn loop—the viewer assumes the position of having shown up late to a middle-aged and upper-middle class bacchanal. Tones of attraction and imminent

Keith Vaughn

Pat O'Neill at Cherry and Martin

February 28–
March 28, 2015

embarrassment abound. With an inebriated blush on her cheeks, she holds a glass of red wine; unaware, or unconcerned, that her blouse has come open. She sits in a totally false, painted space. It is disorienting and confusing, while organized and considered.

Fortune Teller (2015), depicts candles burning upside down; nude female figures are suspended in the background. One has her head bent neatly and unnaturally into the bottom right corner of the picture. In the foreground, an impossibly proportioned odalisque in a turban holds a reflective ball, her placid smile offering no explanations. The composition holds together like a puzzle or a knot: by its own logic. Between the confounding use of illusionistic space and the work's nuanced relationship with painting's history, Currin's depictions are far less literal than Classicism, Pornography, or a tidy mix of the two.

For Currin, among all the veils of reference and experience, any attempt to apply a layer of social critique ultimately fails. This is because his paintings are about painting. Without the shock of pornography, the paintings are hermetic. His restraint reveals that his true guilty pleasure has less do with titillation and everything to do with the painted surface and its capability for expressing the intuitive and indistinct. Per usual, Currin's paintings resist engagement with contemporary art trends, tastes, or discourse. Image making is the primary focus, not narration. If you're

going to like it at all, you're going to first like (or appreciate) how it's painted. Currin's historical literacy and Old Master skills are the product of his obsessive pursuit and investment in the traditional business of making a painting.

In *Maenads* (2015), a young girl in a transparent top sits before a scene of indistinct yet obvious carnality. The compact pictorial organizations and rhythms in the painting direct the viewer's time and attention; contrasts of paint handling, perspective, and historical orientation, force the viewer into a state of submission. This involves following an artist you might not totally trust into a world rife with its own perverted terms.

Hollywood is most certainly perverted, yet it is also wonderfully tolerant, even desirous, of the pictorial and lush, the subjective and imaginative. Currin's work addresses a paradox inherent to the red carpet and the white cube: an image is both authentic and false. It's an interesting idea, but set against the local glitz and conspicuous avarice the work risks losing its nuance, instead embodying the conceptual starvation of gorgeous kitsch. The veil of the commercial art gallery is lifted way up. Like Marilyn Monroe's dress in *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), it blows around and, as if by magic, everyone's intentions are revealed.

Pat O'Neill's recent show at Cherry & Martin distilled his prolific career down to a modestly sized gallery exhibition—tricky for an artist checking as many formal (and mostly two-dimensional) boxes as O'Neill. O'Neill's career began to gather steam in the 1970s, an era defined by a pluralism born out of the paucity and exhaustion of existing practices as well as the ascendancy of nascent new media. Regarding the latter, O'Neill worked as an early pioneer of film and video art, earning "possibly the first [MA] in art based on moving-image work"¹ at UCLA.

Opening the exhibition was a slide projection piece, *In Betweens* (2015), in which one slide faded slowly into another as excerpts of text displayed brief, half-formed sentiments alternately hilarious ("you took my fucking parking space"), and clunkily poignant ("she was so sweet and dainty"). The text displays as discrete, durational sentence fragments over the slides, its subject matter culled from dialogues absent a narrative anchor. Equally rambling are the images projected in tandem: graffiti, concrete, the general absence of nature, the general presence of nature,

Aaron Horst



Lauren Cherry & Max Springer

We're in This Together

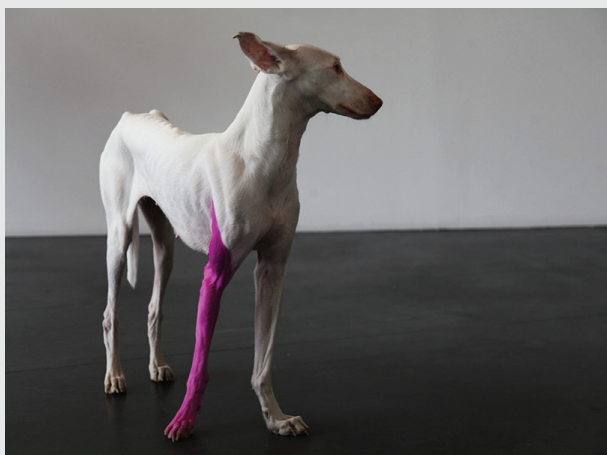
2015

Approximately the size
of your head

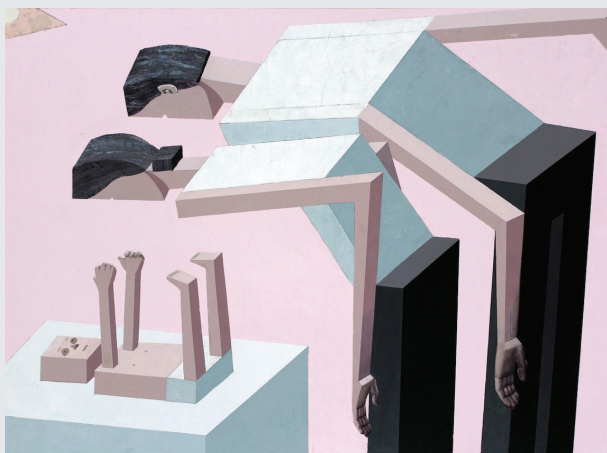
Acrylic, cardboard, ceramic, epoxy
putty, ink, paper, stone, wire, wood
Edition of 10

Need great advice? Curiosity is rewarded. The greatest tragedy is indifference. Don't just rely on your sense of humor. Let your fingers do the walking. Change your perspective. You speak. Say hello. We have that in common. Change for the better. One bold choice leads to another. How far would you go for love? No such thing? We stopped at nothing to give you everything. Hot stuff. Verrry refreshing! Our research is making a big difference. The next big thing is here. Helping all people live healthy lives. Renewable it's doable. Let's find cleaner sources of energy today. Discover yourself. You are a partner, a friend and a fighter. You are the bullet in the chamber. Take control. Just do it. Take back your freedom. Write the future. Not just words. There are some things you just can't afford to gamble with. There is a better way. Tomorrow brings us all closer. We're in this together.

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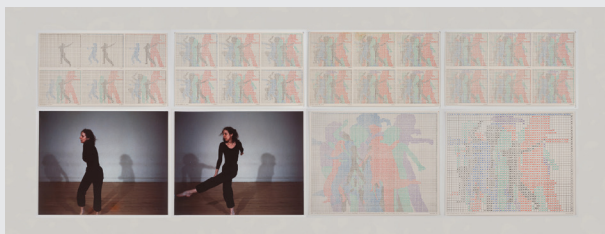
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8



1

Pierre Huyghe, *Human* (2012).
(Photo: Drew Tewksbury).

2

Mernet Larsen, *Aw* (2003), acrylic
and tracing paper on canvas,
40 × 66 inches. Image courtesy of
the artist and Various Small Fires.

3

John Currin, *Maenads* (2015),
oil on canvas, 48 × 36 inches.
Image courtesy of the artist
(Photo: Douglas M. Parker studio).

4

Pat O'Neill, *White Double Sweep*
(1966), acrylic, wood, fiberglass,
lacquer, 11 × 20.5 × 14 inches.
Image courtesy of Cherry
and Martin, Los Angeles
(Photo: Brian Forrest).

5

A New Rhythm, with Charles Atlas,
Benjamin Carlson, Nancy Lupo,
and Silke Otto-Knapp, Installation
view (2015). Image courtesy of the
artists and Park View, Los Angeles
(Photo: Jeff McLane).

6

Still from *Janus* (2013), Miljohn
Ruperto and Aimée de Jongh.
Image courtesy of the artists.

7

Motion: *Trisha Brown Dance*,
Set #11 (1980–81), color photo-
graphs and ink on Strathmore
paper, 31 1/8 × 84 1/2 × 2 inches,
collection of Dean Valentine and
Amy Adelson. Image courtesy of
Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles
Projects (Photo: Robert Wedemeyer).

8

Henry Taylor, Installation View
(2015), UNTITLED. Image courtesy
of the artist and UNTITLED
(Photo: Martin Parsekian).

etc. The combination of text and image creates a series of moody set pieces, which evoke at best a peculiar and ultimately unknowable experience of an absent subject, and at worst the un-jelled intensity of an early MFA.

(When I arrived to the exhibition, the projector wasn't working correctly, but who knew? I watched the same slide of concrete rubble act as the source/background for discontinuous text streams for about 5 minutes, thinking it was absurd that someone would go to the trouble to illuminate only one slide with two projectors present; an endearingly durational riff on minimalist and conceptual art.)

O'Neill works as a maker of moving images with width, height, and time. Depth within the moving image is an alluded illusion, like the animation of shadows dancing on a cave wall (instead of just the wall). *In Betweens* celebrates this in a curious manner: slow-fading in of new images as the old recede beneath stable yet fleeting text.

Distinct and parallel was *Saugus Series* (1974), a three-channel video installation created using an optical printer.² Rather than the illusory depth and warm nostalgia of *In Betweens*, *Saugus Series* exhibits cold crispness, curious flatness, and a wandering attention span. Memory here is freed from the slides' specificity; basking instead in associative passages of layered imagery and striking, durational sections of flickering colored lines.

With jerky yet cleanly edged—even artificial—figurations in its initial section, later passages of teeming, mesmerizing color become all the more striking. The abstract passages buzz with activity like the whispering static of a television screen. *Saugus Series* achieved something that the overall exhibition otherwise lacked: contrast, of the sort making more vivid that on either side of its absent middle ground.

The remainder of the main room was filled largely by the exhibition's two sculptures, *White Double Sweep* (1966) and *Black Sweep* (1012 Pico Series) (1967): mounded forms heavily glossed, and plastic in appearance. *Black Sweep* was the larger of the two; positioned on the floor, it rose slightly from its low perch, curving gently like a conch pastry from a Mexican bakery. Marooned on a plywood life raft and anemically weighty, *Black Sweep* related loosely and formally to one of the exhibition's handful of drawings (*Accounts Receivable Drawing*, 1990), but otherwise felt out of place. A sister video toward which the sculpture bowed, *Two Sweeps* (1979), consisted of nothing more than the metronomic movement of two color-shifting dots.

Other than playing a useful role in the exhibition's flow of space, both sculptures seemed tentative, even dull. A line may, but needn't, be drawn between the plasticity and streamlined (or neutered) movement of these earlier pieces and O'Neill's later film works; a thin, simply

temporal linkage, absent the specificity of intent. *Two Sweeps*, though hypnotic as the hum of a refrigerator, suffers a similar fate, despite its later date.

On the other hand, the evocative and mutually enriching encounters between media and time in the O'Neill show, though occasional, were genuinely striking. More literally, O'Neill creates work that acts both for and against transparency, concerning itself with the face value and the reversal of two key concepts: the transparency of film and the opacity of experience. As experience attempts transparency, and film achieves opacity in O'Neill's hands, a curious and uniquely evocative body of work remains in its wake.

A New Rhythm at Park View

March 1–
Apr 5, 2015

It can be hard to know where to look when confronted with the dizzying array of movement found in the choreography of Merce Cunningham. As opposed to the framing devices of classical ballet and early modern dance, which draw the eye to particular points of focus, “unfocus,” or simultaneity, is a Cunningham hallmark; as the critic Douglas Crimp writes, this “requires the audience to make choices about the dances presented to them.”¹

Over the course of his four-decade long

collaboration with the choreographer Charles Atlas—serving, in some ways, as a proxy audience member—deftly translated this central element of Cunningham’s work to both film and video. A good example is the ghostly *Fractions 1* (1978), in which Atlas uses four separate video cameras (three black and white, and one color) to film a dance performed at the Cunningham Company’s Westbeth studio in New York. After some initial shots, one camera pulls back to reveal four stacked monitors sharing the floor with eight dancers. With quick cuts, the video alternates between black and white and color. What is seen in the dance space is augmented by what is shown on the monitors: close ups of dancers’ faces, divergent perspectives of the featured dance, and accompanying sections of it that are not being featured, ostensibly taking place just out of the frame.

The effect is one of focusing in, but also one of disorientation. With the presence of the monitors in the lower half of the space, the eye splinters. Dancers’ bodies become irregularly segmented, with additional limbs and faces. The camera zooms in on one of the black and white feeds and suddenly we are no longer sure where we’re situated or what part of the dance—main, or auxiliary, or if such terms even apply—we’re being shown.

Throughout his career, Atlas has displayed a similar sensitivity with a diverse group of other choreographers (beyond Cunningham,

a few include Michael Clark, Yvonne Rainer, and Karole Armitage), artists, and musicians; one indication of this is the incredible range of his work.

At *A New Rhythm*—a group show that was organized to coincide with a 10-day long festival, generously spearheaded by the artist Paul Pescador, which brought Charles Atlas to Los Angeles for a packed schedule of screenings and talks at locations all over the city—*Fractions 1* was paired with a later dance video, *Jump* (1984), made in collaboration with the French choreographer Philippe Decouflé. Where the former work is spare and conceptually driven, *Jump* is a wild escapade, set to New Wave music, that takes place in a kind of atomic café by the sea; dancers appear as punk mutants, in colorful face paint, pavonine hairdos, and sculpted costumes. Here Atlas is working less to represent the dynamics of dance as it’s performed on stage (as in *Fractions 1*) and instead enjoying—with abandon—the full spatial freedom of film. In one exhilarating shot, we’re catapulted from the dance floor to a balcony above it, only to follow a young punk down a narrow set of stairs in a tight close-up as he sneers and gestates directly into the camera.

Atlas’s work held prominence in *A New Rhythm* (his videos were the first thing one saw walking in the door and the obvious catalyzing force of the show), a compact exhibition set in small gallery that

also moonlights as its proprietor’s apartment. As a result, dance was the over-riding frame of reference for the rest of the works on display; or, more generally, the body in motion.

Across the wall from the videos, and perhaps most explicitly related, was a spectral, erasure-filled, gray-toned watercolor on canvas by Silke Otto-Knapp: *Seascape (third movement)* (2013). The piece depicts Yvonne Rainer in a prone position, performing the dance of its title. With its layers of pentimenti, it seemed to assert—similarly to *Fractions 1*—the impossibility of representing live performance with a single, unified image.

Nestled around the corner in a bedroom, a recent painting (one of two) by Benjamin Carlson presented a more optical choreography. Based off a Memphis Group design, the untitled work is comprised of frieze-like clusters of gessoed triangles and squares, alternating in size and arrangement across the deep blue dye of the canvas. Neon undertones and outlines (which echoed the palette of *Jump*) cause the shapes to leap from their moorings, projecting energy and motion.

By contrast, Nancy Lupo’s pet/child-scaled undulating couch sculpture, *Tuxedo Feeder* (2014), was the most weighted thing in the room. Coated in black and white quinoa and epoxy, it includes steel inset animal food dishes and floats somewhere between surrealist oddity and luxury item. Still, the sculpture

elicited all forms crouching and bending over from its viewer for inspection and its miniature scale insisted on a somatic awareness.

Surely it's often enough that one is prompted to consider the body when viewing art, but the subtle revelation of this exhibition, and much more so the *Atlas In LA* festival, was encountering variations on the way movement and dance can be depicted across media, apart from live performance. And in the case of *Atlas*, there are few others who have done so with as much rangy charm and imagination.

Unwatchable Scenes and Other Unreliable Images... at Public Fiction

**December 17, 2014–
February 10, 2015**

I spoke with Miljohn Rupert a few weeks before his two-person exhibition with Adrià Julià at Public Fiction. Our conversation occurred in a bar where we were both serving as extras in a mutual friend's film. Between takes we discussed his new video work *Mineral Monster 01-08*, as well as *Janus* (2014), the video he presented last year in the Whitney Biennial. While we drank from our props of beer, we discussed our affections for cartoon animation. I was intrigued by the

manner of imaging Rupert had recently chosen to work in. He seemed to have found a successful counter to the current prevalent use of CGI, by embracing the style of contemporary animated cartoons as seen in the films of the great Hayao Miyazaki.

A few weeks later I stepped into the quiet storefront gallery of Public Fiction, a space secretly nestled in the hills of Highland Park. Rupert's work was presented on a flat screen and Adrià Julià's video projected onto the opposite wall. A soundtrack of dense forest subtly emanated from Rupert's work; Julià left his to play silently. Both videos, though markedly different, expressed a conflicted attitude towards the medium, while also presenting imagery with powerful symbolic associations.

In Rupert's work, *Janus*, we are involved in a site of hardcore animation. In his short video there is a clear attempt to make the viewer complicit in engaging with the labor-intensive medium of the animated cartoon. Hand drawn animations—as well as their contemporary computer generated counterparts—are known for their advantages of creating imagined reality: both dramatic and satirical in representation. Animations, of all forms, are now often farmed out to Korean or Indian production offices for cheap and quick turn around. For *Janus* however, Rupert collaborated with animator Aimée de Jongh, meticulously craft-

ing a genuine microcosm of invented fiction.

Depicted on the screen was a small solitary creature, who has possibly just escaped from some unknown danger. The animal breathes heavily under the shadows of tall trees silhouetted by moonlight overhead. The figure embodies two animals simultaneously: a duck-like bill moves as he breathes, although the bill could easily be viewed as ears to the creature's rabbit-like face. This is a fictive realization of the visual pun of the "duck-rabbit," made famous by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who used it as an emblem to describe the distinction of logic in visual perception. Yet, as hinted by the title of Rupert's work, we may be looking at a possible mascot or gatekeeper to our present-day conflicts: this creature may mark the coming of peace. Historically the Roman god Janus kept the doors of his temple open during times of war, only to shut them once peace had been realized. However, the frightened creature of Rupert's work poetically suggests that our present state of conflict is far from over.

Julià's video, *Unwatchable Scenes*, is seductive as an abstraction, deflecting quickly any immediate reading; instead acting as an invitation to read between the lines. The work was difficult to discern, despite displaying footage of sometimes recognizable landscapes. The images are obscured by a muddle of black lines and shifting planes: visual clues of dam-

aged video media. Slow and meditative, the work is somewhat evocative of the potential beauty of an abstract painting. Yet it also succeeded in pointing to technology's inability to provide a clear record of what is purportedly being evidenced. I later learned that the work had been sourced from a found and edited video on YouTube. The artist had pieced together downloaded video footage of the film sets used for a 1981 Hollywood film called *Inchon*, which primarily depicts the Korean war. *Inchon* is a subject the artist has been obsessed with, and which he has alluded to in his previous works. As a potential meditation on war—or cinema—*Unwatchable Scenes* is difficult to pin down; powerfully evoking the entropic status of the medium of video while leaving the purpose of those visual connotations difficult to define.

Like two sides of a coin—or an animal with two heads—the pair of videos that comprised *Unwatchable Scenes and Other Unreliable Images...* landed on clear opposing sides. Julià's work confounds and asserts a vague fog of war time terror. The found footage related to *Inchon* seemed to provide various entry points into a would-be concept, yet the piece did not engage into a clear dialogue about war or the original film (perhaps a watching of the original Hollywood film would provide an answer). The implied intention of discussing war-time politics is numbed by the abstrac-

tion of the work, rendering the content mute.

By contrast, Ruperto succeeded by providing a work that playfully exists in the realm of myth and the imaginary, producing tangible evidence of empathy: of what it is to suffer in moments of conflict, and the struggle to survive towards an ever possible fleeting moment of peace.

Charles Gaines at The Hammer

February 7–
May 24, 2015

For fifteen years, Charles Gaines lived his life on the grid. Between 1974 and 1989, Gaines employed the grid as a visual tool to explore the terrain of conceptual art and develop a system of representation purged of subjective expression. This period is also the focus of *Charles Gaines: Gridwork, 1974–1989*, an exhibition which traveled from the Studio Museum Harlem to the Hammer Museum in February, providing much-needed critical insight into these formative years in the artist's career.

Most of the series in the exhibition begin with a set of three images that present a single object in three formats, reminiscent of other pioneering conceptual artworks of the time period—notably Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three*

Chairs (1965) and Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* (1974–75). In Gaines' *Walnut Tree Orchard* (1975–2014), which opens the show, a photograph of a tree is displayed next to a line drawing of the same tree on hand-drawn graph paper. In the third image, the tree's coordinates are meticulously plotted, numbers spreading out in ascending order from a central axis to suggest an underlying symmetry intrinsic in all organic life forms.

This first trio then expands into a matrix of seemingly endless combinatory possibilities: in the next three images below, a second tree is photographed, plotted, and overlaid with the first tree. The second tree is visible through the voids between the branches and leaves of the first, its numbers demarcated in a different color. The series represents 27 trees documented in this format (in a total of 81 panels), so that in the series' final image 27 trees overlap in an autumnal explosion of color, forming a palimpsest that collapses space and time into a single gridded frame. Through the methodical sedimentation of his plots, Gaines acknowledges the inability of pictorial and linguistic systems to render subjects totally comprehensible. His grids obfuscate rather than clarify their subjects.

The grid dominates throughout the exhibition (including its title), and its presence begins to exhaust. Recognizable subjects—trees, flowers, human faces—appear all over the

Henry Taylor at Blum & Poe/ Untitled (L.A. in N.Y.)

March 1–
April 4, 2015

Henry Taylor's is a rare practice to encounter today. I say that not out of lament for the bygone era, which god knows we hear enough of (especially here in New York, where painting's recent history could be written in chest bumps). No, Taylor's is a practice that simultaneously simmers on low and boils over ecstatically—touching every simple object in its wake, endowing each with an artful soul. His paintings and sculptures, which were set up recently in two of New York's more disparate galleries (Untitled and Blum & Poe), addressed both adult and childhood situations with the genuine curiosity of a democratic pair of eyes. The most refreshing part of the practice, for me, is that Taylor is a capital "P" painter with a degree from CalArts. His nuanced painting style belies his theoretical training.

The work at Blum & Poe consisted of small portrait based canvases, hung salon style, and a room dedicated to sculptures. Blum & Poe's top three floors (set in a brownstone on East 66th) owed Taylor's work more vertical wall space and general breathing room than it was afforded. The parallel show

gallery walls only to disappear under the weight of their successive plots. Rosalind Krauss has observed that as a modernist trope, "the grid announces, among other things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse."¹ Although representational, Gaines's grids silence individual narratives in favor of an objectively reproducible system, signaling what Roland Barthes called "the death of the author" (or artist) and the subsequent "birth of the reader" (or viewer). Gaines allows viewers to interpret the images for themselves, unmediated by his subjective expression.²

In *Faces* (1978), on display in the exhibition's second gallery alongside the impressive *Motion: Trisha Brown Dance* (1980–81) series, this restoration of agency becomes politically charged in a move toward human subjects. Similar to *Walnut Tree Orchard*, the collection of overlapping and colorblind facial contours—friends and relatives of the artist—resists the typological and ethnological categorization historically used to justify racist criminological and colonialist enterprise. In this regard, the work also questions the presumed objectivity of photographs, linking Gaines with his "Pictures generation" cohorts, such as Sherrie Levine and Louise Lawler. The coordinate plots are themselves insufficient: flattening heterogeneous subjects into a numerical code and layering them until they become unrecognizable. Gaines codes the face, but the

face cannot be reassembled from the code. The material logic of the grid falsely promises the viewer an accurate portrait of the subject imprisoned within the austere and silencing aesthetic plane of modernism. Race falls prey to the grid's dissecting logic.

The poetic power of Gaines's work—which is often mischaracterized as a coldly minimalistic conceptualism—is the grid's violent tendency to rupture the identity of the subject, rather than to portray it objectively. Each set of coordinates attempt yet ultimately fail to identify the subjects they code, challenging the common poststructuralist refrain that "everything is discourse" by rendering such discourse illegible.

Gaines has called marginality "a complex co-presence of textual spaces," resisting coherent representation. "It almost begs a simpler form, a diagram perhaps, that will give shape to an impossibly complex machine, a coding that will make the difficult choices for us, to relieve us of the annoying spectacle of its insurmountability."³ Gaines transforms himself into such a machine to depict the futility of such an enterprise. The resulting work in the exhibition can seem Sisyphean, relentlessly repetitive, and even pointless. But this sense of pointlessness is intentional, reflecting the hard truth that no diagrammatic system in language or art can code the lived complexities of marginalization.

² Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 143.

³ Basquiat, Gaines, Lord, The Theatre *The Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism* (Santa Monica, California: Delta Graphics, 1993), 20.

at Untitled, a larger-than-most Lower East Side gallery, featured four sculptures (assemblages of junk and refuse that I have heard kicked around his studio for years), and seven large, acrylic paintings. The exhibition was capped off on the back wall with the largest painting of the group: a monster, almost religious, canvas.

Now, I could certainly rattle off a list of strong influences here that refuse to be overlooked, and pay a direct homage to the things Taylor holds as self-evident, but most can be read in other reviews of his work. My affirmation of his place in this lineage would only confute his acute stylistic vision.

To Be Titled—most all of Taylor's work is titled this way, which made for an especially ironic conversation when set in the Lower East Side gallery's name, or lack thereof—a 58 × 69" painting from 2015, portrays a cowboy hatted man, atop a horse, in a flatly bucolic, western landscape. This piece struck me the hardest, and seemed to aptly serve up Taylor's iconic essence. The man's cockeyed face wears a look that is simultaneously indignant and concerned. This plurality is reflected in the half brown/ half white, make-up like quality of the man's complexion: as if color were smeared onto his face by the character himself (which color is natural and which is dabbed on remains a mystery). Matisse surfaces in the conversation here with Taylor's desire to release color from description, and liberate

it instead into a force of its own: both literally and perhaps, racially. This sophisticated and intricate chromic grasp defends the more general notion that a direct unpacking of cultural themes would not do justice to the complicated visual questions Taylor is posing. To put it simply, the work urges a more dialogical reading than can be addressed by quick review.

Similarly puzzling to Taylor's use of color is his spatial rapport. What Taylor has created is oxymoronic: deep flatness. Figures expand and collapse into space using only shape and color as means. This is best exemplified in *To Be Titled* (2014), in which a figure clad in an oversized white shirt at the paintings left side stands in front of a deep, indigo blue horse. The only thing keeping the figure in front of the steed is the color choice, and—as strange as it may sound—it is damn near magical to see in person.

On the paintings right side, two unfinished faces emerge, one in front of the other. A hand stretches out forward from the furthest back, yet somehow still foregrounds the horse. The painterly quality of the figures on the right indicates a disinterest in the trickery of surrealism, urging instead a championing of straightforward painting technique.

This was reiterated in the aforementioned large and figure filled canvas at the very back of Untitled's space. At the paintings apex—where the space begins to breathe—there is a Goyer-esque moment in which a small slice of

cake floats centrally above the crowd. These strange spatial relations afford Taylor's work an indescribable, emotional flood that buzzes about but is never nailed down.

Henry Taylor, to some is synonymous with the most straightforward of painters, and in my opinion, that is a grand compliment. So much work these days is clouded by superfluous ideas that tend only to water down the essence. It's important to remember that being good at one thing allows one to say everything.

Review Contributors

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Mateo Tannatt (b. 1979) lives and works in Los Angeles. He has most recently had solo exhibitions at INOVA (Milwaukee), Gallery Diet (Miami), and Marc Foxx Gallery (Los Angeles). He has exhibited at the Hôtel de Miramion (Paris), the CCA Wattis (San Francisco), The Institute of Contemporary Arts (Philadelphia) and the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles). Tannatt has conceived special works for Frieze Projects (New York), Alan Kaprow Push and Pull Reinvention, ArtParcours, Art Basel, and Performa (New York).

Evan Moffitt is a writer and native resident of Los Angeles. He is the former editor-in-chief of the Hammer Museum's annual journal, *Graphite*, and is a current editorial assistant and contributor to *Paris*, *LA Magazine*.

Cal Siegel was born in 1987, and grew up in West Newbury, Massachusetts. He organizes a show in a shed in the woods there every few years. He cares deeply for all Boston sports teams. Cal currently lives and works in Brooklyn, and has shown throughout N.Y., Miami, and L.A., and has written for *Staring At The Wall* and *Carets and Sticks*.

Edition Artists

Lauren Cherry & Max Springer live and work in Los Angeles, California.

Nora Slade grew up in Northern California and lives and works in Los Angeles. She received a BFA from Pratt Institute in 2009. She has participated in group shows at Night Gallery, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, PureO, Queer Thoughts, 321 Gallery, MoMA PS1 Printshop and Terminal Projects. Her art/clothing project Waggy Tee has had exhibition style sales at Bodega, Sax Etc, and in conjunction with an Eckhaus Latta and Faux/Real sample sale. Waggy Tee was most recently exhibited at the Los Angeles book art fair with Night Gallery.

Ben Medansky is a Los Angeles-based artist originally hailing from the blue skies of Scottsdale, Arizona. In 2010, he graduated from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a love for ceramics and a desire to start his own studio. His functional wares and objets d'art are minimalist meditations informed by architectural structures and industrial processes.



Ben Medansky

VESSEL // CINS

2015

8.75 × 8.75 × 2.75 inches

Ceramic

Edition of 4

VESSEL // PERF

2015

8 × 2.5 × 8 inches

Ceramic

Edition of 4

Inspired by minimalist forms, these vessels are handmade geometries that straddle pure formalism and functionality. They incite a connection to the natural world both through their ability to house flora, and with their earthen glazes.



Nora Slade

I've been a lot of places, seen so many faces

2015
Dimensions variable
Tee shirts, dye, bleach, cardboard hanger
Edition of 8

I've been a lot of places, seen so many faces is an edition of found tee shirts that have been altered with hand made methods and simple materials (bleach, resist and fabric dye). On top of each shirt, Slade has hand painted an image of a face that is derivative of a Matisse line drawing. This image too has been appropriated (from a mysterious hand painted tee shirt that she has had for over a decade). The original face images are taken from a variety of sources, allowing the shirts to become a complex stack of cultural referents: the tie-dyes, logos and imagery on the found shirts acting as the base or, "first" image.