

Searching the Sky for Rain

SculptureCenter



Searching the Sky for Rain

All rights reserved, including rights of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

© SculptureCenter and the authors

Published by
SculptureCenter
44–19 Purves Street
Long Island City, NY 11101
+1 718 361 1750
info@sculpture-center.org
www.sculpture-center.org

ISBN: 978-0-9998647-1-5
Design: Chris Wu, Yoon-Young Chai, and
Ella Viscardi at Wkshps
Copy Editor: Lucy Flint
Printer: RMI Printing, New York

Cover: Rindon Johnson, *So it's pretty big, it's about twice the size of my fist, you can hear the bag is crunching as I turn it over, there's not a single animal, no insect, nothing, it is so old it reflects back blue light, so on a very clear, cool day, it is hard to say where it is that the sun meets the sky.*, 2018, detail.

Rawhide and white cotton rope. Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and AALA Gallery, Los Angeles

All photographs by Kyle Knodell, 2019
unless otherwise noted.

Searching the Sky for Rain

Sohrab Mohebbi

Because I, a mestiza,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera*

No slice of reality can have univocal meaning.

—María Lugones, *Pilgrimages / Peregrinajes*

[The politics of transfiguration's] basic desire is to conjure up and enact new modes of friendship, happiness, and solidarity that are consequent on the overcoming of the racial oppression on which modernity and its antimony of rational, western progress as excessive barbarity relied.

—Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*

Searching the Sky for Rain came out of a series of conversations over the past decade with artists, thinkers, and colleagues on questions around representation and abstraction, identity and identification, inclusion and exclusion, visibility and non-visibility. The language used to discuss the exhibition deliberately rejected the terminology usually used by institutions to address social positions and particularities. The exhibition brings together works by artists who disregard the ways in which the art industry regulates, classifies, compartmentalizes, and essentializes difference into sanctioned categories. This multicultural “appropriation/misappropriation” is, according to Gloria Anzaldúa, “an attempt to control difference by allocating it to bordered-off sections in the curriculum.”¹ The artists in *Searching the Sky for Rain* defy the fracking of particularities into niche-marketed, T-shirt formulations of “identities” for institutional meaning and value production.

These exploitative processes administer domination, forcing heterogeneity into operational packages for the stylizing of a lukewarm cosmopolitanism.

In her essay “Two Kinds of Discrimination,”² Adrian Piper suggests how works of art might be able to challenge “political discrimination” by cultivating “cognitive discrimination.” Piper offers a highly technical Kantian analysis of xenophobia before differentiating “first-order” from “higher-order” political discrimination. The former we would find from a full-blown racist or sexist who believes that people of a certain skin color, gender, or sexual orientation are inferior beings and therefore unworthy of the rights that the discriminator and their kind are entitled to only because of variations of race, nationality, gender, sexual preference, or class — “primary valued or disvalued” properties — notions that are irrelevant to their personhood. This form of discrimination, she concludes, represents the “fallacy of equating a partial and conditional series of empirical appearances of persons with the absolute and unconditioned idea of personhood that conceptually unifies them.” Piper formulates higher-order discrimination as the “attitude within which a primary disvalued or valued property in turn confers disvalue or value respectively on further properties of the disvaluee or valuee respectively.” This practice occurs when a person’s manner of talking, diction, style, and pedigree are viewed negatively by the higher-order discriminator, even though such qualities would be seen as either neutral or even valuable had the person been of the same race, gender, class, sexual orientation, or religious or ethnic affiliation as the discriminator. Piper acknowledges that “we can expect that first-order political discrimination and higher-order political discrimination in general are to be found together.” The higher-order political discriminator, through some tortuous psychological disjunction and what she calls “pseudorational” tactics, does not consider the so-called “primary disvalued property” — race, sex, class, or whatever — as the reason for discrimination.

When it comes to art, Piper writes, while it cannot “cure” higher-order political discrimination, it nevertheless can heighten a viewer’s self-awareness, and can “highlight pseudorational failures of cognitive discrimination as themselves objects of aesthetic examination.” To this one might add yet a third form of discrimination in the field of art (or the cultural sphere at large) and that is the epistemic violence of the dominant paradigm that grants the particular positions a limited sphere of representation and “identity.” The marginal, it asserts, can address itself only as it is perceived from the centered position. While the artist in the proclaimed dominant position enjoys a hotline to abstract and structural thinking, others are often accorded only bare biographical facts or storytime “feels” in the critical consideration and

institutional presentation of their work. The question raised by *Searching the Sky for Rain* is: Who has the right to abstraction?

There is a category of artwork that attempts to address the indignation of particular or marginal positions. In challenging viewers' misunderstanding of such positions, these artworks show how they are projecting erroneous attributions onto a minority or are mistakenly overlooking others. The work, through mimesis, might confirm certain qualities and question viewers' prejudices, showing how the traditionally objectionable qualities are perfectly human and that displaying them is aligned with the recognized rights of all humans. The work sheds a positive light on otherwise shunned, rejected, or ridiculed characteristics, and it helps the audience understand, and even appreciate, these supposed anomalies, confronting the viewers' pseudorational preconceptions. At other times, the work confirms what the informed audience knows: members of the minority are the victims of unjust discrimination, undeservingly ostracized and excluded, deprived of rights that should be common to all. Or, as a third alternative, by naming the dehumanizing and discriminatory meaning of terms, practices, and policies, these categories of work present the destructive effects on the subject discriminated against.³

This work for the most part calls for two audiences: those who are aware of, or subject to, the discrimination and the inequalities that the work pertains to, and those who are not. For the former, while the work creates a partial community around shared grievances, it nevertheless falls short of the civic demand for equality and the recognition of this demand by the judicial and political regime. For the latter, the work always remains and operates within the indeterminacy of the art space, which is established—and for the most part accepted—as a place where truth and reality are suspended, conventions and traditions are contested, and there are no limits but those of human imagination and creativity. Piper also acknowledges this condition, calling contemporary art a “paradigmatic experience of cognitive anomaly,” affirming its “conceptual fluidity and inclusiveness” and its post-medium condition, in which there are no expectations or preconceptions that the audience can legitimately bring to the viewing experience. Therefore, the politico-critical content—the indignation—however rooted in the real world, remains within and subjected to the heterogeneous, indefinable realm of contemporary art. In this context, the sites of indignation are metabolized and exchanged through the system of value production, and therefore are equalized with other matters of artistic concern.

There is a third category of audience for this kind of art, represented by the position of white liberals who understand the represented injustices

and indignations and by virtue of doing so claims a moral high ground from which they attempt to own and (mis)appropriate the discourse of the marginalia.⁴ Not unlike the questions around colonial epistemology, through the exotification and extraction of a particular geographic or cultural position the dominant position owns and leverages the critique that is leveled against itself and therefore maintains its central authority. This condition is similar to what Santiago Castro-Gómez identifies as “hubris of the zero point.”⁵ In this formulation, the mainstream cultural authorities claim for themselves the hard-fought civic achievements of minority positions. To rephrase the question regarding the right to abstraction, we can ask who owns and defines the object of critique. Abstraction becomes an attempt to liberate the critical discourse that is constantly defined according to a worn-out center and marginalia dialectics that determine the movement of thought. This is in line with what Walter D. Mignolo calls “epistemic disobedience,” which dismantles the formal apparatus of enunciation and refuses to conform to the totalizing colonial forms of “purposive knowledge-making.”⁶

María Lugones calls the liberal conversation that “thrives on transparency” *monologized*. She proposes instead “complex communication” that requires an “awareness of one’s own multiplicity and a recognition of the other’s opacity that does not attempt to assimilate it into one’s own familiar meanings.”⁷ Rather, “it is enacted through a change in one’s own vocabulary, one’s sense of self, one’s way of living, in the extension of one’s collective memory, through developing forms of communication that signal disruption of the reduction attempted by the oppressor.” Abstraction, therefore, is used here not as the antonym of figuration but rather as a means of addressing or analyzing issues of a time and place by creating new images and vocabularies. These images and words are situated, and artists use the raw materiality of existing conditions (including their own), but that is not where the work ends. As Mignolo writes, “Sure, all knowledge is situated, and every knowledge is constructed. . . . The question is: who, when, why is constructing knowledges?”⁸ The force of Piper’s practice is how the work upends colonial chronopolitics and interrupts pseudorational binaries that are excavated by cultural institutions and define the forms and limits of enunciation.

The admissible space of art operates on the omnivorous promise of authenticity and autonomy, in which validation and value accrue through the production of difference. As such, difference—identified and identifiable—operates within a “culture that values innovation for its own sake” and generates meaning and value through its indeterminable horizon.⁹ In this space, strategic essentialism provides an opportunity to market

difference: it is strategic, in the sense that it creates a pathway for inclusion in a highly exclusive, hierarchical, and non-transparent field where nepotism, pedigree, provenance, and social relations provide for a unbalanced economy of access in which minorities and the underprivileged need to generate their own expanded discursive platforms to level the playing field. At the same time, this strategy on the one hand runs the risk of difference for its own sake, which more often than not creates the institutional tokenism of the higher-order political discrimination that Piper warns of, while on the other it dovetails with Post-Fordism and neoliberalism's aspirational lifestyle consumerism, in which, identities compete for recognition in an increasingly competitive market. This fits perfectly with contemporary art's territorial expansion and curatorial/institutional novelties.¹⁰

The institutional relations of art that operate through the essentialization of the producer remains always affirmative, as this is where its means and ends converge; by default it cannot establish a negative relation to the institutional structure where it becomes visible. The affirmation therefore remains contrary to speaking truth to power. The question of art that articulates difference through the apparent authentic identity of the figure of the artist or the minority s/he "represents" is that the singularity of art is subservient to the authenticity of the artist.¹¹

When particular identities become reified, in a highly competitive field where authenticity is the primary source of value production, then multiple and convergent positionalities will be vying for limited resources and possibilities for admission and recognition. While in the civic sphere, various threatened and marginalized positions and identities attempt to make their grievances common—demanding their shared unalienable rights¹²—in the field of art, where scarcity equals value, intersectional demands are transformed into competing positions that call for exclusivity. Thus what needs to expand and become common in the public sphere instead contracts and shrinks in the field of art in the service of value production and exchange in the marketplace of ideas. Here lies a contradiction that is essentially based on individual interest: while the exclusionary practice in the field of art generates recognition and monetary and/or symbolic capital, commonizing in the public sphere generates access for a larger group of people. The exclusionary demands follow the hierarchical principles of the dominant order that are sustained only through limitation, managing scarcity, and monopolization of access. In other words, the civic sphere becomes politicized by making rights common while contemporary art becomes (de)politicized by taking rights away or *decommunizing* in order to serve the exclusivity of an authentic particular articulation.¹³

There is an inherent dilemma with regard to contemporary art as a site for articulating the inequality and injustice facing a minority: while we hold these wrongs to be "self-evident," they are nonetheless presented in a venue that is governed by indeterminacy, where everything is up for scrutiny and debate, and thus, and to the contrary, are anything but self-evident. The particularities of real-world grievances and discrimination are generalized in the heterogeneity of the art space. Facing the contemporary "deficit of politics proper," Jacques Rancière remains skeptical of assigning a "substitutive political function to the mini-demonstrations of artists . . . their provocations *in situ* or elsewhere."¹⁴ The question is how artworks can deploy a strategic indeterminacy that cracks open and empties out the hegemony that seeks to maintain its discursive sovereignty over the contemporary art discourse.

Charles Gaines's practice has consistently shown how representation is constructed, is anything but self-evident, testifying that the "line separating representation and the real is quite blurred."¹⁵ By rerouting tools of objective analysis, Gaines demonstrates that the claims to truth made via the photographic index and logical systems of image and meaning production are malleable and can be used toward different ends. He has also shown how the most impactful forms of cultural enunciation are situated and addressed through particular articulations. His series *Faces: Identity Politics*, which portrays figures from his philosophical canon from Aristotle to bell hooks, shows how each tectonic shift in discourse is informed by the history of thought while also responding to the thinkers' particular positioning. The particularities include the postcolonial grievances of the dislocated Edward Said, the post-structural redefinition of historical discourse of Michel Foucault, and the radical pedagogy of bell hooks among others.

By using systems, Gaines further demonstrates that artworks are not merely expressions of the artist's imagination that "privilege the creative unconscious." Returning to Adrian Piper, who follows Kant in cautioning against the assumption of privileged access to the self—remarking on "the contingency and epistemic unreliability of the empirical self as a source of information about the transcendental subject to whom the empirical self appears"—she shows how Kant "rules out direct and unmediated knowledge of oneself as an active and spontaneous intellect."¹⁶ One can only ascertain one's existence through empirical means, and therefore as an appearance, and can only "represent" oneself as an active intelligence.¹⁷

This notion of a univocal sense of self is further questioned in the works of Latina/x feminist phenomenologists such as Mariana Ortega, who suggests rather a "multiplicitious selfhood." Providing a forceful reading of Anzaldúa,

Lugones, and others, Ortega discusses the horizon of identification in a project of coalition-building that acknowledges selves that are plural, ambiguous, and contradictory. Her formulation expands on Anzaldúa's new *mestiza*, who copes "by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. . . . She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing is rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else."¹⁸

Lugones, following Inderpal Grewal, describes a sense of "self" as "not an individual, not 'unitary and centered and created out of the binaries of Self-Other, Subject-Object.'"¹⁹ For her, the "importance of the impulse to reject dichotomies lies in the resistance to have one's plurality and the interrelations/paths among the multiple worlds of sense we inhabit reduced or erased."²⁰ This conception of the multiplicitous self further questions the idealization of the figure as a fixed container, given that its position is liminal. As Gaines notes, idealization, lending itself to immediate classification and representation of inclusion and diversity (of a collection/exhibition) and production of value, "can be either positive and negative, any particular theory of marginality can function as well to liberate as to enslave."²¹ The pitfalls of figurative expressionism is that it posits a subject that, particularly in a moment of media fragmentation and multiplication, calcifies positions in a discourse of visibility that proclaims the image as the end product of artistic work.²² Further, contemporary art as a field of activity is proclaimed free of critical criteria, historical determination, media limitations, and conceptual definitions, and its objects are "potential threats to the conceptual unity of a rigidly or provincially structured self."²³ Therefore, it is imperative to utilize its indeterminacy strategically and as a location that empties out the all-knowing, colonial, and univocal self claimed by the point zero position. It is a place to reclaim the object of critique and thereby change the terms of the conversation. It also calls for discarding the institutional demands that define the margins of enunciation, and implements imperatives of authentic self-representation in art. This latter imperative has prompted today's hyper-expressionism, which in the absence of reflexivity poses the "self" as a coordinate with direct access to "truth." Expression remains affirmative toward the predetermined condition of enunciation and operates within its system of value production and classification.

Against this backdrop, the works in *Searching the Sky for Rain* advance the subject's inherent non-sovereignty and unlocatability. As a character in Becket MWN's audio work *Paranoid House* puts it, "Anytime individuality is

institutionally mandated it becomes a performance." Lugones notes how this plural understanding of the self enables us to "remake the connections among crisscrossing oppositional subaltern worlds of sense, oppositional to the very logic of subjection."²⁴ Tishan Hsu, who since the mid-1980s has claimed that "the Self is lost . . . one less thing to worry about," shows how technology is becoming an extension of the body, expanding the horizons of identification while also producing and conditioning new subjectivities and forms of social control and choreography.²⁵ The undoing of interpellation does not imply the exploitation of the produced subjectivities of the margin, which are the byproduct of the normalizing order, as this strategy corroborates, validates, and recuperates the generative process of control. Therefore it is through, and only through, a multiplicity of positions that the dominant omnivorous structure is plundered; but the relationship is negative—the multiple takes away from it, empties it out, expropriates (Craig Owens writes of Sherrie Levine that she "expropriates the appropriators")²⁶ until it is nothing but a shell of what it used to be, before it all collapses and crumbles.

As Édouard Glissant writes, the colonized are "forced into a long and painful quest after an identity whose first task will be the opposition to the denaturing process introduced by the conqueror."²⁷ It is therefore an identity that is built in response to the "process of identification or annihilation triggered by [the] invaders . . . that is, a limitation from the beginning."²⁸ To go beyond this limitation, following Fred Moten, the undoing takes place in "not desiring what was not to be desired in the first place."²⁹ Not to desire, to rechannel and retool the liberating forces of desire and their jamming and jammed designated frequencies of enunciation. This is the power that, in Foucault's words, undoes images and "infuses them with an inner transparency that illuminates them little by little until they burst and scatter in the lightness of the unimaginable."³⁰ Elaine Sturtevant's response, à la Bruce Hainley, is to fold "the situations of self, its various losses, its others and fictions, to test before and after, then and now, oeuvre and désœuvrement, so that they become, visibly, non-orientable."³¹

In Tony Cokes's video *Evil.27.Selma*, we read how the civil rights movement pre-television prompted a "social collectivity heavily dependent on the imagination," which created an abundance of "fantasy what-if" scenarios. What is visible in the artwork operates vis-à-vis an absence, and the extant work has an inverse and negative relationship to what the artist has worked against, disincorporated, taken apart, and reconstituted. The image stands for what is not shown. As Tristan Garcia writes, "To represent is to absent."³² He goes on to note that "artistic representation is that which objectively

inscribes absence in matter, or in the real.”

In *Searching the Sky for Rain*, the project of desubjugation or epistemic disobedience is articulated through works that resist following readily available image templates, relinquishing the pop-up politics of instant visibility: ektor garcia’s hijacking of the social and cultural history of craft, including ceramics and crocheting, which he repositions within the exhibition space; Johanna Unzueta’s inhabitation of the language of abstraction with extracurricular patterns and textile motifs; Carmen Argote’s use of avocado as pigment, inscribing trade routes and agreements, labor and agricultural histories into formal abstraction in paintings confined and defined by the reach of the artist’s body; Mandy El-Sayegh’s feeding of personal, recent, and cultural histories into a metabolizing studio process; Riet Wijnen’s *Sculpture Sixteen Conversations on Abstraction* diagramming artist’s extensive research into positions that have been excluded from the canon of Western abstraction. Eric Wesley creates conceptual strategies, reworking Americana and its cultural myths through (idiosyncratic) logical systems that derail notions of infinity, conceptual purity, and like Gaines’s, emphasize the constructed nature of representations. Shahryar Nashat pictures a sleeping boy, tangentially Middle Eastern, who wakes up to browse Cy Twombly’s catalogue raisonné. Rafael Domenech looks at standardization as a form of oppression and makes it a portal for the dissemination of works. He redefines the building as a machine to make pieces that challenge the apparent functions of materials and structures of containment and concealment. Similarly, Michael Queenland uses the basic units of a transparent and black trash bag to create paintings akin to windows that could be folded, packaged, transported, and rehung; his work with remainder store bargains rephrases the debris of consumer culture of banal obsolescence in a process of material rearticulation. Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon’s sound blanket tent and audio piece cancels out the sonic reflections of the exhibition space to get closer to an audial void and at the same time emphasizes the impossibility of the articulation of the degree zero position. These projects undermine the modern visual epistemology, contributing to what Paul Gilroy calls the “politics of transfiguration.”³³

Rindon Johnson asks: “What should we call this form of existence: a constant vista where from one view one can see the cage of one binding state and from another view, another binding state? Come here and have a taste (play to be played).”³⁴ In the exhibition space, Johnson presents three pieces of rawhide that were exposed to the elements for over a year in a Brooklyn backyard and now split SculptureCenter vertically. The skins are commodities that once formed part of a living being. One hangs from a fluorescent green

bungee cord, one over the catwalk, and one in a nook in the basement, all haunting the space with histories of violence that render some lives dispensable. Jala Wahid shows an enlarged jesmonite cow liver simulating displays in butcher shops in Kurdistan: other lives presumed expendable.

Search the Sky for Rain follows the premise that art desubjugates and that the insistence on assigning the work of decentered, liminal positions to prescribed channels of articulation is an institutional discrimination that is the byproduct of the first-order discrimination that Piper writes about. Similar to higher-order discrimination, this partitioning of positions presupposes that the discriminated-against do not possess the knowledge, skills, or capacity for structural, analytical creation that is beyond the scope of their trajectory. That they can address only issues related to the dominant discourse’s presumption of their identity and the ways to express it authentically. That they cannot define, contribute to, or change the terms of the discourse. Partha Chatterjee tracks this to the legacy of the Enlightenment and the construction of “intricately differentiated structure of authorities which specifies who has the right to say what on which subjects.”³⁵ The institutional labor that needs to be done, to use Anzaldúa’s words, is “punching holes in their categories, labels and theories,” which means “punching holes in their walls.”³⁶ The frames are not to be simply questioned, they are to be discarded, as they are placed and maintained to regulate and control the direction of the discourse and the avenues of enunciation. Institutions are tasked with implementing and upholding the project of framing the scaffolding to uphold the mandates of subject positioning, surveying, placing, assigning singularity to multiplicity. This exhibition hopes to contribute to the critical project of unframing.

We’ll never know if it’s going to rain until it rains, Rin.

The final line of this text is taken from the title of a work by Rindon Johnson on view in the exhibition.

- 1 Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 205.
- 2 This and the following quotations are from Adrian Piper, “Two Kinds Of Discrimination,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 6, no. 1 (1993): 25–75.
- 3 I am borrowing the terminology for the three strategies from Piper’s essay.
- 4 “Diversity is then treated as a superficial overlay that does not disrupt any comfort zones.” Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 205. For a possible fourth category whose awareness is heightened by the work that addresses the cognitive discrimination of the dominant order, the question remains, why should the minority’s practice be burdened by the cognitive failures of a self-anointed dominant position?
- 5 Santiago Castro-Gómez, quoted in Walter D. Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7–8 (2009): 2.
- 6 Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom,” 18.
- 7 María Lugones, “On Complex Communication,” *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 84.
- 8 Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought And Decolonial Freedom,” 2.
- 9 Piper, “Two Kinds of Discrimination,” 63.
- 10 It is also noteworthy how these strategies, in their prevalence and marketability, disproportionally limit the possibilities for any minority artist to make work that is not solely concerned with their particularity and make aesthetic concerns and any form of self-reflexivity the privilege of the so-called dominant culture.
- 11 The cultural advantage of this predicament is the production of new

archetypes, which symbolically challenge the dominant cultural icons in a globalized world. Yet more often than not, the new archetypes merely replace the previous ones, while the plot and the values remain untouched.

- 12 Call it Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness, or liberté, égalité, fraternité.
- 13 Some might argue that the exclusionary politicizing of art might create traction in a field where anything goes. However, the issue would be, first, that the right to exclusion would have to be equably expanded to all positions, which would require literally establishing mechanisms of control and policing that decide where to draw the line, and second, it is an act of violation of hard-won liberties, which Suhail Malik calls the “civic virtue” of contemporary art. <https://ccs.bard.edu/redhook/ape-says-no/index.html>
- 14 Jacques Rancière, “Problems and transformations in critical art,” 2004
- 15 Charles Gaines, in “Interviews: Charles Gaines,” *Artforum* online, posted December 19, 2017, <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/charles-gaines-talks-about-his-work-in-solidary-solitary-73083>.
- 16 Adrian M. S. Piper, “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism” (1991), *Philosophical Forum* 24, no. 1–3 (Fall–Spring 1992–93), pdf available on the artist’s website, 21, [http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/WebsiteXen&KantRat\(1991\).pdf](http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/WebsiteXen&KantRat(1991).pdf).
- 17 Piper, “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism,” 21.
- 18 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 101.
- 19 Mariana Ortega, *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (Albany: State University of New York, 2016), 181.
- 20 María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield), 197.
- 21 Charles Gaines and Catherine Lord, *The Theater of Refusal* (Irvine: Fine Arts Gallery, University of California, Irvine, 1993), n.p.

- 22 About the racialization of the figure in art, Gaines notes: “This has a lot to do with the expectations of representation, expectations of the necessity of the identification of race in works of art, and plays against all those practices that are legitimate, that use the body or use other references of culture, because it minimizes or marginalizes those references around the same politics. So I think it disempowers a whole lot of art that shouldn’t be disempowered.” Charles Gaines, in Nate Young, “Charles Gaines,” *Third Rail*, no. 13. Third Rail online, <http://thirdrailquarterly.org/charles-gaines/>.
- 23 Piper, “Two Kinds of Discrimination,” 65.
- 24 Ortega, *In-Between*, 181.
- 25 Tishan Hsu, artist statement, September 1983.
- 26 Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 73.
- 27 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 17.
- 28 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.
- 29 I paraphrase from Fred Moten, lecture, ArtCenter, Pasadena, December 6, 2016.
- 30 Michel Foucault and Maurice Blanchot, *The Thought from Outside* (New York: Zone Books, 1987), 23.
- 31 Bruce Hainley, *Under the Sign of [sic]: Sturtevant’s Volte-face* (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2013), 300.
- 32 This and the following quotation are from Christoph Cox, Jenny Jaskey, and Suhail Malik, *Realism Materialism Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 251.
- 33 Paul Gilroy, “It Ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re At . . .,” *Third Text* 5, no. 13 (1991): 11.
- 34 This quotation is taken from the title of a work by Rindon Johnson, which was screened in conjunction with the exhibition: *Among other things (nearby occasions or 8 acts for Jeremy): What should we call this form of existence: a constant vista where from one view one can see the cage of one binding state and from another view,*

another binding state? Come here and have a taste (play to be played). Hadi writes: All night I dreamed of these lines and couldn’t help it other than believing that dreaming these lines mean I should send them to you; it is coming from an old poem that made sense to me when I saw the cage inside the cage/ Birds are free of cages, and cages are free of birds / Where have you come from that causes you to be so free / Although every birds voice is a kind of crying for end of the day / You must sing more since your cry more sounds like the beginning of the day. / I think birds are standing for people, but I’m not sure what the cage stands for. You must know. (I don’t.) Maybe there are things that we should become accustomed to not seeing or knowing (I entered the tunnel of my own will.) I play the song over and over; without beginning and without end.

- 35 Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom,” 12.
- 36 Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 205.





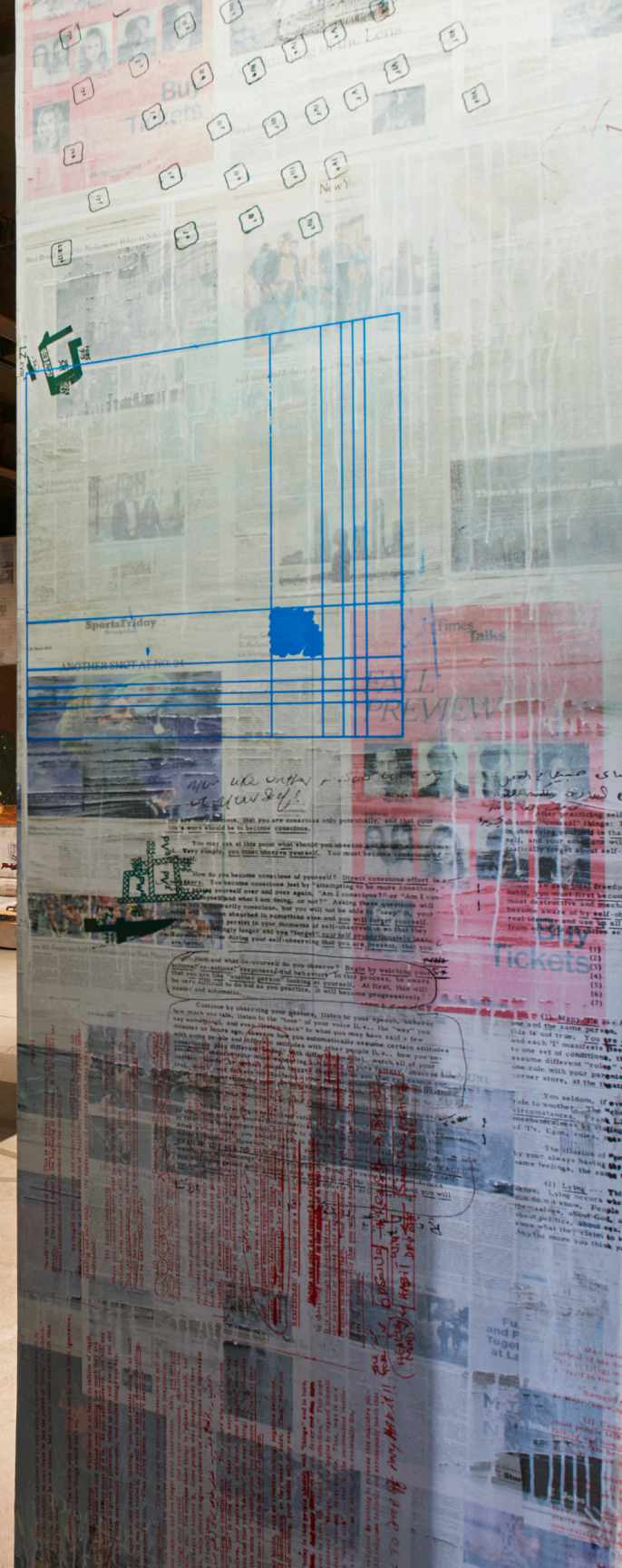
Previous: Installation view.



Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon,
Noise Blanket, Nos. 11–16, or
Everybody's Got Choices, 2019, detail



Johanna Unzueta, Eric Wesley, and Carmen Argote, installation view.



Mandy El-Sayegh, installation view.





Previous: Mandy El-Sayegh, installation view.
Right: Installation view.



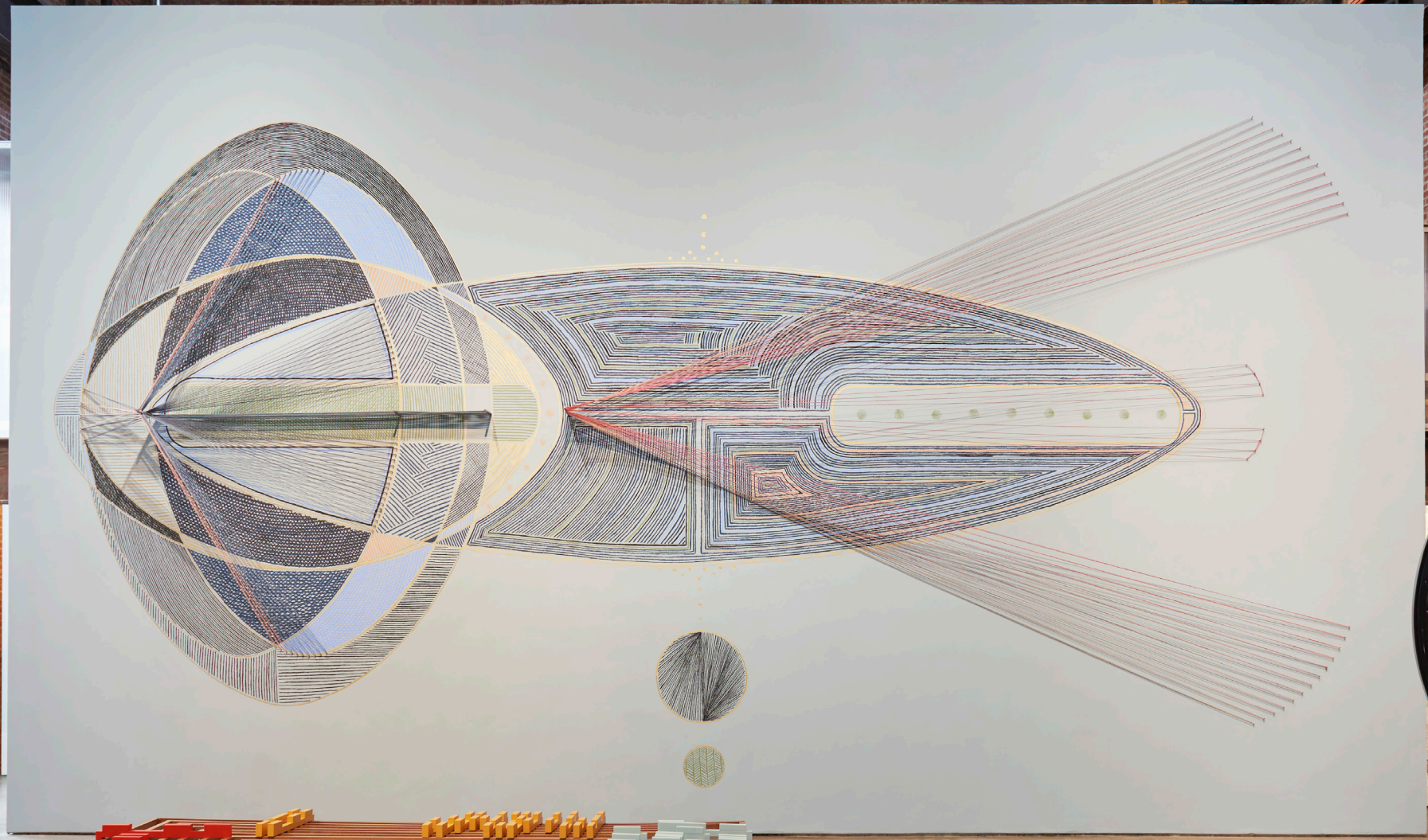
Above: Becket MWN, *Paranoid House, Moulding (3.0)*, 2019, detail.

Right: Rindon Johnson, *The stage is no place for the riot*, Ongoing, installation view.







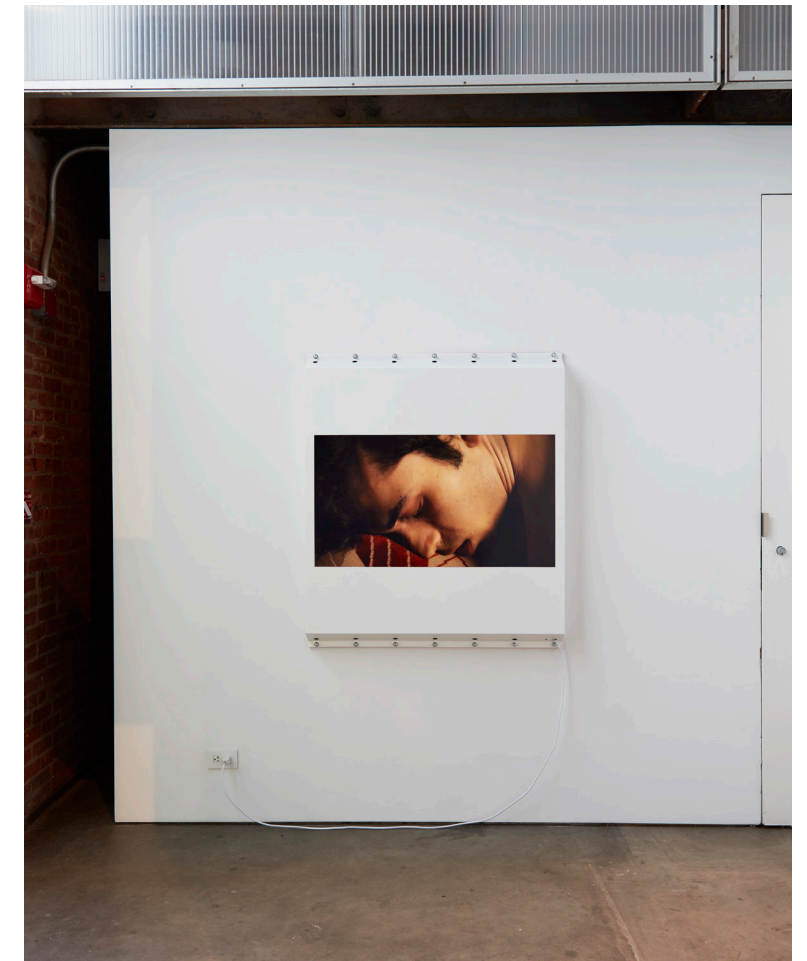


Previous: Johanna Unzueta,
Riet Wijnen, and Eric Wesley,
installation view.
Right: Johanna Unzueta,
Gravity & Grace, 2019, detail





Installation view.



Shahryar Nashat, *Psych Twombly*, 2017, installation view.

ektor garcia, *ceramic hides*,
2019, installation view.





Installation view.



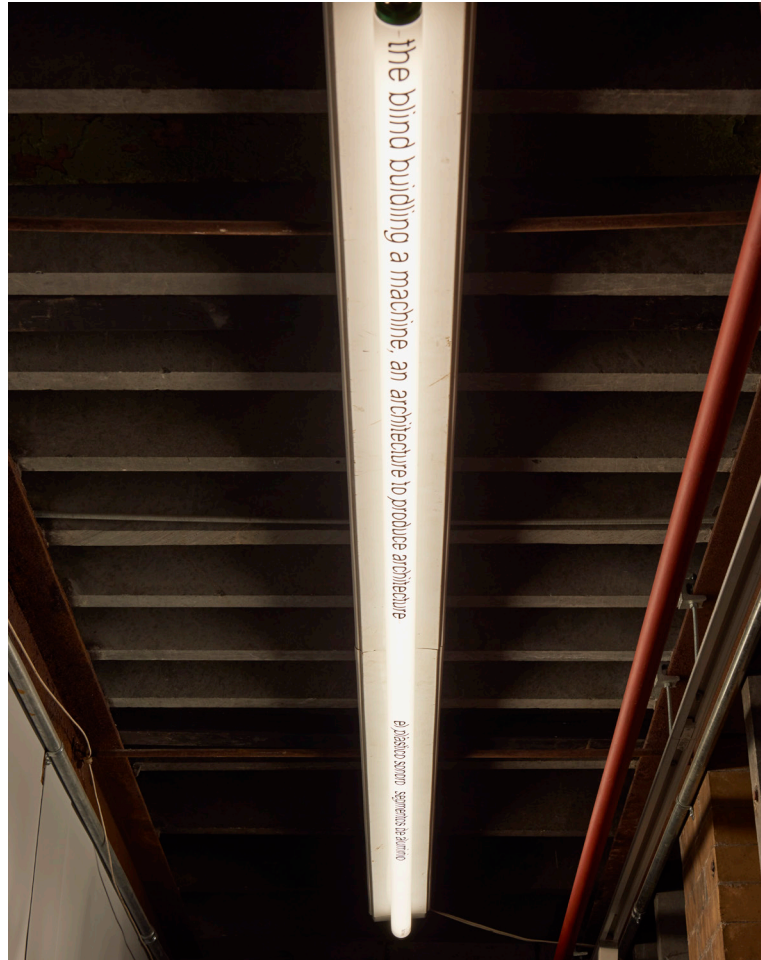
Becket MWN, *Paranoid House*, 2017, installation view.



Above: Rafael Domenech, *Tactics for a new architecture (excerpts from Severo)*, 2019, detail.
Left: Rafael Domenech and Michael Queensland, installation view.



Charles Gaines, Carmen Argote, and ektor garcia, installation view.



Rafael Domenech, *Tactics for a new architecture* (excerpts from *Severo*), 2019, details.







Eric Wesley, *New Realistic Figures*
(*Sleeping*): Michel, 2009/2015, detail.



Rindon Johnson, *If we were frightened people we'd think this was a little bit scary: Watering flowers coming up from the sidewalk you said I could stuff some duck sausage in your pita pocket. Instead I press 3 fingers to your neck while you sound out the letter M. Then, O. Honey under your tongue, cane or water or cinnamon. Drag your head behind you. I cannot accept the bounds of what is known. Arise north, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey. Is it a pleasure? Some passages elsewhere. Is night weather? You've captured my heart with one bead of your necklace. If you come to a place where I cannot see you I'll move so I can see you., Ongoing, installation view.*



Above: *árbol de la muerte*, 2019,
installation view.

Left: ektor garcia, *chainmale ano*,
2019, installation view.



Tony Cokes and Jala Wahid,
installation view.



Tony Cokes, *Evil.27.Selma*,
2011, installation view.

Checklist

Carmen Argote

Cover (for another Island), 2018
Acrylic on muslin, cotton rope,
metal tags, steel rack
68.5 × 83 × 18 inches
(174 × 210.8 × 45.7 cm)
The Mohn Family Trust

Open, 2018
Avocado dye with iron and avocado on linen
72 × 84 inches (213.36 × 182.88 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Commonwealth and
Council, Los Angeles

Tony Cokes

Evil.27.Selma, 2011
Digital video, b/w, stereo
9:00 minutes
Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali,
New York, Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles,
and Electronic Arts Intermix New York

Rafael Domenech

Tactics for a new architecture
(*excerpts from Severo*), 2019
Styrene, 3M adhesive, fluorescent
light bulbs, vinyl, building
Dimensions variable

Mandy El-Sayegh

Citadel, 2019
Stainless steel vitrine table,
polymer clay, soap labels, glass
33.4 × 7.5 × 9.8 inches
(85 × 19 × 25 cm)

Estimated at Nineteen, 2019
Latex and mixed media tiles,
steel tacks
22.9 × 39.4 inches each (58 × 100 cm)

Figured Ground: habits, 2019
Newspapers, wheat paste,
paint, silkscreen
Dimensions variable

Mole Cricket 19, 2019
Stainless steel vitrine table, polymer clay,
pigment, cutlery organizer, rubber pumps,
soap, steel “for sale” sign, glass
31.1 × 16.1 × 15.7 inches (79 × 41 × 40 cm)

Net-Grid Study, 2019
Oil and mixed media on
linen in steel artist frame
63.75 × 59.9 × 2 inches (162 × 152 × 5 cm)

One in Three, 2019
Stainless steel vitrine table,
steel grill, photograph, soap, glass
30.7 × 10.7 × 8.3 inches (78 × 27 × 21 cm)

Surefire-shut-eye, 2019
Stainless steel vitrine table, latex,
oatmeal, pigment, newspaper, polymer clay,
speaker frame, metal handles,
wooden coaster, voided passport, cork
tile with drawing in acrylic and biro,
oil on linen, painting fragment, Vice
magazines, COS home incense papers,
silkscreen on cheesecloth, digital print
on canvas, resin, metal soap grill,
magnetic coil, cockfight blades, device,
photograph
31.5 × 94.75 × 45.25 inches
(80 × 240.7 × 114.9 cm)
Commissioned by Chisenhale
Gallery, London

Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin,
New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul

Charles Gaines

Numbers and Trees: Central Park
Series II: Tree #7 Laurel, 2016
Acrylic sheet, acrylic paint, photograph
95 × 126.5 inches (241.3 × 321.3 cm)

Faces 1: Identity Politics, #10,
Edward Said, 2018
Acrylic sheet, acrylic paint,
lacquer, wood
74 × 59.125 × 5.75 inches
(188 × 150.2 × 146 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

ektor garcia

alien, 2019
Glazed ceramic
6 × 16 × 11 inches
(15.2 × 40.6 × 27.9 cm)

árbol de la muerte, 2019
Glazed ceramic
23.5 × 13 × 13 inches
(59.7 × 33 × 33 cm)

bound child, 2019
Glazed porcelain,
leather cord, wood
1.5 × 19 × 7 inches
(3.8 × 48.3 × 17.8 cm)

ceramic hides, 2019
Glazed ceramic
Dimensions variable

chainmale ano, 2019
Glazed ceramic
2.5 × 11 × 11 inches
(6.4 × 27.9 × 27.9 cm)

tocado, 2019
Glazed earthenware
and stoneware, porcelain, cotton
Dimensions variable

vasija oxida, 2019
Glazed ceramic with copper wire
28 × 9 × 9 inches
(71.1 × 22.9 × 22.9 cm)

Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon

Noise Blanket, Nos. 11–16, or Everybody’s
Got Choices, 2019
Silicone, aluminum, vinyl, yarn, polyester
filling, speakers, noise file filtered to
the frequencies subtracted by the acoustics
of the sculpture
120 × 120 × 130 inches
(304.8 × 304.8 × 330.2 cm)

Custom audio processing by
Jonathan S. Abel at the Center for Computer
Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA),
Stanford University

Audio equipment courtesy Meyer Sound,
Berkeley, CA

Courtesy the artist and
Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

Tishan Hsu

Heading Through, 1984
Vinyl cement, ceramic tile on wood and
Styrofoam, steel
39 × 82 × 60 inches (99 × 208 × 152 cm)

Rindon Johnson

A louse and a flea were brewing beer in an
eggshell. The louse fell in and burnt herself. This
made the flea weep, which made the door creak,
which made the broom sweep, which made the
cart run, which made the ash-heap burn, which
made the tree shake itself, which made the girl
break her water-pitcher, which made the spring
begin to flow. And in the spring’s water everything
was drowned., Ongoing
Rawhide, dirt, leaves, water
Dimensions variable

Checklist

If we were frightened people we'd think this was a little bit scary: Watering flowers coming up from the sidewalk you said I could stuff some duck sausage in your pita pocket. Instead I press 3 fingers to your neck while you sound out the letter M. Then, O. Honey under your tongue, cane or water or cinnamon. Drag your head behind you. I cannot accept the bounds of what is known. Arise north, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey. Is it a pleasure? Some passages elsewhere. Is night weather? You've captured my heart with one bead of your necklace. If you come to a place where I cannot see you I'll move so I can see you.,
Ongoing
Leather hide, sun, 35mm slide, slide projector, dirt, leaves, bushes, pergola, lily pond with lilies
Dimensions variable

The stage is no place for the riot,
Ongoing
Rawhide, dirt, water
Dimensions variable

Why is labor so virtuous when we could have this other thing? (A true radical makes nothing.) What you choose to reinscribe is a form of previous pain brought upon another leave it, leave me be. Inscribe. I will not participate. Oops I'm participating. We'd be best to go a little too hard. (How do I decolonize something I cannot see?) Rose says to me as I am leaning half my body out the window to look at the dark looming cloud, We'll never know if it's going to rain until it rains, Rin. In Nicaragua they say: The world was once destroyed by a deluge. After its destruction, the gods created all things afresh.,
Ongoing
Rawhide, dirt, water, leaves, mold, bungee
Dimensions variable

Becket MWN

Paranoid House, 2017
Audio on three portable devices
22:30 minutes

Voices: Ivan Cheng, Amelia Groom,
“Justin,” and featuring Jeffrey Babcock

Paranoid House, Moulding (3.0), 2019
MDF, paint
14 × 541 × 0.5 inches
(35.6 × 1,374.1 × 1.3 cm)

Shahryar Nashat

Psych Twombly, 2017
HD video on monitor, retrofitted cover
39 × 40.9 × 3.5 inches (99 × 104 × 8.9 cm)
4:44 minutes, silent loop
Beth Rudin DeWoody

Michael Queenland

Rudy's Ramp of Reminders (group 2), 2012
Polyurethane-injected latex balloons,
concave surveillance mirror, metal bowl,
pipe coupling
Dimensions variable

Rudy's Ramp of Reminders (loner ramp), 2012
Polyurethane-injected latex balloon,
New York Times newspaper
23 × 23 × 14 inches
(58.4 × 58.4 × 35.6 cm)

Rudy's Ramp of Reminders (RRR-1-XL-CLR- BLK-CLN-UP-WINDOW-ICT), 2012/2019
Clear drum liner trash bag,
contractor clean-up bag, duct tape
35.75 × 53.9 inches (90.8 × 136.9 cm)

Rudy's Ramp of Reminders (RRR-2-XL-CLR-BLK-CLN-UP-WHEATIES-4CT), 2012/2019
Clear drum liner trash bag,
contractor clean-up bag
35.75 × 53.9 inches (90.8 × 136.9 cm)

Courtesy the artist and
Kristina Kite Gallery, Los Angeles

Johanna Unzueta

Gravity & Grace, 2019
Oil stick pastel, charcoal, upcycled
cotton rope (courtesy The New Denim Project),
beetroot-dyed rope, iron, nails
20 × 30.3 × 1 feet (6.1 × 9.2 × 0.3 m)

Eric Wesley

New Realistic Figures (Sleeping): Gilles, 2009/2015
Paint and plastic on stained
maple pedestal
Figure: 3.5 × 8.5 × 14 inches
(8.9 × 21.6 × 35.6 cm)
Pedestal: 56 × 11.5 × 11.5 inches
(142.2 × 29.2 × 29.2 cm)

New Realistic Figures (Sleeping): Jean, 2009/2015
Paint and plastic on stained
maple pedestal
Figure: 4.75 × 14 × 14.25 inches
(12.1 × 35.6 × 36.2 cm)
Pedestal: 56 × 11.5 × 11.5 inches
142.2 × 29.2 × 29.2 cm)

New Realistic Figures (Sleeping): Michel, 2009/2015
Paint and plastic on stained
maple pedestal
Figure: 3.5 × 8.75 × 18 inches
(8.9 × 22.2 × 45.7 cm)
Pedestal: 56 × 11.5 × 11.5 inches
(142.2 × 29.2 × 29.2 cm)

New Realistic Figures (Sleeping): Plato, 2015
Faux marble and bronze on
stained maple pedestal
Figure: 3.75 × 9 × 16 inches
(9.5 × 22.9 × 40.6 cm)
Pedestal: 56 × 11.5 × 11.5 inches
(142.2 × 29.2 × 29.2 cm)

Inch-Alota I, 2015
Stained glass, lead, painted steel
94 × 75 inches (239 × 193 cm)

Inch-Alota II, 2015
Stained glass, lead, painted steel
94 × 76 inches (239 × 193 cm)

New Realistic Figures (Sleeping): Confucius, 2015
Faux marble and bronze on stained
maple pedestal
Figure: 3.5 × 9.5 × 13.25 inches
(8.9 × 24.1 × 33.7 cm)
Pedestal: 56 × 11.5 × 11.5 inches
(142.2 × 29.2 × 29.2 cm)

Courtesy the artist and
Bortolami, New York

Jala Wahid

Red Forever Approaching Obsidian II, 2019
Jesmonite, latex
19 × 39 × 35 inches
(48.3 × 99 × 88.9 cm)
Dr. Michael I. Jacobs

Riet Wijnen

Sculpture Sixteen Conversations on Abstraction, 2016 – ongoing
Wood and paint
Dimensions variable

Except where noted, all works
courtesy the artists.

Searching the Sky for Rain

Sep 16–Dec 16, 2019

Searching the Sky for Rain is curated by Sohrab Mohebbi, Curator, with Kyle Dancewicz, Director of Exhibitions and Programs.

Searching the Sky for Rain is made possible with financial support from the Mondriaan Fund, the public cultural funding organization focusing on visual arts and cultural heritage. Additional support is provided as part of the Dutch Culture USA program by the Consulate General of the Netherlands in New York.

Lead underwriting support of SculptureCenter's Exhibition Fund has been generously provided by the Kraus Family Foundation with additional support by Toby Devan Lewis. SculptureCenter's programs and operations are provided by the Lambent Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation; public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council; the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; and the National Endowment for the Arts.

An early draft of the essay that appears in this catalog was written during a residency at the Rauschenberg Foundation in Captiva, Florida. Parts were developed for lectures at the Tyler School of Art, thanks to C.T. Jasper; the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, thanks to Lan Tuazon; and Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, thanks to my dear friend Cara Benedetto. Ever grateful to Bruce Hainley for taking the time to read an early draft and for his invaluable comments and critique. Thank you Julie Mehretu for conversations.

Grateful to all the artists who agreed to participate in this exhibition.

Sohrab Mohebbi

Board of Trustees

Andreas Beroutsos
Chair

Carol Bove
President

Danielle Anderman
Vice Chair

Robert K. Elliott
Vice Chair

Allen H. Brill
Treasurer

Candace Barasch
Sascha S. Bauer
Sanford Biggers
Benoit P. Bosc
Priscilla Vail Caldwell

Eleanor Cayre
Elizabeth Ellis
John H. Friedman

Arthur Kuijpers
Nate McBride
Adam McEwen

Eleanor Heyman Propp
Allison Rubler
Lisa Schiff

Diane Solomon
Fred Wilson

Staff

Christian Rattemeyer
Director

Allison Derusha
Director of Advancement

Sohrab Mohebbi
Curator

Kyle Dancewicz
Director of Exhibitions and
Programs

Cheryl Chan
Executive Office and
Development Associate

Jillian Scott
Communications and Marketing
Manager

Sophie Kaufman
Individual Giving and Events
Manager

Michaela Bathrick
Operations Manager

Tracy Keenan
Visitor Services Coordinator

Kiersten Lukason
Head Installer

Josué Guarionex Colón-Rosado
Installer

Madeleine Helwig
Visitor Engagement
Representative

Rohan Khanna
Visitor Engagement
Representative



44-19 Purves Street
Long Island City, NY 11101
+1 718 361 1750
sculpture-center.org

