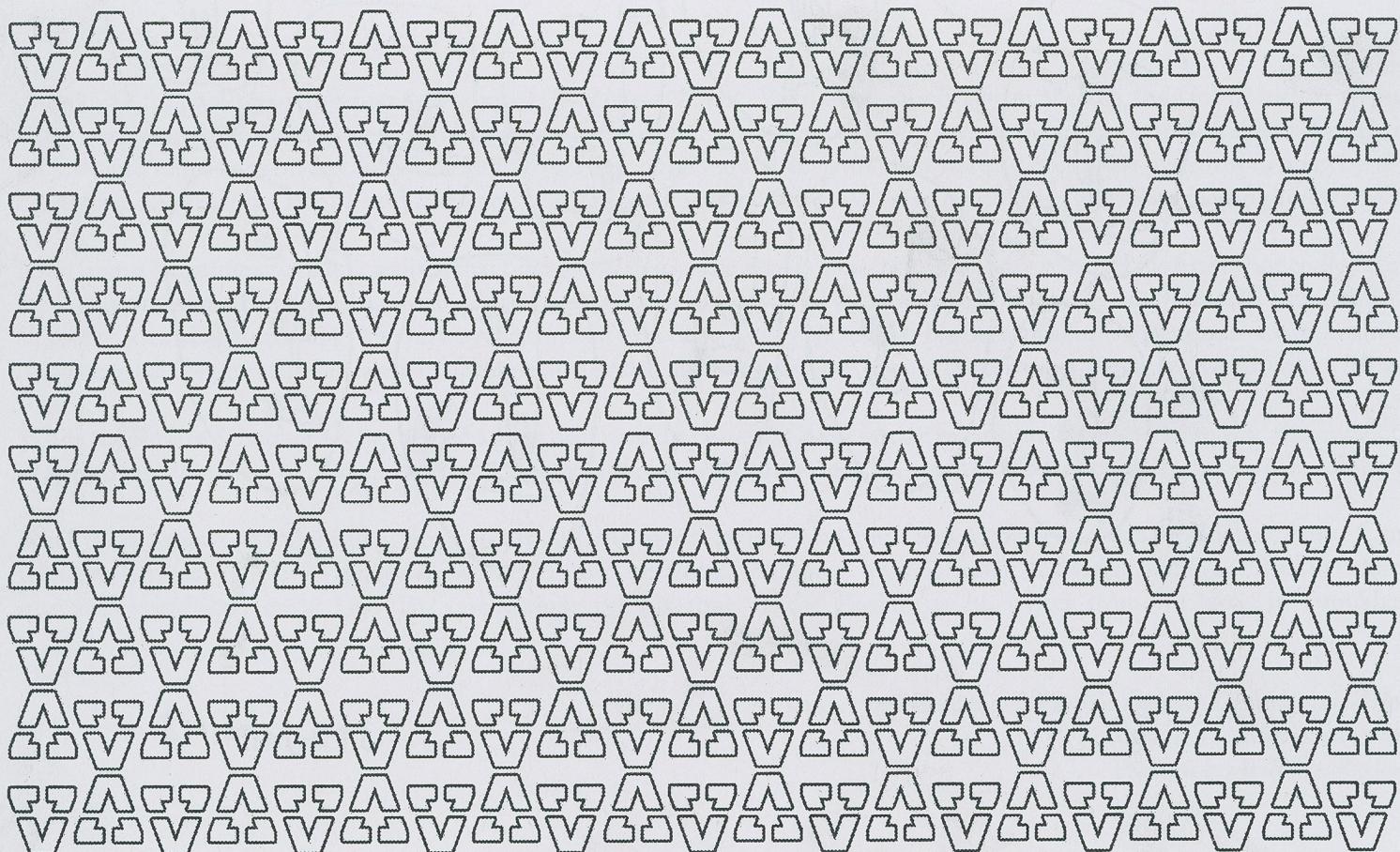


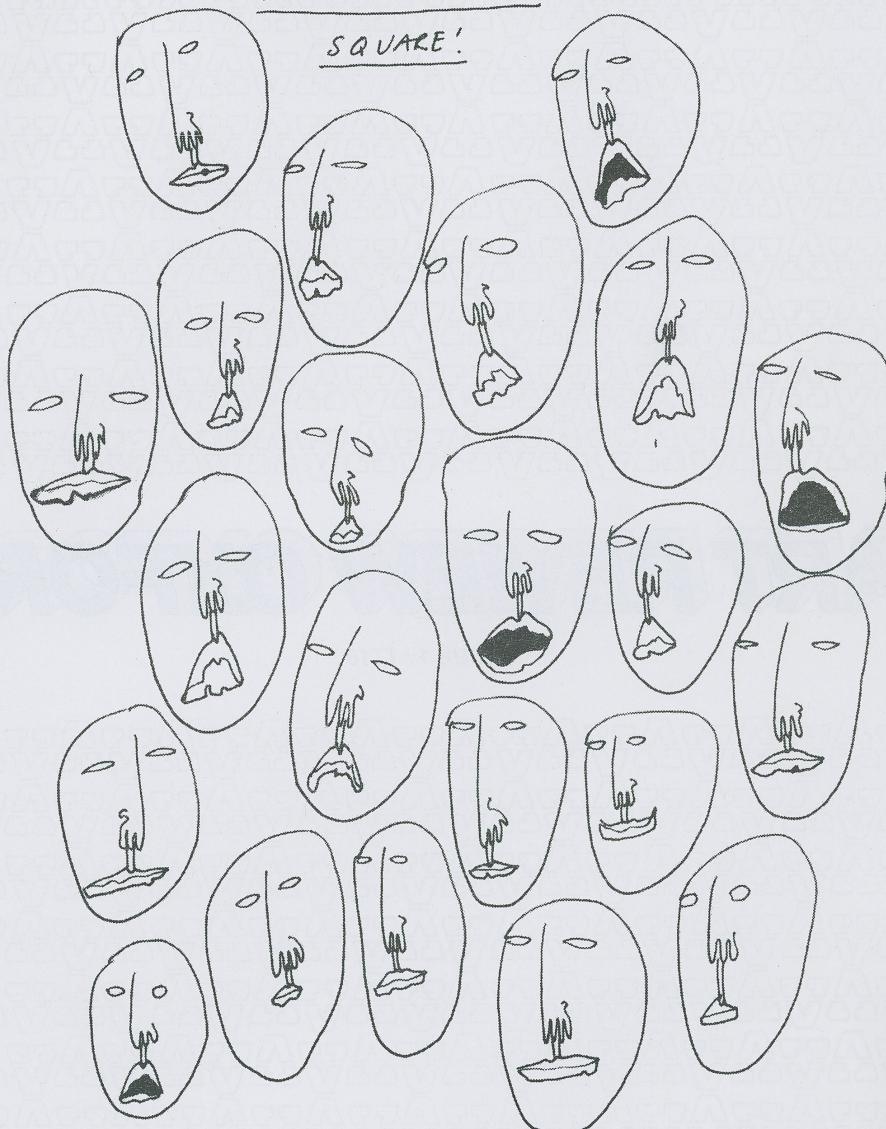
# ART REVIEW OXFORD

ISSUE 1 / TT18



## A FACIAL EXPRESSION REVIEW OF CLAES OLLE RUBEN

ÖSTLUND'S, 'THE



J.PALMER '18.

1

Jessie Palmer

CLAES OLLE RUBEN ÖSTLUND'S 'THE SQUARE'

Michael Kurtz

ARTIST-CURATORS: A NEW MOMENT IN ART (HISTORY)

Josie Perry

CRADLE DRAWINGS

Dan Fox

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Michael Kurtz

CINTHIA MARCELLE @ MODERN ART OXFORD

Claire Peckham

UNTITLED [EDINBURGH 2018]

Niamh Elain

ZANELE MUHOLI @ MUSEO DE ARTE MODERNO DE BUENOS AIRES

Harry Coday

MAKE MORE BORING ART

Mary Gatenby

TORTURED ABSTRACTIONS: RACHEL HOWARD @ NEWPORT STREET GALLERY

Amber Bal

BLACK DOLLS: THE COLLECTION OF DEBORAH NEFF @ LA MAISON ROUGE, PARIS

Jessie Palmer

DARREN BADER @ SADIE COLES HQ

Josie Perry

CRADLE DRAWINGS

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up this first ever copy of *Art Review Oxford*! With huge support from Martha and Colm, editors of our sister magazine *Art Review Glasgow* at the Glasgow School of Art, this new journal is a space for anybody to share their thoughts, reviews and reflections on any subject related to contemporary art. *ARO* is an informal and accessible platform to open up the discussion about art in Oxford, and an escape from the academic and lengthy texts a lot of us are so used to reading and writing.

It has been a long time since I first realised that Oxford needed an *Art Review* of its own, and today you read the first of hopefully many more issues to come. The process has been stressful at times as I realise I took on the challenge of branching out from *ARG*'s success with almost no idea what I was doing - let's just say they made it look easy. Having said that, it has been an absolute pleasure to work on something new that I hope can be the start of many more discussions, and that everyone (not just those studying art) can take a minute to enjoy.

While the Ruskin School of Art has helped a great deal with the launch of *ARO*, we are relying on donations from you, the reader, to keep the magazine alive. We'd love to keep sharing great short texts and drawings with you in glorious risograph print - so please donate!

You'll find reviews of exhibitions from all around the world as you read on: from Oxford to Paris to Buenos Aires. Contributions share not only political, aesthetic and curatorial critiques but personal musings, such as Ruskin alumnus and established critic Dan Fox's reflections on his time at the Ruskin as he writes from his desk in Brooklyn.

Harry

Contact us / donate via Paypal: [artreviewoxford@gmail.com](mailto:artreviewoxford@gmail.com)

Instagram: [@artreviewoxford](#)

Facebook: [ArtReviewOxford](#)

# ARTIST-CURATORS: A NEW MOMENT IN ART (HISTORY)

MICHAEL KURTZ

It has long been said that the artist has become secondary to the new playmaker of the art world, the curator. Tacita Dean and Anthea Hamilton, at the National Gallery and Tate Britain respectively, are resisting that notion by incorporating curated elements into their own artistic practices.

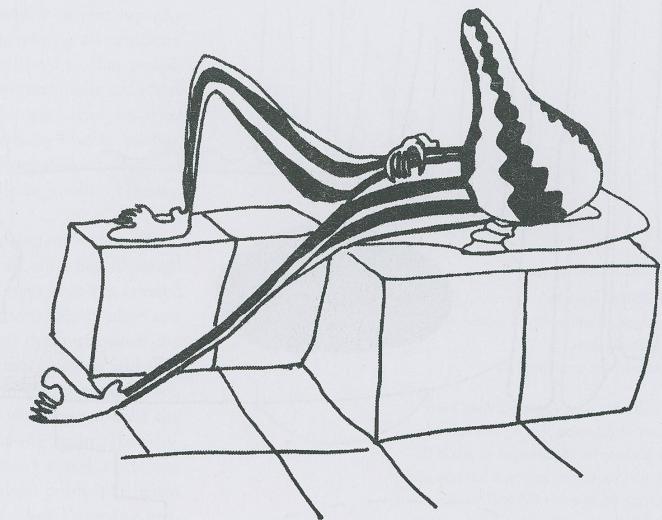
Dean's *Still Life* is a self-curated exhibition in which the artist's films are presented alongside works from the National gallery's collection. The display is based around visual affinities between distantly related artworks that are only superficially interesting, such as a *Cup of Water* by Zurbarán next to Wolfgang Tillmans' photograph of some discarded tupperware. The tone of the show is dictated by Dean's own moving images that are beautifully paced and witty but do not successfully relate to the other works. While *Still Life* is an entertaining meditation on the genre and its materiality, it is ultimately incoherent as the paintings seem to make up little more than a pretext for the display of the artist-curator's films. Such are the pitfalls of conducting your own fanfare.

Anthea Hamilton's installation, *The Squash*, is an altogether more successful piece as the Modernist sculptures she uses (by Henry Moore, Jean Ipoustéguy, among others) are not just placeholders, but wholly integrated elements. She has created a rippling field of white-tiled geometric shapes that stretch through the Tate's Duveen Galleries. Choreographed performers strut and pose across the space in costumes intended to reflect the stimulus for the work, a photograph of 'a person dressed as a vegetable'. A formal interplay is set up between the angularity of the space and the bulbous costumes and fluid movements of the dancers. The Modernist bronzes sit in tension with both elements, static like the architecture but organic

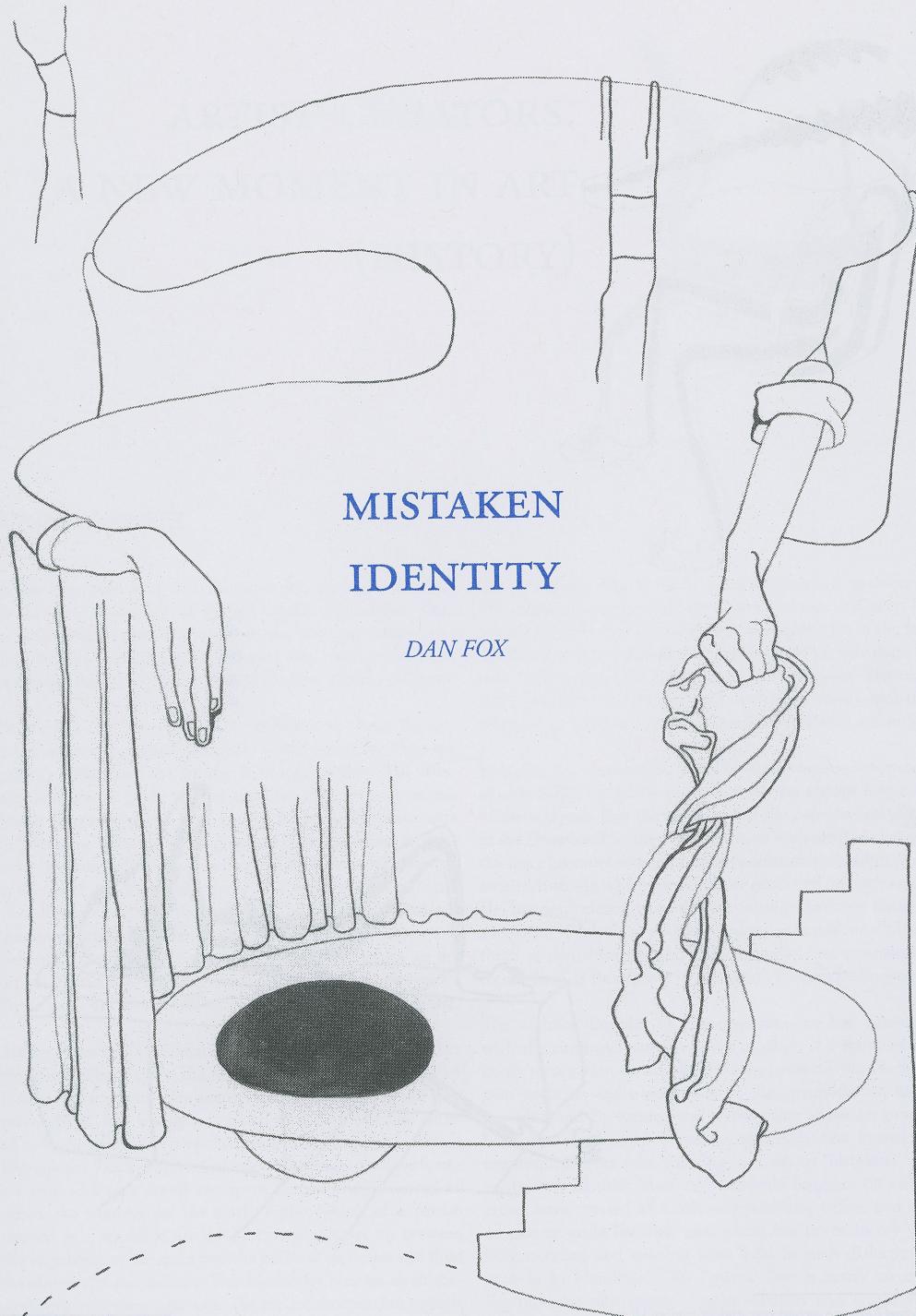
like the figures. This tension creates a precarious position for the sculptures as neither performance nor prop, and as art but not *the artwork*. Not only does this raise questions of the relationship between sculpture and performance art that share the same distorted plinths, it also makes the sculptures discordant in the space. This decenters the patriarchal past from which they originate in relation to the space into which they are pulled.

By basing her negotiations around the anthropomorphic shape of vegetables, Hamilton parodies both the serious formalism of the sculptors that she includes and the neo-classical setting of the Duveens. Her interventions hum with satirical charge as the space becomes an assemblage of performance, sculpture and architecture – in which meanings are generated through no single, hermetic element but the relationships between materials and forms. Sculptures are presented uncaptioned, as if to strip them of their histories and status as individual artworks and recast them as free agents in the artist's theatrical playground.

The archival impulse of contemporary art has converged with the curatorial activity of the museum – a moment that needs recognition as the latest transgression of the Duchampian tradition and a reification of the postmodernist use of reproduction. By turning the mechanisms of her art practice back onto art history, Hamilton generates new formal and taxonomical questions, making use of art historical remnants with all their 'aura' and semantic baggage. Of course, artists have curated all kinds of exhibitions before and edited past artworks for their own pieces but never, in my view, have curating and creating been held in such dialectic balance as in Hamilton's *The Squash*. This is surely an exciting moment that should inspire curators and artists alike.



Michael Kurtz is a second year student reading History of Art at Wadham College



I have finally admitted to myself, exactly 20 years after having left art school, that I am an artist. I blame Oxford University's Ruskin School of Fine Art for this two-decade identity crisis. When I was an undergraduate there way back in the last century, I was taught that it was OK to make films in the painting department, that performance art was a branch of sculpture, and writing a subcategory of drawing. I was made to attend lectures on topics including: the telepathic abilities of domestic pets, the biography of a homeless chess genius, the films of Satyajit Ray, anatomical drawing, noise music, writer's block, and the interior design work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. How did all of this relate? I had no idea.

I did learn that art is a branch of everything in the world. So many activities can be folded into the creative process; working in the studio, reading a novel, cooking a meal, chatting with fellow artists in the pub. Even sparring with the condescending law student who once told me how nice it must be doing my hobby for a degree was somehow a form of training for the way most of the world reacts when you tell them you're artist.

Still, this world-devouring philosophy didn't stop me spending many years telling myself that I was not an artist. You see, within a year of graduating, my art-making had run into a brick wall. I didn't know what to make, nor how to go about it. My ideas were mostly terrible. Added to that, I had moved to London and needed a job to pay the rent. I took an internship at *frieze* magazine, which was a counter-intuitive move for a brassica art grad: it paid only 50 quid a week and gave me a free lunch each day. I was sleeping on a friend's kitchen floor in order to afford the experience. (Don't ever let anyone tell you that class plays no role in building barriers to the arts. Unpaid internships should be illegal.) Then I got lucky: they gave me a job and for the next – gulp – 20 years. I worked there full-time as an editor in one capacity or another. It was at *frieze* that I began writing art criticism, figuring that I preferred thinking about the art other people made, rather than making it myself. I professionally self-identified as a critic for many years, even though I always carried the uneasy sense that I never fitted in amongst other 'proper' critics, those with art history degrees, journalism training, or whose idea of a good time was reading dense books on theory.

It was not until recently that it began to dawn on me that I had, almost without realizing, been making art all along. Through art writing, and friendships with artists, opportunities opened up that led me to write experimental fiction, theatre plays and to broaden my cultural criticism beyond the horizons of the visual arts. I have made short documentary videos and film essays, organized a music festival, co-founded a record label, recorded albums and played in bands who have toured the world. Last summer, I even started painting again. That disquieting feeling I'd always had that I wasn't a 'real' critic was only half-right. I am a 'real' critic because I publish criticism – you only become a thing by doing it – but I'm many other things too, and all of these activities are in dialogue with

one another. The designation 'artist' is loose, vague, perhaps freighted with too many unhelpful associations, but I'll take it.

If you enter the professional art world, you will find that for all it enjoys preaching about boundary-blurring and genre-smashing, it still loves to give everyone a label. You may find that you take a job as teacher or curator in order to earn a living, and your fellow professionals will identify you as such. Yet this does not mean that the music, fiction writing, dance, criticism, filmmaking, activism, poetry, acting, go-kart racing, LARPing, pinball-machine refurbishment, home-brew beer-making, bird-spotting, gardening, or whatever it is you also do creatively in evenings and weekends is a 'hobby.' These activities are all part of who you are.

In retrospect I concede that the condescending law student was correct: it was indeed nice back then to study something I enjoyed, and all these years later, it still is nice to be doing something I love. (Play the long-game and you might just win.) My thoroughly confusing education at the Ruskin taught me to enjoy wearing many different hats, and I would not have had it any other way.

---

Dan Fox is a Ruskin School of Art alumnus, author, and editor-at-large at *frieze* magazine

*Left page: JOSIE PERRY,*  
Ruskin School of Art alumnus, selected from  
*Cradle drawings*, 2017  
See more at [josieperry.com](http://josieperry.com)

The *Cradle Drawings* are a reflection on the physical and psychic states of the terminally ill body; its dependence on medical apparatus, and the temporal stagnancy of a hospice environment. The full series of 20 drawings has acted as a catalyst for a larger body of work, in which sculptural counterparts are developing.

## CINTHIA MARCELLE

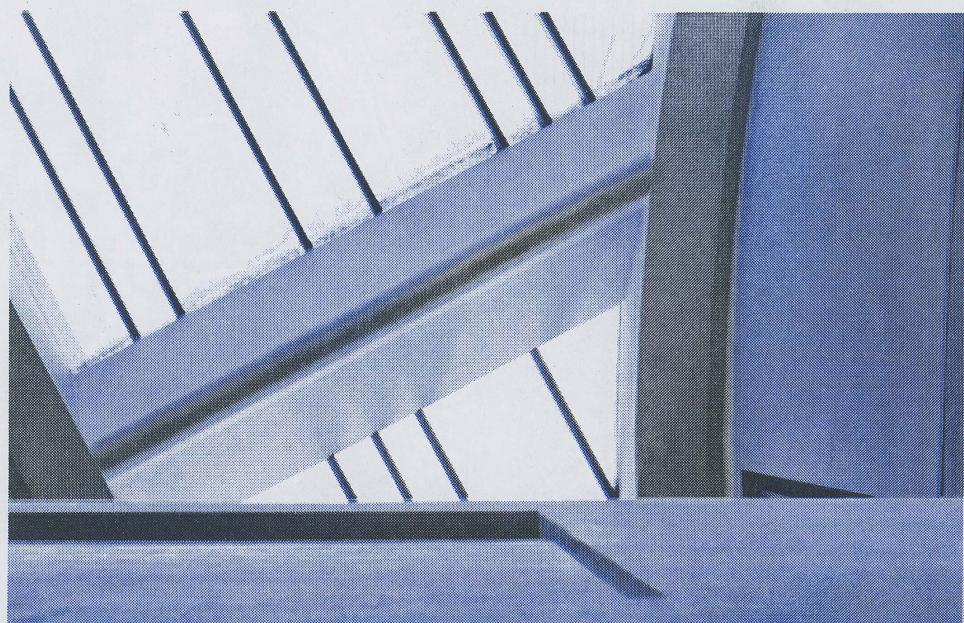
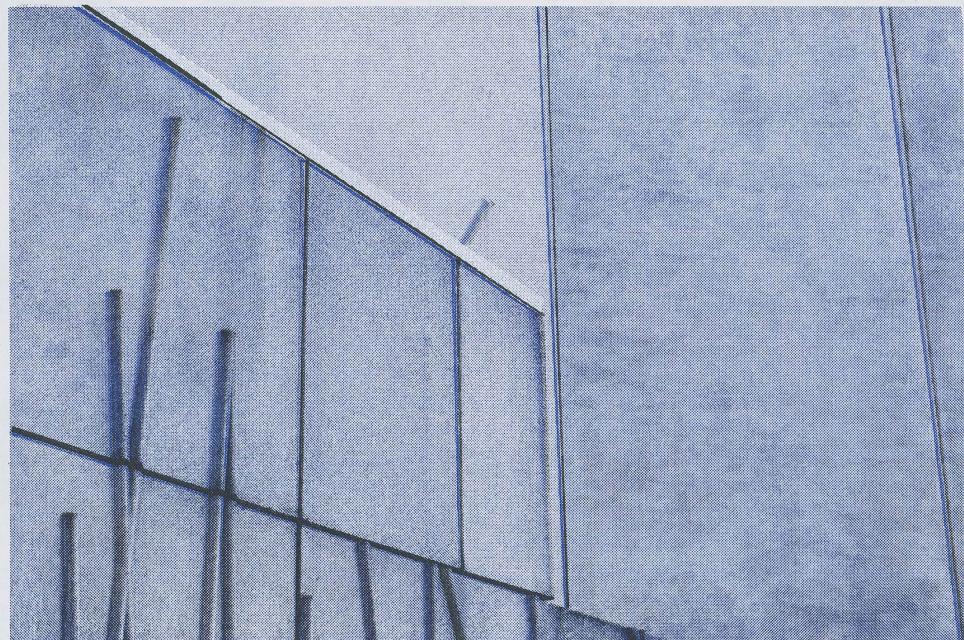
### *The Family in Disorder*

MODERN ART OXFORD

Cinthia Marcelle's installation at MAO is a captivating essay in twenty-first-century Constructivism. Its engagement with the politics of occupational space and the materiality of protest in São Paolo and Oxford is, I think, sincere and thoughtful. The artist created two barricades made up of an assortment of materials, 'both natural and industrial', one in each of the gallery's main rooms. She then invited six gallery technicians to use the provided resources 'to occupy' the larger of the two spaces, leaving the other stock-pile untouched.

As the name of the work seems to acknowledge, the process of creation was clearly riddled with aesthetic indecision and conflict which has resulted in an expression less of material capability than artistic frustration. This, it seems to me, is the strength of the work; the viewer is confronted with a dense, unintelligible space and forced to adapt and eventually discover its subtle repetitions, rich textures and occasional moments of unconventional beauty. As a genuine experiment in collective creativity, resulting in partial revelations despite confusion and compromise, *The Family in Disorder* is a convincing reflection of political activism in the contemporary world.

MICHAEL KURTZ



*Untitled [Edinburgh 2018]*

CLAIRE PECKHAM

Claire Peckham is an artist currently studying on the MFA course at the Ruskin School of Art

# ZANELE MUHOLI

*Somnyama Ngonyama [Hail, the Dark Lioness!]*

MUSEO DE ARTE MODERNO DE BUENOS AIRES

NIAMH ELAIN

**"How is it that one face can represent, and look so similar to, so many others?"**

Zanele Muholi

That is not the thought that comes to mind as you walk around the second floor of Buenos Aires' Museum of Modern Art, home to Zanele Muholi's photographic exhibition *Somnyama Ngonyama* until June. The artist's face becomes imminently recognizable; not least because of the sheer amount of self-portraits hanging on the gallery walls, but rather due to the compelling nature of their gaze. Unwavering, majestic: the artist's face is familiar, but no less chilling, in each new portrait that confronts you.

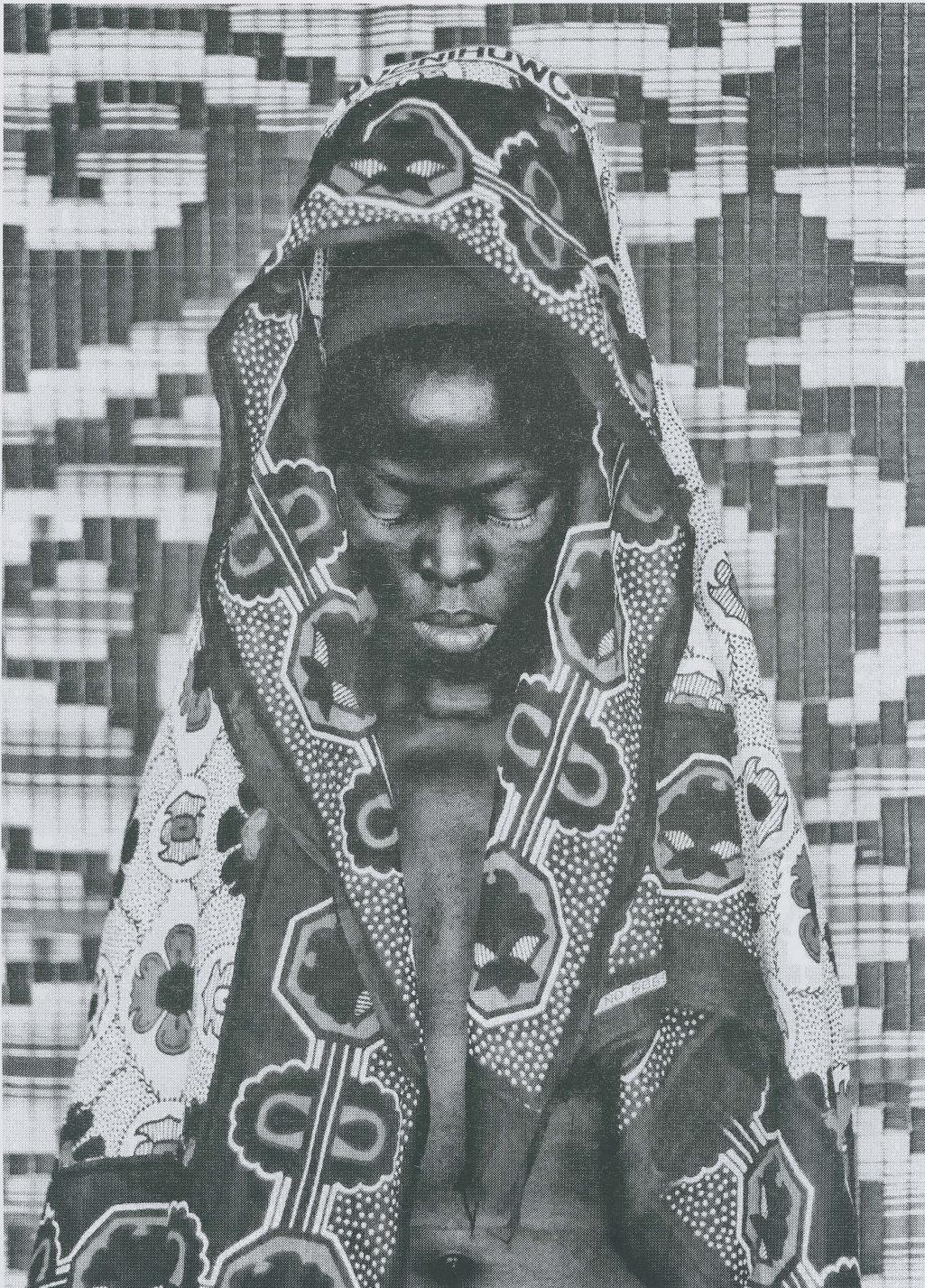
And that's what they do: they confront you. The aim of the exhibition is to highlight the issues faced by people who, like Muholi, are part of certain communities which are often overlooked, or worse, openly oppressed. Born, raised, and still living in South Africa, Muholi highlights the homicides and homophobia which, despite the country's ostensibly progressive equality laws, are frightfully common occurrences for its LGBTQ+ population. The artist and activist describes *Somnyama Ngonyama* as a project mapping their experiences as a queer person of colour. Most are their own, others are based on media reports of hate crimes and discrimination.

When you finally manage to tear your eyes away from theirs, you notice what they're wearing in these portraits. Traditional South African dress is reworked with strange materials, from sponges and rugs to plastic bags and masking tape. But

these items are not as random as you'd think: the meaning behind them is either metaphorical or charged with historical significance. If an incident made Muholi feel "tangled and confused", they might convey this through covering their head in a mass of yarn. But the rubber tyres that adorn their neck in one portrait are a reference to 'necklacing', a brutal form of killing used during South Africa's apartheid era.

In some portraits, the body itself is the only material. Muholi lies on a bed for *Bana ii*, naked and curled up in the foetal position. Being the only photograph which doesn't include their face, it is markedly more touching than the others, which are defiant and challenging. Yet, despite the fragility of such photographs as this one, Muholi never craves pity.

Their work demands visibility for those who seldom get it: "Too often I find we are being mimicked, and distorted by the privileged other. Hence I am producing this photographic document to encourage people to be brave enough to occupy spaces, brave enough to take on that visual text, those visual narratives." Indeed, in taking self-portraits, Muholi succeeds in eliminating the gaze of the 'other', and these blown-up, glossy, and intensely high-contrast black-and-white photographs are not only an unapologetic expression of anger, but also an assertion of autonomy.



Zanele Muholi, *Bester IV, Mayotte*, 2015 | © Zanele Muholi. Courtesy STEVENSON Gallery.

# MAKE MORE BORING ART

AND



THERE ISN'T TIME

Boring isn't fun. Boring is dull, monotonous and uninteresting. That's why, in 1971, John Baldessari declared (rather, he instructed a group of students at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design to write), "I will not make any more boring art". Just a year earlier, the conceptual artist burnt all of his paintings made between 1953 and 1966, and baked their ashes into a batch of cookies.

For most of us, boredom is when we have nothing to do, or when whatever we are doing is tedious and uninspiring. But, Baldessari, now regarded as one of the founders of Conceptual Art, reminds us that boring can be a far more important thing than we might first imagine. Okay, his black and white photographs accompanied by short captions (A paper clip, "And"; or a vase of flowers, "There isn't time") may look boring - but they are very much the opposite. The artist continuously captures the complexity of our understanding of words and images, and reduces it, with a charming wit, into the most simple form possible. All of his image and text works make us stop and think; and that definitely isn't boring.

Boring is in fact slow, empty and full of potential. Boring gives us time to think, reflect and decelerate - and that is time that we should value enormously. Believe the cliché: we live in the Digital Age, and the world is moving faster than ever. Art is one of few respite, and it really would be silly not to take advantage.

Art galleries are not train stations, they aren't newspapers and they aren't Facebook. An inherent value of contemporary art, and the spaces that display it, is to deny the pressure to instantly inform, entertain and persuade us in the way that almost everything else in our lives is designed to do. This is what makes art so alluring, and is exactly why I'm interested in exploring the potential of slow, boring art.

I admit, boring art might not always be the best art. While there is virtue in the way that boring digital art can contradict the technological speed and efficiency on which it relies to be produced and displayed, this paradoxical relationship might not be of interest for other media. A boring drawing won't hold the same value: its slow content is unlikely to challenge our preconceptions of the medium itself, and the same rules are likely not to apply. There is foggy ground as soon as text (arguably a branch of drawing) is involved - as Baldessari proves in his provocative use of aesthetically boring typography and monochrome photography. But what about painting, sculpture, or performance?

It seems that ultimately this boring balance relies on ideas of speed. Perhaps time-based media is the most compatible with slow subject matter, while drawing and painting desire acceleration. Of course, it depends - and as you'd expect it's impossible to set any objective criteria here. But for now, I challenge you: slow down, make more boring art.

HARRY CODAY

*Harry Coday* is editor of ARO and Fine Art student at the Ruskin School of Art/St. Edmund Hall

## TORTURED ABSTRACTIONS

RACHEL HOWARD @ NEWPORT STREET GALLERY

MARY GATENBY

Entering *Repetition is Truth – Via Dolorosa* at the Newport Street Gallery is like entering a Church; the works function as vehicles of contemplation, the gelatinous glossy surfaces acting as sites of reflection and refraction. Yet Rachel Howard's fourteen Stations of the Cross seem, at first glance, to refute the concept of the Via Dolorosa: the slow process of making, the months taken to layer the gloss paint, and the 180° turn between each coat, gives the paintings the impression being suspended in time, delivering no crucifixion and no catharsis.

Yet, out of your initial sightline is a study, described by Howard as a 'sketch', of the 2003 photograph of the torture Ali Shallal al-Qaisi by the US Army. The rapidity and violence of Howard's line coupled with the contemporary political relevance of the image immediately forces the paintings into a personal present. As a result, the viewer begins their journey along the Via Dolorosa in a state akin to the citizens of Jerusalem that lined the way from the Antonia Fortress to Calvary, observing the torture of a political prisoner. The initial study establishes the figurative, and Howard states that repetition is truth, yet there is no repetition of the figure in the works, raising the question of whether figurative painting can ever capture the

tortured abstractions of the reality of the Abu Ghraib photos. Despite the apparent sublime formlessness of Howard's works, slowly, inevitably, the mind places the crucified figure within them. The layering of the varnish, unlike Rothko's windows and tunnels, block rather than reveal. At first the malevolent God of Howard's childhood seems to be absent, but as the plinth on which Shallal al-Qaisi was placed during his torture emerges from the gelatinous paint it takes on the character of the dark cloud which occupied her imagination during her childhood.

The artist Rachel Howard has a deeply complex religious history. As a child Howard's God was a dark cloud of sin and punishment, this powerful fear was gradually tamed by her Quaker schooling, which replaced chaos with order. The absence of numbering, which at first seems odd given the works' basis on the Stations of the Cross, gives a glimpse of Howard's respect for Quakerism both in the rejection of rules and hierarchy and the focus on meditation and silence. The "bloodied edge" of each painting bears testament to a more complex statement than the simple blotting out of sin. The occasional glimpses of unadulterated, raw red on the side of the canvas functions as a reminder that art cannot to provide answers or healing, but can provide truth.

Left top: *Goya Series, And*, John Baldessari 1997 © 2018 John Baldessari  
Left bottom: *Goya Series, There Isn't Time*, John Baldessari, 1997  
© 2018 John Baldessari

*Mary Gatenby* is in her second year studying Fine Art at St. Edmund Hall and is editor of the Edgar Wind Society's *Oculus* journal

# BLACK DOLLS: THE COLLECTION OF DEBORAH NEFF

LA MAISON ROUGE, PARIS

When I first read about Deborah Neff's *Black Dolls* at La Maison Rouge in Paris, I was intrigued. In part, this was disbelief at the existence of a collection of 200 African-American dolls from 1840-1940, given that in my childhood the only 'coloured' doll I ever laid eyes on was Sasha from Bratz...

Despite the clear explanation of the exhibition's content by its title, entering Maison Rouge deals a blow. Dolls are dotted around a dimly lit room, divided into groups of varying sizes, mounted on podiums and backlit so that their shadows adorn the walls. Darkness shrouds the room. The dolls' bobbed fabric, droopy arms, sad eyes and sombre expressions (sometimes complete with tears on their cheeks) are perhaps so striking because they are antithetical to the classic fine-featured, porcelain American doll. Neff explains that almost all the dolls were handmade by African-American nannies, not only for their own children, but also for those they looked after. At the time, no coloured doll existed in the mainstream market - a revealing example of America's white-washed self-perception and how this was perpetuated through the generations.

The second room expands on this with photos of children of both races posing with their dolls. Bizarrely, not a single photo of an African-American girl contains a black doll. This jarred with the Marcus Garvey quote at the entrance of the room: "Mothers give your children dolls that look like them to play with and cuddle so that they learn to love and care for their own children". Garvey's point of identification with one's doll problematises famous

theories surrounding dolls and female identity. Many intellectuals such as Simone de Beauvoir and Rousseau do not consider the role of the doll to be an inanimate best friend, a twin or an idol. Instead, they posit that it represents the woman that a girl seeks to become: "*Elle attend le moment d'être sa poupée elle-même*" - Rousseau. But what are the long-term psychological effects of having a doll that you view as your adult self and the feminine ideal when it differs in race to you? To what extent do you internalise this ideal of femininity and then spend the rest of your life unsuccessfully attempting to embody it?

In the centre of this room were the 'topsy-turvy dolls' that have preoccupied many exhibitions reviewers. These two-headed dolls flip over at the waist and are joined by a single skirt—a black head on one end, a white one on the other. The most common interpretation was that these represented 'black and white being doomed to lead parallel existences, never looking each other in the eye'. Another speculation was that it presented an 'evil doll' and a 'good doll', playing into stereotypes of black and white character. My personal interpretation of these topsy-turvy dolls is that they exemplify the conflict of the BME individual who internalises 'Western' cultural values and ideals but can never fully live up to them. Such a paradox seems to have unfortunate consequences including inferiority complexes, denial, eurocentrism and most simply, irreconcilable internal conflict.

*Amber Bal* is in her third year reading French and Classics at Jesus College

DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS A WORK OF ART?



DO YOU FIND DATING APPS JUST AREN'T UP TO YOUR STANDARDS!?



DARREN BARDER HAS BEEN DATING ART OBJECTS OF HIS OWN WITH OTHER WORKS BY ANCA MUNTEANU RIMNICI, MICHAEL E. SMITH AND MANY OTHER ARTISTS.

MAYBE YOU SHOULD ASK HIM FOR SOME ADVICE?



DARREN BARDER, 'MORE OR LESS', SAOIE COLES HQ.  
13TH JAN - 29TH MARCH 2018.

Above: Jessie Palmer

