

# SCAN

*by CoLab*

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# MICHAEL MOGATAS: THE LIMITATIONS OF PROCESS

HANNAH DOUCET

*Mogatas is an emerging artist and co-founder of the now closed C space gallery in Winnipeg, Canada.*



*big issues*, inkjet transfer on canvas, 36" x 24", 2014.

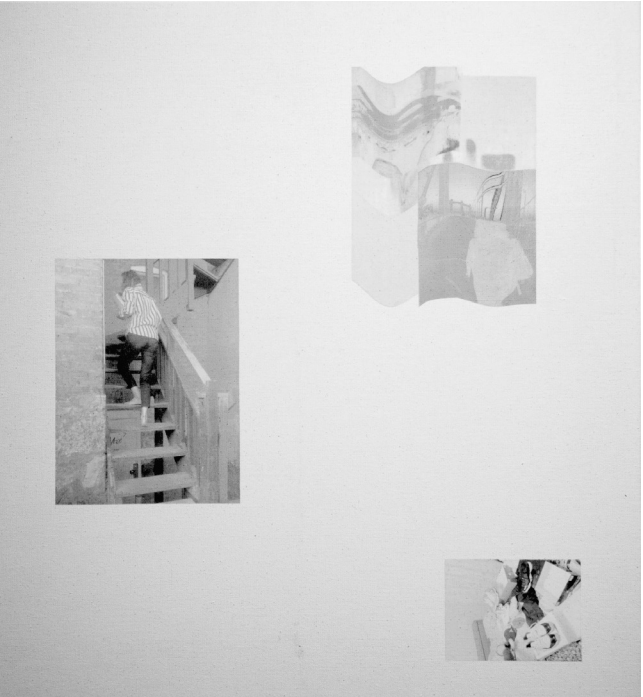
Photography and painting have a strong relationship that has been maintained both in collaboration and opposition throughout the history of photography. Many artists work within the intersection of painting and photography, highlighting a porousness between the two mediums. Painters going back as far as Rauschenberg in the 1950's, used photography as a representational tool within paintings. Alternatively, photo-conceptualists such as Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace rely heavily on tropes of painting in the creation of their photo-based work. In line with this larger painting-photography trajectory, Michael Mogatas' new paintings feature photography prominently and directly. He creates work using expanses of raw stretched fabric and small photographic transfers onto the surface of the cloth. The works are clean, beautiful and alluring.

In Mogatas' new work he completely eliminates the process of painting, an essential element of his earlier work. His current method involves an iphone, low-resolution paper print outs, a photocopier, and iron-on photo-transfer paper. In some cases, Mogatas works directly with an image and in others he distorts them. He manipulates the source material by editing the coloration and saturation in Photoshop, creating photographic compositions in a photocopier, or placing images alongside one another on the scanning bed and moving them as they are being scanned. The actions create softly colored photographic blurs that appear as stylized wavering strokes familiar to painting. His methods preserve a tactile presence in the final works. Mogatas appreciates the imperfections and limitations of this process by embracing the mistakes that occur with the printing of his home-office inkjet printer. Akin to American artist Wade Guyton, Mogatas relishes the snags and streaks that occur in the printing process of the photographic transfers. The material technique he explores is crude; the plasticity of the transfer paper forces the photograph to sit on the surface of the fabric, replete with bubbling and wrinkling. Mogatas' work has a strong relationship to technology, engaging iphones, computers, photocopiers, and printers in its creation. Imperfections present within Mogatas' work highlight the fallibility of certain machinery. He engages with these seemingly inevitable failures and bends the technology to fulfill his intentions. The transfer of the photographs directly onto fabric and stretched on wooden frames occur only after editing. Mogatas' subdued palette, dominated by pastels, beiges and greys, with some images verging on monochromatic. Painterly abstraction is further brought to mind through the discoloring that occurs both through the editing process and the application of the images to colored fabric. The connection between the photographs and reality becomes further distanced. The shift in hue and small scale of the photographs force a remove between the viewer and the imagery, disallowing the viewer to insert themselves into the images. Within some works Mogatas bridges this distance through the insertion of text alongside the abstracted imagery, inviting the viewer to apply meaning to the images.

The pairing of text and image reveals itself as an essential reoccurring element in Mogatas work. In *big*

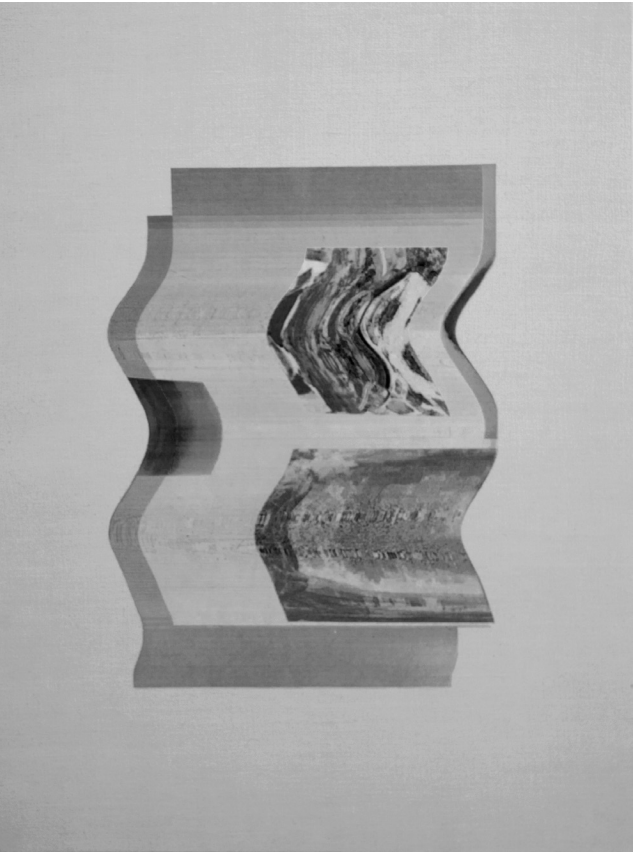
*issues* Mogatas couples an image of a woman's torso in blue and green hues, with the words BIG ISSUES, BIG ISSUES... repeating itself four times in an exaggerated pink font. Mogatas names John Baldesarri as an influence that is apparent in his treatment of text. Baldesarri, best known for his text paintings which aimed to interrogate the nature of painting itself, once said, "It seemed to me that a word could be an image or an image could be a word. They could be interchangeable. I couldn't in my mind prioritize one over the other". In Mogatas' work the words appear in amplified fonts, reminiscent of the clip art or stock fonts found in commercial documents. The cartoonish aesthetic in repetition becomes an image in its own right. In *Quickie* the text reads "QUICKIE STANDING UP QUICKIE AGAINST A WALL", the word "quickie" exaggerated in bubble letter font. Mogatas uses the sexual term as a double entendre, referencing sex as well as painting. Devoid of the tedious and laborious process once involved in the creation of his work, Mogatas' paintings stand proudly against the wall. While his works no longer feature paint in a literal sense, Mogatas' practice is about painting more than ever before. His critique of the process-based nature of painting is an investigation of the medium itself.

The images Mogatas uses for his paintings are found by sifting through his personal archive of iphone snapshots. In Mogatas' older works found photographs and Internet sourced visuals were used as appropriated



*Untitled #3*, inkjet transfer on canvas, 28" x 26", 2015.

reference imagery for paintings. Now he appropriates his own. When he sifts through his iphone to find source material for his work, usually enough time has passed that they have become removed from the original moment in which they were captured. In *Untitled #3* multiple image transfers appear alongside one another; a red-hued woman climbs steps, remnants of a shopping excursion are strewn on the floor, and what appears to be a bridge is superimposed over other blurred, graying images. The images feel vague, like distant memories that cannot enforce a cohesive narrative. Mogatas has long wrestled with the concept of painting versus photography as mediums of representation within his practice. Mogatas' work embodies an ode to, and rejection of, painting with paint. The choice of stretched colored fabrics, although devoid of paint, make reference to color field paintings. Despite this reference, the works maintain a critical distance from abstract painting via Mogatas' use of photography as a representational tool. Michael Mogatas' newest works succeed in maintaining an elegant tension between photographic and painting processes. He breaks down the elements that constitute the conventional understanding of a painting; support, surface, and image, and presents it back to us in a reductive, surprising and thoughtful way.



*Untitled #5*, inkjet transfer on canvas, 16" x 12", 2015.



# CURATING ON THE FLAT AND DOUBLE-FLAT: A CONVERSATION WITH CHARLES ESCHE

SHEPHERD STEINER

Charles Esche is director of the Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven Holland. He is co-founder and co-director with Mark Lewis of Afterall Journal and Books, and is the past curator of the 31st São Paulo Biennial (2014), the 5th Ljubljana Triennial (2010), 2nd and 3rd Riwaq Biennials (2009 and 2007) and the 9th Istanbul Biennial (2005) among many other things. Along with six other institutions he has steered the Van Abbe to help establish *L’Internationale*, which “proposes a space for art within a non-hierarchical and decentralized internationalism, based on the values of difference and horizontal exchange among a constellation of cultural agents, locally rooted and globally connected.”

Shep Steiner: Are there significant trends, conjunctures of events, particular artists, ideas or theorists you are moving upon?

Charles Esche: I just am rather dubious about the art world at the moment, largely because it seems to have become quite conservative and conformist at the same time. It is increasingly controlled by collectors/dealers who are simply the least interesting part of the art ecology for me. It’s fine they exist but - like the over privileging of the economy more generally - their position is out of balance with the creative energy of the artist, the thoughtful response of the critic and the intelligent mediation of the curator. Collectors/dealers seem to want to pin art down like a dead butterfly and restrict its transgressiveness except where they approve. Recent Biennale experiences - Sydney, São Paulo - prove my point directly but it is often a more insidious influence that makes artists, curators and critics curl up in defensive formations and limit their imagination. Collectors/dealers shrink the art world’s agency in general, restricting to perform already defined functions like - investment grade asset; status symbol; icon of largesse; pimp vehicle and sign of a substantial personal hinterland. These all may be functions of art but they are not the ones I most enjoy and they are mostly personally focused, stripped of their potential social or political context and meaning. As I can no longer suspend my disbelief in the autonomous object (but always see the context and environment of production and reception at the same time), I

can no longer bring myself to invest my small intellectual capital in such artworks.

Instead, I have grown even more interested in institutions and I am very charmed by Gerald Raunig’s analyses, particularly when he talks about the post-social democratic state and how it needs to be reinvented. He suggests art institutions, clinging to the vestiges of criticality and the ‘free space’ of art might be the places where the state can be remade from within and using what is left of its patrician socialist infrastructure - in West Europe at least. Also thinking about Stephen Wright and Usership and Elizabeth Povinelli and indigeneity— especially if it could be applied to Europe. In terms of artists, some recently discovered Anti-podean folk include Luke Willis Thompson, Tom Nicholson, Nick Mangan, Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hilal. But also I am proud of the Van Abbe’s recent program: Ahmet Öğüt, Hito Steyerl and Renzo Martens. There is Mapa Teatro from Bogotá. From São Paulo, Clara Ianni, also a filmmaker called Rodrigo Siquera who does re-enactments of trauma, which are a bit like Joshua Oppenheimer but in his own home culture.

SS: Are there specific possibilities you put into play at the Sao Paulo Biennial that you would like to follow up on or animate elsewhere?

CE: I am quite proud of the protests we generated against São Paulo. I think, given the above, it is only protest, ideally from within the art world that would make me feel like I was doing a good job. Dismissive reviews and attempts to ignore the events in São Paulo, collectors writing letters boycotting artists in the show—I’d like that to continue.

Afterword:

Teasing out a number of points is worthwhile if we are to flesh out Esche’s curatorial practice and its possibilities. First, I think it’s important to hear how present Esche’s worries are about the art market. In Winnipeg there is little or no market and there is a lot of talk and energy going into getting one going, so the unevenness of the general terrain is worth keeping in mind at the local level. Second, I am struck by how pragmatic

Esche’s negotiation of the market is. His metaphor of the “art ecology” seems a common sense approach to nurturing some aspects of this ecology and not others. For him the art market is Manitoba’s version of pedigree seeds developed by Monsanto: it doesn’t make the best bread and it definitely flattens the already mono-cultural horizon of the Canadian prairies. Third, his organizational position behind the scenes of the museum and biennial economy has given him a uniquely critical perspective on the notion of autonomy. Apparently, the great historical defenders of arts autonomy only saw it in the museum, and were simply not privy as to how it got there. It seems the art school (as one small part of the larger apparatus of the art institution) has to introduce this question early on so that autonomy does not remain the favored trope. Taken as a whole all of this relates to a theoretical presupposition Esche brings up: given the weight and pervasiveness of the market, its mediating role in shaping and channeling creative energy, it appears that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s emphasis on, and theory of flatness has more of a purchase on trends and events than ever. Esche mentions the work of Austrian theorist Gerald Raunig, who offers one of the sharpest positions of the crypto-Deleuzian/Guattarian type, partly because he is constantly trying to solve real problems. Raunig’s argument in “Flatness Rules” is for a critical horizontality that is “common.” This relates to the kind of work that Esche believes the art institution must do. Thus Esche’s emphasis on the protests generated at São Paulo, but also the potential the institution of art has for remaking the state from within. Obviously the reinvention of the state is a long way off, nevertheless it is tempting to see protest from within the art world as a baby step toward this larger end. Esche’s notion of curating, like Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of critique before him would have us both think the art object and extend the art field horizontally.

Esche’s horizontal logic here is catchy, because when he brings up Elizabeth Povinelli on indigeneity and Steven Wright on use, we can also think of these positions as ways one can horizontally deconstruct the autonomous art object. Seeing the art object horizontally in terms of the viewer’s response or use, makes the art object less autonomous by perceiving it as part of a larger economy, machine or relation—basically the insight of minimalism. Povinelli’s work on “The Governance of the Prior” presses horizontality in a slightly different way, isolating presuppositions in respondents that are located up-stream from content as such. Nevertheless both amount to an emphasis

on the viewer as a mobile institution that is horizontally attached to the art object, and moreover ripe with possibilities for excavation and problems to dispatch—in Wright spectatorship is traded in for user-ship; in Povinelli the “governance of the prior” is brought to light in order to reveal a signifying chain that undoes any claim to sovereignty made by the subject. Both offer critique that is clearly related to the rhetoric of horizontality—especially if one takes the object-viewer axis as the crux. However, the lines of flight from autonomy are complicated; meaning horizontality and depth are also twined together. This is especially true if we hold onto the Lacanian insight that the subject has no nature beyond the contingent laws of language through which it is constituted. The subject is always a technical prosthetic of the object, let alone that subject’s machinic interdependence in a system of relations. My point here is to mark a certain prohibition against the ontological in many examples of post-Deleuzian/post Guattarian politics, and in fact in as many versions of art, criticism and curating. Horizontality is how politics typically gets played out in the art field—whether as off-site exhibition, social practice, the de-emphasis of painting or photography as static art for durational practices like film, sound art over the visual, indigeneity, class, etc.—and for good reason. Raunig relates verticality to “a deepening of the conservative conserving museum.” His call to arms like Esche’s involvement in *L’Internationale* is for “the flat re-composition of the common.”

Politically, I like everything being offered for argument here except Raunig’s doing away with depth. I abide by the horizontal stress Wright places on ontology through “double ontology,” but additionally want to supplement the horizontal by going deeper. I want to hold onto depth—think alongside Esche thinking alongside Povinelli where the controlling metaphor of spatiality is replaced by the temporal metaphor of firstness and anteriority and figured as indigeneity—and think you can do so because of the kind of pressure that critics—in the first place, Jacques Derrida and Paul De Man, and now philosophers including Deleuzians like Erin Manning and Brian Masumi—have placed on the ontological. For Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, ontology is a linguistic artifact: the letter or word that is deep (ontologically loaded) is always seen beside a flat horizon next to it—another word, a white space, the gutter, what lies outside the institution of the book, etc. As in the case of curating no doubt the protests get louder the further away from autonomy and ontology things stray. In short, ontology has not been attached to the singular truth that Heidegger believed only the



poets had glimpsed for quite some time. The ontological drive for buried truth is now to be understood with a flat horizon built into it, where the truth of the thing or object shades off into other things that are less arty, not typeset, staged or exhibited for visual display. Flow in the exhibition environment as well as porosity between the inside and the outside is one option here that all recent Biennials have begun opting for. Collaboration, which has been a recurrent motif of Esche’s curating is another way of spreading things thin. Fostering young artists, working at the local level, injecting energy into emergent scenes, using the art field and institution as models for political process, establishing the culture of biennials as long-term, rather than short term proposals, extending the art field into conversation and the writing about art, all directions Esche has been consistently pursuing for the last 15 years are further ways he has operated on the flat.

Horizontality as critique is nothing new. Critique has always involved unpacking the vertical strata of society and laying it flat. In some cases where flatness is the prevailing mythos as was the case in America in 1950s it was necessary to envision a “Power Elite” as a kind of Upper Crust of Middle Class society and no doubt the current myth of the Network society—take Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World from the Witte de With—requires a little more altitude built into its model as well. In Jacques Rancière’s terms critique as separation is founded upon a similar flattening of verticality, though always with vertiginous complications attached, for paradox and conflictedness are two of his master tropes. In *The Politics of Aesthetics* what does he do if not peel down and back the regimes of visibility that constitute Athenian Democracy. The lowly slave who performs labor for (and beneath) the upright citizen of the Demos is placed beside the citizen and so too is the artist and the shoemaker; a flattening that situates the critic on the track (or better at the opening of the rabbit hole) that is the ethical and aesthetic regimes. Here is Marx on the matter from the “Supplementary Texts” that accompany *The German Ideology*.

“That the secular basis detaches itself from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the cleavages and self-contradictions within the secular basis. The latter must, therefore, in itself be both understood in its contradiction and revolutionized in practice...after the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and practice.”

For Marx critique “consists in dissolving the religious world into its secular basis,” and further to continue the work of ideological de-mystification beyond the inversion of Feuerbach, the secular basis has itself to be “understood in its contradiction.” Ladders, scaffolding or a wrecking ball are not required for this work! One needs yet another tier in an already tiered theory of textuality! Thus Walter Benjamin’s resolve at confronting the dizzy heights in his notes on apotheosis from *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiel*. The elevation of Baroque ceiling painting is brought back down to earth. And then with the symbol in hand, a tool kit equipped with allegory gestures back and down to even mistier origins. These depths are what requires technical description, mapping and curatorial organization now.

Undoubtedly for Esche the practice of placing one object next to another is now simply the bottom line for the language of curating that must additionally be expanded into other less obviously connected playing fields, one of which must now include a second flat field at depth. Of course, the double flat has been there all along. The question is how best to bring it—what the Antonio Negri of *Insurgencies* calls “constituent power as a composition that constitutes itself in a mechanic process”—into visibility. Until then we can only wonder if this is what *L’Internationale* hopes to galvanize? If it is where the multitude awaits?

<http://transversal.at/blog/Flatness-instead-of-Depth>

[http://beautifuldata.metalab.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Wright\\_Toward-a-Lexicon-of-User-ship.pdf](http://beautifuldata.metalab.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Wright_Toward-a-Lexicon-of-User-ship.pdf).

<http://elizabethpovinelli.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/The-Governance-of-the-Prior.pdf>.

[www.mohamedrabeea.com/books/book1\\_3997.pdf](http://www.mohamedrabeea.com/books/book1_3997.pdf)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/>

<https://utopaedia.files.wordpress.com/2007/10/benjamin-trauerspiel-notes.pdf>.

[https://antonionegriinenglish.files.wordpress.com/.../insurgencies\\_constituent\\_power\\_and.pdf](https://antonionegriinenglish.files.wordpress.com/.../insurgencies_constituent_power_and.pdf)

# COLLABORATION, LABOR, AND BREAKING BREAD: AN INTERVIEW WITH SEAN STAROWITZ

STEVEN DUVAL

On a rainy Saturday afternoon I met Sean Starowitz in Kansas City at ‘Talk Shop’, the temporary cultural center he co-runs, which was hosting an exhibition of the ‘Langston Hughes Club’ (a photography group that is made up of members of the fast food workers collective Stand Up KC). It was an incredibly refreshing experience after walking into many white cubes. Here were photos depicting the lives of workers by workers with arresting results. Starowitz was there talking about the work and engaging people that entered the space. He described himself to me as a bread baker. As I discovered he is also a collaborator, organizer, teacher, curator, fundraiser, facilitator, and artist with a diverse and committed practice. We also talked about the role of the artist in the community and the critical problems of that position when attempting to instigate real change. Below is an interview we did at another of his collaborative projects: ‘Bread KC’—an event raising money for the arts in Kansas City.

Steven Duval: In the documentation of your project ‘Byproduct: The Laundromat’ you have a photo of a t-shirt that says ‘I had a token conversation at an invisible venue’. It reminded me of Gregory Scholette’s use of the physics term ‘Dark Matter’ as reference to a cultural sphere that is everywhere but goes unseen. How does visibility play into your activities?

Sean Starowitz: That’s a great question and I was super informed by Gregory’s work when I was in undergrad, actually my studio thesis was on Dark Matter and Everyday practices.

I tend to think of myself as a quilt maker and table designer - though I’ve never made either of those objects, per say. My approach is to thread individual patchwork squares together and try to figure out what the shape and design of a table is. I think that is one of the great challenges of our time - How do we create spaces/environments/projects that are inviting, and participatory? How do we invite people not only to the table to share something but also offer their insight, opinions and ideas? Those spaces seem to be far and few between these days. I like to think of my work as the common thread that stitches a project together or the table that everyone sat down at to have a meal.



Talk Shop Window. Photo credit Sean Starowitz.

I know that sounds like an invisible practice but it’s not. (Full discretion - Image is by Invisible Venue, a socially engaged art project run by Christian Frock who I believe shares similar ideas of visibility). I don’t think you can totally erase the artist’s presence from any project, even though many Socially Engaged Art Practices make that claim. I don’t see it enough or used appropriately. The projects and practices that I’ve been involved in, organized or directed, have been crafted by many collaborators, partners and participants. It’s always difficult for audiences to understand that. I do nothing alone, and no artists have ever done anything alone. I hope that my practice illustrates healthy and collaborative approaches in art-making, urban issues, community building and hopefully creative gestures to complex ideas.

I also think that each project having its own identity is key, especially in relation to the problem of artist visibility. I tend to hide behind sigils, logos and strong graphic images, if I may say so myself, because I’ve worked with great graphic designers over the years. In KC, many folks might not know that I’m behind a project as “Sean Starowitz” but they’re more than likely aware or heard of BREAD! KC, Byproduct or





The Fast Food Workers Langston Hughes Club. From the exhibition *I, Too, Am America*.

Talk Shop...It allows for collaborative authorship, and participation, and just maybe a new way of working or engaging within a community. Somebody said to me recently, "Are your fingerprints on this?" and I found that to be really flattering and something I'm striving for. It's there if you want to find it.

S.D. One of the things you mentioned when we met at the 'Talk Shop', where the Langston Hughes Club were showing their photography in the exhibition 'I, Too, Am America', was the importance of acknowledging power relations especially with regard to 'socially engaged' art practice. The positioning of the artist/curator as the central author or as facilitator/collaborator becomes crucial here. How did you deal with that power dynamic when working with the Langston Hughes Club where empowerment and self-determination is central to their work?

S.S. Full Disclosure: I merely provided a venue for this project. Stand UP KC and Langston Hughes Club are self-sustaining in their own efforts.

Well, I think we can scale back this question a bit. The problem with certain projects and processes that occur within "Socially Engaged" Art (SEA) is that there tends to be a top-down approach either through an institution, organization, or by the privilege of an artist. This can be very problematic and really makes me question this whole entire field. Is it possible to have social change without some form of social exploitation and individual artistic glorification? To me this is the kind of question we need to be asking in the field. I think Langston Hughes Club (LHC) challenges this question at its core and marks a radical shift in the power dynamic between labor reform and artistic practice. LHC is not an exhibition of a Pulitzer Prize-



*Invisible Venue*. Photo credit Sean Starowitz.

winning photojournalist documenting the lives of fast food workers in a "poverty porn" sense, or the controlled frame of poverty in America through the lens of the media; rather, the workers are telling their own stories, with their own voice and through their own frame of reference. The LHC has been in control of the project, not a curator, or photographer. Stand Up KC does a wonderful job of making sure the workers are interviewed not the organizers, and that they're the face of the movement. It's truly humbling and empowering. You don't see this way of working often enough in the contemporary art world or SEA practices, nor do I think they really care about this type of work. It's about museums playing middlemen for dealers and collectors and where they can "park their money."

The hope is that by asking these hard questions of SEA we can get to a place where artists and cultural workers can meet people and communities where they are, rather than coming to the table with a fixed idea. But as always, there has to be a connectedness. A true relationship has to be built and may not have an end goal in mind. When working with different communities audiences and collaborators, for me its important to leave my experiences, knowledge, and expertise at the door and actually try to engage with people. Hopefully, in that process we're able to create something new together, alongside one another and that's the space where you truly shift power dynamics.

S.D. I think you make an excellent point about the glorification of the artist and it brings me back to a comment that Ian Burn and Karl Beverage of Art & Language made about Carl Andre and Robert Morris' activities in the Art Workers Coalition - "the split between art and real problems emerged in the 1960s in an essentially apolitical and asocial art - to the ex-

tent that, for most artists, political engagement meant moving to an extra art activity." Perhaps suggesting that their labor was no longer present in their work and was now displaced onto their personal identities. Ian Burn also talks about the deskilling of the artist in the 1960s. When I look at your pop-up bakery project, 'Fresh Bread', your labor and skill is very present but as an artwork it is also a representation that you, as author, are also present in. Do you think that calling your activities art hinders your ability to be an effectual force for change or can we, as Tania Bruguera says, 'put Duchamp's urinal back into the toilet' and make art useful?

S.S. I think this is a very important question to keep asking artists who engage in this type of practice. For me, to be frank, I think that every system is broken and we need creative gestures to re-imagine them and who better than artists. Art has the ability to be multifaceted, and its capacity to communicate plural meanings gives real power to cultural actions. Artists can transform dissatisfaction with the world into an image of something better, and it could be this imaginative transformation that leads us to hope and rejuvenation. Antanas Mockus, the philosopher and educator who became the Mayor of Bogota re-imagined civic politics with creative gestures. For example, to increase public safety his office hired mimes to act out the proper ways to cross the street, within three years pedestrian fatalities dropped by 50%. Further the violence vaccine program his office enacted pushed homicides rates to fall 70%.

I think calling it art allows for a greater depth of exploration and consideration. I know it's a bold thing to say art and consideration in the same sentence, when arts funding is at an all-time low, and we are constantly at war with people's couches and Netflix accounts. For example, 'Fresh Bread' was shut down on its third pop-up by the City Health Department. While the city was shutting me down, the folks that were in line were tweeting to the City Manager and Mayor Sly James. No less than 5 hours later, I was having a conversation with Councilperson Cindy Circo and City Manager Troy Schulte about the project, all while eating the different types of bread offered through the stand. By the following Monday morning a few emails we're sent and within 3 weeks Fresh Bread was back up and running and allowed to pop-up anywhere in the metro area. I think the reason why the City Manager and Councilperson Cindy Circo were so willing to hear me out, other than the great tasting bread was that Fresh Bread is a creative gesture to a complex problem we

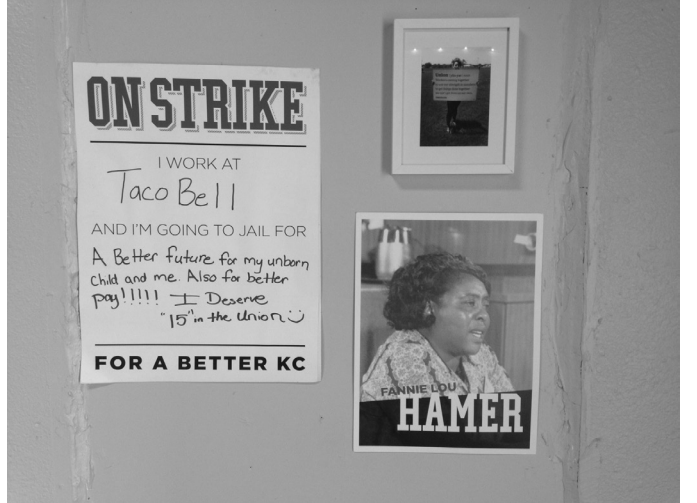
have in the city. Fresh Bread wasn't a bourgeoisie hipster venture; rather it was having a larger dialogue about food access and vacancy while also literally breaking bread with others.

Once again, art can take us to places we haven't been before and it can give us the space we need to reflect and understand. I think that maybe the historic path of the artist has been blinded by our current market-based economy and our failures in art education. The power of art to affect public opinion and organize has been displaced by the many historic events around the world that try to silence it. Arts and culture are usually the first to be censored, removed, or suppressed. I believe this way of engaging and working provides voice to multiple perspectives, it naturally draws out varied forms of response through reflections, discussion, and debate. You know the sort of things that are elemental in a healthy democratic system. Artists, cultural workers, poets, writers, singers, musicians, performers, dancers, and chefs (among countless others) can be the "canary in the coal mine". I think we need song more than ever, we need poetry more than politics, and we need artists to hold up the mirror and provide the space for deep reflection. To quote my dear friend Peter Sellers, "Music is about everything we're hoping for and that's not here yet, and music is here ahead of time to tell us: it's coming"

So to answer your question yes to more useful art, please.

If you would like to know more about Sean Starowitz and his activities please visit [www.seanstarowitz.com](http://www.seanstarowitz.com)

Stand Up KC and the Langston Hughes Club:  
<http://standupkc.org/lhc/>



The Fast Food Workers Langston Hughes Club. From the exhibition *I, Too, Am America*.



# CHARACTER: CORNEL WEST AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

JESSICA EVANS



Omar Khadr, Defense PP Presentation During Sentencing Argument, 2010. <http://www.defense.gov/news/Khadr>

On May 7th Omar Khadr was released from prison in Alberta. Khadr is infamously known as the youngest-ever prisoner at Guantanamo Bay, where he was incarcerated at age 15 for allegedly throwing a grenade during a firefight in Ayub Kheyl that resulted in the death of an American soldier. After ten years at Guantanamo, and with the Canadian government’s knowledge of his torture there, Khadr “confessed” and was transferred to the Millhaven Maximum Security prison in Ontario, where his eligibility for parole was debated in tandem with his culpability, his status as a child soldier, his character.

I noticed on Khadr’s Wikipedia page that there is a tiny anecdote describing pastel drawings he made in 2009, in an art program available to compliant captives. The description says: “Very few of the creators of the works of art made by Guantanamo captives have been tied to specific artwork, but several of Khadr’s pastel drawings were included as exhibits at his sentencing hearing, to show his peaceful nature.”<sup>1</sup> This drawing, of an utterly inoffensive sailboat floating in a bay, is rendered with capable impressionism that supposedly belies the placid and sensitive nature of the artist (though, personally, when I see a drawing of vessels and water I think of “death” and “oblivion”). The drawing is less interesting than its inclusion as character evidence in his trial. In part, my preoccupation with the drawing concerns the authorities who manipulate it in his defense or otherwise, individuals

<sup>1</sup> On his Wikipedia page this entry still requires citation, and further searches online were unsatisfying. So, for the sake of this article, let’s assume this is true.

who are simultaneously the perpetrators of violence and the assessors of innocence or guilt. Using a drawing as evidence speaks of one genealogy of art from the mid twentieth century, which we tend to forget today, that was mired in the study of personality or character structure and focused in the problem of projection. A pleasant image does not equate a clear mind. In the case of Khadr’s drawing and sentencing hearing it reveals the magical thinking that is activated when we expect art to provide the clues into its makers psyche, instead of reflecting the conditions of the making. I don’t know what the drawing means, but it is worth considering that no prisoner at Guantanamo has a view of a picturesque ocean harbor.

The next day I went to a lecture at the University of Winnipeg by the American philosopher, academic, and activist Dr. Cornel West. Most commonly known for his analysis of racial debates in his 1994 book *Race Matters*, he also holds the distinction of the first African-American to receive a PhD in philosophy from Princeton University. His sold-out lecture was competently introduced in both English and Objibwe by Wab Kinew, followed by an address from former University president Lloyd Axworthy in a speech that can only be characterized as incoherent befuddlement.

Throughout West’s lecture, which was hinged on the dilemma of preserving social justice in an unjust society, the nexus of Khadr, the judicious state, and his pastel drawing remained bright in my mind. West, the son of a Baptist minister and a devout Christian in his own right, invokes the oft-forgotten spiritualism that has been integral to the mobilizing energy of civil emancipation. Martin Luther King, Jr., was, after all, an ordained protestant minister, along with the nineteenth-century abolitionists before him. With dynamic, commanding speech West reminded the audience that the civil rights movement appealed not just to secular standards of social justice but to a higher moral code.<sup>2</sup>

I bring up spiritualism here to suggest that the reverence and transcendentalism espoused by West was the footing for his many references to art and artists,

<sup>2</sup> Camille Paglia, “Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s” Arion, 10.3, Winter, Boston University Press, 2003.

reinforcing that to be devout is to be amazed. At the onset of his completely captivating and frenetic oration he recalls W.E.B. Du Bois’s plea in *The Ordeal of Mansart*: “How shall integrity face oppression? What shall honesty do in the face of deception? What does decency do in the face of insult? What shall virtue do to meet brute force?”<sup>3</sup> With these questions as its touchstone, West’s lecture braided political theory, philosophy, and crowd-amping rhetoric throughout his description of the social and psychic deaths that occur in a spectacle economy. The pursuit of “unarmed truth”, he acknowledged, is very difficult for us (fallible and imperfect mortals) for whom the fear of death translates into Socrates’ concept of the unexamined life. “At Disneyland, they say no one has ever died on the property” West joked “which is why everyone wants to go to Disneyland.”

“We are at the brink” West said “of personal catastrophe.” He was referring to, undoubtedly, the ongoing riots in Ferguson, Baltimore, and Oakland, but also to a society that deprives its impoverished and disenfranchised youth of art in their communities or schools. West emphatically cited authors - F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jane Austen, James Baldwin - and musicians throughout his lecture with the sentiment that profound art is the archaeology into and transfiguration of the deepest self, going beyond language and self-enclosure. To deny the most vulnerable citizens the necessity of psychic orientation, recognition, and voice through art is a catastrophe. The media spotlight on the recent riots in America has shown a perverse obsession with the violation of property, to which West recalled the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who believed that nihilism was to regard ourselves as sovereigns of the universe, the world as mere material for endless consumption. The argument seems to be that artistic expression provides an antithesis to the market-driven frenzy for acquisition and speculation, but West’s plea becomes hazy when mandated art programs (such as the classes at Guantanamo Bay) serve as examination and surveillance tool, rather than a vehicle for creative autonomy. The biggest challenge to the appeal for devotion is probably the fear that it is indulgent.

Despite this, the sheer force of West’s magnetic allocution successfully stretched a speech that basically advocated to “be nice” for over an hour. In my world, where relentless parsing and criticism of art, thoughts, and objects constitutes sophisticated participation,

<sup>3</sup> Du Bois goes onto say “there are so many answers and so contradictory; and such differences for those on the one hand who meet questions similar to this once a year or once a decade, and those who face them hourly and daily.”

it is worthwhile to risk being aware (and in awe) of the ineffable: in April, Khadr wrote to Aaf Post saying “even though I’m in prison there are still a lot of small beautiful things around. Seeing the sun rise or set or to see the snow fall.”

Thank you to Janique Vigier.

# MAKING AND SURVEILLING:

## A BOOK REVIEW OF *YOU ARE HERE: ART AFTER THE INTERNET*

JOHN PATTERSON

*You Are Here: Art After the Internet*  
edited: Omar Kholeif  
published: Cornerhouse, SPACE 2014

Deconstruct the title *You Are Here: Art After the Internet* and the theory behind the book is explained: A collection of authors examine identity, place, and time within the context of the contested history of a genre variably known as net.art, new aesthetic, new media, post-internet. Coming in at just under 250 pages the anthology is concise but ambitious. Ideas expressed by several of the authors are sentiments familiar to art-centric internet circles (or internet-centric art circles), but offer more condensed and articulated versions. Where *You Are Here* succeeds is its capability as a tool to compress these conversations into an archival format by disconnecting the discussion from online forums where many of the ideas were first publicly expressed and recorded.

A foreword by editor Omar Kholeif acts as outline and mandate for many of the authors, most notably those who identify as curators, critics, or writers. Kholeif suggests the distinguishing feature of the internet is cultural praxis. By offering the perspective of cultural analysts (a decidedly more limited categorization than that of cultural producer) the authors submit to a holistic definition of the internet. In conjunction with the internet's identity as a system, the web becomes activated through the principle contribution and questioning of itself through the cultural praxis of its many users. This definition and subsequent proposition brings the principle of this book to a focus: That the internet is limited to and defined by its structural nature, which allows it to grow to its ability to be monitored by a wide range of users, many of which are monitored themselves. The proposal suggests that the internet's structural nature contributes to its ability to be thoroughly monitored on a wide scope of users, with information collected ranging from personal information and statistics categorized by demographics, to numerical IP addresses or user ID#s.

The book's most compelling suggestions include the counter-intuitive assertion that privacy segues into

identity politics. 'Digital identity' is complicated by the self-proclamation of a user who claims status as overwhelmed consumer and output driven micro-producer. Ownership defines a productive online identity. The contents of what is produced becomes intertwined with personal information gleaned via algorithms, surveillance software, or people. More interesting still is Brad Troemel's essay "Art After Social Media" which expands on a previously defined notion of image fundamentalism. The theory proposes three categories of license/anti-license philosophies: image fundamentalists, image neo-liberals, and image anarchists. Image fundamentalists enact the policies adopted by institutional governing bodies by proposing that the "rights to property [are] granted at birth through cultural or geographic specificity." The second category, image neo-liberals rely on arts ability to act as a commodity - most importantly, its ability to be sold, traded, bought like any other commodity. Finally, Troemel describes the ideals of image anarchists as a "reflection of a generational indifference toward intellectual property, regarding it as a bureaucratically regulated construct." Even if ownership is defined by the statutes of a third party, consumption of media remains limited only by its potential viewership. "The utopian disposition for art online most idealistically views the near-infinite world of digital images as a kind of commons [...] in its ability to continue to be remade [...] for whatever purposes its network of viewer authors find significant." This version of artistic identity is based on a model of potentially non-discriminatory inclusivity enabled by anonymity. The user/producer dichotomy becomes the only distinguishable identity parameter, an intense simplification, which operates on the untrue assumption that the internet is globally accessible.

In another essay, "Notes on Post Internet", Jennifer Chan forwards a series of poignant, intentionally conflicted arguments. She calls for:

- The re-politicizing of internet art, an increased engagement with politics by artists who operate, even commercially, on the web is necessary. But attempts by players within post-internet culture to legitimize

themselves politically have relied on a pursuit of power evident through, "the migration of web-based practices to the ranks of the gallery and museum".

- The realization and potential of the internet as a cultural environment, and the negative role it plays in the deterioration of a physical or geographical cultural environment.
- The acknowledgement of instantaneous media sharing. The recognition of this concept is simultaneously liberating and problematic, as the over-saturation of cultural content drowns itself out as "everything becomes about creating hype and momentum[...]" And creating recontextualized intensities of meaning where there is none within the attention competitive nature of hyper-mediation."

In the first two-thirds of the book (titled "Essays" and "Provocations" respectively) unanimous focus is placed on the meta-critical consideration of the internet as a structure that is culturally driven by users, but ultimately devoid of its own culture outside of what is defined by the necessities of usability. The culture of the user, while affective on the way they interact with the content seen on the web, ultimately enables its use as a medium. Painting, drawing, photography, internet.

However, as the book progresses into the final third ("Projects"), theoretical ideas and observations outlined in the previous text are realized or challenged by a new set of artistic projects. Analysis is replaced by a language of poetics. Expression is privileged and contrasted to function. A good example is "Resolution 978HD: A Visual Essay" by artist collective Model Court. The collection of texts and photographs document the trial and conviction of a Rwandan exile in Finland who was found guilty of war crimes and participation in the 1994 Rwandan genocide by a Finnish court. The trial took place in Rwanda, with witness testimony and legal proceedings broadcast via internet-based video-conferencing to the prison cell and court in Finland. The visual essay contains images and video stills captured by a Finnish policeman throughout the proceedings, with accompanying annotations and 'log entries' written by the artists. The narrative constructed around the trial is complex and bizarre. "978HD" does not directly examine the social-structure of the web (although it does venture into the politics of creating a global fiber-optic infrastructure to support the world's population). More importantly, the project exists within and on the internet. It feels distinctly of the internet due to the narratives reliance on the technology. The included images adopt an 'inter-

net aesthetic', it can be safely assumed the policeman was not a professional photographer. The hypertext and supplemental text read more like the captions on a news-blog than as didactic wall texts.

The documentary nature of the included works is accelerated by their inclusion in a physical book. The projects become documentation of documentation. Whereas the essays included in provocations take the reader by a theoretical hand, the projects selected by editor Omar Kholeif often seem indifferent to theory, posing a separate set of questions which seem distinctly less involved with internet-politics and more engaged with human-politics, if such a strict divide can be found.

Collectively, *You Are Here* does not propose a conclusive thesis or offer a holistic insight into the ongoing global impact of the internet and the art which exists within and around it. Rather, Kholeif's editorial goal supposedly aims to define, on a variety of scales, what it means to be a cultural producer in the midst of a rapidly developing environment. Functionally, the book may provide a useful tool to locate the points within an ongoing, non-canonized history which allow 'cultural producers' to reassess their own position within the system.



# SÉRIPOP GO PILE WILD: THE FACE STAYED EAST AND THE MOUTH WENT WEST (ELEMENTS) @ GALERIE HUGUES CHARBONNEAU (MTL)

KELLY CAMPBELL

*They pierced my ear with a pink paper clip, telling me (cooing at my neck) that skill and polish are mitigated by class and encouraged by capitalism. Our labours against labour became an exhausting commodity, producing constant and unexpected demands for justification. What we naively believed would be a static object became an autonomous living thing, a relentlessly hungry toddler screaming for us constantly. My ear got infected and no one could drive me to the hospital.*

Printshop and construction site ephemera are dragged from the graveyard to the living gallery site in Séripop(Chloe Lum and Yannick Desranleau)’s recent performative installation at Galerie Hugues Charbonneau. Initially shown at the Confederation Centre for the Arts as a response to the architecture of the building, elements of *The Face Stayed East and the Mouth Went West* are recontextualized and reanimated in Montreal.

See: 1. A huge orange tarp, rolled and tied up. This is the first object encountered upon entering the gallery, effectively serving the always useful function of weeding out those in search of a sleek object or (finished?) concept. Instead, Séripop provides us with a freakily appealing garbage landscape in process. Piles of plastic, shrink wrapped foam, and huge printed sheets of paper are strapped, tied, and piled together across the room, in front of and interacting with -

2. Three gigantic brightly colored photo light boxes (the boxes themselves, not the images.) Leaning against one wall and powered by extension cords dangling from the roof. These objects are the most at home in a gallery of all objects in the installation, and so could never be mounted on the wall. The extension cords, yellow, orange, and blue, are another nice little nod to the material culture of construction junk.

3. Dirty old foam mattresses from the basement that you really should have thrown out last summer (what is growing in there?). Strapped together/ to a hot pink tarp with neon orange woodworking straps. Beautiful like slept in party makeup.

Séripop gets the obvious laid-back jab at material hierarchy and the general squareness of gallery space out of the way early (they *have* been doing this for ten years now) so they can move on to the more impor-



tant business of piling: and pile they do. Piling is the initial curatorial act. Any advance beyond this introductory categorization is repositioned as an obstructive refinement. A love of piles could be interpreted as a Lynda Barry-esque resistance to the question of ‘goodness’ though an interest in the primary organizational stage, which shows more critical promise than what we would expect an end product to look like.

As in; 4. The photos themselves, unfixed to a singular moment or representation. The fallibility of final presentation is emphasized: installation elements exist in various states of motion, falling, stacking, blurring, and rearranging. Séripop asks, of no one in particular,

does this go over here? They don’t wait for an answer, instead yelping immediatley: ‘why the heck not!’

The piles are inevitably related to the capitalist world they live in; but is their adverse position of their own choosing or a wrong place, wrong time situation? Does it matter? Are they off in the corner having their own party, oblivious to the world, or are they over there waiting to pick a fight?

Consider: 5. Shrink-wrapped rainbow foam. Shrink wrapping is an industrial process used to contain a finished product, sanitized and prepared for public consumption. Foam cubes are grouped together unwillingly by the visual noise-pop laws of Séripop. Like too many office workers crammed together uncomfortably in an elevator, the circumstances of their collective likenesses are artificially sucked together in the satirical presentation of a whole.

HOWEVER! piling doesn’t feel like a completely reactionary thing. It’s a way of concentrating like matter that is true to existing in this messy ass world, where you almost never have time to finish a thought. Or maybe a lack of space + time is irrelevant, and the



first part of the thought is just more interesting than whatever sliver/ boring ghost dressed in business casual is left after it passes through the wringers of self-doubt and those annoying desires to please peers/ the market/ those ‘above you’ who ‘know what they are talking about’. Building a table to eat at together, building something to show that you have the desire to eat together, is more important than ordering the wood from Italy (as if we could afford it) or even making dinner.

And so; 6. The ‘loose ends’, trails of ropes tying groups together. Connecting piles and the spaces between them. These ropes leisurely meander away from their groups to pursue membership in another pile or their own presence as an unruly appendage. The piles are staying east, and the rope is going as far west as he can while still tethered to piledom, which, for all its looseness, we cannot deny as a binding force.

~IN CONCLUSION~  
Refusing to arrange beyond the piles is A) a cheeky resistance to gross professionalist capitalist artist culture that champions labour/‘skill’ and status, and B) renders glaring the culture’s willful ignorance towards issues of class, pointing with an oversized foam finger at the correlation between material hierarchy and price tag; or the requisite upper middle class social skills, of which this installation has none. The ephemeral nature of piling posits the ‘finished piece’ as an illusory or at least boring and inconsequential aspect of gallery practice. Maintaining the initial, strong immediacy of associations is more important than presenting their overworked products on a platter.

*Images courtesy Galerie Hugues Charbonneau. Tweets courtesy Chloe Lum.*





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