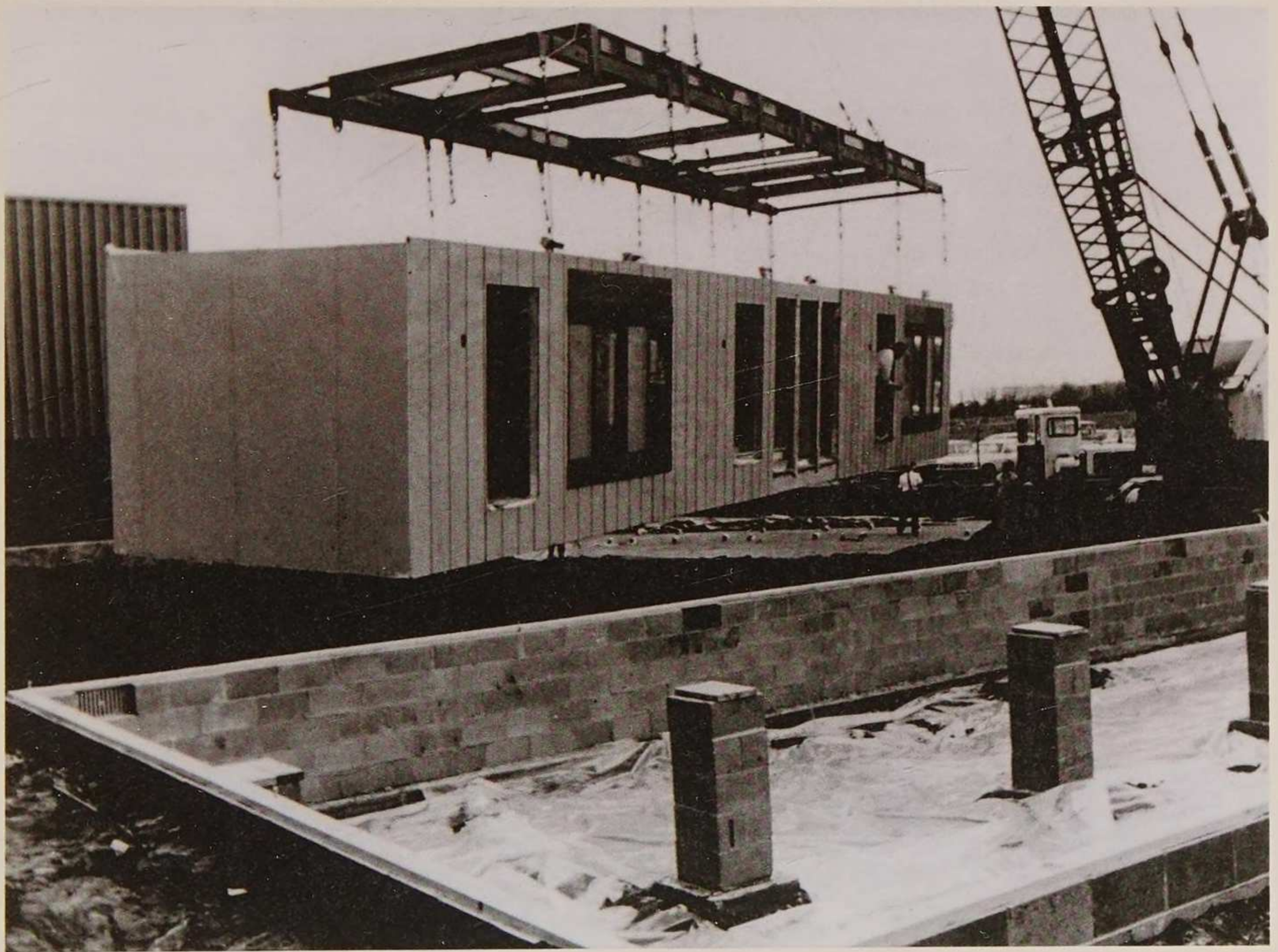


It is *what* it is. *OR* is it?







It is *what* it is. *OR* is it?

CAMH



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CONTENTS

LUIS JACOB, *Album XI (Part 1)*, 2012

I-3

Bill Arning

Preface

8

Marcel Duchamp

Where do we go from here?

11

Dean Daderko

A Readymade Remade, Even

15

Plates

27

Collated by Lucy Lippard

The Romantic Adventures of an Adversative Rotarian
or Allreadymadesomuchoff

96

Joseph Kosuth

Exemplar

106

Claire Fontaine

Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike: A Few Clarifications

110

Artists' Biographies

120

List of Works

127

Acknowledgments

130

LUIS JACOB, *Album XI (Part 2)*, 2012

134-136

PREFACE

Curators are born explorers. Curators (I speak from three decades of experience both in being one and in working with some of the greatest) typically betray an intellectual restlessness, a quest to make discoveries and draw connections between those inhabiting the ever-growing field of art and artists. Some are happy to cherish their discoveries in private, but most are compelled to bring the art before responsive human eyes.

It is my pleasure to introduce the first exhibition by the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's new curator, Dean Daderko. Daderko has been working with cutting-edge artists and organizing shows since 1996, and I am thrilled that we were able to lure him to Houston to share his vision with this city's worldly audience.

His first exhibition, titled "It is what it is. Or is it?," is as conceptually dense as it is engaging. The artworks take a form known as the readymade: objects found in the world that become art when named as such but that do not lose their previous identities merely by this placement into an art context. This radical idea, which questions the very definition of art, still seems frighteningly new to many casual viewers but is in fact almost one hundred years old; as such, it should at this point be fully processed and even seem slightly boring. Instead, this art provocation has proved amazingly rich, and this exhibition shows the myriad ways artists over the past decades have taken the readymade as a starting point to go off into other dimensions of inquiry and experience. It seems as if Marcel Duchamp, in defining the readymade, called into being an entire universe of potential creativity. His *Fountain* (1917), the upturned men's urinal signed "R. Mutt," might be considered a litmus test for young art viewers. Some, who when told what it is turn up their noses in dismissal, will likely spend their art-viewing lives in the safer pastures of traditional media—which is fine, just not quite as exciting. Those, like me and the artists in this show, who felt an electric jolt and smiled broadly in a way that said, "Game on," will find "It is what it is. Or is it?" a joyful ride through a remarkable terrain.

We could not have made this exhibition a reality without the generous support of the Union Pacific Foundation and its representative David Young, who cares deeply that Houston experiences the most important and thought-provoking contemporary art shows being mounted today.

All of the many supporters of CAMH have helped make this exhibition a reality, but the work of our Major Exhibition Fund donors specifically allow CAMH to pursue curatorial excellence unencumbered. Their vision and generosity year after year allows our great curators to do their important scholarly work, and these donors, in their dedication to this venture, provide the lifeblood of our museum.

Our staff, as always, has done a bang-up job. Amber Winsor and her team in CAMH's development department—Olivia Junell, Amanda Bredbrenner, and Victoria Ridgway—led the charge to marshal adequate resources for the massive endeavor, and they are to be congratulated for their many successes. Senior curator Valerie Cassel Oliver freely shared her years of experience making exhibitions in the City of Houston and CAMH's great building with Daderko as he developed this project. Our new curatorial assistant, Nancy O'Connor, has also been a great help in every aspect of this process. Registrar Tim Barkley and Jeff Shore, head preparator, as always, approached this

exhibition with typical enthusiasm. Connie McAllister, director of external affairs, found ways to make Daderko's challenging theme accessible to the public, and Paula Newton, director of education and public programs, used her years of experience to make sometimes inscrutable art actions comprehensible through exhibition didactics and programs.

My greatest thanks go to Daderko himself. He has shared so much information with me over the process of the show and has introduced me to the work of so many artists whose work adds to my art-viewing life today. I leave this exhibition and its accompanying catalogue looking forward to his next curatorial provocation.

Bill Arning, Director



Marcel Duchamp's Studio, c. 1916–18, photograph by Henri Pierre Roché

Philadelphia
March 20, 1961
WLA MMS. College of Art

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE ?

In order to invent the future let us start from a more or less recent past which originated with the realism of Courbet and Manet. Infact realism seems to have been the incentive in the liberation of the artist as an emancipated individual. This work from then on , imposed itself as a free expression to which the collector or spectator had to adapt himself, sometimes with reluctance. This liberation period was immediately followed up by a series of isms, which succeeded one another, in the last 100 years, at the pace of a new ism every 15 years.

Instead of differentiating these isms ^{between} it might be better to group them under a common characterization to try to foretell what will happen tomorrow.

Taken as a whole, in the frame of a century of modern art, the isms have now reached, in abstract expressionism, the apex of a retinal approach, which started with the impressionist school.

By the retinal approach I mean that the esthetic delectation depends almost exclusively upon the sensitivity of the retina without any auxiliary interpretation.

Hardly 20 years ago, the general public still expected some figurative detail in a painting to justify his interest, admiration, or criticism.

Today the opposite is almost true, the general public knows, understands, and even wants abstraction.

I am not speaking now of the collectors who have in the last 50 years upheld this progression towards a complete disappearance of the figurative in the visual arts. These collectors like the artists themselves followed a steady current. And the fact that the problem posed by the last 100 years can be summed up in the dilemma of " figurative " or " non figurative " seems to corroborate the importance I was giving a moment ago to the retinal aspect of the whole production of the different isms.

Therefore after this brief exposé of the past I really believe that the young artist of tomorrow will resent the naiveté of such a dilemma as " figurative " or " non figurative "

Like Alice in Wonderland he will pass through the looking glass of the retina to reach deeper mines of expression.

We all know that, among the isms mentioned above, surrealism has introduced the exploration of the subconscious and turned the retina into a window opening on gray matter phenomena.

I believe that the young artist of tomorrow will go further in that direction to uncover new shock values which are and always will be the basis of a revolution in art.

There are also other considerations - for example the art techniques of the future; It seems quite possible that, nauseated by the smell and the cult of oil paint, the artist might do away altogether with this five century old technique, and its academic tyranny, so likely to limit his freedom of expression. Already new techniques have made their appearance and one can foresee that in the same way, as the invention of new instruments in Music changes the sensitivity of a whole epoch, light effects on new materials may become, among other things, a tool for the new artist.

Speaking now of the rapport between artist and the general public we are witnessing a gigantic production, which the public supports and patronizes. The visual arts through their close connection with the law of supply and demand have become a commodity. The work of art is now a currently monetized item, like soap and securities. As an undesirable consequence of this complete integration of the artist one can fancy the creation of a Union which would regulate the economic questions concerning the artist..... one can imagine that Union deciding on the sale price of a painting according to author, size etc. just as the plumbers Union controls the wages of each workman. Furthermore one

can imagine that Union compelling the artist to abdicate his individuality to the point of losing the right to sign his works.

But One is inclined to question whether this kind of an art production under the guidance of such a tyrannical Union would become a monument comparable to the anonymous Cathedrals of the past ?

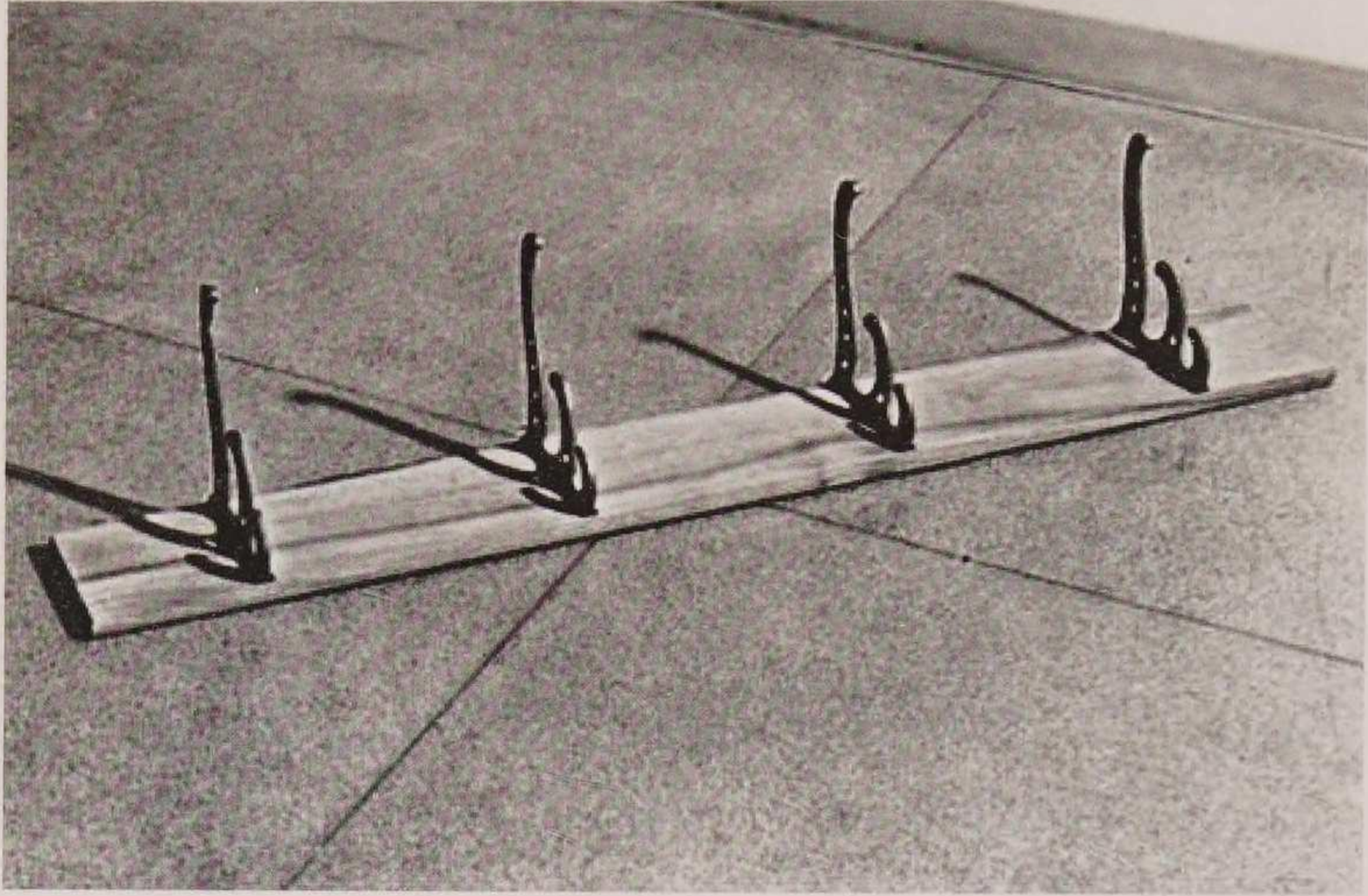
All these unexpected developements made possible by the rapport between artists and the public today show clearly the symptoms of an overwhelming exotericism.

By this I mean the general public in their search for esthetic satisfaction introduces an element of material speculation, to the point of leading the art of today into a state of massive dilution.

And this massive dilution will undoubtedly bring about a general lowering of taste lost in a mist of mediocrity.

Such mediocrity conditioned by too many factors alien to art per se will I hope lead to a revolt, an ascetic revolution this time.

Finally my answer to the question: Where do we go from here ? is that the great artist of tomorrow will go underground.



Marcel Duchamp, *Trébuchet (Trap)*, 1917/1964

DEAN DADERKO

A Readymade Remade, Even

IN 1917, MARCEL DUCHAMP NAILED A COAT RACK to the floor of his studio at 33 West Sixty-Seventh Street in New York City. It was an odd move, to be sure. The artist had acquired it with the intention of mounting it on his wall, but somehow the coat rack never made it there. Instead, it knocked around on the floor near his studio door, where he tripped over it multiple times as he came and went. Even so, he couldn't bring himself to move it out of the way. So, with a hammer and nails, he made it a permanent, sculptural inconvenience. Recognizing it as a readymade, Duchamp called it *Trébuchet* (*Trap*).¹ *Trébuchet*, counter to the conceptual coolness of other readymades, uses this emotive physicality to a stirring end. With its four sturdy cast-metal hooks ready to rake an ankle or catch a pant leg, this formerly useful object took on a menacing edge. By altering the way in which one would normally encounter and deploy this object, Duchamp rendered it strange and imbued it with a new affective tenor.

The readymade is a slippery form. Duchamp, its originator, spoke of it as “a form of denying the possibility of defining art.”² If any one characteristic of the readymade is consistent, it is not a formal but a philosophical consistency. As the physical evidence of a conceptual exercise, the readymade unites material concerns with the invisible function of thought. A lineup of Duchamp's iconic physical objects ranges from the coat rack nailed to the floor to a snow shovel; their material commonalities are few and for the most part irrelevant. The consensus is that Duchamp's objective was to catch us up in a conceptual effort to consider what we *can* and *can't* see and to defamiliarize the commonplace. Conceptual turns are integral to the pleasure we derive from the readymade, and for Duchamp, they are embedded in seemingly unassuming objects. He worked to make his decisions seem like nondecisions, to seem natural. It follows that the readymade is evanescent—so much so that even the attempt to describe it is vexing.

Duchamp's readymades avoid participating in what the artist referred to as “retinal” culture—the development of a solely visual aesthetic—in favor of one that unites material, physical, and formal concerns with ideas, philosophies, concepts, and feelings. “Transferred from a disregarded existence as common manufactured objects into the aesthetic sphere [the readymades] acted as an irritant, a mute pressure against the conventional boundaries of that sphere,” writes Anne d'Harnoncourt. She continues, “The Readymades do not simply constitute a gesture of defiance but rather a venture into unexplored territory.”³ How can we explain the relationship between visual observations and often invisible ideological concerns? Duchamp's concept of the *infra-mince* seems useful here. This term, which roughly translates as *infra-thin*, denotes the barely perceptible difference between two seemingly identical items. An example that Duchamp gives us is the difference in volume between a clean, pressed shirt and the same shirt when dirty.⁴ That this observation is *barely* perceptible is the point; these differences exist, but they are not obvious on a conscious level. We have to pay attention.

“A family likeness pleases when there is a cessation of resemblances.”⁵ Gertrude Stein’s acute observation goes straight to the heart of the matter. If an object or situation seems familiar, we may excuse ourselves from further scrutiny of it, and thus we may fail to recognize details that would help us in separating it from objects or situations it merely resembles. Similarly, the poet Marina Tsvetaeva identifies how our actions and perceptions can easily become rote: “Not to like a work is, in the first and most important place, not to recognize it: not to find the pre-cognized in it. The first cause of not accepting a work is not being prepared for it. . . . A physical turning away of the head: I see nothing in this picture, therefore I don’t wish to look at it. — But, in order to see, one needs to look; in order to really see, one needs to look really closely. Disappointment of an eye that is used to seeing at first glance, which means used to seeing along its old track, that of others’ eyes. Used not to an act of cognition, but of recognition.”⁶ Like many artists who take up the function of the readymade in their work, she encourages us to think instead for ourselves, to strike out into unfamiliar territory and to celebrate the kinds of knowing that come from direct experience.

Duchamp’s material and ideological experimentation revolutionized the field of contemporary art production and laid the groundwork for what we now understand as Conceptual art practice.⁷ Today we acknowledge the place of the readymade in contemporary practice as a fait accompli.⁸ “It is what it is. Or is it?” engages in a dialogue with the readymade, defining it not as a static object but as the physical manifestation of an active displacement of thought into form. Artists identify and play with objects, social behavior, and media that already exist in order to focus our attention on an aspect of their function. These turns can be subtle, and the notion of artistic intent as it relates to objects is especially important.

Joining Tsvetaeva in her endeavor to encourage more careful looking, the painter CATHERINE MURPHY reframes encounters with familiar objects. In *Xmas Lights* (2007), she depicts a window ringed by glowing decorations. Initially, everything outside the window appears shrouded in darkness but when our eyes adjust to the view—as they would through the glass at night—other forms become visible. The thick foliage of a stand of trees presents itself, as does clapboard siding illuminated by a distant light from a neighboring building. *Trash Bags* (1996) presents an image of two black plastic trash bags that appear to have been casually tossed out onto the snow. Looking carefully, one sees evidence of the sun’s waning afternoon light mixing with a hint of incandescence that could be coming from a home nearby. The mystery of the bags’ contents, hidden but suggested by their bulging appearance, pulls us in further. In both cases, Murphy’s extreme care with techniques including glazing and layering makes it possible for us to differentiate between the visible and the barely visible.

With *An Inconspicuous Addition* (2011), PATRICK KILLORAN casts himself as a prankster who lures us in but—like Murphy—reveals his work’s secrets to only the most attentive and patient of viewers. The red Igloo cooler, with its white flip top, is ubiquitous at picnics and beach outings across the United States. With the cooler’s top open, Killoran encourages us to peer inside. What we see is ordinary: ice cubes. But there is more here than initially meets the eye, for a diamond is nestled down among the ice. If you know what you’re looking for, you

can't help but see diamonds everywhere, glimmering in the reflections of the ice. And when—after about three days in the cool environment of the gallery—the ice has turned to water and the diamond is fully visible resting on the bottom of the cooler, Killoran tempts us to reach in and pluck out the object of desire before the cooler is refilled and the location of the true diamond is again obscured. The effect of Killoran's work is temporal, and so our encounters with it trigger subtle awareness of the passage of time.

We all recognize the subjects in ELLEN ALTFEST's paintings—a leg or cactus—but her accretions of textured strokes and daubs of pigment on canvas show us, like the contents of Killoran's cooler, how little we actually see with a casual or cursory glance. Altfest may not “know” her subject at the outset of making a given painting, but over the days, weeks, and even months it takes to build the visual complexity and believability of, for example, leg hair and the capillaries under skin, the artist comes to know her subjects intimately, and she shares this intimacy with her viewers. Her paintings are evidence of focused time and repeated observation and the result of her practice of painting from life and live models. With every square inch of her canvas receiving equal and intense attention to detail, Altfest renders living bodies vital, strange, and unfamiliar. Viewers experience the reverse of her trajectory; time allows Altfest to understand her motifs more deeply, but the more time we give to her paintings the more foreign we realize her subjects are to us.⁹

Culling imagery from the pages of psychology textbooks, art and architecture magazines, and other found sources, LUIS JACOB's *Album* series (2000–present) brings refreshing new readings to the endless flow of images that surround us daily, causing us to reconsider images and subjects we may think we understand. An avowed bibliophile, Jacob cuts out images that catch his eye as he flips through magazines, books, and other printed media, separating them from their original contexts (the only media source Jacob doesn't use in the preparation of this series is the Internet). The *Album* series is a part of Jacob's ongoing studio practice, as he first collects his material en masse in envelopes and folders and later sorts and groups it into discrete montages consisting of only a few found images that share formal or conceptual characteristics. The artist solidifies these compositions into these new relationships by laminating them in plastic. Exhibited, the compositions float in identical clear plastic sheets that are pushpinned directly to walls in a single, ordered line. The flow from one montage to the next becomes legible as we “read” them from left to right or, alternately, from end to beginning; it produces a visual “text” that moves from passage to pictorial passage. The montages are also reproduced in book form as limited-edition publications that further demonstrate the cumulative logic and visual literacy of Jacob's compositions.¹⁰

With their shoulder-length dark hair and scruffy beards, we recognize the models, rock stars, and Hollywood actors—Viggo Mortensen and Pink Floyd's David Gilmour among them—in RACHEL HECKER's airbrushed canvases, but there is little question that these men can also be seen as one of the head-and-shoulders portraits of Jesus Christ pervasive throughout the world. In preparation for this body of nearly a dozen portraits, Hecker amassed a look book of images sourced from fashion magazines, the Internet, and even funeral cards, which then

provided visual inspiration and reference material for her paintings. Hecker steers away from obvious signifiers—there are no halos or crowns of thorns in her paintings. Nevertheless, the religious and the secular are drawn into a compelling and unsettling vacillation. Consequently, this series of Hecker's paintings shows us how little is required to establish a representational typology from the proliferation of images of Christ that circulate within culture.

In christening herself in 2004 with the name of a line of popular French notebooks, CLAIRE FONTAINE plays on brand recognition as a “ready-made artist.” Fontaine, a collaborative effort, has since created a body of work that often resembles the work of other artists but is driven by wholly different intentions. With *Untitled (Prière de Toucher)* (2011), Fontaine takes a direct stab at Duchamp's legacy: the work directly references the catalogue for his exhibition “Le Surréalisme en 1947,” whose cover was adorned with a hand-painted foam-cast breast mounted on black velvet. Sharing the sexual playfulness of Duchamp's original cover, *Untitled (Prière de Toucher)* repurposes a masturbation tool that resembles both a mouth and a vagina. Dropped into a takeaway coffee cup with a green bendable straw inserted into its hole, the masturbation toy's pink silicone form rises over the rim of the cup in a suggestive mound. Fontaine's video *Instructions for the sharing of private property* (2006) is a lesson in how to pick locks and penetrate their secrets. Led by a disembodied voice and two hands, Fontaine's cunning techniques are demonstrated with readily available household objects: paper clips, safety pins, hairpins, and the like. Sourced from the Internet, this informative series of lessons in breaking and entering gives new valence to the term “creative appropriation” as a skill-share in illegal activity. Fontaine's work traverses the boundary between the appropriate and appropriation, investigating and challenging political and social stakes and salting some of contemporary art's most painful wounds—capital value, originality, and brand recognition—with critical precision and sharp humor.

With a dash of slapstick, JAMIE ISENSTEIN, an artist well known for her live performances, transforms the familiar into the surreal or uncanny by injecting everyday objects with a sense of Chaplinesque pathos. For *Straw Fire (with elbow)* (2011), the artist cast a bendable drinking straw in porcelain and outfitted it with a wick. Dropped into a clear glass soda bottle filled with lamp oil, a tiny eternal flame flickers from the straw's tip. This work registers as much a memento mori as a lighthearted gag. *Smoking Pipe* (2006) magically balances upright on a table while periodically emitting wisps of smoke, but *ceci n'est pas une pipe*. Isenstein's work takes on its ready-made form in more than one way: it seemingly presents a commonplace pipe and—like Fontaine's *Untitled (Prière de Toucher)*—riffs on an iconic work of art, in this case René Magritte's iconic Surrealist painting *La trahison des images (The Treason of Images, 1928–29)*, housed in Houston's much-respected Menil Collection.

DAPHNE FITZPATRICK takes us on a journey with works that map complex relationships between disparate common objects, setting out narrative trajectories that are simultaneously dreamlike and mundane. Drawing from a deep and subconscious well of thoughts, images, and ideas, Fitzpatrick has recently begun to create or augment her works on-site, cobbling together absurdist constructions from compelling objects she has acquired

locally or carts along in her bag of tricks. Fitzpatrick's work *Prolonging the Life of Your Cheese* (2012) is a duet between two actors: a fencing foil and a piece of Swiss cheese (which, if we look closely, we'll notice is made of beeswax). Defying gravity, the fencing foil stands on its handle on the floor, while the impaled cheese seems to float away. Dramatic in its presentation, the work retains a sense of the immediacy and activity of its creation.

Imbuing common materials with pathos and gravitas, ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS uses the term *autoconstrucción* (self-construction) to refer to his own extended practice with its reticent attitude to fixedness. His sculptural self-portraits suggest a restless forward movement. In *Autorretrato embarazado y mascando pepitas* (*Self-Portrait Pregnant and Chewing Pumpkin Seeds*) and *Autorretrato acatarrado pero haciendo los siete quiebres del elefantito* (*Self-Portrait with a Cold but Still Trying to Get Busy Anyway*) (both 2010), skateboards are used as plinths for provocative, compelling, and formally elegant assemblages of lumber and organic materials—in one instance, a potato and, in another, a “hand” of ginger root—which will grow and decay over the course of the exhibition, eventually requiring their replacement. In the first instance, the sculpture is precariously balanced with no hardware connecting the individual elements to each other, and the weight of the potato is a counterbalance to the length of lumber extending over the opposite side of the fulcrum—unsteady, alive, and poised to change form.¹¹

An apparent and even brutal materiality prevails in BILL BOLLINGER's work. Bollinger puts materiality front and center: hardware is hardware, tubing and water are tubing and water, and sawhorses are undeniably sawhorses. *Evergreen Joe Hemmis* (1970/2012) is made from thirty sawhorses whose adapted circular formation frames an empty center. For *Untitled* (*Gorgas Stairway*) (1969), Bollinger wove a piece of clear silicone tubing between both ends of the handrails on a set of stairs, draping it between them in a generous curve. When filled part-way with water, the visible liquid finds its own natural level inside the tubing. There is little, if any, transformation of an object's material aspects in Bollinger's practice. Yet for all of the ways in which his work is straightforward and regimental (the artist trained as an aeronautical engineer), the magic of his work is in how he is able to transform our encounter with these supplies by subverting their usual function in favor of a sculptural experience.¹²

KLARA LIDÉN's work often exists as evidence of physical provocations. For instance, in a recent installation, the artist filled a gallery with discarded Christmas trees, creating a repurposed forest concealed behind a wall similar to those that surround construction sites. In her newly commissioned work for the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, *180° Wall Piece* (2012), Lidén has literally turned the museum inside out. Identifying a liminal space—a wall separating the gallery from its loading dock—Lidén immediately proposed, as part joke and part challenge, that the wall be flipped around, putting the back of the house on view in the gallery. The wall bears its architectural history like a body bears its scars: we see patches where holes were once cut through to accommodate video monitors, dripping accumulations of drywall mud, scaffolding in storage, and plenty of extra wood studs. In using the wall as a readymade, Lidén allows us a view of something we weren't intended to see. This simple gesture, undertaken

on a grand scale (the section of excised and turned-around wall measures 22½ by 14 feet), is matter-of-fact, simultaneously sculptural and out of place—a ready-made architectural relief.

With works such as *laberintos (pa' octavio paz y gaspar yanga)* (2003–9) and *untitled (hexagons)* (2001–11), WILLIAM CORDOVA has illuminated another kind of hidden history for his viewers. The gatefold covers of the more than two hundred record albums comprising *laberintos* intersect to construct a maze that grants and blocks passage. What is not apparent to the eye in this construction, however, is the provenance of the album covers. The albums have been “appropriated” (read: stolen) by the artist from the library of an unidentified Ivy League institution, in retribution for that same institution’s refusal to repatriate roughly two hundred Incan cultural artifacts, which the university “borrowed” from Peru in 1914. In navigating the twists and turns of Cordova’s maze, we have the time to pause and consider the injustice of this situation: the university’s refusal to return these works is a crime, which the artist comments on by committing one of his own. The work’s dedication—to Octavio Paz, the Mexican poet and essayist for whom “the revolution of the word is the revolution of the world,”¹³ and Gaspar Yanga, the leader of a slave rebellion in Mexico during the early period of the Spanish colonial rule in that country—reinforces Cordova’s intentions. By reframing views and dialogue, Cordova shifts our perception of the center and suggests new autonomous realms.

By contrast, FAYÇAL BAGHRICHE engages in an act of concealment in his work *Envelopments* (2010). In an inventory of the world’s flags, he noted the ones whose flapping ends are entirely red. At present, there happen to be twenty-six such flags, representing countries as diverse as Bahrain, Italy, Peru, and Somalia. After wrapping each flag around its pole until just the end hangs free, the artist mounted all of them in a single line, angling out from the wall. We are left with twenty-six identical-looking objects, though if we dig deeper (or simply unwrap them) their hidden identities are revealed. In creating this work, Baghriche affords us an opportunity to reflect on the complexity of nationalism and national identity, and offers us a case in point for looking beyond surfaces and toward latent content.

LATIFA ECHAKHCH routinely strips down and alters common objects to offer pointed commentaries on our ever more globalized lives. These provocations, which operate by way of the paradigm of productive creation through destructive or disruptive acts, often address national identity and the complexities of today’s increasingly transnational existence. Deceptively simple, Echakhch’s works rely on straightforward gestures that, in subtly adjusting familiar materials, introduce complex issues. For example, *Globus* (2007) appears from a distance to be a globe, but a closer look reveals it to be a large paper map that has been crumpled into a ball. National borders and continental landmasses have been arbitrarily reshuffled in the process. In another instance, the woven border and fringe of *Frame* (2010), a prayer rug whose center has been cut out, elicits a clear hint of the object it once was. Shown either on the wall or the floor, the work retains relationships to sculpture and painting that can be shifted and scrambled, not as an either-or, but perhaps a bit of each.

In a story PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG once heard, a politician approached a group of rural Thai farmers, as he understood that their support of his candidacy would likely enable his

election. The politician asked the farmers to engage in a demonstration of their support for him. In exchange for their action, he offered the farmers 1,000 baht (roughly US\$32) each, an offer many of the farmers accepted, given their adverse economic situations. It was later revealed that this corrupt politician paid each of the farmers with counterfeit bills. This story motivated Phinthong to find the participating farmers and ask them whether they had held on to a fake bill. When he finally found one, Phinthong purchased the note for 30,000 baht—exchanging a worthless piece of paper for one that recognized its alternative value. In *Demonstrations* (2009), Phinthong engages a gallery attendant to share this story and display the fake bill to visitors, ensuring the ongoing development of this narrative as the story grows and changes through successive tellings, as in a game of telephone. *Demonstrations* implicates this bogus banknote in a more complex narrative of capital exchange, power, and influence within a global economy.

In the 1970s in Prague, during the aftermath of the Prague Spring when Czechoslovakia reverted to Communism after a brief period of Socialist rule, JIŘÍ KOVANDA created simple and poetic actions that could be read as exercises in the expression of individual freedom. In the group of seven photographic and typed-text collages on view at CAMH, Kovanda engaged the possibility of actions-as-readymades by reframing and focusing the context in which simple actions are presented. The text “Waiting for someone to call me” is accompanied by an image of the artist sitting by a phone, gazing off into the distance. In other selections, his activities include staring into the sun until his eyes water and running away from a recently assembled group of friends. Kovanda’s quotidian activities—whether riding an escalator or gathering with groups of friends—share a convenient material and conceptual economy with the readymade. Under Communist rule, state censorship affected all aspects of civilian life, but with his seemingly nonsensical gestures, Kovanda seems to revel in an internal space free from the constraints of the world around him.

The members of the St. Petersburg-based collective CHTO DELAT? (What is to be done?) assert that art can provide an outlet for reenvisioning the world. To quote the artists, “Revolutionary art is that which calls for a nonexistent people and a new world.” Like Fontaine and Isenstein, these artists turned to ahistoric artwork to find inspiration and a basis for new work. For *The Builders* (2005), collective members met in a setting similar to that in Victor Popkov’s Social Realist painting *The Builders of Bratsk* (1960) and photographed themselves interacting with one another, documenting their time together in a series of still photographs. A discussion between the collective’s members recorded later became the soundtrack to this digital slide show. In their dialogue, the members address their understanding of community and contention, which over the course of the video becomes understood as active, fluid, and changing. Their conversation centers on both the challenges and the support they offer one another.

Readymades are often recognized for their conceptual coolness, but this does not imply they lack emotional depth, feeling, or generosity. For the categories of feeling and coolness are not mutually exclusive. The work of Cuban-born American artist FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES provides a poignant case in point. At first glance, it may not be obvious that his work was

generated from the center of a war zone, but Gonzalez-Torres's work speaks directly to the devastation wreaked by the AIDS epidemic that has raged in the United States since the 1980s. In subverting the cool language of Minimalism, Gonzalez-Torres reimagined its forms and aesthetics and thereby reshaped our understanding of Minimalist art. Gonzalez-Torres transforms everyday objects into highly charged symbols that are at once personal, antagonistic, and vulnerable. "Untitled" (*Perfect Lovers*) (1987–90) is composed of two identical round clocks mounted side by side on a wall. Initially set to read the same time, their battery operation ensures that their synchrony will eventually fail, and that they will fall out of step with each other. "Untitled" (*Silver*) (1992) is a string of twenty-four lightbulbs that its exhibitors are charged with installing as they see fit, so that presentations of the work constantly change. By making the museum-as-institution, its workers, and its audience interact anew to reinvent the work each time it is exhibited, Gonzalez-Torres ensured that his art would be rooted firmly in the present. Whether hung in a single line from the ceiling, coiled on the floor, or unplugged and exhibited on a pedestal, Gonzalez-Torres's sculpture maintains a vital connection to the contexts in which it is presented.¹⁴

While "It is what it is. Or is it?" purposefully avoids establishing cohesive thematic groupings of artworks, all of its images and objects encourage us to take a second look or to spend a little more time in considering our quotidian world. These art objects may look familiar, yet they act quite differently from their counterparts outside the gallery. They remind us that new, alternative narratives might be built through a simple act of looking more closely from a shifted point of view. This exhibition is a speculative proposition that considers both how the readymade might be defined and deployed today and how we can learn something about a contemporary state of being if we upend and reconsider the objects and images that surround us. Readymades rely on this recontextualization.

In this investigative line, this book gathers previously published texts that establish a direct relation to the process of recontextualization that the readymade engages. Through these texts—a fictional text by Lucy Lippard and essays by artists Joseph Kosuth and Claire Fontaine—we might discern attitudes toward the readymade as it relates to the evolution of artistic practice.¹⁵ As with the works in the exhibition, these texts also testify to an increasingly politicized and diverse set of social, aesthetic, and temporal realities that artists confront in their practices. While rigorous and scholarly in their own ways, they are less invested in formulating answers than in foregrounding questions about how and why certain notions predominate in relation to art making.

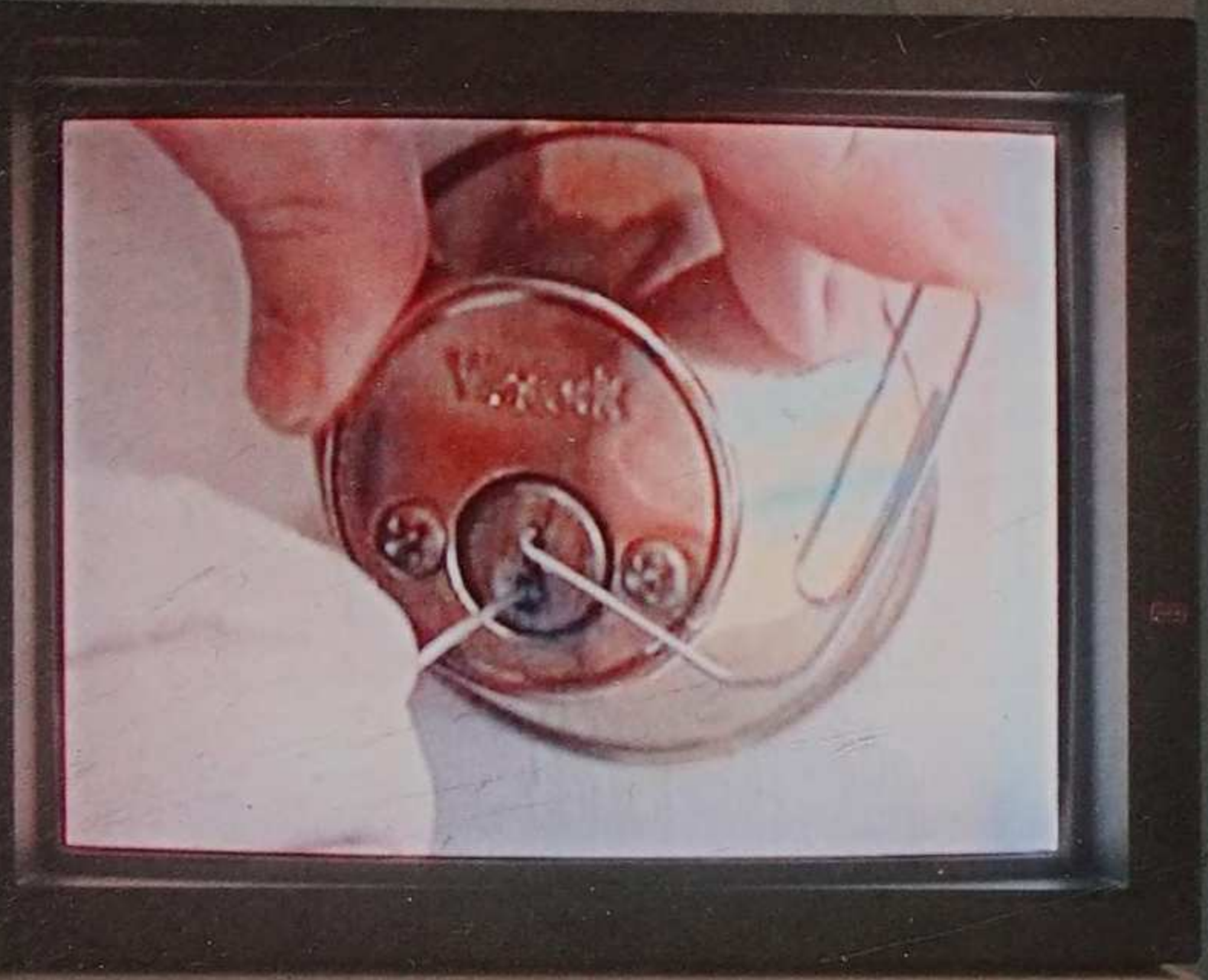
While it may be easier to follow a trail than to blaze one's own, one loses the pleasure of arriving first and encountering a vision with fresh eyes. The readymade, in all of its divergent legacies, demands that we become active viewers. By not focusing exclusively on Duchamp's "retinal culture" or formal issues, "It is what it is. Or is it?" culls varied—even unexpected—interpretations of the readymade in order to insist on its continued relevance as a multivalent method, practice, and approach for artists today.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion regarding the photographic documentation of Marcel Duchamp's studio and the relevance of these documents to the ongoing interpretation of the artist's work, see Elena Filipovic, "A Museum That is Not," *e-flux journal*, no. 4 (March 2009), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/a-museum-that-is-not/>, accessed March 23, 2011.
- 2 Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 48.
- 3 Anne d'Harnoncourt, introduction to *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 1973), p. 36.
- 4 The example comes from Duchamp's note, "Physique de bagage," in *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, ed. André Breton (1940; repr. Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1972), p. 333.
- 5 Gertrude Stein, "Next: Life and Letters of Marcel Duchamp," in *Geography and Plays* (Boston: Four Seas, 1922), p. 405. For considerations of the mutual influence of Gertrude Stein and Marcel Duchamp, see Marjorie Perloff, "A Cessation of Resemblances: Stein/Picasso/Duchamp," *Battersea Review* 1, no. 1 (Summer 2012), online at <http://www.thebatterseareview.com/critical-prose/75-marjorie-perloff>; and Marjorie Perloff, "Of Objects and Readymades: Gertrude Stein and Marcel Duchamp," *Forum of Modern Language Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996), pp. 137–54.
- 6 Marina Tsvetaeva, "The Poet and Time," in *Art in the Light of Conscience: Eight Essays on Poetry* (Northumberland, England: Bloodaxe Books, 2010), p. 87.
- 7 For a discussion of the history and development of Conceptual art and readymades produced outside of North America, see *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).
- 8 For analysis of the reception of the readymade through the 1990s, see Lynne Cooke, "Reviewing Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Rose Sélavy, Marchand Du Sel . . .," in *The Readymade Boomerang: Certain Relations in 20th Century Art* (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 1990); and *The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interviews, Roundtable*, ed. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (Cambridge, MA: October Books, 1996).
- 9 Barry Schwabsky's writings on Ellen Altfest's practice particularly elucidate the tireless depth and breadth of the artist's vision. See Barry Schwabsky, *Ellen Altfest: Paintings* (New York: Bellwether, and White Cube, London, 2007).
- 10 See, for example, pages 1–3 and 134–36 in this book, as well as Luis Jacob, *Album III* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007), and *Album IV* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 2010).
- 11 In conversation with Jimmie Durham, Abraham Cruzvillegas exposes his calculated tendency to playfully provoke. Jimmie Durham, "An Interview with Abraham Cruzvillegas," in *Abraham Cruzvillegas: Autoconstrucción, The Book* (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts/REDCAT, 2009), pp. 145–76.
- 12 For a recent, comprehensive analysis of Bill Bollinger's work, see *Bill Bollinger*, ed. Christiane Meyer-Stoll (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2011).
- 13 Octavio Paz, quoted in "The Nobel Prize in Literature, 1990," http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1990/paz-bio.html, accessed August 4, 2012.
- 14 For a thoughtful commentary on Felix Gonzalez-Torres's contextual approach, see Julie Ault et al., *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (New York: Steidl-dangin, 2006).
- 15 An example of contemporary fiction that exploits appropriation is Jonathan Lethem's "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism" and "The Afterlife of 'Ecstasy,'" in *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions, Etc.* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), pp. 93–120 and 121–24. I thank Fulvia Carnivale and James Thornhill for bringing this text to my attention.

H M A C





previous page:

CLAIRE FONTAINE, *Instructions for the sharing of private property*, 2006

Plates

ELLEN ALTFEST

FAYÇAL BAGHRICHE

BILL BOLLINGER

CHTO DELAT?

WILLIAM CORDOVA

ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS

LATIFA ECHAKHCH

DAPHNE FITZPATRICK

CLAIRE FONTAINE

FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES

RACHEL HECKER

JAMIE ISENSTEIN

LUIS JACOB

PATRICK KILLORAN

JIŘÍ KOVANDA

KLARA LIDÉN

CATHERINE MURPHY

PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG



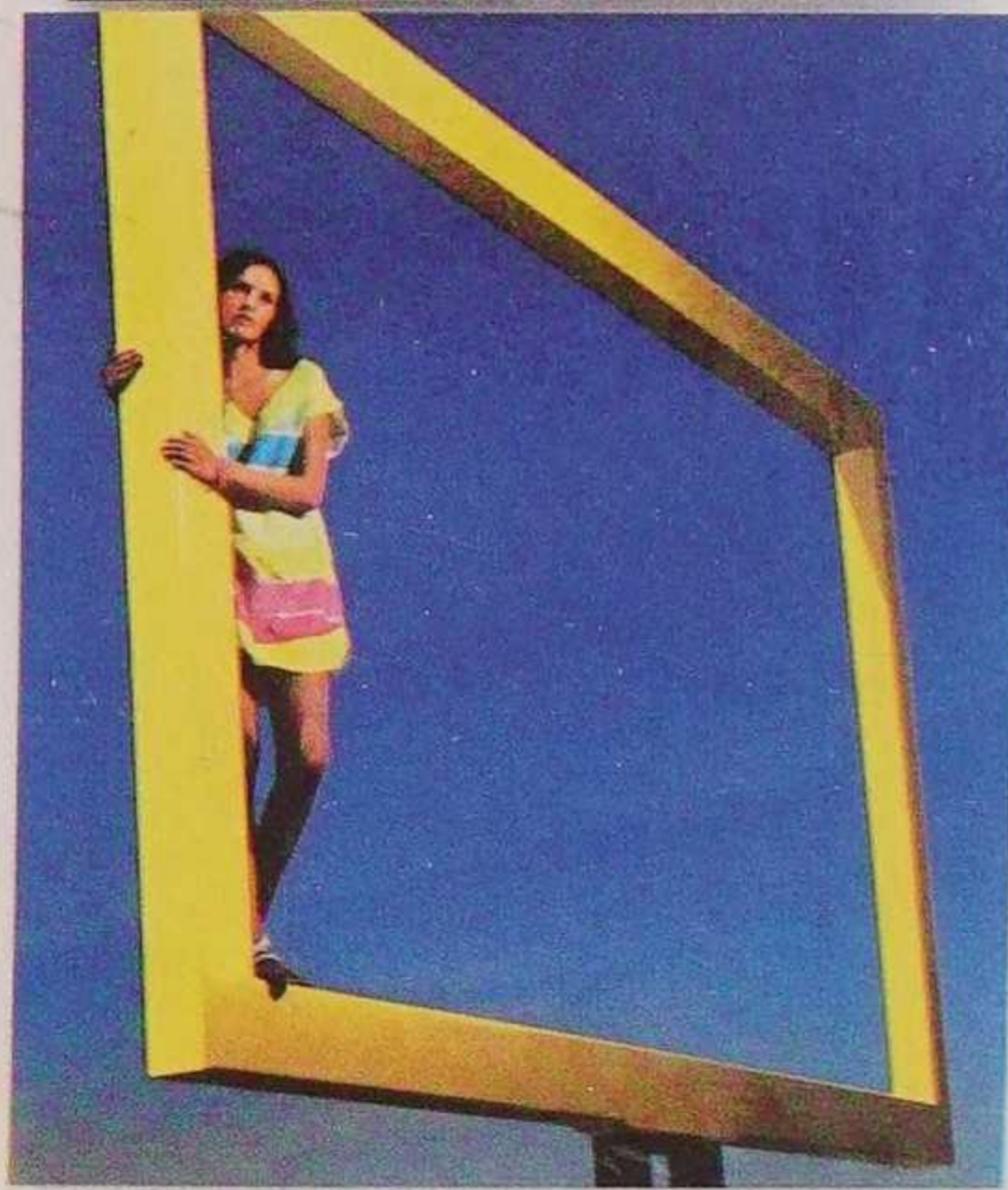


It's what it is.
0













34 BILL BOLLINGER, *Evergreen Joe Hemmis*, 1970/2012; DAPHNE FITZPATRICK, *Fiddle Head Hook*, 2012; and LUIS JACOB, *Album VIII*, 2009



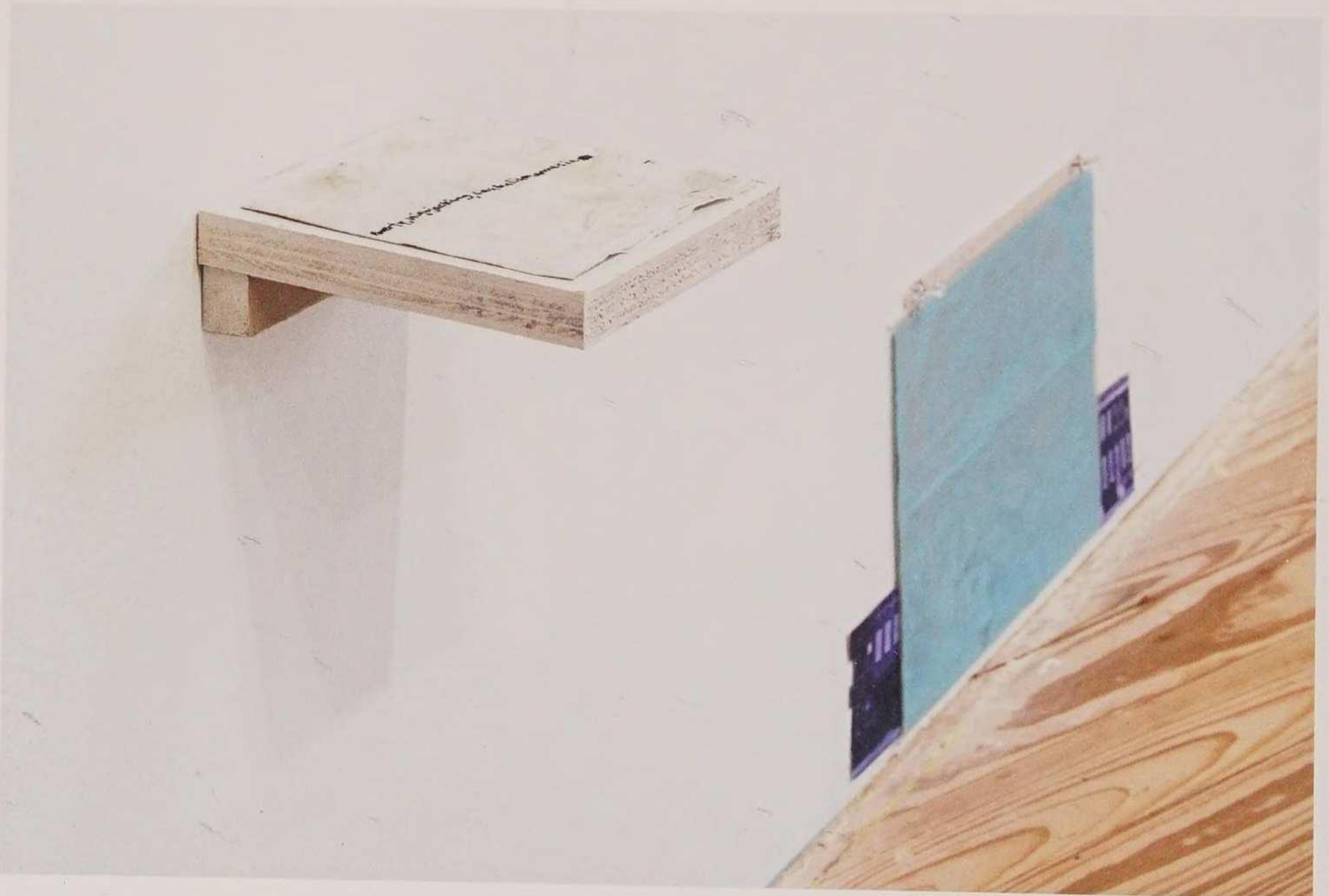




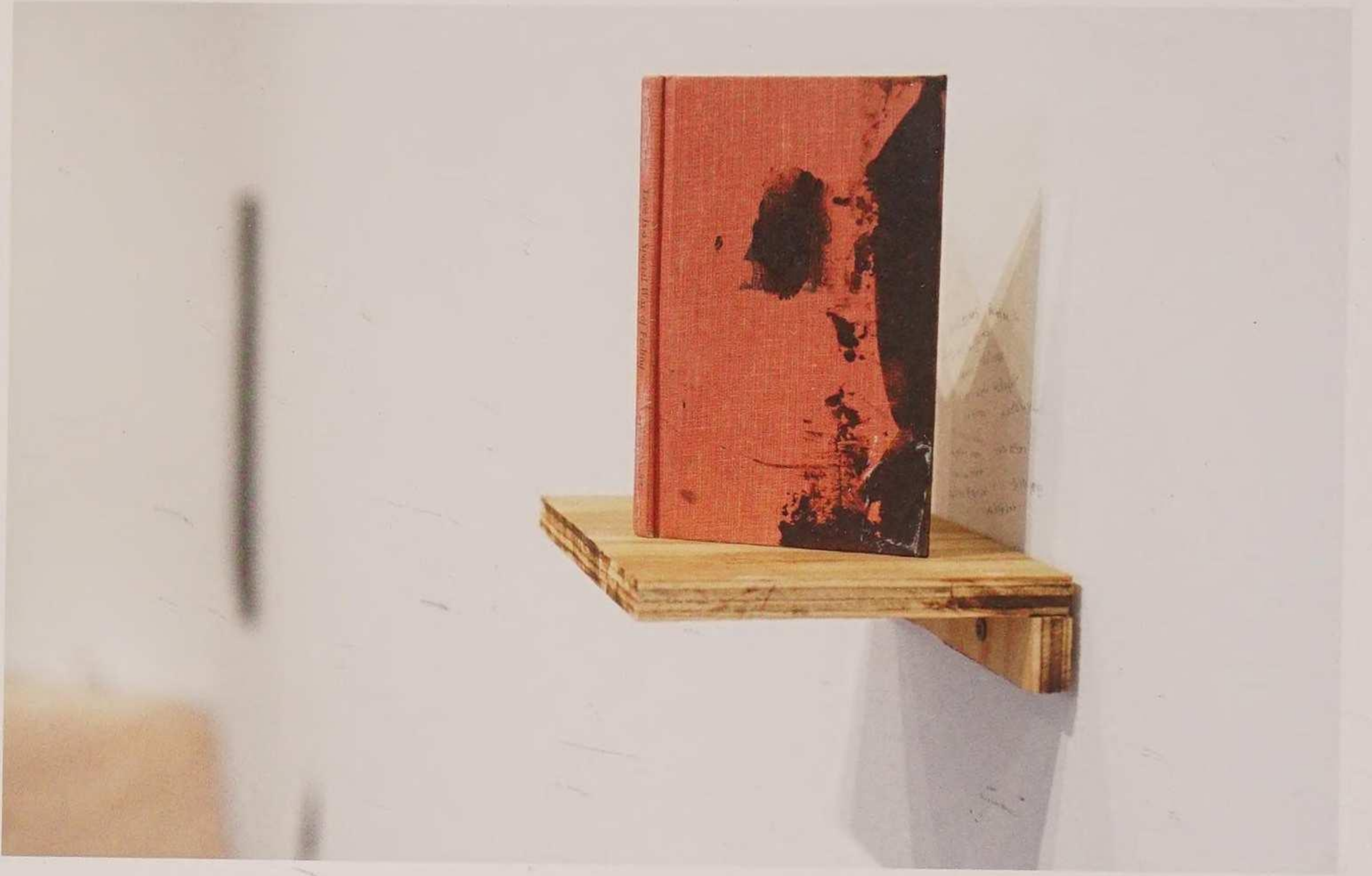


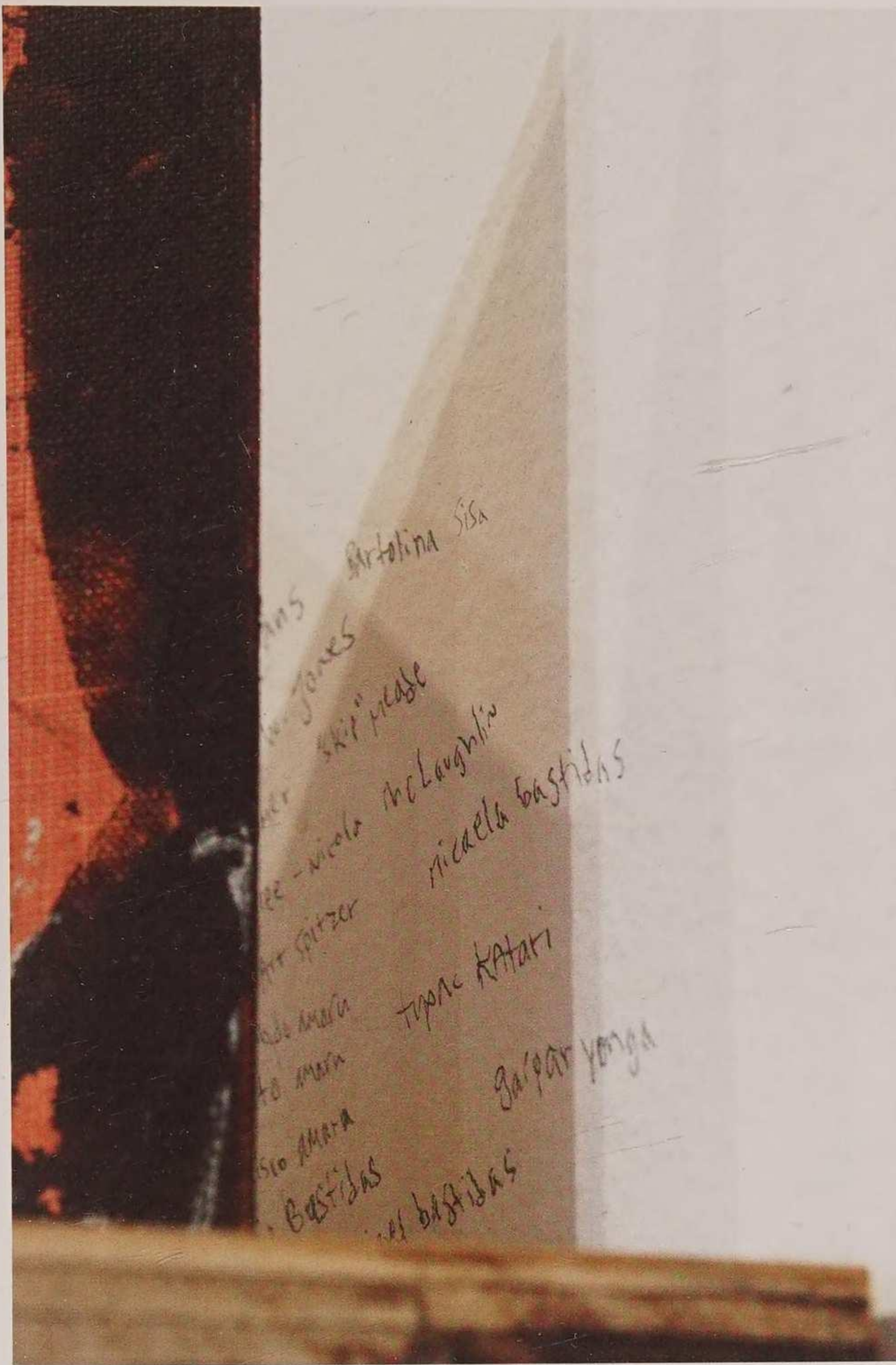




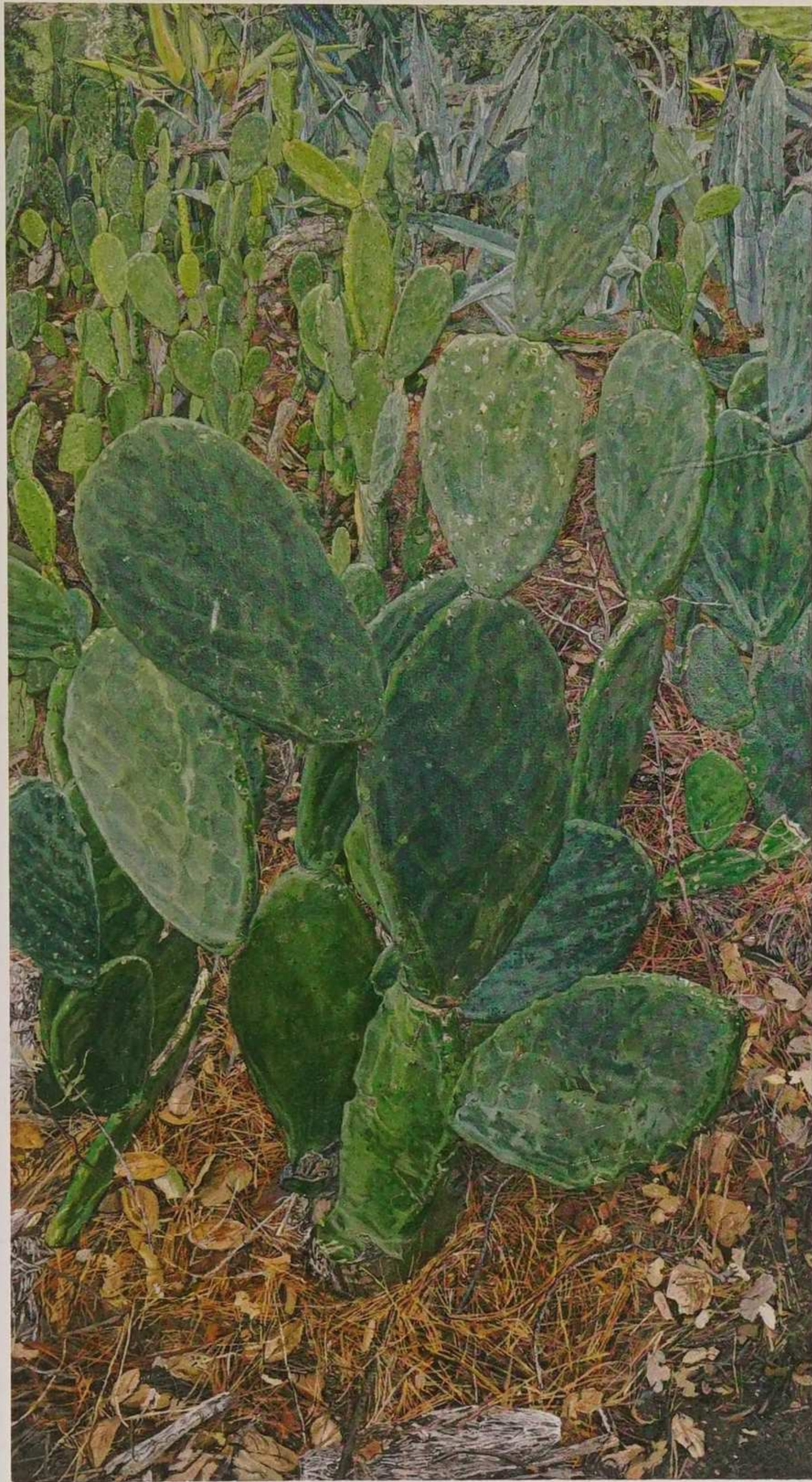


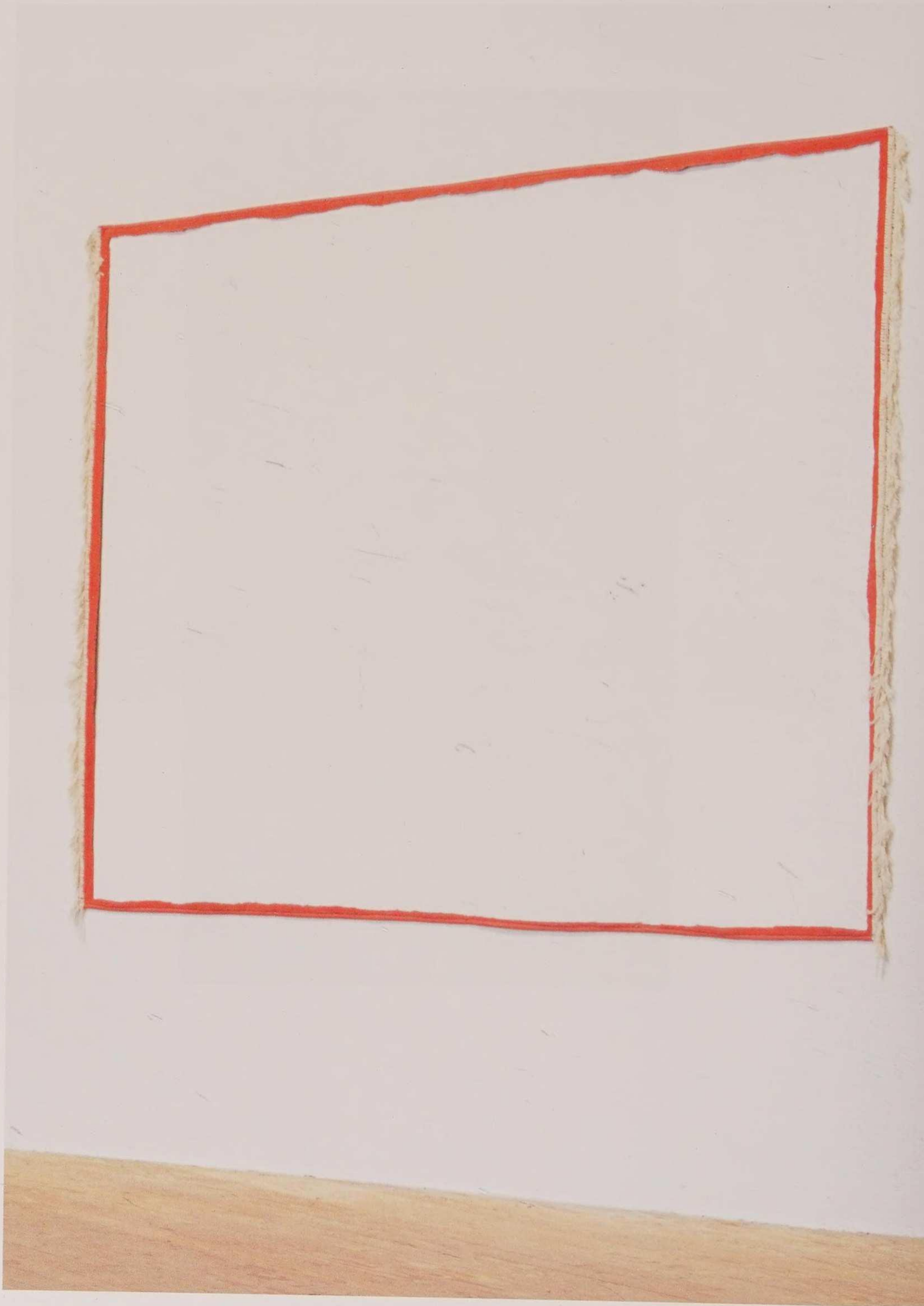


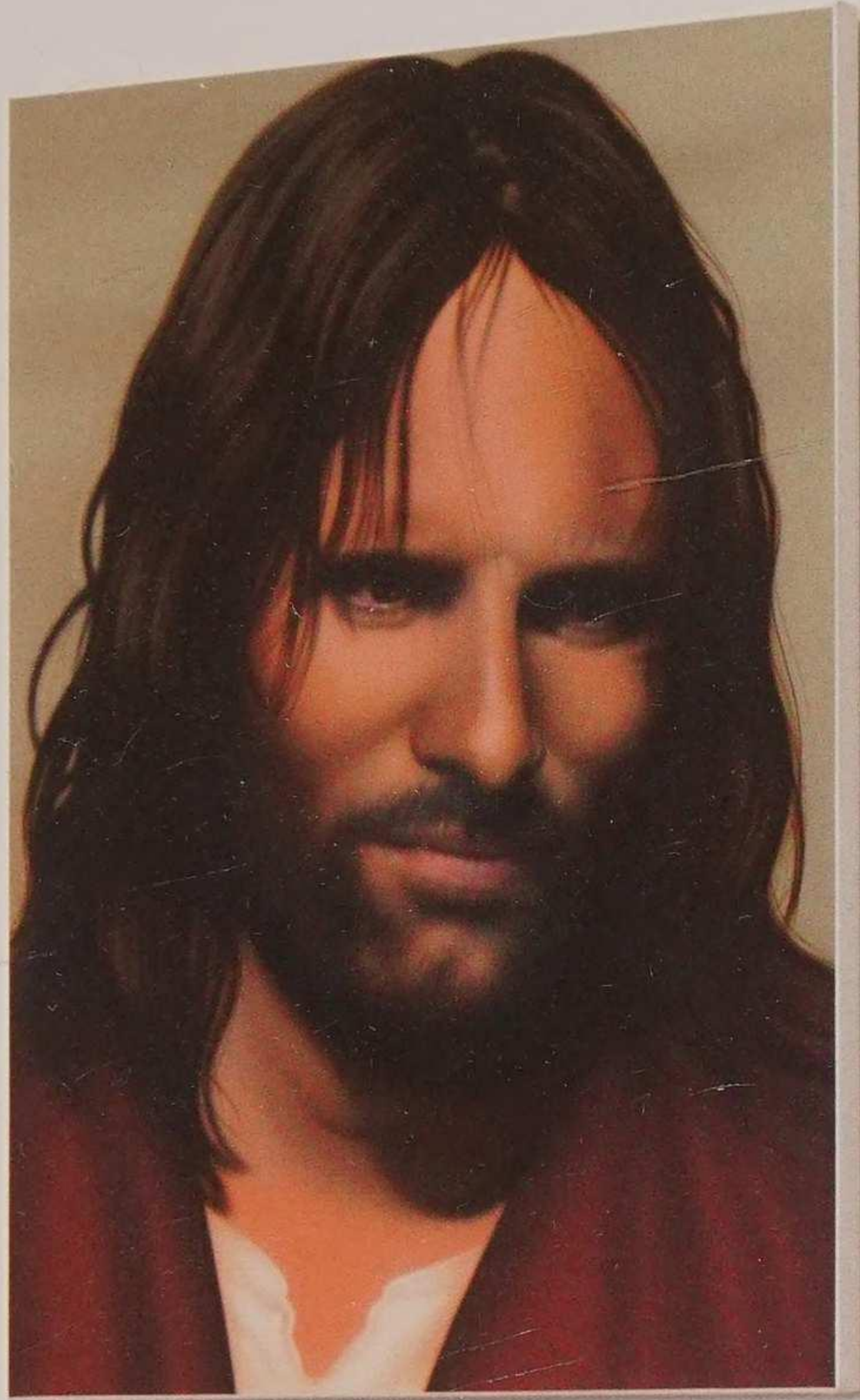


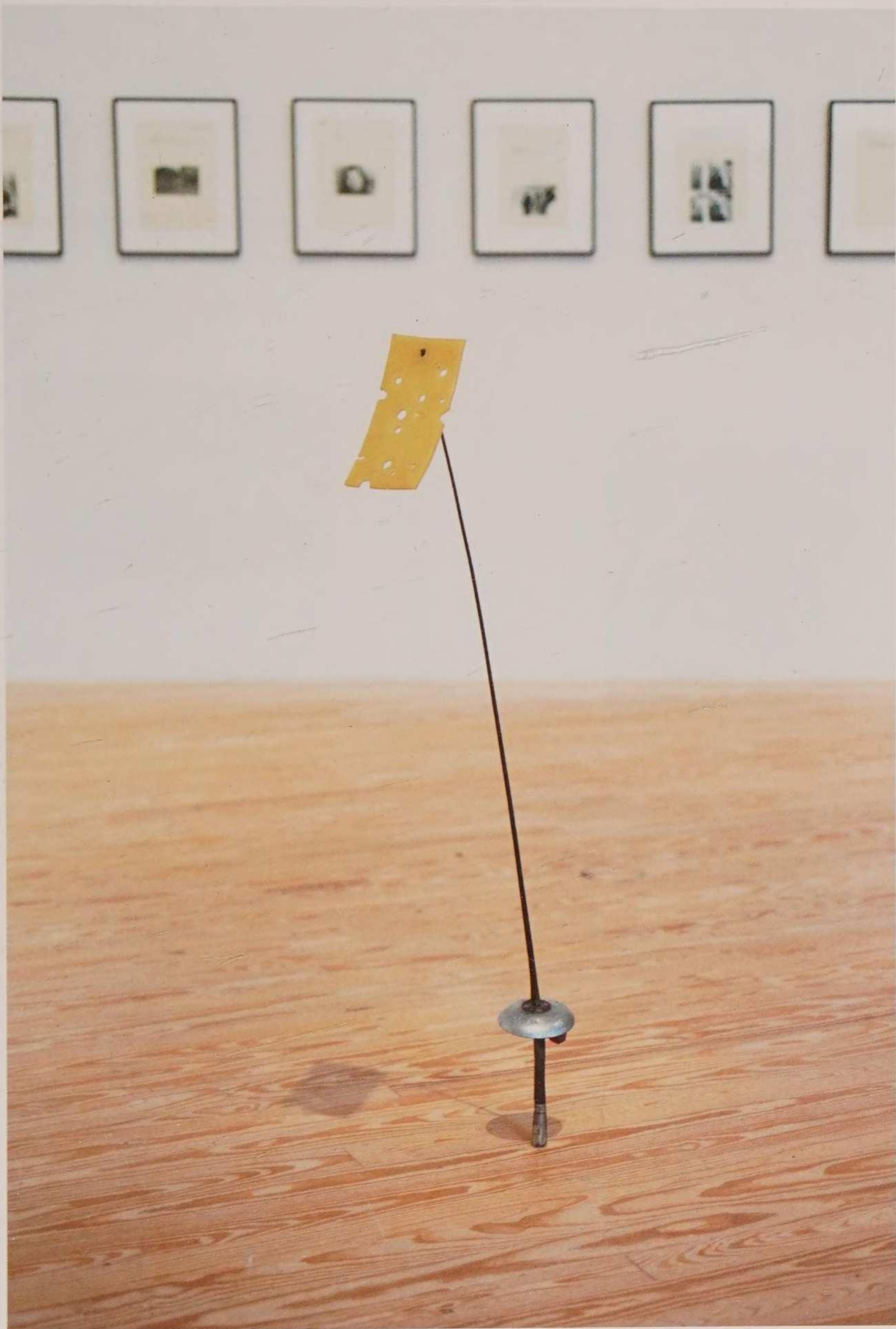












x x x
18. listopadu 1976
Praha
Čekám až mi někdo zavolá...



x x x
23. ledna 1978
Praha, Staroměstské náměstí

Dal jsem si sraz s několika přáteli... stáli jsme v hloučku
na náměstí a hovořili... náhle jsem se roztěhl, utíkal jsem
přes náměstí a zmizel v Melantrichově ulici...



x x x

srpen 1977
Praha

Břečím,
Díval jsem se do slunce tak dlouho, až jsem
se rozbrečel.



x x x

8. prosince 1977
Praha

S rukama na očích jdu poslepu do houfy lidí,
kteří stojí na opačném konci chodby...



JIŘÍ KOVANDA August, 1977, Prague, I'm crying. I gazed at the sun for so long that I've started to cry, 1977 (left); and December 8th, 1977, Prague, With my hands over my eyes, I walk blindly into a group of people standing at the opposite end of the corridor . . . , 1977 (right)

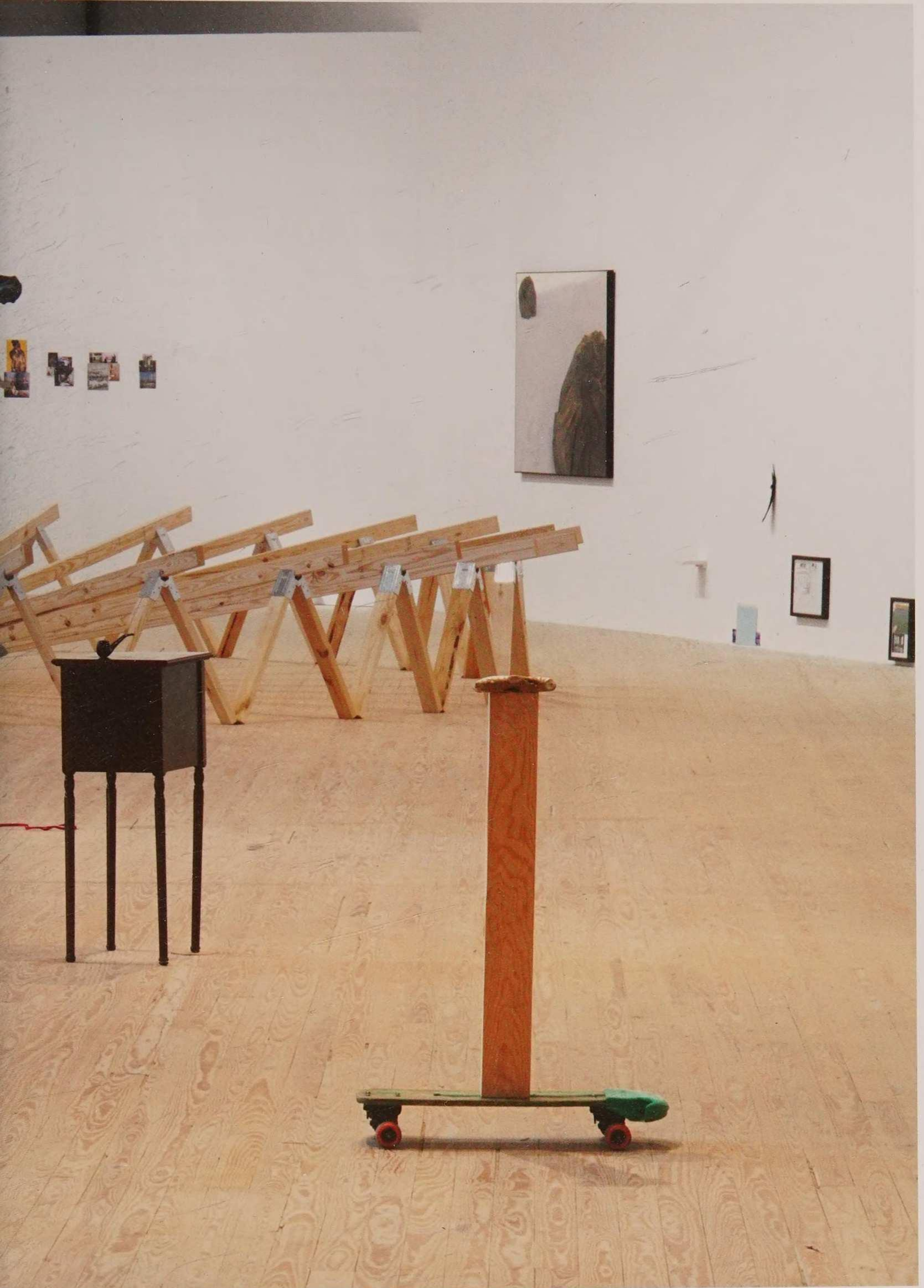


54 JAMIE ISENSTEIN, *Smoking Pipe*, 2006 (foreground); works by JIŘÍ KOVANDA and KLARA LIDÉN, *180° Wall Piece*, 2012 (background)



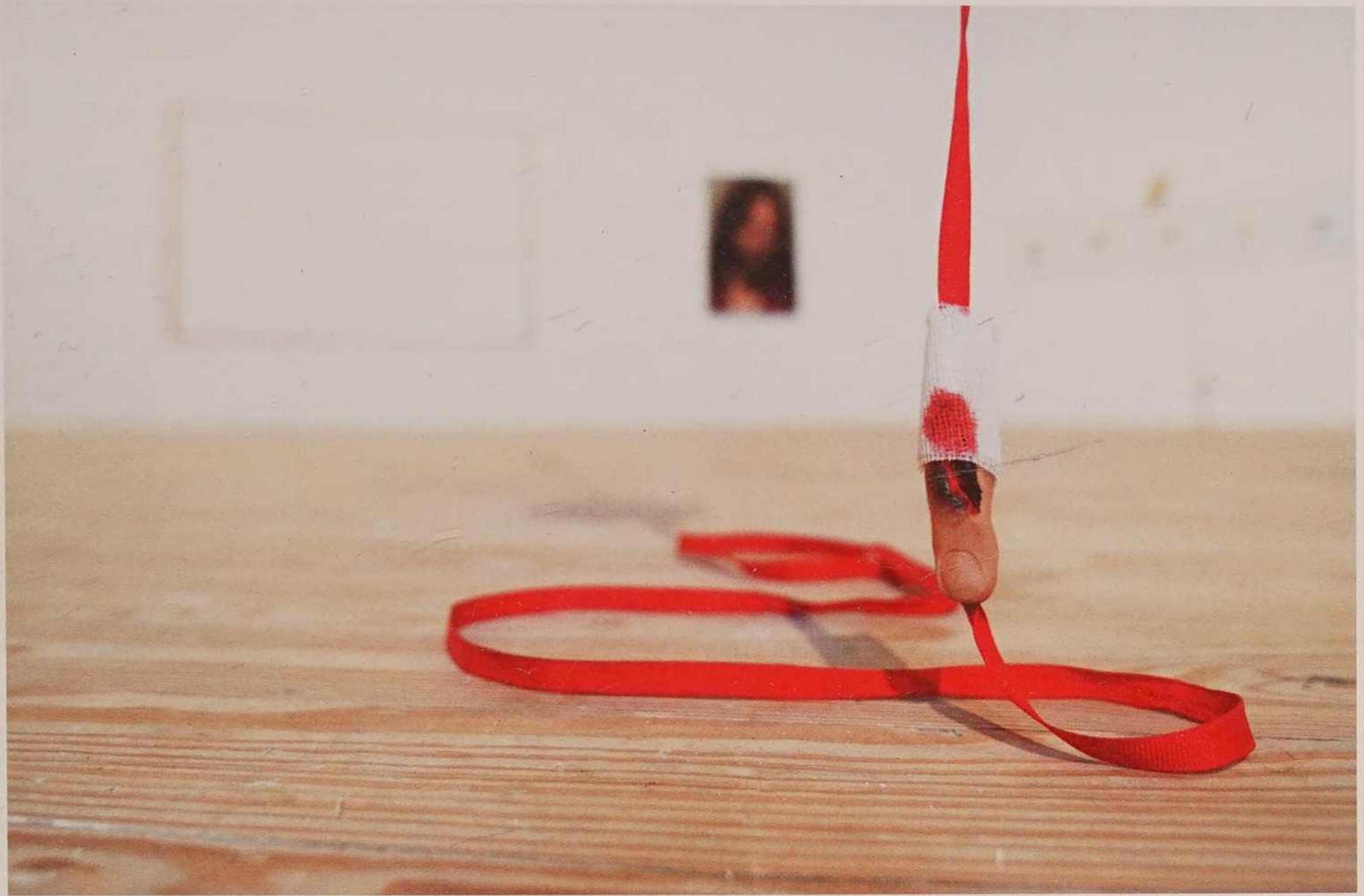




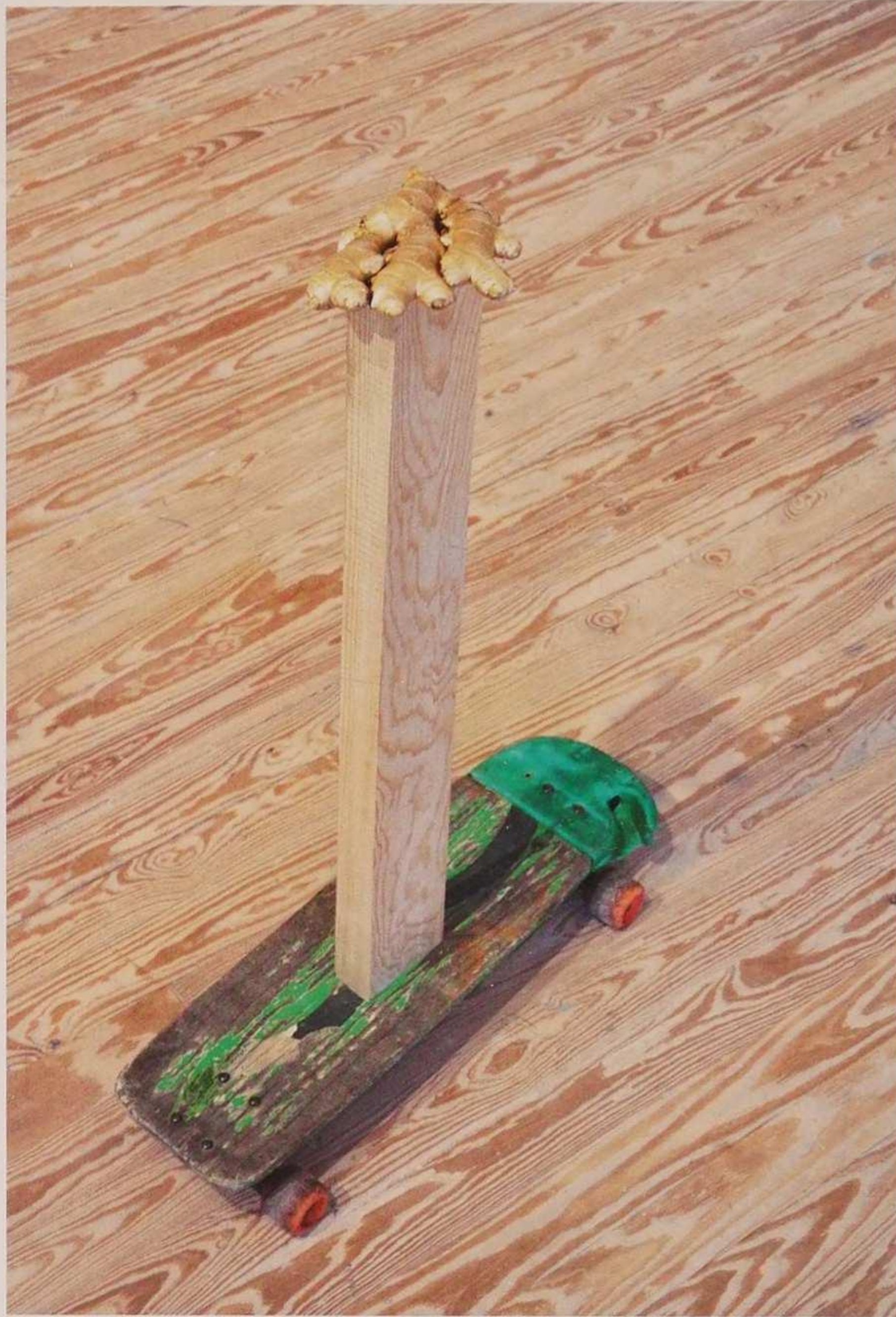




60 DAPHNE FITZPATRICK, *Standing Upright, Island Desert Island* (detail), 2012 (foreground); DAPHNE FITZPATRICK, *Prolonging the Life of Your Cheese*, 2012, and works by JIŘÍ KOVANDA (background)

























74 CHO DELAT?, *The Builders*, 2005 (background); LATIFA ECHAKHCH, *Globus*, 2007 (middle); and WILLIAM CORDOVA, *laberintos (pa' octavio paz y gaspar yanga)*, 2003–9 (foreground)

because we're not a collective of
Yuppies hanging out after work,
but an artistic community



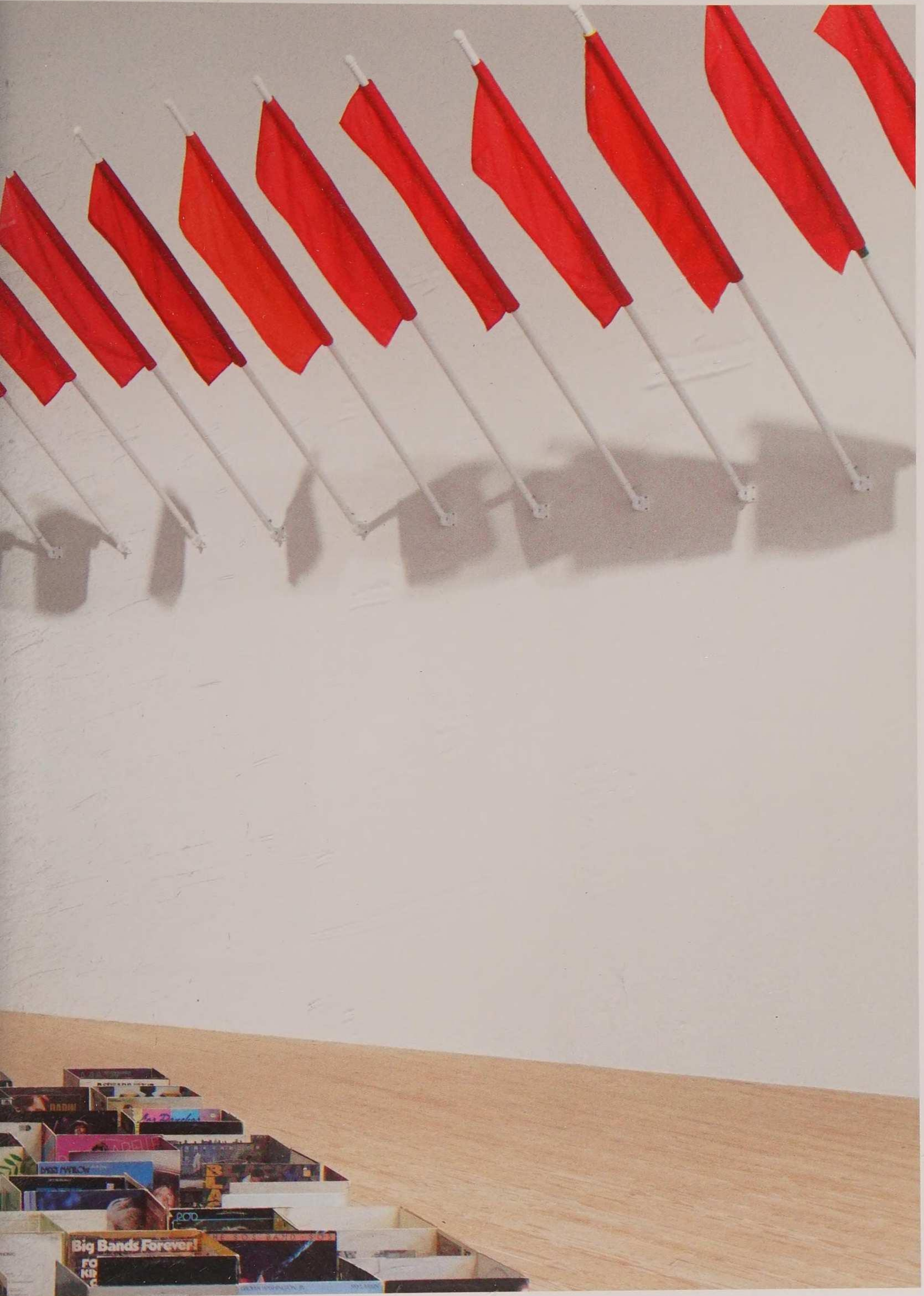


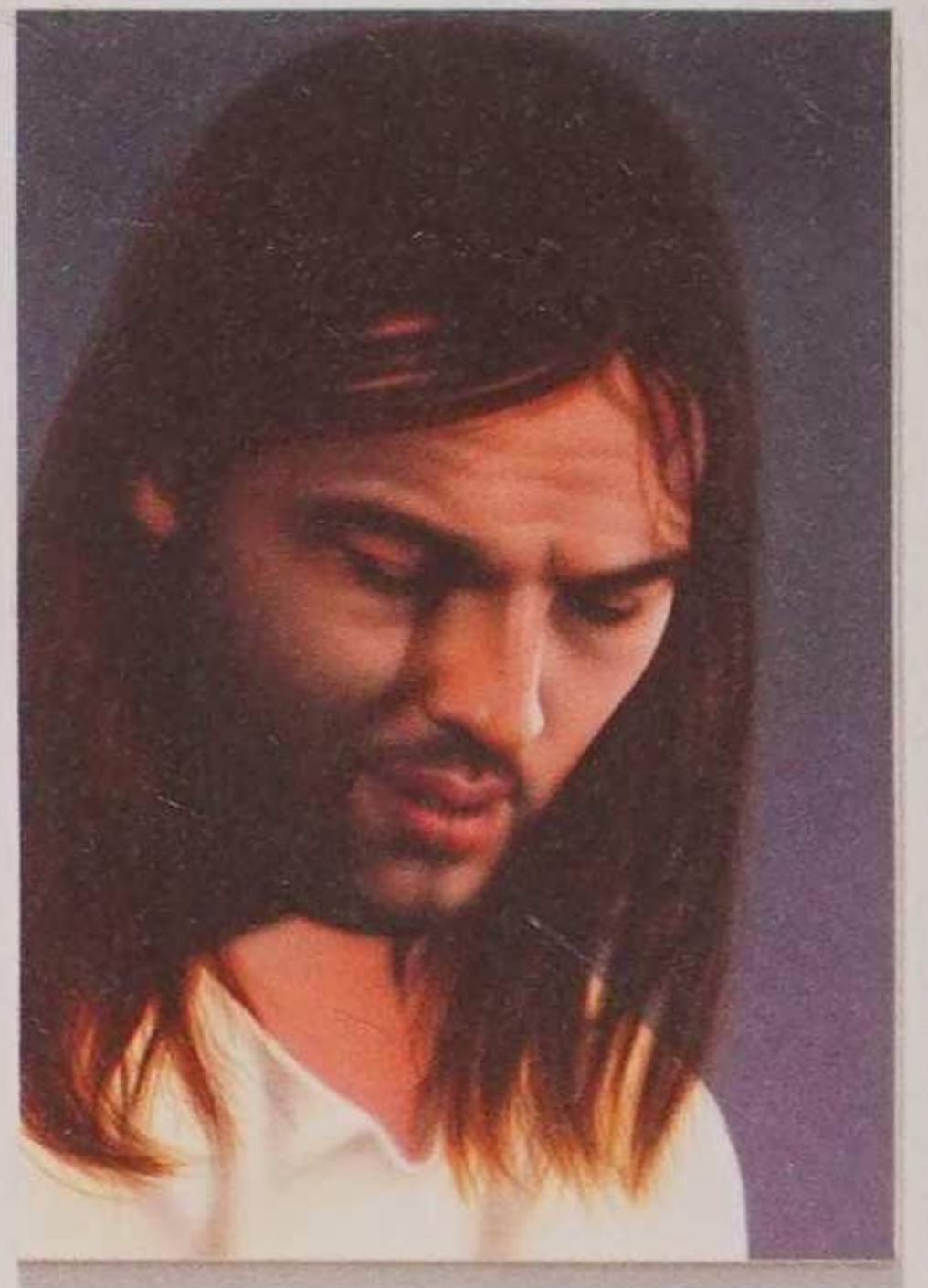
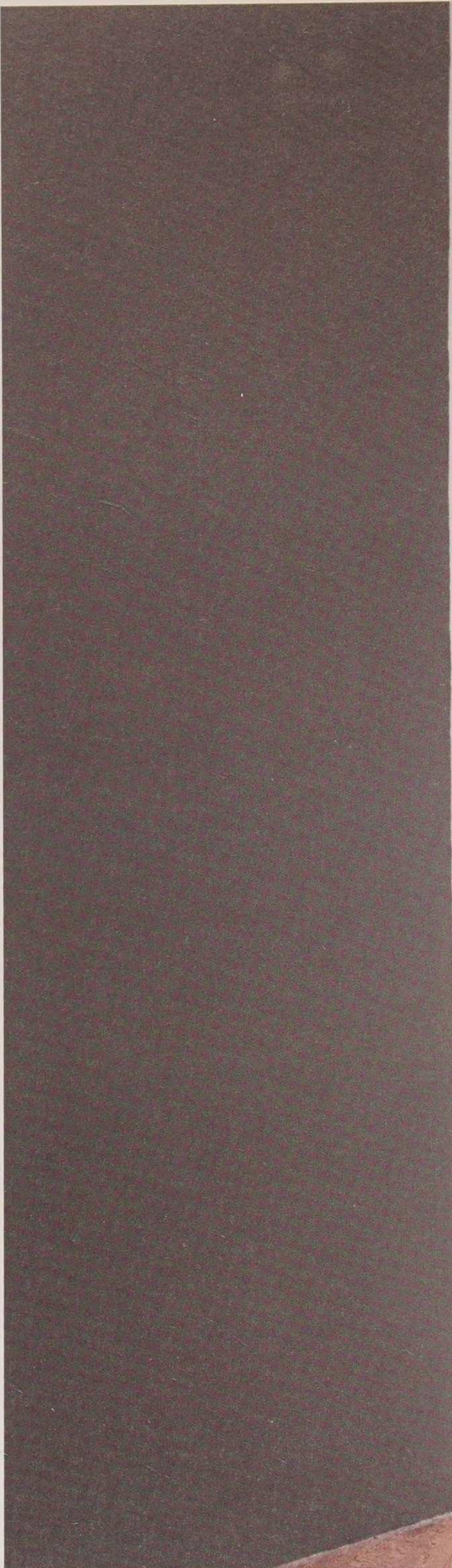


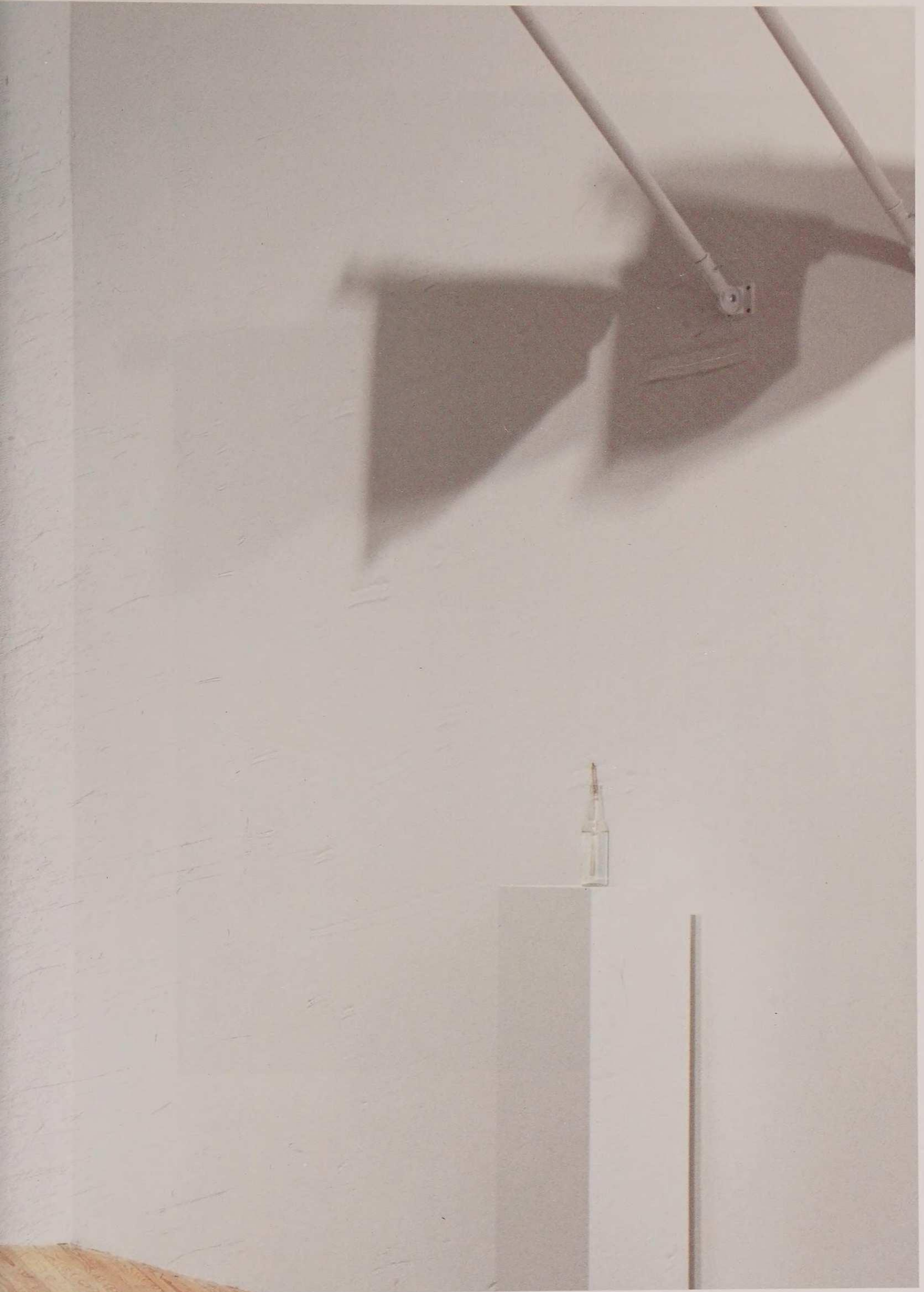








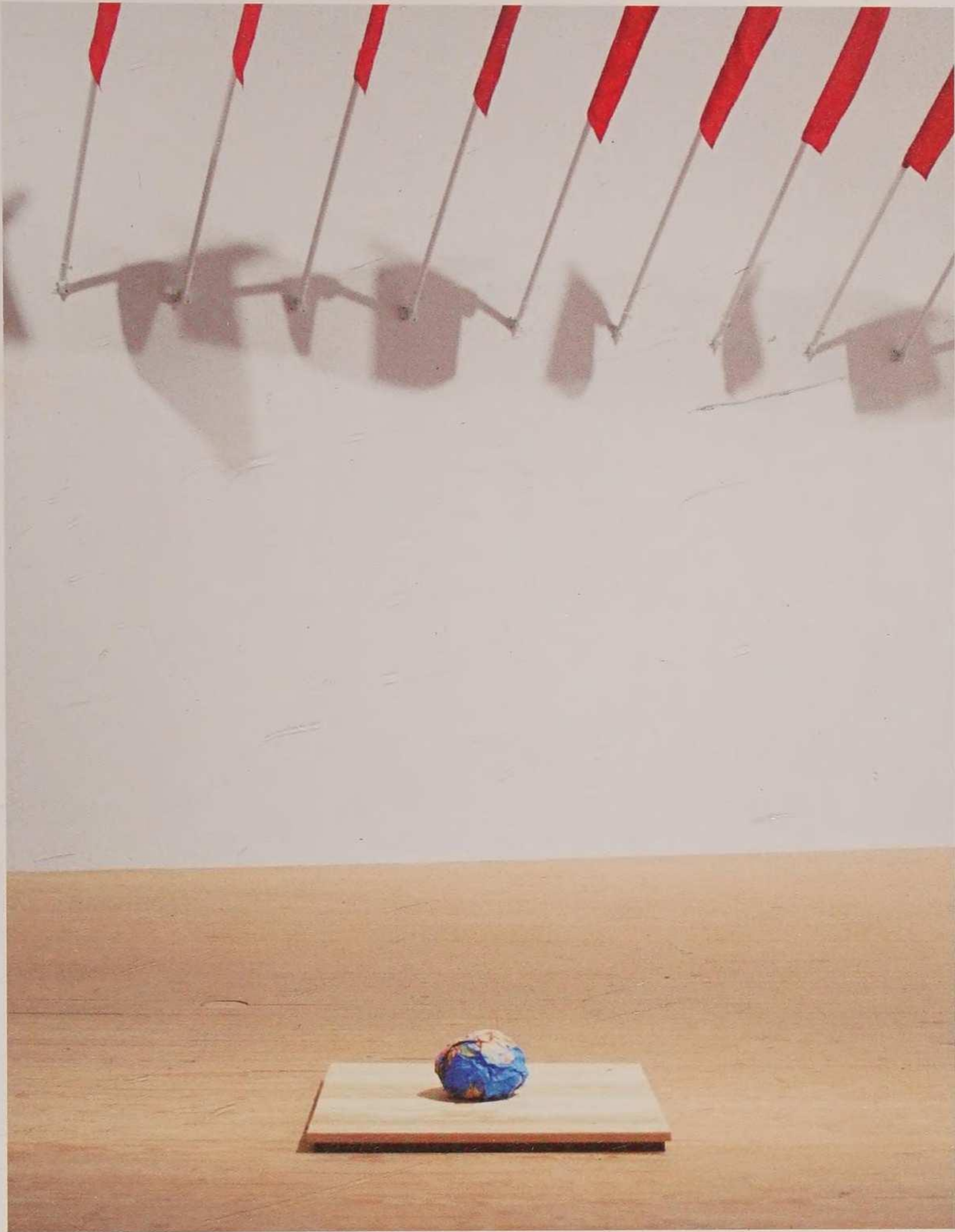




















Reprints

LUCY LIPPARD

JOSEPH KOSUTH

CLAIRE FONTAINE

Collated by
LUCY LIPPARD

The Romantic Adventures of an Adversative Rotarian or Allreadymadesomuchoff

Chapter I

“HE HAD THE ADVANTAGE of seeing the beautiful mechanism in Mr. Chance’s works, and that which struck him most was the cross-stroke in the polishing; when there was a ring lens to be made, the cross-curvature was not given by grinding¹ in a bowl, but by the cross work of the polisher; and by some small adjustment of the mechanism, which Mr. Chance had arranged, there was a power of altering the degrees of curvature which would be given by that cross-stroke. Upon that everything depended, and he looked upon it as the critical point in the construction of these lighthouses. He arrived at that conclusion because, when the light diverged from a lamp and fell upon the prisms, the intention was that it should emerge in parallel beams with reference to the vertical plane.

“During the Exhibition of 1851, he had an occulting light placed on the roof of his own house, with a view to experiment upon its adaptability for telegraphic communication; and subsequently he received a communication from America, requesting him to visit that country to establish that system there. He thought he might be permitted there to state a curious fact relating to the effect of these very rapid occultations so quickly succeeding each other that he was aware of their being double occultations before he was enabled to put into mental language the expression of that fact.”²

On his arrival, he met, of course, Mr. Chance himself, who tut-tutted in kingly fashion, “If your idea of a bicycle is one of these balloon tired, heavy frame, unwieldly

jobs that kids ride, you ought to drop by a bicycle shop and see what *real* bikes are like. You can pick one up with one hand and hoist it on your shoulder, so you can easily carry it up steps, onto stools, into buildings, and so on.”³

“Should the rear wheel run crooked,” his new friend joined in with enthusiasm, “it can be adjusted by screwing up the nuts until it is straight, or in alignment, as it is called.”⁴

At this point, Mr. Chance’s flowing scarf was temporarily caught in the spokes of his monocycle, through which he saw as he chose, and as he extricated himself he suggested ruefully that the wheel might be “a symbolic synthesis of the activity of cosmic forces and the passage of time. The allusion is, in the last resort, to the splitting up of the world-order into two essentially different factors: rotary movement and immobility—or the perimeter of the wheel and its still center, an image of the Aristotelian ‘unmoved mover.’ This becomes an obsessive theme in mythic thinking, and in alchemy it takes the form of the contrast between the volatile (moving, and therefore transitory) and the fixed.”⁵

Rolling this around in his mind, Mr. Chance’s new acquaintance absentmindedly tweaked a thread loose from his waistcoat (a plaid one of which he was very proud; it had once had five buttons spelling the initials of his first five mistresses—L.H.O.O.Q.—but with the loss of the H, the Q, and an O, only a cheery greeting remained). No sooner had he pulled this one thread than another appeared, and that one, breaking, produces a third, which occultation he took as a sign: “The

mass production of machinery by modern manufacturing methods is possible only because of strict standards of measurement. Varying degrees of accuracy in measurement are required for different purposes. It should always be kept in mind that inaccurate and careless measurements are worthless, and may often cause waste of time and materials.”⁶

Here they were briefly interrupted by a French widow whom Mr. Chance had met when they both befriended a blind man taking the wrong, wrong passage from New York to Zurich, via Barcelona. Once introductions had been made, the conversation resumed.

“The process of measurement itself alters the very thing we are measuring and there is nothing to be done about it on account of the quantized nature of radiation, and since position and motion cannot be resolved into simpler terms.”⁷

The visitor fielded this in fine fashion: “A third type of ‘uncertainty’ lies in the limitations of perception. At first signs this might seem to be no more than an instrumental inefficiency, comparable with the inaccuracies of our wooden ruler. This is not really the case, however, since we can go on improving the accuracy of our measuring rods whereas we cannot very greatly improve the acuity of our senses.”⁸

To their surprise, and even pain, the widow broke in afresh with a new, new and extremely feminine theory of random networks, capably attributed to Zachariassen, who was being lionized at the time: “The atomic or molecular arrangement in the glasslike state is an extended network which lacks symmetry and periodicity . . . oxides forming the basis of a glass are known as *network formers* and those which are soluble in the network are termed *network modifiers*. Some oxides

cannot easily be glassified in this way and are termed *intermediates*.”

“Nonsense!” of chorused both men. “If the structure of glass lacked symmetry and periodicity in contrast with the crystalline state, then a new surface created by fracture would possess in its outer layer a statistical distribution of the constituent atoms.”⁹

Meanwhile, Rose, undisturbed by their vehemence, “watching the great white flakes falling over bare woods and gray lake, looking neither to port nor to starboard, felt the benediction of its quiet. She had come, after weeks of turmoil, into a peace which was not happiness but which was at least a working basis for living. She had actually, she felt, prayed herself into acceptance of life as it stretched before her. Perhaps, in time, she might comprehend the triumph of sacrifice.”¹⁰

By then, Mr. Chance’s friend, tortured by her wintry gaze, was hopelessly enamored. “When the victim was securely fixed on the rack, the questions to which answers were desired were put to him. Failure to reply satisfactorily was the signal for the two executioners to commence operating the levers. The result was the stretching of the victim’s limbs and body.”¹¹ “Courage,” he muttered to himself. “The witness, however, is never questioned, in *modern* practice, as to his religious belief. It is not allowed, even after he has been sworn. Not because it is a question of tending to disgrace him; but because it would be a personal scrutiny into the state of his faith and conscience foreign to the spirit of our institutions. . . . The law, in such cases, does not know that he is an atheist.”¹²

Thus reassured, he turned black to the widow and, braving another cold shudder, realized with relief that “nearly every business enterprise is in some way dependent

upon the removal of snow. Unremoved snow may become a real menace to the health of the community because of the inability to remove garbage and refuse. Unhealthful conditions are almost certain to result when garbage is not collected for several days and there are many accidents due to icy, slippery streets."¹³

He folded in his arms in advance, but when she left, his mind, etc., was already made-up. Hidden in his green box, making a curious sound when rattled, was an unspeakable object, attached to his secrets by the ball of twine which so resembled the hair of his beloved. He realized this could be the source of a new and immeasurable standard of measurement. Whatever Mr. Chance advised, there was no stopping now.

Chapter II

"ON REACHING HOME, [Apolinère enamored] would feel ashamed of what had taken place; but the wish to possess hair, always accompanied by great sexual pleasure, became more and more powerful in him. He wondered that previously even in the most intimate intercourse with women, he had experienced no such feeling."¹⁴ Could it be that "since the comb is the attribute of some fabulous female beings, such as lamias and sirens, there is in consequence a relationship between it and the fleshless tail of the fish in turn signifying burials (or the symbolism of sacrificial remains)"?¹⁵ Actually, he made this connection only some years later when his fancy was struck by the sweet lines of a cuttlefish bone that made his temperature rise alarmingly.¹⁶

Feeling himself in need of being pulled together, it was with relief that Mr. Chance's friend closeted himself with a chessboard at hand. But his thoughts continued to

follow a sad train. He recalled an early trip to Germany: "The formation of waterfalls is due to a variety of causes. For instance, cascade falls are due to the fact that Nature is constantly at work wearing away the surface of the earth by swift denudation. In Europe the finest falls are those of the Rhine below Schaffhausen, where the water plunges over a succession of ledges of hard Jura limestone."¹⁷ "All lip urinals," he mused, particularly Queens', "should be of the flushing rim type. The flushing rim allows the entire surface of the interior to be thoroughly cleaned at each flush. The lip urinal may be flushed with the flush under direct pressure and operated by means of a urinal cock attaching to the top of the urinal. Owing to the conditions surrounding the use of the urinal, the known carelessness of many people using it, and the character of the waste entering it, the partitions, backs, and flooring should never be of wood or any material which may corrode. One form of urinal is the waste-preventative urinal, which works in a manner similar to that of the waste-preventative slop-hopper. The fixture is of such sensitive action that the entrance of urine into the trap acts to form a vacuum which produces Independent syphonage and the immediate operation of the flush."¹⁸

Mr. Chance's interpretation of this cleansing dream was as follows: "Jung has devoted much time to the study of the fountain-symbolism, specially insofar as it concerns alchemy, and, in view of how much lies behind it, he is inclined to the conclusion that it is an image of the soul as the source of inner life and of spiritual energy. He links it also with the 'land of infancy,' the recipient of the precepts of the unconscious, pointing out that the need for this fount arises principally when the individual's life is inhibited and dried

up.”¹⁹ This can be remedied by a rapid infusion from Walter.

No longer racked by conscience, though still a bit limp from the ordeal covered, our lover acted upon a deviled ham under wood (then didn't know quite what to think of this slip over glass), applied his corkscrew to a good rosé, and wondered if the widow was really his type. Her name he found affected, her shape less than curvilinear, her surface slick. Since meeting her, he had been a shadow of his former self, but now A. Klang of the inner bell brought him to his senses. He couldn't think why he had found himself hanging on her every word, why she had so tripped his imagination. After all, “decorative racks for various purposes are found in *many* styles, and possess charm and interest for collectors typical of such minor furniture. A conscientious observance of considerations of utility²⁰ in equipping a room or a house is one of the surest means of attaining the fourfold desirable result of *individuality, restraint, comfort, and economy*, qualities which even the most uncompromising utilitarian will unreservedly recommend. It is well to remember that a single piece of *good furniture*, well chosen, is better than six pieces of *poor furniture* ill chosen.”²¹

Chapter III

“THE VALUE OF PHOTOGRAPHY to mankind depends almost entirely upon the truthful records which it gives of different subjects as the eye sees them. Leaving out of these considerations the question of photographic manipulation for artistic or impressional effects, it will be evident that the ordinary flat photograph *does not* depict the subject as the eyes perceive it but only as one eye does. In the case of

solid geometry, the stereoscopic method will be found most valuable. Nothing is more disconcerting to the student than a mass of intersecting lines, intended to represent planes with different inclinations, when studying rectilinear solid geometry. In the stereoscope method, however, the various planes stand out in their natural positions, exactly as if they were made of thin glass sheets with wire framings. The stereoscopic model has the advantage over actual models that everything can be seen at once, and objects can be shown suspended in space, with their reference, or co-ordinate planes in the back or side-ground.”²² “Still better instances of the power I refer to,” he continued to his transparent witnesses, “because they are more analogous to cases to be explained, are furnished by the attraction existing between glass and air, so well known to barometer and thermometer makers, for here the adhesion or attraction is exerted between a solid and gases, bodies having different physical conditions, having no power of combination with each other, and each retaining during the time of action, its physical state unchanged.”²³ All of which reminded him, once again, of the open windows out of which he stared while humming a familiar lay, or air, he had heard on the wireless. (“I love Paris in the springtime, I love Paris in the fall, I love Paris, why oh why do I love Paris . . ., etc.”) Dragging himself back to the present, he scribbled dutifully on a slip of paper: “With reference to (2), it will be seen that the tests dealt with the total transmission through the combination of the following successive regions, glass, glass-air contact, air, air-glass contact, and glass, with the addition of the two water-glass contacts in the experimental procedure (which

replaced only two of the air-glass contacts found in practical conditions.)”²⁴

Suddenly he was distracted by the arrival, in the teeth of the gale, of Mr. Chance himself, who stopped for a moment to check his attire (he was dressed to the nines, except for the four pins which held an extra pocket to his broad chest, a peculiarity he had affected since a Czechoslovakian childhood). “I have in this day, seen professionally,” he announced regally, “Josephine Boisdechêne, and, in relation to the legal question referred to me, hereby certify that although she has beard and whiskers, large, profuse, and strictly masculine, on those parts of the face occupied by the beard and whiskers in men, and, although on her limbs and back she has even more hair than is usually found on men, she is without malformation. Her breasts are large and fair, and strictly characteristic of the female.”²⁵

Aghast with pleasure at the news proffered by his jocund friend, the unhappy reader maintained a silence misinterpreted by the other, who virtually threw the book at him: “Caution! This need not be the same as $[(x_0, \dots, x_n) A]^*$, i.e., $*$ and A need not commute! Be careful when deciding whether or not the collineation $*$ leaves a point $P = [x_0, x, \dots, x_n]$ fixed. There is always one set of homogenous coordinates of P left fixed by the semi-linear map $*$, but not all sets of homogenous coordinates are left fixed if $*$ is nontrivial.”²⁶ “I can recommend a fine polish for leather. Dissolve enough beeswax in turpentine until it is about as thick as the cream you get if you live in New York, that is thin cream, and you will have a polish for leather upholstery that can’t be whipped.”²⁷

“One would expect that the easiest way of producing a clean glass surface would be to fracture a piece of glass,” observed

the other, somewhat recovered from these unexpected solutions. “A simple method of removing superficial dirt from glass is to rub on the surface with cotton wool dipped in a mixture of precipitated chalk and alcohol or ammonia.”²⁸

Mr. Chance now became impatient at his acquaintance’s inability to see through the lady in question. “No, no. Sometimes you are stupid as a painter, unnecessarily opaque. Sometimes you have the breeding of a dirty young man.” But then he repented and invited the expert out to dinner with himself and his nephew Alain.

Chapter IV

AS THEY NEARED the battlefield on which the restaurant was located, the two cronies carried on a witty barrage of allusions to the landscape and to their mode of transportation: “You know about the Arrangement of Exciters in a Station, do you not?” said Mr. C. “Attempts have been made to build self-exciting alternators, but they have been failures, as evidenced by the fact that there are practically none in service, except an occasional machine of very small capacity.”²⁹ “An intersex develops completely as one sex for a period of time and then changes and develops as the other. If the turning-point of intersexuality occurs early enough, it will bring about a total sex reversal: a conversion of potential males to normal females, or the reverse.”³⁰

“But sometimes,” the other followed handily, “sometimes each alternator is furnished with its own exciter (either belted or direct-connected, the exciter in the latter case is often built into the core of the alternator), but in large stations there is generally a set of exciter bus-bars on the switchboard, and two or more exciters

(each equipped with its own driver) furnish power to these buses. In all stations at least one of the exciters is driven by a steam turbine or engine, or by a separate water turbine, to insure excitation for the alternators if the entire station has shut down because of an accident. If the exciters are driven by motors obtaining their power from the alternators, their motors cannot be started until the alternators are excited."³¹

Dinner was lively, with the bel Alain demonstrating his own wares and discoursing on his trade: "To an increasing extent the sale of fabrics for dresses is being supplanted by the sale of ready-made dresses. The shift in purchasing habits in this matter is indicated by the fact that while thirty or forty years ago the ready-made trade was negligible, in 1921 there was placed on the market more than 167 million dresses representing a wide range in quality of fabric and workmanship, as well as character of design."³²

"I'll bet," said Mr. Chance with a veiled glance at his friend, "you can't name the manufacturers of the following perfumes: Sinner, Blue Grass, Mais Oui, Nuit de Noel, No. 5, Breathless, Tapestry, Danger, Emeraude, Tabu, White Shoulders, Aphrodisia, Tweed, Duchess of York, Shocking."³³ Alain's score was perfect: "Adrian, Elizabeth Arden, Bourjois, Caron, Chanel, Charbert, Mary Chess, Ciro, Coty, Dana, Evyan, Fabergé, Lenthéric, Matchabelli, Schiaparelli, Polly Perruque."³⁴

But in the midst of all this gaiety, Mr. Chance's friend's pain became increasingly visible, and spirits sank.³⁵ For across the room swept the widow herself in the attentive company of an infamous bachelor.

"The false French seam is so-called because it somewhat resembles a French

seam," whispered Mr. C. consolingly. "It is used as a finish for a plain seam in thin or medium-weight material, for the armhole finish, for silk garments, and as a finish for the lapped seam."³⁶

"I know," said the younger man ruefully as they walked out into the street. "Some of the sinkers currently in use for any water are the Bank lead (these have holes at one end to fasten the line) and the Pyramid lead (these are solid lead sinkers equipped with a ring on the top for the purpose of fastening the line to the sinker)."³⁷

"Maybe she doesn't know she's Wanted," suggested Alain, sensibly.

"I'll have her by hook or by crook. There are four positions for the eye of a hook: Ringed or straight Eye; Flat Eye; Turned-up Eye; Turned-down Eye. And then there's the line Dreier, a device constructed with open spokes on which a fishing line may be quickly run off to dry it."³⁸

"Nevertheless," put in Mr. Chance fortuitously, "there are gamblers who are convinced that they can devise 'systems' to beat the roulette wheel. The manner in which reasoning may become corrupted by gambling is well known. In trying 'systems' which they hope will out-wit the bank, players ignore the fact that the prediction of roulette sequences is beyond skill. One and the same probability, if it relates to success, is subjectively overrated, and if to failure, underrated. Thus, a 1 in 7,000 chance of winning a prize would be thought by many people to be favorable, whilst these same people would regard as negligible the chance of being killed in an accident on the roads, though the probability is about the same."³⁹

At this, our hero said farewell to his companions and set out for home, grinding his own teeth (which needed a check-up), looking at the single star above, and

thinking of his close shave. As he turned into Larrey Street, a veiled figure appeared out of the cold mist to his left, saying, "Sometimes a sticking door can be made to work by rubbing *French chalk* on the places where it strikes the frame."⁴⁰

His heart fluttering, he locked her in his arms and, before the door opened and the spooning began, somewhat ambiguously described to her his intentions: "Being assured that there will be sufficient depth of sand over the pattern, sand is sifted on the pattern as it lies on the mold-board by means of the riddle until the pattern is completely covered. The molder then tucks the sand around the edges of the pattern with his fingers, but does not press it down on top of the pattern unless there is some special reason for so doing. The drag is next shoveled full of sand and heaped high. The sand is then rammed around inside of the flask with the peen, or sharp end of the rammer. The rammer is held at this time with the butt inclining toward the center and the flask, so that the blow is somewhat outward in direction, compressing the sand at the edges of the mold. After placing the bottom-board, the drag is rolled over, so as to bring the pattern, and also the joint, to the top. When there are a number of molds to be made from a pattern, it is frequently advisable to use a molding machine for this purpose. Molding machines are made in a number of varieties, each designed for some specific purpose. Thus we have the power squeezer and the hand squeezer, the split-pattern squeezer, the jarring machine, also known as a jolt-rammer, and the roll-over machines. Each machine has its particular field in which it will do better work than any of the other types."⁴¹

The widow, never at a loss, looked him straight in the eye and replied: "On every pattern there is a balance line. This line

is always marked on the pattern part and should be looked for and found before attempting to use the pattern. If the pattern needs altering, pay special attention to the balance lines so that their position is not moved when making the alterations. The size of the pattern must be tested, and any necessary alterations made before the lay is attempted. Study the lays given on the instruction sheet of the bought pattern and mark the one provided for your particular size of pattern and width of fabric. A vest should always be worn next to the skin to absorb perspiration. Winter vests are absorbent and not bulky if they are made from fine wool, a fine wool mixture, or a spun yarn of one of the new synthetic fibers."⁴²

Mr. Chance's friend "had no criticism to offer on the subject; but he thought this beautiful apparatus was capable of being rendered of a still greater utility. Most lighthouses were upon the revolving principle, some revolving with more, and some with less velocity; and others had temporary eclipses; but there were circumstances which were greatly influenced by the state of the weather . . ."⁴³

Notes

- 1 The bachelor grinds his own lenses.
- 2 James T. Chance, *On Optical Apparatus Used in Lighthouses*, including "an abstract of the discussion upon the paper" (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1867). The research for the following essay has been carried out at the New York Public Library with Duchamp the librarian in mind at all times, as well as his mistrust of books.
"As soon as we start putting our thoughts into words and sentences, everything gets distorted. Language is just no damn good; I use it because I have to, but I don't put any trust in it. We never understand each other. Only the fact directly perceived by the senses has any meaning. The minute you get beyond that, into abstractions, you're lost" (Duchamp). The readymades in this text are almost without exception unassisted.
- 3 Ernest Callenbach, *Living Poor with Style* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972). "Style is just what the French must get away from and the Americans cease to strive after; for style means following tradition and is bound up with good manners and a standard of behavior, all completely outside the scope of art. Under such conditions, no new norm can be reached" (Duchamp).
- 4 A. Frederick Collins, *The Home Handy Book* (New York: Appleton, 1917).
- 5 J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962). "René Guénon says in relation to Taoist doctrine, that the chosen one, the sage, invisible at the center of the wheel, moves it without himself participating in the movement, and without having to bestir himself in any way."
"Use *delay* instead of 'picture' or 'painting'" (Duchamp). "This sentence gives us a glimpse into the meaning of his activity; painting is a criticism of movement but movement is the criticism of painting" (Octavio Paz).
- 6 Wendell H. Cornetet, Head, Dept. of Vocational Science, Huntington East High Trades School, Huntington, WV, *Methods of Measurement* (Bloomington, IL: McKnight, c. 1942).
- 7 G. W. Scott Blair, *Measurements of Mind and Matter* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1950).
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 L. Holland, *The Property of Glass Surfaces* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1964).
- 10 Mary Synon, *Copper Country* (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1931). "I've decided that art is a habit-forming drug" (Duchamp).
- 11 George Ryley Scott, *The History of Torture throughout the Ages* (London: Laurie, 1941).
- 12 S. G. Weeks, *Remarks on the Exclusion of Atheists as Witnesses* (Boston: Jordan & Co., 1839). "As a drug [art] is probably very useful for a number of people—very sedative—but as religion it's not even as good as God" (Marcel Duchamp, M.D.).
- 13 *Snow Removal from Streets and Highways* (New York: American Automobile Association, 1926–27).
- 14 Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study*, rev. trans. by F. J. Rebman (New York: Pioneer Publications, 1947).
- 15 Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Trois ou quatre gouts d'auteur n'ont rien à voir avec 1a ssovacherie [sic].
- 16 Soon after which he would find himself on his knees (Latvana Greene).
- 17 Ellison Hawks, *The Book of Air and Water Wonders* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1933).
- 18 R. M. Starbuck (used judiciously), *Modern Plumbing Illustrated* (New York: Henley, 1915). "It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows. Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object. As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges" (*The Blind Man*).
- 19 Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*.
- 20 In the case of Duchamp, *une utilité très bougée*.
- 21 *Home Interiors* ed. Henry W. Frone (Grand Rapids, MI: Good Furniture Magazine, 1917).
- 22 Arthur W. Judge, *Stereoscopic Photography* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1935). "I would like to see [photography] make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable" (Duchamp).
- 23 Holland, *The Property of Glass Surfaces*.
- 24 A. Norman Shaw, *Transmission of Heat through Single-Frame Double Windows*, McGill University Publications (Montreal), Series X (Physics), no. 18, 1923.
- 25 *The Biography of Madame Fortune Clofullia, the Bearded Lady* (New York: Baker, Godwin & Co., 1854). (New York Public Library card for Alfred Canel, *Histoire de la barbe et ales cheveux en Normandie* [Rouen, 1959]: "pp. 65–86 mutilated.")
- 26 Paul B. Yale, *Geometry and Symmetry* (San Francisco: Holden-Day, 1968). "[I]f *linear perspective* is a good means of *representing equalities in a variety of ways*, [then in perspective symmetry] the equivalent, the similar (homothetic), and the equal get blended" (Duchamp).
- 27 Collins, *The Home Handy Book*.
- 28 Holland, *The Property of Glass Surfaces*.
- 29 John H. Morecraft and Frederick W. Hehre, *Electrical Circuits and Machinery*, vol. II, *Alternating Currents* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1926).
- 30 E. B. Ford, *Moths* (London: Collins, 1955).
- 31 Morecraft and Hehre, *Alternating Currents*. "The work of art is always positioned between the two poles of maker and onlooker, and the spark that comes from this bi-polar action gives birth to something, like electricity" (Duchamp).

- 32 Alpha Latzke and Beth Quinlan, *Clothing* (Chicago: Lippincott, 1935).
 "In Paris, in the early days, there were seventeen persons who understood the 'readymades'—the very rare readymades by Marcel Duchamp. Nowadays there are seventeen million who understand them, and that one day, when all objects that exist are considered readymades, there will be no readymades at all. Then Originality will become the artistic Work, produced convulsively by the artist *by hand*" (Salvador Dalí).
- 33 John V. Cooper and Raymond J. Healy, *The Fireside Quiz Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1948). Because a rose by any other name smells like quite something else: "Women found wit in Duchamp's conversation, elegance in his manner and masculinity in his gray eyes, reddish blond hair, sharply defined features and trim build" (*New York Times* obituary, October 3, 1968).
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 See Louis Napoleon Filon and H. T. Jessop, "On the Stress-Optical Effect in Transparent Solids Strained beyond the Elastic Limit," Royal Society of London, *Philosophical Transactions* (London), Series A, v. 223, 1922.
- 36 Latzke and Quinlan, *Clothing*.
- 37 *The Wise Fisherman's Encyclopedia* (New York: Wise, 1951).
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 John Cohen, *Chance, Skill and Luck* (London: Penguin Books, 1960).
 "The museums are run, more or less, by the dealers. In New York, the Museum of Modern Art is completely in the hands of the dealers. Obviously this is a manner of speaking, but it's like that. The museum advisers are dealers. A project has to attain a certain monetary value for them to decide to do something. As far as I'm concerned, I have nothing to say, I don't hold much for having shows; I don't give a damn" (Duchamp). "I've forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste" (Duchamp).
- 40 Collins, *The Home Handy Book*.
- 41 R. H. Palmer, *Foundry Practice, Text Book for Molders, Students and Apprentices* (New York: Wiley, 1926).
- 42 Margaret G. Butler, *Clothes, Their Choosing, Making and Care* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1958).
- 43 Chance, *On Optical Apparatus Used in Lighthouses*.

JOSEPH KOSUTH

Exemplar

The eye of the intellect sees in all objects
what it brought with it the means of seeing.

—Thomas Carlyle

WHATEVER ONE WOULD want to say about that project called Conceptual art, begun nearly thirty years ago, it is clear now that what we wanted was based on a contradiction, even if a sublime one. We wanted the *act* of art to have integrity (I discussed it in terms of “tautology” at the time) and we wanted it untethered to a prescriptive formal self-conception. Paul Engelman, a close friend of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the collaborator with him on the house for Wittgenstein’s sister, has commented about tautologies that they are not “a meaningful proposition (i.e. one with a content): yet it can be an indispensable intellectual device, an instrument that can help us—if used correctly in grasping reality, that is in grasping facts—to arrive at insights difficult or impossible to attain by other means.”¹ “What such questioning directed us toward, of course, was not the construction of a theory of art with a static depiction (a map of an internal world which *illustrates*) but, rather, one that presumed the artist as an active agent concerned with meaning; that is, the work of art as a *test*. It is this concept of art as a test, rather than an illustration, which remains. What, then, is the contradiction?

It is as follows. How can art remain a “test” and still maintain an identity as art, that is, continue a relationship with the history of the activity without which it is severed from the community of “believers” that gives it human meaning? It is this difficulty of the project (referred to now

as Conceptual art) that constituted both its “failure”—about which Terry Atkinson has written so well²—as well as its continuing relevance to ongoing art production. It would be difficult to deny that out of the “failure” of Conceptual art emerged a redefined practice of art. Whatever hermeneutic we employ in our approach to the tests of art, the early ones as well as the recent ones, that alteration in terms of how we make meaning of those “tests” is itself the description of a different practice of art than that which preceded it. That is not to say that the project did not proceed without paradox. Can one initiate a practice (of anything) without implying, particularly if it sticks, a teleology? Even at the end of modernism a continuum is suggested. This is one of the ways in which its success constituted its failure. What it had to say, even as a “failure,” still continued to be art. The paradox, of course, is that the ongoing cultural life of this art consisted of two parts which both constituted its origins and remained—even to this day—antagonistic toward each other. The “success” of this project (it was, in fact, believed as art) was obliged to transform it in equal proportion to its “success” within precisely those terms in which it had disassociated itself from the practice of art as previously constituted. Within this contradiction one is able to see, not unlike a silhouette, the defining characteristic of the project itself: its “positive” program remains manifest there within its “failure,” as a usable potential. One test simply awaits the next test, since a test cannot attempt to be a masterpiece that depicts the totality of the world; indeed, it is only

over the course of time that the process of a practice can make the claim of describing more than the specific integrity of its agenda. It is such work, like any work, located within a community, that gives it meaning as it limits that meaning.

What is the character of such “tests”? As Wittgenstein put it: “In mathematics and logic, process and result are equivalent.” The same, I would maintain, can be said of art. I have written elsewhere that the work of art is essentially a *play* within the meaning system of art. As that “play” receives its meaning from the system, that system is—potentially—altered by the difference of that particular play. Since really *anything* can be nominated as the element in such a play (and appear, then, as the “material” of the work) the actual location of the work must be seen as elsewhere, as the point or gap where the production of meaning takes place. In art the how and why collapse into each other as the same sphere of production: the realm of meaning.

As for the project of Conceptual art, we know that what is “different” doesn’t stay different for long if it succeeds, which is perhaps another description of the terms of its “failure.” Thus the relative effectiveness of this practice of art was dependent on those practices of individuals capable of maintaining a sufficiently transformatory process within which “difference” could be maintained. Unfortunately practices begun in the past are subject to an overdetermined view of art history whose presumptions are exclusive to the practice of art outlined here. The traditional scope of art historicizing—that is, the definition of a style attributed to specific individuals—is most comfortable limiting itself to perceived early moments which are then dated and finalized. While such “credits” make sense emotionally for the individuals

concerned, we’ve seen where it stops the conversation just where it should begin. In actual fact, the continued “tests” of the original practitioners should be considered on their own merit along with the “tests” of other generations, insofar as all are relevant to and comprise their own part of the *present* social moment.

Finally, that which proves to be useful now from this project is one and the same as that which immunized this particular practice from the ravages of a concept of progress. It is the accessibility of its theoretically open “methodology” (if only loosely meant as an approach) that has remained viable to a culturally nomadic (even within late capitalism) set of practitioners. Enter here Felix Gonzalez-Torres, stage left.

That monographic tradition referred to above will, undoubtedly, have somewhat other things to do with the work of Gonzalez-Torres. This text has another purpose. I am writing as an older artist who was there at the beginning of a particular process, yet one who is sharing a present context with younger artists. There can be indices on a variety of levels, some superficial and some not, which connect such diverse practices within a cluster of shared concerns, but occasionally the work of a particular individual is exemplary, and such is the case with Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

If one looks through the writing on his work over these past five years, the references most often cited have been to Minimal and Conceptual art. Unfortunately, because of the level of understanding of much of the writing on these topics, the use of these terms tends to block the light rather than enlighten. My interest here is to initiate an attempt to describe the intellectual tradition within which Felix

Gonzalez-Torres works as an artist, and his importance now to that tradition as a difference.

Minimalism, still functioning (even if in protest) as an art conceived of in terms of form, offered to my generation the possibility of a tabula rasa, cleansed of the prior meanings collected by modernism. Formed in negation as a signifying activity (before it was made into sculpture by the market), Minimalism had much to say about what was no longer believable in art. To this end, Minimal art was a stoppage and clearing out; it cleaned the wall of other marks to make way there for the handwriting that was to follow. All that was a long time ago. The recycling now of the Minimalist glossary by Gonzalez-Torres constitutes its re-erasure of prior meaning in yet another way. If anyone doubts that artists work with meaning and not form, consider the literature on Minimalism at the time, with its criticism of this work as being simply a replication of Constructivism. Constructivism, Minimalism, Gonzalez-Torres: it goes a long way to show the role of context in the perception and meaning of a work of art. The conceptual "virus" (as Gonzalez-Torres has described his role) that inhibits the corporal presence of his Minimal forms is, of course, that of sup- planted meaning. The corpus of his work is beyond the form his "host" takes. The basis of a conceptual practice is not what you see but what you understand. It is this process of coming into understanding that links the viewer/reader with the work and concretizes that experience as part of the same event that formed the work, as meaning. The viewer/reader then becomes part of the meaning-making process, rather than being put in the role of passive consumer.

The image-referent of Minimalism succeeds in denying its "objecthood" and here is where Gonzalez-Torres's work leaves behind Minimalism: he contains it as parody. The meaning made is Felix's. This is ensured by maintaining an instability in the work as object, goods, or material. The illusion of an image or object is the illusion of static representation, since what is seen is a frozen moment of its fragmentation and dissemination (they're often there for the taking). The dynamic of that particular movement is as much the material condition of the work as is whatever formal properties the work shares with what preceded it. Where it comes from (ordered from commercial sources), how long it stays (it sits there, and temporarily behaves as an artwork is expected to), and where it goes (questions arise about the cultural meaning of a fragment, unsigned, which could—perhaps—consign it back to its commercial origins . . . yet only almost, since it retains a trace of Felix's subjectivity and political life).

What is the cultural life that Gonzalez-Torres has added to his "host"? We can see, in another context, that expression institutionalized into Expressionism created a paradox of impersonal generalized marks intended to celebrate the personal. The signifying role of auratic relicry which we inherited from Christian ritual found another cultural life in the market, but ritual without religion is simply a stage for authority, albeit in the guise of "quality." Of course art is a form of expression, what else could it be? Such a truth is truistic, however, and we can thank Expressionism for how "expressive" all the work now looks that was once called anything but. We know now what Expressionism was expressing: Expressionism. What can really be said about expression itself, as a

generalization, once it is in the work? If it is not a generalization, but specific, then it has a kind of functional “content” which is part of the work’s play, with no role as “expression” per se. The institutionalized expression celebrated in earlier forms of painting seems to pale in relation to this artist’s use of personal experience to ground works made with “impersonal” materials. But it is even wrong to put it that way. This work, like all of the best work in this century, is about meaning, and the value of the work doesn’t reside in the props employed to construct that meaning but in the authenticity of that manifestation which the integrity of one individual can assert. Perhaps the most eloquent demonstration of a difference between Gonzalez-Torres and Minimalism might be to consider—for a moment—the same wrong move twice. In the first wrong move we look to the fluorescent light of Dan Flavin—to the object, with a bulb, bought in a hardware store—and try to find the meaning of this work in its materials. We then look to one of Gonzalez-Torres’s stacks of paper, also trying to find meaning there, in that stack. We know that both have something to say about an activity called art. Is not the important difference between these artists how they arrive at the condition of art: What do we learn from that passage of impersonal materials into products of subjective responsibility? What is the meaning that stands in the gap between a pile of Gonzalez-Torres candies and a stack of paper that shapes what we see and organizes our thoughts? What, now, does a fluorescent light by Flavin tell us?

One asks these questions to get beyond the object. In a world of objects, we need to know what separates the “objects of art” from the rest. What the work of Felix

Gonzalez-Torres suggests to us is that one can have much to say within the context of art without sacrificing the personal connection to one’s work which keeps it within a real social space, and which, as well, gives work a political grounding. Politics, in the case of Gonzalez-Torres, is not an abstract message that reduces work to a passive purveyor of “content”—as illustration—but, on the contrary, is a socially based activity which makes the viewer/reader part of the cultural act of completing the work.

Notes

- 1 Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Wittgenstein, with a Memoir* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), p. 105.
- 2 Increasingly, after 1970, the intrusion of “the philosophically interrogative subject into the construction of artistic identity/subjectivity”—as Atkinson has put it—began to wind down as a concern. From the point of view of Atkinson and myself (in marked contrast to what now goes under the name Art & Language) the “return to painting” of the eighties was in the main a failure of historical nerve in art practice, a fatigue in the face of the complex legacy of Conceptualism, which buckled under the market’s pressure for “quality-defined” traditional forms of art. For more on Terry Atkinson’s point of view, see his “The Indexing,” in *The World War I Works and the Ruins of Conceptualism* (Belfast: Circa; Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art; Manchester: Cornerhouse, 1992); *The Bridging Works 1974* (London: Mute Publications, 1994); “The Rites of Passage,” in *Symptoms of Interference, Conditions of Possibilities: Ad Reinhardt, Joseph Kosuth, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (London: Camden Art Centre, 1994); and “Curated by The Cat,” presented as a lecture at the Camden Art Centre, January 8, 1994, and as a forthcoming publication.

Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike: A Few Clarifications

Thus instead of adding a film to the thousands of films already out there I prefer to expose here the reason why I chose not to do so. This comes down to replacing the futile adventures recounted by the cinema with an important subject: myself.

—Guy Debord, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, 1956

My self-immolation was something sodden-dark. It was distinctly not modern—yet I saw it in others, saw it in a dozen men of honor and industry since the war.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, “The Crack-Up,” 1936

I live solely from here to there inside a little word in whose inflexion I lose my useless head.

—Franz Kafka, diary, 1911

WE’RE NOT GOING TO pull the death of the author on you again. No, not that again!

No, we’re not going to say anything about it, nor speak in favor of therapeutic endeavor, nor on the possibility of cardiac massage or euthanasia.

We’re going to approach the question from an entirely different perspective, which is that of processes of subjectivization and their relationship to power. The problem at the moment is not so much that of knowing whether the paradigm of the disc jockey may be extended to the situations of all contemporary creators, or whether any spectator/reader, sovereign by means of his or her zapping, short-lived attention, is comparable to any celebrated artist.

The crisis, which must be spoken of, is vaster and no doubt older; it reached its height in the twentieth century but its convulsions are shaking us even today. We are speaking of the crisis of singularities.

Foucault explained it clearly: power produces more than it represses, and its most important products are *subjectivities*. Our bodies are crossed by relations of power and our becomings are oriented by the means through which we either oppose this power or wed ourselves to its flux.

The construction site of the self has always been a collective matter, a matter of interference and resistance, of the distribution of competencies and the division of tasks. Marks of inferiority, sexuality, race, and class are inscribed on the self by a series of focused interventions on the part of the principle relays of power, which act in depth and leave often indelible traces. Black, French, heterosexual, attractive, bachelor’s degree, above the poverty line . . . All of these parameters and others, which we easily introject, result from a social negotiation to which we were not even invited. The dispossession that we thus feel with regard to our presumed identity is the same as that which we feel when facing history, now that we no longer know how to somehow take part in it. No doubt this feeling of indigence is intensified owing to the fact that we know, as Agamben writes in *The Coming Community*, that the hypocritical fiction of an irreplaceable singularity of being in our culture serves solely to guarantee its universal representability.

Whether one speaks of “whatever singularities” or of “men without qualities,” it is by now almost unnecessary to enumerate those who have diagnosed an

impoverishment of Western subjectivity in literature, sociology, philosophy, psychiatry, and so on. From Joyce to Pessoa, Basaglia to Lang, Musil to Michaux, Valéry to Duchamp, and Walser to Agamben via Benjamin, it is evident that the suture that democracy ought to have practiced on those lives mutilated by recent history has actually produced a hitherto-unknown infection. Those injured by modernity, rather than seeing their wounds scar over and regaining the ability to work, actually discovered all sorts of identity disorders and found their nerves as well as their bodies marked by the crack-up. The more the "I" spawned and multiplied in all the cultural products, the less one might encounter the consistency of the self in real life.

In the last fifty years, democratic power, operating under cover of a promise of general equality, has produced equivalence between those previously separated by everything (class, race, culture, age, etc.). This process was not founded on shared ethics, which would have ultimately produced either full equality or conflict, but on the basis of a mall-like universalism. Of course, from the very beginning this universalism was conceived as a short-lived lie, designed to distract us from the fact that the development of Capital was going to debase civil society so profoundly and create such gulfs of inequality that no political tendency could subsequently emerge from this disaster with dignity, let alone propose a possible remedy.

The revolts of the 1970s and in particular the ones that took place in Italy in 1977 aired all sorts of dirty laundry that no political or biological family knew how to clean anymore: colonialism, whose racist heritage was doing rather well, after all; sexism, which only looked healthier after 1968; the "free" spaces of extraparliamen-

tary cells, which had become microfascist breeding grounds; the "emancipation" through work that was a postmodern version of Daddy and Grandpa's slavery; and so on.

What triumphed was the sentiment of having been fooled and having received, in a rural and underdeveloped Europe, an outdated kit for the American way of life of the 1950s, while in the United States people were spitting on consumerism and the family and fighting to bring the Vietnam War home. These movements were unique, insofar as they did not fit into the sociological categories usually employed to mystify uprisings. In Italy a "diffused irrationalism" was spoken of, because young people refused to work and rejected the emerging global petite-bourgeoisie, believing in neither what society said of them nor the future they were offered.

The fact that these years of unheard-of collective creative fertility, both in terms of life forms and intellectual production, passed into the history books as "the years of lead" [translator's note: a literal translation of the Italian expression *gli anni di piombo*, referencing the material of the bullets] tells us a lot about what we are supposed to forget. The feminist movement triggered this transformation, which dissolved all the old groups that had channeled energies since '68. "No more mothers, wives, and daughters: let's destroy the families!" was the cry heard in the street. People were no longer demanding rights from the state but making an *affirmation of foreignness* in regard to the state of the world, an affirmation which made itself heard: nobody wanted to be included to be discriminated on a new basis. These movements were manifestations of the human strike.

Pierre Cabanne: Your best work has been your use of your time.

Marcel Duchamp: That's right.

—Marcel Duchamp, in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 1966

How are you doing?

Fine! It's been a while!

Since Frieze . . .

Oh, my God! Are you going to Basel?

Yeah, see you in Basel!

—Conversation overheard between two unidentified people in the toilets during the opening of the Scottish Pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale

IN ART THE SYMPTOMS manifested themselves violently early on. Dadaism, Duchamp's urinal and other readymades, Pop art, the *détournement*, certain presentations of Conceptual art, to only cite the most obvious: all of these are luminous oscillations of the classical sovereign position of the artist.

But we are not going to trace a genealogy of transformation in the domain of the production of art objects; what interests us here is what happened in the domain of the *production of artists*. No doubt, the manner in which the most brilliant among them latched onto the flux of a still-Fordist Capital via the principle of "multiples"—in which they started to dematerialize production and exhibition—says something about a new relationship that even today binds us to objects, including art objects. But these initial waves of transformation in the relationship between artists and their practice seemed either harmless (for museums, galleries, and collectors, it was merely a matter of finding new criteria for commodification) or gently dissenting (this

time for the critics it was simply a question of proving that there was value beyond the provocation). In fact these stirrings prepared the ground for vast changes. We won't refer here to the mechanical *reproducibility of the artwork but to the reproducibility of artists during the epoch of "whatever singularities."* In an era that has been qualified as post-Fordist, one in which on-demand has replaced stock, the only goods still produced on an assembly line—that of the education system—without knowing for whom, nor why, are workers, including artists.

The extension of the art market, on which there is already a sizable literature, has in particular generated a mass of people, producer/consumers, who move from gallery opening to gallery opening in the capital cities, from residence to residence, from art fair to biennale. This mass buys more or less the same clothes, knows the same musical, visual, and cinematographic references, and conceives of its productions within the frameworks determined by the market with which it had been initially familiarized through art schools and magazines. It is not a question here of moralizing about the tastes, attitudes, and aspirations of those who are called "artists." It is rather a question of understanding the consequences of such an art market on the subjectivities of those who keep it alive.

Yet it is clear that the increasing circulation of works, images of works, and their authors has ended up generating a database of visual and theoretical information, as well as more or less uniform address books, while preserving the same discriminations and inequalities characterizing the rest of society, in line with the protocol of all democratization processes. The self-perpetuating fabric called "art world" has thus reached a moment when interrogating

the term “creativity” truly loses all meaning. Nothing “new,” in the most naive sense of the word, can come to light in this space, for the simple reason that the “whatever singularities,” which know the tastes and judgment of the public, are subjected to analogous procedures of creative stimulation in a strongly normative context. And if the novelty of the work is no longer even necessary for the market nor for the consumers, this massive generation of uniformity will nevertheless generate dysfunction in the social space that surrounds contemporary art.

The reason we insist on this point is not linked to the superstition that artistic work, unlike other types of work, is supposed to emerge from a profound and direct connection with the singularity of the author. It is evident that if one were to pursue Foucault’s dream and, for a year or more, identify productions by their titles alone, eliding the names of the authors, nobody would be able to recognize the paternity of a given work. This is a debate that Fluxus and many others should have already closed because, given the relative transparency of the productive protocols adopted by the artists and the accessibility of the technical means employed, a considerable number of people find themselves, without knowing it, doing “the same thing” in workshops thousands of kilometers apart. Anything to the contrary would be astonishing.

When, wining and dining one evening, you discover that you have actually been speaking to an internationally celebrated artist whom you had taken quite sincerely for a truck driver, you cannot stop yourself from comparing this impression with that made two weeks ago by a brilliant young man, extremely well read—prior, however,

to visiting his website and seeing what he calls his artistic work.

The two distinct problems—that of the eternal discord between the qualities of human beings and the qualities of their works, and that of the crisis in the singular quality of artistic productions—have a common base: *the social space that shelters them, the ethic of those who people it, the use-value of the life led within it. Or, in other words, the possibility of living in social relations that are compatible with artistic production.* The problem raised here, which might appear scandalously elitist, in fact says something about the policies applied to artistic creation and their relation to politics in general.

The only way of assisting creation is to protect those who create nothing and are not even interested in art. If every social relation extracted from capitalist misery is not necessarily a work of art in itself, it is definitely the only possible condition for the occurrence of the artwork. Contemporary artists have the same demands as everybody else: to live an exciting life in which encounters, the everyday, and subsistence are linked in a way that makes sense. They don’t need to be sponsored by the very same multinationals that ruin their life, they don’t need to take up residencies all over the world where nobody loves them and they have nothing to do with their days but tourism. All they need is a world liberated from the social relations and objects generated by Capital.

Niquez en haut debit [fuck on broadband]

—Hijacking of the Bouyges Telecom advertising slogan “Communiquez en haut debit” [“Communicate on broadband”], Metro Chatelet, November 2005

. . . what cannot be commercialized is destined to disappear.

—Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 2001

“RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA organizes a dinner at a collector’s house and leaves him the necessary material for the preparation of a Thai soup. Philippe Parreno invites people to practice their favorite hobbies on the first of May, but on a factory assembly line. Vanessa Beecroft dresses twenty women in a similar manner and gives them a red wig; women that one can only see through the doorjamb. Maurizio Cattelan . . .” Everyone will have recognized in this interrupted list the beginning of Nicolas Bourriaud’s work *Relational Aesthetics*. The author’s intention is to present the “revolutionary” practices of a certain number of artists who should help us oppose behavioral standardization through the creation of “utopias of proximity.” We won’t judge here the pertinence of the examples chosen to develop his thesis, which starts out indeed from a shared acknowledgment of the homogenization of our life conditions.

The book has not aged well; both history and critics have shown to what degree this dream was naive. Above all, experience has demonstrated to visitors/actors that these little utopias accumulate such a quantity of handicaps that they end up becoming grotesque. In addition to carrying the failures already encountered by participative theater—which at least evolved in the 1970s, in a climate of excess and social generosity unimaginable today—these practices advance with the arrogance of the immaterial and ephemeral work of art, laying claim to the obsolete and suspect principle of the “creation of situations.” If the infantile dream of the avant-gardes was to transform the entirety

of life into a work of art, they just transformed separate moments of our lives into the playgrounds of several artists.

To use another metaphor, if for example we take seriously the traditional reading of modernism, which claimed that abstraction in painting was a return to the primacy of the support, in the case of these artists it is as though we were being asked to fabricate frames and canvases ourselves with an Ikea-style instruction manual.

Relational aesthetics exposes the most basic conditions of production of creativity: sociality, conviviality around a meal or a drink. But given that the authors’ singularities are impoverished, these conditions are no longer presented in the auratic distance of the autobiographies of the great. These are mere objects, furniture, totally prosaic, *which must be used*. If you still don’t believe this, recall, among other things, one of Tiravanija’s works in which he exhibited the car that drove him from the airport to the place of the exhibition. A car touched, “miracled” by contact with the artist, but alas any old car, a readymade justified by the simple history of its use-value, which is the exact opposite of the concept of the readymade! (As if the bottle rack or the Brillo boxes were works of art because they had been used by artists!)

The works of relational aesthetics, which have in common the fact of making an inappropriate usage of the gallery or museum space, oddly end up producing an astonishing impression of *familiarity*. (This is not the place to evaluate, according to a Platonist criterion, the quality of these works as simulacra of life or of the controlled liberation of life, in a semi-closed milieu. Art has always been more experimental than representative and thus has always needed a laboratory, a separate milieu in which this experimentation could

be pursued, with the goal of contaminating—or not—the outside world.) The familiarity, which seizes us, is exactly the same as that which we experience with regard to Capital and its everyday operations. Between the zones consecrated to the relational experience of art, and the museum bookshop, or the dinner after the opening, there is no substantial difference; the affects and percepts which emerge are, in sum, similar to those of shops and commercial locales.

Of course, one could ask whether the public who saw Duchamp's urinal reacted in the same manner. After all, what object was more familiar or more trivial? But the operation of the Duchampian readymade was not designed to be unsettling in what it allowed to be seen; it was this way owing to the position in which it placed the spectator, which was the exact opposite of any encouragement toward interactivity. Showing objects from which the use-value had been once and for all subtracted, such that an exhibition value could be assigned to them, tells us that use-value is a concept that concerns life and not art (the joke of the Rembrandt and the ironing board is only another proof of this).

Today it is the place of the artist that is struck with impropriety, no longer the object that is decontextualized, nor the installations that are fabricated with ordinary elements. It is the gesture of wanting to produce an "original" work that transforms authors into multiples of "whatever singularities." But it is not only the poor "relational" artists whom we are targeting here. Under the conditions of production of artistic subjectivity that we have just described, we are all *ready-made artists* and our only hope is to understand this as quickly as possible. We are all just as absurd and displaced as a vulgar object,

deprived of its use and decreed an art object: "whatever singularities," supposed to be artistic. Under the present conditions, we are, like any other proletariat, expropriated from the use of life, because for the most part, the only historically significant use that we can make of it comes down to our artistic work.

But work is only one part of life, and it is far from being the most important.

Ten years of work to pay for a new car and they get two months of prison for burning it.

—Pierre, 48, painter in the building trade,
Libération, November 7, 2005

JACQUES RANCIÈRE'S CONCEPT of an aesthetic regime of the arts clarifies for us the philosophical legitimacy of exhibiting everything today and the impossibility of employing ethical arguments against this. Under the aesthetic regime "everything is equal, and equally representable," the hierarchies and prohibitions that originated in the old world of representations are ruined forever. Our daily experience and its artistic transcription are of the order of "the parataxical linking up of little perceptions"; the promiscuity of everything and anything appears clearly in the syntax of the literature in which "the absolute liberty of art identifies itself with the absolute passivity of sensual matter." In a text entitled "If There Is Any Unrepresentability," Rancière places Antelme and Flaubert side by side:

"I went to piss.—this can be read in *L'espèce humaine*—It was still dark. Others beside me also pissed, we didn't speak. Behind the urinal there was the trench for the loos with a little wall on which other

guys were sitting, trousers around their ankles. A little roof covered the urinal, the loos. Behind us noises of boots, coughs; it was others arriving. The loos were never deserted. At that hour a vapor floated above the urinals. . . . The night in Buchenwald was calm. The camp was an immense machine asleep. From time to time the projectors shone from the watchtowers. The eye of the SS opened and closed. In the woods, which surrounded the camp, patrols did their rounds. Their dogs didn't bark. The guards were tranquil." "She sat down and took up her work again which was a stocking of white cotton in which she made—we read in *Madame Bovary*—she worked with her head down; she did not speak. Charles neither. The air passing above the door pushed some dust over the threshold; he watched it dally, and all he heard was the internal pulse of his head, with the distant chicken's squawk who laid eggs in the courtyard."

If the juxtaposition of these two extracts is orchestrated so as to interpellate the reader, and if the critical and semiotic analysis of this grouping would take up an entire book, we will take it as one effect of parataxic syntax among others, even if it is particularly significant. Our intention is to support a hypothesis that Rancière openly rejects in his argument. According to him one must interpret the gesture of Antelme, whom, in the midst of disaster, uses the Flaubertian syntax as an act of resistance and rehumanization of his limit experience. The silence of the people described in these two extracts and the relation between their resigned lack of words and the hostile surrounding objects raise another question: that of a continuity between the affects of the concentration camps and those of daily life in times of "peace," and even with those of the "peace" that preceded the

existence of the camps. Located in the forced intimacy between human beings and all sorts of vulgar and odious objects, which constitute the daily life of the majority under advanced capitalism, this continuity has produced effects on our subjectivities far more pernicious than those Marx was able to describe. Reification, real subsumption, and alienation say nothing to us of the lack of words afflicting us when faced with our evident familiarity with commodities and their language, as well as our simultaneous incapacity to name the most simple facts of life, such as political events, for a start.

No doubt it is to this talent at making everything coexist in one day, this capacity to call anything and everything "work," that the extermination machine owed its astonishing efficacy during World War II. It was definitely a parataxic banality of evil that transformed an ordinary employee into Eichmann: all he did, after all, was draw up lists; he was only doing his work.

But beyond the appearance of fragmentation, which characterizes the assemblage of abstract and disparate activities that constitute works in the contemporary world, the task of permanently weaving some continuity to hold life together is offered by each of us, a task that collaborates with the entrenched system, made of tiny gestures and small adjustments. Since the 1930s total mobilization has not stopped; we are still and permanently mobilized within the flux of "active life" (*la vie active*). Being "whatever singularities" we are like blank pages on which any history could be written (that of Eichmann, that of a great artist, that of an employee with no vocation); we live surrounded by objects that could become readymades, *could* remain everyday objects, or traverse these two states. However in front of these

possibilities, in a light sleep, beneath the surface of the real, a spread of advertising slogans and a host of stupid tasks saturate time and space. Until an interruption, we will remain foreigners to ourselves and friends with things.

An image is that in which Another time meets the Now in an illumination to form a constellation. In other words, the image is the dialectic frozen. For while the relation between the present and the past is purely temporal and continuous, the relation between Another time and the Now is dialectical: it is not something which unfolds but an image.

—Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," 1940

PARATAXIS IS THUS the very form of our existence under a regime said to be democratic. Class difference remains calm, racism stays hidden, discrimination is practiced amid a multitude of other facts, all flattened on the same horizontal plane of an amnesiac senile present. The images, impressions, and information we receive are a succession of "stuff" that nothing differentiates or organizes. Collage and channel surfing are no longer separate activities, they are the metaphor for our perception of life. This is why we believe that it is no longer necessary to go one way or another on the death of the author: for if the author as "convention" seems more necessary than ever in the meaningless struggles to protect copyright and in the interviews with creators that infest the periodicals, we no longer even have to ask whether it was ever anything but a convention to serve the interests of power. We have always thought via assemblages, editing, and juxtapositions, but, as Deleuze

argues, the most faithful mirror of thought is the *moving image*. If one takes this assertion to be a figure of the real rather than a simple metaphor, one is obliged to inquire into the ontological function of the still image amid total mobilization.

In a 1987 article called "The Interruption," Raymond Bellour remarks that the story of the still image has never been written. In a way we can identify the traces of that absence in Benjamin's work: the definition he gives of the dialectical image responds in part to our inquiry: "the immobilization of thoughts just as much as their movement is part of the process of thinking. When thought stops in a constellation saturated with tension, the dialectical image appears." Product of both a cessation and a saturation, the dialectical image is primarily a place where the past encounters the present. But this encounter happens as in a dream, as if the present were purified of any contingency and had given itself over to the pure movement of time and history. The past encounters the present as pure *possibility*.

The reasons why Benjamin spent so much time analyzing the processes of suspension and cessation in Brechtian theater are inextricably linked to his vision of history and the function that art can assume within it. A large part of his thought appears to be a site for the construction of a knowledge both verbal and visual, which would function as a bridge between the image and life, the fixed image and the moving image. At the center of his research appears always a change in rhythm, whether due to shock, or to other types of interruption.

When, in epic theater, Brecht insists on the processes that produce a strange gaze on the part of both the public and the actors, suspension appears as the technical

device employed to release that affect. In 1931 Benjamin described the procedure thus:

A family scene. Suddenly a stranger enters. The woman was just about to roll up a pillow and smother her daughter; the father in the middle of opening the window to call the police. At that very moment a stranger appears in the doorway. A "tableau" was what one called such a scene in 1900. This means that the stranger finds himself confronted with the situation: bedsheets all ruffled, the window open, furniture turned upside down. Now a type of regard exists before which the most habitual scenes of bourgeois life do not appear to be so different. Strictly speaking, the more the ravages of our social order increase (the more we are affected ourselves, as well as our ability to even notice this), the more the distance of the stranger will be marked.

The prism of the stranger in Benjamin's thought allows us to grasp logical and political links that tend to remain hidden. One becomes strange by means of a halting, for, when the movement picks up again, it is as if the parataxic evidence of the sequence of things appears unbound, as if in that interruption an interstitial space gaped open, sapping both the instituted order and our belonging to it. In a commentary on Brecht's poems in 1939, Benjamin writes, "Whoever fights for the exploited class becomes an immigrant in his own country." Becoming stranger, a process that operates via a successive halting of thought images as well as an abandonment of the self, is manifested by an interruption and its following countermovement.

This process of salutary defamiliarization, which allows us to gain lucidity, seems to

have a close relation to art or, more precisely, to art as source and device of these newfound affects, rather than as a site of their realization. This may be explained by the status of art as a space for the defunctionalization of subjectivities: singularities emerge there emancipated from any utility. As a purely aesthetic space, the world of art harbors a potential critique of the general organization of society, and of the organization of work in particular.

The process of becoming stranger as a revolutionary act appears in Benjamin's work much earlier, in a 1920 text, which has nothing to do with art, entitled "Critique of Violence." Here one can read that "today organized labor is, apart from the state, probably the only subject entitled to exercise violence." But can one term the strike "violence"? Can a simple suspension of activity, "a nonaction, which a strike really is," be categorized as a violent gesture? In all, no, Benjamin responds, since it is equivalent to a simple "severing of relations." He adds, "in the view of the State conception, or the law, the right to strike conceded to labor is certainly a right not to exercised violence but, rather, to escape from a violence indirectly exercised by the employer, strikes conforming to this may undoubtedly occur from time to time and involve only a 'withdrawal' or 'estrangement' from the employer."

What happens in this singular moment of turning away that allows us to lose our familiarity with the misery of ordinary exploitation, suddenly rendering us capable of decreeing that for one day the boss is not the boss? It is an interruption of the normal routine, a mobilization following upon a demobilization. This occurs thanks to a halt that transforms us into astonished spectators, nevertheless ready to intervene. Foucault wrote that the implicit demand

of any revolution is “We must change ourselves.” The revolutionary process thus becomes both the means of this change and the goal, because this transformation must generate for itself a context of possible persistence. It is in this sense that, Benjamin says, a genuinely radical strike would be a *means without end*, a space in which the entirety of hierarchical organization tied to political bureaucracy would fall apart when faced with the power of events. Parataxis would be ruined by the irruption of discontinuity.

But does a means exist today for the practice of such a strike, neither union-based or corporatist, but larger and more ambitious? The question is complex, but perhaps because of our impoverished singularity we are the first citizens of history for whom the metaphysical affirmation of the human being as a being without professional or social destiny has a very concrete sense. Agamben writes: “There is definitely something humans should be, but this something is not an essence, nor is it even a thing: *it is the simple fact of their own existence as possibility or power.*”

Some Italian feminists in the 1970s already envisioned a strike that would be an interruption of all the relations that identify us and subjugate us more than could any professional activity. They knew how to engage in a politics that wasn't considered as politics. During struggles over the penalization of rape, the legalization of abortion, and the application of a quota policy, they simply asked the law to remain silent about their bodies. In 1976 the Bolognian collective for a domestic salary wrote, “If we strike, we won't leave unfinished products or untransformed raw materials; by interrupting our work we won't paralyze production, but rather the reproduction of the working class. And

this would be a real strike even for those who normally go on strike without us.”

This type of strike that interrupts the total mobilization to which we are all submitted and that allows us to transform ourselves might be called a *human strike*, for it is the most general of general strikes and its goal is the transformation of the informal social relations on which domination is founded. The radical character of this type of revolt lies in its ignorance of any kind of reformist result with which it might have to satisfy itself. By its light, the rationality of the behaviors we adopt in our everyday life would appear to be entirely dictated by the acceptance of the economic relationships that regulate them. Each gesture and each constructive activity in which we invest ourselves has a counterpart within the monetary economy or the libidinal economy. The human strike decrees the bankruptcy of these two principles and installs other affective and material fluxes.

Human strike proposes no brilliant solution to the problems produced by those who govern us if it is not Bartleby's maxim: *I would prefer not to.*

PARIS, NOVEMBER 2005

*Translated by Olivier Feltham and
Continuous Project*

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Ellen Altfest

Born 1970, New York

Lives and works in New York

Ellen Altfest earned a BFA in painting from Cornell University (1993) and an MFA in painting from the Yale University School of Art (1997), and in 2002 she attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Recent solo exhibitions of Altfest's work include "Head and Plant," New Museum, New York (2012); "The Bent Leg," White Cube, London (2011–12); and "The Leg," Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas (2010). Group exhibitions that have featured Altfest's work include "NY: New Perspectives," Brand New Gallery, Milan (2011), and "USA Today: New American Art from the Saatchi Gallery," Royal Academy of Arts, London (2006).

Fayçal Baghriche

Born 1972, Skikda, Algeria

Lives and works in Paris

Fayçal Baghriche's solo exhibitions include "PRO FORMA," Galerie GHP, Toulouse, France (2010); "Fayçal Baghriche: Subjective Projections," Kunstverein Bielefeld, Germany (2010); and "Fayçal Baghriche: Something Rather Than Nothing," Le Quartier, Centre d'Art Contemporain de Quimper, France (2010). Additionally, Baghriche has participated in the group exhibitions "The Great Public Sale of Unrealized but Brilliant Ideas," Centre Pompidou, Metz, France (2010); "Retour vers le futur," CAPC, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux (2010); "Seconde main," Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (2010); "As the Land Expands," Al Riwaq Art Space, Adliya, Bahrain (2010); "Les sujets en moins," Galerie Léo Scheer, Paris (2008); and "Faire et défaire c'est toujours travailler," West, The Hague (2008).

Bill Bollinger

Born 1939, Brooklyn, New York

Died 1988, Pine Plains, New York

Bill Bollinger's work was the focus of the solo exhibition "Bill Bollinger: The Retrospective," Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein (2011); as well as those at the Fine Arts Center, University of Rhode Island (1976); the West Bank Art Center, Minneapolis (1975); Bennington College (1973); and Bard College (1973). Bollinger had numerous exhibitions at Bykert Gallery, New York, and Galerie Rolf Ricke, Cologne. His work has also been seen at Bianchini Gallery and Leo Castelli Gallery, both in New York. Group exhibitions that featured Bollinger's work include the 1973 Whitney Biennial and "Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials" (1969), also at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; "Information," Museum of Modern Art, New York (1970); "Painting, Drawing and Sculpture of the '60s and '70s from the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection," Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (1969); "Live in Your

Head. When Attitudes Become Form,” Kunsthalle Bern (1969); “Op Losse Schroeven. Situaties en Cryptostructuren,” Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1969); and “Sound, Light, Silence: Art That Performs,” Atkins Museum of Fine Art, Kansas City, Missouri (1966).

Chto Delat?

Founded 2003

Based in St. Petersburg

Chto Delat? (What is to be done?) is a collective that includes artists, writers, philosophers, and art critics. The group’s recent solo exhibitions include “The Lesson on Dis-Consent,” Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (2011); “Chto Delat? Perestroika: Twenty Years After, 2011–1991,” Kunstverein Köln (2011); “study, study, and act again,” Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana (2011); “What is to be done between tragedy and farce?,” Smart Project Space, Amsterdam (2011); “Chto Delat?,” ar/ge kunst Galerie Museum, Bolzano (2010); and “Chto Delat? (What is to be done?)—The Urgent Need to Struggle Part 2,” Galerija Nova, Zagreb (2010). They have been included in such group exhibitions as “Living as Form,” Creative Time, New York (2011); “Ostalgia,” New Museum, New York (2011); “To the Arts, Citizens!,” Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto (2010); “A History of Irritated Material,” Raven Row, London (2010); and “What Keeps Mankind Alive?,” 11th Istanbul Biennial (2009).

William Cordova

Born 1971, Lima

Lives and works in Lima, Miami, and New York

William Cordova received his BFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1996. He was a fellow of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine, and received his MFA from Yale University in 2004. He was the recipient of a Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant in 2005, and in 2009 he received a grant from Art Matters. Notable solo exhibitions of Cordova’s work include “yawar yallku (royalty, abduction & exile),” La Conservera, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Murcia, Spain (2011); “laberintos,” Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York (2009); “Moby Dick (Tracy),” Artpace, San Antonio (2008); and “Pa’lante,” Arndt & Partner, Berlin (2006). He has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, such as “Halleluhwah! Hommage à CAN,” Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2011); the 2008 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; “NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith,” Menil Collection, Houston (2008); and “Street Level: Marc Bradford, William Cordova, and Robin Rhode,” Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (2007).

Abraham Cruzvillegas

Born 1968, Mexico City

Lives and works in Mexico City

Abraham Cruzvillegas studied pedagogy at the National University of Mexico and was a member of Gabriel Orozco's workshop from 1987 to 1991. In 2010–11, he participated in the DAAD Berlin artists-in-residence program. Cruzvillegas's work has been shown in exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; REDCAT, Los Angeles; Tate Modern, London; Cove Park/CCA, Glasgow; CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco; Centro Cultural Montehermoso, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain; the New Museum, New York; and Media-City, Seoul. His work is included in Documenta 13, Kassel, and the 9th Gwangju Biennial (2012). It has previously been seen in the 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011), the 7th Bienal do Mercosul in Porto Alegre (2009), the 50th Venice Biennale (2005), the 25th São Paulo Bienal (2003), and the 5th Havana Bienal (1994).

Latifa Echakhch

Born 1974, El Khnansa, Morocco

Lives and works in Martigny, Switzerland

Latifa Echakhch received a diploma from the École Nationale des Beaux Arts de Lyon in 2002. In 2005–6, she was an artist in residence at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, and in 2006 was an artist in residence at International Artists Studio Program in Stockholm. Solo exhibitions of her work include "Morgenleid," Kunsthalle Basel (2012); "Verso," kaufmann repetto, Milan (2012); "Currents: Latifa Echakhch," Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio (2012); "Von Schwelle zu Schwelle," Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, Germany (2011); "Movement and Complication," Swiss Institute, New York (2009); "Partitas," Kunstverein Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany (2009); "Les sanglots longs," Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel (2009); "Pendant que les champs brûlent," Galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris (2009); and "Speaker's Corner," Tate Modern, London (2008).

Daphne Fitzpatrick

Born 1964, Long Island, New York

Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York

Daphne Fitzpatrick received a BFA from the School of Visual Arts in 1986 and was a fellow of the Whitney Independent Study Program in 1987. She has received grants from Art Matters and the Jerome Foundation. Solo exhibitions of her work include "Dig the Whole," Tokyo Institute of Technology, Center for the Study of World Civilizations, Toyko (2012); "All Dogs Allowed," Museum 52, New York (2010); "Duck Soup," La MaMa La Galleria, New York (2009); and "A Roll in the Hay," Bellwether, New York (2007). Her work has been shown in the group exhibitions

“this is a performance,” Artist Curated Projects, Los Angeles (2010); “Shared Women,” LACE, Los Angeles (2007); “Ridykeulous,” Participant Inc., New York (2006); and “Daphne Fitzpatrick / Nancy Shaver / Amy Sillman / Kara Walker,” Brent Sikkema, New York (2001).

Claire Fontaine

Founded 2004

Lives and works in Paris

Claire Fontaine is a collective artist based in Paris. Many exhibitions have focused solely on Fontaine’s work, including “Breakfast Starts at Midnight,” Index, Stockholm (2012); “La Chiave,” Fondazione Pastificio Cerere, Rome (2012); “Ma l’amor mio non muore,” Galleria T293, Rome (2012); “Généralités and Equivalences,” Chantal Crousel and La Douane, Paris (2012); “M-A-C-C-H-I-N-A-Z-I-O-N-I,” Museion, Bolzano (2012); “Working Together,” Metro Pictures, New York (2011); “P.I.G.S.,” MUSAC Contemporary Art Museum, Castilla y León, Spain (2011); “Future Tense,” El Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City; “Inhibitions,” Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York (2009); “After Marx April, after Mao June,” Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, Colorado (2009); “Interior Design for Bastards,” Galleria T293, Naples (2009); “Arbeit Macht Kapital,” Kubus, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Munich (2008); and “Get Lost, Module,” Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2007). Fontaine’s work was featured in the 4th Moscow Biennial (2011) and the 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011).

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Born 1953, Güimaro, Cuba

Died 1996, Miami

Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s work has been shown in numerous national and international exhibitions, in solo and group contexts. Solo exhibitions have been presented at Wiels, Brussels (2010); Artpace, San Antonio (2010); El Museo del Barrio, New York (2006); the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (2005); the Serpentine Gallery, London (2000); the Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany (1997); the Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia (1994); and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1992). In 2007, Gonzalez-Torres’s work represented the United States at the 52nd Venice Biennale. His work has also been seen regularly at Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York, since his first exhibition there, “Every Week There Is Something Different” (1991). Group exhibitions including his work have been presented at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt a. M. (2000); Sammlung Goetz, Munich (1995); Printed Matter, New York (1993); the Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (1990); and the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin (1990).

Rachel Hecker

Born 1958, Providence, Rhode Island
Lives and works in Houston

Rachel Hecker received her BFA in sculpture at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia and her MFA in 1982 from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. Solo exhibitions include "Chapel," Skydive Art Space, Houston (2011); "my world is really small and you are in it" (2009) and "Sad and Pissed" (2002), Texas Gallery, Houston; "Dead Yankees," Artpace, San Antonio, Texas (1996); and "Pleasure and Commerce," Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (1995). Group exhibitions include the two-person "Encounter 6: Peter Halley + Rachel Hecker," Dallas Museum of Art (1995); "Postmodern Americans: A Selection," Menil Collection, Houston (2001); "Splat Boom Pow," Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (2003); "Populence," Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston (2005); and "Go West," UNESCO, Paris, France (2011).

Jamie Isenstein

Born 1975, Portland, Oregon
Lives and works in New York

Jamie Isenstein received her BA in 1998 from Reed College in Portland and an MFA from Columbia University in 2004. Isenstein has presented her work in such exhibitions as " " at the Visual Arts Center, University of Texas, Austin (2011); "Special Guest Rug Woogies," etc. Galerie, Prague (2011); "Touched," Liverpool Biennial, Tate Liverpool (2010); "Look Again," Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North-Carolina (2010); "Marina Abramović Presents," Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (2009); "Regift," Swiss Institute, New York (2009); "One Minute More," The Kitchen, New York (2009); "Hammer Projects: Jamie Isenstein: This Way to the Egress," Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles (2007); "General Ideas: Rethinking Conceptual Art 1987-2005," CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2005); and Greater New York 2005, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York (2005).

Luis Jacob

Born 1971, Lima
Lives and works in Toronto

Luis Jacob received his BA from the University of Toronto in 1994. Recent solo exhibitions of Jacob's work include "A Finger in the Pie, a Foot in the Door, a Leg in Quicksand," Kunsthalle Lingen, Germany (2012); "Pictures at an Exhibition," Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto (2011); "Tableaux Vivants," Fonderie Darling, Montreal (2010); "Without Persons," Art in General, New York (2010); "7 Pictures of Nothing Repeated Four Times, in Gratitude," Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (2009); and "Habitat," Kunstverein Hamburg

(2008). Group exhibitions in which his work has been shown include "Animism," Generali Foundation, Vienna (2011); "Haunted: Contemporary Photography/ Video/Performance," Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010); "Dance with Camera," Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (2009); "If We Can't Get It Together," The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto (2008); and Documenta 12, Kassel (2007).

Patrick Killoran

Born 1972, Newtown Square, Pennsylvania
Lives and works in New York

Patrick Killoran has participated in several residency programs, including the Civitella Ranieri Center, Umbertide, Italy, and in 2010 he was the artist in residence in the department of art theory and practice at Northwestern University as a grant recipient of the Pick Laudati Fund. Additionally, he has received grants from such foundations as the Rema Hort Mann Foundation and the Penny McCall Foundation. Killoran has presented solo projects at many institutions including the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut; MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York; IKON, Birmingham, United Kingdom; and Sculpture Center, Long Island City, New York. He has participated in group exhibitions such as the One on One Festival, Battersea Arts Centre, London (2010 and 2011); "All about Laughter," Mori Museum, Tokyo (2007); and "24/7," Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania (2003).

Jiří Kovanda

Born 1953, Prague
Lives and works in Prague

Jiří Kovanda has had numerous solo exhibitions, including "Wait, Please, She Will Come," gb agency, Paris (2011); "White Blanket," Secession, Vienna (2010); "Jiří Kovanda versus the Rest of the World," De Appel, Amsterdam (2007); and "Objektbilder," Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria (1991). He has participated in the group exhibitions "Ostalgia," New Museum, New York (2011); "Museo de las narrativas paralelas," Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2011); "Peripheral Vision and Collective Body," Museion, Bolzano (2008); Documenta 12, Kassel (2007); "Some Time Waiting," Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2007); "Actions and Interruptions (Saturday Live)," Tate Modern, London (2007); "Body and the East," Exit Art, New York (2001); "The Art of Frozen Time: The Czech Art Scene 1969–1985," Moravská Gallery, Brno, Czech Republic (1988); and "Works and Words," De Appel, Amsterdam (1979). Kovanda's work will be the subject of a solo exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, in October 2012.

Klara Lidén

Born 1979, Stockholm

Lives and works in Berlin

Klara Lidén studied at the School of Architecture at the Royal School of Technology in Stockholm from 2000 to 2004. Subsequently, she attended the University of Arts, Crafts and Design, Konstfack, Stockholm. In 2010, Lidén was the international artist in residence at Artpace, San Antonio. "Klara Lidén: Bodies of Society" is the artist's solo exhibition at the New Museum, New York (2012). Her work has also been shown in solo exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel (2009); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2009); and the Nordic Pavilion of the Venice Biennale (2009). Lidén's solo project *Toujours etre ailleurs* was presented at the Jeu de Paume, Paris; the Serpentine Gallery, London; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2010). The exhibition "Elda för kråkorna" took place at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York (2008).

Catherine Murphy

Born 1946, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Lives and works in Poughkeepsie, New York

In 1966 Catherine Murphy attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine, and in 1967 she graduated from the Pratt Institute in New York with a BFA. Solo exhibitions of Murphy's work include "Catherine Murphy: Falk Visiting Artist," Weatherspoon Art Museum at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro (2012); "Catherine Murphy," Texas Gallery, Houston (2006); and "Catherine Murphy: Her World," Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina (1994). Murphy's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, including "Lifelike" (2012–13) and "The Quick and the Dead" (2009), both at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; "Artists' Choice: Vik Muniz, Rebus," Museum of Modern Art, New York (2008); "Nominally Figured: Recent Acquisitions in Contemporary Art," Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2006); "This Must Be the Place," Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (2005); "Catherine Murphy, Joan Mitchell, Harriet Korman: Three Rooms," Lennon Weinberg, Inc., New York (1999); and the 1995 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Pratchaya Phinthong

Born 1974, Ubonratchathani, Thailand

Lives and works in Bangkok

Pratchaya Phinthong received his BFA in 2000 from Silpakorn University in Bangkok and received a Meisterschule certificate at Städelschule, Frankfurt a.M. In 2004, Phinthong received the Kunstaspekte Kunstpreis, and in 2008 he took part in the International Artists Studio Program residency in Stockholm. Phinthong has had many solo exhibitions, including the recent "Pratchaya Phinthong," gb agency, Paris (2012); "Give More Than You Take," a two-part exhibition at the Gallerie d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo, Italy (2011) and the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Brétigny, France (2010); and "The News of the Day, the Problem of the Hour," University Gallery, Bangkok (2010).

LIST OF WORKS

Ellen Altfest

The Leg, 2010

Oil on canvas
8 x 11 inches
Courtesy the artist and White Cube, London
pp. 28, 67, 70, 72

Plants, 2004

Oil on linen
48 x 26 inches
Courtesy the artist and White Cube, London
pp. 28, 46, 47

Fayçal Baghriche

Envelopments, 2010

Fabric (flags from 26 countries), flagpoles,
hardware
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Collection Nadour
pp. 29, 71, 80–81, 86, 87

Bill Bollinger

Evergreen Joe Hemmis, 1970/2012

Lumber, sawhorse brackets
32 inches x 24 feet 10 inches, diameter
pp. 28–29, 30–31, 34–35, 36, 40–41, 58–59

Untitled (Gorgas Stairway), 1969/2012

Silicone tubing, water
Dimensions variable
Collection Rafael and Bunny Ferrer, New York
pp. 90–91

Chto Delat?

The Builders, 2005

Two-channel video: color, sound
8 minutes
Courtesy the artists
pp. 28, 71, 74–75

William Cordova

laberintos (pa' octavio paz y gaspar yanga), 2003–9

Vinyl records and record sleeves appropriated
from the library of an undisclosed Ivy League
institution that refused to repatriate more than
two hundred Incan artifacts borrowed from
Peru in 1914
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.,
New York
pp. 28–29, 58–59, 67, 71, 74–75, 76–77, 80–81

untitled (hexagons), 2001–11

10 elements: 4 mixed-media collages, framed;
Polaroid collage; feathers on string with push-
pin; photo collage; book cover on wood shelf;
plastic, photo, paper, and wood collage; napkin
and ink drawing on painted wood shelf
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.,
New York
pp. 40–41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46

Abraham Cruzvillegas

Autorretrato acatarrado pero haciendo los siete quiebres del elefantito (Self-Portrait with

a Cold but Still Trying to Get Busy Anyway), 2010
Skateboard, lumber, ginger root
39 x 9 x 26 inches
Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto,
Mexico City
pp. 28, 58–59, 64, 67, 71

Autorretrato embarazado y mascando pepitas (Self-Portrait Pregnant and Chewing

Pumpkin Seeds), 2010
Skateboard, lumber, potato
27¼ x 41 x 17 inches
Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto,
Mexico City
pp. 28, 58–59, 66, 70

Latifa Echakhch

Frame, 2010

Altered prayer rug
69¼ x 110¼ inches
Courtesy the artist and kaufmann repetto, Milan
pp. 28, 46, 48, 63

Globus, 2007

Map
5½ x 7 inches, diameter
Courtesy the artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris
pp. 28, 75, 87, 89

Daphne Fitzpatrick

Prolonging the Life of Your Cheese, 2012

Fencing foil, beeswax, hardware
36 x 6 x 6 inches
Courtesy the artist and American
Contemporary, New York
pp. 46, 51, 60, 63

Standing Upright, Island Desert Island, 2012

Rope, chain, scale, galvanized bucket, coins, prop palm tree

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and American

Contemporary, New York

pp. 28–29, 58–59, 60, 63, 71

Skewered, Orson Welles, 2012

Rubber rope, metal hook, soccer cleat, hand-drawn currency, fencing foil, plastic banana, ribbon, rubber gag finger

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and American

Contemporary, New York

pp. 28, 58–59, 61, 63, 70

Fiddle Head Hook, 2012

Cotton dog leash, rebar, prop fiddlehead fern

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and American

Contemporary, New York

pp. 29, 33, 34–35, 36, 58–59

Claire Fontaine

Instructions for the sharing of private property, 2006

Video: color, sound

45:23 minutes

Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

p. 25

Untitled (Prière de Toucher), 2011

Silicone masturbator, disposable coffee cup, straw

9¼ x 4 inches, diameter

Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

pp. 37, 40

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

“Untitled” (Silver), 1992

Lightbulbs, metal light sockets, extension cord

Dimensions variable

42 feet, with 20-foot extension cord

Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

pp. 29, 67, 69, 71

Rachel Hecker

Jesus #1 (Viggo Mortensen/Lord of the Rings), 2011

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 34 inches

Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery, Houston

pp. 28, 49, 63

Jesus #2 (David Gilmour/Pink Floyd), 2011

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 34 inches

Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery, Houston

pp. 71, 80, 82

Jesus #8 (David Axell/Joseph Abboud Ad), 2011

Acrylic on canvas

48 x 34 inches

Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery, Houston

pp. 29, 86

Jamie Isenstein

Smoking Pipe, 2006

Pipe, wood table, humidifier, sound-insulation foam, hardware, glue, enamel
33 x 17 x 10 inches

Courtesy the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Collection Jill and Peter Kraus, New York

pp. 28, 54–55, 57, 58–59, 66, 70

Straw Fire (with elbow), 2011

Porcelain wick, bottle, lamp fluid, lamp
9½ x 2¾ x 2¾ inches

Courtesy the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Private collection, Corvallis, Oregon

pp. 71, 80, 83, 84, 85

Luis Jacob

Album VIII, 2009

Montage in plastic laminate

67 units, 18 x 12 inches each

Courtesy the artist and Birch Libralato, Toronto

Generali Foundation Collection, Vienna

pp. 29, 30–31, 32, 33, 34–35, 36, 40, 58–59

Patrick Killoran

An Inconspicuous Addition, 2011

Rough diamond, melting ice, cooler

18 x 24 x 12 inches

Courtesy the artist

pp. 29, 71, 78, 79

Jiří Kovanda

August, 1977, Prague

I'm crying. I gazed at the sun for so long that I've started to cry, 1977

December 8th, 1977, Prague

With my hands over my eyes, I walk blindly into a group of people standing at the opposite end of the corridor . . . , 1977

May 19th, 1977, Prague, Střelecký ostrov

I carry some water from the river in my cupped hands and release it a few meters downriver . . . , 1977

November 30th, 1977, Prague, Karlovo náměstí

I had arranged to meet some friends at 7:40 pm. I decided I would arrive at the agreed spot about 10 minutes early . . . , 1977

September 3, 1977, Prague, Wenceslas Square

On an escalator . . . turning around, I look into the eyes of the person standing behind me . . . , 1977

November 18, 1976, Prague

Waiting for someone to call me . . . , 1976

January 23rd, 1978, Prague, Staroměstské náměstí

I arranged to meet a few friends . . . we were standing in a small group on the square, talking . . . suddenly, I started running; I raced across the square and disappeared into Melantrich Street . . . , 1978

All Kovanda works above:

Black-and-white photographs and typewritten text on paper

13 x 9³/₈ inches each

Collection Kontakt! The Erste Bank Collection, Vienna

pp. 28, 51, 52–53, 54, 60, 63, 66

Klara Lidén

180° Wall Piece, 2012

Altered gallery wall

168 x 269 x 22 inches

Courtesy the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

pp. 28, 54–55, 65, 66–67, 70

Catherine Murphy

Xmas Lights, 2007

Oil on canvas

52 x 59½ inches

Collection Emily Todd, Houston

pp. 28, 67, 71, 73

Trash Bags, 1996

Oil on canvas

57 x 59 inches

Collection Cynthia and Michael Fowler, Houston

pp. 36, 39, 40, 58–59

Pratchaya Phinthong

Demonstrations, 2009

Counterfeit currency and interaction

Courtesy the artist and gb agency, Paris

p. 93

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibition would not have been possible without the collaboration and effort of many friends and colleagues. First and foremost, I would like to thank the participating artists. They gave time and thought to this exhibition, made and selected work expressly for it, and helped me to shape my ideas about it through our varied conversations. I am truly grateful to them.

David Young and the Union Pacific Foundation provided substantial support for this exhibition, which I enthusiastically acknowledge. The Brown Foundation provides the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston with significant ongoing support for its publications, and I thank them for their generosity, which helps us to reach far wider audiences. Thanks as well to CAMH's Major Exhibition Fund donors, who help us present the best and most exciting international, national, and regional art here in Houston.

CAMH's trustees provide the thoughtful and critical support that allows this institution to grow and blossom, and I truly appreciate their interest, stewardship, and investment. Thanks, in particular, to Jereann Chaney for welcoming artists and supporters into her home to celebrate the opening of this exhibition, Marley Lott for graciously offering to host artists during installation, and Lynn Herbert, who brings her creative eye to an exhibition-related public program.

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The following galleries deserve thanks and recognition for working with me toward presenting the art on view: Irene Bradbury and Ciara Maloney of White Cube, London; Meg Malloy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York; Martha Reta and Anapaula Zamacona of kurimanzutto, Mexico City; Bianca Baroni and Chiara Repetto of kaufmann repetto, Milan; Myrtille Yver-Trochu of Kamel Mennour, Paris; Matthew Dipple of American Contemporary, New York; Alexander Ferrando, Manuela Mozo, and Michael Plunkett of Metro Pictures, New York; Nancy Douthey, Ian Glennie, and Fredericka Hunter of Texas Gallery, Houston; Jackie Klempay and Liz Mulholland of Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York; Patrizia Libralato of Birch Libralato, Toronto; Solene Guillier of gb agency, Paris; and Emily Sundblad of Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York.

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None of this would have been possible without the efforts of the team here at CAMH, which I am honored to have joined a year ago. Director Bill Arning offered his support throughout the development of this project; Valerie Cassel Oliver, CAMH's senior curator, is a mentor I can reliably turn to for feedback and sage advice; Nancy O'Connor, curatorial assistant, oversaw the myriad details of the organization of this exhibition and brought thoughtful ideas to the table; as deputy director of development and administration, Amber Winsor sought and secured the critical fiscal support that enabled the realization of this exhibition; registrar Tim Barkley, gallery supervisor Kenya Evans, and preparator Jeff Shore confidently and dependably facilitated the installation of "It is what it is. Or is it?"; I could thoroughly count on CAMH's director of external affairs, Connie McAllister, to offer editorial clarity and to galvanize an enthused and enlightened audience; Paula Newton, director of education and public programs, and Peter Lucas, education associate, were excellent collaborators in the development of exhibition programming and didactics; assistant gallery supervisor Quincy Berry looks after the works in our exhibition with great care, and amicably participated in Pratchaya Phinthong's *Demonstrations*. Thanks as well to CAMH's staff, present and former, all of whom participated in ways big and small to welcome me into my new position, and who made this exhibition possible: Cheryl Blissitte, Amanda Bredbenner, Jordan Dupuis, Olivia Junell, Jennie King, Sue Pruden, Mike Reed, Victoria Ridgway, Lana Sullivan, and Karen Whitlock, and to our guards and members of the FAQ team.

"It is what it is. Or is it?" is the culmination of much fruitful collaboration, and I am gratefully indebted to these individuals and others whose contributions have brought it from an idea to a reality.

Dean Daderko
Houston, 2012

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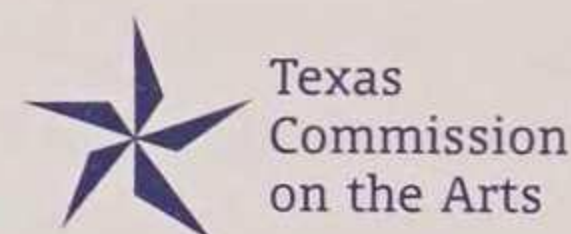
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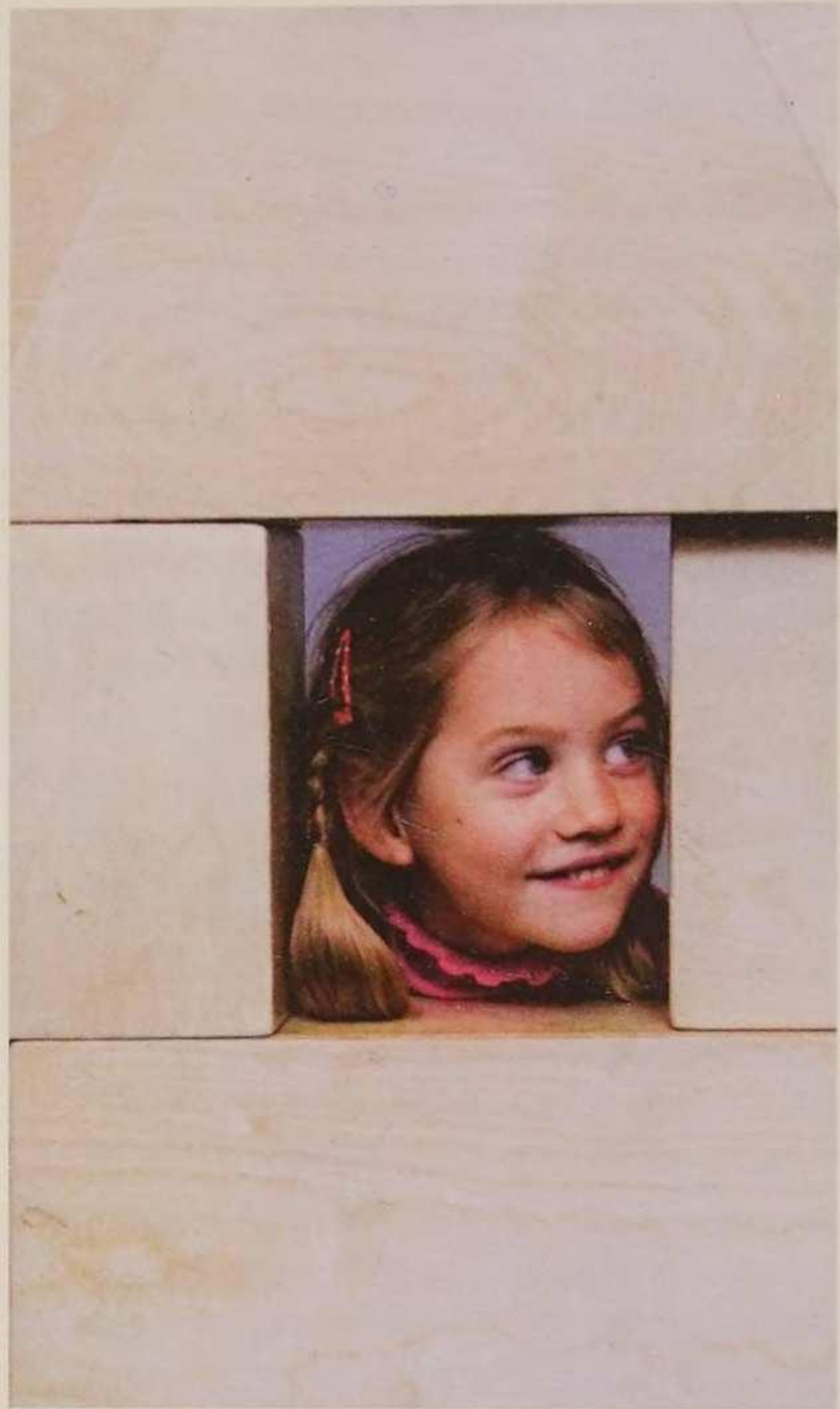
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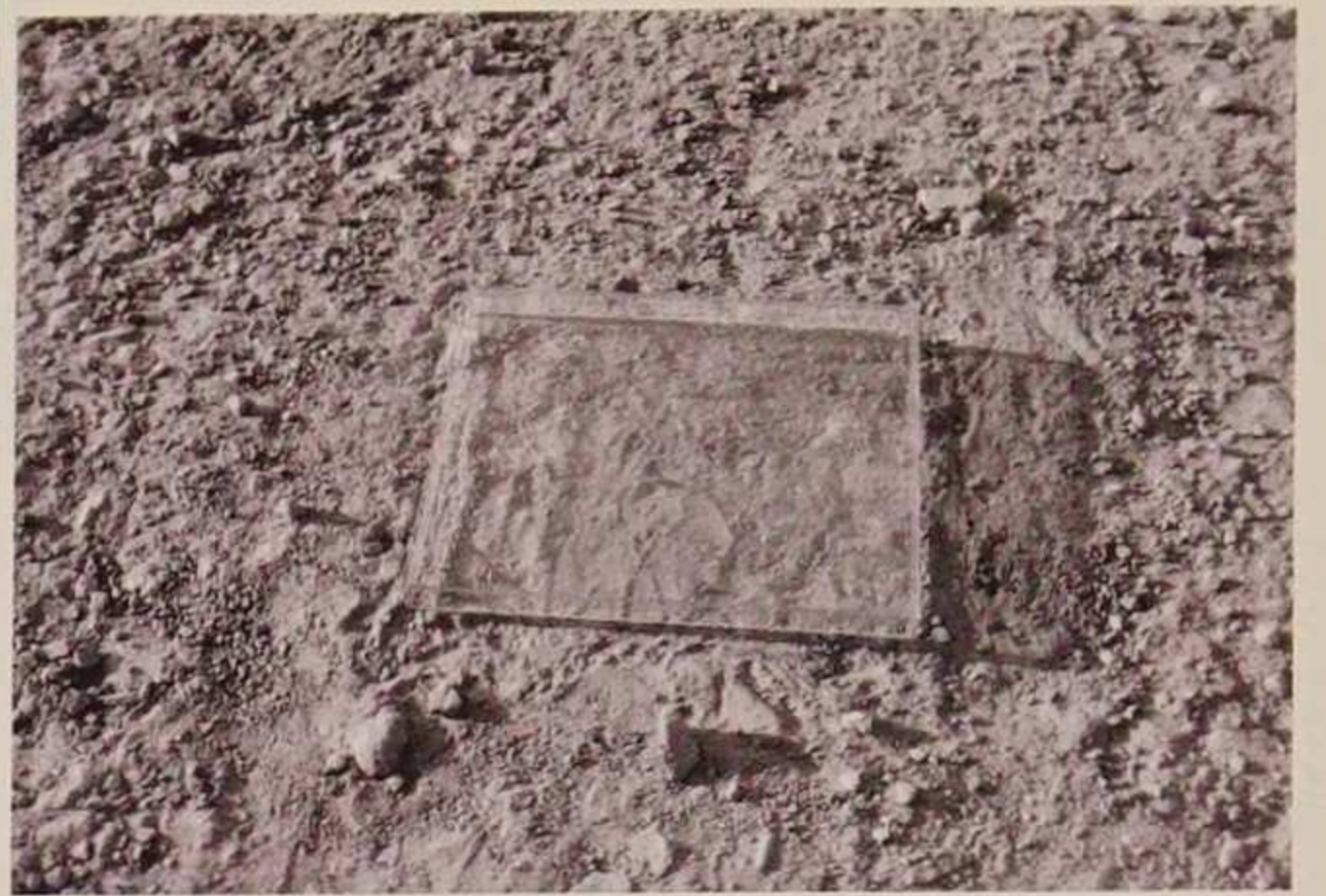
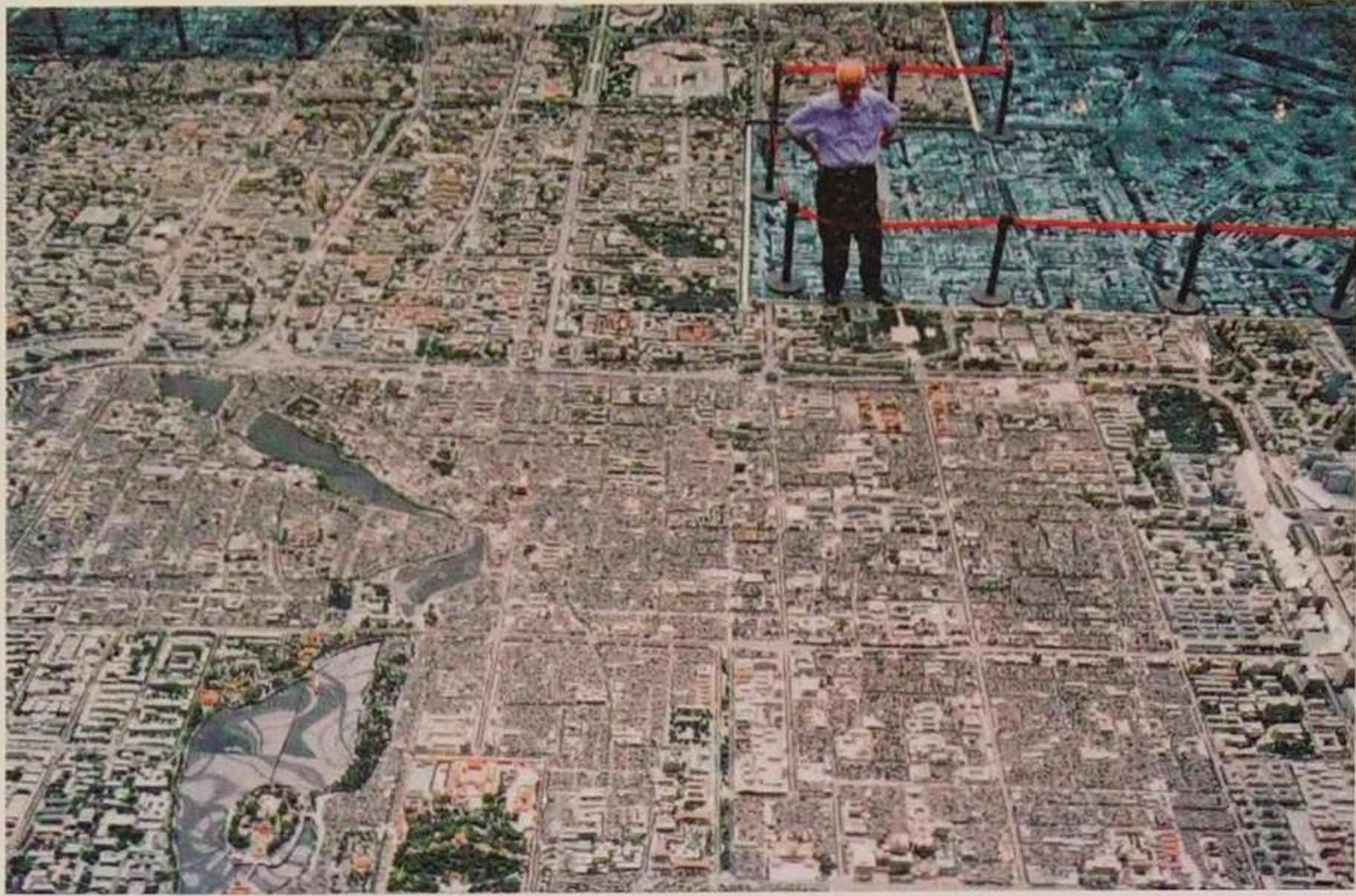
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