

An anatomical engraving of a human torso, showing the musculature and skeletal structure. The image is overlaid with a grid of dashed lines, suggesting a focus on measurement and proportion. The engraving is in a classic style, with fine lines and shading to create depth and texture.

# THE MEASURE OF ALL THINGS

## Rethinking Humanism through Art

October 13 - December 10, 2016  
Department of Art Gallery  
University at Buffalo

# THE MEASURE OF ALL THINGS

## Rethinking Humanism through Art

An exhibition curated by  
Natalie Fleming & Van Tran Nguyen

October 13 - December 10, 2016

Opening Reception  
Thursday, October 13  
5:00–7:00pm

Artists:

Richard Allen  
Nava Atlas  
Michael Beitz  
Maria Bilbao-Herrera  
Tanya Chaly  
Victoria Fuller  
Helen Heß  
Günes-Hélène Isitan  
Katharina Poggendorf-Kakar  
Verena Andrea Prenner  
Alyce Santoro  
Rachel Shelton  
James Eric Simpson  
Michael Salvatore Tierney  
Van Tran Nguyen  
Patty Wallace

Department of Art Gallery  
B45 Center for the Arts  
University at Buffalo  
North Campus



## Introduction

# WHAT IS MAN?

*Natalie Fleming & Van Tran Nguyen, Co-Curators*

The University at Buffalo Department of Art's exhibition, *The Measure of All Things: Rethinking Humanism through Art*, features sixteen artists whose work calls on us to rethink our reliance on the philosophy of humanism.

The ancient philosopher Protagoras famously claimed: "Of all things the measure is Man." In response, the curators ask: "What is Man?" Ask this question to more than one person and you will most likely get more than one answer.

Those who place their trust in science will assert that DNA, the molecule that carries the genetic instructions for all living organisms, makes humankind unique. Even the fact of DNA, however, falls short of explaining what it means to be human, as evidenced by controversies such as that over abortion. At its most basic level, this is a question of whether or not, despite DNA, the not-yet-born have a claim to humanity.

The romantics among us might say that what separates humans from all other beings is our emotional capacity. But how does one measure our aptitude for feeling? What emotions count and how should we express them? And if our emotions are deemed lacking...does that make us less human?

Agency, creativity, intelligence, love, expression, bodily integrity... each response to the question of what makes us human also acts as a dangerous barrier for those that fail to measure up.

Humanism has been trumpeted as the hallmark of a civilized society, founded on the unquestioned value of humankind defining not only our economic, political, religious, and social systems, but also our ethical code. This philosophy posits that as long as we are human, we are entitled to certain rights, such as the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness so-famously declared in the founding documents of the

All photographs have been provided by the artists unless otherwise noted.

United States. However, artists recently have questioned whether humanism has actually lived up to its promises of making the world a better place for humankind. Considering our seeming inability to define what makes us human, are we truly better off privileging this category above all else or could there be other, preferable, ways to value life? With the persistence of discrimination based on superficial differences such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, and class, and the continuation of violent crimes, even genocide, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we see the ways in which the discourse of humanism falters. Groups are targeted through rhetoric that reduces them to the subhuman, and therefore disposable. But what if we reconsidered the worth of the subhuman, nonhuman, and even the non-animal and material?

The artists in this show interrogate the legacy of humanism while posing alternatives to an anthropocentric framework. Works by the artists Helen Heß, Verena Andrea Prenner, Maria Bilbao-Herrera, and UB Department of Art MFA student Rachel Shelton, disturb our distinctions between the human and the nonhuman through practices based on documentation, repetition, and exchange. Artists Tanya Chaly, Victoria Fuller, Richard Allen, and MFA student James Eric Simpson visually record the global impact of our anthropocentrism as a guiding principle in our systems of capitalism, environmentalism, health care, and cultural production. The work of Patty Wallace, Michael Beitz, Nava Atlas, and Michael Salvatore Tierney blur the conventional boundaries that distinguish nature from humanity. Through the eyes of these artists, humans are trapped in self-imposed cages while flora and fauna are personified and gendered, both as agents of change and helpless signifiers of human desire. Alyce Santoro, Katharina Poggendorf-Kakar, Günes-Hélène Isitan, and MFA student Van Tran Nguyen expand our notion of communication with the nonhuman. In their work, birds, mushrooms, single-cell organisms, and even rocks interact, connect, and create, along with, for, and against their (mostly) human audience.

*The Measure of All Things: Rethinking Humanism through Art* destabilizes our false dichotomies, our hierarchies, and our claims of originality (The single-cell organisms in the exhibition might ask what is so wrong with being a copy anyway). No longer limited by Man as the measure of all things, we can reconsider our relationships and responsibilities within a world where we are all inextricably interconnected.

*Are we better off privileging humans above all else  
or could there be other, preferable, ways to value life?*

## THE MEASURE OF ALL THINGS

### Rethinking Humanism through Art

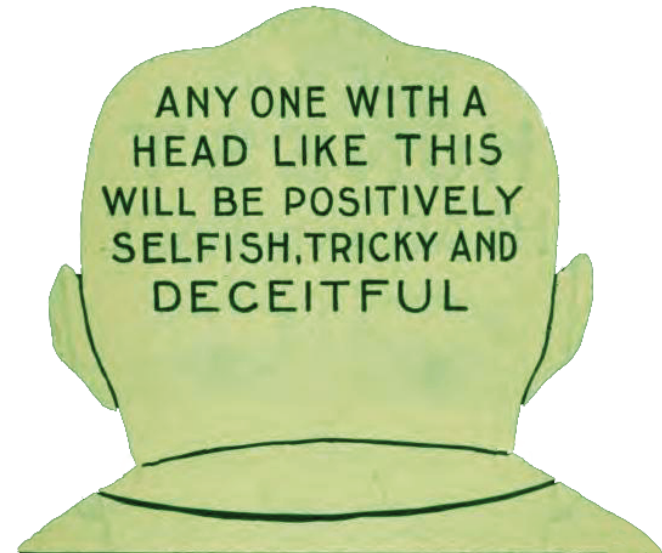


Image: Vaught, L. A. Vaught's Practical Character Reader. Chicago, IL: L.A. Vaught, 1902. 11

**Natalie Fleming** is the Visual Resource Curator for the University at Buffalo Department of Art and a PhD student in the American Studies program within the University at Buffalo Transnational Studies Department.

**Van Tran Nguyen** is a second year MFA student in the University at Buffalo Department of Art and the Graduate Assistant for UB's Coalesce Center for Biological Art.

# RICHARD ALLEN

## Panoramic Sea Happening (After Kantor)

Caroline Doherty

*Panoramic Sea Happening (After Kantor) is a 7 minute durational film that reimagines part of Tadeusz Kantor's original sea happenings from 1967 in a landscape in which the sea has retreated. The conductor of Kantor's original performance is replaced with a sound object cast adrift on a beach in Dungeness (UK). The object plays back the sound of the sea into the landscape, which was performed live and then filmed from three distinct angles. The first angle mimics the position of the conductor in Kantor's original happening, facing outwards into the horizon of the beach and recalls the image in Kantor's work of a human figure undertaking the absurd task of orchestrating the sound of a gigantic expanse of water. The second angle exposes the machine itself and the large cone that amplifies the sound, reinforcing the isolation of the object. The third angle reveals a decommissioned nuclear power station and sound objects used as a warning system for the power plant.*

-Richard Allen

A reenactment, a translation, a reiteration: a machine body replaces a man, and offers a more permanent memory, its rhythmic call at once a statement of its own existence and a lament for the disappearing sea. But for a distant glimpse of humans on the wet horizon, we might think the gull the only creature left to hear the voice of this machine. A first turn reveals our body's profile - long legs, head bowed, in reverence or in shame. A second turn gives us what looms behind: a power station, reactors dead. The muted signal speakers cheer silently for our small hero, child of the larger machine. Balanced in this little boat, precarious for the idea of water and paralyzed for the lack, it stands, it waits. Potential motion embodied, it calls out forever to the horizon but not to the edge; there is, still, a sea there.



**Richard Allen's** work investigates the agency and theatricality of objects through the making of sound installations, performances, films, essays and publications. He makes sound and visual works with theatrical props, stage hardware, novelty items, instruments, machines, apparatuses and artifacts that play with how narratives and animations are formed between objects, sounds and spectators. He has presented work at the National Review of Live Art (Glasgow), Mayfest (Bristol), Chapter Arts Centre (Cardiff), and Oriel Moystn (Llandudno). He has published on the bio-objects of Tadeusz Kantor, the scenographic landscapes of Philippe Quesne and Vivarium Studio and recently edited an edition of the performance research journal *On Anthropomorphism* with Dr. Shaun May. He is currently developing a site-based audio project in response to a number of abandoned Little Chef locations throughout the UK and has written an article about Katrina Palmer's site-specific audio walk *The Loss Adjusters* for an issue of the *Theatre and Performance Design Journal* (Routledge) on 'good vibrations' in sound design. He is a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at the University of Worcester School of Art (UK) where he is the co-founder of the Fabrication Research Group.

**Caroline Doherty** is an artist and educator. Her work uses a variety of media, including performance and sculpture, to engage questions of communication, violence, and power.



**Nava Atlas** is an artist who does text-driven work, and a writer who incorporates images and found materials to create atmospheric reading experiences. In these contexts, she often looks through the lens of history to examine the ways in which media, language, and cultural constructs push long-held beliefs against the desire for changes in the status quo. In her writing and art, she looks at a range of social justice issues that matter to her including women's lives, civil rights, and animal welfare.

Her work has been shown nationally in museums, galleries, and alternative art spaces including the Wichita Art Museum, Suffolk Museum, Purdue University, Duke University, Delaware Center for Contemporary Art, Everson Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, and many others. Her limited edition books are housed in many collections of artist's books, including the libraries of MOMA (NY), National Museum of Women in the Arts (Wash., DC), Brooklyn Museum, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), plus dozens of artist's book collections at universities and colleges nationwide.

A permanent archive of her papers, detailing her work as an exhibiting artist, book artist, author, and food writer is housed at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, a division of the Rubenstein Library at Duke University in Durham, NC.

**Skylar Borgstrom** is a visual artist living and working in Buffalo, NY. Skylar's own artistic practice examines the locations at which visual culture and feminism collide.

## Nava Atlas DECONSTRUCTING ELSIE

Skylar Borgstrom

Nava Atlas is an artist straddling the fence of artist books and commercial publishing as she navigates the multiple ways in which books function across a broad variety of contexts—from commonly mass produced objects to individual installation works. As an accomplished vegetarian cookbook writer, Atlas comes to the work in *Deconstructing Elsie* (2014) and *The Completely-from-Scratch Steer-to-Sirloin Beef Slaughter Guide and Cookbook* (2012) from the perspective of an individual examining animal welfare and gender issues. Both artworks question big agriculture's contemporary meat and dairy production practices, utilizing sales and information materials produced in the early twentieth century; they simultaneously highlight the advertising industry's role as self-appointed creator of cultural norms.

Edward Bernays, often cited as the father of modern propaganda, ensured that American manufacturers, previously focused on WWI and WWII's supply effort, could convert their production lines into ones that fed modern household consumption. Getting women out of the factory and back into the urban/suburban kitchen, to make room for returning war veterans re-entering the workplace, was paramount to the success of this strategy to keep industry, and the American economy, running smoothly.

In *Deconstructing Elsie*, Atlas points specifically to animal welfare and the environmental impact of big ag, utilizing the context of Borden Dairy Company's advertisements featuring Elsie the Cow. In keeping with the time frame in which these ads were originally produced, Borden Dairy reached out to female consumers by implying a woman's role was not only in the home but also the only one available. Similarly, *The Completely-from-Scratch-to-Sirloin Beef Slaughter Guide* uses the physical combination of a 1931 USDA slaughter guide and 1969 Better Homes and Gardens meat cookbook to walk viewers, step by step, from slaughter to table—from the man's world to the woman's.

The overarching theme on display in Atlas's work is that of animal rights and their intersection with gender issues, a product of the culture in which we function.

# NAVA ATLAS

## The Completely-from-Scratch Steer-to-Sirloin Beef Slaughter Guide and Cookbook

Domenic Licata

Each vegan not fortunate enough to have been born into a meat-and-dairy free family has reached a tipping point where suddenly a multitude of small but significant observations culminates in the full revelation of what has been hidden from us. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams explains that plated meat is an “absent referent,” a signifier of something missing. Hidden by cultural sanitization, passive denial, or willful ignorance, meat is a product made possible by the objectification and commoditization of an individual animal. It is the end result of a ritualized process of production and consumption. Beef (once a steer) absently refers to an animal who lived a miserable life and died a violent death at the hands of others with which we are complicit.

We are conditioned to ignore the cruel, cattle-industry-fueled patriarchy that preaches meat-eating as an entitlement, a mark of achieved status, and a statement of masculinity and sexual power. By presenting the traditionally “masculine” act of butchering from a vocational text, alongside the 1950’s *Good Housekeeping* style “feminine” art of cooking, Atlas’s *Beef Slaughter Guide and Cookbook* forces us to confront the consumption of meat in the context of gender roles and sexual politics. A steer that has lost his agency, that becomes an object to be struck, stuck, bled, dismembered and divided, becomes an objectified consumable commodity. Likewise, a woman who is seen as an object of sexual desire to be possessed and consumed, or a servant to fulfill the needs of her husband, becomes an absent referent of the individual personhood she possesses.

Do we accept as matter-of-fact the illustration of the slaughtering and butchering of a steer, or do we sense horror at the dismemberment of a sentient, emotional being, stripped bare of its skin? Do we view the images of lovingly prepared meat with hunger and desire, or do we feel shame and disgust? Even in the blatant act of removing the veil and confronting the referent, I wonder about those on whom the irony may be lost.



**Domenic J. Licata** is an education and technology researcher, a photographer, and an instructor of graphic design and emerging practices in the Department of Art at the University at Buffalo. He has been vegetarian for 26 years, and through the influence of his lifelong vegetarian and recently vegan daughters, has been vegan for two months.



## Michael Beitz SPRING

Gary Sczerbaniewicz

Sculptor and 2009 University at Buffalo Department of Art MFA alumnus Michael Beitz' work offers a playful and poetic contribution to the theme of this exhibition. Seamlessly melding the form of clenched human fists into the divergent branches of a barren tree— executed through the medium of cast plastic— the work posits the inseparable quality of the human condition from the natural, replete with its own existential struggles. This skillful pairing of disembodied limbs, each possessing oppositional aspirations, directs the viewer's gaze to the pivotal and critical juncture, a site of ossified tension. As illustrated by the dual trajectories within the piece, there is an internal conflict at work here. Even the title *Spring* seems to subvert the formal implication of an imminent and brittle schism.

Meticulously rendered in an earth-toned finish (perhaps mimicking unfired clay or human bone) yet articulated by means of an industrially produced material (plastic), Beitz further extends the scope of his poignant form of conceptual play. The work holds a subtle but captivating power in its capacity for restraint and lack of superfluous elements. This vein of quiet, playful, relatable humor runs throughout the artist's body of work, and is often executed through masterful manipulation of materials and use of familiar objects and forms that bear the stamp of the human experience.

**Michael Beitz** is an Assistant Professor at the University at Colorado Boulder. He received his MFA from the University of Buffalo in 2009. Originally from New York State, Beitz spent a number of years working as a furniture maker for artists and designers while continuing his studio practice. Beitz creates large-scale installations and sculpture inspired by the social, personal, and material functions of furniture. His work has been exhibited in numerous galleries and museums, among them the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha, Banksy's Dismaland in the UK and the Madison (Wisconsin) Museum of Contemporary Art. He has also been commissioned to create public artwork for the University at Buffalo as part of an effort to improve the UB experience for students by developing small, comfortable spaces throughout the campuses.

**Gary Sczerbaniewicz** received his BFA in Sculpture from the NYS College of Ceramics at Alfred University and his MFA from the Department of Visual Studies at the University at Buffalo. Sczerbaniewicz is a 2016 fellow in Architecture/ Environmental Structures / Design from the New York Foundation for the Arts. He was also recipient of the Jacob Kassay MFA Award (2013) and was a 2010 member of the NYFA Mark Program. He has exhibited works in NYC, Philadelphia, PA, Wilmington, DE, Toronto, Ontario, and Buffalo, NY. Sczerbaniewicz has recently completed artist residencies at the Constance Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts (2016) and Sculpture Space (2013). He teaches 2D & 3D classes at both the University at Buffalo and Buffalo State College. Sczerbaniewicz is represented by BT&C Gallery in Buffalo, NY - where he currently lives and works.

# MARIA BILBAO-HERRERA

## ON BECOMING: A Mediation (Vermittlung)

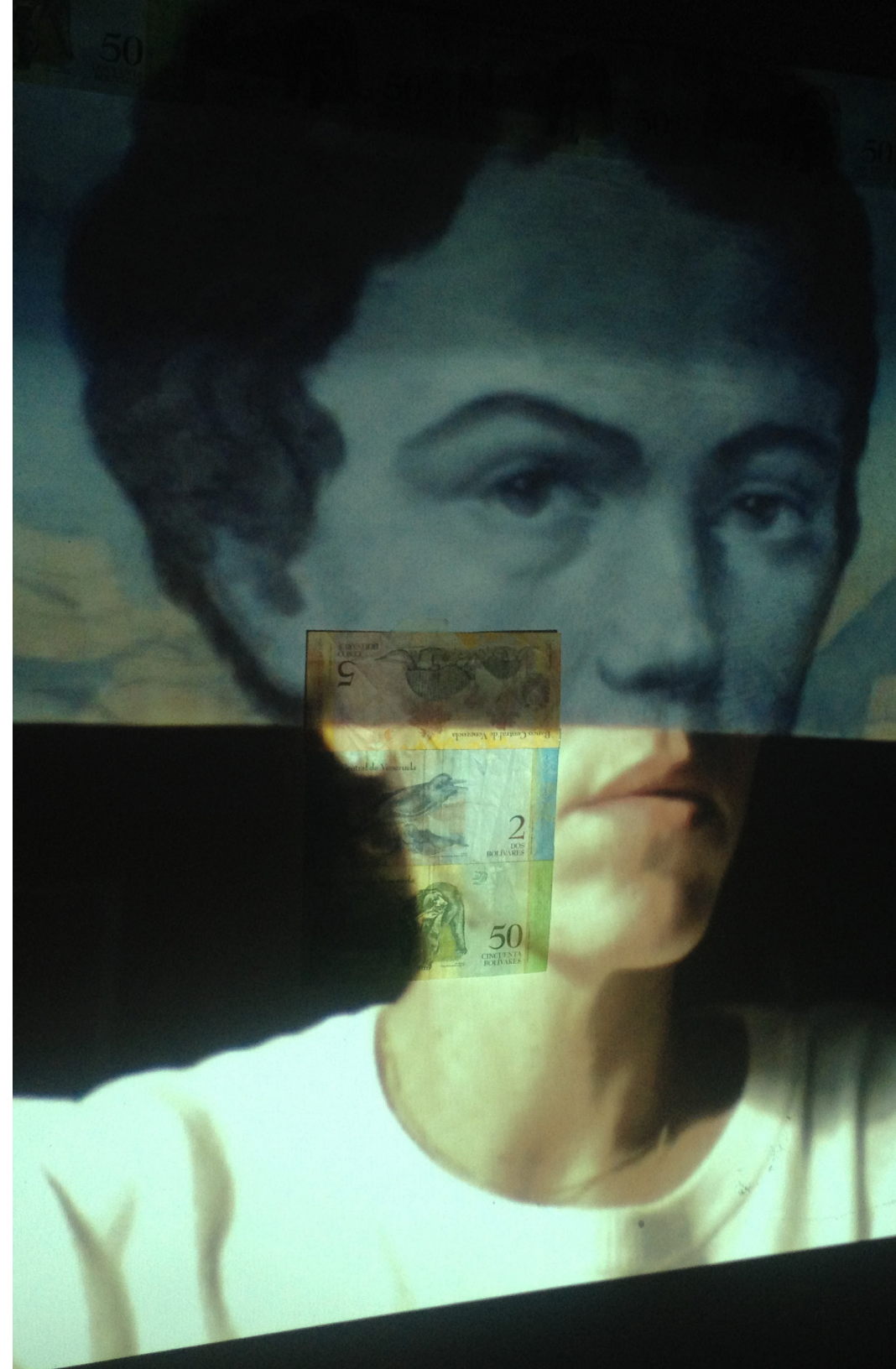
Hilary Vandenberg

Maria Bilbao-Herrera offers a meditation on mediation in her work, *ON BECOMING: A Mediation (Vermittlung)*. By superimposing a collection of devalued and currently struggling Venezuelan Bolivar bills across her face, the artist explores the role of money in mediating our identities and experiences. Further, Bilbao-Herrera holds up physical bills and the predominantly male faces adorning them, cut off at the mouth. These partially cover her own face, becoming something new: not quite human, not quite money. The hybridized face of the artist's mouth and the eyes and noses of various historically-recognized figures command the viewer's attention and direct them to reflect on the life of money. Bilbao-Herrera infuses the dead, sterile faces of history with energy and vibrancy as she disrupts their taciturn smiles through sound and myriad unexpected lip movements. *On Becoming: A Mediation (Vermittlung)* also explores the digitization of money. By using a computer recording and then recording the projection of the original, the artist's use of cash bills almost becomes a form of irony in the age of internet banking and trading. Covering her own face with different currencies, the artist situates herself in multiple places, communities, and identities. This covering and uncovering reveals the tremendous influence money has on our lives; it delineates borders and belonging faster than any military presence, it is often the measure of the powerful and admirable, it represents both life and death in its excess and scarcity.

**Maria Bilbao-Herrera** is an artist and photographer born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela. She received her BA in Interior Design from the Fort Lauderdale Art Institute, and her MA in Art Direction from Elisava School of Design in Barcelona. Upon graduation, Maria attended the International Center of Photography in New York, where she was awarded the prize for excellence Rita K Hillman.

Maria explores media and new technologies within the medium of photography and video, performance and installation. In addition to her own art practice, she is an educator in the field of the image creation, understanding and showcasing. Her works have been exhibited in Caracas, Madrid, New York, Barcelona, Berlin, Brazil and are part of private collections in NY, Bogotá, Florence and Caracas.

**Hilary Vandenberg** is a PhD student in Global Gender Studies. Her research interests include sexual violence, social movements, and feminist legal theory. She uses feminist discourse analysis to explore changing conceptions of victimization in the criminal justice system.







Tanya Chaly

## TIDINGS OF INVISIBLE THINGS RIBEIROIA ONDATRAE PARASITE DEFORMITY

*Van Tran Nguyen*

Tanya Chaly's drawings are intimate studies of change, a naturalist's detailed notes on the impact of the Ribeiroia Ondatrae parasite on frog habitats. The images are strikingly bizarre and demand our attention to each frog's deformities, begging the question of what went wrong. The parasite linked to limb deformity is able to infect hosts after runoff phosphates from fertilizer weaken amphibians' immune systems. The devastation to frogs through the destabilization of their habitats is captured in the placement of Chaly's frames, staggered in the form of an atrazine molecule, one of the most widely-used herbicides in the United States. The images, arranged in diversely-shaped molecular links, also suggest the misalignment of the frog's own growth phases. Chaly's meticulous drawings of frogs contrast the real and unpredictable changes to their bodies. We wonder at the mutants that we have helped create. Why are we so destructive? Why are they so receptive to our destruction? The frames that house her studies harken back to eighteenth and nineteenth century collection and documentation practices, pointing to our need to know and record. She encases the frogs' otherness like a mad scientist houses jars filled to the brim with formaldehyde, as safekeeping of unfamiliar beasts for our curious eyes.

**Tanya Chaly** was born in Sydney, Australia and currently lives and works in New York City. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts and went on to complete post-graduate studies majoring in painting from the University of New South Wales, College of Fine Arts in Sydney, Australia. She enrolled as a Bachelor of Art History at the University of Burgundy in Dijon, France where she was appointed a teaching position at the Ecole Media D'Art, in Chalon sur-Saone. She has been based in New York City since 2007.

She has exhibited widely in both group and solo shows and has been the recipient of a number of awards and prizes. Recent solo shows include LaGuardia Galleries of Fine Art, CUNY, Miller Gallery Alvernia University, McCarthy Art Gallery St Michael's College, The Explorer's Club New York, and the University of Connecticut Art Gallery. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at The Art Gallery of Ballarat, Australia, Drive-By Projects, MA, Idaho State University, Arizona State University, CAP Artspace, NY and Five Points Gallery, CT among many others. In 2014 she received the New York Explorer's Club Artist-in-Exploration Award (sponsored by Rolex), a \$25,000 prize given to an artist to produce a body of work out in the field. Other grants and awards include residencies at Brooklyn Art Cluster 2017, Art of Science Residency The Ligo Project NY, a NSW Ministry for the Arts Gunnery Studio, Australia, the Saltonstall Foundation NY, the Vermont Studio Center and The Zeta Orionis Fellowship in 2017.

# VICTORIA FULLER

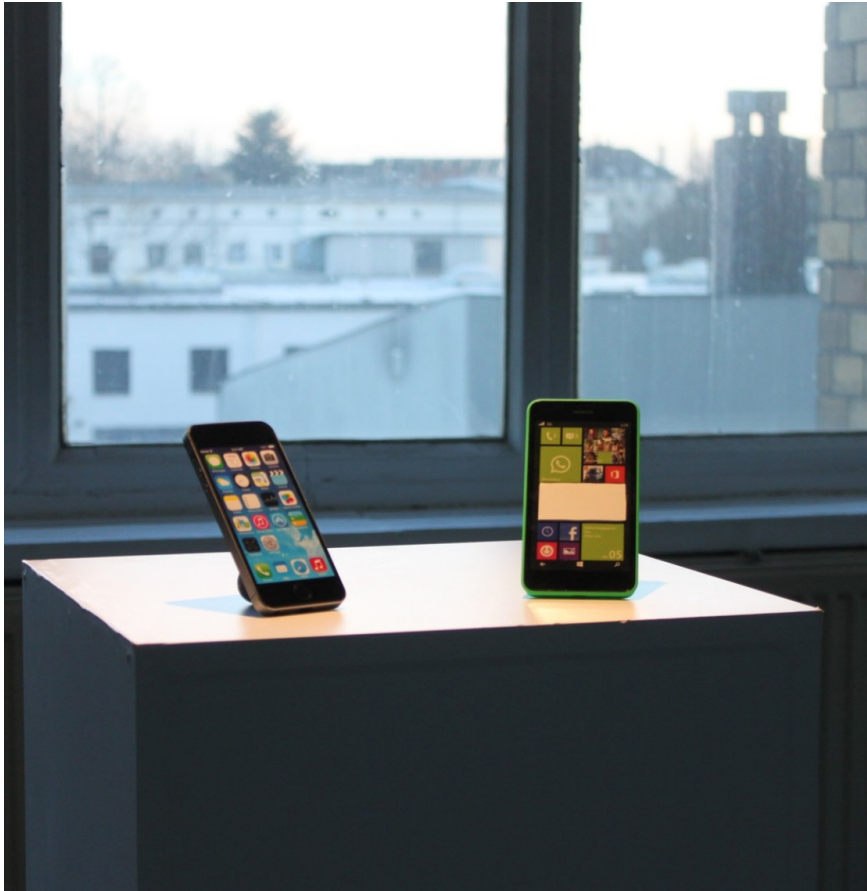
## In My Backyard

Van Tran Nguyen

In Fuller's *In My Backyard*, synthetic materials pose as natural creations: epoxy clay impeccably mimics bark and paper imitates a lively beehive. Sculptural elements are connected by a garden hose, which unites log to pipe, valves, and chain. In this system, our eyes travel over the surface of mushrooms, we buzz with the bees, and crawl amongst beetles. But despite the playful movement of the form and the bright colors that capture our vision, *In My Backyard* is not a happy narrative of artificial and natural collaboration. The log, for example, acts as a worrisome sanctuary for the bees once when we notice that it is penetrated on three sides by threaded pipe. Fuller's mastery over material highlights human domination and exploitation of the environment. She manipulates the seemingly natural elements in this work, but at what cost? Fuller reminds us that human desire for control often has unintended consequences, such as our invention of Pyrethrum, an insecticide used on Japanese beetles, which unintentionally destroys bee populations. Guided by the garden hose, we find ourselves unable to escape the closed loops of the sculpture. We are trapped into witnessing the results of our actions.

**Victoria Fuller** is a Chicago sculptor, painter, and natural science illustrator. Her educational background includes studies at the San Francisco Art Institute, Parson's Paris Program in Paris, France, and a graduate degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Fuller has been honored with fellowships from the Colorado Council for the Arts and Humanities and the Illinois Arts Council with appearances in galleries, museums, and public spaces across the United States. She has been awarded commissioned projects from private and community organizations such as Disney's ESPN Zone, St. Louis' Arts in Transit, and Seattle's Sound Transit where she recently completed her 35' bronze sculpture, *Global Garden Shovel*. Fuller is best known for *Shoe of Shoes*, a large-scale shoe-shaped sculpture comprised of thousands of aluminum high-heels in front of Brown Shoe Company.





**Helen Heß** is a sound artist, composer, sound designer and engineer with a Bachelor of Science in sound and music production from Högskolan Dalarna, Sweden and a Master of Arts in Sound Studies from Universität der Künste, Berlin.

**Jacob Reber** is a PhD student in the Department of English at the University at Buffalo

Helen Heß

## M F X - THE VOICE IN MY POCKET

Jacob Reber

*M F X - The Voice in my Pocket*, a sound installation, blurs distinctions between the digital and material found through automated conversation. Two phones sit alone in a room with their pre-scripted exchanges. Siri and Cortana (iPhone and Windows phones) converse, working from the language sets housed in each operating system. *M F X* recontextualizes the everyday, an opportunity to interface with the extensions of our digital selves in a severed form. It carries the echoes of an excessive mundanity that taps into a sort of uncanny disembodied, disengaged voice – or perhaps, it's the specificity and localization of the voice, the realization that the voiced words are code, translated and processed for a public, for a listener.

The (answering) machines talk for 7 minutes and 40 seconds, followed by a period of silence. This conversation could seemingly continue on forever, except that these phones are not attached to their life-lines – they eventually need to be plugged in. The infinite potential of conversation without ceasing still needs to be tethered to the wall, still needs to deal with fatigue. The possibilities housed in the machine are also limited by it. The machines, like the language itself is cut short. Here, the lines between virtual and actual get crossed, the potential answers are actualized in conversation, but you weren't invited. The machines are fine without a listener, or maybe they have a better listener. The language of conversation doesn't slip away; instead, it is materialized, hanging heavy in the room. It is coded, programed, inscribed into the machine. More than anything else in the space, the language is what is moved around.

This reinstatement of materiality reverberates through the statements made by Siri and Cortana about gender, constantly fluctuating between the virtual performance to the materiality of gendered inscription. *M F X* works to disrupt the predetermined performance, emphasizing the performative rigidity of language at play, allowing, in the silence, for a gap, a space for something more to seep through. Or, perhaps, this is a fabricated conversation on the edge of the digital abyss.

# GÜNES-HÉLÈNE ISITAN

IN COLLABORATION WITH MARTIN GIGUÈRE

## Zones de Contact / Where Species Meet

Elif Ege

It is now well-known that the days of *looking at* an artwork and appreciating it from a safe distance are over, and *Where Species Meet* is one of these works that requires its audience to “get their hands dirty.” In *Where Species Meet*, viewers are asked to cease to be mere viewers by putting their hands into an 30” wide tank, filled with water and paramecium, single-cell organisms, both real and projected ones. While writing about this work, I am shivering at the thought of submerging my hand into an tank full of single-cell organisms, looking like small fish, as some of us, myself included, get very nervous even by the idea of some kind of living organism touching our bodies.

Isitan’s *Where Species Meet* is a conscious attempt to counter this fear, anxiety, and nervousness while thinking about the interactions within and across boundaries: the human and non-human, the real live paramecium and the projected ones, the looking and being looked at. The tank becomes a “contact zone” by creating tangible spaces where different species touch one another. It encourages viewers to revisit their assumptions and prejudices: What does it mean to be a human beyond anthropocentric thinking? How would the way we think about being human change when we come to notice inter-species permeability? What would reality mean when a “real” paramecia we see swimming towards our hand is actually a projected one? And how are the established relations of looking- as in the non-reciprocal/ unidirectional gaze from subject to object- challenged, as we are not only observing paramecium but the paramecium are also observing us? Isitan’s biomedial art invites the viewer to contemplate such philosophical questions through embodied experiences of the artwork.



**Günes-Hélène Isitan** was born in Turkey in 1978, and holds a graduate diploma in Actual Arts Practice (Sherbrooke University, 2016); she currently lives in Montreal (Qc, Canada). Her professional transdisciplinary practice, anchored in biomedial arts, is an interweaving of visual and interactive art, life sciences and philosophy. She has exhibited in galleries in Canada, the US and in Europe, has been featured in books and magazines and her works are part of private collections. She has been supported by the Quebec Arts Council, and is represented both by Galerie uNo (Quebec, Canada) and the SciArt Center (New York, USA).

**Elif Ege** is a forth year PhD student at SUNY University at Buffalo, in the Global Gender Studies program. She received her Masters Degree in 2012 in the Historical Sociology program at Koc University, Turkey. Her dissertation focuses on the Kurdish women’s movement in Turkey and their transnational connections.



**Katharina Poggendorf-Kakar** studied comparative religion, anthropology and Indian art history at the Free University, Berlin, where she received her PhD in 2001. In 2012, she began to work full time on her art. With her debut solo show in Delhi (2015) she received recognition from leading curators in India and abroad.

Kakar plays with different materials to create new visual bodies that address the changing global landscape of identities. She probes what is underneath the surface of cultural beliefs and our contradicting patterns of behavior. Her work emerges from her academic base in anthropology.

**Amber Dennis** is the director of *The Schoolyard*, a floating gallery with the mission to make contemporary art more accessible through classes and events that pair with each exhibition.

## Katharina Poggendorf-Kakar & Ella the Parrot ELLA TALKING ART

Amber Dennis

*"Ella wants to talk art. Ella talking art. You want to talk art? What do you think of Jeff Koons? What a fake, rubbish. What about Picasso? Pretty good. And Van Gogh? Only one ear. What about Ai Wei Wei? Ai Wei Wei Wei uhhh-great. And Roger Ballen? He likes birds. Ella is a bird. What colour? Grey."*

- Ella the Parrot

*To Remember is to Imagine: Ella Talking Art* is as much about the process of creating and consuming as it is about the end product. The beginning of a two-year-long project, Katharina Kakar and Ella the Parrot's work in progress is seemingly a video of a bird working on her art world speak. And she makes some pretty good points, Roger Ballen indeed loves birds and yes...Ella is definitely a bird. There is a deeper underlying meaning, however, in the bond between human and animal that makes this project possible. Kakar elaborates, "it is her decision how to communicate...she refuses to speak on command."

This brings some larger ideas into focus about how we define art. If a bird can "talk art," doesn't that make the self-appointed hierarchies within the art world almost irrelevant? It calls into question what we consider art, who we consider artist and how we come to those decisions. While it is clear that Ella doesn't necessarily understand the "art talk", she does control what she says and when she says it. She is even listed as one half of the creative team alongside Kakar. Does this make her work or opinion any less valid? The only difference between you or I regurgitating the same art world jargon seems to be our humanity. This brings us to Kakar's larger statement: some artists succeed where others do not simply because of often arbitrary parameters set on the art world by well-funded, powerful opinion. Is it possible that said opinion is about as relevant as a bird's thoughts on Jeff Koons?

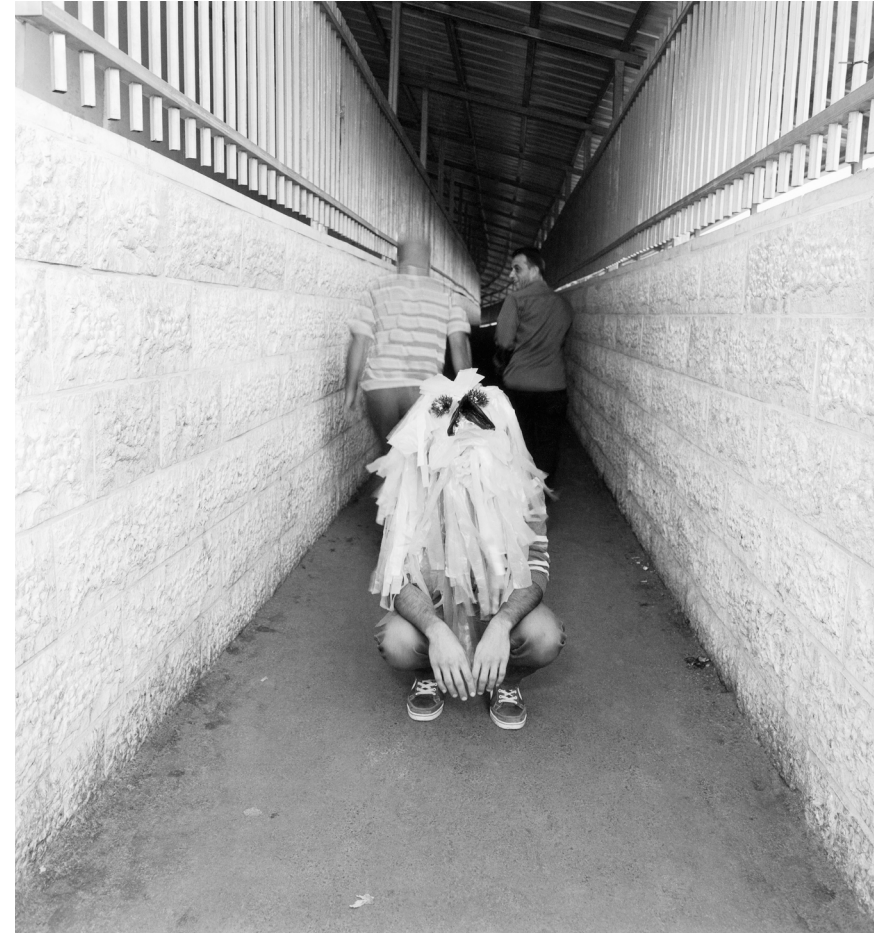
# VERENA ANDREA PRENNER

## Contained

Gabriella Nassif

Prenner's *Contained* is anything but a simple indictment of the grey slabs of concrete erected to protect the citizens of Israel from the spreading infection that is the Palestinian life: a national security threat. In a series of photographs taken in direct view of the security barrier, Palestinian taxi drivers suffer doubly. The wall further drains their material resources, as they cannot carry passengers back and forth, and establishes the Palestinians as gated animals, something only to be observed. And so, the audience watches what we can only assume to be the Palestinian taxi driver as his body materializes underneath piles and piles of refuse lining the Palestinian side of the wall. We see his face in only one photograph, underneath black garbage bags and sitting on a broken couch. How can life materialize under and through the refuse left by both Israelis and Palestinians as they build, repair, and live around the wall? Perhaps it is not the "who" that is being observed from the other side of the wall, but the "what," the driver coterminous with the refuse left in the wake of the wall.

Verena Andrea Prenner is an Austrian-born, self-identified photographer and sociologist whose work rigorously interrogates conceptions of humanness: where is it found, who has it, and at what point does the hope for individual humanity cease to exist? These thoughts have quite pointedly guided Prenner's work in and around Israel, including Palestinian refugee camps, and earlier works completed in Europe. *Contained* was featured in the Delhi Photo Festival 2015, and at the Lalit Kala Akademi in Chennai, India in early 2016.



**Verena Andrea Prenner** is a sociologist and photographer, born and raised in Austria. She finished her Masters Degree in sociology with a thesis titled "Heaven on Earth - Sex Workers in the Field of Tension between Social Stigma and Necessary Service." It comprised an interview and photography series with sex workers in brothels in the Viennese red light district.

In 2013, she moved to Israel and Palestine, first living and working in Tel Aviv and then moving to a refugee camp in Palestine. During her time there, she worked on artistic photography projects and photographed Muslim weddings along with a Palestinian photographer. She also wrote a weekly column, "Notes from the Middle East" for an Austrian newspaper, which contained articles about society, culture, art and life in a conflict region.

Since February 2014, she has been completing art projects as well as commissions in Austria and in the Middle East.

**Gabriella Nassif** is a PhD student in the Global Gender Studies department at the University at Buffalo, and provides research support to the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World located in Beirut, Lebanon. Her work focuses on the various gendered economies that materialize in ethnically-mixed refugee camps across Lebanon, and how these economies are experienced both within and outside the camps.



## Alyce Santoro LISTENING PILLOW / SEA URCHIN SPINE HAT

Natalie Fleming

*Stone demands the abandonment of human history, demands to be understood within an eonic time frame. It's not that stones are, as Heidegger (1962) said, worldless (weltlos) or incapable of world-forming (Weltbildung). They are not even poor in world (weltarm) or devoid of worldedness (Umwelt). Stones are rich in worlds not ours, while we are poor in the time-space they possess. We therefore have a terrible problem communicating with each other.*

- Cohen, Jeffrey J. "Queering the Inorganic."

In *Queer Futures: Reconsidering Ethics, Activism, and the Political*,  
edited by Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Kilian, and Beatrice Michaelis.

Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013.

Alyce Santoro listens to stones. She places her copper *Listening Pillow* around her head and leans onto their hard surfaces, waiting to hear whatever they have to offer her. This effort needs to be made, because, as Jeffrey Cohen reveals, it is very difficult for us to understand rocks, or for rocks to understand us, for that matter. Stones, in their slow subsistence, wait as we scurry about their surfaces and make plans for our fleeting lives without their consultation.

Santoro's pillow is designed after a 1964 patent for an apparatus to improve our ability to lie down on our sides while still being able to enjoy music. This is a very human problem to solve. Santoro sees the possibilities in this design, however, to join humankind with its environment again, to take our ability to connect to new levels.

Before you write off Santoro's practice as the silly imaginings of an artist, you should know that Santoro has a degree in biology. While working as an oceanographic research assistant, she realized: "I was not as separate from the subjects of my research as I'd been taught that scientists are supposed to be." Her headpieces may not physically improve our ability to hear, but they do create a situation in which we stop, wait, and *try, finally try*, to understand the perspective of the nonhuman. Perhaps this opportunity makes all the difference.

**Alyce Santoro** is an intermedia conceptual/sound artist with a background in biology and scientific illustration. While she began her career intending to make visible the invisible wonders of science and nature, she quickly became interested in exploring the cultural phenomenon that causes these fields to be viewed as separate, and in the ways that social imaginaries are formed and can shift.

She is interested in the potential of sound as a medium that can influence both time and space, and in the notion that by shaping atmosphere, sound can affect the ways we think and feel on an individual and collective basis.

She refers to many of her multimedia works as *philosoprops* – devices used to demonstrate a concept, challenge perception, or spark a dialogue. The *philosoprops* offer subtle and sometimes deceptively playful critiques of the foibles of highly literal, logical, objective, and compartmentalized thinking.

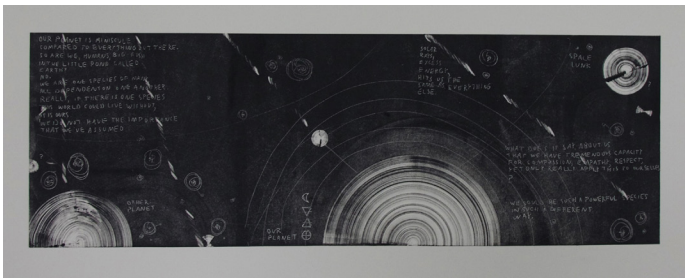
Her visual and sound pieces have appeared in over fifty exhibitions internationally related to innovative textiles, experimental musical scores, and social action and ecology. A contributor to Truth-out.org and the author of *Philosoprops: A Unified Field Guide*, her written works often explore the notion that shifting some common assumptions about "the way things are" may lead to a more just, healthy, and peaceful world.

# RACHEL SHELTON

## Diagram, Part I

Matthew Ballou

With this collection of monotype prints, the artist, Rachel Shelton explores the push and pull of life and thought through graphic and textual play. Equal parts nihilistic, hopeful, and, at times, even absurd, these works explore the ways in which, like the process of print-making, we as a species are continuously in process of understanding ourselves and our place amongst others through both a micro and macro lens of observation. Like the forms that populate Shelton's individual pieces, this viewpoint is never perfect. Through the broken sweeps, irregular lines, and hand-written text, Shelton expresses the inability of a stable and sensible placement of self. This instability and constant search can be discerned in individual works, however, as a collection or whole, the viewer, like the artist, comes to understand that each time we approach a closer understanding of self we lose sight of that which is bigger than we alone. Similarly, when we zoom out and try to take in the "big picture" we become flooded with information, at once beautiful and terrifying. We can never find our place in the universe because we exist on a continuum, much like the circular forms populating Shelton's works. The ambiguity—or better: absurdity—of such a realization infuses even the darkest corners of the art and in those corners, hope is born. Shelton continues to explore that which is uncomfortable or unsettling in its implications because it is through this exploration that she, or we, come to understand ourselves. Though these works are manifestly personal for the artist, they speak to a universal sense—however ambiguous—that most will be able to recognize in themselves. In the tides of uncertainty, we can sometimes find a place of refuge and calm. Shelton continues to search for such a position and we are allowed in on the process and even at times the pain and joke of such a journey.



**Rachel Shelton** received her B.F.A. from the Cleveland Institute of Art in 2011 with a concentration in Printmaking. Her work, centered around this practice, also includes bookmaking, drawing, enameling, and sculpture. Rachel is slated to receive her M.F.A. from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 2017. At both the undergraduate and graduate level, she has studied the methods and theories used in the fields of Archaeology and Anthropology to gain an overhead perspective of the evolution and organizational structures of human populations.

Rachel's recent work lies somewhere between diagram and abstraction. While examining our earthly relationships, it aims to situate our experience and existence in perspective with the vast universe beyond our planet. Given our awareness of being few among many, why do we still feel entitled, in power? Why does this understanding of our comparative scale not mitigate the tendency to obsess over things that ultimately don't matter? Does this perspective instill fear, or might it, for some, have a calming effect? The work is not the presentation of a settled philosophy, but the chronology of research as process as final product.

**Matthew Ballou** is currently in his second year of the PhD program in Visual Studies at the University at Buffalo. His interests lie in the representation of maleness marked by threats and promises of the homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual-erotic within photography broadly.





## James Eric Simpson A PAINTING FOR MONSANTO

Valerie Goodness

As a lifelong farmer with intimate knowledge of what anthropocentric ideation is and what it can do to ecosystems, James Simpson's artistic genius is best described in his own words:

*"This mode of production implements an anthropocentric agency over the land that values individual economic interests, immediacy of production, and quantity of product over quality and sustainability".*

In his artistic articulation of anthropocentrism, Simpson asks what is natural and what is anthropocentric biocolonialism for the sake of profit. Through his art we see that Monsanto's version of nature excludes natural differentiation for the sake of a handful of profiteers who insist on being the only critics or experts on how to be one with our food and resources. *Painting for Monsanto* describes the external costs laying at the feet of those who have to restore the cotton, soil, water, and human health exposed to these chemicals. As he explains, Simpson's painting is "the result is a destructive homage to Monsanto as the chemicals slowly eat away at the structure they are painted on."

Natalie Fleming

**James Eric Simpson** has staged four solo exhibitions since 2013 where he cross-pollinates his interests in philosophy, religion, and consumerism in the United States. By seeing similarities in these topics, he wonders how these social structures shape human behavior and the ideologies we construct about the world around us.

In the Fall of 2014 he attended Land Arts of the American West at Texas Tech University with architect Chris Taylor. Simpson's artwork has been published in the 2014 edition of *Harbinger*, *Student Journal of Literature and Art*, and the Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts: *The Little Black Book* in 2011. Simpson received his BFA in Studio Art from Texas Tech University in May 2013; he is currently a second year MFA student in Studio Art at the University at Buffalo.

**Valerie Goodness** is an ABD PhD candidate in University at Buffalo's Transnational Studies Department, American Studies Program. She is a watershed ecosystems scientist with research in food, natural resource and ecosystem sustainability sovereignty.

Monsanto demands control of our agricultural production, so it seems fitting that James Eric Simpson, an artist with a farming background, would use Monsanto's chemicals to paint his canvases as well his family's fields. This way the cotton canvas, produced through the use of such chemicals, is bathed once again in Monsanto's creative substance. Monsanto is creator and Simpson, simply the conduit. But Monsanto's chemicals alter the natural order of things, damaging the surrounding ecosystem through their limitations on crop variation and introduction of pesticides. Monsanto follows the path of Mary Shelley's tragic scientist, searching to "improve" nature. But who will be held responsible for the unnamed monster?

# MICHAEL SALVATORE TIERNEY

## Vernacular Los Angeles

Andrew Barron

Los Angeles County is comprised of 242 individual neighborhoods. In his series *Vernacular Los Angeles* (2012-2016), Michael Salvatore Tierney lends visibility to some of them. Primarily interested in those locales considered peripheral, Tierney captures the exteriors of various homes and housing units that reside within the mapped boundaries of certain zones. The areas covered by the artist—East LA, Watts, and Inglewood, to name a few—have come to be regarded as neighborhoods with loaded histories, determined by their racial and ethnic makeup and bracketed by their economic rank. Aside from the titles Tierney provides though, there is little in the work to discern exactly where these places are situated. With the application of certain framing devices, these images take on an atemporal guise. Time becomes conflated; stable forms of knowledge are displaced and disrupted. These are sights both familiar and foreign to us, divorced from their larger context yet undeniably defined by it.

In *City Terrace, East Los Angeles, CA* (2016), one of five photographs from Tierney's project that are part of this exhibition, downtown Los Angeles hovers over the image like a specter, taking on a ghostly presence that, while placed firmly in the background of the photograph, haunts it throughout. It stands as both the geographic and cultural center through which East LA, and the image here, is to be understood. The abodes Tierney pictures are cultural constructs whose meaning is established solely in relation to other human imaginings. We can only know these spaces through their ascribed social values. Tierney seems to suggest, however, that these sites might have significance beyond their symbolic prescriptions. Though the evidence of human intervention is ubiquitous in the photographs, humanness itself is nowhere to be found. Have these buildings been abandoned by their makers or is it the other way around? Closed gates and shuttered windows preclude entry. In the absence of human activity, these objects become something else. In Tierney's images, dwellings are not material appendages to a natural landscape as much as they are landscapes in and of themselves. Distinctions are deferred indefinitely, which is a prospect that is frightening and liberating, if not completely inconceivable.

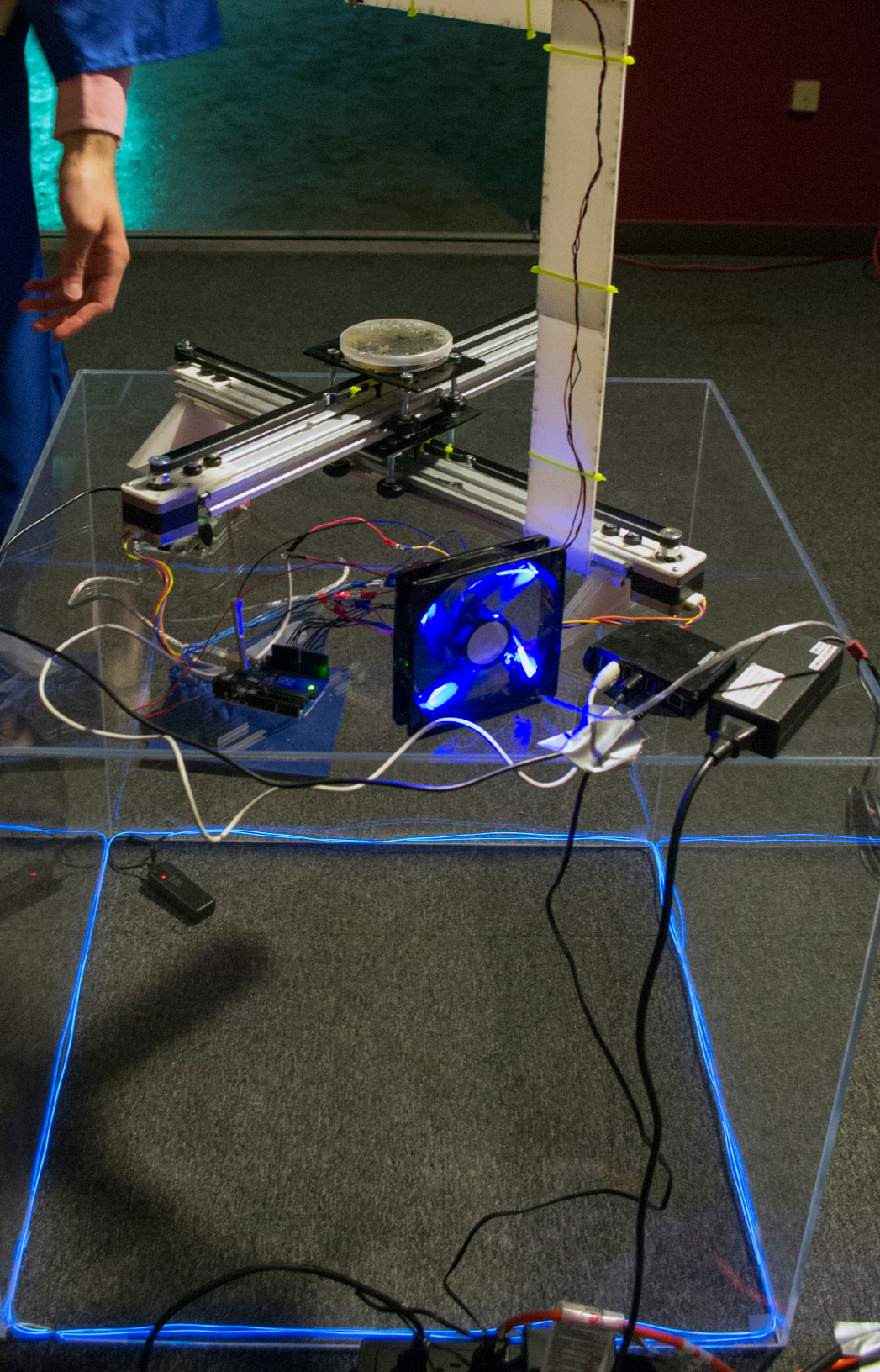


**Michael Salvatore Tierney** is a Los Angeles based photographer. He has exhibited extensively in Los Angeles galleries and museums as well as in major art fairs in the United States and Europe. His work is included in many private and public collections throughout the country.

Tierney's photographic work deals with space and place, temporal and physical (as described by Yi-Fu Tuan), hybrid cultures, and the hypothetical concept of a *Ecumenopolis*, a city made of the whole world, resulting from a fusion of urban areas and megalopolis forming a single continuous worldwide city.

**Andrew Barron** is a doctoral student in the Visual Studies program at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. His research focuses on American feminist and queer art since 1960.





## Van Tran Nguyen PILOPRINT.2

Natalie Fleming

*At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act- rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze, or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.*

Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters" Art News 51/8, Dec. 1952

Inside a steaming pile of cow dung, *Pilobolus Sporangia* wait for the first sign of light. As soon as the sun's rays hit these mushrooms' photosensitive necks, they move quickly, releasing spores in the direction of the source. Such movement comes naturally, a method of reproduction to ensure the continued survival of the species. This is an act of creation.

In 1952, art critic Harold Rosenberg claimed that the Abstract Expressionists created a revolutionary style by using the canvas as "an arena in which to act." Examine a Jackson Pollock painting and it becomes clear why Rosenberg links the art movement with action: energetic, colorful lines travel almost haphazardly, mapping out the position of Pollock's body as he worked to create his image. What Rosenberg and others celebrate as a significant development in the history of art is an instinctive response for the *Pilobolus Sporangia*. Long before Pollock finished his first drip painting, these mushrooms were hurling spores into the air to cover the ground that surrounds them, their transitory masterpieces re-consumed by nearby herbivores.

Van Tran Nguyen's *Piloprint.2* takes advantage of these mushrooms' dark spores, directing light to make prints with their erupting "ink." While exploiting the biological imperative of the *Pilobolus Sporangia*, Tran Nguyen cannot completely control the resulting design. Thus, each image represents a joint creative effort between mushroom and man, an uneven and interdependent relationship perhaps not so different than that between curator and artist.

**Van Tran Nguyen** is a Vietnamese American artist and a second year MFA student in the Department of Art, University at Buffalo. Her interdisciplinary works incorporate performance, video and mixed media installations that ask questions about the significance of matter in a cultural context. She is a co-curator of The Measure of All Things exhibition

# PATTY WALLACE

## Reims Weasel, Colosseum Weasel, Goethe Weasel, Art Hoarding Weasel, Cologne Weasel, Belgium Weasel...

*Natalie Fleming*

What is so repugnant about the weasel? Do we dislike this small mammal because its slender body allows it access to the homes of unsuspecting prey, sliding into burrows and sneaking into the coops of poultry, whose lives we have already claimed for our own meal?

Patty Wallace uses the weasel as a representation of those politicians who ignored their sick and scared constituents diagnosed with AIDS in the 1980's and 1990's. Her own brother-in-law Chris passed away from the disease in 1994, leaving Wallace with her grief and the remnants of a dress he made for her to wear. Seeing Chris and other AIDS victims as "unwilling soldiers at the front of the war of intolerance and ignorance," she fashioned the leftover blue fabric into a puppet of a weasel and inserted it into photographs of European devastation in the aftermath of World War I and II.

Politicians as puppets, puppets as weasels, and weasels from a dress worn to cover human bodies. A weasel-that-never-was representing a politician-that-is, inserted into times long gone, in places never visited. Politicians are manipulated playthings in Wallace's hands while she mourns her helplessness to save her brother as a soldier in a battle that such politicians would neither acknowledge nor support.

In her prints, the weasel is stuck in a chain of signification, a prop that works to distance humanity from actions that are unambiguously human. It is easier to imagine that such political greed, disdain for human life, and fear of difference are not natural human qualities, but are instead anomalies that separate offenders from you and I. But the truth is, the weasel is our scapegoat because we understand its actions through human behavior. We can imagine its movements as sneaking, slithering and stealing, as cowardice and callousness, gluttony and destruction. Does the weasel think of its movements with such scorn? It's short powerful legs, long neck, and low frame are designed for its method of hunting.

What are we designed for?



**Patty Wallace** is a photographer, painter, and media artist whose work has appeared in galleries and museums across the world as well as in various publications and on television.

Wallace studied visual art and media at the University at Buffalo, where she earned a BA in Studio Art and an MA in Humanities. She has exhibited her work at various galleries and museums including CEPA Gallery, Big Orbit Gallery, and Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, all in Buffalo, NY, Kunsthaus am Hofgarten Gallery, Munich, Germany, and the Puffin Room Gallery in New York City. Her photography is in the collections of the Burchfield Penney Art Center, the Castellani Art Museum, Niagara University, NY, and Light Work, Syracuse, NY. Wallace has received many awards and grants from organizations including the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Benton Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Her professional experience includes photographing for the Andy Warhol Foundation and the Brooklyn Museum.



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