

**THE EMPTY-HANDED  
PAINTER FROM YOUR  
STREETS  
IS DRAWING CRAZY  
PATTERNS ON YOUR  
SHEETS.**

**Lisa Williamson  
Alex Olson  
Laura Owens**

— LOS ANGELES —

Like modern-day *fauves* ready to attack, the works of Lisa Williamson, Alex Olson and Laura Owens demand a bodily—more than a visual—reaction. They insist on being seen with the heart, mind, fingertips, tongue, wherever the eyes cannot reach. Andrew Berardini experiences the strange bodily forms of Williamson, the pleading personal ads of Owens, the screens impregnated with shadows of Olson, all in our stead, as it were...

BY ANDREW BERARDINI

Consider this an ill-considered party, a portfolio of stories I've wanted to make about all these picture-makers, the prancing of their brushstrokes, the cut of their jibs, the jibe of their colors. The collection perhaps weirdly obvious, perhaps not. If three of their works faced each other on three walls, you plunked against this trio in a Mexican stand-off; laughter and snorts, flirtations and snubs would slither out of all the layers and armatures, colors and marks, actions spilling out of stillness, a triple whammy of paint.

They window into other rooms and out back at each other. They make me want to write "smeary" over and over. I want to imagine different parts of each like characters in anachronistic costume dramas: Constable Oxblood odd-bodying in the cellar with the Colonel and a half bottle of off-year pinot gris. Wet and slathery, tangible reality pokes out of composed fantasies, a swath of unadorned canvas there, the warp and weft of materials here, four corners of a few jutting out like sharp elbows across unadorned walls.

Abstraction, after all, isn't a veer away from reality, only from one way our eyes see it. Burnt orange clouds frost skies bruising from pink to purple. Squiggles drop shadows. That dangle and bend cracks a tart, off-color joke. New colors: neon and fluorescent shimmer with an alien and electric light, excellent for abductions and dance parties. Close your eyes and rub your fingers over them: is that vision abstract or actual? Remove your glasses or squint: is the blur false?

Representation and abstraction are weak words flailing to summarize strange continents. Alone, our eyes are a feeble instrument seeing. Heart and mind, fingertip and hip-crease, tongue and tickle, cocks and cunts all see where eyes fail. Not to mention that third-eye yogis and new-agers

espy dharmic truth with when the Ajna chakra petals open like a blooming lotus in a mudbath.

Across the summer skies waves of strange light ripple across the blue: colors collide, wobble, shimmy in patterns so protean and unpredictable they are untraceable. I still attempt to trace their patterns with language, painting's linear cousin, a method of mark-making with its own expansive spaces and hard boundaries.

Hallucinations are just another kind of real, patterns repeat out of nature, interior visions wrestle with materials into surfaces daubed and decorated, stabbed and stroked, whorled and colored, here at least with paint.

A history of humans making marks give us only conditions, not directions. When it comes to tradition, we have to paint our way out of that corner on our own.

**LISA WILLIAMSON:  
THE COMEDIENNES**

*I had an idea I'd try and write a play.... He sits there longer and longer until the audience gets more and more bored and restless, and finally they start leaving, first just a few and then the whole audience, whispering to each other how boring and terrible the play is. Then, once the audience have all left, the real action of the play can start.*

David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King*

(AHEM)...

The stand-up comediennes all droop around the white room, speechless. They wear off-colors, tertiaries and strange shades, powder-coated and drapey: a fleshy hue, a cream blushed with ash, lavender clay, teal legs and tuxedo blues, a sliver of star-bright yellow.

(COUGH)...

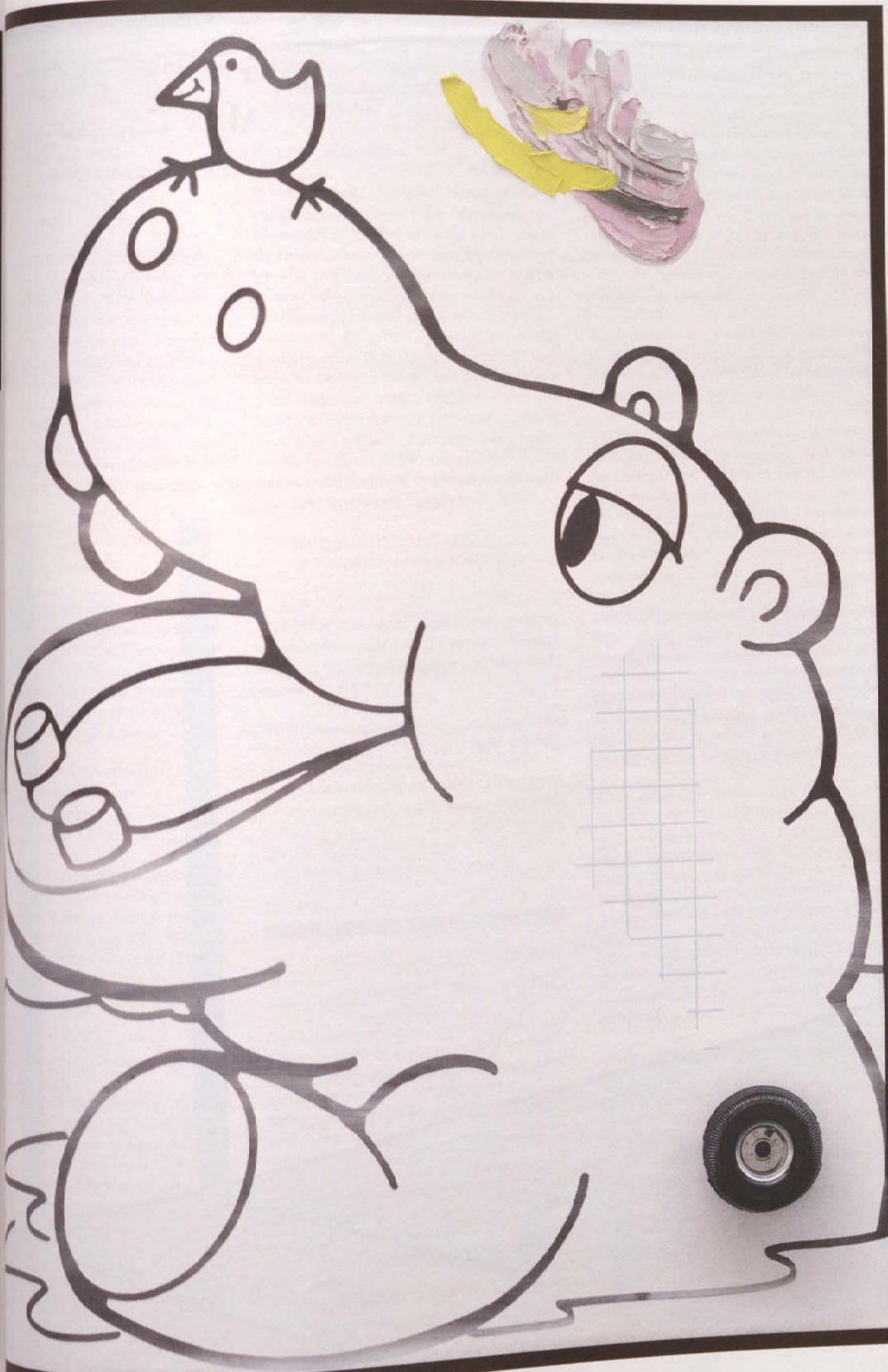
Leaning against the wall stiffly, all of their odd bodies shape just so, hanging and angular, bulbous and planar, bumptious and slim, snicker-worthy, inspiring guffaws, suppressed chortles. Different than one-liner yuck-yucks, their shapes and hues wryly bend, a subtler wit. Staged, their routines change very little from the still, motionless concentrated clustering on view. Separated, each a real somebody, they could snappily fill all the empty sightlines without wasting a breath to crack a joke; you can hear it without a sound.

(SNIFF, SNIFF)...

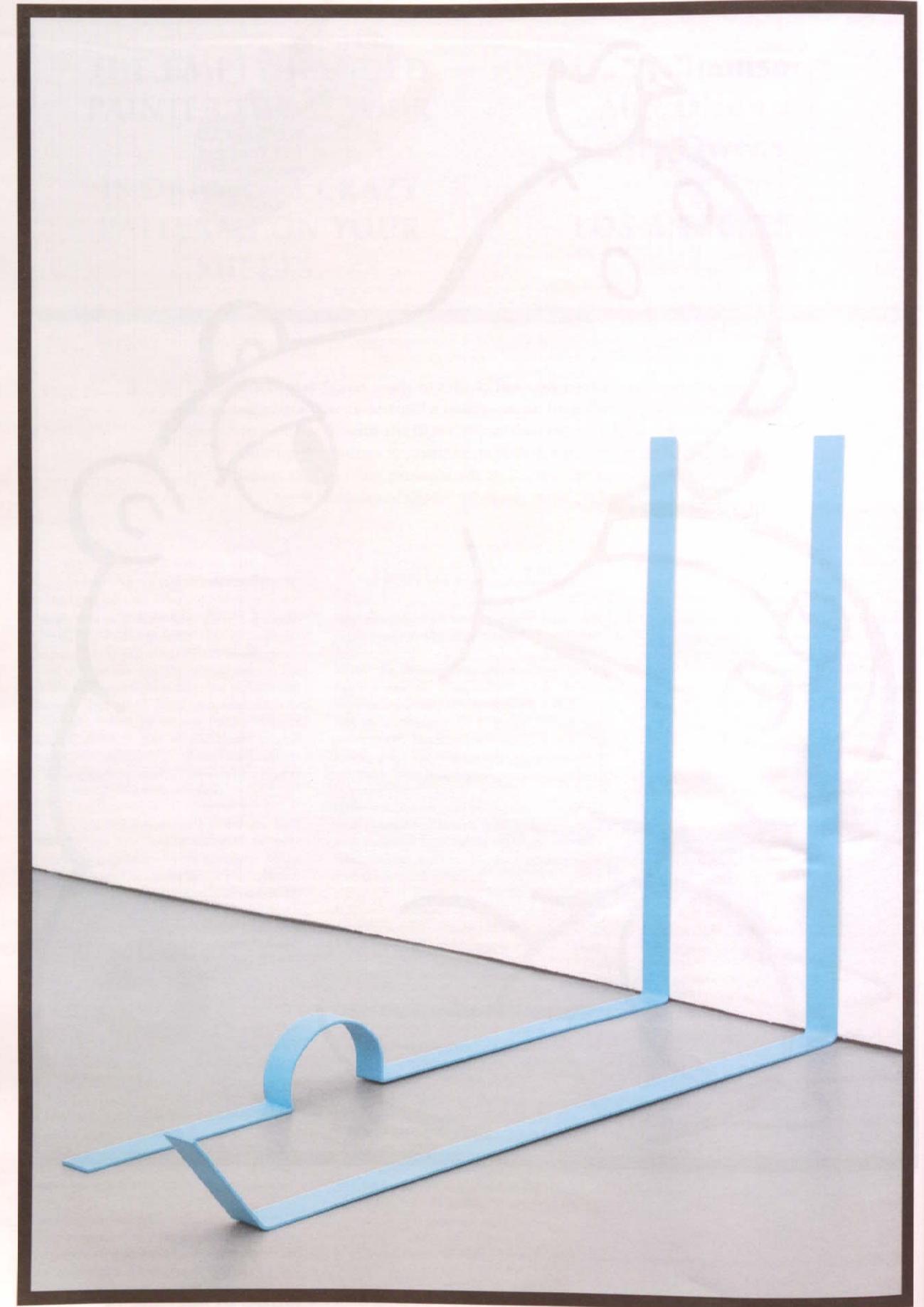
The room doesn't have any windows, except the one out to you, but windowless blinds shiver along the walls in the wind, whispering and peeking trim shades. These tight-lipped cowgirls sing the loneliest tunes, excepting the lack of lips, cows, and any song these comediennes sing is not of the sonic variety. And though feminine form folding off the end of "comediennne" feels like a natural gender epithet, this gaggle bends those terms too (along with their shapely bods) whenever they damn well feel like it.

(SIGH)...

Tiptoeing past, you try not to interrupt them silently practicing their material.



Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2013. Courtesy: the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

LAURA OWENS:  
THE PERSONALS

I'M THINKING TONIGHT of my  
BLUE EYES; over these prison  
walls I will fly; HAPPY BIRTHDAY  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY  
KP (with love)

Each personal is a person. All samed into individual bricks of text, the bricks columned and organized, stacked and contained. So much currency a line, brevity is the soul of an empty wallet. That section of a newspaper sometimes marked classified delivers private passions and secret stories with public ardor, signposting for searchers my variety of offers and requests, a collection of needs and desires, fantasies of couplings and possibilities, acceptance and companionship, teases or possessions priced to sell, promised delivery of spiritual truths, and, doubtlessly, spankings.

WE HAVE A GREAT MESSAGE  
will share priceless truth.  
Fariy or Jim 841-5044 eves.

All flattened and rastered out into just a single layer, the plaintive messages demand, question, search, solicit, dream. Stare hard enough and rainbowed layers leap out. These papers have been painted with polychrome ink, kaleidoscoping and tie-dying with abandon like a throwback kidhead jiggling for a Dead cover band.

THE GOD OF OUTER SPACE IS  
A Living Electronic Cybernetic  
Computer, Who procreates people.  
M. Strong Gen. Del. SF 94101

An interruptive phone call invites a playful squiggle to ribbon and curl, a squirt of color across all those words. Doodling plays across the lines, almost spongy, they fill with gooey color, splattery and harlequin, cakey dollops of sugary frosting, all wholly contained in those viscous discussions. The colors quiver, boldly vulnerable.

WHAT JUSTIFIES my existence  
Peterson 3542 Carroll, Chicago

We read the personals because we're curious. We feel the creaking loneliness of being human, we yearn for connection (and maybe we declare it with the shy bravery of our own ad). We read to see how our shivers and fantasies lie alongside others, all the random interests and defining traits. On every street corner, still in the back pages of the right papers but mostly and more ethereally on one website or another, your fingers can trawl the appeals for companionship. Dollar amounts are sometimes offered, and loneliness certainly has its price, both spiritual and sometimes monetary, but in this cavalcade of weird fetishes and spiritual truths (a Bruce Nauman chestnut jumps to mind, about artists and deliveries of said truths with a spiraling neon luminescence), in this trove of personals, if there isn't what you need, with a few phone calls to the editor and the transfer of a few dollars you can supply and demand with the rest of them.

If you can't locate your bliss, the personals might at least point in you in the right direction to chase it.

SNOOPY  
FOR PRESIDENT  
& 249 other underground buttons  
1/25c, \$1., 50/\$5., 125/\$10...  
(415) 775-3140

It's a space of possibility.

In the personals, there's room for all penchants and passions. Finger the pages long enough, and all manner of goods and services will present themselves: a slightly used scrap of Matisse cut-out will gust forth, a Japanese monkey looking to move off his screen will offer to split gas in a rideshare to Rousseau's animal reserve, a Jacobin embroiderer will recruit a consciousness raising group to defeat the tyranny of unadorned surfaces, an unwashed Bayeux tapestry rescued from a flea market will weave a spell around potential buyers, a hundred wonky clocks and a herd of loose wheels will spin off the pages, and a prancing pony with the ability of speech will neigh at you from the classifieds, though all she can say is "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride."

MURAL PAINTING—Fine Arts  
M.A. breathing colors by hand  
in a million years 346-9281 SF.

Here there is freedom, yearning and assistance, anything you might want and plenty you don't, a thousand would-be dalliances and junk that might be treasure and treasure that might be junk.

Here, the underground is only a phone call away. Perceived naivete of one might only be a willingness to let go, the big brain on that other hides a tender heart, that shy girl looks unblinking and proud out from these pages daring you to mock the colors that ripple out around her, unfurling like the wind-whipped flag of a rebel republic, hand-daubed on an unbleached bed sheet.

ALEX OLSON:  
THE SCREENERS

Down a desert highway, warm winds whip past a lone car creeping across its stripped landscape, two headlights cutting out a path along a black ribbon of highway, the bisecting dash a most utilitarian painting. A few hundred empty stalls, each with a pole holding a speaker meant to dangle inside a window, a thousand actors' voices still rattling inside from a half century of serious romantic dramas and period slapstick epics, action-adventure melodramas and sci-fi musicals, cartoon fantasy slashers and avant-garde westerns, the dust perpetually ghosted by exhaust and popcorn.

A giant screen looms over the lot. A screen is a protector, a partition, a concealment, folded panels hiding the holy of holies and a finely woven net to keep out bugs. A screen is a detachment of troops detailed to cover and a protection against electromagnetic interference and a sieve made to separate, a medical test for disease, contamination, impurity.

A screen is a blank surface in which an image can be projected. An empty space for fantasy to find its point of entry, shimmering with light in the dark, luminous with prowling pictures.

The white surface looms out of the desert, daring the light of a distant projector to play its magic lantern over the pristine, silvery expanse. The right instrument can tattoo an encyclopedia of dreams across the taut skin of a screen, lash the last hidden thoughts out from deep caves to dance in the moonlight, and beam back out of the limits of the visual spectrum a diary of subconscious thrills and chills. Screens are just movie catchers after all, what better movements can be captured than those interior shifts and shudders, crackles and swoops that some people call emotional, some intellectual, and a few scattered visionaries might still profess as spiritual.

But a projector isn't always the right instrument. Its light, shot through celluloid or translated digital binaries, can only dumbly shine and magnify. It cannot dream the projected dreams.

Imagine the beams of light shooting from your eyes. The black mountains above hide against a backdrop of stars, and neither they nor the moon mind another shimmer in the hard darkness. Thoughts and memories, feelings and intuitions play out not in the literal shapes seen by our blinder eyes but in the shift of interior movement made manifest in color.

Each stroke of color (such a lovely word for paintings, couplings, and knives) scintillates with marks, tracing patterns of hue across the wet skin of that thin surface, calendaring days like a prisoner's tally. One stroke cuts open a gray skin, peeling back to reveal varicolored guts, almost patterns peek out like musical notation in a steady rhythm, just enough jiggle of variety to keep it lively.

These untethered visions spring from the weak shadows on the walls of Plato's cave, that suicidal Greek's metaphorical movie palace. Split atoms and helixing DNA, the swirl of galaxies and the mapped trajectory of snowflakes, moved by the pure touch of the wind and the heavy pull of gravity, can never match the static pictures we might snap of them, only a thing that scars with every action, marking time in a long sweep. Tony Conrad made screens in which movies take decades to occur, a slow shift that cares little for the ceaseless activity of nervous mortals.

On the naked surface of this desert, the screen here imprints with every shadow that crosses its surface, every flicker of life you affix, every possible vision over time.

Opposite - Lisa Williamson, Teal Legs, 2011. Courtesy: the artist and Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago. Photo: Sam Lipp

## Mousse



Photographs by Tim Rautert. Cover images: Franz Erhard Walther from "1.Werksatz" (First Works Set) series, 1963–1969. Clockwise from top left: No. 14: Skulptur; No. 26: Kopf Leib Glieder, 1967; No. 32: Kurz vor der Dämmerung; No. 53: Handstück, 1969; No. 57: 10 x Ort Strecke Orte, 1969. No. 31: Für Zwei; No. 23: Zentriert, 1967; No. 29: Körper, 1967. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York. All images © Franz Erhard Walther Foundation.

## Mousse #43 out now

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### In this issue:

Terry Adkins, Kai Althoff, Art After Art, Art Against the Net, Art and Appropriation, Josh Bitelli and Felix Melia, Elaine Cameron-Weir, Paul Chan, Liz Deschenes, João Enxuto and Erica Love, Hallucination Museum, Alex Olson, Laura Owens and Lisa Williamson, A Pedagogy of Invention, Sean Raspet, Cameron Rowland, Ben Schumacher and Jared Madere, A.L. Steiner, Stylometry, Franz Erhard Walther, The Work of Images in the Age of Digital Reproduction, Worldly Worlding.

**THE ARTIST AS CURATOR** is a serial publication\* examining the fundamental role artists have played as curators, from the postwar period to the present. The series is edited by **Elena Filipovic** and made possible by an engaged group of art institutions and foundations, each of which is supporting the research and publication of one installment of the project. In issue #2 Ana Longoni discusses the 1968 exhibition *Tucumán Burns*, by the **Avant-Garde Argentinian Visual Artists Group**, while Dean Insikler's essay focusses on the 1998 show *The Trial of Pol Pot*, by **Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno**. This issue is supported by Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo.

**Nicolaus Schafhausen** met with **Kai Althoff** for a friendly conversation that touched on the theme of the influence of the artist's German background in his work, and experiences of the past, including his band Workshop.

Artists, writers, and bloggers struggle to overcome the web's imperative to brand and make work in accordance with the corporate gestures of "like" and "share." For **Andrew Durbin**, the **art that counts is art that counters the network** by exploiting the senselessness of "liking" each other, a gesture that reinforces the rule of a few quasi-monopolies.

In the first of a two-part series, **John Menick** investigates the field of stylometry—the computational study of writing style as a means of identifying authors. A science that has legal as well as academic and literary applications, ranging from the question of the authorship of Shakespeare's works to forensic linguistics.

**Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev** invites us to reflect on how the dissolution of the canonical sphere of art and its regrouping with other arenas of life and fields of knowledge could today offer an alternative to the process that has led to the exponential financialization and corporatization of the historically determined field of contemporary art.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist** met with German artist **Franz Erhard Walther**, known for his radical reformulation of the relationship between art and action, done by transforming the body, space and time into materials of an original practice that powerfully engages the viewer in the guise of an artistic medium.

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**Chus Martínez** talks about art practice, institutions and education in the years to come. Moving away from traditional alliances between arts and social sciences, she proposes concentrating on radical invention as the basis of a natural contract to position art beyond culture.

**Apsara DiQuinzio** met **Paul Chan** to talk about his upcoming show at the **Schaulager**—which will include the complete *Volumes* work, “discussions” and “non-projections”—and about the artist’s publishing house, Badlands Unlimited, which releases “books in the expanded field.”

What if art were no longer that radically creative sphere of endeavor we always imagined it to be? **Jens Hoffmann** offers some fundamental reflections on the art of the last two decades, pointing out critical factors that have led much of art to neglect the need to be something more comprehensive and substantial than mere refined abstract exercise.

NICE TO MEET YOU: **Cameron Rowland** tells **John Beeson** how the “target hardening” process is a frame of reference for his work / **Isla Leaver-Yap** interviews **Elaine Cameron-Weir** to introduce us to her research on the sense of smell / **Sean Raspet** talks to **Kevin McGarry** about how he exploits the chemical makeup and poetic densities of substances.

**João Enxuto** and **Erica Love** weave a conversation with **Sarah Hromack** on the current and future roles of technology in institutional spaces. Their Art Project 2023 embodies the social anxieties prompted by technology in its narration of a speculative digital future for the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The museum is already compressed inside our smartphones. Museums operate as attractors of our attention, playing with competition in the realm of mass distractions. **Joshua Decter** focuses on aspects of interaction and suggests a fascinating next step, a museum-as-hallucination that will occupy one space only: the mind.

**Charles Gaines** offers a portrait of the late **Terry Adkins**, starting with his family and cultural background, and analyzing his production, which often fused and drew parallels between the synchronic language of the visual arts and the diachronic language of music.

Reporting from:

London: **Lucia Pietroiusti** sits down with **Josh Bitelli & Felix Melia** to talk about their investigations into physical labor, urban situations and sub-urban space.

Los Angeles: Like modern-day fauves ready to attack, the works of **Lisa Williamson**, **Alex Olson** and **Laura Owens** demand a bodily—more than a visual—reaction. **Andrew Berardini** experiences them all in our stead, as it were....

New York: Artists **Jared Madere** and **Ben Schumacher**, moderated by **Luke**, the latter’s writer brother, build a conversation around the human factor behind the work: the artist.

**A.L. Steiner**’s creative practice is shaped, in turns, by an unwavering criticality of power systems and an ethics of generosity founded on principles of openness and personal communication. **Chelsea Haines** spoke with Steiner about the ideas and imperatives that permeate her work.

Photography and painting continue to revitalize histories of abstraction and collage, as these forms are being re-written by new tools. **Lauren Cornell** converses with artists **Michele Abelles**, **Sara Cwynar**, **Jon Rafman** and **Travess Smalley** regarding questions of appropriation.

**Roxana Marcoci** interviews **Liz Deschenes**, an artist whose work seems to imply a multiple timeframe of the moment, a “duration” that refers to history, reflects on the present, continues to unfold in time, and produces new forms of subjectivity.

**Jennifer Allen** continues to delve into the status of the image by returning to Walter Benjamin’s definition of “sense of the universal equality of things,” discovering its unexpected pertinence to digital reproducibility.

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