

MCA



MCA
MAGAZINE

SUMMER
2019

MUSEUM OF
CONTEMPORARY ART
CHICAGO

Claire Ruud on Creative Coalitions;
Virgil Abloh, Rem Koolhaas, and Samir Bantal on Crossing Disciplines;
Laurie Simmons with Naomi Beckwith

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Artist Plus One

MCA Magazine is a biannual publication produced by the Design, Publishing, and New Media Department, in collaboration with the Rights and Images, Membership, and Development teams.

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On the cover: Brendan Fernandes, *Hit Back*, 2017. Performance and installation. Collection of Brendan Fernandes. Photo: Wendy Ploger, courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago. Pictured from left: John Alix, Oisín Monaghan, and Khadija Griffith. Uniforms by the Rational Dress Society.

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CONTRIBUTORS

JANUARY PARKOS ARNALL

January has been thinking recently about the labor and responsibility of care in her roles as a curator of participatory art, providing care for artists and audiences, and as a mother to ten-year-old twins. January is Curator of Public Programs at the MCA.

NAOMI BECKWITH

Naomi just returned from a trip to Ethiopia—where she visited a new art center in Addis Ababa, founded and designed by artist Elisa Sime—and is still tingling from the country’s new art energy. She is Manilow Senior Curator at the MCA.

BLKHAUS STUDIOS

blkHaUS studios is a Chicago-based, socially focused design studio founded in 2016 and dedicated to design as an agent of change to uplift and transform marginal communities. They design objects and spaces, produce small architecture projects and public art, and curate community-based art and design exhibitions and events.

GRACE DEVENEY

Grace recently started listening to *Running from COPS*, a new podcast that examines how the TV show *COPS* is made and affirms her belief in the importance of talking about media and power structures. She is Assistant Curator at the MCA.

BRENDAN FERNANDES

Brendan is an internationally recognized Canadian artist based in Chicago who works at the intersection of dance and visual arts.

MADELEINE GRYN SZTEJN

This year, Madeleine is leading the MCA’s development of the new vision for 2020–25. She is Pritzker Director at the MCA.

PAUL HEYER

Paul was born in Chicago, where he currently lives and works. He received an MFA in painting from Columbia University and has recently exhibited his work in solo shows at the MCA; Night Gallery, Los Angeles; and Chapter NY.

MOLLY LAEMLE

Molly, never seen without wearing some type of animal print, is looking forward to a photo shoot in front of the atrium project by Ellen Berkenblit, *Leopard’s Lane*. She is a fourteen-year-and-running Visitor Services staffer at the MCA.

CLAIRE RUUD

Recently, Claire has been working through a reading list for building community resilience with artists. If you have a recommendation, email cruud@mcachicago.org. She is Director of Curatorial Strategy at the MCA.

TARA AISHA WILLIS

Tara is looking forward to exploring the intersections of performance and writing in an artist residency she cocurated at Mount Tremper Arts, with an eye toward future performance publishing projects. She is Associate Curator of Performance at the MCA.



Madeleine Grynsztejn

WHAT THREADS
JOIN ARTISTS,
THEIR PRACTICES,
AND THEIR
COMMUNITIES?

Bringing together artists and audiences is the single biggest driver of our work at the MCA—whether in the Commons or through collaborations with community partners across the city. This balance between working in and beyond the museum is now aptly reflected in the *MCA Magazine*. Newly redesigned, every issue of the magazine is framed by a question and parallel theme—threads, in this issue—and draws on our work at the MCA to join culturally relevant conversations taking place around the world.

This change reflects a shift toward prioritizing the interests of our audiences, having heard the call for smart content that not only resonates with your lives but also puts you in direct contact with the leading thinkers and doers of contemporary art and culture. To that end, I am delighted to see the proliferation of artist voices in this issue and look forward to broadening our community in the coming years.

Madeleine Grynsztejn
Pritzker Director



Zackary Drucker, *5 E. 73rd Street (Double Portrait)*, 2005. Chromogenic development print; 30 x 30 in. Courtesy of the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

Claire Ruud on Creative Coalitions

Creative work involves risk: experimentation invites failure, imagination faces skepticism, and emotional exposure is not always met with care. As artists put their egos on the line, again and again, they demonstrate an adventurousness and resilience that can motivate us to respond in kind. It takes courage and vulnerability to fully engage with new ideas, and this commitment to openness, necessary for artists and audiences alike, makes plain one of the greatest tasks facing museums: to build a space where people first feel comfortable, then feel encouraged to participate, and finally—and here’s where it gets really tough—feel open to being challenged.

I’ve been thinking about what it takes for people to bring their whole selves to an encounter. Across the United States, we’re working against hundreds of years of systemic injustice that has excluded people of color, women, and others from participation in our social, political, and economic spheres. For the arts, this means huge groups of people don’t see contemporary art as related to their lives and don’t feel like they belong inside museums. Add to this that we’re living in a time characterized by division, incivility, and—at its worst—violence and you’ve got a challenge getting people to *speak up* much less *speak to* one another. At the MCA, we intend to make a space where all people feel welcome and open to engage in tough conversations.

But how can an art museum foster creative families and coalitions? I decided to engage three artists who have long been doing this work. Through our conversations, I identified family and coalition as two points on a wide spectrum of social bonds. Creative family, which entails all the intimacy, support, vulnerability, and endangerment of any family, is a close-knit group that breathes life into your creative experimentation and provides a safety net when you fall. Creative coalition, on the other hand, while it needs mutual commitment and openness to taking risks, requires us to bridge differences across distinct priorities and values. Through these collaborative relationships, we push ourselves to examine our beliefs and practices. The three artists I talked to work with family and through coalition, seeing both as critical to creating their most impactful work.

American artist Zackary Drucker has a lot to say about building familial networks in support of a creative practice, having spent nearly two decades investigating the bonds of blood and chosen family in her work. A portrait of Flawless Sabrina—the queer icon who welcomed Zackary into the New York drag scene with the point of a finger¹—comes to mind. Then the full wonderland of *She Gone Rogue* (2012), a wild, narrative video in which the protagonist (played by Zackary) tries to find herself, guided by mothers of drag, including Flawless, Holly Woodlawn, and Vaginal Davis. Zackary started out as a photographer. Her luscious photographs of herself and her family and lovers draw on fashion, cinematography, and camp. She has also worked a lot with her birth mother, as in *Southern for Pussy* (2015), a spoofy short in which she and her mother discuss various aspects of femininity, from vaginal walls to dating tips. In other words, Zackary makes work *with* and *about* her creative family.

Zackary’s work is guided by a strong sense of self gained through working with this creative family. She cites artist Faith Ringgold with making an important distinction between an artist’s “enabling audience” and their “consuming audience.” Zackary describes the importance of this distinction this way: “We create work for our enabling audience—mom, lover, the trans community—whomever inspires us to create. We use cultural signifiers that are important to our enabling audience, and a consuming audience responds to the specificity of those signifiers even if they don’t understand them the same way. If you are true to your enabling audience, it will speak to universal truths that your consuming audience will respond to as well.

The more specific you are, the more universal it is.”² Zackary gives a window into the power of creative family, the people who get you. Sharing aspects of your experience and perspective, they understand uniquely how to push you, and, if you take a risk and flop, they’ll pick you back up. Intimacy and intensity fuel personal work that ultimately resonates far beyond the private sphere.

Aymar Jean Christian, the founder of Open Television (OTV), has made it his job to elevate diverse voices through the web platform. OTV writers and directors identify with multiple communities marginalized by the market and society—queer, nonbinary, and/or female-identifying artists of color—and they create hit shows such as *Brown Girls* that resonate far beyond “mainstream” audiences. Aymar says it makes all the difference that the team share the experience of having intersectional identities—people of color, female-identified, and queers—so that “when someone says something sincere about trauma and oppression, everyone around the table is nodding.”³ The ability to be understood, to not have to explain yourself, enables creative work to flourish.

Not all creative relationships involve familial intimacy, though. Aymar explains his creative community as a series of concentric circles, with family and extended family on the innermost rings and various coalition groups further out. Aymar has found that the gap between the experiences of intersectional directors and the mostly white, cisgender, heterosexual members of the technical crew on a project occasionally leads to production difficulties. “Sometimes in these situations, all of a sudden the crews and the creators won’t be talking to each other,” he explains. “From what I can tell, the general problem is an attitude in film production that the crew have some level of expertise and domain on set, and a culture of time-is-money that justifies people being curt and brusque in the space. But the creators are in a vulnerable position, very exposed, and need to be perceived as a boss on set.”⁴ So, they stop communicating directly. Fragmentation, miscommunication, and skepticism of the other’s worldview—these are the challenges that coalitions across different communities must confront.

Brazilian artist Jonathas de Andrade navigates these challenges in his work, which is often based on bridging divides and learning from other people’s stories. To create *Suar a Camisa* (*Working up a sweat*) (2014), for example, Jonathas collected t-shirts off the backs of strangers in the street by offering to trade shirts with them, and in *ABC da Cana* (*Sugarcane ABC*) (2014) the artist worked with sugarcane workers on breaks to create the alphabet out of sugar stalks. Relationship-building is integral to Jonathas’s art practice.

He is careful and considered not only in seeking out and approaching collaborators but also in working with them as partners, each project requiring a unique approach. Take, for example, *O Levante* (*The Uprising*) (2014), a project through which Jonathas organized a race of horse-driven carts in a city that had outlawed them. Jonathas based the work in intentional relationships with the carters and deep research into their situation. He spent weeks visiting local markets to meet horse carters one-on-one whom he could enlist for the project. He also cleverly produced a separate pitch for city officials—one that portrayed the happening as a fictional scene in a movie, rather than the symbolic and real act that it was. This ability to work within the languages of multiple social spaces—whether among carters on the street or city administrators—is a useful skill for successfully navigating a coalition toward a particular outcome.

For Jonathas’s 2019 film *Jogos dirigidos* (*Directed Games*), commissioned by the MCA for his exhibition *Jonathas de Andrade: One to One*, he built on



Top: Screening: Open TV Tonight, April 4, 2019, MCA Chicago. Pictured from top left: Ahlaam Delange, Elijah McKinnon, Chelsea Peterson-Salahuddin, Oscar Dang, Chris Walker, Jenna Anast, Aymar Jean Christian, and Stephanie Jeter; bottom: still from 1^o Corrida de Carroças do Centro do Recife/O Levante (1st Horse-Drawn Cart Race of Downtown Recife/The Uprising), 2012–14. Happening and video. Photographs by Josimar Rodrigues e Ricardo Moura. Commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna.

longtime relationships, between him, his partner, and the community his partner works with through the Instituto A Gente Transforma (Institute of Transformative People) in northeast Brazil. Jonathas visited to make a video in collaboration with a group of locals from a majority-deaf community, whom he met through the institute. On arrival, Jonathas and his camera crew were warmly welcomed by the community, but the script he brought proved less welcome. The script used language that did not represent how the deaf community experienced itself. Jonathas responded by allowing his collaborators to lead him through a period of revision and rethinking. The final video is tender, playful, and true to the personalities who worked on the project.

When aligned successfully, creative coalitions, like Jonathas's with the deaf community in Várzea Queimada, move us beyond insular conversations that make it possible to have a broader impact on culture. Jonathas uses his international platform to amplify the voices of collaborators who have been excluded from political and social arenas. His ability to change course based on partners' feedback to develop a work that reflects their experience has been critical to his success.

Aymar also pays close attention to criticism, seeing it as "an invitation to vulnerability,"⁵ and he tries to be as open as possible when discussing his actions and the logic behind them. Recently, he acted on his recognition of his own limits in a position of power when he hired performing artist Jenna Anast as OTV's Head of Community and Exhibition. The mandate for this newly created role is to pilot strategies for restorative justice in creative communities. Aymar recognizes that listening, transparency, and accountability are critical to the success of coalitional work at OTV.

The keys to creative coalition work—listening, transparency, and accountability—are echoed in Zackary's perspective. After finishing production on the next season of *Transparent*, Zackary called out a new part of the team's daily routine during a season marked by a need for healing from sexual harassment: "We do a 'thought circle' every morning where people have the opportunity to get in the center of the circle and speak. We were able to have conversations that we were unable to have before."⁶ The examples of Zackary, Aymar, and Jonathas reveal some of the less measurable impacts of creative coalition. By working toward a goal together across differences, we build our capacity to listen and change. At their best, coalitions generate tolerance, prepare us to work through disagreements, and strengthen our ability to value experiences different from our own.

The MCA can work toward fostering creative coalitions—and it is essential that we do. Our staff, artists, and audiences come together with vast differences in backgrounds, perspectives, and values, and we need to bridge these differences and find common ground. This collaboration will require exceptional humility and openness, as well as the recognition that different levels of privilege and power are constantly in play. And this openness is risky. But we have many successful models in whose footsteps we follow: artists who put themselves on the line every day to envision a more connected and just world.

- 1 Zackary Drucker, "Honoring Mother Flawless Sabrina, The Queer Icon Who Taught Me How to Live," *them.*, March 21, 2018, them.us/story/mother-flawless-sabrina-the-queer-icon-who-taught-me-how-to-live.
- 2 Zackary Drucker, in conversation with the author, February 23, 2019.
- 3 Aymar Jean Christian, in conversation with the author, February 23, 2019.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Drucker, in conversation with the author, February 23, 2019.



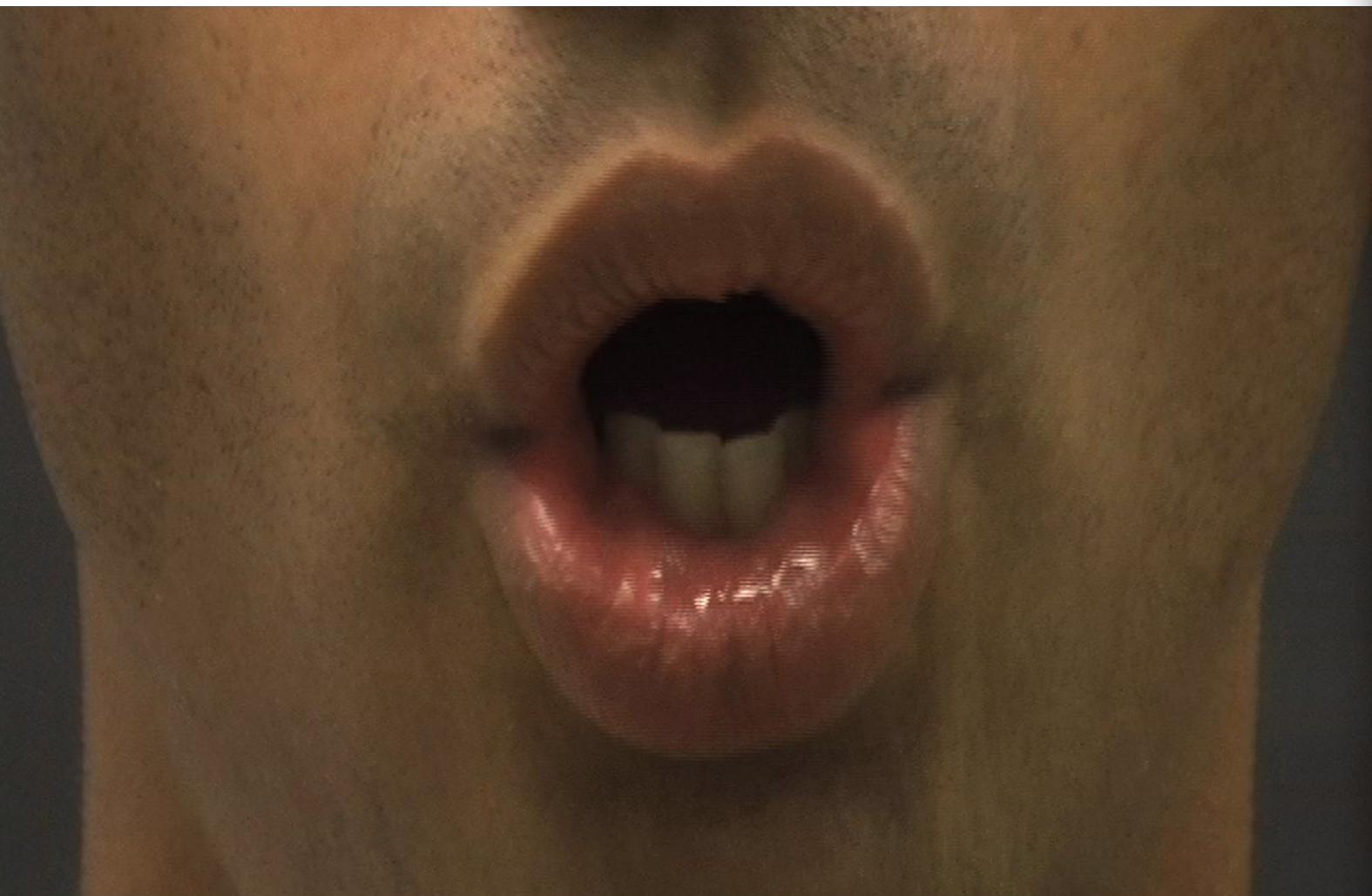
"EEZ FRRY DE EN EEM BAS EEL EEN CEP E BUL UV SPICH?" AY ASKED.

"EEZ THAT WHAAT U MIN TU TELL MI?"

K1USO MOA1 SHUNED F1YDE N1RER.

"OAPIN YOA1 MOW1," HEE JOALD HIM, AND OAPEND HIZ OAN.

F^Ry day Oapund hiz mOuuuth. "Luk," sed KRoooa.



"HEE HEZ NO tUNG," HEE SED.

"THOT IS VAI HEE DUZ NOT SPEEK."

THEY CAWT OT HEEZ TAWNG.

COURTESY OF BRENDAN FERNANDES
We asked Chicago-based artist Brendan Fernandes for a snapshot of his work and he responded with performance and installation views of finished pieces as well as renderings and rehearsal shots from works in progress. *The Commons Artist Project: Brendan Fernandes* is on view at the MCA June 18–October 13, 2019.

This page, foreground: Brendan Fernandes, still from *Foe*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago; background: Brendan Fernandes, *Foe* (poster), 2007. Image courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago. Previous page, foreground: Brendan Fernandes, performance and installation views of *The Master and Form*, 2018,

Graham Foundation. Photo: RCH, courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago; background: Brendan Fernandes, *Foe* (poster), 2007. Image courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

LAURIE SIMMONS IN CONVERSATION WITH NAOMI BECKWITH

NAOMI BECKWITH

You and your work have often been described as making a critique of femininity. Do you feel that that's accurate?

LAURIE SIMMONS

I actually don't. The first pictures I made were about trying to reconstruct a memory and talk about the nature of artifice, talk about the beauty, the light side, and the dark side of what I understood to be happening around me when I was a child.



Laurie Simmons, *Big Camera/Little Camera*, 1976. Gelatin silver print; framed: 14 3/4 x 19 1/4 in. Collection of the artist. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.

Intrigue pervades the work of Laurie Simmons: What's really going on behind the glossy interiors and the glassy stares of her living and lifelike subjects? Manilow Senior Curator Naomi Beckwith interviewed Simmons last fall to get at the heart of the artist's practice. These are excerpts from their wide-ranging conversation, which touched on artifice, feminism, the post-World War II American suburb, and her shift from working with miniatures to life-size dolls, revealing just why Simmons doesn't call herself a photographer.

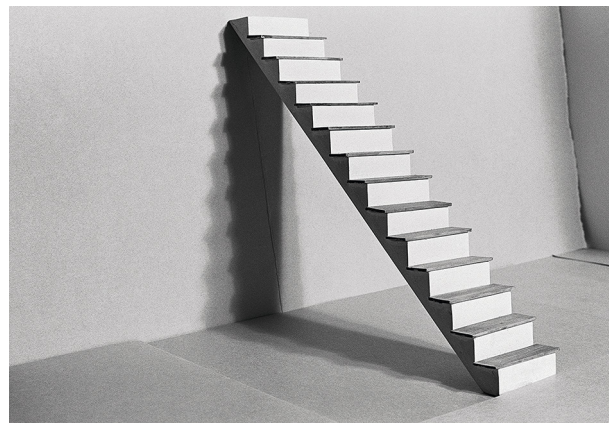
When I put my first dollhouse pictures out in the world, Ben Lifson from *The Village Voice* wrote about them in an article about me and Robert Frank. It was called "Robert Frank and the Track of Life." I guess I was the "track of life." He wrote about me as a feminist artist, and I was really stunned to see those words next to my name because I thought that I was dealing with something more conceptual and more neutral. Although I personally felt like a feminist, I identified more with the feminists of the generation behind me. So there was this kind of split moment where I was so excited just to be written about. I was like: "I'll take it, whatever you want to call me." But the first years of the dollhouse series gave me feelings like: "You wrote about me but you don't get me." As an artist I guess I feel so lucky to have been part of any kind of discourse. I feel so lucky to have been written about, analyzed, examined.

NB As we're looking at some of these miniature scenarios, let's talk about some of the earliest constructions that you made. What would you do with these objects? Like, how would you start to arrange them in the space?

LS Well, I think that one of the most interesting things that happened is that initially I refused to use dolls. I started collecting all of this miniature furniture and making these spaces. I was most inspired by Gordon Matta-Clark and his activity of cutting an abandoned building in half. Of course, he was an activist and an incredible artist. I saw the black-and-white works that documented the interiors that he literally bifurcated. And I thought: I want my pictures to look like that. So I started constructing rooms, and I thought maybe people will think these rooms are real. I started to play with the scale and the space and shoot from angles that would make you dizzy or nauseate you. I did that for several years before I would dare put a doll in a photo. I thought: That's not me. I'm not that. I'm not that artist. I'm not that female artist who takes pictures of dolls or plays with them. So I think for the first few years that I was working I actually was, in that case, naive enough to think that people might mistake my interiors for real spaces.

NB Let's talk a little bit about what artifice has done for your work, and what your interest in it has been.

LS Well, the interesting thing is that I started with scale and artifice because the kind of house I grew up in—during the post-World War II, first-generation American suburban life—was really confusing to me as a child because my house looked like a dollhouse. The dollhouse looked like my house. My house, my kitchen looked like the kitchen in *Life* magazine, or did the kitchen in *Life* magazine look like my kitchen? Could I walk into the Campbell's Soup ad in *Life* magazine and just sit there and eat soup, or did I just eat it in my own kitchen? This was my perception of reality, the way my mind worked. When I started to make my work in my mid-twenties, I realized that I was having memories about my childhood, what I called my grown-up work, which was actually *pictures* of toys and dolls that I'd had as a kid.



Laurie Simmons, *Staircase*, 1977. Gelatin silver print; framed: 14 3/4 x 19 1/4 in. Collection of the artist. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.



Laurie Simmons, *New Kitchen/Aerial View/Seated*, 1979. Pigment print; framed: 12 1/2 x 15 1/4 in. Private collection. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.

It was very hard for me to tease out what was memory versus what was reality, what existed in a TV show and what existed in my own life. And I don't mean that to sound as naive and disingenuous as this does, but everything kind of looked the same. There was a visual thread, a kind of superficial beauty that was woven through everything. And it was attainable by people at all kinds of socioeconomic levels. You could decorate your kitchen. You could buy a kitchen set if you were working class, lower middle class, upper middle class, upper class. Everybody post-World War II seemed to be able to get their hands on everything. That was my perception of reality, the threads of what was "real."

NB You're talking about the birth of a consumer society more than anything.

One of the interesting things for me about your work is that it seems to reflect that post-World War society when we could kind of consume an image of ourselves and then make ourselves into an image.

LS Exactly. You could create your reality. And of course, for most of the families I knew who were first- or maybe

second-generation American, assimilation was so important. Religion was very private and within the home but, publicly, the way that you looked, and the car that you drove, and the clothes that you wore, they were so important for blending in. I mean, my father changed his name. He wore tweed blazers with leather elbow patches and smoked a pipe. His parents came over from Russia! I had a sense—from a really young age—that my life was a construct. And I know that that's a hard thing to imagine that a little kid could know their life was a construct. But it wasn't hidden from me. It was almost like there was great appreciation for the fact that we could mimic everything that we saw—to be a good mimic, to be able to comport yourself and dress and act like the rest of the people, the fancy people. That was something to aspire toward.

NB What do you think brought those memories back as you were also composing yourself as an artist about twenty, twenty-five years later?

LS I don't think I ever let go of those memories—my childhood was so powerful visually. It was difficult for me to be a child because I was an artsy kid, and most artists will tell you that being an artsy kid meant you were—my mother's favorite word—different. But I think that I was always so aware of the power of the visual, and what it meant, and how much more important it was to my parents for all of us to look a certain way, to present a certain way, than it was for us to have our own belief system. They were concerned about our moral values, inasmuch as they didn't want us to do anything to shame them. We needed to be correct. So we learned what was correct. I don't know if we really were taught the true value of right and wrong, or if that's something that can be taught. But the powerful lesson was how utterly important it was to adapt, assimilate, and appear to be comfortable in this environment.

NB You're most famous for shooting dolls, figurines, and miniatures, but you've also been doing this work with, as you say, human-sized humans. When did that work begin?

LS Well, I think that the real moment of change was when I discovered the



Laurie Simmons, *The Love Doll/Day 27/Day 1 (New in Box)*, 2010. Fuji matte print; framed: 74 1/4 x 56 1/4 in. Wilkinson Vintners Collection, London. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.

love doll—the Japanese sex doll—in 2009 in Tokyo. I wasn't really drawn to the doll because it was a sex doll. It was a life-size doll creation and beautifully sculpted, incredibly well articulated. I suddenly saw the world open up as a stage where I could actually place this human-scale doll in human-scale environments rather than trying to find dollhouse furniture in little sets. Let's say my first dollhouse works were around 1976; I realized that after that I kept trying to shoot in human scale. I kept trying to work with humans. It never felt right until I found the love doll—and kind of dragged her onto a chair, and sat her there and thought: This is it. I'm in the right scale now.

NB Do you consider yourself a photographer primarily, or more a practicing visual artist who uses photography as a tool?

LS I've always considered myself an artist who uses photography, an artist who uses a camera. I walked out of my photo class in art school, and I feel like, because I never had a formal education, I'm always reluctant to call myself a photographer. Interestingly, when I'm referred to as a photographer, I get a little bit antsy, and when it's "Laurie Simmons comma photographer," I really need it to say, "Laurie Simmons comma artist." And while I'm very proud of the fact that I work photographically, and am self-taught in that way, I still feel like an artist with a camera.

NB Does that lead us to the title of the exhibition, *Laurie Simmons: Big Camera/Little Camera*?

LS It probably does. Until I used *Big Camera/Little Camera* (p. 9) as the title picture for my exhibition, I wasn't aware of how many layers that photo actually has for me, starting with being some sort of portrait, or self-portrait, of my father and myself.

First, it's his camera with my little toy camera. And then everything that I've ever done that involves disparity of scale is in that photo. All my ambivalence about being a photographer is in that photo at the same time that all my respect for the tools is there as well.

NB What, to you, makes for a successful photograph? Have you been striving for something technical, or are you thinking something beyond the mechanics of a photo?

LS I feel like I've taught myself so much about the mechanics of both photography and the composition of a photograph. But the fact that I do call myself an artist who uses a camera, as many of the photo-based artists of my generation did, I felt free from the constraints of the Museum of Modern Art, eight-by-ten, black-and-white, beautifully printed photo. And I felt like, I can have dust on my photos. I can have someone else click the shutter. I'm not interested in the decisive moment. I have always felt like I have a kind of freedom to borrow from other kinds of work, as in appropriation, a word that has been tremendously overused. But certainly, when I started, I thought: well, I can borrow a piece of that photo and integrate it with my own. And it's also given me the freedom to go into all kinds of crazy scale and sizes, and to not worry about the perfection of the prints. I mean the funny thing about this is that I've become a pretty decent photographer.

I know my way around the dark room, which is something I'm really proud of. I can talk to printers about what I want. I understand the language of photography because I worked in analog and not digital for so long; I have a language in terms of photography that a lot of young people don't even understand anymore. So I

have that. That's kind of valuable. I'm sort of proud of that language that's in my memory, in my muscle memory.

NB Now having said that though, I'm going to ask you an unfair question: What makes you a good artist? Because you're a decent photographer, but what would you say are your criteria then for being a strong artist?

LS Well, I think that when I say I'm a decent photographer I mean I've mastered the skills that I need to make my work. I can speak the language. I can print the photos. The same things come to bear in my letting a work out of the studio that come to bear for a painter or a sculptor or a video artist or any kind of artist.

Things have to pass a pretty rigid set of considerations to even leave my studio and be officially catalogued as an artwork. I mean I feel like the situation of being an artist and making work, in some sense it's fairly universal, and I could find a common language with pretty much any artist that I meet anywhere, any time. The act of making something, whether your hands are on it or not. It's brain work. It's really brain work.

NB Love it.

Laurie Simmons: Big Camera/Little Camera was on view at the MCA February 23–May 5, 2019.

Watch the MCA exhibition video at mcachicago.org/simmons-video.

THREADS IN THE MAKING





B



C

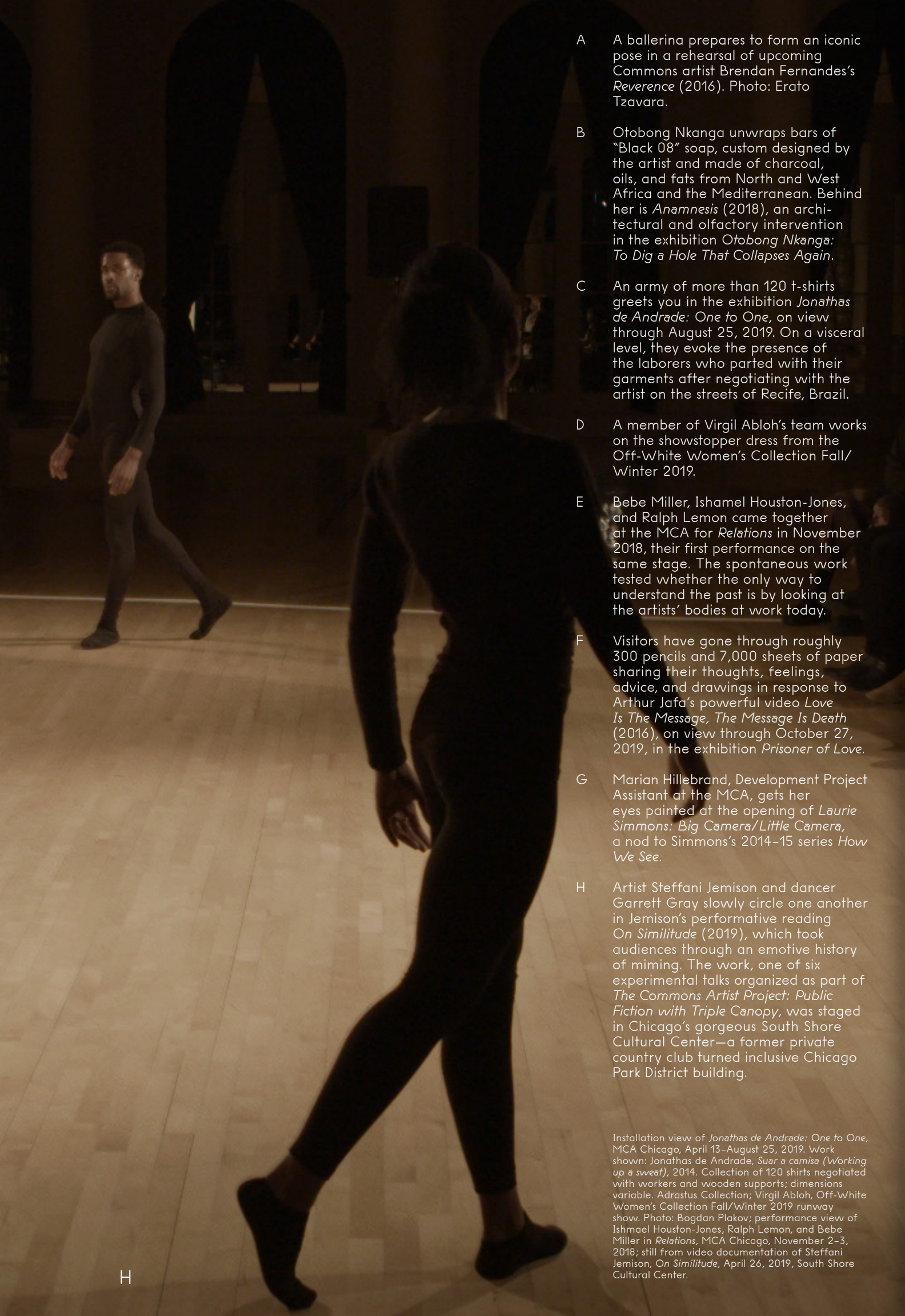


D



E





- A A ballerina prepares to form an iconic pose in a rehearsal of upcoming Commons artist Brendan Fernandes's *Reverence* (2016). Photo: Erato Tzavara.
- B Otobong Nkanga unwraps bars of "Black 08" soap, custom designed by the artist and made of charcoal, oils, and fats from North and West Africa and the Mediterranean. Behind her is *Anamnesis* (2018), an architectural and olfactory intervention in the exhibition *Otobong Nkanga: To Dig a Hole That Collapses Again*.
- C An army of more than 120 t-shirts greets you in the exhibition *Jonathas de Andrade: One to One*, on view through August 25, 2019. On a visceral level, they evoke the presence of the laborers who parted with their garments after negotiating with the artist on the streets of Recife, Brazil.
- D A member of Virgil Abloh's team works on the showstopper dress from the Off-White Women's Collection Fall/Winter 2019.
- E Bebe Miller, Ishamel Houston-Jones, and Ralph Lemon came together at the MCA for *Relations* in November 2018, their first performance on the same stage. The spontaneous work tested whether the only way to understand the past is by looking at the artists' bodies at work today.
- F Visitors have gone through roughly 300 pencils and 7,000 sheets of paper sharing their thoughts, feelings, advice, and drawings in response to Arthur Jafa's powerful video *Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death* (2016), on view through October 27, 2019, in the exhibition *Prisoner of Love*.
- G Marian Hillebrand, Development Project Assistant at the MCA, gets her eyes painted at the opening of *Laurie Simmons: Big Camera/Little Camera*, a nod to Simmons's 2014–15 series *How We See*.
- H Artist Steffani Jemison and dancer Garrett Gray slowly circle one another in Jemison's performative reading *On Similitude* (2019), which took audiences through an emotive history of miming. The work, one of six experimental talks organized as part of *The Commons Artist Project: Public Fiction with Triple Canopy*, was staged in Chicago's gorgeous South Shore Cultural Center—a former private country club turned inclusive Chicago Park District building.

Installation view of *Jonathas de Andrade: One to One*, MCA Chicago, April 13–August 25, 2019. Work shown: *Jonathas de Andrade, Suar a camisa (Working up a sweat)*, 2014. Collection of 120 shirts negotiated with workers and wooden supports; dimensions variable. Adrastus Collection; Virgil Abloh, Off-White Women's Collection Fall/Winter 2019 runway show. Photo: Bogdan Plakov; performance view of Ishmael Houston-Jones, Ralph Lemon, and Bebe Miller in *Relations*, MCA Chicago, November 2–3, 2018; still from video documentation of Steffani Jemison, *On Similitude*, April 26, 2019, South Shore Cultural Center.



Virgil Abloh, *Question Everything Flags*. Photo: Ivan Grianti.

AFTER ARCHITECTURE

REM KOOLHAAS WITH VIRGIL ABLOH AND SAMIR BANTAL

REM KOOLHAAS
I'm very interested in arguing that architecture used to be one of the most immutable of professions, but somehow a chain of events—maybe neoliberalism, capitalism, but also new media, social media, and the digital itself—have vastly increased the potential scope of architecture. And therefore opened architecture completely to new experiences and new potentials, and we've been doing actually a very poor job in discovering those. I see you as one person who is trying to do that.

VIRGIL ABLOH
I completely left architecture and jumped into these other worlds, but always had that DNA. It's in line with the philosophy, but it hasn't been documented. And why I'm excited about this book and this exhibition is to proclaim it, and make it a foundation, and not keep interrogating it.

RK But I think the ultimate thesis behind it is that you're not necessarily trying not to be an architect. You're still trying to be an architect. But that architecture now is a category that is so wide that almost anything can be fitted into it.

SAMIR BANTAL
From a personal point of view, why I thought AMO was interesting was that through AMO, I could be interested in graphic design—so I was interested in graphic design through architecture, but not interested in graphic design per se.¹ And the same thing goes for fashion and for film. Yes, I could be interested in film, but I'm interested in film through architecture.

VA As curator Hans Ulrich Obrist would say, when you crack open the parameters that define architecture, not only does it (re)define the work, it affects the mentality to create new work. What I've found is that for most people, whatever you studied gets you labeled. I trained as an engineer first, an architect second, so technically those are the only things that I should be subscribing to. But what I found when delving into other fields, say fashion design: now they call me a fashion designer. When you compare how other fashion designers approach their work, it's methodology and process. I create fashion from an architect's perspective.

RK I think there have been other fashion designers who were architects first.

VA I meet a lot of artists who were architects, like Tom Sachs or Sterling Ruby—they practiced and then veered off. It's interesting, the allure.

When I was studying, I think I misread the history: an architect was supposed to be knowledgeable about all things. Wide, sweeping knowledge, and then apply it to building buildings quote, unquote.



EXCERPTS FROM
VIRGIL ABLOH: "FIGURES
OF SPEECH"

The catalogue for *Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech"* is emblematic of Virgil Abloh's practice itself: the ambitious venture into the unknown brought numerous people together in close and quick-paced collaboration to produce a distinctive platform for his vision. This excerpt represents a conversation on January 7, 2019, among Abloh and architects Rem Koolhaas and Samir Bantal of OMA and AMO. The conversation traces Abloh's roots in architecture, his formative encounters with "low" and "high" fashion, and his rise to high-fashion fame.

SB For me, reading about the Bauhaus period was interesting because for the first time architects deliberately could incorporate many more disciplines or be trained in more than one discipline. Yes, you can do product design, you can do graphic design, you can do exhibition design. So why not do that? Why would you keep doing just one thing?

VA Then there's the tourist, this new breed.

SB Do you feel that this was almost meant to happen because of the internet? What I'm saying is one of the things that I often hear about is the flattening of knowledge: the purists almost disappeared in this much larger field of many more people who are able to express their critique, and so the field in a way became more democratized. And there were so many more people who were writing about architecture themselves without formal education in architecture.

RK I don't think anything ever really disappears. There are always new layers. I share Virgil's skepticism against that judgmental kind of competence, so to say the least, I have mixed feelings. But I think it's also very important to be able to write about something simply because you're interested. Whether you're educated in it or not.

VA Tourists may have limited knowledge, but their success or failure isn't rooted in a purist badge, but in those dualities. So I've crafted my output into opening minds instead of reaffirming closed minds, which puts it in the middle. If I swing toward purist, I'm reinforcing the closed-door system.

RK I like that purist-tourist opposition, but I think an intelligent purist puts himself constantly in a situation where he becomes a tourist. And

hopefully the intelligent tourist also aspires to be a purist. Or at least have the knowledge of a purist. I like the dialectic.

VA I would say that this compares to fashion, too.

Critics in fashion say it's the brands and publications and the internet that wiped out the insider history of fashion, but I challenge that. The outside world basically said, "Wait, what you're selling, what you're saying about the brand actually doesn't matter. I'm not in the haze that makes me need to buy that dress. And I'm not in the haze where you purists are affecting my real life." Where I came in is that I can ready-make fashion better than fashion can be projected to me, and that was the epiphany: to make something in the system that has different ideals than the system, to influence change from a different direction.

RK Let's talk about the word "fashion." Because fashion is also not a very good word in architectural circles. But ironically, it's a word I really like. I like the idea that you can hit fashion, I think also the idea that you can fail fashion, or that you can be in fashion and out of fashion, kind of lean into both conditions. They're really extremely interesting to live down. For instance, at some point all we did in architecture was recycle modernism, but that was a great incentive to become more challenging of myself. And then, ironically, the point was to be in fashion. But I would like your riff on the word fashion.

VA I found that just as you point out, it's not so finite. There are tribes that uphold a different sort of morals. There are different points of entry. I realized that there wasn't one governing body on something that's literally changing every day, high and low. During the '90s—during my period—high street, high fashion, low fashion mingled with self-pride paralleled those niche communities that were happening around music.

You could say: in New York, this is cool. In Brooklyn, this is cool. American Apparel, this brand that appears not expensive became a look for very influential creators. I took a top-down approach instead of trying to be in fashion. I stayed constant just wearing the same thing.

RK Can you name a number of fashion brands that actually appeal to you? What was the first brand you recognized?

VA The very first brand was Nike because of the role models. The superhero effect of Michael Jordan. I was from Chicago. This guy could fly. I believed the campaign. It was sport meets with a look and a guy. But then skate-





From top: Virgil Abloh at the Off-White Women's Collection Fall/Winter 2019 runway show. Photo: Bogdan Plakov; IKEA x Virgil Abloh. Photo courtesy of IKEA.

Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech" is on view at the MCA June 10–September 22, 2019.

Purchase the Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech" catalogue at mcachicagostore.org or at the MCA Store.

boarding—in this part of my timeline, skateboarding had the most profound impact.

For those of us born in the '80s and '90s, there's this pop-culture tussle between the generation whose parents are basically, "Hey, I want a Rolex, a Mercedes Benz, I need Wall Street." Then in the '90s, you get this rock-and-roll, ripped-jean thing: there's a different type of self-esteem from that. Then add in a dash of the internet, which further spikes this disconnection.

SB I like the idea of what you said before, the tribalism.

VA Yeah. Say within architecture, the community was much smaller, without an entry point for someone at seventeen. In fashion, though—my definition of fashion—there were tribes guarding each place. Skateboarding was just dirty Levi's, a t-shirt with a graphic logo, and that's a brand. At the top of the mountain was high fashion—high fashion was runway. And I was viewing them all. I considered Prada or Gucci or Louis Vuitton iconic. I loved those brands. I couldn't afford them, but I aspired to them.

RK What part of it moved you? How would you look at them? Would you look through advertising, or would you actually look at runway records?

VA I would go to the websites to view the runway shows. But I was also going into the luxury stores because to me they were like museums.

RK And that was in Chicago?

VA Yeah, exactly, in the very center of the city. Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Prada were there. The museum is one block away, ironically. But we would go to the luxury store, not the museum.

Because there were different governing bodies for different realms of fashion, I noticed that the different tribes never spoke to each other. But I liked fashion because on the surface level, it feels like it's about brand, but once you get under the hood, it's very much about personality: you're using different tools or brands to express yourself.

SB Also, there's a strong political layer that is usually ignored.

VA I feel that this exhibition is the perfect platform to unveil the sub-context that's been my guiding premise. This is the way to digest what I'm saying and the point of view, and its visual manifestation at once. The political layer—how we ingest information from where it comes from, who it comes from, and which point of the globe it's messaged to and from.

RK The beauty of fashion is that by definition, it comes without explanation and it has to live without explanation. And I think that a lot what you do is strong enough to accomplish that.

VA I feel like I've climbed the ladder to get the Louis Vuitton label. When I put that label on the neckline and I make it in that factory, it means that some door was opened, that I came in and came out. It's not a progressive label. It's a label like many out there that embrace art. But it's a different can of worms.

RK I think that also in a very short time, you've done something with it.

VA Trying to. And that relates to the last point: I believe in collaboration.

SB You're able to form alliances in many fields that sometimes are actually opposing. And there's rarely a backlash to whatever you do. You move almost automatically between things, and you can immediately speak the language of these fields.

RK But what I say—and no offense about the word, because you're doing so many things—is, how opportunistic is that? I think you're using a rare opportunity rather than being an opportunist, and I think what is beautiful to see here is that you're also in an ideal situation because white men confront so many categories from which they are in a way disqualified.

SB But then the question that immediately enters my head is, how long will that last?

VA I believe that this isn't coincidence, because this is the end of a chapter. That's what is important about this conversation, us buttoning this up. We're collectively crafting this narrative, and it'll end, and that allows me to start a new chapter. This has been a long formulating of data, of opinion, of knowledge. If it continues without an exhibition, without a book—or text to catalogue it—then it'll spiral off and go into some bad work, as all things do. It needs to be encapsulated and needs to be put in a format. Then other people can digest it, reject it, understand it, and then I can 2.0 it.

1 AMO is the design and research studio of the Dutch architecture firm OMA.

VIRGIL ABLOH "FIGURES OF SPEECH" JUN 10– SEP 22, 2019

ARTEDGE GALA
JUN 8, 2019
with a special
performance by
Dev Hynes

MEMBERS' PREVIEW
JUN 9, 2019

EXHIBITION OPENS
JUN 10, 2019

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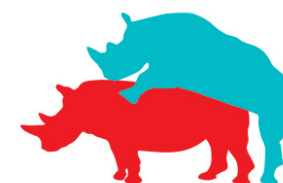
FIVE THINGS ACCORDING TO GRACE DEVENEY



IN MEMORIAM: OKWUI ENWEZOR (1963–2019)

I never met Okwui Enwezor, but his exhibition catalogues revealing histories in Lagos, Bamako, and Cape Town—all places where photography and visual culture were essential to liberation and self-definition—forever shaped the work I do. Since his passing, I have been grateful to learn more about the intersection of Enwezor's ethics and aesthetics from those who knew him. I recommend the following online tributes to his life, work, and friendship: "What We Can Learn from Okwui Enwezor's Post-Colonial Ethics" (frieze.com) by my MCA colleague Manilow Senior Curator Naomi Beckwith, "Okwui Enwezor and the Power of Art Publishing" (frieze.com) by curator Osei Bonsu, and "In memory of Okwui Enwezor, 1963–2019" (e-flux.com) by Hito Steyerl, Coco Fusco, Raqs Media Collective, and Supercommunity.

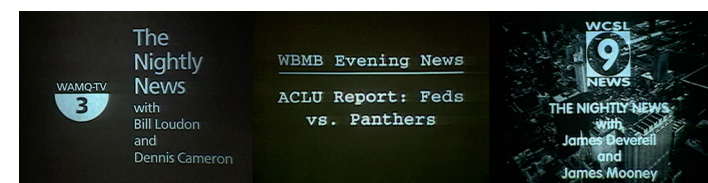
PLEASURE ACTIVISM: THE POLITICS OF FEELING GOOD



With *Pleasure Activism*, adrienne maree brown extends the black feminist tradition, gathering a range of voices on the intersections of sex and liberation politics. I can't wait to experience the ripple effects of this book, which asks what might become possible—for ourselves and the world at large—if we make social justice and pleasure central to our pursuits?

ACLU AND THE CENTER FOR MEDIA JUSTICE, ET AL. V. FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, ET AL.

The lawsuit against the FBI to learn who and what organizations are being investigated under the fabricated category of "Black Identity Extremists"



has been on my mind lately, as I set out to include Stan Douglas's video installation *Evening* (1994) in an upcoming exhibition at the MCA. The work explores how news outlets in the 1960s and 1970s reported the FBI's surveillance of—and violence against—black political activists. Twenty-five years have passed since Douglas created *Evening*, but the ACLU's lawsuit attests to how little has changed.

THE PLANTHUNTER



The Planthunter, an online journal that explores the "endlessly curious connections between people and plants," is a key part of my winter sustenance—and a portal to summer. gorgeously illustrated articles explore the stakes of our entanglements with the natural world, and the ways plants provide some of the best metaphors for how to live.

SMALL SPELLS TAROT DECK

Tarot has been a longtime practice of mine, as a way of bringing ritual, ceremony, and intuition into my everyday routine. This deck is the one I turn to most often these days, as I appreciate Rachel Howe's simple graphic style and the ways she reinterpreted the symbolism of tarot with relatable yet potent motifs such as cats, playing cards, and basketballs.



Clockwise from top left: Okwui Enwezor, February 6, 2002. Photo: Edward Keating/The New York Times/Redux; Stan Douglas, *Evening*, 1994. Video projection, 14 min., 57 sec.; installation composed of three double-sided laser discs and one custom-made synchronization device. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, restricted gift of Frances and Thomas Dittmer and Bernice and Kenneth Newberger Fund, 1996.40. © Stan Douglas. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner; Small Spells Black & White Tarot Deck by Rachel Howe. Photo: Levi Mandel; image courtesy of *The Planthunter*; cover of *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (detail) by adrienne maree brown. Image courtesy of AK Press.

MCA STORE

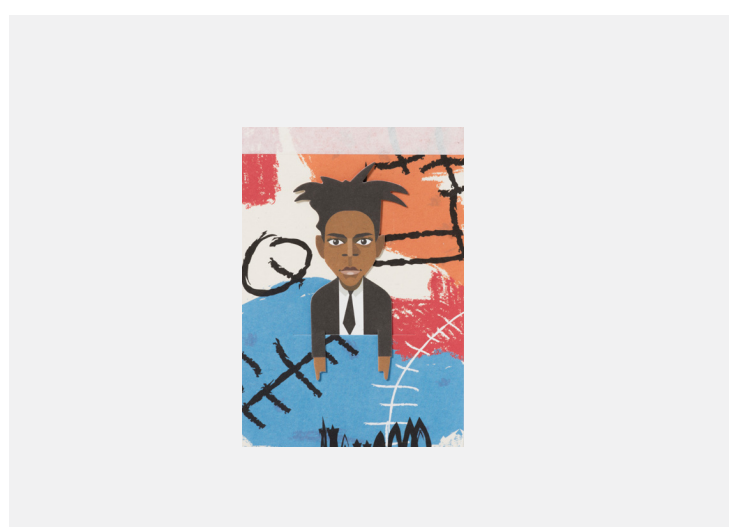
FROM
BLKHAUS STUDIOS
WITH LOVE



LUMIO LAMP
\$200 (MEMBERS \$180)
*This is just a clever way
to assign light—playful
but definitely functional.*



Folayemi Wilson and Norman Teague, of blkHaUS studios, recently stopped by the MCA Store, where a number of items caught their eye—here are their top three. *The Commons Artist Project: blkHaUS studios* opens at the MCA on November 12, 2019.



JEAN-MICHEL
BASQUIAT POCKET
SKETCHBOOK
\$9.95 (MEMBERS \$8.96)

*We never stop ideating,
sketching, documenting,
and recording. This sketch-
book stands out as
a playful solution, with
Basquiat handy as
a constant inspiration.*

ODETTE OSTRICH
\$52.99
(MEMBERS \$47.69)

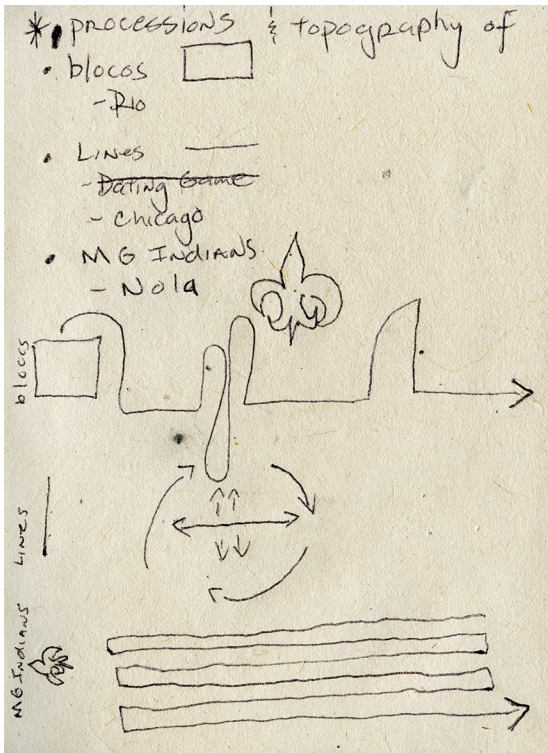
*This furry ostrich object
draws you in from
afar and asks to be held
and hugged. We can't
resist the Big Bird/Nicki
Minaj-type feel of fancy
that surrounds Odette.*



NAMED ONE OF THE WORLD'S BEST MUSEUM GIFT SHOPS BY FODOR'S



DIALOGUE KEYNOTE: ELAINE WELTEROTH
Acclaimed journalist Elaine Welteroth kicked off the MCA's annual Dialogue Series with a compelling keynote. She told her story of coming into her own in the publishing world—and revolutionizing the agenda of *Teen Vogue* as editor-in-chief. Afterward, a conversation between Welteroth and Dr. Robert N. Mayer Director of Learning and Public Programs Marissa Reyes got to the heart of what the Dialogue Series is all about—figuring out ways to foster an empowered and diverse new generation of changemakers. The event drew MCA trustees and members of the public, as well as artist Brendan Fernandes, whose *Commons Artist Project* opens June 18, 2019.



TARA AISHA WILLIS ON LINES AND TONES: MUSIC BY AND FOR THE CITY

What would happen if you tried to draw all the lines of connection within an artist's creative process, or map the influences and experiments that go into making a live performance? For jazz and experimental musician Ben LaMar Gay, a resident of Brazil and Chicago, everything from a soul line dance to a Mardi Gras parade is a manipulation of lines, a rhythm of breath in the body. If we disentangle these social dances from their music or rework familiar rhythms with a new set of instruments, what hidden folklore or backyard barbeque knowledge might be revealed?

On August 30, Gay brings his particular take on the sounds, shapes, and moves of Chicago's black social dances in *Hecky Naw! Angles!*, which features a quintet of local musicians, video projection, and choreography by Columbia College Chicago's Associate Professor of Dance Raquel Monroe. A next-generation member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), Gay shares the evening with another Chicago native, composer, percussionist, and AACM veteran Thurman Barker. Barker's quintet version of his recently released *South Side Suite* is an ode to the music he played and heard in Chicago from the 1950s through the 1970s, including his experiences with AACM cofounder Muhal Richard Abrams. Together Gay and Barker offer a glimpse of intergenerational and geographic lines of influence across the history and future of music experimentation in Chicago.

Left: Research notes and drawings by Ben LaMar Gay for *Hecky Naw! Angles!*, a future commission for the MCA Stage.

Right: Performance view, *In Progress: Brendan Fernandes*, MCA Chicago, January 15, 2019. Pictured: performer Michelle Reid.



JANUARY PARKOS ARNALL ON MAKING SPACE

The social threads that connect artists' communities can teach us to unlearn our contemporary mode of conversation and relearn the arts of listening and collaboration. As someone who works consistently with artist collectives—groups of artists working together to produce artworks or exhibitions—I know that these relationships are never easy, but the works they produce from seeds of common understanding can be deeply powerful.

How can a museum build a space for contemporary artistic and civic exchange? The tools of collectives and artist communities—active listening, transparency, accountability—become imperative. In simultaneously reflecting on the past and envisioning the present and future, museums engender social interaction, and help us imagine ourselves as part of a larger whole. We create a place where we are fed and challenged, a space to build coalition despite disagreement.

Join us in the Commons for Brendan Fernandes's upcoming artist project *A Call and Response*, June 18–October 13, 2019.



PROGRAM
On Style and Streetwear with Don C
JUN 12, 2019

Ten years ago two visionaries saw a future for streetwear that connected this vibrant form of personal and social expression with the highest of high fashion houses and placed it within the canon of contemporary art. Don C and Virgil Abloh asserted this mission in 2009 when they opened RSVP Gallery in Chicago's Wicker Park, where Abloh would launch his signature Pyrex Vision line, and Don C his Just Don brand. Since then a community of makers—artists, musicians, writers—have gathered there over music, clothes, and a shared passion for the future of their art forms. The collaborations forged at RSVP are countless and already legendary, involving genre-breaking artists Lupe Fiasco, Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami, N.E.R.D., A\$AP Rocky, Sterling Ruby, and Raf Simmons, among many others. This summer, Don C himself kicks off the exhibition *Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech"* with a stroll down memory lane, reflecting on those early years when they were first dreaming, together.

The program is organized by January Parkos Arnall, Curator of Public Programs.

EXHIBITION
Chicago Works: Assaf Evron
JUL 23, 2019–FEB 16, 2020

Assaf Evron's artwork invites you to linger on the symbolic and cultural significance of decoration, pulling motifs and meandering lines from architecture and nature from around the world, including his native Israel and his adopted city of Chicago. The former photojournalist uses a "photographic logic"—his term for the camera's ability to simultaneously document the rich and volumetric world while flattening it in an image—to explore how we project ideologies and expressions of

Left: Don C wearing the Jordan Legacy 312. Photo: @asphaltchronicles.

Right, from top: Assaf Evron, *Untitled (Sodom and Gomorrah)*, 2018. Pigment print; 40 x 40 in. Image courtesy of the artist; Prop Thtr Artistic Director Olivia Lilley. Photo: Jeff Bivens.



power onto our built and natural environments. Evron's Chicago Works exhibition—the first solo museum presentation of his work in the United States—opens this summer and coincides with the Chicago Architecture Biennial.

The exhibition is organized by Charlotte Ickes, Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow.



PERFORMANCE
The Storefront Project
SEP 14–15 AND 21–22, 2019

Chicago's renowned theater scene defines itself by nimbly popping up in neighborhoods and connecting communities throughout the city. In a two-weekend festival celebrating devised theater, *The Storefront Project* stitches together six Chicago theater makers at the intersection of the MCA's main stage and the scrappy Prop Thtr in Avondale.

Cocurated by MCA Associate Curator of Performance Tara Aisha Willis and Artistic Director of Prop Thtr Olivia Lilley, the project features six theater artists who will weave their works in and out of Prop's industrial alcoves and the MCA's backstage areas and public spaces. Through this project, MCA Stage connects theater makers and venues across the city on stages large and small, fosters creative exchanges among artists, and helps expand the ways theater makers move from point A to B—and beyond.



LAURIE SIMMONS
CIRCLE DONOR PREVIEW

The Laurie Simmons: *Big Camera/Little Camera* Circle Donor Preview kicked off with a conversation between the artist herself and exhibition curator Naomi Beckwith in the Edlis Neeson Theater. The party continued on the fourth floor with snacks (including big AND little pretzels!), revelry, face painting, and a first look at store products.

If you're interested in enhancing your MCA experience with early access to exhibitions and other intimate encounters with artists and curators, contact our Individual Giving team at circle@mcachicago.org or 312-397-4044 to learn more about becoming a part of our inner circle.



UPCOMING EVENTS

THE ART AUCTION
Nov 16, 2019

COCHAIRS
CARI B. SACKS AND KENNETH C. GRIFFIN

Going once, going twice, sold! Enjoy cocktails, dinner, and the opportunity to add a stunning work of contemporary art to your collection at Chicago's premier event benefitting the MCA.

Tickets start at \$500. Email Lindsay Hutchens at lhutchens@mcachicago.org for further details.

VERNISSAGE
Sep 19, 2019

COCHAIRS
LORI A. CROSLEY AND MARY KAY TOUHY

The MCA is proud to participate in the eighth annual Vernissage, the opening night benefit of EXPO CHICAGO at Festival Hall, Navy Pier.

EXHIBITION CALENDAR

CLOSING SOON

The Commons Artist Project: Public Fiction with Triple Canopy
Through Jun 8

ON VIEW NOW

Chicago Works: Jessica Campbell
Through Jul 7

Jonathas de Andrade: One to One
Through Aug 25

Can You Hear Me Now?
Through Sep 29

Prisoner of Love
Through Oct 27

Fragments of a Crucifixion
Through Nov 3

Atrium Project: Ellen Berkenblit
Through Nov 24

ON VIEW NEXT

Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech"
Jun 10–Sep 22

The Commons Artist Project: Brendan Fernandes
Jun 18–Oct 13

Chicago Works: Assaf Evron
Jul 23, 2019–Feb 16, 2020

Mika Rottenberg: Easypieces
Oct 2, 2019–Mar 8, 2020

The Shape of the Future
Oct 19, 2019–Apr 5, 2020

Direct Message
Oct 26, 2019–Jan 12, 2020

Routes and Territories
Nov 2, 2019–Apr 5, 2020

The Commons Artist Project: blkHaUS studios
Nov 12, 2019–Mar 1, 2020

Water After All
Dec 14, 2019–Jun 7, 2020

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AND EXHIBITION LISTINGS,
VISIT MCACHICAGO.ORG.

ARTIST PLUS ONE



American artist Judith Geichman's *Untitled* (2018) entered the MCA Collection in 2019. Chicago-based artist Paul Heyer shares his thoughts on the exquisite work.

PAUL HEYER ON JUDITH GEICHMAN'S *UNTITLED*

Judith Geichman's *Untitled* (2018) is a little beast of a painting. It's imp as abstraction—seductively unreliable. Geichman has cast a layered spell that calls to mind a time when geology and humankind worked in closer collaboration, when children were groomed to become alchemists and our monuments bore closer affinity to mountains than to glass needles.

People with dyslexia often describe the letters or words as swimming around the page. There's a perversity to a letter or word that doesn't want to stay still. It's like an expensive dog

that refuses to obey a patient master. And in *Untitled* we get teased with almost-characters of a similar temperament. Do we see x's swimming up to us, suggesting some redacted truth or some red-light treat? Or are they scrawls depicting a harlequin's coat, the pattern that promises half-veiled truth?

In *Untitled* it comes down to a kind of reading that we're not used to doing in the light of day. Maybe we remember how to do it. Or maybe it just takes a different kind of looking, as with an X-ray, which the painting also resembles. X's of rays and x's of criss-crossed bones, buried beneath flesh.

Ultimately it's a painting that feels dangerous. And who doesn't crave a little bit of danger?

Judith Geichman, *Untitled*, 2018. Acrylic, enamel, and spray paint on panel; 45 x 33 1/2 in. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of Katherine S. Schamberg by exchange, 2019.2. Courtesy of the artist and Regards, Chicago. Photo: Brian Griffin.

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Virgil Abloh, Off-White
Women's Collection
Fall/Winter 2019
runway show. Photo:
Bogdan Plakov.