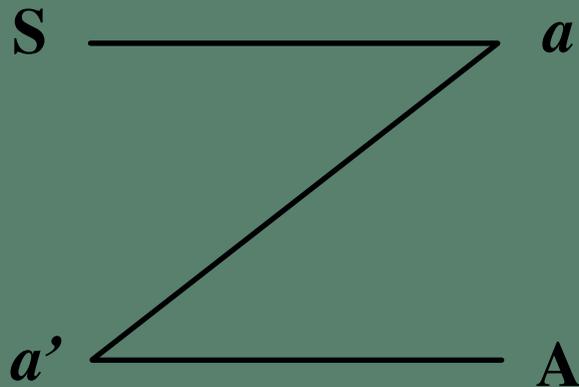


# The Symbolic Landscape: Pictures Beyond the Picturesque



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## The Symbolic Landscape: Pictures Beyond the Picturesque

*The Symbolic Landscape's* thematic derives from Rosalind Krauss's critique of pictorial form, made in her 1984 essay "The Originality of the Avant-Garde." There she reminds us that Jane Austen had challenged the conventional notion of the "picturesque" as early as 1818, at which time the picturesque was conceived as being "remarkable for its singularity" and thereby "afforded a good subject for landscape." Krauss is quick to point out the semantic paradox of conflating "singularity" (*nature*) and "landscape" (*painting*), well before the avant-garde would ponder the same phenomenon within the field of art. For it was this same paradox that directed a branch of modernist and postmodernist artists throughout the twentieth century, from Marcel Duchamp to Sherrie Levine.

Since Krauss's formulation in 1984, similar critiques of the "picturesque" have come to inform an international group of artists – ones working across the mediums of film, photography, painting and installation – who aim to tarry further with the notion of "landscape." They do this not only by employing the conceptual, aesthetic strategies indicative of the avant-garde that preceded them. They also do so as a means of cultural or political analysis. In *The Symbolic Landscape* we thus encounter topics as diverse as the 2008 financial collapse, American "red state" politics, the African-American Civil Rights Movement, Argentine Conceptualism, the Arab Spring, high modernist aesthetics, and what Roland Barthes poetically called "A Lover's Discourse."

Formally speaking, *The Symbolic Landscape* features a number of images that literally resemble a landscape, while others embrace figurative or textual strategies. All the exhibited artworks, however, conceptually defy their morphological resemblance to such tried and true genres. This begs the broader question of just what a landscape *is* for the subject, especially when psychological notions of that genre are entertained. As a result, Krauss's original theorization of the picturesque can be translated into the broader psychoanalytic question of who we are, in the *field* of the Other. For it's within this psychoanalytic, *symbolic* landscape that the Other stands for the many "fields" of desire that define us as subjects: from history, to nation state, to love (and beyond).

– Curated by Juli Carson



## Kevin Appel

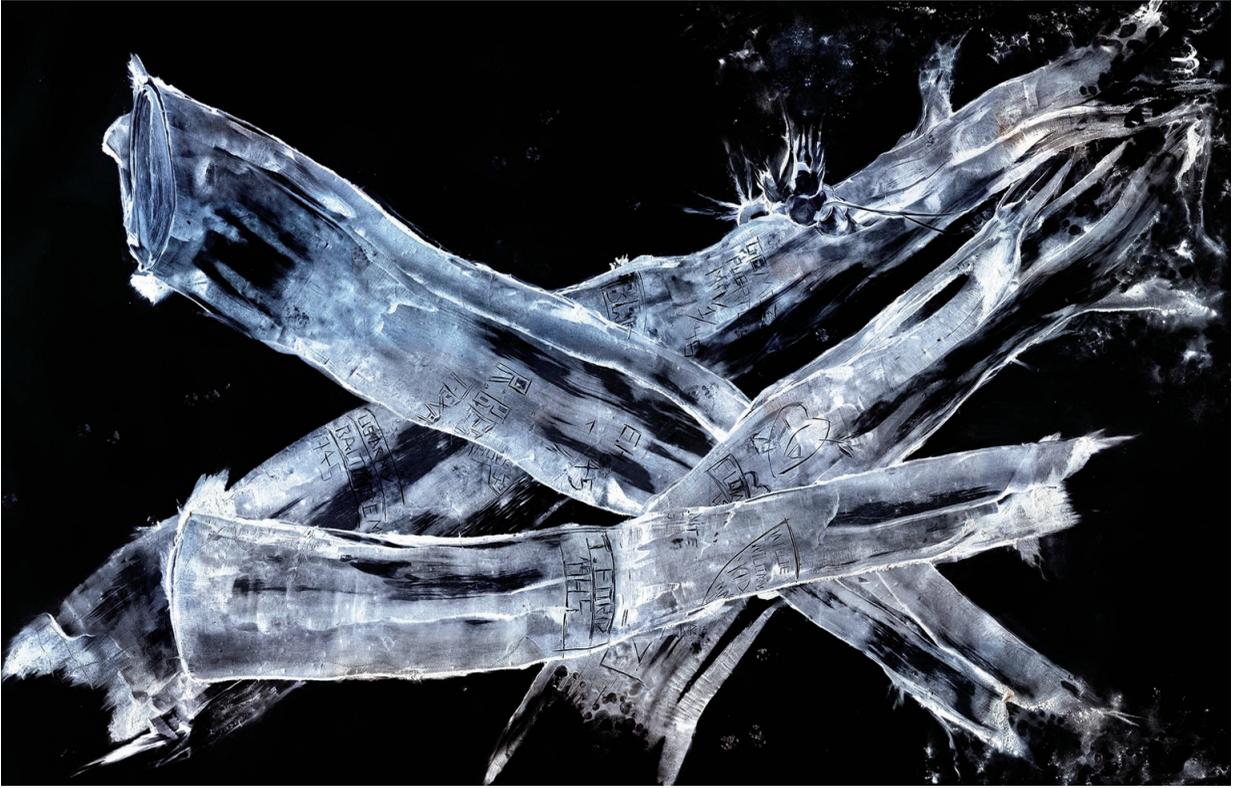
*untitled (rebar 6), detail, 2013*  
acrylic, oil, & UV cured ink on canvas over panel  
courtesy the artist and Christopher Grimes Gallery

Kevin Appel deals in tautologies. His paintings' ends are inseparable from their means. In each one, a "substrate" – drawn from photographs Appel took of twisted rebar at a concrete dump near 29 Palms desert – is scanned and printed using UV inks on a flatbed printer. Silkscreen patterns and imagery – often derived from the same photograph – are then painted in acrylic and oil over the rebar. By way of the substrate's partial obfuscation, the submerged photograph reclaims an expressive, organic connotation usually reserved for gestural abstraction. Meanwhile, the geometric, industrial details of the photograph provide the visual syntax of the surface's painted abstraction. Hence the *inside-out* quality of Appel's new work.

This reciprocal relationship also exists between the industrial materials that Appel's paintings reference. In architectural terms, "rebar" is short for "reinforcing bar." As such, even though concrete is the substrate for the building it constructs, the building's rebar, in turn, is a substrate for concrete, strengthening and holding it together through compression. The relation between concrete and rebar is thus *chiastic*, each serving as a foundation for the other. It's the same with Appel's paintings. Here, the image of discarded, tangled rebar is re-employed to strengthen and hold the painting into compression, whereupon its background and foreground are pushed together until one is the underside of the other, as in a moebius strip.

In biological terms, the word "substrate" also denotes the surface upon which an organism obtains its nourishment. As with Appel's former *Salton Sea* series, these new paintings' substrate evokes the Californian desert. Albeit here the desert is over-determined by industrial detritus. In discussion with Jill Singer, Appel notes the site specificity of the desert's cultural reference in his work: "...the best-case scenario for me, when a viewer comes across these images, is that they call to mind images of Western expansion, the desert, hippie communes, dropout culture, and things like that – but as a nonspecific narrative." In form (geometric shapes) and function (flattening of the surface) Appel's new paintings also reference a branch of Modernism associated with New York. But the painting's substrate, the surface upon which this "culture" grows, is clearly West Coast. And so it is – like rebar and concrete – the reciprocity between cultural milieus that Kevin Appel aesthetically compresses in his work.

– Juli Carson



## Kelly Barrie

### *Name Trees, Saint Pierre de Varengueville - Duclair Forest, Rouen Normandy, circa 1945, 2009*

Lambda print on aluminum

In 2008, Barrie began to depict trees that have come to an historic bad end. The first of his subjects was *The Lonely Tree of Ténééré* – a thorny acacia standing alone in the vast hostile expanse of the Sahara Desert, which perished in 1973 when a Libyan drunk driver collided with it, even though there were no other trees within 250 miles. Another was *Name Trees*, derived from a group of recently felled trees from the Saint Pierre de Varengueville-Duclair forest in Rouen, Normandy, circa 1945. The Duclair forest also housed nine cigarette camps – Lucky Strike, Pall Mall, Twenty Grand, Phillip Morris, etc. – that acted as rest areas for troops entering and leaving the front lines after the D-Day landings. In 1945, while Soldiers passed the time waiting for deployment, love affairs with local villagers were mapped onto these trees through graffiti engravings.

Just as these trees' fate collapse the distinction between figure and ground, so too does the process by which Barrie fabricated their image. This begins with Barrie laying down a roll of black seamless paper on the floor, upon which phosphorescent powder is scattered. He then replicates the photograph, held in his hand as a transparency, into the powder with his feet. The point of “collapse” exists in the place of the artwork's production, which literally occurs in the space between the vertical plane – where the artist stood up right, picture in his hand – and the horizontal plane of black seamless paper – where the image reemerges amidst the glowing powder. Barrie then photographs the powder drawing in pieces as a grid, after which he digitally stitches the pieces back together on the computer. As one image, the tree rejoins the vertical world when displayed on the gallery wall.

In “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin said, “For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.” And it is here that another collapse is theoretically staged by Barrie's photographs: that between the historical moment from which each tree comes and the present moment to which each tree is transplanted as an artwork. We can thus no more return to these trees' historic events anymore than we can turn away from them. Rather the dual moment they evoke continue to shimmer a ghostly presence of the past under our contemplative gaze.

– Juli Carson



## Zanny Begg & Oliver Ressler

*The Bull Laid Bear*  
2012

HD film, 24 min.

In scene one, a young woman sporting a pageboy sings a variation of Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child (That's Got His Own)" in a cabaret. Whereas Holiday's lyric, "Them that's got shall get, them that don't shall lose," concludes with "So the bible says and it is still news," our singer's version ends with the line "Better have deep pockets if you like them shoes... I want a man that's got his own." So begins *The Bull Laid Bear*, a short film about the financial landscape that led to the epic 2008 subprime housing bubble and subsequent bank bailout. The title's wording – the bull laid bear – is an intentional double entendre. For Begg and Ressler's film humorously and intelligently "lays bare" the economic recession (bear market) that hides behind each boom time (bull market).

The film's formal structure is a playful montage of visual and narrative techniques. Economic didactics are provided by interviews conducted with William K. Black, a white-collar criminologist; Yves Smith, the author of the blog *Naked Capitalism*; Tiffiny Cheng, campaign coordinator for *A New Way Forward*; and Gerald Epstein, co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute. All give pithy analyses of neoclassical economic theory, specifically how this theory was distorted and, subsequently, how the public was unknowingly defrauded. Meanwhile, the allegorical meaning of all this is provided by an animated landscape of hoodlum bears, into which the filmmakers have seamlessly integrated the aforementioned live speakers.

A few cases in point. As Black explains "the Irish bailout of subordinated debt," the bears cavort in a pub snorting lines of cocaine, while making general nastiness. After Black explicates the "recipe for maximizing fictional income through accounting fraud," the bears saunter through a police line up, their scrubs sporting bank logos. While Smith details how the investment banks are really defined by "boom and bust cycles," not "supply and demand," the bears sit in court glibly offering such neo-liberal tropes as "A Free Market is Efficient" and "Bankers are Professional Economic Managers." It's all a classic tragic-comedy, best instanced by Black's incredulous glee, which only a criminologist could have, as he describes the bold-faced lies that allowed his subject – the world's largest financial institutions – to literally get away with murder.

– Juli Carson

**civil wars**  
**queer theory and the arenas of activism**  
tuesday 17 may 1994  
the new school

## Civil Wars

*Civil Wars: Queer Theory and  
the Arenas of Activism, 1994*  
audio recording

*Civil Wars* takes as its starting point the division between the 'street,' where something called 'activism' happens, and the 'rarefied air' of the art-world or academy. There is another split, also under consideration, between the academic and the artistic, between the supposedly 'textual' and the 'imagistic.' In all three of these sites, something referred to as 'queer theory,' a cobble-work of feminism, literary criticism (often psychoanalytic) and political theory, is a fast rising force. As a conference which seeks to challenge these divisions, using and questioning queer theory, *Civil Wars* strives to disseminate various activist acts within the 'public' arena of the conference, sparking debate...

...The title *Civil Wars* springs from the notion of *civility* that is used to counter certain kinds of activism. Whenever we confront straights with even surprisingly banal facts of our lives, we are told that we are being impolite, indiscreet – we are told to be more civil. Civility itself, the relation of politeness to politics, is under examination in this conference. If you want something civil, we might respond, we will give you a *civil war*.

– Juli Carson and Matthew Ehrlich, 1994

*The Village Voice*, April 19, 1994

For many nonacademic activists, "queer theory," a blanket term covering the diverse field of lesbian and gay studies, is an elitist, over sophisticated clique of intellectuals. But theorists argue that their studies fuel activism and help shape and direct it.

"Queer Theory and the Arenas of Activism" – a panel to be held at The New School on May 17 at 7 p.m. – will focus on this very impasse. Bringing together artists, activists, and academics, the colloquium will challenge such exclusivity. "Filmmaking, artistic practice, academic writing and take-over, AIDS activism, and civil disobedience all fall within the purview of this panel," a flier announces. Of course, lip service to these issues does not promise an accessible discussion. But the diverse panel means both artists and theorists will have to explain themselves. Perhaps this alone will have a maturing effect on lesbian and gay activism, not to mention the relatively young queer theory. Please attend and demand to understand.

– Michael Miller, 1994



## Miles Coolidge

*Accident Investigation Site*, 2005  
digital c-print on dibond  
courtesy the artist and ACME, Los Angeles

*Accident Investigation Site* represents a common occurrence within the Angeleno public sphere. As Coolidge describes it: "There are a number of designated accident investigation sites next to freeways in Southern California. They are marked by green signs, with the acronym 'AIS' and an arrow. The one I chose to photograph is at the Crenshaw Blvd. exit of the Santa Monica (aka Rosa Parks) Freeway. White lines on the pavement mark them off. What is pictured is within these boundaries."

Thus far, the artwork's subject matter seems fairly clear. But there's more to it. Within modernist practice, the terms "accident," "investigation," and "site" have other meanings. For instance, Surrealists influenced by psychoanalysis equated "accident" with "chance," hence André Breton's experimentation with automatic writing and strolling. Conceptualists influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein equated "investigation" with analytic propositions, hence Joseph Kosuth's philosophical assertion that after Marcel Duchamp all art was conceptual. And for the Minimalists, the word "site" was attached to the word "specific," a simultaneous negation and realignment of Clement Greenberg's call for art's *medium* specificity.

What, then, is to be made of *Accident Investigation Site*, an artwork whose size and non-objective subject matter so easily calls to mind High Modernism? Similar to a Jackson Pollock painting, the work's surface – hung vertically on the wall – is synonymous with the horizontal plane of the street – the axis from which the image is constructed or derived. But as a *photographic* image, *Accident Investigation Site* is simultaneously conceived through the lens of conceptual and minimalist neo-avant-garde practices; ones that more readily address an artwork's linguistic and phenomenological qualities. When these modern and post-modern legacies *collide* – as if by chance – within the space of the art gallery, where the work hangs, a mutual investigation between these practices occurs *in situ*. The following question then ensues: what is the residual, unfinished business of neo-avant-garde practices that addressed the limits of visibility and representation within public space – practices that may have been prematurely tossed out with what T.J. Clark has called the "bad dream of Modernism?" *Accident Investigation Site* quite literally "hails" us, as viewing and speaking subjects, into this query.

– Juli Carson



## Kate Ericson & Mel Ziegler

*Feed and Seed*, 1990  
mixed media,  
Courtesy of MOCA, Los Angeles

*Feed and Seed* was originally conceived for "Notes on the Margin: A Framework in Focus," an exhibition mounted at Gracie Mansion Gallery (NYC) in January 1990. It was there that seven prototypes for the artwork, exhibited here, were first displayed.

In prototype form, the seed bags – grouped by individual farm – were collected from seven farmers who had responded to an advertisement, which Ericson & Ziegler had placed in the newspaper *Lancaster Farming*, soliciting participation in a collaborative art project entitled *Feed and Seed*. To become an artwork, the terms of *Feed and Seed* required that a collector first select a participating farm, based upon the displayed prototypes in Gracie Mansion Gallery. The price of the artwork, in turn, was determined by the price of seeds each farm would use for the upcoming season's crop. The exchange, then, was deceptively simple: the participating farmer – in this case Stolfus Farm – would receive the cost of the seed once the bags were sold by the gallery as art. One farm and one collector complied with the artists' proposal, resulting in the production of one artwork.

In its current form, *Feed and Seed* is a product of the farmer's sowing process, but it is also an aesthetic object. This begs the following question: since the money exchanged between the collector and farmer was used to buy the seeds for that season's crop, what was actually bought and sold at Grace Mansion Gallery? The crop or the artwork? The answer is both, in that Ericson & Ziegler intended to collapse the agricultural and aesthetic economies within the space of an art gallery. Meaning, in 1990 when *Feed and Seed* was first exhibited, as a prototype, it solicited the collector to complete the work, quite literally, in a Duchampian sense. When *Feed and Seed* is re-exhibited, as it has been at MOCA, it's really an *artifact* of the original exchange that occurred before the artwork had yet to exist as a tangible cultural commodity. Exhibited here again, in 2013, the work now asks us to consider the conceptual possibilities of present and future art production, more generally, when diverse economies such as agriculture and art are collapsed and recombined. In these tumultuous times of global neo-classical economics, it's an apt thought experiment for conceptual artists to undertake.

– Juli Carson



## Hassan Khan

*Blind Ambition*  
2012

HD video, 46 min.

Shot on two mobile phones, Hassan Khan's *Blind Ambition* is a 45-minute B/W dubbed, single channel video that was originally commissioned by dOCUMENTA 13. Khan shot the video in Egypt after the revolution at Tahrir Square had ousted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and before the Muslim Brotherhood was democratically elected and then subsequently deposed by the Military. To note that the political landscape in Egypt is *fluid* is a quintessential understatement. And yet, rather than illustrate the tumultuous events taking place in Egypt, *Blind Ambition* instead focuses on what Khan calls the "conditions of material culture."

Composed of nine sequences, the video presents different people interacting in various social situations throughout the streets of Cairo. Moving through the cityscape, Khan's actors talk quickly about nothing particularly important, just the minutia of everyday life. They alternately argue, play or daydream. This *mise-en-scène* seems improvisational and continuous. But the video is actually quite fictional and discontinuous; the script is Khan's and the edits are a series of jump cuts and gaps. In this way, *Blind Ambition* simultaneously draws us in and leaves us out, recalling Bertolt Brecht's famous alienation-effect, a tactic that was employed by many avant-garde filmmaker's of the 1960s to hinder the viewer's passive identification with a given character.

A case in point is the psychological effect of *Blind Ambition's* dubbed soundtrack. At first this tactic isn't readily apparent when Khan's actors are not walking in the street. In other scenes, however, the echoing din of the voices vis-a-vis the spectacle of the bustling city street sets off a cognitive dissonance. This dissonance, in turn, visualizes the repressed reality of all conventional film: that which seems so natural is, in fact, a constructed *representation*, if not a completely fabricated spectacle. On this note, it's true that the Egyptian revolution is never explicitly mentioned in *Blind Ambition*. But it is, nevertheless, consistently *inferred*, most notably by Khan's use of a cell phone to shoot his video – the same device used to video and tweet the events of the so-called Arab Spring to a world audience. As a mean's of both resisting and questioning such representation, the cell phone is used in *Blind Ambition* to capture the prosaic *other side* of life in Cairo that's never mentioned in the media: the endless stream of quotidian events that tick along at their own gradual pace.

– Juli Carson

June 25th

My James,

Been down to the trial  
& to see your grave. Just  
Never going back there  
till I'm dead. Then, at  
least they won't have to  
tell me.

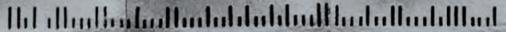
Yesterday, the preacher  
was sent up for 60 yrs.  
But your brother says  
he's out in a forgiving  
state. I'm just tired  
& miss my boy.

XX Mama

JAMES EARL CHANEY FOUNDATION



James Earl Chaney  
90 S.N.C.C  
Meridian, MS  
39301



## Mary Kelly

*My James*  
2008  
compressed lint

Although the postcard's narrative is fictional, Mary Kelly's *My James* is based upon a tragic historical fact. On June 21, 1964, three civil rights activists – Andrew Goodman, Michael H. Schwerner and James Earl Chaney – were murdered during a voter registration drive near Philadelphia, Mississippi. In Meridian, the neighboring town, 18 members of the KKK were subsequently indicted, although all were dismissed in the 1967 trial *United States vs. Cecil Price*, infamously known as the “Mississippi Burning” trial. Even though the Supreme Court overruled the verdict, and seven men were convicted, no one served more than six months. Finally, on June 2005, Edgar Ray Killen, well known as the instigator, was convicted and sentenced to 60 years on three counts of manslaughter.

Addressed to James Earl Chaney, care of S.N.N.C (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), *My James* is Kelly's imaginary response on behalf of the activist's surviving mother, Fannie Mae Chaney, to Killen's 2005 conviction. The postcard's poignant text is derived from interviews and archival material, although ultimately the text is Kelly's own. Nevertheless, the card has an air of authenticity, based in part on the inclusion of the “James Earl Cheney Foundation” stamp. This is just one of three such postcards Kelly made – one for each slain activist – that link a fictional narrative of mourning and melancholy to current real world organizations and events.

We should thus note that *My James*' postage date is June 26, 2005, just two days after Killen was actually convicted. Adjacent to this stamp, the fictional writer laments: “Yesterday the preacher was sent up for 60 yrs. But your brother says he's not in a forgiving state. I'm just tired and miss my boy.” This juxtaposition of factual tragedy and fictional poesis presents an imaginary point of identification with the historical specters that Kelly conjures within the symbolic landscape of civil rights history. A temporal pulse of *back and forth* thus ensues between the viewers *now* and the survivors *then*. Such is the allegorical impulse (to borrow Craig Owens' phrase) of *My James*. A work that speaks to us some 50 years after the original tragedy, in a moment when racial inequality remains so painfully and so spectacularly unresolved.

– Juli Carson



## Monica Majoli

*Black Mirror (Amy)*

2011

oil on panel

Monica Majoli's *Black Mirror* gives us a contemporary, psychoanalytic twist on the traditional use of the "Claude mirror" – that pre-photographic optical device used by landscape painters associated with the European Picturesque Movement in the 18th and 19th centuries. Named for Claude Lorrain, the seventeenth century landscape painter, these small, black, convex mirrors were designed for the artist or traveler to hold up to nature, while he turned his back to the scene at hand. The reflected image dramatically compressed the tonal values of the scene, while unifying its form and line. In so doing, the Claude mirror translated nature into a picturesque image suitable for painting.

Majoli updates and inverts this process, moving beyond the picturesque towards a conceptual, psychological landscape. Most notably, her paintings are constructed *interiors*, the subjects of which are her former lovers. Each sitter has been invited by the artist to pose in Majoli's bedroom, within which a prior resident had installed 1970s black mirrored paneling. Majoli then positioned her subject to be reflected in the mirror, whereupon a photograph of that reflection was taken as a basis for the subsequent painting. But it's more accurate to say that the mirrors gave an *image* back to the viewing subject, rather than a *reflection*. As Majoli herself observes: "Black mirrors seem to absorb the thing it reflects, giving back a half-image. It's otherworldly. The sense of the removal of self automatically occurs."

Simultaneously *absorbing* and *removing* the subject from view, Majoli's portraits are talismans of what Roland Barthes called the "Lover's Discourse." Just as the picturesque painter held his Claude mirror up to nature, in an effort to strip the landscape to its aesthetic core, so too does the artist-as-lover here employ the black mirror in an attempt to abstract the Beloved to her bare essence. And yet, if Majoli's paintings are an attempt to get at what Jacques Lacan called *that something in you more than you* – that abstract cause of the artist-as-lover's desire – then her paintings index a masochistic, melancholic activity. This is because any such retrieval of the Beloved's essence is necessarily illusive and impossible. But it's the *journey* of trying to do just that – to retrieve this object cause of desire – that Majoli's *Black Mirror* portraits so poignantly represent.

– Juli Carson





**Dorit Margreiter**

*Bearing Masonry, Concrete Block (1923)*

2012

archival pigment print

*Bearing Masonry, Concrete Block (1923)* provides a specter of modernity within the contemporary cultural landscape. The photograph is deceptively simple. A single concrete element, from Frank Lloyd Wright's Ennis Brown House in Los Angeles, sits on a white seamless background. A remain of the building's façade, the element is broken, as was the house after the 1993 Northridge earthquake and record rainfall of 2005. Soon after, Ennis House underwent a \$15 million restoration. As an historical landmark, the building is doubly renowned for its architectural feat – it's the last and largest of Wright's structures constructed from patterned and perforated concrete – and its ever-present citation in Hollywood cinema. As such, Ennis House may be a landmark, but its *site* is as unstable as the California terrain upon which it sits.

In *Bearing Masonry, Concrete Block (1923)* Margreiter aptly presents a relic of the house, isolated in a type of photographic no-man's land. Alone without a context, the concrete element could be a staged depiction of a broken sculpture: the remains of a single textile block from the house's façade. At the same time, it could stand as a model for the surrounding landscape: a single unit of the concrete blocks Wright made from decomposed granite extracted from the house's site. Based on this ambiguity, the element evokes two contradictory strains of modernity. On the one hand, if it is a broken sculpture, then it's a self-referential, transportable artwork that is functionally *site-less*. On the other hand, if it's a model for landscape, then it's a *site-specific* work, constructed from the ground upon which it stands and from which it crumbles.

The photograph's ambiguity further evokes the fragmented representation of Ennis House by the film industry. Since cinema is a virtual landscape, existing beyond any dialectic of site/non site, it's unsurprising that Ennis House has been broken up into pieces and devoured by filmmakers and viewers alike. Witness its relief ornament refashioned as a doorframe in *Mulholland Drive* or the façade repositioned for Deckard's house in *Bladerunner*. In the end, while conservationists are busily restoring the actual structure of Ennis House's past, Margreiter, by photographing it's singular broken concrete unit, reminds of us what *remains* of the House as it traverses the larger cultural landscape of art, architecture and film today.

– Juli Carson

The image features a collage of torn paper. A map of Alaska is visible in the background, with the word "ALASKA" printed on it. The text is arranged in a list of news headlines. At the bottom right, there are two strips of torn paper with the date "AUGUST 5 2011" and the name "CHIGNIK".

Fight for food in Mogadishu leaves 7 dead  
Far-right anger, violence thrive on Europe's edges  
Media group urges UN probe of strike on Libya TV  
Italy demands NATO probe over Libya boat migrants  
Polish populist politician Andrzej Lepper dies  
British teen slain by polar bear in Norway Arctic  
Belarus rights group leader faces 7 years in jail  
AP Exclusive: AQIM not ready to attack Europe  
Ukraine's ex-PM Tymoshenko arrested  
Cuba upholds jailed American's 15-year sentence

AUGUST 5 2011

CHIGNIK

## Daniel Joseph Martinez

*She Could See Russia From Her House,  
the future is worth consideration, 2013*  
mixed media, courtesy the artist and Roberts & Tilton

*She Could See Russia From Her House, the future is worth consideration* began with the following proposition. From 2010 - 2011, Daniel J. Martinez would spend the month of August of each year living in Alaska. Upon arrival, his first objective was to visit as many destinations as humanly possible, a difficult task given the state's barren terrain. Since Alaskans travel by small planes – the way Angelenos do by car – travel entailed hiring pilots and planes to move Martinez throughout the state as if he, himself, were a piece of mail. The goal was to reach 28 cities, the same number of U.S. “red states” at that time. Data from his first trip then established the procedural parameter of his second trip: the production of 28 map collages – four editions each for a total of 112 maps – in just 28 days.

A classic “duration piece” – whereby the existence of things are stated in terms of time and place – the work's conceptual proposition seamlessly dovetails with the work's production process. The work's base is a state map purchased from Raven Maps and Images, a company that has painstakingly revived the art of topographic cartography. Martinez then silkscreened a constructivist shape – evoking the Soviet avant-garde – onto the map in the form of a white mask. He then retrieved world news from Yahoo, exactly as it appeared, and screened the text over the white shapes. Finally, a “stamp” denoting the date of the news was spraypainted in the corner. The entire process would occur four times daily – within the 24-hour news cycle – ending with the artwork's deposit at the local post office. 84 of the maps were mailed out to friends and colleagues. One set of 28 was mailed to the artist's home in Los Angeles.

The work's title refers to Governor Sarah Palin's infamous statement, “I can see Russia from my house,” a blunder that both killed her 2008 bid for the Republican Vice Presidency and branded her the primary ideologue for “red state” politics. We must therefore heed the work's subtitle, “the future is worth consideration.” While mailing red state maps to friends re-enacts a type of global potlatch, it also comes in the form of a warning and a proposition: a foreboding look into the future at what might come to pass and a suggestive look to the past when aesthetic, political and geographical propositions were critically recombined and shared. This is the performative invocation that *She Could See Russia From Her House, the future is worth consideration* makes as both a phrase and an artwork.

– Juli Carson



## Florian Pumhösl

5 Themen, 2012

Heliographs on paper, photos: Werner Kaligofsky  
After: Alexander Rodchenko, *Expressive Rhythm*

*5 Themen* is a portfolio containing five photographic studies of Alexander Rodchenko's painting *Expressive Rhythm*, derived from Florian Pumhösl's 35mm film installation of the same name. Pumhösl's *Expressive Rhythm* began with a lucky find: two nearly identical abstract paintings produced by two different artists in two incongruous moments. In 1943, Alexander Rodchenko produced *Expressive Rhythm* in a gestural style that anticipated Jackson Pollock's black and white paintings of 1951. As legend has it, the two paintings were produced at a point when each artist had "lost it." For Clement Greenberg, Pollock's calligraphic painting was a relapse into figuration. For the Soviets, Rodchenko's painting was a bourgeois indulgence of abstract distortion. Though the two paintings looked similar, they were thus opposed in their cultural meaning. However, when taken together, the paintings paradoxically and defiantly exist *between* the categories of formalist individualism versus socialist collectivism.

But, there is more to the story. In 1931, to comply with Stalin's socialist realist mandate, Rodchenko accepted the commission to photograph the White Sea Canal's fabrication for *USSR in Construction*. Rodchenko made three trips to Karelia to produce his epic propagandistic spread for the magazine. While he was in Karelia, Rodchenko *also* made photographic studies of the frozen Baltic countryside, particularly its trees, which he produced with the same formalist eye at which the Soviet's had bristled with regards to Rodchenko's 1927 photographic study of pine trees in Pushkino.

Enter Pumhösl's own *Expressive Rhythm*, made *in situ* at Karelia, where the artist filmed the same trees previously photographed by Rodchenko. Pumhösl's film – consisting of eight fixed-frame shots punctuated by four stretches of black leader – projects what at first appears to be a black and white still image of a tree, its intricate mesh of leafless branches *frozen* into shapes evoking Rodchenko and Pollock's respective paintings. But Pumhösl's return to the Rodchenko of 1943 is neither a celebration of a revolutionary's return to gestural painting nor a political radicalization of Pollock's painting of 1951. Rather, through Pumhösl's camera lens, the frozen tree *pivots* between the trauma of the Soviet avant-garde's failure (realism) and the collapse of high modernism's transcendentalist ideals (abstraction).

– Juli Carson



**Connie Samaras**

*Angelic States - Event Sequence /  
NY Financial District, WTC November 2001*

2001  
digital c-print from film

Connie Samaras's *Angelic States – Event Sequence* derives from Walter Benjamin's ninth thesis on the philosophy of history, wherein history is pictured as an angel: "His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, [the angel] sees a single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet." This static notion of history – being stuck amidst the expanse of past ruins – lies buried under the dialectician's usual sequence of events. Hannah Arendt connects Benjamin's non-dialectical historicism to Charles Baudelaire's notion of the flâneur. In *Illuminations*, she notes: "It is to [the flâneur], aimlessly strolling through the crowds in the big cities in studied contrast to their hurried, purposeful activity, that things reveal themselves in their secret meaning."

This same aimless strolling produced *Angelic States – Event Sequence / NY Financial District, WTC November 2001*. Samaras had been staying with friends near the WTC on the morning of Sept 11, 2001. Soon after she wandered over to Ground Zero and photographed the wreckage. Her camera eye lingers upon the catastrophe laid at her feet, a ruin that in the moment must have seemed like none other. Gazing at this image, 12 years hence, the spectacle now collapses in the cavalcade of man-made ruins that preceded it. Within the vector of this historical gaze, we too are called to linger upon the image in the hopes that we could – in Benjamin's terms – awaken the dead and join together what has been smashed to pieces. But of course, this is impossible. Instead, like Benjamin's angel of history, a storm called progress irresistibly propels us towards the future, as this pile of debris grows skyward before our eyes.

One weekday morning, in 2004, I found myself wandering through "The Site" – the no less ominous name New Yorkers had by then coined the former "Ground Zero." In search of an ATM, I was directed by local firefighters to a nearby Korean grocery. Once there, I was redirected to a backroom, which, as it turned out, was a 24hour speakeasy. It was as if pre-Guilliani New York had been buried deep within the crevices now covered up by the \$3.9 billion project of rebuilding One World Trade Center. From the perspective of Benjamin's angel, when I gaze at Samaras's *New York Financial District, WTC*, I hold these three moments in my mind – 2001, 2004 and 2013 – as in a palimpsest, never a sequence.

– Juli Carson



**Bruce Yonemoto**

*The End of the World at the Edge of the Earth,*  
2013

2 channel HD Digital Installation

Bruce Yonemoto's film installation, *The End of the World at the Edge of the Earth*, was initiated by the poetic observation that two things are simultaneously growing in Argentina: a glacier named Perito Moreno in Patagonia and a clinical psychoanalytic practice founded by Jacques Lacan. One component thus captures Perito Moreno on 16mm film – made from a single 10-minute film load – the soundtrack of which combines natural sound with an original score by Mayo Thompson. While a second 16mm film recreates, *in situ*, a Happening arranged by the conceptual artist and Lacanian theorist Oscar Masotta in Buenos Aires in 1966, called *The Helicopter*. When taken together, the two films reflect the dualistic nature of the Argentine terrain, on the one hand, and 1960s avant-garde aesthetics, on the other.

For instance, in 1966 the Nouvelle Vague defined one branch of the cinematic avant-garde, from which Jean-Luc Godard established his early auteur style. concurrently, a second branch was represented by the likes of Tony Conrad, whose groundbreaking structuralist film, *The Flicker*, consisted only of two alternating frames – one black and one white. Hence the two film avant-gardes of the 1960s: one narrative, the other abstract. Jointly, these legacies comprised an aesthetic binary that divided the Northern Hemisphere's neo-avant-garde into rival camps.

Working in the Southern Hemisphere, Masotta precociously explored and defied such binaries in both his writings and his artwork, combining legacies of Surrealism, existentialism, psychoanalysis and Situationist practice. In Yonemoto's filmic re-enactment of *The Helicopter* – an homage to Masotta's approach – it is notable that *both* Godard and Conrad's strategies are employed, beginning with an implied narrative and ending with a flickering film. But it is Perito Moreno – a landlocked frozen terra firma – that best deconstructs all binaries: at once being land *and* water, terrain *and* subterranean, static *and* mobile, historical *and* contemporary. Yonemoto's large-scale film projection of the glacier thus provides a moment of poetic reflection, connoting the space of the undifferentiated unconscious, where anything and everything is possible. It's a moment of endless potentialities – aesthetically, politically, environmentally – before the viewing subject returns back to the world's all too limited propositions of the merely *possible*.

– Juli Carson