NEW ART examiner

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A Story Worth the Telling

Nancy Nesvet

Cross Cultural Histories of the Black Experience 1920-1940 – Lanita K Brooks Colbert
Sound, Found and Unbound – Mark Bloch
Oscar Nitzchke, Avant-Garde Architect of Modernity 1900 -1991 – Lea Lee
Arte! Arte! Arte! – Elga Wimmer
Samurai – Jorge Miguel Benitez
Brazilian Colour – Mary Fletcher

Interview – Sonia Bryce talks to London Editor, David Goldenberg

Film Review:
Larry Rivers: Bad Boy of the Art World – Rina Oh Amen
Zone of Interest – Annie Markovich

The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading this independent journal of art criticism.

If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall.

The New Art Examiner has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Any art scene needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, insider trading will determine success in this troubled art world.

You can participate directly by commenting on our web site.

All donations will be recognised.

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Lucky Strike Cigarettes, Larry Rivers *(see page 27)*

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner Foundation's aim is to educate youth and the public in general about the creation, interpretation and appreciation of criticism in the visual arts through an open source, magazine style website called www.newartexaminer.net

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The *New Art Examiner* welcomes reviews on books of visual cultural significance.
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Please include the full details of the title, author, publisher, date and ISBN.`

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Deadline for articles/reviews: Pitch at any time:
February 5th, April 5th, June 5th, August 5th, October 5th, December 5th

QUOTE of the MONTH:

"You have to let the viewers come away with their own conclusions. If you dictate what they should think, you've lost it."

Maya Lin

NEW ART examiner CiC

July 2024
Volume 38. No.6

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ARTICLES

6 **A STORY WORTH THE TELLING** Nancy Nesvet
9 **CROSS CULTURAL HISTORIES OF THE BLACK EXPERIENCE 1920-1940** Lanita K Brooks Colbert
15 **SOUND, FOUND AND UNBOUND** Mark Bloch
22 **OSCAR NITZCHKE, AVANT-GARDE ARCHITECT OF MODERNITY 1900 -1991** Lea Lee

REVIEWS

34 **ART! ARTE! ARTE!** Elga Wimmer
36 **BRAZILIAN COLOUR** Mary Fletcher

DEPARTMENTS:

5 **SPEAKEASY SAMURAI** Jorge Miguel Benitez
31 **INTERVIEW** Sonia Bryce talks to London Editor, David Goldenberg

FILM REVIEW:

27 **LARRY RIVERS: BAD BOY OF THE ART WORLD** Rina Oh Amen
35 **ZONE OF INTEREST** Annie Markovich

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Cover

Ayana V. Jackson,
When the Spirit of Kalundo comes so does Kianda, 2019
Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim

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Ayana V. Jackson: Crown. *(see page 9)*
Collaboration with Mwambi Wassaki
Courtesy of the Smithsonian Museum of African Art

SPEAKEASY

Each issue, the New Art Examiner invites a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest.

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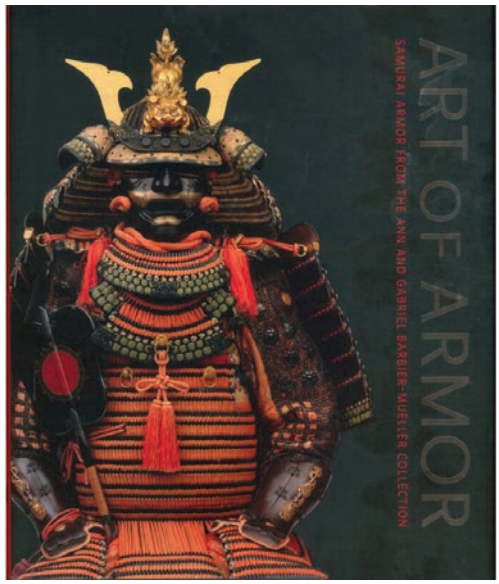
Art Meets Brutality: Samurai at the VMFA



Few warriors have ever been as elegant or aesthetically sensitive as the samurai of Japan…and few have ever been as callous. The current exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), in Richmond, Virginia, highlights the former and hints at the latter with curatorial excellence and scholarly discretion.

The exhibition, titled *Samurai Armor from the Collection of Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller*, runs from April 20 through August 4, 2024. It features nearly 200 items ranging from armor and weapons to textiles and woodcuts. Everything is exquisitely designed and expertly crafted with the finest materials of their time: and therein lies the danger. The visual feast pulls the viewer into a world of harmoniously coordinated colors and nature-inspired forms that belie the true purpose of the objects on display, namely, the dismemberment of human beings with the best steel weapons of their time. Fortunately, the scholarship and linguistic clarity of the accompanying texts explain the context of the objects without judging or romanticizing the samurai. The result is a sobering counterpoint to the simplistic depictions of Japan that plague both Hollywood and Japanese exports such as anime.

The strength of the exhibition lies in what it does not say. There is something poignant and apt about a display of military beauty at a time that threatens a third world war and even an American civil war. All too often, the American art world shies away from military concerns except to condemn soldiers as cartoonish brutes led by unthinking monsters. The result is seemingly cathartic work that validates the biases of an audience predisposed toward uninformed contempt for the armed forces. The VMFA exhibition of samurai armor and weapons disrupts those biases without editorial pandering.

The objects on display destroy more than lives: they rip apart the absurd notion that art improves humanity and reinforces the fact that the most aesthetically sensitive and highly educated people can be among the most brutal and callous due to their capacity for abstract thought and moral compartmentalization. As with many modern warriors, the samurai were often intellectuals. They studied Zen, performed the tea ceremony, attended Noh performances, collected art, recited poetry, and did not hesitate to butcher one another along with any civilian who stood in the way. Their much-vaunted investment in "honor" was a smokescreen for an almost postmodern selfishness and narcissism that culminated in the choice of suicide over surrender. They were ashamed of being defeated. They felt no shame in murdering the innocent. Perhaps we should all study the samurai and their sense of entitlement as we gallop toward the death of our civilization. They may teach us a thing or two about the dangers of hubris and positive affirmations disguised as art.

A Story Worth the Telling

Nancy Nesvet

Ayana V. Jackson: Journey of the Deep-Sea Dweller, Who Among Us Has Killed an Albatross, 2022
Courtesy of the Smithsonian Museum of Art

Artists are storytellers. We make up worlds, connections, visions of people and places, the best connected to who we are and our own personal history and beliefs. The fictions sprout from memories of what has been, who we and who those before us were, who we hope to become and our hopes and dreams and nightmares of the societies that might ensue. Some are audacious. Others allude to events, writings and performances that have gone before. Some recount histories and some express dreams. All are the products of creative minds, creating worlds of artists' own making.

I once proposed a conceptual art project to Graham Campbell, the head of the Art Program at Brandeis University. At a crit, I would sit at the center of a circle of fellow art students and tell them about the beautiful painting I saw. Upon questioning as to where it was, I would answer that it was in my head, in my imagination. Graham replied with a strong "No". To my questioning "Why Not", he replied that it is the job of the visual artist to create something that people can see, something concrete, distinct from literature where the reader forms their own picture from the words of the author, so destroying my conceptual art project in one fell swoop.

In Venice, during the 2017 Venice Art Biennale, Damien Hirst, in his installation, Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable created fictional artifacts, inventing a material culture for a civilization, named for a South African heavy metal band, and a story of its demise, in the sinking of a ship containing sculpture, statues, art, valuables, money and more from that fictionalized civilization. He then exhibited artifacts allegedly rescued from the sea floor and a film depicting the sunken ship attesting to its imagined existence, fulfilling his conception of the ship's sinking, corroborating the story.

Borrowing from Samuel Beckett's short play, "Krapp's Last Tape", Maurizio Catalan, exhibiting at Art Basel 2019, taped a banana to the wall. Undoubtedly inspired by Beckett's concept, in Beckett's play where Krapp speaks into a banana, substituting for a microphone with the only other prop a **tape** recorder documenting the actor's failed career, Catalan's project goes on to have a performance artist eat the banana, increasing the value of the installation manifold, but also underlining the installation as a performance, which is, of course, what Beckett's play was. Importantly, as a visual artist, Catalan adapted Beckett's words (and props) minimized to

Ayana V. Jackson: When the Spirit of Kalundo comes so does Kianda, 2019. HR.
Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim Gallery

Ayana V. Jackson with Rama Diaw: Collar.
Courtesy of the Smithsonian Museum of African Art

only concrete elements leaving the viewer to discover the connection to Beckett's original concept.

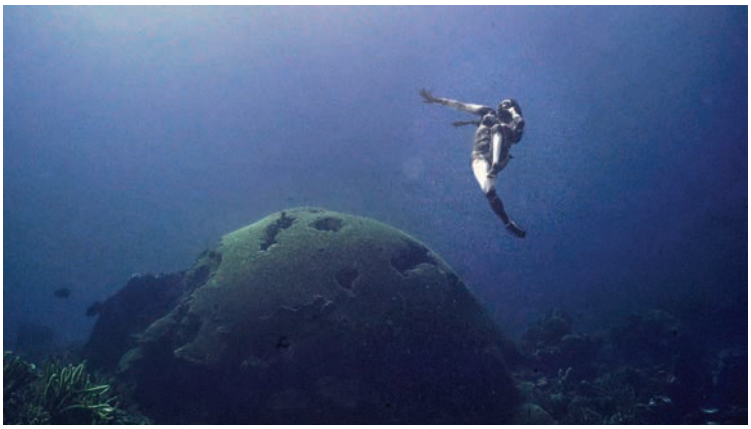
Both conceptually inspired works left me cold, as opposed to the work I recently saw at the Smithsonian African Art Museum by Ayana V. Jackson. Jackson has done it better. Her identification as an African-American woman and her impeccable research into a compendium of myths resulting in a personal myth of African and Caribbean culture produced a beautifully illustrated, convincing installation at the Smithsonian Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., on view until the end of the year.

Born In New Jersey, resident in Brooklyn, Paris, and Johannesburg, adopted into her larger family in Accra, Ghana, the quadrilingual artist has researched fashion history, history of photography, Afrofuturist philosophy and African religions and myths to create this project fusing video, photography, anthropology and fashion, both creating the costumes she wears in photographic digital prints, and the story of the culture she has invented and illustrates.

Introduced by a video screen of the sea's gentle waves surrounding an African woman in the Atlantic Ocean, having survived a shipwreck of a vessel carrying pregnant women from Africa for enslavement in the Americas, Jackson proceeds to show us photographs of those women in dress adapted from sixteenth century African and French, British, Netherlandish, and Portugese origins.

According to her narrative, the pregnant women who walked through the sea began a civilization that traces its roots to Drexciya, a mid-Atlantic mythical nation first envisioned by 1990's Detroit based techno-musicians, James Stinson and Gerald Donald. In Stinson's and Donald's version, enslaved African women jumped or were thrown from the slave ships into the sea. Ayana Jackson re-imagined a scenario where the surviving pregnant women were met by female water spirits who guided to birth a culture in the new Drexciya. Jackson's extensive research led to consideration of pertinent myths and imagery of super-heroine deities including Mame Coumbabang of Senegal, Yemaya and Olokun of Nigeria, relating to Yoruba deities in the African diaspora and of Kianda of Angola, and spiritual beings including the Dogon Nomali of Mali, and Sangoma. Imagery of South African healers and priestesses and more from Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago, all with superpowers particular to each of the super deities and spiritual beings portrayed in the exhibited photographic prints added to the feminist viewpoint of the story.

While difficult to ignore the Christian comparison with Jesus walking upon water, a miracle, recounted in the New Testament, Jackson's story seems possible. The materials accessed for costumes depicted in the photographs and paintings, fishing nets, spoons perhaps rescued from the ship, shredded plastic bags, reminiscent of those strangling our oceans today, seaweed, reeds indigenous to an island nation



Ayana V. Jackson, Journey of the Deep-Sea Dweller, Who Among Us Has Killed an Albatross, 2022
Courtesy of the Smithsonian Museum of Ar

in the Caribbean or other island groups in the Americas fused with Elizabethan collars, rusting imperial crowns, wigs, here intricately braided, and other features of imperialist British, French, Portugese and Netherlandish dress, made from currently found materials in the sea and land, add to the believability of the story.

The gallery, with photographic portraits surrounding the viewer having entered through the room showing the video screen of the women walking through the water, appears like a gallery of family portraits in a sixteenth century British or European manor house. Aware of the possibility of the audience inferring exploitation in the use of portraits of others, Jackson photographs herself in the various costumes and persona, emphasizing that it is her history, her story. Walking from the bright light of the video's sea, to the darkness enveloping the portraits and associated objects like flip flop rubber sandals, spoons, found mechanical parts, reflective beads approximating jewels, that might have washed ashore or been dumped into the sea, or textiles made from hemp or indigo plants sourced on the island testifies to the impression that this place could be anywhere, magnifying the fear and courage of those who walk to an unknown place to begin a newfound culture using objects and myths rescued from the civilization left behind. It is a testament to making stories live, through material culture and visual art.

Ayana Jackson is not content however with visuals, adding sound. Jackson's 2002 exhibition, That, and Full Circle: A Survey of Hip Hop in Ghana, was noted by the senior curator of her current exhibition, Karen E. Milbourne as having "revealed the artist's ability to immerse herself in a community and tease out under-appreciated histories of Africa's central position in global culture." Jackson again uses this anthropological immersion in Drexciya. Jackson explains in the audio MP4 accompanying this article her extensive research and consequent melding of African myths and traditions to invent her own. She interviewed people who knew about Senegalese water spirits in diasporan literature and oral myths of spirits who midwifed pregnant women, capturing the babies in the ocean; the Yoruba pantheon and musical traditions of Nigeria, Haiti, Puerto Rico and Brazil, the Yoruba collector of bones and bodies. She researched the Angolan, Portugese and European mermaids or sirens, and adapted the appearance of the Origin mother, Quiandra, who reflected the twinkle of the moon of the sea at night, in the reflective beads in the costumes of those portrayed in the portraits and on the models. Jackson referred extensively to the Yoruba religions that traveled to the New World, that the women took "to the diaspora," she narrates, and especially to the Yoruba river spirit that communes while walking with women in South Africa to a place where the sweet and saltwater meet, what we call brackish water.

Unlike the work of Hirst and Catalan, Jackson's work is not a one-liner. It stems from research and personal investment in the traditions and history of a people that is her own, to which she belongs. Her grandfather was a follower of Marcus Garvey, famous for the Back to Africa movement, who bought and owned land in Accra, Ghana, and who sponsored relatives to come to the US. Within her family is Jerry Rawling who sought repatriation to Ghana. Jackson is a member of a family of three generations in Ghana, her adopted country. Hirst cannot claim this personal connection for the work portrayed, nor personal investment in its portrayal. Catalan is not honest about where his influence comes and does not understand the ramifications of that Beckett story to his personal history, if it exists. Graham Campbell is right. It is the job of the artist to make concrete the story, but that story is much better when there is research and a strong personal relation to its telling. Ayana Jackson has done it all.

Cross Cultural Histories of the Black Experience, 1920-1940

Lanita K. Brooks Colbert

Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism currently showing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, addresses the controversy created by the MET's 1969 exhibition, *Harlem on My Mind: The Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968*. The 1969 exhibition excluded works of fine art and sculptures by Black artists. Instead, the MET presented a social narrative of Harlem told through reproductions of newspaper clippings, photographs, film and audio recordings. The main critique of *Harlem on My Mind* was that it did not contain a single work of fine art by a Black artist. The BECC, Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, formed directly in response to the MET show, raised public awareness of discriminatory practices in the art world through public demonstrations which led to public unrest and boycotts of the exhibit before it opened. The MET listened and in 1972, consulted black art history academic, Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims, who later became the first African American head curator for the Department of Twentieth Century Art, and special project guest curators including Dr. David Driskell, artist and scholar, long considered a leading authority on African American art and Dr. Regina A. Perry, the first African American woman to receive a PhD in art history. Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims, during her twenty-year career at the MET, was responsible for the acquisition of dozens of important works by Blacks, Latinx, and Indigenous American artists, including many by women. During decades since the 1969 *Harlem on My Mind* exhibit, there has been greater commitment at the MET to intentionally acquire work by Black artists in multiple collecting areas. Now, *Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism* gives us a clear and comprehensive picture of global black creativity, and its roots and aesthetics around art, race and identity while exposing society to the black experience and civil rights in the post-reconstruction and Jim Crow era. The exhibition opens a conversation on how literature, art, music, and theater of the Harlem Renaissance Movement played a central role in black identity from 1920 to 1940 in America and even today.

Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism presents 160 works by Black artists from the Harlem

Laura Wheeler Waring: Marian Anderson 1944. oil on canvas.

Renaissance movement of 1921-1940, contemporary works of French, Belgian, German and English painters with Dutch and French Caribbean representation, including work by the present-day contemporary artist, Kara Walker and literary works of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke,

James Van Der Zee: Luncheon Party, Harlem 1927.
gelatin silver print

and W.E.B. Du Bois. The exhibition delves into many different aspects of the movement, mostly through the lens of paintings and sculptures, with illustrations, literature, printed posters, and photography focusing on the rising black middle class in US Northern and Midwestern cities bringing into full view pivotal moments in African American history from slavery, emancipation and the Harlem Renaissance. It is a comprehensive visual celebration of the complexity of the black experience known as the Harlem Renaissance Movement and its influential legacy.

Viewing the exhibition with a friend, a prolific collector of black art, we were in awe of number of works of well-known artists, such as Bearden's *The Block*, Jacob Lawrence's *Pool Parlor*, William H. Johnson's *Vieille Maison at Porte* and Mailou Jones's *Cauliflower and Pumpkin* that we have never seen as originals or reproductions. Photographs by James Van Der Zee were more than pictures of well-dressed upper middle class, black intellectuals and jazz but provided a historical creative space for black gay and queer in America from 1920-30. However, we left asking ourselves, why are we only now seeing the works of Archibald Motley's *Nightlife*, Laura Fuller Waring's *Girl in Green Cap*, Aaron Douglas' *Aspiration*, Winold Reiss' *Portrait of Alain Locke*, Palmer Hayden's *The Dame from Harlem*, Archibald J. Motley, Jr.'s *Brown Girl After a Bath* and the Self-Portrait by Elizabeth Catlett?

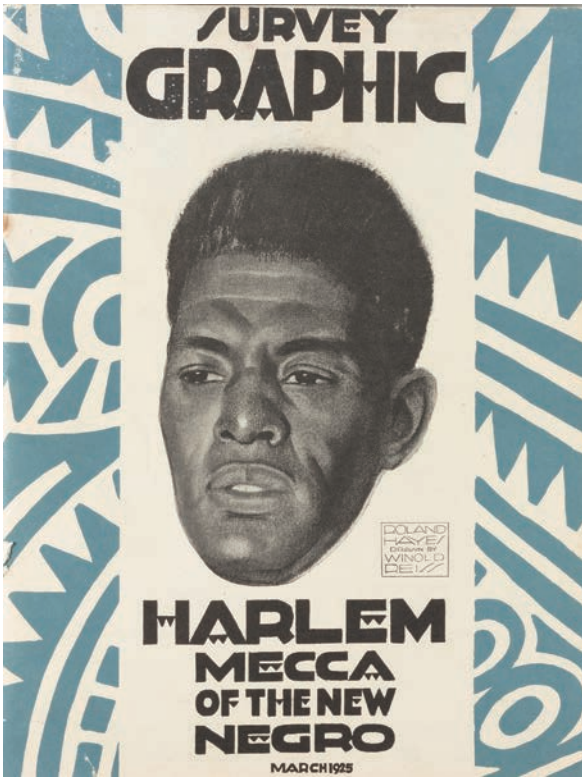
My art traveling buddy stated "from the start, I couldn't help but feel that this exhibition would never happen again." So, we took our time. The experience was incredible. I was so happy to see the Elizabeth Catlett self-portrait, with my own eyes! I walked away so grateful. I purchased the coffee table book and am currently on my fourth reading, cover to cover. The exhibition celebrated the hybrid culture formed between Black America, Africa, the Caribbean, and Western Europe and expertly showed how it reframed the ideas of twentieth century Modernist art in black artistic communities and its impact shaping present day black artists like Kara Walker, Kerry Marshall, Kehinde Wiley, Amy Sherald, Lauren

Archibald J. Motley, Jr.: The Picnic. 1936. oil on canvas.

Simpson, Rasheed Johnson, Nick Cave, McArthur Binion, Mark Bradford, Jordon Castell and Amoako Boafo, all whose works continue to delve into profound issues of race, identity and true representation of black experience in the world. The exhibition's cross-cultural artistic approach to the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance embraced the aesthetics of social consciousness and how it became part of a culture-defining zeitgeist.

I learned the Harlem Renaissance was not only the 'rent parties', the uptown clubs like Cotton Club, where only black entertainers and black staff were allowed, so white patrons could seek out illegal alcohol until Prohibition ended in1933. Nor was it only listening to the foot tapping sounds of Duke Ellington's *Take the A Train* or doing the lindy hop to Cab Calloway's, the *Hi De Ho Man* or watching Josephine Baker's amazing footwork in her 'Banana Skirt'. Rather, it was a blend of histories of the black experience in Upper Manhattan, Harlem, the center of an explosion of art, writing and ideas that has since become legendary. The transatlantic mastery of European Post impressionist artist's works such as Matisse's, *Women in White* portraying his black muse, Laurette, and Hale Woodruff's, *Card Players* influenced in part by Cezanne's *Card Players* produced the 'modern Negro art'. Aaron Douglas' four panels mural *Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery to Reconstructio*n, under the sponsorship of the Works Progress Administration, demonstrated his signature style of sharp-edged flat figures that was popularized by nineteenth century French painter, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes.

This exhibition documents the Harlem Renaissance, begun about 1918, after World War I, that continued to 1937, a movement of race pride and activism to direct social, political, economic reform as African Americans were becoming keepers of their own destiny in the American Dream. Most importantly, the Harlem Renaissance instilled in African Americans across the country a new spirit of self-determination and pride, a new social consciousness, and a new



Survey Graphic: Volume LIII, No. 11, March 1, 1925.
Harlem Mecca of the New Negro

Charles Henry Alston: Girl in a Red Dress 1934.
oil on canvas

commitment to political activism, all of which would provide a foundation for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

The Harlem Renaissance was a global rebirth of black cultural heritage driven by the black experience in America with rebirth meaning reincarnating to new characteristics and a different physical form. The New Negro of the Harlem Renaissance were African Americans who were considered more refined, educated, sophisticated, and involved in the political process. During the era known as The Golden Age of Harlem, 1920-1929 Harlem became a destination for African Americans of all backgrounds. From unskilled laborers to an educated middle-class, they shared common experiences of slavery, emancipation, and racial oppression, as well as a determination to forge a new identity as free people. As the Great Migration picked up speed from 1910 until 1940, it began the push factors for African American workers to relocate to northern and midwestern cities. Poor economic conditions in the South, exacerbated by oppression in the form of Jim Crow laws and labor shortages after World War 1 began the ending of 'plantation – slave culture' and led to the unfolding of visual art, poetry, literature, theater, and music of the New Negro movement. The New Negro movement and the artistic outpouring extended to poetry, novels, theater, music and visual arts in New York, Chicago, Detroit and Pittsburgh. This juggernaut was centered in Harlem, home of many leading African American thought leaders, writers, artists, and entertainers. Their goal was to bring the African Americans into the modern world of the 19th century.

Migrating southern blacks did not want to simulate into the urban culture of "white controlled" cities. They saw an opportunity to build their own oasis for education, the arts, music and cultural pride. In 1925, Alain Locke's periodical, *The New Negro*, the social voice for Harlem Renaissance, an anthology of fiction, poetry and essays on African and African American art and literature was created to chronicle the black cultural heritage as cultural relativism through the arts. Winold Reiss, the German American born artist moved to America because of his fascination with Native American and Black American people. Alain Locke was one of a series of black intellectuals he illustrated for the social reform journal *Survey Graphics*. Reiss' portraiture of W.E. B. DuBois, shows his determination to show how African Americans viewed race as a socially constructed concept that greatly impacts peoples' lives, rather than a mere biological distinction. These visionaries' philosophy was the blueprint for the Harlem Renais-

William Henry Johnson: Moon over Harlem 1943-44.
oil on plywood

sance Movement's black identity as the New Negro. Notable architects of the Harlem Renaissance included Langston Hughes, the 'Poet laureate of Harlem'. Winold Reiss' stylized background of the portrait of Langston Hughes conveys a dynamic impression of Black urban experience, while the foreground features Reiss' sympathetically drawn portrait of Hughes as the man who translated that experience into poetry. Zora Neale Hurston, writer, activist celebrated black culture of the rural south and wrote the autobiographical essay in 1928 *How It feels to Be Colored Me*. Music, theater, and poetry of James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Jean Tomer, Paul Robeson, Rhodes Scholar, and Duke Ellington, jazz musician, Josephine Baker, entertainer and activist became the inspiration for Post-Impressionist work by black painters. Modernism in the angular composition and cubist works of Jacob Lawerence is portrayed in his 60 individual paintings depicting the Great Migration pilgrimage to social justice.

The exhibition includes portraits of Alain Locke, a Harvard- educated writer, critic and teacher known as the 'Dean of the Harlem Renaissance' and of W.E B. DuBois, Harvard-educated sociologist and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), writer of 21 books, who wanted African Americans to seek education, rid the stereotype of the head down and shuttle along to become sophisticated, aware, and involved in the political process that was changing rapidly in America. During the years of 1919-1927, four notable social reform publications; *Crisis*, the written voice for the NAACP, Opportunity, written voice for the National Urban League, Messenger, the political and literary magazine published by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owens, both Socialists and Marcus Garvey's Negro World, Back to Africa became platforms for African American illustrators and writers to develop an authentic voice in American society.

Aaron Douglas was the first artist to document the history of the African American experience through visual art. Douglas contributed designs for

Samuel Joseph Brown, Jr: Self Portrait 1941. watercolor, charcoal, graphite on paper.

Locke's The New Negro, and, on that basis, the author and publisher heralded the artist as a pioneering Africanist. Ideas and art relating to the Harlem Renaissance reverberated throughout the United States, Western Europe, and the Caribbean. Charles Alston, painter, sculptor, and the African American supervisor for the Works Progress Administration and Meta Warrick Fuller, sculptor, working in bronze to create naturalist objects including Ethiopia Statue depicted the African Diaspora and African American experience. Her work symbolized the emergence of the New Negro and the important role of black cultural heritage. William H. Johnson, born in South Carolina during Reconstruction, left home in 1917, educated in fine arts in New York and Provincetown R.I. and spent most of his time from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s in Europe, where he was influenced by Post-Impressionism and Expressionism. Upon returning to New York, he adopted a self-consciously vernacular style marked by vivid colors and flat, distorted compositions, looking at African sculpture and African American models for inspiration. Archibald Motley was an American painter best known for his joyous depictions of black social life, as in *Carnival* and jazz culture in vibrant city scenes. Fascinated with natural and artificial light, Motley chose glowing violet- red tones. Of one of his most famous paintings, *Nightlife*, the artist saw the opportunity to present, in his own words, "an expression of the numerous shades and colors which exist in such great variety" among African Americans in Chicago. Others were Augusta Savage, sculptor, James Van Der Zee, photographer of urban landscapes and the resiliency of African Americans in 1920's Harlem, and Laura Wheeler Waring, best known for her portraits of prominent African Americans such as Marion Anderson, now in the Washington D.C.'s National Portrait Gallery. All the forementioned archivists and chroniclers of the Harlem Renaissance Movement were committed to the narrative of the oppression and the resistance to stop the 'New Negro' from embracing the rapidly changing black experience in 1920's and 30's America.

The Harlem Renaissance became a "spiritual coming of age" for African Americans in 19th century America. Creatives using literature, poetry, visual arts, sculpture, theater, and music of the Harlem Renaissance movement transformed the social disillusionment of race pride to pride in black life and identity, rising consciousness of inequality and discrimination, and interest in who we are as African Americans in the rapidly changing modern world. Although the creative boom of the Harlem Renaissance ended in 1933 with the stock market crash and The Great Depression, with the Harlem Race Riot of 1935 tolling the death knell for the Harlem Renaissance, the Harlem Renaissance continues to reverberate in modern culture, acting as a cornerstone for artists, writers and performers who seek to explore and celebrate the intricacies of the African American experience while confronting the pressing issues of our time.

Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism
Metropolitan Museum of Art, Feb 2024 – July 28th 2024

Sound, Found and Unbound

Mark Bloch

While Fluxus has always been acknowledged for its diversity, *Out of Bounds: Japanese Women Artists in Fluxus* (October 13, 2023-January 21,2024 at the Japan Society in New York highlights four female artists who came from various parts of Japan to New York City in the early 1960s and became influential participants in the Fluxus movement. Directly resulting from Curator Midori Yoshimoto's book, *Into Performance*, the exhibition shines a New York spotlight on four Japanese women fluxus artists and their unique contributions within the Fluxus movement to the art world through four separate utilizations of avant-garde strategies

In the beginning, Fluxus was not an art movement but more a collective of outsider anti-artists united not by style but by their allegiance to boundary busting and experimentation, leading naturally toward diversity. While the word 'bounds' in the exhibition's title, conjures up images of women busting out of shackles to take their overdue place on the world stage, Fluxus has always been remarkably inclusive, a cross-racial, international movement featuring many women. The contributions to Fluxus by these four east Asian matriarchs-to-be in this long overdue show felt timely and important as we continually question the parameters of art making.

Yoko Ono, featured in this show, was present when the word "Fluxus" was initially thrown around by founder George Maciunas as a label for what interested him, interpreting the word, Fluxus, meaning flow, from Latin. Maciunas said that the movement would promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art, promoting living and anti-art. The American Alison Knowles, an active participant in the first Fluxus activities that followed, broke ground for what many future female Fluxists and all future Fluxists and many non-Fluxists would do. Fluxus was concerned with manifesting new intermedia ideas about art. So while scholarship has been quick to point out in recent years "the membership of Fluxus was diverse and included many women, people of color, and queer-identifying artists" and that "Fluxus was more inclusive of women than any other avant-garde movement in Western art history," turning the tide, the differences between what Fluxmen and Fluxwomen did was not as significant as what Fluxus did in relation to the activities of their peers internationally in the late 1950s and early 1960s before ideas like

fluxus - Takako Saito

Fluxus, The New York Correspondence School, Pop, Minimalism and Happenings had names while the rest of Fluxus history was slow to be accepted and appreciated for its innovative approaches.

In her essay in the 1993 catalog for In the *Spirit of Fluxus* at the Walker Art Museum, art historian Kristine Stiles paved the way for later feminist perspectives on the group and beyond as its ideas moved toward its tentative embrace by the mainstream. While the Tate Museum has cited the Fluxus dedication to a "diverse range of art forms and approaches" that no doubt contributed to an acceptance of whomever could get the job done without regard for their ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, MoMA specifically zeroed in on the fact that "female artists who helped shape Fluxus aesthetics … developed in the decade leading up to the women's movement, and the prevalence of female participants in its diverse activities was unprecedented." Sara Seagull, a designer and artist active in Fluxus said, "I did feel that Maciunas was non-gender oriented, that he re-

fluxus - Shigeko Kubota

ally believed in people who had the ideas that fulfilled his vision – and he was extremely egalitarian about letting women work, letting men work, letting misfits work, for him or with him."

Within Fluxus, controversy existed between the views of several women artists adjacent to Fluxus activities exemplified by Charlotte Moorman, the creator of fifteen Avant Garde Festivals between 1963 and 1980 and Carolee Schneemann, the important performance artist and maker of assemblages. Schneemann has cited reasons why she never was officially part of the group including, "the rather harsh judgments of Fluxus in terms of explicit sexuality" and, referring to "Fluxus —where explicit self-depiction was considered incorrect." Perhaps it was indeed the ground-breaking psychological content of her important early pre-feminist works that kept her estranged or perhaps something more interpersonal. Referring to Fluxus-founder Maciunas, Jill Johnston, the 1960s critic for the *Village Voice* speculated: "Eric tells me GM really liked Japanese women, that they didn't threaten him … that women like Carolee terrified him."

Curator of this Japan Society exhibition, Midori Yoshimoto, has written informatively of the four women this show was about: "Unusually courageous and self-determined, they were among the first Japanese women to leave their country to explore their artistic possibilities in New York. While some other Japanese women artists left Japan around the same time … these (four) artists … departed from traditional art making toward unconventional art forms such as performance art … in which artists employ their own bodies as means of artistic expression," citing, "…the transformation of these artists' lifestyle from that of traditionally confined Japanese women to that of internationally active artists." continuing, "In its expanded definition, performance here suggests the (four) artist's self-empowerment through the acquisition of their artistic language and their ability to articulate that language. Through tracing these artists' transformations, this study aims to illuminate their experimental spirit."

Takako Saito from Sabae in Fukui Prefecture came to New York in 1963 and left five years later in 1968. Mieko Shiomi, originally from Tamashima, a small town near Okayama, and Shigeko Kubota from Niigata in northern Japan, arrived together on July 4,

fluxus - Takako Saito

1964, coincidentally the American holiday of independence. Mieko left quickest, 365 days later before her visa ran out, while Shigeko, like Yoko Ono, never left. She and Yoko Ono both became New Yorkers for life, remaining permanently linked to Fluxus despite moving on to other things including their roles as wives and teachers—Ono to John Lennon and Kubota as the partner of Korean videographer Nam June Paik. Ono, from an upper-class residential neighborhood in Tokyo, moved to New York to attend college, married a fellow avant-garde musician, Toshi Ichiyanagi with whom she headed back to Japan from 1962-64. She later settled into an apartment in Shibuya with her second husband, Tony Cox, after suffering a mental breakdown due to an unfavorable review in Japan of her musical experimentation.

During that period, Ono played at least small parts in the other three womens' stories. Presenting her work and events at the Naiqua Gallery in Tokyo in early 1964, Ono enlisted Kubota, and Shiomi to participate. In April, Kubota reciprocated the favor in another piece. Meanwhile, Saito was introduced to Fluxus founder George Maciunas through the Japanese artist Ay-O, who had met him through Ono in 1961.

Not only Ono and her first husband but the experimental Flux-musicians-to-be Paik, Yasunao Tone and Takehisa Kosugi were instrumental in alerting George Maciunas in NYC, the Fluxus founder, to the unorthodox musical goings-on in Japan as the 1960s began. Ono had helped Maciunas finalize the choice of the Fluxus name before departing for her homeland with Ichiyanagi in1962, unaware she'd remain until 1964. Shiomi and Kubota eventually travelled the other way, joining Saito, who had made the trip a few months earlier and had ended up assisting Maciunas—pasting labels on his earliest art products and participating in Fluxus mailings. The three women continued activities together, famously eating, shopping and preparing food for nightly "communal dinner events"—first with Maciunas and then others. Male Japanese artists such as Tone, Kosugi and A-yo would later join them, not only for dinner but also in Fluxus as it entered its middle period. Previous connections A-yo and Saito in Sōzō Biiku Kyōkai (Society for Creative Art Education) in the 1950s, Kubota and Kosugi, linked romantically in Japan, and Kosugi-Shiomi-Tone, in the avant-garde *Group Ongaku*, strengthened inter-cultural network bonds. Because work by Shiomi and Saito are seen less, I enjoyed the chance to see lots of it, in depth, here. Kubota and, of course, Ono have been more visible. Kubota passed away in 2015, then was featured in a show at NYC's Museum of Modern Art in Aug 21, 2021–Feb 13, 2022 and in Japan, *Viva Video!* at Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo which traveled through February 2022, covered by myself here, organized by Tiffany Lambert and Ayaka Iida, Assistant Curator. Kubota, the inventor of video sculpture developed her art form based on Fluxus intermedia ideals as Mrs. Nam June Paik, beating her influential husband to the early sale of a video artwork to New York's MoMA.

fluxus - Mieko Shiomi

MoMA produced a major Ono show in 2015. Ono's *Music of the Mind* at the Tate Modern in London in 2023 made 200 of Yoko's most famous pieces unavailable for this exhibit, requiring The Japan Society's guest curator Midori Yoshimoto to exercise inspired curatorial vision to present rarely-seen, lesser-known works to complement and bolster a continuing understanding of Ono's iconic imagery over the years using what was available—highlighted by the usual boxes, bags and bodies—including *Bottoms* (Fluxfilm #4) and her famous *Cut Piece*.

Out of Bounds provided a sense of Ono's early life including two marriages that corresponded with her Fluxus interactions, documented in Japanese magazines, posters and photos. Lennon, too, became a bonafide Fluxus artist, hinted at by Ono's *Everson Museum Catalogue Box* (1971), designed by Maciunas and seen here which included participation by Lennon. While Ono has been important for many reasons and many decades, Fluxus remains a lesser-known anti-art force that deserves the ever-increasing fame it receives. Ono has done the world a favor, trumpeting and paralleling Fluxus life-art, performance, and Zen tendencies, always accompanied by humor and irreverence, like Dada before it. The culture got wind of Fluxus ideas when Yoko and Lennon married. Even if everything Ono touched hadn't made it impossible to ignore, Fluxus is now better known to the mainstream, due to its merits and time passing. Even when denied its due, the crowd pleaser Yoko now shines deserving light on Shiomi, Saito, Kubota and all of Fluxus, evidenced by the robust attendance at the Japan Society's elegant show.

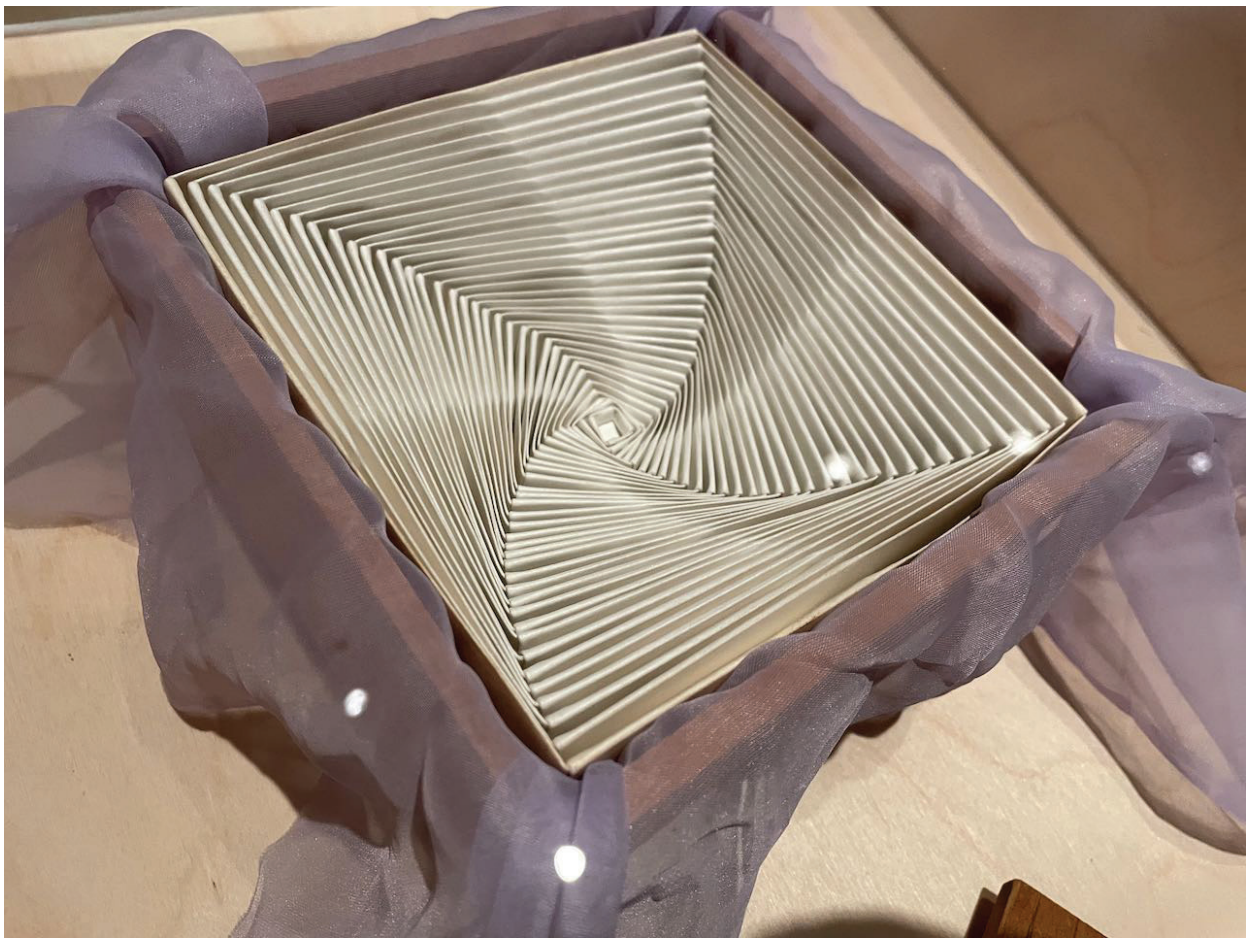
Resonating with 60 years of Fluxus, this exhibition was organized by Tiffany Lambert, the Japan Society's curator with Ayaka Iida, assistant curator and their star guest curator Yoshimoto, a professor at New Jersey City University who literally wrote the book on this subject back in 2005, establishing herself as the specialist in such matters. Their exhibit highlighted the effect each of these four Japanese women had on Fluxus and that Fluxus had on them—and their work. A rich, new overview of Fluxus thus emerged—evident in central rooms deconstructing The Collective's whole. Flux-kits, suitcases and boxes with selected flux-objects fanned out in the glass-covered red and natural wood vitrines that delicately nestled in this show. Bound Flux-yearbooks and other collaborative book projects such as Fluxus 1 (1964) or A Tribute to John Cage (1987), short flux-movies by Ono and Shiomi projected across the gallery space, posters and examples of cc V TRE, the Flux-newspaper, hung sandwiched between plastic sheets for reading in all directions, with both sides viewable. Every example made Maciunas' imaginative graphic design, layout and labelling skills evident.

fluxus - Yoko Ono

Kubota's minimal collage-objects, 1965's *Fluxus Napkins*, red, with magazine cut-outs of a woman's mouth, were called out in this collective hub, as were *Fluxus Pills*, 1966, her clear plastic box of empty capsules, ironic pointers to Maciunas' health challenges. Nearby was Kubota's travel-mate Shiomi's Music for Envelopes and her 1965 Water Music, glass containers for providing shape to wetness.

In adjoining rooms, surrounding the entrance and hub, the four featured artists' œuvres' could be explored individually, beginning with Saito's considerable acumen in graphics, drafting and illustration that echoed and complemented that of Maciunas. A rare and colorful 1966-68 oil painting of the various members of the group conveyed an obvious fondness for the social aspects of New York Fluxus, within which objects, performances, photographs, printing and lettering were utilized to usurp painting and even collage. (Perhaps not coincidentally, Saito's close friend Ay-o, her entree to the group, was also an outlier in this area: a utilizer of paint and ink in two dimensions when he portrayed rainbow imagery, supplementing his boundary-pushing tactile boxes.)

But it was imperative to witness and single out Takako Saito's role in establishing the visual aesthetic of Fluxus here, not in painting but in something akin to feng shui or fusui. Surely Maciunas was the keystone but if there was a Japanese design element that the Lithuanian was in favor of from the start, and there was, it manifested powerfully through Saito's delicate, dedicated practice: a facility with tools and her placement of elements like la-



fluxus - Mieko Shiomi

bels, learned from and developed in her work with George—often on the spot but always spot-on. Another George, Brecht, influenced her appreciation of the playful in Fluxus' look and feel, spotlighted here in etchings, adorned cubes and most prominently, her multi-sensory chess sets, seen here in many forms. Finally, her large *Takako's Music Shop* (2000) offered a colorful variety of musical/visual/performative composition possibilities such as seed pods to be released to the wind. Dozens of pieces were compiled in a free-standing Flux-kiosk.

Saito's extensive work with chess was echoed by the others. Ono's *White Chess Set* (1966) created mono-confusion with a poeticism reminiscent of her book *Grapefruit* while nearby *Video Chess* (1975), Kubota's video sculpture, a horizontal video under glass of Marcel Duchamp playing chess, doubled as a bottom-lit chess board admirably scattering the TV energy often emanating from Shigeko's unique work.

Saito's game-like cubes also had parallels in Mieko Shiomi's *Fluxus Balance* (1993), her 1963 compilation *Events & Games* of 21 offset cards, produced first in wooden and, later, plastic boxes by Maciunas and finally important works completed after she left New York in 1965 with only four seen to their fruition by Maciunas, her nine *Spatial Poems*. The nine Spatial Poems, all seen here in some form were No.1 Word Event (1965); No. 2 Direction Event (1965); No. 3 Falling Event (1966); No. 4 Shadow Event (1972); No. 5 Open Event (1972); No. 6 Orbit Event (1973); No. 7 Sound Event (1974); No. 8 Wind Event (1974) and No. 9 Disappearing Event (1975).

Shiomi had called her early work, unknowingly parallelling early pre-Fluxus ideas, 'action poems.' The approach to Mieko's area included black and white Japanese television news footage of her work as the only female in Group Ongaku, blowing soap bubbles to translate musical concepts into physical expression. Like Ono, Shiomi was a late 1950s trained musician, with strong ties to classicism, that migrated rapidly in Cagean directions at the precise moment Fluxus was manifesting in New York. During an improvisational session of the Ongaku group, when Shiomi tossed keys toward the ceiling to signal a mood change with the noise, she later described that it unleashed in her an awareness of music as action, not sound, in time and space. This change in percep-

fluxus - Yoko Ono

tion led from time intervals created with keys to later classic projects like Event for the Late Afternoon in Okayama (1963), a hanging violin slowly lowered to the ground.

When Maciunas prepared an unrealized *Tentative Program for the Festival of Very Early Music*, Ichiyanagi and Ono first made him aware of Shiomi, even before the first Fluxfests. Shiomi, with Kubota, then visited the Ichiyanagis in Tokyo in 1963 where Shiomi, in turn, first saw Brecht's scores and began calling her pieces events. Soon after, Maciunas purchased Mieko's *Endless Box* (1963), thirty-four nested paper boxes. That sale funded Shiomi's travel to New York accompanying Shigeko, who previously was to be joined by her reluctant romantic partner Kosugi. Kubota donned a large trunk and mailed a letter-scroll to Maciunas, both seen here as art objects animating an important Fluxus moment. A cloth bag sewn by Kubota for an earlier Kosugi performance was also dramatically displayed, highlighting that period. Rare photos of Kubota's early Japan events were also revelatory. One year to the day after she and Shiomi arrived, notoriety arrived for Kubota on July 4,1965 in the form of her Vagina Painting, performed at the Perpetual Fluxus Festival at the New Cinematheque. Despite stage fright, before a group of only ten or so Fluxus artists, Kubota, with a brush attached to her panties, squatted and painted blood red abstract forms on paper spread across the floor. Reminiscent of menstrual blood, geisha references and Asian calligraphy, some saw it as a critique of macho action paintings by Jackson Pollock or Yves Klein's use of females as painting tools in his 1960 Anthropometrics. Others were reminded of Zen for Head, a straight black line performed by Paik's hair dipped in sumi ink mixed with tomato juice at an early Fluxus event in Wiesbaden, Germany in 1962. Kubota's stunning one-time-only event lives on in photographs taken by Maciunas; freeze-frames of iconic pre-Feminist art. Peter Moore's 1964 contact sheets of Kubota's preparations seen at the Japan Society's exhibit freshly illuminate the work which she chose never to perform again. She was propelled instead to video-document her life diaristically a la Jonas Mekas.

According to the curator Yoshimoto, "In her essay in the 1993 exhibition catalog In the Spirit of Fluxus, art historian Kristine Stiles discusses the feminist

implications in Kubota's Vagina Painting for the first time. Stiles asserts that Kubota's performance 'redefined Action Painting according to the codes of female anatomy.' "She continued, "In conjunction with the celebration of Independence Day, Kubota perhaps intended this performance as a declaration of her independence from her past and Japan's male-dominated artistic conventions … Kubota suggested a clever pun between human procreation and artistic creation by using the vagina as an artistic medium. Since Stiles's analysis, other art historians reinforced the feminist reading of *Vagina Painting*." Kubota, Ono and Shiomi had each contributed to the Hi-Red Center group's 1964 *Shelter Plan*. Kubota later edited the 1965 Hi-Red Center Poster in her role as the Fluxus "vice-president," a title Maciunas lovingly bestowed upon her.

I was honored to be part of Mieko Shiomi's *Spatial Poem Number Five*: Open Event. The entrance to the exhibit featured dozens of little doors—divided by continent—that contained answers to Shiomi's recent query to document and send her something that was "opened." I was delighted to participate and it was nice to see a contemporary rendition of this piece that originally took place in 1972. In fact, I was very grateful to see documentation from all nine of Shiomi's *Spatial Poems* displayed here as well as a slide show of mailed responses received in the 60s —after she returned to Japan from New York. I have always seen her Spatial Poems as landmarks in mail art and social communication as art.

Finally, a word about the performance art of Takako Saito. While her additions within the world of Fluxus objects were indeed significant, the curator of this show, Midori Yoshimoto, pointed out in her book *Into Performance*, Saito experienced a string of unfortunate circumstances and near-misses around events, preventing New York audiences from experiencing her work ideally when it was meant to be. The sad tale of events reads like an amusing Fluxus gag, an art prevention machine, as it were. During her first New York City stay, all of Saito's planned official performance opportunities during her residency fell through, leading to a kind of fateful art of absence. First, Saito's performance at the Café au Go Go, a weekly event organized by Brecht and Robert Watts, was announced as a jazz concert by mistake. Next, Saito declined a performance at Al Hansen's loft due to a scheduling conflict. Then in 1964, a Saito performance to be staged by Maciunas was postponed three or four times due to problems securing the venue. Finally, on January 8, 1965, Amusements, part of the Perpetual Fluxfest, Saito's audience-participation games, were cancelled due to the financial problems of the Washington Square Gallery.

Saito's first public performance, influenced by her Manhattan years, did not take place until 1971, three years after she left the USA for Europe. Her overlap with New York Fluxus seems to have paradoxically run the gamut from the deepest possible influence to a beautiful but melancholy invisible non-participation. Saito's friend Shiomi even suggested a mail art event, *Postpone Piece*, to make up for one non-occurrence. Takako created announcements for a fictitious Popcorn Theater that followed. Saito later created another mail event by sending wooden cubes inscribed with sentences including, *Event Disappeared into the Bottom of Pacific Ocean*. Thankfully, Saito went on to become quite a loved and effective performer in Europe and elsewhere, highlighted in photographs and video in this show.

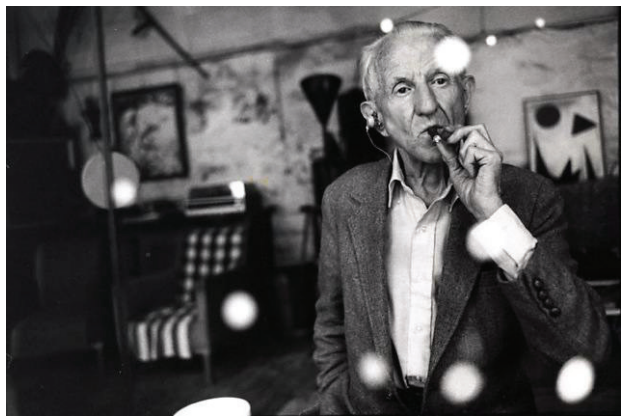
For all four Japanese women, as well as their curators, the art in evidence at the Japan Society was created out of what was there but also what was not. The fact that it has taken decades for this show to materialize is a monument to a once missing respect for their roles as important artists. But *Out of Bounds: Japanese Women Artists in Fluxus* had the last word as one of this New York art season's highlights.

Out of Bounds: Japanese Women Artists in Fluxus
October 13, 2023—January 21, 2024 Japan Society
Curated by Midori Yoshimoto. Organized by Tiffany Lambert and Ayaka Iida, Assistant Curator

Oscar Nitzchke, Avant-garde Architect of the Modernity 1900 – 1991

Lea Lee

Oscar Nitzchke was a modernist architect, friend and associate of pre-and post-World War II era artists whose work he influenced, and whose architecture was influenced by those sculptors and painters. His 1936 drawings for his unrealized *La Maison de la Publicité*, projected for the Champs Elysees in 1935 are now part of MOMA's permanent collection. In describing Nitzchke's friend and associate's project, *Chareau's Maison de Verre*, completed in 1932, Kenneth Frampton, architectural art historian and Emeritus Professor of Architecture at Columbia University wrote that "Chareu's Maison de Verre synthesizes the most diverse avantgardist trends of his time into the form of a new and generalizable architectural paradigm." Then, crediting Nitzchke: "The genealogy of this work and the specific significance of its form are still, in my view, insufficiently known and understood, even today, although the image of Nitzchke's cutaway axonometric is all too familiar to the cognoscenti of the thirties." (*Kenneth Frampton, "Oscar Nitzchke and the Ecole de Paris" published in Oscar Nitzchke Architect © The Cooper Union*). His granddaughter Lea Lee, a visual artist who signed some of her photographs Eléonore Nitzschke in tribute to her grandfather's works and life, recalls when, in 1975, she shared with her grandfather her desire to become a photographer. With a big smile, Oscar Nitzchke advised her to read Bouddhisme *Zen in the Art of Archery*. In this issue, Lea Lee is proud to share the magical, unusual, and forgotten stories from Oscar Nitzchke's life as a brilliant but largely overlooked architect and intimate friend to many important 20th century artists, positioning him to become one of the greatest witnesses to modern Art history.

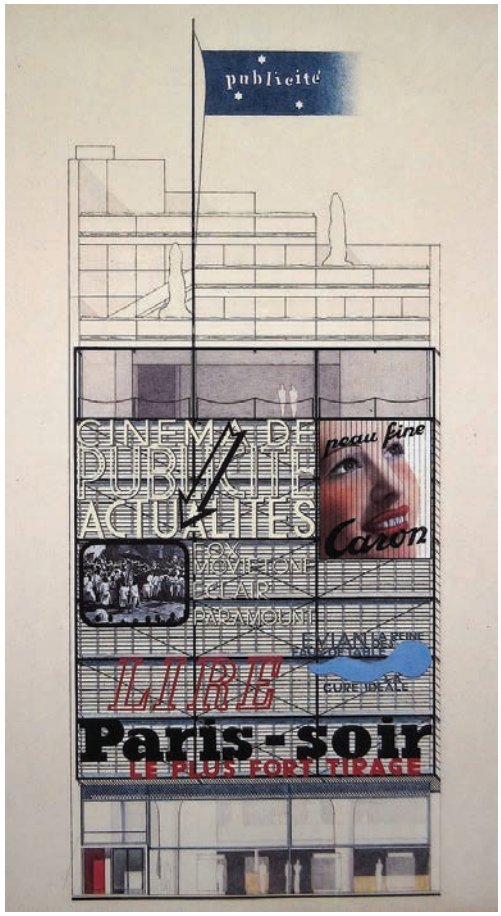


Oscar Nitzschke
©-Eléonore Nitzschke

Born in 1900 in Altona (Germany) Nitzchke was admitted in 1917 to the Geneva Beaux Art in the class with Alberto Giacometti where he trained in drawing with Camoletti. Leaving Geneva, for Paris in 1920, Oscar Nitzchke related "I came to Paris, September 1920, with my mother because my family, my brothers, and sisters, were scared; you see I was the little one, and they were afraid to see me going alone to Paris. Because at that time Paris was known as the Ville Lumière, the 'City of Light". My mother stayed for three weeks. I had come from a little provincial area in Geneva. I did not know anything about Modern Art. In Geneva I had only once seen a watercolor exhibit by Cezanne. I joined Laloux-Lemarewquier studio, a pillar of academic teaching at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Then it was, I think in 1923, that we came across a book by Le Corbusier, *Vers Une Architecture*, also *L'Esprit Nouveau* of Ozenfant and Jeanneret. After I passed by Gallery Jeanne Bucher Carrefour de la Croix Rouge in Paris, and saw on display a painting, I stayed fifteen minutes, fascinated and at the same time not understanding, and finally went in and asked the lady, 'What is this? 'Un Georges Braque, Monsieur.' First time I heard of him." Discovering the avant-garde, he left the studio that year, 1923 with a group of young rebels to open the Palais de Bois studio under Auguste Perret. In the company of Paul Nelson, Pierre Forestier, Ernö Goldfinger and Berthold Lubetkin, Nitzchké explored the potentialities of Perret's rationalist constructive logic.

During his strolls through 1920's Paris, he admired the work of Max Ernst and of the painter, Jean Dubuffet. His footsteps often led him from the Café de Flore in St. Germain-des-Près to Montparnasse where Kiki de Montparnasse, Man Ray, Modigliani, Alberto Giacometti, Pablo Picasso, André Breton, and many others rubbed shoulders. He also encountered painters Picasso, André Derain and Georges Braque in Varangeville and met with musicians, po-

Oscar Nitzschke. Alexander Calder portrait 1960
© Eleonore Nitzschke

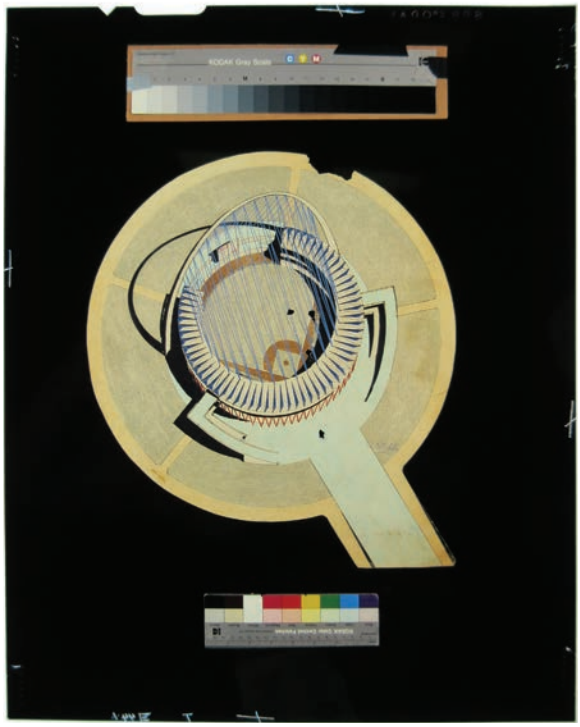


La Maison dela Publicité. 1935. Cover
© Lea Lee

ets and filmmakers. In 1922 during the creation of Auguste Perret's Palais de Bois movement, of which he was a part, he crossed paths with Darius Milhaud, Eric Satie, and Jean Prouvé. Oscar Nitzchke's work was also influenced by other artistic movements extant in Europe at that time; Bauhaus, Constructivism, Dada, Surrealism, Cubism and Art Deco. As well, artists and architects including Sonia and Robert Delaunay, Paul Nelson and Pierre Chareau, and designers Emile Jacques Ruhlmann, Eileen Gray, Jean Michel Franck, Gustave Klimt, Toyen, and Tamara de Lempicka, and illustrators including Cassandre and Paul Colin influenced him. Oscar also discovered, with passion, the jazz of the interwar period, especially the music of Fats Waller. In his youth, he loved to laugh, go out and dance, frequented the Bal Nègre, and was fascinated by shows of artist Josephine Baker. Nitzchke narrates, "I can tell the story, how I met Christian Zervos and all these great characters. In 1928, with two friends from Atelier Perret, we had two first prizes for 'Maisons Metaliques' for the Forges de Strasbourg. And this man, Zervos, who created Cahiers d'Art, the first magazine for modern art saw one of the houses. So he wrote us a letter - he would see the houses - and then he came to see the houses, and we became friends, I went to see him at his gallery. He had a famous gallery on rue du Dragon, in Saint Germain des Prés in the left bank in Paris. Then later, I met through him, Picasso, Braque, Leger, Ozenfant, Mirô, and many others." This effervescence of turn-of-the-century contemporary art communicated with the architecture of the time, where 19th-century art was juxtaposed with avant-garde art.

Nitzchke's mastery of contemporary architectural techniques earned him the prize of the 1929 Metal House competition organized by the Forges de Strasbourg, a city where he contributed to the creation of the Aubette dance hall with Theo Van Doesburg and the Arps. He built more than five hundred examples of his elegant sheet steel box and, introduced by Zervos, met the publicist Martial, owner of a plot of land on the Champs Élysées leading to Nitzchke's design for the Maison de la Publicité in 1934-1936. Calling this "a founding project of a radically new approach to the relationship between

United Nations: Architect Life 1947



Oscar Nitzschké: Shea Stadium's drawing
© Eleonore Nitzschke

visual communication and architecture ... Forty years before the design of the Centre Georges-Pompidou, Nitzchke made the concrete building he imagined the support of a wall of moving images facing the avenue. A billboard by day and a luminous newspaper by night, this skin encompasses exhibition and audition rooms with fluid contours." (Paul Nelson) Solicited by the painter Amédée Ozenfant, who commissioned him to design a project for his London school, Nitzchke then worked with Paul Nelson and Frantz-Philippe Jourdain on a Palais de la Découverte, whose organic forms and roofs suspended from cables inaugurated a repertoire far removed from the orthogonality of the 'sovereign portico' dear to Perret .

In 1936, on his first trip to New York, Oscar Nitzchke and his wife Ritou (Renée Nitzschke) met Alexander Calder and his wife Louisa. They became close friends, remaining friends for their entire lives, resulting in meeting with Paul Nelson in that year. The marvelous result of Alexander Calder's and Oscar Nitzchke's collaboration with Paul Nelson is *La Maison Suspendue* with its magnificent Calder and Arp sculptures, plus the marvelous Mirô contribution. Oscar's perspective drawings for the Palais de la Decouverte, now in MOMA's collection, resulted from Paul Nelson's, Oscar Nitzchke's and his colleague Frantz Jourdain's commission to produce a study for a permanent science Museum in the city. "The project, unfortunately never realized, envisioned a structure that was as functional as it was monumental, the outer envelope being designed to contain diverse exhibits with quite different spatial needs."

Oscar Nitzchke was invited, two years later in 1938, by Wallace K. Harrison, architect of Rockefeller Center, to work with him and teach at Yale University in New Haven. Leaving France for America, under the threat of invading Naziism in 1939 -1940, Oscar's first collaboration in the United States, commissioned by Wallace Harrison, was helping Fernand Léger redecorate Rockefeller's apartments in New York, where Fernand Leger had created his magnificent frescoes. As 1938 progressed, he was invited by Wallace K. Harrison, architect of Rockefeller Center, to work with him and teach at Yale University. Oscar then imagined buildings for the Bronx Zoo and, later, more austere skyscrapers for the United Nations Headquarters (1947), where he played a key role in the team developing the final project. Between 1949 and 1953, Nitzchke directed for Harrison and Max Abramovitz the construction elements, lobby and façade of the Alcoa headquarters in Pittsburgh. Hailed by Marcel Lods as the first classic of metal architecture, this thirty-story skyscraper creates, with the resources of pressed aluminum, a play of light and shadow hitherto missing from American curtain walls. In 1939-1940, Oscar imagined a new plan for the Bronx Zoo, very special and unusual, because the animals walked freely, not caged, unlike people watching them, who were inside a large transparent tube. In this project, Oscar collaborated with Alexander Calder adding Calder's magnificent sculptures created in 1939-1940 for the adjacent African Habitat buildings at the Bronx Zoo designed by Oscar Nitzchke. As related by Paul Nelson, "The reaction to this project created a bit of a scandalous at-

Oscar Nitzschke Cahiers d'Art 1936

mosphere. Oscar told me how much fun he had with Calder and how they laughed a lot while doing this project together to see the offended reaction of the right and strict thinking of New York's bourgeoisie at that time. What would they think of the elevator tubes of Paris' Georges Pompidou Center by Piano and Renzo, which take their audience into the paradise of the Georges Pompidou Museum, surely a nod to Nitzchke's avant-garde project of 1939 that allowed animals freedom while humans had to contemplate them with wonder, while being enclosed in a transparent Tube?"

Not only did Oscar Nitzchke bring Alexander Calder to Yale, making jokes with Calder for the students, who created a hanging mobile with socks, but Oscar also made possible the inclusion of a Calder Mobile in a monumental exhibition at Yale mounted by Henry Kibel in 1943." On a more serious side, in 1958, Oscar Nitzchke again collaborated with Calder, and the architect Saul Edelbaum on an Auschwitz memorial in Israel. Oscar Nitzchke participated in many, major architectural projects where his name has been forgotten, such as his collaboration with Pierre Chareau to redesign Robert Motherwell's East Hampton house in 1947, where, as Lea Lee relates: "My grandfather said to me with a big laugh, "Robert Motherwell didn't have any money at that time to pay our fee with Pierre Chareau so Motherwell gave us a Picasso drawing that we immediately sold, and we ate and drank off it together."

At the same time, Oscar Nitzchke was working on the austere skyscrapers for the United Nations Headquarters as one of the international team of fourteen architects who designed the United Nations Headquarters under Wallace Harrison's leadership. He contributed ideas and drawings; his professional abilities and his personality helped facilitate the cooperative effort of many strong, and often contentious personalities. Oscar and his friend, architect George Dudley, had worked with Harrison in his firm and at Yale. He was also acquainted with architects, especially Le Corbusier, who he had known since 1922 in Paris. George Dudley had acted as the recording secretary of the UN design process, and later wrote a book based on his notes and further research, *Workshop for Peace–Designing the United Nations Headquarters*. In his memories about the UN project, Oscar Nitzchke wrote:

"One evening the others were gone, and I was alone with Corbusier, and there was his model and Oscar Niemeyer's model. And then, he asked me, 'Which one do you like better?' I said I liked Niemeyer's; I like the plans, and I like the sculpture in the middle, and all that I said, it looked more Greek to me; then he said, 'As you know, Oscar, Niemeyer is a wonderful artist, but not so much an architect'. Corbusier was fantastic, how he drew. I mean, he made sketches without hesitation, he was so sure. He was a genius. No doubt I mean impossible genius."

"Le Corbusier's letters from the time describe a less than harmonious working atmosphere. 'I'm working here with Harrison, an American who's a fraction jealous, and fourteen architects from different nations, he wrote to his mother on 6 May 1947. '⅓ hostile, ⅔ in favor. The draftsmen have become my friends. We can do something magnificent, and that's why I forge on.' Officially, the building's design is credited to the committee –which included Le Corbusier – though many say that the completed complex more closely resembled the designs submitted by the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer."

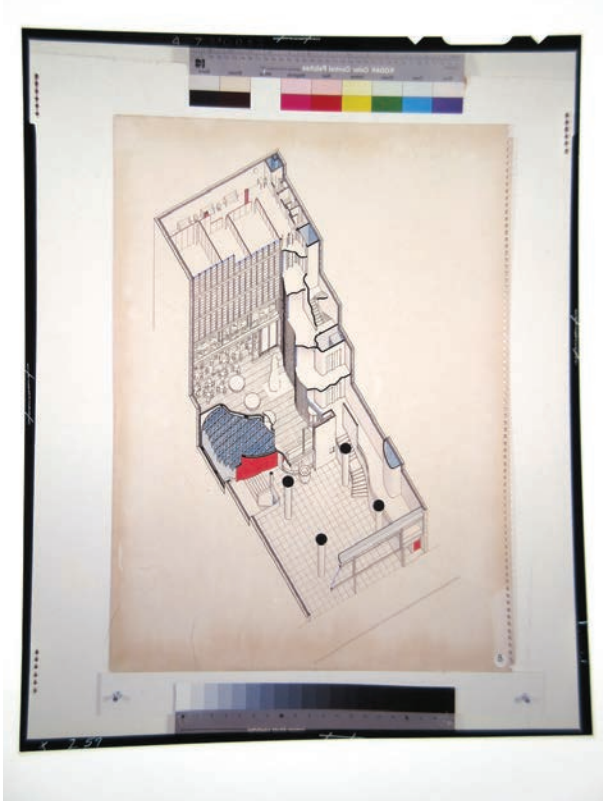
In New York, Oscar became enthusiastic about the first historical exhibition at the Denise René Gallery. With the patronage of Alexander Calder, a pioneering kinetic artist with his moving works of the 1930s and the participation of the young Yaacov Agam and Vasarely, this exhibition introduced the kinetic movement into post-war contemporary art and gave rise to kinetic movements created by South American artists who had taken refuge in 1950s and 60s Paris.

Oscar became good friends with Duke Ellington,

Charlie Parker, Sarah Vaughan regularly frequenting the bars of Harlem, where jazz musicians performed, and Birdland on New York's 47th Street. Oscar became a discreet messenger between Zervos, former publisher and friend from Paris, and Initiator of Picasso's Catalogue Raissone, and American curators and museum directors, including MOMA's in 1945. Always passionate about art, Oscar frequented the whole of New York at the time meeting at galleries, Pierre Matisse, Leo Castelli, Sidney Janis, Julien Levy, Klaus Perls, to name only the most famous.In the 1940s and 50s, good friends Elaine and Willem de Kooning frequented the Cedar Bar with Nitzchke, then the meeting point of many artists including Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Arshile Gorky and John Cage. All these people led a bohemian life and lived in joyful exchanges, bartering being customary, between two drinks and two giggles. The conversations were lively; they were dancing and singing.

Nikolai Buglaï, a New York artist, writes in his interview article in Ragazine magazine, "Oscar Nitzchke is like a delicious slice of twentieth-century art. He was at the same table when Picasso and James Joyce met. He was Bûnuel's roommate in Los Angeles when Bûnuel was a pauper. In Harlem, he knew Basie and Ellington, the whole group. He knew everybody. He used to drive around with Peggy Guggenheim in her pink Cadillac throughout the United States. So he had contact with the whole crew. In his pauper years, he would borrow money from Calder. Calder would give him little works of art that he could sell for money. From Satie he would get original manuscripts that he would turn into money. In that sense, he was an interesting guy. When his hearing got bad, people refused to hire him. But at age 80 or 83, his old students from Yale University got him a show at Cooper Union. Once he got the big show Cooper Union produced this fancy catalogue of his work. Nitzchke met Jean-Louis Cohen at the Eileen Gray Bard Museum exhibit in New York in March 2020, remembering being delighted to read in the exhibition catalogue that Eileen Gray herself had been influenced in 1936 by Oscar Nitzchke's *The House of Advertising. La Maison de la Publicité* featured in an article published by Christian Zervos in the Cahiers d'Art in 1936. Lea Lee is sure that, somewhere, this makes Oscar smile.

Nitzchke's active participation in an important historical process can be seen as it extends over a long

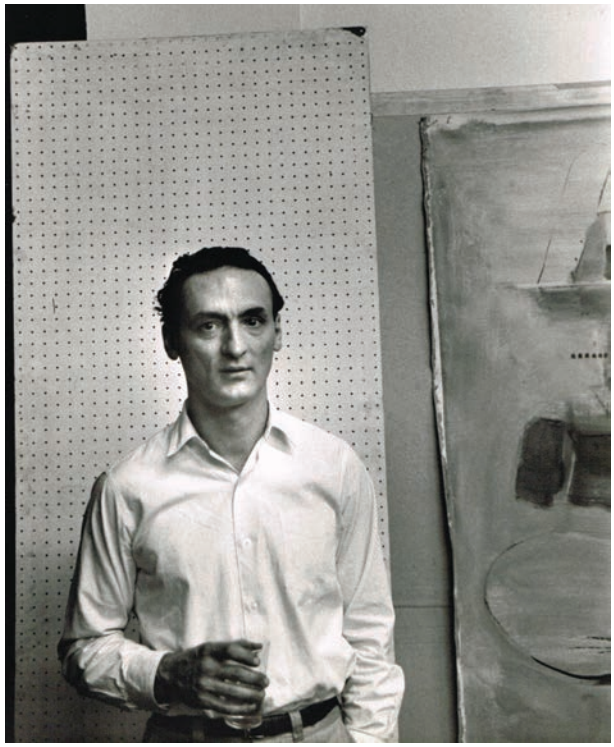


Oscar Nitzschke La Maison de la Publicité-1935
(back of the building)
© Eleonore Nitzschke

professional life on two continents. He was an inspirer, a collaborator, an enthusiast, a communicator, a catalyst; constantly and intimately involved with three generations of many of the most influential shapers of the modern movement. (*from Le Corbusier's letters to his mother about his work during the UN © Phaidon © Jean Louis Cohen)* Oscar's friend and colleague, architect Georges Dudley wrote to Denise Scott and the Art critic/architect Robert Venturi. "The shift of themes and forms from modern European architecture to the United States has too often been seen as resulting solely from the exhibition The International Style, organized in 1932 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson. Those who passed on such as Oscar Nitzchké, however, allow us to discover the more secret itineraries by which a lasting transmission of the experiences of German or French modernism was accomplished.

Bad Boy of the Art World,

Rina Oh Amen



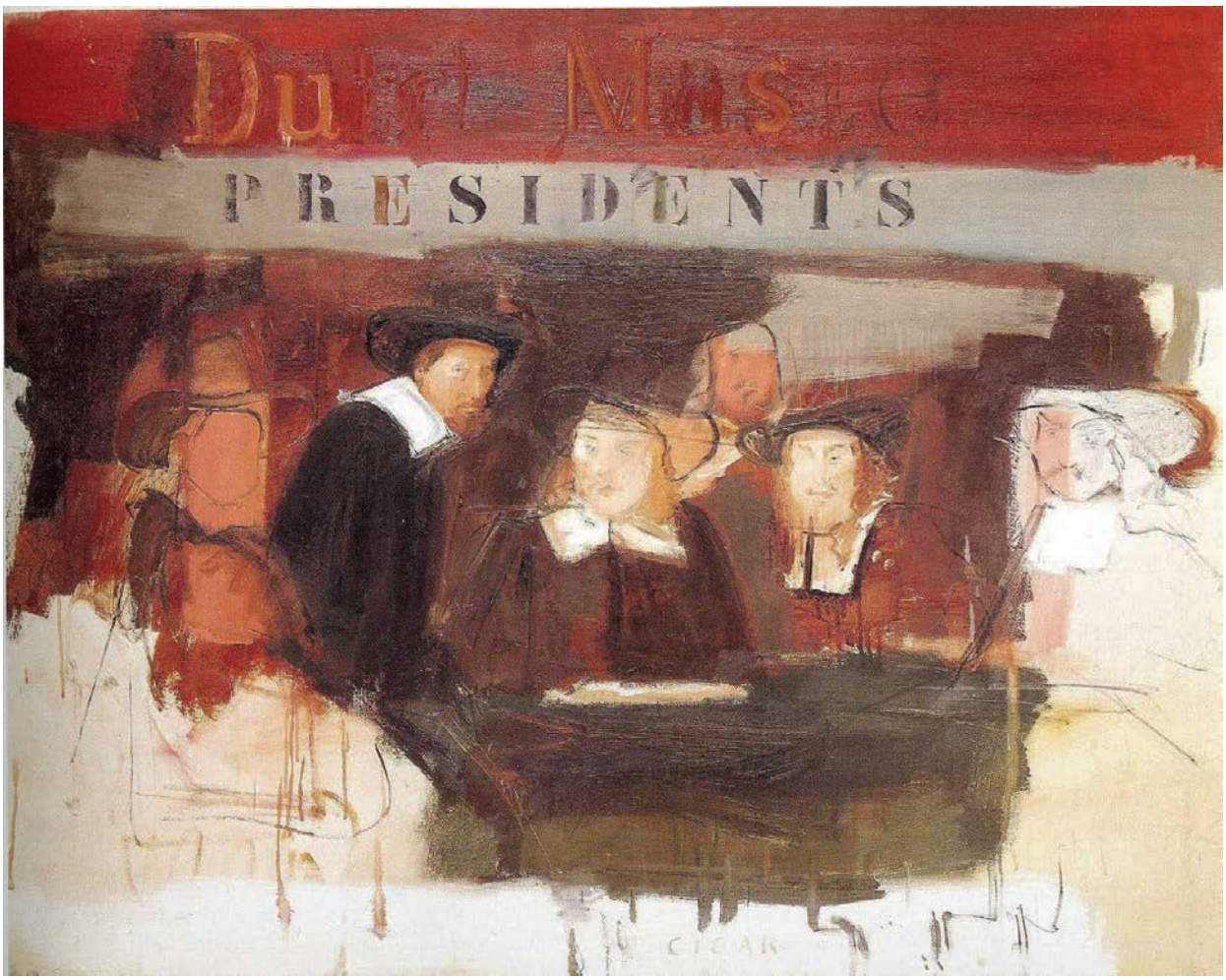
Larry Rivers in his studio.
© John Gruen

Known as the grandfather of the Pop Art Movement, Larry Rivers was a prolific, outrageous and significant artist of the 20th century. The virtuoso creative was a film maker, painter, sculptor, saxophonist and pianist, a natural provocateur who was hungry for attention and oftentimes stunned the art world with his outrageous behavior. In contrast to his public persona, Rivers spent most of his time as an introvert in his creative process often working alone in his art studio, while at other times the studio was buzzing with a crowd of models, other artists and visitors such as Louis Meisel, executive producer of the film. Larry Rivers was born Yitzroch Loiza Grossberg on August 17, 1923 and passed away on August 14, 2002. He earned a B.A. in education from New York University in 1951, changing his name to Rivers in 1940 at the start of his career as a jazz saxophonist. *Bad Boy of the Art World*, the film directed by Louis Meisel, opens with a black and white scene of Larry Rivers and Lisa Minnelli. Many voices found him outrageous. Larry mocked women, while adoring them, and caused a spectacle wherever he went. He was not constrained.

Meisel recalls meeting Rivers for the first time after making his first purchase of the artist's work. He acquired two drawings from a sketchy gallery and wanted Rivers to authenticate them, beginning his decades long relationship with Rivers. Meisel went on to say during a panel discussion in Sag Harbor following the premiere: "I felt very strongly that he, Johns, and Rauschenberg were the ones moving back into imagery from abstract painting. I spent a lot of time with them. I was a bit late in the pop art movement because my friends, the abstract expressionists, didn't like the pop artists. In the 60's the pop artists really brought back the imagery but with a flatness of surface which was one of the rules of abstract painting."

When Rivers began his career in the 1950's making abstract expressionist paintings, he was immersed in the jazz scene playing the saxophone in Harlem every Monday night in "jam sessions". The famous black and white photo in 1959 shot by John Cohen is featured in the film, where a young Larry Rivers sits at the table sharing a meal with fellow creatives. This was all part of his creative process, along with the

Art and the Artist - Ernst and the Rape of the Sabine Women



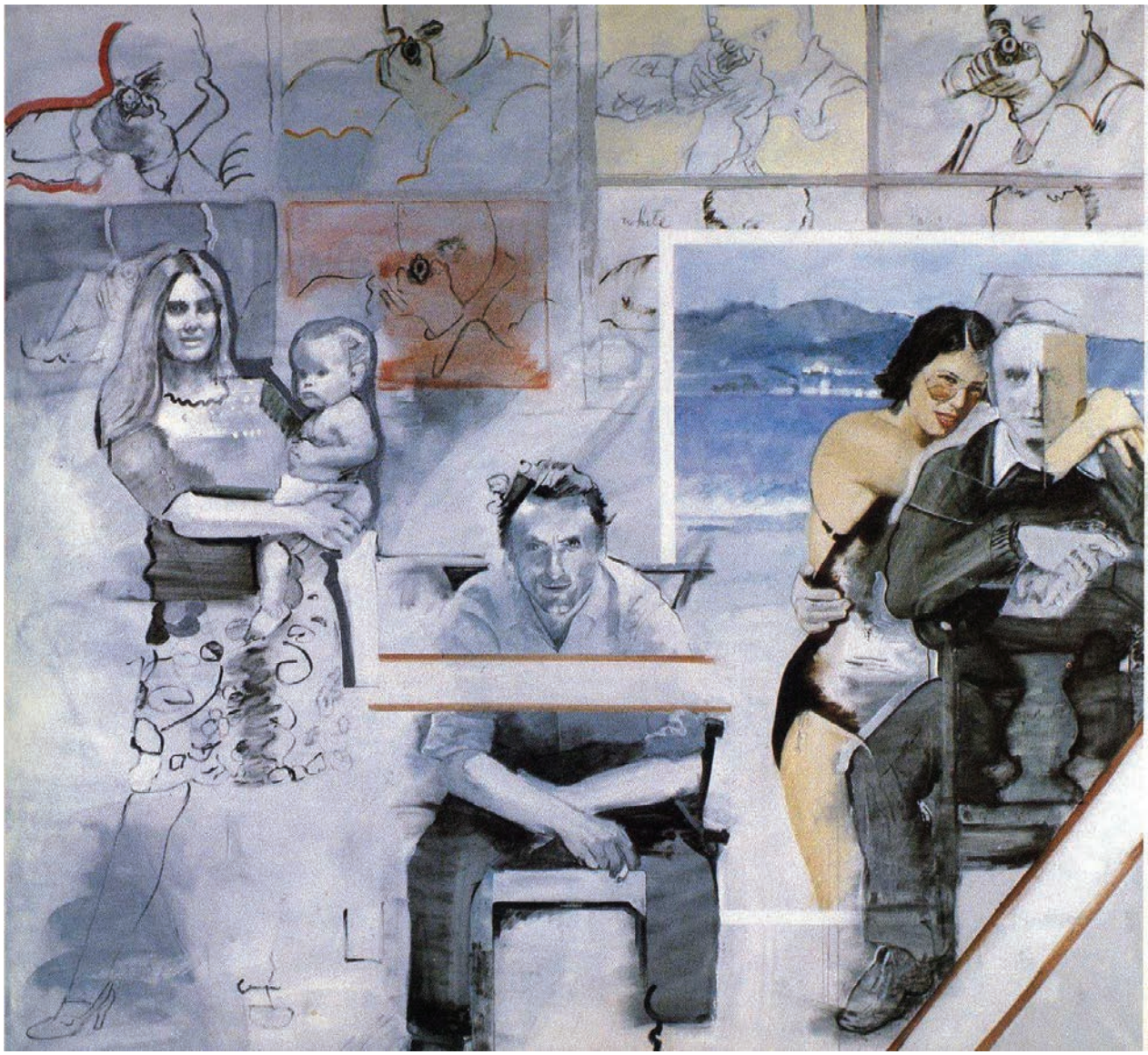
A painting of two people

films he made both outdoors and in his studio. The art world fifty years ago, is not where the art world stands today. Larry Rivers did what he wanted to do and was "very involved in the shock value of his choices"- says painter, Eric Fischl in the film.

Fischl studied Larry Rivers work while attending Phoenix College and earned his B.F.A. from the California Institute for the Arts in 1972. By 1982, he was amongst four artists represented by Mary Boone and his work is heavily influenced by Rivers' realism. Fischl "found the movie incredibly depressing. Not for bad reasons, but because it was such a powerful portrait of an artist's struggle to figure out the deeper meanings of life. And kind of not get to it which is terrifying to think about. But leave all his inquiries behind. The inquiries were so beautiful, provocative, sensitive, and insensitive simultaneously. There was so much there that I as an artist strive for and feel condemned it pursued the same sense. Defining meaning either through breaking boundaries or reaffirming them. Never getting the sense of confidence that it was the right way to go".

Art dealer Ethan Cohen says: "We are pleased to support an important artist's legacy. He is one of the important artists of the 1960's, 70's and 1980's of the American Art scene. This new documentary and interest in his art practice will give needed attention to an under-recognized artist and place him next to Rauschenberg, Johns, Warhol helping us better understand the period of art making in which he lived."

His earlier work is widely depicted and given more attention in the film. Curators and artists were interviewed whom all acknowledged his talent and gave commentaries about the person vs the art and the artist. As the person evolved, the art evolved. Rivers' sensationalist tactics are delivered while at the same time, his significance and mark in 20th century abstract expressionism and the pop art movement are given credit- although Rivers never truly fell into either movement. His greatest contribution was bringing back realism during the time the art world focused mainly on abstract expressionism as Meisel, Eric Fischl, and David Joel expressed during the Sag Harbor panel discussion.



A group of people sitting in chairs

Barbara Goldsmith, who is featured in the film is an art journalist who describes the "painterly quality" of his works. She says Rivers "combines the best of the abstract look with realism". By mid 1950's most artists were producing abstract expressionist works while Rivers stayed behind the times, simultaneously living ahead of his time. In this format, Rivers' work was never confined in one category.

The art world has recently begun to pay closer attention to the works produced by Larry Rivers. Narration of the film are delivered though several voices. I heard Rivers, through his extravagant persona describing what inspires him to create. It is prolific in contrast to the attention seeking and insecure person- separated into halves as the true self (the artist) and in contrast to his alter ego (the public persona). In order to truly acknowledge and appreciate River's work as artist, the public must disassociate the controversial life he lived.

I was taken back into a different time, fifty years ago when the contemporary art world was still emerging as a major market, distinguishing itself and separating from the institutional and non-living artists' work previously admired by art patrons.

Rosen, producer and director once told me the art world post the Nixon administration has dwindled in excitement, and today it is nothing compared to how it was. "We have not had a significant movement past that time frame in American art". According to Rosen, he began his journey making the Larry Rivers film 50 years ago. The film was originally scheduled to premiere five years ago and had a delay.

The female narrative is significant in this film. These female peers included painter Jane Frelicher, who appears in black and white footage from the Rivers' archives giving her thoughts in an interview during

Dutch Masters, Larry Rivers

the later years as one of the narrators. Other female voices include painter Cornelia Foss who says the beginning of the "abstract expressionist movement was serious and earnest".

Rivers contribution to the pop art movement as the "grandfather" paved the way for Lichtenstein and Warhol who later took concepts Larry Rivers developed to the next level. Warhol spent his lifetime focusing on pop art concepts and today his work falls into one category whereas Rivers dabbled in many yet never constrained himself into one. It goes hand in hand with the persona of the work, and the artist who creates it. His inspiration stemmed from several works both old and new, including work by Braque and De Kooning.

The film gives a glimpse into a world of how it used to be for women during the early days as feminism emerged. Today, women are still battling for equality. Larry Rivers was one of America's greatest artists of the 20th century, best known as a pioneer of abstract expressionism and grandfather of the Pop art movement whose work does not fit into a singular category of American Art history. He "dabbled" in several art movements, experimenting yet never fully immersing himself or perhaps tying his work into one category. It is hard to pin down where Larry Rivers work fits but wherever that may be, he was a major contributor to American Art and is finally getting acknowledgement for his contributions.

Ethan Cohen Gallery hosted a screening of "Larry Rivers, Bad Boy of the Art World" at the KuBe Art Center auditorium in New York hosted by Director Peter Rosen.

Sonia Boyce talks to David Goldenberg

David Goldenberg (DG): There is no equivalent to the Other Story and the black art movement in the UK, so how might we learn and build on its lessons? At the moment there seems to be a flaw in large scale exhibitions, Biennales and Documenta, which do not provide long term support to understand the complexities of the events, works, ideas, and program for change, so what form do we need that is adequate to the importance of these cultural events?
On Monday 10th June, I was invited by Sonia Boyce (**SB**) to visit her studio in South London to talk about her work.
The discussion revolved around three key points. *The Other Story* exhibition, Hayward Gallery, London, UK, 1989, where l first encountered Sonia's work. *Feeling Her Way*, Sonia's Venice Biennale installation, toured to the Turner Contemporary Museum Margate, Kent, which l went to see in the summer of 2023.
I started the discussion by asking Sonia to define Colonialism, decolonization, and postcolonialism.
SB: These issues are not my issues but Rasheed Araeen's, my concern is with the materiality of culture, with Modernism, i.e. what was possible, when Anglo American, art, such as Greenbergian formalism and formalist painting, such as Hoylands, was fashionable.

DG: I first encountered your work at Rasheed Araeen's *The Other Story,* at the Hayward Gallery in 1989, which l think is one of the few significant moments in recent times, the same way that l think about Okwaui Enwezer 2002 Documenta, shows which l continue to think about.
SB: The history of *The Other Story* still needs to be written, because it took Rasheed 11 years to realise the exhibition. The exhibition also brought the Black art movement to an end. The exhibition was also marked by the hostile response to the exhibition and the afterlife and history, through artists, critics and, institutions reflecting into the consequences of the exhibition, particularly Jean Fisher's text reappraisal of the other story, 2009. After all, the retelling of the other story or what now, and my recent text *All The Rage: For Oluwale* and the destruction of the national front, 2017 – 19, which revisits Rasheed's and Eddie Chambers work in response to British imperialism, the far right and fashionable use of nazis emblems. And suggests that we might define the first Black British art as Rasheed Araeen's 1971-73 panel

Sonia Boyce in her studio.
photo by David Goldenberg

work of found texts and collages, examining the death of Oluwale by the British Police, and the artist Eddie Chambers' work which continued Araeen's project, a sequence of collages mutating the British flag into a swastika. Sonia noted excerpts from *All The Rage: For Oluwale* and the destruction of the national front:
"I am in a quandary, unable to reconcile a dilemma. The source of my problem comes from a desire to un-couple and de-privilege a sociopolitical reading of artworks by Black-British artists in favour of drawing our attention to the aesthetic form and strategies that the work of art offers. Here, l refer to an essay by Jean Fisher, *The Work Between Us'*(1997), where she remarks on the discrepancies and tendencies to obscure the artwork by focusing on the geopolitical identity of its maker. She says: "I should like to make a plea for visual art every-where. Or more specifically, to ask that we rethink the ways by which we frame art in order to return it to what is proper to art." More often than not, the framework to which Fisher alludes rarely places works of art within an art-historical context, or the genealogies of art practice. Noting her concerns, l am trying to find another way of talking about these works without relying on the familiar narratives of politics in art equals identity, which equals some insight into a subjective condition."
From the same text Rasheed defines Black Art "Black Art is, in fact, a specific contemporary art practice that has emerged directly from the struggle of Asian, African and Caribbean people [i.e. black people] against racism and the work itself specifically deals

with and expresses a 'human condition': the condition of black people resulting from their existence in a racist white society or/and in global terms, from western cultural imperialism."

DG: Rasheed Araeen's follow-up project *The Whole Story, Art In Postwar Britain,* was never realised.
SB: Because the exhibition took so long to realise, the purpose of the exhibition changed in Rasheed's mind, from an exhibition presenting Black British art to an exhibition as a form of institutional critique. Who selects the artist, which art, how is the art and artist defined, and how is art inscribed into Western art history. An example was going to see an exhibition of three minimalist artists' work at Tate Britain, including Rasheed's work, they looked indistinguishable in terms of quality, except the label described Rasheed as a Pakistani self-taught artist.
Black art hasn't developed since *The Other Story*. [And if we are to take Gavin Jantjes statement at face value, on the eve of his show, June 2024, at the Whitechapel Gallery, "the recent influx of black artists into the art industry is just a knee jerk reflex and not a serious response". The exhibition brought to an end the early series of self-portraits.

DG: After talking about *The Other Story* l asked Sonia to talk about the work, beginning with the ICA show *We Move In Her Way, In The Castle Of My Skin*, the series of installations, leading into the installation *Feeling Her Way* for the Venice Biennale in 2022.
SB: From the early 1990s until 2015/17, the work was marked by relatively small-scale projects, as a response to institutional critique and Relational Aesthetics, a move into multimedia, video, collaborative practices, exploring different forms of participatory practices, to break down and confuse identity and representation.
Different ways of representation might be possible. Representation is not always visual. Look at how Plantation songs evolved into Jazz, leading to the sonic as representation and memory. The work that developed from this time can be seen to be a conversation with David Medalla, Adrian Piper, Sophie Cale, Lygia Clark, The Signals gallery that David Medalla established with Paul Keeler, with the support of the curator and art critic Guy Brett.
The legacy from the 1970s remains to be thought

In the Castle of My Skin

about in terms of questioning how and where art takes place, the physical embodiment of what is recognized as art, blurring the boundary between art and the everyday.
The work from the late 1990s can be seen as generative, in progress, such as *Devotional Wallpaper* and *Placards*, 2008 – 2021 and Audition in Colour 1997-2020, developing and mixing aspects of earlier and recent works, colour panels, wallpaper, patterns, jazz, singing, improvisation, crystalline shapes.
Forms establish a sequence of links Jazz/Dada/ collage/trauma. Wallpaper/William Morris/class/nature/interiors.
The performance at the ICA, 2017, of masks and dancers, overran its initial planned time, because of the enthusiasm of the audience, who took over the event, generated a lot of interest.
Afterwards, l was invited by Gavin Wade to work on a project for Eastside projects, or rather develop a project in collaboration with Gavin Wade and the gallery, so expanding the possibility of collaboration to collaborating with an institution, into this mix was added a collaboration with skateboarders. It was Gavin who suggested using irregular sculptural shapes that were laying around the gallery wrapped with my wallpaper, which marked a shift from wall-based works. And it was Gavin who suggested using fool's gold or pyrite, with its multiple evocations.
At this time l was thinking about the James Bond film *Goldfinger*.
At the same time as l started planning for the show with Gavin l received a call from MIMA who was also interested in a collaboration and suggested incorporating works from their collection.
Eastside projects and Mima presented permutations of the In the *Castle Of My Skin*, mixing plywood structures, wallpapers, objects, videos, drawings and prints. Feeling her way was the next iteration of this ensemble of elements and picture of a constituent infrastructure, resulting from ever increasing collaborations, co-dependencies, and negotiations.
If we think about Museums, with a museum we enter other worlds, museums extend the language of theatre and scenography.

DG : How did you design your show for Venice?
SB: I designed it in SketchUp, drawings and 3d printing. Then l used the videos of the sound of the singers to structure the work throughout the venue, but how the sound worked in the space was unknown.
The British Pavilion space is quite difficult to organise an installation, while the spaces for Turner Contemporary allowed for a different experience.
New versions of the installation are currently on

Workspace

show at the PHI Foundation in Montreal and the Toronto Biennale of Art, Canada, and l have just finished a new installation *Benevolence*, for GAMec, Bergamo, comprising resistance songs and protest movements around the world.
Three students from the Gaetano Donizetti Higher Institute Of Musical Studies in Bergamo were invited last autumn to perform and improvise popular songs in the heart of Bergamo's La Citta Alta. In particular, in the preliminary phase of the project, the artist and the students noted how *Bella Ciao* – a key song in the country's democratic history-has now become a symbol of global and transgenerational resistance.

DG During my visit to Venice this year l had the distinct impression that the Biennale as a form didn't work. What were your thoughts?
SB: The pavilion organisation is about managing expectations, and politics. We seem to be in a post nation time, and artists who are showing in the pavilions are not necessarily from the countries of the pavilion they are showing in.

Wallpaper (2022).

Arte! Arte! Arte

Elga Wimmer

Argentine artist Marta Minujin is in the best sense of the word a living legend. The artist is considered a pioneer of happenings, performance, and pop art. Marta Minujin is one of the most recognized post war artists in Latin America and is often referred to as the 'Argentine Andy Warhol.' The conceptual artist, sculptor, and painter, always at the pulse of the time, seems to be at the right place at the right time. In Paris in the early 60's, where she met Nikki de St Phalle and Christo, she staged her first happening, created her now signature soft sculptures, and burned all her artwork to announce a new beginning. In New York in the mid 80's she invited Andy Warhol to her performance with the concept of paying off Argentina's external debt with maize, the traditional Latin American food staple and most widely grown crop in the Americas. Warhol, impressed by the young artist – already by then a household name in Europe and Latin America - asked her if she was rich. Marta replied famously: "I'm not, because I live in Argentina."

From wherever she resided, Marta Minujin returned to Argentina, where she started to show as an artist with her first solo exhibition at Teatro Agon in Buenos Aires in 1959. From the mid 60's on, she became one of the most energetic proponents of pop art and public art scenes in Buenos Aires.

All of the above and more was presented in a recent survey and solo show at the New York gallery Kurimanzutto, Marta Minujin: Making a Presence (April 27 to June 8, 2024), and

Marta Minujin's first major retrospective in the US at the Jewish Museum in New York (Nov. 17, 2023 – March 31, 2024). Curators Rebecca Shaykin and Darcie Alexander presented a stand-alone show at the Jewish Museum with 'Marta Minujin: Arte! Arte!Arte!' The exhibition showcased nearly 100 works from the artist's archives along with private and institutional collections, including her mattress-based soft sculptures, fluorescent large-scale paintings, psychedelic drawings of performances, as well as rarely seen photographs and film footage. Marta Minujin is known for her large-scale politically playful art. A large 'Tower of Babylon' made of forbidden books was built in the middle of Avenida 9 de Julio in Buenos Aires by the artist at the very end of seven years of a horrendous military regime and dictatorship in Argentina. It was a monumental gesture by the artist to symbolize freedom of expression! The sculpture was burnt down in the end and the books given to the cheering crowd. A more recent version 'The Parthenon of Banned Books' could be seen at Dokumenta, Kassel in 2017.

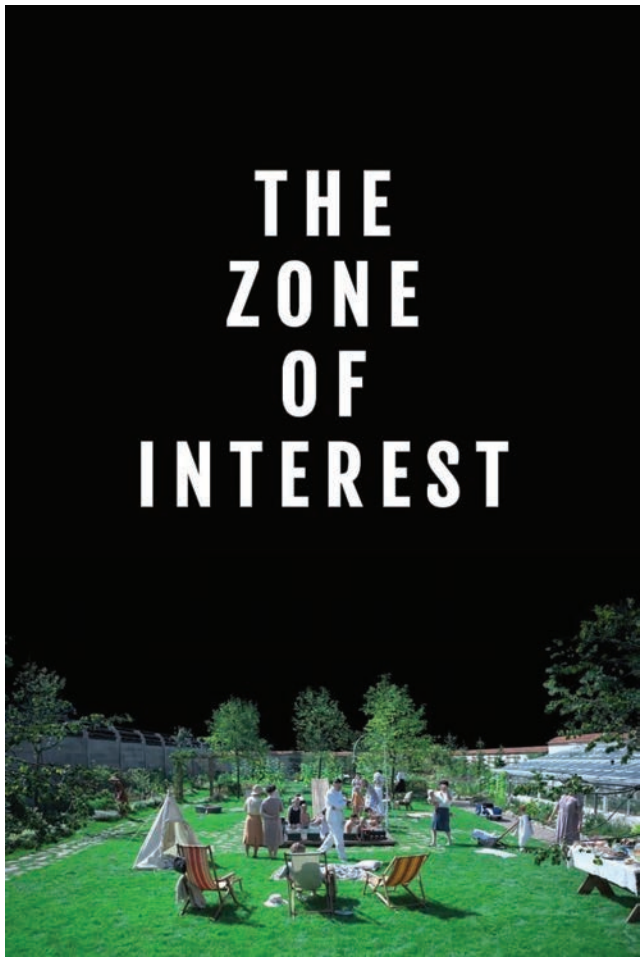
The 100 000 books assembled symbolized the ones censored and subsequently burned by the Nazi Regime. Similarly to the 1983 Parthenon, the books were distributed to people around the world when the work was dismantled.

Monumental sculptural works of art are usually associated with male artists' works. In that sense Marta Minujin emerges as a female pioneer in public art. Daring in political references as opposing the military dictatorship in Argentina, Minujin never neglects the poetic and human in her work. While being a serious artist and an inexhaustible creative force, Marta Minujin - both as a person and an artist – is playful, humorous, engaging, eccentric, and always thought provoking. We look forward to Marta Minujin's next ventures.

Marta Minujin: installation view
Image credit Jewish Museum New York

Zone of Interest

Annie Markovich



Zone of Interest is a cinematic masterpiece. Director Jonathan Glazer uses sounds often as visual stimulus which can free the imagination to interpret what is happening. Sometimes sound communicates in a more direct way what the eye cannot see. In the beginning shot a blank screen addresses the audience.

Zone of Interest begins with a colorful, natural landscape of life; a clean flowing river beneath blue skies, fertile earth, plentiful food and drink for the characters. Rudolph Hoss and his wife Hedwig are living among other deluded characters of the Nazi Party. Rudolph Hoss as Commandant was responsible for the death of over 3,000,000 people in the Birkenau death camps. Hoss's wife, Hedwig lives the "good life" in her claustrophobic denial of what she knows. Glazer shows the audience how easy it is to deny an evil right before our eyes.

Viewers witness the comfortably affluent life in the Hoss household; a birthday party, complete with screams from beyond the fence, a visit from Helga's mother who cannot bear what she suspects and leaves the following morning, with a note for her daughter which Hedwig tosses into the fire. Three German friends enjoy black kaffeeklatsch and laugh about the personal belongings stolen from prisoners; a mink coat for Hedwig, a diamond found in toothpaste and dresses for her friends. The baby is constantly wailing throughout the film, gun shots fire next door, prisoners scream while smoke stacks belch the remains of babies, women and men. Throughout the film Hoss' children act out their aggressiveness and exhibit worrisome behavior as a response to something they cannot see.

Hedwig is cold, indifferent and calculating and conducts her day-to-day activities greedily swallowing her conscience. When her mother visits, she brags about the "goodlife"; plants, garden and house. Local women who provide all the smooth running of the household are victims of Hedwig's uncivilized behavior.

Is her denial more evil than Hoss's blind obedience to authority?

When the film is switched to black and white footage an eerie glow casts a young girl as she distributes apples through furrows in the earth to the starving prisoners across the road. It is dream like and a ray of hope. She gets away on her bicycle unnoticed by the German soldiers nearby.

Climbing up the ranks of the Third Reich, Hoss' blind obedience culminates in wretching and vomiting as he walks down the corridor after a Nazi meeting. Ironically, today this same "office" building houses the Auschwitz Museum with exhibitions of suitcases, prosthetic devices worn by maimed, old and broken humanity.

The bicycle and dress in the film belonged to Alexandria, a brave young girl who delivered the apples, she met Jonathan Glazier shortly before she died.

The film was shot in Alexandria's home.

Brazilian Colour

Mary Fletcher

Beatriz Milhazes: O Diamante, 2002.
Photo: Vicente de Mello. © Beatriz Milhazes Studio

Tate St Ives have a new show on until 29 September *Maresias* meaning 'salty breezes', by Beatrix Malhazes who lives in Rio, a show coming from Margate and also a room of Rothko paintings from London.

To go from one to the other is like a trip to a tropical carnival full of colour and pattern hearing dancing salsa rhythms, seeing luscious vegetation around Beatriz Milhazes studio in Rio and tasting bubbly cocktails, moving through spacious light rooms and then being plunged into a narrow dark cave confronting death in the knowledge that Rothko killed himself, almost drowning in sorrow with Mahler as a suitable soundtrack in my mind.

Milhazes is a new name to me but Beatriz has had exhibitions in many places in the world. You can find her on YouTube explaining her various inspirations and her printing techniques. She mentions liking Bridget Riley but I also thought of the American Pattern and Decoration women artists of the 1970s.

The surfaces of her works are not slickly pristine as she allows marks made during their production to be left. Also her collage methods make motifs stand out with three dimensional vitality.

Whist the imagery remains variations on the same highly patterned decoration there are different developments as Beatriz Milhazes surprises with her inventiveness.

She speaks online of how her place of work, her home in Brazil is important to her and I am so pleased to find an exhibitor not reacting to Cornwall in a superficial way but bringing us her visions from Brazil.

Then on the way out of Tate there are the Rothko paintings from London, made in New York.

Years ago I used to walk through that room in Pimlico dismissing them until I heard a lecturer recommending visitors to give them time. I sat down then, and had to alter my opinion as the powerful fuzzy edged colours vibrated and the rectangular forms affected me. Being in a smaller space in St Ives you are closer to the pictures, hemmed in by them, and if you have time to sit down and gaze for a while you may be surprised by your reactions.

Leaving, I found myself noticing colours- contrasting rubbish bins, bright children's windmills on sticks and also my view of the Sandra Blow and Brian Wynter paintings in the gallery, which use bright colour and pattern, had been refreshed.

Beatriz Milhazes: Maresias
until 29 September 2024
Free for Members

O Turista (2004–05) Acrylic on canvas
Image: Manuel Águas and Pepe Schettino
Courtesy of Cranford Collection, London and Beatriz Milhazes Studio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