The Event of Art
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MarcLafia, et al.
The Event of Art.

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Pictures
open the future in order for the past to push the present in a new direction, history, the Pictures we Never See, To Create Images is to Create Thought or Why I am so Afraid to Think but not Afraid to Make Images An arrangement of Pictures better done by a machine or algorithm than Me

“If you take drama away from form you are left with formalism,” he explains. “Without drama, art becomes merely an industrial affair.” By which he means, no doubt, just a matter of manufacturing objects. “Western thought gives human beings a central role. Everything needs to be centred on humanity, otherwise there’s a great risk of falling into decadence.”

This element of drama or theatricality, to Kounellis’s mind, is what separates him and his European contemporaries from American minimalists such as Donald Judd or Carl Andre. “It is clear that minimalist art has a very different emotional effect. The minimalist point of reference was linked to a Protestant civilisation. For those Americans, drama was démodé. The minimalists didn’t want to have anything to do with images, but my work can be connected to a painting such as Van Gogh’s Potato Eaters (1885). There are various ways to be modern, and various ways of seeing in modernism.”

(Martin Gayford, “‘Everything needs to be centred on humanity’: Jannis Kounellis, 1936–2017”, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/everything-needs-to-be-centred-on-humanity/)
A common denominator in Boltanski's work is memory—spanning childhood and personal memories, memorials and the history of humanity. For his installation Personnes at Monumenta 2010 in the Grand Palais, Paris, the artist made an installation with 30 tons of clothes in memory of all the people who used to wear them, evoking the memory of their disappearance.

I show it to you to give a sense of a number of things; how the information is sensual, tactile, physical. How it carries with it biography, history, how it overwhelms us in its scale. It’s not an image or projected light. It’s spatial and distributed. Notice how I called it information. Because in the image there are not artifacts, there are resemblances to things that are familiar. That’s why artists who make photographs want to make them big so they are things, objects, experiences—they want to be part of the experience economy but in the business of art.

We don’t usually look down on pages. Imagine these pages bound. Or these images unbound.

Below is a scrapbook page from a project called art box. A project about how our sight and senses, our knowledge and memories, our spaces are organized. In our mind, in perspective, in architecture, on the video phone and the theatre.
To create images is to create thought.

In the history of Western philosophy, imagination is conceived as something more than fantasy; it is the capacity to create images. and to create images is to create thought.

Philosophers have termed the imaginal, as an intermediate space populated by images or (re)presentations that are presences in themselves. such images can be considered the social imaginary in which we have grown.

Our capacity to produce images is our capacity to think outside and beyond the present, to go backwards and forwards in time.

Never have we had such access to the world’s images, but to see them, to sense their thoughts, we have to look at them with other images. we have to engage them in conversation, in the conversation of images.

With these new images I wanted to re-imagine, reinvent time, to see it as a physical dimension, to create an object of the image.

At first my interest was in history paintings but over time it became the history of painting and with the history of photography, and I suppose a history of image. I had always been taken by Manet’s *Execution of Maximillian* and only learned at the outset of my project that what Manet had created and abandoned as a painting was also an event that was photographed. Manet’s take on the event is very unique and in conversation with Goya’s painting *Third of May* and Goya was in conversation with Rubens, and Rubens with Leonardo.

This lead me to think of images, in their many modes and many genres, across time and to create conversations with images. I began to imagine new images, to see new things, new thoughts often times by simply placing one image on another, or layering images and cutting them out.

Images in their traces, in their histories, carry forward their techniques, their textures, their surfaces and armatures, their politics. they enfold the world the come from and in conversation can present new worlds.

Real thinking is one of the most difficult challenges there is. Thinking requires a confrontation with stupidity, the state of being formlessly human without engaging any real problems. One discovers that the real path to truth is through the production of sense: the creation of a texture for thought that relates it to its object. Sense is the membrane that relates thought to its other.

Lately, I have been working on a new project, around ideas of history, as an archive with modalities of inscription, circulation and in a constant state of being re-written. It’s as much about the layering of these textures as themselves narrative(s) of histories. It has brought me to understand so much of the limits of what I know.

Today most pictures in contemporary art are abstract. I wonder why. Perhaps we are so inundated with depictive images in our media that from our contemporary art since cubism on, now over 100 years old, we want color, line, shapes and forms to be ‘free’. We want the sensation and the mystery of the abstract, the unsaid. … from history arrangement2_with pictures

There is something so very exciting to imagine, to have come on to oneself the beginnings of the sense of something, to allow the senses to see an image, not a precise image, but the thought of an image or material form, that’s not so very clear, yes, that’s exciting, but then to get it out of the mind and into the world, ah, that’s a real labor.

I have wanted to make some larger works, kind of history paintings, based on photography, not images or representations in photography but from the texture of photographs.

I wanted simply to sample the texture of older photographs, abstractly. In that abstraction would be a kind of history, far away, unfathomable, a mystery, a trace.

But then over the summer, I thought of history as actual events, relations of power, real blood and guts, refracted, narrated and accounted by and in image and words.

I returned to Manet’s *Execution of Maximilian*, a painting which I have look at again and again. From a certain accounting I had thought Manet’s painting of which there are different versions was also photographed.

It returned me to several ideas; photography/painting, colonialism, the Belgian Congo, the event, the seeing of the event, the disappearance of the event. The material image, the seeing of the image…

I, like many others, was taught the book, John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* in the context of Marxist-feminist critique. And while ideology critique is an important way to see the world, it has a tendency to look over the head of the image altogether in order to see what’s behind it. The image once again becomes a symptom of a societal disease that’s out there. You don’t really see the image; you see the system that produced the image.

*(Daniel Coffeen, *Making Sense of Images)*
I ask myself, what would it be like to create a picture of one’s education, one’s national history, one’s cultural memory, one’s connoisseurship, one’s global aspiration, as a work of art. What if I could see everything I’ve seen in my entire life in fast forward in 20 minutes. (Another history picture all together)

Why a work of art? Perhaps better said under the aegis of art. Why? Perhaps to free the work from having to communicate some said thing, and rather, to interrogate the construction of meaning itself.

To make a picture that is at the same time narrative and against narrative or perhaps shows its complication. I found and still find this, let’s call it representation, awkward and difficult. I feel myself hedging.

Why is this?

Perhaps my discomfort is that a picture of representation reveals too much of me. Or just plainly, reveals too much. But after all, isn’t it simply a picture, an image. Yes and no, I have great ambivalence toward them, images.

This is precisely why modernity abandons the history painting. Leave history to photography. From impressionism, to cubism and on, perception becomes the project of the image. To see seeing.

So accustomed are we to the inanity of mass medias over determined images, so exhausted by them, in the project of art we want something else. The pure pleasure of color or the infra ordinary or banal or inane or the structure that reveals, or just that big sculpture of Play-Doh, yes, that’s about all we can take. And thank goodness. Perhaps that’s why we like surveillance cameras, it’s just a machine seeing, seeing blindly, it does not insist on seeing in any particular way, it just sees. It gets out of its way. It has no history, just pure sight, disconnected to memory. It is without a history. Yes of course it has instrumentality and is anything but dumb. But its machineness is its aesthetic. That’s the point.

And why this word, history? History, that leads to biography, place and culture.

Consider for a moment the great sociologist, Stuart Hall, who established the field of Cultural Studies, often using his own experience as a Jamaican-raised part Scottish, part African, part Portuguese Jew to make his point, Hall’s central argument is that a person’s identity is continually shaped by surrounding forces. All knowledge is embodied, spatially and culturally situated.

And so are images. Or are they? Thinking about this gives me reserve. It is in a sense a kind of prohibition. It makes me terribly self-conscious. Does it matter that I am also a Spanish Jew, a French Catholic Canadian, an American, today a New Yorker. Who am I in the narrative? Who speaks? Who has power? What is power? What does that have to do with images? It has to do, I suppose, with whose seeing. The me, in the seeing.
I find these questions very difficult, even to the point of feeling abject. Yet this abjection urged me to make works in this genre of history, at least as I understand or wanted to take it on. Of course history is not always just, not at all.

I felt like the character and I imagine the filmmaker of *Birdman*, whose work wants to critique Hollywood and celebrity but knows how absolutely useless it is. The film calls its critique a virtue, a virtue of ignorance. Ignorance as in, what can I possibly say, you know how it is, like the Leonard Cohen song “Everybody Knows”:

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Everybody knows the fight was fixed
The poor stay poor, the rich get rich
That’s how it goes
Everybody knows
Everybody knows that the boat is leaking
Everybody knows that the captain lied
Everybody got this broken feeling
Like their father or their dog just died
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To say what everybody knows, that seeing is not neutral, that an act we assume to be mechanical and neutral—the eyes just see—is in fact run through with ideology. Everybody knows this.

The image is more than just ideas, more than just biography: it is an entire onto-cosmology, the very manner in which things are and come into the world.

*(Daniel Coffeen, *Making Sense of Images*)

Even with access to all images from all over the world our ability, mine really, to create an image larger than myself is quite impossible. Perhaps the texture of music is much more fluid, more malleable, and moves more easily in and out of various sounds once rooted in specific places. Perhaps sounds can be lifted from their original context (if such a thing exist) and still carry meaning or at the very least a kind of texture that both carries forth a trace of its origin and erases it. But images, of figures and events past, of specific places and representations, even with strong cultural memory, outside their cultures and time, become lost to us, or for most of us, were never known.

Where images once were the preserve of national archives, ubiquitous digital transmission today is global and each of us has become our own archivists. As to what is, and is not in the archives, and there are a host of them, from a wide variety of transnational corporate search engines and social
I wanted to make a go at seeing if images could still represent something to us. Of course this brings forward a whole set of problematic issues because all images are culturally seen. (We’ll get to that soon enough.)

Suffice it to say that in this new work I would no longer put the apparatus before what was seen but I would try and sense what was being seen or depicted as well as how it was seen. Not that the two can be separated. With this access to the world’s images, I wanted to see them, to sense their thoughts, to look at them with other images. I wanted to engage them in conversation, in the conversation of images. And this as I said might be another part of post internet art. And I suppose this is what any remixed does.

Manet’s modernity lies above all in his eagerness to update older genres of painting by injecting new content or by altering the conventional elements. He did so with an acute sensitivity to historical tradition and contemporary reality. This was also undoubtedly the root cause of many of the scandals he provoked.
History Pictures: Pictures in Conversation

One of the problems I confronted in my *Pictures* series, something I did not quite understand until making them and that is taking a pre-existing picture and reworking it, a picture inside the canon of art and as such said picture has lost its force, its disruption. Appropriation or remixing takes a certain deftness to work. And in some sense it’s an insiders’ game, a game of connoisseurship. A game with rewards. Banksy is one of the best at this game as is Christian Marclay, Kathy Acker, Cindy Sherman and many others. I don’t think it’s my game and a game that is a bit old but there are many ways to play it and something’s always new to be found especially along the lines of Yinka Shonibare who for example recast himself as narrator of *The Rake’s Progress*.

This leads to the strategy of re-reading the text, narrating it from having once been a minor character to now MC of affairs. The whole of the postcolonial is taken up by this, those that the colonizer cast aside and denigrated now come back to speak. And alas, like Rashomon or Citizen Kane, the very person or event we thought we know is something entirely else. Not just else but multiple.

With these works I wanted to re-imagine, reinvent time, to see it as a physical dimension, to create an object of the image, that doesn’t obliterate it, but teases out its trajectories and brings it back from its overexposure in its continual transmission. Of course the image will never exhaust itself in its repetition but become so domesticated that all its initial charge is gone. How then to see these familiar pictures but to rework them and make them new again with other pictures.

With the use of perspective and lenses long before photography, western picture making, not unlike genres of movies were pretty stable. There were the genres of History, Landscape, Portraiture and Still Life. Picture and picture making was regulated by the church then academies and the discourse around them narrow. It was this controlled discourse, this decorum of the picture and its reception that artists worked against that created occasional shocks and outrage.

My first interest was in History paintings but over time it became the history of painting and with that the history of photography, and I suppose a history of image. Pictures have often, if not always, been about and in conversation with other pictures. This led me to think of pictures in their many modes and many genres across time and to want to create conversations amongst and between them. I began to imagine new images, to see new things, new thoughts often times by simply placing one image on another, or layering images and cutting them out. These new pictures pointed to things sometimes difficult to discern but there was always a something.
MARC LAFIA

Icon (from the series ‘Pictures in Conversations’), 2015

C-print
25 x 21 in (63.5 x 53.34 cm)
1 of 2 AP
Courtesy of the artist
Signed/numbered on bottom

Estimate $2,200

This auction will open at
12:00pm EST on May 08, 2015.
Eros through the ages
(west end boys and eastern girls)

Beauty for much of human history has been connected to fertility. No matter how we consider female beauty – and in that put away the idea of conception – female beauty has always turned on fertility. But in fact not at all always, soon enough in man’s history, sex became not about procreation, but pleasure, and pleasure for pleasure’s sake. Well that depended on what your philosophy of life was. For the ancients, the cultivation of pleasure and appetite suffused life and its fulfillment was simply a natural appetite to be appeased or cultivated. With the Christian era, focus was on the afterlife, this life was but a short one compared to eternal life and the body was a corruption, strange and alien to the aspiring spirit. Nevertheless, artists and their patrons in the staging of religious or mythic scenarios wanted to visually enjoy such pleasures. (One need only look at the French Rococo painters Boucher and Poussin to see this.) But just turn the globe around, and on the other side of the world, the earthly pleasures of sex during the same time, the 16th to 18th century, are depicted in Japan during the Edo period in Shunga prints using the wood cut or Ukiyo-e technique. Sets of such depictions were enjoyed by all social groups and were often given as wedding gifts and such art integrated into the fabric of everyday life. But things of the body were not all shunned in the western world and found their way into pictures through scenes of mythologies, even religious pictures and then pictures made for the aristo. Wanting to see both east and west simultaneously I made the following works both as an accordion book based on the Japanese screen and as prints on rice paper mounted and superimposed on each other on wood.
Set into the middle of the room is an architectural sized fabric veil that acts as a visual filter. This wall sized filter lies somewhere between an iPhone camera app effect and a rave. The filter allows the work to continually become one’s own personal picture depending on where the viewer positions himself. It is a way to individualize the works from a distinct but finite set of vantage points. Furthermore it evokes a sense of sensuality, late-night club, mysterious, timeless rapture, a non-linear series of encounters, between artworks of eros through the ages, the artist on line, all moments in time reminding us of the continual transactions that we enact on a daily and historical basis. Through collage, re-photography, online performance, and exhibitionism this work enacts how we each encounter the other in sex, love, and ritual—human behavior as current today as it is age-old.

The artist asks us to see the call and response, the back and forth, the circuit of seeing ourselves in today’s online world as a form of seduction. Images that have been culled from personal archives as well as the public domain of the Internet reflects a global infatuation with sensuality.