

ISSUE 2 / MT18

# AWP REVIEW OXYFC



# 2

Dear Reader,

ARO is back! Across the next 18 unpredictably-risograph-printed pages you will find an expanded and exciting horizon for writing and thinking about contemporary art. Pithy reviews of exhibitions hung at our very own Modern Art Oxford as well as those as far away as MoMA sit beside both real and fictional interviews scrutinising the state of the art world today, as well as a number of art-historical analyses, explorations, and other experimental modes of writing and image making. Opening up these new ways of reflecting on art makes for an exciting read ahead, and one that is hopefully just as accessible as it is perceptive. Enjoy!

Harry

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## ARTIST-CURATORS II: ERASURES

MICHAEL KURTZ

Modern Art Oxford's current show, *Future Knowledge*, sheds light on environmental issues through the versatile lens of visual, performance and community art. According to co-curator Sara Lowes, the exhibition attempts to sustain a positive ethos around climate change: no anxiety-inducing statistics or graphic images are splashed across the walls, only astute interpretations of environmental issues rendered in a wide range of media.

Lowes described the structure of the exhibition in terms of scale. The visitor moves from works with the broadest conceptual scope to groups of artworks concerned with personal, small-scale environmental issues. One such larger work was Eve Mutso's *Loop*, a thrilling aerial dance piece performed on the night of the preview party that resulted in the graphite-on-canvas composition on the floor of the first gallery. Mutso began the performance by tentatively circling a mound of graphite powder before leaping into the simultaneous support-restraint of her aerial straps, hung from the ceiling. Wrapping the straps around her, at one point around her neck like a noose, she pirouetted across the canvas, dragging her pointe shoes through the dark substance. The work can be read as both a revelation of the artistic process and a critique of our reckless contamination of the environment.

## FUTURE KNOWLEDGE MODERN ART OXFORD

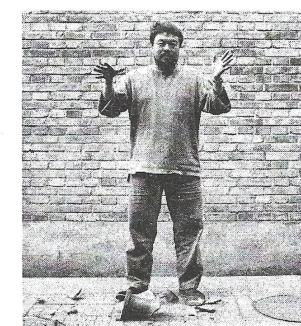
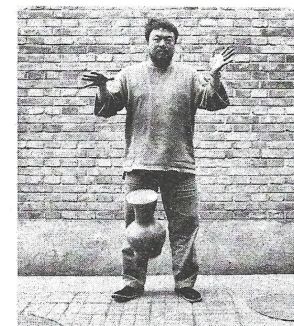
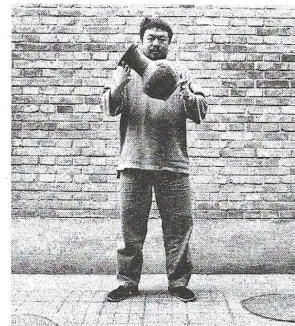
Rachel Sussman's prodigious *The Oldest Living Things in the World* is the next piece to be encountered. This decade-long project, informed by scientific research, presents striking photographs of organisms over 2,000 years old. The artist's intention was to explore 'Deep Time' parameters, crossing geological, biological and 'cosmic' boundaries to compile the images along a timeline. Sussman sought to anthropomorphise the organisms, harnessing a personal connection between them, herself and her audience. Her multidisciplinary approach has combined art and science, forming an unconventionally celebratory, yet mournful, outlook on the environment.

As the visitor moves through the gallery, they experience the works of Eline McGeorge, Tania Kovats, Lucy Kimbell and Andy Owen: all of whom have contributed their artistic vision to the issues of climate change through engagement with natural substances and scientific research, from McGeorge's *Seed Capsules* to Kimbell's *Air Pollution Toile*. The unique position of the artist allows them to mediate between science, nature and humanity to produce poetic, impactful interpretations of bleak and foreboding facts.

*Future Knowledge's* legacy as an exhibition is cemented in the final gallery space, where a public studio encourages visitors to reflect on the ideas generated within the exhibition through various activities, talks and workshops. Rather than pushing an aggressive doctrine regarding climate change, Modern Art Oxford has empowered the visitor to consider their environmental responsibility through the constructive and enduring process of interacting with art.

ANI GILMORE

Ani Gilmore is in her second year at St. Peter's College reading History of Art



Art only reliably occupies the front-page news when it is under threat. The *Mona Lisa's* fame was generated in large part by its theft in 1911 and Brazil's national museum has become the focus of global attention in recent weeks because of its near-total destruction in a tragic fire\*. The frisson<sup>1</sup> generated by such events is not intrinsic to them but caused by the widespread ideology of material heritage – the belief that art is culturally and financially valuable and so needs conserving.

'Artist-Curators I' lauded Anthea Hamilton's recoding of modernist sculptures in her Tate Britain installation *The Squash* and this second article will extend its themes by discussing artists that have engaged destructively with actual artworks. In so doing they have gleaned meaning from the paradigm of heritage fetishization and the tension between themselves and the art of the past.

Robert Rauschenberg's infamous *Erased de Kooning Drawing* of 1953 is a forthright expression of the 'anxiety of influence' and its overcoming. By creating out of an expressionist drawing a work that resembles his cool, emotionless white paintings from the same period, Rauschenberg parodies the essential power that celebrated painters like de Kooning afforded to the indexical mark. The piece thus goes beyond the initial shock-factor effected by the destroyed artwork and engages critically with received artistic conventions of the time. Ai Weiwei's 1995 series of three photos of the artist *Dropping*

a *Han Dynasty Urn* has a more blatant political scope. Weiwei calls attention to the markedly schismatic relationship of the modern artist to traditional heritage and specifically between modernised Communist China and its highly censored dynastic past. The use of photographic documentation reifies the moment itself as a historic event, recorded journalistically in an attempt to present the destruction of traditional culture as an open, honest (even necessary) process in contrast to the reality of the government's covert manipulation of historical truth.

These two pieces achieve their respective aims, of formal experimentation and state critique, by signifying through destruction; they work by making a space of absence into which meaning can be projected. Michael Rakovitz's current Fourth Plinth installation confirms that art is a field of physical contestation – but subverts the image of the artist as an Oedipus character who needs to destroy in order to develop, who can only move forward in negative relation to the past. By reconstructing out of Iraqi date tins a winged god from Nineveh destroyed by ISIS in 2015, Rakovitz expresses loss sincerely while signaling the necessity to create anew. With any desire for destruction thwarted by the omnipresence of ephemerality and iconoclasm, recuperation and regeneration are the order of the day.

\*At the time of writing, a shredded Banksy sits in a Sotheby's backroom and covers the front pages

<sup>1</sup>French word for aesthetic thrill; trendy among anthropologists

Image: Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995. © Guggenheim Museum

Michael Kurtz is assistant editor of ARO and a third year History of Art student at Wadham College.



# "NEW YORK WON ME OVER" FROM OXFORD TO THE LOWER EAST SIDE

**HARRY CODAY** interviews **SIMON PRESTON** at Simon Preston Gallery, New York City. They chat about Simon painting at the Ruskin in the '90s, not fitting in at Christie's, the future of the Art World and all things in-between.

September 2018

**HC:** Shall we start with what you can remember of the Ruskin? What kind of work did you make?

**SP:** Sure, so I was very much a painter - at the High Street Ruskin. I spent a lot of time essentially with Maria Chevska; Stuart Morgan, who was an incredible critical theorist and was my thesis advisor. And I made sort of pretty standard, geometric abstractions that actually took reference from the architecture of the city of Oxford - all the quads and what have you - so they kind of looked like these monochrome Ad Reinhardt type paintings but they actually reflected different architectural features of Oxford. It actually came through a research scholarship that I got from Teddy Hall that took me to Sienna and Florence, and I was looking at these murals of various Florentine baptisteries and the architecture there. So it was grounded in research and that very valuable scholarship. And then my final degree show was basically- my most memorable moment was having a show in New College of these paintings, a sequence of 12 or 14 of them.

**HC:** Large scale paintings?

**SP:** Yeah of scale - maybe kind of 6x6 feet, made out of household gloss and matte paint. They were good, they took time...

**HC:** Quite Gary Hume...

**SP:** *Very* Gary Hume! He'd just made his Hospital Doors.

[HC Laughs]

**SP:** I was right into them. I also had a real architecture fetish so it kind of married those two things. I remember some key tutors being Chris Ofili and Rebecca Warren.

**HC:** At the Ruskin?

**SP:** At the Ruskin - but visiting tutors. But they all had these ascending careers. It was an exciting time in that regard.

**HC:** Sounds very 'YBA'.

**SP:** It was very YBA. And the Saatchi Gallery just opened on Boundary Road, and that was all an influence.

**HC:** It sounds a lot more exciting than it is now... [laughs]

**SP:** Well it was funny because there was such a power of the YBAs. I strongly had this feeling that if I stayed in the UK I was just going to follow behind Tracy Emin. Everywhere I went she would just be holding court and we'd be like a few years later. There was no room I didn't think. They defined such a swathe of what the art world was to be at that time. There wasn't really room. And the Ruskin still was slightly sort of backwater-ish at the time.

**HC:** And so did you want to keep on making painting?

**SP:** I basically made a quite conscious decision that I was going to use some of the strengths of leaving the university to not necessarily stop making work, but definitely get out and explore the world a bit. And that led me to Christie's. One of the negatives of being in a college, collegiate system, is that there were three or four fine artists at Teddy Hall, and you were watching everyone get these knock-around jobs and it was like oh. That was definitely an influence. And I could see just one knock-around job of the sort that I could go after and it was going after an auction house. So I went to Christie's and they basically said: you don't have a family name, you don't have any money, we don't know who you are... no. And that just fired me up! [Laughs]. And I got really dogged about it and I was like I'm going to get this... and I did. And I know that I stepped way out of my comfort zone but I just pursued it - just because I didn't like the first thing I was going for being a fail, basically.

And then it got a little more interesting because that YBA movement was now just falling into the auction world, and we literally put together the first contemporary art sale at Christie's, and actually I then single-handedly put together the first Saatchi sale at work, and delivered Charles Saatchi all the live results. And that felt like: okay, well I now really feel this is sort of an interesting experience.

**HC:** This was in a proper role at Christie's, not just as an intern?

**SP:** *Just* in a proper role. They quickly saw that I had some kind of- no-one else in the building knew what a Damien Hirst was and I had a little bit of that knowledge.

**HC:** I guess they might have been much more used to posh Art History students?...

**SP:** Yeah, like in the elevator everyone would look at me as if I was totally renegade...and we used to get a lot of that,

properly kind of aggressive... and I kept trying to leave and every time I tried to leave someone would say, "look Simon we're gonna get this huge big warehouse in the East End, you don't need to come to King Street you can just stay over there" and... all these became attractive things. But I ultimately knew that I didn't want to be there. And I'd stepped way too far away from, if not my practice, artist's practice. And at that time - I'm grateful to Christie's for it - I started to meet a lot of dealers and what have you. I met Thomas Dane who was at the time a kind of quite singular figure. He didn't have a gallery; he was just supporting artists' projects and he had just started to represent Steve McQueen. He said come and work for me: I don't know what I'm gonna do, I don't know how to represent artists - but just let's start... and we did. And instantly working with Steve, that was really a very formative time because I realised that being in his sphere and learning about his practice and what he was doing was infinitely more exciting than me doing my work in some gallery. And that was the first sort of solid foundation block of thinking that this might be the career that I want to pursue.

**HC:** I guess that's something I'm also thinking about. Whether it's more interesting to make your own work or to work with other people's.

**SP:** Right. Well actually now I think back a little further about my time at the Ruskin... I spent a lot of time in other people's studios talking about what they were doing. And to this day that is exactly what I enjoy, and what I get the most out of the role of having a gallery. Without fail. So it took me a long time to isolate that.

**HC:** And you've stuck with some of those artists whose studios you were visiting at the Ruskin?

**SP:** [Laughs] One... John Gerrard. Yeah we were both at the Ruskin together. We were very close friends, as part of a group of close friends at the Ruskin.

And then I went off and worked with Steve. I started travelling to the US a lot. And with Thomas Dane we started to gather a small group of artists together, with the thought of maybe opening a gallery - and that was very crucial. And then he and Steve had found this gallery in New York City that had just opened up in Harlem and it was really kind of renegade, putting together a very interesting group of artists. And Thomas very shrewdly just said: Simon go and form an alliance - there's so much based on relationships. He said don't come back until you're friends with all these people - which, to a young graduate, was a great offer of something to do and be, but also smart. And I went, and I came back with all these artists who are now new friends, and ascendant, of which now are really kind of successful artists. So I came back and that was interesting, I learnt the power of forging these relationships, but also opened the door to the next phase which basically... That gallery, since that trip, they started to pursue me to move to the US and work for them. And I sort of fought that. I wasn't quite ready for that move and I was very happy with Thomas Dane. But ultimately New York won me over and the

more I went back and forward I was like yeah that's appealing. And so a few years later I ultimately came to be director of the project, which was a great way to arrive to New York with an amazing, very close knit group of artists. And Christian Hay who was one of very few African-American art dealers, was really creating a new bit of history, and creating a new shape for this gallery. It was a fascinating time, and I was there for 5 or so years, and it brought me to the US and it introduced me to the whole American landscape of the art world. Which felt very different. In the UK it still felt like a kind of back-water. YBAs aside, it was still tabloid fodder.

**HC:** So you think New York was 10 years ahead of the UK?

**SP:** More so. I mean New York was built on the renement of art being essential. Without fail. No-one in New York would ever question the legitimacy of contemporary art - the city is built on this. Which felt very different to "what is that crazy stuff you're dealing with", and it felt like so much more possibility.

**HC:** And how did you go from being the director of someone else's project to starting your own?

**SP:** Well unfortunately the project was renegade and fairly fugitive and became a victim of its own success, and we got sued by a rather wealthy collector. He wasn't very happy with the choice of paintings he was being given, and we went through a very public and very telling law suit which again opened up another sphere of American life where- it was just fascinating and it was very public and it was... just a very wealthy Swiss banker attacking a penniless African-American gallerist: who was right, who was wrong? The way that was portrayed in the press was remarkable. It was just a very interesting lesson. But the gallery unfortunately folded in the process. So I came out of that with a lot of a 'baptism of fire' education, but not really knowing where to go. And a sort of resistance to go to this executive director of a big gallery where it becomes incredibly corporate. But also not really necessarily wanting to open my own gallery.

New York then was a city of 800 contemporary art galleries and it felt impossible to just set up shop and expect that to fly. The thing that changed that really was that the New Museum was being built, and there was this idea that- there's always these cycles, and there was this feeling of the Lower East Side being the new gallery district... and I opened here early March 2008. Just before the financial crisis, alongside 3 or 4 colleagues. We opened galleries together. There were no other galleries in the Lower East Side; the New Museum was going to open a year later. And that really was the moment, and they don't come along very often so it was just taking advantage of just being at the right place at a particular cycle.

**HC:** So you wanted to avoid the corporate, big galleries, but ultimately you're starting your own business?

[Continues on page 14]



JOSIAH McNEIL



**Bonnie Clearwater interviews Ian White**  
**British Museum, 2018**  
**[excerpt]**

Ian White: [Laughs] Yes. You're right there. We didn't find much at the sauté. It was largely unsuccessful, a few crumpled off-cuts of miscellaneous fabrics within the smaller batterbergs, couldn't tell you which ones though. Our main finding was lots of scraps. Knotty little bits, probably been stewing there over the last century.

Bonnie Clearwater: That is a marvellous thought [pauses] all those scraps that have nested on the surface vis-à-vis the agency of those much deeper. Bystanders to, and symptomatic of, an unknown history. That must have been encouraging?

IW: Well Bonnie, if it wasn't for our suits overheating and being red arsed I may be able to take such a coated position. We were expecting some setbacks and we knew the logistics were extreme, but the suits had been thoroughly tested so it was disappointing.

BC: Ah, yes, but it is that lingering restriction of the offline condition that, for me, encapsulates the exhibition. Would you mind addressing the simulation in the opening room?

IW: I will, yes, but first I just want to go back to your phrasing of an 'unknown' history. I think there is a vital difference between unknown and overlooked. Or even looked upon, but from a singular viewpoint. I remember being taken to the British Museum as a child and finding the whole thing terribly boring. And then at art school I found artefacts to be quite cool, maybe even fetishised them a bit. It took until much later to recognise the histories of others embodied within these artefacts are not for my entertainment or desire. It was never unknown, I just had to stop being so pathetically romantic.

BC: You've made your bed, now lie in it perhaps best articulates that sentiment.

IW: Yes, I'd be inclined to agree. I had been thinking about video game maps for a while, Minecraft and such, and the endless stroll anticipating stumbling across something to pinch. I'd also read a bit around the formation of civilisations and thinking about homesteaders, and the disappointment of coming home 'empty handed'.

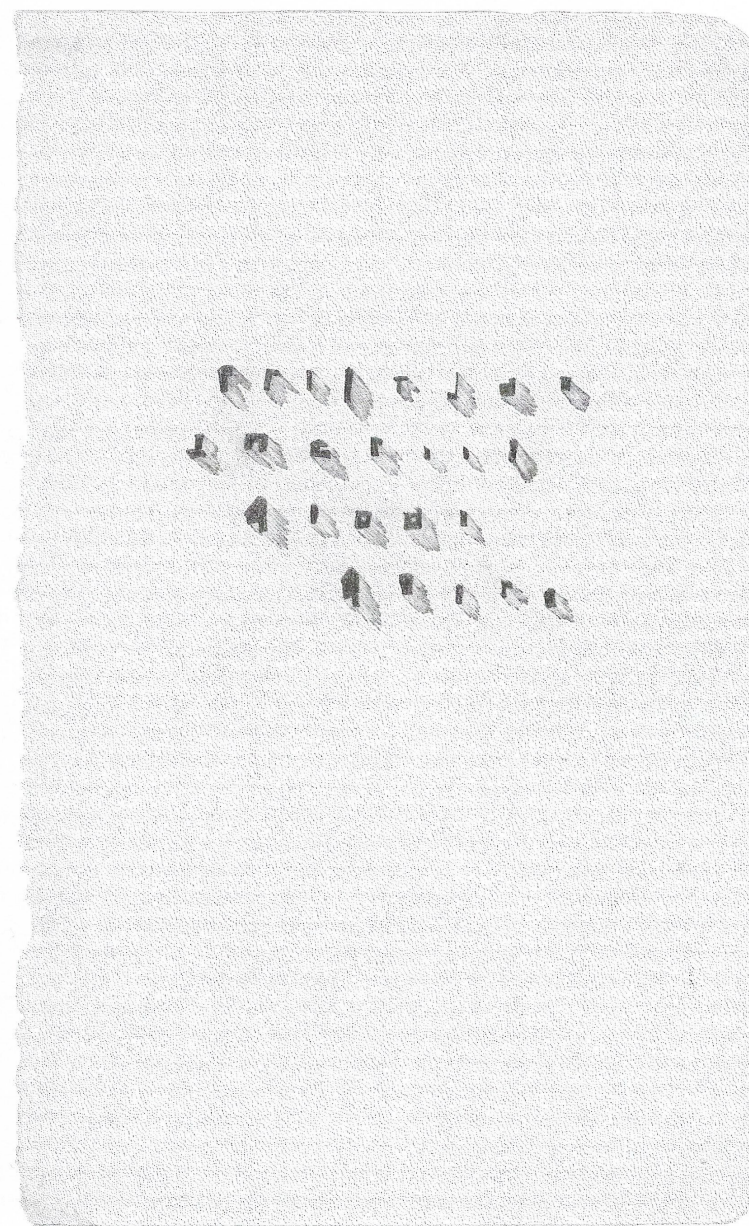
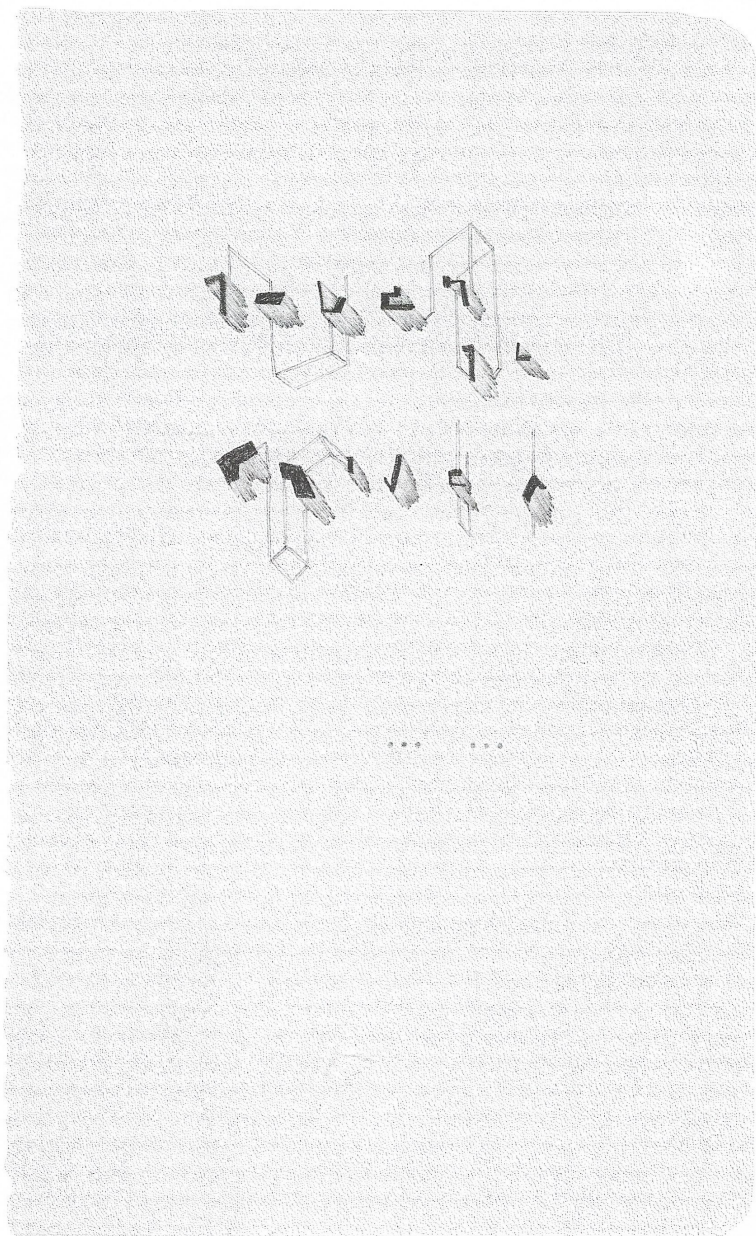
BC: You have created a parallel ocean made entirely of cooking oil, where the viewer takes on the role of a "deep fat diver" using VR. I know you will resist this but your work has an undeniable synergy with Hirst's spectacular exhibition in Venice the other year. I expected to uncover similar treasures in your work but to no avail.

IW: Hmm. I guess. I spotted similar considerations of post-factual politics and artifice, both national and internationally. I reckon he is more seduced by its possibilities than I am, I don't know. It's difficult to be subversive with the subject matter when you're making millions from it. There's something very compromising - American - about it. Not that being British is much better.

BC: I remember visiting your studio and you telling me about something you saw at the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery. Is that worth mentioning?

IW: Yes. Definitely [chuckling] It has a large Ancient Greece collection and in one display on lamps and lighting there was a sole Morrison's olive oil bottle [laughs] I'm sure it was a very museological attempt at humour and accessibility but I went away thinking about it for weeks. I kept picturing museum collections if they only contained artefacts that hadn't, you know, been pinched from another land. So I'm there, oil bottle in hand, thinking how shit it is to be British.







# FULL CIRCLE

ROBERT ROWLAND SMITH

Should art be 'relevant' or 'timeless'? Would you rather be known for an artwork that nails the Zeitgeist and gets tongues wagging, or one that transcends its moment to become 'universal'? Is it better that an artwork sits in its history or rises above it?

This autumn sees the centenary of the ending of the First World War. Among the most iconic British paintings from that time is *We are Making a New World* by Paul Nash. This year, in 2018, Richard Long exhibited a new piece called *Flint Wheel* at London's Lisson Gallery. Together they help answer the question of relevance versus timelessness.

Needless to say, we are not comparing apples with apples. The Nash is a painting where the Long falls into an ambiguous category between sculpture and land art. You look at the Nash at eye level, where it hangs in the Imperial War Museum, and don't feel the need to move around much in front of it. The Long you look down on and walk around, reverently but anxious not to nudge one of the flints with your shoe.

And then there is the apparent contrast between relevance and timelessness. The title of the Nash loudly averts to its historical context - between the end of the war and the start of a 'new world'. In 1918 that couldn't have been more relevant. *Flint Wheel*, on the other hand, suggests a freedom from historical specificity. It seems to stake a claim for timelessness.

And yet the historic quality of the Nash might divert us from the ways in which it, like the Long, points beyond its immediate context. Nash, like Long himself, was interested in stone circles, and was drawn in particular to Avebury. As soon as you know this, you can see how the trees in this image, along with the sunrise, create a painterly henge, a spiritual circle. A circle evokes the cyclical nature of time, the seasonality, and even the infinity thereof. In other words, *We are Making a New World* puts the concept of a historical break caused by the ending of the war together with the natural and indeed eternal return of the sun. Relevance and timelessness combine.

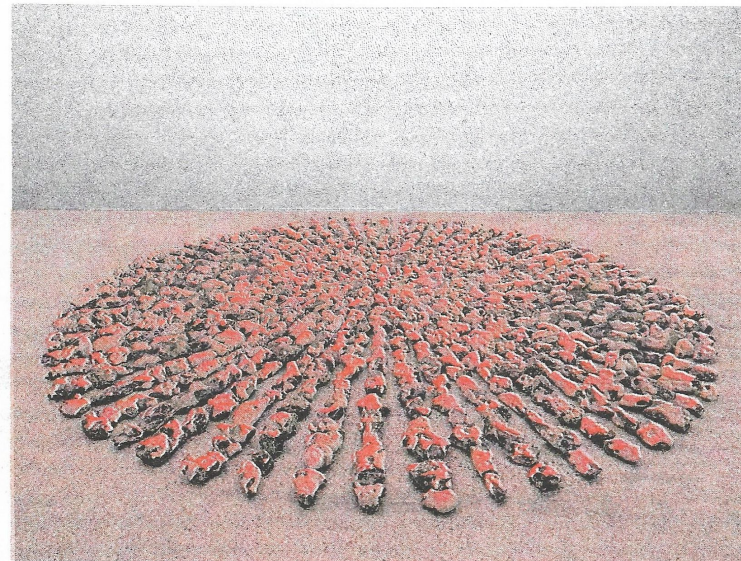
As they do in the Long. We might think that *Flint Wheel* is a purely natural work, given over entirely to the cult of time as a circle. But the title is indeed *Flint Wheel* rather than *Flint Circle*: the wheel more than anything speaks to technological innovation, the invention of the wheel being perhaps the ultimate advance in history. The wheel is that which rolls forward in historical, human time. The fact that the piece is constructed from flint supports the idea, alluding as it does to flint tools and the linear evolution of human development.

So both artworks do both things - they avert to the specificity of human and historical time while encouraging us to meditate on the way in which the figure of the circle takes us towards the unbounded, the archaic and the sublime. The allusion to timelessness within each work should not, however, be confused with the timelessness that either piece might enjoy as a result of being preserved in the canon of western art. That would be a matter of extrinsic evaluation.

A final word about the Long. The pieces of flint allude to human bones; the work as a whole has a skeletal quality. One is reminded of the charnel-house and the tomb. One might add that bones in general have that dual nature of being in and out of time: they are materially here but only as remnants of what has passed to the hereafter. So that whether intended as a centenary memorial for 1918 or not, the exhibiting of *Flint Wheel* in 2018 will have special resonance for anybody with an awareness of that doleful anniversary.



Paul Nash, *We are Making a New World*, 1918. Oil on Canvas. © Imperial War Museum. [Edited by ARO for RISO print]



Richard Long, *Flint Wheel*, 2018. © Richard Long. [Edited by ARO for RISO print]

Robert Rowland Smith is a British author, philosopher and Quondam Fellow of All Souls College. His latest book is *AutoBioPhilosophy: An Intimate Story of What it Means to be Human*.



**SP:** Yeah but it was *very* small. I started with 4 artists. I took a lease on an old fish shop in Chinatown. I think the economy also played into our favour. In putting a gallery programme together that was innovative and challenging and was genuinely trying to do something. I think it's incredibly difficult when the market is up. We couldn't sell anything – so we *weren't* gonna sell anything...at all. So what you chose to show was not in any way pressured by that. So for the first few years as I built the programme it was really the things that I was interested in and nothing to do with the market. Now I think galleries open and they know that if they show *this* it will sell and if they show *that*, it won't, and very quickly they gravitate towards commercial...

**HC:** This is what I was going to ask you: how you balance your taste with what you know can sustain the gallery.

**SP:** Well there was this first few years where I lived in the gallery, I lived very small. The gallery was quite a big space, but I would just go into survival mode. But the bonus of that is being part of a group of gallerists who are starting together, and we got a lot of attention. And every show we did, press would come: they'd write about it. They'd write about all the galleries collectively. You were really carried by each other's...

**HC:** And who were the other galleries?

**SP:** Umm... at that time it was probably James Fuentes, Lisa Cooley, Laurel Gitlan, On Stellar Rays, Candice Madey, myself.

**HC:** But lots of those aren't here anymore.

**SP:** Yeah, unfortunately. And actually over the last ten years, that group of 6 grew to 150. Very fast. But the important thing- I mean it became harder year six, year seven because you're then starting to set a trajectory for the gallery that actually becomes quite difficult to deviate from. Once you're on that, you're fairly set. But I think that I had a strong enough programme that was already acknowledged. It allowed access to art fairs; it allowed access to all the things that you needed it to. And then I was able, as the market picked up, to make adjustments to what I showed that would allow it to prevail.

**HC:** So you've always had a focus on new media? And that's stayed through with the gallery?

**SP:** That's totally stayed through. And the reason for that was as much- enjoying the collaborative approach to new media. So working with film artists, or in John's case, simulation, he would come to me with an idea rather than a finished product. And then from that point on we'd work towards raising the funds, getting who was necessary to see the project completed. And in that you're building support for its home at the end, and the institutions that might be interested.

**HC:** I guess that recalls more of your past being an artist. It becomes a kind of joint venture.

**SP:** Totally. The gallery, which was 2000 sq. ft. was not an insignificant scale. I would often just show one work, and it would be the culmination of two years' production. But often by the time it was shown in the gallery it would already have homes in two or three or four museums.

So that brings me to the current situation. So I had that space for 10 years, I had a 10 year lease. The neighbourhood in the Lower East Side has changed dramatically from what it used to be. Many more galleries, I mean more than that: a sort of paradigm shift within the art world of Instagram; much less foot traffic in galleries. The proliferation of art fairs. But also in a way more importantly, *my* interests developing, and really enjoying this role of producing work and finding support for it and homes for it. And actually the gallery became this appendage that was actually expensive and to some degree redundant. With John for instance, we'd work with a public art fund, they would find a site in Lincoln Center, the collector would raise money, it would get shown there. And then it would be placed in the Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The gallery was redundant to that except I was having to find all that resource to pay for that footprint. So it was probably important just from a profile point of view: it meant people knew who you were and who your artists were.

**HC:** But not in terms of what you actually wanted to achieve?

**SP:** But not- I'm try to conceive the next phase in the very current climate what's really necessary now. If I could put all that resource into making work, as opposed to real estate. I think art fairs and all these other entities are realising as much, and they were very strict about not allowing galleries who didn't have bricks-and-mortar spaces. They've started to be much more flexible on that. And I think that they're increasingly having to become more flexible about that. And I think also that the role of representation of artists is shifting: artists are becoming much more professionalised just in their own practices, and don't necessarily require the full toolbox of a gallery. They actually have that in the studio in a certain way. Often these artists studios can be 10 or 12 to 40 to 50 people, and that doesn't need to be replicated again in a gallery set up.

**HC:** If your presence in a real gallery space has moved, where has it moved to?

**SP:** This is still a period of- the gallery closed and it is definitely a period of figuring that out. My first thought was to move Uptown. The whole of Manhattan kind of gallery district has gone full circle and ended up back in the most historical neighbourhood.

**HC:** But in that transition, have you moved online, or is there another space?

**SP:** No. I think there is knowledge that we have tools. We have technologies. So Instagram is *critical*. I share a lot of what the gallery's artists are doing on Instagram. I share a lot of what the gallery's artists are doing online, in newsletter formats. And I

think ultimately I'll be looking for a bricks-and-mortar space that is much smaller - that is more of a kind of viewing room, an office. But not somewhere where there has to be a gallery programme.

**HC:** Would that mean having to sacrifice the more 2D, painting side of the gallery?

**SP:** No, I don't see why. What I'd like to see is to allow the pop-up nature... in artists necessarily needing to have a very precise type of space, to go out and find it. At the end of the gallery's life, each artist has shown there three or four times. They've explored all the opportunities and potentials of a particular space. So you're forced then to move on and find another space. Why not just do that on a case-by-case basis? If there's a group of paintings that are made and need to be shown, find the space to do that.

So the first step towards that is in November. I will show back at Thomas Dane in London. I'll do a show of Amie Siegel at Thomas Dane. So it's sort of 'Simon Preston Gallery at Thomas Dane'. And that brings that whole idea back in of being able to be- the sharing economy has also taken hold.

**HC:** So are you going to continue with the CONDO project?

**SP:** I think CONDO is more of a sort of flag of saying we need to think about this. Its proliferated so fast. CONDO's a gallery-sharing model. But it doesn't have enough commercial potential I don't think to really prevail and make it worthwhile. What it has done is help mobilise communities of galleries to think about alternative methods. So that has gone online. I don't know. I've sat and talked to many of my colleagues about how successful they've been in selling online. *None* of us have. We've been approached by a million entities that promise access to collectors and access to various different income streams. I've never sold an artwork online in my life. [Laughs]

**HC:** Even with a smaller space, less of a 'gallery', you're still...

**SP:** Maybe. I don't know. My hope is, I realise its an inevitability to some degree. I just don't think any of those platforms have been successful as yet.

**HC:** Well clearly, as you're still seeking a gallery to work in – at Thomas Dane. And at art fairs as well.

**SP:** But there's also an element of the thing I enjoy the most about having a gallery is putting shows on. So I still want to do that. But you look at Manhattan now, and the percentage of store fronts that are empty. So there's a whole paradigm shift in just retail and how that exists. So whereas two, three years ago there was a Nike store on every street corner. But now there isn't. There's one Nike store where you can't buy anything; you experience stuff. And then you go and buy it online. And you can see that on every block of Manhattan. There's only so many dry cleaning stores and coffee shops that you can do... and it has left a lot of empty store fronts. And that's what brought a strong pop-up culture.

**HC:** Fascinating...

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**SP:** The fascinating thing is how fast these things *do* change. And I think having a gallery's a very historical model. And when you're in it it's very hard to move that beast. It's slow moving and it's deep-seated. So what I'm enjoying now as I think the whole art world and art market...no, art world... is going through these seismic shifts to be able to be a bit more nimble, and to be able to have some time to really think about what form you want to take.

I think another really telling moment was going to Art Basel last year after going to Manifesta. So the art world moves around in this season... And previously if you went to Manifesta you'd see certain artists' work that would then be highlighted at the art fair. And now those two Venn diagrams... over the last decade they've got more and more separated. And I think in the last two years they've now get very little or no crossover. You have 'art market' over here and it's about commodity, and you have an 'art world' over here and it's about ideas and the generation of meaning and something else altogether different. And those two things have now broken free, and you have to make a decision which of those two worlds you want to...

**HC:** So you're not trying to bridge them - you have to choose?

**SP:** I think you probably have to choose. And I think If you choose well within the art market and you follow the right innovation, that has to be, in the art world, that has to become the art market tomorrow... to some degree.

**HC:** And in 10, 20 years, I suppose the giant galleries: Gagosian, etc. will still exist quite happily.

**SP:** Quite happily. They might be the only ones that exist.

**HC:** Exactly.

**SP:** It's a good chance. And as they are: gaining incredible wealth. But I think there will always be an art world. There has to be. And that will change and morph as necessary.

Simon Preston is director of Simon Preston Gallery, New York City and an alumnus of the Ruskin School of Art and St Edmund Hall.

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# LANDSCAPE FOR NO WOMAN

FRANCES WHORRALL-CAMPBELL

Baudelaire said he was the knife and the wound, something Linda Nochlin took to mean 'I am the vagina, I am the penis'. Or in the case of Courbet: 'I am the female flesh, I am the brush or palette knife'. The artist materialises man's relationship to the female body; as a foetus in his mother's womb he is part of her flesh, but as an adult he penetrates (or is expected to) such bodies from the outside. Out of the wound and in with the knife.

My mother's wound was physical, not metaphorical. Her stomach was cracked open like a nutshell and I was taken out – there is a thin red line across her pelvis where I was removed. In with the knife, and out of the wound.

For Klaus Theweleit, femininity 'retained a special malleability under patriarchy' (although I feel he should have used the present tense). Woman have, in one way or other, 'always remained objects and raw material, pieces of nature awaiting socialisation. This has enabled men to see and use them collectively as part of the earth's inorganic body – the terrain of men's own productions.' I think of Henry Moore's *Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 3*, 1961. Her body has been scooped out, smacked flat; like a pat of butter, two mounds left in the dish. A giant could shuck an oyster from her collarbone, a dog curl in her hollow ribs. With her delicate elbow and thunderous knees, she sits somewhere between 'our Mam' and 'our Lady'.

A disclosure though. The gender of this sculpture is ambiguous: nothing about its physical form is inherently 'masculine' or 'feminine' (there are no genitalia). However, in the art historical language in which Moore worked, I can infer her

femininity. Public sculptures of men are not usually supine, passive and geographic, but upright, active and historic.

Our understanding of the world is shaped by the stories our cultures tell us. Just think of the medieval T-O maps. Jerusalem is in the middle: the literal and metaphorical centre of the Christian world, the magnetic axis to which all pilgrims were pulled. But sometimes these mental geographies don't map so well onto our experience of the actual topography. Paris syndrome is characterised as the extreme distress that arises in visitors to the French capital who find that the place is nothing like what they expected from the pictures in the brochure and on TV. 'Paris' and the city are two different things.

The Japanese embassy reports that the majority of sufferers are young single females. There is something subversive about the reaction of these women; they refuse to take the guide book at face value, to keep up the pretence. Disappointment is a stubborn feeling.

We also tell stories about ourselves, words that tell the paths our lives are supposed to follow. But sometimes these words don't fit, and we are forced to confront our individual subjectivity outside of this frame. Experience seems to slide off us, with nothing to pin it in place. There are elements of ourselves that occur on the margins, that we have to actively search to locate and understand. This is the endeavour of Carolyn Steedman's historical autobiography *Landscape for a Good Woman*. Steedman's was a life lived in uncharted terrains, but rather than seeking to map them she embraces the indeterminacy of

her position. Her working-class childhood refused to follow the prescribed trajectory as her class and gender interacted in uncertain terms: the power of the patriarchy was fractured by Steedman's cognisance of her father's precarious (and often absent) position and in his place her mother became the source of tyranny. In *Landscape* women enter subject-subject relationships with each other, rejecting male socialisation and instead clinging to the rawness of their experiences.

For Steedman, self-knowledge, subjectivity and agency take shape in the cracks within the linguistically ordered prism. As such, the cultural narratives of our identities become sites of alienation not orientation: one feels a disjuncture between lived and reported experience, like a traveller in a city previously known only through photographs or travel guides. Steadman rebels against this incoherence through fairy tales, retreating into a parallel world of illogical geographies and timelines – a place where the everything is also not what it seems, but we are in on the joke.

It is with her in mind that make the following comparison. Like the miller's daughter in *Rumpelstiltskin* I find I am grasping at straws, trying to guess the answer to a man's riddle of identity. Because I fundamentally do not understand what Baudelaire means when he describes himself as both knife and wound, and I am not sure that this misunderstanding on my part is entirely to do with poetics. Metaphor works because of a shared language: in order for me to understand what it means for someone to describe themselves as a 'knife' I have to know what one is and be able to conceive of a way in which

Detail of *Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 3*, 1961. © The Henry Moore Foundation



a person might be one. I think I have a good idea of what Baudelaire means when he says 'knife', but I cannot be sure what it means for him to be a knife. How did he mean what he wrote? I simply cannot translate my experience into his.

Perhaps it is just that I am a poor empathiser. Or perhaps this reveals the gaps in our cultural scripts. How can I understand Baudelaire's position in the world when I cannot understand my own? When I am equally sure that I could be the knife, the wound, or both?

I imagine that *Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 3* speaks to me. She says that she too does not understand. She does not know why her shape means I call her 'she'; she does not know why she was crafted in this image. I sympathise with her; we are both lost beneath how others have made us. She, by the weight of her creator Henry Moore; that titan of British modernism, re-shaper of England after the destruction of war. Me, by my mother. I was both the wound and the knife in her side: unwitting attacker of feminine organs, penetrator of the womb.

My favourite signs are those carved into stone or wood that appear in hedgerows, those typed onto paper and taped to a lamppost. We treat these with a carefree attitude, they are handmade, personal, impermanent; they mark the footpath through a muddy field, or the right exit to a friend's wedding. I think the challenge is to not get lost following the official signs, but to strike out across your own landscape. Steedman turns to fairy tales as her breadcrumb path: I ask sculptures for directions.

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# JUDSON DANCE THEATRE:

## *The Work is Never Done*

MoMA, NEW YORK

There is a relentless anxiety underlying documentation of dance and performance. Both disciplines are subject to inevitable filtering of their substance through someone's testimony or an apparatus. What comes down to us is usually a refraction of the original piece. This problem has long been an object of academic discussion, but now it's being interrogated institutionally, as demonstrated by the MoMA's current exhibition on the Judson Dance Theatre.

The Judson group was an informal assembly of artists coming from divergent fields of dance, film, visual arts, and music, who emerged in the early 60s and revolutionised dance as artistic discipline. The loose structure of their 'dance company', based on workshops and collaboration, encouraged spontaneity, improvisation and experimentation. The group, inspired by John Cage and Merce Cunningham, explored the evental and aleatory possibilities of their medium. They stripped dance from its theatrical and sentimental conventions and abolished its slavish dependence on music, concepts which had lain at the crux of modernist dance and embodied in the practices of Martha Graham or Doris Humphrey. By rejecting what pleases in dance, the Judson artists uncovered essential qualities of their discipline founded on specificity of the human body and relations between movement and stillness.

Yet, the show hardly investigates notions related to dance; in fact, it is not so much interested in the group's artistic legacy as it is with its genealogy and the ways it redefined social relations. There is a detectable tinge of political charge that underpins the exhibition. It seems to be a story about how an alternative social structure comes into being. Unfolding the quote which gave the title to the exhibition reveals this second axis of the project: Steve Paxton, one of the Judson choreographers, wrote that "a work is never done. A sanctuary always needed"<sup>1</sup>. This points to the processual nature of any community, united by a common goal, and, consequently, a collective effort. The curators take the Judson collective as a case study of overlapping realms of artistic experimentation, 'personal and collective identification' and politics. The sanctuary is conceptualised through an analysis of the Judson's artistic practice; it is envisioned as a site of dismantling traditions and of imagining a different democracy via experimentation and openness.

<sup>1</sup>Dominika Tylcz is a third year History of Art student at St. Catherine's College

The group's history is presented in the form of unique and intimate documents. The first two rooms exhibit personal objects alongside posters and photographs, creating a historical record that pinpoints the collective in time and space. In fact, a map of New York City is painted on a wall, mapping all spaces important to the Judson artists and their allies. This rather petty presentation of memorabilia illustrates its entanglement within its cultural, spatial and social context and thus emphasises the importance of mutual inspiration in a broadly understood artistic community. Although the exhibition is devoted solely to this particular dance collective, it does not frame it as miraculous, but rather embedded in the contemporary reality and as the outcome of an interdisciplinary, collective effort. In this, the exhibition evokes Foucauldian genealogy, as it highlights the contingency of these events, its strenuous becoming, rather than being an inevitable effect of historical tides or outburst of the artistic genius(es).

Belief in possibility of reconstruction permeates the show: not only the historical circumstances are thoroughly recreated, but also seminal pieces are re-enacted in the gallery space, and the surviving documentation of Dance Concerts is shown carefully in a separate room. Every day, Simone Forti's *Dance Constructions* are performed by a group of young dancers and performers, whose actions enliven the rather dull historical display. The setting, together with various imaginative scores, hints to the participatory aspect of performance documentation and artefact - they operate as instructions: movements to be performed each time anew. However, most pieces are treated as historical documents rather than potentials; presentation of the Judson Dance Theatre's oeuvre consists of photographic and film records with a short description - a far cry from the vibrancy of those spectacles. Yet, by stressing the visual and the conceptual charge of the pieces, the MoMA re-orientates the debate about performance documentation. Rather than lamenting the elusiveness of the medium, they point to the distribution, circulation, permanence and reiteration of such works.

DOMINIKA TYLCZ

<sup>1</sup>Ana Janevski, 'Judson Dance Theatre: The Work is Never Done - Sanctuary Always Needed' in Lax & Janevski, *Judson Dance Theatre: The Work is Never Done*, MoMA, New York, 2018

## *The Clock AND Atlas*

How can we conceptualise humanity in broad, abstract terms, without denying the particularities that make us who we are?

Two artworks have caught my eye. At Modern Art Oxford's recent exhibition *Contemporary Artists' Drawings*, one hundred copies of an AA road atlas of Europe, each open on a different page, were laid out singly on small trestle tables arranged to correspond roughly with the geography of the continent: Scandinavia was at one end of the room, the Mediterranean at the other.

These maps indicate no roads, no airports, no forests, no mountains, no lakes, no countries, no borders, no names. Over the course of a year the artist, Kathy Prendergast, entirely covered one double page of each atlas with a black marker pen. Beneath the ink there is a very subtle visible difference between land and sea, but any other differences are indistinguishable - except that at each town or city is a single dot which the artist has left free from marker ink.

This negative process has produced an image of an area where meaning is determined only by the relationship of singular points to each other, and not by their own characteristics. Space, in *Atlas*, becomes both the key factor of difference and devoid of meaning - an undifferentiated, empty expanse. Europe is revealed as what, fundamentally, it is: a construct, overlaid on the world.

In the 2010 film *The Clock*, currently showing at Tate Modern, the artist Christian Marclay has similarly appropriated familiar structures of meaning and painstakingly transformed them. His team searched thousands of films to find scenes in which there is a clock or an indication of time. Then they separated each scene from its original sequence, and reassembled them in montage so that the indications of time occur at the same rate as real time, for twenty-four hours. *The Clock* tells the time. Arranged strictly according to the arbitrary implementation of linear time, the sequence is brought to a level of surreality, loses its intelligibility, and becomes non-sense.

Or it nearly does. But in the course of my viewing, patterns emerged. Most obviously at around one when they all started eating lunch. Here, nestled within the otherwise impersonal and machinelike principle by which the film was assembled, is an uncompromisingly human principle by which people order their lives.

In *Atlas* the non-arbitrary and the distinctive also withstand the homogenising process implemented by the artist. For example, at the point where the map once indicated London, Prendergast has, logically, left only a single point uncovered by black marker. Since the city occupies a much greater area on the original map, there is a large expanse of black around this point, giving the impression that the dot is isolated, far removed from its neighbours. Here, the logic of the procedure undermines itself: its isolation makes the point recognisable as London. This casts ambiguity over all the darkens across the work: they are empty, or they are occupied. Humanity is mapped, but we are left room to breathe.

HENRY TUDOR-POLE

Henry Tudor-Pole is an alumnus of St. John's College having read History of Art

Back cover: MIKE HARVEY, *it seemed important*

Mike Harvey works at [mkhvry.com](http://mkhvry.com) and is bothered by the question 'WHAT IS IT LIKE TO CROSS A LAND THAT EATS ITSELF?'. He is studying on the MFA programme at the Ruskin School of Art.



As if to say —> You could WELL be lying  
BUT: O.K

