

# ARTFORUM

JANUARY 2013

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

WINTER PREVIEW

KATHRYN BIGELOW  
ON ZERO DARK THIRTY

FRANCES STARK

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI



\$10.00



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of Farm Security Administration photography almost makes the classicizing effect of his form more the subject than the sitters themselves. His compositional decisions bluntly relate the holler dwellers to a culture of resistance and perseverance that took root eighty years ago. Of course, Evans and the FSA photographers were depicting what was prevalent in rural America. What Adams seems to be positing is that the “real America” in the twenty-first century is one shaped by active subcultures—including this self-reliant, off-the-grid one, which, however anachronistically, just happens to be populated by folks who bear an uncanny resemblance to so many Evans protagonists.

—Nick Stillman

## CHICAGO

### Jimmy Robert

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Jimmy Robert subjects paper to a series of operations that read like an excerpt from Richard Serra’s famous *Verb List*: to rip, to append, to curl, to stuff, to crumple, to fold, to hang, to lean, to drop. Sturdy ink-jet prints, various paper stocks, found posters, bits of fabric, masking tape, and drawn elements appear collaged together or isolated, in ways that invariably force attention to the sculptural qualities of what we would normally think of as two-dimensional surfaces. If paper hangs on the wall, as it did in Robert’s recent installation of *Untitled (Mickael)*, 2006—part of “Vis-à-vis,” the artist’s first major museum show in the US—it curves or folds into space, departing from the vertical plane. In *Untitled (homage to the young boy...)*, 2007, the work was appended so low that it slid onto the floor, to meet several sheets of paper that were lying flat beneath it. Elsewhere, a handful of elaborately folded or rolled constructions had been propped up into fragile quasi-figurative sculptures (all untitled and dated 2010); that these featured photographs of the artist’s own body only underscored that they were to be taken as surrogates. However, Robert’s “paper objects” (perhaps a better description than “works on paper”) are more than a compendium of materials and gestures. Frequently in his practice, an initial operation is photographed in its own right, as was the case with *Untitled*, 2005, which depicts the crumpling of a newspaper photograph of a pre-scandal Dominique Strauss-Kahn, thereby emphasizing the materiality (and sculptural potential) of the new, unblemished ink-jet print. Such a process yields a set of art objects that are also events—pieces that Robert sites between the “work on paper” and performance.



Jimmy Robert,  
*Untitled*, 2010,  
ink-jet print, wood,  
31 ½ x 31 ½ x 5".

Curated by Naomi Beckwith, “Vis-à-vis” linked the paper objects of this Guadeloupe-born, Brussels-based artist to his many projects incorporating bodily movement—frequently his own. Relayed primarily through videos and films, these performances likewise nod to many artist forebears—Yoko Ono, Yvonne Rainer, Bas Jan Ader, and Lorna Simpson, among others—while also sampling dance, theater, and popular culture. In the video *Different Guise*, 2006, for example, the artist crumples pieces of paper, using them to stuff his T-shirt until the excess begins to slide out. At the opening, this was also evident in a reprise of the 2011 performance *Counter-relief (CCS Bard)*, with dancer Maria Hassabi. For this live piece, the two executed choreographed interactions using elements that had accrued during previous iterations: wooden slabs, a 16-mm film, and a text. By contrast, *Non-scène*, 2008, was not put to new use, but stood as a kind of relic: a brown fiberboard stage supporting a monitor displaying the recording of a performance (at Wiels Centre for Contemporary Art in Brussels four years earlier) in which the now-vacant platform had been used. Typical of Robert’s layered references, in the video we see a shirtless, androgynous performer drawing in rapid strokes on a vertical wall of the structure while another calmly recites a meandering reflection on May 1968.

If Robert “reconsiders identity politics,” as argued by the curator in the catalogue, he does so drastically, with almost no trace of the confrontational performance art of the 1990s. Instead, “politics” occurs on the most intimate and minuscule register of specific bodies set in relation to their immediate environments. He also implies, in the spirit of political theorist Jane Bennett, the ascription of agency to that which used to be understood as the artist’s “materials” or “media.” In Robert’s video *Untitled (Folding 2)*, 2012, two hands fold, unfold, and refold a photograph of the artist into a work of origami. The traditional folding technique is not an end, however, but a means; there is no finished product. A perpetual dynamism is outlined between the body and the malleable objects around it: Each acts upon, and is acted upon by, the other.

—Daniel Quiles

## SAN FRANCISCO

### “Six Lines of Flight: Shifting Geographies in Contemporary Art”

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

A photograph reveals a man sprawled facedown in the street, alone except for a distant cyclist and the presence of the camera. A send-up of Yves Klein’s infamous 1960 photomontage, this work, Romanian artist Ciprian Mureșan’s *Leap into the Void, After 3 Seconds*, 2004, restages Klein’s iconic gesture of artistic freedom. On view here, it served to highlight one of the primary themes of “Six Lines of Flight”: the relationships between as many emergent art scenes and more established centers. Mureșan’s image is exemplary of the witty, intrepid, performative practices of the artists selected for this show, a group that represented a spectrum of geographical points, including Beirut, Lebanon; Cali, Colombia; Cluj-Napoca, Romania; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Tangier, Morocco; and San Francisco. In the pieces gathered here, the freedom and exhilaration of working on the periphery of the art market were evident, yet it was matched by the gravity of recent forces shaping these locales.

Starting with a fragmented sense of the past—as after the end of a restrictive regime or the waning of colonialism and conflict—many of the featured artists had seized the opportunity to rebuild by appropriating and rearranging the shards of their region’s cultural production. Surprisingly, the works were, on balance, more ludic than melancholic.





For example, humor infiltrated not only Mureșan's contributions, but also Lebanese artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's inventive *Wonder Beirut, the Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer*, 1997–2006, an installation of images depicting the exploits of their (semifictional) titular character. Yet recognizing the wonderfully slippery relationship between truth and fiction brings the overwhelming responsibility of charting new paths. It is no wonder that many of the exhibition's artists work in partnerships or collectives (e.g., the Propeller Group, Helena Producciones). For if working on the periphery is as much about *recentering* as *decentering*, banding together appears to provide a protected space where ideas and practices can flourish.

Sân Art is one of those cooperative enterprises, established in 2007 by members of the Vietnamese diaspora who had returned to Ho Chi Minh City. Photographer Dinh Q. Lê is a

Ciprian Mureșan, *Leap into the Void, After 3 Seconds*, 2004, gelatin silver print, 39 3/4 x 25 3/8". From "Six Lines of Flight: Shifting Geographies in Contemporary Art."

founder of this group, and though his three-channel video *Sound and Fury*, 2012, is independently authored, multiple viewpoints characteristically inhabit the very structure of his piece: Spread across three screens, the imagery devolves from synchronicity into chaos before inverting altogether, requiring the viewer to reconcile segmented experiences in order to grasp the content. Even more interactively, the multimedia installation *A Variation on Powers of Ten*, 2010–12, by the California-based collective Futurefarmers, had visitors picking up handsets to listen in on fragments of conversations with contemporary thinkers from diverse fields. The lo-fi aesthetic of the listening stations felt a bit arch, but it was hard to shake the impact of the voices that crossed shared territory while never consolidating.

Other works on view investigated shifting notions of geographic centers by primarily visual means. Moroccan artist Yto Barrada's well-known "A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project," 1998–2004, for example, probed the liminal territory occupied by Tangier, a port visible from the European shore but tectonically tied to Africa. Her photographs of architecture and everyday life quietly evidence the numerous colonial exploitations of a city that is both a point of contact between two continents and a marker of their separation. Similarly, Lamia Joreige's diagrammatic *Beirut, Autopsy of a City*, 2010, and Vietnamese-American artist Tiffany Chung's hand-drawn, diachronic maps encourage conditional notions of place by refusing to resolve into synchronic perspectives.

The title of this exhibition was borrowed from the language of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose theories offer viewers a lens for reading such subversions. Of course, notions of rhizomes, horizons, plateaus—the relative nature of center and periphery—have long had currency in the art world, and so such terminological scaffolding may not have been necessary for apprehending the work presented here. Yet the exhibition's works, all by artists avidly wrestling with shifting terrain, grappling with the contingency of histories and ideologies, lent substantial courage to those still on the precipice, artists and viewers alike who may similarly harbor hopes of taking flight.

—Elizabeth Mangini

## LOS ANGELES

### Dave Muller

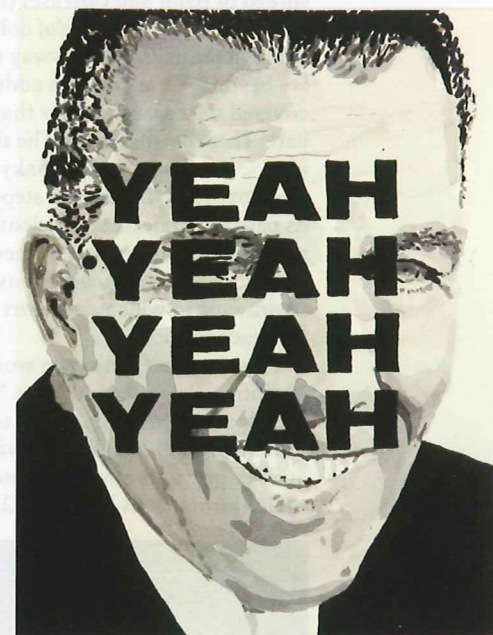
BLUM & POE

Sometime in the 1990s, the critical mandate of the prior decade's "appropriation art" underwent a casual revision by an emerging generation less inclined to feel itself victimized by the "society of the spectacle." Pop-cultural citation would continue apace, but in a less anxious, less clinical manner, one that evoked an element of personal investment. Overall, Dave Muller's work could serve as a case in point, especially his latest exhibition, "Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah." Deriving this insistently affirmative title from the Beatles' 1963 song "She Loves You," the Los Angeles-based artist focused on the era of the band's rise to mania-inducing superstardom and presented a range of that decade's collectibles, ephemera, and iconography—from notable record sleeves to smiley-face buttons to a portrait of Ed Sullivan.

Muller rendered the imagery with his characteristically light and friendly touch, in watered-down acrylic on paper. Its collective impact, however, was anything but anodyne. For instance, the head-on depiction of a fighter plane in *Not Strangelove* (all works cited, 2012) tips toward critique (perhaps relating to the Beatles' dalliance with the protest song) when placed in dialogue with *Little (Ed)*—the aforementioned Sullivan portrait, which, overwritten with four boldface YEAHS, seemed suggestive of the Fab Four's "conquest of America." Other pieces spoke more obliquely to the cultural moment, including *Labyrinths (Forking Paths)*, a modest triptych that depicts paperback copies of Borges's 1962 volume of short fiction. Once a college-dorm staple, Borges's titles, commonly found on a shelf just above the likewise "trippy" record collection, used to boast a certain countercultural cachet.

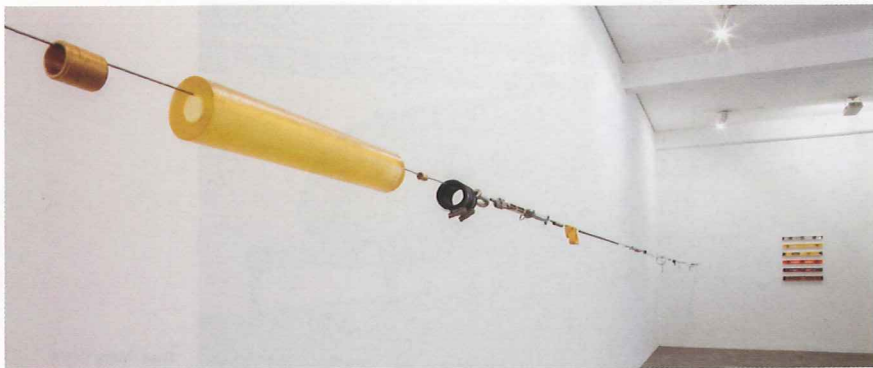
But by every indication, cultural products no longer neatly signify this way. Vaporized as concrete things to take up a second life in the cloud, they have only become increasingly interchangeable. In the act of reproducing these various relics of the not-so-distant past, Muller commemorated a time when social identifiers were implicitly territorial. Yet nostalgia here served less to remind us of how things once were than to articulate the way they are now. Of note is Muller's sharp focus on wear and tear. Convincingly, and with hard-won ease and economy, he takes care to depict signs of use—the creasing of record sleeves, the softening of book spines, the fading of photographs—causing the objects he recovers in his work to appear suspended somewhere between the auratic and the trashed, their exchange value depreciated, their sign value destined to grow ever more opaque to ensuing generations. As though intended to distress or age these works, Muller's technique involves a liberal application of drips and stains; paradoxically, it is this feature that most clearly ties the works to the present, to the artist's own hand and authorship of the work, while suggesting, as well, all that slips out of grasp. Here, pictorial facture functions both as a signature and something akin to a scratch on an LP.

In the last segment of the exhibition, the now-disbanded Beatles reappear, this time as corporate co-owners. Muller had installed four



Dave Muller, *Little (Ed)*, 2012, acrylic on paper, 11 x 8 1/2".





View of "Jac Leirner," 2012. Foreground: *Hardware Seda* (Hardware Silk), 2012. Background: *Seis Níveis* (Six Levels), 2012.

aligned, the levels draw attention only to themselves, but also, by the same token, to our own act of looking at them. What their perfectly centered bubbles now gauge, somewhat ironically, is our rather presumptuous self-reflexivity as we stand there, filling in for painting's ideal viewing subjects.

*Retrato* (Portrait) is an elaborate rhomboid construction from which a bunch of postcards portraying some of Leirner's modernist heroes dangles. It is also a work that attests to her love of color: Fastened to a wire, a series of small square samples of Plexiglas suggests a synthesis of Albers with ready-made color; the influence of that artist, who once taught at Yale, is also detectable in *Quase Quadrado* (Almost Square). *Skin* (*Smoking Red*) is the exhibition's odd work out. This serial and rectangular arrangement of silky rolling paper glued to the wall acted as a cue, further prompting us to relate to the hardware as a deeply tactile sculptural material. It also added a further layer of complexity to the exhibition by means of another set of oppositions: manual work versus leisure activity, the mechanical versus the bodily. The irony, in this case, is that this is not really a comment on issues of labor and class, but rather on elements of one and the same lifestyle.

—Sérgio Martins

## RIO DE JANEIRO

### Dias & Riedweg

CENTRO DE ARTE HÉLIO OITICICA

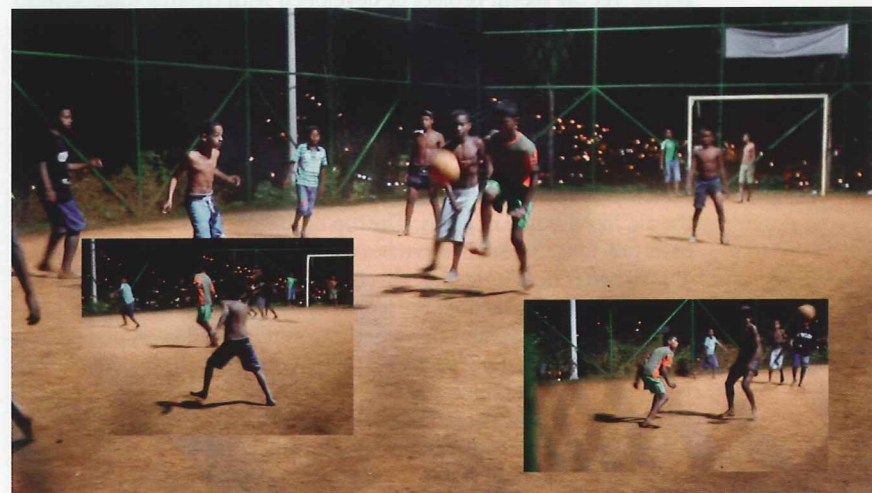
The exhibition "*Até que a Rua Nos Separe*" (Until the Street Do Us Part), installed in exemplary fashion at the Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica in a commercial district of central Rio de Janeiro, brought together nine video installations and four series of photographs made in the city between 1992 and 2012 by Maurício Dias and Walter Riedweg. Their work demonstrates the relationship between art, politics, and society in the complex urban context that is Rio, from the social cataclysm of the 1990s to the present-day efforts toward "liberation" of the favelas, passing through the empire of drug traffickers.

The video installation *Devotionalia*, 1994–2003, is a moving example of a sociological and collective approach to a desperate situation. In 1995, the artists took 1,200 molds of hands and feet, which functioned as ex-votos, from children living in the streets, asking them at the same time to express a wish; they recorded close to eighty hours of speech. A decade later, they sought out those same children to hear what had become of those wishes in the intervening years. Half of them, we read, were no longer alive. With *Devotionalia*, however, we are not confronting a type of sociological reductionism or sentimental exhibitionism but testimony to an act of almost religious solidarity, evoking the humble rite of washing the feet of paupers as one of the noblest symbols of humility in Catholicism.

In the video installation *Funk Staden*, 2007, a funk dance (choreographed as a pagan ritual) is juxtaposed with a reading of Hans Staden's 1557 account of his captivity among the Tupinambá people of Brazil, a pioneering work of ethnology that accentuates the issue of anthropophagy, a concept that has occupied a special place in Brazilian modernism ever since Oswald de Andrade issued his "Cannibal Manifesto" in 1928. The conflict between spoken words and the language of bodies is one of the structural components of Dias & Riedweg's oeuvre and demonstrates that the capacity for sexual expression by people in movement, like those of the youths seen in *Funk Staden*, takes us further than any stereotypical discourse about a body or a community.

But it is in the most recent works—the videos *A cidade fora dela* (The City Outside Itself), 2011; *Sábado à noite no parquinho* (Saturday Night at the Fairground), 2011; *O espelho e a tarde* (The Mirror and the Afternoon), 2011; and *Peladas noturnas* (Nocturnal Kickabouts), 2012—that the artists reach a new level of maturity. They no longer seem to feel the necessity of appealing to a brutal social fact, or of providing external political or anthropological references for viewers. Diverse points of view of a single locale, shown simultaneously, generate a flow of images that superimpose and succeed one another. In *The Mirror and the Afternoon*, for instance, a young man strolls through one of Rio's most infamous favelas, the Complexo do Alemão, with a mirror under his arm, opening up different perspectives inside a single plane.

Dias & Riedweg, *Peladas noturnas* (Nocturnal Kickabouts), 2012, still from a three-channel HD video installation, color, sound, 3 minutes 57 seconds. From the series "Pequenas histórias de modestia e dúvida" (Small Stories of Modesty and Doubt), 2011–12.



With these works, Dias & Riedweg succeed in showing, with sublime calm, what they have seen in the people and places they have known for over twenty years. As the artists explain, they "laud doubt and modesty as supreme virtues of subjectivity." These works open up to lives and gazes that are not our own (and that we can share only until "the street separates us"), demonstrating that the world is an endless flow of images that superimpose and succeed one another but that can suddenly, almost miraculously, become ours for a moment, before they once again escape our grasp.

—Alexandre Melo

Translated from Portuguese by Clifford E. Landers.

**CORRECTIONS:** In the November issue, in a Focus review of "Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974" at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles [pp. 269–270], the male artist Kristján Gudmundsson was, owing to a copyediting error, identified as female.

In a feature article in the December issue, an image of the work of Marcel Broodthaers [p. 254] was incorrectly titled in the caption. The correct title is *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures "L'Aigle de l'Oligocène à nos jours"* (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles, Section of Figures "The Eagle from Oligocene up to Today"). *Artforum* regrets the errors.