

Photo: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

## JAMES MEYER

JAMES MEYER IS CURATOR OF MODERN ART AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART IN WASHINGTON, DC. HIS PUBLICATIONS INCLUDE *THE ART OF RETURN: THE 1960S AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE* (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2019), AND *DWAN GALLERY: LOS ANGELES TO NEW YORK 1959–71* (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2016). HE IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF *ARTFORUM*.

1

**SHARJAH BIENNIAL 15 (VARIOUS VENUES; CURATED BY HOOR AL QASIMI WITH TAREK ABOU EL FETOUH, UTE META BAUER, SALAH M. HASSAN, CHIKA OKEKE-AGULU, AND OCTAVIO ZAYA)** Conceived by the late Okwui Enwezor, the latest edition of the Sharjah Biennial nodded directly to the Nigerian curator's watershed Documenta 11 of 2002, which shifted the predominantly Western focus of the Kassel exhibition to a global optic and reimagined the contemporary exhibition as a sequence of "platforms," where art and discourse stand on an equal footing. (Sharjah's March Meeting is an extension of this idea.) Spread out across sixteen sites and featuring some 150 artists from across the Global South, including major commissions by such established figures as Isaac Julien and Doris Salcedo, the sprawling exhibition acquainted the visitor with Sharjah itself—its arid landscape and gray mountains, its modern towers and sensitively restored souqs, its geographical setting between the Gulfs of Iran and Oman at the edge of Arabian Sea.



2

**14TH GWANGJU BIENNALE (VARIOUS VENUES; CURATED BY SOOK-KYUNG LEE)** Sook-Kyung Lee titled the most recent edition of the Gwangju Biennale after the Taoist epigram "soft and weak like water," a phrase meant to underscore the fluid's "transformative and restorative potential" in a world undergoing violent social and environmental change. The show's opening salvo summed up the generative possibilities of this framework: Titled *The Spirits Descend (Yehla Moya)*, 2022, and created by South African artist Buhlebezwe Siwami, a trained Zulu *sangoma*, the installation led viewers on a winding path through a dimly lit environment of earth and suspended ropes into a chamber where a gorgeous video—featuring female performers walking through the woods and splashing in the sea—glimmered across an actual pool of water.

3

**TOM BURR (BORTOLAMI GALLERY, NEW YORK)** Burr presented photo friezes, assemblages, and four walls mounted with plywood reliefs containing sheets of Plexiglas and mirror and photos printed on metal. Fragmented, masked, bent, hidden, covered in black, Burr's body was the focus of a queer archaeology announced by the enlarged depictions of his "fay" bent left wrist. An old couch supporting a discarded lamp and disco ball referenced the word *pulse*, at once implying "a throb of life . . . vitality" and the Orlando, Florida, nightclub where forty-nine queer people were murdered in 2016. Burr's unapologetic examination of gay male identity is the most consequential since the AIDS-era practices of Robert Gober, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Keith Haring, and David Wojnarowicz.

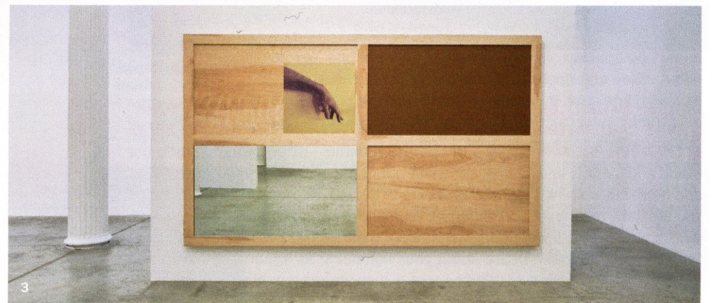
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**PHILIP GUSTON (NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, DC; CURATED BY HARRY COOPER)** A long-awaited retrospective of one of the late twentieth century's most influential figures, "Philip Guston Now" told the story of the artist's improbable development from a precocious teenager in Los Angeles steeped in the figuration of Picasso, Di Chirico, and the Mexican muralists into a leading abstract painter of the New York School, whose seeming about-face in hood paintings of the late 1960s stunned the art world and continue to provoke. Sensitively installed in the National Gallery's Concourse galleries by my colleague Harry Cooper, the exhibition and its superb catalogue capture Guston's dogged independence of mind and his unflagging relevance for artists and viewers some forty years after his death.

*Co-organized with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; and Tate Modern, London, where it is on view through February 25, 2024.*



1. Doris Salcedo, *Uprooted*, 2020–22, 804 dead trees, steel. Installation view, Kalba Ice Factory, Sharjah, 2023. Photo: Juan Castro. 3. Tom Burr, *Stage*, 2023, plywood, acrylic paint, mirror, direct-to-surface print on brass. Installation view, Bortolami, New York. Photo: Guang Xu. 4. Philip Guston, *Painter's Table*, 1973, oil on canvas, 77 × 90". 5. Steve McQueen, *Occupied City*, 2023, 35 mm, color, sound, 262 minutes.



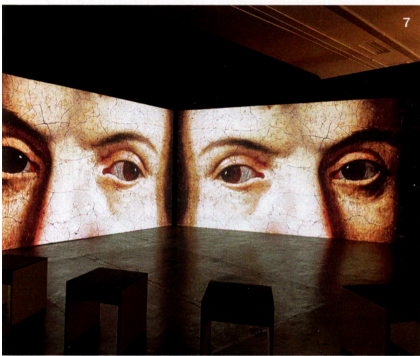
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**STEVE McQUEEN, OCCUPIED CITY** This portrait of Amsterdam is based on *Atlas of an Occupied City: Amsterdam 1940–45* (2019), a rigorously researched book by McQueen's wife, the historian and journalist Bianca Stigter. Depicting private homes and such public sites as medical clinics, schools, railroad stations, riverbanks, and parks, McQueen's film presents Amsterdam's inhabitants at work and at play during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, placing the viewer squarely in the present moment, as a narrator describes the disturbing histories that transpired at these sites—the persecution and murder of 80 percent of the city's Jewish inhabitants, the execution of Resistance fighters, and the starvation of the Dutch populace during the brutal famine of 1944–45.





6. Gedi Sibony, *Good Fortune* (detail), 2023, foamcore, wire, 90 x 10 x 5". 7. Cabello/Carceller, *Una voz para Erauso. Epilogo para un tiempo trans* (A Voice for Erauso, Epilogo for a Trans Time), 2021–22, two-channel 4K video transferred to HD video, color, sound, 28 minutes 15 seconds. Installation view, Cicillo Matarazzo Bienal Pavilion, São Paulo, 2023. 8. View of "Dan Flavin: Kornblee Gallery 1967," 2023, David Zwirner, New York. 10. Kerry James Marshall, *Now and Forever Windows* (detail), 2023, stained glass. Installation view, Washington National Cathedral, Washington, DC.



**6**

**GEDI SIBONY (GREENE NAFTALI GALLERY, NEW YORK)/SER SERPAS (SWISS INSTITUTE, NEW YORK)** Can one still speak of the readymade in 2023, when the planet is drowning in human detritus and our seas will soon contain more plastic than fish? These two exhibitions demonstrated the enduring relevance of this modernist form. At Greene Naftali, Sibony redeemed garbage for aesthetic contemplation, suspending crappy plant containers and a pathetic old broomstick from the ceiling and mounting the rectangular side of a semi-trailer on a wall like a painting. (Punctured by nails and defaced by scratches and splotches of peeling paint, the latter, *Her Seven morning Sentiment*, 2015, bears an uncanny resemblance to certain paintings by Christopher Wool.) At Swiss Institute, Serpas, another gifted scavenger, placed the junk she discovered during urban walks into passing arrangements that *could* be sculpture, manipulating these constructions with her arms, legs, and head. As in those early works of Charles Ray, the body—in this case that of Serpas—is the binding element of a "sculpture" that no longer exists, her face typically covered by a mop of hair. In the work of Serpas and Sibony, the found object finds new purpose in a world of too many things.

**7**

**CABELLO/CARCELLER, A VOICE FOR ERAUSO: EPILOGUE FOR A TRANS TIME, 2021–22 (SÃO PAULO BIENAL)** Initially commissioned by Azkuna Zentroa—Alhóndiga Bilbao in 2018, this double-screen video projection by the duo Cabello/Carceller was a highlight of this year's São Paulo Bienal. The protagonist of this fascinating work, Antonio de Erauso, escaped the confines of their biologically assigned gender and died a conquistador in New Spain. Neither a dry recitation of Erauso's picaresque exploits nor a hagiographic celebration of a queer forebear, *A Voice for Erauso* confronts the complicated history of the "Nun Ensign," who was responsible for numerous homicides and participated in the colonization of the Mapuche. Three nonbinary individuals (Tino de Carlos, Lewin Lerbours, and Bambi) comment on a portrait of Erauso by the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Juan van der Hamen y León. (A final performer, Mursego, spoke in the imaginary voice of the conquistador.) Even better, van der Hamen's original portrait hung nearby, forcing the viewer into a one-on-one encounter with the soldier's grim visage.



**8**

**DAN FLAVIN (DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK)** It is not so easy to see a Flavin. The artist's lights lose their intensity in rooms with too much ambient light or too many other artworks (including too many Flavins); in dark rooms, they risk transforming into light shows of oversaturated color. This impeccable reconstruction of two 1967 Flavin shows at New York's Kornblee Gallery, overseen by Kristine Bell, was judiciously installed in Zwirner's East Sixty-Ninth street space, whose rooms approximate the scale of the original Kornblee space in a town house on East Seventy-Ninth. The Kornblee shows were among the first to demonstrate Flavin's concept of an art of "color sticks" that could define entire rooms. Encountering the Zwirner exhibition's all-white installation of six vertical cool white fluorescent sculptures in one gallery and the six diagonal arrangements of paired green lamps in the other, one experienced the sense of wonder that Flavin's few supporters at the time must have felt when seeing these works for the first time.

**9**

**ED RUSCHA (MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK; CURATED BY CHISTOPHE CHERIX WITH ANA TOROK AND KIKO AEBI)** Organized by MoMA's brilliant chief curator of drawings and prints, this retrospective included such iconic pop works as *Annie*, 1962, and *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, 1965; a rich selection of Ruscha's works on paper; artist's books (a medium he more or less invented for the 1960s); his rarely seen *Chocolate Room*, 1970; and such highlights of his later career as *Course of Empire*, 2005, and *Our Flag*, 2017. Revisiting the theme of the artist-traveler explored in 2009 exhibition "In and Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960–1976," Cherix related the artist's fascination with signage and vernacular architecture to his youthful commutes on Route 66 between Oklahoma City and Los Angeles. For Ruscha, the American road is an endlessly fertile source.



**10**

**KERRY JAMES MARSHALL, THE NOW AND FOREVER WINDOWS (NATIONAL CATHEDRAL, WASHINGTON, DC)** Commissioned by the leadership of the National Cathedral in response to a resurgent white Christian nationalism in the US and a reinvigorated Black Lives Matter movement, Marshall's windows depict Black activists in casual dress and running shoes, their faces hidden, bearing signs demanding equality ("Fairness," "No Foul Play") or terse statements of refusal ("No," "Not."). The stained-glass window, one of the emblematic art forms of the Black church, holds special resonance: The 1963 Klan bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, the artist's hometown, left four girls dead and shattered the sanctuary's windows. With this commission—which replaces the creepy 1950s-era windows portraying Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson—the prodigiously gifted Marshall has imbued this ancient medium with contemporary significance. □