

Persons in the Presence of a Metamorphosis

December 5–15

Phyllida Barlow, Patty Chang, Anne Chu, Trisha Donnelly, Mona Hatoum, Arturo Herrera, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Miguel Angel Ríos, Rosemarie Trockel, and Jackie Winsor

Curatorial Statement

Persons in the Presence of a Metamorphosis is an exhibition of sculpture, textile, and video-based works that engage with processes of transformation in form, nature, or appearance. Bringing together ten artists in the Marieluise Hessel Collection, the exhibition encompasses a diverse range of artistic approaches that use formal and conceptual incongruities to unsettle expectations. Eliciting both the satisfactions and discomforts that arise from change, the exhibition addresses the transformative possibilities of personal regeneration, the animism of materials, and disruption of cyclical time.

The exhibition takes its title from a poem by poet and critic John Yau. Yau weaves fragments of text and the repetition of words into stanzas, disorienting the reader's relationship to meaning while also offering a freedom of interpretation through nonlinear composition. The artists in this exhibition experiment with similar strategies of destabilization, including the unusual use of familiar materials, or creating subtle slippages

in space and time. By doubling, pairing, or joining disparate elements in unexpected combinations, the artworks support multiple associations.

Persons in the Presence of a Metamorphosis positions transformation as a generative force that perpetually broadens the scope of experience. Collectively, the artworks on view provide opportunities to contemplate the fluidity of forms, and the boundaries that purport to contain them. The exhibition embraces dynamic perspectives that are receptive to change, difference, and possibility.

Persons in the Presence of a Metamorphosis is curated by Krista Alba, Caitlin Chaisson, Jenni Crain, and Liv Cuniberti

Artwork Descriptions

Phyllida Barlow, *untitled: dirtytwister*, 2012. Steel armature, steel mesh, wire netting, plaster, bonding plaster, cement, paint, spray paint, and PVA.

Barlow's sculptures and installations are gargantuan in scale, yet precarious in their construction, creating the sense that they might engulf the space in one moment or collapse in the next. *untitled: dirtytwister* is a gnarled, knotted, and burl-like wall sculpture. Its undulating form appears to twist and coil restlessly in the exhibition space. Barlow uses materials in unconventional ways, subjecting them to applications of stress and force which align with her interests in processes of production, destruction, and reconstruction. The ashen surface of the work looks as though it is molting, positioned on the threshold of becoming something new.

Patty Chang, *Fountain*, 1999. Video.

Patty Chang's *Fountain* is a video work depicting a close-up of the artist's face as she slurps water from a mirrored surface. Chang appears as if she is ingesting

her own image, an action that recalls the Greek myth of Narcissus, the man who falls in love with his own reflection in a pool of water. The vertical perspective of the water in *Fountain* defies gravity and disorients the space. In the video, the water's film becomes the site where Chang appears to split into two and then consolidate into one, repeating the insatiable gesture of transfiguring a fragmented self into one that is whole.

Anne Chu, *Nine Hellish Spirits: No. 8*, 2005. Smoked fire ceramic.

Chu's works draw upon a vast range of historical references and cultural practices, including funerary ceramics of the Tang Dynasty, Japanese Jōmon pottery, paintings of the Middle Ages, and mass-produced knickknacks. *Nine Hellish Spirits: No. 8* is one figure from a series of sculptures modeled after early twentieth-century Austrian marionettes, whose title refers to a character in a Bavarian production of Goethe's play *Faust* (1829). Without strings to control it, *Nine Hellish Spirits: No. 8* appears poised to either begin moving on its own, or reverting back into the impressionable clay from which it was formed. The work is spectral as it hovers in a liminal state between the lively and the inert.

Trisha Donnelly, *Untitled (Bells)*, 2007. Audio CD, ed. 3/5. Donnelly uses time and space as material to create embodied encounters that produce multiple interpretations. *Untitled (Bells)* is a sound piece that chimes for fifty seconds every hour, eventually drifting out of sync with standard time as the day progresses. The audio track remains quiet for long durations then rings out abruptly, drawing attention to the sonic void that precedes and follows. Markers of time—like clocks and bells—are both ways to measure and construct experience. *Untitled (Bells)* disrupts this regimentation, exposing the psychological aspects of time that are subjective and malleable.

Mona Hatoum, *T42*, 1998. Fine stoneware, ed. 5/100.

Hatoum's multidisciplinary practice addresses the paradoxes of globalism, including displacement and mobility, territory and confinement, and the construction of identity in times of widespread cultural dislocation and political persecution. Hatoum's works frequently warp mechanisms of control, such as violent force, the minimalist grid, or domestic objects. *T42* is a sculpture composed of two ceramic teacups fused together into a single object. In their conjoined state, the cups evoke the tensions inherent in collaboration and subjugation. Hatoum transforms a singular experience into one of sharing or dominance, generating an unnerving closeness through the tug-of-war implied by the work.

Arturo Herrera, *At Your Side*, 2000. Wool felt.

Herrera manipulates motifs from various art historical movements, including modernism, abstract expressionism, and surrealism, while also drawing from popular culture. His works extract symbols and forms from their original contexts, unhinging them in ways that allow associations to permutate and unfold in unexpected directions. *At Your Side* is an elongated and abstract felt work that evokes the ink blotting method of the Rorschach Test, inspiring multiple and personal readings.

Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *The Empty Jade Throne*, 1975. Foil, cellophane, and magic marker.

Lanigan-Schmidt's sculptures transform everyday materials in ways that complicate the distinction between "high" and "low" art forms. As a gay youth raised in a Catholic home, the artist's upbringing presented a number of contradictions that shaped his resistance to narrow definitions of acceptance. *The Empty Jade Throne* is a magisterial tableau, nestled in cellophane foliage and bejeweled with chains of glittering tinfoil. The miniature scale of the work

evokes a sense of preciousness, wherein the power to transcend manifests through the artist's careful manipulation of commonplace materials.

Miguel Angel Ríos, *Title Unknown*, ca. 1992. Mixed media.

Ríos's works draw upon vast symbolic systems, from Pre-Columbian culture to the vocabulary of modernism. In the work on view, a series of ovular earthen clay forms are arranged in a grid, nested within a chalky oblong recess, and supported within a larger rectangular tablet. The work is an imaginative interpretation of calendrical cycles, inscribed with markings that refuse legibility. Through these densely packed configurations, disquieting collisions of histories and cultures are synthesized in this work.

Rosemarie Trockel, *Menopause*, 2005. Wool.

Trockel's work engages with feminine and domestic labor in order to counter the perceived inferiority of their means and materials. *Menopause* is an example of Trockel's iconic "knitted pictures," which she began creating in the 1980s. The large monochrome is hand knit and stretched in verso, turning the surface inside out, whilst using the title to point to an often stigmatized moment in a woman's life. The formal strategies of the work challenge male-dominated narratives within the field of modernist painting by eschewing the gendered distinctions between art and craft, shifting the power dynamics that operate within the art world and wider society through the monumental work.

Jackie Winsor, *Blue Sphere*, 1985–1986. Concrete, acrylic, and pigment.

Winsor often handcrafts her sculpture through laborious methods that involve uncertainty and imperfection. In *Blue Sphere*, Winsor mixes a vibrant pigment into concrete, which compromises its ability to set. The introduction of this foreign matter creates vulnerability in an otherwise robust and stable material. Further

entangling incompatible processes and forms, Winsor has cut square apertures through to the core of the sculpture, embedding a cube within the sphere. Referring to the nested cube as the work's "silent partner," the artist describes the sculpture as having an interiority and centripetal force that pulls energy inward to a unified state.

Checklist

All works from the Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, unless otherwise noted.

Phyllida Barlow, *untitled: dirtytwister*, 2012. Steel armature, steel mesh, wire netting, plaster, bonding plaster, cement, paint, spray paint, and PVA. 56 in. × 30 in. × 28 in. (142.24 cm × 76.2 cm × 71.12 cm).

Patty Chang, *Fountain*, 1999. Video.

Anne Chu, *Nine Hellish Spirits: No. 8*, 2005. Smoked fire ceramic. 53 in. × 24 in. × 30 in. (134.62 cm × 60.96 cm × 76.2 cm).

Trisha Donnelly, *Untitled (Bells)*, 2007. Audio CD, ed. 3/5. Mona Hatoum, *T42*, 1998. Fine stoneware, ed. 5/100. 2 1/8 in. × 9 5/8 in. × 5 1/2 in. (5.4 cm × 24.45 cm × 13.97 cm).

Arturo Herrera, *At Your Side*, 2000. Wool felt. 65 in. × 240 in. (165.1 cm × 609.6 cm).

Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *The Empty Jade Throne*, 1975. Foil, cellophane, and magic marker. 20 in. × 14 in. × 14 in. (50.8 cm × 35.56 cm × 35.56 cm).

Miguel Angel Ríos, Title Unknown, ca. 1992. Mixed media. 34 3/4 in. × 20 in. × 4 1/2 in. (88.27 cm × 50.8 cm × 11.43 cm).

Rosemarie Trockel, *Menopause*, 2005. Wool. 116 1/2 in. × 116 1/2 in. (295.91 cm × 295.91 cm).

Jackie Winsor, *Blue Sphere*, 1985–1986. Concrete, acrylic, and pigment. 32 in. (81.28 cm).



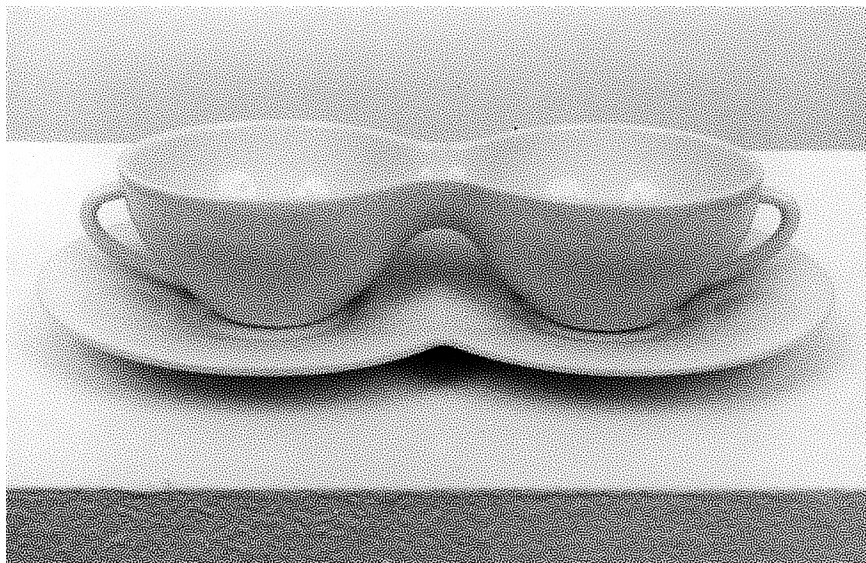
Phyllida Barlow, *untitled: dirtytwister*, Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth.



Patty Chang, *Fountain*, Video still, Courtesy of the artist and Bank/Mabsociety, Shanghai.



Anne Chu, *Nine Hellish Spirits: No. 8*, Courtesy of the artist and Anglim Gilbert Gallery, San Francisco.



Mona Hatoum, *T42*, Courtesy of the artist and Alexander and Bonin, New York.
