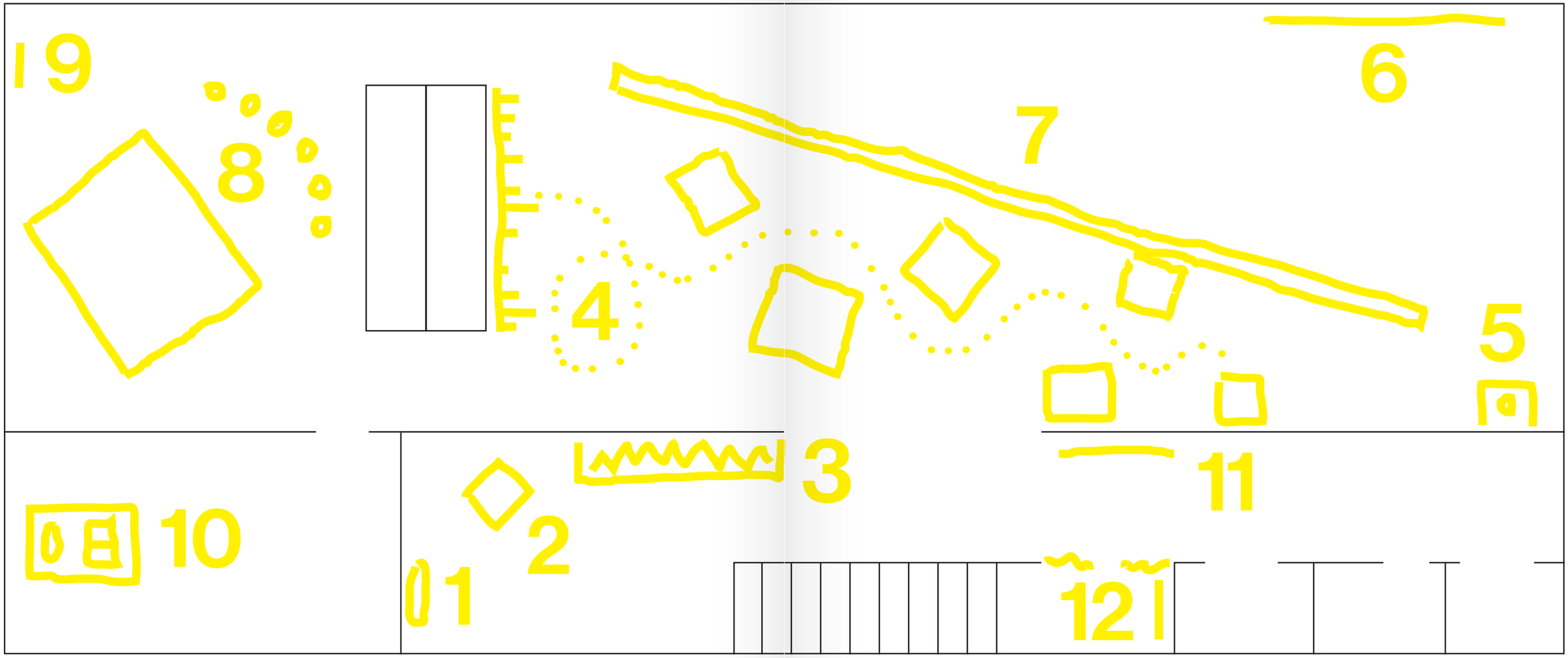
A Little This After




E5
E4


Drawing the Line

A walkabout of the exhibition with
Josh Ginsburg (J.G.) and Penny Siopis (P.S.).

J.G. We didn't set out to make an exhibition about inheritances, thresholds, and grief. It began with a will to do something with you, Penny, inspired, in some part, by seeing *Will* again at the Michaelis School of Fine Art.

Almost immediately, you began inviting other voices into the conversation. One thing led to another – a work to another work, another relationship, and perspective.

We found ourselves, through an ongoing conversation, following along this improvisatory line.

When I think about *Will* as an artwork, and its relationship to thinking about inheritances, estates, and death, I immediately think of Colin [Richards] – this extraordinary creative partnership between you and Colin and the influence you have, and Colin continues to have, on the arts ecology here.

What underpins your individual practices is this tremendous collaboration. This is epitomised in your approach, attuned to the relational quality between all things.

The title of the exhibition only emerged very much later, as the title of Colin's work, *A Little After This*.

P.S. It's a beautiful title and keeps becoming relevant in so many ways. As we continued our conversation, once we had the title in hand, we figured, ok, well, what is *This?* Well, *This*, demonstrative in language, is something you point to. In the event that the thing is not physically present, *this* can be a way to introduce narrative. What is *a Little After?* Everything that is after, is also now, and now also marks before, and before points to the future.

This, this title, the way it emerged, speaks to the continuation of its emergence.

J.G. Let's walk the line of the exhibition. As we arrive on the landing, we are immediately drawn to Kathryn Smith's scans of this skull.

P.S. We may, at first, think of it as appearing in black and white, as being monochromatic. Rather, it's blue-ish, encircled in the line.

J.G. The tempo is slow, invites a patient and considered looking as the rendering of the skull revolves. The depth of field is curious.

P.S. You see the inside and the outside simultaneously. You lose the sense of boundary by seeing through it.

J.G. The skull then speaks to Yoko Ono's *Sky T.V.* that was first conceived of in 1966. Framed in the circle, and circling around, the skull looks towards the sky that is framed in this small, square TV. The monitor draws a boundary on what we see as infinite, radiating out.

P.S. Arriving at Colin Richards' concertina line. The hand is very present in this one, and the horizontal axis of the folded-out pages prompts you to walk along the line of the work.

J.G. That's interesting, as there is almost no evidence of the hand in either the skull, or the sky works. You said something the other day that is quintessential of Colin's practice: you spoke about the cross-hatchings that Colin favoured in his drawings, his focus on making these small, deliberate lines: how he knew that the line was relevant, that lines aren't only about what falls on one side or another of the line, but that the line takes up space – line is a thing, is a *this*. Since then, we have realised that the themes the artworks can speak to in this exhibition, when collected together like this, can all be looked at through the apparatus of the line. Line, in other words, can be used as a tool for engaging the themes of this exhibition; line as a link, as the place between states, as a point of transition, or as a continuum.

P.S. Colin articulated it precisely, theoretically and philosophically – as line being a hinge between the visual and the linguistic. Line connects both sides.
In scientific illustration (Colin was a

medical illustrator, and this led him into the arts) all aspects of the line should have capacity to be 'objectively' calibrated. They're interrelated, as in art, but art takes on subjectivity. Colin took on the critical problem of illustration in this context, feeding it back into questions around, specifically, the linguistic and the visual, the space between image and text, challenging modernist art values where illustration had been given a negative cast in pursuit of disciplinary purity. At that time, illustration was denigrated in the fine arts. He was able to extrapolate a huge critical and creative space in his exploration of the line as hinge. And I think this idea of the line is a key part of this exhibition.

This mosaic effect of the blank paper in the work is made from the margins of a copy of Crusoe's *Treasure Island,* the parts that didn't contain words and print. He also performed this action with the words. He cut out and assembled these into this Moleskine concertina book. The scale of each blank mosaic paper piece mirrors the cut out words – is reminiscent of the scale of a word. These are an absence that is not an absence, it is the book, the words in the book, and not the words in the book. It's the material of the book, in which we would read, but also see the words and the spaces between the words and around the words. A word can be a shape, and it can be the shape of its absence.

The line that is created between cuts is evident by the appearance of a shadowed edge. This effect of being able to see a line is created by the smallest relief of the paper on the page coupled with the ambient light that is cast.

J.G. It is both a sculpture and an archive in a book.

P.S. Again, we keep thinking about these as monochrome but there is colour. The colour of the page is off-white, like the colour of the back of the canvas – you see it when you look towards the paintings hanging in the gallery – the reverse of the paintings in line.

J.G. Let's use this as an opportunity to move forwards towards *Will.* There is an obvious line in the *Will* project, which is your life. Well, at least there is the clear line of your life as living and then as not living, at least in this world. As you're speaking now, I was imagining each object like a cross-hatched little touch that collectively represents a life.

How did *Will* become? Did it begin from a first object?

P.S. I think *Will* began when I started to work with installation, which in turn emerged from my work with painting. In the painting *Melancholia*, I had a taxidermied monkey as reference. Increasingly, I started thinking about the thing itself, the object as its physical self and what it is referencing, at the same time. There was always this tension between the actuality and the reference. I made an installation, *Reconnaissance 1990-1997*, the same year as I started *Will*, which transformed into a massive corpus of found objects, *Charmed Lives*. From this corpus I selected individual 'characters' that then entered *Will*... Even now, I still have a complicated relationship between materiality and reference. I think it's a positive one, but anyway, that's an aside.

'Melancholia monkey' hung around my studio and home, because I was disallowed from giving it back to what was then the Transvaal Museum from where it had been loaned. "It's broken at the seams, it's no good anymore, we don't want it in the museum, you can have it," they said. You're presented with it and wonder, *What am I doing now, presented with this object back to me?* An object which I have to look after, or don't look after, or throw away, or about which people think, "You're weird, why have you got this monkey hanging around your place?" It raised questions beyond the creature's symbolism.

The monkey wasn't the first object. It was a bit of the monkey's skin that had fallen off its owner. It has since been lost. Skin is an important boundary line, human skin in particular. Especially when you're more than one, when you're one with another. Touching. And the boundary is porous and it suffers. It's young, it's old. It's a psychic and social reality.

J.G. That the piece of monkey skin was the first object, and represents the line, is beautiful.

P.S. I think so too. It evokes the complexity of skin, especially in its shed form. From birth we shed skin. Then, getting to the point of death (which I don't see as obviously scary or negative – even in the face of grief, a shattering of self, there is transformation) involves thinking about what it is to be truly cold as felt through the skin. The cold skin is one bit of evidence that the person is no longer in the form that they were before. You touch that person through your skin. There are two skins needed to feel this; theirs, and yours.

J.G. And where you touch, is *something*.

P.S. Yes, the line is relational. You are never only one thing or the other.

J.G. Standing here, one is made aware that each of the objects is also its colours, its textures, and its shape. All these shapes are of different scale. There is an interplay throughout the exhibition between scale and size, from Colin's line, the smallest line, to the towering crates, and the back of this canvas line, which feels monumental in scale.

P.S. Monumental, but not industrial in scale. My body is its reference.

J.G. We have been finding, as a team, that we have different opinions of where to turn next. After the *Will* wall, I turn right, walking through the crates and along the back of the canvas line to find the Sithole sculpture carved from a single branch of wood. It almost feels like it might be meant to be packed away into one of these crates somehow, like it's a part of this *Will* project. The work is very much a line in form. It's also a link, it is a branch of a tree and it is the evidence of the hand that carved it.

Then one enters the widest part from which to view Portia Zvavahera's painting, and to walk along the line of *Maitland* paintings.

P.S. It is interesting to consider the direction because, should one be inclined to go left instead... well, left is the page being read in English, left to right, or the way we drive here, on the left-hand side of the road. Perhaps it's a choice visitors can make, which route to take through the exhibition.

J.G. The wayfinder document, when assembled, does bind the works in an order. The order in which they will appear in the book will take people from *Will*, and turn right. Visitors should try out these different routes through the exhibition, whether to enter from the wide end, or take the narrow tunnel through your paintings towards Portia Zvavahera's painting *Embraced and Protected in You.*

P.S. The painting is remarkable, there is this very definite use of line in parts and, at the same time, Portia's shape-making process lets the line continue and bleed across the surface and edge into the boundaries of the figures.

Having Portia's painting facing the *Maitland* works enables a conversation between the mark making in these paintings. In Portia's painting, the mark is made through the pressure of her hand painting then applying the stamp-print on the canvas. As I work, marks emerge through the painting medium itself. The ink and glue pools and leaves its residue when dry, which creates a variety of circles. Onto this surface, the application of oil impasto makes these individual marks that, when seen together, cohere into a swarm. There are parallels here in the way Portia applies the print, the block, to her painted surface.

In the usual way of describing artworks, paintings are described in terms of 'colour' and drawing in terms of 'line', but the painting is also line, and the drawing is also colour.

J.G. Saying, *now we reach Alex Da Corte's work* while on this walkabout isn't quite accurate, as the sound of *ROY G BIV* bleeds throughout the environment. We've encountered the sound all along.

P.S. It's the audible line that travels through the exhibition

and coheres an ephemeral boundary. There's a scene in the film where you see Alex's feet, he's tiptoeing as if along a line and carrying that boombox indicating how important sound is to this experience.

J.G. Early on in the conversations towards this project we understood that inheritances are a central theme in the exhibition. *ROY G BIV* and Alex's embodiment of these art ancestors links to this theme – a homage to Duchamp, Brancusi, Baldessari and Johns, and also to the intertextuality, borrowing, and iteration that is central to all artmaking.

We then find Gerard Sekoto's small painting of Paris. It feels quite solitary, placed here. The painting, from 1959, talks to the blue of Kathryn's skull, of Yoko's sky.

P.S. The feeling of blue-ish.

J.G. When I returned home from Frieze London where I had seen Shilpa Gupta's *100 Hand-drawn Maps* (those were of England) and I spoke to you about the work – it was so impactful, in that whole massive arena of things, it was the work that stayed with me – you immediately said that, yes, it would work in the exhibition, the work being concerned with edges and boundaries, those real and imagined.

P.S. Shilpa's work also brings in this other element, that of the air. As the fan creates wind, the movement of the air becomes material as the pages are blown over. Our other senses engage, seeing, and feeling the wind, hearing the sound.

J.G. The title of Moshekwa Langa's *The Morning After!* reads like an accompaniment to the exhibition title, of Colin's work *A Little After This* – like another version of it, even.

P.S. Colour tends to hover and become most potent on the margins, creating a visual field from different combinations of colour application. Then, he draws a very lyrical line onto this field, a line that has the feeling of having been drawn as a continuous gesture.

J.G. In Shilpa Gupta's *100 Hand-drawn Maps of South Africa,* we asked participants who drew their versions of South Africa to draw with one continuous line, or as close to one line as they can, which is the artist's specification. Obviously, Lesotho is in the way of making this wholly possible.

When I saw Ane Hjort Guttu's work *Untitled (The City at Night)* the A4 team were in the process of measuring and photographing each *Will* object, creating a digital inventory that would respond to a physical archive. But what the physical archive would look like was still a question. In this work, we come across the physical archive – these beautifully kept drawers, belonging to an anonymous artist who makes her work with no intention of it being shown. The work is made for the archive, for its storage, so to speak. We were invested in this research question at A4 at the time, of sustainable practices in the arts and as part of this, in the maintenance and reuse of things. And we were wanting to find a storage solution for *Will* that could also be its installation strategy, which we have accomplished here in the exhibition.

I'm wondering, looking at *Will* now, as ordered, cohered, organised into this archive, what do you think? How does seeing it this way make you feel?

P.S. That's an interesting question, because my 'natural' aesthetic is not really to separate things. I mean, it's almost as if it's now a contradiction, which I'm happy about. It shows, even dramatises, the discernment that motivates the choices of the *Will* objects, of which to include, marking the particularity of each. With the organisation you've brought to the corpus, it draws a line that contains, but a line that does not end (at least for the moment), because I'll keep adding bits to the distributed body that is *Will,* until the day that the things are dispersed. Then, each object starts a new life, connecting with other bodies. We're doing this all the time in life, we are connecting all the time, and this particular way of working with *Will* materialises that connection.

The crates, some of which are displayed open, allows each thing to settle for a while in a habitat made specifically for it. I love that these crates have been made with precision, craft and care. In organising, we've put things together, but we've also split them... It's this question of a line again, in one form or another. For the moment, this is where we draw the line on the project. A provisional line. One that speaks to A Little After This.

J.G. Perhaps this is a good place to end this part of the conversation. In Ane Hjort Guttu's film, the unnamed artist/protagonist talks about creating these small artworks that fit the scale of the domestic space in which she worked, at home at the table. You mentioned Colin working with the smallest nib size that he could find.

P.S. He used the tiniest nib that he could source, point 0000 whatever. And he also worked at the table at home.

J.G. It's the thinnest material capacity, but it fully occupies space...

Kathryn Smith

b.1975, Durban; works in Cape Town

The Phantom Interlocutor, 2023
Digital animation of 2802 micro-CT slices of a human skull
Infinite loop

Advocating for vital pracademic exchange between operational, institutional and research environments, Kathryn Smith's work mediates across the art studio, archive and the forensic laboratory. With a humanitarian and investigative bent, she occupies herself especially with lesser-known histories, instructive objects that otherwise elude or exceed utilitarian ends, and the unknown dead. Through various documentary and archival practices, Smith evidences a critical and poetic relationship with the forensic imaginary and related processes of truth-making, pursuing inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration as method and practice. Notable studio projects include *Jack in Johannesburg (and elsewhere)* (2003–2004); *In Camera* (2007; various iterations); and *Incident Room* (2012), which re-staged the troubling narratives of the unsolved murder of Jacoba 'Bubbles' Schroeder in Johannesburg in 1949. Her doctoral research project, *Laws of the Face* (2020), holds the folklore and science of the field of forensic art to account against the silent mass disaster of the unidentified dead in South African mortuaries and elsewhere, which was re-presented in part in the online artwork, *www.speakinglikeness.online* (2020). She understands the connection between her forensic and curatorial work as dual expressions of critical care for bodies, infrastructures, and non-human things, directed at mutual visibility and legibility.

The late artist, curator and scholar Colin Richards (1954–2012) had for many years worked alongside two unidentified human skulls inherited through his position as medical illustrator at the University of the Witwatersrand. Troubled by the ethical lacuna they signalled in the history of medical collections in South Africa and their haunting familiarity in his workspace, they became recurring motifs in Richards' drawings, paintings and prints. During the curatorial conversations to prepare the exhibition, Between Subject and Object: human remains at the intersection of art and science (2014, Michaelis Galleries, UCT), which Kathryn Smith co-curated with

Richards' former student Josephine Higgins and Penny Siopis – an exhibition which in many ways was designed to honour Richards' interests and memory – Siopis invited Smith to produce a forensic facial reconstruction of one of the skulls.

Smith produced two facsimiles of the skull: one cast in plastic, which provided the architecture for *The Studio Familiar: X0198/1669* (2014), a sculpture that saw the reconstructed bust mounted on a land surveyor's tripod; and a micro-Computed Tomography scan in collaboration with analytical imaging technicians at Stellenbosch University, after which Siopis documented herself burying the remains in an undisclosed location in her film *Lay Bare Beside* (2015).

The Phantom Interlocutor (2023) is a digital stop-motion film made from the 2802 individual image slices produced by the micro-CT scanner. From a stack of apparently black and empty jpegs, Smith excavated the image of the skull from each slice through digital manipulation. Extending commonsense notions of personhood, the face is animated by filmic movement – an infinite rotation – rather than the presence of muscle, skin or sensory organs. As a visual mnemonic, it translates the history of the skull with reference to both the spectral and the haptic, like the incision along the top of the cranium as an artefact of autopsy, the etymology of which means 'to see for oneself'.

Yoko Ono

b.1933, Tokyo; works in Franklin

Sky T.V., 1966
Closed-circuit video
Live stream

Among the art objects Yoko Ono has made, many have necessitated their own disappearance, much like *Smoke Painting* (1961), a canvas accompanied by the invitation to press lit cigarettes into its fibres until the fabric has all but burnt away. Drawn to the ephemeral, the incomplete and understated, those among her works that find no material expression persist instead as text, performance, film, or as koan-like instructions: “Light a match and watch till it goes out,” “draw a line until you disappear,” “make one tunafish sandwich and eat.” Some read as poetry, others are matter-of-fact. With these ‘instruction pieces’, Ono invites the viewer to perform the gesture she proposes, stepping back so that another may come forward to take her place. Even when the artist is bodily present, as in the performance *Cut Piece* (1965), she remains impassive; allowing her clothes to be cut away, the piece to continue on to its conclusion. Her work is coloured by this quiet contradiction: the precision of her propositions and her commitment to letting go.

Through *Sky T.V.* in 1966, the eternal sky was invited indoors by way of a 24-hour live video feed. Yoko Ono subverted the anxiety that would come to surround television, made manifest in the material of the ‘TV dinner’ and its associated mindless consumption. Instead, the TV is an open window to the miraculous sky and all its promises – whether to be blue and clear, or disrupt the world with tempers. Ono imagined the work while living in a windowless apartment. The artist’s instructions read: “TV to see the sky: This is a TV just to see the sky. Different channels for different skies, high-up sky, low sky, etc.” Ono often collaborates with the sky in her work – as mirror, as escape; the sky as artist. Where the viewer is invited to witness the sky’s unbounded capacity to make out yonder, free of human interference, the sky, personified as conductor, performs like a god. Its metronome holds us in time, dictating our night and day, whereas, when a plane appears in the TV’s view, it’s but a blip, a mere actor stepping into frame for a small moment with little influence (like the way a van driving past the City Hall can’t drown out the orchestra’s symphony). Perhaps the germ of the sky’s intractability was conceived long before – the artist, as a child, remained on the outskirts of Tokyo throughout World War II. A sky flooded with hydrogen, alight with fire, would eventually climb out blue, defiantly redeeming its sunrise and set.

Colin Richards

b.1954, Cape Town; d.2012, Cape Town

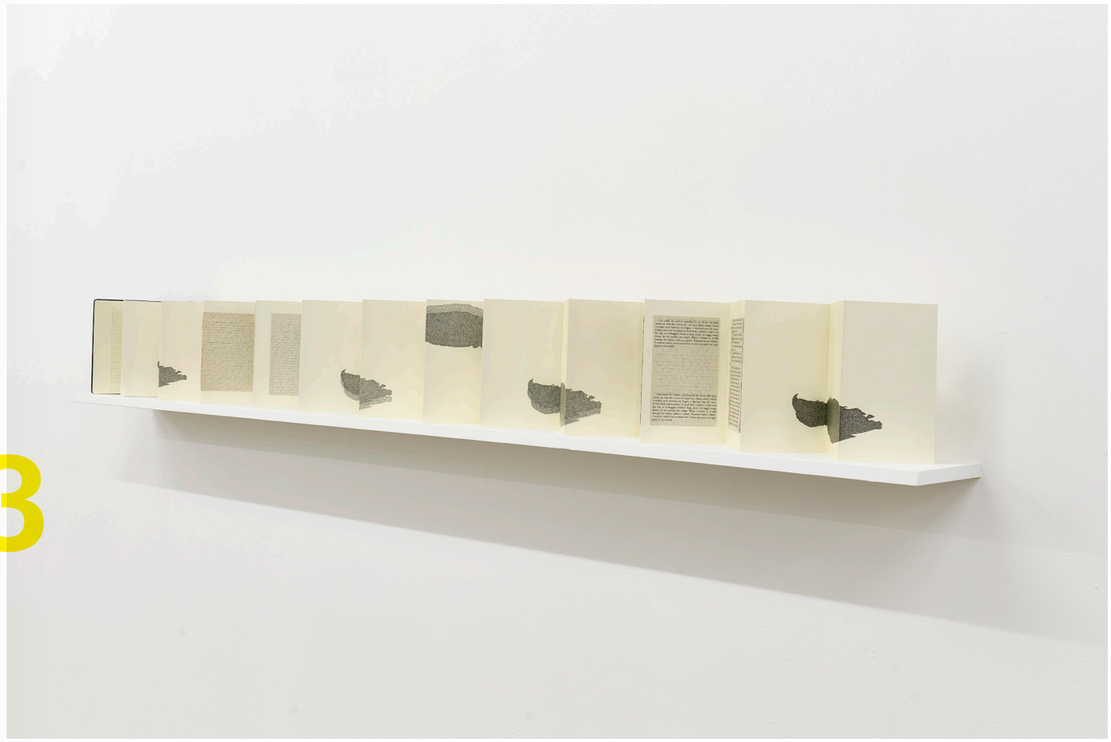
A Little After This, 2012
Ink drawing and woven paper from other books collaged onto accordion Moleskine book
20 x 13 cm (closed)

Colin Richards' artistic practice, conceptual in mode, is a call and response between theory and art-making, and vice versa. His training in meticulous labour and patience, as a medical illustrator at the University of the Witwatersrand's Medical School, proved formative. Preoccupied with skilled mimicry – a matter familiar to the medical illustrator who must prioritise execution over interpretation – his research found a particular affinity for parrots while reflecting on originals, copies, and the ideal of a 'true' image. "Illustration is a hinge between the linguistic and the visual, and it can turn many ways," he told Kathryn Smith. A devoted scholar of Samuel Beckett, Richards wrote, "To grapple with the unruly dynamics of power – the power of seduction, exclusion, coercion, complicity, liberation, oppression – requires a willingness to abstract and generalise in the moment." His formidable intellect is remembered in obituaries written after his untimely death in 2012, his "catholic reading habits" (Sean O'Toole) that "amplified his gifts as a teacher and writer," and his generosity as an educator, where, "he taught them not only how to think or write..." (Robyn Sassen) but "how to dare to say what mattered."

For Colin Richards, illustration offered a method through which to ask questions – to prompt investigative engagement – rather than an artistic medium. Describing *Foirades/Fizzles* (1976), the collaboration between Samuel Beckett and Jasper Johns to which he committed his PhD, Richards wrote, "Relationality lies at the heart of illustrational activity: relation between representation and objecthood, literariness and literalness, discourse and figure, similarity and difference." In *A Little After This*, Richards facilitates relationships between paper and ink, between drawing and collage, and between intersecting lines. Richards' interest in the concept of the line – which he thought to be like a hinge, consisting of the line itself, the inside of the line, and the outside of the line – is evinced in his detailed cross-hatching in pen, forming shadows from which silhouettes of parrots emerge. The parrots, drawn from colleague Pippa Skotnes' taxidermied African Grey that she gave Richards, are seen lying on their backs – ambiguously suspended, and immortalised, in a place between life and death. The other pages consist of what Richards refers to as "horizontal hatchings," paper reliefs and assembled words that reference parrots in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Writing on this work, Richards said:

> *Crusoe taught his parrot to speak and its words (his originally) brought him some comfort in his isolation. Yet other references in the book speak of killing parrots. I reorganized these cut and pasted words to touch on, amongst other things, the capriciousness of creaturely life – human and animal – lived in relative isolation.*

By referring to those stranded on desert islands, *A Little After This* offers a parallel to the castaway's diary, where time's passing is marked in etched tallies.



Penny Siopis

b.1953, Vryburg; works in Cape Town

Will, 1997–
Collected objects, text
Dimensions variable

In describing Penny Siopis' practice, a necessary caveat: it is too slippery in form, too wide-ranging in ambition, to be distilled to pithy statement. Hers is an "aesthetic of accumulation," a logic of excess, a hoarding of signs. Edges, boundary lines, beginnings and endings, states of change – these are among the subjects that inform her enquiries. As to a single preoccupation, the artist offers *residue*. A 'historical materialist', Siopis looks to the traces of past action, asks after the material vibrancy of artefacts made and found; what they might recall of their provenance. She moves between modes with limber agility, playing the roles of both artist and archivist. While predominantly a painter, Siopis' practice extends to include found film and objects in a sustained meditation on trauma as it appears, the artist writes, "in material amalgam." From her early 'history' paintings to *Will*, a growing collection of objects and their anecdotes to be bequeathed to friends and family at the artist's death, loss (past, forthcoming) is a constant undertone. Pursuing a "poetics of vulnerability", Siopis transcribes, however obliquely, shared and individual griefs – punctuated by small moments of material transcendence – in the inherited images and historical flotsam, in the residue, with which she works.

In 1997, while in possession of a small piece of a taxidermied monkey's skin (loosed from the body of a monkey she had loaned from a museum to model for a painting), Penny Siopis began thinking about an artwork as a will. From the many idiosyncratic, lovely, and weird objects the artist found herself drawn to collecting over time, certain ones became imagined as bequests to certain individuals. Upon her death, the collection of objects that became the artwork *Will,* 1997–, would be sent to their new homes and owners. While alive, these things would live together, added to, retracted from, a living body shared and shown across the artist's exhibitions. When she dies, the artwork will receive its closing date and each item will begin a new life. As discrete objects with a person in mind, the artist hopes that they might travel off from the big body of the collected work to begin their own stories, create new offshoots, generous and generating. Or not, Siopis is clear to point out. For not everyone might be as impressed with this inheritance, may not wish to store, tend to, care for this "vibrant matter," to borrow a phrase from Jane Bennett's writings on the political ecology of things.

For *Will*, 1997–, the A4 team took up the challenge of creating an organised home for the objects during this stage of their life, that could also be their installation strategy. Ultimately, the hope was that making a library of objects would assist the project's executor when it comes time for the items to make their way towards their intended recipients. Presented with 744 objects and counting, each was measured, photographed, boxed or enveloped. Stickers were applied, crates built and numbered. A digital inventory now houses the objects for easy management and sorting in the real. Throughout the course of A Little After This, Siopis shifts the installation of *Will*, 1997–, rearranging objects on the wall or swapping these out for others in the project's inventory.

Lucas Sithole b.1931, Springs; d.1994, Pongola

Not You!, c.1983
Carved yellowwood
74 cm tall

Among Lucas Sithole's most astonishing works are those he sculpted from indigenous wood. "A tree," he told writer Peter Anderson, "is like a human being...the branches represent the veins." Then – "Stone is just a material." And, later – "I always try to get the inside..." Where clay

broke too easily, stone gave too little, and metal lacked warmth, wood offered the artist not only an ideal medium but the suggestion of form. He worked on salvaged branches, finding his many figures hidden beneath the bark. While Sithole's sculptures made in other materials share a solidity in weight and form, his wooden works are more often slight and long, just as the tapering boughs from which they are carved. The artist spoke often of an Eswatini myth his grandmother told him, the story of a snake who lives in the rivers but longs for the sky. On the rare occasion its powers allow it to rise up to the clouds, the snake appears as a tornado, twisting upwards, only to fall back down to the river as rain. "This is why some of my figures are long," Sithole said, evoking the fable's unfulfilled desire, "they are longing for heaven."

Described with only the barest details, the figure in *Not You!* is suffused with feeling; its form recalling the willowy branch from which it was carved. Eyes wide and mouth agape, the work echoes in affect the surprise, or shock, of the title's disavowal. The delicate hands appear tightly wrung in a gesture of anxiety; the figure precariously balanced atop the base on which it stands. Though *Not You!* is a more mournful example of Lucas Sithole's snake-like forms, the snake is not an inherently ominous figure. In Southern African belief systems, snakes are carriers of ancestral spirits, conveying both omens and promises – in real life and in the dream world.

Portia Zvavahera

b.1985, Harare; works in Harare

Embraced and Protected in You, 2016
Oil-based printing ink and oil bar on canvas
210 x 400 cm

Portia Zvavahera paints in the day to clarify the visions delivered to the artist through the night. “For me, the dreams are like future-telling, letting me know what to do next or what’s happening in the spirit world that I should be aware of.” Sleep informs her wakefulness, which, in turn, determines her sleep – her paintings a continuation of the dream-state and a method to process symbols and hidden meanings that may lie beneath the surface of comprehension. If there is a membrane between Zvavahera’s nights and days, it is one of state, rather than hierarchy. She affords no less importance to the matters of visitations, dreams, and shadowy messages, than to the day-to-day duties of parenting and painting. Zvavahera’s grandmother instilled in her the daily practice of recounting her dreams. Each morning, she would call the artist, then a child, to sit with her, and begin to interpret the night’s messages. To this day, the artist despairs of a dreamless night, for without these visitations, she is adrift, abandoned. And yet, for Zvavahera, painting is not without its physical and spiritual hardships; often, the potency of the dreamscape renders the artist sick and aching from wrestling with a dream’s traces. The path to healing is through the work. Prayer is a ritual she performs before bed. To pray offers her a modicum of protection against whatever forces she may encounter in the spirit world, much like the presence of veils and angels in her paintings cloak and protect her capacity to work, ensuring that she can continue to paint the telling no matter how challenging the content.

In Portia Zvavahera’s *Embraced and Protected in You*, three figures are arranged in an ambiguous tableau. She recalls that, at this moment of painting, both she and her sister were pregnant. Engaged in prayer each night, they asked in their sleep for the opportunity to hold their children upon birth. The figure to the right – the ‘you’, perhaps, of the work’s title – conducts the scene, arms outstretched in a protective embrace. She evokes Zvavahera’s grandmother, who helped care for the artist while she was pregnant. All three figures in this composition are cloaked in a block-printed veil – a technique popular in Zimbabwean textile cultures. Symbolic of the union between the spiritual world and Earth, the present and future, dreams and reality, this veiling gestures to the artist’s syncretic faith. The large-scale nature of the work – its figures painted life-sized – is an invitation to the viewer to enter the dreamscape of the artist’s imagining. Rendered against shades of deep blue and purple, one defined red line distinguishes the woman on the left from the two ghostlier figures, whose boundaries and edges bleed and blur.

Penny Siopis

b.1953, Vryburg; works in Cape Town

An installation of *Maitland* paintings, 2017/2019
Glue, ink, oil and newspaper on canvas
Dimensions variable

Artist bio on p.20

In 2017 Penny Siopis first took up residency in the Maitland Institute. The resulting project, Open Form/Open Studio, opened her practice to the public and shared her thinking about materiality. The giant glue and ink paintings created in the Institute's warehouse evidence her process-focused approach. Of this mode, Siopis has said: "My method is to set the conditions for something to happen, and respond... The physical things that emerge from this material process are the objects we call paintings. I see these as residues of performance." Through her engagement with materiality, she bears out her philosophy of relationality, describing viscous glue as acting like a "skin" when it dries, transforming from white substance to transparent layer after exposure to the air, and later, when stained, reacting to the chemistry of ink. Shapes emerge through this interaction and through the play of gravity (the canvas placed horizontally on the floor) and with the gestures of her body. "All these material acts resonate for me with wider philosophical concerns about opening oneself to the 'life' of matter and finding, in this openness, an intimate model for relationality in the bigger political picture of the self, the social body, ecology: a model that is full of risk and uncertainty."

Reinhabiting the Maitland Institute in 2019, Siopis' starting point was to gather certain of the canvases gleaned from her residency two years prior, together with earlier works, reincarnating them as elements of an immersive configuration. Imagined as mobile and moveable, the painting installations are site responsive, adapting to context and environment, much like her object installations. The edges of the canvas find one another, individual bodies tessellating to make the larger corpus. Watching the documentary footage of the artist working at Maitland Institute, the physicality of her practice becomes apparent. In the film we see a fine, spare, delicately proportioned person climbing onto an island of white canvas. Thus begins a dance in which she embraces, throws, and holds the giant frames. The artist closely observes glues and inks, watching where they rush, sit, fall, and pool, observing the circles and lines that emerge through "directed chance". Prioritising use and reuse, these paintings were made by "using what's to hand, rather than buying more things." The phrases in them assemble words cut from newspaper articles from the time, many of which reported on the climate crisis.

As an educator, through her time at the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town, Siopis is beloved for her horizontal approach, eschewing hierarchy for deep listening and attentive encouragement of her students. For the artist, everything is relational – is about relationships – her practice illuminating the place of touching, the space of 'between', which is where the work happens, finding its form. That the painting has dried is no indicator that an artwork is complete. Rather, each painting is a record of a process, and the conversation with matter that the artist is having on its surface can be reopened at any time.

Maitland Institute (2016–2020) was founded by Tammi Glick to be a fully-funded environment in which artists could experiment freely with their practices. The sincere, hopeful, and generous contribution that Glick made to the arts community in Cape Town is visible in the traces of the works that were created there, among these Penny Siopis' *Maitland* paintings and Jared Ginsburg's *Hanging Drawings*.

Alex Da Corte

b.1980, Camden; works in Philadelphia

ROY G BIV, 2022
Video, colour, sound; wood box with back-projected screen, paint, performance, and 7 powder-coated chairs
60 min

A play in five acts, Alex Da Corte's *ROY G BIV* is a meditation on love, labour, and colour. The film's logic is that of a fever dream – clarity is suspended in favour of feeling; sense given to sensuality. The set against which the play's strange action unfolds is a recreation of the Brancusi Room (Gallery 288) in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In 1954, Marcel Duchamp, a close friend of Brancusi, assisted the Museum in composing the tableau of four works featured. It is fitting then, that Duchamp is the central character in this play; appearing first as himself (as performed by Da Corte), then his alter-ego Rrose Sélavy, later as the Joker in Tim Burton's *Batman*; and lastly as one of the two figures in Brancusi's *The Kiss* (1916). Da Corte embodies these roles to uncanny effect. Transformed by costumes and prosthetic makeup, he gives an exhaustive and demanding physical performance – a form of what he terms "devotional research" – as a means to attend to and inhabit difference. To this, *ROY G BIV* is liberal in its quotations, citing art-historical and pop-culture references, from Jasper Johns' *Painted Bronze/Ale Cans* (1960) to Stevie Wonder's cover of the Carpenters' *(They Long To Be) Close To You* (1970) – dissimilar artefacts brought into narrative proximity.

As to plot, the film reverse engineers the embrace of *The Kiss*' figures; wonders after how they met, how they came to be locked together for all time. "What does the emancipation of this kiss look like?" Da Corte asks. "What kind of love do they share after all of these years?" As the acts progress, the film moves from greyscale tones to brilliantly saturated colours. "From an early age," the artist says, " I understood colour in relationship to matters of the heart."

The five-act play is accompanied by a durational performance. Every few weeks, the cube on which the film is projected is repainted by a professional house painter. When the work is exhibited in the United States, Alex Da Corte's brother, Americo Da Corte, performs this labour, moving through the colour spectrum suggested by the acronym ROY G BIV – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. This gesture is also borrowed; a nod to John Baldessari's *Six Colorful Inside Jobs* (1977). Of paint's demands, Americo Da Corte told Penny Siopis and Josh Ginsburg:

> *The most difficult colours to cover with are yellow and red. I'm sure you know this, Penny [Siopis], as red is your favourite colour. Red is just so stubborn. You can go cross-eyed looking at it and saying,*
> Is this red? *You almost get a little snowblind looking at it, wondering,* Does it need another coat? Am I seeing the last coat? *It really makes you nuts.*

His presence calls into view the invisible labour of art- and exhibition-making. It is a parallel, too, Alex Da Corte suggests, of love's labour, alluding to Mike Kelley's *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid* (1987) in a conversation between the artist and A4's team about his brother's role:

> *You could say that through the relationships that I was outlining in ROY G BIV, be it familial or social, our relationship to history, our relationship to things, our intimate relationship with each other, that all of these are outlined so clearly in this film. The one perhaps invisible sort of familial relationship, the one that I have with my brother, is then made very clear on the outside of the box, but not necessarily within the video... When you have a relationship, be it a brother or a friend or whomever, that cares in that way about you, there are more love hours than can ever be repaid. You can never thank anyone properly for that kind of relationship because it goes without thanks. It's just what human beings, at their best, should do for each other. But if you have an opportunity to say thank you, then say it, I guess. Maybe that's what that relationship with my brother outside of this box is for me, a way of saying it.*

For this iteration of *ROY G BIV at* A4, a professional house painter based in the city will take up the role intended for Americo Da Corte. Offering an anecdote from his experience of painting for the project, Americo Da Corte recounts:

> *I didn't ever watch the video when I worked. I just listened to it, and I knew each part based on the music. I love the soundtrack to it so much. Whoever is working on the cube is going to hear the soundtrack when they sleep – because that's all you hear as you paint.*

Gerard Sekoto

b.1913, Botshabelo; d.1993, Paris

Le Pont St. Michel, 1959
Oil on canvas
33 x 40.5 cm

19

"All that I do, even outside of South Africa," Gerard Sekoto wrote, "is still with the eye, the heart and the soul of the land of my birth." Today counted among the country's most celebrated modernists, Sekoto's paintings transcribed everyday life into images of profound humanity. Writing in 1983 under apartheid's pall, the art historian Esme Berman championed what she called the artist's *primitive style*. "None of the tired academic clichés or timid prettiness which so irked the modern spirits were present in the self-taught painter's work," she wrote of Sekoto. "The fearless colour, the unconventional viewpoint, even the awkward handling of familiar forms was refreshingly original and honest." He took as subject the scenes around him – in Sophiatown, District Six, and Eastwood – impoverished areas designated for people of colour. By the 1980s, all three suburbs had been razed under the Group Areas Act. Sekoto did not witness their destruction – he had left for Paris in 1947. The following year, the National Party was elected, and apartheid became state legislation. While he returned often to township scenes in his paintings, Sekoto would never again return to his country. He died in exile in 1993, shortly before South Africa's first democratic election.

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While his early years in Paris were marked by hardship – the artist arrived mid-winter, speaking no French and with little money to his name – Gerard Sekoto's paintings of the city share a pictorial lightness, are sparer than his South African images, and bluer, too (a shade, perhaps, of homesickness). *Le Pont St. Michel* is among the artist's many plein-air impressions of the French capital, made in the second decade of his exile. It pre-empts several such paintings of the river: among them, *View of Paris*, made the same year, and *View Along the Seine* and *A View of Notre Dame from the Left Bank*, made in 1960. All feature the same three-arched bridge, Pont St Michel, near to where the artist lived at the time. A later painting, *View Along the Seine, Paris* (1970), reimagines this scene punctuated by formless, blue transparencies; a melding of landscape with abstraction. The looseness of Sekoto's brushstrokes in these compositions and the novel texture of his surfaces respond, in part, to the demands of painting outdoors. They are perhaps also informed by the drawing lessons he attended at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière soon after arriving in the city, and the influence of French modernism.

Shilpa Gupta b.1976, Mumbai; works in Mumbai

100 Hand-drawn Maps of South Africa, 2023
Plastic fan, hardcover book, pen drawings, table
Dimensions variable

In materially understated compositions, Shilpa Gupta attends to the hard edges of geopolitics – border walls, infrastructures of control, the physical limitations placed on bodies – as they play out in our imaginings of nationhood, sovereignty, and belonging. Pairing empirical data with formal lyricism, she asks after the more often insidious mechanisms of statehood. Gupta traverses diverse mediums with conceptual deftness, citing the Hindi expression 'jugaar' as her working principle: a way to innovate with and around imposed rules, rigid bureaucracies, and limited resources. National borders become tensile in Gupta's hands, her various articulations of their forms calling their often intangible yet acutely felt presence into view. "These map lines have become so hard," the artist says, "and they have not always been that way: since they were first drawn, they have been porous." In many of the artist's works, poetics rub up against impassive facts. In *1:14.9* (2011–12), a hand-wound ball of thread presented in a vitrine is accompanied by a small plaque that reads: *1188.5 MILES OF FENCED BORDER – WEST, NORTH-WEST / DATA UPDATE: DEC 31, 2007.* The thread, appearing as an egg-like abstraction, assumes political resonance with this inferred context. Unspooled, it measures nearly one-fifteenth of the length of the borderline between Pakistan and India (the scale recalled in its title without geographic specificity), and gestures to broad political implications – among them, the South Asian partition in 1947 and present-day religious nationalism in India. Other similarly restrained works set commonplace materials and objects in relation to state borders, and still more ask after state oppression, military occupation, and censorship.

Begun in 2008, Shilpa Gupta's ongoing series *100 Hand-drawn Maps* explores the vagaries of discrete national geographies. The work begins with a request: a hundred people from a given country are asked to draw from memory its outline. These collected sets are differently compiled – in some, the drawings are traced onto one another to become a single, layered image; in others, they are traced into a book later set before a table fan, its directed breeze paging through the various renditions. "It's only when you see these shifts and alterations in the drawings that they evoke an emotional resonance," Gupta says. "This brings forth a certain disparity between private and public memory, between the officially sanctioned cartography and the informal mental image one holds of their country." National borders, while largely static, reveal themselves capricious in the minds of their populace. Their accumulation highlights the disparities between geopolitical divisions and imagined boundaries, revealing the similarities and divergences in our impressions of place.

For this edition of the work, *100 Hand-drawn Maps of South Africa*, Gupta sent a blank notebook to A4 from her studio in Mumbai. The artist, through A4's team, invited 100 people to draw an outline of South Africa's borders inside this book. This map was to be drawn from memory (or, should memory not serve, using imagination). Participants were asked not to Google the country's boundary and to resist the urge to peek at the previous drawer's page. As far as possible, the outline was to be drawn in one continuous gesture. Upon receiving the filled book, Gupta traced each drawing. That book of her tracings stands on the table, the pages blown into disarray by a hand-painted fan, awakening the viewer to the handmadeness of all borders despite their pretensions of impermeability, legality, and fact. Borders shift on the whims of so-called leaders. Most boundaries are invisible, more are imagined. The sands shift, the claims multiply, and as the edges blur, so the line divides.

Moshekwa Langa

b.1975, Bakenberg; works in Amsterdam

The Morning After!, 2000
Mixed media on paper
140 x 100 cm

Asked for an adjective to describe his practice, Moshekwa Langa replies with *fugitive*. In medium, his work is disparate; in sensibility, inconstant and changeable. He moves across such mediums as installation, drawing, video and sculpture with easy fluency, his materials as various as string, paper bags, oil paint, words, photographs and found images. Like an anthropologist recording his surroundings in obscure maps, Langa's practice is an exercise in visual note-taking. It is perhaps fugitive in that the artist's attention is transitory, each work an index of a moment soon passed. In a text accompanying the exhibition Ellipsis (2016), the artist's wandering mind is made evident: "Something broke in the description," he writes, "and I am just leaving it here for the moment and I will open another topic because I am talking about many different things... There is a break because I get distracted – maybe it was sunny and then it started raining, and then suddenly, I do not know, something else happened." His work is a gesture of time-keeping, a record of things come and gone. Langa's maps may be illegible, unfinished, without compass, but they pose a curious visual question: how might one transcribe a life in all its routine complexity?

In *The Morning After!*, colour frames and dissects the figure, but seems unable or unwilling to flesh out the implied intimacy of the title. Subtly varying between anticipation and remembrance, it could just as easily be an exclamation of either triumph or grief. Tracing a line from waking to sleeping, the figure is drawn, erased and redrawn in pencil. A caricature by reference almost solely to sensory organs – eye, ear and skin – belies the expressiveness of their posture as equally rapturous and crestfallen. The erasure with white slightly curbs a colour palette that would otherwise have recalled the revelatory colourism of Kandinsky, arguably signalling a pause or reservation. While the later colour additions evince the use of stencilling, it is perhaps the drawing of the figure that is most suggestive of a search for a stable and repeatable shape.

In *10 Years 100 Artists: Art in Democratic South Africa*, Colin Richards described Moshekwa Langa as "a magician, an enigma, a stranger," profiling his prescience and malleable sensibility. Sean O'Toole, revising this characterisation for the Institut für Auslandsbeziehunge, draws attention to Langa's particular negotiation of the "inflexible colour regimes" instilled by his schooling (an interesting note considering that Langa graduated from a Waldorf school). This particular work seems a telling inflection of both these observations. A mixed media work on paper, the dimensions of *The Morning After!* is close to life size, its gender-nonspecific subject an almost impish provocation to look sidelong as one would in a bathroom mirror.

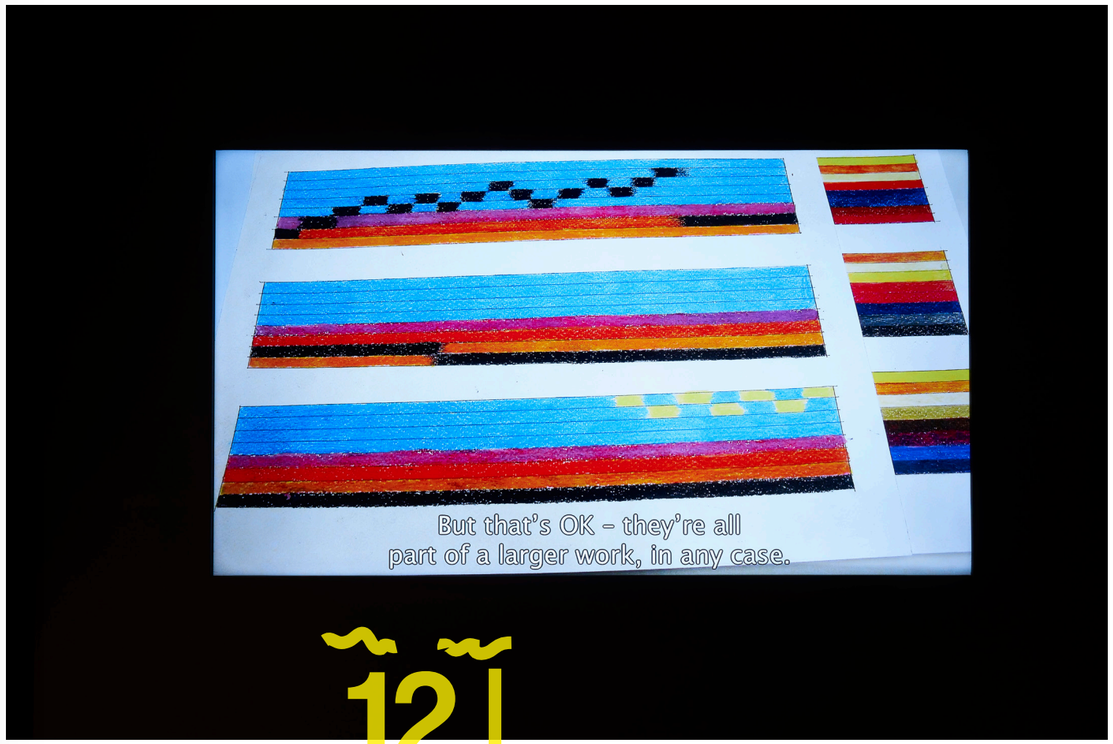
Ane Hjort Guttu

b.1971 Oslo; works in Oslo

Untitled (The City at Night), 2013
HD video
22 min

In text, film, and installation, Ane Hjort Guttu offers spare reflections on the potential of art to challenge political systems. The thematic fulcrum of her work is most eloquently distilled in her suite of four films – *Freedom Requires Free People* (2011), *Untitled (The City at Night)* (2013), *This Place is Every Place* (2014), and *Time Passes* (2015) – which takes as subject individual freedom within the body politic, the artist in society, and the representation of inequalities. The films' refined simplicity, more often centred on a single action, belies the complexities of the artist's concerns. They are neither didactic nor ideological, but rather suggestive and speculative; part documentary, part fiction. The conceit is apparent; the narratives only more compelling for it. A child rails against school rules, an artist makes drawings no one will ever see, activists look to the utopian future, an art student begs alongside an unhoused woman. All gesture to the respective powers of the implicit and the visible, to the political made apparent, and the political left unaccounted for. "I've decided that I don't want to document or represent what I've done these past months," one character says to another. "Because when I do so, I lose my work."

In *Untitled (The City at Night),* an unseen interlocutor asks after an anonymous artist's archive of abstract drawings. Their paired voices are first heard in conversation against a dark screen, the artist recalling two incidents (one declared, one secret) that precipitated her withdrawal from the art world, and society at large, twenty years earlier. Since then, she has transcribed her nightly walks through the city, recounting her encounters with its nocturnal, marginal communities in geometric abstractions. She has no intention of showing her 'scores' – the name she has given the works – except for the small and exact amount of information shared in this film. Moreover, she has hidden her artwork behind another artwork (the artwork that is the film cast as a shield for her work, rather than as a method of exposure). To show the work is to undermine its conceptual potency. To this, the film pairs the interview with few images. A slideshow of the archive's housing plays; its print cabinets, select drawers, and only a handful of discrete 'scores' are shared. This staid restraint is a counterpoint to the work's final scene – the only moving image in the film and its only musical accompaniment. The camera plays the part of artist, traversing the night-time streets of Oslo, observing its inhabitants, its shuttered storefronts, its imperfect emptiness. *Untitled (The City at Night)* is a work of uncertain genre; social document, political fiction, or neither. With its ambivalent claim to truth, it offers an image of the artist as a figure of radical ethical potential on the periphery of late capitalism.



A body in the world

Josh Ginsburg (J.G.), Penny Siopis (P.S.), Sara de Beer (S.d.B.) in conversation with Alex Da Corte (A.D.C.), Tuesday 28 November 2023, online.

J.G. You were talking about set, prescriptive architectural rules –

A.D.C. Yeah, in this particular town – it was a historic town – there was a certain set of colours that were invented by Benjamin Franklin or introduced to the Americas by Benjamin Franklin. And so these are the colours that people had to paint their houses in. Purple, supposedly, was not part of this system. And so people were really upset by the colour purple. But then of course, purple has a history of being a marker for a marginal group of people. It is inherently queer. And I remember thinking in terms of – not even having these words to describe it in this way – but understanding that a colour can polarise, a colour can be radical, and a colour can provoke in ways that maybe, at the time that I was seeing this, I wasn't aware of. That colour could be a spectacle, and colour could be a point of view. But then I was also thinking about the power of a painter. I've worked for my brother for many years, and we would always talk about what the colour that someone chose for their house or for their home, anywhere inside of their home, what that revealed about the person, you know? And we would have these micro conversations about someone's passion for the colour taupe versus another off-white of some kind, and how interesting that was.

S.d.B. Do you think people are really passionate about off-white or they just feel safe with it?

A.D.C. Oh, people are very passionate about certain off-white shades. You could have a whole chart of 20 neutral colours and they would really push towards something warmer or something cooler. Not that they necessarily have a language that Albers, say, would have about colour or colour theory. But there's a certain passion. I find that people, or young people, are educated to name their favourite colour and then that favourite colour becomes a way to identify their personality. Your favourite colour might be related to a sports team or to X, Y or Z. But after years of trying to find words to describe the ways that you feel – and some of those words are ascribed to the colour, for example, or a piece of clothing or something like that. *This is my favourite hat* or *this is my favourite X, Y or Z*. I think people develop real passions for identifying themselves in the world. And seeing things in the world as mirrors to their taste and how they embody themselves. We need those things to understand ourselves. Not necessarily a material thing, but we need to see ourselves in other things, I think, to reflect back on who we are and how we occupy space.

S.d.B. Just an anecdote: when the artist Dor Guez visited A4, he said – he was talking about languages – that English has a pretence of being a neutral language whereas, in fact, it's not neutral, it's white.

J.G. Alex, you said something before, and you've alluded to it now: this question of taste and how you resist taste in some way or challenge your own taste buds. Can you speak to that?

A.D.C. I guess I just never wanted to be someone who saw... This is maybe my hope to be positive always, to say I have the capacity to love everything and everyone. And so by saying *I love purple* or saying *I don't love green*, it cancels out all avenues that I could learn from green. When you have a particular taste, it's about marking a clear vision. It's not to say that I'm not opinionated or critical, but it's to say that I'm willing to understand and absorb all of the things that I don't like or that I'm not naturally drawn to, and go and open those doors and find out what I can discover in a place that maybe isn't about feeling good or about a certain kind of joy. That's how I feel about taste – tastes change. And I don't know if people generally are open to their taste changing. I think of many people in my life who say, *Oh, I never eat coleslaw* or whatever, that they just refuse things. I don't understand that kind of opinion. I think it's boring to be so resolute.

P.S. Don't you find, Alex, that working with colour...you're a multidisciplinary artist, but you work a lot with colour as colour. Looking at your work, at least on the screen, I'm always very aware that it's a reflected colour, it comes from light, from a screen. But it's also set in relation

to the colour that your brother is painting physically on the outside of the box that holds the screen. There's a relationship between colour as tactile surface and as screen, between intimacy and distance. You're simultaneously intimate but you also have a kind of distance to it. And that dynamic, for me, registers as a very open disposition. When you say you can be open to other colours or to varieties of colours, it's not because you're indiscriminate. There's an openness that allows that all those colours are somehow related, and they come through different surface forms, reflective or embodied or whatever. And that feeds the flux that I feel looking at your work.

A.D.C. You make a great point there, which is related to time. It's about a mindset. Say I have to paint a house a colour – orange or something that I just totally despise – but I still have to do it and it's going to take me days to do it. Why not learn to enjoy the time spent with that thing that I hate doing? It's just a mindset. It's not that there's going to be all good days – I don't believe that. But I think there's a way to live through and work through the time spent with whatever it is that you're doing. That you can absorb it or learn from it. The invisible transfer of X to Y is important to catch and notice.

J.G. I've always really appreciated the John Cage approach, which is a derivative or expansion or some kind of iteration on Duchamp, of taking the attention you give to the artwork and deflecting it to the everyday. So Duchamp does the first piece: he brings the everyday in and helps us deal with it. But Cage says, *OK, now we've got this capacity, we know what it takes to give care to things in art institutions, you can actually apply that anywhere.* And when you do, the world is opened up, explicitly. That's what resonates. You have a choice as to how you're going to approach the colouring of that orange house and you can frame that time at your discretion.

A.D.C. It's funny to think about it in terms of performance because my brother is not performing. He's doing this job, and that's what he does and it's his life. It's not even proposing that his life is some kind of theatrical space that is full of privilege and ease. It's actually hard work. But it's valuable in the same way that one might see performance on a stage or in a public realm as having value. I think that that's the thing that I've always noticed about my brother and his work. And he's said this – if you open a closet in someone's home or look behind the toilet in a bathroom, if that's painted with care, with the real care that you'd have if it was your mother's house, you do it with pride and you walk away knowing that you did your best, knowing that you put your best self into it. There's a real joy in that. This invisible performance is what I always go back to. What I was interested in doing when I brought Americo into the space of that museum was to say, *Here is this invisible labour that's all around us, all of the time. See it, see it happen, and respect it.*

J.G. To segue from there into something we've touched already – to my mind, you are distinct from some of these other actors like Duchamp and others. There is a magical world that emanates out of your space and there's a mundane world. That movement, from the mundane to the magical, is astonishing in both directions. There's a sense that makes the real magical, it animates the mundane. It's almost like being lost in some confusion between those two poles. Can you play out this idea of the magical space a little? The world of *The Kiss*' characters, as you backpedal into them, it's like an explosion into some unbelievable, untethered imagination. And yet, at the same time, your brother's busy painting the structure, bringing that absolute mundanity to bear. How do those two things sit for you? How do you play between them?

A.D.C. That's a great question. I don't really think about magic – I don't think of my work in terms of psychedelics or anything. Because they're all physical and quite analogue – like, I sweated through that costume and those performances and rehearsed and worked. And maybe there's something interesting to find here about the banality of labour in general – the banality of just being. And that can be as wild as dressing up as a puppet and giving life to a statue that has long lived, fixed, for some 100 years. It can be as wild as that or it can be as seemingly mundane as painting a wall red. You could also say, *Wow, what joy or what kind of magic lies in painting a wall red.* There can be a real alchemical change in the most banal thing. The magic and mundane live on a scale. They're not different, they're both of this world. This makes me recall a lecture that I've been giving all year about glass and thinking about the body as a home and being inside the home and our relationship to the street – which is the outside world or everything outside of our bodies. And how, for me, the most exquisite place to be would be the pane of glass or the window between the two because it's a space where you can participate in both. When I was making *ROY G BIV*, I rewrote that acronym to stand for – instead of Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet – I made it say Rose Out of Your Garden Because I'm Vines, because I realised that the vines or this idea of vines is the same as glass or the window because vines are this thing that exist in a magic space, both inside and outside of this world. They can take you further. And so I think for this whole project – and for me in the world – it's constantly a negotiation between this and that, taste or no taste, inside or outside, love or hate. This is to say that I'm constantly trying to find a balance between the two. That could be the 'all work, no play' that's present and apparent even in this moment when someone's painting a wall – and then there seems to be magic on the screen. But the magic could be right in front of you and the banality and pain of work is actually presented right there too.

* William Pym [Alex Da Corte manager] If I may, the phrase Rose Out of Your Garden Because I'm Vines, the modified acronym of ROY G BIV, is the final line in the film. It's not something that you pick up unless you listen very closely. But Alex got a singer to seamlessly record an extra line that's not in the song – the final triumphant line of Blue, in the final minutes of the film, Blue sings the last line of the Etta James song, "Rose out of your garden because I'm vines." It's a final declaration of the title. This is something Alex never tells anyone. And I've been in this position before where I have to say that it's actually the last line in the film. It's so seamlessly integrated. The sound has been mastered in such a way that it sounds like it's being sung by Etta James in Montreux in 1974, but it was actually recorded two years ago in Philadelphia.

A.D.C. But also to add that there are several additional lines before that also speak to this thing about inside and outside. Blue, the character Blue says – I'm going to paraphrase but it's something like – *A red brick building / A black and white horizon / I walk across your rooftops / I rose out of your gardens because I'm vines*. Which is to say, there is a structure which is fixed, this red brick building. You could call that a keystone, you could call that the ground. There is a black and white horizon that's speaking to all things related to colour, black being the sum total of all colour in matter, and the sum total of all colour in light being white, and the reverse is true. And then there's this notion of being in and out and beyond that, which is this thing about vines, which we could also call glass or prisms. There's a lot in there, I think.

J.G. Penny, something you noted in one of our conversations was how so many of the processes we were engaging – yours included, specifically *Will* – are about negotiating a threshold. In the case of *Will*, it exists in this world and prepares for another. And so many of the works included in this exhibition, whether it's Shilpa Gupta's book or Ane Hjort Guttu's film, or the cases Alex just offered, engage this threshold space, which is neither one nor the other. How does that play out for you? How do you see *Will* in relation to it, as well as other aspects of your practice? Are you curious about that interstitial space between the known and unknown, lived and not lived.

P.S. Going back to this idea of flux – because flux is movement or change, constantly embracing and engaging change – and, I think, Alex, you've spoken about it with your objects as well, like your *Mouse Museum* and the sense of their being tangible. But they are also on the move, in terms of memory and imagination. The threshold is not only physical. I'm not saying that the prism or the glass is only physical, but it's the physical means by which

‘to catch’ movement. And as a consequence of movement, or recognising movement, you recognise that thresholds are not fixed. Colour interests me because colour, by its nature, is sensation. It is something that we will never agree on, and that we don’t agree on, generally speaking. So there are *Will*’s objects, which is inheritance, the objects that I collect. But they are also, as a larger corpus, constantly being expanded or growing. Recently, I took another little Félix Gonzaléz-Torres candy from The Whitney, which is going to be added to *Will,* that already includes the piece of candy that I took many years ago. It grows as one’s life grows. But, of course, the threshold comes when I die. A threshold is crossed and then the work continues. Each object gets sent off to a beneficiary; can take root again and make another little growth. There is a rhizomatic attitude, which implies that the threshold of my death is not really an end. All these things are about a movement of perception and value as well. Because whenever you look at something, you’re a new person: the consciousness of looking as a consciousness of change. That’s what I think. It’s a very roundabout way of talking about it. As soon as you have simultanaeity, you also have the sense that borders are open. To feel them as open, you need to have something particular – an edge, maybe.

J.G. It’s interesting thinking about the case, Alex, of *The Kiss* sculpture that you replicated pretty accurately, as I understand, except in purple, right?

A.D.C. We replicated it the way it was made by Brancusi and we replicated it again with an added colour to it.

J.G. That’s a very interesting experience because, as you said Penny, it’s almost like colour is *the thing*. You know the object already – what’s different is the colour. And so you read it as a colour. It’s quite disarming and beautiful. Was the first replica you made conceived of as a sculpture that went into the world independently or did it reside as a prop?

A.D.C. The black-and-white one and the colour one ended up being objects in the world. But in the same way that adding a colour was kind of naughty in the realm of that film and in relationship to art history – putting a colour on an old painting is sort of taboo, but it’s no crazier than, say, turning a urinal on its head or, you know, this notion of slippage or change being not an option. The reception of these Brancusi sculptures being orange, green, purple and yellow was to say, *They can’t do that because they just aren’t that*. People think it’s insane, but it’s not insane – it’s just a colour. But the resistance to change even now in the 21st century proposes such complicated emotions about why people are so pressed to *not* change, to stay fixed. You want everything to be the same because maybe that will ground you or allow you to process your own complicated emotions or complicated life if everything just stays the same.

J.G. Do you think the curve, the social curve, is edging towards a reduced inclination to change? It’s a pretty pessimistic view. I think I have that. Or do you think that – if you had to aggregate an attitude towards change all over the world – that number would be the same today as it was ten years ago?

A.D.C. I think it’s like a little bit of both. It’s *hurry up and change always*, you know, *be forever changing, more is more*, etc. It’s the theatricality of change; which is to say, I think people don’t actually always want to change but they want to think they’re changing.

J.G. That’s really interesting because you can sell the proposition, and a good portion of the art world is actually actively doing that. Selling the ruse of adventure or change in the face of stagnation.

A.D.C. Like Penny was saying, real change involves real beginnings. It involves real death, real ends. And if there is never really a markedly true end, how can there be a true beginning? Aversion to change is an aversion to risk, I think. And there’s an aversion to loss because when there is change, there is ostensibly loss too. Loss is loss.

J.G. The need for real ends is very interesting.

S.d.B. On the other hand, we’ve also been working in this exhibition with ends or loss or death as a different state of presence rather than one of absence – where, for example, Penny’s husband Colin is here in the exhibition all the time and in a more metaphysical way. But also because the imprint of Colin on the ecology that we work in is profound and continues to be so. The exhibition gives us a way to talk about Penny and Colin, not necessarily as ‘Penny the artist’ and ‘Colin the artist’, with two separate artistic identities, but as a power couple in the arts who have impact on generations of artists, many of whom were also their students. There’s a sense of something running through this – of death also just being allowed to be death, but still being allowed to be very present rather than ‘gone’. Death as a different sort of presence. Thinking about relationships, I was wondering, Alex, your brother seems to sometimes be playing the Duchamp character. Americo’s ‘Duchamping’ and you’re ‘Brancusi-ing’. I don’t know if that’s a valid interpretation or not. Having your brother play that role, the very potency and strength of Americo’s figure in the space painting the cube brings a foundational person in the environment. His presence...does this allows you to push at a whole lot of edges and openness because there’s someone structural present? Because I do wonder if there are limits, if there are things that we maybe shouldn’t allow in. Are there experiences that we maybe should limit or not allow? I don’t really know, I don’t have an answer to that. But it’s really nice to be able to push at and allow everything in while the foundations and the people that we love and know are so clearly defined in an environment and so clearly present, almost like guardians of that openness, to a degree.

A.D.C. You could say that through the relationships that I was outlining in *ROY G BIV*, be it familial or social, our relationship to history, our relationship to things, our intimate relationship with each other, that all of these are outlined so clearly in this film. The one perhaps invisible sort of familial relationship, the one that I have with my brother, is then made very clear on the outside of the box, but not necessarily within the video. That’s to say, the kind of invisible labour of loving someone and caring for someone and lifting them up, that daily ritual of loving someone from even afar, matters so much and to make that plain – to just show that and clearly lock that in and around the video that you’re watching – is to give back. And to say that none of this within the screen would be able to be without the kind of structure, this invisible structure of love, that is always around me, which you could call familial love or brotherly love or whatever it might be. When you have a relationship, be it a brother or a friend or whomever, that cares in that way about you, there’re more love hours than can ever be repaid. You can never thank anyone properly for that kind of relationship because it goes without thanks. It’s just what human beings, at their best, should do for each other. But if you have an opportunity to say thank you, then say it, I guess. Maybe that’s what that relationship with my brother outside of this box is for me, a way of saying it.

S.d.B. It really did make me think, *What are the conditions that allow us to reach for continual openness? And to really touch and love and experiment with and embrace?* Does having such solid, loving foundations allow this movement forward? We talked about the red as a keystone, but there’s also the foundation stone of painting’s labour.

A.D.C. That kind of invisible labour allows for that which is visible to be free. We’re covering a lot of ground within the space of the video *ROY G BIV* and all of the complex ways that we see a body being a body or a person loving or a person just being. It’s transhuman, it’s out of body, it’s beyond the body. And all of that is able to be fostered and grown. And that only happens with care, with invisible care, and that’s the same as a plant. The plant necessarily doesn’t thank you back – unless it bears fruit and you eat it. But there is something to be said about tending to a garden and growing it for nothing other than for it to grow.

P.S. It’s interesting in this respect because that kind of intimacy

that you have through the distance of your making and the characters that you are in – in a sense, your body is those characters that we see. There's something so caring in the relationship of enactment in those characters that comes through, that is not directly saying, *This is what I do, I care*. But the way you do it says that. There's such an intimacy in touch – and even in the *Art21* film where you're talking about and showing your making – there's such intimacy to materials and to the people you work with. This is the very substance, I think, of the work in the end. So it's not always necessarily a narrative relationship. It's an embodied, emblematic one.

A.D.C. And I think that that for me was born out of a simple question. It is a simple question that I asked – not just of Brancusi's *The Kiss – Why is it fixed in such a way that it'll never change?* But of all things again, to say, *Why is history fixed? Why do we not stay open to questioning things?* And not in the way that, say, *I question this because it is wrong.* But as a way to say, *How do I, in this world as a body, relate to the things I don't know? And can I learn to love these things that I do not know, and spend time with them? What do they mean to me and what do I learn from them?* And then, *How can I give back, as a new version of myself, after I have spent time with these things?*

J.G. Alex, can I pick up on something you said earlier and something you said previously? It's about screens and bodies, and is also connected to the glass conversation. I just want to pull in something that Kathryn Smith was asking after earlier. Kathryn is another artist on the project. She was a student of Penny's and of Colin's, and is a remarkable academic thinker, artist, teacher, etc. She's showing a work titled *The Phantom Interlocutor*, part of a big, elaborate forensic art process and project that involves the scanning, in this instance, of over 2000 micro CT scans of a skull belonging to an unidentified person that Colin had in his possession because he was also an medical illustrator. So he had come into possession of these skulls. Penny has subsequently made a filmic work about taking the skulls back to the earth, if that's an appropriate framing of it, and Kathryn, whose practice intersects with art and forensics, has done a reconstruction of the skull with these frames. The image spins and you look through the skull – it's quite astonishing. One thing she was reflecting on was this idea of a distributed self. I'll get back to screens and bodies in a moment. What she was saying is, *Here's this person who lived, whose skull has been reconfigured in this digital landscape showing in this space. There is something about them, the person, that is replicated here. Yet it's not them*. It's living on the cloud – this picture of a self is distributed in the digital world. This work is one of a distributed self – bits and bytes of us in every direction – relative to the expression of a body in space being the comprehension or totality of self. It was a very curious idea, the idea of a distributed self. And it made me think about artists that put things in the world – those things go on outside of their lives into other people's worlds. Can we think through that a little and maybe contextualise the screens-and-bodies question that you have because I have a suspicion that there's something dynamic in there, between all those elements.

A.D.C. If I think about that and I think about my interest in working with all of these historical characters and things that I don't know or that I've only experienced – mostly in books, less on screens, but screens are the way we experience books now – there will always be a gap between these histories, present and past, me and you, us and them. This is the thing about glass that I'm talking about – how do you deal with that gap? We can call it many things: we can call it a physical prism, we can call it vines, we can call it the screen. The work is always in service of bridging that gap. And so there is an emphasis on the physical, the textural, the things that we were talking about previously, Penny. About materiality. How do you insist on touch? How do we break through the screen? If I turned around, that would be one way to break through the screen because I'd show you more of what it means to be three-dimensional and physical. And so I think the videos are in service of that and that kind of touch. The skin that is being painted around the cube physically – you experience a kind of pressing and touching and thinking about skins and costume and layers of light and colour being applied to the objects in the film while being made physical on the outside of the cube. This is another way of being this bridge; of being a body in being many bodies.

P.S. That's in the work itself, however one defines it. But what strikes me with your work is that there's a distributed self that goes to the viewers, to the spectators, who are engaging and breaking that boundary of the screen. In one of the videos documenting your work, I saw how people responded. In a sense, they become part of the work. It's a beautiful relationship. And there's something about humour as well, or affection, coming from the spectators – a recognition that there's this beautiful colour, or something relatable There's this very magical relationship, as Josh was talking about, the sense that anything is possible in this world. And whilst it's your world, produced from all these different distributed selves, it is also the world of the people who are engaging with it. That's what I love so much – the love and the affection is extraordinary in your works.

A.D.C. Thank you, Penny. I feel like I didn't come to that naturally, but actually quite unnaturally. When I was quite young, I had this terrible illness. It broke my body down. I was very, very ill and had to kind of be born again physically. In my early twenties, when this happened, I felt I physically had to restructure my body. I realised that the body that I had known, the body that I had agency over, the body I lived in, was mine and mine to be fixed and mine to live in and through. And when that rejected me, I realised my body can be anybody. It opened up this notion that my body could be many things. And it's what drew me into the very early ways in which I would perform outside of my body as another person or character. I think about Félix Gonzaléz-Torres' candies you mentioned earlier – they were a very formative work for me where I could understand that he was both a body and, in this sort of religious way, in the candy that you touch and embody as you carry it with you. And I think I do that in my work where my body as it was is no longer, and I can occupy many spaces and wear different hats – not in a colonial way – but in a way that's a true embodiment or a true lived-in, empathetic way of being in the world where I am outside of my taste, but I'm at the will of other tastes, I'm at the will of other people's bodies, and trying to understand myself through that lens. I think that's sort of what you're speaking to. Even if it's not explicitly said in the work, it is how I understand being in the world, which was not a choice, it was a violence that I experienced and which shaped the life that I have.

J.G. What was so interesting to me visiting the studio was how present you are, which is astonishing in the context of what you just said, that you released your body from the expectations of being the only body with the possibility of inhabiting anybody. But the experience is grounded. Time is slower, and patient. I felt very present, and I tend not to – I live in the idea realm. But you manage to straddle the realm of idea and the world, the realm of the thing in front of you, in a way that is amazing. It was a dynamic I was left with: an imagination that is just running wild but explicitly present. How do those two things fully align? I suppose that's what the work does – the work tries to figure that out.

A.D.C. I know there's all of this – the talk of progress and change is always related to technologies and things that are out of body. But I still have to eat a sandwich, and I'm never not going to eat that sandwich, you can take your AI or whatever, but I'm hungry and that matters. I think that the body, for me, still matters. It will always be present.

J.G. I think it's interesting for us to probe the body in the show at large – *Will* as this ultimately decentralised body, and Penny's paintings coming together as one coherent framework.

P.S. With shocks, whether they are shocks to the health status of your body or the shock of grief, there's a kind of dissolution of the self in that moment. And because there's a dissolution,

it also means a new beginning – or constantly new beginnings because I've certainly experienced that. It's not one thing, it's not one death and one new beginning, it's this sort of multiplicity of these experiences that work with the idea of potential and future. And I think, Alex, you've spoken about the idea of the future as not something you try to pin down because that's impossible – even the present you don't pin down, even the past one doesn't pin down. But the sense is there's always some sort of movement towards it, some kind of desire.

A.D.C. It just made me think: if you begin at the end, then everything after is exciting. As with *ROY G BIV* – it begins at the end. And so everything is possible after that. And I think that's a wholly good way to be.

P.S. And when I see Americo painting with the roller, I see there's a matte surface and a shiny surface, and the shiny surface is about to get dry. There's always this sense of change even in the simplest surfaces because the simple things are never really without massive complexity.

There is less sleep in the world today; longer are the nights and longer the days. In each land… in every city, every street, every house, every apartment, the reposeful breath of sleep is now clipped and feverish; like an oppressive and stifling summer night, this inferno of an epoch glows over us, throwing the senses into confusion. Numberless are those who, on whichever side, would otherwise drift through the nocturnal hours in the dark skiff of sleep gilded with colourful and gently fluttering dreams but nightly now hear the clocks march, march, march along the hellish path from daylight to daylight, enduring the burrowing beetle of anxieties and dark thoughts relentlessly gnawing and devouring, until the heart is left raw and ailing. From now on all humanity is in thrall to this fever both night and day, a state of terrible and all-consuming watchfulness, sending its shower of sparks across the heightened senses of millions, fate entering, invisibly, by thousands of windows and doors, chasing out sleep, chasing forgetfulness from every couch. There is less sleep in the world today; longer are the nights and longer the days.

– Stefan Zweig, 'The Sleepless World', 1914, in *Messages from a lost world: Europe on the brink*, 2017, Pushkin Press.

A Little After This
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