

# throbbing\_ quivering\_ pulsing\_beating

December 5–15

Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Paul Chan, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Mona Hatoum, Mwangi Hutter, Milan Knížák, Robert Mapplethorpe, Ernesto Neto, Catherine Opie, Nam June Paik, Arthur Rimbaud, Katy Schimert, Kiki Smith, Rosemarie Trockel, and Germán Venegas

## Curatorial Statement

In her seminal text, *The Body in Pain* (1994), theorist Elaine Scarry writes that pain not only blocks language, it actively destroys it. She refers to a medical questionnaire that helps patients articulate the affective, cognitive, and sensory dimensions of their pain, a vocabulary for what would otherwise be indescribable. Throbbing, quivering, pulsing, and beating are four words used in the survey to express how pain's felt-experience can be understood to have rhythm. These embodied rhythmic sensations might manifest as pain, pleasure, or both. *throbbing\_quivering\_pulsing\_beating* considers the work of fifteen artists to ask what it means to bear witness to the ineffable.

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Selected from the Marieluise Hessel Collection, the artworks on view explore the sensation patterns of pain and pleasure, centering the body in this inquiry. The artworks foreground the abstracted, repeated, or

dismembered body through sketches, snapshots, and fragmented images.

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Located at the center of the gallery, Paul Chan's drawing, *Choros of appetite 2* (2009), depicts a percussive multitude of faces in profile, appearing to cry out in pain, hunger, or ecstasy. Other artworks represent pain inflicted upon the body, as in Germán Venegas's drawing of a human form engulfed in flames. Works such as Catherine Opie's *O* (1999) series complicate the experience of pain by foregrounding moments of care and tenderness in photographic vignettes of a close BDSM community. Both poetic in form and explicit in content, this potent body of work is installed in a vitrine in the back of the gallery for intimate consideration. These images depict the sublimation of pain into pleasure and vulnerability.

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The exhibition includes a range of works from photography to sound by an international and intergenerational group of artists—Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Paul Chan, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Mona Hatoum, Mwangi Hutter, Milan Knížák, Robert Mapplethorpe, Ernesto Neto, Catherine Opie, Nam June Paik, Arthur Rimbaud, Katy Schimert, Kiki Smith, Rosemarie Trockel, and Germán Venegas. In this exhibition, the works are framed as tactical and poetic approaches to experiences that escape language, representations of what Scarry calls “an interior and unshareable experience.”

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*throbbing\_quivering\_pulsing\_beating* is curated by Natasha Matteson, Christine Nyce, Camila Palomino, and Candice Strongwater.

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## Artwork Descriptions

Paul Chan, *Doubleheader*, 2009. Ink on paper.

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These drawings by Chan were created alongside his 2009 video installation, *Sade for Sade's Sake*. The

six-hour video is an animation of silhouetted bodies flickering repetitively through a gamut of sexual positions. Whether the acts in both the video and the drawings are consensual or abusive is ambiguous. The figures' poses reference both the Marquis de Sade's pornographic writings and American torture practices in black site prisons, suggesting a troubling equation between sadomasochism and neocolonial violence. In these drawings, the puppetlike figures, which can be perceived as one body or many, sketch out a murky space between the erotic and the violent.

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Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *"Untitled" (Love Letter)*, 1992. C-print.

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This photograph focuses the viewer's attention towards a segment from one of the many letters Gonzalez-Torres exchanged with his longtime partner, Ross Laycock. Gonzalez-Torres wrote this text shortly before Laycock's death from an AIDS-related illness; it is an intimate and personal reflection of pain, fear, and love in the context of the indescribable suffering experienced by people affected by the AIDS epidemic. The cropping of the text inhibits the viewer's full entry into their correspondence, preserving the intimacy between the two.

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Mwangi Hutter, *How easily we could have missed the hidden gate*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas.

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In 2005, German artists Ingrid Mwangi and Robert Hutter took on one artistic identity. The two, who are also married, use their practice to trouble the notion of the individual with respect to race, gender, culture, and selfhood. This work, from their Union Paintings series, depicts the two bodies of the single artist—their figures dripping together. Acknowledging the artist's differing positions within Germany's history of colonialism and racial violence, the physical connection illustrated in the work obscures the boundaries between "self" and

“other.” Here, a shared felt-experience has the capacity to complicate intergenerational histories of pain.

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Milan Knížák, *Broken Music*, 1988. Sound on audio record.

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In 1963–64, Knížák began a long-term series of sound works called *Broken Music*, in which he would manipulate the speeds of gramophone records to create new compositions with the widest possible variety of sounds. Performing on the streets in Prague, Knížák began to scratch, puncture, and crack popular LPs, destroying the objects only to tape, burn, or suture them back together. By playing the records on repeat, the needle would skip across the grooves, causing repetitive glitches and thuds. The only time-based work in the exhibition, *Broken Music*’s anticlimactic cadence never resolves into an even rhythm, destabilizing the expected listening experience.

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Ernesto Neto, *Ring*, 2001. Stocking fabric, styrofoam, and lavender, ed. 1/5.

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Active since the mid-1990s, Neto is known for his immersive installations that draw from the lineage of Brazilian Neo-Concretism and pleasurably engage or enfold the body. The pendulous sculpture presented here evokes an enormous anthropomorphic limb that pulls away from the wall and drips down, restrained by a single ring. Neto’s work often incorporates organic materials that engage the senses. In *Ring*, he has filled a horizontal band of stocking fabric with lavender which both restricts and animates the form and can be read as offering the possibility of pleasure through bondage and constraint.

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Catherine Opie, *O*, 1999. Photogravure on Durer etching paper.

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*O* is composed of seven photogravures on thick etching paper held in a black cloth folio. Each image depicts a

scene from a queer San Francisco bondage community, taken by Opie with the consent of friends over the course of a year. *O* offers an invitation into private moments of sadomasochistic intimacy, in response to and refutation of the *X Portfolio*, Robert Mapplethorpe's provocative and explicit depictions of an exclusively male S&M community. Unlike *X*'s polished, editorialized aesthetic, *O* prioritizes proximity between photographer and subject, framing the images to reveal a detail of a much larger experience of pleasure and pain.

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Nam June Paik, *Untitled*, n.d. Offset lithograph, ed. 135/299.

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Paik was a video art pioneer who used television as a medium to address the ubiquity of electronic images in the 1960s. Paik's lesser-known drawing practice explores language and transmission through abstracted signs. *Untitled* is a hand-drawn, schematic illustration of visual soundwaves. In dialogue with Korean characters, whose forms are approximations of the shape of the tongue in the mouth as air passes to make sound, Paik's repetitive mark-making evokes the relationship between sound and the body, as well as the dissolution of written text and the "unmaking" of language.

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Arthur Rimbaud, with photogravures by Robert Mapplethorpe, *A Season in Hell*, c.1986.

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Rimbaud's extended poem *A Season in Hell* (1873) is an otherworldly interpretation of his violent love affair with fellow poet Paul Verlain. The poem was reprinted in 1986 with commissioned photogravures by Mapplethorpe. The images feature stylized symbols of passion: the rose, the fired gun, and the cross. Mapplethorpe's controversial series of explicit BDSM images, *X Portfolio*, is a significant body of work in the Marieluise Hessel Collection. In contrast, his illustrations for *A Season in Hell* are subtle and symbolic

in their depictions of ecstatic suffering. Together, Mapplethorpe's photographs and Rimbaud's verse conjure a surreal vision of infernal desire.

## 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.

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Manuel Álvarez Bravo, *Los Cueros (The Wineskins)*, 1969 / printed ca. 1974. Gelatin silver print. 15 1/2 in. x 18 3/4 in. (39.37 cm x 47.63 cm).

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Manuel Álvarez Bravo, *Palmas Y Tile*, 1976. Gelatin silver print. 15 5/8 in. x 18 3/4 in. (39.69 cm x 47.63 cm).

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Paul Chan, *Choros of appetite 2*, 2009. Ink on paper. 39 1/2 in. x 55 1/2 in. (100 cm x 141 cm).

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Paul Chan, *Doubleheader*, 2009. Ink on paper. 17 in. x 14 in. (43 cm x 36 cm).

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Paul Chan, *The whole spectrum hard-on*, 2009. Ink on paper. 17 in. x 14 in. (43 cm x 36 cm).

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Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "*Untitled*" (*Love Letter*), 1992. C-print. 19 1/2 in. x 23 1/4 in. (49.53 cm x 59.06 cm).

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Mona Hatoum, *Untitled (graters)*, 1999. Gelatin silver print, ed. 2/15. 23 1/2 in. x 27 5/8 in. (59.69 cm x 70.17 cm).

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Mwangi Hutter, *How easily we could have missed the hidden gate*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas. 90 9/16 in. x 78 3/4 in. (230 cm x 200 cm).

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Milan Knížák, *Broken Music*, 1988. Sound on audio record.

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Ernesto Neto, *Ring*, 2001. Stocking fabric, styrofoam, and lavender, ed. 1/5. 72 in. x 64 in. x 12 in. (182.88 cm x 162.56 cm x 30.48 cm).

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Catherine Opie, *Julie & Pigpen*, 2013. Pigment print, ed. 1/5, + 2AP. 53 1/2 in. x 41 1/2 in. (135.89 x 105.41 cm).

Catherine Opie, *O*, 1999. Photogravure on Durer etching paper. 18 1/2 in. x 14 in. (46.99 cm x 35.56 cm).

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Nam June Paik, *Untitled*, n.d. Offset lithograph, ed. 135/299. 21 in. x 19 in. (53.34 cm x 48.26 cm).

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Arthur Rimbaud, with photogravures by Robert Mapplethorpe, *A Season in Hell*, c.1986. [New York]: Limited Editions Club. Special Collections, Center for Curatorial Studies Library & Archives, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York.

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Katy Schimert, *Heart*, 2001. Terracotta with black onyx, ed. 1/2. 18 in. x 14 in. x 10 in. (45.72 cm x 35.56 cm x 25.4 cm).

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Kiki Smith, *Little Mountain*, 1996. Kiln-cast lead crystal glass, ed. 119/150. 2 in. x 4 in. x 3 1/2 in. (5.08 cm x 10.16 cm x 8.89 cm).

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Kiki Smith, *Tail*, 1997. Cast lead crystal, ed. 150. 1 1/2 in. x 4 1/2 in. x 5 in. (3.81 cm x 11.43 cm x 12.7 cm).

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Rosemarie Trockel, *Untitled*, 1996. Acrylic on paper. 34 3/4 in. x 42 in. (88.27 cm x 106.68 cm).

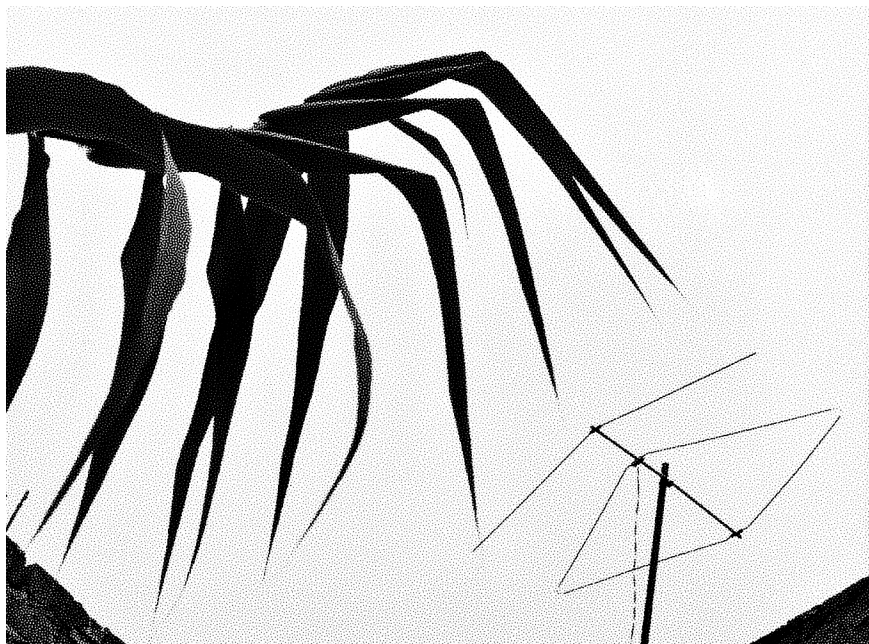
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Germán Venegas, *Hombres en Llamas*, 1989. Charcoal on paper. 23 3/4 in. x 27 1/8 in. (60.33 cm x 68.9 cm).

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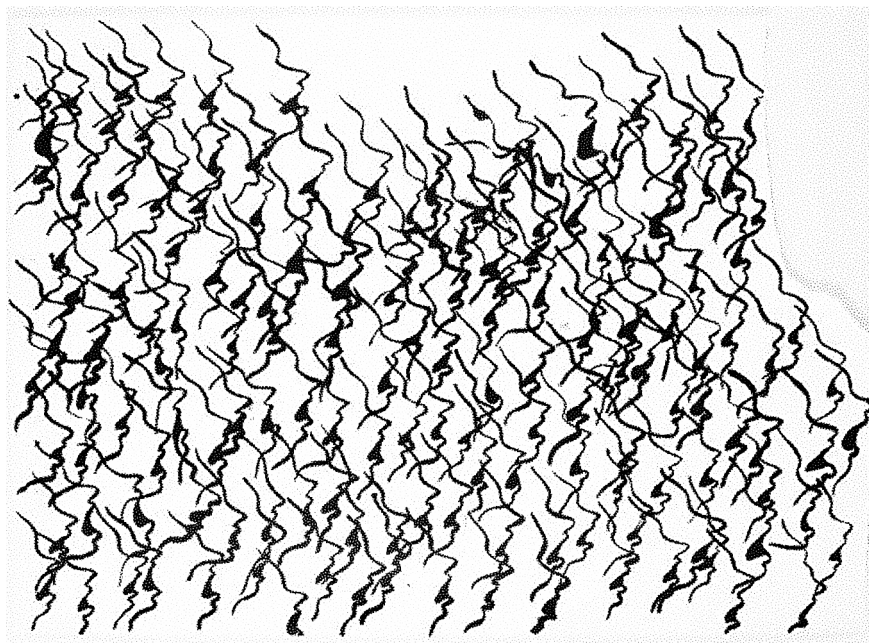






**Manuel Álvarez Bravo, *Palmas Y Tile*, © artist's estate.**

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Paul Chan, *Choros of appetite 2*, © Paul Chan, Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.

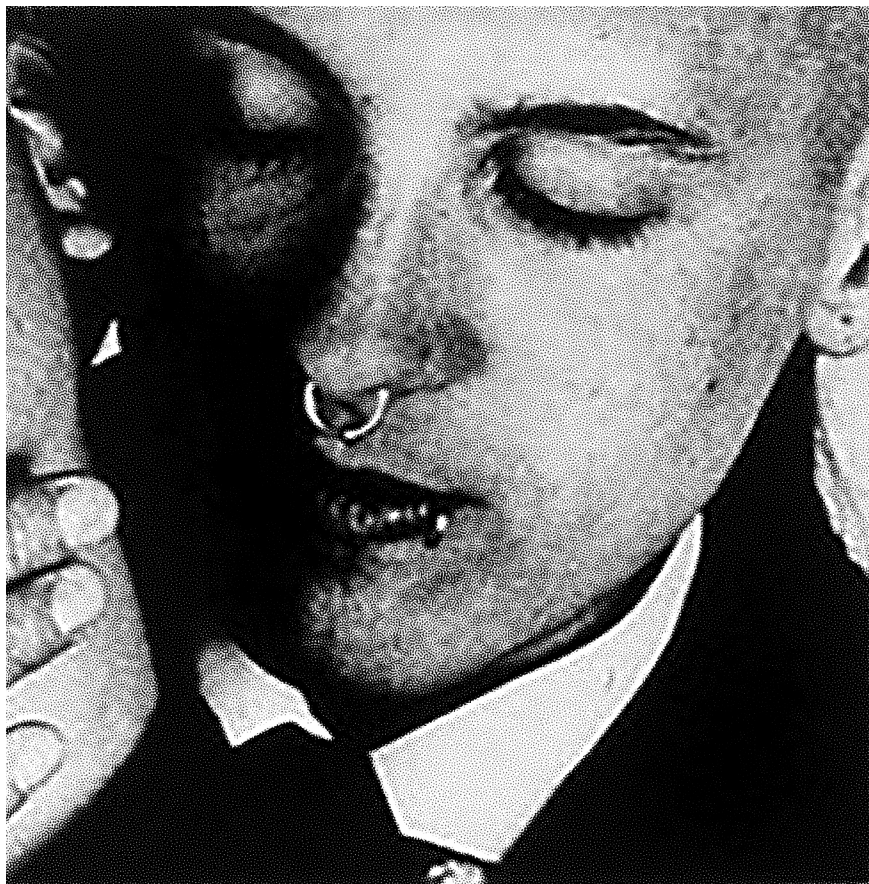
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**Mona Hatoum, *Untitled (graters)*, Courtesy of the artist and Alexander and Bonin, New York.**

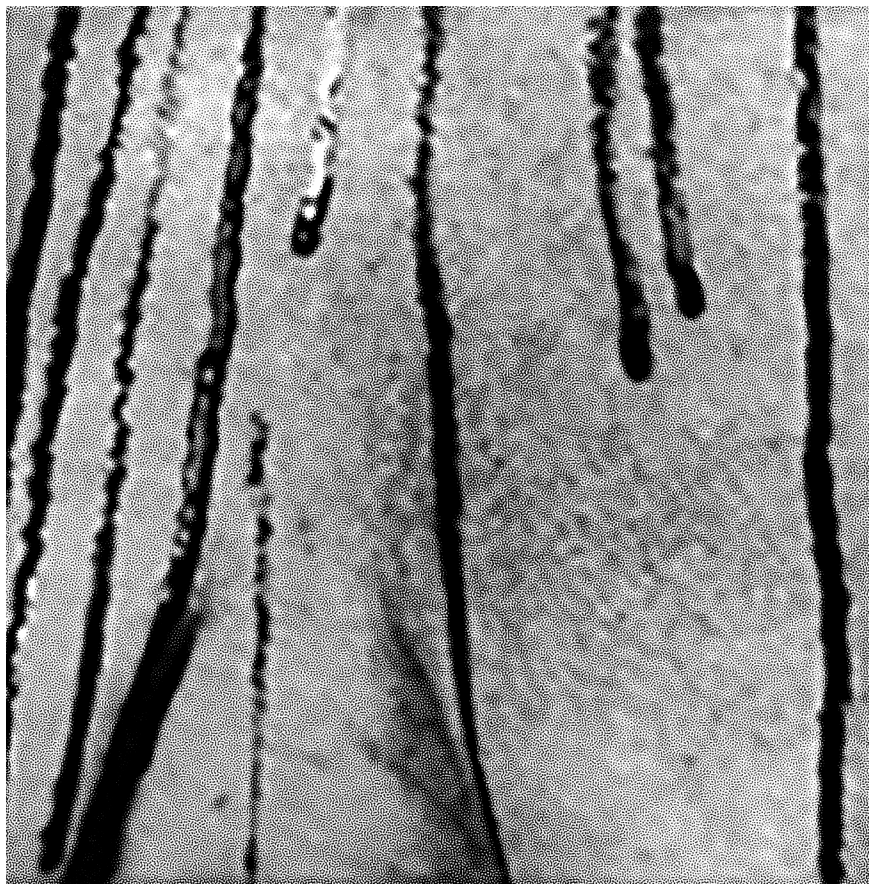
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**Catherine Opie, O, © Catherine Opie. Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul.**

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**Catherine Opie, O, © Catherine Opie. Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul.**

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**Katy Schimert, *Heart*, Courtesy of the artist.**

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**Germán Venegas, *Hombres en Llamas*, Courtesy of the artist.**

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