

Rhizome
seven online
exhibitions

2/7 Cal Arts

April 9–16, 2020

Capitain Petzel
Berlin

Node 2/7 CalArts

The second node of the Rhizome online exhibitions presents works by a selection of artists from **Capitain Petzel's** program who from the 70s through to the early 90s were part of the famed founding years of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). These artists include **Barbara Bloom, Troy Brauntuch, Ross Bleckner, Matt Mullican, Christopher Williams, Stephen Prina, and Andrea Bowers** – many of which have had a long-standing relationship with the gallery.

CalArts is known for having developed a model which was based on the interdisciplinary nature of institutions such as the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. The model equalized students and teachers and dismissed the use of a formal grading system. With courses on conceptual art (taught by John Baldessari) as well as on feminist theory, the school had a truly pioneering outlook. The classes were centered for example around the questioning of authorship and existing artistic working methods, or the dismantling of long-standing patriarchal power structures.

Barbara Bloom, who graduated from CalArts in 1972, talks fondly of Baldessari's class, "I don't remember that there were any assignments, and I don't recall that it was ever involved with the production of work. I don't even remember talking with John about [my art]—that wasn't the pedagogy. It was more about curiosity." Ultimately, this curiosity is what drives her work to this day. Her multimedia installation works construct visual narratives that examine the relationships between objects and the meanings generated by their juxtaposition, drawing from an infinite repertoire of literature and film references. For this node of the Rhizome, Bloom's contribution is a reference to Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-Up*. Produced for her concurrent show with **Capitain Petzel**, *Works on Paper, on Paper*; on a pristine white seamless studio back drop she recreates a specific scene from the cult film, opting for crumpled colored paper to depict the characters.

Troy Brauntuch came from the East Coast to CalArts in 1972. The artist was supposedly selected by the admissions panel on the basis that his drawings and paintings had a "touch". To this day, a chilling atmosphere has haunted Brauntuch's oeuvre, betrayed essentially by his extraordinary touch and skill for rendering pictures of violence and decay in the most beautiful, elegiac manner. The work on view here is based on a photograph of a dress designed by Charles James (known as "America's First Couturier"). Rendered slightly oversized in comparison to the original garment, the painting evokes a bygone era of elegance and style; it is now frozen as an exquisite object, absent of a human body it becomes a phantom of opulence.

Ross Bleckner was in the first graduating master's class in 1973. In a past interview, Bleckner and two former classmates (David Salle and Eric Fischl) explained, "We were painters. Nowadays that sounds minor, but back then, the school was absolutely anti-painting. Conceptual practices reigned". Already in his CalArts days, Bleckner was said to be "painting dark corners of rooms with beams of light". He continued to develop these luminous abstractions throughout the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, which eventually lead to his iconic "cell" paintings. Smoothly layered on the canvas surface against a darker background, Bleckner's *Selective Behavior* features his signature multicolored volumetric circles or cells, which look like glowing droplets of blood or molecules viewed under a microscope. **Capitain Petzel** will hold a solo presentation by Ross Bleckner during Gallery Weekend Berlin later this fall.

Matt Mullican who graduated in 1974 hugely embraced the ideas of conceptual art taught by Baldessari at CalArts. His contribution to this node of the Rhizome series is based on a cosmological model that he began developing as a student. Mullican describes the model as a total cosmology which implements his concept of five universes, each represented by one color to symbolize the five levels of consciousness; green is the level of pure matter (physical elements), blue the world of objects created by humans (the world unframed), yellow the cultural hierarchies and the arts (the world framed), black and white the empire of language, and lastly red the subjective, i.e. mental activity.

Christopher Williams studied at CalArts in the late 1970s and would go on to become a key conceptual artist of his generation. Williams explores sociological and political theory through the structures of modern and contemporary photographic practice. The references in his work range from the images of the 1920s New Objectivity movement, to the advertisement industry, to the photo-conceptualism that he came upon as a student at CalArts. His contribution to the second node of the Rhizome represents an "Exakta VX IIa" camera, which in his eyes represents "the epitome of German fine engineering". Very much in his style, this work foregrounds the technical production process and the practice of photography itself.

Stephen Prina is also from a slightly later cohort, graduating from the school in 1980. Prina examines the cultural production and consumption process by making pre-existing works of art his regular points of departure — the ongoing series, *Exquisite Corpse: The Complete Paintings of Manet* serving as a prime example of this. Using as a starting point an old catalogue raisonné of the paintings of Edouard Manet, Prina has methodically made his way through the impressionist's oeuvre, retaining the scale of the original paintings but adapting the subject matter in a reductively abstract fashion. Rendering the works as monochrome, Prina strips away Manet's authorship, leaving merely secondary information such as the size, title, and location as hints of the original work.

Andrea Bowers graduated from CalArts in 1992. During her time there, Lane Relyea became an important teacher to Bowers. Her contribution to this node of the Rhizome is currently featured in her survey exhibition '[Grief and Hope' at Museum Abteiberg](#), in Mönchengladbach. Made on collaged recycled cardboard with black marker, the large drawing monumentalizes environmental activist fliers and graphics. *I Am Nature* (...) reproduces a photocopied flier of a clear-cut forest from an Eco-Defense zine, that enlarged, fluctuates between abstraction and representation.

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