

BORTOLAMI

University of Disasters

Curated by Matthew Grumbach

30 March – 22 April 2017

Opening Reception 4 April 2017, 6:00-8:00 PM

**Richard Aldrich, Robert Bordo, Daniel Buren, Tom Burr
Simon Denny, Piero Golia, Ann Veronica Janssens, Barbara Kasten
Jutta Koether, Slava Mogutin, Luigi Ontani, Anna Ostoya
Claudio Parmiggiani, Daniel Pflumm, Jack Pierson, Sara Grace Powell
Mimmo Rotella, Ben Schumacher, Jim Shaw, Eric Wesley**

“There is no end. Some may take this assertion as a source of endless hope; others may take it as a source of endless despair. Both would be on the wrong path.” – Franco “Bifo” Berardi¹

Efforts to thwart campaigns of deception and wrest reality from the spectacle will stumble if, in haste, data, statistics, figures, and other indicators of evidence-based practices are touted as our only bulwarks. As appeals for rationality fail to redirect the passions that constitute democratic politics and make us amenable to disinformation, the inauguration of the University of Disasters can no longer wait.

The philosopher and cultural theorist Paul Virilio describes the University of Disasters as a global convocation to commence “a collective reflection on limits.”² Like other institutions of higher learning, Virilio confers the university with a motto: *mea culpa*.³ This means it is haunted by unrealized futures. Therefore, the first action is to exorcise the hubris of scientific knowledge, which, under the banner of progress, culminated in the great catastrophes of modernity. Then comes the task of revitalizing modes of thought that resist militarization. At this crucial juncture, reflection becomes generative and bypasses the pessimism of neoreactionary prophesying.

While Virilio references clinical spaces, such as the hospital and the hospice, in his bid for the rehabilitation of the sciences, the University of Disasters is not wedded to a specific architecture or an educational model. If anything, the University of Disasters is a provisional structure. It is a lean-to, not an ivory tower, nor, for that matter, a tower laden with marble and gold. In light of this structural indeterminacy, the convening of the University of Disasters befits the open-ended proposition of an art exhibition. The word “disasters” happens to be common parlance in an art world predicated on the belief in the market’s imminent collapse. Some works sell and others don’t. Either way, they all end up in storage, and although the crash never quite hits, the precipice remains in sight.

It would be remiss not to mention Trump’s petulant habit of declaring things “disasters.” His rhetoric stokes fear, but it also implies closure where there remains possibility. To fall for his unfounded claims is to implicate oneself in the destruction of institutions that are only imperfect insofar as their work is always incomplete. Luckily for us, when the dust settles, the University of Disasters will continuously reconvene. There is no end to an assembly whose lectern is built of rubble.

– Matthew Grumbach

¹ Berardi, Franco “Bifo.” *And: Phenomenology of the End*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2015: 9.

² Virilio, Paul. *The Administration of Fear*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012: 55.

³ Virilio, Paul. *The University of Disaster*. Cambridge: Polity, 2010: 119.