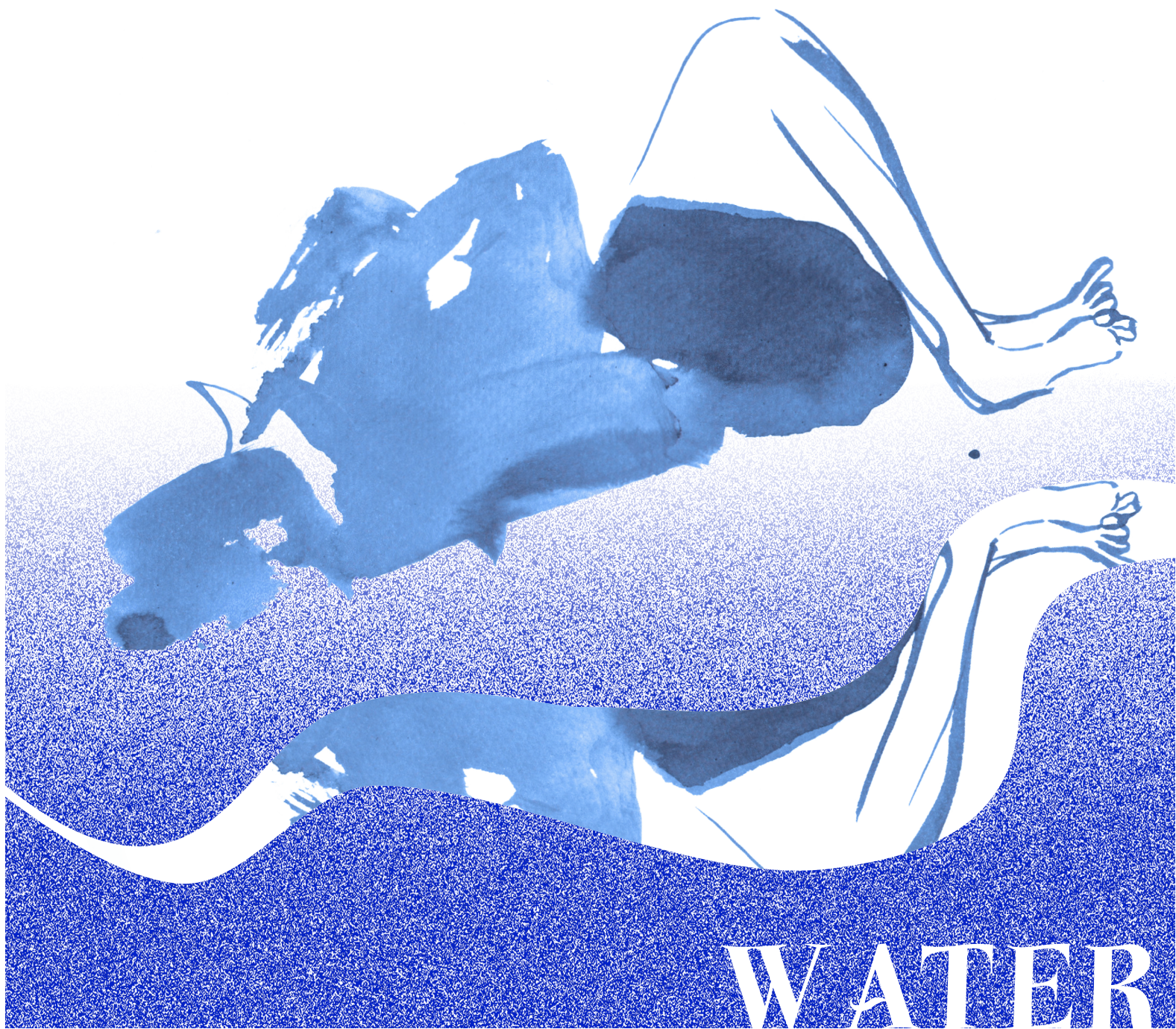


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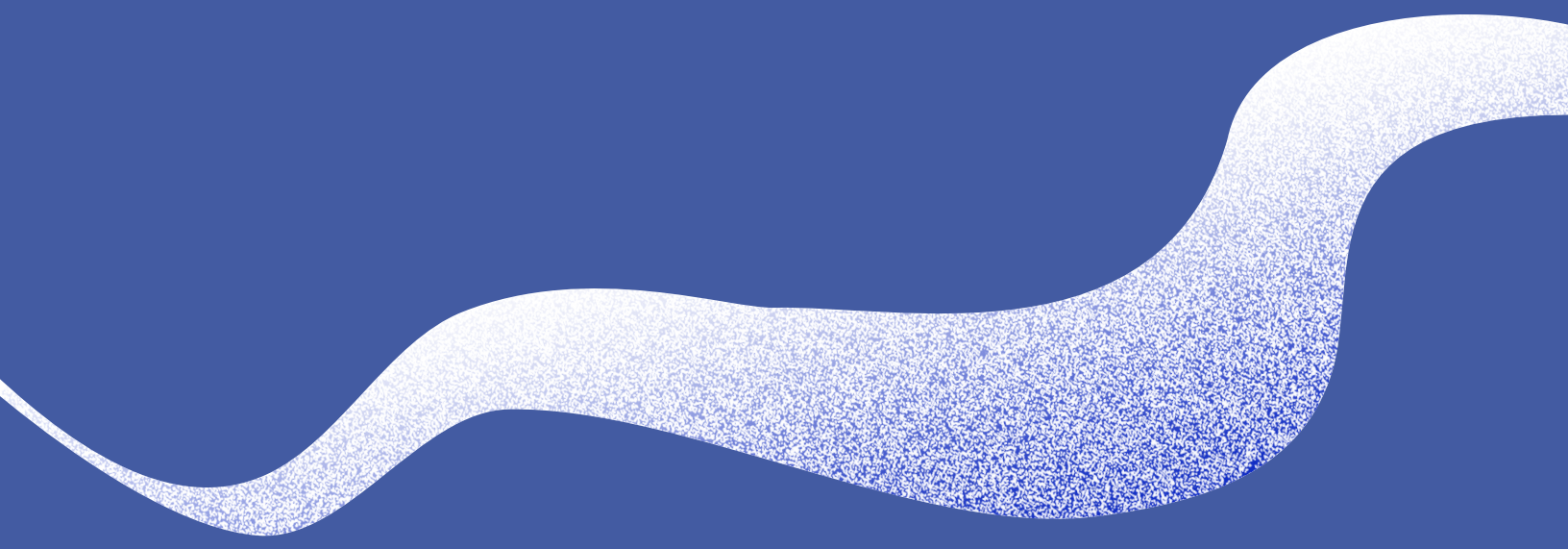
CRITICAL REVIEW

ISSUE 1

2020



WATER



The *MODA Critical Review* is an annual art journal published by MA in Modern and Contemporary Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies in The Department of Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University in the City of New York
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COVER ART

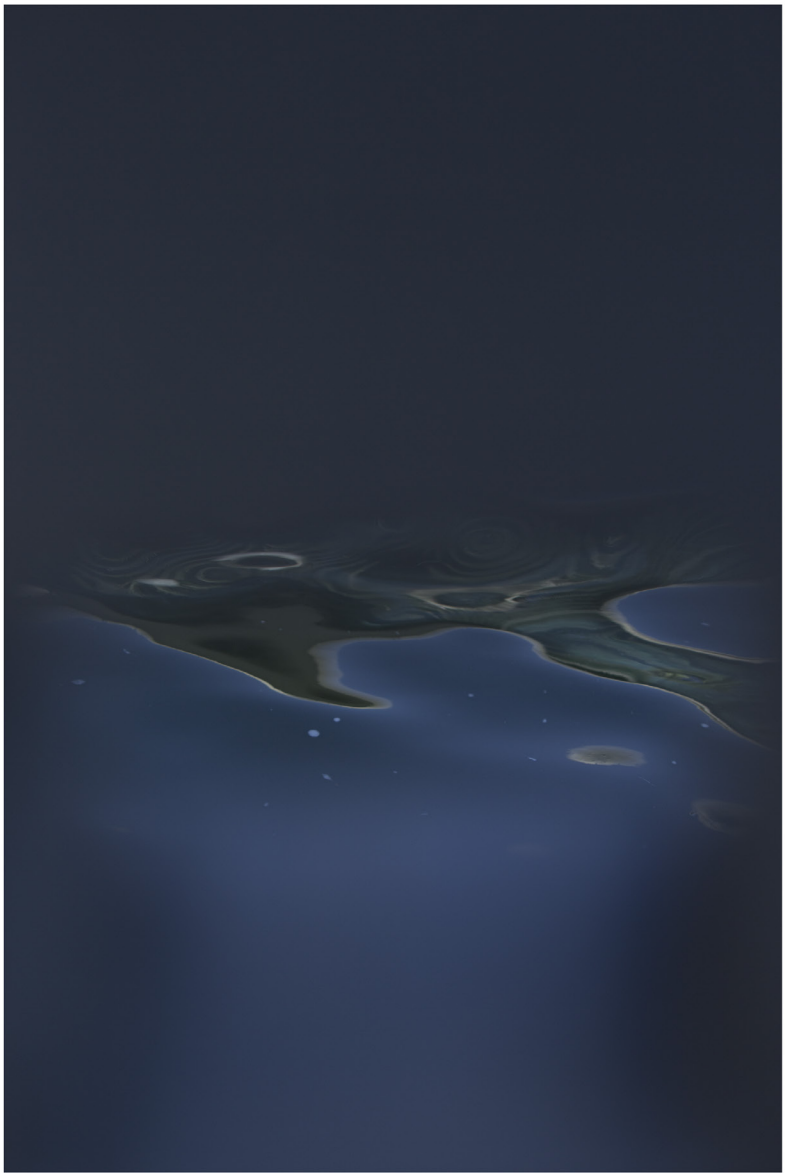
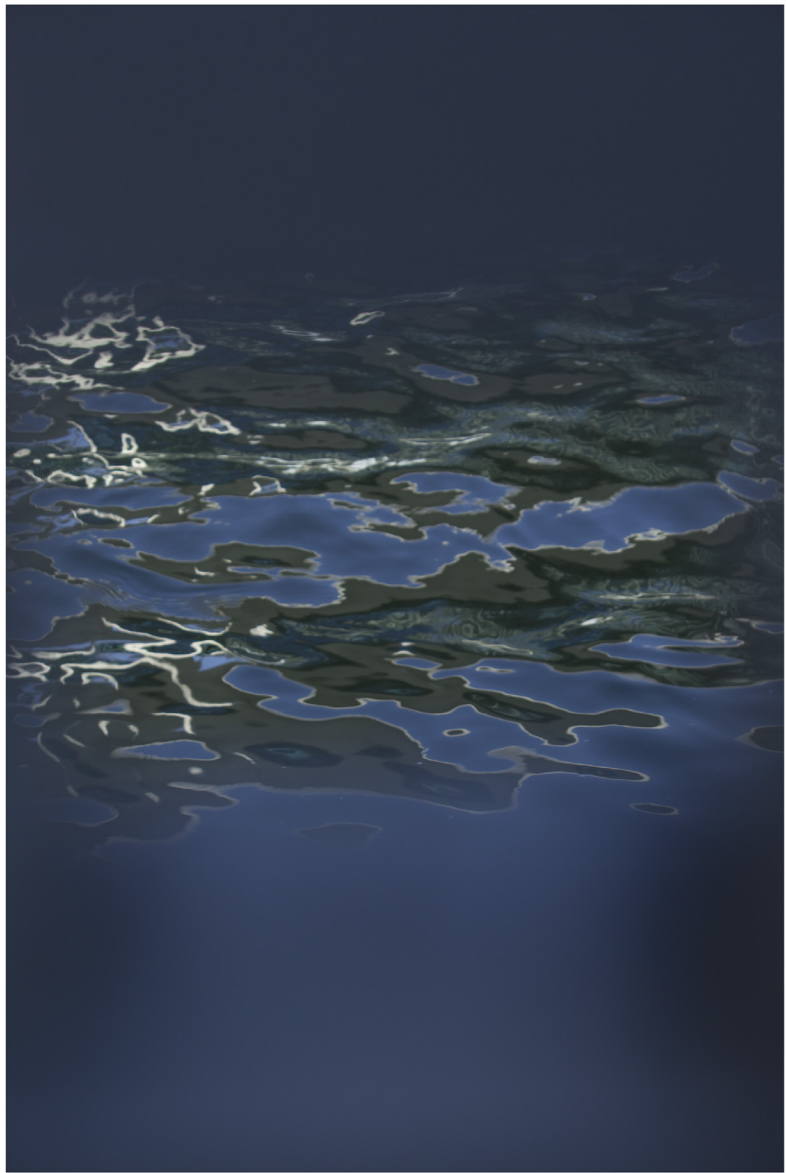
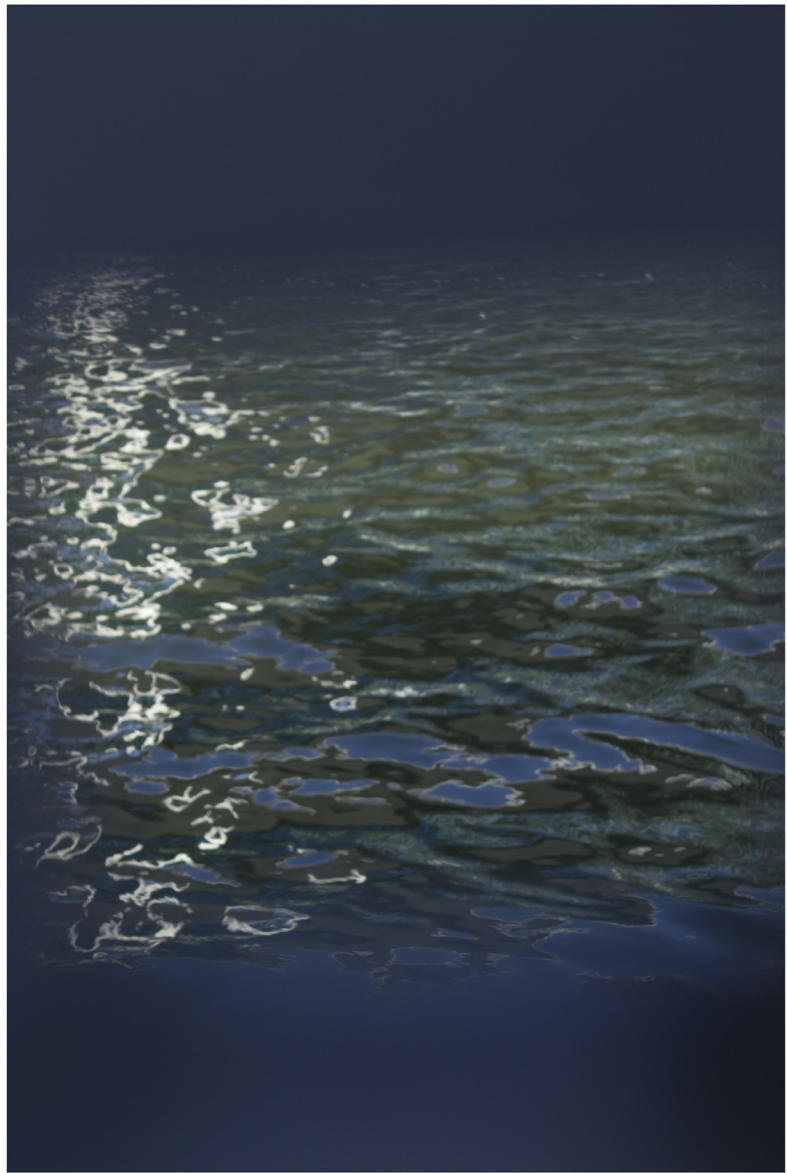
Jean Wong, *Brought But*, Ink on paper, 2018.

BACK COVER ART

Jean Wong, *Grace And*, Ink on paper, 2018.

MARGINALIA

Jean Wong, *Marginalia—Notes on Kenneth Tay's "The Sea is All Highway"*, Pen and digital drawings, 2020.



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BIOGRAPHIES

CRISTINA BELLI

Cristina lives in the States and hails from Nicaragua, her music style embraces vigour and depth in a powerful combination of house and techno. Her nuanced sound is as melodic as it is dramatic, featuring strong build-ups, emotional releases, and hypnotic details; with each mix, Cristina strives to weave an experiential narrative journey for the listener. Her guiding ethos is a steadfast belief in the elemental importance of music as a primordial art that gives no judgement upon its listener. The only request is to tune in to the sound, embracing the moment of the present.

MICHELLE HUYNH CHU

Michelle is an MA candidate and a research and teaching assistant of art and theory. Her research focuses on modern architectural history, media, and technology, and she is interested in the transformations of philosophical and scientific ideas. She received her BA in Film and History from New York University in 2010 after spending a semester at NYU Paris and Université Paris 7 Didérot, and at the European Screenwriting Conservatory. Her films and videos have been screened and exhibited at local and international platforms, including: Anthology Film Archives, Spectacle Theater, Songs for Presidents, Los Angeles Center for Digital Art, and on cable television in France and Germany.

TESS DEBERRY

Tess is a first-year MODA student from New Jersey. She graduated with a BA in History of Art, earning both departmental honors and university honors from the Johns Hopkins University in 2019. Her research interests include gender and queer theory in early 20th-century German art with a focus on the Weimar Republic.

MANUELA HANSEN

Manuela is a Fulbright Scholar from Argentina and current MODA student. Her research focuses on the relationship between technology, embodiment, and contemporary art. She has served on the Steering Committee of the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery and MALBA Joven (Young Friends Association of the Museum of Latin American Art of Buenos Aires); served as Professor in Universidad del Salvador, Argentina; and as Project Manager of Art Basel Cities: Buenos Aires and of Buenos Aires Art Week. Manuela earned her BA in Arts Management and Art History at Universidad del Salvador, Argentina.

HANNAH MORSE

Hannah is a curator and photographer. She is a 2020 MODA Curatorial Fellow and has most recently curated *Reframing the Passport Photo* at the Wallach Gallery. Her current research centers around the photographer Abdourahmane Sakaly, a project that she hopes will culminate in an exhibition in the near future. In terms of her own creative practice, Hannah works with alternative processes and carries out bodies of work that seek to negotiate personal and societal histories.

EUPHIE YING

Euphie is a MA candidate who researches contemporary art in China and critical theories. With a particular interest in the intersection of theoretical discourses on biopolitics, globalization, and postmodernism, she is developing a thesis project that investigates the emergence of contemporary ink art practices in China and the reception to this genre in the global art market. Enthusiastic about art education and curating, Euphie has volunteered to teach art history in a liberal arts summer camp in China for two summers and has held internships at the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Walters Art Museum, and the National Museum of China. Growing up in Ningbo, China, she came to the United States in 2015 and earned her BA in Art History and Economics at the Johns Hopkins University.

ERIN GALLAGHER

Erin is an educator and artist with particular interests in critical pedagogy, community arts education, and social justice. She currently works as an educator and programmer in teen, school, and family programs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. She also works as an educator leading school, youth, family, academic and access programs and has trained and managed a core group of 50+ Museum Guides in adult tours of the collection. As a teaching artist, Erin has led gallery/studio classes for all ages and art-making workshops for various family programs. She is a current MODA student researching American art with a focus on diasporic, queer, feminist, and indigenous topics. She holds a BA in Art History and English from Vassar College.

MARINA RASTORFER

Marina received both her BA in Art History and Museum Professions and her Associates Degree in Applied Science from the Fashion Institute of Technology. Since attending Columbia University, Marina has focused her studies on Interwar Period art with an emphasis on provenance research and restitution of works of art between 1933 and 1945. She has received the Caleb Smith Memorial Fellowship in 2019 from Columbia University in pursuit of her digital humanities MA thesis research. Marina will attend Law School in 2020 with the intent of specializing in Art Law.

DANA RODRIGUEZ

Dana is a recent graduate from the MODA program at Columbia University and she focuses on contemporary art, specifically African American art and art of the African diaspora. Previously, she received a BA in Art History and a BS in Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has worked at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, North Carolina Museum of Art, Ackland Art Museum, and with various art advisory firms.

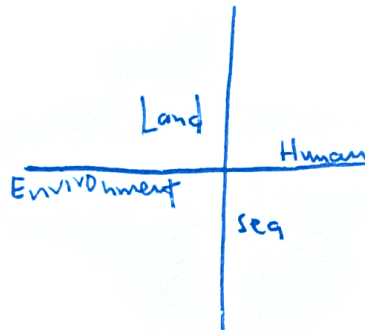
JEAN WONG

Jean is an artist and researcher working at the intersections of film, bodies, and technology. She is interested in intimacy in violent scenarios and times of crisis. Through her work, Jean inquires into how we can find healing from intergenerational and historical trauma. Her academic and artistic practices bleed into each other. As a researcher, Jean studies transportation and communications technology, film, and performance in Southeast and East Asia. As an artist who works primarily in painting and drawing, Jean's creative practice centers on the everyday, 'acceptable' violence that exists in domestic spaces, particularly in her home country, Singapore. Prior to joining the MODA program, Jean worked as an artist educator and art critic in Singapore and graduated from Bard College with a BA in Art History and a BFA in Painting.

TAEHEE WHANG

Taehee Whang is a Korean-American interdisciplinary artist currently based in Queens, NY. Their work combines experimental animation, drawing, and prose writing to propose alternative archives for family history, women's labor, and queer community. They completed their BFA in Painting from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2016. They collaborated with various institutions such as Eyebeam, Abrons Art Center, Asian Art Archive in America, MoMA PS1, Booklyn Inc, Yellow Jackets Collective, and Bubble T. They are also a founder of *Hyperlink Press*, a publication project inspired by the early 2000s queer online communities in South Korea.

EDITORS' NOTE



The *MODA Critical Review* is a publication dedicated to showcasing works by current and past MA in Modern and Contemporary Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies (MODA) students. Developed as the Critical Studies counterpoint to the MODA Curatorial Fellowship, the *MODA Critical Review* was envisioned as a collaborative and experimental space—one that celebrates the multifaceted skills and talents of MODA students and alumni, and the intersections of our diverse voices within the publication format. Our goal was to develop a site of discourse that extends across MODA cohorts, and demonstrate how MODA students wield the skills they acquired during this short Master's program to engage critically with socio-political and cultural issues of our time.

Privileging dialogue and play over polished individual work, this inaugural issue of the *MODA Critical Review* serves as the start of an ongoing, annual publication. It is a platform that binds the MODA community in their educational endeavors and work accomplishments, and shares them with our wider Columbia University community and beyond.

As MODA students, we are interested in forms of research that exist beyond academia. We recognize that critical engagement with contemporary art has to evolve alongside the rapidly-changing landscape of art and culture. The field of modern and contemporary art is dynamic and many MODA students wear different hats in this field. We are artists, teachers, curators, musicians, burgeoning art lawyers, and we bring our varied

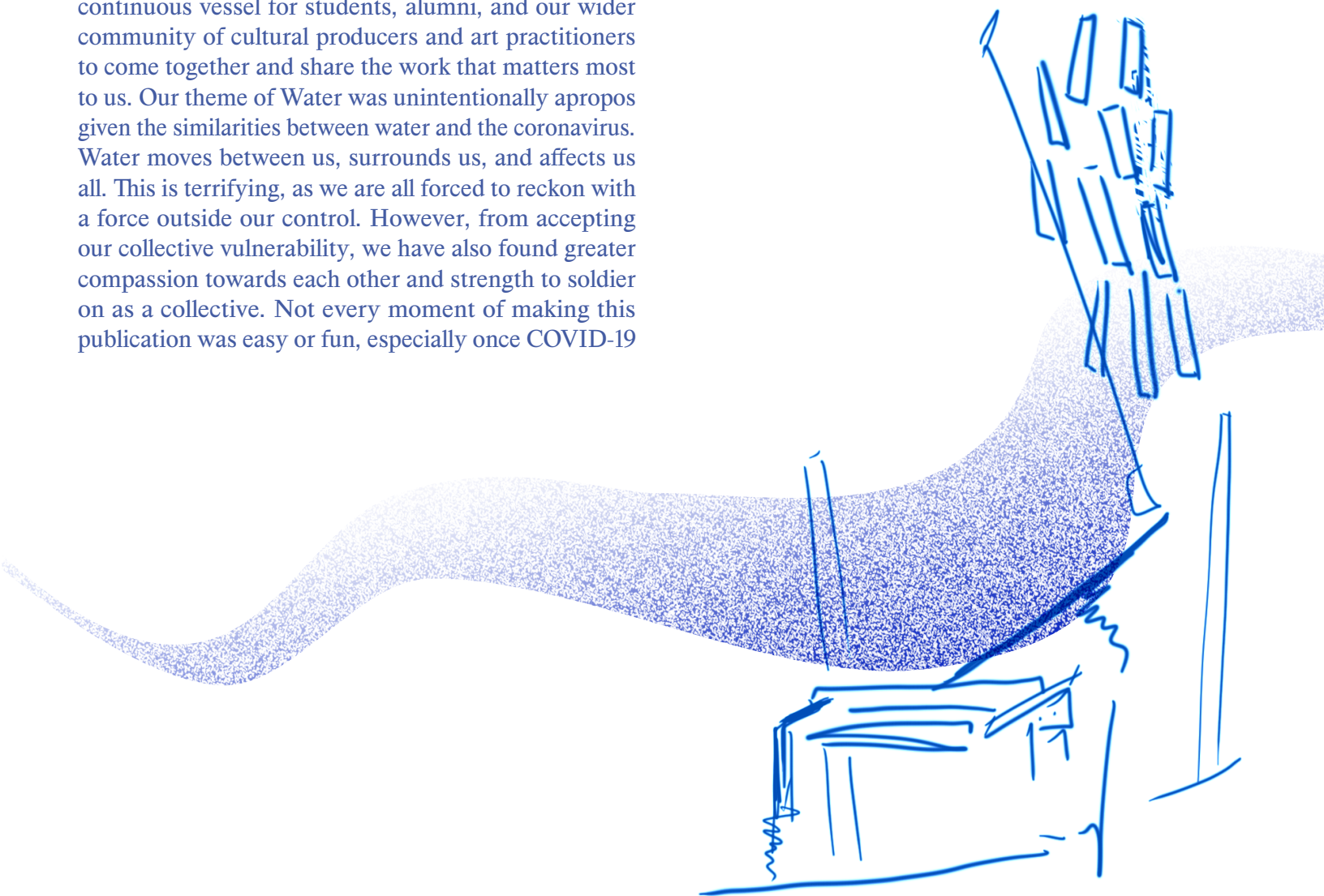
knowledge and experiences into our research, even if they are sometimes rendered invisible in academic writing. The *MODA Critical Review* celebrates our unique journeys by spotlighting works ranging from poems to artworks, to short essays and more.

Every edition of the *MODA Critical Review* centers on a keyword. We chose to organize our seminal issue around the theme of Water in conjunction with Columbia University's Year of Water: An Interdisciplinary Investigation Of Water. Throughout the previous two semesters, the University held art exhibits, concerts, lectures, and symposia focused on the Earth's most precious resource in all of its social, political, cultural, economic, and environmental complexities. Carol Becker, Dean, School of the Arts, writes, "It is exciting for the School of the Arts to spearhead the Year of Water and to play a central role in convening the institutes, schools, and programs at Columbia engaged in research and action around these concerns." As a diverse cohort and alumni, many of whom have traveled across oceans to attend this program, we feel the natural fluidity of our strengths and accomplishments flow across institutional spaces and actions. Water conveys our philosophical purpose: Productive cultural exchanges, cultural mobility, and hybridity as a tool to explore a confluence of perspectives in varied moments of historical memory and meaning.

Furthermore, we feel that open channels of communication are now more important than ever, given that the current COVID-19 pandemic threatens the

ethos of this publication. It is difficult to produce work, especially creative and critical work, in times of crisis. Whether explicitly addressing COVID-19 or actively refraining from mentioning the virus to focus on alternate subjects, we cannot escape the current pandemic. This inaugural issue of the *MODA Critical Review* reflects the ways in which our lives have changed. As an interdisciplinary publication focused on contemporary art and culture, the *MODA Critical Review* prides itself on addressing relevant and important topics and celebrates divergent points of views. This pandemic has taught us that there is not one 'right' way of dealing with crisis. Instead, it has shown these four editors of the *MODA Critical Review* that we must find innovative ways of collaborating in order to support ourselves and each other. Each edition of the *MODA Critical Review* is a timestamp of the lives of current students. It is a fluid, continuous vessel for students, alumni, and our wider community of cultural producers and art practitioners to come together and share the work that matters most to us. Our theme of Water was unintentionally apropos given the similarities between water and the coronavirus. Water moves between us, surrounds us, and affects us all. This is terrifying, as we are all forced to reckon with a force outside our control. However, from accepting our collective vulnerability, we have also found greater compassion towards each other and strength to soldier on as a collective. Not every moment of making this publication was easy or fun, especially once COVID-19

rendered all face-to-face meetings impossible; but this process was pregnant with joy, bewilderment at how each editor uses or does not use the em dash, and solidarity. We showed up for each other, for the writers and artists who contributed to this publication, even when we felt raw from our individual circumstances. It was a great honor to create this publication and we hope our unwavering commitment to criticality ripples across every page. Enjoy.





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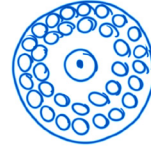
Cristina Belli, *Ederlezi*, Soundcloud.



THE MUSINGS AND GUSHINGS OF POPE.L

EXHIBITION REVIEW OF “MEMBER: POPE.L, 1978–2001” ON VIEW
AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NY. FROM OCT 21, 2019–FEB 1, 2020

BY DANA RODRIGUEZ



Hurricane Sandy, an inevitable force of nature, ripped through Manhattan in 2012. A couple of years later, a completely preventable and even more lethal water flowed through the pipes of Flint, Michigan, poisoning thousands. The damage of the hurricane might still disrupt one’s L-train commute, but Flint residents will deal with health issues for the rest of their lives. In August 2019, Pope.L unceremoniously walked across a Manhattan dock and poured a bottle labelled ‘Flint Water’ into the Hudson River. Months later, not far from that dock, he opened *Choir* (2019) at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In the installation, 800 gallons of (dyed) green water filled a white plastic tank (the tank was found in the basement of the museum, stored from preparations from Hurricane Sandy.) Upon entering the small gallery in which the walls, floor, and ceiling were all black, the tank and its piping system glowed prominently in the center of the room, looming large. For ten minutes, water plunged from an upside-down ‘Jim Crow’era drinking fountain that hung from the ceiling, and filled the plastic tank. For seventeen minutes, the tank bubbled and churned as water drained from the container and traveled through copper pipes that form a maze around the room, allowing visitors to walk tightly around each element (or sit on a few benches placed near the tank,) positioned between the walls and the rumbling extension of the fountain.

Along the dark walls of the shadowy space, vinyl letters subtly shined. These word fragments were sourced from quotes by John Ashbery, Malcolm X, and John Cage: “HL OW WTRR, NGGR WATER, NDVSBLWTR.”

“LIKE HIS ARTWORK, AND LIKE
ARTISTIC AND INSTITUTIONAL
PRACTICES, POPE.L REMINDS US
THAT HISTORY, TOO, IS SO MUCH
MORE THAN LINEAR”

Pope.L’s work was inspired by Cage’s exploration of the anechoic chamber. In a silent room, one was faced with the sounds of one’s own being and the being of the machine on view. A microphone was fixed next to the plastic tub, and another was placed near the opening of the drinking fountain, as if both vessels had something to say. They did and they spoke loudly—with gurgles, spews, rumbles, and drips. The water spoke through hums, switches, and vibrations as it passed through the mechanical pumps, motors, and tank. Man-made over natural, natural over man-made; Hurricane over human error, human error over hurricane.

Speakers projected these noises as they were overlaid with field recordings and sounds from African-themed Hollywood movies of the 1930s. The historic recordings were augmented with the chatter and occasional laughter of visitors. As the tank transitioned between filling and draining, the cacophony of noises dulled to a hushed white noise of dripping. As quickly as it muted, a mechanical clank jolted the piece back into movement, reversing the previous job of emptying the tank and starting the process of filling all over again.

The entire piece was enclosed within the ‘free-of-charge gallery’ of the museum, shut behind a glass door in which a taped handwritten sign read: “DO NOT CLEAN.” Within the room, scraps of garbage were scattered along the floor, piling up at places of contact where pipes, pumps, and walls met the floor. Crayons, blue painter’s tape, bits of paper and plastic, metal washers—all remnants from the birth of the piece—were not to be swept away. Traditionally, an artwork is installed, all traces of labor destroyed, and the piece sits, awaiting its deinstallation and reinstallation in a new location. Not only does *Choir* encompass the physical reversal and renewal of its components, it also renders visible

the installation process of the piece, its movement as it goes back-and-forth between art institutions. The water gushed in and out of the tank. Like his artwork, and like artistic and institutional practices, Pope.L reminds us that history, too, is so much more than linear. Natural and human forces, some more than others, propel the world forward, around, and back again.



Pope.L (b. 1955), *Choir*, 2019 (installation view, Pope.L: Choir, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 10, 2019–February 2020), Thousand-gallon plastic water-storage tank, water, drinking fountain, copper pipes, solenoid valves, pumps, MIDI controllers, electronic timer module, level-detection probe, flow meters, programmable logic controller, wood, scrim, vinyl letters, microphones, speakers, wires, and sound, Dimensions variable, Collection of the artist.

CONGRATULATIONS

TO THE MODA CLASS OF 2020

MARINA RASTORFER • ROTANA SHAKER • DANA RODRIGUEZ • HANNAH MORSE • JEAN WONG

THE *MODA CRITICAL REVIEW*
WOULD LIKE TO
CELEBRATE
THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS
OF THIS GROUP
OF STUDENTS.

GOOD LUCK
ON ALL YOUR FUTURE
ENDEAVORS!

ON PHOTOGRAPHY: WHERE ‘DIASPORA’ MEETS ‘BLACK’ & ‘QUEER’¹

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A PHOTOGRAPH BY JULIANA HUXTABLE

BY MANUELA HANSEN



In this essay, I draw from black queer studies and broader literature regarding African diaspora to examine what might be at stake when the black, queer, and diaspora narratives collide in photography. To ground my research, I focus on the 2015 work titled *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)* by the New York-based, transgender artist, DJ, and poet, Juliana Huxtable (b. 1987). Huxtable uses music, performance, collage, writing, and self-portraiture to explore “the intersections of race, gender, queerness, and identity.”² In her work, Huxtable is the author and subject. Her practice is grounded in her body as a vessel.³ *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)* is part of her self-portraiture series where Huxtable constructs hybrid human-creature avatars for her continuous cache of popular cultural references, which she refers to as “floating-signifier-concept-chaos.”⁴ Through enacting a myriad of original personae-shifting

“BY PRESENTING HERSELF AS
A POSTHUMAN, FANTASTIC,
SURREALIST CREATURE,
HUXTABLE ABSTRACTS A
POLITICAL IMPULSE AGAINST THE
HETERO-REPRODUCTIVE MATRIX
AND TURNS THIS IMPULSE
INTO SYMBOLS THAT RETAIN
POLITICAL AGENCY.”

looks, attitudes, color palette, and styles, Huxtable embraces a journey of becoming that eschews fixed endpoints.⁵

In *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)*, we see an overtly-feminized and sexualized Huxtable as she is depicted nude and kneeling in profile, with her back to

1 My title draws inspiration from authors Susan Sontag and Kathryn Bond Stockton. See Susan Sontag *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) and Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer”* (Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822387985>

2 “Juliana Huxtable,” Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2019, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/juliana-huxtable>.

3 Juliana Huxtable, “‘Existing in the World: Blackness at the Edge of Trans Visibility.’ *Che Gossett and Juliana Huxtable in Conversation (May 18, 2016, at the New Museum)*,” in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (Critical Anthologies in Art and Culture), ed. Gossett, Reina, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017), 49.

4 See Makayla Bailey, “Juliana Huxtable / Let’s Skip the Essentialism and Devour the Semantics,” *Flaunt Magazine*, October 7, 2019, <https://www.fltaunt.com/content/juliana-huxtable>.



Juliana Huxtable (b. 1987), *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)*, 2015, Inkjet print, 40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

the camera. Her black skin has been turned into a radiant shade of neon green, her braided hair, which calls to mind black cultural hair traditions, lays down on her spine as a simple bracelet adorns her ankle. The surrounding landscape is composed of a monochromatic pastel-blue sky that intersects with a yellow sand floor.

Here, Huxtable draws inspiration from black traditions in Nubian and Egyptian cultures and loads the image with references to science fiction to the aesthetics of body modification.⁶ The work highlights an aspirational and triumphant portrayal of black queer identity, interrogating normative attitudes toward gender and sexuality.⁷ Huxtable refers to herself as a “cyborg, cunt, priestess, witch, Nuwaubian princess.”⁸ The symbolic and cosmological references to Nuwaubian faith—in combination with historic invocations of black cultures, her posthuman appearance, and the title of the work—evoke the Nibiru cataclysm and present a new hybrid futuristic ideal.⁹

In *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)*, the history of the Black Atlantic flows into Huxtable’s identity. By presenting herself as a posthuman, fantastic, surrealist creature, Huxtable abstracts a political impulse against the heteroreproductive matrix and turns this impulse into symbols that retain political agency. Huxtable proposes the chaos of pandrogyny—a term coined by the singer-songwriter, poet, performance artist, and occultist Genesis Breyer P-Orridge—as an invitation to murder the cohesion of the body.¹⁰ One can further understand Huxtable’s pandrogyny as fragmentation, indecipherability, and body modification. For Huxtable, “it’s more interesting to just go trans-species.”¹¹

5 Lauren Cornell and Helga Christoffersen, eds., *Surround Audience: New Museum Triennial: 2015* (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli and New Museum, 2015), 177.

6 “Collection Online: *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)*,” Solomon R. Guggenheim, January 1, 2015, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/34476>.

7 Ibid.

8 Nuwaubianism is a religious organization inspired by Islam, Ancient Egypt, and extraterrestrial theories. See Lauren Cornell and Helga Christoffersen, eds., *Surround Audience: New Museum Triennial: 2015* (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli and New Museum, 2015), 177.

9 The Nibiru cataclysm is a science fiction myth that argues that the planet Nibiru will collide with Earth provoking a disastrous event. See Nola Taylor Redd, “Nibiru: The Nonexistent Planet,” Space.com, <https://www.space.com/15551-nibiru.html>.

10 See Tanja M. Laden, “Meet the Pandrogyny,” HuffPost, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/tanja-m-laden/the-ballad-of-genesis-lad_b_1337096.html.

11 “Juliana Huxtable on zoosexuality, furies, and the fetishization of outrage,” interview by Caroline Busta and @LILINTERNET, Art Basel, <https://www.artbasel.com/news/juliana-huxtable-project-native-informant-art-basel-hong-kong>

CRY-BABY: A SINGLE TEAR

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A FILM

BY TESS DEBERRY



A scene opens on a chicken race with high school boys on top of each car, one of whom is Cry-Baby Walker. As the camera pans across the faces of dirty greasers and proper squares, Cry-Baby is eventually victorious in the game, winning the heart of archetypical good girl, Allison Vernon-Williams, and causing the eccentric group of characters to all cry a single teardrop out of one eye. The only exception is Cry-Baby. For the first time in the entire movie, tears spill out of both of the bad boy's eyes. And thus ends the iconic 1990 John Waters film, best known for capturing a young, emotionally capricious Johnny Depp. In quintessentially passionate bad boy fashion, Cry-Baby plays music, gets thrown into a juvenile detention facility, and rides motorcycles as a foil to the perfectly square, Allison.

While at first glance *Cry-Baby* has a rather basic good-girl-falls-for-bad-boy plot, Waters imbues a simple narrative with emotion, absurdity, humor, and symbolism. Cry-Baby's tear drives much of this narrative. Without it, Cry-Baby and Allison would not fall in love, nor would Cry-Baby be able to get out of juvie. The inherent volatility and transient nature of water is crucial: the impetus for the narrative centers on tears and Cry-Baby's behavior seems to mimic the volatility of his defining feature. From the title to the main character to the most emotionally-charged scenes in the film, water pervades, stimulates, and makes it all the more poignantly resonant.

“THE INHERENT VOLATILITY AND TRANSIENT NATURE OF WATER IS CRUCIAL: THE IMPETUS FOR THE NARRATIVE IS CENTERED ON WATER AND CRY-BABY’S BEHAVIOR SEEMS TO MIMIC THE VOLATILITY OF HIS DEFINING FEATURE.”

However, the most poignant parts of the film are the scenes that escape Cry-Baby's tear and his longing for Allison. *Cry-Baby* is about more than the Cry-Baby/Allison relationship. Aside from the main romantic plot, the secondary characters in the film, such as Wanda from Cry-Baby's gang, shine through the watery depths of Cry-Baby's romantic preoccupations. Wanda enjoys growling and writhing and has painfully normative parents. Juxtaposed against her parents, who look as though they just stepped out of a Norman Rockwell painting, Wanda is a hypersexed up version of Sandy at the end of *Grease*. Every scene in which they interact reverberates with comedic clash. In my opinion, Wanda and her family are the real stars of *Cry-Baby*; I would watch the entire movie again just to tune into Wanda's familial dynamics.

This movie made me laugh; it confused me. The emotional intensity, sometimes to a farcical point, of Cry-Baby Walker is hypnotic. *Cry-Baby* is satirical humor mixed perfectly with symbolic expressions of the emotional volatility of human nature, succinctly summed up in the one and only Cry-Baby Walker's tear(s.)



John Waters (b. 1946), *Cry-Baby*, 1990, Film still.

UNDER QUARANTINE— FROM THE M WOODS ONLINE EXHIBITION TO OUR CHANGING LIFESTYLES DURING THE PANDEMIC

ESSAY ON ART AND LIFE DURING COVID-19

BY EUPHIE YING

On February 10, 2020, M Woods, a private museum specializing in contemporary art in Beijing, announced the opening of an online exhibition amidst the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19), which forced the temporary shutdown of institutions across China. Just days after Art Basel Hong Kong was canceled due to the epidemic (now pandemic), M Woods took the lead in reflecting on the role of art institutions during times of crisis.¹ Named *Art is Still Here: A Hypothetical Show for a Closed Museum*, the title reveals an inherent skepticism—that an online show can only be ‘hypothetical’—towards exhibitions existing entirely in a digital landscape. On their website, M Woods wrote:

As a public [sic] museum, we ask how we then experience art during times of institutional closure: what are the forms that art and art museums must take when galleries become inaccessible to the public?²

Although online exhibitions have ceased to be a novelty in the digital age, M Woods’ experimental online exhibition is contextualized within the forced inaccessibility of its physical spaces and the significance of social media in Mainland China as an alternative locale to “share

information and [connect] communities both locally and internationally during the quarantine period.”³

This exhibition is as much about institutional closure, quarantine, and isolation as it is about fluidity of communication, unprecedented accessibility to information, and global connection. Instead of presenting a binary opposition between the two conditions for the show—the hyper-fluid online community and the total alienation from physical reality—M Woods sets the exhibition in dialectic tension between accessibility and inaccessibility, recognizing the contradiction as two halves of the same coin.

The museum’s decision to update the evolving exhibition on all their social media accounts reflects the centrality of social media platforms in their marketing strategy. However, instead of merely endorsing this channel of communication, the exhibition critiques the chaos that has arisen out of the coronavirus pandemic and found a home on Chinese social media platforms. As panic, fear, and anger overwhelm social media platforms, M Woods’ exhibition addresses issues of fake news and the overflow of information in a digital age.⁴ Accessibility (for those

1 “Art is Still Here: A Hypothetical Show for a Closed Museum,” M Woods, <https://www.mwoods.org/Art-Is-Still-Here-A-Hypothetical-Show-for-a-Closed-Museum>

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

“THIS EXHIBITION IS AS MUCH ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL CLOSURE, QUARANTINE, AND ISOLATION AS IT IS ABOUT FLUIDITY OF COMMUNICATION, UNPRECEDENTED ACCESSIBILITY TO INFORMATION, AND GLOBAL CONNECTION.”

to the internet) amplifies the noise of irrelevant and confusing information, which is also a byproduct of the democratization of the circulation of information. Indeed, the Chinese government faced a new challenge in the disputation of ‘rumors’ and ‘fake news’ after the whistleblower, Dr. Li Wenliang—who was unjustly punished by the Communist Party of China for spreading ‘rumors’ about the coronavirus when it first broke out—died of complications from the virus. Meanwhile, as information moves fluidly across the digital realm, this seeming ease of communication is also punctuated by misinterpretation as complicated messages are especially prone to being misrepresented. Weibo, a microblogging website based in China, published an article by People’s Daily on January 31, 2020 which claimed that Shanghai Institute of Materia Medica, Chinese Academy of Sciences (SIMM) and Wuhan Institute of Virology jointly discovered that *shuanghuanglian* (双黄连), an over-the-counter Chinese medicine, is useful in “inhibiting” the coronavirus. This Weibo article later instigated a heated discussion online: some people accused the Party with this overtly faulty message as a calming measure,

while others believed that people were overreacting to the message by misunderstanding the word ‘inhibit’ as an equivalent for ‘treat.’⁵

The sense of alienation in a society under quarantine has also undergone subtle transformations. While physical boundaries are being reinforced through the closure of borders, some virtual boundaries are being dissolved, resulting in shifts in social orders. In China, privacy is being redefined as people with certain travel histories are required to publicize the details of their itineraries and even medical histories. One gets an unprecedented clarity about the whereabouts of others: community centers inform their residents of the exact number of people infected living in the area and their detailed addresses.⁶ People’s personal information, such as images of license plates identifying vehicles coming from Hubei, the epicenter of the outbreak, are circulated online to isolate those perceived as potential sources of contagion.⁷

In other parts of the world, different measures have been put in place to combat the spreading of the virus with varying degrees of stringency and efficacy. Measures include, but are not limited to, tightened border control, international travel bans, quarantine, shutdown of public transportation, and social distancing. As new rules are installed each day, people around the world are adapting to a new norm of living. It is under such circumstances that we are challenged to reflect upon our reliance on the digital and virtual and its impact on how we relate to each other.

4 “Room [0227BS],” M Woods, <https://www.mwoods.org/ROOM-0227BS>.

5 “Shanghai Institute of Materia Medicine and Wuhan Institute of Virology jointly discovered that *shuanghuanglian* (双黄连) is useful in inhibiting the coronavirus (上海药物所、武汉病毒所联合发现：#双黄连可抑制新型冠状病毒#),” People’s Daily (人民日报), Weibo, https://www.weibo.com/2803301701/Is58Rg5zr?type=comment#_rnd1584212967740 (accessed March 14, 2020).

6 For example, in the city of Ningbo in Zhejiang Province, the government issued an official document on February 3 that permitted the publication of private information (such as the residential community) of people who had contracted coronavirus. For more information on how personal data was used to develop an interactive map of the latest confirmed cases in China, see: 规划中国 (China Planning), “

疫情地图诞生记 (The Birth of the Live Epidemic Map),” 自然资源部 (Department of Natural Resources, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/3bAFZenxOK9t8LwGyILf5Q> (accessed March 14, 2020).

7 Searching “Wuhan license plate ()” on Weibo will produce numerous examples. For more information, see: “ ,” Weibo, <https://m.weibo.cn/status/4482097543003202?>. This Weibo details how a family from Wuhan had been reported to local police almost everywhere they traveled, up to four times per day.

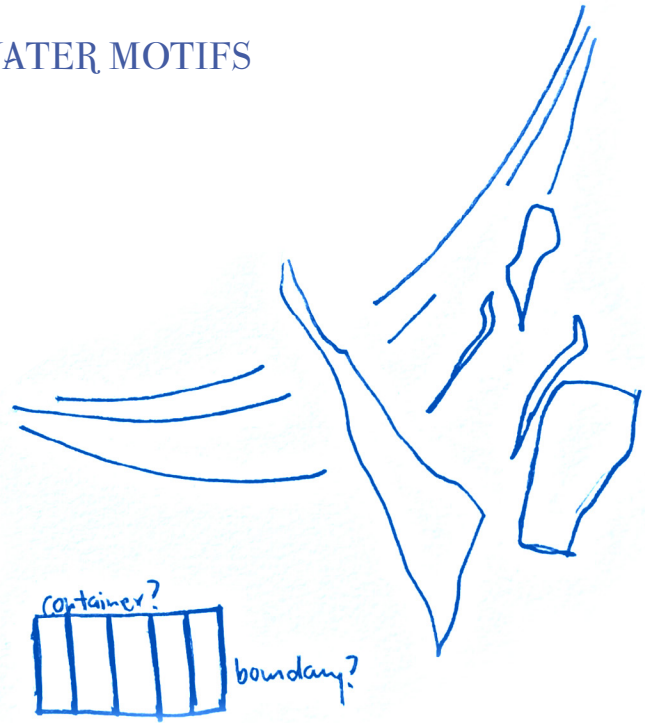


Michelle Huynh Chu, [Untitled], 2015, Digital C-print, 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm).

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE— THE VALUE OF DOUBT

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF KENTRIDGE'S WATER MOTIFS

BY MARINA RASTORFER



Water is a major theme for the artist William Kentridge, regardless of his medium of choice—drawing, performance art, theater, or film. In 2016, Kentridge created one of the largest projects he has ever done. Titled *Triumphs and Laments*, a frieze reaching over 500 meters in length was applied to the travertine stonewall across the Tiber river in Rome. The large public artwork contained over 80 silhouetted images of individuals from Rome's historical and contemporary context. Amongst some of the depictions were Romulus and Remus, Benito Mussolini, immigrants arriving in Italy, and scenes from Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. The silhouettes were 'power-washed' onto the historical stone wall. Using pressurized water and large twelve-meter stencils that were based on original charcoal drawings by the artist, a team of over two hundred volunteers erased the pollution and bacterial growth on the wall to reveal the negative spaces of the clean wall. *Triumphs and Laments* was conceived as an ephemeral work.

After a couple years, the silhouettes have slowly faded away, joining the new patina of the stone wall. This eventual erasure is not lost on Kentridge, who remarked that "it is a commentary on the flawed nature of memory, both individual and collective."¹ The spatial placement of Kentridge's artwork sets it in discourse with Rome's origin myth and Mussolini's fascist attempt at co-opting that myth for his own political gain. *Triumphs and Laments* is situated on the riverbank where Romulus and Remus were found by Lupa the she-wolf. In the 1930s, Mussolini erected a column near the river's source stating: "*Qui nasce il fiume sacro ai destini di Roma.*"² Here is born the river sacred to the destinies of Rome. Like the history of South Africa and Johannesburg, *Triumphs and Laments* illuminates fragmented histories that are reconstructed non-chronologically, bringing to light, or shadow, the human impact on society.

1 Andy Devane, "William Kentridge Triumphs with Mural along the River Tiber in Rome." *Wanted in Rome*, April 20, 2016. <https://www.wantedinrome.com/news/kentridge-mural-triumphs-in-rome.html>.

2 Bruce Ware Allen, *Tiber: Eternal River of Rome* (ForeEdge, 2018), xiii.

“THE RECURRENT IMAGES OF FAUCETS, CHARACTERS TAKING SHOWERS, AND FLOODING ALL EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER IN SOUTH AFRICA.”

Using only blue or reddish-orange pastels in his (otherwise) charcoal drawings, Kentridge has given various reasons for depicting water in many of his works. A common answer is the idea of solace. In an interview with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Kentridge talked about the arid state in which he grew up in Johannesburg. The color blue is a gift to the drying landscape, a utopian image of the artist's home. Kentridge has clarified that water does not represent cleansing in a religious sense in his work. Rather, he uses charcoal to unpack the complexities of human dynamics. In *Felix in Exile* (1994), Felix is shown looking at his reflection in the mirror. He

sees the reflection of Nandi, an African woman who draws a landscape of dead African bodies, their bleeding wounds melting into the landscape. As Felix looks at these horrifying drawings, his faucet overflows and fills his entire room with water. In 2018, Cape Town survived a drought through the government initiative, Day Zero. It was an initiative in which all taps were shut off, forcing people to use communal water collection points. In an effort to avoid a complete water shutdown, households reused water in their washing machines, showered over buckets, and limited the number of times they flushed the toilets. While Day Zero seemed like a communal water conservation initiative, it also made apparent the large inequality gap between South Africa's rich and poor residents.



William Kentridge (b. 1955), *Triumphs and Laments*, 2016, Water and organic buildup on stone wall, 19,685 x 32 in. (500 x 10 m).

Townships, the term used for areas constructed during apartheid, segregate the black community from the white community up until today and are some of the poorest areas of Cape Town. While a quarter of Cape Town's citizens live in these areas, they use less than four percent of the city's water. Even prior to Day Zero, township residents collected their water from standpipes and were limited to 25 liters of water per household. Day Zero, an initiative that took place outside the townships, romanticizes the communal efforts of the upper-middle class and, in the process, render the similar survival efforts of townships residents invisible. In *Sheets of Evidence* (2009), a nude woman bends over a large

bucket rinsing clothes. It shows the daily lives of mothers in Cape Town's townships. The recurrent images of faucets, characters taking showers, and flooding all emphasize the importance of water in South Africa. While other famous South African artists, such as Jan Ernst Abraham Volschenk and Jacobus Hendrik Pierneef, painted idyllic South African landscapes reminiscent of the Hudson River School, Kentridge centers his work on water as a resource, an element that is vital to all our survival, yet valued to different degrees due to access.



[CLICK THE IMAGE FOR](#)

William Kentridge (b. 1955), *Felix in Exile*, 1994, Charcoal and pastel on paper, Short animation film.
Source: Youtube. Posted by SFSUCaptions.

INGRID POLLARD: *OCEANS APART*

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A MULTIMEDIA WORK

BY ERIN GALLAGHER



White foam folds and froths, creating a surge of water that swells against the deep, concealed depths of the dark ocean surface. The motion of the wave crashes forward, pulling us under in its tow or propelling us forward to shore. In Ingrid Pollard's series *Oceans Apart* (1989/2012), the undulating tide dominates the top register of a work with a hand-tinted image of the sea, forging a horizon line within the water that bisects the paper. Lower down are two small family photographs, pinned by their corners like an inlaid family album, showing images of children on the beach joyously lying half-in and half-out of the shoreline with their mother. Separating the two segments like severing worlds, handwritten words cut across the two registers of photographs, writing, "My dear daughter now we are / oceans apart...oceans apart...oceans apart." The throwaway colloquialism of letters, "My dear," recalls, not only the language of postcards, but intimate voices that are often overlooked in the official narrative of the Atlantic Ocean and its role in coastal arrivals and departures that tore families "oceans apart."

The sea and shoreline feature prominently in Ingrid Pollard's text-photographic works signaling the ebb and flow of time. In a meditation on temporality and

"IN A MEDITATION ON TEMPORALITY AND MEMORY, THE SERIES *OCEANS APART*, EVOKES THE CULTURAL MEMORY OF CARIBBEAN DIASPORIC MIGRATIONS TO BRITAIN, BOTH FORCED AND CHOSEN."

memory, the series *Oceans Apart*, evokes the cultural memory of Caribbean diasporic migrations to Britain, both forced and chosen.¹ Pollard explores aspects of memories that flow back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean as a transporter of narratives of enforced migrations and journeying. The imagery in the series addresses the complexity of oceanic mobility, mining multiple travel accounts of the historical Black Atlantic. Pollard explores the eastern shores of the Caribbean to the western coasts of England and Europe as important sites of connection and separation in relation to colonial and imperial practices of the Atlantic "triangle trade." Paul Gilroy writes in *The Black Atlantic* (1993): "...ships were the living means by which the points within the Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting of spaces in between the fixed places that they connect."² He links the coasts of "fixed places" as a temporal 'before' that assigns the sea the role of the ever "shifting" 'after' in an exchange between ideas,



Ingrid Pollard (b. 1953), *Oceans Apart*, 1989, Hand-tinted silver prints and photocopies, plus text, 24 x 20 in. (61 x 51 cm), Images published in Ingrid Pollard, *Postcards Home* (London: Autograph, 2004).

commerce, and human bodies. Images of shoreline and sea in Pollard's work highlight the tempo-spatial moment of both arrival and departure.³ The compositional divide creates a further sense of temporal suspension; the repetition of words, "oceans apart," lap like waves in a cyclical rhythm and the silver print separated from images of family alludes to a transition from one life to the next, or even life to death.⁴ Ingrid Pollard's series shows representations of the fluidity of time and space that engage with geography, history, and cartography. It critiques British imperialism, nationalism, and cultural loss of memory around involvement in the forced migration of enslaved people through transatlantic trade.⁵

In the introduction to selected images of *Oceans Apart* (1989), Pollard writes, "The Atlantic Ocean as physical and psychic space forms the basis for this work."⁶ Indeed, water—ocean water—stands as a metaphor for the unstable confluence of race, nationality, and gender. Many scholars have used wateriness as a metaphor for the history of brown-skinned, fluid-bodied experiences surfaced in intercontinental, maritime contact.⁷ Water overflows with memory; Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley argues the need to "plumb the archival ocean materially, as space that churns with physical remnants, dis(re)membered bodies of the Middle Passage," as well as "plumb it metaphorically, as opaque space to convey the drowned, disremembered,

ebbing and flowing histories of violence and healing in the African diaspora."⁸ This is necessary work in developing a queer feminist practice to uncover "submerged histories," particularly those stories of Africans' forced crossings that "traditional historiography cannot validate."⁹ By drawing on water metaphors of African diaspora and archival materials as a queer, unconventional, and imaginative archive of the black Atlantic, *Oceans Apart*, models a "muddying of divisions between documented and intuited, material, and metaphoric, past and present" and offers an alternative to dominant or drowned narratives.¹⁰



1 Lou Smith, *Beyond the Horizon, Out at Sea. A New Day Breaks: Memory and Identity in Ingrid Pollard's The Boy Who Watches Ships Go By* (ENTERTEXT, 2013), 5.

2 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 16.

3 Smith, 12.

4 Smith, 14 and 7.

5 Ibid., 8.

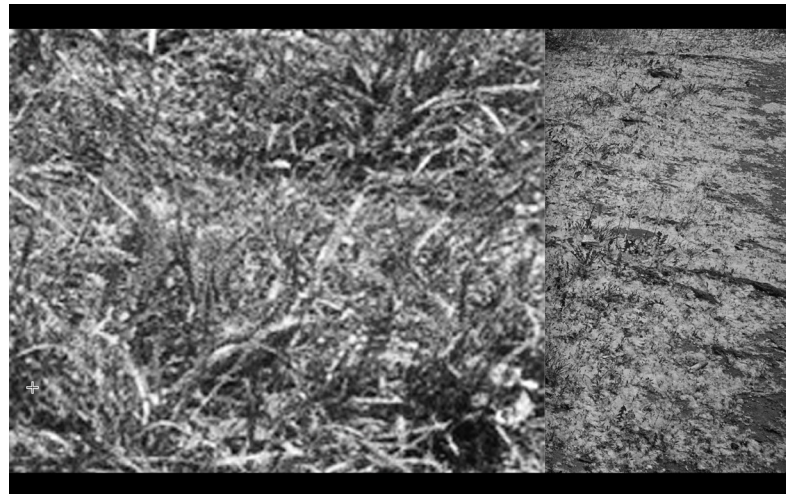
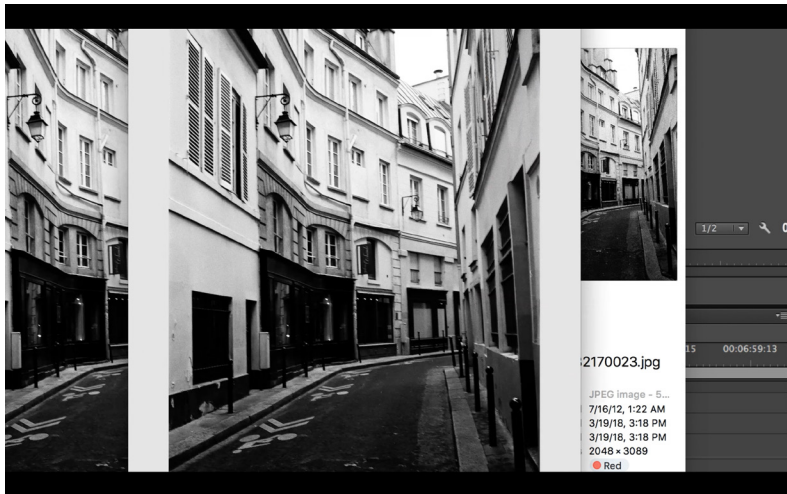
6 Ingrid Pollard, artist website, <http://www.ingridpollard.com/> (accessed 10 December 2019.)

7 Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage* (Duke University Press, 2008), 191.

8 Ibid., 194.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.



CLICK THE IMAGES FOR

Michelle Huynh Chu, stills from *This Is Not Paris But It Is About Paris*, 2018, 35mm film scan/ mini DV/ HD video, 5:12 min.

ARTWORK STATEMENTS

MICHELLE CHU

[Untitled]:

The latin root of the word ‘scan’ suggests looking from a vantage point, particularly when one is measuring rhythm in poetry. When the word was first recorded in the 1540s, its meaning was transformed to capture the sense of looking at something closely. By 1926, the word evolved again and meant ‘looking over something quickly.’ Today, scanning involves both looking over something quickly and searchingly. The modern flatbed scanner follows principles of drawing and ideas of pattern recognition. What are the indeterminate conditions of capturing three-dimensional objects here?

This is Not Paris But It Is About Paris:

In November of 2015, three gunmen entered and began firing into a crowd at the historic La Bataclan theatre in Paris. The few that managed to escape did so through the windows, causing them to cling onto the balconies of buildings in the city’s narrow alley passageways.

The pervasive broadcasting of the event, including images of the incident captured in real time from within the venue, spawned various forms of internal deformations that circle back to image making. The video mines an archive of media captured and saved since 2012. It explores production techniques of nested media and its relationship to forged senses such as hypervigilance, anxiety, and public breakdown that engage with the effects of a 24-hour news-cycle-mediated environment.

JEAN WONG

Brought But and *Grace And* are meditations on the malleability of bodies that derive through physical training and the natural aging process. Part of a larger series of paintings and drawings, these artworks are remnants of a time when I obsessively practiced ballet as I accompanied my grandmother on her slow, unhappy path towards death. As I forced my body to bend towards grace, my grandmother’s humble frame broke under the weight of time. This series is dedicated to my grandmother who passed away shortly after I completed this body of work.

Marginalia—Notes on Kenneth Tay’s “The Sea is All Highway” has been worked into the margins of the *MODA Critical Review*. These doodles are visual manifestations of my note-taking process. When I develop research, I often doodle on a blank piece of paper, interspersing my drawings with quotes from texts I have read. Doodling is how I organize my thoughts, it is how I think my thoughts, and like many of my artistic works, my doodles are visual residues of my brain farts.



HANNAH MORSE

The various memorials that dot Berlin attempt to capture the essence of a time period, to freeze a space's past, to 'never forget.' But, as time moves forward, the growing discrepancy between 'then' and 'now' is felt. As one makes their own personal connections with a space, the location can lose its large-scale historic charge, simply becoming a place like any other; our minds struggle to retain past truths while perceiving present realities.

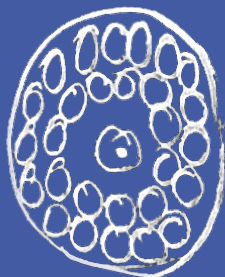
Today's Berliners are challenged to balance their personal relationships to a space with the constant reminder of the space's larger, historical significance. What is it like for the current citizens of Berlin to coexist neutrally with their city's charged past? This project seeks to explore the tensions between the societal, historical level, and the intimate, individual level of a space, aiming to understand the interaction between the two.



CRISTINA BELLÌ

Ederlezi is a folk song of Balkan Romani traditional culture. The song title references the Ederlezi Spring Festival—an annual celebration that welcomes the return of springtime approximately 40 days after the spring equinox.

This set of the same title develops through the sensations of return and discovery. With its progressive structure, the mix works to tap into a fundamental sense of emergence, of blossoming and becoming. The tracks perform as vignettes, laced together by transitions that hold tension and release in dynamic balance; in harmony, they electrify the composition as a fragmentary whole, unfurling as it does beat by beat.



CONGRATULATIONS

TO THE 2019-20 MODA CURATES FELLOWS:
HANNAH MORSE AND ROTANA SHAKER



REFRAMING THE PASSPORT PHOTO

Curated by Hannah Morse

A BOTTOMLESS SILENCE

Curated by Rotana Shaker



Click the image to check out their exhibition on [the Wallach website](#).

MODA

CRITICAL REVIEW

