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1. **View of "The Boat Is Leaking. The Captain Lied.," 2017,** Fondazione Prada, Venice. Floor: Anna Viebrock, *Runners*, 2009. Walls: Anna Viebrock, *Four Doors*, 2017. Center: Alexander Kluge, *Die sanfte Schminke des Lichts* (The Soft Makeup of Lighting), 2007. Photo: Delfino Sisto Legnani and Marco Cappelletti. 2. **Jean Vigo, *L'Atalante*, 1934,** 35 mm, black-and-white, sound, 89 minutes. Jean (Jean Dasté). 4. **Valeska Grisebach, *Western*, 2017,** HD video, color, sound, 119 minutes. Meinhard (Meinhard Neumann). 6. **Agnès Varda and JR, *Faces Places*, 2017,** HD video, color, sound, 89 minutes. 8. **Raymond Depardon, *12 Jours* (12 Days), 2017,** 4K video, color, sound, 87 minutes.

James Quandt

JAMES QUANDT, SENIOR PROGRAMMER AT TIFF CINEMATHEQUE IN TORONTO, IS THE EDITOR OF *APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL* (AUSTRIAN FILM MUSEUM, 2009) AND *ROBERT BRESSON (REVISED)* (INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2012).

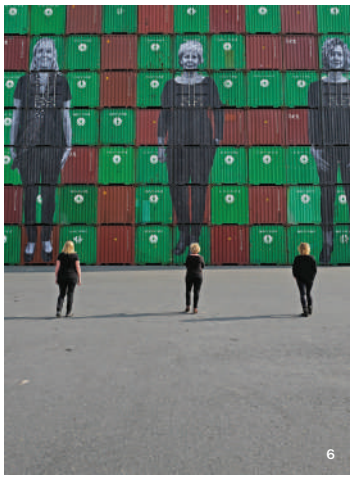
1 **"THE BOAT IS LEAKING. THE CAPTAIN LIED."** **(Fondazione Prada, Venice)** This exhibition, curated by Udo Kittelmann, ingeniously interlaced work by Thomas Demand, Anna Viebrock, and German director Alexander Kluge, offering a bracing reminder of the latter's wit, compassion, political acumen, and formal audacity.

2 **JEAN VIGO (Il Cinema Ritrovato, Bologna, Italy)** The restoration of Vigo's tragically abbreviated oeuvre, including a reference print of *L'Atalante* (1934), proved the high point of this year's Il Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna, though his silent short *À propos de Nice* (1930), a film stubbornly resistant to musical accompaniment, was regrettably live scored.

2

3 ***ZAMA*** **(Lucrecia Martel)** Martel transforms Antonio di Benedetto's slim, existential novel of stanched desire and deferred prospects into a fiercely elliptical and political film. The sound design alone is a work of genius.

4 ***WESTERN*** **(Valeska Grisebach)** This complex triple portrait—of a dusty, sun-baked Bulgarian village; of a company of German laborers who arrive to work on its power plant; and of a taciturn, middle-aged loner among the foreigners—confirms Grisebach's status as a burgeoning auteur of the so-called Berlin School.



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5 ***THE NOTHING FACTORY*** **(Pedro Pinho)** Pinho touches on everything from political polemics reminiscent of Godard's Dziga Vertov period to Jacques Demy–like industrial dance routines in his three-hour radical labor film set in austerity-hobbled Portugal.

6 ***FACES PLACES*** **(Agnès Varda and JR)** Varda's poignant cross-country excursion with photographer JR turns a road movie into an ambulatory essay—on evanescence, resistance, work, and, mostly, the traps of memory.

7 ***CLOSENESS*** **(Kantemir Balagov)** The debut feature of the year, Balagov's harrowing true account of a Jewish family's struggle to pay the ransom for their kidnapped son in Russia's North Caucasus in 1998 exhibits formidable maturity and tonal control.

8 ***12 JOURS*** **(Raymond Depardon)** Ultra-rigorous French documentarian Depardon unwisely interpolates three prettifying sequences scored by the unavoidable Alexandre Desplat into his otherwise severely parametric and moving portrait of involuntarily hospitalized patients arguing for their release before a judge.

9 ***CANIBA*** **(Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor)** The deliquescing flesh of Bacon's paintings manifests in the claustral close-ups and extreme rack-focusing in Paravel and Castaing-Taylor's mesmerizing documentary about the cannibal Issei Sagawa and his ailing brother.

10 ***EX LIBRIS: THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY*** **(Frederick Wiseman)** Unlike Wiseman's recent marathons, his portrait of a library system that appears increasingly more non than ex libris warrants its epic length. □

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The New York Times | 10 dicembre 2017

ART & DESIGN

The Best Art of 2017

By ROBERTA SMITH, HOLLAND COTTER and JASON FARAGO DEC. 6, 2017

The most gripping and engaging art of the year included wild actions, unusual wearables and unexpected materials (like chocolate).

Clockwise from top left: 2017 Estate of Ad Reinhardt/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London; Ryan McNamara; Joshua Bright for The New York Times; Delfino Sisto Legnani and Marco Cappelletti, Fondazione Prada; Mark Wickens for The New York Times; Estate of Belkis Ayón, via Landau Traveling Exhibitions

The art critics of The New York Times Roberta Smith, Holland Cotter and Jason Farago share their picks for the best art of the year.

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/arts/design/the-best-art-of-2017.html

Roberta Smith

An installation view of “Ad Reinhardt: Blue Paintings,” a standout show at the David Zwirner Gallery in New York. Credit2017 Estate of Ad Reinhardt/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London

1. **BEST GALLERY SHOW I REGRETTABLY DID NOT REVIEW** “Ad Reinhardt: Blue Paintings” at the David Zwirner Gallery, which brought together 28 luminous abstract paintings from this artist’s early-1950s “blue period” — the most ever. With blue fields layered with levitating blocks, or intersecting beams of contrasting blues and sometimes greens or purples, these immersive paintings evoked geometric versions of Monet’s “Water Lilies.” Their joyfulness stood in striking contrast to Reinhardt’s relatively daunting if better-known Black Paintings, which suddenly seem a little pretentious.

Florian Troebinger performing in the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija’s frame-by-frame re-creation of a Rainer Werner Fassbinder film, at Gavin Brown’s Enterprise. CreditGavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome

2. **ANOTHER ONE** At Gavin Brown’s Enterprise in Harlem, Rirkrit Tiravanija continued his Johnsian devotion to inventing nothing with a masterpiece: a loving and infinitely touching frame-by-frame re-creation of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s 1974 film “Ali: Fear Eats the Soul.” The story centers on Emmi, a widowed German cleaning woman, and Ali, a much younger Moroccan migrant worker, whose unlikely romance and marriage elicit every species of bigotry from those around them. The Tiravanija version has an exquisite corpse of a title: “‘skip the bruising of the eskimos to the exquisite words’ vs. ‘if I give you a penny you can give me a pair of scissors.’” It was an in-house job, shot in the gallery in four weeks with a cast consisting almost entirely of artists, friends and employees, on sets that then became part of the exhibition. The stiffness of the amateur acting gave the proceedings an odd clarity, and the random casting unsettled stereotypes, as did giving the leading female roles to men: The Swedish artist Karl Holmqvist played Emmi; Florian Troebinger, the film’s only professional actor, portrayed Barbara, the blond Germanic bar

owner and Ali's sometime lover. In keeping with Mr. Tiravanija's relational-aesthetics pieces involving the serving of free food, Mr. Troebinger tended the bar throughout the show. As Ali, Hamid Amini, who has worked with this artist on various projects, gave the remake its center of gravity as well as a touch of Hollywood dreamboat.

3. **BEST FIRST IMPRESSION** "War and Pieced: The Annette Gero Collection of Quilts From Military Fabric" at the American Folk Art Museum and its furnace blast of geometric patterns, predominantly in the reds, blacks and yellows of the military fabrics. On view through Jan. 7, it is some of the best abstract art you'll see this season.
4. **BEST SHOW ABOUT FASHION AS ART (AND EXHIBITION DESIGN AS ARCHITECTURE)** The ravishing "Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between," from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. It inhabited a small village of structures, with some 120 quasi-wearable sculptural ensembles in an array of colors and innovative textiles, disrupting notions of style and gender, past and present, and continually delivering fresh ideas about form, process and meaning.

Norma Kamali's "Sleeping Bag Coat" (1980-89), in the show "Items: Is Fashion Modern?" at the Museum of Modern Art.CreditMark Wickens for The New York Times

5. **BEST SHOW ABOUT FASHION AS JUST GETTING DRESSED**"Items: Is Fashion Modern?" at the Museum of Modern Art presented a kind of canon of global dress in the postwar period, ranging from biker jackets to burkinis, from little black dresses to saris. It is an eye-opening examination of practicality, religious belief, clubbishness and personal identity played out in mostly familiar garments from around the world.

India Salvor Menuez in a reinvention of commedia dell'arte by Ryan McNamara and John Zorn, presented at the Guggenheim Museum.CreditRyan McNamara

6. **MOST SITE-SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE** The updated commedia dell'arte concocted by the artist-choreographer Ryan McNamara in collaboration with the composer John Zorn was part of the Works &Process series at the Guggenheim Museum. In five segments, starting with "Harlequin," eight dancers used all the available space and numerous design details of Frank Lloyd Wright's small, eccentric and circular (of course) auditorium. Whatever nooks and crannies they missed were usually occupied by the different groups of musicians, including a jazz trio and an a cappella quartet performing Mr. Zorn's compositions. The auditorium became a kind of theater in the round, whose every detail was dazzlingly articulated. The event also reflected Mr. McNamara's increasingly impressive transition from performance art to choreography.

7. **SECOND-BIGGEST WASTE OF MONEY AFTER THE LEONARDO AUCTION** "Hansel and Gretel," one of the year's more expensive works of installation art, involving the latest in high-tech surveillance technology reiterated as fun-house spectacle. It was cooked up by the Chinese activist artist Ai Weiwei and the architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron and staged at the Park Avenue Armory. They all should have known better.

8. **BEST WHITNEY BIENNIAL IN RECENT MEMORY** The 2017 version, for its diversity, its accessibility and even for the storms it ignited.

9. **SOME OF THE BEST RECENT SIGNS THAT THE FUTURE IS FEMALE** New York's museums had so many impressive monographic shows of the work of modern women, it's almost feeling normal: Florine Stettheimer at the Jewish Museum; Louise Lawler at the Museum of Modern Art; Marisa Merz and Lygia Pape at the Met Breuer; Carol Rama and Kaari Upson at the New Museum; Laura Owens at the WhitneyMuseum of American Art (through Feb. 4); Patty Chang at the Queens Museum (through Feb. 18); Judy Chicago at the Brooklyn Museum (through March 4); and Carolee Schneemann and Cathy Wilkes at MoMA/PS1 (through March 11).

10. **BEST EXHIBITION SCHEDULE AT A MUSEUM IN UPHEAVAL** The Met's, which included shows of camera-phone images exchanged by 12 pairs of artists; the nearly abstract etchings of the 17th-century Dutch artist Hercules Segers; Marsden Hartley's Maine paintings; an astounding survey of Japanese bamboo art and basketry (through Feb. 4); and, of course, the recently opened shows of David Hockney's paintings (through Feb. 25) and Michelangelo's drawings. That last exhibition includes a veritable show-within-a-show of sheets by his teacher Domenico Ghirlandaio (through Feb. 12).

11. **GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN** Linda Nochlin, Glenn O'Brien, Jack Tilton, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Vito Acconci, A. R. Penck, Trisha Brown, James Rosenquist, Holly Block, George Braziller, Barkley L. Hendricks, Jannis Kounellis, Saloua Raouda Choucair, Dore Ashton, Ousmane Sow, Karl Katz, John Ashbery, Edit DeAk, Julian Stanczak, Beau Dick, James S. Ackerman, Richard Benson and Howard Hodgkin.

Holland Cotter
Bad-dream Washington politics. White nationalism. Sexual predation. Add the spectacle of a flatulent art market raking in endless cash, and 2017 feels like a good year to say goodbye to. But there were positive things. The following meant the most to me:

The Women's March in Washington on Jan. 21, a protest that was itself a form of political performance art. Credit Nina Westervelt

1. **THE MARCH** If art can be defined as form shaped by the pressure of ideas, beliefs and emotions, the Women's March last Jan. 21, the day after the inauguration of President Trump, might be seen as the largest work of political performance art ever. Originating as a gesture of mass revulsion, it was deeply felt, smartly choreographed, memorably costumed ("pussy hats") and emphatically scripted ("Keep your hands off my body"). It continues today on social media (#MeToo), with no end to anger and energy in sight.

Martha Araújo in her piece "Hábito/Habitante (Habit/Inhabitant)," 1985, part of the show "Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985," at the Hammer Museum. CreditMartha Araújo

2. **RADICALS** Not known for mounting the barricades, museums did so anyway with a handful of large but incisive group shows. As part of "Pacific Standard Time" in Los Angeles, the Hammer Museum has organized "Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985," in which every one of the 116 participants opens a picture window on an uncharted history (through Dec. 31).

3. **RADICALS II** At the Brooklyn Museum in April, a smaller exhibition, "We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85," organized by the museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, came with work by more than 40 artist-activists and a dynamite sourcebook-style catalog. (The show is now at the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, through Jan. 14.)

4. **BEING THERE** "Third Space," at the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama, is technically an installation of contemporary art from the collection. But it's more than that: It's at least partly a nuanced look at what it means to be black in America, and specifically in the South. Some of the artists (Kerry James Marshall, Lonnie Holley) are Birmingham natives. At least one work, Dawoud Bey's "Birmingham Project," from 2013, is directly related to the city: It commemorates the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist church by white supremacists, in which four young girls were killed. The show would be moving in any setting, but nowhere else would it feel the way it does in this museum, just a few blocks away from where the church still stands.

5. **JUST SAY NO** There have been repeated calls for museums — beginning with the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis in 2016, and continuing with the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Walker Art Center and others this year — to censor, even destroy, offending works of contemporary art. In an interesting culture-wars shift, many of the calls have come from the political left. These calls should be weighed on a case-by-case basis. Bottom line: Protest is good, healthy; do it. Censorship of art, particularly in the form of destruction, is never good. Don't do it.

6. **DOCUMENTA** Ambitiously diffuse, the 2017 edition of this every-five-years art show was set in two very different places: Kassel, Germany — its traditional home — and Athens. It took off in more thematic directions than any one show could contain, and yet, in its overall thrust — anti-fascist and pro-immigrant — it was fully, and often affectingly, of its moment. The show drew scathing reviews from the German press for being too political, and was finally accused of gross overspending. Had Documenta 14 been lighter, brighter and righter, not to mention a box-office hit,

would its budgetary overdraw have been grounds for disgrace? My guess is, no.

"La Cena" ("The Supper"), from 1991, one of the startling prints in El Museo del Barrio's retrospective of the Cuban artist Belkis Ayón. CreditEstate of Belkis Ayón, via Landau Traveling Exhibitions

7. **BELKIS AYÓN** The season had several outstanding solo shows. The unforgettable retrospective of the Cuban artist Belkis Ayón (1967-99) at El Museo del Barrio last summer was one. In her short career, Ms. Ayón developed a virtuoso style of monumental printmaking and took as her subject myths of the Afro-Cuban fraternal society called Abakuá. Her immersion in spiritual matter was complete. The prints, in shades of black, white and gray, look self-illuminated. They're like lightning flashes in darkness.

8. **THURAYA AL-BAQSAMI** In the 1970s and '80s, the paintings and prints of this Kuwaiti artist were dreamlike accounts of female experience in the post-colonial Middle East. In 1990, when Iraq invaded her homeland, the work became an anguished, diaristic record of the horrors unfolding under occupation. The arc of Ms. Baqsami's career is fully encompassed in a dizzying retrospective — organized by her daughter, the artist and filmmaker Monira al-Qadiri — that fills four floors of the remarkable Sharjah Art Museum in the United Arab Emirates (through Dec. 16).

A still from Barbara Hammer's 1978 film "Double Strength," part of "Evidentiary Bodies," a show of her work at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay & Lesbian Art. CreditBarbara Hammer and KOW, Berlin

9. **BARBARA HAMMER** I've admired this trailblazing artist's exultantly erotic "dyke tactic" films, as she calls them, for years, without knowing the rest of her output. A textured survey, "Barbara Hammer: Evidentiary Bodies," at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art in SoHo (through Jan. 28) finally fills in the blanks with drawings, paintings, photographs, sculptures and installations. Now 78, Ms. Hammer prefers the term "actionary" to "visionary" in describing the work of other queer artists she has documented and promoted over the decades. On the basis of this show, I'd say both terms apply to her.

10. **LASTING IMPRESSIONS** Here are three 2017 events still strong in my memory: "Detroit After Dark," at the Detroit Institute of Arts, a show of nocturnal photographs from the museum's holdings, has stayed with me like a slow tune. The after-hours tour opened with a Robert Frank shot from the 1950s, when the city was still a powerhouse; wound through gradually dimming streets; stopped at jazz clubs; lingered in punk and hip-hop spots. A 2016 view by Dave Jordano of the hulking Michigan Train Depot, ablaze with brand-new, gentrifying lights, brought a moody song to an inconclusive end: not upbeat, not downbeat, something else.

At the Philadelphia Museum of Art last winter, the Mumbai-based artist Jitish Kallat had an

extraordinary installation called “Covering Letter.” In it, a projected video image of a letter written by Mohandas Gandhi to Adolf Hitler just weeks before the start of World War II scrolled slowly down a screen made of billowing artificial fog. Gandhi, who believed in the political efficacy of offering friendship, tries to persuade the Nazi leader to change his destructive course. But aggression doesn’t listen; over and over we watched Gandhi’s words descend into oblivion.
In November, when “Pacific Standard Time” opened, I went on a press tour that the Chicana artist Judith F. Baca led of “The Great Wall of Los Angeles,” a huge mural that she initiated in 1976 with the help of 80 young people referred by the city’s criminal justice department. Done on the wall of a drainage canal, the painting illustrates the history of California as seen through immigrant eyes, with particular attention paid to civil rights advances and abuses. Over the decades, with money tight, progress on the mural has been sporadic; the history runs only through the 1950s, though painting is soon to begin again. Even incomplete, it’s a great American work. Walking it with Ms. Baca was one of the season’s peak moments. Because, in a year when the combination of “great” and “America” sounded incompatible and corrupt to me, it was a walk with a different history, and a history I feel I want to live.

Jason Farago

This was a year of outrage: outrage at injustices beyond the art world, but too often misdirected inward. Disputes over aesthetics and politics frequently devolved — thanks to the accelerant of social media — into shaming and outright censoriousness. Building a better future, together, is going to be arduous work that will require the intelligence, the ambition, and, above all, the seriousness shown by exhibitions like these.

Foreground, Cedrick Tamasala’s “How My Grandfather Survived” (2015), along with other sculptures created by Congolese artists and cast in chocolate, at the SculptureCenter in Queens. CreditJoshua Bright for The New York Times

1. **CERCLE D’ART DES TRAVAILLEURS DE PLANTATION CONGOLAISE** As matters of identity and inequality roiled so many American museums, the small, vital SculptureCenter in Queens mounted a resounding defense of both cross-cultural partnership and moral sincerity. The sculptors of this collective work on a rural Congolese cacao plantation; their solid, clever statues are 3-D-scanned by a Dutch team, cast in chocolate in Europe and then shown and sold in galleries they will never be able to see. The museum’s prestige helps these sculptures obtain high prices, which has made a concrete improvement to these artists’ lives, but the works’ true value, both economically and culturally, as chocolate and as art, depends on global disparities that no exhibition can remedy. This was the most challenging show of the year, and proudly “problematic,” but that was the point: You need to be fearless, and run right into the swamp of possible misunderstanding, to have any hope of making a difference.

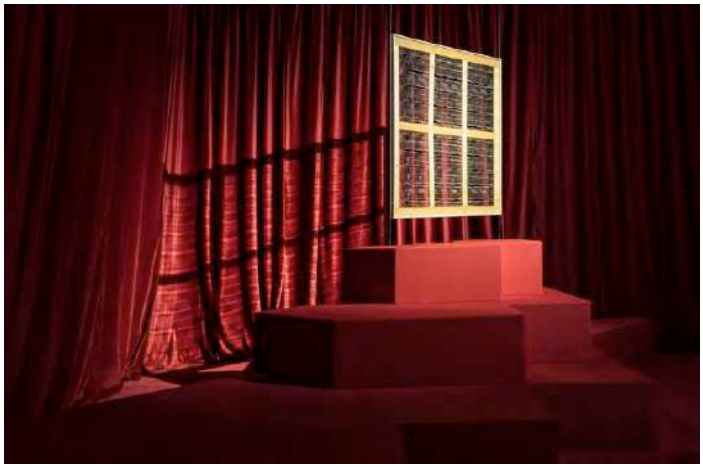
2. **‘GAUGUIN: ARTIST AS ALCHEMIST’** The paintings were here and accounted for, but it was the ceramics, wobbly and wild, that stole the show in this profound rewriting of Post-Impressionism at the Art Institute of Chicago. This vibrant exhibition gave us a new Gauguin, more complicated and more omnivorous than the South Seas stereotype. It was also a paragon of how to engage with the work of great artists whose personal behaviors make us bridle: unflappably, with the sharpest tools.

Works by Kaari Upson on display in the Whitney Biennial, including, foreground, “In Search of the Perfect Double II” (2016). CreditPhilip Greenberg for The New York Times

3. **KAARI UPSON** At 45, this intrepid Californian is looking more and more like the most psychologically incisive artist of her generation. Her uncanny exhibition at the New Museum, replete with casts of mattresses and more than a hundred mannequins of her mother, arrayed on the shelves Costco uses, plunged deep into the intertwined American obsessions with self-improvement and home improvement. Ms. Upson also made one of the strongest contributions to this year’s Whitney Biennial: urethane casts of sectional sofas from Las Vegas tract houses, which appeared less like furniture than like misshaped human bodies.

“Virgin of Sorrows (La Virgen de los Dolores),” circa 1750, attributed to Nicolás Enríquez and featured in “Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici,” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.CreditMuseum Associates/LACMA — Fomento Cultural Banamex, A.C., by Francisco Kochen

4. **‘PACIFIC STANDARD TIME’: THE HISTORICAL SIDE**Contemporary art accounts for the bulk of the Latin American exhibitions now filling Los Angeles, but two showcases of older work dazzle. “Golden Kingdoms,” at the Getty Center through Jan. 28, is a bona fide blockbuster of pre-Columbian bling; “Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici,” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art through March 18, assembles an exhilarating bounty of altarpieces and portraiture. Both tour to the Met next year.



An installation view from the show about Italian television in the 1970s that the artist Francesco Vezzoli organized at the Fondazione Prada in Milan. CreditDelfino Sisto Legnani and Marco Cappelletti, Fondazione Prada

5. **MILAN'S FERTILE FOUNDATIONS** This year's Venice Biennale was a washout, but westward, two private museums scored winners. At the Fondazione Prada, the impish artist Francesco Vezzoli curated an ingenious history of Italian public television of the 1970s, mixing shimmying showgirls with footage of feminist protests and the murder of a prime minister. And the massive HangarBicocca presented a devastating exhibition of the Polish polymath Mirosław Bałka, whose whirring fans, hallways slicked with soap, and pumps of coal-black water circled around, but never disclosed, the horrors of the Holocaust.

6. **PARIS: THE LIVING EARTH** While the climate accord signed in Paris was punctured this year, the city's art world went green. At the Grand Palais, the lush exhibition "Jardins" gathered 500 years of garden designs, herbariums, landscaping tools and botanical art by Delacroix, Klee, Matisse and Gerhard Richter; the garden, it proposed, was the site where nature and culture marry. And at the Palais de Tokyo, Camille Henrot's brilliantly assured midcareer retrospective, through Jan. 7, includes not just a landmark new film, shot partly in the island nation of Tonga, but also ikebana arrangements of dried flowers and scrap metal.

7. **'FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE AND THE BIRTH OF IMPRESSIONISM'**In a strong year for the National Gallery of Art, the standout show was this nearly complete summation of the life of a realist painter who shared a studio with Monet and was on his way to greatness when he died, at 28, in the Franco-Prussian War. Bazille brought a bracing objectivity to scenes of bathers, parties and his fellow artists, and it is wrenching to think of what he did not paint.

8. **'ART AND CHINA AFTER 1989'** The disgraceful threats of violencethat led to the censorship of Huang Yong Ping, Xu Bing, and the couple Sun Yuan and Peng Yu at the Guggenheim Museum further reaffirmed that the world's two most powerful nations can barely make sense of each other. There is, though, no separating the United States and China going forward — and we need exhibitions as engaged as this one (through Jan. 7) to stake a claim for mutual recognition.

9. **'ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER: WORK/TRAVAIL/ARBEID'** This Belgian choreographer's five-day "exhibition" in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art was a model of how to translate dance from the set format of a theater to the open spaces and schedules of a museum. It was also an unabashed showcase of practice and expertise — watch them stick every landing, in sync, hour after hour — in an art world not usually bothered about skill.

10. **'THE SQUARE'** In Ruben Östlund's Palme d'Or-winning satire — perhaps the first movie to depict the world of contemporary art with true insight — a Swedish curator imagines that an exhibition can improve society, and ends up making everything worse. The inane art-speak, the awkward fund-raisers, the drinking, the Teslas: This brutal indictment of the liberal culture sector ridiculed me and everyone I know, and it hurt so good.

The Art Newspaper | 12-12-2017

From VR masterpieces to PR disasters: 2017's ups and downs

The Art Newspaper team assesses the art world's fortunes in a turbulent year

ANNA BRADY, AIMEE DAWSON, MELANIE GERLIS, BEN LUKE, HANNAH MCGIVERN, JULIA MICHALSKA, ANNY SHAW and VICTORIA STAPLEY-BROWN

12th December 2017 16:04 GMT

Alejandro González Iñárritu worked with migrants and refugees to understand the trauma involved in crossing the border Emmanuel Lubekzi

GOOD YEAR

Virtual reality

Alejandro Iñárritu's virtual reality (VR) installation Carne y Arena, arguably the first VR masterpiece, recreated the experience of refugees crossing the Mexico-US border in exhibitions in Milan

and Los Angeles, earning the director a special Oscar. Other notable examples were Zaha Hadid's immersive VR worlds at London's Serpentine Gallery and Ed Fornieles's VR sex experience at Carlos/Ishikawa, also in London. Expect more: HTC's new Vive Arts programme encourages museums to take up the medium.

Cyber criminals

Galleries lost millions as hackers targeted their poorly protected email accounts and rudimentary payment systems. In a widespread scam, criminals hijacked email conversations, intercepting invoices sent to clients and changing payment details to their own account. After clients unwittingly paid the hacker, galleries were left unpaid with both sides unable to recoup their money.

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Basquiat became the unlikely addition to the elite nine-figure club in May when his Untitled (1982) sold at Sotheby's for $110.5m. Buyer Yusaku Maezawa broke the artist's previous auction record of $57.3m of just one year earlier. The artist's first major UK show also opened to acclaim at the Barbican, London (until 28 January).

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

The MCA Chicago had quite the festive 50th anniversary. It finished a $16m building-wide revamp (with a Chris Ofili-designed restaurant); completed an $80m capital campaign; jointly won the inaugural Sotheby's museum prize; mounted its best-attended exhibition to date (a Takashi Murakami retrospective); and launched an initiative to support Middle Eastern, South Asian, African and Latin American artists.

Banksy

The Bristolian street artist's image of a girl watching her heart-shaped balloon float away was crowned the UK's favourite work

of art in 2017, toppling Constable's The Haywain (1821). Proving that it is an actual hotel as well as a gallery space, Banksy's Walled Off Hotel in the Palestinian territories was voted Art Hotel of the Year. And new Banksys were inevitably noteworthy: a Brexit-inspired mural appeared in Dover in May and two Basquiat homages marked the opening of the late US artist's exhibition at London's Barbican in September.

Anne Imhof

This young artist's star has been rising ever since she won Germany's Preis der Nationalgalerie in 2015. And in 2017 the prizes have continued to roll in as she nabbed the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale and the Absolut Art Award. She will use the €100,000 prize money from the latter to create her first public work—in Death Valley—next year.

African art

The massive, privately funded Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa opened its doors in Cape Town with a mission to spotlight artists from Africa and its diaspora. In the trade, Sotheby's launched its first auction of Modern and contemporary African art and the 1:54 fair announced Marrakech as its third location, in February 2018.

BAD YEAR

Jeff Koons

One of the world's richest artists reportedly downsized his New York studio in June after slow sales of the Gazing Ball paintings. In Paris, he lost a plagiarism lawsuit and drew criticism for his gift of a Bouquet of Tulips sculpture—still caught in bureaucratic delays—dedicated to victims of the 2015 terrorist attacks.

Single-venue galleries

"Support your local galleries simply by going," urged the New York critic Jerry Saltz on Instagram in early 2017. But misery for

the middle market showed little sign of abating, with gallery closures around the world including Laura Bartlett (London); Andrea Rosen (New York); Freymond-Guth (Zurich) and Leo Xu (Shanghai).

Beatrix Ruf

The German-born super-curator resigned from the Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam just as she was to unveil the new hang there, following detailed investigations by a Dutch newspaper into her art-advisory activities and remunerations beyond the museum. The Stedelijk has opened two independent investigations into the matter; Ruf has claimed that she was transparent about her private work.

Confederate monuments

A statue of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee prompted the grim spectacle of white nationalists descending on Charlottesville, Virginia in August. A lawsuit still hangs over that monument, but since then Confederate-era statues have been removed in Baltimore, Gainesville and Austin, among other cities, with many more voting to do the same. Some are calling for the statues to be housed in museums, but others point out that most are terrible quality anyway.

Adam Szymczyk

It was a far from triumphant year for the Documenta director, who too often found himself on the defensive, whether over accusations of ignoring the local scene in Athens, or dealing with the expected €5.4m deficit that Documenta's expansion beyond Kassel left in its finances. Most significantly, critics' reaction to the show itself was largely lukewarm.

Dana Schutz

The US artist was accused of cultural appropriation when her painting Open Casket (2016) went on display at the Whitney Biennial. The work, based on a photograph of the badly beaten

body of the African-American teenager Emmett Till, was temporarily pulled due to a water leak but was later reinstalled. Later, Schutz's exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston also attracted criticism, even though the incendiary painting was not included.

Sexual harassment (at last)

The sexual assault allegations made against the film producer Harvey Weinstein and the ensuing social media explosion of #MeToo revealed the magnitude of the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace. Its repercussions were felt in the art world, too, with Knight Landesman, the publisher of Artforum magazine, and Benjamin Genocchio, the former editor of Artnet, both being accused of sexual harassment. Genocchio was subsequently relieved of his position as the director of the Armory Show.

Appeared in The Art Newspaper, 296 December 2017

theguardian

Adrian Searle's top 10 art shows of 2017

Chris Ofili stitched up Eden, Rodney Graham went stilt-walking, Picasso biked to the bullfight and Rachel Whiteread poured herself a hot water bottle. But the year belonged to the unsettling, eruptive visions of Wolfgang Tillmans

Adrian Searle

Tuesday 12 December 2017 18.40 GMT

10. Picasso: Minotaurs and Matadors
Gagosian, London

Minotaure dans une barque sauvant une femme, March 1937 (Paris) Photograph: Eric Baudouin/© 2017 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Gagosian

Picasso the man, the matador, the bull and the minotaur were interchangeable presences in a show beginning with a tiny work from 1889, and ending with furious and absurd matadors and toreros painted in 1970. The core of the exhibition focused on works produced during the 1930s and 40s. Picasso's 1942 head of a bull made from a bicycle seat with handlebars for horns, lumpen blokes on the beach, a sculpted faun with a body smaller than his erection - olé!

9. Rachel Whiteread
Tate Britain, London

Hot water bottles, beds, the spaces under chairs, the imprints of doors, windows and stairwells: Whiteread remakes the spaces within and around objects and places, whole rooms and entire buildings. Filling the Duveen sculpture court, and a suite of galleries opened up into one huge room, Whiteread's show is filled with absences and solidified spaces, surfaces and volumes. The surprise is how various it all is, the constant shift of density and mass, physicality and presence. Until 21 January

8. Chris Ofili: Weaving Magic
National Gallery, London

Chris Ofili's tapestry The Caged Bird's Song at his Weaving Magic exhibition. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

Ofili turned a room at the National Gallery into an idyll. A nightclub mural of curvaceous, moustached floozies paraded and lounged around the walls in pearly grey light. The centrepiece was a large tapestry triptych, an impossible Eden before the fall. Ghanaian Italian footballer Mario Balotelli poured the drinks for a loving couple on the beach. Silent music played. This was a makeshift myth set in the tropics, liquid, languorous and lush, as vivid as a Technicolor musical.

7. Arthur Jafa: Love is the Message, the Message is Death
Store Studios, London

Arthur Jafa's screened installation Love is the Message, the Message is Death, 2016. Photograph: Hugo Glendinning/Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome

Perched on the roof of a brutalist office block, with Kanye West's Ultralight Beam as its thundering and ecstatic soundtrack, Jafa's exhibition sucked all the energy out of the show on the floors below. America's iniquities, the beatings and riots, the songs and shouts of individuals and collective lives were given voice in this fierce and fractured, marvellously edited mix of found footage. A history lesson you could dance to.

6. The Boat is Leaking. The Captain Lied
Fondazione Prada, Venice

This has haunted me for months. Three hours was not enough in this mad melange of film, abandoned theatre sets, city corners, a church. There were control panels, there were ruins. A world out of sync, this collaboration - between Alexander Kluge, pioneer of postwar new German cinema, artist Thomas Demand, set and costume designer Anna Viebrock and curator Ugo Kittelmann - was a wonderfully nightmarish fiction. This is what Prada's money and extreme talent can do.

5. Anne Imhof: Faust
German Pavilion, Venice Biennale

Actors perform in Faust by Anne Imhof. Photograph: Vincenzo Pinto/AFP/Getty Images

Imhof created a disquieting space, for her collaborators and audience alike. I haven't a clue what this all meant - with the patrolling, fenced dogs outside, the moments of nudity and hubbub, suppressed violence and fashion posing. Small fires were lit, people were sluiced down, guitars played, people crawled about under the raised glass floor and climbed the walls. Going back every day for a week, I never saw the same thing twice.

4. America After the Fall
Royal Academy, London

Death on the Ridge Road, 1935 by Grant Wood Photograph: Collection of Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts, Gift of Cole Porter, 47.1.3

Grant Wood's American Gothic presided over this brilliant look at American painting from the Wall Street crash to the second world war. Enormous variety, from modernist abstraction to rural, regional romanticism, Harlem nights, gay cruising, dance marathons, lowering factories and railyards, sharecroppers in the field: it was all there. So too were Jackson Pollock and Philip Guston, painting in the wings. Meanwhile, Edward Hopper's cinema usherette waits, for everything to be over.

3. Rodney Graham: That's Not Me
Baltic Gateshead

The Gifted Amateur, Nov. 10th, 1962 (2007) by Rodney Graham Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

The Vancouver-based trickster's art filled the Baltic with images and films, as well as his own laconic music (he's an accomplished singer and musician). But most of all, he filled the place with images of himself, as stoical lighthouse keeper, 1960s abstract painter, a camera-shop owner, and passer-by on the street. Canoeist, stilt-walking plasterer, sous chef, a dupe in a wild west bar, Graham the artist is the best guise of all.

Madame Cézanne in a Yellow Chair 1888-90 Photograph: The Art Institute of Chicago

2. Cézanne Portraits
National Portrait Gallery, London

Cézanne wasn't all about the landscape, as this tough-minded exhibition shows. People in their surroundings, ordinary as rural life; people and the shapes they made, in the folds of their clothes and in the spaces on the canvas. Whoever Cézanne was painting - his wife at her sewing, his uncle in a succession of guises, a taciturn peasant, himself at work or in a bowler hat - we watch him thinking, a painting being made.

1. Wolfgang Tillmans
Tate Modern, London

A whole world unravelled, room after room, in this complex exhibition. Our hunger for images is insatiable and Tillmans gave us encounters with people, things, places, views, close-ups, emergencies, even the deconstructed machinery of photography itself. The exhibition dared to deal with beauty and the everyday, as well as the whole gamut of photographic manners - from street photography to formal portraiture, land and sky and seascape, the eroticism of the body and a dead colour printer disembowelled on the studio floor.

It was an exhibition punctuated by interruptions and eruptions: a gigantic pair of testicles dangled; Tillmans' own reflection looked back, blurrily and fractured, in a scarred metal mirror in Reading Gaol; a helicopter searchlight scoured the sea for survivors. Story after story unfolded, each one provoked by the connections we make as we look. Go back a second time, and the stories we tell ourselves are different.

Tillmans' exhibition was much more than a parade of passing images or a portfolio of themes unpacked. Handled with a great sense of pace and drama, scale and focus, distance and proximity, the artist paced our journey through 14 rooms. One space, filled with tables, presented his truth study centre as a kind of tabletop scrapbook of archived articles and images. It felt like an emergency room for fake news.

In another, blue room, we could rest and even dance. In a third, we watched a video of Tillmans doing a boxer's feinting dance before a mark on the wall while, on a second screen, his shadow danced across a wall in Tehran. Casting shadows and bringing things into the light, Tillmans displays an endless curiosity and purpose, a sense of responsibility and a poetic, playfulness and desire. My show of the year.

astro crusto, a, 2012. Photograph: © Wolfgang Tillmans

Topics

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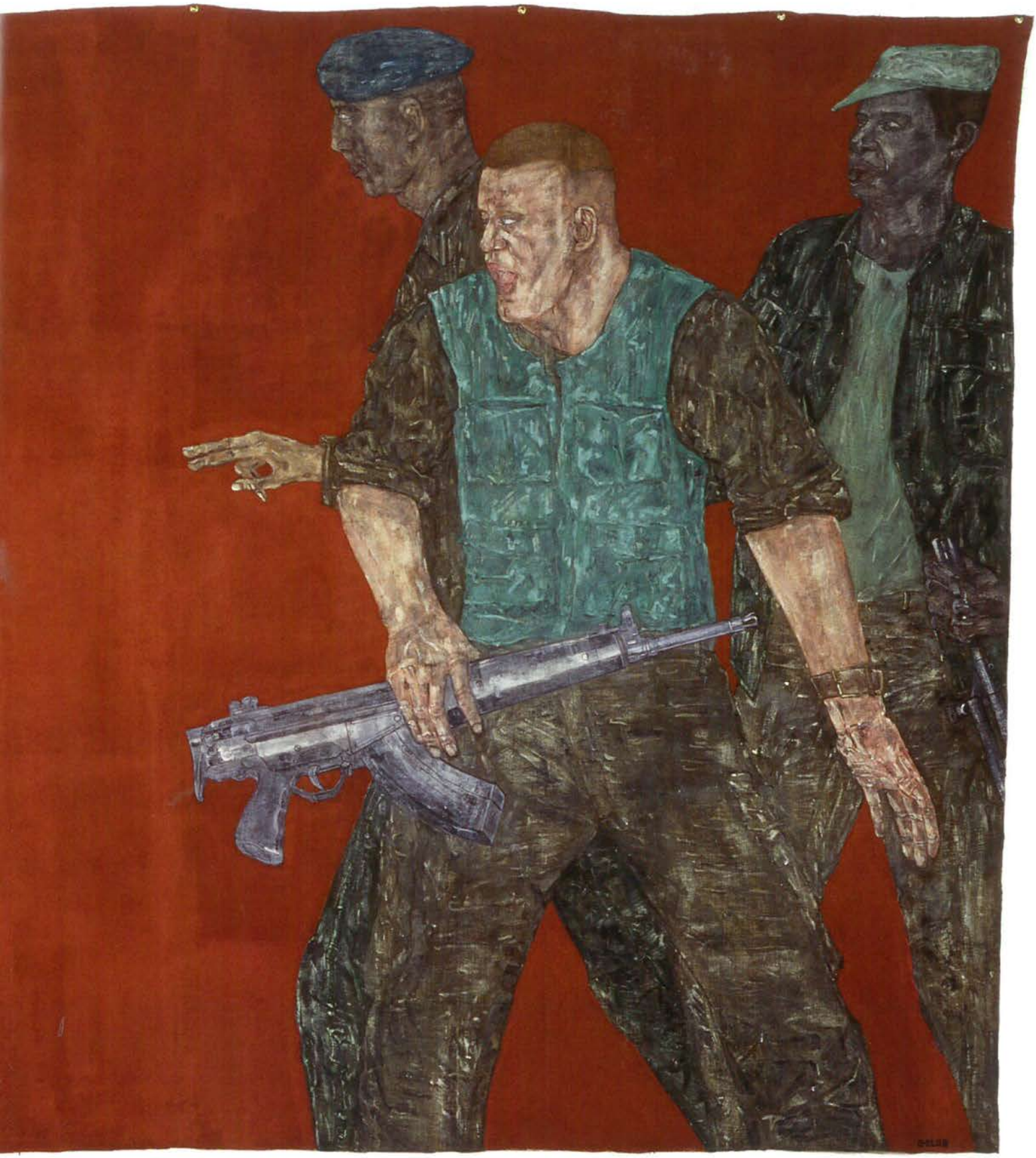
Leon Golub

HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Stemming from an old interview, American painter CHRIS MARTIN looks at the evil and violence in the work of the Chicago-based colleague, who depicted killers and torturers without sensationalism, with a combination of sober realism and weird empathy.

KODAK SAFETY FILM



Back in 2001, Phong Bui, one of the founders of the New York-based free monthly journal of arts, culture, and politics, *The Brooklyn Rail*, approached me about conducting an interview with Chicago artist Leon Golub. I guess a lot of the writing on Golub centered on politics and Phong wanted to foreground the painting process by having two painters talk.

I had met Golub and his wife Nancy Spero downtown in the mid-Seventies. They were a serious and striking-looking couple who came to the openings at Art Galaxy on Mott Street. What most impressed me then was the sense that they were equal partners in life and in art—sort of like the really cool parents all the young artists wished we had. Many years later, when I visited their loft, it was still so beautiful to see how they exchanged ideas and influenced each other.

Flash forward to the young artist Ana Ratner in an art history class in college, looking at slides of Leon Golub's late torture paintings. The professor interrupts his monologue to state "Of course this is not the kind of painting you have in your living room..." Ana shyly raises her hand to say, "Well, actually I grew up with that painting—It's in our living room."

I remember the first time I saw that painting—in Michael Ratner and Karen Ranucci's house—how shocking it was to see it in domestic "real" life. But that was the great achievement of Leon's late work. He found a way to paint evil and violence that did not sensationalize those qualities, but rather presented killers and torturers in everyday life, with a combination of sober realism and weird empathy.

As an artist, Golub was very far from my own practice, and I was envious of his ability to speak directly to the politics of war and violence without losing the reality (and beauty) of paint. I also admired him for stubbornly going his own way for so many years in the face of the art world's neglect and hostility. He had really made a breakthrough, and his latest work was his best. I remember asking him about this image of a lion in a new painting, and he talked about it with a sense of wonder, like he was as surprised as anyone to see it there...

Chris Martin You are known as a painter of darkness. How do you account for your fascination with evil, or the violent side of humanity?

Leon Golub It's all over the place, struggles for survival, struggles for dominance. It's a power game, not just evil itself, it's about control, irrationality, anxiety, and so on. In a hierarchy, or some form of governing body, it's about how to maintain control over their far-flung interests, the prevailing power, and who would have the most at stake in what's going on. For example, during the Reagan and Bush era, the Iran Contra Affair and the Nicaragua Crisis. We are funding those countries and setting them up knowing that they couldn't survive without us, so why are we doing it? It is not just corruption; it's a kind of ass-backward idealism that has gotten all screwed up. What's the purpose? They perversely claim that they kill for the good of society, the good of the future, but in the widest sense, it is done at the expense of other groups outside the hierarchy. There are consequences we are sorry about. Still we must kill more. That's the way it goes. A struggle for dominance and who gets to be on top, who reaps the rewards. I'm trying to tell how it is. It's realism: who does what to whom, who gains, who loses?

CM Speaking of realism, do you feel that your paintings have the possibility of changing the situation?

LG No. No painting is going to change anything, but what one can do is reveal some of what's going on. You can make some comment for the record—the record of our civilization. Different artists stake out different territories.

CM Do you think that abstraction is a viable art form?

LG Abstraction has been the basic mode of 20th century visualization. I most admire the art and architecture of the early soviet years. Abstract art, especially in recent years, tends to defer a great deal to technology, but it is obviously still totally viable.

CM What you have just said—that different artists stake out different territory—in your case, would the subject of your work reflect your own experience as a person, or perhaps your early upbringing?

LG Where does it come from? Who knows? At some point along the line, one develops points of view and one approaches them rationally, irrationally, intuitively, all at the same time, and gradually it becomes larger in intention and context and perhaps even obsessional.

CM I talked to a young painter, Jennifer Skoda, at the show, and she said that what struck her about your paintings was that they are about individuals, not so much about ideologies. So, who are the people in your paintings?

LG You and me. You can be on one side of the other. You can be on the ground as a victim or you can be the guy holding the gun to the victim's head. Given the circumstances, any of us could play different roles. Let's say you're twenty one years old. You live in Guatemala. Your family is poor. You can barely make out, but you have a cousin who has a little influence and he gets you a job as a cop. That's a big thing. Now you have the power or authority of a uniform. Okay, you're a traffic cop and one day you're told to go with a bunch of your fellow officers to some building and they throw a man or woman down the stairs and kill them or drag them off. What are you doing? You didn't commit the act, but you are right there with them. Now, if you slack behind they're going to be suspicious, so you have to become one of them. You have to participate. So, over time, that's how people get into things.

CM During the political turmoil in the '60s, you did take action and a position against the Vietnam War. Could you talk about that specific period? How did being a participant and organizer of political protests prompt a crucial shift in your work, especially when you began the Vietnam paintings? You went from painting more generalized classical mythology to dealing with a contemporary reality.

LG Well, Nancy and I lived in France from 1959–1964, under de Gaulle. There was a huge struggle in France over how things would go. France didn't want to give up Algeria. The pied noirs had been there for generations. To the Algerians they looked like an octopus sitting on top of them. It's clear who was doing the lousy work and who was the elite controller. When it appeared that de Gualle was willing to grant independence, General Massu organized a coup against de Gualle, and almost pulled it off. The two foreign legion paratrooper regiments based in Algeria were supposed to lead the invasion of France, but one backed down and the coup failed. The regiment was demobilized from the French army. Most expelled legionnaire officers became the mercenary leaders in such struggles in Africa as in Rhodesia, etc.

CM After being in France you then came back to the U.S. in 1964?

LG Yes, it was during that time, in the crucial years of the Vietnam War, that I joined "Artists and Writers Protest Against The War in Vietnam." The group was very active.

CM Did that involvement with anti-war protest change the direction of your work?

LG A lot. It became embarrassing. I was painting guys struggling with each other; an aggressive, male kind of power, they were nude, not in uniform and fighting with their hands.

CM Like in Greek relief sculpture?

LG Exactly. They were men fighting, but now we were in Vietnam—guns and tanks. There was a huge discrepancy. Unlike abstract art-


KODAK
10
10A

ists, who could protest the war and separate their art from political actions, I was the guy showing violence and aggression, but it wasn't on target. In 1969, I painted *Napalm I* and that was okay, but the figures still took off from Hellenistic sculptures. In 1972, I painted *Vietnam I*, but the painting was still partially ambiguous as the guy in front was wearing black pants and soldiers don't wear black pants.

CM But they carried M16s, right?

LG [Laughs.] Exactly, that's the compromise.

CM But they began to wear real uniforms later. Speaking of Vietnam, the New School in New York City was always regarded as a center of anti-war activism. How do you feel about the current New School president, Senator Bob Kerry, who admitted to shooting innocent civilians in Vietnam? As someone who's been a keen observer or war and politics, how does the whole incident strike you?

LG I'm mixed up about it. Obviously he felt like a scumbag. But he's been a decent and liberal guy. He certainly looks better than a lot of them in Congress. Well, you could imagine he was young when he was first sent to Vietnam. He probably was very frightened. It was dark in the jungle. If you're in that situation, you figure that you could get shot very easily, so your instinct is to shoot first. I'm sure they were all nervous but didn't want to admit it among themselves—it's not a manly thing to admit in the military.

CM Couldn't Bob Kerry have been one of the guys in your painting?

LG Sure. When I show those mercenaries in my work, they're not okay guys, but that's not the point. I'm trying to show them just like you and me in different circumstances.

CM These are individuals, you mean.

LG That young painter you mentioned earlier was right. I tried to individualize their features. For example, in the "Gigantomachies,"the men, they more or less look alike. They're generalized. In the later work, I became very insistant on showing individual characteristics.

CM Did the shift that took place at that time—the increase of individuality and specificity in their features, as well as uniforms, or even their body gestures—have something to do with photography?

LG Absolutely. It's a specific problem. The Vietnam paintings were painted in 1972, '73, and '74. I called them "Assassins" originally. But the ultimate responsibility was in Washington.

CM But you changed that later.

LG Yes, to Vietnam. I read recently that, when Nixon was running for president, he informed the South Vietnamese that he'd make a better deal with them—that he had a plan in mind to stop the war—but, in fact, he prolonged it and, as a result, another twenty thousand Americans lost their lives. What kind of guy was he? And Kissinger? Kerry is a hell of a lot better than those guys. All the G.I.'s were.

CM How about your portrait painting?

LG Well, it was partially a way of lowering my expectations. In 1975 I got into a big art crisis. The 28' long paintings weren't working! I had to destroy several. What to do? One day I was looking at one of the Vietnam paintings and one of the soldiers looked like Gerald Ford. So I went to a photo agency and rented ten photographs of Gerald Ford for thirty dollars and I tried to carefully draw from them. I tried to make the features look convincing—you know, all of that jazz. To get to their look. The faceless look of the faces of the guys who ran the show.

CM You were marginalized or neglected for a long time by the New York Art World. It began in the '60s with Pop Art, Formalist Abstraction, Minimalism, and Conceptualism—all of which dominated the art world. How did you survive all of those years?

LG You're an artist, aren't you? You just keep doing what you do, that's all.

CM [Laughs.] In the opening of the review of your show at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Grace Glueck wrote something like: "No one has ever accused you of making paintings that are pretty, or for that matter, of painting pretty well." Is that true?

LG What a dumb remark! Come on! To be convincing you better know how to paint! One aspect to this is that I'm physically awkward. A certain aspect of awkwardness comes into my painting. I push the awkwardness to get real! What I'm trying to do is perpetuate that immediacy. My figures can look awkward, but so do people in real life or in photographs. I can imagine what some people would think of my work—monstrously out of the mainstream! Up front and in your face.

CM How did you feel in the '80s, when your work was finally appreciated, especially with the emergence of the Neo-Expressionists, like Clemente, Kiefer, Schnabel, etc.? How did you feel about their work?

LG I like Kiefer's work a great deal, but I have reservations about Schnabel and Clements.

CM You prefer your paintings unstretched. Is there a reason for that?

LG Yes, first of all, they're too big, but that's not the real reason. I like them hanging, like fragments, a 28- or 40-foot canvas that comes on like a fragment, like skins on a wall.

CM Like skins—that's interesting. To change the subject a bit, how do you maintain your incredible partnership with your wife, the painter Nancy Spero?

LG We just get along. We respect each other's work. We talk about art all the time. After all—what the hell do we talk about anyway? Nancy always gives me straight opinions of my work, and I do the same.

CM In your work, the subject is always dominated by male figures. Rarely have we seen female presences in your painting. What's the attraction?

LG [Laughs.] I paint men and Nancy paints women. I paint the guys who act out our psychoses and irrationalites.

CM In the second and third rooms of your show, there were some of the interrogation scenes of a woman being tortured, a hanging man. My initial reaction was almost a flinching desire to turn away from such horrific imagery. I suppose most people would rather look at something beautiful, but as I went on looking at the paintings some more, I was able to discover and appreciate a certain awkwardness in your painterly passages. It that something you're very aware of in your painting process?

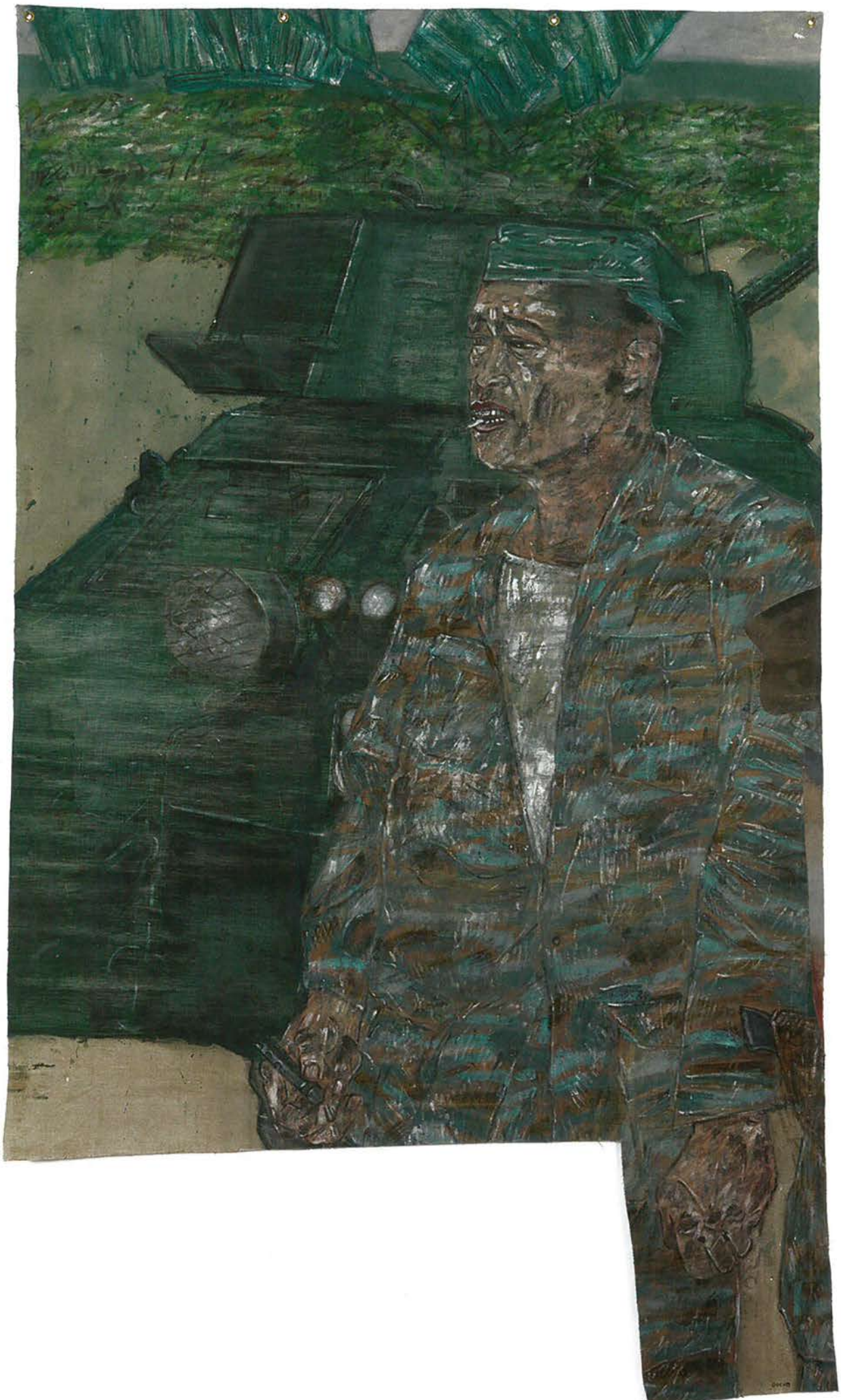
LG My subject matter isn't pleasant. But take the painting process. To paint a hand holding a cigarette, it's got to look right. If it isn't right, somehow natural, your painting goes right out the window. There's a real world out there! How are you going to get at it?

CM You're saying that, in your work, you are trying to address the task of bringing the most difficult and unpleasant realities to our attention?

LG I'm making a report, a reportage, among other forms of reports about what's going on. What the hell is going on?

CM What would you say to a young painter, especially a Brooklyn artist, today?

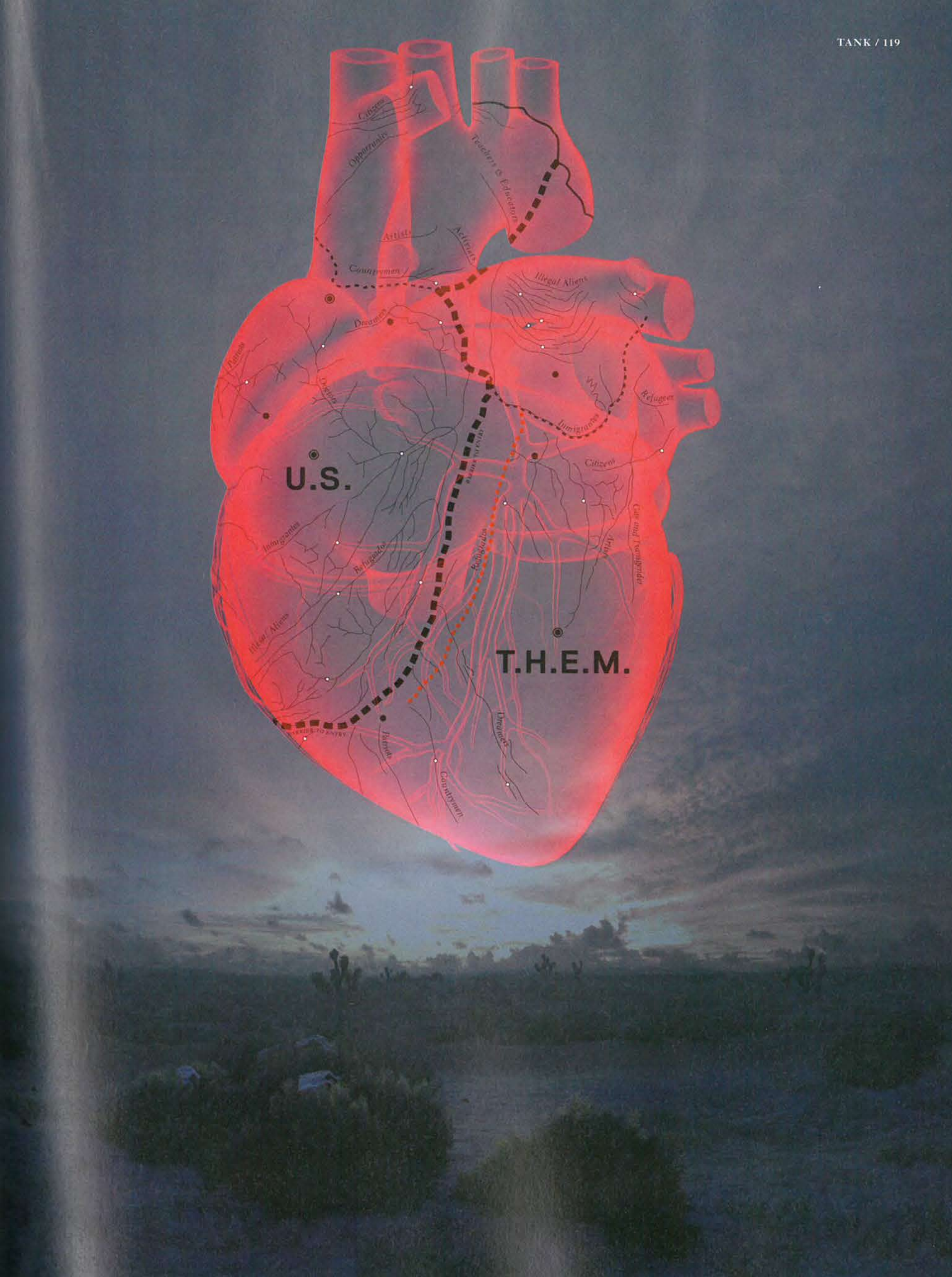
LG Stay skeptical. I really mean it. That goes for me, too. **K**



A SOLO EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO LEON GOLUB WILL BE ON VIEW FROM 20 OCTOBER 2017 – 15 JANUARY 2018 AT FONDAZIONE PRADA, MILAN.
WORKS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE: *MERCENARIES II (SECTION III)*, 1975; *INTERROGATION I*, 1980–81; *MERCENARIES III*, 1980; *MERCENARIES IV*, 1980; *MERCENARIES II (SECTION IV)*, 1980; *RIOT V*, 1987; *WHITE SQUAD V*, 1984; *MERCENARIES II (SECTION I)*, 1975; *INTERROGATION II, 1981*.

Flesh and sand: Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Carne y Arena* at Fondazione Prada. By Adam Thirlwell

Carne y Arena was a project that Alejandro González Iñárritu and Miuccia Prada had discussed for some time. "The idea for the project actually came about in conversation around seven years ago, but Iñárritu wasn't satisfied with the state of the technology at that time and he was busy with his feature films", says Mrs Prada in conversation this September. "He was busy winning Oscars, which I suppose shows we got the right director!" This long period of discussion brought the project to fruition at a time when its subject is most relevant, the era of President Trump and his Mexican border wall, gives the piece an intense sense of urgency. As Prada says, "Back then the technology was not quite sophisticated enough to fully realise the vision. Virtual reality technology has come so far so quickly and in that sense it was very fortunate that we waited".—Masoud Golsorkhi


Citizens
Opportunity
Teachers & Educators
Artists
Activists
Countrymen
Illegal Aliens
Dreamers
Refugees
Immigrants
Citizens
U.S.
Immigrantes
Refugiados
Illegal Aliens
T.H.E.M.
Patriots
Dreamers
Countrymen

Alejandro Gonzáles Iñárritu directs the *coyote* on the motion-capture stage. Photograph by Chachi Ramirez © Legendary Entertainment

Adam Thirlwell is a writer based in London. His most recent book is *Lurid & Cute* (2015).

1

I guess it's always exciting to be present at the youth of a new technology – but also, it's perplexing and disturbing. A new technology not only demands its own consideration; it makes you reconsider all the other technologies, too. It creates borders and distinctions you did not know you perceived. This was true of silent movies in the era of novels. And it is true of VR in the era of universal screens.

2

The spectator enters Alejandro González Iñárritu's virtual-reality installation at the Fondazione Prada in Milan completely alone. She then emerges through a door into a space that is the absolute physical, the way a Roman might once have entered the temple enclosing abstract mysteries through the columns of a peristyle. It is the pure modern non-space – a waiting area. There is a grey floor, grey benches, white fluorescent light. It should be the kind of space that feels drearily familiar, except that there are also desiccated shoes and sandals scattered on the floor, along with plastic boxes of dirty stockings, water bottles – all collected from the desert near the Mexico-US border. These shoes are desperate, uncanny, similar to those piles of shoes on display in the museum that was once Auschwitz: they have the piteous look of shoes that have been walked in forever, destroyed, lost, discarded. Such sadly basic prostheses, shoes; so tenderly human!

This is the first disorientation. Others follow. The whole space is a theatre of manipulation. It is suddenly and surprisingly cold. The proportions of the room seem oddly large for a single person. Metallic noises can be heard, and deep bass reverberations coming from half-hidden subwoofers that make the spectator helplessly uneasy. Then the spectator notices a sign telling you to take off your shoes and socks, put them in the locker, and wait for the alarm to sound before proceeding into the next room. And so you bend down and take off your Saint Laurent trainers, your A.P.C. derbies, whatever, and look for the locker. You would like to find this locker to put away your own shoes, because the contrast between these shoes and the shoes scattered around is subtly and persistently upsetting.

Initially, however, I could not see the locker. (It is slightly around one corner.) Very quickly, I became almost frantic. With the noise crowding in on me, and the cold, and the abandoned shoes, I felt a confusing sense of panic.

This waiting room, in other words, is a laboratory for mimicking fear. (It is not perhaps *true* fear, because you are always aware that just outside, across the courtyard in the Fondazione, there are the cocktails and tiramisu and amusingly *trompe l'oeil* wallpaper of Bar Luce. You are always able to escape, whereas true fear is inescapable. But still: the sense of instability is real.) Fear, it teaches you, is a form of not knowing, combined perhaps with the desire to please an absent, implacable authority – or at least, not be found wanting by this authority. Fear is what you feel when you do not know what is going to happen next. And it turns out that in one's usual world you do know always what will happen next: what happens next is something you have chosen and over which you have total control.

Then at last – what relief! – the alarm sounds and the spectator walks through into a very dark room. There is sand on your feet. It is

slightly sharp. There is a rim of orange light around the walls. Two silhouettes wait for you. The spectator stands as they mount a backpack and a mask with headphones. The mask and backpack are not too heavy but neither are they light. They make your movements uncertain.

Then you are left alone. Then it begins.

3

It is not cinema, you realise, because you experience cinema with other people. To experience something alone is the opposite of cinema.

4

There is a wind, and then what becomes gently visible is a desert scene. It seems to be twilight. There is scrub and cacti and a vast sky. No one else is there. It is the most extraordinary moment of transportation – this combination of your initial disorientation, the sand on your feet, the cold, and the lavishly precise cinematography of Emmanuel Lubezki. You just turn, and take a few steps, like you have emerged onto a moon. You move slowly and try to learn the sounds and look of this new world.

And then a narrative begins.

From out of the night emerge a few people, some limping, some children and a man who seems to be the *coyote* making a muffled call on a phone. They are talking in Spanish. One woman collapses in pain. They pause around you. It is a border, but of course, there is no literal border present. It is just scrub and sand and these people trying to move from one direction to another.

Testing to get the right amount of sand on the shoes for the installation. The migrants talk about sand being everywhere and in everything. Photograph by Chachi Ramirez © Legendary Entertainment

It is possible to walk among these people, to go up to them and inspect them. They will not look at you or acknowledge your presence. The subtitle of the piece is *Virtually Present, Physically Invisible* – and the strangeness is that all these terms are debatable. For of course, you are very much physically present, in this room in Milan, and at the same time feel like you might also be physically present in the American desert – since you can feel the cold of the night wind, and the sharp sand on your bare feet. And yet you are not present at all. No one sees you.

They are like the images of cinema except that they have a kind of ghostliness to them. They move very close to you. (Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction": "The desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'close' spatially and humanly... is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.") You feel reticent about approaching these people, as if you might encroach on the privacy of a real human. But perhaps this is also a reticence about disturbing the illusion. I did not want to put my hand out and prove they were not real. Just as at first I limited my movements, I stayed motionless, looking at them, or up at the sky, or behind me, at the absences of the vast desert.

In the night sky, a helicopter approaches. The *coyote* tells the people to get down, and so they crouch, while white light and a terrible juddering noise engulf the scene. When it passes, there are suddenly two police 4x4s with their headlights trained on you and the group – and a dog that is straining and barking so close to you that you back away.

People are crying. The border-control guards are aiming their guns at people. They are asking which one is the guide. If people speak

in Spanish, then the guards become jumpy. You feel such terrible pity for these people crouching here, exhausted, terrified. They are so creaturely, so unclothed, compared to these guards with their body armour and weapons and vehicles. One of the guards teases a boy – maybe three or four – for being tall for his age and the desire to gather this child in your arms and protect him is overwhelming. But of course, you do not do this. You do nothing.

You look down and it seems that a woman is cradling a baby to her chest, in a makeshift sling.

5

One way of defining cinema is that it's a scene on which you can gaze without anyone returning that gaze. It depends on the absence of the spectator from the scene they are watching. In that sense, what happens here at the Fondazione Prada is cinema in its purest state. But also, this absence is based on the limit of the screen, a border between what we can and cannot inhabit – and now we are inside the screen. To be at once inside a scene and yet still absent from it – to feel the cold and the sand and feel the noise of the helicopter inside one's own body, and yet still be invisible to everyone – is a disturbing paradox of this new technology of seeing.

But it is still, I think, cinema – just a cinema made more intense and strange. "We are breaking the frame and dissolving limits," Iñárritu has said. But I'm not sure that's entirely true. That invisibility to the character represents an absolute border.

6

For you are helpless to intervene. In *Carne y Arena*, this ordinary truth of every artwork becomes more poignant and upsetting: it becomes political. But perhaps this is true of any innovation in truth values. It's why Shakespeare's tragedies can still be too upsetting to watch. An alteration in truth values may be internal to an artwork's composition, not only its technological support. And an alteration in the technology may not always guarantee a work's power.

One aspect of this politics is the work's linguistic multiplicity. When people begin to talk, they talk in Spanish. And when the guards hear people talking in Spanish, they become ferociously anxious – demanding that they use English. One man does not even speak Spanish, just the Guatemalan dialect K'iche'. Everywhere, there is an anxiety of secret communication. And when, much later, I stood there outside, in the Milanese afternoon, dazed, I thought again about the title. For the title is never translated. *Carne y Arena*. It is *Flesh and Sand*.

You feel the sand, of course. You feel it on your feet. And the flesh, the body you feel, is always and only your own. Everything else, you have to imagine.

7

Then suddenly there is light in front of your eyes, something strange and ethereal, and when it passes there is a calm. It is the first cut of this installation or movie or experience, and it begins a kind of dream sequence. A guard points out a flock of birds in the sky. And where the group were crouching there is now a table, and at the table people are drinking from their water bottle, and a girl is training a light on

something on the table, a miniature boat rocking, in which are miniature people – a dream representation of other migrations, the migrations across not desert but water. And then this second take fades.

8

Pier Paolo Pasolini – the saint of all cinema analysis – once gave a speech called "The Cinema of Poetry", in which he argued that cinema was inherently pre-verbal. Its logic was not the same as the logic of the novel or theatre. It was based on sequences of images. And this was something we recognised in certain operations of the brain. Memory and dreams, he argued, functioned in sequences and image-drifts, and this was how cinema functioned, too: "In sum, there is a whole complex world of significant images – formed as much of gestures and of all sorts of signs coming from the environment, as of memories or of dreams, which is proposed as the 'instrumental' foundation of cinematic communication, and prefigures it."

The ambiguity in his theory is between the images and their arrangement into sequences. When we dream or remember we may only dwell on a single image, not a sequence of images. And in the short century of cinema, there has always been a corresponding ambiguity: between montage and the single take.

A visitor experiences the installation, 2017. Photograph by Chachi Ramirez © Legendary Entertainment

For Robert Bresson, the essence of cinema was montage. Montage was what defined the magical reanimation of cinema: "Because you do not have to imitate, like painters, sculptors, novelists, the appearance of persons and objects (machines do that for you), your creation or invention confines itself to the ties you knot between the various bits of reality caught. There is also the choice of the bits. Your flair decides." Or, as he put it elsewhere, like a Vedic master: "THE BONDS THAT BEINGS AND THINGS ARE WAITING FOR, IN ORDER TO LIVE." According to this theory, an image only acquires its energy, its electricity, through the way it is juxtaposed with other images.

Montage was a form of interpretation. And this was precisely why in the early years of the *nouvelle vague* the single take became an opposite and beloved principle. One of Jean-Luc Godard's essays for *Cahiers du cinéma* was called "Montage Interdit!" – a title that was an homage to his mentor, André Bazin, who admired the long take because, he thought, montage was inherently personal. It interposed the director between the audience and the images. The less montage you used, the more an image would seem real. And this *nouvelle vague* love of the single take has had a recent Hollywood renaissance in its Mexican incarnations: in Alfonso Cuarón and Iñárritu himself. Iñárritu's film *Birdman* was a sequence of elongated single takes. In Cuarón's *Children of Men*, there's a brilliant, sustained four-minute take inside a broken-down getaway car, while in *Gravity*, there's the celebrated opening, where the camera drifts for a 15-minute take of paradisiacal space play, before fragmenting into catastrophe and montage. When Iñárritu once tried to offer a theory behind Cuarón's fondness for the long take, it had a familiar Bazin-like feel: "We are not editing our life. It's only when we remember our life that we edit it. Alfonso is interested in this point of view where the audience's point of view integrates with the characters' point of view in a way that there are no interpretations. It's more pure."

It hovers somewhere between the ethical and the immersive, this love of the long take, this refusal of montage. It is a search for

the present moment. And it reminds me of a novelistic equivalent: the Hungarian novelist Imre Kertész. In his Nobel address, "Eureka!", Kertész talks about his great novel *Fateless* – whose hero, like Kertész, is sent as a teenager to Auschwitz. The novel inhabits a meticulous chronological mode, a single camera registering its impressions, and Kertész defends the dead drabness of his structure by observing that his hero "must waste away in the dismal trap of linearity and cannot free himself from miserable details. Instead of a spectacular succession of great tragic moments, he must live the *whole*, which is a burden and which offers little variety, like life". It was this linearity of detail, writes Kertész, that permitted him his novel's discoveries: "Linearity demands that every situation is completed fully." You cannot even skip the leisurely 20 minutes his hero spends on the ramp at Birkenau while waiting for the selection – forcing the novelist into a scandalous precision, where the ramp is not a place of manic fear, but relaxed and sun-lit cooperation. And Kertész then comments that as he wrote this scandalously prosaic scene, this scene without any obvious narrative at all, it was as if a line now separated him from literature – and this line was Auschwitz. Because, he writes, when you write about Auschwitz, you must understand that in a certain way Auschwitz has placed literature in a state of suspension. And in fact, literature is still in suspension, for "nothing has happened since Auschwitz which has nullified Auschwitz, which has refuted Auschwitz". It is still in the present.

The danger of the single take, I think, is that, like all theories of the real, in its effort to reproduce the real, it only emphasises its inescapable artificiality. Just as, more practically, the *sprezzatura* of the long take begins to falter if more than a few characters are involved. As soon as the long take is used with multiple background extras, then a minor character unintentionally dissolves into an *actor*, with the anxiety sadly visible in their eyes of needing to hit their mark when the camera reaches them. What you see isn't life, but the boredom of rehearsal.

But maybe this is not a problem in this new virtual space. For here the ghostliness of the images means that the presence of the actor or model is reduced. It is so ghostly that it all feels real.

Carne y Arena is a new stage in the theory of the single take. It's a new way of trying to refuse interpretations.

9

In the final act – the installation lasts around 15 minutes, and has a three-act structure, like a foreshortened Hollywood movie – people are hustled into the 4x4s. A man drops something in the sand – a wallet, perhaps – and is not allowed to go back to fetch it. Then suddenly a guard stops and looks into the darkness. You are the only person left there. He starts shouting. Someone is moving in the bushes. – *Who, me?* You want to mouth. But you cannot talk, because no one will hear you. A light is being shone at you. Then the guard is pointing a gun at you and telling you to put your hands on your head and to get down on your knees.

I could not believe it. I glanced round, to check if perhaps I had not noticed someone hidden in a bush behind me. There seemed to be no one there. He was talking to me. It was exactly like a dream. And just like a dream, I also had this faint knowledge that none of this was true, that I was safe, that I could not be shot. Just as while walking around one had the knowledge that this was a room, not a desert, that there

were walls to be avoided. And yet also I had this interesting feeling that perhaps after all I should get down on my knees, however absurd that might feel – I should get down on my knees to placate an imaginary police officer.

And then the lights went out.

10

The problem with photography has always been the problem of its description. An image is such a floating thing – pure particularity, pure contingency – that the danger in both photography and cinema is melodrama, when too much meaning is constructed. Which is why I wonder if in another incarnation of this technology, Iñárritu might abandon narrative entirely. Every narrative comes with its interpretations, its manipulations of the audience (the malevolent guards, the broken people). Another version of VR might only offer a situation where nothing seemed to be happening at all.

Or, to put this another way: I understand why Godard was so sad, considering the way sound changed the language of silent film, the way it codified it quickly into theatre. And I wouldn't want always for VR to present a narrative, with its demands of plot and suspense. I might want something more ambiguous, something that would take much longer to explore: a situation, a landscape, an expanse of time.

But the fact that even these questions can be raised is a testament to the wild brilliance of Iñárritu's achievement.

11

There is a long period of black, and then light emerges. It is sunrise. There is light everywhere. Everyone has gone. But on the ground, in the bushes, there are their traces – a kid's backpack, a water bottle, plastic bags caught in the bushes. Someone has lost a shoe in the sand.

Then the lights go out, and you hear the crunch of approaching footsteps – the real footsteps of real people. The silhouettes remove your mask and headphones, and you walk into another waiting area, to recover your shoes from the locker. And once again you wait for the alarm to sound, so that you can leave.

There was dust, I noticed, on the hem of my Dries Van Noten trousers.

12

The moment when the guard points the gun at the spectator was one of the most violent ways I have seen of exposing a basic aesthetic rule, which is also a rule of life. This rule is roughly: in life, I am allowed to always be the spectator. I am never the one in danger. My true habitation is the Fondazione Prada, not the desert and its sand. And yet for a moment the shock of being alone, of this aesthetic distance abandoning me, the way a PA might simply walk out of a room and leave you alone with your interrogator, was real – an echo, I guess, of the way people are said to have fled as the train approached them in an early Lumière brothers movie.

13

The world of the lucky, after all, is fundamentally different to the world of the unlucky.

14

You walk out of the final waiting room, into a more conventional exhibition space. On the walls, there are video portraits of the models for the installation's narrative, with text in which they describe their appalling histories – stories of heat exhaustion, gang warfare, tender love, terror.

And it's strange because it is a reminder of more old-fashioned methods. There is something so absorbing – but differently absorbing to the installation's illusions – in the still precision of these video portraits, some hair stirring in a breeze, their features altering as they stare at the camera. In cinema, everything interior has to be inferred. And it is also possible to explore interiority here, just looking at the detail of people's faces. In the notes for the installation, Iñárritu writes that, "you as a visitor will walk alongside the immigrants (and into their minds) with infinite possibilities and perspectives within a vast landscape..." But this is not exactly true. Or at least, you can feel as much interiority looking into these people's eyes (which also cannot see you) – and reading their infinitely moving stories, like the appallingly vast time span of this small paragraph: "I worked hard as a maid for nine years and finally saved enough money to bring my oldest child. Then, every time I saved enough money, I brought another one of my children. Finally, I brought my youngest. She was three when I left her. I saw her again when she was 23."

15

It is almost beyond cinema, but not quite. And yet it is also distinct from cinema. Cinema is a succession of frames. Whereas here you could look away, or examine an image more closely. The experience was more like *reading*. Your tempo was not constrained by the tempo of a montage. (And yet it was constrained, by the flamboyance of Iñárritu's set-up.)

And, like cinema, it is a form of magic.

In Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Theaters* series he set up a camera in a movie theatre to take a single black-and-white photo whose length of the exposure was the length of the film. This made the cinema screen a glowing white rectangle – the result of overlaying the film's 170,000 frames on the photo's single frame. In an essay, "My Inner Theater", Sugimoto outlines his thinking: "A photograph fixes dead reality in the form of an after-image. But when you are shown a series of those same after-images, dead reality seems to come back to life – that is what a movie is." And so, he continues: "I wanted to photograph a movie, with all its appearance of life and motion, in order to stop it again. What I felt was a sense of vocation: *I must use photography as a means to shut away the ghosts resurrected by the excess of photographic afterimages.*"

In his project, Sugimoto was paying the correct respect to cinema's techniques of reanimation. In cinema, an absence acquires life: a ghost haunts you. And now, unforgettably, there is this. §

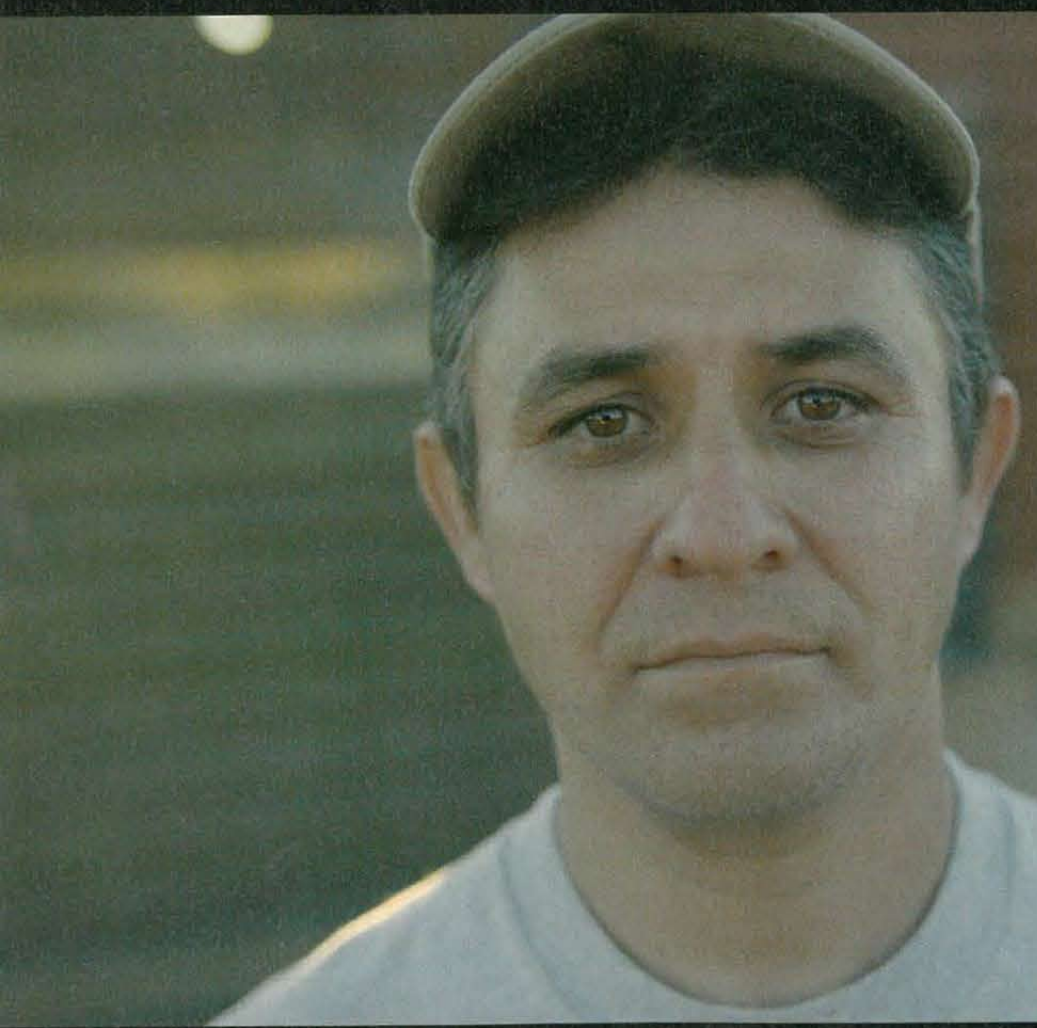
Alejandro Gonzáles Iñárritu at the Fondazione Prada, Milan, in June 2017. Photograph by Ugo Dalla Porta, courtesy Fondazione Prada

Scan this image for more information. Go to page 10 to see how.

Luis, 36, Mexico

Two men helped my mom, me and my two sisters cross the river. The older man carried my four-month-old sister and put her under his jacket and zipped it. The younger guy carried me and my older sister and crossed the river without getting us wet. I was nine years old. We were hiding inside big tires and garbage when I heard helicopters and sirens and saw red lights. People started to run. The three of us were caught and put in the cold detention room for women. My four-month-old sister couldn't stop crying because my mom did not have breast milk anymore. The toilet was exposed there in the middle. For my mom and all women it was pretty uncomfortable to pee. I felt embarrassed and closed my eyes. We were brought to Pacoima. I finally saw my father. I enjoyed being a student and I graduated from high school with good grades and high honours. In 2002, the law in California changed so that those of us without papers were allowed to apply to the state universities and I studied Political Science at UCLA. In 2010, I became the first undocumented immigrant to graduate from UCLA Law School. I turned 31 three months before the DACA programme was proclaimed, and it only protects students under 30 years. I missed being helped by DACA and was still stuck in limbo.

I have been married to an American citizen for ten years and we have a beautiful daughter, but I still can't become a legal US citizen. To do that, I am obligated to return to Mexico to begin the application process, and I might not be able to return to the US for ten years. I work at a non-profit organisation. We protect people like me from being deported, help them get their DACA and work permits and citizenship. I see every day the fear among immigrants of being torn away from their families. I am determined to follow my dreams. I am now applying for my law licence, and my goal is to be working as a lawyer in the next year.



Yoni, 43, Honduras
I worked as a baker in Honduras, but had to leave the country because I struggled to feed my family. When I got to the Mexican border, I was robbed of everything, including my shoes. I begged the thieves to let me keep the picture of my kids that was in my wallet, but they told me to choose between the picture or my life. Coming to the US means you walk; you walk no matter what. I walked barefoot for most of my journey until someone gave me an old, worn out pair of shoes. When I got to Guanajuato, I found a *coyote* and a group to travel with. I crossed the Rio Grande with 17 people and a smuggler. We walked for two days and three nights. We had no flashlights and food. We waited for five days but no one ever came to pick us up. We feared we would die in the desert. Some of us decided to stay and others to walk back. We were ambushed by immigration. I hid in the bushes and watched those who were caught get taken off in a van. I had made it this far and was not going to give up. I had to help my family. I eventually found another *coyote* who helped me. As I was driving away, I looked back and thanked God and cried for the country and family I had left behind. Once I was a baker; I knew how to make every kind of bread. Now I am a sandwich maker in a fast-food restaurant. Life here is hard, but nothing compared to the struggles of Honduras. I feel sad that people think we are bad for coming here to try and help our families. I pray that God will change their hearts and we can stay.

Carmen, 22, Honduras
I grew up in a place called "Little Hell". The gangs threatened to kill me if I didn't transport their guns. I had my son when I was 17. His father soon turned very violent towards me and wanted to take my son. I did not want my son to be a gang member, so when he was three years old, I crossed with him and 20 other people through Guatemala and Mexico crammed inside animal trucks. We were robbed. I saw Mexican policemen beat a South American migrant and throw him from a hill. I pretended to be a lesbian so the men wouldn't touch me. We walked hundreds of miles and didn't eat or drink for two days. A huge spider bit my son and he got a fever. We begged for water. Someone gave me a banana for my son. After he ate, I fainted. Once we had crossed the river on the border, I ran straight to the Border Patrol. My son was so dehydrated that I feared he would die. They told us to take our shoes off and handcuffed us. There was an officer with a Mexican accent who was very cruel. To get refugee status, I had to prove that my life was threatened. Now my Honduran son is four years old, and I just had a daughter two months ago – she is American. What does that make me?

Manuel, 19, Guatemala
I started working in the fields when I was seven. I lived in a very small village in the mountains, where there was no food to eat. A day's work equalled a bag of rice.

I did not abandon my family. I left to go find work and send them money because there was so much suffering. I travelled for two days in the back of a truck under heavy logs. I lost the feeling in my foot. I didn't eat or drink for days and lost my strength to walk. The *coyotes* threw me on the train known as "The Beast".

We rode for four days with hundreds of people without air or food. The *cholos* assaulted us and took away everything we brought. When we arrived, we were locked up for 15 days in a warehouse while waiting for an opportunity to cross.

For three days and three nights we crossed the desert. The cold almost killed me. My feet were filled with sores. A thorn was buried in my foot. I could not walk. The *coyote* threatened me with his gun. I walked or he killed me, he said. I tied my shirt to my feet and walked. One night, a helicopter and three patrol cars caught us. They took my backpack with my food and tied our hands behind our backs. They took us to the holding cells known as "the freezers" because of how cold they kept them. I couldn't communicate with them because I didn't speak Spanish, only K'iche', a Guatemalan dialect, and there was no translator. I took my first plane ever from there to Los Angeles and fell on the airport escalator because I had never seen one before. I spent two months in a shelter for kids who come here alone.

Now I live with my cousin. I wash dishes in a restaurant in Beverly Hills until 1.30am and I go to school at 8am. It is the only way that I can accomplish my dream to become a translator. I am happy because I have almost finished paying my debt to the *coyotes* and soon I will be able to send half of what I make to my parents in Guatemala.