

GAGOSIAN GALLERY ARTNEWS



Installation view of the Whitney Museum's fifth-floor galleries, where Andrea Fraser's multichannel audio piece *Down the River*, 2016, was exhibited.

AROUND NEW YORK

The art that had New York talking this past spring was barely there—shows comprised of empty, or nearly empty, spaces charged with anxious energies: the cacophony of a prison, the voices of art dealers, the movement of balloons, the smell of bacon.

Andrea Fraser led the way. For a little over two weeks, Fraser took over the fifth floor of the **Whitney Museum** as part of “Open Plan,” a series of solo shows in the largest column-free museum exhibition space in New York. Light streamed through floor-to-ceiling windows at each end of the airy gallery as audio that the artist recorded inside Sing Sing prison in Ossining, New York, played from speakers mounted on the ceiling; men talked, shouted, and screamed, metal clanged, and birds chirped.

Titled *Down the River* (2016), the work was brutal and efficient, splicing together examples of institutions that have exponentially

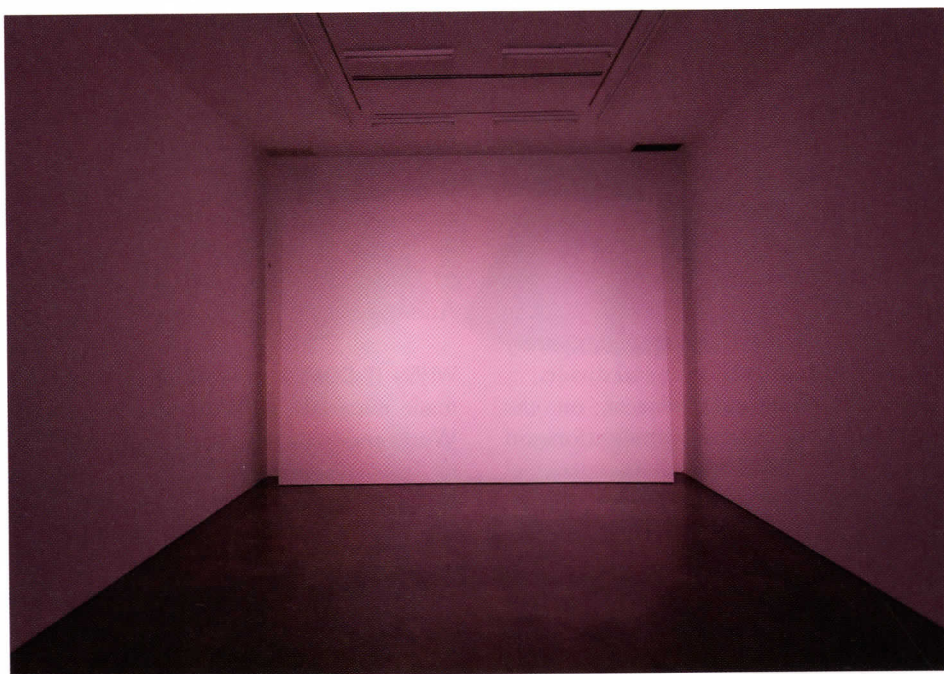
expanded over the past half-century: one focused on control and punishment, the other on learning, pleasure, and leisure; one whose population is disproportionately of color, the other whose patrons are largely white; one hidden away from society, the other dead center. It turned the museum into a site of psychological turmoil, as horror mingled with tranquility.

Few artists today are working as incisively as Fraser, who has, from the beginning of her career, bravely addressed inequality in all its forms—racial, social, gender, and (in her searing essay for the 2012 Whitney Biennial) economic. She has done so in the full knowledge of art's tendency to reduce politics to feel-good back-patting. Acknowledging the pitfalls, Fraser raises the stakes. In an interview in the *New York Times*, she admitted of her show, “I am not sure that on some level it isn't an absolutely monstrous thing to do.” She shouldn't worry. After some time with

the piece it was all other art that seemed monstrous.

A smaller but no less antagonistic void was on offer at **Essex Street** gallery, which was empty save for four speakers that played a four-hour-long loop of the gallery's owner, Maxwell Graham, and his colleague, Neal Curley, reading from Abigail Bray's hard-hitting 2013 manifesto, *Misogyny Re-loaded*. This was the work of **Bea Schlingelhoff**, who paid the two art dealers \$50 an hour to make the recording (\$875 total), which was not for sale.

The business deal, on its own terms, was a commendably taut conceptual maneuver—a reversal of power, if you will, or a reeducation session, with the artist using the dealer quite literally—but for anyone lucky enough to know Graham, it was also a subtly humorous one. One of the more charming and voluble art types in the city, he was required to listen to the sound of his own voice for hours each day, intoning about



TOP Installation view of Bea Schlingelhoff's *The Art Dealer Reads Misogyny Re-loaded*, 2016. Essex Street. BOTTOM Philippe Parreno, *Mont Analogue*, 2001, archival color, silent digital beta-cam, and DVD, 62 minutes, installation view. Gladstone.

radical feminism. How, one wonders, has that experience affected him?

The lights were dim at the **Artist's Institute**, freshly relocated from its dilapidated Lower East Side storefront to the ground floor of a stately Upper East Side

manse, and ghosts seemed to be lingering in the darkness. The occasion was "**One Man Show: Holly, Candy, Bobbie and the Rest**," curated by Hilton Als as part of a full season devoted to the polymath's work. With works scattered about, it felt

a bit like the ramshackle back room of a downtown club. It was an impressionistic look at the glories of the New York underground of the 1970s and '80s and its drag/trans denizens—Holly Woodlawn, Candy Darling, and more—through photographs by Richard Avedon, Fred McDarrah, and others. There were also works by Als himself, an erstwhile artist, one an installation with a black velvet rope and a slide show of black-and-white party images shot by Bill Bernstein in 1979 at the gay hangout GG's Barnum Room. Altogether the exhibition amounted to a wonderfully strange celebration of difference, and of histories that must be remembered.

Uptown, **Philippe Parreno**—a master of the void—turned **Gladstone Gallery's** relatively new space in the Edward Durell Stone House (the most beautiful commercial gallery in Manhattan, in my opinion) into an otherworldly aquarium for his show "If This Then Else." Exotically colored, larger-than-life balloon fish, filled with just the right amount of helium, glided around the space, ascending as they passed over air vents. Lights faded on and off as a sonar-like bell clanged repeatedly. It felt like being deep in the ocean—a bewitching out-of-body experience achieved with the lightest of touches.

Parreno's concurrent show at Gladstone's West 21st Street space was something of a letdown in comparison, despite being a grand production. Upstairs, a projector cycled through bright-colored lights in an empty room, using Morse code to translate the René Daumal novel *Mont Analogue* into an epilepsy-inducing display. The installation downstairs was dominated by *Li-Yan* (2016), a 16-minute video featuring stunning shots of New York City parks at night, populated by a grazing cow, a woman walking, and paper lanterns (or are they spaceships?) flying into the air. It was all darkly mystical and phantasmagoric until you realized the work wasn't going anywhere. Pretty soon, lights above and behind the screen burst on and ran through a sequence, and the video started again. The effect was of a formidable intelligence swimming slowly by, far away, unaware that you are even there. Reading the press



Urs Fischer, “Misunderstandings in the Quest for the Universal,” 2016, installation view. Gagosian.

release and learning that a “bioreactor” at 64th Street was controlling aspects of both shows deepened that feeling.

Stepping into an otherwise empty hallway on the fifth floor of **Gagosian’s** Madison Avenue fortress, I was hit with the unmistakable scent of bacon cooking. It was being microwaved regularly as part of **Urs Fischer’s** show “Misunderstandings in the Quest for the Universal.” If you had told me that the wily Darren Bader, Fischer’s onetime assistant and a great innovator of the readymade, was behind the show, I would have believed you, but the microwave with bacon was not an actual work. Fischer just wanted the smell, which paired nicely with a digitally sliced-and-diced image, printed on shaped aluminum, of two grinning cartoon pigs.

Fischer increasingly seems intent on finding the limits of what can be pulled from the computer and rendered physical. His results are impressive, if obscure. A case in point: the wallpaper printed with ultra-realistic dashes and dabs of paint, as if Michael Krebber (or a precocious child) had gone wild. With the exception of a black-and-white wall (produced with a flip of the digital switch), the paper was

so gloriously frenetic that it was tricky to spot the pigs and other, similarly fractured cartoon figures on view—a void achieved through overload. Fischer’s market success and slickness have earned him detractors, but when he is in his zone, as he was here, he is one of the best we have—a madcap rococo maestro charting the contemporary and very slippery analog-digital divide.

Cameron Rowland’s objects, on the other hand, are brutally straightforward (rococo only in their ingenious conceptual underpinnings), as is his message: slavery continues in the United States. For his show at **Artists Space**, Rowland registered the nonprofit as number 91020000 (the exhibition’s title) with Corcraft, the industrial division of the New York State Department of Corrections that sells goods produced by convicts paid \$0.10 to \$1.14 an hour. A few of these products—manhole levelers, an office desk, and firefighters’ jackets (red-orange for prisoners, yellow for non-prisoners)—were scattered around the largely empty gallery. An explanatory text transformed them into gut-punch sculptures, pathos-filled updates on the readymade that changed the way one looks at objects, and the way one thinks

about how they came into being, and how they are used. Institutional critique has long felt like the project and province of an aging generation, but Rowland, not yet 30, has positioned himself as a natural heir to Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, and yes, Andrea Fraser.

WHEN IT COMES to working with readymade materials, **B. Wurtz** has few rivals. Wurtz endows mass-produced items (plastic bags, tin cans, shoelaces) with noble aesthetic import, doing for dollar-store finds what Robert Irwin has done for light and shadows. Mid-renovation on its Chelsea headquarters, **Metro Pictures** offered a selection of his sculptures at 83 Pitt Street on the Lower East Side, though even just one can break your heart—say, the block of wood balancing on four door springs that bears on its top, screwed in, both parts of a latch lock, never to meet; or the trophy-like tower of wood blocks adorned with a tall yellow sock. The *pièce de résistance* was a soaring tree-like sculpture from 1993 balanced on five legs, blooming translucent blue plastic bags. It rivals Jeff Koons’s flower sculptures in the sheer-joy department, while trading out pathological



Lena Henke, *split*, 2016, clay, glaze, and plastic, 18" x 17" x 8", installation view. Real Fine Arts.

opulence for dazzling ingenuity and wit.

Wurtz's was only one of a number of recent displays that presented assertive, deliberately formed sculpture, much of which had a tough, ready-to-throw-down elegance. One can mention **Valerie Keane's** wicked, sharp-edged, cut-and-hung Perspex pieces at **Lomex**; **Jared Madere's** sprawling, shamanistic arrangement of tinsel, salt, and flowers on the floor of

David Lewis's booth at Independent art fair; **Jessi Reaves's** stone-age chairs made of cut-and-bound foam at **Sculpture-Center**; and **Jeanette Mundt's** stunning paintings at **Off Vendome** of, among other subjects, a nude, kneeling woman and a jaw-dropping mountain scene on thick shaped panels, some attached to the wall or the odd love seat via metal piping—they're Ferdinand Hodler and Henri de

Toulouse-Lautrec meets Cady Noland, and they're great.

Lena Henke's typically winning outing at **Real Fine Arts**, "Heartbreak Highway," presented impressive new ceramics: horse hooves with a traffic light or a car sprouting from their tops, sometimes holding plastic milk cartons. (This sounds impossible, I know, but consult the photos.) She showed these hybrid forms on rickety handmade lazy Susans (an idea that begs to be copied), in a spare arrangement that included garden gates and referred to everything from garden architecture to the victims (human and architectural) of Robert Moses, he of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, which rumbles past the gallery. There is simply too much to say here, so I'll just say this: Henke has established herself as the rare artist who can shift, seemingly effortlessly, from one idea to another and another. Her series are disparate in form but united by a rough-and-tumble way with materials and deep engagement with the city's hidden histories.

Haegue Yang's daring show at **Greene Naftali**, "Quasi-Pagan Minimal," included her trademark fluorescent-lit venetian-blind arrays, psychedelic wall works based on the security patterns found in envelopes, and bulbous sculptures made from intricately woven straw that resembled alien life forms. With sparseness and grit the order of the day, Yang's work supplied some welcome effervescence.

Finally, **Sarah Braman**: her focus, like Wurtz's, is squarely on the stuff of everyday life, on how things are used, stored, and shared, she is also a perceptive observer of America's collective psyche. For her second show at **Mitchell-Innes & Nash**, "You Are Everything," Braman continued steadily down the fertile path she has cleared, combining wooden boxes and Plexiglas sheets in majestic shades of purple and orange with found objects—this time, the back of an old but pretty-well-cared-for white Toyota Celica, the frame of a bunk bed, and some beat-up chairs—to create a warm, hippie-inflected variant of Post-Minimalism that is alive to bodies and aware of time. Some works even featured comfy seating, making them refuges from the ravages outside. "Take a load off and relax," Braman seemed to offer, kindly, to an exhausted nation. **ANDREW RUSSETH**