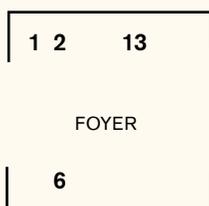


FINESSE

EXHIBITION GUIDE

“It is no longer a matter of trying to subvert or intrude. Those strategies are now recognized and invited. Now it is a matter of finessing, which is certainly not enough.”



The Wallach Art Gallery
January 18–March 11, 2017

Curated by Leah Pires

The artist Louise Lawler made this observation in 1994. Her statement, and the slippery relationship between artists and institutions that it conjures, are the starting point for this exhibition.

What is finesse? In its most general sense, the word denotes skill and discretion in the handling of a situation—perhaps even the subtle manipulation of circumstances to one’s advantage. This may involve clever maneuvering, cunning, or artifice. Finesse can also designate delicate workmanship or refined comportment. Its synonyms include dexterity, trickery, and sleight. In the context of the card game bridge, ‘to finesse’ has another nuance: to win a round not by playing one’s strongest card, but by using a lesser card that one knows will nonetheless trump one’s opponents.

This exhibition brings together recent and newly-commissioned work by seven artists whose work, like Lawler’s, deliberately finesses the relationship between the artist and the structures she occupies—whether material, social, or political. This tactic rests on the premise that those attuned to the conditions that reproduce a system, in all their limits and contingencies, are best positioned to transform them from within.

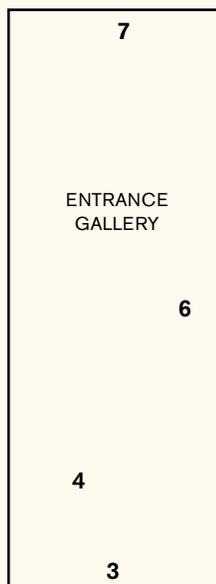
LOUISE LAWLER

- 1 *Untitled, Red/Blue, 1978***
Artist’s book (two volumes), 7 x 5 inches each
- 2 *Untitled, Black/White, 1978***
Artist’s book, 7 x 5 inches

These unassuming books weave together a cryptic set of references to cardplay and espionage. *Untitled, Black/White* presents a screenplay by Janelle Reiring that dramatizes the October 1917 execution of the Dutch dancer, courtesan, and alleged double agent Mata Hari. An appropriated journalistic account of the event is interspersed with references to playing cards, including a seven of diamonds disguised in black-and-white.

By contrast, *Untitled, Red/Blue* presents a succession life-size, face-down playing cards on the recto of every page. Each is captioned with the name of a card from a standard 52-card deck, but can these words be trusted? The cards never reveal their faces. Together, the two volumes almost—but don’t quite—make up a full deck. Some cards appear twice, while others are absent entirely.

Both books have an opaque two-tier pricing scheme: a book priced at \$100 might be indistinguishable from one that sells for \$7.95, save for the placement of a red circle on its inside cover. Like playing cards, these books can’t be taken at face value. There is reason to believe that appearances might be deceiving.



CARISSA RODRIGUEZ

3 *Milieu Intérieur, 2017*

Inkjet print on vinyl wallpaper, 90 x 135 inches

4 *Milieu Intérieur, 2017*

Steel postcard rack, digitally printed postcards
Visitors may take postcards.

5 *Sketch of a woman who would become Albertine (iPhone pic of Proust's notebook at The Morgan Library 4/26/13), 2013*

Digital C-print, custom walnut frame; 15 ³/₈ x 13 x 1 ⁵/₈ inches

As artist-in-residence at the CCA Wattis Institute in San Francisco in 2015, Rodriguez asked her host to broker a transaction between artist and patron: she proposed a photoshoot of the art collection of Mike and Kaitlyn Krieger (co-founders of Instagram and the Future Justice Fund, respectively) in their nearby home. For Rodriguez, the process of procuring the images through the professional and social channels that connect the institution to its benefactors and public is as integral to the work as the resulting photographs. Her proposition, unrealized during her residency, was instead taken up the occasion of this exhibition.

Milieu Intérieur offers a view into the private life of the inventor of the ubiquitous image-sharing app. The mural overlays two private tableaux: a photographic work by Trevor Paglen, an artist widely collected by the Bay Area tech sector, nestled within the entrance to the Kriegers' home. Paglen's photo of a military "black site" could be construed as a benign, decorative landscape; so too is Rodriguez's domestic interior encapsulating it. The artist notes that biopower, the State's prerogative to "make live and let die" (Foucault), is today enabled by the tech industry. The imperative of exposure allows self-maintenance to partly supplant state control. Posting, tagging and liking are a few given means by which we can claim to be *alive*. What is being framed in this view within a view, and what agents were involved in its making?

I'm normal. I have a garden. I'm a person., Rodriguez's exhibition at the Wattis, suggests that normalcy and personhood are contingent on the ownership of private property. The ancient Greek word for economy (*oikos*) encompasses three interrelated realms: the family, the family's property, and the house. The dynamic between artist and institution relies on a similar slippage between the social and the transactional. Rodriguez describes this relationship as the invitation to reside, live, and make work within—to make the institution a temporary house or home. Given *this life*, the question then becomes: who is renting and who is buying?

KARIN SCHNEIDER

6 *Blackout, 2017*

Kodak Pageant 16mm film projector, projector stand, exhibition space, photograph by John Miller taken from the viewpoint of the projector (reproduced in exhibition catalogue), chart to be completed by gallery attendants

Visitors may request the activation of this work with the gallery attendant at the front desk. It may only be activated once per day.

Once per day, for fifteen minutes, the projector illuminates the screen covering the gallery window while the lights in the rest of the exhibition are turned off. The time of activation is marked by the gallery staff on a chart prepared by Schneider, indexing their collaboration in the production of the work. Film is defined by duration; this work, too, is comprised of events that unfold at different temporalities: the time required to recreate a film, take a photograph, visit an exhibition, run a projector, fill out a chart; the time it takes for a technology to become obsolete.

This piece is haunted by two historical precedents: a 15-minute cameraless film by Michael Asher and a light projection by Louise Lawler. In 1973, Asher made a monochrome film by processing 16mm stock in a film lab without ever exposing it to light. Because projecting celluloid inevitably adds scratches, and Asher wanted the work to be devoid of any visual information, the film was screened just once. In 2005, Karin Schneider worked closely with Asher to recreate the film for a screening at the cooperatively-run New York gallery Orchard. Though they used the same film stock and matched the production process as closely as possible, the two screenings were nevertheless "very different situations," Schneider notes in the publication accompanying this exhibition.

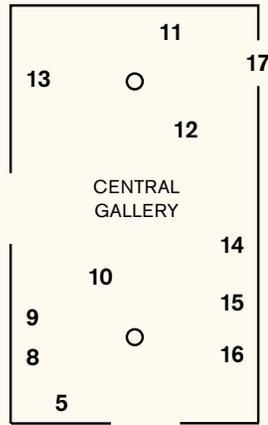
A few years after Asher's film was first made, Louise Lawler placed colored, patterned theater lights in a group exhibition in Los Angeles. When the other artworks were fully illuminated, Lawler's spotlights were washed out and hardly noticeable, so she negotiated with the other artists to have the main exhibition lights turned off for one minute of every fifteen. During that time, her work sheathed the room (and the movie theater across the street) with a pink and blue tree branch pattern, rendering the boundary between her contribution and everyone else's indistinct.

FIA BACKSTRÖM

7 *ART POLITIQUEMENT ENGAGÉ – POLITISCHE ENGAGIERTE KUNST, 2007*

Intervention, 1982, xerox copies; Mac OS 10.3 Panther startup CD; *Artforum*, April 2006; *Pigeon 4/5* by Roe Ethridge, 2001, C-print (courtesy the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York); *Smoke and Mirrors #126* by Eileen Quinlan, 2006, silver gelatin fiber print, half of diptych (private collection, New York); adhesive vinyl print; inkjet print; wheatpaste; tempera paint; spray paint; axe

This installation sets up a chain of visual and textual associations that slip and slide between 'low' and 'high,' corporate and DIY, complicity and critique—ultimately pointing to the unstable, and sometimes arbitrary, relationship between such terms. It brings together materials that are borrowed, sourced, and made: photographs by Roe Ethridge and Eileen Quinlan, wallpaper printed with a Picasso drawing, an issue of *Artforum* with a cover by Christopher Williams, reproductions of a leftist art journal, a flyer for a Broadway production, the installation disc for a Mac operating system, and clenched fists emblematic of the Black Power movement, among other items. These images signal to, operate on, and cross-pollinate with one another. Why does an image read as 'political,' or 'corporate,' and how might its meaning shift through reproduction and circulation? Morphological similarity might turn out to be a misrecognition, leading down a treacherous path. Conversely, the unreliability of images might turn out to be their greatest potential.



LUCY MCKENZIE

- 8 *Quodlibet XXVII (Unlawful Assembly I)*, 2013**
Oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 23 1/2 (Private collection, Chicago, IL)
- 9 *Quodlibet XXVIII (Unlawful Assembly II)*, 2013**
Oil on canvas, 35 7/8 x 23 7/8 (Private collection, Chicago, IL)
- 10 *Quodlibet XII (Thea Westreich & Ethan Wagner)*, 2011**
Oil on wood, 39 1/2 x 78 3/4 inches (Collection of Thea Westreich-Wagner and Ethan Wagner)
- 11 *Quodlibet XLIII ('Olympic Dames' posters)*, 2014**
Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 78 3/4 inches (Collection of Joseph Tabet)

Quodlibets—*trompe l'oeil* still-life paintings that capture everyday materials in seemingly haphazard arrangements—have been central to McKenzie's conceptual painting practice since she studied at a private school for decorative painting in Brussels a decade ago. "Historically they have been used for dissident comment, the interplay between objects producing subtle narratives specific to their context, visible only to those who lean in for a closer look," she explains. The pinboards depicted in the *Unlawful Assembly* paintings bring together false evidence that seem to frame McKenzie's art dealer in a petty crime that she had in fact committed. The nearby tabletop quodlibet immortalizes material of personal significance to the couple who commissioned it: personal notes, a child's drawing, a bird's nest, travel mementos, books, and other keepsakes. *Olympic Dames* restages a magazine insert made by McKenzie that juxtaposes Olympic athletes from Soviet sports almanacs, photos from a pornographic magazine, and the artist's peers modeling her work. Its slogan recasts Barbara Kruger's photomontage appropriation of the feminist slogan "Your Body is a Battleground." McKenzie thinks of these works as unconventional portraits—the deeper significance of the juxtaposed materials is only legible to those who can decipher their codes.

ATELIER E.B.

- 12 *Paravent IX – Mirrored blond vein with text, pastel tartan separations with black stripe*, 2015**

Double sided folding screen in six parts, oil on canvas mounted on wood, silkscreen on Egyptian cotton sheeting on wood, steel frame; 71 x 3/4 inches (Courtesy of Galerie Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin / New York)

Atelier E.B. (Lucy McKenzie and Beca Lipscombe) produces fashion collections, interior design commissions, exhibitions, and events. Their paravents—folding screens printed on one side by Lipscombe and painted on the other by McKenzie—serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, they divide space in exhibitions or offer privacy for trying on clothes in Atelier E.B. shop installations; on the other, they are sold as contemporary art to help subsidize the ethical production of the pair's experimental fashion line. One side of the paravents is more subdued, intended to complement a domestic environment, while the other is

more graphic, suited for exhibition design or shop décor. Defined by two interconnected sides that are never visible simultaneously, they symbolize the dual nature of Atelier E.B.'s activities as design and fine art, and the independent yet collaborative relationship of its creators.

FIA BACKSTRÖM

- 13 *Umläut – In search of spelling as a space to speak from*, 2017**

Monkey by Phoebe d'Heurle, 2016, inkjet print (courtesy the artist); *Nazist-paradis* by Israel Holmgren, 1943, printed publication; *Paranoïd* by Black Sabbath, 1970, vinyl EP; excerpt from *Den Zebrarandiga Pudelkärnan* by Barbro Sandin, 1986; clay; fabric; silver gelatin RC prints; Löwenbräu glass bottle; text intervention (in foyer and exhibition guide)

This work explores the uneasy relationship between language and reality through a "composite essay" (Julie Ault) that brings together materials created by Backström and others. It develops an associative connection between psychosis (clinically defined as a loss of connection to reality) and far-right political rhetoric (which deliberately unmoors language from reality, she suggests). Both are instances when "the signifier and signified lose connection with one another and start to wander freely." A text in the vitrine quotes someone who, experiencing a psychotic episode, became convinced that he had found a safe space in "the dot above the i." Here, language becomes material. The umlaut—two dots that appear over ä, ë, ö, and ü to modify their pronunciation in Germanic languages—connects these themes. It emblemizes a letter or image being modified by its surroundings, a strategy that is the hallmark of Backström's work.

Playing on different associations with German and Scandinavian cultures, umlauts are used in corporate branding to suggest quality and authenticity and by metal bands like Mötörhead to connote toughness or violence. (Here, they augment the exhibition's title in the entrance-way.) Backström notes that Bavaria, where the beer Löwenbräu originates, was also home to the ideological birth of Nazism, its attack on avant-garde art, and the Bayreuth porcelains photographed by Phoebe d'Heurle (see adjacent rooms and excerpt in vitrine). The 1943 book *Nazistparadis* [*Nazi Paradise*] appears alongside paralyph prints of recent news images: an anti-Islam rally in Germany, protests at a refugee detention center in Greece, and a monastery in Iraq destroyed by the Islamic State. In this work, the artist tests the fungibility of signs by probing the limits of their ability to signal clearly.

JILL MAGID

- 14 *I Pick a Life*, 2007**
Silkscreen, four-color print, 27 1/4 x 44 inches
- 15 *My Sensitivity*, 2007**
Silkscreen, four-color print, 27 1/4 x 44 inches
- 16 *Disguise*, 2007**
Silkscreen, four-color print, 27 1/4 x 44 inches

Jill Magid's work engages systems of power and authority on an intimate level. These quotations, annotated by the artist and writ large in silkscreen prints, are culled from Jerzy Kosiński's 1975 spy novel *Cockpit*. The protagonist, a rogue agent named Tarden, is a close observer of his surroundings and a master of disguise and dissimulation. Magid took careful note for her own practice: she first read the book in 2005 while developing a project commissioned by the Dutch secret service. Over the course of three years, the artist interviewed eighteen Dutch agents about their private lives while also gaining insight into their work. Magid used the agents' stories to represent "the face of the institution" through a series of works, including a book, which complied with the secret service's confidentiality guidelines. Nevertheless, the organization confiscated some of her artworks, redacted the manuscript that she had authored, and seized the sole uncensored copy while it was on view behind glass at the Tate Modern in London. Magid later published the redacted text as a paperback titled *Becoming Tarden* (excerpted in the publication that accompanies this exhibition).

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PHOEBE D'HEURLE

17 *Untitled (cat)*, 2017

Ceramic, 13 1/4 x 14 5/8 x 9 3/4 inches

18 *Three color combinations I of V*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 30 x 20 inches

19 *Three color combinations II of V*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 30 x 20 inches

20 *Decoy II*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 10 x 11 inches

21 *Scarecrow*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 14 x 11 inches

22 *Thirty*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 26 x 18 inches

23 *One hundred trillion*, 2016

Offset plate, 32 x 21.5 inches

24 *POV (Still life II)*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 30 x 24 inches

25 *After orange*, 2016

Painted glass, 24 x 20 inches

26 *Ply*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 36 x 24 inches

27 *Monkey*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 40 x 30 inches

28 *After white*, 2016

Painted glass, 24 x 20 inches

29 *POV (Lovebirds II)*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 30 x 24 inches

30 *POV (Lovebirds I)*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 30 x 24 inches

31 *Untitled (cat)*, 2016

Ceramic, 8 1/4 x 18 x 16 inches

33 *After purple*, 2016

Painted glass, 22 x 28 inches

35 *Untitled (cat)*, 2016

Ceramic, 11 1/2 x 18 1/4 x 9 3/4 inches

34 *Three aspects II*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 20 x 16 inches

35 *Three aspects III*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 20 x 16 inches

36 *Three aspects I*, 2016

Inkjet print on aluminum, 20 x 16 inches

Wall-based works hang on the artist's aluminum track system.

These images stage diverse objects against colorful backdrops in order to probe the shifting vectors of taste, class, and consumption through the language of photography. Here, consumer desire is fed through feedback loops of cultural mimicry and exchange: from early 20th-century figural jugs made in Germany and bud vases produced in Occupied Japan to hyperinflated currencies and cans of condensed milk. A labyrinthian network of connections suggests that desire, like value, is context-bound. So too is the point of view from which you look at these photos.

While the German pitchers' forms don't forgo functionality, their embellishments unabashedly entice the viewer, whose gaze they seem to return with their own inquiring eyes. The traditional glazes coating the Japanese vessels belie their occidental roots; the 'original' or 'authentic' remains elusive amidst happenstance transformations that render tradition indistinguishable from influence. 2-D and 3-D collide and collapse on the surface of these objects, which are camouflaged against hand-painted watercolor backdrops. Their seamless forms, a trope borrowed from commercial photography, make it difficult to separate figure from ground—especially through the fixed 'eye' of the camera lens.

Monochrome glass plates offer visual respite, standing in for the photographic process without being produced by it. As color swatches, they reference the development of consumer culture in the early 20th century, whereby the introduction of color choice necessitated a new kind of surplus on reserve. These works suggest that photographs, too, can act as vessels: for representation, information, value, and desire. Like the currencies and commodities they capture, these images are multiplied, circulated, accumulated, and exchanged.

COOPERATIVE PERFORMANCE

What do you think you might need?, 2017

Some of the resources used to rehearse and make this performance include: the work to manage this exhibition space, the materials of this exhibition and the space itself, plus the time that the space of the gallery is open and time between exhibitions.

Rehearsals (gallery closed to the public)

December 19–22, 10 am – 4 pm;

January 23–24, 30–31, 10 am – 4 pm

February 6–7, 13, 20–21, 10 am – 4 pm

Public performance

February 25, 3 p.m.

Artist Emma Hedditch initiated Cooperative Performance as an outgrowth of her research into the history of cooperative organizations: groups of people who join together to meet their shared economic, social, and cultural needs by establishing jointly-owned, democratically-controlled enterprises. (The Park Slope Food Coop, the outdoor goods retailer REI, and the Dunbar apartments in Harlem are all examples of cooperatives.) Unlike corporate business models, which distribute profits between a limited number of shareholders, cooperatives emphasize fairness, equity, and responsibility by extending these privileges to all participants.

Through a series of ongoing discussions, rehearsals in the Wallach Art Gallery, and a public performance, Hedditch and her collaborators explore how the principles of cooperative organization might emerge from the group exhibition *Finesse*. Many different resources enter into the situation: artists' time, material, and activities; the institution's economic and spatial resources; the labor of the curator and the gallery staff. How would the production, work, and consumption of an exhibition be reorganized if they were cooperatized? Resources might be reconceptualized as 'investments.' Each investor would be a member of the cooperative and have a 'share' in the surplus outcome.