

Cinderella Ashtray

group show
October 17th to October 21st, 2013

held at
Concord
1010 N San Fernando Road
Los Angeles, CA 90065

featuring works by
Theodora Allen
Bonnie Begusch
Greg Curtis
Kathryn Garcia
Gracie Devito
Vidisha Fadescha
Fabrice Maze
Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal
Pascual Sisto
Daniel Small
Katrina Umber

curated by
Katharina Weinstock



KNOTS

Curatorial Concept

Los Angeles is a city rife with mirages, gaps and traps opened in the continuous surface of reality. Its vast, desert-like cityscape seems predestined for experiences of Surreality. Here and there we encounter disruptions in its monotonous concrete fabric, when we – passing by – catch a glimpse of a movie set at the side of the street, randomly transforming a piece of space into a temporary stage of Hollywood fiction.

The creation of such islands of experience within the space of real life has been conceptualized by Surrealism. As Rosalind Krauss pointed out, this paradigm is substantially dependent on framing structures, which designate sites of the *surreal* within the *real* (Krauss refers to Giacometti's sculptures, as well as to the surrealist use of photography – the medium of framing reality par excellence).¹ The exhibition

display of “Cinderella Ashtray” adopts this principle of *framing space* by creating a theatrical setting: Works of art, furniture and mere things are – without differentiation in their status – encapsulated in a little theater of their own. Just like Giacometti's cage sculptures, which create a space detached from the viewer,

but involve him at the same time (his famous sculpture “Suspended Ball,” encourages us to reach inside and set up the pendulum, Abb. 1), the exhibition display, too, invites the visitors to interact – to enter the space, take a seat, flip through the books on the coffee table and to engage with the various exhibited objects. The hereby-engendered oscillation between two modes of being (stage/non-stage, art objects/banal things) lies at the very heart of the surrealist idea.



The exhibition “Cinderella Ashtray” aims at tracing the surrealist paradigm back to its poetic origins. Within the context of the exhibition, books by André Breton and Louis Aragon, photocopied excerpts and reproductions of surrealist photography are made available to the visitors. On the one hand the daring juxtaposition of archival material and contemporary art performs the typically surrealist principle of



creating vertiginous constellations. On the other hand it indicates how the ten contemporary artists featured draw upon surrealist aesthetics by estranging the familiar, destabi-

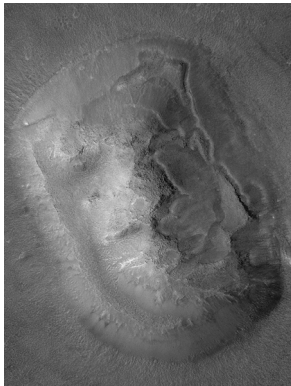
lizing our habitual perception and by making the pavement we stand on turn into precarious drift sand...

There is a peculiar magnetism to Downtown, the dark old heart of Los Angeles. Who hasn't ever been caught up in the vortex of its wicked one-way streets? In the context of her performance "Eldorado to Eldorado" (September 27th, 2013, 426 South Spring Street, Downtown Los Angeles) **Vidisha Fadescha** hosted a guided tour, which made reference to the surrealist practice of *flânerie*. Reveling in the morbid splendor of its bygone glamour, Vidisha Fadescha used Eldorado – the legendary city of gold – as an allegory for a compulsive, never ending search. Within the confines of the exhibition, so-called *record objects* metonymically represent the past event: Golden gloves and shoes worn during the performance, as well as a golden balloon (a marvellous trouvaille, found in the ruinous hundred-year-old lobby the "El Dorado Loft Building" on Spring Street).

Louis Aragon's book "Paris Peasant" is a documentation of his flâneries, as well as a last snapshot of the decaying *Passage de l'Opéra* (Abb. 2). In his haunting descriptions of the labyrinthine streets of the arcade – the corridors, clapping doors, and murmuring walls of its hidden demimonde hotels (Abb. 3) – Aragon captures its unique Surreality. **Greg Curtis'** uncanny gif-images exude a similar atmospheric density. While they seem to show the intimacy of empty bed- and living rooms, the artist actually made use of footage gathered from webcam porn. By infinitely prolonging the moments in which the performers have just left the stage, Greg Curtis intensifies their subliminal expressiveness to an unbearable degree: His mute images seem to be booming with whispering voices, rustling curtains or the sound of a fan, perpetually cutting through the stuffy air of these oppressive cells.

Daniel Small's conceptual piece "Excavation II (Face on Mars)" revolves around the mad, meandering search of Lambert Dolphin – an archeologist flirting with esoteric doctrines, who ended up dedicating his life to tracking no less than whatever holds the world together in its inmost folds. In 1976 Dolphin led the effort to send an orbiter to Mars. It returned with





a sensational photograph of Mars' surface, on which a face resembling a Sphinx could be discerned (the picture from 1976 is present in the exhibition as part of the artist's collected archival material). Small's large-scale photograph is a reproduction of a high-resolution shot of the very same area, taken by

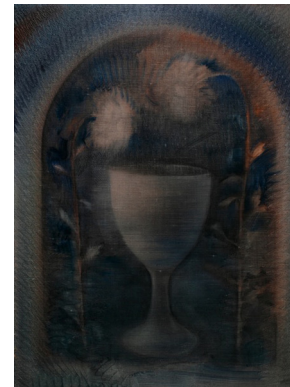
the Mars Global Surveyor 25 years later, in 2001. Ironically enough, the contemporary Mars photograph didn't clarify the fight between esoteric believers (like Dolphin) and NASA scientists at all: Whether, one does – or does not, recognize the face of a Sphinx in the pictured Mars mountain, lies in the eye of the beholder. The surrealist eye is an eye haunted by such hallucinating reminiscences. In his novel "Mad Love", André Breton invokes Leonardo da Vinci's method of finding images by staring at an old wall, as a proto-surrealist technique of inspiration.² In Daniel Small's photograph, the surface of Mars becomes such a screen – allowing for interminable processes of *visual automatism* (Abb. 4 und 5).

The discovery of the inspirational dynamic of *automatism* (methods of free association) had been constitutive for the inception of Surrealism. In 1919 the founding fathers of the movement conducted the experiment of *automatic*

writing, discovering an inexhaustible source of poetic inspiration. Within the world of things, Breton designates the *crystal* as an ideal manifestation of this kind of automatic, involuntary creation³ (Abb. 6 und 7). In the context of the exhibition there are two allusions to the crystal: A selection of stones from



the private collection of the artist **Kathryn Garcia**, and "Facets" by **Katrina Umber**. Seemingly floating above a jet-black backdrop, Katrina Umber's colorful shapes appear like specimens of a crystal collection. By washing out the



photographic print and revealing the underlying layers of the film, Umber transforms photographic representation into pure crystal-like color figurations. In doing so, the artist blurs the lines between the image (i.e. the referential character of analogue photography as trace of light) and self-referential *image objects*.

While Katrina Umber reflects upon image objects, **Theodora Allen** creates *object images*. Her grisaille painting of a chalice and dandelions draws upon the magic of things



– a power the still life genre has always enjoyed. In the still life, the object becomes allegorical, signifying something other than itself.

Bonnie Begusch's piece “Knots” follows a similar

logic: The video image of the letters K N O T S – flickering, distorting, vanishing at times – undermines the self-evidence of the word as signifier, thus revealing its visual and semantic ambiguity. The motif of iridescence fascinated Surrealism: Reversible figures, verbal homophonies, mandrake roots which look like figurines... Surrealist perception is paranoid and hallucinatory. It makes the world appear Janus-faced. To the surrealist eye, slogans and signs in public space turn into enigmatic hieroglyphs⁴ (Abb. 8 und 9).

The superimposition of two distant realities is the essence of Surreality, as one might say. This poetic principle also applies to space, as Lautrèamont's phrase (famously quoted by Breton as a magic formula for surrealist beauty) suggests: “Beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissection table of a sewing machine and an umbrella”⁵. In **Gracie Devito's** object assemblage “Pigeonhole”, it's also a table – an antique, triangular one –, which serves as a field for a bewildering encounter. There's something strange about her arrangement of chess-

patterned tea cookies. Partially covered by pastry, there is an amorphous *something* infiltrating the regular order of things. In its uncanny formlessness, it recalls the *dream objects* Breton wanted to create according to dream visions, put into circulation and make collide with the objects of the real world.

Probably – in terms of unsettling object constellations – the paramount example was the collection of art, ethnographic artifacts, books, photographs and peculiar bric-a-brac André Breton himself had been accumulating in his studio over a lifetime (Abb. 10). This stunning surrealist cabinet of curiosities had been hidden in Breton's studio for decades, until 2003, when the auction of Breton's entire collection attracted media attention. The TV documentary by **Fabrice Maze** (on view in the exhibition) was shot in the same year – making Breton's stunning collection publicly visible for the first time in the very moment of its irreversible disintegration.



There are various ways in which Surrealism performs a transfiguration of the commonplace. In **Pascual Sisto's** minimalist video works, banal objects develop a strange life of their own. As if afflicted by a malicious spell, an ordinary



white plastic chair engages in a rough dance; a deserted parking lot becomes the site of a haunting apparition; and a customary house-plant from *Home Depot* becomes cosmic – spinning around its own center,

projecting little yellow dots into space like an aura. *Finding the Marvellous in the everyday*: This alchemy of Surrealism crystallizes in the phrase “Cinderella Ashtray”⁶ – a poetic afflatus Breton claims to have conceived in a state of semi-sleep and which continued to echo in his mind. The two words (one pertaining to the magical world of fairytales, the other one to the disenchanted world of modernity) create an area of tension, calling for it’s metamorphosing dynamic to be put into effect. In her poem “Nightingale Turbine” **Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal** engaged in this experiment by spelling out its structural logic – thus making Surrealism work what it is: A wor(l)d machine.

Notes

¹ See Rosalind Krauss, “A Game Plan: The terms of Surrealism”, in *Passages in modern Sculpture*, ed. Rosalind Krauss (Cambridge/ London, 1981) and Rosalind Krauss, “The photographic Conditions of Surrealism”, in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, ed. Rosalind Krauss (London/ Cambridge, 1985).

² See André Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 86.

³ See André Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 11: “There could be no higher artistic teaching than that of the crystal”.

⁴ See André Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 15: “You only have to know how to get along in the labyrinth. Interpretive delirium begins only when man, ill-prepared, is taken by a sudden fear in the forest of symbols”.

⁵ André Breton, *The Communicating Vessels*, p. 53.

⁶ See André Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 33. In contrast to the English translation the French phrase rhymes: “Le Cendrier Cendrillon”.

Nightingale Turbine

by Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal

Thank goodness poetry doesn't taste like anything,
just preserves the beauty of words that curdle:

Mary's diamond, a tamarind band around a quivering finger
engulfing some blue thought

The banalities that Mother's shoes ordain

A wasp with the waist of skinny woman
slinking in the corner where Mother chain smokes
and the ashes meet the tile, delighting to be freed of their
heft

Ariel's airplane, the dull escape of a tethered phone

Jack growing sentimental, handling a porcelain tchotchke
from the cheap kitchen shelf

A dragonfly picking up Ariel's crossed signals
ignoring Mary's narcissism which takes all day.

These stanzas pronounce nothing, pretend a lot.
Perhaps, contaminate. Today I play at nihilistic Cinderella,
fathering plans with mulching love

My compositions are bent on iridescence, limitless as
an egg

In solidarity, Nightingale turbine
Your little world machine

Research Material

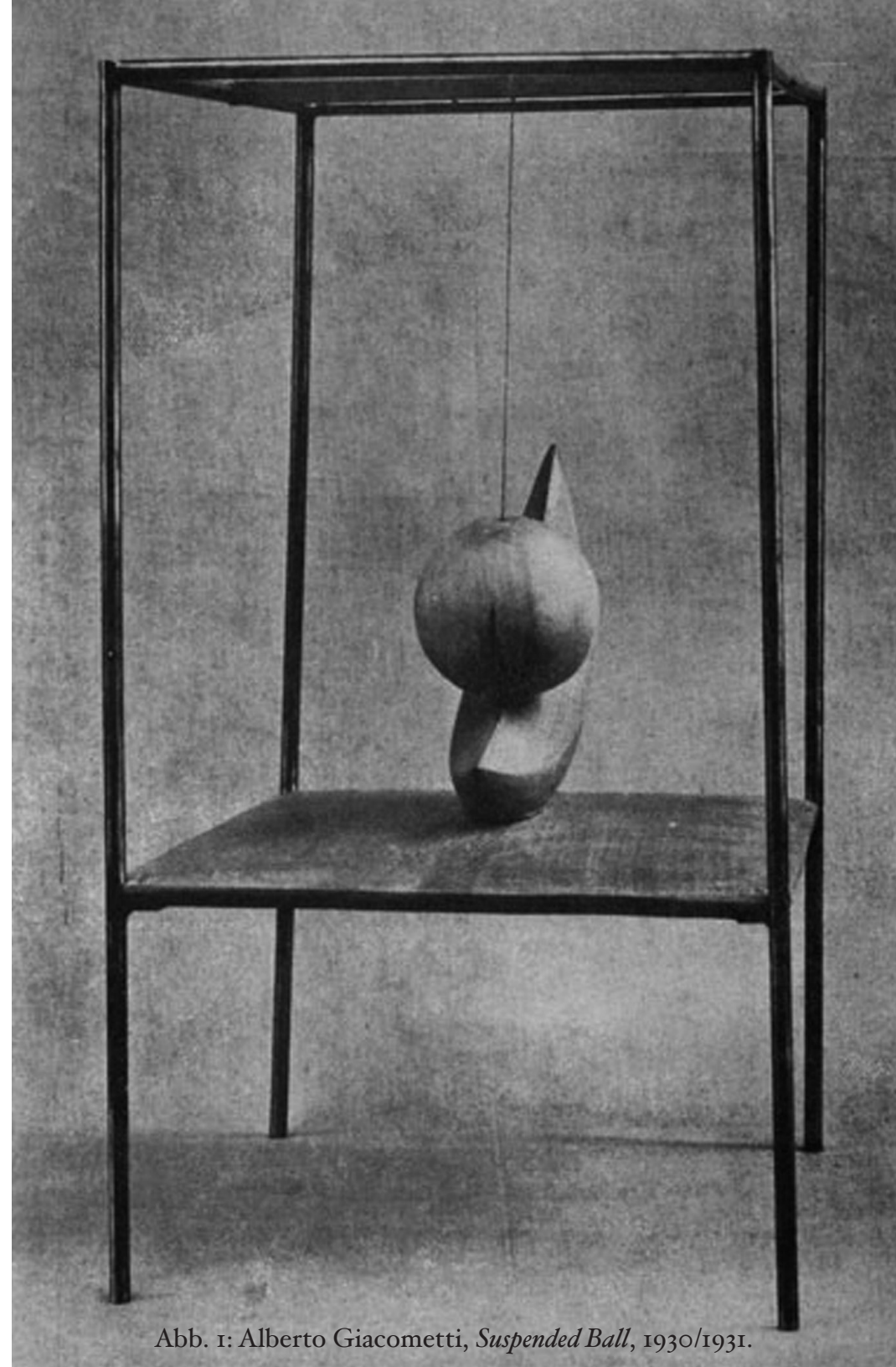


Abb. 1: Alberto Giacometti, *Suspended Ball*, 1930/1931.



Abb. 2: Eugène Atget, *Passage du grand Cerf*, 1907.



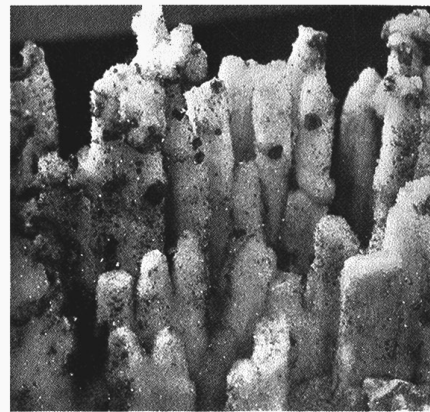
Abb. 3: Brassai, *Washing in Brothel*, 1932.



Abb. 4: Brassäi, *Wall*, 1932.



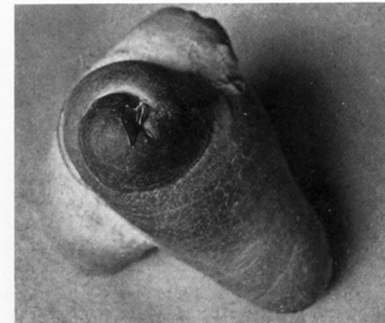
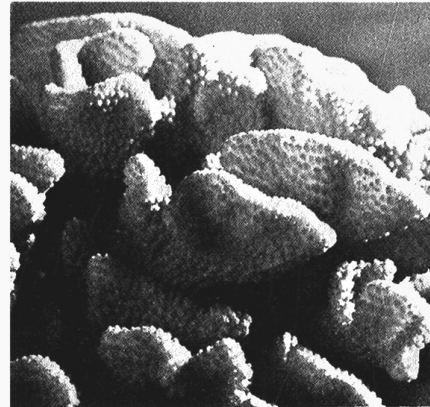
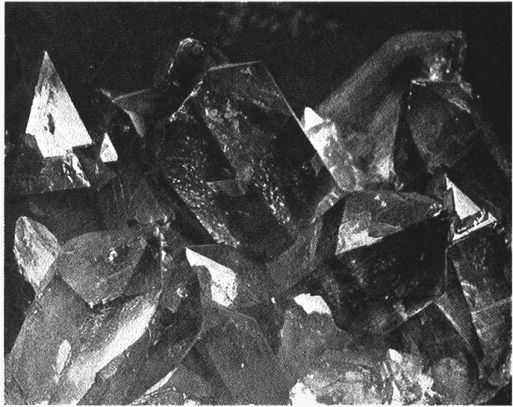
Abb. 5: Karl Blossfeldt, *Acontium*, 1928.



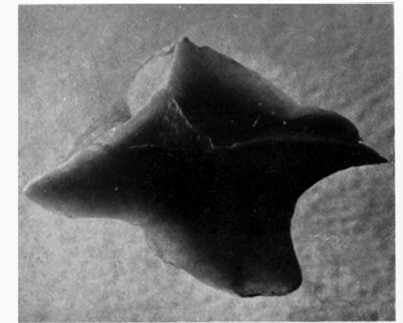
BILLET D'AUTOBUS ROULÉ " SYMÉTRIQUEMENT ", FORME TRÈS RARE D'AUTOMATISME MORPHOLOGIQUE AVEC GERMES ÉVIDENTS DE STÉRÉOTYPE.



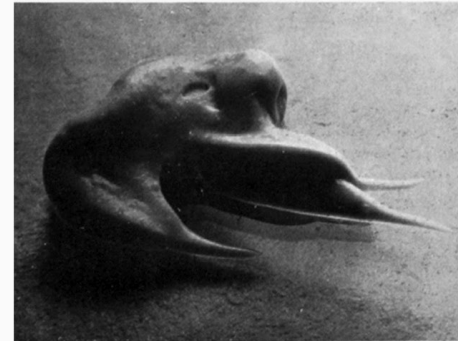
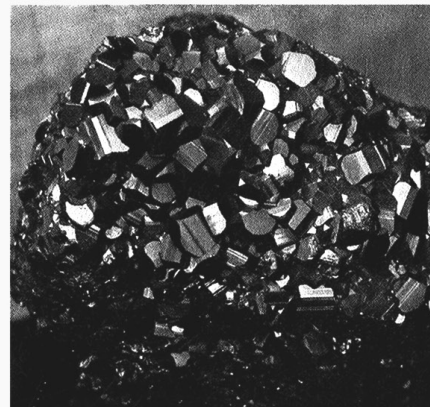
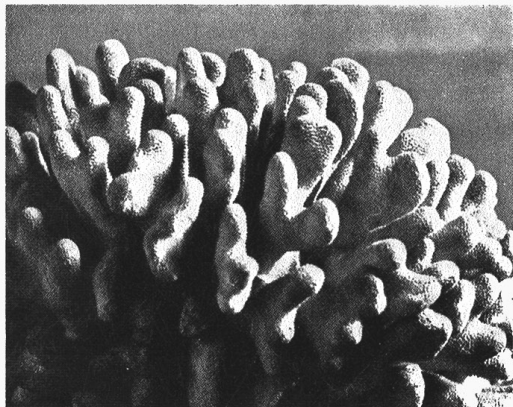
NUMÉRO D'AUTOBUS ROULÉ, TROUVÉ DANS LA POCHE DE VESTON D'UN BUREAUCRATE MOYEN (CRÉDIT LYONNAIS); CARACTÉRISTIQUES LES PLUS FRÉQUENTES DE " MODERN'STYLE ".



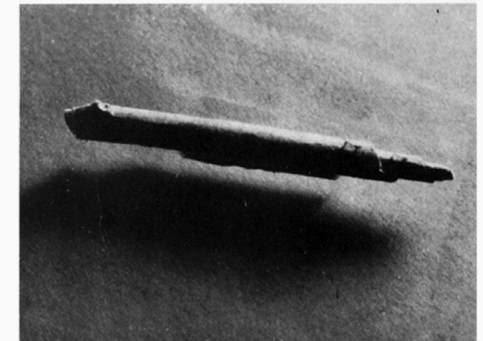
LE PAIN ORNEMENTAL ET MODERN'STYLE ÉCHAPPE À LA STÉRÉOTYPE MOLLE



MORCEAU DE SAVON PRÉSENTANT DES FORMES AUTOMATIQUES MODERN'STYLE TROUVÉ DANS UN LAVABO.



LE HASARD MORPHOLOGIQUE DU DENTRIFIÉ RÉPANDU N'ÉCHAPPE PAS À LA STÉRÉOTYPE FINE ET ORNEMENTALE.



ENROULEMENT ÉLÉMENTAIRE OBTENU CHEZ UN " DÉBILE MENTAL ".

SCULPTURES INVOLONTAIRES



Abb. 8: Jacques-André Boiffard, *The bookstore*, 1928.

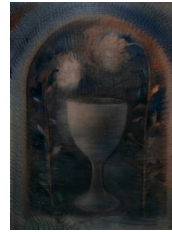


Abb. 9: Jacques-André Boiffard, *The Mazda sign*, 1928.



Abb. 10: Sabine Weiss, *André Breton's studio*, 1960.

List of Works



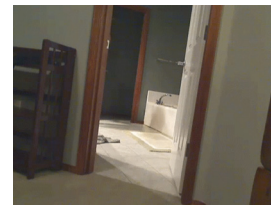
Theodora Allen
“The Rain and the Shine, is yours is mine”, 2013.
Oil on linen,
18” x 24”.



Bonnie Begusch
“Knots”, 2013.
Video loop, bw, silent,
3 min 15 sec.



Greg Curtis
“30th Sep 2011, N° 9”, 2011.
Gif animation (“brb” series),
displayed on digital picture frame.



Greg Curtis
“27th Sep 2011, N° 3”, 2011.
Gif animation (“brb” series),
displayed on digital picture frame.



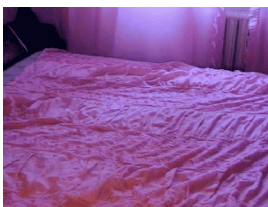
Greg Curtis
“14th Aug 2011, N° 23”, 2011.
Gif animation (“brb” series),
displayed on digital picture frame.



Greg Curtis
 “12th Aug 2011, N° 4”, 2011.
 Gif animation (“brb” series),
 displayed on digital picture frame.



Greg Curtis
 “7th Aug 2011, N° 1”, 2011.
 Gif animation (“brb” series),
 displayed on digital picture frame.



Greg Curtis
 “15th May 2011, N° 7”, 2011.
 Gif animation (“brb” series),
 displayed on digital picture frame.



Kathryn Garcia
 “Homage to Claude Cahun”, 2013.
 Selenite, Obsidian and Millennial
 stone.



Gracie Devito
 “Pigeonhole”, 2011.
 Unfired clay, checkerboard
 cookies, table.



Gracie Devito
 “Ocean and Repeat”, 2013.
 Sea shells,
 headband.



Vidisha Fadescha
 “Eldorado to Eldorado”, 2013.
 Record Object (golden balloon
 found inside El Dorado Lofts, Spring
 Street, Los Angeles) and props from
 performance (golden gloves & shoes).



Vidisha Fadescha, Roslyn Cohen,
 Emma Iocovozzi & Katrin Winkler
 “Waiting for the Drone (A Tour of
 Sepulveda Basin)”, 2012-2013.
 Tour map,
 archival print on bamboo.



Fabrice Maze
 “André Breton, Malgré tout.
 L'Œil à l'état sauvage”, 2003.
 Video, 67 min.



Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal
 “Nightingale Turbine”, 2013.
 Poem on the principle of
 Cinderella Ashtray.



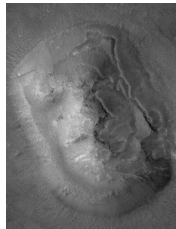
Pascual Sisto
 "Aucuba Expanded",
 2013.
 Single channel HD video loop.



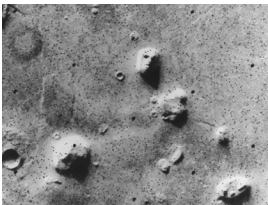
Pascual Sisto
 "No Strings attached",
 2007.
 Single channel video loop.



Pascual Sisto
 "28 Years in the Implicate Order",
 2005.
 Single channel video loop.



Daniel Small
 "Excavation II (Face on Mars)",
 2012.
 Framed photograph,
 24" x 36" x 2".



Daniel Small
 "Excavation II (Face on Mars)", 2012.
 Archival photograph from NASA
 Viking Orbiter (July 25, 1976),
 6" x 9".



Daniel Small
 "Excavation II (Face on Mars)", 2012.
 Archival collection of literature and
 pamphlets relating to Lambert
 Dolphin.



Katrina Umber
 "Soft Mirror (playersblueorange)",
 2013.
 Unique 8" x 10" chromogenic print,
 mounted and built up on 18" x 20"
 white matte board (framed).



Katrina Umber
 "Facets", 2013.
 Seven unique chromogenic prints,
 mounted and built up on a 8.5" x 11"
 black matte board (framed).

Katharina Weinstock is an art historian, media theorist and independent curator. She holds an M.A. in *Art Research & Media Theory, Philosophy and Curatorial Practice* from the University of Art and Design, Karlsruhe (Germany). Currently she is writing her Ph.D at the Freie University Berlin (Prof. Peter Geimer). In September 2012 she became member of the research program “The Real in modern Culture” at the University of Konstanz (Germany), where she is being a recipient of a grant from the German Research Foundation. She has presented papers at the Royal College of Art in London, at University of Kent, the University of Illinois, and elsewhere. In April 2013 she has begun teaching *Art History* in the department of *Literature Art & Media* at the University of Konstanz. Katharina gathered first curatorial experiences as an undergraduate student in Berlin, where she (in collaboration with the gallery “C.O.M.A. - Center for Opinions in Music and Art”) founded and curated *COMA project space* in the vacant rooms of a derelict brewery in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg (www.iwprojekte.de). From September 2012 to September 2013 she was commissioned by Seven Swans to curate the exhibition series *Perspectives* in Frankfurt/Main (www.sevenswans.de/perspectives/about). The exhibition *Cinderella Ashtray* took place in October 2013 at Concord Los Angeles (concordspace.com) and was conceived and implemented within her two-month residency at Los Angeles, sponsored by the research program “The Real in modern Culture”. Contact: katharina.weinstock@uni-konstanz.de