

Exhibition as Image

Over the past decade, exhibition documentation has shifted focus. What was formerly mostly a matter of archival interest has now become more rooted in publicity, following a general growth in online image circulation that has had wide-ranging effects on artistic practice. Exhibition documentation's usage as a promotional tool has become especially prevalent since the proliferation of aggregator websites as repositories for contemporary art exhibitions and the use of social media for photo sharing, which typically flatten exhibitions into images.

Furthermore, a recent tendency in documenting exhibitions – and, symbiotically, making exhibitions – stage-manages artworks for the camera, producing images destined for their subsequent re-appearance online. As such, documentation is composed and 'cleaned up' in post-production in ways that encourages us to forget the presence of the photographer. This creates a machinic, 'unauthored' point of view that tends to erase subjectivity, and in this respect, the 'eye' of the documentarian as well. Consequently, documentation can easily be misconceived as objective and value-free.

In his 1976 book *Inside the White Cube*, Brian O'Doherty describes the installation shot as a 'metaphor for the gallery space'. Since his hypothesis is determined by the physical spaces in which art is shown, and therefore documented, what is the function of (art's) re-representation beyond being a neutral extension of the gallery 'devoted to the technology of esthetics'? As such, *Exhibition as Image* proposes that this 'space' requires re-contextualizing if art is increasingly seen or re-represented through images.

The exhibition repositions documentation as an agent of exhibition-making. How then, do artists think about the afterimage of their own, or the work of others? Throughout *Exhibition as Image*, art is documented by artists as documentation, or, as artworks. Where subjectivity is habitually denied or nullified in this practice of image-making, the various artistic approaches in this show challenge processes of standardization in the production and distribution of exhibition documentation to demonstrate how new forms of documenting can account for context rather than erasing it. These range from the use of changing lens-based media, wherein the recorder is

an active component in the work, to, more recently, ways in which artists have responded, generatively, to art's representative image as it is mostly seen through screen space.

In exhibition documentation, physical presence stands in direct opposition to what O'Doherty refers to as 'space-occupying bodies' that are unwelcomed in a (gallery) space 'devoted to the technology of esthetics'. Indeed, he credits photography, which he calls 'art's old antagonist', with eliminating the spectator completely. If this means a removal of all traces of presence from an exhibition, then Hans Haacke's 1959 series of photographs of documenta 2, ***Fotonotizen documenta 2 (documenta 2 photographic notes)*** re-introduces the body back into the image. In his photographs, people often obscuring the artworks on display so one is only able to get a glimpse of the art or sometimes not even all.

At the other end of this spectrum, however, are Gili Tal's ***Spaces for Reflection (The Whole World at Your Fingertips)*** in which images of exhibition published on Contemporary Art Daily that she photographed from off her computer screen appears completely washed out. In these, the gallery become a phantom space and the spectator that O'Doherty believed the installation shot has eliminated is here nothing but a spectre, haunting empty rooms. 'You are there without being there', as he describes.

In between Haacke's and Tal's respective series, the show presents other forms by which artist's document. Individual works by Esteban Jefferson and Renée Green offer vantages of art and exhibitions as seen through handheld video footage, while Louise Lawler's photographs beneath glass paperweights can only be viewed from above. In other words, they offer alternatives to how art is most often seen through a wide-angle lens, or the corrective image – standard viewpoints in how exhibitions are normally documented nowadays. Elsewhere, Judith Barry, Contemporary Art Writing Daily, Jana Euler, and Carissa Rodriguez counter how exhibitions are reduced to two-dimensions or slow the speed with which we might see images of them circulated online.

In addition, several works in *Exhibition as Image* help us rethink how past exhibitions can be re-presented in ways beyond conventions, such as the curation of exhibitions as a readymade, or re-enactment of historical performance. For instance, Judith Barry's response to re-showing her past

contribution to the New Museum's 1986 exhibition *Damaged Goods* – she designed the exhibition architecture as her participation as an artist within it – for a survey show of artistic practices from around 1990, she instead made three-dimensional printed dioramas from the original installation shots, reanimating the exhibition documentation and collapsing the space between the sculptural and photography with her work *Damaged Goods 3D*. Barry's response to historicization here, serves as a mediator between past and present, it reconfigures the work rather than purely re-enacting it.

Finally, *Exhibition as Image* also includes a room dedicated to Jeff Preiss' *Orchard Documents* that were made as film collaborations together with other members of the cooperatively run artist-led Orchard gallery between 2005 and 2008. The five documents with Moyra Davey, Nicolás Guagnini, Andrea Fraser, Anthony McCall, and Josiah Mc Eleny were each produced within the context of either the respective artist's own shows, or ones that they'd organized at Orchard, and were all originally shown together in Preiss' exhibition, *Spring Wound*, the last to take place at the gallery in 2008.

– Saim Demircan

List of works

1.

Lutz Bacher, *Modules*, 2019

Website

Courtesy of the Estate of Lutz Bacher and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York

Bookending the exhibition are Lutz Bacher's *Modules*, a chronology of photographs and footage of her exhibitions from 2017–2019 taken and edited by Bacher using different formats for viewing, such as split screen, or screen recorded from Preview.

2.

Hans Haacke, *Fotonotizen documenta 2 (documenta 2 photographic notes)*, 1959

26 black and white photographs

6 5/8 x 9 7/8 in. each

Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper

When Hans Haacke was an art student at the Kunsthochschule in Kassel in 1959 he worked on documenta 2. During this time, he photographed the exhibition, yet what appears more prominently than artworks on display in these images are the people who worked on it as well as the professionals and public who visited documenta.

In his paper, *Lessons Learned* that Haacke delivered at the conference Landmark Exhibitions at Tate Modern in 2009, the artist described his own first-hand experience of working under the direction of documenta's founder Arnold Bode who was well-known for his staging of exhibitions, applying the term *Inszenierung*, or *mise-en-scène*, from theatre to the placement of artworks in space. Equating his own labor to that of a stagehand – effectively working behind-the-scenes – this allusion to dramaturgy is not completely out of place in these images either. Here, the depiction of people could be thought of like a cast of actors. Art becomes a backdrop, against which the business of art – the drama – is enacted. As the artist himself has noted, when taking these photographs, he realized how complicit exhibition making was within a collective system, overhearing many conversations among art dealers, collectors, members of the press, as well as with the organisers of the exhibition, and seeing early on, how the machinations of the art world played out as if onstage.

3.

Esteban Jefferson, *Petit Palais*, 2019

2-channel video

7 minutes, 41 seconds; 2 minutes, 39 seconds (each), looped

Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin

Similarly, Esteban Jefferson's *Petit Palais* speaks to what surrounds art, or in this case, that which obscures it. In it, the artist focuses on two busts of unidentified African figures behind a ticket desk at the entrance of the Petit Palais Museum in Paris. Existing somewhere between art and documentation, this footage appears almost as if it was shot with a hidden camera, and forms part of a larger series of works in which the artist interrogates the presentation of these artworks, simply labelled 'Buste d'Africain'.

If Haacke's photographs foreground the social dynamics of people against the backdrop of the exhibition, then Jefferson shows how art is subjected to an accumulation of visual noise from within the museum, namely the way in which it privileges and makes certain artwork public. His footage contrasts the statues with the display of other works in the museum as well as interpretation material, such as brochures and wall labels that all contribute to an audience's read of art.

4.

Louise Lawler, *Untitled (Koons)*, 1988

Paperweight, c-print, crystal, felt

2 × 3 ½ in

Louise Lawler, *Untitled (Matthew Barney)*, 1993

Paperweight, cibachrome, crystal, felt

2 × 3 ½ in

Louise Lawler, *Untitled (Collection of 60 drawings)*, 1992-93

Paperweight, cibachrome, crystal, felt

2 × 3 ½ in

Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

Throughout her practice, Louise Lawler has always revealed what appears around art in her photographs. Whether an exhibition, collector's house or restaurant, the artist frames the presentation of artwork in situ. Between the late-1980s and early-1990s, Lawler made a series of

paperweights are placed over prints of her own photographs, warping the images seen through them. The paperweights are, in a way, like early versions of digital distortion that the artist would later apply to images as a methodology called ‘distorted for our times’. The three paperweights in *Exhibition as Image* offer a lens through which to see art unlike the prototypical wide-angle, or the corrective image – the most straightforward viewpoints in such photography, in other words.

5.

Renée Green, *Venue*, 1994

Video

29 minutes, 49 seconds, looped

Courtesy of Bortolami Gallery, New York

If an exhibition’s inherent temporality draws parallels between it and other fields that are time sensitive, how then to appropriately record shows that themselves are ephemeral or ‘live’ in nature? Renée Green’s *Venue* documents her show ‘Taste Venue’, which took place at Pat Hearn Gallery in 1994, and for which she advertised the gallery as rentable space for the duration of the exhibition. The video compiles excerpts from some of what happened during the exhibition – namely a concert and a fashion show – editing in-between footage of what took place around them, such as the clean-up of the space after the gig or models being styled before appearing on a runway.

Considering the real people in Haacke’s *documenta 2 (Photographic Notes)* as unknowingly taking part in a theatre of sorts, then Green similarly utilizes the exhibition as a space of dramatization. This is apparent at the end of her video, when the credits appear as a cast list assigning the individuals that took part in the exhibition with roles, or characters. Like Haacke, the people in Green’s work become fictionalized: the Booking Agents are played by Derrick Green and Renée Green; The Dealer by Pat Hearn; Door Staff by Jimmy Raskin.

6.

Carissa Rodriguez, *Grey Eminence*, 2013

Steel postcard rack, digitally printed postcards

Rack: 5 ½ ft × 12 in

Postcards: 4 × 6 in

Courtesy of the artist

Given the rate at which images of artworks move through social media and aggregator websites, spatial acts of contemplation and experience are replaced with immediate, unfocused, and often uncritical reception of images. With ***Grey Eminence***, Rodriguez creates a ‘slow-moving image’. The artist photographed her own work in private collections, printing the images as postcards that are then displayed on a rack typically found in museum giftshops. Like other souvenirs, such as paperweights, postcards are merchandise for real life encounters with art.

7.

Contemporary Art Writing Daily, *Pages*, 2021
Laser print on cardstock
Courtesy of the artist

Contemporary Art Writing Daily is an anonymous, parasitical website that mirrors the layout of Contemporary Art Daily, using it as a host for experimental writing on the exhibitions it publishes. ***Pages*** are a chapter from Contemporary Art Writing Daily’s recently published book, *Anti-Ligature Rooms* in which online searches of Contemporary Art Daily are compared with those for forms of Anhedonia, the inability to feel pleasure.

8.

Jana Euler, *When Expectations Meet Needs*, 2014
Inkjet print
17.3 × 12.2 in
Courtesy of the artist

For her 2013 show at Cabinet in London, Jana Euler installed an anamorphic wall painting around the top of the walls of the gallery’s cubic space so that, when photographed from a rectilinear perspective, the words ‘when expectations meet needs’ flattened and became readable only through its documentation. The work conflates the installation shot and text into one singular image, anticipating its own destination, or destined re-appearance on the aggregator website Contemporary Art Daily. Simultaneously aware of and commenting upon how such a platform feeds the desire for the new, Euler’s gesture, if that’s how we ‘read’ it, speaks to the increased pace of image circulation that’s flattening effect can age work prematurely by rendering artwork having been seen as ‘old’. In this sense, ***When Expectations Meet Needs***

interrupts the constant flow of images vying for collective attention online by inserting text into the flatness of the surface image.

9.

Judith Barry, *Damaged Goods 3D*, 1986/2015

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

Judith Barry's *Damaged Goods 3D* was originally made for *expose, to show, to demonstrate, to inform, to offer*, a survey exhibition of artistic practices around 1990 that was held at MUMOK in Vienna in 2015. The artist produced three-dimensional printed dioramas from the original installation photos of the 1986 exhibition *Damaged Goods* at the New Museum, which was considered the first survey of artists associated with 'appropriation' art at the time, and for which Barry designed the exhibition. Rather than re-create her original participation in the show, she re-stages some of the 'object relations' that took between photography and sculpture within the space of the diorama. *Damaged Goods 3D* also includes Barry's original catalogue essay "Dissenting Spaces", which is similarly re-produced in another form: here, reprinted on Iris Cloth on Davey Board.

10.

Gili Tal, *Spaces for Reflection (The Whole World at Your Fingertips)*, 2019

Inkjet prints on paper

16 1/2 × 23 3/8 in. each

Courtesy the artist, Jenny's, and Galerie Buchholz.

Gili Tal's photographs are of images published on Contemporary Art Daily that artist took from off her computer screen, as evidenced by the moiré effect that appears in some. Exhibited at the far end of the gallery, they present the ultimate fulfilment of the exhibition completely flattened into an image.

11–16.

Jeff Preiss, *Orchard documents*, 2005–2008:

Andrea Fraser, *Orchard Document: May I Help You? (text 1991)*, 2005

16mm transferred to Bluray, 14 minutes, looped

Nicolás Guagnini, *Orchard Document: Discharge*, 2005/06
16mm transferred to Bluray, 8 minutes, looped

Jeff Preiss, *Orchard Document: Spring-Wound*, 2005-2008
16mm transferred to Bluray, 110 minutes, looped

Josiah McElheny, *Orchard Document: Light Club*, 2008
16mm transferred to Bluray, 70 minutes, looped

Moyra Davey, Isaac Preiss and Barney Simon, *Orchard Document: High school am over/gin crash*, 2008
Digital file, 9 minutes, looped

Anthony McCall, *Orchard Document: Five-minute Drawing*, 2008
HD Video, 7 minutes 30 seconds, looped

Courtesy of the artist

Filmmaker Jeff Preiss' *Orchard Documents* are a series of film collaborations made together with other members of the cooperatively run artist-led Orchard gallery between 2005 and 2008. These five collaborations with Moyra Davey, Nicolás Guagnini, Andrea Fraser, Anthony McCall, and Josiah McElheny were each produced within the context of either the respective artist's own shows, or ones that they'd organized at Orchard, and were all originally shown together in Preiss' exhibition, *Spring Wound*, the last to take place at the gallery in 2008.

Each document utilized different filmic techniques and formats for re-showing artworks and exhibitions. For example, Preiss filmed Andrea Fraser performing *May I help You?* (1991) on 16mm during gallery hours at Orchard's inaugural exhibition in 2005 and then edited the footage together into one uninterrupted performance. Elsewhere, Preiss and Davey invited their respective children to document Davey's 2008 exhibition *Calendar of flowers, gin bottles, steak bones*, which they filmed themselves using a webcam, and uploaded onto Isaac Preiss' YouTube channel. ***Orchard Document: Light Club*** literally documents the space – Preiss took footage of McElheny's glass sculpture with his signature 'spring-wound' technique, a panning/rotating shot that when shown at a right-angle, creates a cascading image.

Shown between *Orchard Document: May I Help You? (text 1991)* and Nicolás Guagnini's *Orchard Document: Discharge*, Preiss' own document, *Spring-Wound* compiles footage that he filmed within the timespan of Orchard's three-year program. A series of panning shots reverse direction resulting in alternative "cuts" that appear as mechanized bounces between his collaborations with Guagnini and Fraser.