Figure + Ground
Selected Film and Video Works

In collaboration with
Hauser & Wirth

Featuring Sonia Boyce with Ain Bailey, Mark Bradford, Geta Brătescu, Martin Creed, Jeffrey Gibson, David Hammons, Camille Henrot, Rashid Johnson, William Kentridge, Glenn Ligon, Paul McCarthy, Pipilotti Rist, Mika Rottenberg, Anri Sala, Cindy Sherman, Roman Signer, Gary Simmons, Lorna Simpson, David Zink-Yi

The screening brings together a variety of artists whose films and videos can be interpreted as exploring the dynamic between figure and ground in diverse ways. The selection of works also spotlights the development of moving image from the late 1960s to today. From film to the advent of analog (single channel) video technologies during the early 1970s onwards, and later digital video, this technological expansion engendered a new genre of artistic production.

The relationship between figure and ground has been at the heart of visual representation and artistic production since the dawn of picture making. It gained a place in the visual arts through Gestalt theory in the 20th Century, which derives its name from the German word for figure, shape, pattern or whole. In its most basic sense, the figure-ground relation refers to the organization of the visual plane into form and background. However, Gestalt described an approach to the psychology of perception that prioritized overall patterns and configurations, rather than constituent parts. It influenced the understanding of how the human brain perceives and organizes visual information, from that which is seen prominently to that which is unobserved. These dynamics make ideas of figure and ground relevant beyond formal aesthetics to the politics of visibility. In this sense, these artists question perceived hierarchies, suggest new perspectives and highlight the overlooked.

Gestalt ideas of figure and ground were applied to communications media by the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911 – 1980). According to McLuhan, the figure (content) was something that jumps out at us while the ground (medium) was that which contextualized a situation. Together, they form meaning and subtle changes in perception can transform our comprehension of a given situation (or an artwork) and its literal and metaphorical bigger picture. A reversal of perceived meaning is also possible, providing the potential for a critical commentary on culture and society. For McLuhan, the figure and ground dynamic also meant the manner of encountering the medium itself. He saw media as active environments rather than passive systems of delivery, a point at the heart of his well-known dictum 'the medium is the message.'

Program One 7 — 9 — 14 — 16 August
Duration: 1 hr, 42 min

- Sonia Boyce with Ain Bailey, Oh Adelaide, 2010 (7 min, 28 sec)
- Lorna Simpson, Cloudscape, 2004 (3 min, 30 sec)
- David Zink-Yi, Huayno y fuga detras, 2005 (3 min, 43 sec)
- Rashid Johnson, Samuel in Space, 2013 (4 min, 55 sec)
- Mark Bradford, Practice, 2003 (3 min)
- Jeffrey Gibson, To Feel Myself Beloved on the Earth, 2020 (16 min, 18 sec)
- Cindy Sherman, Doll Clothes, 1975 (2 min, 22 sec)

- David Hammons, Phat Free, 1999 (5 min, 2 sec)
- Jeffrey Gibson, She Never Dances Alone, 2020 (2 min, 50 sec)
- William Kentridge, Monument, 1990 (3 min, 11 sec)
- Glenn Ligon, The Death of Tom, 2008, (23 min)
- Lorna Simpson, Easy to Remember, 2001 (2 min, 36 sec)
- Rashid Johnson, The Hikers, 2019 (7 min, 4 sec)
- Roman Signer, Vers la flamme / Towards the Flame, 2014 (8 min, 40 sec)
- William Kentridge, Fugitive Words, 2024 (8 min, 33 sec)

Program Two 8 − 10 − 15 − 17
Duration: 1 hr, 37 min

- Camille Henrot, Grosse Fatigue, 2013 (13 min)
- Anri Sala, Dammi i colori / Give me the colours, 2003 (16 min)
- Gary Simmons, Desert Blizzard, 1997 (8 min)
- Paul McCarthy, Whipping a Wall with Paint, 1974 (3 min, 24 sec)
- Geta Brătescu, Les Mains / The Hands, 1977 (4 min, 55 sec)
- Mark Bradford, Deimos, 2015 (1 min, 21 sec)
- Roman Signer, Beim Radiosender Beromünster / At the Radio Station Beromünster, 2008 (1 min, 4 sec)
- Paul McCarthy, Face Painting – Floor, White Line, 1972 (6 min, 2 sec)
- Roman Signer, Zwei Schirme / Two Umbrellas, 2009 (1 min, 33 sec)
- Martin Creed, Work No. 732, 2007 (2 min, 23 sec)
- Roman Signer, Kugel mit blauer Farbe / Ball with blue colour (side view / view from above), 2012 (1 min, 34 sec / 1 min, 18 sec)
- Pipilotti Rist, (Entlastungen) Pipilottis Fehler / (Absolutions) Pipilotti's Mistakes, 1988 (11 min)
- Mark Bradford, Spiderman, 2015 (6 min, 3 sec)
- Mika Rottenberg, Squeeze, 2010 (20 min)

Further Reading

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Sonia Boyce with Ain Bailey, Oh Adelaide, 2010 (7 min, 28 sec)
'Oh Adelaide' (2010) is a single-channel video by Sonia Boyce and sound artist Ain Bailey that incorporates found film footage from the internet of the late jazz singer and entertainer Adelaide Hall (1901 – 1993), who is widely regarded as a pioneer of jazz scat singing. Through re-imagining the footage, Hall is re-rendered as an ethereal figure on the stage in which she appears both in and outside of history. Bailey's immersive and haunting soundtrack is comprised of re-worked audio tracks of Hall and other performers explored in Sonia Boyce's 'Devotional Collection,' an ongoing project since 1999 archiving Black women in the British music industry.

Lorna Simpson, Cloudscape, 2004 (3 min, 30 sec)
'Cloudscape' (2004) focuses on an elegantly dressed man, spotlit and whistling a hymnal tune on an otherwise empty set. A cloud of grey swirling smoke slowly engulfs the man as the camera closes in. An almost imperceptible seam breaks the single shot, as the cloud twists, and sound and image shift into reverse. The simple structure is emotional and elegiac, even without the knowledge that the man is American sculptor and musician Terry Adkins (1953 – 2014), whose own works focused on the uses and meaning of sound and music in art. The song is a lesser-known African American spiritual chosen by Simpson and Adkins for its blend of familiarity and unfamiliarity, something which is enhanced by the forward and backwards play of the audio as well as the visuals.

David Zink-Yi, Huayno y fuga detras, 2005 (3 min, 43 sec)
Many of Peruvian artist David Zink-Yi's works revolve around the experience of music. At the same time, Zink Yi aims to depict the experiences of marginalized communities through mysterious visuals, avoiding an ethnographic viewpoint. This film captures a street performance of Huayno music—an Andean music genre—by a harpist in the city of Huancayo, which is considered the cultural centre of the Peruvian Andes. The video highlights the vertical cords of the harp and the agile hand movements of the harpist, with the grid-like strings establishing a visual separation between the musician and those around him, as well as us, the audience. 'The hands become what is suggestive—the protagonist of the sound,' the artist has noted.

Rashid Johnson, Samuel in Space, 2013 (4 min, 55 sec)
Rashid Johnson's ventures in film make use of the medium's ability to express meaning through movement. 'Samuel in Space' (2013), commissioned by the art center Ballroom Marfa in Marfa TX explores themes of space, time and the black male body in relation to landscape and history. The film follows a single, black male dancer observing the vast Southwestern landscape before him and dancing, moving and tumbling through the desert at sunrise. The dancer in 'Samuel in Space' can be seen as a figure representing both the past and the future, a site of reflection on history and a path towards renewal and new meaning. The vast desert landscape serves as a backdrop for this exploration, suggesting a sense of both freedom and the weight of history.

Mark Bradford, Practice, 2003 (3 min)
In this video, Mark Bradford plays with identity, movement and both career expectations and gender norms by wearing a voluminous antebellum hoop skirt to practice basketball, along with a Los Angeles Lakers jersey. These skirts, worn by women in the pre–Civil War era, feature expansive boning that allowed for air circulation. Here, the Santa Ana winds lift the skirt and trip Bradford up. Each time he falls on the court, he gets up, dribbles again and eventually makes the shot. It is a way for him to create an image of tension between appearance and desire. As a young man it was assumed that, because he was so tall, Bradford would want to become a basketball player, but he was drawn to hair design and wanted to work in his mother's salon. Bradford has said, 'I wanted to do a video of me playing basketball, but I wanted to create a condition, a struggle.'

Jeffrey Gibson, To Feel Myself Beloved on the Earth, 2020 (16 min, 18 sec)
'To Feel Myself Beloved on the Earth' (2020) takes its title from a poem by American writer and poet Raymond Carver and was produced in the turbulent months of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and the context of national civil unrest. Turning to breathing, physical movement and nature to explore themes of identity, Gibson sought to transform chaos into stability and healing. Incorporating quilts, handmade garments, drums, prints and video, Gibson filmed trained and untrained dancers from a variety of cultural backgrounds in various natural and urban locations. Within a soundscape of polyrhythmic drumming and ambient noises, the dancers transition between meditative breathing and un-choreographed movement to express the oscillating relationship between inner turmoil and harmony.

Cindy Sherman, Doll Clothes, 1975 (2 min, 22 sec)
'Doll Clothes' (1975) is a short black and white silent film that combines live action with animated sequences. The film begins with a shot of the cover of a book made by the artist, decorated with a flowery border and photographic cut-outs of women wearing old-fashioned hats and clothes. Inside the book is a cut-out of a young woman (Sherman) in her underwear housed in a laminated sleeve underneath the label 'DOLL'. The 'doll' comes to life and looks through further sleeves beneath the label 'CLOTHES,' which contains cut-outs of various outfits grouped by categories such as 'SCHOOL' or 'CASUAL.' Sherman explained, 'When I was a young teenager, I made little drawings of all my clothes and each Sunday night I would figure out my school outfits for the week'. The writer and curator Catherine Morris has said, 'Rather than make a film in which she actually appears, Sherman [chose] to make a film about photographic representations of herself in arrested moments of movement. The removal of herself as subject while retaining her body as a backdrop for an imaginary construction that characterizes her mature work [had] begun.'

David Hammons, Phat Free, 1999 (5 min, 2 sec)
'Phat Free' documents David Hammons's 1995 New York street performance. Percussive metallic sounds emanating from a blank screen are eventually revealed as the result of the artist kicking a metal bucket along a pavement. His face is never presented clearly and, at some points, the camera focuses on his feet as if seen from above. Streetlights give the footage a strong orange glow and it is shot in low resolution, making it difficult to discern many details. The film ends with him kicking the bucket up into the air, catching it in his hands and then walking out of shot. The footage was later edited for inclusion in the 1997 Whitney Biennial in New York. The title plays on the phrase 'fat free,' often used to market food and drink products. Hammons' spelling of 'phat' uses an expression popularized by African American culture in the 1980s and '90s to describe something as cool or sexy. The word is also commonly used to praise strong bass lines and drumbeats of hip hop and related urban music genres, and it is possible that the artist intended the rhythmic metallic noises in the film to reflect these musical genres.

Jeffrey Gibson, She Never Dances Alone, 2020 (2 min, 50 sec)
A multi-channel video that is projected on a single screen, 'She Never Dances Alone' (2020) is Jeffrey Gibson's celebration of the Indigenous matriarchy. It centers on the jingle dress dance, a powwow dance that originated with the Ojibewea tribe and is traditionally performed by women to call upon ancestors for strength, healing and protection. As Sarah Ortegon, an acclaimed jingle dress dancer and Miss Native American USA 2013–14, performs in handmade dresses adorned with rows of ziibaaska'iganan (metal cones), the swaying colors, textures and patterns pop against a black background and fold into kaleidoscopic abstractions. Ortegon's image multiplies, creating the impression that many women have come together to dance. In this work, Gibson draws on his Choctaw and Cherokee heritage and his love of abstraction both native and modernist, bringing them together in an expression of contemporary celebration and pride.

William Kentridge, Monument, 1990 (3 min, 11 sec)
'Monument' (1990) explores William Kentridge's feelings of ambivalence about the privileges and comforts of the white South African society into which he was born. It was made from a basis of eleven drawings and is accompanied by music composed by Edward Jordan. The character at the centre of the series, Soho Eckstein, a fictional wealthy real estate developer, assumes the guise of a civic benefactor and erects a monument to the black South African workforce, from whose labour his wealth is derived. The monument is a huge statue of an anonymous African workman and comes to life during the unveiling ceremony. He represents the moral dilemma at the core of Soho's empire and the white South African elite. Soho may feel sufficient gratitude towards the anonymous multitudes labouring for his luxury to build a monument but, if in this act of recognition they become human, he must acknowledge their suffering and his abuse of them. For Kentridge, abuse of

the populace runs parallel to exploitation of the land, as the second half of the film makes clear through the gradually expanding urban landscape.

Glenn Ligon, The Death of Tom, 2008, (23 min)
For 'The Death of Tom' (2008), Glenn Ligon intended to recreate the last scene of a 1903 silent film adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' (1852). In the film, white actors in blackface played the principal roles. Tom, the film's protagonist and a slave, dies in the final scene and images of the future—including the end of the American Civil War and the emancipation of slaves—materialize behind him. After Ligon's footage was processed, he discovered that the film was blurred and the imagery had disappeared. The artist recognized an affinity between this spectral footage and his own earlier work, much of which, he has said, is about 'visibility and legibility being a metaphor for certain kinds of historical disappearance.' Ligon added a commissioned score played by the jazz pianist Jason Moran, which is based on the vaudeville song 'Nobody.' In the artist's work, a cinematic scenario deeply intertwined with the complex and painful history of representations of ethnic difference has been transformed into a series of abstract black, white and grey traces.

Lorna Simpson, Easy to Remember, 2001 (2 min, 36 sec)
Humming in unison, fifteen mouths transform the classic Rodgers and Hart song 'It's Easy to Remember (And So Hard to Forget),' written for the 1935 film 'Mississippi,' into a subtle comment on racial difference. On one hand, Simpson's chorus of anonymous black performers can be seen as universalized, but the repetitive sequence of mouths that hum instead of sing can also represent the erasing of individuality and silencing of voices that lie at the heart of racism. While the song is familiar and comforting, the performance is gently subversive, for the black hummers are following in the footsteps of African American jazz musicians like Billie Holliday and John Coltrane who claimed the song, originally written by and for white men, as their own. The work becomes an ironically disquieting reminder that the effects of racism are, like the title of this catchy tune, hard to forget.

Rashid Johnson, The Hikers, 2019 (7 min, 4 sec)
Shot on location in the mountains of Colorado, 'The Hikers' (2019) features two black male figures—one ascending a mountain, another descending—who encounter each other as their paths cross. Their balletic movements are at once lithe and halting, athletic and awkward, challenging stereotypical notions of the forever rhythmic elegance of the black body in space. Collaborating with a choreographer, Rashid Johnson describes how they 'worked together to figure out a set of movements that borrow from ballet and from what I describe as 'anxious movements'.' Through these movements, Johnson sought to express the psychological and physical consequences of life in the challenging and unjust modern world, asking himself: 'What are the movements like when a black man is walking past a police officer? Or when a black man is suffering from agoraphobia?'

Roman Signer, Vers la flamme / Towards the Flame, 2014 (8 min, 40 sec)
For this work, Roman Signer enlisted the virtuoso pianist Vikingur Olafsson to play Alexander Scriabin's 1914 piano sonata 'Vers la flamme (Towards the flame), Op. 72' on a floating stage in the middle of Lake Vernago in Italy while contending with an interruption by a helicopter. Signer's 'Vers la flamme: A Concert with Interruption,' was the finale to the Transart Festival 2014 and marked the centenary of Scriabin's composition. Scriabin believed that the world's accumulation of heat would ultimately cause its destruction—the crescendo of the piece marking our heading towards the flame. Scriabin's wild apocalyptic vision, written at the start of the First World War and the year before his death, forms a counterpoint to Signer's deadpan-absurdist, anti-romantic concern with the shortness of life and the violence of natural forces.

William Kentridge, Fugitive Words, 2024 (8 min, 33 sec)
'Fugitive Words' (2024) is a video work staged entirely in one notebook. In the opening sequence, the artist pages through a working notebook, with its to-do lists, timelines, 'obligations' (among them 'drawing for A4') and sketches towards sculptures. This overture sets the scene for an elliptical, non-narrative engagement with the book as an aide-memoire. 'Fugitive' words and images find chance proximity between its covers: seemingly unrelated phrases appear; impressions of a tree recur; portraits of the artist and others come and go; a wandering line journeys across the pages; marks feint towards, but seldom resolve into, writing. Even the artist's drawing tools assume the role of characters, participants in the oblique logic of the notebook, around which eraser filings and charcoal dust notate a series of accumulations and erasures. For Kentridge, drawing in charcoal has long offered an analogue to thinking in its immediacy and provisionality. His animations, which most often extend from such drawings, proceed not from a predetermined storyline but 'from an impulse, from an image that's in my head, from something, a phrase, a central idea.'

Program Two
Duration: 1 hr, 37 min

Camille Henrot, Grosse Fatigue, 2013 (13 min)
Camille Henrot's extensive research across a range of disciplines like philosophy, anthropology and history often shapes her work, including 'Grosse Fatigue' (2013). She made the video while in residence at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., digging into its collections to pull together images of objects and specimens. Henrot merges this with additional video clips and images she both made and found online. She frames this material in layered pop-up windows that continually open and close against the changing background of a computer desktop. Brief pauses in the pacing stand out in Henrot's otherwise rapid-fire sequencing. Sometimes, a woman's hands appear in the frames, nails manicured to match the colorful backgrounds. A spoken word-style voiceover, which interweaves stories of creation from across cultures, structures the visual cacophony. Henrot describes this mash-up of scientific discovery and religious myth-making as an 'intuitive unfolding of knowledge,' a presentation meant to highlight our abundance of information, as well as its limits.

Anri Sala, Dammi i colori / Give me the colours, 2003 (16 min)
This film's title is taken from the first line of a libretto from the 1900 opera 'Tosca' by Italian composer Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924). The libretto is sung by Mario Cavaradossi, a painter who is working on a portrait of Mary Magdalene while thinking of his beloved, Tosca. Sala's film focuses on the changes to Albania's capital city, Tirana, three years after a program of urban transformation was initiated that involved painting its buildings in a range of vivid colors. The film's footage consists of scenes of the city filmed by Sala and a voice-over in which the city's then mayor and leader of the project, the painter Edi Rama, explains his regeneration project to Sala. By making reference to Puccini's libretto, the title of Sala's work emphasizes Rama's ambition to unite the inhabitants of Tirana, especially following the riots of the 1997 Albanian Rebellion. As a video work focusing on painting, 'Dammi i Colori' harks back to Sala's and Rama's previous experiences as painters, while also drawing out resonances between the two different artistic mediums.

Gary Simmons, Desert Blizzard, 1997 (8 min)
Filmed in Death Valley CA, 'Desert Blizzard' (1997) captures a 'skywriter' airplane inscribing asterisk-shaped snowflakes in the sky from its vapor trails. These ephemeral forms evaporate and 'melt' into the sky, highlighting the paradox of snowflakes in a hot desert setting which remains the location of the highest registered air temperature on Earth. Shot from varying perspectives, the film overlays multiple snowflakes into a single frame, suggesting the fleeting nature of both real and imagined snowflakes and the elusiveness of memory in recalling their forms. Each snowflake evaporating when the next begins also presents a Sisyphean circuit of visibility and invisibility. Simmons was interested in the site-specificity of the sky drawings as well as the ghostly, ephemeral quality of the images that placed them in a liminal space between representation and abstraction.

Paul McCarthy, Whipping a Wall with Paint, 1974 (3 min, 24 sec)
'Whipping a Wall with Paint' (1974) is one of McCarthy's early performances from the 1970s, performed for and recorded on a video camera. His early videos reveal the nascent development of the themes, the raw physicality and the performance personae that mark McCarthy's well-known later works. In several pieces, McCarthy uses his own body as a tool to examine the process of making art. In this film, he whips the walls and pillars of his studio violently with a large paint-soaked sheet or rag. The work satirizes the technique and machismo of abstract expressionism, the major post-war movement in painting that dominated the New York art scene in the 1950s.

Geta Brătescu, Les Mains / The Hands, 1977 (4 min, 55 sec)
In a 2014 diary entry, Geta Brătescu compares the artist to an acrobat, reasoning that the two face a shared obstacle: 'SPACE.' The artist dedicated much of her seven-decade career to negotiating enclosures ranging from the confines of a blank page to the mutable gap between her thumb and her index finger. While Brătescu would later experiment with more technical methods to displace her hand from the production, opting to 'draw' with scissors or sewing machines, it was in filmmaking that she found the most expedient means of separating her hands from her body. For 'Les Mains. Pentru ochi, mâna trupului meu îmi reconstituie portretul (Hands: For the Eye, the Hand of My Body Reconstitutes My Portrait)' (1977), Brătescu trains the lens on her fists, portraying her fingers as autonomous creatures, independent of her unseen body and mind.

Mark Bradford, Deimos, 2015 (1 min, 21 sec)
'Deimos' (2015) evokes the spirit of the 1970s and early 1980s, when roller discos and nightclubs were central

elements of mainstream culture. As a young man, Bradford spent his days working in his mother's beauty salon and his evenings dancing at nightclubs, finding community in the nighttime scene. Abstracting the socio-political space of LA's club culture, 'Deimos' makes reference to the charged vulnerability of a city, its inhabitants and the single human body in the context of intensifying identity politics and the shattering reality of the AIDS crisis. 'Deimos' shows the end of a party; the lights have been flipped on and all that remains are roller skate wheels drifting across an empty studio floor. The upbeat, old-school rhythm and groove soundtrack is 'Grateful' by Sylvester, the legendary 'Queen of Disco' known for his soaring falsetto voice and androgyny who captivated audiences before losing his own battle to AIDS.

Roman Signer, Beim Radiosender Beromünster / At the Radio Station Beromünster, 2008 (1 min, 4 sec)
The event in this film is located at the radio station Beromünster in Lucerne, Switzerland. The artist fixed a fluorescent tube light to a balloon by means of a copper wire, which worked as an antenna, capturing the broadcast field of the radio station. The electromagnetic waves, that is the energy of the electromagnetic field produced by the radio transmitter, made the neon lamp glow strongly. At the same time the wind caused the balloon to move over the winterly landscape, taking the neon lamp with it. The radio station Beromünster is a local radio station built between 1931 and 1937. For many years, it broadcasted German speaking programs on medium wave, for the Schweizerische Radio- und Fernsehgesellschaft (SRG). With the introduction of the very high frequency (ultra short waves) system, its importance declined.

Paul McCarthy, Face Painting – Floor, White Line, 1972 (6 min, 2 sec)
In this film, Paul McCarthy becomes a human paintbrush as he pulls himself across the floor while holding an open can of white paint. McCarthy paints a white line on the floor with his face, dragging his body from one end of the studio to the other. In doing so, McCarthy performs a recognizable formal gesture—drawing a white line. Radically inserting his body into the painting process may have been intended as a parody of abstract expressionism and also prevailing minimalist sensibilities. McCarthy confounds viewers' notions of physical space by seeming to hang from the upper frame of the picture. He has stated that using the body as part of the ground of the painting was a compelling issue at the time. Related impulses can be seen in happenings of the early and mid-1960s, which often fused audience and performers into the setting and action of the extended painting.

Roman Signer, Zwei Schirme / Two Umbrellas, 2009 (1 min, 33 sec)
Characterized by unexpected encounters, playful experiments and the forces of nature, Roman Signer's art reveals a world full of energy and transformation, where time, movement and material come together in surprising ways. In this film, the camera tracks the movement of two umbrellas which have been taped together by the artist, and released on a coastal location. The work was filmed in Iceland in strong weather conditions, the soundtrack dominated by the gale-force sound of the windstorm. The wheel-like forms of the umbrellas cause them to roll and tumble across the landscape, propelled by the wind like a kite or a sail. Eventually, the action causes the umbrellas to be damaged and they no longer catch the wind. This work explores the concept of agency and the impact of forces of nature on ordinary objects.

Martin Creed, Work No. 732, 2007 (2 min, 23 sec)
Creed's film 'Work No. 732' (2207) depicts the artist running towards an arrangement of a houseplants and flowers and kicking them. The resulting scene is littered with foliage, the remnants of an apparent act of aggression. The motifs of the flowers and plants represent the artist's dislike of gifts and the sense of entrapment and obligation they often bring to him. Yet, this action encapsulates the way that Creed imbues gestures with layers of meaning. While it stands for a moment of repulsion and anger, could it reveal a moment of deeper angst? Is it simply an act of vandalism spurred by dislike and rejection, or indicative of more? Could it be a contribution to the long history of destruction in art, destructive acts that stand in for something else—inner turmoil, anti-art, anti-commodity, environmental degradation, or punk anarchism? Or is it all of these things together?

Roman Signer, Kugel mit blauer Farbe / Ball with blue colour (side view / view from above), 2012 (1 min, 34 sec / 1 min, 18 sec)
Here we see the record of an action that Roman Signer demonstrated at the 2012 Shanghai Biennale. A hollow wooden sphere, 1 meter in diameter, was filled with 800 litres of blue paint and then dropped from a height of 30 meters onto the floor of the building. The video film records the fall and shattering of the sphere and the literal explosion in blue. Such a film relishes in the material qualities of paint, the sudden creation of an explosion of color and parodies abstract painting techniques through this act of chance creation through a

form of destruction. The action is shown from two different angles: from the side, where the paint splatters the camera's lens, and from above, which emphasizes the explosion of color.

Pipilotti Rist, (Entlastungen) Pipilottis Fehler / (Absolutions) Pipilotti's Mistakes, 1988 (11 min)
In this early work, an insistent percussion rhythm accompanies images of a woman in a red dress falling to the ground over and over again. She straightens up, only to hit the ground again shortly afterwards. Another scene shows her jumping into a swimming pool again and again, where she can hardly move because a hand is holding her by the hair and trying to push her under the water. In another sequence, the woman tries to climb a fence before her strength fails her. Pipilotti Rist's scenarios trace the failures of the protagonist in a compassionate and at the same time alienating way. The protagonist is seemingly caught in a cycle of never-ending repetition but is also caught within the color lines of electronic static. Rist embraces the aesthetics of these technical errors, or glitches, revelling in the formal qualities of these accidents. The piece explores the imperfections of video technology as an image-producing machine and draws a parallel with psychological and personal/bodily mistakes. Precisely edited to the start-stop rhythm of a quasi-martial beat and post-punk rock music, the film glories in organized disjunction of both sound and image.

Mark Bradford, Spiderman, 2015 (6 min, 3 sec)
In 'Spiderman' (2015), Bradford draws on and parodies the tropes of black stand-up comedy through a performer, whose image never materializes. Responding to actor and comedian Eddie Murphy's outbursts and rants about sexuality in the 1983 comedic film 'Delirious,' Bradford recasts the performer in the video as the disembodied voice of a transgender man. The character's routine connects us back to a moment of hysteria and homophobia in the 1980s and the power of language to exploit and abuse. Bradford's unseen comedian cracks jokes about Michael Jackson's jheri curls, Eazy-E's battle with HIV and the black community's encounter with AIDS. A laughter track suggests a large audience convulsed in enjoyment while text projected upon the otherwise blank wall tracks the monologue and compels us to imagine the stereotypes being invoked and our roles in perpetuating them.

Mika Rottenberg, Squeeze, 2010 (20 min)
'Squeeze' (2010) examines the synchronicity of globalization and the real bodies—in this case uniformly female—caught up in the mechanics of 21st-century capital. Rottenberg combines documentary and fictional footage to continue her enquiry into the mechanisms by which value is created, and into feminism and labour. Here, it is through the processes and journeys we forget about when using everyday products. To make their merchandise, the protagonists have to pedal, squeeze, cry, sweat, massage, dig, push, burrow, morph, cross continents and use more than a bit of alchemy. As Rottenberg has described 'I began the work by visiting a rubber plant in India and an iceberg lettuce farm in Arizona. Then I designed a telekinetic machine. We built a set in my Harlem studio and used 'movie magic' to create visual slippage between the three locations. In 'Squeeze,' there are portals to the rubber plant and the lettuce farm, which allow workers to collaborate on the production of 'an object.' The telekinetic machine produces a compressed cube from globally sourced rubber, lettuce and makeup.'