

Human Resources
410 Cottage Home St., Los Angeles, CA 90012
humanresourcesla.com

The--family
Performance: 8 March 2014 | 7pm

Exhibition: 14 March–20 April 2014
Reception: 14 March 2014 | 7pm–10pm

Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions
6522 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90028
welcometolace.org

Drown- ing and swallow- ing this text

Math Bass

Body No Body Body, 2013, latex paint on canvas, wood, 51 × 78 × 37 in.
Body No Body Body, 2013, latex paint on canvas, wood, 22 × 57 × 30 in.
Untitled (Brutal Set), 2013, cast concrete jean shorts, 17 × 17 × 9 in.

A.K. Burns

touch parade (wading), 2011, HD video, 3:41 min.
touch parade (pedal pump), 2011, HD video, 5:45 min.
touch parade (squeeze-2-pop), 2011, HD video, 5:49 min.
touch parade (crush), 2011, HD video, 9:22 min.
touch parade (glove love), 2011, HD video, 6:58 min.
Eye Mining, 2014, penny, archival inkjet image transfers on vinyl coated canvas, 15 × 11 in.
Unstable Table, 2014, penny, archival inkjet image transfers on vinyl coated canvas, 18 × 11 in.
Continuum Portrait, 2014, penny, archival inkjet image transfers on vinyl coated canvas, 14 × 11 in.
Mirage, 2014, penny, archival inkjet image transfers on vinyl coated canvas, 16 × 11 in.
Window In My Way, 2014, penny, archival inkjet image transfers on vinyl coated canvas, 14 × 11 in.

Ana Hoffner

Movement, privatized, 2009, video, 11:54 min.

Joan Jonas

Mirage, 1976, b&w, 16mm film on video, silent, 31 min.

Tala Madani

Pipedreams, 2014, paper mâché, stop-motion animation, 2:50 min.

MPA

Envelope, 2014, wood, light, shadow.
Double Arrow, 2014, wood, light, shadow.

Virginia Poundstone

Packing Plant Floor #1, 2014, UV print on aluminum, 20 × 24 × 20 in.
Packing Plant Floor #2, 2014, UV print on aluminum, 23.25 × 20.5 × 10 in.

Laure Prouvost

It, Heat, Hit, 2010, video, 7:20 min.

Mounira Al Solh

The Mute Tongue, 2010, video, 20:47 min.

Jill Spector

Sculpture #2 from Mock-ups and Models for Fountains, 2014, welded steel, wire, cardboard, paper mâché, fabric, plaster, paper, color photocopy, glue, paint, wood, 36 × 40 × 32 in.
Untitled collage #1, 2012, b&w photocopy, color photocopy, glue, tape, fabric, 11 × 17 in.
Untitled collage #2, 2012, b&w photocopy, color photocopy, glue, tape, fabric, 11 × 17 in.

Lawrence Weiner

INHERENT FORM, 1999 / 2007, language + materials, 6 ft. × 18³/₁₆ in.

The--family (with Sjoerd Dijk and Wojciech Kosma)

Liberty is everything when it necessitates a love for a human, 2014, performance.

*at best the contradictions are contemplated,
but it promises a child badassness intersecting you
and real time coinciding with the summoned time.
liberty is everything
when it necessitates a love for a human
of the kind that grants nothing outside of presence,
since shit gets as real
as your living way a faithful copy of it*

Drowning and swallowing this text

● **Shoghig Halajian
and Suzy M. Halajian**

In bold white text against a black background, the words DROWNING AND SWALLOWING THIS TEXT appear 82 seconds into Laure Prouvost's video work *It, Heat, Hit*. They belong to a series of text-images interspersed throughout the work that are playfully unfastened from logic (THE TEXT IS NOW ABOVE YOU ON THE CEILING AND FALLS LIKE GLUE ON YOUR HAIR). Juxtaposed with sensuous and affective imagery, the words return time and again to situate images within a narrative that is building towards a climax that it will never reach. For the purposes of this exhibition, and as a standalone phrase, these five words take on a suggestive and self-referential tone, oscillating between demolition and voracious consumption, and the spiraling act of pointing in on one's self.

Early on in the project, Honoré de Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* served as a common point of reference. Somewhat arbitrarily, the text became a lens through which to discuss the interplay between a narrative and its performance. Considering how an exhibition unfolds through a temporal and spatial experience, the project attempts to distort how one reads—through linearity, with narrative expectation, and the storytelling devices that push meaning towards its solidified resolve.

Sarrasine depicts a nameless narrator who sits outside a mansion where a ball is taking place and tells his beloved Madame Rochefide a tale of gossip in exchange for her admiration and her body. He recounts the story of an artist named Sarrasine who is deep in the throes of a passionate pursuit of his ideal woman, Zambinella. As the story unfolds into one of disgust and unrequited love—after Zambinella is revealed to be a *castrato*, a man dressed in female attire for the opera stage—the narrator's beloved becomes anguished and abandons their agreement. Through this mirrored act of desire, Balzac's narrative collapses in on itself, suggesting that a message cannot be separated from its telling, a story is indistinguishable from its performance.

In his line-by-line deconstruction of *Sarrasine*, Roland Barthes makes the claim that a narrative is determined not by the desire to narrate but rather by a desire to exchange. The economies of gender, body, language, and capital establish a set of equivalents that determine narrative unity and allow meaning to take place. Consequently, the collapse of one such measure of equivalence—here, through the *castrato*—

challenges the entire system of relations and impairs the power to associate and substitute.¹

The exhibition locates itself within this moment of collapse. Questioning the idea that everything must be held together, the project considers forms of desire that refuse equivalence, in order to impel fragmentation and to delay resolve.

Prouvost's *It, Heat, Hit* unabashedly plays with the fluctuation of meaning and performs "narration." An unreliable, seductive narrator offers demanding directives in a staccato sequence of image, text, and voice. This triad refuses to give a clear story, but rather circles around and calculatedly employs a set of familiar storytelling devices such as narrative build, dramatic suspense, and release. The narrator's hissing and hushing textured speech portrays a confused narrative of desire, while testing the limits of comprehension. If forming legible sentences is a prerequisite in society, "for the normal individual the prerequisite for any submission to social laws,"² then the refusal to make sense becomes a fundamentally and defiantly political act.

But can the refusal to speak serve a critical function? As Prouvost's narrator menaces with incessant commentary, Mounira Al Solh's protagonist performs the role of a speaking subject who does not utter a word. The silent and seemingly indifferent protagonist in *The Mute Tongue*, performed by Croatian artist Siniša Labrović, enacts various Arabic proverbs in a series of staged humorous scenarios. Overly used Arabic phrases such as "A mirror in the face, and an old shoe in the back" turn absurd, asserting that meaning relies on the speaker's relation to context and the cultural values that are embedded in identity. While oddball phrases contain moral lessons and mass appeal when spoken by one subject, their resonance and legibility fall apart when displaced through an other's voice. The protagonist no longer serves its function but takes on an antagonistic position that complicates the surrounding narrative and brings forward an utterance of nonsense.

A.K. Burns explores and expands eroticism by performing acts of pleasure with banal objects. Drawing from YouTube fetish videos, Burns crushes a cucumber, squeezes a balloon, and layers on latex gloves to sexualize everyday objects. As evident through the title *Touch Parade*, sensuality takes precedence: the 5-channel video work projects a confluence of murmurs and squeaks that evoke the meeting of body and object, and the affect of this touch. Desire serves capital when it is identified and commodified, when one's drive to experience and possess is rearticulated into consumer wants. Consequently, acts that are not typically considered erotic can linger in the realm of the illegible, and provide a space before categorization, before the labeling and reducing down of desire.

One can also consider the economy of desire within capitalism: the manipulation of an object into a polished product as an erotic act. For Virginia Poundstone, the hard, cold, and smooth surface seduces. Digitally manipulated photographs of flowers, plants, and the natural landscape lay imprinted on metal and aluminum surfaces, turning the ephemeral into a sculptural product, solid and artificial. In *Packing Plant Floor #1* and *Packing Plant Floor #2*,

the flower, the image of the flower, and the manipulation of this image present a metastatic flow towards the production of capital, offering an object that is no longer delicate but confidently poised and displayed in the exhibition space.

Jill Spector's bulbous sculptures also flaunt their own construction, composed of gestures, fringes, tucks, and cut-out images arranged in a seemingly ad-hoc manner. Many of her works seem to dance or stand suspended on the verge of explosion, reminiscent of 17th-century sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*. Euphoria here, however, is colored by detritus and taut chaos, and defined by a precarious division between exteriority and interiority. According to Julia Kristeva, the abject body—the body of leaks and fluids—shows that the limitations of selfhood and the body are ambiguous.³ If the skin is a thin layer that defines the borders of our physical body, then the distinction between our inside and outside is not as severely defined as we would like to think. The excretory body is a sign of disorder and frailty.

In Tala Madani's works, middle-aged, overweight, and balding men touch, rub, and engross themselves in each other, exposing stained and mutated bodies. These are abject and pornographic portraits of men, in which the excretion of fluids and the mutilation of body parts give pleasure and, in doing so, violate the clean and composed stance of the agreeable male subject. Blurred into a multiplicity, these nondescript figures appear confused and clownish, and exist only to compulsively perform Madani's actions over and over again. While they suggest narrative continuity, these framed images never coalesce; they remain isolated, floating in the medium of painting rather than the grounded stance of a geographic or cultural location.

The body in performance serves as a test of discovery for new forms of embodiment. How do we exist in our bodies, and how do we exist among bodies? As the space of theatre traditionally serves as a model for spaces of social action, the performing body presents a series of loaded social, gender, and cultural codes through which a work is interpreted. To escape this predetermined set of signifiers, one must not only render the body abject but exorcise it. According to Elin Diamond in her essay "The Shudder of Catharsis," there is no body without embodiment: "Embodiment is haunted by what it has swallowed, the material 'body,' because the orchestration of that haunting is, I would agree, a crucial datum of performance."⁴ But can there be embodiment in performance without a physical body?

Math Bass's work creates sites of performance that frame the missing body, or the no-body body. Concrete stumps, molds of denim pants turned upside down, and their inverse, a-framed ladders, offer sites of potentiality without the realization. These in-between spaces remain charged and open to invitation, as the artist often stages performances in these sets. The lingering potential for action prolongs the moment of not-yet meaning, and resides in the liminal space that exists before and after action. MPA also transforms the inanimate into the performative. Through the presentation of a red frame on the floor, MPA evokes various loaded symbols of the color red (the body, passion, rage, violence)

and the frame (the boundaries of an image and the site in which action is supposed to take place). Without words or bodies, the frame already orchestrates an act. It tells us that something will happen inside—the shape itself is a form of command. These objects perform in space; like the body, they are loaded with codes and implications. To expose the frame is to bring forward the parameters that prioritize one image over another and recognize certain actions over others.

In his *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (1967-68), Bruce Nauman walked around a square that he delineated with masking tape on his studio floor, performing solely for the camera, in order to explore the language of movement and choreographic instruction. Through a reenactment of the work—this time for an audience—Ana Hoffner discusses the exclusionary function of the square. Narrating a critique of this symbol—as a sign of modernity and the movement of global neoliberalism—Hoffner inserts her own position into the work, as a queer person and an emigrant from former Yugoslavia. Issues around labor, heterosexual reproduction, and migratory rights spill over the edges, revealing multiple and contrasting histories that cannot coexist in the center.

If symbols bear the weight of history, then their erasure and reconfiguration mark a space for agency. Joan Jonas's *Mirage* repeatedly gestures towards this space as the artist draws and erases symbols in an act of temporal transformation, suggesting that no image is fixed and every moment is fleeting and transformable. On a blank chalkboard, with a piece of white chalk in hand, Jonas performs a ritual-like dance that engages her body in order to build a new visual haiku. Lawrence Weiner also opens a space to read and reread meaning as he employs language as material for site-specific installations. Here, the words INHERENT FORM are boxed in and given space, emphasized but also rendered loose in connotation. Through text as image, form, and symbol, Weiner rejects the determination of language and opens meaning to implication and subjective interpretation.

The project strives to dispel the belief in narrative unity by presenting a range of works from varying contexts that question notions of legibility and fixed resolve. As a prelude to the discussion, *The--family* performs at Human Resources the weekend prior to the opening at LACE. Organized by Wojciech Kosma and performed by an evolving set of collaborators, *The--family* stages performances of intimate scenarios between two individuals. The aesthetics of intimacy—an attempt to "explode privacy"⁵—take shape in jokes and personal anecdotes, hand-holding, and physical play. *The--family* invites audiences to witness and participate in this private act, and temporarily engage in a community that is perpetually forming, dissembling, and reforming.⁶ In starting here, and with Prouvost's DROWNING AND SWALLOWING THIS TEXT, the project reevaluates how we understand and experience stories, the harmony of their beginnings, middles, and ends. It presents a fervent appeal to fragment, dissolve and reconfigure—a coming together again, only to come apart.

Notes 1. "It is then no longer possible regularly to contrast opposites, sexes, possessions; it is no longer possible to safeguard an order of just equivalence; in a word, it is no longer possible to represent, to make things representative, individuated, separate, assigned; *Sarrasine* represents the very confusion of representation, the unbridled (pandemic) circulation of signs, of sexes, of fortunes." Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Hill and Wang, 2000), p. 216.

2. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 123.

3. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 2-3.

4. Elin Diamond, "In the Shudder of Catharsis." In *Performativity and Performance*. Eds. Andrew Parker, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Routledge, 1995), p. 154.

5. Elizabeth Gumpert, "Female Trouble," Interview with Chris Krauss, *N+1 Mag*, Issue 13: Machine Politics (January 2012).

6. Jean-Luc Nancy, "Of Being Singular Plural." In *Being Singular Plural*. Eds. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 37-38.



LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions)
6522 Hollywood Blvd. | Los Angeles, CA | 90028
welcometolace.org
t: 323.957.1777 | f: 323.957.9025

Support for LACE and its programs is provided by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the Getty Foundation, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, The Mohn Family Foundation, Morris Family Foundation, the Audrey & Sydney Irmas Charitable Foundation, National Performance Network, the C. Christine Nichols Donor Advised Fund at the Community Foundation of Abilene, Stone Brewing Co., and the members of LACE.

Curated by Shoghig Halajian and Suzy M. Halajian
with Math Bass, A.K. Burns, Ana Hoffner, Joan Jonas, Tala Madani, MPA, Virginia Poundstone, Laure Prouvost, Mounira Al Solh, Jill Spector, Lawrence Weiner, and *The--family* (with Sjoerd Dijk and Wojciech Kosma)

Design: David Karwan

© 2014, the authors and LACE