

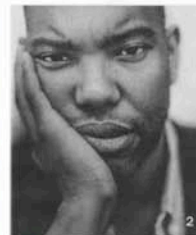


## HELEN MOLESWORTH

HELEN MOLESWORTH IS CHIEF CURATOR AT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES. HER MOST RECENT EXHIBITION, "LEAP BEFORE YOU LOOK: BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE 1933–1957," IS CURRENTLY ON VIEW AT THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART, BOSTON.

1

**SHARJAH BIENNIAL 12: "THE PAST, THE PRESENT, THE POSSIBLE" (VARIOUS VENUES; CURATED BY EUNGIE JOO WITH RYAN INOUE)** This biennial had three unique attributes: Its art could be seen in the time of a "normal" visit, it was exceedingly well curated, and it was beautifully installed. Joo and her team lived and worked in Sharjah, and it showed. Artists were intelligently matched to off-site locations (Abraham Cruzvillegas in the Bird and Animal Market, Adrián Villar Rojas in an abandoned ice factory), well represented (the witty and poignant Beom Kim), gorgeously staged (Rayyane Tabet in the long hallway), and permitted their full complement of emotions (Rodney McMillian's funeral cavern). Throughout, there was an implicit and diplomatic suggestion that sometimes freedom is an idea best tended to quietly.



1. Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Reconstrucción2: Here We Stand*, 2015, wood, iron, leather, carpet, cardboard, glue, stainless steel, cloth, falcon dung. Installation view, Bird and Animal Market, Sharjah. From Sharjah Biennial 12. Photo: Deema Shahin. 2. Ta-Nehisi Coates, Baltimore, July 16, 2015. Photo: Gabriella Demczuk/The New York Times/Redux. 3. Ernesto Ballesteros, *Indoor Flights*, 2015. Performance view, Arsenale, Venice, May 6, 2015. From the 56th Venice Biennale. Photo: Alessandra Chemollo. 4. Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled (Studio)*, 2014, acrylic on PVC panel, 83 1/8 x 119 1/2".

2

**TA-NEHISI COATES AND MAGGIE NELSON** Coates's *Between the World and Me* (Spiegel & Grau) and Nelson's *The Argonauts* (Graywolf Press) each speak from the heart and the gut with fierce intelligence, obliterating any last vestige of a Cartesian subject. Devouring and digesting a whole raft of 1980s and '90s theory, each author emerged with language both sophisticated and accessible. They did so with large stakes: Coates offers a devastating account of the structural state violence against black people that constitutes the terra firma of white privilege, and Nelson summons the blood and chemistry of the body as the counterintuitive means to destroy the binary of gender.

3

**ERNESTO BALLESTEROS, INDOOR FLIGHTS (56TH VENICE BIENNALE)** In the middle of the complete turmoil of the Arsenale, Ballesteros silently pursued the flying of small handmade airplanes. I watched him for an hour on opening day, and the flights went no farther than fifteen feet. I was mesmerized by the simplicity and humanness of the gesture. In August, a friend who had visited Venice long after the opening craze recounted, with utter amazement, watching a flight that occupied a long stretch of the Arsenale, culminating in a boomerang-style return to its maker. That Ballesteros's patience should be so well rewarded bolstered my belief in art's small pleasures.

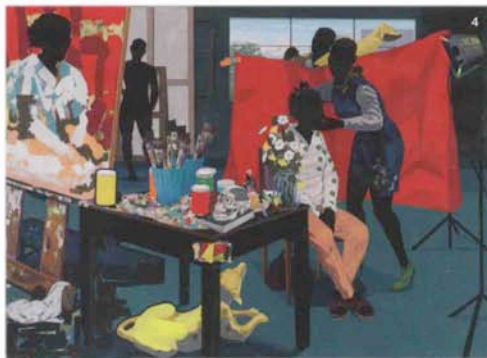
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**KERRY JAMES MARSHALL (DAVID ZWIRNER GALLERY, LONDON)** In Zwirner's polite town house, Marshall installed a suite of figurative paintings depicting extravagantly beautiful women alongside the downright masterful *Untitled (Studio)*, 2014—a picture as complex and gratifying as any nineteenth-century painting as parsed by T. J. Clark or Linda Nochlin. The exhibition had the clarity of a thunderstorm, both destroying and cleansing the canon of Western pictures. After the rain, a glimmer of light offered a Rorschach-esque lurid neon abstraction. I've been following Marshall for two decades and felt wonderfully stumped. Rainbows indeed.



5

**"ABOUT FACE" (KAYNE GRIFFIN CORCORAN, LOS ANGELES; CURATED BY KRISTINA KITE AND SARAH LEHRER-GRAIWER)** This tight group show featured works by Joan Brown, Brian Calvin, Maria Lassnig, Dianna Molzan, Diane Simpson, and Christina Ramberg that traversed sculpture, video (Lassnig's fantastic autobiographical *Kantate*, 1992), and painting. It glided from the 1970s to the present, offering an eccentric counterhistory focused on portraiture in the age of abstraction. Instead of producing a static tension between these two supposedly polarized forms, the exhibition generated a field of play and pleasure where feminism (the rethinking of standard categories) and formalism (the exploration of new meanings) rode slipstream on each other.





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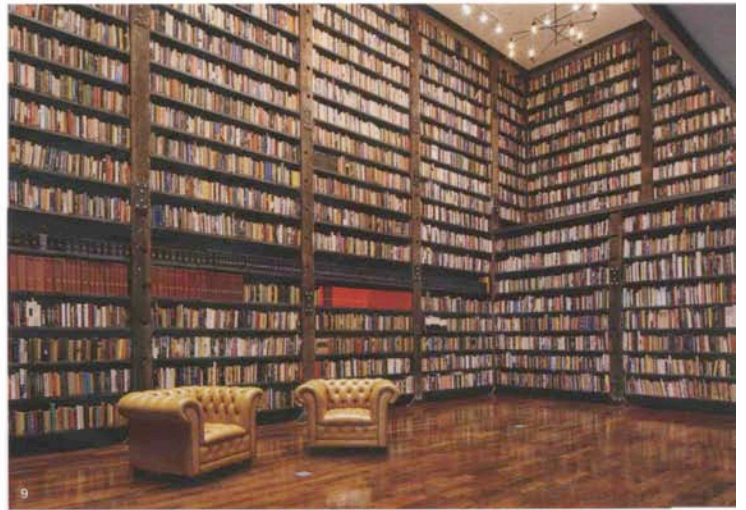
**THE REVIVAL OF DANCENOISE** I met Anne lobst at a monthlong residency program. The first thing she did was dance entirely nude, with rouged nipples, in a studio filled with people she didn't know. I distinctly recall thinking, "This chick's got balls." The more I learned about Dancenoise, the more words like *cheeky* and *saucy* rolled around in my head—this prefeminist lingo seemed best to describe the hilarious punk sensibility of Anne and her partner Lucy Sexton. Jay Sanders smartly opened the new Whitney Museum of American Art with them. Thank God for the past; it may be the only way to the future.

7

**MARK BRADFORD, SPIDERMAN (HAMMER MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES)** In *Spiderman*—shown in his monographic exhibition, curated by Connie Butler with Jamillah James—Bradford occupies the space of the African American comic. The video is a black screen, accompanied by a sound track of Bradford's brilliant performance of a devastatingly funny stand-up routine, with scrolling subtitles in a 1980s video font. By translating the text we can plainly hear into something we can also see, Bradford makes evident the constant demand on black people to perform their blackness, all the while having it closely monitored. When the subtitles stretch out the phrase "I can't breathe," the space between art and life and performance and reality ruthlessly implodes.



5. Christina Ramberg, *O.H.D.*, 1976, acrylic on Masonite, 18 x 16". From "About Face." 6. *Dancenoise, Show*, 2015, Performance view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, July 23, 2015. Anne lobst and Lucy Sexton. Photo: Paula Court. 7. Mark Bradford, *Spiderman*, 2015, multimedia installation, dimensions variable. 8. Sadie Benning, *Red Maze Monochrome*, 2014, Medite, aqua resin, casein, 75 x 51". 9. Johnson Publishing Library, Rebuild Foundation's Stony Island Arts Bank, Chicago, September 24, 2015. Photo: Tom Harris/Hedrich Blessing. 10. Joan Didion with her Corvette, Los Angeles, 1971. Photo: Julian Wasser/Getty Images.



8

**SADIE BENNING (SUSANNE VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES PROJECTS, CULVER CITY, CA)** Benning's magnum opus *Play Pause*, 2006, the apotheosis of her deeply idiosyncratic faux-naïve animation, was a simultaneous meditation on both the demise of public space after 9/11 and the rise of a trans logic—because the way a line starts is not necessarily how it will end. In this exhibition, Benning's line became willfully abstract as she used it to make jigsaw-puzzle-piece paintings that were all about where, and how, things touch each other. Gentleness—as a pervading affect as well as a form of ethics—hung over the show like a cumulus cloud.

9

**JOHNSON PUBLISHING LIBRARY (STONY ISLAND ARTS BANK, REBUILD FOUNDATION, CHICAGO)** The Chicago-based originator of *Ebony* and *Jet* donated its library to Theaster Gates's Rebuild Foundation, another installment of Gates's dynamic use of culture as an engine for socioeconomic change. Housed in a formerly abandoned 1920s bank, the library is sumptuously installed from floor to ceiling. The shelves' height makes reading many of the spines, much less the books, impossible, a powerful image of the contemporary relationship between information and knowledge: It's all there, but it's awfully hard to figure out how to use it.

10

**THE ART SCENE IN LOS ANGELES** Opening dinners at the Chateau Marmont; movie stars at annual galas; parties where Tacita Dean can be seen dancing with Sharon Lockhart; stellar curators at all of the museums; artist-run storefront galleries; Joan Didion on everyone's bookshelf; studio visits with coffee and pastries; museums with consistently diverse audiences; large numbers of artists who studied with either Michael Asher, Catherine Lord, or Lari Pittman; a pervasive sense that formal choices matter (possible cause-and-effect relationship to previous statement); and palm trees. □