

Ko
Co/Projects



Art Writing and Criticism Discussion Group

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In order to create this PDF some of the texts have been altered in terms of design and layout. We have included links to the original texts which may offer further information.

11 Statements Around Art Writing

By Maria Fusco, Frieze, 10 OCT 2011

<https://frieze.com/article/11-statements-around-art-writing>

The teaching team of the MFA in Art Writing at Goldsmiths, London compose sentences as a form of art practice.

Art Writing emerges as a practice.

Art Writing is a possible form of the liberty of the image.

Art Writing names an approach within contemporary culture that, in wanting new potentials, embraces writing as a problematization of the object of art, its dissemination and forms of exhibition.

Art Writing does not take modalities of writing as given, rather it tends to, and experiments with, non-division between practice and theory, criticism and creativity.

Art Writing sustains all forms of art criticism, including the experimental and the hybrid. The art work may be intensely engaged with, or it may be the starting point for fictional and poetic developments.

Art Writing is in the situation of a fulcrum.

Art Writing is an anthology of examples.

Art Writing is re-invented in each instance of Art Writing, determining its own criteria.

Art Writing addresses material literary forms, which draw attention to the spatiality of writing and the physicality of its support, but the interests of Art Writing diverge from those of literature.

Art Writing involves relations between people, as discursive. In so far as it is art, Art Writing can engage public space no longer sustained by ground, including that of truth.

Art Writing institutes such public space without truth, and sometimes disappears into it.

Letter to a Young Doctor

"A document of emergency." An epistolary essay on the terms of engagement between patient and doctor.

By Johanna Hedva, 17 JAN 2018

<https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/letter-to-a-young-doctor/#title->

Dear Erica,

You wrote me asking if I can think of a way, any way, that healing might happen within the current institution of the medical-industrial complex and its attendant oppressions, of which you are currently a student, set to begin your residency this year. The importance of finding a way is urgent, you wrote, because you will soon be seeing patients who come to you to be healed, in hospitals, ERs, clinics, and you'll give them treatments that will decide their lives. You feel uncertain if your chosen path as a doctor, at this moment in history, can also be a path of healing.

You wrote: "I am someone who will soon be a physician attempting to care for people, and yet I find that I still don't know what healing means."

I could graft myself onto that same sentence, but from a different position: "I am someone who will be the recipient of attempts at care from institutions and practitioners of healing, and yet I find that none of us really know what healing means." It meant a lot to me that you used the word "attempting."

You are younger than I—27, you said. You are the first-generation American child of immigrants and, you pointed out, we share Korean heritage, particularly a grandmother who escaped North Korea during the war. Although you didn't explicitly state it, I understand the kind of family pressure that probably existed in your life around choosing the right career. Becoming a doctor has a special meaning to immigrant families; it is considered the noblest profession, and perhaps the greatest signifier of success in America, although it remains a symbolic promise that only comes true for a few. It reminds me of how, every time I visited my Korean grandmother as a child, she urged me either to marry a rich man or to become a doctor. She'd also shake her head severely—no—when I'd ask her if, one day, we might visit her homeland together. As if I were asking her to return to a haunted house.

You asked me a lot of questions in your letter, and they all felt like questions I ask myself. They seem to be variations of asking, "What are we going to do?" which I think is the same as asking, "How can we heal?" I've come to understand that the conflation of these two questions is crucial not only to finding a way toward healing—which is to say finding the way that is healing—but also toward how political resistance might work, toward justice. Keeping this fact—that healing and justice might be the same—always present in your thoughts is a way, one way, I can think of that might answer your questions.

For some of us, there is a relationship between healing and justice because what oppresses us has also made us suffer trauma and its accompanying symptoms. Oppression, domination, and violence live first and foremost in our bodies. As much as they are ideological systems, their effect is always material; they deal in matter: flesh, bones, blood. They pierce tissue with bullets, crack necks with boots, make stomachs chew on their own acid out of hunger, imprison bodies in small lightless rooms made of concrete. They flood brains and nervous systems with adrenaline and panic. On the less dramatic side, they work insidiously: they instantiate and re-instantiate memories of unhelpful doctors and police who are not figures of help or safety but of violence and terror; they invalidate and dismiss experiences of pain and suffering, especially those experiences that they've directly caused. They deny access to medications and therapies, they frighten and alienate with categories that pathologize and discriminate, they construct a world whose very premise insists that suffering, illness, and disability are abnormal and wrong, and that banishes those who experience such stuff.

So, the process of healing is a way of reimagining a political future for the social body as much as it is about finding ways to care for and survive in our individual bodies. And, it should go without saying, bodies are fragile things. That's what makes them different from ideologies—they are bound to matter, they are flesh that can be touched, held, scarred, that can dance and laugh, that will decay, that will remember.

I received your letter months ago, and have not been sure how to respond, although I've thought about it every day. I finally started writing a response from a German hospital, during January and February, where I was for three weeks, in the psych ward for depression. It was the longest winter of my life, and it made my life feel so little, even though my life often feels little. (It was not my first hospitalization for chronic illnesses, mental or otherwise.) For most of my hospitalization, I was unsure that I would survive, and so responding to you felt serious and fateful, something I must take care of if I wasn't going to make it.

This letter, then, is a document of emergency. I wrote it thinking it was one of my last attempts at communication, and in many ways I was trying to communicate to myself as much as I was to you and the questions you asked. If I could articulate something about healing to you, maybe it would articulate healing for me. I wrote it by hand on pieces of printer paper that the nurses gave me from their station. I'd walk down the hallway in my pajamas and knock on the glass. I had to wait for them to unlock the door, then I'd make the gesture of writing by hand because I didn't know the German words. When my partner visited me, I'd ask him to take photos of the pieces of paper I'd written on, in case I couldn't take them out of the hospital myself.

It strikes me that I chose to write to you—a stranger—while I was hospitalized, when I was speaking and interacting with doctors and nurses multiple times a day about these same questions. Instead of walking down the hallway, tapping on the glass, and trying to have a discussion about the relationship between trauma and justice with the people who are trained professionals in the field of medical care, I directed my voice in your direction, you whom I've never met, may never meet, who felt very far away, across a distance that was dark and unfamiliar. I think it reveals how vast the distance feels between patient and doctor: for patients, it often feels like trying to connect with a stranger with whom you have no chance of actually connecting. Many chronically ill and disabled people face this dilemma: we are forced into long-term relationships that are devoid of the things—trust, intimacy—that a long-term relationship needs to work.

The distance is huge, obscured, and unbreachable, but there's a special terror in it because the distance is often right in front of you, between your face and your doctor's as you sit in the small examination room together. The distance swims in the air that you both inhale. It distorts the exchange of two bodies in close proximity, making a little void that yawns open. It can feel like you're speaking a language that your doctor not only can't understand, but doesn't care to hear.

The doctor who admitted me when I arrived at the ER was summoned just for me because he was the only one who spoke fluent English in the psych ward. Because of his generic youthful and German handsomeness, I nicknamed him Yay-Crew (in German, the "i" is pronounced like a "y," like my first name). Yay-Crew challenged my stereotype of the uptight German psychiatric doctor because he'd say things like "for sure." Once he cautioned me against a medication because it might "fuck up" my liver. I wanted to trust him, even to like him. We seemed to be of the same age. He laughed, once or twice, at my attempts at a joke. I sometimes imagined that I might run into him outside of the hospital (if I was ever released), at an art opening or at the movies, where we could meet on shared ground. "You like this director?" "Yes, I'm a fan! You too?" I don't know if imagining that we might have similar social groups or interests helped me or hurt me, because it was all fantasy. I catch myself wondering about sending him this letter, or my other essays on illness, but then I feel a swift rinse of shame, as if I've been cast as the

spurned ex holding on to a false hope. I admonish myself, *But why would he want to know how you're doing? He doesn't care about you.*

I noticed that, when discussing my treatment, he'd state it like this: "What is important for me is that you are stabilized," "What is important for me is that you don't have too many adverse side effects." Always, what was important for him. I wondered if he learned this technique in medical school—are you, Erica, being taught to talk to your patients this way too? He rarely asked me questions, other than the perfunctory, "And how are we today?" The vague, elusive, imagined "we" of that sentence always felt like a large void that yawned open between us. Nonetheless I tried to insert myself into the conversation. "But how much will it cost?" "But I don't want to do that." It was a struggle of making myself not only have a presence, of making myself be seen and heard and understood, but of persuading him that mine was an important presence, one that mattered, one that he had to consider as much as I had to consider his.

A note I wrote down in the hospital: "What am I doing here? Malinger, lingering." Being chronically ill often feels like all I really have, which is to say all that I own, is radically temporary—a lump of painful, decaying, remembering matter whose existence is composed of different strategies for lingering.

In our last meeting, on the day I was released, he told me, "You've made a tremendous accomplishment." It made me laugh. "My tremendous accomplishment is that I didn't kill myself?" I said. Yay-Crew made a gesture then, a little bow of the head, an opening of the hands in my direction, that I've tried to interpret but I still can't say exactly what it meant. It felt a bit parental, *go forth now, my child, I trust that you will be okay.* He told me that I could always come back.

You might wonder what place an emotion like trust has in the science of medicine, but if you take anything from this, I want it to be that trust is the most important thing a doctor and her patient can share, because trust is what keeps people from falling apart, and it's what puts broken ones back together, and in the cases where the brokenness is all there is, trust can offer a small encouragement that the brokenness is bearable—that it can eventually, hopefully, ideally be reframed not as "brokenness" at all, but as the different parts that are there to work with. It's the only force I can think of that might alleviate the vast distance between us, as well as the vast distances between the many parts of myself, not because it will diminish the distance, but because it will honor it. It will acknowledge that the distance is here.

A therapist once asked me to define trust, and I found that I had no answer. After years of feeling my way toward a definition, the best I came up with is that trust is not a permanent state that can be attained, but only a sign of the possibility that unbearable things can be bearable, that they can come together, again, or for the first time, no matter how temporary that moment might be, and even if they never come together, that too can be borne.

I struggle with the fact that the word *health* has its root in *whole* (the Old English *hal*). I guess it can mean that the process of healing—the return, or first trip, to health—means a return, or first trip, or second, third, fourth, fifth trip, to "wholeness," where things come together. But I don't believe that this state of "wholeness" is a permanent one that can be attained, or for that matter, obtained—*attain* meaning to "succeed in achieving," and *obtain*, to "possess or acquire." Along with Yay-Crew telling me that I'd made a tremendous accomplishment, I've heard both verbs used in conversations about how to approach wellness, health, and healing. Both verbs, to me, stink of neoliberalism's many cruel optimisms and empty promises, and they feel too finite. Is my health or healing or well-being or wholeness something that I ought to approach as an achievement, a success? Is it an object of value that I can purchase, possess, and, once obtained, have forever?

Another therapist recently told me his definition of trust: "Trust is that you are here." I thought of flesh, decaying, painful, remembering, that is bound to being here. Lingering, bearing.

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I think the profession of a healer is not a practice that facilitates attaining or obtaining wholeness forever, but a practice of bearing witness to all the parts—the parts that have been apart, are apart, and will remain apart—being here.

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One of the problems with healing in this fucked-up world is that it's presumed that you, the doctor, have a set of knowledges that the patient doesn't, so for the patient to get better, to be cured, or to heal, they must submit themselves to Doctor's Orders. In other words, I'm supposed to wholly, absolutely give my trust to you—but not because you've demonstrated any action that would earn my trust, specifically, or because we've gone through the stages of intimacy and equal exchange together. It's that you represent a discipline that is supposed to be deserving of trust; I'm supposed to trust you simply because you are a doctor.

To us patients, this dynamic feels like one in which we are helpless because it is. It feels one-sided, dangerously unequal. I have to give my trust to you, but not because you've earned it. It's because you work in the hospital, or the clinic, a place that is a metonym for medical expertise; it's because you speak in the coded language of medicine and wear the white lab coat, a rehearsed performance with its attendant costume. I don't feel like you trust me, because you are treating me, or parts of me, as enemies to be vanquished. I'm told things like: "We've got to get these symptoms under control," "We've got to beat this thing." It's framed as an exercise of domination, an attempt at mastery. But the body and the mind are not places for domination and mastery.

It gives me the impression that medicine is like a war room, full of doctors moving little pieces around on a table, and we patients are locked out and waiting for the blast. The presumption that you can make for us a world that doesn't integrate us into its design is a world in which we will never feel or be integrated—and so, what use is this vision of wholeness if it can exist as whole, wholly without us? What kind of integration is it when it is made of only one part?

What if, instead, the presumption went both ways—that the patient was *also* a specialist, like you, in possession of a set of knowledges, a vision of a world we'd like to build, that is different from this one, and so by collaborating as equals, utilizing each person's skills, we might together build a world that contains multiple parts, a world that is not only one part—your part?

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It was weird, for many reasons, to get your letter, but the primary one is that it shocked me to be seen in a position of authority to answer your questions. It made me ask myself what kind of knowledge I have about healing that you, trained and educated in the field of medicine, do not. What would I have to teach you? You mentioned that you'd read my essays "Sick Woman Theory" and "In Defense of De-persons," so I think I know why I came across as an authority on what healing might mean. The voice I was able to construct in those essays was empowered in its sickness and vindicated by its tragedy.

But the truth is that I wrote them as documents of emergency too, just as I'm now writing this letter as a document of emergency. What I mean by emergency in this case is a kind of paradox: I'm trying to talk about the experience of being alive in a chronically ill body, a disabled body, a body that's been traumatized and is still being traumatized by systems of oppression, which is to say a life lived with the certainty that one's fragile body is the only certainty. It's like living right at the edge of what feels ferociously unbearable and what I must learn how to bear. I think of a friend's book title: *A Goddamn Infinite Emergency: Love Stories*.

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I'm out of the hospital for now and, though it feels like the emergency has been paused, I know it will return. In a follow-up appointment, a nurse expressed his shock at my certainty. "You are

so sure?" he said. "Yes, aren't you?" I said. He was silent for a moment, and then said, "Yes, but normally patients aren't so professional about it."

When I tell this story to abled people, or tell other stories about my inextricable lifelong relationship with doctors, hospitals, therapists, medications, and the medical-industrial complex, I've noticed that they have a hard time understanding this certainty I have that such things are not only inevitable in my life, but main players. They balk at the fact that I will have to take medication until I die. They say, "But don't you think you're giving your illness too much space?" That I would be certain I'll return to the hospital seems to betray what they presume is true about hospitals, which I gather is that hospitals are a rare and bizarre interruption of "normal" life. How can I explain that the equipment and smell of hospitals, the wan light and horrid linoleum floors, are as familiar as memories of my childhood home? That the routine appointments that take up my time—in-home care when needed, twice-a-week physical therapy, weekly psychotherapy, biweekly meetings with my social worker, monthly checkups with my general practitioner, etc.—are as woven into my daily life as work, sleep, and having tea with a friend?

In honest, neutral terms, without tragic drama or empowering vindication, I understand that no matter where I sit or sleep in this life, I will be doing it in the house of illness. Everything about living in this house is difficult, but there's a pernicious difficulty in trying to communicate these experiences to a world so structured by ableism. Sometimes this feels like the most unbearable part of it all. It's not so much that articulating the experiences is difficult, although it surely is, but that few really know how to hear and understand them from a non-ableist perspective. Working with my editors on this text, preparing it for publication, revealed to me that, even with the best intentions of trying to support stories like mine, ableism often gets in the way. My editors were not being malicious. They wanted, and tried, to support me as best as they knew how. But they also suggested that I reimagine this letter's position now that I was out of the hospital, implying that the position might be healthier, or at least different. This is not the first time I've had such an experience with an institution that has the power to support me, as much as they have power over me. There is often a fantastical expectation that I have a "true" or "real" self, and those sick, mad, cripples are not really me.

Remember how ideologies work: as much as they settle into your bones, they also insidiously structure your world. Ableism makes it normal to insist, violently and subtly, that everyone has the unlimited capacity to work and produce, according to the standards of the systems in power. Ableism makes it normal to think of disability as something that one "suffers from" and can "overcome" or "transcend," to think of chronic illness as something one needs to be "strong" about, to think of bouts of illness as disruptions of "normal" life. We've all been conditioned to expect that such perspectives are the norm, so much that we don't even notice when we adopt them ourselves. Some of the most frustrating encounters I've had with ableism have been in conversations with people who are chronically ill or disabled themselves. It's taken me years to understand how often I've had, and still have, ableist expectations about myself—even in the hospital ward, I pushed myself to meet the deadline for this article, because I saw its completion as a measure of my worth.

Maybe I don't have to explain to you, Erica, how being alive in my body is to be alive always in a hospital—since you, a young doctor, and I, a professional patient, live and work under the same roof in this house of illness. Maybe you already see that the self I am in the hospital is a no-less-normal part of the self I am at home. Maybe I don't have to explain to you why congratulating someone on not killing themselves frames their life in terms of achievement and success, of health as a kind of property to be acquired. Maybe you already understand that your profession ought to aim for honoring the many parts and the distances between them, and the possibility that such distances might never diminish.

I'm learning to figure the self admitted to hospitals with psychosis, the self who is dissociated, the self who is in chronic pain, the self who is medicated, as being no less than the self who is working here at my desk, the self who is publishing essays, the self who is laughing and

and dancing.

Let me ask you to learn this too.

Let's remind each other: trust is that you are here.

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On an afternoon about halfway through my stay in the bin I had a panic attack and, because none of the nurses on Station 12 speak English, there was a search for Yay-Crew. Intercoms through the building buzzed for him (alas, using his real name) while I flapped my hands and couldn't breathe in a room of ineffectual but concerned nurses. Some time—painful, dissociating—passed before he arrived. In American psych wards they restrain you during attacks like these, so I flinched when his frame appeared in the door, but Yay-Crew instead started talking to me in a gentle, steady voice. He asked me if something had happened to trigger the attack. I managed to explain that I'd become confused because I couldn't remember how Van Gogh had committed suicide (a story I know by heart, so forgetting it alarmed me), and Yay-Crew responded by telling me he'd recently seen a Van Gogh exhibition, and was surprised at how small the canvases are, just this big, and how yellow and vibrant the suns and flowers are. He swept his hands through the air slowly and gracefully. I followed the sound of his voice and tried to find the yellows that he described. I asked him, once language had returned, if he was an optimist, saying he must be in order to be an emergency-room psychiatrist, and he said, simply, with no power in his eyes, only tiredness and sincerity, "Yes. I am."

As he would later congratulate me on my tremendous accomplishment of surviving, he then congratulated me on pulling myself out of the panic attack by listening to him. It was then that I trusted him: not because of his congratulations, but because he had spoken to me in an equal exchange, and he'd listened to me and heard me, and perhaps we'd even had a conversation. I realize only now, as I write the words, that I trusted him because he had trusted me.

If I ever find myself sitting across from you, in an ER, or a clinic, or in your private practice, while you observe my presenting symptoms, categorize what you see according to your encyclopedic knowledge, mentally summarize my problems into diagnoses and possible etiologies and treatments, and speak to me of your "plan of attack," or how we're going to "beat this thing," I hope that you might also speak to me of flowers and suns and the color yellow, and of the world being just this big, and of your optimism, and of my many pieces that are all somehow here, lingering, remembering, and of some ways we might start putting things together, again, or for the first time, or letting them stay in pieces, just honoring that they are here, that you are here, and so am I.

Yours,

Johanna Hedva

What Happens When an “Outsider Artist” Dies, and Who Decides Their Legacy?

For over thirty years, Irish immigrant Gerald Dalton worked privately on hundreds of miniature buildings and collages at his flat in West London, with a series of outdoor sculptures the only clue to the treasure trove of creativity inside. Following his death last month, his legacy remains uncertain. Words by Digby Warde-Aldam; photographs by Miguel Santa Clara

Elephant, 23 OCT 2019

<https://elephant.art/gerald-dalton-gerrys-pompeii-happens-outsider-artist-dies-decides-legacy/>



It goes without saying that the art world is a microcosm plagued by ethical dilemmas, and few come more fraught than the legacy of posthumously “discovered” artists. The dead have no part in forming the mythologies that critics, historians or curators attach to their names, and cannot challenge the truisms that come to surround their work—factors that become all the more uncomfortable when applied to self-taught, so-called “outsiders”.

Class is one issue: it is no coincidence that many figures labelled with the term have hailed from humble backgrounds and work in professions far removed from the glamorous gallery scene. Moreover, history has a way of reading their achievements as visionary statements, obscuring the possibility that they might be driven by the same creative urges as more conventional artists.



What, then, should we make of it when we encounter the work of one yet to be acknowledged by the wider world? Take the case of Gerard Dalton, a man who passed away just over eight weeks ago in west London. Before last week, I had never heard his name—but without knowing it, I had been wondering at his work for years.

For over a decade, I have been walking by the canal near Trellick Tower and stopping to stare at a particular sight. Over the water, against an urban landscape dominated by grimy Victorian brick and the faded concrete of 1960s modernist buildings, stands a long stretch of blue-grey wall that spans past the gardens of four houses. Partially hidden by neat topiary and exotic trees, it resembles a kind of shrine, speckled with tiles, trinkets and colourful objects of all forms and sizes, arranged in uneven but rational patterns. From

the path, you can just make out some unusual figurative sculptural forms rising about three foot from the ground, their chalk-white plinths lending them a sepulchral air at odds with the general magpie aesthetic.

It could be anything: a relic of the area's countercultural past (in the 1970s, the neighbourhood had informally been known as "Squatland"); the lair of some eccentric millionaire art collector; perhaps even a voodoo burial ground. All were theories I entertained when passing by over the course of the next ten years, convinced that the story behind it would remain one of those strange, highly visible but entirely private secrets that form part of living in a city.

Until visiting the house last week, I could never have guessed that Dalton, an immigrant from Ireland who had lived in one of the flats backing onto the canal from 1983 until his death this year, had spent years creating this vision alone. Born to a farming family near Athlone in 1935, Dalton had grown up, in his own words, without "much education really". Despite a fascination with history that would stay with him his entire life, the academic opportunities available to a farm boy from County Westmeath were limited, and he ended up working as a handyman for Colonel Harry Rice, a rich, retired bon vivant with a taste for landscape gardening.

Dalton gave only one formal interview in his lifetime, with his friend and neighbour Roc Sandford, but he made no secret of his creative debt to his one-time employer: "[Colonel Rice] inspired me, he did really," he acknowledged. "Because every tree in the world was planted around that house, it was unbelievable." We can never know for sure, but it is tempting to imagine that his experiences of building a rockery for the colonel might have been the imaginative seed for what would become a life's work.

Dalton moved to London in 1959, first working in railway sorting offices, then taking on a series of catering jobs around the city. We know little about this long period of his life, and nothing of any creative projects he may have undertaken. But following his retirement in the mid-1990s, something sparked him to begin producing his art at a prodigious rate: from here on in, he devoted himself to turning his garden into a personal museum. He created as many as 115 sculptures of British, Irish and European historical figures, and decorated the barren stretch of waterfront until it became the decorative masterpiece that would catch myself and countless others by surprise.

Behind the towpath, he transformed his small, square garden into a miniature sculpture park, its paths lined with statues of subjects including Jonathan Swift, the Irish warrior-queen Maeve, and Napoleon—something of a Dalton obsession; according to him, all were chosen on the democratic basis that they were "brilliant in their ways" (Oliver Cromwell—"a bad guy"—being the exception that made the rule).

Though all these sculptures were fashioned from just a handful of moulds, each individual work contains enough idiosyncratic detail to distinguish it from its neighbour, their clothes and wild hair arrangements all subtly differing, their distinctive, red-rimmed eyes painted to betray startling expressiveness. Others brandish plastic revolvers, or arrangements of brooches and gemstones studded across their bodies in unique configurations.

"I wanted to do a lot of statues [but] I couldn't do them in the winter with the cold weather", Dalton explained to Sandford. The temperature may have forced him indoors, but it was no bar to his creativity. Indeed, the interior of his home is, if anything, more arresting than the garden. Even had I been aware of the nature of Dalton's project before visiting, nothing could have prepared me for the experience of walking into this seemingly modest ground-floor flat. The front

room alone contains around a dozen dolls' house sized replicas of palaces, castles, cathedrals and tower blocks complete with beautiful interior detailing and exquisite handmade furnishings.

Buckingham Palace, the Victoria Monument, St Paul's Cathedral and Syon House were all there, created from wood, papier-mâché, card and whatever other found objects—matches, birthday cake candles, plastic gemstones—that came to hand. The attention to detail is astonishing. His Westminster Abbey, for example, includes everything from miniature tombs to stained glass windows fashioned from translucent plastic, while a vast replica of Hampton Court Palace apparently made with just a hammer, a chisel and a saw ("all the tools I had," Dalton recounted) even finds space for a lonely visitor bench.

Almost every inch of space is put to creative use. The shelves are crammed full of figurines and plastic busts repurposed to represent his heroes, each repainted and labelled to create a very personal pantheon. On the walls hang hundreds of collages constructed from reproductions of historical paintings, as well as dozens of paintings and prints embellished with broad strokes of psychedelically bright paint; though Dalton clearly wasn't much of a hippie, his home is full of evocations of 1960s counterculture. Whether or not this was intentional, it's impossible to say: while Dalton was clearly an appreciator of Classical and Renaissance art, eighteenth and nineteenth century portraiture and history painting, we have no idea if he was concerned with or even much aware of modernism and its attendant theories.



How, then, are we to treat Dalton's legacy? Many so-called outsiders have posthumously been exploited for profit, on the strength of visionary myths they have no say in controlling. The obvious and ideal way to prevent this happening to Gerald Dalton, an artist whose life's work is inextricably linked to the place of its creation, would be to convert his home into a not-for-profit museum.

But herein lies a problem, and an urgent one at that. The Housing Association that owns the apartment has the right to repossess the property on the death of the tenant, and with London's severe shortage of affordable housing, transforming a habitable apartment into a cultural venue is both a commercial hard sell and an ethical dilemma. The only conceivable hope of preserving this otherworldly monument to the imagination may be to buy the property outright.

It will not be easy to raise the funds to do so. "I don't know of any situation in which 'outsider art' created in social housing has survived in Britain," says the independent curator Sasha Galitzine, a friend of Dalton's who opened up the house to the public for several weeks in October. Nevertheless, she is spearheading the campaign to preserve his home, and is quietly optimistic. "We've had about 400 visitors passing through in the past few weeks, and everyone who has come has been amazed by it," she says. "This must at least show that this is a place of inspiration that must be preserved." A Just Giving campaign to turn the flat into a museum has recently been launched.

But over all of this hangs a crucial question: what would Dalton himself have wanted? On this count, he left only one clue as to his hopes and expectations: "They'll be astonished what they'll find in my garden in years to come," he mused. "It'll be like Pompeii or something—Gerry's Pompeii."



Exhibition Reviews

Can Artists Exploring the Korean DMZ Critically Engage with its Thorny History?

Or are they destined to succumb to fantasy, nostalgia and divisive stereotypes?

By Cleo Roberts, Frieze, 24 OCT 2019

<https://frieze.com/article/can-artists-exploring-korean-dmz-critically-engage-its-thorny-history>



A barren strip of land, four km wide and 250 km long, reinforced on either side by stations of troops, delineates the northern and southern parts of Korea. A relic from Korea's Civil War in the 1950s, dubbed a 'demilitarized zone' (DMZ), the area is widely considered a vacuum between the split nations, a wilderness imposed to maintain the 1953 Armistice Agreement. At once disarmed and enclosed within a heavily armed membrane, it is both immune to warfare and pregnant with it, arguably forming one of the world's most heavily militarized areas.

Yet with the anticipation of war comes its antithesis: the prospect of peace. Within and around the zone are peace villages, the most notable among them being P'anmunjŏm – characterized by its utilitarian 1960s architecture executed with Wes Anderson-esque precision – which played host to Donald Trump's recent meeting with Kim Jong-un. Meanwhile, in Cheorwon County, once the centre of the formerly united Korean Peninsula, are the headquarters for The Real DMZ Project, a research-led initiative founded in 2011. Working with artists and academics, it has, through a series of projects, residencies and international exhibitions, opened up ways of critically engaging with the area.

Inviting artists to respond to an area renowned for its 'security tourism' – an industry that relishes the sight of surveillance architecture – the Real DMZ Project is utopian and reparative in its approach, seeking to channel a vision of effective demilitarization and peace. Its current exhibition, 'Negotiating Borders', at London's Korean Cultural Centre, evokes such wistful idealism. A cabinet of sketches pays homage to an exhibition curated by Kyong Park and Cathleen Crabb at the Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York, 1988, which was developed in response to South Korea's democratic uprising of 1987. Mo Bahr's drawing of an amulet re-envisioning the

DMZ area as unified, while Nam June Paik's text on gridded paper repurposes it as a lush tiger farm, appealing to Japanese tourists and threatening to invaders. Nostalgia is denied in Seung H-Sang's *Bird's Monastery* (2017), and Lee Bul's *Study for Aubade* (2019), which take up the mantle and recalibrate the area. For Seung, the zone could be used for a monastery, equipped with chapel, library and a roof configured as an aviary. Meanwhile, Lee suggests melting the barbed wire from the guard posts that enclose the zone to create a quasi-constructivist tower. But they are still feeding into a fantasy, one which quickly disintegrates in the face of realities depicted by other artists.



The popular imagination often holds North Korea as a hermetic state with which any contact is untenable. While avoiding idealism, Seung Woo Back's wall of photographs taken in Pyongyang, *Blow up* (2005–07), makes a start at undoing this stereotype, revealing a higher degree of mobility, autonomy and access than is conventionally associated. Back isolates and zooms in on details from his images to show and enlarge the nation's humanity. A man slumps, a woman runs across the pavement, a child makes an ethereal smile, as if subtly to hint at the roles they play in the country's masquerade. Collectively, these figures mark a space for individuality in a totalitarian state. A similar conjecture is apparent in Noh Suntag's scenes from North Korea's Arirang Mass Games, an annual gymnastics and arts festival staged in homage to Kim Jong-il and his father, the late Communist leader Kim Il Sung. Unlike Andreas Gursky's polished photographs of the same subject, which revel in uniformity and obscure characterization, Suntang looks for the individuals who make up the crowd, showing the glitches in this synchronized operation.

Other works in the show address the idea of individualism, though their effects are questionable. Heinkuhn OH captures soldiers on the DMZ in stylized, homoerotic poses; while Soyoung Chung renders a watch-post in sheets of fine plastic netting replete with peep holes – a flimsy camouflage. These works excite voyeurism but could be seen to ridicule or condescend to their subjects. Without a sister iteration in North Korea, *The Real DMZ Project* runs the risk of

creating a progressive silo, reinforcing divisions rather than alleviating them. As curator Sunjung Kim told me, 'It is not large, nor popular. But slowly, some local people and visitors have discovered the importance of the Real DMZ Project.'

'The Real DMZ: Negotiating Borders' is on view at the Korean Cultural Centre UK, London, until 23 November

"The Coming World: Ecology as the New Politics 2030–2100"

Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, June 28–December 1, 2019

by Philomena Epps, Art Agenda, November 1, 2019

<https://www.art-agenda.com/features/298098/the-coming-world-ecology-as-the-new-politics-2030-2100>



According to the data provided by an online carbon footprint calculator, by taking a return flight from London to Moscow, I was responsible for the emission of 0.43 tons of CO₂e, or carbon dioxide equivalent. I was flying to attend the opening of "The Coming World: Ecology as the New Politics 2030–2100" at Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, which features artistic responses to ecology and nature. The cognitive dissonance required to excuse the substantial environmental impact of traveling more than 2,500 kilometers in order to comment on an exhibition that explores climate change is one of numerous contradictions I encountered during my visit.

This ambitious show is comparable in scale to a museum hang. There are over 50 works by Russian and international artists, including numerous large-scale installations, such as John Akomfrah's elegiac six-channel film *Purple* (2017); Anastasia Potemkina's luminous, site-specific halotherapy environment *Pass Me The Salt, Please* (2019); and Doug Aitken's vast *The Garden* (2017–19), in which viewers are able to enter a glass room enclosed within a verdant greenhouse structure, and, if they wish, to smash up its contents with a baton. Any humor to be found in the cartoonishly violent catharsis of Aitken's hot-headed hothouse quickly dissipates in the uncomfortable viewing of Hayden Fowler's performance installation *Together Again* (2017–19), a Joseph Beuys reboot in which the artist shares a cage with a captive-bred wolf, tracking the animal's movements through a VR headset. In response to the wall label that suggests Fowler promotes "equality between humans and animals" and that the wolf "consents" to being part of the performance, I defer to Victoria Dailey's argument that "presenting live animals as art

demolishes the meaning of art, while consigning living creatures to the impermissible category of object." The ethical implications of using a living being as metaphorical prop felt vulgar and especially misguided within this "ecological" context.

The exhibition guide explains the show's obscure title: "2030 is suggested [by biologist Paul R. Ehrlich] as the year when existing resources of oil will be exhausted," while "2100 denotes the year that, according predictions made by Arthur C. Clarke in the 1960s, human life will be able expand to other star systems." Despite the futuristic timeline, the show opens with a display that mixes historical objects and contemporary artworks in an attempt to explicate a history of "our shifting relationship to the natural and urban world." This initial presentation encapsulates the generalized, and occasionally overwhelming, curatorial approach to come, in which thematic connections feel vague or assumed: an anonymous Flemish tapestry dating from the mid-sixteenth century is displayed alongside Eadweard Muybridge's photographic study *Elephant Walking* (1887), Mikhail Matyushin's tree-root "Root sculptures" (1920s), Le Corbusier's city plans for Algiers from the 1930s, sculptures by Laure Prouvost and Martha Rosler, and more besides.

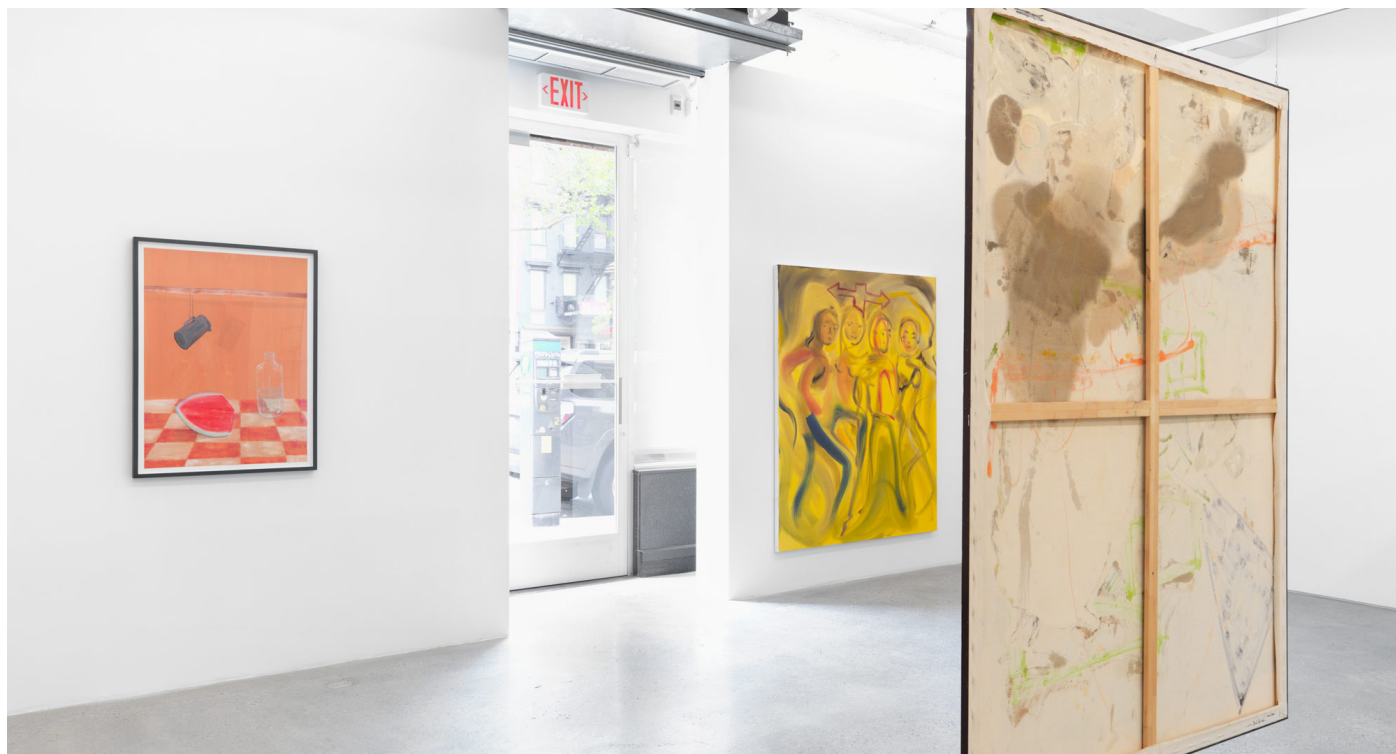
The second section, which includes works by Allan Sekula, Susan Schuppli, Critical Art Ensemble, and Tita Salina, is comparatively cohesive. The focus on tangible, challenging world events—oil spills, floods, water pollution, nuclear disasters—provides a sense of contemporary urgency in an exhibition that privileges the speculative and conceptual. In the penultimate galleries, which are divided into a warren of small "pods" apparently designed to look like spaceships, the exhaustive quantity of work on display can seem self-aggrandizing rather than sensitively selected. Here, the disparate and wide-ranging ideas of genetic engineering, synthetic biology, artificial intelligence, and interspecies breeding are thrown together in videos, sculptures, and room-sized installations by Lawrence Lek, Patricia Piccinini, Jon Rafman, Pamela Rosenkranz, Tomás Saraceno, and Studio Drift, among others.

The overblown broad strokes neutralize the nuance of the individual works. Take Hans Haacke's *Circulation* (1969), a minimalist floor piece made from a circulating pneumatic pump, plastic tubing, and connectors arranged like a vascular system, that shoots water and air bubbles around a continuous circuit that snakes across the gallery floor. Whether intended by the curators or not, the sculpture's latent institutional critique—physical circulation as a metaphor for economic flow—offers an appropriate evaluation on where this exhibition falls short. As the wall label accompanying *Circulation* puts succinctly: art is a "social system that cannot exist behind museum walls autonomously from life." Well, indeed. One salient point that was resoundingly absent from the press fanfare regarding the exhibition's "low carbon footprint" and "responsible consumption"—such as the lack of a paper catalogue and the use of recycled materials—is that the wealth of Garage's founders is largely derived from the extraction of fossil fuels. Against the backdrop of a global climate emergency, it is inadequate that any carbon offsetting prompted by the show will be limited to its six-month run. With "The Coming World," the museum has wasted an opportunity, however complex, for institutional self-reflection or long-lasting change.

Nothing But the Truth: Israel Lund on Four Painters at Magenta Plains in New York

By Israel Lund, ArtNews 07/01/19

<http://www.artnews.com/2019/07/01/israel-lund-magenta-plains-review/>



In our current “post-truth” and “alternative facts” moment, any mention of truth makes for a divisive situation, pitting one group against another on their respective platforms, with little room for nuance. The recent show at Magenta Plains, “Im Grunde ist es die Wahrheit / Essentially it’s the truth” seemed to find a way around that divide, allowing space for subtlety, speculation, and conjecture.

Consisting strictly of paintings, the exhibition included works by Sophie von Hellermann, David Ostrowski, Gerda Scheepers, and Mark van Yetter. The content of the works can be seen as straddling abstraction and representation, each in their respective ways, with Ostrowski and Scheepers leaning more toward abstraction, and von Hellermann and van Yetter toward representation, but only ostensibly so. The paintings hold one in the present moment, allowing for a suspension of any preconceived notions one may have about distinctions between abstraction and representation.

Scheepers’s paintings are comprised of spare line drawings of interiors or floor plans, which are then crossed out with a wavy or less solid line. The rendering of these gestures could lead to confusion as to which came first, the diagrams or the abstractions. Her marks are minimal brushstrokes, never exceeding the amount needed to complete the task at hand, and most are painted on semi-transparent fabric, exposing the structure of the stretcher bars holding it all together. Confident in their self-cancellation, her paintings present a conflicting statement. They hang on the wall, signs without signifieds, wherein the process of the making creates the meaning.

Unlike Scheepers’ works, which favor a quickness of gesture and production, Ostrowski’s multi-layered paintings span 10 years—started in 2009 and revised in 2019. His paintings utilize the reoccurring motif of owls, rendered in different variations. Some paintings show the spray-paint line Ostrowski has become known for, which looks as if the spray-paint cap is partially clogged,

leaving a semi-solid line of colored spittle. Other paintings have been mostly slathered with a solid color, leaving the owls floating in partial obscurity. In *Radical Paintings (Hatte bereits 5 Beziehungen)*, 2009/19, a pair of owl eyes peek through what is a mostly stark white field. The owls return one's gaze, silently evoking an owl's call, "hoo." This reversal of scrutiny turns any question proposed about the validity of this work back onto its viewer: "who?" What to make of a painting that aggressively asks more questions than it answers?



Installation view of "Im Grunde ist es die Wahrheit / Essentially it's the truth" at Magenta Plains in New York, with works visible, by David Ostrowski (left), Gerda Scheepers (center, on back wall), Mark van Yetter (right).

Mark van Yetter's paintings are relatively small in comparison to the other works in the show, and figures typically appear in them alone. There is an almost voyeuristic quality to the paintings that heightens what intentionally little narrative quality they convey. All works are oil on paper and framed behind glass. In two works, both untitled from 2016, a grey-painted rectangle borders the image. This frame within a frame creates self-aware, structural paintings that direct one to the illusory space within. In one, a solemn, rainy looking man shields himself under an umbrella from a storm of pennies. A premeditated refusal of good fortune?

Through a loose narrative structure, von Hellermann succeeds at providing ample room for one to project their personal interpretation onto her paintings. In contrast to van Yetter's solo figure paintings, her works all show a collective of figures, some of them appearing to be a coterie of women. With airy, nonchalant brushstrokes on unprimed canvas, *What's Up Group* (2018) shows four figures, possibly in motion, with an iPhone share icon painted at their feet. Sharing within a group, communicating with your peers, asking questions with other people, this particular painting feels like a summation of the exhibition itself.

Whether through abstraction or representation, seeking truth within painting can be a fool's errand. And now with so much emphasis on, and instrumentalization of, truth, it may no longer be a tool for artists to use, nor it be a desirable endpoint for a work of art. This show finds a way to exhibit cohesively a varied group of paintings that traffic in speculative modes of production and presentation, utilizing multiple methods to eschew the pitfalls of truth—touching on it while not committing to it.