

MARTOS GALLERY

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Temple, Mary "Artists on Diaries: Day to-day," Smithsonian Archives of American Art Blog, April 6, 2015



Artists on Diaries: Day to-day



Oscar Bluemner painting diary, 1911
June 12 - 1912 Jan. 30. Oscar
Bluemner papers, Archives of
American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Oscar Bluemner's painting diary in the show, *A Day in the Life: Artists' Diaries* from the Archives of American Art, documents observations of walking tours of New Jersey and Pennsylvania and plans for future paintings. There are landscape and architecture sketches in pen and ink, some in crayon and color pencil as well as the color study above. Notes and admonishments are extensive, such as "do not put on color unless it is done with full feeling" (p. 37). Although there are artists working today who keep studio diaries for similar purposes, there are also many who have used the idea of diary as the subject of the work itself. Over the past several months I asked a number of contemporary artists to blog about how the idea of diary manifests in their work.

For this, the final contribution in the series, I interviewed curator Anne Couillaud who in 2010 organized an exhibition of 11 artists whose work shared the moniker "diaristic."

— Mary Temple, Artists on Diaries series curator

MARY: Anne, I was thinking back to the exhibition you organized in 2010 at Martos Gallery in Chelsea, NY. In the show, Day to-day, you assembled 11 artists (including me) whose work, utilized daily ritual. One of the things I liked about the show was that it seemed very different each time a person visited it. How important was that to your original concept of the show?



Mary Temple, *1.21.09*, detail from the series, *Currency*, archival ink on paper 15" x 19". Text reads "HILLARY CLINTON SWORN IN AS 67TH U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE". Image courtesy of the artist and Mixed Greens, NY, used with permission.

ANNE: Day to-day presented how artists connect in various ways, sometimes daily, sometimes less frequently to different types of time. By different types of time, I mean the time of nature, and the way each culture experiences time, as well as the individual's sense of temporality—the time of their life. Each artist's inner awareness is the starting point of all these

temporalities. This inner awareness inevitably gives a diaristic dimension to these works.

That said, it was important for me to anchor the exhibition in its present time by having some works changed or added daily. For instance, I was very glad that we could find a way to present the new drawing of your Currency project each day through the entire time of the exhibition.

MARY: Yes, but it can be a lot to ask of a gallery or institution. Every day the staff at Martos Gallery printed a digital file of the drawing I'd just made, rearranging the existing hanging so that the most recent drawing was the first in a row of the seven previous days.

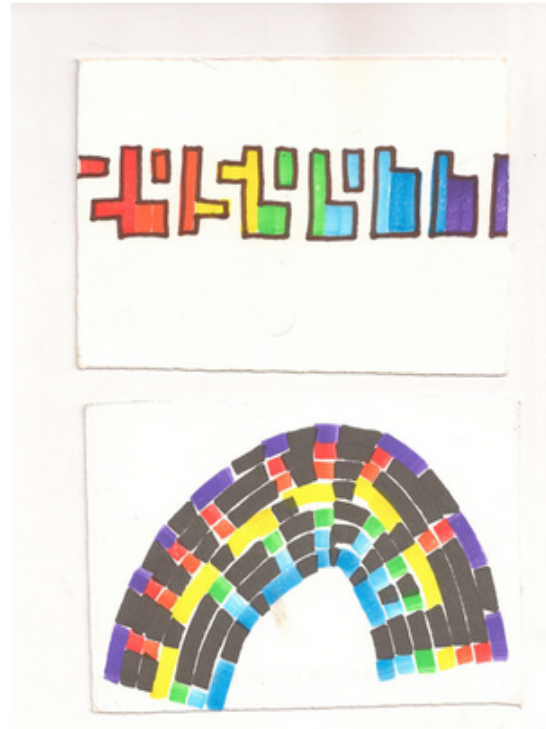
ANNE: Another project that altered both the gallery space and pace of the exhibition was a collaboration between Stephanie Diamond and Adia Millett, titled *You Are Here*. Every day the artists sent instructions to the gallery staff. The directions ranged from calling your mother to say, "I love you," to a yoga class, to a puzzle to be made. I liked very much these disruptions.

MARY: I remember the yoga class—it is something you don't often see in a Chelsea gallery! To me artist Stephanie Diamond's photography practice is essentially diaristic as well.

Having recently seen the On Kawara show at the Guggenheim, I was taken aback by how much he set himself to do each day. Not only did he execute a painting, but he also made a box for newspaper clippings from the day as well as notes about who he saw, what he read, etc. How wide was the spectrum of the daily activities of the artist in this show? Did most of the artists have other bodies of diaristic work beyond the work you were showing?



Guillaume Leingre, *La Grande Vague*, 2008, extract from a series of 216 postcards and 216 photos 13.25" x 10.5" each. Courtesy of the artist and Martos Gallery, used with permission.



Xylor Jane, *2 Postcards*, 2010, 4 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist and Martos Gallery, used with permission.

ANNE: The works presented in the exhibition mainly exposed practices that I like to call interstitial. An example might be an artwork made while the artist was traveling, for instance, *La grande Vague* by Guillaume Leingre (2008). Leingre sent 216 identical postcard reproductions of Katsushika Hokusai's wave to his home in Paris while on residency in Japan. Each day he mailed it from different Japanese mailbox, documenting the postal box and the card. Another example would be Nancy Brooks Brody's sungraphs series (2005) for which the artist set up precise visual parameters for documenting her experience of sunlight. Other practices are closer to an exercise, like Julien Gardair's series of stamps print (2009) or Masaya Chiba's *Every Monday night* series (2006–2010). It could also be the artist experiencing an extraordinary time in her life and finding a way to communicate something about it, as in Danica Phelps' *Pregnancy* (2008) video. There is also Xylor Jane's daily project, called the today show: with bright colored markers, she draws the 7 digit Julian Day number on the front of postcards. The information appearing on the back varies, but may be a

tally of days since something began—like the Iraq war, or her own birth, or Barack Obama’s birth (he is 869 days older than she).

These are works that are rarely shown because they embed moments and works that open and disrupt in a way the artist’s “sealed work in progress.”

The most iconic artist in the exhibition, Roman Opałka, spent more than half his life on a single work entitled *Opałka 1965/1–∞*. The self-portrait we presented was one of the many he took after each working day from 1968 until his death in 2011. Each photograph is very poignant as it retains the exhaustion of his workday.

MARY: Yes, his project might be considered one painting that was an attempt to count out the moments of his entire life on through his last breath. Were there artists you wished you could have included in the show, but were unable to because of the complications of borrowing, etc.?

ANNE: Besides paintings by Roman Opałka, I would say few paintings and postcards by On Kawara. Kawara’s paintings are quite fragile, making the loan of such works very difficult. As you said, they came in a custom box along with the press of the day from the country where the painting was made. I would have liked to include also a work by Hanne Darboven, especially *Sunrise / Sunset, New York, NYC, today (1984)*. Finally, several photographs from Nicholas Nixon’s *Brown Sisters* series would have been great too. These are the first examples that come to my mind. I hope that one day I will find a place where I can deepen this idea and make a larger version of this exhibition. A reason why it is still close to me is that it let us witness the existential dimension of each artist’s oeuvre.

MARY: I can’t wait to see the next show, Anne!