

MARTOS GALLERY

540 WEST 29TH STREET NEW YORK NEW YORK 10001

TEL 212.560.0670 FAX 212.560.0671 MARTOSGALLERY.COM



Poor Working Conditions

Rochelle Feinstein
Maren Hassinger
Asger Jorn
Kate Levant
William Pope.L
Zoe Sheehan Saldana
B. Wurtz

Curated by Claire Grube

February 20 - March 29, 2014

Opening Reception: February 20, 6-8 pm

Poor Working Conditions is an exhibition about an economy of means within an economy of excess. The artists whose works are gathered here have in common a politics of art production, a work ethics and a material means, which prove integral to their works' symbolic position within a neoliberal, patriarchal, racist society. The Artist today is not operating outside of an economy or even in its margins; on the contrary, he or she is fully immersed in it. And yet, the Artist inhabits a particular position in society's Imaginary—bohemian, creative, romantic, outcast, provocateur, dandy, rich-without-doing-much. Since the nineteenth century, at least, artistic identity has been a site of projection for others. His or her decisions are therefore of utmost importance to society at large.

Alongside a continuous and insistent engagement with the problems of painting, **Rochelle Feinstein** (b. 1947, New York City) has produced video as well as sculpture and installation. Her two works on view titled *Nude Model* and *!* are part of the *Estate of Rochelle F.*, a series of paintings and drawings for which Feinstein followed two rules: 1. to not spend additional money on the works and to instead use any supplies at hand as "assets," and 2. to use a maximum of material and a minimum of expressionistic gesture. In *Nude Model*, pieces of cardboard, styrofoam, white paint, and a printout of a Craigslist ad seeking a nude model to pose for an abstract painting make for—an abstract painting. In *!*, the "asset" is a crocheted cleaning cloth followed by a painted exclamation mark. As the person in my household who does most of the unremunerated Sisyphean reproductive labor, Feinstein utters a truth I can only agree with: how much more of our time are we going to spend on this type of work? Or should we just "outsource" the stuff in our lives that is boring, as *The New York Times Magazine* recently proposed. Wouldn't our lives be better if a poorer woman would do the stuff we don't like? Think again. Underlying both works is a simplicity of material means as well as an evocation of those kinds of labor that are typically executed by women: nude posing and cleaning. Feinstein received a BFA from Pratt Institute and an MFA from the University of Minnesota. She is currently Professor and Director of Graduate Studies of painting and printmaking at the Yale University/School of Art. Feinstein's work will be included in this year's Whitney Biennale; Kunsthalle Bern (Switzerland) is dedicating a solo exhibition to her in 2015.

Maren Hassinger (b. 1947, Los Angeles) has been working for over three decades in every conceivable medium. For *Pink Trash* (1982), a public sculpture commissioned by an organization called Art Across the Park, and executed in 3 NYC parks - Central, Van Cortlandt, and Prospect, Hassinger removed all the white trash and replaced it with her own plastic cups, cigarette butts and crumpled bits of paper, which she previously painted pink. Her column made of heavy-duty trash bags is formally reminiscent of Brancusi's oft-cited *Colonne sans fin* (1938). While Brancusi's column was a result of his search for universal truth expressed in sculptural form, Hassinger's material is universal in its unremarkable ubiquity. As container for the trash we discard, the stuff we don't want to see, waste bags are also

MARTOS GALLERY

540 WEST 29TH STREET NEW YORK NEW YORK 10001

TEL 212.560.0670 FAX 212.560.0671 MARTOSGALLERY.COM

associated with the kind of labor few of us envy: picking up the debris of others. Do not be fooled by Bloomberg's eco-capitalist campaign: Our daily production of trash is both omnipresent and infinite. Hassinger received a BA from Bennington College in Vermont in and a MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles. She is the Director of Graduate Sculpture at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). Her work was recently included in *Now Dig This!* (Hammer Museum, LA; MoMA PS1, New York; Williams College, Williamstown) and *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* (Contemporary Art Museum Houston; Studio Museum in Harlem; Grey Art Gallery, New York). Her solo presentation at Reginald Ingraham Gallery in LA is coming up in April; later this year, a retrospective of her work will be presented at Spelman College in Atlanta.

Danish artist **Asger Jorn** (1914-1973) was a polymath working in painting, sculpture, writing, book publishing, and anti-capitalist agitprop, among other things. He was a founding member of COBRA, the European avant-garde movement promoting spontaneous experimentation in art alongside a Marxist worldview. Jorn, alongside Guy Debord, helped found the Situationist International, a group of intellectuals, artists, students, and common thugs united around the critique of capitalism. In 1961 Jorn co-founded *The Scandinavian Institute of Comparative Vandalism*, whose main goal was the research of Scandinavian culture in the age of Viking migrations in the 8th and 9th century. For several years, Jorn and French photographer Gérard Franceschi traveled through Europe to photograph ancient figurative and decorative motifs on sacral and profane buildings. The book on view here, *Signés gravés sur les églises de L'Eure et du Calvados (Engraved Signs on the Churches in the Eure and Calvados)*, published in 1964, includes a chapter titled "Idiotic Vandalism: Graffitomania", an excerpt from art historian Louis Réau's *History of Vandalism* from 1959, in which he quotes journalist Andre Hallays: "There is a breed of vandals more hideous and stupid than the revolutionaries: they are the monomaniacs of graffiti." For Jorn, instead, graffiti was an example of one of the simplest, egalitarian and durable means of popular expression.

Kate Levant (b. 1983 in Chicago) employs poor and quotidian materials largely collected on the streets of her city of residence, Detroit. More than any other American city, Detroit has turned into the example and symbol of the abysmal consequences of the 2008 financial crisis. Levant once said that her specific use of material is partly an open question as to what life "surrounded by so much broken definition" does to a person's psychology. Made from tin, Levant's small sculpture evokes a building: maybe a prison, a factory, or an abandoned home? Her untitled piece from 2012, made in Amsterdam while part of a residency program at the city's Rijksakademie, is made from plastic-coated carton stock that workers in the Netherlands use to cover the floors while doing interior paint jobs or other work that could potentially soil the surrounding space. Both works relate to our built environment and the labor that went into it, while also conveying a sense of fragility and impermanence. Levant holds a BFA from The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and an MFA from Yale University School of Art in New Haven. Levant's work was included in the 2012 Whitney Biennial; in 2011, her work was included in a group exhibition at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare. A solo presentation of her work is currently on view at Zach Feuer Gallery.

Chicago-based **William Pope L.** (b. 1955, Newark, NJ) is without doubt one of the most radical and unmistakable voices today denouncing the relationships between race, gender, and class and challenging the ideological constructs of "whiteness" vs. "blackness." From the standpoint of a black man, one of the most socioeconomically precarious subject positions in a white status quo, Pope L. plays with and provokes the expectations and stereotypes accompanying his "role". *The Great White Way: 22 miles, 5 years, 1 street* (2002), part of his series of *Crawls*, took place over a period of nine years. Pope L., wearing a Superman outfit and a skateboard strapped to his back, crawled along the sidewalk, spanning 22 miles of Broadway. Each episode of the performance lasted as long as the artist could bear the pain of dragging his body forward on the concrete. Although originally conceived as group performances, the artist's *Crawls*, begun in the late 1970s, were mostly performed by himself: "Unfortunately for me, at that time, I was the only volunteer," the artist once explained in an interview. Like his work in general, *The Great White Way* too is characterized by an absurd and dark sense of humor, prodding at the dark absurdity of a city in which access to education and justice are still contingent on money and skin color. Pope L. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago. In 2013, Pope L.'s exhibition *Forlesen* was presented at Chicago's Renaissance Society; his work was also included in *Radical Presence: Black Performance in*

MARTOS GALLERY

540 WEST 29TH STREET NEW YORK NEW YORK 10001

TEL 212.560.0670 FAX 212.560.0671 MARTOSGALLERY.COM

Contemporary Art (Contemporary Art Museum Houston; Studio Museum in Harlem; Grey Art Gallery, New York).

Zoë Sheehan Saldaña (b. 1970, Massachusetts) is interested in how things are made and what their making entails, both on the micro-level of technique and on the larger geopolitical level of production in late capitalism, in which the outsourcing of labor to poorer countries is common fare. *No Boundaries Cotton Bikinis* (2004) and *4LB. Paper Bag Trade* (2005) are part of her *Shopdropping* series, which addresses the machinations of global and large-scale commodity production. For *No Boundaries Cotton Bikinis*, Sheehan Saldaña handcrafted exact replicas of children's underpants sold at Walmart before inserting her replicas onto Walmart's racks, where they sold for \$1.50 each. The artist's gesture is not an exaggeration of the functioning of outsourced production of low-price commodities, but rather its imitation and contemporaneous displacement. The absurdity one might locate in the work stems from the fact that no one in a rich Western country thinks that a comparable amount of time and labor should be spent for such miniscule remuneration, but somehow, it is acceptable that a seamstress in Bangladesh should do it for less than even \$1.50 per piece. Sheehan Saldaña received a BA from Oberlin College in Ohio and a MFA from the Rochester Institute of Technology. She had a solo exhibition titled *TBD* at Tahoe Gallery at Sierra Nevada College; the following year her work was included in group exhibitions at Planthouse, New York and Light Work, Syracuse and New York. She is an Associate Professor, Art, CUNY/Baruch College.

The *Three Important Things* that **B. Wurtz's** text drawing of the same title (1973) refers to are "sleeping, eating, keeping warm"—basic human needs and parameters guiding the artist's choice of material over the past forty years. Wurtz uses plastic bags, food containers, socks, shoe laces, buttons, and other readily available objects and combines them into carefully balanced compositions. It is the correspondence between the familiarity of these materials and Wurtz's delicate, elegant formal language that infuses stuff of the everyday with a sense of beauty and dignity that we ordinarily would not perceive. B. Wurtz (b. 1948, Pasadena, CA) moved to New York in the mid-1980s after studying at the California Institute of Arts and UC Berkeley. In 2013, his work was included in a group exhibition at MoBY - Museum of Bat Yam in Israel; a solo presentation of Wurtz's work is currently on view at Richard Telles Fine Art in Los Angeles.

Claire Grube is a curator and writer. She is a citizen of the world, who punishes evil with a fearsome vengeance.

For additional information please visit www.martosgallery.com or contact the gallery at 212.560.0670 or info@martosgallery.com.