

Carol Szymanski

Selected Press

signs and symbols

New York, New York | www.signsandsymbols.art

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Art World

Editors' Picks: 13 Events for Your Art Calendar This Week, From an Erotic Art Show to a Creative Match-Making Project

Plus, virtual events from the Getty in Los Angeles and the Blanton in Austin.

Artnet News (<https://news.artnet.com/about/artnet-news-39>), February 15, 2022

Each week, we search for the most exciting and thought-provoking shows, screenings, and events, both digitally and in-person in the New York area. See our picks from around the world below. (Times are all E.S.T. unless otherwise noted.)



Carol Szymanski, *Orb Innings* (2021). Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols.

5. “Carol Szymanski: You Pair How” opening at Signs and Symbols, New York

Carol Szymanski’s recent match-making performance *The Go-Between* is at the center of the artist’s latest show at Signs and Symbols gallery. After pairing her participants off for dates (based on their responses to an absurd questionnaire adapted from *Harold and Maude*), Szymanski video-recorded the encounters and isolated particular phrases, hand movements, and other gestures. She then translated them into a series of Polaroid photos, sound works, and a wall painting with neon, all of which will be on view in the show. And there’s still time to participate—just email thego-between@emergencyewash.org.

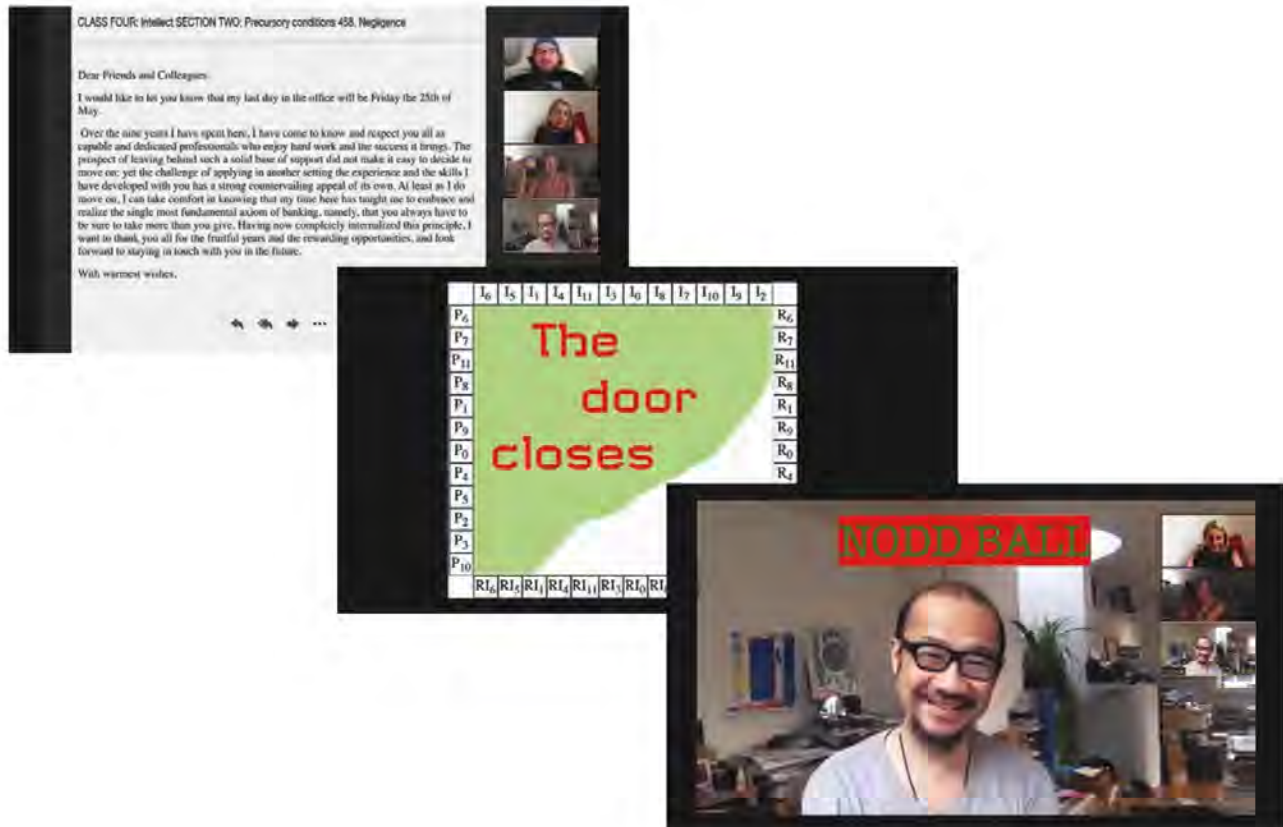
Price: Free

Time: 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

—Rachel Corbett

On Site

Exhibitions, installations, etc



Carol Szymanski, *Lost Contact With 12 Sentiments: A Nod To Resignation* (2020)

Carol Szymanski
Lost Contact With 12 Sentiments:
A Nod To Resignation, Installments 1
And 2

Online/Signs and symbols, New York, US

If the world of office work wasn't already alienating enough, the requirement for many of us to now do it through the glitchy, compression-misted impersonality of conferencing apps like Zoom during the pandemic has generously increased this alienation, and often to the point of absurdity. Our bookshelves, potted plants and errant pets are now available to be scrutinised by co-workers. If we opt to obscure the background, why? What is there to hide? Or perhaps you've experienced the peculiar qualities of the 'Zoom Drinks', as a dozen people pause agonisingly, awaiting the next installment of a single lowest common denominator conversation.

On these apps, the abstractions of institutional structure are made to clash even more vividly than normal with the interactive human immediacy of bodies,

appearances, gestures and living spaces. Nothing represents this tragedy more succinctly than the observation made at least once in virtually every Zoom call: "You're breaking up."

Sudden disconnection is what opens this series of videos that multimedia artist Carol Szymanski is producing for the signs and symbols gallery as part of her residency there. The director of a bank flatly reads out her resignation email, thanking the "dedicated and capable professionals" she has worked with, and adding with ambiguous irony that "my time here has taught me to embrace and realise the single most fundamental axiom of banking, namely, that you always have to be sure to take more than you give".

Szymanski has incorporated her experience of working in a bank for many years into her artistic output, resulting in the text and image pieces of *Cockshut Dummy*, which serves as the basis for the texts read out on webcam here. The director's parting shot casts the formal play of *Lost Contact* in a diffuse satirical

light, as connections between people, symbols and ambitions are lost somewhere in the sequence of jpegs, clips and statements awkwardly externalised by bodies still somewhat human.

Szymanski uses serialism to divide up and organise her materials evenly yet apparently randomly, much as the technique's inventor Arnold Schoenberg did in the 1920s with the 12 pitches of the Western tonal system. Accordingly, there are 12 videos, each a "breakout session" featuring the opinions of one eccentrically named co-worker (played by Szymanski's friends and family) sharing their thoughts on the departure of the director.

The serialist technique redistributes the last vestiges of meaning, grammar and syntax towards greater meaninglessness still, exploding it perfectly into the 12 corners of the executive board: a democracy with all the ennoblement of an email cc. What's more, the formal process intermittently appears onscreen as a grid of 12 by 12, as if in a legalistic yet impenetrable show of transparency.

Yet other signs of the working process secretly hint at the survival of the humanity eradicated by the bank: a clip of the group counting down to action as the share screen function generates a mise en abyme, the painter Sherman Sam smiling as he entertains the meeting by turning his camera upside down. Whether or not he does this in his workplace role as Nodd Ball, or as himself, remains aptly unclear.

The alienation so multifariously on display in *Lost Contact With 12 Sentiments* is disalienating, the relief of the work is not one of escapism but one of recognition. With so many attempts to promise audiences they can survive the pandemic through a screen-based transcendence that can replace the rich physical circulation we once enjoyed – #TogetherAtHome, as the pop megastars put it – the confusion, scattering and passive aggression woven so systematically through *Lost Contact* feels honest, at least.

Adam Harper

Courtesy Carol Szymanski/signs and symbols

Events and Parties

Editors' Picks: 18 Things Not to Miss in New York's Art World This Week

Here's what's on our agenda.

artnet News, November 4, 2019

SHARE



Each week, we search New York City for the most exciting, and thought-provoking, shows, screenings, and events. See them below.

Friday, November 8 and Sunday, November 10



Carol Szymanski, *He Said I Thought* (2019), still. Photo courtesy of Signs and Symbols.

12. Carol Szymanski's *He Said I Thought* at signs and symbols

As part of Carol Szymanski's exhibition at the Lower East Side gallery (on view through November 17), the artist is staging a series of performances inspired largely by the designer suits she wore while working a corporate job in the late 1990s to early 2000s. The hour-long performance reflects on the role of acquiescence in gender relations, as told through a series of abstracted memories that harken back to a distinctly pre-#MeToo era. The gallery is small, so RSVP is required for a seat at one of the final two performances, on November 8 and November 10.

Location: signs and symbols, 102 Forsyth Street

Price: Free, with RSVP

Time: 7 p.m.

—Rachel Corbett

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the online magazine of art and ideas

THE LIST

CRITICISM

FEATURES

ART WORLD

DEPARTMENTS

THE REVIEW PANEL

FEATURES ► A FEATURED ITEM FROM THE LIST

Wednesday, October 30th, 2019



Featured from THE LIST: Carol Szymanski at Signs and Symbols

by David Cohen

In the years that multi-disciplinary conceptual artist Carol Szymanski supported her family with a day job as a corporate banker she was (a) obliged to maintain a wardrobe of designer suits by the likes of Valentino, Jill Sander and Alexander McQueen and (b) able to keep a portion of her mind focused on artistic creativity by means of a daily email practice that generated crowd sourced poetic synonyms arranged according to the categories of Roget's Thesaurus—her “Cockshut Dummy” series. “He Said I Thought” is a dense, intertwined installation at Lower East Side gallery Signs and Symbols consisting of text pieces, 8-channel video, textual wallpaper, sculpture (mesh reworkings of those suits) and live performance of a full-blown dramatic work that shares the exhibition title. The latter folds her suits and found poetry into a set of narratives of a distinctly #MeToo variety, each delivered by a different “suit” with sardonic commentary interjected by a misogynistic boss, a disembodied Wizard of Oz voice from the gallery office, performed, in his NYC acting debut, by yours truly. The cast and crew almost numerically match the cheek by jowl-seated audience in this shoebox venue, echoing perhaps the tense and unsolicited intimacies described in the drama itself. But that is speculation on my part, as behind my wall I can't see a thing.

BROOKLYN RAIL

Art | In Conversation

CAROL SZYMANSKI with David Carrier

“I can use my life as material to make art and also have this job, I could create a structure around my life and call it art.”



Portrait of Carol Szymanski, pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

I first met Carol Szymanski and reviewed one of her shows in 1992. At the time she was constructing musical instruments that were a cross between sculpture and readymades. When then I reviewed her exhibitions in 2002 and, again, in 2012, her art had gone through some dramatic changes. Her day in banking had become more demanding; now based in London, she used that situation to create a fascinating, almost daily bulletin, she calls the cockshut dummy. I fondly remember frequently puzzling with pleasure over these works, which combine words and images in a synthesis that usually was not easy to fully understand. The title of her work, *cockshut dummy* comes from British newspaper *Evening Standard* dialect: In Roget's Thesaurus the word “evening” is also “cockshut” and the word “standard” is “dummy” “the close of the day; evening; twilight.”

Now (as she explains in our interview conducted in late September 2019), with that series completed, she has left the banking world to again become a full time artist. Conceptual artist-banker-conceptual and performance artist: What an extraordinary life story!

NEW YORK
signs and symbols
October 17 – November 17,
2019

Within the art world, there has for several decades been great interest in politically critical work. It's good to be self-critical, but I've often wondered if artists are in a good position to understand the economic system in which, after all, they play such an odd, and surely marginal role. But since Szymanski had a significant position within a key financial institution, she was in a position to have a real practical sense of economic issues. Still as she explains, the record of real financial life within her art is marginal. This, I suppose, is only to be expected. I anticipated doing this interview for a long time. When it was complete, I was most satisfied, for I gained a much fuller understanding of the work of an artist I have long admired. I thank my wife Marianne Novy for raising questions and contributing to the discussion.

David Carrier (Rail): I thought we would start by briefly laying out the whole story of your career. How many years now?

Carol Szymanski: About 30 years.

Rail: I recall you, not quite at the beginning, doing the musical instruments.

Szymanski: The horns are all derived from an alphabet font that I designed. I thought of language as a shaped breath and I was very influenced early on in the late '80s reading a lot of linguistics and semiotics, seeing myself as a translator who translated or "transmuted" from one medium into another. So I had these letter shapes that I had designed of the phonetic alphabet. I was mainly interested in sound, and the way words sounded, more than how they looked. But I was also very involved in the shapes of letters and working with language, taking it into a visual realm. At first I combined the letter's shapes (which originally spelled words) and made abstract sculpture with them. But then realizing that the horn is the most basic, the instrument that's closest to the breath, and closest to the way we speak, so I chose that medium as my preferred vehicle.

Rail: Were those horns playable?

Szymanski: Yes. I was not looking for a particular sound, so my process turned the horn on its head. Instruments play specific notes. I wasn't doing that, I was creating the shape of the letter and I wanted the shape of the letter to determine what the notes and the timbre would be. The mouthpiece and the bell were readymades, which I didn't have anything to do with, but in between, the shape was a shape of a letter symbol. I enjoyed the performative element which is why I wanted them to play and be "real" instruments. So there were a few rules in the making of the horns I had to follow so they would be taken seriously. For instance, the tubing from the mouthpiece to the bell had to go continuously from narrow to wide, never the other way around.



Carol Szymanski, *Phonemophone K*, 2011. Brass. Courtesy the artist.

Early on I combined the letters and they came from drawings that I made. I would start first with the drawings and then I would take these drawings to the horn fabricator, Chuck McAlexander from the Brass Lab, an incredible artisan, and he would build the parts. He repaired all the greatest trumpet players' instruments over the years. He made these in the exact shape as my drawings. Initially, I was creating words with the horns and it was transmuting the meaning of the word into a musical sound from language. This was an important concept for me albeit nonsensical. But that was part of the play!

Rail: The word has a sound, you can hear it.

Szymanski: It was a way of working with language to make something else into a musical sound. The last body of work I completed before the second phase that we're going to talk about, was an alphabet horn band called The Phonemophonic Alphabet Brass Band. I made single letter horns. I have 26 horns in the shape of the letters of the alphabet all following the font I designed. Each one has a unique sound or as some say "sweet spot".

Rail: You can play a word?

Szymanski: Exactly. The final body of work I completed with the horns before going to London was The Phonemophonic Alphabet Brass Band singular horns with the 26 letters. I'd be able to translate any text through these horns, or transmute as I said, into another medium. That was my plan.

Rail: You have the whole alphabet.

Szymanski: That's correct. I worked with Wadada Leo Smith, who is an amazing composer and trumpet player; with Dewey Redman early on at Pat Hearn Gallery, he did a performance on the first horn I made; and then worked with Ben Neill most recently; we did a performance at the Winter Garden as part of a curated program by John Schaefer WNYC New Sounds Series. At the Armory in April 2020 I am working with an amazing composer and trumpet player named Jaimie Branch, who will play the alphabet horn band. This is part of a Jason Moran-curated program at the Armory-Veterans Hall. So even though I completed my alphabet and stopped making these horns, this project goes on.

Rail: When did you move to London?

Szymanski: Right before 9/11.

Rail: The move then generates a different sort of art.

Szymanski: We always wanted to live in Europe at some point in our lives. And my husband and I, Barry—my husband is Barry Schwabsky—we have two daughters. So I needed to make money to support them and I was



Carol Szymanski, *Phonemophone Z*, 2011. Brass. Courtesy the artist.

showing regularly but I wasn't making enough sales to support a family. Before I had got my MFA and went through the Whitney Independent Study program, I had worked as an investment banker. When it was time for me to say "Okay I'm not making enough money on my art, I've gotta go back and get a job," that was actually the only thing that I knew how to do [*Laughter*].

I worked at some very prominent investment banks early in my career. And that's what allowed me to pick it back up some 10 years later. I'd worked about five years in banking, was really well trained, but then I stopped. Having studied and been passionate about Marxist Economics and Socialist Feminism in college I guess I experienced what Sartre called "Bad Faith" in *Being and Nothingness*. I touch on this in my upcoming exhibition at signs and symbols. I left the bank and got an MFA in video/ performance art at the Art Institute in San Francisco. There was a period of probably eight years when I was out of the banking world and was solely making art and then in my mid 30s, after having Davida, our first child, I needed to go back and make money. Eventually the bank asked me to run a group in London.

Rail: I remember vividly these works would come through. How many days would they come? Five?

Szymanski: That was the plan, although it didn't always work out that way. At the end of the work day, which was usually anywhere from eight to eight up to like 10 o'clock at night.

Rail: On a busy day I thought "too bad, I'm missing today but there's gonna be one tomorrow." But on the other days when I was sitting in my office, I'd get a text and an image. People in art history believe an image and associated text have to somehow be connected. But with yours the connection was always elliptical, incomplete, and somewhat indeterminate. How long was the series?

Szymanski: All in all 10 years. I finished the bank, in the seventh year, and I actually cheated a little bit because the structure of the *cockshut dummy* was based on my working at the bank and using the tools, at that time, the Blackberry and the computer. Soon the cell phone took over from the Blackberry. I could take a picture, an image with the Blackberry and I would write with my computer. I always wrote the text first. And the image came after in an improvisational way. And the text, each entry everyday was one category of the Roget's Thesaurus so the whole project, the framework of it, or the foremost structure, or the framing of it is the thesaurus. There are 990 entries.

It becomes very much a historical document. For instance, you see 2008, when the market crashed. You see all the things that are going on in the economic history but also just what's going on politically mostly in Europe and the Middle East. You see the Arab Storm.

In the very first 200 entries I'm appropriating phrases and writing little poetic, short phrases of my own but they eventually evolved into very long passages where I would write stories of my life during the time I was in London. I never considered myself a writer but that was a process of learning how to write and eventually it grew into something that I very much enjoyed and became part of my practice.

Marianne Novy: You have these thesaurus entries and along with each of those entries was your own work?

Szymanski: That's right.

Novy: Would it be skewed by something that happened in the world?

Szymanski: Yes. I'll give an example of something I'm using for my new show, entry number 745. I just printed this out from the *cockshut dummy* emails the other day. The classification was CLASS FIVE: Volition (div. 2), SECTION ONE: General social volition. And it was category 745, Subjection. So what I would do is think about the idea of subjection, that was my topic for that day. On that day, during that week by chance, I was reading Thomas Bernhard's *The Loser* [1983]. And there was this passage I read that day that had to do with subjection. So I juxtaposed my own words with this appropriated text. It was quite remarkable how often these coincidental occurrences would happen in preparing the entry. I viewed them as gifts—chance operations.

Rail: It wasn't as if there was a narrative, an ongoing narrative, but the themes went backwards and forwards. So you needed to look maybe this Monday and Wednesday after, you found, the themes emerge slowly out of the narrative but it wasn't a story being told.

Szymanski: No, but if you knew what was going on around me, you would be able to say, "oh that's what was happening to her at that time." I also traveled to Asia, and Japan, China, all over Europe. So the images, the pictures that I took with my phone are very much tied to where I was because I would use the image that I took from my phone from that day. I might've taken 15 images and then I would have a choice. And often they were just reflections about things of that day and other times they were commentary about the bank or about the world or what I was thinking about.



Carol Szymanski, *Announcement for start of the cockshut dummy*. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: This is all to be published next year?

Szymanski: By Space Sisters Press. It was like mail art, but for a different era, with email.

Rail: This project is very much tied to the time. People don't have Blackberries anymore.

Szymanski: You see all the different versions of the image, the quality changed as I upgraded my phone and as I went from the Blackberry to iPhone. And that happened over the 10 year period as well. I've always been interested in electronic media, which came from studying video art. And now we have Instagram and all these different social media outlets, where people reflect their lives. That didn't exist when I started this.

Rail: If I had to interpret this whole project I would say in a way it's a sort of structural interpretation of the very banking system itself. There's a lot of chaos day by day and a lot of noise in the system. Why this photo? Why this text? We don't know. Why Bernhard Tuesday and not the next day? On the other hand, if you look at the larger structure, you say the larger structure looks like it's very involved in the technology of the day and it has an ordering principle, it's not going to go on forever.

Szymanski: Occasionally I would skip a photo. Barry helped me immensely because I would write the thing when I was pretty exhausted at the end of the day, although when I wrote it and created and picked the image I'd feel really like a load had gone off.

It gave me a great sense of satisfaction and relief from the day of work. Then I would send it to him and he sent it out for me. And I always said if there's something that's terrible just say don't send this one out. But the fact that I had someone to physically send it out, there a big relief there. He only said "don't send that" maybe not more than five or six times out of all the entries.

Rail:In the art world there are endless discussions of the politics of the gallery, the commodification of the artwork, mostly leftwing views. But we the people doing this had as little knowledge of that system as you could possibly have. You were immersed in that system and yet the kind of record that you provide of it is elliptical, distanced, somewhat indeterminate.

Szymanski: It's an indeterminate system and there's quite a bit of what I'd call nonsense out there. And nonsense in the sense that people say things in the banking world and they don't really mean what they say but they're saying it just to achieve something for some other goal and they're not transparent about what's really going on. And so that's the underlying thread of where the nonsense comes from. In fact, a lot of it is a reflection of the culture of the banking environment, the way people behave in that kind of environment. And given what you said in terms of the art world I think we all know that there's been a degree of corporate-professionalism in the art world and the art market and the gallery system and so, yes, I think it's probably beginning to mimic more of that corporate behavior because it's really corporate behavior, it's not just banking. When I first started out as an artist, I'd left banking and I thought that art was going to be the ultimate way of rejection of the system and that it allowed complete freedom, there was no structure. Now I think more and more artists think they have to put out a certain amount of product, they've taken on a business mentality they didn't have thirty years ago.

Rail: I think of you as a woman with a system.

Szymanski: I studied philosophy and economics as an undergraduate. As you know very well, in philosophy you create a logical framework for something. I always felt my work is conceptual in a sense because I'm not an artist that has a particular medium that defines me. I always work with language, my work is always based on language and that's what I'm concerned with. And alongside the language, I've always had this fascination with categorization, which is why I chose the thesaurus. I used to read the thesaurus on the beach. That's how wrapped up I was with it. Ideally I would like to make up my own thesaurus, my own categories for how to structure the world. I guess the *cockshut dummy* is the second best option to this.

I always felt that what was great, what allowed me to do the *cockshut dummy*, was that I can use my life as material to make art and also have this job, I could create a structure around my life and call it art. And that's what I did by using the thesaurus as the structure and it allowed me to move in and out of the job with the art and back and forth and allowed me to continue my practice while I was working.

Rail: A kind of secret practice. But it's not as if you were writing symbolist poetry on a pad and hiding it or painting landscapes. You were doing something that was using the same technology that you were using in the work.

Szymanski: Right.

Rail: We should talk about what comes after that. Can you tell us a little more about the show at signs and symbols?

Szymanski: In the course of making the *cockshut dummy*, I saw it also had raw material for future work. And so, during the time that I was in London, I created a secondary or adjacent body of work called cockshut offshoots. I reconfigured the texts and had four of them I made with Book Works in London, I just finished the fourth one because it takes a very long time to make a book even though I completed them many years ago. So this new work that I'm showing at signs and symbols, is one of the four books, *Acquiescence* (2013). It's taking everything that I had prepared in the cockshut dummy that had any connection to the term acquiescence or the meaning of/behind acquiescence.



Carol Szymanski, *Open Case*. © Carol Szymanski. Courtesy the artist and signs and symbols, New York. Photo: Stan Narten.

That was a work that was very close to me because as a woman I feel frankly that I've been acquiescing for many, many, many years in my life. And it was always something that has bothered me a lot and I was trying to get to understand why it was the case. The phrases and feelings and notions around acquiescence have a lot to do with hidden secrets and having fear and feeling bad for somebody or being trapped in a situation and acquiescing would allow me to not have that feeling. And so when I wrote this—as I said, I didn't finish the *cockshut dummy* until 2015 so there were five more years of writing after I prepared this book—so what I did in the 9 months, I went back through the whole of the *cockshut dummy* and pulled out seven monologues, seven stories around the idea of acquiescence.

There'll be a performance alongside the exhibition called "He Said I Thought" with 10 performers who will be performing the script that I've prepared that's all from the cockshut dummy. There is an eight-channel video work that is a reflection on Jean-Paul Sartre's very famous example of "bad faith." That's an example that's perfectly tied to what acquiescence is all about, and it has to do with a man who is attracted to this woman and he takes her hand. She has three choices: to move your hand away, that is, to refuse; to reciprocate with her hand when the man takes it; or just hold it still and do nothing neither refusing nor accepting. Her hand becomes like an inanimate object. So the videos show seven women wearing seven of my business suits from my actual time at the bank as a man takes their hands, where they (as I instructed) hold their hands very still, not move them. There is a rolling text which is the voice of the man speaking. There are also sculptures I made from the patterns of the suits in a printed text fabric, a text also from *cockshut dummy*, so also another form of cockshut offshoot.

There'll be a sound installation (incorporating the script) and wall paper with the index of the cockshut dummy and then over it are these suits that I wore to work, which were by famous designers—Valentino, Galliano, McQueen, Marni, and so on. I had a tailor, and I made patterns from these suits but child size—about three-quarters size of a young teenager. And I had texts from the cockshut dummy printed on the fabric.

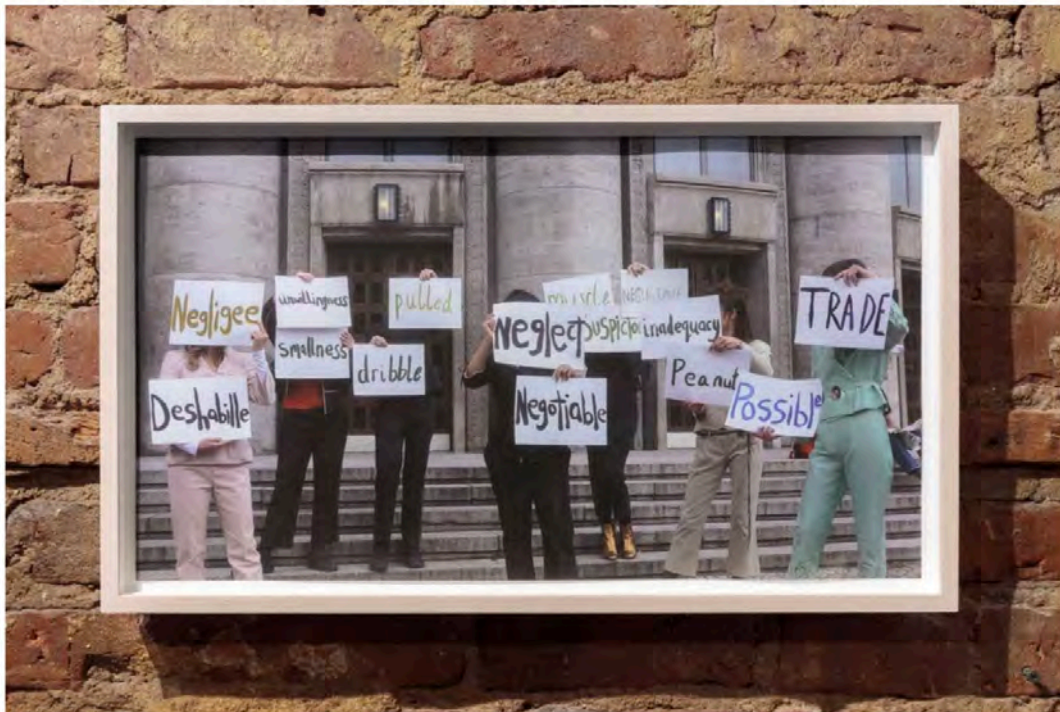
Novy: Those lists of the index, those designs are on the suit?

Szymanski: No. The text on the suits are taken from the cockshut dummy that dealt with the lack of transparency in the corporate banking environment. There are two different transparent fabrics with the words, and there's transparent silk and transparent cotton, and it's really a reflection on the idea that there really is no transparency. I guess it gets back to there's a structure, and things are constantly going outside the structure. And that reality in truth is really floating around or very hard to pin down. Because it moves in and out of the structure. There'll be seven women wearing my suits—wearing the actual suits in the performance. And standing on a speaker's stand that I had made, like Hyde Park Corner. They'll be speaking, and then there'll be a boss speaking in the background, disembodied—he'll be there but you won't see who he is, you'll just hear his voice.

This exhibition is a specific body of work that focuses on a particular subject matter pertinent today, that is, ambivalence in gender relations after post-feminism and before #MeToo that happens to be quite different from my practice since my return from London.

When I came back from London, having left the bank, I wanted to go back to the alphabet shapes, to the font that I had created initially, not to make horns but to work with it in other ways. I wanted to work with words and their meaning visually and knew I had to keep the language simple. So I said, “okay, I’m only going to start with two letter words,” it was a structure I wanted to put around myself which doesn’t get much simpler then that. So I just Googled two letter words. And the do-re-mi, the musical notes, the solfège, the solfeggio came up, it was the first thing that came up. And I said “wow, two letter words that connects to music, musical notations!” And so I decided to go back to the way I used to draw with my letters. I drew do, di, re, mi, fa, well all the 12 notes using my alphabet and I made inflatable balloon sculptures out of these, to reverse the original idea behind the horns and their connection to shaped breath. I mean instead of the air blowing through the horn as in our vocal canal, the shape was containing the air. The shape of the letters were containing the air. Ultimately this all resulted in my creating a system of transmutation called “12 tone interjection series.” I was returning to the notion of transmutation and I discovered that the solfège had already been transmuted by many historical figures in many different ways. I found that John Curwen created a hand gesture system for the solfège and that’s when people read music with their hands, so there was a hand structure already given and he gave meaning to the hands but only for the major scale.

Novy: Who is John Curwen?



Carol Szymanski, *The People's Stage*. © Carol Szymanski. Courtesy the artist and signs and symbols, New York. Photo: Stan Narten.

Szymanski: He was a minister in London in the nineteenth century who wanted to be able to teach congregations to sing. And then there were other strange connections: Isaac Newton in 1704 identified the colors with the solfège so I appropriated Newton's colors, so that's why you get these 12 colors here in this chart. Then Arnold Schönberg used numbers to associate with the solfège, and so then after processing all this I said "okay well that's great but I'm just appropriating everyone else's structure so I'm going to make up my own notational system for the solfège." I chose to assign 12 interjections with the musical notes. For Do I assigned "Aye", Re "yeah", Me, "AAh" and so on. And I also took a poem from the *cockshut dummy*, it was one of my appropriated texts, a poem from Pierre Reverdy called "Coin Obscura," I broke the poem down into 12 parts and each section of the poem associates with one note in the solfège. There are other notational assignments I made around the notes that became abstract photography. And now I have an Instagram project a series of minute-long videos which also stems out of this interjection series. But basically I always come back around to creating new systems of associations to apply to language in order to change the way we see language.

Rail: There's an order to it. There's an order in what looks like chaos but it's not an overwhelming order of the whole, it's an order of element by element.

Szymanski: The world is really quite structured and ordered; the banking world, the corporate world has structures and yet within it is all this stuff that doesn't make any sense and that is nonsense. It also has to do with language and association like what makes this sound "do" the first musical note, why associate with d-o to that musical note? Why did Isaac Newton associate red to that note? Just like Newton's associations of color to notes, my associations of interjections and so on might seem arbitrary, but subjectively, they seemed to fit. So it's systematic but also nonsensical.

Rail: There's a kind of ultimate order to the world, but order isn't exactly what you would see, what you would recognize, it's an order that's — it's not hidden exactly, it's all on the surface, it's the order of a musical piece.

Szymanski: It'll be a musical piece, but instead of the music, it will be visual.

Rail: Visual, and there is the synesthesia. [*Laughter*] That's a lot to absorb. Now I do see the unity of it much more clearly. It's a body of work.

Szymanski: There's definitely a definite thread and it really stems from language, transmutation, the alphabet, the musical instruments, my interest in music and language, and then the writing of the *cockshut dummy*, and connecting all those things together. The *Alphabet* and the *cockshut dummy* are two big bodies of work that connect the thread.

Rail: It's a unity that is not easy to perceive . The unity of your body of work is conceptual—it evolves from these concepts that are playing through the whole. You can't make sense of what's going on, what's going to go on in the show next month, without going all the way back to the musical instruments and the *Alphabet* and the thinking about the sounds and all of that. In that sense, it's this total system that's a kind of structure.

Novy: But it all has to do with language and it all has to do with your experience in the banking world.

Szymanski: Right, but initially, the *Alphabet* had nothing to do with that. I was trained in art school in performance art, and how performance art involves making my life a performance. I was going back to those origins with the *cockshut dummy* using those tools, from the bank, and using the bank, I felt myself as a performer and it was a performative—even though it wasn't a performance art event, it's using something that was live, that was part of the real world, it was not a fiction.

Novy: Would it be accurate to say that you were parodying what you did at the bank?



Installation view: Carol Szymanski: *He Said I Though, signs and symbols*, New York, 2019. © Carol Szymanski. Courtesy the artist and signs and symbols, New York. Photo: Stan Narten.

Szymanski: Yes. In a poetic way, revealing something by making—in kind of a mysterious fashion. You know that wasn't overt, but covert. I used the structure of the working day—Monday through Friday, nine to five or usually longer. But then you have to think of the Thesaurus as one big, important structure. What's puzzling to me is how did Roget create the categories that he used, how did he choose what goes with what, and what were the key ones. For instance, "religion and morality" is the last class, but why is that the last and not the first? The structure by which he related all these concepts could really be as subjective as saying a certain note goes with the color red. And yet the structure of the thesaurus has really never been questioned.

Rail: You're the Claude Lévi-Strauss of banking. [*Laughs*]

Szymanski: I want to be more reflective about what that was and now enough time has gone by that I can be reflective. You know, it's also—there's also something that allows for an improvisational base level to it.

Rail: Schönberg didn't claim that his structure determined the whole piece, but it just determined, whatever piece you wrote, what structure it would have. And that's the principle here.

Szymanski: Many composers after Schönberg, they used his structure, but then they went outside of it. We are taught to think the way we think, and the way our minds are constructed, through language, really, and through accepted categories, and that's how we understand what we're looking at. And what I'm trying to get at with the nonsense is that we're taught things, and we accept them, we acquiesce, even though we know that, in fact, things could be seen another way, so that there's this dialectic, maybe, between structure and nonsense, going back and forth all the time.

Rail: If you wanted to look at very different parallels, there are some visual artists whose work looks very different, like Jasper Johns, who was very involved in structures.

Szymanski: I build off of a structure and add on to it, that leads to the next exhibition. And many times they're experiments, because I wasn't completely satisfied with what I did before, or I felt it could be clarified more or elaborated more—"Let me show this now same thing in a quite different way, in a completely different medium, in a completely different construct rather than working very slowly with one subject matter." The show at signs and symbols is really around the certain subject matter, it's really the first exhibition I've ever done that's been so clearly about a subject, and after this I will go back to my more theoretical examination.

Contributor

David Carrier

David Carrier is writing a book about the historic center of Naples.

ARTE FUSE

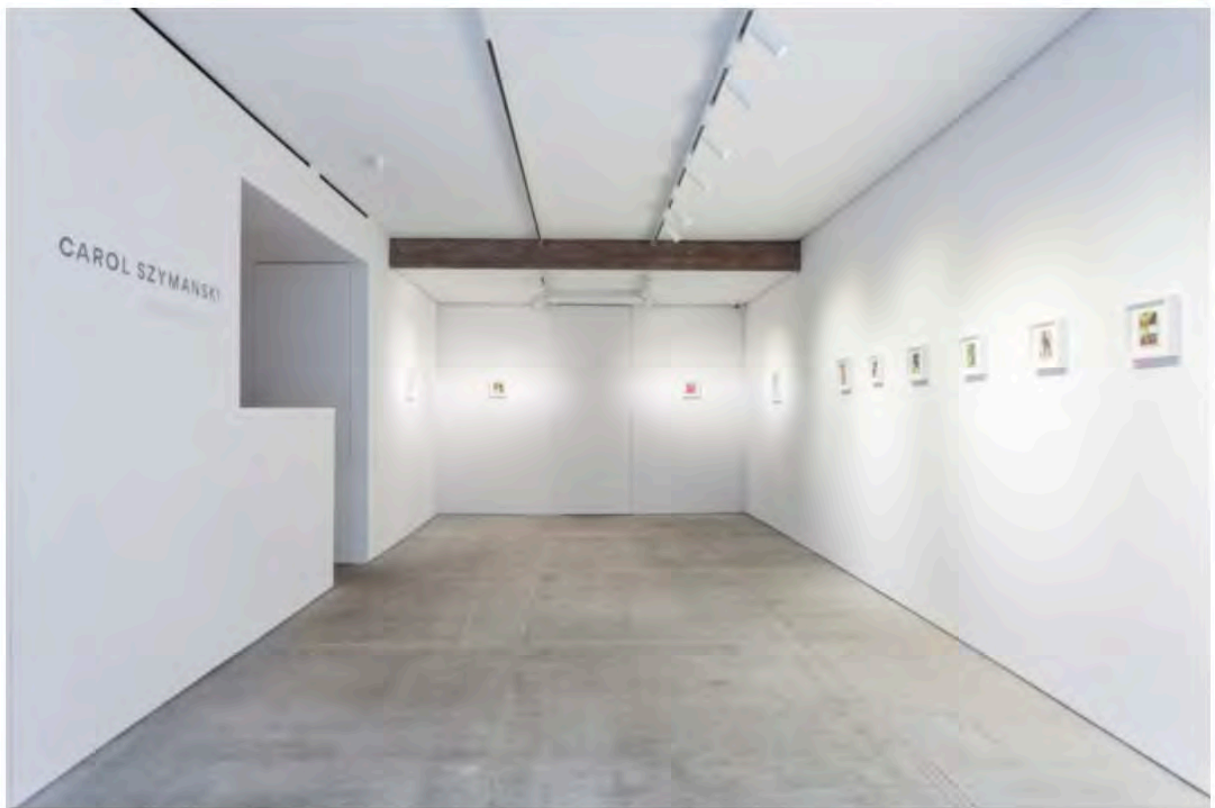
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The Art and Language of Transition at Totah Gallery



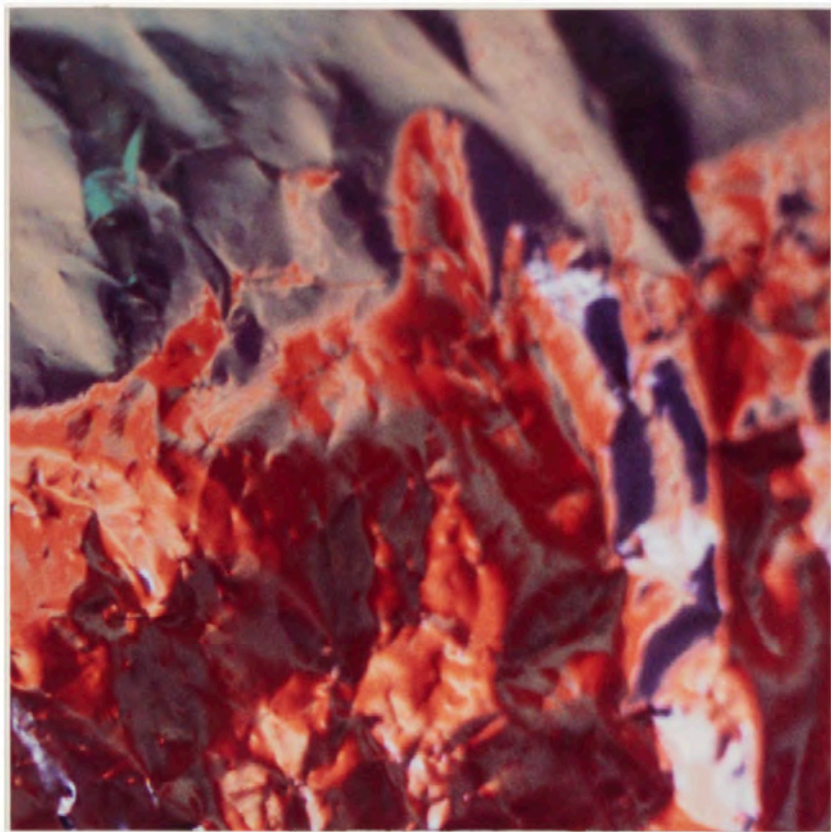
01/27/2018 by **THAVMA PHILLIPS**



Pareidolia by Carol Szymanski at Totah Gallery, installation view, New York.

Currently on view at Totah gallery is a show that lends artistic voice to a process we all experience. Through her work, Szymanski has provided the viewer a world often avoided and thus, virtually unknown. The limbo land found in between the indefinite and the concrete. As the artist suggests, in order to explore this little-known territory we need an intermediary partner. This partner is language. My overwhelming impression was that Szymanski's language makes the viewer comfortable enough to explore and even rest in the most challenging stages of metamorphosis.

Each piece feels like it's in some form of transition. I got the sense that if I looked away I might miss something. This was especially true with *High Noon*. This image appears to be alive and evoked in me some unexpected emotions. I was uncomfortable, then excited and finally expectant. I began to hypothesize what would happen if the image were to somehow become animate, and continue the transformation it appears to have begun. But Szymanski's art forces you to just stay planted in an in-between place that's hard to describe.



Carol Szymanski, *High Noon (rc.Di-1)*, 2017, cibachrome unique print, 4.7 x 4.7 inches (12 x 12 cm).

Transition. We've all experienced it. The space that separates here and there. Oftentimes uncharted territory, it can be at once scary, and exciting, painful and blissful. Sometimes those times we experience between the indefinite and concrete make us feel like there is nothing happening on the surface, while just beneath the confines of our consciousness there is a hotbed of activity that's about to explode into vibrant life. Transition seems to always be the precursor to growth. I experienced Szymanski's pieces as the art equivalent of the transition experience common among us all.

What makes many of the images so unique is how the artist managed to combine so many different textures. The contrasts of luminescence and matte surfaces, color and different forms create a multidimensional effect that is quite pleasing to the eye. *Self Portrait* is the perfect example of this phenomenon. The piece has a prism effect that appears to refract texture and light simultaneously.



Carol Szymanski, Self Portrait (re.Te-10), 2017, cibachrome unique print, 4.5 x 3 inches (11.5 x 8 cm).

The show impressed me with how the artist managed to incorporate so many different forms while still being cohesive. The pieces have elements of the characteristics of watercolor, origami, mixed media and collage. The images simultaneously defy and embrace each of these expressions. They defy them by being too unique to be pinned down to any one technique, and whether or not it was the artist's intent, there is a clever nod to each of them.

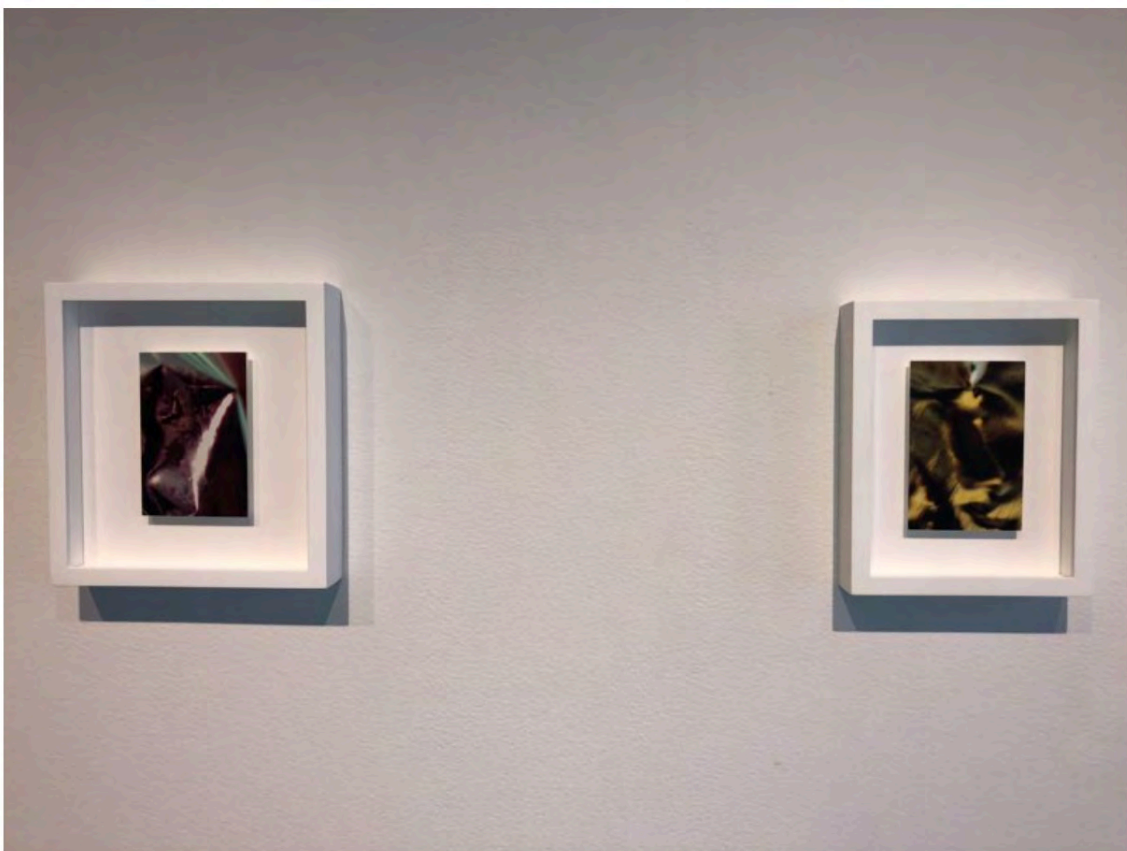
The human mind always tries to fit images and ideas into a familiar paradigm. That's what I naturally did when first confronted with Pareidolia. What am I looking at? Is it a flower? Is it a crumpled up metallic balloon? However, with this work, all you can do is rest in the unknown. Not a comfortable place to be in life, but a delightful place to rest in art.

Carol Szymanski: Pareidolia at Totah Gallery

January 11 – February 11, 2018



Pareidolia by Carol Szymanski at Totah Gallery, installation view, New York.



Pareidolia by Carol Szymanski at Totah Gallery, installation view, New York.



Pareidolia by Carol Szymanski at Totah Gallery, installation view, New York.

TAGS: ART, ART BLOG, CAROL SZYMANSKI, CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY, GALLERY, PAREIDOLIA, PHOTOGRAPHY, TOTAH GALLERY



THAVMA PHILLIPS

THAVMA WRITES AND DIRECTS FOR STAGE AND FILM AND HAS A BACKGROUND ACTING IN COMMERCIALS, INDEPENDENT FILMS AND PLAYS. HER PLAYS HAVE BEEN SEEN AT THE DC BLACK THEATER FESTIVAL, MIDTOWN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL AND OTHER VENUES. ALTHOUGH THAVMA HAS LIVED IN VARIOUS AREAS OF THE U.S. AND PUERTO RICO, HER WORK IS PRIMARILY INSPIRED BY NEW YORK CITY WHERE SHE WAS BORN AND CURRENTLY RESIDES. SHE IS EXPANDING HER WRITING CAREER TO INCLUDE NOVELLAS, ARTICLES AND BLOG POSTS, AND HAS A PASSION FOR INSPIRING OTHERS TO ENJOY THE ARTS.



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Taking the alphabet by the horns

Rarely is an instrumental concert as visually exciting as it is aurally, but that was the case at the Darmstadt Ensemble's quirky recent performance

RACHEL CORBETT

1st November 2017 22:40 BST



One of Carol Szymanski's 26 "phonemophones" © Jeremy Gordon. Courtesy of Arts Brookfield

Rarely is an instrumental concert as visually exciting as it is aurally, but that was the case at the Darmstadt Ensemble's quirky recent performance for WNYC's New Sounds Live at Brookfield Place, where the band played circular, zig-zagging and two-belled instruments made by the artist Carol Szymanski. "The horns are challenging to play as their shapes are not usual for brass instruments," Szymanski said. The 26 horns, which Szymanski calls "phonemophones" are shaped like the letters of the alphabet, in a font she designed. WNYC host John Schaefer suggested using Szymanski's horns in a selection of compositions by the early electronic music pioneer Pauline Oliveros. "I am a great fan of Pauline so was honoured to be part of her tribute," Szymanski said. "I felt that my phonemophones, by being played with this orchestra with the 'real' instruments, had somehow come of age."



Appeared in The Art Newspaper, 295 November 2017



10 FÉVRIER 2017 / DANS ACTUALITÉS, EXPOSITIONS / PAR ARTPRESS

EMERGENCY EYEWASH

The alarm bell is ringing at Tanja Grunert Gallery in New York City. It's in the art of "Emergency Eyewash" – a conceptual "label" conceived by artist Carol Szymanski and poet-critic Barry Schwabsky – signaling the cultural threats, disasters, and failures upon us. Through oblique commentary, methods of artifice and elusion, this self-titled exhibition is perhaps a "post-medium" reprisal to the corrosive "post-truth" powers that be. Objects, text, and images, according to the press release, "open up space for language arts outside the medium of the book and the computer screen." It's a formal ambition that here produces befuddlement and critique. Or is it befuddlement as critique?

Text in this show means poetry. John Yau, for example, crafts homophonic word plays turned into patches. They're on a forest ranger uniform worn by a full-time performer, roaming. "Say Crud / Groaned" (or sacred ground), one reads. "Disguise / The Limit" (or the sky's the limit), says another. The ranger's attire, "Untitled (Bee Ranger)" (2017), fabricated by Norwegian menswear designer Siv Støldal, consists of short pants, a zipper jacket, and beekeeper's hat, all hunter green. The hat's screen alludes to protection as the uniform, and opaquely the poetry, foreground a tenuous relationship humans have with the environment. Or: "To cherish what remains of the Earth and to foster its renewal," poet Wendell Berry warned, "is our only legitimate hope of survival."

The Ghillie suit – a camouflage outfit made of artificial foliage – is cloaked at the face with an Islamic Niqab veil. On this fabric a poem by Judith Goldman is printed, appropriated text of codes women who wear hijabs must follow. The fictive person wearing "HeShe" (2017) is bifurcated by gender and means of concealment, one of militaristic battle and the other mitigated arousal.

Two iterations of "Phable (Business Hoodie)" (2013), the third and fourth "Emergency Eyewash" collaboration with Støldal, hybridize the classic hoodie with a business blazer. Perfect for a Mark Zuckerberg daywear indecision ("Are we meeting the pope or programmers today?"), these works are emblazoned with words by poet Tyrone Williams, most pointedly "worsted"; it can mean either a smooth yarn or to defeat. This rhetorical syphoning of corporate competition and business culture demarcates class status by virtue of a casual-or-formal garment contrasts. It also resurfaces racist assignments given to the hoodie, as black, and the blazer, as white, tying a Gordian knot of economics and race into one piece of clothing.

Across the main room's back wall and lapping its right corner is Szymanski's enormous "606. Absence of Choice" (2016-17). A series of photographs printed on oversized sheets of Kraft paper present an office cubicle built of cardboard. The computers, keyboard, phone, and desktop picture frames, are assembled from cut corrugated sheets – in make-shift manner – sourced from product and moving boxes. The photographs, scaled up to "human" size, were viral images circulating during the 2008 financial crash. Office workers, with nothing to do, needed to appear productive to their employer, a running deceit this useless construct of paper, tape, and glue reveals.

In the ongoing performance "In Memory of Marcel Duchamp" (2017), center stage, two people play chess while being videoed and their activity screened upstairs. Flanked by Williams' poetics of competition and Szymanski's sardonic images, words by Bobby Fischer linger in the air: "I like the moment when I break a man's ego." They'll drift, though, as poetry readings by Yau, Williams, Goldman, Kim Rosenfield, and Brenda Iijima take place in the closing days, as "Emergency Eyewash" proves art gets made, to use an American phrase, come hell or high water.

Rob Colvin



Emergency Eyewash With Siv Støldal Untitled Carol Szymanski Anonymous Eyewash ink on (Abaya, Open or Closed with zipper) text by muslin 18 x 5 feet / 548.64 x 152.4 cm 2013 – Judith Goldman fabric, edition of 5 + 1 AP 2013 courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Vue de l'exposition – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Emergency Eyewash With Siv Støldal Phable (Business Hoodie) text by Tyrone Williams fabric 2013 – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



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Vue de l'exposition – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Emergency Eyewash With Siv Støldal HeShe Ghilie Suit and Niqab fabric with text Text by Judith Goldman – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Emergency Eyewash In Memory of Marcel Duchamp chess table, chairs, chessmen, performance with video and live video feed 2017 – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Emergency Eyewash In Memory of Marcel Duchamp chess table, chairs, chessmen, performance with video and live video feed 2017 – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Carol Szymanski 606. Absence of Choice ink on kraft paper and photo paper Dimensions Vary 2016 – 2017



courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



details of « 606. Absence of Choice » (2017) – courtesy of Rob Colvin for artpress



details of « 606. Absence of Choice » (2017) – courtesy of Rob Colvin for artpress



courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Lisa Blas Aluminum clouds, after S.H. / P.N. Acrylic on watercolor paper on Arches paper 51 x 92 inches / 129.54 x 233.68 cm 2017 – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Lisa Blas Engulfed, v. 5 (D/C) Acrylic on watercolor paper on Opalux vellum 19.5 x 25.5 inches / 49.53 x 64.77 cm 2016 Lisa Blas Flooded, v. 1, after Anna Atkins Acrylic on watercolor paper on Opalux vellum 19.5 x 25.5 inches / 49.53 x 64.77 cm 2016 – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Emergency Eyewash With Siv Støldal Untitled
(Bee Ranger) text by John Yau fabric unique
2017 – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and
Tanja Grunert Gallery »



Emergency Eyewash With Siv Støldal Untitled
(Bee Ranger) Just Patches Text by John Yau
Fabric Unique 2017 – courtesy of
« Emergency Eyewash and Tanja Grunert
Gallery »



Emergency Eyewash With Siv Støldal Untitled
(Bee Ranger) text by John Yau fabric unique
2017 – courtesy of « Emergency Eyewash and
Tanja Grunert Gallery »

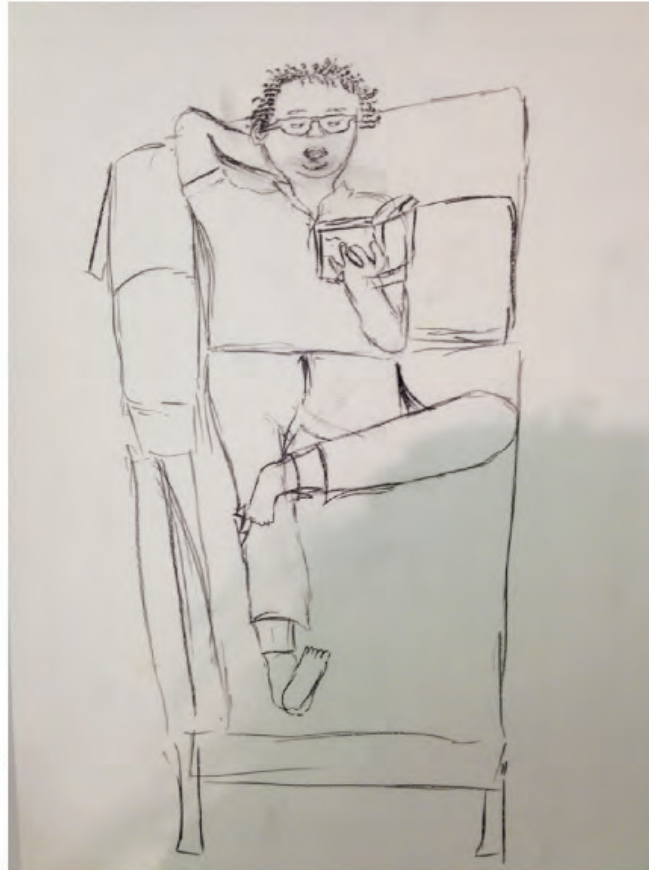
HYPERALLERGIC

INTERVIEWS

Artists Pick Artists: Carol Szymanski



Rob Colvin March 26, 2014



Daddy, Pencil on Paper, by Willa Schwabsky (courtesy her mother casting the shadow) (all images courtesy the artist unless otherwise noted)

Editor's Note: This is the third in a series of interviews with artists that will continue indefinitely, without direction, and outside any one person's control. The artists are asked seven question about their art and their ideas about art. The questions are blunt, but open-ended enough to be answered in any way the artist chooses. The final question is a request for the artist to select the next artist to be interviewed — anyone they wish, well-known or unknown, working in any medium, anywhere — any artist whose work they think highly of, an artist deserving the same public interrogation.

The art of [Carol Szymanski](#) is based in language, bound up in the syntax of human communication, without being reduced to it. And the work is certainly conceptual. Aspects of it derive from Leibniz's belief that reasoning could be formulated into calculations, a precursor to symbolic logic. Yet her pieces are not illustrations of ideas. They don't teach you things, or tell you what's what. In some ways the art doesn't represent anything at all, but instead makes lateral moves and jumps across various types of description. And, still, it's not abstract art.

This makes the work inherently hard to get ahold of. Its elusiveness comes not from a lack of conceptual clarity, which could otherwise be sorted out, but from its materiality. We expect artwork to be a visual starting point or conclusion of an artist's intentions, but Szymanski's sculptures aren't either one – neither here nor there – yet *there* they are.

What *is there* is material, in two fundamental ways: the first is an understanding of communication's physical properties and an awareness of the possibilities found in their rearrangements, and the second is the ability to make rightly-designed instruments to perform such maneuvers. The art is not so much in *what* it is, but in what it *does*, and what it does is stretch the limits of what we can say, think, and feel, or perhaps showing that the limits aren't there.

Photographer [Rhona Bitner](#) picked Carol Szymanski to participate in this project, explaining, "her skill at reinterpreting the essence of speech and language and making them visual and tactile is unique and always intriguing."

Rob Colvin: *Why did you become an artist?*

Carol Szymanski: I became an artist out of necessity, an unavoidable choice. Sort of like how the dice throw themselves. In my case, the dice landed on the question of how and in what ways reality reflects on itself. Since reality is constructed or realized through language and thought through its categorization, language became the subject of my art. I began to see myself as a peculiar kind of translator.

RC: *How would you describe your development and what you're doing now?*

CS: My development has been quite logical although it could appear inconsistent due to some degree of “tripping up” over the years stemming from a general discontent with civilization. I don’t stick to one medium and that always raises the eyebrow.

My first art works were videos. I would audiotape everyday conversation between people for example in a living room over cocktails or playing Monopoly, transcribe the tape, edit it lightly, set it up as a script and give it back to the same people (who were not actors) and have them act out what they had previously said. There was a friction between the whether they were acting or just themselves on video. I was fascinated with what fell out of the tension between fiction and reality. After a year long stint at the Whitney Museum Studio Program in New York under the dictatorship of Ron Clark, I emerged soaked in Semiotics and began a more direct study of language and art by, for instance, designing my own font and making abstract sculpture from it that I called “broken phonemes.”



Carol Szymanski, "Variable No. 2" (1988), steel, 22.5 x 93 x 53 inches

These sculptures eventually became natural trumpets that could play music which reflected for me both a deep attraction to Roman Jakobson's idea of transmutation (the act or process of interpreting linguistic signs through non-linguistic systems) and language as shaped breath (which is after all what speech is anyway, materially). The particular shape of the brass trumpets came from my font that spelled words but were abstracted out of their normal linear reading. It was a form of play on words in an objective concrete sense. In this process a new way of reading and listening emerges. By now I have a horn alphabet band with which I can translate texts into music, most recently the poems of Aram Saroyan in a collaboration with Ben Neil on trumpet.



Carol Szymanski, "th" (1991), silver plated brass, 12 x 7 x 5 inches

Finances eventually became a problem, having a family to support, so I got a day job working in investment banking. It was at least a 60 hour a week job, and this led me to set up a way to keep working on my art stealthily within the work day, since there was no studio time left. The "cockshut dummy" emerged: an ongoing daily email project using the tools I used in the office (i.e., the computer and the mobile phone). I wrote a poetic or diaristic text and shot a corresponding image with my cell phone following a formal structure I set for myself based on the categories of the thesaurus. I am still continuing that project, even though I no longer work at the bank and am happily back in the studio, and I am almost about to finish the project as I have completed 'no. 954 Illegality' with 36 to go to the end, '990 Temple.' The day job paid well and taught me how to write or use language for its own sake, forgetting for a while the manipulation of its shapes as I'd done earlier.

Now, back in my studio, as I said, I have returned to the play on how language represents itself again, using my earlier font alongside my handwriting. I'm working with the Solfège, a method of sight singing that assigns notes of a scale to particular syllables that was devised in the eleventh century by an Italian music theorist, Guido of Arezzo.

I came to it like this: My original idea was to formalize a structure poetically from two letter words and then translate these texts in different mediums. So I Googled two letter words and among them I discovered the solfège words Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, and Ti. I decided to use the letter shapes of these two letter words to make inflatable sculptures — balloons — that would float around a space. I enjoyed the notion of a non-static, variable sculpture moving randomly in space or jostled by the passersby. The particular shapes of each sculpture were worked out first through a series of paintings. When I noticed the paintings reflected in the inflatables in my studio I photographed their colors reflected in the balloons and made large photos of these abstract images. Lastly, to complete this project, I am painting hands which are also the signs of the solfège to make hand songs.



Studio view 1



Studio view 2



Carol Szymanski, "Variable No. 2" (1988), steel, 22.5 x 93 x 53 inches

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Studio view 1



Studio view 2



Studio view 3

RC: *Have you been influenced by anyone or anything in particular?*

CS: I have been heavily influenced by Roget's Thesaurus, Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations," George Lakoff's "Women, Fire and Dangerous Things," and writing itself.

Some of the most influential people were my teachers from art school. The main contributions being (in no particular order) from Howard Fried, for never having to finish according to anyone else's timeframe and maintaining the skill set for nonchalance; Paul Kos, for tenderness of material; David Ross, for keeping fresh in my memory always that the dialectic is there and for showing me the early work of Lawrence Weiner, particularly the films.

Lovers and friends and passing acquaintances have contributed a lot to my understanding of art. Frank Gillette for introducing me to Gregory Bateson and the double bind as well as Kenneth Burke, specifically his book *Grammar of Motives*. And of course my husband Barry Schwabsky for his gentle, respectful, and subtle consideration of art and also for reminding me not to over-think, among other things. Kathy Acker for the knowledge of the derivative, more importantly my own derivativeness. And my dearest friend Joan Jonas for knowing that the doubt and yet the magic are always present.

RC: *What challenges are unique to your process?*

CS: The challenge unique to my process is that although my work is based on text it needs to be seen and not just read.

RC: *If you could own any work of art, what would it be?*

CS: If I could own a work of art it would be Alberto Giacometti's "Woman with Her Throat Cut" (1932).



A version of Alberto Giacometti's "Woman with Her Throat Cut," bronze (via Perryerick's [Plickstream](#))

RC: *So what is art anyway?*

CS: (1) I guess categorization could be art hiding as translation. Or (2) The power chords — a series of translations based on categorization that allow us to re-consider our assumptions of experience. If one assumes that what we call “reality,” as Burke stated, is actually a “clutter of symbols about the past combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present ... a construct of our symbol systems.” Then such is art and more.

RC: *Who should be interviewed next?*

CS: I recommend [Apostolos Georgiou](#) as the next artist to be interviewed. I love the straightforward intelligence, grand finesse, and humor in his paintings — that is very rare.

Art in America

NEWS May 10, 2012

The Lookout: A Weekly Guide to Shows You Won't Want to Miss

by [AiA Staff](#)

With an ever-growing number of galleries scattered around New York, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Where to begin? Here at *A.i.A.*, we are always on the hunt for thought-provoking, clever and memorable shows that stand out in a crowded field. Below is a selection of current shows our team of editors can't stop talking about.

This week we check out D'Amelio's installation of Jedediah Caesar's latest resin panels, which look like they were excavated from a Dr. Seuss-inspired lava field; a three-gallery installation of Gilbert & George's "London Pictures" at Sonnabend and Lehmann Maupin (Chelsea and LES); and, at Guided by Invoices, an astute take on the financial crash by former banker/current artist Carol Szymanski.

Tauba Auerbach at Paula Cooper, through June 9

Tauba Auerbach has produced a wide variety of work over the years, from graphic text paintings to digital photos of analog static to a functional two-player organ. But she remains best known for her visually tricky "Fold" paintings, whose spray-painted trompe l'oeil surfaces convincingly mimic creased canvas. For her first show at Paula Cooper, Auerbach presents half a dozen candy-colored "Fold" pieces, plus a new series of monochrome "Weave" paintings made of narrow strips of cream-colored fabric and, most unexpectedly, *Onyx*, a booklike sculpture in which each page reproduces an image taken from the interior of a block of onyx.

Domenico Gnoli at Luxembourg & Dayan, through June 30

A rare chance to see 18 marvelous canvases and a group of drawings by this little-known Italian painter, who died in 1970 at the age of 36. Each is a hypnotically

enlarged detail of a mundane object—a collar, a bodice, a head of hair—rendered in a textured acrylic. Gnoli had a knack for making bourgeois elegance surreal.

Dana Schutz at Friedrich Petzel, through June 16

Dana Schutz's first show at Petzel is a transitional one. Her canvases show off her painterly finesse, with evocative color and provocative distortions of figure-ground relationships; some of the best works are *Hop* and *Ear on Fire*. However, there are others that seem a bit dashed off, like *Flasher* and *Falling Cat 2*, where the artist misses the mark as she reaches toward pure abstraction. Nevertheless, a somewhat uneven exhibition by Schutz is still a cut above what most painters today have to offer.

Jedediah Caesar at D'Amelio, through June 22

Los Angeles-based sculptor Jedediah Caesar has been experimenting with his signature process-fossilizing nearly unidentifiable found objects into slabs of colored resin—for nearly a decade. Caesar usually sets his murky panels side by side on the gallery floor, so it's difficult to get up as close as you'd like. But this show includes a few larger pieces hung on the wall, where you can pick out fragments that look like pieces of a pencil, cigarette butts, bits of metal and burlap scraps encased in the swirly material.

Gilbert & George at Sonnabend and Lehmann Maupin, through June 23

Using text appropriated from newspaper and tabloid headlines, plus a spare palette of black, white and red, the ever-dynamic British duo present a striking new series of multi-panel photo pieces spread out across several New York galleries. The works cumulatively reflect the wacky preoccupations and gut-wrenching anxiety of our times. Against a background of digitally manipulated self-portraits, a key word in each panel—such as “guns,” “murder,” “rape” or “bomb”—is highlighted in red to give the image an extra sense of urgency.

Carol Szymanski at Guided by Invoices, through May 26

While many have opinions about the recent financial meltdown, few have a real insider's knowledge. Carol Szymanski was a high-level banker when it all came crashing down in 2007-08; also a longtime conceptual artist whose subject is language, she maintained her sanity via an e-mail project called *Cockshut Dummy*

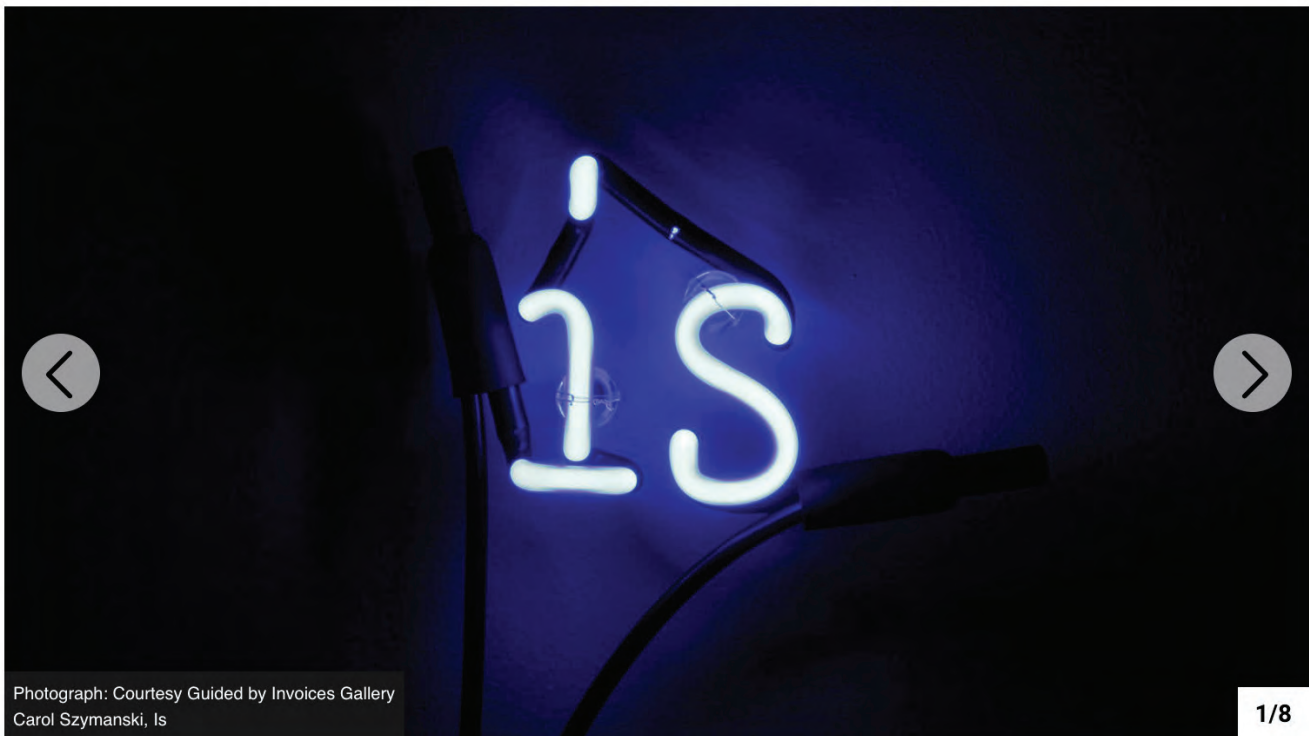
(ongoing), in which she sent elliptical photos and poems about what she was witnessing. These texts, all the more devastating in their iteration as fragmentary concrete poems, appear throughout the show, most strikingly printed on large, backlit, translucent sheets of vellum-but also in neons and, more tellingly, on small women's suits, tragically crumpled.

Alisa Barenboym at 47 Canal, through May 13

They say you don't want to know how the sausage is made, but one of the images in this show, "Abundant Delicacy," shows the gears used to grind meat. The metaphorical sausage here is a layer of fabric laid on top of a print to create 3-D interference. Other images focus in tight on sardines and lox—preserved foods that this Russian-born artist considers to be metaphors for other kinds of preservation—and the interior of an empty meat locker.

Carol Szymanski: Pissin' Against the Wind, or, Sketches of the Mental Drain on the Dead Banker

📍 Guided By Invoices, Greenwich Village 📅 Thursday May 10 2012 ⌚ 11:00 - 18:00 ★★★★★



Photograph: Courtesy Guided by Invoices Gallery
Carol Szymanski, Is

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The idea of quitting a job as an investment banker to devote more time to making art is infused with a familiar romance, but now more than ever, it seems a rather unlikely move. Yet this was the route taken by Carol Szymanski, and her experience among the 1 percent provides intriguing fodder for her current (presumably less profitable) work. Back in 2004, Szymanski began sampling from e-mails concerned with big-money deals for her ongoing text-based series, “cockshut dummy,” and here presents a new set of prints that focus on the midcrisis years of 2008 and ‘09. Words and phrases are scattered across backlit sheets of plastic film, their various sizes and positions generating a poetics of disruption that reflects the chaotic unraveling of the global market.

Other works also employ language, though not to such pointedly topical effect. *Ceci n'est pas un Kosuth* is a neon sign that apes the senior Conceptualist's devotion to linguistic philosophy by quoting Wittgenstein. Another neon, *Pissin' Against the Wind*, presents the titular idiom as if the letters were being carried off by a breeze. Both are neat productions but feel—a perennial risk with this medium—rather generic. *Untitled (Torso)* and *HIM* are more idiosyncratic. In the former, a blown-glass vessel with a stylized feminine profile dangles from a canvas strap; in the latter, three wind instruments have been reshaped to spell out the title. Spicing her economics lesson with sexual politics, Szymanski is clearly not your typical Wall Street burnout. —*Michael Wilson*

Posted: Tuesday May 15 2012

The New York Times

ART GUIDE

April 3, 1998

Here is a selective listing by critics of The Times of new or noteworthy art, design and photography exhibitions at New York City museums and art galleries this weekend. Galleries, unless otherwise noted, are in Manhattan and are open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 or 11 A.M. to 5 or 6 P.M.; gallery admission is free. * denotes a highly recommended show.

CAROL SZYMANSKI, Elga Wimmer Gallery, 560 Broadway, at Prince Street, (212) 274-0274 (April 18). Intriguingly titled "The Cardinal Vowel Marching Band," this exhibition features 18 beautiful brass coronets custom-shaped according to a system of vowel sounds and tongue positions and accompanied by the sounds of a musical composition involving both the horns and spoken dialogue (Smith).

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ART—Cont'd

earliest sculpture, dating from the eleventh to the twelfth century, is an exquisite portrayal of Shakyamuni, the Buddha at the moment before enlightenment. He touches the earth with a look of utter contentment. Formally, it is a marvellous study in gently undulating lines. Another sculpture, from the same period, of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion (from the Ellsworth Collection), is rawer, more archaic in style, and an early manifestation of the voluptuousness of form that exploded centuries later. The Tibetans were masters of creating a sense of great animation through the merest hand gesture—this is especially true in the earlier works. Later, with the introduction of the multi-armed deities, the objects become theatre pieces, sometimes grotesquely over-rendered, at other times hypnotically epic. Through Dec. 28. (I.B.M. Gallery of Science and Art, Madison Ave. at 56th St.)

SHORT LIST—WILLIAM BECKMAN, Stuebel, 32 E. 57th St. (through Jan. 11); JAKE BERTHOT, McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. (through Dec. 24); LARRY COHEN, De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St. (through Dec. 10); EDWARD KOREN (through Dec. 21) and ELISABETH FRINK (through Dec. 16), Dintenfuss, 50 W. 57th St.; ROBERT M. KULICKE, Davis & Langdale, 231 E. 60th St. (through Dec. 21); ROBERT KUSHNER, Holly Solomon, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. (open Mondays, through Dec. 7); JOAN NELSON, Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. (through Dec. 28); BEVERLY PEPPER (through Jan. 4) and STANLEY BOXER (through Dec. 14), Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St.; ANTONIO SAURA, McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. (through Dec. 14); LINDA SOKOLOWSKI, Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. (through Dec. 7); PAVEL TCHELITCHEW, Rosenfeld, 50 W. 57th St. (through Dec. 14); BILL TRAYLOR, Ross, 50 W. 57th St. (through Jan. 11).

GALLERIES—SoHo

IDA APPLEBROOG—New paintings that take on issues of sexual harassment, aging, health care, and nature. All of the works are colored by a sense of withdrawal and an unshakable feeling of injury. Through Dec. 14. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St.)

GEORG BASELITZ—A re-creation of the artist's installation at "Zeitgeist," a 1982 exhibition in Berlin that formalized the new international order in contemporary art. These are some of the artist's most heated Expressionist paintings—inverted shouting men who are the defiant reverse of the silent scream. The paintings are installed very high on the wall, as they originally were, so that they intimidate the viewer. Perhaps in 1982, after several decades of exclusionary American hegemony in the art world, such a move could have been interpreted as a necessary stance for just recognition, but today it simply detracts from one's ability to look at the works for what they are—paintings. Through Dec. 21. (Boone, 417 West Broadway)

JOHN BEERMAN—A large group of somewhat saccharine yet admittedly appealing small paintings. All of them depict feathery and suspiciously well-manicured trees, rendered with an almost de Chiricoan repetitiveness. Through Dec. 21. (Lorenz-Monk, 578 Broadway.)

CHUCK CLOSE—Since he came on the scene, in the late sixties, Close has been one of the most interesting artists around, and these new paintings—all portraits of artists, including himself—are likely his best. He has always been regarded as the thinking man's Photo-Realist, but in the face of this new work such an epithet means little. The new portraits are composed of pointillistic grids of paint, each of which, if viewed at close range, is seen to be a radiating pool of many colors. The portraits say much about beauty and human nature without revealing anything whatsoever about the subjects themselves. Through Dec. 14. (Pace, 142 Greene St.)

GIULIO PAOLINI—For several decades, this artist has been engaged in a romantic expression of artistic melancholy. Two new large-scale works, several collages, and a series of photographs continue in this vein. They are arranged as if they were clues in an art-scene murder mystery. Of the larger works, one, hanging on the wall, is an engaging endgame meditation on illusionism and literalism, but the other, which lies in front of it, is the show's charmer: it's a gargantuan canvas stretcher collapsed atop an easel that's far too small to support it, with the canvas draped in a heap over one of its crossbars. Through Dec. 21. (SteinGladstone, 99 Wooster St.)

NICOLAS RULE—Monochromatic paintings of equine genealogy charts that trail off into perfectly aestheticized drips. Many of the works include the names of racehorses, suggesting an apt correspondence between art-making, or art collecting, and championship breeding. The paintings are very attractive though much too effete. Through Dec. 14. (Klagsbrun, 51 Greene St.)

JULIA SCHER—This artist's bag is surveillance, and she is the *maîtresse* of the obvious. Scher has placed video cameras in various locations throughout the gallery, including the loo, and has installed a group of monitors on which visitors can view the goings-on, with such ominous phrases as "control paths," "incident desensitizers," and "child-torture patrols" superimposed over them. But a single eight-by-ten of an all-female security force says it all more hauntingly and ironically, and in so much less space. Through Dec. 21. (Hearn, 39 Wooster St.)

RICHARD SERRA—There is more variety to this sculptor's work than he is usually given credit for, and this exhibition, though comprising only three works, indicates his breadth. In the main gallery is a piece consisting of two fat, leaning cylindrical slices of forged steel. They rise only to eye level, as if to deny their own monumentality, and have a strong ritualistic reference. In a small second gallery are two massive plates of steel angled in such a way as to add new meaning to the metaphor of having one's back against the wall. All three are powerful works. Through Jan. 11. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St.)

CAROL SZYMANSKI—New sculptures; musical instruments whose shapes are based on the phonetic alphabet. The big copper floor piece—a group of drums—has a presence that is rakishly primordial, if such a thing is possible. The smaller brass pieces—little trumpets twisted into the letter shapes, installed on wall shelves—seem pinched and cold, as if they would make a pained sound. Szymanski is an interesting young artist who definitely follows the beat of her own private drummer. It would be great, however, if she could just start taking those ideas and constructs of hers a bit more for granted, and lavish more attention on the physical objects themselves. Viewers take note: a new work scored for Szymanski's instruments by Ben Neill will be performed at the gallery on Dec. 7 at 8 and 9:30. Call for reservations. Through Dec. 21. (Lipton, 67 Prince St.)

BETTY WOODMAN—Large-scale, exquisitely crafted clay vessels with fanciful handles. Many of the works are glazed to suggest volume where the form is quite flat, and Woodman does a better job with 2-D/3-D games than do most painters and sculptors who attempt them. There are also a few multipart wall pieces, which are less interesting precisely because they try so hard to be "sculpture," whereas the beauty of Woodman's extraordinarily sophisticated pots is that they make superfluous the division between craft and art. Through Dec. 14. (Protech, 560 Broadway.)

"MARKING/TIME"—An engaging grouping of artists who approach in very different ways the



Daniel Spoerri

The New York Times

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, JULY 24, 1987

Art: A Show of Etchings at Academy of Design

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

THE term "painter-etcher" was more than a genteelism distinguishing the "fine" from the commercial etcher. A coinage of the 1870's, it was also a reflection, if faint, of the growing interest in blending all the arts into one Wagnerian whole. Similarly, the American painter-etcher movement accomplished more than the estheticizing of the graphic medium. As proposed by Patricia C. F. Mandel in the catalogue to a recent traveling show on the subject, the movement was instrumental in restoring some of the esthetic confidence lost in the welter of commercialism following the Civil War. It was, nevertheless, much influenced by the work of expatriates such as Whistler and by the spontaneity of French and English etchings as a whole.

Though by no means confined to New York (Philadelphia, for instance, was a center of activity), the movement more or less took off there with the first meeting of the New York Etching Club in 1877. This took place at the studio of James D. Smillie, a bank-note engraver turned painter who became the first teacher of etching in the National Academy of Design's fine arts school.

Smillie is among the 19 artists featured in the academy's present show, "Sketched 'en Plein Air,'" and as might be expected is a technical virtuoso. Less predictable, however, is the air of melancholy enchantment pervading his print of cedars by moonlight. An especially beautiful passage is the softly clouded sky that from a distance looks aquatinted but turns out to be the product of gossamer-like crosshatching. Another seminal figure is Robert Swain Gifford, who helped inaugurate the club by etching a small plate that his companions printed during the group's first session. Though always more painter than etcher, Gifford performs well here in the study of a copse beside a lake, complete with a solitary fisherman.

The successor to Smillie at the

academy was Charles F. W. Mielatz. Brought here from Germany as an infant, Mielatz was still in his teens when he started work as a draftsman for the Army Corps of Engineers. By the age of 22, he was living on the proceeds from his prints, having taken only a few lessons from the commercial etcher James J. Calahan. A specialist in landscape and architecture, Mielatz is said to have worked more from photographs than drawings, producing the large plates that were characteristic of the movement and that Whistler reviled as "a triumph of unthinking earnestness and uncontrolled energy — endowments of a duffer." Still, neither of the images representing him in this exhibition is large, and one is an almost Cézannesque study of a path between trees — a mass of impressionistic smudges that passes for a lithograph until closer inspection reveals it to be a drypoint.

Though Charles A. Platt is best known as a designer of domestic architecture, he trained as a painter (at the academy) and enjoyed considerable success with his etchings. As conventional as his architecture, most of the examples here are large harbor scenes with emphasis on the rigging of moored sailboats. The lone oil accompanying them — a seascape that is all grays except for the sliver of pink light hitting the water in the distance — indicates that the artist had a lighter and more inspired hand as a painter than as an etcher.

The exhibition might have made its point better if it had included more paintings, but it seems that not everyone was a painter as well as an etcher. Besides, there is the suspicion that when etching was not an excuse for mere perfectionism it was a means of repeating techniques acquired in other mediums. The East Hampton landscapes chosen by Thomas Moran and his wife, Mary Nimmo, might have yielded good paintings but certainly make dull and spotty etchings. As for the waves in Moran's "Resounding Sea," they might as well be bushes on a windswept heath.

Thomas Parrish, brother of the bet-

ter-known Stephen and uncle of the even better-known Maxfield, makes the medium work for him in a near-Luminist study of a settlement in a Norwegian fjord. But the only artist to achieve a balance between the two forms of expression is Whistler, who would have no part of the painter-etcher movement although he participated in some of its exhibitions. In this case he appears unofficially by way of two lithographs — small vaporous studies of his friend and follower Joseph Pennell seated in a wicker chair. Pennell himself is at his most precise in a scene of ships on the Thames at Chelsea. Otto Bache was a disciple of both men to the extent that his prints were called "pennywhistlers." All the same, he deserves credit for rendering Venice on a dark, wet night with not a gondola in sight.

Whether or not the images were etched on the spot (and occasionally it's hard to believe that they were), most work remained to be done in the studio — the application of aquatint, for example, not to mention the tricks of the printing trade. The easily portable copper plate lends itself to impromptu sketching, but not the processing that makes the difference between success and failure. So in the end, the show becomes an investigation of graphic esoterica, with all the esthetic ups and downs that are part and parcel of such investigations. (Through Sept. 20 at the National Academy of Design, 1083 Fifth Avenue, at 89th Street.)