

Symposium

Renée Green: Inevitable Distances

Saturday, November 12th, 2022, 2 – 6 pm

On the occasion of Renée Green's solo exhibition, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst hosts a symposium delivered in partnership with Zurich University of the Arts. This event opens a conversation on and a potential re-evaluation of discourses around Green's oeuvre and her ongoing artistic practice.

with: Renée Green, Ima-
Abasi Okon, Howie Chen,
Trajal Harrell, Elvan
Zabunyan, MAS Curating
students (Zurich
University of the Arts)

Since the late 1980s, Green's practice has expanded the ways in which art can surface and give form to unwritten histories, collective memory, and cultural exchange. In her installations, writings, films, digital media, paintings, drawings and sound works, Green questions the power of cultural institutions and their relationship to language, knowledge and identity. The title of the exhibition, *Inevitable Distances*, draws from the words of late cultural theorist and political activist Stuart Hall, and probes gaps and misconceptions of the reception of thinking and the self.

"To think is to construct that inevitable distance between the subject that is thinking and the subject that is being thought about. That is just a condition of intellectual work." (1)

While attending a conference in honour of his own achievements, Hall underwent the uncanny experience of not recognizing the intellectual other contributors were referring to. In response, Hall delivered his lecture "Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life" (2004), which pointed to the inherent struggles, inadequacies and biases that shape the very process of self-reflexivity and critical thinking. Whereas Hall alludes to the probability that our desire to theorize and understand the world – as well as the pursuit of self-knowledge – will always be informed by shortcomings and fallacies, Green's reference to and adjustment of Hall's "inevitable distance" in the exhibition's title serves as a critical aperture through which a discussion on pre-existing notions around viewing and locating Green's work might be initiated. The artist's work has frequently been discussed in connection to conceptual art, postminimalism and postcolonial theories. But instead of following such preconceived schemes, this symposium seeks out other concepts to approach Green's complex and manifold practices, and asks: what is the timeliness of a critical review of Green's practice and its reception now? How might this contemporary reassessment offer us a sense of renewal and interest in engaging with Green's oeuvre and her ongoing practice? What else does this work tell us about our shared present?

This symposium revisits the ways in which Green's multifaceted oeuvre can be encountered and contextualized. Invited participants, ranging from artists, cultural theorists, curators, and art historians to choreographers, will bring into sharp focus how Green's installations, paintings and films continue to weave links, create spaces, and traverse geographical, historical and disciplinary boundaries.

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(1) Stuart Hall in his lecture “Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life”, 2004, at The Centre for Caribbean Thought, The University of the West Indies (UWI). UWI hosted the 3rd Caribbean Reasonings on June 17-19, 2004, under the theme ‘Culture, Politics, Race and Diaspora: The Thought of Stuart Hall’.

The event will be held in English.

Schedule

2.00 pm

Michael Birchall / Lucas Hagin (Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst) and Dorothee Richter (Zurich University of the Arts): Introduction

2.20 – 2.55 pm

Howie Chen

Discussing a materialis/psychoanalytic approach to think about Renée Green's work, Howie Chen is using his essay “Real Historical Drama” as an example of this underlying interpretation. In doing so, Chen explores to what extent this text, which was published in the *Inevitable Distances* catalogue and examines *Mise-En-Scène* (1991), *Commemorative Toile* (1992-93) as well as *Mise-En-Scène: Commemorative Toile* (2020), is informed by connecting psychic/subjective triangulation to material circulation of history, peoples, goods, and production/scene of art.

Coffee break: 10 minutes

3.05 – 3.50 pm

Elvan Zabunyan

In her book *Inevitable Distances*, Renée Green has chosen to insert quotations on pages that she calls “As I Read”. Based on a study of these quotations as well as works she produced since 2009, this presentation proposes to reflect on the role of literature and books in the artist's research. The place of fiction is thought in both a temporality and a spatiality, it is at the heart of the poetic and political artistic process of Renée Green.

Coffee break: 10 minutes

4.00 – 5.00 pm

Zurich University of the Arts / MAS Curating / Dorothee Richter

We develop an autotheory live podcast—autotheory as the commingling of theory and philosophy with autobiography—as a mode of critical artistic practice indebted to feminist writing and activism. We meander through the exhibition, we talk to each other, we see, we feel, we hear. We read texts about Renée Green's works, we turn all this into a live mix. We spoke with Renée Green and heard the music she used in *Import / Export Funk Office* (1992-93). We will perform our collection with you in the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst.

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5.00 – 5.50 pm

Trajal Harrell / Renée Green

5.50 – 6.00 pm

Questions and closing remarks

Speakers

Howie Chen

Howie Chen is the Curator of 80 Washington Square East Gallery at NYU. A founding director of Chen's, a townhouse gallery in Brooklyn, and Dispatch, he has held curatorial roles at the Whitney Museum of American Art and MoMA PS1. His writings have been published by Primary Information and Badlands Unlimited and have appeared in magazines such as Artforum, Frieze, and Art in America. Chen is the editor of the anthology *Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network 1990-2001* (Primary Information, 2021), a comprehensive collection of writings, art projects, publications, correspondence, organizational documents, and other archival ephemera from the trailblazing Asian American artist collective that sought to stimulate social change through art and advocacy.

Renée Green

Renée Green is an artist, writer, filmmaker; she has had solo exhibitions at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2021); the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Harvard University (2018); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012–2013); the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (2010); the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne (2009); the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume (2008); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1993), among others. Her work has also been shown in numerous group exhibitions and biennials. A prolific writer, a selection of Green's essays and film scripts appear in *Other Planes of There: Selected Writings* (Duke University Press, 2014); she's also the editor of the collection of essays *Negotiations in the Contact Zone* (2003, Assirio & Alvim), and a Professor at MIT's Art, Culture, and Technology Program, School of Architecture & Planning.

Trajal Harell

is an American dancer and choreographer. He shot to fame with his series of work entitled *Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at The Judson Church* in which he confronted the history, construction, and interpretation of contemporary dance. Today, Harrell is considered one of the most important choreographers of his generation. Harrell is among the most discussed choreographers and dancers today, because he combines particularly timely subject matters with various schools of dance (particularly postmodern dance, butoh and voguing). In so doing he not only electrifies audiences but equally stimulates discussion and thought which resonates long afterwards.

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Elvan Zabunyan

Elvan Zabunyan, contemporary art historian and art critic based in Paris, is professor at University of Rennes, Brittany. For over 25 years, she works across issues of race and feminism, as well as on the political and cultural history of the United States and the Caribbean. She contributes to national and international publications, she is the author of four monographies and numerous articles in periodicals and essays in books and exhibition catalogues. She recently co-edited the special issue “*Experimenting History with Contemporary Arts*” for the journal *Slaveries and Post-Slaveries* (CRNRS/CIRESC, 2020), the anthology, *Constellations subjectives, pour une histoire féministe de l’art* (Ixe, 2020) and *Decolonizing Colonial Heritage. New Agendas, Actors and Practices in and beyond Europe* (Routledge, 2021). Her book on contemporary arts and the memory of slavery will be published in 2023 by B42 in Paris.

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