

Simon Fujiwara

TOKYO OPERA CITY ART GALLERY
3-20-2 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku
January 16–March 27

Simon Fujiwara's exhibition "White Day" showcases a number of his projects from recent years together with archival objects from assorted collections, in a large-scale presentation that seems to want to annihilate the boundary separating creation from curation. An antique mask of Stalin is situated in the same room as a fan made after Japan's defeat in World War II, from currency used by the Japanese during their wartime occupation of the Philippines. Elsewhere, Fujiwara plays the role of commissioner, as in the series of oil paintings titled "Lactose Intolerance," 2015, depicting glasses of milk, which he ordered from North Korea's largest state-run art studio, Mansudae, the irony being that the nation is one of the only in the world that produces no fresh milk.

The centerpiece—and probably Fujiwara's best-known work to date—is *Rebekkah*, 2012, a so-called rehabilitation project the artist undertook with a young working-class British woman who was involved in the London riots of 2011. Fujiwara filmed Rebekkah's trip to China, where, among other activities, she visited a factory where she was able to witness the conditions under which many of the brand-name goods she and her mates looted were actually produced. The trip climaxed with a visit to Xi'an, home of the famous terra-cotta warriors, where Rebekkah herself was cast as a statue. In addition to the film, an army of several dozen terra-cotta Rebekkahs has been installed in the final room's pristine space. It all goes to show: History, like a precious object, is a thing forged by human hands.



View of "Simon Fujiwara: White Day," 2016.
From left: *Ich*, 2015; *Rebekkah*, 2012.

— Travis Jeppesen



Close up of Simon Fujiwara's 'Rebekkah' (2012) | © SIMON FUJIWARA, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND TARO NASU, PHOTOGRAPH BY KIOKU KEIZO

ART

Fujiwara wants the dirt to stick

BY **JOHN L. TRAN**

SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

MAR 8, 2016

White often seems to be used in contemporary art in Japan as a kind of short cut to signify “beauty,” “purity” or “spirituality.” Simon Fujiwara’s show “White Day” at Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery is, as the title suggests, overwhelmingly white, but it’s designed not to stay that way.

The specially installed white carpet will get progressively get dirtier as time goes by, and Fujiwara is looking forward to having a photograph taken of the show on the last day, to show how “defiled” it will have become from visitors footprints and the muck trailed in from the street. Grubby tracks have already formed from the entrance, where a white

shopping bag from the high-end British department store Harvey Nichols is the first exhibit, through to two large rooms of new and previously exhibited pieces.

The shopping bag was improvised, and very site-specific — borrowed from the museum staff, who usually use it to store bits and pieces by the information desk. It is now spotlighted in a darkened corridor and followed by a scattering of coins around a plum tree branch (money doesn't grow on trees). From this we can guess that Fujiwara's view of the manufactured March 14 tradition of White Day, where in Japan men are supposed to give a gift in return for having received chocolate on St. Valentine's Day, is ambivalent, at best.

Further in, there is a fan made with currency bills issued by the Japanese army during their occupation of the Philippines. After that, a massive stone sculpture of an eagle that once adorned a Nazi building sits next to an Edo Period (1603-1868) scroll painting, also of an eagle. Across the room from these two historical and culturally weighty pieces are two items of juvenilia that belong to Shino Nomura, the curator — her painting of an African Bongo antelope she once saw at Ueno Zoo as a child, and her mother's rendering of it as a cuddly toy. The last work in the exhibition is his 2015 video piece "Hello," which features the true stories of a European designer and a Mexican trash picker who lost a hand in an accident, both recounting how they found happiness in respect of their massively different circumstances.

For the most part the exhibits were not physically made by the artist, and we are not meant to pore over craftsmanship and the quality of the object. This will turn some people off, but as Nomura eloquently put it: "Art doesn't speak to you unless you ask it something."

Even though each piece has a fairly in-depth back story, their value as artworks has more to do with the opportunity they provide for us to reconsider what we take for granted in the social construction of our different realities. Like French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the revolving door of affect between individual and society, there is structure in Fujiwara's work, but its import and impact is created by the structuring of mental patterns and connections that we create in response to it.

Some visitors will consider Fujiwara's exhibition as "mean." Is it the mockery of "harmless" activities like shopping and the exchange of sweets and chocolates? Why bring up unsavory historical events? Maybe it's the epigrammatic and seemingly cryptic way that the works, and the show as a whole, come across. And then there is the matter of dirtying up the place.

Fujiwara was born and partly educated in Britain, and certainly it's possible to see in his wry take on consumer rituals an echo of the fairly scathing view of life in Japan in the late 1980s and '90s by British photographers Paul Graham and Martin Parr. Graham photographed bubble-era office women emphasizing their tortured hairstyles and nervous hand gestures, and Parr captured greasy-haired and bald-patch-threatened heads of exhausted businessmen asleep on trains.

At one level Fujiwara is probably carrying on a certain tradition of British humor, which, as George Mikes in his 1946 book "How to be an Alien" affectionately pointed out, Brits are just as likely to use to ridicule themselves. At another, you could say "serious" level, "White Day" sets up a scenario in which we can test our imagination and perception of objects, behavior, history and narratives; you could spend all day in this exhibition doing a variety of mental workouts, and to me this is the measure of good art.

It's quite cutting at times, but the cut is to separate us from lazy thinking and lazy feelings. As the "Hello" video indicates, Fujiwara challenges us to find our own way to make things work and not settle for received wisdom about how to behave. This isn't meanness, it's rigor.

To put it another way, as contemporary American philosopher Sheryl Crow asks, "If it makes you happy, then why the hell are you so sad?"

"Simon Fujiwara: White Day" at Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery runs until March 27; 11 a.m.-7 p.m. (Fri. and Sat. until 8 p.m. ¥1,200. Closed Mon. www.operacity.jp/ag)



SIMON FUJWARA NEW POMPIDOU

In *New Pompidou*, artist Simon Fujiwara revisits personal memories and professional aspirations while enacting a procession that takes a sculpture of his through the streets of Paris to the Pompidou Centre, the building that radically transformed his dreams of becoming an architect.

New Pompidou

2014, HD Video, 19 minutes
Introduced by James Voorhies

James Voorhies: Your 2014 video *New Pompidou* draws on the context and history of an extraordinarily influential and controversial institution. What was the impetus for making this work?

Simon Fujiwara: It came out of a chance collaboration between the Fondation d'entreprise Galeries Lafayette and the Centre Pompidou, where I had been simultaneously invited to make an on-site residency and project for the Lafayette and to produce a new piece for the Pompidou's Nouveau Festival. I met with Bernard Blistène a month before he was appointed director of the Pompidou, and he asked me, "What is your relationship with the Pompidou?" And I began to tell him about my architectural studies, my first visit to Paris, and my awe for the building and its history, which I believe made me less inclined to become an architect—what is left to build after the Pompidou? It was the most perfectly engineered ruin, the endpoint in history as we know it—so, my logic was "quit now. It's over." Anyhow, the point is that I had a relationship with the building, and in my discussion with Bernard I said I wanted to take on the Pompidou, somehow, for having ruined my architectural ambitions, and to build a second Pompidou. That would be my project. I had no idea what I meant by that; obviously, I wasn't going to build another actual Pompidou. But then Bernard began to tell me about Pontus Hultén, the first Pompidou director's plans to build a twin Pompidou exactly the same, in another part of Paris, razing another whole historic quarter and making a twin Pompidou but double the size. The logic about this was clear: Pompidou was a Meccano-like building, made from interlocking prefabricated parts that could be endlessly replicated, so in theory a second could be made as large and in any quantity you like. The very idea of originality was gone. Then I came to think about the recent spate of twinning or cloning museums—Guggenheim Berlin, Abu Dhabi, Bilbao, or the Louvre's twins—and I thought, why has the Pompidou not cloned itself in Dubai or Hong Kong? And then I discovered that there had also been plans for that to happen, but each time it had fallen through—no country in the "new economy" seems to want a Pompidou enough to make it a reality. It seemed crazy, as the very architecture itself more than any other museum monument lends itself to replication, but it seemed easier to make a second Louvre that was housed in a building that used to be a king's palace. A Pompidou that embodies somewhat the '68 ideas of transparency and democracy didn't seem as enticing an export—still, today, the unique and the elite is sexier. Anyhow, this and the fact that the Lafayette had a good budget and an empty building just a stone's throw from the Pompidou meant that I could produce and experiment nearby with my own version of the Pompidou, and that the results of that, which ended up being a reproduction of a single fragment of the Pompidou recast with biological materials, by the way, could be carried to its mothership, which took place as a performance and procession.

JV: What is the fragment? Could you describe it?

SF: The fragment is a cast of a single structural element of the Pompidou building known as the Gerberette. Like everything in the building, it is a necessary engineering element that is also designed to appear more technological than it needs to—in short, it's a beautiful beam that could have been simpler in design if the architects wanted to be as honest to the materials and construction as they claimed to be. Although it appears to be a mechanical engineered design, it is heavily aestheticized and almost anthropomorphic, like a dinosaur skull, and its appearance on the building is almost like a cathedral gargoyle. It struck me as a

paradox that the architects were striving to make a machinelike building that was a mixture of democratic ideals, transparency, and formal pragmatism, and yet they made these little gargoyle faces all over the building and even gave them a name—Gerberette—named after the German engineer Heinrich Gerber, who designed the bridge to Neuschwanstein Castle, the fairytale castle Disney based theirs on. They were really romantics, or at least seemed to give a nod to the history they were purporting to be disavowing by their futuristic museum. All the paradoxes of the museum as a concept—a place to conserve, preserve, and to create and be radical—were, for me, locked into this one element. That is why I wanted to recreate a Gerberette that brought this paradox to the fore.

JV: What do you mean by biological materials?

SF: My Gerberette, or the New Pompidou Gerberette, contains swamp weeds, bones, roses, and earth among other non-biological materials like rusting metal, dyed paper, and plaster. The work needed to be watered every day by the conservation staff during the show, otherwise it would have rotted and decayed, but by keeping it green, the water activated the metal and eroded the plaster. So the conservation team had to confront the paradox that in conserving the work as I wanted it, they were also accelerating its destruction.

JV: And why did you use those materials?

SF: The Marais is the district of Paris where both the Lafayette Foundation and the Pompidou were built, and I discovered quite early into the project that the word marais means “swamp,” and I loved the idea that Paris’s most romantic, historic, cultural quarter was built on a dirty, destructive, and wet bog. The Marais is now a cleaned-up version of its former days; the buildings that once housed prostitutes galore, rabbits for the felting industry, and slaughter houses are now boutiques and scented candle shops. In short, life and death in its most basic sense is no longer as visible in the Marais as it once was, and so I wanted to bring back certain elements of this in the Lafayette studio to see if, by having a miniature swamp in the studio, a living rabbit in the air conditioning ducts, or by excavating the basement and bringing up desiccated swamp earth—in short, by surrounding myself and my collaborators with the materials of other ages—our New Pompidou project would be able to deny the linearity of time, to be a product of all ages, not just our own.

JV: I always appreciate the way you quickly assess conditions at hand and then proceed to spin a web of ideas into something, intertwining not only the early history of the Pompidou, in this case, but the geographic proximities between the museum and the Fondation Lafayette. What were the benefits and limitations of working with both institutions in terms of the impact on your final work?

SF: One thing I will give the French is that their romanticism and belief in ideas versus Anglo-Saxon pragmatism made it possible to make a large-scale project like New Pompidou without a road map, in just six weeks, and with a modest sum of money and space. Do what you want. And when practical obstacles arose, it was the power of the artwork that always shone through. For example, a week or so before the planned procession in which five large fragments would be carried by hand to the Pompidou from the studio, the authorities said “NO”—for health and safety reasons, the works had to be rolled, not carried. This was a problem: it’s not a procession, with all its faltering, exhausting, human sweat, but a carnival if it is rolled. Blistène stepped in here and began to use his influence, but rather unlike a museum director, who often opts for the safe first approach, Blistène was behind the idea to carry the work. He was almost more adamant and certainly more influential than I was, so it went ahead—against regulation and on his shoulders too. It was the idea of the ruins being rolled that bothered him so much that I was allowed this potentially dangerous liberty. In the end, the police supported it, sending driven escorts that blocked the road as we walked to the Pompidou.

JV: And the Fondation Lafayette? What was their reaction to all of it?

SF: They stood behind it, all the way through. The Foundation is led by François Quintin, who has appointed a great team. The people make the place.

JV: The resulting video is beautifully produced. Was that always the intention to make a video? How did ideas for it develop during the process?

SF: After I made the video, I felt that Bernard, who that week became the new director of the Pompidou, had contributed so much to the project that he would have to be the narrator of the film, which he accepted. In some ways, he considered it his first statement as new director. The voiceover was recorded during one afternoon in the IRCAM studios, also part of the Pompidou complex, which was conceived as an institution for all media and even production. And so the whole project circled around the building in a very satisfying way, using the entire history and the actual facilities, including the conservation department, and catalyzing it all into the work.

JV: What is the text that Bernard Blistène reads?

SF: He speaks as if the whole project is a kind of mad dream of a museum director, but the narrator seems to have multiple personalities, telling other people's stories and slipping into other people's first-person narratives. He speaks about the Pompidou as if it were a mythical and almost living being. It is all very unclear and dreamlike in some ways, but it also describes—together with footage from my production of the Gerberette and studio documentation—the making of the sculpture, so it's a sort of documentary.

JV: How does New Pompidou circulate?

SF: It is shown in exhibitions as a video or in film screenings. I am working on a publication.

JV: I admire the role museums and schools have played in your practice, where resistance, hurdles, and pushes against your ideas could have seemed impossible or, at the very least, negative. Instead, the limitations are transformed into ingredients and sometimes the impetus for art that is direct and with intention, but flexible. A final thought. Could you discuss how you negotiate between the imperatives of the institution or the context and conditions at hand and maintaining an autonomous studio practice?

SF: I make art partly to learn. I never know what the work will be before it is made, and it is always a combination of multiple factors, of which I am one important factor but not the only one. I like the contradiction of this idea, because the great thing about being an artist is that you can say “no” to anything and everything at any point you choose. The work must come first, and if I find myself in a position that compromises that, there is no point in continuing. This has happened, and these are the projects you don't know about. I also like to muse on the idea of the individual as a mini industry or institution of one's own. In light of the recent Volkswagen scandal, and all the other corporate mess-ups that make us trust no state or company, we have come to scrutinize every element of these companies' production. Do they source ethically? Do they produce wastefully? Is their product ecological? These seem to be the de facto moral benchmarks that make us feel better about being consumers. There is almost a Shinto-like animist ideology in how we relate to industrial products these days; the material itself holds a power that is better or worse for the universe. I enjoy wondering if artists should be held to the same benchmark? Does it matter how we source our materials? How and with whom we collaborate? Are we, as artists, now aping the new liberal corporate morality by having these considerations? It's not a question we need to answer. It's a perverse idea that I enjoy, and perversity drives my work because it's unresolvable.

This text is an excerpt of a conversation between Simon Fujiwara and James Voorhies in the forthcoming book *What Ever Happened to New Institutionalism?*, co-published by the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Cambridge, Massachusetts and Sternberg Press, Berlin.

Credits

Simon Fujiwara, 2014

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art agenda

by KEREN GOLDBERG
April 8, 2015

Simon Fujiwara's "Lactose Intolerance"

DVIR GALLERY, Tel Aviv

March 14—April 25, 2015



View of "Lactose/Intolerance," Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2015.

Milk production in two very different countries is the departure point of British-Japanese artist Simon Fujiwara's solo show. North Korea does not produce any fresh milk, while Israel's milk yield per cow is one of the highest in the world. In concordance with these facts, Fujiwara collaborated with two kinds of producers: North Korean painters employed by the Mansudae Art Studio, a state-run facility which manufactures propaganda imagery for the government, and cows from the Israeli kibbutz Ein Harod, a highly lucrative producer of milk.

Shown on one floor, seven paintings commissioned from the North Korean artists all depict the same glass of milk ("Lactose/Intolerance," all works 2015). Their techniques vary, displaying the artists' style range, from nostalgic through hyperrealist to early Pop. The techniques are impressive, but, as we can anticipate of paintings created as commodities on demand, they seem poster-like, lacking any real affect.

On another floor are a series of paintings made by cows, created by their excrement, which colored canvases positioned behind them during lactation ("No Milk Today"). The works are hung lower than the standard hanging height of an artwork, placed at the average cow's eye level, and are unified in shape, size, and khaki shades. In this sense, they are reminiscent of the serialized

production method of “Lactose/Intolerance,” thus implying that both the production of milk—as depicted through the cows’ labor—and its representation—as depicted by the Korean painters—are socially and economically constructed gestures. However, while the North Korean painters are automatically depicting a sterile final result, the cows’ byproduct is used to create unique “Abstract-Expressionist” paintings, with a personal signature.

One could mention similar artistic uses of feces, such as Dieter Roth’s multiples of straw and rabbit droppings, *Bunny-dropping-bunny* (1968, produced 1972–82); Chris Ofili’s frequent use of elephant dung; and, of course, Piero Manzoni’s *Merda d’artista* (1961). But Fujiwara’s adoption of manure is not cynical or provocative, nor was the manure chosen for its earthy qualities. Rather, it was appropriated for its specific use value. Ein Harod, one of the last kibbutzim to function in the Israeli early socialist spirit, based on equality and shared income, is known for its successful art museum. The cows’ manure, an organic material reused as fertilizer for crops on which the cows graze, is as inseparable from this social-economic-agricultural mechanism as the milk they produce—a Zionist national pride. Fujiwara’s works intelligently decompose representations of products, including art, in two problematic regimes that evolved from socialist backdrops, and whose own representation in the media is currently in the eye of the storm, greatly affecting their global positions.



Simon Fujiwara, *Lactose/Intolerance (Comic Style)*, 2015.

As opposed to these two extreme cases, the last part of the show, located on the top floor of the gallery, includes two sets of works centered on a very different political identity, that of Germany. A ready-made sculpture series titled “Ich” (*I* in German) is composed of selected models of domestic trashcans produced in Germany, specially designed for waste separation in a country where recycling has become the norm. The bins, coated in liquefied bronze and positioned on pedestals, seem like weird combinations of minimalist sculptures and classic, figurative masterpieces.

Surrounding these sculptures are abstract paintings in pink and fair skin tones, made by the artist himself. These are fragments of a blown-up portrait of Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel, or, in fact, her makeup (“Masks (Merkel)”). After consulting Merkel’s personal makeup assistant, Fujiwara used the Chancellor’s specific makeup products and application techniques to create a representation of a personal, yet highly public, mask. Putting on makeup can be described as a woman’s social duty to erase her face and paint it anew every morning, much like the ceremony of disposing domestic waste. Both are everyday private rituals that, in a way, construct the self. Domestic waste is the leftovers of what one has consumed, and its disposal may reveal a great deal about an individual, while applying makeup constructs a public persona. However, the clever connection between the two series exists primarily in the public sphere: Merkel, in her famous

2010 declaration that German multiculturalism has failed(1), has de facto demanded that immigrants be recycled into a German identity, an *Ich*.

This show varies from most of Fujiwara's former practice, as he neglects his characteristic pseudo-documentary preoccupation with his personal biography. He does not play his typical roles of novelist, anthropologist, or archaeologist, but takes on the position of the curator, with which he has experimented in various previous shows: in his early project *The Museum of Incest* (first exhibited at the Royal College of Art, London, 2009), he designed an alternative natural history museum; in his major show at Tate St Ives, "Since 1982" (2012), he integrated works from the museum collection into his installation; and recently in "History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain" (2015) at the Hayward Gallery, he exhibited a meticulous selection of objects and artworks side by side, in an attempt to draw a portrait of current British mentality. In his current show, Fujiwara further develops this intriguing practice to explore the impact of global and local economic forces on art production, while synthesizing this immaterial narrative into the objects themselves.

(1) "Merkel says German multicultural society has failed," BBC News, October 17, 2010. Last accessed April 6, 2015.

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REVIEWS OCT. 07, 2013

Art in America

Simon Fujiwara

NEW YORK at Andrea Rosen

by Aimee Walleston



Untitled photographs in Simon Fujiwara's mixed-medium installation *Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)*, 2013; at Andrea Rosen.

For Simon Fujiwara's first solo exhibition in New York, "Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)," the British artist, who lives in Berlin, used his recollection of a photograph of his mother from childhood as the foil for a mixed-medium installation (first shown in March at the Sharjah Biennial). The show delved into themes of stereotyping, inchoate sexuality and the faulty rewiring of memory.

The first room mimicked the look of a detective's office. Two bulletin boards covered in fuzzy gray fabric were pinned with "evidence," including plastic bags of beach gravel and images of the Casino du Liban near Beirut, where Fujiwara's British mother, a Bluebell Girls cabaret dancer, performed in the '60s. One of the boards also displayed photocopies of details of Michelangelo's *Pietà*. In the middle of the room, a photo-shoot set was erected, complete with a spotlight, a reflective umbrella and a seamless backdrop.

In the second room, three large color photographs arranged as a triptych represented Fujiwara's imaginative reconstruction of the original photograph, which depicted the artist's blonde mother draped in the arms of a dark Lebanese man on a beach near the casino. In Fujiwara's re-

creation, he used a blonde female dancer and a Middle-Eastern-looking male actor to reenact the roles. The three photos in turn show the woman alone, with arms outstretched; the woman holding the man (alluding to the pietà theme), assisted by a sling to help her bear his weight; and the man alone in the sling, in a pose that is comically feminine.

The viewer learns of the proto-image (which is not included in the exhibition) through a 20-minute video projected on the seamless backdrop. In the video, Fujiwara performs a voiceover in which he acts as both interviewer and interviewee. He begins by talking about something called the "King Kong complex," reading a passage from a text describing a "fear of the notion of a darker-skinned or hairy male individual." The accompanying image is a still from the German-release version of the 1933 film *King Kong*, which we find bore the title *King Kong und die weiße Frau* (King Kong and the White Woman). Fujiwara goes on to talk about his idea for reimagining the photograph, his visit to Beirut, and the casting and shooting processes. Fujiwara explains that the male actor had complained that continually being typecast in terrorist roles left him feeling like a '50s housewife, incapable of escaping his lot in life. So Fujiwara shot him in the woman's arms, in a reversal of the pose in the original photograph. The video is illustrated with moody, atmospheric images, like a glass of water spilling over a stack of color photographs and the couple air-kissing in slow motion. Fujiwara's voice is often deftly interrupted by sound effects: the word "insemination," for example, is the implied climax of a sentence but is censored with a beep; a celebratory explosion of brass instrumentals unexpectedly muscles its way into the spoken narrative.

Fujiwara has become a rising international presence through works that tease his own biography to a restless point of intrigue. In this video, his cinematic cliff-hanger arrives when, after admitting that he found the man in his mother's photograph "dangerous-looking," he asks himself if, as a child, he had also felt attracted to him. He then declines, or refuses, to answer. By invoking a concept as fraught as the King Kong complex, then framing it against a rather fabulous backdrop of world travel, casinos and showgirls, Fujiwara reveals the brutal parochialism of lust and self-obsession. If the artist is investigating broadly beneath the surfaces of desire, he is also creating a devilishly dazzling surface in which to view himself.

The Boston Globe

GALLERIES

Fujiwara tweaks societal stereotypes at Carpenter Center



LANCE BREWER

Simon Fujiwara's video installation "Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)."

By Cate McQuaid | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 25, 2014

Simon Fujiwara remembers a photo of his mother taken before he was born. She was a British dancer on a beach in Beirut, being carried out of the water in the arms of a hirsute Lebanese man. At least he could have been Lebanese; Fujiwara knows nothing about him, beyond what he looks like, and even that's a memory.

"Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)," a sly video installation in "Simon Fujiwara: Three Easy Pieces," at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, begins with the artist's memory of that lost picture, and nimbly reveals a web of belief systems and power structures. Fujiwara comically and sometimes disturbingly unpacks assumptions about gender, skin color, and sex.

In each of the works in this show — the first mounted by new Carpenter Center director James Voorhies — Fujiwara uses himself or his past as a prism through which to view epic societal tensions. Autobiographically, he has plenty to work with: His mother is British and his father is Japanese; he grew up in England, and lives and works in Berlin.

He sets out to re-create the snapshot. The video projection unspools surrounded by the trappings of a photo studio — lights, a mound of sand on the floor to suggest a beach. Fujiwara hires actors, Lisa and David, to play his mother and her companion. We never see the artist, although we hear his voice.

Fujiwara is clearly attracted to David, and the scene develops an electric charge. The camera lingers on David and Lisa as they meet, kiss, and begin to strip down, and the artist, who interviews himself throughout in an audio commentary, falls silent, as if riveted.

To flip the power dynamic, Fujiwara asks Lisa to carry David (with the help of bolsters suspended on trapezes; he's a big guy), and we learn about the "King Kong Komplex," a cultural fear of darker-skinned or hairy figures, appearing through art history from Pompeii to Japanese manga.

The image of Lisa holding David looks simply goofy; the stereotypes are too rigid for it to have any deeper meaning. Indeed, Fujiwara deems the whole photo shoot a failure — the actors look stiff. The installation, however, is a crafty success.

Across from the video projection, Fujiwara has posted photographic fractions of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, in which Mary holds Jesus' dead body in her arms. These little glimpses return us to maternal love. For a moment, that's comforting, until you remember the context of sex and power that surrounds it.

In another piece, "Rehearsal for a Reunion (with the father of pottery)," Fujiwara scripts a visit he had with his father after years apart, adding his own, symbolic ending. As he utilizes material from his own life for his art, he shows us how unstable and slippery autobiography is. Every memory, every encounter, is a pastiche of beliefs and hopes, different for each individual but steeped in cultural expectations.

We humans hungrily grab at truth, reality, and meaning. Exposing the dynamics of desire, power, and symbolism, Fujiwara leaves us hanging, uncertain of what the truth is. And maybe — if I may, here, compulsively apply meaning — it's only in the experience of *not* knowing that we grasp just how insubstantial reality is.

Where is the pain?

Art objectifies the body. So does medicine. It's not often that the two come together. "Performing Illness," a compelling show at Howard Art Project, features the work of three artists who manage chronic illness.

Suzi Grossman and Rosie Ranauro have fibromyalgia, and map their pain on their bodies. In drawings and photographs, Grossman uses watercolor, colored pencil, and thread to mark where it hurts.

"31 Pain Maps, 1/1/2014-1/31/2014" makes a calendar of the data, with red marks flowering and contracting over her back, chest, and face. In the photos, she stands in front of a patterned curtain that echoes her feminine shape and the inscriptions of her pain, as if the outside world reflects her inner one. For "Mark the X Where Your Face Hurts," she has stitched little Xs along her jaw and toward her nose. Patterns on her skin look like ritual markings, scarification or tattoos — marks of distinction. Yet in real life what they symbolize is hidden.

Ranauro's figure drawings and animations also show little red paths of pain, but her postures are more expressive, like that of a dancer, and in "hold it together," her usual single figure explodes into a tangle of limbs, like she's trying to cover herself. Her interactive video animation "Touch Me (Gently)" invites viewers to tap a huddled figure; when you do, she trembles — creating an unnerving dynamic. You might want to soothe her, but you always cause her pain.

Jodie Mim Goodnough was misdiagnosed with bipolar disorder and put on lithium for 14 years. She's also taken anti-depressants for chronic fatigue. In her video "36,835," she sits on a bed counting out the number of pills she has consumed over the years. The performance took more than nine hours. She gives us a taste of what "chronic" means.

Patients, like artists, have to express something inchoate if they hope to move forward. These works may not heal anything, but they communicate plenty.

SIMON FUJIWARA: Three Easy Pieces

Beach Reading: Simon Fujiwara Blurs Fact and Fiction With a Seaside Casino and a Mysterious Photograph

By M.H. Miller • 07/09/13



Installation view of *Studio Pietà (The King Kong Komplex)*. (Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery)

As a teenager in the 1960s, she performed in a dance troupe called The Blue Bell Girls. She trained in Paris and traveled to Monaco, where she met Grace Kelly and Shirley Bassey. She had a pet monkey that she liberated from a market in Bangkok. In *Tokyo*, her long legs and blond hair attracted catcalls. In Beirut, she danced at the Casino du Liban and met men there. As her son, the artist Simon Fujiwara, remembers it now, she was

photographed on the beach in the arms of one “charming and dangerous” Arabic gentleman. She looked “irresponsibly happy.”

“I honestly can’t remember exactly when I saw this photograph,” Mr. Fujiwara said in an interview at Andrea Rosen Gallery, where his mother is the subject of his first solo show in New York. “But I know I’d seen it.”

He started thinking about the image last year while on his first trip to Beirut. On the beach by the casino, he said, “I had this uncanny feeling that I’d seen this somewhere before.”

It reminded him of “an even sadder version of Vegas.” He left disappointed. Before he did, he collected a sample of the water—the locals all talked about how polluted it was—and some rocks from the beach. “There’s this sense that water should be pure and your notion of a family history should be pure,” he said. “There’s a kind of melancholy in the fact that it’s dirty.”

For his new work, called *Studio Pietà (The King Kong Komplex)*, Mr. Fujiwara has recreated the photograph with two actors who reverse the roles: the woman is holding the man, who is hoisted up on a saddle-like contraption, offering the suggestion of Mary cradling Christ (hence the title). A video reveals his casting process, in which he interviews the actors about their *previous* roles. The room is lined with pinboards displaying head shots (including those of the rejected actors who auditioned for the parts), scribbled notes and a study of the pollution levels of the water in Beirut. In the center of the room rests a jug of water and a pile of rocks.

Mr. Fujiwara, who is 30 and based in Berlin, has always been his own main subject. His parents, naturally, are his supporting cast. They met at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, where his father, who is now an architect, managed an all-Philippine rock band called Superfry. Mom hated Japan, so they tried London, which made dad depressed.

They saw an ad in a newspaper for a hotel and bar in Spain and bought it on a whim for about 4,000 pounds, unaware that the country was in Franco’s iron grip; being foreigners, they were able to create a kind of neutral zone for themselves. Mr. Fujiwara’s older brother was born there with a heart condition, which led them back to London, where Simon was born a few years later. (The parents sold their shares of the hotel and, since money couldn’t legally be brought out of Spain, lined their older child’s oxygen tank with the bills.)

Mr. Fujiwara was baffled by how his parents discussed living in a dictatorship as “happy-go-lucky fun fiction.” In 2009, he began his ongoing project *Welcome to the Hotel Munber*. In it, Mr. Fujiwara sits in an imagined reconstruction of his parents’ bar (he’d never seen it firsthand), outlining his attempts to write an erotic novel starring his father as a gay hustler in Spain. The project, which has been shown in Frankfurt, Basel and Toronto, began as a *series of dispatches that Mr. Fujiwara sent to gay magazines*. One was published in the Manhattan-based *Straight to Hell* (a.k.a. “The New York Review of

Cocksucking,” according to its website). The story appeared anonymously in the magazine in 2008, but in his correspondence with his prospective publishers, Mr. Fujiwara used his father’s name. (He never really owned up to this until 2012, when he included an image of the published article in his first artist book, though even there, the article appears without commentary.)

“He’s never really said anything to me about it,” Mr. Fujiwara said when asked about his father’s thoughts on the piece. “My mother went to see me perform it. I was kind of worried about what her reaction was going to be. There’s a photo in the installation of her holding my brother in front of the hotel. She came up to me after the performance and said, ‘How could you show that dreadful photo of me?’ That’s the only thing she said! She was just embarrassed of having this ’70s hairdo.”

Making art about making the art in question is something Mr. Fujiwara has been exploring for a while now. The video in his current exhibition shows him conducting a kind of Socratic dialogue with himself about the photograph of his mother in Beirut:

Would you describe the picture as erotic?

No.

Hm. So you did not find the man in the picture attractive?

[No response.]

Could you please read the statement on page 84 of this book?

Okay. ‘The King Kong Complex. The King Kong Complex is a phrase that describes a psychological state in which a person or culture at large lives in fear of the notion of a darker-skinned or hairy male individual ...

Themes recur in his work, as do entire narratives, like *The Mirror Stage*, an early performance that has reappeared in several other installations. The piece is a short play about a boy who is based on Mr. Fujiwara at age 11. Mr. Fujiwara grew up in Carbis Bay, a remote fishing village in Cornwall where he would wait restlessly at the post office for his copy of i-D magazine to arrive. (He was perpetually bored—he says that even now, to get anything done, he has to work himself into a similar state of boredom.) In the play, the boy, coached by Mr. Fujiwara, who appears as himself, has a nearly sexual encounter with Patrick Heron’s *Horizontal Stripe Painting* at the Tate Museum in St. Ives—where *The Mirror Stage* appeared as part of a retrospective last year—and it “changes his life forever,” according to the script. “[I]t was because of this painting,” Mr. Fujiwara writes, “that I realised two significant things. Firstly, that I wanted to become an artist; and secondly, that I was gay.”

The play opens with Mr. Fujiwara and the child actor staging a theater exercise, repeating the phrase “I am Simon Fujiwara” “until it becomes meaningless,” according to the stage

directions. Mr. Fujiwara then asks the child actor about his life and acting experience, after which he recalls the discovery of Heron's painting. Onstage is a re-creation of the painting. Mr. Fujiwara speaks to the audience directly: "You may be starting to understand that the play deals a lot with fraud and authenticity." He takes the thought even further: "I give my real name in the play," the child actor playing himself playing Simon Fujiwara says in the script, "so am I playing me or you or ... Who am I?"

"A theatre play is the lie that tells the truth," Mr. Fujiwara responds. He continues:

The only way you learn to live is by copying others and acting, like learning how to talk, or ride a bike or kiss a girl. It's all acting. Even this now is acting. Even the audience now are acting; they are acting in the way audiences should. And when you realise that there is nothing original or genuine or true, you become free to be whoever you want to be, and this is the greatest lesson you can ever learn. And this, I realise, is what I learned that day when I saw the painting.

The implication is not simply that life itself is a kind of premeditated performance, but that if the line between performance and reality doesn't exist—if a lie says as much about the truth as real evidence does—then the very question of authenticity is beside the point. In other words, whether or not Mr. Fujiwara's mother was really on a beach in Beirut in the arms of a man who wasn't Mr. Fujiwara's father does not matter; by staging it, even in a highly fallacious way, the event is as real as the jug holding the polluted Beirut water.

"We all know this experience of sitting in a restaurant and overhearing your neighbors," Mr. Fujiwara said at the gallery. "We hear these conversations like, 'Oh, I'm meeting my ex this weekend and we're going to his house in the Hamptons.' And the other person is like, 'Oh my God, that's going to be so hard for you.' And the other person says, 'Well, I'm in a really good place right now; I've thought it all through. I've dealt with it all, and I'm ready to go and to meet him again and go to this party.' I think it's such a complex and beautiful moment we're in, where people can discuss feelings and propose future scenarios in a way that is so decided and scripted that there's not even a desire to have an emotional risk. Everything can be resolved in advance. You can be a walking ghost, in a way, a puppet version of yourself."

With this in mind, even the obligatory legal disclaimer prefacing the catalog for Mr. Fujiwara's retrospective at the Tate St. Ives, called *Since 1982*, referencing the year of his birth, is a carefully staged performance: "The stories, names, characters and incidents portrayed in this publication are fictional. No identification with actual persons, places, buildings and products is intended or should be inferred."

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ArtReview

Simon Fujiwara: Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)

Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, 28 June – 9 August

By Orit Gat



Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex), 2013 (installation view). Photo: Lance Brewer. © the artist. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

Simon Fujiwara remembers an old photograph of his mother in the arms of her Lebanese boyfriend on the beach in Beirut during the 1960s. The thirty-one-year-old artist has made a name for himself by developing performative pieces based on his personal and family history. Earlier work, for example, interposed the story of a hotel his parents owned with the process of writing an erotic novel (*Welcome to the Hotel Munber*, 2008–10), as well as the artist's first sexual awakening and a piece of art on view at a museum near his childhood home (*The Mirror Stage*, 2009–12); so the focus on his mother's relationship with 'another man' (before meeting his father) is a natural theme for Fujiwara. What seems like another in a series of similar works on

comparable subjects develops, however, to reveal not only the allure of Fujiwara's practice but also a tension that is both political and personal.

Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex) is a strand of stories that stem from one object – that photograph of his mother – which the artist recreated in his Berlin studio by hiring actors as stand-ins for his mother and her then-boyfriend. The layers of narrative here are multiple, and they are reflected upon in a 20-minute video playing on a white backdrop that was used as part of the set for the pietà image. The actor, an Arab man living in Berlin, recounts how he is always typecast in the role of a terrorist. Fujiwara admits that he chose the guy because he found him attractive, which leads the artist to explain the titular King Kong complex: that is, the association of the other – in this case the large, hairy, dark Middle Eastern man – with sexual virility, violence and passion. But it's not Fujiwara's fascination with the Arab man that is interesting here, it's his simple question in the voiceover, when he wonders what would have happened had his mother married her Lebanese boyfriend: "Would I have been born in Beirut? Would we have survived?" *Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)* is an expansion of a commission for the Sharjah Biennial in the UAE, where projects tend to emphasise their Arab or Middle Eastern dimension. The main subject reflected upon in the piece is not a complex relationship with racism as much as it is a strong tension with the locale: its history, its politics and its personal connection to the artist, both enticing and frightening. The result is a much more nuanced and intimate reflection on the Middle East than any pinpointing of this or that leftist stance.

Stepping into a darkened side room beyond the main exhibition space, one would expect to see the pietà photograph, perfectly executed. Instead there are three large prints: the actress who plays Fujiwara's mother alone in her bathing suit; another in which, in a subversion of conventional gender roles, she holds the man, albeit by using an elaborate swinglike construction that allows her to support his weight; and a third in which the actor sits in his bathing suit in that same swing, smiling, looking vindicated.

This review was first published in the October 2013 issue.

Interview

SIMON FUJIWARA'S DISTANT MEMORY



Personal history, pieced together through foggy memories and tangible clues, is at the core of British-born artist Simon Fujiwara's work. As he translates his personal narrative into art, he lets go of any intimate meaning, and the specific becomes universal. "I've been able to steer people's perception of where I come from by working with material perceived as biographical," explains Fujiwara. "That's been an important foundation of my practice." Following his successful solo show last year at the Tate St. Ives in Britain, Fujiwara, 31, has solo shows scheduled at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris and the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. His first solo show in New York opened last week at Andrea Rosen Gallery.

The focus of the exhibition, titled "Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)," is a hazy recollection of a photo showing Fujiwara's bikini-clad mother, who was an English cabaret dancer in Beirut in the late 1960s, in the arms of a Lebanese man—not the artist's father—on the beach. At the center is a video documenting Fujiwara's bid to recreate the photograph, narrated by an interview with himself. "You can say a lot if you only have yourself to answer to," he points out.

The relationship to the models he casts to play his mother (must be: a blonde dancer) and the man (must be: Middle Eastern) are foreseeably charged; he chooses the female model for her directness, but is disappointed when he finds out she's played an archetypal woman in a German commercial. He lets her pick out the male model, thinking himself indifferent until she makes her choice.

The screen is situated among props from the film—there's a pile of sand, a bulletin board with string connecting photos and items, and table that looks like it was used for an interrogation; together, it's reminiscent of a clichéd detective scene.

Ultimately, Fujiwara yields his vision of the photo to his memory's limits and the models' realities: the woman is not quite his mother, and the man's past struggle with typecasting upstages the dominance he's meant to project. Fujiwara gives us a *Pietà* instead as the woman holds the

man, supported in a harness.

"So, it does not look anything like the original photograph," Fujiwara states wryly to himself at the beginning of the film.

"No, not really," he answers nonchalantly.

"STUDIO PIETÀ (KING KONG KOMPLEX)" WILL BE ON VIEW AT ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY THROUGH AUGUST 9.

FIND THIS ARTICLE: <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/simon-fujiwara-studio-pieta-king-kong-komplex-andrea-rosen-gallery/>

BLOUINARTINFO

Simon Fujiwara's Strange Confessions at Andrea Rosen



An installation view of "Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)" at Andrea Rosen Gallery
(Photo by Lance Brewer; © Simon Fujiwara; Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York)

Explaining the autobiographical themes that run through his work, Simon Fujiwara once offered an anecdote from his art-school days in Germany. Because he hailed from an architecture background, his peers tended to dismiss his sculptures as the work of an architect. Turning to his own story, then, was a means to an end, not the end itself: “What we do as artists is almost always read against our biographies, and... the only way I could take control of this would be to use my biography as the material for my works.”

The British-Japanese artist, now based in Berlin, has since mined his personal history to good effect in sly multimedia installations: In 2010 he won Frieze Art Fair’s Cartier Prize, and last year, at 30, he scored a career survey at Tate St Ives. His current project at Andrea Rosen, “Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex),” marks his first solo presentation in New York. In the rear gallery, a series of three large photos centers on the image of a blonde model cradling a shirtless man in her arms, Pietà-style. The main gallery, meanwhile, features a documentary film in which Fujiwara narrates, in the form of a Q&A interview with himself, his motives for staging this image and the process of realizing it. A series of bulletin boards adorned with actor head shots, family photos, and other documents shown in this film surround the projection.

Here is what we learn, from Fujiwara’s voice-over: His intent was to re-create a photo of his own mother, taken on a beach in Lebanon during her days as a traveling showgirl, in the arms of a man other than his father. The image, he suggests, had a personal erotic kick for him; he recalls finding the features of the man in the photo exotic. In the process of telling his story of restaging the image, Fujiwara takes off on a variety of asides: explicating what he calls the King Kong Complex (that dark-skinned men have served as symbols for repressed European sexuality); investigating water pollution on the beach where the original photo was taken (he remembers the figures in the photo as wet—but could they even have been swimming?); and detailing the challenges of casting “Middle Eastern-looking men” in Berlin.

In the age of over-sharing, Fujiwara’s obsession with confession might seem a bit cloying. That’s why, in a kind of reversal of figure and ground, his detours from autobiography are probably the real thing of interest here. The final photo deliberately flips the one Fujiwara set out to re-create, with the woman holding the man. In one of the more poignant turns of his film’s narrative, Fujiwara recounts that the actor playing his mystery man, who once portrayed a terrorist in Stephen Spielberg’s *Munich*, 2005, told him during the shoot how he resented being continually typecast because of his

ethnicity. The final inversion is framed as a coy response to this, and the whole installation then can be read as less about the artist's personal story and more about how that story, bound up with that of others, becomes restructured and reshuffled. And in that sense, Fujiwara does indeed still think like an architect, in that architecture is the art that pits us most directly up against the challenge of living together.

Simon Fujiwara, "Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)," runs at Andrea Rosen Galley from June 28 to August 9, 2013.

This article appeared in the October 2013 issue of Modern Painters.

January 17, 2012 4:36 pm

Simon Fujiwara at St Ives

By Jackie Wullschlager

Jackie Wullschlager meets an artist whose work straddles the borderland between autobiography and self-invention

“I wouldn’t be an artist if it wasn’t for Tracey Emin don’t run that as a headline,” says Simon Fujiwara in one breath. “As a teenager, I was dealing with a lot of identity struggle – especially about sexuality – in this tiny town St Ives, and suddenly a headline appears on our kitchen table about an artist – and she’s not wearing a tie or calico shirt, she’s dancing around making things most people think are totally worthless – this filthy bed. I was absolutely riveted: I thought this thing I am sleeping in now could be art.”

Slight, dark-haired, with piercing eyes and mobile features, 29-year-old Fujiwara is the son of an English mother and Japanese father who, each unwilling to live in the other’s country, chose St Ives because picture postcards suggested “it didn’t look typically British”. In the end, his father refused to live there, and Fujiwara had a varied education: at a nursery school organised around his mother’s Aga, at Harrow and Cambridge, interspersed with a year playing cello – “I was a kind of Asian Nigel Kennedy” – at a Tokyo punk bar where “I dyed my hair a different colour every week.”

He must be the most unlikely prodigal son ever to return to St Ives. Tate’s Cornwall offshoot focuses on local avant-gardes – Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson – but Fujiwara remembers “the most exciting thing in St Ives was Woolworths”, and that his chief encounter with Hepworth was “a fire officer who came to school to tell us not to smoke because Barbara Hepworth died in a fire started by a cigarette”.

His show at Tate St Ives opens today. We met last week in London when he stopped for breakfast at the National Gallery café en route to Cornwall from his Berlin home.

“I moved to Berlin because there was no urban advertising. I’m very fickle, as soon as I see an image or interesting person I latch on to them,” he explains. “Berlin offers nothing, it doesn’t say, hey, today you could be this, it just says, deal with it. The Germans are so bad at advertising, it’s not in their psyche – coquetry, trickery, wit, self-deprecation, manipulation, they can’t do it.”

But Fujiwara can: these are precisely the techniques that play fact against fiction, autobiography against self-invention, in his tightly coiled performances and narrative installations which are garnering increasing international interest, and suggest he is in the vanguard of a new 21st-century genre.

“Desk Job”, an arrangement of props relating futile attempts by a modernist writer to set down his erotic memories, featured in the 2009 Venice Biennale’s Nordic-Danish “The Collector”, masterminded by Elmgreen and Dragset (Ingar Dragset is Fujiwara’s boyfriend). “Frozen” was the hit of Frieze Art Fair 2010: Fujiwara built fake remains of a decadent, art- and sex-crazed city underneath the fair’s tents, dazzlingly ridiculing the excess at Regent’s Park.

Fujiwara studied architecture, and games of faux-reconstruction, mental and physical, dominate his new show. In “Selective Memory”, “horrible, garish, enormous” lighthouses may or may not evoke childhood recollections, “innocence, a sense of safety”. “The Mirror Stage” recalls his teenage bedroom and adolescent erotic/aesthetic response to Patrick Heron’s “Horizontal Stripe Painting”, an iconic St Ives piece. “Creation is erotic,” Fujiwara says. “With sex there’s a glimpse of excitement, the offer of another world, another interior – it’s the great unresolvable, because to come down to real physical basics, it’s only resolvable by sticking something into a hole.” “Welcome to the Hotel Munber” recreates a kitsch Spanish bar, characterised by phallic objects – sausages, horns and homosexual porn: the setting for an attempt to write a novel about a repressed homosexual, supposedly Fujiwara’s father. The title refers to a hotel that was indeed run by Fujiwara’s parents in Franco’s Spain.

Shades of Emin’s Margate “Hotel International”? Yes, except a wall text reads “Fujiwara repeatedly claims that his conception and early years living in the Hotel Munber were strong influences on his work. However, accurate historical research has revealed that this could not have been the case, as Fujiwara was born over three years after his parents relocated to the UK. To date the novel remains incomplete.” Like all the exhibition’s texts, this was written by Fujiwara and embodies his oeuvre’s circularity, unreliability, mockery – of art, history, museums, his own narcissism.

“My ambition for a work is its believability,” he claims. “My work has been a lot about academia,

freeing myself from it while making things look very researched, historical, but the root is to ask what the hell is the point, is any of it true or not, is it all fabricated? It comes from deep boredom with the status quo – including my own life.”

This is said enthusiastically: another self-parody, I presume. “I have no more personas than anyone else – I just formalise them!” Fujiwara counters, then surveys me intently. “You will have five personas today – you’re being lovely to me, then you’ll be an arsehole in the office, then you’ll sweet-talk the gasman . . . I don’t want to present my persona as exotic, it’s not a super-conscious choice like a politician, but especially with today’s – I’m only going to say these two words once – social media, my generation has been able to create such a theatrical world for themselves with no materials, just a collection of texts and images.”

Is this shaping today’s young artists? “My generation is different, its speed, the turnover of everything, that’s why there’s an increasing sense of fiction in our work, artists feel freer to move into narrative,” he says. “And this idea that everyone’s an artist – print your world, make the home cinema version of your baby being born, choose the soundtrack: all this technology sold to make us feel free, creative, individual. I’m completely absorbed by it, but the proliferation and de-elitism of art – it may be the end of art; unattainability was always the sex and attraction of it.”

He adds that he shies away from dealing with Facebook and social sites directly “because people accept stories when they are more removed – my work looks antiquated, my so-called research is done on Wikipedia, whoever can come and find all the references wrong. But we’re finally living out Naked Lunch [William Burrough’s novel about a junkie assuming different aliases]. This is Naked Breakfast!”

Simon Fujiwara, Tate St Ives, January 18-May 7

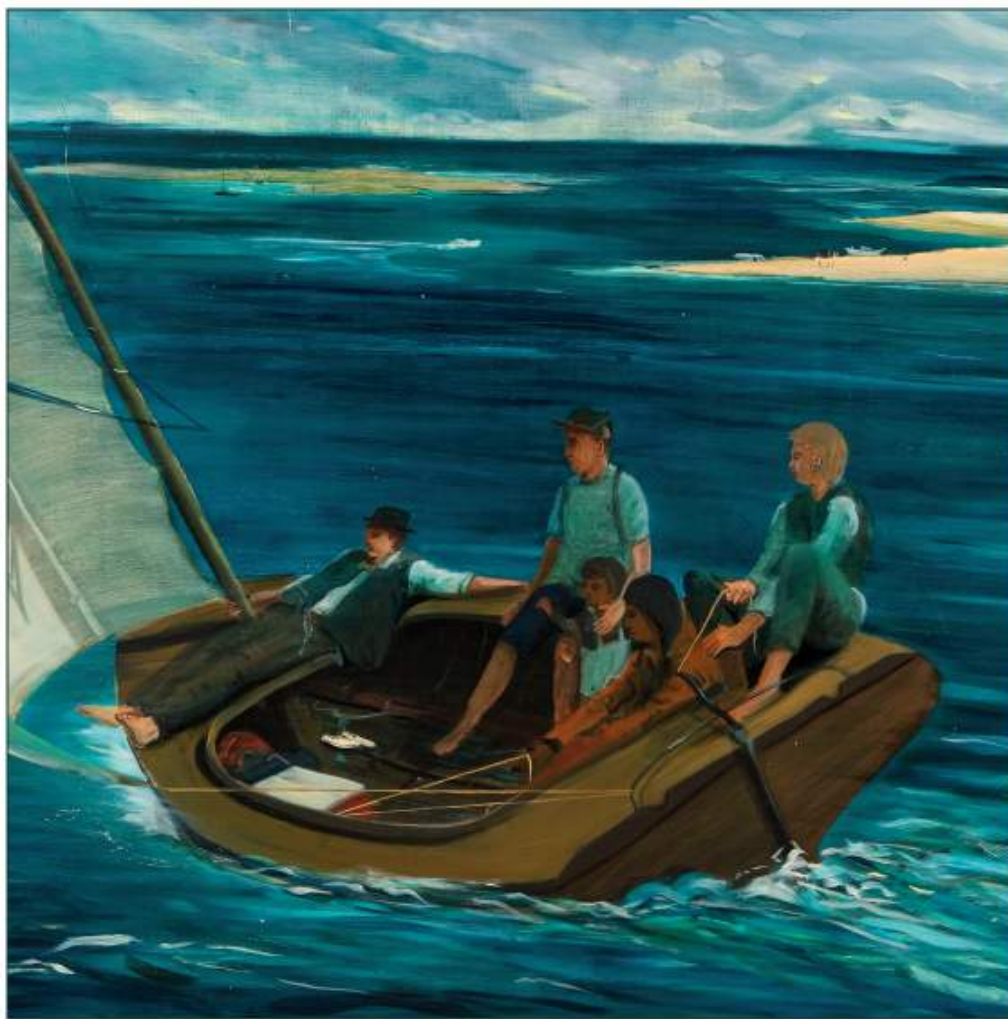
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JULES DE BALINCOURT

Simon Fujiwara

Absorbed Theatricality

by Martin Clark



“Welcome to the Hotel Munber,” (2010) Courtesy Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt.

Martin Clark: *Your work is very autobiographical. Can you talk about why you use your personal history so prominently in your work?*

Simon Fujiwara: It all came out of very pragmatic reasons in the beginning. I came to art school having studied architecture, and quickly realized how much an artist's personal life and history is read into his work — even as a student. It seemed I would never shake off the associations of my architectural past and be accepted as an artist so I decided to do something about it and take my history into my own hands. My first performance work, *The Museum of Incest* (2007-ongoing), dealt specifically with my architectural past, but at the same time was a wildly personal father-son portrait. In the process I started to reflect on the historic role of an artist; how, through the ages, the artist has been associated with the telling of some kind of “inner truth.” Even though it's an idea that had been kicking around for a few centuries now, it still persists in the way we read artworks today. Who made it? Where did the artist come from? When did they make it? Looking at art is conditioned by biographical information sometimes more, sometimes less personal. I didn't realize how deeply this Freudian associative legacy ran until I made the performance *Welcome to the Hotel Munber* (2010), where I recount a story about my parents' owning a hotel under the Franco dictatorship in Spain, as erotic fiction — which is ripe territory for Freudian interpretation. Nevertheless, what is peculiar with this performance is that I start out by saying, “I have never been to the hotel my parent's owned, I was born after they had left Spain, so all I can tell you is a fiction based on the stories they told me.” Yet, by the end of the performance, most people seemed to have concluded that I had made the work because of the deep childhood connection I had to the hotel “I grew up in,” essentially inventing a whole new narrative in an attempt to lend significance to the work. It was alarming and exciting to realize that you can stand in front of an audience and say, “I am telling you a lie” and they can come out thinking and feeling the exact opposite. Journalists even began to write that I was born in Spain which, whilst being completely false, appealed to the part of me that is in all of us. The part that wonders what would it be like to live another life...

MC: *You've mentioned to me your interest in Surrealism in relation to your work. Your work is perhaps not obviously surrealist, though it does seem to draw on these strong psychosexual undercurrents, and there is a marked eroticism and fetishism that is very distinctly relatable to Surrealism. Can you say a bit more about this?*

SF: The Surrealists have been an important influence on my work, in particular their focus on analyzing and manipulating the everyday experience. I believe they were extremely pragmatic artists in that sense. In the context of a rigid and slowly crumbling European society, many Surrealists made what was essentially political or reactionary work. Yet, it is universal enough to still be enjoyed today because of its embrace of certain human problems that have not changed. One of these is oppression/repression, which Buñuel deals with in practically every film, be it oppression by an institution (church, family) or from within — a self-imposed repression. Another idea is conflict, which is, as Bataille would say, “life itself.” Simple pairings of ideas that cause conflicts are often a starting point for my scripts. In *The Museum of Incest* or *Welcome to the Hotel Munber* I chose to pair two major themes: family and eroticism, and use the guise

of a formal structure — an imaginary museum, an unfinished novel — to allow a drama to play out around that conflict. Starting with a conflict, with an un-resolvable conundrum, leaves you free to not look for solutions or for morals in the stories. You know from the start there is no happy ending. With Buñuel, I was always attracted to the atmosphere in his films, the way the sets were used, the lighting and the prosthetics, the not-always-convincing acting. For me the artifice of it all makes the absurdity more plausible and brings the subtext to the forefront, which is something that I like to do.



Phallusiess (2010). Installation view at Manifesta 8, Murcia (ES) (2010). Courtesy Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt.

MC: *Theatricality has often been seen as a dirty word in art, albeit one that has been routinely reclaimed. Your work is unashamedly theatrical, both in its performative quality as well as the prop-like, stage-set type installations and objects. But there is also a very strong emotional charge, one that at times becomes theatrical in a very real sense. Are you OK with this highly emotional tenor to the work? How far would or could you go with this aspect?*

SF: The theatricality in my work started, I would say, with Desk Job (2009), which I made for the Scandinavian Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale and was the first work that I was commissioned to make where I could not be personally present to perform. I realized that the sculpture itself would need to tell the story, to perform for me, as it were, drawing people into the story I was trying to tell. I didn't realize at the time, but my concerns were essentially the same as those of a theater designer or a film production designer, who similarly thinks of interiors, furniture and objects in this economical kind of way — economical in the sense that everything that is shown or selected is there to

drive and reinforce a story. I worked as a set designer and theater director for various operas and plays alongside my studies as an architect, so it came very naturally to me. The Hotel Munber installation expanded on this, where there is a performance that tells one story, but the full reconstruction of my parents' bar as a set tells another aspect of that story. I knew that it would be simply impossible that visitors would understand the whole meandering narrative by just being in the installation, but I wanted to create an atmosphere that would make people curious enough to ask questions and investigate it for themselves. On first glance the bar looks like any kitsch cozy Spanish tapas place you could find on the Costa Brava, yet when you looked more closely at the details, a more sinister, repressed homoerotic subtext pervaded everything. It was interesting to see how people reacted to this installation, because once they found one erotic detail, they began to look for this in everything to the point where I had people telling me that they found wine baskets deeply erotic! They were making their own sexual associations with the castanets, the jamóns, the dripping candles.

MC: *I want to ask you about “sincerity” in your work. A lot of the work uses humor, puns, jokes, one-liners, as well as this highly charged emotional engagement. It’s often quite “stagey” on one level and yet there seems to be a deep and very serious seam running through the work, one that feels very authentic despite how you dress it up.*

SF: I realized quite early on that the ideas I was interested in working with — sexuality, identity, history — were subjects that had been dealt with quite extensively in the '90s and before by many artists, and yet I never felt completely satisfied with the visual language that was used, which often presented “social problems” in an accordingly serious documentary-style language: black-and-white photos, grainy performance shots, long wall texts. Every sphere of public media is becoming more and more focused on entertainment today — if you watch CNN for five minutes you can see that the news is being dressed up to look and feel like a drama that prioritizes the viewer rather than the subject. In my experience, even though we are all much more aware of the problems around the world — corruption, oppression, injustice, wealth gaps, etc. — we are given no space to react to it because information is presented as a product. I wanted to deal with this present reality in some way. So while on the one hand I openly flaunt the same tricks as other fields of entertainment — emotional, personal stories, characterization, music and lighting — on the other hand the audience works much harder because there is this underlying sincerity to my work that becomes surprising and sometimes uncomfortable in my performances.

MC: *History and archaeology is a recurring subject, as well as a theme, running throughout the works. Is this simply a metaphor for your own processes of personal excavation of your family history, biography, etc. or is there another aspect to this? Are you drawn to these disciplines or subjects in and of themselves?*

SF: I have always felt affection for archaeology because I can't help finding the entire process essentially comical — philosophically comical. On the one hand the archaeologist is dealing with dry bone fragments and ugly boring pottery and on the other hand he is trying to piece together the entire story of human civilization. I like the scale

discrepancy of such grand ideas embedded in tiny, banal objects. I was also moved by the personal stories of archaeologists such as Louis Leakey that I was researching when developing *The Museum of Incest* project. Leakey's egoistic drive to succeed as a world famous archaeologist was so strong that he managed to convince the media that the body he had found in East Africa — *Homo Habilis* — was the "First Man." He spun this narrative about the mammal being the first to use stone tools, thus being the first civilized being, the first human. Now there were other similar bodies discovered that were older than *Homo Habilis*, but because of Leakey's rhetorical skill he managed to convince the world with his story, which turned him into a superstar. I'm simplifying here, but the point is that these shared mega-histories often serve a personal agenda as much as a scientific quest. Archaeology is interpretation, as is history.

MC: *You've produced a number of ambitious new works over the past 18 months for Manifesta 8 in Murcia, Bienal de São Paulo, the Frieze Art Fair, Art | Basel, Proyectos Monclova in Mexico City, Giò Marconi in Milan, etc. The next 12 months look equally busy with new works for Performa 11 in New York, and the big exhibition we are working on together at Tate St Ives. How much are all of these works "chapters" or episodes in a much larger "über-project"? What's the relationship between them, and how are they developing?*

SF: While I was developing each work, it was never a conscious idea to weave the works together into a single grand narrative, and I'm not yet sure if this is entirely plausible. However, the one thing that does connect almost all of the works in some way is that my supposed biography is at the core of the works. Whilst each work and performance creates its own world, I'm working now on combining them, editing them, to create a kind of single narrative that is even more rambling, complex and contradictory; it's this that I aim to show at Tate St Ives in the form of a string of installations.

MC: *So do you see the show as a kind of conclusion, a bringing together, a moment to move on?*

SF: The funny thing about doing the Tate St Ives show is that it's by far the biggest show in terms of scale I've yet prepared, and it will cover a lot of ground — stories ranging from African archaeological hunts, Amazonian expeditions, Franco sex tales from the '70s, etc., and yet it will be presented in my home town, part of the audience will be people I went to school with and who I have lost touch with since I was 16. As you know, St Ives is a pretty small place. People like to gossip a lot. But not so much happens. My mum runs a local kindergarten and the more of my work she sees, the more worried she's getting about what the children's parents will think! But to answer your question, all of the stories still change every time I perform them. As I do everything from memory, the scripts are long abandoned, and as my memory changes, the works change. I don't film my performances, so if I ever knock my head and forget everything, the works are gone too. So in a way I'd like the show to be a snapshot in time of all the works, together, at that moment, before they all disappear into the world again to all their separate owners and live their own lives.

29 th December, 2010
Plaza Santo Domingo
México City

Dir América,

Ahi right whit nius from sus of da border. This year in México is ei history moment: Da bicentennial of tha Independence and 100 year since da Revolución. Bat what, Ai ask, is ther tu celebréit? Every wear ai luk ai si porberti and injustis, ai si da concuest: in da arquitectur, on da steet, in da catolic feigt and da language dat yu imposet apon dem, Spanich. Thelni, du yu rili biliv dat da concuest is histori? dir América, did da Revolución rili hapen?

Meny people stil cannot iven rid an raigt, so in every taun square dex ar men ju sit am raigt leters in excheings for mony, wan of this men is taiping dis leter for mi. ai am spiking in inglish an ji dos not anderstan mi. wt good ji fill if hi anderstut?

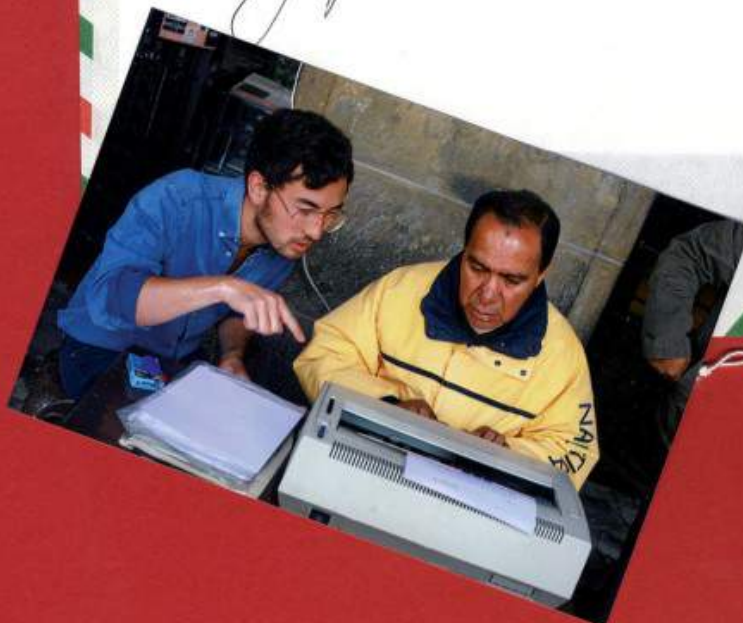
Dir América hir der is violens and wor, der ar drog lords and oligarca and yu ar not free from blein. Da yu remember jau match yu tuc from México? California, Arizona, Niu México etcétera. And yu ar stil jir, on every comer ei starucks, on every oder ei Walmart. Downte quet mi rong, ai lof yor cofee -so crini, sou smut. Pat ai hav ei beter aidia: wai not also import education? imagen da bisnes yu cut du wit da millions living ing ignorancel da Mexicans don nid yor squini soy lates, dey nit yur help. Fink ov ol da chip leivor and drogs dey have given yu.

Ai wanted tu put intu words da injustis ai have sin, bat words ard sou fiutael. México nids acción, wi ol nid acción. Last naigh ai drint of ei new Revolución: el Sexual Revolución. Crauds of Mexicans, wimen and men of ol clases and ethnicitis gaderd on dis square and stated ei mas orgy, at last ai sou eigh yunaited México, it woud beatiful, erotic. ai wanted tu partipei (asd ai am attracted tu latino men) bat wen tei rialaisd ai wos yuropia, dei tuc mi squey and kilid mi. Iven im yur drims yu cant olweys quet quot yu wond.

Tu not worry about mi, dir América, da winter is mail, aim living laikt ei king. Tu morrow ai will bi in Yurop, soon it will bi spring.

Yurs olweys,
Simón Fujiwara

Taip hay José Luis.



“Dir América,” (2011) Courtesy Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt.

Martin Clark is Artistic Director at Tate St Ives.

Simon Fujiwara was born in 1982 in London. He lives and works in Berlin.

Selected solo shows: 2012: Tate St. Ives (UK); CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco (US). 2011: Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Giò Marconi, Milan; Projectos Monclova, Mexico City. 2010: Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf. 2009: Schindler House / MAK Center for Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt/Main. 2008: Architecture Foundation, London; Limoncello, London. 2007: Gallery Stellwerk, Kassel (DE).

Selected group shows: 2011: Performa 11, New York; Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof; Neuer Berliner Kunstverein n.b.k.; Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; "Eleven Rooms," Manchester International Festival; "Based in Berlin," KW Institute for Contemporary Art; Singapore Biennale. 2010: Bienal São Paulo; Manifesta 8, Murcia (ES). 2009: "Zeigen," Temporäre Kunsthalle, Berlin; "The Collectors," Nordic Pavilion, Venice Biennale. 2008: "Home is the Place You Left," Museum of Modern Art, Trondheim (NO).

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Simon Fujiwara

by Alex Gartenfeld

View of Simon Fujiwara's *Frozen*, 2010, installation and performance; at the Frieze Art Fair, London. Courtesy Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt, and Gio Marconi, Milan.



“CECI TUERA CELA” (this will kill that), declares Claude Frolo in Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, gesturing to a book and then to the cathedral, predicting that the more mobile, less labor-intensive product of print would replace architecture as the record of human thought. In recent decades, of course, there has been a revolution at least as radical as that brought about by Gutenberg, with digital technologies outstripping even the most mobile of analog means. As 28-year-old artist Simon Fujiwara shows us, however, the physical monument has proven surprisingly resilient. Bringing together installation, performance, video and text, Fujiwara uses monuments as conceptual anchors for his practice, but in ways that reflect a contemporary culture enamored of its own dematerialization.

Fujiwara centered his current installation at Manifesta 8 in Murcia, Spain, on a single monument whose existence is disputed. A decade ago, four British museum-display artists, while on site during the excavation for an art center in the Arabian Desert, witnessed the discovery of a 25-by-10-foot pre-Islamic pillar. It might have been a phallic object of worship, or it might have been a broken column. Either way, it disappeared from the warehouse next to the

archeologists' tearoom soon after being found, provoking a string of conspiracy theories and charges of censorship. Or so the story goes, according to one of the men presented as the witnesses in Fujiwara's installation, punningly titled *Phallusies*, and its documentary-style video; another denies finding anything at all; yet another disputes the first speaker's critical capacities, while making an obliquely homophobic remark: "I think that says a lot about [him] actually. He's clearly unstable. . . . I wouldn't want to be locked in a room with him at all."

The video is shown in a room, in the city's former post and telegraph office, outfitted as a gritty workshop that appears to have been overtaken by gay bandits. Ceramic mugs with dildos for handles are scattered throughout; at a storage locker, a pair of men's jeans have been dropped onto a pair of boots, a discarded Kleenex nearby. Among the 60-some photographs in the installation is a highly erotic series showing the group of men reconstructing the large phallus in polystyrene and styling it so that it appears 2,000 years old. As occurs in nearly all of Fujiwara's installations, practitioners of a putatively objective science are worked into a narrative that repurposes fact—or supposed fact—as fiction. It's from within apparently naturalist constructs that the artist exercises his absurd sense of fiction, which recalls that of Kurt Vonnegut and Donald Barthelme. Also like Walid Raad's explorations of Lebanese history, which proceed from dry documentation and slip into magic realism, Fujiwara's stories make use of pedagogical methods to achieve imaginative ends.

IN FUJIWARA'S WORK, the dubiousness of the art object is best conveyed via performance. *Frozen* (2010), a site-specific installation at London's Frieze Art Fair that marked the artist's receiving of the Frieze Foundation's Cartier Award, made use of that paragon of unreliable narration, the tour guide. The guide here shuttled small groups of people around six "excavation sites," unearthings of what was referred to as The Frozen City, which had supposedly once occupied the same site as the fair in Regent's Park. Some of these sites seemed to erupt into the fair, and were roped off; others were underground and visible through Plexiglas. Signs accompanying the displays explained that this city flourished during an otherwise undocumented, decadent period between 80 and 200 a.d., after the Roman retreat from Britain and before Christian moral and political subjugation (another instance of Fujiwara's playing with history, since these years in fact fall squarely within Roman occupation). The recovered sites were a patron's home, a brothel, a marketplace, a dead artist's crypt and a restaurant (located adjacent to the fair's cafeteria). It is assuredly not lost on the artist, who was trained at Cambridge University as an architect, that this allegorical, simulated city recalls the life-size re-creations of a natural history museum. Fujiwara eschews fully immersive environments. His installations keep the viewer at a distance and are positioned within—or, in

works like *Frozen*, appear to be the literal foundation of—a larger structure such as a fair or a biennial, the artist aligning those venues with themes of entertainment, tourism and the exotic.

As with many aspects of Fujiwara's work, the strategy of constructing a place within a place—of creating within a particular environment a more private meeting ground for people operating in the bourgeois milieu of art—is rooted in his own biography. The artist is half-Japanese and half-British, and a sense of cultural dislocation, combined with a related sensitivity to conditions of economic inclusion and exclusion, pervades his work. From the artist's multipart "Welcome to the Hotel Munber" project (2008-), we learn that his parents ran a hotel in Catalonia in the early '70s, under Franco's repressive regime. At Art Basel last summer, Fujiwara presented an installation re-creating the hotel bar: a masculine room featuring dartboards, lacquered cherry-wood surfaces, barrels used as tables and cured meats hanging from the ceiling. Yet as with the workshop in *Phallusies*, the latent homosexual themes of this macho environment were brought to the surface, the walls hung with images of naked men, their private areas concealed by oriental fans.

At no point in Fujiwara's work are we expected to know definitively what is truth or fiction. Like archeology, autobiography is for Fujiwara a discipline ripe for creative manipulation. Within the *Welcome to the Hotel Munber* installation, the artist enacted a performance detailing his attempts to write a fictional, homoerotic autobiography as his father, Kan Fujiwara. In the story, excerpts from which the artist recited in the performance, the narrator discusses the frustrated eroticism of the bar, which was populated by military personnel, one of whom forces him to sniff a rifle—an act which, in the end, serves as foreplay. The narrator (Fujiwara as his father) later explains that this episode can be considered a metaphor for Franco's regime at large—with its sporadic violence and sexual authoritarianism—and goes on to relay other, more publicized anecdotes from the country's sexual history, including for example, Franco's having only one testicle, and Dalí's masturbatory practices.

Fujiwara then, speaking as himself in the performance, expresses his hesitancy about "sexualizing" the "true life biography" of his parents. "What is it about using your family sexually that I felt so uncomfortable with?" he asks. "How do sons relate to fathers sexually?" Indeed, his homoeroticization of his father evokes that most taboo of taboos, incest, and speaks to a conflation of the Oedipus Complex and the Electra Complex. Thinking like a psychoanalyst, Fujiwara traces various of his childhood traumas back to an early point in sexual development, concentrating on the moment at which "a penis comes out of a vagina"—an interpretation that differs markedly from the traditional psychoanalytic binary of presence and absence, of male "castration anxiety" and female "penis envy." Through such variations of Freudian doctrine, Fujiwara again adopts rigorous techniques for the purpose of foregrounding

absurdity.

IN *FROZEN*, Fujiwara casts other people as the agents of his authorial voice, although in the dead artist's crypt he makes an appearance as a skeleton, fabricated to the size of his body and laid under Plexiglas with a tablet inscribed with self-portraits in various styles, 500 Roman coins and a large knife stabbed into his skull. Posing as equally possible the artist's murder and a Dorian Gray-like suicide, Fujiwara brings together various narratives in the form of artifacts. This sense that history is written through acts of both remembering and forgetting (and that what is forgotten is often that which is not heteronormative) is shared by Berlin-based artist Henrik Olesen. In his 2009 catalogue *Some Faggy Gestures*, Olesen presents, in the format of a history textbook, underrecognized examples of homoeroticism in visual art. Both artists insist that cultural narratives are incomplete for being heteronormative, and both are keenly aware that history is often uncritically consumed—accepted as it is remembered.

Fujiwara emphasizes the role that subjective interpretation plays in histories both personal (“Welcome to the Hotel Munber”) and public (*Phallusies*). The discursive content of his performances, recited from memory, varies from iteration to iteration and is accompanied by flimsy props, underscoring the questionable nature of the narrative and of the lecture format itself. In so constructing these works, Fujiwara favors a contemporary and essentially political discussion about the various ways in which performance engages with viewers, whether “emancipating” them from prevailing social controls, as Jacques Rancière has discussed,¹ or directly implicating them, as Marina Abramović does in *The Artist Is Present* (2010), an endurance test—conceived for her recent retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art—in which people were invited to sit in a chair facing her for as long as they liked, or could stand it.

Fujiwara puts viewers in the position of being neither entirely free, nor entirely restricted. *Frozen* featured an environment that was equal parts authoritarian (the tour guide being responsible for what the visitors learned and did not learn) and choose-your-own-adventure (the visitors being allowed, of course, to stray from the guide, to look at the sites on their own and ultimately form their own conclusions). This complicated situating of viewership was established at the outset, with an introductory wall text apologizing for the temporary inconvenience of the fair to those wishing to examine the excavation sites—a setup that confused the relationships of the work to its surroundings and of the viewer to both.

Fujiwara's installations and performances have thus far benefited from the international exposure of art fairs (prior to the installations at Frieze and Art

Basel, his work was relatively unknown)—the network of convention-center stopovers which enables art professionals and collectors to travel around the world, thriving on the easy exchange of objects. Fujiwara plays with the impermanence and materialism of the very art fairs at which he presents his work. His quiet, long-form mode of storytelling and the positive reception it has received refute the logic that art fairs reflect our cultural attention deficit, and are simply sites for pretentious and expensive shopping sprees. His *Frozen City* at Frieze served as a reminder that the art-fair network will eventually be lost to history, and as a morality tale about the ultimate futility of acquiring artworks. While Fujiwara's works critique their consumerist context, they do so without being didactic, recalling Jack Bankowsky's identification of "Art Fair Art . . . predicated on the realization that art, particularly art that presumes to stand in some critical—or better, simply revealing—relationship to the institutions to which it is bound, cannot exist at a supposedly purifying distance from the point-of-purchase universe."²

IF HUMANS EXCAVATE the general area of the Frieze fair 2,000 years from now, they will likely find remnants of Regent's Park. They probably won't unearth evidence of the fair; they certainly won't find Fujiwara's project. So how to reconcile Fujiwara's strategies of the accumulation and recontextualization of information with his awareness of the impermanence of such information? And what, moreover, to make of his romance with antiquated materials: period details and artifacts, including those of relatively recent origin, like PowerPoint and the typewriter?

In *Desk Job*, presented at the 2009 Venice Biennale, Fujiwara installed the implements for a novelist writing his life as erotic adventure (suggesting a role similar to the one the artist would later play in the *Welcome to the Hotel Munber* performance). He equipped a desk with a typewriter, a typed synopsis of the story, a collection of notes, and an elegant assortment of architectural photographs. The synopsis describes the author's failed attempts to write the novel, and his eventually going mad. Housed within Elmgreen and Dragset's installation in Sverre Fehn's Nordic pavilion, the desk is a delicate, scaled-down replica of the building's modern, glass-and-concrete form—a highly stylized fetish. Here the monument becomes a foundation—literally the surface—on which another creative person can construct a story. This is what Fujiwara's practice focuses on: the fluidity of meaning and the fact that even the most prized monuments of any era are objects for subsequent reinterpretation, repurposing and embellishment. That is, if they are remembered at all.

Simon

Interview by
Stuart Comer

Fujiwara

Photography by
Carla Vereia



THE BRITISH ARTIST WHO HONED HIS RHETORIC SKILLS IN ARCHITECTURE SCHOOL

Within just half a decade, British artist Simon Fujiwara has infiltrated the art world with brash lies, shocking taboos, and surreal eroticism. Born to a Japanese father and a British mother, Fujiwara is a cosmopolitan polymath whose witty, self-reflexive performances, installations, and sculptures betray the intricacies of growing up gay and precocious in a remote coastal town in Cornwall. Both Fujiwara and his work hum with sassy intelligence. He is a commanding storyteller whose anecdotes are delivered with such disarming persuasion that their ambush on truth and history becomes only slowly apparent to unsuspecting audiences. Drawing on many tropes of 20th-century art, from performance and sculpture to Surrealism and institutional critique, his work effortlessly encompasses architecture, theater, and archaeology, displaying a truly global outlook. PIN-UP met up with Fujiwara — who was trained as an architect — at his winter home in Acapulco to speak about fact, fiction, and porcelain door handles.

Stuart Comer Simon, when we met around 2007, you were working as part of the architecture collective Pankof Bank, and you were doing a project for the Architecture Foundation in London, which was more of a performance piece than a classic architecture exhibition.

Simon Fujiwara Yes, we formed Pankof Bank in 2006 with my best friend and my boyfriend at the time, who was teaching at Cambridge, where I studied architecture. We wanted to work with architecture but also with other ideas that we'd tried to explore during our time at school but couldn't fully encompass. The collective was an experiment and we would often be using performance to activate spaces. But the project failed for me because I realized I couldn't believe in art's making as direct a difference to urban space.

SC Failure isn't really acceptable if you're making a building, but does it potentially work as an art form?

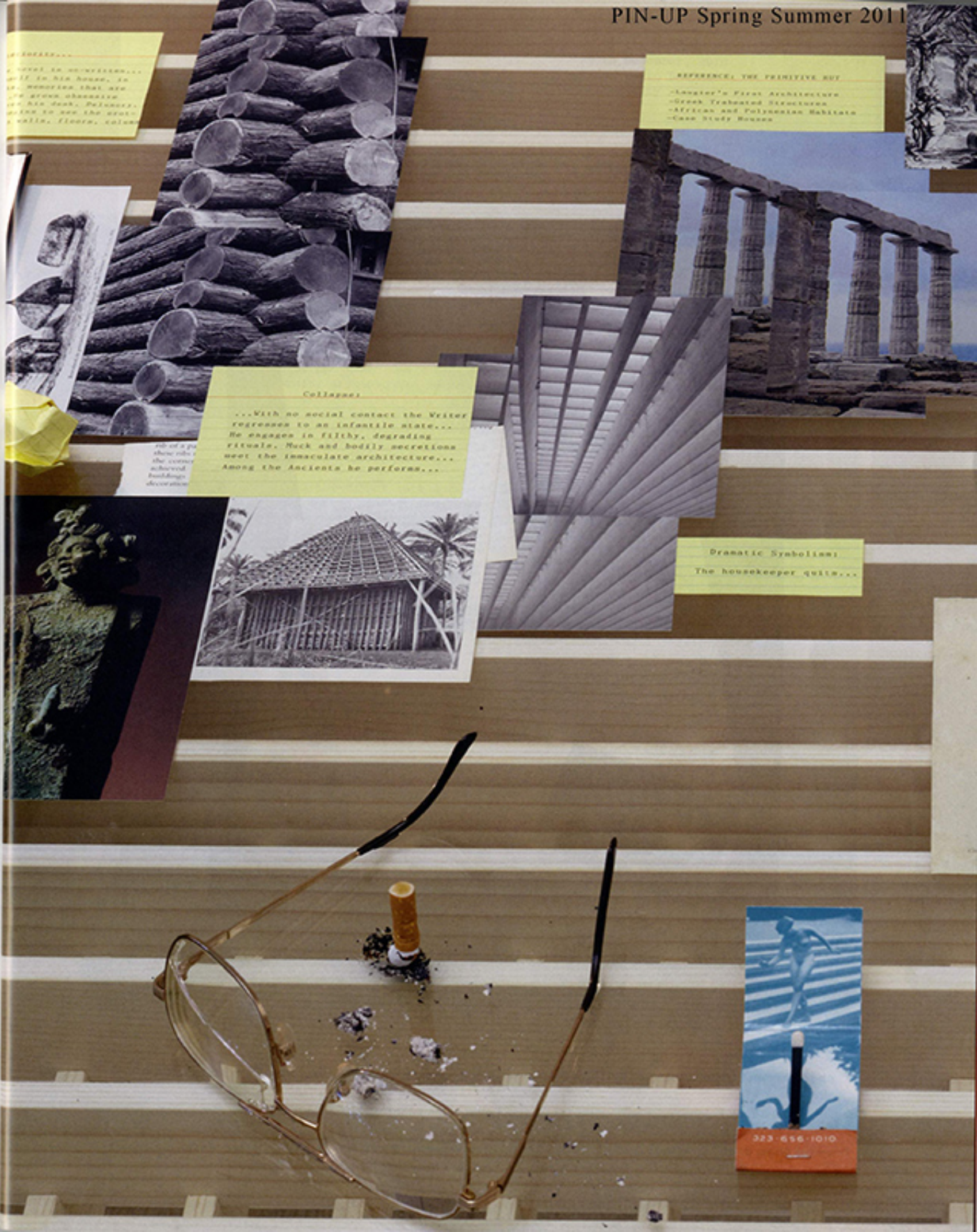
SF The problem was that I felt we weren't actually articulating the failure of our project. Perhaps naively we were trying to effect social change, to work with our frustrations about the overly theoretical projects we produced at architecture school, where we were talking about social change all the time, with the assumption that the architect could be at the front of everything — ecology and social change and betterment through design. When we actually worked in public space I missed the theoretical world, the lack of constraints, the direct engagement with ideas and the ability to play through rhetoric without taking a position. But if you talk to the others they may have a different view...

SC So how, in the space of three or four years, did you move from this collective activity to generating solo performances and installations that are deeply personal and deal with issues of sexuality and your family, and in particular your father?

SF When I was part of the collective I think I was always the one more interested in driving our practice into more artistic terrain, as opposed to an architectural discourse. I felt a loss of personal voice and I realized I was much more interested in metaphor and in narrative. So when I started to make my own work, I was driven by these personal concerns. I realized that I could use my own history and identity as the model or vessel to discuss architectural issues. I think that was the biggest lesson I learned: to stop interactive work and just sit and tell people my own single position and let them react.

SC When you do your live performances, you're always directly engaged with your audience, and even your installations are often activated by live performances that have a direct interface with the audience. What kind of model of theater are you drawing on?

SF I think that's actually something you learn in architecture school, where for three years you turn up every two weeks with some pieces of broken cardboard for a model and some half-finished drawings. You stand in front of a jury, and try to tell them why this building is so important, why it's going to integrate Asians, Blacks and every race in the world, why it's disabled-friendly, why it's going to be the building of the future because it's green... Essentially the objects you take



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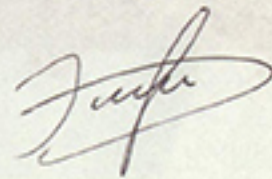
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Taip bay José Luis.


Above: Simon Fujiwara, Dier Erup (2010); mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt

Opposite page: Simon Fujiwara, Dir América (2011); mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt

Previous page: Simon Fujiwara, Desk Job (2009); 53rd Venice Biennale, Nordic Pavillon 2009; mixed media, dimensions variable. © Anders Suneberg, courtesy Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt





The artist on the terrace of his winter home in Acapulco, Mexico, together with his Xoloitzcuintle Chespirito, a traditional Mexican breed of hairless dogs that has been native to the region for more than 3,000 years.

with you are props, and it's your power of persuasion — your rhetoric — that's going to make the jury believe in your building or not. Then, of course, after half an hour you take everything away and the next candidate comes up. This act of performing every two weeks with props and grand ideas makes you realize more and more that the props matter less, eventually, than your ability to persuade, or to explain, or to guide people through these hypothetical, fictional buildings.

SC No matter how inclusive it might be of multiple aspects of society, the architectural approach you're talking about still sounds very Modernist, very "master builder." Was that specific to Cambridge? Or do you think that Modernism hasn't really been expunged from architectural discourse in general?

SF Modernism is something I never consciously consider. There may be resonances between the way I use small objects and artifacts to create grander narratives and the Modernist notion that every element of the building is integral to the idea. But I've been drawn more to what I learned about the Baroque in my trips to Rome when I was an architecture student: the Baroque theatricality, the idea that the deepest of human beliefs and constructs — God, society, power, the church, spatial experience — can be united with a nice paint effect or a well-lit sculpture of a woman in a semi-orgasmic state. I think I always found the artifice of the Baroque a more genuine reflection of the human condition. Modernism, as it was taught to me, had a closer, essential relationship to materiality, which I am less interested in at this point in time.

SC Speaking of semi-orgasmic states, there is an idea of sexuality that underlies almost everything you've done in the last two years. At what point did you decide to make things more sexually explicit, to place this erotic imaginary at the heart of your work?

SF Well, I think it's partly because my sexuality's not reproductive. The generation of gay artists before me had the job of breaking out of the hetero-normative world to find a footing in the art world where their voice could be taken seriously. And it left me with many questions, such as, if we're constantly, as gays, stating that we're not reproductive, that we're not normative, etc., then what are we left with? Are we creating an identity through negation? Are we creating a cocooned culture of our own which is just as exclusive as a heterosexual culture? This is perhaps why I tried with early projects to re-imagine the family into the homosexual world. On one level I think it has been successful, given that it's very rare that people discuss my production as a "gay artist's" work.

SC What about sexuality in relation to architecture?

SF Eroticism and sexuality were just never discussed in architecture school. It was something I discovered really far too late with the first project that I made after I left architecture school, the *Museum of Incest* (2008-09) — the first museum dedicated to the history of incest. Sexuality is such an enigma that it causes conflicts and fascination. And I thought, well, this is kind of like a metaphor for architecture, which is constantly changing, because the idea for a building will never be solved with the material for a building. Where the material world meets the imaginary world — like sexuality — it's a conflict that's there forever. So I wanted to deal with incest as an impossible conundrum, as a historical taboo, and see what that taboo would look like as a building. I threw in a personal narrative about the fact that my father is an architect and has many unrealized projects. I used his projects to form this fictive museum, which finally ended up as a tour where I would sit and show slides and models — exactly the way that I would every week at architecture school — and describe my way through the building.

SC If you have an incestuous relationship with your father that would make him gay by implication. And you make that quite explicit in your performance piece *Welcome to the Hotel Munber* [first created in 2006], in which you imagine your father as a homosexual under Franco's regime. It's left unclear whether that's a fictional device in the performance or not. How did you arrive at this notion of speaking through your parents' erotic lives?

SF I work a lot with the idea that history is not dead, that many things have been left out of the story that can be reinvigorated. So many people throughout history have lived their lives without mentioning things that we can now mention openly. For example, my parents who lived in Franco-era Spain never even imagined that homosexual oppression was happening, because they were not personally implicated in it. They were living in a fascist dictatorship and were having the time of their lives! They couldn't speak the language and so weren't oppressed by what was happening because they couldn't understand it. And they weren't gay. They were outsiders.

Listening to their stories, I always thought, "What if I was living in that time, what would I be feeling?" My thoughts progressed to imagining my father as a gay man trapped in a fascist dictatorship, and the story developed from there. I drew on texts I was reading around that time, Georges Bataille for example, but the initial impulse was to ask a question of my parents, and therefore of the entire generation above me: "Mum, Dad, were you really looking around you?"

SC Your father is a collector, so you grew up in a museum of sorts. How might that have shaped your direction as an artist?

SF Well, initially it shaped my direction as an architect, because my father lived in Japan for most of my childhood, so I had partly an imaginary relationship with him. He had done a whole range of things, from window-dressing to selling saucepans as a door-to-door salesman, before training in a two-year night school as an architect. And now he does sort of pastiche buildings in Japan, which range from a Navajo adobe baby shop in downtown Tokyo to an English country house. My early relationship with my father was through architecture and design. For instance, when he would come to England, which was once a year, it was always on a trip to collect as many antiques as possible to fill these strange, bizarre buildings that he was designing. Beyond that, it was usually a phone call: "How are you, son?" "Fine." "Oh, by the way, can you get me 150 porcelain door handles?" So at the age of 14 I was going to antique markets and buying door handles for him! The moment I arrived at architecture school I was so loaded with this personal relationship to architecture that everything down to the door handles had a personal significance. After a year, one of my tutors said, "You know Simon, every time you do your presentations, it's like you're wearing your heart on your sleeve. I can't help but think it's a device to stop us criticizing you, because it's much harder to critique your building when you're practically in tears at the end of your presentation."

SC After finishing your architecture studies at Cambridge, what compelled you to seek a visual-art education at the Städelschule in Frankfurt?

SF When I left Cambridge I didn't know any artists, and I felt very isolated. I couldn't really have conversations with my architecture-graduate friends about art. So for me, going to art school was about meeting people my age who were doing what I was doing. I remember the first exhibition I did when I arrived. I completely emptied the studio out and turned the studio sink into a fountain that was constantly spewing milk. It went rancid during the three days of the exhibition and filled the whole school with the smell of sick. Nobody could eat in the canteen! I received a very positive reaction, and people were really excited by the piece. But I also remember art students saying, "Well, he's not really an artist, he's an architect." What I had thought would be a freer context for art was bound by the same prejudices as in architecture school. I realized that I would never be free of the history I have as an architect, so I decided to make it the subject of my work.

SC Do you think you'll ever go back to architectural practice? Or is that just not remotely of interest to you?

SF I think one reason I left architecture was that I felt that I could never, ever really accommodate all of the pragmatism, the multiple needs for multiple people, multiple audiences. I mean, even within the art world you're constantly up against pragmatic issues of budget, of time, everything. And to communicate an idea in built architecture is a much more problematic issue than in art. Just starting with the question of whether architecture should communicate anything. But one of the great things I learned in architecture school is to look at things anthropologically, to think of humans as having a set of social issues and economic issues when they come to your building, which will inform how they interact with it. And when I go from that to the art world where there are many different characters and many myths about them, I see things more structurally. For instance the whole construction of the "artist" is itself something I could never really believe in, especially in a climate where people didn't believe I was an artist myself.

SC Is that why, in your work and in your performances, you incorporate role play and constantly assume, and shift between, different identities?

SF In the art world, if you state you're one thing, people very quickly begin to pick up on that energy and push you in that direction. It's so evident in the way that every press release, everything that's written about an artist lists their date of birth, where they're born, or where they grew up, and their work is judged on that. I like to play with the notion that I could have been born



Simon Fujiwara, *Welcome to the Hotel Munber* (2010); mixed media installation and performance; postcard, Hotel Munber. Courtesy Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt



Simon Fujiwara, *Frozen* (2010); Cartier Award, Frieze Art Fair, October 2010; mixed media, Dimensions variable. © David Grandorge, courtesy Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt, and Giò Marconi, Milan

anywhere, perhaps because of the way I look, because it's not immediately possible to place where I'm from. It's interesting that even in this global age it's still worth mentioning where I grew up, as if to say, "But how did this emerge from St. Ives, Cornwall?"

SC But even in St. Ives there was a circle of avant-garde, highly cosmopolitan artists. In fact, in *The Mirror Stage* [first created in 2009] your set includes a replica of a painting by Patrick Heron, who was part of a community of prominent artists living in Cornwall that included Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, and Ben Nicholson.

SF Yes, St. Ives has a funny history. Even though it's so remote, there was a very strong connection to New York, Paris, and other parts of the world through abstract art. Eventually this died out, after the 1960s and 70s it kind of washed away. By the time I arrived it was just yellow iceberg lettuce and really bad fish and chips. I was aged 11 when they decided to build a Tate in St. Ives to commemorate the local artistic history. There were huge local protests about it, because everybody wanted a leisure center instead. I also remember the first time I went to the Tate, and people were looking at the paintings in disgust because public money had been spent on this massive museum. Visitors commented, "My kid could have done this!" I was a kid, and I thought, "Well, I couldn't have done that, and I'm completely moved by it!" Within five years the fish and chips were suddenly piled on plates vertically, and there was *caffè latte* on every corner. The first restaurant that opened after the Tate arrived was called *Al Fresco*, and we all wondered, "Al who?" It completely revolutionized the town and gentrified it. I saw firsthand as a child what a museum could do, and how this myth of local history, once it's formalized into a building, can dramatically change a place. Now, of course, people love it.

SC So much of your work is like a museum within itself. The piece you produced for the Frieze Art Fair last October, *Frozen City*, dealt with an archaeological dig, the uncovering of an invisible museum of sorts. When did your interest in archaeology arise?

SF Archaeology has always been a fascination of mine, because it's like architecture in reverse. An architect tries to understand the social context and the time in which he or she lives and then distills it all down into bricks and mortar, creating a built artifact to reflect this context. The archaeologist, by contrast, finds a shoe, a brick, or a column and has to extrapolate what the entire civilization would have been like. A lot of archaeologists' careers are built on how well they can generate a headline story around the piece of rock they find. Again, it comes down to storytelling. An important starting point for the *Frozen City* project during Frieze was to consider how much one can spin from a fragment of mosaic or a mural, and how much one really knows about what an archaeologist is saying. I was clear from the beginning that it was a fiction — I even put a portrait of myself as a Roman artist in one of the digs. I wanted it to be clear that the work was one man's perverse, masturbatory vision of Roman civilization, which had already been the masturbatory vision of one or two emperors!

SC What kind of legacy do you think your work might leave 200 years from now? How is it going to age?

SF It's a very difficult question and one I never think about.

SC I'm especially thinking about the performances, since you won't always be around to perform them. Would you let them be performed by someone else?

SF If I'm dead I won't have a choice!

SC You could say it's not allowed.

SF I would never do that. My work is about reinterpreting history. I keep telling other people's histories, so I can hardly stop anyone from doing the same to me. In terms of what I think I might leave behind, I don't know. I know certainly that I can't always be there to perform, and I've tried to develop a kind of language for my installations to perform themselves, using empty sets to implicate the viewers as the performers.

SC Have you ever received a commission to make a building?

SF I have not.

SC Would you accept, if you did?

SF I'd have to consult my therapist first.

— Stuart Comer is Tate Curator of Film at Tate Modern in London, where he is co-programming the oil tanks, opening in summer 2012. He loves the smell of Morocco.

MOUSSE

SEXUAL ARCHITECTURE

by Francesca Boenzi



Simon Fujiwara, *Desk Job, (Detail of desktop), 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009*
Photo: Anders Suneberg.

Simon Fujiwara has analysed the conflict between desire and suppression operated by political systems. In his performance-lectures, he questions the possibility of manipulating History and affecting collective memory through the individual tales and anecdotes he tells. The premise for his work is a passion for constructing stories, his love of writing and writers, for the cacophonous dialogues and contradictions in the movies of Cassavetes, Allen, Bergman and in music: Baroque counterpoint as a model of multiple themes – repetitions, conflicts, harmony and discord.

Francesca Boenzi: *I like the importance you confer to anecdotes. The interweaving between autobiography and artistic production begins to reveal the way you generate your work...*

Simon Fujiwara: My mother is very secretive about her age. As her 40th birthday approached, she made me promise to keep it a secret. I was 8 or 9. When the day

came I was bursting to tell someone, I remember going to the park but there was no one to tell except the man in the rain mac who used to hang around watching the kids play. I told him. By dinnertime this guy had turned up on our doorstep with a bunch of flowers for my mum. She was furious about it. Kids are always told not to talk to strangers, but I can't help thinking that if I didn't talk so much as a child, I'd probably be out of a job. Nowadays, talking to strangers is what I do for a living.

FB: You initially studied architecture, then you went to Frankfurt to attend the Staedelschule and "become" an artist. What do you remember of this passage and of your final investiture as an artist?

SF: At one Rundgang [student open studios, n.d.r.] I overheard some students commenting on my work saying, bizarrely, that it was the work of an architect, not a "real" artist. I was confused, mostly because the piece involved spurting milk and stacks of canned sausages, but it was this incident that made me realize that what we do as artists is almost always read against our biographies, and that the only way I could take control of this would be to use my biography as the material for my work. I thought, "Well, they've decided that I'm an architect, I'd better design them a building", so I began working on *The Museum of Incest* – a fictional architectural complex, pieced together almost entirely from structures that my father, also an architect, had built in Japan. I presented the work first as a lecture which begins as a Powerpoint "guided tour" through the building and ends up as a wildly personal portrait of a father-son relationship. Many have said it before: "If you don't write your own history, someone else will – to suit them..." Incidentally, after I made my first performance of *The Incest Museum* I was finally "accepted" by my peers as an artist.

FB: Architecture remains a crucial element in your works. You developed a very personal idea of it that you talk about as "autobiographical architecture". How much does the fact that your father was an architect himself, influence your work?

SF: My father lived on the other side of the world. He was terrible on the telephone, and an even worse letter writer. As he was an architect, "seeing Dad" generally involved going to scrap yards to buy door handles or reclaimed tiles when he came to visit us in England. This and similar activities is how we learned to relate to each other, and so architecture became the keystone to my paternal relationship. Accordingly, architecture presents itself as something deeply personal in my work, for example, as a psycho-sexual portrait in *The Incest Museum*, or in the case of my erotic novel, *Welcome to the Hotel Munber*, as architectural fetishism, where the protagonist becomes erotically obsessed with a hotel building.



Simon Fujiwara, *Desk Job (Installation view)*, 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009
courtesy: Photo: Anders Suneberg.

FB: *What is the Hotel Munber? Why did you start writing erotic stories set in that place?*

SF: The Hotel Munber was a touristy hotel in Catalunya that my parents owned and ran in the 70's during the last years of the Franco dictatorship. My parents told endless tales of violence and oppression, set against a backdrop of sangria and flamenco. I always imagined it like a novel, the characters, the setting – it was exotic and vibrant to me. When I started to seriously think about what kind of book I could write, I placed myself in that time, I tried to imagine how a gay, mixed-race young man would feel about life in a homogenously white dictatorship. I looked for authors who were writing erotica from Franco Catalunya and I found almost nothing for the obvious reason that it was censored to oblivion. It was then I knew that the novel I wanted to write was an explicit erotic story set in the Hotel Munber, a story that could never have been published at that time. Well, then came the hard part – as soon as I started to write I got frustrated and confused because on the one hand I had this unique political story that I felt an urgency and responsibility to tell and on the other hand I would have to use and “abuse” my parents’ personal life story to do so. It’s this conflict that drove the project underground for some years, where I would only print sections of the erotic novel secretly in gay porn magazines, using my father’s name as a pseudonym.

FB: *In Welcome to the Hotel Munber, sexuality and desire are set in contrast to the repressive authoritarian system. Conflict and oppression seem to be important themes in your practice...*

SF: is explored in the novel through the main character – my father – who is so oppressed by Franco’s intolerance of gays that he is forced to find other solutions to satisfy himself, sexually. This solution comes in the form of “substitution”, a process where he begins to use objects that more or less represent the men he is lusting after, in erotic rituals. Gradually the architecture of the entire hotel building becomes erotically charged, it becomes clear that he has created his very own mini-dictatorship. This is intended to mirror Franco’s obscene control over the nation, making the victim now the perpetrator, the repressed the oppressor. History repeats itself...

As for sexuality, well, I tend to confront absurdly large themes in my work as a kind of challenge to find a personal voice among the things that are important to most of us, be it family, history, our environment or, of course, sex. I often use sex as a pretext to explore other topics, a way in to less populist fields such as archaeology or architecture, subjects that may not be as instantly juicy for the viewer. Many of my projects are explicitly sexual or homoerotic which is a privilege of living in a relatively liberal social context, more than many other places in the world and times in history. Liberty can be snatched away at any moment – I’ve seen it happen. I was living in California when they retracted gay marriage rights last year.

①... About a novelist who is writing a novel about a novelist who is writing a novel...

DRAFT PLOT:

THE EROTIC WRITER: A NOVEL, ^① ~~AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.~~

- A novelist is living in an exquisitely crafted modernist house. His work has earned him universal praise, commercial success and the respect of his peers, but he is bored and dissatisfied. For his final novel - the most daring and candid to date - he decides to bring together his two great passions: writing and sex; an erotic novel based on his life. It will not be necessary to protect identities, not a single name, date or fact will be altered, as the accounts will seem so outlandish that no one will believe it to be anything but fiction.

More Character development:

- The project begins with great optimism. Never has research been such a fluid task. Over the course of several decades the writer has compiled erotic experiences to fill many volumes - across five continents, in seven tongues, in bars, bathhouses and bookstores. From his desk he recalls lovers and affairs from his twenties, thirties, forties... Frequently he is arrested with urges to touch himself, he masturbates. When spent, he no longer has the appetite to work. He reads the paper, he tidies his desk.

work/sex dichotomy

long explicit scenes... monotony, fatigue

Months pass and not a single word is down. The Writer grows reclusive. In the dead of night he paces around the sparse moonlit house, furnishing the rooms with scenes from his exotic travels; orgies, supple flesh, sprawling torsos... Bathing in memories, he invents elaborate new methods to pleasure himself. On every stroke of his cock, the past is reinvented, faces, names and races mingle and blur. Drowning in the vastness of his sexual history, he devises schemes to catalogue his encounters. These are the headings: Homes & Hotels / Shelters & Shacks / YMCA / Industrial / Al Fresco / Wheels & Automobiles / Civic & Institutions... At the typewriter he is paralysed, flaccid, limp. He has become, in the words of his agent: irrelevant.

Archetypal / generic

Character embodies both sexual history

use brash, raw language: come, ejaculate

- The ~~places and~~ architectures of his sexual past play an increasingly prominent role in his imagined novel. He immerses himself in the study of erotic history; in marble-crafted phalluses, in damp Roman baths, Pompeii... Deeper into the annals of time he probes, to the base of the human sex. Cooped up in the house for weeks on end, he starts to hallucinate. In the walls, floors, columns, beams of the incarcerating structure, he sees a new erotic potential.

Bestial / Bisexual

→ New narrator?

- The slender ceiling beams become the rough timber roof of a primitive hut; the strong svelte columns take on the power of oaken arms; the floors - trodden, raw earth. In wild and primitive ecstasy, he engages in terrible, degrading rituals, regressions. The house vibrates with tantric energy, cool concrete, textures, protrusions, patinas. The immaculate structure is repeatedly smothered in filth of all kinds, the housekeeper leaves...

become a historic novel, architectural treatise

dream sequence fiction with fiction...

- Enshrined in his soiled palace, red-eyed and utterly spent, The Writer, hunched at his desk, begins to write. For the first time in many months, the tapping of keys echoes in the hall. Gazing around, he sees in the encrusted scene: form, clarity, narrative - the structure of a perfect fiction. Through months of torment, through madness and degradation, a novel has written itself. Word for word, precisely as it occurred, he begins to write the story, The Erotic Writer: A Novel An Autobiography. Pouring through the ceiling beams, a golden morning is breaking. At his desk, enveloped in the new light, he goes on: A novelist is living in an exquisitely crafted modernist house...

imaginary character, represents mental cleanliness vs. dirty habits of protagonist

* Scatological? eschatological?

FB: *I think that The Incest Museum presents another kind of suppression, one that comes with our mute acceptance of the imposed theories of our human origins. How did this project come about?*

SF: It began with an expedition to the “Cradle of Mankind”, the archaeological site in Africa where “First Man” was supposedly found. This was the “missing link” that sent the church crazy because it was used as proof that first man was not human, but an ape and worse still an African.

The idea that this race-less ape could cause all these political problems three and a half million years later was comical to me – being categorically “race-less” myself – so I decided I wanted to go to the site and see it for myself. When I eventually got there I found dust, rocks, and not much more and it struck me as something incredible that these supposedly scientific origin theories are supported on such little material, such little proof. So I decided to try my hand at constructing my own “authoritative” version of the origins of man, told through incest practices and claiming, absurdly, that without incest there would be no human race. This was the premise of The Incest Museum, and I used historical facts and scientific research to give credence to my proposal. Finally I decided to place the museum right there on the graves of first man.

FB: *“Real life begin when we are alone, face to face with our unknown self”, I’m quoting Henry Miller’s The World of Sex. It makes me think about the writer protagonist of your installation at the Nordic Pavillion at the Venice Biennale. What happens to him, alone in his “exquisitely crafted modernistic house”, struggling to start his erotic novel?*

SF: This work was essentially about two things: fiction as a mirror of real life, and the conflict of work and sex – the age-old internal battle of savage man vs. the cultured man. The character in this work is caught in this conflict, slowly growing mad as he tries to write an autobiographical erotic novel. The narrative becomes circular and convoluted when the writer resolves to write the novel about trying to write the erotic novel, describing his descent into madness as life and fiction blur. The writing desk (that the unfinished novel is presented on) is a miniature replica of the Nordic Pavilion building. I wanted the repetition that occurs within the text to have a visible, sculptural presence in the work.

FB: *The Incest Museum is performed as an academic lecture, Welcome to the Hotel Munber is close to a reading. The educational or academic formats you chose for your performances and publications present an individual’s ability to manipulate history, the passage of a personal story into the collective sphere. How does the fact that you are an artist not a writer nor an architect nor a Professor affect the way you negotiate these fields?*

SF: Who says I’m not a writer or an architect or anything? Who has the authority to decide these things? Identities are constructed by means of props, apparatuses; the Academic: his journals, libraries, references; the Writer: his manuscripts, his desk, alcoholism; the Architect his drawings, models, heroic

portraits... Honesty, I am a fraud, I'm an outsider in all these fields, but this gives me the liberty to work subjectively. Truth and accuracy are not my concerns. If an academic would work with fiction in this way, it would be dishonest, wrong even, whereas you'd be a fool to trust an artist in the first place. In school I wanted to be an actor, but I was too self-conscious, I was totally unconvincing. Nowadays my acting is better but this is because the only role I have to play is myself.



Simon Fujiwara, *Desk Job (Installation view)*, 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009
Photo: Anders Suneberg.

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