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18 Maio 2022

Robyn Brentano & Andrew Horn, Carlos Bunga,
Spencer Finch, General Idea, Kapwani Kiwanga,
Eric N. Mack, Joseph del Pesco and Johnny Pootoogook
Curated by Rui Mateus Amaral
18.05.22 – 25.06.22
Opening 6pm –9pm, 18.05.22

Spencer Finch (1962, Connecticut, USA)
Sky Over Coney Island (November 26, 2004, 12:47 pm. Southwest View Over the Cyclone), 2004
Helium balloons and string
Overall dimensions variable; each balloon, diameter 27.94 cm

On November 26, 2004, Spencer Finch drove a car full of blue balloons to the southwestern tip of Brooklyn, once regarded as the “playground of the world,” to capture the sky over Coney Island. The balloons came in an array of blues, with up to four different shades layered within a single balloon and were inflated to various sizes. Holding each up to the sky above the century-old wooden Cyclone roller coaster, Finch eventually found the perfect match: “an ultramarine violet balloon inside a cobalt blue balloon inflated to 11 inches.” While the balloons may be gathered in scales that range “from a bouquet to floating cloud” each time they are exhibited, Finch mandates the individual balloons are always the exact colour and size he chose at 12:47 p.m. nearly twenty years ago. As the balloons deflate, they must also be refilled, appearing in their fullness.

Looking at *Sky Over Coney Island*, it is easy to imagine how the balloons bobbed in the coastal breeze and pulled against Finch’s grasp as though they wished to join the sky and seamlessly drift away with the clouds. And *Sky Over Coney Island* doesn’t just carry the impression of that long gone midday sky; it also carries an echo of all the activity below. It evokes the rollercoaster riders’ screams of delight and terror as the rattling Cyclone carried them up and down and back again. The balloons arouse childhood memories of amusement park midways, of the looping jingle-jangles of carnival games and whoops of celebration [or tears of disappointment] over teddy bears and bagged goldfish. Yet, just like the sky’s ever-changing colours, *Sky Over Coney Island* emphasises how ephemeral these moments were. They are only a suggestion contained within the balloons as they sway with the slightest breeze, vulnerable to pop against the slightest pressure.

Carlos Bunga (1976, Oporto, Portugal)
Homeless #4, Homeless #5, 2021
Acrylic on chromogenic print
30 x 40 cm each

Carlos Bunga is a nomad and a painter. This combination makes for an artistic practice that is constantly expanding and adapting as he moves about the world, responding to diverse architectural, environmental, and socio-political conditions. His core materials are simple: locally sourced cardboard sheets,

packing tape, and house paint. Bunga works them painstakingly into site-specific architectural models that, at 1:1 scale, reveal alternate sightlines and routes. The mixing of pigments (and flora, as of late) that he applies to his structures, bestows them with the action and vitality of his body, as well the impressions of nature and time’s ageing effects. This manner of working allows Bunga to “add, subtract, multiply, restore, or accelerate temporalities,” as he puts it. At the end of his exhibitions, Bunga returns to his works to take them apart, their elements recycled or disposed of, clearing the site for a new beginning imagined by the next person. What remains of his works is their documentation, and the stories passed on by the people who experienced them.

Bunga’s recent paintings offer a new counterpoint to his ongoing three-dimensional works. While expressing “a certain degree of anguish about the two-dimensionality of painting,” Bunga also adds, “at the same time, I don’t want to lose sight of it.” The paintings in *18 Maio 2022* are composed of acrylic paint applied to photographs of overgrown land, citing the natural world’s indifference to borders, ownership, and human rationale. Moved by the environment’s irreverence and fluctuations, Bunga guides paint across the photograph’s surface, mixing gestures and colours fluidly. Reflecting the energy of his inner thoughts and the atmosphere, Bunga urges “the elimination of the single point of view,” inquiring instead, “into oblique perspectives, where the gaze is blurred in a multiplicity and complexity of views.” Similarly, the meaning of *Homeless*, connected personally and broadly to Bunga’s life and art (if they can even be separated), is ever opening, extending across peoples, geographies, climates and frames of mind.

Joseph Del Pesco (1975, Delaware, USA)
All for the Want of a Whisper, 2017
Inkjet prints on 120gsm paper
(7x) 30.48 x 45.2 cm each

Joseph del Pesco’s *All for the Want of a Whisper* is a series of seven posters displayed in stacks and made to be taken by viewers. With white type delicately contrasted against grey backgrounds, the posters feature text adapted from an old proverb, “For the Want of a Nail,” which warns that seemingly simple desires and missteps can lead to grave consequences. Del Pesco’s rewrite elevates the proverb’s pertinence by integrating contemporary geopolitical, sociological, and environmental concerns. Poetic in both their content and design, the posters become a purposeful gift and an invitation to viewers. They can be taped on your wall, stapled to a lamp post,

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or folded in your bag to re-emerge as a reminder next time you dig for your keys.

While the seven posters display the same text, distinct tones of grey differentiate their backgrounds. Each grey was sourced from the skies of Fogo Island in Canada. Del Pesco realised the work by raising Pantone swatches to capture variations of clouds and fog passing through the island. Arranged in a gradation, the seven posters present a subtle evolution that echoes the proverb's chain reaction structure, accelerating until little to no posters remain. Likewise, the poster stacks are not replenished, disappearing at different rates, but then reappearing in new, varying and multiple contexts.

Eric N. Mack (1987, Maryland, USA)

Bodice, 2022

Pleated polyester, paper, string and pins

Dimensions variable

Eric N. Mack's artworks make use of blankets, scarves, sheets, fabric, clothing, and umbrellas. Some of these articles are treated with paint and dye before being assembled together, others are left in the condition they were found in. Using cords, Mack proceeds to work his materials into mercurial fabrications that billow from the ceiling or softly bisect the lines of a room, creating a place of new perspectives where viewers can navigate through abstraction. Art historically, Mack's work emerges from the painterly and spatial innovations of Sam Gilliam and Joe Overstreet, among others. His way of painting, he remarks, "has to do with resolving antagonisms I have towards the medium." Indeed, the elements of painting—colour, line, form, and texture—are as essential to Mack as they are to other abstract painters, although his methods and source materials also belong to fashion styling, textiles, set design, architecture, and everyday life.

In this way, Mack's paintings are weighted despite their buoyancy. Apart from being personal to the artist, his citations are, according to him, a form of equipment, intended to prepare painting to face its many so-called deaths. As he sees it, painting's fusion with other categories and the everyday is what has made the medium's survival possible. Today it is flourishing. And so, as each of his paintings are unpacked and pinned up for us to see, we may very well experience something that suggests a loosened garment, a canopy or tent—a painting en plein air. Working almost exclusively in situ, Mack's works are a form of embrace, markings of a place, of a people, of a day.

General Idea (active 1967-1994. Based in Toronto and New York City)

GENERI©, 1992

Custom-shaped printed red-yellow-black mylar balloon, title sheet (photocopy on card), in plastic sleeve

Sleeve: 29.5 x 23 cm; balloon inflated: 25 x 65 x 25 cm

Edition of 250, signed and numbered

Published by Centre d'Art Santa Monica, Barcelona

General Idea was an art collective based in Toronto and New York that consisted of Felix Partz (1945–94), Jorge Zontal (1944–94), and AA Bronson (1946–). The group was founded in 1969, the year of the Stonewall Riots. Across twenty-five years, General Idea produced a diverse body of work of which editions and multiples play a significant part. Their works refer to art history, sexuality, popular culture, mass media, and the myth of the group itself. General Idea began making AIDS-related work in 1987, the year Ronald Reagan finally expressed the word AIDS in a public speech. It was also the same year that Andy Warhol died. One of the group's greatest contributions to art discourse was their activism. Between 1987 and 1994, they produced countless installations and ephemera connected to the crisis. Partz and Zontal passed away from AIDS-related illnesses in 1994, at which point the collective ceased to exist.

GENERI© is part of a group of distinct works comprised of bi-colour and silver helium-inflated balloons shaped in the form of pills that overlay the ceiling. This work was part of a larger installation in 1992 at Centre d'Art Santa Monica, in Barcelona, that included 3,000 balloons in total. Blown up and arranged overhead, the work has been described as "urbanism of the air." The balloons draw the viewer's gaze upwards as if, like clouds, their formations might change or something might drop from the sky. These works represented a pivotal moment in the group's critique of government inaction and the pharmaceutical industry's false promises. Likewise, they embody the hope of that period, as well as its sorrows.

The group remains influential for the ways they reinterpreted what came before them—namely Modernism, Pop Art, and Minimalism—to political and glamorous ends. As such, the balloon works refer to *Silver Clouds* (1966), an installation by Warhol and engineer Billy Klüver. General Idea's balloons carry forward the merriment of Warhol's installation. Balloons, after all, continue to be associated with festivities and wonder. Pulling on these cultural signs to address the political present, the pills—oversized, puffed, and shiny—embody how cumbersome medical routines can be, as well as reflecting the desperate quest for a cure.

Eventually the balloons do lose their buoyancy, but they are never reinflated. They drift downwards, one, sometimes several at a time. The work is participatory, and viewers are invited to take a balloon with them once it has dropped. This work, among others, was part of General Idea's long-standing and affecting campaign to raise awareness of the AIDS epidemic.

Kapwani Kiwanga (1978, Ontario, Canada)

Flowers for Africa: Angola, 2020

Flower arrangement and ceramic vase

(Protocol of assembly, and display including archival iconography to guide the reconstruction of a sculptural arrangement consisting of foliage and flowers)

Dimensions variable

In her ongoing project, *Flowers for Africa*, Kapwani Kiwanga engages local florists to recreate floral arrangements found in

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archival images from commemorations of independence across Africa. To manifest each work, the florist is only shown a photograph. They are instructed to replicate the flower arrangement as closely as possible based on local resources at the time of exhibition. Naturally, some elements may be historically precise while others are interpretive. By drawing attention to the peripheral decor of these historical scenes, Kiwanga makes space for African experiences and stories that are omitted from conventional archives. What thought was put into these arrangements at the time? Who else was an observer beyond the officials shaking hands? The blooms and foliage are raised as witnesses, and their ongoing recompositions summon the past, "the enthusiasm present during the period of independence [...] and pan-African dreams," Kiwanga notes, so they can be considered from alternate angles.

The bouquets in *Flowers for Africa*, however, are just as transient as the past they evoke. While initially fresh and fragrant, the flowers are left to wilt and dry over the course of the exhibition—bright colours deepen to brown, proud stalks curl and droop, floral aromas shift to earth and decay. "These moments are reactivated fully knowing that you cannot go back to that time; that time has passed," Kiwanga states. "You go back to then move forward. These questions of temporality, it's very non-linear and it develops, it goes back and forth, it folds over...in the way I see things there is no telos, there is no universal end point."

Johnny Pootoogook (1970, Ikerasak, Kinngait, Nunavut, Canada)
Shaman, 2019
Graphite, coloured pencil, ink on paper
76 x 58.5 cm

Shaman, 2018
Graphite, coloured pencil, ink on paper
63.8 x 91.4 cm

Johnny Pootoogook's practice emerges from the rich artistic history in Kinngait (formerly Cape Dorset), a hamlet in Nunavut, Canada. Many artists from this vibrant community are locally and internationally revered, such as Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016) and Shuvina Ashoona. Pootoogook's father, Kananginak Pootoogook (1935–2010), a member of the Sikusalingmiut people, was an accomplished carver and printmaker, as well as an influential figure who helped shape the artistic future of his community. In the mid-twentieth century, after moving to Kinngait from Ikerasak, Pootoogook's father played a leading role in founding the Kinngait Studios, the arts arm of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. The organisation focuses on the production, promotion, and sales of Inuit art, which continues to be the community's main source of economic activity and a mode of preserving Inuit knowledge. The practices of Inuit artists span drawing, printmaking, stone carving, and textiles. The themes explored in said mediums are diverse; some works offer personal views of the Arctic and Inuit customs. Others, since the mid-century, are more openly critical, capturing transitions between a nomadic way of life and a new one imposed by European settlers. These and several other stories are expressed

through illustrations of landscapes, wildlife, mythological and fantastical figures, portraits, ceremonies, and daily events.

Pootoogook's drawings are similarly varied, carried out skillfully with soul and humour, and inclusive of their titles within the works. Distinguishing Pootoogook's practice is an interest in compound words—two disparate things that come together to form a new subject with alternate meanings. In *A Kite in Nunavut*, the title's wordplay and the flattened likeness of a swallow-tailed kite bird, freed from any terrestrial setting, conjure both a bird of prey gliding effortlessly in the sky and a toy kite tilting as someone follows along below. In the first of two *Shaman* drawings, from 2019, a figure kneels on the ground, head bowed, arms outstretched over a *qilaut* (drum) and a *qatuk* (stick) with which "the spirits are called up" in ceremony. The Shaman's posture moves between spiritual offering and preparation for lift off. Curious in the drawing is the figure's white hair that doubles as the coat of a bird. Looking closer, the figure's inner hair lines draw an aerial image of a bird heading north. In the second *Shaman* drawing, from 2018, a figure is shown mid-step, the motion of wind splaying their hair like a second set of wings to reflect the long feathers emerging from their arms. Such visions of transformation are prevalent across Inuit drawings, often represented through hybrid beings. The shaman, a powerful and resilient figure in Inuit culture is believed to "transform in a time of need," adopting the capacities of different avian and mammals to survive hostile circumstances.

Robyn Brentano (1943, NY, USA) & Andrew Horn (1952 - 2019, NY, USA)
Cloud Dance, 1980
Directed by Robyn Brentano and Andrew Horn
Music by Michael Galasso
Poetry by Christopher Knowles
Reading by Arby Ovanessian
16mm film transferred to HD, sound
13:09 min

Cloud Dance is an intimate and mesmerising film co-directed by Robyn Brentano and Andrew Horn (1952–2019). It follows dancer Andy de Groat (1947–2019) improvising movement for the camera amid artist Lenore Tawney's (1907–2007) sculptural weaving, *The Four-Armed Cloud* (1978–79). Similar to other works in her *Cloud* series, Tawney's sculpture is a spatial experience composed of thousands of individually treated and suspended linen threads. Each element is rigorously fastened, forming a diaphanous, floating structure that shimmers and sways to the flow of air, however subtle and pedestrian the source. As she once put it, "I sometimes think of my work as breath."

Responding to Tawney's sculpture—its lightness and geometry—De Groat weaves his body through intuitively as if he were a fibre himself. His movements take on the shapes and attitude of a wandering kite, a wind turbine, a drifting balloon, a circling leaf, a spinning weathervane. Drawing from their own experience as dancers, Brentano and Horn intuitively guide the

