

selection of printing blocks such as those for the voluptuous *Mädchen auf Sofa* (Girl on a Sofa), 1913.

Expressionism was felt to be Germany's indigenous style. Its aesthetic was not strictly pictorial, but also encompassed literature, music, architecture, and cinema. Expressionist film was still in its early stages in 1913, the year of the silent horror film *Der student von Prag* (The Student of Prague), but literary efforts were well under way; a young Alfred Döblin, for instance, was at work on a number of novellas that were published with Kirchner's woodcut illustrations, facsimiles of which were included here.

It was Kirchner to whom the exhibition's narrative kept returning, culminating in a fantastic set of spontaneous pencil-and-ink works depicting Berlin's decadent nightlife that complemented the street scenes by him shown at the outset. One hundred and six years ago, Berlin was, just as it is today, a city that never sleeps, and in pieces such as the monochromatic ink-on-paper *Café Chantant I*, 1914, Kirchner is at his most electric, with his seemingly chaotic but actually intricately controlled bursts of line work, beneath which his female subjects' faces are defined with unusual exactitude, revealing human presences that glow through the fireworks.

—Travis Jeppesen

## Simon Fujiwara

ESTHER SCHIPPER

Rules are made to be broken, they say, but sometimes obeying is just as good a way to cop a thrill. Entering Simon Fujiwara's installation *Empathy I*, 2018, you had to draw a number, then sit down on an airport-style chair and wait your turn. The room was totally nondescript, furnished only with the chairs, a table, a water cooler, and some reading material: two dozen copies of E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), all bookmarked at the page listing the rules of engagement between the novel's submissive protagonist and the dominant Mr. Grey.

What visitors were waiting to enter, two at a time, was a black box, housing a so-called 5-D video simulation, just under four minutes long, for which you had to be strapped into a seat that shook as wind blew through your hair and water splashed on your face. On the massive screen ran a collage of found footage of which I can barely remember a thing. Each clip—of, variously, a wedding ceremony, a street fight, a drone over a city, all shot from a first-person point of view—was just

Simon Fujiwara,  
*Empathy I*, 2018,  
5-D simulation with  
motion, water, wind,  
and video (color,  
sound, 3 minutes  
49 seconds).  
Installation view. Photo:  
Andrea Rossetti.



long enough for you to recognize the scene, but too brief to really stick with you. Though the footage evoked a wide emotional spectrum, it all blended into one unquestionably intense, yet oddly flat, rush of affect. And before you knew it, it was over.

Was it worth the wait? As the rather handsome attendant led me out of the room through a different door from the one I'd entered, I realized he'd been watching my ride on a screen installed by the exit—a strangely titillating invasion of a private moment. All in the service of safety, of course. To recall one of the axioms of s/m culture detailed in *Fifty Shades*, among the primary tasks of the dom is to ensure the ultimate well-being of the sub: Relax, Big Brother is watching you! And just as sex generally, and s/m in particular, is not about reaching climax but about how you get there, Fujiwara's brief ride was exactly sufficient to tinge the elaborate buildup with an unexpected excitement. For what the artist had designed was above all an arc of the anticipation and satisfaction of submitting to a role defined only by adherence to rules. Like a herd inside a paddock, exhibition-goers were joined together in being restricted, for once unable to move on, but lingering in the gallery with nothing to do while waiting except perhaps revel in their own disempowerment.

*Empathy I* is an elegant comment on the mechanics of mass amusement and the pervasive desire for the passivity of spectatorship—a desire so intense it verges on fetishism. But, notwithstanding its title, the work makes a bleak pronouncement: Far from fostering empathy, it's all about *me me me*. Even as visitors were guided through what was a decidedly conveyor-belt experience, the very blandness of the work's stock-image world made it about individuality; it allowed you to be you, in all your specificity. This microdose of life's ups and downs, experienced within the safe confines of a contrived framework, points to the kind of Disneyland existentialism that is ubiquitous in consumer culture: a collective craze for the circumscribed thrill. In Fujiwara's exacerbated version of this familiar fantasy of Dasein without any of the responsibility that comes with it, the illusion cracks, and self-consciousness creeps in. On your way out, all you could take with you was the emptiness.

—Kristian Vistrup Madsen

## Michael Rakowitz

BARBARA WIEN

If the literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky were alive today, Michael Rakowitz might be one of his star pupils. Over the years Rakowitz has received great acclaim for projects that push gestures of *ostranenie*, or estrangement, to operatic dimensions: In New York he once served an Iraqi-inspired dish on plates looted from Saddam Hussein's palaces (*Spoils*, 2011), and for Documenta 13 he presented copies of books that were burned in the Fridericianum in Kassel during World War II; the copies were carved from travertine collected in the hills of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, where the Taliban blew up two massive sixth-century sandstone Buddhas in 2001 (*What Dust Will Rise?*, 2012). For Rakowitz, the practice of, lifting an object or material from its given context and embedding it in an unexpected setting or giving it an unwonted purpose lends itself to a multidimensional confrontation that is powerful not only for the highly politicized and controversial terms of this dislocation but also for foregrounding destruction as the defining motif in the history of civilizations.

The Assyrians returned to Nimrud (near modern-day Mosul, Iraq) after the fall of their empire at the end of the seventh century BCE and lived among its ruins for a brief period of time. Rakowitz's exhibition "The Ballad of Special Ops Cody and other stories" invited viewers to



Michael Rakowitz,  
*The Ballad of Special  
Ops Cody*, 2017,  
HD video, color,  
sound, 14 minutes  
42 seconds.

inhabit loss in a more recent chapter in the history of the same Mesopotamian city. The three large reliefs on view were replicas of panels lining the walls of Nimrud's Northwest Palace, which was demolished by ISIS in 2015. Like some of the other works in Rakowitz's series "The invisible enemy should not exist," 2007–, they are meticulous reconstructions made from Arabic-language periodicals published in the US and Europe as well as from the packaging for various Middle Eastern foodstuffs, including tea, date-filled cookies, and chicken bouillon cubes. Despite the gravity of the subject matter, the boisterously bright hues of these designs were, in fact, not entirely out of place, since two of the panels depict winged deities thought to be wielding the spathe, or sheathing bract, of a male date palm and a bucket of water for the express purpose of fertilizing a female tree, while the third panel, showing a stylized sacred tree, denotes abundance and prosperity. Rakowitz appeared to have restored even their long-vanished colors to the reliefs, but he also "kept" both the cracks and the missing pieces by having black newsprint stand in for them. A museum-style label attached to one panel coolly informed us that the bottom part of the relief was destroyed by ISIS, whereas the missing head—a big black square made of advertising pages from Arabic-language weeklies—has long been in a private collection in New York. No matter how different the motivations of ISIS and a crafty nineteenth-century antiquities dealer may have been, the destruction of cultural heritage is an unfortunate constant across time and space.

Commissioned for the 2017–18 survey of Rakowitz's work at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the fourteen-minute-long stop-motion video *The Ballad of Special Ops Cody*, 2017, also draws a parallel—albeit more didactically—between modern warfare in the Middle East and the pillaging of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations. Special Ops Cody, a souvenir action figure whose photograph was in 2005 almost successfully passed off by Iraqi insurgents as that of a captive American soldier, finds himself at the entrance of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute and launches into an existentialist monologue voiced by a real-life Iraq veteran, Gin McGill-Prather. On encountering a vitrine full of ancient Mesopotamian figurines and recognizing severely injured Iraqis in the idols' damaged faces, he begins to question why *they* are there, quickly homing in on the hypocrisy at the heart of colonization: "They were broken, but we destroyed them. You were broken, so we keep you, locked up, fragile, temperature-controlled. . . ." While the material legacies of great civilizations are preserved with care and at a considerable cost, the generations that came after them can barely earn pity from the rest of the world.

—Gökcan Demirkazık

## Hélène Delprat

CARLIER | GEBAUER

The title of Hélène Delprat's first solo exhibition in Berlin, "TO SLEEP TO DIE, NO MORE," can be understood as a reflection of the ways in which we are touched by our cultural past without necessarily knowing it. It sounds like a misremembered line from Shakespeare or some other poetic phrase we no longer fully understand but still recognize as part of our linguistic heritage. This type of slippery relation to our past is also found in Delprat's phantasmagoric painterly compositions, which take historical and cultural references and distill them into an idiom uniquely her own, yet somehow familiar.

*Mes invités* (My Guests), 2015, is a large acrylic-and-pigment work that greeted visitors like a portent in the gallery's vestibule. While it exhibits techniques she uses in making her other paintings, such as diluting pigment to create a phantomlike underlayer of paint, Delprat here has added writing to the composition. Names of artists and brands such as POLKE, CHANEL, GINA PANE, DISNEY—some more visible than others—are spelled out in light-yellow dots in the amorphous, washed-out, blue-black shape that almost fills the rectangular canvas. A clue to the rest of the exhibition? Not really, since the other paintings on view didn't directly refer to Sigmar Polke, the Walt Disney Co., and so on, even if some faint connections turned up. *U-Boot* (Submarine), 2018, for example, contained smiley-face suns (and one that is frowning), a cheery swordfish with a zigzag bill, and a googly-eyed cloud-like shape, any of which might recall a character from *Finding Nemo* or some other animated film for kids. The creatures float through a diaphanous blue-green field punctuated with dollops of white paint, which is overlaid with a blackish mesh-like design that covers much of the canvas and brings to mind Polke's raster-dot paintings. Like Polke, Delprat deliberately obscures her references: The fish might look like a Disney character, but it is actually based on the laughing sawfish emblem of the German Ninth U-boat Flotilla; other paintings also included elements with similar World War II-era origins.

The googly-eyed cloud was also found in *Que vous avez de grandes dents!*, 2018, whose title renders Little Red Riding Hood's "What big teeth you have!" in French. In this work, though, the cloud looks surprised, and the lines emanating from its open mouth suggest wind. Or perhaps they imply shock, since beneath the nebulous form two



Hélène Delprat, *Mes invités* (My Guests), 2015, acrylic and pigment on canvas, 88% × 102 3/4".