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ARTFORUM

JANUARY 2015
OPENINGS

Kevin Beasley

THOMAS J. LAX

Kevin Beasley, **I Want My Spot Back**, 2012. Performance view, Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 26, 2012. Photo: Julieta Cervantes.

KEVIN BEASLEY kneels before two turntables in the lower-level theater of New York's Studio Museum in Harlem. He's in the middle of a set that is by turns haunting and propulsive, mixing samples that range from extra-percussive house beats to attenuated ambulance sirens, as his spoken-word excerpts betray their midwestern origins and unmistakably American character. Lines from Malcolm X's 1962 speech "Who Taught You to Hate Yourself?" are audible one minute; the next, the Cleveland neighbor who helped free Amanda Berry after she was held hostage for a decade recounts the story of her discovery. The set culminates with the sweet and sweaty promise of Detroit techno/house artist Theo Parrish's 2011 track "Black Music," but through it all, the audio clips that kicked off the set never stop reverberating: *They killed him for no reason. They killed this nigger for no reason. He dead as a motherfucker. They killed this nigger for no reason. That guy is laying in the street dead. That man dead, man. Say he had his hands up and everything. Still shot him. The man laying in the street dead as a motherfucker.*

In her influential essay "Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?," published in the catalogue for the 1994 Whitney Museum of American Art exhibition "Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art,"poet and critic Elizabeth Alexander considers the stakes of representing antiblack violence, attending in particular to the video that famously documented the 1991 beating of Rodney King by police officers in Los Angeles. To be black, argues Alexander, is to have no choice but to confront documentary evidence of the spectacularized violence waged against black people in the United States. "In order to survive," she writes, "black people have paradoxically had to witness their own murder and defilement and then pass along the epic tale of violation." Alexander's title is not only an ethical interrogative but an ontological quandary about the difference between blackness and looking—the kind of looking that, in the Western tradition, has long been the birthright of the sovereign subject, who is free to take pleasure without reservation or threat to bodily integrity. To be black is not a biological or even a cultural fact, she suggests; to be black is to be a vexed onlooker.

Yet looking is not the same as listening. Art historian Huey Copeland has recently argued that many artists of color working around the time of King's beating refused codes of visual and racial representation through recourse to "other bodily faculties . . . : the haptic, the written word, the thinly surrogate, and most signally, the voice." The voice, in particular, goes places vision cannot. Indeed, the terrible beauty of Beasley's set ventures onto perilous ground precisely through use of the voice. He pairs audio clips—which, via the words of a secondhand witness, repeatedly describe the August 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri—with a club track, which he performed at the Studio Museum just over a month after Brown was shot.

The juxtaposition risks aestheticizing Brown's killing, but in fact it subtly underscores the dreadful ordinariness of such acts, as the club and the bloody street are spaces of both eventfulness and habit. To hear a recurring testament of horror from someone who himself did not see Brown's body produces a knowledge of the trauma, not through authenticated firsthand testimony or through the retribution that remains unattainable by due process, but rather in the way such accounts are so often transmitted in communities in which trauma occurs—through a chain of hearsay that feels more reliable than a sworn statement. The chain starts with unwilling looking, which Beasley reproduces by refusing to image it, instead using sound that produces a mental projection of an image in its visual absence. The focused vector of vision is exchanged for something more expansive, even shared. Immersed in and surrounded by the invasiveness of a sound that, once heard, cannot summarily be averted or forgotten, you feel the other listeners rocking next to you.

Beasley—born in 1985 in Lynchburg, Virginia, educated in Detroit and New Haven, and currently based in Queens—works in an expanded sculptural language in which sound not only occupies space but is a material that changes spaces themselves through exertions of mass, weight, content. It's noteworthy that Beasley does not exploit CDJs to the extent his contemporaries in, say, GHE20 G0TH1K or DIS do, instead preferring the physicality of turntables. For him, the materiality of sound seems to have a transitive property, flowing from the haptic immediacy of analog turntablism to the palpable presence of a bass line or a voice. For his 2012 work *I Want My Spot Back,* for example, Beasley was invited by choreographer Ralph Lemon, on the occasion of a dance series at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, to occupy the institution's atrium gallery. During his two one-hour sets, Beasley mixed and slowed down just under forty a cappella tracks by deceased black male rappers from the early to mid-1990s, using more than ten subwoofers and loudspeakers to transform the music into a physical sensation that literally made the museum's walls shake, creating a vibrational force as architectonic as it was somatic. Beasley's acousmatic music—composed for live presentation using speakers—often functions in negativa, as the listener hears sounds without recognizing their originating sources. But while they may be disembodied, abstracted, even nameless, the rappers in *I Want My Spot Back* are here, for as long as their voices issue from Beasley's speakers. Vocality in Beasley's work is always mnemonic, recalling and addressing the departed, and redressing the proximity of black life to social death as the artist points to the potential for everyday culture to attend to loss.

Beasley's sculpture likewise explores the physical pressure of things that remain out of sight. He produces assemblages in which detritus, found or saved, is agglomerated with resin and polyurethane foam, a material that, despite its commercial ubiquity in everything from insulation to surfboards, often remains unseen. Beasley combines a polymer catalyst and reactant to produce the foam, which remains malleable for about half an hour. Within that window, he wrestles his combines into shape—molding, wrapping, stuffing, and embedding. In the resulting works, foam spills formlessly from a sneaker; bulges, bound and taut, beneath fabric or plastic wrappings; or serves as a primordial matrix for bits of junk. The sculptures bear the traces of postindustrial urban cycles of use and disuse, alongside the imprints of his body. Yet despite their folds, holes, and seepages, his objects (like his performances) refuse to represent a body, instead indexing the absent body's actions and movements—a fugitive remainder, reminding the viewer of what was once there.

Beasley's absenting presence—presence as voice, as indexical mark, presence that may be active and collective or haunted, spectral, and deferred—strategically negotiates the reality of being an embodied subject who cannot elide the dangers of subjection or its historical and political specificities; it is a mode of presence that quickens and guards against embodiment's enmeshment with the violent dynamics of spectacularization. His practices of dislocation and recontextualization, his stagings of fragmentation and unstable materiality, and his fleeting consolidations of the mnemonic trace seem to ask: What does it mean to assemble things when those things are beats, limbs, corpses, or people brought provisionally together to mourn or to protest? He encourages us to begin our response by swaying in our seats.

Thomas J. Lax is associate curator of media and performance art at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Lax, Thomas J. "Kevin Beasley," Artforum, January 2015

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Kevin Beasley: Star Material

This young artist is digging deep and stirring things up.

December 2014

December 4, 2014 | by Andrew Russeth
Photography by Biel Parklee

At the end of this past summer, Kevin Beasley was packing up to move to his new studio in Queens. He had just spent nearly a year as an artist in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, where his bulky, beaten-up sculptures were lying on the floor. Made by melting together foam, resin, and pieces of his own clothing, the scrappy forms conceal a microphone wired to Moog pedals and speakers. "This might get a little loud," Beasley, 29, said with a laugh as he flipped one on and began moving and rubbing the work, sending wails and rumbles crackling from the sound system. Moments later, he slipped on a gas mask outfitted with pantyhose and another mic, and things got even more haunting. A longtime musician, Beasley is just two years out of Yale's MFA program, but his unusual practice, which commingles sound, sculpture, and performance, has already won him slots in a show at New York's Museum of Modern Art and in the 2014 Whitney Biennial. For the latter, he set up a system to amplify the sounds of visitors and also performed using his makeshift instruments, through which he reimagines how bodies and sculptures can interact. Next up is his first New York solo show, in February, which will inaugurate Casey Kaplan's new space, and a Guggenheim Museum commission that will expand on the work from the Biennial. "The art objects have a sort of aliveness to them," he said. "They change the sonics of the room, and it maybe becomes a little more immersive."

Russeth, Andrew. "Kevin Beasley: Star Material," *W Magazine,* December 2, 2014

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Art in America
MAGAZINE DEC. 01, 2014

IN THE STUDIO: KEVIN BEASLEY

by Mike Pepi

An obsolete Akai x-1800SD reel-to-reel eight-track player stood in the corner of the back room at Casey Kaplan gallery. Nearby, a simple wooden cabinet held 52 reels, each containing around 40 hours of audiotape combining portions of record albums, personal recordings, audio books and music mixes. During the gallery's opening hours, the reel-to-reel was rigged to play both sides of the tapes simultaneously, emitting often incoherent combinations. Created by Kevin Beasley, this installation—titled *. . . for this moment this moment is yours . . .* and dated 2013—was shown at the gallery as part of a three-artist exhibition earlier this year. In the far corner of the same space was one of Beasley's sculptures, its purple hue and almost corporeal shape the result of a slow accumulation of resin, foam and cotton. Though the two works—one largely audio-based, the other a physical object—seem different in kind, both simultaneously emphasize and obscure their materials, suggesting the artist's view of our experience of the world as a combination of the immediately perceived and the partially concealed.

Beasley grew up in Virginia and currently lives in New York. He received his BFA from the College for Creative Studies in Detroit in 2007 and his MFA from Yale University in 2012. We met last spring at the Studio Museum in Harlem, where he was an artist-in-residence. In his studio there, we spent time handling his sculptures, which have an intensely haptic quality. They are heavy, molten-looking pieces—pregnant with items such as shirts, pillows and dresses, trapped in foam and resin. Even his sound pieces—whether focusing on icons of popular music or exploring the landscape of human emotion—maintain a strong sense of tactility.

For *Movement I: DEF/ACHE/CRYSTALLINE/SLEEVE* (2014), performed in this year's Whitney Biennial in a gallery off the museum's lobby, the artist connected his sculptures to microphones, which amplified the sounds of the surroundings. He physically manipulated the sculptures, moving them around and placing them in different arrangements, allowing them to pick up new sounds and produce feedback. It was a typical work by Beasley, who claimed, in a 2012 interview, that sound is "just as physical, tactile and experiential as any other material."[1]

MIKE PEPI How do you choose the objects that your sculptures contain?

KEVIN BEASLEY Each item has some personal connection to me. It's really important that an object comes from me or at least someone close to me. I have some story of where everything came from and why. That's the starting point, and the work sort of opens up from there.

PEPI During an earlier studio visit, you showed me a video. In one part you're driving on a rural road at night, and then suddenly we see a burning ball with a beam of light shining on it. You also capture this scene in a photograph. Iconography aside, this immolation seems to be a counterweight to your sculptures, which deal with accumulation.

BEASLEY That image is from a very rural property in Virginia that has been in my family for a long time. Since my grandparents passed on, it has become a place for us to convene, really just to maintain it and keep it in the family. It's also where a family graveyard is. The property holds a lot of personal experiences and information, a sort of residue of my family in a way. I was spending time down there just trying to understand, in some way, what makes me: How am I here? What am I doing? Why am I making work?

So I got to thinking about these graves, the family members, the lineages, my connection. I was dealing with a lot of personal, internal questions. The interest in working there came from a project I had started when I was in graduate school, involving this antique cotton gin motor. The motor was used from the 1940s to the 1970s on a cotton farm in Maplesville, Ala., which is about 15 minutes from Selma [the historic civil-rights flashpoint]. I was in Virginia for a family reunion when I noticed that our property was planted with cotton. That was not only the first time I had seen cotton plants in person, but also the first time I had seen the property planted at all, and it seemed really strange to me. I couldn't figure out what the plants were at first. I had an emotional response, and felt like I had to deal with that in some way. So a lot of these photos and a lot of the work I was doing—involving this burning ball—were me trying, for the first time, to deal with this pent-up emotion. Whether I was deconstructing a thought or burning this thing to get my frustration out, I was putting myself in a vulnerable place and confronting something deep-seated. I am constantly chewing on those emotions, and it gave me a lot of material to continue to work with. I am still sort of forming it all, and I think that's why I haven't really been showing those images.

PEPI Viewers can't know everything that lies beneath the surfaces of your sculptures in the same way that the audience can't listen to all the recordings in . . . *for this moment this moment is yours* . . .

BEASLEY I'm interested in the ways in which small elements make up a whole. Even if you can't immediately perceive those elements, they're still critical to whatever that object is. There will always be information that you can't quite put your finger on but that somehow plays into your perception of the object. Your experience of an object involves taking in all that is accumulated within it—which might be reaching you by way of the object's surface qualities or the context in which it is shown—and forming it or making it into a different thing.

Since most of these works are shown in gallery or museum contexts, they are usually accompanied by wall labels or similar texts, and I actually rely heavily on the material lists. I

1.
Kevin Beasley, interviewed by Jerry Schlenzka, Mousse, no. 41, December 2013, www.moussemagazine.it.

Untitled (Jumped Man), 2014, polyurethane foam, resin, soil, coat sleeve liners and a pair of Nike Jordan size 18 shoes, 24 by 16 by 11 inches. Photo Adam Reich.

Beasley during his performance *Movement I: DEF/ ACHE/ CRYSTALLINE/ SLEEVE*, 2014; at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Photo Paula Court.

Installation view. . . *for this moment, this moment is yours* . . . ,2013, wood, cassette tape, Akai x-1800SD reel-to- reel player and mixed mediums.

think that type of information can be a way of understanding works, particularly if you can't actually see what they consist of. Whether someone chooses to delve into that information or not is totally a choice, just as it's a choice whether to spend time with a particular piece or to walk into a gallery in the first place.

PEPI In one of your Whitney Biennial works, you "activated" the sculptures by hooking them up to audio equipment. In another, you used processors and microphones for a piece composed of dissonant sounds and accompanied by a movement performance by Leon Finley and Christian Diaz. The latter work in particular seemed to explore a vast range of nonverbal communication. You've spoken about how it was an attempt to express the ineffable.

BEASLEY The purpose is not the materials in themselves, or even the process. It's really about how all of those things actually connect, and then how we sort of react and respond and negotiate.

People experience the world in so many different ways. I try to parallel that in my practice. I can sometimes limit myself, working in certain ways or with certain materials. And I always try to push against that, to try other ways. Even if I am failing and it's not actually getting to what I want to say, I am going to try.

The Whitney performances were the first time I felt like I was really conscious of my body and my movements because I was relying so much on them. I felt really vulnerable because there are so many precedents for using your body in that kind of space.

PEPI The biennial also included a foam and resin work titled *Jumped Man* [2014]. It consists of two almost rock-like pieces, placed on the ground, with very recognizable and prominent objects affixed to them—two Air Jordan basketball sneakers. Does the title relate to a narrative of any kind?

BEASLEY The work comes from a photograph I took in Queens. There was an abandoned pair of Air Force 1s, just sitting on a grate, and the spacing between the two shoes was really odd. It felt like they belonged to somebody, as opposed to being just some sneakers discarded on the street. I wanted to do a piece with shoes in some way because I am always working with the relationship of a thing, including the body, to its extremities. But I kept thinking about it, and it evolved into an interest in this ownership, this missing body, an interest in disembodied experience—and in trying to find a connection. This led me to the industry developed around these shoes. Everything about the brand is really absurd. Maybe it was cool in the early '90s or something, but by now it's just a ridiculous industry that doesn't address the problems of violence that surround it.

PEPI I did detect a sense of violence in the work. Maybe because it evoked an image of someone's shoes getting knocked off while getting jumped, given the way the shoes are askew in the sculpture.

BEASLEY I don't think that the work is ambivalent. Jordans are specific. If you're a young black male, then they are very specific. I had a tough decision in the studio while I was making this work: should I get generic Jordans or the really serious ones? In the late '80s, a few years after the original Jordans were released, a young man was killed [for the shoes] and his body left in the woods. Recently, when the Air Jordan 11 Gamma Blues came out, there were news reports about similar killings. I finally realized that my intention was not to single out a specific style of Jordans but rather to call out the presence of the brand, which carries its own weight.

So I feel like that violent narrative is there in the work or that understanding is there. For those who are in tune, that's a quick read. I am interested in addressing the disparity that the shoes represent, or at least in having the work contain some element of that.

PEPI What attracts you to working with analog media—like the tape and the reel-to-reel player—in addition to digital tools?

BEASLEY It's funny because I didn't actually anticipate working with tape. Prior to . . . for this moment . . . , most of my sound works were digital; for example, *I Want My Spot Back* [performed at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2012] was driven by software. It's kind of beautiful how today you can merge analog and digital—how you can combine a turntable from the early '70s with software that was put out a year ago.

I am constantly thinking about the physicality of the content I use. I also ask what it is about sound that can get us so emotional, that can affect us so deeply. That's not just about the sound itself. It's about where that sound is coming from and our personal histories. The tape was really me thinking about the physicality of walking into a space and hearing something. When you're listening to something, there is a physical process that is happening—not only in the movement of sound waves, but also in the act of being present.

There was so much tape in that work that there was no looping. I was really specific about not having a loop, or at least about having the time of the loop be so long that no single viewer would experience repetitions. So the physical qualities of the tape allowed people to walk into the space and experience something really particular that they wouldn't experience again, at any other point during the exhibition.

PEPI Would you say there was an element of "analog purism" there?

BEASLEY I am very interested in analog media as a physical, tactile thing, but I'm not necessarily a purist. I think all ways are adequate. When you speak about a purist, the question is always, "A purist of what?" You could say that electronic sound is a bastardization of analog technology, but you could also say that analog technology is a bastardization of acoustic instruments. Last night I was thinking about the Beatles' tape edits and how invested the group was in coming up with different sounds in postproduction. It's about the emotion and the feelings that are elicited when you combine disparate elements, or try to expand the medium or push it beyond what is given to you.

PEPI Take me through your thinking regarding the wooden cabinet holding the reels in the Casey Kaplan installation.

BEASLEY If I am thinking about the sort of sculptural quality of tape and sound, then I'm interested in any opportunity to demonstrate that, and so that's how the cabinet came in. The different shades of brown in the tapes recall wood grain and wood furniture. That relationship is very physical and succinct. I'm interested in the aesthetic and formal properties, but also in the practicality of being able to see all of the tapes there. You're not listening to them all, but they're all present; you're experiencing them in some way. You can even count them if you'd like. There's a closeness and tactility to that. And that is how the work begins to reveal itself.

CURRENTLY ON VIEW Works by Beasley in "Cut to Swipe," at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, through Mar. 22, 2015

MIKE PEPI is a writer living in New York.

Pepi, Mike. "In the Studio: Kevin Beasley," *Art in America*, December 1, 2014

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FADER

Kevin Beasely, *I Want My Spot Back*, 2013

Visual Identity: Kevin Beasley On How Sound Shapes His Art

CULTURE/FEATURE
NOVEMBER 7, 2014

By **HARRY GASSEL**

Kevin Beasley's studio is in the part of Long Island City that's a far walk from any of the high street style shops, restaurants or bars. The story of how the New York based artist ended up there involves a fluid and somewhat unbelievable set of circumstances, like hearing about a rent-controlled two bedroom in the West Village. Beasley explains that as he was finishing up his year long artist-in-residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, a collector offered him use of a largely abandoned wreck above a parking garage. He talks in detail about the work he's put into breaking down rooms, putting up dry wall, and wiring the space for sound—something that's become an important part of Beasley's sculpture practice. A room in back that used to house the owner's massive comic book collection has been left intact and turned into a fully functioning music studio.

Originally from Virginia before he settled in NYC, Beasley's work has for the past several years been a mixture of sculpture and audio based works. Like *I Want My Spot Back*, an improvised soundscape built out of heavily manipulated hip-hop acapellas from dead rappers like Tupac and Ol' Dirty Bastard which he performs on a modified but recognizable nightclub style turntable rig [that's him performing it above at MoMA in 2012]. In it clear snippets, like a passage from The Notorious BIG's "Long Kiss Goodnight" (from which the piece gets its name) seep up out of a viscous, subterranean bed of sound made up of metal and bubble-like effects that could very well be used to score a scene on a near-future battleship. The work stands as a haunting testament to the sheer amount of information that can be pulled out of these left-behind music files.

I.W.M.S.B. was Beasley's first fully realized audio work, but his interest in the material qualities of sound spans back to his time at grad school. "The parties at school were really bad and so I started DJing," he says by way of explanation. "But immediately I was drawn to it as a tool in the studio. Instead of just throwing music in it, I was throwing in weird sounds." Eventually he built his own massive pair of subwoofers in order to intensify the corporeal listening experience. When he performed *I.W.M.S.B.* in October 2012 in the central atrium at MoMA, the sound shook the entire building-tall central column in a way that clearly demonstrated the work's unrelenting physical presence. The curator Ralph Lemon, in a conversation with Art21, talked about the effects of confronting the museum audience with such an overwhelming performance. "Most visitors, I'm sure, just heard it as very loud, terrorizing. MoMA let it happen, as disruptive as it was. That instance crystallized for me this idea of black music as metaphor for some kind of American-ness. An invasive threatening under-rhythm, but also beautiful."

When talking about his own work, Beasley acknowledges that there are inherent implications of race in the making and perception of his work, but it is clearly also not a central concern. In unpacking a performance he did at this year's Whitney Biennial in which he made sounds by interacting with a set of mic'd and prepared sculptures, he talks about it in terms of how context can influence his process: "You have a really specific body in a particular space. And there are consequences that one must reconcile with that kind of interaction. There's these different connotations or relationships that are really exploratory." Beasley's primary interest, it seems, is in the confrontation of material: how sound fills a room, how a body can subtly or wholly effect the space around it, how social dynamics can inform the movements of a body. In a lot of ways his work is about that moment of contact. The Whitney performance, for instance, was Beasley's way of thinking about the physical properties of a microphone-to-speaker set up. "I've been taking these microphones...[and] thinking about sound through a really physical medium," he explains. "It's not just solely about recording atmosphere but actually the quality or condition of that atmosphere. Like the space between you and that microphone—if there is something obstructing then that conditions the way that you're understood or the way that that information is."

The project is comprehensive in its interrogation of these physical qualities, and Beasley uses different types of microphones as ways to explore different sides of this dynamic. "Each one has their own particular way of picking up sound or picking up vibrations," he says. "This one has a contact mic in it, this one has a hypercardioid microphone in it so it kind of tunnels all of the sound. This one is two microphones—you know when you're holding a microphone and your rubbing your hands on it, it picks up that noise, it picks up the sounds of the actual device. They operate kind of like contact mics. But you can also hear a slight ghost of whats happening in the space." In his loosely scored performances he plays each of these sculptures like an instrument in a way that feels like he's trying to exhaust their potential. He later talks about the connection back to how this helps him understand the bodies that inhabit the space: "I think about the condition of a body," he says. "How do we socially

Kevin Beasley, *...for this moment, this moment is yours...*, 2013
Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, NY

"When I look at a pair of Jordans, I have a really specific experience with that: being a teenager, desiring those so much. I'm also thinking about audio or sound as another sensory experience that is culturally embedded in how we view things."

navigate these bodies? Through sound—a really specific kind of sound defines or comes from a certain place. Or maybe its the material of an object like a pillowcase. What does that conjure? Like how you can hear something and that sound that your hearing automatically correlates or responds to some type of really physical thing. Like if I smack my hand on the table, the sound of that is from the hand and this thing. You can draw conclusions about what I'm made of or where I come from, how I feel as a person by the bluntness of that." The logic is somewhat slippery but then again, so are the categories. We may define something as either physical or aural but the two are in a constant feedback loop, and in a sub-visual world these are both just ways people can experience touch.

The materials Beasley uses in these rigs as well as his stand-alone sculpture also speak to this theme of contact. The objects are a combination of resin, polyurethane foam, and bits of old clothes, usually his. Beasley says he was drawn to these materials for their physical qualities—the way he can work them as they set, the way insulation foam finds gaps and fills them. But he was also drawn to their omnipresent role in our lives. "I was thinking about foam being so present daily. Like how we interact with it. But yet we're not necessarily seeing it all the time. It's not a material that sits on the surface because its meant as a filler, it's meant for beds and couches. It provides us with a certain kind of comfort. It fills in a lot of spaces in our places and houses." In a similar way to the recognizable verbal passages in *I Want My Spot Back*, the clothes act as touchstones to culture—to the surface material that defines our experience beyond a primal sense of touch. "It becomes more complex when you think about how it's not just about physical object but an object that has a history," says Beasley. "And then you think about what could that potential history be. I'm using my clothes because it's something for me that has a really particular thing, pieces that start to draw on some broader cultural resonance. I'm trying to be very delicate about how these things reveal themselves. There's a lot of loaded conversation to be had." Beasley is referring to instances where he incorporates things like a pair of bootleg Nike Jordans, a striving status symbol that starts to have a more direct, social conversation. "When I look at a pair of Jordans, I have a really specific experience with that: being a teenager, desiring those so much," he explains. "I'm also thinking about audio or sound as another sensory experience that is culturally embedded in how we view things." The material has a history, but in this case its a personal one—these are Beasley's clothes and music; his hands ply and shape the resin and foam as they set, his body informs their scale.

In the past year things have been moving quickly for Beasley. He was added to the roster at the prestigious Casey Kaplan gallery in New York and recently, along with a group of collaborators called ALLGOLD, started a six-month residency in the Print Shop space at MoMA PS1. ALLGOLD—comprised of Stephen Decker, an artist and DJ under the name SYSDJ, and graphic designers Golnaz Esmaili and Inva Çota—is involved in applying their interdisciplinary skill set towards the creation of an events-oriented "curated social space." Beasley is excited about the possibilities: "We're thinking being open for several days a week where people can literally show up and have coffee and tea and sit and have conversation," he says. "So there will be talks and lectures, all different types of things that you wouldn't necessarily consider to be in a proper museum like PS1." The way he talks about ALLGOLD is almost like a thinktank, a social laboratory where the group can test out different event archetypes as a set of interactive experiments that are at once public and personal, improvisational and highly controlled. It sounds like a fitting next step.

Gassel, Harry, "Visual Identity: Kevin Beasley On How Sound Shapes His Art," Fader, November 2014, Online.

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HERO

October 2014

A COSMIC REALITY

Whitney's Christopher Lew selects "gnarly" New York sculptor Kevin Beasley

text by *Tempe Nakiska*

Welcome to HERO Young Art Week – our essential, multifaceted guide to the new wave of creatives working at the vanguard of contemporary art today. Across a dynamic week of digital content, we're exploring what's happening at the epicentre of this global community: from the ground up, the artists themselves and the key figures witnessing the evolution of the ideas, trends and movements defining this art generation.

When Christopher Lew dropped Kevin Beasley's name and the word 'gnarly' in the same sentence we knew we had to sort an interview out. In our Young Art Week conversation, the Whitney Museum of American Art curator selected Beasley as an emerging artist to watch, touting the New York based sculptor's DIY processes and "assemblage techniques" as used to craft "gnarly, evocative sculptures and sound works."

One look at the types of pieces Beasley makes and you get the word association. T-shirts and tar, footwear and foam; a cotton-gin motor lugged from Alabama: they're all useable – and valuable – materials to the artist, who both features them in their own right and as well as working them into combustive creations that are somehow slick, as gnarly in make-up as they may be.

Beasley's performance at the Whitney Biennial earlier in the year saw him conflate his two practices, burying a microphone within his concrete and fabric sculptures in an endeavour aimed at capturing the essence of each object's 'internal architecture'. It was visceral, raw and electric – words that can be tagged to both Beasley's work and his own vision. Of art, and the world.

Kevin Beasley. 'Katies', 2014. Resin, altered carpet, muumuu dresses.

Tempe Nakiska: You are asked to visualise the future of art in America – one led by your own generation of artists within the context of global culture now. What do you see?

Kevin Beasley: A Mike Brown reincarnated and becomes an artist or maybe a John Crawford III takes up film and video, a year 2030 McQueen. A Renisha Mcbride explores electro-acoustics and becomes maybe not the first, but definitely the most memorable visual artist to sculpt with sound – on Mars. Ezell Ford, who suffered from mental complications, paints – still – from his window. However undiscovered he may be, his work is therapeutic for not only himself, but for those who can see the complications through his mark-making.

I think our generation is poised to shape a new global understanding of what it means to be 'from' somewhere and to generate a fresh cultural perspective but will not take hold until we realise that we are part of a constellation. A cosmic reality. I see art in America no differently than the possibilities in several other parts of the globe and until the prevailing sentiment of separation subsides – there will be no future, only just a desire for what it could be.

TN: What do you set out to do every day in your approach to your work as an artist?

KB: Everyday I commit to it – not just mentally, but physically.

TN: What are the biggest challenges facing young and emerging artists today?

KB: The toughest challenge is one that always exists contemporaneously and that is not being discouraged.

TN: Is the art world a more globalised one today – and what impact if any does it have on you as an artist?

KB: It totally is more globalised; just look at Africa and South America. The attention is slowly building. These continents are registering in both the museum and gallery circuit, but also in the art market. That wasn't always the case. I try not to think about the global impact on my studio. I try to think about how me having a studio and doing the work in respects to my immediate community can have resonance. If the medium flows fervently then it will reach those that it needs to reach.

TN: What is the future of tactile, traditional artist mediums as opposed to digital?

KB: Our bodies are still the conduit and energy is mass. E=mc^2 Digital means nothing without a body to take it in.

TN: What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in your experience rising up within the art community so far?

KB: That regardless of the systems in place, humans are always on the other side. This has been a relief because it means it is malleable.

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The New York Times

ART & DESIGN | ART REVIEW

The Stuff of Life, Urgently Altered

Artists in Residence Display Work at Studio Museum in Harlem

By **HOLLAND COTTER** August 28, 2014

David Hammons's "African American Flag" — with its Pan-African red and black stripes and green field of black stars — floats high over the sidewalk outside the Studio Museum in Harlem. Originally created nearly a quarter-century ago, it has become an identifying emblem for a museum dedicated to nurturing the careers of artists of African descent.

In 1980, Mr. Hammons himself was the beneficiary of that nurturing. A Los Angeles transplant still little known in New York, he was chosen that year to participate in the museum's annual artists-in-residence program, which provides on-the-premises studio space, a stipend and a culminating exhibition. Today, he's a star, the program continues, and work by its latest graduates is on view in a show called "Material Histories: Artists in Residence 2013-14."

All three of its artists are, in more ways than one, Mr. Hammons's heirs. Like him, they take race as a subject, one as critical as ever, as the news keeps reminding us. And they address that complex theme in a variety of subtly polemical visual languages with sources in popular culture.

Language itself, viewed as intrinsically racialized, is Bethany Collins's primary material. It's the very substance of the inconspicuous centerpiece of her work done over the past year. Called "Colorblind Dictionary," it's simply a found and well-thumbed 1965 edition of a Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language in which the artist, who identifies herself as biracial, has carefully erased, or scratched out, all mentions of the words "black," "white" and "brown." As you flip through the book, paper shavings fall from the pages like dust.

She applies a comparable editing process to dozens of framed e applies a comparable editing process to dozens of framed tear sheets from a 1987 issue of The Southern Review, a venerable literary magazine published by Louisiana State University. The contents of the journal itself are neither programmatically about the American South nor about race, but Ms. Collins, born in Montgomery, Ala., in 1984, turns its pages into a metaphorical play of black and white by inking out sections of printed text and isolating references to the writers Elizabeth Alexander, Derek Walcott and Carl van Vechten.

Finally, she cuts language loose from obvious meaning in two abstract paintings. Both, despite strongly worded references to race in their titles, are ethereal looking, with clusters of alphabetical characters written in light-blue pencil on a dark ground, like smudges left on a blackboard, or barely legible nebulae seen in a night sky.

The basic language in Kevin Beasley's sculpture is body language, or the compressed traces of it. Several pieces in the show are made in part from clothing worn by the artist or someone he knows. An urn-shape sculpture from 2013 incorporates a floral-patterned nightgown of a kind favored by his grandmother. A 2014 wall hanging consists of a shag rug encrusted with studio debris, sealed in clear resin and festooned with soft-sculpture globes made from bunched-up underwear.

The work looks at once abject and extraterrestrial, like mysterious, vacuum-packed matter from some other universe. It also has connections, direct or otherwise, to art history, specifically to a style of dense, street-derived assemblage made by John Outterbridge, Noah Purifoy, Dale Brockman Davis and other members of a group of black artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and ’70s, of which Mr. Hammons was an integral member.

As was the case with some of those artists, Mr. Beasley’s output often has an aural dimension in the form of live or taped music. In 2012, he filled the Museum of Modern Art’s atrium with an earsplitting, bone-rattling multitrack soundscape composed from the layered voices of dead rappers like Eazy-E, Guru and Biggie Smalls. Sound doesn’t figure in the Studio Museum work, at least that I could detect, but layering does. So does a sense of vitality generated by objects that look both ruined and precious, pulled raw from the gutter but tenderly detailed, as if they’d been touched a lot, which they have.

Abigail DeVille’s big, busy, conglomerate sculptures speak street talk. Almost everything that went into their making — shopping carts, cinder blocks, plastic bags, clothes mannequins — was harvested from the neighborhood surrounding the museum. She combines the material in very intricate ways, but still leaves the components warm with their individual histories. (An installation she made for the group show “Fore” at the museum in 2012 included cigarette butts from her grandmother’s home in the Bronx.)

Now in her early 30s, Ms. DeVille has been exhibiting in the city for nearly a decade and developing increasingly refined and cogent forms of sculpture and installation. Her work at the Studio Museum, some of her best so far, leans in a distinctly sculptural direction, with “ADDC Obelisk” being the show’s tour de force. It is a 15-foot-long skeletal version of the Washington Monument, tilted on its side, propped up by box springs, its innards exposed, revealing tangles of rope and wiring, chicken-wire walls and mannequin limbs in illogical combinations.

As with everything Ms. DeVille does, the piece is expansively theatrical. (She has done stage design, most recently for the Peter Sellars production of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” at the Stratford Festival in Ontario.) But it’s deliberately shaped and self-contained enough to make a statement, which I take to be a political one: about the attention deficit of an American government that allows monumental degrees of racism to fester under its very eyes.

The exhibition, organized by Lauren Haynes, an assistant curator at the Studio Museum, also has the closest thing to painting I’ve yet seen from Ms. DeVille, an abstract collage assembled on pieces of Sheetrock attached to a gallery wall. The main material is paper, plain but imprinted with rubbings she made of the surface of local streets. With areas of drilled perforations and the addition of a brightly colored but paint-flaking found door, the result looks like a giant, distressed Anne Ryan collage, an aria to art history and to the story of everyday urban life. Its title is “Harlem Flag.” A salute to Mr. Hammons? My guess is yes.

Cotter, Holland, “Material Histories: Artists in Residence 2013-14” New York Times, Art Review, August 28, 2014, Online.

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STUDIO MUSEUM HARLEM

JULY 17 - OCTOBER 26, 2014

A PARTIAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORK OF KEVIN BEASLEY

by Lumi Tan

HOW IT LOOKS

Recently, Kevin and I were in his studio discussing how we never find formal descriptions of artworks quite that fulfilling; the words typically used are too objective, when each viewer comes to an artwork from a highly individualized place. He pointed to a sculpture in progress onthe floor, and asked, “How would you describe this?” It was a rhetorical question, but I’ll attempt it here, since—for better or worse—the printed words in this essay will remain long after the ephemeral exhibition it accompanies. Like many of the sculptures Kevin was making at the moment, it was a bulbous, alien thing, that seemed to be halted on its way to becoming overgrown, bundled in clothing and other materials that had now fused together into something halfway between believably anthropomorphic and completely synthetic. I’m going to leave it at that, because looking is the easiest part, and what we’ve come to this museum to do.

HOW IT FEELS

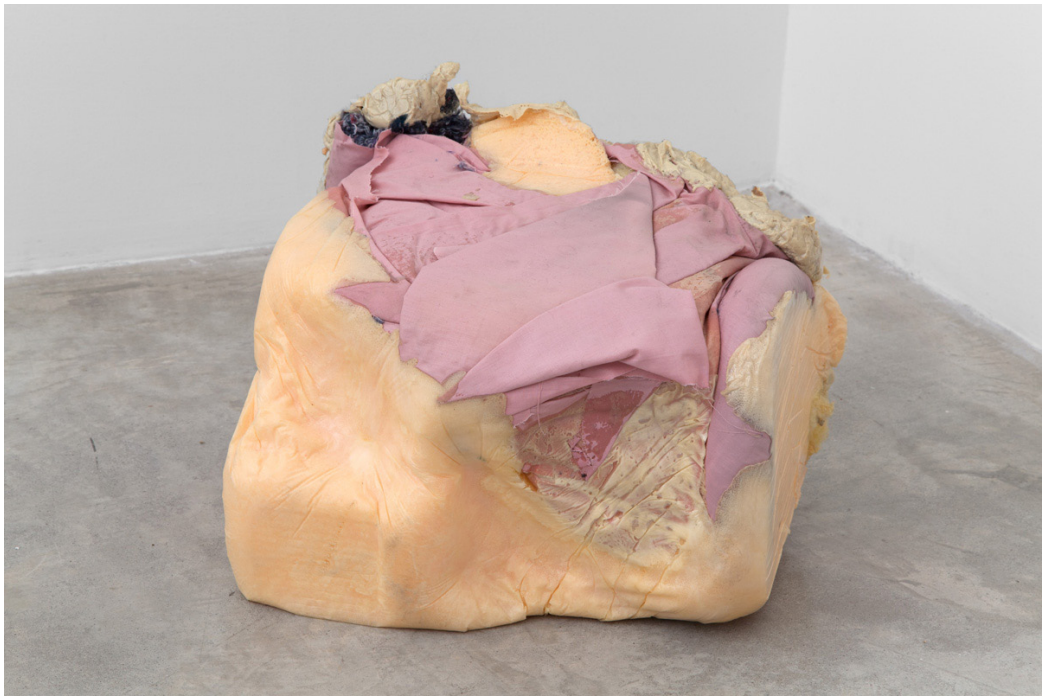
Kevin encourages visitors to his studio to hold his sculptures, which are sized to be cradled in your arms, or gripped like a football. For all their substance—any of these sculptures could contain foam, resin, concrete, and many other quotidian materials—they are unexpectedly light. But this haptic perception isn’t necessary to experience Kevin’s sculptures; through their petrified surfaces, it’s impossible to feel that this is the type of nightgown that his grandmother has favored for the past sixty years, or pick up on the personal significance—small or great—of other family remnants that Kevin has collected over the years. Even these solid objects are vessels, carrying a different psychic weight for each person who encounters them.

HOW IT SOUNDS

An artistic practice as expansive and restless as Kevin's refuses to end with a mere look. I've witnessed him in a darkened room at Casey Kaplan gallery, cross-legged on the floor with turntables, pedals, and laptop within arm's reach—an arrangement that restricts his movement. With sight stripped away, there's not much to do other than sit back and absorb the sound that he produces. The sonic shifts between each sample suspends your attention and keeps you present, instead of overwhelming you with noise or volume. The specific context of the white cube gallery a space created entirely for looking—temporarily became a void for the duration of the performance. This room also contains Kevin's *... for this moment, this moment is yours ...* (2014) a customized reel-to-reel player that he has spliced thousands of hours worth of cassette tape audio onto. This piece functions in-between the indeterminate forms of his sculptures, and Kevin's sound performances; in a way, it makes up for the absence of performances, with sound filling the spaces of the minimally-installed gallery. When performances do take place, the piece records audio rather than projects it. This time, when the lights are flipped back on and the reels reverse, it lands in the middle of an '80s pop song. Our eyes quickly adjust, we adapt our bodies to be social again, and the audience and artist briefly register each other before exiting.

Kevin's literal visibility as an artist—as a public body in an exhibition space—is a constant area of exploration and significance for him. At a recent performance at the Whitney Museum on pay-what-you wish admission night, he switched positions from producing sound to performing sound. Using his minimal tools of delay pedals, amplifiers and microphones, he created waves of distorted sound by moving, simply and fluidly, back and forth through a thicket of microphones. His body became the medium for sound. The particular architectural conventions of museums dictate that performances often take place in open, central spaces that allow the museum public to be non-committal passersby, even if the performer is front and center. But Kevin knows these museum sites well. Sound is a way for him to catch this public in transient moments, to affect an audience without them even knowing. Case in point: during this performance, I was unsure if this minor rumbling I heard was just another artist's sound installation bleeding from the lobby balcony above. At the time, the audience's attention was focused on two dancers in front of us, and the sound was coming from behind. But once we made the concerted decision to turn around, here was the visual proof: the artist was present, connecting the sound and the maker, body to machine. The museum's lights were all on, and the audience could all watch each other in addition to the artist.

Kevin Beasley, *Untitled, (chest pack)*, 2014. Photos: Jean Vong



Kevin Beasley, *Untitled (husbandskin)*, 2013

HOW IT COMES TOGETHER

In response to my question about why he decided to use his body in this more performative way, Kevin explained that he wanted to take the physicality of being in the studio, where he wrangles material into sculpture, and use those movements to manipulate sound. During a later conversation, when Kevin laments that he now has to reckon with producing a "body of work," I immediately envisioned these routine, but individualized, movements as the corollary to this term. After all, wouldn't a "body of work" be an ideal manner in which to describe all he does? There are many immediately apparent bodies involved in his work: his body in the making, the viewers' in the reception, and the imagined bodies in his sculptural forms, whose materials may reference the real bodies in his personal history. He additionally places great emphasis on the presence of other artists' bodies when he invites performers, musicians or thinkers to share in his exhibition space; a "solo" exhibition by Kevin will always be a group effort. Rather than coming to these invited artists with prescribed ideas, each artist is called upon to do what they know. The wild differences between each of these practices only amplify the ineffectualness of looking at Kevin's work from a single vantage point.

So maybe the word "body" is too solid; it connotes something to be understood as a whole. Kevin instead suggests a constellation, a grouping of individual acts which point to each other, and then come together in association. It's not solely the artwork that an artist has grown, cultivated, and considered, but the people who bring themselves to it. Without these receivers and responders, there are no alliances, perspectives, narratives, eyes, ears, or hands. Kevin's role as an artist does not relieve him of the responsibility of being an audience member, and I remember this as he ends a later performance at the Whitney Museum. This time, Kevin had embedded microphones inside his sculptures. He breathed into their negative spaces, rolled one, clutched another as he traced a circle on the gallery floor. After about forty minutes, in lieu of a bow and speedy exit as he usually does, he held up both hands as if in surrender and turned all the way around, making eye contact with each and every person in the audience, many of whom were colleagues and friends.

The lights are all on, and the artist and the audience should take a long look at each other. We're all going to be here for quite some time.

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STUDIO MUSEUM HARLEM

Kevin Beasley
As I rest under many skies, I hear my body escape me, 2014
Two-channel sound installation
TRT 1:56:24 and 00:38:49

On view as part of: *When the Stars Begin to Fall, Imagination and the American South*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, March 27 - June 29, 2014

Kevin Beasley creates sculptures and soundworks that resonate within the viewer's body
While the former are bound and contained, often tied with twine or spilling out of tape or cloth, the sound pieces retain a diffuseness that directly permeates our sensory experience. In *As I rest under many skies, I hear my body escape me* (2014) Beasley draws upon the phenomenological force of sound and its ability to index a time and place, even as it is abstracted. By embedding microphones in resin, clothing and other materials, Beasley creates field recordings on his family's property in Virginia that capture an event, such as a conversation, and the ambient soundscape surrounding it: a chair rocking, floorboards creaking, birds calling. In this way, he transports a document of a specific place to the gallery to explore how a fixed site can be dislocated. This mirrors the portability and influence of the South more broadly and reflects an attempt to explore how Southern tendencies, colloquialisms or ideas may exist in other places.

To complete the installation, Beasley has placed sound-canceling headphones throughout the galleries that play recordings of the small, nuanced noises of the Studio Museum gallery space recorded during his 2013-14 residency. As the visitor becomes immersed in the prerecorded sound of the space in which she stands, the surrounding noises are cancelled out, leaving an uncanny refraction of the sound of another space and time. Beasley describes this experience as "the self disappearing: which generates a simultaneous sense of relocation and dislocation."
Abbe Schriber

Schriber, Abbe. *Studio Museum 2013-2014 Artists in Residence: Kevin Beasley, Bethany Collins, Abigail DeVille*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, April 2014.

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WHITNEY BIENNIAL

Kevin Beasley

Untitled, 2011. Winter glove, latex, cast resin, peanuts, and polyurethane foam, 7 x 7 x 8 in.(17.8 x 20.3 cm)

Born in 1985
Lynchburg, VA

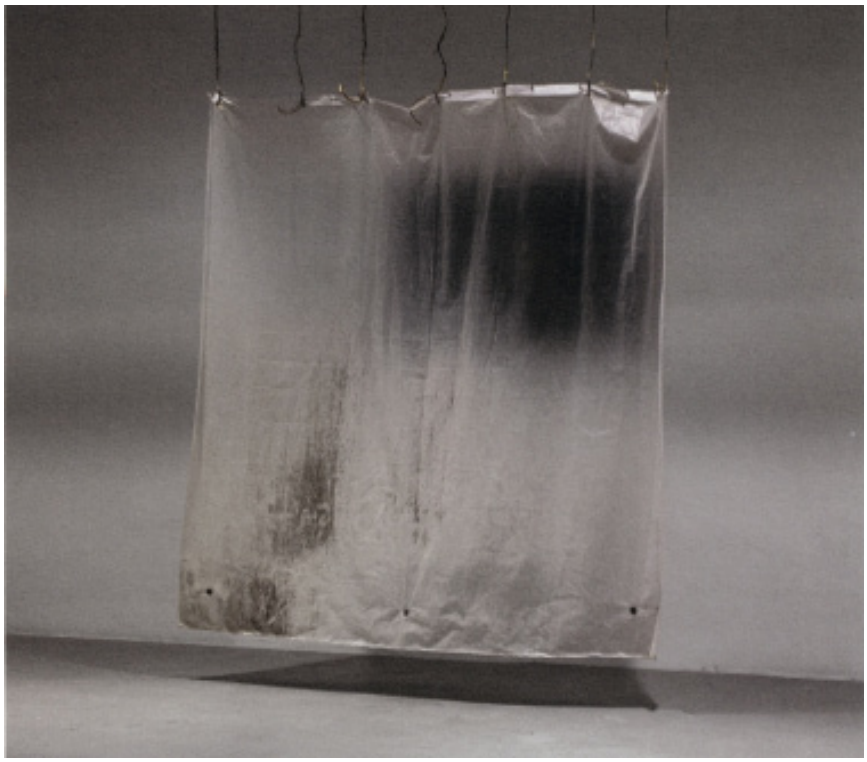
Lives in
New York, NY

Untitled (Sack), 2012. Foam, resin, T-shirt, mattress cover, cotton, and thermal shirt, 51 x 23 16 in. (129.5 x 58.4 x 40.6 cm)

The white T-shirt-stretched taut over a transparent mattress cover, a thermal shirt, and polyurethane foam-bears an uncanny resemblance to its original function: the stitches and seams along the object's side would have once withheld an armpit from view. Stretched and removed from the body of its previous owner, the hole is one of *Untitled (Sack)*'s several allusions to the gaps and folds out of which the sculpture's contents seep through and reveal its holdings. The hardened resin that gives these extrusions their luster also makes the object look wet, as if it were recently produced or a point of entry or refusal. At 4 feet in length, *Untitled (Sack)* (2012), is anthropormorphic in scale, and its compressed form resembles a body bag. The shirt's threads construct a barrier between the unknown, bounded form beneath and the viewer; like the armpits it housed before, the shirt fails to fully withhold the found and used materials that it struggles to encase.

Kevin Beasley's sculptures shuffle between the thrown away and not yet formed, but they almost always relate in some way to abjection. Feminist cultural theorist Julia Kristeva has described the condition thus: " Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects...But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself." 1 Between subject and object, the abject is a frontier, a stray, an ambiguity: a state of abandon. Installed in direct relationship to their architectural container, often on the floor directly in the viewer's path, Beasley's objects makes use of- and continue to look like- biological matter, geological debris, and organic waste. Their near life size renders them anthropomorphic, yet these are disconcertingly truncated, compressed forms. They are at one nonhuman and human-like—distinct from the viewer's body, yet threatening and dissolving that boundary all the while.

To make sculptures such as *Untitled (Sack)*, Beasley fills found and discarded clothing and objects with polyurethane foam made by combining a resin polymer catalyst with a reactant. He has a brief, half-hour window to give his materials shape and form—manipulating, wrapping, and binding the object before the foam solidifies.



Untitled, 2012. Shower curtian, hair clips, twine, foam, and inkjet print, Dimensions variable

Beasley's intervention marks his objects: their form is an index of his very physical handling. His technique is itself a variation of the casting process- a basic tool of sculpture and industrial production alike. Beasley makes use of molds, including found objects such as shower caps and yoga balls, that allude to the body even if they cannot be recognized in their imprint. He also produces handmade molds whose shapes bear little representational funtion. His own body functions as a kind of mold a he wrestles and grapples with his materials. Although Beasley inserts himself into the chain of reproduction, constructing unique objects by hand and with his body, he does not relinquish references to industry and automation. Indeed, the chemicals he uses to fabricate his foam are industrially manufactured, produced, and sold. They fill the insides of any number of domestic products, like car seats and sofas; and as insulation, packaging, and soundproofing, they expedite the transportation of goods. Combining the industrial with the organic, the ready-made with the handmade, Beasley's foam not only mediates between the artist's laboring body and the imprints of his production, it makes visible the otherwise unseen links between commercial circulation and a consumer corpus.

Beasley explores an expansive language of sculpture and its "capacity for investing in the body as a reciever and safe for our experiences,"2 which he extends to time as well as space. The artist's sonic experiences, like his objects, invite their respective viewers and listener into relationships with one another. For his breakthrough *I Want My Spot Back (2012)*, Beasley placed himself with three turntables in the center of the atrium of New York's Museum of Modern Art. 3 Over two days, he mixed and slowed down approximately forty a cappella tracks, all by deceased black male rappers prominent in the early to mid-1990s- the moment when hip-hop gained worldwide as a black-authored commodity. 4 Beasley improvised with extracts of the artists' voices, digitally manipulating their frequencies, volume, and equalization and playing the turntables by hand with his fingers. Miming the process by which producers make beats and DJs embellish and mix tracks, Beasley emphasized the sounds, as the subwoofers thundered throughout the building and their vibrations shook its architecture. Both elevating and reducing the original tracks, he transformed the music into a physical sensation.

The performance's phenomenological intervention relates structurally to Beasley's objects. Evoking ubiquity and invisibility, interiority and enclosure, they bear perciptible, contradictory pressures on the body. The title of *I Want My Spot Back* directly references the Notorious B.I.G.'s posthumously released song "Tonight" (1999), but the work's overtones also made larger claims to time and space, institutional and urban. Occurring one week before the then year-old Occupy movement would turn its attention to the Superstorm Sandy relief effort, the performance's title and physical intervention cited a tale of two citites that has kept pace with an inequitable America.

Beasley makes reference to particular and contigent bodies, eschewing illustion and pushing the materials he uses to the limit of their capacity. While his objects and time-based works evolve from experiences in specific places that happen to bear autobiographical relation to where he grew up, attended school, and currently lives (Lynchburg, Virginia; Detroit; New Haven, Connecticut; and New York), they refuse personal representation, save for the traces of their ongoing formation. Emerging from ready-made materials and everyday beats, the artist's materials are returned- assisted, remixed, and worked over- now rendered unfamiliar and ambiguous. Through a confusion of material and physical identity—corpse or trash, excess or lack-Beasley draws our attnetion to the kinds of dislocation, crisis, and doubt that habitually lie before us, quietly asking us to take notice even if we might again look away.

I Want My Spot Back, 2012 (installation view, Some Sweet Day, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 15-November 4, 2012)

1. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.
2. Kevin Beasley, "WTF Is My Sculpture," Unpublished artist statement.
3. *I Want My Spot Back* took place during the dance exhibition *Some sweet day*, organized by American artist Ralph Lemon (b. 1952) and curator Jenny Schlenzka. The work was previously performed at Lemon's invitation in the East Village's Danspace Projec as part of the finale for American choreographer Ishmael Houston-Jone's (b. 1951) platform of experiemental dance by black dance makers, *Parallels.* See Ralph Lemon and Melissa Perel, "Gimme Shelter | Infiltrating the MoMA Atrium, Part 1: An Interview with Ralph Lemon on the Curation of 'Some sweet day,'" http://blog.art21.org/2012/12/07/gimme-shelter-infiltrating-the-moma-atrium-part-1-an-interview-with-ralph-lemon-on-the-curation-of-some-sweet-day/#.UnHQ846hDzI(accessed October 30, 2013); and Danielle Goldman, "Judson Now Writer-in-Residence Danielle Goldman on Conversations Without Walls: Reflections on Some sweet day, " http://www.danspaceproject.orgblog/?p=836(accessed October 20, 2013).
4. An abbreviated list of the names and birth and death years of some of the artist whose songs Beasley appropriated demonstrates the trunication of their lives: Big L (1974-1999), Eazy E (1963-1995), Guru (1961-2010), the Notorious B.I.G. (1972-1997), Ol' Dirty Bastard (1968-2004), Tupac Shakur (1971-1996)

Your Awaited Evening, 2010. Bathrobe and latex, 12 x 7 x 8 in. (30.5 x 17.8 x 20.3 cm)

Comer, Stuart, et al. *Whitney Bienniale*. Whitney Museum, New York, NY, 2014. p.50-53

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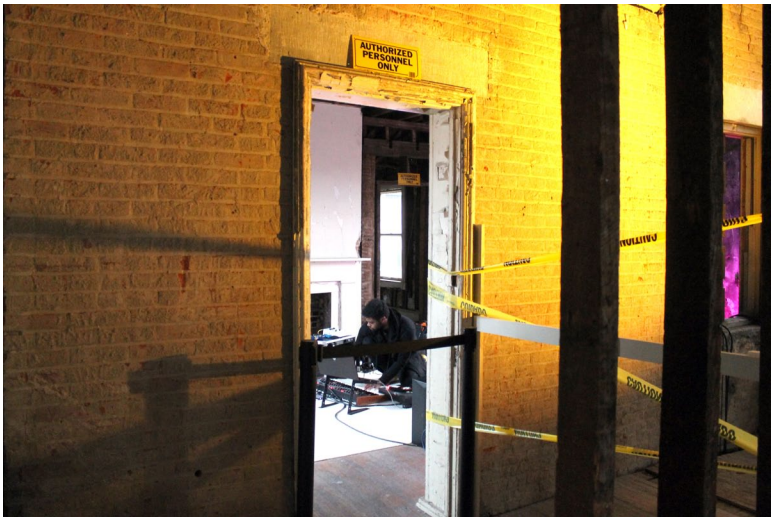
TENSION, FRICTION, HARMONY & LOVE

Kevin Beasley at the Cozad-Bates House

Elena Harvey Collins



Kevin Beasley, *And In my Dream I was Rolling on the Floor*, 2014 performance documentation at the Cozad-Bates house.

The Cozad-Bates house, in the University Circle area of Cleveland, is the oldest surviving structure in that part of the city. It was built in two sections, with the oldest part of the house dating to 1853. This part of the house now makes up the rear and middle of the property and reflects the more modest building style of the time; simple, rectangular rooms are arranged around a large chimney. The proportions are noticeably smaller in comparison to the rest of the house, the brickwork older and rougher. The more ornate, red-brick Italianate mansion addition, which includes the curved filcade that is seen from the street, was added in 1872. It includes generously proportioned rooms, high ceilings, curved moldings, and a spacious front porch. The Cozad family were prominent abolitionists and the cellar of the house is believed to have been a safe house on the Underground Railroad, though no concrete historical account remains, perhaps due to the secret nature of those activities.

Despite the intense development of the surrounding area (shiny new healthcare buildings and the new building of the Museum of Conternporary Art Cleveland, alllong others), and the rebranding of the neighborhood as "Uptown," the property boundary has not been encroached upon. An important historic site, the house sits back from the street, surrounded by an expansive lawn and ranked by student housing. It is in the peculiar position of being both set aside and technically condemned, as it undergoes a multi-year restoration project by Restore Cleveland Hope, an organization that is piecing together the story of Cleveland's anti-slavery past. At present though, the house is a place outside of time and space, preserved and separate, an anachronism that throws the rapidly transforming backdrop of the city into sharp relief. At the first warmth of a late spring, the Cozad-Bates house was the site for a series of performances by artist Kevin Beasley (1984, Virginia), organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland to take place over the course of one day.

Old places are evocative for many reasons. They *feel* a certain way; we perceive in them the traces of past lives and stories, and the degree to which they are haunted. Attracted to the transitional-yet-frozen state of

the house and the way it operates as a fulcrum for the reconstruction of lost histories, along with the layers of texture and the sense of space that it conjured, Beasley developed *And In My Dream I was Rolling on the Floor*, consisting of four separate arrangements to be performed at transitional points throughout the day; *Civil Twilight 1*, *Transit*, *Civil Twilight II*, and *Night*. During site visits to Cleveland, Beasley recorded the clatter of traffic on Euclid Avenue, snatches of conversation and birdsong, and the rumble of passing trains as well as the sighs and creaks of the old house itself, as raw material for his final composhions.

The idea of re-imagining or reconstructing history has a particular resonance in Cleveland. The precarious position of this house, and by extension all vacant properties that connect the city to its layered, textured past, is emblematic of the way we are confronted by the spectacle of history versus the spectacle of decay; attempting historic presenration in a cold weather city that can't keep the potholes filled, where the evidence of impermanence—of infrastructure, homes, and communities is all around. Staging performances at transitional moments of the day, in a house that rests in an uncertain state, emphasized the slipperiness of potential—it is equal parts everything and nothing. And so a designated historic site such as the Cozad Bates house is simultaneously celebrated and held at arms length, while other lived spaces, the homes of people nearby, are foreclosed upon and deteriorate.

During the first performance of the day, *Civil Twilight 1*, strangers stood awkwardly in communal silence that was broken by a slow building crescendo, timed to accompany the sunrise. At 6:45 am, the low-angled sunlight reflected off the apartment building opposite the house, as someone in a purple dressing gown smoked the first cigarette of the day on an apartment balcony. A siren wailed, as the thrumming emanating from the house began to intercept the wake-up rhythms of the neighborhood. While from inside the house the layers of sound were discernible, discrete, from the bottom of the garden path they blended into a low rumble and were easily mistaken for a passing train. Encountering this work in the wider context of the landscape in which the house sits, as the sounds of the neighborhood are re-layered and played back to it, produced a sense of dislocation. Passersby seemed to sense some change to the agreed-upon order of things, noting the sudden flurry of activity around this long-uninhabited house. One section of the composition contained the sounds of bird song; starlings and sparrows roosting in the trees around the house began to call back, closing the feedback loop. In this way, reality was slightly shifted and amplified for both knowing and unknowing participants, human and non-human alike. The borders of sound and by extension this work are leaky, imprecise and generous; flowing outwards from the property line, the effect on reality sweetly disruptive.

A robust, messy street life doesn't come naturally to Cleveland. It is too convenient to navigate by car, and like other Midwestern cities, there never was much of an economic incentive for cheek-by-jowl density. So when we develop in the city, perhaps what we are getting is an approximation of what developers and planners think an organically constructed social space should look like, inherited from long-standing assumptions ahout what public space actually is; and what purposes it should serve, but with the rough edges smoothed out. The artist Vito Acconci, writing on the shifting nature of public space, stated that:

> Public space is an old habit. The words public space are deceptive; when I hear the words, when I say the words, I'm forced to have an image of a physical place I can point to and be in. I should be thinking only of a condition; but, instead, I imagine an architectural type, and I think of a piazza, or a town square, or a city commons. [1]

This project turns our idea of what public space is inside out; it is no longer "the piazza, a space in the light, away from the plots and conspiracies in dark smoky rooms."[2] In this case, public space is opened up inside the dusty, dark Cozad-Bates house, a stand in for those conspiratorial spaces of our collective imagination and arguably, as a domestic space, one of the most opaque private spaces of all. Viewed in this light, the idea of bringing a group of strangers together takes on an added significance—the creation of a public space around a shared experience, risking awkwardness, discomfort or inconvenience through the proximity of other unknown people, and also,

the opportunity to “try your hand at the sea of bodies that swarm through the place.” [3] This sense of tactility and the possibility of closeness seems potentially transgressive when we consider the increasing physical placelessness of contemporary life.

The writer Zadie Smith, in her lecture "Why Write"[4] describes the increasing tendency among her students to attempt to strategically fill a niche with their writing, just like a product might. Students of all creative stripes are encouraged to *build their brand,* their work slipping seamlessly into the updrafts of the market and our lives, resulting in a generalized smoothing out of culture that extends across all creative disciplines. When this kind of thinking is applied to urban planning and development, we get polite, mannered, frictionless spaces; the bricks and mortar version of an Apple product. Here, the formal qualities of public space—its geometry, landscaping or street furniture—signal that it is public, without the inner condition or sense of collective ownership of a part of the city by the community. If we want real places, we have to have active spaces. The relationship between the two has been summed up like this: "the space could be to the place what the word becomes when it is spoken: grasped in the ambiguity of being accomplished." The word on the page is static, closed, while the word spoken aloud is alive. lt denotes action, agency, and is inflected with the nature, mood, and tone of the speaker. In the same way, space is transformed by the dynamic possibilities of movement and relationships enacted within and upon it; its geometry is in a constant state of renegotiation, via appropriation, use, or misuse, and cannot be prescribed. Activated at the point at which lived time and space intersect, it is unstable and ambiguous at the moment of its accomplishment, containing many narratives; simultaneously inscribed with the past *and* containing all of the possibilities of present and future.

For Beasley, this sense of possibility is expressed in the unpredictability of the performance as it unfolds. His split second decisions as he layers and mixes his compositions in real time contain an acknowledgement of all the different contingencies at play; something is at risk here: "There is a lot of tension and friction and there's also harmony and love." There is room here for ambiguity, ambivalence, and refusal. This public space holds the notion of friction close—has it as a value. There is little instruction as to how to be. It's up to the participants now more than just neutral observers—to figure it out. This runs counter to the recent patterns of Cleveland's redevelopment, where there is a hopeful, hyperbolic focus on the renaming, and by extension, redefining, of existing neighborhoods and their boundaries. Naming, as a strategy of place-making, is concerned with redrawing the boundaries between places that are accepted, safe, culturally defined, and those that are not. Places like "Hingetown," on the edge of Cleveland's Ohio City neighborhood, and the aforementioned "Uptown" arc ne neighborhoods fashioned out of old, anchored by visual arts organizations and other cultural assets that fill "perceived voids without structure or history" [7] in "under curated" [8] neighborhoods. But in a city where poverty and racial segregation are entrenched, the narrative of emptiness is charged. We encounter this project in the context of a city marketing its post-industrial aesthetic while still dealing with the effects of long-term economic trauma and uneven recovery. It's a delicate balancing act, between competing narratives of a revitalized city that parlays its colorful past into burning river swagger, and the uncomfortable reality of stubborn infant mortality rates [9] in culturally invisible swathes of the city that will remain so as long as they are easily bypassed by car.

Nestling among questions about leveraging the past and the construction of a new identity and, by extension, economy, is the question of art, and what it can do for a city as an economic driver. This is a conversation in which artists—or more nebulously, creatives—and the associated infrastrucutre of galleries, institutions and studio space, are often gestured at as lynchpins of economic growth in general. And in *My Dream I was Rolling 0n the Floor* offers an active model of engagement with the semi-forgotten but culturally important spaces of the city that foregrounds impermanence and a lightness of touch; a platform for unscripted interactions between people within a space that is rough, unfinished, and facing a future that is by no means settled, which feels like an honest approach to a city in which things still feel like they could go either way. As a temporary intervention, it is also an approach that promises little in the way of product or profit beyond raising the profile of the house, a potentially false positive, addressed by Beasley in an interview with Jimmy Kuehnle for *Arthopper,* when he wondered whether his project might inadvertently cause break-ins or other negative attention.

This event provided little in the way of in structions for use. Beasley chose the oldest, pokiest section of the house to set up his equipment in, to hinder an easy view of himself as he worked, tweaking and layering his arrangements on the spur of the moment. With the placement of speakers in dark corners of each room and Beasley out of sight, the performance was centerless, without hierarchy from front to back or top to bottom. Denying audience members the usual spectatorship afforded them in a performance scenario created new interdependencies between the artist, audience, and space, prompting movement through this sonic landscape as it morphed. An exquisite corpse containing abstract gestures of the past in the form of conserved decorative mantels and ornate brickwork, the house is a performative object in its own right; a stage set for the performance of family life, organized resistance and compassion, and now an interpretive act that amplified all of those things at once. People leaned , sat, swayed, and wandered through the house in the gathering darkness as the visceral sounds of *Civil Twilight II* swerved and bounced through them like a physical presence. Emerging from the nuanced interplay between sound, space, and bodies was a sense of the agency of the space itself. During the 8:45 PM performance, *Night*, the house became a theater of light and shadow, the streetlights and a full moon streaming yellow and white through the windows, picking up the cheekbones and noses of audience members. Now we were all vanishing in the dark with strangers, losing our bodies; the vibe somewhere between a rave and a seance, the sound pitching and rolling like the thrumming of invisible histories, mysterious and prosaic all at once.

NOTES

1 Acconci, Vito, "Public Space in a Private Time; Critical Inquiry, Vol. 16, No. 4, 901 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).
2 Ibid, 908.
3 Ibid, 907.
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5 Maurice Merleau Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 173, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962)
6 Beasley, Kevin, interview with Jimmy Kuehnle, "Physical Bodies Making Sound with Kevin Beasley," Arthopper.org, April 11, 2014. http://arthopper.org/physical-bodies-making-sound-with-kevin-beasley/
7 Potteiger, Mathew, and Jamie Purinton, "Landscape Narratives: Design Practices for Telling Stories; 82 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998)
8 Chilcote, Lee. "Got to Get Down to Hingetown: Introducing Ohio City's Next Hot Block," *Freshwater Cleveland*, July 25, 2013, accessed July 2014. www.freshwatercleveland.com./features/hingetownohiocity07513.aspx
9 Walsh, Michele, "The Sound of Ideas," Thursday, April 4th, 2013, WCPN.

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MOCA

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
CLEVELAND

April 12, 2014

Since 2011, artist Kevin Beasley has developed a series of live audio performances, mixing found and recorded sounds into layered arrangements that address personal and collective histories. Beasley's newly commissioned work for MOCA Cleveland will be his most complex sound work to date, and will occupy both the Museum and the Cozad-Bates house, a historic Italianate mansion just across the street. The house is the only surviving pre-Civil War structure in University Circle, with the original section being built in 1853. The Cozad's were a prominent landowners and abolitionists, and the house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, and designated as a Cleveland Landmark in 2006. Stripped down for renovation, it has been vacant for the past seven years, creating a unique, transitional environment loaded with a deep sense of the past, and ongoing change.

Titled *And in My Dream I Was Rolling on the Floor,* Beasley's sound work will consider the architecture, history and the condition of the bodies that move(d) through the house and the Museum. It will be presented as a sequence of four live, multi-channel audio performances at the house. Each 30-45 minute piece *(Civil Twilight I, Transit, Civil Twilight II, and Night)* is composed for a specific time, charting the shifting atmosphere over the course of a day. At the Museum, the entire scope of the compositions can be experienced in a daylong listening environment in the Gund Commons. Audience members will be immersed in a complex arrangement of sound that alters their perceptions of space and the passage of time, linking the oldest and newest building at the heart of a rapidly evolving community in Cleveland.

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Harold Ancart, Kevin Beasley, Mateo López
February 27 – April 26
Opening Thursday, February 27, 6 – 8pm

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce an exhibition of solo projects by Mateo López (b. 1978, Bogotá), Harold Ancart (b. 1980, Brussels), and Kevin Beasley (b. 1985, Lynchburg, Virginia).

Mateo López's work is an investigation of drawing itself, and the spaces between its mental and physical actions. Crucial to this is an examination of how drawing moves from line to form and object and a conflation of the boundaries between two and three-dimensions. Through the process of observation itself, López begins a dialog between two seemingly opposed motivations: the making of a realistic representation of his surroundings and an investigation of their implications.

López presents a new installation comprised of drawings, sculptures, as well as an animation, an element that is new to his practice. Following a single character – a drafting compass fashioned into a dancer, the protagonist himself presents a contradiction. He is a tool designed for rigidity and precision that instead makes loose, gestural movements. Tracing clockwise or counterclockwise, he begins to form a series of objects: a clock, a door, a globe, among others. Exhibited alongside the animation itself are these artifacts of the dancer's actions crafted meticulously out of paper, simultaneously suggesting a choreography that creates play and narrative and a drawing extending from the second to third dimension.

Harold Ancart's work recombines and repeats familiar tropes and forms in a series of permutations, functioning almost as a stutter. Ancart has previously created works in which lines of pure pigment traverse the walls of the exhibition space, as well as found images of pools and tropical landscapes that have been sullied with burn marks, all sharing a sense of immediacy in their creation – the laying of a mark or a gesture.

Ancart continues his previous explorations in a series of large-scale drawings titled "Ultra Deep Fried". Pre-cut forms of vegetation are layered onto paper as he creates textural, black and white backgrounds with oil stick. It is traces of their immediacy that are consistent throughout, vestiges of the lush color layered into the negative vegetal spaces are found across the surface. For the first time, Ancart arranges these works as a set, with their compositions sprawling across four panels. Their vibrant foliage and color splashes imply a distance that suggests a fascination with another place. This sense of longing recurs throughout Ancart's work, finding a parallel in a tension specific to drawing itself – the simultaneous desire to create and communicate a future while acting in relation to the past; a process through which motivations and intentions are continuously reversed. Additionally, he presents two sculptures immediately reminiscent of furniture, with a proportion and surface that denies function.

Kevin Beasley's work utilizes media including sculpture, photography, sound, and performance to navigate notions of origin and identity. Familiar objects, personal effects and sound elements from various sources are manipulated, distorted, and mixed, acts of removal from their original context that simultaneously investigate their histories. Through this process, they are broken into minutiae and partial forms and also expanded – gaining resonance and new meaning.

For the exhibition, Beasley has sourced approximately 4000 cassette tapes from family, friends, record stores and the Internet. Ranging from commercially sold audiobooks, popular music, independent labels, mixtapes, and home recordings, they have been cut and spliced together to create 52 reels, holding approximately 40 hours

of sound and music each. These reels exist as mixes – combinations of various sounds by a number of authors that play constantly during the gallery's opening hours, corresponding to a cycle of human consistency. Spanning intentions, genres, and decades, the resultant sound demonstrates a complex relationship with the history of the work's materials. Their obsolescence at the same time triggers a series of familiarities and emotional connections.

Played through a reel-to-reel player, an incompatible device, both sides of each tape are heard at once. Interrupting even the most familiar of referents is a layered, alternate track (albeit played in reverse), an ambiguous and sometimes unintelligible sound that asserts itself as an unknown entity. The work hinges on the presence of a listener yet the exhibition itself represents only a partial span of its length with the same sound never played twice. Over the course of the exhibition, performances by Beasley and invited guests will occur in the space, with a live recording made on the reels. Replacing the previous recordings, these newly introduced elements contribute to the ever-evolving nature of the work and its experience; it is growing and deteriorating at the same time.

Mateo López was recently a participant in the Rolex Mentor-Protégé program alongside William Kentridge. In 2013, his work, A Trip from Here to There, was the starting point for an exhibition of the same title at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Recent solo exhibitions include Travesía Cuatro Gallery, Madrid, 2013, Casas Riegner Gallery, Bogotá, 2012, Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo, 2011 and Gasworks, London, 2010. Group exhibitions include: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2013, The Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, 2013, The Drawing Room, London, 2012 and the 8th Bienal do Mercosul, Porto Alegre, 2011.

Harold Ancart has recently had solo exhibitions at Veneklasen Werner, Berlin, 2014, Clearing, Brooklyn, 2013, and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, 2013. Additionally, Ancart has participated in group exhibitions at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 2013, Palais de Toyko, Paris, 2013, WIELS / Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, 2012 and Sculpture Center, Queens, 2011.

Kevin Beasley is currently an artist in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. He will participate in the 2014 Whitney Biennial, curated by Anthony Elms, Michelle Grabner and Stuart Comer, opening March 7. His work was included the 2013 Queens International as well as group exhibitions at Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, 2013, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, 2012. His work "I Want My Spot Back" was performed at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2012 as part of Ralph Lemon's "Some Sweet Day."

For further information, please contact Loring Randolph, loring@caseykaplangallery.com

GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 10:00AM – 6:00PM

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Interview

Kevin BEASLEY

The 28-year-old, Virginia-bom Kevin Beasley is an artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. One of the requirements of the year-long program is that he work in his assigned studio space for a minimum of 20 hours a week–a number far below his usual, self-imposed quota. Over the course of his residency, Beasley's temporary space has become a tossed salad of rubber, resin, boxes of cassette tapes, and antique audio equipment, materials that correspond to the two fundamental threads of his recent work: sculpture and sound.

As a sculptor, Beasley tends to make artifacts of the culture that surrounds him. He ties old, shredded T-shirts into compact hundles; he smears tar; he pours liquid foam makeshift molds, fashioned from shoes, to arrive at elegant, vase-like forms. Beasley carries these collected pieces– a trash-can liner, for example– around for years until they're worn from age and handling.

For a short time, he forwent having a physical studio space and making sculpturc, but his practice eventually returned to his accretion of art materials including a cumbrous cotton-gin motor that he hauled from Alabama–all of which now fill a storage unit he rents in Connecticut. "It's really hard for me to totally abandon something," he says, "unless it's completely spent. And by then it's probably a sculpture." Beasley is also a longtime musician–most often a drummer–and his sound art emerged from a quasi-sculptural interest in the physical materiality of analog tape and reel-to-reel players. Last year he performed in MoMA's atrium as a kind of DJ, remixing and screwing a cappella tracks by deceased rappers (including Guru, ODB, Eazy-E, Biggie Smalls) into a menacing sonic soup he titled *I Want My Spot Back*.

For the Biennial, Beasley plans to conflate his two practices, creating sculptures from concrete and fabric each with a microphone buried within, so as to capture what he calls the object's "internal architecture." As of now, the idea is that, over a week, the objects will be scattered through the Whitney's ground-floor gallery, and the microphones will remain live, continually amplyifying the room's vibrations through haunting delays and humming reverbs. "It's supposed to just echo presence in that building," Beasley explains, "so that when people are there, they're listening to a filtered version of their own presence in the space." Three times during his installation, the artist will step into the space and perform–literally inserting himself into the work, which makes sense for a man who is in a near-constant state of production. "Making art is like shaking something out of your system," he says. "It's like the flu. You have all these symptoms, and some go away and some come back. For me, making work is survival, and afterward, I feel good."

–ROSS SIMONINI

Simonini, Ross. "Kevin Beasley," Interview Magazine, March 2014.

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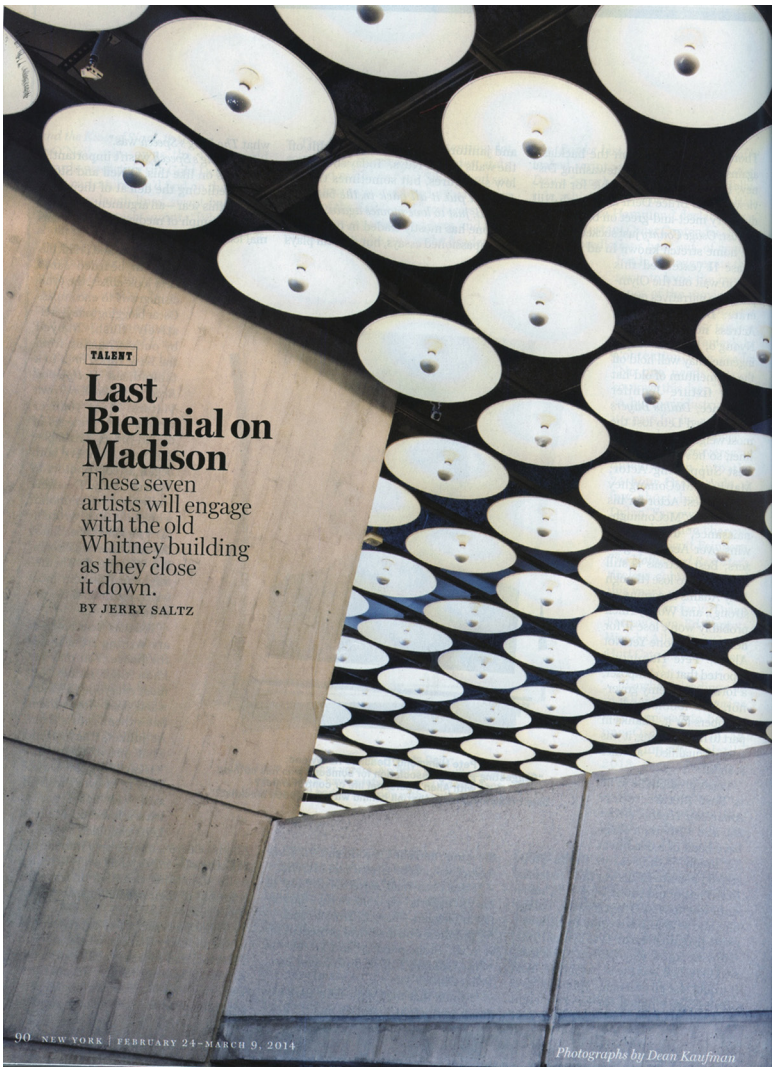
NEW YORK

Last Biennial on Madison
by Jerry Saltz

Feb.24-March 9, 2014



Saltz, Jerry. "Last Biennial on Madison," New York Magazine, Feb.24-March 9, 2014, p. 90-91.

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Discrepant Origins: Political Starts in Sculpture and Sound

By Adrienne Edwards

Published in Fore, Studio Museum in Harlem, 2012

Kevin Beasley practices a kind of auto-ethnography, a mining of personal effects and affects through a range of artistic disciplines, from sculpture to live performance to photography, in search of a nuanced and individuated understanding of blackness at this moment. Beasley's sculptures and installations include unidentifiable fragments of his own undergarments, the inner soles of his shoes, his wave caps, his shower curtain, his toothbrush, peanuts given to him by his father, his brother's wisdom teeth, his winter gloves and more. These materials are rendered illegible through the physical, violent and precarious process through which he combines them with polyurethane foam, cast plastic, molded rags, silicone, epoxy, rubber and twine. The resultant works seem to be characteristically possessed with an inner, secret life bestowed on them through their obscurity, and by virtue of the juxtaposition of their parts.

Beasley often presents his works below eye level, and frequently on the floor, as a strategic positioning that both differently orients viewers and activates their engagement. Through the disavowal of typical visual perspective for art installations, Beasley transforms viewers into participants, as each must spatially and temporally negotiate a relationship to the work. Beasley also emphasizes that art in situ exists within a structure (a museum, with its functional and philosophical parameters), and that that structure is a composite of larger social structures (culture and the normative ways of being, and the attendant understandings and expectations of the roles of artists and museums). This ideological layering of considerations is about more than raising important questions concerning how art is displayed—these systems of display also have profound political, social and cultural implications. Who determines what art is worthy and thus elevated to be exhibited in museums? And what is the transformative potential of the artist and the work of art, if there can be any?

A compelling example of Beasley's sensibilities is *Untitled* (2011), a composite work comprised of a fish aquarium trimmed with faux wood paneling, filled less than halfway with a crystalline marine-blue liquid (fashioned from his use of mouthwash) and inhabited by a floating orb. Situated on a gallery floor, the aquarium is a ready-made aquatic ecosystem that is simultaneously alien and familiar. In this altered context Beasley inserts a primordial sea creature. From above, viewer/participants see the black shiny surface of a wave cap encrusted with flecks of detritus clustered together, as if in an evolutionary process of becoming. As viewer/participants navigate the work, a Day-Glo green bulge emerges, jutting from the base of the drifting creature, from which mangled drinking straws, manipulated at their angle-adjusted bellows, coalesce.

For Beasley, minutiae, sedimentation, fragmentation and temporal suspension are techniques and conceptual apparatuses for his performances as well. For a live performance that was part of *An All Day Event. The End.*—a durational, conceptual, interdisciplinary installation created by Ralph Lemon (b. 1952) and staged at Danspace Project on March 31, 2012—

Beasley presented *I Want My Spot Back* (2012), a sound piece illustrative of his technique of appropriation. He sampled hip-hop anthems using technology that analyzes sound and synthesizes its information into images. Beasley came of age at a moment when hip-hop gained worldwide recognition, along with the economic gains that accompanied it—the age of the commodity who speaks over dubbed beats.[1] Beasley extracted from the captured images of hip-hop recordings a series of single frequencies, notes or keys that are visually represented as hundreds, even thousands, of dashes. These microscopic extractions and condensations are extremely reduced, isolated elements of sound waves, played at a near deafening volume, and then conferred a physicality that rendered an overwhelming somatic experience to his performance. For the event, Beasley built his own subwoofers and performed on the floor (similar to his politics of display). One of the most generative aspects of Beasley's sound piece is that it is a distortingly simple manipulation of air. Sound is nothing more and nothing less than the movement of a medium—in this case, air. The paradoxically ephemeral yet physical character of the sound piece is a natural extension of Beasley's works, as his interest is in how these stretched, condensed and reconstituted sonic elements interface and reverberate in a newly composed assemblage—the hyper-distillation of music that strips it of all of its leaden capitalistic and materialistic references, and reduces it to an essence that is anti-rhythmic and sheer affect.

Beasley is proposing a different mode of corporeality. For the artist, there is an insistence on the most basic yet complicated aspects of being—what we know to be present is relative to our abilities to conceive it. Because we are unable to experience something or perceive it with our senses does not mean it is not there, or that its being there is, in fact, so vital and foundational to everything that follows. While a significant amount of his materials are personal, their inclusion does not posit an autobiographical narrative, and they are not there to signify or testify to his particular lived experience. Rather, they indicate the importance of origin for Beasley as that which is always already suspect, and that which he is constantly negotiating. Where do these things come from? To whom do they belong? What might the identity of this artist be, does it matter and what does it mean for the work? The works' overwhelming specificity is elusive yet ever-present. Beasley's works exist in an entirely different realm in which we viewers/participants are asked to honor, trust and acknowledge aspects of them that are prescenced but not necessarily revealed. This presence is meaningful as a way of understanding that which develops and reveals itself over time.

1. For full explication of the commodity who speaks, see Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International (New York: Routledge, 1994), and Fred Moten, In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

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Mousse Publishing

I Want My Spot Back, at The Museum of Modern Art, October 2012.
Kevin Beasley, *Some Sweet Day,* 2012.

SHAKING THE MUSEUM

by Jenny Schlenzka

One year ago Kevin Beasley shook up the Museum of Modern Art in New York—literally. Just out of grad school the artist presented his sound performance, *I Want My Spot Back*, for which he processed voices of dead Hip Hop rappers and transformed them into bloodcurdling wails blasting through the entire Museum's Atrium. For this interview Beasley returned to the space with one of the curators of the performance, Jenny Schlenzka, to reflect on what happened.

Jenny Schlenzka: We are standing in the MoMA Atrium, the scene of the crime, so to speak, where you…

Kevin Beasley: Where the blood was spilt.

JS: Yes, where you performed I Want My Spot Back almost exactly one year ago.How would you describe the piece to someone who wasn't there?

KB: I performed as part of Ralph Lemon's, Some sweet Day series, which he had conceived for the MoMA Atrium. The performance consisted of me mixing "acapellas" from early-to-mid-Nineties deceased rappers. It was a project I'd been working on for probably about a year and it kind of culminated here—in its best iteration—because it was a real physical exploration, even in the way I was trying to gather the music or gather the sounds, and what I was thinking about in terms of where the sort of body is in these voices and these spaces. Doing it in this space allowed for all of that to be extrapolated because of its cavernousness. It was kind of crazy, I remember Ralph saying, when we were wal ing to do the first performance, Ralph was like, "I'm scared, man." [laughs]

JS: What was so scary about it?

KB: The fact that it was so loud and so obtrusive. From an earlier

iteration, I knew people were really struggling with the aggressive nature of the tracks. They were all a cappella versions, but the way I had expanded and extracted the frequencies and the different layers within those vocals made it very powerful. In order to hear and feel it that way, it just needed to be amplified that much and the Atrium is a transition space, people are passing through. The Edvard Munch Scream had arrived as a special loan in the Painting and Sculpture Galleries that week, so people were mainly coming for that—not expecting this very overt sound from which they couldn't escape.

JS: I remember the sound penetrating everything; my body, the space, the walls, the adjacent galleries, the windows and skylights were shaking. It was very overwhelming. Were you aware of the audience reactions during the performance?

KB: There was constant movement happening, that I caught in my peripheral vision. Once, towards the end, I noticed that the group of people had really thinned out. People were kind of like, "okay, I've had enough" [laughs]. I'm also in the center of it, it's really visceral for me too, but I was working to try to maintain that feeling for myself as it was happening, because I'm trying to reinvent it as it happens.

JS: With the live mixing?

KB: Yes, there is a lot of pre-production in this piece, a lot of m anipulation and moving frequencies and things around. But the live performance is really the opportunity for me to expand and dig deeper, changing the pitches, controlling things with my hands—I didn't have a given set list. There was the first track which was this Biggie interview and then there are a couple parts that I kind of wanted to do something with. In Tupac's Smile there's a part where Scarface says, "And now a moment of silence, let us pray." From that moment on, I kind of reel in all the other sounds and honor whatever is in the track. But it's always evolving, I don't know when that's going to come and if and how it's going to happen, what's going to be layered. It's like being a club DJ, you have your tracks, but when you are mixing them you have to react and respond to the moment.

JS: How did you start making the work?

KB: Initially, it came from this interest in speaker building. I started DJing and it made me get back into Hip Hop; like Biggie, Gang Starr, Big L, and Tupac, something I grew up with. I was very interested in actually just playing with it (Hip Hop) and it made so much sense to me, because at the time I was making objects; to me it was beyond just dance or meeting a crowd, it was another tool that I had in my studio and I was really interested in really thinking about: like what is my relationship to this music? How has it shaped me? I think that that sort of questions made me say, "well, maybe I should just go back to it in a way, and try to explore what it was in the music that I was so drawn to." I was very into P Diddy, he did a lot of really amazing stuff in terms of production, obviously the whole Death Row thing was really—the way like gangster rap on the West Coast was just very sort of definitive and broke out. I then said, "okay, what is the most sort of human bodily thing in all of these tracks?" And that's their voices, their presence. So I just started searching for a cappella tracks and I got really interested in listening to the breathing in between, like Biggie was a heavy breather you know [laughs].

JS: You were interested in the breathing?

KB: [laughs] I felt, "I should really listen to that and see if I can extract the low frequencies from just his breathing"; and then I started to slow the tracks down. (In the past) I had a drum teacher who told me, "You know, if you want to become a better drummer, then you should play everything really slowly to understand time, to understand the feel of something." I guess that was just kind of a natural thing for me, to slow the music and these voices down and then it gets into the actual recording devices, into the production, the timbre and the quality of the voice, the quality of the instruments being used to record. That also interested me, because of the high production values of this rap from the early-to-mid-Nineties—the golden age of rap.

JS: In anticipation of the series, we talked a lot with Ralph Lemon about the Atrium as the big empty white cube at the heart of the temple of modern art and his idea of infiltrating it with what he calls "blackness." He never explicitly said so, but I always understood that as a political act in itself. Did it feel like that to you?

KB: It wasn't initially important for me, when I was first developing the work, but bringing it here it was so blatant and obvious to me that [laughs] – I thought "alright, so I have to deal with that."

JS: Deal with what?

KB: With the fact that the intention of putting me here was to draw some type of attention to this idea of "blackness" and where it exists inside of art, inside of culture, how we sort of define it, how it moves, how it shapes and how it can change, and also how people respond to it. Even though it's not so much about—ha! This is tough—it's not so much about race as much as about a kind of, as Ralph said, "a kind of acting out" or maybe a sort of...

JS: A sort of aesthetics?

KB: Aesthetics, yeah, and it became very apparent: there is a lot of friction. I'm playing alterations of rap music that are very aggressive, and very violent at MoMA, which is—especially in the Atrium—a very sterilized environment. The first time we actually came to this space to look at it, one of the first things Ralph said was "this is your audience." I paused, I looked around, and very few people were speaking English, and there were very few black people walking around.

JS: You mentioned earlier that Ralph told you he was scared, right before the first performance. I remember him being very worried about the piece being too loud and aggressive, that it would get shut down. Did you intend the work as an attack?

KB: That wasn't the intention. For me it was a matter of necessity. During the rehearsal we were asking for more speakers, to make sure there were no pockets where people could escape, because that kind of immersion could allow people to hear and feel what I was trying to do, like exploring something within that space.

JS: But some people did perceive it as an aggression. We received a lot of complaint notes from visitors that day.

KB: The most angry letter said, "Never let Kevin Beasley in the building ever again, Jesus Christ people!" [both laugh] You know, when I first saw them I thought, "where is the positive letters?"

JS: Were you disappointed?

KB: I wish I could have answered, "you should spend more time with it"; or "maybe we should talk"; or "you should hear it again"; or something. I feel that there is something missed in those letters. I can't expect everyone to feel the same way or to even have

the same response. The negative responses come from people's own personal histories. I'm still trying to chew on the kind of letters where people were saying like, "it ruined my experience of the rest of the museum," because I think that gets deeper into what their expectations are of the museum, and how they view this space, and how the structure of the space helps to perpetuate that.

JS: Most of the other work you have been making manifests itself in sculptures. How does sound play into that?

KB: Yes, I am mainly doing sculptures, but sound for me is just as physical, tactile and experiential as any other material, and there is also an equal amount of play, if not more. With this piece, sound was being translated into another kind of material and then came back out through this very physical experience; through dancing, through reverberations in the floor and the wall. I find this very interesting because it's another material I can use to help understand myself and my environment: where am I located, where are other people located in relationship to me? It helps me bridge social aspects, like "how can I understand someone else through this kind of material?" and "how can they understand me through it?" For me, this gets into art making in general.

Exhibition view, I Want My Spot Back, at The Museum of Modern Art, October 2012, Kevin Beasley, *Some Sweet Day*, 2012.

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Cleopatra's

Immediate Release:

...all different: for I do, I suppose, partake of multitude

Kevin Beasley

Curated by Cleopatra's

June 14 – 30, 2013 Performance: June 22, 7:30pm

When one strikes a bell there are several tones that prevail, yet the hum tone is one that lies an octave below the strike tone, the resonance being that of multiple tones within one note/or tone of an instrument. A layering that happens at the time of the actual singular act where a multitude is always produced. So what happens when "we" recognize the initial parts as a multitude and seek to expand that multitude exponentially?

...all different: for I do, I suppose, partake of multitude is an exhibition by Kevin Beasley, comprised of two parts: a site specific installation made from 30 varying wind chimes and a performance building live feed from the installation and pre-recorded sound bites.

Kevin Beasley (b. 1985, Lynchburg, VA) received his BFA from the College for Creative Studies, Detroit and his MFA in Sculpture from Yale University in 2012. He has exhibited nationally with The Butcher's Daughter, Detroit and in group shows in Los Angeles, throughout Michigan, and New York. Beasley's performances were featured during Some Sweet Day at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and Danspace Projects, New York. Beasley's work was also featured in Fore at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

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Cleopatra's

Cleopatra's and Kevin Beasley at Interstate Projects

June 25, 2013

All Different: For I do, I suppose, take part in multitude.

Cleopatra's: Let's begin with the title for this project. Where does it come from?

Kevin Beasley: It's a quote that comes from a book that is comprised of all these audio essays by Christoph Cox and from a section written by DJ Spooky, who was quoting Plato- It's one of Plato's dialogues, Parmenides- It's a section out of that where he is talking about form, and multiplicity and the body.

C: Maybe we should begin with our invitation from Tom Weinrich for this project? We were offered the courtyard and with that in mind, we thought about how to activate the space. It seemed appropriate to integrate some kind of sound installation so we met with Kevin for inspiration. Kevin, how did you decide to hang 30 wind chimes in the Interstate Projects courtyard?

KB: I think my initial impression was thinking about a space and a duration of time and the duration is potentially longer than 15 minutes or 45 minutes and it's something that would be or could possibly be on view. All of those variables opened up potentiality for me because it was nothing I would ordinarily think about: doing an outdoor piece that is situated in a semi-public, semi-private, residential, industrial, commercial gallery of a show organized by a group of curators who are interested in exhibiting work; all of that meshed together.

I thought about the possibility of there being multiple instances of 'something' that can be generated out of one initial act. That sort of leads back to the title and also that prompt. And I think that a bell delineates this idea in that out of so many different instruments it is often times multiplied in tones, like in the case of wind chimes. However, the bell remains a singular thing. You wouldn't have that with a trumpet or any kind of string instrument. Anything percussive has that ability. Continuing that thought about multiplicity, the bell, even in its makeup (as in strike-tones) you have these different resonant points that happen. When you hear a bell, you hear a very sharp noise that is a certain note. That noise or sound is multilayered with several different keys and tones in just one bell. You get partials, but it is all part of one thing. I was very much interested in that, it sort of paralleled what's happening with Cleopatra's (four women working under one moniker) and what's happening in this courtyard with Interstate Projects and the context of the show inviting numerous curators and spaces and people who are all brought to one place.

C: So many more points of contact than an individual show.

KB: Yes, that became really interesting to me because I found a parallel in wind chimes, in the way they're handled and sound speaking.

C: Not to demystify the wind chime too much, but how did you come to a wind chime versus a series of bells that you could string up?

KB: Because the wind chimes also possess this other element of uncontrollability or the of possibility of it

being arrested and taken from me or taken away from people. For example, during the opening everyone was here and there was no sound (from the chimes). They were just very still.

KB: Maybe I'm assuming but I feel like there is a parallel in this and how Cleopatra's is giving up your space for this particular project. Pushing it further and thinking about how you're not in total control of the gallery or the space. Between curators and artists, there is always that control thing happening. As the work developed, one thing that became interesting for me was having this sort of variable that would just produce (manifest) something completely on its own but would always be a part of the initial conversation.

C: Was the idea of chance built into the project? Did you have expectations one way or the other?

KB: Yeah, it is built in, because I'm asking the wind to perform for me. Also, for these things to not come down; for the weather to conduct, the conditions and the people to activate the objects. That was something that I hoped - that it would be perfect.

C: There was a moment where we were installing and we asked "what happens if the whole thing just collapses?", and you said "well then the whole thing collapses". The wind chimes, could break, each time I have been here, it's been different; The one you're sitting under was mangled during the performance and has now kind of gotten itself together. It's been kind of amazing to see the piece transition. We keep referencing the performance and I think there is something important about change and installation. Do you think you could relay some thoughts surrounding the performance from it's inception? For example, the placement of the event in the middle of the exhibition period.

KB: I think I understood that the performance was in some way a focal point. Initially, the performance was the crux of the whole thing. It was a point where something happens - like some type of explosion. This is something that I keep wanting to get into: the possibility of people revisiting and listening, and their listening being shaped by the revisit. There's the space and there are these events that have taken place. If someone comes for the performance, it will be totally different. People will say 'this is completely different than what I saw before' and not only because its on a different day and different time. The fact that there is a performance and there wasn't a performance before... I wanted to highlight the ideas of change in condition as something that drives our perception of time, place, and objects. There was a kind of shift that happened post event, a rupture that had potential to re-generate an alternative awareness of the installation.

C: Can you explain the request you made for audio files from the four curators (Cleopatra's)?

KB: By the time I asked you all for audio files, we had already decided that there would be wind chimes installed, which, to me, seemed like a kind of simple beginning or premise. Everyone knew what the installation was, so thinking about how wind chimes would be present, and thinking about that object and that sound and what I do, taking sound and making objects or art or experience out of them, then - what would you send me if I just asked you? In the email I wrote to you all, I kind of explained the hum tone as a premise; I felt like I was trying to shape the thoughtfulness, wanting that thoughtfulness to be there in the giving of this audio but it didn't matter in what format or what it was actually, just that this sort of attentiveness was carried through. I asked everyone to send me audio snippets from wherever. Anyone could find a bunch of audio files but that wasn't interesting to me; what was interesting to me was the possibility of what would you all would present and that kind of inclusion. Whether you actually recognize what you heard or not, I was really curious about what could be extrapolated from that. As Tom was asking you guys to do something and not knowing what you would come up with, I was being thoughtful in the same way. I think the repetition in these acts generates something that I could not have anticipated.

C: When we first met and you told us about the kind of sound projects you had done previously, the content was a lot more charged. It was political in some cases - specifically the sounds from the LA riots - and personal in other cases. What changes in the performance when the content is "lighter"?

KB: It's actually really refreshing to me. I think that was maybe the prompt in the email. There are these levels of sensitivity carried through everything. I pick the tracks and have all the control, but even with the riots,

I had interest in wanting to hear recorded content from the riots. By making that decision and not really knowing what else would happen, you kind of fall into the same thing where elements jump out at you and present themselves to you. How do I deal with that? How do I navigate this content? Then, it becomes important to me. I think maybe it's too full because there are these personal connections here, geographically, where we live, our friends, that can perhaps be embedded in the work without being totally explicit. The relationship we were able to have on a very sort of local level can be maintained. It doesn't mean that that's not important. I don't want to deny that in any way. I'm aware that it also shapes the work or the project because this wasn't something that you guys thought 'well we want that one (talking about the courtyard),' you were interested in developing something. If we're going to develop something than I'd like to think about it in as many possibilities.

C: I'm wondering what interests you more: the textured multitude or the single ion, you know, the origin. I do think that the origin is not getting lost, but being layered. It's literally what you do in your performances. Is your ultimate goal to erase that origin?

KB: No, I think that maybe I have a backwards way of thinking about that origin. I can investigate that origin. This is why I am so interested in the powers of 10 - thinking about this videos by Charles and Ray Eames - I talk about it so much now- but it's what we consider to be or what we may have thought to be the original and how it expands or how it gets smaller and smaller. How getting very close to something becomes very expansive and you can't really grasp what that is or it's so dense that you can't actually grasp what that is. I feel like that's what I'm trying to do. The sounds or the manipulation is fairly simple. I'm either stretching or slowing everything down. I had a drum teacher who would say 'if you could play really fast, you can do that as much as you want, but to really understand a note you have to be able to play it as slow as possible and maintain a rhythm'. If you can maintain a rhythm at a very, very, very slow tempo then you have a different understanding of time. You're not really realizing time when you're playing as fast as you can. So, I'm always trying to slow things down and I feel like maybe I have a better understanding; Or I get closer to what it actually is in a way; Then there is this other thing, this manipulation that I'm constantly doing, which is breaking up all the sound files into partials. It's like an explosion, a nonabrasive explosion.

C: What is a partial?

KB: A partial is when you take the little parts that make up the larger thing. There is a software that I've been using called Spear that actually takes audio files and explodes them into these partials. Each partial holds a key and a frequency. You take all of your frequencies and you add them all up and then you have your song. It analyzes everything backwards so if you were to select certain frequencies you could then maybe hear what the track was originally, but it's only through these partials.

C: Would a partial be comparable to a pixel?

KB: Yeah, it would take you forever but if you were able to select all of these different pixels to be visible, but you didn't select ones that were right next to each other, this is sort of the same thing.

C: Do you think visually when you are utilizing sound?

KB: Well yeah, with the software I'm using there is a visual. But I don't always use software and it does always, at some point, come to a visual realm, where I can see the sound wave, and, in which case, I'll just turn the monitor off and listen.

C: Is there any reason for the laying out the wind chimes in this four-stringed linear format here in a triangular courtyard?

KB: It maps the architecture but it also maps the possibility of what we can do. We weren't allowed to hang from the adjascent building, so the triangle from corner to corner is the longest element.

C: You could have done one line.
KB: Yeah, I could have but I don't think that would have been interesting

C: So you were thinking about the volume of the space?

KB: Yeah, the volume of the space and also where the chimes are. Sonically, you can be here and not be able to hear that bamboo, but I'm sure when you're at the

door you can hear it. I'm sure that when people are in here, the flow and movement of changes. In wanting these different sounds to have a space - especially when perceiving all the wind chimes - they're so varied that some you don't want next to each other and others you do.

C: Aesthetically...?

KB: Aesthetically and sonically. That was something Erin and I talked about during the installation. The color of one or the height of another one – we wanted them to be at varying heights, so you can play with that – there's a tangibility to that.

C: Can we talk more about the wind chime? Do you think of a wind chime as being something meditative or soothing or spiritual? People then pull it so far away from that; The aestheticization of them, you know, they're really tacky!

KB: They're like characters, with personalities.

C: Right, you're sitting under one now that holds six different angels praying, handpainted, which is spiritual I suppose. And that fish! Is there anything about that aspect? Or did you just completely ignore the instruments.

KB: I do think about the fact that a lot of them came from the Midwest and that being interesting. There is this personalization of them. I don't know how many of them are actually hand made and perhaps a lot of them are manufactured. The fact that they appeal to a demographic and that you can get them at a flea market indigenous to that area.

C: They're passive. It takes something to move them or to provoke a noise. There is a design in place that is wonderful and yet nothing happens until the wind comes. With bells, in a social way- whether it's from church or it's an alarm or it's a warning, it's more aggressive. Wind chimes are so passive and pleasant which is why they're hanging on someone's porch or outside your window. You don't mind if you're hearing it off and on for however long, you wait for them to sort of act up. Similar to the collaging of the sound that we gave you, the sounds are found materials. Even though you made a call for the materials, they're still found not made. Do you think about the connectivity of the work made here, you sound work and other sculptures too?

KB: Yeah, this is the first sound installation that I have done. I haven't made an art object that possesses sound, one you can go and see it and it's on view for however long. I don't really have a precedent for that.

C: I've been thinking about your sculptures, the motor, the gin. We've talked about manipulation, you manipulating raw material into this thing. There is an element that preexists and then you come in. Parallel with the wind chime, the thing exists, statically, not doing more than that. Your work, it seems, observes, and slows down things - whether that is the strange patina and massive size of this gin. How you recognize and freeze this moment, observe it in a natural state and see what it wants to do. I wonder if you have the same approach to these different objects, sounds and material?

KB: Well I do feel like I'm constantly thinking about material. I think about where material can be found. Every piece of material has gone through some kind of processing or has reached a certain point to where we then find it and work with it. So then thinking about what is raw material is really only raw by comparison, relatively speaking. I'm trying to suspend that and then think: these wind chimes are a certain material. They have a history and have gone to different places. I feel like I have to deal with whatever that is - maybe its because all of this history is already embedded in the material, I don't necessarily have to add more shit on. Beyond what the thing is, in that of itself and its context, who is seeing it? Where it is located?

C: It seems like there is a social history to these things: the found sound, it's us, or even the riots, these wind chimes, as you were saying, you could have made chimes from steel tubing. We would have come in and you would have had 30 steel tubes hanging and that is a much more formal piece. It wouldn't be about this colloquial thing that exists in the world. Same for the social history of the gin or other things. You could make cast metal objects, instead of finding this one or framing that one as you do.

KB: I remember talking about making wind chimes and that being an interest but then I feel like this way presented many more questions. Instead of me having

control over whatever it is, what I am learning or realizing more and more is that we would know too much as opposed to other questions and things I don't normally think about that much. I started this project, you guys sent an image of some crazy wind chimes, I opened it and started to think about all of the different wind chimes. There's one that my parents have in their house that I feel has just been there forever. But, it's inside. It's in the kitchen. It has a little baseball and a baseball bat and it's really tiny. I was thinking about that, the visual of that and the fact that it's inside so it doesn't really make any noise at all. It just sits there. That is a point of departure that I can continue to think about. In relation to my own work, in terms of where it comes from, it's sort of a point of origin, through these little objects

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The New York Times

Racial Redefinition in Progress
‘Fore’ at Studio Museum in Harlem

By HOLLAND COTTER
Published: November 29, 2012

In 2001 the Studio Museum in Harlem opened a group exhibition called “Freestyle,” the first in what would be a series intended to introduce freshly minted African-American talent. And in the catalog for that show the curator, Thelma Golden, dropped a neat little cultural bomb. She referred to the group of artists she’d chosen, most of them then in their 20s, as “post-black.”

Even some young artists to whom it was applied weren’t quite clear about what to do with it. Overnight the dynamics of contemporary art changed.

Although little noted in the midst of the uproar at the time, Ms. Golden herself held the term “post-black” at a critical distance, floating it out as a proposition rather than advancing it as a polemic. For her it meant artists who were adamant about not being confined to the category of “black,” though, as she wrote, “their work was deeply interested in redefining complex notions of blackness. Post-black,” she added with a wry twist, “was the new black.”

More than a decade later it still is, to judge by the fourth and latest of the museum’s new-generation shows, this one titled “Fore,” organized by three young staff curators, Lauren Haynes, Naima J. Keith and Thomas J. Lax. Like its predecessors it keeps racial politics alive but discreet and covers the waterfront in terms of mediums, which it samples and mixes with turntablist flair.

In line with current New York trends, painting gets major attention. Three smallish portraits by Jennifer Packer (born 1985; Yale M.F.A. 2012) of art-school friends kick things off. They’re traditional looking and beautiful, their suave brushwork finessed with a palette knife. Portraits by another artist, Toyin Odutola, who was born in Nigeria and now lives in Los Angeles, are more offbeat and generate interesting ideas. Ms. Odutola makes her sitters so black that their forms read like solid, featureless silhouettes from across a room. Only up close do you see that their eyes are wide open, and their skin is a porous weave of ropy ink lines, with rainbow color glinting through like light from behind.

Another Los Angeles artist, Kenyatta A. C. Hinkle, uses images from colonial-era postcards, made for European eyes, to make a point about the vulnerability of the body when seen through a racial lens. In her paint-altered version of the original cards, nude and seminude “native” women from West Africa are under assault from swarming lines of white pigment that bring to mind flames, microbes and spermatozoa.

Then the figure vanishes. It’s just a shadowy smudge on an abstract gold field in a diptych by Noah Davis, and absent altogether in abstract paintings by Kianja Strobert, Sienna Shields and Brenna Youngblood.

Ms. Youngblood looks particularly impressive here. She has, however temporarily, exchanged her complicated, object-laden painting mode of a few years ago for a near-Minimalist austerity. But nothing she does is simple. One 2012 picture in the show consists primarily of a plain white unmarked panel, yet the addition of a small scrap of stuck-on signage keeps her art in painting-plus-something-else terrain.

And “something else” in this show covers a lot of ground. What conventional formal category, or categories, can describe Harold Mendez’s filmy, soot-black Veronica veils made from dryer sheets, ink and fabric softener? Or Cullen Washington Jr.’s “Caped Crusader,” with its collaged black baby superhero anchored to the floor by a T-Mobile sign? Or Eric Nathaniel Mack’s “Honey Hollow,” consisting of nothing more than a paint-brushed blanket hanging loose on the wall and stirred by the breeze from a nearby fan?

Unprepossessing to the eye, it does a lot of conceptual hard work, mashing together the essences of painting, sculpture and kinetic installation. Depending on who's looking, the piece is either barely there, or a sly celebration of material movement in space, of performance art without bodies.

Performance art has a significant place in "Fore," as it does in the local art world these days, with blackness weaving in and out of it. It's hard to locate in a choreographically executed wall drawing by Taisha Paggett, but forms the troubled heart of a two-channel video by Nicole Miller.

On one screen Ms. Miller appears, coached by a white ballet instructor in a pristine studio as she practices classical barre exercises she learned as a child. On the other screen a group of young black woman, with men hovering, rehearse a sexually explicit form of Caribbean popular dance called daggering in a murky Brooklyn nightclub. The piece asks: Is there a connection between the two scenes? Yes. And what's the connection? No answer.

Quite different in spirit, though in its way no less inquiring, is a video called "Reifying Desire: Model It," by the speedily emerging young artist Jacolby Satterwhite. The piece was made for the show and connects whole cultural worlds.

Mr. Satterwhite is its star, and a natural one. Resplendent in spandex suits and sequined wraps, he vogues up a storm in one digitally enhanced setting after another. But the dance sequences are just one part of an exercise in multimedia maximalism that encompasses fashion, Dada, the Home Shopping Network, Sun Ra, CVS pharmacy chic and highly specialized household appliances designed by Patricia Satterwhite — the artist's mother and collaborator — who calls on art to keep schizophrenia at bay.

Mr. Satterwhite will be doing his complex thing, live, in a two-part performance art program that the museum will roll out in December and February, events that give several other artists a chance to extend their range beyond what the galleries can hold.

Steffani Jemison — one of the museum's 2012-13 artists in residence along with Ms. Packer and Mr. Washington — will present a text piece based on urban street fiction of a kind sold in the neighborhood around the museum. The polymathic artist named Narcissister will offer staged equivalents of her gender-bending photo-collages in the show. Jamal Cyrus, from Houston, will deep-fry a tenor saxophone. And Kevin Beasley, whose faintly sinister, bundle-like sculptures sit on the floor here and there, will introduce an immersive sound environment, to which no one will be admitted late and from which no one will be allowed to leave early.

An environment of a different kind, Abigail DeVille's "Haarlem Tower of Babel," is already in place in the museum's open-air courtyard. Assembled by Ms. DeVille from locally scavenged objects and materials (shopping carts, bottles, trash bags) and memorabilia from her grandmother's Bronx apartment, the piece speaks of life on the street, generational bonds, confusion, dispossession and not-having as a chronic, punishing but toughening condition.

These were themes often tackled by African-American artists in the past, including by some of those who founded the Studio Museum in Harlem in the 1960s. And the themes remain relevant now, when the country is coming out of a presidential election shot through with racism, when African-American citizens are being hit disproportionately by a brutal economy, and when the art world, despite the multicultural surges of the recent past, still has scant room for black artists, black anything.

In the circumstances post-black feels like an iffy and unrealistic proposition. Yet it can work. Without identifying itself as "black art," Ms. DeVille's installation brings hard, pertinent existential politics into the museum. And so, in less monumental ways, does other art in "Fore," simply by bearing the clear, proud influence of older artists, living and gone, black and not. Romare Bearden and Robert Rauschenberg are among them. So are David Hammons and the other artists in "Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960-1980" at MoMA PS1. Some of the artists took part in the Studio Museum's three previous important post-black shows.

The young artists in "Fore" take something from all of these forebears but do something to and with it: reshape it, update it, understate it; conceptualize it, magnify or shrink it; and, increasingly it seems, cut it loose from labels. The point is that the something is always there, ready to be passed on, being passed on, no "post" about it.

"Fore" continues through March 10 at the Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 West 125th Street; (212) 864-4500, studiomuseum.org.

Cotter, Holland. "Racial Redefinition in Progress 'Fore' at Studio Museum in Harlem," New York Times, November 29, 2012. Online.