

REVIEWS

poetry's early 21st-century canon.

Even the most hardened critics of post-Internet art will discover entries in this biennale to applaud. It is a relief to find that, for such a large exhibition that takes as its primary subject matter the age of the Internet, no one could dismiss what's on view as simply more novel applications of technology. The curators mobilize pressing themes ranging from Germany's migrant crisis, as in Halil Altindere's impassioned video *Homeland*, 2016, to the future of global housing in light of Berlin's recent ban of Airbnb, as articulated by the installation *Architecture*, 2016, from London-based collective åyr. The biennale is geographically scattered, so as to envelop the city in its lived-in specificity. Branching out from the traditional center of the exhibition, the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, DIS mark as their departure point the Pariser Platz—the tourist trap that is home to both the Brandenburg Gate and their central exhibition site, the Akademie der Künste. A perfect summation of their engagement with this space is Jon Rafman's *View of Pariser Platz*, 2016, a virtual-reality experience produced for Oculus Rift found on the building's balcony. Rafman re-creates the historic square this balcony overlooks, a virtual panoramic vision that ultimately collapses into a dream of falling into an ocean. Users wave their arms in disbelief against the backdrop of the 18th-century monument where Ronald Reagan once challenged Mikhail Gorbachev to "tear down this wall!" It seems increasingly absurd to accuse DIS, and for that matter contemporary art in general, of lacking historical or political consciousness. The biennale's greatest strength may be its ability to pinpoint the current art world's trouble with knowing what to do with all this consciousness. The present and the past are approached here

as a joke, a tragedy, and a party.

The remaining exhibition sites similarly play up the jarring contradictions of the urban present, past, and future that have come to define Berlin. The European School of Management and Technology—where Simon Denny exhibits his latest interrogation of digital capitalism, *Blockchain Visionaries*, 2016—was once home to the Staatsrat (State Council) of the GDR. The Feuerle Collection, a former telecommunications bunker repurposed to publicly display a private art collection, stores large installation works by Guan Xiao and Josephine Pryde. Even the Blue Star tourist sightseeing boat has been reclaimed for the biennale, presenting a video installation by Korakrit Arunanondchai and Alex Gvojjic on its deck. Rather than smooth out all these stark contrasts amid vague praise of "connectivity," the 21st-century technology the artists employ only heightens a sense of awkwardness and disconnect. This rupture is most apparent in Cécile B. Evans's video installation *What the Heart Wants*, 2016, the highlight of the works on view in the KW. Suspended over a wall-to-wall pool of water 16 inches deep, a raised platform leads viewers to a large video screen wherein digitally rendered figures and ears discuss the impossibility of feeling physically whole under the pressure of technology. It is no wonder that much of the art in this biennale takes the form of a product launch, selling various sutures to bodily and psychological wounds. Surrounded by rising water, the only options today appear to be to sink or to swim, to improve the body or to remove it entirely, and the artists here are trying out all their resources to keep their heads above water. Even if the results are sometimes uneven, the propulsive hope and humor in their work brings out the beautiful desperation of all our contemporary aspirations. —Sean Wehle



BERLIN

Ryan Gander

Esther Schipper // June 3–August 27

ART CAN, AT times, feel like magic: Mix materials with a sleight of hand, master the showmanship, distract with a story, and voilà!—you've created something from nothing. But to pull off the trick, one must conjure an audience's imagination. To similar effect, the constituent parts of multimedia artist Ryan Gander's exhibition "The Connectivity Suite (and other places)" befit a magic show, including theatrical curtains, trick coins, and a continuous stream of performative airs.

Wispy gray curtains line

Hito Steyerl

Installation view of *ExtraSpace-Craft*, 2016. 3-channel HD video, 12 min. 30 sec.

ABOVE RIGHT:

Ryan Gander

Installation view of *Portrait of a colour blind artist obscured by flowers*, 2016. HD video, 13 min.



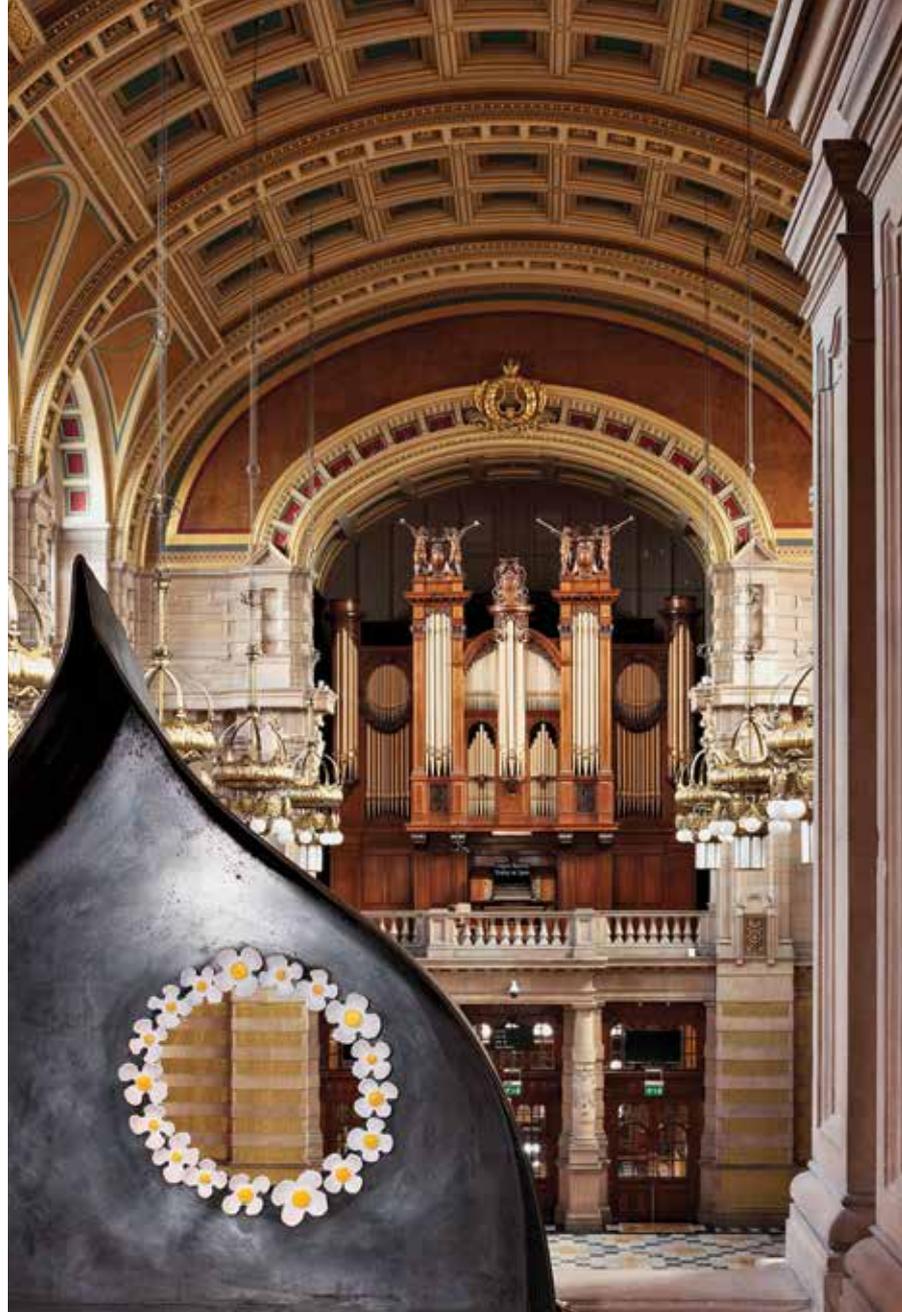
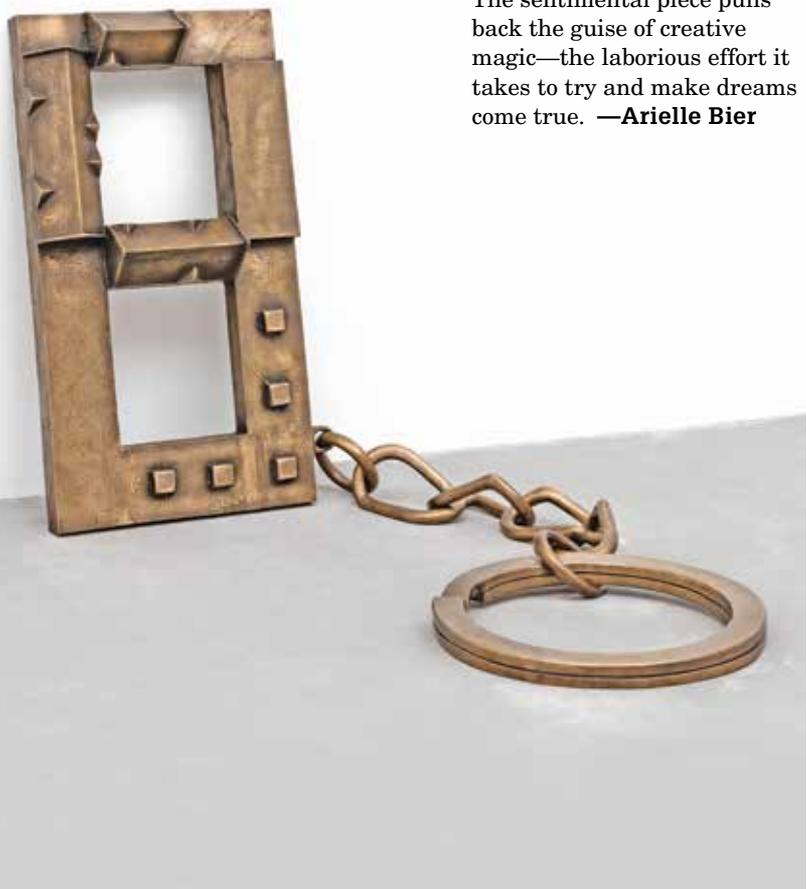
FROM LEFT: TIMO OHLER AND HITO STEYERL; ANDREA ROSSETTI, RYAN GANDER, AND JOHNEN GALERIE, BERLIN

the gallery from ceiling to floor, pulled away in one section to reveal *Elevator to Culturefield* (all works 2016)—a façade of life-size elevator doors in metal relief. In the foreground, a lone balloon is depicted accompanying two decorative frames with a landscape view of a school far off in the woods, peaking out from behind the clouds. This is “Culturefield,” the unrealized art school of Gander’s dreams, imprinted on an elevator whose static doors cannot open. Gander presents the portal to this idealized space for creativity, but withholds the key needed to unlock it.

In *General Studies*, an inlaid vent set low on the adjoining wall expels a constant flow of air, causing the curtain to billow as if a phantom child is playing behind it. Transformative processes undergone by inanimate and animate and tangible and intangible objects recur as themes in Gander’s

work: the liminal spaces that give rise, with a childlike innocence, to creativity, imagination, and self-realization. His process notes, which read as poetic lists, are written on a business directory light box titled *The Connectivity Suite*. A litany of “Acts” and “Treatments” cover sections like “The Baggage,” “Labour,” and “Morathics.” Is creativity also an order of business?

Connecting the tedious aspects of artistic labor with unencumbered perspectives on creativity, Gander enlists his young daughter Olive for the short film *Portrait of a colour blind artist obscured by flowers*. The artist is seen hiding behind flower arrangements, compiling images in groups in front of a wall of A4 papers with printed notes for future project ideas like “Cultivate errors” and “Post Life Romantic.” Close-ups of colored wooden blocks, sculptures, and paintbrushes are followed by a blue screen and voiceover of Olive’s voice critiquing the work; she asks, “Your film makes me think it must be lonely to be an artist, but is it?” The sentimental piece pulls back the guise of creative magic—the laborious effort it takes to try and make dreams come true. —**Arielle Bier**



GLASGOW

Glasgow International

Various venues // April 8–25

WITH SEVERAL TIERS of participation, this year’s Glasgow International took in nearly 80 venues across the city. Many of the venues were not traditional display spaces, offering an inadvertent tour of the city’s patchwork fortunes—from André Komatsu’s installation in an exquisite disused Victorian bank, to “Semi-gloss, Semi-permeable,” an intelligent group show in the empty floor of a sleek new office building in the East End, to projects in a 1970s concrete shopping mall, or the resting place of victims of a 1780s weavers’ strike. Navigating this array of spaces—conceptually and physically—was both stimulating and, at times, wearying. Yet one thing the abundance of this edition communicated was the city’s rich resources for production, including not-for-profit spaces like the Glasgow Sculpture Studios, in whose gallery Alisa Baremboym and Liz Magor were shown in a pitch-perfect pairing, and the Glasgow Print Studio, where a showstopping display saw Nicolas Party’s recent mezzotints accompanied by monochrome murals.

Fittingly, then, for her “Director’s Program” (the part of this edition which most closely follows the top-down, “big statements” model of a traditional biennial), Sarah McCrory took “making” as a theme. At Tramway, a former trolley-bus depot, her group show tried to weave together the productivity of Glasgow’s current artistic community with its history as a once prosperous, then declining, industrial and trading hub. The most striking element is Sheila Hicks’s *Mighty Matilde and her Consort*, 2016, commissioned for the festival: a plunging cascade of fibers and a heap of boulder-like

ABOVE:
Aaron Angell
Installation
view of *The Death
of Robin Hood*
(foreground)
in Glasgow’s
Kelvingrove Art
Gallery, 2016.

LEFT:
Ryan Gander
*The Day to Day
Accumulation
of Hope, Failure,
and Ecstasy—
Better A Productive
Failure than
an Unproductive
Success*, 2016.
Bronze,
34¼ x 33 x 52½ in.