Miami Artist Jillian Mayer Is Laughing All the Way to the Singularity

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY ROB GOYANES
APR 8TH, 2016 7:48 PM

Portrait of Jillian Mayer by Gesi Schilling for Artsy.

When I set up an interview with Miami artist Jillian Mayer, it felt especially fitting to arrange a studio visit via Skype, given her art: post-internet (for the most part). However, when we connected last Monday, she explained that she wasn't at her studio after all—she doesn't have wireless internet there. This anecdote turns out to be an appropriate metaphor for the aesthetic space that Mayer dwells in as an artist. "I play a lot with the tension between physical and digital existence," she tells me.

In lieu of a virtual walkthrough of her workspace, Mayer sent me a melange of JPEGs—some completed works, others in process. One pictures her in blacked-out goggles and a snorkel, a nod to a new direction her art is taking; another showed her Chihuahua, Shivers, a consistent wellspring of inspiration for the artist. As we speak, Mayer is in the midst of a flurry of exhibitions and projects; in the coming weeks and months she'll feature in gallery shows in Miami and Raleigh, North Carolina; group exhibitions at MOCA North Miami and Mexico City's Centro de Cultura Digital; and she'll unveil a billboard commission with LAX ART.

Jillian Mayer, Scenic Jogging (2010). Courtesy of the artist.

Mayer's work teeters between the physical and the digital, much in the same way that life itself increasingly hurtles towards some version of the Singularity—a theory popularized by Ray Kurzweil that predicts the differences between humans and computing machines will be indistinguishable. Rather than taking a solely utopian or dystopian approach, Mayer is interested in the present, the messy imperfections of technology; her work leads one to wonder what the future will *really* look like. "Tech is still super clumsy," she says during our conversation, "and I actually really like it that way."

In her work, Mayer often collaborates with Borscht Corp., the collective of artists and filmmakers based in Miami that she helps run. A prime example is her 2010 video *Scenic Jogging* (which was shown at the Guggenheim in 2010); the work depicts the artist running down a Wynwood street, trying to keep up with a fast-moving projection of various scenic desktop backgrounds.

Stills from Jillian Mayer's I Am Your Grandma (2011). Courtesy of the artist.

Humor (perhaps of a stoner, cybernetic sort), might be the tonal cornerstone of Mayer's oeuvre. Her work spans and contorts video, object, installation, and painting, and often includes herself, or rather, her selves. She channels heartfelt sentiment but usually blends it with mockery and absurdity, in a way that is wry and smartly freaky. Employing equal parts dystopian parody and real sincerity, she probes the question of how technology is increasingly integrated into our lives.

Her most popular work, clocking almost 3.5 million YouTube views, is *I Am Your Grandma* (2011). Part music video and all performance, Mayer delivers a message to her unborn granddaughter by assuming an assortment of mutant characters—a pastiche that will presumably either terrify her future progeny, or make her laugh aplenty. Or both. (Or perhaps her response would be "Ugh, that's so early 2000s"—before she's able to appreciate its historical significance.)

Jillian Mayer, Cloud Swing installation at Locust Projects. Photo by Zach Balber. Courtesy of the artist.

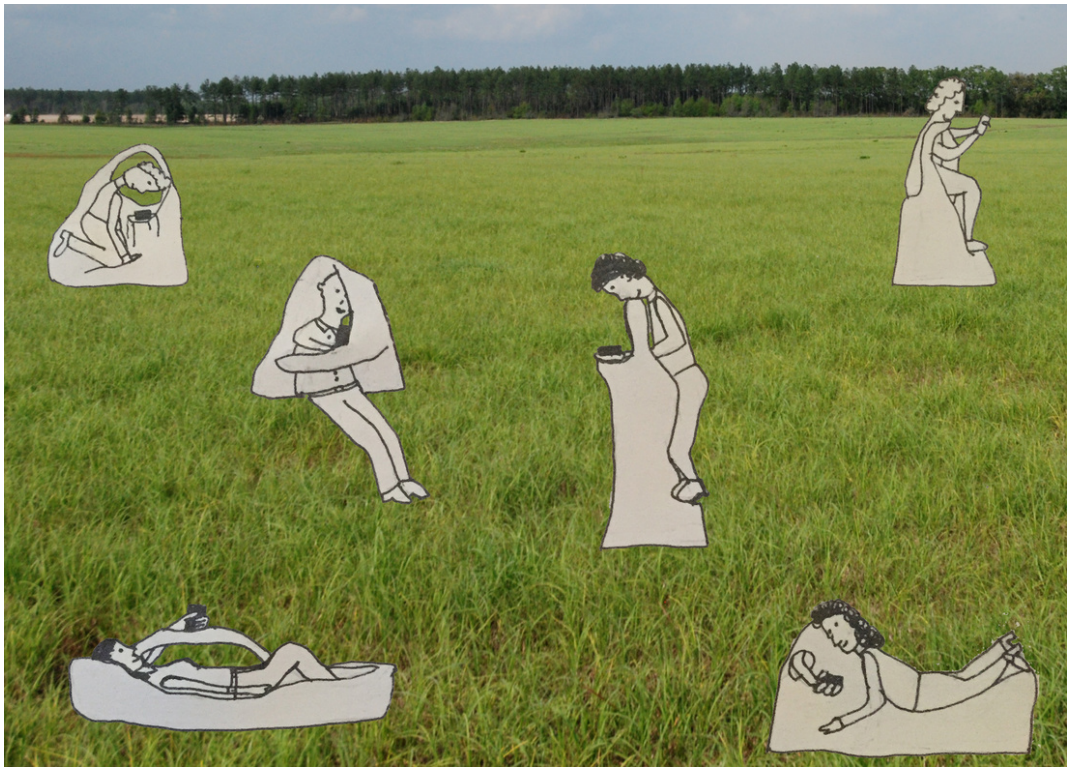
For "salt 9: Jillian Mayer" at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in 2014, the artist included *Giving Birth to Myself* (2011), a video showing a woman giving birth. Filmed by her father, the woman is in fact Mayer's mother giving birth to the artist, but Mayer transplanted her own face onto her mom's, so that she's birthing herself. This warped work acts like many of her pieces—connecting reality with a twisted version of the future, with Mayer as the guide.

Given these works that she's known for, I'm surprised to learn that as of late, when she's not doing video or internet works, Mayer has been "secretly" painting. Recently, her subject matter includes images of a female figure on her computer overlooking beautiful landscapes, or point-of-view shots of a woman (modeled after herself) planted in front of a screen.

Jillian Mayer, CURRENT (2016). Photo by Gesi Schilling, courtesy of the artist.

Despite the form it takes, Mayer's art retains an un-ironic sensitivity to human experience. "My work has to do with the really emotional side of tech," she says, "how the internet and technology affect us and our identity, our experience and what we think of everything." This has likely resulted from a lifetime of sentimental engagements with art. One of her earliest memories, she tells me, is of a painting from her house while growing up. "We had this painting of a girl on a dock," she explains. "It was gifted to my older sister when she was born, and I thought that that was quite beautiful, that this material item was going to be a part of her life journey; that someone can decide you own a piece of art before you're even alive."

Mayer's more recent works also upend the notion that virtual reality is something that's coming and not yet a guiding principle of reality itself. In a performance earlier this week titled *CURRENT* (2016) for the annual poetry festival O, Miami, she led a "guided meditation session" at the pool of The Standard Spa. In a mimicry of both sensory deprivation and virtual reality, participants floated on pool noodles with their heads submerged in the water while wearing blacked-out swimming goggles, while a site-specific sound piece pumped through the pool's underwater speakers. "It's this communal space but it's an isolated practice," she tells me of the performance. "It could be a parallel with the online experience, where everyone is together but alone."



Jillian Mayer, Slumpie Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Her newest exhibition, a two-person show with Susan Lee-Chun that opens at David Castillo Gallery on April 14th, explores the physical structures that enable access to digital dimensions. She'll show her new series, titled "Slumpies" (2016)—"sculptures that the human body can rest on when online," she says. "You know how you get tired when you're out in public, how you just like to tune out for a minute and hang out on your phone? What if there was an art piece that supported that?"

The "Slumpies," however, serve more purpose than Mayer lets on. They are cutesy, delightful works of design, but also critiques of the tech objects of leisure found in Brookstone stores and SkyMall magazines—her two main inspirations for the works. "A sculpture's job is to help you," she proposes. Indeed, these works of art are meant to edge you along towards oneness with the internet, but they also become part of you in the process.

Still from Jillian Mayer's Day Off (2016). Courtesy of the artist.

Also included in the show is a series of videos titled "Day Off" (2016). One shows a man wearing an Oculus Rift headset, fighting off enemies with a giant knife in hand. Another features the artist, also in a headset, falling out of a garbage can—ecstatic with the virtual world she's experiencing. It seems that though Mayer wants us to watch as people engage in this kind of bizarre virtual behavior; she really wants us to think about our own bizarre selves.

Mayer's works, though cheeky, effectively shake with the realization that the body is a thing that experiences life, a thing that breaks down while the world around it goes on. And while the digital realm offers promise, it continues to both benefit and fail us. "I often think about the body and the head, and if they really need each other anymore," Mayer offers. "With notions of the technical Singularity being mentioned in everyday conversations, does it really matter if the body decays?"

—Rob Goyanes

"Susan Lee-Chun & Jillian Mayer" is on view at David Castillo Gallery, Miami, April 14–May 31, 2016.

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Horror Movies Meet Reality TV in Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin's New York Show

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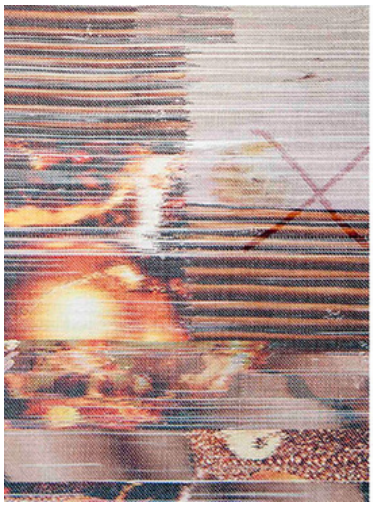

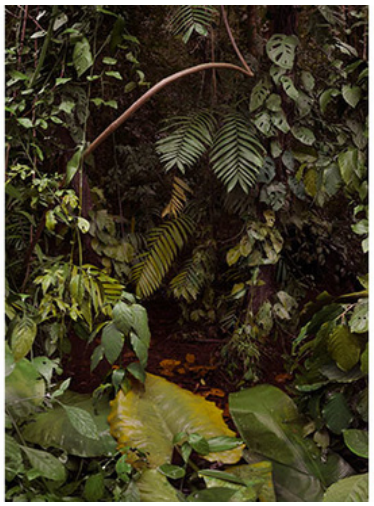

10 Artworks to Collect at Dallas Art Fair

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY ALEXXA GOTTHARDT
APR 11TH, 2016 5:08 PM

This Thursday, the Dallas Art Fair will open its largest edition yet, hosting 97 galleries from 17 countries across its sprawling space, situated next to Dallas Museum of Art in the city's downtown Arts District. New work by up-and-coming artists like Ragna Bley, Margo Wolowiec, and Calvin Marcus is the fair's strongest suit, while exceptional works by older, lesser-known artists like Barbara Kasten, Garth Evans, and Simone Fattal also stand out.

Ragna Bley, *One-size veil*, 2015

AVAILABLE AT:
HESTER, Booth C6

Ragna Bley
One-size veil, 2015
Hester

After graduating from Royal College of Art's MFA program last year, Bley was picked up by the Lower East Side's HESTER gallery, who will be showing her mesmerizing large-scale paintings at the fair. The fair marks the Oslo and London-based artist's first U.S. outing, and will serve as a preview to her forthcoming solo show at the gallery, opening later this month. The shapes that populate Bley's canvases are defined by soft, gauzy edges and cloudy centers that at times resemble figures, landscapes, or the mysterious, churning substances that fill crystal balls. In this piece, an area of grey, blue, and black paint is punctuated by three circles that, at a glance, could be nipples and a phallus. It's this kind of ambiguity that powers the young artist's work, which is also slated for a solo exhibition at the Kunsthall Oslo in 2017.

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ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY IAN EPSTEIN
APR 11TH, 2016 1:00 PM

Installation view of Retreatery Butte (2016). Photo by Pierre Le Hors. © Lizzie Fitch / Ryan Trecartin. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery.

When Maurice Marciano, one of the founders of the Guess clothing label, saw Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin's sprawling, multi-channel video installation, *Priority Innfield* (2013), at the 55th Venice Biennale, the work struck a chord. Around this time, Marciano (who is also a major collector) purchased the landmarked Scottish Rite Masonic Temple on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles with his brother Paul, with intentions of transforming it into a private museum. Designed by California artist and architect Millard Sheets, the temple is an eccentric structure, spanning nearly 90,000 square feet over four floors, including a 2,100-seat

auditorium; it had become a decades-old time capsule, left largely unused since the 1990s. Marciano offered Fitch and Trecartin the opportunity to use the space for a future work—an opportunity the artists jumped at. And so, Fitch and Trecartin were given free reign of the sprawling structure, limited only by a simple request: Don't destroy the mosaics.

With the keys to the temple in hand, the duo and their collaborators had the ability to use the structure from the walls in. They chose to integrate what they recorded there with their growing archive of footage, which has come to supply the source material for their multi-screen installations. In their current exhibition, Fitch and Trecartin give a New York audience a glimpse of the latest results of this endeavor: a suite of four "sculptural theaters" accessed through a dark hallway at Andrea Rosen Gallery on 24th Street. The exhibition (which is Fitch and Trecartin's first solo show with the gallery since they joined the roster in 2012) builds on the narratives of

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Catch up on the latest art news with our rundown of the 10 stories you need to know this week.

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY ABIGAIL CAIN, ALEXANDER FORBES, ISAAC KAPLAN AND TESS THACKARA

APR 8TH, 2016 5:07 PM

01 From insight on Russian collector Dmitry Rybolovlev to the financial arrangement behind a record-breaking 1997 Picasso sale, the Panama Papers leak has shed light on the secretive dealings of the art world.
(via The Art Newspaper, the Guardian, and the Modesto Bee)

The Panama Papers—a leak of over 11 million documents that amounts to the largest in history—detail the off-shore, though not illegal, dealings of numerous individuals, including Rybolovlev. Currently embroiled in a lawsuit with Swiss freeport magnate Yves Bouvier, Rybolovlev apparently

stored millions in art in an offshore company amid divorce proceedings that began in 2008—though in a statement the family's lawyer called such allegations "misleading" and denied concealing assets. Other juicy details outlined in the *Guardian* include the complex financial arrangement behind the 1997 record-breaking sale of Picasso's *Women of Algiers (version O)*. In yet another revelation, the documents reveal that a Modigliani painting valued at $25 million and embroiled in a World War II restitution legal battle is hidden in an offshore company potentially owned by the Nahmad family (their lawyer called this allegation "irrelevant" to the current restitution lawsuit). Although offshore banks, tax havens, and hidden financing aren't atypical in the art world, the sheer volume of detail contained in the papers is significant and shocking. What changes, if any, the leaks will inspire remains to be seen.

02 The Whitney announced Tuesday that its new building will be emblazoned with the name of billionaire cosmetics tycoon Leonard A. Lauder, the institution's chairman emeritus and one of its biggest contributors of artworks and financial support. *(via the New York Times)*

Lauder's name will grace the Renzo Piano-designed building, located in the Meatpacking District and inaugurated to much praise last spring. Although Lauder was initially hesitant to endorse the Whitney's departure from its Upper East Side location (which now houses the Met Breuer), he still contributed $131 million towards the museum's new downtown home. This announcement indicates that America's culture of rewarding big donors by splashing their names across the art landscape is not likely to abate. Other notable recent examples include the Met's new David H. Koch Plaza and the Miami Art Museum—renamed the Pérez Art Museum Miami after real estate mogul and museum donor Jorge Pérez—both of which have been the source of distaste (and the subjects of protest) in recent years.

03 As auction season in Hong Kong kicked off, Sotheby's sales were up 17% from last year—a surprising turn of events given indicators of a slowing

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ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY SILAS MARTI
APR 8TH, 2016 4:24 PM

The 12th edition of SP-Arte opened to VIPs on Wednesday in São Paulo, bringing over 120 exhibitors—both international and Brazilian—to the city's Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion. While more established galleries brought the geometric abstractions that have become staples of art fairs across the country, a group of younger dealers are betting on paintings that are much more colorful, figurative, and in some cases hyperrealist—a radical departure from the more austere pieces on view. In a way, this new movement seems to be a bolder version of the return to painting that marked the Brazilian scene nearly a decade ago, when the group known as 2000E8 (which included now-established artists like Rodolpho Parigi and Marina Rheingantz) came about.

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The Artsy Podcast, No. 3: What Happens to Cities When the Art World Comes to Town

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ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY ALEXXA GOTTHARDT
APR 8TH, 2016 2:48 PM

In anticipation of the opening of AIPAD's 36th edition of The Photography Show at the Park Avenue Armory, Artsy scoured the fair preview with an eye for new and rare works to look out for while navigating the booths of 86 galleries. While superlative images by photography's biggest names abound across the photography-focused fair, our interest was piqued by important but somewhat lesser-known artists working in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, like Hans Breder, Neil Winokur, and John Divola, and emerging names to watch, like Samuel Gratacap, James Mollison, and Clarissa Bonet. Despite recent record-breaking sales of Pictures Generation masters like Cindy Sherman and Düsseldorf School pioneers like Andreas Gursky, photography remains one of art's most accessible markets, and The Photography Show offers strong work at every price point.

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The Artsy Podcast, No. 3: What Happens to Cities When the Art World Comes to Town

Artsy's team of editors takes you behind the scenes of the best stories in art.

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APR 7TH, 2016 5:28 PM

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If Passed, Could a New Law Stop ISIS Profiting from Looted Syrian Antiquities?

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY ISAAC KAPLAN
APR 7TH, 2016 3:19 PM

Could a bill, currently before the Senate, stop ISIS profiting from the sale of looted antiquities in Syria? It's not so simple.

Photo of Palmyra by reibei, via Flickr. Until recently, the ancient city was occupied by ISIS, which reportedly looted pieces of cultural property.

Known as the "Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act" (or H.R. 1493 for you policy wonks), the bill has moved quietly through Congress since it was introduced early in 2015. Following passage in the House in June of last year, it awaits the attention of the Senate, where the bill left committee in January with unanimous support.

If passed, the bill would provide a framework for crafting a more efficient federal response to cultural property threatened by global conflict and disasters, allow the U.S. to provide safe harbor to Syrian cultural objects in danger, and establish an import ban on Syrian cultural artifacts illegally excavated after the start of the country's civil war.

In sum, it could amount to an important change in how the United States government treats cultural preservation of Syrian antiquities—moving from a reactive posture to a proactive one. And that pivot is not without controversy.

Does ISIS profit from antiquities?

While everyone in the heritage community is adamantly against looting, the bill has sparked debate. A key question is if the import ban, which prevents Syrian antiquities illegally removed from the country after March of 2011 from entering and thus being sold in the U.S., makes sense given the available evidence about antiquity looting in Syria.

Much fanfare has been made about ISIS profiting from the sale of looted antiquities, including those from Palmyra, with figures ranging into the ludicrously high (and thoroughly debunked) hundreds of millions of dollars. For better or worse, H.R. 1493 has become a part of this contentious debate. Senator Chuck Grassley, a major proponent of the legislation, praised the bill as "a small but important step in hampering the ability of ISIS terrorists to profit from the sale of looted antiquities."

Some in the cultural community, like Kate Fitz Gibbon, a New Mexico attorney who sits on the board of the Committee for Cultural Policy, finds claims like Grassley's perplexing. "There's no evidence of Syrian artifacts coming into the United States," she told me, adding that looting is encouraged by a "media frenzy talking about a multi-billion-dollar market in looted antiquities." Before passing such legislation under the guise of fighting ISIS, she argues, "it's incumbent upon us to be working with the facts, and not with completely random speculation."

Brian Daniels, director of research and programs for the Penn Cultural Heritage Center, sees the bill not as a response, but as a prevention. "The idea of this particular legislation is to combat the issue *before* there is a significant problem in the United States," he told me. Federal laws currently on the books, passed to give legal force to the 1970 UNESCO treaty, already allow for import bans—but only after demonstrating the presence of a significant market in the United States. As such, it's not preventive. "The idea is to disincentivize an entity like ISIS from doing the looting," says Daniels of H.R. 1493.

Are import restrictions important?

The unilateral restrictions by the United States might not have a major impact if passed in isolation, but, as Daniels points out, the bill before the Senate is the American contribution to a global strategy. In February of 2015, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2199, which called for a concerted effort to stop the illicit trade of antiquities coming out of war-torn Syria. "The idea is actually trying to deprive an international market and have all countries, all market actors say no, they're not going to accept this looted material," Daniels tells me.

As to arguments which say the bill will unduly restrict trade and prevent antiquities from being displayed in museums? "That misses the point entirely," says Daniels, noting the fact that the bill only impacts material removed after March of 2011—roughly the time the Syrian war began.

Broadly, import restrictions aren't uncommon, a state of affairs Fitz Gibbon sees as an undue threat to the ability of culture and antiquity to be viewed by global audiences. Normally under U.S. law, foreign governments can request such restrictions, which are then reviewed by a committee. Part of the rationale behind H.R. 1493 is that Congress needs to establish an import ban because Syria lacks the functioning authority which could make such a request.

Currently, the State Department lists import restrictions for 16 countries, one being the result of emergency legislation passed to prevent looting in the wake of the Iraq War. Similar legislation for Afghanistan died in Congress, after which, according to Daniels, a trafficking network for Afghan antiquities emerged. But Fitz Gibbon says that during her time on the committee that reviews foreign government requests for restrictions, she found the link between antiquity and criminal groups overstated.

The bill beyond the ban

A significant provision in H.R. 1493 involves streamlining how the government safeguards international cultural property at risk by establishing what it calls an "interagency coordinating committee." Daniels is quick to note that this isn't a law enforcement committee—such a group, the Cultural Antiquities Task Force (CATF), was set up in the aftermath of the Iraq War under a State Department umbrella. Rather, the new committee would "deal with things well beyond looting," says Daniels, amid a federal government in which "a whole host of actors—all doing things about cultural heritage destruction in conflicts and in disasters—don't talk or interact with each other." Cultural heritage preservation is a cluttered field, falling into the remit of a numerous departments, from State to Homeland Security.

Moreover, says Daniels, there's "virtually nothing" in terms of information about what these agencies are actually doing to safeguard endangered culture—a blackout the bill would rectify. H.R. 1493 mandates that Congress receive annual reports from the executive branch on the efforts being made to preserve heritage.

While mandated in the House version of the bill, establishing an interagency committee is merely encouraged in the Senate version, not legally mandated. If passed by the Senate, the difference is significant enough to require a re-vote in the House before heading to President Obama's desk. Although she considers it unlikely, if the amended Senate version somehow fails to pass, Fitz Gibbon thinks what she calls an "ugly" version—one with a mandatory interagency committee granted expanded powers not found in the current version—will be reintroduced next session.

These important but hardly eye-catching aspects of the bill are

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A Letter from the Editor—An Inclusive Art World, One Podcast at A Time

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY MARINA CASHDAN
APR 7TH, 2016 2:47 PM

At the start of 2016, we outlined our mission to focus on intention—bypassing cynicism and snark for substantive content that provokes dialogue and expands the audience for art. This past quarter at Artsy, we addressed under-discussed topics, regions, and subjects—African-American artists, museum funding and higher education in art in the United States, Korean minimalism, female artists employing moving image as medium, and the conundrum that is conceptual art (if it confuses you, you're not alone), to name a few. And we responded to our readers' cues: We began to send our art-world stories, news, and features to our most engaged audience as daily emails (sign up here). You responded with overwhelming open rates.

We also explored new mediums and methods for storytelling, launching a podcast series, the first created by any major art publication. For our second podcast, "Art History vs. the Art Market," Deputy Editor Alexander Forbes, Senior Editor Tess Thackara, and Editorial Associate Isaac Kaplan took a journey from one end of the art world to the other—from the current state of the art market, as explored through Alex's fantastic breakdown of the TEFAF Art Market Report, to the institutional focus on "Big Art History," cross-temporal exhibitions that are cropping up across the globe, a discussion spurred by the recent opening of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Breuer Building and inaugural show, "Unfinished." In our next podcast episode, coming out today, our editors explore San Francisco's dramatic economic and cultural shifts and impact

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In Series Of "Installation" Concerts, Beach House Aims to Blur Line between Audience and Performer

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY ABIGAIL CAIN
APR 6TH, 2016 4:02 PM

When do concerts become works of art?

Beach House during a recent installation performance. Photo courtesy of Shawn Brackbill / Icebox Project Space at Crane Arts, Philadelphia.

Kanye West and Jay-Z rapped from the tops of two towering video cubes, each side a screen displaying sharks on the prowl, during their 2011-2012 "Watch The Throne" tour. Miley Cyrus made a grand entrance for 2014's "Bangerz" via a neon pink slide fashioned to look like a tongue protruding from a blown-up image of her own face. These sorts of jaw-dropping backdrops are a logical conclusion in a world in which musicians now make a lion's share of their income from tours, not album sales. Yet no matter how spectacular the visuals, the formula remains the same: There's an audience watching a performer who stands on stage.

In February, Baltimore duo Beach House looked to alter that equation

when they announced a set of "installation" performances to coincide with their tour for last year's critically acclaimed albums *Thank Your Lucky Stars* and *Depression Cherry*. These shows—which run through early May—are capped at 200, held in alternative spaces like galleries or community centers, and feature an hour of uninterrupted music. Guitarist Alex Scally explained the band's objective to *T Magazine*: "When you go to a show, you are there to watch somebody perform for you. The stage is a dividing line. The goal is that people will kind of lose where they are, and go into a very internal place in their mind."

That's how I found myself waiting in line with a couple hundred Beach House super-fans at the Knockdown Center in Maspeth, Queens (a place I imagined might be a taekwondo studio; it is, in fact, an arts space), wondering how exactly the band would blur that line between audience and performer. We filed into the former factory space, taking a seat on the concrete floor to gaze expectantly towards what we assumed was the stage —a square screen lit with undulating red and blue lights a lá James Turrell. The band appeared, seated in shadow behind a now-transparent screen lit by video projections of floral imagery. Along another wall of the room ran a phosphorescent case of fiber-optic flowers, the lights pulsing with the music.

The show was excellent—the gauzy images fluttering across the screen provided a fitting reflection of the band's dreamy synths and ethereal

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