



View of SITElines 2018, showing work by (left) Victoria Mamnguqsualuk and (right) Eric-Paul Riege, at SITE Santa Fe.

SITElines 2018

SANTA FE—SITE Santa Fe

Some time ago I read an essay on Julio Cortázar in which the repetition of the word “yo” in one of the Argentine author’s novels was said to allegorize his sapped authority, as the “o”s resemble bullet holes. Such intense, even hallucinatory, uses of language are found throughout SITElines 2018—the final installment in SITE Santa Fe’s trio of biennials focusing on art from the Americas—with, for instance, its sung press releases (Stephanie Taylor’s *Press Release #1*, 2017, and *Press Release #2*, 2018), woven sentences (Melissa Cody’s textiles), word play (Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds’s *Surviving Active Shooter Custard*, 2018), and poetic musings (Fernanda Laguna’s *Pintada, no vacía/Pintada está mi casa* [Painted, Not Empty/My House Is Painted], 2018). Deftly curated by Candice Hopkins, Ruba Katrib, and José Luis Blondet, the exhibition borrows its title, “Casa Tomada” (House Taken Over), from a 1946 Cortázar short story that tells of a pair of middle-aged siblings being run out of their large family home by unnamed forces. The house, although emptied of its former inhabitants, is fuller than ever, invaded, it seems, by the dark rumblings of a world in upheaval just outside the door, with the story appearing to allude to the rise of Peronist populism.

Similarly, these days, strange forces, once-marginalized ways of thinking and being, are haunting the museum, the university, the social media feed. Certain antagonisms are being registered readily and straightforwardly, whereas previously they might have been encountered mostly as hidden kernels in works by people with privileged cultural status, to be excavated through a kind of

close reading. The center—this time for real—can no longer hold. Or as a monoprint by Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds in the show has it: WHITE MAN FOLLY TIME IS LIMITED.

If Cortázar’s story provides one entry point into the biennial, that of Juan de Oñate’s missing foot provides the other. In 1997, anonymous renegades blowtorched the right foot off a monument dedicated to “the last conquistador” that had been erected in Alcalde (around thirty miles from Santa Fe). While the statue commemorated the founder of New Mexico, the amputation brought to mind the “forgotten” cruelty of his ways. In retaliation for the killing of some of his men during a raid on the food supplies of the Pueblo peoples in 1599, Oñate set villages ablaze, murdered more than eight hundred people, and ordered that the right foot of every Acoma Pueblo man over the age of twenty-five be chopped off. The Oñate foot has never been found, but a cast clay replica of it now sits in the middle of the biennial, put there by the curators. It emphasizes that forces left unattended to can overrun the neat parameters we stake around our territories, including exhibitions.

Victoria Mamnguqsualuk’s drawings, prints, and textiles often feature Kiviuq, a time-leaping migrant. In Inuit oral tradition, he is thought to appear, like Cortázar’s interlopers, in times of great upheaval. In Mamnguqsualuk’s works, Kiviuq inhabits a world in which the borders between animal, human, and spirit worlds are porous. Bodies grow inside other bodies; the stomachs of gigantic animals become shelters. Agency and

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sentience are distributed generously. Such distribution continues in Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa's *Revindication of Tangible Pottery* (2018)—a set of mobiles that evokes an originary myth of the K'iche' Maya population in which clay pots rise in protest and chase away the people with whom they share houses.

Weaving is prominent in the work of both Melissa Cody and Eric-Paul Riege. Cody employs the Navajo Germantown style, which was developed during the genocidal Long Walk of the mid-1860s. She synthesizes it, highlighting its historical depth, with contemporary visual forms—the font of early video games, patterns suggesting TV snow—and poetic uses of text. Riege has built a ghostly hogan, the traditional Navajo home and ceremonial space, out of looms and white threads. Inside this hushed space, two intricate suits woven by the artist are on



Jumana Manna:
Wild Relatives,
2018, video,
66 minutes; in
SITElines 2018.

display. The installation refers to the story of how the spindle and the loom were gifted to the Navajo's mythological twins Naayéé'neizghání (Slayer of Monsters) and Tóbájishchíní (Born of Water) by Na'ashjé'íí Asdzáá (Spider Woman).

Another work that shines is Jumana Manna's hour-long video *Wild Relatives* (2018), which documents the story of a seed bank in Aleppo that had to be abandoned due to the current Syrian conflict. Through the perseverance of exiled scientists, it was reestablished in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon using seeds that the Norwegians are safeguarding for a world that has phase-shifted into a new geological and climatic era.

There are also, unfortunately, a few unimaginative takes on "the occupied house." Andrea Fraser's pie charts showing the financial contributions to political parties of individuals who sit on museum boards feels defanged: what we already knew, if not quite in its precise and troubling details, is rendered in tasteful primary colors and Swiss typography. It's not that Fraser's larger indexing project, *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics*, from which her installation is excerpted, isn't extremely necessary; it's that something of its urgency and magnitude is lost here to the metaphorical and the decorative.

Elements from Angela Bonadies and Juan José Olavarría's "Tower of David" archive likewise would have benefited from

different curatorial framing. The story of the tower is epic: an unfinished bank building in the middle of Caracas was occupied by squatters in 2007 and turned into a favela, becoming a symbol of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution, of popular power and redistributive justice—and later, when Chinese investment money appeared, of betrayal and eviction. What seems under-considered, in relation to some of the guiding themes of the show, is the alluded-to legacy of Simón Bolívar—a hero of the nineteenth-century wars of independence in a number of South American countries, whom the socialists of the twenty-first century have idealized and named their revolutions after. Bolívar was of course no Oñate, not even close, but the project of nation-building in Latin America has to be thought, beyond a quest for independence from a dwindling empire, in relation to the local elite classes' need to fend off Indigenous and slave revolts. The Túpac Amaru Rebellion (1780–82) and the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), for instance, were fresh historical events when European Creoles in Latin America began to plot their moves toward independence, which would allow them full control of their national spaces and military forces.

In the end, what has overtaken this exhibition are not forces that come from other worlds, other epistemologies and cosmologies. To propose that those of us who sustain the museum and the biennial format as they're currently configured through our work or patronage suddenly have full access to such varying forms of knowledge is to exercise the same old appropriative logic that has sentenced us to a ruined world. What haunts the show is an understanding that the power relations museums have helped maintain must be denaturalized, brought out into the open. The "common sense" that has allowed us to proceed as we have is earning the scare quotes and the claim to historical contingency that they signal. But unlike the siblings in Cortázar's story, we may have a choice: we can stick with our bankrupt worldviews, be baffled by all the things that are now appearing in our midst, and continue hoarding and policing; or we can work toward understanding our contribution to how things have been settled and ordered, and acknowledge all that we have violently pushed to the edges to, ultimately, our own detriment.

—Gean Moreno

NEW YORK

GERTRUDE ABERCROMBIE

Karma

During the 1940s and '50s, the Chicago-based Surrealist Gertrude Abercrombie (1909–1977) was known locally as the "queen of the bohemian artists." A self-styled regional "other Gertrude," she hosted salons in her Hyde Park home that were frequented by artists, writers, and jazz musicians based in, or passing through, the city. Regular guests included Thornton Wilder, Sonny Rollins, and Dizzy Gillespie; Gillespie even led the band at her 1948 wedding to music critic Frank Sandiford. Despite Abercrombie's prominence in Chicago, her paintings were, until recently, little known outside the Midwest. A compact