

FLAUNT

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MY DAS UNHEIMLICHE

A Curation and Inquiry by Artist Luis Gispert



Luis Gispert. "Carmencita What Have You Done?," (2013). C-print triptych. 48 x 38 inches. Courtesy Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago.

For this article I'd like to frame our conversation around one question. I've been revisiting Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny." He defines the uncanny as an instance where something can be familiar, yet foreign at the same time, resulting in a feeling of it being uncomfortably strange or uncomfortably familiar.

Because the uncanny is familiar, yet strange, it often creates cognitive dissonance within the experiencing subject due to the paradoxical nature of being attracted to yet repulsed by an object at the same time.

This cognitive dissonance often leads to an outright rejection of the object, as one would rather reject than rationalize. As visual artists we consume and consider everything in culture.

What is uncanny to you today?

—Luis Gispert

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Pooneh Maghazehe

About a month ago, I spent six hours in Urgent Care. I had pink eye. The resident doctor dilated my eyes and threw me back in the pen with 150 other waitees.

When your eyes are dilated, they get crusty and a lot of energy is spent:

1. Picking at the corners of each with Kleenex.
2. Trying to somehow beat the blurry vision.

What a waste of an entire afternoon. But somehow, time passed with such ease.

For the 20 minutes I sat in waiting, I eavesdropped on the woman next to me.

She drank a coffee and ate a Danish from the deli; not much else happened. What kept me occupied was my heightened awareness of her physicality and my general nosiness.

She was roughly 70 years old, but looked great, so I think. It was clear that her nationality, black, Hispanic, or both, helped to keep a general droopiness/power of gravity at arm's length. She had a bob like Salt-n-Pepa, with bangs. She felt so familiar. Her hands, though, were like two mitts. They only folded in half. Her coffee was too hot; my left ear picked up on her mumbling that the coffee was too hot, that it didn't have sugar. Luckily, she had an extra Splenda in her purse.

Like her hands hinging at only a single point, her lips were the only things that moved on her face. I watched, or tried to watch, them pucker to reach the Styrofoam cup. These body parts: hands and head, looked numb, as if they didn't experience temperature—she held the cup as if she had first dipped her hand in a few coats of wax—a dampened sensation. Dull and mute. She loved that coffee and Danish though. —PM

Pooneh Maghazehe earned an MFA in visual art from Columbia University in 2011, an MS in Interior Architecture from Pratt Institute in 2005, and a BS in Behavioral Sciences from Penn State University in 2001. Select exhibitions and performances include the Beijing 798 Biennale, ICA Philadelphia, ZKM Institute for Art and Media, ICA Portland, DePaul University Museum in Chicago, Chelsea Art Museum, 247365, and most recently, Newark Penn Station. Maghazehe is currently working on a site-specific project at Torrance Shipman Gallery in Brooklyn NY. Select publications include The New York Times, Art Asia Pacific Magazine, Art Map Magazine, Contemporary Practices, Guernica Magazine, 1 Magazine, and Art Crush. Maghazehe lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

Stephanie Powell

My studio mate bought a 'money tree' when we first moved into our studio. For those that don't know, money trees, a.k.a. Pachira Aquatica, are decorative plants that symbolize prosperity based on Chinese mythology. I thought it was funny, perhaps uncanny, that this plant ended up in my workspace, especially given that it ties directly into my work and felt oddly familiar. Within the context of my work, the money tree now represents a Western dispersion of the Oriental aesthetic, embodying a questionable sense of authenticity in Eastern culture. It was precisely an object I might more or less reject.

Although we lived with this "good luck charm" for six months, we never took care of it. I'm not sure whether to attribute my disconnection with the money tree to a subconscious protest of its assigned magical powers or the fact that I'm just not a plant person.

Until one day I noticed it was dying. It just seemed wrong to let it die. So, I changed the soil, watered it, bought plant food (which was kind of expensive), and even monitored its sunlight exposure. Unfortunately I couldn't save it.

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The money tree was at the point of no return. It was physically dead, although the commoditized mythology was still alive and well. And for some reason that was strangely comforting to me: knowing I could walk a few blocks to the local dollar store and buy a \$7 money tree and replace the good luck.

Instead, it became the subject of a video piece I'm currently working on titled, "Cash Rules Everything Around Me."

What is uncanny to me today? The uncanny are those déjà vu moments in time when one realizes their personal experience is such a vital piece of this larger societal fabric we live in. And that scares me. —SP

Stephanie Powell is an artist based in Brooklyn, New York. She was born on a navy base in Yokosuka, Japan and raised in Portland, Oregon. She received a BFA from the University of Oregon and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Currently she is the visiting professor at Pratt Institute. Her work is inspired by ethnic conflict and the 20th century colonialism. Her works have been shown at Mills Gallery, Primo Piano Living Gallery, and Grace Institute, amongst other galleries.

Sheree Hovsepian



Sheree Hovsepian. "Untitled #92," from *Haptic Wonders* series. (2013). Unique silver gelatin photogram. 20 x 24 inches.

Working primarily in abstraction for the past several years, I was faced with a dilemma the first time the [human] figure accidentally appeared in my work. I was in the dark room making photograms (a photographic image made without a camera by placing objects directly on a light sensitive material and exposing it to light). The composition that appeared—as the print was in the developer bath—looked eerily like a face.

I had to make a conscious decision to allow the work that followed to either go toward figuration or avoid it. The dilemma I faced was that the comfort in being able to recognize the figure was on some level very rational and satisfying, however my immediate response was one of dismissal. The act of accidentally producing a figure (or life) was startling to me and the discomfort arose out of a fear in not being able to rationalize it in the context of my work.

Looking back on this time, I realized that when I was working on these photograms, I had recently given birth to my son. Carrying and expelling another human being is ensconced in its own sense of the uncanny.

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The act of giving life had been replicated in the studio.

Today: the figure, the visage, the head are important facets in my work. The paradoxical nature of inserting the figure within the language of abstraction allows for a push-pull reaction, which informs the breadth of my practice.—SH



Sheree Hovsepian. "Domes," (2013). Installation view. Bischoff/Wesis Gallery, London.

Sheree Hovsepian is an Iranian-born American contemporary artist who photographs on film-based cameras, using light sensitive paper, construction paper, objects, and her body to achieve her desired effects of deconstructing the medium of photography. Her work has shown internationally at group and solo shows, including at Etemad Gallery, Dubai; Spertus Museum, Chicago; Bischoff/Weiss, London; and Magnan Metz Gallery, New York City.

Jacolby Satterwhite

The contemporary term for the uncanny is "Ratchet," and I've been obsessed with it for five years, starting with my discovery of "Media Takeout" and "Bossip." These websites are black tabloids that often cover news about celebrities and regular people in the raunchiest way possible.

In the Urban Dictionary, ratchet's definition is:

"Ratchet is if Ghetto and Hot Shitty Mess had a baby, and that baby had no father, and became a stripper, then made a sex tape with an athlete, then became a reality star!

Basically Ratchet is a term for someone who is such a ghetto/slutty/ugly/trashy hot mess that you have to use a word that doesn't even technically apply because what you are seeing is such a mess that it goes beyond any normal description.

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God Damn! Look at that Ratchet ass bitch over there!

You are pointing out an extremely unattractive woman walking by in a Bikini too small for her body type and her tampon string hanging out.”

Celebrity culture has appropriated the aesthetic of ratchet as a strategy to appear down to earth and accessible to society. In an age where anyone can Photoshop or manicure their perfection via advanced digital media. The Internet is a vehicle where we can all curate our bodies to appear godly. The general reaction created a paradigm shift where appearing realistic, porous, rough around the edges, and flawed would be more appealing and seductive to the average visual consumer. Megastar Rihanna is a prime example. In a previous generation where having an eight octave vocal range and military precision dance moves was important for stardom, Rihanna is the polarizing shift in that idea. She is the equivalent to the birth of modernism, where average and realness with glitter on top was more important to the conversation than Baroque and Renaissance virtuosity. She sings, dances, and writes as much as she needs to get her message across, but her personal life viewed via Instagram, Twitter, “Media Takeout,” etc...acts as the trailer for her lyrical content in her songs. Via social media, you can witness her rolling 14-inch blunts on her bodyguard’s head at Coachella, making it rain 10K on ‘skrippers’ at a strip club. She bullies Ciara, Teyana Taylor, Karrueche Tran, fans, and even her music video directors with hashtag line #butthurtniggaalert. She does countless duets with her former lover Chris Brown a year-and-a-half after their domestic violence incident. Her alluring appeal is that she is a gorgeous bad example, erratic, free, gross, and young, the uncanny. I live for her, and think of her every day. A generation after Rihanna (i.e. Miley Cyrus) have proceeded to refine the brand of ratchet, I like to call it Slutty Agency...Something I think I have. —JS

Jacolby Satterwhite is a video, performance, 3D animation, drawing, and printmaking artist based in New York. His exhibit The Matriarch’s Rhapsody at Monya Rowe Gallery (2013) was highlighted in the New Yorker at the beginning of the year, receiving praise for the inclusion of a “wondrously strange nine-minute-long video.” His upcoming exhibitions include a solo exhibition at Mallorca Landings Gallery, Palma De Mallorca in December 2013; a solo exhibition at Monya Rowe Gallery in March 2014; and an exhibition at the Whitney Biennial in March 2014.

Alex Da Corte

A few years ago, a close friend of mine came across a self-portrait of a man standing in front of “The Mona Lisa” at the Louvre.

He sent it to me and told me he had found a photo of me at the Louvre by “The Mona Lisa.” I had been living in Paris for a bit and didn’t recall taking that photo but clearly there was a photograph of me with Mona. A few days later when I looked at the self-portrait again, I realized that it wasn’t me in the photograph, but actually Marshall Mathers a.k.a. Eminem. How could this possibly be? How could one not know their own skin, their own face? How could Eminem morph and mutate like that? Where did he get that mask? Why was he at the Louvre? Does this mean his morals are mine too? Have we fallen into a wrinkle in time? Have I arrived at a place I desired and feared without realizing it? Is this what the back of my head looks like? Am I a straight, white misogynist too? Am I a rap god? Where does my body end and his begin? What would Hailie Jade think of this? Is Marshall wearing a mask too? What am I going to be for Halloween this year? —ADC

Alex Da Corte is an artist, sculptor, and photographer. Born in Camden, New Jersey, Da Corte lived in Venezuela until he was eight years old. He received an MFA in sculpture from Yale University. His works play with humor, late 20th-century pop aesthetic, and bright pastels. Da Corte has exhibited at Mallorca Landings, Still House, Joe Sheftel Gallery, Galerie Olivier Robert, and Miami Art Basel in 2011.

<http://www.flaunt.com/art/das-unheimliche/>

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