



IDEAS

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Cover: Chiharu Shiota, *The Key in the Hand*, 2015, Dimensions variable. Red wool, keys, wooden boat, Japan Pavilion, Venice Biennale (detail). **Back cover:** Jeanne Vicerial, *Mue n°1*, 2022, ropes, threads, brass and copper engraving of roses, handmade, 195 × 60 × 40 cm – 76 3/4 × 23 5/8 × 15 3/4 in (detail). **Right:** Philippe Cognée, *Amaryllis I*, 2022, wax painting on canvas, 200 × 150 cm, 78 3/4 × 59 in. **Page 14:** *Alone Street* (detail), 2018–2019, digital pigment print mounted to Dibond, 127 × 226 cm – 50 × 89 in (145 × 243 × 5 cm – 57 1/8 × 95 5/8 × 2 in framed), edition of 4 + 2 EA



PHILIPPE COGNÉE. PAINTING AFTER

COLIN LEMOINE

Colin Lemoine, curator of the exhibition ‘Philippe Cognée. La peinture d’après’ at the musée Bourdelle, analyzes the approach of an artist who always paints with others: proliferation and repainting, germination and finitude are considered by the author.

Painting is always painted after. After another, after others; after oils on canvases and temperas on wood; after polyptychs on gallery walls or history paintings along church aisles; after Cimabue, Rembrandt, Van Gogh or Cézanne; after crucifixions, self-portraits, wheat fields, or bathers; after Frenhofer and Elstir; after Lascaux and Pompeii; after aurochs in damp caves or Bacchic cults in parched tombs.

Painting is always painted after painting.

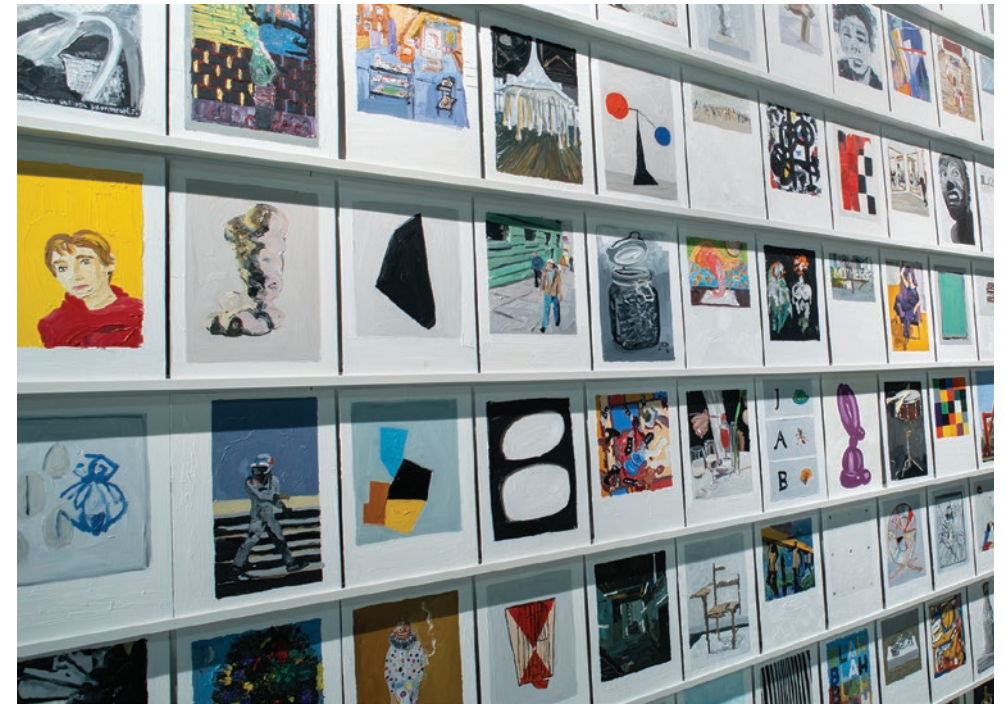
[...] The exhibition ‘Philippe Cognée.

La peinture d’après’, centering on his major project *Le Catalogue de Bâle* (2003–2013), is the largest to have been devoted to the artist in Paris to date. [...] Presented in the musée Bourdelle’s striking extension

designed by the architect Christian de Portzamparc in 1992, the show’s three sections explore a process of *re-painting*¹, through which Philippe Cognée reappropriates works from the past and, like a modern-day Janus, looks to the yesterdays to seek out the tomorrows, a manner of recognizing the fate of any painting, which, while it always comes *after*, can still show *again* and *anew*, obstinately and freshly. In a word, inexhaustibly.

RE-PAINTING

In Picasso, Cézanne. In Cézanne, Manet. In Manet, Velázquez. In Velázquez, El Greco. Such nested influences and homages have traced a history of art made of quotations



Le catalogue de Bâle, 2013–2015, oil on paper mounted on aluminium, approx. 1000 paintings, 29,7 × 21 cm, 11 × 8 in each, exhibition view, espace Villeglé in St Gratien (France), 2018

and allusions, of deliberate borrowings and unconscious slips. For his part, Cognée draws on iconic works, not so as to copy them slavishly, not to duplicate them in the academic style, or with a sterile virtuosity, but to disfigure them by means of a tried-and-tested technique: after executing an encaustic (hot wax) painting, the artist covers his composition with a plastic film, which he then melts with an iron, thereby creating a highly recognizable shaky effect and a burying of the painting material. [...]

For this is Philippe Cognée’s discovery: despite the denaturation inferred by his method, despite the alteration of the painted surface, there always remains something of the original work, so that

the iron’s passing over it, just as a wave begins to erase a child’s drawing in the sand, does not completely wipe out the primitive form but retains its essentiality: that which stays when there is almost nothing left. And so this passing-over technique is not an abolition; on the contrary, it is an epiphany —of the work, and of our gaze. As long as its outlines have been preserved², when we perceive the seminal painting, we can also perceive *what our gaze can see*, what it is capable of taking in despite the visual disorder or the disturbance of the original material. The flesh may be damaged, but the skeleton remains, the skeleton which enables identification, in painting just as in criminal investigation.

It is a **POLITICAL**
act, then,
to interfere with
the workings
of the **WORLD**,
to counter that
over-SATURATION.

PROLIFERATION

[...] Philippe Cognée has a reverence for profusion, for the numerous. A numerousness that speaks of the thrill of the repeated action. Numerous are his self-portraits that, in breaking up the artist's outward appearance and status, as in Rembrandt and in Francis Bacon, bring about the disfigurement of the "body of the king,"³ a body both "dynastic" and "mortal," to use Pierre Michon's terms [ill.2]. Numerous are his vanitas (2001–2022), encaustic or ink paintings, in which the skull works as a poignant metonymy of the "living-dead community,"⁴ as in Pieter Claesz and Philippe de Champaigne. Numerous are his carcasses (2003) reappropriating the masterpieces of Chaïm Soutine, where meat and flesh are the obverse and reverse of a wholly vulnerable, infinitely sensual body. [...] Cognée's sculptures in the first part of the exhibition, designed as the anteroom of *The Catalogue de Bâle*, show, besides his enduring interest in this medium, the importance of proliferation in his work, which Pierre Bergounioux describes as haunted by slaughterhouses and superstores – *grandes surfaces* in French, a painter's expression if ever there was one – in an era when "the supermarket resembles the nouveau roman."⁵ [...]

The Nantes-based artist has explored like no other the neutrality of the subject, using masterpieces from Western art as well as readily available, even trivial motifs. No magic erasers here, but plastic chairs, random trees, simple flowers, ashtrays, containers—so many modest, ordinary things which art, in its nobility, can elevate, render in painting, *visibilize*, where the



Le catalogue de Bâle (detail), 2013–2015, after Antoine Bourdelle

familiar and the banal had exhausted our capacity for delight. [...]

CATALOGUE

The central second section of the exhibition presents a dizzying ensemble of a thousand paintings—*Le Catalogue de Bâle* (2003–2013)—arranged within a great labyrinth, the visitor flanked left and right by rows of paintings hung so close together they almost touch.⁶ Each work is executed using the same method, almost a ritual: Cognée selects an Art Basel catalogue, its pages containing superlative works considered the finest and most expensive on the art market, removes a page, and paints over in white everything—text, caption, catalogue entry—that prevents the reproduction of

the work shown—be it a sculpture, painting, or installation—thus sparing it, and removing it from its context.[...] Painting *after*, then—after Hans Hartung, after Alberto Giacometti, after Jeff Koons, or after Pascale Marthine Tayou⁷, but also, in the French language, painting *on*—*peindre sur*, in the literal sense of *peindre sur le motif*.

By this act, which is a translation of the mother tongue and therefore a betrayal, but a *loyal betrayal*, Cognée re-presents, through painting, a work that had been re-produced mechanically, on impersonal rotary presses. In other words, what barely fifteen minutes earlier had been an image becomes a work once more. It is a political act, then, to interfere with the workings of the world, to counter that over-saturation,



Le catalogue de Bâle (detail), 2013-2015

not of paintings but of the images of paintings—in magazines, on cookie tins, in advertisements, on paperback covers—where each of those works is presented to us as if disembodied, without texture or weight, deprived of its corporeity and its grace, imbued solely with its own aura, an aura that is its fraternal twin and its false friend, hypnotic in its radiance, dazzling in its aura, its luminous metaphor exasperating itself in the world of smartphones and screens and immersive art experiences. This re-painting gives back to the work its primary, almost religious, vocation, which is inherent in its irresistible singularity.

In putting his hand to all these works - his treatment of the re-paintings' indifferent to the nature of each original - Cognée creates a coherent, seemingly homogeneous history of art, all the more so in that all of the works thus conceived have the same format - that of the catalogue from which they came (21 × 29.7 cm). Better still, a history of art and a history of the art market, with their insights *and* oversights, their blind spots, inspirations, and aberrations. [...]

SAP

[...] Sap: that defining vital force that flows through the sculptures of Antoine Bourdelle, full-blown and impenetrable. The sculpture as flower—stem and petal, phallic and feminine, Apollonian and Dionysian. This is the allegory behind the new canvases produced by Cognée for the final section of the exhibition⁸ pairing sculptures in the round and flowers, their vitality and their vigor. Pablo Picasso's *Flowery Watering Can* (1951–1953) [ill.7], the philodendrons of Sam Szafran, who was



Pivoine 1, 2022, wax painting on canvas, 240 × 180 cm, 94 1/2 × 70 7/8 in

a master of detail, and Johan Creten's multi-colored flowers [ill.8], fragile, heavy ceramics, all go to prove it: with the same vitalistic principle, the same germination, sculpture and flower go hand in hand. After all, did the sculpture not gain its independence by tearing itself from the monument, as a flower from its bouquet, a sunflower from its field, an asparagus from its bundle?

—
'Philippe Cognée. La peinture d'après', musée Bourdelle (Paris), until July 16, 2023.

Also 'Philippe Cognée', musée de l'Orangerie (Paris), until September 4, 2023.

THIS TEXT IS A REDUCED AND EDITED VERSION OF COLIN LEMOINE'S ESSAY, 'PHILIPPE COGNÉE, LA PEINTURE D'APRÈS', FROM THE CATALOGUE OF THE EONYMOUS EXHIBITION PUBLISHED BY PARIS MUSÉES IN 2023.

1. The term is mine.
2. This brings to mind the University of Cambridge experiment that showed how a word can be read even when the letters are mixed up, as long as the first and last letter are in place. A gaze lightly skims and deeply probes.
3. In his *Corps du roi* (Lagrasse, Éditions Verdier, 2002), Pierre Michon offers an intense reflection on the real and symbolic body, the "immortal" and the "functional" body, of the author, and the artist, who, reflexive by nature, does not shy from using images of self, both others' photographs and reflections in the mirror.
4. This expression of Arnaud Esquerre's (*Les os, les cendres et l'État*, Paris, Fayard, 2011) opens the epilogue of Laurence Bertrand Dorléac's definitive work *Pour en finir avec la nature morte* (Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Art et artistes", 2020, p. 253). This brilliantly probing book was recently translated into an exhibition at the Musée du Louvre (*Les Choses. Une histoire*

5. Pierre Bergounioux, *Peindre aujourd'hui*. Philippe Cognée, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2012, p. 33.
6. Small parts of this ensemble have been exhibited twice before, in different arrangements: in 2016, at the Fondation Fernet-Branca in the Haut-Rhin and in Saint-Gratien in the autumn of 2018.
7. The expression *to paint "after"* combines these two notions, of continuation and inspiration, time and response, the time of the response—for every work is an echo. But of what? Cognée seems to ask.
8. The exhibition *Carne dei fiori* at the Galerie Templon in Paris from January 11 to March 7, 2020 was a resounding celebration of the artist's exploration of the floral motif.

GREGORY CREWDSON IN DISCUSSION WITH BRUCE BÉGOUT

The American photographer Gregory Crewdson and the French philosopher Bruce Bégout meet in the run-up to the artist's exhibition at the Rencontres d'Arles, 'Eveningside', and discuss the creation of an atmosphere, the notion of the sublime, 18th century French painting, the influence of psychoanalysis, and Crewdson's enduring fascination with the fixed image.

BB: Different contrasts run through your work. The first one would be between the complexity and richness of the technical setup – of the production of the photographs – and, on the other hand, the simplicity – banality even – of the scenes depicted. Have you ever considered using a simpler, more direct, more elemental technical process to capture these moments of everyday life which are the subject of your photographs?

GC: Well, at the core of it, I would consider myself to be a storyteller; I use still pictures

in a way to try to capture some kind of mood or atmosphere using light and color and form.

Still photographs, unlike movies or other narrative forms, are frozen and mute, so for me the only way to make a narrative is through light, essentially.

That's the key element in all the work, and I do try to create a kind of tension between very ordinary experience like something that feels familiar and then something that's also transformed and feels elevated in some way, sort of subjective and beautiful and mysterious.



The Corner Market, 2021–2022, framed archival pigment print mounted to dibond, 87 × 117 cm – 34 1/2 × 46 in (102 × 132 cm – 40 1/2 × 52 in framed), edition of 6 + 3 AP

BB: What I notice in your work, in particular in *Twilight* or in *An Eclipse of Moths*, is the fact that the America you portray, which is an America of the margins, of small towns which have been left behind, seems frozen in the 60s, as if fundamentally these images occupy the role of childhood memories.

GC: I want the pictures to feel timeless, like something just out of our grasp in terms of specific place or time. So, I tend to use similar iconography; similar kinds of cars and streets, and costumes, all in an effort to create a world that is familiar but also kind of mysterious and outside of time.

At the same time, I want the pictures to

feel relevant to the moment we're in. I want them to remain outside of time but also be meaningful to where we are as a culture.

BB: You've mentioned on a number of occasions the role played by your father's psychoanalytic practice in your artistic development, and in raising your awareness of hidden truths – of the underside of things which had been brushed under the carpet of normality. In fact, your works have a very strong dreamlike, even psychoanalytic quality. Have you read Freud and in particular his essay on the 'Uncanny', which seems almost to illustrate your work?

GC: It's really interesting that you mention that because I have my father's edition of the entire collection of Freud's writing and I have the volume in my studio with the essay *The Uncanny* with all his original notes in it, which is one of my very precious books. And indeed, almost by happenstance that book kind of directly connects to every single one of my pictures trying to locate a kind of sense of terror or mystery unexpectedly in everyday life. My father, when I was growing up, had his office in the basement of our house and so that was always, even on an unconscious level, an interest in what's beneath the surface of things, the kind of secrets that exist just

beneath the surface of domestic façades.

BB: So, to further develop that point, do you consider your images – your works, as a sort of therapeutic process which works through images rather than words?

GC: I absolutely think there's a kind of psychological element to the work but I think it's also important to separate the psychology of the picture from the maker. There is a connection but I don't believe my pictures are autobiographical in any sort of literal sense. They hold within them my own kind of obsessions and preoccupations, my fears and desires so they are definitely

psychological in nature.

BB: What also astonishes me with your photography is the relationship which is fundamentally between three elements: characters, landscape, and action. Often when looking at your images we get the impression that you're not representing an action but rather the moment directly after. It's not the disaster that you're interested in but the state of awe, of astonishment, in the aftermath of the disaster.

GC: My pictures seem to be kind of caught between before and after. There's very little that's actually happening in any of the pictures, so, either something just happened or something's about to happen, but never happening.

According to me part of the strength of photography as opposed to other narrative forms is that there is this great inbetweenness; it's very hard to capture continuity in a picture, or plot, or any kind of traditional story because you only have this one moment. Rather than trying to make it about something, I want it to be about a kind of quiet, private revelation of something; some small thing that's magnified by the form of the pictures, by the place, as you said about the relationship between the figure and the space.

Setting is so important. The landscape is so important. All these things are part of what motivates the pictorial experience.

BB: I'd like to focus on the attitude of the characters in most of your photos, who often seem immobilized, dumbstruck, and almost prostrate. In a book on 18th century

French painting, Michael Fried, who you know perhaps as an art theorist, wrote about an attitude of absorption – of immersion on the part of characters, for example in Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Jean Siméon Chardin, or Charles André van Loo. But these were characters engrossed in a task, an activity, in what they are doing. Whereas the characters in your photographs are just as absorbed. Here the sense is in fact that these characters are waiting for something impossible to define, rather like the characters in the plays by the Irish, or French, dramatist Samuel Beckett. Is this emptiness conveyed by the characters some kind of expectation? Or paralysis?

GC: That's a good question! First of all, I really love your read on it and the reference to Michael Fried and theatricality and absorption; it's something that definitely influenced me when I was a younger artist coming of age.

I think that's, to me, what the still image is really great at because it's not good as a literal narrative... When I'm working with the people in the pictures, I always tell them I want less, emptied out. Almost nothing is what I really desire in the picture because it just makes it more of a kind of mystery or question mark. I don't like any literal actions or answers in the picture, I want it to kind of remain kind of unresolved. That the viewer brings their own meaning to the pictures.

BB: Returning to my first question on contrast, in your images there is a very strong contrast between people lost in themselves and the immensity of an urban,



Jim's House of Shoes, 2021–2022, framed archival pigment print mounted to dibond, 87 × 117 cm – 34 1/2 × 46 in (102 × 132 cm – 40 1/2 × 52 in framed), edition of 6 + 3 AP

or natural, landscape which seems indifferent to them. Often, these scenes are situated in the American suburbia, and in particular in what Nan Goldin calls the ‘suffocating trap of the suburbs’.

What is so fascinating about the American suburbs that means that all these great American artists – John Cheever, Raymond Carver, Stephen Shore, Tod Hido, David Lynch – are obsessed with representing this ‘suffocating trap’?

GC: Well, I can’t speak for them. But admire all their work. Let me say that photography, the medium itself, has a kind of alienation to it – just looking through a lens. You’re always separated from the world that you’re in. I love the idea of these isolated figures, in a very ordinary landscape that feels familiar, searching for something outside of themselves, trying to make a connection in the world.

There is this long-time tradition of artists working in ordinary life and looking for some kind of theatrical moment. It is not only alienating but there’s also something that’s potentially beautiful about it.

To me, my first ambition, always, is to try to make the most beautiful picture I can.

And I believe a lot of artists who are working in this terrain also feel that way. Even though there’s a criticality to it and an alienation, and a discontent, there is also something beautiful about a Stephen Shore picture or a Tod Hido picture. Something appears ordinary and beautiful at the same time; both normal and paranormal. Something about nature and domesticity; something about fiction and reality. All these tensions come together to create meaning.

BB: You talk about beauty but what seems more characteristic of your work is in fact that you treat ordinary life as something sublime. And precisely what is striking is that the trivial, banal aspect is treated like something sublime. It’s as though it were, for instance, a grand landscape or a great historical battle painting from the 18th century, but this treatment is deployed for small, insignificant occurrences.

GC: I love that use of the word sublime because it’s not only beauty but there’s also a sense of terror in it. Something kind of looming, some sense of possible collapse or – the apocalypse of some sort. Definitely the sublime is something that I’ve always been interested in and influenced by.

BB: One thing that often comes up in discussion of your work is your ability to create atmospheres: troubling, strange, and bizarre atmospheres. Yet atmosphere is something which is often difficult to grasp, it’s something floating and subtle. So, I’d like to know how, with such a considerable and complex technical setup, you manage to produce something as fragile and evanescent as atmosphere. How do you manage to create an atmosphere? Do you feel like you always succeed?

GC: In terms of atmosphere, that’s what it’s all about for me: to create a mood. We do that through lighting and fog machines, and wet-downs, and various other things.

That is all part of it – trying to create an image that feels like it’s another world. To try to capture that is very difficult and many times it doesn’t work. But when

it does work you can see it right in front of you. You can see it happening on set – you can see it all coming together. To me, that’s the most beautiful part of the whole experience: making all of that come together in a beautiful way.

BB: It is often rightly said that your work has a cinematic quality. How come you’ve never made the jump into filmmaking when so many artists, painters, or photographers, have taken this step towards cinema and you, as far as I can tell, never have?

GC: Well, Juliane Hiam and I have been working on a project in private. I organically think in terms of still images so, if we ever made this it would be a real challenge.

—
‘Gregory Crewdson. Eveningside – 2012–2022’, Les Rencontres de la photographie, La Mécanique Générale, Arles, France, from July 3 to September 23, 2023. Curator: Jean–Charles Vergne.



Madeline's Beauty Salon, 2021–2022, framed archival pigment print mounted to dibond, 87 × 117 cm – 34 1/2 × 46 in (102 × 132 cm – 40 1/2 × 52 in framed), edition of 6 + 3 AP



HAMMER PROJECTS: CHI HARU SHIOTA

NIKA CHILEWICH

Nika Chilewich traces connections between Chiharu Shiota's work and the histories of the postwar Japanese Avant garde – a newly performative relationship to medium. She expands notions of early contemporary radicality within installation art to encompass an ethos of the *institution as a collectivity* with which the artist engages in her works.

A veritable alchemist of her medium, Chiharu Shiota has spent the majority of her career extracting a poetic language from a single material: yarn. In what has been a nearly thirty-year practice of formal distillation, the Japanese artist has developed a transcendent conceptual relationship to her materials. Shiota's monolithic site-specific landscapes take on questions of time, permanence, presence, and mortality. Matter becomes a pretext for a discussion of the universal nature of subjective experience and the longing that accompanies it. Her vast, ephemeral

gestures coopt their surrounding architectural space with abstract lines of yarn woven into fantastical landscapes. The artist's use of red, black, or white yarn to create monochromatic installations tempers the almost cinematic scope of her formal lyricism.

Shiota approaches physical site as an ideological space, a framework wherein her installations explore the relationships between and within the institutional entities that support the production of each work. Humanist in its approach to the institution, Shiota's practice engages the museum not as



'Hammer Projects: Chiharu Shiota', installation view, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2023

a singular entity but rather as the container for the community of individuals it houses at any given time. A denial of the sort of "uncovering" or indictment of the museum and gallery space that was popularized in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, Shiota's work can be seen as a staging of an institutional dance between the individual and the collective body.

Shiota, who purposely offers very little contextualizing information about her work, has referred to her installations as drawings in three-dimensional space,

a description that subverts traditional distinctions between artistic mediums and emphasizes the importance of process in her work. Instead of engaging with the traditions of craft or fiber art, she uses her material of choice to access new contemplative states, achieved through the simplicity of a single repeated gesture enacted over time. This meditative, almost spiritual process allows her to trace the relationship between mind, body, and spirit that is awakened when the body comes into contact with the material world. Enacted by a collectivity of bodies at

a scale that mirrors that of religious or civic architecture, Shiota's sculptural drawings attempt to reach beyond the individual toward a more universal conception of human experience.

According to Japanese mythology, an invisible red thread tied to a baby's finger at birth binds them to a network of people who will play significant roles in their life. Such stories have informed Shiota's use of yarn, and encounters with her installations, which employ the illusory nature of figurative representation, often take on a mythic quality. This is especially true when everyday objects such as keys, windows, or love letters are woven into her sculptural landscapes, imbuing them with an elegiac narrative tone in which the object



Human Rhizome (detail), variable dimensions, 2023

invokes the absence of the human form.¹

Shiota initially trained as a painter in Japan before continuing her studies in Germany, where she currently resides. One of her first installation works, *Becoming Painting* (1994), would set the tone for her artistic trajectory by establishing two central components within her work: the use of thread as a singular object of investigation and an embodied, performative artistic positioning of the self within the work. From there she continued to explore and build a lexicon of her own. As her installations grew in scale, she would spend countless hours weaving the thread into itself, moving her hands in and out of the webbed material, positioning the act of weaving—a form of gendered creative labor that has been relegated to the unremunerated margins of our cultural economy because of its association with women—as a complex philosophical and spiritual pursuit.

Shiota's work embodies a rejection of traditional artistic hierarchies centered on US and European conceptualism, and one can observe an affinity with and the legacies of Japan's post-World War II avant-garde. Her use of performance as a means of depicting the relationship between artistic form and human spirit seems reminiscent of the artistic production of the action-based Gutai group, for example.² And Shiota's systematic approach to artistic process, as well as her choice of medium, mirror the measured explorations of artistic material undertaken by the artists associated with Mono-ha. Key to their practices was an awareness of the process through which perception is generated and the affective

BEAUTY is an invitation to viewers to engage in a **COLLECTIVE** horizontal exchange.



The Key in the Hand, 2015. Red wool, keys, wooden boats, Japan Pavilion, Venice Biennale

systems in which it is embedded.³

Although Shiota is not dismissive of the affinities between her work and Japan’s early conceptual histories, she does not cite the experimental movements as having influenced her. She has, however, noted that the artists of this generation were almost exclusively male, a reality that informed her decision to leave Japan.⁴ A more significant point of departure between Shiota’s practice and those of the postwar Japanese avant-garde is the artist’s celebration of figurative space. Instead of rejecting the relationship that figuration has to Western art making and Eurocentric cultural values, Shiota has harnessed a sense of lyrical beauty and narrative theatricality for its ability to transport the viewer. She uses representational space as

a mechanism of seduction, part of an arsenal of tools that she harnesses to transport viewers out of their daily lives and into a more transcendent space of reverence and curiosity.

Exquisitely constructed landscapes are for the artist as much a register of a performance as they are an exploration of foundational concepts of figuration: things like line quality, shadow, density, weight, and scale. Shiota’s works touch on the concept of infinity, as echoed by the hundreds of thousands of strings that make up each piece. Hers is a world-building exercise in which beauty is an invitation to viewers to engage in a collective horizontal exchange. When seen from this vantage point, each installation becomes a sort of theater of interrelatedness between

the artist, her team, the institutional community housing the work, and finally its different publics, both live and virtual. They demonstrate a macro-poetic structure created through the revelatory process of repetition. Each work hums with a chorus of phenomenologically charged moves that contain a multitude of entry points capable of dislodging viewers from their quotidian existence and inducing reflection on the evanescence of time and the fleeting yet sacred experience of presence.

It is precisely this analog poetic machine that is the subject of *The Network* (2023), Shiota’s intervention in the newly remodeled Hammer Lobby. Based on a series of questions the artist asks of her own practice, *The Network* is her first major installation to reflect on her personal poetics. In lieu of found objects, the work uses form and process to generate a sort of call-and-response between Shiota and the Hammer Museum. By asking questions of its own existence, *The Network* employs the artist’s visual language and poetic style

to draw parallels — points of similarity and tension — between her practice and the communities it involves and the collective histories implicit in the museum’s institutional architecture. *The Network* is a conversation about the relationships that serve as the foundation of our creative existence, tracing the contours of a shared lived experience and the experiences that have altered the course of our individual and communal lives.

—
 ‘*Hammer Projects: Chiharu Shiota*’, *Hammer Museum (Los Angeles)*, until August 27, 2023, organized by Erin Christovale, curator, and Nika Chilewich, curatorial assistant.

Also Chiharu Shiota, ‘*Memory under the Skin*’, *Templon Paris*, until July 22, 2023.

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1. Examples of this include *House of Windows* (2005), *A Key in Hand* (2015), and the more recent *Letters of Love* (2022), in which Shiota asked viewers to submit letters of gratitude for someone in their lives.
 2. The Gutai group was founded by Jirō Yoshihara in the 1950s. Today it is arguably the best-known collective to emerge from this period of Japanese art history. For more on these histories,

see Mika Yoshitake, “Breaking Through: Shōzō Shimamoto and the Aesthetics of ‘Dakai,’” in *Target Practice: Painting under Attack 1949–78* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2009), 106–23.
 3. Mika Yoshitake, “What Is Mono-Ha?,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 25 (December 2013): 204.
 4. Chiharu Shiota, conversation with the author, January 24, 2023

SCULPTURE AS EPIDERMIS, CLOTHING AS ORGAN: A CONVERSATION WITH JEANNE VICERIAL

IDA SOULARD

Art historian Ida Soulard interviews Jeanne Vicerial on the origins and evolution of her practice. Their conversation takes in her research work in fashion design and her relationship to the body, her beginnings in sculpture, her commitment to digital craft and the importance of the collaborative process.

IS: You recently completed a major project entitled *Clinique Vestimentaire*, comprising the defence of your doctoral thesis (2019) and an exhibition at the Magasins Généraux (2021). You inaugurated a textile work at the crossroads of fashion, design and contemporary art, borrowing from

the vocabulary of anatomy and medicine. Can you tell us how *Clinique* led you to this exhibition, 'Armors' (Templon Paris, 2023)?

JV: *Clinique Vestimentaire* is a project that stretched over eight years. It started with my degree at the École des Arts Décoratifs and ended with the exhibition at the Magasins Généraux, which was an obvious prolongation of my PhD work. The pieces and ideas flowed naturally from this project

Page 22: From left to right: *Puppa n°4* (66⁷/₈ × 11 × 6²/₇ in), *Catula, Présence* (103⁴/₇ × 35³/₇ × 27⁴/₇ in), *Entité n°3* (154 × 38 × 23 cm - 60⁵/₈ × 14¹/₉ in) - 2022, cordes, fils, tricotissage, travail à la main

to the exhibition. Sculpture is another form of writing and reading, one that suits me better.

IS: How did you come up with the idea of producing woven sculptures?

JV: I spent a year in residence at the Villa Medici in Rome in 2019–20 and that was where I started wanting to make my own sculptures. I originally had the idea of studying male bodies and clothing, but when I looked at the sculptures in the park there and saw the Venuses with their wet drapery, the representations of women in lascivious postures with draped cloth that always seems to be accidentally slipping off, I decided to focus again on the female body. I started by copying in 3D the bust of a Venus that was in the loggia known as Cleopatra’s loggia, laid out by Cardinal Ferdinando de’ Medici, and I worked on my costume–sculptures in the studio before doing two fittings with the real sculpture and taking a series of photographs of that. Then, during the lockdown, I had only my body to work with. So, in collaboration with the photographer Leslie Moquin, who was also at the Villa, I produced a series of forty photographic self–portraits titled *Quarantaine Vestimentaire*. These were costumes and masks, a “lockdown spring–summer collection” made with flowers from the Villa’s garden with the active blessing of the gardeners. I posted one a day on Instagram. It was at the Villa that photography and lens–based images became a more important part of my work.

Little by little, I moved into the realm of art. The exhibition *Présences*, at the Templon



Jeanne Vicerial, Cleopatra’s Loggia, Villa Medici, Rome, 2019

gallery in Brussels (2022), still showed traces of the fashion world. I had conceived part of the exhibition as a “static fashion show” of sculptures, with music composed specifically by Marco Paltrinieri, who imagined what the soundtrack of such a show might be. The dressmaker’s dummy was less and less identifiable, but the pieces remained in transition, wearable: clothing sculptures. In the ‘Armors’ exhibition, these traces have disappeared; it is as if the dressmaker’s dummy had been eaten by the sculpture.

IS: You work with bodies that are almost exclusively female or genderless (presences,

armors). There is also this idea of bringing the interior to the exterior: viscera, organs, but also fluids, through the appearance of pink threads. You highlight what we usually try to hide by giving it the status of a cosmic ornament. Could it be said that there is a deliberate feminist commitment in your work?

JV: That’s for sure, but I don’t want to reduce the discussion to the female body. I am thinking more generally about the transformation of bodies, trying to include all types of bodies in transformation. From a fashion point of view, for too long bodies have been trying to fit into clothes, even going so far as contemporary surgery. In my fashion work, I was interested in designing clothes that fit real bodies, not the other way around. Here I am working with bodies that follow the canons of haute couture, but they are impossible canons, and bodies that do not exist, literally alien. Here I lengthen them even more, intensifying their strangeness. It seems to me that while scientific representations of the stages of body modification, be it abortion, pregnancy, childbirth, or any kind of male/female or non–binary transformation, are tolerated when they allow for the management and control of bodies, these events meet with a kind of artistic hostility. I do not conceive of the human body as having an a priori identity to which one must conform, but as a fibered space that is permanently mutating.

IS: The works you make are highly technical, based on meticulous craftsmanship, and they also take a long time to produce.

Alongside this extremely precise manual work, there is also a machine: a robotic arm that weaves autonomously. This reminds me of the defence of handicraft by weaving artists of the early 20th century, such as Anni Albers (1899–1994), for whom manual work was a means to better engage with industry. It made it possible to regain degrees of lost freedom. What is your relationship to manual work, industry, and robotics?

JV: Each piece in the exhibition is entirely handmade and requires between 600 and 1,200 hours of work. The installation, preparation and “styling” time is also very long. There are quite a few of us in the workshop, because we need a solution to make more of the time available. It is important to understand that none of the pieces in the exhibition were produced with the robotic arm. That represents the research part of my work. It is a robot that was originally made to pack boxes in a warehouse and that here was chosen to dance. It works at 5% of its capacity and is also the soundtrack for the upper part of the exhibition. It is important for me to integrate an element of digital craft and to mix craft, design and art in the same space, without any difference in degree or value. When you are a costume designer or a technician, you are not given the same kind of respect as an artist. But I want people to be able to question the way things are produced.

IS: Your sculptures have a quality of movement and their installation proposes a different type of dramaturgy each time.

You have collaborated with performers for their activation at the Magasins Généraux, and in Brussels with a perfumer and a musician. This is total sensory work. You also designed the costumes for Angelin Preljocaj's opera *Atys*, for Hervé Robbe's *Sollicitudes*, and the costume for the performance *Figures* by the choreographer Dalila Belaza. How do you see the action of textile sculpture at the heart of these different modes of collaboration?

JV: I like the idea of sculptures in motion and working collaboratively. Each exhibition tells a story of protection that is reconfigured each time. In the context of producing costumes for the choreographers you mention, I feel it is important that the costume goes beyond its traditional function as a prop to become a material-character and that it has a structuring role in the dramaturgical construction. The design of the clothing sculptures for *Sollicitudes*, which was my first collaboration of this type, was seminal, because it was carried out in a real process of co-construction. I am only at the beginning however, and I would like to be able to develop this aspect further. In my work, I regularly invite collaborators to develop certain aspects with me. This is the case with Louise Hernandez who directed the film, the three musicians who produced the soundtrack in the form of a musical *exquisite corpse*, and the performers with whom I conceive the activation of certain pieces. I like the idea that the spectator should come and have an experience. It was, for example, with this idea in mind that I developed a perfume for the sculptures with Nicolas Beaulieu.

The first, *PH 6.3*, synthesises the average PH of the skin and is the scent of a clean body. The second, *Étude Vénus n°1*, concentrates the smell of a flower, from bud to wilted flower. The experience is visual, olfactory, and aural.

IS: What projects are you working on currently?

JV: I have several, notably intensifying the links between music and sculpture. I am thinking of creating an "album of sculptures", a series of musical pieces produced by invited musicians that would allow me to compose a sound vocabulary for the "voices" of the sculptures. I am also developing with Nadine Schütz (sound artist) and Julia Cima (choreographer, dancer and fasciatherapist) a project of performances and sculpture-instrument between the work of sewing, music and the body. These are two long term projects. Otherwise, we are producing, with Nicolas Beaulieu, a new perfume, *Armoressence*, which will soon be launched in partnership with the magazine *Nez*.

—
Jeanne Vicerial, Fondation Thalie, Arles (France), from July 2023.

THIS TEXT INCLUDES EXCERPTS FROM THE ORIGINAL INTERVIEW PUBLISHED IN THE CATALOG *ARMORS*, (TEMPLON, 2023).

Right: *Vénus ouverte #2*, 2020, textile, knitted yarn (proprietary technique), dried flowers from the Villa Medici, 180 × 80 cm – 70 7/8 × 31 1/2 in





A CONVERSATION WITH KEHINDE WILEY

CLAUDIA SCHMUCKLI

Led by curator Claudia Schmuckli, this conversation with Kehinde Wiley revisits the artist's exhibition 'An Archaeology of Silence' at the de Young museum (San Francisco) and explores his new body of work that sheds light on the brutalities of American and global colonial pasts.

CS: I was curious about when you went to school — in San Francisco and then Yale — at what point did you realize that your personal project of becoming an artist and finding a career could link to a social project that has become so much part of your work?

KW: It's a really interesting question. If I paint a bowl of fruit, it would be an African-American in the late-capitalist 21st century painting a bowl of fruit, right? Are you ever capable of escaping a rubric through which people filter what you do? I think the answer

is no. So you just have to proceed, and make the work that you make. What I do is all based on radical contingency: for instance, these moments of chance where I find someone who's minding their own business walking through the streets, I tap them on the shoulder, and the next thing is they're hanging in one of the great museums. That is a responsibility. It's a social project, but it's also personal. If you really think about my entire body of work, it's a self-portrait.

CS: You put yourself into these situations where you had to make yourself very vulnerable. That's an interesting part of the work: how you emphasize your own

Left: *An Archaeology of Silence*, 2022, bronze, 410 × 510 × 150 cm – 161³/₈ × 200⁴/₅ × 59 in, edition of 1 + 1 AP, exhibition view, de Young museum, San Francisco, 2023

vulnerability in making the work and how you comment on that vulnerability within the work.

KW: There is something to be said about the vulnerable – this show is about the vulnerable. So much of my work has been about the strident, the self-possessed, and the actualized. It was a play in power, playing through the power that people have seen themselves through historically.

In this show, I wanted to zoom in on every individual detail – a cell phone or a shoelace or the tracks of a weave, small little things that deserve to be elevated, as in an old Dutch painting by Frans Hals.

This is our version of a time capsule, it's a way for us to say "yes" to the people who happen to look like me, to people who are oftentimes seen at arm's distance. I don't want the arm's distance. I want to bring you close, and I use scale as way to deal with that. I want the paintings and the sculpture to dominate you as a situation.

But then, there are these quiet moments with little sculptures in which you contemplate these Black bodies as being actual loved, cared-for, actualized people.

CS: You have explored the subject before



Entombment (Titian), 2022, bronze, 32 x 111 x 81 cm - 12 3/8 x 43 3/7 x 31 7/8 in, edition of 3 + 1AP

– in 'Down' in 2008 – this idea of the fallen figure, the prone figure. Since 2008 to this iteration, what has changed? And what motivated you to put great emphasis on sculpture in this body of work?

KW: The first and most important question is that you're dealing with the powerless and you use institutional devices to create a sort of change system around powerlessness.

But when you are dealing with Barack Obama, you don't just get the job.

You sit in the Oval Office with Barack Obama. He wants to know how you are going to translate his image into something that is enduring, but that also blasts through the tradition of the staid thing.

So he says, "let's do it my way: I want to lean forward, I want my collar open. I want my hands open. I want this sense of I belong to you, I'm a man of the people." But there was also a desire on my part to ask, "Well, who are you and who are your people?"

We did deep research into botanicals from Kenya, Indonesia, Hawaii. We wanted to follow his trajectory as an internationalist. I thought the biggest story was that people didn't really recognize his complexity.

I wanted his complexity to become the star of the show.

He got his way, and I got my way – portraiture is a battle back and forth. But most of my work is not portraiture in that sense, it is rather a kind of conceptual process.

During the Covid period, I was in Dakar, Senegal and I spent about two years thinking about Black bodies being seen differently. George Floyd had just been slain. I thought about my show 'Down',



Femme piquée par un serpent (Mamadou Gueye), 2022, oil on canvas, 363 x 790 x 10 cm - 142 7/8 x 311 x 3 7/8 in

and there was something about it, a gravity to seeing prone black bodies. I wanted to create something where you see this prone, broken moment but monumentalize it in a way that you could slowly come to the sculpture, come to the painting, and see some humanity there.

CS: I would love to hear you talk about the importance of sculpture in this work because you bring in another iconographic language.

KW: Sculpture is different. Sculpture is painting on steroids. Sculpture says, "Ping! I'm in the world, you've got to deal with me." In fact, sculpture becomes precisely the kind of space-taking person I'm talking about. You are literally creating a moment.

For this show I wanted sculpture to be epic and terrible – not epic and wonderful. Because what we're dealing with, as a community and as a society, is epic and terrible. And I want art to do more than point: it has to have a heart that beats and

responds to the beautiful and terrible world we live in.

CS: Let's talk about this interplay between the monumental and the intimate that you establish with the sculpture. On the one hand, you are working within the tradition of the monument – a language associated with empire – whereas the smaller sculpture registers more in terms of the reliquary and the sacred.

KW: It's all sacred. You're making a really interesting point, because art-historically there is a difference between scales. Large scale was generally commissioned by the state – like a great David painting in the Louvre, dedicated to Napoleon's conquests. This is a scale we understand: history writ large, ego writ large.

I want to weaponize that power, that language, for my paintings – but sometimes in unconventional ways, using a very large-scale language to talk about something very intimate and tiny. Who is she? Why is she

here? One moment in time gave rise to her being in front of the artist.

It's not about historic turns in times, but about what is huge and historic and turning when you pay attention to the people who oftentimes have not been seen. That is the revolution, that is the history, that is the war.

CS: What was it like for you to make this work in Dakar? As you embarked on that journey, did you have an idea of where it would land?

KW: I had absolutely no idea. I was stuck in Dakar. I say "stuck", but it was a blessing. I had to rely on everything I knew to be true – what I was taught as a young art student. I had to pull in every single aspect of this, the material aspect of paintings. There were no studio assistants, no help, it was just me and this painting.

We created paintings based on the people in my community. As we were socially isolated, all the models that you see in the show are people who were in the small group of *artists who knew artists*.

Dakar is also a place where I can get away from white people – and I don't mean to be cheeky. A weight comes off your shoulder



Christian Martyr Tarcisius (El Hadji Malick Gueye), 2022, oil on canvas, 210 × 301 × 9 cm, 82 2/5 × 118 1/2 × 3 4/7 in

the minute the plane lands, the minute you see Colgate ads with all-black families.

A sense of being in which you don't have to second-guess what it means to be alive. A lot of you in this room never have to second-guess what it means to be alive – but a lot of us *do*. "How do I look? Am I presenting myself the right way? Am I looking threatening?" All of that just falls away. It's a bunch of negroes dealing with a bunch of negroes, and I *love* that.

CS: One crucial aspect of 'An Archaeology of Silence' is that it is a global story, it really is a subject that is not exclusive to the US. Can you talk about your thinking about the role of technology within that?

KW: The role of technology with regards to Black bodies is instrumental but not necessarily revolutionary. We know we've been slaughtered and killed, and that state-sanctioned violence was the common state of affairs. But social media allowed the rest of the world to see it.

Covid was a situation in which people were in their homes and had nothing else to do but think about what was going on. And they started thinking about Black folks.

There was an opportunity in Venice to pull the resources I have to create one of the largest shows that I've ever been invited to do, the biggest show and the best ideas. And my best ideas surround how we get seen and how we get subsumed sometimes.

CS: Do you feel that there is a difference in terms of presenting the work in Venice and presenting it here in the US and in San Francisco in particular?



'An Archaeology of Silence', Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 59th Venice Biennale, 2022

KW: San Francisco is for me like the biggest homecoming ever. This is the place where I learned to paint. Venice was Venice. Venice is the biggest character in the room. In Venice you don't have the show without this story of art history and its background.

Now when it comes back to San Francisco, this is now my story, this is now my stuff.

It is also meaningful to be at the leading edge of what is happening with museums right now: we all have to understand that being cultural gatekeepers is a huge responsibility.

What we say in monuments is "we collectively believe in this." That is why they're so terrifying – if they're the wrong monument. The huge horse you see in this exhibition is the one that was ridden by one of the colonialists. And I said, let's take the faces of young Black men from the last

10 years using computer technology to mold all their faces into one face, and that's the face of that person who's riding that horse.

Coming to San Francisco is also coming to the place in which radicalism exceeds, it survives. The Black Panther Party finds its home here, the queer rights movement finds its home here. We are a people of openness. Many of us. And I think that sets the tone for who I later go on to become.

—
'Kehinde Wiley: An Archaeology of Silence', *de Young / Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco until October 15, 2023*.
Curator: Claudia Schmuckli.

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Right: Jeanne Vicerial, *Gardiennne n°2*, 2020, rope, threads, handmade, 184 × 38 × 27 cm - 72³/₇ × 14 × 10⁵/₈ in

Next Page: Chiharu Shiota, *Human Rhizome*, variable dimensions, 2023, exhibition 'Signs of Life', Templon NY

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