



January 16 – February 20, 2005

The Here and Now

Sanford Biggers
Katrín Sigurdardóttir
Javier Téllez

The Renaissance Society
at The University of Chicago

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at The University of Chicago
5811 South Ellis Avenue
4th floor
Chicago, IL 60637

Museum Hours
Tuesday - Friday: 10 am - 5 pm
Saturday, Sunday: 12 - 5 pm
Closed Mondays
<http://www.renaissancesociety.org>

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Sanford Biggers
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Javier Téllez

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Opening Reception: January 16, 4:00-7:00 pm
Featuring a talk with the artists from 5:00-6:00 pm

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5811 South Ellis Avenue
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Phone: (773) 702-8670

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Where is my Buddha-mind?

What is it to be admitted to a museum, to see a myriad of particular things, compared with being shown some star's surface, some hard matter in its home! I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one, — that, my body might, — but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! — Think of our life in nature,—daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The *solid* earth! The *actual* world! the *common sense!* *Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?* ¹

Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*

Thoreau (1817-1862) was an adamant home-body. A native of Concord, Massachusetts, he made a world of his immediate environment and a universe of the Maine wilderness to which he traveled on three separate occasions. His accounts were published together posthumously as *The Maine Woods*. The language is a mixture of the starkly factual, the hymnal praising of nature, and the deeply metaphysical. Thoreau's treks no doubt doubled as inward spiritual journeys, an effort to know the world in the profound sense of trying to grasp the mind's role in understanding experience. In the above passage, when his body strikes against its surroundings, as though it were a match stick ("*Contact! Contact!*"), Thoreau's phenomenological communion with nature gives way to the burning questions "*Who are we? Where are we?*"

The Here and Now raises these same question on terms belonging to sculpture. The exhibition features three artists represented by a single work each of which addresses the notion of presence—literally, metaphorically and spiritually. All three of the works call attention to features of the gallery that make it a unique space. In this respect, the *Here* in the title of the exhibition refers to the gallery and more specifically to one's position in the gallery, whether it is sitting on a tatami mat before a silver, singing bowl; having to negotiate one's way around a large helium balloon; or elevating oneself 6 feet up a series of stairs to view islands off the coast of Iceland. Each work is an invitation to critically reflect upon one's relationship to the art work as it in turn relates to its location.

Once experienced *in situ*, however, any further move on the part of these sculptures toward site-specificity is abruptly halted. Consciousness of location as an end itself is antithetical to this grouping of work, which above all else seeks to recuperate metaphor as derived from a direct encounter with the work. Just as Thoreau's spiritual quest was played out in the Maine geography, these three sculptures make concrete the imagination's bid for transcendence, giving form to the very metaphors that would then allow the imagination to go beyond the material and spatial forms of the gallery, and indeed the artworks themselves. In other words, presence of body is activated only to yield to presence of mind.

The artists in *The Here and Now* are heir to a legacy in which Conceptual Art's biggest success was not the disappearance of the art object but extending the category of art to include any and all things. Javier Téllez's *Socle du Monde* (Base of the World) (1999), refashions Piero Manzoni's work of the same title as a 5' x 5' x 5' red, helium-filled balloon. The original is a simple, iron plinth resting on the ground. Its inverted text reads "Socle du Monde, Socle Magic No. 3 de Piero Manzoni—1961—Homage

à Galileo" (Base of the World, Magic Base No. 3 by Piero Manzoni—1961—Homage to Galileo). Subtitled his work an homage to Galileo, Manzoni was stily making the absurd proclamation that the entire earth is a sculpture. Defying gravity, Téllez's balloon refutes Manzoni's gesture, denying an institutionally conceived category of art its claim to the world. Capped by a ceiling, Téllez's piece suggests that the power of art extends only as far as its immediate context, which is not to say that art is any less powerful. If anything, art could be seen as more powerful when striving for rather than achieving transcendence.

Situated on the truss work spanning the gallery, Katrin Sigurdardottir's *High Plain III*, (2005) consists of miniature islands modeled loosely on those off the coast of western Iceland. Viewers must climb 6 feet of stairs to a portal that allows access to only the head, which then becomes part of the work as a site of consciousness isolated from the body. To borrow a description from University of Chicago professor Bill Brown's recent book *A Sense of Things*, Sigurdardottir's model of consciousness is one

disassociated from psychology, consciousness understood outside the confines of a psychological self, detached from the body, from character, and from the environment. This is the consciousness that Edmund Husserl theorized as a new object of inquiry that eradicates any distinction between "inner" experience and the "outer" world, reduces the world to consciousness, and argues that things must be understood only as things-in-thought. ²

Based on Sigurdardottir's play with scale, the thing-in-thought is the very world over which Manzoni sought to extend the power of art so as to make it an object of the imagination.

The spiritual ramifications of conceptual art were forthrightly acknowledged by one of its key practitioners, Sol LeWitt, when in his famous series of statements on conceptual art, he proclaimed that the conceptual artist was a mystic. Given that conceptual art has taught us how to see (and think) through and beyond the form of things, there was bound to be an affinity with Eastern thought. Privileging ideational over material form cannot help but be read as a sign of enlightenment, one not void of spiritual connotations. Rather than flirt with the connotations, Sanford Biggers would have a go at making them real. Biggers' work consists of several silver, singing bowls of various sizes, resting on satin pillows positioned throughout the gallery on the floor. These polished silver bowls can be found at Buddhist temples, and when struck with an accompanying mallet, they produce an even, ringing pitch thought to facilitate meditation. Each is inscribed with the title of the piece,

Hip Hop Ni Sasagu (*Hip Hop In Fond Memory*), which refers to giving up the desire for stardom and its material rewards in favor of humble, spiritual fulfillment.

Based on the above passage it sounds as if Thoreau attained sartori, a moment of enlightenment or awakening in Buddhist thought. That his experience should take place in the face of nature is in keeping with a spirit of Zen poetry dating back dozens of centuries. In comparison to Zen poetry, which often stressed the humble, Thoreau's account is steeped in drama. A more down to earth response to his metaphysical musings, "*Who are we? Where are we?*", might be found in the following poem by Layman Seiken, an 11th century Zen poet.

There I was, hunched over office desk,
Mind an unruffled pool.
A thunderbolt! My middle eye
Shot wide, revealing—my ordinary self. ³

Now that's a morning when the coffee is doing its job.

¹ Thoreau, Henry, D., *The Maine Woods*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 71.

² Brown, Bill, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 182.

³ *Zen Poems of China and Japan: The Crane's Bill*, translated and compiled by Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto (New York: Grove Press, 1973), 14.

Related Events

Opening reception
Sunday, January 16, 4:00 to 7:00 pm
artist talk from 5:00 to 6:00 pm

Concert
Sunday, January 23, 12:00 pm
Friends of the gamelan
Gamelan concert

The Friends of Gamelan certainly aren't strangers to Hyde Parkers. They rehearse regularly at Rockefeller Chapel where they also perform on occasion. We are pleased to lure away a small group for a concert of gadon style gamelan. Gadon hails from Java and features the form's softer instruments notably the rebab a string instrument of Islamic origin. This concert is FREE and will take place in the gallery.

Concert
Thursday, January 27, 7:00 pm
Maverick Ensemble
William Jason Raynovich, (Director/violoncello)
Elizabeth Brausa Brathwaite (violin)
Andrea DiOrio (clarinet)
Lisa Goethe-McGinn (flute)

For those who missed Maverick's superb performance of works by James Tenney a couple of years ago, quit paying penance and make up for it in-kind by coming out for this outstanding bill. This chamber ensemble presents the inaugural concert of its Spring 2005 Concert Series with a bill entitled *Private Music*, featuring works by Virko Baley, William Brooks, Mario Davidovsky, Christopher Fox, Olivier Messiaen, and Kaija Saariaho. This concert is FREE and will take place in the gallery.

Concert
Saturday, January 29, 9:00 pm
Atua Tanaka
Corporeal, a solo electronics performance
Presented in conjunction with LAMPO

Atua Tanaka is a Japanese-American composer and performer currently based in Tokyo. In his performance *Corporeal*, Tanaka uses physical gestures to articulate music and sound synthesis and real-time image transformation. Using BioMuse, he tracks electrical activity (EMG) in the fore-arms of the performer. This analog voltage information is sent to the computer where it is transformed into digital data. "The micro functions of the body are amplified to macro level media projection. The inner space of the body is articulated into the public space of performance transformation and re-coding of the biological information" (Tanaka). Tanaka began his work in multimedia in 1984 at the Boston Film/Video Foundation. He studied electronic music with Ivan Tcherepnin at Harvard, and computer music at CCRMA at Stanford University. Tanaka moved to Paris in 1992 to conduct research at IRCAM. He has worked with Fred Frith and the studio STEIM in Amsterdam to create an interactive art gallery. This concert is FREE and will take place in the gallery.

Concert
Sunday, February 13, 6:00 pm
Karen Stackpole
Solo percussion

Stackpole's recording of solo gong work entitled *Metalwork: Music for Gongs* (2000) leaves no mind unblown. This San Francisco Bay Area-based drummer/percussionist specializes in gongs and soundscapes. In her explorations of metals, she has cultivated some special techniques for drawing harmonics out of tam tams with various implements: rubber mallets, felt and yarn mallets, ball chains, cello bow, kitchen utensils, and other small objects. In addition to solo work, she currently performs and records with the improvising quartet Vorticella, the Left Coast Improv Group, Ghost in the House, and gongs/metals duo Euphonics. Active in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles creative music scenes, she has collaborated with Gino Robair, Jack Wright, Myles Boisen, John Shiurba, Chris Heenan, Steve Roden, Rod Poole, Tucker Dulin, and John Schott among others. Given the gallery's dynamic acoustics this is not one to miss. This concert is FREE and will take place in the gallery.

Javier Téllez
Socle du Monde, (Base of the World) 1999
inflatable balloon and helium



The Here and Now has been made possible through generous support from Alhaward Foundation; Chicago Community Trust; the CityArts Program of The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, a municipal agency; Christie's; The Danielson Foundation; Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation; the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; LaSalle Bank; The LLWW Foundation; The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; The Peter Norton Family Foundation; the Provost's Discretionary Fund at The University of Chicago; The Pritzker Foundation; The Siragusa Foundation; and our membership.

American Airlines is the official airline of The Renaissance Society's 2004-2005 season.