Ryan Gander: These are the markers of our time at Lisson Gallery, NYC

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All Images courtesy of Lisson Gallery and the artist

Ryan Gander will open Lisson Gallery's new space in New York with an exhibition highlighting time as the new currency, reflecting on how – in an age of identity politics, selfie culture and an incessant need to shout the loudest – the focus of our time should be on the value of time itself. The exhibition is made up of many individual works that create a whole, like chapters in a book, but with no linear beginning or end. Upon entering the space, the visitor is presented with a feeling of disarray – from broken glass to graphite marks on the walls – where each work is a piece of the puzzle, referencing Gander’s interest in chance, serendipity, and storytelling, laying out a series of clues and markers to be decrypted.

In his last exhibition at Lisson Gallery London, Gander encouraged the viewer to allow a natural course of action, claiming that time has its own course, a power that we cannot control. Gander now delves into the complexity of our experience of time, reflecting on the two Greek terms for time: ‘kronos’ and ‘kairos’. While we just have one word to describe many realities, the Greeks used ‘kronos’ (or ‘chronus’, from which ‘chronology’ is derived) to refer to linear, sequential, measurable time, and ‘kairos’ to describe a circular time, dancing back and forth with no clear beginning or end. Arguably today, ‘kronos’ prevails, in a world driven by clocks and calendars. This also reflects our incessant growth-led culture and fear of the unknown, where all visualizations of the future are seemingly apocalyptic, contrasting to, for example, the optimism of futuristic science fiction films.

Leaning on one of the walls is the one figurative element of the show – Balthazar: Bit Part Player. Having just marked the pristine walls of the gallery, as well as his own perfectly white tracksuit, with smudges of graphite, the figure’s posture is one of resignation or fatigue as his form leans downwards in an act of endless waiting. Gander here comments on our collective obsession with legacy, mark-making: our attempt to interrupt the natural course of time by reinserting ourselves within it.

A selection from Gander’s Broken Windows series (2019-2020) – geometric, abstract paintings – are hung on the walls of the gallery. These works are created by happenstance: Gander places a sheet of glass on a table and, without being able to see it, smashes the glass with a hammer. He then tapes over the cracks with black gaffer tape, resulting in an abstracted composition that marks a moment in time, each different from the next, created by a planned accident. The theme of fortuity continues within the works: hidden within each Broken Windows painting hides a fortune cookie describing an idea for an artwork. This series also alludes to the ‘Broken Windows Theory’, referencing
the history of sociological transformation in New York, and demonstrating how profoundly humans are affected by the aesthetics of their surroundings.

The information Totem, a mirrored screen, displays a controlled reading of new work, Gander’s Staccato Refractions (2019-2020). Taking the form of a digital animated concrete poetry, the Totem displays the prose, choosing chapters in a random order, meaning any given visitor receives a unique narrative. The text investigates our fascination with the invisible values represented by tangible things, nationality represented by a flag for example and the opposing notion of the Black Box, the devices that we interact with that we can’t comprehend... (in science, computing, and engineering, a black box being a device, system or object which can be viewed in terms of its inputs and outputs without any knowledge of its internal workings, highlighting the way we give value to objects that we cannot physically understand. A transistor, an engine, an algorithm, the human brain, an institution or government.)

In the far side of the gallery, a tiny brown mouse emerges from debris in the wall. “If you had ten days to live, would you spend it looking at Instagram?”, the mouse asks. Written by Gander and read by his youngest daughter, the mouse sermonizes some of the biggest questions that face humanity, from our ability to cognitively time travel to our limitations in being able to foresee our own end. Demanding our attention by refusing to be the one that shouts the loudest, we kneel down to hear what the mouse has to say. Watch a video of the work here. Nearby (first greeting you by the window), three animatronic stray cats can be found – one ginger, one tabby, and one white. Luckily for the mouse, The squatters (as Gander titles them) are relatively benign and disengaged, instead found sleeping on their newly-claimed homes: pedestals previously owned by historic works of art by Susan Hiller, Richard Wentworth, and Ceal Floyer.

The theme of play and chance continues throughout the exhibition with a vending machine filled with graphite pebbles – cast from real pebbles found on the beach, one of these holds the key to the whole machine and its contents – and a crumpled up letter, A Letter to a Young Artist, written by Gander to himself when he was eight years old.

The exhibition follows the release of the British rock band, the IDLES’ new music video, directed by Gander; and precedes the launch of a new Gander-designed sportswear line with Kappa, realized with A FOUR Labs and Kazuki Kuraishi which will be released later this year. The texts featured in this exhibition were realized during an extensive period of research supported by Princeton University, Hodder Fellowship 2019.
Ryan Gander Exclusive Q&A

Ryan Gander work ‘The End’ the third and final work in Ryan’s trilogy of philosophical mice went live on the Lisson website last week. It was completed just before the start of coronavirus but strangely is very in tune with our current climate... they are called the prophets for a reason!

Alongside this you can see a never-before-seen film by Ryan called Only a matter of time here. a take on his BBC documentary, Me, My Selfie and I. Also on his Instagram Ryan launched free tutorials for BA & MA art students, with 5 other artists helping out- so with all this stuff going on we decided to ask Ryan some questions and see what he came back with – as ever totally cool.
1. Hi, I just watched ‘The End’ online and was thinking maybe it even works better online? I actually listened to the whole thing which I wouldn’t have done in a gallery setting – for me, the ‘whisper’ works better online than in the gallery – is that good?

Personally, I’m of the opinion that nothing works better online, the world is a beautifully rich and stimulating place, full of chance, and risk, and consequences, nothing can better that. Whispers work very efficiently in any context, because we know the world is too loud, too fast, too distracting and too unethical. This is a reality we’ve accidentally created for ourselves through the acceleration of everything. For decades we wanted everything quick and easy, but only now are we realising that most things are only a rich rewarding experience when they are slow and difficult.

2. Only a matter of time is a take on your BBC documentary, ‘Me, My Selfie and I’ – I really liked the BBC documentary, in fact, I like all your BBC stuff especially the Japan one. However, I can’t help thinking that if something works you shouldn’t mess with it – should you?

It depends on your view on the value of originality and authenticity. A4 paper is 21cm x 29.7cm because it has been reworked over hundreds of years by different people to be the most.
economic and efficient promotion for its use. Do you prefer taint‘ed Love by Soft Cell, Coil, Grace Jones, Marilyn Manson or The Cure? A lot of people are hung up on copyright and plagiarism, although making a cover version of your own material is not likely to entail copyright infringement. It is nevertheless an interesting subject. For me, everything in the world is material, like a painter perhaps understands colour, everything is to be used, sampled, reworked and collided with other things, that’s how accidental and unexpected transformations occur. Usually, the people who perceive ideas as property, are the people that don't have a lot of ideas of their own but really wish they could have. As my mother says ‘There’s no pockets in a shroud’ – by which she means you can’t take it with you. The value of an idea is the enjoyment of having it and watching the consequences of it unfold in peoples’ lives. Growth economy means we spend our time accumulating stuff, and the more we gain the less time we have to enjoy it. Time is running out. We should enjoy ideas like we enjoy the taste of different food; they’re not property, they’re not for accumulating and their value fluctuates through time.

3. You seem to be keeping busy with work and the tutorials on Instagram – in your conversation with Cory in The Art of Conversation, you mention you had three teaching jobs to keep your practice going – are you a great believer in hard work?

I believe people that work hard must enjoy work, or see what they do not as work, otherwise they wouldn’t be doing it. An online student from Free Tutorials said ‘thank you for doing this, it’s very generous’ to me last week. I explained that this wasn’t done through generosity. I enjoy seeing and thinking about art, I enjoy meeting new people and I enjoy talking about art. If anything it’s a selfish act, perhaps I get more from it than the students. Weirdly though if I was paid for it I was thinking perhaps I would enjoy it less. There is a liberty in having agency over how you choose to spend your time, that being paid to do something can take away.

![Picture of a bench](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Ryan Gander I be... (xxv). 201 Antique mirror, marble resin 160 x 85 x 15 cm 62 7/8 x 33 3/8 x 5 7/8 in

4. Final question – painting is something else you and Cory talked about – there seems to be a boom in painting especially shiny cartoony colourful stuff – have you felt tempted to pick up a paintbrush during lockdown?

Ha ha ha ha, would it add a zero to my bank balance? As I said above: There is a liberty in having agency over how you choose to spend your time, that being paid to do something can take away. It doesn’t matter what it looks like, it matters what it is.
Ryan Gander Shares a Message of Hope During Coronavirus Lockdown

As parts of the world continue to endure lockdown conditions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Designboom — whose headquarters is in Milan — has reached out to artists to share messages of hope with our readers worldwide. Since beginning the initiative, dedications have been kindly contributed to us by Olafur Eliasson, David Shrigley, Julian Charrière, Doug Aitken, Monica Bonvicini, Tomás Saraceno, and Tony Oursler.

British artist Ryan Gander now shares with Designboom a saying that his father often repeated throughout his youth — an anecdote that takes on a poignant tone in the context of today’s global challenges.
Let the world take a turn.

Dad

*let the world take a turn (poster encounter)*, 2019

a saying often repeated by the artist's father when he was a young boy

For this message of hope, Ryan Gander draws on the simple yet significant advice that his father imparted to him – *'let the world take a turn'*; the artist encourages viewers to sit back and watch, to pause, observe and allow for a natural course of action. Time has the uncanny power to heal, shift perceptions, transform situations and bring forth change. Rather than trying to control, stop, or change time, Gander embraces a more interference-free attitude, allowing things to change as the world does. If we remain open to this perspective, we can see the world, and our place in it, in a more honest and empathetic light.

Discover more of Gander's work on his Instagram, and at Lisson Gallery.
Artists show us what they have been up to during the lockdown ahead ofRyan Gander’s live studio tour today

LOUISA BUCK
9th April 2020 10:08 GMT
Along with inspecting the domestic habitat of colleagues via Zoom meetings, another by-product of the coronavirus crisis has been the opening-up of hitherto private studios, as artists under lockdown increasingly reveal their places of work to online audiences.

This sanctum-baring often takes the form of brief and selective sneak peeks viewable on gallery websites or Instagram accounts. The night before the full-UK lockdown on 23 March, Hauser & Wirth livestreamed Martin Creed clad in back-to-front “staying-in clothes”, jamming on guitar and accordion from a cluttered corner of his London studio. Since then H&W have also launched a series of short films of gallery artists living and making their work behind closed doors. So far these have include: George Condo producing *Drawings for Distanced Figures*, showing socially-spaced people from the quarantined “wilderness” of his studio in New York State; Zhang Enli making Chinese pancakes in his pristine Shanghai kitchen; Guillermo Kuitca keeping his Buenos Aires studio assistants well exercised with YouTube salsa classes; and Luchita Hurtado admiring a eucalyptus tree and drawing one of the jungle of plants on her Santa Monica balcony.

On White Cube’s Instagram account, He Xiangyu in Berlin has presented a four minute in-progress demonstration of his painted and drawn *Palette Project* in which he gives visual expression to the inside of his mouth, while in London first Tracey Emin and then Antony Gormley have each been posted a week’s worth of daily images showing what they have been creating in lockdown.
But for those hungry for a more intense in-situ experience, later today (9 April) at 6pm BST, Ryan Gander is offering a comprehensive inspection of his studio and a discussion of his ideas via Zoom. The live virtual studio tour lasts for nearly an hour and is organized by Lisson Gallery. An earlier trial run on Tuesday attracted nearly 365 visitors, according to the gallery. Viewers who logged on were able to accompany Gander and his remote interlocutor, the gallery’s Ossian Ward, in his expansive studio housed in a former radio factory in the village of Melton on the east coast of England. The format will be the same on Thursday, just a little later timewise, to make it easier for more viewers across the globe.

Whizzing round with two cameras strapped to his wheelchair, Gander describes himself as a “double dolly” and his normally buzzing studio as being “like a ghost town”. All his assistants are closeted in their various homes and the artist himself has likewise been working from his kitchen
table, an experience he is finding “liberating and frustrating at the same
time”. Now the studio is only inhabited—or perhaps haunted—by some
decidedly uncanny artworks that form the focus of the tour. These include a
life sized *Bit Part Player* figure made from graphite who has left a series of
grubby marks trailed along an adjoining wall. “It’s visualizing an event or a
touch which shows where the figure has been,” Gander says. There is also an
illuminated staircase leading to a portal-like doorway drenched in light and
a tiny animatronic mouse poking its head through a hole in the wall and
declaiming *The End*, an apocalyptic text written by Gander and spoken by
his six-year-old daughter. Gander explains that the loquacious rodent is the
final one in his trilogy of *Prophet Mice*. “It talks about the idea that the real
threats are the ones we cannot see,” he says.

All these works were made in advance of the coronavirus crisis, yet it is hard
not to view them in the current context, something that Gander himself
concedes. “We see things in context and their meaning changes,” he says.
“It is interesting the way that art changes as the world changes around it.”
Back in his studio for the first time in several days, Gander feels that time
spent at his kitchen table has underlined the benefits of slowing down.
“Maybe a part of this change will be that the time famine we have been
experiencing over the last decade will evaporate and we might start feeling
the world as we are in it rather than navigating our way through and always
living in the future or the past.”

• To join Ryan Gander’s livestream tour today, join the Zoom meeting by
clicking here (ID: 819 421 858; password: 950869) at 10am PST / 1pm EST /
6pm BST
RYAN GANDER
Kunsthalle Bern,
Switzerland

It rarely ever happens that people kneel down to listen carefully to philosophizing mice. It is even less common for mice to share their philosophy with humans. At Kunsthalle Bern, however, mice listeners were a common sight during Ryan Gander’s solo show, ‘The 500 Million Year Collaboration’. Sticking its head out of a hole that the British artist had drilled into the gallery wall, a computer-animated robot mouse addressed the audience in a child’s voice (in fact that of the artist’s 9-year-old daughter). ‘You can be anything you want if you put your mind to it! But your achievements mean nothing if they are not of your own making’.

In choosing to have the mouse (2000 year collaboration (The Prophet), 2018) speak these lines based on Charlie Chaplin’s The Great Dictator (1940), was Gander offering us a moment of ironic self-reflection? The artist has developed a multi-faceted, multi-media practice that provides a witty take on the disillusionment of post-conceptualism. Today, art has become largely indistinguishable from our broader cultural lives: as Hito Steyerl noted in Art as Occupation (2011) ‘nowadays, the invasion of life by art is not the exception, but the rule’. And Gander, who recently co-founded the homeware-design lifestyle venture Otoromi with Tony Chambers, has certainly made his mark in this regard as a post-art artist. In this connection, he has refrained from developing a unique style or ‘brand’ that would make his work ‘recognizable at first sight’. What is original about Gander is his circumvention of originality.

This show is Gander’s most comprehensive to date and comprises 38 works, dating from 2006 to 2019, a number of which have not been exhibited previously. Equivalent Economies and Equivalent Means (2018) is a vending machine filled with stones, costing €9,999.99 each, which replicate ones found on the beach by the artist’s children; a lone slot contains a waif of euro notes totalling €10,000.

A crossbreed of a schoolboy prank and what Marcel Duchamp termed ‘rectified ready-mades’, this patently ludicrous vending machine stands solemnly in the Kunsthalle’s stately interior.

Is ... (II) (2016) is a marble resin sculpture replicating an assortment of furniture that the artist’s young daughter had covered with a blanket to make a den. A series of ink drawings depicts candles at the moment of their extinguishing (Embrace Your Mistakes ... Your Mistakes Are the Markers of Your Time, 2019). The installation Staccato Reflections (2017) contains a slate-like, reflecting flatscreen upon which some stream-of-consciousness text is floating, comprising phrases such as: ‘I see. I look. The look I see!’ Elsewhere, the undersides of an inverted Wassily Chair by Marcel Breuer are covered with raised white marble bulges to appear snowed upon (Upside Down Breuer Chair after a Couple of Inches of Snowfall, 2017). The ostensible silliness of such works recalls early Romantic aesthetics, when silliness was associated, positively, with boundlessness. Every joke has a punchline. But silliness, a Romantic boundlessness shared by contemporary art, may go on forever.

Gander dives into the stream of life, picks out seemingly random elements, alters them or commissions new versions, charges them with new meaning augmented by shrewd titling, then dives back in again. What connects these heterogeneous elements is the artist’s selective process and what he invests them with: interest, humour, nonchalance. ‘Art’, Andy Warhol is alleged to have once said, ‘is what you can get away with.’ Gander’s tricksterish, boundless art, infused with ambiguous humour, perfectly encapsulates the freedom, openness and caprice of our neoliberal era. Resisting confirming his own position on neoliberalism – whether critical or favourable – Gander simply, strategically, embodies it. There’s a story, but it has no plot. Defy expectation and allow your assumptions to be defied, as the mouse says.

Jörg Scheller
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Jörg Scheller
Rusam Gander 我看到你正在进步

Harmoon Mirza 电之离调

Tones in the Key of Electricity
LISSON GALLERY

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Undated (May 2019)

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瑞安·甘德”我看到你正在进步”

[新闻稿]

瑞安·甘德（Ryan Gander）继2017年在收藏家周大力的Gc基金会成功举办个展“人类/非人类/破损/未破损”之后第二次在中国举办个展。此次展览将在上海拉开帷幕，全方位呈现艺术家利用多媒体创作的标志性作品，包括动画、LED全息图像以及自2016年以来创作的雕塑和“肖像”。展览标题“我看到你正在进步”反映了甘德在多个领域取得的进步和创作实践的发展轨迹，也表示他作品的观众越来越多，还标志着他的努力和创造力的发挥——或者缺失——都是艺术创作的必经阶段。

2019年的作品《工作室的窗外（2017年11月8日）》呈现了从早到晚24小时之内艺术家工作室外面逐渐变化的街头景象。把显示器放在磨砂玻璃后面的设置方式相当准确地模拟了当时的光线和天气条件——甚至还出现了晃动的阴影和铁丝网的阴影。展览中还有另一块全白的“窗户玻璃”，不过已经被打磨了。艺术家采取性而为，利用看似随意粘贴的强力胶带，创造出一种新的“绘画”形式，简直让人看不出来作品其实也是一幅纸上墨水画。

在凝视窗外的同时——犹如卡斯帕·大卫·弗里德里希（Caspar David Friedrich）、亨利·马蒂斯（Henri Matisse）的此类作品中也弥漫着浪漫气息，甘德还关注艺术创作中经历的失败、失败和挫败：它们都是在寻求进步的过程中必须经历的坎坷。雪纺（实际上是青铜制品）或零零碎碎在地板上，已经开始融化；利用LED全息图像技术呈现的鸡蛋打着蝴蝶结，看上去像是一件虚拟的礼物，不过就如同电子游戏当中的奖励一样，永远也不可能真正握在手里。
此次展览中规模最大的作品当属《这是创造性的游戏，有些冒险——自动抽象》（2016年）。这件作品由44个组件构成，每一个组件里面都是20世纪最伟大的教育家玛丽亚·蒙特梭利（Maria Montessori）设计的儿童教学教具。这些简单的彩色木棒通常被用来帮助儿童学习加减法、理解分数概念，不过甘德把它们当作是促进自由联想的工具，曾经在学校里举办过相关的工作坊，也利用它们教导自己的孩子。甘德试图放弃绘画，展出的作品看上去更像是用于混合颜料的调色板，从概念性的角度比拟了已经被遗忘的群像，不过他正在创作的以熟人为对象的肖像系列依然反映了协作和共鸣的概念。甘德近期创作的题点显示板系列作品表现了万事皆将衰败的命运，随机产生的形状持续不断地像雨滴一样在显示板上流淌，其中涉及的算法是艺术家自己设计的，再一次体现了“进步”，不过是更加缓慢、更加痛苦的幅度。
Ryan Gander on the hell of selfies: 'The world has gone mad'

We're drowning in self-imagery. Is it harming the world? And can we wake up to ourselves again? The artist's new documentary is on hand to help.

Earlier this month, a woman was attacked by a jaguar at a zoo in Arizona. The jaguar lacerated her arm after she climbed over the concrete barrier to try and take a selfie with it. Last year, a global study found that the quest for extreme selfies killed 259 people between 2011 and 2017. We cannot stop taking our own picture, even when it puts our lives in danger.

And yet the word 'selfie', now so embedded in our day-to-day language, only entered the Oxford English Dictionary in late 2013. In just a handful of years, the term has become as quotidian as the act it describes: taking a photo of oneself, invariably with a smartphone, usually to be posted on social media.

There is much cynicism about so-called narcissistic millennials who can't get enough of their own image; the pouting, the filters that turn one's face into a puppy, the 27 'takes' to get the perfect shot. But as artist Ryan Gander points out in new documentary Me, My Selfie and I, this 21st-century phenomenon doesn't signify a boom in narcissism so much as modern technology powering us to radically rethink who is looking back at us.
“It’s a revolution like the Industrial Revolution,” says Gander, drinking strong tea in his Haggerston studio. “But we are at this point in history where we haven’t worked out what this social acceleration does to us. The world has never changed as fast as it does now, but the speed means you don’t have time to address the morals, ethics and values of what’s happening.”

We know social media encourages us to present an idealised version of ourselves – particularly Instagram, where most selfies end up. We can filter ourselves to be shiny, exciting or covetable, creating digital holograms of the person we want to be. A fascination with “the modern idea that there is always something better for us to do or be” took Gander on a journey to meet a selection of ‘modern selves’, including: a woman living tech-free in rural Wales who believes the energy released through self-broadcast is harming the world, a YouTube star with an audience of millions, a transhumanist and a man who cryogenically freezes dead people who believe they will one day be thawed and live again. “This is not about science,” says Gander. “It’s about ego; the inability to let go of the idea that the world might not remember us when we’re gone.”

Each person has their own existential plight and there are fascinating insights into the different ways we try to make an impact on this world, whether that’s the overwhelming sense of responsibility a YouTube star feels to entertain his audience, or a transhumanist’s desire to draw out their life by replacing flesh and bone with robotics and circuit boards.

Gander’s lines of questioning make for compelling viewing. It would have been easy to be cynical, particularly when addressing the relationship young people have with social media, but as Gander points out when interviewing a twentiesomething Instagram ‘influencer’, these people have barely been without it in their lives. How are they deserving of our judgment when they’ve never known anything else?

Gander is acutely self-aware (“It was a weird mirror for myself, because here’s me going on about everyone wanting to be noticed and here I am on bloody telly”) and talks a lot about perspective. “The problem we’re facing now is that people often only see things from their own singular perspective.
I kept saying during filming that the world has gone mad, and that's why.” He feels we’re in a “craze of individualisation”, that we have forgotten “our thoughts don’t just stop at the edge of our heads.”

One of the most striking scenes in the documentary is when the transhumanist with a chip imbedded in his palm to open doors implies that Gander might be “improved” with bionic limbs modelled on cheetah legs. It angers him. “Being in a wheelchair doesn't affect my view on the world. In an age where everyone identifies with being different, I am someone who actually can't walk and don't associate with being disabled. I don't tick the Arts Council funding box that says ‘disabled’ because I don't identify.” As he says on screen, “I don't want cheetah legs. I don't know any cheetahs.”

The assumption that Gander would want to be superhuman when he says he is “happy being exactly the way I am” is a metaphor for what the social media monoliths compel us to do: keep reappraising who we are and, based on the positive feedback loops of likes, comments and retweets, keep reappraising some more. You end the documentary aware that Silicon Valley may actively be trying to hinder self-actualisation, because then why would you need them? Better to be stuck in self-questioning perpetuity. But Gander questions the mark we are trying to make with all these images of ourselves. “No one will be looking at all the selfies we take now because there's too many. We've almost become drowned in self-imagery.”

There is hope, though. By examining our modern compulsions, Gander makes room for the idea that there is, in fact, real peace to be found in acknowledging the “perpetual present tense” we create on social media, putting our phones down and listening to other people’s stories. We all want to be seen. We all want to be liked. But in this Age of the Self, there may be a freedom in accepting that trying to be special and unique all the time can be bloody tiring.

Me, My Selfie and I with Ryan Gander is on BBC Four tonight at 9pm.
Ryan Gander: The Self Righting of All Things

Lisson Gallery, London
Fri 2 Mar 2018 to Sat 21 Apr 2018

67 Lisson St

Special event:
Ryan Gander in conversation with Gábor Domokos at the Potting Shed Bar & Restaurant at the Dorset Square Hotel, London. Saturday 14 April, 11am. RSVP: rsvp@lissongallery.com

Ryan Gander’s sixth exhibition with Lisson Gallery draws on notions of time and its passage. With a philosophical overture and a sharp existential focus, the exhibition illustrates the innate ability of all things, in both physics and the wider human context, to naturally self-right themselves.
Drawing on the simple yet profound advice given by his father – “Let the world take a turn” – Gander encourages the viewer to sit back and watch, to observe, and allow for a natural course of action, as time has power to heal, transform, shift perceptions and elicit change. Rather than trying to control time, to stop it or to change it, Gander embraces a more laissez faire attitude. Things change as the world changes, while everything stays the same, and if we are open to this approach, we can see the world, and our place in it, in a more honest and empathetic light.
A cube made entirely of flip-dot panels, like those formerly found in public transportation timetables, hangs from the front ceiling of 67 Lime Street. Analogous to a massive clock, the large scale installation measures time in an abstract way, showing its passage both audibly and visibly. Different tears of coloured dots rain down each panel, programmed according to an algorithm set by the artist. The clicking sound of the dots is accompanied by Gander’s voice, telling autobiographic stories that are at once humorous and melancholic. Each story hints at the destruction that surrounds us, shadowed by an overarching sense of anxiety and loss, although not without a touch of the artist’s usual hope and playfulness. The texts, which include a series of poems and essays, will be transcribed on the back of a poster, with the quote by Gander’s father on the front, the first 100 of which will be given away through a social media competition announced on the artist’s Instagram page (@ryan_gander).

Gander activates the gallery completely by the passage of time, with the entire front spaces turned into a giant architectural hourglass, fully visible from the façade of the building off 52 Bell Street. At the start of the exhibition, the top half of the gallery will be filled with black sand, cascading down to the ground floor below. As the sand trickles through the floor, it reveals a series of stone sculptures – mythological nymphs like those found in classical Victorian paintings, rendered in 3D with precise replications of figural poses, albeit removed from their original context and altered by their new surroundings – all the while slowly covering up the sculptural realisation of a Gömböc on the ground floor. An ancient problem first conjectured by Russian mathematician Vladimir Arnold and later proved by the Hungarian scientist Gábor Domokos, these convex objects have countless varieties but hold in common a simple mathematical equation: when resting on a flat surface, each Gömböc has one stable and one unstable point of equilibrium, adjusting to find balance in its own instability. From a mathematical point of view, the Gömböc can be regarded as the origin of all shapes; all other form types can be evolved from the Gömböc by a man-made algorithm. From the point of view of natural philosophy, as well as a broader sociological perspective, an opposing interpretation emerges: the Gömböc represents the ultimate through unattainable goal of shape evolution in the non-living world. It represents both the starting point of life and the finalization of all things. Here one can see and experience the moment of time elapsing.

The presence of the Gömböc in the context of Gander’s installation alludes to both the search for balance in a mathematical sense but also for the redress of imbalance and mass inequality on a global scale.

The relationship between Gömböcs and spheres is further explored in an oversized snow globe, nearly one metre in diameter, in constant motion with surrreal visibility – a snow globe that never stops snowing. Snowfall itself is a temporal marker, a more evanescent sand of time: one wants to know when it will stop snowing and how long it will last before it melts into spring. The work relates to Gander’s participation in the 21st Biennale of Sydney (16 March – 11 June), where he will use the UNESCO heritage prison Cockatoo Island as a giant, walk-in snow globe. The globe at Lime will be presented next to a chair designed in the 1920s by Marcel Breuer, flipped on its side, seemingly discarded and removed of any function, with several inches of snowfall cast in marble resin moulded on top.

A new font, titled ‘Set in Stone’ and available to download for free at setinstoneypeface.co.uk, will feature throughout the exhibition. Gander and his daughter often collect stones from a nearby beach in Suffolk, and as part of a lesson in semiotics, they created a new Roman alphabet from the stones and turned it into a typeface. The stones themselves are significant: in that amongst the millions of them found on any beach, there is an infinite probability that they exist as Gömböcs. A copy of ‘How to Lose Friends and Alienate People’ rendered with this font will be available from the desk at reception.

Knock Knock! Who's there? A Welshman overly fond of sheep.

Rodney Graham, seated on a park bench, eyeing the world through two small holes torn in the newspaper he's pretending to read. A clown and a tin-foil flailing rock-god guitarist. Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse and the real Snow White. Here comes everybody.

Filling the South London Gallery and its new expansion into the 19th-century fire station across the Peckham Road, Knock Knock - the title taken not just from the hoary old formula for a joke, but also from a drawing by Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein - has been curated by South London Gallery director Margot Heller and artist Ryan Gander.

Knock Knock jokes usually evince a groan. Stop me if you've heard this one before. Stop me before I kill again. Artists who are genuinely funny, and whose wit is complex enough to sustain, and even to deepen, on repeated viewings are uncommon. Swiss duo Pechil and Weiss, David Shrigley, Ed Ruscha, Nicole Eisenman, Paul McCarthy, Bruce Nauman all come to mind. They're not here. Nor is Andy Holden, whose recent animated films, as well as being very funny, analyse humour itself in deft, often sly ways. Perhaps a funny thing happened to him on the way to the gallery.

I like a good laugh as well as the next miserable art critic. Featuring a mix of old works and new, of pieces and artists who have shown previously at SLG, much of the humour here really has to be worked at. One-liners and no-liners, impenetrable sight gags that leave me dumbfounded, things that just aren't funny at all, and perhaps aren't even trying to be, fill the galleries. In one of the best works, Harold Offen's 2001 video Smile, the artist grimaces with a rictus grin to Nat King Cole's 1954 version of the song Smile (Charlie Chaplin composed the music). Offen follows the song's injunction to smile, but it looks like a terrible ordeal.
The big, open space of the original 1891 gallery is dominated by Joyce Pensato’s Take Me to Your Leader, an enormous charcoal drawing in which Mickey Mouse confronts a group of Donald Ducks. I like the drawing well enough, though its scale seems unnecessary. Martin Creed’s big, black diagonal stripes on an adjacent wall evince a sort of blank fury. A saw seems to be about to cut a circular hole in the gallery floor from below in a work by Cecil Floyer. Maybe she’s trying to help us escape. A brick foot and a brick ball, by Judith Hopf, aren’t going to have a kick about soon, and if you try to have a go with Basim Magdy’s basketball hoop you would break it. It is made of glass. Ba-boom.

Many things here defeat me. Heman Chong has printed the internet 404 error phrase “Something went wrong. We’re working on getting it fixed as soon as we can” on one of the doors, while Maurizio Cattelan’s stuffed flock of pigeons have infested the gallery eaves. An old gag, but sometimes they’re the best. Bedwyr Williams has parked his bike in the corridor. The bicycle’s frame has been upholstered in sheep fur, the handlebars are a pair of horns and there’s a sheep skull poking out the front. Fucking Inbred Welsh Sheepshagger, it is called, turning the xenophobic English insult against the Welsh back on itself.

The real star of the show is the building across the street, where the show continues in the old Peckham Road Fire Station, donated anonymously to the gallery after it was sold at auction in 2008 and left derelict for several years. Built in 1867, the fire station – with its horse-drawn carriages kept on the ground floor, and the firemen and their families housed above, has been gutted and rebuilt. 6a Architects have provided a stack of larger and smaller exhibition and project spaces, an archive room and a kitchen. Various original features remain in fireplace hangs high on a blank wall in the opened-up full-height stairwell, and a replica of the original station gaslight hangs outside, the word ENGINEERED printed on the glass. A small group of concrete sheep nestle in the veriginous stairwell. Basic concrete blocks mounted on old table legs, Judith Hopf’s little flock are only identifiable as sheep by the cartoonish sheep faces drawn on the bare concrete. Better keep Bedwyr Williams away from them. He might do himself a mischief.

On the floor a man lies sleeping. Wrapped in a sheepskin and a towel, and his face painted as a clown. Ugo Rondinone’s lifelike sculpture has a drift of glitter at his feet. Like several other works here, the title of Rondinone’s sculpture is at least as intriguing as the 2002 work itself. If There Were Anywhere But Desert, Friday, it is called. Upstairs, Sarah Lucas’s latest mannequin perches on a chair. With her lewed breasts, long bendy legs and clumping blue velvet shoes that look far too big, Lucas’s Yves (named after
Yves Klein, maybe because of the blue heels she wears) is as vulnerable as she is provocative. Ryan Gander’s animatronic pair of eyes, inset in the wall, blink and follow you round the room. Tom Friedman’s kitchen-foil guitarist flails his silver-foil hair. On a grumpy video, Lucy Gunning’s 1914 The Horse Impressionists whiney and neigh. Still funny, Gunning’s work also feels old-fashioned, even quaint, like an old comedy re-run on a dead-zone channel. In its way, there’s human pathos in there, too, oddly amplified, like Offel’s Smile, by the passage of time.

With its beautiful Gabriel Orozco garden, its incursion into adjoining buildings and the council estate behind, where it hosts community projects and art classes, and now with the fire station across the street, South London Gallery has slowly, incrementally expanded over the past decade. And the works keep coming, as you mount the stairs and go from room to room. Cartoons, sound works, an ice cream cone, slightly sinister drawings and in-jokes I’m still trying to get. It’s not exactly a bundle of laughs but it keeps you on the move, looking for a punchline, which might be the point.

- Knock Knock: Humour in Contemporary Art is at the South London Gallery, from 22 September until 18 November.

- This article was amended on 24 September 2018 to correct the spelling of Basim Magdy’s name.

Since you’re here...

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Whether sending audiences on sleuthing missions or employing an actor to play his future self, Ryan Gander won’t be hemmed in by the gallery. Payal Uttam meets the art world’s playful prince of the unexpected.

On the floor at the centre of a bustling art fair, a small girl begins to arrange from a white wooden box, reaching forward tentatively and causing her head into the light. The girl is a bronze replica of one of Edgar Degas’ renowned ballerinas, and focus of a sculptural installation by British artist Ryan Gander. "She’s crawling out of the pithe, which represents the institution of art. She’s freed herself. But what’s she hiding from? Probably all the terrible contemporary art," Gander jokes, chuckling gently from his wheelchair towards other works on display at Art Basel in Hong Kong. An elfin figure dressed in a red jacket, white beanie and blue polka-dot scarf, the artist has much in common with the little dancer. Despite his standing invitation to flashy art-world parties, he eyes the system with suspicion.

Known for his irreverent approach, Gander smuggles viewers into unexpected situations, opening them up to new ways of experiencing art. At first glance, some may read his works as abstract and difficult to grasp, but unlike many of his conceptualist peers, Gander infuses his work with a child-like wonder and curiosity that’s infectious. He once hid an exhibition in a London warehouse, leaving clues that forced visitors to take on the role of detective to find it. For another work, he hired two bodyguards to escort curator Nicholas Baume around Art Basel in Miami Beach, raising questions about the cult of celebrity in the art world.

"I thought it would be really ironic if he’d afford a budget and invited me to do whatever I wanted, and then I turned it back on him," Gander says with a grin. "Bodyguards are a signifier of prestige, so you had people crowding around this curator and they didn’t know if he was important or not." Gander decided he wanted to become an artist when he was 16 years old while working a deadend job in a carpet shop. "I realized that having a job was really shit," he says. "You end up doing the same thing every day. So it was a problem-solving exercise trying to identify a job where I could have fun."

Pace came fast for the young artist, who won...
Artists spend their whole lives trying to remain children

as participating in an exhibition at Beijing’s M Woods museum, he will install enlarged versions of tiny key rings used in his self-deprecating performance piece Earnest Hawk at The Contemporary Austin museum in Texas. For the original performance, staged in 2015, Gander asked an actor to pose as an obnoxious future version of himself—a failed artist in New York. He then tried to sell small key rings featuring replicas of works from his more successful days to the public.

Recently, Gander has been preoccupied with broader issues related to technology and growing egotism in society. “It’s a generation of the self, isn’t it? That’s what wrong with America and Britain,” he says. “There’s no longer society, there is only T, and social media obviously plays a massive part in that. It’s not very good for humanity. You lose empathy.” Among new works exploring the issue is a series of mirrors shrouded in cloth made from marble.

They were part of his recent solo show in Shanghai and at the National Museum of Art, Osaka, and he describes one piece, called I be, XVII, as “an antique French mirror that is about 200 years old, but you can’t see yourself. It negates the self-image. People will probably take selfies with their back to it, which is a perfect contradiction.”

Gander also continues to poke holes into preconceptions of art through new works such as Strong Signifiers and Understanding Poetic Value (Grammatical Framework for Structure and Stability), which was shown in Shanghai and consists of a metal armature of a man facing a lightbox. “It’s basically from a kid’s stick drawing of a human,” Gander says of the work, which takes aim at the limits of contemporary art in galleries. “It’s the most basic figurative sculpture that you get, and that is looking at an illustration or pastiche of a contemporary artwork, which is just a lightbox.”

According to Gander, the world outside the gallery walls is infinitely more interesting than what’s inside. “In a gallery, you see stuff because the space changes you to observe,” he says. “You become a spectator, but as soon as you leave, spectatorship stops. But if you just wander around with that [creative] valve open, then there is definitely more interesting stuff outside the gallery.”

Gander has made it his life’s work to keep the valve open, though he admits it’s increasingly difficult as he gets older. “You can’t control it, but it’s usually open when I’m driving between London and home, in the shower, when I’m about to fall asleep or wake up,” he says. “Or wheeling around a new city. But when you’re a kid, the valve is open all the time. There’s a cliché quote by Picasso about how it took him four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child. It’s so true. Artists spend
their whole lives trying to remain children."

Lately, Gander has been prolific in his output. Not only does he create public works and shows in art institutions, but he also designs clothes (collections for Japanese clothing brand A.Four; Adidas shoes caked in fake mud) and advises companies on art and even landscaping. To juggle all his projects, Gander has an eccentric process that is "quite mad and logical." He begins by snapping photographs, colour-coding them with Post-it notes and grouping them with specific paperclips from Japan. They are then placed in box files on eight table-tennis tables. Like an internal brain, of sorts, they serve as catalysts and reminders.

One of the latest ideas fastened together with one of the paperclips is a football kit he designed for the team of Chinese art collector and patron David Chiu. "And I haven't talked to anyone about it yet, but I want to make a feature film in 36 parts," Gander reveals. "It's just hard because films cost a lot of money. But that's my guilty pleasure. In a way, it's better than going on holiday, spending money on stuff that's no bangers no one wants it."

Whether via experiments like his film project, or the little dancer who raises questions about the institution of art, Gander says his aim is to create cognitive works that trigger viewers' imaginations and stoke the curiosity about the world, which he fears is on the decline. In today's age of Instagram, minimal art (he cites the example of sad-clowns and unicorn paintings popular on social media) is on the rise.

"But that's just a fruitless adolescent shouting," Gander says. "There's no nuance to that visual language. There's no intonation to the voice. Cognitive art gives you something that I would read differently to you, and we would leave it with different ideas. And that's the expansive possibility of art. That's what art is good for."
Art in America

Lisson Gallery

Art in America

May 2017

Currently on view


Interview by Elizabeth Fullerton
Portrait by Tom Mannion

In the Studio
BRITISH ARTIST Ryan Gander is an idea man. They are his métier and material, not just because he is a conceptual artist but also because he has an insatiable, childlike curiosity about everything. Arriving before Christmas at Gander’s studio in a picturesque village in Suffolk, northeast of London, I was eager to peruse his legendary “idea wall,” having seen the floor-to-ceiling expanse of white, typed sheets on a television program. However, Gander was in the process of building a new space, and the wall had been dismantled. But he photographed it with myriad props beforehand, turning it into the subject of a series of artworks.

Gander’s work encompasses a wide range of forms, from sculpture (life-size figures made of artist-model armatures, or animatronic eyes embedded in the wall) and wall-hung pieces (mirrors draped in bed sheets made of marble) to books, fictional characters, concrete poetry, and fashion. He has produced limited-edition sculptures with fake hair on the sides and dresses made from postal sacks. Despite this diversity of mediums and styles, themes recur often, including the relationship between spectator and spectacle, parallel realities, incongruous collisions, and access and accessibility, which are especially pertinent for the artist, who uses a wheelchair.

A keen storyteller with a love of puzzles and intrigue, Gander offers the viewer economical clues to kindle the imagination. For example, he paints portraits and self-portraits but exhibits only the palettes, whose daubed pigments yield no clue as to the sitters’ identity. He has several glass or mirror palettes strewn around the studio.

Gander has also turned viewers into detectives hunting an elusive group show, made childrens forts out of marble, and presented vortices that turn opaque on approach. At Documenta 13 in 2012, Gander’s work consisted of nothing but an almost imperceptible breeze wafting spectators through the gallery. He prefers to deal in the creative potential of absence rather than the satiety of presence.

Gander was born in 1976 in Chester, northwest England, and earned a BA in interactive art from Manchester Metropolitan University. Between 2000 and 2004 he completed postgraduate studies at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, and the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam. He has exhibited extensively and lives between London and Suffolk with his wife and two daughters, from whom he takes frequent inspiration.

This spring Gander has solo exhibitions at the C3 Foundation in Shanghai, the National Museum of Art, Osaka, and the Hyundai Gallery in Seoul. “Night in the Museum,” his curated selection from the British Arts Council Collection, tours the UK until May 21, and he will have the inaugural exhibition at the Remai Modern in Saskatoon, Canada, opening Sept. 30.

After visiting Gander in Suffolk, I met him in his East London studio, where he handles the business side of his practice. Among the topics of conversation were the nature of creativity and madness, and the difference between art shown and art exhibitions.

ELIZABETH FULLERTON Will you resurrect your ideas wall in your new space? RYAN GANDER The wall makes me panic a bit. It’s like having so many children that you can’t feed them all. I made a resolution—not at New Year’s—to finish more things before starting new ones. There were too many on the go.

Do you want to see a secret? You know all the portraits that I paint and never show anyone? Do you want to see [a photo of]
one! They’re actually really good. People think I don’t do them, and that’s annoying. I enjoy painting them.

FULLERTON Why do you show only the palettes? GANDER The palette means more because the palette represents all the paintings that could have been, not the painting that I decided on. The self-portrait palettes are like a tongue-in-cheek dig at how ridiculous it is to build clumsy egocentric monuments to yourself, which is what so many artists do.

FULLERTON Your practice extends to writing, sculpture, architecture, and design. Is there any hierarchy to your production?

GANDER No. I like things that are outside the realm of art. I like the trainers (Ye-yi Criticism, 2014), and I like the cocktail book (Artists’ Cocktails of Compendium, 2015), and I like designing buildings and doing consultancy work for property developers, and I like doing public art. It’s just a different context, a different audience. There’s a functionality about those things. They exist in the real world. The trainers are a great artwork because thousands of people wear them on the street. It’s astonishing and really exciting. You can tell when people are making or curating art for the right reasons, because they do things that you wouldn’t expect. I think that a key way to identify quality is expectation. It should surpass expectation. If I go to a show and it’s what I thought it would be, then it’s pandering to being successful.

FULLERTON Is there one medium that you enjoy most? GANDER Writing, I guess. Not just writing books. There’s writing in everything, because everything’s a story.

FULLERTON Where did your love of storytelling come from?

GANDER I spent a lot of time on my own when I was little; I didn’t go to school. How do I say this without sounding twee and needy, because it’s not a wheelchair thing. It’s something different. Accessibility is very overrated, and that idea fails my work, and me as a human. Let’s say I’m at a party in Berlin and it’s up a flight of steps. I’m in the room downstairs, and I don’t know what’s upstairs. So I imagine what would be there. Spending your entire life envisaging things that are inaccessible to you is like taking your imagination to the gym.

And then when you think about my work and about the fact that I get for being inaccessible or elitist—it’s because there’s always something missing or covered or negated or latent. But the beauty of that lies in the spectator’s need to imagine. Enabling people to imagine is a gift as valuable as education.

FULLERTON In New York this past fall you showed a 2016 version of the installation Fieldwork at Liaison Gallery, comprising objects—such as an urn that held your aunt’s ashes, a baseball bat covered in nails, a pair of taxidermied pigeons—parading past an opening in the wall on a conveyor belt. Each object forms the basis for a discourse in your accompanying tome Fieldwork, The Complete Reader.
“Spending your life envisaging things that are inaccessible to you is like taking your imagination to the gym.”

GANDER I was trying to make vessels for powerful stories. It’s not that the work needs support from the book. I wanted to make the book, and then the fallout of that desire was to physically manifest the objects. I wanted to make a collection.

It’s going to be the first show at the Remai Modern in Saskatoon. They’ve got a big collection of Picasso prints. I love that I make a collection that goes into a collection. I want to hang the entire collection of Picasso prints around the box with the conveyor belt in it.

FULLERTON Fieldwork: The Complete Reader recalls Montaigne’s Essays or Roland Barthes’ Mythologies in that your musings are witty, personal, digestive, and random.

GANDER I love those books. I love the short chapters. That is, in general, what my practice in short chapters that contain a massive amount of work and time. They’re economical, because each chapter could be a book. The most inspiring parts of those books are the contents pages, definitely, because the chapters potentially could be about anything and most of them don’t relate to each other. I wanted to test myself and do something that I’d find really difficult. And writing the book was really difficult.


GANDER It was a bit cynical, wasn’t it? Obviously there are works like the [animatronic] eyes, and then there are works like the armature men, which essentially present the structure of a human without any of the substance. Yet they give emotion.

The title also had to do with New York. When you go to galleries in New York, most of the works are one work made many times in different colors and sizes. And that’s it. They don’t feel like exhibitions, in the sense that a greater artwork is being made from the individual pieces. For an exhibition, you curate your own work. You have a palette of ideas that form a broader concept. But I would say a tiny proportion of shows that I’ve seen in New York are exhibitions—instead they feel like car showrooms.

FULLERTON For “Night in the Museum,” the exhibition that you selected from the UK Arts Council Collection, you explored the theme of spectatorship further, positioning figurative sculptures in front of abstract works containing the color blue. So Kerry Stewart’s 1996 sculpture of an early human, Untitled (Lucy), stared intently at Garth Evans’s Blue No. 30 from 1964.

GANDER When the exhibition was at the gallery in Yorkshire Sculpture Park, a hely came over to me and said, “I keep saying ‘ory’ to all these sculptures. I was in front of one and think it’s a person.” I liked that. I’d not thought of it but when you try it, we really felt like we were disrupting a gaze.

It’s strange how much power you can create with iridescent eyes made with bicom or plastic.

FULLERTON Your curatorial strategy generated unanticipated associations between the pair. What is the significance of the color blue for you? Could it equally have been red?

GANDER Blue, historically, in color theory and popular culture, is often associated with an optimistic unknown. It’s about exploration, it’s about an abyss that is not empty, something that is full but you can’t see what it is. It’s an absence, but you are given the possibility to imagine what is absent. So I guess all my work should be blue.

If your TV loses its signal, the screen goes blue—it encompasses every possibility of everything that could be shown on TV. When you look into the sea, the blue is the depth. When you look into the sky, the blue is the depth. Blue is important.

FULLERTON The starting point for “Night in the Museum” came from your ongoing series of artworks that couple one of your bronze versions of Degas’s famous ballerinas with a blue cube, which is intended as a cartoonish emblem of modern art. You have freed the girl from her plush and shown her smoking a cigarette or lying on her elbow. What fascinated you so much about the dancer?

GANDER I thought she was really sad. When I was installing my work for the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh in 2009, I kept passing her, and every time I thought, “God, I bet she’s seen a thing or two.” And then I thought she was so immovable for a ballerina, so stationary and heavy.

“The palette means more than the painting, because it represents all the paintings that could have been.”

FULLERTON You have made at least ten versions. What are her next projects?
GANDER It’s funny when people talk about the different sculptures, because for me they’re not really different. It’s just one for different moments. I’m writing a storyboard following her elopements of the institution of art and her adventures around the plinth and blue cube. At the moment there are three: that I definitely want to make and two of those I want to keep, so it’s just finding the money. One is where she’s crawling out of her hollow plinth, which is overturned on its side, and there’s another where she’s dead over a plinth.

FULLERTON That’s the end of the series?
GANDER Yeah, but she’s not ready to die quite yet.
FULLERTON Recently, you have been displaying word compositions on the type of information monitors found in hotels or corporate lobbies.
GANDER I just showed one of the info totems called Stature Moments. It plays with all the conformity of writing. The compositions are in sections: the conference room, the ballroom—each section is from a room in the same Chateau (Chez in the United States). There are all these visual devices on the screen that relate to the word compositions, which are basically screams of thoughts. (He recites.)

Laggards,
Early adopters, hear me now,
Here we are now…
Here I am!
Am I here?
I’m here.

Guinea pigs, Pigs, Hogs, Boars, Sows, Gourners,
Screamers,
Fakers, Lovers, Haters,
Swine you are here
Sign you are here
On the long dotted line, you are here

The work is like a game in itself that contains references to other games. It is made in my mind like a puzzle, so it’s a bit like explaining what my practice is.

FULLERTON And you’re writing a new info totem with animated visual elements that will feature in your forthcoming exhibition in Korea.
GANDER Stature Reflections is based on the idea of the self in culture, the obsession with the me and the self and the narcissist wand. The surface is mirrored, so as you read the words, you see yourself. The work has devices in it that are self-referential. It asks you to touch the screen, and then says “don’t touch the screen.” So it seems like it is responding to you, but it’s not.

FULLERTON You also have a major exhibition coming up at the National Museum of Art in Osaka. It will consist of your own work as well as an exhibition curated from their collection. What are your plans for the curated section?
GANDER It’s called “The Greatest Story Ever Told,” and the works are in pairs. So you get a Picasso with a Man Ray and a Jiro Yoshihara painting with an Isamu Noguchi sculpture. There’s obviously a visual association to those paintings, and they jump around in history, geography, art movements, and mediums.

It’s based on one of my “Associative Photo” works from 2004 that is in the museum’s collection. For this series, I take materials like photos, photocopiers, and letters, put them on the wall and make a caption. Then I photograph it with a plate camera and reprint it as a single image. The shadows make it look like a trompe l’oeil of things stuck to the wall in a frame. Each of the items has associations connected to the diverse research I’ve collected over the years.

FULLERTON So for the exhibition you are curating, you are using your “Associative Photo”…

GANDER … as a material, yeah. It’s like using ideas as material rather than material as material. It’s about being prolific enough and varied enough to create a collection or a stockpile or a toolbox of work that you can then use to make into masterworks for exhibitions.

FULLERTON Speaking of materials, you frequently create works where things are not what they seem. For instance, what appears to be drapery is marble, or a used condom is made of the same wood as the chest of drawers it sits on. Is it about experimenting with materials or are you providing the spectator toward fresh perspectives?
GANDER There’s a certain currency in not being sure whether what you approach is an artwork or not, and then there’s also a currency to the materiality of things in general. You can construct an artwork from those currencies as if they were materials. So instead of having burnt sienna or ochre, you have the currency of the double take.

It’s hard to explain. This is why it’s visual language. Only a tiny section of art practitioners are into the semiotics of visual language, and some of them are very eloquent, like Pierre Huyghe or Rosemarie Trockel. Being that light on your feet with language and with meaning, it’s a beautiful thing. It pushes the brain and everything that you know. And, for me, that’s true creativity.

FULLERTON Working across a broad spectrum, as these artists do, seems key to you.
GANDER The artists that I’m not into are the ones who just do the art thing. Because if being creative is applicable to the whole world and can go anywhere, why would you just do the one thing? I think you have this valve in your head that lets you read information in an abstract, unprejudiced way. When you’re a kid, it’s fully open, but over time it gets smaller and smaller.

The exercise of seeing—(he looks around the room) like seeing the rhythm of the Christmas lights on the plants and sensing air pulled into the humidifiers and turned into water, and
thinking about the air in the lungs and the water we drink—
that's having the valve open, taking the time to notice all those
things. I sound like a mad person.

As you get older, the valve closes. Art becomes logical, it
becomes your job, and it doesn't feel mad anymore.

I've just told you about things that I know I'm going to
make and that don't make me feel so mad at the moment. But
there are all these other things that we haven't talked about.

FULLERTON Can you discuss some of those?

GANDER It's just a big list. One idea is this robot arm
that would be made in Germany to sort small plastic animal
toys. While it divides different species into mothers and
children, it plays music to work to. You have a zebra baby near
to a lion baby, and a lion mother near to a bear near to a seal. It
randomly mixes them up and then sets them back out.

FULLERTON What was the genesis of that?

GANDER My kids play with toy animals, made by
Schleich. I like the idea that when Neil Armstrong walked on
the moon, the guy left in the shuttle had to orbit the moon. So
while Armstrong made "one small step for [a] man, one great
leap for mankind," there's this poor dude that no one remem-
bers. There's a frailty to the shuttle going around and around.
The robot arm is a bit like that. Pure frailty. But it's massively
loaded with politics and emotion.

FULLERTON Yes, and of course German history.

GANDER I didn't think about that. Fuck! I need to
change it. I need to get some Swiss animals, make a politically
neutral artwork.

Then there's the snow globe that never stops snowing. An
internal blizzard keeps you from being able to see the object
inside. And there's a film script that I need to finish. The actor
Jim Broadbent has agreed to play me when I'm old. He sees
systems that happen all around him; the bear signature of all
the things in the kitchen, the footpaths of all the people mor-
ing around the cafe. It's like a portrait of someone who's mad.

FULLERTON Do you think all these works manifest
madness?

GANDER Let's call it illogic rather than madness.

FULLERTON How important is humor in your work? Is
it a by-product or a conscious element?

GANDER That's what trying to be creative is. It's play-
ing, because you understand stuff through play. I'm interested
in accidental art-making, in compositions that come about
through happenstance. The structure of comedy is grounded in
making collisions and associations that are illogical and absurd.
My work uses the mind to think about things in depth, so it's
not surprising that what I do is funny. Because it's out of the
ordinary. It's not of logic—it's of illogic. ☝
The top 10 NYC gallery exhibitions in September

Check out our list of the best gallery shows of painting, sculpture and more opening during the first week of September

Labor Day is almost here, which means the end of summer is nigh and the art world’s sleepy season is almost over. Most of the top art galleries in Chelsea, the Lower East Side and Uptown have been closed for August, but they’re about to come roaring back to life with dozens of new shows in September—including many featuring hot young talents. To help mark your art calendars, we’ve assembled the best art shows to see when the art world re-opens next month.

“Ryan Gander: I see straight through you”

This British Conceptualist is something of a prankster, and in for his first solo show in New York since 2008, he brings his considerable wit to bear on the “psychology of the body” and the figurative tradition in art. One of the highlights includes a follow-up to his Magnus Opus from 2013: A pair of cartoonish animatronic eyes embedded straight within the wall; activated by motion-detectors, they follow you around the room in a way that’s both amusing and disturbing.

Ryan Gander, installation view
Photograph: Jack Hems

Lisson Gallery Friday September 16 2016 - Saturday October 15 2016
On View

Ryan Gander Talks Art, Curation, and Politics for His ‘Night in the Museum’ Exhibition

The show involves figurative sculptures "looking" at blue art.

Carol Civrre, July 22, 2016

David Batchelor, I Love King’s Cross and King’s Cross Loves Me, 5, (2001) (back). Uli Nimptsch, Seated Figure, 1951. Photo by Anna Arca courtesy of Longside Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park.
Ryan Gander, one of Britain’s leading contemporary artists, never ceases to surprise and enthrall with his varied practice. Never sticking to any particular style or category, Gander tackles ideas through a variety of mediums, from sculpture and installation to language and commercial products. His artwork is frequently seen as a harmonious mix of complex and conceptual notions carried out using humorous and nonsensical elements. Narrative plays a big role in Gander’s practice, as many of his pieces serve to tell a story or share a thought.

For the Arts Council Collection’s exhibition “A Night in the Museum,” which opened at Yorkshire Sculpture Park’s Longside Gallery on July 6, Gander assumes the role of not just artist, but also curator. This exhibition brings together more than thirty works form the Arts Council’s wide collection, including a new piece from Gander himself, As old as time itself, slept alone (2015-16).

We were able to speak to the artist about his selection process for the exhibition, the significance of his dual role as curator and artist, and about the tumultuous politics of his home country post-Brexit.
As curator of the “Night in the Museum” exhibition you were invited to select art works from the Arts Council Collection, which features over 8,000 works of British contemporary art. You narrowed this vast collection down to only 30. How did you go about this laborious process?

It wasn’t laborious it was exhilarating, I learned more in a couple of weeks than in the last couple of years, but the collection is so diverse and so large that I was like a kid in a candy store. So I went about it very logically, analytically even. I set a series of methodological constraints to restrict me, to narrow down the choice. The formula consisted of only showing figurative sculpture of the human form and artworks containing the color blue. These works were then paired into a spectator (the figure) and the spectacle (the work containing blue) and positioned so that the figure became almost another visitor to the exhibition, with a directed gaze to the artwork it was paired with.

The color blue is of some significance to you both in the context of this exhibition as well as in your general practice. What about this color draws you to it?

Poetically, blue is the color of an untuned television, the depth of the ocean and the atmosphere, for me blue is the color of nothingness and of the absolute depth of the infinite. It’s a kind of zero point/neutrality of color. In ancient Egypt blue (irtyu) was the color of the heavens and hence represented the universe. It’s a color of neutrality, rebirth, a beginning. Logically from my perspective, it is a good color for a stereotype of what we think of contemporary art. If Bugs Bunny walked into a gallery, the contemporary artwork he would see would most likely be an abstract organic shape in ultra-marine blue... within the history of art it seems to be a sort of cliché, because we are all in agreeance of the contemporaneity of the color.
Do you think that the works you selected form an exhibition that as a whole reflects your personal style?

Idiosyncrasies of course will always prevail, even in a logical system. To an extent my taste was formed by “things I wanted to see out in real life” as opposed to on the page of a catalog or database, but it would be wrong to say that that followed a personal aesthetic, as one of the objectives of the work I make is to try to avoid stylistic signature or conformity to repetitive aesthetics, even if I don’t always achieve it. Conceptually I guess there is an underlying interest in the idea of the gaze, the viewer and the viewed, who exactly is looking at what and why... I would hope the show is diverse, full of collisions and clashes, that’s the type of show that ordinarily I am challenged by.
Your piece included in the exhibition, titled As old as time itself, slept alone, is commissioned by the Arts Council Collection, which relies on public funding. You shared your opinions of Brexit with our readers previously—how you think Brexit might affect this type of funding in the future?

Asking me that is like opening a can of worms... I don’t think anyone can predict anything at the moment, not even Mystic Meg, everything is uncertain and in turmoil, whilst a few weeks ago everything was quite stable and positive.
The title of the exhibition might be familiar to the public because of its relevance in popular culture. Is there any relationship between the Ben Stiller film titled Night at the Museum and this exhibition, which shares a strikingly similar title?

I’m not sure because I’ve never seen the film, but I do know that the name isn’t “exactly” the same so we are totally safe legally... But essentially the show for me is about activating two artworks by making them collide. It sounds like a Woody Allen gag he would serve up at an Upper East Side dinner party, but “What did one artwork say to the other artwork?” ... Well I guess a multitude of things, it depends on who is watching...


Ryan Gander, “Night in the Museum” will be on view at Longside Gallery from July 16 – October 16, 2016.
From Ryan Gander, More Moving Objects

imagine a conveyor belt with 32 objects that you can view only through a single window, one object at a time — a selfie stick, three pairs of stockings, a collection of mints from all over the world.

This is the installation that the British conceptual artist Ryan Gander will bring in September to Lisson’s New York gallery, which recently opened in Chelsea.

“Usually the spectator moves around an exhibition,” Mr. Gander said in a phone interview from his home in England. “I quite like the idea that the exhibition moves around the spectator.”

The piece, “Ryan Gander: I see straight through you,” expands on Mr. Gander’s similar installation at Lisson’s London gallery last year.

“It’s about the passing of objects,” said Alex Logsdail, the director of the New York gallery. “It’s very poignant for this moment when everyone’s attention span is so short and everyone is scrolling through images and texts and just skimming the surface of things.”

The Lisson show will also include a new series of figurative sculptures — essentially nailed stainless-steel skeletons. “There is no face, so the emotions you get from human eyes aren’t there — all I can manipulate are the body parts,” Mr. Gander said.

“They’re a little bit scary, they’re comical and, when I look at them, I see a lot of failed hopes, lost dreams, regret.”

Mr. Gander’s disability — he has used a wheelchair since childhood — is not integral to his artistic identity, but his work often deals with themes of inaccessibility, Mr. Logsdail said, “things that are hidden or out of reach or unattainable.”
The artists’ artists

Collecting

The way most artists collect is through trades and swaps with their peers. It’s a weird economy.

That artists are not only collectors of their contemporaries. An exhibition that occupies London’s National Gallery this month, Painter’s Partners, explores the significance of artist-collector relationships and their contributions to our understanding of art history. The show, which opens today, comprises an exhibition of 80 works spanning 500 years, plus an installation of works by living artists that explore the concept of collectors as artists. It also features a range of other artists’ collaborative projects, including a video by Ryan Gander, which he created for the show.

The show includes works by artists such as David Hockney, who was a major influence on many of the artists in the exhibition, and is one of the few living artists to have had a major impact on contemporary art. The show also features works by less well-known artists, including those from the 19th century, who were often responsible for the development of modern art.

The exhibition explores the relationship between art and society, and the role of the collector as an artist in shaping the art world. It also highlights the importance of collaboration and the role of the artist-collector in the development of contemporary art.

Exhibitions: From Dürer to Hirst, artists have amassed rich collections by swapping work. By Melanie Gerlis

The artists’ artists

What is the concept of artist-collectors? Artist-collectors are individuals who have a passion for art and are willing to pay a high price for it. They are usually wealthy collectors and are often well-connected people in the art world. Artist-collectors are often interested in the history of art and the development of new art forms. They are usually very knowledgeable about art and are willing to share their knowledge with other collectors.

The concept of artist-collectors is important because it helps to shape the art world. Artist-collectors are often able to influence the price of art and can determine which artists are successful. They are also often able to influence the direction of art, because they have the power to buy and sell art. This can have a significant impact on the art world, because it can affect the price of art and the direction of new art forms.

The concept of artist-collectors is also important because it helps to support the art world. Artist-collectors are often willing to pay a high price for art, which helps to support the artists who create it. They are also often able to provide financial support to new artists, which can be very important for their success. Artist-collectors are also often willing to share their knowledge with other collectors, which can help to support the art world in other ways.

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