

Art Basel Hong Kong

March 27 - 31, 2019

The Modern Institute

Booth 3Co9

Simon Starling

At Twilight

A Play for Two Actors, Three Musicians, One Dancer,
Eight Masks (and a Donkey Costume), 2014-2016

Materials: 8 masks, 4 costumes, cloth, 9 charred wood trees + lectern,
wall hooks, 3 stands, 2 fencing foils, HD video projection, wall text
Dimensions variable

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Simon Starling

'At Twilight', 2014 - 2016

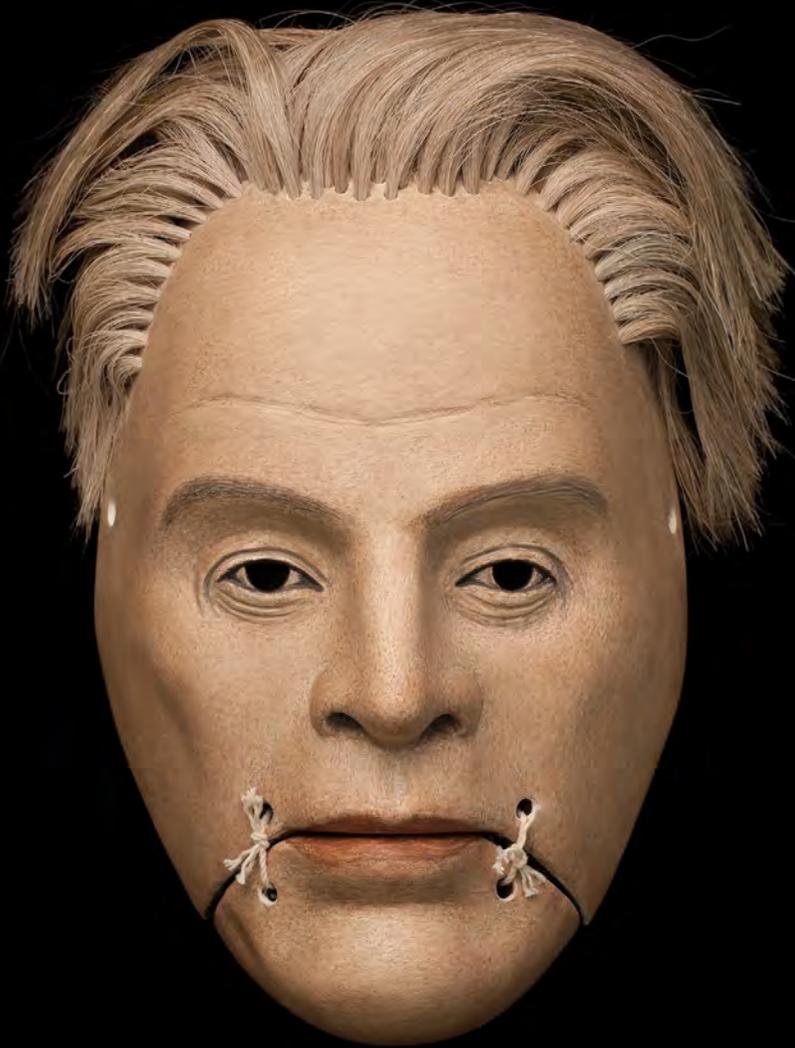
At Art Basel Hong Kong, The Modern Institute will present 'At Twilight' - a major project by Simon Starling, developed over a period of 3 years in collaboration with theatre director Graham Eatough. For the presentation, we will have the full sculptural installation alongside a new series of daguerreotypes.

'At Twilight' incorporates traditional Noh theatre masks and handmade costumes, originally used in the play, 'At Twilight: A play for 2 actors, 1 dancer, 8 masks (and a donkey costume)'. Each mask or costume represents one of 9 characters, some real, some fictional, all interconnected by Starling through the W.B. Yeats' play, 'At The Hawk's Well'. Written and performed over 100 years ago, Yeats wrote his play while working with poet Ezra Pound and was inspired by traditional Japanese Noh theatre. Yeats' play is a fusion of Irish folklore and what he then saw as an exciting new possibility for theatre. 'At Twilight' encapsulates this dynamic discourse between tradition and the avant-garde, in a kind of absurd, dramatised tussle between history, mythology and Modernism.

Central to the creation of this atmosphere is the use of masks in Noh theatre - here displayed as each of the characters. Noh masks are fitted in the highly ritualised atmosphere of the Mirror Room, adjacent to the Noh stage. Here identities are traded, ghosts assume human form, men are transformed into women, the young become old, and the old young. These nine characters, animated by their individual blackened trees as a reference to the blasted landscapes of the First World War, are here accompanied by a notional "mirror room" comprised of a series of ghostly, illusive, daguerreotypes of each the characters from 'At Twilight' made in the traditional manner on mirror-polished silver.

By fusing historical and archival research with classical, modern, and contemporary artworks, "At Twilight" illuminates the impact of traditional Japanese art upon the Western avant garde, its ongoing inspiration of new modes of expression and the ability of art to continuously evolve in ways that defy geographic borders.

Further details of 'At Twilight', performed as a play can be found at the bottom of the document.



W.B. Yeats
Paulownia, Japanese lacquer, gesso, pigment, glue, animal hair
Mask 23 x 12.5 x 11 cm

- P 5-9 Installation images of the masks on charred wood trees
- P 10-15 Images of the front and back of the masks
- P 16 Mind map exploring the reference and connections between the characters, W.B. Yeats and the play
- P 17-23 Daguerreotypes on silver-plated copper
- P 24-25 Text on 'At Twilight: A play for 2 actors, 1 dancer, 8 masks (and a donkey costume)' and link to play



Installation view, 'At Twilight', Japan Society, New York, 2016



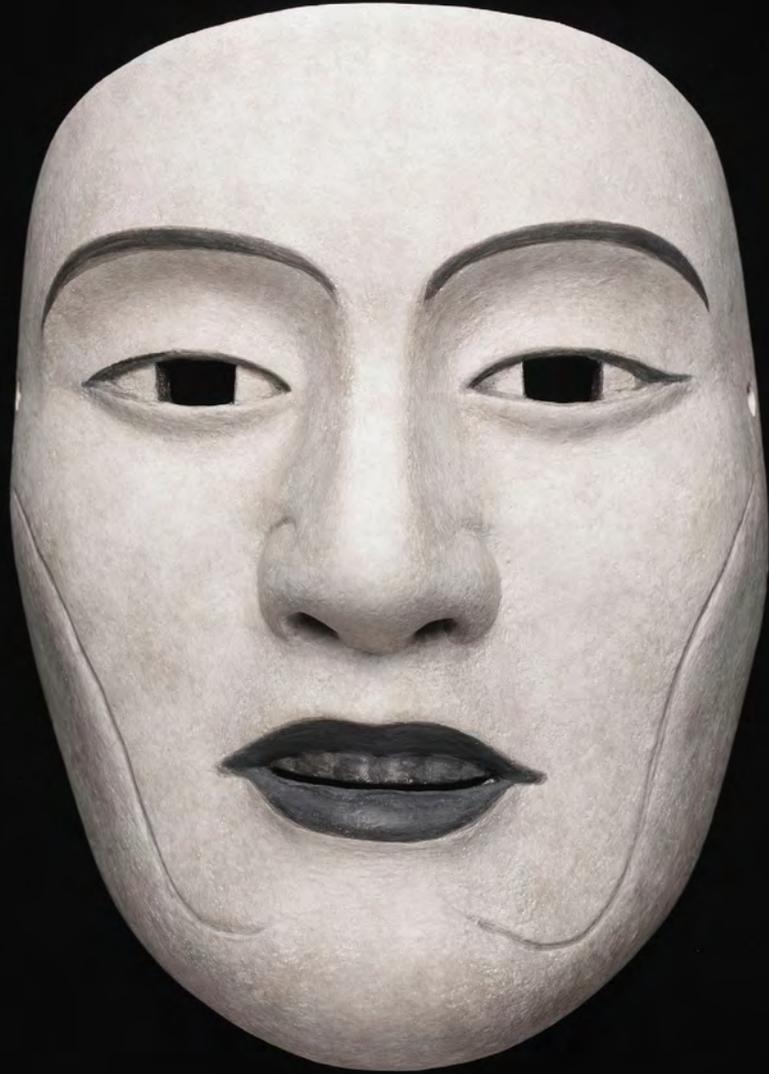
Installation view, 'At Twilight', Japan Society, New York, 2016





Old Man (After Edmund Dulac)
Paulownia, Japanese lacquer, gesso,
pigment, glue, animal hair
Mask 47 x 15 x 19 cm

Young Man (After Edmund Dulac) (pictured here without helmet)
Paulownia, Japanese lacquer, gesso, pigment
Mask 21 x 15 x 10.5 cm



Young Man (After Edmund Dulac) (reversed)
Paulownia, Japanese lacquer, gesso, pigment
Mask 21 x 15 x 10.5 cm



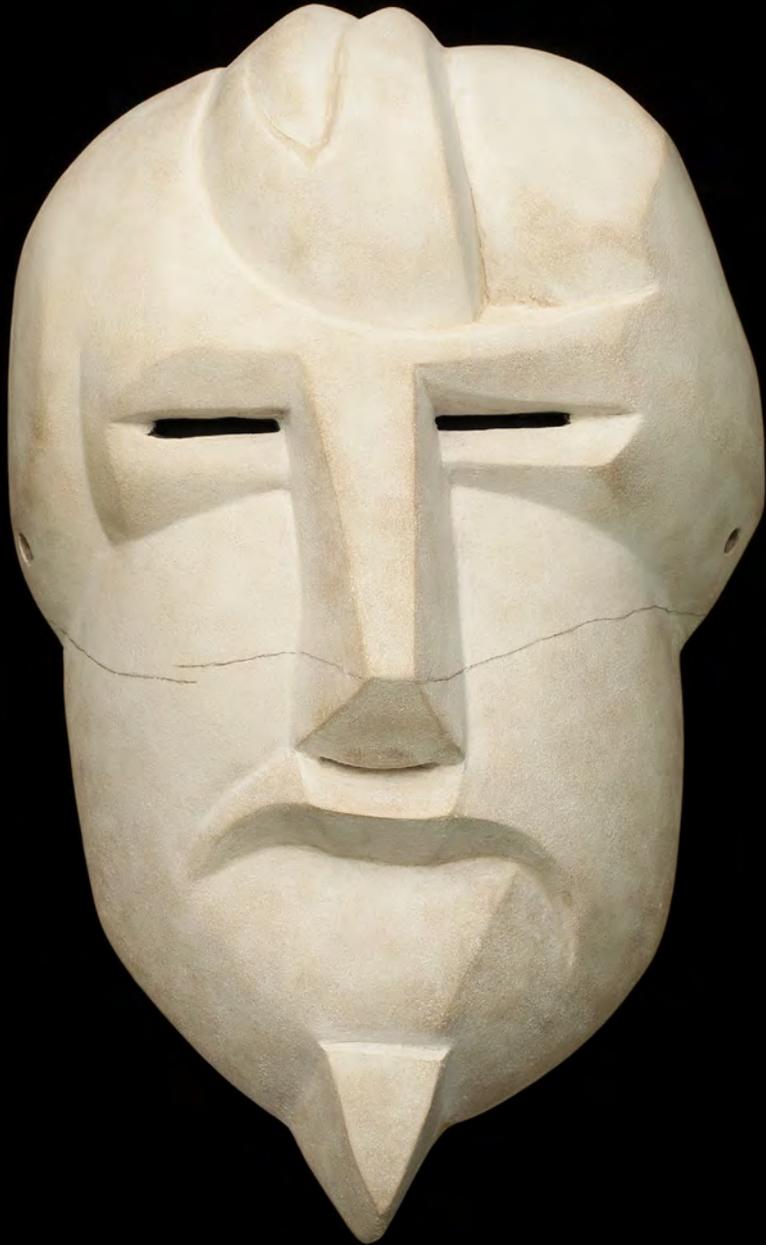
Young Man (After Edmund Dulac) (helmet)
Velvet, felt, hemp yarn, Japanese paper



The Guardian of the Well (After Edmund Dulac)
Felt, silk, hemp yarn, wire, paper



Ezra Pound (After Henri Gaudier-Brzeska)
Paulownia, Japanese lacquer, gesso, pigment
Mask 27.5 x 17 x 10.5 cm



Michio Ito (After Isamu Noguchi)
Paulownia, Japanese lacquer, gesso, pigment, glue, animal hair
Mask 55 x 12 x 9 cm



Nancy Cunard (After Constantin Brancusi)
Paulownia, Japanese lacquer, gesso, pigment
Mask 56.5 x 17 x 12 cm



Rock Drill (After Jacob Epstein)
Paulownia, Japanese lacquer, gesso, pigment
Mask 56.5 x 17 x 12 cm





At Twilight: Mind Map, 2014-16
Collage and ink on paper
108 x 203 x 4 cm framed



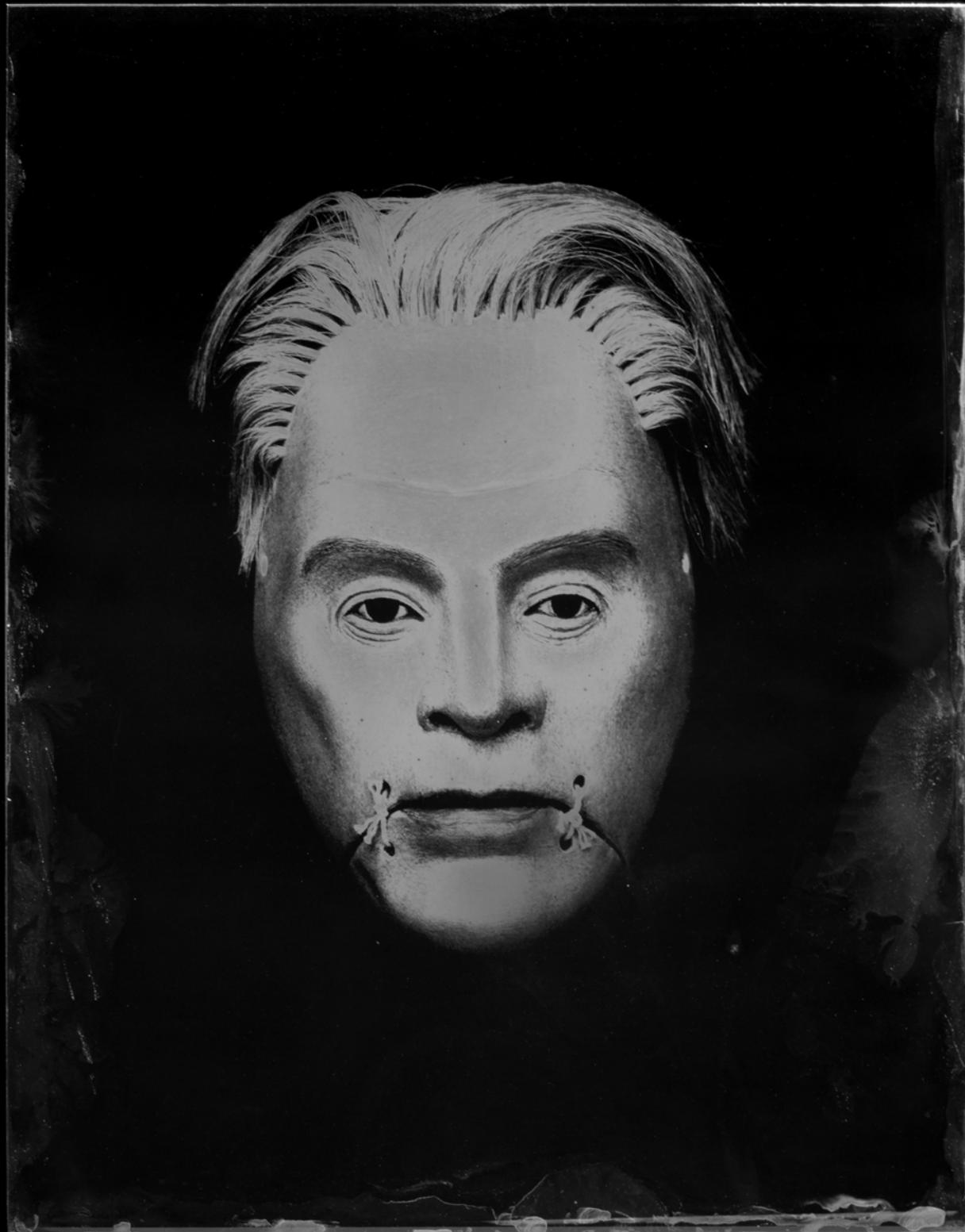
At Twilight: Michio Ito (After Isamu Noguchi), 2018
Daguerreotype on silver-plated copper
19 x 20 cm silver plate; 57.3 x 50.8 x 5 cm framed
7.5 x 7.9 in silver plate; 22.6 x 20 x 2 in framed
TMI-STARS-45187

At Twilight: Nancy Cunard (After Constantin Brancusi), 2018
Daguerreotype on silver-plated copper
19 x 20 cm silver plate; 57.3 x 50.8 x 5 cm framed
7.5 x 7.9 in silver plate; 22.6 x 20 x 2 in framed
TMI-STARS-45188





At Twilight: Rock Drill (After Jacob Epstein), 2018
Daguerreotype on silver-plated copper
19 x 20 cm silver plate; 57.3 x 50.8 x 5 cm framed
7.5 x 7.9 in silver plate; 22.6 x 20 x 2 in framed
TMI-STARS-45189



At Twilight: W. B. Yeats, 2018
Daguerreotype on silver-plated copper
19 x 20 cm silver plate; 57.3 x 50.8 x 5 cm framed
7.5 x 7.9 in silver plate; 22.6 x 20 x 2 in framed
TMI-STARS-45190

At Twilight: Young Man (After Edmund Dulac), 2018
Daguerreotype on silver-plated copper
19 x 20 cm silver plate; 57.3 x 50.8 x 5 cm framed
7.5 x 7.9 in silver plate; 22.6 x 20 x 2 in framed
TMI-STARS-45191



At Twilight: Old Man (After Edmund Dulac) 2018
Daguerreotype on silver-plated copper
19 x 20 cm silver plate; 57.3 x 50.8 x 5 cm framed
7.5 x 7.9 in silver plate; 22.6 x 20 x 2 in framed
TMI-STARS-45192





At Twilight: Ezra Pound (After Henri Gaudier-Brzeska), 2018
Daguerreotype on silver-plated copper
19 x 20 cm silver plate; 57.3 x 50.8 x 5 cm framed
7.5 x 7.9 in silver plate; 22.6 x 20 x 2 in framed
TMI-STARS-45193

'At Twilight. A Play for Two Actors, Three Musicians, One Dancer, Eight Masks (and a Donkey Costume)' looks at the circumstances of how the play 'At the Hawk's Well' came into being, through a remarkable and truly international range of people who came together in London at a particular moment in time, including a French illustrator turned costume designer (Edmund Dulac), a Japanese dancer (Michio Ito) and the central figures of the Irish and American poets, W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. The sharing of interests and influences, and the desire for experimentation that ensued, all took place against the unfolding horrors of war in Europe.

Encapsulating a dynamic discourse between tradition and the avant-garde, in a kind of absurd, dramatised tussle between history, mythology and Modernism, it is at times a clash between young and old, and at others more of an entanglement, but also a work of collaboration, with multiple influences and inputs, slippages and misunderstandings that become potent creative forces.

One of five plays by W.B. Yeats that are based on the stories of Cuchulain the mythological hero of the ancient Irish province of Ulster, 'At the Hawk's Well' is a hybrid concoction, fusing Yeats' interest in Irish Folklore with his then recent and seemingly superficial exposure to the rarified and ancient Japanese art of Noh theatre. 'At the Hawk's Well' was one of a number of 'dance plays' from this period that attempted to deploy the energy, atmosphere and style that Yeats understood to be central to this noble form of masked theatre, to retell folktales from the 'Irish Heroic Age'. For Yeats the Noh seemed to offer a "strange intimacy" and thus an escape from the familiar distance that was predominant in the naturalistic tradition of early 20th century European theatre.

Premiered in 1916 to a small 'salon' audience in a private London home, the one act play, set by a dried-up well on a hillside, was staged on a "bare space" with a minimum of props and scenography. The opening lines of the play, sung by the First Musician, paint a mental picture of the scene and a simple folded cloth stands in for the well. The play is accompanied throughout by simple percussive music performed on a drum, a gong and a zither. At the Hawk's Well tells the story of two men—one young, one old—and their vain search for immortality which, it is claimed, can be achieved by drinking the illusive waters of the well—a well closely guarded by a Hawk-like creature.



At Twilight: The Guardian of the Well (After Edmund Dulac), Hand-painted cotton muslin



The key players in the staging of this masquerade (both on stage and off) seem to have been striving to reinvent themselves by momentarily co-opting Oriental culture into a radically new Occidental moment - European Modernism.

All those involved in the staging of this hybrid drama, the Japanese dancer, Michio Ito, French children's book illustrator, Edmund Dulac, the Irish poet, W.B. Yeats and his friend and colleague, Ezra Pound, the photographer, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and indeed the event's aristocratic and radical hostess, Lady Nancy Cunard, seem to have been able to find themselves anew in the adopted manners of Japanese Noh theatre—finding new voices in a short-lived Modernist patois—an elitist theatrical pidgin. This historical trajectory of adoption, adaption and mistranslation, has, since 1916, come full circle with the gradual integration of 'At the Hawk's Well' into the classical Noh canon. Originally used in attempts to modernize this ancient art form, including Mario Yokomichi's abstracted reworking 'The Hawk Princess' (Takahime)(1967), Yeats' hybrid drama is now seen by some as material ripe for redeployment on the traditional Noh stage.

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Link to performance at Holmwood House, Glasgow:

<https://vimeo.com/191481965>

Password: SS-ATW-HWH

Simon Starling

Simon Starling (b. 1967, Epsom, UK) lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark. Starling graduated from MFA at the Glasgow School of Art (1992). He was Professor of Fine Arts at the Städelschule in Frankfurt between 2003-2013.

Starling won the Turner Prize in 2005 and was shortlisted for the 2004 Hugo Boss Prize. He represented Scotland at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 and was included in the central exhibition Fare Mondi/Making Worlds in the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009.

Starling has exhibited widely with solo exhibitions at Musée Régional d'Art Contemporain; Rennie Collection, Vancouver; Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham ; Common Guild, Glasgow; Japan Society, New York; Kunstmuseum St.Gallen, St Gallen; Musée d'art contemporain, Montréal; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Casa Estudio Luis Barragán/Luis Barragán House and Studio, Mexico City; Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City; The Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; Monash University Museum of Art – MUMA, Caulfield East; Tate Britain, London; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna; La Kunsthalle Mulhouse, Mulhouse; Tate St Ives, Cornwall; Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima; MAC/VAL, Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne; The Power Plant, Toronto; MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts; and Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel.

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