

homophobia. The US election results threatened the world with fascism and so things seemed bleak as many alternative voices waited fearfully for something impending. In this paper, I address the wake of the disaster by asking what enables art to face the aftermath? What can be generated while or when we wring our collective hands. This idea is extended by the exhibition *This Now, More than Ever*, installed at SFU Gallery in Vancouver from February-March 2017, (Figure I) organized and curated by Melanie O’Brian and Stephen Collis. In their curatorial statement O’Brian and Collis emphasize the “tilt of the time toward disaster” to ask what else can be contained by the present. Although the term *disaster* tenders a vision of decimation – a feeling of political ‘bottoming out’ that many shared – this post-election period also carried a dynamism that prompted many to action in a variety of ways, suggesting that the bottom can be vitally productive.

This Now, More than Ever was part of a current of international and local quick-fire responses to the January 20th American presidential inauguration date. Across the US, multiple arts institutions organized the #J20artstrike where several art venues and individual workers across the country shut down in protest or organized accessible alternative community programming. At the College Arts Association Congress in New York last February, I attended a panel discussion organized by Occupy Museums entitled Sense of Emergency, attended by thinkers and workers across the arts to discuss how to target their resistance; there was a series of “woke shops” ran by Seth Kim Cohen of the Chicago Arts Institute; and an art historians march at Trump Towers that took place during the conference, among multiple individual interventions. At the same time, in Vancouver, SFU professor Roxanne Panchasi (a contributor to *This Now, More than Ever*) swiftly organized Un-Auguration day where university and community members gathered in large numbers and shared creative responses, a convergence that

accompanied the Spectres of Fascism Free School (community “teach-ins” across the city running in partial organization from Collis), and this exhibition which hosted an open discussion with participants in lieu of a typical opening event.

The need to unite the community and attend to the moment with urgency lie at the center of these counteractivities and focusses *This Now, More than Ever* in form and content. Artists were invited to participate, and with quick turnaround, submit their pieces by email to be printed digitally. The show went up in the satellite gallery space at the SFU campus in Burnaby, a site

included reflecting on Adorno's damaged life and reading passages of Marx to the packed audience at Un-Auguration Day – and weaves this day with memories of his grandfather, expelled from Uganda by the dictator Idi Amin. Ganesha clusters the past with the present in his description of “now”:

I crave a drink today because now, as the sun sets, and the darkness comes flooding in, as I feel myself relaxing, the inherent gravity of our own catastrophic *now* begins, slowly to sink in. The edge needs to be caressed.

Yet in a way, this particular *now* is an *Unheimlich* now; it is, at once strange and familiar. These forms of *now* heighten the tone of anxiety, demonstrate the frustration with the political moment, and show the present as something we have already dreamed of and waited for. This *nowness* is poised on the head of a pin, a hill with the steepest incline that drops away.

Some submissions remain future focussed. There is the tongue in cheek nature of Michael Turner's personal ad for one moment (a) 4 o“.

question arises of how, if at all possible, can art provide a space to resist, or to “strike back” as the case may be, understanding that contemporary art and artists effect a wide range of aims that are not limited to speaking back to politics. How does art give expression to the spirit of resistance? In the case of *This Now*, these temporal and temporary works combine in force to demonstrate a counter will. In conversation, Melanie O’Brian reflected that although they did not leave the with a detailed plan for action, as a group they were grateful for the opportunity to assemble, demonstrating that the value of an exhibition such as this lay outside the field of tactics, and instead in the process of bodies gathering to dream them.

Whereas participation is central to political action, in the context of this show, I highlight the gathering of bodies as a public, joined in mutual conative striving, where affect provides the navigating force. My thinking is informed by a Spinozan tradition that defines the body in terms of its capacity to affect and be affected. In the *Ethics* (1677/2000), when material bodies encounter each other, their capacities rise as they combine to form a more powerful whole (Deleuze, 1988, 19). In her book, *Vibrant Matter*

from Rosie Braidotti, “somewhere between the no longer and the not yet.” (2011, 203) For Braidotti, this is the time when activism can be active, in oscillation between temporal binaries, at once informed by the past, yet future focussed. Paraphrasing Adrienne Rich, Braidotti writes that we must “think ‘in spite of the times’ and hence ‘out of my time’,” thus to transform the present condition into future possibility. (2011, 202-203) The question becomes how to resist the violence of the present moment while also engaging with it so that it can become productive of something else. (Braidotti, 2011, 268)

The change that is longed for requires a moment of pause – to survey the debris, to reimagine how the aftermath might become something other than the effects of collapse. Carol Sawyer’s Untitled (Figure V) work contains this imperative. Sawyer’s piece was the only contribution not submitted digitally, instead the artist provided instructions for the work’s

I am reminded of Benjamin's critique of Marx in "Theses on the Philosophy of History":
"Marx said that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps things are very different. It may be that revolutions are the act by which the human race travelling in the train applies the emergency brake."¹ Benjamin imagines the travellers pulling the brake to avoid hurling the train into further disaster, but what happens after the brake is thrown? When the train slows and another direction is pondered? Pulling the break recasts the light on the present, the moment of contemplation, generative because it bears the capacities of the present along with the sensations of anxiety, expectation, and the desire to continue. *This Now, More than Ever* is an invitation to pause, the exhibitions' works show the ground after the event and the range of available politics contained by the present.

Bibliography

Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History" *Illuminations*. Ed.