

FRESH  
ART

research  
guide



# new centers of critical gravity

ART BIENNIALS IN NORTH AMERICA

issue 1 | 2015/2020



## **FRESH ART INTERNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CREATIVITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

This Research Guide is a digital publication featuring conversations and themes illuminated in the **Fresh Art International podcast**. A resource for individuals, communities, and schools, the podcast combines interviews with field recordings and rich sound effects that inform and inspire each conversation. Keeping in mind both the curious and the cognoscenti, Fresh Art promotes and supports public access and awareness of the arts through a free digital archive. The podcast brings you informed, balanced, and diverse stories through the lens of today's art, film and architecture. Extending to public talks, workshops, residencies and educational resources, Fresh Art engages with cultural communities at the center and fringe of art scenes around the world.

### **Research Guide: New Centers of Critical Gravity Issue 1 | 2015/2020**

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# introduction

## new centers of critical gravity: art biennials in north america

We released this inaugural issue of Fresh Art International's Research Guide series in 2015. Under the title *Shifting Points of View*, Founder and Artistic Director Cathy Byrd identified an incipient trend within the constellation of recent North American art biennials in Santa Fe, New Orleans, and Montreal. She rightly surmised that the art world was becoming markedly more decentralized, transitioning from a network with a few bright epicenters (New York, Paris, e.g.) to one with many disparate and vibrant nodes. But in 2015, it was not yet evident that this wave would become a seachange with lasting ramifications for the way that artists, curators, and the public experience and engage contemporary art on a global scale. Today, diverse cultural hubs are proliferating, empowering more creative communities and providing increasingly democratized access to artists and art-making.

The rise of the international art biennial (and its close relatives, the triennial and the quadrennial) is one of the most significant forces powering this shift. The new crop of biennials presents a locally and globally relevant interpretation of the Venice Biennale model established in 1895. When this publication was first released, there were more than 150 international art biennials around the world. Today, there are at least double that number listed in the [Biennial Foundation's directory](#).

This updated Research Guide considers the underpinnings and outcomes of three international contemporary art biennials in North America in 2014 and 2015. Featured here are the voices of artistic directors, artists, and communities that give a unique character to ephemeral, large-scale, multinational exhibitions in three new "centers of critical gravity."

What is a center of gravity for our purposes? Critics and theorists across disciplines have appropriated this physics term. Surprisingly, the role this concept serves in military tactics is perhaps the closest to what we hope to evoke in these conversations:

1. ....sources of strength or balance. It is that characteristic, capability, or locality from which the force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.
2. the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, the three biennials featured are nuclei that mediate new art and activism and forge new critical connections—geographically, culturally, and historically. Geography motivated the transformation of SITE Santa Fe's international biennial into *SITELines*, a thematic exhibition series that began by exploring landscape, territory, and trade along the Pan-American Highway. *Prospect.3 (P.3) New Orleans* was the third iteration of an international biennial launched in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Looking past "the big storm," Artistic Director Franklin Sirmans pursues what he calls creative "nodes," rather than "margins," of culture. Premised on "what is to come" or "l'avenir," the 2014-2015 Montreal Biennial acknowledged that the future is informed by the past, and points to the potential for art to effect change.

Each of these biennials honored local practices while bringing in outsiders to react to and interface with the particularities of the host city and region, thereby extending the reach of the local to global. All three highlighted art from the "Global South," regions in the Southern Hemisphere that remain underexposed (the small South American country of Suriname is represented in all three biennials). Most significantly, the exhibitions revealed how art has become a central force in contemporary activism. Encouraged by curators in Santa Fe, New Orleans, and Montreal, artists' projects address social, technological, environmental, and sustainability issues of concern both within and far beyond North America. Together, they reveal how a global commitment to support creative agency can be key to a healthy and equitable future.

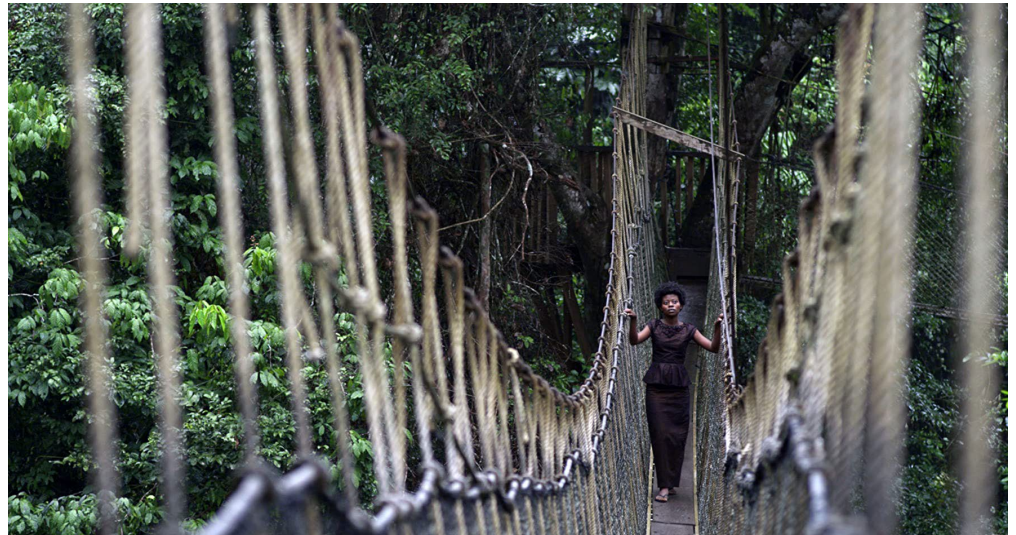
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<sup>1</sup> Col. Dale C. Eikmeier, U.S. Army, Retired, "The Center of Gravity: Still Relevant After All These Years?" *Army University Press*, May 11, 2017. [[link](#)]

Today, the unchallenged dominance of biennials in showcasing established and emerging artists within a variety of groundbreaking and sometimes controversial curatorial frameworks has provoked critical and popular backlash. Is the art world becoming *too* decentralized? Are there so many biennials now that inclusion in one is no longer a rigorous metric of artistic achievement? Do we have too many “centers of critical gravity” competing for our attention, both in person and online?

Spring 2020 has brought with it the COVID-19 pandemic, and with that outbreak, biennial postponements, including **Prospect.5 New Orleans: Yesterday we said tomorrow**, among **many others**. The necessary caesura of biennials around the globe is a significant setback for the artists and curators who rely on these venues to showcase their work, and an economic hardship for the communities that benefit from the tourism they inspire. Yet, this pause presents an opportunity to examine how these events can best serve all of their stakeholders and constituencies. What will the biennial become in a post-COVID world? How will these events change, both artistically and in terms of infrastructure, to support new cultural norms of social distancing? Curators responding to this shifting ground have expressed **a need to acknowledge the pandemic** while avoiding **making these events about COVID**. As the art world negotiates the new topography of these **relentlessly interesting times**, we hope that revisiting the three biennials in this Research Guide will help us anticipate a day when cultural events such as these are once again informing and inspiring our world.

Sarah Rovang  
Publications Editor



Akosua Adoma Owusu, *Kwaku Ananse*, 2013. Akosua Adoma Owusu, an American filmmaker of Ghanaian descent, talks about her film *Kwaku Ananse*, a standout project at *Prospect.3 New Orleans*. The title of the film refers to Anansi (spider) tales that originated from the Ashanti people of present-day Ghana. In Owusu's fable, the lead character is female, and her father is part spider, part man. Curator Franklin Sirmans used P.3 to spotlight the cultural nodes of the Global South, by including films like that of Owusu. You can hear the full conversation [here](#). Film still courtesy Akosua Adoma Owusu.

## reading list

1. **How to Make Biennials in Contemporary Times**, *World Biennial Forum No 2, São Paulo, Brazil*, Nov 26-30, 2014.
2. Terry Smith, “**Biennials Within the Contemporary Composition**,” *Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art*, Stages #6, 2016.
3. Francesco Bonami and Charles Esche, “**Debate: Biennials**,” *Frieze*, Issue 92, June-August 2005.
4. Siddhartha Mitter, “**Art Biennials Were Testing Grounds. Now They Are Being Tested**.” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2020.

An aerial photograph of a massive glacier flowing through a deep, narrow mountain valley. The glacier is a pale blue-grey color, contrasting with the dark, rocky slopes of the surrounding mountains. The sky is overcast and grey. The overall scene is rugged and majestic.

# 01 // unsettled landscapes sitelines / santa fe

**SITelines**, **SITE Santa Fe**'s biennial exhibition series, showcases contemporary art of the Americas. Scheduled for 2014, 2016, and 2018—each iteration organized by different curators from throughout the Western hemisphere—SITelines is a reimagining of SITE Santa Fe's original art biennial established in 1995. Structured to support curator residencies during the biennial planning process for better resonance with place and community, each exhibition is linked thematically. The inaugural edition of SITelines, entitled **Unsettled Landscapes** was on view from June 20, 2014, through January 11, 2015. Presented in SITE Santa Fe's exhibition space, the biennial brought together 45 artists from 16 countries. Thirteen of the projects were new commissions.

*featured image: Gianfranco Foschino, Fluxus, 2010*



## profiles

**Irene Hofmann** is SITE Santa Fe's Director and Chief Curator as well as the Director of SITElines. She previously served as Executive Director and Curator of The Contemporary in Baltimore, and held curatorial positions at the Orange County Museum of Art and Cranbook Art Museum, among other institutions. Hofmann's curatorial projects reflect her interest in socio-political and environmental art, the work of artist collectives, and multimedia, immersive environments.

**Glenda León** is a Cuban artist who splits her time between Madrid and Havana. Her work—which ranges from photography and drawing to installation and video—explores contrasts such as permanence and ephemerality, the natural and the man-made. León's accolades include a grant from The Pollock-Krasner Foundation and her inclusion in the Cuban Pavilion at 55th International Venice Biennale in 2013.

**Jason Middlebrook** is a visual artist based in New York. Often incorporating found objects, his sculptures and installations reference art history and contemplate our relationship with nature. Institutions that have exhibited Middlebrook's work include the New Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, and MASS MoCA, among others.

**Melanie Smith** is an English-born, Mexico City-based artist who creates cinematic installations blending a variety of art historical influences—from surrealism to land art—with references to her adoptive city and the sense of displacement common to expatriates. Smith was selected to represent Mexico at the 54th International Venice Biennale in 2011.

**Jamison Chas Banks** is a Santa Fe-based visual and performance artist interested in diverse aspects of American history, pop culture, and propaganda. A Native American, Banks is especially concerned with the ramifications of imperialism and territorial expansion. In addition to his work as an artist, which has led to solo and group exhibitions around the world, Banks is a printmaking instructor at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe.

**Gianfranco Foschino** is a Chilean artist whose haunting works hover between still photography and cinema. His focus on natural and urban scenes with barely perceptible movement creates visual and emotional tension. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America. In 2011, one of Foschino's videos was featured in the Latin American Pavilion at the 54th International Venice Biennale.

**Andrea Bowers** is a Los Angeles-based artist whose work is infused with feminist and political activism. Her video and installation art is a call-to-action addressing hot-button issues such as the environment, rape culture, gender discrimination, and immigration. Bowers's work was showcased at the 2004 Whitney Biennial and has been exhibited in museums around the world.

## reading list

1. Miguel A. López, "**Betraying the Landscape**," *ArtNexus* 13 (2014): 64-67.
2. Natalie Hegert, Hannah Hoel, Lauren Tresp. "**Settling Unsettled Landscapes: Talking about SITElines**," *ArtSlant*, July 21, 2014.
3. Diane Armitage, "**Unsettled Landscapes**," *THE magazine* (September 2014): 59.

irene hofmann 

july 2, 2014



Irene Hofmann, Director and Chief Curator, SITE Santa Fe

**CATHY BYRD:** The remote landscape and native culture of the American Southwest has long inspired artists and writers. Before 1995, traditional landscape painting, pottery, weaving, and silver jewelry were perhaps the best-known regional aesthetics. Then came the nonprofit art space SITE Santa Fe, the first official outpost of contemporary art in New Mexico, and home to one of the first international biennials.

I'm speaking with **Irene Hofmann**, Director and Chief Curator of **SITE Santa Fe** since 2010. The identity of SITE has gone through radical changes in the past few years.

**IRENE HOFMANN:** Now we're in 2014, on the eve of the opening of a new biennial at SITE Santa Fe. I think, when I arrived, it wasn't just a new director coming in, wanting to make a break with the past. The desire for change was throughout the institution. As we pretty quickly learned, as we started to expand our conversations to colleagues nationally and internationally, we were not the only ones that were rethinking the biennial model.

The restlessness or the dissatisfaction that was expressed to me about SITE's biennial and what ought to be done in the future was something that is shared by many institutions that have been making biennials as long as SITE has. Of course, there are many that have been doing it longer. We're at a moment where there are so many biennials around the world. When SITE first launched a biennial in Santa Fe, the international biennial here was the only one in the United States at the time and, of course, one of only just a handful that were being presented internationally.

Of course, now the numbers of biennials are staggering. They're everywhere. The very meaning of what a biennial is depends on where you are and also on who is the organizing body. Is it a contemporary art institution like SITE Santa Fe? Is it a city that's hoping to perhaps redefine its image—bring tourism? There are so many reasons why biennials have been cropping up all over the world. And so, what to make of that? Suddenly the contemporary art world has expanded so greatly you could spend your entire year going around to every opening of every new biennial.

**CB:** It's true. I looked on my calendar, and I saw there were four biennials opening this month, globally.

**IH:** There you go. That is part of the issue in terms of biennial making, but the other is that even in this vast sea of biennials that now exist, there still, for quite a long period, were only a handful of curators that were making the circuit. They were going around the world and presenting their biennials in different cities.

**CB:** You have had at least two at SITE Santa Fe, right? Robert Storr and Rosa Martinez?

**IH:** Well, Francesco Bonami was here, too. For them, this is where their biennial-making career started. From here, they went on to Venice, and, of course, many other great biennials. For all of us, whether it's SITE Santa Fe, or whether it's Venice, having these extraordinary curators come to our cities and present these exhibitions served us really well. They were really important and vital for all of our institutions. But I think, now we're at a point where a broader pool of curators have a voice in this biennial-making process and a broader group of artists.

**CB:** The way biennials are typically organized is not always sensitive to the community.

**IH:** I think that what we really started seeing is a small group of artists, a kind of "biennial art" that was emerging—a kind of response to the festival nature of biennials that was producing, in so many cases, artwork that attempted to respond to a place without really understanding that place. We've all seen works like this where an artist comes to a place and is inspired by the history, the architecture, and the landscape. But often, without a whole lot of research or a whole lot of time, the projects can become very surface. Even worse, in the case of SITE Santa Fe, projects can really offend the communities here that are often invited in by an artist into the process of making a work. But it's more complex than that.

**CB:** Several key questions led to the re-imagined biennial at SITE.

**IH:** What happens when a biennial actually can be more meaningful for the place, for the community that's there, and not just for the art world that shows up for the opening, when there's continuity between biennials. Ideas carry forward. Then what happens if artists who come here, who are inspired by the place, want to make work that deals with history: the history of this land when it was Mexico, the history of this place in terms of the land use or all the various cultures that come together here in Santa Fe? These aren't easy projects to navigate if an artist just drops in a few times during the process of creating an exhibition.

What happens if we have an infrastructure at SITE that allows artists to spend deep time here? What happens if we create a structure for curators to spend greater time here? Within the structure of **SITelines**, the idea, as we move



forward, is that we ask the curators to spend as much time here as is possible. It's already quite a different structure to have the curators really almost in residence at SITE. The same goes for the artists.

**CB:** I like that concept, curators in residence.

**IH:** Well, it is rarely asked of biennial curators to move to the place during the planning. Whenever and however possible, we want to create a support, an infrastructure to allow for curators to spend that kind of time here because, with this first *SITElines* iteration, we already see it's just incredible to have them here and what it means to have the team together in the place where this exhibition is being staged.

**CB:** I'm sure that it has an effect on their relationships with the artists doing onsite projects and within the community.

**IH:** Definitely. For artists, it's the same thing. If someone has expressed interest in doing a project that is engaging this place, there is now a greater infrastructure that we've developed at SITE to allow for longer-term engagement. In fact, one of the artists in *Unsettled Landscapes* has a project that will continue after our exhibition, because it's really ambitious.

It is one that engages the history of Santa Fe when this was part of Mexico, and so he's been doing research in the archives in Santa Fe, but also in Mexico City, and is developing a project that will take the form of a performance at our opening. This is **Pablo Helguera**. This is a performance that I think has the capacity to expand and grow over the next several years, and so perhaps maybe in 2016, another component of this performance is in the next *SITElines* show. Perhaps even in 2018, we'll see an even more ambitious component.

**CB:** Pablo Helguera's is just one of the territories explored in *SITElines*. In this biennial, artists of different generations reveal a range of perspectives on the meaning of *Unsettled Landscapes*.

**IH:** You'll see emerging artists in this exhibition. You will see very accomplished, very important artists from parts of the Western hemisphere that we, as curators, don't often visit. They're incredibly prominent in their own countries, but we don't know their work here.

At the same time, there are also more historical works in the *SITElines* exhibition. We look back to, in some cases, early conceptual art in the United States, and look at what was going on in Argentina or in Brazil. It's a real range of perspectives, a real range of points in an artist's career. All the works that we chose very specifically for this particular theme look at landscape, look at territory, and trade—three notions, three ideas that link us all in the Americas.

**CB:** Back in the day when there was no money, people used to barter. For this biennial, **Jason Middlebrook** created a general store that brings back the practice of trading.

**IH:** When we think about the history of the Americas, we think about different economies, different kinds of exchange

over borders, exchange with different countries, so there's lots of territory that this sort of thematic of trade could possibly express. For Jason, it's actually looking back at a time when there was a completely different kind of economic system that was based on barter.

He is creating a pretty extraordinary installation in a shipping container. This shipping container has been completely transformed, inside and out, to look like a general store. It looks like you're walking into a movie set of an old Western. It's really amazing: wood floors, walls, and counters.

The general store, of course, in a place like Santa Fe and so many other early cities in the West, was the place where you could buy everything. Everything that's in the store is available for visitors to buy, but only through barter. So it suddenly sets up a relationship with the clerk and the visitor in a negotiation over value.



Jason Middlebrook, *Your General Store*, *Unsettled Landscapes*, 2014

**CB:** Visitors should come prepared to barter, then.

**IH:** They should come prepared to barter, but it's not just finding a rubber band in your pocket and trying to make the case that this really has some very special provenance and, therefore, you should hand over this amazing birdhouse that you want to buy. Instead, you're going to have to make your own birdhouse. I imagine, even within a month, most of the original merchandise in the store will turn over.

**CB:** **Andrea Bowers** is a defender of territories. For her project, she literally runs across the wild land of Utah that was saved by activist **Tim DeChristopher**.

**IH:** Andrea's piece is really poetic. It shows these amazing vistas of this empty land: beautiful mountains, trees. She shot most of this film in spots where it's full of snow, and you just see these beautiful views. Then you see a figure running towards the camera, and it's her. She comes all the way up to the camera after being completely out of sight, and, with a chalkboard, writes down the number of the parcel of land that she's standing on.

Then we see the next screen, and it's a totally different view of another parcel. Again, she's running towards the camera. Parcel after parcel, we get to see. Interspersed is Tim telling a story. It's a really powerful piece.

**CB:** I notice that some of the projects won't even be on view in Santa Fe. Some artists are doing projects way off-site, right? **Suriname** is one of them.

**IH:** That's right. That's **Marcel Pinas**. It's a project that really engages the local community and is one that will have a long-term engagement with us. Even after the exhibition, his project will have a physical component here in early 2015. But, throughout the run of the show, it's really taking shape.

The same is true for **Marcos Rameriz ERRE and David Taylor**. Their project launches at our opening. They are traveling the original border between the U.S. and Mexico and placing obelisks, not dissimilar to a series of monuments that mark the current Mexico/U.S. border. They have purchased a van, they've been fabricating these monuments, and they are going to be traveling throughout the West, making stops in cities all over, and reminding us of the time that this land was Mexico.



Erre and Taylor, *De/LiMITations* markers, *Unsettled Landscapes*, 2014

**CB:** **Liz Cohen**'s project reinvents the iconic El Camino.

**IH:** She will be represented by her long-term project called *Trabantimino*, and it is a car. She has modified an East German Trabant. Through hydraulics, the car extends to the exact dimensions of an El Camino, and so the parts have also been altered. It's not exactly, but roughly half Trabant, half American car, and has many parts from an El Camino.

She has traveled with this vehicle, not driving it necessarily, but on a trailer, bringing it around the country and especially in the West and photographing it on really important highways. Last summer, in fact, she brought it to a number of lowrider competitions. One of them was just an hour from here, in Española, New Mexico, where her car won a prize in the extreme body modification category.



Liz Cohen, *Trabantimino* Series, *Rio Grande*, 2012

**CB:** The romance of the road runs through *Unsettled Landscapes*.

**IH:** Santa Fe, in fact, sits very close to the **Pan-American Highway**. This idea that Santa Fe and SITE are near this road—though it's pretty broken up by now—that roughly connects Alaska to Argentina, is pretty amazing. It's romantic, this idea that the Pan-American Highway connects us all. That notion started us on a path thinking about connectivity in the hemisphere and how it actually can come down to something as simple as a shared road.

**CB:** Chilean artist **Gianfranco Foschino** makes his expedition by boat, exploring remote islands off the coast of South America.

**IH:** He took a boat and traveled among all of these amazing islands that are at the very end of the continent, in Patagonia. It used to be inhabited. The native people who had lived there were exterminated. They traveled from island to island with canoes. It is now completely uninhabited and quite beautiful. The footage that I've seen already of the piece, it's very quiet—beautiful sun, beautiful ocean, beautiful, lush, green, tree filled, little islands, and bigger islands. *No Man's Land* is the name of this piece, which feels like the end of the world.

**CB:** What do you hope is the legacy of *SITelines*?

**IH:** I think, with *SITelines*, we have created a structure and began on a course with this first exhibition to present an exhibition that has many perspectives that aren't often shown in exhibitions in the United States. So many of the artists in this exhibition find themselves only known to us when they're presented in an exhibition that is "art from the Caribbean," "Native American art," "art from Argentina," or even the much broader "Latin American art."

While those kinds of structures for exhibitions certainly help frame our understanding of a context for an artist, this exhibition breaks away from all of that and presents artists from all of these regions and perspectives, but presents them all on equal footing and gives us a chance to really look at a lot of work that we are not usually seeing. Over time, I think we have created a structure and a network throughout the Americas that really allows SITE's new *SITelines Biennial Series* to really present something fresh and something really new to the field and to audiences.

## unsettled landscapes

glenda león, chas jamison banks, jason middlebrook, melanie smith, gianfranco foschino

august 21, 2014



FOREGROUND: *Unsettled Landscapes* sign.  
BACKGROUND: Jason Middlebrook, *Your General Store*, SITE Santa Fe, 2014

**CATHY BYRD:** This week, we're at SITE Santa Fe, a contemporary art space in New Mexico. We're here for the opening of *Unsettled Landscapes*, an international art biennial featuring work about landscape, territory, and trade. Today, our spotlight is on five participating artists from across the Americas.

We're recording this episode in **The Railyard**. The once blighted district was redeveloped over the past decade. Today, an active streetscape radiates from the train depot to shops, galleries, and cafés, a plaza, a park, and SITE Santa Fe. Just outside the entrance, Cuban artist **Glenda León** secretly attached her art to the trees.

My job is to find the leaves that aren't real. They're going to be here when all the other leaves fall off these trees. These leaves will remain.



Glenda León, *Esperanza (Out of Season)*, 2014

**GLENDA LEÓN:** It's hard for me, too. Here, you have to...

**CB:** All right, I'm starting to see them. What is this project about, Glenda?

**GL:** For me, that's a question between what is eternal and what is ephemeral. "What is life?" "What is death?" It's also probably a sign for art. Art is something we create and we insert in the world already with this natural rhythm.

As a creator, you have a compromise. This thing you add to the world, for me, should be positive because the world has already too much negative news, bad news, bad things happening. I think it's mathematical. If you, as a creator, add something more into that area, you create more negative things. I think this project a good example for that. It's very subtle. It's just attached in the tree.

**CB:** After looking into Glenda's trees, I follow a path toward the tracks and come upon a bright blue shipping container. The sign out front reads *Your General Store*. The artist behind the enterprise: **Jason Middlebrook**.

**JASON MIDDLEBROOK:** I had this idea about five years ago. There was an abandoned, old gas station at the end of my road up in upstate New York. I always wanted to have a barter general store, like an 1800s general store, or like a trading post. I always thought it'd be a great idea to take the money out of the equation because there's always something you need that you don't have, that you can't find at Target or Home Depot, etcetera.

I talked to Irene [Hofmann] about the idea of it being mobile, of it being in a shipping container. I pitched the idea to her. In the context of the show, it made a lot of sense because it dealt with landscape, border, barter, monetary issues, and non-monetary issues. SITE Santa Fe bought the container, and I transformed it up in the Hudson Valley.

Then I got the idea that maybe I should include more art, and so I invited about 40 artists to participate. They sent in birdhouses, paintings, and little objects. The idea is that someone has to trade something for equal or similar value. At the end of the project, those artists that gave things will end up getting something back. The motto is, "Browse, Create, Barter."

**CB:** Let's describe some of the objects, besides birdhouses, that you have here.

**JM:** Well, here's a pile of walking sticks. There are a lot of farm tools. Up on the little shelf over here are items from a place in Upstate New York called Camp Hill, which is really exciting because they make teas and soaps. This is to maybe trade with a local tea maker.

This is one of my favorites. Just a bin of brushes. Everybody needs a brush. Trade a brush for a brush. Lots of wrenches, belt buckles... There's all kinds of good stuff in here.

This is Bill Stone's birdhouse, which I love. Kelly Thompson, a painter. Then there are a lot of contributions by me. I made this mirror. I made this toilet paper holder.

**CB:** Which is fantastic, and it says here, "Toilet paper holder stump. Artist Jason Middlebrook. Trade for another funny toilet paper holder." I'll post that on the Internet and see what comes in.

**JM:** Yes! Let's see what happens!

**CB:** You may not know this, but automaker Henry Ford once had a utopian vision to build a rubber plantation settlement deep in the Brazilian rainforest. Not far from Jason's store, I sit down with **Melanie Smith** to talk about her fascination with Henry Ford's failed dream.

**MELANIE SMITH:** I did a project in 2009/2010, about a place called **Xilitla** in the jungle of the San Luis Potosi. This English man called Edward James set up this kind of surrealist garden there. I kind of was on the track of finding these far off spaces.

Then when I showed the Xilitla piece in Brazil, someone mentioned **Fordlandia**, and so that immediately struck a cord that there would be a parallel between these two men who had been doing these kind of endeavors. Then I started that investigation.



Melanie Smith, *Fordlandia*, 2014

**CB:** Just hours before the official opening, I meet **Jamison Chas Banks** inside the main exhibition space. We're looking into this small vitrine at a baseball and glove with a special signature. Tell me about the provenance of this ball.

**JAMISON CHAS BANKS:** Well, the ball is actually mine from childhood as a little league player. Then the signature of Napoleon is laser-etched onto the ball in the style of how a baseball player would sign the ball. This signature is the exact signature from the **Louisiana Purchase**, so that's the significance of having it here.

**CB:** Let's give our listeners that may not be American the history of this project.

**JCB:** What I'm talking about is the idea of exile because the selling of the Louisiana Purchase by **Napoleon** to the United States government instigated the opening up of that land for the eventual exile of the **Cherokee** and the **Seneca-Cayuga** people. I'm a part of those tribes. It kind of becomes a cause-and-effect story about the Louisiana Purchase as the cause. The exile of my people is the effect. But also, the selling of the Louisiana Purchase financed Napoleon's final campaigns, which ended in defeat and his eventual exile, as well. I'm talking about these two parallel trails of exile that are instigated by the same event.

Now, I further the discussion by talking about my own grandparents and how they were forced into government boarding schools. It was an indoctrination into Christian ideology and also a lesson into becoming European or

European American. There were instances of optimism, and that's what I'm touching on.

One of the instances was sports. My grandfather learned how to play baseball at the boarding school. Then, once he was older, as an adult, he actually played baseball for a semi pro ball team. This was back when every small town in America had its own semi pro ball team. He was able to make a financial contribution to his family from baseball.



Jamison Chas Banks, *Retour aux cendres*, 2014, film still

**CB:** This project that we're seeing here represents a much broader body of work that will continue after *Unsettled Landscapes*.

**JCB:** It does. This is actually a mock up to a bigger project. These will become props for the film that I hope to make.

**CB:** A few steps away, I record this conversation with Chilean artist **Gianfranco Foschino**. I'm watching his video *No Man's Land* on a wall-size projection behind a velvet curtain. Are there any people there at all?

**GIANFRANCO FOSCHINO:** No, no, never.

**CB:** That's why *No Man's Land*...

**GF:** Yeah, it's really hard because of the weather and also because it's completely isolated. There are no cities around. To get there in this boat was like three days of navigation.

I love the idea to make a trip that also was made 200 years ago when appeared the first Europeans in this area with the same sensation, discovering the landscape. I never actually get to the islands. It's just to move across them at a certain distance. You don't really know what is inside this landscape. The mechanical sound of the boat makes the landscape contemporary.

The image is really clean and shows this incredible landscape, but, at the same time, the sound of the machine reminds you of the drama of being there. I'm always really curious about what is out of frame, so I think here the intrigue is also these questions: "Where I'm going?" "What is coming next?" There is no answer.

## andrea bowers, part 1

october 2, 2014



Andrea Bowers, *The United States v. Tim DeChristopher*, 2014, film still

**ANDREA BOWERS:** I went to CalArts, and I didn't take classes in how to draw. I took a class in how to secede from the country! I took a class on the Left and the failure of the Left. I took classes on not working as a radical political position. I mean I took amazing, crazy, political classes because it was kind of like a school founded by utopian, Marxist feminists. I think that had a lot to do with it.

**CATHY BYRD:** This is Fresh Talk with Andrea Bowers. As you just heard, Andrea's studies were rather unconventional. But it turns out she was thinking like an activist long before art school.

**AB:** I was always, as a kid, really passionate about politics. George Bush's presidency really made me rebel against him, and it made me really, like, whatever I can do to help change things, I'm going to do it! And so I started using what my skills are, which is art, to try to participate or help in any way I could, with activists and activist campaigns.

I would lend my artistic skills, and I found that those groups of people were so excited to have me participate. It was a very welcoming experience, and so I've just become more and more courageous and involved. I don't think of it as courage anymore. At the time, when I first started, I did.

**CB:** These days, Andrea shapes entire exhibitions around activism. Her art is a call-to-action that gives voice to concerns often ignored.

**AB:** I've been thinking about what art can do and what art can be rather than what it can't do and what it can't be. One of the things that art can do is it can bear witness. I think a lot about my role. I document these under-told stories of these incredible activists or these incredible activist events in a much deeper, long-term way than 24/7 news.

**CB:** It might not surprise you to hear that, a few years ago, Andrea made the news herself. The artist explains exactly how she ended up chained to a tree in the **Arcadia Woodlands** outside Los Angeles.

**AB:** My art practice has made me a more radical activist since I met the activist **John Quigley**, a famous American tree sitter that I've been following him for years. He stayed at my house for six months because he was traveling so much that he needed a crash pad. Also, because he's an activist, he puts all his money into the cause. So, he had no money. He didn't pay rent or anything for six months.

I said, "John, you have to trade me something, so I want you to spend a day teaching me how to tree sit, and I'm going to videotape it as a kind of training-video-artwork." Well, I loved it. I was a little cynical about it. I was like, "It'll be goofy," but I actually was really good at it!

Then, six months later, he called me up. He's like, "There's a terrible situation in Arcadia. We're going in, and we need you to go."

What they were trying to do was rip out this beautiful, pristine, urban wilderness area. It was unfortunately kind of bowl shaped. These trees were beautiful oak trees. There were like 250 of them. But they wanted to clear-cut this valley so they could dredge the concrete rivers, take all of the debris, soot, and dirt, and put it someplace. They needed a dumping ground.

I attempted to stop that from happening. It did not stop it, but it did stop other areas from being cleared because it got a lot of media attention.

**CB:** Andrea wove artifacts of her tree sitting experience into the shimmering green sculpture that's now on view in SITE Santa Fe's 2014 biennial exhibition.

**AB:** As soon as I was released from jail (I was in jail for around two days, I guess.), I went out. I wanted to see what it looked like, and it was devastating. They were these beautiful oak trees and, instead of cutting them down and at least using this wood, they put them in wood chippers and turned them into little, tiny pieces.

I didn't know what to do. I had no ideas, but I thought, "I have this truck. I'm going to fill the truck up with woodchips until I can't move anymore." One of the neighbors helped me, and we filled up the truck with woodchips. I just saved them all this time. So, for this piece, I used all the climbing ropes that we use as tree sitters. You know you use climbing gear, and I've used the climbing gear to make this kind of beautiful. It almost looks like a chandelier, I think.

All the wood pieces are tied in bundles at the bottom because I was really trying to pay homage to these trees and thinking, "Is there some way I can re-monumentalize them?"

**CB:** In a video she produced about the Arcadian Woodlands protest, Andrea remembers what happened in the late afternoon when her tree was the last one standing. Just before police officers climbed into a cherry picker to pluck Andrea from her perch, she had a surprising encounter.

**AB:** The weirdest thing happened. There were no trees left. All of a sudden, animals started to come into the tree we were in because it was the only tree left. We were suddenly swarmed by bats encircling us and all different kinds of birds. There were actually rats running into the tree.

It was craziness because it was the last of the little bit of this ecosystem. It was devastating. It was depressing because you realized how many other animals' habitats and insects' habitats had been destroyed in an afternoon.

**CB:** I'm happy to report that at least one of Andrea's stories has a happy ending. Her work about activist **Tim DeChristopher** celebrates his disruption of a land auction in Utah.



Andrea Bowers, *Memorial to Arcadia Woodlands Clear-Cut (Green, Violet, Brown)*, 2014

**AB:** I've started to think about activists who try to protect the land as heroic because they're trying not to touch the land. They're trying to protect it.

Right at the end of George W. Bush's presidency, a month before he was to leave office, he had a private, quiet, little auction, that only a few oil and gas men knew about, to sell off much of the pristine wilderness area around Arches National Park there in Utah. This young, amazing activist, Tim DeChristopher, found out about it.

Actually, he had been watching *The Yes Men*, which inspired him that he couldn't just go hold a sign, that he had to do something else—art inspiring activism, right?

**CB:** Right. Exactly.

**AB:** He walked up to the auction not knowing exactly what he was going to do. It was like hundreds of thousands of acres of land.

**CB:** I was listening to him tell it. He thought maybe he would throw a shoe or shout.

**AB:** Right, he didn't know. But they opened it up for him. They said, "Oh, are you here to bid?" He was athletic, outdoorsy. He didn't look like some sort of traditional, stereotype of an activist.

He thought about it for a second, and he said, "Yeah. Well, yes, I am." He went in there, and he first thought to just bid

up the prices because, first of all, they were all in on it. They were getting this unbelievable land that they were going to destroy for almost nothing because it was all rigged.

Then he got courageous and started buying. Finally, they figured out that this was not for real, and he got arrested on the spot. But it canceled the sale, and they prosecuted him. Tim did two years in federal prison for this.

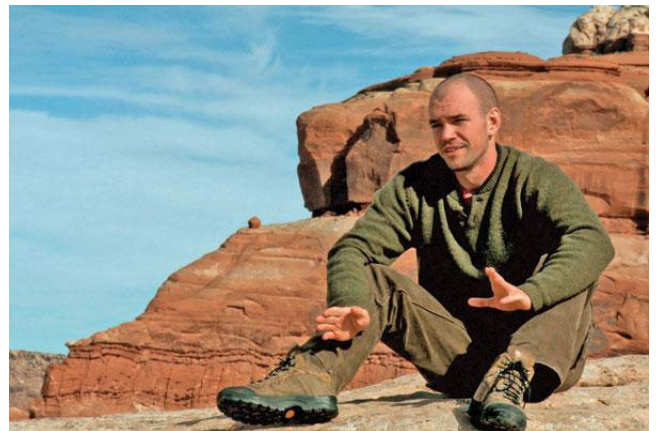
I was actually the only person who went out and recorded the land that he saved. I found every parcel of land that he bought, and I videotaped it. But I not only videotaped it; I videotaped myself walking through the land.

**CB:** Andrea's practice proves that art can make a difference. Tim DeChristopher's lawyer showed Andrea's film footage and photos as evidence during Tim's federal trial.

You recorded the video in the winter.

**AB:** Yeah, it was cold. But I thought that kind of frozen landscape would kind of be amazing. It was really inspiring!

**TIM DECHRISTOPHER:** ...All that, to me, kind of made this a really outrageous thing that was going on. It convinced me that it was something that we couldn't accept, that we had to do something about. There were some folks having a protest outside while the auction was going on. I went down there for the protest, but at the same time realized that the protest wasn't actually going to do anything. It wasn't enough just to hold a sign on the sidewalk...



Activist Tim DeChristopher

## 02 // p.3: notes for now prospect new orleans



**Prospect New Orleans** was founded in 2007 to present the work of artists on the vanguard of contemporary art and to celebrate community as New Orleans rebuilds its post-Katrina cultural tourism. First envisioned by curator Dan Cameron—who organized **Prospect.1** (2008–09), **Prospect.1.5** (2010–11), and **Prospect.2** (2011–12). The once biennial, now triennial, gives particular attention to socially inspired projects speaking to the unique character, history and landscape of New Orleans. A critical success, the inaugural Prospect.1 attracted 42,000 visitors and generated more than \$23 million in economic activity. **Prospect.3: Notes for Now**, the third iteration, was on view from October 25, 2014 to January 25, 2015. P.3 presented the work of 58 artists in 18 venues, including more than ten commissioned projects. Expanding on the citywide exhibition experience, P.3+ featured projects by local artists in 50 satellite spaces.

*featured image: Tavares Strachan, You Belong Here, 2014, New Orleans*

PROS PECT  
NEW ORLEANS

## profiles

**Franklin Sirmans** has been the director of the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) since 2015. Previously, he was the curator of contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). He served as the artistic director of Prospect.3, the 2014 iteration of *Prospect New Orleans*. A native New Yorker and former journalist, Sirmans guest-curates exhibitions and lectures around the world. He previously held curatorial posts at The Menil Collection in Houston and MoMA PS1 in New York.

**Remy Jungerman** is a Suriname-born sculptor and mixed-media artist based in Amsterdam. Blending influences from European modernist geometry to the religions and ritual objects of his African-influenced Surinamese culture, his work explores the idea of “global citizenship.” Jungerman’s silkscreens, installations, sculptures, and collages have been exhibited in solo and group shows worldwide.

**Tavares Strachan** is a Nassau, Bahamas-born, New York-based conceptual artist working at the intersection of science, technology, and “frontier exploration.” Strachan represented the first Bahamian Pavilion at the 55th International Venice Biennale in 2013.

**Gary Simmons** is an artist based in New York. He is known for provoking questions about race, class, identity, and pop culture through works on paper, performance, sculpture, installation, painting, and his signature “erasure” technique. Solo exhibitions include shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Studio Museum in Harlem, and Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

**Margaret Thomas** is a New Orleans native. With her family, she co-owns the Tremé Market Branch building, a former bank in the historic Tremé neighborhood of New Orleans. They are converting the space into a multi-disciplinary cultural arts center and performance venue. Tremé Market Branch was an official venue for P.3.

## reading list

1. Jonathan Griffin, “**Prospect.3**,” *Frieze* 168, January-February 2015.
2. M. H. Miller, “**America’s Existential Art Biennial: On the Ground at Prospect 3 in New Orleans**,” *ARTnews*, October 28, 2014.
3. Ben Davis, “**Beating Heart New Orleans**,” *artnet*, September 1, 2010.



## franklin sirmans ◀

april 17, 2014



Franklin Sirmans, Artistic Director, Prospect.3 New Orleans

**CATHY BYRD:** Today I'm in New York, with Franklin Sirmans, a curator at the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**. We're talking about **Prospect New Orleans**, an exhibition the size of a city.

Six years ago, in the wake of **Hurricane Katrina**, Curator **Dan Cameron** launched *Prospect New Orleans*. In 2011, Franklin was appointed Artistic Director of this year's biennial. With the citywide exhibition now six months away, Franklin shares a concept that spans decades and oceans.



Los Jaihackers, *Subterranean Homesick Cumbia*, video still, 2014

**FRANKLIN SIRMANS:** First and foremost is that the exhibition and the project really began with Dan [Cameron] in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. That major, catastrophic event played so much of a role in terms of the art and discussion around the exhibition at its founding. I believe that, at this point further removed, we can do something quite different, so we draw upon a thematic that includes aspects of New Orleans, but not necessarily that one event.

**CB:** Franklin intends for the exhibition to evoke an ambiguous sense of place.

**FS:** The exhibition, for me, might be subtitled *Somewhere And Not Anywhere*. So, there is this very strong focus on that place and it can't be done anywhere else, by any means. But it is also wide enough to encompass many different ideas and many different places and artists. I'm hoping that's what rings true and that's what people are left with.

**CB:** What would be considered your curatorial vision or the philosophy that's behind how you're organizing this exhibition?

**FS:** Well, the philosophy very much comes out of research and experience in thinking about these types of biennial exhibitions and how they have been used historically, so I think the approach begins there.

**CB:** Franklin says that books are often where his curatorial projects begin.

**FS:** For me, literature always provides a sort of jumping-off point. In this case, I had been thinking about several different epic kinds of novels, if you will, because that's what I do and that's kind of where the approach often begins. I have settled on a book very specific to New Orleans called **The Moviegoer**, by Walker Percy, which takes us back historically, of course, to the late 1950s and early 60s. That plays a really important role, and I think that although there are artworks that span all the way back to the beginning of the 20th century, that our discussion is very much in the here and now.

**CB:** The 2014 biennial in New Orleans is about existentialism, exoticism, and other idiosyncratic ideas.

**FS:** I would say that *The Moviegoer* provides inspiration as a sort of existentialist, discursive kind of text in which things happen very subtly and perhaps poetically, and that the surface of that book is in New Orleans, but again, it could be anywhere. And really, at its heart, it's about people and how people see each other. So, for me, visually, that relates back to two artists. One is **Paul Gauguin**, and the other is **Tarsila do Amaral**, a Brazilian artist.

There's a conversation between those two that's happening, and it has to do with how we choose to see each other. I think that comes out of a reading of the book, perhaps. With Gauguin, there is, I think, an interesting side where he's trying to find himself in this sort of other, this exoticized other. And then, with Tarsila, she's trying to define another, as in define what it is to be Brazilian in the 1920s.

**CB:** Franklin talks about a 1928 manifesto that shaped Tarsila's perspective and introduces some of the 21st century views in the biennial.

**FS:** That relates very much to a manifesto called the **Cannibalist Manifesto** or *Antropofagia*, and this idea of eating the other in order to show one's true self. She's talking about the Brazilian identity around Africa and

Europe, and it can't be one without the other. They're coming at these ideas about the other from two different viewpoints, from two different places in the world, from two different cultural experiences. I think there's something interesting in that dialogue.

Moving forward from there, there are several nodes of sustained thought or interest that artists will address. You have artists who are interested in crime and punishment, for instance, in a very universal way. Artists who are interested in the South. In fact, there is a smaller exhibition that is part of the general exhibition called **Basquiat and the Bayou**, which is very much about the American South, about the Mississippi River and the area around New Orleans.

And then there are other ways of addressing that idea, and to think about the Caribbean, to think about South America, to think about Central America, to think about Latin America as a node, and not as the margin, but as a center.



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Zydeco*, 1984, detail, Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans, 2014

**CB:** The Lower Ninth Ward, a neighborhood devastated by Hurricane Katrina, was the focal point of Prospect.1 interventions.

I know that Prospect.1 and Prospect.2, as well, had a relationship with different communities. **Mark Bradford** did a project within a community and **Wangechi Mutu** did the project in the house that was missing [had been swept away in the flood], and I'm wondering—how are the artists working in communities or within environments this time?

**FS:** Well, in the past, those specifically were all in the Lower Ninth Ward, and we have something going on there, but it's not by any means a central focus of this exhibition. The show will take place in most of the institutional venues, including the **Contemporary Art Center**, the **New Orleans Museum of Art**, the **Ogden Museum of Southern Art**, the **Newcomb at Tulane**, and then there are these other positions around the city that artists have been working on for quite some time as far as site-specific projects.

**CB:** Franklin introduces several of the artists involved in neighborhood projects.



Mark Bradford, *Mithra*, 2008, Prospect.1 New Orleans

**FS:** There are several of those at play. One is with the duo **Los Jaichackers** [Julio Cesar Morales and Eamon Ore-Girón]. Another is with the artist **Theaster Gates**. Another big one is with the artist **Glenn Kaino**. **Mary-Ellen Carroll** has been working on one for a long time. And all of these are kind of spread out, and I think that they are part of the sort of surprises, the poetry. I don't know exactly, in some cases, what we're going to see. And one of the ideas behind that though that touches upon, I think, what you're mentioning of the Lower Ninth Ward past experiences, is that there is a concern within this exhibition for leaving something in New Orleans and not just doing a biennial that comes and goes.

For instance, there are a couple of ephemeral works that are going to change people's lives, like literally, like entrepreneurial setups that will allow some people to become entrepreneurs long after the biennial is gone. Mary-Ellen Carroll's project is to provide Internet in a neighborhood that doesn't have it, which is almost unheard of at this point in the game, in this country.



Mary-Ellen Carroll, *Potential Super Wifi Nodes, Public Utility 2.0*, 2014, sketch

**CB:** We talk about the challenges that come with the biennial model, among them sustainability. I'm thinking that globally, the biennial is a problematic platform.

**FS:** Yes, I don't know. It's the circumstance. Each one is specific to its circumstances. Support comes from different places in different ways. I think it's a matter of being able to work from a standpoint that allows for the form to grow and to change and to be dynamic in the way that it relates to its host city. So we are tapping into the cultural life of New Orleans. Like, you can't do a show there and not think about music and not think about food. I mean these are important aspects of it. And I believe that plays an important role in that those kinds of ties are important to sustainability.



Glenn Kaino, *Tank*, 2014, Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans

**CB:** Where does *Prospect* fit into the international conversation of biennials?

**FS:** It's a pretty amazing city in terms of its uniqueness, not unlike a Venice. It's a city that has a lot of cultural activity. It has a lot to offer as a site of disruption in some ways or as a site of interest in terms of American history, in terms of American politics, in terms of right now, and so it has something to offer to a conversation that is not only about contemporary art. It's built into the city and has been situated, at least in the prior exhibitions, as an international biennial that came about in the wake of Katrina, but with an eye on **Venice**, an eye on **Documenta**. So that is the foundation that Dan [Cameron] set that I've tried to use as a platform. I think it can be a really viable voice.



Cathy Byrd recording with Franklin Sirmans, New York, March 2014

**CB:** Finally, I'd really love to know what you hope to leave behind as your own curatorial statement, so to speak.

**FS:** Just one good show people want to see, which helps them experience the city more. With the mix of artists we're working with, people will be really curious about coming to the exhibition. And that the platform provided is one that honors the city in which it takes place while also opening up a dialogue or a conversation with everywhere else. So I hope that's what people are left with.

## remy jungerman «»

september 18, 2014



Artist Remy Jungerman

**CATHY BYRD:** Today, we feature a conversation recorded during my residency in Amsterdam. On the day I arrived, I met artist **Remy Jungerman** quite by chance on the sidewalk outside his studio.

I soon discovered that he's an artist from Suriname. His small country sits on the northeast coast of South America. It's a former Dutch colony with a rich and interesting history.

Suriname is a place I knew not much about until I started looking at Remy's art. Though he's been living in the Netherlands for more than 20 years, I see Europe and Africa in his work. So I asked him, what was it like to study art in his home country?

**REMY JUNGEMAN:** Being born and raised in Suriname didn't have much influence on my work because, those days, we were educated at art school and the whole context was actually based on the development of modernism and what happened in Europe in contemporary art. Afterwards, I started to think more about aesthetics, which do come from the surrounding in which I was raised and born. And that started influencing my work. But, in the beginning, I was very much focused on what was happening in the West.

**CB:** A recurring theme in your work is religion and ritual. Tell me about that.

**RJ:** That theme also came into my work the last seven years, maybe I can say, and it came because I have a fascination for the aesthetics of Afro religions.

**CB:** Remy explains why he's drawn to African altars and ritual objects.

**RJ:** I'm taken by that kind of aesthetic in African religion, which is also a practice in Suriname by people of African descent who came to Suriname as slaves. And what's important also in my connection is that I am the descendant of a **Maroon** called Broos, Captain Broos, who fought for his freedom in the Suriname rainforest. And, until today, there

is a ritual place in Suriname, a physical altar where there are still ancestral rituals. Being connected to this history and looking at religion in an aesthetic form does influence my work nowadays.

I call them altar pieces, which are wall installations, existing of a grid. And on that grid, I put a shelf. And, on top of the shelf, I add elements, bottles which you might connect to the African religion. And, in that way, I make an art piece, which stands alone, but, at a certain level, is connected to religion.

I'm also working with collage, paper collage. In the paper collage, I'm also adding elements, which do come from a specific religion. Sometimes, it's not only the Surinamese Afro religion, which is called **Winti**. I also add elements of **Voodoo**, which is connected to Haiti. I've been traveling in Africa searching for the real Voodoo thing. I've been to the roots of Voodoo in Benin, and those elements or those things I saw during my journey are also aesthetic elements in my collage and my wall installations I call altar pieces.

**CB:** We talk about modernist geometry and the grid patterns in the ritual ceremony clothing back home.



Remy Jungerman, *Transition Obeah*, 2013

**RJ:** I'm connecting it with modernism, and modernism is actually the strict grid form or abstract geometric forms, used by artists like **[Piet] Mondrian** and the grids are — originally they are patterns of clothes people wear during rituals. Lately, I've been doing, for instance, silk screens, which are based on clothes, which are large, abstract, geometric forms, which the Surinamese Maroons have used as clothes, dresses, and they've made them themselves. They originated, I think, in quilts from Africa.

**CB:** We talked about the fact that, at one point in your career, you felt that your work was just appreciated for being work, good work. But then, at a point, in the Netherlands, they passed a law to provide more opportunities for artists of the diaspora. And you noted how everything changed when they made a distinction between your art and that of other artists in Amsterdam.

**RJ:** I think that's evidence of a colonial residue, and the fact that, before 2000, our work had already been noticed. When I say our work, I mean artists with a Surinamese background who had been educated in Holland, maybe sometimes even born here. But at that time, you were just a good artist, and the museum bought your work. People were interested in what you were doing. Until one moment when a change came and they gave artist of the diaspora a sort of [recognition]—made them special.

Doing that caused a change in our development in the sense that people started to think that we were good because of the political influences. So I felt like that was one step backwards.

But nowadays, I believe that if you continue doing your work, in the end, people will see the quality of it. And then, I realize that I'm an artist who has come from abroad. In my culture or context, that's only a connection to a Western development in the art scene. But in the elements I'm using in my work, there is no [art historical] reference. There is no modern art writing about the Surinamese or African context. The only reference you can make is connecting modernism, connecting your development to European art. That's maybe why I also decide to work on this reference, to find ways to show how you create your own history, even what has not been written.

**CB:** Toads were a part of the natural environment where Remy grew up. It turns out that toads can be inspiring. In Suriname, a couple of years ago, Remy created a public art installation in his hometown featuring 21 knee-high toads.

**RJ:** Well, a toad is, it's a memory since my childhood, and toads were things which were always there in your natural surrounding. But where I grew up as a child, I was always protecting this toad because friends were throwing stones at toads or whatever, or blew them up.

I was protecting them in the sense that you should not kill the toad because, "God's going to punish you!" I always remember that, and I also got a nickname because of the fact that I protected toads.

**CB:** What was your nickname?

**RJ:** "Talapi," and it's like "Godou au straffen you," and that's the Suriname language, which means "God is going to punish you!"

I was fortunate to do the residency, to do this specific residency in Suriname in the place, Moengo, which is 100 kilometers from Paramaribo [capital of Suriname], and it happened to be that I was born and raised in this place. They asked me to do an installation during my residency of 3 months, and the idea came to do 21 toads.

I built them out of concrete. I made them first in clay. I made a mold and then cast 21 toads for a specific location in Suriname. I felt great about this outdoor installation because I felt like, for me, myself, it's a monument. And it's also a once in a lifetime chance you're getting to build a piece in the place where you were born.

**CB:** At first, Remy wasn't sure if the community would like his project.

**RJ:** In the beginning, I was afraid of how people were going to interpret this piece. Are they going to be afraid of it because, in toads, there are evil spirits? At the same time, the toad also represents wealth, brings people wealth, brings them more money. In Chinese culture, they have the idea of *feng shui*, which tells you the best place for the money frog. This idea also played a role in Surinamese culture. In our town, people thought that a family that was good at business was growing a toad in their house. And it turned out to be a very large toad. We always wanted to see this toad, so with my brothers always went at the back yard of these people, but never ever saw this toad.

**CB:** A symbol of good fortune in the neighborhood and the site of ceremonial photos, Remy's toads are on their way to becoming real.



*Remy Jungerman's model for the public art project Happy Land Apuku Return Blue Eye, 2012, Amsterdam*

**RJ:** All across the area where I placed the toads, people were selling watermelons. And they had a great business because there are many people coming to see the toads! Nowadays I heard also that there are people going there to do their wedding photos.

So I made the toads, and then I washed them with blue water, the blue ultramarine pigment called "blauwsel," which people use in the wash to whiten the clothes. In the Winti religion, they use it also to protect against evil spirits. So I washed them first with blue pigment liquid, and then I gave them another layer of kaolin. Kaolin is a kind of clay for porcelain. I made a ritual by adding the liquid.

What's going to happen now is that the rain is going to wash the white and the blue away, but for sure there will be areas on the frog where the rain doesn't reach. So I think what's going to happen in five years is that this toad is going to be real in the sense that mushrooms are going to grow on top of it, and there will be white parts. So it will be very colorful, this toad, in five to ten years.

## prospect new orleans ◀)

tavares strachan, gary simmons, margaret thomas

november 20, 2014



Tavares Strachan, *You Belong Here*, 2014, Esplanade Avenue Wharf, New Orleans

**TIMOTHY “SPEED” LEVITCH:** Take a moment to appreciate the concrete beneath your feet. The concrete is, after all, the epidermis of the great city teacher New Orleans. And, as you walk the streets of the city, you should know you’re also massaging the city’s flesh. And when you’re skipping and enjoying yourself, you’re caressing the city’s skin. And when you’re appreciating the beauty of the place and moving to your own beat, you are actually eroticizing the city teacher, creating goose bumps that become potholes. And every traffic jam in the city becomes only a tantric orgy, complete with horns and exhaust. Let’s roll!

**CATHY BYRD:** I’m Cathy Byrd, and this is Fresh Talk. Today we’re in New Orleans, Louisiana. Tour guide, **Timothy “Speed” Levitch**, believes that here, even the concrete beneath your feet offers a sensual experience. In fact, vivid encounters with culture and history await you on every corner. The French Quarter and the Garden District, Mardi Gras, and the Jazz Festival are all known and loved around the world, but the idea of the city as a destination for international contemporary art? That’s a fairly new concept.

In October 2008, three years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, the art world gathered here to explore a new citywide exhibition: *Prospect New Orleans*.

Fast-forward to 2014, third time’s the charm. *Prospect* is beginning to feel at home. In this episode, we take you to two project sites where we found a deep connection between art and community.

We begin at sunset on Esplanade Avenue Wharf with a crowd that has come to behold artist **Tavares Strachan’s** monumental message to New Orleans. From the Bahamas, now based in New York, Tavares wrote the words “You belong here,” in violet neon on a sign that’s 100 feet long and 22 feet high. This sign sits atop a barge that will float on the Mississippi River at the edge of the city for 3 months.

**TAVARES STRACHAN:** I think it’s a very friendly and loving and welcoming statement. But, at the same time, I think it’s asking a lot of kind of hardcore questions like, “Who are you?,” “Where do you belong?,” and “How do you define ‘here’?”



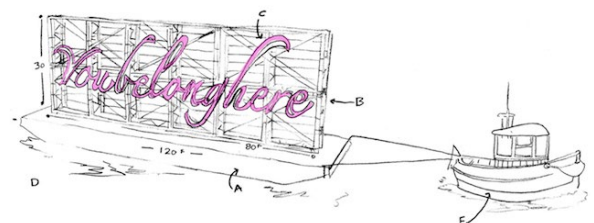
Timothy Speed Levitch leading tour to view Tavares Strachan’s project: *You Belong Here*, October 2014, Esplanade Avenue, New Orleans

**CB:** And that’s what this whole Prospect.3 is about. “New Orleans,” says Tavares, “is a key player in this project.”

**TS:** None of this would be possible without New Orleans, so the piece is literally produced by New Orleans. It couldn’t...I don’t know if it could exist in any other scenario. It’s totally a result of being here.

**CB:** Philosophically, where do you think the project stands? What about its relationship specifically to New Orleans?

**TS:** My grandmother used to say, “Sometimes you have to show people the termites in the wall,” because you don’t see them. So it’s always stuck with me, like thinking about artmaking as a way of giving access to where there is no access, or illuminating something that might have been sort of hidden away. And there’s a lot of that. I mean in history we get it wrong all the time, but yet we hold history up on a mantel like it’s this piece of poetic justice—is how I see it. And so, it resonates with New Orleans, but I think New Orleans is a city teacher. I think it has a lot of lessons for a lot of other cities.



Tavares Strachan, *You Belong Here*, 2014, sketch

**CB:** We found another Prospect.3 project on Claiborne Avenue in the shadow of Interstate 10. I-10 is infamous. In 1967, the highway cut New Orleans in half, disrupting life in many of the city's communities. **The Tremé District** was one of them. **Margaret Thomas** and her family are determined to revive one corner of the neighborhood where she grew up, the former bank building known as Tremé Market Branch.



*Gary Simmons, Recapturing Memories of the Black Ark, 2014. Crowd gathering inside Tremé Market Branch building for Beans performance.*

**MARGARET THOMAS:** We want to restore this historical building. We've owned it for a little over two and a half years. We have been searching and applying for various funding.

The building is zoned as a cultural arts theater. Our intention for the building is to house cultural art that is specific to New Orleans, and we also want to attract tourism into the Tremé neighborhood. It's one of the last neighborhoods in New Orleans that doesn't have a true, strong tourist base, and we're walking distance from the French Quarter.

We are so excited. In looking at the lineup of galleries that were chosen as sites, we are in the major league. So having Prospect.3 here just is breathing the life into it that we need. So from this point on, in the state that it's in, we will continue to do community events here. We've got a stage. We're claiming that stage.



*Tremé Market Branch building.*



*Gary Simmons, Recapturing Memories of the Black Ark, 2014. Beans performing inside Tremé Market Branch building.*

**CB:** New York artist **Gary Simmons** is the man behind that stage. Gary worked with local musician John Crown to assemble a platform, spotlights, and a speaker tower from scavenged materials. The dub sensation referred to as "**Beans**" flew in from New York to celebrate the new performance space.

**BEANS:** ...don't you understand that a chain in command is the chain ... with your understanding? The command....

**GARY SIMMONS:** Oh, it was brilliant. I mean it all came together. I think the space was fantastic. The acoustics of the room were -- you couldn't ask for anything more than that. It was really old school. We kind of ran the electricity out the front door and down the street and into the bar, *Paulie's* next door, and those guys were really cool in letting us do that. And Beans, once he turned on the speakers, it was just, you know, it was magic.

**CB:** The community is embracing this.

**GS:** The community completely embraced it, and I was really interested in doing that. I didn't want to just drop something like an alien spaceship into a neighborhood. I wanted it to be part of the neighborhood, and Tremé is loaded with a lot of different musicians. You know, the folks that own the building are really involved in programming it and getting other people to play in there, so it's not just about reggae or hip-hop. It's about zydeco or second line, jazz, blues, or any of the other genres of music that are down in New Orleans.

## 03 // l'avenir montreal biennial



*L'avenir* (in English, “what is to come”) is the 2014 edition of the **Montreal Biennial**, or, La Biennale de Montréal (BNLMTL), on view from October 22, 2014 through April 1, 2015. Imagined as a forum for contemporary artists who are socially responsive or speak to society’s current challenges, *L'avenir* has its finger on the pulse of next trends, with an eye to Montreal’s past, present, and future. BNLMTL began in 1998 under the aegis of the **Centre international d’art contemporain de Montréal** (CIAC), which organized the first seven iterations, until BNLMTL became independent in 2013 and partnered with the **Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal** (MAC), presenters of the now defunct Quebec Triennial. Organized by four curators, and including 23 new commissions, the 2014 Montreal Biennial presented the work of 50 artists from 22 countries in 14 venues across the city.

*featured image: Klara Hobza, Diving Through Europe, 2010-2040*



# BNL MTL

## profiles

**Sylvie Fortin** is a curator, critic, editor, and arts administrator based in Montréal. A Quebec native, she was Executive and Artistic Director of La Biennale de Montréal from 2013 to 2017. She previously served as executive director and editor-in-chief of ART PAPERS and held curatorial roles at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and the Ottawa Art Gallery.

**Jillian Mayer** is a Miami-based artist exploring contemporary issues of privacy, online identity, authorship, and information sharing. Riffing on the pitfalls of technology, her projects explore the tension between how we present ourselves digitally and in real life. Her work often requires the viewer's complicity and participation. Mayer's photographs, videos, online experiments, drawings and installations have been shown at museums around the world, and her films screened at Sundance Film Festival, SXSW, and the New York Film Festival.

**Andrea Bowers** is a Los Angeles-based artist whose work is infused with feminist and political activism. Her video and installation art is a call-to-action addressing hot-button issues such as the environment, rape culture, gender discrimination, and immigration. Bowers's work was showcased at the 2004 Whitney Biennial and has been exhibited in museums around the world.

## reading list

1. Murtaza Vali, "**Revamped Montreal Biennial Looks to the Future, in More Ways than One**," *Art in America*, November 7, 2014.
2. Saelan Twerdy, "**Future Forecast: The Montreal Biennale 2014**," *MOMUS*, November 10, 2014.
3. Cait Munro, "**At Montreal Biennial Artists Tackle Sexual Politics In the 21st Century**," *artnet*, November 3, 2014.

## sylvie fortin ◀▶

june 12, 2014



Sylvie Fortin, Artistic Director, Montreal Biennial

**CATHY BYRD:** Today, we're on the top floor of a hotel in Manhattan with **Sylvie Fortin**, the artistic director of the Montreal Biennial. To set the stage for our conversation, Sylvie describes Montreal's cultural landscape.

**SYLVIE FORTIN:** Montreal is a city that is linguistically divided, so I think that your listeners in the States will understand the presence of racial segregation in some cities. We don't have that so much. What we have is linguistic separation, so to bring together the Francophone communities, in the plural, and the Anglophone communities, is a tall order. Thankfully, I think we have the desire and also the knowledge and the kind of fluidity to navigate both of these communities.

Within each of these linguistic communities, there are also great variations. For example, in Montreal, in the last decade, there's been massive immigration from France and Belgium because of the dire state of the economy in these countries. We've witnessed this massive immigration of people from Paris and Brussels.

There's also, since the late 1970s, massive immigration from Western Africa and Northern Africa. That has shaped the linguistic landscape in terms of French communities. Typically, cultural institutions tend to not address themselves very much to these immigrants. For us, that is very, very important.

**CB:** Anglophone communities will add a dimension to the biennial.

**SF:** As far as the Anglophone community, it tends to be a mostly transient community. People come to Montreal because of our four universities. People come from all over the world to go to McGill University and to Concordia University, so they tend to stay anywhere between four to seven years and then move on. It's a very different dynamic, so we are working with the universities as well to try to engage those transient communities.

**CB:** The title of the exhibition is completely on point with today's politics in Quebec.

**SF:** Quebec politics are always very interesting. We just had an election a couple of weeks ago. When I moved back to Montreal in September, I thought all this sort of nationalism was behind us, and this place had gone forward, and was poised and very open to the world. But, as soon as I moved back, there was an election, and the PQ [Parti Québécois] government got back in power. The PQ government is, at this point, fairly outdated in its views of possible futures for Quebec.

Working with a theme like *L'avenir* is a perfect platform right now. The exhibition is "*L'avenir*," which translates as "what is to come," so it's not just a future, but it is that which is just coming. The subtitle is *Looking Forward*, so it's not about some fantasies or some kind of "future from the past."

It's not about jetpacks and moving to other galaxies. It's about having feet firmly grounded and looking. This is about visual art practices, so it's about looking at a range of possible futures that we can debate. Fifty artists are going to allow us to do that.

**CB:** The biennial explores complicated subjects.

**SF:** It's a very generous exhibition that deals with, of course, topics like the environment, but not in a way that is kind of pointing fingers or saying this is doomsday and we're beyond the point of no return, which I don't think is very useful as a position. Yes, it's good to sound the alarm, but unless you can also offer some possible solutions, then it's like my hands are tied; why should I bother? Right?

I think most of the artists that we've selected are coming to these big problems. The economy is another one, of course. The political landscape is another one. The future of art, its efficacy, what can art actually do. Lots of claims are being made all the time about activism, about efficacy, and about community work, and questioning what is actually possible.

We have a team of four curators and, in a way, this is a result of this year-one and this collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art. And, in collaborating with the Musée [museum], it became obvious that we needed to integrate people from the inside for many reasons. Building this team allowed us to make sure that we could cover a lot of ground. These four curators brought all of their knowledge and research, over a number of years, to this project. And it really shows.

**CB:** In the way that you're approaching the biennial, artists from Montreal or from Canada will be seen as major players on the international scene.

**SF:** Yes, and also I should mention that, in the collaboration with the museum, what it meant concretely is that there was a triennial of Quebec art that existed. And so, the collaboration with the biennial means that the triennial will no longer exist. The resources that were allocated to this vast operation that focused strictly on Quebec artists is no longer there. So, in this first year, I thought that it was really

important to be particularly attentive to that reality because that's history that we have inherited, and to do some solid research about what was actually going on in Quebec.

What I should also say is that what's really healthy about working with curators who are not from a place is that they can really see the scene differently. The Quebec artists who are in the show, many of them have important international careers, but they've never shown in Montreal. They are completely unknown locally. In this Year One, yes, there is a particular attentiveness to the local, but it's also presenting a different view of the local, a view of the local that addresses what we were talking about, the diversity of people who are in the city, this kind of linguistic messiness, but also the presence of aboriginal peoples, which is very important, but often overlooked.

**CB:** We talk about **Krzysztof Wodiczko's** community-based concept. The Polish artist is known internationally for his monumental projects.



*Krzysztof Wodiczko, 2009, Guests, Polish Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennale*

**SF:** We're working with Krzysztof Wodiczko, who is doing a great new piece for us. For this piece, when I was talking about broader collaboration, there is a kind of entertainment district in Montreal that programs a number of things. We collaborated with them because they have the best projectors, and they have all the equipment in place. But sometimes, the content can be a little on the light side.

It meant coming together, saying we can deliver a really potent work, and you have all the equipment. It's a co-production, so they're also investing half of the money in this new piece. The piece will ultimately become part of the collection of the museum. It's a win-win situation.

**CB:** What will unfold over these 76 days?

**SF:** Madness! Intensity! Delight! We are working right now on the public programs, and we are, as I mentioned, partnering with a number of institutions like the **Canadian Center for Architecture**, the **Museum of Fine Arts**, and universities. We'll have, at our disposal, a variety of spaces and their readymade connections and communities, but also working with other communities like through Krzysztof.

He's working with the **Native Friendship Center** and with the homeless population right around the neighborhood. So, we're working very closely with them as well.

There will be a combination of talks, screenings, and performances. In addition, part of the public programs that we're presenting are developed by our partners. So, when we're working with transient populations, we're basically becoming a platform for them to develop programs around the exhibition for us. Because we're talking about *l'avenir*, no one holds all the knowledge, and no one can articulate all of the questions, so part of the money in the envelope for the public programs is geared towards these community-generated programs.

**CB:** In one of the statements I read, there are other reference points to Montreal's presence in the universe; the city is where the World's Fair took place and the futurist architecture of **Buckminster Fuller**. I'm wondering what artists have seized on that topic or are looking back at history as a way to see the future of Montreal.

**SF:** Well, there's one artist, a young man from Montreal. His name is **Etienne Tremblay-Tardif**. He is working around...I don't know how you say it in English, but in Atlanta it's called "Spaghetti Junction"...you know, where all the highways kind of converge. Well, this was very much a symbol of that Montreal futurism. It's called the "**Échangeur Turcot**," and it's a many, many, many level grandiose structure that is now falling apart and actually is being taken down.

His work connects that form and that thinking about the urban fabric with the Canadian identity quest and the sovereignty movement and its demise now. Looking at both of these as things that are not too far away, but no longer valid. Of course, growing up with a **Buckminster Fuller dome** in your backyard changes very much the way that you see the world and see your place in the world, and that is a reference that is picked up in a number of works.

**CB:** We consider the meaning of artist **Klara Hobza's** diving practice.

**SF:** In her multi-year project, she is scuba diving through Europe. She started a couple of years ago in Rotterdam and will follow the rivers all the way out to Constanta, Romania. So from the North Sea to the Black Sea. It's that sort of total commitment project that humorously and quite playfully is rehashing the whole territorial conquest, the whole histories of Europe, but also a project that is very much asking questions about the future of art.

What does it mean if someone embarks on a project that may take 50 years? How does it shape, then, what we think of as contemporary practice? Does it have to be performative in this way? Does it have to be durational in this way?

**CB:** At least two of the projects are venturing to the North Pole.

**SF:** **Kevin Schmidt** has a project that he started in 2010, and it's called *In Search of the Northwest Passage* [a sea route that connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago]. He created a billboard and set it out on an iceberg in the Northwest Passage, and the project will be finished when he finds it again, if he ever finds it again!

We're also working with an artist collective called **Arctic Perspective Initiative**, and that's **Matthew Biederman** from Montreal and **Marko Peljhan** from Slovenia. Their project has, of course, a manifestation within the realm of art, but it's premised on something much, much greater, which is the empowerment of populations around the Arctic Circle. They are developing technologies, such as drones, other kinds of imaging technology, but also hydroponic structures to have food diversity, as these people move forward. It's really working with communities, of course, in Northern Canada, but around the globe, around the Arctic.

**CB:** I notice that you're working with **Adaptive Actions**, whom we have featured on **Fresh Art International**.

**SF:** Yes, we're working with **Jean-François Prost** and **Jean-Maxime Dufresne**, and this will be a project in public space. For them and for another artist, **Abbas Akhavan**, the works are very site-responsive and very context specific. These are homeless proposals. They will find their space, their time, and their forum, as we get closer to the event. Again, this is a very important part of possible future practices.

site for experimentation. At the end of the day, there are so many square feet that need to be filled. I think that there is a certain predetermination of practice that happens this way. I think, also, finding alternative spaces or kind of warehouse spaces is still about real estate. Hopefully we can, not negate the real estate, but understand it in an expanded field that allows us to think of variously sited, spatial and temporal interventions in a different way.



Abbas Akhavan, *Fatigues*, 2014-15, detail, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal



Matthew Biederman and Marko Peljhan, *Arctic Perspective*, 2009, Image from 2009 research throughout Foxe Basin, Nunavut, Canada

**CB:** What kind of portrait will the exhibition create of art that is to come?

**SF:** What I hope is that we come out with a sense that art has great agency, but something that's a bit more lucid than the grand political dreams that we perhaps sometimes would like to make for it. I hope it's open. I hope we make discoveries and we're able to articulate modes of agency that are a bit different.

I think about what biennials can do because they are not so connected to a physical space and to real estate that needs to be filled. A museum or even an artist run space or even a university gallery, although they can be laboratories and a

## jillian mayer ◀▶

june 12, 2014



Artist Jillian Mayer with a photo cutout she used to photoshop nude selfies

**CATHY BYRD:** Today's global access to mobile devices and the Internet has created the opportunity for a new "virtual rite of passage," the nude selfie. But while young women take charge of how they photograph their bodies, they often lose control when they click *send* to share them.

One Miami-based artist has immersed herself in this phenomenon. For more than a year, **Jillian Mayer** sifted through thousands of nude self-portraits on Google, Tumblr, and **revenge porn** sites. She photoshopped hundreds of the images she found, replacing the faces of the nude selfies with her own.

**JILLIAN MAYER:** I really wanted to find different types of women. I also wanted to find ones that weren't necessarily ones that looked like they were mass marketed. The reason I'm interested in the selfie as opposed to a nude portrait of a female is because ideally or inherently, if it is a selfie, it was directed and executed by the person in the photo. Then, if it was accessible to me, it's because that person sent it to someone else. It wasn't a personal photo that was to remain on their cell phone. It was one that was meant to be shared. Most of the time, in my research, nude selfies were not intended to be mass distributed

**CB:** There is a certain age group reflected. You chose an age range.

**JM:** I chose anyone that looked over 18.

**CB:** You weren't looking on adult friend sites. You were looking on mainstream Tumblr, Google. Were you looking on hidden sites or sites you have to subscribe to?

**JM:** No. I was going for public sites, especially revenge porn ones because those are the ones that are uploading pictures of females where they weren't authorized. I recapture and reclaim the images of these girls.

**CB:** Scrolling through the images that Jillian shared with me, I realized there's something really positive here. In their poses, these young women show what they love about their bodies. Therefore they control the male gaze when they snap a photo.

**JM:** I think it's great that people document themselves. And, so many of the women in this batch, or the women that were most easy to find, have really beautiful bodies, and they're all really different. That was exciting to see. I don't want to use the word "objectify," but they definitely center themselves as the main event in the photo. They are all taken with acknowledgment, yet after that is when the information kind of gets blurry.

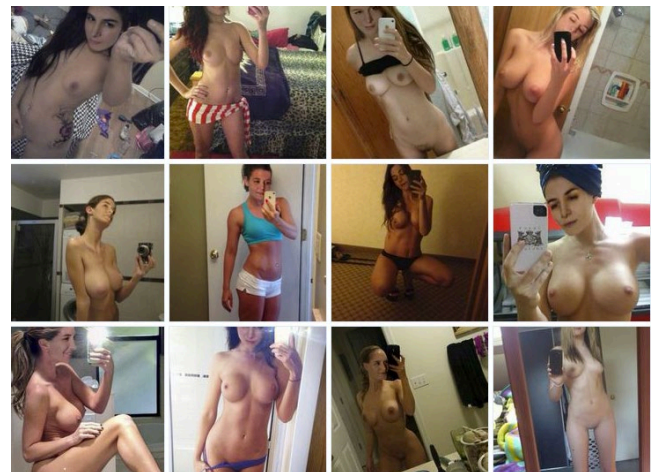
**CB:** There's no shortage of nude selfies on the Web. In fact, Jillian had over a million naked bodies to choose from.

**JM:** In this mass group of photos, it was really interesting to me because you can't help but feel that some malice occurred. I'm not saying in every photo because there are lots of people and websites for contributors to upload their own selfies. But I have a feeling that a lot of these were somehow leaked or given away without authorization.

**CB:** In her search, one find was a nude selfie advice column for teens.

**JM:** These are tips that are made to protect young people and, particularly young girls. One of the top tips was: "Don't include your face." I thought, oh, okay, obviously that's for there to be no identity with this naked body. But, then I thought, how funny is that! This post is giving these tips, and the first tip is to decapitate yourself, to remove your identity. It's expecting that these pictures will come back in a bad way, in a way that you didn't intend. It just kind of sent me off into thinking about what could be potential ways to control the information while still being exhibited.

**CB:** Jillian reflects on global concerns about information sharing and privacy.



Jillian Mayer, *400 Nudes*, 2014, screenshots

**JM:** The network of information and identity is something that I really tune into with this work. Also, by placing my face upon each image, in a way I universalize the online naked, the nude selfie. Everyone is the same after a while. What I'm really interested in is the disruption of information even on such a minute level as one nude self-portrait.

**CB:** Is any one of these pictures actually you?

**JM:** Yes. There are a couple that are me, and then there are a couple that are me with distortions, so a photoshop manipulation of features.



Jillian Mayer, *400 Nudes*, 2014, screenshot

**CB:** In fact, photoshopping is one way that Jillian envisions safely sharing intimacy online.

**JM:** If everyone could disrupt photos, is that the future of the online nude? If I wanted to share a photo of myself with someone, would the best and safest way to go about it be creating maybe ten images and where the proportions are distorted or I've taken different body parts from different people? It becomes a game of authenticity and identity confusion. I find that really interesting.

**CB:** Did you have a team with you for your photo shoots, or were you shooting selfies?

**JM:** I had a team of people helping. It's really difficult to do a lot of my media projects on my own. I'm often dependent on many talented friends and professionals.

**CB:** Was your idea that it should look as much as possible like it did originally, or were you trying to make it look slightly off?

**JM:** They're supposed to be as good as possible, but most of the time they're not going to look perfect. Some of them are actually even quite bad, but they're not supposed to be real. They're supposed to be an image that was altered.

**CB:** When she goes public with her project, Jillian understands that she will likely compromise her future.

**JM:** For me now, my Google image results will be ruined. If someone was looking me up, perhaps, online or my Google image results, and they find a nude, perhaps that could jeopardize me from something. Now there would be a certain impression of me. It's kind of like a scandal, right,

that you have this photo online of your body. We all have a body. Yet, there's a lot of shame that's wrapped up into having your naked photos online.

**CB:** Jillian's risky work seems just about perfect for the 2014 Montreal Biennial considering the citywide exhibition theme is *l'avenir* (in English, "what is to come").

**JM:** My project is an experiment dealing with very timely and very contemporary issues. It's a fluid project, and the outcome of it is not 100% trackable. I think that it's reflective of how the Internet works. When I release this project, once it's out of my hands, I have no control.

We're now constantly dealing with issues and having to come to conclusions on where we stand with privacy and information sharing. I guess this project fits into that category. I don't want it to sound like a pessimistic project, but I think it just brings up a lot of these concerns of the future.

**CB:** Montreal's contemporary art museum will display hundreds of Jillian's 3x5 inch nude photo prints. At the museum, you'll see that the artist has further exposed herself by leaving endless copies of the photo prints for you to take home.

**JM:** Viewers are allowed to take as many of these photographs with them as they like. For a lot of my projects, especially this one, it's important to have a physical and a digital existence. To me, it becomes more real and more interesting, especially for the confusion of information, if there are different iterations of a project.

**CB:** There's one more dimension in which it will appear, which would be websites, from what I understand. Where would I go to find these images online?

**JM:** Well, there will be a main site called [400Nudes.com](http://400Nudes.com) that will host all the images with no information, but they will also be disseminated through various other websites. I'm going to upload them back to revenge porn sites. I'm going to post them on Tumblr in places where I initially found these images from because I think that they should exist in some capacity alongside the originals.

**CB:** Where do you see this project leading you?

**JM:** This project will probably mean that I never get a job where it matters if they Google image search me, because a lot of the pictures will start coming up in my Google image feed. That's how I'll know if it's successful!

I'm not sure where this project will lead me. I've been playing a lot with identity online throughout my artmaking, so I think it's just another step into whatever I'm trying to figure out.

## andrea bowers, part 2 (09:48)

october 2, 2014



Artist **Andrea Bowers**

**ANDREA BOWERS:** Art has always been political. It's better for the market if we aren't like that because, right away, if you think about just in the States, I'm cutting out 50% of the people who might want to buy my work.

But that's not why I make art. I make art because I want to be in service of those political campaigns and activists that I believe in. That's my number one goal in my work. But I think about art too and what important things can art do.

**CATHY BYRD:** And what art can do in the future. You've set a pattern for yourself; you've had this pattern. That's who you are.

**AB:** Yeah, but you have to press yourself forward and try to do more and more, and take on more difficult subjects.

**CB:** Our conversation turns to Andrea's investigation of a tragic high school incident in her home state of Ohio. She talks about what motivated her to get involved.

**AB:** Well, it became a **very famous rape case** and trial because of the [hacker group] **Activists Anonymous** who found out about this horrific rape, which was that it was the end of summer for all those summer, high school parties where they all drink too much. It's all the football players. It was in the town of **Steubenville**, which is the number one high school football team in Ohio, and I'm from Ohio. Football is big.

A 16 year old girl passed out from drinking, and a group of football players dragged her from party to party, treated her like a sex toy, and raped her. What was even more horrific about it was that they tweeted it and posted videos on YouTube. They spread it all over social media, bragging about it.

That lack of a sense of humanity and ethics was one thing that I wanted to investigate in this project. But also, on a personal level, growing up in Ohio, one of the reasons I'm a feminist is because culturally it was so hard to be a girl and a young woman. It was understood that if you went out with a guy, they could do whatever they wanted to you.

It's rape culture, right? I grew up in that, and it affects your sense of identity. It's brutal, and we act as if this doesn't exist in America, in the United States, but it's a horrible thing. I just didn't want this to just disappear into the 24-hour news cycle.



Andrea Bowers, *#sweetjane*, 2014, video still

**CB:** When the case went to court, Andrea was there. She found a way to document the evidence that was presented. Her project, **#SweetJane**, presents the disturbing proof in a room-sized installation at the 2014 Montreal Biennial.

**AB:** I actually managed to weasel my way into the courtroom. They wouldn't let me have a video camera or anything. They wouldn't let me have my phone. They actually told me, because I was an artist, I couldn't draw any of the images of the people.

I was able to handwrite all of the text messages and Twitter feed. Well, they were almost all text messages that were used as evidence in the courtroom. It's literally a document of the rape. It's unbelievable. It tells the whole story. It's so violent and so atrocious, but I thought it was important to not be silenced and to always be remembered.

It's very painful to look at, and I was really nervous because I was using aesthetics. I didn't want to aestheticize a horrific subject, but I also wanted to give something to people that would be a motive. It was a really challenging piece and a really personal piece for me.



Andrea Bowers, *#sweetjane*, 2014. Installation view and detail of Courtroom Drawings (Steubenville Rape Case, Text Messages Entered As Evidence, 2013), Pomona College Museum of Art, Claremont CA.

**CB:** Andrea is working on her current project in Paris, France, with **Fantani Touré**. The singer from Mali dedicates herself to young women's rights. [*Ms. Touré died on December 3, 2014.*]



*Singer Fantani Touré*

**AB:** I'm working with a woman from Mali, who is from one of the first families of Mali. She is an African princess, and she was raised in a polygamist family. She was forced into a child marriage. She was married off very young. She is one of most famous singers in Mali, and she is stunning. I've been recording her singing. She sings political songs.

She has an organization that fights against genital mutilation. That's a tough taboo subject. And she's working against the forced marriage of young women—12, 13, 14 years old. I'm working with her right now. It's a pretty phenomenal experience.

**CB:** Andrea is joining Fantani [Touré] to offer new, economic opportunities to women in Mali whose job is to perform the excision procedures.

**AB:** They make traditional African dresses and jewelry and all sorts of beautiful items to raise money so these women won't perform these surgeries. They're teaching them other trades. They're beautiful.

So I've recorded her singing on the roof of Louis Vuitton, with a view of the whole city.

**CB:** This is a video project?

**AB:** It's in a video format right now. Also, the women in Mali are actually making some of my work. We're working together through crafts. I've done this before. I worked with Native American beaders, like beading circles, to talk about climate change.

**CB:** What are they creating for you?

**AB:** Her name is Fantani Touré, and her organization is called **Association Kolomba**. "Kolomba" means "well," because women carry water from the wells to their villages. She says something over and over again that I think is so beautiful. And she says it in French: "Don't Diminish Me." By "diminish," she means, "don't do these excisions on women." To me, that term, "don't diminish me," is so powerful. It gets back to this Steubenville rape case, right?

**CB:** It means so much, yes.

**AB:** So, they're making these beautiful, beaded wall works that say, in English and French, "Don't Diminish Me." I think it'll be really beautiful—a small, but touching installation.



*Andrea Bowers with Fantani Toure and the members of her association Kolomba Don't diminish me ; Aw Kana Fin Bo Na. 2014. Beads and leather. With the support of the Espace culturel Louis Vuitton*



## start a conversation

questions to spark a discussion

1. In what ways did the unique landscape and history of the American Southwest inform *Unsettled Landscapes*? What particular local issues or concerns did the artists and participating communities take into account in mounting these works?
2. How does *Prospect New Orleans* respond to the city in a post-Katrina world? How have the artists featured here chosen to engage with the city's recent or more distant past? In what ways do these artists foster a dialogue on major issues such as race, urban planning, and economic inequality? Listen to the episode linked in the box below to see how these concepts played out in the realization of *Prospect.4* (2018).
3. Which projects in *L'avenir* address Montreal's present and future identity as a linguistically divided city? How does that heritage and Quebec's current political environment inform the environment in which the biennial artists are presenting? What "futures" are envisioned in the works presented?
4. Despite the increasing prevalence of biennials worldwide, they are not necessarily a surefire way for cities and artists to turn a profit. In 2018, the **Montreal Biennial** filed for bankruptcy, two decades after its initial launch in 1998. The biennial's financial troubles also impacted its creditors, including many museums and other arts nonprofits. Funding and sustaining an art biennial is a huge fiscal challenge. What do cities like Santa Fe, Montreal, and New Orleans have to gain from these events? Why do they take the risk?
5. Before COVID, biennials were growing in popularity worldwide as a way to display and experience art in a range of cultural contexts. How do you anticipate biennials will change in a post-COVID world? What ongoing public health concerns might motivate the rise of more locally-organized grassroots exhibitions? How might international biennials create environments that control crowds and maintain social distancing while respecting the intention of artists whose projects invite interactivity? How might digital exhibitions create opportunities for meaningful remote art experiences?



### *Prospect.4* New Orleans: *The Lotus In Spite of the Swamp*

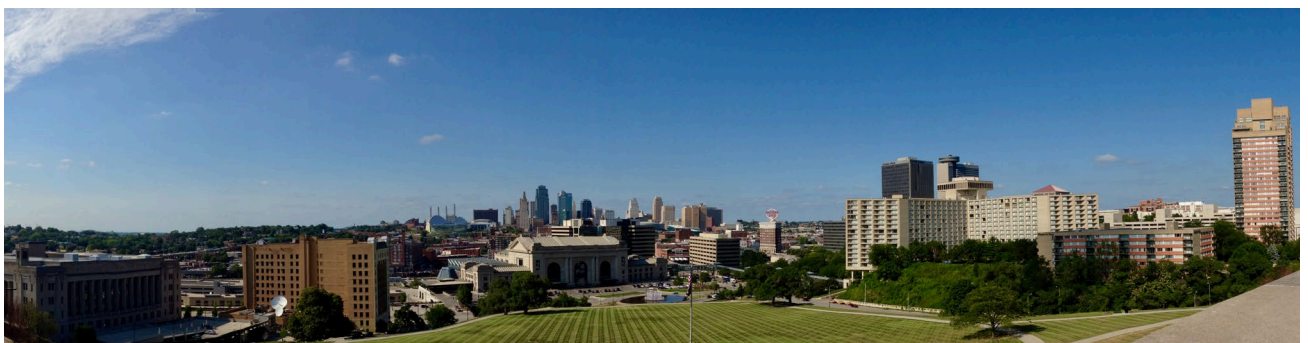
[Listen](#) along as we explore *Prospect.4* New Orleans. Titled *The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*, the fourth iteration in 2018 evokes the musical character of New Orleans and the surrounding natural environment—the bayous, lakes and wetlands near the mouth of the Mississippi River. Voices in this episode: *Prospect.4*'s artistic director [Trevor Schoonmaker](#), former executive director [Brooke Davis Anderson](#), artists [Quintron](#) and [Miss Pussycat](#), [Paulo Nazareth](#), [Sonia Boyce](#), [Rusty Lazer](#), [Darryl Montana](#), [Davia Nelson of the Kitchen Sisters](#), and more!

Photo: Darryl Montana, Mardi Gras Indian suit, detail, on display at the New Orleans Jazz Museum during *Prospect.4*.

## write on

invitations to respond in writing

1. Traditionally, artistic centers in the United States have tended to cluster on the coasts. However, in the last several years, major cities in the southern part of the country have begun to launch their own biennial-style exhibitions. For instance, **Kansas City Open Spaces 2018 brought public art** into a metropolis still largely segregated along racial lines. And in Tennessee, two women of color—Lauren Haynes, the curator of contemporary art at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, and Teka Selman, an independent curator—will organize a **new triennial** scheduled to launch in 2022. What do you think is the significance of biennials reaching the southern U.S.? How might these longer-standing recurring shows provide opportunities for open dialogue and civic discourse in the wake of nationwide Black Lives Matter protests in Spring 2020? **As more Confederate monuments topple**, how might organizers and artists seize this moment to reimagine the art of public spaces in the South?
2. Curators and artists involved in the three North American biennials that we explore in this Research Guide strive to connect artmaking to placemaking, rooting their concepts in the particulars of landscape and community. Over the span of a decade, Fresh Art International has often ventured outside the U.S. to explore other international exhibitions. Listen to one of our other art biennial episodes **here**. Write a short response comparing the exhibition you chose with those featured in this guide. Questions you may wish to consider: What issues or concepts do the curators and/or artists investigate? What common themes do you identify? How do these exhibitions bring together their local communities through art? If so, how? To dig a little deeper and research the background of international art exhibitions, the **Biennial Foundation** is a great place to start.
3. Now that you've begun to explore the biennial phenomenon, we invite you to consider some of the questions we posed in the introduction to this guide: Today, the unchallenged dominance of biennials in showcasing established and emerging artists within a variety of groundbreaking and sometimes controversial curatorial frameworks has provoked critical and popular backlash. What is the impact of decentralizing the art world? How might so many biennials affect the value of art? The level of artistic achievement? When will we reach a point of saturation, with too many “centers of critical gravity” competing for our attention, both in person and online? Or will broadening the field enable more accessible, rich and meaningful real-life and virtual art experiences for both art aficionados and the broader public?



*In 2018, Kansas City became the urban venue for Open Spaces, a major exhibition of public art launched by Prospect New Orleans founder Dan Cameron with the support of the Kansas City's Office of Culture and Creative Services and local philanthropists, and the engagement of local museums and cultural institutions. Image source: Sarah Rovang, 2013.*



Explore the multiethnic, multilingual reality of today's small world in *New Centers of Critical Gravity: Art Biennials in North America*

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