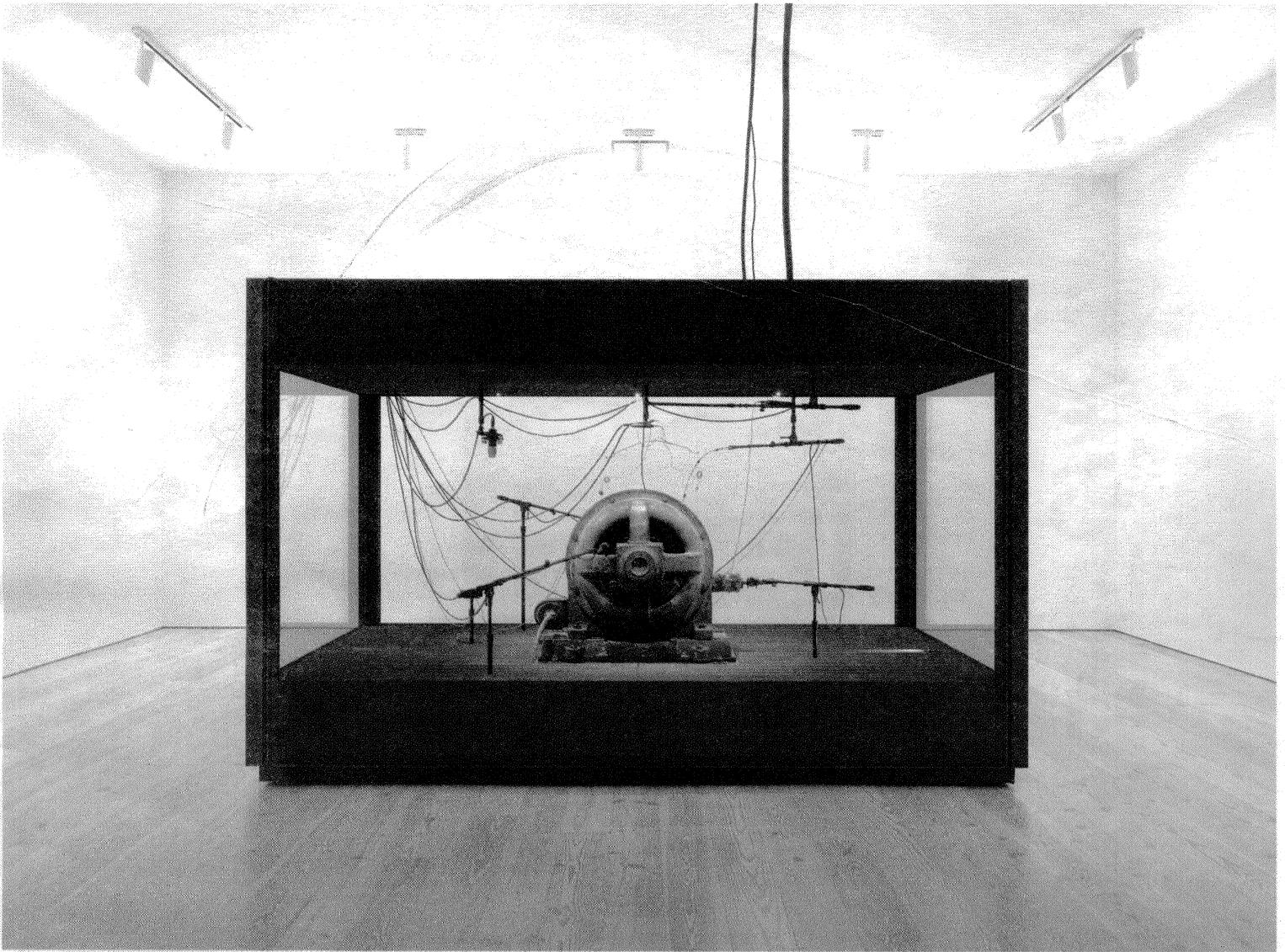


# BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

FEBRUARY 2019



**CHARLES STEIN**  
**JULIE MEHRETU**  
**IAN CHENG**  
**KEVIN BEASLEY**  
**DANIEL S. PALMER**

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## EJ HAUSER: BARN SPIRITS

DEREK ELLER GALLERY  
JANUARY 6–FEBRUARY 3, 2019

BY LOUIS BLOCK

**b**ig blue mountain bed pulls me in. Caught in a web of blue and gray, I find arcades and lintels, flasks and halos, ornaments and wires. Like false tracings, the painting's successive layers form blueprints to be canceled and overwritten. A root system of drooping serifs holds up a vibrating triangle of starlings mid-flight, or tinsel on a fir, or a pyramid's shimmering bricks.

In this show of nine canvases, all painted in 2018, EJ Hauser mines an ever-shifting vocabulary of form. The language here lies somewhere between literal and mythological, spoken and remembered. Working in a barn and field in the Catskills last year, Hauser sought out the "roar of nature." Looking at the paintings, you get the impression that she carefully catalogued that roar into individual notes. It is out of this dissection of phenomena that the painter's icons emerge, singular and strange.

One of the delightful paradoxes of the paintings is their interplay of fluid and static. Where many painters exploit the viscosity of their medium to mimic nature's incessant shifting, Hauser's mark-making is jittery and definitive. It gives hope for our binary Anthropocene: it interprets, ruthlessly, and then dissolves.

Pablo Neruda saw ancient hieroglyphs in lichen, a massive map in granite, purple thorns in amethyst.<sup>1</sup> Hauser has a similar penchant for metaphor: *blue wing blue starchart* is a bootprint in the snow and a warped constellation. Its puddles are nebulae and its quick smears glacial tills. *big pink barnspirit* is Neolithic and alien. Blushing beneath its knotted surface, tender pinks and blues and yellows are lens flares or overdose makeup. What a mark pretends to be is just as important as how it's made.

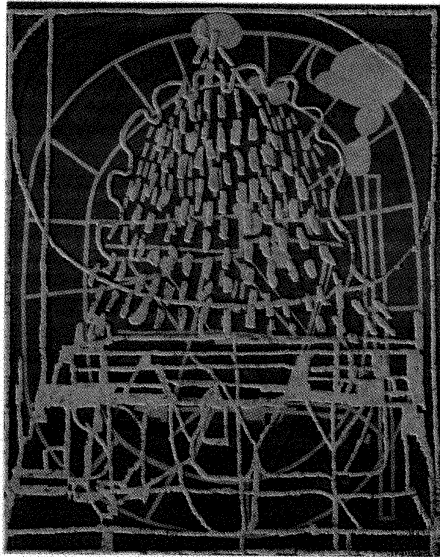
In the *primary forest pocket*, Hauser repeats the right-hand radial blocks of *blue starchart*, masked with fungus and vines in organized globs. Blues hop between phthalo and cobalt and ultramarine over a rouged cadmium. What is a *forest pocket*? A shield, of sorts, where the cabin is our pale blue dot. Our nucleus. The bounds of the forest are where the program fails to render more texture. Our line of sight ends not in distance but in density, where spooky creatures can be chalked up to anti-aliased backgrounds. Entropy encroaches.

Symbols are more soldered than drawn. Revisions are highlighted rather than washed out. Hauser's icons progress with version notes. There is no dust here, only tablets in intimate cuneiform. Forms evolve through tactile repetition—some layers are fishbowl reflections, others false projections. Look at the peaks in *summer mountain bed*, dancing from mystic sprinkles of quartz to steady garden hose spray.

This lexicon is vulnerable, mercurial. It exists in the back of the throat and in the grayed out memories of the retina. Stargaze at these paintings, read their dregs. ☞

LOUIS BLOCK is a painter based in Brooklyn.

1. Neruda, Pablo. "XIII," "XV," and "XXII," from *Las piedras del cielo*, 1970.



EJ Hauser, *big blue mountain bed*, 2018, oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches. Courtesy Derek Eller.

## ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN: IMAGE OF AN IMAGE

THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS  
NOVEMBER 7, 2018–MARCH 3, 2019

BY DAVID CARRIER

**W**hat can an abstract painting represent? Rochelle Feinstein offers a plenitude of answers. *Image of an Image* is the most challenging retrospective that I have recently had the pleasure of viewing. At first blush, this collection of works seems like a group show of diverse artists. Feinstein's *In Anticipation of Women's History Month* (2013)—made with acrylic, oil, black cobalt glass, and buttons on canvas—is an abstraction, a color field painting gone bad. And *Plein Air 1* (2018) is made from a gray drop cloth; just as 19th-century artists ordered paint tubes, so she made this painting with materials purchased online. Other paintings are made from untraditional materials: *Fulfillment House* (2017) is a loosely painted yellow, black, and grey grid, a redoing of that familiar modernist motif. *Mr. Natural* (2009) depicts two green crossed lines made of crystal, reflective glass powder, oil, and charcoal on drop cloth. And *Nude Model* (2009), which looks completely abstract, is constructed from Styrofoam, enamel, cloth, and paper mounted on a stretcher. Responding to the printout of a Craigslist post that read, "Nude Model needed for abstract painting," Feinstein shows that an "abstract nude" can only be an oxymoron.

Like many artists who matured in the 1980s after the formalist vision of abstraction had become passé, Feinstein wanted to give her paintings political resonance, and so her abstract works also refer to contemporary culture in the manner of traditional figurative paintings. That, too, may seem a contradiction in terms, but she brilliantly resolves this by incorporating descriptive materials into her abstractions, and then uses their titles to secure their references. *Image of an Image* (2010), the titular work of her current exhibition at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (which comes to the Bronx after a tour of art centers in Geneva, Munich, and Hannover), is a painting hidden behind a scrim. It might stand for all of her art, in which she brackets and visually conceals her subjects. Perhaps in reaction to her early career as an

illustrator, Feinstein proceeds through indirection. In *Anticipation of Women's History Month*, for example, was inspired by sad humor with the fact "that the other eleven months of the year are not also an occasion to 'celebrate' feminism."

Feinstein's art, which looks unfinished and determinedly provisional, consists of what appear to be fragments of modernist compositions—often just barely held together by grids, by color, or by words. She loves incompleteness and imperfection. Her work, which is not easy to place, is consistently off-kilter and offhand. Feinstein makes Robert Rauschenberg—one of her obvious influences—look like Rembrandt through her determined pursuit of incompleteness. And compared to her, Mary Heilmann is a straightforward visual thinker. In her refusal to reduce her ambitious work to a singular narrative, she wants to open abstract art to encompass almost any subject. Her art escapes all definitions, for no sooner have you pinned her down, than you find that her next work offers fresh puzzles.

Ultimately what I admire most about Feinstein is this refusal of resolution and her serious cultivation of slight visual pleasures. Look, if you will, at *Love Is Over* (2008), which consists of two panels, each made of mirrors on masonite board and acrylic, with those three words laid out—in reverse on the lower panel—and resting on Styrofoam bricks. And consider *El Bronco* (1994), which consists of oil, acrylic, tape on linen, and a framed digital print. Skid marks are formed by the words "WHITE BRONCO," an allusion to the O. J. Simpson police chase, as seen in black and white on TV. Or view (should I say, read?) *The Little Engine* (2005–08/2016). Alluding to the well-known children's book, it is an ironic parable about colonialism, gender, and race, as well as the embattled legacy of modernism. Composed of two engraved aluminum plaques and three canvases, it features quotations from South African painter and photographer Zwelethu Mthethwa. Brilliantly and continuously elusive, she extends the range of painting in seemingly illogical ways. In her art, one commentator in the exhibition catalogue says, we experience "the shipwreck of the premises of abstraction and modernism." Fortunately what remains is more than enough to make possible her body of enchanting, deeply mysterious paintings. ☞

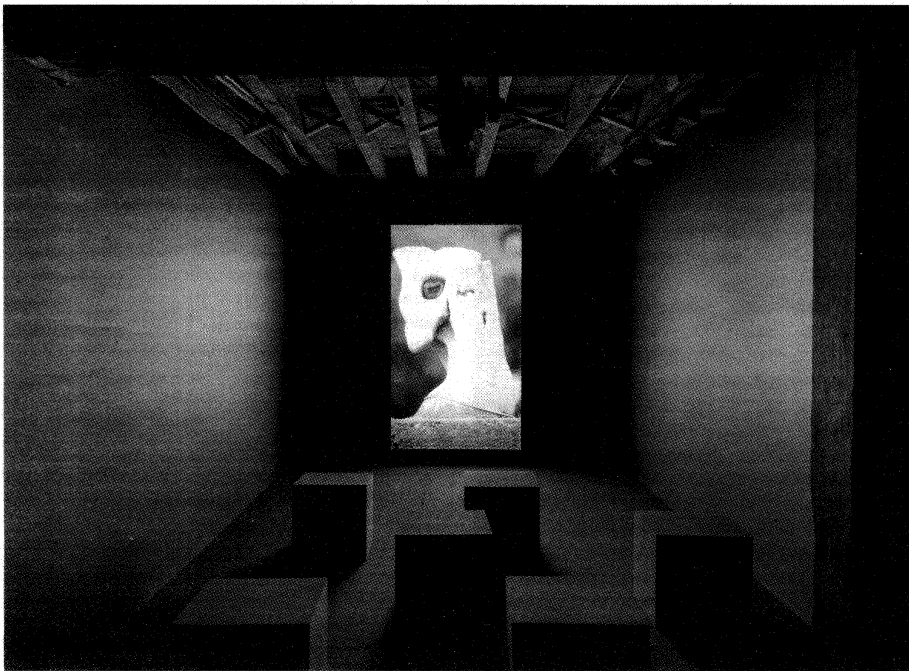
DAVID CARRIER is co-author with Joachim Pissarro of *Wild Art* (Phaidon, 2013). His next books, with Joachim Pissarro, are *Aesthetics of the Margins / The Margins of Aesthetics and Aesthetic Theory*, *Abstract Art*, and *Lawrence Carroll*.

## MARIA ANTELMAN: DISASSEMBLER

PIONEER WORKS  
DECEMBER 6, 2018–FEBRUARY 10, 2019

BY ANN C. COLLINS

**O**n a bleak, late December afternoon in late December, the heavy door to Pioneer Works in Red Hook gives way to a dark stairwell that serves as the gallery's vestibule. Overhead, an imposing video monitor holds a silent black-and-white image of a hand, palm open, fingertips twitching in and out. Maria Antelman's *Hand* (2018) could be a scene from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, taken the moment when the patched-together corpse comes to life. Positioned in the entryway, the disembodied entity serves as a greeter, or perhaps a sentinel, marking the entrance to Antelman's show. The intimacy of the image stirs feelings of connection to whoever is attached to the hand, but the staccato movement seems unnatural, foreboding. I hesitate before climbing the stairs.



Maria Antelman, *Disassembler*, installation view, Pioneer Works, 2018–2019. Curated by Gabriel Florenz. © Dan Bradica.

Eight video installations by Antelman are displayed across three floors of gallery space in *Maria Antelman: Disassembler*, curated by Gabriel Florenz. Gathering found footage, still photographs and ominous audio, the artist builds jumpy strands of animation that play in endless loops. Throughout the work, Antelman taps into well-worn cautionary tales of a future in which the natural world submits to the technological, the individual serves as slave to the machine, and the human figure transforms into a cyber-organism. If the themes are familiar, Antelman draws on them in unexpected ways to add an infusion of creepiness to her assemblages of nonfiction elements.

Upstairs, I step tentatively into the blackness of a room barely lit by screens. A small video monitor placed on the floor shows a close-up of an quivering eye pressed against its mirror-image. In *I/Eye* (2018) Antelman presents another unsettling reduction of the human form. Her tight framing distills the myth of Narcissus down to its most elemental components as the eye of the beholder and the beheld merge, unblinking and unable to look away from each other. The body series continues with *Eye & Mouth* (2018), in which an eye stares helplessly at a gaping mouth, its tongue rolling behind a row of teeth as if in a scream. *Tongue* (2018) features a stuck-out tongue that waggles at the viewer, bringing levity to work that questions the parameters of existence when a subject—or part of a subject?—is encountered solely in a video monitor. The four pieces are silent, leaving any message the entities may be trying to emit unexpressed, as if muted by the thick glass of the video screen. The viewer is held at a distance, observing but not really understanding whatever language the appendages may possess.

Rumblings and crashes punctuate alternating voices as viewers take turns reclining in a chair equipped with speakers in the headrest and a monitor hanging at eye-level in the installation *The Wild West* (2017). On screen, Antelman strings out archival images of walls, tunnels, and figures clad in protective jumpsuits. The clips look to have been lifted from NASA or perhaps the labs at MIT. The narration, based on the work of geoscientist Paul S. Martin, explains his theory of “rewilding” the American West with lost species that include the mammoth and saber-toothed tiger. The video stands as a meditation on the accelerating loss of life forms on this planet, as the space-age images point to the impossibility of restoration for such long-gone wild things. As I watch, my mind wanders

to lists of endangered species, to the acceleration of climate change, and to the feeling of lying passively in a chair, observing the futility of what is being proposed on screen.

Central to the show is the eponymous *Disassembler* (2018), a single channel video co-commissioned by Pioneer Works, and the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (EMST). *Disassembler* takes its name from a software program that translates code to language, and was inspired by Amazon’s newly patented wristband, which would track the movements of warehouse workers’ hands. In Antelman’s video, a computerized voice chants instructions about mounting sensors to fingertips and palm, but the recitation is upstaged by shifting images of trees, rocks, animal skins. Hands dig into mud. The face of a child emerges from a formation of clouds. I repeatedly find myself trying to tune out the voice in favor of Antelman’s soothing montage of images backed by the sounds of water, insects, and birds. Is this the experience of a worker whose days are spent mindlessly following robotic procedures, comforted by traces of memory and dreams? Or is Antelman setting her gaze on some unforeseen epoch when the technological systems are finally switched off? An image of a woman, fingers bound by elbow-shaped tubing, flashes on screen. The device that binds her looks more like a puzzle, something from which she can wriggle out if she tries—but will she? As the door to the gallery closes behind me, I can only wonder. ☞

ANN C. COLLINS is a writer living in Brooklyn. She is a graduate of the MFA in Art Criticism and Writing program at the School of Visual Arts.

## ROBERT JANITZ: UPTOWN CAMPUS / COLLEGE ROBERT JANITZ

ANTON KERN GALLERY  
DECEMBER 13, 2018–JANUARY 26, 2019

CANADA  
DECEMBER 14, 2018–JANUARY 20, 2019

BY DAVID RHODES

Both Anton Kern Gallery and CANADA present their first solo exhibitions of Robert Janitz. Now based in New York for some years, Janitz was living in Paris after leaving his native Germany and in so doing travelled somewhat against the flow—many artists moving in the opposite direction to Berlin. The two exhibitions differ in that at Anton Kern’s *Uptown Campus* there are mostly “twisted box” paintings and at CANADA’s *College Robert Janitz*, mostly “field” paintings together with three cast concrete bench sculptures. Semiotic play between image and process is present in all of Janitz’s work and it’s tempting to think of a link to the paintings of both Markus Lüpertz (tent paintings from the mid 1960s) and Günter Förg (abstract window paintings from the mid 1990s) who incorporated gestural painted surface and image without the specifically American post-war reduction of abstraction and process to purely self-referential ends. Both Lüpertz and Förg, of course, also extended painting into sculpture.

Prosaic actions—the arm’s length, swift movement of a squeegee across a soaped windowpane or the use of a knife to spread butter on toasted bread—are brought to mind as much as meditations on post formal modernist painting when viewing this work. Paint is typically brushed across the linen surface, up and down in broad rhythmic strokes, thick and opaque at the beginning and end of the gesture, transparent between. Even Janitz’s paint incorporates flour with wax rather than other paint mediums, inviting more domestic reference. His benches—concrete forms that recall zoomorphic or schematic dogs as well as minimalistic sculpture or Brutalist architectural detail—lead us out from the virtual space of the paintings. Nonchalance and elegance, speed and subtlety, all come together in Janitz’s work.

At Anton Kern the “twisted box” paintings present images of one or two tower-like structures, apparently placed on a surface as on the edge of a table. The paint handling is quick, cursory, and gestural; the forms seem derived from an imaginary model—one made with cardboard or on a computer screen, it is easy to envisage either. The paintings are illusionistic, and real only as painted surface. Take, *Liquid Conscience* (2018) for example, the two vertical structures twist animatedly, playful and almost mocking. There is a gradient of color beneath the brush strokes that constitute the surrounding space of the boxes (a gradient much more visible in the “field paintings” at CANADA) that reads like screen-printing (a John Giorno or Japanese nineteenth century wood block, take your pick) or light glowing incrementally across a screen. Though there are geometric shapes, their forms are all absurdist play, supporting apparently whimsical painterliness that is one moment independently abstract, the next fitting in around a shape to indicate a form. Janitz would have his cake and eat it too, uninterested as he is in distinctions between representational painting and non-objective painting as such. Rather, presentations of what might or might not be illusion or reality, or both simultaneously, concern him. The color is somewhat greyed or bleached in appearance, pale but also resonant, not pretty or pure.

One of the “field” paintings at CANADA, *Pitch and Copper*, (2018) has a background gradient that