



MINUS PLATO

Art and Education

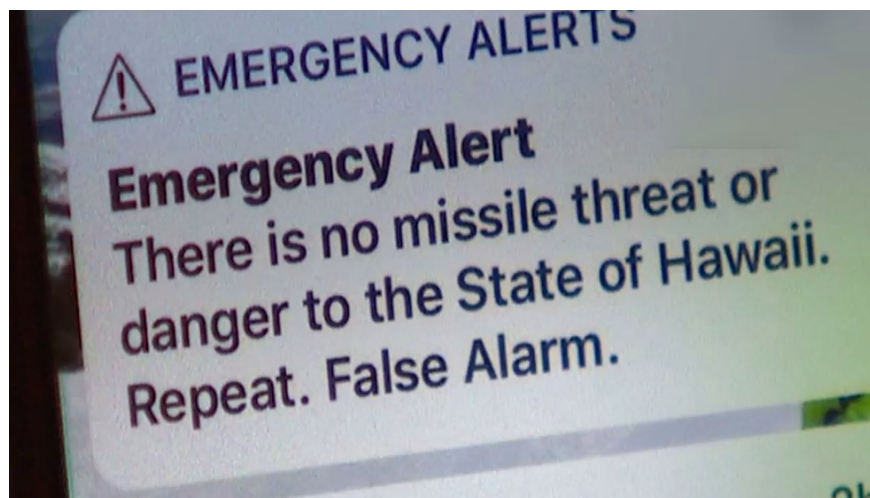
for an Unfinished Exhibition

THERE IS NO THREAT: FALSE ALARMS, OBSOLETE CALENDARS AND OTHER ALLEGORICAL DECOYS

© 15th January 2018 Minus Plato Return Reform Refresh, No Philosophr King Draft Alarm Clock Academy, Bruce Hainley, Catalina Ouyang, Chelsea Culprit, Cudelice Brazelton, Daniel R. Small, Daniela Rossell, documenta 14, Haiti, Hawaii, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Kettly Noël, Kim Schoen, Laura Owens, Martin Luther King Jr, Olia Lialina, R. H. Quaytman, Seth Price, South as a State of Mind, Vanessa Thill Minus Plato

As tempted as we are to unleash one of Haitian artist Kettly Noël's zombies (see [Oct. 16](#)) to avenge the racist president for his 'shit hole' countries remark, instead we want to take you back to those 30 minutes in Hawaii on Saturday morning, when islanders were reacting in horror to the message announcing an incoming ballistic missile threat ('THIS IS NOT A DRILL'). Less than half an hour later, it had ended and they were reassured 'THERE IS NO THREAT' and that it was a 'False Alarm'.





Sure, we can now look back at the mistake, the human error, but imagine how long that moment was for those experiencing it and imagine how many people, during those excruciatingly long 30 minutes, connected their imminent destruction with rhetoric of 'Fire and Fury' of our tweeter-in-chief? Nothing happened, but at the same time, something had happened in the just-past to frame the non-event into a tangible reality for those who had to suffer it.

These days, our days and calendars are full of such moments in which time contracts and expands. Take today, for example. Martin Luther King Jr Day is a time to celebrate the life and achievements of an icon of the civil rights movement on his birthday. Yet, you will no doubt have read that this year is the 50th anniversary of King's murder in 1968. Even though we will wait for April 4th for the precise anniversary of his death, you can read numerous accounts of the significance of this MLK day, not merely because of this anniversary of his murder, but also because of it occurring during the regime of an unrepentant racist ('I am not a racist'). This framing, like the escalating Trump rhetoric of nuclear war for people in Hawaii yesterday, generates a conception of time that alters reality. While we are meant to be celebrating King's legacy, amid the white-nationalist framework of the Trump administration, the anniversary of his assassination and racialized violence becomes the overwhelming context.

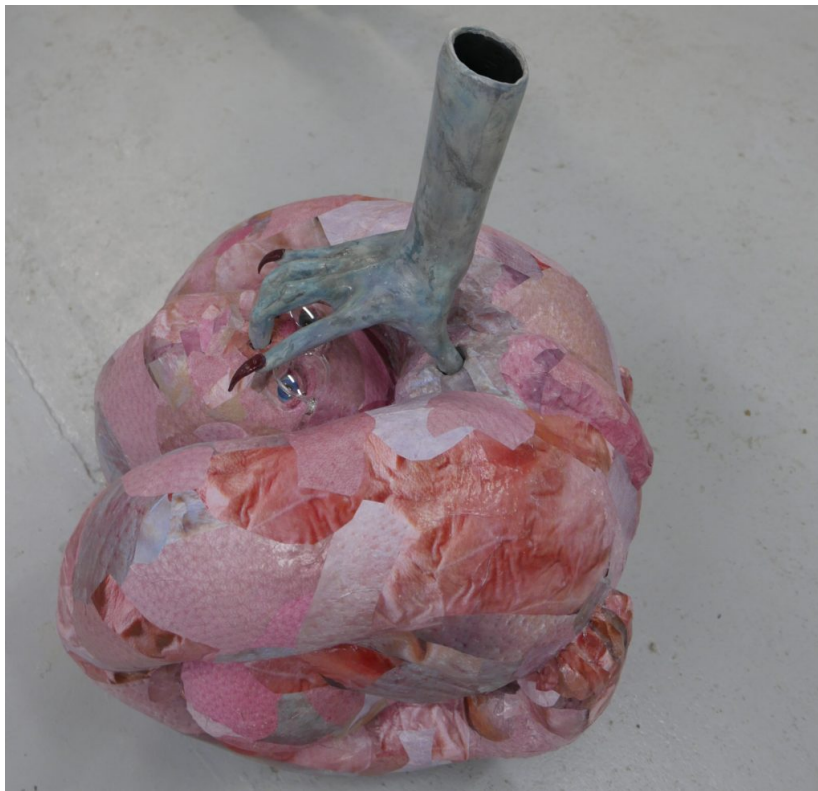
This leads us to ask the following question that chimes with our current project of turning last year's daily posts into a book (to come): how does a period of time – whether 30 minutes, a day or 50 years – function as a stand-in or substitute for something else – the larger context of nuclear war, the civil right movement or white nationalism? As we look back over the posts from 'Minus Plato Today' from December 5-16, we are struck by the way we deployed the figure of the decoy again and again. For example, we found ourselves unable to process the gun-rights activists on OSU campus in any form of direct statement, so instead we juxtaposed photographs with works about guns and the pastoral by Scottish artist Ian Hamilton Finlay (Dec. 5). As we acknowledged the news of the death of astronaut and Ohio senator John Glenn, we only managed to do so indirectly by juxtaposing two works (about the eclipse and ancient history) by Daniel R. Small (Dec. 8). Like Small's archaeological work on Hollywood sets, we continued to explore the stand-in in the book photographs of Kim Schoen (Dec. 10), and to continue the book-theme, we imagined the empty space of the book to come of the fourth issue of documenta 14's *South as a State of Mind* (Dec. 14) – which we can now finally show as complete.



We also looked at individual impostors, such as Seth Price hamming it up as Zeus (Dec. 11) or Mrs. Midas, aka Melania Trump, added to Mexican artist

Daniela Rossell's iconic series of photographs *Ricas y Famosas* (Dec. 16). Finally, escaping our present responsibilities, we wrote posts that set us future activities for ourselves and our readers either in the form of philosopher Alain Badiou's essay on a new classicism (Dec. 13), Olia Lialina's early net art work *My Boyfriend Came Back From the War* (Dec. 12) and R. H. Quaytman's artist book *Allegorical Decoys* (Dec. 15). The only posts where we were truly in the moment and not creating posts as decoys or placeholders for a future time, were either focused on the students' work for our class *Drawing Ideas* (Dec. 6 and Dec. 9) as the semester came to a close or digging deeper into the affinities laid out in earlier posts between our daily practice and Petra Cortright's *HELL_TREE* (Dec. 7).

Thinking back to these moments of deferral, we are now convinced that they were the result to the context of a period of dread and anticipation before the inauguration and what it would bring. Where does this leave us now? We could happily update Kettly Noël's zombies with the chimeras we saw last night at *No Place* gallery in the work of Chelsea Culprit, Catalina Ouyang (her *The New White Meat* pictured below) and Vanessa Thill, and curated by Cudelice Brazelton.



But instead we found another way to explain where we are at. We were recently reading the catalogue for Laura Owens' current exhibition at the Whitney and came across the essay by Bruce Hainley, "How Should a Painting Do?", focused on *Untitled, 1997* (a sparse seascape, populated by a couple of marks as birds) which begins:

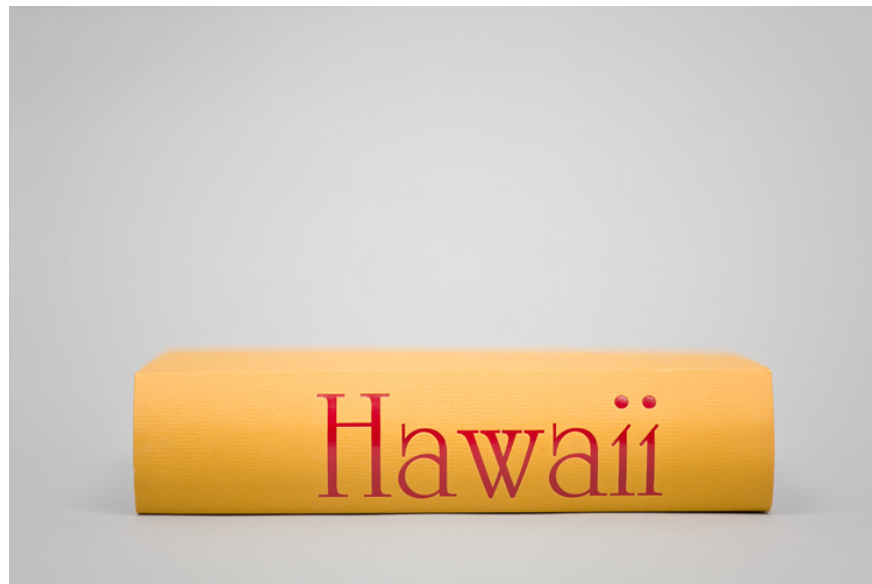
That goon was inaugurated today. He bellowed words that have never been used in any previous inauguration speech: bleed, carnage, stealing, stolen, rusted, tombstones, trapped, depletion, flush, sad were just a few of them, all delivered to exploit as much fearmongering as possible. Some said passages

of the speech parroted lines lifted from the monologue of a blockbuster villain. Are those words now outside or inside here (not quite the here Laura refers to above, but not exactly unrelated to it either)? Some will have noticed I've slipped into the familiar, referring to the artist by her first name. Confronting the problems she raises of outside and inside, of large problems that may not be the problems of art, which has its own variously sized problems, it strikes me right now that not calling her Laura would seem odd, akin to providing "alternative facts" or giving purchase to those who might think that this text is in any way unbiased or "objective" (it isn't). Shut up, kiss me, hold me tight.

The 'above' that Hainley refers to is an extended statement by Owens about her approach to painting and its limits. Owens writes, from the beginning:

Before we start looking, let's reflect where we are. This location was designed for you to train your eyes and senses on objects and talk to your neighbor or yourself about what it is you are looking at. It happens all the time here, and it should be easy to find the art. It could be obvious that it is in here. Outside of here there are large problems that are not art problems. Inside-the-art problems are only in the art objects. You know what I mean. When you look at these objects, do you think they are looking at you? Don't you think they are human too? You see the birds but they don't see you.

Later in Owens' catalogue, the birds have been replaced and now we are facing painted clocks. But as Owens writes in statement about these works from 2011-12, these paintings of clocks are also like books in how they stand in for works of art (Here we are brought back to Kim Schoen's work, specifically from the series *The Empty Library* and the book as stand in, like this photograph of a book called *Hawaii* which expanded to become the basis for a whole exhibition last spring of the same name).

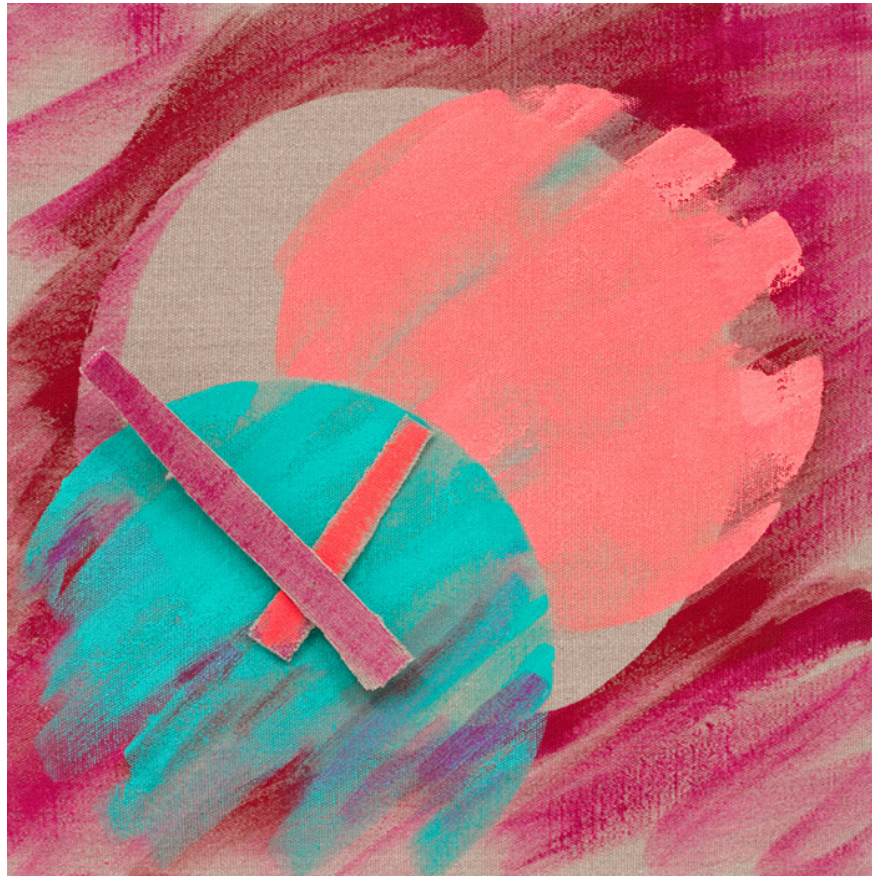


I am interested in the way the idea of a clock and the idea of painting could cross over or interpolate...

A book can stand in for a work of art, and be just a book at the same time....

A book like a clock is both familiar and mass produced...

Owens' clock paintings make us think about how time, as it is represented, merely hanging there on the wall, also stands for something else.



This then led us to another time-hanging-object – the calendar – and their reuse in works of Zeus (aka Seth Price) (made in 2004, but only shown in 2008) and what the artist calls their obsolescence as calendars.

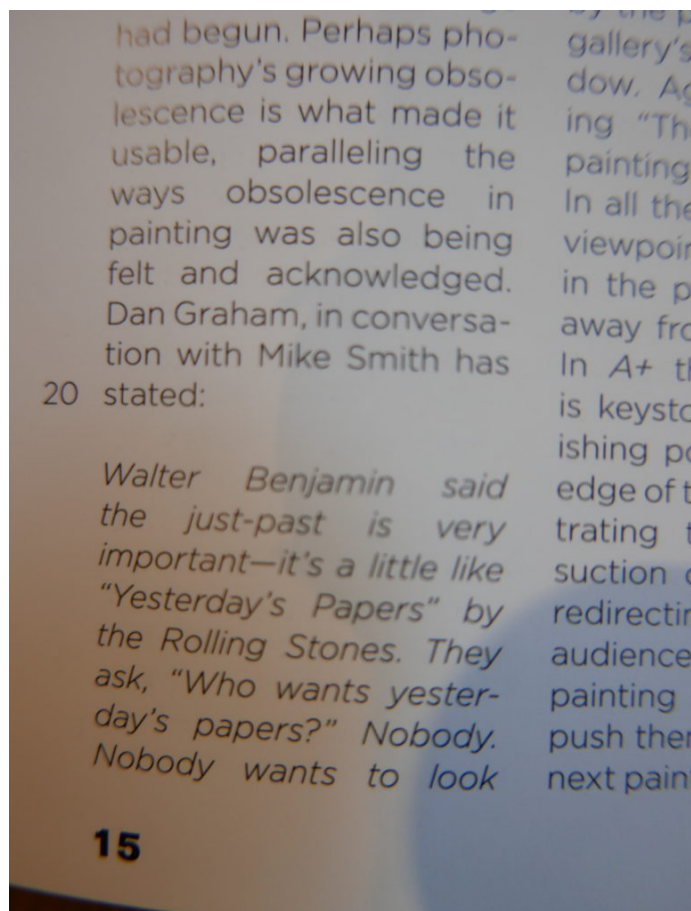


Our reading about Owens (who we didn't write about last year) and thinking about Price (who we wrote about several times last year), made us return to R. H. Quaytman, her calendar of works as chapters in a book, and specifically her now impossible to find book *Allegorical Decoys*. In our original post we fixated on the artist's use of the metaphor of the Cyclops to describe a particularly limited way of looking at painting. We were especially drawn to Quaytman's description of her time at the American Academy in Rome.

It was there that she initiated her series of works as chapters as a response to what she describes as 'painting's status as an isolated target of a monocular and disembodied eye'. She continues to unpack this metaphor by evoking the monstrous figure of the Cyclops: 'What mechanisms are at work in painting that assume an audience of one male monogamous Cyclops who will never leave?'



But now we have finally read Quaytman's text, we are struck by the broader context of our short-sighted Cyclops comment. For example, Quaytman cites an interview with Dan Graham where he invokes Walter Benjamin's idea of the just-past and The Rolling Stones' song *Yesterday's Papers* when addressing the question of 'obsolescence' in painting and photography:



This lead us to think of Seth Price's obsolete calendar works and Laura Owens' clock paintings in terms of how time and its representations are allegorical

decoys for painting. We have also been thinking about the anecdote of Plato's invention of the first alarm clock to wake his students. Did it really happen, or is it just a story to show how the philosopher combined his research and his teaching? (He had complained in the *Laws* about the dangers of sleeping too long). As with the false alarm in Hawaii and the compounded significance of today's MLK celebrations, the context and framework turns the temporal moment into something of broader significance.

Let us end with the ending of Hainley's essay describing *Untitled, 1997* by Laura Owens:

By the time you're reading this description of a description, the goon, that rough beast, will have possibly slouched his way to (almost, but let's hope not) a year in office. What will the world be like? Better? Worse? I don't know. Masha Gessen has stated that her worst fear is him bringing about nuclear holocaust. That's a large problem, maybe the largest, and it's outside, suppurating. Remaining vigilant to the inside-the-art problems – there are some that only in art objects, whether we know which ones she means or not, whether we agree with her or not – enables Laura to make more than a few paintings that are the most powerful retort, including joy even, to the situation at hand, in some way because she allows herself to fail in not always making a painting that is "powerful" or a "retort" to anything at all. Instead, in that refusal, there remains a way of being steadfast to the local concerns of art – which is to say, in allowing it to be what can be, will be, and could be, which is hard to know and sometimes difficult to see. It is a fact that people are discriminated against for being HIV positive. It is a fact the majority of the Nazi industrialists retained their wealth after the war. It is a fact the night belongs to Michelob and Coke is real. The Palestinian cause remains dire. It is a fact the color of your skin matters. Crazy Eddie now sits at the left hand of power, which has so many left hands, no right at all. Who is your crew? How do they assemble? Do they eschew mourning for possibility? How should a painting do? How does anyone look to sea? Pick your battles. Shut up, kiss me, hold me tight.

