

**BODIES
BURNING
AT THE EDGES**

I dreamed of bodies burning at the edges
When I awoke my belly was cold as an abandoned stove
The streets were cleared, trees bent
The air so still, as though just inhaled
When I noticed it was spring.

— *Yvonne Rainer, 1977*

ALIZA SHVARTS

ON SABOTAGE

I wonder if we can think about the question of sabotage as a question of time. The figure of the saboteur operates in a temporality outside the time of the cohesive rational actor, the universal subject of enlightenment, the one man with his one voice, his one (patrilineal) name, and his one vote. To sabotage something is to act out of time with it, to trouble the linear narrative of progress, to stymie cause and effect. To sabotage something—or oneself—is to engage the multiplicity that operates outside of the presumption of continuity that enables the honest relations of consent, contracts, etc., which are inexorably bound up in a capitalist logic of exchange in which to be accountable is to be subject to account.

In a lecture called “The Touring Machine,” Fred Moten says that the history of blackness is a history of the tenuous and unstable distinction between subjecthood and objecthood (overwritten by co-emergent formulations of the enlightened rational subject, whose very possibility depended on the existence of those non-subjects or human commodities produced and reproduced through colonialism and enslavement). This history thus opens up the possibility to consent to non-consent, that is, to consent to being more than a single continuous subject that is the implied subject of consent.

Sabotage is an abstraction of this consent to non-consent. To sabotage is to violate the dictum that a self be continuous over time, it is to challenge the idea that everyone has access to this type of cohesive subjecthood: a subjecthood invoked as the subject of labor and marriage contracts, sexual or social consent, etc., the possibility of which were historically produced in the nonconsensual and noncontractual relations of slavery and coloniality. Such a singular subject both depends on and obscures the historical figures of the 3/5ths man, the untouchable, the second sex—figures on whom were produced the present conditions of our subjection; figures who, at the same time, sow the seed of our continuing possibility.

When we talk about trustworthiness or honesty, we are really talking about a relationship to power and to the future: an ability to guarantee that things will be as we say (a temporality which becomes more apparent in speech acts like “I promise”). We are also communicating that the language of such guarantees can belong to us, that we are the speaking subjects such language presupposes. This relationship to the future presumes a subjectivity historically produced by the object relations and material histories of a significant amount of people.

And there seems something worthwhile to me to refuse this position, to refuse to assure others of your ability to maintain the latent history of a normative subjectivity—the dehistoricized, deracinated, unmarked “good guy” produced in the assurances between other “good guys” that such a thing exists.

Different men in my life have asked me, in relation to not only my gender but also my work, how they can trust me. And though I think the things I make and do are pretty self-evident, I have responded to these various men by saying that they shouldn’t, because I don’t think that trustworthiness is ever anything that I could have access to. It is a temporal enclosure that is part of a lineage of historical and material enclosures. I am not—and do not want to be—its rightful heir.

The body can be a form of sabotage, particularly those corporeal excesses that overflow, overwhelm, and otherwise breach the smooth silhouette of the subject-form. The sabotaging body is marked by both overabundance and lack, qualities distributed within different gendered, raced, and sexed productions of difference, but not confined to those positions. The sabotaging body disrupts the working body, even when it is coterminous with it, bound by the same flesh, contained in the same skin. It troubles the seamless capture of human action by abstract value, expending energies and performing actions that elude the language of exchange. Any one body may contain simultaneous working and sabotaging parts.

Intuition can be a form of sabotage in that it short-circuits the channels of knowledge production, directing them away from truth-producing institutions or power and back toward the self. Instead of relying on the corroboration or confirmation of an outside source, intuition draws its power from the depths of the selfsame body that deploys it, bringing together that opposition upon which so much of enlightened thought depends: the irreconcilable difference between knowing and feeling. Intuition so thoroughly undermines this distinction as to produce knowledge and feeling as one and the same. It is a form of knowing by feeling, feeling within oneself a truth that at the same time exists beyond the self, waiting to be known.

Aesthetic production can be a form of sabotage, precisely because it is useless—because it is quite likely that no one will read what you have written, no one’s life depends on your art. This lack of utility is the aesthetic’s great power: it’s what makes it a realm (perhaps the



only realm) where experimentation is possible. This is the place to provisionally rehearse new ways of being, to fantastically conjure new worlds, to take up utopian projects and the full extent of their unmaking, because this is the place—if there is any place—where consequence need not fully attach. This is the place where the narratives of what is good, valuable, productive, or beautiful can be troubled, the place where we can survive the difficulty of that troubling—survive, though perhaps not remain unchanged.

I was asked once by a tenured art historian, when I brought up the work of a “difficult” body artist whom I know, love, and respect, whether I was “advocating” for this type of work. I did not know what to say then, which I regret, because I do know what I would say now. I advocate for these and other forms of sabotage: for work that questions the borders of the body, the frameworks of our theoretical models, and above all the axiom that when we make things, we must know their value or outcome beforehand. Such advocacy, as I must have recognized in that encounter, is perhaps itself a form of sabotage. So with this writing, I advocate; I enact; I recruit.



PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Thomas Beale

Thomas Beale is a New York-based artist who works primarily with found, natural materials. He was the founder and director of Honey Space, a no-profit, shape-shifting exhibition space active in Chelsea from 2008-2012. Exhibitions include Museum of Old and New Art (Tasmania, 2013), Family Business (New York, 2013), Moscow Biennial (2011), and Gogolfest (Kiev, Ukraine 2010). Thomas has received numerous honors including grants from the New York Foundation for the Arts, the U.S.–Japan Creative Artist Fellowship, and has participated in residencies at Yaddo, Pioneer Works, the Watermill Center, and the Vermont Studio Center, amongst others.

Robert Montgomery

b.1972, Chapelhall Scotland, United Kingdom; lives and works in London, United Kingdom. Montgomery follows a tradition of conceptual art and stands out by drawing from examples of public interventionist strategies and brings a poetic voice to the discourse of text art. Montgomery creates billboards, light pieces, woodcuts and watercolors. He was the British artist selected for Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2012, the first biennale in India. Montgomery has had solo exhibitions at venues in Europe and in Asia, including recently mounted, major outdoor light installations on the site of the old US Air Force base at Tempelhof in Berlin with Neue Berliner Räume, and at the 2012 Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India. His work has been included in numerous exhibitions at venues including KOP, Breda, NL; Athens Festival, GR; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR; 54th Venice Biennale, Venice, IT; The De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, UK; The Grand Palais, Paris, FR; Guido Costa Projects, Turin, IT; The Embassy Gallery, Edinburgh Scotland; and The BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle-Gateshead, UK.

Jacolby Satterwhite

Jacolby Satterwhite is a multi-disciplinary artist who uses video, performance, 3D animation, drawing, fibers and printmaking to explore themes of memory, desire, and personal and public mythology. In his video works, Satterwhite creates fantastical digital landscapes populated with multiple, costumed avatars of himself, engaging with hand-drawn objects and text as extensions of the body, in a seamless exchange between live performance and constructed worlds. Satterwhite's computer-generated realms—densely layered with proliferating drawings, objects and performances—encompass animated narratives of personal memory and identity.

Satterwhite was born in 1986. He was a featured artist in the 2014 Whitney Biennial. Satterwhite is a recipient of the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award and the Art Matters grant. His works are in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Seattle Art Museum, and Studio Museum in Harlem, among others. Satterwhite lives in New York.

Kiki Smith

Kiki Smith (American, b. 1954, Nuremberg, Germany) has been known since the 1980s for her multidisciplinary practice relating to the human condition and the natural world. She uses a broad variety of materials to continuously expand and evolve a body of work that includes sculpture, printmaking, photography, drawing and textile. Smith has been the subject of numerous one-person exhibitions worldwide including over 25 solo museum exhibitions. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is the recipient of several awards including the 2012 National Medal of Arts, conferred by Hillary Clinton; the 2010 Nelson A. Rockefeller Award, Purchase College School of the Arts; the 2009 Edward MacDowell Medal, and the Skowhegan Medal for Sculpture in 2000, among others. In 2006, Smith was recognized by TIME Magazine as one of the "TIME 100: The People Who Shape Our World." She is an adjunct professor at NYU and Columbia University.

Aliza Shvarts

Aliza Shvarts is a PhD student in Performance Studies at NYU, where she writes on figuration and doom. She received her BA from Yale University, where she double majored in English and Art (Phi Beta Kappa, Summa cum laude). In 2008, Shvarts's senior thesis for the art major at Yale became the subject of international controversy. Shvarts has been published in *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, *Extensions: the online journal of embodiment and technology*, and *Feminist and Queer Information Studies Reader* (Litwin 2012). She has given talks at the Brooklyn Museum and Bruce High Quality Foundation University. Her artwork has appeared in LOOP international film festival, the Slought Foundation and the Tate Modern.

Curators Serra Victoria Bothwell Fels and Jonah King, are MFA candidates at Columbia University, class of 2016.

Special thanks to Marie Tennyson and The LeRoy Neiman Centre for Print Studies; Michelle Maigret and C24 Gallery; Lucy Newman; Angela and Hillarey; Nathan Catlin, Alex Mctigue, Devra Fox, Duy Hoang, Jenna Pietrobon, Iris Hu, Victoria Udondian, Rocio Oliveres, Emily Kloppenburg, Peter Clough.

**BODIES BURNING AT THE EDGES IS A
CELEBRATION OF THE VISCERAL REALM OF
KNOWLEDGE MOST DIFFICULT TO EXPLORE IN
WORDS— THE PRECURSIVE WISDOM OF THE BODY
AND NON-VERBAL SEMIOTICS.**

**KIKI SMITH, JACOLBY SATTERWHITE, ROBERT
MONTGOMERY AND THOMAS BEALE—
THROUGH CONTRASTING MEDIUMS AND
METHODOLOGIES, EACH DISPLAY A TRUST IN
DIRECT BODILY EXPERIENCE.**

**TOGETHER AT LEROY NEIMAN GALLERY,
THEY EMBRACE THE POSSIBILITIES OF
INTUITION, IMAGINATION, AND CORPOREAL
COMMUNICATION INSIDE AN ACADEMIC
DISCOURSE.**

**EXHIBITION RUNS 1 - 23 OCTOBER 2016
AT THE LEROY NEIMAN GALLERY,
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.**