

Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz  
Aleesa Cohene  
Glen Fogel  
Onya Hogan-Finlay  
Christian Holstad  
Danny Jauregui  
Adam Garnet Jones  
Jean-Paul Kelly  
Tim Leyendekker  
Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay  
James Richards  
Emily Roysdon  
Dean Sameshima  
Jonathan VanDyke  
Susanne M. Winterling

Jon Davies  
Sharon Hayes  
Zoe Leonard  
Ulrike Müller  
Jimmy Robert



THE  
POWER  
PLANT

Coming After

The Power Plant

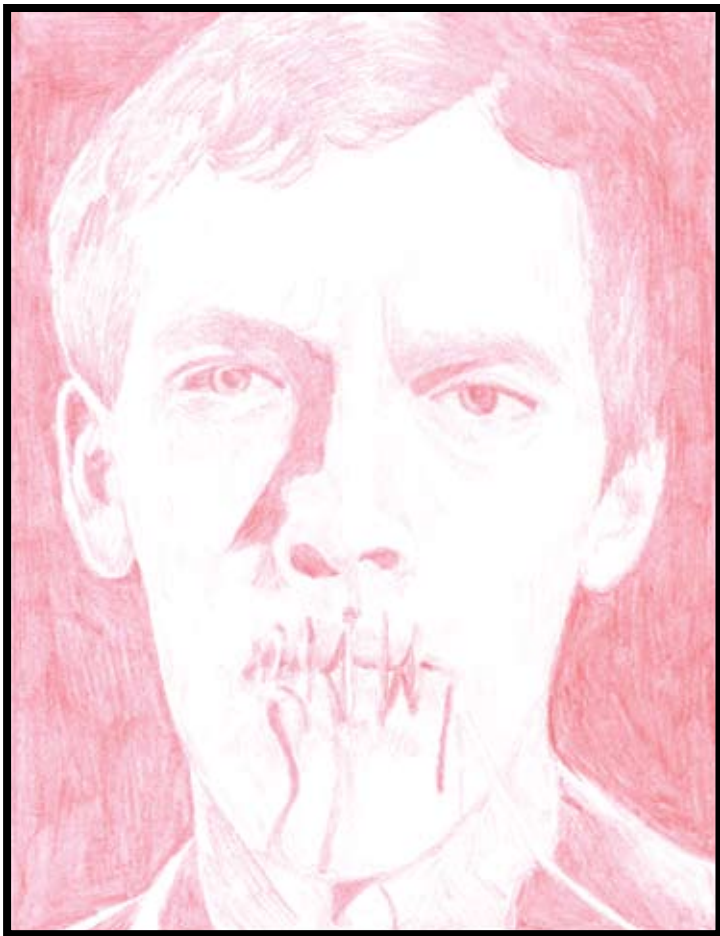


Coming After:

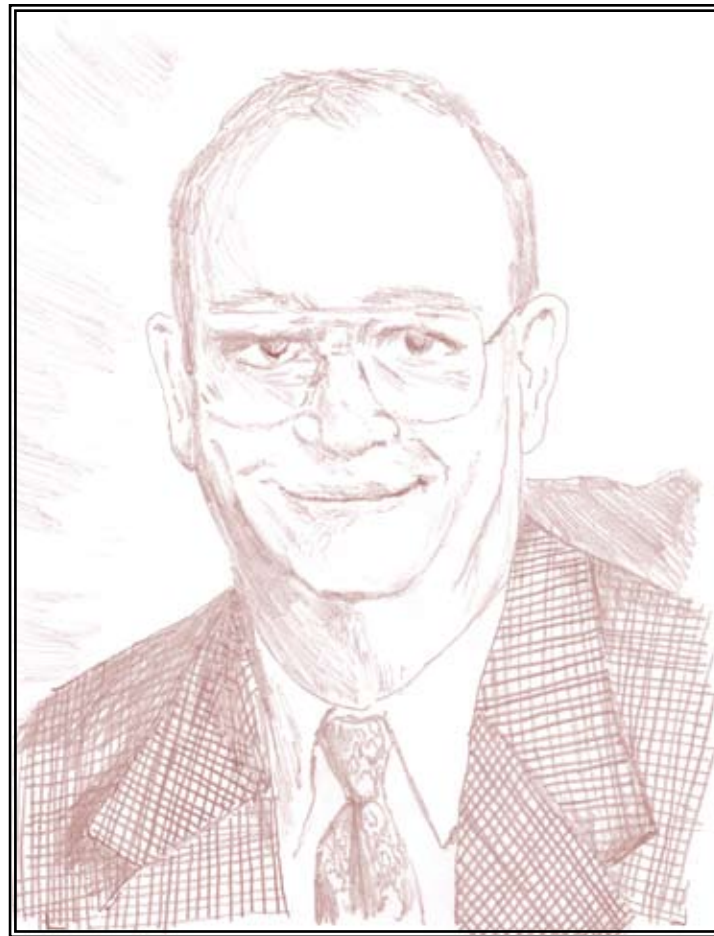
queer time,  
arriving too late  
and the spectre  
of the  
recent past

In 2010 the late American artist David Wojnarowicz's video *A Fire in My Belly* (1986–87) was removed from the major gay and lesbian exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC. A collusion of Republican politicians and the Catholic League objected to imagery of a crucifix swarmed with ants, denouncing it as hate speech. They urged the head of the Smithsonian to censor the offending work, which he did.

Such an incident acts not only as a painful reminder of the  
fragility of artistic freedom but also as an insidious repetition of  
the censorship and smear campaigns that Wojnarowicz faced as  
a queer artist during his lifetime. In 1989 Wojnarowicz became



☛ an unwitting poster child for free speech after the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) withdrew funding for the landmark Nan Goldin-curated exhibition of artists with AIDS, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*, at Artists Space in New York due to his inflammatory, impassioned catalogue essay. The same year, decontextualized fragments of Wojnarowicz's artworks



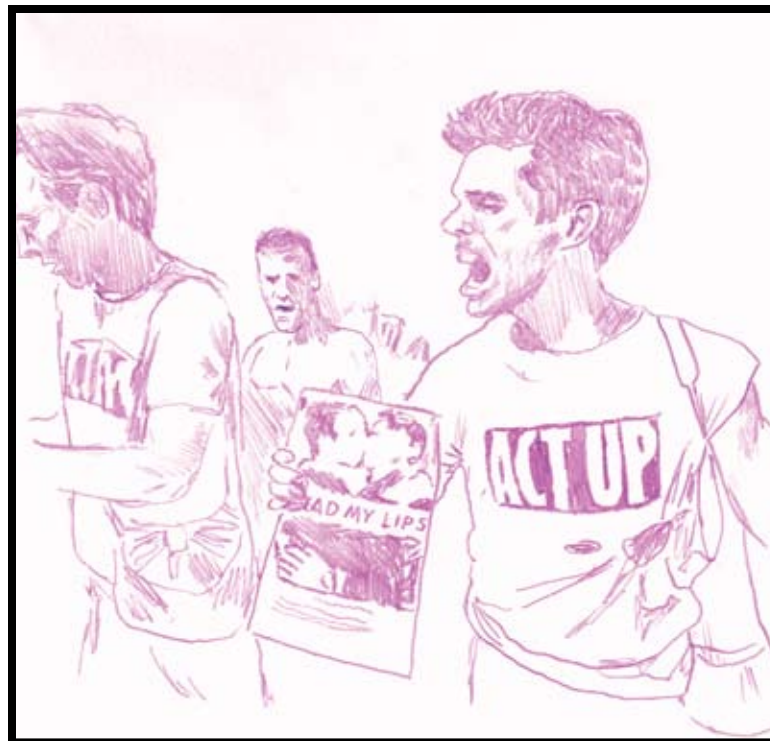
were used by Reverend Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association in salacious propaganda to whip up outrage against the NEA, a popular political punching bag.

History repeats itself.

This re-enactment of the attack on Wojnarowicz's work seemed particularly brutal as it was now being committed posthumously, as the artist had died of AIDS in 1992: the act was akin to violating a grave. If the art world has been consistently drawn to practices of historical engagement and re-enactment in recent years, it is because the same injustices keep being committed and follies stumbled into again and again.



The recent Wojnarowicz debacle confirmed my understanding that the period of the mid-1980s to early 1990s has come back to discourse and is only now being historicized, as if it were too close to properly appraise before. Decisive for North



American cultural politics and for the course of art history, this period witnessed the Culture Wars and the vitriolic fight over public funding of the arts that played out in spectacular court cases involving artists like Wojnarowicz who tackled provocative subject matter to confront a corrupted society head on. It also saw the rise of a direct-action AIDS activist movement – epitomized by ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) – fighting a new plague that was specifically devastating communities of artists, gay men and people of colour. Forged in the fires of the AIDS crisis and ACT UP, “queer” emerged at this time as an oppositional identity predicated on challenging binaries of man and woman, heterosexual and homosexual, and also as a school of theory that has exerted a major influence on artists, curators and critics as it’s flourished in the academy over the past two decades.



Born in 1980, I grew up in the specific historical position of being too young to fully understand what was happening in this crisis moment; by my teenage years, safe sex was an accepted necessity because homosexuality was indelibly tied to the threat of AIDS and to death.<sup>1</sup> I have long been interested in the art being produced during this highly contentious period, and how its legacies play out today. As a curator who feels deeply attached to this era, I imagined that artists of my generation might feel this kinship too, and perhaps this would explain why their work did not seem to fit comfortably with the current representations of LGBT culture trafficked in mass media. Drawn to artists working with idiosyncratic queer forms and aesthetics – arguably the first generation of artists to be exposed to queer theory in school – I came to identify a shared sensibility that the scholar Heather Love has succinctly called “feeling backward.” Love writes,

*[I]n their attempt to create a positive genealogy for queer existence in the present, critics have tended to focus on the positive and to ignore the most painful episodes from the past. ... I argue that backwardness is central to modern queer community. By backwardness I mean several things:*

*Shyness,*

*perversion,*

*unwillingness to grow up,*

*identification with the past,*

*with the minor,*

*with the invisible and the impossible,*

*and stubborn refusal of community and of the future.*

*... Mainstream society has shown itself perfectly willing to take on particularly attractive, fun, or marketable aspects of the gay lifestyle. Now that gays are offered the opportunity to be like everyone else... it is important to make a claim for the less presentable and more embarrassing aspects of the gay and lesbian past.<sup>2</sup>*



While the years of the mid-80s to early 90s were undeniably traumatic, they also represented a galvanizing, dynamic moment for queer citizenship,<sup>3</sup> and for artists' sense of political engagement. Queer artists were being publicly denigrated for their work, living with and dying from AIDS, and contributing immensely to AIDS activism. This moment haunts our psyches and our feelings, and thereby shapes our present and our future. Scholar Ann Cvetkovich is committed to collecting what she calls "an archive of feelings" from queer experiences of trauma. She has commented on this period:

*"in the process whereby AIDS activism was the catalyst for what has now become mainstream gay politics and consumer visibility, something got lost along the way, and I'm mourning that loss along with the loss of so many lives."*<sup>4</sup>

Looking for this something lost along the way, The Power Plant exhibition *Coming After* does not focus on AIDS as an issue or queer as an identity. Nor does it include those artists who were, as Christian Holstad succinctly put it,

"burying their dead"

at that time, but rather those who *came after*. We grew up in the shadow of these crisis years – whether by fate or by choice – seeking out these narratives and figures of not-so-long ago and consciously aligning ourselves with them emotionally, culturally and politically, whether as open wound, fount of inspiration or both at once.

For many born after the 1970s, identifying with what Sarah Schulman has termed "the gorgeousness of ACT UP"<sup>5</sup> has become a kind of ethical imperative. Scholar Roger Hallas has pointed out how "[t]he mutuality and activism of the ACT UP era ... serves as a powerful popular memory."<sup>6</sup>



Even if the ACT UP era is experienced at a generational remove – often aided by the Internet – and even if its kinks and debates have been smoothed over by history's gloss, it represented a new queer mode of being. Formed in March 1987 in New York and soon becoming an international network, ACT UP was the largest and most impactful of the direct-action AIDS activist groups that emerged after the Bowers v. Hardwick Supreme Court ruling served to radicalize American gays and lesbians en masse. (Against the backdrop of the US government's promises of ever-greater affluence to its citizens, the Supreme Court upheld the legitimacy of states' sodomy laws in this notorious 1986 decision, negating the strides made by gays and lesbians to be acknowledged as citizens.) Beyond ACT UP's legendary tactics – spectacular demonstrations and theatrical die-ins, era-defining agit-prop and activist videos – sociologist Deborah Gould argues that their legacy extends to establishing a specifically queer conceptualization of citizenship and kinship that resonates today:



“ACT UP gave birth to a new queer generation that shook up straight and gay establishments with defiant, sex-radical politics... ACT UP queers opened up ways of being gay and of being political that had been foreclosed by the more mainstream-oriented lesbian and gay establishment, paving the way for new identity and political formations among sexual and gender outlaws of all ages.”<sup>7</sup>

While the concept of “queer” has been the subject of heated critical debate for decades, *Coming After* was specifically compelled by what Gould calls

“the emotion of queer,”

which

“ushered in alternative modes of feeling, thinking, and belonging”

and

“offered a new sensibility that allowed, encouraged, and in a way enacted, a changed orientation both to self and to dominant society.”<sup>8</sup>

How can we feel the “emotion of queer” contained in this and other moments of radical potential gone by through what is created today? *Coming After* bears witness to touches across time, evidencing a persistent engagement with a past that is still undigested.<sup>9</sup> As Love suggests, this backwards look signals that queers’ current state of pop-culture visibility and the citizenship that such publicity supposedly represents is lacking.<sup>10</sup>



The artists in *Coming After* share a sense of themselves as part of queer cultural and art historical lineages that play out through time and space in complex ways that attest to the intricacies and nuances of queer affinity and initiation. AIDS has forced queer people to create space for ghosts, making the phenomenon of queer cultural transmission legible as a kind of haunting. How are artists tracing what this haunting, this feeling of “coming after” actually *feels* like, and how does this shape what they dream into being? While sometimes taking the form of melancholia or a fraught, conflicted nostalgia for this something lost along the way, a backwards look can be a critical gesture gleaning what is of value to the here and now and beyond. What visitors encounter in the exhibition are spaces of potential and gestures of invocation. Figures and objects, practices and philosophies from the past are restaged and consequently re-imagined; emptied-out social enclaves and the distinctive temporalities of missing out on something or arriving too late conjure a tangle of queer emotions for our current moment. From the presences, spaces and temporalities staged in *Coming After*, new forms of political and affective engagement are given a medium through which to arise.

FRIENDS FROM THE PAST

Curatorially, I am interested in how younger artists experience cross-generational kinship with other artists and engage with their legacies, particularly as AIDS was supposedly the “cure” for our existence and all of our self-representation was hard-won. The practices and personas of artists living and dead who were prominent in the mid-80s to early 90s such as Félix González-Torres,



Catherine Opie,



Mark Morrisroe, and General Idea are sources of inspiration for contemporary artists and continue to be subject to heightened curatorial and critical interest. Writing about underground filmmaker and performance artist Jack Smith and his legacy, performance scholar Dominic Johnson argues,

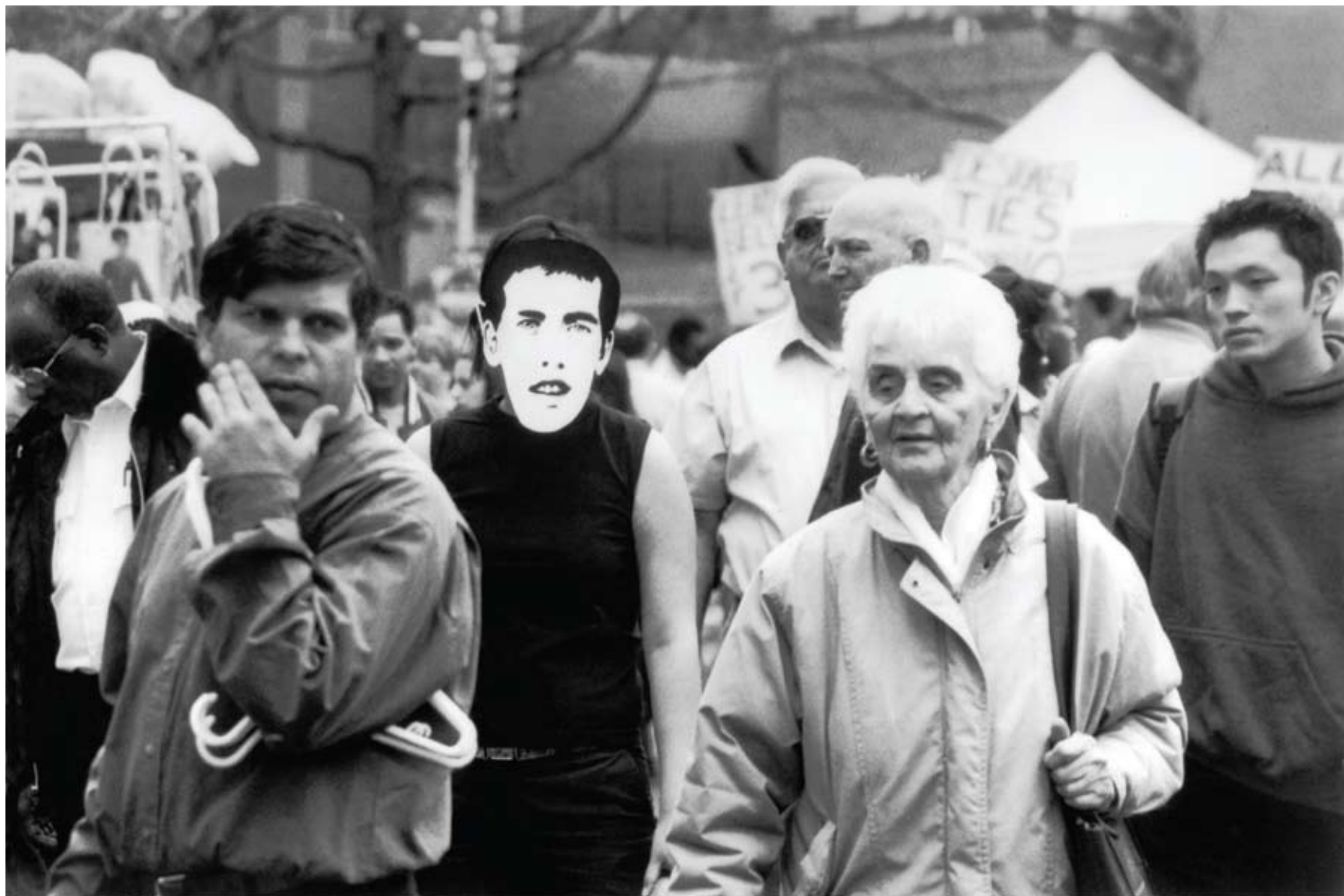
*“As individuals frequently removed from reproductive futurity, and often alienated from familial legacies, lesbian, gay and transgender people are especially well-placed to reinvent fantastical histories by asserting new lineages with figures who attract our attention. Plotting out a marginal ancestry, we may procure imaginative cultural heredities to prolong the affective reverberations of missed encounters with those who have preceded us.”<sup>11</sup>*

A roundtable on “feminist time” in *Grey Room* similarly explored “the problem of retroactive, transgenerational identification,” as Rosalyn Deutsche put it.<sup>12</sup> Participant Ulrike Müller (who has an artist project in this publication) noted,

*“Thinking of generations as relationships seems a productive way to make a place for personal interactions without abstracting the personal as purely individual; it acknowledges collectively shaped and changing beliefs, emotions, and subjectivities, without reducing us to mere representatives of our moment in history, members of our generation.”<sup>13</sup>*

Emily Roysdon's 2001 untitled photographic series, where she re-enacted Wojnarowicz's early *Rimbaud in New York* (1978–79) project, has become a canonical example of queer cross-generational affinity. The original work saw Wojnarowicz and his friends pose with a mask of Arthur Rimbaud around the streets of New York – shooting up, riding the subway and generally playing the *flâneur*. Roysdon's remake – using the mask of a young Wojnarowicz – is a kind of double haunting tracing a lineage of influence from the *enfant terrible* poet of nineteenth-century France to an iconic figure in the post-punk East Village New York art world to her own position as a kind of touchstone – particularly through her co-founding of the journal *LTTR* – for a generation of queer/trans and feminist artists in the twenty-first century. Roysdon has stated, “My David project wasn't really about loss... it was about how productive my identification with him became, across sex and gender boundaries. I re-conceptualized his project for contemporary queer politics.”<sup>14</sup> In her interview with the artist, Jean Carlomusto describes Roysdon's “transport[ing] the spirit of our heroes to the present drama of our lives, a drama they somehow inspire anyway.”<sup>15</sup> Printed at an intimate scale and pinned unframed to the wall, the photos' modest display belies the potency of their presence. Roysdon's practice has continued to trace the politics of gesture and the dynamic provisionality of how bodies occupy space, and what kind of potential these positions may hold.





Emily Roysdon,  
from *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)*, 2001-07.  
Twelve black-and-white photographs, two embroidered,  
36 x 28 cm each. Courtesy the artist.

James Richards's 2007 *Untitled Merchandise (Lovers and Dealers)* were modeled after – and produced through the same manufacturing process as – personalized photo blankets commemorating loved ones at war. However, instead of noble young soldiers, Richards's blankets figure the boyfriends and gallerists of American artist Keith Haring, whose own face is pushed out of the frame in order to draw our attention to the pictured lover or dealer instead (some well-known, some more obscure). A wry comment on memorialization and the economics of both the art world and the love lives of the rich and famous, Richards's series casts artist, lover, dealer, art history, queer history, and the blankets themselves as all so much merchandise to be bought and sold. Poised between the funereal and the domestic, one imagines the beds the blankets might cover and the transactions that might take place there. The low-quality images, mechanically knit into the blankets, resemble many of the “poor” images employed in Richards's appropriated video works and sculptures. While degraded, Richards manages to salvage a distinctive aura from them.



James Richards,  
from *Untitled Merchandise (Lovers and Dealers)*, 2007/11.  
Six cotton knit blankets, 229 x 152 cm each.  
Courtesy the artist and Rodeo, Istanbul.  
Installation view: *Coming After*, with work by  
Adam Garnet Jones, Susanne M. Winterling and  
Jean-Paul Kelly (l-r). Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

Practitioners of a queer archaeology, Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz stage dynamic encounters between performance and film in their work. In a kind of “temporal drag,”<sup>16</sup> they resurrect queer historical moments and figures but always complicate how the past and its ambassadors are framed, staged and mediated. Boudry/Lorenz’s diptych *No Future/No Past* (2011) performs a queer punk bricolage of rhetoric and gesture in a graffitied set somewhere in Berlin. If the late 70s punk credo was “no future,” the artists imagine what that might look like now that a future has and will continue to take place, for better or worse. This tense space of negation is populated by a motley crew of queer performers, crudely standing in for notable punk rockers so, for example, Ginger Brooks Takahashi (of the band MEN) takes on the role of Darby Crash and Fruity Frankie (of Lesbians on Ecstasy) plays Poly Styrene. Whether set in 1976 (*No Past*) or 2031 (*No Future*) they are equally devoid of affect, and must follow the instructions dictated by the “on-screen director,” performance artist Werner Hirsch – a meta-structure borrowed from the Andy Warhol and Ronald Tavel film *The Life of Juanita Castro* (1965). (The governing affect of nihilistic boredom is distinctly Warholian as well.) These figures – puppets in a way for others’ philosophies and postures – are stuck in time, and as the artists describe it, they “stage and practice outmoded acts and sentiments of the past that have been deemed useless,” words and actions culled from other texts, other moments. A guitar is smashed, poses are struck; anarchy, utopia and apocalypse are sloganeered with ennui; and any idea of future progress is defeated.





Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz,  
still from *No Future/No Past*, 2011.  
Installation with two 16mm films on HD video,  
15 min. each. Courtesy the artists.

Onya Hogan-Finlay's practice also works with queer archives, animating their eclectic contents with the actions of living participants, and bringing them out into the public sphere through publishing and exhibition projects. Hogan-Finlay became interested in vintage lesbian erotic calendars when an image of explicit sex in one such calendar was one of only a few scant scenes of lesbian desire that she found in preparing her MFA thesis project *My Taste in Men*, which worked with the (overwhelming gay male) ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles. She began looking for gay/lesbian homoerotic and social justice calendars from the period of 1984–2012. Judith “Jack” Halberstam commented on Hogan-Finlay’s project that we “enter the archive looking for something, hoping to find something, wanting to be redeemed, found, remembered, and saved through the pieces we find, through the lives we reconstruct, and through the memories we uncover.”<sup>17</sup> Hogan-Finlay noted that the calendar years of 1984 and 2012 match up, suggesting that this past era could be relived in some way. Functionally tied as they are to the marking of time’s passing, the images on these calendars become documents of the subcultural sexual tastes, fashions, mores – and, inevitably, politics – of their historical moment. For *Coming After*, Hogan-Finlay produced a 2012 calendar superimposing salient images from the historical gay and lesbian calendars, and a new video documenting all the calendars she found in her archival research.



Onya Hogan-Finlay,  
from *Periods. 2012 Calendar*, 2011.  
Digital print, spiral bound, edition of 100.  
Courtesy the artist.

Aleesa Cohene's personal archive consists of film and television dating from the period of her youth in the 80s and 90s. She intricately assembles her video installations from decontextualized actions, gestures and phrases in order to create new hybrid characters and compositions. Cohene choreographs their emotional, visual and aural tones so effectively that they work on the viewer's feelings almost subconsciously and, as critic Michael Sicinski put it, "with aching precision."<sup>18</sup> The artist has stated, "My work aspires to understand why we live in a poverty of emotion and how it can change."<sup>19</sup> Cohene's new project *Yes, Angel* (2011) follows four characters: a woman who has a relationship with a girl, and a man with a boy, each trapped in their own screen and, despite all being in some way "queer," alienated one from the other. A night sky scene from the video extends from the projection and into a wall painting in a vestibule space, while a scent in the installation subtly impacts our viewing. A wise narrator intones, "There was once a time of great clarity, we had come through a great tragedy, but we knew ourselves. Why now have we lost our way?" Cohene's work evokes how "the radically unfinished history of the AIDS epidemic" (as scholar Mathias Danbolt calls it)<sup>20</sup> has left queer people traumatized, psychically damaged and unmoored to the point that we don't recognize the value of our marginal position or the potency of our desires. However, Cohene's characters inhabit a strange transitional zone: something new seems poised to emerge from their present disorientation.





Aleesa Cohene,  
*Yes, Angel*, 2011.  
Video installation, 13 min. Courtesy the artist.  
Installation view: *Coming After*. Photo: Toni Hafkenschied.

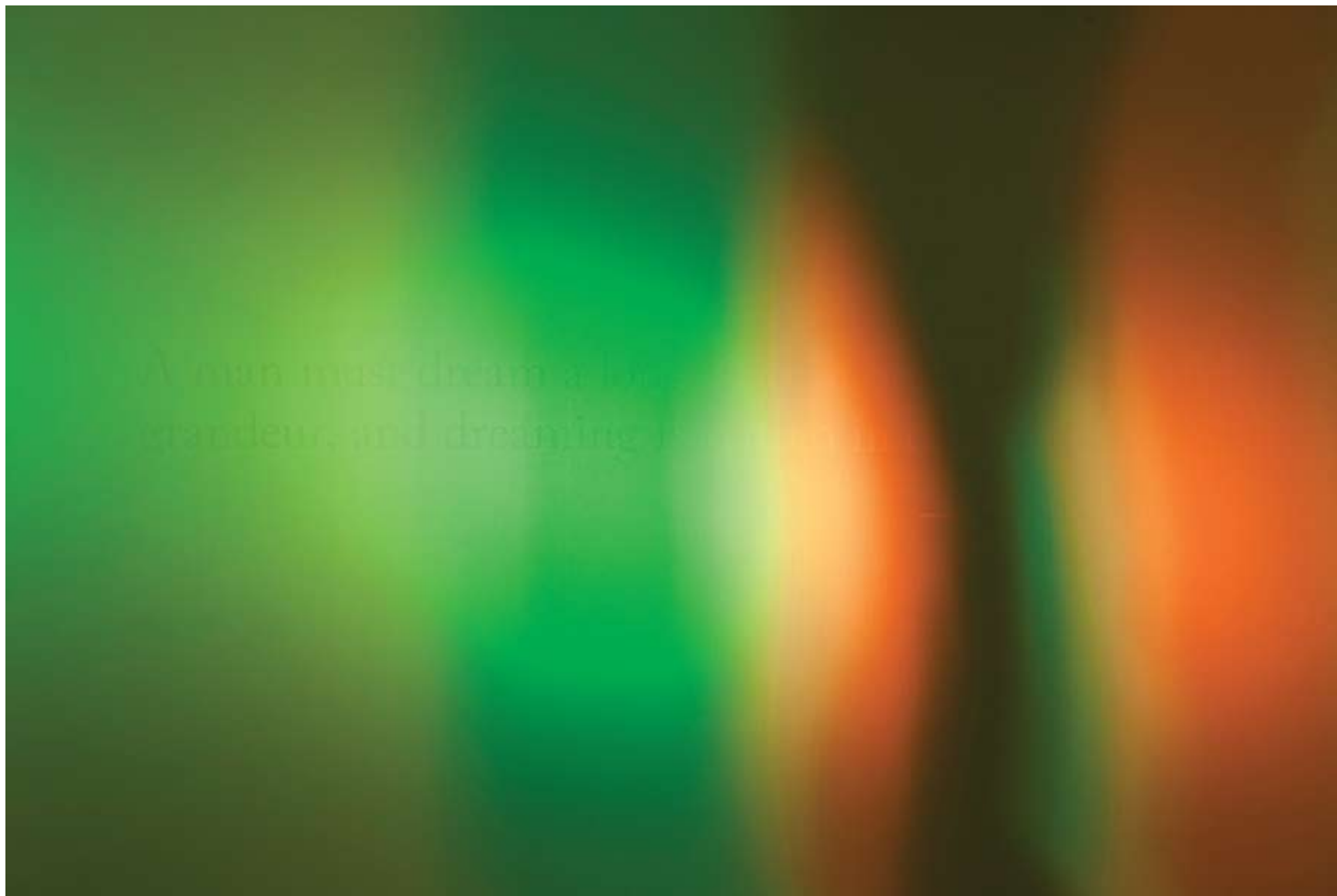
Also unfolding across four screens, Adam Garnet Jones's video *Secret Weapons* (2008) draws on a specifically local cultural history in the figure of HIV+ experimental film and videomaker Mike Hoolboom. The image divided into quadrants borrows a technique used repeatedly by Hoolboom, while also invoking the strength and balance of a "digital medicine wheel," as Jones has described it. His monologue is a kind of manifesto about growing up in the 90s with the spectre of a death by AIDS "or worse" as the only future for being gay, and making a conscious decision at the age of fourteen to say "yes to death." Jones also surveys and reflects on the generational cycles of genocidal oppression faced by Native communities since colonization, hypothesizing that this burden of mourning might be "intentional": "I wonder if it's a tactic, a way to solve the fag problem, the Indian problem, I wonder if they want us to be weak, if they want us to grieve without stopping until that's all we are, these great heaving waves of grief..." Jones makes an ardent pact with the viewer that we can be each other's "secret weapons," to offer support and solidarity, which could begin to heal centuries of pain and shame.



Adam Garnet Jones,  
*Secret Weapons*, 2008.  
Digital video, 5:30 min. Commissioned by Canadian  
Filmmakers Distribution Centre (CFMDC) ReGeneration.  
Courtesy the artist. Installation view: *Coming After*.  
Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

Susanne M. Winterling invokes transgressive cultural figures in her poetic work across a range of media, refracting their biographies and capturing their haunting presence in our lives today. The works at The Power Plant (all 2009) draw specifically on the persona of French writer, activist and criminal Jean Genet (1910–86), stylishly and subtly casting the performance of identity as a game of hide-and-seek.<sup>21</sup> *Poetry and the Looking Glass of the Closet (A.D. and J.G. and the Patterns of Radical Films)* is a collage that overlays Genet’s face with Angela Davis’s in a highly cinematic shared moment of Winterling’s construction, while her series of pedestals holding up trinkets (such as a large collar and dice) act as talismans of Genet’s persona more obliquely, the pedestals’ reflective surfaces evoking a hall of mirrors of transhistorical affinity. Critic Jens Asthoff suggests, “From punk relic to fanciful trinket, Winterling’s girlish artifacts drift like archaeological fragments of lives past or forgotten. . . . With [her] gestures, Winterling still hopes, it seems, that history can course through her representations, embedding political agency within their inversions and refractions.”<sup>22</sup> In *Your Shadow Is Reading Funeral Rites (Room of Light for Funeral Rites)* the visitor’s shadow, cast in pink and green, illuminates an influential Genet quote on the wall – “A man must dream a long time in order to act with grandeur, and dreaming is nursed in darkness” – as if to revive its sentiment with each act of reading.





Susanne M. Winterling,  
*Your Shadow Is Reading Funeral Rites*  
(*Room of Light for Funeral Rites*), 2009.  
Site-specific installation (filter, light and quotation from  
*Funeral Rites*). Courtesy the artist and Lüttgenmeijer, Berlin.  
Installation view: *Coming After*. Photo: Toni Hafkenschaid.

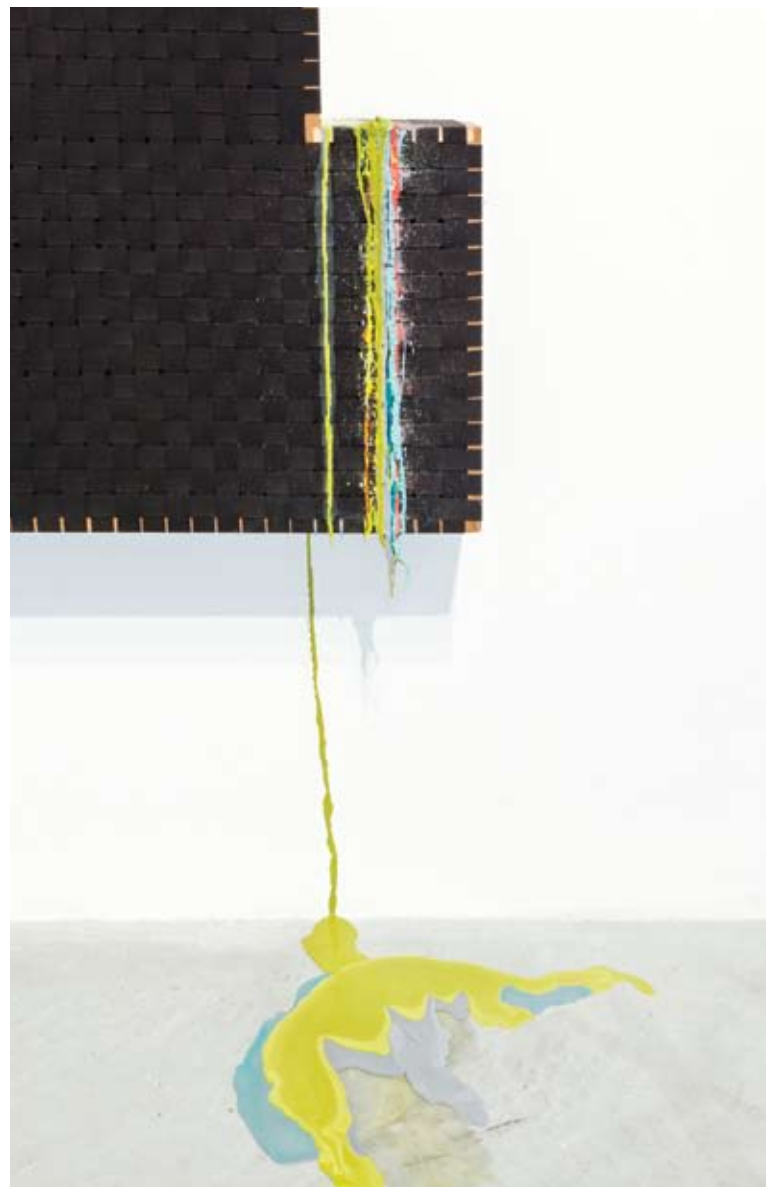
## THE FEELING OF “TOO LATE”

The sentimentality and melancholy of Winterling’s work expresses a decidedly queer feeling tied to melodrama. Film scholar Steve Neale developed a theory of melodrama built around the temporality of “too late.” Melodrama is based on “discrepancies between the knowledge and point of view of the spectator and the knowledge and point of view of the characters,” a phenomenon that I would argue we experience when we look back at historical actors with the privilege of hindsight. “Pathos results, Neale explained, from a realization (characters discovering what the spectator already knows) that comes too late or almost too late (that is, just in the nick of time). . . . Throughout the period of delay (whilst the spectator waits to see if the characters will discover what they already know), the spectator is unable to intervene, to change the events or the misconceptions of the characters. Tears result, in part, from this powerlessness.”<sup>23</sup> In addition to including artists who directly reference past queer moments, *Coming After* includes work that invokes the feelings of anticlimax, deflation and undoing that arise from this experience of arriving too late.<sup>24</sup>

Jonathan VanDyke’s sculptures quietly “weep” over the course of the exhibition. The slowly discharged drips of brightly coloured paint, which leak onto the floor, originate from hard, controlled “masculine” forms penetrated by spouts. These ruptured stand-ins for bodies dribble pigment more mechanically than the Abstract Expressionists did, a movement and a legacy that VanDyke is specifically interested in queering by casting stillness and slowness as active, engaged processes. VanDyke’s work is also animated by performance, where the roles of inert sculpture and living, breathing human seem to reverse: the sculptures perform by dripping onto the seemingly quiescent bodies below them. VanDyke has suggested that the paint has a way of making the sculptures “fall apart,” which evokes emotional as well as physical vulnerability and breakdown.<sup>25</sup> While slower moving, his performers also channel the men in messy frathouse “guys gone wild” softcore pornography, bodily fluids replaced by VanDyke’s dazzling “special sauce,” as critic Michael Wilson describes it. Wilson also notes how in VanDyke’s work “efforts at outward polish . . . are tragically and hilariously stymied by the always embarrassing chaos of internal actuality.”<sup>26</sup>



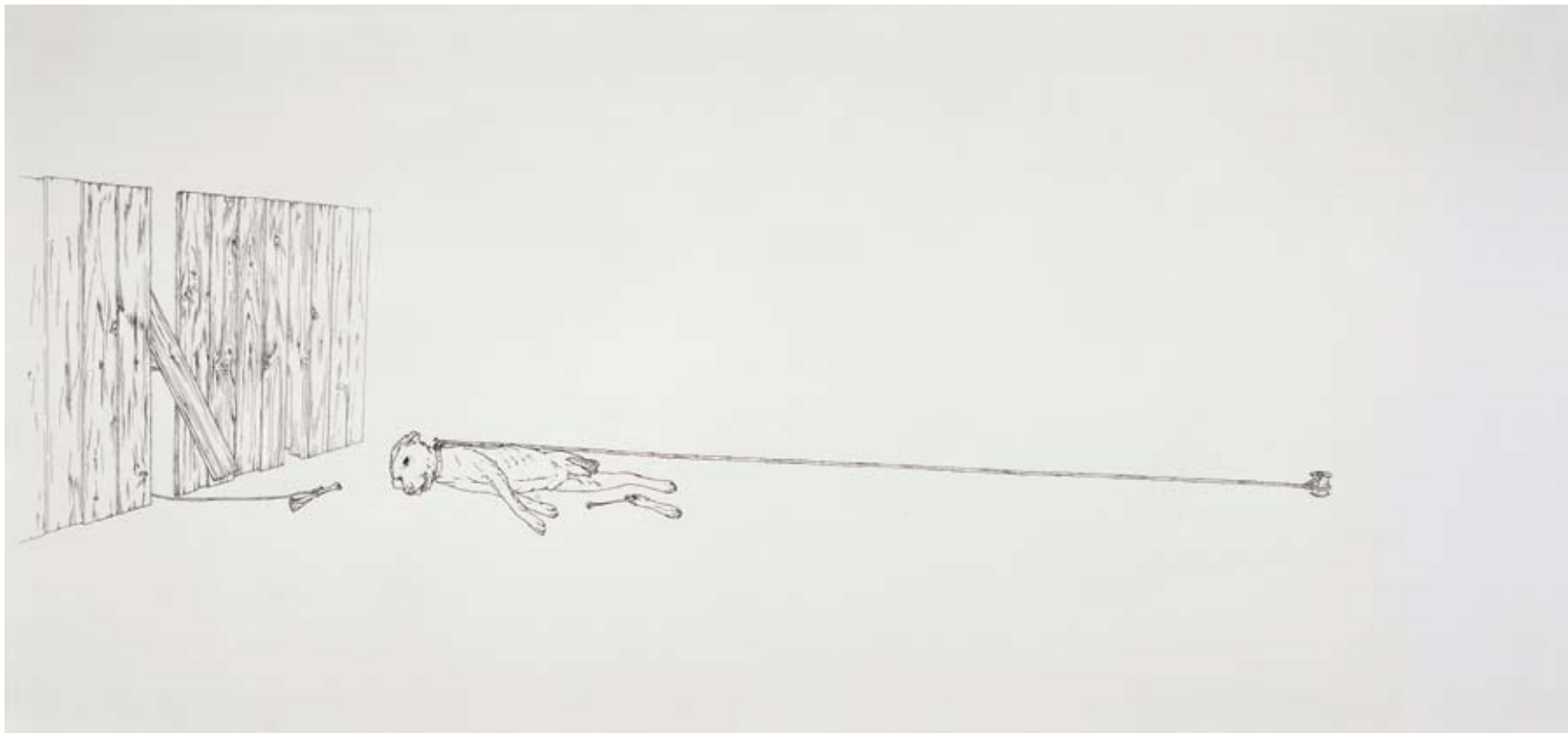
Jonathan VanDyke,  
*Obstructed View*, 2011–12.  
 Durational performance for two figures.  
*Underneath Overhang*, 2011.  
 Wood, cast plastic and paint on canvas, 206 x 130 x 38 cm.  
 Courtesy the artist. Photo: Henry Chan.



Jonathan VanDyke,  
 detail of *Asymmetrical Relationship*, 2009.  
 Cedar, Shaker tape, cast plastic, and paint, 210 x 159 x 14 cm.  
 Courtesy the artist. Installation view: *Coming After*.  
 Photo: Toni Hafkenscheld.

Jean-Paul Kelly's theoretically informed photographic works, drawings and videos always seem to reach us "too late" as they poke and prod the act of representation, particularly of traumatic events. Intentionally "de-sensitized and apathetic," the artist has stated that his work's "alienation from the ethical or utopian is [a] potent resource." Kelly engages in a highly productive "endless deferral of meaning" through tactics such as camp, metaphor, allegory, and irony.<sup>27</sup> *Rags* (2010) restages news photos from the artist's personal image bank where blankets, tarps and other coverings had been used to obscure dead bodies from the prying eyes of onlookers, including the news media. In these images, there is no trauma, just the shield, almost as if the photographs are canceling themselves out. This is an apt response when the ubiquitous circulation of images serves only to emotionally distance us from what they might actually represent. Kelly's darkly witty black ink drawings – the boarded-up house in *Dwelling* (2008), for example, or a Warner Bros. cartoon-like scenario of the aftermath of a bird snatched from its cage by a predator in "*Of what is past, passing, or to come.*" (2008) – are so precisely rendered that they seem far more "real" than the photos that refuse us access. But it's still too late: the mortgage has been foreclosed, the bird has been devoured, the decisive moment lies elsewhere in time.





Jean-Paul Kelly,  
*Limit*, 2011. Ink drawing, 168 x 76 cm.  
Courtesy the artist. Photo: Toni Hafkenschied.