

imagine recreating Baldessari's early work *Wrong*. Here the wrong has become a right.

The ocean murals are part of *Brain/Cloud* (2009), a multimedia interactive work created specifically for this exhibition. *Brain/Cloud* uses the painting *Falling Cloud* (1965) as its point of departure. The painting is a diagrammatic work depicting a crudely painted cloud-like shape on top that appears to be expelling a smaller incarnation of itself below. In the 2009 piece, Baldessari three-dimensionalizes the brain, making it a large white object that floats on an empty wall. A digital video of the object is captured by a camera on time delay and projected on the opposite wall. Here viewers can see themselves lingering under the brain, becoming part of the work. While this piece is the most technically sophisticated within the exhibition, the payoff is somewhat disappointing. Seeing oneself as a black-and-white element in the work does not enhance its content or impact; its only significance is to illustrate Baldessari's engagement with the technology.

Concurrent with the LACMA exhibition, Baldessari launched an iPhone app. The work, a re-creation of a piece originally presented in LACMA Lab's "Seeing" exhibition in 2001, was designed to be an interactive work where viewers could use the computer and view

a projection depicting their rearrangement of the elements in *Banquet Still Life* (1667) by Abraham van Beyeren. The projected display from the "Seeing" exhibition can now be rearranged by the finger on the iPhone's touch screen, allowing viewers to create and save numerous new versions of the still life. While there is nothing extraordinary about the work or the experience, what is notable is that Baldessari is mining this territory. Baldessari is an adventurer and a pioneer. He charts out new territories to be explored and pushes what can be done. There is a consistency to his vision that becomes all the more evident in a retrospective exhibition where works from different series are juxtaposed. Walking through the chronologically installed retrospective gives viewers the opportunity to trace Baldessari's influence and impact on the contemporary art world, but more importantly it allows seasoned viewers to discover new threads and connections. The layout and choice of works in this exhibition make clear that Baldessari has always been quick to adopt new technologies and equipment and use them in both the conceptual and material development of his work. Occasionally these lead to false starts, but more often result in strange and amusing new pieces (that still manage to surprise). His adventurousness serves us well.

**JODY ZELLEN** is an artist and writer living in Los Angeles.

## RESTLESS SPIRITS

**Haunted: Contemporary Photography/Video/Performance**

Guggenheim Museum  
New York City

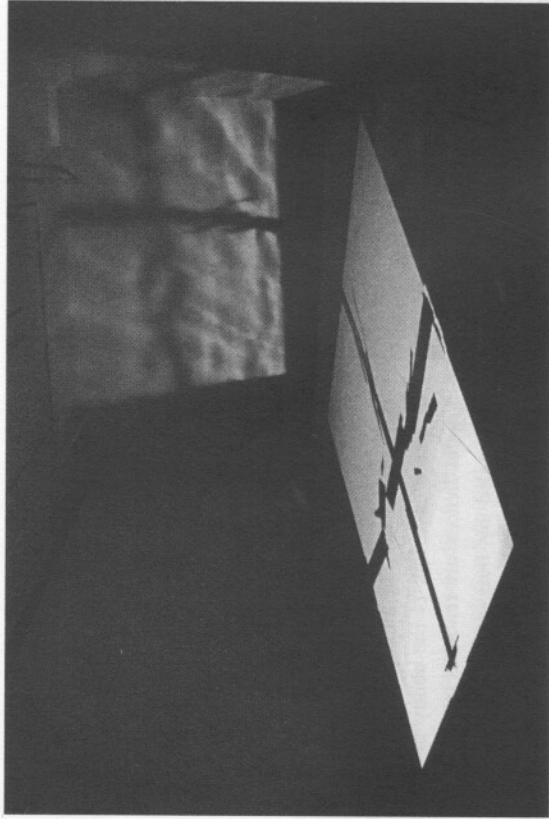
March 26–September 6, 2010

The term "haunted" conjures up visions of ghosts, poltergeists, tortured souls, and demons. A more complex meaning of the word is to be preoccupied with memory or an idea to the point of obsession; to be haunted is to be distressed or disturbed.<sup>1</sup> The Guggenheim's press release for the exhibition "Haunted: Contemporary Photography/Video/Performance" states, "Much of contemporary photography and video seems haunted by the past, by the history of art, by apparitions that are reanimated with reproductive mediums, live performance and the virtual world."<sup>2</sup> In addition to the expansive theme, the curators faced the daunting challenge of extracting works from the Guggenheim's permanent collection that cohesively and provocatively examine the topic. Featuring one hundred works by sixty artists, "Haunted" presents a multi-faceted view into how contemporary artists use photographic images and processes.

The curators Jennifer Blessing and Nat Trotman classified the exhibition into four sections that address formal and conceptual connections among the works. The first section, "Appropriation and the Archive," examines the postmodern shift of artists using sourced photography and images from popular culture.

Featured are seminal works from Sarah Charlesworth, Douglas Gordon, Barbara Kruger, Sherry Levine, Richard Prince, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol, among others. While the works bear some relevance, most of them have been previously exhibited many times in more interesting contexts. Considering the works in relationship to the exhibition theme, the idea that photography is haunted by the past seems an obvious interpretation. Some of these works, however, do transcend this basic connection: Warhol's image of electric chairs (*Orange Disaster #5*, 1963) continues to resonate due to its bleak reminder of our failed justice system. Charlesworth's series "Modern History" (1977–79) questions how photographs shape history, using stark images that remind us of our fleeting collective memory.

The next section of the exhibition, "Landscape, Architecture and the Passage of Time," explores the relationship between site, history, and trauma. This section includes well-known works by James Casbere, Sally Mann, and Hiroshi Sugimoto. Four other artists—Walead Beshty, Ori Gersht, An-My Lê, and Janaina Tschäpe—depict sites embedded with political meaning. Beshty photographed an abandoned building in Berlin, the site of a failed Iraqi diplomatic mission. A strange colorful fog shrouds the images, the result of film damage caused by the airport's x-ray machines. Tschäpe's disquieting video features a figure twirling to the sound of a child's music box. Set in Goethe's summer home, the eighteenth-century building overlooks the former Nazi death camp Buchenwald. A former Vietnamese refugee, Lê photographs reenactments of the Vietnam War. Staged in Virginia woods, the work calls into question the veracity of documentary photography. Gersht photographs Holocaust sites in the Ukraine; the resulting



While “Trauma and the Uncanny” most closely aligns with the traditional definition of “haunted,” this section includes some original work. Zoe Leonard’s 1990 black-and-white photograph of a wax anatomical female doll with exposed internal organs is boldly disturbing. Why is she wearing pearls? Why does she have the vacant expression of a sex doll? Anthony Goicolea’s manic video *Nailbiter* (2002) elicits a visceral reaction in the viewer. Covered in saliva and thousands of fingernail clippings, the young protagonist, played by the artist, appears possessed as he obsessively bites his nails. Adam McEwen’s convincing faux obituary of porno artist Richard Prince humorously reasserts appropriation as a current artistic strategy. McEwan’s clever language describes Prince as a “restless connoisseur of the underbelly of the American Dream” who “strip-mined popular culture.” Paul Chan’s flash animation *6th Light* (2007), of silhouetted falling objects, powerfully evokes disaster and destruction, while its glowing light promises renewal.

The exhibition’s strength is the Guggenheim’s diverse collection. Rich with important works and influential artists, it was a pleasure to see some younger and lesser-known artists featured as well. The show felt too safe, however, lacking in curatorial risk-taking. Perhaps this is due to the limitations posed in the collection, but the end result left me anything but haunted.

**COLLETTE COPELAND** is a multimedia artist who teaches critical writing and visual studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

*NOTES* 1. Webster’s dictionary definition. 2. Press release dated March 23, 2010, New York, New York.

**Above**  
6th Light (2007) by Paul Chan

images resemble abstract Colorfield paintings. Their beauty belies the horrific violence that occurred at the sites. In addition to the political connotation of these works, the artists’ formal processes question photography’s role in portraying an accurate history.

In “Documentation and Reiteration,” the curators address how photography and video have been used to document temporal works. Included are documented performance works by Sophie Calle, Joan Jonas, Ana Mendieta, Gina Pane, and others. Tacita Dean’s video installation “Merce Cunningham performs Stillness (in three movements) to John Cage’s composition 4’33”” (2007) functions beautifully within the Guggenheim architecture. The freestanding screens allow the viewers to interact with the work as they walk along the ramp. The viewers’ silhouetted bodies project on the screens, and *they* become the movement. German artist Markus Hansen’s unassuming work *Curtain* (2004) delicately captures the performative act of breathing. Hanson combines dust, varnish, and breath on glass to produce this ethereal image.

## PARTICIPATORY POLITICS

**THINK AGAIN: Actions Speak**

Worcester Art Museum  
Worcester, Massachusetts

October 30, 2008–October 17, 2010

While wandering through a little maze at the Worcester Art Museum, something that looks like a large-scale rendition of a human femur appears through a glass door down a hall. A closer look reveals *Actions Speak*, a 67 x 17-foot, context-specific interior mural and exterior projection by the artist collaborative THINK AGAIN (David John Attyah and S.A. Bachman). The piece is part of the “Wall at WAM” series, organized by Susan Stoops, the

museum’s Curator of Contemporary Art. Central to the museum’s contemporary curatorial mandate, the Wall is, according to museum literature, “a laboratory for participating artists and visitors alike.”<sup>1</sup> A laboratory in which “monumental scale, ephemeral nature, and moving juxtaposition of past and present” come together to delight, solicit, and challenge an audience initially drawn, presumably, to the museum’s substantial and well-established historical collection.

The left side of the mural depicts a somber mass of dry bones, hand-drawn, enlarged, and collaged into a pile. The paper bones are intertwined with masses of black microphone cable and float on a field of black ash. The right side of the picture is dominated by two enormous microphones on a bed of salt. Each microphone is rendered useless—one is covered in a red condom—a limp, translucent, glistening sheath—and the other is covered in the chopped heads of countless smashed and smeared lipsticks. Each