

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Sam Korman, "Teen O.P.E.R.A (Teen Orchestra Plays, Everyone Reads Along)," *Flash Art*, October, 2018

FLASH ART

1 READYMADES BELONG TO EVERYONE

Swiss Institute, New York
By Rahel Aima

Readymades haven't made such a splash since Marcel Duchamp first submitted a porcelain urinal to New York's Society of Independent Artists in 1917. Now, just over a century later, sixty-five readymades from over fifty artists spill over four floors in "READYMADES BELONG TO EVERYONE," the Swiss Institute's first exhibition in its new East Village location. The building formerly housed a series of progressively more corporate banks, and certainly impresses following its gleaming renovation. Unfortunately, the show itself is something more akin to the slow drip of AC runoff, or what we fondly like to call city rain.

Inside, the crowded ground floor is staged as a kind of ersatz urban environment, albeit one as sanitized as the Institute's St Mark's Place address. Here are Richard Sides & Gili Tal's touristy slogan tees folded on cardboard boxes, various Claire Fontaine street performers, Martin Wong's charming *Traffic Signs for the Hearing Impaired* (1990), which spell out words as ASL signs, and Lutz Bacher's cardboard cutout of a fire truck. The siren is displaced to Jan Vorisek's *Paranoid Parade* (2018) in the basement - a kind of sonic red shift that is a pleasing accompaniment to Dusty Baker's grab bag of gray paint on the walls. Nearby are a Christo storefront, Sylvie Fleury and Lady Pink's cheesy pop-feminist graffiti, Cedric Price's newspaper kiosk, and Klara Lidén's *Untitled (Loveseat)* (2018) made out of plywood leftover from the space's refurbishment, painted the familiar green of construction scaffolding.

Other works are more ephemeral, such as Lena Tutunjian's unfinished lunch of coffee and a Subway cookie crumbling on a windowsill and elsewhere on video loop, and performances featuring a policeman, or a curator fast-talking on a phone. There are intimations of the domestic and the desktop too, in Ser Serpas's bathtub, Jennifer Bolande's excitingly juxtaposed amp screen, refrigerator door, and photograph combo, and Alan Belcher's rather glib gallery wall of ceramic jpeg icons. In a small back room, Kaspar Müller offers a different kind of readymade with a 3D-printed shelf that is broken to reveal its filamented interior.

Like any city, there are some particularly rewarding views among all the trash and pigeons (a papier-mâché iteration from Sveta Mordovskaya). Wade Guyton's contorted tubular Breuer chair and Irix and Robert Hausmann's *Maso Chair* (1967/2018) play beautifully with chairs from Heimo Zobernig and OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen, also in golds and silvers. But a closer look at the Hausmann chair, especially rewarding in its modesty, gestures toward a different narrative of the city. In a move reminiscent of Man Ray's *Cadeau* (1921), the artists have affixed cruelly sharp *ikebana kenzan* - the Japanese

translates to "sword mountain" - mounts to an Eames chair frame. Duchamp might have termed this an assisted readymade, in which found objects are combined in a way that renders them inoperable. But in context, the work instead suggests the anti-homeless spikes that are becoming an increasingly prevalent urban fixture.

The thing is, readymades - like the city - do not belong to everyone, and they aren't accessible or affordable to everyone either. As fictional placeholder Reena Spaulings's paint-marked metal detector perhaps inadvertently suggests, readymades are ultimately about gatekeeping. A sixty-sixth readymade in this show might be the art world's own self-reification and control of access - a dynamic that is all the more jarring given that the Swiss Institute is free to all. Fittingly, the title is taken from artist Philippe Thomas's 1987 conceptual artwork in the guise of a PR agency, which transferred authorship of an artwork to its collector at the point of sale. And it feels as sincere as Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York" tinkling over the sound system at JFK's immigration hall.

2 FRANCES STARK

Teen O.P.E.R.A. (Teen Orchestra Plays, Everyone Read Along)

Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York
By Sam Korman

The underlying question of Frances Stark's exhibition "Teen O.P.E.R.A. (Teen Orchestra Plays, Everyone Read Along)" is why *The Magic Flute*? The show's centerpiece is a video adaptation of Mozart's classic opera, for which Stark collaborated with a youth orchestra to produce the score. Conductors were brought in. The musicians rehearsed at the artist's studio. With the talent assembled, Stark designed the visuals and assigned each of the dozen or so characters a special typeface. The final product resembles a karaoke video, but at feature length.

The exhibition also includes static reproductions of the video's title cards and typefaces, but they lack purpose on their own. Oh well, I'm not here for the merch, and the video's formal success upstages the rest. *The Magic Flute*'s melodies proceed in lockstep with the lyrics and propel the story forward. Love once again triumphs over evil. And the lovers Tamino and Pamina are finally allowed to kiss. Stark's ingenuity always brings to mind an observation by Minutemen bassist and DIY saint Mike Watt: bands today have all the tools, he states, but remain limited by their own imagination. That the video is so entertaining, and possesses its own dramatic merits testifies to Stark's deftness and rigor with even the most basic tools or well-worn stories. No small feat considering subtitles are essentially the star.

But the project gets the most miles out of its democratic way of working, and, as

1C Alain Clairet, *Untitled*, 1987. Screenprint on paper and title card with text: "Alain Clairet 1987". 31 1/2 x 55 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.
1D Martin Wong, *Traffic Signs for the Hearing Impaired (stop sign)*, 1990. Aluminum. 30 x 30 in. Courtesy of the Estate of Martin Wong and P.P.O.W., New York.

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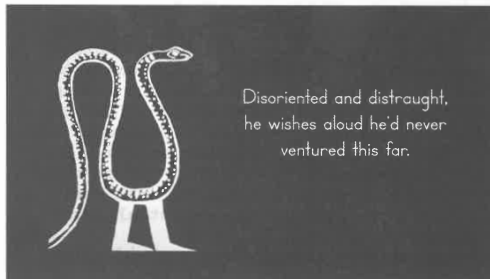
Stark often does, relies on her immediate neighbors in Los Angeles to both question and circumvent privileged access to the art world. *The Magic Flute* is no different, though this time she's selected a fairy tale about power, corruption, and innocent love with obvious appeal to children. It's a collection of diverse musicians who bring an indelible energy to these themes, driving home the integrity of their music to pass on a political message to other kids. Stark's clearly so taken with them that she rewrites the ending, which ordinarily celebrates love and reason, so the opera's high priest instead spotlights each musician. They deserve the accolades. Their music really does just as much of the talking.

3 HELEN CHO
You Remain Dismembered

Trinity Square Video, Toronto
By Gabrielle Moser

Translation is always a political act. As any multilingualist will confirm, every word choice obscures as much as it reveals, lending phrases (sometimes unintended) discrepant meanings from the original. Helen Cho's latest sculptural and video works probe the poetics of translation across diverse sources and media, turning life story into narrative film and transforming everyday materials into objects of contemplation. Cho isn't after an accurate or faithful rendering, though; her formal choices invite a polyphony of sounds and meanings, skirting opacity without ever straying into incoherence.

The promise of home is central to Cho's works. The single-channel video *So Many Wind* (2018) tells a story of immigration, loss, and settlement through archival photographs, first-person storytelling, and long takes of the narrator's everyday environment. The second in a trilogy of films about Tai Lam - a Vietnamese immigrant who came to Canada in 1986 by way of a refugee camp in Indonesia - the story unfolds naturally and nonlinearly, interweaving his childhood, harrowing journey, and present-day life in Canada where he works at a pizzeria. Filmed in almost imperceptibly low light, or through richly saturated red and blue filters, the video pans across a garden filled with lilies and daisies, studies a pigeon scratching at peanuts on the pavement, and fixes on a



Disoriented and distraught,
he wishes aloud he'd never
ventured this far.

2

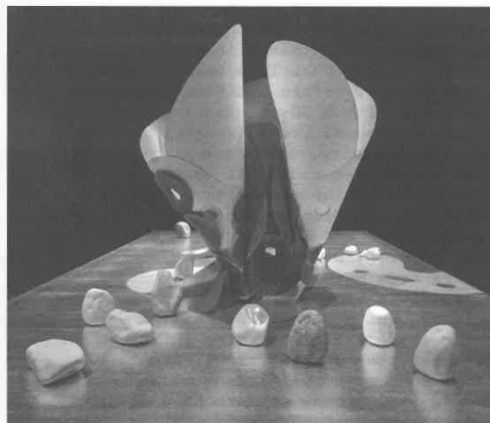
man's polo-clad back as he deftly cuts and weighs out dough in an industrial kitchen. Birds chirp over the man's gentle voice, interspersed with chatter from customers and the sounds of a turn indicator and a car radio. The content is devastating, but it is Lam's delivery that sticks with the viewer: his voice halting, breaking, and pausing between words. Though this might be described as the "broken" English of newcomers, Cho revels in its poetry. Excerpts from Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's 1982 novel *Dictee*, which mixes English, French, and Korean, appear as intertitles along the bottom third of the screen, underscoring the lyricism of this fractured speech and lending the video its name.

A sculptural assemblage nearby continues these themes. On a *pyeong-sang* (low bench) covered in gold vinyl, the faux-leather petals of an oversized floral still life are flanked by or shield stones in *Materiality Reconstructing a Desire for Auspicious Life* (2018). Made from dough, these delicate stones act as a linking device back to the video, and underscore the ways everyday objects become provisional sites of transference for both the desires and realities of migrants.

4 FEMINIST LAND ART RETREAT
Free Rein

Audain Gallery, Vancouver
By Steffanie Ling

The concept of retreat implies a physical distancing, but what we are really trying to get away from is dominant ideology, or at least the images that circulate to reinforce it. Notions of feminist land art, or a feminist land art retreat, do not exclusively belong to the realm of art. Images of agency between women and land quickly reveal a political project: one of making visible ways of being that are not beholden to the terrain of men. In its exhibition of video and sculpture, the artist group Feminist Land Art Retreat (FLAR) cultivates subtle ways of



3

2 Frances Stark, *The Magic Flute*, 2017-18. Video still. Single channel video TRT. Color with sound. 112". Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York.
3 Helen Cho, *Materiality Reconstructing a Desire for Auspicious Life*, 2018. Leatherette, dough, celadon, bone china, wood. Photography by Jocelyn Reynolds. Courtesy of the artist.
4 Feminist Land Art Retreat, *Transmissions*, 2018. Photography by Blaine Campbell. Courtesy of the artists and Audain Gallery, Vancouver.