

there are people. A chair. Word “stone” movement in mind, barefoot on concrete steps, smooth stone on cheek washed and (g)rounded by sea and ice, build a wall, coal mine, punishment, iron ore under the ground, refined and made for landmines, exported from the tall northern country south. “Paint” movement in mind, wherever you go (with it), boredom, emotion, breakfast. (Still) may be “an image of” reveals its impotence, it shows the world yet it is not the world it is showing.*

* Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 2005

SUPERSTITION

Inside the glass-surfaced gadgets live our new gnomes. We* do things *because*; we may not know why we do it (turn the Wi-Fi button on and off three times, restart our computers, take a detour in browsing); it will just work then or we think it will improve our chances. We stop asking questions; we use the habits from older systems when dealing with new ones.

*Feel free to interpret the *We* here. It could refer to, but is not restricted to, humans who have access to those liquid crystal screens and silicon based computational devices.

I was thinking about a text I read, *Echoes of Individuation: The Black Stack, Bicameral Minds & EVP*, and the relationship between schizophrenia, hearing voices and its relationship historically with language as technology, written and spoken. I haven’t read it properly, but remember being very annoyed with the arguments used.

SURFACE

How thin is a surface? I remember talking to one of my old teachers about paint rising up to the surface. I trained at a classical painting school for one year (nude painting classes from 9 to 4), and I remember so clearly some of the discussions on these painterly ways of seeing what you’re doing. It’s somehow easier to see with others. To tone a surface so it creates an illusion of a room, instead of jumping up and creating another illusion of being “on top” of the image. Or how to make something in a painting look like an opening, a dark room behind the open door, a cavern,—“Use a warm colour,” one of them said. “Brown. I don’t know why it is so but it works.”

SYNTHETIC

Stockings. The ones we wore were always ripped. Always black ones, in layers. Always too cold in the winter.

MARK BEASLEY IN CONVERSATION WITH NOAH BARKER

The New York-based artist Noah Barker discusses the role of negation in the thinking of the last century, specifically the ability of art to test capital while describing its social functions and the continually on-call mode that has become prevalent even among art professionals.

Noah Barker was born in 1991 and is currently based in New York. His fall 2015 exhibition at First Continent, Baltimore, *Prologue: Divergence Motor/Albatross Alarm*, set the scene for a narrative based in a futureless present which his fall 2016 exhibition at And Now, Dallas, will attempt to enact. Between these exhibitions he will have participated in the X Bienal de Nicaragua and the first Okayama Art Summit.

Projecting an Island from Another

En route to Okayama, Japan, where *Development*, the inaugural Okayama Art Summit Triennial is being planned, artist Noah Barker speaks with curatorial advisor Mark Beasley about ideas surrounding his previous and future projects. The conversation occurs while touring an island under going renovation in the East River that lies between Manhattan Island to its left and the borough of Queens on Long Island to its east.

MARK BEASLEY

I have to be certain not to erase over past conversations on this card... there’s an interview with Malcolm McLaren I gotta get off it... Ok, so, negation... Maybe we can start there. It was a word that recurred over a number of the conversations we had in Japan and I noticed the term again when I was reading one of your press releases. Can you define your usage? Do you view it as a form of denial or a means of thinking?

NOAH BARKER

Negation is a motor of a lot of thought from the past hundred plus years and it refers to a lack. It’s an aspect of the process of modernity that manifests itself in personal and social ways. It’s a historically implicated conception that I am positioning myself in relation to. It’s also got to do with the cynic as one who imagines the present as “what should not be” and the future as “what ought to be.”

MB

The cynic was something “to be” at some point; now it’s a dismissive term because it largely addresses notions of progress that are not acceptable.

NB

Exactly. **MB**

So what would the opening few lines be of your imagined *Dummy’s Guide To Negation*? **NB**

It would read, “Beneath the cobblestone, the beach.” It would mean get rid of this society and start over for something more accommodating. And the point of that show... **MB**

What was this show called? **NB**

“International Currency,” which is a phrase taken from the collector Donald Rubell. He says, “Art has become an international currency.” The quote is brought up on the first page of David Joselit’s *After Art*. And the first line of the press release is an inversion of the start to the would-be *Dummy’s Guide*: “We’re at the beach now beneath the cobblestone so it seems.” It transforms the negativity into an affirmation of the present. The text was written from a specific relation to power and perspective on the future, namely one filled with uncertainty rather than hope, but also self-projection.

MB

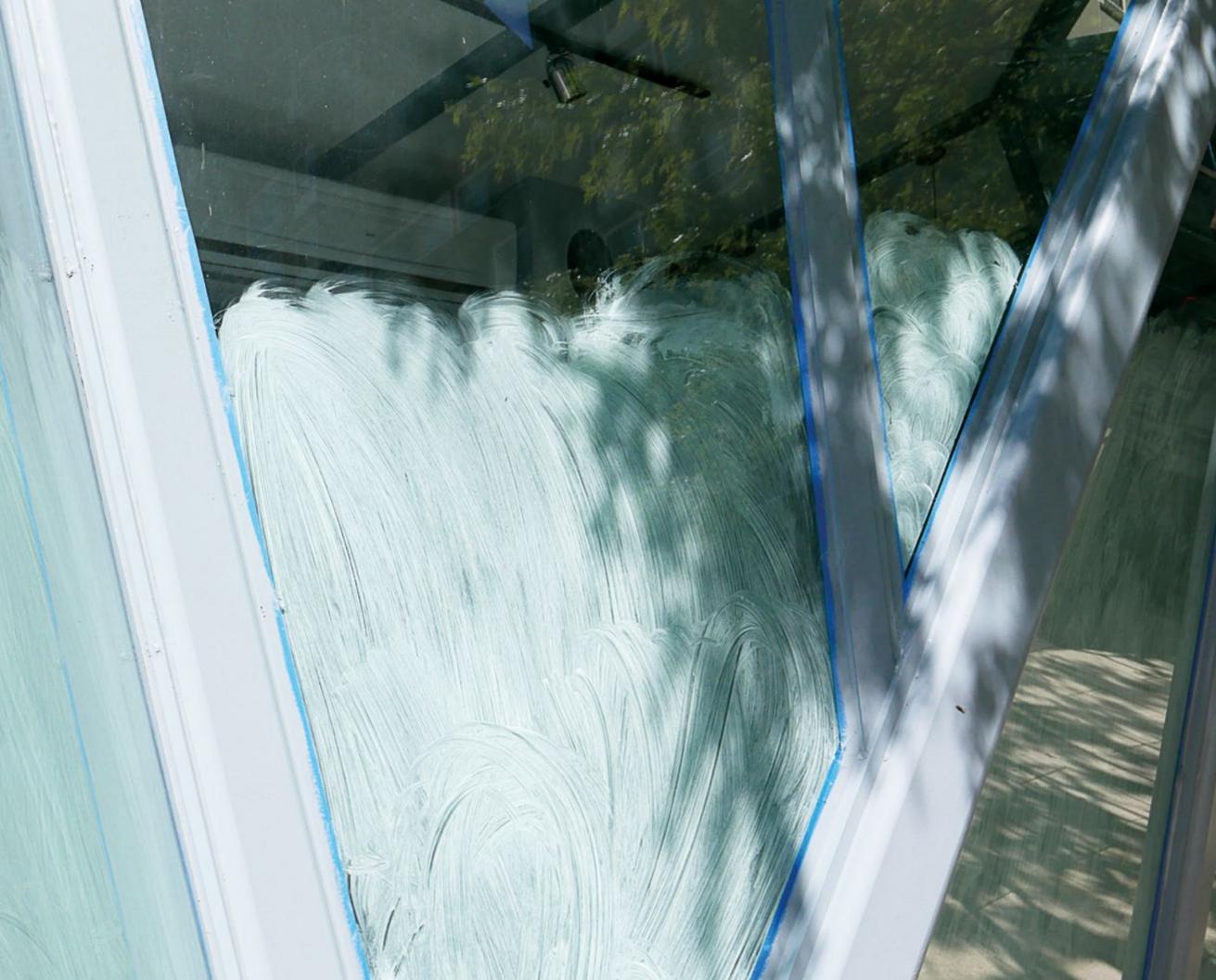
You placed Scott Reeder and Liam Gillick in the show. It’s an unlikely pairing. **NB**

It was really a test, the whole show was a test. I was interested in these tests of capital and its recuperative ability, but also narrating its mediation. **MB**

I wonder to what extent art as

Top and bottom - *Prologue: Divergence Motor/Albatross Alarm*, 2015, *Prologue: Divergence Motor/Albatross Alarm* installation views at First Continent, Baltimore, 2015. Courtesy: the artist and First Continent, Baltimore





a form is any kind of test to capital; as we've seen, it's likely something that can be swallowed by it. And how was that test read? It was in Mexico City. I wonder how Scott's *Detroit Rubble* sculptures were received. **NB**

I was interested in the multiple publics and an inherently fragmented social sphere. I was painting a target on the gallery in a way, like suggesting maybe this should be rejected, on the one hand, but on the other, it will likely be tolerated. The group of anarchists working next door really liked the show.

MB

It's an example where one is complicit, as curator or artist, in a clear notion of gentrification and development. This brings us back to Okayama and the hopes for the city and the triennial. **NB**

And what are the hopes of the city? **MB**

Well, we should discuss that.

NB

I think understanding the way we work is vital to grasping the expectations of the experiences we will create there. Generally, I think it's hoped that the value intrinsic to the labor exerted into the city by the group will engage and reflect the social and economic forces and subjectivities already present. **MB**

There's a slightness to your work, especially how you deal with images and text onscreen. That's to say there's rigor and depth to the ideas but also fractures and discontents within what can be communicated visually after the exhibition. There's an allusion to the process of becoming and piecing together and it begins with labor and with production and with invitation. Do you feel you are an active agent or an on-call sleeper whose terms or tendencies are supplied and informed by external desire and suggestion? **NB**

I do a kind of common thing. No works are made until I'm asked to do something. **MB**

But it's not common to all, at least in terms of those with a studio practice. **NB**

But there's a legacy. **MB**

Ok, but I'm thinking about this kind of dispute with an idea of labor of being asked to perform and produce, yet you're willingly waiting. Is that a submissive role? **NB**

I'd say a lot of the time that I'm waiting, I'm actually situating myself in a position where I'm more likely to be asked. There's conversations, there's nights, there's emails, that all amounts to opportunities to do things. Then when I get the opportunity to do something, that structure gets fed back into what is shown. **MB**

The condition strikes me as the continually on-call mode that both curators and artists are asked to engage in. Where even in one's leisure or down-time or "post-work" we're still active, we're still called to be a useful machine somehow. And so that becomes part of this production. We were at e-flux last night. As a younger artist, maybe it was useful for your development; it might also be part of your entertainment, it might also pass as your social time as well. But how does one actively confront the requirements of engagement? Is it like one uses Starbucks because you can sit there and you can write and you can use Wi-Fi and there's a restroom so why not? **NB**

I've sought to seep into the crevasses of compromise. It's like the idea of the myth that the periphery is inherently more complicated than the center. I don't remember where I heard it but it's a third way thing. I say it to draw out the socio-political implications of participating in a culture that you don't necessarily agree with, just to resolve the need to do something. How to obstruct an individuating logic and a fixed temporal relation... This is the crisis that is imagined in the *Divergence Motor/Albatross Alarm* scenario. Social space gets activated by discursive activity and it gets deployed, it gets made into self-conscious non-work-working areas. **MB**

For that alarm you used Fleetwood Mac's "Albatross," which sounds like a warm cozy place to be, but the way you positioned, it is not. It's not

fraught, but it kind of fights against what else was happening in the space. Maybe you can talk about what an Albatross Alarm means, how popular musical form is brought into something that perhaps isn't and how it functions. **NB**

Well I first encountered the song in the credits of *World on a Wire*, Fassbinder's science fiction film and I realized I was going to produce a prologue for a sci-fi to set the mise-en-scène for a narrative that would occur within the gallery. Originally with the show, I was trying to occupy the gallery the way the students occupied the apartment in Godard's *La Chinoise*. Go in, do something, and have it go back to how it was. However, what I was occupying was a hair dresser becoming a white box. So I called a work stoppage and within it, I inserted the Albatross Alarm and Divergence Motor. **MB**

And then there were the news sheets... **NB**

Yes, there was a subscription to the *Financial Times* so that the newspaper on the windows, blocking views from the street, could be updated throughout the exhibition. The lulling alarm is there to notify you that you are doing what you're doing. It's a stand-in for self-consciousness and the discursive and the mediation that comes with it. The words scrolling across a screen move fast enough that you can only get a sense of what's occurring, but the first line is: "There's a unity referred to as the present that exists in heightened forms in certain spaces." This would be contemporary art. I was proposing that after I leave, people will come and bring things here and the collective activity will be taken as some way of us all relating to each other equally, because we exist simultaneously. But that subjectivity is rhetoricized as common interest and shared prosperity in the justification of free trade zones. Perhaps this temporal relation is illegitimate when it gets deployed culturally in different places, whether Okayama, Nicaragua, or Baltimore. And now I'm working to complete the movie that was alluded to by the prologue, to show in Dallas, at a space that won't exist where it currently does in a few years because of development. **MB**

It feels like your attempting to rescue, retrieve, or produce an art from a chain of events whose logic and organizational system only exists within an art super-structure. Could this process be described as the serpent that eats its tail or the dog that wags his? **NB**

From the options, it seems to be the serpent, but to quote Lawrence Weiner: "Let us take the bagel from Hegel."