

N "LA CAIXA" FOUNDATION
CONTEMPORARY ART COLLECTION
CALL FOR CURATORS

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THE NEXT MUTATION

WITH WORKS BY

Absalon

Nacho Criado

Eva Fàbregas

Cyprien Gaillard

Dora García

Eulàlia Garcia Valls

Gego

Isa Genzken

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Joan Jonas

Antoni Llena

Àngels Ribé

Victor Ruiz Colomer + Joe Highton

Wolfgang Tillmans

Francesc Torres

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THE NEXT MUTATION

EXHIBITION

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By condensing the rhythm of mutation, we could summarise it as sequence, cut, alteration, altered sequence. This sequence isn't guided in any particular direction but rather diverted onto an unexpected path. Once repeated, a sequence becomes a convention, an applied, accepted, *normalised* rule that packs what we think of as customary into a neatly defined, done-and-dusted space that offers few surprises. A revolution is somewhat similar to a mutation in that it puts us in a new position, "a process that produces history, taking us away from a repetition of the same attitudes and the same significances".¹ A cut disrupts things and throws the known and unchanging into crisis, opening up a possible escape route from the established world.

The virus said: "If you hadn't changed the whole expanse of the world, or worlds rather, that just yesterday were still luxuriant, chaotic, infinitely inhabited, into a vast desert for the monoculture of the Same and the More, I wouldn't have been able to launch myself into the global conquest of your throats. If nearly all of you had not become, over the last century, redundant copies of a single, untenable form of life, you would not be preparing to die like flies abandoned in the water of your sugary civilization. If you had not made your environments so empty, so transparent, so *abstract*, you can be sure that I wouldn't be moving at the speed of an aircraft."² The virus, an entity on the very edge of life and death, has emerged from the depths of genetic history to subvert the present.

The virus inhabits our bodies, presses us to mutate and forces us to look into the abyss of our own extinction. The virus infiltrates cells and partakes in the evolution of life; its history is intimately linked to our own in the tangled web of species and ecosystems that make up the Earth, Gaia, the symbiotic planet.³ According to Paul B. Preciado, the virus copies and reproduces mechanisms of domination, turbocharges biosurveillance and locks us down in homes that have

¹ Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, trans. Karel Clapshow and Brian Holmes (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007).

² "What the Virus Said", an anonymous text published in *Lundimatin* on 16 May 2020, <https://lundi.am/What-the-virus-said>.

³ Lynn Margulis stressed the key role played by symbiosis in evolution: intimate contact between entities as a form of genetic variability.

been turned into hubs for digital consumption and obedience with a vanishing presence of organic bodies. The pandemic accelerates history, imposes new means of segregation, dishes out death along lines of structural, race and class inequalities and ushers in border policies designed to protect Western immunity:

“the new Lampedusa is your skin”.⁴ With this in mind, the exhibition brings together a selection of works by artists of different generations to explore a whole series of interrelated ideas: appropriating mutations, imitating the virus, seeing the pandemic as a gateway to an alternative understanding of our mutual relationships with the world, looking at the positions we hold afresh through the prism of alteration and reassessing the social and ecological ramifications in store for us.

This show owes much to the groundbreaking artists of the 1960s, who saw the art object as a catalyst for collaborations and emotions that bind us together in an assemblage of shared experiences. It maps out a rugged terrain forged by combinations and relationships between materials and life, presence and absence, the actual and the possible. These intersections provide an opportunity for intimacy, touch and ephemeral encounters and set our bodies in a performative relationship with our environment—a dimension in a constant state of creative flux, always in the process

of becoming something else. If we want to explain the world as a network of open configurations, we need to think about the reciprocal approaches we can use to open up our minds to move from a conception of a planet inhabited by ostensibly self-sufficient individuals and species competing for control of inert resources to an understanding of the world as an indefinite process of coexistence. But how can an art object switch the interrelatedness of the world and empower us to participate as latent combinations of entities? By attempting to answer this question, this show offers a glimpse of a period of art history ranging from representativeness to performativity,⁵ by way of Minimalism, in

⁴ Paul B. Preciado, “Learning from the Virus”, *Artforum International* 58, no. 9 (May/June 2020), <https://www.artforum.com/print/202005/paul-b-preciado-82823>

⁵ This story merits further research on visual poetry’s role in bringing about this shift. I am indebted to Llorenç Mas Bancells for his input on this matter.

which the object is not done and dusted but intimately linked to the presence of an audience, triggering a questioning of space and relationships, blurring boundaries and putting subject and object on an equally precarious footing in a situated composition. The following series of arguments should help us see mutation as a means of destabilising the customary and normative and creating a collective practice of joyful communal existence.

2

The performative object and the situated subject. On Tuesday 9 January 1968, unaware that it would prove to be the coldest day of the winter, Joan Jonas and a group of like-minded dancers headed for a Long Island beach to shoot a performance film, *Wind*, named for the unexpected appearance of one of the elements as an additional actor that day. The weather conditioned the performers' movements, adding a degree of uncertainty which, though not envisaged, was in keeping with the artistic coordinates of the time. In this 16 mm film, compound bodies that aren't quite human engage in actions influenced by coats, mirrors, plastic and tinfoil. In these task performances,⁶ body and object share equal billing, and these interdependent figures conjure up ephemeral constructions cloaked and transformed by the wind and freezing cold (the temperature fell to -20 °C that day). In addition to its situated relationships and ecological interactions, the piece also draws on Jonas's interest in Imagism, a movement whose followers included Ezra Pound and H. D. (Hilda Doolittle). She was particularly taken by its aim of presenting—not representing—complex things in compositions that elude attempts to find concrete meanings.⁷ Pound advocated poetry that featured direct treatment of the “thing”, whether subjective or objective; to use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation; and to compose in the rhythm and sequence of the musical phrase (freely), not in the sequence of a metronome (regular). An economy of means, a rejection of the contrived and lifeless, a way of understanding poetry which, by presenting

6
Task performance was a common term at the time to describe a movement governed by the use of an object, similar to the rules or structures in a game that replace personal expressiveness with an operative movement. See, among others, Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1983).

7
Joan Jonas referred to this directly at a talk she gave at the Bergen Kunsthall on 25 February 2011, <https://vimeo.com/20412896>



Joan Jonas. *Wind*, 1968

intellectual and emotional “complexes” instantaneously, “gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.”⁸ Here we can find part of the animus behind 1960s dance

8

Ezra Pound, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste”, *Poetry* 1, no. 6 (March 1913): 200–206, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69409/a-retrospect-and-a-few-donts>

9

André Lepecki “Moving as Thing: Choreographic Critiques of the Object”, *October* 140 (Spring 2012): 75–90, https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO_a_00090. His emphasis on a-personal, subjectless movement as a means of liberation from hierarchical, patriarchal concepts and interaction with other “things” on a horizontal basis, as a way of living alongside other entities within ecosystems, is something that Jonas has continued to explore in her work.

10

Created, as the artist herself recognises, almost impulsively in the privacy of her own home in 1970–1971, *3 punts* re-emerges now some fifty years after it was first created and ten years after it was last on show, at a 2011 MACBA retrospective.

11

It would be worth exploring the history of the corner as a crucial intimate location, a crossroads of two planes, which has been the object of multiple intentions from the avant-gardes onwards, including Malevich, Tatlin, Flavin and Nengudi, among others.

movements that used anti-expressiveness and the equality of bodies and objects to “liberate a dancer’s moves into a field of nonhierarchical, horizontal interactions”.⁹

Phenomenology was another movement that had a major influence on the 1960s generation of artists, who saw sensory and corporeal experiences as a means of carrying out political and ecological experiments by focusing on the subject as an entity in a state of constant flux with its surroundings. Àngels Ribé’s *3 punts* (3 Points, 1970–1971)¹⁰ places us in an internal space created by the piece.¹¹ The geometric play of lines reveals a certain fragility and variability as visitors—and their shifting perceptions—move through the space and recognise themselves as moving bodies. By placing the public in a process of occurring and becoming, the piece opens up a relational time and traces out a triangle formed by the three points of the piece plus a fourth: the visitor-spectator. From this position, we begin to acknowledge our environment and see how links between interdependent entities can reveal a network. In this variation of the customary, such connections don’t anticipate a codified other but open up a process in which we are unable to foresee the characteristics of the other point, be it body or object. This correlation transcends each entity and puts them on a par with each other in an expanded comprehension that takes in the piece, the space and the system, affirming positionality

as one of the requirements for being a situated part of the world and its interpretation—not a homogenous, hierarchical, vertical, supposedly objective vision, but participation on an equal basis.



Àngels Ribé. *3 punts*, 1970–1971

3

The performative object and the critique to stability. Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology leads us to consider the notion of orientation by reflecting on what we have close by in general and behind us in particular. Left, right, east, west, north, south: our body inhabits the world, and its oriented situation sparks a two-way interpretation between exterior and interior, inside and out, pushing us towards objects and propelling objects in other directions. By considering what lies behind objects, Ahmed urges us to think about their conditions of arrival and the material history that emerges from the background. Husserl's¹² writing table—the first object the philosopher had close by to perceive the world—indicates an orientation within a domestic space, as well as a series of uses: writing, doing things on the table, touching objects—and thereby constantly orienting ourselves, given that we change in relation to whatever we touch. A cohabitation between bodies and objects. This orientation arranges our immediate surroundings, the everyday things we have close by; as we orient ourselves with our surroundings, the objects orient us, forming a cultural context in which the queer subject deviates from the dominant heterosexual norm. These rules of behaviour follow successive furrows of accepted codified life stages, a “straight” line etching out continuities in time, family, genetics and heritage.

On the table in the exhibition, Absalon's video *Proposition d'habitation* (Prototype Living Quarters, 1991) shows a performer moving around a made-to-measure space based on the dimensions of the artist's body. He inhabits the space and interacts with the objects, seeking a kind of correspondence to escape from the normative world. Based on this prototype, the artist designed a series of cells to be installed in cities all around the world, “like a virus,” he said. Shortly before dying from Aids-related complications, he planned to build these living modules in six cities,¹³ each one varying slightly in design depending on the site in question. Adapted to its environment, this basic, essential, functional architecture¹⁴ also had a performative side that

¹² Edmund Husserl established the school of phenomenology in the early 20th century.

¹³ Frankfurt, Paris, New York, Tel Aviv, Tokyo and Zurich.

¹⁴ Absalon had a studio and living quarters in Villa Lipchitz, built by Le Corbusier in Boulogne-sur-Seine.

announced a form of altered domesticity. The space and furniture created a daily choreography, a modulation of inner life and an experience of existence physically constrained by the austere design, creating a perpetual state of mind

15

In *How to Live Together* (1977), Roland Barthes placed idiorhythmic life somewhere between a hermit's seclusion and religious or lay community life in a monastery or cooperative community. Idiorhythmia—the individual rhythm at which we each pass through life—is almost inevitably repressed by power structures, which impose a series of tempos sounded out at ceremonies celebrating the heteropatriarchal family as the basis of Western society, thus eliminating differences and clearly marking off the normal and accepted from the peculiar and peripheral.

16

“It could have been the greatest provocation I am capable of giving to the art world: not to offer anything for sale, only to be within this system with no output, without producing anything. . . . It is not an activity anyone will ever support. The system is not interested in sustaining such ideas. Once art is no longer a commodity, it will cease to exist. Artistic value is monetary value. It's crazy.” Absalon in conversation with Catherine Francblin, “By the Way, I'm Always Worried: What If I Die Today?”, in *Absalon* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2013).

that turned the artist into a cosmonaut in an escape pod that was also a bastion of resistance to standardised bourgeois middle-class life. He couldn't accumulate goods, have a family or anyone else on hand or read more than one book at a time. He would be living like a hermit, an anchorite, like a desert father, living an idiorhythmic¹⁵ existence outside a community. In their opposition to consumerism, Absalon's cells offer both the possibility of an alternative existence and an attack on the way the art market operates, in that they are planned purely to exist, without producing anything.¹⁶

By binding an economic critique together with a form of subjective otherness, Absalon's habitats function like essays on articulating the space between the present and the possible. They are physical challenges that propagate a constant negotiation of contacts, distances and exchanges, given that, inserted into the city, they question rather than delimit what we share. These minuscule living spaces also hint at Etruscan tombs, mastabas, bachelor machines and bunkers awaiting a new postapocalyptic—perhaps post-pandemic—community. By deciding to shut himself away from the outside world in a state of architectural purity, Absalon was trying out a prototype of life, isolated but not asocial, total but not totalitarian, a space where the body was on a par with its living quarters, specially designed by himself for himself. From the malleability of the object to the consideration of space, Absalon works on order, the arrangement of objects, series, scale, domesticity done and undone, to rethink the relationship between the individual and the collective,

between artist and audience. This understanding of the art object goes back to Minimalism, which saw the object as triggering a temporality that sets the public in a performative relationship and which, when recognised, invites us to consider the conditions of the container, the exhibition space, and thus develop a critical awareness of the institution, the representation device.



Absalon. *Proposition d'habitation*, 1991

On the other side of the table, Francesc Torres's cube, *Prototip per a una edició il·limitada* (Prototype for an Unlimited Edition, 1968–1969), makes a similar critique of the art system. Departing from visual poetry, Torres made forays into minimalist objectuality in the form of a series of paper objects. Although the pieces themselves were burned,¹⁷ a group of prototypes survived that Torres planned to mass-produce and distribute as a revolutionary venture for subjective and social transformation. This exhibition presents a previously unreleased edition of one of these prototypes, in this case a cube, which the artist planned to produce as an unlimited edition and sell for 1½ francs apiece. Some of these cubes included words, like poetic objects, while others, such as the one presented here, exude colour in a way that stresses the cube as an object. Although the emphasis is on the object, and therefore on the coordinates of volume and surface, which already implies a change in how it is perceived, the act of bringing out its colour makes it more starkly defined, heightening its presence

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At some point between the late 1960s and early 1970s, Santi Pau burned his own work and several pieces by Torres. Pau and Torres, together with other artists and poets such as Carles Camps, Xavier Franquesa, Salvador Saura and Jordi Pablo, regularly met at a workshop on Gran de Gràcia, Barcelona. This group has not received a great deal of attention in recent art history.

over the horizon as a singularised yet also reproduceable object, an entity at the same level as the spectator, here a cocreator. This reciprocity between the parts leads us to think of a joint formation, the performative definition of one based on the other. On printed cardboard, Torres offers spectators a tactile experience that furthers his reflections on consumption, on our relationships with the material world around us and with those that share the same production

ties, on how we make ourselves while being made.

This construction, this cube-ourselves, might look like a quest for order, although its irregular shape complicates things and indicates a trend towards disorder and imbalance. Bringing the notion of entropy to bear on artistic practice, Torres says: “If order, expressed through the positive activities associated with it (science and technology), is a necessary reaction against nature as part of the endeavour to control it, art is the process of physical and psychic compensation and accommodation with the natural world. In terms of both how it is made and how it is perceived, art is an entropic experience, and its meaning lies in what it represents as alternative forms of behaviour

to the sedimentary accumulation of objects.”¹⁸ In the process of making the cube-ourselves, we explore the possibility of alternative relationships, forms of behaviour and actions with the surroundings (Absalon), and we recognise ourselves as immersed in a continual material process whose ultimate fate is its destruction.



Francesc Torres. *Prototip per a una edició il·limitada*, 1968–1969



Antoni Llena. *Escultura dissecada*, 1968

Alongside Torres’s cube we find another piece from the same year: Antoni Llena’s *Escultura dissecada* (Dissected Sculpture, 1968). This is one of Llena’s works from the 1960s made out of fragile, immaterial parts and bodily fluids: paper and semen, sweat and shadows. In an article for *Mosca* magazine published in 1969, Llena said that Arte Povera “reveals and ridicules any form of strength or power; and within the art world it implicitly opposes forms of speculation that exploit artists and render them inoffensive. . . . Seen in this light, it would be difficult to speculate with art of such a limited lifetime. . . . This is art with a human lifetime.”¹⁹ Llena had lived in a monastery some years before and it may well be that his experience of poverty and appreciation of time in nature, and perhaps also communal living,²⁰ led him to reflect on the ethereal nature of existence. By seeking out this character in the material nature of artwork, he not only questions art’s economic value and market speculation (whose scope might be debatable) but also invites us to reflect on temporality: once material and human²¹ are on a par, all things in existence follow the same fleeting rhythm, an irreversible, revolutionary, entropic process. The human and the material share the same status of precarious vulnerability. “Precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others. Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves. Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as our others.”²² This precarity points to a shared state between matter and life, object and body, goods and workers, and puts paid to the creed of unlimited growth and modernisation as the paradigm of progress. The 1968 clamour against an authoritarian, conservative world rings out in *Escultura dissecada* and its insistent questioning of stable structures and narratives of power, leading us to recognise other pre/post-capitalist temporalities in which the subject relinquishes its preeminent role in interpreting the world.

¹⁹ *Mosca* 6 (1969), quoted in Pilar Parcerises, ed., *Conceptualismo(s) poéticos, políticos y periféricos* (Barcelona: Aka!, 2007).

²⁰ He spent a well-known period at the Jardí del Maduixer commune with Jordi Galí, Silvia Gubern, Àngel Jové and Albert Porta/Zush/Evru.

²¹ In his article “Antoni Llena i l’art pobre”, *Serra d’Or* 126 (March 1970), Alexandre Cirici equates the fragility of materials with the transient nature of human life.

²² Anna L. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015): 20.

4

The performative object and stagings. Rituals lead us to think of a world of multiple agencies in which shared history is moulded by the ostensibly inanimate, biological and geological. Although there is very little in the literature²³ about Nacho Criado's *Discoidales* (Discoidals, 1985), the artist may well have been aware of the Basque funerary steles, or hilarri, with a carved *lauburu*²⁴. Criado's fascination with combining "techne and witchcraft"²⁵ suggests a fruitful encounter between the productive and modern on the one hand and the enchanted and ancestral on the other, mutually absorbed into transfigured debris, fragmented, obsolete, residual goods—in short, into art. An allegorical operation that, though not a readymade (since his pieces are not consumer goods), does involve a transformation of the object, which shifts from the inert to the enveloping. By hinting at a rotating movement, this mechanism spins spectators into an unknown ritual. Criado's piece sets materiality in motion, with mirrors reflecting the passage of time as we are swept into hypnotic circular currents. This movement also draws attention to a process that incorporates an organic component as a sign of the transient and perishable side to life: the human bodies reflected in its three constituent parts, which might be three crosses, three stelae, three tombstones.

23

This piece appears to have been overlooked in retrospectives on the artist, and to date I have been unable to find any further information beyond a technical description and an old photograph of the piece installed in 1985 at the Palau Macaya, home to the Fundació "la Caixa" cultural centre until CaixaForum Barcelona opened, in 2002.

24

This hooked cross with curved arms, containing symbols of sacred fire and the protective sun, dates back far into history and links the physical with the spiritual, the masculine with the feminine.

25

As Remo Guidieri recalls in his text for the exhibition catalogue for the Criado retrospective *Nacho Criado: Collaborating Agents*, on at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo between 2012 and 2013.



Nacho Criado. *Discoidales*, 1985

The transformation of the objects in Criado's piece, with its procedural, ritualistic arrangement, leads us to think about staging, which brings us back to a consideration of the exhibition space as the catalyst of experience, be it consumption or transformation. "Everything to do with the theatre, like everything related to art as an institution, exists in a shared space between subversion and absorption, between passive contemplation and active rupture, between the state and the multitude, between creation and the market. . . .

26

Manolo Borja-Villel in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue for *Um Teatro sem Teatro*, organised by MACBA and the Fundação de Arte Moderna e Contemporânea—Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, in 2007.

Now that museums have all embarked on an endless spiral towards ever-greater spaces and franchises, now that capitalism is accelerating at a dizzy pace, perhaps it is time to rethink how we fold, in the sense Pasolini gave to the term: tending outwards rather than inwards. Paying attention to the fragile life of bodies, to the hostility towards the commodification of our existence, to the explicit manifestation of the vanishing line between the public and private in everything to do with the theatre: these must be the key areas of political action today."²⁶ Performativity, the continuous formation of spectator and object, sparks a process of opening up outwards and shapes individuals' fit within a group, with the aim of understanding them as a system in which they all play a part and where the action of one individual affects the group as a whole. Collaboration builds collectiveness.

Continuing in the same theatrical vein is Dora García's *Bolsa dorada* (Golden Bag, 1995). A plastic bag containing a golden material covers one of the corners of the room. The lightweight nature of the bag suggests its ephemeral nature and invites us to peek between the present and the absent, between the visible space and its other side, the hidden part behind it, created by the intervention of the object in the architecture of the gallery. Somewhat ambiguously, the piece creates an inside and outside with a certain degree of theatricality in the duration of its shift from front to back, from the artist's intention to speculation about the unknown space behind. Furthermore, we could also consider the ambiguous

gesture of offering and hiding something as a distancing and defamiliarisation effect, a form of questioning the spectator's position.²⁷ Above and beyond possible similarities with other works by the same artist (such as her inflatable bags and golden sentences), *Bolsa dorada* has a particular focus on representation devices that involve the formulation of a subject, devices which have been historically articulated by the theatre, museum and film. The presentation of an art object is intrinsically linked to the conception of the moment of reception and the space where it takes place (black box, white cube); and it is the introduction of a performative object (interaction, duration, variation, materiality) that leads to a questioning of the exhibition space, a critique of art as an institution that also raises questions about how we use the relationship between different elements to create knowledge of the environment, and how this manifests and/or constructs a system of domination. In other words, the relationship created by the performative object shifts the logic of representation to place the spectator in a process of transformation of reality. In this correspondence with its surroundings, the object participates in a material history, which in the case of gold has had a profound influence—like the virus—on human development.

27

I take this argument from Borja-Villel's text in the catalogue for the exhibition *Second Time Around* at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in 2018: "Broadly speaking, much of Dora García's work is a reformulation of Brechtian *Verfremdung*, or estrangement. . . . Based on critical and emotional distancing, the defamiliarization effect that Bertolt Brecht sought in his theater reactivates the audience's cognitive apparatus, making them see reality in a new light. One of the techniques that Dora García uses to achieve this effect is 'delegated performance', which eliminates the possibility of her own subjectivity determining the course of action." It is worth wondering whether we can consider *Bolsa dorada* as a delegated performance, where the object takes on an authorship, putting the spectator on an equal footing and creating a defamiliarisation effect through its material qualities, which both attract and abstract us at the same time.



Dora García. *Bolsa dorada*, 1995

5

The performative object and the crisis of time. The search for a different temporality to that forged by the lines of progress overlaps with the endeavour not to codify life, not to adopt certain patterns of behaviour oneself or impose them on others. It offers an opening to an indeterminate meeting that might foster another kind of relationship. Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work *Untitled* (1990) provides an opportunity to explore this space of potentiality. Although the artist is well known for his strategies for disseminating his work through multiples, which have been compared to the transmission of a virus,²⁸ the piece included here is from a series of a circle of dolphins presented in various media.²⁹ In this case, the artist placed an unusual requirement on the piece: once all the copies of the poster had been handed out, the work should cease to exist as such. Whereas other multiples can be reproduced and given out to the public, and it is explicitly up to curators and collectors how to present the pieces, here the artist has taken a step that nudges us towards disappearance. Following the owner's instructions, this piece is presented in a display case, which conserves its economic value while keeping it well away from visitors' grubby hands, like an untouchable patient, an infectious body. Isolation as a mechanism of biocontrol and, at the same time, a definition of what makes something individual, what it means to be shut away, what constitutes content. Although conservation of the ephemeral is one of the major issues of concern in the world and the art market, here we aren't contemplating the possibility of extending the life of a sculpture made out of shit or chocolate,³⁰ but rather facing a freezing of a moment yet to culminate, in a twist that thwarts the artist's intentions for the benefit of conserving the piece's economic and iconic value.

28

Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson, "Contracting Justice: The Viral Strategy of Felix Gonzalez-Torres", *Criticism* 51, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 559–587.

29

Other variations have presented the circle of dolphins (a symbol of prosperity in classical antiquity) on a range of different textures: on the skin as a tattoo, on the glass in a window and on a cotton long-sleeved T-shirt, such as the one—as indicated by the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation—produced by the "la Caixa" Foundation for the exhibition *El jardín salvaje* (Madrid, 1991), curated by Dan Cameron. The one on show here, on paper, is a limited edition made by the artist at a Californian printing press in 1990.

30

Typical examples of conservation are Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Shit* (1961) and Dieter Roth's chocolate sculptures, such as *Schokoladenmeer* (Sea of Chocolate, 1970), currently in the MACBA collection.

By forcing it to live on, we are imposing a similar heteronormative temporality to that described by José Esteban Muñoz. Queer utopia strives for a critique of presentism, the here and now dominated by normative behaviour, in which capitalism occupies the whole space as something inevitable and naturalised, like heterosexuality.³¹ At the same time, if the poster in the display case were to be handed out as Gonzalez-Torres had planned, we wouldn't be facing a

disappearance of its aesthetic value and potential for change, but rather a material continuation that places us in the flow, in the potentiality of the multiple lives that each of these copies (of its original DNA) would have in combinations unthinkable in everyday life, even if they were to pass through the art market again. It is this potentiality that Muñoz has in mind when exploring queer utopia and performance, and in this piece we see that “performance is the kernel of a potentiality that is transmitted to audiences and witnesses, and the real force of performance is its ability

to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging.”³² Muñoz places us in a utopia as a performative space, not a temporality of something yet to come, but a radical appreciation of an opening, a horizon, which in this conjunction with the material poster leads us into the treatment of a remnant as a potentiality. “Utopian performativity suggests another modality of doing and being that is, in process, unfinished,” says Muñoz. It is in this potentiality of becoming where we ought to see the dolphins and minority community that might be released if the glass in the display case enclosing them were broken.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. *Untitled*, 1990

31
And, we might add, echoing Mark Fisher, with no possible alternative to capitalist realism.

32
José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University, 2009), 99.



Cyprien Gaillard. *Cairns (251/261 Résidence Provence, Dammarie-lès-Lys, 1973-2008)*, 2008

Entropy finds another echo in Cyprien Gaillard's photograph *Cairns (251/261 Résidence Provence, Dammarie-lès-Lys, 1973-2008)*, which shows a mound of rubble on the outskirts of a city, a picture with powerful connotations of the 2008 financial crisis, triggered by the subprime mortgage crisis and which had devastating effects on the housing market. This path to surefire destruction—forged by what can only be seen as suicidal capitalism, valuing profit above wellbeing—offers a reading of the photograph (taken the same year the crisis hit) as an almost militant document. The mention of entropy naturally brings to mind the writings of Robert Smithson,³³ who expanded the field of artistic action towards the process itself, and whose focus on waste—negative accumulation—aptly captures current consumer trends: from desire to trash. This short-lived existence is spurred on by an advertising machine whose reach extends far beyond what an image denotes to construct a vast symbolic illustration of what constitutes social and material success in a system of possession and ownership. Following a similar approach to American Land Art, Gaillard photographed a demolished building on the outskirts of Paris as if it were a deliberate work. This

33
Robert Smithson, “The Monuments of Passaic”, *Artforum* 6, no .4 (December 1967): 52–57. On the morning of Saturday 30 September 1967, Smithson went for a walk around his hometown in the New Jersey suburbs. There, between wastelands, overgrown lots, dilapidated houses and the remains of unfinished constructions, he reflected on entropy, the cosmic trend towards disorder and chaos, as an inevitable form of decomposition and transformation—an interest which led him to leave the gallery and head for the American West as the site for his works.

heap of rubble is both a pile of stones and a cairn suggesting a route through the history of ruins as a timescale that goes beyond the individual: a material transcendence that dwarfs us. Far from a bucolic scene, Gaillard's ruin is further confirmation of junkspace, a concept coined by Rem Koolhaas to refer to the final process of modernity, where the proliferation of grandiose architecture with global pretensions soon becomes repetitive and irrelevant, like waste, which "instead of development, offers entropy".³⁴

34

Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace",
October 100 (Spring 2002):
175–190.

35

I thank the exhibition designer,
Pep Canaletta, for identifying
these shelves.

Architectural thought and reflections on materiality continue in the work of Isa Genzken. Her work *Bookshelves* (2008), echoing aspects of designer Patrick Jouin's storage cubes and Meccano and Metro Erecta shelves,³⁵ forms part of a set of pieces in which the artist evokes the 9/11 attacks. Genzken, who was in Manhattan on the day the Twin Towers fell, replicates the collapse, which retains a powerful grip on our collective imagination, and leads us into an appreciation of the fragment, a piece of devastated infrastructure. In other series such as *Fuck the Bauhaus* (2000) and *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death* (2002–2003), Genzken composes

small-scale models of constructions and scenes of violence and chaos out of everyday objects. The juxtaposition of dissimilar elements brings out the banality of consumer products and takes a critical swipe at Constructivism and Minimalism by turning the object into a piece of reality that shares our state of crisis. Genzken is also known for assembling the objects herself, often junk from the street repositioned to create distorted portrayals of a world of accumulation and waste. It isn't hard to conjure up the picture of a mound of contemporary ruins—the cheap clothes, endless plastic and Ikea furniture that swamps our lives—as a far cry from the utopia of functional, egalitarian modern architecture. Taking our cue from one of Genzken's titles, we might say that in our own time Bauhaus has given birth to a glacial form of global corporate architecture, which for Benjamin Buchloh "correspond[s] to the ever-expanding demands of late-capitalist forms of exploitation of human labor and ecological resources . . . architecture exclusively determined to following

economic necessities of profit maximization to the detriment of any concern of urban dwellings, urban communities, or ecologies."³⁶ According to Buchloh, Genzken's recent sculpture goes beyond the phenomenology of experience, central to Minimalism, which reaffirmed the subject as an entity in space—relational but singled out—to present a commodified subject, equivalent to the detritus of fast consumerism.

36

Benjamin Buchloh, "Keynote
Address", in *Graduate
Symposium Compendium 2019*
(Dallas, Texas: Nasher Price-
Nasher Sculpture Center, 2019),
95–110.



Isa Genzken. *Bookshelves*, 2008

6

The performative object and intimacy. In conversation with Genzken, one of his close friends, Wolfgang Tillmans makes the following point: “I think it’s much more radical to see and show things as they look instead of making them somehow subversive through alienation or estrangement. . . . It’s better if you can show an inner thought or something shocking with a so-to-speak realistic representation, without it becoming immediately ‘art’.”³⁷ The set of images presented here brings together individual pieces from various years between 2006 and 2016. From left to right: a photo of a beach on Fire Island, a queer hotspot off Long Island, close to New York City; a detail from one of the tapestries in the *Unicorn Tapestries* series, made in the late 15th century and now hanging at the Met Cloisters in New York City; an abstract image from the *Silver* series; and a photograph of two flowers titled *Geschlechtsteile*, “genitals” in German. Above and beyond any concrete references in this semantic landscape, these images are all openings, whirls of seductive associations for spectators. Tillmans has referred to his work as an effort to make the invisible visible,³⁸ first and foremost by paying close attention to detail, which enables him to transmit an intense intimacy we can relate to. His reflections on representation encompass the act of photography, and in his abstract series he manages to treat photography as an object, representing itself. The images in the *Silver* series, made without the use of a camera and processed in the laboratory using salts, algae, chemicals and light, make the silver nitrate-covered paper an object that influences the emotional feel of the whole. As with Criado’s work, we find a sequence, a continuation altered by the introduction of a nonreferential image alongside images taken with a camera. The conjunction between figure and abstraction, between express selection and uncontrollable process, makes the *Silver* series act by itself, like a nonhuman entity³⁹ able to alter the photographic sequence with its materiality.

37
Wolfgang Tillmans and Isa Genzken “In Conversation: Who do you Love?”, *Artforum* 44, no. 3 (November 2005), <https://www.artforum.com/print/200509/in-conversation-who-do-you-love-9739>

38
In conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Hans Ulrich Obrist & Wolfgang Tillmans: The Conversation Series*, vol. 6 (Köln: Walter König, 2008).

39
Tom Holert, text in *Wolfgang Tillmans: Saturated Light (The Silver Works)* (Berlin: Galerie Buchholz, 2021). Many thanks to Juana de Aizpuru for the gift of this book.



Wolfgang Tillmans.
Fire Island II, 2016

Intimacy leads us on to Eva Fàbregas. Her piece *Kimberly & Chloe* (2019) forms part of a series of amplified moulds taken from two people's ears. By setting them up in relation to each other, the piece creates a hug that transmits a tactility based on form and surface, while the matt colour and finish of the synthetic material achieves a velvety quality that draws our attraction, stimulating one of the senses usually banished from the exhibition space. Here, touching, being touched, invokes a sensual, erotic desire that seeks a connection with visitors. In this way, body and exhibition space are questioned as producers of individuality, and the object opens us up to other origins, other configurations of life and material, while also throwing down a challenge to the gallery by exhibiting close contact and proximity. By stressing the affective touch between the unknown Kimberly and Chloe (whose ears are neither male nor female), Fàbregas's piece suggests proximity as a radical form of merging, mixing and co-being where individual identity is relinquished. Although the first thing that comes to mind might be references to modern sculptures stressing object and subject as separate but related entities, here, as we have seen with Genzken, sculpture appears to collapse subjectivity and objectivity. We are no different to our surroundings, we are made out of them and become them—an indeterminate genre, at once human and nonhuman, a precarious, fragile, malleable correlation. In this shared,

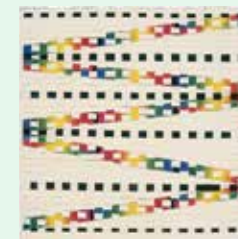
focused materiality, which defines how we live and can live together, hugs and embraces map out a terrain of associations and proximity that is all too often fenced off as out of bounds by the codified restrictions we agree to accept (not only during a pandemic).



Eva Fàbregas.
Kimberly & Chloe, 2019

7

The performative object weaves a network. Gego's *Tejedura 91/15* (*Weaving 91/15*, 1991) is a weft that explores entwinement as a continuation and disruption of a pattern; helped by colour and paper, it shifts between collage and assemblage. The expansion from two- to three-dimensions—something which ever since the historical avant-gardes has gone hand-in-hand with reflections on the status of the art object—parallels the transition from representative to performative. Gego's work is not an illustration of a network of interactions or an abstraction, but a form of articulating space, probing the possibility of variation in existing settings. Driven by her ever-present interest in the body, her wire meshes envelop visitors and place them within a spatial network, thus situating and inserting them. In her *Tejeduras*, Gego interlinks everyday elements—magazine cuttings, small pieces of cigarette packets—to create a combination of colour and movement, repetition and difference, that takes flight from the two-dimensional plane to create a composition that is all about entwinement. In other *Tejeduras* we can catch glimpses of pictures from adverts, or the composition might recall music scores or indigenous designs. In any case, these pieces don't explain but allude and invite us to reflect on the relationships that make up our environment, patterns we can recognise. The zigzag frieze is a visual onomatopoeia that brings together word, image and movement to mobilise a performative incidence. If these pieces aren't metaphors, we should think about how to write about them while avoiding these tropes; it is not about comparing or inventing properties, but writing continuously, incorporating the piece in an expanded creation that follows the same logic as text, taking on a discourse that doesn't seek to be all-seeing, but its own, delving into a critical perception of the order of space. In this comprehension, the pieces are points leading into or out of the exhibition, tangential lines that attract and engage visitors beyond the edges of the pieces, beyond the confines of the exhibition.



Gego. *Tejedura 91/15*, 1991

We find this same expanded character of pieces that mould the space-text as an open system in work by Moisès Villèlia. His late-1960s sojourn in Buenos Aires and Quito with Magda Bolumar and their son, Nahum, put him in contact with indigenous cultures, in particular the Quito-Cara. His fascination with the lines in their decorative drawings led him to consider “the mechanism of the human body as a ‘pantograph’, given that there is a certain degree of valuation in drawing where the expressive power lies in gestural coordination”.⁴⁰ The correspondence between body and drawing indicates an interest in contact, in continuation, where the object doesn’t follow a division between the natural and artificial, between nature and history, but seeks precisely the flow between them, between matter

40

Moisès Villèlia, excerpt from “Estudio de los Pirus y de los Pequenus” (December 1972), included in the catalogue *Moisès Villèlia*, published by IVAM in 1999.

41

In the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition in New York in 1942, Marcel Duchamp threaded the entire space of the gallery in a web of twine, almost obliterating the view of some of the works, while also bringing them into contact in a fragile mesh that filtered and connected a network made up of other artworks.

42

Given that this is a temporary exhibition, the particular relationships struck up within this combination of pieces are seen here for the first and only time.

and space. In his objectual explorations, Villèlia used all kinds of organic materials whose fragility echoes the ephemeral nature of relationships. His *Mòbil* (Mobile, 1985–1986) included here is an example of how the object draws relationships in space. It fills and empties it and plays at the suspension between referential (bug, tool, musical instrument) and actual (their incidence in space), making us read the gallery and, through its openings, the exhibition—a clear nod to a photograph of Villèlia peeking through a twine spider’s web in one of his sculptures. Looking through woven webs has a very particular meaning in art history⁴¹ and invites us to read the show as a whole, dotted with pieces like nodes in a network of ephemeral intensities.⁴²



Moisès Villèlia. *Mòbil*, 1985–1986

The reflection between visible and audible space, infrastructure and networks continues with projects by three Barcelona artists: Eulàlia García Valls and Victor Ruiz Colomer + Joe Highton. Their pieces and activities for this show offer further thoughts on the flux between nature and culture. García Valls’s sound piece *Subsols* (Subsoils, 2021), made in collaboration with visitors, explores listening as a form of comprehension and ecological participation to draw our attention to joint processes that inhabit and define the city, not as a space of division but for collective encounters between species. Victor Ruiz Colomer + Joe Highton’s intervention leads us into infrastructure as a cultural fact central to the construction of the global flows that crisscross our private lives. We depend on an extensive network of elements that are dispersed across the planet and beyond, resources and supplies that make our everyday life a tangled mesh of cables, connections, appliances, signals and screens enabling us to participate in global infrastructures of exploitation and extraction.



Eulàlia García Valls.
Subsols, 2021



Victor Ruiz Colomer + Joe Highton.
Pont Ponts Jardí, 2021

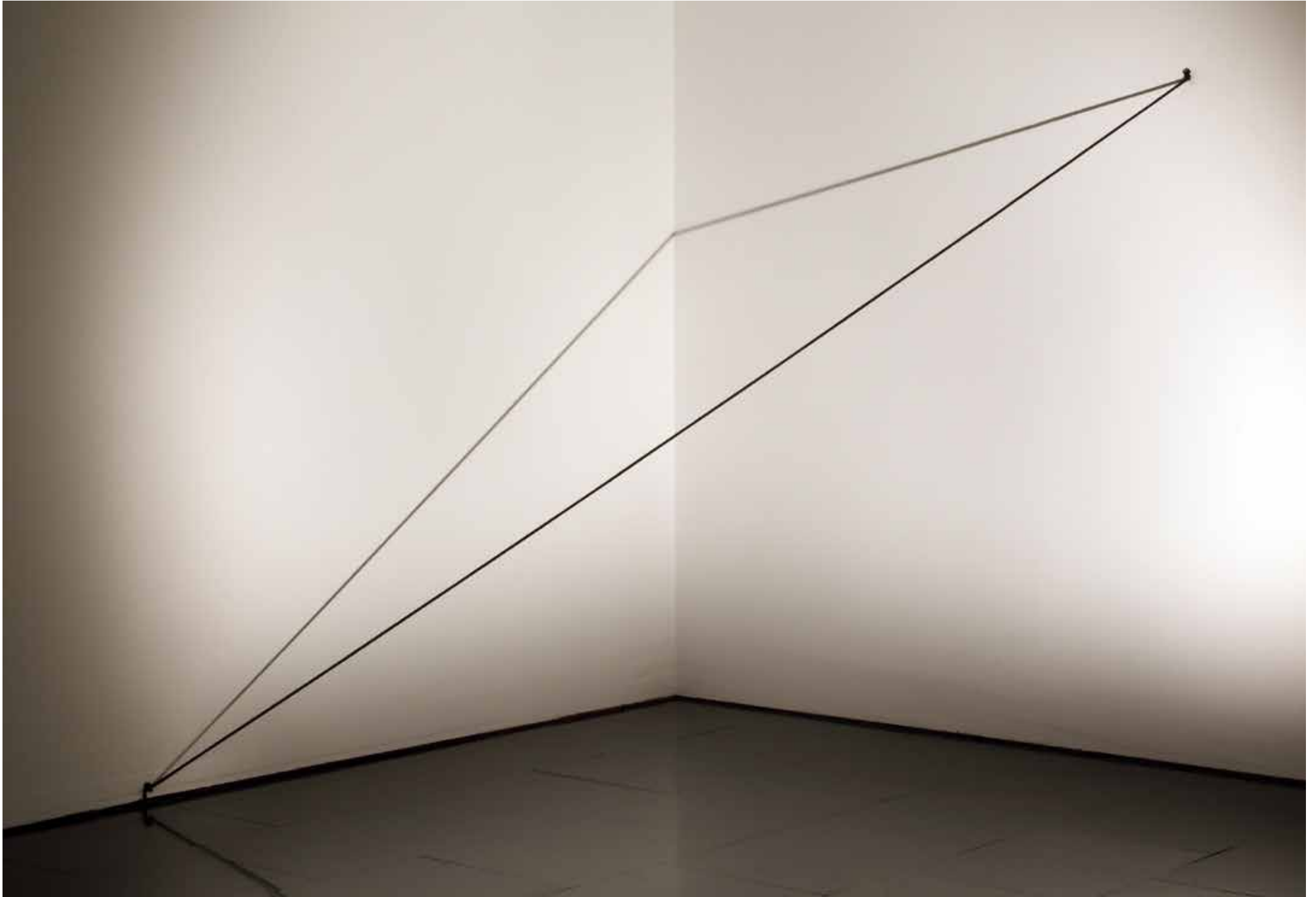
In this amalgam of proximities, the object triggers a revision of the relational parameters that form the subject, entwining subject and object together through a joint performativity in which it is no longer clear where one starts and the other ends and plunging us into an ecology of emotions that ventures beyond the hollow promise of linear progress and brings us closer to a community—a constantly mutating variation on life.

8

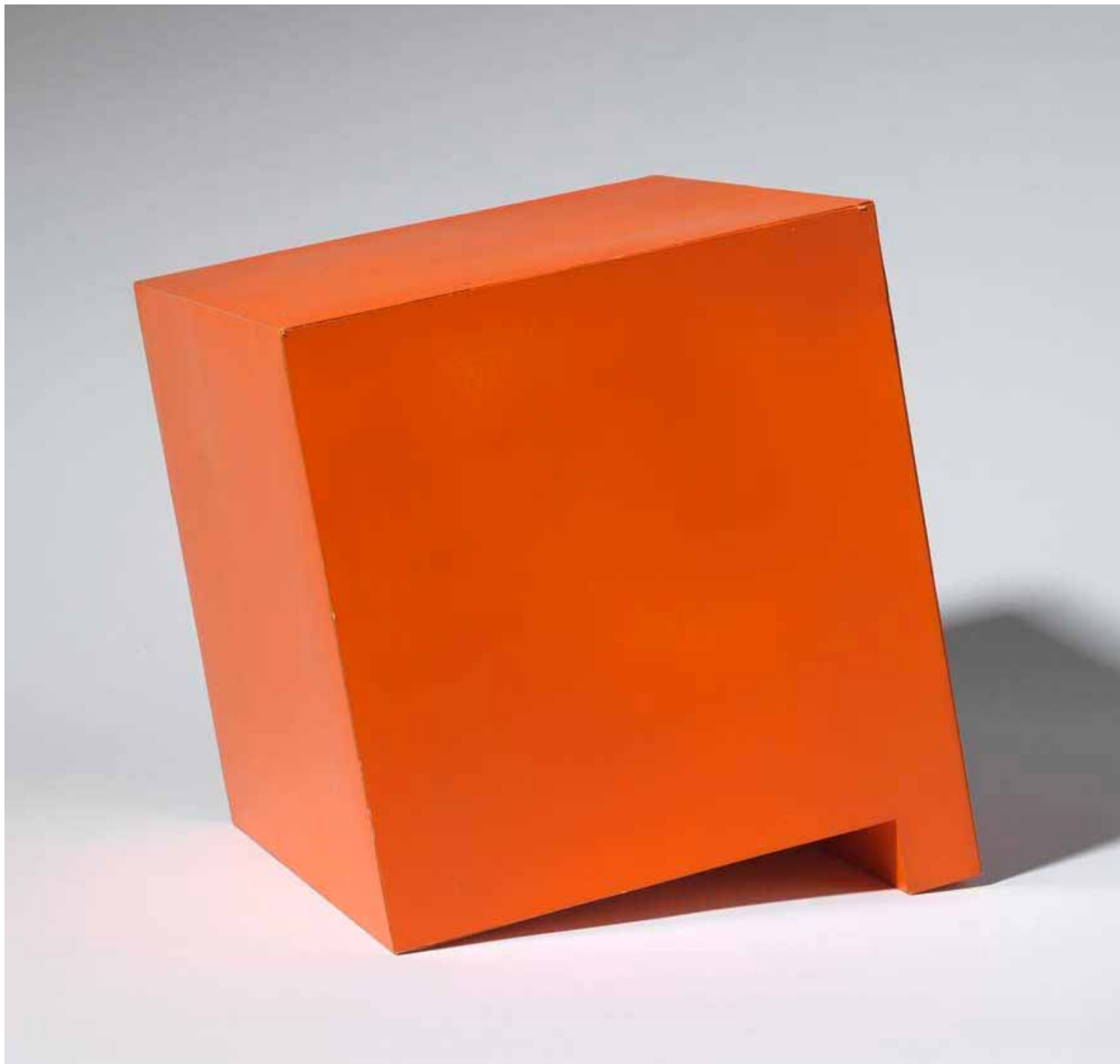
JOAN JONAS / ÀNGELS RIBÉ / ABSALON / FRANCESC TORRES / ANTONI LLENA /
NACHO CRIADO / DORA GARCÍA / FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES / CYPRIEN GAILLARD /
ISA GENZKEN / WOLFGANG TILLMANS / EVA FÀBREGAS / GEGO / MOISÈS VILLÈLIA /
EULÀLIA GARCIA VALLS / VICTOR RUIZ COLOMER + JOE HIGHTON

THE NEXT MUTATION

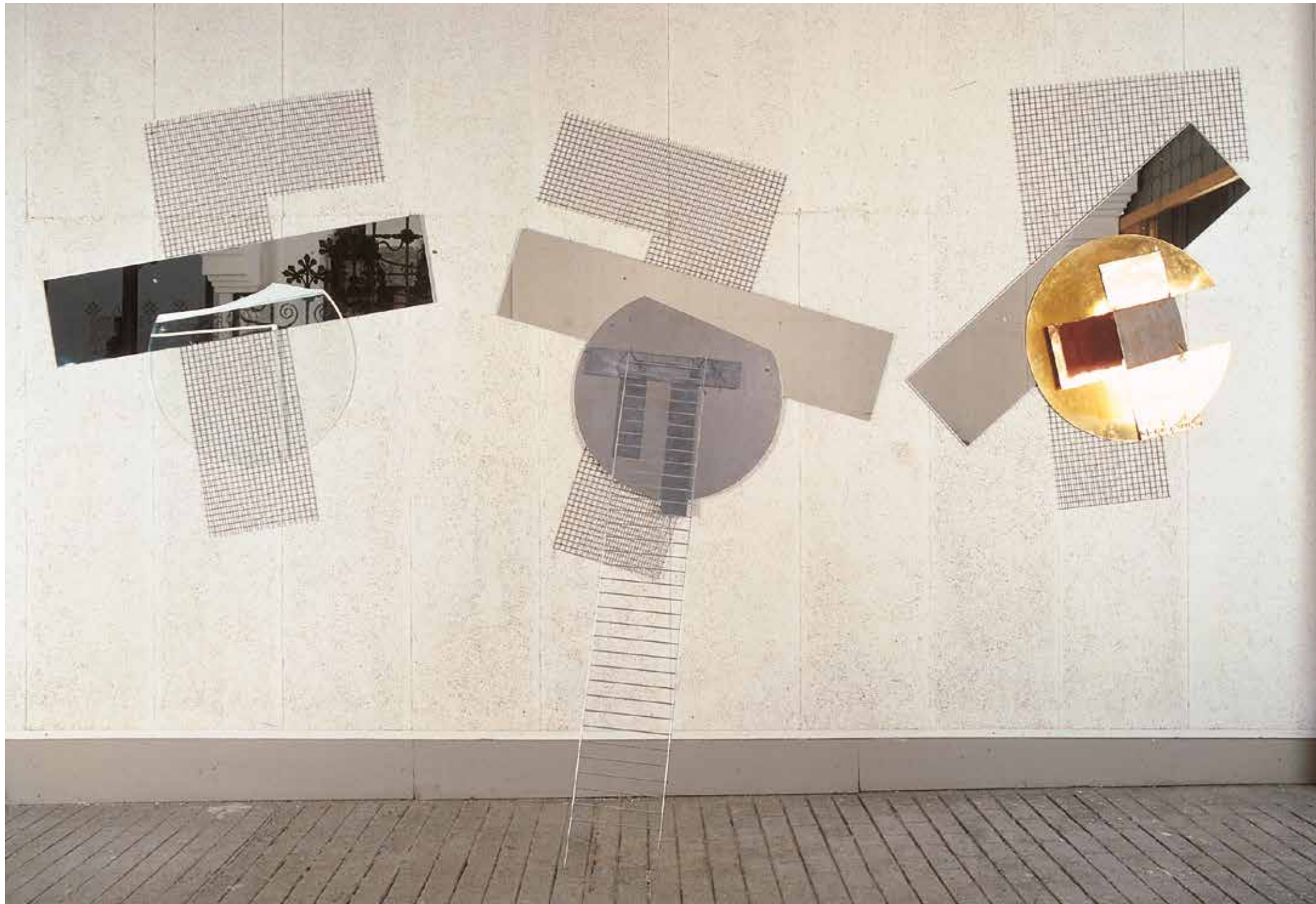














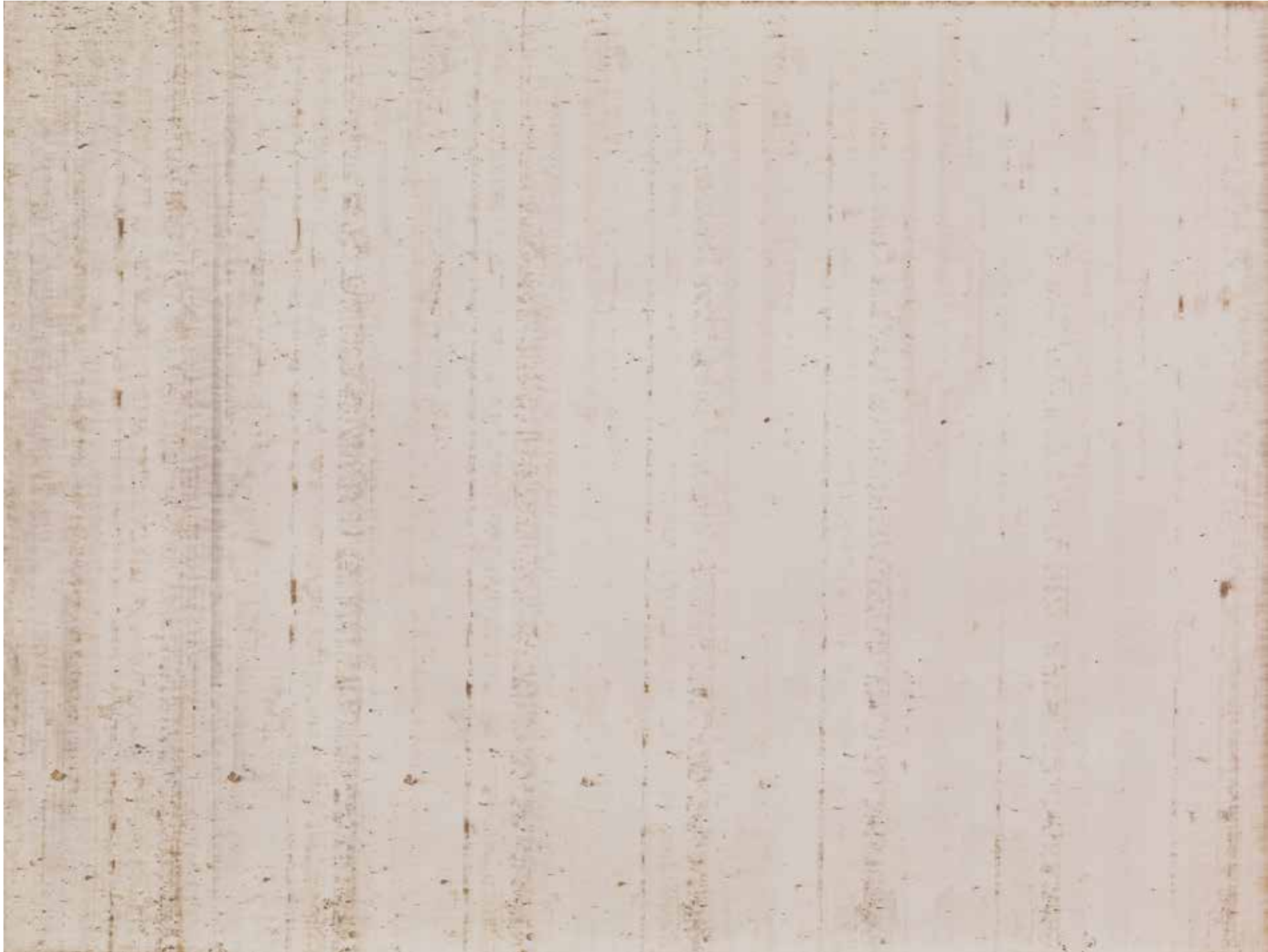






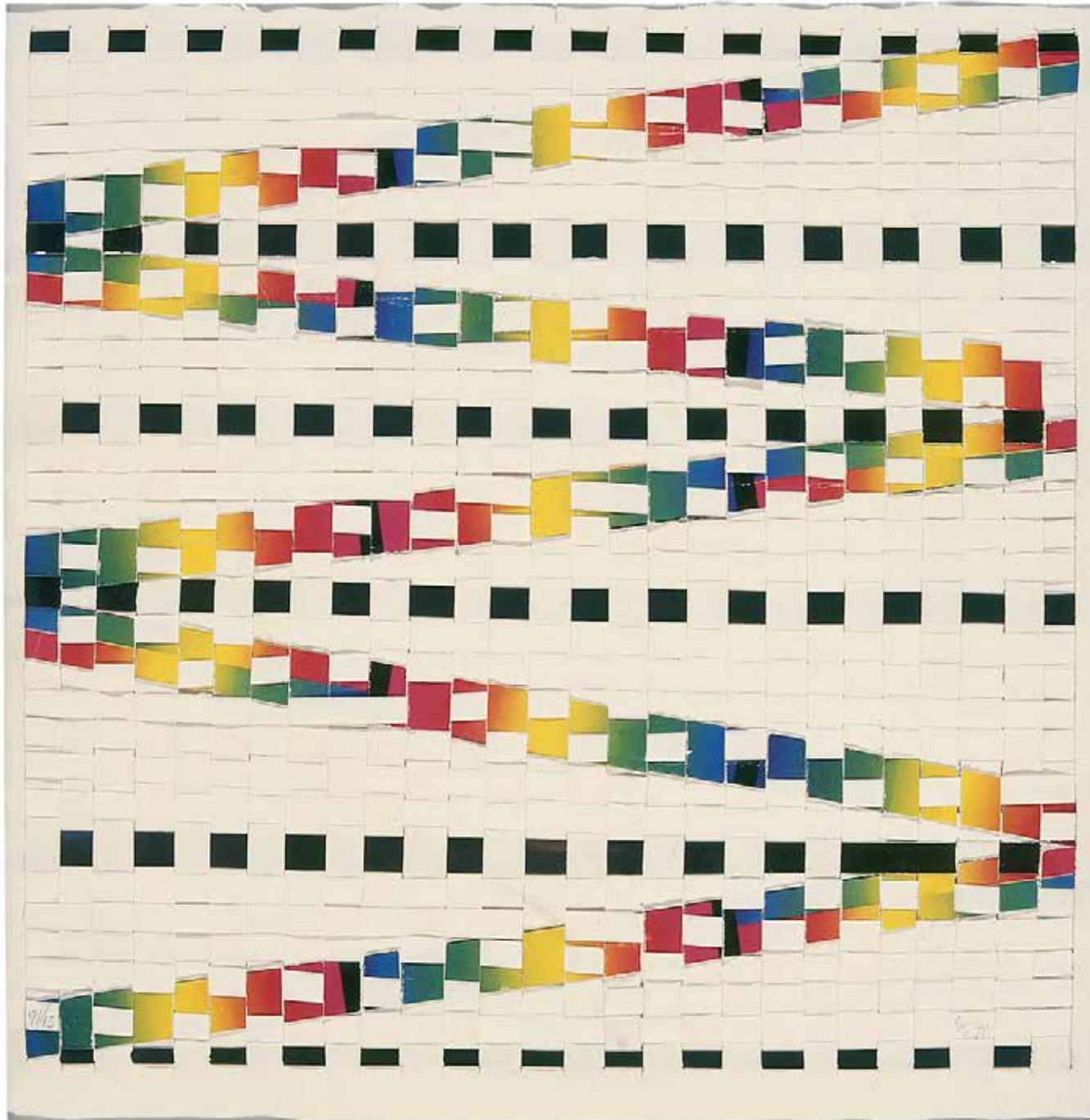






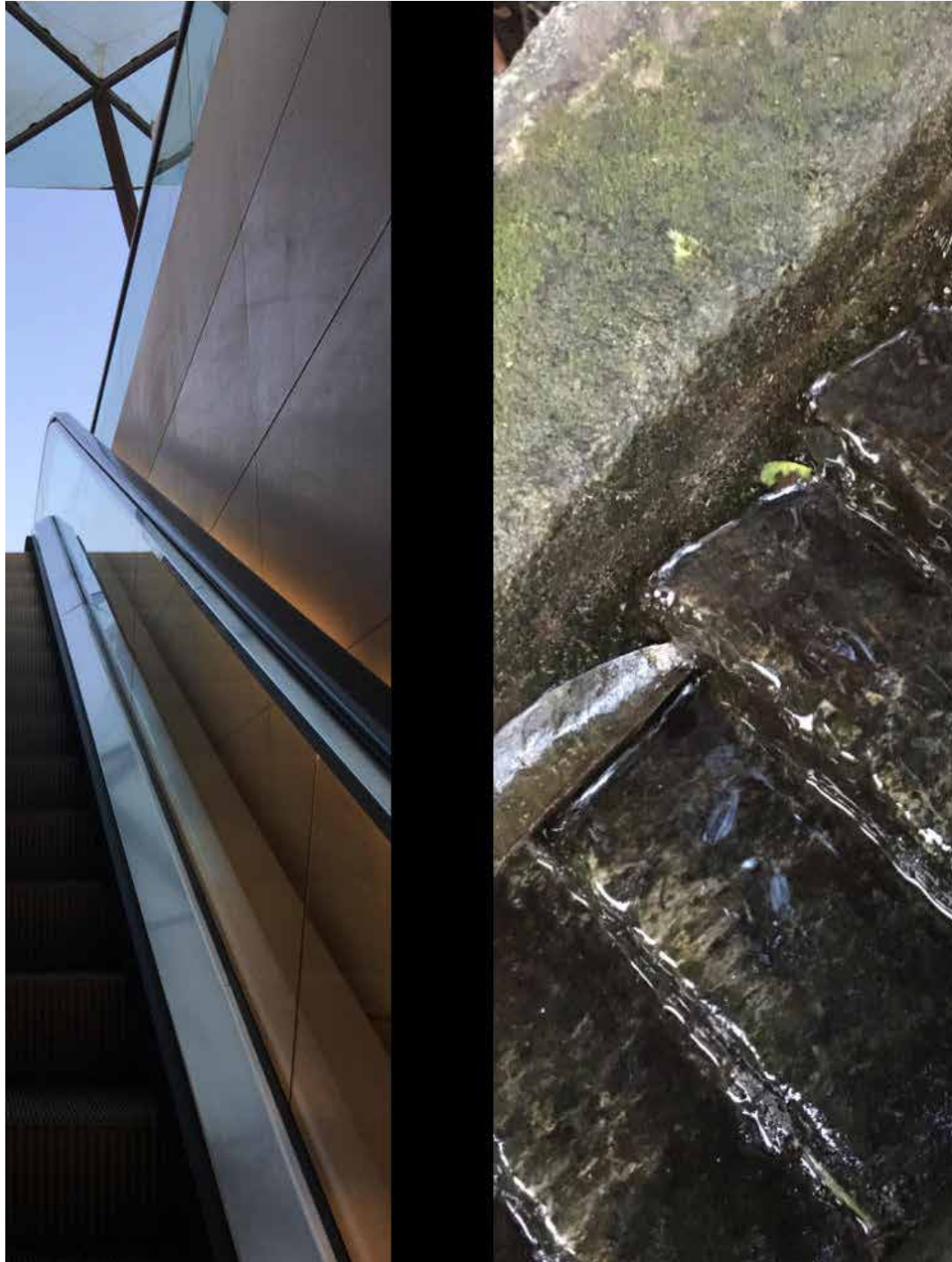












THE NEXT MUTATION

LIST OF WORKS

LIST OF WORKS

85

Absalon

Proposition d'habitation

[Prototype Living Quarters]

1991

Video, TV, colour, sound

3' 38"

Ratio: 4:3

"la Caixa" Foundation

Contemporary Art Collection

Nacho Criado

Discoidales

[Discoidals]

1985

Mixed media

300 × 500 cm

"la Caixa" Foundation

Contemporary Art Collection

Eva Fàbregas

Kimberly & Chloe

2019

Epoxy resin, Styrofoam
and flocking

70 × 90 × 70 cm (2 pieces)

"la Caixa" Foundation

Contemporary Art Collection

Cyprien Gaillard

Cairns (251/261 Résidence

***Provence, Dammarie-lès-Lys,
1973-2008)***

2008

Chromogenic print

175 × 216.5 × 5 cm

MACBA Collection.

MACBA Foundation.

Private long-term loan

Dora García

Bolsa dorada

[Golden Bag]

1995

Polyethylene and golden pigment

215 × 130 × 30 cm

"la Caixa" Foundation

Contemporary Art Collection

Eulàlia Garcia Valls

Subsols

[Subsoils]

2021

Sound installation

Varying dimensions

Courtesy of the artist

Gego

Tejedura 91/15

[Weaving 91/15]

1991

Semigloss paper

20.5 × 20 cm

MACBA Collection.

MACBA Foundation.

Fundación Gego long-term loan

Isa Genzken

Bookshelves

2008

Metal, plastic, spray-paint, textile,
animal jawbone (fragment)

295 × 203 × 123 cm

"la Caixa" Foundation

Contemporary Art Collection

Felix Gonzalez-Torres**Untitled**

1990
Paper and cardboard
20.5 × 37.5 × 37.5 cm
MACBA Collection. MACBA
Foundation. Brondesbury
Holdings Ltd long-term loan

Joan Jonas**Wind**

1968
16 mm film transferred to video,
b/w, silent, single-channel
projection
Varying dimensions
5' 40"
MACBA Collection.
MACBA Foundation

Antoni Llena**Escultura dissecada**

[Dissected Sculpture]
1968
Cellophane paper and paper
15 × 11.5 cm
MACBA Collection.
MACBA Foundation

Àngels Ribé**3 punts**

[3 Points]
1970–1971 (2011)
Cotton rope and lamp
450 × 656 × 480 cm
MACBA Collection. MACBA
Foundation. Donated by the artist

Victor Ruiz Colomer + Joe Highton**Pont Ponts Jardí**

[Bridge Bridges Garden]
2021
Sound installation
Varying dimensions
Courtesy of the artists

Wolfgang Tillmans**Fire Island II**

2016
Inkjet print
40.6 × 30.5 cm
"la Caixa" Foundation
Contemporary Art Collection

Wolfgang Tillmans**Tapestry**

2006
Chromogenic print
61 × 50.8 cm
"la Caixa" Foundation
Contemporary Art Collection

Wolfgang Tillmans**Silver 112**

2013
Chromogenic print
171 × 226 cm
"la Caixa" Foundation
Contemporary Art Collection

Wolfgang Tillmans**Geschlechtsteile**

[Genitals]
2010
Inkjet print
40.6 × 30.5 cm
"la Caixa" Foundation
Contemporary Art Collection

Francesc Torres**Prototip per a una edició il·limitada**

[Prototype for an Unlimited Edition]
1968–1969
Cardboard
25 × 25 × 27.7 cm
Original cube. Production of a life-
size die and film of the work being
put together by Francesc Torres.
Video: Adolf Alcañiz
MACBA Collection. Ajuntament
de Barcelona long-term loan

Moisés Villèlia**Mòbil**

[Mobile]
1985–1986
Bamboo
55 × 106 × 106 cm
"la Caixa" Foundation
Contemporary Art Collection

THE NEXT MUTATION

BIOGRAPHY

Xavier Acarín Wieland is a curator and teacher. His projects and exhibitions have been presented at Elastic City, Parsons School of Design, Hessel Museum of Art, Peekskill Project 6, Abrons Arts Center, Knockdown Center and Unbag-Wendy's Subway, in New York; La Ira de Dios-cheLA, in Buenos Aires; HIAP Suomenlinna and MUU Kaapeli, in Helsinki (in collaboration with Sant Andreu Contemporani-Fabra i Coats and the Institut Ramon Llull); and the Fundació Mies van der Rohe and Reial Cercle Artistic, as part of Festival LOOP, in Barcelona, among others. Xavier has written texts for shows at Centre d'Art Tecla Sala, PAD Gallery, Galería Rosa Santos, ADN Galería and Participant Inc. His articles, essays and interviews have been published in *El Periódico*, *A*DESK*, *La Vanguardia's Cultura/s* supplement, *Esnorquel* and *Terremoto*, and he has cowritten three books: *Dear Helen* (CCS Bard, 2014), *Experience Design* (Bloomsbury, 2014) and *Facing the Image* (Comanegra/BRAC, 2016). Xavier holds a Bachelor's Degree in Art History from the University of Barcelona, an MA in Museum Studies from New York University and an MA in Curatorial Studies from Bard College. He is currently a PhD student at the Departament of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. In a teaching capacity, he has worked with Syracuse University, Parsons School of Design, School of Visual Arts NYC, IED and Elisava.

