

KINO SKULPTUR PROJEKTE

Moving Image Installation as Public Sculpture at Münster's Decennial Exhibition

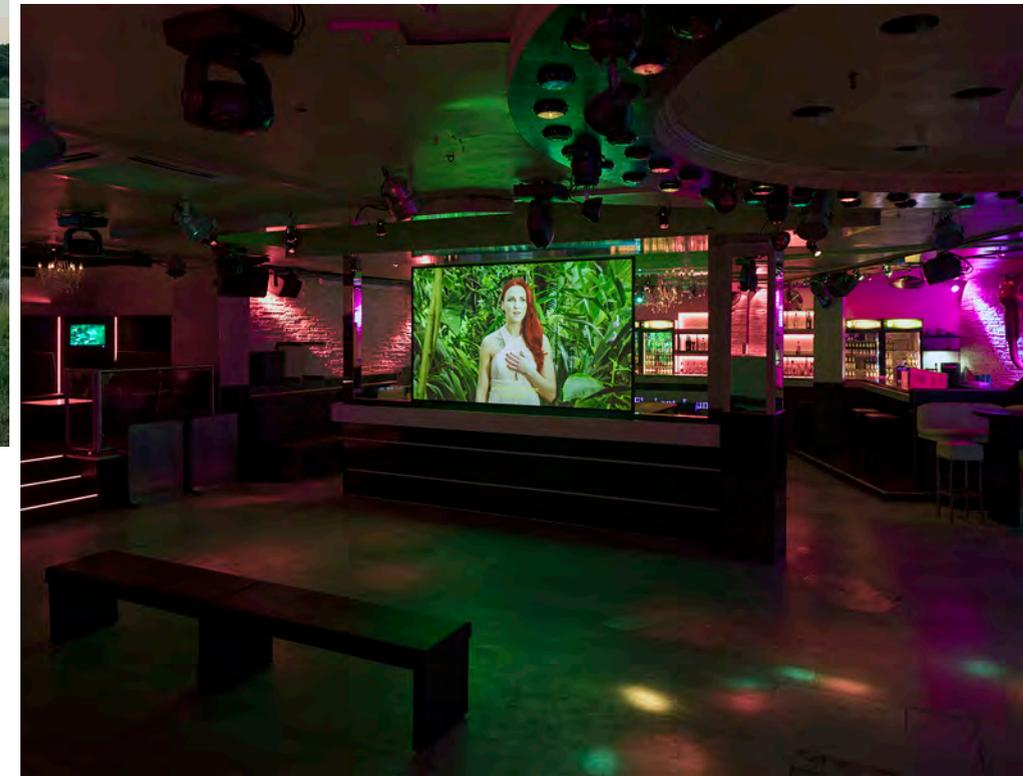
Summer 2017, Münster, Germany. In a darkened nightclub nestled in the back of a bland mini-mall, Brazilian artists Benjamin de Burca and Bárbara Wagner projected their film *Bye Bye Deutschland! Eine Lebensmelodie [Bye Bye Germany! A Life Melody]* on a hanging screen, segmenting the space of the club. Surrounded by leather couches, a colored neon-lit bar, and the glittering reflections of a disco ball, high-definition images of local singers belted sentimental tunes to kitschy techno beats in lavishly shot settings, the artists' investigation of *schlager*, the oft-maligned genre of German pop music. On the outskirts of town, techno music similarly fills the glass-walled, white, modernist lobby of the LBS savings bank, site of German artist Hito Steyerl's multiscreen exploration of automation in our irrational times. Amidst industrial steel partitions, sculptures of standing and fallen blue robots, and the bright neon sculptures of the work's title, *HellYeahWeFuckDie* (derived from Billboard's top song lyrics), video monitors show footage of real and computer-simulated robots enduring physical assault, learning to become

resilient in humankind's increasingly hostile environments. On another screen in the lobby, a child asks SIRI questions about the nature of war as a short film explores the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, site of Al-Jazari's 13th century writings on automation and the Turkish military's attack in 2016.

Every ten years Münster turns into a laboratory for exploring the constantly changing field of public sculpture. This year, the selection of thirty-five works included nine moving image installations (including the two mentioned above), positioning film and video centrally within sculpture's expanded field. Public sculpture has a long historical connection to concepts of place, identity, and community, particularly as defined by the monument. Rethinking public sculpture's relationship to its physical and social site outside of the paradigm of the monument (most often associated with power and exclusion) is one of the significant projects of art since the 1960s and of Skulptur Projekte. Although the original show in 1977, which featured site-specific work by artists working in land art, minimalism, and

conceptual art, included no works by video or media artists (and incidentally no women), in 1987 a sculpture by Nam June Paik and a projection by Thomas Struth introduced media art into the exhibition. Each succeeding iteration has witnessed an increased interest in moving image media, culminating in last summer where moving image artworks made up over one-fourth of the pieces in the show.¹

Perhaps the most literal use of screens as public sculpture was New York-based Japanese artist Ei Arakawa's installation of color LED screens in a meadow outside the city center, *Harsh Citation, Harsh Pastoral, Harsh Münster*. The screens featured paintings transferred to LED ranging from Amy Sillman to Joan Mitchell to Gustave Courbet. For Arakawa the screens demystify the spatial experience of paintings by placing their images in performative situations. Similarly engaged in critiquing the art institution's viewing structures was American Nora Schultz's *Pointing their fingers at an unidentified event out of frame*. Projected high on the wall of the lobby atrium of the LWL-Museum, Schultz's video



LEFT TO RIGHT

Hito Steyerl, *HellYeahWeFuckDie* (2017), installation view.

Ei Arakawa, *Harsh Citation, Harsh Pastoral, Harsh Münster* (2017), installation view.

Benjamin de Burca and Bárbara Wagner, *Bye Bye Deutschland! Eine Lebensmelodie (Bye Bye Germany! A Life Melody)* (2017), installation view.

Courtesy Referentin Skulptur Projekte Archiv, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster.

fused projection and production site. The short video was shot from a drone navigating the same atrium, violating traditional museological sight-lines and patterns of movement.

Brazilian artist Mika Rottenberg's *Cosmic Generator* screened in the back of a defunct Asian goods store, a space normally removed from public life but made public through the city's transformation during the exhibition. In the film Rottenberg explores clandestine and dreamlike spaces of international hypercapitalism, specifically the fabled tunnels between Mexico and the U.S. whose entrances are found in Chinese restaurants in Mexicali. Rottenberg's surrealist exploration of these liminal spaces includes street vendors, crawling businessmen, and characters dressed as tacos navigating magical tunnels intercut with sleeping women workers nestled inside the garishly colored, endless stalls of the sprawling, million-square-foot Yiwu Market in Zhejiang, China. The exhibition venue's narrow aisles and scattered cheap products lingering on empty shelves, forms another international portal that parallels the film's narrative and complicates the experience of the cinematic installation, prompting viewers to consider what other surreal routes lurk behind commercial spaces.

Japanese artist Koki Tanaka's *Provisional Studies: Workshop #7 How to Live Together and Sharing the Unknown* similarly incorporated its exhibition venue into the work's conceptual structure and spectatorial experience. Over nine days Tanaka asked a diverse group of Münster strangers to live together in a Cold War bomb shelter. Filmed not only during the artist's planned activities and guided discussions but also during their moments of boredom, frustration, and awareness of being filmed,

the participants' range of social and affective bonds and fissures plays out over multiple screens installed in an empty industrial space near the shooting location. Exposed lightbulbs, projections onto unpainted walls, screens mounted on bare plywood, makeshift seating, and an abandoned kitchen make the exhibition space blend into the documentary footage, turning the viewers into a parallel temporary community of proximity engendered by shared space and the exhibition of documentary film.

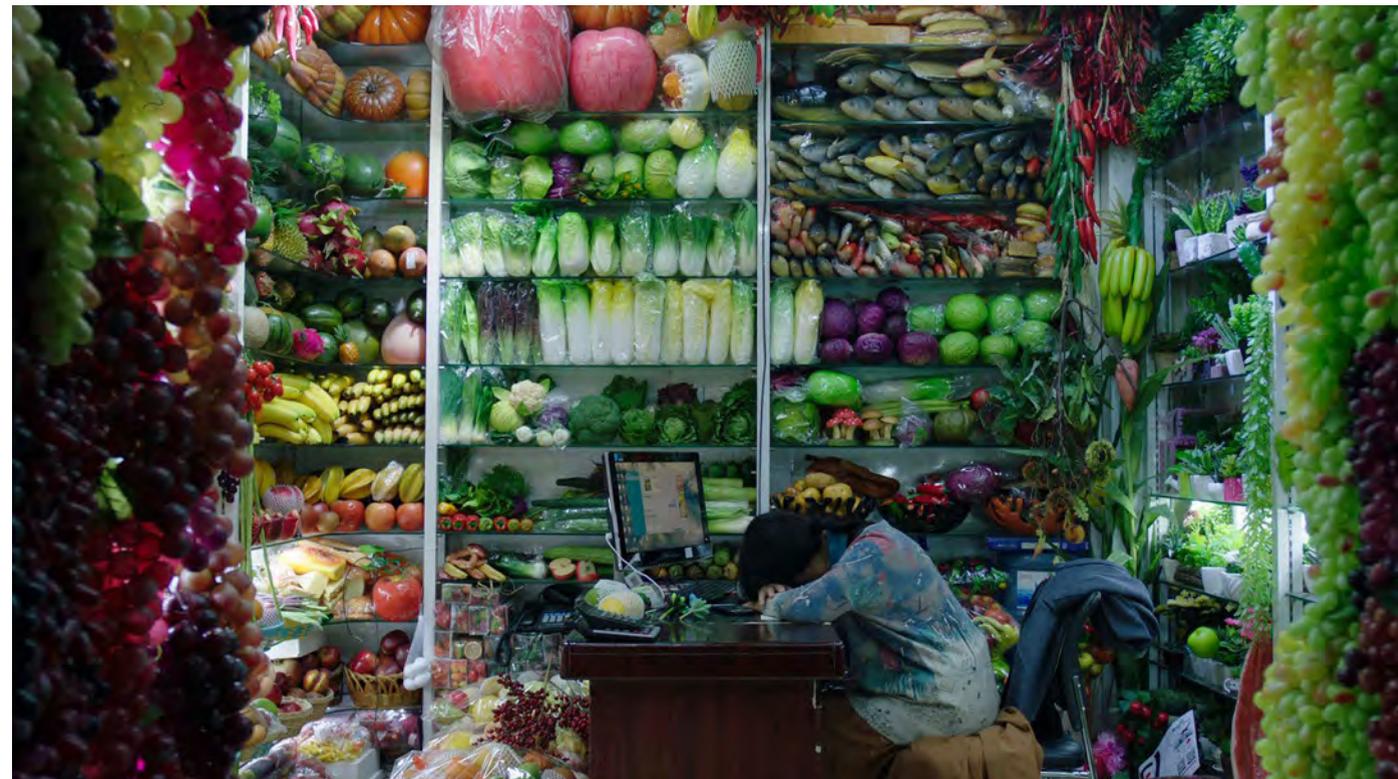
Benjamin H.D. Buchloh argued recently that works featured in the three international shows of 2017—Skulptur Projekte, the Venice Biennale, and documenta 14—suggest sculpture has acquired the condition of the book: finding itself on the verge of obsolescence after having forged a place of prominence in what used to be called the public sphere.² As the public sphere diminishes sculpture is thrown into a state a crisis. Moving image installation is perhaps uniquely prepared to respond to this crisis. It is a shared physical experience that recalls the lost public sphere of cinema-going before the long tail of narrowcasting, and its apparatus has been thoroughly deconstructed via the same art historical investigations that redefined public sculpture. By both engaging the moving image's capacity for alluring spectators and sculpturally investigating the spatial, historical, and social contours of place, Münster's cinematic sculptures begin to reclaim public sculpture's capacity for creating the commons.

ANNIE DELL'ARIA

Notes and citations are online at <https://millenniumfilmjournal.com/mfj-67-supplements/>



Nora Schultz, *Pointing their fingers at an unidentified event out of frame* (2017), installation view. Courtesy Referentin Skulptur Projekte Archiv, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster.



Mika Rottenberg, *Cosmic Generator* (2017), installation view and frame enlargements. Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery.