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ROBIN RHODE
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(selection)

ARTFORUM

NEWS



Robin Rhode. Courtesy: the artist.
January 25, 2018 at 11:45am

ROBIN RHODE AWARDED \$100,000 ZURICH ART PRIZE

Zurich's Museum Haus Konstruktiv has announced that South African artist Robin Rhode is the eleventh winner of the Zurich Art Prize. The artist was awarded \$80,000 for the production of new work for a solo exhibition to be held at the museum in October and \$20,000 in prize money.

According to a statement issued by the museum, the jury praised Rhode's vocabulary of constructivism, his engagement with audiences, and his ability to see the medium of drawing as something not limited to the pictorial plane. "Whether choreographed or improvised, Rhode sees the drawing as something interwoven with space and context, which is ultimately captured in the form of photo sequences, videos, or objects," the statement read.

Born in Cape Town in 1976, the Berlin-based artist is known for his performance-based process, through which he activates the walls of galleries. An example of this is his performance *Car Wash*, 2014, for which the artist drew a car on an empty black wall and then “unfazed by the enthralled audience . . . pushed people aside and treated them as props, later letting them participate by encouraging them to clean the drawing,” Cristina Sanchez-Kozyreva wrote in a Critics’ Pick for artforum.com.



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The Endless Inspiration Robin Rhode Drew from One Wall

By Tess Thackara

Jan 19, 2018 7:10 pm



Robin Rhode, *Lute of Pythagorus*, 2017 (detail). Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong.



In 2011, the South African artist Robin Rhode began a long and complicated relationship with a wall. He had been looking for a new surface on which to create his street paintings—ephemeral compositions that play the backdrop to the movements of a performer, Kevin Narain, in Rhode’s poetic, serialized photographs that suggest Eadweard Muybridge-esque time-lapses. And this wall, located on a vacant lot in the Newclare neighborhood of western Johannesburg, came to him auspiciously. A local hairdresser had heard of his search, and told him she knew just the place. She introduced him to the landlord who owned the lot, Mr. Mills, and he and Rhode settled on an arrangement over a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black. (It has since become their tradition to discuss their lives and the community of Newclare over a bottle of whiskey.)

The artist estimates that over the past seven years he has completed 20 or more large-scale works at the Broken Wall, as he calls it, named for a crack that snakes diagonally across one section of it. It’s a spectacular wall, Rhode says, because the daytime brings it ample sunlight, and there’s plenty of space around it, affording him the distance to capture it effectively in photographs. He has grown fond of its special features, including a peculiar oak tree that stands in front of it. “It’s a very very interesting tree because it’s in the shape of a heart,” says Rhode. “So there’s a lot of spiritual symbolism there.”



But now the relationship is drawing to a close. Rhode announced in a 201 letter published in *Art Africa* that he would be quitting the wall due to the increasing risk he faces working in the neighborhood, which he says is plagued with high levels of unemployment, violence, and drug abuse—and where he and his crew (local men who have become his studio hands) have been targeted by gang members. Rhode describes having hired a security detail to protect him from this continual threat. The news lends all the mc poignancy—and, certainly, a dose of drama—to his latest body of work, which is currently on view in an exhibition, “The Geometry of Colour,” at Lehmann Maupin in New York.

The new works remain faithful to the core ingredients of his signature practice, and as with past works, they hint at the social conditions they developed out of. In *Black Friday—1 Billion* (2016), a stray shopping cart becomes a prop for Narain—dressed all in black, with a stocking over his head, to create the illusion of a silhouette—as he responds to a giant cubic form, painted in vermillion on the white-washed wall, and a series of small

geometric parts that appear in progressive images.

Rhode conceived of the square as a representation of the number one billion, broken down proportionally to 100 million, one million, and so on. “It speaks about value systems, consumerism, wealth,” he says. Yet the artist sees these latest works, in particular, as a rejection of the external world and the social tensions that surround the wall. Whereas his earlier works were often looser, scrappier, line drawings, Rhode has taken a turn toward Minimalist volumes and color theory, invoking the influence of Josef Albers, Sol LeWitt, and Carl Andre.



Robin Rhode, *Under the Sun*, 2017 (detail). Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong.

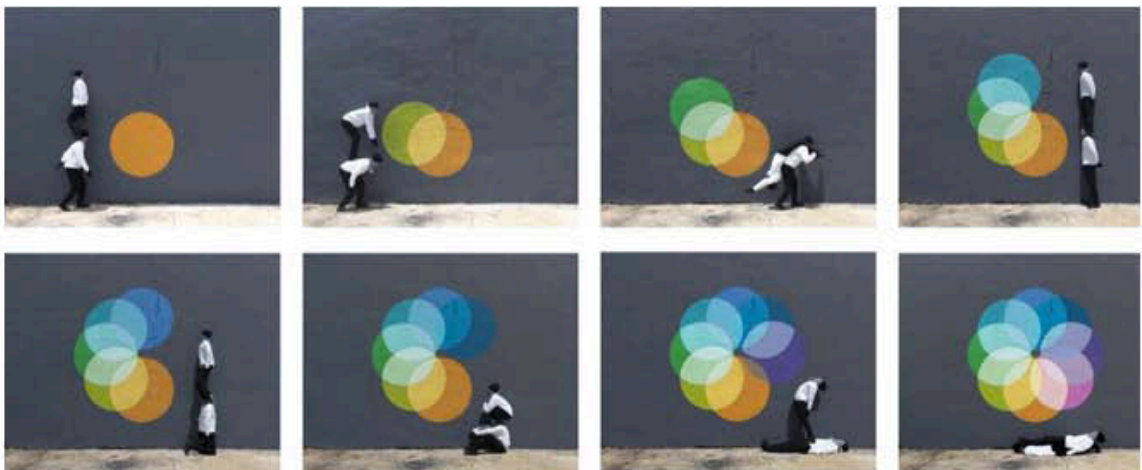


Robin Rhode, *Under the Sun*, 2017 (detail). Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong.

He is grappling with the idea of “the infinitive, the universal,” he says, “to stall the chaos and anarchy” that he and his crew are regularly confronted with. A quote printed on the wall of Lehmann Maupin nods to the influence of another modernist, Le Corbusier: “In order to save himself

from this chaos, in order to provide himself with a bearable, acceptable framework for his existence, one productive of human well-being and control, man has projected the laws of nature into a system that is a manifestation of the human spirit itself: geometry.”

In *Under the Sun* (2017), a grid of paintings in which the performer, Narain, basks in the light of a rising sun, the artist has reimagined our life-giving star in geometric proportions, distilling it into a series of squares, like jumbo digital pixels. But just as Rhode reaches for a higher realm of metaphysics, he is also drawn to the low: to the material, humble, commonplace object. Narain is perched on a car tire to create the suggestion of being adrift at sea on a tiny lifeboat. And Rhode is quick to note another layer to the image, given the realities of the surrounding community. “We are so far inland,” he says, “and almost none of my crew had actually seen the sea.”

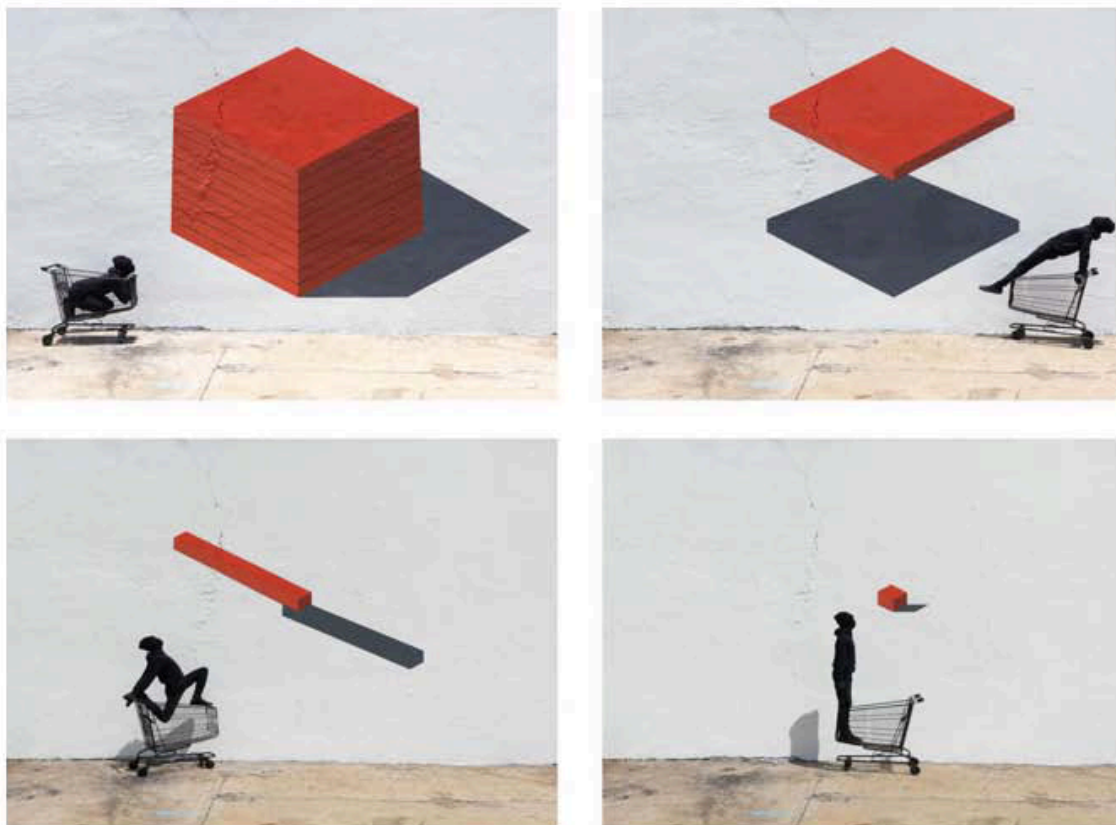


Robin Rhode, *Inverted Cycle*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

If these works offer an imaginative escape, or metaphysical transcendence, from the temporal particularities of life in Newclare, as well as the broader

chaos of human societies around the world, their very existence lays testament to the community's complex social fabric. Each work is the product of up to 16 people following the artist's drawing and painting instructions, and takes 48 hours or so to complete. Rhode's soldiers, as he calls them—he likens himself to a general, with six lieutenants—sleep under the paintings to protect them against vandalism during their fleeting life-span. The compositions are painted over within 24 hours of completion.

The impermanence of his works gestures not only at the existential conditions faced by Rhode's crew, but also at the more universal experience of time. "I'll create the monument, but I'll tear the monument down as well," the artist says. "The works exist for a short moment of time, related the notion of life and death."



Robin Rhode, *Black Friday - 1 Billion*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong.

Though Rhode has now quit the wall, and has for many years lived in Berlin—returning to South Africa regularly for art projects—he feels emotionally committed to the community of Newclare, and to empowering its inhabitants. He also feels an emotional bond to the particular surface he has made his canvas for so many years, and to its symbolism, which speaks as much to the possibility of transformation as it does to collapse. “It’s a broken wall, in a broken world,” he says. “That means ideas and narratives are seeping through.”

Tess Thackara is Artsy’s Senior Editor.

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GUIDE EXPOS

ROBIN RHODE EN NOIR ET BLANC

L'ARTISTE SUD-AFRICAÎN DE BERLIN EST UN MAGICIEN DE L'ARRÊT SUR IMAGE. MÉLANT STREET DANCE ET DESSINS QUI ÉVOLUENT À CHAQUE PRISE, IL INVENTE UNE « SORTE DE CINÉMA VIVANT » À LA FOIS TONIQUE, ÉMOUVANT ET PROFOND.

AR VALÉRIE DUPONCHELLE
@VDuponchelle

Robin Rhode est né à Cape Town en Afrique du Sud en 1976. Autant dire qu'il a eu le temps, jusqu'à la révolution de 1994, jusqu'aux premières élections multiraciales de l'histoire du pays remportées par l'ANC et à la victoire de Nelson Mandela, premier président noir, de vivre durement son pays natal sous la férule de l'apartheid. Cet artiste acrobate, installé désormais à Berlin dans un studio immense propice à ses chorégraphies, retourne régulièrement en Afrique du Sud. Il était, il y a encore quelques jours, au Cap pour sa grande exposition à la Galerie Stevenson où son talent explose comme un feu d'artifice (« Paths & Fields », jusqu'au 4 mars). C'est donc une chance de le retrouver enfin à Paris, chez Kamel Mennour.

Robin Rhode, c'est l'enfant naturel de la street dance et des pionniers de la photographie, Étienne-Jules Marey et Eadweard Muybridge, dont les clichés décomposent le mouvement

en un ballet de formes et de combinaisons possibles. La succession de photographies de Robin Rhode juxtapose les poses du danseur et l'évolution d'un dessin à la craie ou aux pastels sur le mur, racontant une histoire à trois dimensions qui inclut le temps. C'est pure poésie et revendication vitale d'être vu, malgré tout. L'art est l'échappée belle au gris du trottoir, à la réalité de l'enfance, au monde divisé par l'apartheid en deux couleurs, noir ou blanc, frontière terrible distinguant les Blancs et « non-Blancs ». Comme une pirouette à l'histoire afrikaans, Robin Rhode



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n'est volontairement ni l'un ni l'autre et cache son visage sous un bas noir à la Fantomas.

À Paris, il a choisi de faire une performance plongée dans l'actualité. La baignoire qui trône dans le grand espace sous verrière aurait dû contenir de l'encre de Chine. Robin Rhode y a plongé, en est ressorti ruisselant de noir sur une mosaïque de unes narrant l'investiture de Donald Trump à la Maison-Blanche. Symbole direct. Alors que les Oscars viennent de couronner meilleur film le poignant *Moonlight* de Barry Jenkins et meilleur second rôle masculin le sculptural Mahershala Ali, on voit combien l'envers du décor peut être riche de talents, d'émotions nouvelles, d'artistes intenses. On retrouvera Robin Rhode, du 26 avril au 28 août, dans l'exposition orchestrale de la Fondation Vuitton, « Afrique, le nouvel atelier ». La scène sud-africaine, si passionnante, y sera en vedette. ■

"I'm very youth-conscious with my work because I am trying to search for that purity of imagination."

Robin Rhode



Foreground. Charcoal crayons in custom box from Robin Rhode's "Paries Pictus - Connect the Dots (Place of Dreams)," 2016

When Robin Rhode was in high school, he and his schoolmates drew life-sized chalk images and pretended to interact with them. As his artistic career continued, so did his passion for bringing drawings to life. His work in deFINE ART 2016 combines drawing with performance, including two short films with actors who play out their roles among animated wall drawings.

Interacting with drawings is also a part of Rhode's work "Paries Pictus," a series of collaborative drawings he makes with schoolchildren. Rhode prepares a set of connect the dot images for the wall of an exhibition space, and includes a boxed set of oversized charcoal crayons. He then invites a group of students to the exhibition gallery and allows them to add their marks on the museum walls to finish his work. The oversized charcoal crayons are a physical challenge to use and make collaboration necessary. The students' interaction with each other and the drawings becomes a part of a performance that brings the act of creating into a space usually reserved for finished work.

Investigate the possibilities of interacting with drawings. Use sidewalk chalk and a suitable concrete surface, or dry-erase markers and a whiteboard. Start by drawing a ball and pose a friend to look as if she or he were holding it. Take a picture, erase the ball and redraw it as if it had been thrown. Pose your friend in a throwing position and take another picture. Create enough images to combine them in a series that tells a story. This method of interacting with animated drawings is similar to the techniques used by Rhode to create his short films.



Robin Rhode, "Paries Pichus - Connect the Dots (Place of Dreams)," 2016

Add to your understanding of animation by experimenting with a technique for creating the illusion of motion with only two drawings. Look in the back of this guide on page 51, find the image of the flying horse labeled "image 2" and cut it out. Compare it with "image 1" on this page. You will notice that they are slightly different.

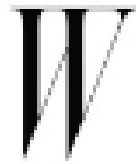
Roll the bottom half of "image 2" around a pencil. With the pencil still rolled inside, line up "image 2" over "image 1." With one hand, press on the shaded area at the top of "image 2" to hold it firmly in place. With the other hand, move the pencil rapidly back and forth so that "image 2" rolls up and down. This will create the illusion of movement, as the still images of the flying horses appear to beat their wings and gallop.

Use this technique to animate your own drawings. Start with two slips of paper similar in size to the ones used here. You can find templates on page 51. Draw matching shapes on both pieces of paper and gradually add slightly different details to each drawing. Stop between additions of details and check your progress by flipping back and forth between the images.

Rhode's winged horses, even in single still images, are posed in ways that suggest movement. Study other still works by Rhode and find examples of images or marks that also suggest movement. Describe your discoveries here.

image 1





CULTURE + ART & DESIGN

Robin Rhode Draws on Everything

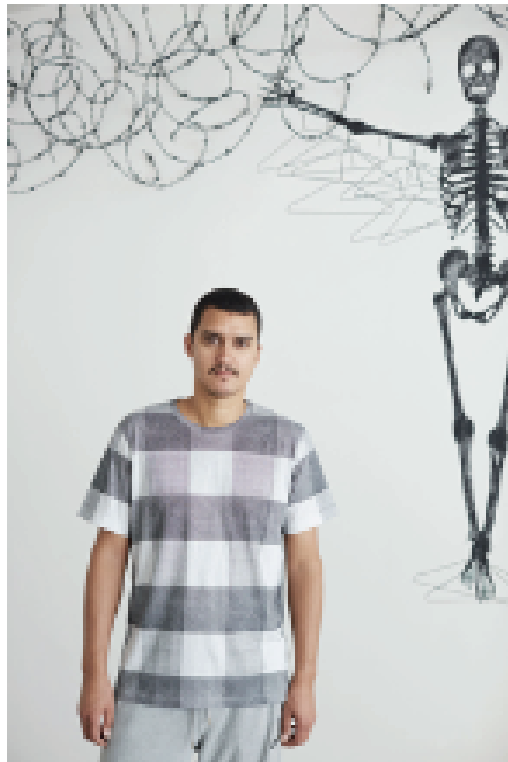
Since exploding onto the art scene in 2003 with his playful wall drawing performances, Robin Rhode has scribbled on just about every type of surface, while also making photographs and sculptures of objects like bikes, candles, and light bulbs out of chalk and charcoal. Before debuting his new show at Lehmann Maupin in New York's Chelsea, the South Africa-born, Berlin based artist offered a behind the scenes glimpse into his multi disciplinary practice.

In addition to his Lehmann Maupin exhibition on view through August 21, Rhode will present *Drawing Waves* at The Drawing Center in New York from July 17 through August 31, 2015.

July 1, 2015 05:15 PM | by [Antwuan Sargent](#)

Robin Rhode at Lehmann Maupin.

Photo courtesy of the gallery.





"This show is tied to this very strong notion of drawing, embracing the materials of chalk and charcoal to embody memory and artistry. Chalk and charcoal bring together the notions of black and white for me. The show tries to capture not only the performative impulses but also creative impulses in my work."



"We take the notion of light for granted, so I wanted to play with that with this piece."



"When I was a student in college, I thought the only way I could find my own way was by investigating and engaging with the experiences I had in high school."



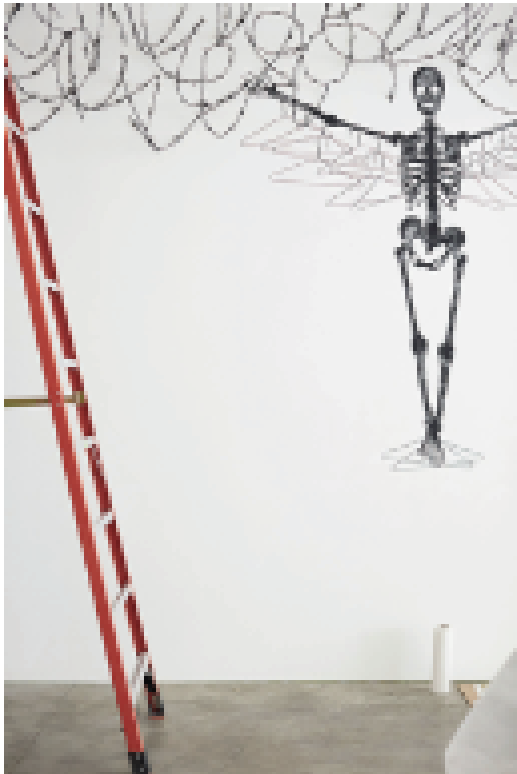
"When I was in high school, we used to steal chalk from the classroom and then take one of the young boys into the toilets, draw a bike on a wall with the chalk, and then the kid to interact with the drawing, by 'riding' it."



"In school, we didn't have an education in any facilities, and chalk was the cheapest mode of expression. We channelled our creativity onto the concrete walls."



"In the 1950s, Duchamp created a piece where he installed multiple hangers from the ceiling that resembled a flock of birds. This man has hangers attached to his skeletal structure so that he becomes a bird."



"The hangers embody a sense of religious iconography. The barbed wire evokes mark making. It's a way of seeing the urban situation."



"I was so anti studio at art school, so I went to the streets. I wanted the people to be my audience and witness the process of contemporary art, so I started to do these fast drawing performances."

Wallpaper*

THE STUFF THAT REFINES YOU

Powerful statements, modest means: Robin Rhode's 'Born Frieze' opens at Lehmann Maupin

ART / 3 JUL 2015 / BY STEPHANIE WURG



Robin Rhode's exhibition of work from 2015, 'Born Frieze', is on show at Lehmann Maupin's Chelsea space in New York. Pictured: *Chalk Bike*

'Exercise goal achieved!' cries Robin Rhode, peering down at the Apple Watch on his wrist and then raising both arms in triumph. 'I did it – phew!' But there's no stopping him. The South African-born, Berlin-based artist is in the midst of an invigorated lap around Lehmann Maupin's Chelsea space, where his third solo exhibition with the gallery – titled 'Born Frieze' – is on view until 21 August. Loping among the show's four installations, he punctuates rapid-fire comments

with claps and snaps, his infectious personal intensity rivalled only by that of his work.

'I wanted to use the architecture of the gallery to create environments for my pieces, so I could work throughout each space, all the way down to the floor,' says Rhode, 39, pausing in the darkened front room filled by *Light Giver Light Taker* (all works 2015). Two giant lightbulb sculptures made of charcoal and chalk, respectively, lie on the dark grey floor, which bears the whirled traces of Rhode's dragging and pulling of their opaque forms.

Animated by strobe lights, the scene transforms a universal symbol for ideation into outsized drawing tools poised to go another round, evoking the lightbulb-illuminated coal cellar of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Inspirations for the piece include a t-shirt depicting 'Black Inventors and Their Inventions' such as Lewis Latimer, who drafted patent drawings for the likes of Alexander Graham Bell and later improved upon Edison's electric light with carbon filament bulbs. Rhode bought the t-shirt at a New Orleans supermarket in 2007 and frequently wears it while at work in his studio, he explains, 'because in Southern Africa where I'm from, the idea of a black man inventor is totally foreign'.

Unreliable light sources, however, are commonplace in his native country, where an energy crisis fueled by a floundering power monopoly has led to frequent blackouts. 'Issues in Johannesburg – the power cuts – were another point of inspiration for this piece,' says Rhode. 'Light is becoming quite scarce at the moment.'

Another room is devoted to *Chalk Bike*, for which the walls have been coated in black chalkboard paint and hung with white window frames that open inward to suggest an exterior scene. An actual bike, its steel frame whitewashed in chalk, stands among sketched cycles, and the floor is dotted with newspapers on which sit sneakers darkly haloed in spray paint. The work is a reference to an initiation rite that Rhode recalls from high school: underclassmen were forced to play-act with chalk drawings. 'With this particular environment, the chalk stolen from the classroom and the drawing on the concrete walls of the school now manifests itself into the actual chalk bicycle,' says the artist, who points to the newspaper pages of last week's *New York Times* as a way of dating the work.

Wafting through the exhibition is the deep, deliberate voice of South African poet and activist Don Mattera, whose dreamy elegy, *The Moon Is Asleep*, accompanies Rhode's film of the same name. Evoking both *Sesame Street* and surrealism, the Super 8 footage shows a boy (the artist's son, Llijah) sleeping against a wall that becomes a canvas for a shifting ocean of wavy lines and phases of the moon.

'These low-fidelity materials and techniques – black and white, chalk and charcoal, Super 8 film – are present throughout the show,' says Rhode. 'I'm a firm believer that we can make so many powerful statements by using very modest means.' Exercise goal achieved.

Slideshow



Rhode says, 'I wanted to use the architecture of the gallery to create environments for my pieces, so I could work throughout each space, all the way down to the floor'



An example of this is *Light Civer Light Taker*, which factors whirled traces of where Rhode has dragged and pulled the opaque forms of the oversized bulbs across the floor



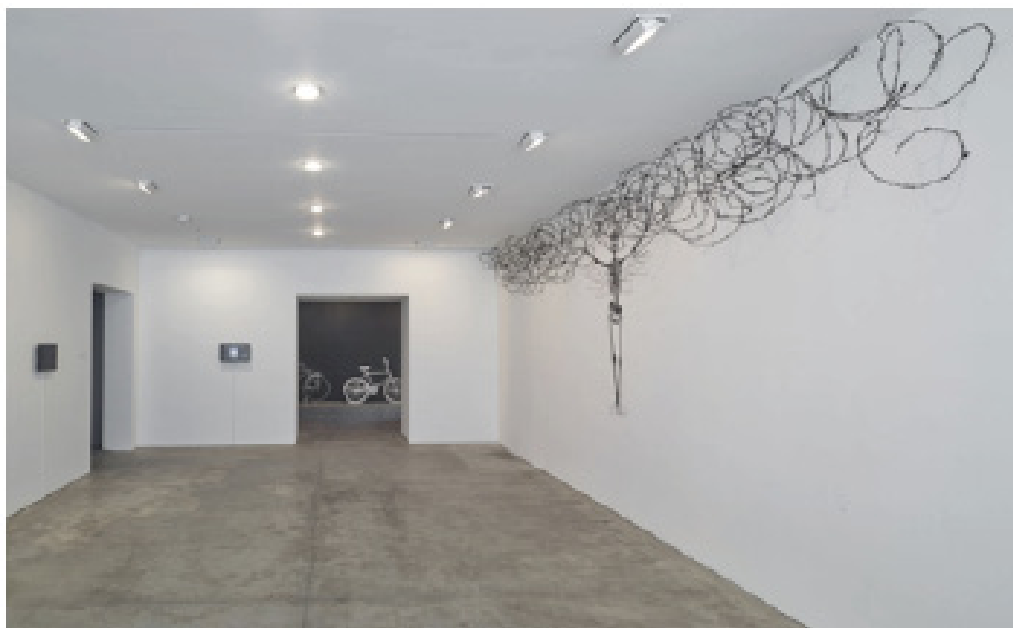
The macabre *Evidence* is made of vinyl, charcoal, and barbed wire



Still from *The Moon is Asleep* - the Super 8 footage shows a boy (the artist's son, Elijah) sleeping against a wall that becomes a canvas for a shifting ocean of wavy lines and phases of the moon



'I'm a firm believer that we can make so many powerful statements by using very modest means,' Rhode explains



'Borne Frieze' will remain on show until 21 August

Full Body at Work In Those Drawings

For the South African artist Robin Rhode, drawing is never enough. He draws on gallery walls, then throws his body against the images he's made, or drags his hands through the fresh chalk or charcoal. He draws in public places or in improvised, highly physical exertions. Drawing is not a stand-alone artistic medium; it forms part of a constellation of techniques, from performance to photography and video, which in turn informs a larger cluster of concerns, from his own childhood to the politics of urban space.

Two concurrent exhibitions in New York — at the Drawing Center, in SoHo, and at Lehmann Maupin, in Chelsea — make a mostly convincing case for the polyvalent drawings of Mr. Rhode, who was born in Cape Town in 1976, grew up in Johannesburg, and now lives in Berlin. The better show is at the Drawing Center, where Mr. Rhode is presenting two works in its basement gallery.

In a series of 16 photographs called "Breaking Waves," completed last year, he documents a performance in front of a mural on a ramshackle Johannesburg street. Each photograph shows new additions to the mural: blue semicircles, smeared four at a time, until the white wall is covered in blue rings. Instead of holding a brush, Mr. Rhode has a surfboard, and in a fine bit of urban slapstick he is trying to surf the waves he's just painted. The waves are a fantasy, nothing more than that; in most of the photos Mr. Rhode has collapsed, shoulders on the pavement while he tries to keep the surfboard aloft with his feet. Still, he perseveres — and the Johannesburg street gets a glimpse of the far-

off ocean.

Abstracted waves and physical exertion also form the basis for the other work in Mr. Rhode's Drawing Center exhibition: a wall-spanning drawing of stuttering, impetuous breakers, amid which the artist has affixed vinyl cutouts of old ships, the sort that brought the merchants and colonists of the Dutch East India Company to the Cape of Good Hope. In a box on the floor are six giant oil crayons, in shades from navy to teal to aquamarine, and in an accompanying video, we see Mr. Rhode's collaborators: young students from P.S. 42 and P.S. 130 slowly dragging the mega-pastels along the white wall, as if the gallery were a coloring book. The crayons are so big that it takes two kids to wield them, one holding up the aft and one wielding the tip. When a pair of them try to draw a dark blue wave near the bottom of the wall, they drop the crayon and collapse onto the floor.

It would be a mistake to ascribe Mr. Rhode's public drawings into a tradition of graffiti and street art, though he did have an early flirtation with break dancing. In South African cities, especially in the townships, walls were usually decorated not with individual tags but with political murals, often with messages of social inspiration and public protest. Mr. Rhode's more abstract and poetic wall drawings have at least partial roots in that tradition, though the murals and installations of Sol LeWitt and Bridget Riley may also come to mind. His stop-motion photographs, by turn, recall the early images of Eadweard Muybridge, who captured men or horses in mid-movement, or the staged photo sequences by performance artists like Gisa Pore and Vito Acconci.

Mr. Rhode's exhibits at Lehmann Maupin is more uneven. He's named the show "Borne Frieze" — a play on the South African expression "born free," referring to those born after the end of apartheid in 1994 — and here he takes a more potential and hot-blooded stance.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, COLLECTION OF ALLAN & LARRY BANC



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND HAS TURNER, LEHMAN MAUPIN, NEW YORK AND BERLIN

Contrasts between black and white abound, with evident racial connotations. (In the apartheid system's brutal racial hierarchy, Mr. Rhode was classified as "coloured" — that is, of mixed

Robin Rhode Above, this artist tries to surf the waves he just painted in "Breaking Waves," a series of 16 photographs at the Drawing Center. At left, a detail from his "Chalk Bicycle" (2011-12) in the show "Borne Frieze" at Lehmann Maupin.

African, European and Asian ancestry.)

One gallery is illuminated by a strobe light and contains two large sculptures shaped like light bulbs, one covered in white chalk and the other in black charcoal, which have been dragged across the floor in improvisatory jags. Along with the apposition of white and black, the bulbs and the strobe light add up to a rarely literal evocation of South Africa's continuing power supply crisis — the country has endured rolling blackouts for nearly a year — and lack the poetic, multidimensional appeal of his public wall works. So too a vinyl cutout of a crucified skeleton, its arms weighed down by charcoal drawings of coat hangers. Mr. Rhode has hung 17 feet of (real) barbed wire above his victim, an act of unusual bluntness from an artist usually inclined to metaphor.

Yet "Chalk Bicycle," the anchor work of the Lehmann Maupin exhibition, confirms Mr. Rhode's gift for active invention, and the potential of his mixed-up practice of drawing and performance. A

steel sculpture of a bicycle is painted entirely white, like the "ghost bikes" set up as memorials at sites of cycling accidents, while on the black gallery walls Mr. Rhode has drawn hasty, energetic images of bicycles, the chalk smudged and streaked. He has often used the image of the bicycle frame in his wall drawings — in school, he has said, classmates would have younger students by forcing them to "ride" drawn bicycles, since none of them could afford the real thing.

As a video here documents, the artist tried desperately to ride these chalk bikes too. What remains of that performance are the shoes he wore: white Chuck Taylors, spray-painted black, sitting on a copy of The New York Times, dated June 18, its banner headline, reporting on the killing of nine parishioners at a historic black church in Charleston, S.C., installed in Mr. Rhode's biographically and historically minded installation a gut-churning contemporaneity.

"Robin Rhode: Drawing Waves" runs through Aug. 30 at the Drawing Center, SoHo; 212-229-2185, drawingcenter.org. "Borne Frieze" runs through Aug. 21 at Lehmann Maupin, Chelsea; 212-255-2522, lehmannmaupin.com.

4 Questions with South African Artist Robin Rhode



Courtney Willis Blair
ARTIST ROOMS

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Continued from page 1

You often play within a space that exists in between past, present, and future political and social histories. Can you talk about handling collective histories and employing the structure of performance? How do you confront these spaces?

I think that the key word in your question is the idea of 'play.' Play allows us to engage with unseemly histories that are often fraught with trauma or even repressed memory. Play allows us to destabilize these sometimes heavy social and political experiences, so that a new formation of a group identity can be created that is more inclusive in our already very exclusive reality. Play, too, has a strong association to humor, and humor becomes a powerful mechanism to engage, or even reinvent certain dominant ideals or discourses, therefore allowing us a new understanding of lived experiences. Whether it is past, present, or future. From humor comes gesture. Gesture relates to the use of the human body as a vehicle to communicate, sometimes without words, narratives that are more fleeting and more intuitive. Through physical gesture one is able to overcome the limitations of written languages or words. I tend to employ intuition quite often in my process. Meaning, I tend to take risks and rely on a given moment to make decisions, whether it is in the process of conceptualizing a work, or in the process of drawing or mark making, but especially when it comes to a live performance. I rely on the energy of the given space as a support structure in generating a line, a mark, a drawing, or a physical action. Most times I intentionally generate the energy for drawing and performance by creating boundaries, or parameters for myself. Even for my ideas. Limitations feed the intuitive muscle. I believe that constraint can lead to the most provocative and interesting aesthetic output.



Robin Rhode, "Light/Glow/Light/Taker," 2015. Installation view, Lehman Museum, 396 West 22nd Street, New York. Courtesy the artist and Lehman Museum, New York and Hong Kong. Photo: Michael Sogge

You're having quite a moment in New York right now. Can you talk about your exhibition at Lehmann Maupin, the Drawing Center, and commission for Performa? How did these shows come together? How do they differ or interact with one another?

Well, a moment probably, but I'm not getting carried away. I'm very conscious about over-exposure and also how quickly the art world can first consume then becomes exhausted by artists and their ideas. I'm being critical, not cynical. Therefore my approach to the current art season is to produce quite varied projects in the specific venues. My exhibition at Lehmann Maupin focused on the process of drawing using walls and floors, and was deeply rooted in the economical meanings of chalk and charcoal as a basic medium of expression. These accessible materials allowed for a monochromatic exhibition that had a very nostalgic overtone. The sense of monochrome touches on aspects of early cinema as well the aesthetics of historical photography. However, all this manifested into drawings and sculptures that allows the viewer a very ephemeral exhibition experience. Ephemerality is sometimes lacking in most gallery exhibitions due to the market pressure in our current commercial climate, so I felt my approach could rekindle aspects of 60's and 70's avant-garde performances as well as engage with the concept of sculpture as the medium, or starting point, for drawing.

Can you talk in depth about "Erwartung: A Street Opera," commissioned for the Performa Biennial? How have you reimagined the 20th century opera? What similarities were you able to draw? How is Carole Sidney Louis essential to the work?

My inspiration for the opera idea came about by trying to imagine a new exhibition of sculpture. I was in a phase of questioning sculpture as a medium with limitations. I was influenced by the Japanese art movement called Gutai and deeply inspired by their Manifesto that considers aspects of time, past, present, and future, in the realization of the art concept. Their idea was that through human engagement with the art medium, one is able to project life, or narrative, into the dead material. This concept then brought me to imagining a sculpture exhibition as something quite theatrical or operatic, since the idea of sound too I felt would be deeply emotive to the experience of the audience. It is through this research that I encountered Schoenberg's ERWARTUNG.



Robin Rhode, still of *Piano Chair*, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York and Hong Kong. © 2015 Robin Rhode

You activate your work in public areas through performance. How does the approach to your work change depending on the physical location you're in, be it a city such as Cape Town, New York, or Berlin or a space such as a white box gallery, a museum, or in the street?

Initially I avoided having any hierarchical structure, or divisional approach, between the street and the gallery/museum space, whereby one was more important than the other. My intention was to reflect both. In other words, when I worked on the street I would attempt to engage with very high-order references from art history within a low-order system, being a street corner or abandoned plot where one could find protruding concrete walls. Whether it would be Russian Constructivism as a point of inspiration, or Der Stijl, I would use these conceptual references as templates for wall drawings on the streets.



Performing Robin Rhode: Drawing, the street and Urbanism in Cape Town



Inside The Times

...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

Loud Life of Desperation In a Milling Times Square

After seeing The World
...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

This was the person ...
...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...



...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

World Schooling 'Erasing'

...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

...the crowd was a mix of people, some of whom were ...

In Times Square, Robin Rhode Stages an Anxious Call to Address Racial Disparities

Wails and shrieks of horror filled Times Square on Saturday and Sunday nights this past weekend. These were not the sounds of prudish tourists shocked at the return of the Descent into Hell, but rather the 33-minute lamentation of an unnamed Woman, searching for a lover she cannot find—and may well have killed.

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY ALEXANDER FORDEG
MARCH 10TH, 2015 1:00 PM



Robin Rhode, Arnold Schoenberg's *Transcriving: A Verjima Casanova*, 2012. Photo by Paula Caine, courtesy of Debarrow

Billed as a "90 second anxiety attack extended musically into a 30 minute opera" in paraphrase of its original composer, Arnold Schoenberg, *Transcriving* drew crowds from the art world to an oval stage on Broadway between 42nd and 43rd Streets. It also drew many more uninitiated onlookers to the exterior of the seating area to snap a photo on, in at least

the case of one partly man, stand with mouth agape. A reimagining of Schönberg's 1909 opera by artist Robin Rhode for *Performa 15*, the piece featured a single soprano (the renowned Carolee Sydney Louis, her face painted a stark white) projecting above a sizable orchestra conducted by Massimo Ariano Tancredi.

It was the first time an opera had ever been staged in Times Square, a location that updates the backdrop of Schönberg's original piece. The libretto sets *Erwartung* in a dark forest, illuminated only by moonlight. In Rhode's rendition, metal and glass skyscrapers fill in for trees, ultra-HD billboards serving as so many moons. The stage—many layers of poster-sized prints of sketches Rhode made after Schönberg's original plans for the mise-en-scène, plastered to the ground—was set sparsely. A pair of mannequin arms could be seen at stage left (the "hazlet" about whom the Woman's jealousy boils), a bench made from concrete bricks at right, and a sole brick at center serving as stand-in for a log, which, at the end of the second of four scenes, the Woman mistakes for her lover's body.



Robin Rhode, Arnold Schönberg's *Erwartung*, *A Performa Commission*, 2015. Photo by Paula Loontjens, courtesy of Performa.

Reforming Schönberg, whose atonal and aleatoric compositions have often been ascribed to the anxieties of the age of industrial capitalism, within the world's greatest emblem of the cognitive-cultural economy of our moment is nothing short of brilliant. (Rhode says that much was the suggestion of *Performa* director RoseLee Goldberg.) But precarious labor is just one knock-on effect of the core anxiety Rhode is out to finger: specifically, the racial politics of post-apartheid South Africa, the Berlin-based artist's home country.

The unnamed Woman stands in for any number of her South African sisters (and others around the globe facing similarly stacked decks) who are caught up in an endemic system of migrant labor within the mineral-rich country. The system sees primarily their husbands, but in some cases the women too, travel to mines for great stretches of the year, putting their lives on hold, the danger of the work such that. Like for Schönberg's Frau, it is unclear if they will ever be reunited. So too could the Woman and Man be Winnie and Nelson Mandela, suggested Rhode after Saturday's performance, Winnie having spent the 27 years of her husband's imprisonment unsure if they would reunite.



Robin Rhode, Arnold Schönberg's *Erwartung*, *A Performer Commission*, 2015. Photo by Paula Court, courtesy of Performa.

Erwartung's first three scenes are but the hand-tugging, tight-chested forebodes of scene four's full blown panic attack, which consumes well more than half the opera's length. The Man, played by Moses Loo, who wears a black stocking over his face throughout the performance, rises from beneath a pile of Rhode's drawings and begins to circle the stage in a halting, almost robotic gait, as both spectre of the Woman's desire (and rage) and a reminder of the racial context in which Rhode's rendition takes place.

Both Woman and Man wear patterns associated with sangomas, traditional South African healers who are drawn to their cause by an initial psychosomatic illness. The red, black, and white costumes (which coincidentally mirrored the color scheme of a number of advertisements playing on loop on the screen: moons suspended above the stage) feature a chicken motif, itself a reference to sangoma rituals using chicken blood to bond the healers to their ancestors.



Robin Rhode, Arnold Schönberg's Emancipation, A Performer's Conscience, 2013. Photo by Paula Court, courtesy of Performa.

Thus, a redemptive thread runs even more prominently through the performance as Louise's laments swell, her words increasingly staccato blips of memories racing past so frantically that they are inaccessible to the audience. But it's a thread cut short. Schönberg cum Rhode's opera ends with the Man returned to his papery grave and the Woman, arm outstretched, howling "ich sehe" ("I looked for ..."). In its original formulation, this ultimate lament could be read as a final note in a funeral march for agency. But in Rhode's interpretation, and in this most public of settings, it reads much more as a collective call to cohesive action. It's a mandate for both those of us seated for 30 minutes of emotional torment, and the countless others looking on for 30 seconds of spectacle, to look for and, together, find a solution.

Alexander Forbes

Performa 15 takes place November 1–22 at various locations across New York City.

Robin Rhode

LEHMANN MAUPIN

The presentation of Robin Rhode's photographic works, who is played out by the artist or a stand-in for him, is a follow-in casual street game—puffer-puff, smokers, watch up, sunglasses. His characters always turned from the camera, his hands often covered in paint. He is a playful, a prescient in these works—as Edward Gurney shows the in positive high-ups—but also a bit myself, caught up, like Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin, in situations beyond life control.

Expressions of photography, which shows the character interacting with images scratched, chalked or painted onto walls and sidewalks, portray his actions as framed in a film world. In *Birds on Wire* (all works 2012–13), the photo depicts a stranded bird flying across rows of wall-mounted wire strung across the wall, while the protagonist, dressed all in black and wearing a bright-orange backpack, appears from frame to frame to pull himself along the wire until the bird finally comes to perch on his hand. In *The Point of Writing*, postcards passed on a wall, one after another in a grid formation, portraying a boat sailing toward us and away again; the protagonist, in a yellow slicker—now prone, now crouched, now bucking up, now he on hands and feet—seems to shoot rays from his eyes that trap the boats in his line of sight (a notion achieved with goggles and elastic string).

The playfulness of these works belies the artist's somewhat hand-headed engagement with strategies of representation. The photo depicts drawings in the world's most fundamental unit, for they comprise the basic mode of peering by opening up the scene to include such considerations as exposing strokes in the wall or, in *The Point of*

instead in looking around in making scenes. In *Zoozoo*, one then get down and figure up a striped car that in each frame is associated with more and more lines denoting movement. Arranged in a circle, the images suggest a world and, in fact, show the car shifting from frame to frame. This reveals, in the placement and shape of the hand-drawn, that the protagonist is doing his "flip" while lying on the sidewalk—an illusion in plain sight.

At Lehmann Maupin's Lower East Side gallery, Rhode presented the results of a collaboration with Time Inc., a New York-based nonprofit that provides art education to underprivileged school children. Some fifty kids from 15–21 in the South Bronx were invited to color in large sheets of birds, buildings, and other less-identifiable things on the walls of the ground, high-ceilinged gallery and to complete four minutes—the duration of images from Rhode's works, including the bird from *Birds on Wire*. This performance was carried out, as might be expected, with an enormous amount of glue. The children were given crayons that were too big for one person to handle alone, so that one child was required to hold the crayon aloft and another to maneuver the colorant scribbles around the strictly red outlines in both jumpy and joyful. This serious play dovetails with one of the central themes of Rhode's work: the end of disruption that comes with drawing on walls.

—Geoffrey Holf



Writing, the images created by gluing the posters, which form three dimensional waves on the flat surfaces. The presence of the protagonist—the creator, the performer—makes the wall itself become a performance. A pair of wall forms, at roughly two-foot-high standing compasses that seem to dance in the middle of the gallery, take this idea in a new direction for Rhode, but come off for the most part like visual puns.

The artist and the viewer's movements are so capably rendered—and shown in the medium of photography, that even the slightest of empirical truths—that one could be tempted to believe that this two-dimensional graffiti has, in fact, come to life. But Rhode seems less

Robin Rhode, *Birds on Wire*, 2012–13, 8 pp. "Time Inc. Open House" in 12th St. NYC, 2012.

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