



Trisha Donnelly, *Untitled*, 2010 - digital video, color, sound, 91 minutes. Installation view, Gloria Cinema, Kassel. From Documenta 13. Photo: Nils Klinger.

Reviews

FOCUS

- 254 Daniel Birnbaum and Dieter Roelstraete on **Documenta 13**
 258 Sarah K. Rich on **La Triennale**
 259 Michael Ned Holte on **Made in L.A. 2012**
 260 Molly Warnock on "Displace, Disclose, Discover: Acts of Painting 1960-1999"

NEW YORK

- 262 Robert Pincus-Witten on **André Masson**
 Barry Schwabsky on **Richard Avedon**
 263 Johanna Burton on **Annette Messager**
 David Frankel on **Martin Puryear**
 264 Ara H. Merjian on **Domenico Gnoli**
 265 Jeffrey Kastner on **Tom Sachs**
 Eva Díaz on **Christian Jankowski**
 266 Emily Hall on **Tomás Saraceno**
 267 Frances Richard on **Sharon Hayes**
 Donald Kuspit on **Martine Franck**
 268 Lloyd Wise on **Evelyne Axell**
 269 Michael Wilson on **Jane Fox Hipple**
 and on **Hannah Weinberger**
 270 Lauren O'Neill-Butler on **Ulrike Müller**

WINSTON-SALEM, NC

- David M. Lubin on "paperless"

MIAMI BEACH

- 271 Alpesh Kantilal Patel on **Charles LeDray**

CHICAGO

- 272 Michelle Grabner on **Jerome Acks**

SAN FRANCISCO

- Lisa Turvey on **Katharina Wulff**

LOS ANGELES

- 273 Ben Carlson on **Roger Hiorns**
 274 Catherine Taft on **Allison Schulnik**
 Natilee Harren on
 "Needles in the Camel's Eye"

TORONTO

- 275 Scott Lyall on **Jorinde Voigt**

LONDON

- 276 Anna Lovatt on **Jo Spence**
 Sherman Sam on **Markus Karstieß**

CARLOW, IRELAND

- 277 Declan Long on **Brian Duggan**

GRENOBLE, FRANCE

- 278 Paul Galvez on **Isabelle Cornaro**

BERLIN

- Jurriaan Benschop on **Tomasz Kowalski**

FRANKFURT

- 279 Barry Schwabsky on **Bettina Pousttchi**

MUNICH

- Daniela Stöppel on **Michaela Melián**

BREMEN, GERMANY

- 280 Bibiana Obler on **Rebecca Horn**

LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND

- 281 Karen Kurczynski on **Asger Jorn**

MILAN

- Marco Tagliapietra on **Riccardo Beretta**

ROME

- 282 Pier Paolo Pancotto on **Francesco Arena**

GHENT, BELGIUM

- 283 Javier Hontoria on "Sint-Jan"

THE HAGUE

- Hans den Hartog Jäger on
Robert Zandvliet

BERGEN, NORWAY

- 284 Johanne Nordby Wernø on
Marianne Heier

TEL AVIV

- Nuit Banai on **Larry Abramson**

BUCHAREST

- 285 Kaelen Wilson-Goldie on
Bucharest Biennale 5

ISTANBUL

- 286 Mine Haydaroglu on
Berlinde De Bruyckere

SÃO PAULO

- Sérgio Martins on **Gisele Camargo**

BUENOS AIRES

- 287 María Gainza on **Santiago Villanueva**

Documenta 13

VARIOUS VENUES,
KASSEL, BANFF, CAIRO, AND KABUL
Daniel Birnbaum

WHAT WOULD IT MEAN to think that things could have stories as troubled as those of people? Many of the objects in this year's Documenta—among them engines, a beehive, a palette knife—had complex, sometimes difficult, stories to tell. Take the Korbinian, a German apple. Its origin arguably lies in 1923, when the Bavarian priest, activist, and apple lover Korbinian Aigner saw Adolf Hitler speaking in Munich. Aigner began to protest the Nazi regime, was arrested in the fall of 1939, and was subsequently moved to Dachau—where, unbelievably enough, he tended a small orchard between two barracks and even bred several new varieties of apple. Using the German abbreviation for *concentration camp*, he named them KZ-1, KZ-2, KZ-3, and KZ-4. Documenta 13 curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev included nearly four hundred of the priest's drawings of apples in her sprawling exhibition, which was so full of odd objects and curious constellations that nothing, in the end, should have surprised us. The meticulous illustrations, made between circa 1912 and 1960, were installed in strict grids reminiscent of 1970s Conceptualism. They looked monotonous from a distance, but on closer inspection the graceful depictions—some shown singly, some in pairs—displayed all the quirks and blemishes we'd expect from real fruit. Together with artist Jimmie Durham, Christov-Bakargiev

also planted two apple trees in Kassel's Karlsaue Park as a modest monument to the rebellious priest, whose KZ-3 was renamed the Korbinian in 1985.

In the Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Documenta's central venue, the grids of apples were displayed in the same room as the late Mark Lombardi's large drawings mapping the personal and financial connections behind major political scandals such as the Iran-Contra affair. The adjoining gallery contained tables with scientific instruments exploring the nature of light and speed—a "work" by Austrian physicist Anton Zeilinger. The mathematical calculations scribbled on an adjacent wall were impenetrable to me, but according to the catalogue they pointed to a necessary "renewal of the discussion of the definition of reality." The diversity of these examples can perhaps serve as an illustration of the vast ambitions of this exhibition and of the radical heterogeneity of the projects included.

Christov-Bakargiev—who, as the hundred pamphlets published in the run-up to her exhibition demonstrated, is not opposed to metaphysical speculation or to the most complex of thinkers—insisted that her project was not limited by an overarching theme. What was on offer instead, for those of us who wanted some guidance, was a section of the exhibition called "The Brain," located in the rotunda of the Fridericianum and separated from the other rooms by a glass wall. This was described as an "associative space," in which "a number of artworks, objects, and documents [were] brought together in lieu of a concept." It was posited as the very locus of Christov-Bakargiev's vast project, as Lawrence Weiner's *THE MIDDLE OF THE MIDDLE OF THE MIDDLE OF*, 2012, applied to the glass partition, made clear.

The Brain was thus pitched as a "puzzle of an exhibition that condenses and centers the thought lines" of the whole Documenta. Among the items on view were artifacts from the National Museum of Beirut that had melted into one another when the museum was shelled during the Lebanese Civil War, an excerpt of a video made by the Egyptian artist Ahmed Basyony just three days before he

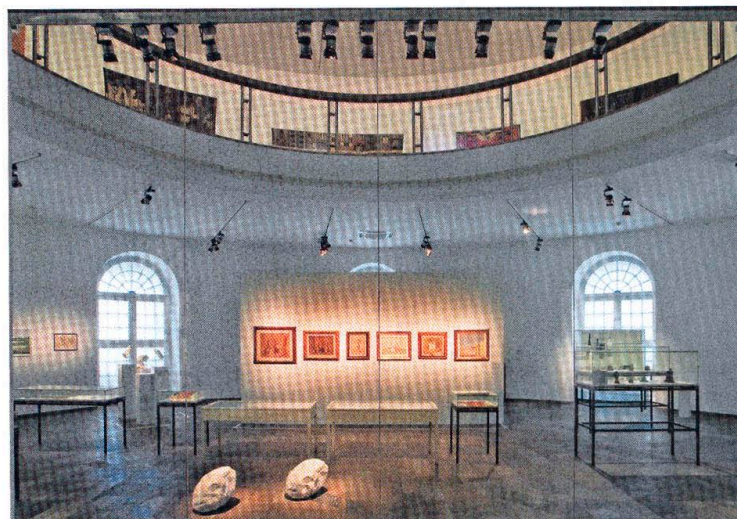
died from gunshot wounds inflicted by the Egyptian police in the winter of 2011, a palette knife used for more than thirty years by the marvelous Lebanese poet and painter Etel Adnan, a bathtub thermometer that the photographer Lee Miller took from Hitler's Munich apartment in 1945, and a selection of figures made some three thousand years ago in Central Asia that are today known as the Bactrian Princesses. Many of these objects could be considered troubled—as the catalogue puts it, there are "innocent objects and objects that have lost something; destroyed objects, damaged objects and indestructible objects . . . hidden or disguised objects, objects on retreat, objects in refuge, traumatized objects." That's where we may want to pause: traumatized objects?

There was, I think, a conflict—perhaps a productive one—at the heart of this enormous multidisciplinary show, and it can be located exactly in the tension between those two words. On the one hand, many of the artworks and the stories they told circled around collective traumas: those of Nazi Germany and, much more recently, those of

Things have stories, but are they so much like us that they are capable of experiencing trauma or having political intentions?

Afghanistan or the countries involved in the Arab Spring. Indeed, Christov-Bakargiev's focus on what she calls "collapse and recovery" is so familiar from recent cultural theory that it is almost a cliché to speak of a traumatic temporality at the very core of all avant-garde artistic developments. But on the other hand, such psychoanalytic language here collides with the idiom of a new, object-oriented philosophy that wants to liberate us once and for all from anthropocentrism and consider instead what the catalogue calls the "inanimate makers of the world." In fact, Christov-Bakargiev's project is in many ways perfectly in tune with the approaches today discussed as "speculative realism,"

From left: Korbinian Aigner, *Apples* (detail), ca. 1912–60, 402 drawings, gouache, pencil, watercolor, colored pencil on cardboard, each 4 1/4 x 6 1/8". Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel. View of "The Brain," 2012, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel. Photo: Roman März.



with its ambition to rid our thinking of the obsession with that historically overemphasized relationship between a perceiving subject and a known object. Instead, the argument goes, we should look into other equally exciting and productive relationships in the world, consisting of so many human and nonhuman actors, or “actants,” as Bruno Latour would put it. Philosopher Graham Harman goes so far as to claim: “Atoms and molecules are actants, as are children, raindrops, bullet trains, politicians, and numerals. All entities are on exactly the same ontological footing.” One can go further still: To quote from an interview with Christov-Bakargiev, “The question is not whether we give dogs or strawberries permission to vote, but how a strawberry can assert its political intention.”

Things have stories, but are they so much like us that they are capable of experiencing trauma or having political intentions? If we end up attributing human subjectivity to nonhuman actors, isn't there a risk of making anthropocentrism a model for the rest of the world, rather than eradicating the problem? Indeed, the show's own structure illustrated this paradox: Its center was called the Brain, after all. But it was not at all clear whether we should understand the Brain as imputing subjectivity to the entire exhibition or take it as a neutral scientific metaphor positing a new relationship to things (including artworks) and other living beings.

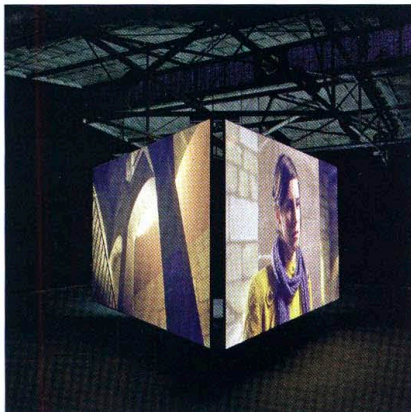
Either way, the resulting tension played out among numerous assemblages and apparatuses that hovered indecisively at the division between subject and object. What were we to make of the impressive array of car engines that **Thomas Bayrle** had made into praying machines—as well as the windshield wipers whose movements became inseparable from an audio track of Hail Marys? How, and in what language, were we to respond to the scenario that Pierre Huyghe staged in the composting area of the Baroque park, a scene involving a female statue reclining in the mud with a beehive taking the place of her head, an *acéphale* who was guarded by an uncanny dog with a fluorescent leg? It was as mystifying

a tableau as that behind the wooden door in Duchamp's *Étant donnés* and reminded us that one of the show's “thought lines” led back through the history of Surrealism. Collected in the Brain were several versions of Man Ray's *Objet indestructible*, 1923/1965, in which Lee Miller's wide-open eye, set atop a metronome, never blinks, although it has seen unlikely things, including Eva Braun's perfume flask and the Führer's monogrammed towel on the day of his suicide.

In several of the roughly dozen works installed at the Hauptbahnhof, Kassel's former main train station, the ghostly presence of the past reminded us of the function of the German railway not so many decades ago. It was addressed directly in Susan Philipsz's *Study for Strings*, 2012, installed at the end of a functioning platform, where seven speakers played music composed by Pavel Haas in the Terezin concentration camp in 1943. In a disused part of the station, meanwhile, Haegue Yang's *Approaching: Choreography Engineered in Never-Past Tense*, 2012, comprising motorized venetian blinds suspended above the tracks, created an uncanny sense of trains arriving and departing. Yang's installation was one of the most substantial works in an exhibition with many great new pieces. Another, also at the Hauptbahnhof, was Clemens von Wedemeyer's riveting three-channel film *Muster (Rushes)*, 2012, a tightly knit narrative about the former Benedictine monastery Breitenau, just outside Kassel. The work is a mazelike telling of a German psychohistory spinning out from the history of the site. (The Nazis converted it into an early concentration camp, and after the end of World War II it housed a reformatory for girls; parts of it are used today as a psychiatric clinic.) Installed in a large dark space in a triangular fashion, von Wedemeyer's piece could only be viewed from one side at a time, so one kept circling to get a grip on the connections between Breitenau's history and such scenes as the liberation of a concentration camp's inmates by American soldiers, a punk concert, and fragments from Ulrike Meinhof's 1970 film *Bambule*.

This Documenta, with a firm footing in Kassel as well as outposts unknown to most of us in Cairo, Kabul, and Banff, Canada, was a wildly ambitious and in many ways outrageous exhibition. It created its own imaginary geographies, insisting that there are secret relationships that most of us have never paid attention to. Kassel, Kabul, Kassel, Kabul. Mention the two cities often enough together and things start happening. Energies start rubbing off, layers of meaning migrate. Naturally, there were plenty of times such frictions did not go anywhere, plenty of not-so-fantastic projects, and a few vain decisions. An awkward handwritten letter in which Kai Althoff explains to Christov-Bakargiev why he could not participate in the show was displayed prominently in the Fridericianum's ground-floor gallery, which was otherwise almost entirely empty, albeit suffused with an artificial breeze, Ryan Gander's *I Need Some Meaning I Can Memorize (The Invisible Pull)*, 2012. But much more evocative was the exhibition's plethora of magnificent projects, which included immersive installations by Theaster Gates and Tino Sehgal, both of which made viewers part of musical activities that went far beyond anything they might have expected, as well as subtle meditations on painting-in-spite-of-everything by the likes of Paul Chan and Francis Alÿs. Wandering into a beautiful cinema in the north of Kassel, I saw a truly majestic and inexplicable shiny entity appearing and disappearing on the screen, elusive, like some sort of cosmic quicksilver. This piece by **Trisha Donnelly** (*Untitled*, 2010–) existed—like everything else the artist has ever touched—without any explanation. A more modest film elsewhere in the exhibition, Tamara Henderson's *Sloshed Ballot & Anonymous Loan*, 2011, showed everyday objects being manipulated by invisible hands. There is, after all, so little we actually know about the true nature of the things that surround us. However contradictory, the show's attempt to blur the line between the perceiving subject and the rest of the world left me with a question: Was I looking at this show, or was it looking at me? □

DANIEL BIRNBAUM IS DIRECTOR OF MODERNA MUSEET IN STOCKHOLM.



From left: Clemens von Wedemeyer, *Muster (Rushes)*, 2012, 27 minutes. Installation view, Hauptbahnhof, Kassel. Photo: Henrik Stromberg. Francis Alÿs, *Untitled (detail)*, 2011–12, nineteen paintings, photocopy, oil, encaustic on canvas, dimensions variable. Obere Karlsstraße, Kassel. Haegue Yang, *Approaching: Choreography Engineered in Never-Past Tense*, 2012, motorized aluminum venetian blinds, aluminum, cable, module box, DMX recorder. Installation view, Hauptbahnhof, Kassel. Photo: Nils Klingner.

