

2009

# The Role of the Viewer in the Gallery Space

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## Recommended Citation

Berliner, Meghan, "The Role of the Viewer in the Gallery Space" (2009). *Scripps Senior Theses*. Paper 12.  
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**THE ROLE OF THE VIEWER IN THE GALLERY SPACE**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL  
FULLFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR RANKAITIS  
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**April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

My installation, “The Viewers”, consists of three life-sized figures and a projected video feed. The figures are placed in and around the gallery space, and the video originates from a hidden camera installed in one of the figures eyes. The first figure that the viewer encounters upon entering the gallery space is hyper-realistic security guard<sup>1</sup> His position behind the gallery circulation desk, a space which is traditionally assumed not to be an ‘art space’ allows him to view those entering the gallery while remaining relatively unnoticed. A camera that is installed in his one of his eye sockets and hidden behind sunglasses feeds live images that “he perceives” to another part of the gallery where they are projected. The second figure is a male soldier<sup>2</sup>, positioned covertly on a lighting ledge connected to the ceiling of the gallery. From his high-post, he can clearly view the gallery’s occupants through his binoculars, while only being noticeable himself from particular angles. The third figure is a real person dressed as a gorilla<sup>3</sup>. Throughout the evening, he will move through the gallery, viewing and contemplating the artworks and its viewers as well. The purpose of the gorilla is primarily to view the exhibit and the social interaction generated by the gallery setting, but inevitably, viewers will want to interact with him, drawing them into the playful drama of the piece as a whole.

Together, and through their individual means of viewing, each figure alludes to the idea of playing a part: the security guard in his fulfilment of the role of a security guard, the soldier in the almost costume-like quality evoked by his camouflage attire, and the gorilla being fairly obviously a performer in costume. That each is in a sense playing a role, and that each has a particular means of viewing the people in the gallery, suggests the additional roles and importance of the fourth element, that of the viewers. My work aims to suggest that the viewers are always playing a part of sorts when viewing an exhibition: the part of the viewer. This references not only the integral nature that the viewer has in defining the meaning of an artwork, but also the role that the viewer agrees to take on – the set of assumptions and mode of viewing the art as ‘art’ – as soon as one enters the gallery space.

My installation holds several common goals and mechanisms with several genres of art. Firstly, my inclusion of live video feed in the gallery as an artistic method

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Figures 3 and 4 in Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Figure 5 in Appendix A.

references surveillance art. Surveillance art has been recently popularized by the rising role of video media in our everyday experience as well as our acceptance of the increasing use of video surveillance by various authorities for security purposes. It is used by some to present the inescapability of being surveyed, as in, for example, Gary Perkins's "Cleanliness next to Godliness". In this piece, Perkins creates dollhouse-like rooms that are being videotaped, and the video image is blown up and projected to life-size. John Walker interprets, "Perkins's works imply that even within the privacy of our own homes we are not exempt from a Big Brother type of scrutiny."<sup>4</sup> While this is not the intended message of all surveillance works, it is certainly a central concept for many of the artists in this genre. In my own work, my selection of two authority-like figures: a security guard and soldier, is meant to reference just this point. However, I accomplish a diffusion of the "big brother effect" through the comical juxtaposition of the gorilla as the third viewer.

This is not to say that all surveillance art is meant to reference authority per se. As Michael Rush comments, "Interest in surveillance arose not only from the public revelations in the news media about actual policing practices, but also from the nature of television itself which appears to be constantly watching the viewer even as the viewer is watching it."<sup>5</sup> This is the primary sense in which surveillance is relevant in my own work. The video screen acts to reveal the viewer, as seen by my security guard, to herself. The self-consciousness that this produces should heighten her awareness of how she is viewing the work in the gallery. As Rush continues, "The privacy of the viewing space is invaded and, willingly or not, the viewer becomes the viewed not only by herself, but also by others."<sup>6</sup> This method of revealing the gallery space and the viewers within it in order to present a critical commentary is also one of the central devices of art of institutional critique.

Beginning with the Dadaists and Surrealists in the 30s, and furthered by the anti-institutional movements of the late 60s and 70s, art of institutional critique causes us to reconsider the relationship between art and gallery space. It denies the notion of a gallery as a neutral 'white cube', along with the previously accepted assumption that "the ideal

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<sup>4</sup> Walker, p.158

<sup>5</sup> Rush, p. 122.

<sup>6</sup> Rush, p. 124.

gallery space subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'."<sup>7</sup> Rather than attempt to create a neutral artistic viewing space, art of institutional critique recognizes the role that the gallery space plays in informing and interacting with the works and providing a set of assumptions about how one 'ought' to go about viewing the art within. As Brian O'Doherty notes, "The wall is our assumptions. It is imperative for every artist to know this content and what it does to his/her work."<sup>8</sup> This awareness is central in informing the works of artists of institutional critique.

Like the black-clothed stagehands rearranging set-pieces between scenes, the viewer agrees to ignore the frames and gallery space as part and parcel of her viewing experience. She also agrees to view the artworks themselves, each one separate and distinct on its respective pedestal as something to be seen as such: something distinct, great, rare, expensive, or meaningful, innovative, thought-provoking, novel, not to be touched, altered or interacted with. But the *tabula rasa* of the 'white cube' is no longer an accurate ascription. From Duchamp to Asher, artists of institutional critique urge us to reconsider the notion of the gallery as a neutral space and to recognize the interaction, not only between the gallery and the works, but between the viewer, the gallery and the works as well.

One of the first artists to reference the nature of viewing within the gallery space was Marcel Duchamp. O'Doherty writes of Duchamp that, "He first visited the house's 'white cube' in 1938 and invented the ceiling – if invention is making us conscious of what we agree not to see, i.e., take for granted. The second time, four years later, he delivered every particle of the interior space to our consciousness."<sup>9</sup> In his piece, *1,200 Bags of Coal*<sup>10</sup>, Duchamp covered the ceiling in stuffed sacks, not only drawing attention to the previously ignored ceiling space of the gallery, but seeming to flip the whole exhibition space upside down. In another work, *Mile of String*<sup>11</sup>, Duchamp laced the entire 1942 surrealist exhibition with a long red piece of string, keeping viewers from easily accessing the exhibit and failing to recognize the autonomous rights of the other artworks. O'Doherty interprets, "He keeps the spectator, whose presence is always

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<sup>7</sup> O'Doherty, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> O'Doherty, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> O'Doherty, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> Refer to Figure 6 in Appendix A.

<sup>11</sup> Refer to Figure 7 in Appendix A.

voluntary, hung up on his own etiquette, thus preventing him/her from disapproving of his/her own harassment – a source of further annoyance.”<sup>12</sup> We can see how Duchamp begins to draw attention, not only to the gallery space itself, though it is clear that he does this as well, but to the distinct yet variegated relationships that viewers have when approaching these works and spaces.

In the 70s, art of institutional critique advanced the role of the viewer from affective to fundamental. Kirsi Peltomaki notes, “Beyond the generic viewer who, in Marcel Duchamp’s 1957 quip, would complete the work of art, the 1960s and 1970s viewing subject had become an increasingly specific entity whose place in the work was scripted alongside material or processual relations.”<sup>13</sup> Artists such as Asher, Buren and Haake shift the process of viewing to become social-psychological. One is left unsure of whether the social interaction becomes context, rather, the new gallery space, for the work to be exhibited within, or whether the artistic work becomes the context for the art of social interaction.

I am particularly intrigued by Michael Asher’s 1974 Clare Copely exhibition. For this installation, Asher removed the wall which separated the gallery space from the back storage room and gallery director’s office. The affect was a forced interaction between the viewer and the director by exposing the office’s activities: interviewing artists, making calls, scheduling shows, etc. to the public, and exposing the exhibition space to the director’s view. Peltomaki describes, “Considering the psychological ramifications of this radically increased visibility, Asher observed, ‘In the same way that gallery personnel seemed to become increasingly aware of their activities, viewers also became more aware of themselves as viewers’.”<sup>14</sup> This is quite a profound affect for ‘merely’ removing a wall. This promotion of awareness of the self and the assumed roles that one plays when in the gallery setting is a theme that I explore in my own work. For Asher, the reactions of the viewers were fundamental to the meaning of the piece. Many viewers were confused, disgruntled, irritated, and embarrassed as they debated the notion that the exhibit had not yet been installed, or they had come to the wrong place. A critic of the Asher show explains that “Actually viewers don’t intend social interaction. They come to

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<sup>12</sup> O’Doherty, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Peltomaki, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Peltomaki, p. 37.

look at art. But without knowing it, they are an integral part of the work they see. How unsettling, and uncomfortable.”<sup>15</sup> While one can clearly see the merits of this statement, one cannot help but marvel that an empty gallery space can actively cause these strong emotional responses in a viewer. Certainly it fundamentally demonstrates that the gallery space should not be taken as neutral and that context plays a powerful role in informing the work and its viewers.

Yet another Asher work that draws attention to the nature of the gallery space by creating an institutionally framed social interaction is his 1976 installation at the Clocktower Gallery of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources. For this work, Asher removed all of the doors and windows to the exhibit space, causing an interaction of the interior of the building with the noises, weather, smells, and lighting of the outer setting. Critic Nancy Foote describes that, “Once you make the indoor/outdoor connection, you think you’ve got it. Then it dawns on you that the work is also about the process of making that connection. It comments on awareness itself by forcing you to think about how it ought to affect you.”<sup>16</sup> It is precisely this self-reflexive nature that makes Asher’s works so successful in their critique of art institution. Similarly, it is this heightening of the viewer’s self-awareness that I would like to carry into my own piece.

An additional element of Asher’s work that is fundamental to my own work is its site-specificity. Rather than installing any preconceived work into a provided gallery space, Asher lets the space itself inform and create the work. Kimberli Meyer notes that “Asher works site-specifically: he responds to an invitation to exhibit by surveying the host venue, identifying key areas of interest, instigating a proposition that responds to the host institution, and manifesting an exhibition according to the principles he establishes.”<sup>17</sup> This dimension of his work is particularly relevant to development of my own work.

My piece, “The Viewers” was conceptualized from my experience within the space of the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery. Walking around the gallery and viewing each of the neatly contained student works, I was highly distracted by the fact that I could not separate my experience of the works from the context of what I knew they were

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<sup>15</sup> Peltomaki, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> Peltomaki, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Meyer, p. 26

‘supposed to’ be. In fact, I noted that nearly every one of my gallery experiences has been ‘plagued’ by my knowledge that the contained works are considered to be art, and by extension, my implied responsibility is to view them as such. This is particularly salient in the Williamson gallery due to its open and exposed nature, preventing any of the art objects from escaping the critical view. The gallery space is literally a white cube.

The most interesting feature in the gallery, which I became very focused on, was a large square cut-out in the ceiling, about three feet deep, containing a ledge that hides additional lighting. I noted how disconcerting it would be to discover a figure in that space, since we expect it to be empty. A work placed up there could find respite from the scrutiny of the established means of viewing, and from its high post would be in a prime position for viewing the people in the gallery while they were viewing the rest of the artworks. Additionally, if or when the work would actually get discovered, it would force the viewer to foster a dialogue with this non-art space.

In contemplating what other spaces are ignored in a similar fashion to the ceiling cut-out or Clare Copley’s office, I noted the circulation desk, as well as the food and beverage tables during opening reception, surrounding trees, etc. as places which escape the traditional means of judgement that the viewer uses when addressing the gallery itself. Instead, the viewer has no expectations of these spaces – well, besides perhaps the expectations that the beverage table will supply them beverages, and that the circulation desk might provide information. Rather, the viewer holds no artistic expectations of them. In stark contrast to the ‘this is art’ premise that encompasses the gallery proper, these spaces remain incognito, purposefully neglected because they remain in the realm of ‘this is not art’. Like Asher’s exposal of Clare Copley and the daily workings of her office space, the places which assist in the facilitation of the gallery exhibit (the lighting ledge, the circulation desk, the refreshment table, etc.) are not seen as part of the gallery space itself. By appealing to these non-art spaces, my figures remain out of the viewer’s gaze and cast their own gaze on the viewers instead. When, presumably, the viewers do notice the fact that they themselves are being viewed, they should (initially) become startled, annoyed, scared, confused, offset, self-conscious or some response to this effect. Granted that after this initial response the viewers will realize that they are looking at another instance of art, they will likely resume their ‘gaze’. However, their awareness of



their initial responses to being viewed should give them pause, or at least allow them to be more aware of their gaze.

Michael Asher's exhibition at the Santa Monica Museum of Art (2008)<sup>18</sup> similarly accomplishes this affect through different means. In this installation, Asher recreated walls from previous exhibitions, but left the metal studded skeletons of the walls uncovered. The piece not only referenced the process of museum installation, but caused those in the gallery to unintentionally view other viewers through the transparent windows created by the uncovered walls. Meyer explains, "The installation makes the act of viewing visible: within the artwork's frame, the viewer views through the structure, views others viewing, is viewed by others, and is thereby conscious of the act of viewing."<sup>19</sup> Through the slow realization of being watched, reinforced by the projection of a video which the security guard captures, my work creates a similar effect.

It is important to mention here how my work differs from that of Asher and others of institutional critique, and this is accomplished through my methods of conveying my concept. My choice to employ the seeming traditionalism of sculptural figures rather than working purely conceptually or abstractly might seem non sequitur: to return to conventional means in order to express unconventional concepts. I believe, however, that my method should be taken as just the opposite; the fact that we can now conceptualize art of institutional critique as genre is testament to its now assumed conventionality. Consequently, the now 'traditional' methods of discussion for works within this genre generally consist of employing raw conceptuality, usually through installation and performance, though this is not always the case. My return to figurative work as a means of making a similar commentary can thus be actually seen as quite novel.

Mario Cutajar notes in a sort of meta-critique that, "The fact that critique came to be understood as an essentially academic practice is itself symptomatic of a narrowing of the space of critique. In other words, appropriation became critique only when the left had become so weak that it could mount nothing more threatening in the way of dissent than a mirror that reflects corporate hegemony."<sup>20</sup> While this offers a particularly harsh picture of what works such as Asher's accomplish, we can draw from this statement the

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<sup>18</sup> Refer to Figure 8 in Appendix A.

<sup>19</sup> Meyer, 26

<sup>20</sup> Cutajar, "Lost and Found"

insight that by limiting the conventions by which we critique, these critiques indict themselves to becoming exactly the institutions that they aim to critique. He concludes, “At some point this search for the outside of bourgeois consciousness reached a limit and turned in on itself. That is to say, rebellion became indistinguishable from conformity, ironic kitsch indistinguishable from ordinary kitsch, and critique indistinguishable from affirmation.”<sup>21</sup> I find Cutajar’s charges to be a bit exaggerated, as I still contend that many merits can still be found in art of institutional critique, its promotion of self-awareness if nothing else. It does not seem as though that he explicitly denies the possibility that this outside consciousness of a true institutional critique could be achieved, only that we have not yet been able to. There does seem to be a possible paradox worth mentioning here though: that perhaps once a work of art is created and its meaning understood, it is somehow absorbed into the greater conventions of art as a whole. Arguably it at least adheres to the institution’s rigid demands for meaning or a new or unique perspective. And it does seem that the seriousness with which these artists critique the institution is not so foreign from the seriousness with which these institutions frame how we should critique art itself.

My decision to work figuratively rather than conceptually accomplishes a similar affect as art of institutional critique, namely, a realization of one’s institutionally framed set of assumptions about how one should view art. However, I accomplish this by employing innovative means of discussing an already established concept. By creating these dramatic figures, I knowingly invite the narratives that the viewers will inevitably make about who these figures are, what they are doing, and what their greater meaning is. The theatricality of the security guard, the soldier, and the gorilla requires that each play a part in a playful drama. After noticing the figures, the viewers’ curiosities compel them to interact with each, (especially the gorilla I suspect) and in doing so they assume a part in the drama themselves. But haven’t they been playing a part all along? Upon entering the gallery, doesn’t one consent to play the role of the viewer – the contemplative, uninvolved, critical, unassuming, forgiving, behaved (what have you) agent who assumes the etiquette appropriate to art viewing? In this way, my work establishes its critique by poking fun at these roles that we assume. It reveals the fact that in resolving to be a

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<sup>21</sup> Cutajar, “Lost and Found”

viewer, we are merely playing a part, one which we can play in various other ways if we so choose. By not taking their roles too seriously, my characters ask that the viewers do the same as viewers. Thus, rather than pointing an academically superior finger at the institution's limitations and constructs, my work reminds the viewer that these assumed limitations are only part of the drama of the gallery, and thus do not impose any 'real' limit on the viewer at all.

There are countless figure artists that work sculpturally, but another that employs realistic sculptural figures in a conceptual manner is Duane Hanson. Hanson has created countless hyper-realistic figures that he has installed in galleries as well as public spaces. I had the pleasure of seeing his piece, *the traveller*<sup>22</sup> in the Orlando airport and was thrilled at the reactions that I observed. At first glance one viewed a traveller unlike the countless others encountered at the airport, but upon realizing that it was in fact a statue, observers felt tricked, deemed the work as 'weird' or 'creepy', and averted looking at it. Other works such as *Queenie II*<sup>23</sup> put figures that are normally ignored, like a cleaning woman, right in the gallery space so that you are forced to acknowledge them. This reaction to the familiar brings up an important aspect of my work that I have yet to discuss: the uncanny.

First addressed by Freud and later a subject of fascination for the Dadaists, the uncanny refers to the feeling of something being both familiar and foreign, causing dissonant feelings in a person of attraction and repulsions. The result is an uncomfortable strangeness, often causing the viewer to reject the uncanny object out of an inability to rationalize it. In his essay, "The Uncanny" Freud writes about Jentsch's characterization that the uncanny can manifest as, "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate"; and he refers in this connection to the impression made by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata. To these he adds the uncanny effect of epileptic fits, and of manifestations of insanity, because these excite in the spectator the impression of automatic, mechanical processes at work behind the 'ordinary appearance of mental

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<sup>22</sup> Refer to figure 9 in Appendix A

<sup>23</sup> Refer to Figure 10 in Appendix A

activity.”<sup>24</sup> This is highly related to the effect of Hanson’s work as well as my own. When the figures are realized as non-human, the effect does become to view the forms as ‘weird’ or ‘creepy’ because they are at once familiar and foreign. This is furthered by my inclusion of a live performer, thus confusing the animate and inanimate even more.

Similar to this notion of the uncanny is the idea of the unexpected. Art is expected in certain contexts but not others. While the hyper-real traveller would be impressive just due to technique in the gallery setting, by placing it in an airport where one does encounter countless faceless travellers but does not expect to encounter art works, the sculpture is that much more engaging. Cutajar asserts that art is meant to entertainment our minds. He notes that, “More and more, I wish that art would come out of its own peculiar closet and acknowledge that it is a rarefied form of entertainment for a specialized audience. And I am driven to this not just by what I see in art galleries, but also by what I come across when I’m looking for “mere” entertainment.”<sup>25</sup> This should not be taken to suggest that Cutajar means to demote art in any way, rather, that entertainment – media, movies, performance – often can reveal more truths than work in a gallery precisely because we do not expect it to do so. He argues that specifically seeking or imposing meaning often is of no effect, rather meaning is something which overtakes and impresses itself upon us when we are not anticipating its doing so. The gallery setting thus detracts from the works by imposing expectations on them which often prevent them from succeeding in their efforts. My placement of works within unexpected settings, or non-art spaces, thus increases their ability to convey meaning without forcing it upon the viewer. Granted, after my having addressed these spaces, they will likely also become absorbed into the viewers’ notion of the gallery proper, and will be included in their critical gaze during future exhibitions.

One main implication that I characterize from Cutajar’s claims is a critique of seriousness. He implies that in taking the effort to exude meaning too seriously, the gallery undermines its own efforts to allow meaning to be truly appreciated. Likewise, in making their efforts to criticize the institution too serious, many works of institutional critique ironically surrender to the seriousness of institutional methods that they aim to

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<sup>24</sup> Freud, p. 121

<sup>25</sup> Cutajar, “Lost and Found”

critique. In *my* version of art of institutional critique, my work escapes this irony by demonstrating an alternative for the viewer; my characters express: “I [the work of art] do not take myself too seriously (and neither should you!)”. Because the characters are actually viewing the people in the gallery, as exemplified by the projection of the security guard’s perspective as a video on the wall, they ask you as a viewer to literally “look at yourself and your peers and the seriousness with which you are taking your roles as the viewers”. In this way, and because of their placement in traditionally non-art spaces, my figures are able to provide meaning for some viewers *because* that meaning is unexpected. Granted, many viewers may not recognize this meaning, and that is fine. Some may not realize that the figures are even there, and this is also fine. The figures’ meanings will have far greater impact for the viewer if she discovers them herself versus the meanings requiring that she acknowledge them.

One artist who also works figuratively to poke fun at the institution without becoming absorbed by the seriousness of the system is Maurizio Cattelan. Cattelan works with various sculptural materials and performance to create playful characters that flirt with the line between reality and imagination. An interviewer from Designboom writes, “Cattelan has a subtle sense of the paradoxes of transgression, the limits of tolerance. Since the early 1990s, his work has provoked and challenged the limits of contemporary value systems through its use of irony and humor.”<sup>26</sup> Cattelan is sometimes accused, however, of not taking the art world seriously enough and his comical and provoking figures have been criticized as being mere ‘stunts’ for the purposes of reaction or shock value. I feel that this claim is unwarranted. By looking at Cattelan’s body of work itself and the themes and effects that run throughout, it becomes clear that although his work does not take itself seriously, one cannot infer that it has no deeper meaning or poses no challenges.

His wide range of characters include a miniature Hitler on his knees<sup>27</sup>, a meteor hitting the Pope<sup>28</sup>, a pair of policemen flipped on their heads<sup>29</sup>, along with several others. Certainly there are greater meanings and more serious undertones to many of his works,

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<sup>26</sup> Cattelan, *Interview with Designboom*

<sup>27</sup> Refer to Figure 11 in Appendix A.

<sup>28</sup> Refer to Figure 12 in Appendix A.

<sup>29</sup> Refer to Figure 13 in Appendix A.

though he refuses explicitly express them, claiming that he does not know what his work means. He prefers instead to poke fun through an almost morbid juxtaposition of comedy with destruction, chaos, and absurdity. Take, for example, his diorama of a squirrel committing suicide with a gun at a breakfast table, or his installation of three young boys hung from a tree with nooses in the XXIV maggio public square in Milan<sup>30</sup>. The latter was so provoking even that a vandal was compelled to cut the figures down. The authorities debated about whether or not to press charges because they argued that the installation may have been ‘too real and overstepped the limits of art’<sup>31</sup>. This is not to say that the purpose of his pieces is merely provocation. His interviewer from Designboom continues, “He teases the art world without ever falling into the naive trap of thinking he can subvert a system of which he is part. The characters and personas inhabiting Maurizio Cattelan’s world are ghostly appearances in a personal theatre of the absurd.”<sup>32</sup> Cattelan’s work can thus be seen as a form of institutional critique which incorporates a realization and even celebration of its own irony. I draw upon this notion and some of the devices that Cattelan employs in my own work through playing with the same boundary of reality and imaginary, as well as the juxtaposition of comedy with more serious undertones.

In conclusion, my work, “The Viewers” facilitates a state of self-awareness and reflection. While it desires many of the same affects as art of institutional critique, it focuses less on criticizing the conventions of the gallery and more on allowing the viewer to realize that the limitations of these conventions are only as real as she allows them to be. While my work is relevant to more serious conceptions of surveillance and the traditional gaze assumed by the viewer within the gallery, the theatrical nature of the characters begs that the viewers not take themselves or the artwork too seriously, lest they reduce their receptivity to the meaning that they seek.

## Chapter 2: Changes for the Spring Exhibition

After receiving varied feedback in the fall critiques about increasing and decreasing the role of performance in my work, I was forced to rethink the gorilla and its

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<sup>30</sup> Refer to Figure 14 in Appendix A.

<sup>31</sup> Cattelan, *Interview with Sophie Arie*

<sup>32</sup> Cattelan, *Interview with Designboom*

contribution to the piece as a whole. Though it was originally intended to be a ‘wildcard’ of sorts, challenging the viewer’s desire to make assumptions about the work’s employment of male authority figures as the central concept, the gorilla proved to be distracting and overpowered the piece as a whole. One concern that I had about removing the gorilla though, was that it would cause the piece to lose the playful nature that is central to the spirit of the work as a whole. I worried that without a live figure, the others would seem dead and lifeless. I realised, however, that there is an element of animation to the two other figures that I have created. Though stationary, the fact that the figures are not hyper-real, but rather human-like characters excuses them from a statue-like stasis. I considered alternate ways in which I could utilize performance that played with the subtler, uncanny nature of the other two figures.

On the suggestion of artist Byron Kim, I researched works by Jamie Isenstein, a young, up and coming performance artist. In Isenstein’s piece *Magic Fingers*<sup>33</sup> the artist sits behind the gallery wall with her hand sticking up within a gold frame against a blue background. At first, the stationary hand appears to have been created, but upon closer examination, the viewer becomes aware that she is observing a real hand. The effect is uncanny, blurring the lines of the animate and inanimate, the body and the other, the familiar and the foreign. Isenstein is interested in examining the line between sculpture and performance, noting that, “Since Duchamp, sculpture can be anything, so if you put a living body into the sculpture, is it still sculpture, or is it a performance? This of course led me to the problem of time. I think I’ve figured it out with the “Will Return” sign. Now, with every performance that I do, I make sure there is something in my place to continue the artwork when I am not actually performing the piece.”<sup>34</sup> This re-examination of the readymade allows us to question what is assumed about sculpture: whether the body can be seen as sculpture, whether sculpture is necessarily eternal, etc. The viewers that I have created address similar questions about the nature of the art object in the gallery space and challenge whether the viewer is justified in holding those assumptions. Isenstein also includes other works in which she utilizes her body as

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<sup>33</sup> Refer to figure 15 in Appendix A

<sup>34</sup> Isenstein, *Interview with Ali Subotnick*

sculpture. In a piece entitled *Arm Chair*<sup>35</sup>, the artist sits for hours inside a chair with only her legs and arms visible. In another work, she poses completely still among statues of other famous figures. Ali Subotnick explains, “Isenstein makes us consider our physicality, anthropomorphizing and animating everyday objects and transforming her body into various inanimate objects.”<sup>36</sup> Intrigued by Isenstein’s body of work, I proposed the inclusion of a third figure in my work that was a real figure that appeared to be another sculpture.

The third figure that I have created is a lifeguard. The lifeguard is a real person dressed in red wind-pants, a muscle suit, a hat, a wig, and a silicone life-cast mask. To the viewer, the lifeguard looks just like the other two inanimate statues: humanlike enough to mistake at first glance, but not realistic enough to mistake the silicone face for flesh. The catch is that the lifeguard *is* actually a real person, disguised to look as if it is not. The choice of a lifeguard was consistent with the selection of the other two figures. It is a type of person who views other people, is in a position of authority, and is male. The lifeguard also playfully suggests that an art exhibition can be a place of risk, in which one needs to behave in a safe manner according to a certain set of assumed rules. This is in accord with the overall meaning of the piece as pointing out the rules and assumptions that the viewer brings into the gallery space. This third figure is also the only of the three to actually sit in the traditional area of the gallery, reinforcing the reversal of the role of the human viewer as the art object, and the actual art objects as the viewers.

I believe that the substitution of this third lifeguard figure for the gorilla will greatly enhance the effect of the entire piece. By creating both inanimate and animate uncanny pieces that are both within and outside of the traditional gallery space, my work, “The Viewers” is able to play with these relationships from various angles, causing the viewer to continue to re-examine her own role within the gallery space.

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<sup>35</sup> Refer to figure 16 in Appendix A

<sup>36</sup> Isenstein, *Interview with Ali Subotnick*



Appendix A



Figure 1. Security Guard Full



Figure 2: Security Guard Detail



Figure 3. Soldier Top View



Figure 4. Soldier Side View



Figure 5. Rendering of Gorilla



Figure 6. *1,200 Bags of Coal* – Marcel Duchamp

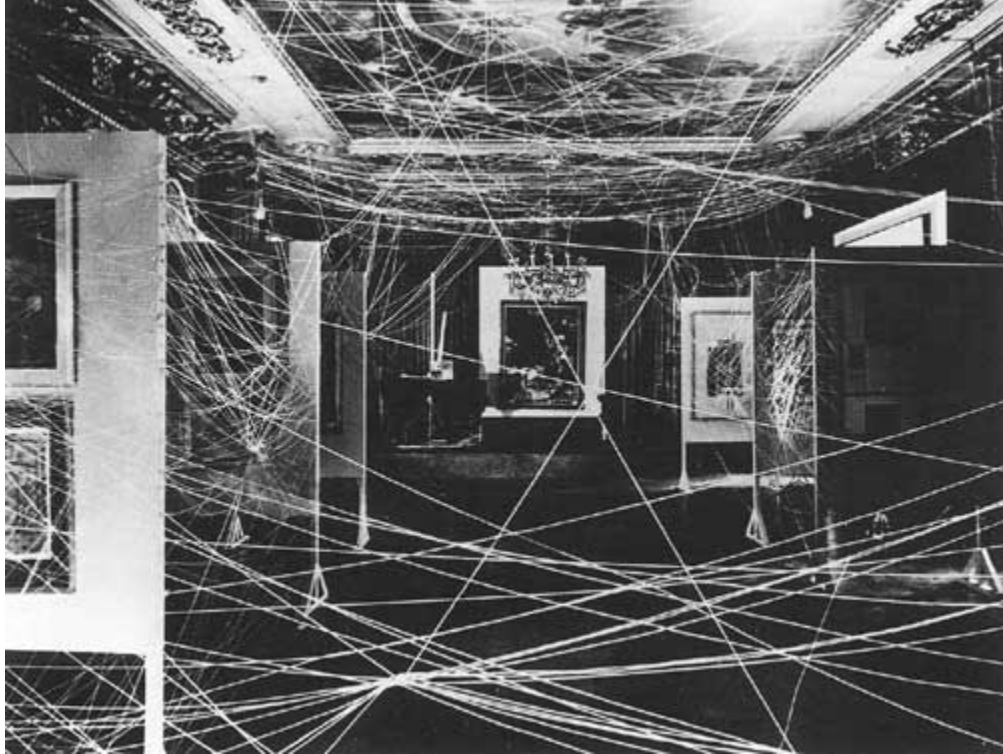


Figure 7. *Mile of String* – Marcel Duchamp



Figure 8. *Exhibition at the Santa Monica Museum of Art (2008)* – Michael Asher



Figure 9. *The Traveller* – Duane Hanson



Figure 10. *Queenie II* – Duane Hanson



Figure 11. *Him* – Maurizio Cattelan



Figure 12. *The Ninth Hour* – Maurizio Cattelan



Figure 13. *Frank and Jamie* – Maurizio Cattelan



Figure 14. *Hanging Children in Milan* – Maurizio Cattelan

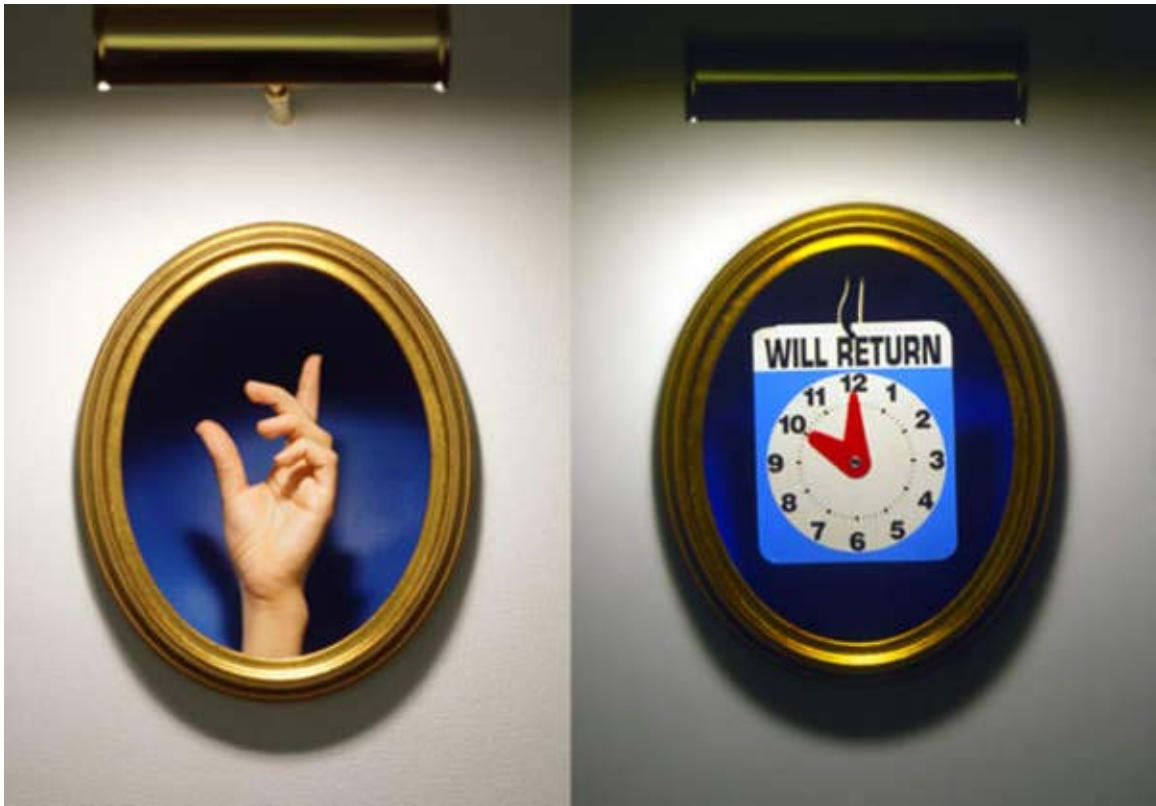


Figure 15. *Magic Fingers* – Jamie Isenstein

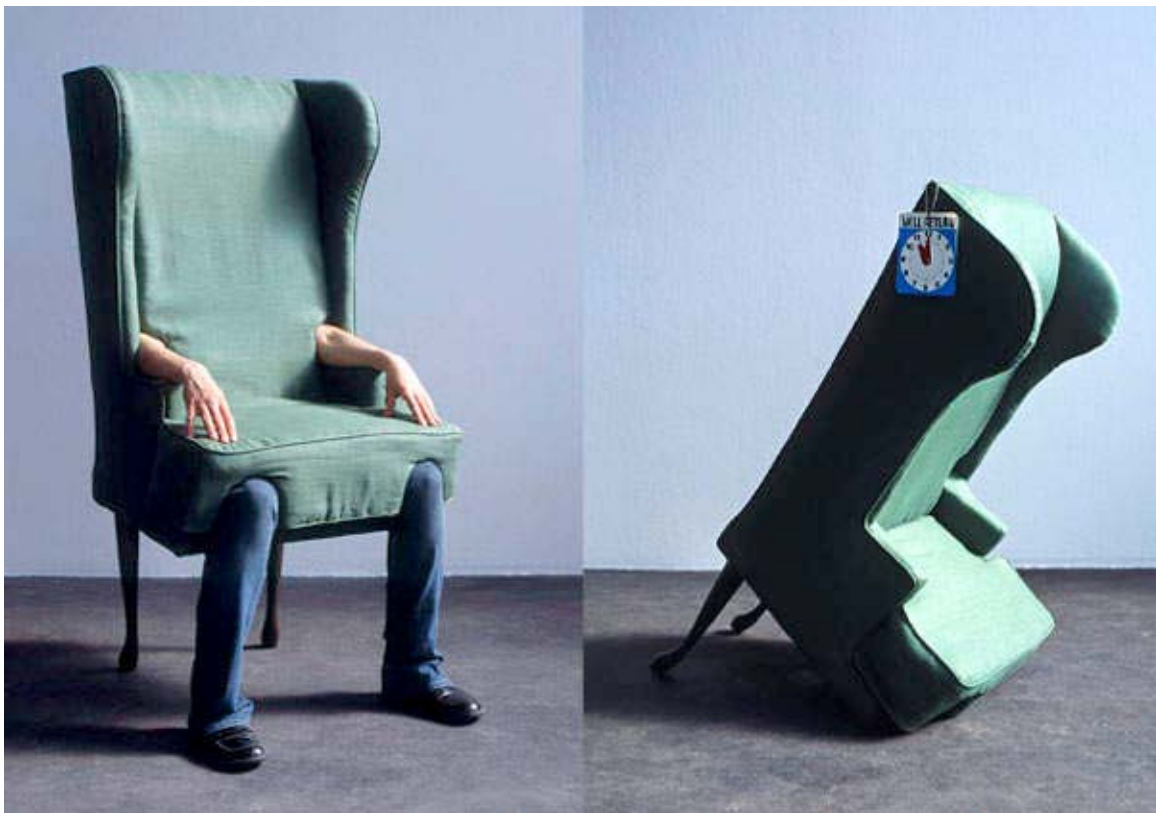


Figure 16. *Arm Chair* – Jamie Isenstein



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