

ARTFORUM

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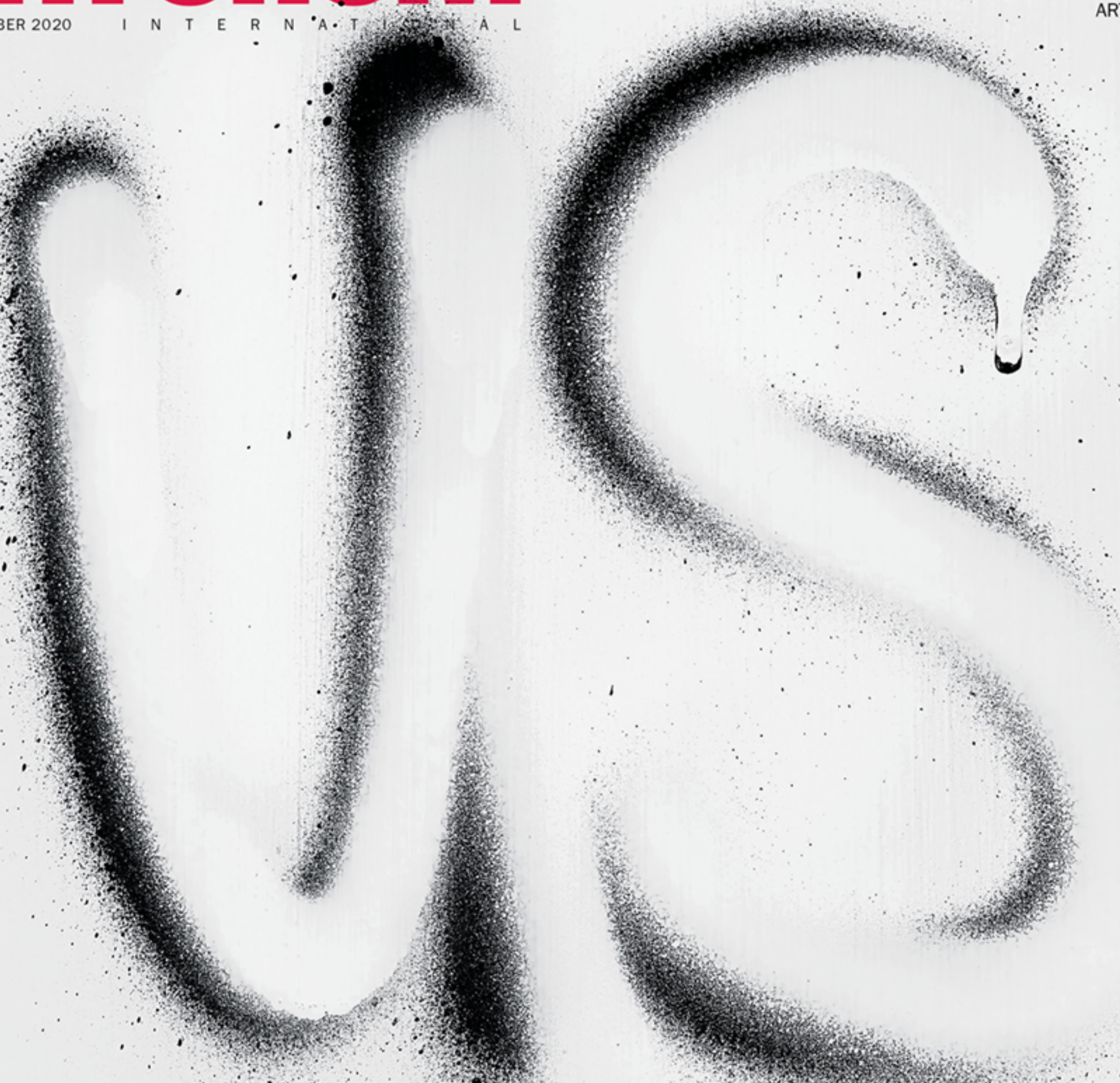
I N T E R N A T I O N A L

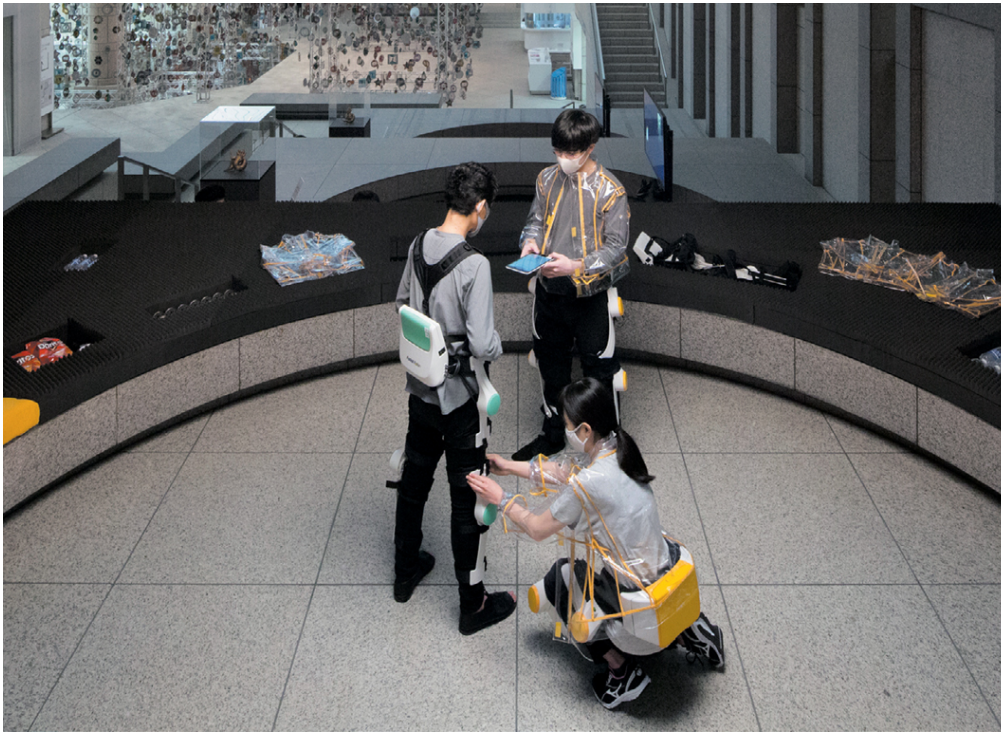
PARK McARTHUR

BENJAMIN H. D. BUCHLOH
ON LUCIANO PERNA

GARRETT BRADLEY

ELECTION 2020
ARTISTS' PROJECTS





Lantian Xie, *When I Move, You Move*, 2020, wearable motors, cloth bands, battery case, tablet, vinyl vests, packaged food, packaged drinks, cigarette boxes, light box, urethane foam, HD video (color, sound, 5 minutes 24 seconds). Installation view. Photo: Keita Otsuka.

Yokohama Triennale 2020

YOKOHAMA MUSEUM OF ART AND PLOT 48

Curated by Raqs Media Collective

THIS PAST JULY, the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Tokyo rose to more than two hundred per day. In spite of this, the Yokohama Triennale, less than twenty miles away, went on to open July 17, having pushed its original date back only two weeks. This speaks volumes about the courage and determination of its artistic directors, the New Delhi trio Raqs Media Collective. With international travel still on hiatus, neither the collective nor the non-local artists participating in the Triennale could attend the opening in person, and many had to participate in the installation process remotely.

In light of these unprecedented challenges, this edition of the Triennale (its seventh) is all the more impressive. Hanging in the atrium on the second floor of the Yokohama Museum of Art, Nick Cave's *Kinetic Spinner Forest*, 2016, a dynamic installation composed of myriad garden spinners (some custom-made to look like guns and bullets), admirably

captures the entire exhibition's sensibility, at once intricate, dense, and airy. Compared to the last biennial curated by the Raqs Media Collective (the Eleventh Shanghai Biennale, which was nothing short of a historical epic), the Triennale seems less dramatic, though more lucid and welcoming.

The exhibition points to a kind of luminosity in chiaroscuro, highlighting unexpected linkages.

Titled "Afterglow," the show proposes models of enlightenment suited to our own times. In place of the old idea that autonomous individuals access privileged knowledge solely through rational thinking, the exhibition points to a kind of luminosity in chiaroscuro, highlighting unexpected linkages among heterogeneous elements widely separated in space and time. As revealed by the eclectic yet clearly not random contents of an accompanying publication called the *Sourcebook* (which informs us, for example, that microwaves produced by the big bang are detectable in analog television static and that the biofluorescence of some coral species protects them from harmful solar radiation), this kind of enlightenment allows us to glimpse a shimmering state of entanglement, exchange, and coexistence. Within this symbiotic mesh, there is power that nourishes life but also lethal toxicity. The source of illumination is always flickering, demanding constant attention and curiosity.



Masaharu Sato, *Stairs*, 2018, acrylic on board, 35 7/8 × 25 5/8". © Estate of Masaharu Sato.

This theme of alertness is manifest throughout the Triennale, not always to benign effect. In Taus Makhacheva's *Quantitative Infinity of the Objective*, 2019, it emerges in the harshly critical exhortations ("Why can't you be like everybody else?") we hear as we contemplate a chamber full of gymnastics equipment. The amplified demands of invisible coaches elevate the sense of blame into a monumental presence that cannot be ignored. In Lebohang Kganye's dark, narrow room packed with shadowy figures (*Mohlokomedi wa Tora* [Lighthouse Keeper], 2017), it is in the light that keeps illuminating alternate corners of the space. In Rayyane Tabet's rubbings of ancient carved artifacts excavated in Syria, as in Takashi Arai's daguerreotypes of intricately knotted sashes made by Japanese women for soldiers during World War II, we're reminded of the vigilance required to carry out acts of documentation or care that seem almost obsessive-compulsive. One cannot dismiss any detail, because it might prove to be the key to our grasp of a spectral whole, a world that does not fully exist yet refuses to entirely disappear. This is what Masaharu Sato's

paintings bearing witness to the final days of his life suggest. After being informed that he had only three months to live, the artist chose to record minute, mundane details of his domestic surroundings: a lizard on a window screen, a section of a staircase, an electrical socket, an airplane in the night sky.

In Plot 48, the exhibition's other main venue, viewers find additional subtle explorations of the plight of living in a poisonous environment. In *Jole Dobe Na* (Those Who Do Not Drown, 2020), a film commissioned by the Triennale and the Bildmuseet at Sweden's Umeå University, Naeem Mohaiemen turns his lens on a young man trapped inside an abandoned hospital by grief over his lover's death. In this limbo where time has come to a halt, he and his deceased yet still present lover pace the empty corridors hand in hand; they talk nonchalantly, occasionally getting into a minor quarrel as they go up and down in an old-fashioned elevator. What are the limits of love, and what is it for? Anton Vidokle offers a comparatively cheerful answer. The ultimate goal of love, he reveals in his 2014 film *This Is Cosmos*, is to fight against death. As the screen suddenly fills with the glow of red LEDs, an intertitle explains that the wavelength of the light we're seeing has a therapeutic effect. When I viewed the film, people in the audience smiled at the information, realizing that this work offered a practical enhancement of their well-being in addition to speculations on immortality.



Naeem Mohaiemen, *Jole Dobe Na* (Those Who Do Not Drown), 2020, 2K video, color, sound, 64 minutes.

In a similar vein, Lantian Xie's wearable exoskeleton promises to reduce the physical burden of the user (*When I Move, You Move*, 2020). I wasn't able to experience the work, but I pictured myself strutting around in it, driven by mechanical power. It sounded a bit absurd, almost unbelievable, but perhaps it is precisely in these interstitial spaces of doubt that the world will "disintegrate and get reconstituted," to quote an essay by Raqs Media Collective in the *Sourcebook*. As the three artists remind us, in a time when rules are being rewritten, the most important thing we can do with our alertness is "to learn, and unlearn."

The Yokohama Triennale is on view through October 11.

Translated from Chinese by Alvin Li.

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