

# LISA SETTE GALLERY

2010-2011

FALL / VOLUME 13





# FIONA PARDINGTON

The men in the photographs stare from closed eyes; in each portrait is the intimacy of a held breath. The clarity of the images—the minutely creased lids, hollowed cheeks, grooved moko tattoos—matches a clarity of purpose apparent on the men's faces on the day, approximately 175 years ago, they paused to have their likenesses cast. Some were considered “examples of their race”—young and anonymous and physically exquisite; others are recognizable even now as powerful chiefs and ship captains. Cast by French explorers Dumont d'Urville and Pierre-Marie Dumoutier, restless souls who charted the Pacific and believed in the pseudoscience of phrenology, the life-masks have been retrieved from history by photographer Fiona Pardington. Today her portraits glow like strange maps of a past world in *Ahua: A Beautiful Hesitation*.

A New Zealand photographer of Maori descent, Pardington describes how she came to know of the life masks of two influential men of her tribe: “One of our esteemed historians, Mr. Tahu Potiki, told me about two life casts made of the very important Ngai Tahu chiefs, Tangatahara



and Piuraki. These two are the real deal, warrior chiefs, politicians and leaders of the highest caliber: fully tattooed moko, hard and strong men. Tangatahara was a fighting chief... Piuraki was multilingual, had lived in France for 8 years, and was a great lawyer for his people.”

Pardington's corresponding *The Language of Skulls* series, a study of phrenological models, addresses Enlightenment-era attempts to catalogue the known world and the human psyche. Franz Joseph Gall, the father of phrenology, mapped out the cranial surface according to 27 corresponding “mind organs” (religion, poetry, vanity, arrogance, etc.). His quest to determine the true psyche of his subjects according to corresponding bulges or indentations was suspect at the time and seems laughable now. And yet both his romantic ideas about the human form and his medical castings remind us of our own ongoing and relentless pursuit of authority, even as we are confronted by the vast unknowable magic of both our private

experience and the ever-expanding cosmos. In Pardington's images the phrenological busts radiate eerie everyman blandness, even as elaborate festoons and mosaics map out territories of moral and intellectual notions.

The life masks of Tangatahara and Piuraki (as well as Gall's busts and the torsos of d'Urville and Dumoutier) now reside uneventfully in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, the margins of the unexplored world have narrowed or even disappeared, and phrenology was long ago disproved. Yet the idea that one can take the measure of a man from the appearance of his head makes a certain sense in the light of Pardington's imposing portraits and the living topographies of the *ahua* (a Maori word for likeness), with their telltale furrows and miens either stormy or calm, evoking a sense of new and unexplored territories.

For one, there is the chronological conundrum suggested by these works: Casting, photography's scientific antecedent, captured in plaster relief scientific specimens and exotic or important likenesses. Pardington's contemporary photographic study captures again and literally exposes the early documentary form and its enigmatic subjects—we could not know one without the other. As witnesses of the constant conceptual reinvention of the world, we exist in both the present and past. Pardington sees this as central to her practice: "Time is everything to a photographer—how we situate ourselves and others in time, and how the past is served up in the present, how we take the present in to the future when we take or own a photograph. Death, life and the likeness—that is a photograph."

If the medium of photography lends itself to this chronological fold, the portraits in *Ahua: A Beautiful Hesitation* and the castings in *The Language of Skulls* owe their haunting presences to Pardington's sensuous optical attention. She remarks, "I envisaged the images as large, like paintings, a size that gathers you in to it, that you can physically move in to. This is important because of the physical nature of the inkjet at scale, the surfaces have a very distinctive quality that operates best when mural-sized. I have a chance to involve myself in color and to work with its emotionally affective nature."

"Gathering in" describes the experience of looking at Pardington's works, in which no one feature claims our attention, and we are instead confronted by the wholeness of the visages and all that they imply. The triplicate portraits, taken from front, side and back, are compositionally both formal and intimate. Says Pardington, "I love the majesty of upscaling the human form, especially the head; our own forms presented back to us in an imaginative intensity. I like a feeling of immersion, swept up in to the past and brought in to the present, to represent past love and life, the power of humanity at its most essential."

In bringing together these portraits from the past, and her own contemporary methodology, Pardington's work is both a critique of the Enlightenment views of the French explorers and a reimagining of the lives of her ancestors. Pardington's images, a form of homage, sweep us across time and oceans. For Pardington this is not an examination of historical legacy, but a very contemporary spiritual imperative. Commenting on the Maori belief system, the artist inadvertently sums up the central achievement of her works: "We are not divided from the world, but rather a part of its intricacy."



Cover: *Portrait of a Life-Cast of Guidon, Madagascar*, 2010, pigment inks on Hahnemuhle photo rag paper, 41.25" x 31", edition of 10, Courtesy of the Musée de l'Homme (Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle), Paris. Page 1: *Gall's Bust III, A Study in Winter*, 2010, pigment inks on Hahnemuhle photo rag paper, 41.25" x 31", edition of 10, Courtesy of the Musée de l'Homme (Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle), Paris. Page 2: *Female Phrenology Head*, 2010, pigment inks on Hahnemuhle photo rag paper, 41.25" x 31", edition of 10, Courtesy of the Musée de l'Homme (Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle), Paris. Above: *Gall's Bust IV, A Study in Winter*, 2010, pigment inks on Hahnemuhle photo rag paper, 41.25" x 31", edition of 10, Courtesy of the Musée de l'Homme (Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle), Paris



Above: William Wegman: *Lamp Stand*, 1989, Color Polaroid, 24" x 20"  
Left: Claudio Dicochea: *de la Reina y el NRA, el Faraon (of the Queen and the NRA, the Pharaoh)*, 2010, acrylic, graphite, charcoal, transfer, wood, 48" x 36"



# MARIE NAVARRE



In many of Marie Navarre's works there are birds—winged silhouettes against heavy pale clouds. They ascend in pairs or meet on a scattering of tree branches, angular and stark. Sometimes there is the hint of a moon or a vast expanse of crumpled gray ocean. We seem to be unbound from the earth, gazing from sky or treetop height. And yet although these scenes—the private gatherings of blackbirds, the shimmering silver expanses of horizon—seem outside of the realm of human observation, like unspooling stills from a distant memory, they are captured in a photograph and committed to film.

This dreamlike subversion of the specific is key to Marie Navarre's enigmatic photo constructions. Her works document the implications of a moment in time rather than the actuality, and from the subjects themselves to the way her transparent films hover slightly, stitched over a background of fathomless Gampi paper, Navarre strives to remove what she thinks of as the inherent "rootedness and specificity" of photographic images.

Navarre says, "I have this trouble of being a photographer but wanting to make the photographs into something else." But, she says, "I still think like a photographer even though in some ways I'm sabotaging the way that photography works. I still begin my artmaking process by making pictures. I don't know how to begin without the photograph."

The artist's experience with her camera has become almost subconscious: "I am drawn to a certain kind of imagery—not consciously while I'm photographing—but somehow I am choosing to point my camera at things that are less rooted in location and time: clouds, skies, birds. I'm definitely a Western person... I think it's practically cellular now, the giant 180 degree horizon in front of me."

Navarre's recent works seem at first glance like spare, atmospheric studies of the phenomena of the open horizon. Yet tensions and complexities reveal themselves as we realize that Navarre



has stripped her photographs to their most essential expressive elements and willed the images to bend to her poetic vision. Eliding the conventional framed grammar of photography, Navarre's works expand and contract to accommodate a more surreal delineation of time and space. Often, photographic films overlap at the edges or are stitched atop one another in what Navarre thinks of as "veils of information."

And while Navarre's images, in their serene beauty, speak of stillness and timelessness, questions of movement and mortality are intertwined. Tree branches seem to tremble in the crepuscular light and the athletic profile of a soaring black wingspan, caught mid-flight, suggest both life and its transitory nature. Such images, says the artist, convey "how sound or breath or even an image, in a different way, can hang in the air for just a moment after it's gone." Navarre's works, using a private and poetic system, measure and make known to the viewer the transcendental weight of the "just after." "This is the quality that I am interested in with photography," she says, "that it is a fixed image, but we're very aware that the world is not fixed."

Above: *breathing the in between*, 2010, film, silk thread, paper, 19.5" x 77" framed, edition of 5. Left: *dark reply*, 2010, film, silk thread, monofilament, paper, 37" x 21" framed, edition of 5



Above: Binh Danh: *Memories of Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum 3*, 2008, chlorophyll print on nasturtium, resin, 13" x 10.25"

Above left: Zheng Li: *To shoot or not to shoot, that is the question*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 63" x 39.5"

Above right: Huang Binyan: *Rabbit #5*, 2007, ceramic, 37.5" x 13.75" x 9.75", edition of 8

Opposite Top: Carrie Marill: *An Icon is Both a Mirror and a Riddle*, 2009, gouache on kitakata gampi paper, 17" x 20.5"

Opposite bottom: Gilbert Garcin (Mister G.): *Lorsque le vent viendra (When the wind will come)*, gelatin silver print, 12" x 8", edition of 12



ANGELA ELLSWORTH is an interdisciplinary artist whose startling performance pieces and objects often draw on her own background as a descendant of Mormon pioneers. The 17th Biennale of Sydney included an installation of nine of Ellsworth's exquisitely sinister Seer Bonnets—bonnets whose iridescent exteriors, formed entirely by the pearl-tips of tens of thousands of corsage pins, belie their dangerous needle-point interiors. Titled *Seer Bonnets: A Continuing Offense* (above), each of the nine bonnets represents the wives of Ellsworth's great-great grandfather, who was the fifth prophet of the Mormon Church. Ellsworth also created a performance for the Biennale that took place throughout the event space and involved dancing Mormon "sister-wives." Writing in *ArtForum* magazine, Deborah Sussman observes: "Ellsworth mines two seemingly dissonant genealogies—a lineage of influential female performance artists and her own Mormon heritage—to produce an unholy hybrid."



Angela Ellsworth: *Seer Bonnet X*, 2010, 17,214 pearl corsage pins, fabric, steel, 56" x 12" x 15"



Top: Mayme Kratz: *Until I am Dust*, 2010, resin, agave, rattlesnake ribs, feathers on panel, 60" x 108"  
 Below: David Kroll: *Koi*, 2010, oil on linen, 29" x 39"





## EXHIBITION SCHEDULE 2010/2011

November 4 – December 31, 2010 Opening November 4th, 7-9pm	Fiona Pardington / Binh Danh
January 6 – 29, 2011 Opening January 6th, 7-9pm	Mayme Kratz / Jo Whaley
February 3-26, 2011 Opening February 3rd, 7-9pm	Marie Navarre / Gilbert Garcin (Mister G.)
March 3 – April 2, 2011 Opening March 3rd, 7-9pm	25th Anniversary Exhibition
April 7 – 30, 2011 Opening April 7th, 7-9pm	David Kroll
May 5 – June 25, 2011 Opening May 5th, 7-9pm	William Wegman

## ART FAIRS 2010/2011

2010	2011
<b>Art Miami</b> December 1 – 5, 2010 The Miami Midtown Arts District NE 1st Ave between NE 32nd and NE 31st Street Miami, Florida	<b>AIPAD</b> Association of International Photography Art Dealers March 17-20, 2011 Park Avenue Armory New York, New York

## LISA SETTE GALLERY

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Gallery hours: Tuesday-Friday: 10 am to 5 pm | Thursday evening: 7 to 9 pm | Saturday: 12 to 5 pm  
 Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day

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 Essays written by Megan Bates. Design: P.S. Studios

Above: Jessica Joslin: *Almeria and Alonia*, 2010, antique hardware and findings, bone, velvet, silver, vestment trim, glove leather, cast pewter, glass eyes, 24" x 33" x 11" each