

January 10 – February 17, 2007

Let Everything Be Temporary, or When is the Exhibition?

Curated by **Elena Filipovic**

Michel Blazy
Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Gabriel Kuri
Oksana Pasaiko
Tomo Savić-Gecan
Joëlle Tuerlinckx
with **Boris Belay**

In 1969, Gordon Matta-Clark laid out large sheets of agar (the gelatinous remains of boiled algae) to which he added mixtures of such substances as vegetable juice, chicken bouillon, mold, trash, and various unmentionables. The air-dried results, a series of reliefs with scuttled surfaces and still chemically mutating materials, were hung from ropes and first shown as a group. *Museum* was the title that the artist gave to the ensemble.¹ What better name, after all, than *Museum*? The unsightly organic assemblages, as volatile in their materiality as they were unpredictable in their shifting visual form, defied the usual definitions of the artwork and the museological object—that precious thing to be protected and conserved for posterity. Matta-Clark had given each work in the series a title of its own, but to call the group *Museum* was more than to ironically evoke the institution, it was to underscore the unconscious distance separating the series from its namesake; it was to demonstrate that the premises of the museum and those of *Museum* stood so far apart that the two could never meet or agree. The chemical volatility of most all of the pieces determined that they would never stabilize, never behave like bona fide art objects, and indeed never enter the museum. And as an ensemble—as *Museum*—they never did.² The series thus reveals that the rethinking of (good) form through the rethinking of the (seemingly stable, eternal) duration of the artwork was aimed at “Art” as much as it was at the institutions meant to show it.

In more recent times, artists’ production of objects of various mediums largely conforms to art’s traditional aspirations to everlastingness (after all, artworks, like memorials, are meant to be eternal and unchanging). Their messages might be radical and their intentions critical, but their aesthetic forms are all too often fixed forever. *Let Everything be Temporary, or When is the Exhibition?* brings together the work of a group of artists that consistently and very differently explore temporariness and, more specifically, the possibility of temporal instability in the work of art.³ This is manifest not so much as a subject (although it is sometimes also that), but rather as a constitutive element, shaping the artwork’s fragility as well as the indeterminacy of an exhibition visitor’s experience of it. Whether primarily motivated by the political, aesthetic, economic, or the intimate, these objects literally *perform* their temporal questioning. This project, rather than being a theme show with a series of singular illustrations of an idea, instead aims to reveal a persistent questioning at the center of these artists’ practices; it endeavors as well to suggest that in these practices might be found some of the most salient questions being asked concerning the limits and nature of art today.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ famous pile works—from which viewers are allowed to take a piece of candy, a photocopied paper or poster—may be one of the best known recent examples of the artwork as a system of formal precariousness or diminishment. The “ideal weight” for one such candy pile, “*Untitled*” (*Ross in L.A.*), (1991), is 175 pounds, the weight of Gonzalez-Torres’ AIDS-afflicted lover at the time. In these works the exhibitor may regularly replenish its voluntary evanescence or let the candies dwindle. There are, however, other specific rules inherent to this and other piles: visitors may take candy, but

they cannot be specifically instructed to do so, and no sign or label in the exhibition should tell them that they can transgress the rules that typically define the art exhibition (Do not approach the objects too closely, Do not touch, and above all, *Do not take*). In appropriating a unit of the “pile,” the visitor thus institutes an individual violation of (the idea of) the institution along with the undoing of the artwork’s dimensions and contours. This perpetual shrinking and subsequent refashioning of form is as integral to the work as is the fact that it offers a model of the work of art as necessarily unstable and unpredictable, like life itself.

The fragile balance between the emergence and annihilation of form is repeatedly explored in **Joëlle Tuerlinckx’s** *oeuvre*. *Stukjes stukjes en dingen, dingen dingen en stukjes* [Particles particles and objects, objects objects and particles] (1994), a square meticulously outlined with confetti on the floor, is inevitably transformed—indeed nullified as a geometric shape—by gushes of air in the exhibition space or the footsteps of unsuspecting visitors. The artist’s playful and ethereal riposte to the seriousness and solidity of so many Minimalist works (think Carl Andre’s lead squares), perfectly exemplifies the transience but also the complexity of her body of work. Equally typical to it is the slippage between materiality and language and between the original and its copy or representation. *Wall* (2007), a projection of the doubly crossed out word “wall,” written with a marker on a single glass slide, fades over the course of the exhibition because of the effect of the heat of the projector lamp on the ink. The slowly effacing word, already twice crossed out (which is to say, already declaring: This is *not* a wall), reveals and indeed spotlights the actual wall behind it as the word disappears. Differently, *Ça là* [That there] (1994) shuffles between original and copy, form and formless. As a perfect, rectangular cube of ordinary baker’s flour, it sits monument-like on a table at the start of the exhibition. Held together by nothing except the invisible tension that allows the flour’s temporary and improbable replication of the mold that it was once in, *Ça là* could at any moment give way to being a collapsed heap of the minute and disparate particles of flour that compose it. A sketch of the model on which the piece was based hangs nearby, suggesting the necessary gap between the “original” and the three-dimensional form that it never manages to equal or permanently reproduce.

The floor and the wall are surfaces **Michel Blazy** uses often, less as sites on which he situates or hangs something than as the ground that the artwork might act upon and defy. A whole

1. I am indebted here to the description of the series by Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois in *Formless: A User’s Guide* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 183-4.

2. A lone remaining piece from the series, *Land of Milk and Honey*, failed to be as unstable as all the rest and survived; it is currently in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

3. The title makes reference to a line by Lenin, who, in 1917, ordered monuments of the revolution, including his own effigy, to be made in cheap, readily avail-

able, and ephemeral materials. The principal was simple, he explained, just “let everything be temporary.” As it happens, his pursuit was itself perfectly temporary: countless surviving monuments attest that the imposing permanence of bronze won out over that particular refutation of bourgeois values. However short-lived, the directive meant to challenge one essential function of the memorial, a function shared with works of art more generally: the message and aura of both are arguably located in their unflappable condition of everlasting timelessness.



Lectures: Sat. January 13, 3:00pm
Jeff Byles – Dieter Roelstraete – Elena Filipovic
on ephemerality, destruction, and aesthetics

Documentation: Jan. 10 – Feb. 17, 2007
In response to the challenge of documenting a constantly changing presentation, filmmaker Boris Belay will capture the different states of the exhibition via such methods as stop-motion film for the duration of the show. The resulting record will manifest after the close of the exhibition.

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Photo of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ artwork: James Franklin
Cover image: detail from Michel Blazy, *Mur qui pèle*, 1998

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array of organic substances—from pasta and cotton to beet juice and mashed potatoes—are the staples of a practice that reverses the artistic mandate to “compose” and makes decomposition the motor of an unstable, mutating body of work. His wall paintings including, *Mur qui pèle* [Wall that peels] (1998), are made of homemade mixtures of agar or vegetable purées that contaminate the architectonics of the exhibition space. By introducing perishable materials, pungent odors, and decay into the exhibition and onto the white gallery walls, Blazy makes that otherwise ignored backdrop (because taken to be pristine, neutral, and timeless), the explicit and progressively changing subject of the viewer’s attention. *Rosace* (1993), made of a roll of ordinary paper towels, approaches decomposition in a different way; coiling like a tree trunk’s age rings or Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, the unfurled upright sheets make up an elaborate structure of spirals that wane and collapse—literally undoing their form—over time and under their own weight.

Waiting, that banal quotidian act that perhaps better than any other reminds one of the inexorable passage of time, is a recurrent motif in Gabriel Kuri’s work. Tied to it is a complex relationship between leisure and production, expenditure and speculation, which finds expression in the prosaic items that populate Kuri’s oeuvre: cash register receipts, waiting stubs, daily newspapers, disposable shopping bags, and fruit labels, to name but a few. In *The Recurrence of the Sublime* (2003), a trio of avocados carefully wrapped in newspapers dated 21 July 1969, juxtaposes mundane practice (any Mexican would tell you that an avocado in newspaper ripens faster) with monumentally historic progress (America’s triumphant first steps on the moon). The pile of newspapers beneath the avocado bowl slowly diminishes as the papers are used to envelop new avocados in the play of consumption and accelerated obsolescence that the wrapping sets in motion. The quiet absurdity of it all—of using ever more but different pages, each with lunar landing announcements alongside car ads, pimple cures, and other newsworthy events of the day; every elegantly swathed ball flaunting the anachronism between the *then* of 1969 and the *now* of an avocado—makes for its strange sculptural grace. *Untitled* (2007) provokes different but no less evocative questions about the march of time. A take-a-number machine enables visitors to take their turn and an ongoing number-calling sequence is displayed, but no definable reason for the wait is given. The visitors are left to deposit their stubs in a voluntary, arbitrary way so that the advancement of numbers and consumption of tickets accumulates into the progressive erection of an ad hoc and indeterminate sculpture—a testament or commemoration, if there could be one, to anticipation and duration.

Tomo Savić-Gecan’s deliberately inconspicuous projects deny the primacy of the visual without retreating to the pure ideation of conceptual art. His is an art intimately concerned with experience, often spread across two places or temporalities. For *Untitled* (2005–2007), he alters the temperature of the gallery space by infinitesimal amounts based on data recorded from an exhibition held a year earlier.⁴ Using intangible elements such as air and temperature to transform the conditions of an entire exhibition space in accordance with an

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

“Untitled” (Ross in L.A.), 1991

© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation.
Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.



Michel Blazy

Rosace, 1993

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Art:Concept, Paris.

Oksana Pasaiko

Short Sad Text (based on the borders of 14 countries), 2004–2005

Courtesy of Roma Publications, Amsterdam.



The value of the artwork is the artwork; the value is in a constant state of devaluation, from the moment the exhibition begins until its closure, at which point the artwork will be worth nothing. You may inquire at apex about the value of the artwork at any given moment or consult their website.

Tomo Savić-Gecan

Untitled, 2007

Courtesy of the artist.



Gabriel Kuri

The Recurrence of the Sublime, 2003

Courtesy of the artist and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City.

Joëlle Tuerlinckx

Stukjes stukjes en dingen, dingen dingen en stukjes [Particles particles and objects, objects objects and particles], 1994

Courtesy of the artist and Stella Lohaus Gallery, Antwerp.



invisible logic, *Untitled* recalls a previous project in which Savić-Gecan changed the temperature of a public pool in Tallinn by 1°C according to the entry patterns of visitors to an exhibition in Amsterdam. In both projects, the individuals whose data concretely makes up the “artwork” are separated in time and space from those who will experience the sensorial—that is to say, properly aesthetic—results of the changing temperature. In a second piece, entitled (like all his projects), *Untitled* (2007), Savić-Gecan declares that the value of the artwork at any given moment is the artwork itself, and the value is in a continuous process of devaluation throughout the duration of the show. Problematising the commodification of the work of art, Savić-Gecan erases the ambiguity between the commercial price and the “art.” If one attaches importance to value, then the piece will have destroyed itself entirely, indeed ceased to exist, at the very moment that the show ends; if, however, one can abstract an artwork from its market price, then Savić-Gecan’s piece will remain an artwork despite its being nothing more than a value, which happens to be nothing.

Oksana Pasaiko’s *Short Sad Text (based on the borders of 14 countries)*, (2004–2005), a small sculpture made of soap and strands of hair that map the contours of several former Eastern Bloc countries, is not physically present in the exhibition. Pasaiko left the sculpture in a public bathroom in Oslo where its soapy dissipation might literalize the transformation and effacement of actual borders. No documentation or other evidence tells of the expenditure of the work, but a postcard of its pristine original state was made, providing the exhibition visitor with the possibility of a “souvenir” of an artwork they will never see.

When do these artworks *take place*? At what moment can the visitor be said to have effectively seen or experienced them? When, then, is this exhibition? Duration and exposure (in its dual sense of display *and* the wearing away of something) both determines and undermines the forms of all the pieces in the show. They are premised on their fleetingness, instability and, at times, their disintegration. As Matta-Clark knew well, any such artwork raises the question of the conditions under which art is bought and sold, comprehended and historicized, exhibited and collected. In so doing, they refuse the illusion of the transcendent experience of the work of art at the same time as they undermine the logic of the author as its unique activator. There is something impetuous, violent even, about artworks that operate this way, that resist being finished or fully available for visual consumption. Visitors are invited to return to see the show again and again so as to experience something of its continuous evolution, but the truth is that it will always escape them because, in between every visit, these artworks—like time—will go on while no one is looking.⁵

—Elena Filipovic, 2007

4. A mechanism recording the times of visitor entries was Savić-Gecan’s contribution to *The One*, held at New General Catalogue Gallery in Brooklyn from October 15–November 14, 2005; that mechanism now provides the data determining the temperature at apex for the duration of the exhibition.

5. In a related way, the images of frozen, singular moments in the life of these artworks can only betray the pieces themselves and the exhibition this brochure accompanies. Still, because they are partial and failing as records, these images might be read as testaments to the ways the artworks resist static representation.