

ONE BRIEF MOMENT

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Archives can achieve a feeble nod to the idea that someone existed. Ken Lum

The contemporary art institution is a storehouse of knowledge and artwork of the present day and recent past. It is an immeasurable aggregate of the multiple experiences and stories of artists and their works, respective audiences, as well as all those involved in its production. Differentiated from a 'collection' by virtue of its role as evidence and function as a resource rather than the artwork itself, a gallery archive comprises of a record of exhibitions and events and is a veritable repository of the life of an institution. Whether faced with a diminutive image on a press release, a brief description on a website, or the mountain of materials generated to support each event, an archive of these items is often mapped chronologically, representing a bias of history conceivably much larger than what one might have been able to experience individually.

As a rational system, a successful archive is only as good as its ability to reliably represent information, privileging logic, accessibility and objectivity over the flow of individual interpretation. In what way can it be reshaped by those who produced it? In what way does it construct our understanding of the current moment? Freed from a purely informational function, in what way can these moments and materials be relativized with the present for—as the exhibition's namesake implies—one brief moment?

No matter how informative, the archive and its stories are always subject to the contingencies of mediation. Confronting its constants and continuities, this exhibition *One Brief Moment* turns this infrastructure over to artists and invites Adam Chodzko, Maria Eichhorn, Elizabeth Price and collective Knowles Eddy Knowles to review the apexart archive and respond with projects that creatively interpret and speculate upon their own understanding of these documentary materials. A range of artistic strategies are juxtaposed, and works in this exhibition reflect the many differing ways in which we occupy, and by turns, are occupied by our cultural landscape. Located within this constellation, the exhibition examines the frictions between the archive and moments it purports to represent, and hopes to exchange an understanding of the paradigms of objectivity and authority with the complex negotiation of refracted, personal or conditional conceptions of the archive.

Marked by a spirit of playful exploration, Adam Chodzko's video project for *One Brief Moment* imagines an atmospheric and allusive narrative framed from the perspective of the future. An unknown group discovers the apexart gallery archive in a landfill site and transfers it to a ramshackle hut in the middle of a cabbage field for sorting. Processes of 'retrieval and recycling' are evoked, but why the materials are found there remain a mystery and we are left to envision its many possible reasons.¹ From the hut, the materials are split up and dispersed along three different paths. Disjunctive sounds and images intermingle through freewheeling perspectives of storytelling and documentary observation, suggesting the possibilities of fictive space as a way to confuse the archive as a body of empirical knowledge, authenticity and objectivity. Through this intense process of speculation, Chodzko asks audiences to consider meanings in the giddy gaps in both the narrative and archive. Notions of access, value and interpretation of historical material are mapped onto the story itself, and assumptions of cohesion are upturned to privilege

a range of more associative and expressive readings. Creating a dreamlike story filled with misunderstandings, inventions and contradictions, the video reflects upon the symbolic authority of the archive and poetically imagines it through the mirage of a fictional memory.

Elizabeth Price's use of archives and archival methodologies pervades much of her practice, denoting the passage of time, the determination of labour, and narrations of failure or frustration, often through a deadpan and discomfitingly bizarre logic of black humour. For apexart, Price has engaged the gallery history as a tongue-in-cheek physical monument to Conceptual Art's once radical yet unfulfilled promise of the dematerialization of art. Exhuming the boxes of archived material and covering them under a large, richly textured satin fabric, Price echoes the impossible task of comprehending the totality and sheer volume of contained information. Standard measures of Conceptual Art are the reduction of visual experience and the tendency towards an 'aesthetics of administration,' which Price absurdly inverts and contrasts by the monuments expression of luster and patina of sheen.² Revealing a sense of misappropriation, the mass assumes both a sympathetic understanding as well as an irreverence of the material's original function or activity. There is something quite outlandish or almost preposterous about a monument to the immaterial and here, the archive and its physical bulk as a resource of knowledge and history are emphatically eroded through comic manifestations of puerile satire and levity.

If Price complexifies the objecthood and physicality of the archive materials, Maria Eichhorn deploys far more restrained strategies of engagement that investigate the archive in terms of its representation. For Eichhorn, an archive is how an individual observer creates coherent meaning from a constellation of information. Her often collaborative practice creates

situations that produce, gather, and display information to explore the mediation of prevailing economic and social structures and their intersections with art. In the exhibition, Eichhorn displays a series of documents that draw a direct correlative between visible aspects of the archive with other less visible aspects through the donation of her production fee back to the gallery. With this action, she brings together the 'spaces of production with those of reproduction' while showing how the documentation of one (the donations list) constructs and supports the documentation of the other (this exhibition's representation).³ Importantly, the work marks buried processes and dependencies in the gallery archive, but in openly displaying these documents, Eichhorn also cues the spectators experience in forming their own conclusions.

Knowles Eddy Knowles' beguilingly simple sound work for the exhibition consists of a series of reinterpreted questions taken from past brochures and texts in the archive, broadcast across the gallery at irregular intervals. A disembodied voice gives the impression of ambiguous authority. If the walls could talk, what would they say? Drawn from their original context and reanimated through their collective announcement, a tenuous relationship between each exhibition cited is imagined where, other than their connection to the gallery, none had previously existed. In addition, the work proposes the original exhibitions as possibly 'unfinished' with questions still to be answered, and responses still to be determined. Questions such as "But what about things that have been lost?" (from *Lost and Found* curated by René Block) pepper the gallery alongside others such as "Can you direct me to Canal Street please?" Presented now without sight of the corresponding artworks, some seem quite sharp or reflexive and some seem almost hackneyed, perhaps even patently inauthentic as expressions of the profound. Resynthesizing words into sound, Knowles Eddy Knowles' trenchant observations raise further queries about the shifting perspec-

tives of curatorial inquiry, ultimately locating their rhetorical answers in as fleeting a space as the ghosts of audio floating through the gallery.

Conceived in many ways as a speculative experiment, *One Brief Moment* examines evidence belonging to apexart's past in an attempt to open the archive and its narratives to the contingencies of individual interpretation and interests. It must be considered that it is neither the intention of this exhibition to venerate a historical trajectory nor to provide definitive conclusions. The juxtaposition of new works by these four artists against the 'integrity' of the archive exaggerates its conventions and claims to neutrality and create new stories in the process. In unraveling the formalities that govern this set of materials, the projects of the artists involved index a range of responses and possibilities of engagement that reveal ways in which we assess the past by what we are shown in the present. What remains primary, however, is that if only for one brief moment, the exhibition animates the different ways in which the archive and its materials develop meaning for the spectator, and the beautiful or inane ways in which we choose to overcome the often difficult task of matching this information to the actual events in which they represent.

Mark Soo 2005

1. Catherine Russell. 'Archival Apocalypse: Found Footage as Ethnography.' In *Experimental Ethnography*, 238. Durham: Duke University Press (1999).

2. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions.' *October* 55 (Winter 1991): 124.

3. Ibid.

Image (left): Adam Chodzko, *Yet* (2005), production still

