

# 2013 Carnegie International Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh

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By Rose Bouthillier

The Carnegie International has a long and complicated history, beginning in 1896 when Andrew Carnegie conceived of an annual exhibition from which to collect the best art of the day. Over the decades, it has evolved, stagnated, entered obscurity and reemerged as one of the most important exhibitions in the US. This idiosyncratic history sets the stage for new iterations to question and reformulate the exhibition's premise. The 2013 Carnegie International does this in an extremely thoughtful and even profound way, modelling new ways to engage the institution and the city of Pittsburgh.

Co-curated by Daniel Baumann, Dan Byers and Tina Kukielski, the exhibition includes 35 artists from 19 different countries and, as a larger undertaking, an array of other moving parts. These include The Apartment, a satellite space in the Lawrenceville neighborhood that has hosted a series of talks, performances and gatherings since 2011; a Lozziworm playground installed by the museum's entrance (and a connected exhibition on playground architecture in the galleries, curated by Gabriela Burkhalter); and a re-hanging of the museum's modern and contemporary collection, highlighting how the International has shaped the museum's holdings and historical consciousness.

Many of the standout works take on the museum's architecture in lively negotiation. Phyllida Barlow's massive sculpture, *TIP* (2013), marches out of the museum's entrance in a fragmented, ascending explosion of wooden posts, wire mesh and colourful ribbon. Though Barlow's materials are humble and explicit, her works loom more as manifestations of will than as constructions of the hand, seeming to generate their own logics of scale, inertia and gravity. *TIP*'s unstoppable, hurtling joy spreads over the visual and social chaos of the plaza, grazing Richard Serra's *Carnegie* (created for the 1985 International), which, thus eclipsed, takes on the posture of a lamppost. Inside the museum, Gabriel Sierra's sculptural intervention in the Hall of Architecture, *Untitled (III.III.III × III.III.III = 12345678987654321)* (2013) makes everything old appear anew. Sierra changed the room's wall paint from a receding green to a bursting purple, transforming the pre-

viously muted expanse into a complex space of contrast, figure and ground. Everything seems alive; in fact, the fakeness of the sculptures and friezes, all plaster casts, becomes an endearing quality. Sierra enhances this effect by also placing his own purple sculptural forms around the room, propped, hugging or nesting like camouflaged beings. In another alteration, Wade Guyton gutted the museum's coatroom, installing several large canvases and worn leather couches. Left grungy and raw, with some kind of a machine tower blinking away in the corner, the space feels like the sitting room of a squatter with taste. Guyton's spare paintings — composed of horizontal, top-aligned rectangles of pigment floating on mostly blank fields, replete with smudges, scratches and creases — are produced using large-scale inkjet printers. They benefit from the immediacy of this non-space, which resonates with uncertainty. Are these the remains of a disaster, or a stage set? Are these paintings, or things that act like them?

Two concise mini-retrospectives provide long views of philosophic and artistic pursuits. Croatian artist Mladen Stiljinović is represented with photography, sculpture, performance and text-based works spanning 1975–2009, all of which address ideological power (political, cultural and linguistic), with succinct irreverence. His text *The Praise of Laziness* (1993), reprinted in the catalogue, is so biting and passionate that you'll want to pin it up over your computer screen and perfect your own idleness. A large selection of paintings by the winner of the exhibition's Carnegie Prize, Nicole Eisenman, spans nearly 20 years and conveys a range of visual references, from comics to history and genre painting. The paintings fill the mezzanine above the Hall of Sculpture with rowdy, violent, pathetic and ecstatic characters. Also lounging about the space are several large, white plaster figures, napping, staring at a phone-like object, or posing on pedestals alongside classical sculptures. Eisenman's work benefits from quantity: viewers are encircled by a crowd, a crush of bodies with their timelessness, their animated insistence.

Many other encounters with bodily presence punctuate the show, among them Zanele Muholi's arresting portraits from black and African LGBTI communities; Henry Taylor's large-scale paintings of personal and historical figures in iconic isolation; Sarah Lucas' disembodied parts and fleshy, twisting lumps; and Mark Leckey's audio-object-erotic video *Pearl Vision* (2012). This "one-on-one" energy permeates the exhibition, giving it a personal directness. Layered with a complex array of images, language and sound, Frances Stark's newest video installation, *Bobby Jesus's Alma Mater b/w Reading the Book of David and/or Paying Attention Is Free* (2013), also has such encounters at its heart. Mediated biography,



Nicole Eisenman, *Guy with Mugwort (Water Element)*, installation view, 2013.  
PHOTO: GREENHOUSE MEDIA;  
IMAGE COURTESY OF CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

mythologies, connections, pain, death and style all flow across a checkerboard mindscape, hailing the viewer in a disarming way.

Slightness and modesty are qualities shared by many of the sculptures on view. Erika Verzutti occupies a small gallery with works that draw on a range of natural forms like geodes, sea creatures, eggs and plant pods; huddled in groups, they look like gravestones or selections from a curios collection. Lara Favaretto's 36-inch cubes made from tightly packed confetti will dissolve over the course of the exhibition, and get swept up at the end. Vincent Fecteau's *papier-mâché* sculptures look like they are constantly in the midst of unfolding. These unassuming forms all have a quiet power and appear as lively manifestations of thought passing through material.

Conscious of the museum's own immediate context, the curators facilitated artist engagement with surrounding communities. The collective Transformazium (Dana Bishop-Root, Ruthie Stringer, and Leslie Stern) created an Art Lending Collection (ALC) in the grandiose and dilapidated Braddock Carnegie Library situated in the nearby town of North Braddock. The "birthplace of steel," heavily hit by industry collapse and recession, the community is also home to the collective, which has been running a neighbourhood screen-printing shop in the library for the past few years. Works in the ALC were donated by artists in the 2013 Carnegie International, as well as others, both local and national, and anyone with an Allegheny County library card is able to borrow them. There is something truly powerful about contemporary art being touched, being lived with, but one immediately wonders how the risks inherent to such a proposition determined the market value of available works. The project is also represented at the museum, with armchairs and a salon-style display of a changing selection of works from the ALC curated by members of the Braddock community. It's here that the project becomes fuzzy: its power lies in a particular place, elsewhere and in art circulating outside of the system. Photographer Zoe Strauss' engagement with the nearby town of Homestead, once home to Andrew Carnegie's Homestead Steel Works, involved a portrait studio she ran for two months, street photography of the area and projected video footage from a Chinese steel mill. The portraits, around 200 of them, are unassuming, fresh and captivating, and speak to Strauss' ability to connect with her subjects. However, their placement in the museum, lining an obscure hallway, provokes consideration of "the way that images are placed in the world," to borrow Strauss' own words for describing the concerns of her practice. Why not in a gallery proper? Or, was the space chosen precisely for its out-of-the-way-ness, a distance from the centre that, like Strauss' photographs, allows for

more informal engagement? In any case, both Strauss' and Transformazium's projects illustrate a genuine challenge for curators and artists: how to present the social dimensions of such projects in fixed, physical displays. They show great thoughtfulness and generosity from artists and participants alike but there is also friction and compromise.

In addition to those mentioned above, there are other powerful and politically charged works on film and video, visionary and fantastical drawings, and extensively researched photographic projects; the 2013 Carnegie International proliferates and defies clear narration, just as the territory it surveys. Through it all, things feel unfamiliar, hopeful and very close; there is something upfront and personal about how the viewer is hailed, and, across disparate contexts and moments, the works feel very much of their time and in this space, *present*. ×

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Phyllida Barlow, *TIP*, installation view, 2013.  
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