



REALIZATION
IS BETTER
THAN
ANTICIPATION

KEVIN BEASLEY

JERRY BIRCHFIELD

JULIA CHRISTENSEN

JACOB CIOCCI

LENKA CLAYTON

HILARY HARNISCHFEGER

FRANK HEWITT

LEZA McVEY

SCOTT OLSON

MICHAEL E. SMITH

REVEREND ALBERT WAGNER

LAUREN YEAGER

FOREWORD

...Once in a blue moon there is a blue moon.
Once in a blue moon you can see as far as the
Fortunate Isles and the Big Rock Candy Mountains.
Once in a blue moon realization is better than anticipation.
And a kiss shatters a star.
Once in a blue moon Here is better than There...

—Jake Falstaff¹

This poem was included on ephemera for the Kokoon Klub, an avant-garde arts society started in Cleveland in 1911. Principal founders William Sommer and Carl Moellmann brought together a group of artists who shared a “deep-seated need for expressive freedom” and a “passionate conviction that artistic liberation could be achieved through the adoption of modernism in all its forms.”² They organized drawing sessions, printed now-sought-after posters, participated in The Cleveland Museum of Art’s annual May Shows, and partied. Hard. Their annual Bal Masque is memorialized as a truly bacchanalian night where Cleveland’s conservative air was punctured by costume, revelry, and sex. Counting around 60 active members at its peak, the Kokoon Klub embodied a type of collective, alternative spirit before dwindling membership led to its official disbandment in 1956. Note that in the poem, the sentiment “realization is better than anticipation” is not a statement of fact, but rather, the exception to the rule. A case when an array of variables line up just so. However, “realization” is not so staid as, say, “actuality” or “certainty.” Realization holds within it the vision that takes shape. While reality often falls short of expectation, art is something that can create a space outside of both.

Realization is Better than Anticipation features work by 12 artists connected to Cleveland and the surrounding region, including Detroit, Pittsburgh, and locations throughout Ohio. The exhibition brings together emerging and established artists, some with deep histories in the region, others who have arrived from elsewhere, and seeks to promote an open conversation about creative practices that develop in this area. We conceived of this digital catalog to foster dialog, inviting writers from outside of the institution to contribute their knowledge of, and ideas about, these artists and their work. It is an evolving document and images, content, and feedback

will be added over the course of the exhibition.

At its core, *Realization is Better than Anticipation* is an exhibition about making. Focused on the act of bringing something into being, here “realization” is taken as equal parts practical (doing, constructing) and alchemical (magical, transformative). The works on view include painting, photography, sculpture, textiles, ceramics, video, sound, and performance. Across these media, the artists demonstrate a particular sensitivity to their materials and surroundings. Therein, the region has entered their work in a variety of ways: the landscape; the cityscape; detritus; the light; locally-sourced and regionally-specific materials; a rich craft tradition; a spirit of resourcefulness and productivity; working with what’s at hand; the openness and freedom that comes from being “outside the center.” The exhibition focuses intentionally on *how* artists work here, on their particular modes and reasons for making. Through their individual strategies, each of the artists show a responsiveness that is in turns thoughtful, unguarded, and generative.

Starting with pre-existing objects that channel human presence, Lenka Clayton, Michael E. Smith, and Reverend Albert Wagner tend to them in ways that draw out new symbolic potential. Clayton often encounters such objects in thrift shops and at estate sales, archives of lives lived. Her focus on abandoned diaries, correspondence, and ephemera magnifies their value and draws upon their uncomplicated intimacy to address larger themes such as aspiration, longing, and transience. Wagner’s art practice was deeply tied to his religious convictions, and this exhibition focuses on his works that embody a spirited intensity. His sculptures, combinations of found wood and

household kitchenware that become oddly conscious forms, allude to his belief in God's ability to act through inanimate objects. Smith's works are made from materials that refer to the human body in ways that are strange, awkward, and personal. Often installed in unlikely or unconventional ways, Smith allows them to "choose" their own placement—the new works in this exhibition introduce a charged, destabilizing presence into MOCA Cleveland's vaulted monumental staircase.

Jerry Birchfield, Frank Hewitt, and Scott Olson take a studied and exploratory approach to their mediums. In 1960, Hewitt, along with Ernst Benkert and Ed Mieczkowski, formed the Anonima Group in Cleveland, and they set out to investigate the latest science and psychology of perception through art. Hewitt's reflective *Light and Shade Series on Mylar* (1970), stored in an attic in Vermont for most of the past 40 years, shows age while still glinting with a fresh, reflexive currency. Birchfield shares Hewitt's interest in the relationship between perception, material facts, and artistic conventions. Working with a blend of film and digital tools, he uses mundane objects to generate enigmatic images that underline their own physicality, while calling up an expansive range of photographic tropes. Likewise, Olson's paintings engage with the language of painting's history, while at the same time presenting a quality of hesitant coming-into-being. Working on linen and a ground of marble dust and rabbit-skin glue, Olson creates layered, labored surfaces that seem absorbed in their own matter.

Working with raw materials in a highly tactile way, Kevin Beasley, Hilary Harnischfeger, and Leza McVey activate and emphasize their physical properties. Beasley's monoprints show his interest in working with materials in ways that allow them to, as he describes, "take on a life of their own." Made with studio detritus and tar pitch (which remains chemically active and ever changing), their abstract imagery appears photographic and suggests smoke, urban decay, or the night sky. Harnischfeger's sculptures combine pigmented plaster, shattered ceramics, compacted paper, crystals, metal, and glass, and seem to be growing and crumbling at the same time. Inspired by the ancient earthworks and shifting landscape of Central Ohio, they evoke deep time and a precarious combination of earth, minerals, and hands. The exhibition includes several rugs by McVey, a celebrated ceramist who, due to deteriorating eyesight, turned increasingly to textiles near the end of

her life. Most of the works come from Pepper Ridge Road—a cooperative community of Modernist homes just outside of Cleveland where McVey lived and worked for decades—and embody the neighborhood's values of custom craft and independent vision.

With a sense of humor and liveliness, Julia Christensen, Jacob Ciocci, and Lauren Yeager produce collaborative, open-ended works. Yeager reflects on the basic processes and structures of everyday life, often harnessing natural forces as in *UV Index* (2012-ongoing), a series of calendars made from daily doses of sunlight. For *iTunes on Color* (2013), an environmental intervention in MOCA Cleveland's interior staircase, Yeager creates a vibrant atmosphere of light and sound, shifting the highly designed institutional space into a sensorial playground. Christensen's propositional installation, *THE FUTURE IS IN THE LOBBY* (2013) explores art museum lobbies and other non-gallery communal spaces as sites of display, confusion, tension, and creative potential. Installed in MOCA Cleveland's Gund Commons—a free, public, mixed-use space—Christensen's 3D-printed work contains components that local artists and cultural groups will be invited to use in order to occupy the space, and consider its purpose. Ciocci works in a distinctive mashed up-style that borrows from YouTube, comic books, pop culture, and street art. His suite of new videos and collages revolve around Cleveland's Norton Furniture store and its owner, Marc Brown, renowned for wacky DIY TV commercials. The results are bizarre, raucous explorations of consumerism, entertainment, reality, and desire.

Realization is Better than Anticipation is not an exhibition that concludes. Rather, it's an exhibition that proposes, spreads out, and continues. It is one of many exhibitions that MOCA Cleveland will present at its new home to promote critical dialog, support the production of new work by artists nearby, and to forge strong connections with our neighboring cities. We thank the many authors who have contributed thoughtful essays about these artists and their works. And, of course, we thank the artists for their inspiration, vision, and insights that invite us to come to our own realizations.

Sincerely,

Megan Lykins Reich
Associate Curator and Director of Programs
+
Rose Bouthillier
Assistant Curator

¹ Ohio born Jake Falstaff was the pen name of Herman Fetzer (1899-1935), a novelist, poet, and columnist for the *Cleveland Press* and *Akron Times*. This excerpt is taken from Henry Adams, *Out of the Kokoon* (Cleveland: Cleveland Public Library and Cleveland Artists Foundation, 2011), 122.

² Adams, 9.