

# LAURA BARTLETT GALLERY

## BREATHER

Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili, Sarah Dobai, Simone Forti, Alex Olson, Brie Ruais  
25 November 2016 – 15 January 2017

*Breather* brings together five artists whose work addresses the liminal space that exists between two actions, as thoughts are processed, events connected and a work of art makes the transition from a verb to a noun. Presenting works by Alex Olson, Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili, Sarah Dobai, Brie Ruais and Simone Forti, the exhibition aims to explore this moment of mid-transition through a variety of media, including photography, ceramics, painting and film.

This instant manifests itself in the blink between eyes open/eyes closed and the activation of the 'mind's eye' in the case of Alex Olson. In her diptych she paints the right hand canvas blindly from her memory of the left, veiling and unveiling her vision as she moves between the two. This effort to "see" the same mark from a trace left on the underside of her eyelid acts as a report back from looking inside. In fact, the three paintings on display (all made this year), present a concern for the relationship between the eye and the brain in the intake of physical and semiotic information. In *Chart 1* a textured geometry competes and collaborates for attention with its shadowed counterpart below. Similarly in *Return* a rectangular shape emerges above, casting light into the spectre of a shape beneath. By switching silhouettes and surfaces in this way, Olson alludes to the ambiguous line that exists between sight and insight as it transitions from material to metaphysical implication.

Alexi-Meskhishvili likewise plays with perception in her photographs, countering the intimacy of the close-up with the distancing devices offered by digital manipulation. By combining digital and analogue technology, the artist alludes to the possibility of a space beyond the flat surface, as she de-contextualises her pictures through the process of layering. Comprised of found images, reworked images and the original negatives themselves, her photographs take on a sculptural quality; they operate between abstraction and reality, in a transitory space that hints at a narrative, but refuses to unfold. Whilst lights and colours serve to abstract and disorientate the compositions, traces of life (flowers and hair) pull reality back in.

In the photographs from Sarah Dobai's series *The Overcoat*, the artist explores material desire and the self-reflexive nature of photography as a medium. Taken on a large-format analogue camera and inspired by Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, her photographs portray commercial vitrines in London and Paris, all named after the streets and areas (Bond Street, Mile End, Hatton Gardens) that compose them. Principally unpeopled, the photographs consider the displays as a form of vernacular picture making, with the glassed in rectangle of the vitrines referring back to the photographic process itself and the capture of transient reflections connecting subject to medium. As with Alexi-Meskhishvili's works, Dobai's choice of windows and approach to photographing them play with the viewer's perception of surface and depth.

Brie Ruais likewise functions on this threshold, as her works operate on the nexus between ceramics and conceptual art, and embody the transition from action to outcome. In order to make these works, Ruais first sets herself a list of limitations that determine the weight of the clay (often equal to her own bodyweight), the action, the time, and the basic shape, and then confronts the material with her body in a highly physical process, that involves kneeling, kicking, spreading, scraping, skimming.... The resultant ceramics trace the act that brought them into being, with the ephemeral moment forever caught in clay. The works are then cut into tiles, glazed and fired, and titled in a way that describes both method and aesthetic (*Spreading Outward from Copper Center*). The glazing process operates on a further frontier, bringing the works back to life by colouring them in.

Finally, in Simone Forti's collaboration with the film-maker Hollis Frampton, *Cloths*, this instant is given a temporal quality through the choreographed creation and documentation of suspense. For this performance, filmed in 1967, layers of material were flung over a rectangular frame by an invisible puppeteer, in a sequence both comic and hypnotic. This abrupt motion, along with the clumsy splicing together of takes, and flecks of dust puzzling on the surface of the film deny any attempt at a smooth transition, further emphasising the length of the pause between. The simplicity of the gesture captivates the viewer on the cusp of impatience as the new layer cancels out the cloth before it, shifting the colour, pattern and texture of each subsequent view.

*Breather* thus unites these artists in that illusory moment of disorientation that exists when works are performed into being.

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Alex Olson (b. 1978, Boston, Massachusetts), lives and works in Los Angeles.

Recent exhibitions include: "Variations: Conversations in and Around Abstract Painting", curated by Nancy Meyer and Franklin Sirmans, LACMA, Los Angeles; "Reductive Minimalism", curated by Erica Barrish, University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor; "The Stand In (Or a Glass of Milk)", curated by Alexandra Gaty and Lauren Mackler, Public Fiction, Los Angeles; "Murmurs: Recent Contemporary Acquisitions", curated by Rita Gonzalez, LACMA, Los Angeles; "Painter, Painter", curated by Eric Crosby and Bartholomew Ryan, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis and "Made in LA", Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Forthcoming solo exhibition in 2017 at Altman Siegel, Gallery, San Francisco.

Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili (b. 1979, Tbilisi, Georgia), lives and works in Berlin.

Alexi-Meskhishvili has had solo exhibitions at Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; Micky Schubert, Berlin; Andrea Rosen Gallery 2, New York; Kaufmann Repetto project space, Milan; Spazio Morris, Milan; Eight Veil, Los Angeles. Her work has featured in group exhibitions at: Bridget Donahue, New York; FRAC Haut-Normandie, Sotteville-lès-Rouen; Kunstverein Hannover, Hannover; Surround Audience: 2015 Triennial, New Museum, New York; Kunstverein Bielefeld, Bielefeld; Fotogalleriet, Oslo; Kaufmann Repetto, Milan; Galerie Gregor Steiger, Zurich; Chelsea Art Museum, New York; MAGASIN-Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble, Grenoble.

Sarah Dobai (b. 1965, London), lives and works in London.

Dobai's works have been included in exhibitions at the Photographer's Gallery, London; Kettles Yard, Cambridge; Museum of Contemporary Art, Santiago de Compostela; Hayward Gallery, London; CCA Glasgow; Spike Island, Bristol; Whitechapel Gallery, London; Contemporary Art Society, London; Foto Museum Winterthur, Zurich; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver; ICA London, Camden Arts Centre.

For the publication *The Overcoat*, 2015, Dobai was commissioned to produce a new series of works to accompany the republication of Russian author Nicolai Gogol's story *The Overcoat* (1842), published by Four Corners Books London. In 2016 the bookwork *The Copyist* was released and published by Everyday Press.

Brie Ruais (b. 1982, Southern California), lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She received her MFA from Columbia University's School of the Arts in 2011.

Ruais work has been exhibited at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Mesler/Feuer, New York; Nicole Klagsbrun, New York; Marc Selwyn Fine Arts, Los Angeles; Lefebvre & Fils Gallery, Paris; Fused Space, San Francisco; Cooper Cole, Toronto; Halsey McKay, East Hampton; Xavier Huffkens, Brussels; The Horticultural Society, New York; Salon 94, New York; The Hudson Valley Contemporary Center for Art, Peekskill, New York and The Abrons Arts Center, New York. Ruais is the recipient of The Socrates EAF Fellowship, The Shandaken Project Residency, and the Abrons Arts Center Residency.

Simone Forti (B. 1935, Florence, Italy), lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

Forti is a key figure of 1960s minimalist dance, examining the relationship of space and the body. She emigrated to the US with her family in 1939. In 1955, Forti started dancing with Anna Halprin, a pioneer in improvisation and working with kinesthetic awareness. In 1959, she moved to New York to study composition at Merce Cunningham Studio with musicologist and dance educator Robert Dunn, where she met and began to work informally with choreographers Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, and Steve Paxton.

Forti collaborated with artists and composers, including Robert Morris, La Monte Young, Yoko Ono, Robert Whitman, Charlemagne Palestine and Peter Van Riper. In the early 1980s Forti started speaking while moving, working with newspapers and doing solo performances called "News Animations," giving expression to images, memories and speculations sparked by the news media. Forti has published several books, among them *Handbook in Motion: An Account of an Ongoing Personal Discourse and Its Manifestations in Dance* (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Press, Halifax 1974) and *Oh, Tongue!*, edited and published by Fred Dewey (Beyond Baroque Books, Los Angeles 2003). Her works and performances were presented in exhibitions and museums in the US and internationally, most recently at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Hammer Museum Los Angeles, Museum of Modern Art New York, Guggenheim Museum, Sao Paulo Biennale and Louvre Paris.