

freeze

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applied unstretched canvases directly to walls or pierced and hung them by means of paper-clip chains, pushpins, staples and binder rings – a nimble, economic method for fastening these swatches to the gallery's clinical contours that also playfully alluded to the sadomasochism of organizational stationery. Yet with titles such as *hot wired heart/appendage* (1999), *reticent infection* (1998) and *colostomy* (1998), the contradiction of depleted bone density and loose flesh that is wasted, though ultimately kept alive by, the scientific introduction of a 'triple cocktail' of AIDS drugs (first made available in 1996) at once comes into sharp focus. (Nanney is HIV positive.)

His pop-savvy installation at Jenny's – a series of painted pine and plywood sculptures – jumped across and along all four walls (and the ceiling) while sensuously attending to, or rhyming with, the room's extruding beams, electrical sockets and cable raceways. The fasteners here are steel brackets and zinc or brass hinges; layered and scraped acrylics are psychedelic in their near-fluorescent hues. Nanney's pastiche of recognizable historical forms is joyously (because anthropometrically) scaled, and also catalogues a certain phallocentric fixation: in the repetition of El Lissitzky's upward-thrusting 'proun' (*multi color composition proun*, *pink corner composition proun* and *phantom composition proun*, all 2014), Constantin Brâncuși's infinite vertical (*truncated endless column viewer*, 2014) and an Anthony Caro-esque splay of nubs and pointed spikes (*telepath*, 2014). This energetic potential is affirmed by the kineticism of works on wheels (*mobile brain in a box*, 2014) or hinges that invite a pinch, push, stroke or other light touch. One might imagine the gentle swinging gesture needed to part the door-like wings of *mobile secret love spell corner* (2014) to be almost prayerful in concentrated motion – a sort of cheeky liberation from such architectonic acts of bunting up as Kazimir Malevich's *Black Quadrilateral*, Carl Andre's copper floor plates or Robert Morris's grey corners.

This encouragement towards the open also resonated through symphonic vibrations collaged together by Nanney from sci-fi film soliloquies, Memphis field recordings and flashes of cut-up poetry or experimental pop that pulse in the airy, ten-hour-long drone accompanying his visual display (*Untitled*, 2003–14). Embedded in the exhibition's restrained sunniness is a lived, devotional quality – the complex response of a survivor, which rebuffs the entrepreneurial edge of 21st-century wellbeing industries. Because flesh – the 'body parts' examined here – endures despite the holy moral compass of the iPhone and other oracles.

KARI RITTENBACH



3

SARAH CHARLESWORTH

The Art Institute of Chicago

They say that those who survive attempted suicide often recount the overwhelming regret that they experienced the second they jumped – precisely at the point of no going back. Sarah Charlesworth's series 'Stills' (1980/2012), on view for the first time in its entirety at the Art Institute of Chicago, reproduces and magnifies photographs of people – both named and anonymous – attempting to jump to their deaths. Caught between living and dying, the subjects confront that quintessential moment of self-affirmation and self-destruction. We cannot know if there were survivors amongst those depicted; thus we long for a chance to intervene, to reverse time and to reject the documentary function of the photograph. This desire is perhaps especially pertinent considering Charlesworth's passing last year; a well-respected teacher and friend, she imprinted her spirit on the hearts of many. Like Roland Barthes's 'winter garden photograph' – a picture of his mother discussed at length in *Camera Lucida* (1980) – 'Stills' is between this world and the next, an illustration of the photograph's ability to instigate our will to existence and remembrance.

The in-between status of the suspended jump also has parallels in Charlesworth's treatment of her materials: she was among the first artists to print life-size photographs on cheap supports, a direct insult to the prevailing idea of the precious unique print. As a result of Charlesworth's particular process, and demonstrating her love for newspaper and stock photographs, the 'Stills' images fall apart into stacks of horizontals and dots, hovering somewhere between clarity and disintegration. Despite their unsympathetic,

deadpan and tabloid-like appearance, there is nevertheless something beautiful about these appropriated acts of desperation, not only for their balletic associations, but also for the understated formal virtuosity of every print. Each of the 14 stills has its own character because of Charlesworth's careful cropping and tearing, the signs of which she leaves visible. Unlike the people they represent, who are often left unnamed, every print has a distinct personality. Portraying people at the precise moment they have lost all control, the artist's own rigour is asserted, leaving us with a simultaneously critical and intensely emotional image.

These are not didactic images and you would be hard-pressed to find a simple illustration of mass media's callous relationship to human life. Charlesworth instead evokes a transitional psychic space and prompts the question: 'What could they be thinking about right now?'. She attempts to make visible the exact moment in which bodies face the possibility of destruction, translated, in the photographic medium, as the point at which forms disintegrate into lines and dots. As a result, we find ourselves in a world marked by inspiring contrasts – beauty and ugliness, anonymity and identification, bodies and pure forms.

Perhaps longing for the past, for a time when choices could yet be amended, the individuals in 'Stills' come to represent an embodied netherworld – a darkroom wherein bodies constantly emerge and are dispersed. We do not know these figures, but there is nevertheless something perversely brave about their acceptance of the unknown. As Kate Linker noted in the panel discussion that accompanied the opening of the exhibition, Charlesworth's 'toughest, strongest images had a kind of seduction'. She invited her viewers to come with her to the darkest places – darkness and light, after all, are the foundations of photographic practice. This first major museum show of the artist's work since her death is exemplary of her radical charge into the unknown.

WILLIAM J. SIMMONS

1
Alex Becerra
Fresa, 2014, oil on canvas,
1.8 × 1.6 m

2
Chuck Nanney
telepath, 2014, acrylic on plywood
and pine, 36 × 189 × 2 cm

3
Sarah Charlesworth
Unidentified Man, Ontani Hotel,
Los Angeles, 1980/2012,
from the series 'Stills', photograph