CONVERSATIONS

Simon Denny ...... 24
Haegue Yang ...... 32
Elmgreen & Dragset ...... 46
Rasheed Araeen ...... 54
Shahzia Sikander ...... 64
Adriana Varejão ...... 74
Eko Nugroho ...... 82
Song Dong ...... 88
Gillian Wearing ...... 96
Yang Fudong ...... 104
Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev ...... 110
Pauline J. Yao ...... 120
Tianzhuo Chen ...... 134
Hassan Sharif ...... 140
Jim Shaw ...... 150

OCULA PHOTOLOGS ...... 162
Art Basel in Miami Beach, FIAC, Asia Now, Frieze London, Sydney Contemporary, Art Basel, Frieze New York, Art Dubai, Art Basel in Hong Kong
CONVERSATIONS
January 2015 – May 2015

Koki Tanaka......228
Antony Gormley......238
Heri Dono......250
Eungie Joo......256
Ryan Gander......262
Fiona Hall......272
Grayson Perry......286
Lynda Benglis......296
Camille Henrot......308
Bharti Kher......314
Jitish Kallat......324
Makoto Aida......334
Heinz Mack......342

GALLERY DIRECTORY......356
Foreword

The Ocula story has an unusual trajectory. We didn’t set out to create a book and we didn’t envisage a return to print, yet here we are. But how did we arrive? Back in 2012, Simon Fisher and Christopher Taylor sketched a plan to launch an online platform focused on the artists, artworks and exhibition programmes of the world’s leading galleries. Determined not to have ‘all’ the galleries, but rather a careful selection, Ocula now represents 160 of the world’s leading contemporary art galleries on its platform. Along the way, we have introduced a digital newsletter and published original content in the form of ‘Ocula Conversations’ (interviews with leading art world luminaries) and ‘Ocula Reports’ (focused on important art world events). Aware that the content had begun to attract committed followers, Ocula launched an online magazine in 2013. Ocula Magazine now also includes ‘Photologs’ (featuring images from art fairs and other events) and ‘Insights’ (focused on the exhibitions and artists on Ocula). With the launch of Conversations, Ocula takes another step forward and expands from digital into print for the first time.

Just as the idea of this book developed organically, so too did the editorial. Two years after we launched Ocula Magazine, and reflecting on where to go from here, we took time to listen to what people were saying. The positive discovery was praise for our editorial approach, often described as offering a fresh perspective. We had inverted the gaze of the art world; we weren’t looking at the global art world from New York or London, but from Hong Kong.

Along this journey, we have been grateful for the support of many of the art world’s leading voices, people like Lars Nittve, Claire Hsu and Hans Ulrich Obrist, who participated in our ‘Ocula Conversations’ when we were just starting out. One of the first people we interviewed was Philip Tinari, who now, along with Christopher Taylor and Xiaoyu Weng, selected the interviews for inclusion in this publication. For this support and the support of all those who have been involved in contributing to the Ocula Magazine and to Conversations, including our writers, interviewees, partner galleries, press teams from around the world, and the wider Ocula team, we are exceptionally grateful.

Conversations presents a selection of interviews commissioned in 2015 by Ocula for its digital magazine, accompanied by images from our ‘Photologs’ of major art fairs. Interviewees include artists such as Simon Denny and Camille Henrot, who were launched into the global art stratosphere by major shows of their work; Haegue Yang, Adriana Varejão and Yang Fudong, who enjoyed important institutional exhibitions again this year; Grayson Perry, who had a major survey at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and whose influence, like that of Lynda Benglis, continues to reverberate across the art world; and Rasheed Araeen, who has only just begun to be appropriately recognised for his influence on Minimalism. Major cultural events of the year are marked by interviews with the artists who contributed, such as Heri Dono and Fiona Hall, who represented their countries at the 56th Venice Biennale; and curators like Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, who curated the Istanbul Biennial, and Eungie Joo, curator of Sharjah Biennial 12: The past, the present, the possible.

Things only come to be defined once they pass, and perhaps it is too soon to reflect on the year that was 2015, but in publishing Conversations, we hope to mark it through some of the people and events that had an impact. In doing so, we hope to contribute to an understanding of what the year meant and what 2016 might herald.

• All interviews, including their introductions, are reproduced for the purpose of this book as at the date of their completion, which is noted at the top of each Conversation.
• Where interviews have been in person, the transcript of the relevant discussion is reflected. In some instances, with the agreement of the interviewees, the published transcript has been edited.
• All captions are presented in accordance with the specifications of those who granted us rights to use such images.
Philip Tinari

Philip Tinari assumed the directorship of Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing in 2011. In this role, he organises an exhibition program devoted to established figures and rising talents both Chinese and international, as well as a wide range of public and educational programs and development activities. In the past four years, he has curated exhibitions at UCCA of artists including William Kentridge, Liu Wei, Sterling Ruby, Alex Israel, Pawel Althamer, Xu Zhen/MadeIn Company, Tino Sehgal, Wang Keping, Teppei Kaneuji, Tehching Hsieh, Wang Xingwei, Yung Ho Chang, Yun Fei-Ji, and Gu Dexin among others. Prior to joining UCCA he was founding editor of the bilingual art magazine LEAP. Before that, in addition to independent work as a writer, translator, publisher, and curator, he served in roles including China advisor to Art Basel, lecturer at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and founding editor of Artforum’s Chinese web edition. Tinari serves on advisory boards to institutions including the Guggenheim, the Asia Society Hong Kong Center, and NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, and is a contributing editor to Artforum. In 2015 he was named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum. He holds a B.A. from the Program in Literature at Duke, an A.M. in East Asian Studies from Harvard, was a Fulbright scholar at Peking University, and is currently pursuing a D.Phil. in the History of Art at Oxford.

Xiaoyu Weng

In 2015 curator and writer Xiaoyu Weng was named The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Associate Curator of Chinese Art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Prior to this she was the founding director of the Kadist Art Foundation’s Asia Programs, Paris and San Francisco, where she launched the Kadist Curatorial Collaboration. Previously based in San Francisco, Weng also worked as Program Director of the Asian Contemporary Art Consortium in the city and as a curator at the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts at the California College of the Arts (CCA). Educated at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing and later at CCA, Weng has organised exhibitions and events for venues including the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, CAFA Art Museum, Beijing; and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam among others. She is also a contributing editor of LEAP, and her essay ‘Working with Archive’ won the Artforum Critical Writing Award in 2011.
2015 was a stellar year for the Berlin-based artist Simon Denny. First, MoMA PS1 presented *The Innovator’s Dilemma* (3 April to 31 August 2015), Denny’s first significant United States museum solo show. Then, representing New Zealand at the 56th Venice Biennale, his project *Secret Power* attracted both art world accolades and mainstream media attention for exploring the design aesthetics of files famously leaked by the National Security Agency (NSA) whistle-blower, Edward Snowden. More recently, the artist opened an exhibition at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, *Products for Organising* (25 November 2015 to 14 February 2016), which looks at the cultures of both global corporate organisations and hacktivist movements. Ocula first caught up with Denny just as he was preparing for his Venice exhibition and this e-conversation between Denny and Kate Brettkelly-Chalmers follows on from those conversations.
The project Secret Power addressed the contemporary intersection of global geopolitics and communication technology through the lens of aesthetics, design and the visual iconography of tech culture. The term ‘nesting’ was rather insightfully used to describe the relationship of the project’s many different parts: computer server racks that act as museum-style vitrines, Snowden files re-rendered as objects and visual compositions, and the ceiling of the Marciana Library transposed onto the floor of the Marco Polo Airport transit terminal in Venice. I like ‘nesting’ because it is also used to describe the file structure of some database systems like Windows, for instance. But what descriptions have been most useful for you? Where do you begin when you discuss this work with other artists or curators?

It’s nice to read your summary. I usually begin by describing this project by identifying my own search to find an artistic context for the powerful imagery that the Edward Snowden documents introduced to the world. That is the core of the project for me. When I looked through the Snowden files I was strongly affected by the artwork that framed and shaped this information. I wanted to know what kind of author would be producing this work, to give more background to its production. Following some of the information gathering tactics of journalists that I read, the figure of David Darchicourt, the self-proclaimed former creative director of the NSA, came up through social media searches. Suddenly there was a placeholder for an artist’s hand in the Snowden slides. His online portfolios on Behance and LinkedIn gave me some understanding of the context I was looking for. Here, there were more illustrations and diagrams that helped flesh out the position of this image-maker who was, at one point, developing some of the world’s most powerful imagery within secretive organisations.

The figure of Darchicourt made me think differently about other artwork as well, which became important when selecting and crafting the sculptures in the exhibition in dialogue with the pavilion venue, the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. I came to see the Marciana’s beautiful masterpieces as a kind of ‘intelligence imagery’ from an older commercial empire. Fra Mauro’s world map, a richly detailed map pieced together by a monk from his conversations with merchants, sits beside many allegorical paintings describing the value of knowledge, which cover the walls of the library. By making display units that re-rendered Darchicourt’s work in a monumental format in this rich library, I was able to cast him as a master of contemporary intelligence image-making in dialogue with masters of the past. And I think that was the core viewer experience that cycled out into the other layers and stories within the project, across the borders at the airport and beyond.

You developed many of the graphics and aesthetic elements of the exhibition together with the designer David Bennewith, a frequent collaborator, and David Darchicourt, the NSA ‘Creative Director’. Can you describe the process of working with these two Davids?

The process of working with David Bennewith was something that was, and is, long-term—not confined to this exhibition. We have worked on publications together, but also whole projects, and he is one of a number of close conversation-partners I am in dialogue with ... So our discussions beginning around the ‘national pavilion’ aspect of the project eventually turned into co-developing the research, and this led to Bennewith reaching out on Twitter and finding Darchicourt’s profiles. We then had this kind of revelatory moment looking through Darchicourt’s portfolios and sort of threw ideas back and forth until the plan to offer him an original commission came up. Then Bennewith approached Darchicourt through his online profiles with the first of two commissions.

We worked carefully together on the brief: thinking about what would be the most interesting thing to have the ‘hand of the NSA’ draw in relation to a ‘New Zealand’ pavilion. The question of what we were commissioning and how we were doing this—including the level of complicity we wanted Darchicourt to have in the process—formed the underlying logic that determined the stance of the entire pavilion. From that, I developed a two-part exhibition where half the show features interpretations of Darchicourt’s work and half features anonymous work from the Snowden slides. Bennewith and I had many of the graphics redrawn and vectorised, and I interpreted some of the drawings in 3D models. I printed and designed custom panels for the server racks with the imagery printed on them, and arranged them into groups that suggested common themes and an identifiable aesthetic position.
For Haegue Yang, 2015 was a busy year. Along with participating in major art events, such as the Biennale de Lyon, the Sharjah Biennial and the 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Yang also presented four solo shows around the world, including two extensive institutional exhibitions in Asia at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, and the Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul.

In conversation with Katie Fallen
Hong Kong, 15 January 2016
Working across a broad range of mediums, from Venetian blind installations and sculptures made of clothing racks, straw and bells, to video and works on paper, Yang’s hybrid practice creates a multitude of sensorial experiences that serve to reconfigure and explore the quotidian. This strong visual language and conceptual drive, combined with Yang’s increasing international presence, has meant her practice has become clearly identifiable.

Alongside the widely recognised aspects of her oeuvre, the South Korean-born artist has been working on a lesser-known creative trajectory. Driven by a quest for a deeper level of understanding, Yang has staged a series of readings of the French writer Marguerite Duras’ 1982 novella The Malady of Death, while also initiating translations of the text, first into Korean in 2008 and now in Chinese.

Beginning in 2010 during her residency at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in the United States, each performance has been in a different and local language, with a different performer and with various visual outcomes. Motivated by a passionate, or even obsessive, yearning to comprehend and explore the true meaning of Duras’ text, Yang’s staging of The Malady of Death is characterised by a sense of uncertainty, and a desire to pursue the notion of the ‘unknown other’.

In December 2015, as part of Mobile M+: Live Art, Yang presented The Malady of Death: Écrire et Lire, which was comprised of a staging of The Malady of Death at Hong Kong’s Sunbeam Theatre and the publication of its first Chinese translation. Held over two nights, the opening performance saw Hon Lai-chu recite Duras’ text, dressed in a long white dress upon an all but black stage. Broken up by tension-filled pauses, a burning mosquito coil, moving lights and an intermittent bold background image of French actress Jeanne Balibar, the staging was powerfully effective. It opened up a multitude of considerations for a text that continues to intrigue.

Expanding on a previous Ocula Conversation which explored the artist’s sculpture and installation work, Katie Fallen met with her to discuss The Malady of Death; what inspires this unusual practice, how it has developed over the years, and the complex meanings behind Yang’s decisive commitment to the project.

The performance in Hong Kong is the fourth of this work. It was initially staged in 2010 at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, then the Namsan Arts Center in Seoul and more recently at dOCUMENTA (13) in 2012. Would you talk us through how you have changed the performance each time, building up to the version in Hong Kong?

While I was in search of a notion of community, I encountered an essay by Maurice Blanchot, called The Unavowable Community. There was one chapter, called ‘The Community of Lovers’, which was impossible to digest since the whole chapter was about a book, unknown to me till then, by Marguerite Duras called The Malady of Death. So I had to read this book, but I couldn’t understand it. Then I read it again, twice in a row, but I still didn’t understand what was going on, even though there is nothing theoretical about it. So the whole trajectory about Duras started from this point of not understanding her work.

Initially, I started to study all her novels as well as her biography, and there were many other things that I discovered along the way, such as her films and theatre productions as well as the intertextuality of her works.

Anyway, after two years I returned to The Malady of Death, and initiated the Korean translation of the book. When I was in residency at the Walker from 2009 to 2010, Doryun Chong proposed to stage this book and obviously, I wanted to hear the text translated into the voice … so it is born out of curiosity to hear Duras’ writing.

The conceptual premise of staging this text over and over again was immediately there; it is a kind of blind commitment to make a circle around somewhere that is unknown and even supposed to remain unknown. I’m not sharing what I know; I rather attempt to share what I don’t know.

The staging at Namsan was an interesting experience because it was the first time I had gone through the proper casting process. I ended up asking a

***HAEGUE YANG***

HAEGUE YANG HONG KONG, 15 JANUARY 2016
Art Basel in Miami Beach
3–6 December 2015

FIAC
22–25 October 2015

Asia Now
20–22 October 2015

Frieze London
14–17 October 2015

Sydney Contemporary
10–13 September 2015

Art Basel
18–21 June 2015

Frieze New York
14–17 May 2015

Art Dubai
18–21 March 2015

Art Basel in Hong Kong
15–17 March 2015

See more in Ocula Magazine
www.ocula.com/magazine/photologs