

Rétrospective 1989-2009
Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts / Lausanne
19.09.2009-03.01.2010
www.mcba.ch

We are pleased to invite you to the press conference of the exhibition

Renée Green. Ongoing Becomings

on Friday, September 18, 2009 at 11.00 am

The artist will be present

General Information

Opening reception Friday, September 18, 2009, 6.30 pm, in the presence of the artist

Curator Nicole Schweizer, nicole.schweizer@vd.ch

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Opening hours Tuesday to Wednesday 11.00 am to 6.00 pm
Thursday 11.00 am to 8.00 pm
Friday to Sunday 11.00 am to 5.00 pm
Closed on Monday, 25.12.2009 and 01.01.2010

Tickets Adults: CHF 10.-
Pensioners, students, apprentices: CHF 8.-
Children up to 16 : free of charge
1st Saturday of each month: free of charge

Access Metro: station Riponne-M. Béjart
Bus: n°8 stop at Riponne
Bus: n°1 and 2 stop at rue Neuve

Events, guided tours, and education See page 5

Renée Green. Ongoing Becomings Retrospective 1989-2009

September 19, 2009 – January 3, 2010

This autumn the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts of Lausanne is presenting the first retrospective of the work of Renée Green (*1959) from the 1980s to the present day. Paintings, photographs, multimedia installations, films, videos and sound pieces are displayed in a presentation reflecting the different periods of her output and the tendencies they are linked to (Conceptual art, Post-Minimal art, etc.).

Devised in close collaboration with Renée Green, the exhibition will make it possible to appreciate the range and exceptional richness of the works produced by the artist over more than twenty years. It brings together major pieces, including *Neutral/Natural* (1990), *Seen* (1990), *Commemorative Toile* (1993), *Partially Buried in Three Parts* (1996-97), *Some Chance Operations* (1998-99), *Wavelinks* (2002-04), and *Endless Dreams and Water Between* (2009), in a non-chronological sequence punctuated by color and sound.

Educated in New York and at Harvard, Renée Green who has worked both in Europe and the United States generally devises her works in connection with a specific place, questioning its visible or repressed history, whether it is in Lisbon, Berlin, Amsterdam, Naples, New York or Los Angeles. The artist allies thoughts arising from post-colonial criticism to the artistic procedures inherited from Conceptual and Post-Minimal art to ask about the place of the subject in history and tackle the question of identities and their possible fluctuations. In a constant back and forth between documentary and fiction, she articulates personal and collective memory, individual histories – her own, those of other people – and historical events, questioning the implications of movements, displacements and geographical positions over the course of time, and calling on us to answer questions about vision and perception – those we form of the world, history, ourselves, and others.

Publication

Renée Green. Ongoing Becomings, a bilingual monographic reference catalogue (French / English) is published by the Museum and JRP Ringier, Zurich, with newly commissioned texts by Nora Alter, Diedrich Diederichsen, Kobena Mercer, Catherine Quéloz, Gloria Sutton, Elvan Zabunyan, and an interview between Juliane Rebentisch and Renée Green, numerous color plates of the works exhibited, and a systematic, illustrated chronology. Price: CHF 50.- / 35 Euros, after the exhibition : CHF 60.- /40 Euros

Generous support for the catalogue was provided by the Association des Amis du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne and the Embassy of the United States in Bern, Switzerland (Department of State).

A tour of the exhibition

Room 1

This room presents a selection of Renée Green's first works which already contain numerous elements which the artist will develop at a later date. In them she tackles systems of perception and the arbitrariness of classifications. Thus in *Color II* (1990), color pigments are associated with days of the week (Sunday = red, etc.), referring to the arbitrary nature of associations linked to color, and by extension to race. Thus we read a text taken from the book *Lola Leroy: Or Shadows Uplifted* by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1892) which recounts the meeting of two doctors who admire one another until one reveals to the other that he has black blood. Likewise in *Color IV* (1990), colors are associated with letters of the alphabet, interspersed with texts recounting respectively the linking of colors to the "humors", a medical report on a patient who divided the world into "light" and "dark", and the story of a journalist who blackened his skin to experience what it was like to be black in the southern United States (John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me*, 1961). Green's taxonomies thus allow viewers to ponder about the way color and race depend on categories of vision which, though inexact, form the basis of a whole series of value judgments.

In the same vein, *Neutral/Natural* (1990) tackles the question of received ideas about what is "neutral" and "natural". Words that are often associated with the term "natural" (science, laws, selection, etc.) are listed alongside shades of gray, and turn out all to be associated with concepts that have to do with the racial discourse. Renée Green questions how images of the world that are anything but "neutral" and "natural" are constructed through particular systems of representation (here mainly the system of language).

Seen (1990) is one of a series of works Renée Green has carried out focusing on representations of the black female body in western art history (*Permitted*, 1989, *Sa main charmante*, 1989, *Revue*, 1990, etc.). Here she tackles more specifically the figure of Saartjie Baartman, known as the Hottentot Venus, a young African woman who was exhibited like a caged animal at European fairs at the beginning of the 19th century. Rather than showing documentary images of Saartjie Baartman, Renée Green creates a special viewing arrangement to explore Europeans' perception of the African woman's body as exotic, bizarre or monstrous. Viewers are invited to climb on to a platform which conjures up both a stage and the rostrums where slave auctions were conducted, while their shadow is projected on to a screen. On the plates, texts describing Saartjie Baartman's appearances on stage at Piccadilly Circus in London, as well as those of the famous singer and dancer Josephine Baker who caused a sensation in the Paris of the 1920s, can be read, while one of her songs, *Voulez-vous de la canne...*, rings out.

As they are standing on the rostrum, viewers are involved in the arrangement: from being "onlookers" they are transformed into "exhibits", and the separation between self and the other, as well as that between the subject and object of knowledge, is destabilized. The physical discomfort that may be felt at the point of the momentary permutation between the positions of subject and object immediately changes our way of understanding Saartjie Baartman's "place" in the intermingling of archival images of colonialism and modernity.

Room 2

This room brings together works from different periods, but all focus on the question of travel and the circulation of ideas and forms, whether they be visual or musical. *Idyll Pursuit* (1991) is an installation Renée Green made at Caracas. Amid texts from fiction glorifying explorers, documents and images by American landscapists, particularly those of the Hudson River School, who traveled in South America in search of unspoiled, Eden-like nature, Renée Green inserts a photograph of herself taken in Venezuela. She thus establishes a parallel between contemporary artists who travel to "exotic" places to work, and 19th-century artists whose journeys were made in the context of imperialist practices.

In the installation *Wavelinks* (2002-2004), Renée Green is interested in a different type of circulation between places and people, between the local and the global: that made possible by music. Composed of seven octagonal units that are all viewing and listening spaces, simultaneously isolated from one another and linked

by a color system, *Wavelinks* explores the many relationships people establish with sound. The seven videos take the electronic music of the 1990s as their theme, and its various interpretations by individuals who produce, write about, or listen to that music (Diedrich Diederichsen, Christian Marclay, Mika Vaino, etc.). The octagonal units that constitute *Wavelinks* are inspired both by primitive architectural structures like the hut and fun buildings like garden pavilions, while at the same time being related to the “pavilions” of the conceptual artist Dan Graham, also intended to create a different viewing context, and to concentrate visitors’ attention on an environment, an image, a voice, a sound.

Room 3

When she was invited to make a work at Nantes in 1992, Renée Green explored the traces left by that city’s colonial past, in particular its central role in the triangular trade (exchange of goods manufactured in Europe for men and women from Africa, subsequently sold as slaves in return for primary materials, mainly in the West Indies). Thus she produced printed fabrics by way of an allusion to the printed calico industry which flourished in Nantes in the 18th century, materials used both to pay for the purchase slaves in Africa, and to decorate the interiors of the well-do-do in France. Renée Green integrates into them scenes taken from engravings or stories of the period, like that of the Senegalese nun who was the heroine of *Ourika* (1824), a popular novel by Claire de Duras, or that hateful image of a European licking an African’s face to make an assessment of his health and so determine his commercial value. But by also inserting the picture of a Frenchman hanged during the Haitian revolution amidst the wreaths of flowers, Renée Green also commemorates the first successful slave rebellion in the modern world which led to Haiti’s independence in 1804, so jolting the seemingly innocent comfort of the bourgeois furnishings.

Opposite *Commemorative Toile*, this room presents *Certain Miscellanies* (1995), a second installation that refers to a “period interior” – here that of the Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens (Great Britain), named after its founder, Marianne North, an artist with a passion for botany who traveled in many countries between 1871 and 1885, bringing back paintings of plants made in their natural environment. In it Renée Green assembles photographs documenting various places she has visited on her own travels both in Europe and the United States, as a reference to Marianne North’s activity as a “collector-traveler”.

Rooms 4-5

The installation and video *Partially Buried* (1996) take the year 1970 as their starting point from several complementary aspects: where the paths of personal history, the history of art and History with a capital H intersect at a particular place, the campus of Kent State University in Ohio. That is where Renée Green’s mother used to teach music, also where Robert Smithson, who became famous for his Land Art works, created the sculpture *Partially Buried Woodshed* of which only a photograph remains, and also where on May 4, 1970 the National Guard opened fire on students who were demonstrating against the American invasion of Cambodia, killing four of them and provoking an unprecedented strike throughout the country’s universities. By concentrating her work on a given moment in history and a given place, Renée Green reflects on the way in which personal associations with history, places and genealogy are entangled into a subjective fabric that complicates any separation between history and fiction. Carrying on from the video *Partially Buried*, the artist made *Partially Buried Continued* (1997) on a journey to Kwangju, in Korea. The video opens with a slide presentations consisting of pictures the artist’s father took when he was serving as a GI in the Korean War between 1950 and 1953. To this event drawn from her personal life, Renée Green adds her own research into the occurrences that have made a mark on the country and the city of Kwangju in a more recent period.

In the final installation, *Partially Buried in Three Parts*, Renée Green then brings two war histories together visually and allegorically, those of the Korean and the Vietnam War, histories in which her father and mother were respectively involved. Her installation is thus the result of a process that allies field research, the appropriation of political and historical events, and a subjective story.

Rooms 5-6

Like *Partially Buried*, the installation *Some Chance Operations* is composed of several complementary and successive stages. Filmed in Naples, Vienna and New York, the video *Some Chance Operations* (1999) explores the question of cinema as an unstable form of archive, a receptacle of memory that can disappear at any moment. History and its manufacture are considered, in particular through the example of the filmmaker Elvira Notari, who owned a film production company in Naples between 1906 and 1930. Although she made more than sixty very popular feature films, widely distributed in Italy and in New York at the request of Italian immigrants, only three of her films are still in existence today. *Some Chance Operations* questions the process of memory and its relationship to place, to the experience undergone directly or with a delay. "How do we remember?" could be the central question of the video. Linking the project to the city of Naples, Renée Green's rumination is accompanied by the testimony of individuals who ponder about the way in which memory relies on words, sounds, sensations and images.

One of the artist's investigations prior to the filming of the video took the form of an installation of texts and photographs on colored walls. Entitled *Some Chance Operations: Between and Including* (1998), the installation consists of film stills taken from three encyclopedias of cinema (*The Oxford Companion to Film*, 1976, *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film*, 1983 and *The Women's Companion to International Film*, 1990), related to one another by a system of alphabetically arranged cross-references. The installation thus questions the way in which the selection of items of information, the inclusion or exclusion of a lexicon or an archive, contribute to determining which films, which stories, which memories, will or will not be preserved from oblivion.

Room 7

Secret presents the photographic, sound and video records of research carried out by Renée Green in an apartment in Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation at Firminy in 1993, which is comparable to a sort of "ethnographic field study". In fact, when invited to intervene on the site in the context of a collective exhibition, Renée Green decided to put up her tent for a week in an unoccupied apartment in Le Corbusier's huge building, the ruin of a project for utopian living, and to make notes on her impressions and her meetings with the inhabitants, while at the same time documenting her environment. Conceived as a meditation on different stories and different trajectories (those of the architecture itself, its inhabitants, and Le Corbusier), this work raises the question of knowing what it means to do a work on a specific site (thoughts that will be found again in *Partially Buried in Three Parts* in particular), and what the effects of such a work are on a foreign environment and on oneself. But at the same time Renée Green does not recount her experience in an autobiographical way; on the contrary, the experience of disorientation induced by this particular place is recounted in the third person, as if it were a fictional account. In the same room, visitors can immerse themselves in the artist's huge film and sound output, thanks to a compilation of 33 videos created between 1993 and 2005 (among them *Returns: Tracing Lusitania*, 2000 and *Climates and Paradoxes*, 2005) and a sound compilation. These elements are part of a larger project, *United Space of Conditioned Becoming* (2007), which the artist made in Berlin and New York to celebrate the thirteen years of the existence of her independent production company, Free Agent Media (FAM). Defined by the artist as "my dream label and production company", FAM archives and publishes not only the works and writings of the artist, but also distributes those of other people, and organizes temporary events.

Rooms 8-9-10

“Much of the work I've done has in some way to do with charting relationships between what is imagined to be home and what is imagined to be away.” In the installation *Endless Dreams and Water Between* (2009) which closes the exhibition, Renée Green explores the way in which desires and dreams have crystallized around islands in literature, history and the imagination over the years. Visitors first of all move around in the two rooms to the sound of waves and ships' hooters, amidst colored banners bearing inscriptions which together compose a poem, *There Is No Land Yet*, written by Laura Riding when she was living with Robert Graves on the island of Majorca in the early 1930s. Maps and texts are scattered along the route, presenting the islands of Manhattan, Majorca and San Francisco Bay, as well as the real and imaginary protagonists of the video *Endless Dreams and Water Between* filmed in these various places.

The main “story” of the video *Endless Dreams and Water Between* consists of an exchange of letters between four fictional characters (all female) who think aloud about meeting up at an imaginary place called the September Institute. These women have names (Lyn, Mar, Raya and Aria), and are also distinguished by their foreign and regional accents: Lebanese, South African, Canadian and North American. All write in addition to their other activities: Lyn is a designer living in Manhattan who is interested in communication systems, Mar is a herbalist and botanist based in Majorca, Raya does marine biology in San Francisco, and Aria edits and writes books, dividing her time between Manhattan, California and Majorca. *Winter in Majorca* by George Sand (1855) is the text all four voices comment on – a text written when Sand spent a winter on the island with her children and Frédéric Chopin, which Robert Graves would translate into English. The literary stories are therefore interwoven with the stories created by the artist, who draws on very personal archives to create webs of meaning, “correspondences” between places and between her fictional characters who at times have a strange resemblance to her. The film travels between Manhattan (an island where the artist lives) and ruminations about Majorca as an island at the crossroads between the European and Islamic worlds in a succession of images shown at a slow, poetic pace. Special attention is devoted to the details of these places located between land and water, to the ebb and flow of those elements; they are both real places and places where our imaginary worlds can be projected. The voices that cut across one another speak of dreams and possibilities to be created. Through them the fundamental question is raised of the relationship we have with other people's words, other people's worlds, the history of places and the inhabitants and travelers who have created stories about them, the many different migrations that have shaped them and of which language bears the traces. As one of the voices in the *Come Closer* video says: « There's all of this and there are our daily lives. And there's history and its press upon the present. Because of the histories we are where we are and linked as we are. Still, we try to move. Despite everything. Not to get stuck in cycles or patterns that seem exhausted. These are daily efforts. Questions of where and how to live in these times, in this present. This is what each of us continues to face. How do we do it? How do we continue? How will we create the next endeavour? How will we create our lives ? »

EVENTS

Thursdays at the MCBA

Guided Tours in French

October 8, at 6.30 pm
November 5, at 6.30 pm
November 26, at 6.30 pm
December 10, at 6.30pm

Guided Tour for the Friends of the Museum

Thursday, October 1, at 6.30 pm by Nicole Schweizer

Public lecture

November 12, at 6.30 pm, salle du Sénat, Palais de Rumine
By Elvan Zabunyan, Maître de conférences en histoire de l'art contemporain,
Université de Rennes

Week-ends at the MCBA

Dialo-Guides

From October 17, to December 20.
Every Saturday and Sunday from 3 to 5 pm, students from the Research Master in
Critical Curatorial Cybermedia from the Geneva University of Art and Design are
available to share discussions and answer visitors' questions about the works on
display.

Children at the MCBA

A children's discovery-guide is available at the front desk of the museum upon
request

Museum Night at the MCBA

September 26, 2 pm to 2 am
Tours of the exhibition and
Sound Workshop for children aged 8 to 12
More information : www.lanuitdesmusees.ch

Schools at the MCBA

Wednesday 23, at 12.30 am
Special guided tour for teachers
Registration required by phone or by e-mail, entrance free

Every Thursdays and Fridays
Free guided tours for classes
Registration required by phone, fax or e-mail

Private Guided Tours at the MCBA

Private guided tours (french and english) are available for groups up to 25 people
on request by letter, fax or e-mail. Price: CHF 120.- + admission charges.

"Hors les murs"

Festival des Urbaines – *Can't Forget What I Don't Remember*

In association with the exhibition *Renée Green. Ongoing Becomings*, « Les
Urbaines – Festival des créations émergentes » organizes an exhibition with works
by several contemporary artists who tackle questions of identity and memory.
Address : Circuit – Centre d'art contemporain, 9, av. de Montchoisi, 1001 Lausanne
Opening hours: December 4, 6–10 pm; December 5, 3-10 pm; December 6, 12–6 pm
The exhibition will also be open from December 7 to 19 on Thursdays, Fridays and
Saturdays from 2 to 6 pm, and upon request until January 3, 2010.
More information : www.urbaines.ch

Biography

Renée Green

Born in 1959 in Cleveland, Ohio. Lives and works in New York and San Francisco

EDUCATION

Whitney Independent Study Program, 1989-1990
Radcliffe Publishing Procedures Course, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA., 1981
Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. B.A., 1981
Parsons School of Design, 1982 & 1984
School of Visual Arts, New York City, 1979-1980

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2009 *Endless Dreams and Water Between*, National Maritime Museum, London
2007 *United Space of Conditioned Becoming (1)*, Participant Inc., New York
United Space of Conditioned Becoming (2), Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin
2006 *Unité d'habitation*, Galerie Martine Aboucaya, Paris
2004 *Elsewhere? Here*, Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon
Wavelinks, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati
2002 *Phases + Versions*, Portikus, Frankfurt
2001 *Returns: Tracing Lusitania*, Centro Cultural de Belem, Lisbon
2000 *Shadows and Signals*, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona
1999 *Between and Including*, Vienna Secession, Vienna
1998 *Some Chance Operations*, Galleria Emi Fontana, Milan
1996 *Certain Miscellanies*, Stichting de Appel, Amsterdam
Flow, FRI-ART Centre d'Art Contemporain, Fribourg
Partially Buried, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
1995 *Miscellaneous*, DAAD Gallery, Berlin
1993 *World Tour*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
1992 *Import/Export Funk Office*, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne
1991 *VistaVision: Landscape of Desire*, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
Bequest, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA
1990 *Anatomies of Escape*, Institute of Contemporary Art, The Clocktower Gallery, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Manifesta 7 (2008); Istanbul Biennial (2007); Sevilla Biennial (2006); Documenta XI (2002); Berlin Biennial (2001); Kwangju Biennial (1997); Johannesburg Biennial (1997); Venice Biennial (1993); Whitney Biennial (1993).

AWARDS & GRANTS

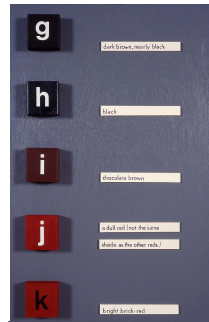
DAAD Grant, Berlin, Artist in Residency (1993-1994); Arts International Grant, Lisbon, Artist in Residency (1992); The Fabric Workshop with Mid-Atlantic States Grant (1992); New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Grant recipient (1991-1992 and 1987-1988); New York State Council on the Arts, Harlem School of the Arts, Artist-in-Residence Program Grant (1989-1990); Art Matters Inc., Grant recipient (1989-1990 and 1993); The Studio Museum in Harlem, Artist in Residency (1988-1989); Geraldine Dodge Foundation (via Jersey City Museum), Grant recipient (1988); School of Alternative Media, New York University, Artist in Residency (1987-1988); Artist's Space Exhibition Grants (1986-1987); Bronx Museum of the Arts (1985-1986).

Press images (selection)

More images are available upon request (florence.dizardi@vd.ch)

Renée Green, *Color IV*, 1990 (détail)

Mixed media
122 x 244 x 10 cm
Collection of the Landesbank Baden-Württemberg,
Stuttgart
Photo credit: Tom Warren



Renée Green, *Partially Buried in Three Parts*, 1996-1997

Installation. Mixed media, dimensions variables
(detail)
Courtesy the artist, Free Agent Media, and
Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York
Photo credit: Pez Hejduk, Matthias Herrmann,
Stefan Lugbauer



Renée Green, *Some Chance Operations: Between and Including*, 1998 (detail)

Installation: 9 sets of framed b/w photographs and
texts on colored walls
Rubell Family Collection, Miami



Renée Green, *Wavelinks*, 2002-2004

Installation. 7 octagonal units videos and sound
Dimensions variable
Collection Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore



Renée Green, *Endless Dreams and Water Between*, 2009

Installation. Mixed media, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist, Free Agent Media, and the
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich



