

Agnes Denes

Firstsite / Colchester

Agnes Denes's first solo exhibition in the UK since 1979 began with black-and-white photographic documentation from *Rice/Tree/Burial* (1968–79), an action first realized in 1968 in Sullivan County, New York. For Denes, this was a symbolic event, in which the artist announced her commitment to environmental issues and human concerns. Denes planted rice to represent life, chained trees to indicate interference with life and nature, and buried her haiku poetry to symbolize thinking processes. Denes kept no copies of her poetry; their burial was a sacrifice of sorts reflecting a commitment to the "new analytical art form" based on the transitional triangulation of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The triangular form became central to Denes's work. In the *Pyramids Series*, drawings and prints from 1967 onwards consider the design and symbolism of the pyramid as a representation not only of "logical structures, architectural innovations and society building structures" but also of the "past and the possible future." There is a distinct sense of humor to Denes's logic, summarized in other bodies of work that illustrate the artist's approach to her subject matter: the human condition. "Map Projections," drawings and prints produced between 1973 and 1979, convey world maps rendered in three-dimensional shapes, from an egg, a cuboid, to a sausage. Presented alongside pieces from the *Philosophical Drawings* series, was a selection of *Body Prints*, in which breasts and a penis were printed directly onto gridded graph paper using computer ink.

Then there is *Tree Mountain*, Denes's largest pyramidal form: a manmade mountain measuring 420 meters long and 270 meters wide dedicated in 1996 in Ylöjärvi, Finland. A 400-year project, the intention is for this to become the first manmade virgin forest in the world, and the idea is to reproduce the project elsewhere. Like philosophy itself, and the work of this artist in general, the work is at once a monument to civilization and a sanctuary from it.

by Stephanie Bailey

Anicka Yi

Lars Friederich / Berlin

The three largest works in Anicka Yi's exhibition "DENIAL" at Lars Friederich in Berlin are sculptural accumulations of prefab hardware, vinyl tubing and translucent casts of glycerin soap. They are carefully arranged — one could say styled — and compositionally harmonious. In *It Only Takes 20 Minutes to Shift the Blame* (all works 2013), a polished chrome ball is placed a few inches from a brass ring suggestively encircling a plexiglass rod. Set on low pedestals and inset within a purpose-built display wall, the sculptural tableaux are backlit in a diffuse fluorescent glow. Rather than passively offering themselves up for scrutiny, the sculptures in Yi's exhibition possess a self-determining agency distinctly similar to the way we maintain our own figurative images through literal ones. Yi's works dictate their own representation.

Paradoxically, the artist's previous bodies of work sought to pry the experience of art away from the strictly visual and place it into a (much more nauseating) sensory realm — an effort that has frequently led Yi to the materials of the kitchen, as a bodily stand-in and metaphor for temporality. At Lars Friederich, Yi swings back across the aisle. The bulk of the exhibition, a sculptural collaboration with Mari Ouchi (one half of the jewelry design team Faux/Real), is indeed displayed in a manner much more familiar to jewelry than contemporary art.

This embrace of posturing is mused over in the exhibition's three-page press release, co-authored by Yi with artist and writer Jordan Lord. Is carefully kept affectlessness a positive form of denial, allowing us to control our likeness rather than risk exposure by it? The soul-searching missive pits disassociation against nostalgia, wondering if either are productive methods of understanding past experience or heartbreak. Of course, there is a limit to anyone's stoicism (or anything's for that matter), and there are reassuring moments of betrayed vulnerability scattered throughout the exhibition. The personality to be found in "DENIAL" is reticent, but Yi rewards those viewers who look long enough to find cracks in the facade.

by Patrick Armstrong

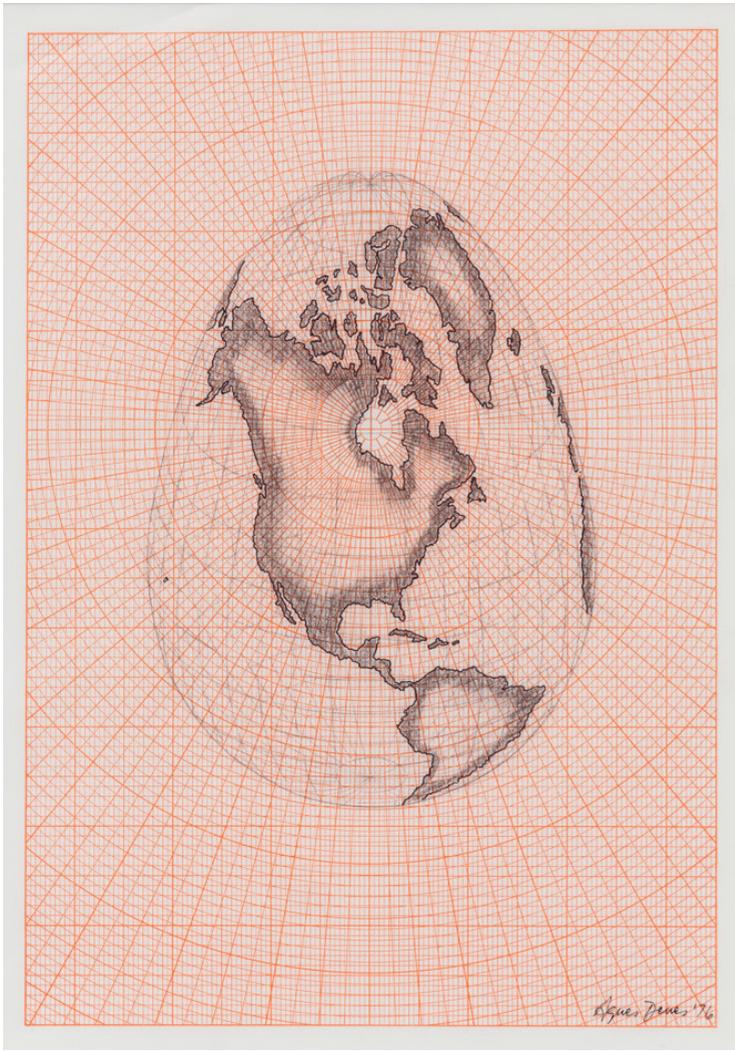
La voix humaine

Kunstverein Munchen / Munich

In 1958, the German-American political theorist Hannah Arendt published *The Human Condition*, drawing attention to the loss of language due to technological progress. *La voix humaine* at Kunstverein Munich continues this thought, but adds another angle to the discussion. Taking Francis Poulenc's eponymous opera-adaptation of the same year as a starting point, it focuses on the co-dependent relationship between humanity and technology, while negotiating concepts such as subjectivity, isolation and hysteria.

Featuring works by Tyler Coburn, Cécile B. Evans, R. Kelly, Kalup Linzy, Erica Scourti, Cally Spooner, Frances Stark and Amelie von Wulffen, the exhibition traces different stages of man's relationship with technology throughout a recent "communication history" — from the often impaired application of technological devices (such as the telephone or internet) by the user, to the loss of communication skills and the immanent need to shape one's subjectivity in response to a media society, and finally to the incorporation and superior dominance of the machine. Entering the institution, visitors find themselves isolated within the vast emptiness of the space. Except for the faint sound of piano playing, there is no human noise audible, despite the exhibition's title ("the human voice"). Similarly, display elements — works such as Cécile B. Evans's "spambot" *AGNES* are presented on wall-mounted flatscreens with just a single wired headphone for listening — echo the feeling of isolation. In this sense the exhibition, in tune with the thematic framework, not only renders visible the breakdown of human communication and the failure of a discursive public space, but it enables the visitor to experience this as a sense of loss. A solution to this fragile human condition within media society, though, is not proposed — but can the exhibition format ever achieve that? Nonetheless, *La voix humaine* is an inspiring and thoughtfully conceived inducement to continue the search.

by Anja Lückenkemper



Anicka Yi
It Only Takes 20 Minutes To
Shift The Blame, 2013
Courtesy of the Artist and
Lars Friedrich, Berlin

*Installation view, "La voix
humaine," Kunstverein
München, 2014
Photography by Ulrich
Gebert*

Agnes Denes
Isometric Systems In
Isotropic Space - Map
Collection of Agnes Gund,
New York. Photography by
Dave Morgan

