Saletnik, Jeffrey, "Michelle Grabner: Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland," *Artforum*, March 2014.

ARTFORUM

Carlos Jiménez Cahua, *Untitled #104*, 2013, ink-jet print, steamer, water, 81 x 32¼ x 16½".

transformation, one saw the immaterial "copy" in reverse of electronic information that perhaps epitomizes our globalized present. By juxtaposing such pure abstraction with the phenomenological emplacement and unpredictable ambulations of the spectator in the exhibition space, Jiménez Cahua brought to light the gnawing anxiety that sensory perception and bodily operations are becoming more and more organized in the shape of machinic functions. In other words, while staring at the fractured and slightly hallucinatory unfolding of light (easily missed because of the work's restrained tempo), one had to wonder whether human inscription within contemporary conditions of generalized abstraction leads to a personal and social identity based on greater homogenization or if a glitch might occur in this self-replicating system.

Jiménez Cahua suggests that a totalized alignment between the individual and visual culture emerging from networked technology can be resisted in *Untitled #104*, a highly pixelated ink-jet print of a desert landscape with a mountainous ridge (downloaded from the Internet) that was sporadically humidified by an electric steamer attached like a prosthesis to the print's surface. The appearance of crinkly curves along the panorama's point of highest elevation and the soaking of the paper support to the point of dripping on the floor transformed a rather banal image into a droll sculptural installation and, more important, offered it a distinctive afterlife in its next permutation as a digital reproduction. This strategy of creative dysfunction reminded us that an image cannot make us feel either the heat or the moisture of the tactile environment; it is always a surrogate. Yet Jiménez Cahua's humor—adding real water to the fake desert, "saturating" an image—suggests that Jean Baudrillard's discouraging prognosis of our simulacral present as the "desert of the real" can be answered with DIY tactics.

Indeed, Jiménez Cahua aggravates images of all kinds to insist on the material—or analog—quality that lies within them. For *Untitled #89.1–89.35 (M[A]VDTTH...)*, the artist covered one wall with a grid of ink-jet prints on low-quality paper: Internet-sourced likenesses of acquaintances whom the artist considers mentors or figures of authority. Each printout has been dipped about halfway in water, causing the ink on the image's lower portion to bleed and smudge, thus revealing the unruly agency of its constitutive elements. Similarly, in *Untitled #93.1*, one of four "photograms" riffing on Robert Rauschenberg's 1951 collaboration with John Cage (a single tire track in paint on paper), a gorgeous, rosy imprint emerges from a concoction of chemicals: a week's worth of rain, sunshine, and debris surrounding the impression of the parked car's tire, operating in partnership with the silver-gelatin paper to bring out its distinct phenomenal qualities. These works, seen in tandem with *Untitled #78*, a color photograph of waves that has been placed in a plastic container of water, insist that images are objects in their own right, rather than docile surfaces.

By producing deviations in our expectations of the "natural" (or logical) behavior of images, Jiménez Cahua also asks whether eccentricities might be provoked within the seamlessness of looking and knowing. With social relationships woven through so many mediatized apparatuses, is it possible to evade standardization by recovering the material substrates of our experiences?

—*Nuit Banai*

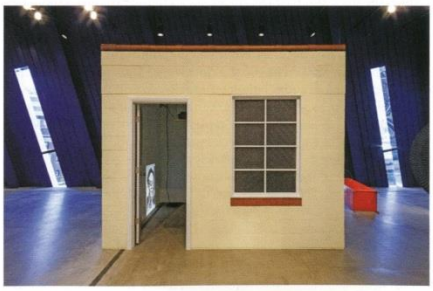
CLEVELAND

Michelle Grabner

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CLEVELAND

During the past sixteen years, Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam have presided over some two hundred ad hoc exhibitions in an eight-by-eight-foot converted shed behind their house in Oak Park, Illinois, known as the Suburban. A full-scale replica of this concrete-block structure anchored "I Work From Home," Grabner's midcareer retrospective: She selected four artists—Michael Smith, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, Amanda Ross-Ho, and Karl Haendel—to display work therein, effectively creating a rotation of shows within the show. Grabner would appear to be among the most generous artists of her generation: She is keenly interested in what other artists do; she frequently brings people, ideas, and objects together; she writes about other artists' works; she's an educator and mentor. The sum of these activities, together with her own studio work, constitutes a mutually inflective practice in which Grabner's paintings, drawings, and prints mine the interstices of both material and social fabrics.

At sixty-four square feet, the Suburban's original exhibition space is absurdly small. (Since 2003, the venue has also included another, separate room.) And while the format may have been intended as a kind of institutional critique (insofar as this white cube is a noncommercial space in a backyard), for the artists who show work in, around, and atop the structure, the Suburban also stands as a challenge with which to contend—and as an exemplar of the variety of creative activity that strict limitations can foster. Grabner luxuriates in precisely this (modernist) notion in her own work, some of which seems deliberately engaged with Ad Reinhardt and Anni Albers. In a series of paintings titled "metalpoint ginghams," 2010–, Grabner uses gold-, silver-, and copper-point styli to draw gingham-patterned grids on rectangular panels covered in black gesso. Like Reinhardt's, her marks are not expressive; the meticulousness of her ruled lines and the formal functioning of the grid together serve to disperse the gaze across the surface, which takes on an iridescent sheen. Despite these paintings' limited color palette, fixed design parameters, and controlled markings, an astonishing variety emerges. This is also true of the artist's "radial silverpoint" series, 2008–: The magic happens between the lines, in the delicate spaces separating figure and ground, in moments when Grabner eased up on the stylus, and, over time, as the metals oxidize. Her "indexical paintings," 1993–99, share this delicate sensibility. In these works, she made marks on panels through the tiny spaces between the fibers and wires of woven domestic materials—textiles, plastic tablecloths, metal screens—later using this residue to render brilliantly



View of "Michelle Grabner," 2013–14. Foreground: Replica of The Suburban. Inside, left: Karl Haendel, *The bridle from the saddle and the cow from the cattle* (detail), 2013.

enameled versions of the original patterns. Some works retain the regularity of their source material, while others demonstrate the possibility for variation when the internal dynamics of a structure—warp and weft—shift even slightly. Grabner's formal investigation of mundane objects, patterns, and routine activities—such as baking, which is taken up in an uncharacteristically humorous video, *Cooking with Confidence: The Merry Christmas Cookie*, 1996, starring her collaborator David Robbins—underscores the impossibility of uniformity.

The critique of authorship (which may now seem a bit dated) has been a long-standing conceptual concern for Grabner. Her work often involves several layers of mediation; for *Untitled (Nancy Holt)*, 2013, she made silk screens from images she copied out of a book that Holt produced of her 1985 suite "Time Outs," in which she photographed football games broadcast on her TV. Grabner's desire to separate the domestic from the conceptual in her studio work might also inform the distinction that she maintains between her studio work and her activities as writer, educator, and curator (which currently include cocurating this year's Whitney Biennial). In her studio practice, Grabner's objects perform the heavy lifting, whereas *she* is the agent in the latter three enterprises. Grabner's view is that her participation in these different arenas puts pressure on the disciplinary authority that each maintains. But as evinced by the artist's success in being Michelle Grabner, we see how the criteria for recognition in these fields seem to overlap, as the practices of making, writing, and educating become increasingly ecumenical.

—Jeffrey Saletnik

MINNEAPOLIS

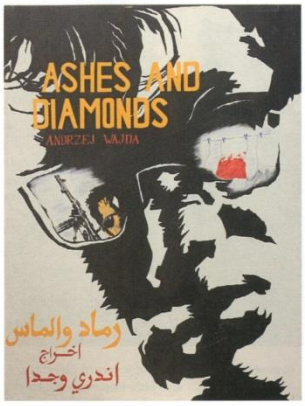
Yto Barrada

WALKER ART CENTER

Over the past decade, the work of the French-born, Morocco-based artist Yto Barrada has gradually revealed itself as recursive, with new projects incorporating the documentary images of the Maghreb and the Mediterranean that brought the artist international attention. At once chromatic and undersaturated, those ambiguously allusive pictures stand on their own, but Barrada has taken to redeploying them—along with her sculptural works, films, and videos—in broader thematic installations. Her most recent project, "Album: Cinematheque Tangier" (on view through May 18), is perhaps the culmination of this turn in her evolving practice, comprising not only new and old work as well as archival materials but a satellite of Cinema Rif, the Tangier movie house that Barrada was instrumental in founding.

Pale-yellow, blue, and deep-orange walls provide a backdrop for works that call to mind a bygone era of grand downtown marquees: handpainted reproductions of vintage film posters; Barrada's sculpture *Palm Sign*, 2010, lit by exposed incandescent bulbs; maquettes of golden-age movie palaces. Other elements, however, feel out of place: a suite of unframed works on paper referring to Hubert Lyautey, the first colonial administrator of French Morocco (*A Modest Proposal*, 2010); an entry wall that lists Tangier street names in French and Arabic. But there are anchor points. Vitrines full of midcentury programs in Arabic and English attest to a vibrant if little-known Moroccan film industry, juxtaposed with posters for American adventure staples of the 1950s, portraying proto–Indiana Joneses on exotic Oriental excursions. Nearby, a 2008 film by Barrada explains that the Maghreb once had a thriving culture centered on cinema, but by 2000, no art houses remained. In 2006, she and a team constructed a new theater and café at the Rif, which has since hosted more than ten thousand visitors and serves as a film archive with a growing public education program.

In this light, "Cinematheque Tangier" assumes a formal clarity, as a cultural repository that works on the raw logistical level of conservation and circulation (like a library) and also on a larger sociopolitical project that is "the Orient" in general and Tangier in particular. As Edward Said famously argued in 1978, northern Africa has long been a site of projected fantasy and repressed desire for Western audiences. Barrada's psychic remapping mirrors on-the-ground changes to administration and the built environment but unfolds in the seemingly anodyne terrain of art and literature. In deploying this symbolic archive alongside the physical documentation of her own seven-year-old site, Barrada brings her practice into focus as a continual resituating of objects to create new meanings. Of course, even in an atomized, streaming world one needs nodes through which the past can be preserved and the present staged. A notable reason that so many prominent African artists live or work on other continents is that such physical infrastructure—from supply stores to libraries of critical theory to art-house theaters—is lacking.



Poster for Andrzej Wajda's 1958 film, *Ashes and Diamonds*, repainted by Said Mesfioui Ben Salam, 2011–12. From "Yto Barrada."

At the heart of "Cinematheque Tangier" is a utopian pragmatism suited to modernist projects of yore. Indeed, in her now-classic essay "One Place After Another: Notes on Site-Specificity" from 1997, Miwon Kwon cautioned against "globalized" or nomadic work that would feed the market's insatiable "consumption of difference (for difference's sake)," presciently remarking that "the siting of art in 'real' places can also be a means to extract the social and historical dimensions out of places." "Cinematheque Tangier" is important, then, because it works in precisely the opposite direction. Viewers here do not so much enjoy visual documentation of Tangier as support the operation of an avant-garde infrastructure that extends to the Walker itself: Built into the show is a cinema in miniature, which screens eight films totaling two hours in length. Rather than trade on a veneer of documentary criticality or cash in on the voyeurism of difference, "Cinematheque Tangier" creates a platform for reinvestment in a place and the redefinition of its contours.

—Ian Bourland

LOS ANGELES

Bob Mizer and Tom of Finland

MoCA PACIFIC DESIGN CENTER

In Victorian times, the site of gay pleasure, sensuality, and communality was the ol' swimming hole, celebrated by artists like Walt Whitman and Mark Twain, Thomas Eakins and Henry Scott Tuke. Photographer and publisher Bob Mizer and illustrator Touko Laaksonen ("Tom of Finland") relocated the Victorian Eden to the filling stations, pools, bars, gyms, and barracks of a postwar landscape remarkably like Los Angeles, a sunbaked utopia where every man's a dreamboat and he's bursting out of his jeans to get at you. In recent years, Mizer's and Laaksonen's respective foundations (both artists died in the early 1990s) have attempted to insert their work into a high-art context; the MoCA Pacific Design Center show was only the