

# BOMB MAGAZINE

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### Experiencing a Museum Through Its Past: Liz Park Interviewed by Scott Turri

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Thaddeus Mosley. Installation view. Carnegie International 57th Edition. Photograph by Bryan Conley

*The Carnegie International 57th Edition recalls past works and embraces new artists.*

I studied art at the University of Pittsburgh in the 1980s. During the Reagan years and shortly thereafter, I was hanging out at Chief's Cafe after spending nights raising money for Planned Parenthood with the other misfits at the local call center and then heading to the Electric Banana to catch Thin White Line. Everything was about power—who had it and who didn't. To me the Carnegie international was the embodiment of this kind of power. In one of my earliest memories of the exhibition, I remember seeing the 6'6" white-bearded, impeccably dressed Richard Armstrong leading a group of patrons around the exhibition. He was the taller, thinner version of Andrew Carnegie. In the past the exhibitions felt like they could have landed in the city of Pittsburgh from another planet. My lot in life has changed—in an improbable twist of fate, I am now on the faculty of the Studio Arts Department at the University of Pittsburgh. I have become a part of the establishment here. Today the exhibition feels much closer to home, perhaps because of the digital age, the global economy, and also my deeper engagement with the art world. Although the hard edges of youth have softened with age, to a large extent the punk ethos survives and my skepticism of power remains. It is through this lens that I approached my interview with Liz Park, the associate curator for the 57th Carnegie International, who was gracious enough to sit down and speak with me about the exhibition.

—Scott Turri

## **Scott Turri**

One of the themes of this exhibition is its connection to previous editions of the Carnegie International. Since I live in Pittsburgh, I get to engage with the work for prolonged periods over the course of the exhibition and I have a kind of accessible library of the exhibitions stored in my memory bank. When I first walked through, I made a lot of connections and I'm sure I'll make many more when I see the exhibition again and again. A few specific instances came to my mind and I'm curious to see whether this was something that I just dreamed up, or if they were conscious decisions on your part.

I thought there was a strong connection between Jessi Reaves and Lee Bontecou. I also saw a connection between Huma Bhabha and Georg Baselitz, specifically one large sculpture by Bhabha that reminded me of some of Baselitz's sculptures and maybe his paintings too. Lynette Yiadom-Boakye reminded me of Henry Taylor, Rirkrit Tiravanija reminded me of Art Labor with Joan Jonas.

Did you consciously reach out to artists you felt had an affiliation or connection to some of these past International artists, or did these connections emerge later?

## **Liz Park**

Certain kinds of art practices are in the air at times. The idea of serving tea or coffee, for instance, is not something that is exclusive to a particular artist. It's been a zeitgeist of a certain moment when artists are trying to explore different ways of interacting with viewers through art, especially in the '90s. Yes, we are aware and conscious of the exhibition history in any given space because that contributes to the general context in which we present the artwork. It's not that there's necessarily a one-to-one correspondence, but given the exhibition history of a specific site, we do think about what has come before. The example of Yuji Agematsu being presented in the Charity Randall Gallery recalls On Kawara's date paintings. The most iconic space in the International's history is arguably the Hall of Sculpture, where you have this very grand space and you can look down at an installation from the balcony. Thinking about what has come before, with Postcommodity's work on view currently, we can draw a connection to Pedro Reyes from the 2013 International and the musical activation of his work, or even Alan McCollum's installation from 1991, the graveyard of dinosaur bones, and how that relates to the idea of digging and resource extraction in Postcommodity's work. There are layers of history that a specific place evokes and the placement of artworks of course is a trigger. It jogs a seasoned viewer's memories and prompts them to rifle through their own index cards of past installations in that space.

## **ST**

There is another connection that comes to mind in relation to the work of Kevin Jerome Everson's eight-hour film that chronicles a day in the life at a factory in Mechanicsville, VA, and its location in the pit of the museum's grand staircase, which has the glorified labor and industry murals. There was an artist whose work appeared in this same space, not the last edition but maybe the one prior.

## **LP**

It was Cao Fei's *Whose Utopia* presented in the 2008 Carnegie International.

**ST**

Yes, right, her film was about factory work in China and was presented in the exact same location as Everson's.

**LP**

Yes, absolutely. That was definitely something that we, of course, were aware of. We showed installation photographs of that work to Kevin when he came for a site visit. He said, "Oh, that's great. I'll have my work installed just like that."

**ST**

I noticed that there are more Pittsburgh artists this time, whereas in the past there haven't been many, or any at all for that matter. The last International had Transformazium, the artist collaborative based in North Braddock, but they had only really lived here for about five years. This year you've included Thad Mosley, who was born in the region and still lives here, as well as Lenka Clayton and Jon Rubin, who are both based in Pittsburgh. Did you create a mandate for yourselves to include Pittsburgh artists or was that just something that kind of happened organically?

**LP**

I don't know if mandate is the right word, but we are definitely thinking about what the International means to this particular place. For someone like Mosley, it seemed like he was the living embodiment of the history of the International itself and his work is so expansive and representative of all the ways in which we can understand the exhibition. He has seen every International since the '50s, when he was learning to become an artist. I am always thinking about the International as an immense resource for people of the region. I also want to point out that Mel Bochner is a Pittsburgh native, born, raised, and educated here. The International affords us an opportunity to think about what this exhibition means and what kind of place it can provide. We'd like it to be a place for people to come and have encounters that are impactful and long lasting.

**ST**

The curator, writer, and critic Ingrid Schaffner mentioned that more and more artists have been expanding beyond traditional media and spaces for art—especially those immersed in socially engaged practices—and working to subvert the institution. How do you reconcile your role as a curator working within an institution of power and bringing in artists who are creating work that is trying to get outside of these institutions?

**LP**

I think that regardless of the practice, the museum itself provides a certain kind of opportunity. Art Labor, for example, has a practice that extends beyond the context of the museum. One of the Art Labor collective members, Tung, has a family farm in Vietnam that grows coffee. That's where the coffee being served in the museum comes from. The sculptures and the paintings in that space are made with coffee from his family farm as well. As you say, certain artists' practices are harder to contain within the museum. But our aim really isn't to try and make a neat package

of something, it's to present an experience within the museum walls that points to these things outside.

## **ST**

If you were a long-distance trucker in Vietnam, you could find a hammock cafe, which is essentially a truck stop set up on the side of the road where one might stop to rest in a hammock and drink some locally sourced coffee. Obviously in Art Labor's installation, where one could rest in a suspended hammock and where coffee is served on a daily basis, you are not attempting to replicate the hammock cafe, but present a model that makes this type of practice known to people who might not realize that this sort of thing happens in Vietnam. To draw attention to the practice of a socially engaged art that exists outside of the traditional gallery and museum context.

## **LP**

I think there are different layers that visitors can access. Art Labor's installation made with coffee from Tung's family farm is one part of the experience that people can have. But artists' practices also tend to be multilayered and there are certain things that they recognize as functioning better in a museum context than others. Lenka Clayton and Jon Rubin are also examples of artists with practices that function in public spaces. For instance, Rubin's *Conflict Kitchen* or *Last Billboard* or Clayton's works that circulate in the postal system. These are practices that take the artist's work outside of the museum, yet they are presenting a project in the forum gallery that makes sense for people to experience inside. There's a certain amount of curatorial call and artistic response that happens to make artist's work function within a museum context, and what we can do to support their work inside the museum is different from what they do outside of the museum. What we want to do is provide the best possible conditions for them to experiment and to circulate their work within the museum setting.