

Sadie Benning

Shared Eye

10.2.–30.4.2017

Kunsthalle Basel

EN

Videos are what Sadie Benning first became known for; they won the then-teenage artist awards and visibility throughout the 1990s on the experimental art and video circuit. Lo-fi and black and white, they explore aspects of memory, identity, and the anxiousness of growing up queer in the Midwestern United States. “I got started partly because I needed different images and I never wanted to wait for someone to do them for me,” the artist once explained in an interview. Improvising with materials at hand and a toy camera, the adolescent Benning constructed fragmented, highly personal moving images, portraying the artist amid everyday objects, drawings, and scraps of handwritten text.

More than two decades later, the homespun poetics, grainy images, and durational logic explored in these earlier video works has expanded and taken on quite a different form as it confronts the political, conceptual, and material concerns of another moment in history. This exhibition, the artist’s first institutional solo show in Europe, is a collaboration between Kunsthalle Basel and The Renaissance Society in Chicago. It is also the first institutional exhibition to focus on the importance of what are often referred to, for lack of a better term, as the artist’s “paintings.”

Entitled *Shared Eye*, the presentation consists of a new series of fifty-five panels. Each is composed of mounted digital snapshots taken with the artist’s smartphone, embedded with painted aqua-resin elements and found photographs (drawn from a variety of sources, from Internet-found images of strangers to 1960s newspaper telefax images), occasionally punctuated by miniature toys or inexpensive keepsakes nestled upon tiny sculpted shelves. There is a felt intensity to the labor involved in making each piece, and a decided (willfully imperfect) hand detectable in the rough-hewn forms, sanded edges, and incorporated elements. A nervous pictorial energy is built up through this process, and inexplicable connections emerge among a work’s different elements.

A gathering of protesters, the artist’s own vinyl collection and bedroom, a film still from

Room 4 + 5

1
Shared Eye (Sequence 1, Panel 1), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 7 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 1, Panel 2), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 6 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 1, Panel 3), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 8.5 cm

2
Shared Eye (Sequence 2, Panel 4), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 5.7 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 2, Panel 5), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 7 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 2, Panel 6), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 8 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 2, Panel 7), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 6 cm

3
Shared Eye (Sequence 3, Panel 8), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 9.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 3, Panel 9), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 9 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 3, Panel 10), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 7 cm

4
Shared Eye (Sequence 4, Panel 9), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 6.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 4, Panel 10), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 6.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 4, Panel 11), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 7 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 4, Panel 12), 2016
 20.96 × 16.21 × 6.5 cm

5
Shared Eye (Sequence 5, Panel 15), 2016
 26.67 × 20.69 × 9 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 5, Panel 16), 2016
 26.67 × 20.69 × 4.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 5, Panel 17), 2016
 26.67 × 20.69 × 4.5 cm

6
Shared Eye (Sequence 6, Panels 18 and 19), 2016
 2 parts, each 99.70 × 44.15 × 4.5 cm

All works of the *Shared Eye* series
 Acrylic, aqua resin, casein,
 digital images, found material,
 photographs, wood

7
Shared Eye (Sequence 7, Panel 20), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 9 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 7, Panel 21), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 10 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 7, Panel 22), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 9 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 7, Panel 23), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 9.5 cm

8
Shared Eye (Sequence 8, Panel 24), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 9 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 8, Panel 25), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 8.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 8, Panel 26), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 4.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 8, Panel 27), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 9 cm

9
Shared Eye (Sequence 9, Panel 28), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 4.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 9, Panel 29), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 9.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 9, Panel 30), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 4.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 9, Panel 31), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 4.5 cm

10
Shared Eye (Sequence 10, Panel 32), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 8.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 10, Panel 33), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 10.5 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 10, Panel 34), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 10 cm
Shared Eye (Sequence 10, Panel 35), 2016
 52.07 × 43.18 × 10 cm

11
Shared Eye (Sequence 11, Panel 36), 2016
 100.03 × 200.03 × 4.5 cm

12
Shared Eye (Sequence 12, Panel 37), 2016
 100.03 × 200.03 × 4.5 cm

13
Shared Eye (Sequence 13, Panel 38), 2016
 100.03 × 200.03 × 6.5 cm

14
Shared Eye (Sequence 14, Panel 39), 2016
 100.03 × 200.03 × 4.5 cm

15
Shared Eye (Sequence 15, Panel 40), 2016
 125.73 × 109.86 × 4.5 cm

Room 3

1
Camel, 2016
 3D object, acrylic paint,
 digital photograph, wood
 121.92 × 121.92 × 9 cm

2
Protest, 2016
 3D object, acrylic paint,
 digital photograph, penny,
 photograph, wood
 59.69 × 59.69 × 8 cm

3
Priest, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital
 photograph, photograph, wood
 67.31 × 67.31 × 4.5 cm

4
Bedroom, 2016
 3D object, acrylic paint,
 digital photograph, fabric, wood
 129.54 × 175.26 × 10.2 cm

Room 1

1
Sleeping Person, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 35.56 × 35.56 × 4.5 cm

2
Bridal Shop, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 31.75 × 31.75 × 4.2 cm

3
Rain, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 36.83 × 36.83 × 4.2 cm

4
Jesus Statue, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 46.99 × 46.99 × 4 cm

5
Umbrella, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 110.49 × 110.49 × 4.5 cm

6
Stones, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 36.83 × 36.83 × 4 cm

7
Liquor, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 38.10 × 38.10 × 4.2 cm

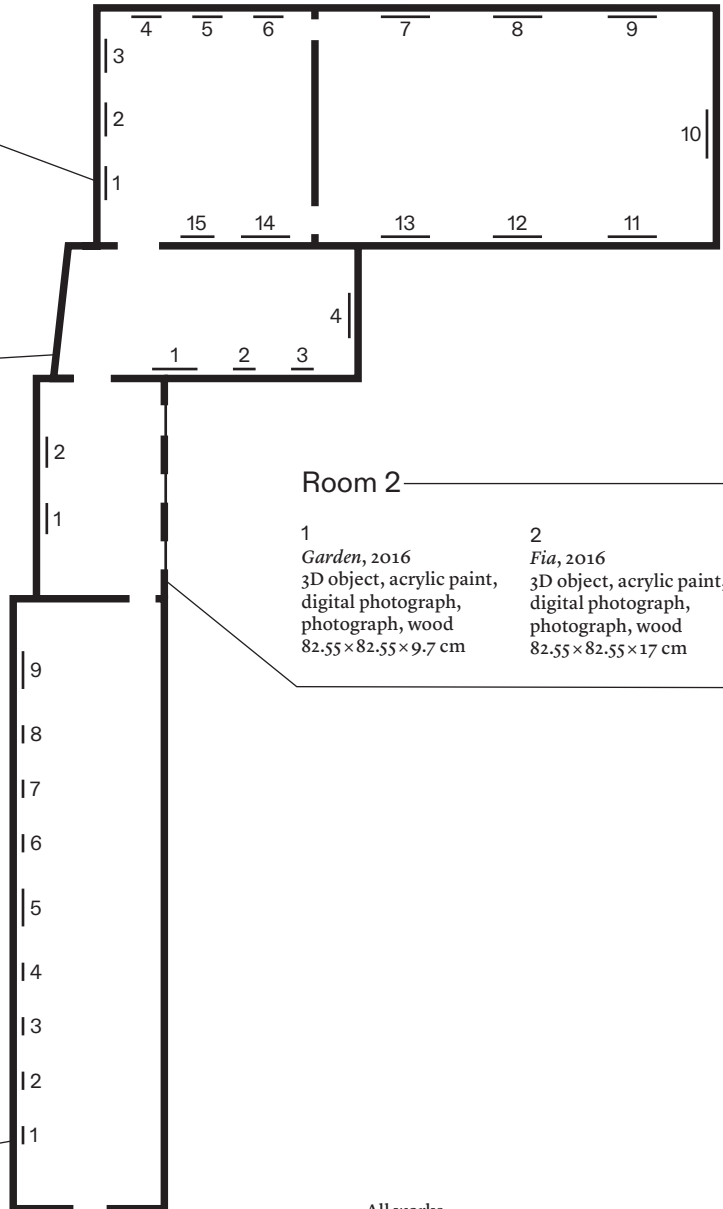
8
Person with Package, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 43.18 × 43.18 × 4 cm

9
Crosswalk, 2016
 Acrylic paint, digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 110.49 × 110.49 × 4.5 cm

Room 2

1
Garden, 2016
 3D object, acrylic paint,
 digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 82.55 × 82.55 × 9.7 cm

2
Fia, 2016
 3D object, acrylic paint,
 digital photograph,
 photograph, wood
 82.55 × 82.55 × 17 cm



All works
 Courtesy of Sadie Benning and
 Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

Citizen Kane, a desolate alleyway, Benjamin Franklin's visage on a US banknote, a miniature calendar, a toy robot, Ku Klux Klan members marching together: these describe just some of the images, objects, and references embedded in the works. They juxtapose the intimate and the anonymous, the digital present and an indeterminate analog past, the miniature and the extreme close-up, putting viewers in front of Benning's highly personal response to the state of the world at a moment of deep political uncertainty. They are also imbued with the charge of what has come before and what is yet to come, since each piece, the artist attests, "serves as a visual representation of the past, the present, and the future, colliding."

The resultant pieces hover between mediums, defying easy categorization, acting simultaneously as drawings, sculptures, photographic works, and even paintings. When speaking of them Benning persistently evokes film editing techniques, and it is tempting to read this show as a kind of film loop. The rhythm of the display is intentionally cinematic in nature, mimicking the cuts, pans, fades, pauses, and staccato transitions of time-based media. Here, meaning is produced not only from within the composition of each still image-panel and the dialogues between them (notice how in the first room the found photograph of the "person with package" in that eponymous work seems to walk toward the figures in *Crosswalk*). Meaning is also built through the spacing and the deliberately vacant areas in the exhibition, like leader punctuating a film. Notice how in the first rooms the spacing is wide and blank wall spaces are abundant, like the start of a film in which clues are being left, a scene set, a mood established. By the end, the pace has quickened and the density of arrangements and flicker of images becomes more intense, even willfully aggravated. The experience of the ensemble is thus spatial and textural, but also temporal.

Since the first galleries are seen twice—upon entering and exiting the space—Benning conceived the pieces in rooms 1 to 3 as both a prologue and an afterword to the core of the exhibition: an installation that bears the

title of the show itself, *Shared Eye*. The last two galleries, rooms 4 and 5, contain an installation made in response to the 1976 series of paintings *To the People of New York City* by the late German artist Blinky Palermo. Made shortly before Palermo died and never exhibited in his lifetime, *To the People of New York City* left an impact on Benning. Palermo's installation is composed of forty seemingly nonrepresentational paintings, presented in a rhythmic pattern of different scales and proximities, and arranged in fifteen sequences for which he left annotated sketches. Benning's installation uses the frame ratio of each panel of Palermo's series as well as the same total number of panels and grouping arrangements, appropriating the late artist's idiosyncratic specifications. There is no intentionally overt relationship between the content of Benning's and Palermo's works, but in their mathematical connection (or "mathematic mania," as Benning puts it), there is a numerology that quietly binds them. And in so doing, Benning highlights the ways that we insert our own histories and ideas into the frames we encounter.

The title *Shared Eye* evokes the idea of seeing as an ongoing collaboration between individuals, which cannot be extricated from its many, often conflicting, sources. These works emphasize how rampant capitalism and its adjoining structures of patriarchy, misogyny, racism, and xenophobia inform the subconscious—redirecting the imagination and one's sense of what is true. The body of presented work was designed to draw attention to how we experience, collectively and alone, and each piece functions individually and as part of the larger group. Cumulatively, the show is meant to generate the fragmented, filmic quality of memory and dreams, inviting a distinctive response in the viewer who encounters them. The body and the mind complete each work.

Sadie Benning was born in 1973 in Madison, USA; the artist lives and works in New York, USA.

The exhibition *Shared Eye* is organized in collaboration with The Renaissance Society, Chicago, where it was on view from November 19, 2016 to January 22, 2017, curated by Solveig Øvstebø.

Kunsthalle Basel and The Renaissance Society are co-publishing the artist's first monograph, to be released later in 2017.

Thanks to

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GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German

12.2.2017, Sunday, 3 pm

12.3.2017, Sunday, 3 pm

curator's tour, in English and French

16.3.2017, Thursday, 6:30 pm

guided tour, in English

EDUCATION / PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Children's tour *I Spy with My Little Eye!*

12.2.2017, Sunday, 3 pm

12.3.2017, Sunday, 3 pm

30.4.2017, Sunday, 3 pm

A tour and workshop for children, from 5—10 yrs., in German, by reservation only:

kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

Guided tour by students in the context of *Perspektive Kunstvermittlung*

30.3.2017, Thursday, 6:30 pm

Guided tour through the exhibition conducted by students of the Institute for Art and Design Education, HGK Basel. Free entry for students, in German.

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find an associative selection of publications related to Sadie Benning's artistic practice.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch

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