

the elbow. Most incorporated the same picture, printed from the same negative, though a couple of others offered variations on the theme. But the photographs served only as the ground for figures to come: With marker and paint, Edelson went to work on them, transforming herself into a cast of fantastic characters—in one (*Burning Bright*), she becomes a tiger, while in another she dons the bikinied costume of TV's Wonder Woman. The imagery moves in all directions—from the mythological to



Mary Beth Edelson, *Many Breasted Great Mother (Lucy Lippard)*, 1973, ink, grease pencil, and paper on silver gelatin print, 10 × 8". From the series "Women Rising," 1973.

the mediatic, and the space where the two meet—but the striking thing about them is their anti-essentialism. They don't so much say, "I contain multitudes," as declare that the artist can try anything on.

Edelson often pays homage in her art to her predecessors and contemporaries—those people who sustain her work and make it possible—and one of the most powerful works in the series depicts Lucy Lippard, her face collaged over Edelson's, labeled "many breasted great mother." It's one of the most generative depictions of a critic I know, and it's worth noting that Edelson made the work (as well as the other pictures in the series) the year Lippard published her great file on Conceptual art, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. But if Edelson acknowledges Lippard's canonical accomplishment, she also pushes her thinking into other registers. A related work in the group, *Dematerializing*, depicts Edelson engulfed in a swarm of dots, as if she were breaking up and disintegrating into space. Clearly, the new information economy had different consequences for different subjects, and different art practices internalized them in different ways.

But these photographs lined only the entryway of the exhibition. At its end, *we* entered a swarm. This work—for it was impossible to see it otherwise—is, in fact, a collection of many smaller works, and it has been some time in the making (the earliest pieces date from the 1970s and Edelson continues to create them). Each unit depicts an image from Edelson's private pantheon: Botticelli's *Venus* is here. Grace Jones appears again and again. Louise Nevelson is somewhere over there, perhaps next to a Cycladic figure, and she might be over here again. You couldn't keep track; you just followed your eye. The cumulative effect, somewhat similar to the work of Edelson's contemporary Nancy Spero, celebrates female multiplicity. Pinned in temporary position, the images repeat and enjoy different afterlives, making new kinships and alliances. Importantly, the installation was not fixed and the next owner will be allowed to reconfigure the components as he or she sees fit. Supported by raw canvas, the pieces seemed like parts of a patchwork quilt that would never be bound together in final form.

In the middle of this maelstrom was *Kali Bobbit*, 1994, a store-bought female mannequin reworked to take on patriarchy, with a belt of knives tightened fast around her waist. Sporting six arms like the Hindu goddess Kali—it is worth noting that one of the 1973 photographs transforms Edelson into the same deity—the figure also evokes Lorena Bobbitt, who cut off her husband's penis one night after many years of abuse. If each age invents its own god(ess), I think it goes without saying that *Kali Bobbit* is a fitting one for our time.

—Alex Kitnick

Sara Magenheimer

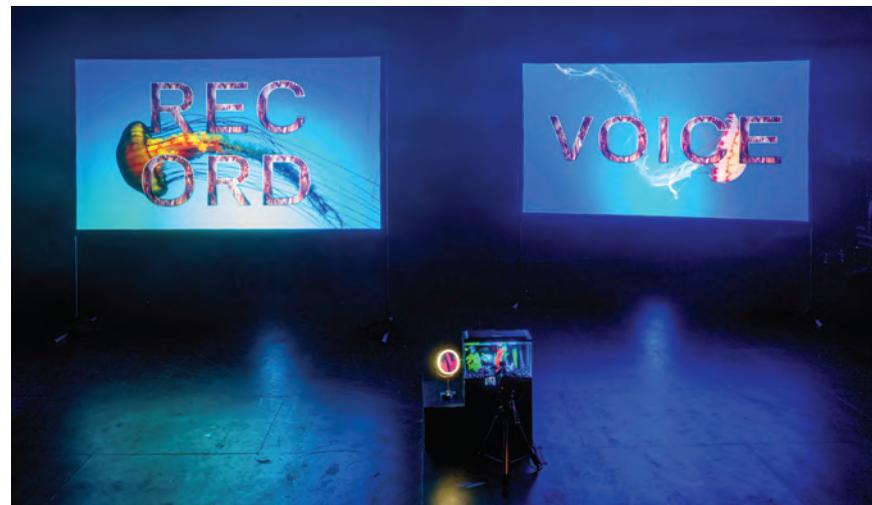
THE KITCHEN

Louis Agassiz, 1862: "I have never felt more deeply the imperfection of our knowledge of some of the most remarkable types of the animal kingdom than in attempting to describe the beautiful representative of the genus *Cyanea* found along the Atlantic coast of North America. I can truly say that I have fully shared the surprise of casual observers in noticing this gigantic radiate stranded upon our beaches, and wondered what may be the meaning of all the different parts hanging from the lower surface of the large gelatinous disk." Claude Monet, 1924: "It took me time to understand my water lilies." Ani DiFranco, 1998: "They say goldfish have no memory / I guess their lives are much like mine / And the little plastic castle / Is a surprise every time."

I present these statements, by a scientist, a painter, and a songwriter, respectively, in part because their subject matter—jellyfish, water lilies, aquariums—all figured into Sara Magenheimer's solo exhibition, "I Collect Neglected Venoms," curated by Lumi Tan and Tim Griffin. Its centerpiece video, *Best Is Man's Breath Quality*, 2017, is ostensibly narrated by a member of the species *Chironex fleckeri*, commonly known as the sea wasp or box jellyfish, who speaks over footage as varied as a motorbike emitting exhaust fumes, a summer solstice festival in Sweden, and water lilies absorbing sunlight. As installed in the Kitchen's black-box theater, the video played across two screens that stood staggered behind a fish tank filled with neon plastic plants and five genetically modified phosphorescent Glo-Fish. A live feed of the tank was projected ten feet high onto the theater's back wall, subtly framing the darkened room as the interior of a tabletop aquarium.

More important, these three statements reflect the different epistemological modes—of zoology, impressionism, and pop music—that Magenheimer deployed over the course of *Best Is Man's Breath Quality*'s fifteen minutes. Jellyfish are slippery, alien. As Agassiz put it, "The most active imagination is truly at a loss to discover, in such a creature, any thing that recalls the animals with which we ourselves are most closely allied." *Best Is Man's* resembles an absurdist nature documentary where the animal itself, voiced by Leo Smith, explains the functions of its nervous system and the potency of its venom. Simultaneously, Magenheimer treats jellyfish as Monet did water lilies, i.e., as an occasion for testing and thematizing the limits of vision. Clips filmed on both iPhone and HD cameras attempt to capture the sea wasp's quivering translucence, while the split in the video's double-screen projection triggers stereoscopic effects. "Your primate eyes," says *C. fleckeri*,

Sara Magenheimer, *Best Is Man's Breath Quality*, 2017, aquarium, Glo-Fish, vanity mirror, video camera, tripod, two-channel HD video projection (color, sound, 15 minutes 30 seconds). Installation view. Photo: Jason Mandella.



“both facing in the same direction, sometimes seem to me a great hindrance to sympathy.” Finally, for the video’s sound track, Magenheimer draws freely from Top 40 radio, sampling snippets of songs by Jennifer Lopez, Britney Spears, and, most memorably, a slowed-down, syrupy rendition of Fiona Apple’s “Criminal” that uncannily evokes a lethal jellyfish’s languid drift along underwater currents.

Magenheimer tangles these modes together, but they can never fully reconcile or synthesize. Agassiz constructs scientific detachment, whereas DiFranco seeks out emotional connection. *Best Is Man’s* tells us a bit about jellyfish, and a great deal more about the current state of video. It reveals an emerging tendency—also evident in the work of Trisha Baga, Rachel Rose, and Camille Henrot—that combines the music video’s entrancing rhythms with documentary’s spirit of inquiry and experimental film’s plays on perception. The result is, like jellyfish, resistant to disarticulation, but that hardly means it lacks sting. “I’m not separate or simple,” murmurs *C. fleckeri*. “I’m part of you.”

—Colby Chamberlain

Allyson Vieira

KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND/COMPANY GALLERY

In her two concurrent gallery exhibitions, sculptor Allyson Vieira leveraged the kind of aghast grief induced by images of whale autopsies—when we’re shown the colorful array of plastic bags cut from their stomachs—with a dose of the approving wonder inspired in us by straw-into-gold recycling feats. There’s a sober classicism to her strange urns and square, tapestry-like works made from postconsumer waste, as well as an efficient, impersonal quality to their mysterious serial production. These qualities fend off the threat of discordant wackiness that often curses such found-material endeavors, and Vieira achieves an unsettling, un-gimmicky elegance with her environments of plastic overload.

At Klaus von Nichtssagend, you had to crouch down, as if entering a cave, to investigate the objects assembled in two lines down the length of the narrow front room. Baggy black construction-site safety netting made a shadowy low ceiling over the wastepaper basket-size, melted-plastic containers on the ground. Each of the fourteen pieces in this ongoing body of work, which the artist began this year, is titled *Vessel*, and boasts a unique shape and mottled surface, like worn glaze, formed from layers of the deathly bags, heated and stretched into uneven webs. Rough and irregular, the objects have an aura of earthy, excavated ancientness despite their unmistakably synthetic character. And though they appear rudimentary at first, details reveal their clever sophistication. Some balance ingeniously, despite their top-heavy or hourglass asymmetry; another has curiously dainty decorative handles. “A Pot to Piss In,” as the show is titled, is what you *don’t* have, according to the saying, when you’re desperately poor, maybe itinerant, so probably these aren’t meant for pee. It’s easy to imagine the catastrophic eventuality that would give rise to these improvised liquid-bearing things as rain collectors, more so than chamber pots, for the global exodus to higher ground.

In contrast, for “Disinherited,” at Company Gallery, you stood, uncramped, in a kind of airy tent to view works hung on the walls, through windows Vieira had cut into white netting. Dissolved, molded Styrofoam and resin encase printed shopping bags in these bubbly, warped slabs of collaged promotional text. Like her speculative utilitarian vessels, these graceful compositions made from repeated words culled from sheaves of identical bags, or collections of similar ones, suggest a make-do scenario of future scarcity. *I Thank You Thank*, 2017, is a messy Mondrian of the word THANK in a handful of cheerful

colors and typefaces; in *More Have Less Pay*, also from this year, lines of gold MORE radiate from black and blue circles of HAVE, and a solid aquamarine bag bursts from one corner like a flare. Such painterly moments are used judiciously for maximum visual effect, and to remind us that, though the artist has pointedly accumulated and fossilized them here, each individual bag is but a wisp.

Fellow artist Josh Kline, in a text accompanying the exhibition, writes of the omnipresent bags’ disposability as a metaphor, their un-biodegradable endurance as a “memorial in reverse” honoring the precarious, global super majority of “human lives spent building and maintaining this world while receiving greasy toxic trash, poorly made consumer goods, and alternative facts in return.” But Vieira, of course, did not simply assemble a monumental cross section of the infinite castoffs: She made stuff from them. Her work evokes a not-so-distant culture that celebrates—or, at least, accepts—thrown-away plastic as a new natural resource, something to be harvested from oceans and mined from landfills in order to make or have anything at all.

—Johanna Fateman



View of “Allyson Vieira,” 2017. Center: *You. Us! It’s personal.*, 2017. Netting: *Neither Here Nor There*, 2017. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

Jeff Donaldson

KRAVETS WEHBY GALLERY

Jeff Donaldson (1932–2004) attained many distinctions in his lifetime. In addition to chalking up a highly impressive list of academic and pedagogical achievements, culminating in a Ph.D. in African and African American art history from Chicago’s Northwestern University and, later in life, a long-standing deanship at Howard University in Washington, DC, he played a defining role in the development of a “trans-African” aesthetic that endeavored to help shape attitudes toward the African diaspora via unifying signs of protest, positivity, and cultural pride. A founding member of the Organization of Black American Culture, with which he participated through its Visual Arts Workshop in the painting of the historic *Wall of Respect*, 1967—a mounted pantheon of African American heroes and heroines that graced the exterior of a building in the heart of Chicago’s once so-called Black Belt—Donaldson was also a founding member of the collective AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists). Hatched amid the turbulent ferment of the civil rights movement, the philosophical precepts and aesthetic practices developed by the AfriCOBRA artists were geared toward the advancement of black liberation and self-determination, but with room for individual expression.

Now representing the artist’s estate, Kravets Wehby presented a compact yet potent selection of thirteen mostly mixed-media works executed between 1969 and 1999. Consistently complex, intricate, and finely crafted, each of these pictures pulsates with a kaleidoscopic visual intensity hawking a fecund activation of politicized words and images. Unabashedly graphic in nature, especially the earlier works, form and content conspire seductively here to convey an idealized, but also