



What was the father to the inside of an object's name

by Matt Morris

In the dream, I walk across a parking lot and into a brick corridor. Gaps in the masonry permit shafts of light to glint in. The path wraps around the exterior of a building before turning inward. I enter what appears to be some kind of Asian restaurant. The space is mostly darkened, and in puddles of light I see a koi pond, several miniature gardens, and a series of sliding doors through which one dining room proceeds into the next.

"Incorporation denotes a fantasy, introjection a process...That fantasies are often unconscious does not mean they pertain to something outside the subject but rather that they refer to a *secretly perpetuated* typography...Why are some fantasies directed at the very metaphor of introjection?...Introjecting a desire, a pain, a situation means channeling them through language into a communion of empty mouths."¹

Casting Inside is not a collection of fantastical images, but rather a process. Of course, there are fantasies and images here, but my curiosity in these artists' works is attached to the ways that they act upon material, embedding that which is internalized into the form of their objects. We will need to understand their surfaces as extensions of the bodies and psyches of their makers. A Phyllis Bramson painting is not a screen that one would sit before, enjoying projections as if at a drive-in movie. Rather, Bramson, Josh Dihle, and Cathy Hsiao each process how meaning is produced from chains of signifiers, and further, how one might realize the relationship between those signifiers arranged within their work, and to what, and most of all, *how*, they attach to the significations that are carried by them.

Front Cover: Cathy Hsiao, *Mary Miss (Horizon)*, 2018
Inkjet print, gouache, plaster
Courtesy of the artist

I am groping, in the darkness in between the spots illumined by light dropped to the floor of the space. This process of meaning production winds through hell. And art history, which can be hell. And childhood, with all of its psychosexual formations, dark protrusions held by webs.

The first room is set up with a long banquet table full of people I recognized. I hear one say, "A paradox is involved here, in that in this initial phase the baby creates the object, but the object is already there, else he would not have created it. The paradox has to be accepted, not resolved."² I am invited to sit and eat with them, but think better of it. I am trying to find somewhere quiet to make notes about a dream I'd just woken from.

The first room is itself a paradox. The space, like the object (is the object), is already there, and, more, it is not distinguished from the matter that becomes us. "Something takes place at the level of this invisible, unthinkable subject...so one then embarks on this quasi-mythology...."³ The first room is a mother, a uterus. The potential for recognition, then, occurs in the having been before: two histories, imbricated but one extending further backwards beyond the other which is still, as of yet, itself. What is recognized may be me but might not be mine, might be hers, ours. The first room is a steel trap. The first room washed the spider out. In order to find somewhere to write, I venture inward.

So too does Josh Dihle, when he carves deeper into wood. Drawing from Dante, where language is hell, Dihle's relationship to pictures possesses hellish dimensions too, and the capacity for the painted surface to behave as an illusion is disrupted. The image is brought into question through his penetrative gestures: either embedding personal artifacts into the compositional space of small paintings, or departing from the common constitutive features of painting altogether through a series of low relief wood carvings. His production and my curating of these works both demonstrate a capacity to fantasize about introjection's process—it would be enough of an invasion into privacy to seek to know his images, those that sit in the pit of his stomach, hung around him

in the first room, but these pieces are all the more intimate in their invitation to make visible the internalization of the value systems and relationships that determine how the environments in which the artist's personal history resides are encoded along his insides. "What was the outside becomes the inside, what was the father [sic] becomes the super-ego."⁴ Splayed reproductive organs, art museum architectures, hardened fluids, populations of biological specimens that gently insist on the ambiguity of our corporeal borders are hybridized into dryad bodies he takes as his own as he cuts into them. They occur mystically, in the sense that the overlays are dazzling and dreadful, not-yet-quantified knowledges that project the speech of our present age inwardly. Eschatological endgame strategies in which labor and sex and consciousness and absence are characterized by Dihle's attentively hewn gestures.

Lacan says we introject fathers because symbolic systems of law recur in our self definitions. I am defined by a curator's hungry desire to know what his artist looks for, what he revisits when his work is formalized. Dihle, it would seem, hunts across a world ablaze, a forest fire in which wood nymphs and priapic carved idols burn as he wanders among them, is them. "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together...seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space."⁵

In the second room I pass through, dinner guests read from large, laminated menus, spiral bound and covered with full color photographs of the items available for order. I look down across someone's shoulder and see a page of the menu that shows paintings for sale: modestly priced, seemingly ink on silk, mostly depicting flowering trees. I wonder where they are stored.

A question of storage denotes interiority, and where those insides occur characterizes Cathy Hsiao's ongoing experimental research. Hers is a practice predicated on cavities—that of the mold, that of the gullet, that of the voice or absence thereof. While Dihle's

objects act upon a father's wishes for how painterly strategies have been made to perform in service of or rebellion from the image, Hsiao's process is one that tests how disparate materials behave relationally when held within the gesture of her sculptural works. How might, for example, a slurry of concrete, plaster, zinc mesh, brazilwood, turmeric, chamomile tea, and indigo affect itself chemically, physically, formally? Audiences are asked to observe the effects of the casting process, where color and texture blossom in unpredictable ways across rigid puddles hanging against the gallery wall or otherwise installed responsively to the conditions of the room.

The second room is, I think, seen behind our reflections in the mirror. A phantom always departing which the rhetoric of the gallery environ attempts to stabilize. It is only the failure of this attempt that has been called beauty. Likewise, what Hsiao casts inside is haunted by the certain possibility of a space now vacated by the material we witness in her installations. Elsewhere: absence, loss, a grave clawed apart and gaping. The threshold across which an introjection proceeds; "not simply the symmetrical displacement of an object from the outside to the inside, but a movement from the outside *to the inside of an object's name....*"⁶ (Italics mine) Introjection here meaning a search to find the words—to a song, or those spoken by a father. Hsiao's fathers are women, as she processes the inheritances of forebears such as Land Artist Mary Miss or the abstract figurations of Louise Bourgeois. The second room is an image of an excavation or a cell.

There are other ways that the material trace of Hsiao's objects signal potentialities for acting into a social matrix, where these processes of outside entering begin again always. Sometimes the objects are used in performances, or appear in proximity to song. Often they may be read as scripts and scores, representing what has been embedded as an act upon their contextualizing circumstances. Here, for me, they are dirges for a lost love object sung with lyrical grace, absolute vulnerability, and a measure of contempt for the myth of permanence that holds the white echo chamber of a gallery's interior.

The third room is noisy and crowded. An elaborately carved bar stocked with shelves of bottles takes up nearly half of the space. Many people are inebriated, slurring loudly. I notice some glasses of beer sitting on the floor amidst the feet of those seated and standing; I make sure to avoid knocking them over. I worry that I will forget the details of the dream of which I aimed to make a record. As I make my way to enter a fourth room, the bottom edge of my jeans catch on several shards of broken glass that are sticking up out of the floor. I struggle to free myself.

I have been writing about a dream about a dream. My consciousness is a nesting doll. The third room is an ethical orientation to the social, and the contradictions and transgressions that arise from those efforts. Love is (can be) destruction, and we have no foresight, no control, no show of willpower over that which introjects. We have internalized authority, and with it “an endless process of self-policing [that] reinforces parental proscriptions long after the parental authority has ceased to make its demands.”⁷ For decades, Phyllis Bramson has been recognizing, returning, intervening, collaging, and restructuring with attention to those parts of her childhood and the broader cultural landscape within which she came to regard herself. The composite parts of her formal language are not without controversy: often, orientalist kitsch and chinoiserie permute alongside clowns, fairytale characters, art historical quotations, dolls, cartoons, erotica, and spiders. Concerns about cultural appropriation and the reproduction of negative stereotypes trail behind her formidable exhibition record, but what is often overlooked is that those concerns appear in the paintings themselves. Bramson notices the unspoken dimensions of pleasure and fear that accompany symbolic violence, and her approach to her artworks cuts across cultural spheres to understand how disparate and often sullied histories are gathered into who we [are made to] become. Her paintings physicalize the excesses of received instructions, and she persists in making visible even those orders that distort and oppress women, minorities, and class systems divided by taste and access. Against those naysayers of her work, it would in fact be injustice to not remember the force and

effects of how young girls are taught to comply to male domination, or how caricature has been used to fetishize, commodify, colonize, and apprehend otherness.

Bramson's paintings are hardly mere collections of imagery; like the other artists in this exhibition, she works with physical integrations of form. In noticing her process of cutting apart and collaging found paintings and other pictures that precede her canvases, she invites her audience to participate in a sort of noticing how a signifier performs its task of meaning. Shifts from mass-produced kitsch, to found and altered paintings by unknown hands, into her own boisterous handiwork show the surfaces of her paintings to be sites of cultural contestation, where imperfect assumptions about authors, subjects, and interiors are made to crash about, frolicking toward their ruin.

In *Casting Inside*, we selected works by Bramson that track a spider encroaching upon bucolic images of home. The shadow figure is metaphoric for devices of abstraction which also overtake what might otherwise be conventional narrative imagery. For Bramson, a loss of innocence is among the effects of an introjection process.

"But what was this other adventurous self? Certainly the idea of everyone having an imaginative body as well as a physical one seemed likely to be connected in some way with the transfiguration of the object in the light of one's own dreams...These questions brought me back to thinking more about the phenomena of spreading the imaginative body to take the form of what one looked at. For might not this power to spread around objects of the outer world something that was nevertheless part of oneself, might it not be a way of trying to deal with the primary human predicament of disillusion through separation and jealousy and loss of love?"⁸

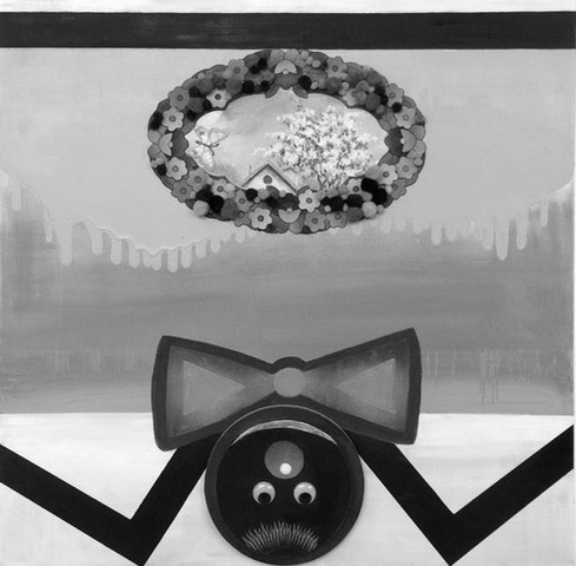
Artworks as imaginative bodies, artists and curators spreading around objects that are nonetheless part of us. It could almost be corny, fraught with symbolism and metaphor, if not for the visceral, psychological implications of what is exterior being drawn into a stomach lining, a rectum, a throat, a heart muscle

might effect. There are tooth marks. It's a trap. This is a song. We are a womb. And what of that fourth room in the dream, the one I had not yet entered for being caught on broken glass? In the context of this iteration of this exhibition, I'm inclined to think it's death, the memory of the basement of a flower shop. Notice that none of these rooms leave us discrete and separate from one another. This project wonders aloud at the possible usefulness of these psychoanalytics while disinvesting from subjecthood as desirable, terminal, eventual, at least in its traditionally conceived form. Rather, I want you inside me as if you are a shard of glass penetrating, while still honoring the emptiness that persists. Maybe only a melancholic would even need to ask these questions or express these desires. None of these works are images, but rather operations for comprehending the inferno that we form by being together.

Endnotes

- ¹ Torok, Maria and Nicola Abraham. *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. Print, pp. 125, 128.
- ² Winnicott, D. W. *Home is Where We Start From*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986. Print, p. 30.
- ³ Lacan, Jacques. *Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988. Print, p. 169.
- ⁴ *Ibid.* P. 169.
- ⁵ Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. New York: Mariner Books, 2013. First published in English, 1974. Print, p. —
- ⁶ Felman, Shoshana. *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. Print, p. 115.
- ⁷ Felluga, Dino Franco. "General Introduction to Psychoanalysis." *Introduction Guide to Critical Theory*. Purdue University. Accessed 5 June 2018. <<https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/definitions/introjection.html>>
- ⁸ Milner, Marion. *On Not Being Able to Paint*. New York: International Universities Press, 1957. Print, p. 36, 55.

Opposite: Phyllis Bramson, *Abstract Spidey*, 2013
Mixed media and collage on canvas
Courtesy of the artist and Zolla Lieberman, Chicago



Exhibition organized by Adds Donna and Matt Morris, Chicago, IL. The first iteration of the exhibition ran from November 17 to December 16, 2017, and travels to Essex Flowers in New York with the support of a Propeller Fund Grant. Thanks to Kaylee Wyant, Jerome Acks, Holly Murkerson, Robert Chase Heishmann, and Eric Ruschman for support in realizing this project. Sincere gratitude to Essex Flowers for being such supportive friends and hospitable hosts. Special thanks to D. Denenge Duyst-Akpem and William J. O'Brien for lending works from their collection to this traveling exhibition.

Phyllis Bramson is an artist based in Chicago. She is the recipient of three National Endowments, a Senior Fulbright Scholar, Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Rockefeller Foundation Grant, Artadia: the fund for Art and Dialog Jury Award, Anonymous Was A Woman Award, and selected as one of the Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Awardees for 2014. A thirty-year retrospective of Bramson's work was shown at the Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, IL, and traveled to the Chicago Cultural Center in 2016. She has been included in numerous group exhibitions such as Seattle Art Museum, Art Institute of Chicago, Contemporary Museum of Art/Chicago, Smart Museum, Renwick Museum, New Museum of Contemporary Art and the Corcoran Museum's 43rd Biennial. Over 40 one-person exhibitions including: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder Art Museum and Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (mid-career survey). Her work is held in many collections, including the Hirshhorn Museum, the Milwaukee Art Museum, National Museum of American Art, and the Brooklyn Museum.

Josh Dihle received his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL in 2012 and his BA at Middlebury College, VT in 2007. Recent solo exhibitions include Valerie Carberry Gallery in Chicago, Pleasant Plains in Washington D.C., and Autumn Space in Chicago. Group exhibitions include Annarumma Gallery in Naples, Italy, Shane Campbell Gallery in Chicago, Elmhurst Art Museum in Elmhurst, the University of Maine Museum of Art in Bangor, and

DUTTON in New York. Dihle teaches in the Painting and Drawing Department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and codirects the project space Julius Caesar.

Cathy Hsiao is an artist working in Chicago. She was born in New York City and immigrated to Taiwan at the age of three and back to the US after graduating high school in Taichung, Taiwan. She comes from a background in craft, specifically weaving animal fibers dyed with plants, raised by a devout Buddhist mother. "Plant and Animal Studio" keeps this name as acknowledgement to those histories. She holds a BA from the University of California Berkeley and a MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2017). She has been awarded the 2016 Emerging Illinois Artists Triennial Juror Prize, the New Artist Merit Society Fellowship, School of the Art Institute (2014 - 2017), a Peripheral Vision Arts Fellowship, a Cornell School of Criticism and Theory Certificate, amongst others.

Matt Morris is an artist, writer, and sometimes curator based in Chicago. He has presented artwork nationally and internationally including Shane Campbell Gallery, Queer Thoughts, and Gallery 400, Chicago, IL; The Mary + Leigh Block Museum of Art in Evanston, IL; The Elmhurst Art Museum in Elmhurst, IL; Fjord and Vox Populi in Philadelphia, PA; and The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH. He is a contributor to Artforum.com, *Art Papers*, *ARTnews*, *Flash Art*, and *Sculpture*; and his writing appears in numerous exhibition catalogues and artist monographs. He is a transplant from southern Louisiana who holds a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati, and earned an MFA in Art Theory + Practice from Northwestern University, as well as a Certificate in Gender + Sexuality Studies. In Summer 2017 he earned a Certification in Fairyology from Doreen Virtue, PhD. Morris is a lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Back: Josh Dihle, *Trap*, 2016
Rocks, fossils, found objects, and oil on wood
Courtesy of the artist

