

CHÂTEAU SHATTO

Ma

Curated by Fiona Connor

Opening Saturday December 10, 2016

3 – 6pm

Ma is an exhibition curated by Fiona Connor at Château Shatto, sprung from the artist's encounters with the photographic archives of Frank J. Thomas.

For *Ma*, Connor has composed a group of works that she understands as being nourished by similar concerns that she first responded to in Frank J. Thomas' photographs, more specifically his documentation of the paintings of John McLaughlin. *Ma* includes works by Judy Fiskin, Sydney de Jong, John McLaughlin, Frank J. Thomas, Audrey Wollen, Bedros Yeretizian and Fiona Connor. The exhibition design has been undertaken by Sebastian Clough.

Ma is the culmination of a series of projects by Connor including a display case at the Auckland Art Gallery, a lecture at Elam School of Fine Arts at University of Auckland and an exhibition at Minerva in Sydney, Australia. This exhibition takes Connor's research back to Los Angeles, where it began.

Frank J. Thomas was tasked with documenting McLaughlin's paintings to serve his retrospective and its attendant catalogue at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963. This process took him to McLaughlin's Laguna Beach home and studio, and to the back rooms of Los Angeles galleries in possession of his works. Making use of Southern California's ample and even light, Thomas photographed the paintings outside; in gardens and against exterior walls. McLaughlin's paintings are formally reductive. They forego an object in favor of unmodified planes of flat color, compositions the artist hoped would provoke a contemplation, as opposed to association, when meeting with an audience. In Frank J. Thomas' photographs, McLaughlin's paintings uphold their promise of anonymity and yet just beyond their boundary and before the photograph ends, the pictorial space is filled with stucco, foliage, easels, flowerpots, feet slipped in shoes.

It is this space – this interval between the boundary of the work and the boundary of the photograph – that first stirred Connor. She was prompted to look more closely at McLaughlin's work and found a practice that was warmer than its severe lines first suggested to her. Though McLaughlin's practice sits in the epochal belly of American Minimalism, he drew his conceptual preference in painting from the notion of *ma*, a Japanese word that describes an understanding of space through intervals. In reference to

art, *ma* cannot reside in compositional elements, but it is the experience that is produced in the intervals between these elements.

In Connor's own words, each work in *Ma* 'flirts with the outline or boundary of an object.' Whether this flirtation takes place at the material, metaphysical, linguistic or other boundary differs amongst the works. Each object in the show can also be understood as a mediation of a primary document, per the reproductions of Frank J. Thomas' 4x5 inch photographs that were the initial propellant for Connor's project.

Mingling with these reproductions in the first compartment of Château Shatto's exhibition space are five photographs from Judy Fiskin's series *Military Architecture*, made in 1975, the year before McLaughlin's death. Where McLaughlin's works leveraged the pure abstraction of geometric forms to produce non-specificity, Fiskin frames geometric forms that are loaded with the often-dark social history of military endeavor.

A reproduction of Diego Velázquez' *Rokeby Venus* is the visual base for Audrey Wollen's 20 minute video *Objects or Themselves*. Entwining the history and optics of the painting with her own, Wollen narrates Mary Raleigh Richardson's knifing of the *Rokeby Venus* and the physical incisions made in her own body as a tumor was removed. The bright and brittle reproduction of *Rokeby Venus* glows in contrast with Wollen's recollection of the physical life of the iconic painting, that exists between its existence as an image and as an object.

John McLaughlin's 1964 painting *#13* is compositionally split down its vertical centre and devoid of color. It succinctly achieves his aspiration to make painting that announces the absence of an object. Though it was unknown to Connor at the time the exhibition was planned, McLaughlin's work is concurrently the subject of a retrospective at LACMA, enabling many other examples of his paintings to be viewed in Los Angeles for the duration of our exhibition.

Connor's research methods tend to equally favor rigorous textual analysis and knocking on people's doors uninvited. Earlier this year, the artist sourced the address of the Dana Point home where McLaughlin lived from 1946–1976. For *Ma*, Connor will reproduce two windows from this house. The windows remain from when McLaughlin inhabited the home decades ago yet years of wear, touch-ups and retrofitting determine that what Connor is reproducing is not exactly the object that McLaughlin lived with, shaving off a little of the romanticism from this sculptural gesture.

A paperweight will secure this press release and a map of the exhibition on the white ledge at the front of the gallery. Bedros Yeretjian's small, cast sculpture is a descriptive timestamp of the exhibition, incised with calligraphy listing the name of the gallery, the title of the show and the dates of its duration.

At the opposing end of the gallery are a series of silkscreen reproductions of Los Angeles Times newspaper articles that feature John McLaughlin, from 1956–1987. Beyond the wall that divides Château Shatto's gallery space from the offices and 'showroom' are works by, and related to, Sydney de Jong. The first is a work by Connor, a reproduction of a bulletin board in de Jong's ceramic studio that serves as a receptacle for de Jong's inspirations and fascinations. The verisimilitude of Connor's reproduction is striking, yet her selected materials are secure, hard and cold where the source object is formed of weightless cuttings of paper. On the stained-pink office table is a set of ceramic plates, bowls and cups, intended to be used by the gallery's owners, staff and occupants during the exhibition. De Jong's ceramic practice is underscored by an insistence on her objects' 'usefulness' – and the ties between art, living and making.

On three Saturdays during the exhibition, Fiona Connor and Audrey Wollen will make public presentations in the gallery space. These are scheduled at 2pm on December 17, January 7 and January 14.

All inquiries can be directed towards Olivia Barrett olivia@chateaushatto.com