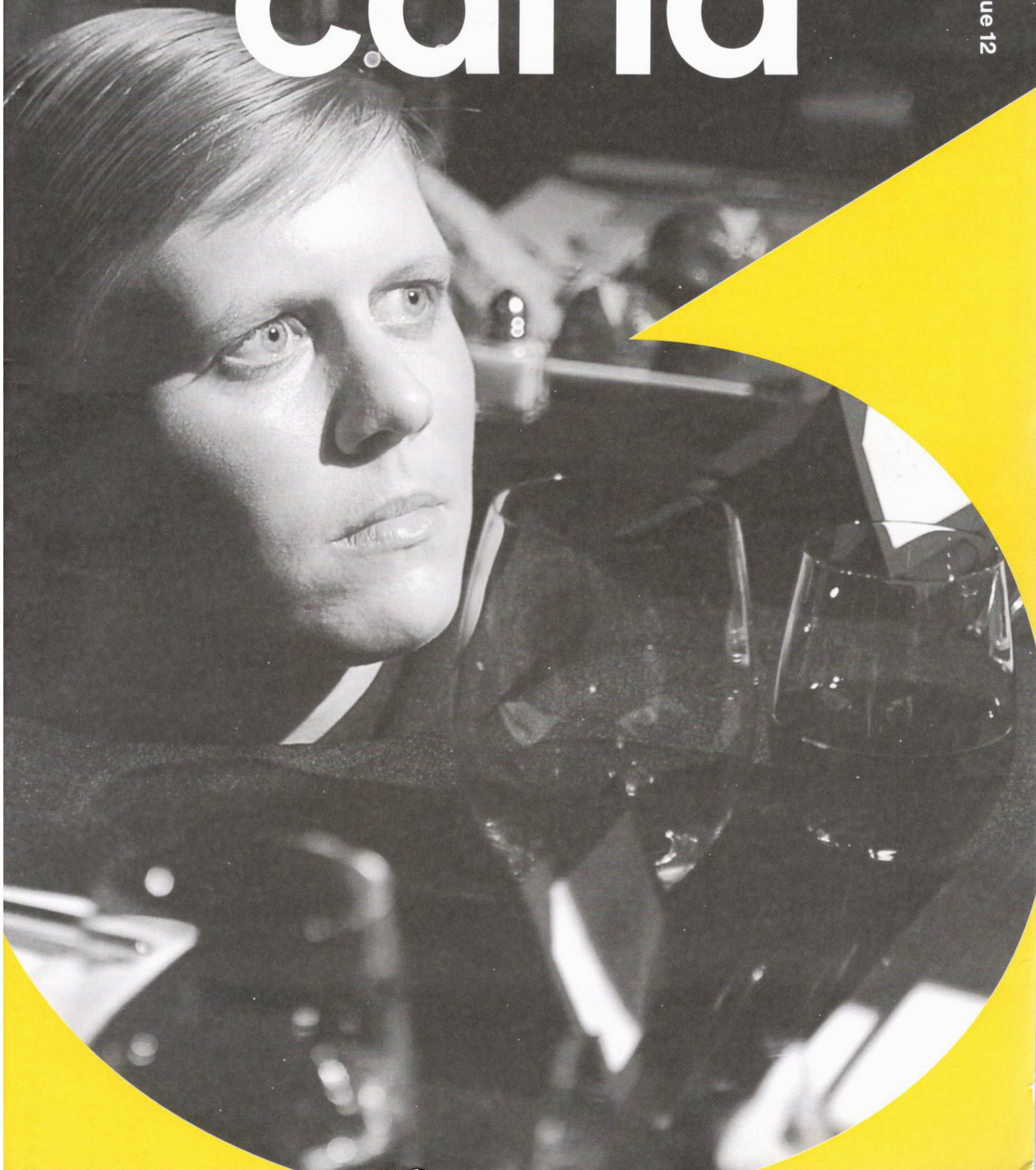


# carla

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ellipses, three large canvases of text—one in English, and two in the Southern African language of Setswana—are dispersed throughout the exhibition's cinematic installation. Hand-painted in a translucent wash of graphite and bleach, these semantic interludes directly thread back to the conceptual and linguistic snares metaphorically cast by the books and prints across the room. In one, permanently stained into the canvas with whitening bleach, Mokgosi transcribes—yet does not translate—a traditional oral proverb that, according to the artist, recounts a phantasmagoric fable. Another, in English and formatted as a formal academic footnote, asserts that democracy is inherently gendered—a written synthesis of Mokgosi's research (and a thesis conceptualized within his paintings). These almost dueling languages serve a dual purpose: he immunizes one language from symbolic erasure, while employing the other, English—itself a linguistic vestige of colonialism in Southern Africa—to complicate the idealized vision of a political system touted by neo-colonial forces.

Mokgosi ultimately frames the act of painting as an instructive, restitutive, and restorative one—an act akin to language in its ability to craft, frame, and laud that which yearns for historical (and contemporaneous) representation. As such, the exhibition suggests that the texts footnote the paintings, while the paintings themselves—intimate tableaux that unearth poetic moments

of individual agency against the backdrop of postcolonial discourse—append the texts. While Mokgosi's inclusion of an academic index directly encourages cultivation of an intellectually literate viewership, his scholarly generosity verges on overshadowing the transformational language of his paintings themselves. If Baby Suggs' lyrical sermon points to a radical reclaiming of personal agency—physically, spiritually, psychologically—amidst the violent throes of oppression, then Mokgosi's painterly impulse echoes this through his attentive, indeed loving, approach to his subjects. This begs a final question: should painting—or should these (exquisitely crafted) paintings—necessitate such textual prerequisites?

## Chris Kraus at Château Shatto March 24–May 19, 2018

"The detective novel is the only novel truly invented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the detective novel, the hero is dead at the very beginning, so you don't have to deal with human nature at all, only the slow accumulation of facts..."<sup>1</sup>

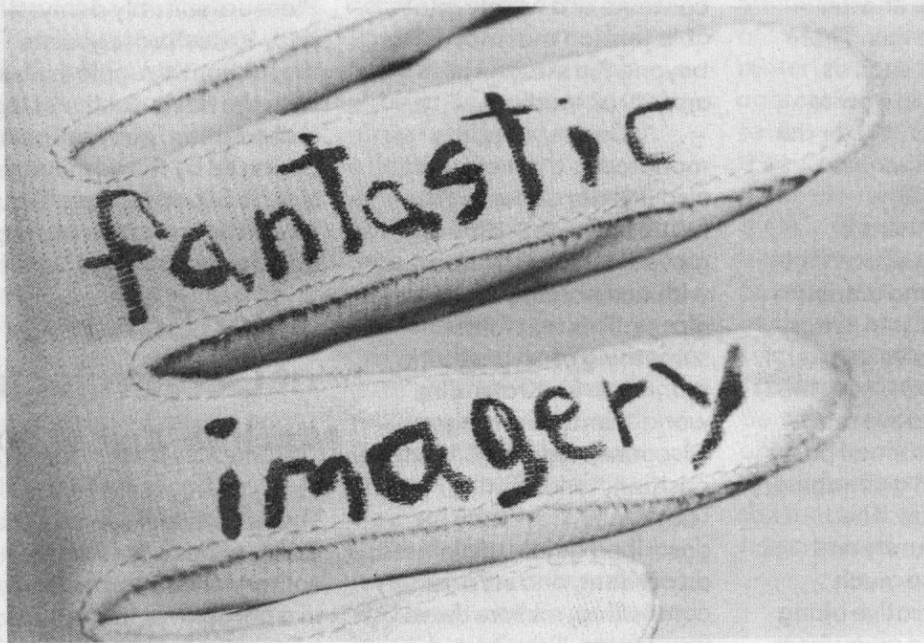
Laurie Anderson

Maybe it's the fact that Chris Kraus' videos so effectively mirror and index their New York City location during the city's grittiest and most annoyingly hyped period (mid-'80s to early '90s)—this, in turn, a fond and early touchstone for my own aesthetic fascination. Or

maybe it's the New Yorkiness of voice in Kraus' works, seeming always grimly determined, always moving despite their operative, plaguing demystification of structure, of narrative, of the image. Dave Hickey, in a different context, says "Think of it this way: Up in the front of the boat the guys in power are tossing bales of 'inessentials' overboard—content, rhetoric, image, narrative, genre, contingency, complexity, and desire all go over the side—while, back in the stern, as the boat chugs along, a bunch of women and queers are frantically hauling those bales out of the water and back into the boat."<sup>2</sup>

Kraus' videos at Château Shatto, comprising the entirety of her work in the medium, have the air of a reworked bale, marked as they are by uncertainty and anxiety, particularly towards narrative. Most of the narrative outlines conjured in her videos are rudely and routinely interrupted, often mid-sentence, by shifts in tone and voice. These moves align Kraus with the structuralist strategy—better on paper—of pointing at the mechanics of film itself by, I suppose, making it difficult to watch, understand, or care about.

Kraus' video works were made in the decades immediately following minimalism and conceptualism, spanning 1982–1995, in which each were in their "post-" phases—the chronically neurotic condition so many movements find themselves in in academically-minded contemporary art in which



Chris Kraus, *The Golden Bowl or Repression (2)* (2018). Digital print on 100 lb. uncoated paper. Image courtesy of the artist and Chateau Shatto. Photo: Elon Schoenholz.

Chris Kraus, *How to Shoot A Crime (3)* (2018). Digital print on 100 lb. uncoated paper. Image courtesy of the artist and Chateau Shatto. Photo: Elon Schoenholz.

the “questioning” of every structure became as essential to art as form, color, or medium once were.

But whatever the reason, I find Kraus’ work both endlessly watchable and tedious, kinetic and oddly cold. Kraus, in a manner that feels very French, regularly presents the warmth of sexuality, desire, passion, and storytelling through the lenses of conflict, sadomasochism, murder, and madness.

To put it more succinctly, Kraus’ films are not fun, but nor are they merely, drably, good for you. Kraus makes heavy use of voice over, undercutting its associative omniscience with readings, diaristic passages, and text out of context, routinely interrupted by a shift or cut in the video stream. Several works reference the structure of crime or procedural television shows—gritty, mournful saxophone and hard-to-decipher police chatter thrown into the mix. There are characters, such as the dominatrix in *How to Shoot a Crime* (1987), or the kidnappers in *Sadness at Leaving* (1992).

Mainly, there is philosophizing, of both the pontifical and diaristic sort so particular to Kraus’ written work, in voice over form. *Terrorists in Love* (1983) features a narrative read over scenes of a small party of individuals in an imaginary boat on a hillside. The spoken text is funny and squirrely, not so much moving the narrative along as ping-ponging away from and around whatever Kraus’ central conceits are. It’s an evasive filmmaking,

making its way periodically into abject and sadomasochistic territory. In a long work, *Foolproof Illusion* (1986), which fixates on French dramatist Antonin Artaud and his “theatre of cruelty,” the abjectness is literalized in scenes of Kraus and others declaiming some poor out-of-frame sod as “filthy,” “disgusting,” “fecal.”

Perhaps the most “New York” aspect of Kraus’ films are the lingering shots of the city’s crappy back ends—a visual implication of NYC’s toughness so commonly dramatized as to soften its authentic contemporary misery. Scrolling text in *In Order to Pass* (1982) obsesses over the act of remembering as partial and incomplete, and thus a plaguing disappointment. History of course coaxes us to regard remembrance as particular and essential to culture and its continuing survival, and it is here that Kraus begins to find the contours of a widely relatable tension that moves beyond the structuralist anxiety of medium.

One set of prints mounted to a gallery wall, also titled *In Order to Pass* (2018), show four different gloved hands and forearms, with text painted onto the gloves. This text forms something of an aesthetic manifesto for Kraus’ film work: “Fantastic Imagery,” “Disconnectedness,” “Juxtaposition,” and “Sitting.” That Kraus’ work may be described as idle, disjointed, discordant, and surprisingly compelling, mirrors these four tenets. *Gravity and Grace* (1995), Kraus’ feature-length final film, features a hilarious scene at the end

where Gravity, our heroine throughout, meets with a curator at the New Museum who describes her work as “neither abject nor sublime,” pontificating at screamingly funny length on Gravity’s media and work as “not shitty enough” for the contemporary moment. A befuddled Gravity exclaims, “My work is made out of garbage!”

Kraus’ film work would seem to reach back beyond the structuralist work of the ’60s and ’70s to an earlier realm, of montage and vignettes—the parlance of Sergei Eisenstein with the tone of Chantal Ackerman. Kraus’ film aesthetic limits the viewer to a fits-and-starts narrative, and one continually bungled by its own mechanics: the fact of being a film or an image, the desire to seduce and move one emotionally through the movement of a picture, the distillation of a narrative into a cultural form never matched in real, lived life. Pleasure suitably demystified, Kraus’ protagonists throughout struggle instead with the basic duality of logic and emotion, perhaps best captured by the dominatrix in *How to Shoot a Crime*: “You have to be sensitive to people in order to be shitty to them.”

## Ben Sanders at Ochi Projects

March 03–April 14, 2018

The 1912 gospel song “In the Garden” describes a moving, solitary encounter with Jesus in a garden—a metaphorical account of personal salvation. Over the past century, it has been interpreted by a wide range of artists from Mahalia

1. Laurie Anderson, “Three Songs for Paper, Film and Video,” 1984, *United States Live*, Warner Brothers, LP.

2. Dave Hickey, *25 Women: Essays on Their Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 62.

Matt Stromberg