

# ARTFORUM

a bizarre green growth with hints of sunny yellow, similarly erupts from gray. In *Le Vin des Fleurs*, 1969, the colorful light has dispersed across the picture plane. Both *Le Temps Space du Pissenlit* and *Le Vin des Fleurs* are majestically large—tours de force, in which the life force, signified by the flourishing green, triumphs over threatening death and decay. The paintings are manically chaotic and uncontrollably turbulent—whirlpools of luminous curves.

It is customary to accept Duchamp's assertion that Matta was exploring "regions of space previously unexplored in art," and it is even more routine to speak of Matta's works, along with those of many others regarded as seminal modern, as "representations" of space-time—that is, as influenced by Einstein's theory of relativity. Matta himself says that he was exploring a region "made of oscillations, waves, beams . . . a nexus of vibrations." But there are other strains in his practice: The particular drawings and paintings in the exhibition were characterized first of all by their mix of geomorphic and biomorphic forms, and by shadowy gray and ruptures of light. They depict a nightmarish Manichean struggle, with an uncertain outcome. The flowers defiantly blossom, but they are small, and float in a sea of murky, shadowy green that seems likely to reclaim them. It is as if Matta were a kind of gnostic, possessed by the demiurge and desperate to be saved by the light, which suddenly appears in miraculous flickers.

—Donald Kuspit

## Sadamasa Motonaga

FERGUS MCCAFFREY

One of the coolest pieces of ephemera in the catalogue accompanying this exhibition of Sadamasa Motonaga's later work is the artist's "My Abstract Manga Manifesto," a sequence of four line drawings published in a 1963 edition of *Bijutsu techō*, a Japanese art journal. Consisting of wordless, biomorphic shapes, the illustrations lay out the knowingly "low" and faintly obscene mode of abstract painting that would become central to the artist's practice until his death in 2011.

Born in 1922, Motonaga joined the Gutai group in 1955, parting ways with the avant-garde movement a year before its dissolution in 1972. A lifelong fan of manga, Motonaga had let a cartoonish sensibility permeate his work early on—see, for example, the unmodulated white plane of *Sakubin 66-2*, 1966 (the only Gutai-era work in this show). After his departure from Gutai, this quality of his work became explicit, settling into an aesthetic of precise lines, vaguely figurative motifs, and shading executed with airbrush, a technique he picked up during a decisive visit to New York in 1966. Given the affinities between this psychedelic work and the commercial illustration of the era, one might see Motonaga's compositions as a kind of Pop; but, as critic Tomohiko Murakami argues in his catalogue essay, such a label is misleading, for Motonaga is taking mass culture not as a subject—as a thing to be parodied or critiqued—but rather as a kind of grist for the mill, the raw material for a new language of painting.

Though they are ostensibly abstract, many of the works in this show—*Polygonal Line*, 1979; *Howa Howa*, 1978; *Two in Order*, 1985; *White Triangle in the Black*, 1979; and the more recent *White Triangle and Black Flows*, 2006—can be read as landscapes. In each, a dark band along the bottom margin delineates the bleak horizon, and an airbrushed field lights up the sky in a chilly, crepuscular gradient. Motonaga fills this empty space with unusual shapes, like floating orbs and folding ribbons, and the impression we get is that of sci-fi spacecraft or quasi-animate kites. Certain of these motifs reoccur across his compositions, but they are always shifting, alive and amoeboid, and never feel routine. The landscape itself is front and center in his drawings for *Moko MokoMoko*,

a children's book that was released in 1977 and sold more than a million copies in Japan. (The full set of original drawings, dated 1976, were on view here.) The wonderfully bizarre sequence of images, done in dense, saturated acrylic, chronicles the fate of a mountain as it bursts from the ground, devours a brightly colored tree, and then explodes into an array of flying saucers that race off toward the pages' margins.

Via picture books and public murals, Motonaga sought to bring his abstract art to the masses, and there is a clear affinity between his approach and that of Japan's Superflat generation of the 1990s, whose anime-influenced Pop was as likely to appear in a blue-chip gallery as on a T-shirt or key chain. Motonaga, for his part, changed directions during this time, bringing back the thick, gestural strokes and drippy cascades of acrylic of his Gutai-era art, and combining these marks with blurry spray-painted forms. To my mind, the integration isn't successful; the works lose the cohesiveness and subdued, spaced-out whimsy that made his earlier output so appealing.

—Lloyd Wise



Sadamasa Motonaga, *Two in Order*, 1985, oil on canvas, 23 1/4 x 19 1/4".

## Josh Tonsfeldt

SIMON PRESTON GALLERY

In Josh Tonsfeldt's recent exhibition "Adrenaline," images had a curious, often fugitive relationship to their sources, supports, and meanings. The New York-based artist prints photographs onto a variety of fragile-seeming surfaces and employs unusual processes such as hydrography to investigate the visual, conceptual, and emotional arenas of everyday life as mediated by the ubiquitous electronic screen. "Familiarity becomes something slippery in the timespan of making a picture," he writes, characterizing this mutable relationship as "a machine-body behavior ready to play itself out in situations un tethered from its source." Juxtaposing his part-photographic works with part-sculptural objects, Tonsfeldt holds our certainties about space, time, and the "real" up to a penetrating light.

The smartphone has long been an important tool in our filtration of reality; for *Adrenaline Tattoo* (all works 2015), Tonsfeldt makes the ubiquitous device the conceptual center of a composition that collapses the intimate into the public, the observer into the observed. The work, a pigment print with ink and spray-paint additions, depicts a man receiving a tattoo while holding up a phone to document the process, as seen through a store window printed with the word ADRENALINE. This image layers representations that range from the material (the letters on the window), to the immaterial (the image transmitted by the phone), to that which is inscribed on the body (the tattoo). Printed as it is on a sheet of crumbling gypsum cement—a support more often associated with the architectural construction of a gallery space than with its contents—the work evokes a tenor that is doubly hard to establish.

The small *Lenox Hill*, which features a photo of the artist's wife's hand, one of her fingers encased in an oximeter, after she gave birth at the titular New York hospital, and the much larger triptych *BOM-DAC*,



Josh Tonsfeldt, *Adrenaline Tattoo*, 2015. UV-cured pigment print on Hydrocal, spray paint, epoxy resin, ink, 32 x 48".

a view of an airplane passenger's decorative hat or scarf shot from the seat behind the person, both show Tonsfeldt taking a similar approach to their respective subjects, fragmenting and re-representing them as skeins of more-or-less blurry color just barely coating stuff that appears on the verge of dissolution. But what could so easily convey little more than a tentative hand—a self-effacing aesthetic of provisionality—comes across instead as a subtle play on intimacy, vision, and the weird selectivity of memory. There's an unexpected poignancy to these works, a sense of struggling for definition that locates the technological firmly within the human.

Stranger still are three untitled works in which framed sheets of prism film entomb wire bundles and the like so that the impersonal objects seem to float in fields of silver. There's also a television, stripped of its screen and hung like a painting so that its grid of blue-white LED lights casts a cold glow across the room, suggesting that everything we see is defined in large part by these semi-visible patterns of light. Another flat-screen television lies on a pedestal, opened partway like a book so that the video that plays on it arrives chopped up into its component parts: It has dissolved into part-images and shadows, harsh brightness and impenetrable shade. The electronic production and dissemination of pictures has become so effortless that it's almost shocking to see their carriers pulled apart. Much more than a "simple" set of media, this system, with all its promises and demands, Tonsfeldt reminds us, is in our blood.

—Michael Wilson

## Jason Simon

### CALLICOON FINE ARTS

In an age when the entire history of recorded music is just a click away, it's tempting to dismiss radio as a hopelessly antiquated medium. After all, why rely on a DJ when Spotify and iTunes allow you to compile your own playlists? Yet, as is often remarked, the self-curated online/digital experience, for all its potential, can ultimately become isolating. Conventional radio at its best retains the power to establish and strengthen the bonds of community by making a virtue of broadcasters' idiosyncratic tastes and voices. And local radio can add to that a capacity to respond to specificities of place while also allowing for a shared experience within a given locale.

Jason Simon's recent exhibition "Request Lines Are Open" documented the resonance of one particular example of local radio, a show called *Soul Spectrum* on WJFF, a public station based in Jeffersonville, New York, close to the town in which this gallery started and from which it takes its name. In addition to playing music, the host, Liberty Green, reads dedications and letters by, from, and to local prison inmates and their friends and families. Simon, whose studio is also within WJFF's reach, juxtaposed photographs of the station and Green's house with a box of metal auto-body-repair dollies, twenty

crates containing the DJ's archive of correspondence, and a vintage horn speaker—salvaged from behind the screen of the Callicoon Cinema—that plays *Soul Spectrum* broadcasts.

Also included in the exhibition, secreted in the gallery's darkened basement, was a Super 8 film, *In and Around the Ohio Pen*, 2014. An eleven-minute edit of quarter-century-old footage showing curator and writer Bill Horrigan wandering around a derelict Columbus jail, it also features the incongruously jaunty piano stylings of Horrigan's sometime collaborator, the filmmaker Chris Marker. In conjunction with the artifacts and images on the floor above, the film conjures a singular vision of the relationship between incarcerated individuals and the culture from which they are excluded. With its fresh-looking graffiti and broken-but-still-present institutional furniture, the vacant building has a Mary Celeste-like quality of mysterious abandonment and aesthetically pleasing decay, one that evokes the "ruin porn" popular in the last few decades.

There's no doubting Simon's committed interest in the subject of imprisonment and the particular kinds of communication that go along with it—a lengthy interview excerpted in the press release and available for perusal in the gallery exhaustively demonstrated as much—but as is the case with all too many research-based projects, we were left wondering what the artist had achieved beyond the mere documentation of an extant (albeit interesting) phenomenon. Simon's photographs are certainly evocative, painting WJFF as a ragtag but sincere enterprise with an endearing residue of signage, equipment, and, of course, records; but the images are arguably a little too melancholic, not just unpeopled but positively ghostly. Even the prisoners' letters are mostly hidden from view, filed away in their envelopes, their writers unnamed. Given that it

View of "Jason Simon," 2015. On floor: 2LGA5, 2015. On wall, from left: *Production*, 2015; *Nobodys Road*, 2015. Photo: Chris Austin.



is a still-vital resource, the station is made to seem oddly static, that transplanted speaker in particular feeling like a relic. The requiem is premature. As a compact encapsulation of a phenomenon, a portrait of an exchange between a medium and its users, "Request Lines Are Open" succeeded, but the connections it attempted to make between a form and its audience, sound and its echoes in the visual, remained blurred.

—Michael Wilson

## Rodrigo Valenzuela

### ENVOY ENTERPRISES

The photographic works in Rodrigo Valenzuela's "Hedonic Reversal" (all works 2014) depict ruins, or representations of ruins, which have been constructed from stark white elements—lath, chalk, a crumbling material that might be drywall or polystyrene—and set against a saturated black background. They have the air of abandoned infrastructure