

Marching to the Beat

July 14 – August 26, 2017

Kutluğ Ataman
Charles Atlas
Andrea Bowers
Tammy Rae Carland
Chelsea Culprit
Rineke Dijkstra
Nicole Eisenman
Brendan Fernandes
Aaron Garber-Maikovska
Anna Halprin
Juliana Huxtable
Karen Kilimnik
Becky Kolsrud
David Korty
Paul Lee
Li Ming
Kelly Nipper
Catherine Opie
Silke Otto-Knapp
Puppies Puppies
Yinka Shonibare
Malick Sidibé
Maya Stovall
Wolfgang Tillmans
Francis Upritchard
Grace Weaver
Carrie Mae Weems

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Crowd Crush

Julia Bryan-Wilson



Catherine Opie

Football Landscape #11 (Poway vs. Mira Mesa, Poway, CA), 2007

C-Print

49 x 65 inches framed

© Catherine Opie, Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

In his 1895 book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, Gustave Le Bon declared: “Crowds are only powerful for destruction. Their rule is always tantamount to a barbarian phase.... When the structure of a civilization is rotten, it is always the masses that bring about its downfall.”¹ Throughout the early twentieth century, crowds were characterized as both teeming hordes—racialized as other and classed as infectious agents—and as obedient, conformist throngs, stamping out traces of such deviant otherness. Perhaps because of its incipient elitism, the history of modern

Western art has focused on individuals—from the detailed faces in portraiture both painted and photographic to the efforts of the solo performance artist. Not only that, but distinctly individual authorship, along with its attendant, overly vaunted qualities of originality and uniqueness, is one of the ostensible hallmarks of avant-garde art. More rare, arguably because these thematics are more stubbornly resistant to conventional models of representation, are images of co-existence, togetherness, or collaboration. Within some narrow histories of art, they are

dismissed as the purview of socialist realism with its imperatives to illustrate collective work literally, resulting in canvases of farmers laboring in a field. The grim counterpoint to such cheery depictions of bodies synched together in some sort of unison are those that show violent repression, forced labor, or the presumed terrors of urban proximity.

Against Le Bon’s politically reactionary assessment, others have looked at the effervescence of street demonstrations, the ebullience of the rabble coming together, and the open generosity that can flow when a populace amasses. In his influential 1960 book *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti parses a range of crowd formations, including “packs,” and describes some of the ecstasy that can attend the sensation of merging, as when people dance and begin to move as a singular entity:

Density and equality become one and the same. In the end, there appears to be a single creature dancing, a creature with fifty heads and a hundred legs and arms, all performing in exactly the same way and with the same purpose. When their excitement is at its height, these people really feel as one, and nothing but physical exhaustion can stop them. Thanks to the dominance of rhythm, all throbbing crowds have something similar in their appearance.²

With more recent theories of populations, self-organization, and group identification, including Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s “assemblage,” Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s “multitude,” and Bruno Latour’s “network,” the crowd takes on more flexible, potentially resistant forms.³ The multitude, for instance, is characterized by surging uprisings in which the divisions and hierarchies enforced by armed globalism are bridged in recognition

of “life in common” within struggles against capitalism.⁴

The artists in *Marching to the Beat* examine the contradictions embedded in its titular exhortation—some reject the command to fall into line; others embrace the opportunity to sway together, forming new alliances. Taking its inspiration from the limber sense of sociality modeled above all by dance, as in Canetti, the exhibition brings together works in a diverse range of media (including sculpture, video, performance, photography, painting, and sound) to tell a complex story about what communal spaces, and shared projects, might look and feel like. Choreographer and Bay Area legend Anna Halprin, who has emphatically asserted the power of dance as a form of “community renewal,” is one relevant forerunner for *Marching to the Beat*.



Fig. 1

Malick Sidibé

Baila Club Darsalame, 1962

The earliest piece in the show is from 1962 by Malian photographer Malick Sidibé, who was often drawn to clubs and other sites

of youth culture. The black-and-white silver-gelatin print, *Baila Club Darsalame*, depicts a tall man and a short woman dancing in tight embrace under balloons, a festive banner and a photo of Modibo Keita, the first President of Mali. [Fig. 1] While the woman smiles broadly so that we can catch a glimpse of her teeth, the man stares at the camera, perhaps a little stunned, with a frilly, coned party hat atop his head. The couple has found each other but they still appear lost; their dance is both intimate and exposed.



Fig. 2
Nicole Eisenman
Pagan Guggenheim, 1994

In keeping with the empathetic eye of Sidibé, Rineke Dijkstra and Wolfgang Tillmans train their lenses on club-goers. In Dijkstra's *Krazyhouse* series, she photographed teenagers she met at a discotheque in Liverpool. Tillmans's *The Spectrum/Dagger* (2014) was taken at a queer club and shows a tender moment of laughter and friendship.

Bathed in an orange-red light, the group is fully absorbed in each other, not acknowledging the presence of the camera; we as viewers do not have full access to their scene. Tillmans grasps the multi-directional desire—the thrill, the crush—that can arise from the sensation of being surrounded by others.

The coexistence of several registers is typical of the entire exhibition, which explores the rich contradictions embedded in our understanding of what it means to congregate. Nicole Eisenman's colored ink drawing *Pagan Guggenheim* (1994) evokes the spiraling architecture of Pieter Breugel's *Tower of Babel* (c. 1563) as she presents a warped version of Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic museum ramp. [Fig. 2] In her rendition, the Guggenheim's spiral becomes a seemingly endless vortex within which hundreds of bodies scramble over each other in a frenzied attempt to climb up. Some are fighting, some are kissing, and it becomes impossible to distinguish pleasure from pain, grimace from grin, in this grotesque and compelling bacchanal/battle scene. Other painters in the show, such as Silke Otto-Knapp, Grace Weaver, and Becky Kolsrud portray bodies dissolving into one another—sometimes the outcome is a riot of limbs, other times a carefully orchestrated ballet.



Fig. 3
Yinka Shonibare
Un Ballo in Maschera (A Masked Ball), 2004

Dance as an ambivalent discourse—one tied to bodily liberation but also to discipline—is a key theme in *Marching to the Beat*. In his thirty-two minute video, *Un Ballo in Maschera (A Masked Ball)* (2004) Yinka Shonibare updates Verdi's opera of the same name by showing a female king, dressed in the artist's signature wax patterned fabrics, being shot during an elaborate, music-less dance. [Fig. 3] Unlike Verdi's version, which was based on the 1792 assassination of Gustav III, the monarch's death in Shonibare's work is temporary—she springs back almost immediately to her feet, scrambling cause and effect, and heightening the theatricality of the video's looping narrative. As Shonibare has commented, his use of masquerade relates to the transformations made possible by the collective space of the carnivalesque, in which strictly divided classes and races might temporarily co-mingle⁵.

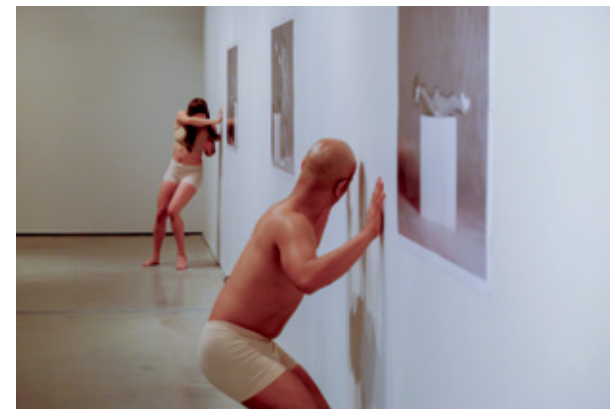


Fig. 4
Brendan Fernandes
Still Move, 2015

Many artists in *Marching to the Beat* interrogate the intersection between gendered space and dancing bodies. A queer Canadian of Kenyan and Indian descent, Brendan Fernandes examines the politics of embodiment, and in his performance *Still Move* (2015), he deploys a seemingly simple formal conceit—dancers use many parts of their bodies to press a diverse range of “flesh-colored” rubber balls against the gallery walls—to think about the mutuality between stasis

and activity, confinement and release. [Fig. 4] Again signaling ambivalence, in Fernandes's work, the mediating object (the ball) both limits how the dancers can move but also helps alleviate tension in their working muscles. In some iterations of this piece, the balls are left scattered on the floor of the gallery; in this way, Fernandes uses abstract sculptural objects as a proxy for masses of bodies. Similarly, in his “touch paintings” such as *Summer Skin* (2016), Paul Lee uses tambourines and canvases to create oddly intimate couples that are minimal and ceremonial, aloof and temptingly tactile.

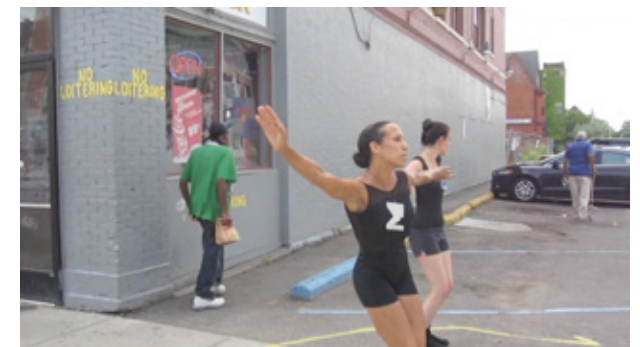


Fig. 5
Maya Stovall
The Liquor Store Theatre, vol. 2, no. 2, 2017

Detroit-based Maya Stovall performs her *Liquor Store Theatre* “dance ethnography” on city sidewalks outside of corner stores. Documented by crisply edited videos that include interviews and conversations with nearby residents, the performances have featured Stovall alone, but have often taken the shape of duets with locals and trios that deploy a moveable abstract sculpture as a third dancing body. [Fig. 5] Stovall's work probes the friction generated between the present landscapes she occupies—which she is careful to situate with establishing shots of street signs, billboards, etc.—and her studied movements that include citations of ballet and modernist dance sequences. It also unfolds within the context of the contemporary U.S., in which race, gender, age, and class, among other factors, determine and restrict which

bodies can and cannot gather together in public space; certain configurations—such as a group of black youth—are heavily policed and their very presence can be unjustly criminalized. By presenting the contested territory in front of corner stores as a generative site for dancerly exploration, *Liquor Store Theater* functions as a celebration of resilience and everyday acts of resistance.



Fig. 6
Li Ming
MEIWE #1, 2015

Carrie Mae Weems's photographic triptych *A Single's Waltz in Time* (2013) situates a black female body dancing in relationship to architecture; framed in the center of an ornate room, decorated by gauzy curtains and elaborate crown molding, a woman revels in taking up space, the fabric of her printed dress whirling around her as she moves. Her hands and feet are blurred, so that even as she is forever arrested by the click of the shutter, she will always be represented as fluid and in motion. As with Weems, some of the artists in *Marching to the Beat* turn not to the collective or to public space, but rather withdraw from the mass and go inward. Li Ming's video *MEIWE #1*, 2015, is in part a lyrical conjuring of some of the alienation of being in a crowd, using found footage of athletic events and commercials for sporting goods to highlight a hollow togetherness. [Fig. 6] Even when surrounded by others, we can be alone. Its title is derived from an improvised poem written by the boxer and activist Muhammad Ali in 1975, when a student

asked him to come up with a verse on the spot and he responded "Me, we." Glenn Ligon created a sculptural tribute to this utterance, *Give Us a Poem (Palindrome #2)*, 2007, and in turn Ming pays homage to Ligon's neon version, creating a multi-layered evocation of celebrity, isolation, and identification. Ming sends the phrase spinning as an overlaid graphic element in the video, rotating it so that the *me* becomes indistinguishable from the *we*—one of collectivity's perils, and one of its most enticing promises.

Indeed, sports can emphasize the conflict that arises when individuals are grouped into teams. In Catherine Opie's photograph *Football Landscape #2 (Fairfax vs. Marshall, Los Angeles, CA)* (2007), the players stand spread across the grass, their faces occluded by their helmets and their sense of purpose obscure as they prepare for the next play. In a different image from her football series, *Football Landscape #11 (Poway vs. Mira Mesa, Poway, CA)*, (2007), the teams engage each other on a rainy field; as their bodies tussle and clash, it is impossible in this instant to tell who is winning and who is losing.

Bodies gathered together in space are always contingent formations and will be understood differently based on who the bodies are and where they choose to gather. Though theories of the crowd emerging from 19th century French theorists posited swarms as dangerous sites of mindless de-individuation, or uncontrollable mob rule, masses of people on the street have—historically as well as in our own era—been an important engine of protest and have successfully agitated for progressive social change. The artists in *Marching to the Beat* examine some of those contingencies, looking to the crowd for direction in a moment marked by negative political turmoil as a possible space of hope, of respite, and of collective energy.

Notes

¹ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, second edition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1896), p. xviii.

² Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* [1960], trans. Carole Stewart (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), p. 32.

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴ Hardt and Negri, "Preface: Life in Common," *Multitude*, xi–xviii.

⁵ "Yinka Shonibare by Anthony Downey," *BOMB* 93 (Fall 2005); <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2777/yinka-shonibare>.

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Fig. 4: Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

Fig. 5: Courtesy the artist and Todd Stovall.

Fig. 6: Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space Shanghai.

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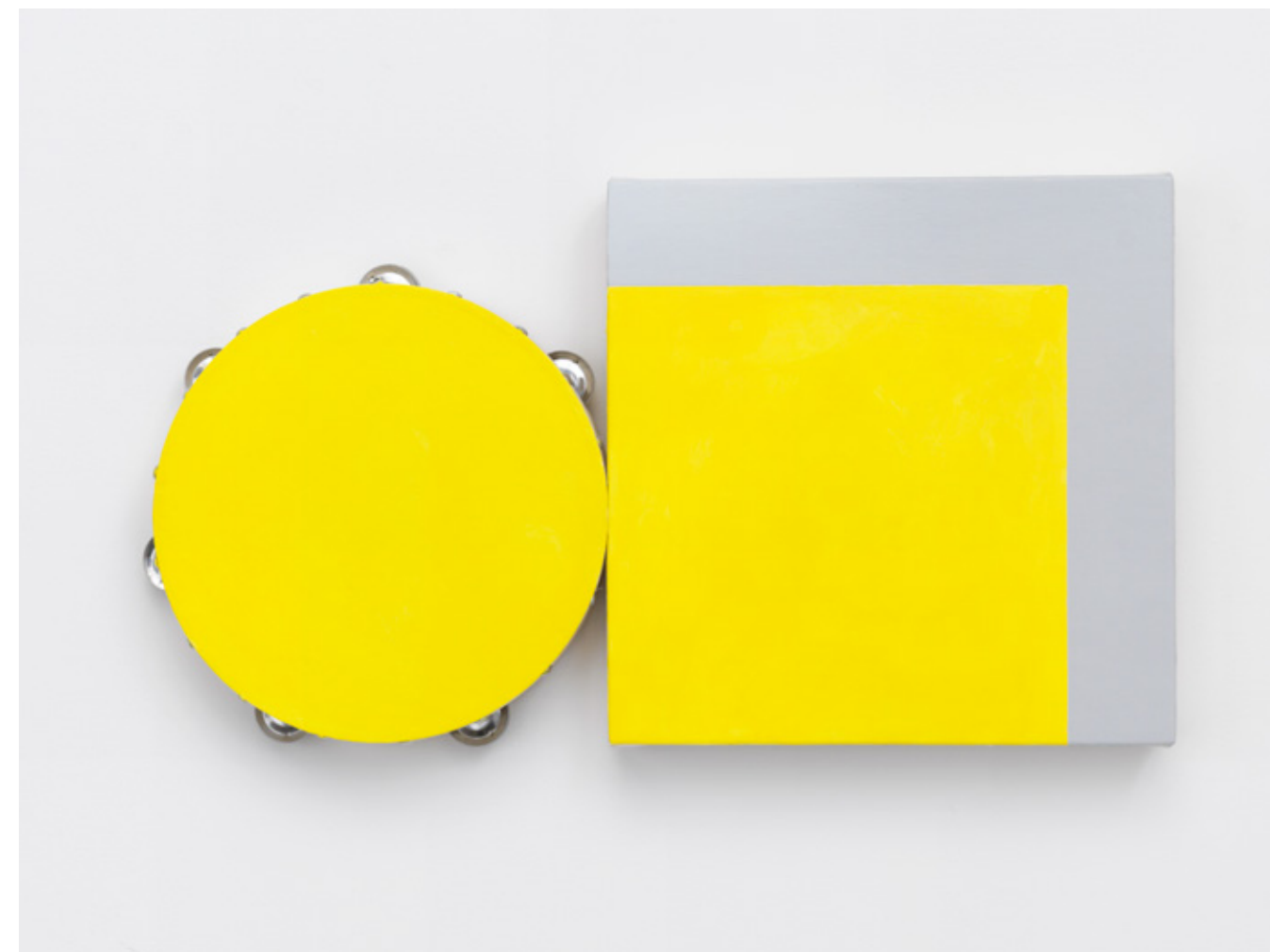
Rineke Dijkstra
Beth, The Crazyhouse, Liverpool, England, December 22, 2008, 2008
 Archival inkjet print
 48 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 2 inches
 Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.



Wolfgang Tillmans
The Spectrum/Dagger, 2014
 Inkjet print on paper mounted on Dibond aluminum in artist's frame
 83 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 57 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
 Courtesy David Zwirner, New York, Galerie Buchholz, Cologne/Berlin, and Maureen Paley, London.



Becky Kolsrud
Double Portrait (Face-Profile), 2017
 Oil on canvas
 38 x 30 inches
 Courtesy of the artist, JTT, New York.



Paul Lee
Summer Skin, 2016
 Tambourine, acrylic and canvas
 12 x 22 x 1¼ inches
 Courtesy of the artist and Maccarone, New York/Los Angeles.



Francis Upritchard
Second Sun, 2013
 Modeling material, foil, wire and paint
 65 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches
 Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York.



Kelly Nipper
Interval (outake), 2000 - 2012
 Framed chromogenic print
 39 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 50 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches
 Courtesy of the artist.



Carrie Mae Weems

A Single's Waltz in Time, 2003

Gelatin silver print

20 x 20 inches each image

20¾ x 20¾ x 1½ inches each framed

© Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Silke Otto-Knapp

Every Afternoon, 2009

Watercolor and gouache on canvas

39½ x 39½ inches

Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome.

Cover

Yinka Shonibare

Un ballo in Maschera (A Masked Ball), 2004

High definition digital video

32 minute loop

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