

NOTHING

TO

SEE

HERE

**Nothing to See Here There
Never Was**

Copyright © 2015 Silverlens Inc.
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or otherwise, without the prior written consent of the above mentioned copyright holders, with the exception of brief excerpts and quotations used in articles, critical essays or research.

All texts copyright the authors.

Cover Image:
Grid #4, 2014, detail

Back Cover Image:
Grid #2, 2014, detail

PHILIPPINES

2F YMC Bldg 2
2320 Don Chino Roces Ave Ext
Makati City 1231
T +632.8160044
F +632.8160044
M +63917.5874011
Tue-Fri 10am-7pm, Sat 10am-6pm

www.silverlensgalleries.com
info@silverlensgalleries.com

N O T H I N G
T O S E E
H E R E
T H E R E
N E V E R
W A S

GINA OSTERLOH

16 July - 15 August 2015

Nothing to See Here There Never Was —an Essay in Four Parts

Jan Christian Bernabe, Ph.D.

What you see in contemporary Filipino American photographer Gina Osterloh's current solo exhibition *Nothing to See Here There Never Was* at Silverlens, composed of 14 photographic works and one 16mm film loop piece, defies, exceeds, and often belies expectations. Bodies (or the lack thereof), techniques of viewing, and photographic modernity preoccupy Osterloh's mind in her latest solo exhibition.

I.

Throughout her artistic oeuvre, Gina Osterloh's photographs are bound together by a sense of estrangement. Her work compels us to move a little closer to scrutinize their details, to see whether what we are looking at is what we had expected. These details unsettle and disorient us; they direct us to the artist's hand—whether through the colorful cut paper in her 2008 *Cut Room* series or the obvious staging of large sheaths of white paper in her 2012 *Dots* and *Web* photographs, the latter two are covered with hand-drawn dots and lines. And from her hand, we are moved to think about the artist's body, for her hand functions as a synecdoche, even if we cannot visually see either within the photographic frames.

It is this sense of the absent presence that also weaves itself across her photographic archive. In her oft-cited treatise *On Photography*, Susan Sontag writes, "A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence."¹ Sontag's words resonate in Osterloh's recent *Blue Rectangle (Wide Shot)* and *Blue Rectangle (Medium Shot)*, both of which render visible a rectangular

object that had once been present. Soft clouds of paint enshroud the invisible remnants of the rectangular objects. The two photographs, when paired together, play tricks on our eyes and cause us to question the very nature of the objects themselves: What are they? Are they moving away or towards us? Are they the same object? Osterloh pictures the improbable paradox—the absent presence—but more importantly, she reveals her investment in the photographic medium itself, as a technology that is capable of concretizing and eviscerating narratological and epistemic certitudes.

Whether by camouflage or mimesis, two terms often attached to criticism of her work, Osterloh's photographs capture her ongoing engagement, or confrontation with, the ground upon which visibility is contingent. I am reminded here of Alan Sekula and his deployment of the "shadow archive" to describe nineteenth-century photographic practices. For Sekula, the photographic archive of the nineteenth century "encompasses an entire social terrain," which, as he argues, unified "a single hermeneutic paradigm."² Osterloh's pieces go beyond the evidentiary functions of photography and the sentimentalism often associated with vernacular practices. We might argue that her turn to abstraction immediately distances her photographic work from the medium's social functions—indeed, from the social terrain writ large. Though to dismiss the social altogether from her work would be to deny Osterloh's hand in her craft, indeed, the whole of her body and experiences. While we might also argue that there is neither one unified or unifying interpretative ground on which we might stand steadily when we look at Osterloh's photographs—a disconcerting prospect, no doubt—we might, however, consider that this unsteadiness marks an opportunity for the critic-viewer

to advance their own hermeneutic frame. Moreover, we might consider how deeply invested Osterloh is to photography's history. That is, Osterloh's work hinges precisely on a conceptualism that is as much about how we think about the functions of photography—or photography's ontology—as it is about the quotidian acts that we participate in such as looking and reading bodies rendered (in)visible by photographic practices.

II.

Photography, and to some degree performance, allows Osterloh to enact visually a system of calls and responses in the Althusserian sense. Though rather than the audible act of hailing and responding unflinchingly to the hail—that is, being interpellated into a system for which the subjectivity of the receiver is produced—Osterloh uses photography to capture the limits, slippages, and perhaps the failures of interpellation and, ironically, the functions of photography as part of the interpellative process itself. If the interpellative system produces subjectivity of the body who is hailed, the body's response to the hail ultimately limns a form of identificatory practice that at once may be normative, while the potential of a misfired call and response may likewise also exist. We might consider, for example, Osterloh's 2008 *Dots Front Misfire (Shooting Blanks)* and the ways in which the interpellative demands of the call (the hail) is mis-recognized (the response) such that the subjectivity of the configured body staged at its center becomes a proxy body—a body that is a stand-in, an outlier of sorts. The proxy body fails to assimilate into the larger symbolic order of the room, which itself indexes the social.

We might take pause here to think about Osterloh's 2007 series *Press and Erase*, in particular #2; the body hailed is not configured out of paper but rather performed by the artist. The enclosure is constructed out of large reams of red paper with a black circular cut out (the orifice) set off center. With only the hands of a body dressed in black visible, the body is positioned in such

a way as to convey the body's attempt to enter the orifice. But the body's flattened hands evidence the impossibility of doing so. *Press and Release #2* captures precisely the weighty demands of identification, and more specifically the challenges and dangers of attempts to transgress the constitution of the subject by eluding the hail (escaping through the black orifice). The red enclosure thus defines the symbolic system of the social for which bodies are constituted materially and epistemically as known or knowable subjects. When paired next to her 2014 *Orifice and Color Field (Red)*, the body that was once present within the red enclosure has disappeared into the black void. The body has seemingly transgressed the symbolic order, yet at what cost? The black orifice has reduced the body into a singular point in the photographic frame and displaced it to an unknowable space. Transgression enacts a type of material and epistemic violence, the pain of which is rendered visible in the photograph by the body's open mouth.

III.

Osterloh's negotiation of a politics of sociality—or a politics of belonging—runs across the gamut of her oeuvre. Yet Osterloh's engagement with sociality is one based not on expected or aspirational models of communal or collective successes, but rather her work offers a counterintuitive challenge to notions of identity formations facilitated by the very nature of photography, especially within minoritarian communities that invest in particular types of narratives of belonging. If earlier works pictured the construction (constructed nature) of bodies within the photographic field through performance and paper and cardboard creations, Osterloh makes a distinct move in recent work to reduce processes of identification, and more broadly sociality, to their most minimalist of structures. Think here, for example, of the photographs *Dots* and *Web*, which on the surface picture respectively benign-looking dots and webs; to leave interpretation at just what is visible would undermine the investment that Osterloh has with photography's ability to capture those which are not

manifest visually but rather intellectually. This conceptual fundament, of which the absent presence is part of a larger aesthetic ethos, creates opportunities to think about *Dots* and *Web* as meta-commentaries on those that comprise the social (dots) and the social's investment in cohesion (webs). It is only later that we see in *Drawing for the Camera* (2014) the limits of the social's imperative for cohesion through its entropic configuration of lines.

Dots and *Web* guide us to Osterloh's most recent work in *Nothing To See Here There Never Was (Grids #1-#6)*, *Drawing for the Camera*, and *Intimacy Is Never Perfect*, which, prior to the exhibition at Silverlens, were shown at the Francois Ghebaly Gallery in Los Angeles in 2014. Looking at Osterloh's turn to gridded systems, I am reminded of Martin Jay's essay *Scopic Regimes of Modernity*, in which he argues against Cartesian perspectivalism, describing it as the "the dominant, even totally hegemonic, visual model of the modern era," which "best expressed the 'natural' experience of sight valorized by the scientific world view."³ In *Nothing To See Here There Never Was (Grids #1-#6)*, Osterloh unwittingly (or not) offers up a challenge to the singular scopic regime to which photography's ontology is firmly associated. The gridded patterns in Osterloh's series do not correspond to the Western Cartesian model of perspective, which has been associated by scholars and critics to the masculine and heterosexist gaze—a frame that marks photography's ontological foundations as rational, gendered, and sexualized. These attributions of photography can and should be applied to the ways in which the social body is constituted by the medium itself. Osterloh's gridded photographs perform a type of epistemic work that questions the possibilities of multiple visual regimes that photography is capable of paradoxically producing, doing so in an ironic and self-referential manner. Moreover, the social body for Osterloh, absent and yet also eerily present, within the artist's grid systems is always creating new modes of vision and representation and non-normative modes of social communion. There is perhaps *Nothing to See Here There Never Was*, as is written in the piece for which the current show is titled. We might think of the title as an apt rejection of the dominant visual systems that have dislo-

cated the subject precisely because of the very constraints placed upon the medium of photography.

IV.

By way of conclusion, I turn to Osterloh's meditative 16mm film projection loop *Press and Outline*. Described by the artist as "both odd as well as intimate," the viewers of Osterloh's film watches the artist, clad in a black leotard, slowly and sometimes awkwardly performing a dance with her shadow in silence. Osterloh's movements are slow and yet deliberate, and her body is never separated from her shadow—it is perhaps her shadow that takes the lead and influences Osterloh's kinesthetics. Like her photographs, *Press and Outline* separates the viewer from that which is being observed—Osterloh's performance at center—producing a distance that is marked by an a type of ethnographic objectivity (think here of the popular ethnographic convention of positioning the camera in front of bodies of the Other and letting the camera roll). The film also envisions a type of queer reduplication of self, endlessly dancing with each other by the very nature of the looped film.

There is certainly something *queer* about the black-and-white film and Osterloh's performance therein captured. Indeed, the anachronistic feel of the 16mm film hearkens to a time and space where film was used tout court to supplement scientific studies of the Other. Let me pause here and qualify my use of the term queer. On one hand, my deployment of queer is to suggest one possible epistemic lens through which to view Osterloh's film and does not necessarily act as identifying marker of Osterloh's lived real-time experience. That being said, my use of queer is also not meant to evacuate the term of the non-normative sexual body by merely using it as an analytic frame; on the contrary, it is precisely the engagement with (hetero)normativity that marks the potency of the term. Thinking about the film as queer and using a queer critical framework allow us to question how Osterloh's moving picture is in

constant negotiation of larger normative visual regimes that govern modes of identificatory engagement. The dance that Osterloh performs exploits photography's narcissistic ontology, as Carol Mavor writes, "for queer (re)production."⁴ What is produced then is a queer performance that is at its core about the self, and more specifically the larger forces that constitutes the precarious ground on which the self is endlessly constituted.

A dancer's worst nightmare is to fall, after all.

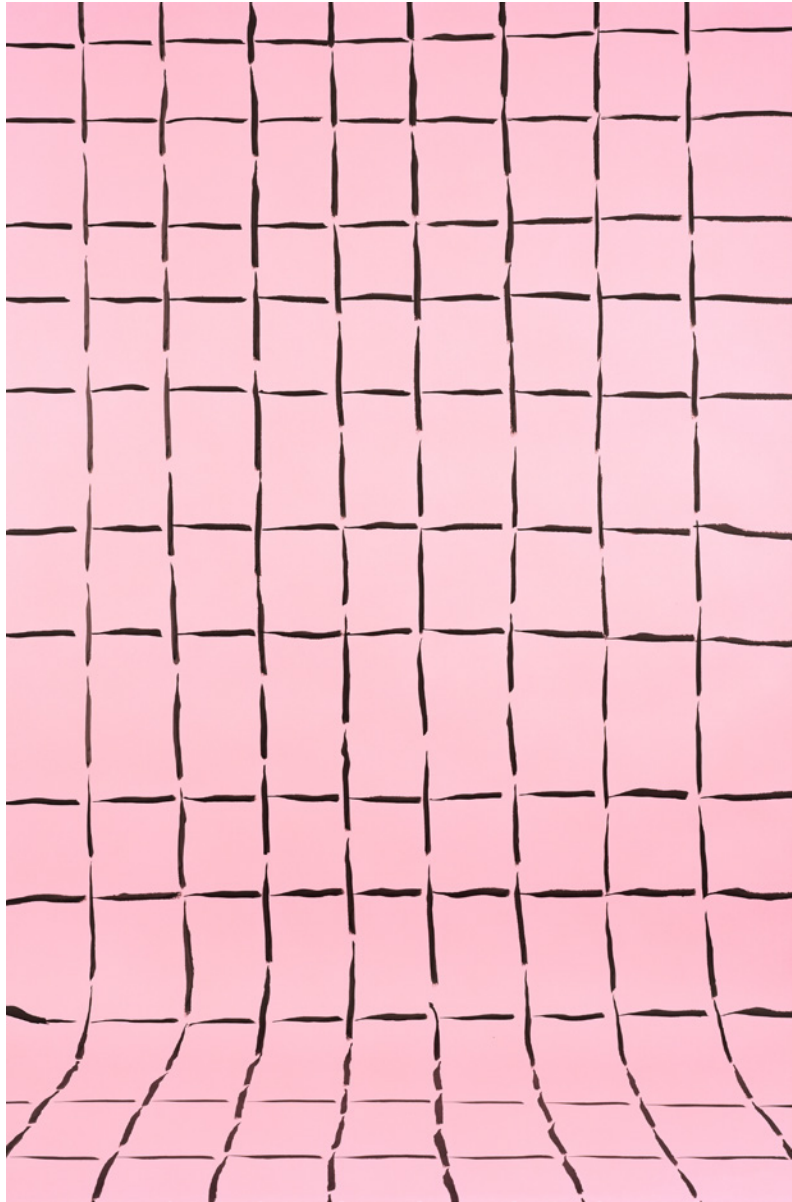
Footnotes

¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 1973), 16.

² Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986), 10.

³ Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" in *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1988), 4–5.

⁴ Carol Mavor, *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina*, Viscountess Hawarden, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 107.



Grid #6

archival photograph mounted on dibond with UV
laminare

45.75 x 30 in • 116.2 x 76.2 cm

2014

Edition of 3

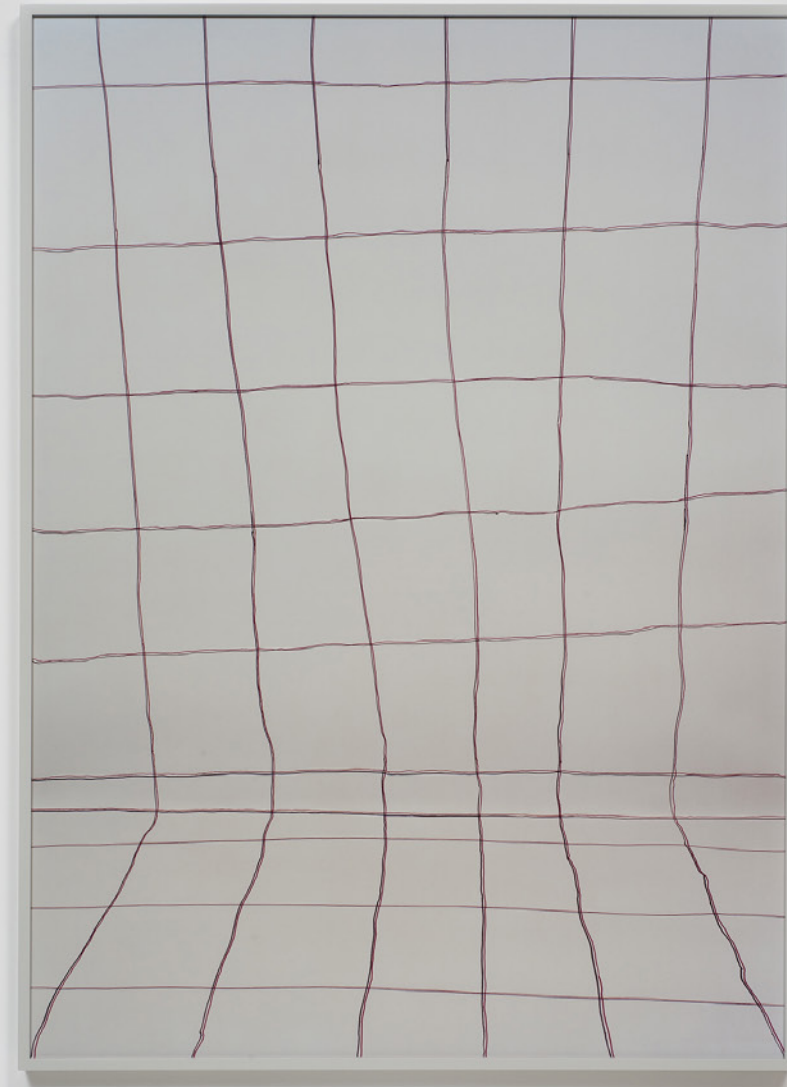
Drop Shadow (Intimacy is Never Perfect)

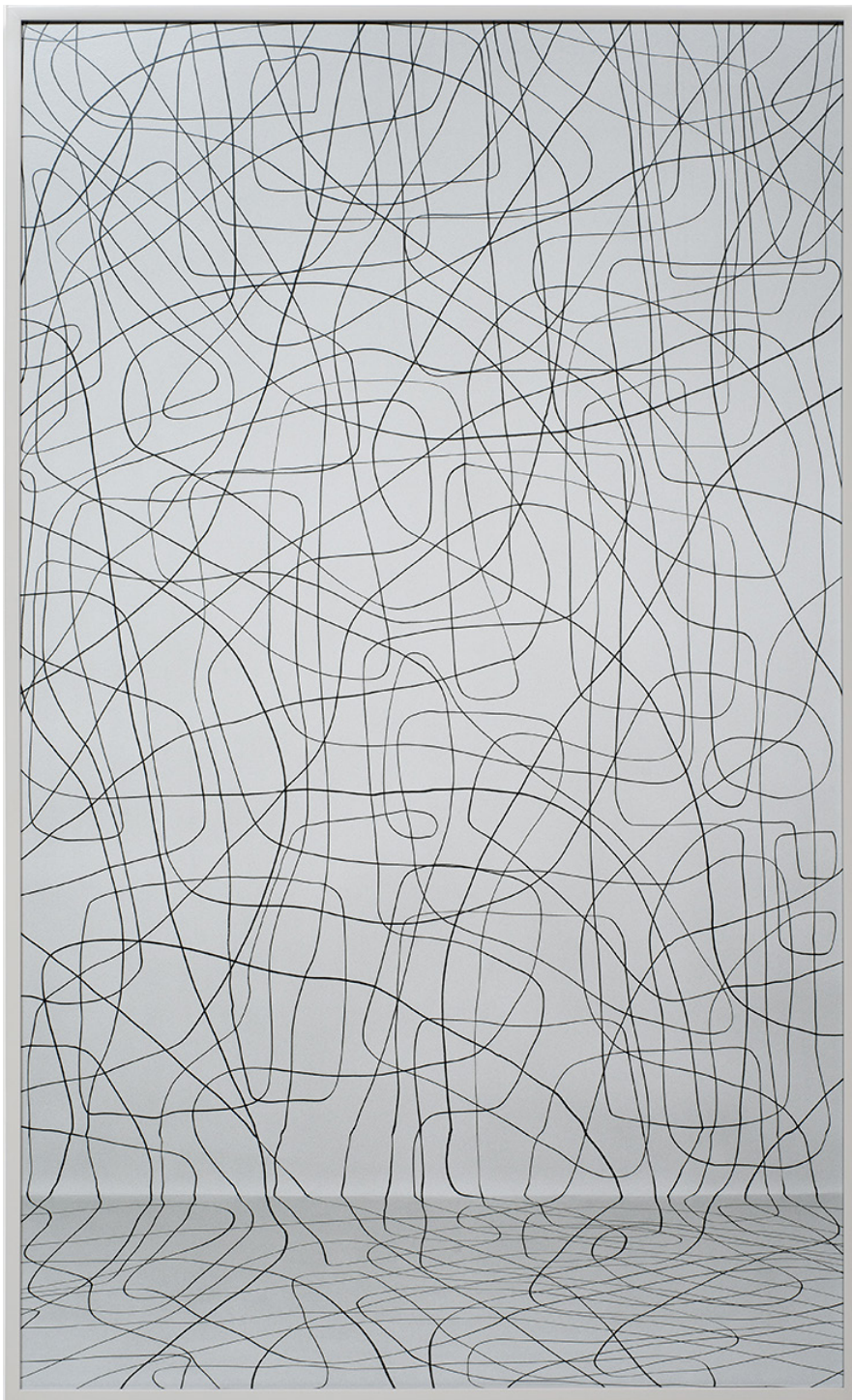
archival inkjet print mounted on dibond with UV laminate and custom
color frame

50 x 36 in • 116.2 x 76. cm

2014

Edition of 3





Drawing for the Camera (Vertical)

archival inkjet mounted on dibond with UV laminate and custom color
frame

53 x 31 in • 134.6 x 78.8 cm

2014

Edition of 3



Blue Rectangle (Medium Shot), Perspective Shift via Distance
lightjet print with UV laminate and custom color frame
24.5 x 30.25 in • 62.2 x 76.8 cm
2014
Edition of 3



Blue Rectangle (Wide Shot)
archival inkjet mounted on dibond with UV laminate and custom color frame
lightjet print with UV laminate and custom color frame
24.5 x 30.25 in • 62.2 x 76.8 cm
2014
Edition of 3



Orifice and Color Field (Red)
lightjet print with UV laminate and custom color frame
16.25 x 20.5 in • 41.3 x 52.1 cm
2007/2014
Edition of 3

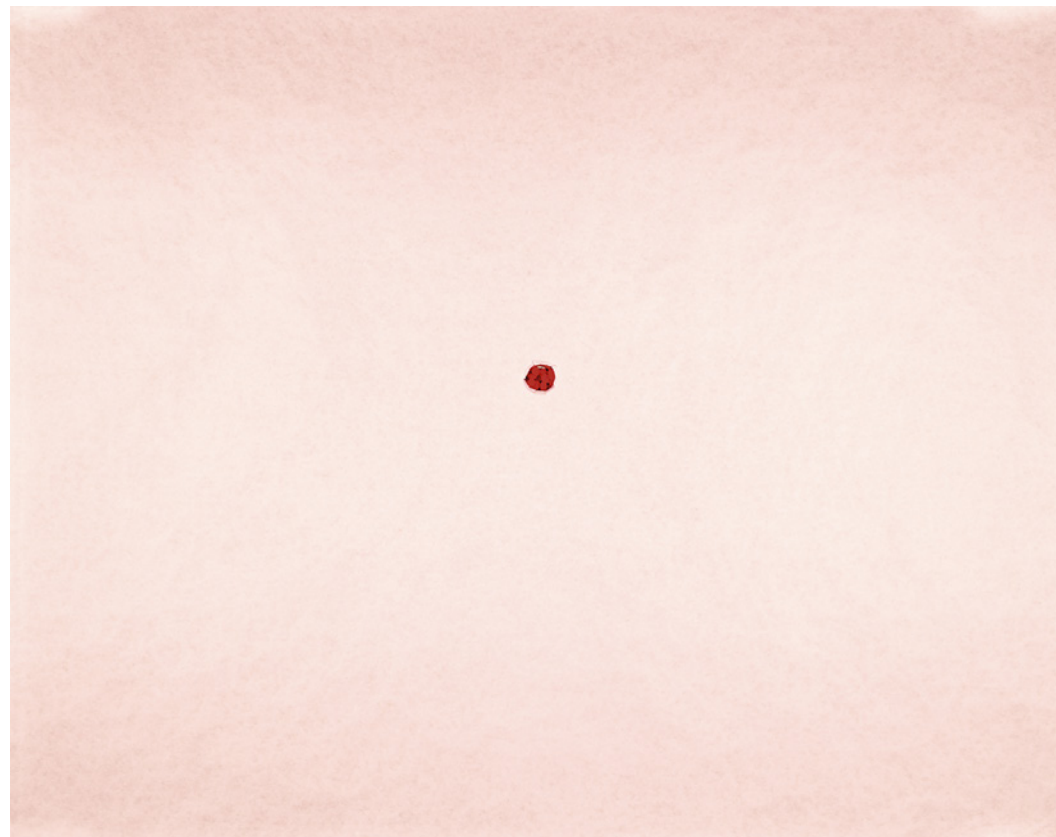
Orifice and Color Field (Pink)

lightjet print with UV laminate and custom color frame

30.25 x 38.25 in • 77 x 97.2 cm

2007/2014

Edition of 3





Grid #4

archival inkjet mounted on dibond with UV laminate

45.75 x 30 in • 116.2 x 76.2 cm

2014

Edition of 3



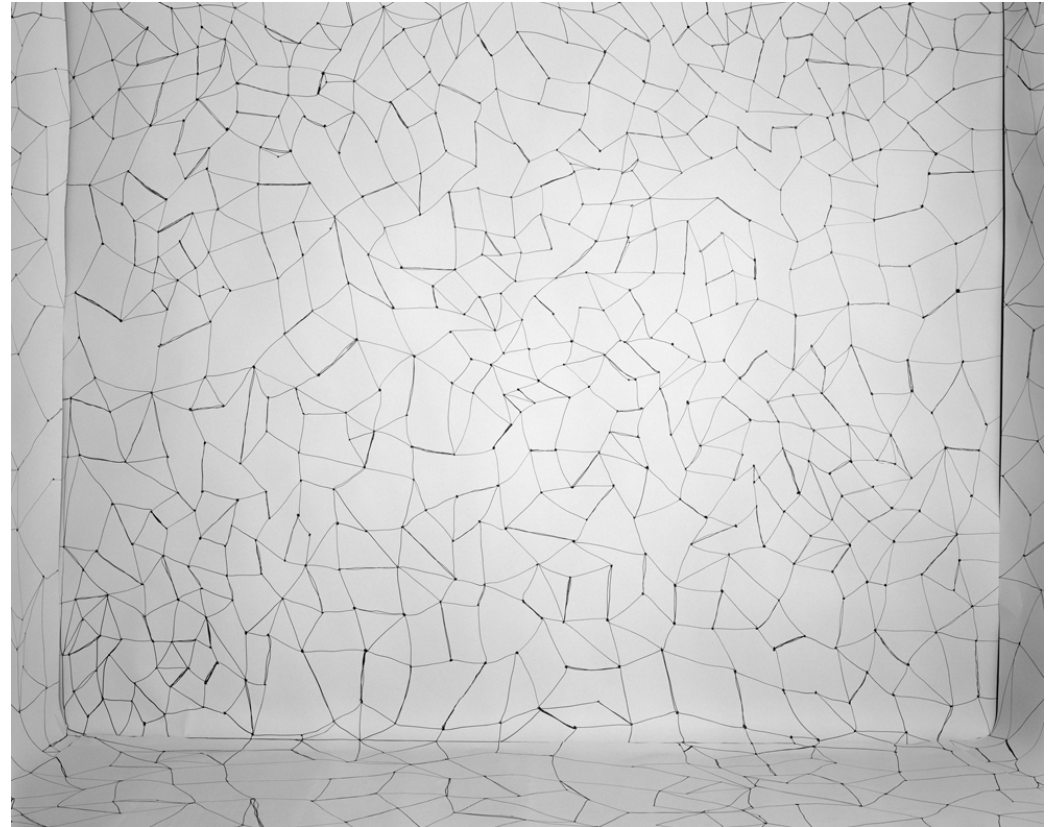
Dots

archival inkjet with UV laminate and custom color frame

20 x 25 in • 50.8 x 63.5 cm

2012

Edition of 5



Web (Yayoi Kusama Knew This Would Happen)

archival inkjet with UV laminate and custom color frame

20 x 25 in • 50.8 x 63.5 cm

2012

Edition of 5



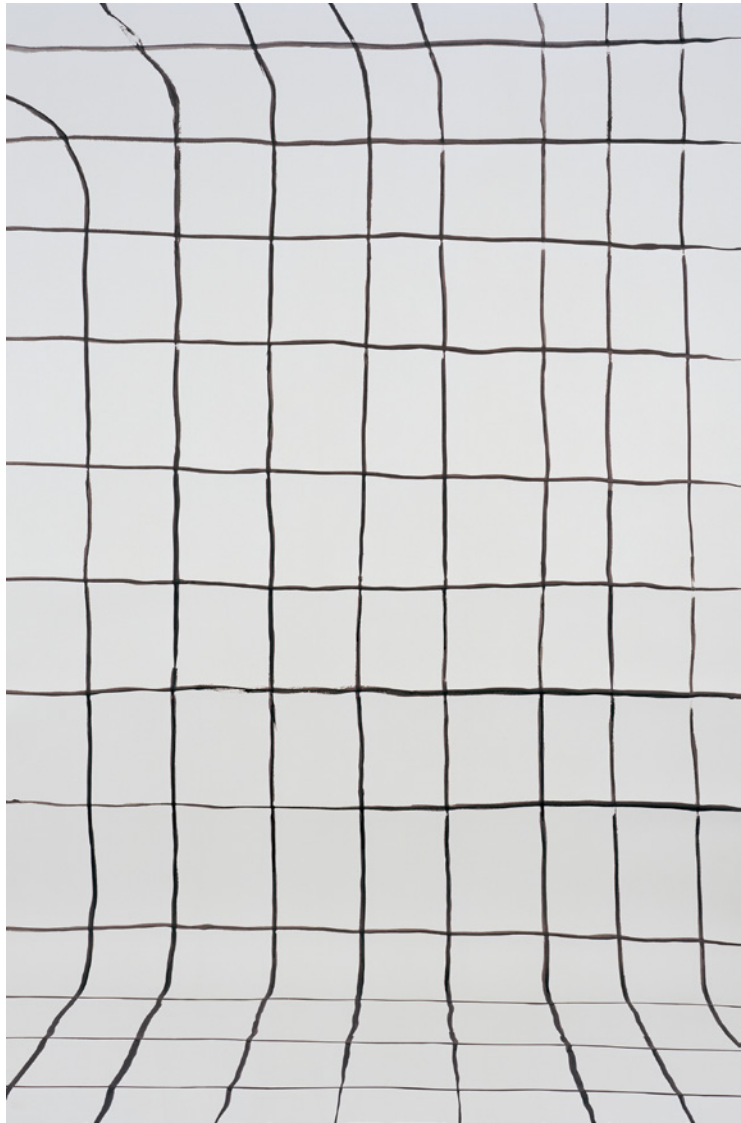
Press and Erase #2

glossy chromogenic print mounted on dibond and custom color frame

24 x 20 in • 60.9 x 50.8 cm

2012

Edition of 5



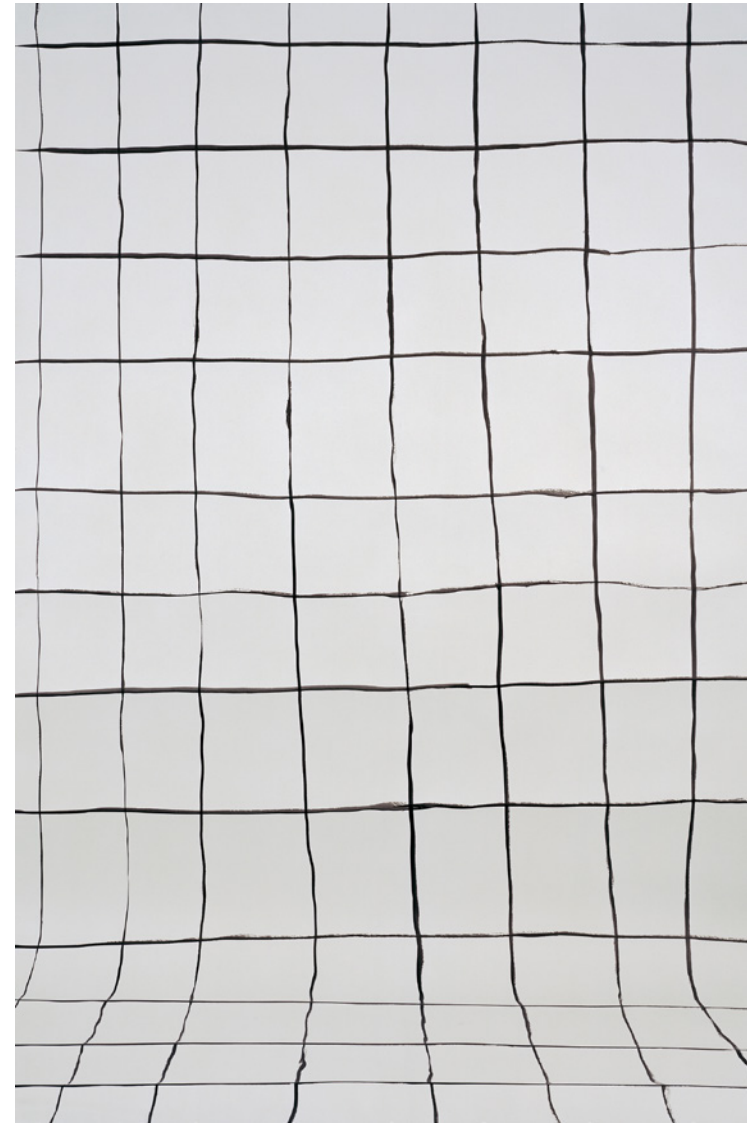
Grid #1

archival inkjet mounted on dibond with UV laminate

45.75 x 30 in • 116.2 x 76.2 cm

2014

Edition of 3



Grid #2

archival inkjet h mounted on dibond with UV laminate

45.75 x 30 in • 116.2 x 76.2 cm

2014

Edition of 3

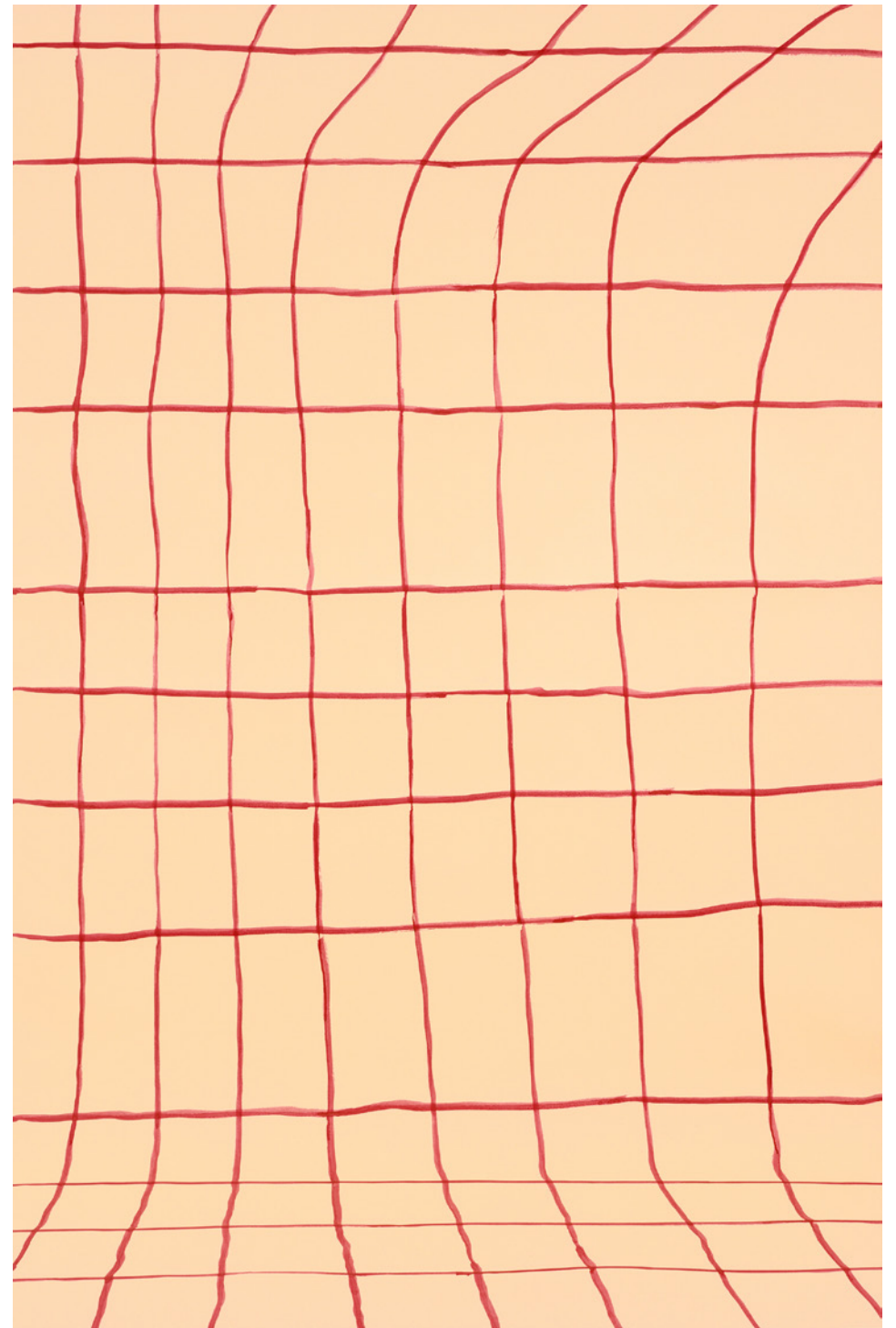
Grid #3

archival inkjet mounted on dibond with UV laminate

45.75 x 30 in • 116.2 x 76.2 cm

2014

Edition of 3





Press and Outline

16mm black and white silent film (00:06:00 min. loop)

2014

Edition of 5

GINA OSTERLOH

Gina Osterloh investigates operations of mimesis and perception, along with new ways of addressing identity through photography, film, video, and performance. Her photographs depict line drawings for the camera, as well as constructed life-size room environments activated through still performances, papier-mâché models and cardboard cutouts.

Recent projects include the performance Prick, Prick, Prick –part of ongoing research examining call and response relationships between the body and the photographic frame, as well as repetition and rhythm produced by speech and actions. Osterloh's 16mm film Press and Outline investigates the act of tracing of her own shadow and the origins of photography located in the desire to make the image of self (and the other) permanent.

Exhibitions include: Photography Sees The Surface at Higher Pictures, New York; Second Sight, New Representations in Photography at the Torrance Art Museum; This is Not America: Resistance, Protest and

Poetics Arizona State University Museum; Race, Love, and Labor Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art; Women in Photography, in LA at Contact Lab; Fragments of the Unknowable Whole Urban Arts Space Ohio State University; Material Object Charlie James Gallery; Solo exhibitions include: Press, Erase, Outline, Slice, Strike, Make an X, Prick at Francois Ghebaly; Anonymous Front, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; Group Dynamic and Improper Light at LACE & Body Prop Silverlens, Manila. Collaborative projects include Outside Crease of the Elbow Commonwealth & Council with Paris-based artist Ana Vega. Reviews of her work include Art Forum, Art in America, Art Asia Pacific, Art Monthly Australia, Art Ltd., Art on Paper and Art Practical. Osterloh received her MFA from the University of California, Irvine. Gina Osterloh teaches a diverse range of photography, performance art, and time-based media classes throughout the Greater Los Angeles area at various universities.

AWARDS

- 2012 Book Publication and 3-Month Artist Residency with LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions)
Create Cultivate Matching Grant, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions and LA County Arts Commission
- 2011 Woodstock Center of Photography, Artist in Residency
- 2010 Durfee Foundation ARC Grant
- 2008 Silverlens Foundation Completion Grant
- 2007-2008 Fulbright Recipient, Manila, Philippines
- 2006 Medici Grant
- 2004-2005 Diversity Fellowship Recipient, University of California Irvine
- 2004-2006 Graduate Travel and Research Grant Recipient, University of California Irvine

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 ***Nothing to See Here There Never Was***, Silverlens Gallery, Manila
- 2014 ***Press Erase Outline Slice Strike Make an X Prick***, François Ghebaly Gallery, LA
- 2012 ***Group Dynamic & Improper Light***, LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions), Los Angeles
Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, curated by Juilo Cesar Morales, San Francisco
- 2011 ***Body Prop***, Silverlens, Manila
Los Angeles, California to Manila, Philippines: You Are My

Blindspot (Part I), Thirty Nine Hotel Residency Project, Honolulu

- 2009 ***Shooting Blanks***, Chung King Project, Los Angeles
- 2008 ***Shooting Blanks***, Green Papaya Art Projects, Manila
- 2007 ***Blank Athleticism***, [2nd floor projects], San Francisco

TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 ***Outside Crease of the Elbow (residency and exhibition with Paris-based artist Ana Vega)***, Commonwealth & Council
- 2011 ***Differentiate***, Allcott Gallery, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 ***Second Sight: New Representations in Photography***, Torrance Art Museum, California
Photography Sees The Surface, Higher Pictures, New York
Drawings | Fridges, Greene Exhibitions, Los Angeles
- 2014 ***Race Love and Labor***, Samuel Dorsky Museum Of Art, State University Of New York At New Paltz
Life Transmissions, Guggenheim Gallery, Chapman University
Material Object, Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles
Frieze New York, François Ghebaly Gallery, New York
Paris Photo LA, François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles
Fragments of the Unknowable Whole, Urban Arts Space, Ohio State University
This Is Not America: Resistance, Protest and Poetics, Curated by

- Julio César Morales, Arizona State University Museum of Art
- 2013 **NADA Art Fair**, François Ghebaly Gallery, Miami Beach, Florida
- Demolition Women**, curated by Commonwealth & Council, Guggenheim Gallery Chapman University, California
- Show and Tell**, Curated by Irene Tsatsos, Armory Center For The Arts Pasadena, California
- Color Consciousness**, Torrence Art Museum, California
- War Baby, Love Child**, Depaul University, Chicago and Wing Luke Museum Of The Asian American Seattle, Washington
- Asia Serendipity**, traveling group exhibition curated by Fumio Nanjo of the Mori Museum, Tokyo: Sala de exposiciones San Benito, Valladolid, Spain
- La Termica**, Malaga, Spain
- Ley Hunting Pt. 2**, curated by Hary-Ross Pastrana, Silverlens, Singapore
- 2012 **Ley Hunting**, Silverlens, Manila
- Paris Photo**, Silverlens, Paris
- Asia Serendipity**, La Fabrica | Photo Espana, Madrid, curated by Fumio Nanjo, Mori Museum
- Out of Sight, Out of Mind**, Workplace Gallery, Gateshead, United Kingdom
- Art HK 12**, Hong Kong, with Silverlens
- Francois Ghebaly Gallery**, Art Cologne 2012, Cologne
- Los Angeles Contemporary Tendencies**, Curated by Annka Kultys, Helene Bailly Gallery, Paris
- Anonymous Front**, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco
- 2011 **NADA Art Fair**, with François Ghebaly Gallery, Miami Beach, Florida
- Paramount Reality**, Latned Atsär, Los Angeles
- Territories of the Real and Unreal: Contemporary Photography in Southeast Asia**, Laggeng Art Foundation
- Gathered in a Clearing**, Level / Gallery Three, Brisbane
- Transitions: Time based Asian American Art**, Whitman College, Sheehan Gallery, Washington
- On Forgery: Is One Thing Better Than Another?**, LA ART, Los Angeles
- 2010 **The Unnamable**, Manila Contemporary, Manila
- Let Them Eat Lacma**, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
- Summertime Project LA**, Cypress College, Los Angeles
- Psychic Outlaws**, Luckman Gallery, Cal State LA, Los Angeles
- New Editions**, Pepin Moore, Los Angeles
- Commonwealth**, PØST, Los Angeles
- Group Show: Daniel Bayles, Gina Osterloh, and Patrick Jackson**, Kate Werble Gallery, New York
- Group Show**, Art Los Angeles Contemporary, Los Angeles
- 2009 **Uncommon Sense (trauma, interrupted, too)**, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila
- Cut09: Figure (New Photography in Southeast Asia)**, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore
- Cut09: Figure (New Photography in Southeast Asia)**, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur
- beyond frame: philippine fotomedia**, La Trobe Visual Arts Center, Australia

- FuturaManila*, Osage Gallery, Singapore
- 2008 *Silverlens Grantee Exhibition*, Silverlens, Manila
Swarm in the Aperture: Recent Photography in the Philippines,
 Museum of the Filipino People, Manila
- Strain Extension*, MO Space Gallery, Manila
beyond frame: philippine fotomedia, UTS Gallery, Sydney
- FuturaManila*, Osage Gallery, HongKong
- Galleon Trade*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco
- Truthiness*, California Museum of Photography, UC Riverside
- Tints of Majesty*, Lizabeth Oliveria Gallery, Los Angeles
- Whatcha See Is Whatcha Get, What You Don't See (Is Better Yet)*,
 Five Thirty Three, Los Angeles
- 2007 *Trauma, Interrupted*, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila
- Galleon Trade*, Mag:net Gallery, Manila
- Marfa-the B sides*, Queen's Nails Annex, Marfa, Texas
- Body Double*, Luckman Gallery, Los Angeles
- The Pyramid Show*, Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles
- Outside In*, LACE, Los Angeles
- MFA Thesis Exhibition*, UC Irvine, Irvine, California
- 2006 *Good Times For Never*, Queen's Nails Annex, San Francisco
- Video MixTape 5* (curated by Chris Bassett), Kunstraum Innsbruck,
 Austria
- There, There*, New Langton Arts, San Francisco
- Satellite* (video screening, curated by Natasha Garcia-Lomas)
 Elojo Atomico/Antimuseo de Arte Contemporaneo, Madrid

- 2004 *All-City*, Lizabeth Oliveria Gallery, (Project Space), Los Angeles
Subject to Oneself, Playspace, California College of the Arts San
 Francisco
- 2003 *All-City*, Luggage Store Gallery Annex, San Francisco
Infinite Booty, Galeria de la Raza, San Francisco
- 2002 *12 Artists-2minutes*, SF Arts Commission, San Francisco
Axis of Good, Ze Dos Bois, Lisbon, Portugal.

CURATORIAL PROJECTS

- 2011 *Support>System*, co-curated with Marco Rios, Luckman Gallery,
 California State University, Los Angeles
- Each of Our Erasure*, San Francisco Arts Commission and The
 Luggage Store Gallery
- Collection Rotation*, SF MOMA Blog Archive online
- 2010 *Minimum Yields Maximum*, Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles
- 2006 *Glitch*, LACMA LAB, Los Angeles

EDUCATION

- 2007 University of California Irvine
 Masters of Fine Arts, Studio Art
- 1996 De Paul University - Chicago, Illinois, USA
 Bachelor of Communications/Media Studies

SILVERLENS



SILVERLENS (Manila), through its exhibition program, artist representation, art fair participation and institutional collaboration, aims to place its artists within the broader framework of international contemporary art dialogue.

A leading gallery in Southeast Asia, collaborations include the Singapore Art Museum, New Museum New York City, CCP Manila, Metropolitan Museum Manila, and Vargas Museum Manila. Institutional collectors include the LUMI Collection, Singapore Art Museum, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Collection. SILVERLENS participates annually in Art Basel Hong Kong, Art Basel, and ParisPhoto. It is the first Philippine gallery to be part of Art Basel.

SILVERLENS

