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## CRITICS' PICKS

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### New York

Pablo Bronstein  
"Frottage"  
"Ecstatic Resistance"  
"Besides, With, Against,  
and Yet: Abstraction and  
the Ready-Made Gesture"  
Alighiero e Boetti  
Agnes Denes  
"Dress Codes"

### Los Angeles

Drew Heitzler  
Dan Finzel

### San Francisco

Emigre

### Boston

Taro Shinoda  
Damián Ortega

### Chicago

"Heartland"

### Houston

Joseph Cohen

### Philadelphia

Natalie Alper

### Providence

Carey Young

### London

Kendell Geers  
"Words"

### Paris

Keren Cytter  
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"Chasing Napoleon"

### Noisy-le-Sec

Bettina Samson

### Berlin

Isa Genzken  
"Berlin 89/09: Art Between  
Traces of the Past and  
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### Milan

"The Rustle of Language"  
Marta Dell'Angelo

### Pistoia

Chiara Camoni

### Trento

"Celebration, Institution,  
Critique"

### Humblebaek

Jacob Holdt

### Madrid

## Cairo

### "Assume the Position"

TOWNHOUSE GALLERY OF CONTEMPORARY ART  
10 Nabrawy Street, off Champollion Street, Downtown  
December 13–January 17

For an exhibition exploring various expressions of distraction, "Assume the Position" is remarkably (and perhaps paradoxically) focused. Featuring works of seven disparate international artists and a cache of archival photographs from the collection of Amgad Naguib (whose ramshackle junk shop in downtown Cairo is as wondrous and illuminating as David Wilson's Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles), the show, the first by curator Nikki Columbus, is both elegant and concise in its conception and execution. It is also a serious, far-reaching, and provocative rumination on the ethical and behavioral dimensions of performance and spectatorship in the field of contemporary art.



Osama Dawod, *Summit #3*, 2007, color photograph, 20 x 27 1/2".

Take the trio from Naguib's collection, for example—photographs of bystanders crowding around car crashes in Egypt, culled from the archives of the newspaper *Al-Gomhuria*. Adjacent are Enrique Metinides's similarly sensational photographs made for a newspaper in Mexico City. The show moves nimbly through a series of incongruously beautiful works, from Cyprien Gaillard's *Real Remnants of Fictive Wars I*, 2003, to the Atlas Group/Walid Raad's *I Only Wish That I Could Weep*, 2002, and Osama Dawod's photographs of G8 Summit protestors in Germany taking a breather (or a leak) in a lush, tranquil landscape of wheat fields. Rounding out the exhibition are selections by Sanja Iveković, Jill Magid, and David Levine, all which deal more explicitly with performativity, power, and position.

But the crux of Columbus's inquiry surfaced outside the gallery entirely, with a performance by Amal Kenawy that was staged only once, a few days after the exhibition opened. Kenawy is adept at crafting highly symbolic imagery. Performances have included sewing an enormous pink blanket around a crumbling structure in Sharjah and setting a white wedding dress on fire amid the ruins of a Byzantine church in Amman. Here, she enlisted around fifteen people, including a dozen day laborers hired for the occasion, to crawl on their hands and knees across a congested intersection in downtown Cairo. However simple the idea may have been in the artist's mind, when the piece was placed in context, it was so politically charged that an explosive shouting match about dignity, humiliation, national identity, and Egypt's image in the eyes of the world ensued. Kenawy and all but three of the performers ended up in police custody overnight. It was over-the-top melodrama, to be sure, but it also raised tough questions about the responsibilities and ramifications of such work.

— Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

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## Shenzhen

### "Permanent Migrants"

INHERITANCE: SHENZHEN  
104 Block 10, Hetang Community, Huaxia Rd., Nanshan District,  
December 7–February 15

Located between a village and a shopping mall, "Permanent Migrants," the inaugural exhibition in this pop-up alternative space, appropriately reflects the conditions of contemporary art production in Shenzhen throughout its brief history. A retrospective of an entire city should be a daunting task, and indeed this project is far from complete. Nevertheless, the artists who made Shenzhen their home, however briefly, seem to share a particular sensibility, veering between the public and the private in an attempt to define and intervene in the urban condition.

Work exhibited by many of the best-known artists in the exhibition will be familiar to international audiences: Yang Yong's portraits of prostitutes and construction workers, Jiang Zhi's light-based photography, Liu Chuang's social sculpture bought from new immigrants, and



View of "Permanent Migrants," 2009.

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Christian Jankowski's plastic-guitar-as-stereo project. The exhibition excels most where it rediscovers early and marginal work by artists known for their outsider status, as with Bai Xiaoci's slide show of local domestic spaces or Chu Yun's light boxes consisting of his own possessions photographed with the visual rhetoric of billboard advertisements. This project marks a necessary rehabilitation of southern China as a distinct cultural territory; though the majority of artists in the exhibition have since moved to Beijing or back to their home cities, the work they produced in Shenzhen maintains a pioneering character within the context of this disturbingly mobile region.

— Robin Peckham

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## Beirut

### "America"

**BEIRUT ART CENTER****Jisr El Wati, off Corniche an Nahr. Building 13, Street 97, Zone 66 Adlieh.****October 21–January 16**

With seminal, historic works by Joseph Beuys, William Eggleston, and Martha Rosler alongside more recent efforts by Ziad Antar, Mounir Fatmi, and the duo of Julia Meltzer and David Thorne, the latest exhibition at the Beirut Art Center is eclectic almost to the point of incoherence. The title, "America," is also totally misleading. This is neither a survey nor a statement about the art, history, or politics of the United States. The accompanying curatorial text may ape the attitude of Jean Baudrillard's *America* (1989), but it articulates little in terms of tangible themes. In fact, the show seems to have come together more through a process of vague intuition and loose association than as a result of any desire to construct a clear argument or explore a singular idea. But somehow, it works—on the one hand because the sixteen selected pieces are so resonant in this particular context (sharing concerns with many artists in Beirut while diverging productively on the level of form), on the other because the show is bolstered by a truly stellar eleven-part program of related events, including an artist's talk by Kara Walker (whose video *Testimony: Narrative of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions*, 2004, is one of the exhibition's standouts) and a workshop on political graphics led by the former Black Panther Party member Emory Douglas.



Mounir Fatmi, *Out of History*, 2005–2009, still from a color video, 38 minutes.

Instead of addressing an amorphous territory, "America" could have easily been staged under a title evoking agitated or excised histories, episodes of injustice and repression, or strategies of artistic subversion and creative interference. For example, Fatmi's terrific video installation *Out of History*, 2005–2009, features interview footage with David Hilliard, another former Black Panther, layered under still images of declassified government documents, many of them heavily redacted. (Photocopies of those same documents are papered over the walls enclosing the room in which the video is being projected.) Coaxing Hilliard to speak on everything from dialectical materialism to the commonalities between the Black Panthers in America in the 1960s and Palestinians in Gaza today, the work sidesteps nostalgia and the romance of long-lost revolutionary moments and explores more pointedly what can be resurrected from the past and still have meaning and purpose in the present.

— Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

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## Sydney

### Fiona Foley

**MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, SYDNEY****140 George Street, The Rocks****November 12–January 31**

Fiona Foley is one of Australia's leading indigenous artists, and this solo exhibition presents a selection of her output from the past fifteen years. "Native Blood" and "Badtjala Woman," two black-and-white photographic series from 1994, are among her best-known works on view. Based on ethnographic photography, the pictures portray the artist bare-chested, adorned with simple seed necklaces, and holding a traditional woven basket. These works, along with many others in this excellent survey, subvert the way photography was used by white colonists in the early twentieth century to document the "exotic."

Foley engages not only contemporary indigenous politics in Australia but also the formation of identity politics in a global



Fiona Foley, *HHH #1*, 2004, color photograph, 76 x 101".

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Melissa Anderson on  
Charlotte Gainsbourg  
Michael Ned Holte on  
James Benning's *Ruhr*  
Amy Taubin on Kelly  
Reichardt's short films  
Andrew Schenker on  
*Sweetgrass*

age. For example, "HHH," 2004, a series she developed during a residency in New York, depicts surviving members of the Hedonistic Honky Haters, a defunct secret society of African Americans founded during the 1960s. The black headpieces and brightly patterned cloaks that the members wear in these images are reminiscent of Ku Klux Klan costumes. Immediately confrontational, Foley invites us to imagine alternative political histories by presenting images that play on our assumptions of dominance.

While Foley brings race relations to the fore, she regards herself as an "educator" rather than a political artist. The exhibition includes several works that are presented in their original installation format, including "Wild Times Call," 2001, a photographic series she developed during a residency in America, which depicts the artist dressed in Seminole regalia. Partly inspired by a fashion shoot that Foley saw in Oprah's magazine, *O*, this series plays on the voyeuristic representation of indigenous people in the media. In order to see these sepia-toned photographs, viewers are invited to take off their shoes and wade through an ankle-high sea of yellow corn kernels. The sensuous feeling of the material underfoot is a simple gesture, but it allows the audience to think about the construction of images through an interrogation of the ground from which they perceive it.

— Jane Somerville

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## Auckland

### James Cousins and Simon Ingram

GOW LANGSFORD GALLERY  
26 Lorne Street, PO Box 546  
January 9–January 23

Gow Langsford is touting its new "Initiative" exhibition series as a forum for the gallery's artists to show what is, in the context of chiefly formalist practices, more or less experimental work. "TAG," the project's inaugural entry, offers abstract paintings by James Cousins and Simon Ingram. Ranged around the space in ones and twos, the diminutive panels perform a variety of material and compositional stunts, the paired artists' contributions interacting neatly with each other to the degree that they nearly appear as products of a single hand. All the pictures make use of intense color, Cousins adding the counterpoint of allover textural effects, while Ingram relies on simple, linear brushwork.

Known for using "artificial life systems" as a governing creative principle and for constructing picture-making robots, Ingram customarily produces large-scale canvases and uses video to document the semiautomatic processes by which they come into being. Of his works on display here, two feature the staccato dabs of pigment characteristic of the artist's machine-made works, while a third weaves a maplike composition around a tight grid. Cousins has also made previous use of partially or apparently mechanistic and schematic techniques, using complex masking to make and unmake painted surfaces. But while much of his recent work has employed stylized landscape imagery, the works here are largely cast adrift from identifiable figuration. The strain of experimentation that "TAG" presents is, then, only subtly divergent from its participants' norms, but the dialogue it acknowledges is a rewarding one.

— Michael Wilson



View of "James Cousins and Simon Ingram," 2009. From left: James Cousins, *Drought*, 2010; Simon Ingram, *Riser*, 2009; James Cousins, *Y.F. 4*, 2009; Simon Ingram, *Untitled*, 2009.

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