

# JAMES COHAN GALLERY

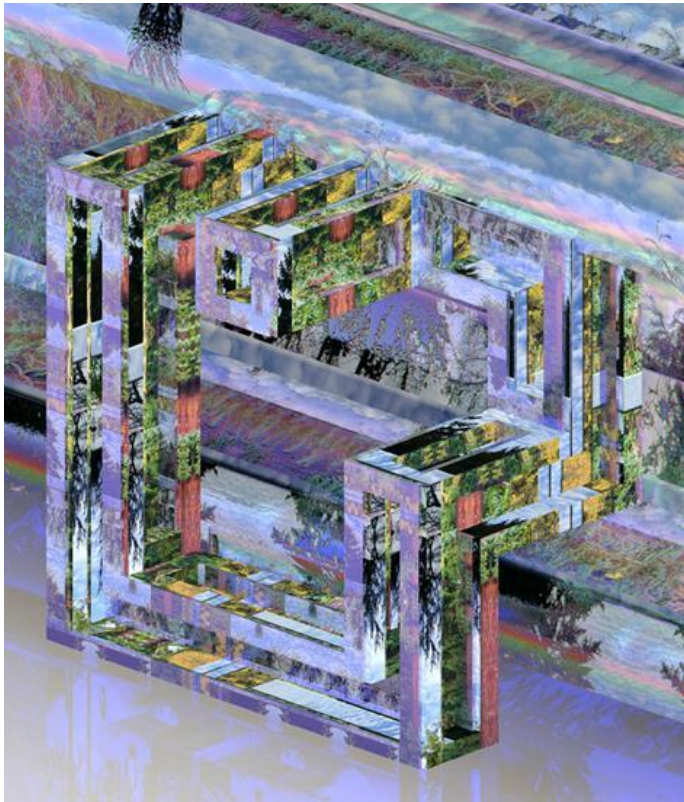
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*All Watched Over*

curated by Tina Kukielski

June 25 – August 7, 2015

Opening Reception: Thursday, June 25, 6 – 8 PM



BRENNA MURPHY *sunriseSequence-inlet*, 2015 archival pigment print  
Courtesy of American Medium, Brooklyn, NY

James Cohan Gallery is pleased to present a group exhibition curated by Tina Kukielski entitled *All Watched Over*, opening on June 25th, 2015 and running through August 7th, 2015.

Richard Brautigan's poem *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, written in 1967 while he was poet-in-residence at the California Institute of Technology, anticipates an ecosystem where animal, human, and machine live in harmony with nature. Freed from the constraints of labor and balanced by cybernetic feedback mechanisms that regulate and sustain life, the humans in Brautigan's short poem flourish in a naturalistic techno-utopia. Years later, acclaimed documentary journalist Adam Curtis appropriated Brautigan's title when he aired a BBC television series under the same name in 2011. From the standpoint of the recent past, Curtis's wide-reaching documentary analyses the vicissitudes of the postmodern techno-utopia Brautigan alludes to in his poem. In his signature style, Curtis argues that computers have failed to be the great liberators they were once purported to be.

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With the promise of a cybernetic techno-utopia as its backdrop, this exhibition brings together a group of artists who apply systems to and in their work. Across a diversity of practices and cultures, the dominant theme in *All Watched Over* is art in the form of information processing and its diagramming. Set against today's data-processed landscape, the artworks in *All Watched Over* transform data into hidden messages, ciphers, unifying theories, complex diagrams, and personal or cultural cosmologies. As such, subjects of encoding and encryption percolate in a number of works on view; they manifest as algorithmic or systemic codes on the one hand, and through abstraction and the optical experience of language on the other.

Artists include: Doug Ashford, Shannon Ebner, Iman Issa, Josh Kline, KRIWET, Paul Laffoley, Margaret Lee, Nonggirnga Marawili, Lee Mullican, Brenna Murphy, Michael Portnoy, Michael Riedel, Gabriel Sierra, and Roman Štětina.

All of these artists transform data into other form or other content. Whether it be the cosmological encoding that occurs in the geometric patterning of **Lee Mullican's** (born Chichasha, Oklahoma, 1919; died Santa Monica, 1998) mesmerizing energy field paintings from the 1970s, or the abstracting traditions of an aboriginal community as seen through the honorific and innovative paintings of **Nonggirnga Marawili** (born Yirrkala, Northern Territory, c. 1939; lives and works in Yirrkala). Decoding Marawili's diamond patterns reveals ancestral origin stories involving water and fire; in other words, these are oral traditions transformed into image. Similarly **Doug Ashford** (born Rabat, Morocco 1958; lives and works in New York) creates artworks that through the mediating strategies of abstraction attempt to resolve an unstable, unpredictable world. However Ashford's chosen subjects are recent tragedies closer to home—such as September 11, 2001—described in the artist's words as “too big to see all at once.” Taking the sense of the overwhelming nature of information in another direction is the work of **Michael Riedel** (born Rüsselsheim, Germany 1972; lives and works in Frankfurt) whose paintings process and regurgitate data culled from self-referential sources like websites featuring Riedel's work or posters designed as advertisements for previous shows.

As the personal information Riedel habitually mines accumulates in databases worldwide, its mass becomes easily indecipherable. This distortion of data—specifically language as data—is one of many subjects in the photographs of **Shannon Ebner** (born Englewood, NJ, 1971; lives and works in Los Angeles). **KRIWET** (born Dusseldorf, 1942; lives and works in Dusseldorf)—whose work has been little seen in the U.S.—has since the 1960s considered himself a visual poet who like Ebner encodes images with sensorial, language-based information. Hanging off the wall like tall banners, his *Comicstrip* (1970) works employ the language of print media and advertising to explore the materiality of language and how information is stored as mental pictures. Such is precisely the subject of **Iman Issa's** (born Cairo, 1979; lives and works in New York) ongoing sculptural series *Lexicon* (2013-ongoing), for which the artist selects canonical artworks and describes them in a short text on the wall. Each text is paired with an unfaithful remake of the allusion, thereby provoking verbal-visual relationships and questioning the effects of an established westernized canon.

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If there ever was an artist interested in finding his own pathways through the established canon of artistic and scientific history it would be **Paul Laffoley** (born Cambridge, MA, 1940; lives and works in Boston). Laffoley's paintings, executed with great precision, visualize complex networks of information such that they function like infographics totalizing cosmic and earth-bound worlds. Nature's encoding in computer-based systems finds its apogee in the highly processed 3-D renderings of **Brenna Murphy** (born Edmonds, Washington 1986; lives and works in Portland, Oregon). Her work evokes a futuristic prosthetic consciousness that bears some resemblance in its subject matter to *ThinkStrong* (2013) by **Josh Kline** (born Philadelphia, 1979; lives and works in New York), a commentary on emergent trends that embrace and promote synthetic life. Speculation about the encoding of sexual and gender identity in an increasingly synthetic world is at the heart of **Margaret Lee's** (born Bronx, NY 1980; lives and works in New York) sculptural studies of the readymade and its replicas.

On the other hand, **Michael Portnoy** (born Washington D.C. 1971; lives and works in New York) is interested in encryption, or how digital information from one image (in his case, the vegetable of the future) can be concealed into that of another image (kale). Two decades from now, the decryption key to Portnoy's humorous *Kalochromes* (2014) will be provided and the vegetable of 2034 will be unveiled. Revelation is the subject of **Roman Štětina's** (born Kadaň 1986; lives and works in Prague) replica of a Brussels-style curtain used by Czech Radio between the years 1965-1980 to listen to and approve of stereo radio programs and equipment. **Gabriel Sierra's** (born San Juan Nepomuceno, Colombia, 1975; lives and works in Bogota) sculpture operates as a cipher, the size and placement of his materials subtly suggest other positions, placements, and relationships evoked in the installation of artworks that comprise the exhibition itself.

Tina Kukielski is an independent curator and writer based in New York. Her recent projects include co-curating the acclaimed international exhibition the *2013 Carnegie International; Antoine Catala: Distant Feel* (both at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh); *Ugo Mulas: A Sensitive Surface* (Lia Rumma, Milan and Naples); and editor of the recent collaborative monograph of Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh and Hesam Rahmadian (Kunsthalle Zürich/Mousse). Kukielski held a curatorial position at the Whitney Museum of American Art from 2002-2010 where she organized solo museum exhibitions with artists Sadie Benning, Corin Hewitt, Omer Fast, Taryn Simon, and Sara VanDerBeek and wrote about the work of Gordon Matta-Clark and William Eggleston among others. Kukielski is also a contributor to *Artforum*, *Mousse Contemporary Art Magazine* and *The Exhibitionist*.

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