

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

# Making an Artist's Absence Fonder

Gordon Matta-Clark's Spirit of 'Anarchitecture' Is Celebrated in New Exhibition by a Curator With Personal Ties

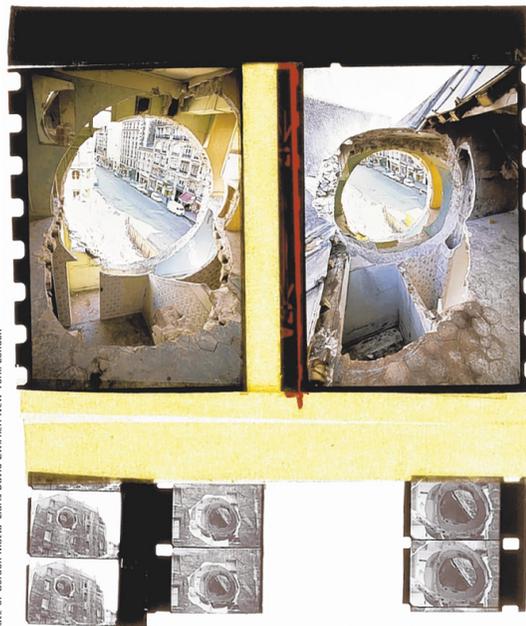
BY ANDY BATTAGLIA

Gordon Matta-Clark was an artist who made absence his medium. In the 1970s in New York, he cut holes into the sides of buildings and dug voids deep into the ground. But in life as well as art, absence for him was about more than what it isn't.

"He's a very active absence," said Jessamyn Fiore, the curator of "Gordon Matta-Clark: Above and Below," an exhibition of the late artist's work opening Tuesday at David Zwirner gallery in Chelsea. "Friends are struck when they spend time with me and my parents that we talk about Gordon in the present tense. It's always been that way."

Ms. Fiore, who is 32 years old, grew up with the artist in her midst. Her mother, Jane Crawford, was married to Matta-Clark before his death in 1978, and a connection through transfiguration remains. "I like to attribute it to his energy and charisma, his inclusivity, that carried through to his work," said Ms. Fiore, who was born to another father two years after Matta-Clark succumbed to pancreatic cancer at the age of 35. "My mother would say that he was a preacher of the word of art."

The metaphysical relationship suits the work of Matta-Clark, who played a profound role in reconceiving what art could and should mean in the '70s, in New York and beyond. As a principal player at 112 Greene Street, an early alternative exhibition space downtown, he helped transform SoHo from a disused hub of industry to an incubator for art. From his outpost there, he ab-



Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark/David Zwirner, New York/London

stained from the solemn gestures of Abstract Expressionism and the strategic sheen of Pop Art to cultivate a practice with purposefully earthy and conceptual aims.

Much of his work was conducted in the spirit of "anarchitecture," a self-styled movement that used architectural thinking in projects concerned less with material results than a pointed sense of impressionism and play.

"He began to look beyond the bodily architecture of buildings that we encounter everyday and wanted to see all the layers below and what developed above," Ms. Fiore said.

"In what we normally see as neglected or obsolete spaces, he had an ability to see potential, beauty and possibility."

Matta-Clark's anarchic constructions and deconstructions figure into "Above and Below," which includes works of photographic collage, drawings, sculpture and films full of urban adventure in Paris and New York. Among the films is footage shot in underground tunnels beneath Grand Central Terminal. "The audio in the film is him on the phone with the station manager, who's saying, 'Absolutely no way am I giving you permission to film,'" Ms. Fiore said. "Mean-



Left, Gordon Matta-Clark's 'Conical Intersect' (1975); above, Jessamyn Fiore, the exhibition's curator.

while, the footage is him following businessmen who know all the underground passages for shortcuts to work."

That sense of mischievousness factored into much of Matta-Clark's work, including an archetypal piece, "Conical Intersect," for which he cut a telescoping hole through a large building in Paris. Photographic remnants of that piece are on display in "Above and Below," which Ms. Fiore curated as a sort of personal memorial. "I grew up with his art on the walls. My childhood was very much steeped in Gordon's world," she said of her early years in a loft near Union Square and later in Connecticut.

"Growing up around these stories and knowing the family history gives her insights into

the work that someone else couldn't have," said Justine Durrett, a director at David Zwirner gallery. "What she brought to this show are spiritual underpinnings that have not really been discussed or explored."

Though Ms. Fiore grew up with a father who is notable on his own, the filmmaker Robert Fiore, the legacy of Matta-Clark featured prominently in her interest in New York art from the '70s. In 2011, she curated a show devoted to the influential rise of 112 Greene Street, and work on that led her to reconnect with a close relation never far from mind.

"I feel like my relationship with Gordon is one I'm constantly negotiating and that keeps it interesting," she said.

"One of the first questions I posed to myself for this show was: If he hadn't passed away, what were some of the trajectories that he was beginning to explore?"

Among those trajectories was a fantastical proposal to build houses that could hover over the city by way of balloons. "This was when he was ill, but he did a lot of research into it," Ms. Fiore said of a series of drawings to be hung on a wall in frames. "He had an assistant he sent out to see if he could find a large warehouse where they could experiment with how exactly to make these balloons and what kind of substance they could be filled with. He became very interested in the lightness and the space and the freedom of that sort of architecture."

## DJ's New Sound: Piano

BY ANDY BETA

A decade ago, while American hip-hop artists like Jay-Z and Missy Elliott were mining international sources for their platinum hits, the Brooklyn experimental musician and DJ Jace Clayton was quietly taking the idea to breathtaking ends. Released under the handle DJ /rupture, Mr. Clayton's 2001 mix-CD "Gold Teeth Thief" amalgamated hip-hop, Armenian and Arabic folk, modern composition and much more.

From there, Mr. Clayton became a producer, a writer, a label boss and a pundit, championing music from all over the world. Earlier this year, he shut down "Mudd Up!," his influential weekly show on Jersey City's WFMU and announced a new album, "The Julius Eastman Memorial Depot." Rather than the whiplash collages he was known for as DJ /rupture, the new album draws on the work of the unheralded gay African-American composer Julius Eastman, who died in obscurity in 1990. Scored for two grand pianos and electronics, the album, which was released this week, is Mr. Clayton's most elegant and restrained to date.

The Wall Street Journal caught up with the musical polyglot at his brownstone apartment in Sunset Park, where he talked about Julius Eastman and the launch of his Sufi Plug Ins musical software.

**Between the end of your radio show and releasing music under your own name, it seems you're intent on moving into new territory.**

It was intentional. Last December, I put up nine hours of DJ /rupture mixes online for free, which gave me new momentum going into the new year. I finally have the space and time to think of album ideas like this Julius Eastman album.

**Why Julius Eastman?**

In 2011, Performa Festival asked me to put together a radio play that could be performed in front of a live studio audience. There was a grand piano in the space, so I conceived of the piece with that in mind. Knowing it was going to be about the piano, I started going down this wormhole researching this pianist Philippa Duke Schuyler, who traveled to Vietnam during the war as a correspondent and died in a helicopter crash. But her music was extremely difficult to track down and in talking to a friend, she said, "If you're interested in tragic black piano prodigies from New York, you should check out Julius Eastman."

**What did you find?**

The biography of Eastman wasn't startling, but the music was great and he was so under-



Jace Clayton in Brooklyn

noticed in the historical record. The tragedy of Eastman's life, the downward spiral, that's actually the common narrative for musicians. Most musicians and composers do less and less, ending up in obscurity and silence. That's normal. The rare thing is the Steve Reichs and Meredith Monks of the world—those who remain active and heard.

**The recording features two grand pianos and then your processing of those sounds. You recently developed musical software called "Sufi Plug Ins." Is that what you used for this project?**

Using electronics was important to the spirit of the piece, as that's where my voice lies: I'm interested in taking a fixed score of classical music and applying another layer to it. The Sufi Plug Ins are inspired by and based on non-Western ideas of sound. The genesis for it was six years ago, but it wasn't until three years ago when it became technically possible to actualize it, thanks to an amazing coder and designer. There's a synthesizer that is hardwired to Arabic and North African scales, with the quarter tones that are missing from our Western 12-tone scale.

**Who else is using this software?**

By this point, 10,000 people have downloaded it and sometimes they send me the tracks they subsequently made with it—everything from hip-hop tracks to super-experimental stuff. The whole process was to think of a tool, but I'm constantly surprised by how people are using it and what excites them about it. I'm also doing a new version of the Plug Ins that will have "forgetfulness." Every time you make something with the program and open it a few days later, the settings will be ever so slightly off from what they were before. It'll slowly drift over time, mimicking how we ourselves forget. If you read neuroscience, the more you access a memory, the more it distorts. If you open up a project you recorded a year later, it will sound very different. It's not a glitch or a corrupted file, it's just an aesthetic experience of forgetting.

FINE ART | By Peter Plagens

## From Early Tales To Wit and Song

**Faith Ringgold's America: Early Works And Story Quilts**

◆ ACA Galleries  
529 W. 20th St., (212) 206-8080  
Through April 27

Faith Ringgold (b. 1930) certainly has the credentials. A professor emerita at the University of California, San Diego, the recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships as well as another from the Guggenheim Foundation, and holder of more than 20 honorary doctorates, Ms. Ringgold is about as unassailable an artist as there is. Moreover, her half-century's worth of work has consistently addressed, as the gallery's press material says, "what it means to be defined as a woman, an African American, and a citizen of the United States." To find fault with a Faith Ringgold exhibition—especially one organized by a university museum (the Neuberger, at SUNY Purchase) that will also appear at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington—is probably not the most endearing thing a critic can do.

Still, except for Ms. Ringgold's poignantly inventive "story quilts," this is an exhibition whose provenance is better than its contents. Her early paintings are stylized in a reiterative, relentlessly simplifying and ultimately deadening way that subtracts from the impact of her social statement.

"American People Series: #8 The In Crowd" (1964) is a salient example. Her paintings in "Early Works" possess little of the crisp, semicubist playfulness that characterizes the work of Romare Bearden or the compositional genius that powers Jacob Lawrence.

The quilts—soft paintings surrounded by sewn and embroidered borders, in the Buddhist Thangka tradition—are another story. In them, Ms. Ringgold tells moving tales, such as that of a military

wife's infidelity, or, as in "Feminist: #12 We Meet the Monster" (1972), alludes to the greater struggle in vertical lines of prose.

While her perseverance and effect on younger artists is incontrovertible, and "Early Works and Story Quilts" is nothing if not passionate, sometimes we're compelled to admire the artist more than the art.

**Robert Bordo: Three Point Turn**

◆ Alexander and Bonin  
132 10th Ave., (212) 367-7474  
Through April 27

Several other artists come to mind when you're looking at the paintings of Robert Bordo (b. 1949), an old New York hand who teaches at Cooper Union. Mr. Bordo, though, doesn't just accumulate the apparent influences of Milton Avery, Philip Guston and Alex Katz, but synthesizes them into something pleasantly, if not radically, original.

"Mogul" (2012), for instance, is a 4½-by-5½-foot oil painting that seems agreeably smaller because it's so informally friendly. In what has become Mr. Bordo's trademark muted color—earthy but never dingy—it depicts in the most basic, off-hand manner a lumpy landscape, the kind skiers do tricks on when it is covered by snow. The artist accurately describes "Mogul" as "a kind of naked, cartoon landscape...[which] refers to a rich and powerful man or woman and also to a pile of mud, a morass." Whatever the picture's implied social comment, aesthetically it is downright likeable.

Mr. Bordo has also conjured up a gimmick, which he uses in a few pictures: the landscape viewed through, or around, either one of its mirrors or the fan shape left by a car's windshield wiper. And guess what? In Mr. Bordo's avuncularly witty style, it works.

**Diego Perrone: Scultura che non sia conchiglia non canta**

◆ Casey Kaplan  
525 W. 21st St., (212) 645-7335  
Through April 27

The title of this exhibition of attenuated paintings and one giant representational sculpture by Italian artist Diego Perrone (b. 1970) means "sculpture that isn't a shell

doesn't sing." These words of wisdom from the renowned architect Gio Ponti are only the beginning of the art-historical dominoes that have to fall in order to get to the point—if there is one—of Mr. Perrone's show. Mr. Ponti's maxim brings into play one Adolfo Wildt (1868-1931), an eccentric and little-known Milanese sculptor of strange "masks"—themselves echoing Roman and Baroque art—who taught the likes of Italian avant-gardists Lucio Fontana and Fausto Melotti.

Mr. Perrone photographed a Wildt mask at the former residence of the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, contemporary of Wildt, and then painted in white—with an airbrush—different, widely separated views of the mask onto long horizontal strips of 40-inch-high black PVC fabric. The paintings have the arch elegance of a ritzy Roman boutique window, with just a hint of a Milanese runway show's S&M vibe. To top things off, a back gallery contains—you guessed it—a giant seashell in white resin. All this sophisticated cultural huffing and puffing is supposed to be impressive. It's not.

Mr. Plagens is an artist and writer in New York.