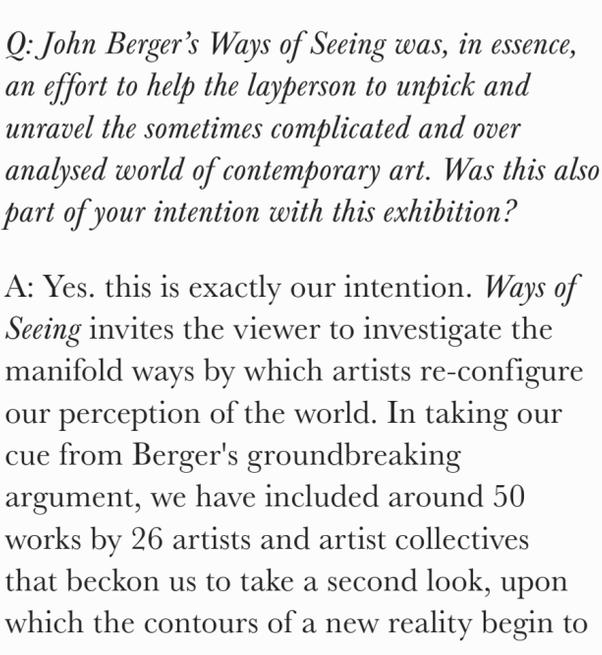


October 24, 2018

Sam Bardaouil & Till Fellrath on Ways of Seeing

This interview with Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath about their curated exhibition at [The Art Gallery, New York University Abu Dhabi](#) was commissioned and originally published by [Shawati Magazine](#)



Sam Bardaouil & Till Fellrath stand inside Fred Sandback's work inside their Ways of Seeing exhibition.

[To read my review about this exhibition, follow this link](#)

Q: John Berger's Ways of Seeing was, in essence, an effort to help the layperson to unpick and unravel the sometimes complicated and over analysed world of contemporary art. Was this also part of your intention with this exhibition?

A: Yes. this is exactly our intention. *Ways of Seeing* invites the viewer to investigate the manifold ways by which artists re-configure our perception of the world. In taking our cue from Berger's groundbreaking argument, we have included around 50 works by 26 artists and artist collectives that beckon us to take a second look, upon which the contours of a new reality begin to emerge.

Q: Why did you decide to revisit this 1972 text now?

A: Our curatorial work is largely underpinned with a desire to challenge the mechanisms of exhibition making and the conventions of art historical writing that

being put forward through these presentations. Berger's postulations provide some of the most differentiated criticisms of how the act of looking at an artwork can never be fully divorced from the politics that underpin the traditions in which it was created, and the mechanisms that are used for its display. For example, Berger tackled the impact that mechanical reproduction had on the mass dissemination of images of artworks. He de-centralised the patriarchal hegemony over the European tradition of the female nude, reflecting, and in some ways anticipating, many of the leading revisionist feminist writings on art history. He criticised the European painting tradition's anthropological depiction of non-European, mostly colonised cultures, places and people. These are but some of the main revisions that Berger proposed, and given our ongoing affinity to

matter of time before we would pick up Berger as a fitting context for one of our exhibitions.

Q: The artworks you have chosen challenge not only visual perceptions but also assumptions about time and space. Would you say that a successful piece of contemporary art has to work on multiple planes?

A: Absolutely. In our opinion, if the formal component of an artwork is resolved, then the work will resonate anywhere and anytime, regardless of what the semantics of the piece are. A lot of art that is formally lacking hides behind a veneer of ostensible conceptualism, and in some cases the label of "politically engaged art-ivism." Through this exhibition, we seek to highlight the significance of the pre-conceived formal labour that an artist invests in the creative process, by which objects transform from a representation of life into a reflection about it. The weight that this exhibition places on the formal component of the creative process must not be perceived as a reductionist call to celebrate the artist simply as a craftsman. Instead, we would like to prompt the visitor to consider the emphasis on the act of making as primarily an entry point to the crux of this exhibition's curatorial proposition: that artists in re-making and re-doing, un-make and undo what we have assumed to be a fixed truth.

Q: The act of seeing itself is something we don't always reflect upon, however with many of the works selected for this show, that is precisely what we are being asked to do. Are you hoping to awaken audiences to the way they see?

A: What we are hoping to do is to make the viewer aware that there is always more than one side to every story, and that upon spending more time with an artwork, and by allowing it to engage our senses, to speak to our prior assumptions, some of which might not be without prejudice, we may well be confronted with a different account of something familiar that may well reveal to us an alternative way of accessing the topic at hand. In this regards, we seek to remind the viewer that making art, and the act of looking at it, are inherently political.

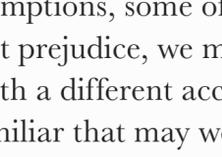
Q: In that respect, would you go so far as to call the viewer's presence to be a performative part of the exhibition?

A: Rather participatory perhaps. The performative element, if you wish to use this term, would come into play in the renewed way the viewer may begin to respond and interact with the world around them due to the change in perception that was triggered by their experience of the artwork.

Q: This brings into question why a piece of art exists and whether it is complete if it is not seen. Are they the kinds of questions we should be asking as we visit this show?

A: The notion of witnessing something as a means of asserting its existence is certainly one of the conceptual threads that we have weaved into the exhibition. Several works in the show raise an essential question that has occupied a central position in the history of art theory: "Does an artwork come to existence upon its completion, or does it only truly exist when seen by the viewer?" The curatorial argument of this exhibition contends that an artwork fully achieves its agency when the inquisitive eye of the beholder encounters it.

• **[Ways of Seeing. September 3 - November 17, 2018. The Art Gallery, New York University Abu Dhabi](#)**



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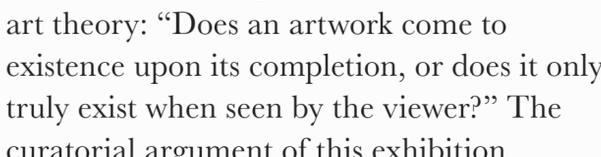
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Look again: Ways of Seeing

anna seaman

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