

Caroline Bergvall, Brendan Fernandes, Samson Kambalu,
Matthew Metzger, Catherine Sullivan and Samson Young

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performative actions
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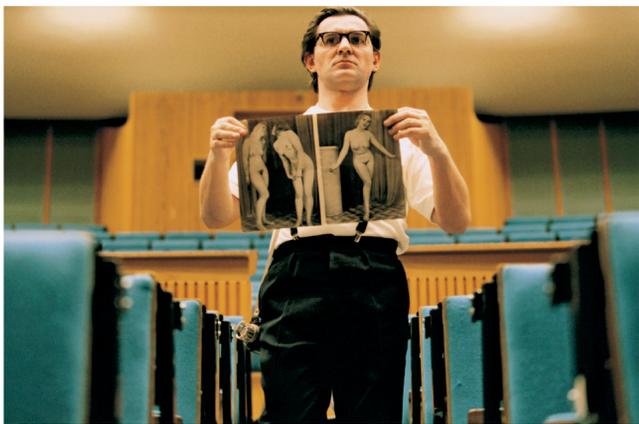
Retrogarde

About the Artists

Caroline Bergvall (b.1962) is a writer of French-Norwegian origins based in London and Geneva. Her publications include *Drift*, *Meddle English: New and Selected Texts*, and *Fig*. She has presented her work at the Fundacio Tapiès, Barcelona; Theatre du Grütli, Geneva; The Serpentine Gallery, London; the Museum of Modern Art, New York and Tate Modern, London. Bergvall was the Director of the Performance Writing program at Dartington College of Arts (1995–2000) and co-Chair of MFA in Writing at Bard College (2005–2007). She is a recent Judith E. Wilson Fellow in Poetry and Drama at the University of Cambridge (2012–2013).

Brendan Fernandes (b. 1979) is a Canadian artist of Kenyan and Indian descent. He completed the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art (2007) and earned his MFA from the University of Western Ontario (2005). He has exhibited internationally and nationally including exhibitions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Bergen Kunsthall; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the third Guangzhou Triennial. Fernandes has participated in residencies around the world, including the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Work Space (2008). He lives and works in Chicago.

Samson Kambalu (b.1975) is a Malawi-born, London-based artist and author who received a BA in Fine Art and Ethnomusicology from the University of Malawi (1999), an MA in Fine Art from Nottingham Trent University (2003), and a PhD from Chelsea College of Art and Design (2015). His first book *The Jive Talker, or How to Get a British Passport* (Jonathan Cape, 2008 / Unionsverlag, 2010) was voted favorite of National Book Tokens' "Global Reads" (2010). He was included in the Liverpool Biennial (2016), Dak'art (2016), and the 56th Venice Biennial (2015).



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Matthew Metzger (b.1978) attended the University of Chicago and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Residency Program. He has had solo exhibitions at Regards, Chicago; Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago; Arratia Beer, Berlin; and Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago. Recent group exhibitions include *The Freedom Principle* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; and *The Works* at CAB Art Center, Brussels. He lives and works in Chicago and currently teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Catherine Sullivan (b.1968) studied at the California Institute of the Arts, where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting. In 1997 she received her MFA from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena. She has presented exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; UCLA Arm and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Renaissance Society, Chicago; The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford; Biennale de Lyon and Opera de Lyon; Volksbühne, Berlin; Kunsthalle Zurich; Secession, Vienna; Kunstverein Braunschweig; and Tate Modern, London.

Samson Young (b.1979) studied music, philosophy, and gender studies at the University of Sydney and holds a Ph.D. in Music Composition from Princeton University. Young was the inaugural winner of the BMW Art Journey Award at Art Basel Hong Kong 2015. He recently presented solo projects at Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (2015); Team Gallery, New York (2015); Para Site, Hong Kong (2016); Experimentier, Kolkata (2016); and Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany (2016).

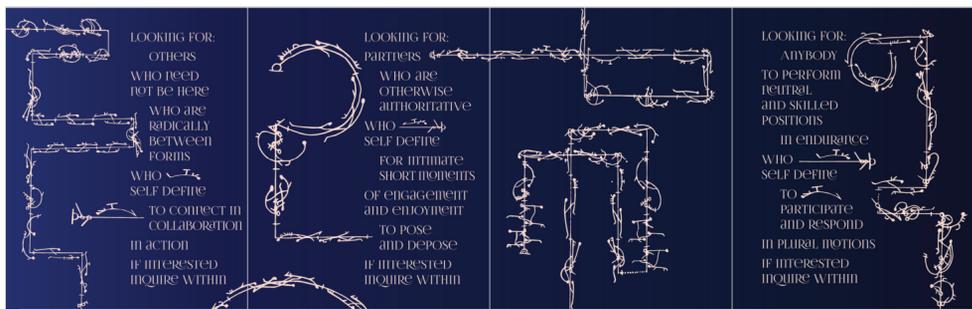
Fernandes's series of wall-mounted posters. Informed by his training as a ballet dancer and prompted by a desire to resist western notions of the ideal body, the artist's graphic and text-based scores call for queer, self-defined bodies to engage in movement. Fernandes's work addresses the codified practices of classical dance to question dance's prescribed subjects and audience. In queering the lens of performance, Fernandes proposes a new system of values for contemporary dance and thereby calls forth new subjectivities.

Adapting the methodologies of the musical avant-garde, Samson Young translates military strategies into musical notations that he inscribes into large pieces of granite. Overlaid onto these surfaces is the Frantz Fanon quote, "To speak a language is to take on the world." Here the artist addresses the emergence of radical aural practices during moments of conflict as well as the relationship between language and power. Young's work takes up themes that are closely related to the avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 1960s, whose work was closely related to politics of the postwar years and a radical call to redefine aesthetic norms of that period. Young builds on this tradition by asserting the need to challenge the received languages of composition and auditory experimentation today, including those adopted from the postwar avant-garde.

Drawing on ancient narratives of seafaring and addressing issues of migration, exile, and transnationalism, Caroline Bergvall's multimedia installation *Drift* (2014) combines two murals with a sound piece and text. Creating a mimetic experience of flight in the gallery, this immersive work resists the capture of language and the body into a single recognizable form. Bergvall's work lies at the intersection of conceptual art, conceptual literature, and experimental performance, engaging a cross-disciplinary approach that is indebted to the intermedia practices of the postwar avant-garde.

Taken together, the works on view in *Retrogarde* highlight the continued relevance of avant-garde approaches to art production today. The exhibiting artists' attitude towards this lineage is not one of blind veneration but rather pervasive disobedience, echoing the transgressive actions of their predecessors.

— Yesomi Umolu,
Logan Center Exhibitions Curator



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Caroline Bergvall, Brendan Fernandes, Samson Kambalu, Matthew Metzger, Catherine Sullivan and Samson Young

Retrogarde



Opening Reception

Friday
November
11

6:00 pm

Logan Center Gallery

Image Credits

- 1 Catherine Sullivan
'Tis Pity She's a Fluxus Whore
2003
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Catherine Bastide
- 2 Matthew Metzger
Collapse, Movement I
2014
Courtesy of Arratia Beer, Berlin and Regards, Chicago
- 3 Samson Young
SDIHK
2014
Courtesy of Living Collection

Logan Center Gallery
Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts
915 E 60th St
Chicago IL 60637

Tues – Sat
9am – 9pm
Sun
11am – 9pm
Mon
Closed

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Exhibitions

Retrogarde is presented by Logan Center Exhibitions and curated by Yesomi Umolu, Exhibitions Curator.

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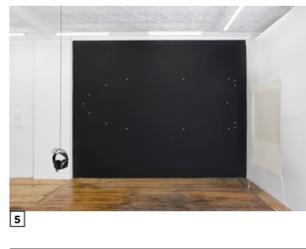
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RELATED PROGRAMMING



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Retrogarde

Opening Reception
Friday
November
11
6:00 pm

Logan Center Gallery
915 E 60th St
Chicago IL 60637

Please join us to celebrate the opening of *Retrogarde*. Exhibiting artist Caroline Bergvall will deliver a selection of readings during the reception.

All events are **free** and open to the public.

Samson Kambalu and Jennifer Wild

Artist Talk
Saturday
November
12
2:00 pm
Logan Center Screening Room
915 E 60th St
Chicago IL 60637

A conversation with artist Samson Kambalu and University of Chicago Associate Professor Jennifer Wild (Department of Cinema and Media Studies), moderated by Yesomi Umolu, Logan Center Exhibitions Curator. The discussion will address alternative readings of avant-garde art and cinema in Kambalu's and Wild's artistic and scholarly work, respectively.

Presented by Logan Center Exhibitions and the Counter Cinema/Counter Media Project at the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality.

Retrogarde

Retrogarde brings together an international group of contemporary artists exploring avant-garde strategies, histories, and archives in their work. Inspired by the return of Wolf Vostell's landmark sculpture *Concrete Traffic* (1970) to the University of Chicago campus, this exhibition integrates other viewpoints, narratives, and contexts to open up a collective reading of avant-garde traditions. Conceptually and formally, the works on view adopt a series of recognizable avant-garde modes—fusing play with the profane; detouring language, space, and matter; and working through performative actions and interventions—to address the politics of everyday life.

Matthew Metzger renders stills from video documentation of Yvonne Rainer's seminal 1966 performance of *Trio A* into two abstract canvases, each stretched to the exact size of one of Philip Guston's last abstract paintings. Metzger's work reveals a schism in Rainer's performance—while performing a tuck-and-roll, Rainer momentarily drops her outward gaze at the space surrounding her and the audience. Metzger posits that in this moment Rainer's body becomes an object in space and the philosophical thrust of her project collapses. By rendering each identifiable point in this moment across an ongoing series of twenty-three canvases, combining expressive mark-making with layers of representational conventions, Metzger considers the tussle between figuration and abstraction in painting.

Confronting similar moments of rupture in the histories of the Anglo-American avant-garde, Catherine Sullivan turns to the Festival of New Art, which took place at the Technical Academy in Aachen, Germany on July 20, 1964. On this occasion, a gathering of twelve Fluxus artists met with a hostile reception from the festival's audience, who took issue with their unconventional performances and the political nature of some of their content. In a two-channel video installation, Sullivan restages performative actions by eight of the twelve artists including Joseph Beuys, Robert Filliou, and Wolf Vostell within a theatrical production of a seventeenth-century Jacobean drama. In conjoining these distinct traditions, Sullivan deconstructs tropes of performance and asserts an avant-gardist commitment to a multitude of forms and meaning.

Across a collection of films from his *Nyau Cinema* series, Samson Kambalu brings into convergence the aesthetics of early European cinema and a myriad of influences including the urban interventions of the Situationist International, the scatological rants of Protestant Reformer Martin Luther, American spiritualism, and masquerade practices from southeast Africa. Kambalu's silent films, which feature the artist engaging in humorous and surreal actions, connects the shared impulse for play and improvisation across these cultural forms. Also on view is the artist's interactive piece *Holy Balls* (2000), which invites visitors to play with soccer balls covered with pages from the Bible, simultaneously engaging them in an act of sacrilege and free-spirited expression.

This possibility of spontaneous action in the gallery is further accentuated by Brendan

