ollywood notables, including notorious Ronald Reagan, and eleven so-called only Brecht gave testimony. The others l were later jailed for contempt of Con-, had never joined the Communist Party, Ten had; yet his polite but firm declara-HUAC undertaking as injudicious. As ensibly revolutionary activities were in many, presumably a common enemy of arded a plane for Europe the day after and never again returned to the States.

d captivating video is a tour de force, as "The Artist and the Economic Crisis," ish for the first time, printed on a poster, Elements accompanying the installation comparison. Five leather IKEA armchair rs hung from the ceiling—referencing, own leather-jacket-as-working-class es on the floor provided seating, their n words and phrases for "close," "not," " (the words come from placards bran-*penny Opera*). A red curtain—a former -separated the gallery entrance from the ay: The video's expert montage confers ready stirring moment of political con-reundlich text, it points to the dialogic d economic hardship, and the necessity se conditions.

—Eva Díaz

osh Mannis's exhibition "Zeal for the t otherwise seem to be a rather disparate natic allusion to authority also invites g, collage, and video work as successful s and provocative explorations of genre. s, which hits all the right contemporary ff of *le bon ton*; yet, with equal aplomb, y same aesthetic regulations.

11, is a hanging tartan textile adorned tening a gold-plated brass nipple from langles to the floor. As this work cleverly

explores the hybrid possibilities of painting, it is difficult to fathom whether Mannis is also evoking the symbol of Scottish nationalism, if not steampunk sexual fetishism. Across the room, the eight ink drawings of *Nadia Comaneci Generation,* 2011, partially incorporate the color palette of the Romanian flag in lines resembling the nation's 1976 Olympic leotard. Yet yellow and red, in Mannis's drawings, are joined by green rather than blue, and the exceptional gymnast named in the title—noted for scoring the first ever "perfect ten" in an Olympic event—here appears as a stout-legged creature with arms resembling crustacean claws. In a related work, *Nadia Comaneci*, 2011 (an ink portrait of the gymnast in wild abandon), the athlete's likeness has been punctuated by a newspaper image in which she appears an elegant waif.

In both tributes, Mannis has transformed perfection into the grotesque, a declassifying and degrading gesture continued in *Zeal for the Law*, 2012, a hypnotic video showing the artist barefoot, repeating a sequence of ritualistic movements to a sound track of industrial bass and a backdrop of streaming dark clouds. Wearing scruffy tartan pants (matching the tartan painting), a sleeveless white shirt that barely covers his paunch and the edges of his farmer's tan, an abundant blond wig, and a rubber mask painted white around the nose and mouth, Mannis manipulates the same golden chain that he subsequently worked into *The Law,* repurposing the "erect nipple" baubles as potentially sadistic knuckle rings. The artist whose corpulent body is a far cry from the fourteen-year-old Comaneci's lithe physique, follows the music's downbeat and, with each forceful stomp, makes hand signs to the camera, alternatively holding up one, two, three, or four fingers. In this performance, which scrambles codes of masculinity and femininity, Mannis animates the fiend that inhabits the law; it's Comaneci's inner drag queen if only she had been allowed to take a day off from training, go to art school, and wolf down a few hamburgers.

The exhibition's cumulative effect suggests that there is only a tiny difference between a passion for the law and bondage to it, or between earnest adherence to the rules and their perversion. Mannis suggests that, whether regarding the conventions of art or competitive sports, identity of the nation-state or constructs of gender, the law is fundamentally unstable. Paradoxically, of course, he also exploits an arsenal of well-honed contemporary strategies to communicate these ideals of misbehavior, as, for example, by transforming the surface of painting into kinky assemblage or using video as a space for the queering of identity. The frisson of transgression here treads carefully along the periphery of normativity though, pointing to the difficulty of ever truly operating beyond the rules. Given these limits, Mannis is most impressive in his video work, through which he embraces the simulacral as the very condition of the creative act. In ways that recall the work of artists such as Ryan Trecartin and Brian Bress, Mannis uses irreverent pastiche to reprocess the ciphers of contemporary experience and carve out an original image zone where new rules might yet be formulated. Yet he is also acutely aware that in an era when "acting out" is a democratic prerogative facilitated by such distribution platforms as YouTube and Tumblr, the gallery still functions as "the law" by sanctioning the name of art.

—Nuit Banai

NEW ORLEANS

"Spaces: Antenna, the Front, Good Children Gallery"

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

Here's an intimidating curatorial gambit: a museum exhibition venturing to manifest a palpable web of energy spun by a triad of emerging artists' collectives. The collectives are located in a working-class, historically black, increasingly multicultural enclave that is literally on the other side of the tracks from the Contemporary Arts Center, which is situated in a well-trafficked touristic business district. From the outset of this project, potential pitfalls for the museum abounded. On the one hand, ideological and class tensions would be there for the stoking; on the other (and maybe more disastrously), were those frictions to *not* be prodded, the institution would be guilty of swallowing the various identities of the collectives only to spit them out as a homogenous, depoliticized group showcased out of context.

So give the exhibition's curator, Amy Mackie (assisted by now former-CAC visual-arts coordinator Angela Berry), some credit for the moxie of following through with "Spaces," which presents the artists of Antenna, the Front, and Good Children Gallery, the three most prominent initiatives of a cluster of artists' collectives that sprouted after Hurricane Katrina on or near St. Claude Avenue in the Bywater District. (Three additional collectives contributed street-level window installations.) Crucial to this narrative is gentrification: Some community activists say the collectives are not only gentrifying the area but also failing to represent the district's historical racial composition. While this may be true, the young collectives in "Spaces" are far from "established" in the manner that the older Julia Street commercial galleries are. Only the Front owns its own building, and as the cultural cachet of the Bywater mounts, the cost of operating there may soon prove prohibitive. Of course, all artists' neighborhoods change, and a show like this one will likely only expedite the rate of transformation.

Sophie T. Lvoff, *Purple Rain*, 2011, color ink-jet print, 47½ x 40½". From "Spaces: Antenna, the Front, Good Children Gallery."

Some pieces on view address such issues head-on. For example, the mustachioed, champagne-sipping duo Generic Art Solutions—known for their staged reinterpretations of works from the art-historical canon—played an intense game of Monopoly as an opening-night performance, with a board reflecting the St. Claude scene. Tucked in a dark corner, Ryan Watkins-Hughes's *See St. Claude* (all works cited, 2012) allows viewers to mug against a to-scale photomural of the urban decay in the St. Claude neighborhood. Watkins-Hughes's piece cheekily literalizes the displacement that is the essence of the exhibition: "seeing" St. Claude without necessarily feeling its energy, blight, fear, and soul.

This show initiated a few collaborative works, including *Posing Process*, the contribution of a desk by Sophie T. Lvoff and Lala Raščić, at which each artist works during gallery hours, and Dave Greber's three-channel video installation *The Front on Display*, which features the Front members hamming for a reality-style parody while knowingly spouting art clichés. Absurdist parodies of twenty-first-century mass media have become Greber's métier, and as maddening as his video's looping Muzak and wink-wink art platitudes are in this otherwise silent gallery, his piece is also one of the few that retains a "signature style." As for Stephanie Patton's *Wave*, a gorgeously weird achromatic soft sculpture/Op-art mattress; Brian Guidry's explosive abstract paintings in the shape of heraldic shields; and Lee Deigaard's photos of wild animals looking at you, *through* you—these are works by some of the collectives' most interesting artists, but they seem to lose their specificity on this side of town.

Problems notwithstanding, there's the feeling of a Happening surrounding the show; that it represents another moment when New Orleans art will change again. The process has in fact already begun. In response to Mackie's and other staffers' resignations shortly after the opening and to the CAC neglecting to notify the artists that *Spaces* would be closed for approximately two weeks to accommodate a film shoot, several artists pulled their work from the exhibition, citing reasons ranging from the CAC's lack of commitment to visual art to the institution's inability to retain staff.

In its brief, complete manifestation, *Spaces* offered a glimpse of what a community's art looks like, but didn't address the forces that shaped it. But the very issue of why a tight-knit scene of collectives exists in New Orleans immediately came to the fore nonetheless. As all artists' neighborhoods can attest, things will change. *Spaces* has already catalyzed that transformation.

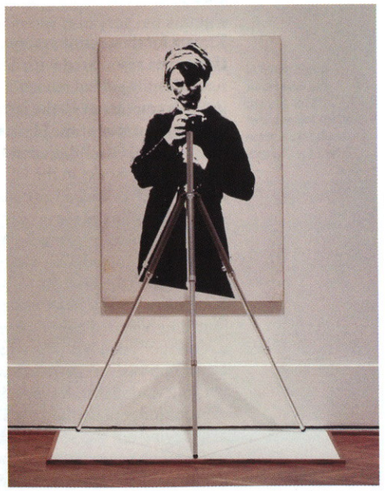
—Nick Stillman

CHICAGO

"Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph, 1964–1977"

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

For a time, the consensus on Conceptual art was that it had to do with "dematerialization" or "idea"; after a while, though, it began to seem better to read the specificity of Conceptualism through its emphasis on language. But in recent years, there has been a shift away from seeing language as Conceptualism's distinguishing attribute to what might seem a somewhat surprising element: photography. In the past, there was a tendency to strategically ignore photography's role as a medium, since Conceptualists often treated the camera as a simple artless recording device, leaving "fine art" photography to the likes of Ansel Adams. In more recent years, that polarity has largely been blurred. Thus in her 2007 book, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art*, Liz Kotz discerned the boundary between Fluxus and Conceptual art, not in terms of any distinct approach to language, the ostensible subject of her study, but in the Conceptualists' use of photography, evidence of the "larger shift from the perception-oriented and 'participatory' post-Cagean paradigms of the early 1960s to the overtly representational, systematized, and self-reflexive structures of Conceptual art."



Marcel Broodthaers, *Portrait of Maria Gilissen with Tripod*, 1967, gelatin silver emulsion on canvas with tripod, approx. 66 x 43 x 24". From "Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph, 1964–1977."

If anyone still questioned just how crucial photography—or perhaps it would be better to say "the photographic"—really was to Conceptual art, Matthew S. Witkovsky's exhibition "Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph, 1964–1977" should have put all doubts to rest. Featuring 144 works by fifty-seven artists and groups, it amply demonstrated the centrality of photography to Conceptual art; as a result, Witkovsky says, the medium "became a paradigmatic form of contemporary art." But as my tentative suggestion of the phrase "the photographic" to replace "photography" might indicate, I'm still not sure that the photograph-as-such is quite to the