



THE PRESENCE OF **ABSENCE**

Curated by Dave Tolchinsky and Debra Tolchinsky

Sponsored by the Contemporary Arts Council

May 6–June 2, 2013

Hairpin Arts Center, Chicago, Illinois

Awakening from a deep sleep and the dream begins to fade. Trying to hang onto a particular image, an evaporating face. A face that belonged to a person whom the dreamer loved. The person has passed. What remains? Dust and bone and something even less tangible . . . absence. The initial concept for our exhibition came about from such a dream and the ensuing awareness that an absence of anything—a person, an action, an idea—often affects us more acutely than that which may be concretely present. Gathering work for the show, we found ourselves attracted to artists who explore the tension between that which is and that which is not in a variety of media and from a multitude of perspectives. For example, with **Robert Chase Heishman** and **Brendan Meara**'s video, we consider what it means to confront an endless fuse. How keenly we await an explosion that will never come. And the longer the fuse is lit, the more palpable the ghostly *ka-boom*. In contrast, **Christopher Baker**'s immersive video installation bombards us with thousands of YouTube users simultaneously introducing themselves to the world. We ask: What does it mean to announce oneself if no one can hear because of the cacophony of announcements? Meanwhile, **Melika Bass** uses film and installation to transport us to odd cult-like communities, cut off and hermetically sealed, where the abnormal becomes the normal and where we slowly become attuned to all that is wanting. Similarly, **Laurie Palmer** fills our minds with the elements that have been removed through her construction of a large-scale hole. Like the image of the sun burned into the retina of someone who stared too long, Palmer's work prompts us to reflect on the meaning of a space that is at once monumental and nonexistent. And speaking of the sun, what if even the sunlight is . . . just an illusory wish. With **Paola Cabal**'s painted wall, we perceive something that isn't there even while appreciating the cold beauty that is. We long for the warmth, which we might even mistakenly feel. Across the room, **Katarina Weslien** offers us spiritual waters transported from afar, inviting us to imagine the missing location. And as time passes, we witness these waters transform. They become mystically suspended between two worlds, neither here nor there, not what they were nor what they will be. Finally, **Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle** bathes us in crimson light while an instrument for measuring the wind flutters outside a red-tinted window. We think about the effect of that which we see and believe but can't feel or confirm, and as we continue to contemplate, it dawns on us—Manglano-Ovalle's artwork occupies no physical space inside the gallery. In fact, like the remnants of our original dream, his artwork and all the artworks in our exhibition embody the presence of absence. —**Dave Tolchinsky and Debra Tolchinsky**

## Melika Bass

I create atmospheric narratives revolving around fractured stories that slip between hyperreality and fantasy. These films and installations focus on the everyday, encompassing a series of rituals or tasks—usually eating, working, sleeping, caretaking—and endowing them with the quality of sacrament. These daily activities, performed with deliberation, are simultaneously familiar and strange, mundane and monumental. The figures in my work are poetic—the wild child, the hermit, the prophet, the captive—observed in enigmatic narratives that are situational rather than plot based. I explore survival within family relationships as archetypal children and adults enact the thorny dynamics of interdependence. The visual effects of film grain and the viscera of soundscapes create sensory experiences that suggest a history of use, blending an evocation of the past with the present. Episodic tales invite viewers to accept a dream logic and project their own emotions into the films' open and jagged spaces.



*Nanty*, 2013

Super 16 mm film on high-definition  
video, stereo sound

**Laurie Palmer**

My work—which takes various forms, including sculpture, public projects, installation, and writing—is concerned with amplifying access to, and redistributing, shared resources, as well as with exploring matter's active nature as it asserts itself on different scales and in different speeds.



*Hole*, 2010–13

Recycled wood from torn-down houses

**Robert Chase Heishman and Brendan Meara**

*Long Fuse* is a feature-length color film focusing on the very earth beneath our feet and this moment in time. A fuse burns a path across public and private space day and night, throughout spring, summer, fall, and winter, leaving a scorched trail where it has been. The pressing question is how, when, and where it will end.



*Long Fuse*, 2012–13

High-definition video, stereo, color, 16:9

## Katarina Weslien

My work is multidisciplinary, taking form in cross-media installation, video, photography, collaborative efforts, books, and printmaking. I'm interested in moments of radical transformation, the place where one thing can quickly become something else. The space where the known becomes the strange and where dislocation of what we know presents an unfamiliar familiarity. I wonder about what is important in this cultural moment, what needs to be said, what needs to be made. I believe in the power of simple embodied gestures, subtle shifts, nuance, magnification, and doubt, that hesitation before engagement is possible.

*alignment*, 2013 (detail at right)

Table, video projectors, hand-blown glass spheres, fabric, water from the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati Rivers

*Decomposition of Memory* project, 1998–present

Metal, fish tanks, mixed media, found and personal objects



## Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle

There is something to be said about seeing or rendering a thing in high contrast. This simple spectral shift calls out the thing we contemplate, sharpens its contours, scrutinizes its edges. Without it our view is attenuated by the ubiquitous haze of all things all at once. Without it our existence remains nebulous, of the clouds, something to merely ponder while we miss the signs of the oncoming storm. And yet, you don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.

*You Don't Need a Weatherman* (Version 2), 2013  
Weather vane and anemometer, window film  
(photo by Brendan Meara)





## Christopher Baker

My work examines the complex relationship between society and its technologies. I was originally trained as a scientist, and my practice represents an uneasy balance of eager technological optimism, analytical processes, deep-rooted skepticism, and intuitive engagement. As technologists make daily promises to improve our lives by uniting our physical and digital worlds, I attempt to make work that reflects upon the practical implications of our increasingly networked lifestyles. With these interests at heart, in my large-scale video projections, participatory practices, and multimedia installations I attempt to fuse existing physical spaces with our disembodied yet poetic digital ephemera, resulting in revelatory and sometimes disorienting forms.

*Hello World! Or How I Learned to Stop Listening  
and Love the Noise, 2008*

Immersive video installation featuring more than  
5,000 video diaries found on the Internet





**Paola Cabal**

How can I fix sunlight into a space, thereby preventing it from continuing to change? Or, since it is going to change, how can I map all of its possible positions throughout an entire year (analemma) so that I can see them all at once? Copying sunlight patterns cast into the Hairpin Arts Center at 7:45 a.m. biweekly, in paint, responds to my own anxiety over the passage of time—a response in which I register my “control” as illusory, even as the piece forms a plausible illusion.

*Analemma, 2013*

Interior latex and spray paint  
on interior drywall

**Dave Tolchinsky** is a feature screenwriter, sound designer, and curator whose work has been seen internationally. He is a professor and chair of the Department of Radio/Television/Film at Northwestern University, where he is also director of the MFA Program in Writing for the Screen and Stage. Dave received a BA from Yale University and an MFA from the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts. [davidetolchinsky.com](http://davidetolchinsky.com)

**Debra Tolchinsky** is a documentary filmmaker, multidisciplinary artist, and curator whose work has been seen internationally. She teaches media production in the Department of Radio/Television/Film at Northwestern University, where she is an associate professor. Debra received an AB from the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts and a BFA and MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Information on her most recent documentary can be seen at [www.fasttalkthemovie.com](http://www.fasttalkthemovie.com).

**The Tolchinskys** previously curated *The Neighbor Next Door: Shimon Attie* at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum in Evanston, Illinois, and *The Horror Show* at the Chicago City Arts Gallery and then at Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs in New York City. Debra Tolchinsky also previously cocurated *Crossing Wires: Technology and Play* at the Evanston Art Center.

**Christopher Baker** is an artist whose award-winning work has been featured extensively online, in print, and internationally in festivals, galleries, and museums, including New York's Pace Gallery and Museum of the Moving Image, London's Saatchi Gallery, Spain's Laboral, Italy's Centro di Cultura Contemporanea Strozzi, and Peru's Alta Tecnologia Andina. Published and reviewed widely, he was recently featured in *Sculpture* magazine and the critically acclaimed Data Flow: Visualising Information in Graphic Design series. Since completing his MFA in experimental and media arts at the University of Minnesota, Baker has held visiting artist positions at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and Hungary's experimental media lab Kitchen Budapest. He is currently an assistant professor of art and technology studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. [www.christopherbaker.net](http://www.christopherbaker.net)

**Melika Bass** is a filmmaker and installation artist living in Chicago. Bass is the recipient of an Artadia Award, a Media Arts Fellowship from the Illinois Arts Council, an Experimental Film Prize at the 2012 Athens International Film Festival, and the Kodak/Filmcraft Imaging Award at the 2010 Ann Arbor Film Festival. She directed an original film for the Valtari Mystery Film Experiment, commissioned by the Icelandic band Sigur Rós. Recent screenings and exhibitions include those at Munich's Kino der Kunst, New York's Film Society of Lincoln Center, BFI London Film Festival, and Italy's Torino Film Festival as well as a 12x12 New Artists/ New Work solo exhibition at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art. Recent installations include the solo exhibitions *Nocturama* at the Comfort Station and *Slider* in the BOLT Project Space of the Chicago Artists' Coalition. Bass is the spring 2013 Pick-Laudati Artist in Residence for Northwestern University's Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities. [www.tenderarchive.com](http://www.tenderarchive.com)

**Paola Cabal**, a native of Bogotá, Colombia, has lived in Chicago since 2001. Trained in observational realism, she continues to implement responsive looking in her increasingly diverse practice, which includes site-specific installation, collaborative work, and most recently curating and writing in addition to her ongoing engagement with more traditional drawing media. Alongside her individual practice, Cabal is an active member of the three-person collaborative (*f*)utility projects. Her work has been featured in *Time Out Delhi*, the *Indian Express*, and *Café* magazine, among others, and is discussed in an essay by Carol Becker in the book *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. Cabal has exhibited in Bogotá, New York, Omaha, Charleston, and Fort Lauderdale, in addition to numerous exhibitions in Chicago. Awarded the prestigious Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Individual Artist Award in 2006, she was a visiting co-mentor for the 2010 "WhyNot Place" residency program in New Delhi.

**Robert Chase Heishman** is an artist living and working in Chicago. His artistic practice is predicated on using photography and video to explore image production, self-referentiality, peripheral vision, conditions of framing, the screen-based, and the everyday. Heishman has shown work at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Alderman Exhibitions, Subterranean Gallery, the Chicago Cultural Center, MDW Fair, Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts Toronto, Roots & Culture Contemporary Arts Center, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. He has created an original set design for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company's *Split-Sides*, provided artwork for the Icelandic band Sigur Rós's album *Ba Ba Ti Ki Di Do*, and spoken at Columbia College Chicago, Kansas University, and the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. His work is held in the collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the Walker Art Center. Heishman completed his BFA at the Kansas City Art Institute and his MFA at Northwestern University.

**Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle** is a conceptual artist working across media to create works that challenge our notions of the political and the cultural. He is internationally recognized for his activist-inspired public art and studio-based works. His current work explores the inversion of utopia, the fabrication of war, and the hypersonic reentry of modernism. His numerous honors include a United States Artists Guthman Fellowship, a Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Award, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Manglano-Ovalle has presented major projects at SITE Santa Fe; Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica; the Power Plant Contemporary, Toronto; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Kunst-Werke, Berlin; the Art Institute of Chicago; Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal; the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art; Documenta XII, Kassel; Krefelder Kunstmuseen, Krefeld; Barcelona Pavilion, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona; the Guggenheim Museum, New York and Bilbao; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. A professor of art theory and practice at Northwestern University, Manglano-Ovalle lives and works in Chicago.

**Brendan Meara** lives and works in Chicago. His conceptually based, itinerant practice incorporates film, photography, sculpture, and installation. Meara's solo and two-person exhibitions have been seen at Chicago's Roots & Culture Contemporary Arts Center, Mexico's University of the Americas Puebla, and Kansas City's Review Incorporated. He received his BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute and MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

**Laurie Palmer** is an artist, writer, and teacher living in Chicago and California. She is professor and chair in the sculpture department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

**Katarina Weslien** is a multidisciplinary artist. Recent exhibitions include *Maine Women Pioneers: Homage* at the University of New England and *Blink*, a six-channel video installation at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The many public collections displaying her work include Xerox Corporation, Stamford, Connecticut; Bates Museum, Lewiston, Maine; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Pavilion Hotel, Singapore; Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan; and Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine. Weslien received a BA from Utah State University and an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Recently a visiting artist and faculty member at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she continues to collaborate with Joan Livingstone on the school's India study abroad program. Weslien is the director of the MFA Archive Project and editor of the Moth Press at the Maine College of Art in Portland, where she formerly was director of graduate studies. Her Moth Press projects include *Pure Raw: Performance, Pedagogy, and (Re)presentation—Conversations with Marina Abramović and Alison Knowles* (2007) and Anne West's newly published *The Intelligence of Visual Work: An Explorative Guide to Making, Thinking, and Writing*. [www.katarinaweslien.com](http://www.katarinaweslien.com)

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## **Hairpin Arts Center**

2800 North Milwaukee Avenue  
2nd Floor  
Chicago, Illinois 60618  
May 6–June 2, 2013



## **Artists**

Christopher Baker  
Melika Bass  
Paola Cabal  
Robert Chase Heishman  
Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle  
Brendan Meara  
Laurie Palmer  
Katarina Weslien

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Tom Van Eynde, *photographer*

## **Sponsored by the Contemporary Arts Council**

[www.contemporaryartscouncil.org](http://www.contemporaryartscouncil.org)

The Logan Square Chamber of Arts is grateful for the assistance and encouragement of State Senator Iris Martinez, State Representative Toni Berrios, and Alderman Rey Colon.

This exhibition is made possible in part with support from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and is supported by a grant from the Center for Global Culture and Communication, Northwestern University.

Thanks to Lisa Corrin, Jane Michalski, Emily Moorhead, Brian Perkinson, Dan Silverstein, and Elizabeth Wolf.

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