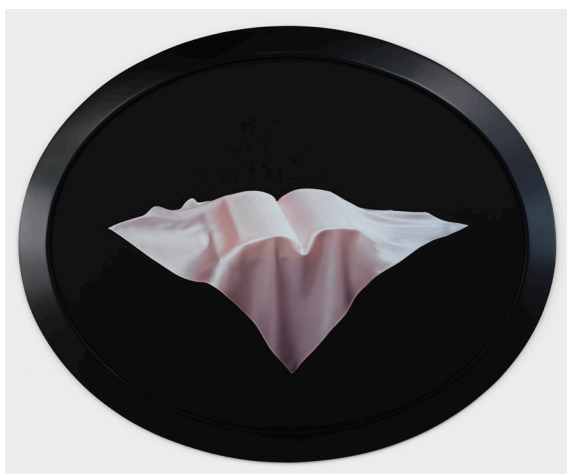
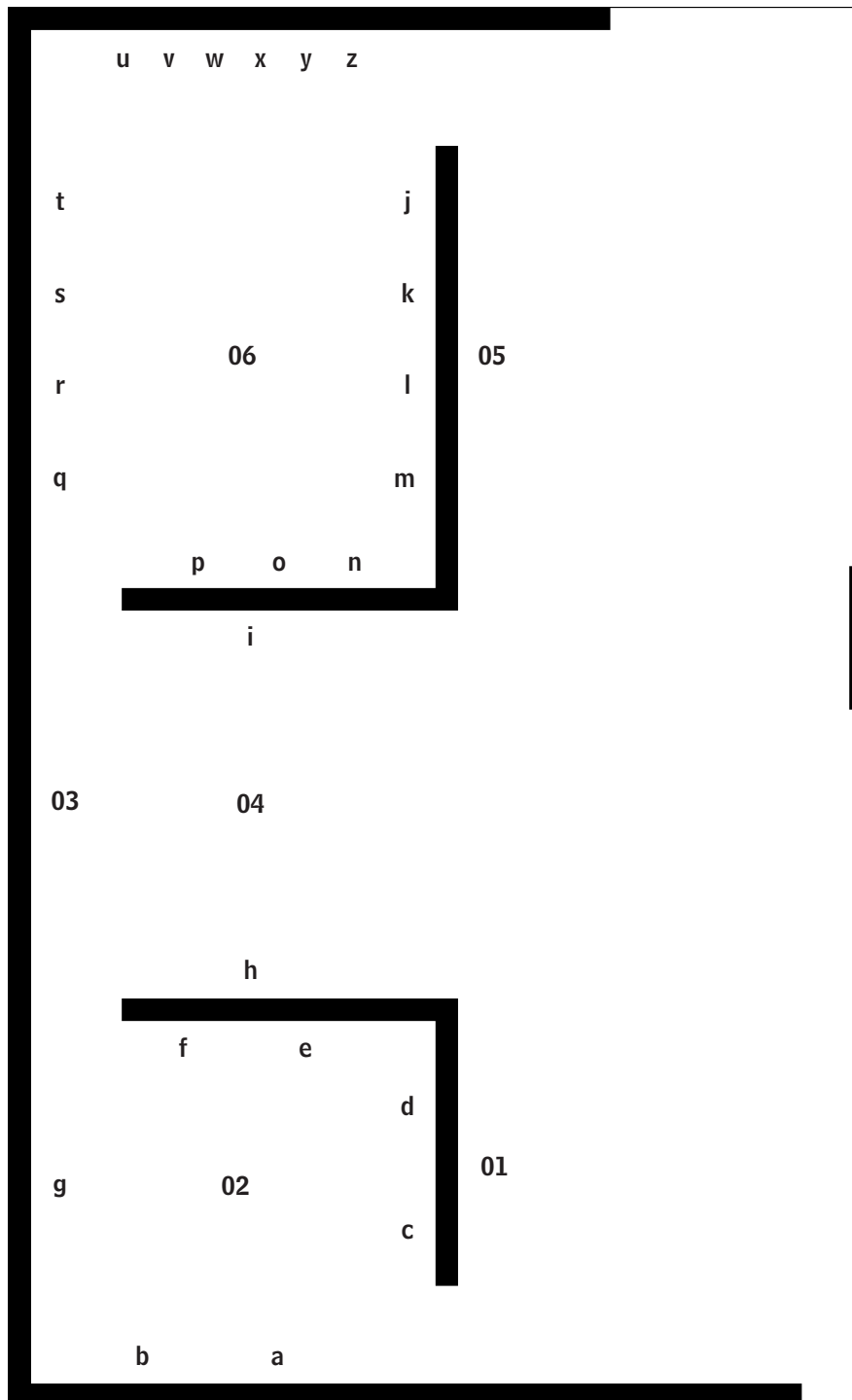


# **VISIBLE COMMUNICATION**



**Mary Ascher  
Sarah Charlesworth  
Juan Downey  
Jannis Kounellis  
Martha Rosler  
Andy Warhol**

**Mishkin Gallery  
March 28–June 6, 2025**



01. Sarah Charlesworth, *Pleasure of the Text*, 1993-94
02. Juan Downey, *Do It Yourself* series, 1967
  - a. *Do It Yourself: Invisible Communication*
  - b. *Do It Yourself: The Human Voice*
  - c. *Do It Yourself: Sound Operated Relay*
  - d. *Do It Yourself: Capacitance Relay*
  - e. *Do It Yourself: Mass Produced Machine*
  - f. *Do It Yourself: The Pink Box*
  - g. *Do It Yourself: Nostalgic Item*
03. Martha Rosler, *If it's too bad to be true, it could be DISINFORMATION*, 1985
04. Mary Ascher, *Corridors of Power* series, 1967
  - h. *Automation II*, 1967
  - i. *Finance and Industry II*, 1967
05. Jannis Kounellis, *Edizione Notturna*, 1986
06. Andy Warhol, *Selected Polaroids*, 1974-86
  - j. *Unidentified Woman #28*, 1985-86
  - k. *Enrico Coveri*, 5/1982
  - l. *Mr. Koenige (Husband of Erika Hoffman)*, 2/1980
  - m. *Bracka Weintraub*, 1986
  - n. *Shoes*, 1980
  - o. *Candy Box*, 1981
  - c. *Christmas Poinsettias - White*, 1982
  - p. *Maria Cooper Janis*, 1976
  - q. *Hyatt Bass*, 10/1980
  - Samantha Bass, 10/1980
  - Unidentified Boy (Shaggy Blond Hair)*, 5/1981
  - r. *Stephanie Blau*, 12/1981
  - Sean Lennon, 1985
  - s. *Ladies and Gentlemen (Lurdes)*, 1974
  - Dorothy Hamill, 1977
  - Sylvester Stallone, 1980
  - t. *Dolly Parton*, 1985
  - Ashraf Pahlavi (Princess of Iran), 1977
  - u. *Bob Rattner*, 8/1977
  - v. *Madame Ursula Spinola*, 10/1980
  - w. *Florinda Bolkan*, 9/1980
  - x. *Unidentified Man #73 (Holding Cigarette)*, 11/1975
  - y. *Unidentified Woman #28*, 1985-86
  - z. *Unidentified Woman (Clipped Back Blonde Hair)*, 6/1980

## Mediated Lives / Mediated Cultures

In 1987, art critic Kenneth Baker went to see an exhibition by Jannis Kounellis in Chicago. In Kounellis's work, Baker recognized an embrace of contradiction and subjective experience over facts and determinacy in the face of World War II. He came away questioning: "Does any of the information we take in from distant and dubious sources count as 'knowledge'? What value remains to subjectivity if information of the world means nothing other than that provided by the media? How do we orient ourselves in a world in which all information appears already to be institutionalized, owned, codified, and distanced from every individual's life?"<sup>1</sup> Writing in the late 80s—prior to our engagement with social media, cell phones, email, or the internet— Baker's questions are as relevant and vital as ever.

This exhibition examines how communication technologies serve as tools for worldmaking—socially, culturally, and politically. While the artists included emerged from different backgrounds and intentions, all are engaged with some form of media and its mis/use. Collectively, the works here call attention to the material contours of communication—from traditional mass media (books, newspapers, TV) as seen in contributions by Sarah Charlesworth, Martha Rosler, and Kounellis, to experimental sound machines and instant cameras in the work of Juan Downey and Andy Warhol respectively—and they engage with these media technologies as subject matter, raw material, and apparatuses for image-making. Many of works in the exhibition focus on communication technologies that are not "new" media per se, such as the printed book (c. 15th century) and newspaper (c. 17th century). However, all were created during the second half of the 20th century, a period marked by significant transformation in consumer communication technologies driven by Cold War defense research and economic incentives.

Developments in media technology have always posed a threat to former and familiar ways of life (consider the transformation that the written word brought to the oral tradition of storytelling, all the way to social media and the relentless curation of our lives). There is inherent contradiction in these changes: such technologies disturb our imagination *and* help us to realize its potential. We are more embedded with our devices than ever, as we become increasingly dependent on them to perform our daily lives. We are also on the cusp of a new technological frontier with profound stakes, as most major world powers compete to create ever-more powerful versions of A.I. Rather than speculate on what this future will look like, *Visible Communication* looks to past eras of our relationships to communication technologies.

Today, while subjectivity and truth are more difficult than ever to decipher, the exhibition looks at how artists have manipulated existing forms of media, embraced new technologies, or developed entirely novel tools for communicating. From Rosler's strident critique of disinformation (*If it's too bad to be true, it could be DISINFORMATION*, 1985) to Downey's imagining of a communications utopia (*Do It Yourself* series, 1967), these works call on us to question which warnings we will heed from the past and what visions we will carry forward.

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Baker, "Jannis Kounellis and the Reenchantment of Contradiction," *Artforum* (February 1987).

## Sarah Charlesworth Pleasure of the Text, 1992-93

Cibachrome with lacquered wood frame  
33 1/2 × 41 1/5 inches  
Baruch College Art Collection

"I turn to photography precisely because of its ubiquity, because photography informs every aspect of how we see and know the world around us."<sup>2</sup>  
—Sarah Charlesworth

Sarah Charlesworth (1947–2013) was an important artist affiliated with the "Pictures Generation." She used photographs from newspapers, magazines, and other publicly available media sources that she isolated or altered, unearthing hidden patterns, structures, and questions concerning our relationship with these images. In her series "Natural Magic," Charlesworth turned to creating her own photographs in the studio. *Pleasure of the Text* is one such work of this grouping, illusorily depicting a floating, open-faced book gingerly shrouded with a silken cloth. There is an interplay of media in this piece, capturing the allure of information (the book) through the seduction of the image (the photograph). We can imagine how media technologies have for centuries—with the book being one of the oldest—revealed and obscured our understanding of the world around us. With photography being, as Charlesworth put it, the "dominant language of our contemporary culture," it's worthwhile to consider the subjective nature of the gaze, the selection of what lies within or outside of the frame, and the inherent curation and illusion present in media technologies, old and new alike.

<sup>2</sup> *Artist Talk: Sarah Charlesworth*, Guggenheim Museum, June 3, 2010.

## Juan Downey Do It Yourself series, 1967

Etchings on paper  
9 × 11 1/2 inches (each)  
Baruch College Art Collection

This set of seven etchings is a blueprint for building various sound-based communication devices. The etchings are companion works to a series of interactive objects called *Electronic Sculptures*, produced by Juan Downey (1940–1993) between 1967 and 1971. The works on display, structured as sets of do-it-yourself instructions, invite the viewer to replicate the original electronic sculptures, each of which consist of various circuits and feedback channels to produce different sonic and visual operations. Downey, a Chilean-born artist who later lived and worked in New York, had a longstanding interest in cybernetics, the systems that govern the transmission of information. He fostered a profound belief in creating what he termed "a communications utopia." Downey wrote of his hope for "strong communications networks of multi-directional potentials as opposed to our present-day pyramidal oppressive hierarchy that misinforms the base in order to remain at the apex."<sup>3</sup> By creating functional communication devices presented as participatory artworks, Downey disrupted the unidirectional consumption typical of both mass media and art viewership. Further, the DIY ethos of these works reflects Downey's utopian ideals of accessibility and communitarianism in art, technology, and communication.

<sup>3</sup> Juan Downey, "Architecture, Video, Telepathy: A Communications Utopia," in *Journal of the Centre for Advanced TV Studies* 5, no. 1 (1977): 1. Quoted in Ciara Ennis, "The Politics of Play in The Early Works of Juan Downey," in *Juan Downey: Radiant Nature*, eds. Robert Crouch and Ciara Ennis (LACE & Pitzer College Art Galleries, 2017).

## Martha Rosler

### If it's too bad to be true, it could be DISINFORMATION, 1985

Video with sound

16:26 min

Courtesy the artist and Video Data Bank

In this video, Martha Rosler (1943–) utilizes and manipulates found footage to comment on the tendency of television news to obfuscate and distract. An NBC Nightly News broadcast reports on the rumored (but soon debunked) presence of Soviet war planes, or MiGs, in socialist Nicaragua. As the voice of the broadcaster cuts in and out, the image is interrupted by static and scrolling text. Later, we see an obscured advertisement for a new model of Canon camera, stressing vision and freedom. President Ronald Reagan appears clearly for his 1984 State of the Union address, gleefully redefining words, so that attack becomes self-defense. In another unobscured segment, assisted by “file footage,” a reporter expresses concern about a Soviet response to a possible US invasion of Nicaragua. The work ends with a jaunty US Army Guard recruitment commercial and its rapid-fire machine gun shots. Rosler critiques the casual commingling of war, advertising, journalism, and jingoism in the American media environment, all of which are frequent subjects across her oeuvre. The work’s title is borrowed from the headline of a contemporaneous *New York Times* article investigating the thorny problem of government disinformation—the intentional seeding of false stories to advance political ends. Rosler draws attention to the absurdity of the conventions of TV news (a medium whose fundamental function is entertainment), pointing out the all too easy digestibility of information (or more precisely, disinformation), and in a deadpan mocking of its self-serious airs, reveals what the artist calls “its banally hypnotic, systematic quality.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Martha Rosler, “If it’s too bad to be true, it could be DISINFORMATION,” <https://www.martharosler.net/if-its-too-good-to-be-true>.

## Mary Ascher

### Corridors of Power series

Mixed media on canvases

54 × 26 inches; 50 × 60 inches

Baruch College Art Collection

Mary Ascher (1900–1988) was an England-born painter who lived and studied in New York City. In her series *Corridors of Power* (a title borrowed from the British political novel by S.P. Snow), she articulates the power dynamics central to institutions, media, and lived experience. The size of these paintings evokes the imposing, dominating force of institutional power over individuals. *Finance and Industry II* depicts a collage of newspaper clippings, advertisements, and financial graphs cascading out from a bucolic scene in the center. Through a motif of hands, *Automation II* suggests an overwhelming deindividuation as humans become more reliant on machines. Ascher produced this series at a moment when the United States was in the midst of the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, and the Cold War. She was attuned to how ideological extremism emerged in reaction to such profound societal and technological changes. As she wrote of another work in this series in 1970, “while the problems of extremism are represented as they occur in our own country, there is a universal aspect that is applicable to all men and all nations. Instant communication is contracting our world.”<sup>5</sup> Over half a century later, this statement rings eerily true of our current political and cultural climate. In the context of this exhibition, these works consider how power and ideologies are presented, disseminated, challenged, and upheld through mass media and technology. And it asks: What effect does the messaging of mass media have on our daily lives? How does it shape our perception of reality and of each other?

<sup>5</sup> Mary Ascher, *Corridors of Power in Contemporary American Life: Statement of Principle*, 1970. Mary Ascher papers, 1949–1980. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Jannis Kounellis Edizione Notturna, 1986

Lithograph and newspaper collage on paper  
30 × 22 1/2 inches  
Baruch College Art Collection

Jannis Kounellis (1936–2017) was a Greek-Italian painter, sculptor, and performance artist associated with the Arte Povera movement, which championed the use of everyday materials to create art. Kounellis successfully troubled familiar notions of art (and the mediums with which one uses to make it) by incorporating materials and objects that texture our everyday lives. In *Edizione Notturna*, the newspaper becomes a canvas. With abstract blocks of ink obscuring the text, disrupting and transforming its function, our relationship to it is unsettled. Kounellis's intervention reveals the often passive nature of consuming mass media, as well as how such pervasive forms of media function as scaffolding for our reality. When the message is disrupted, the medium itself comes into focus—in this case, an otherwise ubiquitous mechanism of information sharing becomes language in material and mutable form. As art historian Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev states, "It is this sensuous knowledge. . .that Arte Povera has set down in the relationship between the physical and the mental. . .between the abstract and the concrete."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *L'Arte Povera n'est pas un mouvement, c'est un état d'âme*, Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection, November 28, 2024.

## Andy Warhol Selected Polaroids, 1974-86

Polacolor 2, Polacolor ER, and Polacolor Type 108  
4 1/4 × 3 3/8 inches (each print)  
Collection of Baruch College  
The Andy Warhol Photographic Legacy Program Award, 2008

Though Andy Warhol (1928–1987) is best known for his silkscreens of readymade popular images, Polaroid photographs were a crucial part of his practice. The Polaroid camera, starting in the early 1960s, became a kind of a bodily extension for Warhol, as he frequently documented his surroundings—both as studies for his painted and silkscreened work, and as a type of diary. Warhol's connection to the worlds of celebrity and mass media are evident in some of the works on display here, particularly in his portraits of figures like Dolly Parton, Sylvester Stallone, and Sean Lennon. However, the Polaroids not only reveal something about Warhol's fascinations and relationships with his subjects; they also reflect his love for the Polaroid device itself (and its instantaneousness). As images produced in an instant, Warhol's Polaroids became a means of interfacing with the artist's surroundings—a way to engage subjects who sat for portraits in immediate feedback, and a social mechanism for participating in the NYC nightlife scene that was part and parcel of Warhol's work. As art historian Nat Trotman has written of the instant camera: "Taking a Polaroid is an event unto itself, contained within the party atmosphere...the picture does not commemorate the past party, but participates in the party as it occurs."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Nat Trotman, "The Life of the Party," *Afterimage*, 2002-05, Vol.29 (6), p.10

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Cibachrome with lacquered wood frame, 33 1/2 × 41 1/2 in.  
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