

The Atomic Archive of Bryan LaPlante, Gregg Bordowitz,
Nina Katchadourian, Lucy Raven, Elaine Reichek,
Turquoise, Bruno Zhu
Snake, Turtle, Alligator

January 8 – February 7, 2026
Opening Reception: Thursday, January 8
6-8pm

co-organized with *Interrobang*

4/26/48

Bryan:

Here's some GAC doodles - better censor one or two¹

Following Trinity, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, Harry S. Truman² signed the Atomic Energy Act bringing together a committee of researchers, military, and civilians to provide oversight on each aspect of the nation's atomic weaponry and energy protocol. During these meetings (headed by Robert Oppenheimer), all note-taking mechanisms were strictly prohibited, with doodling as an exception. Bryan LaPlante, a security guard specifically appointed to conduct a full sweep after meetings, saved each drawing (along with a meticulously redrawn seating chart, to attribute the drawings to their respective maker). LaPlante referred to himself as “messenger boy”.

Performing Günther Anders³ analysis of our atomic age, the exhibition presents all 130 of the Atomic Energy Committee's drawings through scanned reproduction, scattered as imagining their arrangement in origin. Each their own idiosyncratic ciphers, these drawings retain information while operating under code. As the meeting minutes remain classified, we are left only to project onto their twice-removed contents. In the same way that they became metonymic to the impossible notetaking, their scans become emblematic for an archives goal of conservation (the collection, unprocessed at time of request, was unauthorized for physical loan). The exhibition was thus instructed of its own constraint.

Six contemporary artists operate in concert with the archive, echoing the complicated tenets and rules of engagement. Spatial, temporal, or bureaucratic “systems” exert upon us regardless of conscious participation or complicity— their subversion, though quelled, is inevitable. Communication becomes an inconceivable or unpermitted dilemma. The task becomes speaking the unspeakable.

The essence of conceptual art shares the essence of the atomic age; the object itself need not be present, made, or even exist— rather, it is its potentiality which is inscrutable. Roger Fisher, an academic and veteran of World War II, sought to dispel the ease of annihilation by proposing a protocol of placing the nuclear codes into the heart of one of the president's most trusted advisors. Upon approach, his colleagues in the Pentagon replied: *“He might never push the button.”*⁴

¹ Bryan LaPlante Papers, Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Corvallis, Oregon.

² In addition to initiating this part group therapy, part long form bureaucratic performance, Truman encouraged the Atomic Energy Commission to authorize acquisition “by purchase or by condemnation” of any land—within and outside of the US—containing atomic energy resources. Under the guise of “ensuring the necessary research”, the nuclear arms race transformed to a renewed decree in Manifest Destiny. (Harry S. Truman, ‘Special Message to the Congress on Atomic Energy’, October 3, 1945. Held in Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Presidential Libraries System administered by the National Archives and Records.)

³ “Don't believe, furthermore, that once we have succeeded in stopping production of A- and H- bombs, in having all existing bombs destroyed, that we would be entitled to cease worrying... We still would 'have' them because we know how to make them. There doesn't exist, in our epoch of mechanical reproduction, the non-existence of any possible product, because it is not the actual physical objects that count.” (Günther Anders, ‘Commandments in the Atomic Age’, 1961.)

⁴ Roger Fisher, ‘Preventing nuclear war’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1981.

After serving in the Army during World War II and as a security official with the Manhattan Project, **Bryan LaPlante** (b. 1915, St. Louis, Missouri; d. 1999, Alexandria, Virginia) worked for the Atomic Energy Commission. LaPlante was director of security operations, before transitioning to congressional liaison officer. Mr. LaPlante had been staff director of the Senate Republican Policy Committee when he joined the Interior Department in 1969 as commissioner of the water pollution control administration. He retired from the Interior Department in 1977 as director of the office of legislation for congressional affairs. He was an associate of Joyce & Fisher, a legislative consulting firm in Boston and Washington and director of Mitre Corp.'s legislative office. A native of St. Louis and a graduate of Washington University, he had been a member of the Army Navy Country Club, the American Society of Industrial Security, the Capitol Hill Club and the American Legion. His first wife, Helen LaPlante, died in 1968 and his second wife, Dorothea "Sonny" LaPlante, died in 1993. LaPlante passed of renal failure on September 9, 1999 at his home in Alexandria, VA. LaPlante's archive of doodle collected from the Atomic Energy Commission meetings were stewarded by physicist Robert Dalton Harris and writer Diane DeBlois—before being incorporated into the Atomic Energy Special Collections archive at Oregon State University. In 2015, the papers were subject of a week-long intensive program at Arts, Letters, Numbers in Averill Park, NY with David Gersten in collaboration with Harris and DeBlois.

Gregg Bordowitz (b. 1964, Brooklyn, NY; lives and works in Brooklyn) is an artist, writer, and activist who is committed to writing as an activity of thought manifesting in transdisciplinary forms. In his 1995 video work *A Cloud in Trousers 1914-1915*, the narrator in Vladimir Mayakovsky's poem (played by David Rakoff) finds himself in the opposite position as LaPlante's unquestioned access to many, unable to interface with any but the revolution personified, who is "a demanding lover: it requires the withdrawal from all other romantic interests. It demands fidelity". Mayakovsky, though having committed suicide over 15 years before the race for nuclear arms between the USA and the USSR (whose Stalin regarded Mayakovsky as the "most talented poet of our Soviet epoch"), had his own anti-war poem (*The War and The World*) censored.

In **Nina Katchadourian's** (b. 1968, Stanford, CA; lives and works in Brooklyn and Berlin) body of work, *Seat Assignment*, image-making happens despite foreboding constraints. Temporarily within a foreign and manufactured atmosphere, olives and cookie crumbs are assembled to become miniature monuments on airline catalogues. These works contribute to Katchadourian's larger ethos of making; whereby everyday phenomenon is ordered and allowed to determine a larger picture of categorical attempt and logic.

To produce the series *Socorro!*, **Lucy Raven** (b. 1977, Tucson, Arizona; lives and works in New York City) built a room-sized light-safe container nearby the first nuclear test site. On this land, actively used for munitions research, she set off custom-made explosives to record air displacement onto light-sensitive paper for mere milliseconds. At once instances of micro-disasters catalyzed by Raven, these direct abstractions of worldly forces (such as particle motion, pressure, and matter transformation) also become documents of rupture to the air present thousands of years before, having traveled around the globe countless repetitions.

Much of **Elaine Reichek's** (b. 1943, Brooklyn; lives and works in New York) work emerges from deep study into embroidery thread as line, "women's work", and the distinctions between craft/art, old/new, pixel/stitch. Her sprawling 2004 work *First Morse Message* covers the entirety of the largest wall of the gallery, further pooling onto the floor. The organdy curtain is split in two by an embroidered replica of the first sentence of that communication's form: *What hath God wrought?*. Sent at 8:45, the morning of May 24th 1844, the beeps traveled from Washington to Baltimore.

Turquoise (est. 2024, Brooklyn, NY) is a gallery founded and directed by the artist Bennett Smith, focusing on lesser-known aspects of canonical conceptual artists' practices and formal and conceptual relays throughout history. The work on view—Unhappy Readymade—was shown in the 2025 exhibition *Some Debatable Readymades*, in

which Smith restaged five of Duchamp's more obscure readymades. Unhappy Readymade was originally "made" as a wedding gift to Duchamp's sister Suzanne Duchamp in 1919. In the exhibition guide for the show, Smith wrote: "Conceived as a set of instructions to be carried out, it presages by 40 years the Conceptualist model of the score— as practiced by artists like Sol Lewitt, John Cage, and the Fluxus group— and exists almost solely as an idea. By its nature it is un-conservable and non-archival; no original could possibly persist." This replica was strung up on the fire-escape of Turquoise, fully exposed to time and the elements. It now hangs at David Peter Francis out of the 3rd floor window.

Bruno Zhu (b. 1991, Porto, Portugal; lives and works in Portugal and The Netherlands) employs methods that cut, stitch, and write against normative modes of knowledge production and social reproduction. Zhu's work *Situation at German Customs* (initially titled *Situation Vacant*) was opened by Bundeszollverwaltung officers in transit, incurring a large gash across its surface from the officer's blade. In repairing the damage, Zhu utilized the Bundeszollverwaltung-branded packing tape, allowing governmental overview to play its overbearing role to visual effect. Wordlessly, in *Gonorrhea Free*, an info-card from the sexual health clinic depicts a man sitting on a chair with a clock and "15 MIN" hovering over his head. To the right, a single line separates the patient's waiting space from a large flowering tree outdoors, which awaits following assurance of no adverse reaction to any-given shot.

The gallery would like to thank Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Robert Dalton Harris and Diane Deblois, Arts Letters & Numbers, Video Data Bank at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Catharine Clark Gallery, Pace Gallery, Lisson, Seven Sisters, and Marinaro.

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Checklist
(clockwise from left to right)

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Room 1:



Lucy Raven

Untitled, 2021

framed shadowgram; silver gelatin direct print

Framed: 15 1/8 x 12 1/8 x 1 1/4 inches (38.4 x 30.8 x 3.2 cm)
(LR100)



Nina Katchadourian

Topiary, 2012

c-print

24 x 19 inches (61 x 48.3 cm)

24 3/4 x 19 3/4 x 1 1/2 (62.9 cm x 50.2 cm x 3.8 cm), framed

AP 1 of 2, Edition of 3 + 2 APs

(NK101)



Nina Katchadourian

Giant S, 2019

c-print

45 1/2 x 35 1/2 inches (115.6 x 90.2 cm)

46 1/4 x 36 1/4 x 1 1/2 (117.5 cm x 92.1 cm x 3.8 cm), framed

Edition 1 of 8 + 2 APs

(NK100)



Nina Katchadourian

Earthwork, 2019

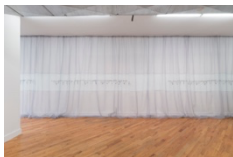
c-print

19 x 15 1/4 inches (48.3 x 38.7 cm)

19 3/4 x 16 x 1 1/4 (50.2 cm x 40.6 cm x 3.2 cm), framed

Edition 1 of 8 + 2 AP

(NK102)



Elaine Reichek

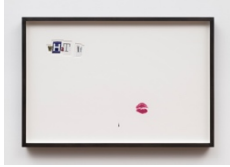
First Morse Message, 2003-06

machine embroidery on polyester organdy

4 panels, total: 144 x 720 inches (365.8 x 1828.8 cm)

(ERE100)

Room 2:



Bruno Zhu

What If Sabrina, 2025

magazine cut-outs of letters and Sabrina Carpenter photographed by Steven Meisel for Vogue Italia Issue 901 [October 2025] on custom cut mountboard, lipstick

16 1/2 x 24 1/4 inches (41.9 x 61.6 cm)

(BZ102)



Bruno Zhu

Gonorrhea free, 2025

printed card distributed by GGD-Amsterdam Public Health Service on custom cut mountboard, lipstick

16 1/2 x 24 1/4 inches (41.9 x 61.6 cm)

(BZ100)



Bruno Zhu

Situation at German Customs, 2012-2025

Magazine cut-out of a Gray & Farrar advertisement, Maison Martin Margiela Replica Beach Walk perfume sample card, and adhesive tape courtesy of

Bundes Zollverwaltung on custom cut mountboard, lipstick

16 1/2 x 24 1/4 inches (41.9 x 61.6 cm)

(BZ101)



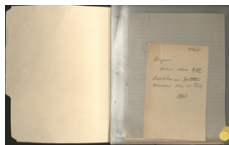
Gregg Bordowitz

A Cloud in Trousers 1914-1915, 1995

single-channel video, duration 32m 33s

dimensions variable

(GB100)



The Atomic Archive of Bryan LaPlante

130 scanned replicas of doodles made during the Atomic Energy Committee meetings in Washington DC from 1946-48.

Part of the Bryan LaPlante Papers at Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Corvallis, Oregon.

Exterior:



Turquoise

Unhappy Readymade, 1919/2025

geometry textbook, wire

9 x 6 x 2 inches (22.9 x 15.2 x 5.1 cm)

(T100)