

**Issue No.1—March 2012**  
**Heart to Hand—Jimmie Durham—Nicolas Party**

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# Swiss Institute Contemporary Art

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Heart  
to  
Hand

Maquette  
for a  
Museum  
of  
Switzerland

Still life,  
Stones,  
and  
Elephants

Zoe Leonard (American, b. 1961) investigates unusual aspects of urban America in her photographs. *Tree and Fence* is a series of five closely-cropped black and white images depicting fence lines that inhibit the growth of bordering trees, with chain links and barbed wire confining swollen and bursting bark. Viewed within the larger context of Leonard’s photography, these images imprint an abstracted, unknown narrative that draws from ambiguity and contradiction, and generates questions regarding movement, dereliction and fertility.

Klara Liden (Swedish, b. 1979) works in a variety of media, ranging from architectural interventions and installations to video and photography. Liden mobilizes low-brow and threadbare materials such as cardboard, corrugated metal, drywall, carpet remnants, or even discarded Christmas trees and pairs them with unbridled ferocity. The resulting artworks question the use of public space and manipulate the way in which we inhabit it.

Adam Pendleton (American, b. 1980) borrows from iconic films and photographs, transferring them to silkscreen and splicing them with text narratives. The imagery weaves together language, history, race, and politics. His multifaceted praxis speaks to the increasingly complex pathos of American culture and the social polemics of inclusion and alienation.

Oscar Tuazon and Elias Hansen (Americans, Hansen b. 1979, Tuazon b. 1975) are brothers from the Pacific Northwest. The two artists work collaboratively and independently. At the core of their praxis is a Do-It-Yourself attitude, which propels them to complete nearly impossible architectural feats. At Swiss Institute, the artists have demolished the platform which formerly unified the main gallery. An optimism for used, discarded materials propelled the creation of a scaffolding-like monument made of the castoff detritus. The resulting triumph, though temporary, provokes questions towards the usefulness of repurposed material, form, and ideas.

Jimmie Durham (American, b. 1940, lives in Rome, Italy) works in a range of mediums. A Native American artist, he is a poet, former activist, essayist, and sculptor. He deftly mines the fields of art and political reality, infiltrating culture industries in ways that are both ironic and ambivalent. In his contemporary work, Durham plays upon the construction and build up of a “postmodern savage.”

Nicolas Party (Swiss, b. 1980, lives in Glasgow, Scotland) is hailed as a painter, illustrator, and graffiti artist. His praxis is an earnest investigation into painting techniques and art historical sources. Party’s intervention at Swiss Institute brings together wall drawing and painting, as well as sculpture. Combining limitless pattern and traditional motifs, Party renegotiates the divisions made between public and private space.

# H E A R T T O H A N D

Heart to Hand, curated by Pati Hertling  
Zoe Leonard, Klara Liden, Adam Pendleton,  
Oscar Tuazon / Elias Hansen

One German intellectual provokingly suggests that “we are already good enough!” Maybe he (that is, Dietmar Dath) is right, and the question of good and bad is not the problem. Perhaps we should focus on specific problems in our society which we can tackle directly and not ponder the larger concepts. Then again, I don’t agree. How can anybody ever be good enough? I think it is important to talk and think about greed, for example. Isn’t this a central theme? Also compassion... aren’t those questions cornerstones of an egalitarian society? Then I ask myself, what is the right thing to do? The power and necessity of direct action must be considered in this context. What do I want? Where do we start? Where do I start? I have not yet found the ultimate answer. The world is changing. People are taking their heads out of the sand. It interests me to think about the meaning of being good enough, of doing enough, or doing the right thing. The picture, of course, is never perfect. I do not want to be afraid of not being good enough. We can all be hypocrites at times. Being a realist can be boring sometimes. I am all for idealism. And I love dreamers.

What is art’s role in this context? In this climate of change today? Is art changing? Is our reading of art changing? To be polemic: can art change the world? Is it possible to have constructive political criticism in the arts? What is “political”? Is there a difference between ethics and politics? I am interested in ethics. I am also interested in law. Am I political? I don’t think all art has to be political. But when I see, hear, or read art it can make me concerned with politics. And it is not because the work itself necessarily inhabits a political statement, but when I experience art, I experience a feeling and that feeling can be political. I think we have arrived at a time again where it is important to contemplate politics. I refuse not to. I believe art is engaged with ethics. Being political is always about being ethical, as well.

Are those who are concerned with the injustices happening in our world to be criticized when they take no direct action? When they make “only” art? I believe there is a lot to process. Art helps processing.

Aesthetic disobedience with language and form without having to give us an answer. A piece of heart held out to you and me so we can make up our own answers and actions in becoming “good” enough. That is generous.

Some make us feel before they make us talk.  
—Pati Hertling

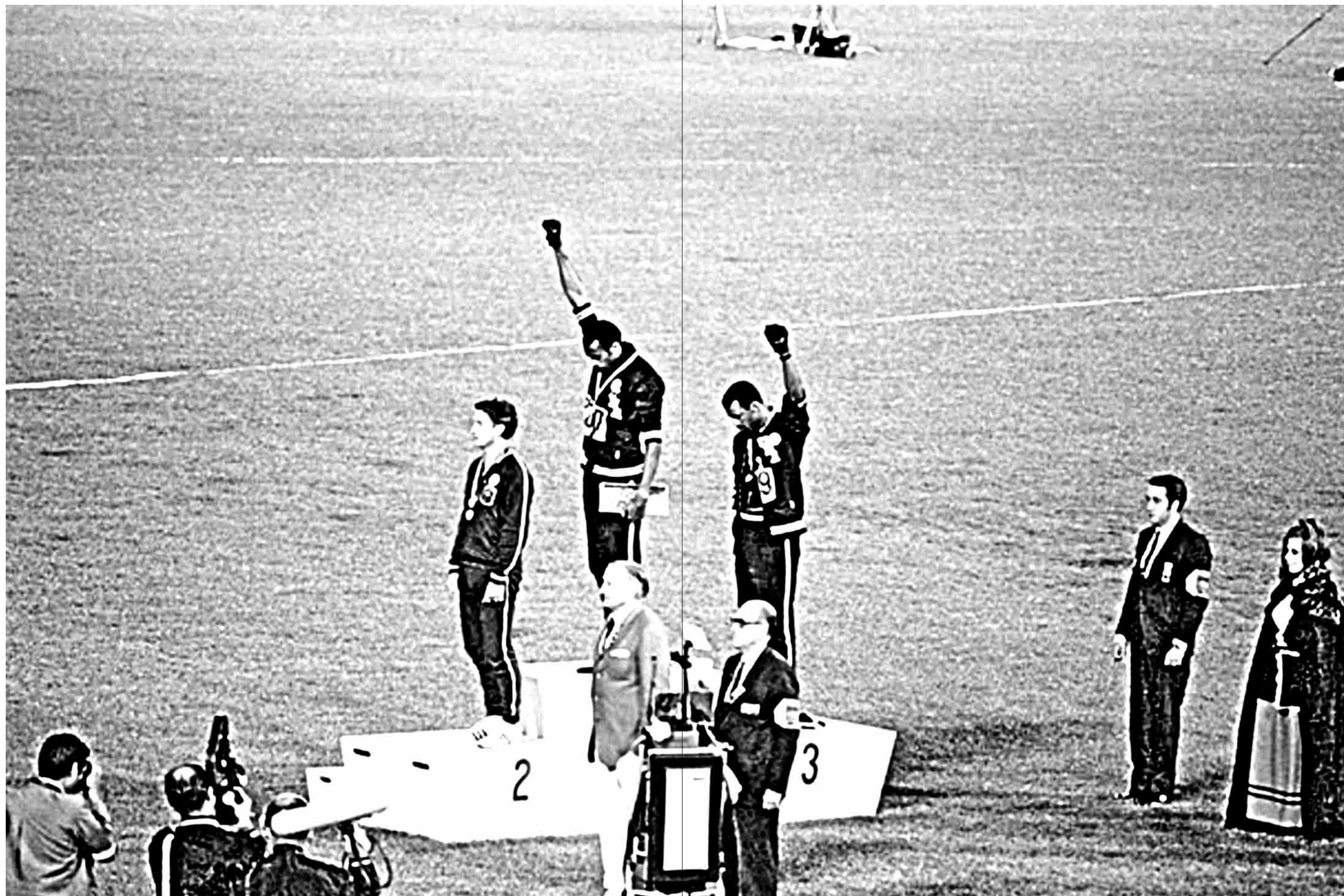
















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From: durham <\*\*\*\*\*@snafu.de>  
Date: Tue, 14 Feb 2012 21:13:42 +0100  
To: Gianni Jetzer <\*\*\*@swissinstitute.net>  
Subject: Durham on swiss museum

Dear gianni jetzer, may this note find you well. Thought I might write to you last year, in appreciation of your good mention about our swiss museum... But I never did. Now I am happy that you show it in nyc...

The fotos of older masks are from a book by karl mueli, but my machine will not make the umlaut over the u in his name... It was published in zurich in 1943, no copyright. In l'ecole de beaux arts in geneve swiss masks and the destruction of culture by folklorizing it was the bases of my thesis. Other fotos of masks from carnivals, from folk museums, are of masks that seem made only for the tourist trade, even if there was no tourist trade...

You wrote, by the way, that some of my facts were fiction, but they are all true.

Good luck finding a saucisson choux...

Best, jimmie



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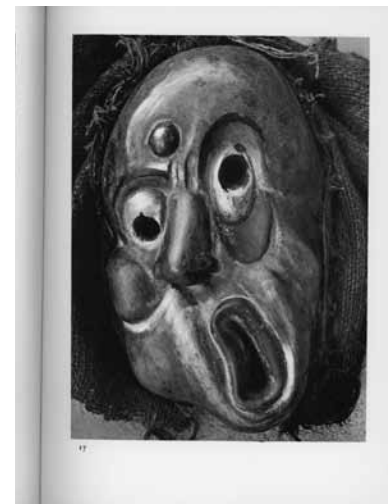
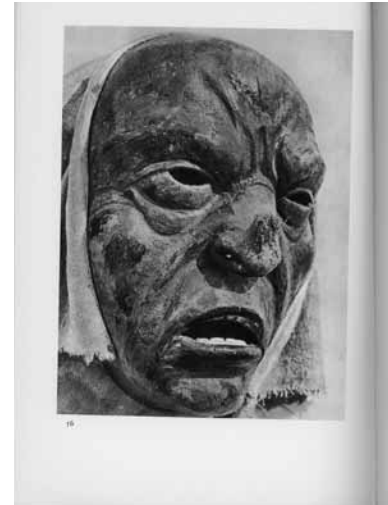




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For Nicolas Party, surface is as important as his chosen mark-making materials. Using spray paint, charcoal, stencils, and gold leaf, Party covers architecture and objects and in a ‘second skin,’ creating delightful (sometimes absurd) environments full of diverse textures, lusters, and patterns.

On the occasion of his first New York show, Party talks about his technique, where he finds inspiration, and why it’s good to draw on the wall...

**MARA HOBERMAN:** This is your first show at Swiss Institute in New York. What, if anything, about your work and/or practice is particularly Swiss?

**NICOLAS PARTY:** The Swiss landscape—the lake and the mountains—forms an impressive and beautiful panorama. I grew up on a lake facing huge mountains and saw this amazing landscape everyday. Working in this environment is very different from working in New York or in Glasgow. When I first started looking at art, I enjoyed artists such as Ferdinand Hodler and Felix Vallotton who translate this familiar landscape into paintings.

**MH:** Your wall pieces have been described as graffiti—a designation that brings to mind deviant behavior, hurried execution, vandalism, and turf wars. You, however, use spray paint and stencils in a very controlled manner and in sanctioned art spaces. Do you consider these works graffiti?

**NP:** I did graffiti for ten years when I was younger and all that—hurried execution, vandalism, territory marking—was part of it. Those aspects are still engrained in me and reappear in different ways. When I was doing graffiti on the streets, I learned you could paint a large surface very quickly if you used the right design—one that took advantage of the physical properties of the medium (spray paint) and made optimal use of the wall space. I learned not to be afraid of painting a very big wall. I’ve always liked the attitude of a graffiti artist who doesn’t ask before taking action.

**MH:** Do you consider your charcoal wall drawings and spray paint wall patterns site-specific? How do you plan for a piece like the one that takes over the entire lobby of the Swiss Institute?

**NP:** What is interesting to me about the wall works is how the various materials react when applied to the same surface. I use three techniques on the wall: charcoal, spray paint, and gold leaf. Each substance reacts in a unique way and reveals different aspects of the wall’s surface. Charcoal is very sensitive and fragile. It registers every imperfection, revealing the

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history of the wall. If there is a scratch or any unevenness in the wall paint, you will see this much more clearly after I apply the charcoal. By contrast, the spray paint glosses over the wall perfectly. The spray paint creates a ‘second skin’ that masks the wall’s original surface and thereby flattens it. The acrylic-based spray paint has a very even color; it does not play off the wall’s surface. Finally, there is the gold leaf. Like the charcoal, it augments any flaws in the wall. Furthermore, because the gold is very reflective its color and texture constantly change depending on how the light hits it and where in the room you are standing. I like that these three materials react differently to the wall and expose unusual aspects of its surface quality and relative flatness.

**MH:** Did you conceive of the works on view at Swiss Institute as discrete artworks or as part of a single cohesive installation? How do the components all relate? What overall experience are you interested in creating through this particular combination of works?

**NP:** There are five different types of work in the show: the food stones, the charcoal drawings, the gold leaf frames, the spray painted wall pattern, and the elephant furniture. I see them all as actors in the same play—each has its own role, but they are part of one intrigue. Something the works share in common is that they all have painted ‘skin.’ The surfaces I paint are simple, but very different. Each surface is transformed by the paint—the craggy rocks become food, the wooden boxes become elephants, and the walls of the gallery become a mural. At the end, the space is filled with elephants, fruit, vegetables, meat, teapots, and decorative wall painting. This is a space that I would like to be in.

**MH:** It can be difficult to describe your work using typical art terms: painting, drawing, sculpture, etc. For example, the fact that the charcoal drawings cannot be removed from the wall challenges the presumption that a drawing is something done on paper which can be bought and rehung on any wall. What interests you about challenging art classifications?

**NP:** I’m not trying to challenge any art classifications. Rather, I’m playing with the ingredients I have in my kitchen, but none of these ingredients are original or unique. I spend a lot of time painting still life. They are very conventional in a way—a table, a teapot, an apple... What I find exiting is that I know these elements are supposed to make a ‘good’ painting somehow. I’ve seen many great paintings with the exact same set of objects. Still, it’s not easy to make delicious tomato pasta even if you have 100 recipes and all the best ingredients.



