

There Is Absolutely No Inevitability As Long As There Is A Willingness To Contemplate What Is Happening

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This title, taken from the Marshall McLuhan text, *The Medium is the Massage*, 1967, resides adjacent to a page entitled, "*the others*", which states:

The shock of recognition! In an electric information environment, minority groups can no longer be contained — ignored. Too many people know too much about each other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other.⁰¹

Apropos? Prophetic? Utopian? This concept, from the book on the progress and effect of technology nearly fifty years old, has so much to do with our moment in time. We devote so much attention to our periphery — our digital selves and interactions — that too often we forget the basics of living in a society. It seems we are missing the component parts of relating to one another as humans who agree and disagree. Physical experience and time needed to evolve and mature have been replaced with immediate gratification and instant forgetfulness. How far we've come.

There Is Absolutely No Inevitability As Long As There Is A Willingness To Contemplate What Is Happening brings together three artists who work in different ways and with different outcomes. What MaryKate Maher, Jo Baer, and Don DeMauro have in common is resilience and rigor in their practice. Through new technologies and old, this exhibit looks to the foundational elements within the studio, and how each artist extracts from this interior space to facilitate the process of thought and consideration of a broader nature. The exterior then becomes not only a constant source of stimuli and material, but a contemplative space that balances the equally contemplative, if not combative, space of the studio.

Drawing thus from within and without, these artists create a seamless line between their studio practice and everyday life, moving in tandem with and corresponding with breadth to the modern era. Their purpose is strengthened by an honest and clear willingness to deal with the external, to accept uncertainty and to reject the inevitable.

MaryKate Maher refers to her immediate physical surroundings in Bushwick, Brooklyn. In this cosmopolitan petri dish, Maher becomes a scavenger, collecting materials as she walks the streets that surround her studio. Her dedication to the importance of naturally and unnaturally occurring materials within her environment allows for an equally

exciting assembly of shapes and textures in her practice. Items from here and there fit together to propose newly formed objects.

Maher may be working spontaneously, but her technique inspires a consciousness of the larger social landscape. She notes, "In the neighborhood where I work, there are a lot of industrial forms, hybrids of mechanical and industrial with clods of earth ... It's a beautiful composition. I am attracted to the beauty of these hybrid forms. ... I am documenting textures and ideas of forms and how things go together."⁰² Maher's finished pieces become homages to the landscapes of past, present and future. These new occupants offer an additional conversation to the process of being a civilian.

Jo Baer's gatherings are compiled from physical and digital collections. Baer plays with images in layers, digitally collaging the visual collections sourced from her myriad of experiences. The sourced connections fold and flop and hold to her critical hand and eye as she prints and hand-colors and cuts; from digital to analog, then back to digital, then to analog again. This open-ended relay process creates a dynamic and exciting modern practice of hybridity. The computer screen has become a new studio drawing space and by her own account, she is "getting very handy with Google search."⁰³

Layer upon layer, Baer pushes the limits and allows for possibility in every new transaction. Scanning each reworked print brings further information to the computer drawing space. As with any translation, blips may occur. Baer uses this to her advantage, allowing the process to excite the possibility of unearthing something new by accident. Baer's practice has been in constant flux for over half a century; now in her late eighties, the thrill of walking in uncharted territory has given her the confidence to accept the uncertainty of such oscillation.

Don DeMauro collects and archives. He is surrounded at all times with all of his materials — beyond entrenched, beyond fascinated, he simply walks around the studio abyss of source and art materials. His exciting laboratory of constant change and chance allows for philosophies to unravel in connections made to history, politics, literature and culture. At eighty, DeMauro's mark is as attuned as his affection for the figure is deep. His artist statement contemplates, "Art is language, and the body is the site of language. [T]he body is by its existential nature nomadic and migrates to the figural. The term figural wants to acknowledge singularity, multiplicity, form, boundaries and becoming. Art is ... equally anatomical and political, personal and social. The body is the site of conception and sensation. Art ... mediates and interprets through line, shape, plane, tone and color, the internal and external intensities of boundaries and their entanglements."⁰⁴

DeMauro's daily movements and methods make up his practice, which is rooted in generosity. He has an insatiable appetite for research, which turns to lived experience. DeMauro then offers that experience to his viewers. It is this personal reach that brings each conversation to full strength, together with the intense compassion for relentless dialogue with the studio that allows for DeMauro's success.

In *Rules of Engagement*, 1939, Albert Camus wrote, "Clarity presupposes resistance to the impulses of hatred as well as to the cult of inevitability. In the world of our experience, everything can be avoided."⁰⁵ On the experience of the artist, he noted that "all ... held the labors of art in high esteem and complained of the organization of the modern world that makes so difficult the pursuit of those labors, as well as the exercise of meditation, indispensable to the artist."⁰⁶ Foreshadowing our preoccupation with the digital "connections" we are forced to make, Camus' words recognized the importance of the need for a rigorous relationship with the studio. Throughout their working processes, Maher, Baer and DeMauro accept nothing as inevitable in their search for clarity. They share their experiences open-handedly, with the hope of infecting us all with curiosity. Curiosity allows for an engaged public.

Awareness brings hope and despair. It is up to the compassionate observer to act. The studio can be a space for such awareness and activity. As Alice Walker said, "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."^[07] We are powerful. We must not take anything for granted. We must see past the nods to the inevitable and like Maher, Baer and DeMauro, take to a rigor of practice and learn to appreciate possibility in this world of absolutes. Nothing is inevitable as long as we are aware of ourselves and of the impacts, intended and unintended, we have on our communities.

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