

Virtual Walkthrough Transcript of *To Cast Too Bold A Shadow*
Exhibition Dates: October 15, 2020 – February 6, 2021

Sara Reisman:

The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation's current exhibition, *To Cast Too Bold a Shadow*, is the fourth installment in a two-year series of exhibitions titled *Revolutionary Cycles*. A series organized in six thematic installments, this suite of shows considers how human rights, labor, gender, the media, surveillance and family, collectively shape our experience in the current political climate. *To Cast Too Bold A Shadow* was organized by Sara Reisman with George Bolster and Anjuli Nanda Diamond, with installation design and production led by Matt Johnson.

The script for the exhibition tour draws from excerpts from the exhibition essay, object labels, and descriptive texts for accessibility, highlighting a selection of artworks in the show.

Conceived as a rigorous examination of culturally entrenched forms of misogyny, *To Cast Too Bold a Shadow* embraces the complexities of sexism in relation to both gender and feminism. The exhibition features works that challenge the constraints women have endured across economic, cultural, and political lines. The title suggests that *To Cast Too Bold a Shadow* is not only a right, but a necessity in the pursuit of a just society.

The exhibition's title, *To Cast Too bold a Shadow* is a line borrowed from a poem written by the late feminist poet, Adrienne Rich. In her 1963 poem, *Snapshots Of A Daughter-In-Law*, Rich wrote, "Time is male and in his cups drinks to the fair. Bemused by gallantry, we hear our mediocrities over-praised, indolence read as abnegation, slattern thought styled intuition, every lapse forgiven, our crime only to cast too bold a shadow or smash the mold straight off. For that, solitary confinement, tear gas, attrition shelling. Few applicants for that honor". Rich's poem *Snapshots Of A Daughter-In-Law* characterizes a time, somewhat like 2020, marked by cultural and political transformation across the spectrum. Seismic shifts that might now be described as intersectional.

With the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, second wave feminism had gained momentum. This was the same year that the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women submitted its final reports to President John F. Kennedy. Friedan's book, in which she identified the problem that has no name, was written at a time when women, who'd been in the workforce through the Second World War, were told that their fulfillment was now to be found in housework and family just as American suburbs were growing exponentially.

Another important aspect of the early 1960s was civil rights activism organized in response to racism and segregation in the United States. Martin Luther King made his "I Have a Dream" speech and Malcolm X delivered "Message to the Grassroots." It's also the same year that President Kennedy was assassinated. In the context of this public turmoil, Adrienne Rich's prose about the drudgery of domestic life might register as less consequential. Yet it's these nuanced corners of the everyday that reveal the degree to which the systemic oppression of women is entrenched in Western culture.

In her renowned *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*, 1969, conceptual artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles denounced the tedium of domestic life, especially the under-appreciated labor borne by mother and wife. In her manifesto, Ukeles wrote, "maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time. The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay.

Rajkamal Kahlon's *Untitled (Green Stripes)*, 2017 is from the series, *Do You Know Our Names?* The artwork consists of gouache and acrylic on archival digital print.

Descriptive text: In this work, the artist paints over enlargements taken from a German anthropology book from 1890 that features portrait photographs of women from around the world. A page from that book shows a black woman with short curly hair and a fixed gaze looking directly at the viewer. She's wearing green and yellow horizontal striped shirt with a necklace. From her nose to her chin, a series of five horizontal cream-colored bands cross her face, like a mask or muscle. At the very bottom of the page, German text and Gothic font reads: Frau von Neu Britannien, translating to woman from New Britain. She is set against a solid off-white background.

Rajkamal Kahlon's series *Do You Know Our Names?* modifies photographic material to question how photography has been used to document the colonial subject. The series is based on 19th Century portraits of women appropriated from imagery in *Die Völker Der Erde*, people of the earth, an 1890 German book on anthropology that Kahlon bought at a used bookshop in Vienna. The artist's painterly interventions rehumanize those whose histories have long since been reduced to nameless identities.

She digitally enlarged a selection of portraits of women, and then embellished them with acrylic paint in a similar manner to the coloration techniques of 19th-century photography studios. Kahlon's interventions restore the humanity of the portraits' subjects by adorning them in present-day attire, and with dotted lined and banded decorative elements, that range from whimsical patterns to suggestions of disease. A gauze head wrap is both bandage and blindfold, obscuring the subject's gaze from legibility.

Joiri Minaya's *#dominicanwomengooglesearch* (2016) is a mixed media installation.

Descriptive text: This life-sized installation features cut-out images of female body parts with stylized tropical pattern fabrics collaged to the backs, which are then suspended from the gallery ceiling. After running a Google search for Dominican women, the artists pulled the resulting images of exoticized women. Here are fragments of the female form. A head and neck, a leg, a chest and arm are suspended in midair, disembodied, dismembered in a surrealist constellation. The backsides of the figures show brightly-colored tropical pattern fabric, images of palm fronds, hibiscus flowers and fruits.

Like Kahlon's appropriated illustrations Minaya's work scrutinizes the fetishization of women of Dominican descent. *#dominicanwomengooglesearch* is based on images generated by search engine results for the phrase "Dominican women". The three-dimensional kinetic installation of female body parts is comprised of flat muscular stomachs, headless wet torsos, crossed legs, long

hair, floating hands, breasts, and buttocks.

The work combines images of the female body with tropical symbols deconstructing the effects of culturally specific fantasies on the agency of women, specifically those from developing parts of the world. Curator Tatiana Santa Rosa writes, “their assertive gazes might suggest empowerment, but numerous images belong to dating websites following a visual standardization that discloses their staging and production further reiterating the contradictions inherent in cultural appropriation.”

Artworks by Maria D. Rapicavoli and Furen Dai prompt questions about the inequities produced by marriage and motherhood and their impact on education and economic advancement for women. Maria D. Rapicavoli's *The Other: A Familiar Story* (2020) is a two-channel film with sound accompanied by a sculptural installation. Rapicavoli's project is supported by the Italian Council program, 6th Edition, 2019, to promote Italian contemporary art in the world by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism.

Descriptive text: A split-screen video with color and sound features a white woman with red hair, the sole protagonist of this video in varied environments. She quietly walks alone along a seashore in one scene then hurriedly runs through a verdant orchard screaming silently in another. In another scene, she walks through a dark cave guided by a light from her flashlight. She wanders to an abandoned home. Another scene shows her onboard a ferry with the Statue of Liberty in the background. The second half of the film shifts to show the woman now inside a large industrial space, hosting a meal for a group of mannequins, rearranging objects in a large empty space, and writing on the wall the question, “What am I?” The final scene opens on a dark space with a single light source revealing the protagonist sitting barefoot on the floor with her arms around her knees. The video has a narrated soundtrack with ambient sound. To the left of the split screen projection are two wooden walls that create an enclosure with three mirrors in one corner, an Yves Klein blue bed frame leaning up against the gray wall, a wooden stool that is painted white, a stained natural wood box on top of which is a wooden puzzle of a face that is painted red. A black ladder leans against the back wall. To the right, inside is a red painted work surface that holds three dress form busts who appear in the film. Other objects on the dark red work surface include blue painted geometric puzzle pieces, three white ceramic plates, a white ceramic pitcher, and wooden blocks with long screws strewn along the tabletop.

The Other: A Familiar Story is a two-channel film that recounts the imposed matrimony of the protagonist who is forced to immigrate to the United States through marriage against her will, leaving her children and previous partner behind in the process. To contextualize the character's journey and the conditions of women historically, Rapicavoli cites Simone de Beauvoir's writings on the construct of woman as Other, a term that has come into wider circulation in recent years. The act of othering has emerged in vernacular discourse to describe the sense of alienation experienced by marginalized individuals defined in contrast to the dominant culture that is, in the most general terms, identified as white, heteronormative, and male.

In volume one of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir wrote, "it is not the Other who defining itself as Other defines the One. The Other is posited as Other by the One positing itself as One. But in

order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to submit to this foreign point of view".

Furen Dai's *Love for Sale* (2020) is a digital video in color with sound.

Descriptive text: This digital video features a blue screen upon which white and yellow Chinese text flash in alternating colors. The text rotates 90 degrees clockwise, or counterclockwise, throughout the conversation, zooming in and out on particular sentences. The bottom of the video contains a purple horizontal register with English subtitles in white. The audio plays excerpts of conversations between parents looking for suitable matches for their adult children and potential suitors. One exchange goes as follows: You have a better selling price if you are under 30. Once you pass 30, your price drops. Once you pass 35, your price is going to get worse. Boys are different. They're as good as when they are 40.

In this video Dai records conversations at five different marriage markets held in public parks throughout Beijing, where parents attempt to find potential matches for their adult children. Their exchanges call attention to the gender inequity in traditional Chinese culture, in which men are the hot commodity and women age out of consideration as viable matches much sooner than their male counterparts. *Love for Sale* reveals how parents appraise the status of prospective suitors through the lenses of education, class, position, and immigration. The soundtrack is made up of transcribed snippets of dialogue resulting in an experimental documentation of this matchmaking ritual.

In response to gender-based sexual assault, Betty Tompkins' collage paintings lay bare the hollow apologies delivered by celebrities in the wake of the Me Too movement. Betty Tompkins' *Apologia* (Caravaggio #3), 2018 is comprised of painted text on torn-out pages from an art history book.

Descriptive text: Two torn book pages placed side by side feature prints of two paintings by Caravaggio. On the left, *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* shows a young boy recoiling after having been bitten by a lizard, which still clings to his finger. In the foreground there is a still life with a vase containing a pink rose and sprig of jasmine. Over the boy's face and body, pink handwritten text reads: There are no words to express my sorrow and regret for the pain I have caused others by words and actions. To the people I have hurt, I am truly sorry. As I'm writing this, I realize the depth of the damage and disappointment I've left behind at home and at NBC. Some of what is being said about me is untrue or mis-characterized, but there is enough truth in these stories to make me feel embarrassed and ashamed. I regret that my shame is now shared by the people I cherished dearly.

On the right, Caravaggio's *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* shows a young boy carrying a basket of fruit: bunches of grapes, a peach, pears, apples, figs, and an open pomegranate. The text reads: Repairing the damage will take a lot of time and soul-searching and I'm committed to beginning that effort. It's now my full-time job. The last two days have been humbling. I'm blessed to be surrounded by people I love. Signed, Matt Lauer.

Tompkins *Apologia* series features pages torn from art history books onto which the artist has

painted text derived from statements, most likely written by publicist issued by famous figures like Matt Lauer and R. Kelly who've been publicly accused of rape and assault, each by multiple women. Individual works in the series employ contrite declarations made in the wake of the Me Too movement, questioning their authenticity.

Anatomy (2020) is comprised of reproductions of sexual assault evidence collection kit diagrams, set-up boxes, inkjet prints on paper.

Descriptive text: A collection of white boxes with anatomical diagrams line the walls of the gallery. These boxes are reproductions of sexual assault evidence collection kits, colloquially called rape kits from various US State Justice Departments. These white boxes and prints with black outlined images of bodies and body parts, anatomical drawings of adults, children, babies, cis-gender males, and cisgender females index the clinical points of reference used to catalog injury and sexual assault.

Aliza Shvarts' *Anatomy* is newly commissioned for *To Cast Too Bold a Shadow*. The work assembles from graphic diagrams culled from sexual assault evidence kits, colloquially known as rape kits, implemented for law enforcement purposes across the United States. Used by sexual assault nurse examiners and forensic nurses to document bodily injuries, the interpretive nature of these evaluative tools is puzzling for two reasons: first, for the omission of critical anatomical details. And second, for their lack of recognition of the bodily diversity of sexual assault survivors, particularly the bodies of transgender and non-binary people who are disproportionately subject to sexual violence. Yet, even if these diagrams were more accurate and inclusive, they are still unable to document the presence or absence of consent, according to Shvarts, which is critical to adjudicating sexual assault.

The diagrams have been isolated and printed at their original dimensions and their original positions and frequency on their original support materials. They're installed geographically rather than alphabetically in the gallery space with Western States on the left wall, Eastern States on the right and Southern States on the pedestals.

Artist duo Anetta Mona Chisa and Lucia Tkáčová stage a tableau vivant of female models who stand in for the mythological figures found in classical architecture as a play on the silent, but ever-present work of women throughout civilization. Anetta Mona Chisa and Lucia Tkáčová's *Caryatids* (2013) consists of a giclee print and books.

Descriptive text: This installation consists of a life-sized color portrait hanging on the wall with a stack of books flanking on each side. In this photograph, five young women re-enact the role of Greek caryatids, an architectural feature in which female figures hold up a column. Here, real-life women balance on top of a stack of books on the floor while balancing another stack of books atop each of their heads, creating human book columns from floor to ceiling. Some book titles include *Pyramida*, *Encyklopédia Slovenska*, *Vagina*, and *Marx*. These women with fair skin and long auburn hair wear monochrome gray street clothing, long sleeve shirts, cardigans, leggings, skirts, and slacks. They look directly at the camera lens with blank expressions. They stand in a room with parquet wooden flooring and white walls lined with bookshelves.

For *Caryatids* (2013), artists Chisa and Tkáčová staged a photograph in which several women perform a tableau vivant of caryatids, reenacting a classical Greek architectural feature, in which each woman holds up a column. The most prominent example of this can be found in the temple dedicated to Artemis and the Acropolis of Athens, Greece. In *Caryatids*, the columns are built of books.

Alongside the photographs are actual towers of stacked books selected from the Rubin Foundation curatorial team's offices, symbolizing the tenuous balancing act between art and life, one especially familiar to women artists. The piece asks an awkward question: How long can these women continue to uphold the very institutions that exploit them?

Also highlighting invisible labor is Mierle Laderman Ukeles' performance *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside, July 23rd, 1973*, which signals a radical reevaluation of manual labor traditionally performed by women, often for lower or no pay. As Ukeles wrote in her *Maintenance Manifesto*, "My working will be the work suggesting that once women's work is accepted as work, a true state of gender equity can be realized".

Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Second Binding* (1964). Cheesecloth stuffed with rags and newspaper, dye, and aluminum foil on canvas, on loan from the Jewish Museum, New York, purchased by Milton and Miriam handler Fund 2017.

Description: Between painting and sculpture, this work is made from cheese cloth stuffed with rags, newspaper, and aluminum foil, forming a cluster of interwoven pods on canvas. The off-white cheesecloth and canvas have been painted in shades of brown, beige, pale yellow, magenta, pink, orange, red, and dark gray similar to the style of abstract expressionists' gestural painting, made of marks, drip, splashes, and splatters. One of the two central pods open to reveal aluminum balls, one containing a red and white interior.

As an art student at Pratt Institute in the early sixties, Ukeles made *Second Binding*. According to the artist, the binding series were "sort of energy pods, where I stuffed them up to the point of bursting with rags." The abstract works redeemed pornographic art by the predominantly male faculty at Pratt. Unsupported by the school in her experimental approach, which was influenced by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Marcel Duchamp, and others, she took a leave of absence in 1964, returning the next year and eventually withdrawing from Pratt because her work was criticized for being oversexed.

This artwork is significant for embodying tension, movement, and contingency, revealing what curator Patricia Phillips has called a "robust physicality." It introduced a pivotal development in the artist's practice as the body of work that followed was considerably larger in scale, described by Ukeles as "air art", breaking away from the density of the bindings.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside, July 23rd, 1973*, part of *Maintenance Art* performance series staged between 1973 and 1974. The work here documents a performance at the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut. This photo series was selected in 1998 and includes one typed letter, one handwritten letter, and 12 black and white photographs, courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

Descriptive text: A four by three grid of black and white photographs document a performance in which the artist washes the steps and square in front of the Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum in Hartford, Connecticut. She's pictured mopping and hand-washing this outdoor public space, sometimes on her hands and knees. To the left of the photographs are two documents. The top left is a handwritten letter to the spectator, which reads: Dear Spectator, The cleanliness of this area is now being maintained as Maintenance Art by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, artist. Please feel free to continue on your way, right through the dust painting as she will be continuing to maintain it this whole day. Signed, Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

Steeped in the ethos of acknowledging maintenance work Mierle Laderman Ukeles' practices influenced a generation of socially-engaged artists who address systems of labor. Situated between symbolic gesture and activist intervention, is Ukeles four-part performance staged at the Wadsworth Athenaeum. One of the four parts on view here is *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside, July 23rd, 1973*. In realizing these ritualistic cleanings at the museum Ukeles scoured the floors of the galleries and outdoor public spaces without break or interruption, as many visitors stepped around her, with a few children, but no adults offering to help.

While the work aggressively called out the institution's tendency to keep the labor of the museums upkeep out of public view, Ukeles' practice, steeped in the ethos of acknowledging maintenance work, has continued to gain visibility from her early works until the present day. Some will wonder why cleaning at home or in a cultural institution is attributed value as art. As Ukeles wrote in her *Maintenance Manifesto*, "my working will be the work. Once women's work is accepted as work, perhaps that's when a true state of gender equity can finally be realized."

Video credits for the virtual walkthrough of *To Cast Too Bold a Shadow*:

Narrator, Sara Reisman.

Cinematographer, Carlos Bido.

Production, George Bolster, William Furio, Anjuli Nanda Diamond, and Sara Reisman.

Maria D. Rapticavoli's two-channel video installation *The Other: A Familiar Story* (2020) was supported by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, under the Italian Council Program (2019).

Video excerpts from Maria D. Rapticavoli's *The Other: A Familiar Story* (2020) Furen Dai's *Love for Sale* (2020).

Artworks courtesy of:

Anetta Mona Chisa, Lucia Tkáčová, Furen Dai, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York, The Jewish Museum, Rajkamal Kahlon, Joiri Minaya, P.P.O.W., New York, Maria D. Rapticavoli, Aliza Schvarts, Betty Tompkins, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

About The 8th Floor. The 8th Floor is an exhibition and event space established in 2010 by Shelley and Donald Rubin, dedicated to promoting cultural and philanthropic initiatives and to expanding artistic and cultural accessibility in New York City.

The 8th floor is located at 17 West 17th street and is free and open to the public. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM by appointment. Please visit www.The8thFloor.org for more information.