Once, in a summer that feels like a lifetime ago, a search for a hard to find book took me to the Brooklyn Public Library. It was the catalogue for Ad Reinhardt's 1966 retrospective at the Jewish Museum: a slim but coveted book, with an influential essay by Lucy Lippard, as well as a funny chronology penned by the artist which commingles moments from his own life world-historical and art-historical events. ("1913: Born, Christmas Eve, nine months after the Armory Show.") I had flipped through it in the office at work, but at the time I had not yet given up appearances, not yet realized that I could read on the clock without losing my minimum-wage internship. So, since I wanted to actually *read* the catalogue, I went and found it on my day off.

Unlike the New York Public Library, Brooklyn lets you take the art books offsite. So I brought the book outside, crossed the street into Prospect Park, and found a sliver of unoccupied, sun-drenched dirt at the edge of the "Long Meadow." It was a hot day, and on hot days the Meadow is always rowdy. But the library's aggressive air conditioning had chilled my sweat, producing the feeling of a fever: the body struggling to decide whether it was too hot or too cold. I probably hadn't eaten much. Between that, the hipster cavalcade of the Long Meadow, the cold brew, and the glare of the sun on the glossy page, I didn't really read the book, of course. I *looked* at every word of Lippard's essay, adjusting the angle of the page to outmaneuver the glare spot, sometimes even using it like a pointer to track my movement from word to word. I was taking my sunglasses on and off, overhearing conversations, pondering what I could afford to eat nearby—too much in a place, and too much in my body, I did not read. And yet it's one of my most vivid experiences with an art book. Reinhardt once called sculpture "something you bump into when you look up at a painting."[1] What would he say about art books in a park?[2]

In Brooklyn, the main image that the catalogue left with me was its own dismemberment. Due to the limits of print technology in the 60s, the book's six color images were actual tipped-in color plates, hinged to the page at two points. If you hold the book downward, the plates fall forward; if you fidget like me, you can make a game of tapping the plate away from the page as you read, or try to read, the opposite page. And if you have fewer scruples than me, you can remove the plates entirely—as someone before me had done to the Brooklyn Public Library's copy of this catalogue. I think three of the six plates were missing. This, I assume, is why other libraries don't let you take art books offsite.

A stolen color plate, leaving behind its caption and two points of yellowed adhesive. And funny plates to steal, at that: the ones that were missing were of Reinhardt's late red and black paintings, not quite 'monochromes' due to their grids of miniscule color variances. Reinhardt maintained that they were unphotographable. In a way, he was right: looking at the plates in a different, unpillaged copy, along with reproductions in other books, they have often registered as undifferentiated voids. Looking at the paintings in person, what also stands out is how *matte* they appear, in a way that chromogenic paper generally can't convey. Despite his belief that they couldn't be photographed, Reinhardt worked with the printers to do the least damage. MoMA has a relic of this: a photo print that he overpainted entirely with gouache. He buried the photo paper's high gloss reproduction in pursuit of the paintings' true "utter matteness," apparently with the

purpose of conveying something to the printer.[3]

What did the thief do with their plates of unrepresentable, all-too-matte paintings? Stick them on their fridge? Use them as coasters, or postcards?

A stolen black color plate, "falling" out of its book – and me, later on, finding the empty page on a hot summer day. This image returned to me as I thought about the artists in this exhibition. There are two aspects of it that I'd like to explore in relation to their work. On the one hand, with Jonida Laçi and Valentina Triet, I'm thinking about the process of the reproduction "falling out" of its context, and into appropriation. On the other, with Noémie Degen and Simon Jaton, I'm thinking about what happens to the appropriated image where it lands.

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All images lean on their context for legibility, but some are more self-sufficient, better travelers, than others. Laçi and Triet have made a series of photographic prints from 16:9 video stills, which they shot while traveling, with the mindset of location scouting. Typically, between the preliminary scout and the post-facto "film still," there is the production itself: the film. In this case there is only a notion of a film; what counts is pre- and post-. The film would be about dance and clubs.

Photography has a vexed relationship with the club. Some clubs ban cameras, of course, either invoking the importance of "being in the moment" or, more prosaically, to leave narcs without evidence. But where club photography does happen, it often underscores what is unphotographable about the experience. Take away movement, pulse, odor, darkness, and intoxication—in a word, embodiment—and you are often left with a rather pitiful image, like shooting the full moon with your phone. What counts is so far away.

Laçi and Triet are attuned to these difficulties. Their selected stills don't *depict* dance in the slightest: of the six, two appear to be from parties, or at least dimly lit rooms, with a handful of people facing away from the camera. Two others show the streets of Marseilles in broad daylight, with no people. The remaining two verge on abstraction: a blank wall with a large spotlight on it, its lower half blocked, producing something like a moonrise—and much, much larger than the moon on your phone.

Maybe dance is the unnamable. Thomas Aquinas made the case for apophasis, or knowledge conveyed through negation: "We have no means for considering how God is, but rather how He is not."[4] Reinhardt, too, trafficked in negation, including his decisive negation of the "action" in Action Painting, the "expression" of AbEx. Here, with dance and its figures removed, what is left is hard ground: place, or potential, or context.

Where should the action happen? In filmmaking, that's the question that drives location scouting. Laçi and Triet began with this loose prompt—but in the stills, the settings don't always add up. Can dance happen in broad daylight? Can dance happen in a kayak? Whatever the case, the "main event" is here passed over: the scout shoot of pre-production meets post-production and its film still. A leapfrog over the "action"; a void where the "proper" shoot ought to be.

Moving between phases, intervals of potential: while we were discussing the work, the artists shared with me a German term that has been on their minds. *Bürgerliche Dämmerung*—bourgeois dusk?—: the time when the sunset has set, but you can still read. This notion of light without source, between solid

states, seems essential here.

A stolen black color plate, leaving behind its caption and two points of yellowed adhesive. In order for the image to "fall out" and yield all these contextual traces, it first has to be picked out of its proper place. In order for it to be picked *out*, the appropriator first has to *pick* it. What did the thief do with their plates of unrepresentable, all-too-matte Reinhardt paintings? Whatever their rationale, their attraction *to* the image had little to do with what is *in* the image.

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If Laçi and Triet's photographs take a kind of outside-in approach, negating their core subject by leapfrogging from pre- to post-, Noémie Degen and Simon Jaton's silkscreens grow outward from their center, like an onion. Their images are picked out from found video, and through a chain of augmentations, they end up even further away from their context. What counts here is what happens to the image once it's picked out. There is an obliteration of their referent, through an iterative, workmanlike process, true enough to the ethic of printmaking. Through a loop of printing, defacement, scanning, and reprinting, the image is shaped and re-shaped, until it becomes its own; in semiotic terms, its iconicity is scrubbed out and replaced with a thicket of indexical traces.

For a viewer with certain theoretical inclinations, this loop might invite the assume that its aim is entropy, artifacting, glitch—the production of a "poor image." But the work refutes such presumptions. Here, the image is defaced while retaining its sense of *fineness*. In terms of surface, the image is not so much degraded; rather, each fine-grain silkscreen yields its own lively and animated surface. In person, their moments of optical moiré feel less accidental than calibrated: one grid overlays another, not chaotically but ordered along cardinal axes. Rather than becoming "poor," the duo's process moves the image along laterally, like a body replacing old cells with new ones. Like Reinhardt overpainting his photo plate proof, reconstituting his grid in another medium, Degen and Jaton reconstitute the image in accretions of gesture.

Still, there are seams. Quite literally: each panel requires multiple screens, each receiving its own sequence of passes, leading to a particular density where the segments touch. Here you can make out slight variations in ink hue, but the differences are subtle, crepuscular. The seams' density reminds me of the crease in a folded newspaper: images turning back on themselves, embracing themselves, rubbing against themselves. An American printer once cautioned me that images on folded newsprint "have grip marks down the center gutter which can smudge ink." An image that grips, and leaves grip marks on itself; its byproduct, a small industrial Rorschach pattern. What that printer saw was error, impoverishment. I imagine that Degen and Jaton would have something more interesting to say about this epiphenomenon and its potentials, its values.

For all their conversion of source material, the silkscreens don't lose their image entirely. Previous pieces in this body of work have had a range of subjects, many of them domestic interiors, and never is a human figure present. Instead, in this show, the images are all from nature: greenery in one, underbrush in another, and a snowy forest in two. I don't want to speculate on the "meaning" of this decision of motif, beyond that it seems decisive. Nature, like dance, is a moving target, and fallacies abound. Certainly there is a friction here—and friction yields sparks—between the

machinic and the vital. But even as I type that, I am struck by how Degen and Jaton's work undermines such binaries: there is so much body in their process. And contrary to received notions about mechanical reproduction, much of that body is evident in the object. A "cold" technique that is also warm: the feeling of a fever on a hot summer's day.

A stolen black color plate, leaving behind its caption and two points of yellowed adhesive. What did the thief do with their plates of unrepresentable, all-too-matte Reinhardt paintings? Whatever their rationale, their attraction to the image had little to do with what is *in* the image. And whatever they did with the image was not the desecration of its referent, but its reconstitution of the object into its own unique relic.

Nick Irvin, April 2025

for

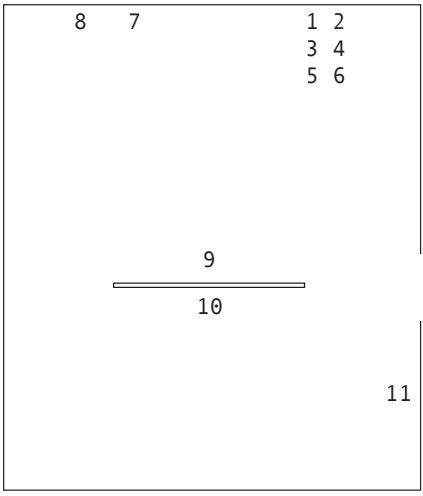
Affairs
an exhibition by
Noémie Degen/Simon Jaton
Jonida Laçi and Valentina Triet
Forde, Geneva
6 April — 11 May 2025

[1] Quoted in Lippard, "As Painting is to Sculpture: A Changing Ratio," in M. Tuchman (ed.), *American Sculpture of the Sixties* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967), p. 31. The quote has circulated wide enough to become an aphorism, detached from Reinhardt himself. On 'famous quote' websites, it has become misattributed to Barnett Newman—more of a household name, I suppose.

[2] Barthes, later, more charitably: "[A text] produces, in me, the best pleasure if it manages to make itself heard indirectly; if, reading it, I am led to look up often, to listen to something else." *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (Hill & Wang, 1975), p. 18.

[3] Christine Mehring, "Ad Reinhardt, Untitled, c. 1966," *Brooklyn Rail*, Ad Reinhardt Centennial Special Issue, Fall 2014.

[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a, q.3, prologue (Benziger Bros edition, 1947). Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.



1-6
Jonida Laçi and Valentina Triet
'Floors,' 2025
c-prints, each 51 × 91 × 2.5 cm

7-8
Noémie Degen/Simon Jaton
Untitled, 2025
Silkscreen ink, watercolor on arches paper stretched on frame
60 × 142 cm

9
Noémie Degen/Simon Jaton
Untitled, 2025
Silkscreen ink, watercolor, iron gall ink and indian ink on arches paper stretched on frame, 50 × 150 cm

10
Noémie Degen/Simon Jaton
Untitled, 2025
Copper plate etching on paper in iplex frame
plate: 21 × 40.5 cm
paper: 32 × 52 cm

11
Noémie Degen/Simon Jaton
Untitled, 2025
Silkscreen ink, watercolor, iron gall ink and indian ink on arches paper stretched on frame, 80 × 115 cm