

Dia Art Foundation

Raphael Rubinstein and Mónica de la Torre

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

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Introduction by Vincent Katz

Mónica de la Torre is the author of *Public Domain* (2008) and *Talk Shows* (2007), as well as two collections in Spanish: *The Happy End* (2014) and *Four* (2012). Her work has been published in the journals *Aufgabe*, *Art in America*, *Convolution*, *frieze*, and *Triple Canopy's Corrected Slogans*. She is senior editor at *BOMB Magazine*.

"Random has become the new normal, and normalcy, the exception. The city is defined by its incongruities." Thus begins Mónica de la Torre's "[Forty Nameless Cities] [Invisible Cities] [Forty Windows] [Ruins]." This new piece relates to her series "All Welcome," which is based on the artist Martin Kippenberger's gallery-size installation, *The Happy End of Kafka's Amerika*, based, of course, on Kafka's *Amerika*. De la Torre writes that "All Welcome" "is a polyphonic bricolage of interviews, job postings, questionnaires, and materials related to work, all specifically taking place in the settings devised by Kippenberger." Throughout her work, de la Torre has made use of found materials, yet what is remarkable is how she has lovingly crafted not only newly exquisite materials but also a tone that is identifiably her own. That tone encompasses a sense of humor, an indignant outrage at injustice and excess, and a delicately humane belief in the possibility of positive change.

Reading her *Views from Chairs*, inspired by Kippenberger inspired by Kafka, one is amazed by de la Torre's invention. She seems able to spin endless imaginations of experiences not yet or perhaps never to be encountered. Something similar underpins her neo-investigative work, such as her piece "Doubles" from *Public Domain*, in which a listserv request for information on a person named Mónica de la Torre leads to endless miscommunication and misconception but also humor and tenderness. Much of de la Torre's work has a strong aural, performative, component. I am curious as to how she will meld the conceptual, the investigative, and the performative tonight. To find out, please help me welcome Mónica de la Torre.

Raphael Rubinstein is a New York-based poet and art critic. Among his books of poetry are *The Afterglow of Minor Pop Masterpieces* (2007) and *The Basement of the Café Rilke* (1997). His poems have recently appeared in *Fence*, *Vanitas and Privacy Policy: the Anthology of Surveillance Poetics* (2014). Raphael Rubinstein has long been using procedural frameworks to gird his poems. As an admirer of Harry Mathews and other OuLiPo writers, Rubinstein, like them, has used rules and restrictions to structure some of his poems. His inventiveness, humor, and compassionate twists take his works far beyond anything that could be seen and coldly calculating, or a parlor game (not that OuLiPo is those things, but it has been accused of them). It is in fact Rubinstein's passion for cultural artifacts that gives his poems their own unique cultural valence. Whether it's *nouvelle vague* cinema, late '70s post-punk rock bands, or French literary theory, or more commonly all three colliding, Rubinstein evokes while creating and provokes while titillating. In *The Afterglow of Minor Pop Masterpieces*, the first set of poems is programmed as follows: a two-stanza poem, in which each stanza has two lines, each line two words, and each word two letters; next, a three-stanza poem, in which each stanza has three lines, each line three words, and each word three letters; this continues through the number eight. The one for the number six, entitled "Six Sex," is particularly exciting. Somehow, within his strictures, and heightened by them, Rubinstein manages in lurid detail to document an imagined sex romp through Europe. Here's a snippet: "CANNES: / tanned nymphs bathed, German taking photos / moaned. MONACO: pretty casino filles sulked / around gaming tables. Common lament, 'nobody / greedy screws.' . . ." Rubinstein, with his impressive cultural knowledge, is brilliant at inventing period film scripts, bands, and poets. The reader experiences a familiar rush hearing or reading a Rubinstein description, even when, as in the poem "Illusion is a Gangstergirl," a poem I hope he will consider reading tonight, he proves, by accumulating alternate explanations for the title phrase, that none has the imprimatur of veracity. Reality is a tricky thing for Rubinstein. More and more, as time goes on, among the other cultural forms he cites, reveres, and models, there is poetry, and Rubinstein's own poetry, operating within a slightly less brightly lit, but nonetheless exuberant, sphere. In "Poetry as a Nonprofessional Experiment," he writes, "this is a poem about being in a poem / that was never supposed to be this big a part of my life." Fortunately for us, it is. Please join me in welcoming Raphael Rubinstein.