

THE TALE TELLERS

The Rag Pickers



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MAY 8 – MAY 22, 2021

curated by Charlie Levine
with Samantha Ros



Cover: (image detail)

Ivo Bisignano, Human Forms exhibition documentation, 2020

Curated by Charlie Levine with Samantha Ros

Jeannine Bardo / Founder, Director

John Ros / Curator-in-Residence

THRESHOLD at Stand4 Gallery and Community Art Center
414 78th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11209

stand4gallery.org

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IN CONVERSATION

14 April 2021

SR: You began working on The Tale Tellers in 2013, can you speak a bit about the inspiration behind the initial project?

CL: I had been thinking for a while about the role of the curator as a storyteller. It was something I was dwelling on and researching while I was on a residency with artist Elly Clarke in upstate New York. This was a very formative time for several reasons, firstly because Elly and I were exploring new identities, Elly / #Sergina and me as said storytelling curator. Secondly, while we were there, it was that year's Performa Festival, a festival showcasing contemporary performance art with a series of talks and engagement opportunities. Elly and I attended a talk as part of the programme between Jens Hoffmann and Triple Candie. I knew of Hoffmann's curatorial and editorial works, he had an approach to curating that I always admired. But this was the first I had heard of Triple Candie who are a curatorial agency based in Washington now but previously residents of New York, and they were incredibly inspiring.

The talk between Hoffmann and Triple Candie representatives explored themes and ideas that I had been researching on that residency. How can a curator tell fictional stories through art, play with audiences in a way that enhances the experience of the exhibition, and how can the curators imagination be as impactful as the artwork on the exhibitions themes?

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Hoffmann talked through his (personally) revolutionary book exhibitions at CCA Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art between 2008 - 2010 where he created exhibitions based on seminal books such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Moby Dick*. While Triple Candie talked through some of their exhibition history with a particular focus on (or the ones that have stayed with me the most) exhibitions about an imagined retrospective of the artist Maurizio Cattelan upon his death (the artist is still alive). This exhibition featured re-created works of Cattelan's and some the group imagined he would go on to create before his death. Another exhibition discussed was David Hammons: The unauthorized retrospective. The show consisted of images photocopied from books and catalogues, and is summed up perfectly by Triple Candie on their website as to why:

"On one level, this exhibition is about David Hammons, his art, and his career. The artist and his oeuvre are enshrouded in mystery and the lack of monographs on his work (there is only one: *Rousing the Rubble*, 1991) has served to amplify this condition. On another, it is about the art world: particularly, how the strategic process of ascribing value to an artist's work -- by galleries, collectors, curators, even artists -- changes the art's relationship to the public. Finally, this collection of reproductions is meant to question the status quo of exhibition-making itself. By going through the effort to present an artist's work in this way, Triple Candie attempts to show the inherent absurdity and many retrospectives, which are usually hagiographic enterprises that seek to minimize any true critical investigation of their subjects."

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Both Hoffmann and Triple Candie simply gave me the push to create The Tale Tellers. At first it was about everything I was absorbing and researching while in New York, it was also a way to catalogue the relationships I was having with artists. It became a way of creating a collaborative opportunity for artists I was studio visiting without having an actual exhibition to offer them in the immediate. It has continued to do this a little, though it has become its own body of work now rather than this archive of interactions.

SR: This 2021 iteration of The Tale Tellers at THRESHOLD is inspired in part by an excerpt of The Arcade Project from Walter Benjamin's Archive: Chapter 10, Rag Picking. What about this text caused you to want to dissect it in this way?

CL: I have always gone back to this particular chapter, it resonates with me as a curator. I am a rag picker, taking artists or specific works and piecing them together to make a whole narrative. This is something Benjamin did throughout his career, whether the scraps being intentional (postcards sent to friends while on trips, to then ask for them back upon his return) to the 'rags' I believe we all create throughout our days.

Whether shopping lists, something a friend says that's inspiring you to type into your phone, a screen grab of an artwork you like or a media reference you want to look up at a later date that you might tweet as a reminder. And these rags are what make up the tales, snippets or clips of things the tale teller has stored in their minds somewhere.

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How we collect, archive and store these art rags, how when they're brought together they create a cohesive story. How our memories get triggered when we read a phrase, think of a lyric or experience something - we can create a link to an artwork, image, film or piece of music etc we've seen, experienced. Every tale teller is ultimately a rag picker and the rags prompts a memory to them to help them tell the stories. And this is something I wanted to bring to the fore for this exhibition.

SR: I really resonate with the idea of sifting through / collecting scraps of the media we consume, and creating rags of our own as we move throughout our day. It's also interesting to think about the idea of rag picking in an age where the digital world is so dominant. I generate a great deal of physical scraps by holding onto notes to myself or bits of paper that signify a memory, but while reading your description of Benjamin's writing I am reminded that I collect a significant amount of digital 'rags,' often without even realizing it. I have a shoebox in my closet where I keep old birthday cards, photos, small significant objects; things I do not want to forget. As I think about it now, though, I do the same through my cellphone: taking screenshots of artwork, writing down the titles of books I want to read, making lists of favorite albums, writing down funny quotes from friends that I have long forgotten the context of. I even feel attached to the various browser tabs I have open in my Safari app, worried that I will not be able to find the exact recipe again or remember the exact topic that I wanted to look into if I delete them.

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It's as if we are all creating and accumulating our own personal archives. We move through life slowly cataloging our memories, making note of the people, places, art, text, and information that we believe holds some significance to us.

CL: Yes, I love finding those notes or snippets of conversations that I've typed into Notes on my phone that then mean nothing when you return to them There are also all the ideas you have, for example, I have written down 'storm in a teacup' which I originally wrote down as a curatorial idea, how in small everyday spaces you can create something that makes waves of change. But now I read it as a meditation, whilst sitting on the train commuting and your thumbs are moving around your phone clicking on buttons mindlessly and eventually you click on notes and there it is, a storm in a teacup, much like me in that moment - a fidget on a train.

SR: I think part of my desire to accumulate and collect the 'rags' and 'scraps' of my life (both physically and digitally) comes from a place of fear. I am worried that I will forget. I spend a lot of time feeling very nostalgic for the past stages of my life, and I think this longing causes me to want to preserve these memories in whatever way I can. By collecting fragments in a box or archiving them in my phone I feel as if I am pressing my memories between the pages of a book. When I return to them later sometimes the memories are fuzzy. I cannot remember why I held onto certain rags and I worry that I am forgetting large swathes of time. Or else I worry that my memory has become inaccurate, turning over on itself and rewriting the story so that I no longer remember things

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In these moments of realization that I am unable to perfectly preserve or distill my memories I envision them being slowly deteriorated, or altered in some way, with the passage of time. In combing through the text and selecting the images for this exhibition, how have the concepts of deterioration and alteration informed your choices?

CL: Precisely, forgetting and being forgotten. The want and need to record memories, whether to maintain a sense of and claim 'I was here' or a foresight in knowing you will want to remember something is strong in all of us. I have often thought this is something to do with our fear of death, a need for immortality that we project onto objects or 'rags'. By recording ourselves in words, photographs, objects, social media feeds or memories, we create ways for us to remember and be remembered which, with the passing of time and as the generations pass, memories of and to ourselves become forgotten. I heard recently a thought that we die twice, once when we physically die and the second when someone says our name for the last time. There is a tragic beauty, somehow, in that deterioration of self through memory, which is reflected in the deterioration of things. When we go to flea / second hand markets and imagine the stories behind the objects, we bring those old objects back to life a little, but it is imagined. And this, as you note, is a little like The Tale Tellers. These reproduced objects and images hold my memories and link to a narrative I want to tell, however, upon viewing they take on a new meaning. Each image dies over and over again till eventually it is looked at for the last time, death of the (original) author, also

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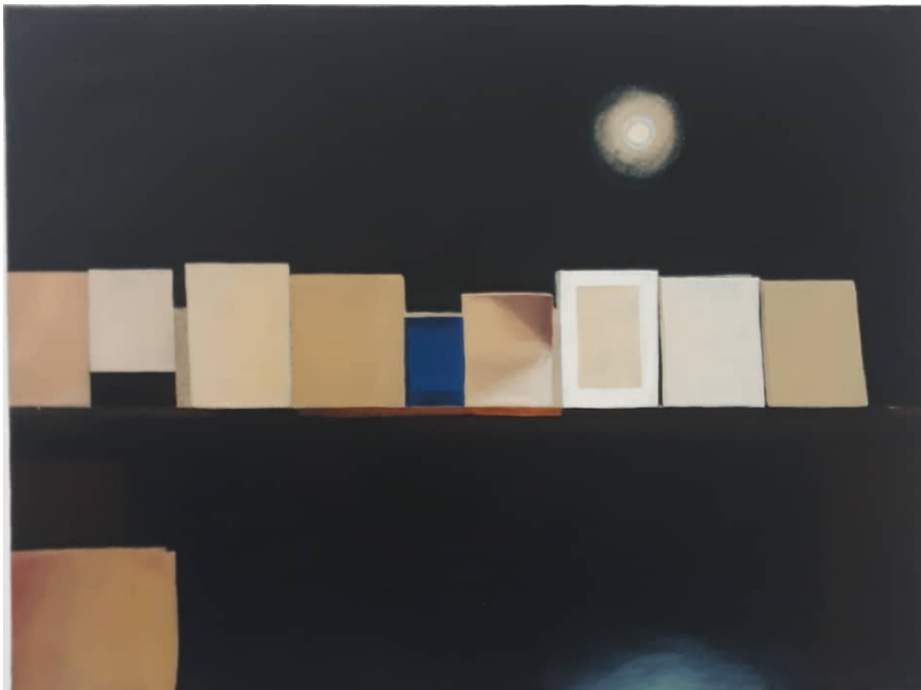
However, this thought process didn't impact the choice of works selected, that was based very much on phrases taken from the chapter. For example the phrase "allocated a letter of the alphabet" was something that stuck out to me in the chapter. It was a note about how Benjamin made recordings of his rags and the phrase made me immediately think of Martin Kippenberger's The End of the Alphabet work. So that is the work I have reproduced here for that 'plot point'. But I am purposefully using found images from the internet, and as I share those with you for printing, or online at thetalellers.com, the image deteriorates a little bit more. And so the journey goes for the works, as said, that that rag deteriorates, ultimately, to digital and physical dust.

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PLATES



Human Forms, Ivo Bisignano, 2020, photo by Shai Epstein



Bookshop at Night, Mandy Hudson, 2006



Breathing Room, Anna Berry, 2014



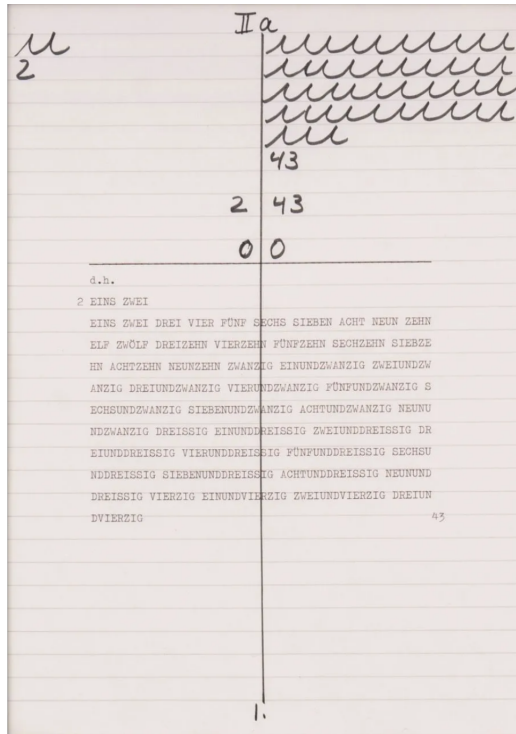
Coventry Market Car Park, Historic England



Vitrine from the Original Furnishings of the Collection "Kunst industrieller Gegenstände" (today Kunstammer), 2019, photo by Csilla Ariese



A top-hatted spectre, Léon Spilliaert, 1908, photo by Vincent Everarts





Title unknown, Hanne Darboven, date unknown



Das Ende Des Alphabets (The End of the Alphabet), Martin Kippenberger, 1989



Green Knots, Yifat Gat, 2010

PREVIOUS TALES

31 - *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein
Told by Elizabeth White



Are They Thinking about the Grape? (Pensent-ils au raisin?), François Boucher, 1747

Tale 31 Image Details:

01. "Once there was a tree.... and she loved a little boy." Film still from *Le Bonheur*, directed by Agnes Varda, 1965
02. "And the boy loved the tree.... very much. And the tree was happy." *Are They Thinking about the Grape?* (*Pensent-ils au raisin?*), François Boucher, 1747
03. "But time went by." Film still from *Marriage, Italian Style* (*Matrimonio all'italiana*), directed by Vittorio De Sica, 1964
04. <https://www.espacebuzz.com/article/les-calins-les-plus-mignons-du-monde/>
05. "And the tree was happy..."
06. *Cape Cod Morning*, Edward Hopper, 1950
07. "And the tree was happy..." Film still from *Breaking the Waves*, directed by Lars von Trier, 1996
08. *Awaiting His Return*, Auguste Raynaud (b. 1845)
09. "And the tree was happy..." Film still of Yoko Ono performing *Cut Piece* at Carnegie Hall (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, 1965)

15 - *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll Told by Vishwa Shroff



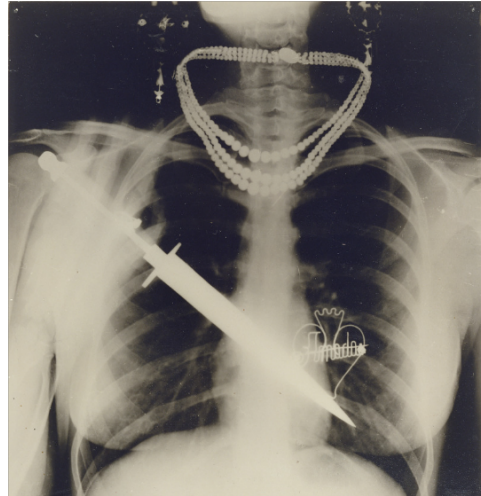
Screenshot from Spirited Away, 2001

Tale 15 Image Details:

01. Screenshot from Sprited Away, 2001
02. Screenshot from 20th Century Boys 1: Beginning of the End, 2008
03. time went by slowly that day, Vishwa Shroff, oil on canvas, 2007
04. Film Still, Air Doll, 2009
05. Film Still, The Blind Swordsman: Zatoichi, 2003
06. Film still, Bladerunner, 1982
07. Film still, Saya-zamurai, 2010
08. Film still, Kikujiro, 1999
09. Animation still, Akira, 1988
10. Film poster, Sakuran, 2006

41 - *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare

Told by Samantha Ros



Classic Theme/[Tema Clásico], Manuel Álvarez Bravo, 1942-1946, Archivo Manuel Álvarez Bravo, S.C.

Tale 41 Image Details:

01. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/93731235972643276/>

02. Two lovers, Frankenthal Porcelain Manufactory, c. 1760

03. Film Still, The Phantom of the Opera, 2004

04. Animation Still, Robin Hood, 2003

05. Casket with Scenes of Romances, 1330-1350, French

06. Woman Dispensing Poison from the Legend of Saint Germain of Paris, 1245-47, French

07. Animation Still, Sleeping Beauty, 1959

08. Poison Bottle, c. 1880s, Artist unknown, English or American

09. Eve Bewailing the Death of Abel, Joseph Nollekens, 1800-1810

10. Classic Theme/[Tema Clásico], Manuel Álvarez Bravo, 1942-1946, Archivo Manuel Álvarez Bravo, S.C.

INSTRUCTIONS

- (1) Choose a favorite story, poem, song, tale, narrative, etc.
- (2) Figure out its 8-10 key plot points
- (3) Find an image / film clip / gif / etc. (either your own or by others) that illustrates each of the plot points

Then please follow the QR code to the form to submit your tale.
Please be sure to attach all images in the correct order, and list the image titles/authors (if applicable) in the correct order as well.



STATEMENT OF CURATORIAL PRACTICE

CHARLIE LEVINE

Charlie Levine is an independent curator, artistic director, project manager and lecturer working in the West Midlands, London and Mumbai. Levine's curatorial practice centralises on in/visible networks, working with feminist histories, creating and bringing together communities, and working site responsively and with architecture.

She is currently co-director of SqW:Lab, an international fellowship for creatives in Mumbai; curator of ITV Creates, now in its third year ITV Creates profiles UK based artists and their responses to the ITV logo as the main channel idents; curator of St. Pancras Wires, a new public art project in St. Pancras Station, Creative Director of The Show Windows, a public realm project for Coventry City of Culture, and a consultant / project manager for various creative projects.

With an MA in Critical and Contextual Art Practices from Birmingham City University, Levine started her curatorial career as founder and curator of TROVE, an independent art gallery in Birmingham, which ran from 2009 to 2013. She was formerly; Arts Manager, Camden Council, where she managed several large scale programmes and projects specifically *Camden is...*, Camden's London Borough of Culture bid where they were awarded a Cultural Impact Award (2017); Curator / Programmer for Sluice, a London art fair and international expo hosted in Brooklyn (2013-2017); and Associate Producer, mac birmingham (2011-2012).

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THRESHOLD at Stand4 Gallery and Community Art Center

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Catalogue © 2021 Stand4 Gallery

stand4gallery.org

