

MAMCO GENEVE

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GENERAL IDEA
IAN BURN
FRANÇOIS RISTORI
PICTURES & AFTER
GORDON MATTA-CLARK
MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

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SUMMARY

Introduction	p. 3
General Idea	p. 4
Ian Burn	p. 5
François Ristori	p. 6
<i>Pictures & After</i>	p. 7
Gordon Matta-Clark	p. 8
Mierle Laderman Ukeles	p. 9
Iconography	p.10
Partners	p. 11

Previous Page

Nicole Gravier (*1949), *Per tutto il giorno non ha fatto altro che pensare a Daniel*, 1976-1980,
photo-text, 30 x 45 c,m éd. 1/5

coll. MAMCO, artwork acquired thanks to the Friends of MAMCO Association,
Michael Ringier and Mirabaud & Cie

INTRODUCTION

Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* is a climate fiction ("cli-fi") novel published in 2020. Set in 2025, it tells the story of a new organization—the eponymous ministry—established to mount a legal campaign on behalf of future generations, with the aim of ensuring that the world remains habitable. Touching on climate, economic, and political themes, the novel focuses on the two leaders of the Ministry for the Future and their encounters with victims, politicians, and eco-terrorists.

Today's eco-activists, from groups such as Extinction Rebellion, Letzte Generation, and Just Stop Oil, are making similar demands through their declarations and actions, including "performances" staged in museums. In a recent opinion column, Emmanuel Tibloux observed that their chosen method—pouring or spraying thick liquids on works of art—bears many similarities with Jackson Pollock's drip technique, with Larry Poons' method of covering pictures in layers of paint, with images of oil slicks and rivers of mud, as symbolic acts of "turning words into deeds." In this sense, these groups are indexing past generations of activists who used the semiotics of art to further their cause—from the Conceptual artists who pushed back against predatory capitalism in the late 1960s, to the anti-Vietnam War protest movement that swept through New York's galleries in the mid-1970s, and the backlash against discriminatory AIDS-related visuals in the 1980s.

MAMCO's 2023 exhibition cycle reflects on activism in art throughout these decades, touching on just some of the many forms it has taken. The retrospective of Ian Burn's work, for instance, charts the development of the artist's militant stance against the alienation of labor and the individual through the "commodification" of the world. The discursive and Conceptual pieces produced by Burn and Art & Language (the group of which he was a part), as well as contemporary peers such as Hans Haacke, serve as a lens through which to analyze and deconstruct this system.

A similar topic can be seen in the work of the late-1970s "Pictures Generation"—a group of artists operating in the age of mass media who turned their attention not to political representations but rather to the politics of representation.

In the 1980s, when the political response to the AIDS crisis was one of exclusion, artists' collectives formed to offer up alternative representations of the disease. One of the most striking examples was the "AIDS logo" created by members of the General Idea group based on *LOVE*, Robert Indiana's famous painting. They envisioned their logo as an image that could be "injected" into society and that would "go viral."

Taken together, these examples of "activist" art, which take the museum as their "theater of operations," suggest two things: first, that museums themselves are public forums for discussion of today's burning political issues, and second, that symbolism remains as compelling as ever and continues to offer counter-representations and responses to the storytelling techniques so deftly employed by media, political, and corporate organizations.

GENERAL IDEA

Living and working together as part of the late 1960s Toronto counterculture, AA Bronson (b. Michael Tims, 1946, Vancouver), Felix Partz (b. Ronald Gabe, 1945, Winnipeg, d. 1994), and Jorge Zontal (b. Slobodan Saia-Levy, 1944, Parma, d. 1994) formalized their collaboration in 1969 as a single entity known as General Idea. From their earliest projects like staging of *The 1970 Miss General Idea Pageant* to their late activist initiatives around the AIDS crisis, General Idea explored multimedia, conceptual, and performance work as a tool for engaging with common culture and its repressions. A definitive retrospective of General Idea is currently travelling from the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and the Gropius Bau, Berlin.

Less well-known are the group's drawings, the vast majority of which have never been seen. The 200 drawings on view were all produced by Jorge Zontal, who made them as a habitual practice during the group's brainstorming meetings; however, given General Idea's mandate for co-authorship (and as demonstrated by the "GI" signature affixed by Zontal shortly before his death) as well as the circumstances under which they were executed, they are considered to be collaborative. The drawings assumed a greater regularity after 1985, the year the group left Toronto, which felt increasingly isolated from the global art world, for New York. As the 1980s wore on, their early joie de vivre was tempered by the pervasive presence of AIDS. In Bronson's words, it was a period "during which we had to face and somehow incorporate the illness and death of most of our friends, as well as Jorge and Felix themselves." A number of AIDS-related works by General Idea are presented in adjacent rooms, including the rarely seen *AIDS (Nauman)* of 1991.

The drawings' exhibition and the book that accompanies it were titled *Ecce Homo* to reference a 1923 publication by German artist George Grosz because, according to AA Bronson, "the anti-Semitism in Grosz's narrative is mirrored by the homophobia in ours." The pain and gravity are immediately felt in the drawings, whether in a series of silhouetted figures shot through with holes or the latest drawings where, during Zontal's last months and as he was going blind, he represented the black floaters in his eyes as cockroaches. These darker strains are leavened by "fluffer" moments as figures familiar from General Idea's lexicon (high heels, heraldic symbols, floating lips, and prancing poodles) join the fray.

Although drawn by hand, the repetition of specific motifs follows a logic that is akin to General Idea's own penchant for mass reproduction and that echo the virality of their AIDS works. In their mutability and insistent flow, the drawings on view are a fascinating window into General Idea's distinct artistic vision and unique notions of authorship, exposing representation's inadequacy while acknowledging its urgency.

The exhibition of General Idea's drawings is organized by Lionel Bovier and Claire Gilman, Chief Curator of The Drawing Center, New York, where it was first presented.

IAN BURN

Ian Burn has been described as many things: an activist, a trade-unionist, a journalist, an art critic, a curator, and an art historian—and in a moment of self-deprecating alienation, he once described himself as “an ex-Conceptual artist.” This exhibition reveals Burn as a probing and often collaborative Conceptual artist, puzzling with the perceptual challenges of “looking at seeing and reading” in company with others.

The survey consists of artworks from 1966 to his death in 1993, accompanied by journals, posters, slide talks, and videos. It traces his remarkable journey from Australia via London to the so-called center of the art world, New York, and the expanded world of the collective Art & Language.

It begins with several Minimal paintings and a selection of his early Conceptual artworks that combine text with materials of low visibility (like mirrors and glass), and two installations made with Mel Ramsden. It ends on his return to Australia, where after more than a decade immersed in trade-union journalism, he began to make art again. One late series, *Value Added Landscape* (1992–1993), reveals how he straddled different spheres, spanning amateur landscape, Conceptual art, and politics.

In the three decades since his death, Ian Burn has become something of a model for the political legacy of Conceptual art, as a result of his activism particularly in union journalism and in advocating for artists to “organize.” While his withdrawal from the art world was always partial, it was unlike the political turn of much contemporary art, insofar as the latter remained within the art world itself. It is hoped that the exhibition will lead to greater recognition of his contribution as an artist in rethinking art in a “decentered” world through what he called “peripheral vision.”

The exhibition is organized chronologically into five sections, each specific to a place and time, revealing the origins and often collaborative character of Burn’s Conceptual art across three continents and three decades at the end of the 20th century.

The exhibition, curated by Ann Stephen, received the support of the artist’s Estate, the Milani Gallery (Brisbane), and the Australia Council for the Arts.

FRANÇOIS RISTORI

The MAMCO collection includes two works by François Ristori (1936–2015). Produced in the early 1970s, both belong to a series that the artist called *Traces-Formes*.

Following two years of grueling military service in Algeria, Ristori resumed his studies at the Beaux-Arts de Paris fine arts school in 1959. His works from this period showed a clear predilection for gestural abstraction: Ristori used a limited palette of colors and a regular brush stroke to achieve uniform coverage, with some paintings exceeding 380 cm in length.

In 1967, Ristori began altering his approach, shifting from automatic to systematic painting. At a time of great societal upheaval, he turned his focus to process, taking blue, red, and white hexagons as his preferred motif. Ristori was a contemporary of the artists whose works were shown in *Systemic Painting*, a 1966 exhibition by Lawrence Alloway at the Guggenheim in New York. In this period, he adopted conceptual, extensive painting as his medium of expression.

In the fall of 1969, Daniel Buren and Niele Toroni—who, as members of the BMPT collective, had called for “reduced” painting (non-expressive, non-perfectible and non-illusionist)—were invited to exhibit at the Sixth Biennale de Paris. In the end, they gave up their place for Ristori, who showed his paintings in public for the very first time. He went on to forge other, equally important relationships with artists such as André Cadere, Bernard Joubert, Claude Rutault, as well as with Yvon Lambert.

In the spring of 2021, the floor of MAMCO became the canvas on which the museum applied the process behind *Traces-Formes* (c. 1970). According to Ristori’s method, the pattern could be drawn in chalk, pencil, felt pen, or oil pastel, in color or in black and white, and—depending on the chosen medium—indoors or outdoors, on a horizontal or vertical surface, and opaquely or transparently. In 1976, Ristori reproduced this concept outdoors on two occasions: in the middle of Rue de l’Echaudé in Paris (for Galerie Yvon Lambert) and on the sidewalk at 105 Hudson Street in New York (for Paula Cooper Gallery). The process behind *Traces-Formes* is one of extensive painting—which lends itself to large-scale formats—and of delegation and in-situ adaptation. Like his three-colored hexagons, Ristori’s art may have been abstract, but it still retained the power to convey the structure inherent in context.

Exhibition curated by Julien Fronsacq. A monograph is published in parallel in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou and the Fonds de dotation François Ristori.

PICTURES & AFTER

Vikky Alexander, Mitchell Anderson, Rasheed Araeen, John M Armleder, Erica Baum, Jennifer Bolande, Etienne Bossut, Troy Brauntuch, Valentin Carron, Collection Yoon Ja & Paul Devautour, Sylvie Fleury, Jack Goldstein, Nicole Gravier, IFP, Larry Johnson, Silvia Kolbowski, Bertrand Lavier, Louise Lawler, William Leavitt, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Ken Lum, Tobias Madison & Emanuel Rossetti, Allan McCollum, John Miller, Richard Pettibone, Adrian Piper, Présence Panchounette, Steven Parrino, Richard Prince, readymades belong to everyone®, David Robbins, Walter Robinson, Allen Ruppersberg, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Haim Steinbach, Sturtevant, Meyer Vaisman, Julia Wachtel, Ian Wallace

For several years, MAMCO has been building up a substantial collection of works from the “Pictures Generation,” the name now used to describe the generation of artists who reshaped image production and distribution practices in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Thanks to the efforts of the MAMCO Foundation and the MAMCO Friends Association, and to the generosity of artists and private donors, this process has reached a first step of achievement—albeit with scope for further development. This exhibition showcases the resulting collection and aims to shine a light on the various strategies employed by artists since the 1960s and on how they have influenced younger practices.

In the 1960s, Elaine Sturtevant and Richard Pettibone set about “appropriating” the work of other artists—in this instance, pieces by Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. Their “repurposing” of existing images foreshadowed the approach adopted by later artists such as Sherrie Levine in the 1980s and Yoon Ja & Paul Devautour in the 1990s, all of whom used reproduction as part of their artistic practice.

The generation of artists who featured in Douglas Crimp’s *Pictures* exhibition in 1977 shared a critical interest in the representation of mass-media images and in their citing, reframing, and decontextualization. Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, and Robert Longo could rightly be described as “iconographers”: by recasting mass-produced images in a fresh light, they sought to emphasize the reason for their impact and to tease out their underlying meaning. Contemporaries such as Cindy Sherman, Ian Wallace, David Robbins, Walter Robinson, and Philippe Thomas focused on the stories behind the images they manipulated, while the works of Ken Lum, Vikky Alexander, Richard Prince, and Julia Wachtel served as a critical commentary on the language of advertising.

The “commodity sculpture” movement of the late 1980s took these same strategies and applied them to the arrangement of physical objects, an approach evident in the works of Haim Steinbach and in John M. Armleder’s “furniture sculptures.” Meanwhile, Louise Lawler and Allan McCollum—in both their solo and collaborative efforts—incorporated techniques of simulacra and mise en abyme into their practice.

John Miller’s works are given a room in the exhibition for the very reasons that the museum holds a large collection of them and that he, along with Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw, most clearly articulated a “post-Pictures” critique of our society’s value systems.

By displaying the works by typologies, the exhibition aims to highlight the strategies employed by members of the “Pictures Generation,” and to compare these approaches with those of more recent Swiss artists.

GORDON MATTA-CLARK, WALLS PAPER, 1972

In the fall of 1972, Gordon Matta-Clark (1943–1978) created *Dumpster Duplex*, an outdoor intervention in a garbage dumpster. It was the second iteration of his earlier work, *Open House*, a re-created version of which is part of the MAMCO collection. A photograph shows the container outside 112 Greene Street, a legendary alternative exhibition space in New York’s SoHo district. The main difference in layout between *Dumpster Duplex* and the earlier version lies in the fact that it featured a second story: steps led to a raised platform where a fire pit served as a barbecue, as depicted in the photographs by Andy Grunberg on display here.

Around the same time, Matta-Clark held a show at 112 Greene Street. The invitation card showed a series of partially demolished buildings, with fragments of wallpaper, chipped paint, and ceramic tiles visible through the holes in the walls. The main focus of the exhibition was a series of long strips of paper cascading down the wall from the ceiling. This “wallpaper” in fact consisted of color silkscreen prints on newspaper. It was made from black and white photos of abandoned buildings in the Bronx and the Lower East Side (nine of which are on display here). Matta-Clark added color to some reframed and expanded sections, rendering the original “designs” unrecognizable or even abstract in appearance. He produced a total of 72 color prints in this way. Together, they formed the original *Walls Paper* installation. The artist arranged them in piles against the wall, like newspapers, allowing visitors to peruse them at their leisure. The following year, he published a book by the same name containing all the silkscreen prints—the originals of which were destroyed shortly after the exhibition.

This exhibition, which features the re-created versions of *Open House* and *Walls Paper* in the same space, not only recalls the spirit of the 1972 show, but also touches on the notion of recycling—a key theme of Matta-Clark’s ephemeral installations.

Exhibition curated by Sophie Costes with the support of the Tate Modern (London), the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark and the Zwirner gallery (New York).

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

As an artist, a wife, and a mother, Mierle Laderman Ukeles (b. 1939, Denver, CO) found herself marginalized by both the political and the art worlds in the midst of the 1968 social changes. With a simple question—“After the revolution, who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?”—she raised the significance of the life-sustaining work that enables revolutions to happen and is still needed in their aftermath. Following this conviction, Ukeles wrote a *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* (1969), in which she refers to mothers as care workers, and elevates the unpaid labor of women to an artistic process. By stating that the value of repeatable, everyday actions—such as cleaning, cooking, washing, mending, and changing sheets and diapers—is overshadowed by a focus on the new, advancement, and excitement, she called into question the very foundations of the historical avant-gardes.

In the years that followed, Ukeles developed live performances based on the proposals she made in her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*. Her focus shifted from the household to the institutional sphere, complicating the social and gendered division and illuminating the hidden powers of those who benefit from it.

In 1976, in response to the neoliberal order that freed the New York City government from its role as a public service maintainer, she started engaging with the city as a site of maintenance, or the “city-as-home.” The performance *Touch Sanitation* (1977-1980) is Ukeles’ first project as the official unsalaried artist-in-residence at the New York Sanitation Department (DSNY), a self-initiated role that defined her place within New York City over the next 40 years. This large-scale project took eleven months to execute, engaged 8500 sanitation workers, and resulted in numerous long-duration performance pieces—some of which are presented in this exhibition through archival photographs and videos. These documents reveal Ukeles’ respectful communication and curiosity for her subjects, while initiating a long-term collaboration with DSNY workers.

Ukeles later developed choreographed routines and actions in which heavy-duty municipal vehicles such as garbage collection trucks, snowploughs, barges, towboats, and other vehicles perform outdoor, ballet-like performances.

The exhibition, organized by Lionel Bovier and Elisabeth Jobin, echoes the one organized by John M Armleder at Ecart booth in Basel in 2022. Thanks to Aga Wielocha, researcher of the program “Activating Fluxus” at the HKB, Bern, for this text.

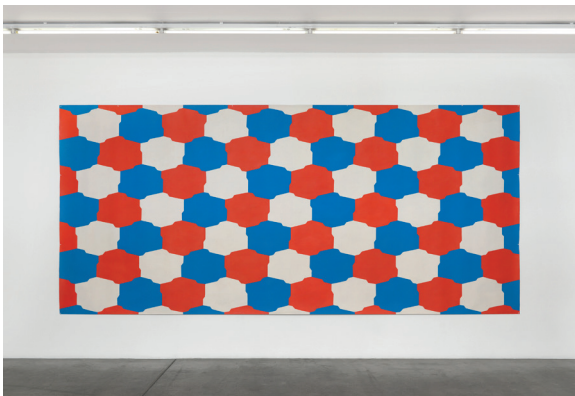
ICONOGRAPHY



General Idea (1969-1994)
Untitled (AIDS with Cockroaches #2), 1993
Gouache on offset on paper
81 x 81 cm ; 88 x 88 x 5 cm encadré
court. MAI 36 Gallery, Zurich



Ian Burn and unknown artist (1939-1993)
«Value Added» Landscape No 7, 1992
Oil on board, wood, enamel, acrylic, bolts
and lettering on Perspex
59 x 87 x 10.5 cm
coll. court. The Estate of Ian Burn and Milani Gallery



François Ristori (1936-2015)
Sans titre, ca 1970
Painting on paper
246 x 542 cm
coll. MAMCO, donation from the Fonds de dotation
François Ristori



Nicole Gravier (*1949)
Per tutto il giorno non ha fatto altro che pensare a Daniel,
1976-1980,
photo-text, 30 x 45 c,m éd. 1/5
coll. MAMCO, artwork acquired thanks to the
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ICONOGRAPHY



Mierle Laderman Ukeles (*1939)

Touch Sanitation, Photo Day 1-15, Sweep 8, Brooklyn 14/15, 4/18/1980

Photograph by Marcia Bricker, 1977 - 1980/2017

Archival pigment print

With frame: 40.60 x 61 cm



Gordon Matta Clark (1943-1978)

Walls Paper, 1972

72 offset lithographs on newsprint

Overall display dimensions variable support,
each: 860 × 576 mm

coll. Tate Modern, Londres

PARTNERS 2023

Exhibition Partners – Spring 2023

- Australia Council for the Arts
- Centre Pompidou, Paris
- Fonds de dotation François Ristori
- Gordon Matta-Clark Estate
- Ian Burn Estate
- Milani Gallery, Brisbane
- Tate Modern, London
- Zwirner gallery, New York

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