



FRYE
ART MUSEUM

Subspontaneous
Francesca Lohmann
and Rob Rhee

January 25-April 19, 2020

Confounding the distinction between the natural and the manufactured, so-called subsponaneous plant species are introduced by humans but spread without further intervention, traveling across ecological boundaries and living in diverse forms of symbiosis. The term has double resonance in this exhibition, which presents a curator-cultivated but organically developed collaboration between Francesca Lohmann and Rob Rhee, Seattle-based artists who each, in turn, collaborate with the forces of nature in their sculptural practices. Gravity, time, and unpredictable processes such as biological growth play a significant role in the creation of both artists' works, which are often executed in series that foreground material experimentation and formal variation. *Subspontaneous* brings pieces by each artist into relationship within an installation designed by the duo, proposing a mutualistic model of co-creation and celebrating contingency, entanglement, and interdependence.

Trained in printmaking, Francesca Lohmann employs sculptural methods such as casting—in which a fluid substance is poured into a mold and allowed to harden—that are related to imprinting, repetition, and mutation. Her bulging, body-like plaster-cast lumps and coils retain impressions of the woven fabric tubes and sacks in which they cured, evidence of the once-liquid plaster's gravitational strain against its textile "skin." Sprouted potatoes cast in bronze suspend a process of organic transformation, while large, plaster-filled sausage casings bear the permanent coloration of transient mold blooms.

Rob Rhee's work is concerned primarily with structural anomalies and environmental manipulation, combining volatile substances with artificial constraints so as to thwart rule-based systems. For his long-term project *The Occupations of Uninhabited Space*, Rhee distributes cage-like, welded steel sculptures to regional farmers who place them over immature gourds. As the gourds grow, they protrude from their enclosures according to their own obscure sensibilities, determining the hybridized sculpture's display orientation. Other featured bodies of work include castings made by pouring incompatible materials, like plaster and alginate (a polymer derived from seaweed), into plastic soda bottles, where the two elements interact in unpredictable ways.

Appearing together in the exhibition as a field of forms on supports of unusual dimensions and composition, the works in *Subspontaneous* shift our attention from the singular, autonomous object toward phenomena, processes, and sites of contact—the places where disparate types of matter meet, give way, or remain in tension.



Francesca Lohmann and Rob Rhee. Installation view of provisional studio arrangement, 2019. Photo: Jueqian Fang.

Francesca Lohmann (American, b. 1986, San Francisco) lives and works in Seattle. Recent exhibitions of her work have been held at Ditch Projects, Eugene, Oregon; Seattle Freezer; Coffin Farm, Redmond, Washington; Veronica, Seattle; and Jacob Lawrence Gallery, Seattle. Lohmann received her BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and her MFA from Cornell University.

Rob Rhee (American, b. 1982, Bronx, New York) lives and works in Seattle. His work has been exhibited nationally at the Portland Art Museum, Oregon; the Hunterdon Art Museum, New Jersey; White Columns, New York; Fort Worth Contemporary Arts, Texas; and the Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles. He has also exhibited internationally at the 10th Berlin Biennale and the Ilmin Museum of Art, South Korea. Rhee received his BA from Yale University and his MFA from Columbia University.

Subspontaneous.doc: A Citational Correspondence

The following is a condensed and edited version of a Google Docs conversation between Francesca Lohmann and Rob Rhee that occurred over the summer months of 2019, as the artists formulated their proposal for the exhibition now titled Subspontaneous. Replete with hyperlinks and quotes from philosophers, poets, playwrights, and pop singers that have influenced each artist's thinking, the original document reached 27 pages in length. Though abridged, the discussion below captures the halting, intertextual nature of their exchange as well as hints of the personal, everyday circumstances that bracketed their intellectual and material work over the course of their collaboration. – Amanda Donnan, Chief Curator

Francesca Lohmann: When we started this conversation, I had just encountered a new term, "oceanic feeling," which expresses explicitly something that I've been trying to get at through my work. As Kaja Silverman writes: "The oceanic feeling is 'imposed' upon us as a 'fact,' and it is a 'sensation' instead of a thought—the sensation of the 'contact' between ourselves and other beings."¹

The term was coined in 1927 by the French writer and dramatist Romain Rolland in his correspondence with Sigmund Freud. Though he rejected the notion as infantile, Freud devoted time to addressing it in his later works, and in *Civilization and Its Discontents* he compares the feeling to something like that experienced by an infant before she learns to differentiate between her own internal boundaries and the outside world, her mother's breast.

I'm attracted to that idea of inclusion/confusion and lack of differentiation.

Rob Rhee: I've been thinking about oceanic feeling and how Freud characterizes it as primitive, an emotional relic. He describes the feeling as something one ideally moves beyond.

Why insist on the superiority of independence, freedom, self-sufficiency? Why denigrate dependency?

An image of epic vulnerability registered tonight as I was lying on the ground, exhausted, at Dance Church [a biweekly movement class], listening to "Bleeding Love" by Leona Lewis. The lyrics are pretty good, and I remember how much I like the song every time it comes on.

It creates this image of inexhaustible bleeding, a bleeding beyond the limits of one's body, a bleeding so epic that it eclipses the bleeding body.

There is a kind of retribution played out in the epic vulnerability Lewis depicts: her ex cuts her and she responds with an unfathomable outpouring. She bleeds out continuously, as if her body "forgets" or rather rebukes its essential separation. She is bleeding out with the same unceasing blood flow that characterizes circulation, bleeding in.

Is this image of bleeding out as a mysterious circulation a kind of oceanic feeling?

P.S. I just got a copy of *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Francesca: I like the image that you describe of circulating with the world, the body big enough to include everything. Or maybe just connected enough. So there is no bleeding out, only circulation, entanglement. In that image, everything is enclosed, circular, endlessly plentiful.

I tend more toward the linear—the finite—eventually the blood runs out . . . death, change, etc.

I like this passage on the transformation and recirculation of things from *On the Nature of the Universe* by Lucretius (1st century BCE):

Showers perish when father ether has flung them down into the lap of mother earth. But the crops spring up fresh and gay; the branches on the trees burst into leaf; the trees themselves grow and are weighed down with fruit. Hence in turn man and beast draw nourishment. . . Hence in lush pastures cattle wearied by their bulk fling down their bodies, and the white milky juice oozes from their swollen udders. Hence a new generation frolic friskily on wobbly legs through the fresh grass, their young minds tipsy with undiluted milk. Visible objects therefore do not perish utterly, since nature repairs one thing from another and allows nothing to be born without the aid of another's death.²

I was reading through old notes tonight and came across this definition:

SEMANTIC SATIATION: A psychological phenomenon in which repetition causes a word or phrase to temporarily lose meaning for the listener, who then perceives the speech as repeated meaningless sounds.

The thing is repeated and repeated, but the meaning runs out.

It makes me think of when I first learned to read, and suddenly all the arrangements of letters had sounds and meanings, and I couldn't go back to a place where they were just shapes with no content attached. It really bothered me.

Maybe semantic satiation is a way to do that with language?

Rob: I love that! I've never heard of semantic satiation before, but I like how it comingles sensation and thought, to bring it back to Silverman. Just the act of repetition creates a condensed experience—an event—in which a thing loses itself over time to its own facts.

It's surprising how quickly words fall apart and need to be recollected, in being called to reappear.

Or is it? From a different angle, do we use words in order to conjure their meaning or interrupt it?

This reminds me of a stage note by Sarah Ruhl for her play *The Clean House*. The events of the play follow Matilde: the play is precipitated by the death of her parents and concludes with a scene from her birth. The actors who play Matilde's parents also play two characters (Ana and Charles) whom she encounters after their death.

A Note on Double Casting

It is important that Ana and Charles play Matilde's mother and father in Act 1. How much can they create, without speaking, a sense of memory and longing, through silence, gesture and dance? Ana's transformation at the very end of the play should create a full circle for Matilde, from the dead to the living and back again.³

(F. just refused to take her nap. Will try to finish tonight or tomorrow morning!)

Francesca: Rob, this is wonderful, thank you. I'm on my way out the door, back to work. The last week/weekend was crazy with Mother's Day flower madness. I should have more time this week to respond at some point, but I love the parallels you're creating.

Rob: Francesca, thank you for suggesting this format. I love it. It's so fun to write and read in this semiprivate way.

I've gone back in and added a part and reworked some thoughts. I also left in our commentary as it might prove to be an interesting temporal record, this scroll. I'm picking up below where I left off last time.

...

For me, making sculpture can be like this. The repetition of a process becomes automatic. I temporarily forget why I am doing what I am doing and get caught up in mixing, pouring, scooping, measuring. When I'm lost in the flow, mistakes arise. Sometimes these mistakes generate a recognition that's more basic than the work they derail, and more full of attention.

I like to think of my "hand" in my work as generic or mechanical, as if I am reproducing the sculptures as opposed to creating them. I tend to exaggerate (to myself) the extent to which I am not in control (or separate) but simply following a pattern or process to its natural (or internally motivated) conclusion.

I know that this myth aids me in making work in an almost random fashion, which is what I like. But the randomness often runs out. I think the processes that I stick with are the ones which are random enough, and which suit my desire for play. It feels weird to use that word, since it smacks of privilege. However, it is the most appropriate term.

Play can denote a disconnection from "real life," or it can serve as an exploratory condition within "real life." I think the question is not one of aimless play versus urgent work but of exploration and sensation: Does one's play consolidate or reanimate the way one lives?

Along these lines, I've been reading *Difference and Repetition* after you brought it up during our last conversation and wonder if Deleuze's thoughts on simulacra describe something we share?

SIMULACRA:

I forget because I repeat. I repress, because I can live certain things or certain experiences only in the mode of repetition.⁴

Repetition is no more the permanence of the One than the resemblance of the many. The subject of the eternal return is not the same but the different, not the similar but the dissimilar, not the one but the many, not necessity but chance.⁵

I see a connection back to circulation and semantic satiation via process, or process-based work.

Perhaps this is belaboring the point, but it seems fair to say that process-based works are simulacra even when they are first made, not in the sense of being unoriginal or derivative but in that they simulate material conditions or phenomena (of gravity, growth, resiliency, entanglement, etc.). They are not imitations or representations of the phenomena but distortions of them.

I think this happens via the process Deleuze describes at the end of the passage you shared with me: "However, in the infinite movement of degraded likeness from copy to copy, we reach a point at which everything changes nature, at which copies themselves flip over into simulacra and at which, finally, resemblance or spiritual imitation gives way to repetition."⁶

Francesca: I don't really think of my work as process based, but maybe that doesn't matter. Making objects allows thinking through being and doing in the world, in relation to outside forces (gravity, time, change, boundary, accident). I'm trying to use that to build my own specific language, to achieve certain gestures. For me it's not random or automatic. It's very deliberate. And there are infinite variations that can be made, and through that repetition of variation and difference maybe the language becomes more clear. For me it's about ways of being finite and embodied, trying to feel closer to everything else, less separate.

Rob:

Here here!

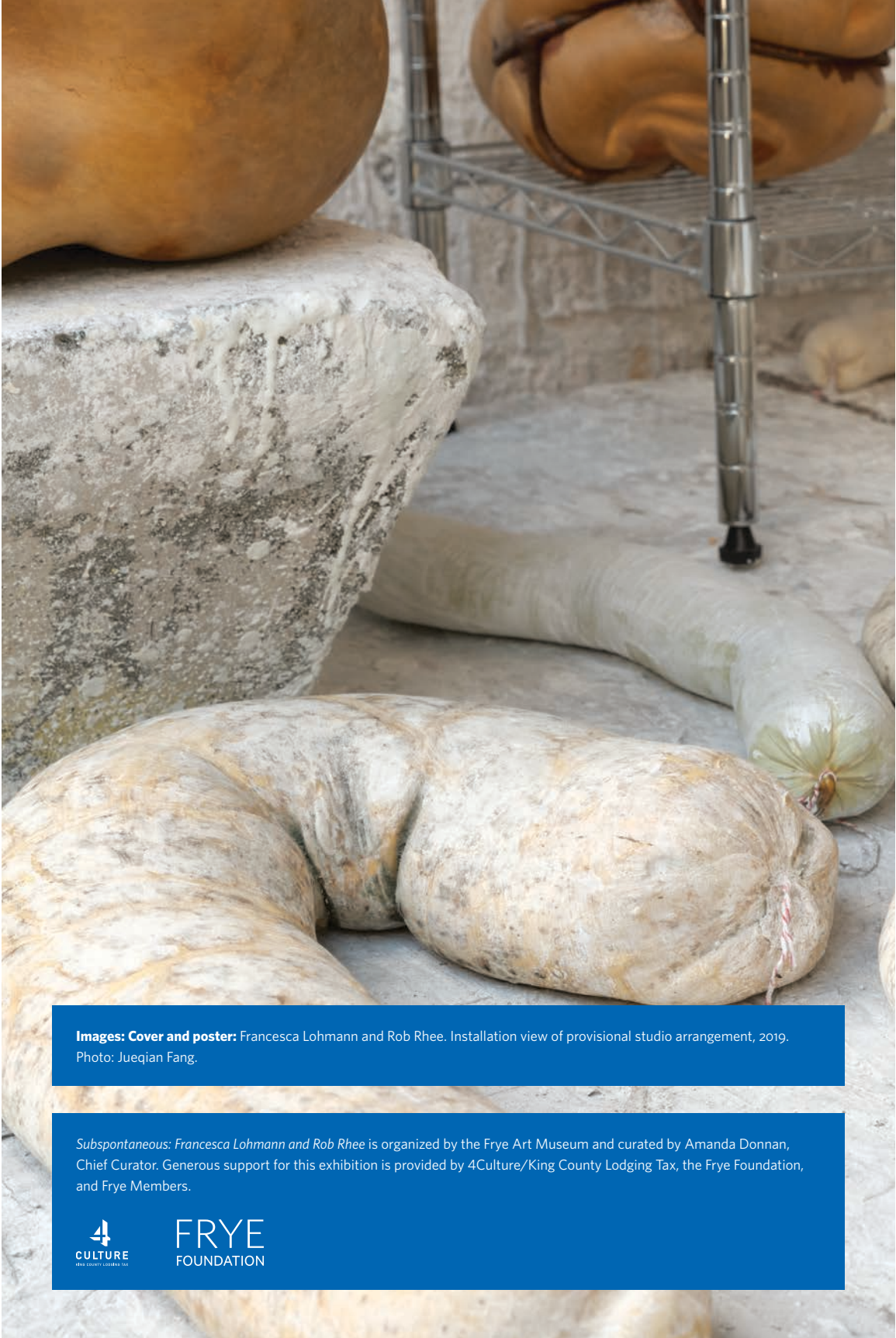
Here here?

Hear here?

Hear hear!

(semantic satiation kicking in . . .)

Endnotes: 1. Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 29. 2. Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R. E. Latham (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1951), 34-35. 3. Sarah Ruhl, *The Clean House and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006), 8. 4. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 18. 5. Deleuze, 126. 6. Deleuze, 128.



Images: Cover and poster: Francesca Lohmann and Rob Rhee. Installation view of provisional studio arrangement, 2019.
Photo: Jueqian Fang.

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