

Communicating Vessels



IAIN BAXTER &

Luis Jacob

Roula Partheniou

Judy Radul



IAIN BAXTER&, *Rebecca's Bagged Place*, Raven Row, 2013, C-print, 10" x 13.5"
Photograph: Marcus J. Leith

Front Cover: Luis Jacob, *Album XI*, 2013, Image montage in plastic laminate, 40 panels, 17" x 11" each

Communicating Vessels

I find myself in the act of looking. I find myself. The everyday experience of being in the world is not one of aware perception as consciousness forgets its own phenomena, allowing itself to be constituted by familiar glances. To be removed from this is to be reminded of the experience of perception. This moment of aware interaction, found in the re-presenting of familiar objects as means of bringing attention to the assumptions of looking, is taken up in the work of Luis Jacob, IAIN BAXTER&, Roula Partheniou, and Judy Radul. When we take from the language of the familiar, we are caught in the act of looking, and the subtle disturbances and renegotiations of how we perceive objects startle us back into an awareness of ourselves.

Communicating Vessels brings together three generations of Canadian artists from a range of backgrounds and disciplines, from 1965 to the present day, which offer an examination of visual associations that are held by familiar objects, and how these assumptions, when disrupted, force a self-conscious renegotiation of the body in it's environment. This disruption brings us back to our bodies, relearning and repositioning ourselves in our environment and in relation to the object. How much of what we know of an object is from our subjective experience of it? At what point does this structure of expected interactions break down? The everyday object is a place at which to start. Common forms, colour, materials, all become signifiers to the physical and emotional relationships we build through interaction with our environment.

The relationship between the body's sensory interactions with familiar objects is the focus of Jacob's *Inhabitants* (2008). In a series of five black-and-white photographs, two men and two women perform mundane acts in the nude within a domestic setting—an installation he created for the Kunstverein Hamburg

titled *Habitat* (2005). The nude bodies confront the relationship between object, environment, and body, engaging with the complex ways in which we relate to the objects around us. Ceramic housewares from Jacob's *Habitat* sit next to the black-and-white images in which they appear; the banality of objects representing a language of the familiar that is critically repositioned through their relations to the bodies in the *Inhabitants* photos.



Luis Jacob, *Object Tableau (Habitat)*, 2005-13, collection of nine ceramic and plastic objects, variable dimensions, courtesy of Birch Contemporary, Toronto, and Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf

These systems of expectation and perception permeate Jacob's *Album XI* (2013). Ongoing since 2000, Jacob's albums consist of hundreds of images excised from magazines and books, which he arranges to form a narrative. Presented in plastic laminate, *Album XI* sourced images address common objects and collection, with the intent to "liberate images and objects from

existing systems.”¹

The act of removal, sanitization by plasticization/lamination is highlighted in IAIN BAXTER&’s *Vacuum Formed Pop Bottle* (1965) and the preceding N.E. Thing Co.’s *Bagged Place* (1966)², as well it’s contemporary iteration *Rebecca’s Bagged Place* (2013). The act of bagging was originally enacted as a temporarily constructed living space, critiquing the domestic sphere being by new methods of mass production.³ The plastics that were becoming the medium of household objects were used to contain every object within the constructed space. Similar to a vinyl sofa cover, BAXTER&’s intervention separates us from the objects, intervening with any comfortable interaction. BAXTER&’s documentation of his interventions invite us to question how our perception of objects relates to our inability to experience objects as their material form alone, but rather as a subject of environment and conditions from which it can never be isolated.

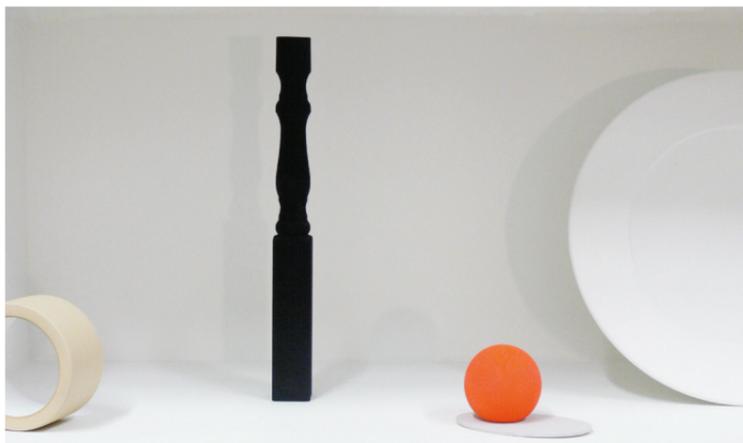
Reflecting on the conditions surrounding expectation and

1 “Luis Jacob: In a Material World,” Work Gallery Press Release, London, England (September 12, 2013).

2 The invitation to N.E. Thing Co’s *Bagged Place* at UBC, included in the exhibition, reflects a longstanding interest in collection and paraphernalia, which was continued in the promotional material of N.E. Thing Co.

3 In an interview with Alexander Alberro, reflects on the act of bagging as reflective of emerging western consumerist tendencies. Stating, “I think that whereas Europe is a wrapping culture, we in North America are really more of a bagging culture.” He continues to reflect on the consumerist environment reflecting on his interest in the still life artist Giorgio Morandi who painted the wine bottles and pottery of his community in Italy, “And thinking about Morandi in the 1960’s I realized that the objects that surrounded me and my community in Vancouver at the time weren’t pottery or glass, but plastic... I decided to work with the common objects of my own time, which were mostly made of plastic.” IAIN BAXTER&. *IAIN BAXTER&: Works 1958-2011*, eds. IAIN BAXTER& and David Moos (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011), 18.

the gaze, Roula Partheniou's *Nook* (2014) presents a constellation of objects that hold our attention in a moment of recognition, while at the same time denying familiarity. Making use of visual similes, colour cues, and planes of perception, she challenges and builds from the familiar experiences we have with objects. Objects found within Partheniou's collection are actively involved in relationships with each other within the space of the shelf containing them, as well as the realm of the interior



Roula Partheniou, *Nook* (detail), 2014, Acrylic on MDF, 4' x 3'. Courtesy of MKG 127

—a theme echoed throughout the exhibition. The elements at play remind us that these sensible qualities are not in the things themselves but rather in our subjective relation to them. Playing with this subjective familiarity of objects, Partheniou's treatment foregrounds the expectations we get caught up in through our acts of looking, and our associations of form with how we experience and define space.

The phenomenological experience of engaged looking is also examined by Judy Radul in *Concrete Objects* (2002–2007). A

live CCTV feed of the gallery overlaid with quotations from Merleau-Ponty's *The Thing and the Natural World* that reflect on the construction of perception. The text appears on the monitor for the length of time it took the artist to read the statement out loud. She recontextualizes the space and objects presented within the frame of the monitor, with everything caught on camera



Judy Radul, *Concrete Objects*, 2002–2007, DVD, CCT camera, video mixer, video monitor, the text examples Maurice Merleau-Ponty used to illustrate the chapter “The Thing and the Natural World,” in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), the reading time between examples, 2 hours, 38 minutes, Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

being subjected to this descriptor. *In Relation to Objects* (1999), a four-channel video installation presented in the e|gallery, Radul brings together performance artists Aaron Vidaver, Margaret Dragu, Warren Arcan, and Susan Elliot in an exploration of the relationship between body and the physical nature of perceiving objects in space. Radul's work focuses on renegotiating norms of interaction between the body and objects it encounters.



IAIN BAXTER&, *Pepsi Bottle*, 1965, Vacuum-formed plastic, 15" x 17.5"
Courtesy of David Silcox

Acts of looking are negated in various ways by these artists. The physical or material qualities of objects are actively re-examined, and consequently we are invited to reflect on the distancing and disjunction found throughout the exhibition, which brings together works that openly explore the perceptual relationship of the object and the body.

Artist Biographies

Luis Jacob (born 1971, Lima, Peru) is an artist, writer, curator, and educator based in Toronto. His work has been exhibited internationally at venues including documenta 12, Kassel; Barbican Centre, London; Generali Foundation, Vienna; and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Key solo exhibitions include *L'œil, la brèche, l'image/The Eye, The Hole, The Picture* at the McCord Museum, Montreal in 2012; *Pictures at an Exhibition* at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto (2011); and *Tableaux Vivants* at Fonderie Darling, Montreal (2010). Luis Jacob is represented by Galerie Max Mayer, Düsseldorf and Birch Contemporary, Toronto.

IAIN BAXTER& (born 1936, Middlesbrough, England) founded N.E. Thing Co. in 1966, along with his then wife and collaborative partner Ingrid Baxter. N.E. Thing Co. became an outlet for experimentation in the production and dissemination of artwork. The company was dissolved in 1978, when the couple separated. IAIN BAXTER& has gone on to exhibit internationally, representing Canada at the Bienal de São Paulo, 1969. His retrospective exhibition *IAIN BAXTER&: Works 1958-2011* recently travelled to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2011) and the Art Gallery of Ontario (2012). He has received numerous awards including a Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts in 2004, the Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2006, and was named a Companion to the Order of Canada in 2007. IAIN BAXTER& is represented by TrépanierBaer, Calgary.

Roula Partheniou's (born 1977, Niagara Falls, Ontario) work is marked by an interest in material play and the double-take. Graduating from the University of Guelph in 2001, she has exhibited both nationally and internationally, with recent exhibitions at AHVA Gallery, Vancouver; Convenience Gallery, G Gallery, and Mercer Union, Toronto; DAAP Galleries, Cincinnati; Truck Gallery, Calgary; Mass MOCA, Massachusetts; MSVU Art Gallery, Halifax; Plug In ICA, Winnipeg; and Modern Fuel, Kingston. Her work is held in numerous private collections, and in the corporate and institutional collections of the Bank of Montreal, TD Bank, MunichRe, University of Toronto, and the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives. Roula Partheniou is represented by MKG127 in Toronto.

Judy Radul (born 1962, Lillooet, British Columbia) studied at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, BC, graduating in 1990 with a Bachelors degree in fine and performing arts. She continued her graduate studies from 1998-2000, at Bard College in New York. Radul's interdisciplinary practice includes photography, sculpture, performance, video, and mixed media installation. She has exhibited her work nationally and internationally, and her creative writing and essays have appeared in a variety of publications since 1991. Radul's *In Relation to Objects* was shown in the 2009 exhibition *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, curated by Dieter Roelstraete in Mechelen, Belgium. Her recent solo exhibitions include Daadgalerie, Berlin (2013), Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver (2012), *World Rehearsal Court*, Henie Onstad Art Centre, Høvikodden, Norway (2011), *World Rehearsal Court*, Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, Vancouver (2009), and *The Power Plant*, Toronto (2003). Judy Radul is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver.



Judy Radul, *In Relation to Objects*, 1999, 4-channel video projection. Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

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