

Simon Fujiwara



Three Easy Pieces

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← *Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)*, 2013
Installation view: Andrea Rosen Gallery,
New York, 2013. (Photo: Lance Brewer, courtesy
of Andrea Rosen Gallery)

Letters from Mexico [detail], 2010–11
Installation view: *Unattained Landscape*, Palazzetto
Tito, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice, 2013
(Photo: Keizo Kioku, courtesy of The Japan Foundation)

Simon Fujiwara

Born in 1982 in London and currently based in Berlin, Simon Fujiwara has shaped a complex and rich practice that interweaves performance, film, sculpture, and text into highly immersive environmental installations. *Simon Fujiwara: Three Easy Pieces* inaugurates the new exhibition program at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts with a presentation of three installations that reconstitute notions of truth, authenticity, morality, and the credibility of the artist as narrator, leveraging new perspectives on issues such as sexuality, globalism, and race. The exhibition is organized by James Voorhies, the John R. and Barbara Robinson Family Director. It is the first solo exhibition by Fujiwara at an arts institution in the United States.

Simon Fujiwara studied architecture at Cambridge University and Fine Art at Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main. His work has been presented at numerous institutions in group and solo exhibitions at institutions including Tate St Ives, United Kingdom; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf; the Power Plant, Toronto; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; Kunstverein Braunschweig; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. His participation in international biennials includes Venice (2009); São Paulo (2010); Performa 11, New York (2011); Gwangju (2012); Shanghai (2012); and Sharjah (2013).



Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex) [detail], 2013
 Installation view: Andrea Rosen Gallery,
 New York, 2013. (Photo: Lance Brewer, courtesy
 of Andrea Rosen Gallery)

Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)

In *Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)*, the artist restages elements remembered from a childhood photograph, now lost. In the photograph, his bikini-clad British mother was held aloft in the arms of a Lebanese boyfriend on a Beirut beach by the Casino du Liban, where she performed as a cabaret dancer. Here, the physical evidence of an attempt to recast the lost photograph, including

stage lights, office desk, photographs, and sand, creates a kind of hybrid site of photographer's studio, casting room, and beach. In the 20-minute video component, fact and fiction stunningly combine into an enthralling process of reconstructing the photograph from personal memory, which leads to inquiries on the relationship between the West and the Middle East, touching on racial profiling, exoticism, and terrorism.



Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex) [detail], 2013
 (Production photograph: © Rainer Elstermann)

GROUPS OF STRANGERS WE CALL FRIENDS

James Voorhies

In 1967, Jean-Luc Godard made the film *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*. The “Her” in Godard’s title refers to both a female protagonist named Juliette Janson and the city of Paris. In the film, Godard chronicles a day in the life of Juliette, a housewife who lives in a large housing complex on the edge of Paris. Each day, she leaves her family and drives into the heart of the city to secretly sell her body in order to pay for the consumer goods and attain the luxurious lifestyle that fashion magazines, television programs, radio, and advertising posters tell her to desire. While Godard tracks Juliette’s daily routine of prostitution, he also portrays Paris as a living organism. Its skin, too, is under assault by consumerism—capital—and bruised by the relentless erecting of massive apartment buildings, shopping centers, and advertising billboards. Elevated freeway systems slice through old neighborhoods.

Today, corporate media are not only billboards, fashion magazines, radio, television, and travel posters but also the Internet and social media—Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. As a result, individuals are tasked as both producers and consumers of content at a moment in capitalism that reaches well beyond the proportions envisioned by Godard in 1967. In our current era, we collectively take from and give to the capitalist impulse through digital technology that demands that we define ourselves online while satiating the desire to see more—of ourselves. It is an odd, circular predicament, the desire for instantaneous, repeated affirmation from groups of strangers we call friends.

Questions about these societal forces that characterize us and shape our identity are at the heart of Simon Fujiwara’s compelling and deeply engaging practice. In works of art with absorbing narratives that conflate fact and fiction, the artist raises questions about gender identity, sexuality, libidinal desire, belonging, and racial profiling. Bringing personal experiences into contact with broader historical, social, and political issues, Fujiwara’s exhibitions and projects function as theatrical frameworks where players—family members, real-life friends, historical figures—and events cohabit and interact within the very same contexts. He draws on the autobiographical in his performances, films, sculptures, and texts that present complex scenarios where spectators watch, listen, walk around, and put the pieces together.

Each of the three installations in this exhibition, *Simon Fujiwara: Three Easy Pieces*, attests to just that in unique ways. And not unlike the surprising figure of Godard himself in *Two or Three Things*, when he rudely interrupts a bathing scene or interjects his off-camera questions and commentary, Fujiwara, too, frequently appears or shifts into various guises in his filmic, photographic, and performative works. His figure adds to and confuses the logical interpretation of his stories, whether he is narrating a tale about a lost photograph of his mother, making pottery as a means to reconnect with his father, or dictating letters to Europe from a city plaza in Mexico. We are uncertain about the legitimacy of any of these stories. Confusion abounds and momentarily arrests the spectator. This apprehension ultimately creates opportunities for critical reflection on Fujiwara’s installations and films. Confusion makes room for thinking.

Godard’s film was made during a zeitgeist of critical thinking about the future of capitalism, its effect on human behavior and impact on personal biographies. Around the time he made *Two or Three Things*, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard wrote *Libidinal Economy* (1974). In this book, Lyotard correlates the flow of capital to Freud’s theory of the libido. Lyotard theorizes a society where capital is an organism inextricably linked to human desire. This society is fueled by systems of production and consumption where capital is nourished by our desires in order to develop and grow, just as Freud theorized that the sex drive is the underlying pulse of our every decision and action. Lyotard says to go ahead and feed the libidinal, parasitic hunger of capital. Let it go. Perhaps that’s happening now.

While Godard’s and Lyotard’s criticisms of capitalism were astute observations at that moment, Simon Fujiwara’s practice raises particularly urgent questions about the structural factors that govern our identity today. Indeed, it is a moment completely hypnotized by the digital screen in which a network of social media both constructs and disperses biography based entirely on uploaded photographs and content. What is the difference between fact and fiction in such a reality? Fujiwara asks us to consider our trust in the photographic image, its inextricable connection to information capital, and the effects of our digital content on people and places—now.



Rehearsal for a Reunion (with the father of pottery),
2011–13. Installation views: Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2012
(Photo: Dvir Gallery, courtesy of Dvir Gallery)



Rehearsal for a Reunion (with the father of pottery)

Rehearsal for a Reunion (with the father of pottery) is a video and installation that explores the psychology of a father-son relationship. The work is based on the artist's trip to Japan to reconnect with his estranged Japanese father through the collective act of making a tea set in a pottery workshop. The tea set they made together is a replica of one by famed British studio potter

Bernard Leach, who worked in Japan before returning to the United Kingdom to establish a studio in St Ives, the very town where Fujiwara grew up. The installation features artifacts from this experience and a video. In the video, the artist performs a script that explains the reunion to the actor who plays his father but without coming to a definitive end, raising questions about authenticity, identity, and our innate desire for some form of conclusion.



Letters from Mexico [detail], 2010–11
Installation view: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2011
(Photo: Hamburger Kunsthalle)

Letters from Mexico

The installation *Letters from Mexico*, inspired by the 16th-century *Letters from Mexico* by conquistador Hernán Cortés, features objects and texts that chronicle Fujiwara's experiences during a visit to Mexico, which coincided with dual celebrations of the 200th anniversary of its independence from Spain and 100th anniversary of its revolution. Fujiwara's letters, addressed to "Europe," were translated phonetically and transcribed by street typists in Mexico City's Plaza Santo Domingo. This communication process alludes to the relationship

between Europe and Mexico, to what is lost in translation as vestiges of colonialism linger in other socioeconomic forms. In the manner of an anthropological museum, *Letters from Mexico* presents Fujiwara's framed letters alongside travel memorabilia and other objects. In the gallery, red, green, and white curtains form a theatrical backdrop for the letters, evoking Mexico's nationalism through the colors of the flag, while ultimately problematizing the notion of independence under the current socio-political conditions of global capitalism and tourism.

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Mission

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University is dedicated to the synthesis of art, design, and education through the exhibition of existing works and production of new commissions. In addition to a site for exhibition and public events, CCVA is home to the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies and Harvard Film Archive. At CCVA, visual literacy, knowledge production, contemporary art, and critical inquiry seamlessly meet, ultimately enriching the creative and intellectual lives of our audiences. The Carpenter Center is the only building in North America designed by Swiss-born architect Le Corbusier.

Simon Fujiwara: Three Easy Pieces

Oct 23–Dec 21, 2014
Levels 1 + 3

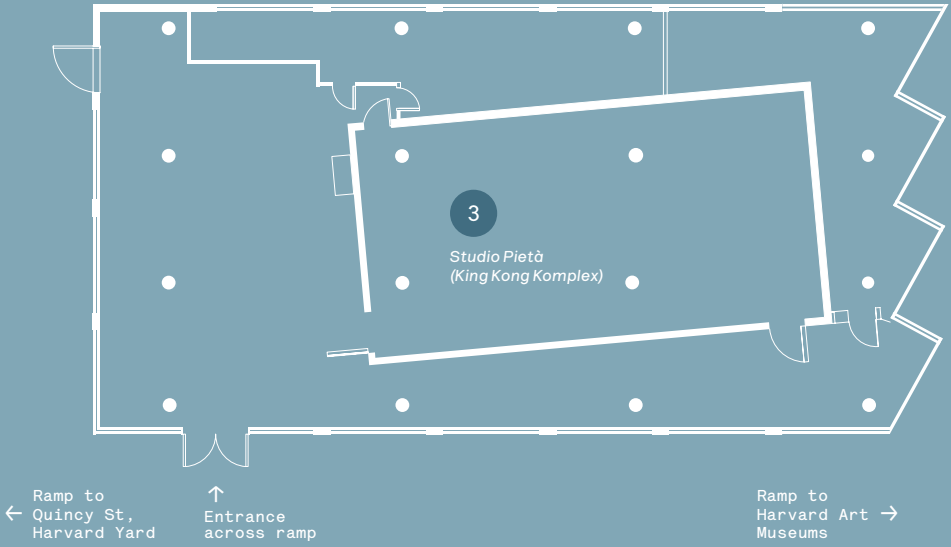
- 1 *Letters from Mexico*, 2010–11
Mixed media installation. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist
- 2 *Rehearsal for a Reunion (with the father of pottery)*, 2011–13. Mixed media installation with video projection
Duration: 14:18. Dimensions variable
Commissioned by MOT, Tokyo, 2011
Courtesy of Private Collection, Japan
- 3 *Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex)*, 2013. Mixed media installation with video projection
Duration: 20:30. Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Program

The Carpenter Center fosters meaningful engagement among artists, art, and our audiences. Choreographing exhibitions, lectures, residencies, publications, performances, screenings, and informal gatherings, CCVA brings people, ideas, and objects together in generative ways that provide unparalleled experiences with contemporary art.

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