

THE UNKNOWN ARTIST

Curated by Lucy Cotter



05 MARCH — 18 APRIL 2020

Center for Contemporary Art and Culture
Portland, OR

THE UNKNOWN ARTIST

The Unknown Artist stages a dialogue around obsolescence, the relative value of making, and its entanglement with artistic authorship and visibility. The exhibition presents contemporary artworks that reflect on the act of making, the role of identity in artistic validation, and the future ecology of artistic practices, alongside works from Portland's now-closed Museum of Contemporary Craft, whose makers' identities have been lost or never recorded. The museum's absence reflects the wider instability of art and cultural institutions in our time, raising questions about sustainability, the vulnerability of art and the reimagining of possible futures. Manifesting varying states of objecthood, conceptions of authorship, disparate value systems and histories, the collection objects on exhibit test how we look at made things. They ask us where the continuities and discontinuities between art and other making practices lie, how art has been defined, and whether we wish to carry established systems of value forward. The (artistic) status of these objects is dependent on economies of looking and visibility, on highly uneven systems of cultural exchange, and on the transactional value of individual identities.

Zsolt Asztalos's *Unknown Artists* installations reflect on European art history as a narrative of forgetting. Aram Lee's video *A Dissonance of Landscapes* looks at art in the gaps between cultural discourses, circulating as a currency of uneven exchange. Mami Takahashi's photographs test the complex interrelationship between her visibility as an artist and an immigrant in US society. Combining social collaboration with craft, Cannupa Hanska Luger's *Mirror Shield Project* suggests new roles for the artist. Reinterpreting Indigenous craft practices for the future, he utilizes social media to reinvigorate the power of collective making and in doing so, expands the purview of art. Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen's video work *75 Watt* reminds us that the maker is ever-present, albeit unseen, in the anonymous labor of mass-production. The exhibition title draws on Soetsu Yanagi's book *The Unknown Craftsman*, which proposed the value of unknown makers in Japan at a time when craft was becoming obsolete. His essays instigated the *mingei* folk art movement (1920s-30s), which repositioned everyday craftspeople, closely aligning them with artists. *The Unknown Artist* highlights the always-shifting positions of the maker, the craftsperson, and the artist and asks how these roles and their interrelationships might be reimagined for a more sustainable and equitable future. The exhibition is accompanied by Takahiro Yamamoto's dance performance *Property of Opaqueness*, which tests the interplay of visibility and validation, among a dedicated series of other events that delve further into the exhibition's premises.

EXHIBITED WORKS:



(left) Zsolt Asztalos, **Untitled**, from Unknown Artists III series (2014-2019) Mixed media installation

Zsolt Asztalos, **Untitled II**, from Unknown Artists III series (2014-2019) Mixed media installation

Asztalos Zsolt's *Unknown Artists* series makes tangible the fate of artworks whose makers have fallen into oblivion. The presented images are stacked and wrapped, as if to be stored for indefinite periods of time, invoking the human care necessary for the ongoing wellbeing of art. The images of paintings contained within the installations act as a placeholder for the disappearance of their makers rather than a guarantee of their remembrance through their art. Based on Asztalos's four-year research into forgotten artists, this series raises questions about the art that never reaches the history books. Foregrounding the slippage of artworks into mere things, the two installations presented here imply the uncertainty of art's future.



Aram Lee, **A Dissonance of Landscapes** (2019) HD Video, 13:50 mins Archive: 'Ten export Landscape', ten series of oil paintings, Canton, China, NMVW, The Netherlands. Project supported by AFK and Framed Framed

A Dissonance of Landscapes documents performers taking ten "export winter landscapes" on a precarious boat journey from Amsterdam's IJ channel to the sea. Found in the archives of the city's Tropical Museum, built as an ode to its colonial exploits, these paintings from the 1800s are by Cantonese artists living in a subtropical climate. Yet they depict winter scenes, imagined through prints and drawings brought by Dutch traders. Made by artists whose names were not meant to be remembered, their status as art is questionable; a fate made palpable by the rough taping of their broken surfaces. They hover in the in-betweenness of cultural flows, becoming a marker of uneven "exchange". Lee's video re-performs their historical narrative as an unstable and poorly visible scene that never quite arrives at a destination. Embracing the conflation of cultural narratives in these neglected paintings, she foregrounds histories connected through diaspora, destabilizing criteria for cultural authority.

THE UNKNOWN ARTIST

(right) Mami Takahashi,
Seeing You/Seeing Me (Bench), 2014, mounted
photograph

Mami Takahashi,
Seeing You/Seeing Me (Façade I), 2014,
mounted
photograph

Mami Takahashi,
Seeing You/Seeing Me (Hedge), 2014, mounted
photograph



The *Seeing You/Seeing Me* (2014) series document performances in public space that seek to capture Mami Takahashi's paradoxical sense of being both invisible and hyper-visible as a Japanese woman and an artist, living in the US. Using various mirrored props to camouflage or hide her physicality, Takahashi refuses to represent a culture, reflecting instead the social conditions of her surrounds in urban Portland. Her interventions knowingly deflect the awkwardness of social codes for many immigrants, defying the norms of assimilation. Takahashi's image is equally a metaphor for the ambivalent position of the artist as marginal and largely invisible in the wider social context, despite the implied value of art.

**Mirror Shield
Project Concept**
artist: Cannupa
Hanska Luger

(right) *River (The Water
Serpent)*, 2016. Performance
organization and drone
operator: Rory Wakemup
Film editing: Dylan McLaughlin
Field recording and sound
mastering: Ginger Dunnill
Audio: Oceti Sakowin main
camp announcer, prayer song
Onsite field recording, Standing
Rock, ND, September 2016

**How To Build Mirror Shields
for Standing Rock Water
Protectors** Social collaboration
call to action video, USA 2016
Film editing: Razelle Benally

Mirror shields by
unknown makers
Used at Standing Rock, ND,
September 2016
Masonite, reflective adhesive
paper, para cord



Combining social collaboration with craft, artist Cannupa Hanska Luger's Mirror Shield Project was initiated for and at Oceti Sakowin camp near Standing Rock, ND in 2016. The project was inspired by images of women holding mirrors up to riot police in the Ukraine, so that the police could see themselves. Adapting their design for safety and durability, Luger created a tutorial video for social media, calling people everywhere to make mirror shields and send them to the water protectors. *River (The Water Serpent)* documents one of the related performative actions that took place at the water protectors Oceti Sakowin camp near Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Indian Reservation. The mirror shields have since been used in resistance movements across the Nation. By instigating collective making practices, Luger's practice reimagines the role of craft and art in the creation of a more equitable and sustainable future for all peoples.

EXHIBITED WORKS



(left) Revital Cohen
& Tuur Van Balen
75 Watt, 2013
Video, 11 mins

Choreography:
Alexander Whitley
Assembly: Cai DianFa, Chen
QiuLe, Du ZhiFeng, Fang
LiFeng, Hu HaiXin, Huang
JiaWen, Huang YuFeng,
Kong LinXin, Liu YuFeng,
Tan HaiFeng, Tan YongJun,
Xu JiaLi, Xu MengTing,
Yang WenTao, Ye ShaoYing,
Zhou JianXiong

Revital Cohen
& Tuur Van Balen
Object design,
75 Watt, 2013
Technical drawings on
paper

Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen's *75 Watt* shifts attention from the anonymous mass manufacture of "Made in China" goods to the human act of making that lies behind them. The artist duo conceived the design for a useless object, whose sole function would be to produce certain movements on the assembly line. This approach reversed the usual hierarchy of the workers' bodily movements being dictated by product specifications. The title *75 Watt* refers to a statement in the Marks Standard Handbook for Mechanical Engineers—that a laborer over the course of an eight-hour day can sustain an average output of about seventy-five watts. Filmed at the White Horse Electric Factory in Zhongshan, China; the work highlights how the global economy depends on individual human producers.



Soetsu Yanagi,
The Unknown Craftsman,
1973
Adapted by Bernard Leach
Book printed in Japan by
unnamed printers
Binding: Mulberry bark
paper and bone glue

Artist unknown,
Bench, Douglas fir, date
unknown
Acquired from the Portland
Museum of Art
for the Pacific Northwest
College of Art
by Jenifer DeKalb
(1947-2016)

Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961) sought to reconsider the value of making, following the rapid industrialization of Japan. Written in the 1920s-1950s, the essays in *The Unknown Craftsman* spearheaded the survival of craft at a time of threatened obsolescence, leading to the *mingei* (folk art) movement. He was radical in including undervalued indigenous as well as dominant craft traditions. Potter Shoji Hamada became the movement's leading artist representative, working with local clays and using traditional firing methods. He was closely connected to British potter Bernard Leach and the two would tour through the US in the early 1950s, helping to prompt a revival of studio pottery. (A solo exhibition of Leach's work at the Oregon Ceramic Studio, Portland in 1951 achieved epic visitor numbers.) Hamada's demonstrations at Black Mountain College led Janet Darnell to return with him to Japan and is said to be the first foreign woman to train in traditional ceramics. Works by all three potters from the MOCC collection will be shown as part of an accompanying lecture-performance, *After Difference*. (See events).

The Douglas fir bench, whose value was recognized and safeguarded by former PNCA Registrar Jenifer DeKalb, has the quiet aesthetic presence of many unattributed handmade objects. It can be seen as a material manifestation of Yanagi's proposals.

WORKS BY UNKNOWN ARTISTS:

These works reflect a curated selection of works by artists, whose names have been lost or never recorded, held in the Museum of Contemporary Craft (MOCC) Collection. From 1937 to 2016, the MOCC served as a center for investigation and dialogue around the definition and exploration of craft. With a central focus on the Pacific Northwest region, the collection of over 1,300 objects documents the studio craft movement and the unfolding of craft over 79 years. It is now stewarded by the Center for Contemporary Art & Culture at Pacific Northwest College of Art.

Artist Unknown
Moss Green Wool, ca. 1948, wool
Machine-woven textile
Museum of Contemporary Craft Collection

Artist Unknown
Striped Upholstery Fabric, ca. 1947, fiber
Machine-woven textile
Museum of Contemporary Craft Collection

(right) Artist Unknown
Ceramic vessel, date unknown
Museum of Contemporary Craft Collection
Gift of Francis Newton



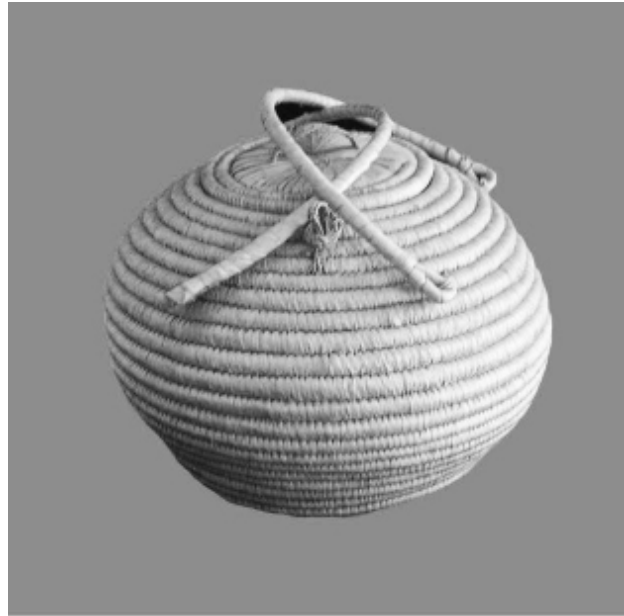
(left) Artist Unknown
Constructivist Figure, date unknown
Ceramic on wooden base
Museum of Contemporary Craft Collection
Gift of Ruth Halvorsen

Artist Unknown
Pot with small neck, ceramic, date unknown
Museum of Contemporary Craft Collection
Gift of Christine Charneski on behalf of
Helen S. Charneski

Artist Unknown
Figure with Gourd,
Ceramic, Pre-Columbian period
Unidentified origin in South or Central America
Museum of Contemporary Craft Collection
Estate of Rose Fenzd

(right) Artist Unknown,
Basket, 1971, fiber
Nupe tribal group, Nigeria
Museum of Contemporary
Craft Collection
Gift of the Department of
Architecture and Allied Arts

Artist Unknown
Dish, date unknown
Museum of Contemporary
Craft Collection
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon
Estate



Artist Unknown
Jar with 2 lids, stoneware, date unknown
Museum of Contemporary Craft Collection
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate

Artist Unknown
Tall cylindrical vase, ceramic, date unknown
Museum of Contemporary Craft Collection
Gift of Christine Charneski on behalf of
Helen S. Charneski



(left) Artist Unknown
Figure, ca. 1954, ceramic
Museum of Contemporary Craft Collection
Gift of Ruth Halvorsen

EVENTS:

THE UNKNOWN FUTURE

Lecture-performance by Lucy Cotter

March 12th, 7PM

PNCA auditorium

Soetsu Yanagi's book *The Unknown Craftsman* sought to reconsider the value of making and spearheaded the survival of craft at a time of threatened obsolescence, leading to the *mingei* (folk art) movement that became known worldwide. In this lecture-performance, Lucy Cotter looks to Yanagi's reflections as entry points into questions about artistic ecology and the sustainability of art practice. Combining text fragments from Yanagi's writings with personal anecdotes and questions, she invites speculation on shape-shifting, reimagined roles, and the recalibration of contemporary art.

PROPERTY OF OPAQUENESS

Performance by Takahiro Yamamoto

March 19th, 7 pm

PNCA Mediatheque

Property of Opaqueness is a collaborative dance performance by artist and choreographer Takahiro Yamamoto that investigates visibility, artistic validation processes and the physical emotional effects that performers and viewers undergo through subtle variations in acts of looking, moving, and paying attention over an extended time period. The performance is the second iteration in a multi-year project with the umbrella title *Opacity of Performance*, which will culminate in a major work at the Portland Art Museum in Fall 2020.

SOMETHING TO HOLD ONTO

Social collaboration workshop in conjunction with Cannupa

Hanska Luger

March 18th, 12PM – 4PM

PNCA auditorium/foyer

Cannupa Hanska Luger's *Something To Hold Onto* project aims to utilize social collaboration to re-humanize abstract statistics about the number of deaths that occur during US migration. Participants are asked to make fist-sized clay beads to contribute to the 7,209 hand-made beads that will be strung together in a large-scale art installation to make tangible the unfathomable statistic that over 7, 209 human beings have died while crossing the southwestern border of the United States over the past 20 years.

AFTER DIFFERENCE

Lecture-performance by Lucy Cotter

09 April, 7 pm

PNCA auditorium

Taking ceramic works by artists Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach from the Museum of Contemporary Craft collection as her material departure point, Lucy Cotter will unpick the complexity of their renowned “East-West dialogue” in a lecture-performance that provokes reflection on the economy of cultural identities and sanctioned “difference” in creating artistic value, while reinstating potter Janet Darnell Leach’s role within the conversation.

BIOGRAPHIES

Zsolt Asztalos is a Budapest-based artist who works across installation, film, photography and painting to examine the relationship between art, artifacts and historical memory. He represented Hungary at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013) with his project *Fired but Unexploded*. His work has been shown at the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest; Kunsthalle, Budapest; Milan Dome, Great Museum, Milan; ARCO, Madrid; Contemporary Art Platform, Kuwait City; Contemporary Art Ruhr, Essen; Avantpost Contemporary Art Collective, Timisoara, Romania; Art Bologna, Italy; Candid Art Gallery, London; Galatea Gallery, Boston; among other venues. Zsolt holds a BA in Painting from the Hungarian Academy of Fine Art, Budapest. He was awarded the Munkácsy Mihály Art Award in 2016 and nominated for the Leopold Bloom Art Award at the Ludwig Museum, Budapest in 2019. This is the first time Zsolt's work will be shown on the west coast of the US.

Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen are London based artists who work across sculpture, installation, and film to explore processes of production as cultural, personal and political practices. Both are graduates of the Royal College of Art in London. Their work has been presented at The Renaissance Society, Chicago; Serpentine Cinema, London; Mu.Zee, Ostend; Fotomuseum Winterthur; Para Site, Hong Kong; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, and Congo International Film Festival, Goma, among other venues. A major survey of their work will open at Z33 Kunstencentrum in Belgium in summer 2020 and their upcoming monograph '*Not What I Meant but Anyway*' will be published by Columbia Books on Architecture and the City (2020). The duo's work is held in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and M+ Museum, Hong Kong.

Lucy Cotter is an Irish-born writer, curator and artist, currently living in Portland, Oregon. Her multidisciplinary practice explores the relationship between aesthetics, politics, and the unknown through ficto-theory, exhibitions, lecture performances and art critical writings. A regular contributor to journals such as *Flash Art*, *Frieze*, *Mousse* and *Third Text*; her new book *Reclaiming Artistic Research* (2019) foregrounds artistic thinking as a material and embodied entity. She is presently working on a further book, *Art Knowledge: Between the Known and the Unknown*, and an experimental play, *The Entangled Museum*, which revolves around issues of restitution, cultural beliefs and the limits of acceptable knowledge. She was curator of the Dutch Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale, 2017, with other recent exhibitions and events at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam and EYE Film Museum, Amsterdam. She holds a BFA from Crawford College of Art and Design, Cork; an MA History of Art, University of Southampton and a PhD in Cultural Analysis from the University of Amsterdam.

Shoji Hamada (1884-1978) was a Japanese potter from Tokyo, who became a significant influence on studio pottery of the twentieth century, and a major figure of the *mingei* folk-art movement, establishing the town of Mashiko as a world-renowned pottery center. Hamada spent three years in St. Ives, UK, supporting the establishment of what became a world-renowned Leach Pottery studio of Bernard and Janet Leach. They had taught workshops together at the Black Mountain College as part of an influential tour of the US. In 1955, the Japanese Minister of Culture declared Hamada a "Living National Treasure." Hamada's used locally sourced clays and preserved traditional crafts by refurbishing Edo period farmhouses, warehouses, and *nagaya-mon* gatehouses unique to the Tochigi Prefecture and relocating them to his property, which later became the Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art. His works are held in the collections of Tate Museum, London; the Art Institute of Chicago, the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among other global collections.

Bernard Leach (1887-1979) was a British studio potter, writer, and teacher, often regarded as the "father of British studio pottery". Born in Hong Kong and spending early childhood in Japan, Leach attended the Slade School of Fine Art and the London School of Art. Moving to Japan in 1906, he turned to pottery and trained with the sixth *Kenzan*. Shoji Hamada and theorist Soetsu Yanagi, who initiated the Japanese folk art movement were close friends and collaborators. With Hamada's help, he established what became the renowned Leach Pottery studio with potter Janet Leach, his third wife. He would champion the appreciation of traditional British and Japanese pottery all his life, authoring several books including the seminal *A Potter's Book* (1940). He is associated with the rise of the artist-potter internationally and with the renewed interest in functional pottery in the US. Leach was bestowed with national honours in Britain and Japan. His work is held in museum collections worldwide.

Janet Darnell Leach (1918-1997) was an American studio potter from Texas who began her practice as a metal sculptor, working with the Federal Works Art project. She worked as a welder in the Navy during the Second World War. She turned to clay in her mid thirties, while living in New York. On meeting potter Shoji Hamada during her studies at Black Mountain College, she moved to Japan to train with him and at the Mashiko and Tamba pottery villages. Her style and opinions on ceramics also reflected her interest in the Steiner community and anthroposophy. She ran the renowned Leach Pottery studio in St. Ives, UK, with potter Bernard Leach, who became her husband in 1956, and she continued the studio for 17 years following his death. A major retrospective of her work was held at Tate Britain, London in 2007. Her ceramic works are held in collections worldwide, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; the National Museum of Wales; Paisley Museum and Art Gallery, Scotland; the Smithsonian Museum, Washington and the Gardiner Museum, Toronto.

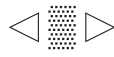
Aram Lee was born in Seoul and lives and works in Amsterdam. As an artist, her research-driven practice revolves around reinterpreting materials found within institutions, often seeking to relocate their role and purpose through performative events, film and video installations. Sometimes taking up processes of performative action with the public, her practice shapes the way objects are described and circulated. Her artworks challenge diasporic amnesia and release impure, spectral and false fictions from the institutions to enable the dissolution of (cultural) predominance and visualize new structures. Her work has been shown and performed at, among other venues, De Appel, Amsterdam; Framer Framed, Amsterdam; Tetterode, Amsterdam; Zuiderseemuseum, Eindhoven; Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin and the Bienal de arte textil contemporanea, Guimares, Portugal. Recent artists books include *From Pluto to Pyongyang and back* and *Post Ghost Bust, Charles Nyples Lab* (2019) and *Landscape with bear* (2019). She was an artist in residence at Jan Van Eyck Academie in 2018-19, and at the Goethe Institute, Marseille in 2019.

Cannupa Hanska Luger is a New Mexico based multidisciplinary artist, raised on the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota. Working through social collaboration and monumental installations incorporating ceramics, video and repurposed materials, Luger communicates stories about 21st Century Indigeneity and interweaves performance and political action in response to urgent site-specific issues. His work has been exhibited at such venues as the Gardiner Museum, Toronto; Washington Project for the Arts, Washington; Art Mûr, Quebec; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; and the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, Atlanta, GA. Luger holds a BFA from the Institute of American Indian Arts. He is a Creative Capital Award recipient in 2020 and previous awards include a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant in 2019 and the Museum of Arts and Design's inaugural Burke Prize in 2018. He is currently artist in residence at c3: initiative, Portland, Oregon.

Mami Takahashi is an artist from Tokyo, currently based in Portland, Oregon. Using photography, performance, installation and urban interventions, her practice often explores the complexities of being Japanese and a woman, living in the US. Her forthcoming solo exhibition at Blackfish gallery, Portland, focuses on her new project *Lifting as We Climb*, which engages with feminist histories in Japan and the US. Previous exhibitions and performances have taken place at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, OR; San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco; DANK Haus, Chicago, IL; The International Museum of Art, El Paso, TX; Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Alberta, Canada; Gwangju Folk Art Museum, Gwangju, Korea; Instituto Municipal del Arte la Cultura, DG Mexico and Toriizaka Art Gallery, Tokyo, among other venues. She holds an MFA from Portland State University, a BFA from Joshibi University of Art and Design, Kanagawa, and an AA in Japanese Aesthetics from Aoyama-gakuin College, Tokyo.

Takahiro Yamamoto is an artist and choreographer from Shizuoka, Japan, based in Portland, Oregon. His approach to choreography is interpersonal and observational. Starting his conceptual investigations with questions – currently about the ontology of performance, the mutability of identity, and the social implications of the gaze – he often invites collaborators to bring their own perspectives into the creation. His performance and visual art works have been presented at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland; Diverseworks, Houston; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; The Henry Art Gallery, Seattle and GoDown Arts Centre, Nairobi, among other venues. He co-directs the performance company madhause with Ben Evans, and is part of the Portland-based support group Physical Education with Allie Hankins, keyon gaskin, and Lu Yim. Yamamoto holds an MFA in Visual Studies from PNCA. At present he is a Full-Time Visiting Artist at Performance Department at the School of Art Institute of Chicago.

Cover image:
Takahiro Yamamoto,
Property of Opaqueness,
performance image.



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courtesy of PNCA. Images of all other
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