

# ARTFORUM

OCTOBER 2017

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

**RUSSIA AND THE ART OF REVOLUTION**

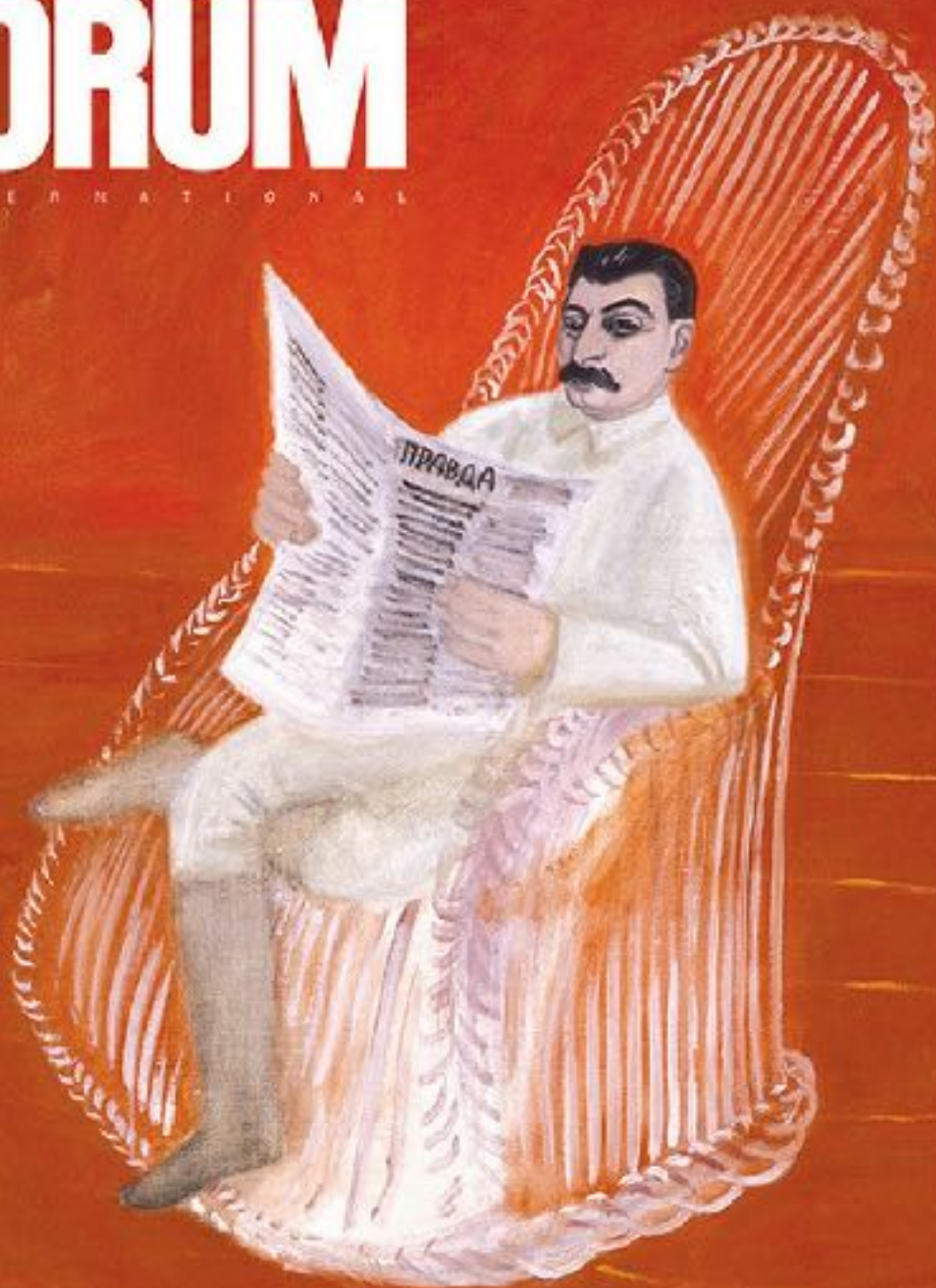
DAVID ADJAYE

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ALIZA NISENBAUM

MICHAEL HARDT



## DUBAI

# Amba Sayal-Bennett

CARBON 12

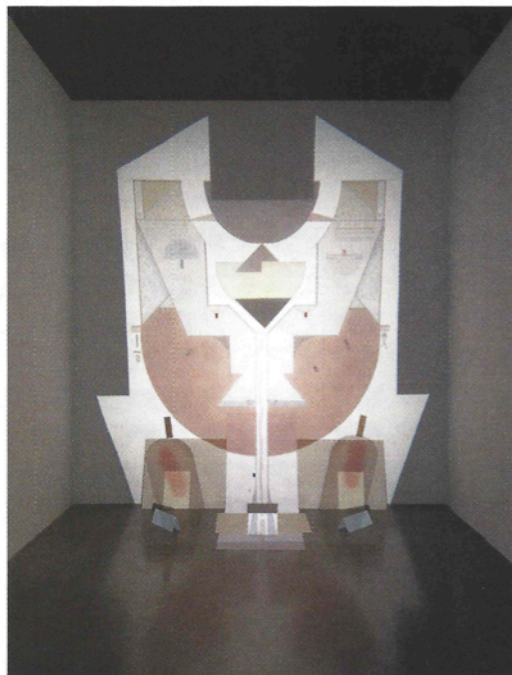
While drawing is the undeniable core of Amba Sayal-Bennett's practice, this strong, self-assured exhibition, "Plane Maker," provocatively and playfully expanded the field of drawing into other dimensions. The thirty-four small abstract drawings that were shown here, along with a pair of sculptures and an installation incorporating a projected image of a drawing, intuitively combine references derived from a broad spectrum of diagrammatic sources, suggesting everything from scientific schematics and architectural drawings—both plans and cross sections—to mystical charts and esoteric totems.

Made with marker and graphite, the line drawings typically feature enclosed areas filled in with muted washes of colored ink, to which the London-based artist adds texture through delicate and often whimsical patterns made up of a variety of smaller marks: dots and lines, loops and squiggles, bacterial and cellular forms that suggest a microscopic architecture. A recurring bilateral symmetry—rarely quite complete—occasionally suggests a schematized face or body. Sayal-Bennett's drawings achieve a delicate semiotic balance; their constituent parts point to referents without declaring them outright. Open-ended and generous, they are also promiscuous, bringing together such an abundance of references that their allusions become hard to place or impossible to read. Each drawing closes in upon itself, displaying an autonomy that verges on the hermetic. Though they are given unique, usually one-word titles—*Ponty*, *Leblon*, *Bab*, *Morter* (all works 2017)—these are often so mysterious or nonsensical as to further frustrate our quest for meaning. Assiduously and endlessly deferred within the drawings themselves, the onus of interpretation falls firmly on the viewer, reminding us of how uncomfortable the unknown can make us and how powerful compulsion to make meaning is.

Enlarged, three-dimensional translations of her drawings, Sayal-Bennett's sculptures are built up of numerous smaller components, all fabricated out of MDF, their surfaces covered in slick, seamless coats of vivid acrylic paint. *Harth* resembles an altar, or a console table—in a style best described as Art Deco meets *The Jetsons*—bearing a strong resemblance to irreverent Italian architect and designer Ettore Sottsass's iconic room divider *Carlton*, 1981. Spilling forward onto the floor from a pair of brick-red pyramids, *Katkin* suggests an architectural model of an ancient temple complex or city cobbled together from an enlarged set of children's building blocks. While the spatial presence of these sculptures is undeniable, it comes at a cost, as some of the drawings' playful ambiguity is lost in translation.

Another attempt at pushing drawing into the expanded field—by opening it up to other media such as murals and slide/film projection—was more productively elusive. For *Aera*, Sayal-Bennett used an overhead projector to enlarge an image of one of her drawings and cast it on the wall. A

Amba Sayal-Bennett, *Aera*, 2017, drawing, projection, and mixed media, 10' 4" x 10' 7/8" x 4' 10 1/2".





paper cutout carefully laid on top of the painted transparency determined the projection's outline. Pieces of colored tape and loops drawn on bits of paper applied directly to the wall introduced marks that were literally present, not projected. And sheets of paper lying on the floor and leaning against and standing at angles to the wall subtly introduced multiple, overlapping surfaces and depths, which dismantled the unified plane of the projected image. The semiotic uncertainty of Sayal-Bennett's curious abstract compositions expanded into space and also more deeply into the viewer's mind.

—Murtaza Vali

## MEXICO CITY

# Andy Warhol

MUSEO JUMEX

Although “Andy Warhol: Dark Star” included a range of works from 1951 through 1978 installed on every floor of the museum, its great success was in shedding new light on the best-known phase of the Pop artist's career, between 1961 and 1972. Instead of assuming Warhol's paintings of that time to be interchangeable and of equal value, as others have done, curator Douglas Fogle stressed the variety of distinguishing decisions—aesthetic as well as thematic—that the artist made.

For example, Fogle opted to juxtapose *Large Campbell's Soup Can*, 1964, a painting of a single pristine, solitary tin, with another sporting a ripped red-and-white label (*Big Torn Campbell's Soup Can [Pepper Pot]*, 1962), and a third depicting cans of beef noodle soup in a grid (*100 Cans*, 1962). In the same vein, there was a smiling Jacqueline Kennedy, moments before JFK's assassination, as well as a second canvas with a grieving first lady in her widow's weeds, both titled *Jackie*, 1964. Three versions of Elizabeth Taylor were on view next to one another, and a trio of car crashes, each with a different monochromatic ground and the same image silk-screened on a different section of the canvas, were installed side by side.

From the get-go, it was clear that Warhol and his studio assistants, not a machine, had executed the exhibited works. Ironically, the early handpainted objects also on view—a vintage manual typewriter, a candlestick telephone—are now anachronisms. (A 1962 painting featuring a long-expired seven-cent red airmail stamp must be worth a pretty penny today.) The later silk-screened images printed off-register also evoked human error. In his choice of themes, Warhol was a traditionalist. After all, he specialized in portraits, landscapes, and still lifes, also sometimes turning out a history painting or two. It's just that his versions of these canonical genres are somewhat unorthodox.

Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe's Lips*, 1962, synthetic polymer, silk-screen ink, and pencil on canvas, 6' 10¾" × 13' 7".

