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A Collage of Fragmentary Murmuers

Cici Wu | Ben Schonberger | Magali Hebert-Huot | Sebastian Martorana

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The Artist Platform at [\(e\)merge art fair](#) in Washington, DC, offers free exhibition space to a vetted selection of independent artists. In this year's edition of (e)merge, the work of four artists stand out for their multivalent poetic and material qualities. Despite differences in medium, each of these artists mines source material and re-presents it, bringing together historical, material, and individual narratives both past and present. For each of these artists, intervention in preexisting narratives is crucial, be it on the part of the artist or the viewer. This intervention, however, does not hold one singular meaning. As original sources transform into new artistic experience, these narratives are in one moment created and in another moment confounded. We experience constant slippages of tangible meaning, yet the result is a productive constellation of instability. These artistic associations open up our minds to the new, the uncertain, and the real where anything and everything is possible. Let us approach these artists' work with dichotomies held in the balance and the readiness to perceive what Cici Wu calls "a collage of fragmentary murmurs."



[Cici Wu's](#) multi-media installation [*The phone rang, so the room suddenly began to snow*](#) juxtaposes mundane objects with film clips to open up a lyric space between sculpture and cinema. The objects — a telephone, a black pair of women's shoes, an ice cream bucket, a rear view mirror — rest on a table. Are they sculptures or props? The telephone rings. An array of rubber gloves affixed to a motor begins to spin in circular motion above the table. The film reel to the left of the table plays scenes from Hong Kong films made between 1992 and 1997. These years represent the latter part of Hong Kong's golden age of cinema that ended with the region's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. In addition to these specific cinematic references, this enchanted display opens up a poetic space that coyly eludes a definite structure and relies upon the viewer to inhabit and complete the cinematic narratives at play. In a digital world that often questions the future of cinema as a medium, Wu presents us with a personal and poetic argument for cinema's future as an emotive and humanist medium.



In his practice, [Ben Schonberger](#) explores the power of the photographic image and the way narratives inform our notions of identity. The project [Beautiful Pig](#) grew out of a two-year partnership with Sergeant Marty Gaynor, a former Detroit Police officer. Over the course of Gaynor's time as an officer, he meticulously documented arrests he made. Sorting through thousands of photographs, Schonberger arranged the photographs into pairs and grids, asking Gaynor to annotate them over the course of weekly interviews. The product is a personal archive that raises questions about masculinity, categorization, and power. Taken as a whole, this work presents a chaotic narrative, in which meaning coheres and then later breaks down. Interspersed with the historical images are photographs of Schonberger in a police uniform or recreating an arrest scene with Gaynor. These performative acts punctuate the apparent "facts" of the image narrative from the 70s. This intervention throws past and present together, exposing the archive to be a parafictional narrative of anachronic temporality. Ultimately, Schonberger presents the archive as a way of storytelling that is complex, anachronous, and performed, calling into question the notion of the photographic record as truth. We are reminded of Jacques Derrida's words that "archivization produces as much as it records the event."



In her sculptural work, [Magali Hébert-Huot](#) makes use of raw and processed materials to draw our attention to form, structure, and the value we attribute to them. Utilitarian and decorative elements combine in [Untitled \(Columns\)](#). Raw panels of oriented strand board, with factory markings and plywood components visible, rest

on the gallery floor with delicately molded wax capitals on top. Simplicity is juxtaposed with ornateness, posing a dialectical relationship between material and architecture, function and decoration. The use of this cheap plywood material subverts the notion that architecture and sculpture are sacred forms, while at the same time referencing the ubiquity of these cheap materials used in construction today. For her presentation at (e)merge, Hébert-Huot will exhibit her work alongside that of Jim Leach and Zack Ingram. Rather than a monographic approach, this collaborative presentation will forefront an investigation of line, form, and objecthood across three different material practices.



[Sebastian Martorana](#) works in the tradition of carved marble monuments to tell a material history of changing urban landscapes. Using salvaged marble slabs from front stoops of Baltimore row houses, the artist transforms this local stone with a playful approach to materiality and the most expert trompe l'oeil. The works in his *Soft Step* series simulate plump domestic cushions, featuring carved indentations of puckering couches that belie the object's hard materiality. Though the technique articulates the appearance of softness, the iridescent white sheen with underlying veins of grey stone remind viewers at every moment that the plump cushion is not what it appears. An unfinished segment on one side of the cushion exposes the marble's rough natural state. One piece from the series [Lil' Rocker](#) takes the form of a rocking chair seat in the artist's home, one used to nurse his son. Presenting the front

stoop in the guise of domestic furniture, the artist reclaims a material moment in Baltimore's architectural history and also speaks to a transition toward interior space at a time when these marble stoops are fast disappearing from homes across the city.

Martha Joseph is a writer, curator, and art historian based in Brooklyn, NY. She holds an M.A. in the History of Art from Williams College. Recently she worked at the Whitney Museum of American Art, assisting on the 2014 Whitney Biennial. Prior to that she worked at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, where she curated the group exhibition *Love to Love You*. She also worked at Conner Contemporary Art in Washington, D.C. Her scholarly interests include performance, spectatorship, temporality in modern and contemporary art, and film.