



art as an entire situation rather than a series of disconnected circumstances, and he required that the viewer see and sense everything as he intended. In the case of the environments, made over the course of 30 years, that intention includes a preliminary darkness immediately replaced by intensely illuminated rooms of light in which modern materials are juxtaposed in such a way as to create solid sensations.

For decades these conceptual environments have been more speculative than specific for audiences. The opportunity to experience them for the first time could not help but expand one's idea of Fontana. More than a painter or sculptor, he is an architect: "I do not want to make a painting; I want to open up space." And so he does, by introducing ceramics, colored walls, and curving and contorted neon light to shape his intensely luminous environments while creating subtle and very substantial physical experiences designed down to the last detail.

Struttura al neon per la IX Triennale di Milano (Neon Structure for the 9th Milan Triennale) (1951), which opened the HangarBicocca show, recalls Cerith Wyn Evans's more recent foray into neon—whirling dervish-like structures suspended from Tate Britain's main hall. Fontana's work is pushed high up into the ceiling as a spike to the imagination, in what might appear to be an entirely empty space.

Only after entering the first enclosed installation was it possible

to understand the extent to which some of Fontana's works require an audience to come alive. *Ambiente spaziale: "Utopia", nella XIII Triennale di Milano* (1964) for instance, with its pinhole lights and entirely blackened room, resembles an upturned runway in which all sense and perspective have been intentionally directed to the specially constructed walls. Walking over the carpeted mound completely shifts one's perception, as Fontana concentrates on fundamentals of light, space, texture, and material to redesign space as a vehicle for modern art. In *Ambiente spaziale con neon* (1967), an even more intensely colored room, the walls are painted a luminous pink; a stretch of curved neon suspended from the ceiling opens into an alternative stratosphere within the darkness.

Fontana's environments altered the ambition of art and paved the way for a new lexicon underscoring greater openness and invention—"concepts," "happenings," "environments," "art as an exercise through space." Following his example, artists would come to embrace space, creating living, participatory artworks with more than a passing resemblance to the spaces of life.

—Rajesh Punj

Above: Lucio Fontana, *Fonti di energia, soffitto al neon per l'Italia 61, a Torino, 1961/2017*. Mixed media, installation view. Right: Michael Johansson, *Sista Sommaren (Last Summer)*, 2014. Coolers and cool packs, 4.4 x 5 x 2.4 meters.



WASSENAAR, THE NETHERLANDS
Michael Johansson
Museum Voorlinden

A first look at Michael Johansson's work suggests that he might be quoting other contemporary artists a bit too literally. His well-ordered stacks of household objects variously recall Jackie Winsor's Post-Minimal cubes, Jannis Kounellis's niche-filling accumulations, and Tom Wesselmann's Pop Art *Interior* (1964), a wall piece that fuses working domestic items and painting to create a hybrid and not-so-quiet vision of quietude. Johansson even includes an igloo: Is there any more obvious reference to Mario Merz?

Despite the comparisons, Johansson's unique engagement with paradox and wordplay sets him apart. *Last Summer*, his richly chromatic igloo, is built out of picnic coolers. Installed outside on the grass, it not only conjures nostalgic visions of summer outings, but also shines light on changing times. The word "igloo" was once associated first and foremost with the structure that insulated Arctic nomads from harsh winds and cold; but it also identifies the world's largest manufacturer of coolers, and today it is synonymous with a commercial product that guards food and drink against the effects of heat.

Many of Johansson's works are hexahedrons, so Tony Cragg's *Stack* (1975) forms another seemingly obvious reference point. Cragg's cube of randomly layered detritus transmits the look of geological strata; it conveys density and weight, an earthbound feature produced over an immensely protracted period of time. Johansson, on the other hand, uses collapsible cardboard boxes, file drawer units, suitcases, and vented plastic storage crates to create airy structures implying transience. The addition of an occasional speaker cabinet or television set accentuates the objects' sonic potential and underscores a literal or symbolic hollowness. Judicious sorting and assembly enable him to devise geometrical patterns and deploy color in a painterly manner. Cubes of transparent glass objects, like *Miniature Glacier* (2017) and *Spegling (Reflection)* (2017), evoke natural phenomena and allow their centers to be scrutinized. The material content, worn appearance, and predominance of earth tones in two older works, made by packing leather-bound volumes, a turntable, briefcases, and camera bags onto and under reading chairs, not only casts furniture as infrastructure, but also calls up the archive. Situating them in the environs of the museum's new library rather than the tempo-



rarily exhibition galleries constituted a shrewd and fitting gesture that added an intriguing set of relationships to this survey.

Primary features of Johansson's work include humor, light-heartedness, and implied movement. The wall-mounted *Flip Shelf* (2017) is a prime example. Hang it right side up or upside down, its orientation is interchangeable. Close examination also reveals unexpected objects—a toy car, a ceramic bowl—that, disguised by monochromatic color schemes and prudent placement, appear to hide in plain sight. And then, factor in the exhibition's centerpiece—the site-specific, floor-to-ceiling, and completely white *Ghost VI*, which broaches the IKEA aesthetic and brings the axiom "a place for everything and everything in its place" to a captivatingly ridiculous conclusion. *Ghost* shows that in Johansson's hands, the logic of the modular world is both crushingly chaotic and divinely amusing.

—John Gayer

Above: Michael Johansson, *Miniature Glacier*, 2017. Glass items, 26 x 26 x 26 cm. Right: Exhibition view of "Trigger" with (right), Simone Leigh, *Cupboard VII*, 2017, steel and raffia, installation with audio; and *trophalaxis*, 2012, terra cotta, porcelain, epoxy, graphite, and antennae.

DISPATCH
NEW YORK
"Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon"
New Museum

The provocatively titled "Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon" took on the politics of gender and identity with works by 40 artists, groups, and collectives. Avoiding the trap of using sexual orientation as an organizing principle and throwing out heteronormative or binary definitions of gendered identity in favor of a more fluid, inclusive,

and performative model—one that refused limits and boundaries—the show's organizer, Johanna Burton, with the assistance of Sara O'Keeffe and Natalie Bell, proposed a more activist curatorial model for how art about gender circulates in contemporary life.

A number of artists intent on moving beyond simple stereotypes shared a strategy of posing and drag performance. On several occasions, Justin Vivian Bond posed in the New Museum's front window as Karen Graham, the sphinx-like face of Estée Lauder cosmetics from 1970 to 1985. For Bond, Graham embodies an ideal, serving as the perfect vessel for homage and commentary. Bond developed this concept further in an installation that included watercolor portraits of the model, self-portraits of the artist, a table with a record player, and two chairs where one could sit and listen to Bond's LP *Dendrophile* and contemplate the artist's obsession alongside public and private fantasies of aspiration and fulfillment. Berlin-based Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz cross-dressed as 19th-century transvestites in their film *Toxic*, dis-

cussing the disparity between public stage and private experience in the Parisian demi-mode. Reina Gossett and Sasha Wortzel also combined reenactment with archival footage to commemorate and reclaim the joyful, emancipatory performances of the drag activist Marsha P. Johnson (1945–92), while the collective House of Ladasha startled visitors in the stairwell with drag parodies, video remixes, and appropriated commercials that deployed humor and inversion to disrupt assumptions about the queer body.

Many artists exploited the unruly potential of gender fluidity to upend engrained notions of sexuality and identity. Nayland Blake, for instance, performed several times as *Gnomes*, a hybrid bear/bison "fursona" of ambiguous sex and gender, who invited viewers to share their secrets and fantasies as a way of building new communities outside conventional sexualities.

Other artists focused on the intersection of gender and race. Mickalene Thomas's wall display of stacked monitors, *Me as Muse*, examined the objectified and eroticized female body. The screens shifted between



TOP LEFT: MARCO HUTCHINSON/EPW STUDIO / CENTER AND RIGHT: MARCO HUTCHINSON/EPW STUDIO / BOTTOM LEFT: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND INDISBLE/REPORTS, NY