



NICOLE COHEN
SUPER VISION

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Stony Brook University, on the occasion of
the exhibition **Nicole Cohen: SUPER VISION**,
curated by Karen Levitov.

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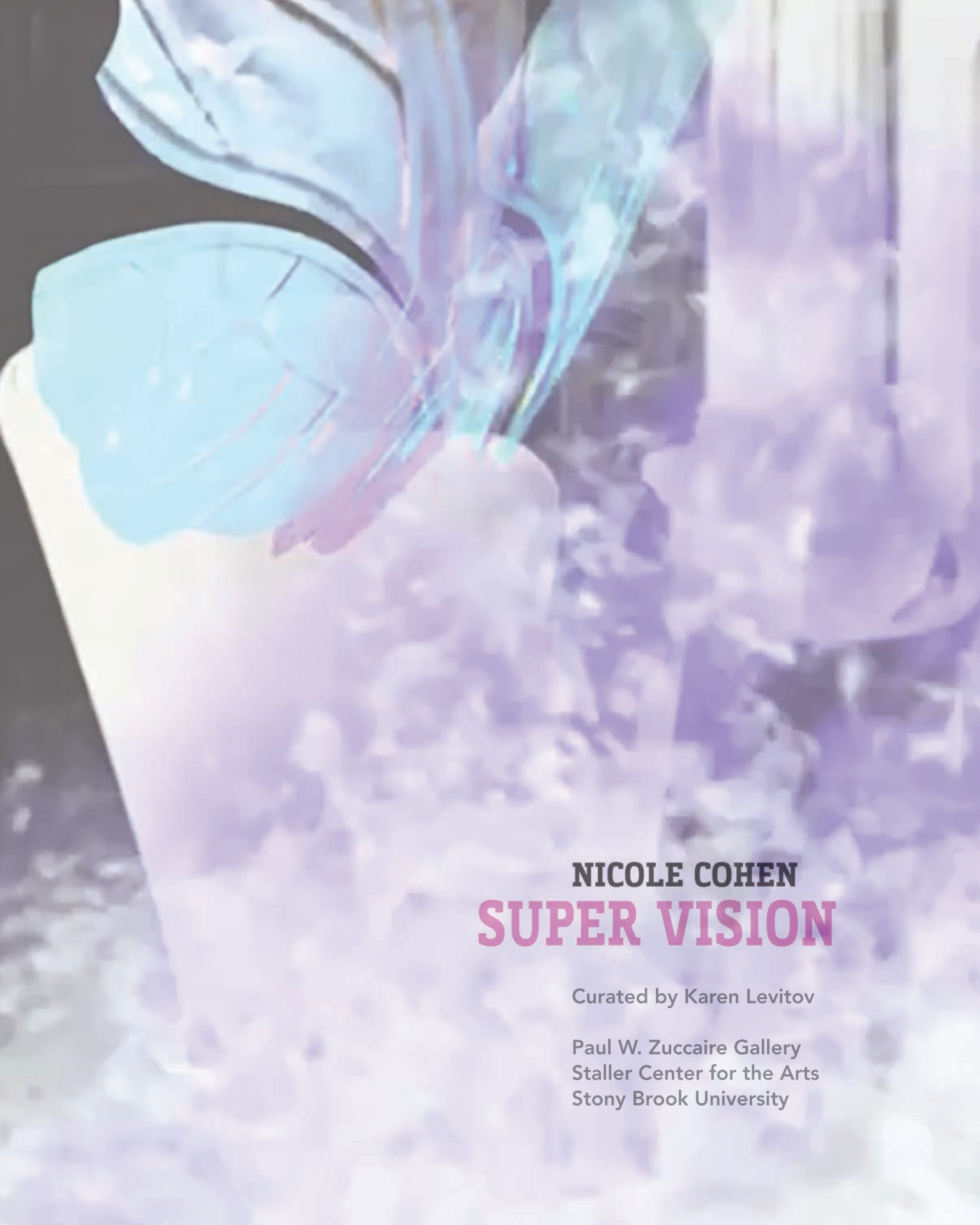
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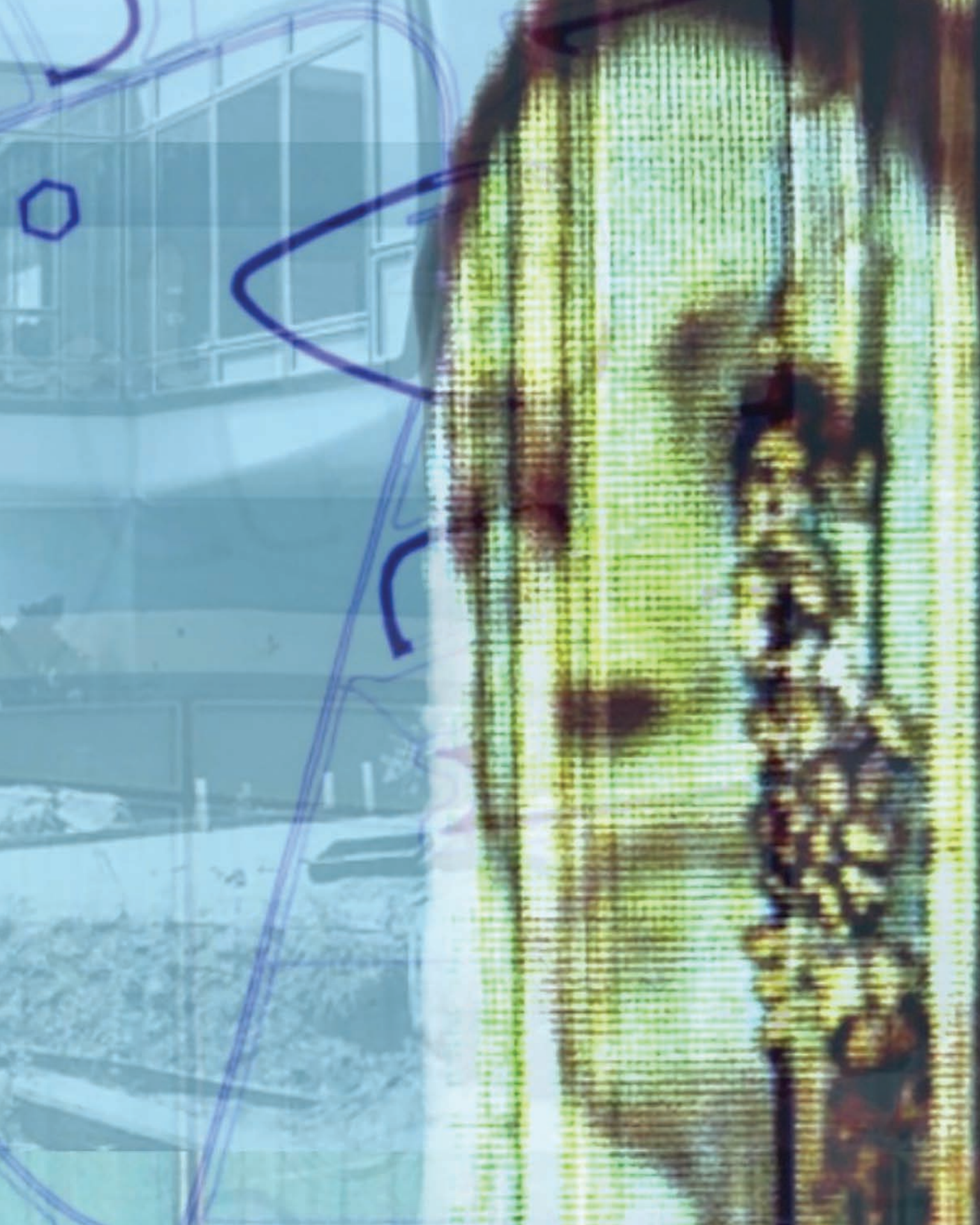
 Stony Brook
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FOREWORD

Our vision is mediated by the spaces we embody. Extending beyond the realm of sight, our vision of the world includes our individual narratives as well as those who have come before us. It encompasses our memories and stories that were told to us. Our viewpoint is affected by the physical spaces that surround us, as well as the digital spaces that permeate nearly every aspect of our lives. These layered spaces—multitudinal places, times, points of view—are the medium and substance of Nicole Cohen's practice. Within private and public built environments, Cohen invites us to think about who might have previously inhabited these spaces and how our presence might affect and be affected by the space itself. We are both the viewer and the observed. Overlaying static and moving imagery, Cohen's video and photo work offers a shifting perspective that is both transient and transformative—a super vision.

Nicole Cohen: SUPER VISION presents over sixty works from Cohen's major projects over the last twenty years, including the small video projections onto vintage magazine pages that galvanized her career, large projected videos, a selection of her photo collages, short "intervention" video loops and a new site-specific floor piece.

It is a great honor and an immense pleasure to have the opportunity to work with Nicole Cohen on this exhibition and catalog. I thank her for her boundless energy and creative collaboration as we developed ideas and brought this exhibition to fruition. I am thrilled that she has created an exciting new work for

this exhibition and am pleased to share her unique vision with the Stony Brook community.

I am deeply grateful to the collectors who graciously lent work to the exhibition. Many thanks also to Danielle Ofri, Editor-in-Chief of the *Bellevue Literary Review*, for permission to screen *BLR Studio Visits: Nicole Cohen*.

My great appreciation to all of the generous donors who made this publication possible. I am especially grateful to Nicole's students for their enthusiastic support of the catalog.

Thank you to Stephen Wozniak for graciously allowing us to print his insightful essay, "Being in Time: Scripted Spaces and the Art of Nicole Cohen." My sincere gratitude also to Amy Herling for the striking design of this catalog.

Lastly, I am incredibly appreciative of the support of Stony Brook University and my colleagues at the Staller Center for the Arts, especially Zuccaire Gallery Public Programs Manager Georgia LaMair Tomczak, who was integral to every aspect of this exhibition and catalog, Staller Center Director Alan Inkle, the Staller Production team, and our gallery students.

Karen Levitov
Director and Curator, Zuccaire Gallery
Professor of Practice, Art Department
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Contemporary Art Books & New York Public Library



CONVERSATION

Nicole Cohen, Artist & Karen Levitov, Curator

Karen Levitov: It is a delight to speak with you! First of all, you have a connection to Stony Brook, can you tell me about it?

Nicole Cohen: I am really so happy to work with you and really pleased to be here!

Yes, I used to come and stay in Stony Brook with my grandparents, who lived here. My grandmother was a sculptor and educator and my grandfather was a professor of Pharmacological Sciences at Stony Brook University.

As a child I invented a library with all of their books with library cards, permitting them to enter and check out books. It is definitely on my life history map.

KL: Perhaps inventing a library as a child led you to create your Library pieces—*Contemporary Books & New York Public Library* and *Library (Donald Judd 's)*. What draws you to libraries as a source material?

NC: The archive is an incredible source of knowledge and material, and I have always been drawn to the act of searching and discovering

information. I love looking through old books and seeing how different the times were and it informs my ability to see how different the time is that we live in today. The uncanny fact that I did this as a child in Stony Brook and now show video art must be connected in some way. What certainly has not changed is my interest in the solitude and possibility of spending time in libraries. They are frozen in time which is an ongoing interest of mine.

KL: What draws you to work with layering past and present imagery?

NC: Growing up in D.C. we used to go to Sears department store and I loved seeing the showrooms. The Sears catalogs fascinated me, and I collected images from magazines, postcards, and poems. As I aged, I started to see how these places were so outdated and I was curious how people would relate to the images now. Coming from a painting background, I was interested in activating the “performance space” or the canvas with sound and movement. I started experimenting with a fusion of images with a short film.



The result resembled virtual trespassing. The layering of photography shows a static time and the video acts like the dynamic liquid of an ephemeral variable. It was a way to ask a question about identity through seeing a performer act in the space from the present but be in the past. It somehow makes it more apparent how different things are to see them inside an actual reference.

KL: What is the inspiration behind short video loops like *Pink Dust* and *Purple Haze*?

NC: *Dust* and *Haze* relate to film, the screening of the light coming from the projector. These pieces suggest that the room has a life of its own. The effects of purple smoke, birds, fire, water, make you actively look at the still image and is playful in wondering about the presence of elements that they can also possess.

These works are very surreal and show other forces that are ghostlike in the rooms.

KL: Let's discuss the concept of surveillance in your work.

NC: Sure, I think surveillance is used as a material in my work to activate the spaces and have the viewers feel that they could see themselves in the room. I hope that the viewers act as voyeurs and can see something in common they recognize with the performers. Either they can relate to lounging or procrastinating and this draws them into the work for a stronger effect. By the visitor leaning over and looking into the works it gives them an experience which I want to be impactful in some way.

KL: You have said that your work, specifically the *Vintage Photographs* series, is like an interrupted conversation. Can you explain?

NC: The characters are translucent and are walking away. I see them as existing in the past but you happen to see them for a moment, like a ghost, as if there is a short technical issue with reality and the play mode is in reverse, but some tech support is fixing it. So you are on PLAY and they were there earlier in the performance. They are walking away because they are not supposed to be there, but it is helpful to know that others walked there and there are overlays. For example in *Amazon Woman*, maybe your family was at that park. Or your ancestors were in that same elevator. Or a legend sat on the same seat of a bus. The serendipity is really incredible. I also feel that living people think that they might be jealous to not live now, and they are happy to have lived then and I don't show their faces out of respect to them.

KL: Looking at your work is like stepping through the Wardrobe into another time and place. Can you discuss the fantasy aspect of your work?

NC: I am glad you think that. It is so important to be creative and play. A lot of my work stems from drawing in visual performance, almost like a collage video. I see these photographs of interiors becoming activated and transforming into a kind of time travel or you seeing something by accident.

KL: You often use historical photographs, but there is a blurring between fiction and non-fiction in the layered imagery.

NC: Yes, I like to imagine other types of possibilities, which is why I like to create a synthesis between the real and unlikely.



You're Invited, floor installation
Center wall: *Dream Houses*
Right wall: *Envisioning the Invisible*

KL: I am so excited that you created a new piece for our exhibition! Tell me about it.

NC: Architecture and drawing have always been a large component of my practice. I love exhibition design, installations, home design. This piece, called *You're Invited*, is my first attempt at an interactive drawing.

Here you literally walk on top of room-sized blueprints modeled on interior design from the 1950s and today and compare the feeling of domestic spaces of two different time periods.

Stepping over the threshold, indicated by a Welcome mat, you enter the floorplan of a 1950s home which is actually modeled after Marilyn Monroe's kitchen and living room.

You will see that in the living room there are two chairs for the mother and father and the kids on the floor, it all points to the brand new television. The lines are straight and rigid.

Then you pass over the orange doorway to the 2024 lighter blueprint, which is an open concept design. The lines are more rounded and the walls are longer. The contemporary design shows how we are innovative, independent, our roles are multifaceted, and it in fact could demonstrate how far we have come. There is so much we still don't know about how interior design affects behavior, and how scripted spaces dictated ways of being. I find it endlessly rich with content for creating works.



Pink Dust



Do you read me?



Fire pits



Indoor Fireworks



Rainbow Room



BEING IN TIME

Scripted Spaces and the Art of Nicole Cohen

Stephen Wozniak

All Possible Worlds

“We look at the present through a rear view mirror. We march backwards into the future.”

– Marshall McLuhan

When I experience any of Nicole Cohen’s installation, video, or collage art, I often feel like I’ve stepped back in time by a couple of centuries—but sometimes it’s only a few years ago or even just yesterday. She gives me keys to the deep and recent past, admission to an exceptional place I wouldn’t likely have been permitted to participate within or see on my own. In that sense, as a viewer of her work, I’m a voyeur that peers into privilege, pretending I am the authority that once was, which made and activated the space that I stand in behind a veil of history. Her work offers


an elegiac, elegant, almost innocent form, but it comes with a sharp look at the site of influence that often drives both our conscious and unconscious needs and desires. Cohen then takes us on a journey beyond this review, enabling audiences to participate in breaching, revising and—importantly—playing with the canons of history in our ostensibly living present, echoing what scholar Saidiya Hartman has termed critical fabulation.¹

During year one of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cohen began working on a series of animated NFTs, entitled *Wild West Project*. These works feature collaged, colorless, dilapidated buildings—once centers of life and livelihood, largely from the turn of the 19th century—that included imagery of a columned country store, a silvered wooden barn, a boarded brick church, a Chinese laundry, a hot-rod travel trailer, and a blazing pine tree. Coupled

with titles like *Glamping, Beams, Paris/Texas, Intimate Presence of the Past, Bad Problems, The History of Linen, and Natural Disaster*, the works pointed to distinctly American social and commercial hubs—stationed by pioneers in colonial engagement—and the manifold troubles within them. Shattered glass, toppled drawers, falling rubble, rushing water, and flickering flames showed viewers what seemed like the inevitable undoing of each structure and, possibly, the value that we assign these spaces as establishments, their services rendered, and, ultimately, the people—who we never see—that are the engine inside each. All of the NFTs seemed to additionally feature a tiny patch of sunlight and bright blue sky above the gray decay below, as well as a gentle green glimpse of flora or an azure butterfly fluttering; small signals of prospect and renewal. Positioned within each were informal translucent curtains that provided loose cover and, once actuated, revealed the breath of fresh air blowing into each deadened, once populated scene, giving us a peek through its windows, the eyes to the souls of these spaces. In a parallel plane, as the worldwide pandemic raged on and lives lost mounted into millions, we played witness on the news to numerous vicious hate crimes and police brutality—most notably that of George Floyd in Minneapolis whose breathless purge from space punctuates a series of perennial sacrifices still bleeding into the contemporary moment. Perhaps Cohen’s veils and wind allude to the last proverbial breath of past constructed places, but also the lives lost and sacrificed during their construction, destruction and inevitable erosion over time, and, still, those taken similarly away from us today. It may be said that for every breakdown in life—however devastating—there

is a breakthrough. As philosopher Gottfried Leibniz suggested, to resolve evil, we must live here and now in the “best of all possible worlds,”² one that presents loss and hope simultaneously, as a way to understand and appreciate the value of each, and allow space for learning, acceptance and development. Here, Cohen’s work, with its eyes on the structures of power and social convention, provides some hope and a few rejoinders.

Scripted Spaces



“This is a world that has more than lost its way. It is the best and the worst of all possible worlds, dominated by scripted spaces and social imaginaries inside a level of surveillance, top-heavy economic fragility and media feudalism that rivals the medieval papacy and the great caliphates. And yet, its possibilities are extraordinary. The next decade promises to be crucial. The challenges are breathtaking.”

– Norman M. Klein, historian and author of *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles*

Picture a kitchen. In that specific scripted space—a phrase coined by media and architectural historian Norman M. Klein—we prepare food, set a table, eat dinner, and connect with loved ones in the course of an evening. We behave in a set manner that the

"I think it only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled to increase the scope of human freedom."

– Noam Chomsky,
Language and Politics

space allows or is scripted for socially. Of course, we're only human and don't stick to a strict list of activities, but within that space we perform certain tasks and act a certain way for a few hours. Similarly, another scripted behavior applies to employees in the working world arena called the office where the playing of assured roles toward high-performance productivity is expected. Another scripted behavior applies to guests who enjoy a wondrous adventure at Disneyland and buy a bounty of memorabilia at the end of their happiest day on Earth. Yet another scripted behavior applies to gamblers who play exciting rounds of roulette in colorful gaming halls, win modestly, and later buy tickets to see a delightful musical show with the entire family at The Mirage casino in Las Vegas. We think we're largely conscious of consumption and complicity in those and many other activity-structured commercial places. But perhaps we are not. Creatives like architect Victor Gruen devised simple eye-catching storefront displays

that later led to elaborate theme park-like showroom pathways—in furniture superstore Ikea, for example—which entice consumers to spend impulsively beyond their expectations. But that's just the shopping experience. Other innovators have crafted many different experiences that unfold in controlled spaces—from temples to tea houses—that have changed our lives, drives, desires, ills, and fears. Who ultimately manages the scripted spaces that we enjoy, spend time and money in, and commune throughout—and what do they want exactly? As participants, what do we want?

Picture Imperfect

Nicole Cohen doesn't assume what happens within or who leads many of those places and spaces. That's one of her numerous outstanding strengths and instincts as an artist—and as a person. Never shy and always engaged in the epicenter of action growing up, Cohen's precocious powers of observation led to the development of her irrepressible comments about the immediate world around her. However, she often felt like an outsider who both sensed and saw the construction of intended spaces, the social mores required within them, and the script that many followed but that she could not. In turn, Cohen created art growing up, drafting her own point view through the authorship of sketching and drawing, developing her shrewd perception and unmistakable voice.

After graduating with a degree in painting, drawing and art history from Hampshire College, Nicole Cohen attended the University of Southern California Master of Fine Arts program as a painter—but, not surprisingly, one

who simply couldn't stick to the script. Instead, she sought to animate the works she created, to give them life beyond their state as two-dimensional specimens trapped in the amber of flat, canvas picture planes. Her subjects were toys—objects of desire that we seek as children to rehearse and emulate mature activities borrowed from those future spaces across time we call adulthood—images of which she paired with paintings of their adult counterparts, the “real thing”—Hummers and porcelain tea sets, for example—that we use to sustain our outward grown-up lives and elective identities. She then made simple stop-motion video loops of those works with sound effects. The tea sets clinked and moved, the autos revved up and drove—at least a little, just enough. The videos were exhibited in Los Angeles during the late 1990s, and limited editions of them immediately sold out. It was clear that Cohen was onto something.

Small Projections, Big Machines

Cohen soon began work on what would become her ongoing series of short video loops, *Small Projections*. Around that time, inspired by showroom junk mail postcards from luxury interior design firms and even ordinary department stores like Sears and Roebuck, Cohen started video recording her friends, figure models, and herself against white draped interior backgrounds. She then loosely superimposed these moving video figures onto the fantasy interiors of the postcards, and also onto original mid-20th-century American magazine advertisements. The video figures either ambled about, performing mundane activities in the new “spaces,” or created

havoc, like the glowing, flickering, blackclad Gothic punk rockers that dance erratically on quaint suburban furniture in *How to Make Your Windows Beautiful*.

Cohen referred to this figure activity—and the work itself—as a form of “virtual trespassing,” an almost anarchic method of rewriting history in whatever popular formats it emerged from. Owing to the technological medium limits in the early aughts, each piece displayed its now obsolete, bulky projector, corded A/V connections, and white, steel-tube wall armature when exhibited. But to Cohen, the use of this hardware—even then—was intentional. In a certain manner, the unavoidable physical display reminded viewers of any age familiar with early cinema about nickelodeon



How to Make Your Windows Beautiful,
photo by Tami R. Phillion

players that showed short peep show motion pictures, but on small face-to-film enclosed screens. Access to Cohen's fascinating, colorful, rough, projected images, on the other hand, challenged many viewers, partially obscured by the mass of machinery. Both these obstacles and the loose alignment of the moving and

static imagery made it clear Cohen wished to reveal the apparatus, the narrative machine, the Wizard of Oz spinning stories on the wall. But in a cyborgian twist, she also made plain both viewers' complicity and their innate voyeurism. As philosopher Donna Haraway describes it, "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs."³ Cohen's work not only reveals but also questions this bionic condition, compelling audiences to confront the hybrid nature of their own existence. Many of these diminutive, made-you-look short videos in the series were shown in California, as well as at the Galerie Loevenburck in Paris.

A Light at the Museum

After a long day of working together in the education department of The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, Cohen and her staff friend, Andrea, walked inside a dark, sumptuous, 18th-century Rococo gallery in the museum. Andrea jokingly asked Cohen, "Don't you just want to lie down on that gorgeous, plush chaise lounge?" A light bulb immediately went on in Cohen's head, sparking her imagination about the elite historic figures who had lived in such settings, who had sat on such furniture, and experienced a space just like the one on exhibition—but, importantly, who also led a very different and, most likely, rarified life.

In 2000, John Baldessari, Judy Fiskin, Martin Kersels, and several other known artists were chosen to work with the Getty's historic permanent collection of pre-modern art and artifacts to create new works for *Departures*,

an upcoming exhibition about challenging the notions of art and historicity. Cohen continued her own work—this time within the show's parameters—and privately made dozens more of her *Small Projection* video loops. The work, she said, "was always about people from one time period going into these past spaces that were not the past for those who once occupied them. It raised questions like, 'Why am I here now in this period of time, while other people populated a different space during different times and circumstances?'" Several of these small projection video works were ultimately seen by numerous viewers of the *Fantasy Space & Crystal Ball: Dreamhouse* show at Shoshana Wayne Gallery.

A Foot in Foreign Land, A Seat in the Time Machine

In 2003, Cohen lived and worked in Brooklyn, New York. She continued to create her *Small Projection* videos and paintings of related imagery. One of her key mentors in Los Angeles, video artist Bill Viola, had made a vivid impression on Cohen several years before when he visited her studio at USC. After reviewing some of her video loops, photo collages, and other works, Viola offered a suggestion, "Your art is so American. How would your work be perceived if it were shown in Europe?" This question landed like another epiphany. While maintaining her home base in New York, Cohen soon struck out to Berlin in 2005—the other great Western art capital of the world—and stayed there for four years. Her new outlook and experience in Europe greatly strengthened her work and also provided her with a new international credibility. Cohen's

art was exhibited in several venues in Paris, Berlin, London and New York, including Galerie La B.A.N.K., and Autostadt, in Wolfsburg, Germany, Volkswagen's corporate headquarters.

In 2007-2009, The J. Paul Getty Museum commissioned Cohen to create a new interactive video installation, *Please Be Seated*. This time, the work required deeper research and preparation, including custom furniture fabrication and filming in the Louvre Museum and the Palace of Versailles. At these sites, Cohen took footage of important furniture holdings and delved into the history of the wealthy 18th-century royalty who had formerly occupied them. Cohen selected several chairs in the Getty collection—pieces that once furnished historic palace bathrooms, libraries, parlors and bedrooms in France—and then commissioned perfect white replicas of each. In *Please Be Seated*, museumgoers sat in the new Rococo-style chairs against empty gallery walls, captured on video and displayed on monitors they could see, which featured recreated majestic 18th-century rooms populated with original furniture, paintings, carpets, chandeliers, and other key period luxury items. The visitors now experienced the integration of past and present—right before their very eyes. Guests could move about, playing musical chairs in historic settings without harming the delicate Getty collection. While noting the important freedom and amusement afforded audiences in their novel experience of *Please Be Seated*, Cohen was also interested in the closed-box monitor format and walled space “cage” created by the room of the work. Cohen has said the installation was, in part, based on fantasy sequences in Stanley Kubrick's classic science fiction film *2001: A Space*

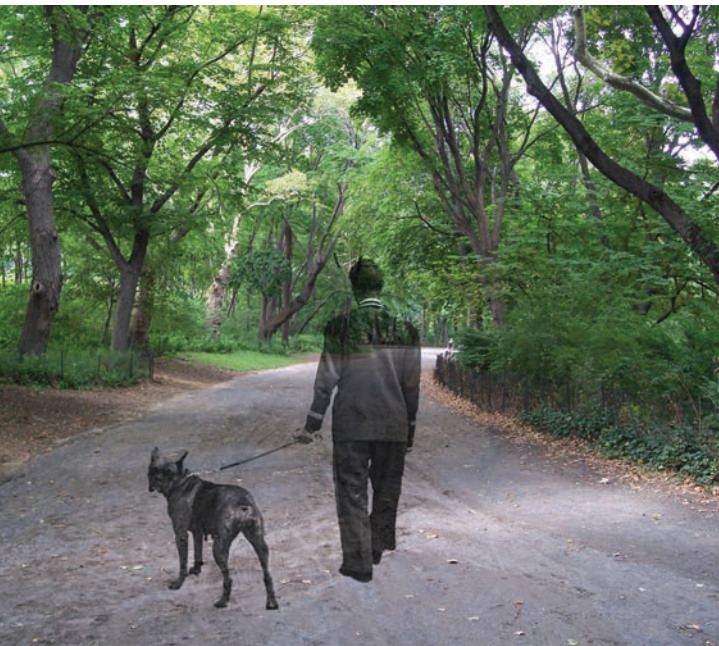
Odyssey, which featured an idealized French Rococo room that the movie's protagonist was “trapped in,” as he approached the zenith of his space-time travel and ultimate death. *Please Be Seated* exhibited for nearly two years continuously after it opened in 2007 and was among the most popular, high-traffic, and well-publicized shows of that period at the museum.

Life and the Living, Death and the Dying

In her later video loop piece, *Time Lapse*, from 2012, Cohen utilized still life imagery found in Jan van Huysum's 1722 painting *Fruit Piece*. A bountiful florid arrangement, composed of glossy grapes, dewy plums, and pink carnations, fills the foreground of a classic, latticed, double-hung window that frames the video work. It slowly drains of color then begins to shine,



Please Be Seated, photo courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Man with Dog

turning faint green, then gold, and then a few other seasonal hues. Falling leaves drift into the not-so-still life video. Barren, winter-season trees stoically stand in the background behind the panes to the elegant austere sounds of Chopin's *Nocturne in E-flat Major, op. 9, no. 2*. *Time Lapse* gives us a discrete, partial, portal view of what symbolically appears to be the end stage in life: colorless, leafless, branch-dense trees, which is the next step beyond the beautiful, bursting but ostensibly dying, tabled plant flesh. The cycling color changes of the fruit and flowers, symbolic of life stages, remind us that even the trees in the beyond will come back to life, buds will bloom, as the seasons will move forward and circle around again. While not a strict time-lapse video, the work provides a poetic, transcendent moment for viewers about the splendors we enjoy and inevitable

losses we bear during our short time alive on Earth.

All the while, Cohen continued to create numerous enchanting large-scale photo collages. Many featured translucent black and white photo print images of female and male figures from the 1940s through 1960s that she found in vintage and antique stores. All on foot, the figures seemed to be in transit, heading somewhere along a path that's superimposed over color photographs of landscapes and leafy suburbanscapes that the artist had taken recently. Many of the works show the yesteryear figures from behind or in profile, affording viewers another voyeuristic pleasure: the fantasy of peeking into the past from the safety of the present—a place where the subject doesn't look back. There's an eerie quality to these collages, as if heaven-lost ghosts had returned home to pass along the paths they had taken in the prime of their lives. Or maybe they had been there all along only to finally be caught on film. The locations were personal to Cohen, those she circulated through numerous times during her formative years in Connecticut. Perhaps the works serve to provide a richer history, a way to connect with simpler people in seemingly easier times to Cohen. It's interesting that glimpses of the residential architecture in the color portions of some Cohen collages reveal split-level homes from the 1970s and 1980s when the artist came of age—the era just after the captured moment of the featured figures. One piece in particular, *Man with Dog*, shows a man from behind, dressed in a boxy formal suit, a wing collar tuxedo dress shirt, and a bow tie with a muscular black pit bull dog on a leash. The dog looks back at the viewer as if it were the only species able to commune with us across time,



Time Lapse

while his human caretaker must take the path of Sisyphus pushing his rock uphill for eternity without ever engaging with us as viewers who share their space.

Greatest Hits

Cohen's comprehensive solo exhibition *Domestic Concerns* first showed at Morgan Lehman Gallery in New York City in 2013. It featured many of Cohen's animated "virtual trespassing" and "intervention" video works,

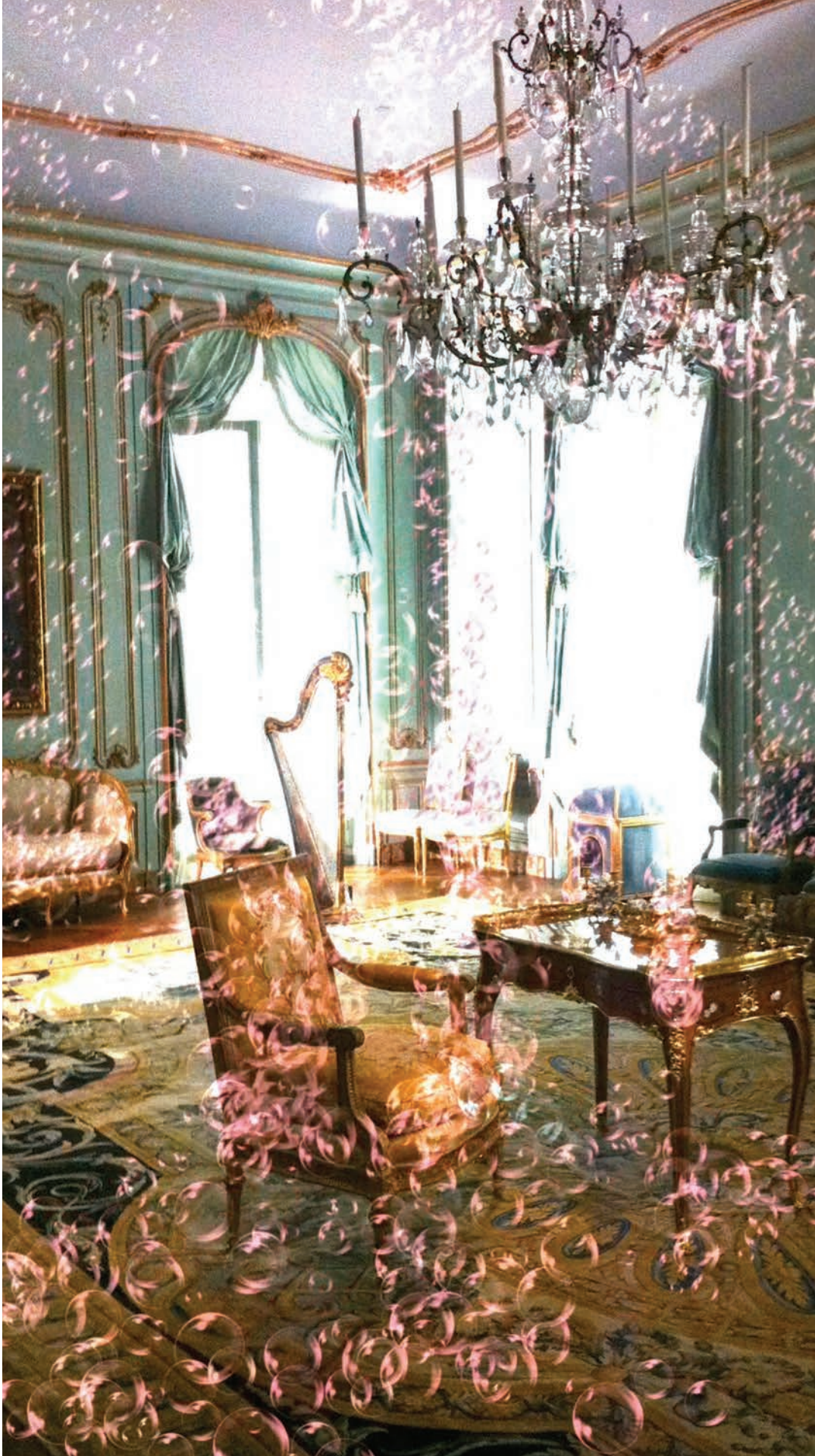


Domestic Concerns

vintage collages and large reflective prints created to date. One piece in the show, also entitled *Domestic Concerns* from 2012, a three-minute video loop, utilized color advertisement

imagery of a now-kitschy-but-then-luxurious basement den from the 1950s, featuring a red-brick walled fireplace, black vinyl chaise lounge, tiger skin rug, and a Rococo-style chair—a favorite Cohen symbol of class. The room seems inviting, ready for relaxation, as smoke begins to rise from the fireplace. But soon—because where there's smoke, there's fire—flames rise up to the bricks, gaining height by the first minute of the video. Then, a light from above the floating stairwell pulsates slowly to techno music, followed by a single glass goblet that falls over on its own, dripping red wine onto the tiger rug below. Other "objects" stealthily come and go, while a bloodstain across the room expands and a chair catches on fire. The piece raises many questions and layers many mysteries. What transpired in that room, especially when we can't see the people who populate and activate it? Are there ghosts haunting the room, stuck in a perpetual cycle of family drama? What's happening upstairs, outside of the image? The setting and imagery gives a nod to the seminal 1956 collage work by Pop artist Richard Hamilton, entitled *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* But in Cohen's disruptive video work, it's like the house interior has a wild, dangerous, party-on, Amityville Horror life of its own.

For other works in the *Domestic Concerns* show, Cohen appropriated images of historically important and protected spaces, such as the Donald Judd Foundation library for *Library*, 2013, and the French Rococo room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for *Champagne Room*, also 2013. As she learned about the death of minimalist artist Donald Judd while visiting his Marfa, Texas, office and studio, it was



*Champagne
Room*

clear that his estate managers and staff sought to preserve his home for posterity. However, as one of his assistants opened the window, Judd's papers—stacked on a desk—flew across the room, foiling that vacuum-sealed conservation attempt. Cohen saw the folly and humor of it, creating a video that showed audiences chinks in the armor against the elements that act as the great equalizer—even among the famous and their once-private spaces. Another Cohen piece, *Champagne Room*, provided a bright moment of levity. As the loop begins, small bubbles emerge from a Rococo chair seat—the perfect location for both whoopee cushion flatulence and the life of the party who might sit and raise a glass of bubbly to high classes. Like her other works in this series, no humans actually populate the spaces depicted. Instead, we see the ephemeral effects of what perhaps took place there.

The Past, Present, and Future

Nicole Cohen's remarkable body of work—like that of other pertinent critical Western metamodern, postmodern and contemporary art forms from the past hundred years—is about our personal and cultural perception. It asks that we explore space, which often belongs to others—those privileged, protected, and promised a place both in history and in our everyday lives. More importantly, her work affords us the opportunity to both celebrate and interrupt that space, transposing our contemporary experience into the artifacts and architecture of the past in order to assess our fundamental, common humanity with those who once populated and activated them—despite our great social and cultural divides.

Her work also points to the natural powers that abide beyond our long-storied willful show of strength to plant pyramids that eternalize pharaohs and raise lavish ballrooms to party with royal aristocracy. Most of her art shows us that the primary, natural, entropic elements—water, wind, fire, air and earth—will slowly and beautifully work their way into and through each of these constructed, scripted spaces, eroding both the periphery and central forces of the rooms that contain them. It shows there's no way to really trap moments or the people who create those moments in such rooms. Nor is there a way to preserve the inanimate objects that are in the rooms—or the rooms themselves. Nothing on Earth or in this life we lead, of course, is permanent. Like the change of seasons or daily weather patterns, our observer perceptions about the values of the spaces featured in Cohen's work also change over time.

Her art then raises a hand and asks questions about what we identify as the rarity and sanctity of art, interior space, and architecture. It then blurs the perimeter of classically high and low art, and the activity of our lives depicted therein. Cohen's work addresses these questions and issues directly by encouraging and evoking audience involvement, showing us moving projections over static ones, revealing the little imperfections of appropriated source material and newly authored video imagery laid over it. To her, the work is often about the "performance pressure" to uphold expectation within action that will inevitably fail or fall apart in the space designed for it.

When viewing the works of Nicole Cohen, we may feel both lamentation for a past whose relics we can only imagine and the growing

strength of our own presence, which we scribble across the surface of that artful interpretation by standing within its many, varied, re-cast spaces. The work provides fantasy for viewers and mystery of the partially known, but it never lionizes or rarifies the singular spaces and their former, often-unseen, eminent occupants alluded to or depicted. Like the written work of Norman M. Klein, Cohen's visual art prods us to identify our complicity and acceptance of the scripted space created by those in nominal power. We love the wow factor that the powerful deliver and, in turn, dance for our proverbial meal, which they sell us. Yet, while Cohen also wows us, she also reminds us of the fissures, the fractures, the follies and failings of that power, as well as the mechanisms, dynamics, and language we utilize and misuse, which we inherit from them. As we explore the artifacts of history in her work, we seek to remember a past we never experienced first-hand by occupying the simulated, projected spaces she gives us. But we are also offered that space and place to author the experience to some degree, to participate in the story and, ultimately, to learn something new, something deeper we know but haven't acknowledged before, instead of merely witnessing the dazzling spectacles that either distract us or consume us.



First Impressions

NOTES

¹ Okeowo, A. (2020, October 19). *How Saidiya Hartman Retells the History of Black Life*. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/10/26/how-saidiya-hartman-retells-the-history-of-black-life>.

² Leibniz, G. W. (1985). *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (E. M. Huggard, Trans.). Open Court. (Original work published 1710).

³ Haraway, D. J. (2016). *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Manifestly Haraway, 3–90. <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816650477.003.0001>.

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Orange Living Room Still



Van Fantasy



White Dress



Above: *Sisters*

Opposite: *Snow Steps*





Moving Forward



Secret Shortcut



Walking Away





Above: *One night in Marrakesh*
Opposite: *Amazon Woman*





Above: Gaze

Opposite: *I Walk the Line*



REMAIND
GUMEA
TRUSS

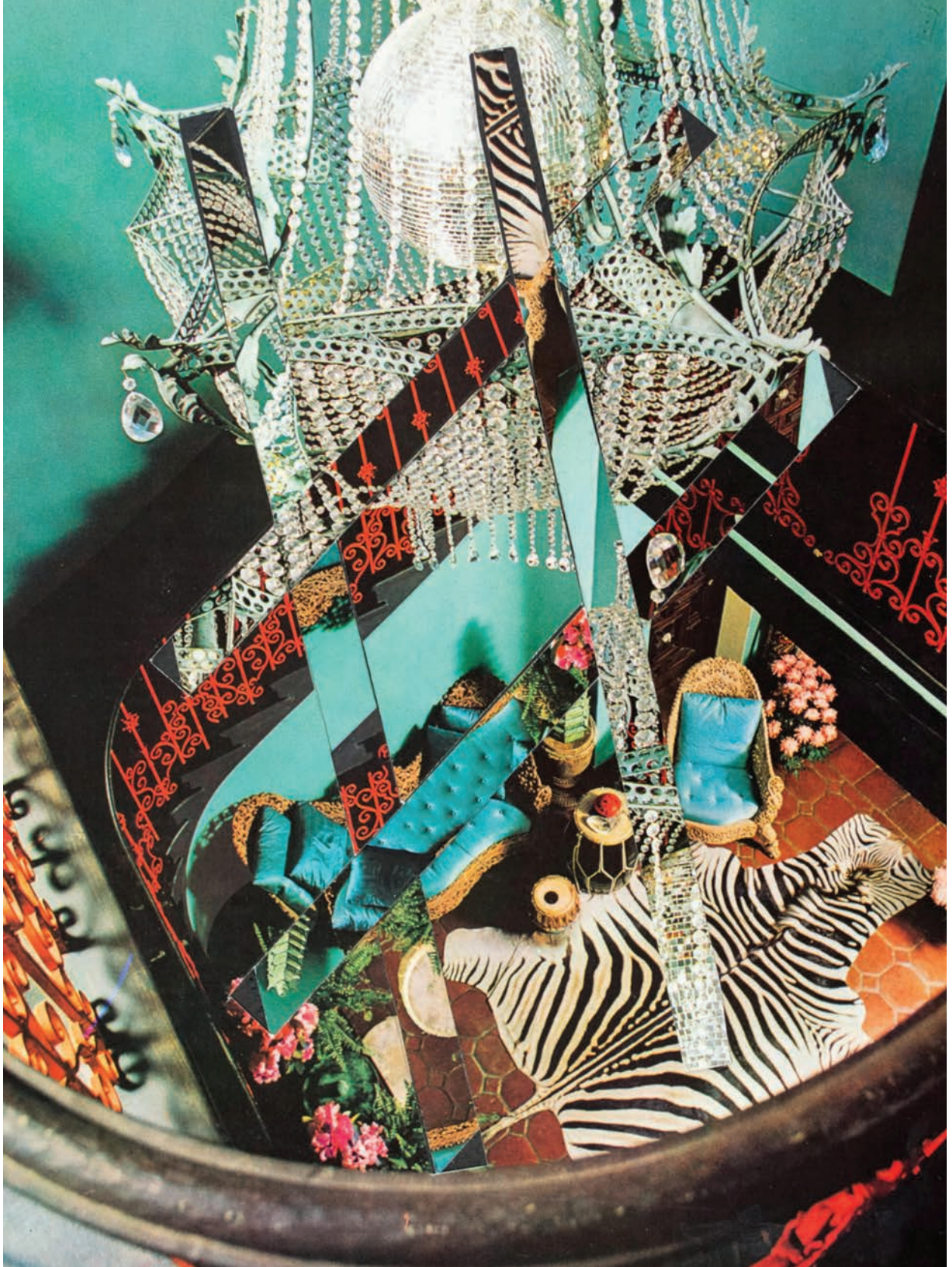
ONE WAY

TRADES
ONLY
REMAIND

WOLLEST



Above: Rome
Opposite: Tribeca



Steve McQueen



Disco



Rouge Table



Video Conferencing



Fantasy Space





EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All works courtesy of the artist unless otherwise indicated

Large Projected Videos

Contemporary Art Books & New York Public Library, 2023

3 minutes

Collection of Alexis Deutsch-Adler

Super Vision, 2024

5 second loop

Rainbow Room, 2018

5 minutes

Small Video Projections on Prints

Videos on digital prints mounted on Plexiglas

Mariko/Living Room, 2000

14 minutes, 55 seconds

Van Fantasy, 2004

17 minutes, 35 seconds

Collection of Micheal Straus

How to Make Your Windows Beautiful, 2005

5 minutes, 28 seconds

Sunday Morning, 2002

39 minutes, 50 seconds

Fantasy Space, 2001

43 minutes, 9 seconds

Videos on Large Monitors

3 minutes each

Champagne Room, 2014

Jody & Peter Ashby Howard

Collection

Domestic Concerns, 2014

First Impressions, 2020

Smoking Room, 2014

Collection of Bob O'Leary

Time Lapse, 2016

Permanent Collection, Art in Embassies, U.S. Department of State

Short Video Loops

Pink Dust, 2023

Take out, 2023

Explode, 2023

Fire pits, 2023

Interior, 2022

Indoor Fireworks, 2023

Do you read me?, 2023

Super Vision, 2024

Photographs

Amazon Woman, 2022

Central Park North, 2021

White Dress, 2021

Court, 2020

Falmouth, 2021

Sight Seeing, 2022

Gaze, 2022

Central Park, 2022

Walking Away, 2021

Man with Dog, 2022

Fountain, 2022

One night in Marrakesh, 2023

Woods Phantom, 2022

Snow Steps, 2021

Cape Codder, 2021

Renovation, 2023

Tribeca, 2024

Moving Forward, 2020

Read Between the Lines, 2021

Rome, 2021

I Walk the Line, 2024

Sisters, 2020

Prints

Disco, 2013

UV flatbed prints on Dibond, 48 x 47"

Collection of Dinora Padrino

Video Conferencing, 2013

UV flatbed prints on Dibond,

22.3 x 24"

Collection of Vimla and Mark Black

Orange Living Room Still, 2001

Video still digital print and acetate,

11.5 x 13"

Collection of Dinora Padrino

Vintage Magazine Collages

12.5 x 9" each

Sandra Dee, 2014

Collection of Karen and David Kabat

Dick Van Dyke, 2013

Collection of Karen and David Kabat

James Bond, 2013

Collection of Tracy McKenna

Blue Monochromatic, 2014

Collection of Vimla and Mark Black

Renovation, 2014

Collection of Vimla and Mark Black

Quarters, 2014

Collection of Vimla and Mark Black

Marlene Dietrich, 2013

Steve McQueen, 2014

Mirrored, 2013

Rouge Table, 2022

Floor installation

You're Invited, 2024

Vinyl floor installation

Dream Houses, 2024

C-print, 36 x 48"

Envisioning the Invisible, 2024

C-Print, 36 x 48"

Documentary Video

BLR Studio Visits: Nicole Cohen,

2024, Courtesy of Bellevue

Literary Review



ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Nicole Cohen is an internationally-renowned installation artist who works with video and new media. Cohen received her BA from Hampshire College and her MFA from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. She has exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Los Angeles County of Art, Williams College Museum of Art, Shoshana Wayne Gallery, La B.A.N.K Galerie in Paris, France, The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, The Autostadt, Wolfsburg, Schloss Britz in Berlin, Germany, American University Museum at Katzen Art Center in Washington D.C., Wave Hill Public Gardens and Cultural Center in the Bronx, and The Museum of the Moving Image.

nicolecohen.org

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