

# State of the World

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ARTSPACE

*(Cover image)*

The Refugee Nation Archive, *Refugee Flag*, 2016  
photograph

*State of the World* presents work by artists whose projects invoke and explore the symbolic power of the flag as a means to understand and question the power structures they represent and, at times, create imaginative new proposals for alliances and allegiances.

Employing artistic strategies including abstraction, representation, and performance, these artists investigate ideas relating to identity, alienation, nationalism, citizenship, and communication as they confront issues pertinent to global culture today and respond to social and political stress and unrest of our time.

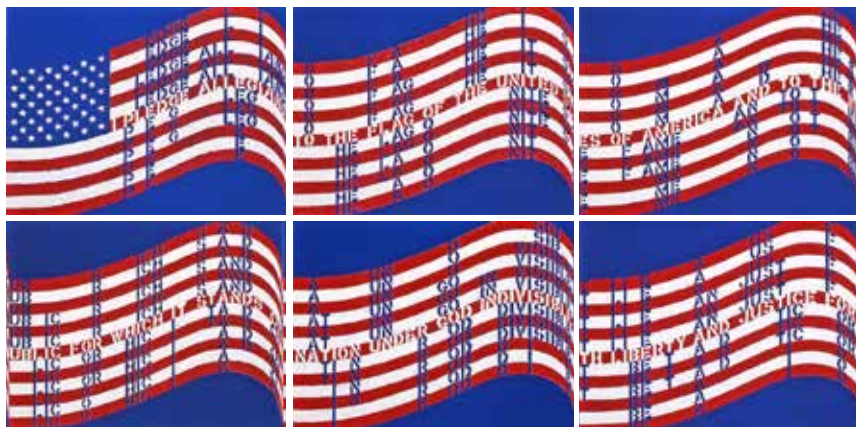
*State of the World* offers a rich and complex story of the flag as a potent symbol and a marker of time, place, belief, union, and difference. While reminding us that shifts in larger systems often create turbulence, rifts, and possibilities for change, the artists invite us to think carefully about how we experience a sense of belonging, negotiate allegiances, and how we proclaim ourselves and our connectedness to the world around us.

Vito Acconci, who began his career as a poet, gained renown (and infamy) in the 1970s for performance-based work through which he challenged borders between public and private space and interrogated the limits of his own body. Throughout his performative work and subsequent sculpture, installation, and architecture have run interests in language, power, and the body/self in relationship to space and society. Included have been a number of prints, sculptures and installations incorporating flags, including architectural “houses” in which viewers are literally walled-in by American and/or Soviet flags, as well as a more generalized *Flag Full of Holes* (1988), which is precisely what the title describes.

*Wav(er)ing Flag*, a suite of six color lithographs that combine to form a 12-foot long American flag, reflects many of Acconci’s ongoing concerns, both as it pushes beyond the borders of the conventional print format and as it challenges the authority of flag, deconstructing its symbolic power and complicating its meanings. Here, the text of the Pledge of Allegiance (written in 1887, adopted by Congress in 1942, and to which “under God” was added in 1954) is brought into conversation with the flag itself, breaking down into fragments—literally falling apart—as it stretches across the stripes of this absurdly long flag. Exemplifying Acconci’s dexterity manipulating language and use of repetition as formal and conceptual strategy, the blue text above and below the pledge interrogates the notions of unity, strength, and the freedom “for which it stands.” Words like “fame,” “mad,” “rich,” “un,” and “lie,” are called out as alternate assessments of the nation’s character, while pairings such as “peg/leg” “fag/lag,” “us/just,” “edge/ledge,” and “divisible/die” allude to its vulnerability. The stripes, as formal element, reiterate ideas of division and exclusion.

*Wav(er)ing Flag* was created by Acconci with Landfall Press at the beginning of the “Culture Wars” in the U.S, when the divide between conservative and liberal values was coming into ever starker relief, polarizing around issues including abortion, gun politics, homosexuality, censorship, and the separation of church and state, including debates surrounding school prayer and the place of “God” in the classroom. Acconci’s piece distills these tensions and raises questions, which feel more timely than ever, about what America stands for, what it means to be an American, and to whom America belongs.

— *Kate Hackman*  
*Independent writer and curator, Ipswich, MA*



**Vito Acconci**

American, 1940-2017

*Wav(er)ing Flag*, 1990

lithograph

Gift of Landfall Press, Collection of Kansas City Art Institute

*“What keeps me living is this: the idea that I might provide some kind of situation that makes people do a double-take, that nudges people out of certainty and assumption of power.”*

~ VITO ACCONCI

SONYA CLARK

Sonya Clark draws on fiber craft techniques as well as performance to explore the complexity of material culture and stories laden within. The artist learned the value of storytelling from her Trinidadian and Jamaican family, and it was her maternal grandmother—a professional tailor—who first taught her how to sew. This personal history has attuned Clark to the narratives embedded within materials and their potential for telling powerful stories about history, politics, race, and class.

*Gele Kente Flag* (1995) is an elongated handwoven textile featuring fragmented elements of the American flag interspersed with sections of brightly colored and brilliantly graphic Western African *kente* cloth. Native to the Akan ethnic group of southern Ghana, *kente* (derived from the Akan word for “basket”) is one of the most recognizable of African textiles, known for its sumptuous colors and striking geometric motifs. Traditionally, it is woven with silk and cotton threads on a specially-designed loom, resulting in bands of fabric that can then be pieced together to create clothing and other goods. The pan-African colors of the Ghana flag (red, gold, green, and black) are often prominent in the design, though they are interpreted into a range of patterns established through centuries of practice and continually expanded upon by contemporary weavers. In making this work, Clark employed a European loom to create an African weave in which the stars and stripes of the American flag are interspersed with *kente* designs that convey ideas about prosperity, strength, endurance, advancement, and achievement.

The storytelling potential of *Gele Kente Flag* can be understood through the interwoven iconography of American and African material cultures and even further through the performative iteration of the project. Clark—who describes the head as “a sacred place, the center where cultural influences are absorbed, siphoned, and retained, and the site where we process the world through the senses,”—invited fifty African-American women to be photographed wearing the *kente* flag as a *gele*, or traditional Nigerian head wrap, and, further, invited the women photographed to share their feelings about *kente* cloth, the flag, and the term “African-American.” Through enacting the cloth in a functional way and giving lived dimension to its hybrid physical structure, Clark imbued the textile with an even more layered composition of hybrid identities and interlaced desires, beliefs, and notions of cultural pride.

—Jennifer Baker  
Assistant Curator, H&R Block Artspace



**Sonya Clark**

American, born 1967

*Gele Kente Flag*, 1995  
handwoven silk and cotton  
Courtesy of the artist

SONYA CLARK

The daughter of a psychiatrist from Trinidad and a nurse from Jamaica, Sonya Clark was born in Washington, DC and is currently based in Richmond, Virginia (the capital of the Confederate States of America during the Civil War), where she is Chair of the Craft and Materials Studies department at Virginia Commonwealth University. Rooted in her deep knowledge of the fiber arts, Clark's work is invested in the cultural meanings and multi-valent resonances of materials, specifically as they speak to race, history, and identity. These works include a series of projects exploring the politics of black hair and the craft, poetics, and social significance of hair braiding, as well as a number of works through which she has literally deconstructed both American and Confederate flags. To create *Interwoven*, for example, which preceded the work on view here, she wove together a Confederate and an American flag, such that the pattern of the former haunted the stars and stripes of the latter as a dark blue "X" across its surface.

*Unraveled* is the ultimate outcome of *Unraveling*, a closely related performative work through which Clark engaged the participation of students and community/audience members in the time-and labor-intensive process of physically unraveling a Confederate battle flag. Commenced on April 9, 2015, the 150-year anniversary of the end of the Civil War, the process of creating the work opened space for reflection and exchange among Clark and participants as they engaged in the slow and painstaking task of unknitting each thread. The piece simultaneously served as potent metaphor for the complexities and challenges of coming to terms with and unraveling the history of racial injustice in this country. "It took years for us to make the Confederate flag. It's not going to be an easy thing for us to undo," Clark has said. Her deliberate choice of a high quality cotton flag to deconstruct relates not only to her attentiveness to the physical properties of the cotton (much more difficult to unravel than nylon), but also in reference to the history of slave labor on cotton plantations in the south. Clark drew a parallel between the work of those slaves and the shared labor involved in taking the flag apart, knot by knot: "There's a little bit of ...well, we're picking cotton together."

In June 2015, just following Clark's completion of this work, nine African Americans were killed in a racially motivated mass shooting at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, the oldest black congregation in the nation. The tragedy spurred renewed national conversation about the symbolic significance and public display of the Confederate Flag, leading to its removal from the South Carolina statehouse and a series of other public spaces. As we consider the three latent piles of red, white and blue thread that comprise *Unraveled*, we might think



about the nature and process of transformation—the potential of methodical, persistent, dedicated collective action to make change, but also the persistence of history, its legacy and its residue. While the physical form of this particular flag has been altered, all of its components remain.

— *Kate Hackman*

*Independent writer and curator, Ipswich, MA*



**Sonya Clark**

American, born 1967

*Unraveled*, 2015

thread from a completely unraveled  
cotton Confederate Battle flag

Courtesy of the artist

EDITH DEKYNDT

Whether projecting dust caught in a beam of light, audio-recording the sound of static electricity, filming the Dead Sea underwater, or constructing the sonic environment in which crystal glasses shatter in order to record their vibration and breakage, Edith Dekyndt creates artworks that give poetic physical form to forces and matter typically beyond the limits of our perception. In so doing, she encourages us to tune in more fully to the phenomenon at play all around us, and to consider the world—and ourselves as agents within it—in newly expansive and imaginative ways.

In Dekyndt's *One Second of Silence*, a transparent flag flutters in the wind against a cloudy sky. Even as it flirts with disappearance, this flag's materiality is brought into relief, its contours and rippling surface revealing its physicality as a rectangular piece of drapery, a sheer veil between viewer and world beyond. In the absence of identifying colors or patterns, we are reminded that a flag's meaning relies first on our recognition of the flag as symbol, and then on our relationship to that which it stands for.

In lieu of emblems of specific nation or state, Dekyndt—who has referred to hers as a “mute” flag — offers both everything and nothing; a blank slate and a void; a vision of a borderless world, embracing everyone and everywhere, or a portrait of existential crisis and absence of belonging. The meaning of this flag is thus turned back to us. It becomes a device to take our measure—a function Dekyndt has advanced by displaying and filming this flag in a number of different countries and contexts. The work's title underlines this open-endedness, referencing the practice of collectively taking pause for reflection. Here again, without attachment to any specific occasion or reference point, it is left to us to determine our position in relation to it, and to define the significance of this moment.

— *Kate Hackman*

*Independent writer and curator, Ipswich, MA*



**Edith Dekyndt**

Belgian, born 1960

*One Second of Silence, (Part 01, New York)*, 2008

video, 18:29 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Carl Freedman Gallery, London

Mounir Fatmi's *The Lost Springs* represents the 22 pristine flags of the Arab League member states, clustered in close formation. Yet this unassuming first impression of a seemingly benign collection of flags begins to collapse as the signals unfold. In a poignant reversal of the sight of fluttering flags outside the Arab League headquarters in Cairo, *Lost Spring's* crestfallen flags hang dejectedly against a bare wall as if to convey the disappointment of both the dashed hopes of the protestors of the Arab Spring and the broken dreams of 1950-60s Pan Arab unity. Singled out for special treatment are the flags of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, which ousted their leaders in the Arab Spring in 2010-11. These flags hang from what appear at first glance to be flagpoles but are in fact broomsticks, playfully evoking the "political spring cleaning" of the Arab Spring and the sweeping of detritus while foregrounding cleansing, renewal and rebirth. Positioned as if mid-sweeping, the quotidian brooms contrast sharply with the lofty aspirations of the Arab Spring protesters yet somehow also echo both their improvised tactics and rallying calls for basic rights: "Bread! Freedom! Social Justice!" The original French title of this work: "Les Printemps Perdus" implies staleness, thus spring is both lost in the conventional sense but also lacking in freshness and vitality.

The potency of this installation lies in its combination of subversion and evolution. First displayed in 2011 at the Venice Biennale, the flags have since been reordered with each display with a broomstick added to the Libyan flag, thus acting simultaneously as ongoing political commentary and ominous warning. Embedded within this installation is also a reminder of the Arab League's troubled past: for just as the founding nation states of Egypt and Iraq in 1945 ousted their kings, turning from monarchies to republics between 1945 and 1960, so too would these nations reshape the political landscape in 2010 and beyond. *The Lost Springs* further acts as commentary on the Arab League's controversial decisions related to member states' suspension or intermittently frozen membership in 2010-11, such as Syria and Libya's suspension following the uprisings in 2011 and the subsequent challenges to re-admittance, particularly of Syria under an altered flag representing the opposition.

Simultaneously looking to past and future, *Lost Springs'* potency lies in the subtlety of its implied prophetic nature as a shifting installation predicting future possibilities with the simple re-ordering of flags in an act akin to witchcraft or sorcery. Yet the artist operates here also as oracle, or perhaps even biblical prophet, forecasting both impending triumphs alongside the possibility of crushing defeat. With its ongoing display it further toys with our hubristic sense of certainty by questioning the very stability of

political prediction and the inherent volatility of the status quo; a quality which may have contributed to the censoring of this work at Art Dubai in 2011. Current preoccupation with the serious implications of inclusion and exclusion of Arab countries in global sanctions, entry bans or otherwise, renders Fatmi's work highly relevant as a stark reminder of the many challenges facing the Arab world.

— *Heba Mostafa*

*Assistant Professor, Islamic Art, Architecture, and Urbanism, University of Kansas, Lawrence*



**Mounir Fatmi**

Born Morocco, 1970, based in Paris, France

*The Lost Springs*, 2011

3 brooms, 22 flags of the Arab League

Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery, New York

## KOMAR & MELAMID

Working together from the time they were art students in Moscow, in the '60s, until 2004, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid together created a huge body of conceptually driven work that included prints, paintings, sculpture, music, poetry, performances and public projects. Typically infused with irony and a wit, their work (which they termed “Sots Art,” a combination of Soviet Realism and Pop Art) is deeply political and invariably loaded with pointed critique of communism, capitalism, and other forms of institutional power and behavioral excess.

This etching relates closely to an installation presented by the artists in 1980 at Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York titled *Onward to the Final Victory of Capitalism*, which featured a standard American flag, altered, as in this print, to display an image of the cosmos in place of the standard 50 stars on blue. Hung on a flagpole, it leaned in a corner, near which were hung a series of Soviet propaganda-style posters declaring the great merits of capitalism.

Replacing the finite stars (states) with an image of the infinite, Komar and Melamid give succinct visual form to a U.S. drive to be the ultimate “superpower”—an American empire extending not only across the globe, but indeed all the way to the heavens. Created during the era of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and at height of the Cold War, this work certainly alludes to the ongoing “Space Race,” between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, deeply intertwined with the nuclear arms race, which Reagan sought to—and would greatly—accelerate with the intent of forcing the collapse of the Soviet Republic and facilitating the global spread of capitalism. And yet, as Komar and Melamid’s work consistently resists didacticism, *Our Flag* (emphasis on “Our”) simultaneously invites a more open-ended and hopeful reading; a vision of an America representing idealism, inclusivity, and infinite possibility.

— *Kate Hackman*  
*Independent writer and curator, Ipswich, MA*



**Komar & Melamid**

Vitaly Komar, born Moscow, 1943

Alexander Melamid, born Moscow, 1945

*Our Flag (Second Project)*, 1989

color etching

Courtesy of Hallmark Art Collection, Kansas City, Missouri

## PEDRO LASCH

Pedro Lasch divides his time between North Carolina, where he teaches art, art theory, and visual studies at Duke University and New York, where he leads ongoing projects with immigrant communities and art collectives. Born and raised in Mexico City, Lasch became a United States citizen on January 20, 2017, Inauguration Day.

*Abstract Nationalism & National Abstraction* (2001-ongoing) is the common title for a series whose social interventions, visual compositions, flag displays, and musical performances allow the audience to understand other national anthems in their native language for the first time, while their own anthem becomes incomprehensible. For those speaking several languages, or having strong associations with more than one anthem, the experience is even more layered and representative of today's cultural pluralism.

Each piece in the *Flag Fusions and Anthems for Four Voices* combines four national anthems, arranged for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). Each voice is assigned one of the national anthems. The countries' groups of four are determined by their English alphabetical order, as found in the 2001 World Almanac and Book of Facts. The language that each anthem is sung in, however, shifts to that of the country that follows it in the Almanac. So, for example, the United States anthem is sung in Spanish, the official language of Uruguay. For some parts of the project, the voices are allowed an independent flow, so that the audience can appreciate them in their new linguistic and poetic articulation. These sections are called the musical processions. Other parts, called compositions, are created by guest composers according to Lasch's conceptual guidelines. Generating a complete musical overlay of complex phonetic and semantic contradictions, these compositions are contemporary works of music in their own right, consistent with the aesthetic and stylistic vision of each composer.

Begun in 2001 with the above conceptual structure and its forty-eight *Schematic Scores*, the series has grown over the years to include *Sing Along (or Karaoke) Anthems* designed for specific contexts, as well as video art, visual scores, paintings, and various media associated with socially engaged art. Different parts from the series have been exhibited and staged at The Phillips Collection (2014), the Hirshhorn Museum (2014), and the 56th Venice Biennale (2015 Creative Time Summit), and now, the H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute.





**Pedro Lasch**

American, born 1975 Mexico City

*Anthems for Four Voices / Composition 45 / Flag Modulation, 2014*

video with sound

4:04 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

## LUCY AND JORGE ORTA

Lucy and Jorge Orta, partners who have been working collaboratively as Studio Orta since 1992, have been deeply invested in a series of timely projects concerned with bringing attention to urgent environmental and humanitarian concerns. Through a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary practice, they propose new ways of living and behaving that advance values of connectedness, collaboration, environmental responsibility and global citizenship.

This Antarctica flag is a component of the artists' larger Antarctica project, which they developed over the course of an expedition to Antarctica aboard the Hercules KC130 flight, aided by a logistical crew and scientists stationed at the Marambio Antarctic Base. The project involved the creation of *Antarctic Village*, an "ephemeral encampment" composed of handmade Dome Dwellings and complete with its own flag, passport, and clothing. Their project grew from an interest in the spirit embodied in Antarctica itself: a territory protected by the Antarctic Treaty, entered into by a global consortium in 1961, which bans military activity and sets aside Antarctica as a scientific preserve that "shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and shall not become the scene or object of international discord."

*Antarctic Village – No Borders, Métisse Flag* gives physical form to the spirit of peace and cooperation embodied in the treaty as it includes, and blurs boundaries among, the flags of a global spectrum of participating nations. "As if through the filter of a prism, the flag concentrates all the national colours into the sum of light, similar to the snowy white of purity and hope," the artists write. The flag also symbolizes the commitment to "mutual aid and solidarity" required for survival in Antarctica's severe climate, and thus functions as a pragmatic and urgent reminder of humanity's shared stake in the preservation of our natural environment, literally flagging the need for global cooperation if we are to counter climate change and preserve our planet.

— *Kate Hackman*

*Independent writer and curator, Ipswich, MA*



**Lucy + Jorge Orta**

Lucy Orta, born United Kingdom, 1966, based in Paris, France

Jorge Orta, born Argentina, 1953, based in Paris, France

*Antarctic Village – No Borders, Métisse Flag, 2007*

inkjet on polyamide

edition of 7

Courtesy of the artists and Jane Lombard Gallery, New York

## GEORGIA PAPAGEORGE

Georgia Papageorge studied Fine Art at the University of South Africa and the Technikon, both in Pretoria, South Africa, where she now lives and works. Since the 1980s, Papageorge has created large-scale land art installations and films that poetically address personal loss, apartheid, South Africa's violent political situation, and monumental natural catastrophes. A recent project is a meditation on more responsible stewardship of the land setting a laser sharp focus on man-made ecological disasters in the making, such as the disruption of Serengeti migration route and the devastation of natural habitats in Tanzania, all at risk due to aggressive and unchecked Chinese investment and development plans at play throughout regions in Africa.

Papageorge has worked in some of the African continent's most stunning and remote landscapes, including along the infamous Skeleton Coast in the southwest African country of Namibia. Staking the landscape with flowing red cloth banners where the land meets the sea along a once joined coastline, the artist explores concepts of rift, synchronicity and transcendence in *Africa Rifting: Lines of Fire, Namibia/Brazil*. As a reference to an ancient geological schism, Africa Rifting speaks of a longer arc of time than occurs in the naming of individual nation states and invites us to consider the Gondwanaland split that served to separate the continents of South America and Africa some 135 million years ago. Geopolitical conditions shift over time, as do our perceptions of borders, boundaries, and belonging. The work becomes even more poignant, perhaps, upon realization that summer filming in Namibia was followed by filming on the Brazilian coast near the town of Torres on the day of September 11, 2001, an event that would augur a violent division of a very different kind and for many years to come.

— *Raechell Smith*  
*Director/Curator, H&R Block Artspace*



**Georgia Papageorge**

South African, born 1941

*Africa Rifting - Lines of Fire: Namibia /Brazil*, 2001

video with sound

15:40 minutes

Courtesy of the Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas,  
Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund, 2007.0085

## YARA SAID

What does a flag represent? A nation? A place? A people? Does it represent everyone or only a few? These questions are not usually asked when driving past a flagpole flying the American flag, questions not asked when children are taught to use flags to identify countries and states.

The ten refugees competing in the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, however, had no flag, no symbol, and therefore no identity. As a result, they competed under the official Olympic flag and anthem. This seemed inadequate as they represented not only themselves as athletes, but also the 65 million displaced people throughout the world. In response, artist Yara Said, a Syrian refugee who found asylum in Amsterdam, designed this flag for the refugee team.

Said's flag follows the 5 basic principles for designing a great flag compiled by *The North American Vexillological Association*:

1. Keep it Simple
2. Use Meaningful Symbolism
3. Use 2-3 Basic colors
4. No Lettering or Seals
5. Be Distinctive or Be Related

This design is inspired by the orange life jackets worn by refugees fleeing their homeland by foot and by water in search of a safer place to live. Its simplicity is inherent in its immediate recognition, and its symbolism potent. The two colors are identifiable and arresting, causing both a visceral and personal reaction; they evoke solidarity for any refugee with personal experience wearing one, especially those who traveled across the Mediterranean Sea. This effect is particularly compelling considering the staggering statistics for the likelihood of surviving such a journey; according to the UN Refugee Agency one in 88 refugees died while crossing the Mediterranean in 2016, for those fleeing Libya to Italy that statistic jumps to one death for every 47 arrivals. The design has no need for lettering or seals, as the colors speak for themselves inducing a relationship between the flag, viewers and refugees.

The Refugee Nation and this flag represent a symbolic nation, one that has no location only the loci of the many individuals searching for a permanent home. A symbol of unity, of empathy, and of acknowledgement—despite its ultimate lack of recognition by the International Olympic Committee— Said's flag has given solidarity and

recognition to the refugees. This flag unifies a placeless people and highlights the struggles they face in this crisis. For them it is synonymous with their own borderlessness, it represents all nations, all places, and all peoples.

— *Stefanie Kae Dlugosz-Acton*

*Assistant Curator, Architecture, Design and Decorative Arts, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*



**Yara Said**

Born Syria, 1991, currently based in Amsterdam

*Refugee Flag*, 2016

archival print on Photo Tex

Courtesy of The Refugee Nation

MIKE SINCLAIR

Mike Sinclair began his career as a commercial photographer, but his photography has evolved in a conceptual direction with narrative-based images of middle-class American society engaged in various types of leisure and everyday activities. His photographs were used to illustrate the Time Magazine July 2, 2012 issue's special section on the American dream, and his photograph *Oceanside* was the second Project Wall commissioned by the Artspace in 2000.

The photographs included in this exhibition illustrate both the ubiquity and the power of the American flag as seen in the context of everyday life. Instantly recognizable here and everywhere, and both complex and strong as an image, the American flag may be the epitome of all symbols. Its very power opens the flag up to interpretation and contestation: it is simultaneously our flag and that of each individual, subject to continual reconsideration and steadfast allegiance, simple and complicated at the same time. In two of these shots – those of the restaurant and the barbeque – the flags appear incidental, either difficult to see (BBQ) or overshadowed by a host of red, white, and blue Pepsi placards. If not for the theme of this show, we might not even notice these flags; or, perhaps, we'd just ignore them. But they are there, waved high on top of a stand (BBQ) and perched on pole after pole inside the restaurant. Even when they do not command our attention, the flags provide a narrative within their commonplace settings. In particular, the flags mixed with the Pepsi signs speak to our commercial republic. Viewed alongside the flags, the Pepsi advertisements become richer, more significant, with Sinclair's framing of this interplay encouraging us to consider the simultaneity—perhaps inextricability—of our roles as American citizens and as consumers.

In his other two images—of a flag-lowering and a middle school hallway – the American flag stands front and center, compelling our attention. Yet both photographs depict something a little off: a closer look reveals the make-shift nature of this flag-lowering, dependent on support from a tree branch, and the inaccuracy of this primitive, hand-drawn flag, displayed amongst fliers and posters in the school's exhibition cabinet. Nonetheless, we immediately understand these gestures and their significance. If the British “planted” their flag around the globe, Americans have “raised” the flag, not in conquest, but – arguably, if not actually – as a symbol of democracy and self-determination. Here this instinct is on display in the most seemingly democratic of contexts, as the flag, our flag, is placed in a position of honor.

— *Burdett Loomis*

*Professor, Political Science, University of Kansas, Lawrences*





**Mike Sinclair**

American, born 1952

*Front Hall, Kauffman Middle School, Kansas City, MO, 2013 2013*

archival pigment print

Courtesy of the artist and Haw Contemporary, Kansas City, Missouri

ALLISON SMITH

Allison Smith is internationally known for her large-scale performances and installations that critically engage popular forms of historical reenactment and traditional craft, such as quilting, pottery, and wood-carving, in order to redo, restage, and refigure conceptions of history and collective memory. Often calling attention to uncomfortable aspects of American culture, such as slaveholding, war mongering, and white nationalism, Smith offers material re-interpretations of the past in order to inform both our present and our future, reminding us with urgency that craft is never neutral.

Commissioned by the H&R Block Artspace for this exhibition, Allison Smith's *A Hatespun Flag: The Prepper's Blindspot* (2017) is a large flag composed of hand sewn piecework linen digitally printed with images the artist sourced from Ebay, Etsy, and other consumer websites selling resources that support Viking, American Colonial, Revolutionary War, and Civil War reenactment culture. The items featured in the printed images range from hand-sewn clothing and props to traditional quilt-making calico fabrics and Civil War reproduction sewing kits, the latter two making reference to the making of this work. Mimicking the structure of a quilt, Smith's flag calls to mind the history of quilting as a gendered communal activity and site for social exchange, but here notions of warmth and mending inherent to needlework are interrupted by a sinister darkness: the homespun has transformed into the "Hatespun" in this flag made for a fictitious paranoid survivalist "Prepper."

By sourcing images from the Internet, Smith calls attention to a contemporary economy of these goods and lifestyles. The aesthetics of the fundamentalist/survivalist/historical reenactment costumes, objects, and practices—which might easily be mistaken for hipster/artisanal craft/DIY aesthetics—read as authentic and homey, but the extreme devotion to—and ilk of nostalgia manifest in—reenactment culture can be viewed in alignment with the significant rise in conservative nationalist attitudes and agendas seen recently throughout Europe and the United States.

Several of the images in Smith's flag refer to fire-starting materials: flints, newspaper and herb bundles, red candles bundled like dynamite, and improvised bombs made from Mason jars. These can be read as allegories for paranoia, fear, gaslighting, survivalism, violent protest, and flag burning. But, alternately, these images might illustrate a protest strategy Smith noted in a November 2016 lecture at the Kansas City Art Institute, immediately in the wake of the election that put Donald Trump in office: *"Ignite a light, be a catalyst for powerful thought and ideas."*

—Jennifer Baker  
Assistant Curator, H&R Block Artspace



**Allison Smith**

American, born 1972

*A Hatespun Flag: The Prepper's Blindspot*, 2017

archival pigment print on linen

Courtesy of the artist

## JAMES WOODFILL

When James Woodfill was a student at Kansas City Art Institute, he made a living sewing for a local commercial flag company. This particular arrangement informed a twenty-year investigation of functionality, materiality, abstraction, and modes of signaling in both visual art and flags. With a resistance to producing static objects and an objective to “collaborate with the built environment,” Woodfill’s installations and public art projects use light, sound, video, and/or kinetic elements to activate the space of the everyday in the time of human perception.

Invited to create a site-responsive installation for this exhibition, Woodfill delivered a portable kit of handmade flags, weights, tethers, and hardware. *Flag Kit - Dispatches 2-5* allows for multiple compositions or “dispatches” that can be easily scaled and quickly altered to suit a given environment. *Flag Kit* began in the artist’s studio as *Dispatch 1*, has since grown into *Dispatch 2*, and will continue to transmit messages as *Dispatches 3-5*, appearing at regular intervals throughout the exhibition. The first configuration is a sharp horizon of flags hanging from the ceiling, stationed at a diagonal to the walls in the alcove it inhabits, revealing itself slowly to a viewer as they enter the gallery space. This creates a surprising encounter that courts both the familiar: we recognize the flag as a form; as well as a sense of uncertainty: what do these strange flags represent? The functional apparatuses and hardware are revealed and in full view; however, the artist’s conceptual aims remain more elusive.

Each “dispatch” references systems of flag signaling without ever fully adhering to the parameters of the system. These flags are made of unusual materials and deviate from standard sizes. They may have individual significance, or perhaps they only function in concert, each reliant on its position relative to others in order to convey a larger meaning. While they do appear to relay some kind of free association—one can identify formal relationships, visual rhythm, abbreviated symbols, and even text; the rows of flags never quite materialize into fully-articulated communication. Instead they read as noise or chatter. Woodfill invites his audience to intercept this chatter, examine it, and deduce information from the patterns he presents. Questions proliferate about what each flag implies, if there is a flag code that corresponds to this kit, and whether these dispatches will reveal information about hidden intentions and actions.

While flag signals were invented to solve the problem of communicating over great distances, Woodfill’s flags reward physical proximity. The configuration provides pedestrian space to move in and out of the installation; and tactility, color, transparency,

and light summon an intimate investigation. These signals do not aim to breach a spatial distance, instead they endeavor to connect temporal intervals. An established flag vernacular has been reiterated into a present tense that anticipates future communiqués. Will the impending transmission be a memory or a message? And do we expect it to deliver an idea or an event?

— *Jennifer Baker*

*Assistant Curator, H&R Block Artspace*



**Jim Woodfill**

American, born 1958

*Flag Kit – Dispatches 2-5, 2017*

textiles and hardware

Image courtesy of the artist

## Exhibition Checklist

### Vito Acconci

American, born 1940

*Wav(er)ing Flag*, 1990

lithograph

Gift of Landfall Press, Collection of Kansas City Art Institute

### Sonya Clark

American, born 1967

*Gele Kente Flag*, 1995

handwoven silk and cotton

Courtesy of the artist

### Sonya Clark

American, born 1967

*Unraveled*, 2015

thread from a completely unraveled cotton Confederate Battle flag

Courtesy of the artist

### Edith Dekyndt

Belgian, born 1960

*One Second of Silence, (Part 01, New York)*, 2008

video, 18:29 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Carl Freedman Gallery, London

### Mounir Fatmi

Born Morocco, 1970, based in Paris, France

*The Lost Springs*, 2011

3 brooms, 22 flags of the Arab League

Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery, New York

### Komar & Melamid

Vitaly Komar, born Moscow, 1943

Alexander Melamid, born Moscow, 1945

*Our Flag (Second Project)*, 1989

color etching

Courtesy of the Hallmark Art Collection, Kansas City, Missouri

### Pedro Lasch

American, born 1975 Mexico City

*Anthems for Four Voices / Composition 20 / Flag Modulation*, 2014

video with sound, 7:35 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

### Pedro Lasch

American, born 1975 Mexico City

*Anthems for Four Voices / Composition 45 / Flag Modulation*, 2014

video with sound, 4:04 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

### Pedro Lasch

American, born 1975 Mexico City

*Venice Biennale Sing Along (or Karaoke) Anthem*, 2015

video with sound, 7:21 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

**Pedro Lasch**

American, born 1975 Mexico City  
*Schematic Scores*, 2001  
archival collage  
edition of 10  
Courtesy of the artist

**Lucy + Jorge Orta**

Lucy Orta, born United Kingdom, 1966, based in Paris, France  
Jorge Orta, born Argentina, 1953, based in Paris, France  
*Antarctic Village – No Borders, Métisse Flag*, 2007  
inkjet on polyamide  
edition of 7  
Courtesy of the artists and Jane Lombard Gallery, New York

**Georgia Papageorge**

Born Simonstown, Cape Province, South Africa 1941  
*Africa Rifting – Lines of Fire: Namibia/ Brazil*, 2001  
video with sound, 15:40 minutes  
Courtesy of the Spencer Museum of Art, The University of  
Kansas, Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund, 2007.0085

**Yara Said**

Born Syria, 1991, currently based in Amsterdam  
*Refugee Flag*, 2016  
archival print on Photo Tex  
Courtesy of The Refugee Nation

**Mike Sinclair**

American, born 1952  
*Front Hall, Kauffman Middle School, Kansas City, MO*, 2013  
archival pigment print  
Courtesy of the artist and Haw Contemporary, Kansas City, Missouri

**Allison Smith**

American, born 1972  
*A Hatespun Flag: The Prepper's Blindspot*, 2017  
archival pigment print on linen  
Courtesy of the artist

**Jim Woodfill**

American, born 1958  
*Flag Kit – Dispatches 2-5*, 2017  
textiles and hardware  
Courtesy of the artist

**Artspace Project Wall: The Refugee Nation**

*Refugee Flag*, 2016  
Courtesy of The Refugee Nation

*State of the World* is organized for the H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute by Raechell Smith, Director, and Jennifer Baker, Assistant Curator.

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H&R Block Artspace  
at the Kansas City Art Institute  
16 East 43rd Street  
Kansas City, Missouri 64111  
[www.kcai.edu/artspace](http://www.kcai.edu/artspace)

Hours  
Tuesday-Saturday, 12:00-5:00 pm

**Artists. Art. Ideas.**

Dedicated to artists, art, and ideas since 1999, the H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute presents exhibitions of contemporary art and a range of public programs for a growing audience of students, educators, artists, and the general public.