DF It is more a meditation on the dance between figuration and abstraction and between the self and an other. I like the reference to theatricality, but it should be read through Artaud. For example, João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva evoke the "world as theater" with their film *Cowfish* (2011). In slow motion, the monstrous fish moves its fins with an almost surreal choreography as it revolves around a dinner plate and expires. It's an incredibly human film about life and death.

Jack Smith is also important to consider. One collage includes photographs of naked men, which inhabit a landscape dominated by childlike drawings of somewhat menacing animated buildings. A kind of Brutalist architecture come alive. It acts out what you call the "theater of the self", as they invariably refer back to the self-portraits of Smith and his various alter egos.

Additionally, David Hammons's almost abstract body prints resonate in context with Hans Bellmer, Picabia, and even Mark Manders. Manders's figures reimagine art historical and archeological representations of the body, and mix animal and human worlds. Michael Dean's sculpture evokes body parts like concrete ghosts. There's a physical relationship between the works and the human figure. I'm reminded of Ovid's Metamorphoses: "Of bodies changed to other forms, I sing".

SK *"Beautiful Monsters" comprises work from the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but previous eras seem to haunt it, too.*

DF My wife and collaborator Hanneke Skerath suggested that we use the Bruegel drawing *The Beekeepers*, c. 1568, as the invitation for the exhibition. It's an extremely strange image of a group of beekeepers wearing protective masks as they tend their hives. It's haunting and surreal: the human figures seem almost alien. Historically, as modernity approaches in the West, abstraction and figuration are intimately tied in an unresolvable dance.

SK *How would you describe the beautiful monster you've arrived at with the show?*

DF In the end, the idea behind this show is a simple one. Instead of speaking of the "return" to figuration we should be looking at the fact that it never disappeared, and also that the boundaries between the poles of figuration and abstraction are far more fluid than art history tends to suggest. The works in the show really deal with this non-contradiction: between beauty and monstrosity, the figurative and the abstract, the body and the work of art. It is a very Hegelian sense of self. But above all else, each of them has a real human quality. Picabia said it best: "What I love most in others is myself."

(Douglas Fogle interviewed by
Sam Korman)

FIVE ISSUES OF STUDIO INTERNATIONAL

(8) RAVEN ROW
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ravenrow.org

In this show, curator Jo Melvin focuses on five issues of the British magazine *Studio International*, ranging from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, all edited by Peter Townsend. The works featured in the pages of these issues are included in the show, and will be exhibited alongside the issues themselves and archival materials.

KEREN GOLDBERG *Your main interest in the issues you chose was the way in which they presented, as well as affected, the influence of sculpture on the perception of public space, in a period when it was at the center of political and social debates. Could you briefly describe how you see this influence?*

JO MELVIN The April 1966 issue focuses on Naum Gabo and constructivism, and coincided with Gabo's Tate retrospective exhibition. Townsend was interested in the vibrancy and currency of the constructivist idea, as expressed by Gabo's operational strategy and materiality, as a potential vehicle to engage social change.

This investigation of materials continues in the May 1968 issue – featuring John Latham and Barry Flanagan. The issue also covers the first citywide exhibition in the UK, an open-air exhibition in Bristol, which included a range of contemporary artists. It served as a flyer for the much larger-scale, Peter Stuyvesant-sponsored City Sculpture Project – featured in the July/August 1972 issue. Here the relationship between sponsorship, town planning, the artists, and the public's responses coalesces in ways that cause artists to reconsider their strategies and even their practices. For example, after his work was destroyed by students in Cambridge, Flanagan started to rethink his attitude to materials, and headed off to a stone quarry in Italy.

The other issue, July/August 1970, was a "48-page exhibition", in which six critics invited various artists to exhibit their work in the pages of the magazine. It really testifies to Townsend's commitment to giving space to new practices and his interest in the breadth of strategies employed by artists. It was the only magazine at the time that was bold enough to take this step. Townsend considered that it shows the way to all kinds of different strategies of exhibition management and distribution.

KG *This concept of "exhibition in a magazine" is interesting in regard to your curatorial approach. Would you consider this show to be a "magazine in an exhibition"?*

JM Well, I think it's interesting to consider how dematerialization affects the sculptural encounter, and how we continue to think about what the sculptural encounter is. It's exciting to have the juxtaposition of actual works in all these spaces. I think it'll be an eye-opener and a way of thinking differently about connections between artists' practices. I think it will also give a different situation to the way we think about the role of art magazines in reconstructing recent histories.

KG *In his final editorial in 1975, Townsend wrote, "opening magazine pages to artists on an absolutely open basis has meant confronting them with problems different to those they normally face". In the above-mentioned exhibition issue, most of the works are text-based. Today, when the borders between critic, writer and artist are blurred, do you find that art magazines have the same power as they had before? As* Studio International *once had?*

JM No, they can't have the same "power" they once had, that's like thinking we can go back to a time when books were made using and re-using vellum! Townsend was acutely aware of the time – how offset lithography transformed print possibilities, for instance – and publications became a material for artists' production. The magazine blurs the boundary between editor/curator/artist/writer – these terms have been up for grabs since that time. The magazine definitely sets a touchstone for artists' taking control, and I think the current interest in artist's publications, whether online or hardcopy, can be traced to these precedents.

KG *I understand that a publication will accompany the show, with reproductions of original essays from the magazine. Could you mention some highlights of what will be included?*

JM John Morgan studio are working on the publication and I'm very impressed by the way they have steered the path between close attention to detail and a faithful rendition of the magazine's design integrity without being nostalgic. It will include some adverts, and the contents pages. There will be lot of artists' statements, including Gabo's, William Turnbull's, Gillian Wise's, Kenneth and Mary Martin's, Barry Flanagan's, Garth Evans', and Nicholas Munro's, as well as writings on Gabo and constructivism by artists John Ernest and Anthony Hill. Also included is Charles Harrison's essay "Against Precedents", which was written for the London version of the exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form" at the ICA, and, unlike the exhibition catalogue, includes several photographs – the selection is striking and informative. I'm confident it will generate further engagements with the magazine itself, its design, contents and function.

(Jo Melvin interviewed by
Keren Goldberg)

OLA VASILJEVA: UNIVERSITY

(9) GALERIE ANTOINE LEVI
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75020 Paris, France
antoinelevi.fr

JENNIFER TEETS *Could you tell me about the Antiuniversity of London and the Institute of Phenomenological Studies?*

OLA VASILJEVA These were somewhat revolutionary experiments into self-organized education which took place in the late '60's in London. They were founded by artists, thinkers, psychologists, and psychiatrists who believed in and craved a drastic change to the traditional education system. The Antiuniversity brought under one roof a number of ideas that would not be permitted or accessible through traditional establishments. They proposed very unorthodox courses and made them accessible to anyone interested, including farmers, students, professors, and madmen. There was a strong absence of hierarchy. The newcomers were encouraged to enroll as teachers only, not as a students. As the founders themselves stated, "The Antiuniversity of London was founded as an outpost in the struggle for liberation from an oppressive civilization." The Institute of Phenomenological Studies, on the other hand, was founded by a group of radical existential psychiatrists whose ideas were mainly based on a critique of society's inhumanity and the repressive functioning of civilization. These were short-lived experiments, yet their ideas were nevertheless somewhat contagious and inspired new approaches in both psychiatry and education.

JT *How does The Oceans Academy of Arts (OAOA), your collective, configure itself within the legacy of these short-lived experiments and your solo show "University", currently on display at Antoine Levi gallery in Paris?*

OV I am fascinated by the idea of such anti-education systems because they involved

a very old-fashioned idea of school, actually. The earliest definition of school was "leisure," not in the sense of inactivity, but in the sense of intellectual development outside of productive labor and not directed to exploitation.

The other reason for my admiration of such movements is the fundamental idea of rising up against the falsity of old connections, accepted rules and rationality in general, whether it's in society, education, psychiatry, knowledge or language. Latham, one of the members of the Antiuniversity of London, introduced this wonderful term "anti-know", which was addressing a traditional learning process in a critical tone. Latham's ideas of un-learning run close to the ideas of the Russian OBERIU poets and their term "zaum", which also praises nonsense above logic: un-knowing, un-learning, dismemberment in language and logic, the disconnectedness of the world and the dismemberment of time. Both zaum and anti-know, though poetically charged, strike a political note; both were used partly to underline disobedience to social and political systems.

My approach for "University" at Antoine Levi was to somehow wed together these two ideas.

JT Knowing a little about the Antiuniversity through John Latham's participation in 1968 and having seen your show at 1646 in The Hague years ago with work by OAOA, I can see some affinity for fictional institutions that present themselves as real; or perhaps it is in fact the opposite?

OV OAOA was born in part out of a rebellion similar to the one that gave birth to the anti-universities. OAOA is more curious as such a platform within the context of art practice. The body of OAOA is perhaps more elusive, less organized and definitely more fictional.

JT Could you share some of the quotes culled from the manifestos of experimental schools, and are these visible in the silkscreen works in the exhibition?

OV The quotes come from both sources, such as a poem by Lipavsky about the pseudo-mystical and self-sufficient realm of the chess game, which in the end ideally remains mentally inaccessible. And other fragments come from manifestos of the Institute of Phenomenological Studies: "We seek a maximal clarification of our field of experience aside from those preconceptual schemata that would be imposed on us by certain rigid systems of knowledge."

JT Who is the cartoonish, chalkboard-sketched man that appears to be plummeting from the heights of a building? Is he an academic himself?

OV He is one of the Ignorant Scholars!

JT There are a couple of things I find fascinating in this exhibition: one is your use of humor as a tool for the critique of pedagogic systems, and the other is the live, impromptu nature of the staging. What drives you to sketch staged, fantastical pedagogies? I have noticed that these staged scenarios fold into one another from exhibition to exhibition over the last couple of years.

OV My approach is neither strictly analytical of these themes, nor only visual, I love to play with both. And I love staging everything! Staging a school that stages an anti-school, where mischievous characters appear and disappear. And I guess I see my work not as a finished statement but rather as series of events, where as in Lipavsky's chess game, the staging ideally remains if not inaccessible, then at least questionable.

JT Will the same unfolding happen within your solo exhibition at BOZAR Brussels, titled "The Limp of a Letter"?

OV "The Limp of a Letter" stems from the same idea of language dismemberment and aphasia in thoughts. The visual staging mutates each time from installation to installation. It's like a different umbrella each time. Some signature elements linger longer than others, like these cigarette ashes mixed with gold ...

JT Oh, I hope they keep on burning, Ola, good luck!

(Ola Vasiljeva interviewed by Jennifer Teets)

WAEL SHAWKY: CABARET CRUSADES

(10) MOMA PS1
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momaps1.org

Exhibitions spend their lives (with the slight exception of the viewing time) as narratives – discussed and debated among friends, with the scattered misinterpretations and misrememberings of those who attended. Mine could start in the basement of a museum in Kassel, or walking through a faux desert inside the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, but in this case, my mind stays stuck on the story being told rather than the one I'm telling. In "Cabaret Crusades", Wael Shawky's first solo exhibition in an American Museum, Shawky presents three films (*The Horror Show Files*, 2010, *The Path to Cairo*, 2012, and the premiere of *The Secrets of Karbala*) from a series executed over five years of research and inquiry into the misrepresentation of the famous era of religious warfare that spanned from 1000 to 1200 AD. It's a story familiar to us from pop culture and grade school, disrupted by glimpses into ulterior motives. Inspired by Lebanese historian Amin Maalouf's *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, Shawky actively combats and complicates our understanding of one of history's defining East-West clashes.

However, Shawky's oeuvre does not stop here, as his storytelling relies as much on format as it does on content. Throughout his career, he has explicitly fought against his own character's reliability, filtering his narratives through children, marionettes, or others who immediately connote a failure to understand the language they appear to speak. The marionettes featured in the three films at PS1 appear to be unreliable narrators or actors. The films veer at times towards a reading in which the viewer sees them as parody or humor. What these players begin to enact is instead the absurdity of history, positing it as something controlled by another agent through a system as simple as the strings of a puppet. It is malleable, though more typically amorphous, subject to a number of factors, and despite centuries of speakers, it remains at its core, arguable. Shawky's retelling (modeled after Maalouf's own readings) quickly posits itself as something equally familiar – the story of a violence that results from the desire for fame and fortune. It manifests as modern entertainment, Shawky's films rendered as digestible as a guilty pleasure, as the Arab rulers depicted combat each other just as much as their Christian counterparts, if not more so.

The ease of a speaker's manipulation in these films is not an accident – the marionettes are, as in previous exhibitions of this series, displayed in a separate space in glass vitrines. For *Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show File*, 2010, Shawky borrowed 200-year-old cast-glass figures from a private Italian collection. For the films following, these have instead been designed and handmade explicitly for the purpose of the film, adding layers to the complexity of their own mise-en-scène. As a viewer observes their forms, their movable parts, and most of all, their strings, what quickly becomes apparent is their flexibility. They're easily manipulated to suit the story at hand, as most figurines in history are – it's easy to succumb to a dominant narrative. It is this that leads viewers to adjust and question their own notions of history, as well as their relationship to stories being told.

(Text by Alex Philip Fitzgerald)

9. Ola Vasiljeva, "University", installation view, Galerie Antoine Levi, Paris, 2015.
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Antoine Levi, Paris. Photo: Claire Dorn

10. Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades (The Path to Cairo)*, 2012