BIG MINIS- CRISIS FETISHES

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BigMinis  
Fetishes of crisis

Featuring works by

- Julieta Aranda
- Carl Andre
- Dan Attoe
- Gianfranco Baruchello
- Marcel Broodthaers
- Maurizio Cattelan
- Martin Creed
- William Daniels
- Marcel Duchamp
- Gabi Dzuba
- Michaela Eichwald
- Cédric Eisenring
- Michael Fullerton
- John Giorno
- Ellen Gronemeyer
- David Hammons
- Richard Hawkins
- Karl Holmqvist
- David Hominal
- Jonathan Horowitz
- Dean Hughes
- Des Hughes
- Patrick Jackson
- Paul Johnson
- Thomas Juliet
- Dorota Jurczak
- Edward Kay
- Klat
- John Kleckner
- Terence Koh
- Elad Lassry
- Laurent Le Deunff
- Delaine Le Bas
- Manuela Leinhoss
- Kalup Linzy
- Anissa Mack
- Daniel McDonald
- Roberto Matta
- Jason Meadows
- Alan Michael
- John Miller
- Futoshi Miyagi
- Katy Moran
- Jeanette Mundt
- David Musgrave
- Philip Newcombe
- Rupert Norfolk
- Yoko Ono
- Catherine Opie
- Christopher Orr
- Richard Pettibone
- Francis Picabia
- Pablo Picasso
- Paola Pivi
- Aida Ruílova
- Ed Ruscha
- Pamela Rosenkranz
- Laurie Simmons
- Jim Shaw
- Glenn Sorensen
- Martin Soto Climent
- Tomoaki Suzuki
- Akiko & Masako Takada
- Yves Tanguy
- Tetrpak
- Wolfgang Tillmans
- Jacques Vaché
- Erika Verzutti
- Richard Wathen
- Eric Wesley
- Maximilian Zentz Zlomovitz

special: Grace Jones

Press Kit

CAPC  
musée d’art contemporain  
de Bordeaux
Are the mini and smallness a portent of crisis, or a reflection, a consequence thereof? Might they also be an effective and off-kilter response to THE crisis? With the exhibition Big Minis, the CAPC is idea to explore the special fascination wielded by the “scaled-down” object in a period of recession. While miniaturization may conjure up lower costs, less time, and less space, the production of the mini is, for its part, strategic. The mini resists reduction and scaling-down. It exists because of its small size. A cheeky smallness which reveals, in the current economic and cultural context, some of the capitalist pathologies in which the mini originates, and to which it responds. Is the mini a regulatory object?

The exhibition Big Minis brings together works by some 50 contemporary artists, on loan from public collections in France and abroad, private foundations and collections, galleries, and the artists themselves. The idea, which originates in the present-day economic state of affairs, unfolds against a backdrop of recession, and questions, in particular, the notion of “fetishes of crisis.”

It is wrongly thought that in the mini, everything is proportionately scaled down: so the same might apply to the idea behind it, and its impact. Experience shows the opposite, however. The mini endures and marks. It apparently even withstands crisis. This exhibition is conceived with this in mind. In order to make the idea dialectical and spicy, large works informed by mini-ideas are also on view, thus indicating that the impact of an idea conveyed by an object is not proportionate to the latter’s size. Otherwise put, the large works are far from having a monopoly on “big” ideas and small ideas are not necessarily proportionate to the size of the objects conveying them.

The minis are not aware of the canons of the day and age. One-off mini-artworks, if they may be so pigeonholed, are as if driven by life. It does not matter much if they are beautiful or ugly. Their dimensions and materials, as well as their technical and conceptual prowess makes them enviable and engaging, and stimulating for eye and mind alike. They surprise and impose themselves. Nothing can be taken away from them. Their impact goes so far as to arouse the kleptomania dormant in us.

Unlike the “king size,” the mini must be seen up close. It presupposes a focus, whence the grip it has on the sphere of desire. At the same time, the small creates the void around it, because in order to be seen, it needs more space. It thus takes up more room than its size might have us suppose, whence its capacity to become a fetish. Its relationship with the environment (the city for cars, the exhibition venue for art objects, the pocket for tamagotchi…) and with us thus becomes political.

After incarnating the object boom of the industrialized countries, when the shortening of skirts and compacting of vehicles had taken on the dimension of a social phenomenon, creating the vogue for the word “mini” in the West, the compact object is gauged today by the yardstick of the cute (symptomatic, superfluous, polished object), the disquieting (fetichized, serial, cult object) and the resistant (individualistic, Pear to Pear, critical object). We hate to love it and we love to hate it. We want it in secret and without ever having seen it enough. The contemporary mini has sex appeal.

Exhibition Curator: Alexis Vaillant, Chief Curator
CAPC, museum of contemporary art, Bordeaux
Jason Meadows
Hamburger Tower, 2008
Painting and spray paint on canvas
182 x 61 cm
Courtesy Convi-Mora, London
Photo Marcus Leith

Paul Johnson
Head, 2010
Paper mache
19 x 14 x 12 cm
Courtesy Ancient & Modern, London

Dorota Jurczak
Smierszczac Balasem, 2007
Smelly turd
Painted bronze
19.5 x 10.5 x 9 cm
Courtesy Convi-Mora, London
Photo Marcus Leith

Karl Holmqvist
Untitled (jokepainting), 2006
Silkscreen on canvas
70 x 100 cm
Courtesy Galerie Giti Nourbakhsh, Berlin
Photo Matthias Kolb
Gabi Dziuba
Jewels, 2009
Variable dimensions
Courtesy Giti Nourbakhsh, Berlin
Photo Thomas Gaska

Anissa Mack
Untitled (Pumpkin), 2007
Painted bronze and magazines
22.8 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm
Courtesy Laurel Gitlen / Small A Projects, New York

Eric Wesley
Lexus, 2009 (detail)
Printed decal on die cast model
8 x 30 x 13 cm
Courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Jonathan Horowitz
The Governor, 2003 (detail)
Inkjet prints
7 parts each 28.5 x 22.5 x 2.5 cm
Collection Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst Zürich
Photos A. Burger, Zürich
Michael Fullerton  
*Rupert Murdoch’s Third Wife* (Wendy Deng), 2007  
Oil on linen  
60 x 45 cm  
Peter Peri Collection, London  
Courtesy the artist and Carl Freedman Gallery, London  
Photo Andy Keate

Daniel McDonald  
Forced To Sell Artwork From Personal Collection In Order To Offset Living Expenses / Economic Collapse Limits Resale Opportunities (Gizmo), 2008  
Mixed media  
31.75 x 8.9 cm  
Josef della Nobbe Collection, Bolzano  
Courtesy of GaGA, Mexico City  
Photo Wiley Hoard

Philip Newcombe  
Queen Bitch, 2010  
Cigarette stub, tape  
Courtesy the artist, London

Dean Hughes  
Boxes, 2008  
Backing card  
16 x 15 x 6 cm  
Maria Stenfors Collection, London  
Courtesy the artist, Edinburgh

Akiko & Masako Takada  
Shopping Bag, 2008  
Package of gum  
3.4 x 2.3 x 1 cm  
Courtesy of the artists, Tokyo
Des Hughes
Angry Pins, 1999
Resin, brass powder, brass wire
5 x 0.5 x 0.5 cm
Courtesy Ancient & Modern, London

Michaela Eichwald
Hand Bedeutungsproduzent, 2010
Lentils, thermometer, needles, comb, chalk, Chinese noodles, potato sprouts and elastic in resin, metal, lacquer
30 x 10 x 12 cm
Courtesy Vilma Gold, London

Glenn Sorensen
A Treat, 2008
Oil on canvas
19 x 31 cm
Courtesy Convi-Mora, London
Photo Marcus Leith

Richard Wathen
Llaregub, 2009
Oil on linen on aluminium
225 x 180 cm
Private collection, London
Courtesy Max Wigram, London

Richard Pettibone
Frank Stella Yagd II, 1968-69
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 15 cm
Private collection, Paris
Photo Aurelien Mole
Complaining is a very important form of pleasure
Aaron Schuster in conversation with Maša Ogrizek

M.O.: The main aim of psychiatry is to cure, to restore mental health, “normality”. Today it is mainly done with pills, which has become a big business.
A.S.: The pharmaceutical industry actively shapes our understanding of mental illness and creates new clinical categories based on what chemicals are discovered. Today the questions of mentally illness, the cure, and pharmaceutical research are all merged into one. Because of the explosion of antidepressant drugs everybody discovered that they are more or less depressed. But I disagree that mental illnesses are simply invented out of nothing. Some hardcore cultural constructionists would say these categories are meaningless and they are created as means of social control and profit making. This is misguided, but it’s clear that our understanding of mental illness is greatly influenced by the drugs that are available and marketed to treat it.

At first it seems that as a society we have become more tolerant of mental illness. But in fact we recognise and accept mental illness only in order to cure it. So in a way while the line between normality and mental illness is becoming more blurred, at the same time it is strengthened.
I agree. There’s a funny coincidence here of two seemingly opposed positions. One is the Freudian idea that everybody is ill, and that madness isn’t something you can simply eradicate, but must learn to live with one way or another. And the other is that we have all these new therapies, especially pills, for eliminating our problems. So, indeed, we have become obsessed as a culture with tracking down all sorts of different pathologies – sleep disorders, depression, sexual dysfunction, everything you can think of.

We just recognise our problems in order to eliminate them…
Not even eliminate. A “normal” person would be useless as a consumer. The point of these drug therapies is to create an anxiety – I don’t sleep eight hours every night, so maybe I should take a pill, when probably five hours would be perfectly O.K. So these campaigns generate an anxiety and a new need, which is what capitalism always does – create new desires.

… and strengthen norms.
Of course if you were able to list what these norms are and somebody would be able to achieve them, this would be a pure nightmare – sleeping eight hours a night, always in a good mood, always having an erection … Terrible!

As you mentioned Freud himself denied the distinction between health and mental illness.
Freud’s argument that there is a continuity between normality and pathology is really radical, because it undermines the idea that there is some kind of a fixed norm of health. And indeed, from the psychoanalytic perspective, we are all more or less sick, we can all identify with neurosis and even psychosis to a certain extent. On the other hand, the way that culture has exploited this idea is highly ironic: if we are all ill, that means that we must constantly be in therapy, working on ourselves, getting better. And there are plenty of industries that are happy to minister to our various ticks and mental problems… So culture has perverted the original radical insight into an ideal of perpetual therapy, a problem already present in Freud.

Now we have the Oprah Winfrey phenomenon, and the whole discourse and culture of self-help.
Let’s take the specific case of depression. It took over from earlier clinical categories like neurosis or hysteria in the 80’s. Today everybody is depressed or at least a bit depressed. And there is a serious side to that. It’s not simply that it’s a purely socially constructed disease, there is, let us say, a real depression. For psychoanalysis, depression is a narcissistic illness, because it means that you are stuck with yourself, obsessed by yourself, but at the same time—and this is the terrible thing—the self is totally empty. Nothing really interests you, you can’t engage in any activity, maybe the world still vaguely tempts you but you can’t manage to escape this stupid self of yours that has become totally uninteresting and persecutes you with its unending boredom. Now, if you look at pop-culture, all it does is talk about the self incessantly. Everything, from art to life to politics, is reduced to expressions or reflections of the self. And of course we end up creating a totally boring and depressed culture. In the end, the self is really uninteresting. You are only happy in life when you forget yourself. A philosopher in the library is a perfect image of happiness: just lost in his meditations, pouring through a stack of books. But people are constantly thinking about themselves, talking about themselves, and in general wanting to be a self—this is the model of depression.

In one of your texts you mentioned hypochondria as a form of pleasure. Is this in a way connected with this phenomenon of self-involvement?
What it is interesting in hypochondria is that it is a very serious, painful experience. But there is a specific pleasure in hypochondria, that the person loses himself in complaining about it. The real pleasure of the hypochondriac is explaining to someone in great detail all the little things going on in his body, the different aches and so on. In fact, the other person doesn’t even have to say anything, he or she just has to be present. This happens quite frequently, by the way, in totally different contexts. Often you need the presence of someone in order to be able to ‘talk to yourself’, because it is impossible to do this in a direct way. You have to go through the detour of the other, to address another person, but this appeal is a kind of fiction. In such circumstances, the other is definitely not called on to respond; they should basically just shut up.
I realize this is a totally unromantic thing to say – but this almost sounds like a formula for good relationships. Sometimes you just have to pretend that you are listening…
Hypocrisy – like pretending to listen - is a very important aspect of our social relationships, without it we wouldn’t be able to get along at all. People are always saying that you have to listen to the other; to try to understand the other. I think that the model of good relationships is actually interlinking monologues; I think
that there is no real dialogue in life at all. I mean, it is not that you really listen and truly respond to what the other person says. If you have good luck you and your partner deliver your monologues and they manage to accidentally intersect at certain points. That’s magical. You have to be quite rational to accept this idea, which is not very romantic. But it is romantic. Freud had a very nice definition of love – that you have mutually compatible symptoms. So what would be the couple of two hypochondriacs be like? It would be a marvellous couple. They would talk endlessly about their own illnesses, a perfect couple. Complaining is a very important form of pleasure which has been devalued by Christian culture, especially Protestant culture. They completely misunderstood the necessity of complaining to be happy. Put otherwise, the problem of being happy is that you have nothing to complain about and therefore you are not happy anymore.

Do you agree that there is a mutual relation between a specific form of mental illness and a broader historical, cultural frame? There is always something either too right or too wrong with the human mind, which necessarily leads to malfunctions and breakdowns of all kinds. But the specific forms these pathologies take are always determined in a historical moment by culture. They receive a kind of cultural coloration. There is a madness intrinsic to the species, I mean on a biological level, but this madness is also always symbolically articulated. You could say that mental illness is both natural and artificial.

Is there a pathology that is specific to our culture? There is a kind of socially mandatory depression nowadays, which consists in the imperative to express yourself and especially how you feel. But I don’t know how I feel. In fact, nobody knows how they really feel. This is what is repressed in contemporary culture, which has made feelings the very measure of personal authenticity. Concepts are complicated, speech is ambiguous, words can mislead, but the one thing that is absolutely certain are feelings. That’s the big lie today. Feelings are totally amorphous and deceptive; we don’t really know what they are, but we talk about them a lot, so they must exist, right?

In your lecture you mentioned that you don’t agree with Deleuze who makes a connection between capitalism and patriarchy. You claimed that the opposite is true: capitalism itself had undermined patriarchy. There used to be this idea that capitalism needs a stable family form in order to reproduce itself, that it ends up reaffirming strict divisions between mother, father, and child. Now this is not true. Capitalism is incredibly perverse and is happy to break apart the family like any other social structure in order to create new consumers. Capitalism reinforces de-oedipalization. What do we have today? Supposedly the strong father figure has disappeared and now we have to negotiate everything. We have shifted from a society based on authority to one based on constant negotiation. This undoubtedly constitutes a kind of progress, but it also creates new problems and anxieties. The open, liberal, tolerant institution is another kind of monster. That explains the kind of nostalgia for “good old totalitarianism”? Yes. Even Obama is a good example of that. He has this very liberal attitude of negotiation, of listening to other people’s voices, of including as many people as possible in the coalition, we even have to listen to stupid Republicans... And really what the left was dreaming about was a left fascist, someone who would just make decrees and fix Bush’s mess. So there is this nostalgia for a real authority figure.

You chose pleasure as a topic for your PhD dissertation, which was entitled The Trouble With Pleasure: Philosophy and Psychoanalysis. Why? I was very interested in – and I didn’t think that had been done before – a real philosophical analysis of the concept of pleasure and the history of it. I started at the end, as it were, by rereading Freud. When Freud speaks about Lust he actually has multiple definitions of it, which change throughout his career and even contradict one another. I set about untangling the different ideas of pleasure in Freud’s work, and I came to see his theory as recapitulating, implicitly, many of the different concepts of pleasure and debates about it in the history of philosophy. I eventually went back to Plato and Aristotle and made my way through the tradition.

And you enjoyed this work? Tremendously. Too much, in fact. It took me many years to finish my PhD and, of course, I was very sad when it was done, since the pleasure came to an end. In everyday life the term pleasure is usually associated with hedonism as opposed to asceticism. All advertisements are based on the command: Enjoy! We have to be careful. Advertising isn’t about enjoyment, it’s about images of enjoyment, which is something else. Advertising is perverse in a very precise sense: namely, that the idea of enjoyment becomes more important than enjoyment itself and in a way becomes another source of pleasure – contemplating enjoyment. That is a very interesting thing about human desire – we prefer to consume images of pleasure than actually experience it, and that is the basis of advertising, its ‘higher’ form of pleasure.

This makes me think of a joke about a guy who slept with a beautiful woman on a desert island and was very unhappy, because he had nobody he could brag to. The real pleasure is talking about the sex afterwards, not doing it. When people talk about pleasure, in philosophy too, of course everyone is for it: who doesn’t like pleasure?! It’s sexy. But the truth of the matter is that while people like the idea of pleasure, pleasure itself is much less attractive.

Why is that? Because pleasure means self-loss, loss of self-control. You don’t know where it’s going to go, you’re not directing things anymore. And it’s precisely this disappearance of the self that can create anxiety. This anxiety lies at the core of perversion. Typically, people associate perversion with dirtiness, excitement, breaking taboos, etc. But in a more technical sense, perverts are actually exceptionally immaculate and theoretically-minded people. The basic pervert fantasy is to watch yourself enjoying, that is, to be present as a subject at the very moment when you should ‘let yourself go’, disappear into the flow of activity. What a pervert cannot stand is the impersonal aspect of enjoyment, the temporary loss of self in the play of anonymous drives and organs that defines ‘normal’ sexual pleasure. They want to direct things, to be in control, even their own submission is something they arrange and direct.

You named the present form of pleasure “antisepic hedonism”. There is a socially acceptable form of hedonism, a kind of “healthy” hedonism. Everyone still talks about May ’68, this moment of breaking taboos, free love, sexual revolution, political radicalism; it is considered a high point of liberation – jouissez sans entraves! - that was later repressed or normalized. But the period that in
my opinion really embodies pleasure for us is not the
late but the early sixties. This was the time when taboos
were still in force and people knew how to keep secrets
– before confessionalized culture. Constant smoking
and drinking and sexual harassment… mixed together
with a vague consciousness that it was all about to
radically change, that the world was coming to an end.
There is a kind of a reverse Biblical movement from
the sixties to today. Instead of falling from the Garden
of Eden into sin, we were in sin and now we have
fallen into the Garden of Eden and we are not so
happy about it.
The belief is still alive that the political “right” is
conservative, it represses pleasure, and “the left”
is more liberated, it enjoys.
It’s a strong cliché that the political right represses
pleasure, especially bodily pleasure, and the left stands
for its liberation. Of course there’s a point to this.
Repression is responsible for all the well known sexual
scandals that plague the Church or the Republican
party in the US: pedophile priests and homophobic
politicians frequenting male prostitutes are not mere
accidents, but structural symptoms. However, I think
it’s important to emphasize, against a certain sixties
radicalism, that pleasure is not per se politically
progressive. There is nothing intrinsically leftist about
pleasure. Indeed, if you look around the opposite is
more true. If anybody today is on the side of pleasure
it’s definitely the far right. They are fulfilling their
desires, having loads of populist fun. The left is largely
paralyzed in the face of this reactionary enjoyment.

Have the cultural forms of pleasure, in your
opinion, significantly changed throughout history?
Lacan famously complained that psychoanalysis never
managed to invent a new perversion. Related to this,
there is an interesting essay by Aldous Huxley from the
1930s titled Wanted: A New Pleasure. His argument is
that pleasure hasn’t changed at all since Roman or
Greek times, or even earlier. Across history, we have
always experienced exactly the same pleasure, the
only thing that’s changed is its culture shapes or forms;
television instead of coliseum games, for example.
Huxley speculates that the only real possibility for a
pleasure revolution would be the invention of a
wonder drug with no side effects: ecstasy without the
 crash. I think that what’s happening today in the
neurosciences would really fascinate Huxley, the
possibility of directly inducing pleasure through neuro-
electrical stimulation. Instead of the same pleasure
being articulated in different cultural shapes, here we
confront the possibility of pleasure without any culture
shape whatsoever. Just mindless ecstasy, pure brain
pleasure.

Is there an asymmetry between the way man and
woman enjoy?
Men are convinced that men and women enjoy in
completely different ways and women are not
interested in the question at all.
Maybe the reason is that the men are scared that
their pleasure is smaller – remember the myth of
Tiresias who said that if sexual pleasure were
divided into ten parts, one is for the man, and nine
for the woman.
Man is concerned with pleasure in a very phallic way:
about the size, is it bigger or smaller, who enjoys more,
can I control its appearance, am I the cause, etc. These
are typical male obsessions. Women think it’s stupid
and are mostly laughing at us about it.
And what would be in your opinion the highest
form of pleasure?
Philosophy is the best pleasure. Sitting in the library
reading all the time is the ultimate dream.

Is this your subjective preference or do you mean
that it is true in general?
The sad thing is that today, in modern times, I would
have to say it’s subjective, but in Greek times it was
absolutely objective. Philosophical pleasure was the
highest pleasure, and it was not a personal preference,
it was inscribed in Being itself, the very structure of the
cosmos. The best philosophical theology ever
invented was Aristotle’s. God is thinking all the time
and enjoys tremendously and all the other beings in
the universe are so impressed with this that they just
circle around him. It’s completely surreal! This is my
favourite theology.
Isn’t it a bit autistic?
Yes it is. But is. But pleasure is autistic. It’s not that you
can’t share pleasure; indeed many pleasures are very
social and involve other people. But there is always a
crucial moment when pleasure completely
disconnects you from yourself, from the other, from
the world, from everything.

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pp. 10-12)
Events

A tiny incision in reality.
by Corinne Atlan, Haiku master and translator from the japanese
December 1, 2010, 7 p.m.
Ground-floor, inside the BigMinis exhibition

Are the minis swashbuckler objects?
by Claire Mouliène, art critic at Inrocks
January 19, 2011, 7 p.m.
CAPC conference hall

Screening of Laurie Simmons’ cult movie
February 2, 2011, 7 p.m.
Featuring Meryl Streep, Adam Guettel, Tony Nation & the nervous puppets
Courtesy Salon 94, New York
CAPC conference hall

Publication

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Press contacts

• Claudine Colin Communication / Sandrine Mahaut
  Sandrine Mahaut
  sandrine@claudinecolin.com
  Tél. +33 (0)1 42 72 60 01
• Mairie de Bordeaux
  direction de la Communication, service de presse
  Tel. +33 (0)5 56 10 20 46
• CAPC musée d’art contemporain
  François Guilmethaudeau
  f.guilmethaudeau@mairie-bordeaux.fr
  capc-com@mairie-bordeaux.fr
  Tél. +33 (0)5 56 00 81 70

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November 19, 2010/February 27, 2011
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Anarchivies fragmentaires et énigmatiques
Until April 3, 2011

CAPC
musée d’art contemporain
Entrepôt Lainé, 7, rue Ferrère
F-33000 Bordeaux
Tel. +33 (0)5 56 00 81 50
Fax. +33 (0)5 56 44 12 07
capc@mairie-bordeaux.fr
www.rosab.net
www.capc-bordeaux.fr

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arc en rêve centre d’architecture
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front page
David Musgrave
Animal, 1998
Mixed media
22 x 14 x 3 cm
Courtesy greengrassi, London. Photo: Marcus Leith

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