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CRITICS' PICKS



PAUL RAMÍREZ JONAS

"Ramírez Jonas is one of many artists who have importantly stretched or inverted the parameters of public art." ... READ ON

MARK LECKEY

"Leckey pays extra attention to the underlying processes that enable things to come alive." ... READ ON

NASREEN MOHAMED

"This large-scale retrospective stands out among a trio of shows the museum has ambitiously organized to explore links among artwork by women of South Asian descent over the last century." ... READ ON

Paul Ramírez Jonas

KOENIG & CLINTON
459 West 19th Street
October 17–December 7

In case you find yourself curious, here are the identities of Paul Ramírez Jonas's five "Ventriloquists," 2013, the cork facsimiles of classical busts on pedestals at the center of his exhibition "Aggregate": Sophocles, Freud, Lenin, Obama, Darwin. With time, you'd probably recognize them yourself—certain beards, and ears, stick out—but not easily. These famous visages are here deliberately blurred, and literally effaced. Ramírez Jonas is interested less in public figures than in *publics*—not audiences, crowds, masses, or populations, not the reader or the viewer, but publics. Publics, argues theorist Michael Warner, are peculiar constructions: a set of individuals, mostly strangers, provisionally held together by the mere act of paying attention to the same text, a social reality that's also always an imaginary projection. This is a more robust concept of "public" than its default definition in art-world chatter, which simplistically equates publicness with being sited outdoors.

Ramírez Jonas is one of many artists who have importantly stretched or inverted the parameters of public art, as in his 2010 collaboration with Creative Time, "Key to the City." He uses gallery exhibitions like this one to further test what a "public" might be. For instance, a public is sometimes a concrete assembly corralled into a designated area. In a series of multipanel drawings, Ramírez Jonas overlays the floor plans and seating charts of several such spaces: a sports arena atop a theater atop a courtroom. Alternately, Jürgen Habermas portrays a public sustained by circulating texts and eddies of debate in coffeehouses and the like. This ghostly public is conjured by the "Ventriloquist" sculptures. Lined entirely with cork, they're three-dimensional bulletin boards; thumbtacks are available for posting scraps and notices—an act Ramírez Jonas describes as "publishing."

However, bulletin-board "posting" long ago migrated into Internet lingo. "Aggregate" leaves certain timely questions largely unanswered: How do publics coalesce around a digital commons? Or, how must we rethink public assembly in the wake of recent protest actions where the seating chart was drawn by bodies in the street?



Paul Ramírez Jonas, *Ventriloquist V*, 2013, cork, push pins, notes contributed by the public, 69 3/4 x 18 1/8 x 18 1/8".