

Michelle Jaffé creates installations of sculpture, sound and performative video, immersing people in a participatory experience that engages their sensory awareness. These encounters offer a moment where a synaptic shift is possible and new neural connections can be made.

Jaffé's work explores how individual psychology and pathology is mirrored and embedded in society, with a view to stimulate conversation for change.

She asks when and where are the borders between terror, abuse and negligence blurred and crossed? Since 2000, her work has engaged with and incorporated armor, both psychic and architectural, culminating in *Wappen Field*. The direct outgrowth of that inquiry is her current focus on the raw emotions, power, and intent that are conveyed and betrayed by the human voice and facial expression in my works *Neural: Cleave* and *Soul Junk*.

Jaffé chooses materials specifically for their ability to convey the concept. A sculptor at her core, her work explores volume and space in such a way that each medium augments the other. Concept is wedded to intuition.

#### SOUL JUNK

*SOUL JUNK* is a 1, 2 or 3-channel video / audio installation that explores raw emotions, power & intent conveyed & betrayed by the human voice & facial expression. In the age of the selfie, *Soul Junk* places people inside a mind at work.

Confessions about family trauma are juxtaposed with observations about the cocksure attitudes of those in power. Narcissistic & patriarchal behavior is probed, exposing the political, economic & ethical landscape of our time, where decisions by power brokers in government or corporations prevail at the expense of individuals, families, & communities.

Spotlight speakers focus sound in a physically disorienting way. Sound is felt viscerally in the body, as well as heard aurally. Videos are projected onto sculptural materials at large scale. The projection exceeds the height & width of the materials, creating a fractured image. This visual & sonic structure amplifies the narrative juxtapositions expressed in the video. Opposing ideas are hurled against one another in rapid fire. Participants compose the work as they navigate the space. Akin to synaptic firing in the brain, new neural pathways are forged. Complexity & not always understanding the narrative is an intention of this work; mimicking the information overload of our times. Where the focused beam of 2 speakers cross over, one hears the narrative of 2 video projections. This complicates & confounds understanding, similar to the way our own minds chatter & process information. Each video is understood more clearly, the further away one stands from the speaker. This gives a macro & micro experience.

*Soul Junk* exposes the limits of personal choice as it intersects with the collective choices made by a society. For example, Voting: a population's choice for government is up against the industrial complex of lobbying, social data mining, influence peddling, media bias, institutionalized

suppression, economic repression & colonization.

How do personal behavior, corporate & national interests, and various forms of terrorism drive politics? How have these forces driven us to the present state of things?

When & where are the borders between terror, abuse & negligence blurred & crossed?

The artist bares her frustration in a range of emotions that fluctuate wildly from playful cynicism to whispering anguish; from a visible sense of disbelief to anger, we witness the frustration of one human trying to make sense of the world we live in & to stimulate a conversation about change. *Soul Junk* is a catalyst for social justice.

WAPPEN FIELD

*Wappen Field* is a sculpture and sound installation comprised of 12 chrome plated steel helmets resembling face guards. Each helmet's dedicated speaker transforms the sculptural installation into an immersive audio environment. Vocal recordings, from seven diverse performers, created for *Wappen Field* by Ayelet Rose Gottlieb, are composed by Michelle Jaffé and spatialized algorithmically by David Reeder in SuperCollider. The visual and sonic configuration explores humanity's inclination to arm, clothe and conceal, exposing the strategies we adopt to belong and protect ourselves from pain or annihilation. Armor is probed as a metaphor for public and private personae. The tribalism and militarism of our current social space is on full display.

The term Wappen, the German word for Coat of Arms, is used for its potential to impart expanded meaning, updated for the twenty first century. It suggests brand, a badge identifying groups such as family, team, tribe and religious order. Shadows of helmets on the floor reflect this emblematic idea, suggesting a logo for a new group or a cartoon action hero. Suspended and spot lit from above, the height and form of the helmet implies the body below.

Wedding sculpture with sound creates a participatory experience where each element forges a sum greater than their individual parts. The installation is a space of visceral possibility, igniting the memory and subjective experience of participants engaging in the work. Visitors perceive sound spatially. Male & female voices are dynamically dispersed throughout the helmets, creating dissonance, rhythms & vortexes of sounds. The vocal configuration explores a range of human emotion. Discord, anguish and cacophony evolve into & out of a primal sense of vulnerability & grace, in a way that imagines the collective unconscious as energy, propelled between impulses of aggression and concord.

Walking into and amongst the helmets, participants may experience the sea of helmets as a field of souls dispossessed of their bodies. For others, it may evoke a graveyard, where we perceive our ancestors and future descendants as one with us in the present. Or some may experience the frontal presentation and the precision of the configuration as a militaristic assault. The helmets evoke armor, which protects and hides us in an attempt to create a border between self and the other. Information and objects are obstructed. Physical and psychic space is guarded, unless the edge is pierced, allowing foreign bodies and ideas to flood in. The boundary of armor asks the question: what is shut in, what is shut out?

*Wappen Field* asks us to consider what we, as human beings, share in common instead of focusing on what divides us. Experiencing the work we may be reminded that while civilization evolves and technology races ahead, the basic tenets of human existence are the same. Humanity appears to be tethered to its limbic brain, pulling us again and again into conflict. This installation is an occasion to imagine the unconscious as energy driven by collective subliminal desires. These proclivities shape societies. Political and economic regimes reflect this rhythm, shuttling through the pendulum of history, between repression and enlightened engagement.

#### Vestment and Cod Variations series

The sculpture exposes and uncovers the body through the visual language of clothing. Clothing is explored as shelter; both psychic and architectural space. How we display and mask the body and our selves is investigated. The signals we send both consciously and subconsciously are examined.

The work presents graphic images of reduced and abstracted forms of male and female outer and undergarments. Planes of aluminum, steel, vinyl and plastic intersect to become volume and form. Line has the precision of drawing. Though absent, the form implies the body. The sculptures act as a locus of distilled images. They are the occasion where complex visual systems of reference and meanings meet and overlap. The encapsulated images reveal primal emotions such as: seduction, power, and it's co-relative slavery, beauty, narcissism, fear, the motivating force of sexuality, the nurture of the young vs. killing of the offspring, and public vs. private persona. In the new series "Cod Variations", the exaggerated line evinces the hubris of a nation, suggesting the Logo, Branded Identity, and caricature of the Cartoon Action Hero.

I explore clothing for its psychological potential to reveal deeper truths. Possessing its own grammar and syntax, clothing is an important component of our elaborate visual terrain. The eye processes visceral information intuitively and experientially, before we become verbally articulate & conscious of what we have apprehended. I am interested in the precognitive state of mind.

My work exhibits a formal clarity and restrained reserve. Reduction of form and economy of means, leads to iconic images. The images pivot on the edge where abstraction and representation meet. The sculptures gain strength from their location at the juncture, where form, reduced to its essential elements, is evocative, suggesting multiple interpretations and connotations. Crystallized and compact, they are psychological containers that reach deep into the collective memory, while referencing design, fashion and cultural cues.

#### Site Specific Installation: Between the Clock and the Bed (January 2008)

Given the opportunity to create a Site Specific work, I chose to listen and respond to the space itself. In an effort to reveal other meanings, I drew attention to architectural elements, the eye would ordinarily dismiss, such as corners, windowsills, edges, columns, and heating ducts. In so doing the depth and volume of the room was elucidated.

In an effort to coax out the sculptural qualities of both the room architecture and the mundane, common everyday materials used, I made seventeen interventions in the space, akin to musical notes, phrases and pauses. The viewer is invited to travel through vignettes of color that punctuate the space. The color palette evolves from fluorescent pink, green, yellow, and orange, to deep purple and bubble gum pink, to the pastels of robins egg blue and teal, which reference and pay homage to both the structure and the Mediterranean blues of Picasso's synthetic cubist paintings, such as "La Baignade" in the Guggenheim collection.

The installation, *Between the Clock and the Bed*, was named after the 1983 Jasper Johns's painting, which I saw when first exhibited at Leo Castelli Gallery. The title made an indelible impression on my mind, as each day I experienced that state of anxiety that comes from being brutally alarmed into awakening each morning. One desperately hangs onto the state of semi consciousness, savoring the warmth of the bed and the dream state, while obligations to the conscious world encroach and finally supersede. It was only during the Edvard Munch exhibition at MoMA a few years back, that I realized Johns, himself, had named his painting after Munch's late self portrait. The artist placed himself in a compressed space between the clock and his patterned bedspread, that has graphically inspired so many of Johns's "cross hatched" marked drawings and paintings. I am an heir to this sense of compressed anxiety.

The "Contain Yourself" bag, casually anchoring the exhibition, speaks to my strategy of how to survive the gastritis one feels living during the Bush Cheney administration. Finally I understood that life is cyclical. This branch of government will collapse under the weight of its own shameful behavior. In the interim, I offer a reserved and covert critique. The first heating ventilation duct is dressed in a Super Man T Shirt/Underwear outfit, (the hubris of a nation), while the second duct comes on like the undies of a hussy fem butt crack. They remind me of the rather vulgar yet common US Navy soldier's saying, "BOHICA", "Bend Over Here It Comes Again."