

Act 2

Prisoners of Love

André Acquart, Emory Douglas, Latifa Echakhch, Mona Hatoum, Glenn Ligon, Abdul Hay Mosallam, The Otolith Group, Lili Reynaud-Dewar, Gil J Wolman, Akram Zaatari, Carole Roussopoulos

Act 2 of the Jean Genet exhibition reflects on the late Genet, who allied himself, in person and in his writing, with revolutionary and anti-colonial struggles in France, America, Africa and the Middle East. His two final plays, The Blacks (1958) and The Screens (1961), were indictments of British and French colonial rule in Ghana and Algeria, and the racist myths that underpinned them.

He renounced his own status as a literary figure in the 1960s, writing only political pieces in support of radical causes in the mainstream, cultural and radical press. Even at their most propagandistic, his writing of the 60s and 70s retains its philosophical and psychological complexity. He experienced key revolutionary events in 1968 – Paris in May and Chicago in August – as euphoric. Chicago in ‘68 was his first encounter with the Black Panther Party. In 1970 he joined them for three months, entering America illegally, as his criminal past made him ineligible for a visa. He campaigned across America for the release of Panther leader, Bobby Seale, denouncing racism in America.

His other great love was the Palestinian fedayeen, young guerrilla soldiers in exile in Jordan, with whom he spent two

years, on and off, from 1970 to 72. His recollections of his time with them formed the basis of his final great work, Prisoner of Love, written in 1984 while dying of throat cancer and listening continuously to Mozart’s Requiem.

Having graduated from France’s prison system and deserted its Foreign Legion, later becoming an outspoken critic of French imperialism, it is fitting that Morocco, a former French colony, is Genet’s final resting place. He is buried there in Larache.



‘Big Man’ Howard At Black Panther Rally and Jean Genet (right). Photographer David Fenton. Getty Images.

Latifa Echakhch

Ironically titled Resolutions, the numbers that appear in charcoal on the gallery walls correspond to unrealised United Nations resolutions on Israel/Palestine, agreed since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli War in 1948. Echakhch lives in Switzerland and Paris and was born in Morocco in 1974.

Abdul Hay Mosallam

Mosallam was born in 1933 in Dawaymeh in Palestine. He left for Jordan as part of the Palestinian exodus in 1948. After fifteen years in the Jordanian air force he joined the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. A self-taught artist, he developed a narrative and symbolic art in support of the Palestinian revolution – much as Emory Douglas did for the Black Panthers. Mosallam: “I believe that art, if correctly made, is no less powerful than the bullet”. One of the works refers to the massacre of Palestinian refugees in Chatila, Beirut, in 1982. Genet was the first European to witness the aftermath of the massacre, which he memorialized in one of his most powerful essays, Four Hours in Chatila. Today Mosallam lives and works in Amman, Jordan.

The Otolith Group

The Otolith Group is a London based artist led collective and organisation founded by Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun in 2002. Nervus Rerum (meaning “the nerve of things”) is set in Jenin refugee camp, the second largest camp in the West Bank. In 2002 its 14,000 occupants were subject to a 13 day Israeli attack by tank, bulldozer and helicopter as part of Operation Defensive Shield during the Second Intifada. It is not known how many died in the massacre. The video simulates the experience of moving through the camp’s cramped, labyrinthine spaces. The soundtrack is derived from Genet’s Prisoner of Love and The Book of Disquiet by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa

Gil J Wolman

Wolman (1929-1995) was a highly experimental artist, poet and filmmaker who founded the Lettrist International – the forerunner of the influential Situationist International – with Guy Debord in the 1950s. His Scotch Art was an unusual printing process involving the lifting of newspaper ink with sticky tape. Many refer to the political events of the day, including the ones shown here on May ‘68 in Paris and the Arab-Israeli War. In contrast, motor racing is included as a reference to one of Genet’s boyfriends, Jacky Maglia.

Emory Douglas

As the Black Panther Party’s Minister of Culture from the party’s formation in 1967 to its demise in the 80s, the “Revolutionary Artist” Douglas was responsible for the Party’s powerful graphic image. He also did the layout of its weekly newspaper, which at its peak had a circulation of several hundred thousand. Douglas knew Genet from his time with the Panthers. Genet accompanied Douglas and David Hilliard, Chief of Staff, at the pre-trial of Bobby Seale, in which Douglas and Hilliard were sentenced to six months for contempt of court (Genet regarded the fact that he wasn’t as blatantly racist). For this exhibition we have realized three of Emory’s powerful posters as murals, one of which appears outside at the south end of our building. Douglas was born in 1943 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today he lives in San Francisco.



Emory Douglas, October 17, 1970. Courtesy of the center for the Study of Political Graphics © DACS 2011



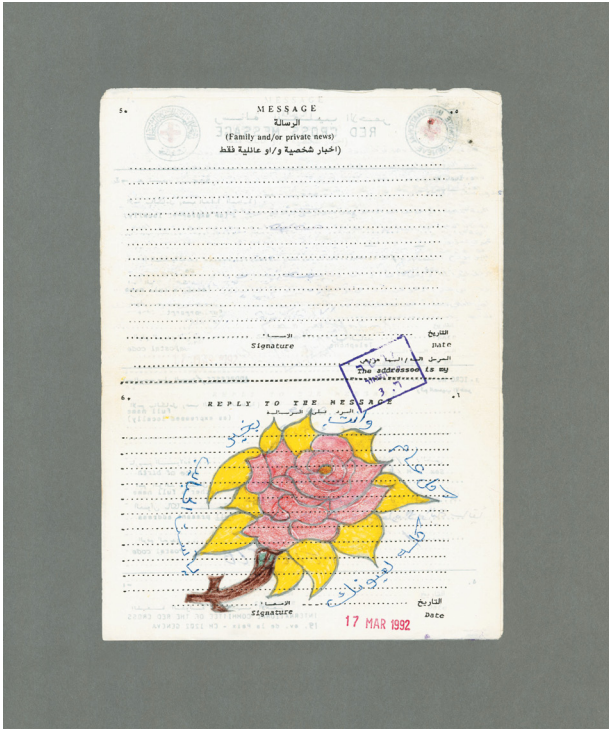
Glenn Ligon, Excerpt, 2008. Courtesy of Private Collection, NY

Glenn Ligon

Ligon’s three works are a conceptual approach to the culture, politics and history of race in America. Untitled (We are the ink...) is an example of one of his well-known text paintings made using the writings of others and executed in oil stick, which he smudges to the point of illegibility. This one refers to a famous passage in Prisoner of Love in which Genet writes “In white America the Blacks are the characters in which history is written. They are the ink that gives the white page a meaning”. Ligon, African-American himself, replaces Genet’s

Akram Zaatari

The letters that appear in this series of photographs were sent by a Palestinian fighter, nicknamed Neruda. He was writing to his mother from a prison in Israel, where he had been held for ten years since the age of 16. Zaatari has erased Neruda’s writing, leaving blank spaces for us to imagine. All that is left is the political prisoner’s tender drawings of flowers, a key motif in Genet’s own early prison literary works. Zaatari was born in Saïda, Lebanon in 1966, and lives in Beirut.



Akram Zaatari, Neruda's Flower, 2007. C-Print. Courtesy the artist and Stein-Samler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg.

Mona Hatoum

Ornamental and inoperative, Hatoum’s ceramic sculptures of hand grenades are strange memorials, evoking the poetry of revolution perhaps, as much as the violence. Hatoum was born 1952 in Beirut, Lebanon, and lives in London.

Carole Roussopoulos

Genet’s statement of support for the Black Panthers was read out on French TV, and filmed by his friend Carole Roussopoulos – a simple act characteristic of Genet’s critique of the framing of the world by the media. The French filmmaker, who died in 2009, went on to document many of the radical movements in France of the 1970s, particularly women’s liberation. She became a filmmaker on Genet’s urging. He persuaded her to buy a Sony portable video camera, the first on the market, telling her it was a “literally revolutionary device that will change your life”. She was the second to buy one. Jean-Luc Godard was the first. Roussopoulos was born in 1945, Lausanne, Switzerland and died in 2009.



Gil J Wolman, Untitled (Mal X) 1968. Collage on canvas. allers pro arte, courtesy galerie Lara Vincy, Paris.

“they” with “we”. He is also known for his text pieces in neon, often painted black. The words “black and live / black and die” in Excerpt are taken from a much larger neon work by the influential American artist, Bruce Nauman. Here, the words also evoke the fate of many leaders of the Black Liberation struggles of the 60s and 70s in America. Untitled (Malcolm X) is derived from an art class for young children Ligon taught. Ligon’s painting of Malcolm X is a direct transcription of one of the children’s colouring exercises - which resulted in the revolutionary leader as a white man. In 1958, Genet’s play The Blacks was written for the black actors company Les Griots. The cast, playing British imperialists, appear in white make-up. Ligon was born in 1960 and lives in New York.

Lili Reynaud-Dewar

Lili Reynaud Dewar (born 1975, living in Paris) has made a major new sculpture for the exhibition. Four walls are made from blankets, perhaps alluding to Palestinian refugees, or Genet as a vagabond. The coloured sections of the walls and the make-up on the casts of raised fists refer to Genet’s ironic, critical treatment of the politics of race. In an interview he remarked “Maybe I’m a black who’s white or pink, but still black”. The books on the walls are about immigrant conditions in France and were referred to by Genet in his essay (On two or three books no one has ever talked about). The walls ‘speak’ passages from Genet’s Prisoner of Love and The Declared Enemy, an anthology of his political writing, read by singer Sabisha Friedberg, who studied philosophy with Angela Davis. The selection was made in collaboration with poet Pierre Giquel.

Act 1

Marc Camille Chaimowicz

Jean Genet... The Courtesy of Objects

featuring **Alberto Giacometti**
and Tariq Alvi, Lukas Duwenhögger,
Mathilde Rachet, Wolfgang Tillmans

Marc Camille Chaimowicz was born in Post-War Paris – the Paris of Jean Genet, Alberto Giacometti and Jean Cocteau. He emerged in the London art scene in the early 70s. Symbolic of an individual’s private, imaginary realm, the domestic interior is important in his work. Objects are invested with personality – and erotic charge. Furniture implies the body or presence of its owner, and is connected to desire.



Galleries 3 & 4
Marc Camille Chaimowicz: Coffees (detail), 2008.
Courtesy Cabinet London and the Artist

Marc Camille Chaimowicz traces the narrative of The Maids in a highly stylised manner, using theatricality and role-play. A new film partly shot in a chateau in Burgundy - records a fictional casting for The Maids. Three female protagonists swap roles, echoing the film’s complex and provocative power play. A prop and wardrobe room is a space for reverie, while a short surrealist-like film by Mathilde Rachet explores erotic fantasies of equality and emancipation.

Works by guest artists Lukas Duwenhögger, Tariq Alvi and Wolfgang Tillmans portray young men. Perhaps they allude to Genet’s real life friends and lovers, who included prisoners, the racing driver Jacky Maglia, the French resistance fighter Jean Decarnin and the acrobat Abdallah Bentaga. Furniture made by Diego Giacometti, Alberto’s brother, acts as a bridge between Giacometti’s sculpture and Chaimowicz’s domestic objects.



Lukas Duwenhögger: The End of the Season, 2007-2008.
Oil on canvas. Courtesy of a Private Collection, London.

- Alberto Giacometti
Born 1901 Borgonovo, Stampa, Switzerland – 1966 Chur, Switzerland

Marc Camille Chaimowicz
Born post-war Paris
Lives and works in London and Burgundy, France

Mathilde Rachet
Born 1988 in Dijon
Lives and works in Dijon

Wolfgang Tillmans
born 1968 in Remscheid, Germany
Lives and works in London and Berlin

Lukas Duwenhögger
born 1956 in Munich, Germany

Tariq Alvi
born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1965
Lives and works in London

His new large scale solo exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary is dedicated to the famous French writer Jean Genet. It includes the work of guest artists like Genet’s friend, the sculptor Alberto Giacometti. He has set up an imaginary space, evoking the interior fantasies that sustained the harsh and turbulent life of the young Genet.



Marc Camille Chaimowicz: Second Quarter, No. 3 2011. Courtesy of Cabinet, London and the artist.



Wolfgang Tillmans
Mark studio
unframed inkjet print
200 x 137 cm - 78 3/4 x 53 7/8 inches, 2011. Image Courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Genet was abandoned by his mother, a prostitute, and brought up by foster parents in rural Burgundy, France. He spent much of his adolescence in a penal colony, for various petty crimes. At 18 Genet joined the French Foreign Legion, where he gained his first experience of the Middle East and North Africa, before deserting. He wandered Europe as a thief, vagabond and prostitute, and spent much of the German occupation of Paris in prison, where he began to write poems and novels explicitly celebrating homoeroticism and criminality, transgressing traditional morality. The prison objects in the exhibition recall his life at that time.

Championed and admired by the famous poet, painter and filmmaker Jean Cocteau, Genet wrote The Maids in 1947. The widely regarded play was inspired by the true story of the infamous Papin sisters, Lea and Christine, who brutally murdered their employer and her daughter in Le Mans, France, in 1933.



Marc Camille Chaimowicz,
Jean Genet... The Courtesy of Objects, installation view 2011.
Photo by Andy Keate. Courtesy of The Gallery at NUCA

In 1954 Genet met Alberto Giacometti who asked him to pose for him. Giacometti made four drawings and three paintings of Genet, as well as a cover for Genet’s play The Balcony. The two men spent much time together, discussing and observing each other. During this time Jean Genet wrote his famous essay The Studio of Alberto Giacometti. Picasso considered it the best essay on art he had ever read.

“For me, the work of Giacometti makes our universe even harder to bear, such is his ability to sweep away what hampers his vision and to reveal what will remain of man when he is stripped of appearances,” Genet wrote.



Logo by Ben Cain



Nottingham Contemporary



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Jean Genet...The Courtesy of Objects is a new commission by Norfolk and Norwich Festival 2011, curated by Lynda Morris. Chaimowicz’s exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary is a significantly expanded sequel to his exhibition at The Gallery at NUCA, Norwich, in April 2011.



Front cover image: Mona Hatoum, Still Life, (detail) 2008-09. Glazed ceramics, wood and painted steel © the artist. Courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler
Logo by Flavia Muller

Exhibition Notes Jean Genet

16 July - 2 October