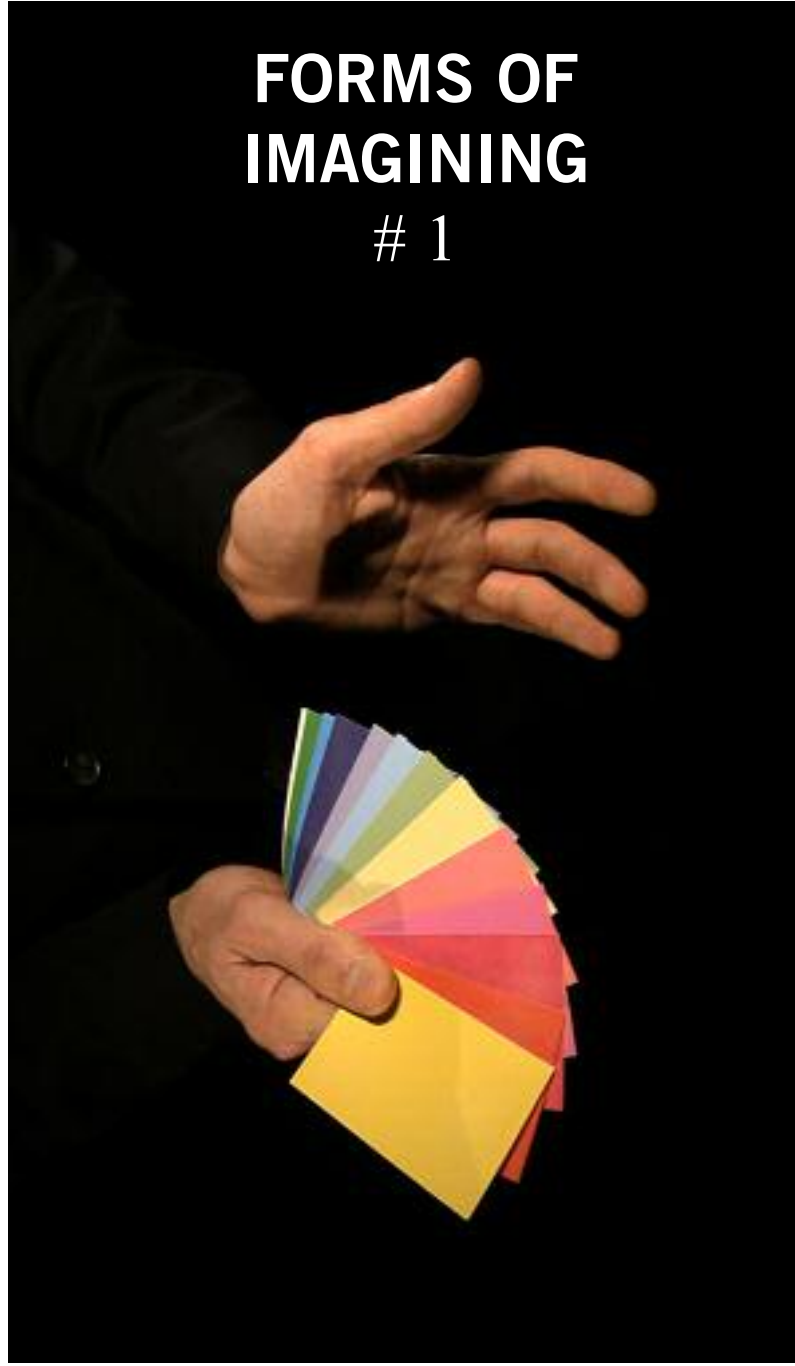


FORMS OF IMAGINING #1 .07



FORMS OF IMAGINING # 1



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*Tessa Giblin, Curator of Visual Arts,
Projects Arts Centre*

Written by Heman Chong, Cosmin Costinas,
Rosemary Heather, Francis McKee, David
Reinfurt, Steve Rushton, Leif Magne Tangen
and Mark Aerial Waller. With screenings of
Dara Birnbaum, Juha van Ingen, Tina Keane,
George Méliès, Anthony Lucas, Otolith
Group, Semiconductor and Samuel Beckett.
Curated by Mai Abu EIDahab.

Rosa Barba, Lonnie van Brummelen &
Siebren de Haan, Jeremiah Day and Aurélien
Froment. Curated by Tessa Giblin.

Gabriel Lester, Charlotte Moth and
Alexandre Singh, with Maria Fusco.
Curated by Tessa Giblin.

Sung Hwan Kim & David Michael
DiGregorio.

Yael Bartana, Ralph Borland, Joost Conijn,
Gintaras Makarevičius and Axel Stockburger.
Curated by Jonathan Carroll.

Lucio Battisti, Ulla von Brandenburg, Paul
Elliman, Mario Garcia Torres, Amy Granat,
Karl Holmqvist, Donghee Koo, Olivia
Plender, with Ina Blom & Aaron Schuster.
Curated by Alexis Vaillant.

Mariana Castillo Deball, L Budd et al.,
Rene Gabri & Ayreen Anastas, Peter Galison
& Robb Moss, Bea McMahon, Garrett
Phelan, Grace Weir, Mick Wilson.
Curated by Tessa Giblin.

Aurélien Froment.

Edited by Tim Stott.

Details and descriptions of artworks

FORMS OF IMAGINING

1

CALLING THE ELEPHANT

AURÉLIEN FROMENT
A PROJECT ARTS CENTRE COMMISSION

Prompter (softly) - Hey!
Aurélien - Hey?
Prompter (softly) - You talking to me?
Aurélien - You talking to me?
(Excerpt from Théâtre de Poche, Volume 1)

A magician, like the forgotten Human Card Index - Arthur Lloyd, who could produce almost any kind of printed item from one of his pockets on request, conjures images into the air telling a cyclical tale. The sequences are performed and have something of the quality of a child's film – there's a rabbit and a hat and a turtledove-duck – a film in which the innocently clear images belie the careful navigation of its own construction. Set within the gallery, the new film, Théâtre de poche, was one of the characters in a cast of odd bed-fellows. The Jack of Hearts and the Jack of Spades turn on their heel and disappear into the blackness, while a prompter searches for images through forgotten magazines. Théâtre de poche, (vol. 1), the first publication in a series of new interview scripts, introduced us to an architect, a retoucher and a puzzle maker, continuing the exploration of Théâtre de poche the film. One after another, they sustained an ongoing vaudevillian conversation.

White Balance, a constant beam of light projected from the specially constructed 'projection booth', threw all of the elements of Froment's exhibition into the same set – the glass frames, casually propped against a side wall and the prompter's box, sitting in the middle of the room, both took on elements of the cast as they were implicated in a cinema screen that didn't exist. The projection from the booth turned the real space of the room into the flat screen of the cinema, and spectators could imagine them-selves trapped, if just for a moment, within it. *Calling the Elephant* was an exhibition in which individual works revealed peculiar qualities of each other, where characters were shadowed by caricatures, and through which the gallery was transformed into both a stage and a screen.

Calling the Elephant: The Folds of Representation
Esperanza Collado

'So I propose to extricate cinema from this circular maze by superimposing on it a second labyrinth (containing an exit) – by positing something that has by now begun to come to concrete actuality: we might call it an infinite cinema.' Hollis Frampton, *For a Metahistory of Film: CommonplaceNotes and Hypotheses*, 1971.

Nietzsche: "Who is Speaking?"
Mallarmé: "Language itself."

Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* opens with a painting, *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego de Velázquez, and its complex arrangement of sight-lines, impenetrable depth and puzzling appearance. Foucault chose this baroque painting to mark a decisive moment in art history: the moment in which representation could finally emerge as pure representation. In Velázquez's painting, the content vanishes into a circular maze full of representational traps or a mise en abîme in which each element reveals something of the other.

Aurélien Froment's exhibition *Calling the Elephant* shares with the baroque époque a moving beyond the limitations of representation; the dissolution of boundaries between the subject and the object of the gaze. *Calling the Elephant* gathers cinema, theatre and magic together to articulate a complex and enigmatic composition that raises questions about spectacle, illusionism, the folds of representation, and the architecture of vision. For Froment, a chiasmic confrontation between these forms of spectacle and representation occurs precisely through extension, invoking the motion of the fold. This motion, which folds in on itself like two mirrors facing each other, is notable if we look at

the labyrinthine complementary relation created between the individual artworks of the show. Every work ‘reveals something of the others’ we are advised in the exhibition’s brochure. Representation of representation: itself a baroque perceptual trope. More revealing, in this respect, is our experience when we first enter the gallery space. We certainly do experience a transformation in terms of corporeal awareness, a feeling of being on a theatrical stage or a cinematic screen, a phenomenon resulting from a complex mechanism or interaction of forces: the folds of representation.

George Berkeley, the Irish philosopher who was born into the baroque world of the seventeenth century, coined the phrase *esse est percipi* – ‘to be is to be perceived’ – in reference to self-perception. If extraneous perception (human, divine, animal) is suppressed, an inescapable sense of being perceived persists. Self-perception is exactly what makes us feel as if we are on a cinematic screen in Froment’s show. This type of perception is emphasized when objects and gazes enter our own space, as happens to Buster Keaton in Samuel Beckett’s short film *Film* (1964). In *Film*, the protagonist tries to evade self-perception by circumventing the gaze that windows, mirrors, photographs, paintings, and the camera’s eye project onto him. The openness of Froment’s work – which at times operates in a ‘trompe-loeil’ fashion – make it possible to argue that certain objects in the show seem to look at us, creating a trap that captures us in an intertwining flow of gazes.

Calling the Elephant consists of five individual works: *Théâtre de Poche* is the title of both a video and a publication of a series of interviews between the artist and a retoucher, an architect and a puzzle maker. The video’s protagonist, the magician, conjures the chromatic spectrum to invoke images that seem to come from a collective memory of visual historical culture. Not only is the screen itself a mirror and an eye, which invades our space, the magician repeatedly projects his gaze on us from the screen. Continuing this approach, a framed-piece of transparent perspex is found in the show, unexpectedly since the piece did not appear in the list of works. It is there to whisper the magician’s trick – the floating images mystery – and to function as a mirror or screen that reflects the audience’s image, returning the gaze, reinforcing the labyrinthine flow created between the inside and the outside of all the pieces.

The remaining two pieces are direct references to theatre and cinema. They ultimately recreate the idea of a theatre of the world and an infinite cinema in which we – spectators – become the performers and the film proper. *The Prompter’s Work* is a reproduction of a theatre’s prompt. Its black interior gives the impression of being open and connected to a secret subterranean passage from which the prompter will eventually whisper our lines. *The Prompter’s Work*, like the rest of the pieces, could be viewed as a form of projection directed at us, a potential sound projection. *White Balance* is a partition wall that not only divides the

gallery space in two; it also hides a 16mm film projector pointing at us. Through the wall, we can just about hear the projector. The small window in the top centre of the wall is a clear indication that White Balance recreates a projection booth. We have no access to this room, as we have no access to the front side of the canvas, which Velázquez is painting in *Las Meninas*.

Both *Calling the Elephant* and *Las Meninas* offer a circular composition that folds in on itself, with the exception of one segment of the circle, which is incomplete: exactly the point at which the gaze is projected, the spectator. In *Las Meninas*, the mirror on the back wall, Velázquez's direct gaze at us, and the half-open door at the back enter our space duplicating an abyss of gazes. The painting inscribes the spectator in the artwork by projecting a conical gaze – a vanishing point – that overcomes the boundaries of the frame. In the same way, the privileged position of the projector in *White Balance* both exceeds the boundaries of our frame of vision and transforms the gallery into a three-dimensional screen. Moreover, the dominant role of the cinematic apparatus in *Calling the Elephant* posits cinema as a synthesis of all the arts: writing (poetry), object (plastic), performance (theatre), and image (photography, painting). *White Balance* strikes the equilibrium between the formation of meaning and its absence, between an intensive qualification of experience and the limitations of representation, between silence and a mistrust of language, between cinema and its double; a cinema in which the spectator looks at herself looking at – and materializing- the film.



Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656–57, Oil on canvas

1. Gilles Deleuze argues that 'baroque establishes a total art or a unity of the arts' and that "it does so first of all in extension, each art tending to be prolonged and even to be prolonged into the next art, which exceeds the one before." See *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1992.

COLOPHON

FORMS OF IMAGINING #1

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Edited by Tessa Giblin

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