



# HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents



MoMA Says There Are No Known Allergen Fears from "Pollen from Hazelnut" Exhibit



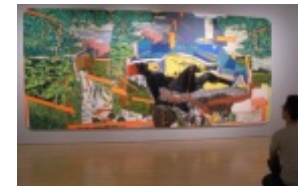
Art Rx



Indigenous Action Highlights British Museum's Role in Colonialism



The Vandals Are No Longer Too Hot To Handle at MoMA



Mickalene Thomas and the Seduction of Beauty



Kate Middleton Portrait Buzz: Art Criticism, Sexism, or Something Else?

MUSEUMS • WEEKEND

## The World According to Charles Ginnever

by John Yau on January 13, 2013 0

Like 119

+1 2

Tweet 10

CONTEMPORARY ART EVENT  
2 CITIES, 16 INSTITUTIONS, 40 ARTISTS

Brooklyn: January — February, 2013

[www.brooklynart.com](http://www.brooklynart.com)



Charles Ginnever, "Rashomon" (All images courtesy San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art)

For those weary souls who claim that there is nothing new under the sun, especially in the realm of art, where everything has already been done, I offer this observation by Kenneth Baker, which appeared without fanfare in the pages of the *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 23, 2012):

The [San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art](#) gives us a rare, close look at one of the most significant and little-celebrated innovations in late 20th century art: [Charles Ginnever's](#) "Rashomon" suite.

It consists of 15 identical objects — open structures of rusting steel planes — that

[www.brooklynmontreal.com](http://www.brooklynmontreal.com)

B R O O  
K L Y N  
L A E R  
T N O M

Parker's Box  
Front Room  
Interstate Projects  
Smack Mellon

Momenta Art  
A.I.R. Gallery  
Causey Contemporary  
Pierogi

Advertise on Hyperallergic with Nectar Ads

Subscribe to our Email Newsletter

Enter your email

Subscribe



Like 37,951 people like this. Sign Up to see

can stand unsupported in 15 distinct positions.

The identical objects are around three feet high and, in this exhibition, arranged in five rows of three each, in close proximity to each other. It's not ideal, but the strength of the ensemble overcame my misgivings about not being able to get closer to some of the objects. For the most part I walked around the group, looking down at them.

The objects are maquettes for sculptures that would stand fifteen feet high. Because they are identical, each of them has to be marked whenever the ensemble is sent to an exhibition. It is the only way to remember how the object is to be placed on the floor.

Baker goes to write:

Much important sculpture of our era has concerned itself with tensions between the bodily and mental grasp of the real. "Rashomon" goes to the heart of that matter, defying its viewers to compare its identical components by rotating them mentally.

It took me 10 minutes' concentration on two adjacent pieces to become convinced that I understood the relationship between their respective positions.


At that rate, truly to see the whole ensemble for what it is could take hours. The viewer's basic confidence in the purchase of perception and memory on objects comes down a notch, and a subliminal haste in ordinary conduct of life stands uncomfortably exposed.

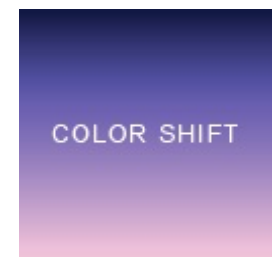
In a world that prizes signature styles and instant recognition, Ginnever slows down and challenges the viewer's experience. He inculcates us with a nagging doubt, which becomes part of the pleasure of the work.

\* \* \*

what your friends like.

Follow @hyperallergic 21.1K followers

Hyperallergic on  Follow

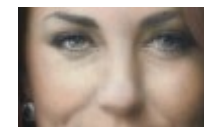


Advertise on Hyperallergic with Nectar Ads

### Popular Posts



**My Top Concerns While Degrading Myself For Art**



**Kate Middleton Portrait Buzz: Art Criticism, Sexism, or Something Else?**



**Albrecht Dürer's Advice to Artists**

I went to see Ginnever's exhibition at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (November 17, 2012 – February 16, 2013) for a variety of reasons, one of them being that I wanted to see an assembled version of "Multus," a sculptural print by the artist that is being edited by Landfall Press, Santa Fe, NM.



**MOCA Loses Another Curator, With No Plans to Replace Her**



**Early Diego Rivera Uncovered on Antiques Road Show**



**Wild, Punk and Slightly Off-Kilter: An Interview with Mary Heilmann**



**The Vandals Are No Longer Too Hot To Handle at MoMA**



**Mickalene Thomas and the Seduction of Beauty**



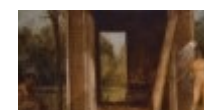
**MoMA Says There Are No Known Allergen Fears from "Pollen from Hazelnut" Exhibit**



**No One Likes a Sunday Painter**



**When Paintings Come Apart: Sharon Butler on the Inside Out**



**The Last of the True Believers**

Charles Ginnever, "Multus" (Assembled)

"Multus" is a single sheet of flat, rust-colored paper that can be folded into a planar sculpture. I was invited by the press to write a description of the piece, and I remember staring at a prototype of the print, along with a picture of the assembled sculpture, while double and triple-checking the instructions. I finally concluded that anyone who bought the print should ideally purchase two sheets — something I recommended in a note to the press. It's probably not what they wanted to hear. I told them that it would be ideal to assemble one print but leave the other untouched. The magic of "Multus" is recognizing the transformation that transpires between the flat sheet and the portable sculpture.

In the description that will presumably accompany the print once it is published, I wrote:

The tension between the flat plane and the folded form asks us to pay attention to the everyday world we live in, and to recognize that in the simplest things — a flat sheet of paper — there exists a possibility simultaneously enchanting and revealing.

The gap between sight and memory — between the object and how we remember it in the mind's eye — is one of Ginnever's preoccupations. Unlike other abstract sculptors — Brancusi and his "Bird in Space," Donald Judd's "Stacks," and Richard Serra's curved walls come to mind — Ginnever doesn't seem interested in making a significant form, whether organic or industrial. This is particularly evident in the 15-piece "Rashomon."



Required Reading



Video Artist Tony Oursler Turns David Bowie into a Doll



Art Rx

**HYPERALLERGIC  
WEEKEND**

**Deepening the Conversation**





*Charles Ginnever, "Rashomon"*

Knowing that all fifteen pieces are identical, I tried to see if I could determine the points at which two adjacent pieces lined up with each other. I hadn't yet read Baker's review, and so I hadn't yet been clued in that what I was trying to do was nearly impossible. Whenever I felt I could tell how a set of adjacent pieces matched up, the relationship suddenly dissolved, leaving me aware of the mind's limitations — not something you necessarily want to bump up against. It happens all the time, of course, but I think we are loath to admit it, and simply begin thinking about something else.

A similar experience happens when you read certain poems by John Ashbery. At some point the poem seems to be slipping away from you while you are reading it, and you can't

account for the change from the “smooth” to the “haywire,” as Ashbery wrote in a recent poem.

\* \* \*

Ginnever has unraveled the bonds holding together an aggregate of identical units, a modular model. His “Rashomon” is the opposite of a sculpture that enables you to follow along, such as Sol Lewitt’s open cubes. Rather than define a secure, repeating form, Ginnever’s units convey a state of constant change and instability. You begin to feel as if you are stuck inside your body, increasingly aware that your eyes are only able to perceive and process a small amount of information. Rather than being able to verify what you see, the mind and eyes begin to feel disconnected, which is unsettling.

When I thought of Lewitt, I was reminded that curators usually don’t like to set works by different artists against each other, to initiate conversations between them about where they overlap and where they differ. Nevertheless, I think it would be interesting to place Ginnever’s “Rashomon” in close proximity to a group of Lewitt’s “Incomplete Open Cubes,” not to suggest that one artist is better than the other, but to understand that the difference between these seminal works isn’t purely aesthetic: it is also philosophical. This is why the idea that there is a single aesthetic model to adhere to (whether formalism or appropriation) has had a deleterious effect on art for both viewers and practitioners. We begin to elide differences in favor of similarities.

“Rashomon” is titled after a 1950 film by Akira Kurosawa, which weaves together two stories by [Ryūnosuke Akutagawa](#). According to film critic Stanley Kauffman, Kurosawa often used multiple cameras to film a scene, splicing them together so that the point of view is constantly shifting among the four witnesses to a rape and murder; each tells his or her version of the events. The stories are mutually contradictory.

Kurosawa emphasizes subjectivity rather than positing the existence of a universal truth. In the film, he never backs the camera up to offer a panoramic view. Ginnever brings us face to face with our own perceptual limitations. Knowing the piece can be placed in one of

fifteen positions, we are invited to visualize the rotations in our mind's eye and, for the most part, find it impossible to do.

In Ginnever's view of reality, Plato had it all wrong.

[Charles Ginnever: Roshomon](#) continues at *The San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art* (560 South First Street San Jose, California) through February 16.

Tagged as: [Charles Ginnever](#), [Plato](#), [San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art](#)



**Subscribe to our newsletter to get the top stories delivered to your inbox each week!**

Enter your Email

**Sign Up!**

You may also like:

- ["The Rose" Is Not A Rose](#)
  - [Fleeting Glimpses of Scientific Knowledge, Turned Into Art](#)
  - [Largest Contemporary Glass Museum to Open in Upstate NY](#)
  - [Popularizing Contemporary Art in San Salvador](#)
  - [A Collector's Passion for All Things British](#)
-





Advertise on Hyperallergic with Nectar Ads

Hyperallergic welcomes comments and a lively discussion, but comments are moderated after being posted. For more details please [read our comment policy](#).



PREVIOUS POST: [Wild, Punk and Slightly Off-Kilter: An Interview with Mary Heilmann](#)

NEXT POST: [Mic Drop: 2012 Hip-Hop Faves](#)

## HYPERALLERGIC

Hyperallergic is a forum for serious, playful and radical thinking about art in the world today. Founded in 2009, Hyperallergic is headquartered in Brooklyn, New York. [Learn More](#) →

**Company**  
About Us  
Contact Us  
Advertise  
Store

**Subscribe**  
Newsletter  
RSS Feed  
Archives

**Follow Us**  
Facebook  
Twitter  
Tumblr  
Google+

Original material is licensed under a Creative Commons License permitting non-commercial sharing with attribution.