galerie frank elbaz.

Mungo Thomson

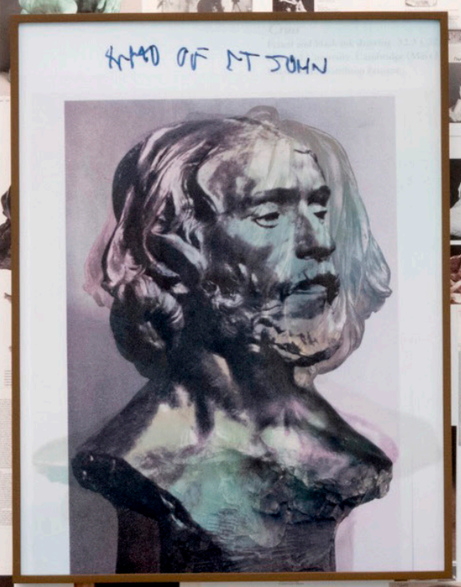


Mungo Thomson, *Walking Pictures*, Isetan, Japan, 2025, Photo : Suzuki Shimpei



Mungo Thomson
Volume 5. Sideways Thought, 2020-2022
4K video with sound, 8:09 minutes
Original Score by Ernst Karel
Edition of 5 + 2 AP
(202020222937)
Exhibition view, *Sideways Thought*, 2022, galerie frank elbaz, Paris


Collectionneur
de tout, il a en réserve
un stock impressionnant
d'«abattis» : des bras,
des jambes, des pieds
et des mains qu'il utilise
comme bon lui semble.


HEAD OF ST JOHN


19. Le Penseur
Pierre Rosso





Mungo Thomson, *Background Materials,* Maki gallery, Tokyo, 2025



Mungo Thomson
Volume 1. Foods of the World, 2014–22
4K video with sound
12:09 Minutes
Edition of 5, 2 AP
Exhibition view, *Time Life*, KARMA, New York, USA

Mungo Thomson

TIME

TIME

MAKI Gallery

Mungo Thomson

AFTER FIDEL

MAKI Gallery

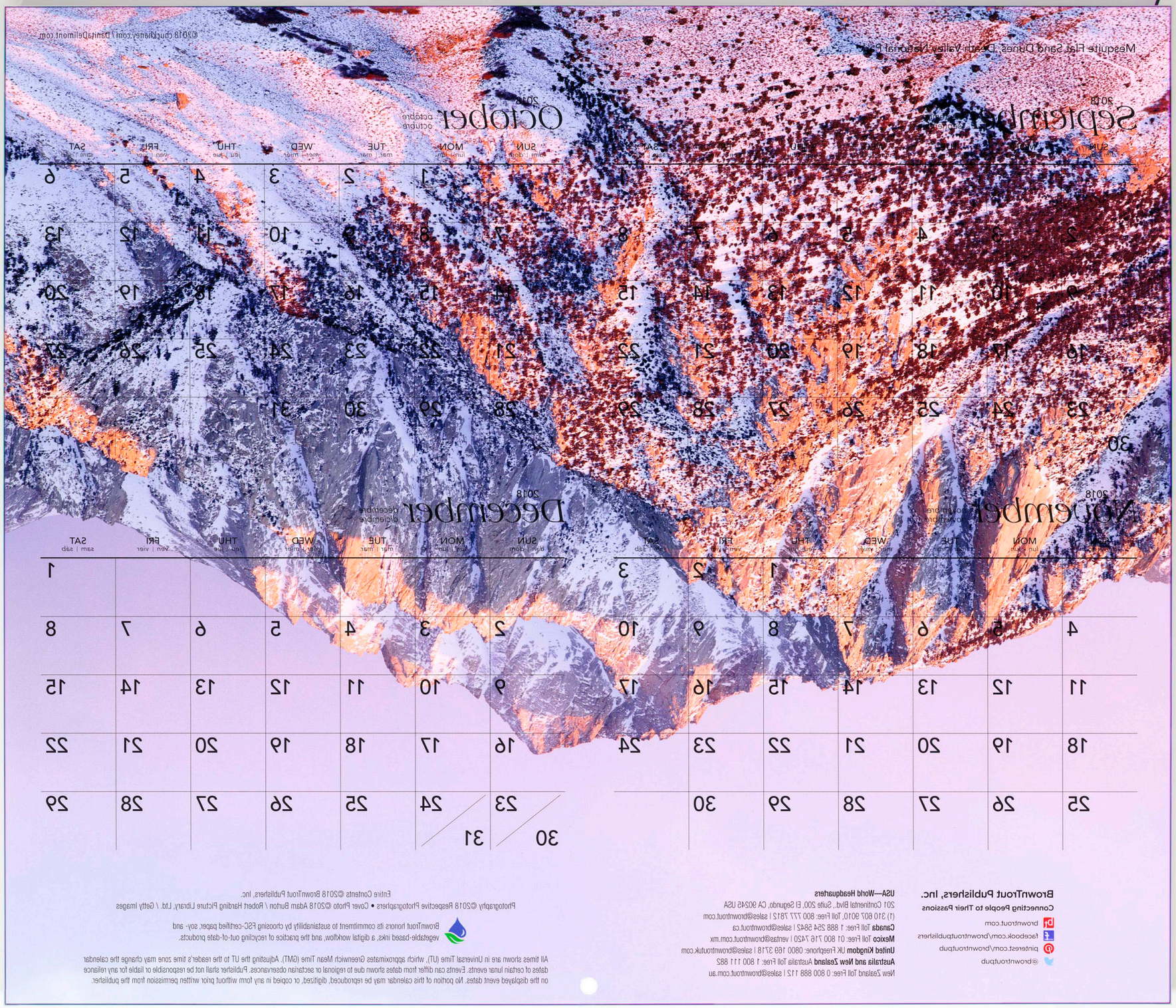


Mungo Thomson
Snowman, 2020
Painted bronze
46,4 x 48,6 x 65,4 cm (18 1/4 x 19 1/8 x 25 3/4 in.)
Unique
(20202280)


UNIQLO
UNIQLO



Mungo Thomson
Stories of Almost Everyone curated by Aram Moshayedi, exhibition view, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2018
Photo: Brian Forrest



Mungo Thomson
Wild & Scenic California 2019 (September-December), 2019
2-sided UV-cured print on samba fabric, custom LED lightbox
244 x 285 x 10 cm (96 1/8 x 112 1/4 x 3 7/8 in.)
(20192081)

BrownTrout Publishers, Inc.
Connecting People to Their Passions

browntrout.com
facebook.com/browntroutpublishers
pinterest.com/browntroutpub
@browntroutpub

USA—World Headquarters
207 Continental Blvd., Suite 200, El Segundo, CA 90245 USA
(t) 310 607 9010, Toll Free: 800 777 7812 | sales@browntrout.com
Canada Toll Free: 1 888 254 3842 | sales@browntrout.ca
Mexico Toll Free: 01 800 718 7420 | ventas@browntrout.com.mx
United Kingdom UK Freephone: 0800 169 3718 | sales@browntroutuk.com
Australia and New Zealand Australia Toll Free: 1 800 1111 882
New Zealand Toll Free: 0 800 888 112 | sales@browntrout.com.au

Entire Contents ©2018 BrownTrout Publishers, Inc.
Photography ©2018 Respective Photographers • Cover Photo ©2018 Adam Burton / Robert Harding Picture Library, Ltd. / Getty Images

BrownTrout honors its commitment to sustainability by choosing FSC-certified paper, soy- and vegetable-based inks, a digital workflow, and the practice of recycling out-of-date products.

All times shown are in Universal Time (UT), which approximates Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). Adjusting the UT to the reader's time zone may change the calendar dates of certain lunar events. Events can differ from dates shown due to regional or sectarian observances. Publisher shall not be responsible or liable for any reliance on the displayed event dates. No portion of this calendar may be reproduced, digitized, or copied in any form without prior written permission from the publisher.

Mungo Thomson

Born in 1969 in Woodland, California, USA. Lives and works in Los Angeles, USA.

Education

2000	Master of Fine Arts, Interdisciplinary Studio, University of California, Los Angeles, USA
1994	Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program, New York, USA
1991	Bachelor of Arts, University of California, Santa Cruz, USA

Solo Exhibitions, Projects & Performances (selection)

2026	*Screening of Time Life Vol. 15. Monument to a Period of Time in Which I Lived,* Los Angeles Festival of Movies, USA *Material Shifts,* Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway *Monument*, Lafayette Anticipations, Paris, France
2025	*Walking Pictures,* Isetan Shinjuku, Tokyo *Background Materials, Maki Gallery, Tokyo* *Time Life,* Karma, New York, USA *A Universal Picture*, Karma, New York, USA
2024	*Collection in Focus: Mungo Thomson*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA
2023	*Time Life*, Karma, Los Angeles, USA
2022	Sculptures, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO, USA *Sideways Thought*, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France Time Life, Karma, New York, USA
2021	Nagori Yuki, Isetan Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan
2020	Mungo Thomson | Archives, Masahiro Maki Gallery, Tokyo, Japan Background Extinction, galerie frank elbaz, Dallas
2019	Rods and Cones, Masahiro Maki Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
2018	Composition for 52 Keys, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA, USA American Desert (for Chuck Jones), Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX, USA
2016	Why Does The World Exist?, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France
2015	Time, People, Money, Crickets, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada

galerie frank elbaz.

2014	Crickets for Solo and Ensemble, ArtPace, San Antonio, TX, USA Wall, Window or Bar Signs, Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco, CA, USA
2013	Mungo Thomson – Negative Space, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada Time, People, Money, Crickets, SITE Santa Fe, NM, USA Times Museum, Guangzhou, China High Line Art Performances, The High Line, New York, NY, USA Mungo Thomson, galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France
2012	Levitating Mass, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO, USA The Apartment, Vancouver, Canada
2010	New Year 7, Western Bridge, Seattle, USA Mungo Thomson, Gavlak, Palm Beach, FL, USA
2009	The Varieties of Experience, John Connelly Presents, New York, USA Silent Film of a Tree Falling in the Forest, SCREENING, Philadelphia, USA Billboard Project, LAXART, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2008	Hammer Projects: Mungo Thomson, UCLA Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA Einstein #1, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2007	Mungo Thomson: Between Projects, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, France
2006	Mungo Thomson: Negative Space Variations, Eldorado Series, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAMeC), Bergamo, Italy Art Statements, Art Basel 37, Basel, Switzerland Freak Flag (White Flag), REC (Galerie Esther Schipper Project Space), Berlin, Germany
2005	The Suburban, Oak Park, Illinois, USA New York, New York, New York, New York, John Connelly Presents, New York, NY, USA
2004	Centric 65: Mungo Thomson, California State University Art Museum, Long Beach, CA, USA 2004 Bienal Internacional de Cuenca, Cuenca, Ecuador Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2002	Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2000	Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
1998	Levitating In My Studio, The Hole, Postmasters Gallery, New York, NY, USA
1996	Rest Area, Stefany Martz Gallery, New York, NY, USA
1995	Mungo Thomson, Stefany Martz Gallery, New York, NY, USA

Group Exhibitions (selection)

2026 *Further Down the Line,* Exhibition of Fireplace at Aigburth Railway Station, Liverpool, UK
The American Desert (for Chuck Jones) Curated by Francesco Tenaglia, Chiarominte, online presentation
Anozero: Bienal de Coimbra, Portugal
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA
Notes on Translation, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway

2025 *SNOW SHOW: Winter Now,* Sun Valley Museum of Art, Ketchum, Idaho, USA

2024 *A History of Photography: Selections from the Museum's Collection,* Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA
A Particular Kind of Heaven, 70 Main Street, Thomaston, Maine, USA
Hollywood Dream Bubble: Ed Ruscha's Influence in Los Angeles and Beyond curated by Dani Tull and Jessica Gallucci, The Hole, Los Angeles, USA
Color is the First Revelation of the World, Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, California, USA

2023 Negative Space (STScI-2015-02), Grand Av Arts/Bunker Hill Metro Station, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Four On The Floor, Probably Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
After Laughter Comes Tears, MUDAM, Luxembourg

2022 Building and Dreaming, By Art Matters, Hangzhou, China
Five Ways In: Themes from the Collection, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA
Communication Systems in a Global Context, Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, USA

2020 ATTO 4 – DIVERSI, Museo Burel, Belluno, Italy
Friends of Ours, organized by Benjamin Godsill and Joel Mesler, Rental Gallery, East Hampton, NY, USA
Frieze Projects Los Angeles 2020

2019 Cartooney, New Media Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
Among Others: Photography and the Group, Morgan Library, New York, NY, USA

2018 Superstition, Marres, Maastricht, Netherlands
Post-Studio, Museo Jumex, Mexico City, MEX
Vision Valley, Brand Library & Art Center, Glendale, CA, USA

galerie frank elbaz.

2010 Aleksandra Mir / Mungo Thomson, Gavlak Projects, Palm Beach, FL, USA
Exhibition, Exhibition, Castello di Rivoli, Torino, Italy
Olympic Sculpture Park Summer Projects, Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA, USA
MOCA Art Basel Miami Beach Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL, USA
El Gabinete Blanco / The White Cabinet, Fundación/Colección Jumex, México City, Mexico
For Real: 28 Projections in Public Space, Maastricht, The Netherlands
¡Sin techo está pelón!, Universidad de Guanajuato, Guanajuato, Mexico
DARK MATTER / SMOOTH STRUCTURES, Smart Project Space, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Huis Clos / No Exit, Galerie Elba Benitez, Madrid, Spain
Gallery, Galerie, Galleria, Norma Mangione Gallery, Torino, Italy
Altogether Elsewhere, Rodeo Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey
Billboard Project, Portugal Arte 2010, Lisbon, Portugal
The Secret Knows / The Secret (Still) Knows, 508 8th Street, Austin, TX; LAB, Los Angeles, CA, USA

2009 Compilation IV, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany
Beyond the Picturesque, Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuelle Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent, Belgium; Museum Marta Herford, Herford, Germany
La nada y el ser (Nothingness and Being), Fundación/Colección Jumex, México City, Mexico
Looking Through the Other End of the Telescope, Scotsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scotsdale, AZ, USA
The Moving Image: Scan to Screen, Pixel to Projection, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA, USA

Changing Light Bulbs In Thin Air, Hessel Museum at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, NY, USA
Les Enfants Terribles, Fundación/Colección Jumex, México City, Mexico
Black Curtains: Art, Theater and Cinema, Artissima 16, Torino, Italy
Los Angeles: Aspects of The Archaic Revival, Galerie Haus Schneider, Uschi Kolb, Karlsruhe, Germany
Broken English, Seiler + Mosseri-Marlio Galerie, Zurich, Switzerland
Reading Standing Up, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA

2008 2008 Whitney Biennial Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, USA
Le Havre Biennial of Contemporary Art, Musée Malraux, Le Havre, France
8th Bienal de Arte Panama: The Sweet Burnt Smell of History, Museum of Contemporary Art, Panama City, Panama
The Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality, and the Moving Image, Part 2: Realisms, Hirshhorn, Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, USA

The Possibility of an Island, North Miami Museum of Contemporary Art at Goldman Warehouse, Miami, FL, USA
Sudden White (After London), Royal Academy of Art, London, UK
The Future as Disruption, The Kitchen, New York, NY, USA
The Lining of Forgetting, Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC, USA
The Tree: From the Sublime to the Social, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
You Complete Me, Western Bridge, Seattle, WA, USA
Desertshore, Luckman Fine Arts Gallery, California State University, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Huis Clos / No Exit, Proyectos Monclova, México City, Mexico
The Store, Tulips & Roses, Vilnius, Lithuania
Everything Must out Going!, Asia Song Society, New York, NY, USA
Red Wind, Blum and Poe, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Tapestry, Karyn Lovegrove Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA

2007
Bill Leavitt, Allen Ruppersberg, Mungo Thomson, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll Since 1967, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, USA; Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL, USA
Been Up So Long It Looks Like Down To Me, Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
Some Time Waiting, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, France

2006
Strange Powers, Creative Time, New York, NY, USA
Prophets of Deceit, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, CA, USA
Eigenheim, Kunstverein Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany
Happiness, Gagosian Gallery, 4th Berlin Biennal for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany
Yes Bruce Nauman, Zwirner and Wirth, New York, NY, USA
When the Moon Shines on the Moonshine, The Breeder, Athens, Greece
The Show Will Be Open When the Show Will Be Closed, STORE Gallery, London, UK

2005
PERFORMA05: First Biennal Of Visual Art Performance, New York, NY, USA
Frieze Art Fair Sculpture Park, Regent's Park, London, UK
The Early Show, White Columns, New York, NY, USA

2004
2004 California Biennial, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, USA
Treble, Sculpture Center, Long Island City, New York, NY, USA
100 Artists See God, Independent Curators International, New York, NY, USA

galerie frank elbaz.

VIDEODROME: 27 International Artists, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, USA
Repeat Performance, Artists' Space, New York, NY, USA
2048 KM, Or Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
Drunk vs. Stoned, Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York, NY, USA
Land of the Free, Jack Hanley Gallery, San Francisco, CA, USA
Tonight, Studio Voltaire, London, UK

2003
SNOWBLIND: Matthew Brannon, Wade Guyton, Mungo Thomson, John Connelly Presents, New York, NY, USA
17 Reasons, Jack Hanley Gallery, San Francisco, CA, USA
Sandwiched, Public Art Project, Los Angeles, CA, USA
The Outlaw Series, New York, NY, USA
Now Playing, D'Amelio Terras, New York, NY, USA

2002
ELEKTRA: Gabriel Orozco and Mungo Thomson, TRANSMISSION, Glasgow, Scotland
Rock My World: Recent Art and the Memory of Rock'n'Roll, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA, USA
Videodrome II, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY, USA
Hear the Art, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, Austria
High Desert Test Sites, A-Z West, Joshua Tree, USA

2001
Sound System: 9th Biennial of the Moving Image, MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland
[untitled] 654321, Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense, Denmark
Hemorrhaging of States, TENT.CBK, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
I Want More...And More..., Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
Drawn from LA, Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, USA

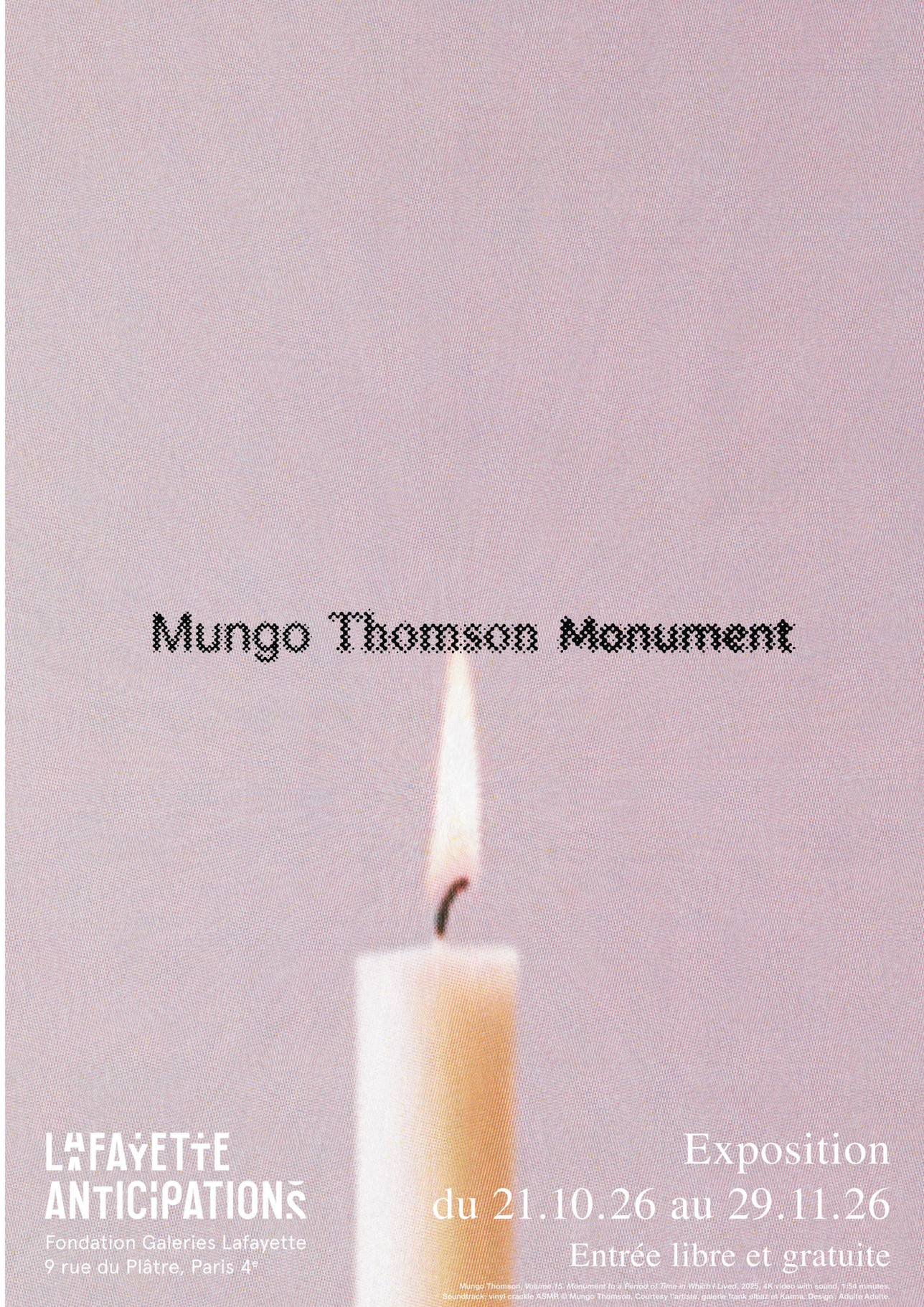
2000
Re-Drawing the Line, Art In General, New York, NY, USA
Living, Part Two, Chicago Project Room, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Public Collections

France	FRAC Ile-de-France, Paris Kadist Art Foundation, Paris
Italy	Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAMeC), Bergamo
Mexico	Fundación/Colección Jumex, México City
Switzerland	Schaulager – Emmanuel Hoffmann Collection, Basel
USA	Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA

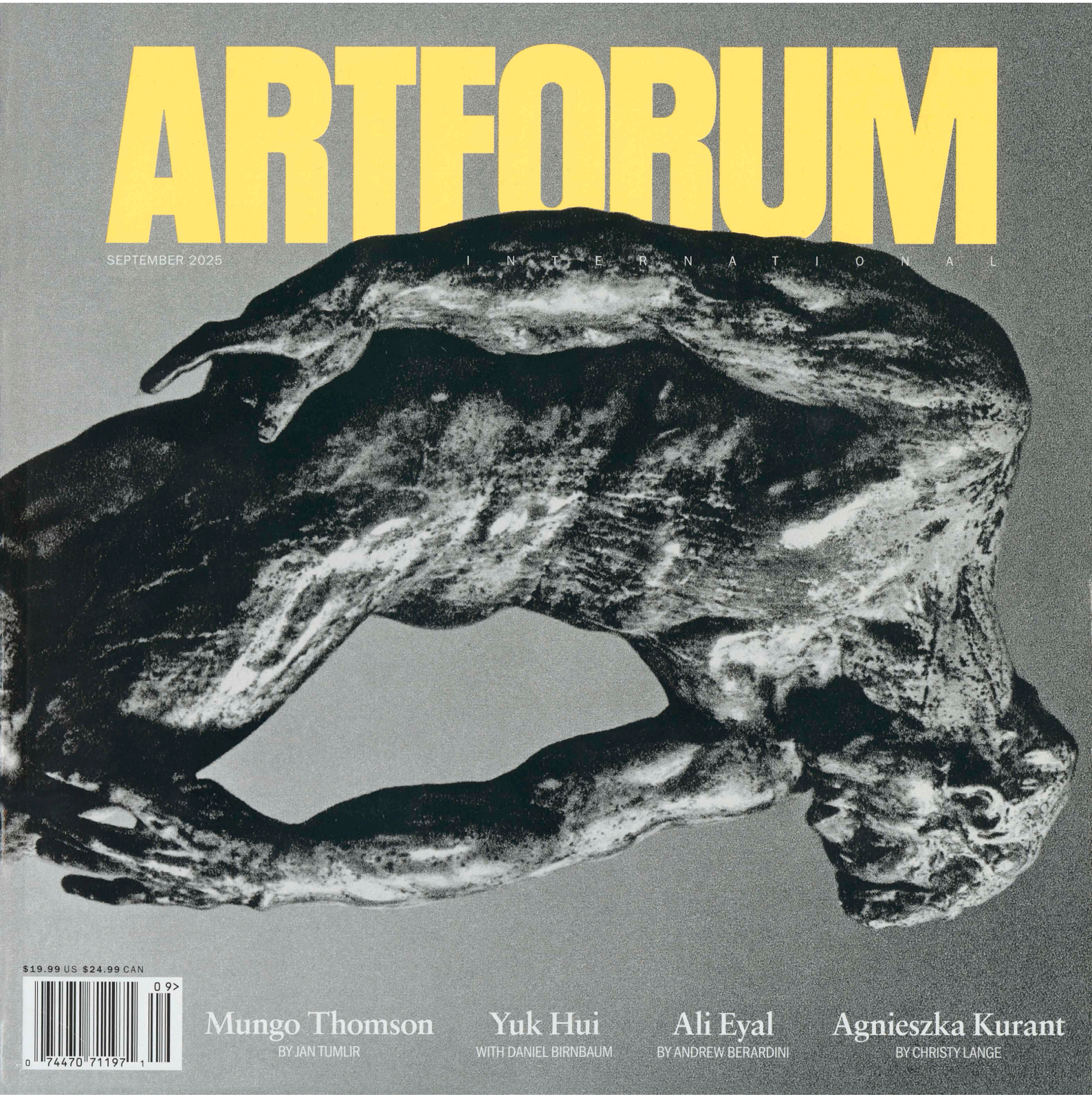
galerie frank elbaz.

Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco, CA
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, TX
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
New School University Art Collection, New York, NY
Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA
University Art Museum, California State University, Long Beach, CA
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY



Press

galerie frank elbaz.



galerie frank elbaz.

EDITOR'S LETTER

SIDEWAYS THOUGHTS

WHAT MAKES A WORK OF ART "GREAT"? When I was teaching art history, one idea that emerged in our classroom discussions was that the great work of art is often (though not always) polyvalent, proposing multiple ideas or themes simultaneously and readily lending itself to new readings by new audiences. In other words, it is the opposite of a question that answers itself, or an utterance that fully discharges its meaning in the moment of its uttering.

An approximation of this idea appears in this issue's thoughtful Close-Up on Mungo Thomson's video *Sideways Thought*, 2020–22, which is featured on the cover. As Jan Tumlir explains, the work is a kind of stop-motion animation made from Thomson's photographs of images of Auguste Rodin's sculptures that have appeared in books on the artist, including a 1969 volume from the popular Time-Life Library of Art series. Writing in defense of Thomson's "cleverness," Tumlir notes that every aspect of this video that may appear like a "one-liner" in fact "opens . . . to a radiating constellation of lines, pretty much inexhaustible." These include (but are not limited to) the analogous relationship of photographic prints and sculptural multiples; the feedback loops between Rodin's own photographs and sculptures; the modern *paragone* between photography and sculpture as mediums for freezing movement; and the ongoing digital transformation of the photo-based visual culture that emerged in mid-century.

When I sat down with *Sideways Thought* this summer, other "radiating constellations" appeared to me. Most notably, its unrelenting staccato rhythm seemed to reflect the breathless pace of current events, with Rodin's expressive figures—here suspended in the virtual space of technological media—becoming expressions of our own mediatized suspense. "Sideways Thought": what better phrase than this to describe the ricocheting between horror and hope in this hall of mirrors we call the present, or the experience of having our minds riven by bearing witness to world-changing events (from Trump's mobilization of ICE as a kind of secret police to Netanyahu's starvation of Gazans) while going about our daily lives?

As I finish writing this letter in mid-summer, I have to assume our readers will still be in this "sideways" condition as they encounter this issue's texts on various forms of subversive art, from Elizabeth Mangini's sympathetic analysis of Carol Rama's rebellious feminism to Moritz Scheper's appreciation of the sincerity of Monika Stricker's fleshy paintings and Jim Quilty's narration of Lawrence Abu Hamdan's latest sonic investigation. Another theme that I hope will resonate is the relevance—both aesthetic and social—of artists who engage the fields of science and technology, as demonstrated by Christy Lange's essay on the art of Agnieszka Kurant, Doreen Ríos's introduction to Manuel Felguérez's "*La máquina estética*" (The Aesthetic Machine), and contributing editor Daniel Birnbaum's interview with philosopher Yuk Hui (which also continues our renewed interest in the theoretical models shaping contemporary art). The Features section is rounded out by the poetic reflections of senior editor Alex Jovanovich on Agosto Machado's queer archives and of longtime contributor Andrew Berardini on the haunted and haunting paintings of Ali Eyal, whose work remembers the US invasion of Iraq, but is also so much more than that.

I am glad that today—though it has not always been the case (and in fact, the magazine was founded on the antithesis of these terms)—*Artforum* is capacious enough to encompass the expressive and the expository, the diaristic and the diagnostic—sometimes within a single text.* The idea that the magazine is not just an archive or institution but also a dynamic, collaborative enterprise—one that can and should change with the times—is something I tried to keep in mind this summer, as we embarked upon the first redesign of the print issue in many years. (As you can see, it remains square; some traditions are too sacred, even for me.) In addition to moving our logo out of the top left corner (not for the first time), we are returning to having the names of select contributors featured on the cover, once again emphasizing writers and the important work they do. We also have reorganized the table of contents, with the aim of making it easier for readers to navigate each issue. Finally, we continue to expand our content: Our previews of notable exhibitions are back, and will appear every September, January, and May; the new Studio Visit page will close out each issue with a snapshot from an artist's studio, reminding us of the labor at the heart of this whole thing we reductively call "the art world." To repeat the words of Koyo Kouoh that Adam Szymczyk cites in his tribute to her in these pages, "artists are the visionaries and social scientists who allow us to reflect and project in ways afforded only to this line of work." □

—Tina Rivers Ryan

*On the distinction between "belletristic" and "analytical" criticism that informed *Artforum*'s early years, see Yve-Alain Bois, "Books: Phil Said, They Said: Yve-Alain Bois on *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962–1974*," *Artforum*, October 2000, 21.



This page: **Mungo Thomson, *Volume 5, Sideways Thought*, 2020–22**, 4K video, color, sound, 8 minutes 9 seconds. Score by Ernst Karel. From the series "Time Life," 2014–. Installation view, Karma, Los Angeles, 2023. Photo: Joshua White. Opposite page: **Slipcover of William Harlan Hale's *The World of Rodin: 1840–1917*** (Time-Life Books, 1969).

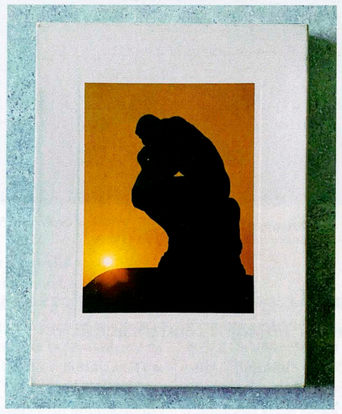
galerie frank elbaz.

CLOSE-UP

MUNGO THOMSON'S *SIDEWAYS THOUGHT*, 2020–22

JAN TUMLIR

THE VIDEO WORK *SIDEWAYS THOUGHT*, 2020–22, by Mungo Thomson comprises one part—or, as he puts it, "volume" (number 5, in this case)—of his expansive "Time Life" series, begun in 2014 and ongoing. *Sideways Thought* is generally devoted to the work of Auguste Rodin and, more specifically, to how the sculptor's practice appears in print media. The pictorial material included in the video was gleaned from some fifty art catalogues, their number large enough to suggest comprehensiveness, although it doesn't come anywhere near representing the totality of publications on the sculptor's work—a goal that would in any case be unreachable, since new entries continue to appear on a regular basis. Thomson's production process is relatively straightforward: He cuts pages from their bindings and shoots them on a copy stand with a Canon 5D camera connected to a Dragonframe stop-motion animation program. On-screen, static pictures of static objects are thus made to move, or rather, since all of these objects have been photographed from multiple angles, in different spaces, and under varying conditions of light, our eyes are set into motion around them. Simple enough, yet the viewing experience is much more complicated, by turns enthralling and deeply disquieting. It is uncanny in precisely the sense highlighted by Freud, prompting anxious questions as to whether something dead has come alive, and vice versa. State-of-the-art animation techniques here collide with primal intuitions of animism.

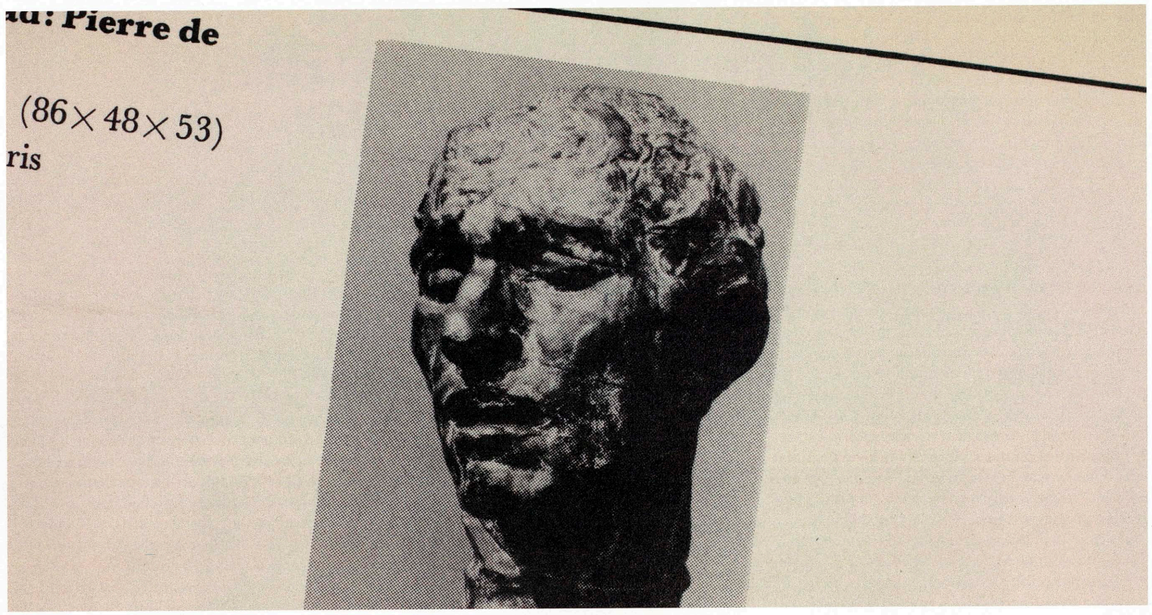


In *Sideways Thought*, discrete works by Rodin are merged into a singular, monstrous entity, a lump of *prima materia* continually undergoing decomposition and recomposition. One might be reminded of the malleability that defined Art Clokey's clay character Gumby, a staple of children's television programming during the 1950s and '60s, only now the process unfolds without beginning or end: Ceaselessly, sculptural form pulsates and mutates. As we are never returned to any figural baseline, our eyes are increasingly ungrounded. Only in the technical artifacts—which include the registration lines of the copy stand, the skewed edges of pages, the fragments of text and annotation surrounding the pictures, and ultimately the grain of the photograph—do we find anything to firmly latch on to. These details are all reproduced in extremely high resolution and projected at large scale, a reminder that every illusion on offer stems from concrete "facts on the ground." Remain focused: The main event of the work is mediation.

Other entries in Thomson's "Time Life" series relate to exercise, cooking, flowers, etc.—an assortment of topics deemed by the publishers of Time-Life Books as essential to individual cultivation at a particular moment in history. Together, they point back to a midcentury period of inflection in the logistics of mass culture, particularly in the United States. They place us squarely in the midst of the "American Century," a time of booming prosperity, national pride, and seemingly unlimited cultural clout.[1] Abstract Expressionist painting and jazz were being exported worldwide and yet, against this effervescent backdrop of free-form cosmopolitanism, the figure of the uncultured, uncouth, "Ugly American" remained stubbornly present. This might well have been Time-Life's target audience; to put it bluntly, its books were designed to counter our incipient provincialism, and nowhere more sharply than in the art-related titles. These offered a tour of the art-historical horizon to an audience that, for the most part, had no access to the works collected in the cultural capitals. Sold on a subscription basis, books devoted to the old and new masters would arrive every few months in the homes of those marooned in "flyover country," delivered by mail like emergency rations. One could say that the promise of André Malraux's "museum without walls" was here fulfilled to the letter.[2] But the counterargument is no less valid: Reducing fine art to just another delectable item of staycation tourism, this virtual show-space might have advanced cultural taste no farther than the middlebrow mark.

Between 1966 and 1970, Time-Life released its Library of Art special collection, a corpus of twenty-eight volumes, introduced (as per usual) one at a time. Among these was the 1969 title *The World of Rodin, 1840–1917*. While this book was certainly a prime catalyst in the making of *Sideways Thought*, Thomson's work reaches well beyond the imagery that appears in its pages. This marks a departure from his earlier videos, which tend to hew more closely to a single source in the imprint.[3] The exorbitant proliferation of such imagery is here delivered in a form that might be termed at once cinematic and not, something like a very fast-turning slideshow. The upshot is undeniably a moving picture; however, animated at eight frames per second—well below the once-optimal number of twenty-four (now sometimes ratcheted up to sixty and even 120)—it falls short of that physiological sweet spot where the succession of distinct imagistic units is merged into a seamless flow by way of the persistence of vision.[4] Rather, *Sideways Thought* plumbs a sour spot, and does so with great precision. Its momentum is herky-jerky, staccato. Between every frame a disjunctive gap intrudes, subdividing the whole back into its parts, and thereby confronting the viewer with the plethora of copy culture, a barely manageable immensity of data.

If we can relate Thomson's video to cinema in more than a metaphorical sense, then it would have to be a highly fragile sort, always accelerating while at the same time devolving toward the stasis of its photographic building blocks. It is a psychologically taxing experience; one struggles with it but then also occasionally surrenders in a kind of blissed-out exhaustion. Numerous precedents for Thomson's approach can be cited from the annals of the avant-garde and/or underground, including such works as Wallace Berman's *Aleph*, 1956–66; Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight*, 1963; and Tony Conrad's *The Flicker*, 1966. That the heyday of "hypnagogic cinema," as some have labeled it, intersects with that of the Time-Life books lends this project a near-irreproachable conceptual basis. No less fortuitously, the concept can quickly be set aside. The impact of Thomson's work is as overwhelmingly embodied and visceral—and also, I will add with some trepidation, mystical—as that of his forebears.



That the current stage of "the age of technical reproducibility" is one equally prey to the forces of acceleration and inertia is a sense *Sideways Thought* renders acute.

There is a distinctly anachronistic quality to these proceedings, and this too contributes to their uncanny effect. But whereas the filmic auteurs mentioned above drilled down on the stroboscopic flashing of their projectors, always set at the same rate, as a means of synchronizing the viewer's breathing, pulse, and synaptic firing with the flow of images on-screen, Thomson commands a much more versatile technology. Here, because lenses remain open, the hypnagogic timing is adjustable. In the "Time Life" works the image not only moves but vibrates; it carries a rhythm. These videos are composed either in response to a soundtrack (as is the knot-tying-themed *Volume 6. The Working End*, 2021–22, which is edited to the beat of Pauline Oliveros's 1974 percussion piece "Single Stroke Roll Meditation") or else they instigate it (for instance, *Volume 16. FOLK2NS, or The Encyclopedia of Guitar Chords*, 2025, in which the imagery literally scores the soundtrack, performed by Lee Ranaldo). The timbrally meandering electronic pulse in *Sideways Thought* was generated by Ernst Karel to the tempo of the footage. Reminiscent of Steve Reich's metronomic Minimalism and equally of the thrum of scanning devices, its design came in reply to the artist's demand for "an MRI you can dance to."

Upon his emergence, right around the start of the aughts, Thomson was often characterized as a late-stage responder to the so-called Pictures generation. This was a period when terms like *media hacking* and *culture jamming* had begun to displace the old-school "appropriation." Plundering the reserves of mass-market entertainment as well as avant-garde art, he has always deployed both erasure and archival accumulation as signature tactics. For instance, in *The American Desert (for Chuck Jones)*, 2002, the characters from "Road Runner" cartoons are excised

galerie frank elbaz.

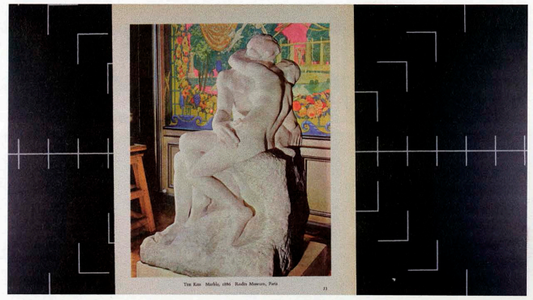
to leave behind just the scenery, a succession of moving landscape tableaux. In *Untitled (Time)*, 2010, a video that more directly relates to the one under discussion here, every *Time* magazine cover, from that of the first issue through that of the then-latest, scrolls by at an impossible pace. We are dealing with the life of *Time*, approaching information and knowledge from the outside, at an angle at once philological and absurdist.

Clever is a term that is sometimes used to describe Thomson by his detractors. In art, it carries a decidedly unflattering tone. Yet the cleverness on offer here opens every "one liner" interpretation to a radiating constellation of lines that is pretty much inexhaustible. One of these has to do with the fact that, as Rosalind Krauss notes in her 1981 essay "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," Rodin was among the first in his field to work perfectly in sync with the regime of technical reproducibility. "Now, nothing in the myth of Rodin as the prodigious form giver," she writes there, "prepares us for the reality of these arrangements of multiple clones."[5] Nevertheless, it is evident that Rodin multiplied his sculptures in edition copies circulated throughout the globe, much like photographs. This analogy is central to Krauss's argument.[6] The connection between the *dispositifs* of these two media—one involving casts and molds, the other negative film and positive prints—deserves much more attention than I am prepared to give it here, but let's keep it in mind. Another tangential line worth pursuing: Rodin made ample use of photography proper in his figural renderings. In other words, the emphatically hands-on aesthetic for which he is known took shape in the shadows of the hands-off. By the end of his life, this artist had amassed an archive of some seven thousand photographs, many of them featuring nude models, which he employed in his studio process. In addition, Rodin regularly commissioned photographs of his sculptures, thus twisting this intermedial exchange into a feedback loop.[7] One more line, this one pushing back against the last two: Rodin both embraced photography and decried it. He never went so far as to renounce it, as the record amply proves, but neither did he accept its vaunted realism without reservation. Rather, one could say that his goal was to mobilize the medium's limits, these having everything to do with its incapacitating relation to movement.

In a famous dialogue with the critic Paul Gsell, Rodin reportedly said, "People in photographs suddenly seem frozen in mid-air despite being caught in full swing: this is because every part of their body is reproduced at exactly the same twentieth and fortieth of a second, so there is no gradual unfolding of a gesture, as there is in art."[8] That this "gradual unfolding of a gesture" might have been made up by the artist, and hence potentially erroneous, is suggested in Gsell's rebuttal, as is the idea that the camera is incapable of any such fault. "So," he responds, "when art interprets movement and finds itself completely at loggerheads with photography, which is an unimpeachable mechanical witness, art obviously distorts the truth." "No," insists Rodin. "It is art that tells the truth and photography that lies. For in reality time does not stand still." This exchange is quoted at the very start of Paul Virilio's 1994 book *The Vision Machine*, where it leads into an excursus on the automation of imaging and, moreover, seeing. For all their quibbling over questions of reality versus falsehood, the sparring partners drive at an insight that is central to Thomson's project in general. Ultimately, it has to do with *energy* and the distinction between its patient aesthetic conservation and its abrupt technical capture and suspension.[9]

It is on this point that Thomson's cleverness takes on a metaphysical tint, for these are concerns that can be traced back to ancient philosophy.[10] The "Time Life" videos enjoin us to revisit such thoughts from the perspective of a picture industry that has, in the interim, undergone mechanization, electrification, and, finally, digitization. What is at stake today is the conversion of all images to a single standard of distribution. These once appeared in stand-alone works of art, either here (where I can see them) or there (where I cannot). Later, they came to be circulated more widely via editioned prints, photographs, newspapers, magazines, films, and TV. At present, they exist in one place, on a screen that folds all these formerly discrete modalities together. A good number of the Time-Life books are now available on such digital platforms as the Internet Archive. Somewhat ironically, Thomson's studio process thus parallels a much broader (industrial) method, whereby books are systematically manipulated by robotic devices, their pages shuffled at great speed beneath a lens. Volumes are often destroyed in the course of their digital preservation, as is the imagery they contain. Now that these all are composed of exactly the same "elementary particles," they can, in a sense, communicate with one another and, further, generate novel images through their algorithmic interaction. This can now happen at nearly the speed of light, which is not to say that the results are necessarily invigorating. That the current stage of "the age of technical reproducibility" is one equally prey to the forces of acceleration and inertia is a sense *Sideways Thought* renders acute. This is very rapidly becoming "the new normal," yet Thomson's work keeps us auspiciously estranged. Rodin's effort to distill entire bodily movements (or gestures) into a single pose—his pushback against their sudden arrest in technical imaging—is one that we in effect replicate as viewers. Anything that moves in the imagistic pile-on of *Sideways Thought* only does so in our eyes, differently in every eye, but always here and now, in this space and at this time—a singular experience in which invitation to deep reflection collides with the invocation of fugue states. What more could you want from a work of art? □

JAN TUMLIR IS A LOS ANGELES–BASED ART WRITER.



This page and opposite: **Three stills from Mungo Thomson's *Volume 5. Sideways Thought*, 2020–22,** 4K video, color, sound, 8 minutes 9 seconds. Score by Ernst Karel. From the series "Time Life," 2014–.

For notes, see page 186.

galerie frank elbaz.

TUMLIR/THOMSON from page 147

NOTES

1. The "American Century" was announced in a February 1941 issue of *Life* magazine by its founder, Henry Luce, in an editorial piece urging the nation to reconsider its isolationist policies and engage in the conflict of World War II. This language is resumed in a Time-Life book series published retrospectively in 1997: "Our American Century."

2. The phrase *museum without walls* is derived from the first chapter of Malraux's book *Voices of Silence*, which was originally published in three volumes under the title *The Psychology of Art* between 1947 and 1949. A meditation on the promise of photography as an aid to art appreciation, it preceded the first Time-Life title by a little over a decade but partakes of much the same zeitgeist.

3. As Thomson explained it to me, "Because *Sideways Thought* required so many more books on Rodin than Time-Life offered, I released Time-Life books as a parameter for the series and, after that, any bound printed matter was fair game." Nevertheless, the publisher's name has retained its place in his titling. One can infer that it remains a central point of reference for everything that follows.

4. This time signature was also chosen because hard-copy books are scanned at this same rate when digitized—eight pages per second is the rate scanned by the BGS-Auto at the University of Tokyo.

5. Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press, 1991), 155.

6. In this passage, for instance: "Like Cartier-Bresson, who never printed his own photographs, Rodin's relation to the casting of his sculptures could only be called remote." Krauss, 153.

7. Interestingly, this practice begins in a quasi-legal context, as is related in the following article on the website of the Musée Rodin in Meudon, France: "In 1877, his submission to the Paris Salon, *The Age of Bronze*, was the subject of huge controversy. Its critics accused Rodin of not having modelled this male figure, but of having used a life cast. The sculptor reacted by employing photographer Gaudenzio Marconi, who supplied art students with images, to take a series of shots of both the plaster version of *The Age of Bronze* and Auguste Neyt, the model who had posed for the work, so that they could be used as proof in his defense." See "Rodin and Photography," Musée Rodin, accessed July 9, 2025, musee-rodin.fr/en/resources/rodin-and-arts/rodin-and-photography.

8. This and the following quotes are derived from Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, trans. Julie Rose (Indiana University Press, 1994), 1–2.

9. I am employing some of Rodin's language here: As he says to Gsell, "If the artist manages to give the impression that a gesture is being executed over several seconds, their work is certainly much less conventional than the scientific image in which time is abruptly suspended." Rodin, in Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 2.

10. Aristotle, for one, placed the distinction between actual and potential energy at the core of his thinking. In his *De Anima*, we encounter the somewhat obvious but still striking observation that energy is extinguished in its actualization whereas its withholding as potential is outwardly akin to impotence. Nevertheless, without the latter the former could not arise. Potential is the animating principle, which the Latin term *anima* relates to the soul. Aristotle, *De Anima*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (The Modern Library, 2001), Section 5, 564–67.



SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE OVER
60% OFF COVER PRICE

subscribe.artforum.com

