

CHRISTOPHER KLINE

PORTFOLIO 2015

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O.K. – The Musical (Pre-Production)

'O.K. – The Musical' is based on the folklore and myths of Kline's hometown of Kinderhook, a small town in the Hudson River Valley, about 200 km upstate from New York City. Kinderhook is also home of 8th US President Martin Van Buren, the term "O.K.", whistle-blower Frank Serpico, and the Headless Horseman. In this project Kline explores the potential of narrative installations whilst deconstructing the community theatre musical into its fundamentals and, at times, unfortunate realities.

For the duration of the project, insitu has become a dynamic space for production and rehearsals open to the public. Kline has built a highly detailed creation of a community theatre's front and back stage, encompassing the entire exhibition space and almost entirely obscuring any traces of insitu's typical 'white cube' status. During regular workshop sessions Christopher Kline has been working together with young children, teenagers and adults to create the stage scenery, props, music, and costumes for the musical.



O.K. – The Musical (Pre-Production), installation views, insitu, Berlin, 2015





O.K. – The Musical (Pre-Production), installation views, insitu, Berlin, 2015





O.K. – The Musical (Pre-Production), installation views, insitu, Berlin, 2015



O.K. – The Musical (Pre-Production), workshop documentation, insitu, Berlin, 2015



O.K. – The Musical (Dress Rehearsals)
KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2015

“O.K. – The Musical” is an ongoing project by Kline tracing the history of his hometown of Kinderhook, New York from when Henry Hudson encountered the Mahican Indians of the region in 1609 through Martin Van Buren’s presidency and his popularization of the now widely-used term “O.K.” (Old Kinderhook) up until the Kinderhook Creature bigfoot sightings of the 1980s.

This first, fragmented iteration of the performance was developed at insitu through workshops, events and rehearsals within Kline’s immersive installation there over the previous two months. (*Dress Rehearsals*) presents five vignette’s from Kinderhook’s history with a cast and chorus of 25 actors, 15 crew and 10 orchestra players.

Video documentation of the 30 minute performance is viewable here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8TOSjgCQh8>

Playbill with lyrics and scene background is viewable here:
<http://www.christopher-kline.com/files/okkwbookletimagesweb.pdf>

Stills from *O.K. – The Musical (Dress Rehearsals)*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2015
Scene I: Henry Hudson Encounters the Mahicans



Stills from *O.K. – The Musical (Dress Rehearsals)*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2015
Scene II: Don't Lose Your Head, Ichabod



Stills from *O.K. – The Musical (Dress Rehearsals)*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2015
Scene III: Tour of Lindewald/Indian Removal Act of 1830



Stills from *O.K. – The Musical (Dress Rehearsals)*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2015
Scene IV: Ballad of the Kinderhook Creature

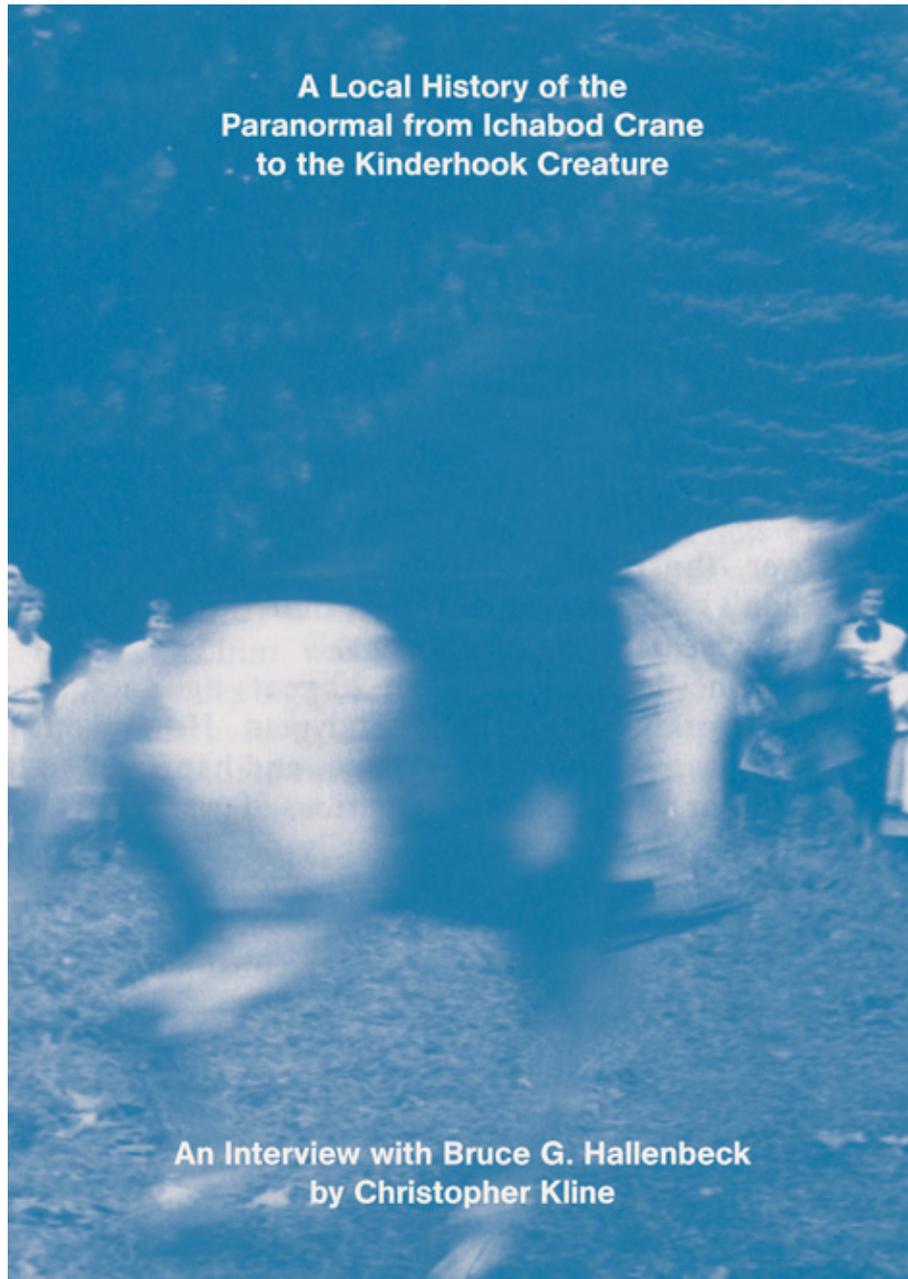


Stills from *O.K. – The Musical (Dress Rehearsals)*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2015
Scene V: O.K. Finale



O.K. ORCHESTRA AND CHOIR
from *O.K. – The Musical (Dress Rehearsals)*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2015





Bruce G. Hallenbeck is a writer, horror filmmaker, and cryptozoology researcher from the small Hudson River Valley town of Kinderhook, NY. Hallenbeck shares this hometown with artist Christopher Kline, whose ongoing project, O.K., explores Kinderhook's unusually rich (and eccentric) cultural legacy. The Dutch settlement was the birthplace of President Martin van Buren, the long-rumored inventor of the very term "Okay." Kinderhook also inspired Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, and is now home to Frank Serpico—the whistle-blowing policeman who inspired Sidney Lumet's 1973 *Serpico*, and whose portrayal earned Al Pacino a Golden Globe. Hallenbeck is among the town's more obscure figures; his expertise in the paranormal, and the area's particular influence on his cult horror films and non-fiction writing, make him a part of Kinderhook's living archive.

Kline was commissioned to create a project for print and web distribution that would function as a case study in research-oriented artistic practice, and an investigation into a notion of a cultural community—that is, how oral and archival histories shape its identity, and they might re-engage its participants. The result is a document available in two forms—as a PDF, downloadable here, and as a limited edition Risograph-printed booklet, designed by John McCusker. It is only one ephemeral part of O.K.'s development not only through research and publications, but through exhibitions, workshops, and performances. These multi-disciplinary explorations will culminate in the realization of a full-scale community theater musical—a synthesis of document and participation, "dead" pasts and living presence.

O.K.

O.K. is the first manifestation of an ongoing project by Christopher Kline. Kline was born in 1982 in Kinderhook, NY, a small town in the Hudson River Valley, about 200 km upstate from New York City. The village and surrounding rural communities of Kinderhook are home to 8,498 residents today. The term “O.K.” has become one of the most universally used and understood words in the world. Its rise to prominence can be traced back to Martin Van Buren’s failed U.S. Presidential reelection campaign of 1840, for which the abbreviation of his hometown nickname “Old Kinderhook” was the rallying cry of his supporters.

Oriented around the propagation of “O.K.” as a metaphor for the subtle permeation of small-town American idiosyncrasies into broader cultural forms, Kline’s project explores early cultural exports and anomalies originating in Van Buren’s (and Kline’s) birthplace as well as recent local developments there since post-industrialization. *O.K.* synthesizes and expands on Kinderhook’s lore and attempts to construct a fresh overview of local history through the exposition of historical documents, videos, replicas, interpretive research, and collaborations with local students, craftspeople, filmmakers, and other community members.

The period of Van Buren’s political rise and fall, starting as a NY Senator in 1812, presidency from 1837-1841 and ending in his final failed presidential bid in 1848, was also a time of great historical activity and source of legend in the area around Kinderhook itself. These were the glory days of Old Kinderhook. Writer Washington Irving published *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* in 1819 whose protagonist Ichabod Crane was based on a local school teacher whom Irving met while living briefly in Kinderhook. Irving was a key figure in the burgeoning field of American literature, which was gaining legitimacy across the Atlantic. Irving’s tenuous relationship with Kinderhook has become an added source of local pride for the town, who named their incorporated public school system Ichabod Crane Central in 1954. The school’s logo and sports team mascot is either the figure of Ichabod Crane on his galloping horse, or the terrifying figure of the pumpkin-wielding Headless Horseman chasing him.

In the years of Van Buren’s presidency and later failures, the local Shakers at Mount Lebanon were going through their “Era of Manifestations” (1837-53), a high-point for the celibate and hard-working sect famous for their pioneering of gender equality, conscientious objection, and fine furniture design. Meanwhile nearby, landscape painter Frederic Edwin Church was becoming one of the first widely-celebrated American artists as the foremost member of the Hudson River School. But as years passed, the mills around Columbia County began to close down, and as the physical exports slowed, so did the cultural exports, both leading to stagnated growth until its rise as a ‘bedroom community’ for Albany, New York’s capital. Since the 1970s rural upstate NY has become a permanent destination for those wanting to escape the hustle of New York City, attracting artists such as Ellsworth Kelly and famous whistle-blower Frank Serpico, as well as less inspiring rich weekenders locally referred to as “cidiots”.

While Kinderhook’s history is unique, it is not atypical of other small towns in the northeastern U.S., or perhaps small towns all over the world that relish their small claims to fame and brushes with greatness. Van Buren remains a troubled source of pride for the town, and despite his not being a particularly admirable president (he set up the first political machines, lead the country further into financial crisis, was against the abolition of slavery, intervened controversially in the Amistad incident, and executed the Indian Removal Act which lead to the Trail of Tears, amongst other crimes against humanity), he is something of a local hero. And so it is perhaps not ironic that the town’s most propagated cultural export is a word synonymous with ‘alright’, ‘fine’, ‘enough’, ‘unremarkable’, ‘mediocre’, a word to signify acknowledgement, assent, or acquiescence. *O.K.*

Full exhibition research guide viewable here:
<http://www.christopher-kline.com/files/okbooklet.pdf>



O.K. Poster Project with Ichabod Crane 4th and 5th graders, from *O.K.*, installation views at Grimmuseum, 2014





O.K., installation views at Grimmuseum, 2014





O.K., installation views at Grimmuseum, 2014



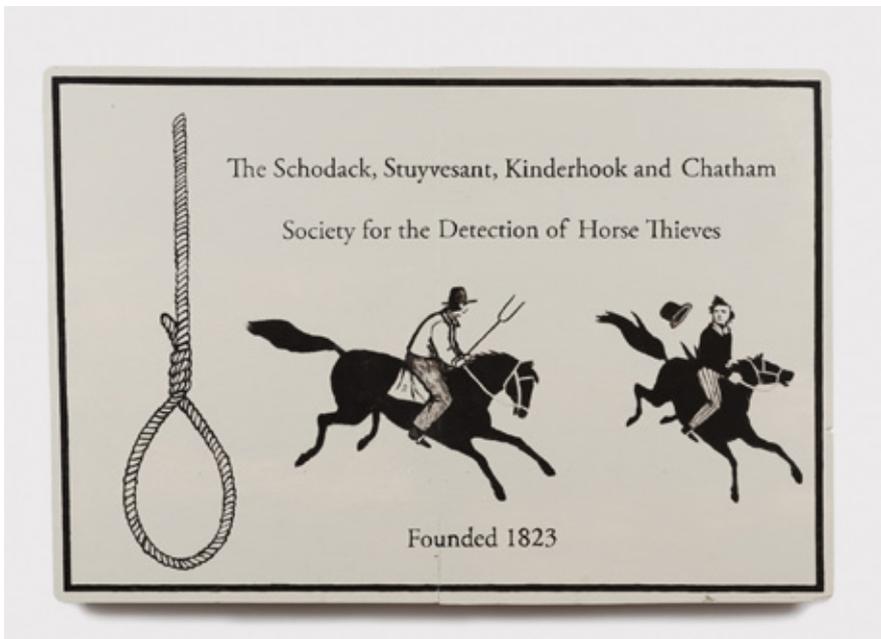


Shots from the first *O.K.* performance. These are ‘tableaus’ based on the “Living Paintings” project that used to take place in the ICC elementary art classes. In between tableaus I acted as ‘director’ and changed the signs of the civic groups. Each tableau has a musical song playing while the actors freeze.





“Replicas” of local civic group signs for use in Town Hall





Olana Quilt, based on the tower roof design of Frederic Church's Olana.





O.K., installation view at Grimmuseum, 2014

Room painting as a nod to landscape painter Frederic Church and also to create a setting for the Shaker's Mountain Meetings



Shaker Gift Drawing Table, table designed based on Shaker furniture and decorated with replicas of Shaker Gift Drawings made at Mount Lebanon.



Fictional NYS Historic Markers to mark the unknown site of the Shaker's Visionary Fountain and another with the definition of "O.K."





O.K., installation views at Grimmuseum, 2014
with Ellsworth Kelly Chatham Series banner and other objects



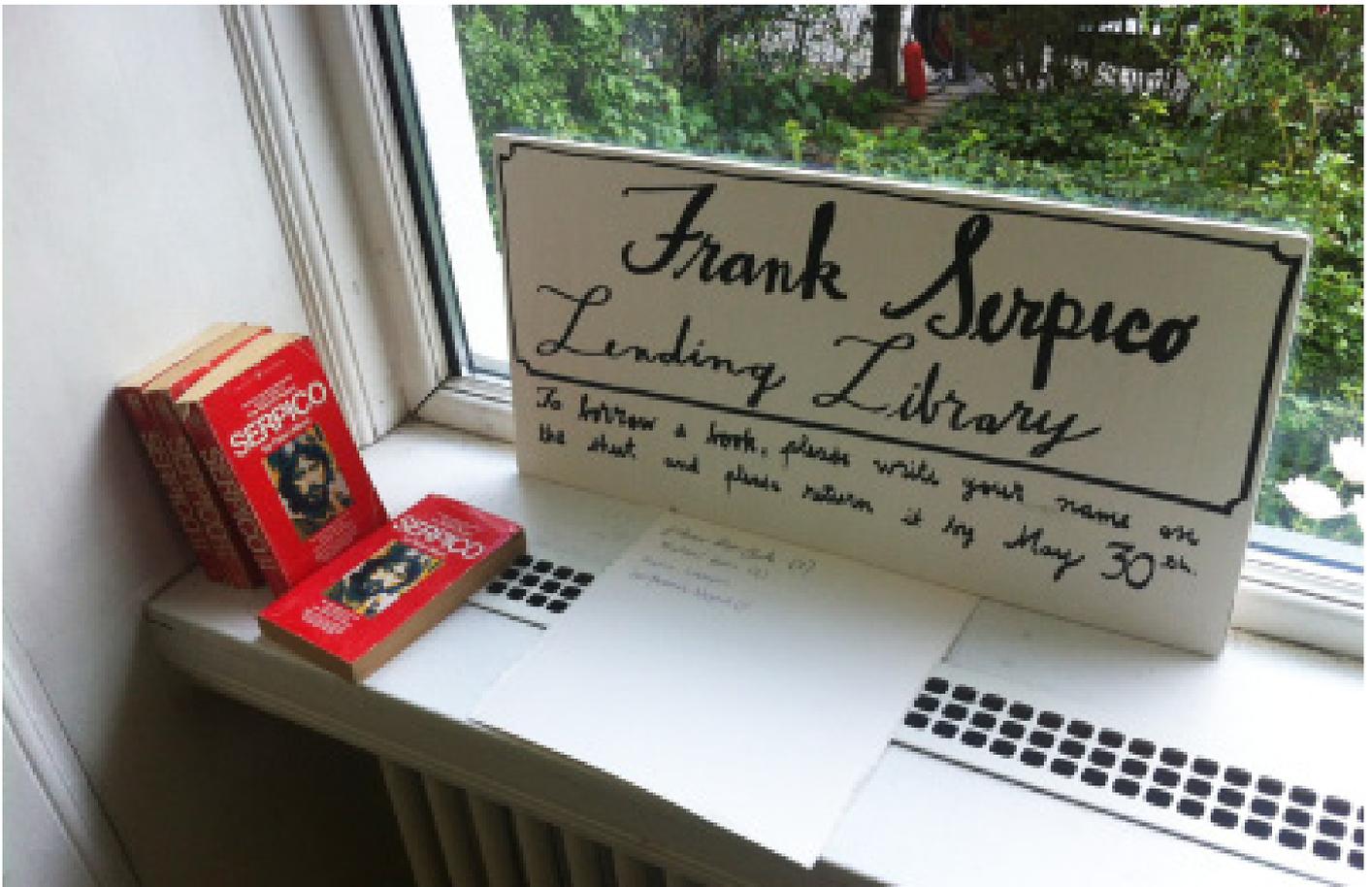


Map of Northern Columbia County



Below: Screening of the trailer for Bruce G. Hallenbeck's unfinished 1983 film *Cannibal Church*





Above: *Frank Serpico Lending Library*, a tribute to local resident Frank Serpico who often frequents the Kinderhook Memorial Library. Visitors can sign out and borrow a copy of Peter Maas' 1973 biography on Serpico for the duration of the exhibition.

Below: Bookholder created for one-arm use by Northend Woodworking, Kinderhook. Holding *The Legend of Sleep Hollow*





Above: Headless Horseman sculpture, wearing an old Ichabod Crane Central sweatshirt.
Upholstered with fabric remnants from Traditions Linens, Claverack, NY.

O.K., installation view at Grimmuseum, 2014

LABYRINTHS

I EGGS

After night falls, the women congregate around kitchen tables with their wax and candles and kystkas and set to work. The men are often banished from the house while this work goes on and the patterns and color combinations are carefully guarded, passed down from mother to daughter. Writing pysanka dates back to ancient times though no examples exist due to the eggs' fragility. They were initially created as talismans for sun-worshipping rituals, and later syncretized into Christian practice, shifting from a symbol of the rites-of-spring to the resurrection of Man. Many symbols remained unchanged, such as the spiral motif, thought to be the most powerful because they could be used to trap demons and other unholy creatures within their infinite shape. Later they were banned as religious practice under communist rule and entire museum collections were destroyed by Soviet cadres, the tradition living on predominantly through diasporan practice in North America.

II MONUMENTS

While in English the egg carries mostly ovarian and motherly connotations, in other languages a more testicular association remains prominent. In a true show of maleness, the largest "pysanka egg" in the world now exists in Canada, created out of anodized aluminum by an artist of Ukrainian descent named Paul Maxum Sembaliuk.

As if the perversity of having to out-do all previously existing pysanka eggs whose essence is their fragility, humility and ephemerality by making a permanent, nine meter, two ton version weren't enough, in keeping with the masculine tradition of honoring power and fear through violence with huge constructions, the egg was erected as a monument to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Male artists such as Kippenberger and Dalí have long honed in on the egg, the latter devoting fourteen years to creating a museum of his own work adorned with a couple dozen of his giant eggs. But it was Nelson Rockefeller who had the resources to truly realize his megalomaniacal egg vision. During a visit from Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands to explore the Dutch history of New York State's capital region, Governor Rockefeller felt embarrassed of Albany, especially during their limo ride through "The Gut", a low-income immigrant neighborhood of about 9,000 people. It is said that it was after this brush with royalty that Rockefeller resolved to build something monumental, more fitting to the grandeur of his administration. The Gut was completely razed along with its shops and churches after a combination of forced and paid evictions using eminent domain laws. 17 years and 2 billion dollars later, the ribbon was cut on the Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza, an enormous high-modern dystopian complex, its odd focal point being "The Egg", a giant theatre which has become the icon of Albany's now fairly fascist-looking skyline.

III LABYRINTHS

The original labyrinth was built by Daedalus upon the order of King Minos in order to imprison his wife's son, the flesh-eating Minotaur, who was fathered by a bull after a long series of strange events. It is said that even Daedalus could barely find his way out of the labyrinth after he created it. Every seventh year Minos would send seven maidens and seven Athenian youths into the labyrinth as a sacrifice to the Minotaur. The brave Theseus elected to slay the monster and to find his way back out of the labyrinth was secretly given a ball of thread by Minos' daughter Ariadne who had fallen in love with him. Many different versions of this story exist, and although the ruins of Minos' palace have been found, the labyrinth's existence remains a mystery. Some have also posited that the Minotaur and Minos are in fact the same being and that legend of his labyrinthine palace of many rooms and hallways was embellished and distorted over time into a maze.

...

The labyrinth is a key feature in two 1980s films in which this kind of uncomfortable male megalomania is again taken to extremes. First in Kubrick's 1980 *The Shining*, a hedge maze on the grounds of the Overlook Hotel (built upon an Indian burial site) serves as a day-outing for mother and child as Jack Torrance, the writer father, chillingly watches over them walking through a scale model inside of the hotel. Later, as Jack's descent into supernatural madness climaxes with an attempt at filicide, the blizzard-filled labyrinth again serves as the setting for the son's escape from his father's murderous hand, reversing the role of the minotaur as Jack freezes to death, lost in the labyrinth.

Jim Henson's 1986 commercial failure and final feature film of his life *Labyrinth* centers around Jareth the Goblin King (played by who better than legendary narcissist David Bowie) and his kidnapping of the baby brother of the film's protagonist, a 14 year old girl named Sarah. After a movie's worth of confusing motivations and intentions, Sarah reaches the center of the labyrinth kingdom where Jareth's true intentions become clear as he attempts to seduce her into staying there with him forever. She thwarts his plan simply by remembering a line from a fictional play (titled *The Labyrinth*) she had trouble memorizing for homework at the beginning of the film, "You have no power over me".

IV CRAZY QUILTS

The rote mechanics involved in quilting and the fact that, unlike handicrafts such as knitting or embroidery, many people can work on a piece at the same time encouraged much dialog between women and the quilting bee became a forum for trading tips, designs, recipes, and discussing religion, politics, and life in general. Due to this social nature imbued with a sense of purpose, quilting had become one of the central activities for American women in the 19th century.

In the early 1880s “Crazy Quilts” exploded in popularity with women’s magazines heralding them as a bold and daring development coinciding with the Decorative Art craze of the era. Their seemingly random piecing, lack of pattern, bright colors and visually overwhelming effect garnered them the label “Crazy Quilts”, which is still the official nomenclature, though the works are often not quilts in a technical sense, lacking the batting and stitching through the top and bottom layer which defines quilt-making.

As Quilting Hall of Famer Sally Garoutte has noted: “Better than swooning, better than nervous breakdowns, better than gin or patent medicines, Crazy Quilts were American women’s answer to the constrictions of the Victorian age.”

These heirlooms were often particularly sentimental, including pieces of wedding dresses, prize ribbons, old clothing, and embroidered names, dates, and places of the family or community making it. This imbues many of them with a strange nostalgia of a lost time, the fabric itself carrying a great many stories and past-lives.

By 1887 the fad was over and Godey’s Ladies’ Book proclaimed in December of that year, “We regretted much the time and energy spent on the most childish, and unsatisfactory of all work done with the needle, ‘crazy’ patchwork.”

V METAPHYSICS

Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrá formally established the tenants of Pittura Metafisica (Metaphysical Painting) in 1917, focusing their attention on the inner-life of the object, painting that which can’t be seen. Their work, in sharp contrast to the Futurists at the time, presided along the dislocation between the past and the present. As the fascists were rewriting history, paving over it, promoting war as “the only hygiene of the world”, De Chirico longed for a return to classic grandeur. “What shall I love if not the enigma.”

VI THE TRANCE STATE AND ARTISTRY

“One does not freely create divine images; nor does one improvise the mantras which are the phonetic form of these deities. The Hindu maker of divine images is not an artist, but a craftsman, a shilpin. A shilpin however can be artistically gifted, thus giving birth to beautiful images which, though fashioned according to a canonical set of rules, are able to arouse emotions or even to fill with wonder those who see them. ... They are things of beauty, a ‘joy forever,’ and thus very much capable, we may believe, to become supports of cosmic visions. They would also have been, when most abstract, the starting point of aniconic meditations.”

-André Padoux from his essay *Of Images & Beauty in Tantra Song*

VII. JOINT SNAKES

“Yep. I’ve seed them too. They look like these here old king snakes—kind’a spotted—an’ when y’hit one, it’ll break up in pieces about as long as yer finger. Just like you had cut it up. And if y’leave it there ‘til th’ next mornin’, it will be a snake again. That’s a funny snake t’me. I’ve seed a lot of’em down here.

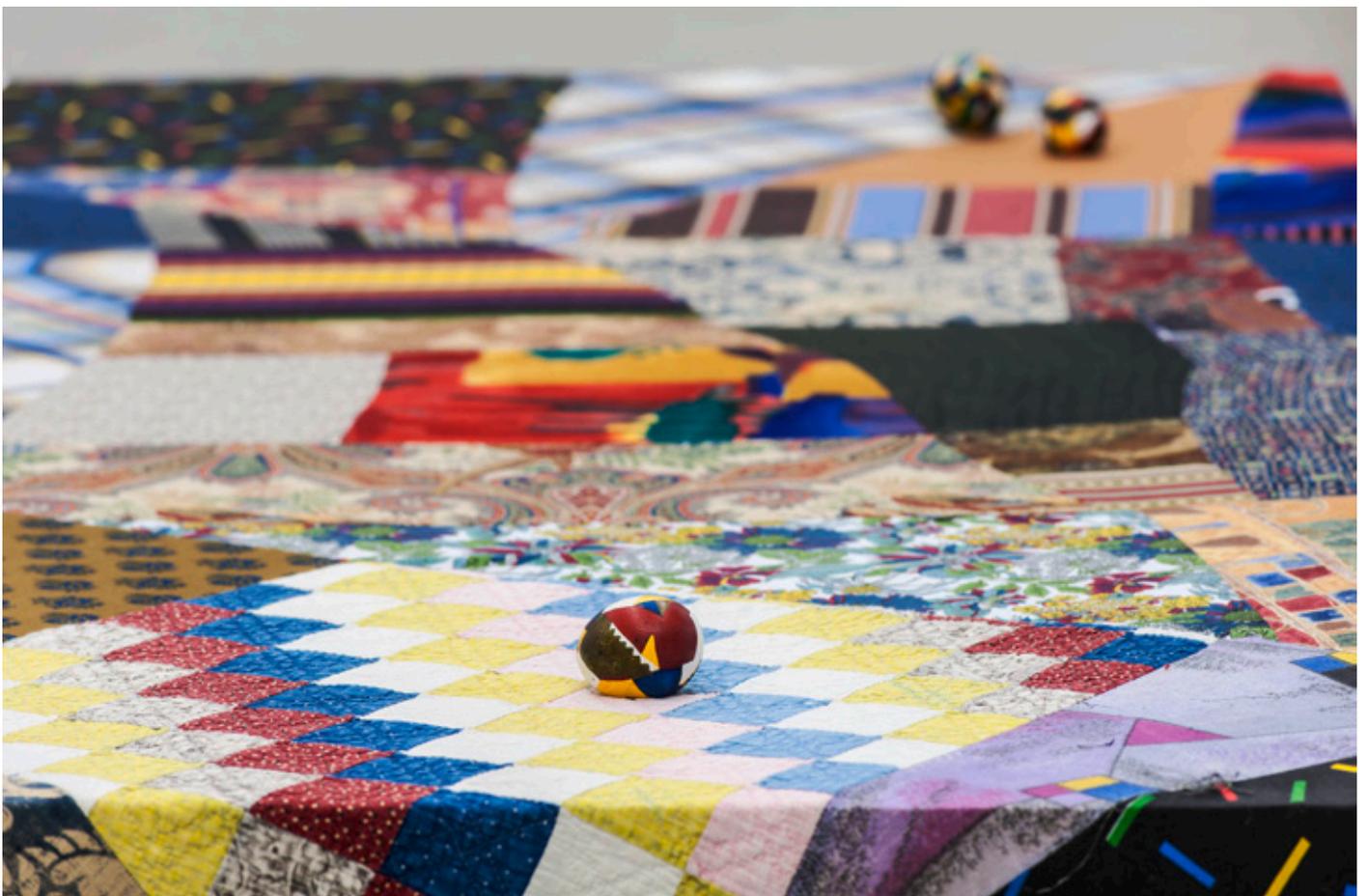
“That’s the funniest thing I ever did know—how they done that. But they’ll grow back t’gether. They’ll just fall all t’pieces like somethin’ y’break, y’know. That way you’d think y’killed him. I don’t know what they would do if you was t’move one a’them pieces.”

-Harv Reid of Rabun Gap, Georgia, as interviewed in *The Foxfire Book*

-text for *Labyrinths*, solo exhibition at Lüttgenmeijer, Berlin, June-July 2013.

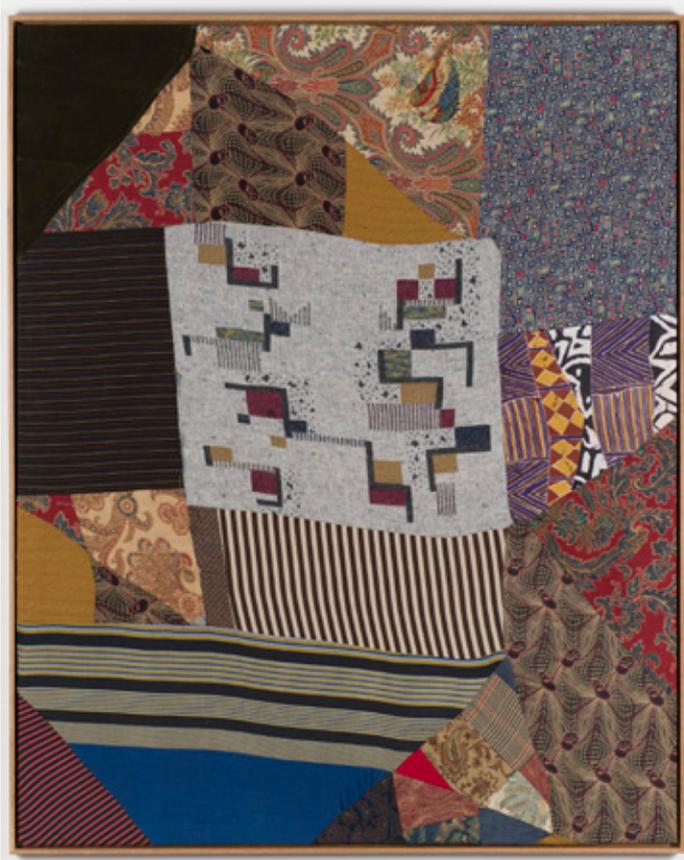


Labyrinths, installation views at Lüttgenmeijer, Berlin, 2013





Monolith, fabric, 210x140cm, 2013



Quilt Collage, fabric, 150x122cm, 2012



Quilt Collage, fabric, 130x103cm, 2013



Woven Kleider Collage,
sweaters, 150x122cm, 2013



Quilt Collage, fabric, 130x103cm, 2013



Labyrinth, oil pastel on burlap, 150x122cm, 2013



Labyrinth, oil pastel on burlap, 150x120cm, 2013



Labyrinth, oil pastel on fabric, 150x122cm, 2013



Labyrinth, oil pastel on burlap, 148x120cm, 2013



Spiral, oil pastel on burlap, 150x122cm, 2012



Shelved Ritual, installation views with Grimmuseum, Berlin, 2012





Shelved Ritual, installation views with Grimmuseum, Berlin, 2012



Drawing Shelf with Broken Arm, 2012



Color-Era Wooden Robe, fabric, 140x80cm, 2008/12



Color-Era Wooden Robe, fabric, 140x80cm, 2008/12



Drei, installation view at Galerie Conradi, Hamburg, 2011



Set Mosaic, performance at HAU2, 2013

REGALOS ANCESTRALES

Regalos Ancestrales (Ancestral Gifts) is a multi-part collaboration between Sol Calero and Christopher Kline. The project serves as a channel between our individual practices and revolves around the subjectivity of archaeology and the logistics and politics of artifact recovery, transportation, preservation, and storage. It often deals with the ways artists and societies at large have dealt with the 'ancient', the 'tribal', and 'the other' particularly during Modernism (and especially Cubism and Surrealism).

Regalos Ancestrales has been realized through publications, talks, performances, and several exhibitions. In its first incarnation, we collaborated to create a patchwork quilt, embarking from the point of the heirloom. Our focus has often been abstracting the dichotomy between the masculine tradition of permanent monuments (architecture in its preserved and ruined state, war and religious monuments, etc.) and the feminine traditions of ephemeral craftwork (quilting, weaving, sewing, egg-dying, etc). In a personal way, we're asking what gets passed on to posterity and why, often lending equal footing to found objects and hand-made works to highlight this aspect of selection.

At TEA, Tenerife the installation made use of the museum's immense storage facility, creating a monument out of their crates, pedestals and trash, given form by wrapping it with quilted moving-blankets. Also reappropriated were the many large vitrines and plinths which were originally created to encase African masks as part of a Picasso exhibition there. The museum, completed in 1998, was designed by Herzog & de Meuron during a period of economic boom in Spain before the financial crisis sent Spanish unemployment sky-rocketing and effectively cancelled all cultural funding. Today the museum can barely function as a contemporary institution and all exhibitions were doubled and tripled in their duration. To address this, for the second two of four months of *Regalos Ancestrales* the show was deinstalled and the wrapped works, empty vitrines and plinths were left in the gallery, storing the objects in a state of flux, on display for the visitors.

For *Modern Dowry* at Toves in Copenhagen, the exhibition was based on the custom of dowries: the distribution of valuables from the bride's family to the groom during marriage ceremonies. The installation investigated different objects that constitute a traditional dowry. Cubist and Constructivist features assumed three-dimensionality resembling furniture and ceramics in interim materials such as fabrics collected on their travels and handcrafted wooden and cardboard elements. Puzzling together our own dowry we injected seemingly inanimate objects with character and tenderness to showcase close aesthetic and cultural relationships between the artifacts, emphasizing distant narratives that linger through time.



Modern Dowry, in collaboration with Sol Calero, installation views at Toves, Copenhagen, 2013





Regalos Ancestrales (Part I), in collaboration with Sol Calero, installation view at Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, Tenerife, 2012

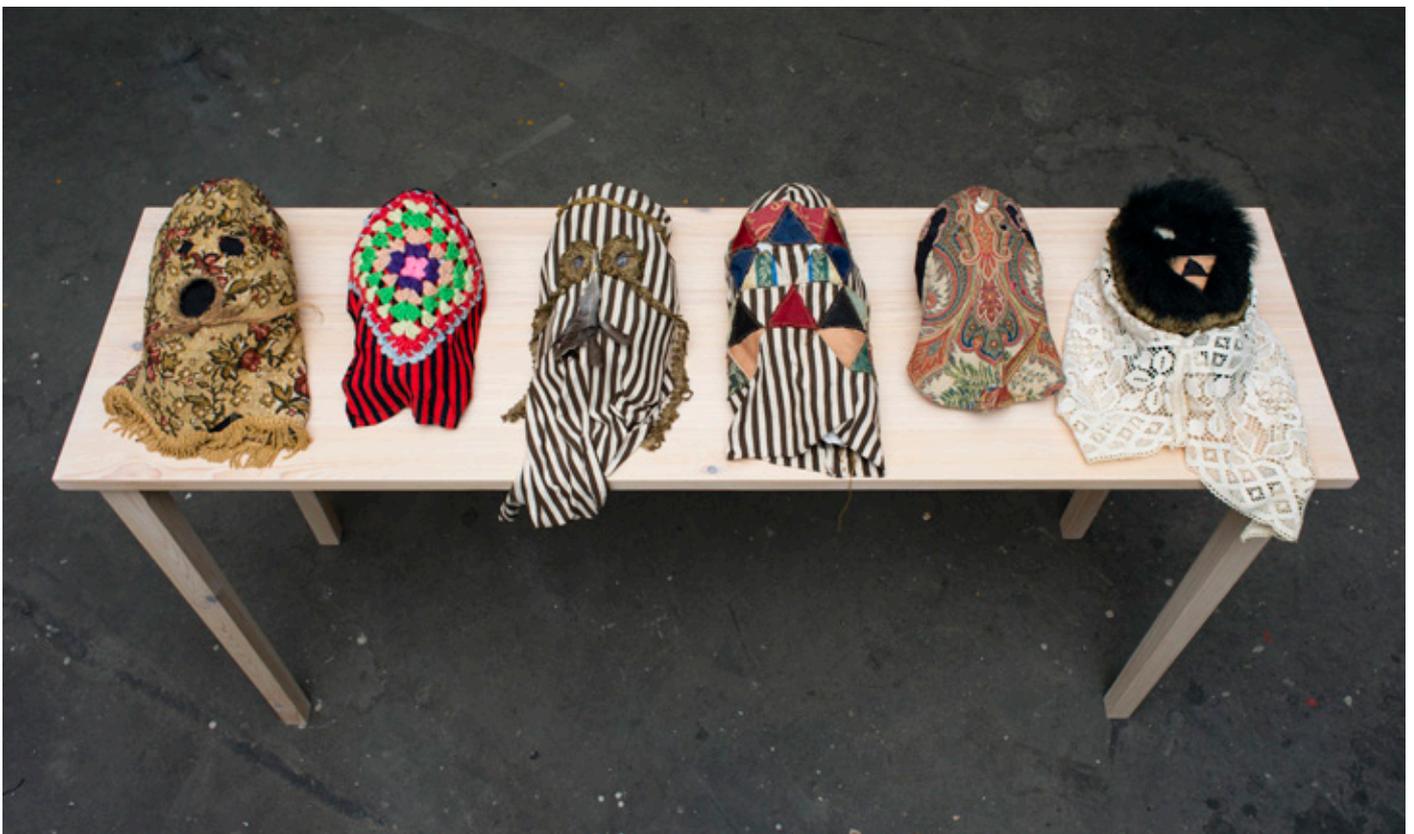
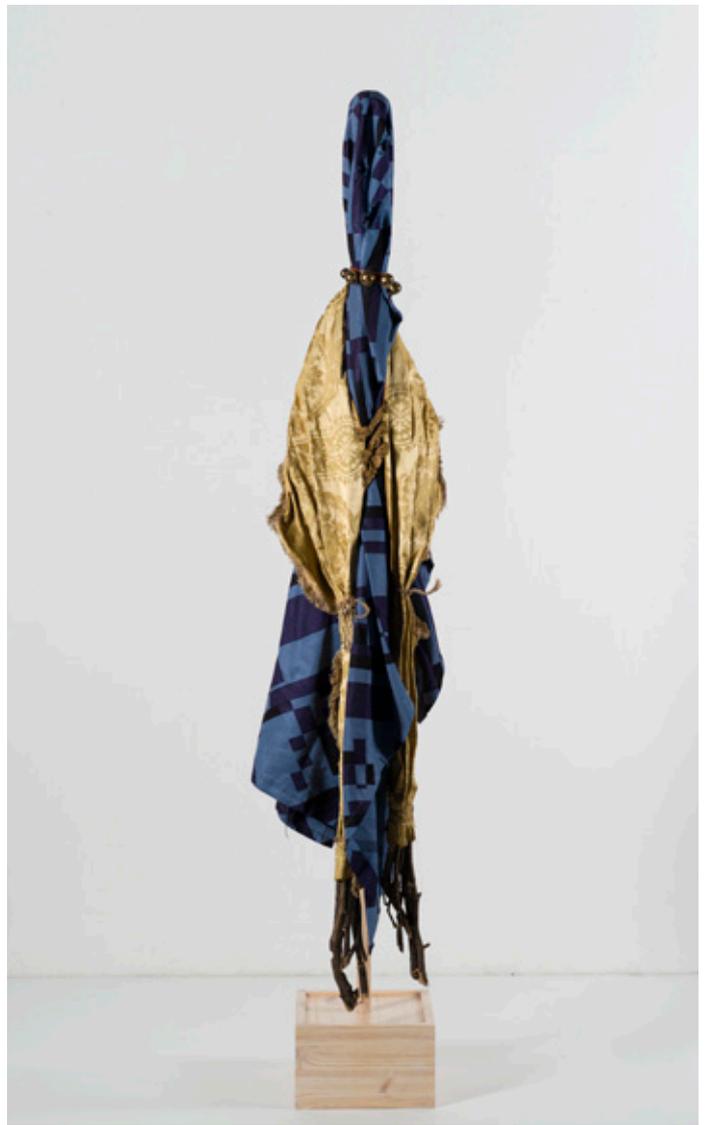




Quilt, in collaboration with Sol Calero, 250x250cm



Stations of the Snakebraid (photographs by Philip Wiegard)



Ritual Dress Archive, mixed materials, 2007-13

HUSH HUSH

BIO: HUSH HUSH is one of the multiple alter-egos of American artist Christopher Kline, who has been performing in the Berlin underground since 2006 under different pseudonyms such as Snakebraid, Night Music, and in the groups Wooden Veil and Gemeine Gesteine. Mixing r&b, soul, dance, and less palatable genres, HUSH HUSH describes himself as a 'self-styled hit-machine', considering every track a single and defiantly creating pop music which is not, in fact, very popular. Master of profane ceremonies, HUSH HUSH engenders furious and feverish evening performances, pounding stage after stage into a sort of asexual jelly. www.hushhushhush.com

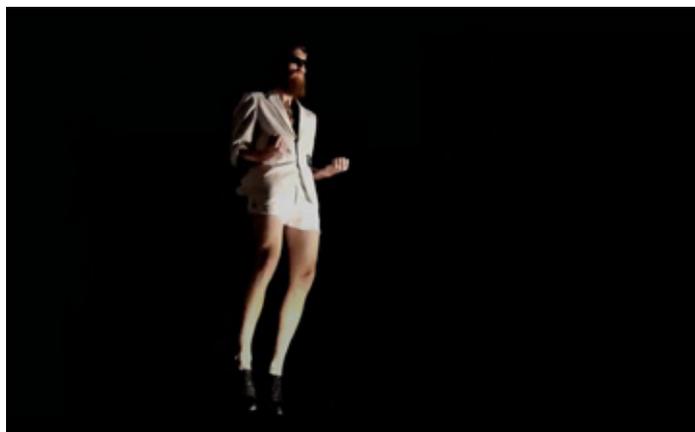


Photo: Trevor Good



Photo: Chris Frey





Stills from Hush Hush music videos