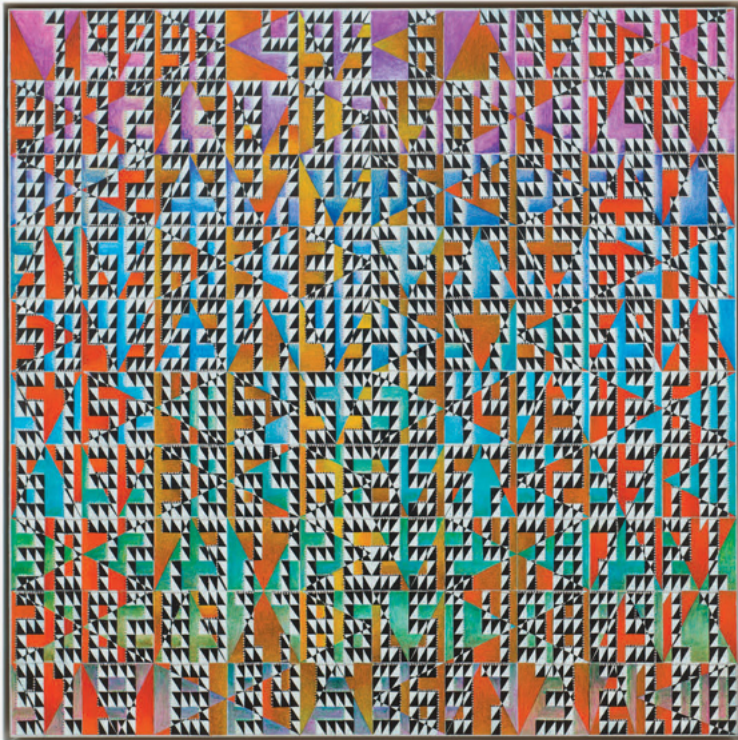


## ARTFORUM

### BEST OF 2019 | NICOLE EISENMAN

*Nicole Eisenman is an artist who lives and works in Brooklyn. She is a member of Ridykeulous.*



Xylor Jane, 10th Order Magic Square for Planet Earth, 2019, ink and oil on panel, 19 3/4 x 19 3/4".

#### 1. XYLOR JANE (CANADA, NEW YORK)

Jane's subject matter is the 96 percent of the universe that we've never seen. After the longest time I've spent in a gallery in ages, I went home to research magic squares, an ancient method for organizing numbers that Jane referenced in her show. I hear that mathematics is under and inside everything—no clue what that means, really, but I can feel the idea of mathematical systems in Jane's paintings. They hum and shimmer. Their structure appears and dissolves depending on how you adjust your vision, and you have to play with your focus to really see them. She makes Op art a sensuous pleasure.



**2. CADY NOLAND (MUSEUM FÜR MODERNE KUNST, FRANKFURT; CURATED BY SUSANNE PFEFFER)**

Psychosis, violence, patriarchy, nationalism, carceralism, dysfunctional structures: Noland's vision of America is terrifyingly accurate and deathly elegant. A giant, soft Claes Oldenburg sculpture of a slab of bacon, pulled from the museum's storage and mixed into the show, was the perfect garnish.

View of "Cady Noland," 2018–19, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt. From left: Cady Noland, Corral Gates, 1989; Claes Oldenburg, Bacon/Caport, 1991. Photo: Axel Schneider.



**3. WILLIAM BLAKE (TATE BRITAIN, LONDON; CURATED BY MARTIN MYRONE AND AMY CONCANNON)**

Blake is more than an important artist to me: He's my dead mentor. In London on a layover, I dragged my two tired kids and my ex to Tate Britain because I couldn't not see this show. The galleries were packed and my kids were grouchy and rain-soaked, making for challenging conditions in which to contemplate the artist's sublime allegories. I squeezed in front of a crowd to see *The Ghost of a Flea*, ca. 1819–20, perhaps my favorite of his fantastical characters. The miniature painting is a dark, reluctant jewel, and I was happy to be with it for a minute or two. I moved quickly past the rest of the intimately scaled art, my daughter pulling me toward the exit. I settled for buying a catalogue in the gift shop, which I read on the plane home, but this show still makes my list. <https://>

William Blake, *The Ghost of a Flea*, ca. 1819–20, tempera and gold on mahogany, 8 3/8 x 6 3/8".

**4. HANNAH BLACK, CIARÁN FINLAYSON, AND TOBI HASLETT, "THE TEAR GAS BIENNIAL" (ARTFORUM.COM)**

"There are moments when the disembodied, declarative politics of art are forced into an encounter with real politics, i.e., with violence." For me, this statement was a clarion call to leverage my art in the Whitney Biennial to protest Warren B. Kanders, the CEO of the weapons manufacturer Safariland and then vice chair of the Whitney Museum's board. Easily the most important piece of writing I've read in years. Teachers, teach this essay!



Peter Parlow, *The Plagiarists*, 2019, video transferred to 2K video, color, sound, 76 minutes.

**5. THE PLAGIARISTS (PETER PARLOW)**

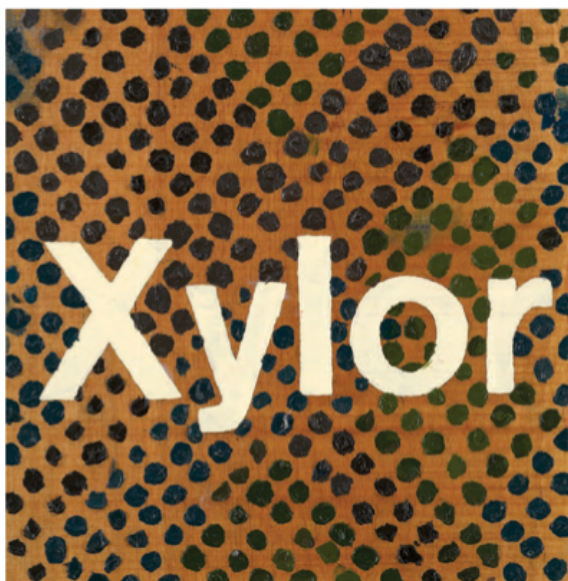
*The Plagiarists* is a small, sticky film that asks an uncomfortable question: What's wrong with plagiarizing? It's super-low-budget and bleak as hell, shot in the winter in upstate New York on vintage Betacam SP cameras. (Even the medium on which it was made is haunted.) If everything has been done and there is nothing new under the sun, how do we not plagiarize? And if no one gets hurt, does it matter? A final, shocking twist strips down our desire to make "authenticity" the core of our emotional experiences.



Siah Armajani, *Dictionary for Building: Back Yard*, 1974–75, plastic maquette furniture, paint, plywood, 3 × 8 1/8 × 10".

**6. SIAH ARMAJANI (MET BREUER, NEW YORK; CURATED BY CLARE DAVIES WITH VICTORIA SUNG AND JADINE COLLINGWOOD)**

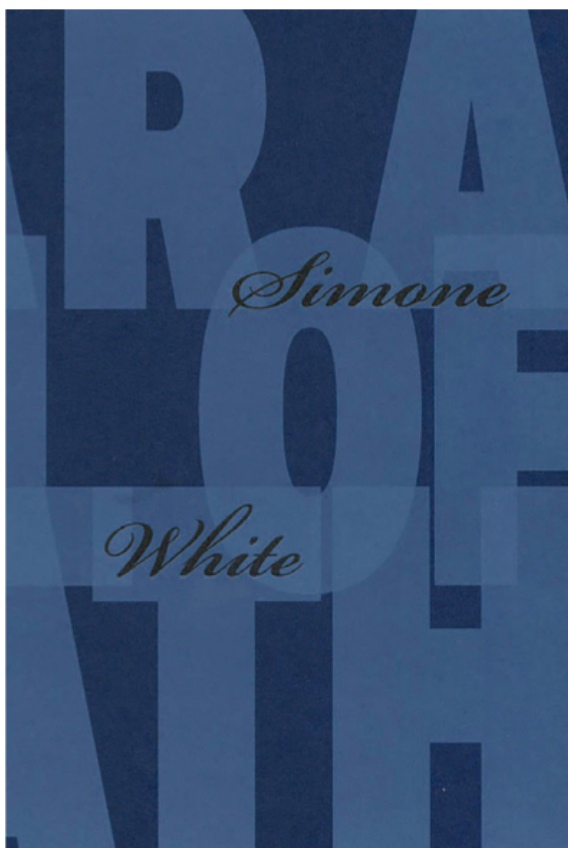
Who wouldn't want to pursue Armajani through "Follow This Line," the artist's exhaustive exhibition at the Met Breuer? The place to get lost, if you were looking for one, was "Dictionary for Building," 1974–75, an installation of some 150 architectural maquettes that evoked something your aunt might make if she followed Martha Stewart's instructions on how to build a Vitra Miniature. These delicate gems of cardboard, wood, and paint reeled me in with their charm. Once there, I was left alone with the smallest oubliette modernism could produce.



**7. LEIDY CHURCHMAN (HESSEL MUSEUM OF ART, ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK; CURATED BY LAUREN CORNELL)**

What Churchman paints is a fascinating riddle. Their choice of subject is almost the subject itself. It amazes me that the same person who paints, say, a new ad for the iPhone 11 Pro or a cover of Vogue Paris could also paint their dreams or, plain air style, their backyard in Maine. Enigmatic—and yet Churchman paints without tricks. Their approach to the material is always open and honest.

Leidy Churchman, *Xylor*, 2010, oil on wood, 9 × 9".



**8. SIMONE WHITE**

I'm not equipped to review or even summarize White's poetry and writings. Here's what I know: I feel her precision of language deep in my bones, and my clock shifts into low gear. Her poems can flip; like, things go well until they don't. There are words about milk and language, the speed of time, bodies, motherhood, desire, failure, separation. White is both a poet and a scholar. Halfway through her volume *Dear Angel of Death* (2018), White detonates her dissertation on the idea of black music. I'm still spinning from the blast.

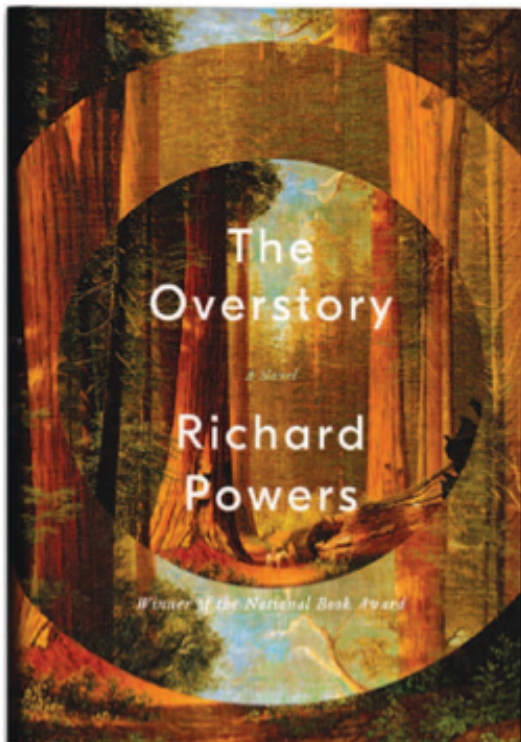
Cover of Simone White's *Dear Angel of Death* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2018).



View of "Artist's Choice: Amy Sillman—The Shape of Shape," 2019–20, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Heidi Bohnenkamp.

### 9. "ARTIST'S CHOICE: AMY SILLMAN—THE SHAPE OF SHAPE" (MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK)

Sillman's eye is sharp and witty. She makes brilliant, often hilarious connections between objects that may be wildly disparate. As part of the opening gambit at the new MoMA, Sillman chose seventy-one works from the institution's collection, using shape as her conceptual lodestar. Walk around the small, anxiously stuffed gallery and you will recognize aspects of Sillman's own work: lumps, lines, cuts, and lots of awkward, bulbous things.



### 10. RICHARD POWERS

Powers's *The Overstory* is, branches down, one of the most transformative pieces of fiction I have ever read. Powers tells the tale of trees through the lives of humans. Trees that were here before us; trees we have killed so that we can have tables and chairs and pages in magazines on which we write words that they will never read. It tells of people who love trees, how the lives of these people and these trees become inextricably entwined. My heart is now indelibly tied to their lives, too. Thank you, Richard Powers, for radically changing the way in which I see the world.

Cover of Richard Powers's *The Overstory* (W.W. Norton, 2018).