

Contact:
Marni McEntee
Director of Communications
Cell: 608.515.0137
marni@mmoca.org

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MADISON MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART PRESENTS MICHELLE HANDELMAN'S NEW VIDEO TRILOGY, *THE PANDEMIC SERIES*, EXAMINING HOW LIVES ARE TRANSFIGURED DURING PERIODS OF ISOLATION AND FEAR

Michelle Handelman: These Unruly and Ungovernable Selves places selected characters from three of the artist's earlier film installations into a new world of found text and images from the pandemic

On View April 24 through
August 15, 2021

>
Michelle Handelman,
*These Unruly and
Ungovernable Selves*
(video still), 2020, from
The Pandemic Series

Single-channel high
definition video with sound,
6:07 minutes. Courtesy of
the artist and signs and
signals NYC

@michellehandelman

Join the virtual opening
celebration Friday, April 23,
from 5-6 PM CST and meet
the UW-Madison students
who organized the
exhibition. Moderated by
MMoCA Assistant Curator
Elizabeth Shoshany
Anderson, the free
Facebook Live event is
open to the public.

MADISON, WI— The Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA) presents *Michelle Handelman: These Unruly and Ungovernable Selves*, an exhibition that includes Handelman's new video trilogy, *The Pandemic Series* (2020-2021), which will be available in its entirety on mmoca.org. Two of the artist's earlier film installations, *Irma Vep*, *The Last Breath* (2013/2015), and *Candyland* (1999), will be on view inside the Museum. A multimedia and performance artist, Michelle Handelman (b. 1960) creates film installations that draw on her life experiences and those of her performers to confront life and death, pain and pleasure.

At times dark and confrontational, Handelman's works explore these universal themes while still allowing audience members to reach their own conclusions about their meaning.



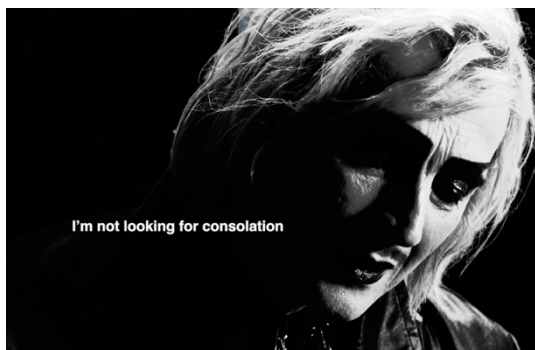
“So much of this comes from my own experiences in life, but I would think that most people have experienced a lot of uncomfortable and negative situations; those moments where we grow and learn more about who we are and where we find our resilience and strength,” reflects Handelman, who is based in Brooklyn, N.Y. “I don’t look at the despair and sadness as a permanent state. To me, it’s a place you travel through. It’s unique to every individual. So that’s part of why my works are made the way they’re made, so that everyone can bring their own story to it.”

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>
Michelle Handelman,
*Solitude is an Artifact
of the Struggle
Against Oppression*
(video still), 2020,
from *The Pandemic
Series*

Single-channel high
definition video with
sound, 4:00 minutes.
Courtesy of the artist
and signs and signals
NYC



The Pandemic Series
includes *These Unruly
and Ungovernable
Selves*, (*The
Lockdown*); *Solitude
is an Artifact of the
Struggle Against
Oppression* (*The
Uprising*); and
*Claiming The Liminal
Space* (*The
Aftermath*), which

was just recently completed and will debut on MMoCA's website. The series recontextualizes characters from Handelman's previous works into a visual essay about how individuals' subjective lives are transfigured during periods of isolation and fear. Handelman says the series takes as its starting point the current coronavirus pandemic and filters it through theorist Jill Casid's writings on the necrocene—which Casid has described as living and dying on a dying planet—and Walter Benjamin's writings on identifying the difference between threshold and boundaries

>
Michelle Handelman, *Irma
Vep, The Last Breath*,
(production still),
2013/2015, from *The
Pandemic Series*

HD video with sound, 33:13
minutes. Courtesy of the
artist



Handelman's characters, who have already struggled with existential questions of belonging and fear in her projects *Dorian, a Cinematic Perfume* (2009/2011); *Irma Vep, The Last Breath* (2013/2015); and *Hustlers & Empires* (2018), are juxtaposed with images and texts that Handelman collected during the pandemic from news sites, art journals, and conversations. Since the pandemic prevented Handelman from doing the larger-scale shoots she is accustomed to, she returned to some of her earlier projects to cast some of those characters into *The Pandemic Series*. "It was a way to go back into conversation with myself in terms of what those pieces were about,

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>
Michelle Handelman,
Candyland
(production still),
1999.

Single-channel video
with sound, 05:36
minutes. Courtesy of the
artist



and recontextualize that within the pandemic,” Handelman said. Irma Vep, *the Last Breath*, which will be on view in MMoCA’s Imprint

Gallery, features trans artist and activist Zackary Drucker and drag legend Flawless Sabrina. The film reimagines the silent film character Irma Vep from prominent French director Louis Feuillade’s film *LES VAMPIRES* (1915) as a transgender figure, taking viewers through a therapy session (in which Handelman portrays the

therapist) that unveils layers of queer agency while examining how identity is formed in resistance to oppression. *Candyland* (1999),

screening on MMoCA’s second-floor landing, is one of a series of studio performances Handelman did from 1999-2002 for the series called *Cannibal Garden*. The series includes private performances she did in studio, where the camera lens remains the ultimate object of affection. *Candyland* features a character portrayed by Handelman crawling along a floor toward the camera, devouring colorful tidbits on the floor—which the artist describes as “an obsessive fantasyland of desire” that simultaneously brings the character great pleasure and discomfort, as what starts out as playful becomes obsessive and grotesque.

Michelle Handelman: These Unruly and Ungovernable Selves is organized by students in Design Thinking for Exhibits, a University of Wisconsin-Madison Art History Department seminar led by Associate Professor Anna Campbell. Students in the class worked with MMoCA staff members to develop the exhibition.

Born in Chicago, Handelman is heavily influenced by the work of the Chicago Imagists, a cohort of artists well represented in MMoCA’s collection. But, ultimately, Handelman’s aesthetic vision is distinct. Handelman is drawn to the aesthetics of the supernatural in gothic literature and poetry, and expressionist cinema. Handelman explained, “Poems are inside me, they haunt me, waiting their turn to be in a project.”

The artist has been awarded the Creative Capital Award in 2019, New York State Council on the Arts in 2018, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellow in 2011, and New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow in 2010. Exhibitions include solo shows at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2018); Broad Art Museum (2013);

Michelle Handelman will give an artist lecture, *Gloom With a View*, via Zoom on April 29 at 5 PM CST.

Handelman will also offer a workshop, *These Unruly and Ungovernable Selves* on Tuesday, April 27 at 11 am CST. To

participate in the workshop, RSVP to cvc@mailplus.wisc.edu. Both events are free and open to the public. They are possible thanks to the Center for Visual Cultures at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, with the generous financial support of the Anonymous Fund.

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Guangzhou 53 Art Museum, China (2012); MIT List Visual Arts Center (2010); PARTICIPANT, INC (2009) and the PERFORMA Biennial (2005). Her work has been widely reviewed in The New York Times, Art in America, and Art Forum.

Generous support for Imprint Gallery programming has been provided by Willy Haeberli in memory of Gabriele Haberland.

ABOUT MMoCA

The Madison Museum of Contemporary Art is always admission-free. Its vision is to be an organization that fosters the exchange of ideas and creates experiences that will inspire a wide audience; be a nexus for the work of emerging and established regional, national, and international artists; serve as a catalyst for the continued development of a vigorous community of artists; and provide a forum that will encourage people to be challenged by, reflect on, and make connections between art and the world around them.

The Museum includes four galleries and The Shop, a recently opened space to provide interactive contemporary art experiences and educational workshops to Madison's communities. The Museum's Rooftop Sculpture Garden provides an urban oasis with an incredible view which serves as a lovely venue for weddings, art openings, dining, and cinema.

The Museum is open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, noon-6 PM. MMoCA also has a slate of online events, including wellness activities, education workshops, and virtual tours. Please visit mmoca.org to learn more.

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