

ON POINT

Participants: David Altmejd, James Stuart Blackton, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Buckminster Fuller, Elliot Green, Ben Hagari, Jasper Johns, Joan Jonas, William Kentridge, Jon Kessler, Dr. Lakra, Ofra Lapid, George Laws Weinberg, Len Lye, Lothar Meggendorfer, Jonas Mekas, Lotte Reiniger, Aki Sasamoto, Dasha Shishkin, Shahzia Sikander, Kiki Smith, Sarah Sze, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Tomas Vu-Daniel, Kara Walker, and Terry Winters

Curator: Ben Hagari

In the 17th century, wandering showmen used to carry performance machines on their backs from village to village across Europe. To attract audiences, they would cry “*Chi vuol veder il Mondo Nuovo?*” (“Who wants to see the new world?”). They would pull strings to orchestrate universes in confined spaces, which one viewed through peepholes – a perspective that provided the illusion of depth. These miraculous worlds showcased exotic flora and fauna, historical events such as earthquakes and epic battles, and fantastic sights. The showmen guided explorations of worlds otherwise beyond the reach of the beholder.

The exhibition *On Point* is a result of an ongoing personal exploration of the history and mechanisms of moving images – an interest that intensified a few years ago, when I began teaching a hand-made animation course at Columbia University in New York. The class offered a new look at early technologies for the creation of moving images: peephole theaters, optical devices that provided visual illusions before the invention of the motion picture camera, movable books, magic lanterns, as well as an analysis of the trick-making mechanisms in films and manually-produced video works. This early technological age – both analog and manual – intrigued me, and I wanted to juxtapose it with contemporary means of production and with a generation who grew up with digital media.

At the same time, I encountered paper-based works from the collection at the university’s LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies. The collection, works of which are presented in this exhibition, is founded on

inviting artists to develop their projects in the Center's printshop, using various techniques of printmaking. Numerous interrelationships exist between print and film works: reproduction, duplication, and repetition are characteristics of printmaking that can also be found in the mechanisms of filmmaking and animations. In a film roll lies a similar logic: frame by frame, seemingly identical. Negatives of films from the early days of cinema were transferred to paper prints, thanks to which the films survived after the original negatives had deteriorated or were destroyed.

The exhibition *On Point* blurs the distinction between humans and things, between objects and their users, and between live action and animation, and considers hand-made moving images as a theme, a form, and a worldview. Historical and contemporary works present an alternative sequence for the formation of the moving image. For me, this exhibition is itself an artwork, in which I create contexts, weave threads, and mark out lines in the space of the museum.

The exhibition, which spans most of the upper level of the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, features etchings, collages, engravings, movable books, peepholes, silhouettes, films, animation, and new video works. A wiggly or dancing line emerges from the pieces into the space and vice versa, linking together the various exhibition rooms. The line that "comes alive" follows the movement of the drawing hand as an act of magic.

The film *The Enchanted Drawing* (1900) by James Stuart Blackton is the starting point for the exhibition. At its center is an easel with a large sheet of white paper on it, and a painter who quickly sketches a portrait of a man with a comic expression. After completing the figure, he draws a bottle of wine and a goblet, and then, unexpectedly, removes them – as real objects – from the paper on which they were drawn and pours wine from an actual bottle into an actual glass. Soon, other surprising effects occur, and the expressions on the drawn face change in response, such that the distinction between real and imaginary objects, and between live action and animation, is blurred. One of the earliest films to feature an animated sequence, it was shot with a Kinetoscope – the first film camera in North America, invented by Thomas Edison.

In another film by Blackton that is on display at the exhibition, *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906),

an artist draws the faces of a man and a woman on a chalkboard. Soon, the painter's hand disappears, but the drawings keep evolving, seemingly of their own accord, shifting from live images to static ones – whose rapid display as a sequence creates the illusion of movement. Blackton creates further illusions by projecting the sequence backwards and applying “erasing” actions, highlighting the fleeting nature of the moving image. Blackton's first films embody the potential to create a world where anything can move.

Inspired by fairy tales, fables, and folklore, Lotte Reiniger's films breathed life into elaborate silhouettes inspired by ancient Eastern traditions, such as Chinese paper cut-outs and Indonesian shadow puppets. She created silhouettes of animals, plants, and inanimate objects, which she then moved and photographed – frame by frame – on a light table, in a technique uniquely her own. The film *Papageno* (1935), on view in the exhibition, consists of scenes from Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*. In it, Papageno is forced to fight a snake to secure the safety of his beloved, and is repeatedly helped in this effort by his loyal birds. Reiniger created a world in which human and animal merge inseparably. Her work process entailed extensive observation of animals at the zoo, in order to accurately mimic their movement patterns.

Another part of the exhibition presents movable books as moving images prior to the invention of cinema. Lothar Meggendorfer (1847–1925), a German illustrator, was a pioneer in this field. He is known for his original children's books, which involved elaborate innovations in paper engineering. The reader pulls the tabs hidden between the pages and moves the characters, who interact with each other. The book *Lustiges Automaten-Theater* (Funny Automata Theater), published in 1891, brings together various professionals such as a tailor, a photographer, a dancer, and a singer, presenting their work as perpetual and repetitive. The humor in the book reflects the great interest in physiognomy that arose in the nineteenth century, as well as awareness of class and cultural stereotypes of the period.

The historical works in the exhibition (early films, silhouettes, movable books) are presented in new theatrical environments that project the space in which they were created – as though the viewer were physically entering through the peephole, much as the visible world

is projected within the brain from information passed through the eye holes. In the seventeenth century, the wandering showmen were a central part of the show: they operated the machines, played the music, and produced background sounds for the miraculous performances within the enclosed space. Who, then, was operating whom – was it the wandering showmen who operated the show in the box by pulling the strings, or was it the wondrous worlds that prompted them to shout, play music, and venture out into the world?

The exhibition also features my own works as an artist. The photograph *The Animator*, which I created with the artist George Laws Weinberg in 2019, depicts a man with a mirror in one hand and a pen in the other. On the table in front of him is a sheet of paper with drawings of faces – part human, part animal. Watching the mirror, the man makes a humorous face. Is he observing himself in order to depict his own gaze, or have the roles been reversed and it is the drawing that has prompted this expression? Who is imitating whom? This photograph was inspired by a production still of animators at work at the Walt Disney studios in the 1930s. The animators were looking at their own expressions and rendering them into drawings of animated characters.

My film *I, Pencil* (2022) follows the production of a single pencil, from the initial preparation of the graphite to its conversion into a basic, familiar object. In the second part of the film, the pencil rises up like a string puppet operated by an invisible hand, and when it meets a little girl a dance begins. At a time of handwriting's rapid disappearance, this exhibition begs the necessity of creating things by hand, of idiosyncratic production and work born from dreams.

Ben Hagari, still from
I, Pencil, 2022, digital
video, sound, 16 min,
courtesy of the artist
בן הגרי, דימוי מתוך
אני, עיפרון, 2022, וידאו
דיגיטלי, סאונד, 16 דקות,
באדיבות האמן

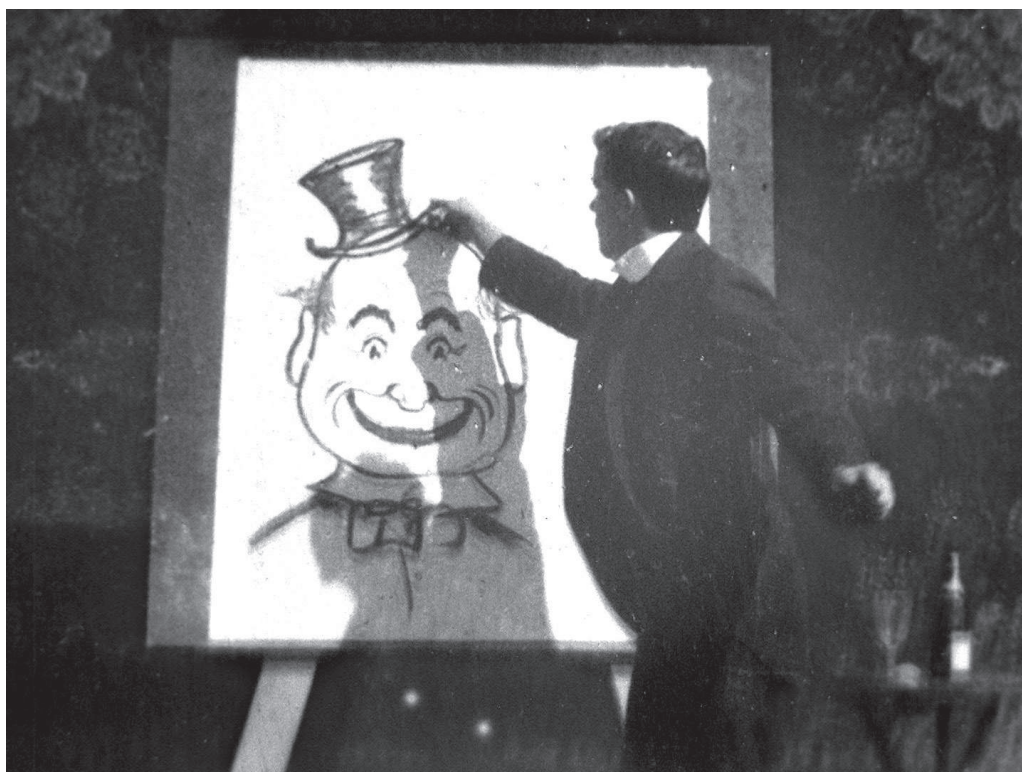


Top: Kara Walker, **Scene of McPherson's Death from Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)**, 2005, offset lithograph and screen print, 135×99 cm, courtesy of the LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies in the School of the Arts at Columbia University, New York;
 Bottom: Ben Hagari, still from **Automata Theater**, 2023, digital video, sound, 6 min, courtesy of the artist

למעלה: קארה ווקר, **סצינת מותו של מקפירסון מתוך היסטוריה (מוערת) בתמונות של מלחמת האזרחים של הארצות, 2005**, ליתוגרפיית אופסט והדפס רשת, 135×99 ס"מ, באדיבות מרכז לירוי נימן לחקר ההדפס, אוניברסיטת קולומביה, ניו יורק;
 למטה: בן הגרי, דימוי מתוך **תיאטרון האוטומטים, 2023**, וידאו דיגיטלי, סאונד, 6 דקות, באדיבות האמן



למעלה: בן הגרי וג'ורג' לוז
 ויינברג, **המנפיע**, 2019,
 הזרקת דיו, 50.8x40.6 ס"מ,
 באדיבות האמנים;
 למטה: ג'יימס סטיוארט
 בלקטון, דימוי מתוך **הרישום**
הקטום, 1900, פילם מומר
 לווידיאו דיגיטלי, אילם,
 1:07 דקות, אוסף ספריית
 הקונגרס, ארצות הברית
 Top: Ben Hagari and
 George Laws Weinberg,
The Animator,
 2019, inkjet print,
 50.8x40.6 cm, courtesy
 of the artists;
 Bottom: James Stuart
 Blackton, still from **The**
Enchanted Drawing,
 1900, film transferred to
 digital video, silent,
 1 min 7 sec, collection
 of the Library of
 Congress, USA



Top: Sarah Sze,
Eyechart, 2012,
 silkscreen with laser
 engraving, 20x28 cm,
 courtesy of the LeRoy
 Neiman Center for Print
 Studies in the School
 of the Arts at Columbia
 University, New York;
 Bottom: Installation
 sketch for the exhibition
 On Point: Lotte Reiniger,
Papageno, 1935,
 black and-white film
 transferred to digital
 video, sound, 10 min
 42 sec, courtesy of
 Goethe-Institut Israel

למעלה: שרה זי,
לוח לבדיקת ראייה,
 2012,
 הדפס רשת עם חריטת
 לייזר, 20x28 ס"מ, באדיבות
 מרכז לירוי נימן לחקר
 ההדפס, אוניברסיטת
 קולומביה, ניו יורק;
 למטה: מתווה הצבה
 לתערוכה "על קולו של
 חוד": לוטה רייניגר, **פפגנו**,
 1935, פילם שחור-לבן מומר
 לווידיאו דיגיטלי, סאונד,
 10:42 דקות, באדיבות
 מכון גתה, ישראל

