It Passes like a Thought

Opening Reception:
Saturday, March 3, 2018, 2-5pm

On view through:
Saturday, May 26, 2018

Holiday Closures:
March 26-April 1, 2018

Curated by David Familian

Featuring: Lynn Aldrich, Juan Fontanive, Ian Ingram, Richard Ross, Susan Silton, Victoria Vesna, and Anne Walsh

When an individual [bird] is seen gliding through the woods and close to the observer, it passes like a thought... trying to see it again, the eye searches in vain; the bird is gone. —John James Audubon

Perhaps there is no better metaphor for the fleeting world around us than birds. Before we had various technologies and methods to capture birds visually or to record their song, we only had our memories and our imaginations to represent their ephemeral presence. Considering that there are more than 9,000 avian species, it is not surprising that many ornithologists, linguists, musicologists, and countless amateurs spend their lives watching and listening to birds.

It Passes like a Thought includes seven contemporary artists who explore our obsessions with birds through various media. Some artists in this exhibition engage with birdsong, or more specifically, how we mimic or manipulate their sounds—looking for a response or a connection by creating a feedback loop with nature. Other artists are more interested in the visual diversity of birds, as well as how they are archived, classified, and preserved.

Victoria Vesna, Susan Silton, and Anne Walsh explore the imitation of birdsong or simulated language between disparate species. Through their respective linguistic interests, these artists draw moving conclusions about the nature of communication and its universal purpose across all genera. Lynn Aldrich and Juan Fontanive focus largely on the animal’s capacity for flight; Aldrich creates a faux birdwatching experience of isolated bird wings while Fontanive mechanizes the hypnotic quality of their rapid movements. Ian Ingram draws an unlikely parallel between birds and humans by addressing technology’s ability to simultaneously disrupt and emulate certain animate behaviors, while Richard Ross documents our uniquely human need to taxonomize the world around us in order to understand it; in both cases, an eerie allusion to human contributions to avian extinction and endangerment is palpable.

Each artist in It Passes like a Thought represents the unique ways that birds enter our consciousness. They imitate their sublime sound, attempt to translate avian language, and/or represent their stunning likenesses, flight, and habitats. Perhaps we watch and listen to birds so intently and universally as a way to remind ourselves that we must protect them. Birds are the ultimate memento mori: a reminder of vulnerability of the world around us.

It Passes like a Thought will be accompanied by a series of public events. For more information about these, please visit our website at beallcenter.uci.edu. This exhibition is generously supported by the Beall Family Foundation.
Lynn Aldrich


Inspired by the extravagant excess and diversity of nature, Lynn Aldrich begins her process with empirical observation—as is required by the natural sciences—but remains open to poetic metaphors allowed by her own artistic perspective. For this exhibition, Aldrich has restored a portion of an installation originally shown at the Santa Monica Museum of Art (CA) titled *Flying Lessons: The Birds of America,* and reconstituted it for the Beall Center for Art + Technology.

*Flying Lessons* is an installation that is at once alluring and haunting. Consisting of a selection of found book pages taken from John James Audubon’s 19th century folio of prints, *The Birds of America,* Aldrich’s work riffs on the tradition of bird watching. The detached book pages are painted gold—except for the wing anatomy of each species—and arranged in a shimmering grid on the wall. Suddenly, each creature becomes an anonymous representation of its former self; distilled down to the shared trait of flight. In one respect, the images are haunting – as if our fascination with their flight has resulted in the destruction their bodies in order to indulge our primal curiosity. Alternatively, the installation appears as a celebration of this seemingly magical ability – and references our own attempts to imitate this skill; be it through the technology of physics or the romantic symbolism of mythology. From a distance, the viewer can “bird watch” through binoculars that are waiting on a nearby tree stump. In this way, Aldrich allows us all to become “citizen scientists.”

Aldrich (b. 1944, Bryan, Texas) received her MFA from Art Center College of Design (Pasadena, CA). She has had solo exhibitions around the world, and has been included in group exhibitions at the Museum of Art and History (Lancaster, CA), Westmont Museum of Art (Santa Barbara, CA), Irvine Fine Arts Center (Irvine, CA), The American Center (Prague), Armory Center for the Arts (Pasadena, CA), LACMA (Los Angeles, CA), Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (Portland, OR), and Kunstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), among many other venues. Her work appears in many public collections, including the Calder Foundation (New York, NY), Cornell Fine Arts Museum (Winter Park, FL), LACMA (Los Angeles, CA), and the New York Public Library (New York, NY). Aldrich was the recipient of the 2014 Guggenheim Fellowship in Creative Arts, an ARC Grant from the Center for Cultural Innovation in 2013, and an Individual Artist Fellowship from the J. Paul Getty Trust Fund for the Visual Arts in 2000, in addition to several other grants and awards. The artist lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.
Juan Fontanive's *Ornithology* series began while the artist was studying at the Royal College of Art (London) in 2004. At that time, the artist collected Victorian clocks from the street markets in East London, and found himself increasingly fascinated by their intricate mechanics. By marrying the machinery behind the clocks with appropriated illustrations, he was able to devise small-scaled kinetic animation "sculptures" that reference both the elegant simplicity of a flipbook as well as the intricate nature of self-regulating movement: be it the wings of a bird or the ticking gears of a motor.

Says the artist, “The [resulting] film itself is constructed from collaged 18th and 19th century natural history illustrations – multiples frames of still birds combined to form a single bird in flight. Uncovering a type of hidden movement between each still frame, patterns of the birds’ behavior emerge when played through time.” In a sense, Fontanive has created a dynamic composite image that stimulates the inquisitive nature of humans as it relates to nature and technology, and reveals yet another behavioral pattern. The viewer cannot help being drawn in to closer inspect the fluttering movement of the animated bird, and the whirring mechanical system that powers it—revealing an inherent need to analyze and understand the complexities of the world around us. “Designing the mechanism over time,” Fontanive points out, “the bird animation and machine have informed each other in their development – the wings hinging like paper, and the paper cards flapping at the rate of the bird’s wings.”

Fontanive (b. 1977, Cleveland, OH) received his MA from the Royal College of Art (London) in 2006. He has had solo exhibitions in Baltimore, MD; Dallas, TX; New York, NY; Basel, Switzerland; London, UK; São Paulo, Brazil; and San Francisco, CA; among other cities. His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Nassau Museum of Art (New York, NY), Museum Meermanno (The Hague, Netherlands), Biennale Internationale Saint-Etienne (Saint-Etienne, France), New Museum (New York, NY), and the Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisbon, Portugal), in addition to many other venues. He was the 2016 recipient of the Marble House Project Residency (Dorset, VT), and the 2004 recipient of the Desmond Preston Drawing Prize from the Royal College of Art (London). The artist lives and works in Bushwick, NY.
Ian Ingram will re-create his seminal work, *The Woodiest* (2010), for exhibition at the Beall Center for Art + Technology. Originally presented in a North American forest, this installation will be housed in the gallery on a birch tree, denuded of branches and mechanically interfaced into the built structure, and accompanied by an archival video presented alongside the work’s components. Visitors to the Beall Center will find themselves in a slice of the forest brought indoors, with Ingram’s robotic bird perched in its midst.

Ingram’s installation concept was inspired by the mating ritual of the North American Pileated Woodpecker, and its application to human behavior—as well as the role of technology in collapsing uniquely animate practices. Ingram states, “After two Pileated Woodpeckers have chosen each other as mates, the very next thing they do is seek a suitable tree in which to excavate their nest hole. The male has been ‘drumming,’ i.e., rapidly beating his beak against a resonant tree trunk to produce a territorial signal that echoes through the forest. This has attracted the fine mate who has joined him. Now he switches to ‘drum-tapping’ at a location on a tree that he thinks has desirable qualities for siting a nest. If the female does not agree with his site choice, she will drum-tap on another tree or location. Incrementally, the woodpeckers will narrow their search until they both agree on a site and hence are both drum tapping on the very same tree in the very same place on the trunk. They then begin the excavation.” Ingram attempted to imitate and disrupt this rite by creating a “sex robot” of sorts that would listen for drum tapping in its original installation location in the woods, and begin its own drum-tapping ritual. Says the artist, “When it hears such drumming, it responds by raising its male sub-system and drumming back, simultaneously declaring its territory and indicating where it would like to build a nest. However, in this case, its mate is built-in: after retracting the male head, the machine raises its female sub-system and drum-taps in the exact same place. The result is an autoerotic, hermaphroditic, all-in-one woodpecker love-bot. It exists to pleasure itself via the Pileated model and through performing both roles it can fulfill its needs independently of another entity. Besides, of course, the instigating extra-terrestrial invader.”

Ian Ingram (b 1977, Portsmouth, NH) has exhibited his work internationally, including at the Andy Warhol Museum (Pittsburgh, PA), the Museum of Modern Art (Toluca, Mexico), the Yada Gallery (Nagoya, Japan), Bedford Gallery (Walnut Creek, CA), and Eyelevel Gallery (Halifax, Nova Scotia), Nikolaj Kunsthal (Copenhagen, Netherlands), and the Victoria and Albert Museum (London, UK). His work is in the collections of the Carnegie Science Center and the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh. Ingram has a BS and MS from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an MFA from Carnegie Mellon University. He lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.
Richard Ross


Since 1973, Richard Ross has photographed museums around the globe, both independently and on assignment for *Discover Magazine*, *Scientific American* and the Getty. Decades of museum visits and behind-the-scenes access have allowed Ross to create a rich archive of material that documents the changing face of the modern natural history museum. These images visualize key issues in museum studies: curation, conservation, collection, history, and taxonomy display. In this exhibition, he presents selected works from his ongoing series, *Museology*, which began in the late 1970s and continues today.

The featured works at the Beall Center are focused on bird exhibitions and archives from the British Museum of Natural History (London, England), Booth’s Bird Museum (Brighton, England), and the Museum National D’Histoire Naturelle (Paris, France), ranging from 1982 to 1993. In some photographs, the winged creatures appear meticulously catalogued and nearly militant in their presentation; in others, they seem to be huddled and cowering in a forgotten storage cubicle. In both scenes, the viewer has to deduce carefully if there is life beneath the well-coiffed feathers, or if they are gazing at an inanimate specimen gathered from remote places. Ross’ photographs are at once eerie and alluring as we use the taxidermied fowl to evaluate the state of the world around us: how many of these species are already extinct? At what point will seemingly common creatures become exotic rarities? Like Ross’ subjects, our curiosities and concerns become varied and plentiful.

Richard Ross (b. 1947, New York, NY) is a photographer, researcher and professor of art. Ross has been the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and MacArthur Foundation. Ross was awarded both Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellowships. His work has been exhibited at the Tate Modern (London), National Building Museum (Washington D.C), Aperture Gallery (New York), ACME. Gallery (Los Angeles), and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco). He was the principal photographer for the Getty Conservation Institute and the Getty Museum on many of their architectural projects. He has photographed extensively for the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *SF Examiner*, *Vogue*, *COLORS*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Le Monde* and many more. A dozen books of his work have been published including *Girls in Justice* (2015), *Juvenile in Justice* (2012), *Architecture of Authority* (Aperture, 2007), *Waiting for the End of the World* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), *Gathering Light* (University of New Mexico, 2001) and *Museology* (Aperture, 1988). Ross is a Distinguished Professor of Art at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he has taught since 1977. Ross lives and works in Santa Barbara, CA.
Susan Silton’s videos explore both the lesser-known and popular aspects of birds’ influences on humans. In one work, she presents a clip from a work-in-progress called *Lifting Belly*, a short film which incorporates footage of young female practitioners of a centuries-old whistling language called *Silbo Gomero*. The “speakers” are whistling (and speaking in Spanish) an excerpt from Gertrude Stein’s 1917 poem, *Lifting Belly*. Silton shot the footage on the island of La Gomera in the Canary Islands, where the language originates, and continues to be practiced among younger generations of inhabitants. The project evolves from the artist’s interest in the impact of voice on subjectivity, and also makes reference to non-verbal forms of communication, which—in this case—can emulate non-human communication styles like birdsong. In the second video presented in this exhibition, Silton’s lens covertly captures footage of birds in their natural habitats. The nearly pin-hole sized frame of the lens makes the viewer feel as if they are watching from an obscured location, a private, intimate observation that feels at once commonplace and exotic. Her surreptitious video reminds us of the preciousness of nature, and the delicate temperament that we must practice when interacting with it.

Susan Silton (b. 1956) creates interdisciplinary projects. Her work takes form in performative and participatory-based projects, photography, video, installation, text/audio works, and print-based projects, and presents in diverse contexts such as public sites, social network platforms, and traditional galleries and institutions. Her work has been exhibited/presented nationally and internationally at Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles, CA), SFMOMA (San Francisco, CA), Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects (Los Angeles, CA), LA><ART (Los Angeles, CA), Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, CA), ICA (Philadelphia, PA), MAK Center for Art and Architecture (Los Angeles, CA), and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (Melbourne, Australia), among others. In November, 2015, Silton’s *Whistling Project* was included in SITE Santa Fe’s year-long series of exhibitions, *SITE 20 Years/20 Shows*, which included a commissioned performance by Silton’s women’s whistling group, The Crowing Hens. She has received fellowships and awards from the Getty/California Community Foundation, Art Matters, Center for Cultural Innovation, Cultural Affairs Department of the City of Los Angeles, The MacDowell Colony, Banff Centre for the Arts, Durfee Foundation, The Shifting Foundation, and most recently, Fellows of Contemporary Art (FOCA). The artist lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.
Victoria Vesna's “Bird Song Mimic” (2011-2017) is an installation in which participants are engaged to listen and respond to recordings of bird songs or other humans mimicking bird songs. The goal is to have audiences listen and relate to the acoustic world of birds in ways they otherwise might not. This interactive piece is part of a larger virtual reality immersive project called “Bird Song Diamond,” which was created over a period of five years (2011-17) by the Art|Sci collective at UCLA, in collaboration with evolutionary biologist Charles Taylor, engineer Hiroo Iwata, physicist Takashi Ikegami and their laboratories.

Based on Taylor’s NSF funded research—“Acoustic Sensor Arrays for Understanding Bird Communication”—this project included the development of devices and algorithms for locative sensing of bird song in the field, the creation of an annotated bird song database, and automated classification and annotation of bird songs. Vesna was inspired by the scientists mimicking and attracting birds with digital recordings, which seemed to create interspecies communication. This resulted in the more open-ended, habitat-specific installation that allowed participants to grapple with both audition and vocalization of birdsong. Audiences are introduced to the complexity of bird song language, which is further complicated by mechanical birds (i.e., drones), and human/machine language assessing the level of their imitation competency. In past iterations, the system could be used either individually or collaboratively. Through observations and experimentation, Vesna and her collaborators found that having two participants engaging in a “call and response” simulation is more effective for deeper engagement and the understanding of the diversity of bird song.

Victoria Vesna, Ph.D., (b. 1959, Washington, D.C.) is an Artist and Professor at the UCLA Department of Design Media Arts and Director of the Art|Sci Center at the School of the Arts and California NanoSystems Institute (CNSI). Although she was trained early on as a painter (Faculty of Fine arts, University of Belgrade, 1984), she took an exploratory path that resulted in work that can be defined as experimental creative research residing between disciplines and technologies. Her work involves long-term collaborations with composers, nanoscientists, neuroscientists, and evolutionary biologists. Vesna has exhibited her work in numerous solo exhibitions and group shows around the world, has been published in more than twenty in the last decade. She is the North American editor of AI & Society Journal (Springer Verlag, UK) and in 2007 published an edited volume—Database Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Information Overflow (Minnesota Press)—and another in 2011: Context Providers: Conditions of Meaning in Media Arts (co-edited with Christiane Paul and Margot Lovejoy, Intellect Ltd). Currently, she is working on a series about Art Science & Technology based on her online lecture class.
Anne Walsh

*Parrot Suite #1 (2002) / single channel video / duration: 5:00 mins*

Anne Walsh’s *Parrot Suite #1 (2002)* features a crude robotic parrot whose recording chip and playback speaker allow it to repeat—within a narrow pitch range—a portion of any sound it hears. In a sequence of five dyadic scenes, the toy “responds” to the artist’s live voice, recorded sound effects, location sound, a recording of Gertrude Stein reading, and a second toy parrot, which produces an audio feedback war. The parrot simultaneously becomes a child, lover, antagonist, teacher, student, friend, enemy, musical instrument, machine, and echo. In this sense, Walsh’s video explores many aspects of our innate need to communicate, in addition to our fascination with interspecies communication (especially as it pertains to the imitative personality traits of birds), and even communication between the animate and inanimate (as is often the case with machine learning, however rudimentary it may be).

Anne Walsh (b. 1962) produces works in video, performance, audio, photography and text. Her works have been shown at Martina }{ Johnston (Berkeley CA), Artists Space (New York, NY), Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (New York, NY), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, NY), Diapason Gallery (New York, NY), GrandArts (Kansas City, MO), Hayward Gallery (London, UK), Royal College of Art (London, UK), Southern Exposure (San Francisco, CA), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles, CA), the J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles, CA), Laboratorium (Antwerp, Belgium), MUU gallery (Helsinki, Finland), Tredje Spooet (Stockholm, Sweden), Lothring 13 (Munich, Germany), Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre for the Arts (Alberta, Canada), and numerous other galleries and festivals in Europe, Japan, and North America. With artist Chris Kubick, Walsh produces the spoken word audio series Art After Death, as well as video, and sculptural sound installations. Walsh was an editor of *X-Tra Contemporary Art Quarterly* from 1997-2004, and has contributed criticism, reviews, and interviews regularly to the magazine. She is now a contributing editor to the publication. In 2009, Walsh was a commissioned blogger for San Francisco Museum of Modern Art’s *Open Space* publication. Walsh is Associate Professor in the Department of Art Practice at U. C. Berkeley, where she teaches new genres, video, and creative writing. She received her MFA in Art at the California Institute of Arts, and her B.A. in Art History from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The artist lives and works in Oakland, California.
About the Curator

David Familian is the Artistic Director and Curator at the Beall Center. He began working at the Beall Center in 2005 and was appointed Artistic Director and Curator in 2009. An artist and educator, he received his BFA from California Institute of the Arts in 1979 and his MFA from UCLA in 1986. For the past thirty years, Familian has taught studio art and critical theory in art schools and universities including Otis College of Art and Design, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Santa Clara University, San Francisco Art Institute and U.C. Irvine. Familian initiated Black Box Projects at the Beall Center, which produces collaborative exhibitions in which artists work with scientists and other experts in areas such as Cognitive Robotics, Computational Genetics, and Information Science. He has curated one-person exhibitions of artists Shih Chieh Huang, Golan Levin, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Chico MacMurtie, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, Nam June Paik, and others. He has also curated numerous group exhibitions that explore topics such as data visualization, new forms of gaming and narratives, real-time data, interactive installations, and sound art. He currently teaches the Beall Center’s Digital Arts Exhibition course at UC Irvine’s Claire Trevor School of the Arts.

About the Beall Center for Art + Technology

The Beall Center is an exhibition and research center located on the campus of the University of California, Irvine. Since its opening in 2000, the Beall Center’s exhibitions, research, and public programs have promoted new forms of creation and expression. For artists, the Beall Center serves as a proving ground — a place between the artist’s studio and the art museum — and allows them to work with new technologies in their early stages of development. For visitors, the Beall Center serves as a window to the most imaginative and creative innovations in the visual arts occurring anywhere. The Beall Center promotes new forms of creative expression by: exhibiting art that uses different forms of science and technology to engage the senses; building innovative scholarly relationships and community collaborations between artists, scientists and technologists; encouraging research and development of art forms that can affect the future; and reintroducing artistic and creative thinking into STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) integrated learning in K-12 to Higher Education. The Beall Center’s curatorial focus presents a diverse range of innovative, world-renowned artists, both national and international, who work with experimental and interactive media. Many of these artists have shown their works primarily within group exhibitions or have a limited number of solo exhibitions in the US. The Beall Center is committed to exhibiting these artists in a way that more fully expresses their individual body of work. We strive to present a direct connection between our programs and the larger trajectory of the history of video, installation art, kinetic and cybernetic sculpture. Our approach is not to exclusively emphasize the technological aspects of works, but to present experimental media projects that are equally strong aesthetically, conceptually and technically. The Beall Center received its initial support from the Rockwell Corporation in honor of retired chairman Don Beall and his wife, Joan; the core idea being to merge their lifelong passions - business, engineering and the arts - in one place. Today, major support is generously provided by the Beall Family Foundation.

About UC Irvine’s Claire Trevor School of the Arts

Times Higher Education ranked UC Irvine first among U.S. universities under 50 years old and fifth worldwide. Since its founding in 1965 as one of UC Irvine’s original schools, the School of the Arts (renamed for actress Claire Trevor in 2000) has become one of the nation’s leading educators in visual and performing arts. Awarded “Best Arts Organization” in Orange County 2014 by the Coast Community Awards, the School offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in Art, Dance, Drama and Music, a minor in Digital Arts and Digital Filmmaking, and one of the few university doctoral programs in Drama. The UCI Claire Trevor School of the Arts is located at 4000 Mesa Road, Irvine, CA 92617. For more information, please visit www.arts.uci.edu.
It Passes like a Thought Fact Sheet

Exhibition:
Exhibit Dates: March 3 – May 26, 2018; Curated by David Familian

Featuring: Lynn Aldrich, Juan Fontanive, Ian Ingram, Richard Ross, Susan Silton, Victoria Vesna, and Anne Walsh

Events:

• **Opening Reception**: Saturday, March 3, 2018, 2pm – 5pm
  FREE admission

• **LASER Talk: “Bird Song”**
  Monday, March 5, 2018, 5:30-7:30pm
  At UCI Applied Innovation
  5141 California Ave., #250
  Irvine, CA 92617
  FREE admission with online registration

• **LASER Talk: “The Art of Conservation”**
  Monday, May 7, 2018, 5:30-7:30pm
  At UCI Applied Innovation
  5141 California Ave., #250
  Irvine, CA 92617
  FREE admission with online registration

*LASER Talks are panel discussions produced in association with Leonardo International Society for the Arts, Sciences, and Technology; a full speaker lineup and registration information will be available on [beallcenter.uci.edu](http://beallcenter.uci.edu). The Beall Center’s 2018 LASER Talks series is generously funded by the UCI Illuminations fund.*

• Additional performances and special events to be announced online. Join our mailing list at [www.beallcenter.uci.edu](http://www.beallcenter.uci.edu).

Gallery Hours:
Monday - Saturday: 12pm – 6pm
Closed: Sundays
Holiday Closures: March 26-April 1, 2018
Free admission and docent tours

Location:
712 Arts Plaza, Claire Trevor School of the Arts, UC Irvine, Irvine, CA 92697

Parking:
Student Center Parking Structure: 311 W. Peltason Drive, Irvine, CA 92697
Mesa Parking Structure: 4000 Mesa Road, Irvine, CA 92697
*all campus parking requires payment; $2 per hour, $7 half day, $10 full day, credit and debit cards accepted

For maps, driving directions and parking information go to: [http://www.parking.uci.edu/maps/imap.cfm](http://www.parking.uci.edu/maps/imap.cfm)

More Info: [www.beallcenter.uci.edu](http://www.beallcenter.uci.edu)

Note to Editors: Images may be requested from Catlin Moore: [CMOORE@UCI.EDU](mailto:CMOORE@UCI.EDU), 949-824-6206
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