



# 02

[Home](#)[Dossier](#)[Guest](#)[Interview](#)[Review](#)[Spécial Web](#)[Archives](#)

## « *If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution* » au Haverford College, Pennsylvanie

*Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford College, 370 Lancaster Avenue, Haverford, Pennsylvania. USA.*  
March 21 – May 2.

Various factions committed to various principles; passionate manifestos sparking bitter quarrels; and a suspicion of authoritarianism occasionally tarnished by alliances with governments, corporations, or other entities of power. To some extent, the history of anarchy reads like the history of the artistic avant-garde. What, then, prevents all art from being categorized as anarchist? In, *if I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution* curator Natalie Musteata suggests Horizontality, Black, and Free Love as lenses to focus the relationship between anarchy and the art of 27 artists and collectives whose work spans 1960 to the present.

Certain of these themes are spatially delineated while others surface randomly throughout the show. Andrea Bowers and Olga Koumoundouros' *Transformer Display for Community Education, Activism and Fundraising: Version 5* (2014) embodies the principle of horizontality. The project—in the form of three different kiosks—is a collaboration between the artists and Philadelphia-based anarchist bookstore, The Wooden Shoe. Each kiosk offers different services. The first sits directly outside the main gallery and functions as a 'take a book/leave a book' reading room; the second is an anarcho-feminist library, where visitors are encouraged to borrow books to peruse on Adrian Blackwell's adjacent sculpture-cum-public-bench, *Circles describing spheres* (2013); the third sells patches, posters, and other anarchist swag.

Par [Katherine Rochester](#)

[Reviews](#)

Légende bandeau :  
Adrian Blackwell, "Circles describing spheres" © photos Lisa Boughter.

Du même auteur

["If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution" au Haverford College, Pennsylvanie](#)



Andrea Bowers and Olga Koumoundouros, « Transformer Display for Community Education, Activism and Fundraising »  
 © photos Lisa Boughter.

While horizontal principles such as non-hierarchical organization, collective decision-making, and the democratic use of materials characterize the work of many artists in the show, the concept of Blackness is more restricted. Black is both the official color of anarchy and the racial designation of many activists who used anarchist tactics in the Civil Rights movement. This category works hardest to forge new connections between anarchy and art as an agent for social change. For example, Gayle “Asali” Dickson’s prints are powerful indictments of the mistreatment of African American women. They appeared regularly in the Black Panther Party’s newspaper but have since been forgotten. One political campaign endorsement for a race in Oakland, California, in 1972 features a woman in curlers, dramatically outlined against a yellow ground. A line of photo-montaged people stream behind her while the motto, “Survival, survival, survival!” rings out above her head. The militant tone of Dickson’s work is echoed in the broadsheets published by the based anarchist collective, Black Mask (1965-68), and by the pulsating footage from race riots, demonstrations, and assassinations spliced together in Aldo Tambellini’s film *Black TV* (1968).



*Black Mask, various broadsheets and publications / Gayle « Asali » Dickson, numerous prints © photos Lisa Boughter.*

If the category, 'Black,' yields the largest number of under-recognized artists then 'Free Love,' delivers one of the most familiar standbys. Carolee Schneemann's film, *Meat Joy* (1964-2010) oozes anarchy in the form of fish guts, flapping limbs, and snapping chicken necks. The film shares a wall with two other moving image works by the Danish film collective Kanonklubben and faces off with a monitor screening films by Sherry Millner and Ernest Larsen on the opposite wall. Neither can match the sheer exuberance of Schneemann's orgiastic ode.



*Carolee Schneemann's « Meat Joy » © photos Lisa Boughter.*

The piles of flesh in *Meat Joy* and the blurred abstractions in *Black TV* provide an antidote to the text-heavy

start of the exhibition. Indeed, the decidedly literary work that frames the show suggests that anarchy—paradoxically—relies on one of the most highly structured systems in the world: that of language. Can such a system ever rupture an old order? Of all the tomes, broadsheets, posters, and flyers that populate the atrium and the first few galleries, only the poems by John Cage and Jackson Mac Low explore this question at the level of form. Cage and Mac Low used chance operations to randomly order language. Other artists on view maintain grammatical rules in order to transmit revolutionary content. Such an accumulation of reading materials at the beginning of the exhibition posits pre-requisites: anarchy has required readings, methodologies to master, and handbooks for the initiated. In this way, the show is very much at home in the gallery of an academic institution such as Haverford College.



Claire Fontaine, « La société du spectacle » © photos Lisa Boughter.

Is that a contradiction? Maybe. But as The Wooden Shoe acknowledges in its mission statement, we all function “within a system we oppose” whenever we bother to struggle. The exhibition may begin with textual didacticism but it ultimately dissolves into visual abstraction. Bowers and Koumoundouros’ well-lit reading room cedes to a darkened theater; moments of mute static in Tambellini’s film stymie even the most emphatic prescriptions from the preceding posters. Lest I conclude by suggesting some final opposition between form and content in the anarchist aesthetic, let me turn to an artwork that is also an action. Claire Fontaine’s *La société du spectacle brickbat* (2005) intervenes between text and object with stunning dialectical swiftness. Resting on the floor sits what appears to be a copy of Guy Debord’s foundational Situationist text. In reality, the pages have been replaced by a red clay brick, the cover, by a modified sleeve. Here, content meets form in an object that turns a text into a projectile. The instrumentalized Debord is at once a facile joke and a blunt weapon. It may work better like this, but it could never have worked at all had not the careful labor of theory preceded it.

What I like about Musteata’s vision is the desire to have a politics, to discuss and debate and identify. That we should think about our place in structures of power is a good thing, even if it necessarily means that contradictions proliferate and that simple pictures buckle under the pressure of real politics.