

# A World Redrawn: Eisenstein and Brecht in Hollywood

## Zoe Beloff

### Exhibition & Programs

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**A World Redrawn: Eisenstein  
and Brecht in Hollywood**

**Zoe Beloff**

**The James Gallery  
The Graduate Center, CUNY**

**365 Fifth Avenue at 35th Street  
The Graduate Center**

**[centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery](http://centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery)**

**Sep 3–Nov 21, 2015**

**Exhibition and Programs**

The traditional model home of the 1940s is an American dream that has gone through more than its share of nightmares. Investments in this form are both psychological and financial, and extend well beyond American borders. Its flipside is the modernist dream of the glass house, with its total transparency. Both of these architectures are primarily concerned with display of inhabitants as solidification of ideology. Artist Zoe Beloff opens up the moment in history when these two distinct forms of homes were launched in popular imagination and, more specifically, in the fantasies of the two of the most well-known avant-garde creative intellectuals of the twentieth century, Bertolt Brecht and Sergei Eisenstein.

"A World Redrawn: Eisenstein and Brecht in Hollywood" premieres Beloff's three new films, two architectural models, five large-scale watercolors, and four film backdrops, alongside archival news materials, drawings, and notebooks from Russian State Archives of Literature and Art and Bertolt Brecht Archiv Berlin. The project is a culmination of her years of research, image sleuthing, filming, editing, drawing, building sets and models, and travel from Berlin to Los Angeles to Moscow to St. Louis, Missouri. This diverse range of objects reveals and imagines Eisenstein and Brecht's expectations of artistic freedom of Hollywood. Despite coming to the United States in 1930 under contract with Paramount Pictures and with high hopes, Eisenstein was met with a country in the Depression and his fantasy of making a major motion picture was thwarted. Brecht, faced with the reality of exile in America at wartime in 1941-1947, found that the American dream was not only on display but for sale at the Ohio State Fair.

These artist-immigrants' experiences of America in the 1930s and '40s can be seen through their unfinished film scenarios: *Glass House* by Eisenstein and *A Model Family in a Model Home* by Brecht. These two projects could not be more divergent. Eisenstein was fascinated by a home that would provide total freedom—and voyeurism from the outside—as inhabitants could be viewed from every side

as well as above and below. The ideal of transparency veered into dystopian full surveillance, making a performance out of intimate daily life. For Brecht, the Model Home displayed domestic life for a mass audience to consume as cultural mores, gestures, and items tagged for sale. Everyday life became a commodity.

For the project on view, Beloff draws upon Eisenstein's notes and sketches for *Glass House*, which she found within the Russian State Archives of Literature and Art in Moscow. She has made unlikely choices when selecting photographs from the archive, assigning value and prominence to moments of amusement and levity. Photographs of Eisenstein playing tennis show him as a carefree man of leisure. Is he only acting as if he enjoyed life in sunny LA? Is he not the same dark brooding Soviet avant-garde film director who Stalin admired? Was he so used to acting "as if" in his personal life as a closeted homosexual that such an attitude wasn't difficult to feign? A picture of him with Felix the Cat stuffed animals on his lap, which he won from going to the amusement park with his friend Charlie Chaplin, as Beloff recounts, finds a new form in the abandon of his drawings for *Glass House* of a twirling woman with dolls on her bosom. This translation from private childhood play with dolls to the freedom of non-conformity and wild gesturing erupts again in Beloff's film as a woman transforms into Mickey Mouse, her limbs undulating like liquid. In her book *Hollywood Flatlands*, Esther Leslie discusses the stark differences of opinion between Eisenstein, Charlie Chaplin, and Theodor Adorno about Disney's animation. Eisenstein believed that Disney portrayed a pure childhood impulse of play, whereas Chaplin delighted in nostalgia of the animations, and Adorno thought they were fetishistic. It could be said that the corresponding sequence in Beloff's film oscillates among all three. In her model *Glass House* at the north end of the gallery, Eisenstein's belief in the omnipotence of the director is realized at the scale of a toy, reduced for the viewer's eyes. As we take in the view we can imagine the thorough sensation of immersion that inhabitants would feel. With complete openness and exposure comes the delusional version of freedom, not actual free will.

Further playing with scale's effect on voyeurism, Beloff has re-animated Eisenstein's light pencil sketches from the 1930s, *Nudiste Association*, in large contour drawings directly on the wall. Painted in red, approaching life size, and facing out to 35th Street, abstracted outlines of nude women happily don spectacles and binoculars on their bosoms, poking fun at the assumed one-way vision these lenses cast on women. In an enlarged scale, their color jumps dynamically against the stark white wall, recalling the energy and abstraction of now canonical paintings like Pablo Picasso's *Desmoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) or Henri Matisse's *The Dance* (1910). Here, too, a kinship between the human drive toward both drawing and dance is convincingly demonstrated.

Zoe Beloff has worked in both drawing and film throughout her practice. Originally from Scotland, she studied painting in Edinburgh and film at Columbia University, her inside/outside view towards American popular culture and democracy, as well as financial and social systems, brings critical acuity together with humor in her past projects including *The Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society and its Circle* (2009), *Days of the Commune* (2012), and *The Infernal Tale of Mutt and Jeff* (2011). As with these predecessors, in "A World Redrawn" Beloff entwines her fascinations with these larger histories and this specific archival material. Certainly the archive becomes an artistic medium in her hands, but more importantly, she considers herself a medium for the archive. As a repository of material, to be deployed not in order to reinforce existing narratives but rather to open more questions about unknown connections between people and imagery in the films they created. The shared task of the creators, keepers, and explorers of such collections is to open paths for others to invent something else altogether.

The artist's five watercolor drawings, disproportionately large for the medium, can be viewed from the Fifth Avenue windows of the gallery. The watercolors chart over time the stories of Eisenstein and Brecht's impressions of America through montage similar to film transitions, yet a number of images appear simultaneously on one large page often sharing

space. For Beloff, watercolor is like the medium of film as it couples a transparent quality with the potential for collage. Beloff employs multiple axes and timelines throughout her films and drawings demarcating key moments in the interwar period and WWII. An important visual resource for this series of watercolors was the British wartime artist Eric Ravilious' work. In *Beyond the Visible*, depicting Eisenstein's dream of America and Hollywood a story of the progression of WWII and the relations between the United States and Europe unfolds. Yet the calibrations are overtaken by Eisenstein's head, which is depicted as overflowing with musings of the promise of Hollywood's glitz and grandeur. Beloff has been a medium for dreams in previous projects like the *Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society and its Circle*, in which she brought to light films made by lonely housewives about their incredibly strange (what else would dreams be?) dream life. Here, in "A World Redrawn," Beloff continues to stitch together the real and potential, the strange and the banal that are such fruitful sources running throughout German Critical Theory in the mid-twentieth-century.

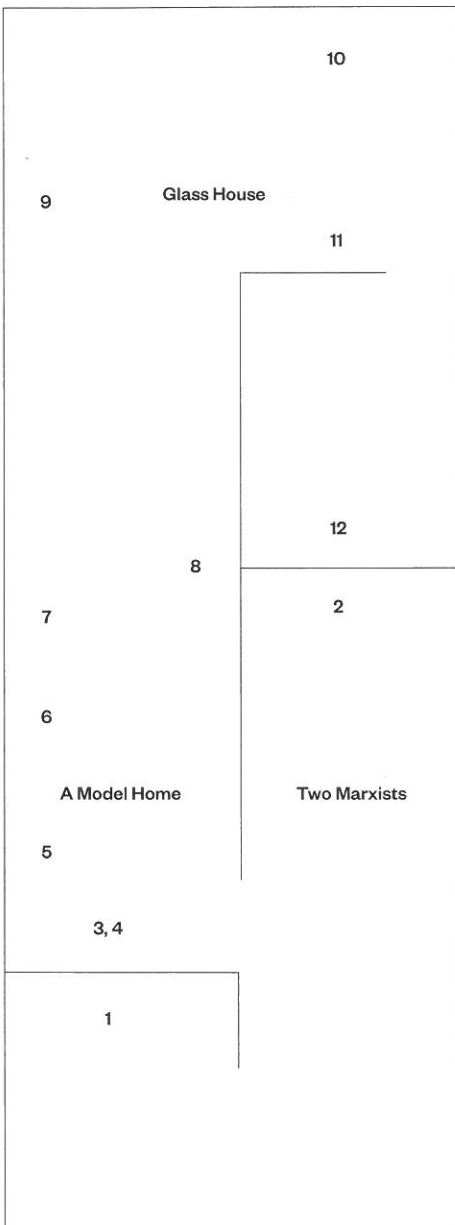
Several other watercolors including *American Home Ownership* and *Price Tag* borrow imagery from a series of articles, published in *The Columbus Dispatch* and *Life* magazine, about "The Model Home for the Model Family," which was on view at the 1941 Ohio State Fair. This heralded the birth of the typical A-frame house with porch and white picket fence. Bertolt Brecht became utterly fascinated: not only was the house on display but so was the Frank Engels Family. Winners of a contest to inhabit the house during the state fair, they remained on view while lines of visitors wove their way through the structure's interior. Unpublished Alfred Eisenstaedt photographs for *Life* magazine included in this exhibition show the prize family demonstrating stereotypical domestic rituals. From that point on, the model family in their home became a brand. Imagery of American culture by Eames and Steichen would later be exported to Moscow at the American pavilion of the 1959 World's Exposition, but at that moment in Ohio, America was mesmerized by the vision of itself. Whereas the

1959 presentation showed highway infrastructure and technological prowess, as well as art and design objects, the Model Home narrative highlighted objects in the home, a structure that itself would soon be mass produced.

As we know, this cultural formation then multiplied to tract housing, depicted in Beloff's film in the small room at the left of the entry to the exhibition. Scouting for locations for her film *Two Marxists in Hollywood*, Beloff found that big box store consumerism had displaced many cultural icons in the Los Angeles cityscape. Her backdrops for the film sketch the 20th Century Fox film lots, Charlie Chaplin's house, the Disney Studios, Brecht's home, and many other famous locations that have undergone such big changes. In the film they are placed as mediators between the actors and the current day. A hovering memory, they act simultaneously as background to the actors and foreground to the contemporary urban landscape. Fitting, as for immigrants Eisenstein and Brecht, L.A. was already a city estranged from their dreams and expectations.

Beloff has cast boys to play Brecht and Eisenstein in *Two Marxists in Hollywood* bringing a heightened awareness of the passage of time, in film as in life. As they inhabit the layered scenes they passionately quote passages from both artists' writings and tell anecdotes from their lives in reverse. It is through these disjunctions that Beloff provides insight and feelings of human pathos for these complex figures and their questions about American culture that persist today. A photograph in the vitrine in the south end of the gallery shows Brecht and Eisenstein looking intensely in each other's eyes; although one could imagine a moment of friendly exchange between them, in reality the two greatly disliked each other. As more material is crafted by Zoe Beloff, more new ways of looking at the documents can be imagined.

— Katherine Carl



## Exhibition Checklist

All works are by Zoe Beloff, unless otherwise noted.

1. *A Model Family in a Model Home*, 2015  
HD video, 22 minutes

2. *Two Marxists in Hollywood*, 2015  
HD video, 26 minutes

3. Alfred Eisenstaedt, eight unpublished photographs taken for an article in *Life* magazine, "A Model Family in a Model Home," 1941. Courtesy of Getty Images.

4. Articles in *Life* magazine, September 15, 1941, and November 10, 1947

Facsimiles of Bertolt Brecht's notes for his unfinished film, *A Model Family in a Model Home*. Courtesy of the Brecht Archiv Berlin.

5. *The Model Home*, 2015  
Wood, 30" x 20" x 21 1/2"

6. "For Sale", 2015  
Series of ink jet prints, 24" x 32"  
Based on images from *The Columbus Dispatch*, August 1941.

7. *Bert Brecht Reads Life Magazine*, 2015  
Mixed media, 18" x 18" x 24"

8. *Beyond the Visible*, 2015  
Watercolor on paper, 40" x 60"

*Unopened Suitcases*, 2015  
Watercolor on paper, 40" x 60"

*Inquisitive Eyes*, 2015  
Watercolor on paper, 40" x 60"

*American Home Ownership*, 2015  
Watercolor on paper, 40" x 60"

*Price Tag*, 2015  
Watercolor on paper, 40" x 60"

9. Facsimiles of Sergei Eisenstein's drawings and photographs from the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art. Courtesy RGALI.

10. *Glass House*, 2015  
Plexi glass, three video projections, miniature furniture, metal fasteners  
24" x 24" x 48"

11. *The Nudiste Association*, 2015  
Site-specific drawing  
acrylic, dimensions variable.

12. *Glass House*, 2014  
HD video, 20 minutes



Le Corbusier, S.M. Eisenstein and Andrei Burov, 1928. Courtesy RGALI.



Bertolt Brecht and S.M. Eisenstein. Courtesy RGALI.

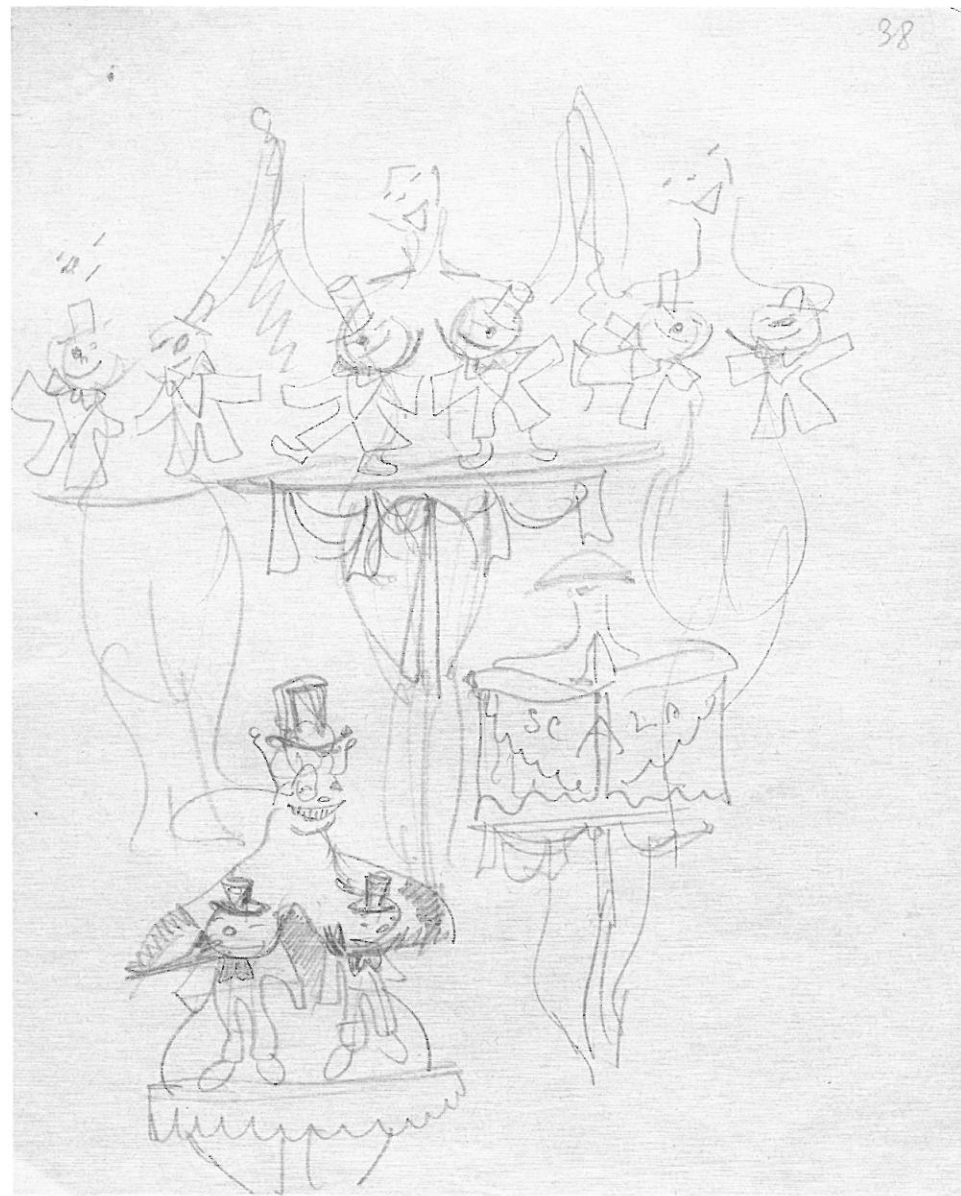


Zoe Beloff, film stills from *Glass House*, 2014.





S.M. Eisenstein, synopsis of *Glass House*. June 1930. Courtesy RGALI.

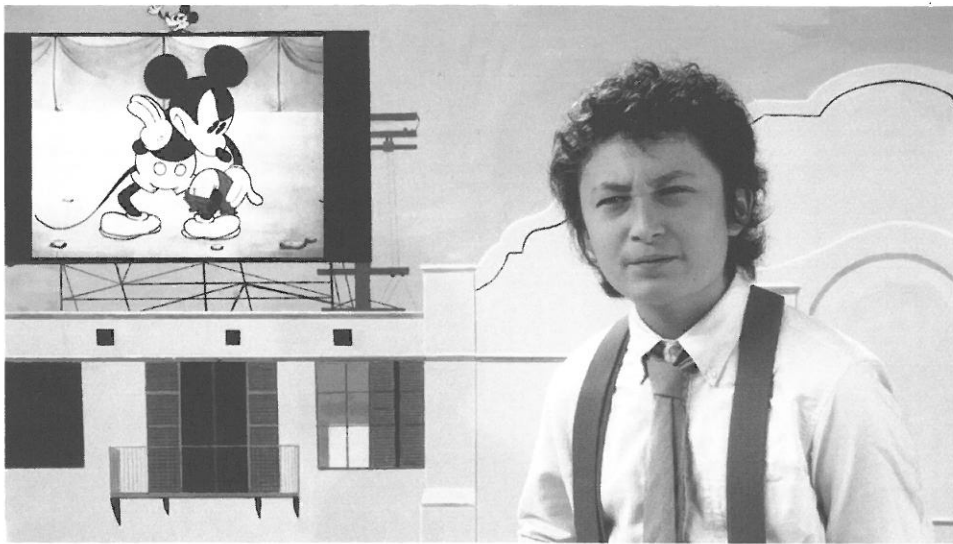


S.M. Eisenstein, *Glass House*. June 1930. Courtesy RGALI.

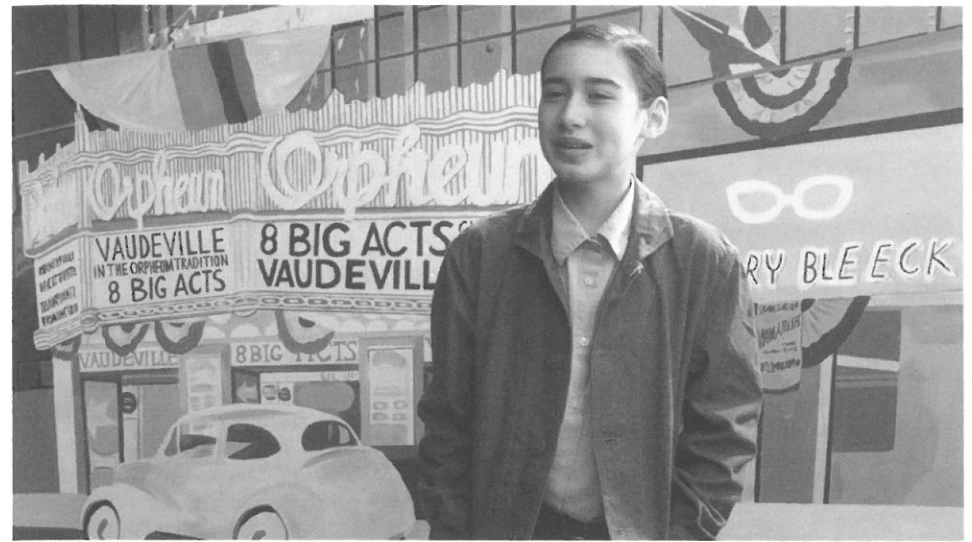




Zoe Beloff, film still from *Two Marxists in Hollywood*, 2015.



Zoe Beloff, film still from *Two Marxists in Hollywood*, 2015.



Zoe Beloff, film stills from *Two Marxists in Hollywood*, 2015.

Wed, Sep 2, 6–8pm  
Exhibition Reception

## A World Redrawn: Eisenstein and Brecht in Hollywood

Zoe Beloff, artist.

Sergei Eisenstein was invited to Hollywood in 1930 under contract with Paramount Pictures. Fleeing from the Nazis, Brecht arrived in 1941. Both attempted the impossible, to challenge the formulas of the motion picture industry, to create works that were popular and radical. Through films, drawings, architectural models and archival documents, New York artist Zoe Beloff explores their unrealized film scenarios *Glass House* and *A Model Family in a Model Home* and reimagines their ideas for today.

The James Gallery

*Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, and the Ph.D. Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY.*

Fri, Sep 11, 2–9pm  
Symposium and Performance

## Imagining Further Conversations with Eisenstein and Brecht

Zoe Beloff, artist; Hannah Frank, Cinema and Media Studies, University of Chicago; Amy Herzog, Film Studies and Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Jonathan Kalb, Theater, Hunter College, CUNY; Ian Saville, performer.

What are the unexpected affinities between avant-garde European theater, Russian cinema, and Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s? How did the friendships (despite their differences) of Walt Disney, Sergei Eisenstein, Charlie Chaplin, and Bertolt Brecht open a new language for cinema beyond the big-budget Hollywood pictures that eluded Eisenstein? Join scholars of Brecht and Russian avant-garde cinema and Hollywood animation in a dynamic conversation followed by a live ventriloquism performance by Ian Saville of “Magic for Brecht.”

Martin E. Segal Theatre

*Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, and the Ph.D. Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY.*

Mon, Sep 14, 11am–4pm  
Workshop

## Queer Eisenstein

Yevgeniy Fiks, artist.

Sergei Eisenstein, the renowned Russian avant-garde filmmaker and favorite of Stalin, is known to be homosexual yet very little has been published on the subject. Peter Greenaway’s recent film addresses Eisenstein’s sexuality and raised Vladimir Putin’s ire when it was being made. In this working session, participants are welcome to join throughout the day to cull through books, films, photos, news clippings, Eisenstein’s drawings and correspondence to assemble mentions or allusions to Eisenstein’s sexuality and the impact this had on his creative work. The output for the day’s work will be determined collaboratively by the group.

The James Gallery

*Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, The Graduate Center, CUNY.*

Tue, Sep 22, 6:30pm  
Conversation

## From Animation to the Avant-garde in Disney and Eisenstein's Hollywood

Zoe Beloff, artist; Amy Herzog, Film Studies and Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Esther Leslie, Political Aesthetics, Birkbeck College, University of London.

What do the films of Walt Disney and Sergei Eisenstein have in common? How did Hollywood animation technology impact not only popular culture but also intellectual thought of figures like Sergei Eisenstein and Theodor Adorno in exile in California in the 1930s and 1940s? Join Esther Leslie, author of *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory, and the Avant-garde* for a conversation with Zoe Beloff and Amy Herzog.

~~THE SKYLIGHT ROOM (9100)~~  
**MARTIN E. SEGAL THEATRE**  
Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, and the Ph.D. Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Wed, Sep 30, 6:30pm  
Conversation

## Stefan Brecht's *Queer Theater*

Kelly Aliano, Ph.D. Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Sean Edgecomb, Performing and Creative Arts, College of Staten Island, CUNY; Benjamin Gillespie, Ph.D. Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Joe Jeffreys, writer; Ed Miller, Media Culture, College of Staten Island, CUNY.

Stefan Brecht, Bertolt Brecht's son, was a poet, a theater scholar, and a well-known figure in the downtown New York theater scene in the 1960s and 70s. His book *Queer Theatre* (1978) provided a lyrical and contemporary consideration of its subjects including Jack Smith and Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theater. The book prompts discussion about Bertolt Brecht's methodology of transparency of the mechanisms of theater in relation to the work of directors and playwrights in the downtown scene who were more interested in entrancing audiences through performance. How does his approach play out in contemporary downtown and queer New York City theatre—for example the immediacy of a Justin Vivian Bond performance versus the hypermediacy of the Wooster Group? Join in a lively discussion with professors and students at the Graduate Center as part of the Mediating the Archive Seminar at the Center for the Humanities for an evening exploring the lasting impact of Brecht's critical writing on the legacies of this complex scene and its queer aspects. This program is presented in tandem with the exhibition "A World Redrawn: Eisenstein and Brecht in Hollywood" by artist Zoe Beloff, professor at Queens College, CUNY.

The Skylight Room (9100)

Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, and the Ph.D. Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Tue, Oct 6, 6:30pm  
Performance

## Ask Me More About Brecht

Sabine Berendse, performer; Paul Clements, performer; Hannah Temple, accordionist.

What would it be like to listen in on a conversation between Austrian composer Hanns Eisler and Brecht scholar Hans Bunge in East Berlin in 1958? Bunge recorded fourteen interviews with the courageous and committed left-wing composer that are the script for this performance. Eisler was an enormously intelligent and entertaining conversationalist: sharp, witty, incisive, humorous and lively. His wide breadth of knowledge and profound understanding of historical processes provide unlikely insights into culture in Europe in the mid-twentieth century.

Performing the interview translated into English are Paul Clements as Eisler with questions read by Sabine Berendse, the daughter of Hans Bunge, who was one of Bertolt Brecht's assistants at the Berliner Ensemble. After the playwright's death in 1956, Brecht's widow Helene Weigel gave him the responsibility of creating the Brecht Archive. The performance will offer a glimpse into another era and the opportunity for the audience also to ask questions of these historical characters. Included in the performance are recordings of Eisler's music and rarely seen photographic images of Eisler. The evening will be opened by New York accordionist Hannah Temple performing her compositions for Brecht included in Beloff's film.

C198

Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, and the Ph.D. Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Wed, Oct 21, 5:30pm  
Gallery Tour

## Brecht's Influence on Contemporary Art

Francesco Scasciamacchia, Ph.D. Program in Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Bertolt Brecht is a central character in Zoe Beloff's films, drawings, and archival research materials on view in the James Gallery. Beloff interprets, imagines, and inhabits Brecht's thinking about America during his time in Hollywood, asking what if he had made his "Model Family for a Model Home" film? Materials from the Brecht Archiv in Berlin are on view as part of her project and invite more questions about Brecht's life and approach to theater. In recent years theater and visual arts have met in large part on the territory of Brechtian methodology. Scasciamacchia will delve into details and examples in contemporary art-making and curatorial practice in a lively discussion of the influence of Brecht's thinking and practice in theatre on new forms of contemporary visual art.

The James Gallery

Co-sponsored by the Ph.D. Program in Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Wed, Nov 4, 6:30pm  
Symposium

## Art Ecologies

Paavo Järvensivu, curator and writer, and others.

This symposium, held on the occasion of Järvensivu's residency fellowship, will continue ongoing discussions at the James Gallery on image ecologies and also examine links between the changing environment in the Earth's North and in New York City.

C201

*Co-sponsored by The Finnish Cultural Institute.*

~~Wed, Nov 4, 6:30pm~~  
Panel

## Fabulated Archives

Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Art History, Harvard University; Zoe Beloff, artist; Katarina Buren, artist.

In a world in which "truthiness" has entered the Oxford English Dictionary, how are artists responding to the newly malleable condition of fact? Art historian Carrie Lambert Beatty has categorized the recent strategies of contemporary artists to creatively play with the conventions of storytelling and history as the parafictional. Neither pure invention nor just the facts, today artists are employing archives and historical material to produce new stories in unprecedented ways to engender skepticism, doubt, and hope on the part of the viewer. Within such works, the notion of history and the belief in truth undergoes destabilization but not obliteration. Join us on the occasion of Zoe Beloff's solo exhibition in the James Gallery for a discussion on the fictional, the parafictional, and the seemingly fictitious but true in contemporary art.

C198

*Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities and the Ph.D. Program in Art History.*

Wed, Nov 18, 6:30pm  
Lecture

## Transversal Methodologies

Pelin Tan, Architecture, Mardin, Artuklu University, Turkey.

How do existing methodological structures choreograph the diverse outputs of social art practice and what tools have we developed to enact new transversal methods for instituting this practice? Furthermore, how can social art practice begin to be historicized as it interacts with disciplines of visual art, performance, and theater as well as uneven geographies and political conditions? Join in conversation with sociologist Pelin Tan as she presents her research in this area in conversation with James Gallery curator Katherine Carl and participants in the Social Choreography Working Group.

C198

*Co-sponsored by the Social Choreography Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, Center for Place, Culture and Politics, and Committee on Globalization and Social Change.*

Thu, Nov 19, 6:30pm  
Conversation

## Gulf Labor and Precarious Workers' Rights

Setare Arashloo, M.F.A., Queens College, CUNY; Barrie Cline, activist; Andrew Ross, Social and Cultural Analysis, New York University; Greg Sholette, Fine Arts, Queens College, CUNY.

What does Bertolt Brecht have to do with workers' rights in Abu Dhabi? Although politically engaged art and theater take many forms, the recent Precarious Workers Pageant at the Venice Biennale took a Brechtian approach as it pointed out the solidification of global capital in architecture in Abu Dhabi and the precarious state of migrant workers who are building these future cultural sites. The pageant proposed new constructions for public commons from the ruins of the avant garde notion of the museum. Join members of Gulf Labor and Workers Art Coalition for an evening of discussion, debate, and propositions as part of the Social Choreography seminar at the Center for the Humanities and in tandem with the exhibition by Zoe Beloff at the James Gallery, "A World Redrawn: Eisenstein and Brecht in Hollywood."

Skylight Room 9100

*Co-sponsored by the Social Choreography Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, Center for Place, Culture and Politics, and Committee on Globalization and Social Change.*

The artwork is created by Zoe Beloff in association with Eric Muzzy.

This project is supported by Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in Fine Arts.

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The exhibition is made possible in part by The Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Bertolt Brecht Archiv Berlin, and Getty Images. Co-sponsored by the Mediating the Archive Mellon Seminar in Public Engagement and Collaborative Research in the Humanities, and the Ph.D. Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center CUNY.

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James Gallery Exhibitions Coordinator:  
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James Gallery Graduate Assistants:  
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Production: LanningSmith Studio

Design: MTWTF

The Amie and Tony James Gallery's mission is to bring artists and scholars into public dialogue on topics of mutual concern. As a window into the research work of The Graduate Center and a hub of international discussion, The James Gallery is central to The Graduate Center's and the City University of New York's contribution to the cultural life of New York City.

Located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city, the gallery is dedicated to exhibition-making as advanced research embedded in the scholarly work of The Graduate Center across multiple disciplines. The gallery creates and presents artwork to the public in a variety of formats. While some exhibitions remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussions, salons, and screenings have a short duration. The gallery works with scholars, students, artists and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary boundaries.

# The James Gallery

THE  
GRADUATE  
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