

Context and Blackmail:  
MARIE ANGELETTI

BY  
Daniel R. Quiles



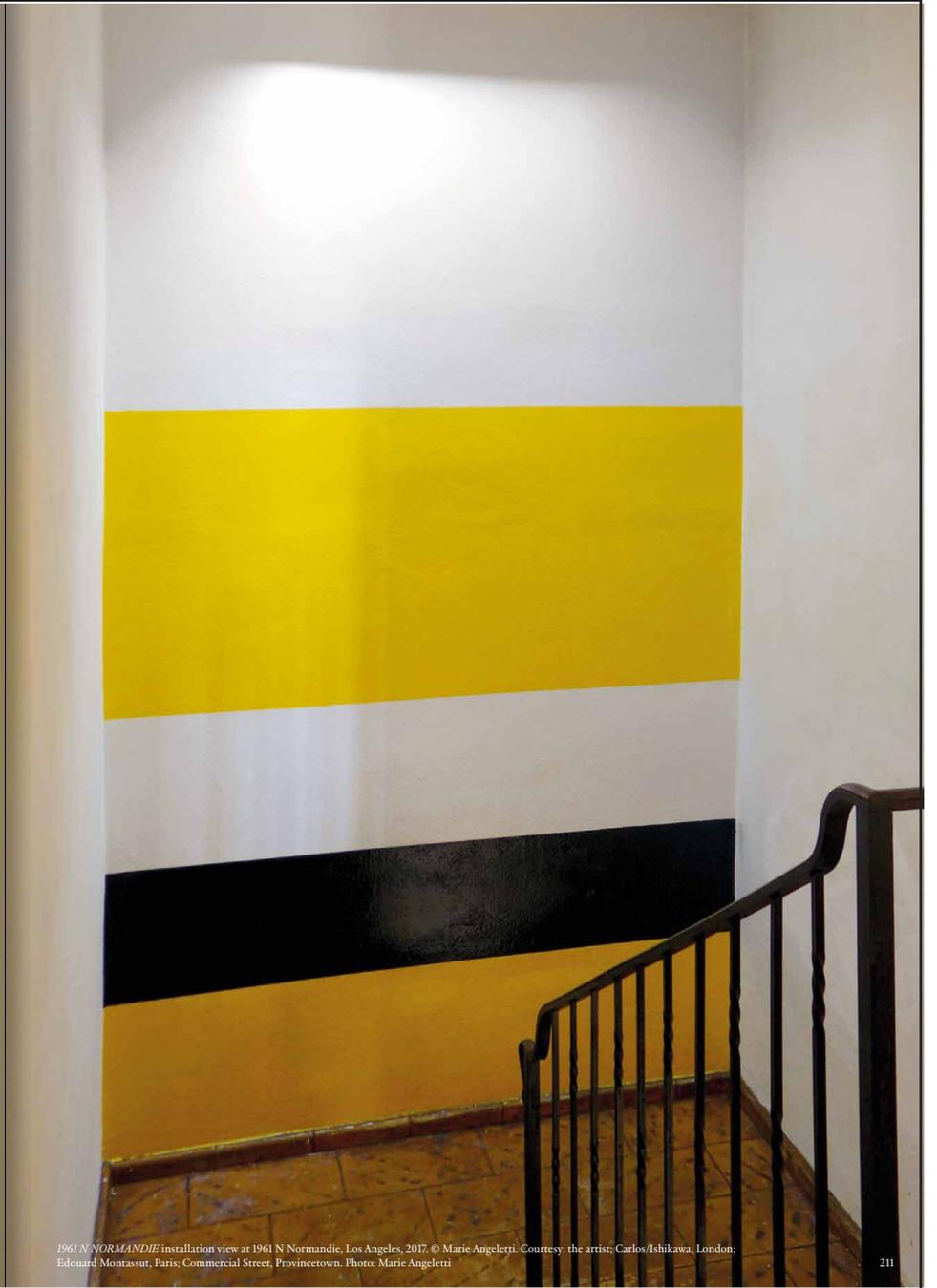
*New York, October, 2018. Swingers installation view. Greene Nafali, New York, 2018. © Marie Angeletti. Courtesy: the artist; Greene Nafali, New York; Carlos Ishikawa, London; Edouard Moutassat, Paris. Photo: Craig White*

MARIE ANGELETTI's recent projects have intensified her folding of the exhibition context—as space, as site, as situation, as transaction—into her work. This approach has led the artist to normally unconsidered interactions with various agents involved in art platforms at a range of levels, from nonprofit spaces to commercial galleries to museums. As many contemporary art venues have recently embraced provisional, temporary locations, Angeletti has examined shifting protocols of conduct and permission between artists and their facilitators. Rather than narrow the scope of the work toward a critique of the institution at hand, however, Angeletti's choices—particularly her use of photographs—invariably heighten ambiguity, evading singular interpretations. The artist's bottom line is to reinvent the play of forces within which the artist and her work are circumscribed and implicated.





*Conseille par JP Long*, 2018. © Marie Angeletti 2019. Courtesy: the artist



*1961 N NORMANDIE* installation view at 1961 N Normandie, Los Angeles, 2017. © Marie Angeletti. Courtesy: the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; Edouard Montrassut, Paris; Commercial Street, Provincetown. Photo: Marie Angeletti

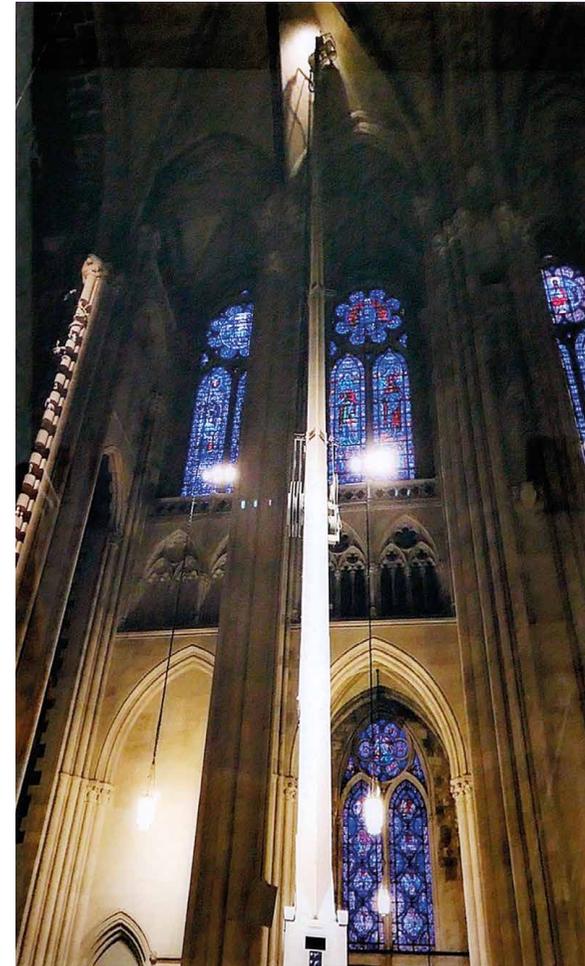


*Les vœux, les agneaux* installation view at Beach Office, Berlin, 2017-2018.  
© Marie Angeletti. Courtesy: the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; Edouard Montassut, Paris; Beach Office, Berlin. Photo: Marie Angeletti



*Pour qui tu chantes?* installation view at Atlantis, Marseille, 2018. © Marie Angeletti.  
Courtesy: the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; Edouard Montassut, Paris; Atlantis, Marseille. Photo: Marie Angeletti

*1961 N NORMANDIE* installation view at 1961 N Normandie, Los Angeles, 2017. © Marie Angeletti. Courtesy: the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; Edouard Montassut, Paris; Commercial Street, Provincetown. Photo: Marie Angeletti



*Maintenance*, 2018. © Marie Angeletti 2019. Courtesy: the artist and Carlos/Ishikawa, London

Angeletti's *Pour qui tu chantes?* (For Whom Do You Sing?, 2018) consisted of three consecutive interventions at the project space Atlantis in Marseille. Run by LUMIÈRE, a consortium of eight art collectors, Atlantis is situated on rue du Chevalier Roze, where in 2017 a new gallery district was underwritten by the real estate investment firm d'ANF Immobilier to serve as a gentrifying bridge between the city's wealthy Panier neighborhood and working-class Vieux-Port. Angeletti's first work, *Longevity-Permanence*, was to paint the facade of the gallery, both inside and outside, using silver Rust-Oleum, a light-reflective industrial paint used on roofing in the United States. At night the gallery was illuminated from within via three 400-watt spotlights pointed at the windows. The resulting effect, day or night, was to pop the space out from its surrounding context, identifying it as a frame while also shattering the cultivated understatement of the twenty-first-century gallery in the urban fabric. It was as if the very process of gentrification, and art's place within it, was momentarily suspended and held up to view.

*Longevity-Permanence* inverted the display concept of a project from six months prior, *Les veaux, les agneaux* (Calves, Lambs, 2017-2018) at Tempelhof Airport in Berlin, coordinated by the project space Beach Office and presented in a former security guard booth in the airport's parking lot. On the walls of a network of bunkers beneath the airport, Angeletti had found Wilhelm Busch scenes painted by an anonymous artist between 1939 and 1940 that may have been commissioned to comfort children hiding during Allied bombardments.<sup>2</sup> She transposed illustrations and text fragments from the Busch stories "Der Maulwurf" (The Mole, 1874) and "Pilsch und Plum" (1882), in which mischievous animals are violently punished for digging up gardens. At night, the entire booth was illuminated by car headlights pointed directly at the windows from outside, identifying the entirety of the space as the work. If Angeletti used lighting to better identify Atlantis as part of the changing city surrounding it, her theatrical excavations in Berlin insisted that repurposed venues for contemporary art are always already historical—and indeed susceptible to traumatic repetition. In early 2017, Tempelhof was designated a refugee settlement for recent migrants, placing the area at the heart of new tensions and nationalism in Germany.<sup>3</sup> Visible in the guard booth, severed from its context (a description of the incorrigible mole in "Der Maulwurf"), the phrase "schon wieder wühlt das Ungetier" (again, the monster digs) hovered ominously between past and future.

The second component of *Pour qui tu chantes?*, titled *Finger*, was a pre-sale agreement with the LUMIÈRE collectors. This contract stipulated that other than the facade and spotlights, only artworks sold prior to the opening night could be shown inside the gallery. The only work made available for purchase was a single photograph in an edition of eight, one for each member of LUMIÈRE, in addition to one artist's print. Four were bought and thus on view at Atlantis. The last ten years have seen rising experimentation with contracts in contemporary art, recalling Seth Siegelaub and Bob Projansky's *Artist's Contract* (1971) from the heyday of Conceptualism. Angeletti's contract stipulated that the artwork incorporate and insist upon the context's true

identity as a collector-run gallery. Its owners had to act not as quasi-curators but as the collectors that they are; for one show, they could not advance their interests under the cover of an "alternative space." As would become clear in the project's third phase, this posited an implicit link between art-world clientelism and the cliché of Marseille as a mafia-run city.

*Finger* refers to the editioned work for sale: a photograph of 1961 *NORMANDIE* (2017), an exhibition in a private Los Angeles house before its owners moved in. The title refers to Roy Lichtenstein's *Finger Pointing* (1961-1973), which Angeletti reproduced into a wall mural above an old fireplace mantel. A number of other works were similarly reproduced throughout the house, primarily large-scale abstract paintings by Los Angeles artist John McLaughlin, then on view at his LACMA retrospective. That Angeletti elected to transpose this aspect of her experience while in Los Angeles into her work is typical of what she calls her "fast," or deictic, mode of art making: "pointing at things," displacing them to an expanded context beyond the bounds of each respective venue.<sup>4</sup> She also added a reproduction of the Honoré Daumier caricature *Le passé - Le présent - L'avenir* (The Past - The Present - The Future, 1834). The image of a pyramidal head with three increasingly enraged faces mocked King Louis Philippe's gradual loss of popularity over the course of his reign. Daumier had previously been jailed for his openly political art, while McLaughlin was devoted to a radical abstraction "entirely devoid of any connection to everyday experience, inspired by the Japanese notion of the void."<sup>5</sup> Between clear signification and void, there was Lichtenstein's finger, a linguistic "shifter" in that it points to whomever (or whatever) is in its path. When Angeletti sold and displayed photographs of her Los Angeles mural in Marseille, she converted a noncommercial mode of production that many artists engage in—ephemeral work installed in an alternative space—into commercial art. This transactional dimension of *Finger* supersedes its nomadic poetics (the transposition of one city, one place the artist has visited and met people and enriched her work, onto the other) and points insistently, or accusingly, at the viewer.

1961 *NORMANDIE* was organized in cooperation with Tyler Murphy, director of the itinerant gallery Commercial Street. Murphy subsequently invited Angeletti to show alongside the artist Bedros Yeretizian in summer 2018, and she responded by giving Murphy three weeks to create a video in the style of a Western, based on the idea that the genre "already exists in our minds."<sup>6</sup> Murphy filmed alone in the Mojave Desert and sent footage to Angeletti for editing, resulting in *Rocking Chair* (2018), which predictably alternates between open, depopulated vistas, people riding horses, and a deconstructed shootout sequence, also on horseback. While Angeletti ceded control over the images, actors, and locations, the exhaustive set of instructions she provided to Murphy inserted her ideational presence at the heart of "his" part of the work. At the same time, she was insistent that the *entirety* of his trip—not just making the video, but all other actions and time spent—was part and parcel of *Rocking Chair*, encompassed in its expanded frame. As such, viewers only witness on-screen a fragment of the work.

Geographically distant as artist and gallerist were during the making of *Rocking Chair*, Angeletti achieved a fleeting, arguably perverse, intersubjectivity through the blurring of their professional roles. Consonant with one of the Western's driving themes—the frontier—Angeletti's aim was to push the boundaries of the work far beyond meditation on institutional conditions or the initial situation of being "given a show." Instead, she pushed this familiar art-world relationship into unforeseen territory by assigning Murphy not only her tasks as maker, but also the very experiential research that she normally performs prior to a show. She again collaborated that fall in a group show at Greene Naftali, New York, this time with art historian Robert Snowden. They installed works in public and private locations within the gallery, and in the windows placed analog slides with photographs taken elsewhere in New York, producing a centrifugal flow of attention away from the exhibition site and toward its conditioning contexts. These included shots of a American Museum of Natural History diorama of the Lenape meeting Dutch settlers on Manna-hata / New Amsterdam: the representation of a harmonious past through which the speculative fantasies of High Line-era Chelsea were visible.

For the third, untitled phase of *Pour qui tu chantes?*, Angeletti added seven additional photographs to the Atlantis exhibition, breaking the terms of her pre-sale contract with the LUMIÈRE collectors. "I did so," writes Angeletti, "to ensure that I remained indeterminate. Normally, one expects from the hero that he accept or refuse what he is asked to do, but not that he change his mind."<sup>7</sup> These images came directly from the artist's recent meanderings and research: a Simone Forti performance; an action in which she invited a select audience to a cathedral; and two photographs related to Marseille's Corsican mafia. One was a historical photograph with a gangster that the local audience would have recognized, the other a contemporary black-and-white image of Mazargue square, a banal-looking location on the way to Baumettes prison. A mafia representative had advised the artist to go there to take a photograph.<sup>8</sup> In lieu of a press release was a folder with numerous other photographs and local newspaper articles detailing the current situation in Marseille regarding corruption and crime. From the mythic days of the "French connection," the older Corsican mafia is now reported to be working closely with a younger, North African generation based in the *banlieues*, or poor suburbs of the city, in an era of neo-bandidry for narco-traffickers and developers alike.

"For whom do you sing?" Lest the query seem antagonistic, it is clear that Angeletti is also asking herself this question, with each successive experiment. At Atlantis her ultimate act was blackmail, using the power of the artwork to override her own legal arrangement and force the collectors to play along. In her recent work she has treated normally trivial interactions—the location of a venue; a pre-sale contract; the commissioning of work at a geographical remove; an unexpected, last-minute change that could start a dispute between artist and curator—as part of the context, and thus as material to be incorporated and manipulated. Angeletti's contention that *Longevity-Permanence* "frames" the site extends the latter's status as a field of action, extending to decision making in

addition to the finalized exhibition seen by the public. Understood as such, the artist is right to treat herself as a protagonist, with a significant component of her work a sort of professional autobiography. That the autobiographical lurks does not mean that what we see can be called self-portraiture, however—certainly not in the traditional, figurative sense. The contemporary artist here covets and flits, almost invisible, in the interstices of her works and preparatory labor. The image we receive is more like a map of topological contortions over time.

- 1 "Chevalier Roze: un nouveau pôle d'art contemporain au cœur de Marseille," *Go Met*, July 27, 2017, <https://www.go-met.com/chevalier-roze-nouveau-pole-dart-contemporain-au-coeur-marseille-2/>.
- 2 As Angeletti notes in the press release, the idea that the Reich Ministry commissioned the murals is supported by the presence of Busch drawings in shelters all over Germany. In the historical archives at Bundesarchiv Berlin, however, there is no information that confirms this.
- 3 Ellen Rothenberg's *SO 6346: inductible immigrant* (2018) examined the settlement's "Tempohomes." See Pinar Üner Yilmaz, "Ellen Rothenberg // Sperras Institute," *The Seen*, March 2, 2018, <http://theseenjournal.org/art-scen-chicago/ellen-rothenberg/>.
- 4 Email conversation with the artist, May 5, 2019.
- 5 "John McLaughlin Paintings: Total Abstraction," LACMA online, 2016, <https://www.lacma.org/exhibition/john-mclaughlin-paintings-total-abstraction>.
- 6 Email conversation with the artist, May 5, 2019.
- 7 Marie Angeletti, "*Pour qui tu chantes?* Atlantis," unpublished text, 2019.
- 8 Email conversation with the artist, May 5, 2019.

MARIE ANGELETTI (b. 1984) lives and works in Berlin. Her work has been exhibited at Le Consortium, Dijon; Kunstverein Cologne; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; Kunstherhaus Bremen; castillo/corrales, Paris; Kunsthalle Zurich; Edouard Montassut, Paris; and Kunsthalle Vienna, among others. She worked on large-scale commissions with *Les Nouveaux commanditaires*, Paris, and *Pévo* Factory, China / Gemenos. She has been teaching at HEAD, Art School in Geneva, for the past three years, and regularly set up her own projects mainly in Marseille, the city she is from.

DANIEL R. QUILES is an art critic as well as an Associate Professor of Art History, Theory and Criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His academic research has focused on Argentinian conceptualism as well as broader questions related to new media and politics in Latin American art. He is author of *Jaime Davídovich in Conversation with Daniel R. Quiles*, published by Fundación Cisneros in 2017.