

ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2011 INTERNATIONAL

ACTING OUT
THE AB-EX EFFECT

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\$10.00

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From top: Fatima Al Qadiri, New York, 2011. Photo: Dom Smith. Campbell X, *Ragga Gyal D'Bout!*, 1993. still from a color video, 5 minutes.



1 FATIMA AL QADIRI Born in Senegal and raised in Kuwait, composer Fatima Al Qadiri uses a complex set of references to create her mostly electronic-based music. In addition to her current musical projects—Ayshay, CHILDREN, and Future Brown—Al Qadiri is also a regular contributor to web-based *Dis* magazine's world music column, Global.wav. In all that she makes, she offers an evolving critical response to world pop culture, informed both by the West and by traditional Muslim values and aesthetics—only to reconstruct these diverse narratives and create new outlets via dance music.

2 BLACKMANVISION, RAGGA GYAL D'BOUT! (1993) This short documentary video by English director Campbell X (aka BlackmanVision) features female fans of ragga, offering an appraisal of the subculture by its own members—one that talks back to the mainstream, countering conceptions of dancehall music as misogynistic and homophobic. My favorite line: “[Ragga] tells you how glamorous and beautiful you look, and if I as a black woman was to wait for the wider media to actually portray me in a beautiful and positive light . . . I'd be old and gray.”

3 GHE20 GOTHIK As a recent transplant to New York, I just survived my first year in this city. So far, it seems like a “guys rule” kind of town, which is pretty different from Los Angeles, where I'm from and where “pretty girls” top the social pyramid. Both social arrangements affect the way the city works, each situation producing a particular kind of culture to which you have to adapt. I'm still learning how to have fun in the NYC scene and this party helps. It's been interesting listening to what the public has to say about GHE20 GOTHIK, a night with a loyal fan base and a real voice; conversations about it span issues of race, commerce, cash, feminism and its backlash, and what, if anything, nightlife can offer. But the party is also very fun, a headbang, lose-your-mind time. Much needed.

4 NINA TOTENBERG According to a FindLaw.com survey, two-thirds of Americans polled last year couldn't name a single current Supreme Court justice. However, National Public Radio correspondent Nina Totenberg has been reporting on Supreme Court hearings (which prohibit the use of cameras or other recording devices) for more than three decades, and her voice has become a primary conduit for transmitting to Americans the inner workings of their nation's power structure. More than other legal correspondents, Totenberg has a deep understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of the justices, revealing to her listeners not just the proceedings of the court but the personalities that ultimately make this country's most critical legal decisions.

5 DUKES v. WAL-MART AND WAL-MART v. DUKES Despite six years of Wal-Mart employment, for which she was given consistently good performance ratings, Betty Dukes failed to receive an increase in either position or pay; so in 2000 she took her complaint to state district court. Citing similar stories, 1.5 million female Wal-Mart workers joined her, making for the largest civil rights class action suit in US history. More than a decade later, the case has still not been resolved, and the retail giant has now initiated a suit of its own, arguing that due to its outsize organizational structure it cannot be held responsible for the minor management decisions of its individual stores and that therefore Dukes's original case should not qualify as "class action." In other words, the nation's largest employer is petitioning the US Supreme Court to revise the very legal definition of the term. Oral arguments were heard in March.

6 TEDTALKS Ray Kurzweil, Ron Fglash, Chris Abani—I've learned about so many contemporary thinkers by listening to their TEDTalks, the ongoing, Web-published speaker series on issues of "Technology, Entertainment, Design." One lecture I've rewatched is by Blaise Agüera y Arcas, a digital architect who presents Photosynth, a program that searches the Internet for photo uploads of a given place or landmark and then creates an interactive composite image. Unshyly, Agüera y Arcas describes the basic concept like this: "We can do things with the social environment . . . taking data from everybody, from the entire collective memory of . . . what the Earth looks like and . . . make something emergent that's greater than the sum of the parts."

7 NICOLAU VERGUEIRO AT ESPASSO, PACIFIC DESIGN CENTER, LOS ANGELES The LA-based artist explores the design and function of graphic identities in search of the political and polycenic potential of the decorative—for example, abstracting interlocking anchors of a naval flag to read as ankhs, morphing utilitarian symbols and alluding to the esoteric. There is also a documentary element to Vergueiro's collages, a reordering of public information, as demonstrated in his recent collaboration with Marco Antonio Prado in which he peeled away some ten years of ads on a billboard at Crenshaw and Adams (a major intersection in a working-class LA neighborhood), effectively attuning our perception to consumer branding and national/religious propaganda narratives.

8 ORDOS CITY, INNER MONGOLIA, CHINA I'm so curious about this empty Chinese city. It was constructed along with many others (also still largely vacant) as part of the Chinese government's initiative to stimulate the national GDP. In the past decade China has invested hundreds of billions of dollars in infrastructure development. But without accounting for who the residents of these new municipalities would be or considering the local economics that would be needed to sustain them, the country created a dramatic surplus of real estate, a frontier of sprawling prefab towns still waiting to be populated.

9 SIMULATED WATER CGI animation programs like Blender and RealFlow are really good at rendering water that looks like real water. On YouTube, Vimeo, and other info-sharing sites, you can watch numerous test files that people have uploaded. I find these clips mesmerizing, not so much for the likeness to actual water that their sequences achieve but for the scenarios they depict/enact—usually something catastrophic like a fast-rising flood or an entire metropolis deluged by building-size waves.

10 CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER, A PATTERN LANGUAGE (OXFORD, 1977) I bring this book with me when I travel. An encyclopedia of good ideas about building, the text advocates a kind of architecture that can be understood by ordinary people with ordinary intelligence and that promotes a comprehensive correspondence between design and function. This approach suggests that nothing should go to waste and takes into consideration even the smallest lifestyle details: Chapters discuss issues such as "common land," "teenage society," "eating atmosphere," and a "house for a small family." Developing this work alongside coauthors Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein, Alexander presents humble yet progressive concepts that seem like a solid ideological foundation for production and growth. □



From top: Former Wal-Mart employee Betty Dukes, the first named plaintiff in *Dukes v. Wal-Mart*, Pittsburg, CA, April 28, 2010. Photo: AP/Ben Murgol; Nicolau Vergueiro and Marco Antonio Prado, *History of the World—Adams and Crenshaw #4*, 2011, reclaimed posters, 32 x 38 x 4". Linyinlu Square, Ordos, China, 2010. Photo: Michael Christopher Brown

