

# NOT I: Throwing Voices, 1500 BCE–2020 CE

American ventriloquist Edgar Bergen once described his colleague Valentine Vox as a dishonest ventriloquist because he did not move his lips when he performed. Bergen's distrust highlighted an obvious but elusive aspect of this art: ventriloquism is about revealing a voice as much as it is about concealing it.

Issues of identity, embodiment, performance, and objecthood are at the core of even the most conventional ventriloquist sketch: Where is the voice coming from? How is that voice split into many bodies? Whose voice is this? Who is speaking on behalf of whom?

Drawn primarily from LACMA's encyclopedic collection, the exhibition considers ventriloquism, a popular form of entertainment, as both a theme and a methodology integral to the logic of institutions devoted to the dissemination of knowledge, namely museums and libraries. Using this popular form of entertainment as a structuring device for the exhibition allows for cross-collection discussions of representations of sound and text, and the misalignment of voice and body.

Arranged in ten nonsequential sections, the exhibition features more than two hundred objects spanning more than thirty-five hundred years to offer various degrees of ventriloquized voices, from the literal to the liberal. *NOT I* includes a special project by Meriç Algün in collaboration with the Los Angeles Public Library, as well as commissions from artists Raven Chacon, Patricia Fernández, and Puppies Puppies (Jade Kuriki Olivo).

# Not I

## Dolls, Dummies, Surrogates, Pygmalion, and Plugs

The reanimation of a doll, puppet, or sculpture is a common topic in love and horror stories alike.

Ventriloquists produce the illusion of reanimation by throwing the voice (breathing) from one body to another. In Greek mythology, Pygmalion falls irredeemably in love with an ivory sculpture he makes of a woman. Upon kissing it, he feels the warmth of her lips and realizes his creation is alive. In the Bible's Genesis, God creates human life by breathing into a dust figurine.

Gallery Two

# Not Double

## Rewritings and Recasting Voices



### Patricia Fernández

Spain, b. 1980, active United States

#### Untitled frames, 2020

Hand carved walnut, pine wood, and one or two prints by Francisco de Goya

Courtesy of the artist, commissioned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

For this commission, we invited Fernández to produce frames for six prints by Francisco de Goya. The artist designed and carved four sculptures that double as frames, further amplifying the ventriloquist game of unfolding voices.





# Giulio Cesare Casseri

Italy, 1552–1616

## Tabulae anatomicae LXXIIX, 1627

Book

The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens

Giulio Cesare Casseri is the author of an early anatomical treatise that offered detailed accounts of how the larynx functions and its role in the production of the voice. This treatise influenced discussions about whether ventriloquists had supernatural or demonic powers or had a different physiognomy that allowed them to speak from their bellies.





## Tina Modotti

Italy, 1896–1942, active Mexico and Russia

### Rene d'Harnoncourt Puppet, 1929

Gelatin silver print

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase funded by Marion and Joe Mundy in honor of Rachel Mundy, 96.563

The scene depicted in this photograph is theatrical, reverential, and almost absurd. The curtain in the background suggests a stage where a play is coming to an end. The marionette is Rene d'Harnoncourt, a curator and art dealer who was living in Mexico at the time. Twenty years after this photograph was made, d'Harnoncourt became director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where he developed a global vision for the museum and distinguished his exhibitions with thoughtful and theatrical spatial designs.





## The Tower of Babel

Germany, c. 1637

Woodcut with hand coloring

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Irene Salinger  
in memory of her father, Adolph Stern

54.89.72

For hundreds of years, encyclopedic museums have aspired to speak many languages, portray myriad cultures, and represent a comprehensive history of humanity. This impossible task, however, becomes more useful when understood as a flawed, fragmentary project.

The legend of the Tower of Babel explains the origin of diverse languages as a divine punishment for human ambition: plans to build a tower taller than the skies collapsed after builders started speaking different languages. The tower remained unfinished, but amid the chaos and confusion, multiple languages and systems of communication flourished.

Gallery Three

# Not Silence

## Bubbles, Whistles, and Love Letters



## Barbara Bloom

United States, b. 1951

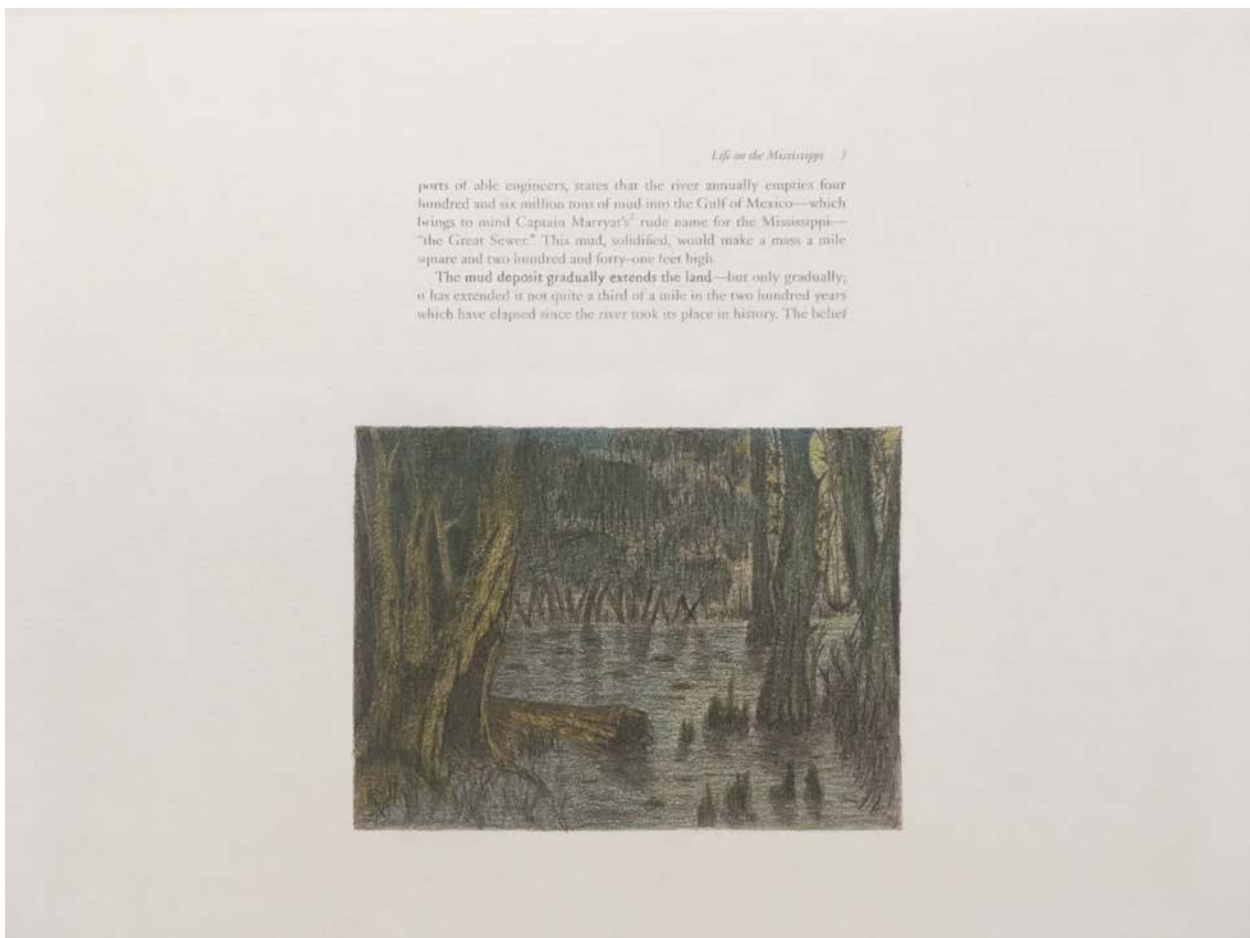
### Flaubert Letters III, 1987/2012

Glassware engraved with fragments of letters from Gustave Flaubert to Louise Colet with vitrine

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of John Baldessari  
M.2014.294.1–.6

These crystal objects possess excerpts of the correspondence between French writers and lovers Gustave Flaubert and Louise Colet. While Flaubert's letters have been widely published, Colet's did not make it to posterity. Bloom began working on this project in 1987. The artist rewrote Colet's lost epistles and engraved them on crystal in her own handwriting. Flaubert's voice was lettered by a male friend of the artist.





# Dolores Zinny

Argentina, b. 1968

## Word for Word: extension for dissolution/ Twain and Borges, 2017

Two colored pencil and graphite drawings on paper  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds  
 provided by Judith and Alexander Angerman through  
 Contemporary@LACMA  
 M.2018.6.3a–b

Jorge Luis Borges lifts a paragraph from Mark Twain’s *Life on the Mississippi* (1833) for his story *The Cruel Redeemer Lazarus Morell* (1935). The paragraph depicts the Mississippi River expanding the North American continent into the Gulf of Mexico. Borges, however, replaces the word “expansion” with “dissolution.” In his version of the story, the Mississippi does not “extend” America into the Gulf, but becomes “a continent in perpetual dissolution.”



## The Rattle, the Hidden Noise, the Inner Voice

“Duchamp’s work was a collaborative one, made with the assistance of his friend and patron, Walter Arensberg. Duchamp invited Arensberg to insert an object (the nature of which was unknown to the artist) inside a ball of string which Duchamp then clamped shut between two screwed metal plates. Duchamp said of it ‘A Readymade with a secret noise. Listen to it. I will never know whether it is a diamond or a coin.’ The conceit is a powerful one. The inner voice (essence, meaning, intention, investment) of the piece has been (ostensibly) supplied not by the artist, but by his patron. It is, (...)Arensberg poses as the ventriloquist of Duchamp’s dummy (or rather, rattle).”

Jon Wood, *With Hidden Noise:  
Sculpture, Video and Ventriloquism*





“A man plucked a nightingale and, finding but little to eat, said: You are just a voice and nothing more.”

Plutarch, *Moralia: Sayings of Spartans*  
[Apophthegmata Laconica] 233a

The human ambition to sing like a bird is probably as old as birds and ambition. Whistles make that longing viable as they turn silent human breath into sounds often resembling a bird call. The legend of Saint Francis, a pious man able to speak with birds and understand their language, is one of the many examples of the quest for interspecies dialogues.



# Raven Chacon

United States, b. 1977

## **Mouth Piece (for a collection of objects), 2020**

Sound installation

Courtesy of the artist, commissioned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

For this commission, Chacon composed a group of songs from sounds and pitches of pre-Columbian whistles and ocarinas from LACMA's collection (on display in this gallery). *Mouth Piece* is performed by Alethia Lozano, principal flutist for the National Symphony Orchestra in Mexico. Presented as “beams of directionalised sound,” as Chacon says, the songs tell stories of other non-sounding objects throughout the exhibition, and invite listeners to align their own voices with the cumulative activity in the gallery.



# Bubbles

The scene in Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin's painting depicts a figure blowing a bubble, a symbol of impermanence and fragility. The painting itself is performing that task, rendering transparency visible.

Like singing, whistling, or any other variation of speaking, blowing bubbles requires controlled breathing. Bubbles do not produce sound, they encapsulate silence. Bruce Nauman's bubble is broadcasted to the gallery from a subterranean chamber located in Vienna. Roughly the size of a human body, the chamber is equipped with a lamp, a camera, and a microphone; the images and sounds are transmitted to the monitor displayed in this gallery.





In Rosa Barba's installation, a modified projector is suspended from the ceiling by the very film being projected. The projected image is blank, but gets altered by the dust and scratches that accumulate over the course of the exhibition. Barba's work engages with the image of the invisible and the apparatus to display it: the body and the bubble, the shaky projector, and the picture-less film.

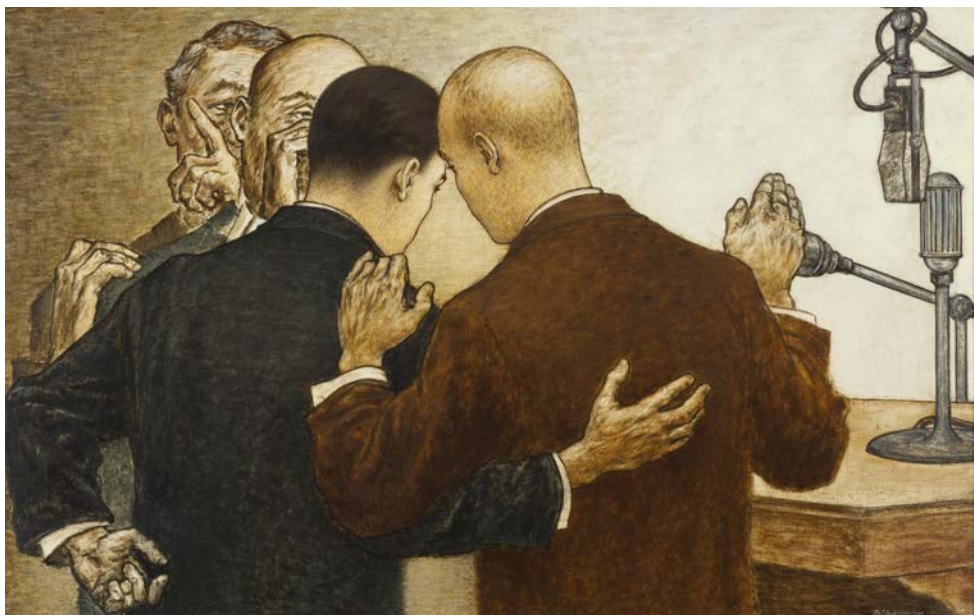




## Gallery Four

# Not Nowhere

## Voices from a Lovely Nowhere



## Edward Biberman

United States, 1904–1986

### **Conspiracy**, c. 1955

Oil on board

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by the Judith Rothschild Foundation; Hansen, Jacobson, Teller, Hoberman, Newman, Warren & Sloane, L.L.P.; Daniel Greenberg and Susan Steinhauser; the Frederick R. Weisman Philanthropic Foundation; Dr. Judd Marmor; Paul and Suzanne Muchnic; the Reese E. and Linda M. Polesky Family Foundation; and Marvin and Judy Zeidler

M.2002.86

From the Oxford English Dictionary:

conspire, v. Brit. /kən'spaɪə/, U.S. /kən'spaɪ(ə)r/  
Frequency (in current use): Etymology: < French  
conspire-r (15th cent. in Littré) (= Provençal  
conspirar, Spanish conspirar, Italian conspirare), <  
Latin conspīrāre lit. 'to breathe together,' whence,  
'to accord, harmonize, agree, combine or unite in  
a purpose, plot mischief together secretly.'



“Ventriloquism is mythical, not just in the sense that it is so intimately bound up with fable and fantasy, but also in that it may fairly be said of it, as early mythographers suspected of myth itself, that it is a past without a present. Whether because it is scandalously or mysteriously archaic, or uncannily premonitory, ventriloquism is always anachronistic, never quite on time.”

Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*

Most of the artworks and manuscripts in this gallery showcase ways in which the divine voice becomes a religious text: pages of the Bible inspired by the word of God; a page from the Quran, a text believed to be delivered orally by God to the prophet Muhammad; and a more contemporary textual work by R. B. Kitaj, evocatively entitled *Voice from Lovely Nowhere*.





# Not Treachery

## Pipes. Literally.

A ventriloquist's performance relies on the misalignment of words, images, and objects. It is a self-reflective act in which both the dummy and the ventriloquist are fictive characters, constantly switching roles: owner-user, subject-object, original-copy. Not Treachery groups a wide array of disparate pipes from the museum's many collections, starting with *Une Pipe (A Pipe)* by American artist Sherrie Levine, and evokes the treachery of images, literalizations, and taxonomies. Levine's pipe talks back and contradicts the famous painting by René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images (This is Not a Pipe)*, which has been



defined as a treatise on the impossibility of reconciling words, images, and objects. “Every word, every image, is leased and mortgaged,” said Levine in an artist statement. “We know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, blend and clash. A picture is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture.”

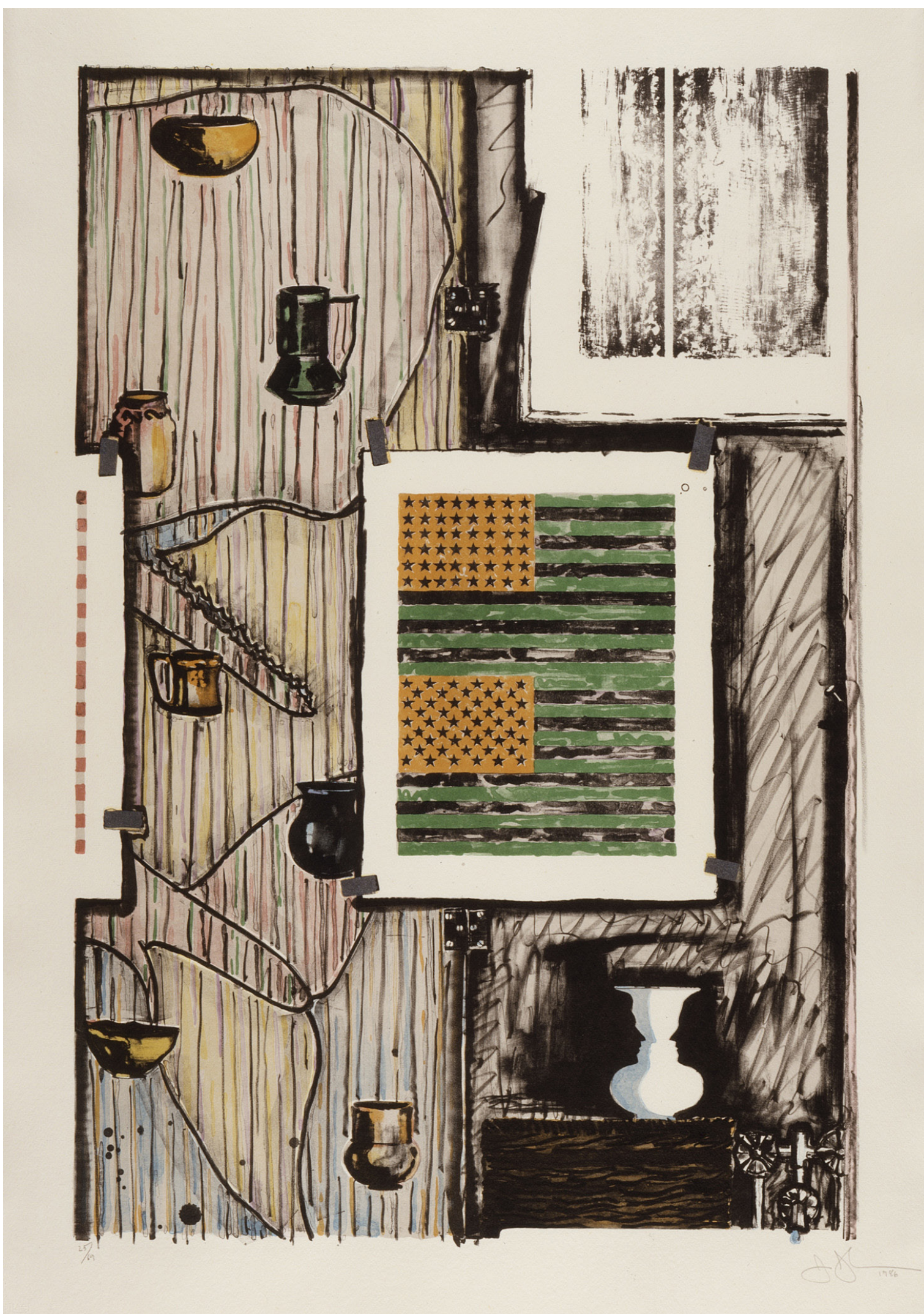


## Gallery Six

# Not Johns

## One and Many Works

Ventriloquism can function as a methodology. This section is organized around *Ventriloquist II* by Jasper Johns. The print presents a series of quotes and references dear to the artist, such as a lithograph by Barnett Newman in the top right, an illustration of Moby Dick in the background, and ceramic pieces by George Ohr floating around, along with a work by Johns himself, the iconic double flags. Difficult to see at first, these quotations (Newman, Ohr, and Moby Dick) can





be traced and cited. There are, however, references (the bathroom, the incomplete flag, the hinges, etc.) that can be unpacked and conjured by works in the collection (Gober, Petto, Ligon, a Navajo American flag). Johns creates a temporary arrangement, a mini exhibition almost, concerning his voice in a complex spatial relationship with other voices. The print's title implies all of the voices folded within the work.



Gallery Seven

# Not Heard, Not Seen

## Hearing Aids



## John Baldessari

United States, 1931–2020

### Beethoven's Trumpet (With Ear)

**Opus #131**, 2007

Aluminum, electronics, resin, fiberglass, and bronze, 3/6

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Margo Leavin

M.2015.274a–b

After encountering Beethoven's ear trumpet in a museum in Bonn, the composer's hometown, Baldessari made an aggrandized replica of the hearing device. When a viewer (a listener?) speaks into the trumpet, the voice triggers short musical phrases from Beethoven's String Quartet No. 14, op. 131, which was written when the composer was completely deaf.



## Gallery Eight

# Not Duck, Not Hare

## Out of Sync

Images are carried across time and geographies, and through cultures, and peoples. Some take longer than others to land. These echoes and refractions are favored in museums and libraries with a wide and sweeping scope. One can argue that it only took 189 years and a good dose of chance and luck for the distant gesture of a Japanese woman to produce the shadow of a rabbit on the surface of a Ruscha print.



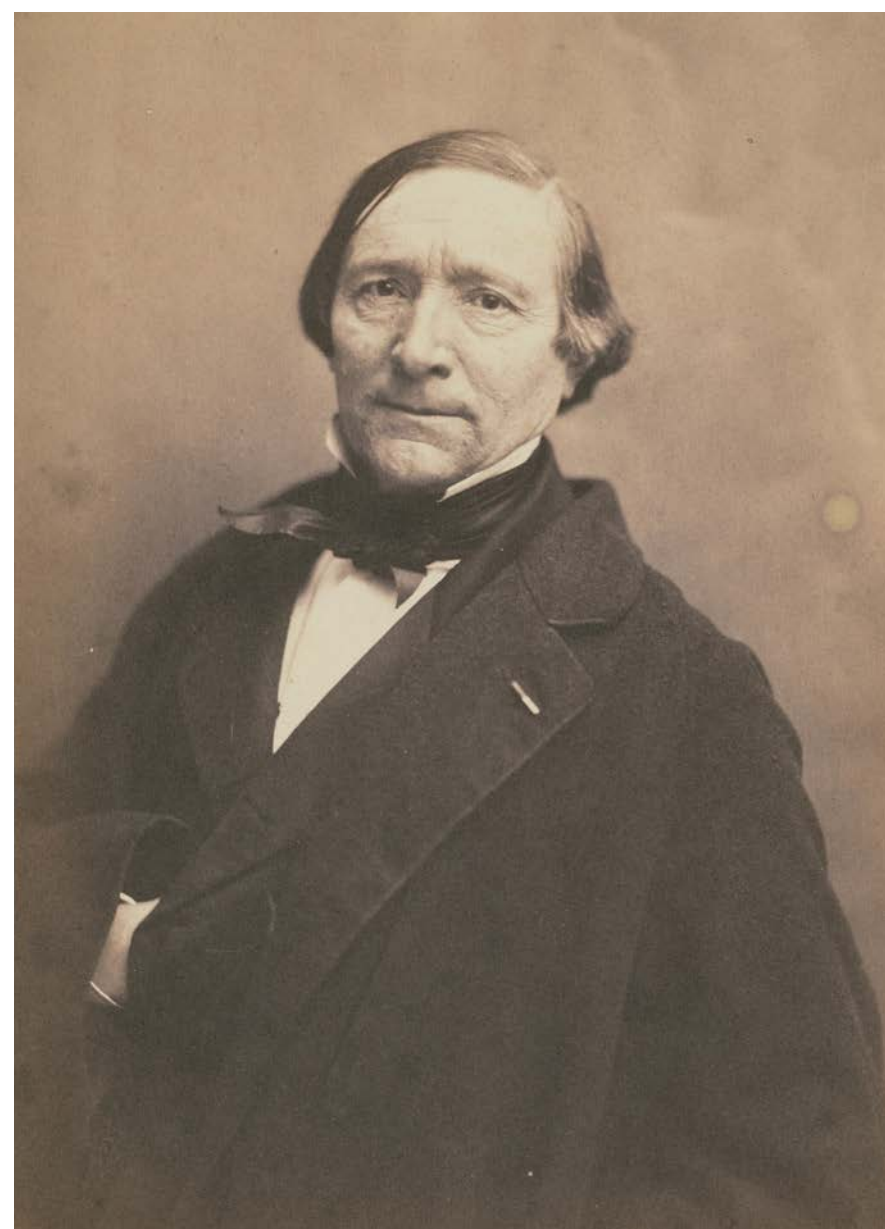


# Not Borrowed

## Alphabets, Ventriloquists, and Libraries

Alexandre Vattemare (Paris, 1796–1864), was a renowned ventriloquist known as Monsieur Alexandre who later in his life pioneered an early international system of interlibrary loans. Monsieur Alexandre didn't throw his voice through a dummy, but mastered the illusion of creating disparate characters with his voice, as if they were speaking from far away or in adjacent rooms. It should not come as a surprise that a ventriloquist, able to conjure voices from afar to address the audience in front of him, is deeply connected to the history of public libraries and cultural exchange.

Vattemare was instrumental in the founding of the Boston Public Library as a sister of the Paris Public Library. He created the Central Agency for International Literary Exchange which, although short-lived, paved the way for more robust systems of collaborations between libraries around the world.







## Cindy Bernard

United States, b. 1959

### **Ask the Dust: Dirty Harry, 1971/1990, 1990**

Dye coupler print

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection, gift of The Annenberg Foundation, acquired from Carol Vernon and Robert Turbin

M.2008.40.219

For her series *Ask the Dust* (1989–92), Bernard photographed landscapes that became iconic through famous movies. The artist fastidiously duplicated a frame of the film to trigger cinematic memories and a sense of déjà vu. Bernard stands in the same place where the director of the evoked movie once stood. This photograph visually quotes the terrace from which Harry Callahan aimed at one of his victims in the film *Dirty Harry* (1971) by Don Siegel.





## Valeska Soares

Brazil, b. 1957, active United States

### Untitled (**Sin título**), 2005

Platinum-glazed ceramic characters

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Andrew Hauptman

M.2006.125

The 1,443 characters randomly piled on a pedestal here correspond to an episode in the novel *Invisible Cities* (1972) by Italo Calvino. Soares uses a heap of language to make a sculpture that is as much an evocation of the original text as it is of all the possible reconfigurations allowed by a finite number of characters.



Gallery Ten

# Not I. Again

Coda