A DESIRE FOR THE DECADENT AND THE ABJECT: AN ANALYSIS OF KAI ALTHOFF'S INSTALLATION ART, *SOLO FÜR EINE BEFALLENE TROMPETE (SOLO FOR AN AFFLICTED TRUMPET)* (2005) AND *UNTITLED* (2007)

by

LANA AYERS SHAFER

Bachelor of Arts, 2007
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas

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Thesis approved:

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Dr. Frances Colpitt, Major Professor

_____

Dr. Mark Thistlethwaite

_____

Terri Thornton, Curator of Education, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

_____

Graduate Studies Representative
For the College of Fine Arts

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Introduction

Kai Althoff is an artist who strives to maintain artistic as well as biographical ambiguities. His oeuvre consists of a wide variety of artistic media including murky watercolors and drawings, bold and vibrant paintings, music, installations, sculptures, films, and written narratives. Within each medium he deliberately develops stylistic inconsistencies. For his drawings and paintings, Althoff utilizes modes of expression from the past; in particular, he appropriates styles from German art history ranging from medieval folk art to twentieth-century German expressionism and neo-expressionism. Althoff's paintings and drawings are predominately figurative, and his installations frequently include mannequins or anthropomorphic objects and images, establishing themes concerning the existential and the abject.

Critics, such as Oliver Koerner von Gustorf, have noted Althoff's interest, even obsession, with his created "characters," serving as the artist's alter egos.[1] Similarly, Philippe Vergne described the experience of walking into Althoff's installation *Solo für eine befallene Trompete (Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet)* as "akin to stepping into the artist's mind."[2] Althoff has stated his wish to create a dialectic between himself and the viewer "to get to know [the viewers] through my work, and if they and I want to, become real friends."[3] Certainly, the works in Althoff's oeuvre that involve the viewer most are

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[1] Oliver Koerner von Gustorf, "Super Creeps: Cruising Through the Work of Kai Althoff," *Parkett*, no. 75 (2005): 99.
[2] Philippe Vergne, ed., *Heart of Darkness: Kai Althoff, Ellen Gallagher and Edgar Cleijne, Thomas Hirschhorn* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2006), 10.
[3] Kai Althoff, quoted in Angela Rosenberg, "Kai Althoff: General Rehearsals for a New Language," *Flash Art (International Edition)* 35 (May/June 2002): 97.

his installations. However, a close look at two of Althoff's recent installations, *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* (2005) shown at ACME. gallery in Los Angeles, California, and *Untitled* (2007) at the fifty-fifth Carnegie International exhibition, Life on Mars, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, reveals a deliberate lack of authentic personal expression and a postmodern self which is fragmented and de-centered.

This refusal of authenticity, or lack of personal expression and communication, results from Althoff's incorporation of decadence which is exemplified by his usage of regressive modes of expressive painting, decorative objects, elaborate environments, psychologically and sexually decadent figurative subjects, and the literal decay manifest in the dusty sight and smell of the found objects. Traditionally, "decadent" has been used pejoratively to describe an artwork based on form without content or an artwork that rejects classical moral values.[4] Althoff's appropriation of the form of previous artistic styles severs it from its original content or authentic self-expression. Nonetheless, Althoff's installations are anything but devoid of meaning; the artworks' emphasis on formal decadence contributes to their criticality. As Richard Gilman has argued, both the ideas of decadence and its supposed antonym, progress, are parts of an illusion.[5] Gilman contends that decadence is an unstable word, without any concrete reality, or fixed materiality, because the term's meaning constantly changes in response to shifts in morals, cultural attitudes, and technology.[6] Paradoxically, progress is also vulnerable to

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[4] Charles Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe*, ed. T. Jefferson Kline and Naomi Schor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 143.
[5] Richard Gilman, *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 160.
[6] Ibid., 19.

these same vacillating factors.[7] Althoff's installations reveal the instability of this binary by concurrently attracting and repulsing the viewer with the work's decadence.

In an age of postindustrialism, postcapitalism, and postmodernism one must look past Althoff's biography to interpret his work. In fact, Althoff gives us little biographical information with which to work. While Althoff's installations can be looked at as references to uniquely German socio-political issues and art history, in the context of contemporary globalization, Althoff's installations speak to ontological issues that provide grounds for multivalent interpretations. Althoff's art cannot be simply perceived "as architecture of a Self, of an artist-self as an ideal, fictive, social outsider."[8] Rather, *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled* present images, environments, and experiences pertaining to the desire and decadence of a collective, postmodern, and de-centered self.

[7] Ibid.
[8] Jutta Koether, quoted in Kristy Bell, "The Escape Artist," *Art Review (London, England)* 2, no. 6 (2004): 84.

Background: Kai Althoff's Position in German and Contemporary Art History

Kai Althoff was born in 1966 in Cologne, Germany, where he works and resides. This is the extent of Althoff's publicized biography. Art historian Nicholas Baume purports that Althoff did attend art school intermittently, but never graduated and is mostly self-taught.[9] Althoff's installations epitomize Roland Barthes' "death of the author" by embracing ambiguity, eliminating preconceptions of the role of the artist through the adoption of performative "alter egos," and privileging the experience of the viewer. As an elusive "social outsider," in the words of Jutta Koether, Althoff's constructed identity is precisely what undermines its authenticity. Althoff has never considered himself a professional artist; he is not interested in anything this term implies: formal education, medium-specific objects, career development, or personal style.[10] For Althoff, the constraints of formal education suppress the independence that it claims to cultivate.[11]

Althoff can also be paradoxical in his statements and responses to his work. For instance, answering the curators' questions about *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* he stated,

> I suffer from some kind of weird impatience, causing me to be unwilling to answer some questions of the kind you are posing. When I feel insufficient, it only adds to this reaction to answer questions on a level of high cultural and

[9] Nicholas Baume, "Feel It All," in *Kai Kein Respekt*, ed. Nicholas Baume (Miami Beach, FL: Bridge House Publishing, 2004), 6.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 16.

> intellectual substance. But I believe all this is no substance—it often seems to be the worst state of voidness a human being could get into.[12]

Althoff's most comprehensive solo exhibition to date, held at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 2004, was appropriately titled *Kai Kein Respekt* (Kai No Respect). The title demonstrates Althoff's disregard for artistic and societal norms: he has no respect for modernist purity or truth to materials.

Additionally, Althoff's work frequently alludes to the darker sides of German history and humanity by representing images of German military figures (Prussian and Nazi soldiers) or religious figures in ambiguous contexts that provoke the viewer to reexamine preconceptions about these social roles. Despite Althoff's dismissal of formal education and insipid intellectuals, his works demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of art history, philosophy, and visual culture. For example, Althoff's *Untitled* painting from 2000 (Figure 1) depicts three soldiers in an interaction that borders on violent homoeroticism. The sexuality implied by the interaction between the figures is further enhanced by Althoff's manipulation of his media. He incorporates the sinuous lines and draftsman-like precision seen in the drawings and paintings of fin-de-siècle artists, such as Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele, to evoke a decadent and faux naïve style of sensuality. Through his usage of traditional media, such as painting and drawing, Althoff challenges, reinvents, and critiques the sanctioned conventions of art making and display. As Baume asserts, while Althoff has no respect for art world and social institutions, "the artists' disrespect is a creative method, a way of overcoming what has become stale in

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[12] Kai Althoff, "Solo für eine befallene Trompete (Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet)," in *Heart of Darkness: Kai Althoff, Ellen Gallagher and Edgar Cleijne, Thomas Hirschhorn*, ed. Philippe Vergne (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2006), 56.

art."[13] Some of his "paintings" are really drawings mounted on canvas and some of his "drawings" are actually photographic reproductions. Moreover, Althoff's incorporation of his painted and graphic representations in his installations further obscure the role of traditional media in his oeuvre through the painted images' obfuscation among found objects.

Frequently, Althoff's works are comprised of multi-figure compositions that investigate the nature of group dynamics and collectivity. Althoff is also interested in working collaboratively as well as pseudo-anonymously to negate the conception of the solitary artist with a distinct style. Some of Althoff's early projects are better described as collaborative craft events. In 1990, he staged *A Group of Friends Meet in a Shop Near the Friesenwall in Cologne to Make Masks* and, in 1992, an event titled *Urban Quilters* in New York City, where a group of people collaborated to make a quilt out of appropriated images of the city. Since 1990, Althoff has been involved in a Krautfolk band Workshop (the name Workshop signifying Althoff's interest in the importance of the group over the individual); in reference to Workshop, Althoff has proclaimed, "the group idea is superior to the idea of expressing something in the songs."[14]

Althoff also undermines traditional notions of authority through his references to abjection. His fascination with the "detritus of society" and bodily abjection create aesthetic experiences that are simultaneously attractive and repulsive.[15] An earlier installation, *Reflex Lux* (1998, Figure 2), first shown at Galerie Neu in Berlin, includes two pale, almost ghostly, mannequins dressed like "urban hipsters" sitting at a makeshift

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[13] Baume, "Feel It All," in *Kai Kein Respekt*, 6.
[14] Ibid., 12.
[15] Olaf Karnik, "Attraction and Repulsion," in *Kai Kein Respekt*, ed. Nicholas Baume (Miami Beach, FL: Bridge House Publishing, 2004), 31.

dinner table complete with dirty plates and remnants of food, while a television set rambles on in the background.[16] One mannequin lies with his head on the table in a pool of his own vomit. Nicholas Baume has interpreted Althoff's abject installations as a recurring thematic investigation of the fragile nature of the human body and mind. Althoff's usage of commonplace items and images—commodities from contemporary society and visual culture—can have equally important social and political implications. Althoff's installations, *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled* (from the Life on Mars exhibit), certainly incorporate found objects that have been used and discarded to serve as reminders of the cast-off and abject.

Althoff not only includes used objects in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet,* but he also recycles expressive styles of representation from the history of German painting. Twentieth-century German art can be generally characterized as a search for inner expression. At the turn of the twentieth century, artists in many European countries, Germany included, aimed at producing works that were "antirealist;" rather than realistically depicting an object on canvas painters sought to render the forces that lay behind the object.[17] Modern stylistic movements often occurred in Germany years after their implementation in Paris, signifying an already decadent, or regressive, past in Germany's modern art history. [18] German artists, nevertheless, saw their visual forms as spiritual inner visions that distinguished German art as superior from the genres

[16] Baume, "Feel It All," in *Kai Kein Respekt,* 25.
[17] Franz Roh and Juliane Roh, *German Art in the 20th Century,* ed. Julia Phelps, trans. Catherine Hutter (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 9.
[18] Ibid., 45.

developing in other parts of Europe.[19] Additionally, artistic developments differed in Germany than other European countries. Whereas Paris was the main artistic center of France during the twentieth century, in Germany various movements developed separately and simultaneously in Berlin, Dresden, Düsseldorf, Leipzig, Munich, Cologne, and other smaller cities due to the lack of political centralization in Germany.[20]

During and after World War I, Althoff's native Cologne was known as a center of Dadaism led by Hans Arp and Max Ernst (commonly known during this time as "Dada Max").[21] However, Althoff appropriates painting styles of those practiced in Dresden, the center of expressionism and Die Brücke, and Munich, the center of Jugenstil and the Der Blaue Reiter group.[22] Formally, Althoff's paintings and drawings borrow from the liberal use of non-local color and forms found in the German expressionist styles of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter. Expressionists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Emil Nolde aimed at finding a powerful expression from within that opposed the outward appearance of nature through deformations of the human figure.[23]

Another important link between Althoff and currents in early twentieth-century German art history is the proclivity for collectivism and collaboration. Before World War II, four attempts were made at organizing holistic artistic communities in Germany: Jugenstil, Die Brücke, Der Blaue Reiter, and the Bauhaus.[24] The fusion of art, craft, and industry emphasized in the Bauhaus was preceded by the 1907 foundation of the

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[19] Eckhart Gillen, "Tabula Rasa and Inwardness: German Images before and after 1945," in *German Art from Beckmann to Richter: Images of a Divided Country*, ed. Eckhart Gillen (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1997), 17.
[20] Roh, *German Art in the 20th Century*, 11.
[21] Ibid., 130.
[22] Ibid., 11.
[23] Ibid., 52.
[24] Ibid., 85.

Deutscher Werkbund (German Work Federation) that focused on cultivating and propagating exceptional German design principles in order to compete in world markets.[25] The Vienna Secessionists in fin-de-siècle Austria also created an artistic collective combining fine art and craft in their designs. These efforts at collaboration, at merging art and craft, art and life, failed due to the individualistic and expressive nature of their artistic philosophies that undermined the goals of the collective. Their pluralist avant-garde philosophies were also repressed by Hitler's assent to power and condemnation of "degenerate art." Hitler and National Socialism presented a singular point of view and forbade any art that did not conform to values of the Aryan race, communicating a clear moral ideology, and representing beautiful and recognizable forms.[26]

After World War II, Germany faced new socio-political problems that affected its artistic production and development. After 1945 Germany was severed into the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) in an effort to curb the nation's power. The country remained divided until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The FRG was associated with Anglo-American capitalism and materialism whereas the GDR was under Soviet Communist control. Stifling avant-garde artistic developments, the Soviets controlled the curricula of the East German Kunstakademie confining pupils to a figurative, socialist realist style, and restricting exposure to modernism.

A seminal figure in post-war German art, Joseph Beuys was instrumental in revitalizing the avant-garde and leading the way for subsequent German artists, such as

[25] Ibid., 405.
[26] Ibid., 154.

Gerhard Richter and Anselm Kiefer, to reexamine Germany's repressed past through imagery that referenced the Holocaust. Beuys, a politically active artist who founded the German Student Party in 1967, was also a professor of monumental sculpture at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 1961 until 1972. Artists such as Gerhard Richter moved to the West during the post-war period to be educated by progressive professors akin to Beuys in the FRG's Kunstakademie. Beuys is credited with bringing conceptual art and the Fluxus movement to Germany, garnering attention from abroad to the German art scene. Art dealer and gallery owner Michael Werner, who began his career in Cologne and now also has a gallery in New York City, has asserted, "Without Beuys, the German art world of the '80s would have developed very differently. He thought strategically, and his public appearances and performances … not only attracted great interest but created connections and opened new territories."[27] Beuys' performances exemplify his expanded concept of art and sculpture. Beuys' idea of "social sculpture" put forth the notion that anything could be art, anyone could make art, and that the combination of all intellectual and social activities was indeed sculpture.[28] Beuys' "social sculpture" is echoed in Althoff's early community events, *A Group of Friends Meet in a Shop Near the Friesenwall in Cologne to Make Masks* and *Urban Quilters*, that focused on the collaboration and creativity of other people.

Althoff's work is also indebted to Beuys' usage of materials. Beuys incorporated felt and fat to evoke spiritual and symbolic meaning. Actions, or *aktionen* as Beuys termed them, such as *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* at the Galerie Schmela in

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[27] Michael Werner, quoted in Daniel Birnbaum, "Ripening on the Rhine: The Cologne Art World of the '80s," *Artforum International* 41, no. 7 (March 2003): 218.
[28] Beate Stärk, *Contemporary Painting in Germany* (Roseville East, NSW: Craftsman House, 1994), 5.

Düsseldorf (1965) and *I Like America and America Likes Me* at the René Block Gallery in New York City (1974) incorporated unconventional and abject materials, such as a dead hare, a coyote, hay, and honey, to raise social and political issues concerning suffering, pain, and the passage to recovery.[29] The worn-out found objects that Althoff incorporates in his work are also abject due to their fragmented and sullied states and are included to critique social and political issues as well. In his installations, Althoff juxtaposes these objects with his paintings, which become commodified objects through their representation of reified styles. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh argues that a style becomes reified when it is separated from its original symbolic value.[30] Thus, the painting with a reified style enters artistic categories that emphasize aesthetic beauty but lack critical rigor: decoration, fashion, and objets d'art.[31] Althoff's criticality emerges in his installations as he deliberately appropriates reified artistic styles and conflates his paintings with decadent and decorative commodities. These materials reference the stigma of Anglo-American materialism and capitalism associated with post-war West Germany, the region where Althoff's native Cologne is located, but they are also symptoms of global consumerism.

During the 1960s, Cologne emerged as a center of artistic activity. Cologne's presence in the art world resulted partially from the commodification of artworks, especially evident in the Art Cologne fair held annually since 1967. During the 1970s, Cologne fostered many internationally known galleries, collectors, dealers, and an experimental film scene; an influx of artists from all over Germany to Cologne in the

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[29] Lucrezia de Domizio Durini, *The Felt Hat: Joseph Beuys, A Life Told* (Milan: Charta, 1997), 35.
[30] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return to Representation in European Painting," *October* 16 (Spring 1981): 44.
[31] Ibid.

1980s provoked the opening of even more new galleries.[32] Internationally, the 1980s saw a return to commodified art objects, paintings in particular, in contrast to the emphasis on dematerialized, conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s. Paintings also flooded the art market in Cologne establishing it as one of the most important centers (alongside Berlin) for German painting.[33] In 1980, a group of painters established the "Mülheimer Freiheit" group in Cologne, producing works individually but also collaboratively. Galleries in Cologne acquired and promoted German painters from other cities as well. Daniel Birnbaum credits the rising international popularity of German painters such as Georg Baselitz, Gerhard Richter, and Sigmar Polke for stimulating the market for German art.[34] Along the same lines, Michael Werner has underscored the importance of the marketplace in his assertion that, "Cologne is really rather provincial, and always has been. But the situation [in the 1980s] was new in that we had something to sell."[35] This posits Cologne as a contemporary artistic center that has been immersed in the art market and production of "saleable" art objects over the past four decades. Althoff's inclusion of paintings, drawings, and found objects in his installations reflect Cologne's predilection for consumer goods.

Although Althoff does not reveal biographical information one can surmise that the art scene in Cologne during the 1980s was surely influential. The Museum Ludwig in Cologne has held an extensive German expressionism collection since a 1946 donation

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[32] Birnbaum, "Ripening on the Rhine," *Artforum International*: 218.
[33] Wolfgang Max Faust, "Painting—Positions and Contradictions," in *Art Today in the Federal Republic of Germany*, trans. Timothy Nevill (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1988), 13.
[34] Birnbaum, "Ripening on the Rhine," *Artforum International*: 217.
[35] Ibid.

from Dr. Josef Haubrich, a local lawyer.[36] In 1976, the museum acquired the Peter and Irene Ludwig collection that included American artists Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, and Jasper Johns, as well as the Europeans Yves Klein, Baselitz, and Beuys.[37] Works such as Rauschenberg's combines and Beuys' felt and fat pieces can certainly be tied to Althoff's usage of found materials and implementation of assemblage; however, in order to closely analyze *Solo for and Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled* one must also look at Althoff's work in the context of installation art as a whole.

A pervasive contemporary phenomenon, installation art involves an arrangement of objects in a given space to create an environment, or situation, which is concerned with the viewers' immersion and activation.[38] Claire Bishop delineates the development of installation art through a genealogy of both European and American twentieth-century artists: from El Lissitzky's Proun Rooms and Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau, to the Environments and Happenings introduced by Allan Kaprow in the late 1950s, then minimal sculpture in the 1960s, to the rise of installation art that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s.[39] In this lineage minimalism is crucial to the sculptural paradigm shift by placing the focus of the artwork on the viewer as a corporeal body. Robert Morris' *L Beams* (1965), for instance, whose installation took on the whole gallery space, aimed at establishing external relationships with the space and the viewer rather than being a purely visual experience. By producing autonomous unitary forms, which were not concerned with complex internal compositions, Morris' *L Beams* were perceived by the

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[36] Siegfried Gohr, *Museum Ludwig, Cologne: Paintings, Sculptures, Environments from Expressionism to the Present Day* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1986), 8.
[37] Ibid., 10.
[38] Claire Bishop, "But is it Installation Art?," *Tate Etc.*, Spring 2005, http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue3/butisitinstallationart.htm (accessed January 13, 2009), 8.
[39] Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, 8.

viewer as a single *gestalt* and could therefore be experienced in relation to the space and the viewers' own body. Althoff's installations incorporate some of these same effects. *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled*, composed of various found objects and paintings packed into the gallery space, although certainly not minimal in their aesthetic, make the viewing subject more aware of his/her corporeal presence.

Minimalism is also central to the evolution of installation art by presaging postmodernism's criticality and fragmented self. Hal Foster put forth, in his essay "The Crux of Minimalism," that minimalism both consummates and breaks with modernism.[40] While minimalism asserts the formalist autonomy of a modernist work, Foster also credits minimalism with a reprise of avant-gardism through its challenge of traditional categories of institutional art and the initiation of postmodern criticality.[41] Installation art that has developed into institutional critique grows out of this aspect of minimalism by implicating the viewer's "social matrix:" his/her subject's class, race, gender, and sexuality.[42]

Minimalism also introduced the fragmented subject that has become pervasive throughout postmodern art and, in particular, installation art. Here, again, Robert Morris is a pertinent example. Morris' *Untitled (Threadwaste)* (1968), in direct opposition to the unified shape of *L Beams*, presents the viewer with an anti-form. Morris allows the threadwaste to take its own form on the gallery floor, presenting a chaotic entanglement of threads and fibers. Morris then places mirrors randomly throughout the threadwaste to further fragment the viewers' perception of the artwork and complicate any identification

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[40] Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986*, ed. Howard Singerman (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1986), 162.
[41] Ibid., 174.
[42] Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, 13.

of a cohesive form. Installation art grows out of this type of perceptual artwork. When experiencing a work of installation art, the viewer is activated through a heightened awareness of the objects and their arrangement in space in relation to the body. This becomes a fragmented and de-centered experience because the viewer-as-subject is forced to see the work from multiple and incomplete vantage points.[43] All these facets of postmodern installation art, criticality, the fragmentation of the self, and the immersive and activating corporeal experience, are present in Althoff's installation work.

Althoff's inclusion of found objects in his installations also generates a dialogue with the history of assemblage art and the Italian Arte Povera artists. Artists involved in assemblage and Arte Povera include worn, fragmented, and untraditional materials in their artworks. The Arte Povera artists aimed at establishing a constant dialogue with their past culture, while remaining skeptical of modernist utopias and technology.[44] Likewise, artists working in assemblage fuse art and life through implementation of real materials which oscillate between the human and the natural, the attractive and the repulsive.[45] In 1961, William Seitz wrote that assemblage art had become a vehicle for "impatient, hypercritical, and anarchistic young artists."[46] Althoff's incorporation of the language of assemblage art into his installations shows a new level of sophistication. While Althoff's installation work will be discussed in the following sections as critical of the art market and postcapitalist consumerism, and as maintaining the dichotomy of attraction and repulsion inherent to assemblage, the following analysis of *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled* will also demonstrate Althoff's balance of subtlety and

[43] Ibid., 11.
[44] Robert Lumley, *Arte Povera* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004), 61.
[45] William Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961), 83.
[46] Ibid., 87.

intensity through his unique blend of formal complexity and philosophical inquiry into decadence and abjection.

Althoff's Dialectic with Decadence: *Solo für eine befallene Trompete (Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet)*

Althoff's 2005 installation *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* (Figures 3 and 4), at ACME. gallery in Los Angeles, exemplifies Althoff's investigation of the decorative and the decadent. Gilman posits that decadence "has always broadly meant a backward movement or sterile arrest, the mulling over and taking to the self materials and actions that have been surpassed or left behind by society, a dwelling on values that are thought infertile and a consequent refusal to 'advance'."[47] Applied to the arts, decadence has been manifested, particularly in fin-de-siècle Europe, through highly stylized forms and ornate decorative elements. For instance, Gustav Klimt, who demonstrated a strong desire for decadence in his paintings, incorporated glittering gold, jewels, and ornamental patterns that threatened to subsume his stylized nudes. The decadence of *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* was characterized precisely in this way through Althoff's utilization of turn-of-the-century inspired furniture, period costume clothing, fragments of old toys, and artistic styles that have been surpassed and left behind. Althoff crowded the gallery with objects and artworks echoing the excessively decorated canvases of the fin-de-siècle artists. Furthermore, the installation was characterized by the decorative, or ornamental, due to Althoff's incorporation of objects associated with interior design, which possess more aesthetic than functional qualities.

The gallery space was filled with an accumulation of draped fabrics, mannequins, dolls, knick-knacks, magazine advertisements, posters, and other objects of ostensible

[47] Gilman, *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet*, 137.

junk. Portions of the gallery floor were completely covered with dirty rugs, cloths, and tschotskes, while similar items spilt out of randomly dispersed metallic silver boxes. Hung across the walls were bolts of fabric, artworks, other images, and antique mirrors, overlapping each other and obscuring the pure white walls of the gallery. No surface remained untouched or uncluttered. The whole space appeared as if a theatrical costume closet or thrift store had exploded. The decadent and decorative qualities of the objects were emphasized through their old age and fragmented state; they were no longer materials desirable for their functional qualities, but were anachronistic, broken, and discarded items. Althoff's own paintings and drawings were interspersed among the found objects, some hanging on the walls, others lying haphazardly on the ground or across the antique furniture.

Althoff's conflation of "high" art with found decorative objects, and even trash ("low" art), camouflaged his paintings. Althoff's paintings are not only decadent because he degraded them to the status of junk, but also due to their re-presentation of obsolete painting styles, such as those associated with the Viennese fin-de-siècle artists. Many critics and art historians have noted Althoff's affinity for the decadent aesthetic of fin-de-siècle Vienna and, in particular, to Gustav Klimt. Fin-de-siècle Vienna was notorious for decadence in both society and the arts. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the first time the term "decadent" was used as a proper noun; however, "decadence" was also used at that time pejoratively by critics, such as the architect Adolf Loos, who strongly opposed Klimt's artwork, the art nouveau style, and its incorporation of extraneous ornament. [48]

[48] Ibid., 24.

Loos' lecture *Ornament and Crime* (1908) refuted the usage of decorative elements by contending, "The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use."[49] Loos believed primitive people who enjoyed ornamentation were easier for the government to control than the more evolved, sophisticated class.[50] Since the Austro-Hungarian state had founded the Kunstgewerbeschule (The School of the Arts and Crafts) in Vienna which aimed to merge the fine and applied arts, Loos indicted the government for encouraging decadent ornamentation.[51] The Kunstgewerbeschule, founded in 1867, cultivated a new modern style that incorporated current developments in European crafts establishing it as one of the important centers for Viennese art nouveau.[52]

Klimt was at the heart of this new modern movement. He was educated at the Kunstgewerbeschule and in 1897 became the chairman of the Vienna Secession, a coalition of local artists committed to rebelling against traditional academic painting. After 1904, when the Secessionists parted ways, Klimt was associated with Wie Wiener Werkstätte (The Vienna Workshops) that specifically focused on crafts.[53] Klimt's association with the Vienna Secession, and, in particular, his *Beethoven Frieze* for the Secession's 1902 Beethoven exhibition (their fourteenth exhibition), offers the most constructive comparison with Althoff's *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* installation through

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[49] Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime," *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998), 167.
[50] Ibid., 168.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Patrick Werkner, "Art in Vienna Around 1900," in *Vienna 1900: Klimt, Schiele, Moser, Kokoschka,* eds. Serge Lemoine and Marie-Amelie zu Salm-Salm (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2005), 37.
[53] Ibid., 40.

the concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk and both artists' presentation of aesthetically, sexually, and psychologically decadent imagery.

The Beethoven exhibition intended to be a cohesive environment—a Gesamtkunstwerk, or total work of art, that combined all artistic media: sculpture, painting, poetry, music, and architecture.[54] Centered around Max Klinger's sculpture *Beethoven* (1902), the Beethoven exhibition offered a visual and symbolic translation of Beethoven's ninth symphony.[55] The exhibition featured sculptures, frescoes, paintings, reliefs, mosaics, music, and metalwork by Vienna Secession artists. A synthesis of the arts, and emphasis on the abstract nature of music, is also present in Wasilly Kandinsky's paintings from his time in Munich (1896-1914) and is particularly evident in his abstract stage production *The Yellow Sound* (1912). This conflation of music and the visual arts is also suggested by the title of Althoff's installation (*Solo for and Afflicted Trumpet*). The mélange of disparate objects and artworks in Althoff's installation, combined with varied colors and textures, created a visual cacophony that could be synesthetically translated into a mixture of sounds in the viewer's mind.

Klimt's *Beethoven Frieze* (Figure 5) consisted of three large fresco paintings, painted with casein colors on stucco and inlaid with semiprecious jewels and gold, which hung near the ceiling of the gallery in the Vienna Secession building. The ultimate goal of this program was to demonstrate art as an exploration into the essence of humankind.[56] The first section contrasts *The Longing for Happiness*, personified by horizontal female

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[54] Jane Kallir, " 'High' and 'Low' in Imperial Vienna: Gustav Klimt and the Applied Arts," in *Gustav Klimt: Modernism in the Making*, ed. John Collins (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2001), 55.
[55] Stephan Koja, " '…just about the nastiest women I have ever seen…': Gustav Klimt's *Beethoven Frieze*: Evolution and Programme," in *Gustav Klimt: The* Beethoven Frieze *and the Controversy Over the Freedom of Art*, ed. Stephan Koja (Munich: Prestel, 2006), 93.
[56] Kallir, " 'High' and 'Low' in Imperial Vienna," in *Gustav Klimt: Modernism in the Making*, 63.

figures floating at the top of the frieze, to *The Sufferings of Weak Mankind* (Figure 6), represented through allegorical depictions of Ambition, Pity, and External Power. The Weak, represented by the nude female figures, have strong contour lines delineating their bony bodies and pale white flesh that would otherwise blend in with sparse, white background. The presumably stronger willed characters are embellished with gold and decorative geometric patterns. The second section depicts *The Forces of Evil* (Figure 7) in the guise of Disease, Madness, Death, Desire, Lewdness, Licentiousness, and Nagging Care. These allegories are also represented by female nudes, some sexual and seductive, others grotesque. The grotesque is underscored with the depiction of a monstrous, ape-like animal and the scaly snake-like curves included as decorative elements. This entire portion of the composition is crammed with figures and ornamentation. The last section depicts the sinuous floating women of *The Longing for Happiness* finding appeasement in the allegory of Poetry.[57] This section ends with a choir of angelic women surrounding the *Kiss for the Whole World* (Figure 8), which features a nude man and woman locked in an embrace and surrounded by glittering gold ornamentation. The allegorical figures and images represented in the *Beethoven Frieze* demonstrate the concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk by evoking numerous artistic media: the visual art of painting, poetry, and music, as well as presenting a sculptural element through Klimt's inclusion of three-dimensional jewels.

The concept of the synesthetic Gesamtkunstwerk, which began with Richard Wagner's operas in the mid-nineteenth century, informs not only the Vienna Secession's Beethoven exhibition, but also Kandinsky's *The Yellow Sound*, Joseph Beuys' "social sculpture" and Althoff's installations. Art historian Jane Kallir has deemed the

[57] Koja, "…just about the nastiest women…," in *Gustav Klimt: The* Beethoven Frieze, 64.

Beethoven exhibition's attempt at the Gesamtkunstwerk as a forerunner to contemporary installation art because it intended to create a holistic aesthetic experience.[58] From its inception, the focus of the Gesamtkunstwerk has been to ensure the viewer's ability to coherently and collectively absorb all aspects of the spectacle with all the senses.[59] Contemporary installation art also places the viewers' activation in the forefront. Althoff's Gesamtkunstwerk, unlike that of the Beethoven exhibition, does not aim to reconcile all artistic media into a cohesive experience. Rather, as Diedrich Diederichsen has argued, by fragmenting his artistic production into varied media and styles Althoff reconfigures the artist as subject and individual into a de-centered self, a product of multiple perspectives.[60]

Klimt's and Althoff's subject matter and treatment of figures also share decadent similarities. In the *Beethoven Frieze* Klimt delves into the decadent and grotesque, contorting his figures, exposing their bodies, and investigating themes of deceit, desire, lasciviousness, and death. Althoff also incorporates themes of sexuality and desire in his paintings. In an interview about *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet*, Althoff admitted that he has "drawn many things that I would want to be a part of sexually, or that I admired because of their highest sexual and mental power over me. All highest powers include sexual power for me."[61] Althoff's painting *Untitled* from 2005 (Figure 9), included in the *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* installation, represents a group of half nude figures

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[58] Kallir, " 'High' and 'Low' in Imperial Vienna," in *Gustav Klimt: Modernism in the Making*, ed. Collins, 66.
[59] Esther da Costa Meyer, "Gesamtkunstwerk, or the Politics of Wholeness," in *Gustav Klimt: Painting, Design and Modern Life*, ed. Tobias G. Natter and Christoph Grunenberg (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 26.
[60] Diedrich Diederichsen, "Intimacy and Gestamtkunstwerk," in *Kai Kein Repekt (Kai No Respect)* ed. Nicholas Baume (Miami Beach, FL: Bridge House Publishing, 2004), 67.
[61] Althoff, "Solo for and Afflicted Trumpet," in *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Vergne, 58.

engaged in an ambiguous situation. The sinuous contour lines and elongated limbs emphasize the sexuality of the androgynous figures in *Untitled* and are reminiscent of Klimt's curving art nouveau line in the *Beethoven Frieze*. Likewise, the ostentatious gold background of Althoff's *Untitled* recalls Klimt's decadent integration of the fine and applied arts through his usage of gold and jewels in the *Beethoven Frieze*. Klimt's conflation of art and craft is even more pronounced in his "golden phase," during which he produced paintings such as the famous portrait *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907) (Figure 10). Other paintings included in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet*, such as *Untitled* from 2005 (Figure 11), appear ambiguous as to whether sexual or violent interactions are occurring between the figures. This painting displays a curvaceous female nude in the foreground as two clothed men are seated in the bright blue background gazing upon her. However, the female is represented with her arms tied together above her head, blurring the lines between the sexual and the harmful. In a similar way the female figures in Klimt's *The Forces of Evil* wear expressions and are contorted in poses of both pleasure and pain.

Despite Klimt and Althoff's shared formal and sexual decadence, *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* has a much different affect on the viewer than the *Beethoven Frieze*. Klimt's organic compositions and sensually rendered figures suggest an idealistic pursuit of the mystical nature of humanity through liberated sexuality. Although sections of the frieze are completely covered with decorative patterns, jewels, and gold, the parts that represent *The Longing for Happiness* are essentially blank, except for the figures floating near the top of the frame. Moreover, the portions of the panels that Klimt filled in with

ornamentation are geometrically ordered and, in conjunction with the curving lines, create a sense of balance and accord.

It is also important to note the positioning of Klimt's *Beethoven Frieze* in the gallery space. Klimt's choice to place the frieze up near the ceiling of the gallery required viewers to direct their gazes upwards in aspiration, inspiration, and transcendental awe of the art object and its message. Ultimately, the Beethoven exhibition, as a whole, gave the viewer a sense of harmony, balance, and transcendence. Stephan Koja interprets the Beethoven exhibition as "a refuge from the adversity and ugliness of everyday life."[62]

Conversely, Althoff's installation *confronts* the viewer with the adversity, complexity, and ugliness of life. His paintings were chaotically dispersed throughout, some debased to the floor of the gallery and degraded to the status of junk. His random and hectic arrangement besmirched the "white cube" of the gallery and caused viewers to direct their gazes in all directions and across all surfaces to sift through the hodge-podge in order to locate the paintings, which were presumably the "real" art. Althoff presented a plethora of objects for the viewer to peruse and the sensory overload was distancing and restricting. Alex Segade criticized the installation because Althoff restricted the viewer to one narrow path amidst the collection of objects that made the viewer feel small in comparison.[63] This type of fragmented and alienating experience is comparable to the everyday bombardment of images that individuals experience in contemporary visual culture and is integral to the installation's criticality.

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[62] Koja, "…'just about the nastiest women…'," in *Gustav Klimt: The Beethoven Frieze*, ed. Koja, 84.
[63] Alex Segade, "Kai Althoff: ACME, Los Angeles CA." *artUS*, March/April 2006, 7.

Fredric Jameson has asserted that any position on postmodernism and culture is inherently, either explicitly or implicitly, a political stance on the nature of our current state of multinational capitalism.[64] Seconding this idea, Thomas Docherty professes that the aesthetic and political are inextricably linked in postmodern art and discourse.[65] Ever since the May 1968 student revolts, postmodernism has investigated Marxist issues by placing the laboring base between material history and consciousness.[66] As an act of degradation, Althoff's juxtaposition of his own paintings with found objects in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* generates a critique of the current state of multinational capitalism. Much like Claes Oldenburg's 1961 installation *The Store*, in which he displayed painted plaster sculptures of various consumer goods, Althoff's *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* is involved in institutional critique through the transformation of the pristine gallery space into an environment reminiscent of a garage sale.

Althoff's degradation of the paintings included in the ACME. installation is critical of the dynamics of a capitalistic art market. In a January 2006 review of *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet*, Bruce Hainley emphasized Althoff's dependence on pictorial representation and its commodified value. Hainley described the installation as, "a stage set for painting, where painting is both literal prop and metaphorical proscenium … what 'supports' this contrived mess is a rhetoric of (and market for) painting."[67] Althoff's placement of his paintings and drawings throughout the assemblage of found objects evoked a yard-sale aesthetic that blurred the distinction between the art objects and the

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[64] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 64.
[65] Thomas Docherty, "Introduction," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 3.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Bruce Hainley, "Kai Althoff: ACME," *Artforum International* 44, no. 5 (January 2006): 229.

commodities. Furthermore, Althoff breaks up installations like *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* to sell individual paintings and recycle portions of the installation for other exhibits. For his 2004 retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Althoff reconceived each artwork to create an overall synergistic exhibition.[68] Additionally, a recent solo exhibition of Althoff's work at the Kunsthalle Zurich, In Any Case I Wish You Ill (2007), was composed of fragments of his previous installations. This demonstrates a deliberate lack of unity and a built-in impermanence in Althoff's installation work. The paintings themselves are degraded to the low status of found and recycled objects and the installation as a whole is decadent in the sense that it all eventually decays and decomposes when parts of it are broken up to be sold or shown elsewhere.

Althoff's production of figurative representations, and particularly his appropriation of styles from the canon of art history, exemplifies the debate concerning the death of painting and the return to figuration: is this type of artistic production conservative? Authentic? Avant-garde? Decadent? In contemporary criticism, figurative painting, and particularly that which appears expressive in a painterly or faux naïve style, is often condemned as politically regressive. In his essay "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," Benjamin H. D. Buchloh identified historicist painting with a return to authoritarianism, in its affirmation of "the 'eternal' or ancient systems of order."[69] Buchloh went on to explain that "style then becomes the ideological equivalent of the commodity" in condemnation

[68] Baume, "Feel It All," *Kai Kein Respekt*, 7.
[69] Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," *October* 16: 43.

of artists who utilize these styles and their associations with fame and value.[70] In the 1980s, the German neo-expressionists were particularly taken to task by critics for their implementation of an outdated style that feigned historical authenticity and promoted "the continuing domination of the obsolete."[71]

Not all discourse on this style of painting and postmodernists' usage of art history has been negative. Donald Kuspit, a champion of the return to painting and expressionism, situates this genre of art in the dialectic of decadence: at first an outsider, a decadent seems different, and not progressive, but soon becomes assimilated and can even become authoritative.[72] For Kuspit, the decadence of any given artwork is inevitable—even the most progressive and pure modern artworks become decadent. Kuspit cites Duchamp's conception of decadence: no painting lives more than thirty years; they all must die, loose their aura, and take their place in art history.[73] Similarly, Kuspit argues that revival movements such as neo-expressionism are no more decadent than movements such as abstract expressionism, which looked back to Kandinsky, and pop art, which looked back to Dada.[74]

The fact that Althoff's paintings have been compared stylistically to the Viennese fin-de-siècle artists, the German expressionists, and the neo-expressionists of the 1980s, underscores their inexpressive content. Whereas the original manifestations of these styles presented a level of religiosity and a mystical search for truth through self-expression, Althoff's paintings lack this authenticity. By borrowing other artists' modes

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[70] Ibid., 52.
[71] Ibid., 67.
[72] Donald Kuspit, *The Dialectic of Decadence: Between Advance and Decline in Art* (New York: Allworth Press, 2000), 59.
[73] Ibid., 45.
[74] Donald Kuspit, "The New (?) Expressionism: Art as Damaged Goods," *Artforum* 20 (November 1981): 47.

of expression, his paintings are devoid of elements that are truly expressive of Althoff himself. Instead, the appropriated painting styles, and the figures composed by them, become fictitious alter egos that Althoff performs for the viewer. Tom Holert asserts that in Althoff's work, "on the one hand everything seems to lead toward an art of pure, unmediated expression; on the other, what emerges is a highly developed sense of the artificial and performative nature of such a project."[75] Particularly in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* one can see the performative nature of Althoff's aesthetic: the installation resembles a crowded stage set with theatrical props, costumes, and decorations.

Althoff's deliberate denial of genuine expressiveness is indicative of the impossibility of personal expression, as asserted by postmodernist discourse. Frederic Jameson has observed that not only is personal expression obsolete in the postmodern period, but also the idea of authentic expression has always been a myth. Using Edvard Munch's ubiquitously reproduced *The Scream* (1893) as an example, Jameson contends that authentic expression implies a separation in the artist as subject; expression therefore implies metaphysical interiority and exteriority because the subject must externalize his/her interior expression in the artwork.[76] Jameson, and postmodernist discourse, denies this type of depth model because of its insistence on the possibility of authentically obtaining a "truth" through expression.[77] Conversely, Jameson argues that interior feelings can have no authentic exterior counterpart or mode of expression.

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[75] Tom Holert, "Band of Outsiders: The Art of Kai Althoff," *Artforum International* 41, no. 2 (October 2002): 128.
[76] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Docherty, 70.
[77] Ibid.

Whereas other modes of theory still rely on dichotomous depth models, postmodern discourse has replaced depth with surface.[78] Each surface can be read as text and the presence of multiple texts generates a play of intertextuality.[79] Althoff's historicism embraces surface and textual interplay through a de-centering of the subject. *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* shows the "random cannibalization of all styles of the past," as Jameson defines historicism, thus opening the installation up to a dialogue with multiple media, time periods, cultures, perspectives, ideologies, etc.[80] Althoff rejects the essence, or meaning, traditionally associated with the styles he utilizes in order to privilege form, superficiality, and open the work up to multivalent perspectives. In contrast to the quintessential modern centered subject, epitomized by Munch's *The Scream*, Althoff's work does not express anxiety from alienation, but instead embraces the fragmented self through decadence.[81]

Althoff's embrace of postmodern superficiality and fragmentation in his paintings, through the separation of form and content, also emphasizes their status as commodities. Twenty-first century society has become more enmeshed with commodities than ever before. Even in 1985, Jean-François Lyotard determined that the material result of modern progress was humanity's accumulation of new objects.[82] In particular, Lyotard warned about technoscientific developments that proceed on their own, forcefully, without heeding to the demands of human needs.[83] *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* seems to acknowledge, even relish, the accumulation of objects. As if

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[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 74.
[81] Ibid., 72.
[82] Jean François Lyotard, "Note on the Meaning of 'Post-'," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 49.
[83] Ibid.

demonstrating Lyotard's postmodern skepticism, Althoff incorporated *used* objects and aesthetic styles, commodities that have been expended and cast off. In an indictment of consumer culture, Althoff confronted viewers with relics and reminders of their own decadence.

Inherent in this confrontation of decadence are simultaneous feelings of attraction and repulsion. Althoff himself admits that his gathering of objects in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* is meant partially to seduce. He displayed many beautiful objects, delicate, lacey fabrics, and seemingly benign dolls and mannequins, using bright seductive colors and varied textured surfaces. Althoff also recognizes that the installation's decadence resulted in an underlying malevolent tone.[84] Claire Bishop argues, "the best installation art is marked by a sense of antagonism towards its environment, a friction with its context that resists organizational pressure and instead exerts its own terms of engagement;" in this sense the installation functions as "an alternative to the passivity of mass-media consumption … to induce a critical vigilance towards the environments in which we find ourselves."[85] *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* provokes this type of activation and antagonism on many levels: between the gallery space and the installation, between the objects and paintings, and, ultimately, between the viewer and the installation itself by conjuring contradictory feelings of attraction and repulsion, desire and disgust. These aspects distinguish Althoff's decadent installation from the harmonious work of his predecessors—Klimt and the Vienna Secession artists.

It is Althoff's emphasis on the abject quality of objects in his installation that evokes conflicting urges in the viewer. Analogous to Mike Kelley's *More Love Hours*

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[84] Althoff, *Heart of Darkness*¸ ed. Philippe Vergne, 59.
[85] Claire Bishop, "But is it Installation Art?" *Tate Etc.*, 8.

Than Can Ever Be Repaid (1987), which is composed of old and dirty thrift store stuffed animals that show visible signs of their use, the found objects in Althoff's installation reveal, through their appearance and musty smells, that they are legitimately old and abject. In a similarly decadent installation, *Immo* (Figure 17, 18) shown in Cologne in 2004, Althoff even went as far as to hide rotten meat throughout the assemblage of objects to give off the sweet smell of decay.[86] The notion of the cast-off, or the abject, will be discussed further in the following section's analysis of Althoff's *Untitled* (2007) installation.

[86] Veit Loers, "With Bellbottoms in the Underworld," *Parkett* 75 (2005), 87.

Life on Mars: Abjection and the Human Condition in Althoff's *Untitled* Installation from the 55th Carnegie International

Althoff's exploration of attraction and repulsion through decadence, desire, and abjection came to even greater fruition in his 2007 installation *Untitled* (Figure 14 and 15), as seen in Life on Mars: Fifty-Fifth Carnegie International exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In comparison to *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Immo*, Althoff's contribution to the Life on Mars exhibit was pared down, using fewer found objects and eliminating the paintings, and less involved in institutional critique. However, *Untitled* continued the exploration of abjection and the human condition begun in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and pushed the experiential component of his installation art even further by fashioning a holistic aesthetic environment inside the gallery space.

Including contemporary artists from around the world, the Carnegie International is a triennial exhibition held since 1896 at the Carnegie Museum of Art. The 2008 exhibition, curated by Douglas Fogle, was themed Life on Mars and posed the questions: "Are we alone in the universe? Do aliens exist? Or are we, ourselves, the strangers in our own worlds?"[87] The forty artists included in the exhibition answered these questions in various ways and dealt with "the conundrum of our existence as humans," namely that, "we are profoundly alone, yet paradoxically together."[88] The exhibition incorporated multiple perspectives on human experience in a variety of media: painting, drawing,

[87] Douglas Fogle, *Life on Mars: 2008 Carnegie International*, gallery guide (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 2008), 3.
[88] Douglas Fogle, "Is There Life on Mars?," in *Life on Mars: 55th Carnegie International*, exhibition catalog (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 2008), 21.

photography, sculpture, film, and installation art. With a common thematic goal, the synergistic relationship between the artists and media engendered a total aesthetic experience that echoed that of the Gesamtkunstwerk. The idea of synergy and collaboration is one that has occurred frequently throughout Althoff's oeuvre: from his early mask-making and quilting events (*A Group of Friends Meet in a Shop Near the Friesenwall in Cologne to Make Masks* and *Urban Quilters*), to his regular participation in group shows and the reworking of his own artworks and installations to create cohesive solo exhibitions.

While some artists' work envisioned the theme of Life on Mars with more overtly futuristic and intergalactic imagery, Althoff referenced alien culture in more metaphorical terms. As stated in the exhibition's gallery guide, Fogle hoped that the viewer would be transported to different aesthetic worlds throughout the exhibition and "learn to love the alien."[89] The alien in Althoff's installation, *Untitled*, is the abject. For this installation Althoff constructed a separate environment within the Carnegie Museum of Art's gallery. A four-sided room was completely enclosed except for two entrances situated across from each other. Its curved walls were lined with tiles of smooth red fiberglass. In the center of the room Althoff placed a large resin sculpture bisected by a trench which was reminiscent of a large tabletop or altar. Presiding over this altar was a large female doll that represented a fragment of a human, lacking arms and bearing short stubs for legs. Dressed in a long and flowing pink gown, the doll towered over the sculpture. Behind the doll was a red metal grid, on which Althoff draped fabrics, hung a men's suit jacket, and placed a vase below. The room was lit with small lights attached to the metal grid;

[89] Fogle, *Life on Mars*, gallery guide, 3.

this spotlighted the resin "altar," as well as any viewer standing before it, and caused the fiberglass walls to glow blood red.

Seen from outside, in the museum gallery space, the installation's seductive red glow beckoned the viewer to enter. Once inside, the viewer was confined to a small path in order to circumambulate the imposing resin sculpture, doll, and metal armature. The feeling of confinement in *Untitled* recalls Althoff's over-packed space in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet.* Althoff also carried over his interest in found objects and the "yard sale aesthetic" to *Untitled* through his incorporation of the fabric, doll, tunic, suit jacket and vase, although *Untitled*'s cavernous space felt more constructed than the chaotic and random assemblage of *Solo for and Afflicted Trumpet*. In both of these installations Althoff succeeded in fusing decadence and abjection through their mutual evocation of attraction and repulsion in the viewer.

While Althoff's strange juxtaposition of objects created a theatrical environment suggestive of an ambiguous and otherworldly narrative, his imagery was also referential to the human body. The red room, together with the daunting feminine presence of the doll, suggested a womb: the original site of abjection. Since the 1982 publication of Julia Kristeva's seminal text *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, the concept of abjection has permeated art, theory, and criticism.[90] In this essay Kristeva puts forth the concept of abjection as that which "…disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[91] She defines the abject as that which is opposed to the "I," to the self, asserting, "to each ego

[90] Simon Taylor, "The Phobic Object: Abjection in Contemporary Art," in *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1993), 59.
[91] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

its object, to each superego its abject."[92] Fundamental to Kristeva's explanation of abjection are Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theories of ego development. Lacan posited the body ego as formed at the mirror stage in infant development around the age of six months.[93] Essential to Lacan's mirror stage is the ego's formulation, although fantastical, of a cohesive and stable identity due to the positioning of itself as a subject, separate from the Other and from objects, in the space of its own body.[94] Despite this crucial stage of self-recognition, the ego is always threatened by the abject.[95] As Freud declared, "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego."[96] The threat placed upon the ego is due to the fact that the abject, on the most essential and elementary level, threatens the body by exposing what is on the inside, by casting out the interior. This type of exposure goes against socially and culturally imposed rules and affects the moralizing superego; in Elizabeth Gross' words, "abjection is the body's acknowledgement that the boundaries and limits imposed on it are really social projections—effects of desire not nature."[97]

Kristeva states that the most archaic form of abjection is food loathing; intrinsic to the process of regurgitating is that the subject must expel his/herself, abject his/herself.[98] For Kristeva, the next category of the abject is corporeal waste that is exemplified by the

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[92] Ibid., 2.
[93] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), 1.
[94] Elizabeth Gross, "The Body of Signification," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (New York: Routledge, 1990), 82.
[95] Taylor, "The Phobic Object," in *Abject Art*, 60.
[96] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1962), 26.
[97] Gross, "The Body of Signification," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, 90.
[98] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4. Althoff's aforementioned *Reflex Lux* (1998) features the abject through food loathing.

corpse. This is the ultimate abject because the body is turned into an empty object; the stable identity of the self has been lost, the "I" has been expelled.[99] As uncanny representations of the human form, the disfigured mannequins and dolls featured in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled* become reminders of the ultimate abject. However, it is abjection of the self, Kristeva's third category of abjection rooted in the act of childbirth, which Althoff addresses in *Untitled*. Kristeva contends that, "abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be."[100] Thus, abjection of the self occurs when the subject realizes "that all its objects are merely based on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being."[101]

The inaugural loss to which Kristeva refers is the initial expulsion of the subject from its mother's womb. The subject comes to realize the tenuousness of its own identity and the possibility that it "may slide back into the impure chaos out of which it was formed."[102] Couched in this fear, in the abjection of the self, is the horror of sexual difference illustrated through the horror of menstrual blood. It is the subject's refusal to acknowledge his/her corporeal link to the mother due to the insurmountable debt of life that the subject (Gross implicates culture as a whole) owes to the maternal body.[103] Althoff's red womb-environment serves as a reminder of the maternal body and the secure, yet stifling, connotations that come with it.[104]

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[99] Ibid., 4.
[100] Ibid., 10.
[101] Ibid., 5.
[102] Gross, "The Body of Signification," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, 90.
[103] Ibid., 92.
[104] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 13.

In a video interview made in conjunction with the Life on Mars exhibition, Althoff's comments specifically reference maternal imagery and the horror of the abject, as well as convey his own feelings of attraction and repulsion towards the installation.[105] The deliberately enigmatic and overtly theatrical nature of Althoff's commentary corresponds to the imagery presented in *Untitled*. Althoff chose to make himself inaccessible to the viewer by having a female, who appeared androgynous much like the figures Althoff paints, present his statements on *Untitled*. The woman read Althoff's transcribed account of the installation's inspiration and creation off of a cue card matter-of-factly, with little tonal inflection, and downcast eyes. The artificiality of the reader's presentation underscored the performative nature of the entire project and makes the video interview a narrative extension, albeit disjointed and enigmatic, of the installation itself, rather than an authentic statement from the artist. Some of Althoff's descriptions do not correspond to the installation's incarnation at the Carnegie Museum of Art but are part of the narrative "performance-interview," further undermining his statements as truths and emphasizing the project's theatricality.

Althoff's account of the installation's inception begins by focusing on the fantastic elements of the artwork. Althoff admits that the idea for the resin sculpture came to him in a dream; the sculpture appeared to him as a platform with a trough, or trench, which housed a highly toxic liquid and a fin that churned the deadly concoction. Curiously, the liquid and fin were absent from *Untitled*'s exhibition in Pittsburgh. Althoff goes on to explain that he had fabricated a tall doll prior to his dream of the sculpture. This doll was sitting in his apartment and was threatening to him. Thus,

[105] Kai Althoff, "Kai Althoff: CI08 Life on Mars, (Carnegie Museum of Art, 2008), 3 min., 23 sec., http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjUiTN33vME (accessed March 2nd, 2009).

Althoff decided to place the doll over the sculpture as a sort of punishment. Althoff posits that he is mocking the female sex organ in geometric form in the "sculpture of degradation," imposed on him by Satan, and that by placing the trench through the middle of the sculpture he has forced the doll to "look constantly, gaze at her own body sleeping with someone…. It seemed to be her vagina being perforated, penetrated and that she has to look at this."[106]

Althoff laments, "The doll will probably conquer, but I certainly can't stand her mercy or pity or compassionated knowledge that she might have for me. Why can't I love her though I wanted to so much?"[107] The intense unease and bewilderment caused by the female doll signifies the maternal abjection that Althoff associates with her. Althoff further emphasizes the abject in his retelling of a text he wrote to be set to music and sung to the doll; neither the text nor the song is included in the installation itself, but is only accessible to the viewer through the online "performance-interview." Althoff's lyrics go as follows: "I did not call for her, the mother, but why do I come out of her body and stuff? And that still I don't know nothing of her. Furthermore, that death doesn't bother me, but birth does. And who dares to set up rules, meaning in the sense of one world orders, anyhow?"[108]

While *Untitled* was not the explicit institutional critique of commodity culture that *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* was, Althoff's *Untitled* was anything but complicit. His exploration of the abject was an affront to the status quo, to patriarchal systems, and to traditional social order. Althoff's question, "who dares to set up rules?" reflects the commanding and provocative effect that *Untitled* had on the viewer. From the gallery

[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

outside *Untitled*, the viewer was attracted, even seduced, by the glowing red hue emitted from the installation. After entering the room, the viewer was confronted by the commanding presence of the doll inside. The doll loomed large over the altar-like sculpture and the bright lights shined down on the viewer as if some sort of malevolent sacrificial rite was imminent. In order to escape the discomfiting environment, the viewer had to physically abject him/herself from the womb-like room out into the bright white light of the gallery. The viewer-as-subject was confronted with his/her debt to the maternal body, forced to experience the abjection of the self, and urged to realize the socially constructed and fragile nature of his/her own identity.

Intrinsic to the experience of *Untitled* were the conflicting feelings of attraction and repulsion. Heather Pesanti, Assistant Curator of the Life on Mars exhibition, has described the encounter as

> Rife with sexuality and potentially demonic revelations…. Here, the symbolic manifestations of opposing powers, metaphorically pushing and pulling on body and mind, collapse good and evil into a unified and potentially dangerous whole…. [In Althoff's work] the degeneration and decay of previous innocents into incarnations of abjection form a metaphor for the destructive—and seductive—forces of life.[109]

It is through Althoff's simultaneous evocation of the seductive and destructive, the attractive and the repulsive, in *Untitled* that his synthesis of abjection and decadence comes full circle. The presence of attraction and repulsion is inherent to the experience of both abjection and decadence. Kristeva insists that, "abjection is above all ambiguity…. [It is the] composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning."[110] This stems from the fact that the orifices and areas of the body that

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[109] Heather Pesanti, "Kai Althoff," in *Life on Mars: 55th Carnegie International*, ed. Douglas Fogle (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 2008), 73.
[110] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

generate corporeal abjection (mouth, eyes, anus, ears, and genitals) are also erotogenic zones.[111] This dichotomy is also seen in *jouissance,* which Kristeva likens to the abject because neither is objective or objectal but is enjoyed both passionately and painfully.[112] This duality is evident in decadence as well. Klimt's aforementioned *Beethoven Frieze* fused imagery of both the sexual and the grotesque. The decadent femme fatale, represented in Klimt's work, and echoed in Althoff's androgynous painted figures, is "rife with sexuality and potentially demonic revelations," she possesses the allure of sexuality, but is also a harbinger of danger, even death.

Just as the human body is essential to the concept of abjection, a biological or physiological model is frequently used as an allegory for decadence. As far back as ancient Rome, in 410 A.D., during the invasion of the Goths, St. Augustine wrote of Rome's decline proclaiming, "Does it surprise you that the world is failing? You are surprised that the world grows old? Man is born, grows up, ages."[113] Friedrich Nietzsche's conception of decadence directly embraces the body as abject. As Charles Bernheimer has recounted, Nietzschean decadence maintains that waste and decay are natural and essential functions of a healthy organism and a healthy society.[114] Decadence is an integral phase in life, growth, and prosperity.[115] Other influential German artists have highlighted the degenerative and the abject in their work through unorthodox biodegradable materials: Beuys' use of animals and fat and Dieter Roth's incorporation of trash and foodstuff in his work. These artists' emphasis on decay in the aesthetic realm underscores the inevitability of decadence in art and society.

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[111] Gross, "The Body of Signification," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, 88.
[112] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.
[113] St. Augustine quoted Gilman, *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* , 43.
[114] Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects*, eds. T. Jefferson Kline and Naomi Schor, 26.
[115] Ibid., 9.

Recalling Kuspit's dialectic of decadence, an artist first perceived as decadent, differing from tradition and representing a decline in art, eventually becomes assimilated and accepted.[116] Furthermore, all art eventually becomes decadent and resigned to the canon of art history.[117] Kuspit also emphasizes that those artists who perceive themselves as avant-garde and accuse other artists of being decadent are, in fact, decadent themselves. Because they regard their own art as an unchanging model, they are no longer avant-garde, they no longer keep culture moving.[118] Thus, Kuspit posits decadence as an inevitable and necessary component of artistic progress. Decadence, however, also implies a fragmentation through degeneration. This fragmentation parallels the "inaugural loss" to which Kristeva refers: fundamental to abjection is the separation of two bodies and, ultimately, the subject's realization of the decadent and degenerative nature of the body, self, and identity.

The realization of a fragmented self and the concept of abjection both are integral tenets of postmodern discourse. Althoff's *Untitled* entered into this dialogue through his incorporation of decadence and desire via abjection. As Gross has pinpointed, abjection is the body's recognition that the limits placed upon it, the moral rules and regulations imposed on it, are effects of cultural and social *desires* and not the effects of nature.[119] The conflict between the social and natural arose in Lyotard's discourse on the postmodern period as skeptical of the beneficial aspects of technology and progress. As previously discussed in connection with Althoff's *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet*

[116] Kuspit, *The Dialectic of Decadence*, 59.
[117] Ibid., 45.
[118] Ibid., 93.
[119] Gross, "The Body of Signification," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, 90.

installation, Lyotard presaged the material results of modern progress.[120] He noted that developments in science and technology progressed quickly, forcefully, and surpassed humanity's biological needs.[121] Lyotard interpreted this as a division in humanity in which one part must deal with the challenges of new complexity and the other part must deal with survival needs.[122] Jameson, in 1991, announced that the global postmodern condition, distinctly influenced by American culture, "is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense … the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and horror."[123] Jameson's indictment of the underside of culture, the results of late capitalism and American dominance, seem to be abject references straight out of Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*.

[120] Lyotard, "Note on the Meaning of 'Post'," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Docherty, 49.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Docherty, 65.

Conclusion

Althoff's oeuvre, his installation work in particular, is full of ambiguities and dichotomies. The *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled* installations reflect Althoff's desire to generate dialectical experiences that invoke feelings of attraction and repulsion simultaneously in the viewer through the exploration of decadence and abjection. As holistic aesthetic environments these installations made viewers more aware of their corporeal presence and individual experiences. A propensity for the performative, or theatrical, is inherent to these installations, Althoff's oeuvre as a whole, and is exemplified in Althoff's video "performance-interview" for *Untitled*. The constructed nature of the installations, Althoff's borrowing of art historical styles, his assemblage of found objects, and Althoff's persona and commentary on the installations signal a lack of authenticity. It is important that viewers do not interpret this lack of authenticity as insincerity; rather, Althoff's representation of the decadent, superficial, and inauthentic are symptomatic of a de-centered and fragmented postmodern self. Althoff's investigation of the postmodern self in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled* provided arenas for institutional critique, enabling viewers to look deeper into the meaning and implications of our own societal decadence and abjection.

While Althoff's work frequently references a uniquely German past, *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled* provide textual interplay making them accessible from a multitude of perspectives. Althoff's references to German art history through stylistic appropriations and a dialogue with fin-de-siècle Austrian decadence in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* speak to our late capitalist global economy, with its proclivity for

commodity, consumption, and materialism. In *Untitled*, Althoff questioned traditional notions of authority by asking, "Who dares to set up rules?" Althoff evoked a primal environment that, through its representation of the abject, brought to the forefront a culturally/socially constructed self and urged the viewer to evaluate socially imposed expectations.

Althoff has stated, in reference to his fondness for historicism, for old-fashioned objects and art history, "In general, I like the past, and how it could have been and become a perfect future," suggesting his postmodern worldview of both veneration and pathos.[124] *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* and *Untitled* were sites of individual experience, but also brought forth group, social, and global issues. The postmodern, de-centered, and fragmented self, as revealed in Althoff's installation pieces, is one that is abject: a self that recognizes the dialectic between inside and outside and embraces both the attractive and the repulsive. It is a self that recognizes its instability and fragmented state, and a self that conflates multiple perspectives, from both past and present, to withstand the future.

[124] Kai Althoff, quoted in Angela Rosenberg, "Kai Althoff: General Rehearsals for a New Language," *Flash Art*, 97.

Figure 1

Kai Althoff, *Untitled*, 2000
Lacquer, paper, watercolor and varnish on canvas, 50 x 50 cm
The Saatchi Gallery, London
As reproduced on: http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/artpages/althoff_Untitled_3.htm Retrieved March 10, 2009

Figure 2

Kai Althoff, *Reflex Lux*, 1998
Installation view, Galerie Neu, Berlin
As reproduced in Veit Loers, "With Bellbottoms in the Underworld,"
Parkett 75 (2005): 90.

Figure 3

Kai Althoff, *Solo für eine befallene Trompete (Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet)*, 2005
Installation view, ACME. gallery, Los Angeles
Image courtesy of ACME. gallery, Los Angeles

Figure 4

Kai Althoff, *Solo für eine befallene Trompete (Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet)*, 2005
Installation view, ACME. gallery, Los Angeles
As reproduced in *Heart of Darkness: Kai Althoff, Ellen Gallagher and Edgar Cleijne, Thomas Hirschhorn*, ed. Philippe Vergne
(New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2006), 66.

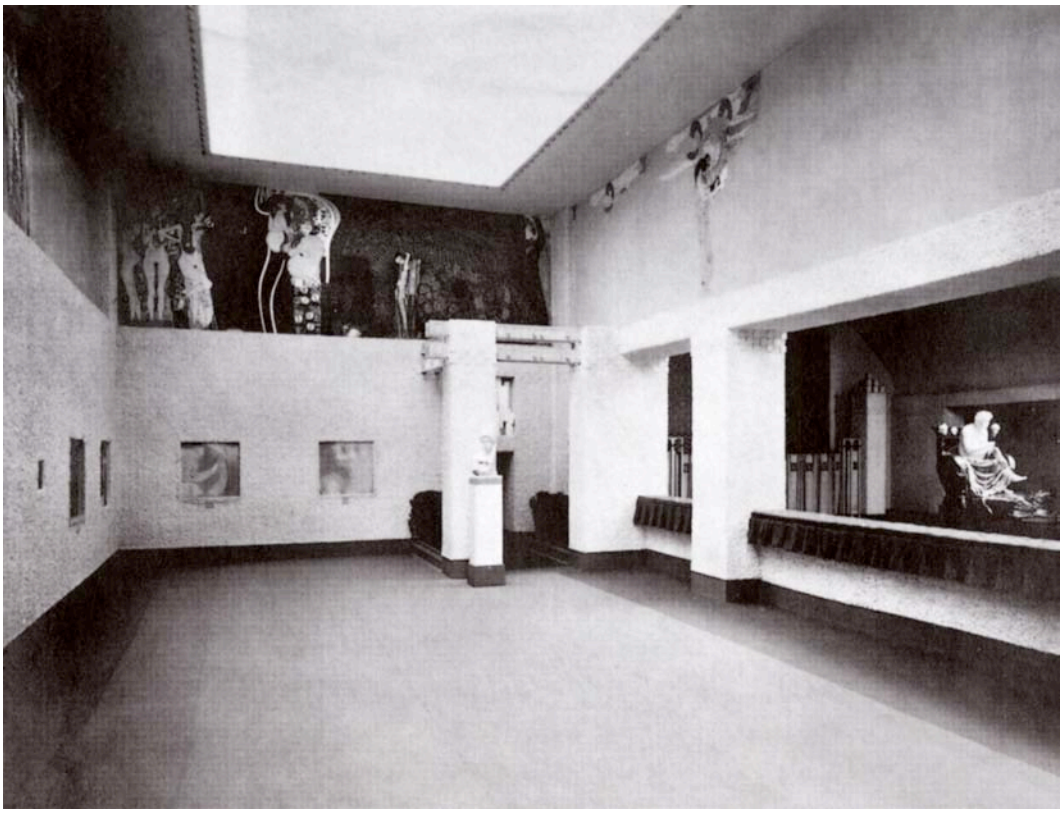

Figure 5

Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*, 1902
Installation view
XIVth exhibition of the Vienna Secession
As reproduced in *Gustav Klimt: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sebarsky Collections*, ed. Renée Price (New York: Neue Galerie, 2007), 44.

Figure 6

Gustav Klimt, *The Longing for Happiness* and *The Sufferings of Weak Mankind*
Detail from the *Beethoven Frieze*, 1902
Casein colors on a stucco base with semiprecious stone inlay
As reproduced in *Gustav Klimt: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sebarsky Collections*, ed. Renée Price (New York: Neue Galerie, 2007), 44.

Figure 7

Gustav Klimt, *The Forces of Evil* detail from the *Beethoven Frieze*, 1902
Casein colors on a stucco base with semiprecious stone inlay
As reproduced in *Gustav Klimt: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sebarsky Collections*, ed. Renée Price (New York: Neue Galerie, 2007), 44.

Figure 8

Gustav Klimt, *Kiss for the Whole World* detail from the *Beethoven Frieze*, 1902
Casein colors on a stucco base with semiprecious stone inlay
As reproduced in *Gustav Klimt: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sebarsky Collections*, ed. Renée Price (New York: Neue Galerie, 2007), 44.

Figure 9

Kai Althoff, *Untitled* , 2005
Included in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* installation, ACME., Los Angeles, 2005
As reproduced in *Heart of Darkness: Kai Althoff, Ellen Gallagher and Edgar Cleijne, Thomas Hirschhorn*, ed. Philippe Vergne
(New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2006), 71.

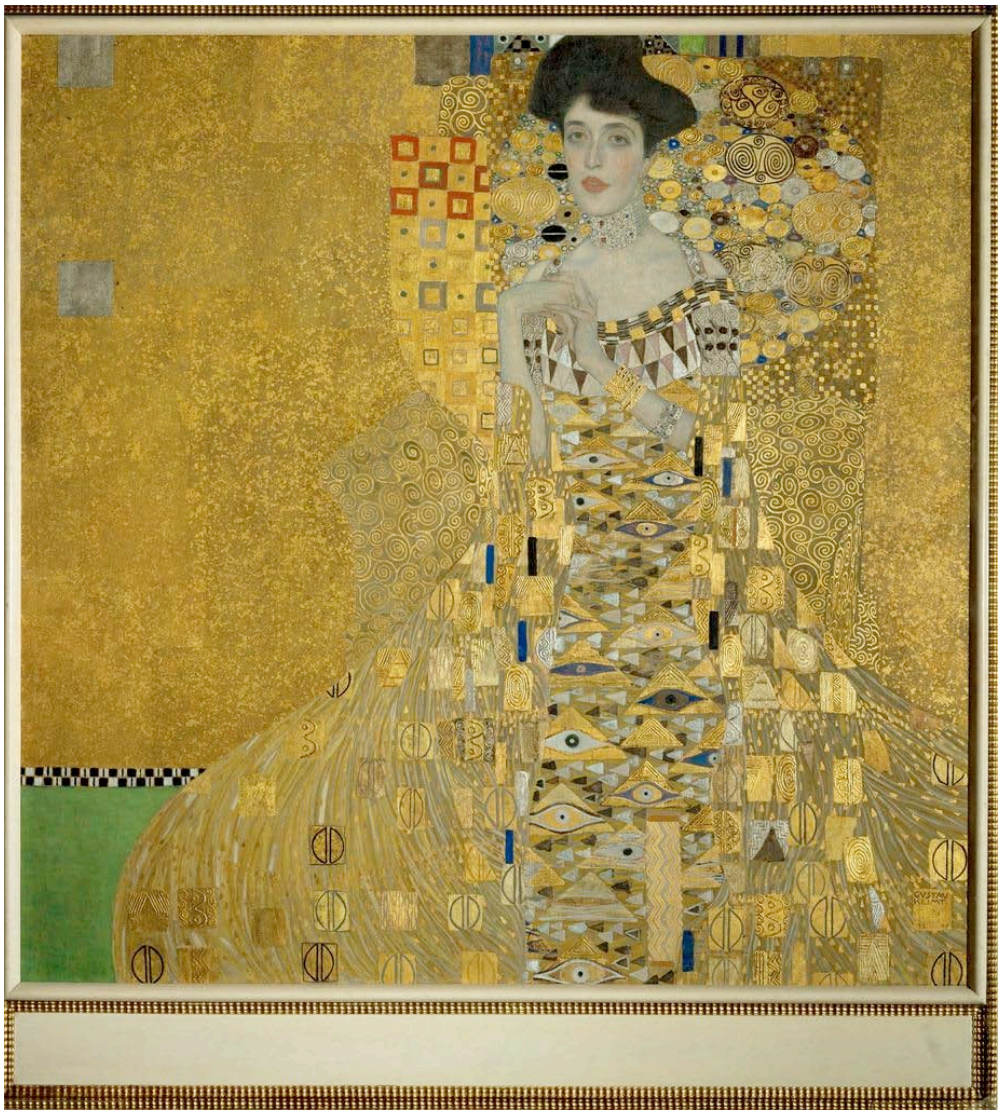

Figure 10

Gustav Klimt, *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, 1907
Oil, gold and silver on canvas, 140 x 140 cm
Neue Galerie New York
As reproduced in *Vienna 1900: Klimt, Schiele, Moser, Kokoschka*, eds. Serge Lemoine and Marie-Amelie zu Salm-Salm (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2005), 71.

Figure 11

Kai Althoff, *Untitled*, 2005
Included in *Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet* installation, ACME., Los Angeles, 2005
As reproduced in *Heart of Darkness: Kai Althoff, Ellen Gallagher and Edgar Cleijne, Thomas Hirschhorn*, ed. Philippe Vergne
(New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2006) 70.

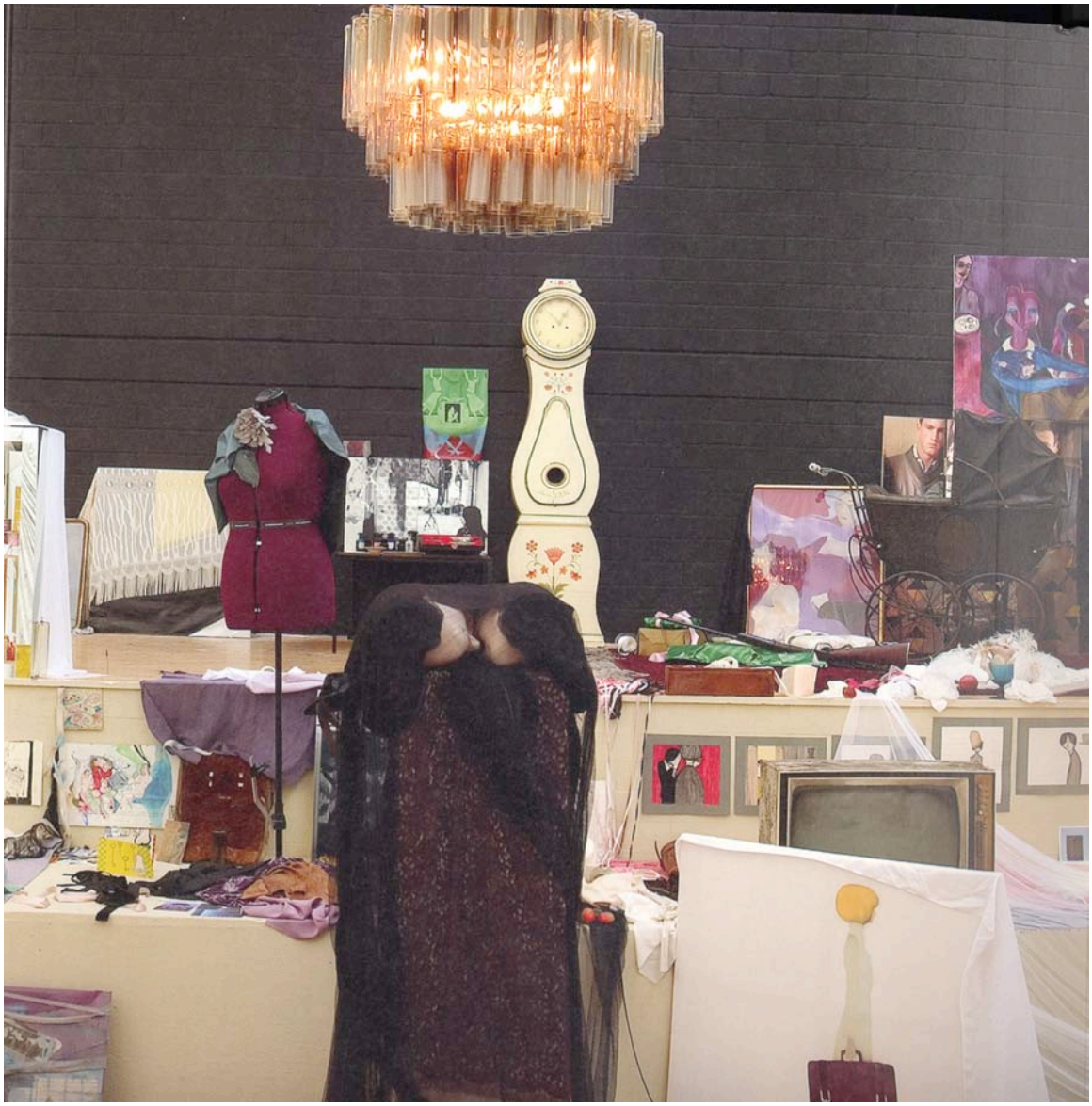

Figure 12

Kai Althoff, *Immo*, 2004
Installation view, Simultanhalle, Cologne
As reproduced in *Parkett* 75 (2005): inside of front cover.

Figure 13

Kai Althoff, *Immo*, 2004
Installation view, Simultanhalle, Cologne
As reproduced in *Parkett* 75 (2005): inside of front cover.

Figure 14

Kai Althoff, *Untitled*, 2007
Installation view, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh
Photograph courtesy of the Carnegie Museum of Art
Photography credit: Tom Little

Figure 15

Kai Althoff, *Untitled*, 2007
Installation view, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh
Photograph courtesy of the Carnegie Museum of Art
Photography credit: Tom Little

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VITA

Lana Ayers Shafer was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma on July 27th, 1985. She is the daughter of John Lionel Shafer, III and Laura Ruth Shafer. A 2003 graduate of Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa, Lana attended The University of Texas at Austin where she received her Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in art history. She graduated from UT in May 2007 Phi Beta Kappa and with university honors.

In August 2007, Lana began her graduate studies at Texas Christian University. She has received Graduate Tuition Fellowships each semester at TCU as well as a Kimbell Fellowship for the fall 2008 and spring 2009 semesters. While at TCU Lana served as a teaching assistant for Dr. Frances Colpitt and as a research assistant for Dr. Mark Thistlethwaite. Lana was also the recipient of two Sunkel Travel Endowment Awards from the Department of Art and Art History for travel to New York City to research Gustav Klimt in May 2008 and to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to research Kai Althoff's installation in December 2008.

Additionally, during her residence in Fort Worth, Lana worked as an information desk assistant at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, completed an internship in the Public Relations department at The Modern, and another internship with the Registrar of the Kimbell Art Museum.

ABSTRACT

German artist Kai Althoff embraces ambiguity through his production of varied media (working in painting, drawing, sculpture, film, music, prose, and installation art) and his evasion of stylistic coherence within each medium. Additionally, Althoff reveals little biographical information and presents enigmatic and performative statements regarding his work. In Althoff's installation art these ambiguities and discrepancies form disjointed environments and viewer experiences that are further fragmented by Althoff's emphasis on the decadent and the abject. In *Solo für eine befallene Trompete (Solo for an Afflicted Trumpet)* (2005) shown at ACME. gallery in Los Angeles, California, Althoff assembled a chaotic mass of fin-de-siècle inspired clothing, found objects, furniture, and other items of ostensible junk. Hidden within the decorative objects were Althoff's paintings, which formally appropriate reified styles from Germany's art history, conflating "high" and "low" art in a critique of postcapitalist consumerism and a postmodern denial of authentic self-expression. Althoff's installation *Untitled* (2007), included in the Life on Mars exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was a constructed decadent environment that signified a womb, the site of human abjection. Althoff's fusion of decadence and abjection, superficiality and theatricality, evoke contradictory urges of attraction and repulsion in the viewer. Althoff's exploration of these binaries in his immersive installations results in an embrace of a postmodern, fragmented, and de-centered self in both the artist and the beholder.