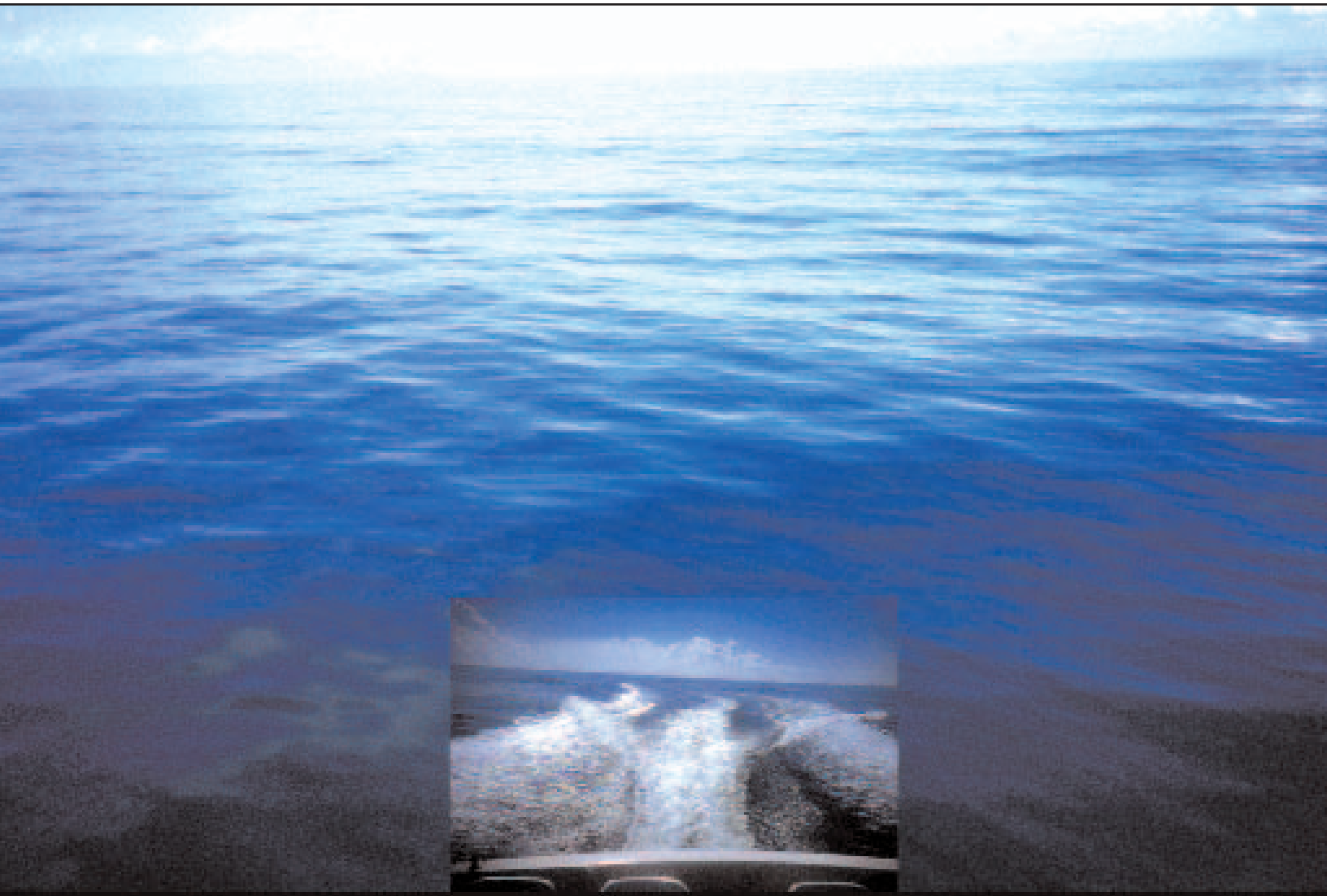


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Miami Art Museum



Janine Antoni and Paul Ramírez Jonas



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Janine Antoni and **Paul Ramírez Jonas** are internationally recognized artists each known for their distinct bodies of work. Less well known is the fact that the pair, who are married, have been making videos and photographs together since 1999. The exhibition at MAM is the first museum exhibition in the United States dedicated to their collaborative works.

The exhibition features two major installations. It includes the video piece *Always New, Always Familiar*, the first work the artists created together, as well as *Mirror*, the artists' first sculpture, which MAM commissioned for this occasion.

Mirror is massive. The sculpture dominates the first room of the gallery. It consists of two components: a seven-foot tall stairway made from twenty-six, twelve-by-twelve inch stacked wood beams and a seven-foot tall, twenty-five foot long red felt curtain. The curtain spans the gallery on a diagonal, intersecting midway with the stairs, which are first seen from the side. What is not immediately understood upon encountering the piece is the relationship of the curtain to the stairs and the full dimensions of the stairs. Cut to the shape of each step, the curtain appears at first to be positioned behind the staircase or balanced on the top stair. From this vantage point, we don't fully understand the size of the space around the sculpture because the opaque curtain is just tall enough to obstruct our view of the rest of the room.

To fully experience *Mirror*, we have to walk around the length of the curtain at one end or the other or use the stairway. At this point we realize that the title refers to the physical nature of the piece revealed through our participatory experience. We see that the stairs are bisected by the curtain and that each side is a mirror image of the other. This duality and our decision on how to interact with the piece, influences our experience of the space around the sculpture, as well as our relationship with the work itself.

At the top of the stairs there is what the artists call a "point of crisis" where the two separate and opposing elements – the soft curtain and the hard wood – intersect and become one before separating again. The stairway "yields" to the red curtain in a seamless channel grooved into the top step. This relatively small section of the sculpture is the place where the two elements are physically conjoined to provide balance and support for the entire piece. At this point we must choose whether to turn around and go down the same way we came up, or cross the furrow and climb down on the other side.

According to the artists, *Mirror* was inspired by structures they have encountered during their travels. They refer to the stiles found along stone walls in the English and Irish countryside that are designed as a practical solution to crossing through pastureland. The artists note that there is a certain amount of faith and imagination required to climb up something that you are not quite sure where it will lead. The artists were also inspired by the matching sets of stairs found in Shaker buildings that are made for men and women to enter the same space separately. The steps are a physical manifestation of the Shaker's belief in celibacy, equality and cohabitation. Their simple and symmetrical design reflects basic Shaker principles for guiding both sexes on life's path.

Behind *Mirror* is the entrance to the room where *Always New, Always Familiar* is installed. Stepping into the space, we are immersed in sounds and images of the ocean. The work consists of two videos. The large, projected image that fills the far

wall was filmed by Antoni from the front of a boat moving across the ocean. The image shows the path directly ahead of the boat, a seemingly endless seascape. It is an exhilarating and inspiring point of view embodying anticipation for the journey and unknown potentialities of what lies ahead.

Ramírez Jonas shot the second image simultaneously from the back of the boat. Playing on a monitor inset into the bottom of the larger image, this view is of the white-capped trail left in the boat's wake. Here, the immediate and quickly receding past evokes a sense of longing as the waves, like memories, eventually lose their shape and definition. The sounds coming from speakers positioned at the front and back of the room correspond to the images and the part of the boat where they were filmed so that the sound of the boat's engine is heard towards the back of the room and the rushing sound of wind and breaking waves is heard towards the front.

Always New, Always Familiar and *Mirror*, both make use of assumed opposites. In addition to depicting front and back, future and past, the formal combination of the two images in *Always New, Always Familiar* has an overall "push/pull" effect. By simultaneously depicting two-dimensional and three-dimensional space through the use of video and sound, *Always New, Always Familiar* distorts our perception and experience of the space. This simultaneous forwards and backwards motion is disorienting, causing our eyes to seek balance by alternating between the two images and points of view. We have an equal impulse to linger on the image of the boat's wake and look up at what is ahead. In experiencing the different points of view at the same time, we become like the artists who were filming from the same boat – positioned in the present, between the future and the past.

As in *Mirror*, there is a "point of crisis" in *Always New, Always Familiar* where the two opposite images meet and become one. The tension in this work also results from the combination of media. Because the light from the projected image has to travel across the length of the room, the image is not as sharp or bright as the image emitted from the monitor. The result, according to the artists, is a "compromise," with the impact of the larger image equalized by the intensity of the smaller image.

Both works address concepts inherent in installation art. Our relationship to these works is defined by the ways in which we choose to experience them. Each requires our participation in locating and defining our own physical and emotional relationships to each environment. There is also the element of time present in our interaction with each of the works of art: whether we climb up or walk past *Mirror* or contemplate *Always New, Always Familiar* for a few moments or watch the video for its entire cycle.

As meditations on the passage of time, conflict and compromise, the works serve as metaphors for the nature of relationships. Through their physical configurations and through the way we experience them, each poetically maps or diagrams aspects of a relationship, stressing separation as well as union. While it is not necessary to know the professional or personal biographical histories of the artists to experience *Always New, Always Familiar* and *Mirror*, this knowledge does add to our impulse to ascribe to these works our own lessons and experiences about life and love.

Lorie Mertes
Curator

"Love is not eternity; nor is it the time of calendars and watches, successive time. The time of love is neither great nor small; it is the perception of all times, of all lives, in a single instant. It does not free us from death but makes us see it face to face. That instant is the reverse and complement of the "oceanic feeling." It is not the return to the waters of origin but the attainment of a state that reconciles us to our having been driven out of paradise. We are the theater of the embrace of opposites and of their dissolution, resolved in a single note that is not affirmation or negation but acceptance. What does the couple see in the space of an instant, a blink of the eye? The equation of appearance and disappearance, the truth of the body and the nonbody, the vision of the presence that dissolves..."

– Octavio Paz
from *The Double Flame*

BIOGRAPHIES

Janine Antoni

Janine Antoni was born in Freeport, Bahamas in 1964. She received her BA from Sarah Lawrence College in New York, and earned her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1989. Antoni has had major exhibitions of her work at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York; S.I.T.E. Santa Fe, New Mexico; and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. The recipient of several prestigious awards including a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship in 1998 and the Larry Aldrich Foundation Award in 1999, Janine Antoni currently resides in New York.

Antoni is known for works that blur the distinction between performance art and sculpture. Transforming such everyday activities as eating, bathing, and sleeping into ways of making art, Antoni uses her own body as the primary tool for making sculpture. She has chiseled cubes of lard and chocolate with her teeth, washed away the faces of soap busts made in her own likeness, and wove a blanket during the day using the pattern made by her rapid eye movement recorded each night while she slept. For her most recent work she created a sculpture that she balanced on and fell into.

Paul Ramírez Jonas

Paul Ramirez Jonas was born in 1965 and raised in Honduras. He received his BA from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and earned an MFA in Painting from Rhode Island School of Design in 1989. Ramirez Jonas work has been exhibited nationally and internationally with solo exhibitions at: LFL Gallery, New York; Postmasters Gallery, New York; White Cube, London; White Columns, New York; and Artists Space, New York. Group exhibitions include: *Pictures, Patents, Monkeys and More...On Collecting at the ICA*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia in 2002; *Every Day*, Public Art Fund, New York; *Special Projects*, PS 1, Long Island City; *Work in Progress* at the New Museum, New York, in 2001; *Speed* at the Whitechapel, London in 1998; and *Projects* at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland in 1997. His work will be the subject of a survey exhibition at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, United Kingdom in 2004. Ramirez Jonas lives in New York.

Ramirez Jonas' work in various media dwells on the inevitability of time and its consequences: memory, attention, and expectation. In works that combine scientific inquiry and the inevitability of futility, the artist has done everything from recording his climbs to the highest points of each state in the country and remaking Thomas Edison's first recording machine to making an attempt at stopping time by waking up at dawn and chasing after the sun by driving as far west as possible before it sets – all the while questioning whether progress resides in the future, and history in the past.

Miami Art Museum



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www.miamiartmuseum.org

CHECKLIST

Always New, Always Familiar 2000

Video projection, single channel video and monitor
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artists

Mirror 2003

Twenty-six wood timbers of various sizes, metal frame, felt
94 x 72 x 82 inches
Courtesy the artists

Janine Antoni and Paul Ramirez Jonas is organized by Miami Art Museum as part of its *New Work* series of projects by contemporary artists. Curated by Lorie Mertes, MAM Curator.