

PATRON

ART / CULTURE / DESIGN

PIERRE HUYGHE
2017 NASHER PRIZE LAUREATE



Nearly Nine
Dallas Art Fair Preview

TACA Silver Cup Honorees
Walter Elcock & Nancy Nasher



BY AURIEL GARZA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAN COULTER

A NEW LEASE ON SCULPTURE

Varied disciplines, materials, and time-based elements instill
Nasher Prize Laureate Pierre Huyghe's practice.



When the Nasher Sculpture Center set out to award an international sculpture prize to the most groundbreaking artists advancing the medium today, they certainly meant business. The selection of Pierre Huyghe as the second recipient of the Nasher Prize proposes the discussion and celebration of an artist whose broad practice incorporates everything from film, musical opera, gardening, animation, weather machines, holiday celebrations, arctic expeditions, puppet shows, fish tanks, and so much more.

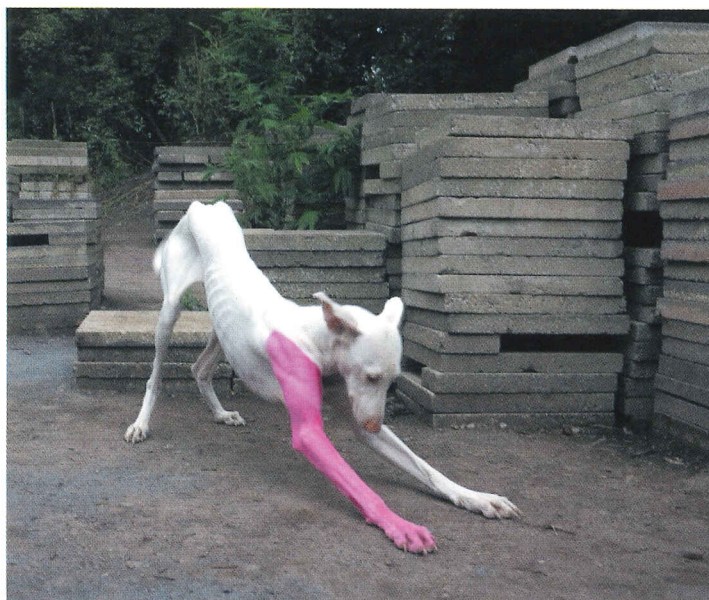
A student of the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris from 1982 to 1985, Huyghe became associated with a group of artists in the 1990s, including Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno, and Carsten Höller, whose works involved participation, social interaction, and a surprising degree of chance. It was then that notorious art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud first coined the term “relational aesthetics” to describe these unusual practices.

Much like his contemporaries, Pierre Huyghe isn't interested in

creating discrete objects fixed in stone, marble, or paint on canvas. Instead he often presents his audience with living systems of entities (animal, mineral, and/or vegetable) that the viewer encounters in flux rather than passively observes. This is why Director, Jeremy Strick, and his colleagues at the Nasher are presently concerned with how to grow moss on a cement sculpture of a reclining nude. They're also rehashing how to best maintain the lives of sea creatures that will once again occupy a large aquarium by Pierre Huyghe when it is re-exhibited at the Nasher, potentially as soon as February 1st.

Pierre Huyghe was first named the winner of the Nasher Prize in September of last year, but the award will officially be conferred to the artist at a formal gala event on Saturday, April 1st. Leading up to that presentation, the Nasher will be organizing a month-long celebration of the prize that includes a graduate symposium led by keynote speaker and aforementioned critic, Bourriaud, a conversation with select members of the Nasher Prize jury, and a public conversation with Huyghe himself.

Pierre Huyghe on the streets of Brooklyn near his studio. Photograph by Nan Coulter. Opposite: Pierre Huyghe, *La déraison* (detail), 2014, concrete, marble, heating system, water, and plants. Courtesy of The Rachofsky Collection. Photograph by Nan Coulter



Clockwise from upper left: Studio detail, photograph by Nan Coulter; Pierre Huyghe sits at desk in his Brooklyn studio with Jeremy Strick, the Director of the Nasher Sculpture Center. Photographed on December 1, 2016, by Nan Coulter; Pierre Huyghe, *Untilled*, 2011–12, living entities and inanimate things, made or not made. Courtesy of the Nasher Sculpture Center.



Pending complications with the moss and a few capricious hermit crabs, the stone sculpture and the aquarium will be two of three works by Pierre Huyghe going on view in the coming weeks. The aquarium, which was first shown at the Nasher as part of *Chalet Dallas*, the experimental social space organized by artist Piero Golia in 2015, perfectly demonstrates Huyghe's practice of presenting living systems as works of art. Within the tank, the artist has put forth a set of conditions and material circumstances that he then sets in motion without knowing entirely what may or may not transpire as a result.

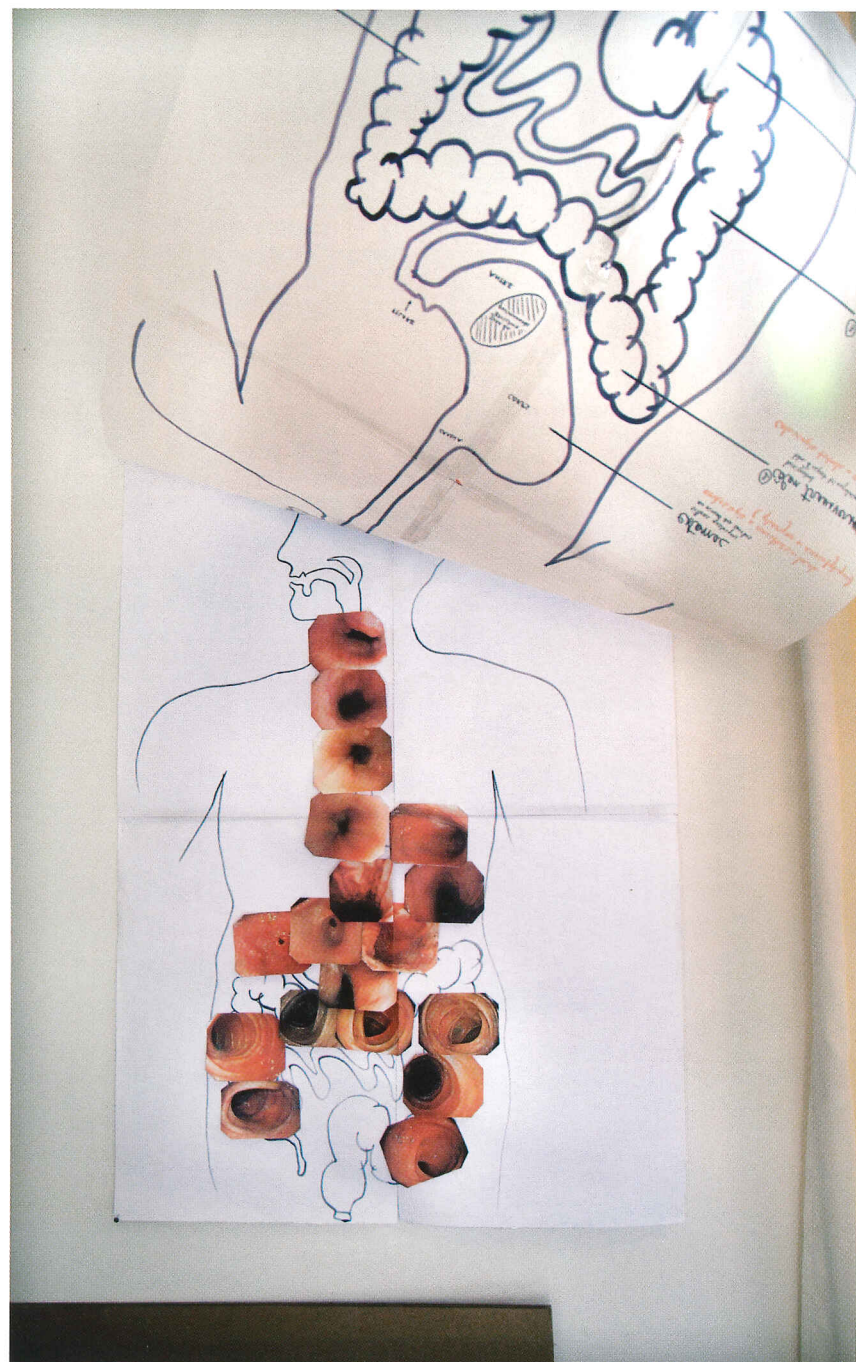
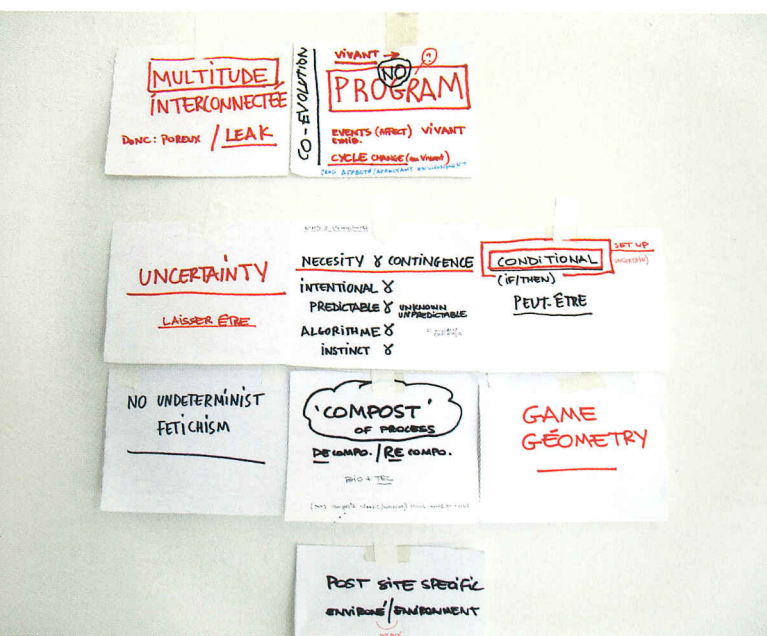
Often filled with rare and beautiful flora and fauna as well as large but surprisingly buoyant volcanic rocks, each of Huyghe's aquariums is a miniature theater unto itself, in which living performers play out unscripted events in real time. Gaze long enough at one of these alien seascapes and one might witness complex situations that are surprisingly relatable to human life. As the creatures struggle to coexist in Huyghe's manufactured environment, the fish tanks shift and evolve without the artist's direct intervention, and these aquatic dramas continue to unfold long after the spectator departs from the

gallery as well.

In their efforts to bring Huyghe's work in concert with museum visitors, the Nasher joins a small contingent of ambitious and frankly brave and industrious museums that include the Centre de Pompidou in Paris, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, all of whom contended with the artist's traveling retrospective in 2013–2015. In addition to minding Huyghe's aquariums, organizers at these institutions had to figure out how to systematically produce snow, rain, and fog in one gallery; how to lure living ants from a hole in the wall of another; and how to allow a white Ibizan hound with a pink-painted leg named Human to freely roam the exhibition.

Human was the same dog who for 100 days occupied the site of Huyghe's breakthrough work, *Untilled*, 2011–2012. Part of dOCUMENTA (13) and installed in the compost heap of the manicured grounds of a Baroque park in Kassel, this expansive work included objects Huyghe found at the site as well as those brought in by the artist. In addition to Human, the work incorporated large cement blocks, an uprooted oak tree once planted by German artist

From left to right: Project ideas at Pierre Huyghe's studio in Brooklyn, December 1, 2016. Photographs by Nan Coulter. Below: Pierre Huyghe, *L'Expédition Scintillante*, Acte 1, 2002; Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled* (Weather Score), snow, rain, fog, programmed precipitation; Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled* (Ice Boat), ice. Photograph: Kub, Marcus Tretter



Opposite, top: Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled* (*Liegender Frauenakt*), 2012, concrete cast with beehive structure, wax.



Joseph Beuys, a bench by the French artist Dominique Gonzalez Foerster, aphrodisiac and psychotropic plants, and a beehive-headed Modigliani reclining nude sculpture teeming with live bees.

The third work by Pierre Huyghe going on view at the Nasher will be a film the artist made from footage shot at the site. Much like Huyghe's aquariums, the verdant art garden was very much alive and host to encounters and events that occurred with or without spectators present. Huyghe wasn't interested in how the objects existed individually but how they interacted and converged operationally in terms of organic processes and chemical reactions. The site was host to consumption, intoxication, and fertilization, and as is fitting of compost, dead materials metabolized and allowed new and exciting forms to emerge, forms that in this case should be called art.

Though the material manifestations of Huyghe's art are in fact remarkably accessible, e.g., insects, cartoons, figure skaters, fish tanks, etc., the appearance of these elements in an art museum leaves many visitors scratching their heads. But if we immediately move past the question of "Is it art?" and take the time to truly experience the work and consider how these objects, situations, and

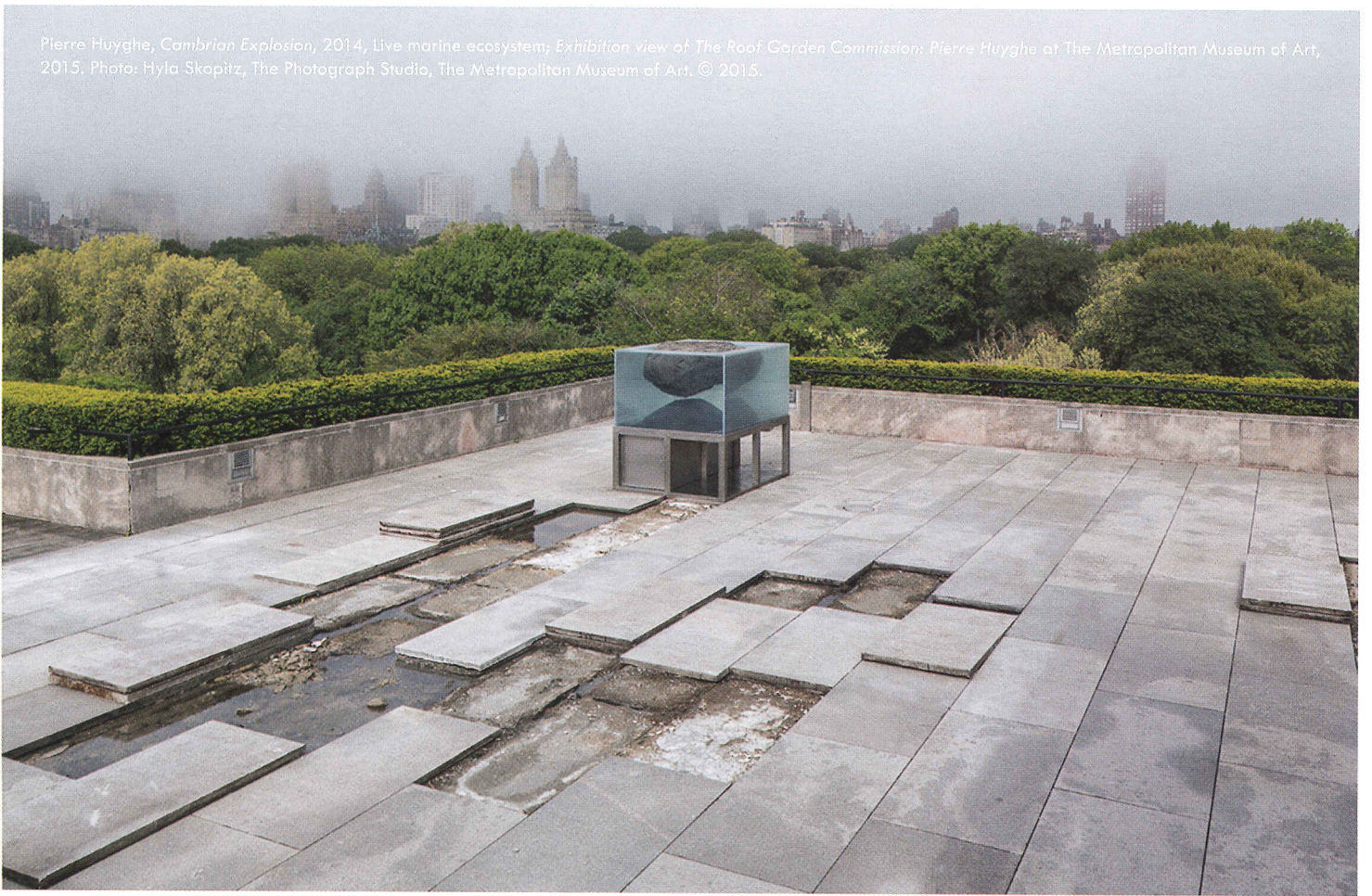
environments make us feel and why, the result may be immensely rewarding.

Nasher Director, Jeremy Strick, argues that "the experience for those who are uninitiated or for anyone is actually quite strong and profound because these are very often quite sensual experiences. They're works that visually and experientially reveal themselves very quickly, and they're unusual and fascinating. I think that anyone who encounters the work will find it that way. When you become involved in explaining it, then it becomes more complicated."

It's true, the work of Pierre Huyghe has been at the heart of serious intellectual discussion for some time now, and it's the sort of discussion that may tire even the most credentialed participant. The more you read about Huyghe's work, the more complicated it becomes, and the more he creates, the less likely we are to ever summarily define the meaning of his remarkably eclectic and ever-shifting body of work, but maybe that's the point.

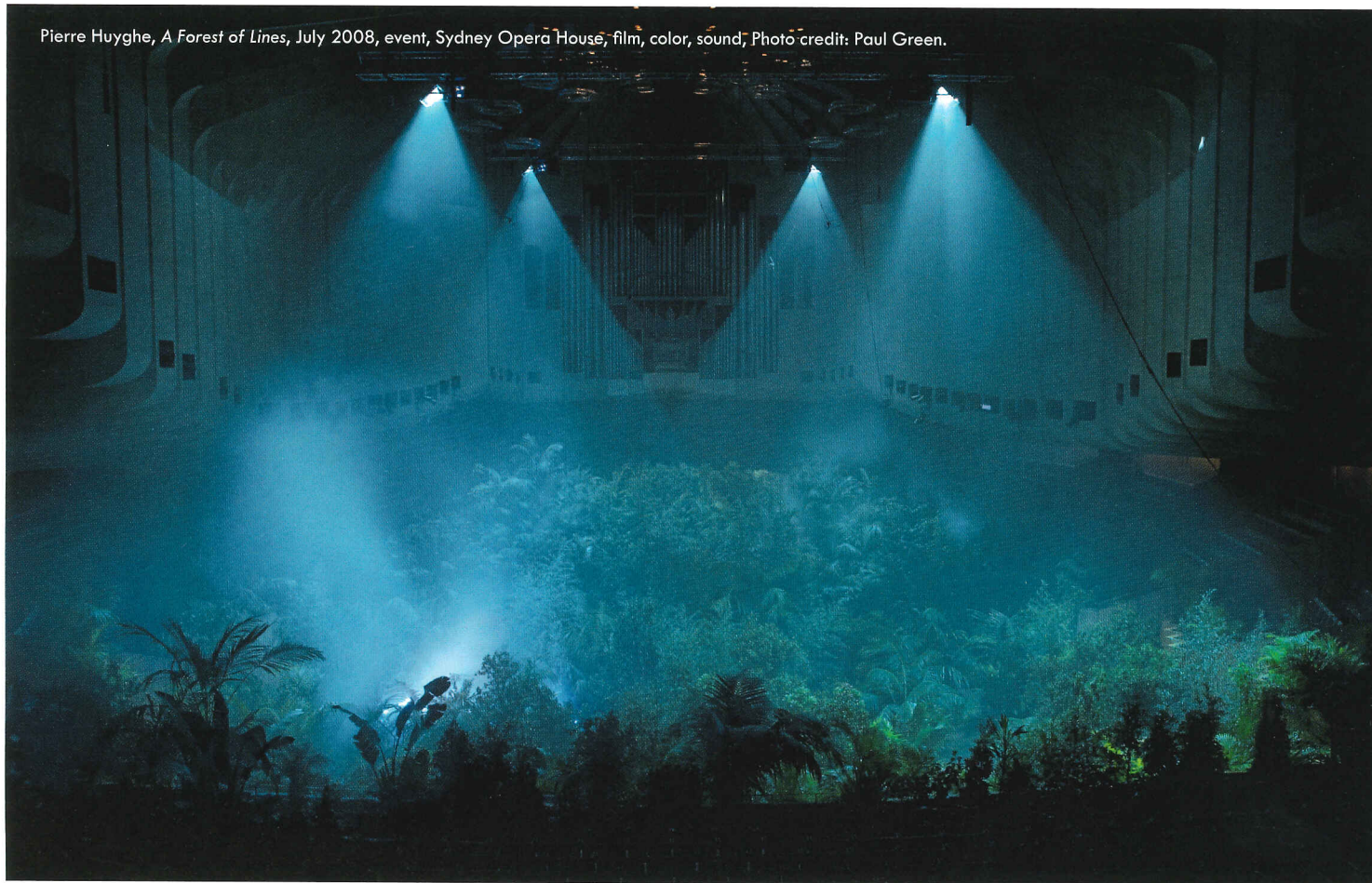
When asked to consider Pierre's vitality within the contemporary zeitgeist, Lynne Cooke, Senior Curator at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, commented, "I think Pierre's interest in broad questions that are posed in ways that speak in very contemporary

Pierre Huyghe, *Cambrian Explosion*, 2014, Live marine ecosystem; Exhibition view of *The Roof Garden Commission: Pierre Huyghe* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015. Photo: Hyla Skopitz, The Photograph Studio, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. © 2015.



Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day*, 2003, event, celebration, October 11, 2003, Streamside Knolls, NY, USA. Super 16mm film transferred to digital Betacam, color, sound

Pierre Huyghe, *A Forest of Lines*, July 2008, event, Sydney Opera House, film, color, sound, Photo credit: Paul Green.



languages, film being one, is very relevant to that concern. His resistance to over-theorization and fixed readings is also important. He wants the work to be porous, to be open to a variety of readings, to the idea that there isn't one answer or a better interpretation. I think he has a great trust in audiences, that people will find their way."

A recent film by Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled (Human Mask)*, 2014, features a monkey wearing a human mask wandering a vacant restaurant. Huyghe discovered the monkey on YouTube working part-time as a masked female waiter in the same restaurant outside Fukushima, Japan. In Huyghe's film, the customers have gone home, and the masked animal appears almost somber and remarkably humanlike as it aimlessly explores the empty space.

In regards to the film, Cooke says, "It's a very haunting and remarkable piece. You can see audiences from teenagers to adults from many different cultures immediately having a rapport with that. It's compelling, destabilizing, and uncanny, asking, if you want

it to follow one line of thought, to think about Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and how humans are part of an evolutionary chain... that's something we may know, but we don't always find so easy to grasp or even accept. It asks the question without being didactic or polemical... However you choose to address it, it's very engaging."

Though Huyghe's penchant for the enigmatic seems now and again very much intentional, what if it is the lack of singular interpretations that opens his work up to any number of meanings? What if perhaps his work is so unstable and so remarkably diverse and dependent upon the very sensual experience of each viewer/witness/participant, that it matters less and less what's written or said about it?

The work of Pierre Huyghe draws us into the present moment, into a heightened consciousness where we must contend with the passing of time and our relationship to nature, media, and society at large. It not only tests our understanding of the possibilities of sculpture, but also the possibilities of art more generally. **P**



Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled (Human Mask)*, 2014, film, color, sound.