THE NARCISSISM OF MINOR DIFFERENCES, DEC. 9–MARCH 13
A Certain Angle, Edited Excerpts From Co-Curator Christopher Whitney’s Catalog Essay

“The questions that preoccupy me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What makes for a grievable life?”
—Judith Butler
Precarious Life

“The one as the other. At one and the same time, but in the same time that is out of joint. The one forgets to remember itself to its self. It keeps and erases the archive of this injustice that it is, of this violence that it does. The one makes itself violence, it violates and does violence to itself. It becomes what it is, the very violence that it does to itself. The determination of the self as one is violence.”
—Jacques Derrida
Archive Fever

“What a useless son you’ve got, Amma; can’t you see there’s a hole in the middle of me the size of a melon?”
—Salman Rushdie
Midnight’s Children

I imagine visitors to the galleries at the exhibition under consideration here, and I envision the self-identity that will be reinforced, for them, in those spaces. I imagine them wandering through the exhibition and viewing access holes, one might say, cut from an entirely different order of fabric. Spaces of hatred and loathing, vile sites of intolerance. Oneness as violence.

And space will fill a void. It always has.

My fear is that the exhibition will have been a profoundly successful failure, something along the lines of a Philip Guston work. For what does work of this kind and exhibitions of this ilk accomplish other than to reinforce the liberal-democratic, autonomous self?

Imagine a viewer making his or her way through these exhibition spaces, here confronted by a racist sentiment, there face-to-face with a homophobic one. The viewer refuses: I am not those. And as the voyage through the space continues, she or he confronts more, always more, as the systems of triangulated location bend and assume new configurations. Yet, (unless the spaces are visited by the truly hateful), none will identify with these manifestations of intolerance or will only do so in the negative. Again: I am not these. The end result of this denial is a consequent acceptance and valorization of the self as currently lived. While outside, the State of Exception persists and the cities continue, elsewhere (literally) and here (figuratively), to burn.

For more information about The Narcissism of Minor Differences, contact MICA’s Office of Communications at 410.225.2300.

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