

The background of the cover is a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping circles and splatters in various colors including red, blue, green, yellow, and black. The circles vary in size and some have a textured, almost marbled appearance. The overall effect is a dynamic and colorful collage.

# THE BERLIN JOURNAL

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CELEBRATING 25 YEARS  
OF FELLOWSHIPS

**NOTES ON THE VIRGINIA CAPITOL**  
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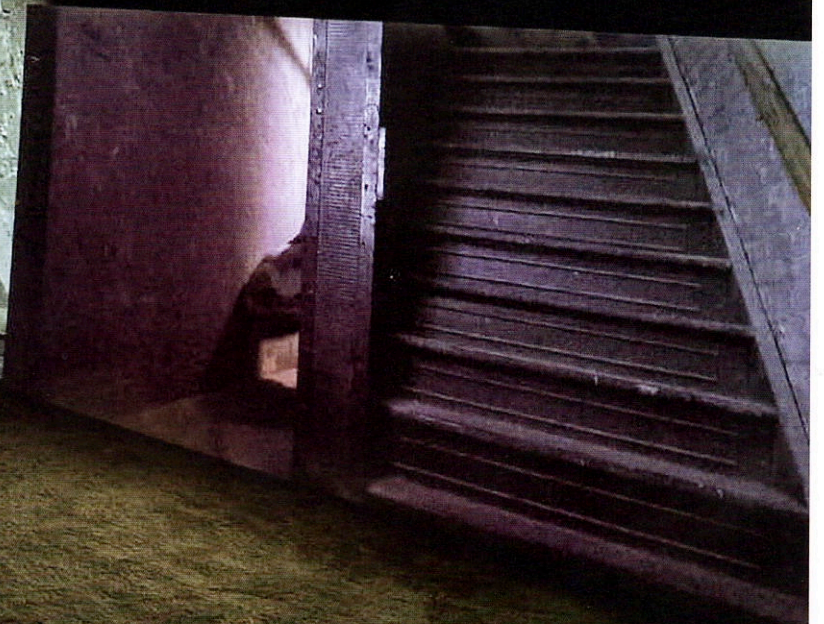
**COLD PEACE**  
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**FICTION**  
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**WHO "WE" ARE**  
an interview with  
Anne-Marie Slaughter





# A.K. Burns

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Artist Portfolio

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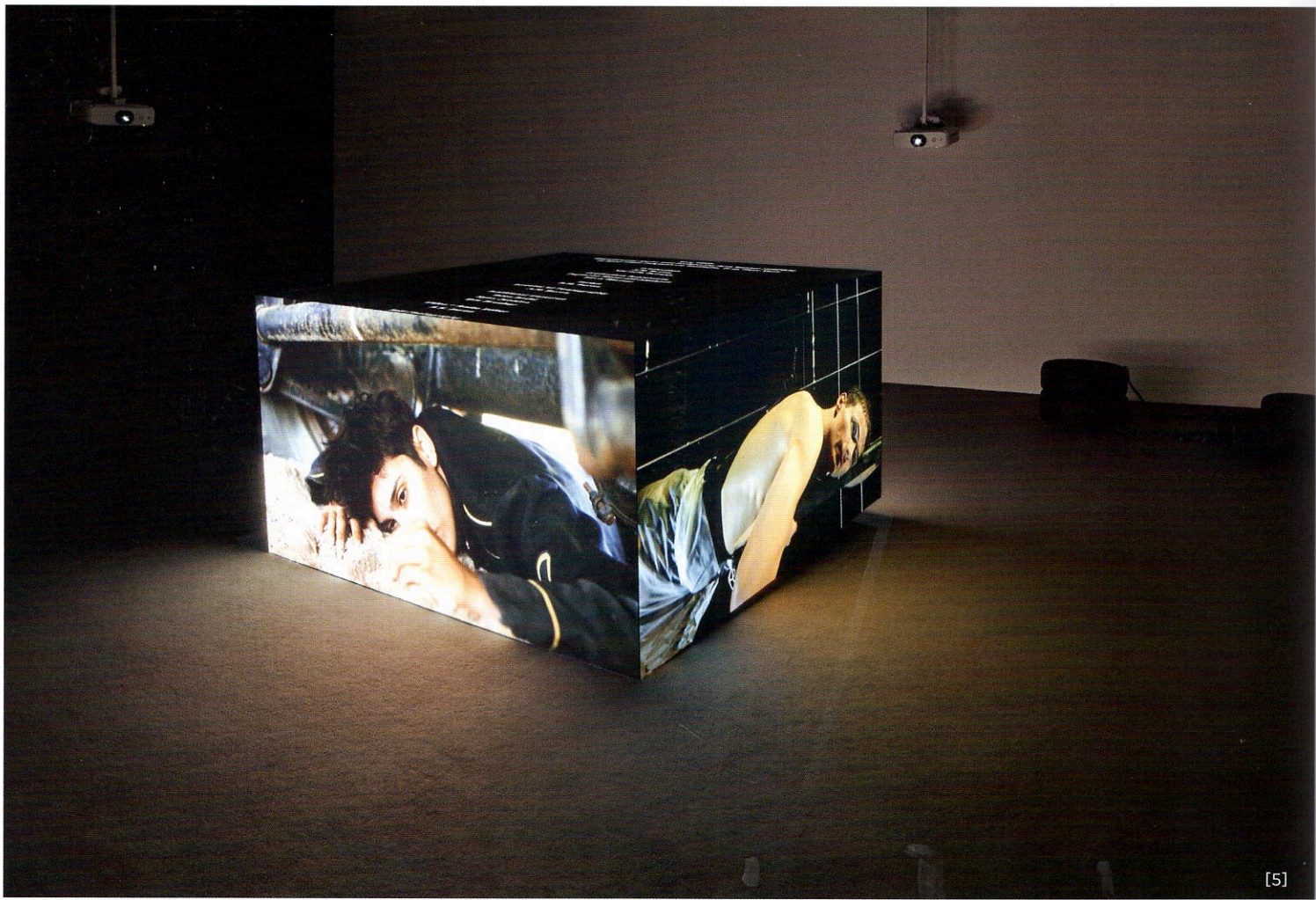
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# On A.K. Burns

by Dean Daderko

**UNBOUND BY CONVENTIONS**, marginal positions invite invention and exploration. Operating at the edges of culture, and in its cracks, marginal activities can develop independently, eluding surveillance and policing. As bell hooks has written of marginality, it is "much more than a site of deprivation, . . . it is the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance."

It should come as no surprise that A.K. Burns chooses to operate in such cultural margins—metaphorically, materially, politically—and that her art and work are situated in these spaces of potential. If one traditionally thinks of a sculptor as creatively engaged with materials—carving stone, casting bronze, building—Burns's work sidesteps such simplified expectations. She's materially and conceptually drawn to porosity and mutability, picking at the medium's edges. In her studio, and working with craftspersons, she has welded functional gates, cast cement and resin into bodily forms, powder-coated fences, and poured slabs of molten glass. Her gates keep no one in or out; viewers can circulate freely around or through them. Her fence posts bend like pipe cleaners, with chain-link that undulates through space. These barriers suggest aftermaths in which publics could not be contained.

After molten glass has been hand-ladled into rough rectangles, remnants are affixed: a coil of frayed electrical wire, copper mesh, a rock, handfuls of sand. Some additions remain visible, sinking into the glass, but we're left to imagine others, like when a checklist offers up a "dematerialized leather work glove" that presumably disintegrated in extreme heat. Hung on walls for viewing, these works resemble paintings and bas reliefs. Burns selectively coats the glass with silver nitrate, turning these vitreous slabs into rough mirrors. If we can't see ourselves in them, it's because they're not about us. The embedded materials and burn-outs, in Burns's words, "disturb the ability of the mirror to reflect the outside world. Instead they reflect an interior cosmos." What we

encounter are moments of entropy and process. Objects change; objects changing us.

As her sculptures challenge the notion of objects as immutable, Burns's video works also play with and against the medium's regulated codes. In *A Smeary Spot* (2015), one of four video channels continuously loops credits on a boxy monitor. Such a simple move subverts the expectation that there's a beginning or end to the actions projected onto accompanying screens. Wheeled office-chairs allow viewers to be mobile. Characters in the video appear unmoored; some wander through punishing deserts under a blaring sun, dancing in dystopia, and others occupy the no-space/anyplace of the black-box theater. Time is manifold, simultaneously real and proposed, staged and actual. Trash-picking at society's decaying edges, these figures eke out relief and pleasure from its discards; they make life from scraps, they make it matter, and they do it better.

Burns's two-channel installation *Living Room* (2017) implies a psycho-geographic leakiness. Entering an unfinished room, we encounter images projected onto a sheet of drywall propped against bare studs. We watch while sitting on the wooden skeleton of a couch that's been played on and dissembled by youths in the video. Vignettes unfold in a bathroom, a seemingly endless stairwell, and a dank basement. If this house is a body, humans are its antibodies. Burns's cast of characters impresses the precarity of our existence upon us. *Living Room* is by turns humorous, profound, absurd and deeply disconcerting. Burns builds a space where the thinness of the walls that separate fiction and reality dissolve, revealing the flimsy fiction of our creature comforts. □

#### [OPENING SPREAD]

Installation view of *Living Room (NS 00)*, 2017, exhibited at Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio. Two-channel HD video, color, and sound; 36 mins. Dimensions variable. Photo: Stephen Takacs

#### [PREVIOUS SPREAD]

[1] *The Leak*, 2022. Replica of Chelsea Manning's military jacket, concrete, garment bag, and metal hanger. 157.5 × 60.9 × 45.8 cm

[2] *Query*, 2021. Glass, silver nitrate, sand, carbon, and dematerialized rope. 40 × 50.17 × 5.08 cm

[3] *Sad Eyes*, 2021. Glass, silver nitrate, copper mesh, sand, carbon, and dematerialized bark. 40 × 50.17 × 3.18 cm

[4] Video still from *A Smeary Spot (NS 0)*, 2015, exhibited at Participant Inc., New York, New York. Four-channel video installation. Projected videos 1–3: HD with color and six-channel sound; 53 mins. Box monitor video 4: SD black and white, silent; 4 mins. Dimensions variable.

#### [OPPOSITE]

[5] *Leave No Trace (NS 000)*, 2019, exhibited at Julia Stoschek Foundation, Düsseldorf. Five-channel HD video, color, and sound; 28 mins. Projection cube, faux skull, used tires, and ratchet straps. Dimensions variable. Photo: Alwin Lay

[6] Production still from *Living Room (NS 00)*, 2017. Exhibited at Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio. Two-channel HD video, color, and sound; 36 mins. Dimensions variable. Photo: Eden Batki