



2017 MFA Qualifying Exhibition  
SPECIAL EDITION

# Shelby David Meier

April 1 – April 15, 2017  
Opening reception April 1, 5PM to 7PM

Pollock Gallery, SMU Meadows

# Shelby David Meier

*There's no way to describe what I do.  
It's just me.*

—Andy Kaufman

Slipping between painting, drawing, sculpture, performance, and the digital realm, Shelby David Meier's work casually avoids categorization. He finds ways to work between media-specific boundaries, constantly searching for the best means of illustrating complex ideas in simplified, or, as the artist says, "dumbed down" ways. It might be more useful to think of Meier's work as a series of demonstrations or experiments\* of scientific theories or philosophies than to attempt to describe Meier simply as a "sculptor" or even simply "conceptual" artist (although he is either/neither/both). Take for example a box of hundreds of polyhedral dice, which Meier collects. Typically found in role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons, these dice each have up to 20 sides. Multiplied, they represent infinity. In *What Are the Chances*, Meier scatters hundreds of dice across the floor of a space (or throughout multiple spaces) to illustrate not just the concept of infinity, but also the probability of a specific number being rolled. Viewer interaction provides an added element of chance. As people move through the dice-strewn space(s), they inevitably kick the dice, whose numbers change. The work is constantly in flux. As Meier describes, just as we move through space as matter, we likewise affect the matter through which we move. In other words, Meier's *What Are the Chances* demonstrates the concept of



**Theseus**  
Wood, paint, screws, roomba  
120 x 240 x 4 in

interconnectedness: the idea that everything is connected in some fundamental way.

This is not to imply that Meier's work is overtly serious. In fact, Meier has a sense of humor that derives from his focus on the absurd and his ability to render meaning in simple and familiar expressions. His 2016 video *In ... And out ... (video meditation)* plays on both notions of irony and commonplace. Taking as its subject an In-N-Out cheeseburger—symbolic of the U.S.'s obsession with fast food—Meier's video satirizes advertising, cultural consumption, and the therapeutic. With its elongated notes and atmospheric tones, the soundtrack evokes the type of music heard at meditation workshops; in fact it is a 1987 In-N-Out commercial slowed down to 50 times its normal speed. When paired with the image of the spinning cheeseburger—a common trope in fast food commercials—Meier's video suggests a link between commercial advertising and mindfulness meditation videos that promise to cure anxiety, depression, or stress.

The title refers to meditative breathing techniques, while the use of an In-N-Out cheeseburger (instead of, for example, the arguably more iconic McDonald's cheeseburger), jabs at Southern California culture: the prevalence of yoga retreats, meditation centers, and the commercialization of ashrams promoted by Hollywood celebrities.

Meier's series of recent works involving bread he baked himself demonstrate his clever economy of means. Using his bread as a painting substrate, or as building blocks for sculptural cairns, the series began with Meier's contemplation on consumption and impermanence: "I can't eat a painting, but I can eat bread and then I can make it into a painting." Over time, the bread will decay, break down, and deteriorate—a demonstration of entropy.



**Working the Room**  
Digital video  
7 min 1 sec

Meier's influences range from comedians like Andy Kaufman, to artists (Ryan Gander, Andy Warhol, Donald Judd), to writers (Chuck Klosterman), poets (John Giorno), and metaphysicists (Timothy Morton). Listening to Meier speak about his work is a lesson in popular culture as well as metaphysics. He has an ability to combine high and low concepts into his work, communicating a complexity beyond that of a one-off joke. A common theme that pervades all of Meier's work is its intersection with everyday life through the use of common or mundane materials (such as dice, a cheeseburger, or baked bread). As Meier says, he is interested in that gray area where the art stops ... or doesn't. But he is also careful to maintain boundaries that separate art and life, instead operating—as Robert Rauschenberg famously described—in the "gap" between the two.

\*The Oxford English Dictionary's second definition for "experiment" seems an apt description of Meier's practice: "a course of action tentatively adopted without being sure of the eventual outcome."

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