

**Jonathon Keats: Untitled
Collection CAE2408**

Introduction/Abstract

The archive “Jonathon Keats: Untitled” contains general artist information, writings including published materials, drafts, and unfinished manuscripts, as well as ephemera related to Keats’ conceptual art projects.

Biographical Note: Jonathon Keats

Jonathon Keats is an American award-winning writer, conceptual artist, and experimental philosopher known for his large-scale thought experiments. He was born in New York City and studied philosophy at Amherst College. Keats is a research associate at the University of Arizona’s College of Fine Arts, a fellow at the Berggruen Institute, a research fellow at the Highland Institute and the Long Now Foundation, principal philosopher at Earth Law Center, and an artist-in-residence at the SETI Institute and Biosphere 2.

Keats is also an art critic for San Francisco magazine, and writes about art for Art in America, Art + Auction, ArtNews, and Artweek. He is the Jargon Watch columnist for Wired Magazine, and author of a book of essays, *Virtual Words: Language on the Edge of Science and Technology*, which Oxford University Press published in October 2010. Keats is a fiction writer as well, the author of two novels, *The Pathology of Lies*, published in English by Warner Books, and *Lighter Than Vanity*, published exclusively in Russian by Eksmo. *The Book of the Unknown*, a collection of fables loosely based on Talmudic legend, was published by Random House in February 2009. His most recent nonfiction books are *Forged: Why Fakes are the Great Art of our Age* (2013) and *You Belong to the Universe: Buckminster Fuller and the Future* (2016).

His conceptual art has been exhibited at museums and galleries worldwide and is the subject of “Thought Experiments”, a monograph published by Hirmer Verlag. He now lives in San Francisco.

Scope and Content

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Keats made his artistic debut in 2000 at Refusalon in San Francisco, where he sat in a chair and thought for 24 hours, with a female model posing nude in the gallery. His thoughts were sold to patrons as art, at a price determined by dividing their annual income down to the minute. Other examples of conceptual art projects included in the archive are listed below chronologically.

Keats copyrighted his mind in 2003, claiming that it was a sculpture that he'd created, neural network by neural network, through the act of thinking. In 2004 he attempted to genetically engineer God in a UC Berkeley laboratory in order to determine where to place God on the phylogenetic tree. In 2005 he customized the metric system for patrons, including Craigslist founder Craig Newmark and Pop artist Ed Ruscha. He did so by recalibrating time to each person's heartbeat, and mathematically deriving a new length for the meter, liter, kilogram, and calorie. He became interested in extraterrestrial abstract art, and made paintings based on signals detected by the Arecibo Observatory radio telescope in Puerto Rico, the basis of the First Intergalactic Art Exposition, a 2006 solo show at the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley, California.

In 2006 he gave fifty Leyland cypress trees the opportunity to make art by providing them with easels. He also choreographed a ballet for honeybees by selectively planting flowers on the Chico State University farm. Keats

also made himself the subject of a lifelong thought experiment, undertaken through the act of living. To make the experiment scientifically rigorous, he established a scientific control in the form of a high-density carbon graphite block precisely calibrated to match the carbon weight of his own body. The block was placed on display under a bell jar at the Exploratorium in San Francisco and at Modernism Gallery in San Francisco, he applied string theory to real estate development, enlisting the legal framework of air rights to buy and sell properties in the extra dimensions of space theorized by physics.

In 2007, Keats created a mobile ring tone based on the John Cage composition 4'33", a remix comprising precisely four minutes and 33 seconds of digital silence. Titled "My Cage (Silence for Cellphone)", the ringtone has since been broadcast on public radio in both the United States and Sweden, discussed in a monograph about Cage published by Yale University Press, and included in a museum exhibition on Cage at HMKV in Dortmund, Germany. In Chico, California, Keats opened the world's first porn theater for house plants, projecting video footage of pollination onto the foliage of ninety rhododendrons.

Keats brought his honeybee ballet to San Francisco in 2008 as part of Bay Area Now, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts triennial. He also erected the first temple devoted to the worship of science, dubbed "the Atheon", in downtown Berkeley, CA, a public art project commissioned by the Judah L. Magnes Museum and funded with a grant from the University of California. In the midst of the Atheon debate, Keats announced that he had discovered a way to play God, using quantum mechanics to generate new universes using equipment uranium-doped glass and scintillating crystal, all acquired on eBay. Keats manufactured a D.I.Y. kit that purported to let anyone create new universes with a mason jar, a drinking straw, and a piece of chewing gum. He also submitted plans to the United States Department of Energy, for a factory that would generate new universes from the nuclear waste slated to be buried in the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository.

In early 2009, Keats created "The Longest Story Ever Told," a 9-word story printed on the cover of the eighth issue of Opium Magazine, "The Infinity Issue." The story was printed in a double layer of black ink, with the second layer screened to make each successive word fractionally less vulnerable to ultraviolet radiation. When exposed to sunlight, words will appear at a rate of one per century over the next one thousand years. In 2010 he created a pinhole camera intended to take a single 100-year-long exposure. Printed in Good Magazine, the box camera was designed to be cut out, folded, and glued together, and then left to take a picture. Keats launched an alternative space agency, the Local Air and Space Administration (LASA), in October. Headquartered at California State University, Chico, the organization claimed to be taking on the exploratory role abandoned by NASA, and announced simultaneous missions to the Moon and Mars. Rather than building rockets, LASA amassed lunar and Martian terrain locally in California, by pulverizing meteorites.

In 2011 Keats opened a "photosynthetic restaurant" where plants could enjoy "gourmet sunlight". Recipes were prepared by filtering solar radiation through colored plexiglass. The restaurant was installed in the outdoor gardens of the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, California, where 100-year-old rose bushes were the first patrons. Keats catered to plants elsewhere in the world by publishing a recipe book.

This archive is currently in process.