

**Everything**

**Is**

**One**



*Everything Is One*, 2014-2015. LP record, field recordings of chants from Tibet and New York, 19:46 min. [side A] and 17:58 min. [side B]

Recordings in Tibet were made at the Samye Monastery, the Chimpu Hermitage Caves and the Potala Kora, on July 24, 25 and 29, 2014. Recordings in New York were made during a solidarity protest in Union Square on April 29, 2015.

*Saskia Janssen: Everything Is One*

July 8 - October 2, 2015

## Foreword

*Everything Is One*, the solo exhibition of Saskia Janssen's recent work, takes place in the midst of her one-year residency at ISCP—a perfect point after she has acclimated to New York City, and before she is setting her sights elsewhere. For this presentation, curated by ISCP's Director of Programs and Exhibitions, Kari Conte, working with Shinnie Kim, Programs Manager, the artist has drawn together her experiences from Tibet to Union Square, creating a generous, open, and inspiring body of work. Furthermore, she and Ishu Han, also a current artist in residence, are collaborating for this presentation on a sort of homage to Joseph Beuys' *I Like America and America Likes Me*. They will don coyote costumes and have themselves photographed at the storefront site of the old René Block Gallery in Soho, where Beuys performed as a kind of shaman for three days in 1974, sharing the space with a live coyote. *Two coyotes at 409 West Broadway* will be a fitting and droll tribute to our cultural environment, creative lineages, and the untamable natures of both artists and this wild city.

Janssen's residency is made possible by the dedicated support of the Mondriaan Fund, a partner sponsor since 2012, preceded by the Fonds BKVB that sent over twenty artists as residents from the Netherlands, starting in 1999. The exhibition is further supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Greenwich Collection, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, which has allowed new art commissions as well as exhibition production and this publication. The transcultural exchange that results from these residencies and exhibitions greatly benefit us all, enriching the arts community, and expanding New York City's exposure to practices originating elsewhere.

Susan Haggood  
Executive Director

# Everything Is One

Kari Conte

By now, it is well known that D.T. Suzuki's lectures at Columbia University in the 1950s influenced numerous artists and writers of the time. A Japanese Zen scholar, Suzuki introduced Buddhist thinking into Western art, impacting seminal figures such as John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Allen Ginsburg, and Thomas Merton.

In the ensuing years, many artists—both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike—have integrated into their work the religion's emphasis on personal contemplation and being fully present, awake and open to looking and thinking deeply. The relationship between Buddhist practice and art making is the kernel of the exhibition *Saskia Janssen: Everything Is One*. While the exhibition does not outwardly espouse religious or philosophical tenets and iconography, Janssen's process and intent illuminate the world with a distinct Buddhist outlook: one of engaged action where everything and everyone are interrelated and interdependent.

The individual elements in the exhibition comprise a *gesamtkunstwerk* in which art and life coalesce. The exhibition begins with a series of encounters Janssen had over the past year, first with monks, nuns and pilgrims in Tibet and then with protestors and passersby in New York City. During a visit to Tibet in 2014, she was struck by mantras chanted everywhere: in the streets, temples, caves, and markets. Most of these chants endeavored for a better world for everyone and the attainment of peace, happiness, compassion, and triumph over obstacles. Janssen heard these visceral and atmospheric mantras, chanted for different purposes—to fulfill the wishes of all beings, to purify body, speech and mind, or to protect travelers from daily risks and dangers. A chant encourages the group to listen to each other in order to pitch their tones in unison. Mantras wish for the good of all living beings, and help individuals get over their egos and feelings of separateness. In this regard, the togetherness and solidarity that are kindled by chanting a mantra are as important as what is being said.



Janssen made field recordings of the mantras she heard in Tibet, not knowing what to do with this archive until April 2015 in New York City. Here, protests were taking place, as in many other parts of the country, in connection with the recent deaths of two African American men that occurred due to police brutality, sparking protests over race relations and law enforcement in the United States. Janssen recorded some of the demonstrations that took place in Union Square, a public park that in recent years has become the go-to gathering place for protestors and activists of various causes. Protestors cried out the names of the two men who were killed—Michael Brown and Freddie Gray—along with the slogans, “No Justice, No Peace, No Racist Police!” (a phrase that originated during the 1992 Los Angeles race riots), and “Hands up, don’t shoot!” (alluding to Michael Brown being unarmed and surrendering), among many others.

Given the ubiquity of handheld devices, we often think of protests in relation to the instantaneous images and videos captured and disseminated online through the efforts of citizen-journalists. Political solidarity is less often thought of as a generator of new sound. However, the sound that mass demonstrations create is a mightily physical kind of sound, and it is imbued with the same fervent conviction and shared intent as the chants of monks and pilgrims in Tibet.

Recognizing that both groups, the religious chanters in Tibet and the protesters in New York City, shared some of their methods and many of their goals, Janssen decided to produce a two-sided LP record of the field recordings she made in both places. Each side of the record contains alternating mantras from Tibet and protest slogans from Union Square, ordered intuitively through the artist’s close attention to rhythm.

The physical act of playing the transparent vinyl record in the exhibition space allows the listener to sit and focus on the sounds produced and their similarities. One can travel back and forth between two places that



Protesters in Union Square, New York, during a solidarity protest, April 29, 2015



Saskia Janssen and George Korsmit with Tibetan pilgrims at Lake Yamdrok, July 2014

are so far from one another, brought close by the artist. This leads to an awareness of the shared humanness between two divergent groups of people who likely will never meet each other. In this vein, Janssen remarked, "It struck me how alike we all are, regardless of nationality or geography—and how both groups chant for a better world each in their own way and how we all want happiness, justice, peace. Their roles seem to blend, Buddhist chanting seems to become political (permission to chant is given arbitrarily by the police) and political chanting seems to become 'religious.' They all have the same goal at the very end." Ultimately, by bringing together the two groups of people, in a sense, Janssen eradicates the idea of the 'other.' She puts two disparate communities in a shared space and time, with a shared goal, dismantling cultural binaries of East and West.

There is another critical aspect of Janssen's LP record to consider here, one of bearing witness in relation to the archive. Janssen has created an archive of sounds based on her own lived experience, her role as a witness. Archives are comprehensive yet incomplete repositories of everyday life. From the arcane to the monumental, they not only provide material access to history and memory, but also enable our interpretation and sight of the world. They contain the potential to decode meanings and to compose future histories. The archive allows both new and revisionary histories to be written—Jacques Derrida suggested that more than the past, the archive points to the future. New technologies enable us all to become archivists—we are able to infinitely record and transmit images and sounds—making the contemporary archive inexhaustible, a reservoir of collective and personal memory. The witness fills gaps and holes of the archive, as in the case of *Everything Is One*.

In addition to the interrelated chants of Tibet and New York City, the exhibition includes line drawings—as a metaphor for connection—running through the gallery space. Lines drawings are visible on the album covers and in a photograph on display, and they were also part of a street performance by Janssen that is not included in the exhibition, but which relates to the work on view. Janssen linked the forty editions of the

record with each other not only through sound, but also by placing the covers in a line and running four conjoined purple brushstrokes across each, so each record shares brushstrokes with two others. The cover of each record is different but the paint strokes unify all the editions; Janssen views this gesture as a visual mantra.

The exhibition's second line drawing, titled *Everything Is One* like all of the other works in the exhibition, appears in a photograph taken by Janssen of New York City's skyline seen from Brooklyn. In the foreground is a ready-made sculpture comprised of wood, bricks, rope and a bucket. Tracing the cityscape, the segments of the "drawing" are precariously propped against one another, likely collapsing moments after the image was taken, testifying to the impermanence of all things. Equally ephemeral was the aforementioned street performance that Janssen initiated as a prelude to the exhibition. For several days she took to the streets of New York City and asked the public to make a simple (but sizable at six to seven feet) white line drawing on craft paper, with materials she provided that included a brush affixed to the bottom of a bamboo stick. The sweeping physical action needed by the participants to make the line with the oversized brush not only created a moment of pause in the frenetic city, but also a detour from their daily routine.

As D.T. Suzuki wrote in his 1934 book, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (page 75), "The idea of Zen is to catch life as it flows. There is nothing extraordinary or mysterious about Zen. I raise my hand; I take a book from the other side of this desk; I hear the boys playing ball outside my window; I see the clouds blown away beyond neighboring wood:—in all these I am practicing Zen, I am living Zen." And herein, perhaps, lies the mindfulness needed for making art in an increasingly complex and conflicted world.



*Everything Is One*, 2015. Cardboard, vinyl, and acrylic, dimensions variable



Studio view, Saskia Janssen painting the album covers, June 2015

**Saskia Janssen** (born 1968, Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands) lives and works in Amsterdam. She graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Art in The Hague and was a resident at the Rijksakademie in 1996 and 1997. Her exhibitions include *Diamonds in the Sky*, Museum Het Dolhuys, Haarlem; *A Glass of Water (Some Objects on the Path to Enlightenment)*, Ellen de Bruijne PROJECTS, Amsterdam; *The Dutch Identity?*, Museum De Paviljoens, Almere; and *Monument for Invisible Particles*, a commission for the Bonairian tax building for the Central Government Real Estate Agency.

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