Liv Schulman: The Gobernment (2019) speculates on the work and destiny of unconventional and often forgotten women, lesbian, and genderqueer artists who lived in Paris between 1910 and 1980. Formally, the work refuses recuperation and uniformity. It exists as both a feature-length film and a six-channel episodic video installation, hovering between these two forms: one ghosting the other.

Venturing beyond the mere critique of phallocentrism’s hold on twentieth-century art, The Gobernment playfully weaves together lived and imagined alternative stories that defy the dictates of rationality, reverence, and linear history. Tellingly, the work’s intentional titular misspelling enacts a productive refusal, destabilizing its authority. The title’s intrusive “b” condenses several key dimensions of Schulman’s work: the inventive multilingualism of cosmopolitan discourses (“v” sounds like “b” in Spanish); the body’s wondrously elusive performances (nasal congestion’s highjacking of pronunciation); and deception (the strategic use of misspelling to evade online surveillance). In French, the language in which the project was initially developed, the verb “berner” means to deceive or delude, adding weight to this last reference.
For its presentation at Bemis Center, the multi-channel version of *The Gobernment*—an exhibition-cum-art tv series—immerses us in a genealogy that refuses to conform or inform, fictionalizing the archive as it stages the desires, challenges, and contributions of twentieth-century women and non-binary artists. Populated by cosmopolitan femizens in full effect, this text-driven, performative work rejects the primacy of history, social and political orthodoxies, and the rules of representation. Instead, we encounter pirated narratives spoken in provocatively defiant tongues and women unapologetically on the move.

A radically reconfigured gallery with no single entry point or sequence of works, no hierarchy, no center or periphery, welcomes visitors. Architectural interventions, sculptural objects, and theatrical props jostle with six moving-image channels, vectorizing a space that mobilizes all of our faculties. At every turn, we must make a decision. This augmented experience offers a glimpse into a different, more egalitarian world, where power is offset by self-determination, diverse knowledge, sensuality, imagination, and becoming.
In the videos, seven actresses—Eden Tinto-Collins, Agathe Paysan, Catherine Hargreaves, Chloé Giraud, Manuela Guevara, Viviana Méndez Moya (Curtis Putralk), and Nicole Mersey—play over forty-five female-identifying artists. Roles are fluid; time is non-linear. Different actresses take turns playing an artist/character, accentuating different dimensions of their life and work. An actress may also play several roles simultaneously, layering life stories and aesthetic pursuits. Identities circulate, evolve, and sometimes dissolve, echoing the circulation of social, political, and psychological constructs at the heart of the artist’s practice. Real stories, anecdotes, and fictions interweave and shuffle temporalities into a provocatively uncertain present of collective becoming.

Neither a realistic film, a period fiction nor a rational history, The Gobernment is a speculative rendering that turns words, speech, and images into fluid characters emancipated from phallocratic discourse.
Episode 1, 6:20 minutes, French, English, and Spanish with English subtitles
Evoking the freedom and excitement of summer camp, Episode 1 takes us on an adventure. A monologue interweaves languages and ideas, inviting us to develop a new system of thought to experience The Gobernment.

Episode 2: The New Subjectivity, 30:24 minutes, French, English, and Spanish with English subtitles
Taking place in the early twentieth century, this episode depicts the collective invention of a new artistic movement: the New Subjectivity, replacing Surrealism. The succession and posturing of artistic movements fuel the self-fulfilling prophecy of the avant-garde, which is defined here as a big sex party for white men. The avant-garde thrives on mental contortions that firmly deny women artists: they are always in the wrong place, the wrong movement, at

Liv Schulman; Le Gobernment [The Gobernment] (detail of still), 2019; Video; Courtesy of the artist; © ADAGP 2019.
the wrong time. Their bodies get in the way. Neither here nor there, they are forever too early and too late. The artists María Blanchard, Esther Carp, Claude Cahun, Marcel Moore, Marcelle Cahn, Suzanne Duchamp, and Pan Yuliang intersect with Marie Vassilieff—who is possessed by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and dreams of dialogues between Valentine Prax, Jenny-Laure Garcin, Karin van Leyden, Leonora Carrington, France Hamelin, and Lorenza Böttner.

**Episode 3**, 16:25 minutes, French, English, German, and Spanish with English subtitles

In a sequence filmed in the Montparnasse neighborhood today, a group of artists (Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Artemisia Gentileschi, Louise Hervieu, Lea Lublin, Chana Orloff, Carol Rama, Juana Muller, Toyen, Dora Maar, Remedios Varo Uranga, and Marie Vassilieff) take turns in and out of the frame, in a visual and narrative relay that navigates through the century. One after the other, as they walk down

Liv Schulman; *Le Gouvernement* [The Gobernment] (detail of still), 2019; Video; Courtesy of the artist; © ADAGP 2019.
city streets facing the camera, they deliver monologues glossing their eccentric lives and punctuated by a central question, often repeated: Do you see me? Masculinity is a Dadaist performance, we are told. These women arm themselves with patience, insistence, and irreverence for they know that the stakes are far greater than representation.

**Episode 4**, 8:14 minutes, French with English subtitles

Featuring Germaine Richier, Fan Tchunpi, Lois Mailou Jones, and Mariette Lydis, this episode addresses the issues of exile and travel as affective forms that constitute the life of some artists.

**Episode 5: The Custom Officers**, 21:30 minutes, French, English, Portuguese, and Spanish with English subtitles

This episode takes place between 1950 and 1960, as we meet Marta Minujín, Alicia Penalba, Germaine Derbecq, Shirley Goldfarb, Maria Lassnig, Françoise Adnet, Geneviève Asse, Lygia Clark, Anne Bonnet, and Aurélie Nemours in a Montparnasse office tower. Conversations shuttle us between the latest modernities, the pharmaceutical industry, novel drugs, and new performative forms of gender. The body becomes a metaphor for customs, with bodies, desires, and their elaborations tightly controlled by different power apparati, including states and the economy.

**Episode 6**, 8:54 minutes, French with English subtitles

This episode takes place in Antoine Bourdelle’s former studio, now inhabited by four of his ex-students, Irène Codréano, Hedwig Woermann, Germaine Richier, and Vera Mukhina. How are artistic identities impacted by national or nationalist representations? How do gender and nationalist ideology negotiate? How does the nation co-opt women artists, using their promotion as propaganda? What affects do nationalist ideologies and totalitarian systems produce?
The Government is accompanied by a survey of Liv Schulman’s video works, on view in the video room, and the world premiere of The New Inflation, a new performance in three episodes that explores the multivalence of inflation. Developed, written, cast, produced, and filmed in Omaha, The New Inflation will be presented at Bemis Center on March 26 and 28, May 7 and 9, and June 4 and 6. Free and open to all but space is limited. RSVP required at bemiscenter.org/theneverinflation.

Granting Bemis’s visitors unprecedented access to Liv Schulman’s work, ideas, and creative process, this tripartite project is the first North American presentation of her work.

Liv Schulman: The Government was conceived with the support of an ADAGP-Villa Vassilieff grant, in partnership with Bibliothèque Kandinsky, MNAM-CCI, Centre Pompidou.

Additional support provided by:

The Curator-in-Residence program is supported, in part, by Esther and Dan Brabec and Carol Gendler.
Through a multitude of material choices, abstracted narratives, and constructed interactions, Claudia Wieser instills a sense of theatricality within her harmonious environments. Upon entering, one might feel as if they have walked into a Bauhaus-designed stage set or the site of a mystically-inspired architectural dig. Through her understanding of art and the object, Wieser’s work mines and expands upon cultural histories, creating balanced compositions that marinate her classically modernist style with spirituality and antiquity.

This exhibition combines a variety of works from the last seven years. Assembled together for the first time, Wieser incorporates the architecture of Bemis Center directly into the exhibition design. Beginning with a combination of imagery that skims the walls in the artist’s wallpaper collages, Wieser sets the stage before one walks into the galleries. Drawing from her vast archive of images, these collages combine photographs of ancient sculptures juxtaposed with textured concrete walls and tiles from the artist’s sculptures. Often these wallpaper works include the body, yet only in fragments. Body parts tend to be cropped and shapes are repeated, creating a rhythm that is harmonic, yet fractured.

Often found in Wieser’s wallpaper are images of classical Greek and Roman sculpture and architecture. This influence stems from her interest in ideas of timelessness, power, philosophy, and questions
of existence, and ancient histories that continue to populate modern life—lays from 2,500 years ago are still performed today and most high schoolers still read the *Odyssey*. In 2017, she began incorporating imagery from the 1976 BBC series “I, Claudius” into her exhibitions. While Wieser is generally interested in history, and her work is abstract or abstracted narrative, she is also influenced by current events. By incorporating the “I, Claudius’ imagery, she is suggesting that human psychology and human conditions have not changed that much. By splicing historic images with her abstract, highly-designed language, her imagery builds upon itself and engages with time in a non-linear fashion while creating drama in the gallery space.\(^1\) Adding to this, the large-scale tends to play with perspective and dimensionality, creating an allure while also disorienting the viewer as they absorb the rhythmic collage.
Wieser’s work provokes the viewer and simultaneously places them directly into the work. The space is transformed into a forum where the artist’s interest in fine art, architecture, design, theatre, and film collide. Mirrored works are placed specifically in both galleries, fracturing yet reflecting both the environment and the viewers back on themselves. In these works, the artist echoes a technique she discovered in Paris by Art Deco architect Robert Mallet-Stevens that uses fractured, stacked mirrors to reflect the space. Similar to Mallet-Stevens, who also designed stage sets and grand interiors, Wieser creates an ever-changing non-linear narrative depending on who inhabits the space and the path they follow through the exhibition. Specifically in Gallery 2, the mirrored wallworks reflect part of the outside environment back into Bemis, creating another layer to the exhibition.
Many of Wieser’s works reference spirituality. With materials that have a long tradition of human production including metal, gold, ceramic, and wood, she repeats shapes and patterns found throughout history, both religious and secular, and oftentimes referred to as sacred geometry. Wieser is influenced by artists Hilma af Klint (1862–1994) and Emma Kunz (1892–1963) who both had an interest in spiritualism. Each of their works explore geometry through repetition and pattern. af Klint’s style, which varied from simplistic, monochromatic works to complex compositions of shapes, lines, colors, and words, was developed over time through the influence of theosophy, the educator and visionary Rudolf Steiner, and studies in modern science. Specifically, af Klint’s series Paintings for The Temple is an example of how her work functioned spiritually, with those paintings planned for an installation in a spiral temple. Kunz was a healer who created large mandalas of lines and concentric circles, which she created in 24-hour-long sessions with the help of a pendulum. She used these
drawings in her sessions with her patients, often placing them between herself and the patient to guide meditation and diagnosis. While their work remained relatively unknown throughout their lives and has only recently been re-discovered, their importance in the canon of art history is seen throughout contemporary art. Wieser’s work has similar meditative and awe-inspiring qualities found in the works of af Klint and Kunz, and all three speak to metaphysical possibility through their respective abstract pictorial language. With a nod to artists who came before her, the formal style of Wieser’s compositions speak to transformation of space and, by opening the door to spirituality and religion, offer another layer as she continues to push the bounds of her abstract vocabulary.

*Claudia Wieser: Generations* is an intimate view of the artist’s work from the last seven years. Her classical, modernist aesthetic mixes with ideas relating to spirituality and mysticism and her heterogeneous practice combines elements of cultural history with formal geometry, suggesting spaces of contemplation while imbuing drama and theatricality. While relating heavily to formalism, Wieser carefully stitches together a constellation of elements, aiming to change the visual interpretation of the viewer and give them a vastly new experience.


3 While af Klint’s temple never came to fruition, her first major solo museum exhibition in the United States took place at the Guggenheim Museum in 2019, itself a spiral “temple” to art designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.
Claudia Wieser: Generations is organized by Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts and the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago and is on view at the Smart Museum of Art September 22–December 13, 2020.
Thanks to the generous support of individual donors, local and national foundations, and corporate partners, the Bemis Center offers free admission to all of its exhibitions and public programs.

Visitors are welcome to take photographs without flash. Tag us on Instagram or Twitter: @bemiscenter or #bemiscenter.

Group tours of exhibitions are available during regular business hours. To schedule a tour, call 402.341.7130 or email info@bemiscenter.org.

Access details are available at bemiscenter.org/access. Please ask staff for assistance.
Founded in 1981, by artists for artists, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts supports today’s artists through an international residency program, temporary exhibitions and commissions, and innovative public programs.

RESIDENCY PROGRAM
For more than three decades, Bemis has provided artists from around the world dedicated time, space, and resources to conduct research and to create new work. Bemis offers artists private live/work studios, financial support, technical/administrative assistance, and opportunities for intellectual discourse about contemporary art. Nearly 900 artists have participated in the residency program. Bemis’s Curator-in-Residence Program provides a curator the opportunity to participate in the Bemis Residency Program, serve as a professional resource to Bemis artists-in-residence and the Greater Omaha arts community, and organize exhibitions and public programs at Bemis Center. Bemis’s Sound Art + Experimental Music Program, launched in 2019, is a special track within the Residency Program for artists working in sound, composition, voice, and music of all genres. Participating artists receive financial, technical, and administrative support, along with dedicated facilities for rehearsing, recording, and performing. The program includes a performance venue offering free live shows for the public to experience the latest innovations by local, national, and international sound artists and experimental musicians.

EXHIBITION PROGRAM
Bemis Center’s exhibition program features solo and group exhibitions of artwork in all media by local, national, and international artists. Exhibitions are always free, open to the public, and frequently introduce the community of Omaha to the most experimental and provocative art forms today.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS
Throughout the organization’s history, Bemis Center has offered artist-driven, community-responsive programs that bolster civic engagement in the creation and understanding of art. Public programs provide regular opportunities for the public to learn about and be inspired by the visual arts. Through artist-led classes and workshops, ARTalks, open studio events, panel discussions, film screenings, and performances, the community has direct access to artists and to their diverse approaches to art-making and interpreting the world around us.
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Richard Vierk | President
Victoria Maclin | President-elect
Todd Simon | Vice President
Michael J. Smith II | Treasurer
Alexandra Grant | Secretary
Arun Agarwal
Deanna Bosselman
Lili Cheng
Robert Duncan
Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez
Jeff Gordman
Lawrence R. “Chip” James II
Emiliano Lerda
Mary Mattingly
Gigi O’Hara
Kambui Olujimi
Tyler Owen
Gregory Schnackel
Paul Smith
Rodrigo Valenzuela
Watie White
Christo | Emeritus
Ree Kaneko | Emerita
Chris Cook | Ex-Officio
The Nebraska Arts Council, a state agency, has supported these programs through its matching grants program funded by the Nebraska Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Visit www.nebraskaartscouncil.org for information on how the Nebraska Arts Council can assist your organization, or how you can support the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.