

Kley, Elisabeth.

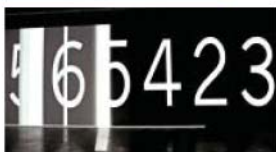
"Charles Atlas: Mapping New Territory"

[Artnet.com](http://www.artnet.com).

<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/kley/charles-atlas-luhtring-augustine-bushwick-2-27-12.asp>

LUHRING  
AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street  
New York NY 10011  
tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055  
[www.luhringaugustine.com](http://www.luhringaugustine.com)



**Charles Atlas**  
143652 (detail)  
Single channel video projection  
(silent)  
2012  
Luhring Augustine Bushwick



Charles Atlas, "The Illusion of Democracy," installation view, 2012, Luhring Augustine Bushwick



Charles Atlas, "The Illusion of Democracy," installation view, 2012, Luhring Augustine Bushwick



Opening night for Charles Atlas, "The Illusion of Democracy," Feb. 2012, at Luhring Augustine Bushwick



Opening night for Charles Atlas, "The Illusion of Democracy," Feb. 2012, at Luhring Augustine Bushwick

## Charles Atlas MAPPING NEW TERRITORY by Elisabeth Kley

Share |

0

The crowds that flocked to Bushwick for the opening of **Luhring Augustine**'s much-awaited new space on Feb. 17, 2012, were rewarded with "The Illusion of Democracy," a spectacular display of video projections by the Charles Atlas (b. 1958), the media artist long known for his collaborations with the late **Merce Cunningham**. In several high-ceilinged galleries, Atlas has devised a computer-generated universe of illuminated numbers that seems to materialize on the walls out of the darkness, setting up a dialogue between order and chaos.

Ranging from infinitesimal, star-like dots of light to giant white digits rising from floor to ceiling, and organized in orderly grids that morph into undulating ribbons and tangled clouds clustered in midair, the visual variety of Atlas' numerical arrangements is mesmerizing. Sometimes a quivering bar of vertical or horizontal light appears on a wall and then splits progressively into more and more stripes, or travels over numbers that change as it passes by. Gloom is illuminated by fleeting bursts of color, or pierced by strobes of projected illumination, depending on where viewers stand.

"Charles is a really important artist with an amazing eye," said Donald Johnson-Montenegro, who's been working as associate gallery director since January. "He has collaborated with everyone under the sun, starting when he trained his sensibilities under Cunningham and **John Cage**, who recognized his unique vision and talent."

Kley, Elisabeth.

"Charles Atlas: Mapping New Territory"

[Artnet.com](http://www.artnet.com).

<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/kley/charles-atlas-luhring-augustine-bushwick-2-27-12.asp>

LUHRING  
AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street

New York NY 10011

tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055

[www.luhringaugustine.com](http://www.luhringaugustine.com)



Opening night for Charles Atlas, "The Illusion of Democracy," Feb. 2012, at Luhring Augustine Bushwick



Artist Charles Atlas at the opening of his exhibition, "The Illusion of Democracy," 2012, at Luhring Augustine Bushwick



Gallery owner Roland Augustine at the opening of Charles Atlas, "The Illusion of Democracy," 2012, Luhring Augustine Bushwick



MOMA curator Klaus Biesenbach and performer Antony Hegarty at the opening of Charles Atlas, "The Illusion of Democracy," 2012, Luhring Augustine Bushwick

During his more than 40-year career, the versatile Atlas, who taught himself film and video and painstakingly edits all of his works himself, has made narrative documentary portraits of artists including Yvonne Rainer, Michael Clark, Leigh Bowery, William Kentridge and Marina Abramovic. He recently reworked some of his earliest films -- studies of Cunningham's minimally moving ankles, wrists, knees and elbows, which Atlas made when he was 22 years old -- into *Joints Array* (1971/2011), which was presented at the New Museum last summer. Atlas even once made a porn film called *Staten Island Sex Cult* (1999) under the alias "Jack Shoot."

While he continues to work with performers and recently completed *Turning*, a feature made in collaboration with singer Antony Hegarty that will be released later this spring, Atlas has become more and more involved in making independent, site-specific installations. The Luhring Augustine show includes two videos previously seen in Europe: *Plato's Alley* (2008) and *Painting by Numbers* (2011). A third work called *143652* (2012) was made especially for the space and finished just before the exhibition opened. Together, they form a single immersive experience.

Artist Mika Tajima, who collaborated with Atlas on *The Pedestrians*, a sculptural environment for a series of guest performances with live video feedback seen at South London Gallery last spring, was delighted to be at the show. "It's wonderful to be here to bathe in Charles's work," she said -- and her husband, independent curator Howie Chen, agreed. "I think it's amazing to finally see these videos in New York," chimed in another boundary-crosser, artist, filmmaker and writer Renée Green.

"When I started *Plato's Alley*," explained the quietly unassuming Atlas, whose only flamboyance is a tendency to dress in bright colors and dye his sideburns to match, "I set out to make something as 'inhuman' as possible, so that it would contrast with the rest of my work. That's how I came to the idea of 'numberness'. It's really like a dance," he went on, "in which the numbers 1-2-3-4-5-6 do short solos, and then there is the curtain call when they all come out together."

In other words, dancing is all about counting, digital video is entirely based on numbers and editing is based on time codes -- so these works aren't actually so different from what he's done before. Viewed from every possible angle, arrayed in spirals, grids and rows, Atlas's hyperactive digits sometimes resemble Hollywood hoofers performing Busby Berkeley's spectacular choreography.

Kley, Elisabeth.

"Charles Atlas: Mapping New Territory"

Artnet.com.

<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/kley/charles-atlas-luhtring-augustine-bushwick-2-27-12.asp>

LUHRING  
AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street  
New York NY 10011  
tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055  
[www.luhringaugustine.com](http://www.luhringaugustine.com)

In light of Atlas' lifelong fascination with movement, the interaction between his viewers and his projections is among the most interesting features of the exhibition. Ghostly silhouettes appear on the screen when viewers pass between the light source and the wall, while dappled video patterns wash across their bodies. One little girl was entranced with creating shapes and reflections out of her hands and feet, turning herself into a living shadow puppet.

From Michael Clark's gorgeous frolicking dancers dressed in Leigh Bowery's bizarre disguises, to the austerity of numerals floating in the dark, every image captured by Atlas is similarly spellbinding. Prices in the show range from \$25,000 to \$35,000, and the show is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons through May 20, 2012.

"Charles Atlas: The Illusion of Democracy," Feb. 18-May 20, 2012, Luhring Augustine gallery, 25 Kickerbocker Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11237.

**ELISABETH KLEY** is a New York artist and art writer.