



PARADOX NOW!

June 19-August 22, 2009





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PARADOX NOW!

JOSH AZZARELLA

A. CLARKE BEDFORD

MEGAN HILDEBRANDT

ANNA LUCAS

DING REN

E. BRADY ROBINSON

MARK TRIBE

ERIN WILLIAMS

Front Cover: Mark Tribe, from the *Port Huron Project: We Must Name the System: Paul Potter 1965/2007, 2007*

Back Cover: Megan Hildebrandt, *They were rolling on a deskchair down Lombard St. as I approached. Hey, it's Cinderella! they shouted*, 2008, digital photograph, 26x30 inches with Anna Lucas, from the book and video project, *Little White Feather and the Hunter*, 2008

Foreward

Claire Huschle

Executive Director

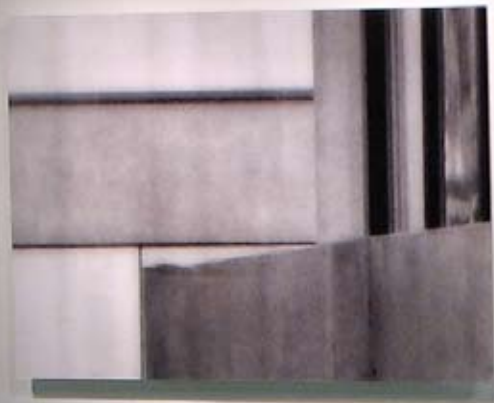
Our individual recollections of historical occurrences can be complicated by our distance from, and investment in, the events themselves. Uncovering the objective truth is a complicated matter, requiring us to strip away biases about both the event and the medium delivering the retelling. In deciphering the facts of a day's news, for example, I often I feel as though I need to turn to two or three sources just to figure out where the truth of any given story lies. I add weight to details that are repeated, subtract value from deliveries which are overtly biased, and insert my own recollections of context (which, naturally, are colored by my own personal biases). At the end of the exercise, I like to feel I've constructed an accurate version of events, but I know I can never be sure.

We rely on media that—traditionally—imply veracity: reportage, photography, scholarly exegesis, and civic records. We trust what we see and read to be factual, and build understanding from there. But what if those vehicles are compromised? And if two seemingly objective narratives conflict, who decides which is privileged? If we accept both in the spirit of equity, when does impartiality slip into moral relativism?

The artists in *Paradox Now!* wrestle with some of these issues. They explore the challenges of finding accuracy in an age of crowd-sourced online encyclopedias, news outlets that develop programming based on hyper-targeted market research, and academic scholarship still fearful (or perhaps enamored) of postmodern theories that overturned concepts of singular, knowable truths. Each in their own way lays claim to (or reclaims) a history forgotten, misunderstood, or fanaticized about. It is my hope that looking at these approaches to the historical record will inspire viewers to more closely examine their own.

I am particularly pleased that we were able to bring British artist **Anna Lucas** to the Arlington Arts Center, both to be part of this exhibition and to work in residence here for a month. Lucas's treatment of the biography of Pocahontas expertly captures the tension between perceived and factual history. We are grateful to the Dominion Foundation for their support of this residency.

I also wish to thank our Director of Exhibition, Jeffrey Cudlin, who curated this exhibition and gave such thoughtful treatment to the theme. As always, the AAC is extremely grateful for the individuals, members, corporations, and foundations that so generously support our mission.



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PARADOX NOW!

Jeffry Cudlin

Director of Exhibitions

PARADOX NOW!

“Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.” George Orwell, 1984

The artists featured in *PARADOX NOW!* exploit the tension between event and explanation, storytelling and fact. They do so by creating works that mimic forms of cultural production with claims to authority and accuracy—like historical documentary, photojournalism, and museum display. Many of these artists rely on simulation, either creating their own reenactments of familiar events, or interrogating the use of such simulations in our media culture. In the process of untangling all of the hoaxes, misdirections, and flat-out lies included here, viewers may begin to question how they have come to know what they think they know about the world.

All eight of these artists recognize that historical narratives do not simply tell us what has happened before. Instead, these stories tend to rely on the identity of the storyteller, someone who is likely advancing an agenda or attempting to offer moral instruction. Once past events are stripped of the usual synopses and are fully examined in all of their particulars, they tend to resist interpretation. As historian Keith Jenkins once put it: “The past and history float free of each other; they are ages and miles apart.”

A *paradox*, of course, is typically defined as something that appears impossible, yet is true nonetheless. The show’s title, then, might appear to contradict the actual artworks in it, most of which claim to be something other than what they actually are—unless we consider the outsized roles that simulation and spectacle play in contemporary life.

In his landmark 1981 book, *Simulacra and Simulation*, the French theorist Jean Baudrillard turned the difference between truth and playacting on its head. In Baudrillard’s world, media culture programs our existence. The media is not infiltrating our lives or acting as a parasite, draining the authenticity from everything it describes, but rather acting as a nucleus or command center, disseminating spectacular images and experiences that provide models for all future human social interactions.

As an example of this, Baudrillard famously proclaimed that Disneyland is not, as it appears, a simulation of America, but is the only real America. It is the entirety of American life that has ceased to be real, and only exists as a pale shadow of the childishness and imaginative play that Disneyland so effectively embodies. Whether or not we accept such a scenario—which might sound to some like a bad science fiction novel—it is certainly true that we humans rely on stereotypes and assumptions to operate in our daily lives.

Some of these assumptions obscure the true complexity of the past. Artists who reenact historical events often do so in order to reclaim or restore that complexity. In his Port Huron Project, New York artist **Mark Tribe** uses actors to stage famous American left-wing political speeches. Tribe does this not only to demonstrate the vitality of New Left thought in the 1960s, rescuing it from popular stereotypes of self-indulgent or utopian student radicalism, but also to ask questions about the comparative disengagement of youth culture today.

Other artists use reenactments to ask questions about vanishing traditions. Every Saturday over the course of six months, Baltimore artist **Megan Hildebrandt** dressed as a 1940s Polish washerwoman and scrubbed the marble steps of rowhouses in Baltimore neighborhoods. In so doing, Hildebrandt was repeating a ritual that Eastern European immigrants practiced in those neighborhoods over half a century ago. Hildebrandt's project, titled *Do Your Steps*, confronted the current neighborhood residents, now predominantly Latino and African-American, with an archaic, somewhat romantic image of urban life.

Although Orlando, Florida-based photographer **E. Brady Robinson** doesn't perform her own simulations, she does record a daily historical reenactment at The Holy Land Experience Christian theme park. There, every day, actors recreate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Robinson doesn't simply record the drama; she thrusts the park's visitors into the spotlight, and shows them consuming this spectacle with disposable cameras, sipping 32 oz. soft drinks, and happily chatting as events both disturbingly violent and deeply sacred are replayed for their benefit. Robinson shows how the park is blurring the lines between devotion and entertainment, between inspiring piety and affording opportunities for voyeurism.

Like Robinson, New York artist **Josh Azzarella** questions our relationship to powerful, violent imagery. But Azzarella doesn't reenact the past; he simply alters the evidence. Azzarella edits out the images of victims from familiar news photos—of Abu Ghraib, Kent State, and United Airlines Flight 93. By leaving only onlookers and accomplices, Azzarella asks the viewer to consider her or his status as a voyeur, digesting images of real atrocities at a remove without feeling the responsibility to act.

Still other artists create pure historical fictions that are presented persuasively, but ultimately veer into ludicrous territory—like D.C. artist **A. Clarke Bedford**'s presentation of the work of non-existent conceptual artist, Coeslaw Baklava; or Philadelphia artist **Erin Williams**'s thirty foot linen scroll, tracing her ancestry back to the Pilgrims, a Holy Roman Emperor, and then, inevitably, to Mary Magdalen and Jesus Christ. Bedford's parody launches a critique of museum practice and puffery by derivative contemporary artists; Williams's project seems like a riff on the countless genealogy websites that promise to uncover the consumer's past—and that often provide an improved, storied ancestry with which to construct a new hyperreal self, à la Baudrillard.

And some of these artists simply cause the viewer to feel that reality is a slippery construct—like British filmmaker **Anna Lucas**, whose film and book project, *Little White Feather and the Hunter*, weaves a discontinuous, atmospheric, and ultimately unreliable narrative of the life of Pocahontas in the Jamestown colony. *Little White Feather* features many unidentified voices telling different versions of the same story: A British anthropologist, an American archaeologist, descendants of the Powhatan tribe, and even actresses who responded to a casting call weigh in on the events of Pocahontas's life, with varying degrees of authority. Few of them seem to agree on even the most basic facts.

And finally, D.C. artist **Ding Ren** attempts a sort of real-world, real-time simulation: She presents signed contracts that outline the terms under which she hired stand-ins to take her place over the course of five different days. These doubles attended university classes and art critiques in her place. Ren's piece is not image-based, nor does it tackle history per se—but it does present possibly the most direct challenge to our notions of reality, propriety, and authenticity.

This kind of contemporary art engages the very same set of skills we use every day to gather information and make judgements about current events, consumer culture, and personal values. All of us navigate simulation and spectacle; all of us are bombarded daily with information coded specifically for niche markets and political points of view, information bolstered by claims to authority and truth. In other words: We are already well-prepared to engage the puzzles offered by these eight artists, to untangle the true content of their works from the parodic misdirection they employ.

As with all of our programming here at the AAC, this show was organized with the implicit belief that contemporary art can and should be seen by a wide, general audience. Art is not and should not be set apart from life. Accordingly, the art world should not be viewed as some involuted, self-referential sphere, illegible to those not trained to untangle its secrets. That, of course, is yet another stereotype, a shortcut for operating in some part of the world without understanding the forces at work there.

The artists in *PARADOX NOW!* certainly can't dispel all frames of reference that depend on stereotypes, but their work at least offers the opportunity to glimpse behind the veil of constructed knowledge and conventional assumptions, at least for a moment. It is for this reason that, despite all of its absurd humor, this art ultimately matters.



Above: E. Brady Robinson, *Photo Opp*, 2008 20x30, Courtesy of Heineman Meyers Contemporary Art

JOSH AZZARELLA

Josh Azzarella is a New York-based artist who might be described as an un-photographer: He takes people out of famous photographs, leaving only barren landscapes and supporting characters.

The results of his practice to some extent recall censored images from Stalin's reign in Soviet-era Russia. Stalin ordered that figures who had been purged from the Communist party—and subsequently sent to the Gulag, exiled, or executed—were to be obliterated from the historical record. This often meant carefully airbrushing banned persons out of all photos featuring the supreme Soviet leader. The resulting redacted images offer a heightened sense of unreality.

Though Azzarella also banishes people from the visual record of history, in so doing, he manages to make them seem more present. From the now-infamous leaked snapshots from Abu Ghraib, to the picture of the plume of smoke marking the destruction of Flight 93 on September 11, to images of lynchings from a few generations ago, Azzarella removes all traces of the victims depicted in each. All that remains are undisguised, generic locations, and perpetrators and accomplices grinning in empty rooms.

Azzarella's treatment of these images reminds the viewer of the banality of evil—Hannah Arendt's oft-repeated contention that truly terrible crimes are often enough not committed by sociopaths, but by ordinary people, convinced that their actions are somehow both culturally acceptable and more or less normal. Once the piles of naked, terrified prisoners have been removed from them, photos of Charles Graner and Lynndie England, for example, appear like bored horseplay in any bleak institutional setting.

But Azzarella also draws the viewer's attention to her or his own relationship to images of violence. When the artist removes the prostrate body of Jeffrey Miller and the sobbing, crouching figure of Mary Vecchio from John Filo's famous photo of the shootings at Kent State on May 4, 1970, the photo's new main characters are the voyeurs, walking past the scene, looking, but not acting. They are stand-ins for the viewer, who also allows unthinkable events to unfold as if they were merely spectacular entertainment.

If the availability of such images really does numb the viewer to their content, then the loss of what they once depicted is all the more disturbing: through sheer overexposure, the horror that's in plain sight slowly turns invisible. Azzarella may initially appear to be cleaning up the messy corners of our history, but he's really only making our relationship with them seem all the more problematic.



A. CLARKE BEDFORD

A. Clarke Bedford is D.C.'s longstanding master of fictive art: a type of work in which seemingly plausible worlds are created through a variety of means, including objects or props, lectures, staged photography, and performances.

Since at least the early '90s, Bedford has been appropriating the language of academia in order to document the lives of completely fictional artists, collectors, and historians. Bedford's strange yet familiar alternative artworld features objects from the collection of fin-de-siècle adventurer Frederick Draper Kalley; grainy photos of the founding of the Hornbuckle School of Hygiene and the Arts by General William Tecumseh Sherman; and a book documenting the all-too-likely career of conceptual artist Coleslaw Baklava, who supposedly turned obsessive-compulsive disorder and a love of the number four into international art superstardom.

His installation for *Paradox Now!* is divided into two parts. One corner is an essentially faithful recreation of Clarke's own living room, which any visitor will find packed with art historical and archaeological ephemera—some fake, some real, and some occupying the curious territory between the two. The remaining wall features a retrospective of the work of Coleslaw Baklava, a conceptual artist who is, in effect, Clarke's alter ego.

The installation clearly illustrates the dichotomy of Clarke's life. At home, Bedford cobbles together his own private universe, equal parts Dada, outsider art, and nineteenth century pseudo-science. Nearly a decade ago, Bedford parted ways with commercial gallery representation, and



Above Right: A. Clarke Bedford, *From Ready-Made to Reddi-Whip: The Art of Coleslaw Baklava*, n.d., Collaged Book Page, 11 x 8 1/2 inches

has continued with his project, it would seem, strictly for his own amusement.

At work, Bedford is certainly no outsider. He has served as a conservator at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden since 1980. His Coleslaw Baklava installation lays bare the artist's bemused disdain for self-important conceptual or minimal artists and the demands that they make on institutions.

The artist's preference for creating faux modern artifacts reflects his skepticism of much contemporary art. Bedford doubts that much of anything new has happened, art-historically speaking, since the heyday of Dada, Suprematism, and other early 20th century avante-garde-isms. As he noted in a 2006 interview: "Once you get to the point where you have an all-white painting like Malevich, and you have a found object like Duchamp, really, what else is there? More found objects? More paintings that aren't anything?"



It's also clear that Bedford is skeptical of the machinery of the art world. His work cuts out all middlemen: Bedford is his own best artist, art historian, curator, and archivist. Bedford's art career is reminiscent of Coleslaw Baklava's Institute of Theoretical Art, a project in which the fictional artist declares a thrift store to be an art museum, thereby transforming the store's employees into unwitting security guards, docents, and conservators. As with Baklava's institute, in the home grown museum of A. Clarke Bedford, there is a "100% savings on salaries and benefits."

MEGAN HILDEBRANDT

Baltimore-based artist Megan Hildebrandt's performance, *Do Your Steps?*, was inspired by photojournalist A. Aubrey Bodine's *Wash Day*. Taken in West Baltimore in 1945, the photograph depicts women and children outdoors, scrubbing in unison, the marble steps of their Penrose Avenue rowhouses.

These families were mostly first generation immigrants from Italy, Poland, and Germany. The image may have been choreographed, but according to Hildebrandt, this weekly chore was a Baltimore tradition beginning in the 19th century. As the generation depicted in the photo migrated out of the area, and the neighborhood moved from ownership to renting, the ritual faded.

Hildebrandt decided to try to connect the current residents of the neighborhood—now predominantly African-American and Latino, a new generation of immigrants—with this version of local history. To do this, every Saturday for six months, the artist traveled from door to door dressed in a 1940s housedress and apron, toting cans of Bon Ami brand cleanser and a scrub brush. She offered to scrub each resident's steps for free, and explained the historical origins of the service she sought to provide.

The performance raises some thorny questions. Hildebrandt is essentially an outsider, engaging the current population of Penrose Avenue in a conversation about the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of their neighborhood. Ultimately, the artist confronts participants in her performance with an idealized, romantic image of urban life from half a century ago, and asks them to define their relationship to it.





ANNA LUCAS

Anna Lucas lives and works in London; she is known for creating hybrid works that occupy the space between documentary and fiction. Her previous project, *Here and Your Here* (2007), consisted of three films in which the artist traced the origins of Kaff Mariam and Una de Gato, two plants that are often used for medicinal purposes, but which are shrouded in superstition in their countries of origin.

Her current project, *Little White Feather and the Hunter*, is presented here in film and book form. *Little White Feather* weaves a discontinuous, atmospheric, and unreliable narrative of the life and impact of Pocahontas both in the United States and in Britain. The film intercuts several competing stories of Pocahontas, each of which seems to contain plenty of dreamy, personal speculation and only a thin veneer of plausible detail.

In making the film, Lucas spent many hours interviewing leaders for the Pamunkey and Mattaponi tribes, contemporary Native American reenactors, historians both in the U.S. and U.K., and amateur enthusiasts. Their disembodied voices joust back and forth with contradictory accounts of how and why Pocahontas figures so prominently in the story of the colonization of North America.

Lucas accompanies each possible account with slowly unfolding images of life as it is currently lived by hunters on the Pamunkey Indian reservation; by reenactors hanging tobacco leaves, or occupying a recreation of a Powhatan settlement; and even by archaeologists, sifting through unpromising clots of mud for bits of evidence. The narrative appears to have a life of its own, independent of reality, and no longer corresponding to actual personages or events.

Little White Feather relies on an unconventional structure. Lucas departs significantly from the traditional rules of documentary filmmaking, choosing not to identify the various speakers, and creating long, lingering shots open to chance within the moment of filming. With these irreconcilable stories and banal, everyday moments, Lucas makes the gap between the world each speaker describes and life as it is lived in the present-day Chesapeake Bay area seem unbridgeable—and makes the possibility of sussing out any one true story seem remote.

Anna Lucas is the Arlington Arts Center's 2009 International Visiting Artist in Residence.



Above: Anna Lucas, from the book and video project, *Little White Feather and the Hunter*, 2008

DING REN

In her *Replacement Project*, D.C. artist Ding Ren solved a seemingly impossible conundrum: how can you be in two places at once?

The answer, it turns out, is simple: Pay someone to be your stand-in. While working on her MFA at George Washington University, Ren devised an art project in which, on each of five dates between October 22 and November 19, 2007, she paid \$35 to someone to take her place for the day. Her replacements attended class critiques for her, offering opinions and suggestions as needed.

Unlike many of the other projects featured in this show, Ren's undertaking is decidedly not image-based. Her performances were meant to be experienced firsthand, and exist after the fact only in the memories of people who engaged in a dialogue with Ren's surrogates. All that remains of the project are a series of signed and dated contracts and a brief typed summary of the activities Ren was able to undertake while freed from her usual responsibilities on a given day.

Ren insisted that her stand-ins not try to be doppelgangers but instead retain full autonomy, behaving not as they imagined Ren might, but speaking from their own experience, and offering their own opinions. Still, despite this large degree of transparency, Ren's insistence that hand-picked helpers could somehow be her and satisfy her obligations for a modest price seems more than a little unreal.

The succession of signed and dated contracts presented here resembles the sorts of self-serious documentation that early performance artists relied upon. Contrasting sharply with that seriousness are the typed notes detailing what Ren accomplished while liberated from her usual tasks. Replacing herself for the day allowed her to cut shapes from construction paper, go to the grocery store, and have the occasional snack.

Replacement Performance Project
Contract

Between Ding Ren (hereafter known as "the Artist") and

Deneé Barr (hereafter known as "the
Replacement").

1. The Replacement agrees to take the place of the Artist from roughly 1:00 - 4:00 pm on the date of October, 22 2007 or for the entire duration of the Artists' *Critical Practices* course. (Sometimes the course runs overtime - a little past 4.00pm). The Replacement will remain a part of the course no later than 4:30pm.
2. The Replacement agrees to physically fill the place of the Artist only. The Replacement will not say what he or she thinks the Artist would say in the given situation, nor will the Replacement be obligated to try to act or express oneself similar to how the Artist would.
3. It is important for the Replacement to retain personal autonomy, expressing thoughtful opinions, suggestions, proclamations, etc. of his or her own while participating in the critique session. If the Replacement so chooses, he or she may remain silent as well whenever he or she finds it necessary.
4. The role of the Replacement is to instill a fresh and new perspective into the *Critical Practices* course because he or she will be viewing the student's artwork for the first time. The Replacement will thus assume the role of MFA student at the George Washington University for the allotted time of the performance. The Replacement may interpret "role of MFA student" as he or she chooses, as this label may be highly amorphous.
5. The other role of the Replacement is to physically take the place of the Artist so that the Artist has more time to perform other tasks. (Such as work in the studio, take a nap, go to the gym, go to the library, etc. The activity/activities that the Artist performs during the allotted time of the Replacement will be documented in writing.)
6. If it is the Artists' turn to present work during the critique session, the Replacement scheduled for that day will present his or her own personal work to be critiqued. This will allow the class to critique an entirely new body of work that they have not seen before. If this is the case, the Replacement will be notified by the Artist at least a week in advance of the performance date whether or not to bring a selection of his or her own work.

7. The Replacement agrees to meet the artist at 12:30 pm (30 minutes before the start of class) in a mutually agreed upon location on the day of his or her performance for a brief orientation.

8. The Replacement will be compensated in the amount of \$35.00 USD for his or her time by a personal check written by the Artist. The compensation check will be presented to the Replacement prior to the beginning of the course at 1:00pm - after the official contract has been signed and dated.

9. The Replacement agrees to keep notes, either physically or mentally throughout the course of the performance. The Replacement agrees to email the Artist with an as detailed as possible account of the goings on during the course, as well as an account of one's overall experience serving as a replacement in the setting of the MFA program at GW.

10. The Replacement agrees to have his or her photograph taken for posterity purposes. The photographs will be documentary shots, taken by another student during the course of the performance.

11. The final written email account that The Replacement sends to the Artist and any photographs taken during the course of the performance may be used by the Artist for documentary purposes. Publication is subject to the approval of the Replacement, who may ask to edit or change any portion of the final email account or photographs prior to publication.

12. The replacement agrees to allow the Artist to use his or her name, as it appears on this contract for documentary purposes pertaining to the "Replacement Performance Project." Any other use of the Replacement's name, likeness, photograph, written words outside the realm of the "Replacement Performance Project" is strictly prohibited.

Deneé Barr
The Replacement (Printed Name)

October 22, 2007
Date

Deneé Barr
(Signature)

Ding Ren
The Artist (Printed Name)

10/22/07
Date

Ding Ren
(Signature)

E. BRADY ROBINSON

Orlando, Florida-based photographer E. Brady Robinson's *Scenes from Jesusland* series documents the jarring hyper-reality available every day at the Holy Land Experience Christian Theme Park in Orlando, Florida. The park is owned and operated by the Trinity Broadcasting Network, a Christian television network originally founded by Evangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker and Paul and Jan Crouch in 1973.

As the park's website describes its attractions:

The structures and exhibits at The Holy Land Experience characterize the style, the architecture and the settings that existed in the Holy Land two thousand years ago. The Garden Tomb, the Qumran Caves, The Plaza of the Nations, the Temple of the Great King, the Jerusalem Model and the Wilderness Tabernacle are intricately detailed, both inside and out, to provide you with a clearer understanding of their biblical significance.

Daily theatrical performances are a key component—including not only the chance to shop in an ancient Jerusalem street market, or dine with Jesus and the Apostles, but also to witness a daily reenactment of Christ's crucifixion. Park visitors are strongly encouraged to take their own pictures and capture memories of such events; park gift shops supply ready access to additional film, videotape, or disposable cameras.

Visitors to the park, of course, are believers, and invested in the scenes that are being provided for them. Yet the images that Robinson gathered during her many visits are often disturbing to eyes unfamiliar with the park and its mission.

Possibly the main reason these images make the viewer uncomfortable is the inclusion of the audience. In one image, people linger close by, chatting, sipping 32 oz. soft drinks, and casually snapping photos as a bloodied Christ is taunted by centurions. In another, Christ is on the cross in the distance; in the foreground, a group wearing tennis shoes, shorts, and ball caps mills around, taking in this most sacred moment.

Art historically speaking, such images are actually not without precedent. In Northern Europe in the 15th century, for example, when painters created devotional images—of the Annunciation, the birth of Christ, the Crucifixion—it was common practice to include images of the patrons in either the foreground or the wings, in contemporary dress and therefore looking entirely out of place.

Typically, though, the people paying for the painting (and shoehorned into the scenario) are looking away from the biblical episodes on offer. These paintings purported to show inward mystical experience, something that was essentially invisible, now miraculously available thanks to the painter's skill. The patrons might look to the ground, the distance, or directly at the viewer: They are not in the scene; they are merely envisioning and facilitating it.

The sheer availability of the images at The Holy Land Experience and the clear fact that these are not inward visions but garish outward manifestations ready to be consumed clearly distinguish them from these paintings. This is a distinctly new kind of devotional tableau, one that ironically brings to mind all of the age-old prohibitions against idolatry built into the faith itself—prohibitions that have led to long, violent iconoclastic purges at certain points in history.



Above: E. Brady Robinson, *Roman Centurions, Christ (actor) + Crowd*, 2008, Ink Jet Archival Print, 21x 31 inches, Courtesy of Heineman Meyers Contemporary Art

MARK TRIBE

New York artist Mark Tribe is perhaps best known for founding Rhizome, an online nonprofit organization that not only offers exhibitions and commissions for new media artists, but also maintains the world's largest archive of new media art projects.

Tribe is primarily interested in new media culture as a vehicle for creating dialogue and generating social change. The video presented here, *We Must Name the System* (2007), comes from Tribe's *Port Huron Project*, a series of performances in which landmark speeches by New Left leaders in the 1960s and early '70s are restaged using professional actors.

We Must Name the System is a reenactment of a speech given by Paul Potter, onetime president of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) during the 1965 March on Washington to End the War in Vietnam. Tribe's reenactment of the speech takes place in front of the Washington Monument, exactly as Potter's original did in 1965. D.C. area actor Max Bunzel stands in for Potter, and addresses a crowd of young and veteran activists, including former SDS Vice President Paul Booth, area arts cognoscenti, and random passers-by on the National Mall. Clearly not everyone in the audience is wise to Tribe's premise; those happening upon it by chance surely must be perplexed by the many references to current actions in Vietnam in what otherwise sounds like a timely anti-war speech.

Tribe lectures on new media and culture as a professor at Brown University. At the start of the current U.S. war in Iraq, the artist noted a real lack of protests and student activism on his campus. This became his motivation for recreating statements of social activism from another era.

The extent to which the language of Potter's speech still sounds fresh and contemporary is almost jarring, and argues for the originality of the vision expressed by '60s radicals. Yet it would also seem that despite the transformations of American life brought about particularly by the civil rights movement and feminism, the establishment has not changed so much after all. By creating a space in which two different historical moments collide, Tribe manages to interrogate both the disengagement of the present generation and the unfinished business of the past.



ERIN WILLIAMS

Erin Colleen Williams is a sculptor and metalworker from Philadelphia. Like A. Clarke Bedford, she builds props and documents to support a seemingly plausible but patently untrue version of history. Williams attempts to shoehorn her own family into widely circulating historical narratives, in effect claiming herself to be an heir to imagined greatness.

Her last exhibition here at the AAC featured large, elaborate devices made from metal, wood, and fabric that the artist attributed to a fictitious great-grandmother, Minnie Eureka Young. According to Williams, Young was an imaginative inventor working at the turn of the century, the designs were overlooked for the most part because of her gender. Young (according to Williams) created everything from a filing cabinet-sized gramophone, created long before Edison purloined the idea; a beautifully crafted humane hunting rifle that fires weighted nets to snare prey; and a dancing dress for a legless lady, looking something like a giant satin-wrapped birdcage with a harness suspended inside.

For this show, Williams makes much bolder claims for her ancestors. Her newest piece, *A Hypothetical Lineage*, is a 23 foot linen scroll tracing her genealogy not only back to the Pilgrims who arrived on these shores via the *Mayflower*, but to all manner of royalty. Through a long series of names, complete with birth and death dates, countries of origin, and heraldry, Williams connects herself to the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne, and draws the viewer ineluctably down through the ages, to the most outrageous endpoint possible: Jesus Christ.

As with the rest of Williams's production, her scroll looks uncannily like an actual found artifact—clearly handmade, possibly old, and employing the look and syntax of similar historical sewn handcrafts. Of course, a thriving industry (much of it based online) exists for anyone looking for a shortcut to her or his own beginnings and possible celebrity ancestors. Often the answers such services provide are dubious or inflated—if not as outrageously extravagant as Williams's claims.

More broadly, the piece points to the contemporary tendency to view history as a series of competing claims, all of which exist simultaneously, and all of which somehow might be equally valid, available for editing or recasting by anyone. The world continues to move from clear professional categories in journalism and cultural production to a more democratic, open-source sort of information culture. In light of this, Williams's insertion of self-serving fictions into existing historical narratives is timely, not unlike editing one's own biography on Wikipedia.



The Arlington Arts Center (AAC) was founded in 1974 and is housed in the historic Maury School. We are a private, nonprofit contemporary visual arts center dedicated to presenting and supporting new work of regional artists. Through exhibitions, educational programs, and subsidized studios, the AAC serves as a bridge between artists and the public.

We are one of the largest non-federal venues for emerging and contemporary artists in the greater Washington DC area and have taken a leadership role in supporting visual arts throughout the region. The AAC has become a launching pad for many emerging artistic careers and is a significant contributor to the area's cultural life.

The exhibition program at the AAC consists of group shows and solo exhibitions. The year is divided into five slots, each eight–twelve weeks long. The AAC issues an annual call for solo exhibition proposals for the subsequent season. Proposals are reviewed by a rotating Exhibitions Committee, which includes members of staff and Board, as well as outside curators, artists, and other arts professionals. Calls for entry for group shows are issued intermittently and are juried by an AAC designated curator. Occasional invitational exhibitions take place, with the AAC Director of Exhibitions or a guest curator making the selections. The AAC continues to pursue artistic excellence and to facilitate bringing emerging and under-represented artists into contact with the public as well as with museum and gallery professionals. The AAC serves as a focal point for the ongoing exchange of ideas and images between artists and the public and as a doorway to the arts for the local and Mid-Atlantic community.

Our programs and workshops are made possible through the generous support of the Virginia Commission for the Arts/NEA, the Arlington Commission for the Arts, The Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, the Philip L. Graham Fund, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Strategic Analysis, the Washington Forrest Foundation, BB&T, The Venable Foundation, the Arlington Community Foundation, and our members and donors. Generous in-kind support is provided by Arlington Catering.

The center is free and open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 11 am to 5 pm.



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