

Life on Mars, 55th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 3, 2008 - January 11, 2009

Jacob Korczynski

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L'installation vidéo d'Omer Fast *Tank Translated* condense plusieurs préoccupations de l'exposition. Ses quatre canaux présentent des entrevues avec le commandant, le conducteur, le canonier et le chargeur d'un char d'assaut israélien précédemment déployé en territoire palestinien. Agencés selon les positions des occupants du véhicule, les moniteurs rendent caduque la possibilité d'un récit unique, alors que les sous-titres anglais tronquent le sens des entrevues. L'ellipse, la traduction antinomique ou la commutation de termes militaires et artistiques réduisent l'efficacité du langage et de l'image comme systèmes d'accès à l'expérience de la guerre, tout en soulignant le jeu de pouvoir inhérent aux pratiques artistiques.

La multiplication des pistes d'interprétation est également au cœur de la magistrale *Tin Drum Trilogy* de Paul Chan. Sa première partie conçoit sur un mode grotesque la vie privée des membres de l'administration Bush s'ils étaient soldats en Afghanistan; la deuxième étale presque sans commentaire la diversité de la vie quotidienne à Bagdad à la veille de l'invasion de 2003; la troisième révèle les tensions inavouées entre éthique religieuse et politique offi-

cielle chez les électeurs conservateurs du Nebraska. La trilogie complexifie ainsi intentionnellement les représentations préconçues des amis et des ennemis, tant politiques que religieux².

Il reste toutefois à savoir ce qui attire le public dans une exposition sur l'art et la guerre: est-ce l'attente, exprimée par Groys, que le contexte de l'art soit un véritable rempart de résistance critique, ou le soulagement d'y exercer notre responsabilité civique?

1 L'essai du commissaire dans le catalogue de l'exposition élabore en détail l'idée de la « machine de guerre » en s'inspirant des écrits de Gilles Deleuze, de Slavoj Žižek, de Michael Hardt et d'Antonio Negri. Voir *Signals in the Dark: Art in the Shadow of War*, Toronto, Blackwood Gallery, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, 2008. 2 Voir l'entrevue de George Baker avec Chan dans *October*, n° 123, hiver 2008. Pour plus d'informations sur les œuvres dans l'exposition, voir le site de la galerie Leonard et Bina Ellen: <http://ellengallery.concordia.ca/2006/fr/reflexion-signals.php>

Elitza Dulguerova est post-doctorante à Stanford University. Son livre *Usages et utopies: l'exposition dans l'avant-garde russe préévolutionnaire* paraîtra en 2009 aux Presses du réel.



Johan Grimonperez, image tirée de *DIAL H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, 1997. Avec la permission du Netherlands Media Art Institute.

Life on Mars

55th Carnegie International
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,
May 3, 2008–January 11, 2009



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Tiere*, 2005, C print, 144,8 x 213,4 cm, Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery (New York).

Despite fulfilling several different roles during its century-plus history, the Carnegie International exists today as a quadrennial exhibition of international contemporary art. This second-oldest exhibition of its kind opened just months after the first edition of the Venice Biennale, but today the Carnegie International is only one stop in an ongoing global cycle. With each subsequent edition, the exhibition and its institution stand in stark contrast with the proliferation of hundreds of younger biennials that draw upon strategies of site-specificity in order to establish a self-reflexive discourse with the

communities in which they are based. Like the Whitney Biennial, each edition of which is dictated primarily by the site of the organizing institution, the Carnegie International must address international contemporary art and its socio-political climate within an exhibition site that is demarcated by the galleries of the Carnegie Museum of Art.

While *Life on Mars* curator Douglas Fogle deserves credit for a heuristic installation methodology that has the viewer encountering the exhibition in spaces outside of the museum's contemporary galleries, including the exterior courtyard, the corri-

dor leading to the curatorial offices, and even the roof, the most successful strategy that Fogle deploys in addressing what he calls a world "in which global events challenge and threaten to overtake our everyday existence" is an emphasis on artists' projects in photography and other image-based media, including film and video. In the first chapter of *On the Museum's Ruins*, Douglas Crimp proposes that the photographic image, based upon its function as document, fulfils a radical role within the institution of the museum, directing the viewer to a reality beyond the walls of the museum. The photo-based projects in *Life on Mars* critically formulate a frame through which the outside world is allowed entrance, thus challenging not only the autonomy of the exhibition and institution, but also the position of the viewer.

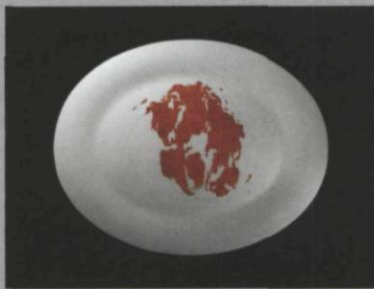
The role of photography in reshaping institutional space is perhaps most evident upon entering one of the largest exhibition spaces devoted to a single artist in *Life on Mars*. Here, in the cavernous Carnegie Museum of Art Theater, Sharon Lockhart's feature-length 16 mm film *Pine Flat* (2005) is being screened twice daily for the duration of the exhibition. The culmination of years of research in the eponymous community in rural California, *Pine Flat* has a structure that is informed by an extended contemplation of the artist's young subjects, composed of twelve static ten-minute takes of children from the community at play and rest, both alone and in groups. These images of American youths in the lead-up to the inauguration of George W. Bush's second term in office are meticulously recorded by Lockhart. These are the children of our time, those who have only ever known an America at war, New Orleans as a devastated city, and pho-

tography as digital and malleable, not as physical material. Outside the cinema, a series of nineteen large-format photographs of children from the same community, titled *Pine Flat Portrait Series* (2005), extends Lockhart's project beyond the duration of the film and, in doing so, invites the viewer to contemplate the future function of the photograph as museum object after the life of the exhibition has expired.

While the ethnographic impulse of Lockhart's project emphasizes the role of the artist in production of the image and the deployment of the photograph in the service of an archive, elsewhere in the exhibition the photograph circulates as found image, the product of parallel histories. The presentation of work by Wolfgang Tillmans in *Life on Mars* is highly fragmented and encompasses a variety of modes in which the photographer is known to work, including abstraction and portraiture.



Sharon Lockhart, *Pine Flat Portrait Studio: Becky*, 2005, c-print, 115,57 x 85,55 cm, Courtesy Carnegie Museum of Art, The Henry Hillman Fund.



Rivane Neuenschwander, *Pangaea's Diaries*, 2008, digital photographs transferred to 16 mm film, loop approx. 2 min. Courtesy of Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, (New York), Galeria Fortes Vilaça (San Paulo), and Stephen Friedman Gallery, (London).

His installation forsakes the tidy boundaries of the museum space to present a tactile patchwork of photographs that have

been simply tacked or taped to the wall, or even laid out upon tables. The artist's dissolution of boundaries extends to the dichotomy between public and private with his incorporation of found press photographs alongside his images. Here, among the photographs scattered upon surfaces, emerges one of the starkest images in the entire exhibition, the haunting illustration of a press headline that reads, "Two Iranian teenagers, sentenced under Sharia law, are publicly hanged for the 'crime' of homosexuality. Mashhad, 2005." Well known for documenting queer culture, in which he is a major figure, Tillmans not only opens the museum to the events of the world beyond, but, more importantly, embraces this found image as part of his own continuing

history, transferred from an ephemeral existence demarcated by time to a public presence in the occupation of space. In contrast to the projects in *Life on Mars* that situate photography as a mnemotechnique, Rivane Neuenschwander's *Pangaea's Diaries* (2008) is a scenario without humans, an animation composed of a series of digital photographs, transferred to 16 mm film for projection. Neuenschwander has used a stop-frame animation technique to record hundreds of ants as they consume a plate of meat, an image that echoes the formation of Earth from the massive supercontinent of the film's title to the separation of the seven continents. With her photographic sequence making visible a process that is normally unseen,

Neuenschwander, like Lockhart and Tillmans, asserts that it will be the underestimated or the largely unobserved that will shape the world, and in doing so she provides the most astute metaphor for *Life on Mars* and the project of the Carnegie International: the divisions of the world are temporarily mediated by way of the image, and yet, this assembly is a vision that cannot hold, it will soon disperse, and in time, we will begin again.

Jacob Korczynski is a curator currently based in Toronto, where he is the programmer at the Images Festival and a member of the Pleasure Dome collective.

Molly Landreth

Embodiment: A Portrait of Queer Life in America
IPS gallery, Montreal
November 1 – December 20, 2008

From Barack Obama's gay-inclusive acceptance speech to the controversial passing of the Prop. 8 ban on gay marriage, the lives of gay Americans are, for better or for worse, on the public radar in the United States. Molly Landreth moves beyond party platforms and ballot boxes, embarking on a tour of the country to produce a growing archive of queer photographic portraits, often working outside of urban gay centres, to provide a distinctive portrayal of what it means, to those who live it, to be queer in America. In this excursion, she revolts against clichéd narratives dictated by policy-makers and mainstream media and permits her lively cast to take charge of their own queer representation. Taking a cue from Robert Frank, entering into dialogues with an unpredictable ensemble both embedded in their environments and breaking free of the stereotyped lives that those environments sometimes inflict, Landreth introduces into the gallery evidence that bright lights, big city, is not always where community – or family – is formed.

Landreth's large-format prints depict small town made suspect by conceptions of the appropriateness of certain bodies to certain backdrops. "You're not from around here, are you?" is a euphemistic remark made to those deemed out of place in their surroundings, a passive denunciation of difference, a phrase that sometimes precedes a literal running-out-of-town. Landreth manipulates this exilic custom by choosing as subjects individuals typically made to feel like outsiders in the very places that they call home. Rustic backgrounds situate prodigious subjects as both displaced and firmly planted, her anthropological project extending an affirming hand. "Paying attention to carefully considered identities and surroundings," she notes, "I find in a



Ronnie and Jo, 2008, digital pigment print, 81.3 x 101.6 cm.

moment suspended, that an overlap is revealed, exposing the subtle outlines of who people are and more importantly, who they wish to become."¹¹

Armed with camera and a candid cross-country community, she is conveniently on hand to witness innumerable unique acts of being and becoming.

In the gallery, queers convene in the backyard and in the kitchen, park themselves proudly on and in cars, and open doors – bedroom and others – that many Americans would rather leave closed. Youthful rites of passage are extended to America's queer population in the Gregory Crewdson-evoking summer idyll *Meg and Renee*, Seattle, WA, in which a couple sits cosily in the front seat of an ancient Toyota parked at a lover's lane – the site of romantic refuge for countless eras of American teens. In *Gary and Jeremy*, Brooklyn, NY, dreamy repose is on the menu for two post-adolescent boys who sit at a wood-paneled diner table, the arm of Jeremy brought into focus by its dotting enveloping of Gary. Straight and queer prejudices are challenged in *Ronnie and Jo*, a ruminative

depiction of two Orthodox Jewish men sitting in a brightly coloured kitchen, fingers intertwined, Jo staring into the camera and Ronnie staring at Jo. A "No War" flier hangs on the window behind, attesting to the political identities of the sitters and complicating uninformed perceptions of the incompatibility of devout religious faith and politically radical identities. In *Travis at Gay Skate*, Glendale, CA, light-hearted vulnerability and playful awkwardness exude from Travis, who sits off-rink, his hands crossed over his lap, his back hunched in humorous contrast to the reckless confidence that his wheeled footwear requires. Offsetting nuanced representations of queer life are explicit portrayals of queer intimacy, such as *Simon and West*, 9AM, Seattle, WA, in which two lovers awake to Landreth's lens, staring unabashedly and directly ahead. Pushing past oversimplified notions of sexual and gender identities, Landreth incorporates into her series the array of bodies that comprise the realities of queer communities and partnerships, compassionately illustrating the untold ways in which they are experienced.

Landreth's compositional style may be commonplace in photographic practice, but her portraits are nevertheless stimulating, contributing to the body of queer representation that has, arguably, yet to reach its saturation point. Indeed, in a straight world in which queer lives and the bodies that live them are rarely noted for anything other than how they deviate, *Embodiment: A Portrait of Queer Life in America* enters into the gallery at an opportune moment in American history, a history that, as Landreth makes clear, must stretch to accommodate the heterogeneous population that forms it. While it might still be a while before queer life in America is appreciated in all its diverse manifestations, queer audiences will perhaps be pleased by the prospect of seeing themselves reflected in the images that stare back at them.

1 Molly Landreth, "Work Statement," *Embodiment: A Portrait of Queer Life in America*. Hey, Hot Shot!, <http://www.heyshot.com/blog/2007/02/19/winter-hhs-winner-molly-landreth/>

Erin Silver is a graduate student in the Department of Art History at Concordia University. Her research is focused on queer aesthetics, collage, and radical exhibition practice.



Simon and West, Seattle, 2008, digital pigment print, 101.6 x 81.3 cm.