

D O R S K Y
G A L L E R Y
Curatorial Programs



POSSESSED

VERONICA BAILEY, CONRAD BAKKER, STEVE BUDINGTON, MARGARIDA CORREIA,
HARRELL FLETCHER, MICHAEL LANDY, ANDRZEJ ZIELINSKI

Curated by Miriam Kienle
February 4 – April 17, 2007

Opening reception: Sunday, February 4, 2:00–5:00 p.m.

“If referring to what you eat you were to say, “I possess this,” then I would understand you. Because you obviously incorporate what you eat into yourself, you transform it into your substance, you feel it enter you and belong to you. But it’s not with regard to what you eat that you speak of possession. What do you call possessing?” — Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*’

How does art about objects facilitate an understanding of the process of possession? How does a simple object very quickly become complex when it enters into subject/object, object/thing, artist/art/viewer relationships within the work of art? By rendering single objects that hold a particular resonance, the artists in this exhibition address these questions. Their works engage us with personal, everyday objects—objects that protect and assist us in rationalizing both the built and natural world, as well as aid us in communicating what we have come to understand about these worlds. Although these objects may feel immediately recognizable and familiar, deeper inspection yields psychological and aesthetic dislocation. Through the artist’s rendering, the object

becomes strange—clunky, witty, wordy, worn, full of longing and loss. These artists question spatial realms by representing the object as beyond a singular function or symbolic value. In asking how we possess objects—and how objects possess us—they animate our intimate, inanimate world.

Veronica Bailey’s series *Postscripts* treats the correspondence between the photographer Lee Miller and her lover (later, husband), Surrealist artist, Roland Penrose, as an intimate meditation on the nature of absence. In *Missing You*, the opened edge of the torn envelope is foregrounded—its rough edges an index of the hurried act of opening. The letter floats vertically in dark space in front of us, allowing us a taste of the contents within. The physicality of the protruding paper is accentuated by the larger-than-life-sized scale of its representation. The verticality and size of the print gives one the sense that they could actually enter the letter. The depicted object appears so tactile, but the quality of vintage letters—the scent, texture of brittle paper, and faded handwriting—can only be imagined when looking at Bailey’s photographs of them. Their presence is absent to us, echoing the overall sense of loss that charges the body of work. Even Bailey, who has read and handled the letters, giving them names such as *Missing You*, *Don’t Make Me Wait Too Long*, and *All My Love*, cannot fully grasp that which passed between Penrose and Miller in the letters from their time apart.

The painting *Rough Draft* by **Steve Budington** depicts a larger-than-life-sized stack of ruled notebook paper. Like Bailey’s photographed letters, we are presented with a monumental, visually tactile object, but are not able to read the contents within. In contrast to Bailey’s works, where the captions disclose to whom the letter belonged and hints to its content, Budington’s title tells us simply that this is a rough draft. Between the detailed ripples of the manuscript’s pages is revealed the structure onto which the painting is constructed. There is liveliness to this contrast. This painting from life, in attempting to get at the vigor of the thing, remains a rough draft of sorts. Budington’s work in many ways is about how the visual and haptic overflow of objects may exceed their definition in the language that we use to discuss them. In a recent interview, Budington stated: “I like to find extremely large spaces in small or banal things and vice versa. How things we encounter can switch from amazing to banal and back again without physical change. As poet/novelist Fanny Howe said, the great challenge that faces this generation of artists is to be able to maintain a sense of ‘bewilderment’ with things.” The allusion is to Howe’s lecture on the poet’s process, wherein she also stated: “And it is with this language problem that bewilderment begins to form, for me, more than an attitude—but an actual approach, a way—to resolve the unresolvable. In the dictionary,



Veronica Bailey *Missing You*, 2005

to bewilder is 'to cause to lose one's sense of where one is.'"² On each page of our orderly dictionary is a collision of the things that the world has created. In Budington's dictionary painting *Hostage* our eyes are drawn around a gigantic dictionary held opened by chance to the letter "O." Going from colors to brushstrokes, forms and small pictures of an octopus or Ingres' *Odalisque* to words like "October," "oculus," and "odious", words become simultaneously visual and textual; it is left to each viewer to process their own complex set of associations among the selected words, pictures, painted surfaces, and the painting as a whole. In so doing, Budington forces each viewer to question the preconception that the dictionary holds hostage the truth of a word or that the painting contains the "essence" of the object's function.

The exhibited works by **Margarida Correia** are part of her project *Saudade*—a Portuguese word that does not precisely translate into English but loosely means "longing" or "to miss." Her photographs depict objects owned by members of her generation (born in the 1970s) that once belonged to an elder relative with whom the current owner had a close relationship. The objects are articles of clothing that tend to be of no particular monetary value and were intended to be ephemeral, but have not only managed to survive, in some cases, they have outlasted their original owner.



Steve Budington *Hostage*, 2005

Each work is a triptych containing a portrait of the current owner wearing the object, a reproduction of an old photograph of the original owner with the object, and a photograph of the object alone on a black background. Together the three photographs



Margarida Correia *Ana* (from *Saudade*), 2005

evoke layers of time and various modes of representation in photography. The interplay invites the viewer to contemplate the passing of time as made tangible through objects or relics and the role of these objects in forging the connection between two people. Furthermore, Correia's works bring to attention aspects of our personal experiences that affected objects necessarily cannot contain.

Andrzej Zielinski's paintings are of laptops and cell phones, objects that could be said to possess us not only because of the amount of time that we spend with them, but because they retain traces of our histories: pictures, contacts, conversations, memories and ideas. Furthermore, through these objects we can access a seemingly infinite number of things, some intentionally created/found and others stumbled upon. It is our window into cyberspace, where simulated environments offer strange products that signal our fears and desires. In this way, the laptop becomes like a virtual version of the arcades found in Surrealist's novels (a place Breton and Aragon found anachronistic objects—things that spoke to displaced desire). But Zielinski's object is not the laptop itself, but a strange representation that is more akin to the Surrealist "found object" of indeterminable function. These humorous items float alone, brightly colored. Zielinski's electronics are seductive and recall the strategies of advertising.

But clearly these are neither representations of “real” laptops, nor advertisements for them. They are not iconic or well “branded.” They are oddly shaped, clunky, and ridiculously dysfunctional in the over-the-top quality of their painted surface. One might imagine them as a future or obsolete model of a laptop that reveals the absurdity of the desire for that which is “state-of-the-art.”

Conrad Bakker, too, utilizes humor and humble materials (wood and paint) to create objects that give one momentary pause in a society churning with consumerist strategies. His ongoing body of work, *Untitled Projects*, has employed a number of social, institutional and consumer contexts—mail order catalogues, pyramid schemes, art fairs, museums, K-mart, eBay and yard sales—in ways that call attention to our expectations of objects and the spaces they inhabit. In each project, Bakker makes painted wood replicas of objects that are both congruous and incongruous to the particular setting in which they are placed—imagine reaching for consumables on the shelves in the supermarket, and finding a carved and painted version of the desired object, or at MASS MoCA coming across his display for a pyramid scheme featuring fake functionless containers labelled “Untitled Product.” Bakker frequently places projects within the context of eBay. His items there have ranged from colorful Tupperware sets to 2D panel paintings that are based on eBay auction photographs (for example, six views of an Ed Ruscha collectable book or formal arrangements of Eames chairs and Rolex watches that bring into view the overlooked and often compelling contexts and compositions in which objects are presented on eBay). Outside of the cleverness of Bakker’s placement of objects, there is also something endearing about the objects themselves as their awkward physical construction reveals and mimics our desire for them. For the present exhibition, Bakker will be creating a site-specific work that engages the institutional infrastructure and the values we project into gallery space. The installation brings notice to certain aesthetic conventions concerning presentation and display of art in a gallery/museum setting.

In a video project by **Harrell Fletcher** titled, *Hello There Friend*, a hand opens and closes, each time revealing a new found object that has been picked up from the street below. Shot in Queens, New York with local resident, Raymond Denyson, it is one of a series of similar collaborative, site-specific works that utilizes a simple format to engage its audience in an intimate understanding of a particular place. As Denyson singles out new objects, Fletcher is introduced to the things to which his

collaborator is drawn. The artist attempts to see what Denyson sees in a particular item—when one object blows out of his hand too quickly, we hear Fletcher’s muffled voice say, “wa, what was it?” Some of the objects are discernible (a red cap-gun ring, pink plastic heart, or rubber hair tie) while others are more ambiguous (a brown cylindrical thing, blue blob, or red piece of plastic). When a grey wad of plastic-like ribbon pops from his hand, Denyson seems to cherish the humorous gesture by anticipating the object’s materiality and the action it will perform. Conversely, when the viewer can more specifically name an item, like a metal lock with its loop cut or a candied Valentine’s heart, one begins to imagine meanings



Andrzej Zieliński *Laptop with Shadow*, 2006



Conrad Bakker *Consumer Actions*, 2002

outside the object's physical presence. With each new object presented in a repeating manner, we begin to assemble a sense of place through the eyes of an individual from that community. Fletcher's project considers how things that often go overlooked in our immediate surroundings at the same time help to shape them.

In his widely recognized work *Break Down* (2001), **Michael Landy** gathered a team to take detailed inventory and destroy via industrial shredder each of his possessions (totaling over 7,000 items), in an event he has called a consumerist experiment in identity. Many of us may have fantasized about such an act when burdened by our belongings while moving house, but cannot imagine ridding ourselves of everything. After shredding his car, books, clothes, photographs, letters, and artworks (his own and those of others—Chris

Ofilo, Gary Hume, Damien Hirst, etc.), the last and most difficult item to go was a sheepskin coat that had been his father's. The expensive coat, which was paid off in installments by Landy's mother after his father suffered severe disabilities from a tunnel-mining accident, was handed down to Landy, as it had become too heavy and cumbersome for his father to wear. The coat that took on totemic significance during the project can be seen as a point of departure for a new body of work, where Landy has created hyper-realistic drawings of his father's face, scarred appendages, and personal belongings in a series entitled, *Welcome to My World—Built with You in Mind*. Just as meticulously as he destroyed his possessions, Landy recreated in minute detail his father's things (depicting each hair on a Barbie comb or his father's handwriting on a VHS tape of a boxing match). The drawings on view



Harrell Fletcher *Hello There Friend (Queens)*, 2004



Michael Landy *Barbie Comb*, 2004

are a small selection from this series, which in itself is a selection—the object's the artist chooses appear, again like the coat, eccentric and insignificant outside personal attachment. (When we lose a loved one and must sort through their things, isn't it often the most insignificant items that elicit the strongest memories of that person?) Encountering these intimate objects recalls the voyeurism of *Break Down*, but they elicit a more meditative and empathetic kind of looking. The drawings, in both making and looking, seem to figure a contemplative space where, "Even in the era of global capital, a possession can be something other than a commodity."³

Each of the works in *Possessed* negotiates in differing ways how objects, singled out and translated into the artist's chosen medium, can resonate with human experiences.

They are not transparent windows into the histories of the depicted objects, but starting points for looking empathetically at that which is nearest to us. □

— *Miriam Kienle*

NOTES

1. Pessoa, Fernando. *The Book of Disquiet*, ed & trans. Richard Zenith (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002) p. 302. This quote is by the Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa, ca. 1900. Almost a century later, in a world increasingly abundant with objects, we must continue to ask what it means to "possess" something, and perhaps conversely, what does it mean to "consume" it? Do our man-made possessions transform into our substance? Enter and belong to us?
2. Fanny Howe's lecture was given as part of a Poetics & Readings Series, sponsored by Small Press Traffic at New College (San Francisco: Sept. 1998).
3. Withers review of *Break Down* opens: "Peter Vanezis, a forensic scientist who specializes in human identification, was recently asked on British radio about the emotional demands of the human rights work he undertakes in places like Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia. He replied that his professional composure was tested most when the bodies he examined still bore personal effects: a toy clutched in a child's hand, for example. Even in the era of global capital, a possession can be something other than a commodity." Withers questions whether Landy's reiteration of consumer structures has the ability to offer any critique and I juxtapose this quote to propose that these drawings offer something other than critique or reiteration. Withers, Rachael, "International Shorts" *Artforum* Vol. 44, no. 9 (May 2001) p. 77-78.

BIOGRAPHY

Miriam Kienle is an independent curator and writer. Formerly the director of Ubu Gallery in New York, she is currently pursuing her doctorate in modern/contemporary art history at the University of Illinois. She has co-authored and/or edited numerous critical articles, reviews, and books including *Richard Yelle's International Glass Art*.

C H E C K L I S T

VERONICA BAILEY

MISSING YOU (from *Postscripts*), 2005
Durst Lambda Archival Fuji print
43" x 19" (edition of 5)
Courtesy of the artist

*From: Roland Penrose [21 Downshire Hill, Hampstead, London]
To: Madame Lee Miller Eloui, Villa Albeit, Sharia Sabri Pacha, Dokki, Giza, Cairo
Postmarked: London 7.30am January 10th 1939*

I LOVE YOU (from *Postscripts*), 2005
Durst Lambda Archival Fuji print
43" x 19" (edition of 5)
Courtesy of the artist

*From: Lee Miller [Hotel Grand-Bretagne, Athens]
To: Mr Roland Penrose, 21 Downshire Hill, Hampstead, London
Postmarked: Athens 6.15pm May 2nd 1938*

ALL MY LOVE (from *Postscripts*), 2005
Durst Lambda Archival Fuji print
43" x 19" (edition of 5)
Courtesy of the artist

*From: Lee Miller [Villa Albeit, Sharia Sabri Pacha, Dokki, Giza, Cairo]
To: Mr Roland Penrose, 21 Downshire Hill, Hampstead, London
Postmarked: Cairo 8.30pm March 8th 1939*

CONRAD BAKKER

UNTITLED PROJECT: PROJECTION, 2007
Wood and paint
Courtesy of the artist

STEVE BUDINGTON

ROUGH DRAFT, 2004
Oil on canvas
42" x 59"
Courtesy of the artist

HOSTAGE, 2005
Oil on canvas
60" x 64"
Courtesy of the artist

POSSESSED, 2002
Oil on canvas
22" x 24"
Collection Patrick Chamberlain and Jessica Stockholder

RULER, 2002
Oil on canvas
22" x 24"
Collection Patrick Chamberlain and Jessica Stockholder

AMBIVALENCE, 2002
Oil on canvas
22" x 24"
Collection Patrick Chamberlain and Jessica Stockholder

MARGARIDA CORREIA

PAULA (from *Saudade*), 2005
C-Print
20" x 30"/ 14" x 17 1/2"/ 11" x 14"
Courtesy of the artist

ANA (from *Saudade*), 2005
C-Print
20" x 30"/ 14" x 17 1/2"/ 11" x 14"
Courtesy of the artist

ALEXIS (from *Saudade*), 2005
C-Print
20" x 30"/ 14" x 17 1/2"/ 11" x 14"
Courtesy of the artist

SIMS (from *Saudade*), 2005
C-Print
20" x 30"/ 14" x 17 1/2"/ 11" x 14"
Courtesy of the artist

ADRIENNE (from *Saudade*), 2004
C-Print
20" x 30"/ 14" x 17 1/2"/ 11" x 14"
Courtesy of the artist

HARRELL FLETCHER

HELLO THERE FRIEND (Queens), 2004
DVD (Time: 18.16 min.)
Courtesy of the artist

HELLO THERE FRIEND (Portland), 2002
DVD (Time: 6.37 min.)
Courtesy of the artist

MICHAEL LANDY

ASTER DWARF QUEEN, 2004
Colored pencil on paper
19" x 25 1/4"
Courtesy Alexander and Bonin

DRAUGHT EXCLUDER, 2004
Colored pencil on paper
25 1/4" x 38 1/4"
Courtesy Alexander and Bonin

BARBIE COMB, 2004
Colored pencil on paper
22" x 30 1/4"
Collection Linda and Ronald F. Daitz

ANDRZEJ ZIELINSKI

LAPTOP WITH CARRYING HOLE, 2006
Oil on panel
27" x 27"
Private Collection

LAPTOP WITH SHADOW, 2006
Oil on panel
27" x 27"
Collection Larry and Cynthia Meeker

UNTITLED, 2003
Oil on linen over panel
20" x 20"
Courtesy of the artist

UNTITLED, 2004
Oil on linen
20" x 20"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Roger Felberbaum

Cover: **Steve Budington**, *Rough Draft*, 2004

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

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