

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



EXTREMES & IN-BETWEENS

CECILY BROWN, ROBERT BREER, MARTHA COLBURN, BRENT GREEN, SUSI JIRKUFF,
EZRA JOHNSON, DAVID SHRIGLEY, FEDERICO SOLMI, NAOYUKI TSUJI

Curated by Joshua Altman
November 18 – January 27, 2008

Opening reception: Sunday, November 18, 2:00–5:00 p.m.

The title of the exhibition, *Extremes & In-Betweens*, references animation vernacular. “In-betweens” are small sketches that serve as transitions between the key-frames—“extremes”—which are those points in a sequence of motion that define pivotal periods in the motion. Traditionally, animators are consumed with making in-betweens as smooth as possible, while extremes typically follow standard forms of exaggerating the beginning or end of a particular action.

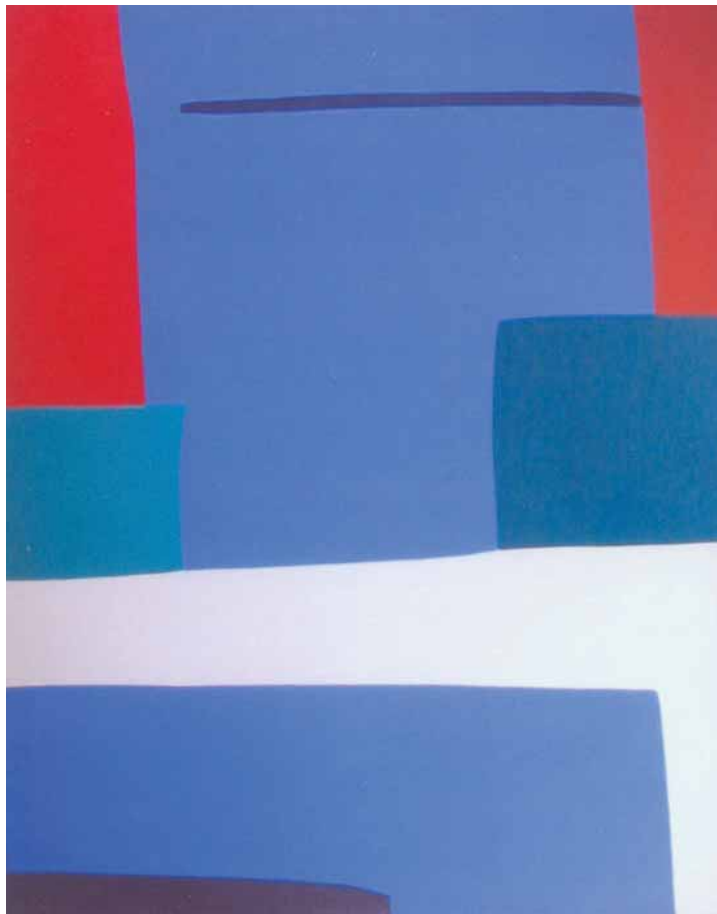
The artists in this exhibition break from the traditional confines of animation dogma, featuring irregular in-betweens and nontraditional extremes. Their lack of technical acumen in the medium and disregard for conformity is manifest by a virtual shunning of visual and/or narrative continuity. With little or no formal training in the use of traditional animating techniques, these artists, some of whom have achieved considerable

success in their chosen media, have challenged themselves to create the illusion of movement by serializing unique artistic frames and objects. *Extremes & In-Betweens*, which features a selection of international artists, focuses on this atypical use of animation.

While working as a painter in 1950s Paris, **Robert Breer** picked up a Bolex 16mm camera to make his first films, simple stop-action studies based on his abstract paintings. With a blatant disregard for the tenets of animation, he incorporated elements of painting, collage and photography to create a new kind of animated film that undermined the basic convention of the medium. In *Form Phases IV* (1954) the artist transforms simple linear geometries into organic shapes, and collapses recognizable forms into fleeting lines that threaten to revert to complete abstraction. This and other early films by the artist are influenced by such diverse European modern art elements as the abstract forms of the Russian Constructivists, the structuralist formulae of the Bauhaus, and the insensible universe of the Dadaists.

In Breer’s early paintings we see a new aesthetic, somewhere between abstract painting and kinetic sculpture. To illustrate the conventions and characteristics that helped to shape this new aesthetic, the exhibition includes *Untitled* (1954), a painting produced just prior to Breer’s ultimate transition into filmmaking. Now, 50 years later, the artist has compiled a portfolio of films that push the aesthetic and technical boundaries of conventional animation. Pegged by some critics as the *anti-animator*, Breer clearly has no interest in conforming to the seamless illusions of time, so characteristic of mainstream animation.

Utilizing a variety of non-traditional approaches and methods in their animating processes, the exhibition’s artists can be seen as continuing the innovations not only of Robert Breer, but of “Oskar Fischinger, Len Lye, and Harry Smith, all of whom applied the model of painting literally, appropriat-



Robert Breer *Untitled*, 1954



Martha Colburn *Still from Spiders in Love*, 2000

ing the technical means of painterly abstraction for filmic use” (Jan Tumlir, Hammer Museum). One can look back even earlier to the Italian Futurists who, shortly after the emergence of cinema as such, hand-painted and projected strips of raw film. In that vein, the artists in *Extremes & In-Betweens* are concerned not only with traditional “message via media,” but in some instances showcase the actual materials of the medium. Thus, **Martha Colburn’s** animations study the *materiel* of film, by incorporating elements of found footage (universal film leader countdown) and scratch film (direct animation), and by the appropriation of other films. Colburn’s filmic collages integrate such materials as plastic, paint and acetate to comment on subjects as diverse as fetishistic sex and current political events.

In other works, Colburn utilizes elements of cultural detritus to comment on consumerism, politics, sexuality, and social memory. Through a melding of live action paint-on-glass animations and found footage, Colburn’s films are a disturbing—if at times humorous—take on pop culture. In *Spiders In Love: An Arachnogasmic Musical* (2000) Colburn examines a particularly irritating grouping of “She-Spiders,” whose overt expression of lust ends with the ghoulish consumption of phalluses.

Ezra Johnson produces low-tech narrative films out of his vivid paintings. In *What Visions Burn* (2006) Johnson tells the story of the theft of a piece of art from a museum, offering a visually

poetic narrative of such a scandalous story. The film is the result of a time-consuming, arduous process in which Johnson paints and repaints the surface of his canvas, creating a still photograph for each frame of the film, while animating his characters in the process. On view with the film will be one of the large-scale paintings that resulted from the process of production. In it, we see Johnson’s painterly technique is perfect for capturing the gritty scenes of the film’s various inner city locations.

Cecily Brown, in her sole foray into animation, gives us the sexually graphic film, *Four*

Letter Heaven (1995), which continues themes central to her work: pornography, the depiction of flesh, and the sensuality of paint. Composed of 2000 hand-painted stills rendered on 3” x 5” index cards, the work, composed with a rotoscope, and set to Pérez Prado’s Latin music, highlights the gestural abstractions found in the erotic poses of an appropriated pornographic film. This work is recognized as a major turning point in the artist’s career. Brown’s animated work certainly predicts her future successes in painting which, according to the artist, are “highly charged, frenzied spectacles involving



Cecily Brown *Four Letter Heaven* (Animation cell), 1995

orgiastic rituals with an element of black comedy.” (Brown, Deitch Projects, NY)

In *Carlin* (2006), **Brent Green** relates the harrowing tale of the death of his aunt. In the film, a human-sized wooden skeleton (Green’s dying aunt, Carlin), taxidermied chickens, and live bees offer a voyeuristic glimpse into the deterioration and ultimate death of the body and the soul. The setting for the film is the actual farmhouse in Pennsylvania where Green was raised, adding an air of authenticity and angst to this tale of the artist’s diabetic aunt. When threatening ghosts with shotguns pursue Carlin, the chickens from the henhouse rescue her by pulling her into different rooms of the farm. Melding live action with hand-drawn techniques, Green combines the zeitgeist of a Grimm fairy tale with the unease of a Tim Burton film.

Austrian artist **Susi Jirkuff**’s felt-tip marker drawings and animations bring into question the effect of the media on the idiosyncrasies of intimate communication. Her animated figures employ nuanced speech and mundane gestures to express their self-awareness (they speak directly into the camera). The works, contained inside such restricted urban spaces as cars, cafés and small apartments, capture and display the eccentricities of globalized stereotypes. As concerned with artistic theoretic texts, urban theories and media analysis as they are with television, newspapers and popular music, Jirkuff’s works can be seen as “...multi-media reports from the zone of the mediascape” (Stella Rollig, Lentos Linz).

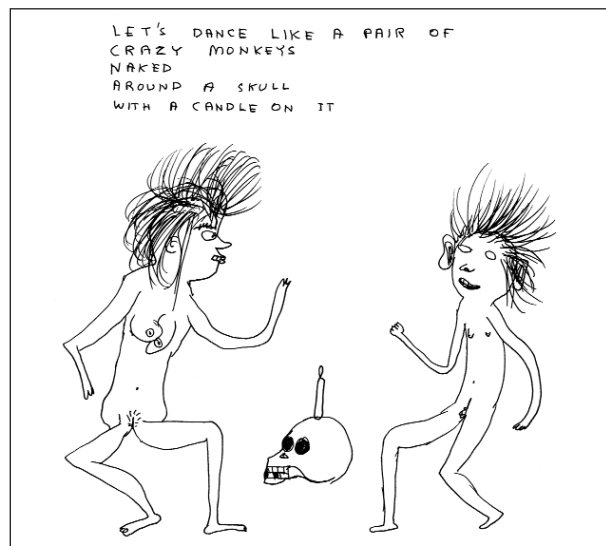
Conceived by **David Shrigley** as a music video for Bonnie Prince Billy (Will Oldham), *Agnes Queen of Sorrow* (2004) is an animation which functions as a strangely funny but highly unsettling examination of the human condition, one that is paralleled in the song’s hopelessly romantic lyrical refrain:

*If you wait another day, I will wait another day
And if you wait another day, I will wait another day...*

Shrigley continually challenges the tedium of daily life, revealing the world around him in a darkly humorous way. In describing his



Susi Jirkuff *Portraits (Hong Jon)*, 2005



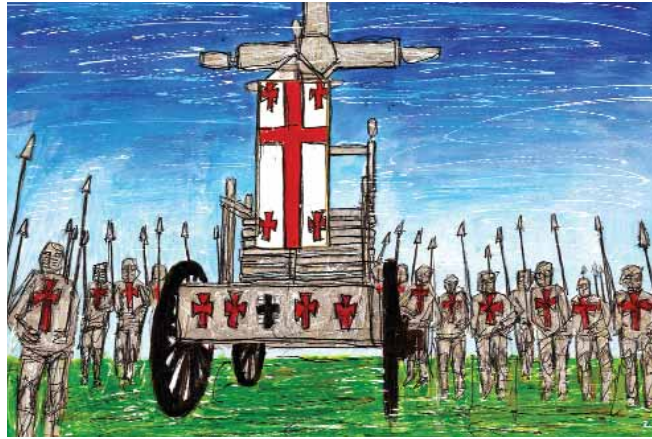
David Shrigley *Untitled*, 2005

inspiration for the work, Shrigley says, “Oldham sent a video he had made of him miming the song in a duet with a glove puppet that was either Agnes or an Agnes substitute...Eventually they asked me if I would animate Will, and that’s what I did.”

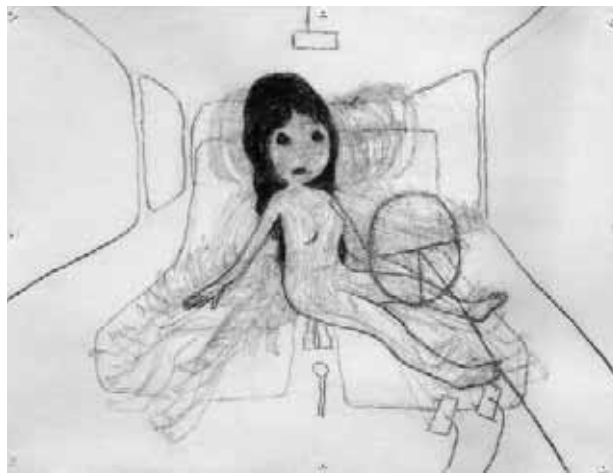
Federico Solmi's *The Evil Empire* (2007) is situated within the heart of Vatican City in the year 2046. The work recounts the misadventures of a young pope in crisis over his insatiable addiction to pornography. Solmi's films are, in his words, "a criticism of a system that approves and trusts without questioning the fragile foundation on which our culture and post-modernist society is based." In a culture where the historic pillars of ethical and rational behavior are consistently being challenged, and where religion, marriage and the family are under siege and seemingly crumbling, Solmi's film is a

sobering reflection of our contemporary reality.

Naoyuki Tsuji's *Children of Shadows* (2006) is a delicate and childlike vision of violent family drama, composed of eerie morphing images, otherworldly landscapes, and unsettling psychedelic streams of consciousness. Tsuji continually erases and re-works his characteristic charcoal drawings in the additive style, revealing what he calls the "afterimage." The result is a continuing



Federico Solmi *The Evil Empire* (detail), 2007



Naoyuki Tsuji *Untitled #1*, 2006

with little or no formal training in the use of standardized animating techniques, present unique and thought-provoking adaptations of the medium of animation. □

— Joshua Altman
New York, NY
October 2007

BIOGRAPHY

Joshua Altman is a Director at the Stux Gallery in New York. From 2003-2005 he was the Program Coordinator at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, a MoMA affiliate, where he was a producer of the acclaimed *Warm Up* series. Previously, Altman studied at City College at the City University of New York in the Art History and Museum Studies programs. He has curated several exhibitions, including: *The Inner Workings of Cold Contact*, Stux Gallery, New York, NY; *Chinese Relativity*, Stux Gallery, New York, NY; *SUPERFAT*, Brooklyn Fire Proof Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; *Recast: Postmodern Classical* (Co-curator), Onassis Center at Olympic Tower, New York, NY; *Visa For Thirteen* (Assistant Curator), P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, L.I.C., NY; *Absence of Light*, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA. He has contributed exhibition texts for the Shanghai Biennale catalogue and the Greater New York exhibition catalogue at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center.

CHECKLIST

CECILY BROWN

FOUR LETTER HEAVEN, 1995
16mm transfer to DVD, 3:00 min.

FOUR LETTER HEAVEN (Animation cells), 1995
Mixed media on paper
7.75 x 29.5 inches

FOUR LETTER HEAVEN (Animation cells), 1995
Mixed media on paper
7.75 x 29.5 inches

FOUR LETTER HEAVEN (Animation cells), 1995
Mixed media on paper
7.75 x 29.5 inches

FOUR LETTER HEAVEN (Animation cells), 1995
Mixed media on paper
7.75 x 29.5 inches

All works ©Cecily Brown. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

ROBERT BREER

FORM PHASES IV, 1954
Color film, 3:30 min.

BANG!, 1986
16mm, 10 min.

UNTITLED, 1954
Oil on canvas
4.5 x 5.5 feet

All works courtesy of the artist and GB Agency, Paris

MARTHA COLBURN

SPIDERS IN LOVE: AN ARACHNOGASMIC MUSICAL, 2000
Animation and found footage
16mm transfer to DVD, 2:30 min.

DESTINY MANIFESTO, 2006
Animation and found footage
16mm transfer to DVD, 9:00 min.

STILL FROM DESTINY MANIFESTO, 2007
Oil, acetate, paper
17 x 20 inches

STILL FROM DESTINY MANIFESTO, 2007
Oil, acetate, paper
12 x 15 inches

STILL FROM SPIDERS IN LOVE, 2000
Oil, acetate, paper
15.25 x 21.5 inches

All works courtesy of the artist

BRENT GREEN

CARLIN, 2006
Color film, 7:30 min.

5 STORYBOARDS (CARLIN), 2006
8.5 x 11 inches (each)

All works courtesy of the artist and Bellwether, New York

SUSI JIRKUFF

MOTHER, 2005
Video animation, 1:35 min.

SIGGI, 2005
Video animation, 2:06 min.

HONG JON, 2005
Video animation, 3:19 min.

PORTRAITS (SIGGI), 2005
Marker on paper
11 x 14 inches

PORTRAITS (KAUCYLIA), 2006
Marker on paper
11 x 14 inches

PORTRAITS (YUTE), 2005
Marker on paper
11 x 14 inches

PORTRAITS (ADAM), 2005
Marker on paper
11 x 14 inches

PORTRAITS (HONG JON), 2005
Marker on paper
11 x 14 inches

PORTRAITS (LI), 2005
Marker on paper
11 x 14 inches

All works courtesy Thrust Projects, New York

EZRA JOHNSON

WHAT VISIONS BURN, 2006
DVD, 22:23 min.

MAIN STREET SCENE (from WHAT VISIONS BURN), 2007
Oil on canvas
48 x 84 inches

All works courtesy of the artist and Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery

DAVID SHRIGLEY

AGNES QUEEN OF SORROW, 2004
DVD, 3:30 min.
Courtesy of the artist and Drag City Records

UNTITLED, 2005
Ink on paper
Set of 4, 7 x 7 inches (each)
Courtesy of the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York

FEDERICO SOLMI

THE EVIL EMPIRE, 2007
DVD, 2:00 min.

A SELECTION OF STILLS FROM THE EVIL EMPIRE, 2007
Dimensions variable

All works courtesy of the artist and LMAK Projects, New York

NAOYUKI TSUJI

CHILDREN OF SHADOWS, 2006
16 mm transfer to DVD, 18:00 min.

UNTITLED #1, 2006
Charcoal on paper
20.5 x 16.5 x 2.2 inches

UNTITLED #2, 2006
Charcoal on paper
20.5 x 16.5 x 2.2 inches

UNTITLED #3, 2006
Charcoal on paper
20.5 x 16.5 x 2.2 inches

All works courtesy of the artist and Aichi Arts Center

Cover: Brent Green, *Carlin*, 2006

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs for the opportunity to present this exhibition. I am particularly grateful to David Dorsky and Noah Dorsky for their guidance and support, to Bea Blondo for her skill in turning my fleeting ideas into concrete realities, and to Deborah Rising for designing this brochure. I would also like to thank the artists and their galleries for their generous efforts and extraordinary insights on behalf of this exhibition. Most of all, I am indebted to the artists for their willingness to work with me in creating a truly unique exhibition.

Thank you to my wife, family, friends and colleagues for encouraging me to pursue this exhibition. Thank you to Stefan Stux and Andrea Schnabl for your unwavering support. Finally, I would like to thank my father for continually inspiring me to do the right thing.



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