

AMERICAN DREAMERS

REALTÀ E IMMAGINAZIONE NELL'ARTE
CONTEMPORANEA AMERICANA



strozzina | cc

centro di cultura contemporanea a palazzo strozzi

9 MARZO – 15 LUGLIO 2012



© THOMAS DOYLE

American Dreamers ***Reality and Imagination in Contemporary American Art*** **9 March to 15 July 2012**

American Dreamers. Reality and Imagination in Contemporary American Art, an exhibition organised curated by Bartholomew Bland, opens at the Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozzi (Palazzo Strozzi, Florence) on 9 March 2012. It comprises a reflection on the work of artists who use their fantasy, their imagination and their dreams to build alternative worlds to the increasingly complex and difficult reality of life today.

Does the "American dream" still exist? Since 11 September 2011 the United States of America has witnessed the collapse of its sense of invulnerability and security, but at the same time a spirit of optimism, the ability to imagine and to dream, the will to carry on believing in a future with a happy ending through work and through the triumph of the values of freedom and of equality of opportunity, have maintained their central place in the very idea of "being American" and of the "American dream". The latter promises success and happiness constantly fuelled by the fantasy of Hollywood and by the aesthetics adopted in the advertising campaigns of such leading multinational brands as Coca Cola or Walt Disney. Fleeing reality is a way of fighting against the complex difficulties of life today: a psychological break with reality or the creation of a better alternative become strategies for escaping from such concrete and very real threats as rising unemployment, the negative international financial situation, or forecasts of impending environmental doom.

The eleven American artists involved in the exhibition (Laura Ball, Adrien Broom, Nick Cave, Will Cotton, Adam Cvijanovic, Richard Deon, Thomas Doyle, Mandy Greer, Kirsten Hassenfeld, Patrick Jacobs and Christy Rupp) resort to their imagination to produce a personal revisitation of reality or at times even a flight from that reality, through the construction of parallel, alternative worlds which explicitly turn their backs on "true" reality. Some of the works condense the essence of reality into miniaturised systems while others expand outwards into space, creating worlds in which spectators can immerse themselves in parallel realities, and yet others feed on fantastic, dreamlike images or reflect on such symbolic themes as the home and the family which continue even today to play a central role in the construction of the myth of the "American way of life".

For some artists the construction of fantasy worlds represents their own personal critique of contemporary society, for others it enables them to create alternative solutions in which to rediscover meanings and values that appear to have been lost in today's world. Some of the artists also seem to share an interest in manual skills echoing the principles of outmoded manufacturing methods or alternative ways of organising life, espousing a deliberately unconventional attitude in an effort to combat the principles of serial production and the excessive speed that is demanded by contemporary society.

The exhibition attempts to explore these different issues revealing the language of the artists involved in order to create parallel worlds that, in many cases, are in sharp contrast with each other. The show opens with a site-specific work by **Adam Cvijanovic** (1960), whose wall painting draws visitors into a visual illusion, a surprising panorama that portrays an idyllic and typically American urban landscape that can be interpreted in two different ways: is it being demolished or built? **Will Cotton** has created an unreal world of overabundance in which everything becomes cotton candy, custard and cream, merging references to the American pop culture (from the singer Katy Perry to *Candy Land*, a board game that is immensely popular among American children) and art history (18th-century French painting by artists such as François Boucher and Jean-Honoré Fragonard). However, **Nick Cave** (1959) displays a selection of his *Soundsuits*, "indestructible sculptures" that are colourful and extravagant, the instrument for a multisensory experience in the amplification of the movement of the limbs and for the creation of unexpected sound effects when the artist uses them as costumes for his performances.

The exhibition continues with the apocalyptic imagination of **Thomas Doyle** (1976). In his works, at close range, the most attentive observer discovers that seemingly serene and controlled micro-worlds are actually dramatic realities that express the precariousness of the human condition using the symbols of middle-class life such as the home, yard and family in alienating, catastrophic and sometimes sarcastic settings. Starting with stereotyped images, **Richard Deon** (1956) stages his personal and evocative aesthetics, which he defines as “social surrealism”. With pictorial works in different formats that interact with the surrounding space, Deon creates scenes of people and places that emerge like surreal paradoxes and play with images and situations that look familiar, using the graphic forms and figures typical of the civics handbooks of the 1950s.

Uniting references to art history with the languages of advertising and fashion, **Adrien Broom** (1980) creates visions of women poised between reality and dreams, inspired by figures ranging from the dramatic character of Shakespeare's *Ophelia* to the images of saints in ecstatic adoration before the divine, typical of Baroque art. The sensation of suspension can also be found in the work **Laura Ball** (1972). Through the fluidity of watercolour, the artist creates a world populated by allegorical images that are constantly changing and that dialogue with her self-portrait, clearly an allusion to Jungian psychoanalysis. Fears and dreams acquire a bodily form as if in a game of free association and with a highly imaginative style.

In the next room **Kirsten Hassenfeld's** (1971) works use commonplace materials such as recycled gift-wrapping paper to create hanging sculptures, set at the evanescent boundary between the enigmatic and the domestic. They are juxtaposed with **Christy Rupp's** (1949) works, which reflect on the issues of mass production and the exploitation of animals in industrial processes. Both artists unite references to the decorative tradition of the Arts and Crafts Movement with elements of contemporary sociopolitical condemnation. Rupp's sculptures of extinct birds evoke the skeletons exhibited at museums of natural history, but they are actually made from countless bone fragments collected by the artist from the rubbish outside fast-food restaurants, the emblems of today's materialistic consumerism. Hassenfeld instead uses an ephemeral material such as paper to create objects and installations whose immense evocative power takes us to a separate dimension, exalting the value of art in finding new meanings and new values in objects and materials that our society considers to be mere waste.

Mandy Greer (1973) has made a site-specific spatial installation that visitors can explore as if it were a sort of fantastical forest. Using the art of crocheting with inserts of various materials, she creates sculptural objects with a biological and phytomorphic appearance that allude to the stories and images of mythological worlds, combining shamanism and Native American traditions. In the room devoted to **Patrick Jacobs's** (1971) work, visitors find small windows that allow them to peer into dioramas. Close up, this reveals miniatures of imaginary worlds, which reconstruct in detail the subjective visions of lawns or the interiors of an apartment and fool the observer, who is forced to wonder if he is gazing at something real or if it is merely an illusion.

Part of the city of Florence's celebrations marking the 500th anniversary of the death of Amerigo Vespucci, **American Dreamers** dialogues with **Americans in Florence. Sargent and the American Impressionists** (3 March to 15 July 2012) at **Palazzo Strozzi**. (See separate press release)

With the support of: Comune di Firenze, Provincia di Firenze, Camera di Commercio di Firenze, Associazione Partners Palazzo Strozzi; Regione Toscana; Unicoop Firenze, Ataf.

With the patronage of: The Consulate General of the United States of America in Florence

Location: Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozzi
Palazzo Strozzi, 50123 Florence, Italy

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday, 10.00 to 20.00; Thursday 10.00 to 23.00; Monday closed

Admission: € 5.00 full price (ticket valid one month);
€ 4.00 concessions (university students and other concessions); € 3.00 schools
Thursday, admission free from 18.00 to 23.00 hours

Catalogue: The exhibition catalogue is published by Silvana Editoriale.

Information: Tel. +39 055 2645155, www.strozzina.org

For further information and images, please contact:

Sue Bond Public Relations

Tel. +44 (0)1359 271085, Fax. +44 (0)1359 271934

E-mail info@suebond.co.uk, Website www.suebond.co.uk

24/2/2012

AMERICAN DREAMERS

REALTÀ E IMMAGINAZIONE NELL'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA AMERICANA



strozzina | cc
centro di cultura contemporanea a palazzo strozzi

9 MARZO – 15 LUGLIO 2012



© THOMAS DOYLE

ARTISTI IN MOSTRA

LAURA BALL

In her delicate yet complex watercolors, Laura Ball shows representations of animals, human figures and natural elements. The small dimensions of her compositions and the contrast between the highly detailed and colorful imagery set against stark white backgrounds attracts the viewer's gaze towards the intricate works. The artist employs a highly figurative style in which recurring symbols – the wall, the net, the mask, specific animals – create a world open to interpretation that strongly evokes the subconscious dimension. Ball draws her images from a wide range of sources. Her minutely observed, almost scientific renderings of animals seem to be inspired by the nineteenth-century illustrator John James Audubon. At the same time Ball's work refers to the style of the sixteenth-century artist Arcimboldo in the way that individual elements are reworked together to create a greater whole. A further possible reference can be seen in the shamanic tradition of the Native Americans, where animal figures often represent mediators between the real and spiritual worlds.

Laura Ball's style also hints at the psychoanalytical theories developed by Carl Gustav Jung, whose "amplification technique" – where the patient is prompted to interpret his or her own dreams using images from myths and popular folk tales – is a key concept for understanding the artist's work. More specifically, Ball's *Mandala* series harks back to a traditional Hindu practice involving the use of artistic expression as a spiritual exercise based on transcendental meditation. Jung interpreted that practice as "a representation of the unconscious self" which led the individual to express his or her deepest desires, emotions and urges. Through her works, Ball portrays a journey into the human psyche. As her creatures continuously morph into new forms, so do the notions of reality and dream and the meanings behind good and evil. The artist's fantastical worlds, much like the realm of the unconscious are free from the inherent judgment that is found in the conscious mind.

Laura Ball (1972, Syracuse, NY, USA; lives and works in San Diego, CA) creates an artistic world where scenes and creatures change constantly, drawn by the stream of the subconscious. Her surreal world comes up from the fluidity of the watercolor, attempting to freeze movements and shapes, like holding a mirror to our own strife and resilience. She studied at the University of California, Davis and in 2004 she earned her MFA at the University of California, Berkeley. Recent collective exhibitions include: (2009) *Note to Self*, Schroeder Romero, New York; *Vous Avez Eté Juste Servi*, LeBasse Projects, Los Angeles, CA; *Malice and Anxiety*, Peter Miller Gallery, Chicago, IL; *Aftermath*, PULSE Miami (with Kopeikin Gallery); *Family Pictures*, Root Division Gallery, San Francisco, CA; (2010) *Cynosure: New York from East Bay Galleries*, Worth Ryder Gallery, Berkeley, CA; *NEXT*, Chicago Art Fair (with Kopeikin Gallery); *San Francisco Art Fair* (with Swarm Gallery); *New & Improved*, Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York; *Transparency and Transformations in American Art*, U.S. Embassy, Stockholm, Sweden; *Things are Expanding*, Swarm Gallery, Oakland, CA. Recent solo exhibitions were held at Morgan Lehman Gallery (New York), Swarm Gallery (Oakland), David B. Smith Gallery (Denver), Bucheon Gallery (San Francisco), Peter Miller Gallery (Chicago), Paul Kopeikin Gallery (Los Angeles).

ADRIEN BROOM

Adrien Broom's work fits within a current trend in contemporary art that emphasizes impulses of fantasy. The artist employs a vocabulary of gestures and emotions that are instantly recognizable and strongly effective.

In the series represented in the show, Broom focuses on the lyrical images of women who seem to be floating or descending in space, making reference to specific art historical traditions. With their heavy, sculptural robes and ecstatic facial expressions her women recall the voluptuous forms of Baroque female figures. A key historical reference are the theatrical and dramatic sculptures by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, most notably his *Ecstasy of Santa Teresa d'Avila*. The protagonists in Broom's work also bring to mind Pre-Raphaelite iconography of the sleeping woman, as well as the image of the drowned Ophelia, symbol for female melancholia, who was driven to madness and suicide by Hamlet.

Broom's images of women encircled by white robes seem lost in a sort of "dreaming reverie". On one hand, these figures appear as visual metaphors floating in a state of grace, suspended in a world with no time or space. On the other, they become solipsistic and isolated, threatened to be drown by deep waters. Just at the moment one perceives them as having the potential to transcend their current condition, the heavy folds and layers of the fabrics create a weighted, sculptural effect that leaves the protagonist in an ambiguous state of suspension. Broom uses this state to suggest the slowing down of time, charging her figures with meaning and power that transcend any physical reality. When regarded in the context of a psychological phenomenon, suspension becomes the expression of a shift towards an alternate realm where notions of reality seem to lose their relevancy.

Adrien Broom (1980, USA; lives and works in New Haven, CT, USA) is a self-taught photographer whose images tell stories exploring connections between natural world and Western culture. Through a cinematographic approach to photography, Broom creates illusions that plays between reality and fantasy. She graduated in 2002 in Computer Animation and in 2006 she lived in Florence, studying at the SACI University, and in London, where she attended a course in Fine and Decorative Art History at Christie's. Thanks to these experiences the artist has been exposed to different fields, like music, fashion and publishing. Broom also collaborated with magazines like *Rolling Stone*, *Marie Claire*, *The New York Sun* and others. Recent collective exhibitions include: (2009) *Portraits*, Vermont Center for Photography, Burlington, VT; *Images 2009*, Juried Show, Shoreline Arts Alliance Guilford, CT; *Portraits in-fashion* – solo show, Diane Birdsall Gallery, Old Lyme, CT; (2010) *Ambient Light* – solo show, Diane Birdsall Gallery, Old Lyme, CT; *Images 2010*, Juried Show, Shoreline Arts Alliance, Guilford, CT; *Spring Salon*, 3D Gallery – Elwa Productions, New York; (2011) *Fashion*, Hans de Castellane Gallery, New York; *Blurred Lines* – solo show, Hans de Castellane Gallery, New York; *116 Crown*, New Haven, CT; D&D Building, Lorin Marsh, New York.

NICK CAVE

The transformative role art plays is at the heart of Nick Cave's work. His works are wearable sculptures made of a wide range of materials including sequins, buttons, fake fur, children's toys, human hair as well as other found objects. Created in a dimension between sculpture, performance art and contemporary dance, the suits take on a shape modeled after the form of the artist's body. When used as performers' costumes, the *Soundsuits* create music, producing different sounds based on the varying materials they are made out of.

As with most of the artists featured in the exhibition, Cave's artistic research is based on the employment of humble material from everyday life. Fueled by the imaginative power of an artistic gesture, the objects are transformed into what the artist calls a "psychedelic freak show" and carry a great sense of primordial energy. Arranged in groupings that gain power with their number and diversity of forms, his sculptures are silent and still when in a gallery setting, contrasting greatly from their effect when put into motion. As immobile forms that are slightly larger than human scale, the *Soundsuits* are both strange and wonderful as, even in their stillness, they appear both threatening and fantastical.

Cave's work is influenced by different references ranging from the role of the mask in African and Caribbean cultures, to the costumes and language of expressionistic avant-garde theatre, along with inspirations from what is known as "social sculpture" with artists like Joseph Beuys and Niki de Saint Phalle that believed that an artist needed to rethink his role within society and that art should be treated as an act more than a material object. The carnivalesque forms of Cave's suits also evoke such traditional American celebrations as the New Orleans Mardi Gras Parade, which relies on elaborate costumes that are typically built by local groups and reflect a strong sense of regional identity.

By providing a physical covering, the *Soundsuits* neutralize the gender, age, race and class of the wearer, alluding to the symbol of the mask as a tool for protection. The artist as activator is transformed into an archetypal figure. Cave goes beyond his own individuality and projects himself and his viewers towards a greater dimension, inducing a new sense of liberty and a reflection on the value of imagination in those who experience his works.

Nick Cave (1959, Fulton, MI, USA; lives and works in Chicago, IL) is professor and chair in the Fashion Department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he teaches in the Fiber Arts Program. He has led numerous workshops on various topics, such as *Extending the Body: Experiments in Clothing* and has designed, manufactured and marketed his own line of men's and women's clothing and ran a successful clothing company in Chicago. Cave has received numerous awards including the United States Artist Fellow Award (2006), Joyce Award (2006), Artadia Award (2005), Creative Capital Grant (2005, 2004, 2001), Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award (2001) and National Endowment for the Arts (1991). He studied at the Kansas City Art Institute and in 1989 he earned his MFA at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Recent collective exhibitions include: (2010) *Disidentification*, Göteborgs Konsthall, Svezia; *Dead or Alive*, Museum of Arts and Design, New York; *Pattern, Costume, and Ornament in African and African-America Art*, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL; *Hand + Made: The Performative Impulse in Art and Craft*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX; *Resurrectine*, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York; *Call and Response: Africa to America*, Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, Charleston, SC; *The Figure: Contemporary Works from the Collection*, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, RI; *Now What?*, Norton Museum, Miami, FL; *The Global Africa Project*, Museum of Art and Design, New York; (2011) *Go Figure*, Smart Museum, University of Chicago, IL; *Are You A Hybrid*, Museum of Arts and Design, New York; *Pandora's Box: Joseph Cornell Unlocks the MCA Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL. Recent solo shows were held at (2010) Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, Kansas; Studio La Città, Verona; (2011) Jack Shainman Gallery and Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

WILL COTTON

Through his art Will Cotton grants the wish of every child across America by creating a world built entirely by candy, directly alluding to the popular board game *Candy Land* and to movies like *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. His paintings portray figures and landscapes made from an assortment of sweets, from cotton candy to taffy to liquid caramel. Cotton's works are first developed as miniature models inside his studio and after the model is completed, he uses a realistic technique to paint renderings of the three-dimensional forms.

Cotton expresses a sensibility for mixing high and low art forms through a complex interplay between kitsch and consumerist fantasy. His paintings are often done on a large scale, giving his frivolous subjects the monumentality of history painting. His aesthetic quotes eighteenth-century artists like François Boucher, Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Giambattista Tiepolo. Although he maintains their Rococo aesthetic, he fills his settings with figures from the contemporary world, from the likes of New York City socialites to show-business stars like Katy Perry, an icon in today's pop music scene. Cotton also created Perry's *Teenage Dream* album cover (visualized in the painting *Cotton Candy Katy*) and the set for her *California Gurls* video, thus opening a new and wider communication network for his works and inverting the traditional relationship between pop culture and "high" art.

Cotton's female characters quote traditional iconographic and stylistic elements, while at the same time they become objects of a new form of erotic desire, demonstrating a self-aware and post-feminist exhibitionism that is particularly suited to our age of self-promotion.

In addition to a strong voyeuristic element, the paintings seem to induce in the viewer a reflection on our times, underlining a sense of decadency hidden within the splendour and opulence of the subjects. In addressing the hyper-consumerism of contemporary society, Cotton reflects on the iconography of the Golden Age as the apex of human history that at its height was inevitably doomed to fall. In his work, *The Consummation of Empire*, the artist quotes the famous series by the nineteenth-century American artist Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire*, whose response to human nature had already pointed out the unavoidable, dramatic end of American ambition for success and strength. The sunset over the marzipan castle, the fast-approaching shadows in *Consuming Folly*, the overwhelming sugar doused on the churros in *Abandoned* along with other elements in Cotton's work seem to prefigure the implosion and crisis of a civilization made blind and distracted by its excesses.

Will Cotton (1965, Melrose, MA, USA; lives and works in New York) is a painter whose work primarily features landscapes composed of sweets, often inhabited by human subjects. Cotton studied in France at the Fine Arts Academy in Rouen, then he came back to the United States where he finished his studies at the Cooper Union and then at the New York Academy of Art. He is represented by Mary Boone Gallery, New York; Baldwin Gallery, Aspen, CO; Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles; Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France and Jablonka Galerie, Cologne, Germany. His works have also been exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Art (2000); the Seattle Art Museum (2002); the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany (2004); the Hudson River Museum (2007); the Triennale di Milano, Italy (2007); the Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris (2008). His work is in the collections of the Seattle Art Museum, Washington and the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, as well as many prominent private collections. His recent exhibitions include: (2009) *Talk Dirty to Me*, Larissa Goldston Gallery, New York; *I Want Candy: The Sweet Stuff in American Art*, Fresno Metropolitan Museum, Fresno, CA; *Chelsea visits Havana*, Museo Nacional De Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba; *Aspects of Pop Art*, Galerie Gmurzynska, Zurich, CH; *Transitions. Painting at the (Other) End of Art*, Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia; *A Tribute to Ron Warren*, Mary Boone Gallery, New York; (2010) *Accessories to an Artwork*, Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, East Hampton, NY; *Divine Comedy*, Sotheby's, New York; (2011) *Tous Cannibales*, La Maison Rouge, Paris. Recent solo shows were held at galleries like (2009) Mary Boone Gallery, New York; (2010) Galerie Templon, Paris; Pace Prints Chelsea, New York; Baldwin Gallery, Aspen, CO; (2011) Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles.

ADAM CVIJANOVIC

The large-scale panorama realized for the exhibition by Adam Cvijanovic addresses the subject of the typical single-family American home in relation with the idea of natural and urban landscapes.

The artist started from his personal observation of actual suburban places, the residential fringes of Hillsborough, New Jersey and New City, New York, which are two examples of typical American suburbia and are also traditional symbols of the American dream. In more recent times, these scenes have also become symbols of the current economic crisis that occurred with the explosion of the speculative bubble in the real estate market.

Where human presence is denied, nature appears to become the sole protagonist of the work. A wide and rich vegetation and a reassuring blue sky seem to control the scene. However, the real main character is rooted in the effect that resulted from human intervention. This is made clear not only by the many houses under construction or already built, but also in considering the diverse and incoherent architectural styles. Even the natural elements that the artist portrays are the result of human intervention. We can recognize plants, trees and flowers that are not native to these places, but were brought to this part of America by the first European settlers.

Like in his other works, the artist started with a photographic documentation of real landscapes. Then inside his studio Cvijanovic created what he defines as "portable frescoes": sections of the paintings are realized on tyvek, a durable, lightweight material easily transportable and mountable. Like in a sort of "analogic photoshop", all the different painted strips and portions are then applied on the wall of the gallery. After, the artist uses brushes and paints to fix the overlays and empty spaces. The final work becomes a sort of revision of a site-specific intervention in which the artwork reacts to the specific conditions of the context where it is exhibited. For this occasion, Cvijanovic's work reacts to the peculiar plan of the room and also reflects his knowledge and expertise of traditional Renaissance principles of perspective in terms of techniques and subjects.

Cvijanovic also draws inspiration from the first acknowledged school of American art, the nineteenth-century Hudson River School known for the development of the "American sublime". This style inspired light-drenched, grandly-scaled landscapes as expressive symbols of the contrast between beauty and strength found in American nature. Cvijanovic paints views of the present Hudson River valley, thus portraying what is now left of these untainted lands that were formerly imbued with the idea of America as God's promised land.

Adam Cvijanovic (1960, Cambridge, MA, USA; lives and works in New York) studied at the Philadelphia College of Art (1982) and Columbia University (1986) but he is largely self-taught. His early career was as a mural painter and now his work is considered as one of the most interesting among the figurative painters in the New York art scene. Known for his "portable murales", Cvijanovic is often attracted to images of ruins used as symbol for the decadency of contemporary American culture. His solo shows have been held at many international museum and galleries like Bellwether Gallery, New York; The Massachusetts MoCA, North Adams, MA; The Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Centre of Arts, Los Angeles, CA. His paintings have also been featured in exhibitions at PS1 Contemporary Art Center in New York, the Royal Academy in London, the New Orleans Biennial, the Walker Arts Center and the Liverpool Biennial at the Tate Liverpool. Recent collective exhibitions include: (2010) *Undefined Borders for Unlimited Perceptions*, Blindarte Contemporary, Naples; *The Sixth Borough*, Governors Island, New York; *Defrosted: A Life of Walt Disney*, Postmasters Gallery, New York; *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, Robert Goff Gallery, New York; (2011) *Alpine Desire*, Australian Cultural Forum, New York; *COLORIFIC! We Make An Art Rainbow*, Postmasters Gallery, New York.

RICHARD DEON

Richard Deon's work is deeply inspired by his childhood education when he was taught history from outdated American social studies textbooks that included illustrations reflecting the so-called "consensus history" of the 1950s in the United States. A major influence for the artist has been the book *Visualized Civics*, published to teach – through illustrations and text – social behaviors and concepts to the young generation of American citizens of the time.

Through Deon's contemporary use of imagery found in *Visualized Civics*, the original scenes from the book lose their rational, didactic meaning. What remains are isolated figures and structures assembled into new scenarios through visual and conceptual collages that can be defined as a sort of social surrealism. Deon's works reflect a language based on recursive imagery, and while always identical in form, the key figures change meaning in relation to the context of each new work.

Among the recurring imagery that can be identified is the figure that the artist calls "the Subject" who is always shown in stiff profile, either standing up or lying down. "The Subject" appears in *Weehawken 2*, whose title is a reference to Jersey City, a town famous for its view of Manhattan. The figure is also present in a work whose title *Death in the Long Grass* quotes a famous adventure book, and where Deon depicts a mysterious ritual. Another recurring image is "the Object", a construct in the shape of a plane with an irregular silhouette. "The Object" appears both independently (such as in *Yonkers*) and also as an element within other works. Deon's most recent work, *Quick Response Squadron*, is based on powerful imagery of World War II fighter planes where the artist has integrated the figure of "the Subject" as part of the body of the aircraft.

The conformity promoted in the 1950s through familiar and reassuring images is deconstructed in Deon's work and represent paradoxical conditions of today's society, where relativism and individualism have become the new and uncertain principles of our lives.

Richard Deon (1956, Potsdam, NY, USA; lives and works in Dover Plains, New York) creates paintings, prints, and sculptures composed of a group of primarily black-and-white motifs, recognizable characters, universal shapes, and historical themes that he presents in confusing juxtapositions creating surreal scenes. His precise, editorial eye developed in his second career as a graphic designer spills over into his art. He studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York. His recent solo exhibitions include: (2008) *Paradox and Conformity: Paintings and Prints by Richard Deon*, Gibson Gallery, Potsdam College, Potsdam, NY; (2009) *Paradox and Conformity: Paintings and Prints by Richard Deon*, Daum Museum of Contemporary Art, Sedalia, MO; *Paradox and Conformity: Paintings by Richard Deon*, The Azarian McCullough Art Gallery, St. Thomas Aquinas College, Sparkill, NY; *Stare Decisis: Paintings And Prints by Richard Deon*, Earlville Opera House, Earlville, New York; (2010) *Richard Deon: Paradox and Conformity*, Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY; *Paradox and Conformity: Paintings and Prints by Richard Deon*, Olin Art Gallery, Washington & Jefferson College, Washington, PA; (2011) *Richard Deon: Paradox and Conformity*, Foreman Gallery, Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY; *Richard Deon: Paradox and Conformity*, Arts Center of the Capital Region, Troy, NY. Recent group exhibitions include: (2005) *T-Zone*, Smack Mellon Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; (2007) *Lineal Investigations*, Housatonic Museum of Art, Bridgeport, CT; (2008) *Seven: Out of this World*, Rockland Center for the Arts, West Nyack, NY; *Hudson Valley Invitational*, Van Brunt Gallery, Beacon, NY; (2011) SGI International Conference billboard competition, St. Louis, MO.

THOMAS DOYLE

A central theme within the works of Thomas Doyle is the classic, quaint single-family American home. The artist creates perfectly scaled-down dioramas sealed inside glass globes, which underline the contrast between an idyllic vision of suburban life and a fascination for imagery of both fantasy and horror.

Doyle hurls everything the natural world, and even the supernatural world, might offer in terms of an apocalypse into his encapsulated spheres. Houses teeter on cliffs, are swept up by tornadoes and suffer the after-effects of mysterious explosions in which the domestic contents of the houses are blown apart. While fantastic in theme and aesthetic, Doyle's dioramas allude to real contemporary fears. Much like the dizzying sense one feels when looking down the edge of a cliff is the fear of losing everything you have built up in your life and the constant anxiety that another tragedy is right around the corner.

Along with the theme of the home, Doyle also toys with the notion of context. The fascination for creating miniature worlds, totally enclosed and controllable, have been innately appealing to many cultures. From Fabergé eggs to aquariums and terrariums and as seen through the popularity of snow domes, one of the chief pleasures they provide is the chance for a 360-degree view into a little world that places the viewer in the position of a looming god.

Through the disturbing and contradictory atmospheres of his dioramas, Doyle shows us how small and precarious each of our lives really is, however charming and fantastical the package may be. His works serve as a metaphor not just for the current economic crisis in the American real estate market, but more profoundly they become a sort of existential allegory that reflect the illusion of safety and a perceived sense of control from within. Parallel to these constructed worlds is reality itself, where through our false sense of security we fail to realize that at the deepest level, our own reality is in fact wholly uncertain and completely uncontrollable. The confined human figures inside these works express a static and frozen sense of time, enclosed within spaces from which they cannot escape. The viewers on the other hand are left on the periphery, which allows one to stare at a scene that can be controlled through the gaze, but makes it impossible to really understand the mysteries and tragedies hidden within.

Thomas Doyle (1976, Grand Haven, MI; lives and works in New York) mostly works with sculpture, realizing under-sealed environments, meticulous and highly detailed miniatures "*under glass*" that capture disturbing and transformative moments in human life. He studied at the Humboldt State University and he has received prestigious acknowledgments like the West Prize Acquisition Finalist, West Collection in 2008 and the Mac Dowell Colony Fellowship in 2009. Recent exhibitions include: (2010) *There's No Place Like Here*, Tower Fine Arts Gallery, Brockport, NY; *Tragic Sense of Life*, Fine Arts Gallery, Westchester Community College, Valhalla, NY; The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum's Radius exhibition, Ridgefield, CT; *Synesthesia 2010*, Electric Pear Productions – The Wild Project, New York; *Collateral Damage*, LeBasse Projects, Culver City, CA; (2011) *Suggestivism*, Grand Central Art Center, Santa Ana, CA; *Mini-Size Me*, Bakerfield Museum of Art, Bakerfield, CA; *Otherworldly: Optical Selusion and Small Realites*, Museum of Arts and Design, New York.

MANDY GREER

Mandy Greer's hallmark works are comprised of soft fabrics, moody shadows and delicate lines that create distinct, interior fantasy worlds. She uses discarded domestic items and materials, like buttons, beads, and fabrics, and repurposes them with new functions and meanings.

In occasion for *American Dreamers*, Greer has developed an installation, *Cynosura*, composed of large, draped sculptural objects that make up the elements of an impressive allegorical representation. The artist creates a path between two realms that she defines as two "heavens" through a transitory dimension, which is represented by the natural world. The title of the new work refers to the name of a nymph who, according to one version of the myth, nursed Zeus who then transformed her into the brightest star in the sky. The star named Polaris, also referred to as the North Star, is a symbol of the vital principle found in nature and serves as a tool for sailors due to its central, permanent position in the sky. On one side of the environment is the *Honey Chandelier*, a sculptural object that evokes the incandescence of a luminous sun. On the other side is the *Moon*, which is surrounded by seven stars, the *Seven Sisters*, that symbolize Pleiades. In between there are figures and shapes that recall a nocturnal atmosphere. Works such as the *Owl* and the *Raven*, along with other symbols of the natural world are expressed by intricate biomorphic sculptures that represent, for example, different tree species like the lemon and olive tree.

Greer forges conglomerates of heterogenic materials to create, layer after layer, archetypal objects. They become part of a narration fuelled by the myths of primordial cultures that lived within a pantheistic dimension. Such cultures were searching for a relationship close to nature and were united by their belief in a common vital principle: the eternal succession of death and rebirth.

Greer's work fights against the traditional borders between artist and audience, artistic process and art object. Following her own system, she often organizes open workshops in different cities, is always searching for diverse material and promotes conceptual sharing through the creation of her works. As Greer herself states: "I aim through my work to pull diverse worlds closer together, to weave connections between people who might otherwise not have the slow space to find where their lives intersect."

Mandy Greer (1973; lives and works in Seattle, WA) creates theatrical spaces through installations, performances, films and pictures. She joins together different fields like fairytales, myths and traditional stories and reconnects them to everyday life, inquiring the sensuality of life itself – which is shown through the sensitivity of the material the artist uses for her works. In 1996 she graduated at the University of Georgia, Athens, and in 1999 she earned her MFA at the University of Washington, Seattle. In 2006, Mandy completed a permanent installation in the Rem Koolhaas-designed Seattle Central Library and had a room-sized installation at the Bumbershoot Arts Festival supported by a City Artists Grant. In 2008, Mandy had her first solo museum show at the Bellevue Arts Museum, debuting *Dare alla Luce*, supported by an Artist Trust GAP grant. Recent solo exhibitions include: (2009) *Dare alla luce*, Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, OR; (2010) *Zuster Sweostor Systir*, Ohge Ltd. Gallery, Seattle, WA; (2011) *Honey and Lightning*, Roq La Rue Gallery, Seattle, WA. Recent collective exhibitions include: (2009) *Aqua Art Miami-Wynwood* (with MyArtSpace.com Gallery), Paolo Alto, CA and Miami, FL; *5280*, Columbia City Gallery, Seattle; (2010) *Unravelling Tradition*, 516 Arts, Albuquerque, NM; (2011) *Seattle As Collector*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; *Degenerate Art Ensemble*, Frye Art Museum, Seattle, WA.

Kirsten Hassenfeld

Kirsten Hassenfeld begins her works by experimenting with the material she uses where her skill reflects the revival of traditional craft techniques. She manually hand-cuts pieces of paper, rolls and coils them to assemble the tens of thousands of tiny, fragile components that comprise each of her works. In the *Star* series, Hassenfeld creates translucent objects that are exhibited as hanging light sculptures, where each one is made out of ordinary material like generic giftwrapping paper.

Hassenfeld's personal skill and vision transmute the constructed shapes into art objects. Her work is an example of the new ornamentalism found in contemporary art, which has seen a resurgence in the United States over the last decade and directly challenges the hierarchy between the decorative and fine arts. For this series, the artist works with recycled material and discarded objects found in thrift stores or off the street. In reusing bits of wrapping paper, she infuses her works with an idea of fragility, while at the same time refers to the concept of gifting, playing on the possibility to transform discarded material into something new, in the form of a gift with precious value. Hassenfeld draws a direct parallel to the idea of the artist as a giver of gifts and the viewer as a charmed recipient. Her work triggers a reflection on the human condition and on being in a state of desire, not simply for material objects but also yearnings for greater existential answers.

As she says: "When I was in Brooklyn, I lived in an area where there were a lot of pawnshops, and that was hugely influential on my thinking. I started making these environments that were about abundance and splendor, but almost in a generic way about the shape of the gem form, the universally understood symbol for treasure. Everybody usually wants what that they don't have, and sometimes it's not a material thing and sometimes it is."

Kirsten Hassenfeld (1971, Albany, NY, USA; lives and works in New York) studied at the University of Arizona, Tucson and the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence. Her translucent sculptures are characterized by a hand-made originality. Since 1999 she has been using ordinary material like paper to create elaborate works where she expresses his obsession for highly detailed constructions. She has been awarded with prestigious acknowledgments like the Individual Artist Grant, New York Foundation for Arts and the Percent for Art Commission of the Department of Cultural Affairs, New York (both in 2009). Her work has been included in numerous prestigious group exhibitions at locations such as MoMA PS1, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, White Columns and an exhibition organized by the Public Art Fund in Brooklyn. She has received grants from The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Dieu Donne Papermill and The Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation. Her recent solo shows include: (2007) *Dans La Lune*, Rice Gallery, Rice University, Houston, TX; (2009) Smack Mellon Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; Cade Tompkins Edition&Project, Providence, RI; David Winton Bell Gallery, List Art Center, Brown University, Providence, RI; (2010) Institute of Contemporary Art, Maine College of Art, Portland, OR; Esther Massry Gallery and College of St. Rose, Albany, OR.

PATRICK JACOBS

Patrick Jacobs creates meticulously crafted miniature environments as dioramas that are viewable only through peepholes and portholes in the walls. When entering a gallery containing his pieces, for a moment one may think that the space is empty. By peering into the small holes, as if spying through a keyhole, the viewer is confronted with luminous landscapes, close-ups of meadows or the interiors of an apartment through which a window leads the observer into an even deeper realm.

Through the use of intense lighting and circular convex lenses that amplify the depth and alter the visual perception of the viewer, Jacobs creates artificial, heightened realities whose intensity exceeds what is experienced in everyday life. In works like *Fairy Ring with Dandelions*, and *Mushroom Clusters #1 and #2*, the perceived worlds seem subtly enhanced, where devoid of the presence of human figures, viewers are free to imagine themselves as the sole protagonist within the dioramic scene.

Interior with View of Gowanus Heights presents a situation that is not typically part of Jacobs' other creations. By combining the drab everydayness of an apartment building with an idealized landscape, the artist positions the viewer within a sort of double diorama. Looking through the peephole provides entrance to the first level of space within. Once inside, the viewer finds a window through which to observe a lush, green landscape whose far off distance makes it impossible to reach.

It is this tantalizing inaccessibility that gives power to Jacobs' work where the viewer is allowed only a peep from the outside into his worlds. In taking on the role of a voyeur, yet isolated from the context itself, the viewer is projected into a parallel dimension that can only be accessed by the gaze, but never experienced physically.

Patrick Jacobs (1971, Merced, CA, USA; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York) earned his BFA from the University of West Florida in 1994 and his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999. He is represented by Pierogi Gallery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. A kind of pseudo-science or homespun natural phenomena characterizes Jacobs' work, whose protagonists are typically at odds with an increasingly anxious and paranoid world. It is only in their futile attempt at transcending their reality and achieving the impossible that they succeed. Recent solo shows include: (2010) *Patrick Jacobs: Dioramas*, The Pool, Moretti Fine Art, London; *Other People's Fiction*, Kenise Barnes, Larchmont, New York; (2011) *Patrick Jacobs: Familiar Terrain*, Pierogi, Brooklyn, NY. Recent collective shows include: (2010) *The Worlds We Live In, the Worlds We Create*, Like the Spice Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; *Other People's Fiction*, Kenise Barnes Gallery, Larchmont, NY; *There's No Place Like Here*, The College at Brockport, SUNY, Brockport, NY; *Instructions Not Included*, Pierogi Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; (2011) *Subjective/Objective*, Pierogi Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; *Otherworldly: Optical Delusions & Small Realities*, Museum of Arts and Design, New York; *Obsessions*, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York.

CHRISTY RUPP

The main theme of Christy Rupp's work is the reflection on the relationship between man and nature when nature becomes something used in a purely utilitarian way. For her collages, Rupp uses paper decorated with floral motifs reminiscent of Art Nouveau or of the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century, that began as a reaction on the part of artists and thinkers who were critical of the mechanisation and mass production that had emerged in the early days of the Industrial Revolution.

In her series *Extinct Birds Previously Consumed by Humans*, Rupp addresses the incongruity between the fast-food industry with its mode of mass production and the beauty the artist recognizes in individual animals. To develop the series, Rupp spent several years gathering chicken and turkey bones she collected through friends, from fast-food joints and barbecues, and by placing advertisements in small town newspapers to gather large amounts of leftover bones. She then started to meticulously assemble these organic elements into life-size sculptures, building representations of extinct birds. Her series developed as the artist retrofitted a group of skeletal representations of Great Auks, Moas, and Dodos, all species of flightless endemic birds that became extinct when man invaded their native lands.

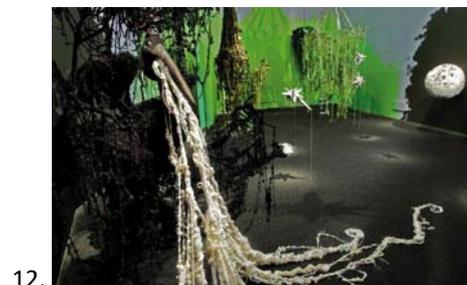
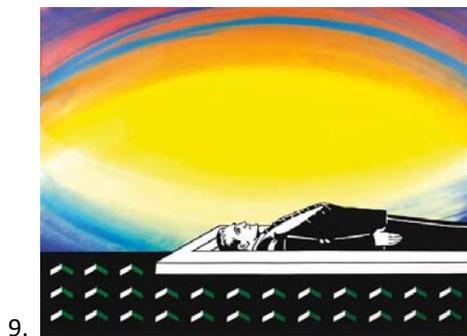
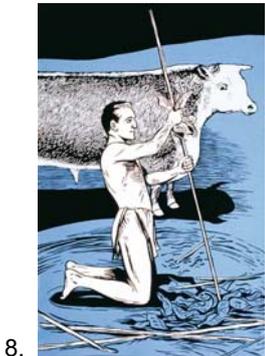
The careful, manual process with which Rupp assembles her animal structures is in strident contrast with the context in which she sources her bone material. The artist rearticulates the refuse of the fast-food society whose rationale of industrial productivity degrades every living creature to the role of an object for commercial use.

Paradoxically, Rupp's works evoke the aesthetics found in natural history museums, appropriating the likenesses of unique and precious objects worthy of preservation as part of our cultural heritage. Time is a crucial element in the work of this artist who juxtaposes an extremely slow and laborious manual processes to create her works to the lifetime of, say, a battery hen. Rupp introduces subtle metaphors that address compelling and very serious issues like the increasingly alienated and destructive relationship between man and all other living creatures.

Christy Rupp (1949, Rochester, NY, USA; lives and works in New York and Catskills) graduated in 1973 at the Colgate University and earned her MFA in 1977 at the Rinehart School of Sculpture, Maryland Institute College of Art. She is as much a research scientist as she is an artist. Her sculptures raise complicated issues about bio-diversity and genetic engineering, globalization and personal choice, and she has also developed projects with the Paleontology Department of the American Museum of Natural History. She often uses recycled material to create new animal and plants, reflecting on the employment of the natural sources and the necessity to safeguard animal and plant species. Her works have been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum, the MoMA in New York, the National Gallery in Washington and the Burchfield-Penney Art Center in New York. She has also realized public commissioned works for Central Park in New York, the Municipal Art Society in Baltimore, the NYC Percent for Art Program and many others. Recent collective exhibitions include: (2011) *A Show About Collab*, Printed Matter, New York; *Living Here*, KTD Monastery, Woodstock, OR; *Buffalo on the Bowery*, Charles Bank Gallery, New York; *Pop Patriotism*, Carriage Trade, New York; *Outer Space*, Exit Art, New York; *Dead or Alive*, Museum of Arts and Design, New York.

Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozzina
Palazzo Strozzi, Florence

American Dreamers
Reality and Imagination in Contemporary American Art
9 March–15 July 2012



Centre for Contemporary Culture Strozzi
Palazzo Strozzi, Florence

American Dreamers
Reality and Imagination in Contemporary American Art
9 March–15 July 2012

1. Laura Ball

Web, 2009
Watercolour on paper - 51 x 43 cm
Courtesy the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery, NY

2. Adrien Broom

Rapture, 2010
C-Print - 91 x 76 cm
Courtesy Diane Birdsall Gallery

3. Nick Cave

Soundsuit, 2011
Mixed media - approx. 280 cm high
Photo: James Prinz/Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

4. Nick Cave

Speak Louder, 2011
Mixed media - 249 x 173 x 137 cm
Photo: James Prinz/Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

5. Will Cotton

Consuming Folly, 2009-2010
Oil on linen - 183 x 214 cm
Courtesy Private collection and Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris. Photo: B. Huet/Tutti

6. Will Cotton

Cotton Candy Katy, 2010
Oil on linen - 183 x 214 cm
Courtesy the artist and Mary Boone Gallery, New York

7. Adam Cvijanovic

New City, 2001-2012 (detail)
Flashe on Tyvek - 2,43 x 1,98 m
Courtesy the artist and Blindarte Contemporanea, Napoli

8. Richard Deon

Death in the Long Grass, 2001
Acrylic on canvas - 146 x 94 cm
Courtesy the artist

9. Richard Deon

Reseller, 2006
Acrylic on canvas - 193 x 246 cm
Courtesy the artist

10. Thomas Doyle

Null cipher, 2006
Mixed media - 35.6 x 34.9 x 34.9 cm
Courtesy of The West Collection, Oak
© Thomas Doyle

11. Thomas Doyle

Acceptable losses, 2008 (detail)
Mixed media sculpture
Courtesy of Amanda Erlanson
© Thomas Doyle

12. Mandy Greer

Dare alla Luce, 2008
Installation view at Bellevue Arts Museum, Bellevue
Courtesy the artist / Photo credit: Nora Atkinson

13. Kirsten Hassenfeld

Star Upon Star, 2011 (detail)
Paper with mixed media - 121,9 x 160 x 160 cm
Courtesy the artist and Peter Mendenhall Gallery, LA

14. Patrick Jacobs

Interior with View of the Gowanus Heights 2011
Diorama viewed through 5 inch window
73.7 x 53.3 x 53.3 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Pierogi Gallery, New York

15. Patrick Jacobs

Mushroom Cluster #2, 2011
Diorama-like sculpture with window, mixed material
diam. 5 cm
Courtesy the artist and Pierogi Gallery, New York

16. Christy Rupp

Brinkiness, 2007-8
Mixed media
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy the artist and Federeike Gallery

17. Christy Rupp

Extinct Birds Previously Consumed by Humans,
2005-2008
Steel, chicken bones, mixed media
Variable dimensions
Courtesy the artist and Frederieke Taylor Gallery, NY

For further information and images, please contact:

Sue Bond Public Relations

Tel. +44 (0)1359 271085, Fax. +44 (0)1359 271934
E-mail info@suebond.co.uk,
Website www.suebond.co.uk