

Real Nonfiction

THE 3RD ANNUAL ARTISTS FROM THE REGISTRY EXHIBITION

DAMALI ABRAMS, BECCA ALBEE, ALISA BAREMBOYM,
BEN COONLEY & DR. JONATHAN ZIZMOR,
JESSE HAMERMAN, MIKE HEIN, TATIANA KRONBERG,
SHELDON SEAN MOYER, CARRIE POLLACK, AMY YAO

Curated by Baseera Fox Khan and Jon Lutz

September 15 – October 23, 2010

BRIC Rotunda Gallery

the contemporary art space of BRIC Arts | Media | Bklyn

Real *Nonfiction* brings together work by damali abrams, Becca Albee, Alisa Baremboym, Ben Coonley & Dr. Jonathan Zizmor, Jesse Hamerman, Mike Hein, Tatiana Kronberg, Sheldon Sean Moyer, Carrie Pollack, and Amy Yao. These Brooklyn-based artists express unusually perceptive views of the world around them and an equally insightful articulation of lived experience. Their art practices engage the tangible and intangible ephemera of their daily lives. In this sense, *Real Nonfiction* asks the viewer to inhabit the artists' perspectives, forget categorical pre-conceptions, and spend some time looking to this body of work as one looks at a document—observing and absorbing factual information that helps us comprehend reality anew. In grounding this exhibition in “real” and in “nonfiction,” the issues of truth and authenticity come to the fore. In sum, these artists present a varied picture of twenty-first century reality as we experience it: complex, unquantifiable, and subjective.

All of these artists offer up their own histories and backgrounds as they infuse and reuse popular and consumer culture. Though some artists reveal their sources and documentation in a direct manner, others apply this methodology in an ancillary form. Their works represent a synthesis of things seen, heard, consumed, collected, and absorbed, whether drawn from a television commercial, abstract painting, wall sculpture, or recorded Internet conversation. Overall, *Real Nonfiction* is dictated by the artists' perspective and accounts, leaving the spectator with few answers, yet many questions. Ben Coonley & Jonathan Zizmor, Becca

Albee, and damali abrams interrogate the boundary between art and its practical uses in the marketplace. Carrie Pollack, Sheldon Sean Moyer, and Mike Hein utilize materials with varied symbolic resonance and recall art historical precedents. Jesse Hamerman, Alisa Baremboym, Tatiana Kronberg, and Amy Yao investigate the signs and symbols of our time.

damali abrams works primarily with video and performance. She creates sustained conceptual projects such as *Self Help TV* which fuses tropes of reality television, public service announcements, and video art, into informative calls to action within a contemporary art framework. At once performative and playful, these videos often include straightforward instruction and advice on practical concerns such as healthy eating and other self-improvement topics. With a personal investment in alternative medicine and an artistic sensibility that is directly informed by daytime television, abrams eschews an ironic deconstruction of vulgar televisual forms and opts instead for a practical way to disseminate constructive information to her audience.

Becca Albee's work represents a searching examination of the essential duplicity of representation. She formulates an implicit statement about contemporary reality, arguing that the unverifiable is no less real than more tangible phenomena. In her *Skype Scrap Book*, Joan Lowell, Albee's point of departure is Lowell's 1929 autobiography, *Cradle of the Deep*. In the book, Lowell—whose fame came from a brief movie career—grossly exaggerates her time spent on an ocean vessel. She recounted daring stories of adventures at sea, too fantastic to be true. Albee's entry point to this subject is her own father, who curates the historical papers of a man named Lincoln Colcord. Colcord was a writer, sailor, and contemporary of Lowell's, who famously exposed her book as a fabrication. Albee's piece consists of a Skype conversation she had

with her father, in which she engages the truth claims within Coldcord's and Lowell's texts. Once Lowell's story unravels, all that is left for the artist is the physical object, a book. In spite of its falsifications, it still serves as a tangible link among a series of relationships.

Alisa Barenboym is interested in the connections between food and visual consumption, and the viewer's relationship to both of these interconnected realms. Her work engages such commonplace tasks of cooking and eating, and while rooted in the real, her macro-view photographs adopt a hyperrealist point of view. *Untitled*, a close-up portrait of raw salmon flesh printed on fabric with textile dyes, is so fully detailed and textured that it transcends its physical referent. In this way, the documentation re-imagines the body quality of the salmon as a much more universal, yet ambiguous symbol of otherness.

Ben Coonley created the thirty-second television commercial *Thank You Dr. Zizmor!* as a commission for Dr. Jonathan Zizmor, the dermatologist whose advertisements are familiar to any New York city straphanger. The commercial piece emerged out of a prior collaboration in which Dr. Zizmor appeared in a promotional video for the New York Underground Film Festival. *New York Underground Film Festival Trailer* is itself a response to Coonley's strong reaction to Zizmor's colorful subway car ads. Catchy and idiosyncratic in their presentation and use of early Photoshop and proto-digital post-production technologies, the pieces represent a positive feedback loop between the roles of artist, consumer, producer, and patron.

In exploring the representational versus the abstract, and the milieu of personal memory and experience, **Jesse Hamerman's** *Signature* series takes up the phenomenon of the celebrity autograph. As an examination of the celebrity's seal of authenticity, *My Signature Series*

(*Baywatch*) is a magnified, three-dimensional replica of actor David Hasselhoff's signature. According to Hamerman, Hasselhoff was a seminal figure in his childhood imagination. For this work, he has perfectly refashioned the autograph into a large sculptural relief and line drawing. In doing so, he questions the value of the physical autograph, the concept of the "work of art," and the intangible childhood fantasies such an object represents.

In the work of **Mike Hein**, deceptively simple sculptures reveal a dynamic interplay of old and new, organic and inorganic, and the conceptual and the verifiable. Found objects are often the conceptual raw material for his sculptures, sophisticated constructions of bent, shaped, and colored Plexiglas. In Hein's juxtaposition of a "fine art object," nature, and human detritus, *Driftwood* is constructed from Plexiglas and an old soda pop can. It also contains an honest nod to the exquisite appearance of 1960s minimal art. As in Albee's work, embedded in *Driftwood* is a presentation of the degrees of separation that the work is removed from its original.

In her *Chanel* series, **Tatiana Kronberg** questions the pragmatism of the choices we make. More than a simple gesture towards consumer criticism, Kronberg's work suggests how value is tied to personality, how identity is constructed by the objects around us, and just how foreign [random?] and arbitrary the things around us often are. In a deadpan instructional video, Kronberg demonstrates how a luxury Chanel handbag can be easily reproduced in a few easy steps. These works, in sculptural form, ask us where and how we locate the value of production.

Sheldon Moyer was tasked to address the particularities of the BRIC Rotunda Gallery space and install a site-specific installation. Drawing on his background in art production in combination with a diverse studio

practice, he has constructed a piece that simultaneously addresses the viewer, the architecture, and the exhibition's theme. The piece, designed to subtly shift the way we digest the physical space of this exhibition, begins a dialog with the architecture of the gallery itself before addressing the viewer. In previous projects, Moyer's designs have disrupted the way that audiences physically enter and interact with the exhibition space, thus challenging audiences to reinterpret the physical act of gallery spectatorship.

Aside from their overtly non-objective appearance, **Carrie Pollack's** recent work is directly informed by ruminations on existence. To produce *Presents 1, 2, and 3*, she distressed canvases by folding, bleaching, ironing, and carrying them around with her on daily errands. In this way, she exposes her material to uncontrollable elements and routine before she undertakes the fragile and tactile process of applying gold leaf to canvas. By making an intangible force in her life tangible, Pollack manufactures decay and degeneration instead of being passively affected by it. In the end, these works reverse the way we often approach abstract painting and remove the pretensions and presumptions linked with historical modernism.

Amy Yao works with the symbology of the door, but these doors do not act to interrupt, or create illusions of the stark white walls found in gallery spaces. Nor do these doors act as interactive installations. Instead, these objects are more like interventions that break patterns of common sense and leave only mystery. Yao's doors are ornamented and decorated in a way that slyly twists the viewer's reading of the object as the thing itself. Through this interventionist act and wit, the absurdity of Marcel Duchamp is brought to bear, reminding us that one can never define what is in front of us as absolute.

There are many statements of confidence that belly-up from much of the work in *Real Nonfiction*. When something new meets something old, without pretension or market pressure, one can begin to look past fixed ideals and begin to see reality in all its forms. Together, the works in this exhibition take an honest look at our material culture, the societies that produce it, and our intense relationships with the objects that literally and figuratively structure our lives. Some of the best artists today don't obsess over creating something new, but allow art making to take place organically. In this way these artists all demonstrate a serious engagement with the conversation of art. They work among, but do not rely upon, the conceptual seduction of pastiche, ironic nostalgia, and material fetishism. Through personal and sincere explorations, they help to construct a sense of our twenty-first century selves.

— **Baseera Fox Khan and Jon Lutz**

Real Nonfiction is co-curated by Baseera Fox Khan, who served as Assistant Curator for BRIC Arts | Media | Bklyn until July 2010 and is an artist currently pursuing an MFA at Cornell University, and by Jon Lutz, an independent Brooklyn-based curator who operates a roving exhibition project entitled Daily Operation.

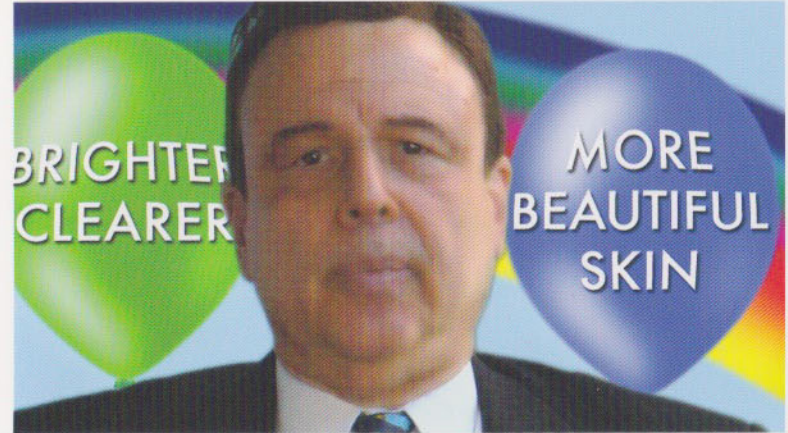
ALISA BAREMBOYM



Untitled, 2010

Born in 1982 in Moscow, Alisa Baremboym received her BFA from School of Visual Arts, NY, and MFA from Bard College, NY. Baremboym lives and works in East Williamsburg, and shows her work internationally. Recent venues include 179 Canal, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow; and Nine Things, Frankfurt, Germany. Her work is included in the ongoing online exhibition, *Why and Wherefore 7 x 7(2)* (whyandwherefore.com) curated by Josh Kline.

BEN COONLEY & DR. JONATHAN ZIZMOR



New York Underground Trailer Film Festival, 2008

Born in Boston, Ben Coonley lives and works in Gowanus. Coonley studied Art Semiotics at Brown University and obtained his MFA from Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. His films and performances have been presented at venues including the International Film Festival Rotterdam; New York Underground Film Festival; Images Festival, Toronto; and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY. He was the recipient of the 2003 Barbara Aronofsky Latham Memorial Award for an Emerging Video Artist, and is the recipient of a 2010 Grant from Art Matters. His *Valentine for Perfect Strangers* was exhibited at the 2007 Moscow Biennial. Coonley has taught video and media production at Princeton University, Bard College, and The New School. Video Data Bank distributes his work.

Dr. Jonathan Zizmor is a physician specializing in dermatology. Born and raised in New York, he received his BA from New York University and his MD from Yeshiva University's Albert Einstein College of Medicine. He is former Chief of Dermatology at St. Vincent's Hospital and is the author of several books on skin care.

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