Selections from Project 35: International Video

New Orleans Museum of Art
October 20 through January 30, 2011
Selections from Project 35: International Video

The New Orleans Museum of Art is pleased to present Selections from Project 35, a series of nine international videos organized by Independent Curators International (ICI). In this series, nine curators from around the globe were invited to select one single-channel video they consider vital to the discourse of contemporary art.

The diversity of styles and techniques in the videos chosen demonstrate the range of resources available to artists today. Artists use animation, stop-motion, cinema, performance, and YouTube clips to produce works that weave between documentary and fiction. Their subject matter ranges from protests in Zimbabwe, to propaganda news broadcasts in China, to emerging youth culture in modern-day Ho Chi Minh City. The transportability of video, and its ability to communicate across cultures makes it one of the most important and far-reaching mediums in art today.

In the spirit of the many voices of that came together to create Selections from Project 35, NOMA has partnered with Tulane University in gathering the voices of nine students, each of whom provided his or her analysis of one video in the exhibition. The students are all participants in The Artist as a Global Traveler, a Tulane Service Learning course taught by Professor Florencia Bazzano-Nelson.

In addition to creating this brochure, Tulane University students will also present a public lecture on three videos from Selections from Project 35. Please join us:

**Saturday, November 6, 2010, at 2pm in the Stern Auditorium at NOMA for a lecture on**

- Yukihiro Taguchi by Hannah Udell
- Zhou Xiaohu by Adrianna Province
- Edwin Sánchez by Laura Cilek

Event promotion by Cameron Fry
Related Events:

**Friday, November 5, noon, Stern Auditorium at NOMA**
Public lecture by Miranda Lash, curator of Modern and Contemporary Art with a focus on artists Guy Ben-Ner, Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, and Phù Nam Thúc Hà.

**Friday, November 19, 2010 at 3pm, Stone Auditorium at Tulane University, Woldenberg Art Center, Room 210**
Public lecture by video artist Kota Ezawa

*Selections from Project 35* is on view at the New Orleans Museum of Art
October 20, 2010 through January 30, 2011

*Project 35* is produced and circulated by ICI (Independent Curators International), New York. The exhibition and tour are made possible, in part, by grants from the Cowles Charitable Trust, Foundation for Contemporary Art, Foundation To-Life, Inc., the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, and The Toby Fund; the ICI Board of Trustees; and ICI Benefactors Barbara and John Robinson. Project 35 also benefitted from donations made to ICI's Access Fund, created to widen the reach of ICI programs – Burt Aaron, Bobbie Brown and Steven Plofker, Jim Cohan, Phillip Drill, Leslie Fritz, Marilyn and Stephen Greene, Agnes Gund, Ken Kuchin, Gerrit and Sydie Lansing, Jo Carole Lauder, Janelle Reiring, Patterson Sims, Bill and Ruth True, August Uribe, Frank and Margo Walter, Helene Winer, and Virginia and Bagley Wright.
Guy Ben-Ner constructs an “island” in his tiny kitchen, complete with sand and a palm tree, as the set for his 1999 film, Berkeley’s Island. Inspired by George Berkeley’s dictum, “to be is to be perceived,” the artist explores theories of solipsism, while providing the viewer with a glimpse into his physically confining, but imaginatively expansive domestic life. Creative and sexual impulses fuel the often hilarious scenes, which reflect his conflicting roles as artist and father. As an artist, we see him delve deeper and deeper into his self-conscious, acknowledging his most primitive urges. He expresses an awareness of and a desire to remain in tune with his pure, wild nature, despite his new role as a husband and father. In a 2006 press release, Postmaster’s Gallery in New York described the work: “Low-tech, but ingeniously inventive, Ben-Ner videos center around home and family, exploring, exposing and exploiting the relationship he has with his children.”
The narrative quality of the piece, which resembles that of Robinson Crusoe, is significant because it provides the framework around which the artist can apply his own story. “In my earlier movies, literature functioned more like a construction upon which I could mount my own material,” said Ben-Ner. Indeed, in Berkeley’s Island, the artist relates his own imaginative island to the fictional one written about by Daniel Defoe. “My island does not exist. It is a fantasy inaccessible to foreign eyes. It is Crusoe’s island living in complete secrecy within The Swiss Family Robinson.”

The Swiss Family Robinson, written by Johann David Wyss, was intended to teach the author’s four sons about family values, good husbandry, the uses of the natural world, and self-reliance. The dichotomy between Ben-Ner’s need to nurture his own imagination within the constraints of the household, and an expectation to nurture the imaginations of his young children provides the basis for the film’s tension. Boundaries are broken when a rock is thrown at his window from the outside, or when a foreign footprint appears in the sand, or when his daughter attempts to claim his island as her own. At the same time, it conveys an understanding that his tale is a classic tale of a transformation into manhood and self-awareness.

The opening Sartre quotation alludes to themes of solipsism, in sync with theories advanced by George Berkeley: “to the child who steals and the child who masturbates, to exist is to be seen by adults, and since these secret activities take place in solitude, they do not exist.” His cleverness is displayed in his efforts to use what the island supplies him with, taking advantage of the washing machine’s vibrations or digging holes in the sand in order to masturbate. He explores the periphery of his creativity. “Today I learned the island’s limits. It was the first time I walked from one end to the other. I drew a map, trying desperately to see myself from above—from the outside.” He invents a sunburn on his chest, suggesting the one that would have been left by the ship’s wheel, uses mirrors for special effects (appearing to be fornicating in one scene, and cutting off his leg in another), creates the illusion of a storm, and puts eyes on his penis to produce a singing companion. He also learns that this organ can be employed as a candlesnuffer with the ability to extinguish two candles at once.

Guy Ben-Ner received a B.Ed. from Hamidrasha Art Teachers School in Ramat Hasharon, Israel, in 1997 and an MFA from Colombia University, New York, in 2003. New York’s Postmaster’s Gallery was the first to exhibit Berkeley’s Island in the United States in 2006. The piece was presented alongside the artist’s Treehouse Kit, originally commissioned for the Israeli Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennale (2005). His work has also been presented in many group exhibitions, including Greater New York (2005, P.S.1, New York), Skulptur Projekte Munster (2007), Shanghai Biennale (2008), and Liverpool Biennial (2008).

—Jane Winslow
Yukihiro Taguchi's Moment is a three-part video series that shows the transformation of interior and exterior spaces, accomplished by recycling the floorboards of one room to create a multitude of environments. Taguchi experiments with the idea of cycles in space and time through his art. He makes temporary interventions to the urban landscape of Berlin with his reconstructions of a painted wood panel floor in different sites. The artist recreates the floorboards in a three-step process: a systematized transformation of a conventional interior space, an adaptation to exterior surroundings, and finally a reinstallation of the slabs in their place of origin. Using his free time in Berlin, Taguchi commutes daily to the workspace, exemplifying active participation in a city where the environment is always changing along with its audience.6

Taguchi’s stop-motion series begins with Moment-performative installation, 2007 (silent). The title of this first video in the series implies a performance within the white walls of an art gallery. Taguchi transformed the
space daily when the site was closed to the public, but visitors could view the installations during open gallery hours. The artist positioned the panels to address the flow and functionality of the architectural space. Taguchi has said of this piece, “I don’t think anyone consciously thinks about the fact that one is standing on the ground.” Many forms emerge from the panels, consequently emphasizing the inhabitants’ unconscious relationship to their surrounding space. What will be the connections observed in the video to the space for viewers of Selections from Project 35?

The second excerpt from the series entitled Moment-performative spazieren, 2008 (silent) also begins in a white box. However, after a few seconds the scene quickly moves to an outdoor venue. Each grey wood board scales down the side of the building and extends across the street. The wood panels integrate themselves with familiar scenes of modern life in the city of Berlin. The floor adapts to modes of transportation, and in venturing down to the subway, the floor is exhibited in a new gallery-like space. The piece culminates with the panels’ return to the white-walled room, thereby returning the transformed boards to their place of origin.

In the last section, entitled Moment-making, the artist reveals his activities in the workspace, this time including sound in his video. Yukihiro Taguchi becomes another element in the transformation and construction of the space: dressed in a grey sweater and jeans, he tears up the wood boards. To indicate the cyclical process of creation, this audio draws the viewer back to the birth pangs at the beginning of the series. Contrasting with the ease and flow of the first two sections, which seemed effortless, in the last section construction materials and tools creak and clang their way to the forefront. Viewers are asked to identify with the life of a worker in an urban environment.

Taguchi’s approach to art was nurtured in part by his studies at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. Working in Berlin provides him with the opportunity to produce an artistic space in a modern city. “Any space has its peculiarity, its character, and I therefore concentrate first on trying to identify them.” Like a kuroko, a Japanese stage artist who does not reveal himself to the audience when the theater production is in progress, Taguchi works on his constructions when the public is not present. The stage of contemporary art, the art gallery, transmutes at the hand of the stage manager, the artist, into a backstage scene that is only revealed by withdrawing a curtain. The viewer gains knowledge of the intimate process of creation from Taguchi, who pulls the ropes and heartstrings of this magic theater. At the same time, he empowers the public by including them in the process, and encouraging them to imagine other possible re-constructed environments. Selected by Mami Kataoka, who has curated and co-curated a number of exhibitions in Tokyo and London, this video demonstrates Taguchi’s knack for mesmerizing audiences in such distinct metropolises as Berlin, Tokyo, London, and New Orleans.

—Rebecca McClain
Dan Halter’s Swiss citizenship and Zimbabwean ID card are emblematic of a common condition for whites in post-colonial Africa who are legally and culturally bound to two continents. That condition is one of simultaneous belonging and alienation from a place of complex ethno-cultural and political juxtapositions that is called home.

Dan Halter was three years old when Zimbabwe gained independence. He lived there until 1998, moving to South Africa in order to study at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town only four years after the end of apartheid. Thus, Halter grew up in the seams of cultural transition, political upheaval, and economic collapse. Those seams, which he threaded with images and icons of the 1980s, are prominent features of his work. For example, Halter’s repertoire includes a video-performance of a man moonwalking across Beitbridge (which traverses the border of South Africa and Zimbabwe), and imagery from the video game *Space Invaders* superimposed onto themes of migration and imported culture. These works place his video *Untitled (Zimbabwean Queen of Rave)* within a continuum of artistic exploration that is deeply personal, often comic, and politically and culturally subversive. However, as an early work—it originally appeared at his first solo-exhibition in 2006 at the João Ferreira Gallery in Cape Town—*Queen of Rave* anticipated Halter’s oeuvre.

Fifteen years before his solo exhibition, when Zimbabwean singer Rozalla Miller’s breakthrough hit *Everybody’s Free (To Feel Good)* topped international music charts, Dan Halter was in high school. It was the height of the rave scene, which Halter experienced firsthand, and Miller, the sister
of Halter’s classmate, was dubbed “The Queen of Rave.” Simultaneously, in neighboring South Africa, and in stark contrast, violent protests against apartheid were erupting. Using found footage, Halter spliced together these two different national realities to construct a sense of duality.

For Halter, the juxtaposition of white rave culture and the political movement of black South Africans in Queen of Rave expressed the reality of displacement and divisiveness in which he lived.\(^{11}\) The links between these two scenarios were, according to the artist, the common denominator of “… crowd psychology and shared longing for a different reality.”\(^ {12}\) Comparing the two disparate groups in this way, Halter draws an analogy that functions as a powerful tool for subversion and elicits a response from the viewer. Whether or not someone likes rave music, or even finds its aesthetic appealing, one could hardly deny that Halter found a distinct, compelling, and multi-dimensional synchronicity in his blending of music and imagery. In Halter’s visual and audial assemblage, the beat and tempo of the music seem to drive the pulse of African bodies that are choreographed into the mass movements of crowds and the southern African Toyi-toyi dances that were used during political protests. Overlaid are refrains of “everybody is free” and “brothers and sisters, together we’ll make it through.” Together music, text, and imagery work in concert to create a unity infused with emotion and adrenaline that powerfully plays upon the feelings of the viewer. Subsequently, when the video cuts to footage of what Halter perceives as white-raver culture, there is an inevitable disorientation. This occurs as the viewer is transported to a contrived reality, an environment where excess and over-stimulation remedy the privileged angst of white youth. From the imperative to the synthetic, from poverty and repression to wealth and self-imposed, recreational disenfranchisement, Queen of Rave hurriedly ushers the viewer back and forth between alternate realities. Without any allowance for reflection or digestion, the incessant music and barrage of imagery forces the viewer between worlds and moral conundrums. By Halter’s design, it is through this mechanism that we are exposed to the artist’s experience in the cultural limbo of post-colonial Africa. As one soon realizes, Queen of Rave is a pop paradox of propaganda and personal expression.

Untitled (Zimbabwean Queen of Rave) was chosen for inclusion in Project 35 by Kathryn Smith, a practicing artist, scholar, and curator. Based in Durban, South Africa, Smith is privy to the complications of white identity in Africa. In candid remarks, the curator recounts discomfort in seeing Halter’s film and the feeling that she was both compromised and complicit, an active participant in the disparity between two cultures inhabiting the same space.\(^ {13}\) Admittedly, the audience at the New Orleans Museum of Art, unlike Smith and Halter, enjoys the comfort of being removed from the realities that are depicted in Queen of Rave. However, on a broad level, Halter’s work speaks universally about the complexities of interracial relationships and the sometimes harsh realities that exist within multiracial nations. However, Halter’s work is not merely political commentary. Rather, his video accuses as well as self-accuses and denies the viewer both innocence and sanctuary.

—Anthony Stellaccio
4. Zhou Xiaohu (China, born 1960)

_Utopian Machine_, 2002

Duration: 8 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

Selected by Lu Jie (China), chief curator of the Long March Project

In the short film _Utopian Machine_, Zhou Xiaohu recreates a Chinese evening news segment using claymation, giving the typically machine-like nature of the news a handmade feeling. Through the media's perspective, Xiaohu refers to China's socialist history. He makes viewers aware of its complex nature and gives insight to its portrayal. The film oscillates through time and location; it begins in a typical evening newsroom before moving to world news, local news, the Long March taken by Mao Zedong, the explosion of the Twin Towers, and ultimately ends with hope for salvation from the cockpit of a helicopter. Xiaohu’s film uses symbolism to comment on the socio-political framework of modern day China.

Lu Jie, the curator who chose this video, is also the curator of _The Long March Project_, the exhibition for which this video was made. Originally conceived as a series of art activities, this exhibition takes place at various public sites along the route of Mao Zedong’s historic Long March. Lu Jie said about the artist’s work, “[Xiaohu] uses claymation to deconstruct and reinterpret the formulaic news broadcasts of Chinese public channels. These public broadcasts are programmed to inculcate and maintain a
national utopian outlook.” Both the artist and curator oppose the media’s presentation of current events and the government’s oppressive control over the people. Xiaohu said about the media, “I—like many people—am suspicious of the media, it’s really a superficial way at looking at the events of the world. I try to show this by filtering the information from television or the press through my work. It’s not a reaction to the actual events, but a reaction to, or an observation of, how they are reported through the media.”

Because Xiaohu combines elements of fiction with fact, his representation of the media is somewhat fabricated. The artist said of his film, “[Utopian Machine] is all about information, news, the nature of summits, conferences and meeting (political and international), decisions made, and violence that erupts as a result.” The first scene is set in a typical evening newsroom with the familiar evening news broadcast’s tune. The clay figures speak incomprehensibly with grins plastered to their faces. The first story, which pertains to world news, shows state delegates on visits abroad and foreign leaders such as Richard Nixon arriving at the Beijing airport. The camera then pans out at a distorted angle around the cityscape as the viewers watch the local news. Cultural events are included, such as a meeting of international cultural workers at the site of the Long March. Figures travel along the Long March until another group of figures appears in a room, dancing around a globe. A tagline reads, “The scholars from China and foreign countries discuss the new spiritual outlet of mankind,” which refers to the site where Mao revealed his communist strategy. Unexpectedly, the explosion of the Twin Towers interrupts this meeting, and civilian figures frantically run and cry. Just as they appear to be sinking into quicksand, a helicopter swiftly swoops down with a ladder to aid in their escape, alluding to hope for salvation in the future.

Utopian Machine is an ironic title for the film, because it connotes a perfect society that moves with a machine-like precision. While Xiaohu enjoys the technological possibilities of the computer, he once said, “No matter how much we can achieve with computers, and in spite of the perfect images they allow us to attain, I have always been conscious of injecting a handmade touch in my work that locates it in the sphere of fine art. Art can never be made by machine alone.” Xiaohu individually manipulates each clay figurine by the millimeter, physically involving himself in the production of each figure, its setting, and its movement, which subverts the reality of what he creates. He cannot change history, so he chooses to reconstruct it. By recreating the news as opposed to simply replaying it, there is a satirical, almost fantastical quality to his film. He universalizes moments of history in such a way that it can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. By debuting in an era of Chinese modernization, Utopian Machine creatively juxtaposes the handmade with the machine to successfully comment on possible subjective interpretations of China’s history.

—Grace Moore
This warning is imperative to keep in mind when viewing Topic 1: Contemporary Art, created by Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz and selected by Franklin Sirmans. In this video (the first in a trilogy) Raimundi-Ortiz presents herself as the character “Chuleta,” a young Latina woman who attempts to help viewers understand art terminology by explaining it in everyday terms. Through Chuleta’s dress, mannerisms, and speaking habits we are forced to examine our views on social class and the limitations we impose on those of different backgrounds. The explanation of art historical terms becomes a backdrop for the artist to addresses her Latina background and our potential prejudices.

Chuleta begins her lesson by attempting to teach viewers about the white box concept. She uses ordinary wording, sometimes street slang, in an attempt to make her audience feel comfortable and more at ease with the often confusing language of art. Next she makes brief stops at other terms
such as "post-modernism"\textsuperscript{26} and "identity politics."\textsuperscript{27} However, her explanations are very brief and are often interrupted mid-stream as Chuleta’s thoughts burst forth without a seemingly organized path.

Even though Raimundi-Ortiz’s character seems scatterbrained and somewhat ignorant, the artist is highly educated. She received her MFA from Rutgers University in 2008 and her AAS from New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology. Additionally, Raimundi-Ortiz was the recipient of the BRIO award in 2001 and was named a fellow at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2002.\textsuperscript{28} This experience serves to validate the artist’s claims, thus showing viewers that her character’s explanations are not the rantings of an over-caffeinated yet passionate woman venting through her character, but rather those of a socially conscious and well-educated artist. Through this video Raimundi-Ortiz brings to light the prejudices that we harbor against those with less education as a further example of how people are not always what they seem.

Through this seeming confusion, Raimundi-Ortiz uses Chuleta to touch upon important topics, such as how a museum can feel judgmental and intimidating for people who do not fit into society’s typical box. This affects people of all types, but especially those who are less educated, impoverished, or even just different from mainstream expectations.

In this video Chuleta embraces people who feel uncomfortable with the overbearing art world, thus taking on a sort of mother-hen role. Everything from the slight inclination of her head to the over-exaggerated way she uses her hands to assert a point all serve one purpose: to make the viewer feel comfortable and at ease. She not only guides us through art terminology, she also leads us through our own uncertainties, misunderstandings, and prejudices.

Chuleta might seem slightly abrasive and brash to some, making them feel on edge, attacked, or even uncomfortable. This, however, is easily explained. Chuleta’s abrasiveness stems from the mistreatment various people experience when they visit museums. She asserts that the educated group assaults those less educated through their word choice and unnecessary use of art terminology. Her anger is fueled just as a mother's is when her child is verbally beaten up at school. Chuleta shows how this verbal abuse of terminology only serves to further separate people that it should instead bring together.

Audiences learn that art terminology should not be used as a barrier for viewing art, just as cultural differences should not be a barrier in society. Do not be distracted by Chuleta’s seemingly naïve approach to art, because in fact it is not naïve at all. Rather, her approach is meant to highlight the underlying concern of prejudice and how terminology can create a barrier between people of different backgrounds. Chuleta encourages viewers to let wording act as neither a sword nor a shield, but instead a tool used to garner understanding for art and culture alike.

—Candice Bunner

“Uh…”, 2007

Duration: 7 minutes

Courtesy of the artists

Selected by: Zoe Butt (Australia/Vietnam), Director of programs and development for Sài Gòn Art, Hồ Chí Minh City

Working in collaboration, artists Phù Nam Thúc Hà and Tuan Andrew Nguyen seek to demonstrate how the culture of Vietnam is changing due to influences from other countries and the impact of the nation’s youth. Graffiti is used as a metaphor to show how the youth culture is trying to adapt to these transformations in Hồ Chí Minh City. The word “Uh” is tagged on different walls and surfaces throughout the city. As people pass by on foot or on motorized bikes behind the painted graffiti, we realize that the “Uh” is set on top of the film rather than on the walls. It becomes clear that this is not an actual tag, but exists in an invented space created by the artists. This makes the viewer question whether the cultural and physical change occurring in Vietnam is also real or simply perceived.29

The use of graffiti and English words exemplifies the loss of cultural identity and native traditions in Vietnam, especially in Hồ Chí Minh City. Graffiti is spontaneous and uninvited, the antithesis of what the socialist Vietnamese government allowed. It is unscripted, loose, and in sharp contrast to the orderliness that was imposed on the Vietnamese. The inclusion of non-traditional elements such as graffiti illustrates how individuality is currently manifested in a country where personal expression was barred by the government. Looking at the idiosyncratic interruption of graffiti, the viewer can extrapolate how individual personalities are impacting the visual and cultural landscape of the country.

Nguyen and Hà founded The Propeller Group (TPG) in 2006 along with fellow artist Matt Lucero. TPG uses media production and popular culture through advertising, television, and cinema to publicize art projects. Their
projects combine the ideas of “collapsing media strategies of power, distribution, and access to information as well as issues of public versus private space within the development of sub-cultures and popular cultures.” Nguyen and Hà draw on these concepts by depicting graffiti on walls that are in a public space but are most likely private property. Curator Zoe Butt believes that Vietnamese artists are limited compared to artists elsewhere in the information and resources available to them, such as publications and exhibitions. This demonstrates the global importance of video in disseminating important cultural ideas.

Tuan Andrew Nguyen received his BA in Digital Arts at the University of California, Irvine in 1999 and his MFA from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California, in 2004. His works have been shown internationally in many film festivals as well as other group exhibitions. He currently lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City. Phù Nam Thúc Hà studied bronze Buddha sculpting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 1995 as well as painting and restoration at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Hanoi, where he graduated in 1997. He has worked on and directed many feature-length documentary films, television programs, short films, music videos as well as video art installations. He co-founded Sàn Art, an independent artist-run exhibition space in Ho Chi Minh City, where he lives and works.

Zoe Butt resides and works in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. She is currently the curator and director of programs and development for Sàn Art. Butt worked on The Long March Project, an international artist organization and continuing art project and served as the director of international programs in Beijing, China. Previously, in Australia, she was assistant curator for the Queensland Art Gallery for contemporary Asian Art. There, Butt assisted in the development of the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT). Currently, Butt researches contemporary Asian art.

—Jessie Himmelrich

7. Kota Ezawa (Germany/United States, born 1969)
Lennon Sontag Beuys, 2004
Duration: 2 minutes, 10 seconds
Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery, San Francisco
Selected by Constance Lewallen (United States), adjunct curator at the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive
Kota Ezawa, known to explore aspects of American cultural history and art history through his animation process, imposes in *Lennon Sontag Beuys* a codified version of past events that seem familiar yet distant. These historical moments have been written into our cultural history through their representation in the media. Over time, our collective memory of these events has become reduced to summarized versions that continue to cull an emotional response. Ezawa investigates the deeply rooted emotions these events still produce as a point of reflection for his animations.

Ezawa recycles archival material from television, cinema, and art history, reducing the recognizable images into animated stills and videos. Using his version of an old animation technique called "rotoscoping," each frame of a video is meticulously recreated by tracing over the original. The artist paints fields of color over the source imagery, using a limited color palette. The shadow-less figures and limited color choices flatten the representation of space, creating an almost two-dimensional world that straddles the border between the source models and the resulting animation. Ezawa's videos make reference to reality through their movement, which is based on original footage, while simultaneously detaching themselves from the real by flattening the visual field and limiting the color palette. Through this strategy, Ezawa's abstractions shift the understanding of the events depicted, by assigning meaning to the animation but also making us project our visual memories onto the moving images.

*Lennon Sontag Beuys*, 2004, a video comprised of three scenes, shows three icons speaking publicly about their own areas of concern. In the first scene, John Lennon speaks with the press during his 1969 *Bed In* for peace. In the second scene, Susan Sontag is lecturing at Columbia University in 2001 about violence in photographs, and in the third scene Joseph Beuys gives a presentation in 1974 describing his thesis on social sculptures at the New School for Social Research in New York. Ezawa creates each scene using the rotoscoping method, flattening his subjects into an animation composed of flat color fields. The original audio track is played along with its corresponding animation, suggesting an element of the real.

Similar to the events that Ezawa explores in his other works, the mode in which these three figures are represented in the media influence their portrayal within history. Lennon, Sontag, and Beuys were all cultural revolutionaries within the twentieth century in the fields of music, criticism, and art. Using their names elicits an emotional response. Ezawa's animation process visually reduces these characters, suppressing their power while also unifying them as symbols. The fact that they are speaking adds an element of reality, which produces an interesting juxtaposition of "the real" and "the representation." This piece does not pay homage to these specific figures as individuals, yet recognizes the effect that individuals had in cultural history, a power that is bound to the massive circulation of their images.

Kota Ezawa received his BFA from San Francisco Art Institute in 1995 and in 2003 received his MFA from Stanford. He has shown in several solo exhibitions around the world and has also taken part in exhibitions at venues...
such as Shanghai Biennial, The Museum of Modern Art San Francisco, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, The Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, and The Museum of Modern Art New York. He was also the recipient of the SECA Arts Award in 2006, and in 2010 received the Fleishhacker Foundation Eureka Fellowship.36

—Flynn O’Brien

8. Edwin Sánchez (Bogotá, Colombia, born 1976)
Clases de Cuchillo (Knife Lessons), 2006-2007
Duration: 8 minutes, 16 seconds
Courtesy of the artist
Selected by José Roca (Colombia), Artistic Director of Philagrafika 2010

Edwin Sánchez’s Clases de Cuchillo is an instructional video in three parts that shows the viewer how to make a knife and how to use it effectively to kill. As in previous projects, Sánchez’s work thematizes the violence experienced in Colombia, where he lives and works. In Clases de Cuchillo, the artist films and interviews Jimmy, a professional robber from Bogotá, who introduces us to the “art” of stabbing by drawing (Lesson 1), sculpting (Lesson 2) the knife, and finally enacting (Lesson 3) how to stab someone with it.

The curator, José Roca, states that the video provokes “conflicting feelings of attraction and repulsion—empathy for the destitute man who is endearingly candid, and the need to continually remind oneself of the brutality of the actions he is describing.”37 Emotional tension is also produced by the humorous comments made by Jimmy and the laughter of the artist, which give the potential act of violence an appearance of cheerfulness. The film ends on a comical note, as Jimmy interrupts his demonstration of fighting techniques when he hears his “mommy” calling him from across the street.
Clases de Cuchillo is also about the relation between the artist and his subject. The title of the piece implies a bond in which Jimmy is the teacher and Sánchez the apprentice. Like a student, the artist constantly asks Jimmy about the techniques of knife-making and stabbing (“In what direction do you point the knife?” and “Do you try to stab the legs?”). As a patient teacher, Jimmy provides ample explanations and demonstrations. But is this a “real” lesson? Is the artist there to learn how to fight with knives?

There are differences between Sánchez and Jimmy, which suggest an ethnographic, rather than pedagogic relation. Apart from obvious class differences, Sánchez is in control of the camera. Unlike Jimmy, who becomes gradually visible throughout the lessons, we never see the artist, except for his hand, whose color also reveals an ethnic difference. In Lesson 1, Jimmy accidentally dirties the notepad that Sánchez gave him to draw on, apologetically remarking that he “never studied.” This contrast in Jimmy and Sánchez’s educational backgrounds is ironic, as it is Jimmy who supposedly is the teacher. Sánchez resembles an anthropologist who uses Jimmy as an informant to gather data. In order to maintain some credibility as a student, the artist/anthropologist adopts the street slang of his informant, sometimes repeating expressions he learned from Jimmy, such as “that crap is for killing anyone.” Sánchez has stated that he does not see his work as art, which speaks for the ethnographic purpose of the film.

Clases de Cuchillo contains two lessons. The lesson that the artist teaches the viewer is symbolic. It shocks the viewer, but is not actually meant to teach him/her how to use a knife. The lesson that Jimmy teaches Sánchez, on the other hand, is directly linked to a historical reality. In a country where violence is ever-present, the idea of an actual lesson in knife fighting does not seem absurd. Colombia’s history of armed conflict goes back to the 1940s and ‘50s, a period of civil war commonly referred to as “La Violencia,” in which more than 200,000 died. In the 1960s and ’70s, guerrillas and paramilitary groups emerged—both with ties to the drug trade. These warring factions continue to threaten democratic consolidation in the present. In the 1980s and ‘90s, the rise of narco-terrorism took the violence to an unprecedented level. During this time, Medellin became the murder capital of the world. Colombia’s cultural production has been deeply influenced by these events; its most famous literary export product, Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), revolves precisely around the historical inescapability of violence in this country. Popular music and, more recently, cinema have also focused on the topic. It is not surprising, then, that violence is also the main focus of Clases de Cuchillo. Similar to the effect of magical realism in Márquez’s novels, the film makes the absurdity of violence seem normal.

Sánchez’s video makes the viewer aware of the ambiguous relation between the artist and his subject, while confronting her with a disturbing context. What makes the film somewhat uncanny is not its ethnographic documentation of a violent reality, but the emotionally contradictory tone with which this reality is narrated. Clases de Cuchillo challenges our perspective on art and reality through the uncomfortable lens of everyday violence.

—Katharina Kniess
In Cauble’s video, Alice’s search for excitement takes her down the rabbit hole and into a Wonderland steeped in Guy Debord’s philosophy. Although familiarity with Debord and his group, the Situationist International, is not necessary to enjoy this video (the piece provides an introduction to their philosophy in a rap song), a little background information reveals Cauble’s video to be in the rebellious, inquisitive spirit of the situationists.

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* has been reinterpreted many times. The curator, Raimundas Malasauskas, suggests that although the conception of Wonderland changes in different interpretations, the overall effect of the project depends on Alice because we encounter the story through her eyes. Cauble’s Alice brings to mind a rebellious adolescent; she is bored with the predictability of her routine, tired of piano lessons, and sick of living in Victorian England. Alice’s disgust with the dreariness of her life echoes the philosophy of Guy Debord and the situationists, who based their ideas on the conviction that “modern life was boring and therefore wrong.”

Born in Paris in 1931, Debord was central to the Situationist International, a group with Dadaist roots concerned with the degradation of the quality of modern life. Debord argued that contemporary society was characterized by a feeling of alienation, relationships between people had become
transactional, and life was “mediated by images.” Debord termed this phenomenon “the Society of the Spectacle.”

An important tool in Debord’s fight against the spectacle was the détournement, the process of recovering images from the spectacle and using radical juxtaposition to create new meaning. Consistent with the strategy of détournement, Cauble appropriates footage of the 1951 Disney film, edits it, and provides a new soundtrack in order to re-imagine Alice’s adventure. Cauble’s video is lively and fun—Disney’s prim heroine swears in frustration—reminding us that a project need not be somber to be insightful.

In Wonderland, Alice encounters the Mad Hatter and March Hare, who are engaged in an endless tea party, in a manic, thoughtless cycle of consumption. When Alice tries to get some answers about the strange place she has found herself, the Hare tells her, “We don’t like questions, unless we give the answers first.” The Hare’s comment reflects a superficial level of consciousness; questions are only acceptable if the spectacle has already provided a solution. There is no place for reflection, only consumption. Cauble uses to great effect the animation of the pair carelessly spilling, sipping, and destroying. The scene brings to mind Debord’s observation that “the spectacle produces spectators, and thus protects itself from questioning.” Indeed, questioning is active, acceptance is passive; therefore, questioning is subversive. Rather than be passive consumers, content with the simple scenarios and solutions reflected in advertisements, situationist philosophy challenges us to ask questions and draw our own conclusions. After all, the important questions of who we are and what we want cannot be answered by advertisements.

Leaving the tea party, Alice continues her search for Guy Debord, encountering the Cheshire cat, a situationist philosopher. Frustrated that no one seems willing to answer her questions or help her make sense of Wonderland, Alice tries to escape but is confronted by a cacophony of images and white noise—the spectacle manifest. The intrusion of the “real” images into the animated world is jarring, as is the accompanying soundtrack. Divorced from their original context, the imagery becomes bizarre, disorienting, and distressingly powerful. We sympathize with Alice as she raises her arms to protect herself against the audio visual assault. Furthermore, the viewer recognizes the images: President Bush, infomercials, Shakira, television shows, Jerry Springer—their familiarity makes them all the more powerful. Even Disney’s fair-haired Alice is a part of the vernacular of images Cauble draws from to create his détournement. We know the spectacle. It is no longer an obscure bit of French philosophy, but a reality with which the viewer is intimately and unquestionably familiar.

Shaken from her experience, Alice tearfully asks the Cheshire cat if she should go back to England. The situationist replies, “Why not stay in the present, Alice, my dear?” In Cauble’s interpretation, boredom inspires Alice’s journey to Wonderland; the video comes full circle reminding us to stay in the present. Like Debord, Cauble challenges us to be more than spectators. Be curious, participate, think for yourself—or risk dying of boredom.

—Lindsay O’Connor
Notes


8. Matsuyama, 2.


10. Matsuyama, 3.


16. The Long March was a 6,000-mile trek taken by the Communists. It resulted in the relocation of the communist revolutionary base, and the rise of Mao Zedong as their leader.


21. Smith, 188.

22. Smith, "In My Solitude."

23. Smith, 185.


26. A concept that emerged in the 1970s in opposition to the dictates of modernism. Postmodernism rejects the idea of one truth and of a strict sense of black and white, instead embracing the relation between the two and how they correlate. A philosophical approach to art which emphasizes the cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, religious, or social interests that characterize a group identity.


40. Two examples of films that deal with the urban violence and poverty caused by warring drug cartels in the 1990s are La virgen de los sicarios (Our Lady of the Assassins) by Barbet Schroeder (Paramount Pictures, 2000), and Rosario Tijeras by Emilio Maillé (Mexico: Rio Negro Productions, 2005).


43. Greil Marcus, 7-8.


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