

watery, domestic

Michael Ashkin New York **Conrad Bakker** Urbana, IL **Joseph del Pesco** Minneapolis **Andrew Ehrenworth** New York **Jay Heikes** Minneapolis **Brian Jungen** Vancouver **Jennifer and Kevin McCoy** New York **Harvey Oppenorth** Milwaukee **David Patton** Los Angeles **Richard Prince** New York
Dario Robleto San Antonio **Mindy Schwartz** Chicago **Christine Tarkowski** Chicago **Siebrren Versteeg** Chicago **Mary C. Wilson** San Francisco **Paul Winstanley** London

November 17 – December 22, 2002



The Renaissance Society

at The University of Chicago, 5811 South Ellis, Chicago, IL 60637

The Renaissance Society

Museum Hours:
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Opening reception: Sunday, November 17, 2002, 4:00 - 7:00pm

featuring a round table discussion with the artists at 5:00pm in Cobb Hall room 307.

Downer's Groove

“Forget Irony... Have A Nice Decade.”

That headline appeared on the cover of the September 1991 issue of *Esquire*. Unfortunately, it reads as all too ironic given that the September 11th attacks took place exactly a decade later, not to mention that throughout the 1990s irony was anything but forgotten. As if *Wayne's World* was enough, NOT!, many took irony as a definitive characteristic of the present moment to the extent that Graydon Carter, publisher of *Vanity Fair*, declared the September 11th attacks “an end to the Age of Irony.” Broadly defined as a discrepancy between what is expressed and what is meant, irony is inherent to the act of signification, making it anything but unique to a given era. Having made a pronouncement no different than sentiments expressed after two World Wars, Carter can count himself quite far down on the list of individuals who have wished for civilization’s delivery into an epoch of truth and moral clarity. What distinguishes the species of irony to which Carter refers, however, is that it is no longer discernible from a nostalgic impulse. Although we are a full generation and a half removed from the Nixon administration, those years still serve to remind us of the degree to which great expectations have been blunted by disappointments or circumscribed by the fatigue of unfulfilled aspirations. Under these circumstances, there is little wonder as to why the rock band Pavement adopted a mantra of negative hope — “don’t expect, don’t expect, don’t expect” — as the ending refrain on the recording from which *watery, domestic* takes its title.

“Remember Irony...Have A Nice Century.”

From an art historical perspective that is how the *Esquire* headline should have read. Now that successive generations of artists have long been fashioning sentiment from strategies questioning art’s material, social, and institutional basis, it is safe to say post-modernism’s illustrious past dates back to the early Twentieth Century. Not bound by mastery, suspect of master narratives, and more than willing to blur the distinction between fine art and popular culture, the seventeen artists in *watery, domestic* have settled into a downer’s groove whose wake harbors laugh tracks and landfills, reruns and ready-mades, impeachments and implants. Lacking the self-consciousness associated with irony, much of the work is vulnerable rather than cynical. The exhibition includes Michael Ashkin’s bleak but beautiful panoramas of the New Jersey Meadowlands; the respectively modular and procedurally assisted ready-mades of Brian Jungen and Joseph del Pesco; the second-hand, unassisted,

ready-mades of Mary C. Wilson and Harvey Oppenorth; the explicit representation of irony in Richard Prince’s joke paintings; the haunting, photo-realistic paintings of Paul Winstanley; the rigorous deconstruction of a television sitcom by Jennifer and Kevin McCoy; the lovably and laughably degraded commodity-based sculptural tableaux of Conrad Bakker; Jay Heikes’s unadulterated idol worship; David Patton and Dario Robelto’s literal and metaphorical redux of the over-celebrated cult of disc jockeying; Mindy Schwartz’s flirtation with the uncanny via campfire arts and crafts; Christine Tarkowski’s wallpaper and serial sensibility realized in vacuum-formed plastic; Andrew Eherenworths’ subtly warped but oddly accurate graphite renderings of presidents; and Siebren Versteeg’s self-portrait of the artist as a young man’s cassette collection. As the title *watery, domestic* suggests, there is none of the emotional surplus associated with the more heroic work of art. With cameos by Gerald Ford, Billie Holiday, Barry Manilow, and Starsky and Hutch, any irony is less the construction of the artist and more a byproduct of nostalgia. For many of these works, the sentimental value in their source material has been spent giving *watery, domestic* the melancholy feel of a thriftstore. Despite any pathos or humor, the exhibition seeks to recoup the word hope from hopeless, spelling it as two words rather than one, lest anyone think we have run out.

RELATED EVENTS

Performance

Sunday, November 17, 4:30 pm

David Patton

Forget cut, bust and scratch, this is Old School before there was a school. David Patton a.k.a. DJ David Patton has won a cult following for a humorous performance in which he literally spins records the old fashioned way, i.e. with his index finger. This event will take place in the gallery during the opening reception.

Roundtable discussion

Sunday, November 17, 5:00 pm

This discussion will feature several of the artists from the exhibition. This event will take place in Cobb Hall, room 307, directly below the gallery.

Reading

Sunday, December 8, 2:00 pm

Sam Lipsyte and Gary Lutz

This double bill features two outstanding talents in contemporary fiction. Sam Lipsyte is most recently the author of *The Subject Steve*, an all too familiar satire of a society littered with cults, failed dotcoms and reality-based sitcoms all hellbent on watching a man die of a mysterious disease called boredom. His previous book is a collection of short stories entitled *Venus Drive*. Lutz is the author of a collection of shorts entitled *Stories In The Worst Way*, recently issued in paperback by 3rd Bed press. His stories have been called “crushingly sad” and as Brian Evenson noted, “His phrases strip away all that we have built to hide ourselves from ourselves, revealing the essential ache that crowds beneath our skin.” This event is FREE and will take place in Cobb Hall, Room 402, down the hall from the gallery.

Concert

Sunday, December 15, 5:00 pm

Town and Country

Founded in 1997, Town and Country have become a much beloved staple of Chicago’s rich and inexhaustible music scene. Over the course of four recordings, its members, Jim Dorling, Ben Vida, Liz Payne and Josh Abrams, have fashioned a smart and wholly accessible weave of minimalist influences, including John Fahey, Tony Conrad, and Morton Feldman, to produce a sound not unlike that of Henry Flynt. Town and Country’s all acoustic instrumentation features bass clarinet, guitar, double bass, harmonium, celeste and chimes. Without a drummer, their sound is best characterized as gentle. You are invited to join us as the gallery becomes an extension of Jim Dorling’s living room where the band perfected their subtle sensibility.

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Michael Ashkin

Untitled (New Jersey Meadowlands Project), 2000-01

silver gelatin prints

3 1/4 x 8 1/4"

[that side]

Dario Robleto

Sometimes Billie Is All That Keeps Me Together, 1998

Buttons crafted from melted and recast Billie Holiday records, and enamel paint

