

MARY BOONE GALLERY

745 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10151 . 212.752.2929

VIEW ELEVEN : UPSTATE

On 5 October 2006 the Mary Boone Gallery will open at its Fifth Avenue location "Upstate", an exhibition curated by Amy Smith-Stewart featuring work by twelve international artists: ERNESTO CAIVANO, JEN DENIKE, BENJAMIN DEGEN, ADAM HELMS, IGNACIO LANG, JEN LIU, CHRISTOPHER MINER, ALEKSANDRA MIR, MICHAEL PHELAN, ELIF URAS, MICHAEL VAHRENWALD AND AARON YOUNG.

The exhibition refers to the geographical region outside New York City, but speaks more specifically to the urban dwellers' perception of life on the outskirts, the sprawling exurbs and vast countryside and all the connotations associated with life "upstate". Some works romanticize the open landscape with its majestic views, fairytale scenery and utopian possibilities while other works explore clichéd ideas about our rural counterpart with its profusion of big box stores, depressed towns, religious extremism, patriotic zealotry, terrorist recluses, hippies and hunters.

The exhibition begins with a sharpie drawing by Aleksandra Mir that reads in bold, black letters upside down: "Welcome to Upstate," a sly reminder that we are entering a world of mixed attitudes.

Aaron Young's video "White Cons", 2004, takes place on a frozen lake somewhere far upstate. Young kicks a video camera across the snow-covered ice. As the video progresses, the snow obscures the view until there is only a picture of eye-burning white, a total blankness. The process is a kind of erasing, knocking us off balance and forcing us to reevaluate our frame of reference.

Michael Vahrenwald creates large-scaled photographic portraits of grassy, otherworldly landscapes, with a tipped perspective. Oddly, they are actually photographs of the landscaping around big box stores like Wal-Mart and Home Depot.

Jen DeNike searches out bucolic locations and local natives to create telling pictures of lost innocence. "Julius, Skipping Stones, Germantown, New York", 2002, one of a photographic series, portrays a quintessential portrait of a young boy skipping a stone across a pond. In another work, titled "Mike and Kevin, Germantown, New York", 2006, DeNike captures an ordinary scene in rural New York: a clapboard white house adorned with an American flag. Two teenage boys sit out front. The setting exudes a heartfelt patriotism, except for the upside down flag.

Reminiscent of 'pour painting' on unprimed canvas as pioneered by Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, Michael Phelan's tie-dye paintings - wall-sized sheets of linen stained with concentric rings of saturated color - concern the "contemporary American landscape" and how the United States' concept of 'manifest destiny' evolved from westward expansion to globalization, and the West's absorption and perversion of history for a popular sensibility.

Adam Helms created the NFA (New Frontier Army), a fictitious paramilitary outfit, informed by radicalized nationalism, backcountry militias, and the colorful outlaws of the Wild West. Here, Helms presents two diptychs, each a portrait, one in graphite, depicting a dead confederate in repose and the other an ink (on Mylar) image of a mask, a pairing that juxtaposes the terrorizing banditry of the Civil War Era against an image that signifies contemporary terrorism.

Jen Liu conceived "The Brethren of the Stone", an imaginary 14th century monastic faction. Liu's mythology links the fanaticism of the Christian Crusaders with today's radical right-wing Christian Fundamentalism, spreading rapidly across rural and exurban America. Simultaneously, it invokes 60's & 70's back-to-the-land movements and its more sinister tendencies. Liu's series of watercolors forecast an apocalyptic clash between two opposing forces of parallel degrees of religious extremism.

Ignacio Lang's sculpture "RECONQUISTA", 2006, refers to a conspiracy theory that alleges that the government of Mexico has been intentionally exporting illegal immigrants to the United States in order to re-annex the American Southwest, which was ceded to the U.S. after the Mexican-American War. An authentic KKK robe hand-embroidered with indigenous textile motifs hangs on a mannequin modified to the height of an average illegal immigrant crossing the border today. In another work, "that which [has been believed] always, everywhere, by all", 2006, a flag from the American Reconstruction period is reproduced in the Middle Eastern tradition of gold embroidery.

Christopher Miner's video, "Between Me and the Earth", 2006, centers on the artist's trip to Niagara Falls with his girlfriend. The 18-minute video unfolds against a backdrop of striking vistas and man-made sites, contrasting natural beauty with tawdry tourist traps. In his accompanying monologue, Miner uses the quixotic goal of going over Niagara Falls in a barrel as a metaphor for a monumental decision concerning his own sexual and religious commitments. Miner's work moves between the intensely personal and the universal, with religion mediating between the two.

Elif Uras' painting, "X-Games", 2006 depicts a scorched landscape where armed men on horses, rugged 4-wheelers and dirt bikes, suspended in a state of action, ride in pursuit of each other as prey and predator blur. In a nod to the extreme and precarious nature of conflict, the two panels of the diptych combine vertically to create an unsteady form. Uras' imagery is influenced by 16th-century Ottoman painting, Western history painting and even prehistoric cave painting, as she compresses contemporary and historic elements into a single sequential narrative.

Benjamin Degen's painting, "Last Taste", 2006, shows a deer dying in the woods; the aftermath of a hunt. The work is loosely based on the slain unicorn, whose hunt and death are portrayed in the famed 16th century Unicorn Tapestries.

The land's mythical potential informs Ernesto Caivano's ongoing series "After the Woods". Caivano's narrative is an epic tale of magical proportions that centers on the separation of a man and woman for 1000 years. The woods are the setting of a series of calamitous events experienced by the man and woman as they traverse the alchemic and at times desolate landscape, populated by supernatural species of flora and fauna. "New Stalks", 2006, is a charcoal drawing inspired by an endangered plant species of paranormal proportions. Its beastly size bestows it with a foreboding presence, alluding to the darker forces of nature.

The exhibition, at 745 Fifth Avenue, will continue through 28 October 2006. Please contact Ron Warren at the Gallery for further assistance, or visit our website www.maryboonegallery.com.