

UNCERTAIN STATES OF AMERICA

American Art in the 3rd Millennium



ARTISTS:

Allora & Calzadilla
Edgar Arceneaux/Rodney McMillian
Devendra Banhart
Frank Benson
Jennifer Bornstein
Mike Bouchet
Matthew Brannon
Anthony Burdin
Paul Chan
Sean Dack
Trisha Donnelly
Jim Drain
Piero Golia
Hannah Greely
Taft Green
Guyton\Walker
Karl Haendel
Christian Holstad
Shane Huffman
Jiae Hwang
Matthew Day Jackson
Matt Johnson
Miranda July
Nate Lowman
Daria Martin
Matt McCormick
Ohad Meromi
Kori Newkirk
Seth Price
Adam Putnam
Cristina Lei Rodriguez
Matthew Ronay
Mika Rottenberg
Aida Rullova
Paul Sietsema
Josh Smith
Mika Tajima
TM Sisters
Jordan Wolfson
Mario Ybarra Jr.
Aaron Young

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UNCERTAIN STATES OF AMERICA

American Art in the 3rd Millennium



ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEET FOR MODERNE KUNST
ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOREWORD

Over the past few years, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art has focused on contemporary American art. The museum has added to its collection important works from the last couple of decades by outstanding American artists. We have also organized several exhibitions including works of some of these artists.

It seemed logical, therefore, to move on and see what the emerging generation of American artists was doing, and present a sample of "American art in the third millennium". As it would clearly be an enormously ambitious project, we wanted the best possible team of curators. And we were lucky enough to procure the services of the internationally experienced curators, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Daniel Birnbaum. Coming from the outside, but intimately knowledgeable of the American art scene, it could only add breadth to the curatorial approach and allow for a different kind of survey of current American art.

We wanted from the beginning to show young, emerging artists who represented a new "vision" in American contemporary art. We visited a number of cities in the USA and compiled nearly 1000 files on young American artists. And we were surprised by the level of diversity, complexity and richness. All over the country, it seems, young artists are engaging with an infinite variety of materials, techniques and concepts.

To do credit to this horn of plenty, an exhibition centered on a particular theme or idiom was obviously out of the question. We decided to go for a multistructured exhibition with enough space for multimedia installations, sculptures (exhibition within the exhibition), videos, performances, lectures (as artworks), not to forget the catalogue, (a work of art in its own right). In other words, an instance of every significant art form pursued by the new generation of American artists.

In this fragmented vision of young US artists (nearly all of them born after 1970) the spectator will find a highly narrative art, conscious of its art historical context, expressing on many different levels a clear social and political commitment, without losing sight of the importance of esthetics and innovation.

This kind of exhibition would be simply unfeasible without good connections in "the art world": gallerists and curators, critics and collectors, alert to art and art's conditions in America right now. Getting close to this young generation is about getting information, visiting studios, listening to everything and looking everywhere. I want to thank Hans Ulrich Obrist and Daniel Birnbaum for their great

work throughout this ambitious project. And on behalf of the curators I would like to thank people from all over America for supplying information and guiding us towards this new phenomenon in contemporary American art. Last but not least, we have to thank the artists themselves, for kindly submitting personal résumés. In one way or another, they will shortly be representing American art at the beginning of the third millennium.

Gunnar B. Kvaran,

Director

UNCERTAIN STATES OF AMERICA

AMERICAN ART IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Q: What are the United States of America?

Maurizio Cattelan: In a way the United States don't exist; they are just a mirage. Which is both exciting and terribly frightening.

Q: Do you like it here?

Maurizio Cattelan: That's like asking yourself: do you like water or oxygen? You might hate them, but—for better or for worse—you cannot live without them.

In early 2005, a postcard with this miniature interview announced a show we knew almost nothing about. With the rather general idea of finding out what preoccupies artists emerging in the US today, without relying too heavily on sources only in the most predictable cities (New York and L.A.), we set out on a long journey that took us to many places where we had never been before. Whilst crisscrossing the US for a year—visiting studios, galleries, alternative art spaces, and museums—we gathered the most diverse, even contradictory, impressions of a multifaceted culture and innumerable artists' dossiers that we brought back to Europe for closer scrutiny. The exhibition *Uncertain States of America*, the tangible result of this endeavor, presents but a small fraction of the challenging and sometimes disturbing works that we came across during this intense period of research. The level of ambition and sincerity of the artists we encountered made our exploration a rewarding undertaking. Clearly we want this exhibition to reflect the variety of expressions and the heterogeneity of the artistic landscape, but in the end the intensity and indisputable quality of the works remain our key criteria.

Is there such a thing as a new vision or a common language, perhaps even a new movement that can be discerned in the works of this generation of artists, all of them in their 20s or 30s? Considering the wide range of techniques and issues dealt with it would seem logical instead to emphasize the plurality of style. And yet the territory we try to chart, obviously more characterized by diversity than unity, displays artistic characteristics (a way of telling weird and open-ended stories, new modes of merging techniques, a specific tone we haven't heard before...) that we hope to see reflected in the polyphonic structure of the exhibition. Actually, the show is not one but many: a series of small, one-person shows of artists working in a variety of techniques, a program of films and videos by a large number of different artists, a display of sculptural works juxtaposed in one "garden," a series of performances happening inside as well as outside of the museum, and a presenta-

tion of text-related works and printed materials in the bookshop area. Our show is a multiplicity masquerading as a unity: inside the exhibition are other exhibitions.

Large-scale shows tend to be very much like continents (rock solid and imposing), says poet Edouard Glissant, who suggests another more productive metaphor: the archipelago (which is welcoming and sheltering). The essential heterogeneity of such a model no doubt better mirrors the multi-centered US art world of today. Long-gone is the time when the tastemakers of NYC ruled supreme. An irreducible plurality of languages comes out of many cities and there is no one dominating aesthetic, style, or mode of production. These are the Uncertain States of America where nothing is fully possible to predict and where surprise is always around the corner.* (In a now legendary intellectual exchange, Diaghilev challenged Cocteau to surprise him. Perhaps his "étonnez moi!" should be seen not only as the prescription of great art but also as a challenge for makers of exhibition to constantly question what we expect from displays of art. Our show will have several chapters, and we anticipate it to grow in ways we still know little about. Like all collective endeavors it is a complex system with feedback loops: an organism or "learning system" that will gain a certain life of its own and might surprise everyone involved.)

What is new? Since the emergence of Pop in the 1960s we have witnessed a veritable orgy of repetition, appropriation, and revival, and the rhythm of these artistic returns has become increasingly rapid. At the same time, the geography of the art world has been expanding apace. Can today's samplings and repetitions, which often involve geographic and cultural displacements, be interpreted as critical reassessments of previous aesthetic models or has contemporary art finally succumbed to the omnivorous machinery driving the inexorable recycling of fashion and style? No doubt the pop sensibility is strongly felt in works coming out of most cities and one sign of this legacy is a recent tradition of the self-confidently flat. A certain entrepreneurial tendency is often a sign not of commercialism per se, but of an artistic practice concerned not only with the production of objects but with the social context, the very theater in which art meets audience. Sometimes artists' interest in the market and in the desires manifested in the world of commodities and advertisement cannot so easily be defined in black-and-white terms of criticality or complicity. No doubt there is a strong will to produce politically relevant art across the nation – we at least came across many examples of socially engaged projects that reference moments of protest, political critique, and subversion from previous decades. There is political rage in the Uncertain States of America, even a sense of rebellion.

Many of these artists catapult a European viewer back to ideas that appear familiar. Thus the notion of a foreign perspective, a view from the outside, evaporates once one gets deeper into the artistic material. There obviously is no such thing: in so many ways we are already implicated. References to art from other parts of the world, historical and recent, abound. To get a grasp on the recurring interest in formal structures which surfaces in rather surprising contexts today we are forced back into the labyrinthine genealogies of formalism. And in the highly

developed technological environment of today, the sense of the surreal gains new power. Often innocent forms and figures seem to slide into each other, creating strings of "sense" that lead nowhere and atmospheres that invite us to move in and out of dreams. At the very center of many of these works is an experience of enigma. Something, it seems, always remains unsaid.

The Uncertain States of America are not entirely American – influences come from everywhere. In a period where the official political culture of the US is viewed with great skepticism on the other side of the Atlantic, it seems important to remind ourselves of this complexity. The Uncertain States of America are not only uncertain, they are many.

Daniel Birnbaum Gunnar B. Kvaran Hans Ulrich Obrist

* We want to acknowledge the inspiration of Stefano Boeri and Multiplicity, who in 2000 organized USE – *Uncertain States of Europe*, an exhibition on the transformations of urban environments in Europe and on the notion of uncertainty.



JENNIFER ALLORA & GUILLERMO CALZADILLA

Jennifer Allora; born 1974 in Philadelphia, PA
 Guillermo Calzadilla; born 1971 in Havana, Cuba
 Live and work in San Juan, Puerto Rico

Over the past five years, Allora and Calzadilla have realized a series of site-specific projects informed by the working concept Land Mark, which unsettles the formal and ecological premises of earlier Land Art by posing the following questions: in whose interest is land marked, and to what ends? Which marks are deemed worthy of preservation, and which are subject to obliteration?

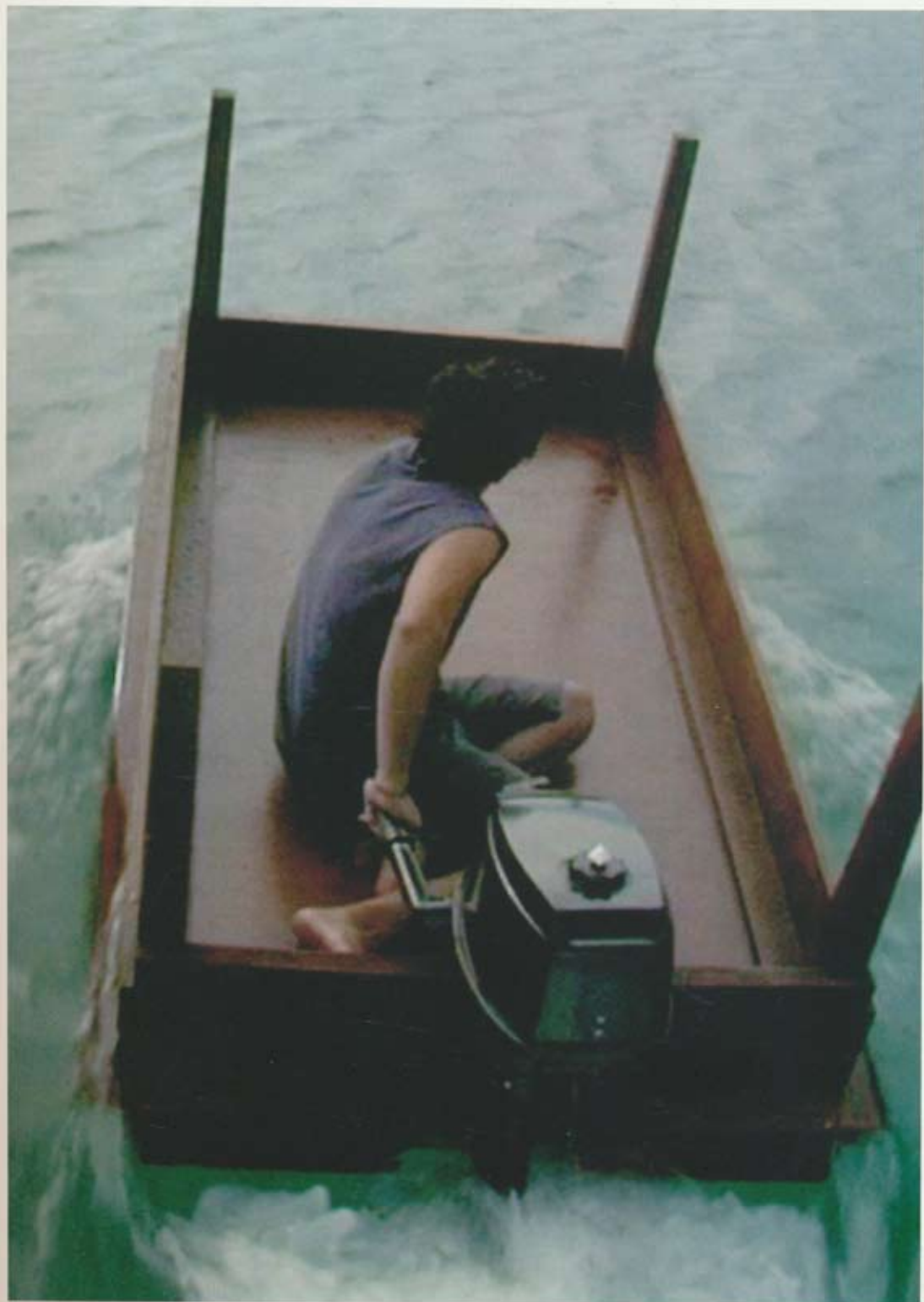
These questions were formulated in response to what the artists call the “transitional geography” of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. In 2003, a long-term campaign of civil disobedience succeeded in forcing the U.S. Navy to quit the western half of the island, which for 60 years was used as a munitions testing ground. This was only a partial victory for activists—the bomb-scarred land was transferred from the military to the Department of the Interior and reclassified as a wildlife refuge, purportedly to restore the costal ecosystem and protect it from “disruptive” human activity. While claiming to heal the land in the aftermath of its violent usage, official environmentalism has inscribed a violence of its own, silencing the demands of island residents that the land to be fully decontaminated and turned over to municipal management, which would enable the process of reconstruction to be debated democratically rather than dictated from above.

This conflict is the point of departure for *Under Discussion*, which combines surrealist collage with constructivist equipment-design in an unlikely act of re-engineering: an overturned conference table has been retrofitted with an engine and rudder grafted from a local fishing boat, transforming it into a hybrid vehicle at once practical and symbolic. In liberal thought, “sitting down at the table” suggests an ideal space of conflict-resolution through rational dialogue, in which different parties assent to a common set of ground-rules from which they proceed to negotiate. Yet this ideal fails to account for the inequalities that underwrite the space of the table to begin with, such as the hierarchical division between scientific expertise and local ecological knowledges, which rarely register at all in planning processes.

Under Discussion is an experimental device for publicizing such counter-knowledge, not only as information but as a testimonial rights-claim for *environmental justice* that interrupts the space of politics itself. In the video, a local activist uses the displaced, motorized table to lead viewers on a kind of situationist eco-tour around the restricted area of the island, reactivating the antagonisms that haunt the picturesque coastline and bearing witness to the legacy of the Vieques fishermen’s movement, which initiated maritime civil disobedience against the Navy in the 1970’s.

Yates McKee

Under Discussion, 2005



EDGAR ARCENEAUX & RODNEY McMILLIAN

Edgar Arceneaux; born 1972 in Los Angeles, CA
 Rodney McMillian; born 1969 in Columbia, SC
 Live and work in Los Angeles, CA

THE MICHAEL JACKSON PROJECT

The famous ballad "Memories", sung by Gladys Knight, is mimed in a performance by Rodney McMillian. The monitor is set peripherally to one with a video of the 19th century French pianist Alfred Cortot. Cortot is playing the piano and reciting text; "these two phrases are not connected, [yet] they are two different elements of the same musical state. Here like a question, and here again, another, tenderly asking the way... (The Poet Speaks from Children Scenes)." Knight is singing, "Can it be that it was all so simple then or has time erased every line? If we had the chance to do it all again

Would we, could we...?

The Michael Jackson project was collaboration by two friends who were intrigued by Jackson, not only as a musician and performer but also as a cultural entity. We collaborated via discussing the subject based on readings that we each had done on our own.

One of the fascinating aspects about Michael Jackson is his un-containability. The totalizing analysis, searching for root causes of how Jackson became what he is, will never find the seed of that tree. One of the fascinating components of working collaboratively is that it is also uncontainable. Distinguishing between where each author's contribution begins and ends in the MJ project is a difficult task. It was fueled by an intense discourse and it is from this, that the boundaries of our thoughts and subject-hoods lost their boundaries.

We made the artworks fairly independent of each other. We saw this as an opportunity to go beyond what we had done in our individual practices. We discussed what we planned on making but it was done in a tentative manner. One of us would make something, show it and the other would do the same. We riffed off one another—we did this through talking about the actual forms and how the content would or would not relate to one another's work. We were fairly open to the possibility of none of this making sense. Those were sensitive and vulnerable times.

"If pointing is a form of memory, then how did we get to know Boo Radley.?"

RM

Boo Radley is the allusive and terrifying neighbor in the book, "To Kill a Mockingbird." We saw both Radley and Jackson as screens that people projected onto, feared, attacked or dismissed. They exist as easy targets that one doesn't really have to face; they can become depositories for societal ills.

With those thoughts and questions in mind, we didn't attempt to represent the image of Jackson or his music. We were more intrigued by the ideas floating

around him, his family, career and mythology. We found those non-fixed areas to be dense in meaning and rich in interpretation and movement.

Some of the work in the MJ project came about through the direct experience of going to Gary, Indiana looking for the home that the Jackson's grew up in. We actually found the wrong house on that day, but found what we were looking for. It was also the same day that the serial killer Maust was captured; wanted for killing numerous young boys. When we came upon the house of Jackson we were surprised by its disrepair. The windows were boarded up, it was graffitied and the roof had been collapsed in by a fire. It related well to ideas we had about the American Dream.

After several hours of documenting the house and its neighborhood, a gentleman informed us that we were standing in front of the wrong house. In actuality, it was a very small, white, non-descript house, which was exactly one block away. However, it was the *ruin* that met our expectations. Those expectations were more real than the real thing. The act of pointing is what constitutes recognition—that is how we came to know Boo Radley, Alfred Cortot, Gladys Knight, Maust the serial killer, Disney, Michael Jackson and Gary, Indiana.

Our primary goal was to create a discussion around the type of dynamic that he inspires. This approach was in synch with our process of trying to make sense out of someone who actively confounds such endeavors. Thus the work is a series of references and relationships. No text, image, sound or construction leads to a conclusion about Jackson. It simply points to ideas and fascinations around him.

* From the book "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee, 1961. Scout Finch Lives with her brother, *Jem*, and their widowed father, *Atticus*, in Maycomb, Alabama. The backdrop is the Great Depression. *Jem* and *Scout* become fascinated with the spooky house on their street called the Radley Place. The house is owned by Mr. *Nathan Radley*, whose brother, Arthur (nicknamed *Boo*), has lived there for years only venturing outside secretly at night.

(Overview excerpts from sparknotes.com.)

The Michael Jackson Project, 2004



EDGAR ARCENEUX

Born 1972 in Los Angeles, CA
Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

Negative Capability: The Michael Jackson Project, 2004



DEVENDRA BANHART

Born 1981 in Houston, TX
Lives and works in New York, NY

the creative spirit hovers above us eternally.
sometimes a thread from its energy ridden robe falls inside me and I draw it, and it
looks like energy.



FRANK BENSON

Born 1978 in Norfolk, VA
Lives and works in New York, NY

“...splits the difference
between formal and found
with an unpretentious,
sculpturally satisfying
combination of weight,
shape and color.”

Roberta Smith

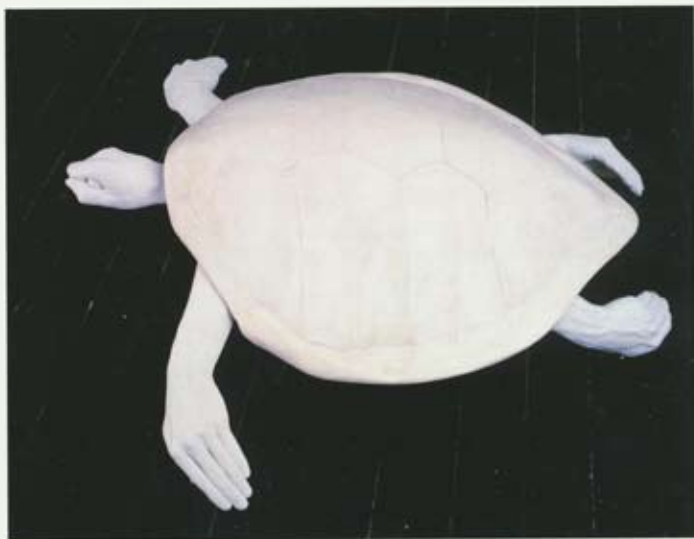
Flag, 2005



A Portrait of the Artist's Mother, 2004



1. Legend, 2004 2. Swan Gourd, 2005 3. Birds in Coke, 2005



JENNIFER BORNSTEIN

Born 1970 in Seattle, WA
Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

Untitled (copperplate etching), 2005



MIKE BOUCHET

Born 1970 in Castro Valley, CA

Lives and works in Frankfurt, Germany and New York, NY

I am generally interested in the same things most people are interested in: jeans, movies, tv-shows, architecture, food and sex. I play with components of these topics by way of juxtaposition, combination and experimentation. I try to investigate and understand any deeper ulterior motives and vocabulary behind my topical interests.

Culling material from the surface of the everyday, I undertake projects that tend to result in formal objects like sculpture, video, drawings, photographs, documents or in actions. The ability of an artist to make work in traditional production/distribution/consumption circles is interesting, and I often conceive of work in this arena.

Simultaneously, I investigate social content and consider the formal and aesthetic implications in my artwork. Sometimes the composition of these objects overrides their conceptual value. Sometimes the space between the artwork and the viewer—the passage by which the object is consumed—becomes an autonomous element unto itself.

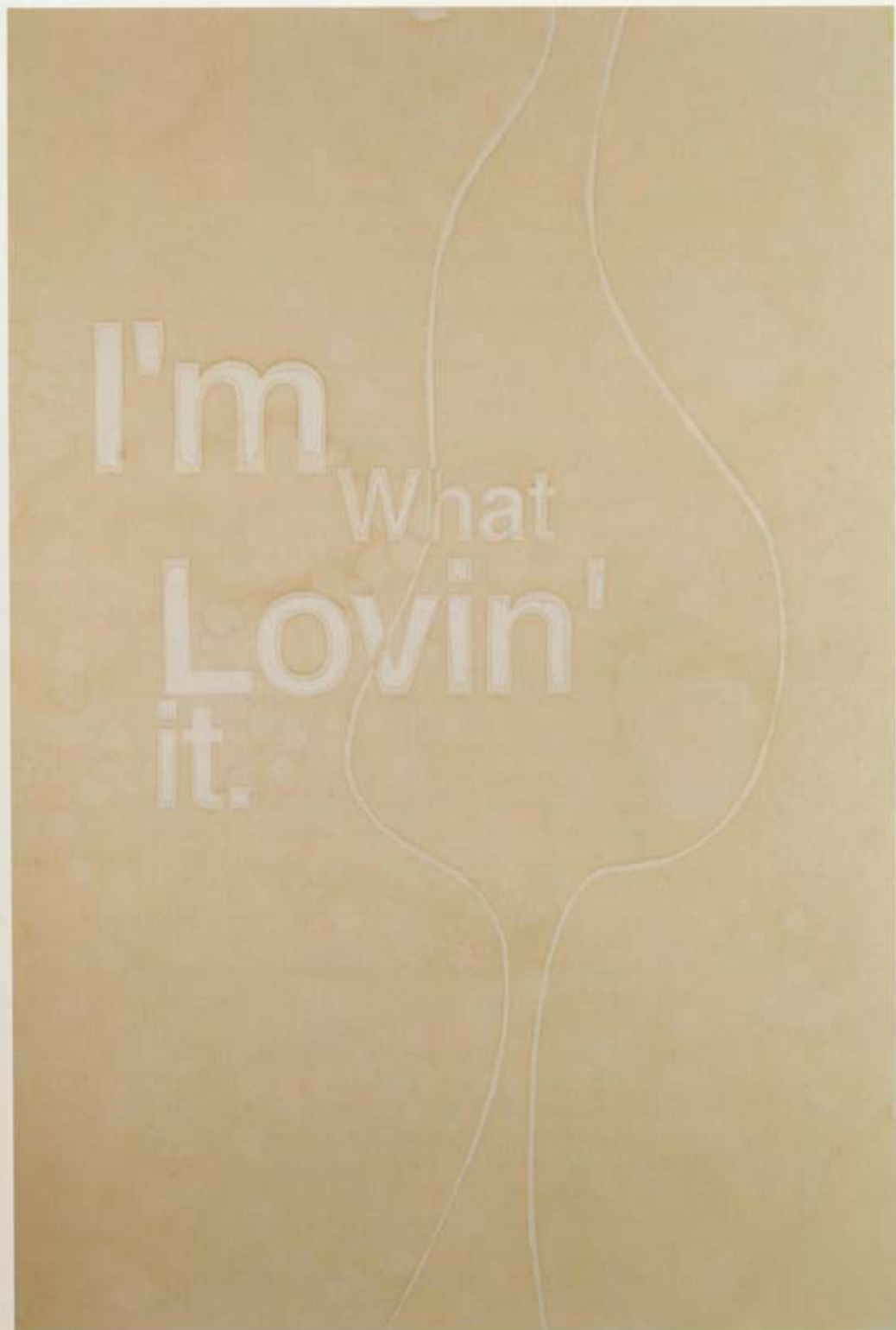
Top Cruise, 2005



1. Celebrity Jacuzzi (Steffi Graf), 2001 2. Thai Sucky Fucky, 2005 3. Cola Explosion 1, 2005



I'm What Lovin' it, 2005



MATTHEW BRANNON

Born 1971 in St. Maries, ID
Lives and works in New York, NY

Having broken into the entertainment business with ●●●, ●●● made his feature-film debut as a nerdy smart kid in ●●● (1985). But it was the box-office success ●●● based on a ●●● novella, that brought young ●●● to national prominence. ●●● (1986), starring ●●● as a man anxious to take his family back to a primitive and elemental life, was set in a ●●● jungle. Its plot premise bore remarkable parallels to ●●●'s unusual upbringing having been born in a log cabin in ●●●. ●●● accepted his escalating success reluctantly, glad that at least it provided a way for him to help his family by being their breadwinner.

Unlike many rising actors, ●●● was very shy and hated publicity. He disliked being involved in media hype. He once said, "I've kept my ego and my happiness completely separate from my work. In fact, if I see my face on the cover of a magazine I go into remission. I shut myself out and freak."

After roles in many successful pictures like ●●●, ●●● and ●●● people began to notice major personality changes in ●●●, who was once so appreciated for his innocence and wholesomeness. He had been a strict vegetarian who wore no leather, and who cared so much about the diminished rain forest that he bought many acres of it in ●●● to save it from development. He was the celebrity who said, "I don't see any point or any good in drugs that are as disruptive as cocaine. I never tried heroin. I tried alcohol and most of the others when I was 15, and got it out of the way—finished with the stuff." Now all that had radically changed, and people began to wonder why.

Some thought ●●●'s complete turnaround was nothing more than cynicism, the price he paid for competing in the rough film making world. Others felt it was his ongoing rebellion against his bizarre childhood, or that he was hell-bent to test all his limits. Still others judged him a lost soul who had caved in to his demons and would not deal with recovery.

At any rate, in the early 1990s ●●● abandoned acting and returned to ●●● to live in ●●● with his family (and later on his own). For a time he called himself ●●●. He formed a band called ●●● with his sister ●●●, in which he sang, played guitar, and wrote songs. He remained a firm environmentalist and a dedicated animal rights activist. In mid 1993, ●●● was in ●●●, working on a film called, ●●●, for ●●●. He was also signed to star in ●●●, with ●●●. While in ●●●, he usually stayed at the ●●●, on ●●●.

On the evening of October 30th 1993, he went to ●●●, a club owned by ●●●, at ●●●. ●●● was wearing striped brown pants and black and white ●●● high tops and socks. A few minutes before 1:00 am, ●●● had been in the bathroom doing drugs with some drug dealer friends when someone offered him a snort of high-grade Persian Brown. Immediately upon snorting the drug he began trembling and shaking. He then screamed at his friend and vomited. Someone tried to help by giving him a Valium.

He then staggered back out into the bar and over to actress ●●● and his sister ●●●. He complained that he could not breathe and then briefly passed out. When he

awakened, he asked *** to take him outside of the bar. *** first called ***'s friend and assistant ***, then *** and ***'s brother *** took him outside. *** then proceeded to collapse on the sidewalk. He then started having seizures before a photographer, ***, went to call 911 at the nearby payphone, as did ***. "He looked like a fish out of water," said ***, who happened to be standing outside the club. He was "thrashing spasmodically, his head flopping from side to side, arms flailing wildly." By now *** had come out and thrown herself on *** to attempt to stop the seizures. *** then became still, at which point *** said he was not breathing. It was 1:14 a.m. He was in full cardiac arrest when paramedics arrived and Paramedic *** of the *** County Fire Department began to administer CPR. They rushed him to *** Medical Center where they arrived at 1:34. When they got there, his skin was dark blue, but his body was still warm. The ER physicians did everything to revive him, including inserting a pacemaker. He was pronounced dead at 1:51 am on October 31, 1993.

***'s autopsy showed lethal levels of cocaine and morphine (heroin shows up as morphine, as the body metabolizes it), Valium, marijuana and ephedrine. Ephedrine is the main ingredient found in crystal meth. Official cause of death was acute multiple drug ingestion. *** was 23 years old.

*** was placed in a blue coffin (click to view the coffin – warning extremely graphic!!!!!!), and on November 4, sixty mourners showed up at *** Funeral Home for the viewing. His usual blonde hair was dyed black for the film he was working on. The mortician cut **'s shoulder length hair, and placed the cut hair beside him in the coffin, at his mother's request.

He was dressed in a black t-shirt with the logo of his band, *** on it. His mother put a single carnation in the coffin. As mourners passed his coffin, many placed things like notes and necklaces in the casket.

Polluted Minds & Open Wounds, 2005



POLLUTED MINDS & OPEN WOUNDS

- BLOOD MATTED FUR • JAPANESE DÉCOR & DUTCH FLOWER PAINTING • PUBLIC BATHROOM SCENE •
- KILLER WHALE DOCUMENTARY • BIRDS OF PREY VIDEO • SEPARATE BEDS • PHOTO ALBUMS IN GARAGE •
- TEENAGE MILLIONAIRE • LIGHT FROM THE TELEVISION UNDER THE DOOR • A MANNERED INSECURITY •
- CHURNING UP THE DREAD • MISTAKEN DEPTH VIA ASSOCIATION • HITTING 30 HARD • STEPPED ON DRUGS •
- SICK FUCK • KILL FEE • WELL FED FUCK • FANS OF FILTH • FANS OF FAKES • LICKING YOUR WOUNDS •
- DYSTOPIAN ANHEDONIC BEHAVIOR • EXTENDED SENTENCE & STABBED PRIDE • PRESIDENT GAS •

POLICE OFFICER GIVING UP

Produced by: UNWASHED HANDS • CHIPPED GLASSES • SMOKING & SWEATING

WAKE UP THIS IS IMPORTANT

Public Breakup & Career Backlash, 2005



& PUBLIC BREAKUP & CAREER BACKLASH

- EXCLUSION RESULTS IN SERIOUS BLOW TO CONFIDENCE •
- REPEAT OFFENDER • STAGGERING TO THE FINISH • WAKING IN A PARKING LOT • SHOULD'VE BEEN YOU •
- MISREAD TONE • CHANGED PASSWORD • WRISTS PINNED BEHIND BACK • DISCONNECTED PHONE •
- GIN & TONIC PREGNANCY • SUN SETS ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP • CONDESCENDING LOVER • WHORISH STRATEGY •
- LEAVES WITH SOMEONE ELSE • THREW THAT RING IN YOUR FACE • UNPINNABLE SHAME • NOT A LOVE SONG •
- INCLUSION RESULTS IN SHORT LIVED INFLATED SELF WORTH •

GETTING USED TO BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

Produced by: SOFA SIZE PAINTING • PAINTING SIZE PHOTOGRAPH • BACKYARD SCULPTURE

DATE OF THIS IS IMPROBABLE



ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEET FOR MODERNE KUNST
ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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