

Site Inscription

June 7 – July 21, 2007

Curated by: Terri C. Smith with Lauren Benanti and Daniel Byers, graduate students at Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies, in partnership with the Bard College Photography Department, Director Stephen Shore.

Projection and Play in *Site Inscription*

Terri C. Smith

An after dinner stroll in virtually any U.S. neighborhood includes streets lined with lit windows. The incandescent interiors they reveal seem to be trapped in eternal stillness as if surrounded by amber. Often, the only sign of life is implied via a spastically flickering blue strobe that barks from the television set. When the TV's luminescent clatter reaches the peripheral vision of passer byes, it is no longer images and sound conveying a sitcom, drama or commercial. Instead, it is a pulsing light that expresses little more than the medium through which it enters the world. As the television's image is cast outside, its specific messages are obliterated. Disguised as light, the signal escapes into the night, writing itself onto the larger environment and those who inhabit it.

In a similar vein, literary theorist M. H. Abrams described one of two models of the mind using the metaphor of the projector. While the first model is the mind as "reflector of external objects," the second is a "radiant projector which makes a contribution to the object it perceives." Lining the walls of *Site Inscription*, photographs by David Bush, Tim Davis, Ahndraya Parlato, Paul Salveson, and drawings by Stephen Sollins resonate with these concerns. Their approaches and themes vary, but each artist puts less emphasis on recording (or reflecting) and more on the play that occurs between artist and subject – a relationship to the environment reminiscent of the television's escaping light or Abrams's mind-as-projector model.

Through evident interaction and interference, the artists in this exhibition consciously engage in what photography scholar Peter D. Osborne describes as "an inscribing of self on the world." In *Site Inscription*, this includes gestures ranging from subtle aesthetic and social critique to more apparent physical interventions and staging. Interested in such phenomena as the "reinvention of ... meaning," "creating a photographic world that, like the uncanny, is unnerving because of its familiarity," and "resisting authority" by "renaming everything," these artists are aware of and exploit the simultaneous exchange that occurs when applying ideas of mark making and erasure to objects and the environment.

While this approach is the most transparent in Stephen Sollins's drawings where he uses correction fluid to obscure printed television schedules in newspapers, it also exists in the exhibition's photographs. These artists to some degree concur with Osborne's opinion that "Photography, too, marks our presence in a place, or rather, has the place mark its presence in our images." Tim Davis provides a more personalized and expanded account of this philosophy:

Architecture, for example, is a form for controlling human behavior. It's ideological. Try noticing in every room you enter how some cognitive force has anticipated every move you make. Then notice how your presence in that room alters the grand design in infinite ways no architect could anticipate. You scratch surfaces. You add images. You misuse. That is how I feel about photography. It is the mapping of the way humans rename every syntax the designers can toss at us.

Every Christmas, televisions emit a similar sentiment into our homes with Frank Capra's movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. That film serves, in part, as an annual reminder that our presence alters the world and that these exchanges can be ephemeral, unconscious, and difficult to locate. For the artists in *Site Inscription*, this unavoidable cause-and-effect is intentionally foregrounded and recorded, producing traces that question, reframe and even humorously rearrange familiar objects and everyday environments.

Sources:

M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), preface

Tim Davis, "On Photography," <http://www.Davistim.com/writing/photography.html>

Peter D. Osborne, *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.187

Ahndraya Parlato artist statement, <http://www.ahndrayaparlato.com/statement.html>

Paul Salveson artist statement, 2007.

The Photography Department at Bard College is directed by Stephen Shore who is joined by a faculty of accomplished, practicing artists such as Barbara Ess, John Pilson, Larry Fink, An-My Le and Tim Davis. For more information on the program and faculty, go to <http://inside.bard.edu/photo/>.

The Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College (CCS Bard) is an exhibition and research center dedicated to the study of art and exhibition practices from the 1960s to the present day. The Center's graduate curriculum is specifically designed to deepen students' understanding of the intellectual and practical tasks of curating exhibitions of contemporary art, particularly in the complex social and cultural situations of present-day urban arts institutions. In November, 2006, CCS Bard inaugurated the Hessel Museum of Art, a new 17,000 square-foot building for exhibitions curated from the Marielouise Hessel Collection of more than 1,700 contemporary works. For further information, call the Center for Curatorial Studies ph: 845.758.7598, email: ccs@bard.edu, website:www.bard.edu/ccs

Paul Rodgers/**9W** Gallery
529 West 20th Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10011
ph: 212.414.9810
fax: 347.438.3309
email:paul@paulroddgers9w.com
website:www.paulroddgers9w.com