



BlackBeard 1718, 2000-2006, 40 x 40 inches, c-print from series of 7 images



Beuys N the Hood, 2012, 180 x 80 x 67 inches, felt, steel, cast copper, mirror, copper-plated 100-spoke 13" steel rims, white wall tires



Michael Jackson Pollock, 2007, 33.5 x 27 inches, c-prints from series of 5 images



Diamond Dave, 2000, 30 x 40 inches, c-print



Can't Stop Reiman, 1999, 20 x 20 inches, c-print from series of two images

JOSHUA REIMAN
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BUFFALO / NY

GOING
STOP
REIMAN

Curators Discuss Reiman

JOHN MASSIER: So Cori, I'm thinking back to the summer of 2009 when you and I and Holly Hughes from the Albright-Knox visited Josh in Ithaca and we left that studio visit practically high-fiving ourselves with enthusiasm. What do you think it was about Josh's work that melted our cold curatorial hearts? Why was it love at first sight?

CORI WOLFF: It was definitely one of the more intimate studio visits. I recall the four of us crowding around his projection screen; I strategically chose a spot on a blue couch under a couple of *Diamond Dave* portraits. I don't think I even knew who David Lee Roth was at the time but, simultaneously repulsive and sultry, they spoke to me. The first slide in Josh's presentation was a photograph of himself as a child Rubik's Cube prodigy, followed by images of *Michael Jackson Pollock* and *G. Washington*. I remember thinking to myself, "Is this guy for real?" Initially considering them as humorous one-liners, moving from these series to *The People*, I was struck by the underlying sincerity of his entire body of work. It had a comedic wit that screamed "ROCK STAR!" paired with an unnerving social commentary that made for a contemplative car ride home (post-high-fives). Josh's own electric enthusiasm and modesty were undeniably endearing; his offering of warm homemade pie didn't hurt, either...

Why *did* we turn down that pie?!

Which single work was most appealing to you at the time of our visit and why? Do you have a new "turning down pie"?

JM: The inexplicable fact of the two of us turning down pie will never be satisfactorily explained, particularly since it was artist-baked pie.

It's interesting to quantify or categorize a bit here. Our studio visit with Josh was one of 130 studio visits for the *Beyond/In Western New York* project, but we can go back even further to a dozen local curators, us included, reviewing over 700 submissions from artists across the region and that crazy *Michael Jackson Pollock* image came up on the screen and everyone kind of jumped to attention. Which is not to say that curators are naturally inclined toward one-liners, but one-liners are difficult to pull off in such a way that the viewer doesn't just simultaneously get it and groan at recognizing the gag. The conflation of high art and popular music is an effective hybrid, especially once you start thinking about how Michael Jackson was really defined (iconically) as much by how he moved as how he sounded. Pollock's movement, his sense of rhythm and timing, were essential, rather than secondary, parts of his process. It also brings up the funny question of to what degree Josh The Artist wants to be Josh The Rock Star. Or whether his desire is to be both at the same time. We might have actually used the term "rock star" when we left our studio visit.

I digress from your other question. I don't think I have a favorite. With Josh, it seems to be a case of perpetual intrigue, the newer proposed works for our show being as intriguing as those already completed. What will that full-sized Chevy Impala made out of felt look like once it's completed and in the gallery? And, as of this writing, we've still only seen about two seconds of the *David Lee Rothko, American Mudra* video and it's already hilariously captivating. I showed that two seconds to a local artist yesterday and he let loose with a gleeful "Whaaaaat?" I think what perpetuates intrigue in Josh's work, for me, is that combination of personal, artistic identity with the identities of iconic artistic and historical figures, as well as acute elements of popular culture. I'm interested in the hybridization of all these elements.

Additionally, I'm interested in his treatment of heroic archetypes, which to my next question for you—given that almost all of the figures depicted in Josh's work are male, is he exalting them, admiring them, aspiring to be them, or dismantling their masculine tropes?

CW: From our recent conversations, we've learned he's attending a Van Halen concert and following the Buffalo Sabres, which would indicate an exaltation, or at least admiration, of the acts of these "heroic" figures. Whether or not he's aspiring to be them...

that's a potentially embarrassing question that might be better suited for Josh.

With regard to your last question, his work is strikingly appropriate in the context of Hallwalls—dare I call him the male Cindy Sherman? At least in terms of investigating gender roles in society, media, and the arts, there are undeniable similarities. However, it's interesting that, while Sherman deliberately titled her series "Untitled", Josh's works are amplified by the word play of their titles; her characters are intentionally anonymous and ambiguous, whereas his rely on the viewer's recognition of specific personalities for their meaning. While both artists engage in myriad roles as creator, director, stylist, and model in an effort to blur the distinction between the real and imagined, a key difference is Sherman's subtle depiction of the objectification of women—in which she uses a sort of reverse psychology with the intention of exposing female stereotypes and the viewer's own internal perpetuation of them—versus Josh's blatantly fantastical amalgamation of actual people, whereby essential aspects of each individual character are preserved, thus identifying and presenting humanistic archetypes throughout history. Rather than dismantling masculine tropes, I see the objective of his role play as one of self-discovery and the reflection of our universal gender/race/ethnicity-defying potential for greatness, as well as failure.

Beyond Josh's overwhelming influence and fusion of disparate cultures, perhaps you could touch on his inclusion of literary elements such as mythology, symbolism, and metaphor. Each work is like a visual puzzle with its own fascinating background; how important do you think these (often very personal) allusions are to understanding Josh's work?

JM: You're touching on two distinct elements here, the personal and the... let's call it the epic, something enfolding mythology, symbolism, and metaphor. On the one hand, the works are undeniably personal as we see the artist himself in many of the images, but the personal is almost completely submerged in the epic.

CW: I'm not sure I agree that the personal is completely submerged in the epic (maybe for the viewer; but for Josh, I would imagine the entire process of configuring himself into these characters is very self-revelatory).

JM: I think that's absolutely true, which is not the same as being essential to the works. I think they also function effectively because they're not entirely contingent upon any in-depth knowledge of the allusions being used. You don't have to really know anything about Blackbeard, historically, to absorb the dreamy sentiment behind the desire to be a pirate—to be rebellious, unfettered, free of care, even raping and pillaging (figuratively, that is). That image of Blackbeard Josh, floating backward in a calm sea toward his boat while the sun wanes, that's an extremely evocative image that is immediately accessible to anyone.

CW: I agree, but then I wonder why he would even bother to title the works. One of the things I've noticed about my own interactions with them is a desire to delve deeper into the histories behind each of these personalities. For instance, I've learned more about car culture in the past week than I've ever cared to know. And I was charmed by the artist's accounts that he "loves sports and art equally" and sees David Lee Roth as a spiritual leader, and that his mother drove the same car depicted in *Beuys N the Hood*. These bits of information are superfluous to some extent but, ultimately, they helped me appreciate the work more.

JM: You are answering your own question there—superfluous, to an extent, but also providing a more fulsome account of the meaning in the work. We can know very little of history or basketball and yet immediately come to terms with the notion that George Washington's revolutionary army was some kind of hardcore posse of early American badasses. The work suggests a shared sense of emphatic strut (connoting confidence, skill, bravery, and the justness of one's cause) between the basketball team and Washington's crew. Now, there's a wonkiness there too because he's not suggesting these two groups are equally meritorious—the men who helped carve a nation and the men who carve up the court—but there's a comingling of attitude.

Then again, certain references Josh is using may be contingent upon your age and set of available pop culture memories. For someone my age, Josh's film *The People* immediately references a famous 1970s television PSA with a Native American crying on the side of a littered and polluted highway. I'm not even sure Josh is alluding to that, but it's an unmistakable point of reference for me because both underscore a degraded relationship to the land, to cultural history, and to indigenous peoples.

And that connection draws me to the notion of ritual and the image of the shaman, a key element to that film. In a newer work, *David Lee Rothko*, Josh has super-imposed the Van Halen singer into the Rothko Chapel at the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, leaping in that preposterous way that only DLR could. Yet, it's not merely another pun-worthy piece with a clever title. I think there's a suggestion here of the ritual potency—and even the sacred spaces—of rock performance and art gallery exhibition. I think he's equally earnest about the deep value of both arenas as spaces where ritual dreams are fulfilled.

CW: I think so too, and this is especially apparent in *A Collection of Modern Objects*. He somehow manages to deride the absurdity of these figures and objects while glorifying them. His reduction



The People, 2009, (film stills) super 8 film 11:38 minutes

of sports trophies and modernist sculptures to their most basic forms is a curious display of institutional critique; by removing the objects' contexts, he challenges the viewer to recognize the subjective nature of achievement in sports and art, while at the same time empathizing with our collective desire to attain it.

JM: That brings me to another interesting question. We've used the word "iconic" a couple of times here and I'd like to replace a letter and ask whether you think Josh's works are "ironic." It's in my mind recently because I was lately accused by an artist of never considering them for exhibition at Hallwalls because their work wasn't ironic. It's not an accusation that concerns me because I think it's entirely wrong-headed and misreads a lot of the contemporary work that we show, but let's take Josh's exhibition as an example.

I think that my accuser would perhaps use these works as an example of my ironic programming, though I don't think of them

that way at all, nor do I think the artist does. They're absolutely witty and humorous. But rather than ironic, I see them as entirely direct and emotionally honest. You just pointed out Josh's mutual adoration of art and sports and I absolutely agree, but do you see what I'm getting at? I think sometimes people mistakenly look at work like this, recognize its cleverness, and then proceed to misapply a word like "ironic" as though it were a scarlet letter of shame. Yet, I don't think of the word "ironic" at all when I consider these works. What do you think?

CW: I wholeheartedly concur. The film he showed at the Albright-Knox for *Beyond/In* was about an explorer (played by Josh) searching for the sublime, and I think that work accurately reflects his broader artistic practice. There is this overarching theme of self-discovery, as well as an urge to connect with other human beings, largely based on a hyper awareness of his own aspirations and shortcomings, which make it impossible to classify as irony. He's a real person who's experiencing genuine emotions not unlike those of you or me, and presenting them in this highly poetic yet approachable way. The only reason I can conceive that his work might be labeled "ironic" is that, all too often, artists approach similar themes with such an academic dullness, and because Josh's works are quite the opposite—formally sensuous and thoroughly entertaining—they might be reduced to that sort of surface interpretation.

JM: I guess we can talk about Josh forever because our enthusiasm knows no bounds. Let me see if I can conclude our chat by deriving a haiku from your last remarks:

The sublime human
Josh his artistic hyper
Surface poetic

Joshua Reiman is a trans-disciplinary artist working simultaneously in sculpture, film, video, and photography. His work has been shown in galleries and museums across the United States, and has been included in group shows in Germany and Estonia. He has been an artist in residence at SIM Reykjavik, Iceland; The Ucross Foundation; The Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts; Skulpturen Park Berlin; and the 7 Below Arts Initiative, to name a few. His work has been reviewed in *The New York Times*, *Art New England*, *The Kansas City Star*, *The Buffalo News*, *7 Days Vermont*, and various other newspapers and blogs. He received an MFA from Syracuse University and a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute. Josh is a part-time visiting faculty member at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and lives in Jamaica Plain, MA with his wife Addy and their two dogs Diamond Dave and Goat. Josh's work can be seen on his website at, www.joshuareiman.com

Josh would like to thank: My family for all their love and support—Mom, Dad, Nan, and Matt and Leslie. A giant thank you to John and Cori for everything, you are wonderful curators and it has been to much fun to work on this with you! I would like to thank my wife Addy for her constant love, fun collaborations, welcomed criticism and for always being supportive. Love ya.

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The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts



G.Washington, 2001, 30 x 30 inches, c-prints from series of 14 images – clockwise from the top: I Can Not Tell a Lie, Outside the Battle of Trenton, Flagrant Foul



Jackass, 1998, 40 x 60 inches, c-print from series of 7 images



David Lee Rothko, American Mudra, 2012 (video still) SD video loop, 26 seconds