

EVENTS

OPENING RECEPTION & PARTY!

Saturday 14 April, 8PM-late / cash bar

ARTIST'S TALK WITH DEBORAH STRATMAN

Sunday 15 April, 2 PM / free / cash bar

IN STUDIO WITH IAN CARR-HARRIS AND YVONNE LAMMERICH

Thursday 26 April, 7 PM / free to sustaining members

IN-GALLERY SOUND PERFORMANCE

Saturday 12 May, doors open at 8 PM / free admission / cash bar

READING BY JACOB WREN

Thursday 31 May, 7 PM / free admission / cash bar

BIOS

Deborah Stratman is a Chicago-based artist and filmmaker interested in landscapes and systems. Her films, rather than telling stories, pose a series of problems, and through their at times, ambiguous nature, allow for a complicated reading of the questions being asked. Many of her films point to the relationships between physical environments and the very human struggles for power, ownership, mastery and control that are played out on the land. Most recently, they have questioned elemental historical narratives about freedom, expansion, security, and the regulation of space. Stratman works in multiple mediums, including photography, sound, drawing and sculpture. She has exhibited internationally at venues including the Whitney Biennial, MoMA, the Pompidou, Hammer Museum and many international film festivals including Sundance, the Vienne, Ann Arbor and Rotterdam. She is the recipient of Fulbright and Guggenheim fellowships and she currently teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Adrian Blackwell is an artist and urban designer whose work focuses on the interaction between physical spaces and social forces. He teaches architecture and urban design at the University of Toronto and is a co-founder and editor of the journal *Scapegoat: Architecture/Landscape/Political Economy*.

ARTIST'S TALK WITH DEBORAH STRATMAN

Sunday 15 January, 2 PM / free / cash bar



Deborah Stratman will be in from Chicago to discuss both her current installation at Mercer Union and aspects of her interdisciplinary practice.

IN STUDIO WITH IAN CARR-HARRIS AND YVONNE LAMMERICH

Thursday 26 April, 7PM / Free and guaranteed to Sustaining Members on RSVP to york@mercunion.org.

Refreshments will be served.



Yvonne Lammerich and Ian Carr-Harris, *Abitation* (model after W.C. Jeffries' rendering, installation view).

Join in this exclusive opportunity for Mercer Union Sustaining Members to meet over drinks with artists Ian Carr-Harris and Yvonne Lammerich.

Ian Carr-Harris is an artist based in Toronto whose work has been exhibited nationally and internationally since 1971. Exhibitions include the Paris Biennale (1975), the Venice Biennale (1984), Documenta (1987), the Canadian Biennial at the National Gallery (1989), the Sydney Biennale (1990), the Montreal Biennale (1998) and *Threshold* at The Power Plant, Toronto (1998). He has been Director of Library Services and Chair of the Experimental Arts & the Sculpture/Installation programs, as well as Acting Chair of the Criticism and Curatorial program at OCADU, where he continues to teach full time as an instructor in studio and theory. Carr-Harris's active publication schedule includes the writing of reviews and articles as well as catalogue essays. He was a founding board member of A Space (1971) and The Power Plant (1987), and has served on boards at Harbourfront and the Art Gallery of Ontario. He is represented by the Susan Hobbs Gallery in Toronto.

Yvonne Lammerich has exhibited in Canada and Europe since the 1980s, including *peinture peinture*, Montreal (1997, 1999), Le Musée de Québec (1998), and the Québec International Biennale, 2000. Since moving to Toronto she has contributed a major installation, *Island*, to the Nature in the Garage Project, Toronto (2006) and mounted a solo exhibition, *Belief*, at Diaz Contemporary in 2008. Also in 2008 she was invited as one of three artists to participate in *Correspondence/Common Ground* at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery as well as exhibiting *Abitation* 1608-2008 at the Trianon Gallery in Lethbridge. In 2010 she co-produced (with Ian Carr-Harris) the project *Copy This* to the exhibition Art School Dismissed, Toronto. In 2011 she initiated the TMCA project (Toronto Museum of Contemporary Art – a hybrid virtual Museum) through the exhibition *It takes everyone to know no one* at the Barnicke Gallery (2011). Upcoming in June, 2012, is the *Ideal House Project*, School of Architecture, Cambridge Art Gallery/University of Waterloo. Over her career she has curated several exhibitions and written for *Parachute*, *Canadian Art*, and *Contemporary Magazine*, London UK. She participated in the Banff residency "The Future of Idea Art" in 2006, and in 2010/11 she taught at Zayed University in Dubai. Her work is represented in a number of private and public collections, and articulates the simultaneity of experiencing the body's response as we navigate both real and projected space.

IN-GALLERY SOUND PERFORMANCE

Saturday 12 May, doors open at 8 PM / free admission / cash bar

An evening of sound by local musicians utilizing the tessellated landscape built by Deborah Stratman for her installation *Tactical Uses of a Belief in the Unseen (2)*. Check the website for the lineup of acts and latest information.

READING BY JACOB WREN

Thursday 31 May, 7 PM / free admission / cash bar



Jacob Wren is a writer and maker of eccentric performances. (Searching for a more accurate description than 'theatre director' he eventually stumbled upon 'maker of eccentric performances.'). His books include *Unrehearsed Beauty*, *Families Are Formed Through Copulation* and *Revenge Fantasies of the Politically Dispossessed*. As co-artistic director of Montreal-based interdisciplinary group PME-ART he has co-created *En francais comme en anglais, it's easy to criticize* (1998), *Unrehearsed Beauty / Le Génie des autres* (2002), *La famille se crée en copulant* (2005) and the ongoing *HOSPITALITÉ / HOSPITALITY* series. He has also collaborated with Nadia Ross and her company STO Union. Together they co-wrote and co-directed *Recent Experiences* (2000) and *Revolutions in Therapy* (2004). In 2007 he was invited by Sophiensaele (Berlin) to adapt and direct Wolfgang Koeppen's 1954 novel *Der Tod in Rom* and in 2008 he was commissioned by Campo (Ghent) to collaborate with Pieter De Buysser on *An Anthology of Optimism*. He travels internationally with alarming frequency and frequently writes about contemporary art.

THANKS TO ALL PARTIPANTS IN SPIKED TEA 2012!



Ice fishing, karaoke singing, tea leaf reading, and signature cocktails by artists conspired to make Spiked Tea 2012 another smashing success! Our sincere thanks to participating artists Basil AIZeri, CN Tower Liquidation, Robyn Cumming, Brette Gabel, Soft Turns, Maggie Groat, Stuart Keeler, Jean-Paul Kelly, Nina Leo, Heather Nicol, Bojana Stancic & Alex Wolfson. We are grateful for the outstanding support of our table sponsor Variant Path, beverage sponsor Mill Street Brewery and food sponsors Dufflet Pastries, European Meats and Julian Muratori. We also thank our volunteers Rob Alder, Jenal Dolson, Kate Fane, The Illescas Sisters, Raveesh Nagpal, Maryam Taghavi, and Joan Wilson. Last but not least, we recognize the Spiked Tea task force leader Lee Henderson and members Ali Ebrahimi, Jennifer Matotek, and Jessica Vallentin for all their effort in making the event a success.



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The exhibition *Tactical Uses of a Belief in the Unseen (2)* is presented in collaboration with the 25th Images Festival, April 12 - April 21. Mercer Union and the artist wish to acknowledge the assistance of the following individuals: Steven Badgett, Pat Finlay, Eric Glavin, Kate MacKay, Pablo de Ocampo, Jen Wang and Ean White. Project support provided through the generous support of the Harpo Foundation.



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Deborah Stratman
Tactical Uses of a Belief in the Unseen (2)

14 April–19 May 2012

Opening: Saturday 14 April, 8 PM



Acoustic locator, circa 1921, Army War College, Fort McNair.

Front Gallery

Deborah Stratman: *Tactical Uses of a Belief in the Unseen (2)*

By creating an environment that is both a landscape and a speaker, Deborah Stratman shows the way that sound both defines and disturbs place, and how the immateriality of sound can be used to seduce us into believing in something that may not be true. Applying cinematic concepts to sculpture, *Tactical Uses of a Belief in the Unseen (2)* uses a multifaceted sound collage consisting of explosions, earthquake frequencies, helicopters and other heavy equipment that suggest sounds of military action. These low frequency sounds coming from the floor are more felt than heard and evoke a kind of suspense or approaching dread. This composition is paired with a moving beam of sound broadcast from above. Inaudible until it is pointed directly at the listener, it provides an element of surprise and consists of sounds of sirens, trumpets and bagpipes, which are traditionally declarative instruments associated with warfare or police states.

Despite its immateriality, sound is powerfully suggestive of both physical and temporal realms. As sounds exist in constant flux, we instinctively ascribe to them a here-and-now-ness. For these and other physiological reasons, we have a certain belief in our sonic surroundings, even when the sources generating the sounds remain unseen. Professionals routinely take advantage of our sonic gullibility (film sound designers for instance, or military psy-op units), in some ingeniously subversive and strategic ways.

Historically, sound has often been used as a medium for waging psychological warfare because of how efficiently it suggests events and locations. Whether declarative, as with anthems or artillery, or deceptive, as with sonic decoys or surveillance, the audio-sphere is well disposed to militarization. Sound is a virtual tool that provokes belief in an unseen material world. Stratman allows us to experience and reflect on this in a material world of her own making.

—Kate MacKay, Images Festival Programmer

Back Gallery

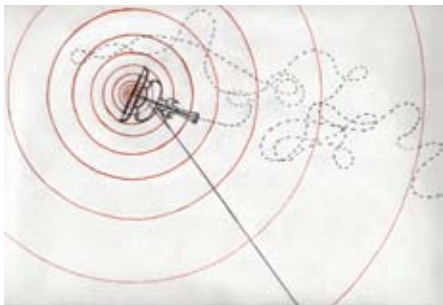
As a complement to the exhibition, the back gallery features a suite of drawings as well as projection of the video *Village, Silenced* (2012), a re-working of Humphrey Jennings’s seminal 36-minute 1943 docudrama *The Silent Village*, in which Welsh coal miners from the village of Cwmgiedd collectively re-enact the Nazi invasion and annihilation of the resisting Czech mining village of Lidice. Focus here is on sound as a mode of social control and the larger historical implications of repetition. An homage to Jennings’s lucid address of labour solidarity, power and commemoration.

Dislocating What Is Seen and What Is Said: Deborah Stratman in conversation with Adrian Blackwell

Adrian Blackwell: *Tactical Uses of a Belief in the Unseen (2)* resonates with the ongoing wars against terror in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and, as you have pointed out, it refers to the sonic attacks by the Israeli defense forces in Gaza. The piece is simply a way of “bringing the war home” as Martha Rosler put it in her work of the late 1960s. You use sound as a way of making the violence of war palpable to people, to make them feel it, to use the techniques of war as a way of affecting people who are not in the battlefield. Why did you feel compelled to make this work right now?

Deborah Stratman: Bringing wars “home,” back to a place of sensorial experience that is concurrent with our physical bodies, is important to me. Thinking about geographies not of a perennial elsewhere—which both war and technology today are so facile at—but rather of a here, of the immediate, of the tactile stuff that surrounds us. Sound for me is the keenest way I know to evoke the here/now, and the best way I know to infiltrate the body. It’s so easy to log on and log off with the remote imaging of corporate or private or military operations. The ways that other spaces now come in to our lived experience through cellular and other remote sensing technologies is a paradigm shift I’ve been extremely slow to internalize and understand. I have trouble navigating the world of the mobile phone, where the virtual urgency of being “live,” on air, walking in a here, but talking and thinking into an elsewhere takes precedence over the physical.

AB: Seeing and hearing your films, I have been struck by your delamination of sound and image. It is often unclear exactly how they relate and as a result each often has a disturbing autonomy, which doesn’t allow us to take one or the other for granted, but rather forces us to consider each separately. You have stated that you are interested in “the possibilities of misunderstandings between what is seen and what is said.”¹ In this work you jettison the image, does this stem from



Deborah Stratman, *Aeolian Kite – 6th century BC Han Chinese PSYOP tactic for over-enemy night flights*, 2010. Charcoal and pencil on paper, 27.9 x 35.5 cm.

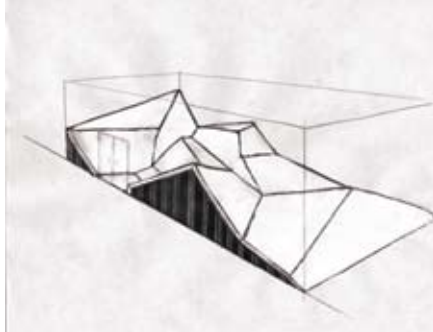
a desire to affect the audience in a different way than film can, does the image produce a distancing effect that the unseen function of sound does not allow?

DS: Delamination! I love that as a descriptor. I think of the sound and picture design as utilizing dislocation, which is really just following the advice of Robert Bresson. As far as jettisoning the image, I don’t feel I have because the tessellated topography became the image when the viewer was outside the glass, peering in at the bisected terrain.² Outside the glass wall, you couldn’t hear the sound of the installation. So from out looking in, it seemed more like an archeological dig, or geological strata, a dissection and a model of a place, but from inside, you are on top of it. So it’s the difference perhaps between being in front of a world and being in a world, which is precisely where audio’s strength lies. Audio always puts you in the midst of, not in front of.

AB: This specific work seems to synthesize your ongoing interests in architecture and landscape. Many of your sculptures and films seem to produce a space of landscape/architecture—but usually through a condition of figure ground. I am thinking of the transmission tower that stands against the wide open spaces of the desert in *Power/Exchange*, or the way the minimal architecture of the parking booths are related to the asphalt expanse of parking lots in *PARK*. In this piece the space is a constructed surface, a kind of architecture/landscape contraction.

DS: Maybe it’s the closest I’ve come to fusing the two. I can’t say I set out with that as a goal—but I’m definitely intrigued by that read. In the conceptualizing, I thought of the wandering beam of the HSS speaker as the figure. But a figure who has become a ghost, a ghost who can’t find a material body to adhere to. The South East Asian concept of the wandering ghost was very influential here. And maybe, obliquely, the work of filmmakers like Apichatpong Weerasathakul, for whom the spirit world is so strongly felt, always teasing and tugging at the material world. In a way, both the very low-end territory sounds and the higher wandering HSS sound approximate a virtual figure/ground. They mirror sculptural landscape and the visiting human bodies traversing it.

AB: The thinness of the ground renders it as a kind of horizon from the exterior, a dividing line not only between figure and ground, but also between earth and sky. These two spaces: the earth as territory of capital and state, a surface traversed by lines of properties and borders, constructed of fences and



Deborah Stratman, *Topography (Variant 1)*, 2010 . Charcoal, pencil and acrylic paint on paper, 27.9 x 35.5 cm.

armies and a sky inhabited by surveillance helicopters, planes and drones, seem to be key spaces in your film works, especially in *O’er the Land*, and *In Order not to be here*. Could you say a little about how the land and the sky as distinct spaces figure within your larger body of work?

DS: The omniscience of the gaze when it comes from above, patrolling the land, the skies, or even outer space from an airborne position, has definitely been a recent theme in my films and videos. Now that I think of it, it also comes up in ... *These Blazing Stars!* (a film about comets and their history of augury) and in *Kings of the Sky*, a documentary about Uyghur people in western China for whom tightrope walking is both an act of nationalism and an act of resistance. I think my interest in the airborne gaze has a lot to do with an ongoing investigation of control systems. But it’s equally tied to my love of the ether, and of how a space that appears to be vacant is jam packed full of transmissions. It’s curious that an entity which appears to be so essentially marker-less, borderless, is in fact infinitesimally divided up and owned. *O’er the Land* especially dwells on the complicated eddies that are produced when concepts of ownership and freedom rub up against each other. So the airborne gaze in that film (up to the sky, or up to fighter jets and B2s) is more about the ratcheting up of technologies which accompany that confluence (of freedom/ownership). With *In Order Not To Be Here*, the final shot from the helicopter reinforces this sense of omnipresent policing that’s built up throughout the film. This is why it was so spiritually or existentially important for me that the running figure escape its hovering gaze in the end, at least for the time being.

DS: Time as an ideology definitely resonates for me. As does thinking about temporal construction in terms of building and releasing volumes of pressure. Or time as a space that can contain more or less potential energy. I’m answering more in terms of physics than politics because that’s more intuitive for me. I definitely distrust “end of history” and doomsday predictions which all just seem too easy in their fundamentalist crutch of the after-life. Like the end of history is a big clean up crew, absolving everybody of their obligation to the future and to the past.

AB: The title of one of your films is taken from Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed* where one of the characters says: “Time isn’t a thing, it’s an idea. It’ll die out in the mind.” It seems clear from this, that for you, time is ideological. In your de-



Deborah Stratman, *Echo Corral (after Athanasius Kircher)*, 2010. Charcoal, pencil and acrylic paint on paper, 35.5 x 27.9 cm.

scription of your work *FEAR* you argue that “The relationship between safety and fear is a cyclical one.” For me this cycle resonates with neoliberal time as a crisis of the endless present: on the one hand you have American Political Scientist Francis Fukuyama’s end of history thesis, which refuses to think beyond the horizon of democratic capitalism. On the other hand we seem to live in a highly contingent and uncertain present, without a past or future we feel incredibly precarious. As an artist who uses time as a medium, how do you understand time today and how do you try to engage or experiment with time in response to this understanding?

DS: Time as an ideology definitely resonates for me. As does thinking about temporal construction in terms of building and releasing volumes of pressure. Or time as a space that can contain more or less potential energy. I’m answering more in terms of physics than politics because that’s more intuitive for me. I definitely distrust “end of history” and doomsday predictions which all just seem too easy in their fundamentalist crutch of the after-life. Like the end of history is a big clean up crew, absolving everybody of their obligation to the future and to the past.

AB: I am thinking about your interest in the subject of the fear and violence of the present, *Tactical uses of a Belief in the Unseen (2)* is a nightmare of present-ness and I think that this extends outside the wars of the middle east into our living rooms already, through the economic violence that

people in both Europe and North America are being subject to. This precariousness also produces a strong affect. Your work seems to approach time very differently. It stretches time wide open, approaching a distant history or even a pre-historic, geologic and atmospheric past, and also engages the future not as closed but as mysterious and unknown—a potentially different future. I feel like your work shares a kinship with Robert Smithson in this sense: with its view both to the distant past and the distant future at the same time.

DS: Economic, military, religious, racial and other forms of fear mongering are definitely something I can’t seem to rid my work of. I guess now and then I do. But it keeps coming back thematically because it’s so present in our daily experience when reading the paper, or listening to the radio, or going through check points, or having to wear ID badges everywhere. I’m totally flattered that you would bring up Smithson, as he’s a superhero. Engaging with multiple levels of time or pasts, and considering how histories are embedded in places, how they politicize places is very compelling to me. Do you know the films of Jean Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet? They are experts in this regard.

AB: No I don’t, I will have to watch them!

DS: I do need to think more on time as ideology though. This is so succinct and compelling to me, especially as I’m currently working on a new project that is (again) concerned with themes of faith and technology. Can time be moral? If so, then duration might be embedded with varying degrees of morality, depending on circumstances.

AB: I would like to finish by returning to the double structure of above and below as two modes of resistance to the present. Sometimes I feel like you often use the abstraction of flight as a metaphor for escape. In different places you make reference to the iron-clad laws of science and then you argue that “lyricism provides us a means of escape.”³ But in contrast to these lyrical lines of flight you also advocate for the public spaces of the airwaves. You assert the importance of a non-judgmental perspective, so that your work is not speaking down to people, but rather opens its narrative to the public, whoever they may be. This seems to indicate a more grounded and down to earth mode of resistance. It seems to me that your new collaboration with Steven Badgett in Washington DC, another architectural/sound work called *Pentagonal Address System*, engages both these forms of resistance. In this piece, a five-sided floating saucer floats on the water in the river in DC, spinning in the reflected sky and projecting voices of protest. The piece is a mirror to the one



Deborah Stratman, *Village, Silenced*, 2012. Video, black and white, 7 min.

you are doing in Toronto; it is also a tactical use of sound, thrown out at an audience in the hopes of convincing them of something. Like the “wandering soul” you referred to earlier, these marching activists speak to the tourists of Washington. Can you describe how you see the relationship between these two sound works?

DS: *Pentagonal Address System* and *Tactical Uses of a Belief in the Unseen (2)* are indeed related in their investigation of landscapes of resistance, or if you prefer, soundscapes of resistance. They both take behemoth institutions (in this case, the military industrial complex) and juxtapose them against something ephemeral, or maybe magical: the spinning levitation of the pentagonal form, the wandering figure of the sonic ghost. I’m mixing my metaphors a bit though, because the wandering ghost audio in form is resonant with the souls of the dead, but in content, consists of the urgent declarative sounds of sirens and trumpets and alarms. Maybe it’s not that flight is the metaphor for escape, but rather falling. Flight still suggests a purposeful, narrative directionality, whereas falling forgoes control. Falling means the system that supported you (the plane, the bridge, the ground, etc) has been relinquished. The succession of voices delivering speeches from *Pentagonal Address System* is the resilient, hopeful, resistant force that levitates the dark star of the pentagon and all it represents. Two of the voices we included in that piece are especially prescient in this regard: Reverend Graylan Hagler’s speech sums up for me the potential relationship of the voice and the individual to the institution, while it’s Abbie Hoffman who originally proposed the levitation concept in a press conference.

Notes

¹ Deborah Stratman in Mike Hoolboom, “What is Felt Cannot Be Forgotten: an Interview with Deborah Stratman” (<http://www.mikehoolboom.com/r2/artist.php?artist=90>, 2009. Accessed April 1, 2012).

² The first version of the installation at the Gahlberg Gallery (College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL, 26 August–16 October 2010) was delimited by a glass wall.

³ Deborah Stratman in Mike Hoolboom interview.