

April 30 - August 8, 2010

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CAMERON FULLER

(Born in 1975 in Chehalis, Washington. Lives and works in St. Louis)

Cameron Fuller studied printmaking at San Francisco State University and received a Bachelor of Arts in 2005.

In 2007, he received his Master of Fine Arts degree from Washington University in St. Louis. His installations have been shown at alternative art spaces throughout St. Louis, including Fort Gondo; White Flag Projects; Maps Contemporary Art Space; and Gallery 210; and at La Esquina in Kansas City. In addition to his own work, Fuller has collaborated since 2008 on installations with Sarah Paulsen at Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis; Open Lot, St. Louis; The Foundry Art Centre, St. Charles, Missouri; and Saint Charles Community College, St. Charles.

Cover image:

From the Collection of the Institute for the Perpetuation of Imaginal Processes, 2010

Mixed media, 8 x 4 x 4 feet
Courtesy of the artist



Remembering Washington, 2010

Cardboard, masking tape, paint marker, dimensions vary
Courtesy of the artist

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Great Rivers Biennial 2010

Cameron Fuller

From the Collection of the Institute for the Perpetuation of Imaginal Processes

The influence of folk art and Native American artifacts often appears in Cameron Fuller's whimsical, imaginative, and, at times ephemeral artwork. Through his playful and fanciful imagery, Fuller evokes the uncanny presentation of natural and cultural histories in his new, immersive environment at the Contemporary. Here Laura Fried interviews Fuller about his new project.

LAURA FRIED: Cameron, for your new exhibition, you transform several of the galleries into a new kind of museum. Riffing on the structure, or aesthetics, of a history museum, you construct a space that promises drama (through reenactment), illumination (through document), and fantasy.

Could you give me a virtual tour of your museum?

CAMERON FULLER: The whole project falls under the umbrella of an ongoing project called The Institute for the Perpetuation of Imaginal Processes. The Institute was formed out of my desire to create more opportunities to collaborate with artists close to me, and to provide a productive platform for new ideas.

The first piece that the visitor will encounter is *As it is*, a life-size diorama, somewhat in the tradition of the natural history museum. Instead of recreating a familiar slice of the natural world, this work compresses a piece of some place foreign. Initially, the diorama was a way to present faraway lands and exotic creatures to an audience. But in a time where frontiers are essentially non-existent, this piece resurrects a place that exists only in fables, fairy tales, or in the imagination. The diorama, as a structure, also provides a glimpse of a static cinema. As much of my work involves coaxing the audience into the role of storyteller, the environment framed by the diorama also creates a three-dimensional film still. It's like walking into a paused movie, where you have to

decide where the story is going before the action resumes.

Remembering Washington is a group of masks and objects based on my recollections of Northwest Coast Native American designs. I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and am drawn to these images and objects. I went to my first pow-wow when I was about ten and discovered how a community could come together to celebrate art, craft, and dance. These pieces began as reminiscences, but as the project has gone on, I have invited a few fellow artists and friends to participate in their creation. In a way, I hope that we can create objects that declare the collective necessity of art in our everyday existence.

The exhibition ends with *Where My Heart Will Lead Me*. I see this as the origin of the universe, with regard to the Institute. It combines the idea of childhood fantasy—running away with the circus, building forts, secret clubhouses—with the voyeuristic notion of poking around in the space of a solitary tinkerer. It gives the audience a way to see how these things have come together. The sketches, models, and objects all play a role in developing the

ideas for the Institute, and all of its parts.

FRIED: Your work in the theater arts becomes clear in this exhibition, particularly in your attention to set design. What is your relationship to theater, as it appears in your practice?

FULLER: I started building sets for the theater right out of high school. It served as the foundation for a lot of my early construction experience and was probably one of the reasons I started working three dimensionally. Working in the theater, I also came to understand the possibility of transforming everyday materials ... It was an introduction to the magic of "smoke and mirrors." The real magic of building for the theater was in the time I spent working in the middle of a set, where the actors weren't present. The empty set contained a proposition, something that asked whoever was present to use the cues to construct the action that was supposed to happen in this strangely empty space. I found it to be a place where, as a viewer, I felt compelled to combine what I saw with my own interests and associations ... like reconstructing a culture from ruins and remains.

FRIED: The macabre art

of taxidermy appears in this exhibition as well. What part do these specimens play in this project?

FULLER: Taxidermy plays two roles in the exhibit. First, because I use the tropes of fables and fairy tales in much of my work, the animals bring with them a culturally constructed character that comes from the stories many of us grow up hearing. When we are given a cast of characters, there is an urge to fit the pieces together into a narrative. Additionally, the animals provide a familiar entry point to the diorama. As most of the environment is constructed, the animals indicate that something made of cardboard is a rock or a tree. They provide the counterpoint to the strangeness of the rest of the world being presented; it's the tension between strangeness and familiarity that makes fairy tales so compelling. Although we know that the story is about, say, a fox and a rabbit, we know that it's really about us, about how people interact with one another.

FRIED: I have been drawn to this salon of small photographs presented between various cases

or dioramas in the show. These images of decaying structures lend a poignant note of disaster, even death, to this fantastical environment. How did they come to play a role in the exhibition?

FULLER: I have been collecting these for some time. I found the first few at a garage sale when I was living in the Bay Area. They speak to me about the way in which human nature is inextricably tied to folly. There is a part of being human that compels us to take risks and put ourselves into ridiculous and unnecessary predicaments, and yet it is exactly the willingness to engage in this behavior that has advanced us as a species as far as we have managed to go. Our awareness and understanding of success exists in direct relation to the measure of our failures, and these images serve to remind us of this. The fact that people took the time to document these events seems to imply that within them there is something we should remember. Like the fables and fairy tales, I get the sense that within these images, there are lessons to be learned about who we are and how we approach the world.