

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

Great Rivers Biennial 2010 is generously supported by the Gateway Foundation.

General support for the Contemporary's exhibitions program is generously provided by the Whitaker Foundation; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; William E. Weiss Foundation; Nancy Reynolds and Dwyer Brown; Missouri Arts Council, a state agency; Regional Arts Commission; Arts and Education Council; and members of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Special thanks to Chase Park Plaza Hotel, Glazer's Midwest, and Midwest Valet.



1 — Main Galleries

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.

1 — Main Galleries

Great Rivers Biennial 2010

Martin Brief

Amazon God

Martin Brief's work explores the way that language, thought, and information relate to contemporary culture and the creation of self. His work is characterized by precision and alteration, as he takes robust sources of information and translates them into images with only traces of their former selves. His process of obscuring and renewing textual data presents us with new ways of experiencing networks of information. Brief presents a new suite of large-scale drawings at the Contemporary.

LAURA FRIED: Martin, your current project attends to the seemingly infinite catalog of the word "God" as it appears in titles for sale on Amazon.com. Spanning diverse literary genres—from "nonfiction" to "religion and spirituality" and even to "cooking"—this registry

becomes a stream of textual data on large-scale sheets of paper. Could you describe your project?

MARTIN BRIEF: Language has its limitations. Attempting to describe God using language is an absurd proposition and yet it is one that has been tried *ad nauseam*. This project is my foray into this Sisyphean task but with the acknowledgement (or perhaps the outright intent to demonstrate) that this is a fool's errand. My interest lies in the question of what happens if we reconfigure language and emphasize its role as form. I use very small type in my drawings because it allows language to transform into abstract form. This creates a synthesis of the two systems of description; line becomes language and language becomes line. These pieces never fully settle into one system or the other. In the end, this "portrait" of God transcends its linguistic armature.

FRIED: Could you describe your process in the studio?

BRIEF: This project began when I became curious about what a search for the word "God" on Amazon.com would yield. The result from the book department was around 700,000 items. I don't

know what anyone else's response to this would be, but I found it irresistible, and my immediate instinct was to collect and use all 700,000 titles. I appreciate a challenge and can handle tedious tasks, but definitively amassing every book title seemed impossible. Ultimately I built my project around Amazon's category structure and chose to use a representative number of titles rather than the complete catalog. This allowed me to maintain some sense of the enormity of the endeavor, while making it manageable enough to complete in one lifetime. The arrangement of the titles developed very naturally. I wanted the word "God" to be the focal point of the drawings and it seemed like a logical, if not obvious, choice to arrange the titles by aligning the word into a straight vertical line. This arrangement unexpectedly created a graph-like form that placed "God" at the center as a mean value that all of the information would be measured against.

FRIED: I have come to read this series of works as endurance tests on a micro scale. How did you reach this point in your practice?

BRIEF: Endurance test is a

great description. I found it to be more a test of mental endurance than physical, although there is a physical component. My previous projects involved a similar kind of practice, although the timeline for this project forced me to work more hours per day and more days per week. At one point, I was able to spend a few weeks devoted almost exclusively to it. Transcribing book titles for six to eight hours a day for two weeks in silence proved to be an intense experience.

FRIED: I wonder if you could elaborate on how your relationship to this loaded signifier (the word "God") has changed as you have developed these works.

BRIEF: I was interested in getting a broad sense of God through the books written on the subject. Admittedly, by using Amazon my search was impacted by market forces, and the commodification of God became readily apparent. In this context, God is used in association with every conceivable endeavor, from dating to money management, with books suggesting these can be done "God's way." I think what I see most clearly from this project is quite simply this: God has been and will likely always be ineffable,

amorphous, and for sale.

FRIED: What have previous projects looked like?

BRIEF: Drawing and language have been at the center of my practice for the past four or five years. In the *Dictionary* and *Newspaper* series, I eliminated the text, instead relying on the visual patterns created by the text. In the former, I am creating one drawing for each page of the dictionary by tracing the outline of the columns of text on each page. In the latter, I filled in all of the o's in the text on the front page of randomly selected issues of the *New York Times*, revealing a similar sequence of dots in each drawing. In the *Artforum Series*, I began to use text as the raw material for the drawings, allowing it to function as both language and abstract form. For this project, I collected all of the names from each issue of *Artforum* magazine for an entire year. I made one drawing for each issue, rewriting the names line by line to create a 10.5" square matching the size of the magazine.

FRIED: Could you describe your relationship to cataloguing, taxonomies, classification ... and how this endeavor is manifest in

your nearly abstract, seismologic drawings?

BRIEF: Cataloguing is about control and, for me, the illusion of control. Similar to the idea that myths help to explain the unexplainable, these types of catalogues bring a sense of order to what can never be ordered. In the end, the form of the drawing relies on the order the titles appear on Amazon, the length of the titles, and how much of the title falls to the left or right of the word God. These uncontrollable factors determine the formal aspects of the drawing. Within the tight controls of the process, chaos prevails.

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SARAH FROST

(Born in 1967 in Detroit. Lives and works in St. Louis)

Sarah Frost received a Master of Fine Arts degree in sculpture and painting from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting from Washington University in St. Louis. Recent exhibitions have been presented at Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis; Regional Arts Commission, St. Louis; Foundry Art Centre, St. Charles, Missouri; Mad Art Gallery, St. Louis; The Jacoby Arts Center, Alton, Illinois; and Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, Mt. Vernon, Illinois. She has recently exhibited in New York, and has been awarded grants from Arts in Transit, St. Louis and the Missouri Arts Council.

Cover image:
Pistol, 2010
Paper, glue
Courtesy of the artist



Sniper Rifle Tutorial (still), 2010

Captured You Tube video still
Courtesy of the artist

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1 — Main Galleries

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Sarah Frost

Arsenal

Interested in the history of objects, Sarah Frost creates large-scale installations and sculptures using materials as diverse as computer keyboards, Bundt pans, and toilet-seat covers. Her work not only serves as a reminder of our object-driven culture, but also demonstrates a desire for the personal through her use of cold masses of forgotten objects. Laura Fried interviews Frost about her simultaneous interest in the finely crafted and the ready-made, revealed in her new, monumental installation in the galleries.

LAURA FRIED: Sarah, in your newest installation, you've combined a cascading paper cloud with photographic stills. On first encounter, we recognize the material as a catalog of handmade paper artillery and the photographs as video stills of the

boys who made them. Could you describe the project?

SARAH FROST: While browsing You Tube, I stumbled upon a paper-sniper-rifle tutorial made by an adolescent boy and subsequently discovered hundreds of similar videos of boys showing off their homemade paper guns. I was amazed by the ingenuity and functionality of the guns: shotguns that pump and spit out paper rounds; six-shooters with spinning chambers; guns with folding or extendable stocks; and so forth. The guns are made of the simplest materials, paper and tape, and are built using simple tubular forms, yet they are surprisingly sophisticated. I felt simultaneously attracted to the inventiveness and formal qualities of the guns and stunned by the knowledge the boys had about the workings of the guns.

The You Tube community itself is interesting because of the dialogue surrounding the boys' handiwork. Community members critique each other's work and collaborate on how to solve a specific technical problem, such as how to construct the curved form of a magazine. From a sculptor's point of view, this was exciting, even in this surprising form.

For the Great Rivers Biennial, I initially had a formal idea for the space at the Contemporary. The clerestory windows are a defining characteristic of the space. They have always drawn my eye upward toward their natural light and my attention to the distinctive height of the galleries and space above the exhibited works. I wanted to activate that space and thought of these windows as a point of departure for a piece that cascaded downward. The subject and formal idea came together as I worked with the paper guns; it became clear that the negative space around the guns was important and that suspending them was a solution. I tried to activate the space of the gallery through their dynamic configuration and to make the viewer want to walk among them, to walk a sort of gauntlet.

While the form of the installation in the gallery was important, communicating that these guns are re-creations of found forms was critical. The stills give a sense of the authors of these forms, and reveal a range of abilities in this online community.

FRIED: Following your practice for the last couple of years, I've

seen a rigorous attention to the found form as material for your large-scale built environments. You construct a texture, and indeed an architecture, through the found, the discarded, the plastic, and the handmade. What is the relationship between the object and the built environment in your work?

FROST: Many of my recent works rely on scale to create a sense that the viewer is within a larger framework. I often employ hundreds or thousands of similar units in an installation; together these units create a space that dwarfs or contains the viewer. The particular materials used are evocative of this framework, such as communications systems, technology, or commodity. I am also interested phenomenology—the idea that our knowledge of the world is gained through our bodies, both our physical and visual experience. I like the idea that one may first perceive my work and be drawn toward it without knowing what the forms are.

FRIED: In past works, you largely drew from found materials, but this installation brings craftsmanship and the homemade to the fore. Can you elaborate on this new direction?

FROST: For the past several years, I've worked with either found objects themselves or found form that I re-create in a different medium or context. For example, I have worked with found form by casting it in metal, plaster, or paper; through casting, the form of the original object remains but is transformed by the new material. I have also re-created found forms by fabricating them in a different scale, quantity, material, or in a different context. In short, I like to access the history inherent in found objects, and both ways of working facilitate this. Sometimes I just like making things.

FRIED: The culture of war and weaponry is part of the popular imagination, from the shootings at Columbine to violent video games and the collective trauma of war. How did you come upon your chosen form?

FROST: I try to make work that is of the moment. In this case, You Tube is only about five years old, and such an online community seems current. At the same time, our country has a military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, and our culture is full of guns. Love them or hate them, guns are

all around us.

FRIED: The hostile role of weaponry is belied in your project. From the You Tube stills picturing cute and clever kids hosting their own instructional videos, to the suspended delicacy of your installation, the latent violence is muted. How do you see these tensions playing out in your project?

FROST: Found objects or forms reflect upon a culture and the people who used them. The artist in this case plays the role of an anthropologist. This project appealed to me because it was thought provoking on its own terms; if only I could re-present them, the paper guns could collectively raise so many questions. I don't have an answer to these questions, but in my mind, this work touches on fragility, the need to be part of a community, sexuality and masculine identity, as well as the more obvious issues of guns and violence.