

May 9 – August 3, 2008



CONTEMPORARYARTMUSEUMSTLOUIS

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1 — Main Galleries

Lutz Bacher Spill

For her first major museum exhibition, Lutz Bacher takes over the Main Galleries of the Contemporary. Working since the 1970s in Berkeley, California, Bacher makes use of a broad range of media to search for the noises that disfigure contemporary culture, isolating the alien images that make up our shared visual landscape.

Spill maps out the artist's most current artistic territory. The exhibition's centerpiece is *Our Beloved Revolutionary Sweetheart*, a site-specific installation in many parts. Alongside it are other new works, on view in the museum's performance space gallery, outdoor courtyard, lobby, and on its window-façade. A rotating display of older works-- continuously interrupted and re-arranged -completes the exhibition. The accompanying publication, *SMOKE (Gets In Your Eyes)*, does not "catalogue" Bacher's artwork but rather emphasizes

the erratic gestures, juxtaposed references, comic punch-lines, and sudden gear-shifts that exist in the experience of the exhibition itself.

Rooted in a tradition of appropriation, Bacher sifts through anonymous books, illustrations, pulp fiction, advertisements, self-help manuals, pornography, interviews, trade shows, and abandoned photographs. She deliberately migrates between methods, styles, and attitudes: making photocopies, hiring painters, shooting large-scale Polaroids, manipulating found TV footage, videotaping ambient walk- or drive-throughs, and always taking snapshots, she relentlessly takes what we think we already know and throws it right back at us, albeit with traces of disquieting perversion, resilient idiosyncrasy, and sexual ambiguity. What at first seems familiar slowly unravels and becomes much less so.

The exhibition begins with a dead-end: painted fluorescent yellow, *Reflex Yellow* forms an interactive viewing platform for the exhibition, resembling a distorted (St. Louis) arch, but the ramp turns back onto itself and leads

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nowhere. Alongside it are debris of shattered electric guitars and life-sized cardboard cut-outs. If the ramp welcomes us and the Star Trek watchmen are there to accompany us, the monumental text work PLEASE fits into Bacher's way of showing us around: phrases lifted from a tourist's translation guide form another type of way-finding that might be familiar, somewhat helpful, a bit dated, and yet undoubtedly alien.

A multi-channel video work on three monitors and a large projection, TKTK, dominates the main galleries, moving in and out in a choreography of pixilated landscapes, technical glitches, superimposed ambient shots, and bursts of song, as if caught between many overlapping radio signals emitting all at once.

DEBORD provides the backdrop for a rotating display of past works. Photocopied from a book on the Situationist's all-defying French leader Guy Debord, the wheat pasted installation trumpets a male super-ego but dilutes it in grainy black-and-white—a ghost of an amputated revolution. Presented for periods of a few

weeks, the older works provide glimpses—although interrupted, provisional, and partial—of the artist's overall practice. The Lee Harvey Oswald Interview (1976) is an assemblage of documents about the (presumed) sole gunman; her Jokes (1985-1988) present a series of quotes with well-known faces lifted from an anonymous book; she commissioned a painter to create her Playboys paintings (1991-93) based on the Vargas illustrations from the 1950s; Gap (2003-06) re-presents Gap ads that sometimes feature the famous Californian artist Ed Ruscha; her large-scale Polaroids of plastic trolls, Little People (2005) are half-toy and half-monster; and Bien Hoa (2007) are photographs she found, presumably taken by an American soldier in Vietnam, an old war that feels eerily contemporary. All of these works are portraits of people and yet all they give us are blank stares. Bacher herself appears nowhere, appropriating photographs or paintings made by someone else.

Inspired by Anheuser-Busch's headquarters in St. Louis, Bacher fills a second gallery with stacks

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of Budweiser cases, which, along with *Be Kind to the Horses* (2008), a re-created Budweiser sign, offers a local monument that threatens to transform the quiet museum into a place of excessive intoxication. Other artists are nearby: while *Club Bud* (2008) quotes renegade artist Cady Noland's many Budweiser sculptures, Bacher plays the recording of Bruce Nauman's *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room* (1968) in the outdoor courtyard.

Visible only from the street, a 12 by 32-foot window-graphic, *Crash* (2008), serves as the exhibition's emblematic image. Incorporating many of the themes running throughout the exhibition—breakdowns, appropriated photographs, familiar but uncomfortable situations, art historical references (this time, Andy Warhol's car crashes), alcoholic haze, disfigured portraiture, scale-shifts, anonymity, and defiant armies-of-one—these two blown-up photographs carry Bacher's art of interference to the traffic outside, inserting an alien within the community of other cars

LUTZ BACHER

(born in XXXX. Lives and works in Berkeley, California)

In recent years, Bacher's group exhibitions have included *Photography on Photography* (2008) and *Closed Circuit* (2007) at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; *Grey Flags* (2006) at Sculpture-Center, New York and CAPC musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux; and *Defamation of Character* (2006) at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; *American Tableaux* (2002) at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and *Bitstreams* (2001) at the Whitney Museum, New York. Her gallery, Taxter & Spengemann in New York, recently presented solo exhibitions. In 2009, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center presents *My Secret Life*, a 40-year survey exhibition of her work

Cover image:

Crash, 2008

vinyl window graphic, 12 x 32 feet.
Courtesy of the artist and Taxter & Spengemann, New York

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