

L. Barry Stone, *I Met a Unicorn*, Austin, TX, 1.10.2010; archival inkjet print; 23<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 35<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches; edition of 10

R. Alan Greenspan as a Rainbow in Washington D.C. on October 23, 2009, 12.20.2009; archival inkjet print; 23<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 35<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches; edition of 10; courtesy Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, Brooklyn

## NEW YORK

Barry Stone  
Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery

In *I Met a Unicorn*, Barry Stone's third solo show at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery—a Williamsburg storefront with a preposterous made-up name—the Austin artist offers a textbook sampler of current ideas in contemporary art photography. Issues of representation and illusion, viewer and author, appropriation and the artist's hand abound, almost to distraction. In fact, if *nichtssagend* translates roughly as “empty” or “meaningless,” then Stone's large-format digital prints initially fit the bill. But as in much photo-based work today, the first glance is merely a teaser to draw the viewer into a more considered encounter—here, the artist's interests unpack slowly, by degrees, like a conceptual Salome.

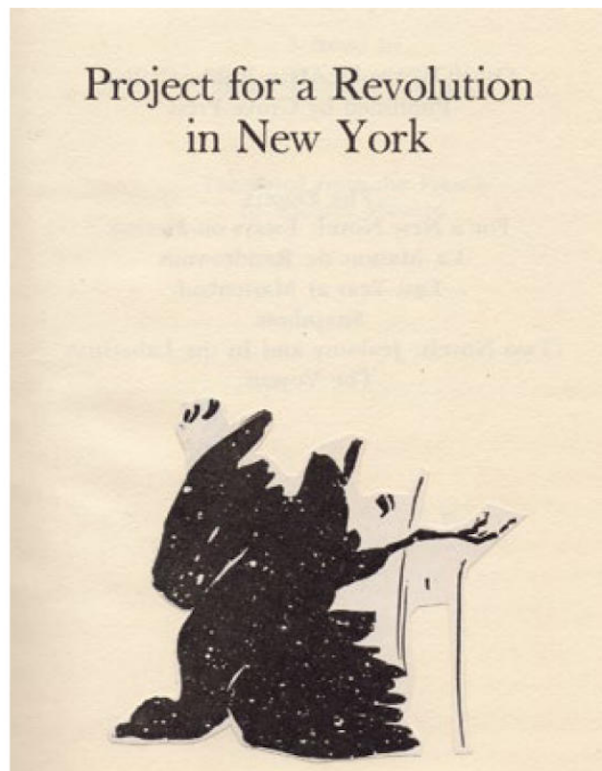
“I met a unicorn” is a phrase taken from Bertrand Russell's *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, used by the philosopher to demonstrate the unreliability of words and syntax in representing reality. This idea is a leitmotif for Stone's photography. In the show's title work, *I Met a Unicorn*, Austin, TX, 1.10.2010, a white, sun-dappled pony with the eponymous horn is pictured in profile against a lush green background. The twin seductions of illusion and fantasy are historical mainstays in art but still enough at odds with photography's documentary history to stir the viewer. The “realness” of unicorns is not the question; rather, the uncanny subject prompts a questioning attitude toward the image itself: What's the context of the photograph? Is the image “found” or “staged”? Has the artist “intervened” (doctored the image) in some way?

This questioning attitude is sustained across the show's seven works, all toying with art history in some way. *Crop*, *The Golden Hour* by Thomas Moran, 1875, Jack S. Blanton Museum, Austin, TX, 1.2.2010 is explicitly what the title states—and not. Stone has transformed the source image by

selectively framing the detail of the painting, converting the color palette to black and white, shifting the time “frame” and, most obviously, exchanging Moran's original brushstrokes of oil paint for digital pixels. Three other works—*Sunset Photographer* [...], *Alan Greenspan as a Rainbow* [...] and *The Jeff Wall*, MoMA [...]—directly or indirectly call up the work of other contemporary artists, namely, Elger Esser, Ugo Rondinone and Jeff Wall, respectively. In each, Stone shifts a source image through various manipulations and several frames of reference before ever bringing it to the viewer's eye.

In *Artificial Pond Reflection*, Austin, TX, 3.28.2009—a lovely, vertical rectangular image of rippling water with glinting, white starbursts on the surface—the questioning starts with a play on words: is it the “pond” or the “reflection” that is artificial? Such a concern is fairly nouveau in the history of art, a seductive illusion introduced with the advent of Photoshop. As his titles indicate, most of Stone's source images are caught at random and on the fly, thus documentary in practice if not in spirit. But just as the “subject” in art grows increasingly subordinate to the “frame,” Stone's true practice is the culling, cropping, altering and grouping of images. This way, questions about reality and representation in art remain fresh and grow increasingly sophisticated—and as compelling as a unicorn in a tapestry.

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L. Ayreen Anastas, Rene Gabri, *we will all feel the pinch, before noon or soon thereafter, / or / i am a political prisoner / you are a political prisoner / she is a political prisoner / he is a political prisoner / we are political prisoners / they are political prisoners*, 2005–10 (detail); works on paper, notebooks, diagrams, cutouts and miscellaneous ephemera; dimensions variable

R. Julieta Aranda, *Memories of things present #1*, 2008; handmade paper from newspapers, water resulting from the paper-making process, glass bottles, vinyl appliqué, pedestal; dimensions variable

## NEW YORK

### Museum as Hub: In and Out of Context REDUX New Museum

*Museum as Hub: In and Out of Context* is an idea that sounds good on paper—as a proposal—but is frustrating to experience in person. According to museum literature, the yearlong project “reveals a partnership of arts organizations pursuing experimental methods of exhibition, communication, and collaboration, and considers the consequences of being part of a ‘hub,’ including challenges of producing and exhibiting work in differing international contexts.” The project is sponsored by New Museum with partner institutions and galleries in Seoul, Mexico City, Cairo and Eindhoven, and the first installment (August '09 thru March '10) featured the work of artists from South Korea, Germany and Lebanon.

REDUX, the project’s second installment, features artist Julieta Aranda and the artist-activist duo Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri. Occupying New Museum’s fifth floor, their work is loosely installed in a flexible setting designed by Choi Jeong Hwa to serve as an “envelope” for the project’s changing/evolving displays, presentations and public programs. (That evocative idea translates into walls painted silver and an eye-smarting day-glo green, with simple wooden fixtures arranged like sauna bleachers.)

Anastas and Gabri contributed multiple works under the rubric *Project for a Revolution in New York, or How to arrest a Hurricane*, with the intention to “explore art’s potential place in the economic, national, and urban struggles...” In *Kindred Spirits*, a video of a family sitcom (from an unspecified, presumably East Asian source) plays muted on a monitor; as viewers sit and watch, they may listen on headphones to readings of dense, unidentified texts of political and social critique. Awash with isms, this droning recitation of abuses, manipulations and deceptions, where populations are likened to putty in the hands of statist or corporate powers, is delivered in a mind- and ear-numbing monotone, while on the

monitor the actors chatter silently in a comfortable, middle-class living room. What is the connection? Is it up to us, the “silly putty” masses, to synthesize the disparate parts and connect the dots?

This attitude is carried over to *why...do sometimes...images...begin... To shake?...*, a 47-min., high-def video projection of street scenes, some from the Lower East Side setting of the museum. As figures walk down sidewalks and into and out of storefronts, we hear various spoken texts, such as a mathematical calculation for figuring out where you are on the NYC street grid, again delivered in an affectless voice. Which do we attend to, the lush, seductive HD video image or the flat drone? Humans typically prioritize the visual over the aural, a habit startlingly challenged by movie soundtracks like *The Hurt Locker*, or the film works of Michel Auder where the disconnect of image and sound is put to truly revelatory ends, pointing up the (dis)functions of consciousness.

Anastas and Gabri are more engaging (and successful) with *we will all feel the pinch, before noon or soon thereafter, or i am a political prisoner, you are a political prisoner, she is a political prisoner, he is a political prisoner, we are political prisoners, they are political prisoners*, a large display case of open journals laid out flat to expose individual pages. These are stunning works of freehand “thinking”—obsessively clean, crisp and coherent snapshots of busy minds at work. Reminiscent of Mark Lombardi’s graphed networks of corruption, these journal pages are given such headings as “Reasons to Revolt” and “Thesis on Cultural Revolution,” featuring drawings and newspaper clippings annotated in infinitesimally small handwritten script. Lists lead to sentences, which lead to diagrammatic illustrations of ideas and further adumbrations. Unlike the videos, these works don’t need us. Instead of “interrogating” (or teasing) the viewer, these journal pages are



L. Julieta Aranda, *Memories of things present #2*, 2008; wine glasses, newspaper, cotton, seeds; dimensions variable; photos by Julieta Aranda



R. Installation view, *Museum as Hub: In and Out of Context REDUX*, New Museum, New York

self-contained, a mesmerizing record of the real-time interaction between the “journalist,” the pen and the paper.

Aranda contributes more material-based but no less conceptual works to REDUX. Focusing on the mechanics and historical significance of memory, her project *All the memory of the world (We can remember it for you)* begins with a self-made newspaper stacked in the gallery entrance for visitors to take. The tabloid-style *All the Memory of the World* includes juicy articles on “corporate amnesia,” “protochronism,” “mnemonics” and “false memory,” and biographies of various historical figures and philosophers who proposed theories on memory.

This tabloid spins off into other works, such as a shelf of glass containers stuffed with wads of the same newspaper, dirt and growing plants; and a large, hollow plastic rock split in two and stuffed with wadded tabloids. Nearby, a pedestal is stacked with blank sheets of rough, handmade paper created from pulped tabloids, and arrayed around the base are glass jugs of dirty water collected from the papermaking process, stamped with the phrase “Public Occurrence.” It’s a strong and poetic metaphor for the solubility of language and thus memory, which Aranda describes as “declarative” and subject to contested representations.

REDUX is a good example of what Art Lies feature writer Joanna Fiduccia describes in this issue as “smart art.” I’m not sure what kind of response the artists and the exhibition intend to elicit from the museumgoer. With the videos (and to a lesser extent the journals and objects), are we to merely take in this production by others and digest it however it goes down? This is in stark contrast to the hand-holding, pedantic approach museums have historically taken vis-à-vis the viewer. Yet, for all the talk of revolution, I

felt anesthetized by the tiresome wash of words and lulling video images instead of shocked, outraged or morally indignant—is that the artists’ intention? Is there a productive use for (or instructive lesson in) stupor?

And “Museum as Hub”—Hub of what? For whom? Although there are three planned events for the space during the project’s three-month run, visiting the museum in between is a perplexing experience, imparting a distinct sensation that the action is occurring somewhere else (particularly when looking at those empty bleachers). How does the experience of the gallery presentation contrast with the public screenings and discussion components? Is this expanded aspect adequately communicated to museumgoers when the gallery is quiet?

None of these questions is easy for an art institution to answer when it engages in “experiments,” or new forms of audience engagement, as so many museums appear increasingly compelled to develop: the reading room, the lecture hall, the lounge, the gymnasium, the video arcade. At New Museum, the flavor seems to be an aggressive avoidance of institutional orthodoxy—here, the museum experience is an exchange, a “collaboration” (read struggle) with terms like *interrogation*, *disputed* and *contested*. Forget optical pleasure, or any pleasure—this art is a fight to digest. I don’t mean at all to minimize or trivialize the real struggles that Aranda and company refer to in their projects. But where the rubber hits the road—that is, for most, in the gallery—*Museum as Hub* does little to draw one closer or deeper into their interests. It is a hermetic wheel with no spokes.

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