

# “Not Really”: Fictive Narratives in Contemporary Art

January 27 – April 19, 2015

Curated by **SUSAN CANNING**



**CASTLE GALLERY**

The College of New Rochelle

These days, it is difficult to know fact from fiction. Voyeurism is in, but can we believe what we see? In today's digitalized, mediated world, nothing is sure, fixed or really real. Photoshop naturalizes the false. Any image can be manipulated, cropped, retouched, enhanced, any sound altered, any voice “Auto-Tuned” until authenticity is left in doubt. Likewise, “Reality T.V.” is all simulation and artifice with predictable narrative arcs and soap opera-like plots, directed and scripted dialogue, and post-production editing that seamlessly delivers emotional attachment and pleasure in between strategically placed commercial breaks. In “CelebReality” everyone can vicariously share the 15 minutes of fame not so readily found in the real world.

Collectively casting a satirical, skeptical, political, artistic eye on their surroundings, the 15 artists on view in “Not Really” deploy representation and illusion “against the grain” to lend another perspective on our current state. Their paintings, sculpture, installation, video and photography interrogate, critique, and deconstruct this illusion of the real and the meanings and values at play in the artifice and fiction of contemporary experience.

In her video, **ALEX BAG** satirizes consumer and media culture, the co-dependency of high and low culture and the ways we define ourselves in relation to television, fashion, and art. Delighting in the critical potential of performance, Bag casts a witty, discerning eye on the many intersections of celebrity and mediated reality, making her project for the Andy Warhol museum both a fitting tribute to Warhol's exploration of fame and stardom in the 1960's and a sequel with its own savvy spin.

Writing and starring in her own performance video, **MARY REID KELLEY**, in collaboration with her husband **PATRICK KELLEY**, uses the past as a conceptual frame to comment on present reality. With its graphic, black and white scenery and backdrops, painted faces and paper costumes, *Syphilis of Sisyphus* resembles an animated cartoon in which Kelley, playing a young pregnant 19th century bohemian named Sisyphus, interacts with historical figures, literary theory and romantic constructions of women and modernity. The script, an elaborate montage of allusion, jokes, puns, rhymes and poetic couplets combines with Kelley's archly artificial performance to present contemporary audiences with a clever entertainment intent on satirizing today's culture of vanity and celebrity.

**MAC ADAMS**'s photographs explore the narrative void, that disjunctive space between seeing and believing, that is at play in all representation. Joining together photographs that share rich color and intriguing imagery but refuse narrative connection, Adams confounds expected associations, undermining what we think we know. In a similar vein, his photograph of a shiny colander seduces us with its high keyed palette and sleek well-crafted design even as its supposed reflection complicates desire with dread.

If in Adams world, all is not what it seems, **TEUN HOCKS** photographs are all smoke and mirrors illusion, reassuring and intriguing, but just as artificial. Using obvious props and dramatic lighting effects, Hocks constructs scenes in his studio that he then jumps into, photographs, and paints. The resultant image positions the artist as the director, actor, and editor of his own reality tale. Hock's manipulations of scale and the medium authenticate our gaze even as his elaborate staging and hand tinting plunges us into a decidedly theatrical and surreal world, one that underscores its fake, constructed nature.

Painted on Tyvek®, a lightweight packaging material used by Fed-Ex and shipping containers, **ADAM CVIJANOVIC**'s paintings take on a cinematic scale. *Stage Mountain's* mural-like panorama thrusts the viewer into a disorienting expanse of river and valley leading to distant mountain range and a blue sky. This almost visionary merger with the romantic sublime is simultaneously disrupted, indeed, undermined by an elaborate network of scaffolding and windows that appear to hold up this supposedly natural world, disorienting our view and turning it upside down. In the middle, a painter's ladder stands matter of factly along the horizon line further underscoring the painter's role as producer of both image and meaning. Dislodging our faith in illusory reality, Cvijanovic reveals the constructed nature of collective fantasies whether it be of landscape or history, that in turn lead to further questions as to what we are seeing and whether we are looking out or observing from within.

**DAVID OPDYKE** also inquires into the interface between organic and man-made systems. Utilizing industrial materials such as PVC pipe and cast urethane, Opdyke fashions hybrid sculptures whose allusion to nature, detritus, and civilization's waste – like the Dystopian narrative of science fiction – is paradoxical and troubled. In Opdyke's sculpture, things take on doubled meaning: a cherry blossom flower is formed from tiny Styrofoam toilets sprouting from a plastic pipe, as the aesthetic forms of one system expose those of another. A tree trunk fashioned from urethane foam presents an even more ironic juxtaposition providing the materials for construction of form and idea that is only a simulation of its more sustainable renewable natural source.

**GREG DRASLER**'s paintings self-consciously reveal their role as painted artifice, as we take the driver's seat and look – out the window or windshield – onto staged settings that allude to memory and metaphor. Artfully constructed out of precise, illusionistic detail these artful simulations are dislodged by props, patterns, decorative arrangements and a high-keyed palette that undermines any pretense of belief. The only thing real here is the studio that frames our view and the labor of the artist's hand that constructs this painted space. Drasler delights in conjuring up the real out of the hallucinatory fabrications of the mind. His *Road House* installation of photographs of vernacular architecture juxtaposed on a landscape made up of bands of patterned color trumps the mundane world of the everyday with the ruminative dislocation of a field trip.

As Drasler, **LARISSA BATES**'s gouache and gold leaf paintings brings together dissimilar frames of our disjunctive experience with the decorative narrative of fantasy, a realm of design, pattern and play no doubt familiar to animé and graphic novel enthusiasts. In Bates's imaginary universe the fantastic patterns of Persian miniatures and Viennese flower plates cross paths with the narratives of white privilege, neo-colonialism and masculinity, leading to unsettling associations while undermining notions of the heroic and monumental.

**GREGORY ELTRINGHAM** also explores the expressive, interstitial place between lived experience and the psychological fantasy, reality and the dream, a parallel virtual world where one is free to roam unobstructed by logic, time, or social convention. Set upon an hypothetical albeit prototypical all-American landscape, Eltringham's perversely inaccessible dream houses present an alternative world view experienced in intimate proximity to the actual one.

Rooted in popular culture and surrealism, **LAMAR PETERSON**'s colorful cartoon-like collages and paintings offer graphic portraits of an often absurd world in which issues of race, community, and social and economic upheaval are both candy-colored and darkly ironic. This is certainly the case with *Cop* whose eerie vacated eyes and mouth, in the light of present day events, offers up a shifting double edged meaning dependent on the perspective of one's circumstance.

**JEAN LOWE**'s sculptures, paintings and installations explore consumerism and consumption now in the speculative world of art and auctions. Fashioned out of papier-mâché, ordinary objects and "trompe l'oeil" paintings displayed as if ready to sell become in Lowe's installation desirable collectibles of both the high and the low. Here all is simulation and fakery, a fittingly false addition for anyone's collection.

**JOHANNES VANDERBEEK** also makes use of recycled materials. In both works on view paper pulp infused with flecks and drips of color have been fashioned into facsimiles of the real – rocks, banana, stool, spatula. Joined together into zany edifices of absurd form and function these sculpted shapes act out their role as art objects – creative, handmade stand-ins for a tactile visceral material world that these days has all but been replaced by its digitalized simulation.

**PATRICK JACOBS** presents the viewer with a spatial and perceptual conundrum; we are drawn into a space at once determinate and infinite, natural and contrived, prosaic and otherworldly. Encouraging voyeuristic desire, Jacobs's elaborate three-dimensional, miniature diorama looks beyond natural phenomenon and optical illusion into the luminously transcendent yet completely constructed artifice of nature.

**ALEX PRAGER**'s photograph *7:12pm Redcliff Avenue* aptly sums up the many overlapping discourses at play in *"Not Really"*. We take our place in the crowd looking up. What we see might be a tragedy or just as easily a chance encounter of one world with another. Concern might be replaced with wonder, incredulity and finally the realization that we cannot believe everything we see.

– **SUSAN CANNING**, Guest Curator