

## *Other Certainties*

Curated by Summer Guthery and Amy Owen

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NYCAMS (New York Center for Art and Media Studies)

With works by: Tyler Coburn, Catherine Czacki, Patricia Esquivias, Tommy Hartung, David Maljkovic, Rachel Mason, Paulina Olowska, Lisa Oppenheim, Walid Raad

*Other Certainties* presents nine international artists whose diverse practices question accepted histories through alternative accounts of the distant and not so distant past. Here, history is retooled, or sometimes even invented, to reveal slippages in authenticity, often proposing an arguably more accurate and nuanced chronology. The artists' malleable approach to narrative, at times bold in motive, audacious and absurd, is infused with intimacy and humor through a hyper-personalized voice.

The works presented take many forms, including homemade history lectures, a film that examines the past through a makeshift time-traveling car wrapped in foil, and a raw animation of an imagined historical figure made from found objects and knick-knacks. These pieces, while wide ranging in subject matter, are linked by their shared embrace of farce and fabrication through low-tech or transparent means, revealing their process to gain credibility while also highlighting the assumptive and approximate elements of history making.

By taking an authorial role, these artists complicate and disrupt traditional methodologies of archival documentation. The seemingly fixed realm of fact becomes the basis of dialectical inquiry, opening the door to new possibilities. The works presented here expose complex circumstances that beg for further analysis, prompting us to become speculative readers of the histories that shape us. In this way, they suggest that known or documented accounts are never the last word, rather they are slippery, mutable, and hence, open to revision.

The exhibition will close on October 24<sup>th</sup> with a night of lectures and performances that blur the boundaries between past, present and future including: Rachel Mason, Pablo Helguera, Melissa Brown, and Carla Edwards.

About the works:

**Catherine Czacki's** installation *Ineffectual descriptor )1937(* juxtaposes an array of seemingly unrelated objects and texts that investigate both personal and impersonal histories: tapestries bleached beyond recognition, a handmade stool that has circulated amongst friends and returned home for a time, a ghostly image of two silver pendants, a time capsule. The relationships between Czacki's "curated" items pose more questions than they answer, challenging the viewer to fill in the gaps, cobble together the story, and slow down to examine the multiple layers of history present in her collage of material things.

**Tyler Coburn's** photographs *Chroma Blue/Chroma Green* examine the process by which individuals construct and assume political identities and cast themselves into the annals of history. Here, the artist modifies two images from the *New York Times* taken on the day when Tony Blair

left his prime minister post at 10 Downing St., and current prime minister, Gordon Brown, assumed this post. Blue and green curtains are digitally placed into the foreground of each image amplifying their flat, theatrical qualities. By referencing the chroma blue and chroma green screens used in feature films., the artist alludes to the often fabricated nature of the political realm.

**Patricia Esquivias'** videos *Folklore 1* and *Folklore II* present deadpan lectures on Spanish History that combine vernacular culture with subjective readings of "textbook" history. Embracing a DIY aesthetic, Esquivias captures these on-the-fly presentations through a focused view of her own hands, often schizophrenically grabbing at an amalgam of collected imagery, ephemera, and handwritten notes. As she displays these props to the viewer, her extemporaneous narration crafts a tapestry of unrelated facts, a revised history that oddly becomes believable through its embrace of the absurd.

**Tommy Hartung's** video work and sculptural installation, *The Story of Edward Holmes*, uses modest materials and low-tech animation to tell the chaotic adventures of fictional protagonist Edward Holmes. An omnipresent narrator weaves the tale of Holmes traveling by sea and eventually becoming shipwrecked on a small island inhabited by native people. In the style of Jules Verne, the story is told from the perspective of Holmes with a mock authorial voice. Hartung's social critique becomes clear as the reliability of the narrator fades with the whirling absurdist animations and dramatic play in scale.

**David Maljkovic's** filmic trilogy *Scenes for a New Heritage* takes a step into the future to gain perspective on the past. Each segment takes place at a different time over the next one hundred years at the same location, the foot of a modernist monument in Croatia's Petra Gora Park, which is dedicated to the victims of the Second World War. Unaware of the loaded history of the undulating metallic monument, young visitors at first speculate on the building's function and meaning. As time moves forward, interest in the building's significance is lost as it becomes an ominous setting.

**Rachel Mason's** sculptural installation and performance is an extension of a larger ongoing project initiated in 2005 entitled *The Ambassadors*. The work features small ceramic busts of political figures that correspond to the leaders of various international wars and conflicts that have taken place during each year of the artist's life, including self-portraits of the artist herself as an ambassador to each war. This aspect has led to Mason's eventual attempt to inhabit the minds of each of the political figures she depicts, writing and performing songs in their own words. Nodding to the portrait busts of Honoré Daumier, her caricatures and musical performances imbue these figures with humor, questioning who and how such individuals enter a historic canon.

**Paulina Olowska's** collage, *Sketch for Nowa Scena*, is part of a body of work by the same name that explores the complicated relationship between the US and the Soviet Bloc as seen through the lens of propaganda and pop culture imagery received by Soviet youth. Beginning with references to the multi-faceted and swift political changes in her native Poland, Olowska weaves together a new subjective history by redefining objects of culture. Her materials are gathered from politically biased culture magazines, punk aesthetic, and commercial imagery to form a new collage fore-fronting women protagonists as well as Olowska's own subjective interests and history.

**Lisa Oppenheim's** photographic series *Killed Negatives, After Walker Evans*, conceptualizes the missing visual information of a series of unpublished 1938 photographs by Walker Evans for the Farm Society Congress. "Killed" photographs refer to rejects of the film rolls through which holes were punched in the negative to prevent publication. With visual acuity Oppenheim reconstructs the missing information with one or more possible scenarios, simultaneously repairing history and revealing the archive as an opportunity for subjective reinterpretation.

**Walid Raad's** ongoing project *The Atlas Group*, documents, presents, and critiques the contemporary history of war and violence in Lebanon through film, video, photography, and essays. Questions are posed on the representation of physical and psychological trauma within archival documents and photographic evidence as well as the role of the subjective versus historical accounts.