

# THE LANDSCAPE OF WAR

NOVEMBER 10, 2007 - JANUARY 19, 2007



MIKE ARCEGA  
SANDOW BIRK  
ENRIQUE CHAGOYA  
CHRISTOPH DRAEGER

JAMES DRAKE  
MARK KLETT  
MICHAEL LIGHT  
TREVOR PAGLEN

FANNY RETSEK  
LIGORANO/REESE  
PAMELA WILSON-  
RYCKMAN

The artists in this exhibition are united by a desire to challenge the common characteristics of power, glory, honor and patriotism that are often associated with war. Taken together, the works present a visual landscape of war – both physical and metaphoric. Individually, they represent unique perspectives on the effects of war on past, present and future generations.

In *Untitled 2001*, New York-based collaborators Ligorano/Reese capture the moment on September 11, 2001, when President Bush was informed of the attacks on the World Trade Center -- the moment when everything changed and America was rushed into the vortex of a new landscape – a landscape of fear. Building on that notion of fear, Trevor Paglen provides a glimpse into a world of secrecy with his ongoing investigation and documentation of secret military missions. He uses telescopic equipment to photograph an off-limits military installation in the Nevada desert known to contain Area 51. The photographs are taken from a distance of up to 22 miles yet they reveal a hidden infrastructure of deception.

Michael Light's aerial photographic investigation Rancho San Pedro 04.28.06, exposes an infrastructure dependent on oil. The series chronicles tank farms, refineries, and the oil-drilling platform "Eva." This work represents Light's allegorical landscape of war in the US – comprised of the ravaging effects of consumption and consumerism that we humans have waged on the planet. Mark Klett's recent series of photographs investigates the social and historical significance of the Enola Gay and the abandoned Wendover airbase where the plane was briefly stored. By showing the ruins of the airbase, Klett reveals the important role history plays in our future, asking how, and indeed if, we as a society have learned anything from past wars.

Sandow Birk's work explores the nature of warfare and violence. Based on Jacques Callot's etchings titled *The Miseries and Misfortunes of War* as well as Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War*, Birk's woodblock series reinforces the notion that history has taught us nothing. According to Enrique Chagoya, "history is written by those who win wars; but there is always the other side, the other's history." In *Road Map*, Chagoya re-maps the world depicting the US disproportionately larger than any other country. Throughout his work, Chagoya asks what role the victor and the vanquished play. Terrorice, the most recent body of work by Michael Arcega, similarly indicts America's role as both aggressor and peacekeeper. Arcega uses rice to create sculptures of hand grenades and other weapons. Rice is the grain that the US gives to war-torn and developing countries as aid. Arcega cleverly plays with language and materials that are loaded with political associations.

Incorporating found video footage in *Helenés-Apparition of Freedom*, Christoph Draeger plunges us into a horrific scene of a war-torn city. As death and destruction unfold, Draeger deftly inserts subtitles from George W. Bush's 2004 inaugural speech to reveal the absurdity of our administration's promises of freedom and safety from the "Axis of Evil."

Pamela Wilson-Ryckman's delicately painted watercolors lure the viewer into a seemingly beautiful landscape only to reveal buildings in ruin and apocalyptic street scenes. In contrast to these catastrophic visions, Fanny Retsek symbolically counts each death in Iraq with individual hatch marks on paper. By making the exploits of war personal, Retsek implicates herself in the world events. James Drake's charcoal tapestries serve as large-scale mementoes blending a personal history with a mythic sense of war. Drake compels the viewer to consider the lasting impact of war, juxtaposing the futility and the necessity of violence during wartime with the personal experience of those who witness it.

This exhibition, largely inspired by the writings of Rebecca Solnit, illustrates the complex politics of war and our relationship to it. In *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics*, Solnit states, "We should always, especially when it is difficult, exercise our freedoms of speech and assembly, and I mean exercise. Rights are like muscles: they atrophy and aren't there when you need them if you don't use them. The First Amendment is in trouble not because of

Attorney General John Ashcroft and the USA Patriot Act, but because of a pall of self-censorship – some have spoken up with great courage, but many have been silenced not only by the acts of the authorities but by the prison of their own fear.” By embracing the role of artist as an instrument of social conscience, these artists are speaking out. Their message is both haunting and confrontational, challenging the viewer to fully consider the multi-faceted effects of war.

Anne Veh, Guest Curator, with contributions from Kate Nicholson.

## EXHIBITING ARTISTS:

### ENRIQUE CHAGOYA

History is written by those who win wars; but there is always the other side, the other's history. When viewed through this prism, history, for Chagoya, becomes a social construct – one that he creates by appropriating imagery from pre-phonetic or pre-alphabetic cultures and blending in contemporary sources of imagery such as the American mass media, Mexican folk art and religious sources. The result is a humorous political and social satire that exposes the conflicting duality of the historical perspective. Creating his own ideology, Chagoya tells the stories of cultural hybrids, political collisions and universal consequences.

After receiving a bachelors degree in political economics from the Nacional Autonoma de Mexico in 1975, Chagoya immigrated to the United States and earned his B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute as well as his M.F.A from the University of California at Berkeley. He has been awarded fellowships from the NEA, the Lila Wallace Foundation/Foundation Monet and the Tiffany Foundation and his work has been shown in numerous collections including the LA County Museum, The National Museum of American Art, and The Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Public Library among others. He currently teaches printmaking at Stanford University.

### MIKE ARCEGA

Michael Arcega is an interdisciplinary artist who is as concerned with Filipino history, imperialism and global socio-political issues as he is with puns. He employs word play and humor to discuss globalization through history and historic icons. Interested in how history repeats itself, Arcega uses iconic materials that draw attention to implements of power such as military strength, organized religion and trade. In his Terrorice series, Arcega uses the imagery of weapons and grain to speak to the broader issues surrounding US aid.

Arcega received his BFA in Interdisciplinary Studies at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1998. His work has been exhibited widely in such venues as the

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, The Luggage Store, and Southern Exposure in San Francisco; Ze Dos Bois, Lisbon, Portugal; Leefahsalung at The New Chinatown Barbershop, Los Angeles, and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. He was a de Young artist in residence in 2002 and a 2005 resident at The Headlands Center for the Arts. The artist lives and works in San Francisco.

#### SANDOW BIRK

At a time when popular support for the Iraq war is at an all time low, Sandow Birk's work is a particularly poignant and polemical exploration of the nature of warfare and violence. In the Palace of Saddam, 2007, Birk raises questions about the disparity between governmental promises and military action.

Sandow Birk's recent project with the HuiPress in Hawaii, The Depravities of War, features fifteen woodblock prints, each measuring 48" x 96". Birk brilliantly organizes scenes from the Iraq war based on Jacques Callot's suite of eighteen etchings, The Miseries and Misfortunes of War made in 1633. Birk's admiration and indebtedness to Callot are evident in his translation of scenes, but in spirit he is closer to Francisco de Goya's political criticism of war depicted in The Disasters of War. By continuing the tradition of making war prints, Birk reinforces the notion that history, and indeed the vicious cycle of violence that breeds violence, has taught us nothing.

Sandow Birk is a Los Angeles artist well known for his adaptation of historical art as the basis for works that comment on social and political issues of contemporary America. His work has been featured in exhibitions across the country and abroad, and his insightful, often humorous, works have received critical attention and acclaim. Birk is represented by Koplin del Rio Gallery in Los Angeles, Catharine Clark Gallery in San Francisco and P.P.O.W. in New York City.

#### CHRISTOPH DRAEGER

Swiss-born artist Christoph Draeger employs installation, drawing, sculpture, video, and photo-based media to explore his obsession with disasters and catastrophes. His conceptual projects often use appropriated photography as is the case in Helenés Apparition of Freedom. The footage is from a bleak Hungarian instructional film on how to react in the event of a nuclear attack. The film is presented in its entirety, strategically subtitled with text from President Bush's 2005 inaugural speech. Draeger writes, "I believe that the image and the (sub-) text form a new symbiosis, one that reveals indeed the subtext in Bush's words: the ideal of American hegemony and world domination through the mission of bringing Freedom even to 'the darkest corners of this world.'"

Draeger studied at the Institute for Contemporary Art, Long Island City, New York; International Studio Program, Studio of Switzerland; Natale Supérieur des Arts Visuels de la Cambre, Brussels, Belgium; and School of Visual Arts, Luzerne, Switzerland. His work has been exhibited with galleries and institutions in locations such as Sao Paulo, Brazil; Berlin, Germany; Paris, France; Derry, Northern Ireland; as well as in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Draeger's work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York; Kunsthaus, Zurich, Switzerland; and Centre Pompidou, Paris, France. He is represented by Catharine Clark Gallery in San Francisco and Roebling Hall in New York.

#### MICHAEL LIGHT

Michael Light's images are rooted in the notion that our historically fossil-fuel-based templates of production will cause destruction and dislocation far beyond any the world has known in what is classically termed "war." The seat of this metaphoric war is Southern California, a location that serves as the visual representation of Light's underlying question in this work – how do we define war: is it the opposite of living in happy oblivious consumption, or is it the exact effect of that oblivious consumption?

Rancho San Pedro 04.28.06 is a handmade photographic book documenting a helicopter flight over the southern Los Angeles basin that chronicles tank farms, refineries, the interstate highway system and finally the oil drilling platform, "Eva." This work represents Light's version of an allegorical landscape of war in American society – comprised of the ravaging effects of consumption and consumerism – that we humans have waged on the planet with little acknowledgement to either the memory of the past or the potential of the future.

Michael Light is a recipient of the 2007 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in Photography. He grew up on Long Island and currently resides in California. Major publications with accompanying exhibitions include FULL MOON (1999) and 100 SUNS (2003). Light's work is in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); Victoria and Albert Museum, London; New York Public Library; American Museum of Natural History, New York (permanent exhibition); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and many others.

#### MARK KLETT

Informed by his background in geology, Mark Klett photographs the intersection of cultures, landscapes and time. His recent body of work, The Wendover Project, investigates the social and historical significance of the Enola Gay and the abandoned Wendover airbase where the plane was briefly stored. Decommissioned after WWII, the Wendover airbase served

as a secret base camp on the Nevada/Utah border for bomber crews, training the soldiers who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Infused with a deep sense of history, Klett's images refer not to the immediacy of wartime mentality and decision-making, but rather to an understanding of the ineffectuality of actions that are undertaken and then erased by time. By showing the ruins of the airbase, Klett reveals the important role history plays in our future, asking how and indeed if, we, as a society, have learned anything from our past wars. This work was produced in collaboration with writer William L. Fox. A book, at present untitled, is planned for release in 2008.

Klett has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Buhl Foundation, and the Japan/US Friendship Commission. His work has been exhibited and collected both nationally and internationally for over 25 years. He is the author of twelve books including the recently released *Yosemite in Time* (Trinity University Press, 2005, with Rebecca Solnit and Byron Wolfe), *Third Views, Second Sights* (Museum of New Mexico Press 2004), and *After the Ruins* (University of California Press). Mark Klett is Regents' Professor of Art at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona.

#### JAMES DRAKE

James Drake's charcoal tapestries are at once looming and nostalgic, serving as large-scale mementos blending a personal history with a mythic sense of war. Drake compels the viewer to consider the lasting impact of war, juxtaposing the futility and the necessity of violence during wartime with the personal experience of those who witness it. In his image *Echo Rattlers Strike Hard Strike Fast Kill*, Drake offers a self-portrait of his time in basic training at Ft. Lewis, Washington in unit E52 (4th platoon, E company, 2nd brigade). The title comes from their motto: *Echo Rattlers Strike Hard Strike Fast Kill*.

Included in the 2007 Venice Biennale, James Drake is the recipient of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship and two National Endowment for the Arts grants. Born in Lubbock, Texas, Drake holds a BFA and an MFA degree from the Art Center College of Design, Los Angeles. His work is exhibited extensively throughout the United States including one-person exhibitions at Diverseworks Artspace, Houston, TX; SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; La Jolla Museum of Art, CA; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, TX; and the Alternative Museum, New York. His work was included in the 2000 Whitney Biennial and is included in numerous public and private collections.

#### MARSHALL AND NORA LIGORANO/REESE

New York-based artists Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese have collaborated as Ligorano/Reese since the early 1980s. Their work examines political, social and cultural trends in society and the media through the manipulation of images and sound from print, television, the internet, and radio. The iconic image in *Untitled* is instantly recognizable as the moment when President George W. Bush was informed of the attack on the World Trade Towers. That moment was televised throughout the world as we simultaneously watched the horrific tragedy unfold in New York City, Washington, D.C. and rural Pennsylvania. In retrospect, it represents the moment when the psychological landscape in the United States drastically changed. We were quickly rushed into the vortex of war and a new landscape was created – one based on fear. Today, the significance of this fearful landscape has not only intensified, but grown more polemic and urgent.

Ligorano/Reese's installations, limited edition multiples and artists books have been exhibited at Jim Kempner Fine Art, Kent Gallery, the Beall Center, the Cleveland Museum of Art, Museum für Angewandte Kunst (MAK) in Frankfurt, Germany, MIT MediaLab, Museum of Arts & Design, the Neuberger Museum of Art, and Lincoln Center. They have received fellowships and funding from the Jerome Foundation, the Puffin Foundation, NYFA, NYSCA, the NEA, Art Matters and have been artists in residence at the MacDowell Colony, the Djerassi Resident Artists Program and are currently in residence at the Sally and Don Lucas Artists Programs at Montalvo Arts Center.

#### FANNY RETSEK

The artwork of Fanny Retsek combines traditional printmaking with drawing and mixed media as a means of mulling over of the current impact of the human race on itself, the environment and other living things. In her series, *Some People Count, Some People Don't*, Retsek creates images with thousands of hatch marks to symbolize a statistical figure describing any number of hideous events: a violent death, a family in mourning, the loss of an acre of forest, another barrel of oil, an animal living on a factory farm floor. While these numbers are symbols of on-going atrocious behavior, Retsek considers her marks as a type of penance for participation and the shapes that emerge from these marks as ghosts of the lives that are hidden in statistics.

Her work has been exhibited in San Francisco and the greater Bay Area, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Mexico and Australia. This year she was awarded an artist residency at Works/San Jose. Retsek received her Master of Fine Arts from San Jose State University. She is the Print Center Director for the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art and the former co-owner and co-director of Magpie Studios, a fine art printmaking facility in San Jose, CA.

## TREVOR PAGLEN

The drama in Trevor Paglen's work comes from the innuendo and mystery surrounding his projects— which focus on secret military bases, the California prison system, and the CIA's practice of "extraordinary rendition" — if not from the visuals themselves. An artist who blends conceptual art, geography and activism, Paglen uncovers the intrigue of covert government operations by putting the viewer in the role of investigator, meticulously connecting seemingly disparate pieces of information. His images serve as documents of the information he collects and assembles, often photographed with high-powered telescopic cameras from miles away.

Paglen holds a BA from UC Berkeley, an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and is currently completing a PhD in the Department of Geography at the University of California at Berkeley. His first book co-authored with A.C. Thompson, *Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the C.I.A.'s Rendition Flights*, was released in September 2006. Paglen's artwork has been shown at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art (2003), the California College of the Arts (2002), MASSMOCA (2006), Halle 14 - Stiftung Federkiel (2006), *Diverse Works* (2005), and numerous other arts venues, universities, conferences, and public spaces. He has had one-person shows at Deadtech (2001) and the LAB (2005), and Bellwether Gallery (2006).

## PAMELA WILSON-RYCKMAN

Contrasting the delicate beauty of her palette with the turmoil of her subject matter, Pamela Wilson-Ryckman's watercolors are illustrative of a civilization on the brink of destruction, subjected to large-scale crises and catastrophe. Intentionally ambiguous, Wilson-Ryckman strives to combine the language of abstract painting with the realities of dealing with disaster. In her series *Noise*, Wilson-Ryckman takes a more omniscient and sublime perspective, allowing the viewer to look down on an exploded vehicle in all its horror and beauty.

Pamela Wilson Ryckman received her B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley and her M.A. from the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. She has been awarded fellowships from Yaddo in New York and the Ossabow Island Foundation.

The Landscape of War is sponsored in part by Deborah and Andy Rappaport.

### Hours

Tues - Wed, Fri 10 - 5  
Thurs 10 - 8  
Sat 12 - 5

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