

"freeStanding" is a group exhibition about the figurative defined by a performative stance, a live immediacy, and an attitude of (sometimes brazen) autonomy. The exhibition includes the work of fifteen contemporary artists, a group comprised of young international talent: Gillian Wearing, Martin Creed (London), Annika von Hausswolff (Stockholm), Erwin Wurm (Austria), Lara Schnitger, Matthew Monahan, Evan Holloway, Torbjörn Vejvi (Los Angeles), Type A, Christopher Chiappa (New York), emerging artists Emily Thompson (Los Angeles), Martha Morgan (Cambridge, New York), Lucy Pullen (Elkins Park, Pennsylvania), gansomaeda (Tokyo), and self-taught, octogenarian Ida May Sydnor (Philadelphia). With the exception of Sydnor all the artists are exhibiting in the region for the first time. Executed in a variety of media (including sculpture, video, drawing, photography, and performance), the sixteen works in the exhibition explore figurative presence suspended between possibility and consequence, fiction and record, the existential and the absurd. While figuration as a subject is timeless—if not primal—the treatments here reflect not only a contemporary dissolution of media and art historical categories, but also the cumulative experience of four decades of performance art, a new concern for engaging the viewer, and a mounting regard for documentation.

The show strives to investigate diverse interpretations of the upright, performative figure, a notion perhaps most conspicuously expressed by the three sculptures in the exhibition. **Lara Schnitger's** *Now That You're Dead* (2000), is a tent-like web made of broad strips of plaid cloth endowed with seven appendage-like pockets (sewn from camouflage fabric) that hold wooden sticks of various lengths tightly in suspension. Suggesting an abstract figure in rotation, the open fabric and interior armature permit the viewer to see both the inside and outside at the same time. Despite the work's formal and mechanical complexity, the harmonic tension keeping the whole thing together is that we sense immediately. This reciprocal exchange of internal and external forces is also at play in **Torbjörn Vejvi's** *Untitled (Turtleneck)* (2000). This deceptively simple sculpture conflates throat and spine, hanging and standing, inside and outside, viewer and artwork. (The piece actually proposes the possibility of gazing down into one's own body.) **Martha Morgan's** *Tower* (1998), a hollow, knee-high column built from hundreds of sugar cubes, also invites us to look down into a cylinder. Like Schnitger's work, the piece allows us to enjoy both its inside and outside simultaneously. Sensing its perfection, we're made to question the structural integrity of our own bodies. Originally built as a model for an eighteen-foot-high tower made of salt blocks, this open column, which at first glance appears fragile, is a powerful entity unto itself.

The vulnerability of the vertical is taken to dramatic extremes in **Christopher Chiappa's** 12-part photo-sequence in which the artist is seen gnawing away like a beaver at the trunk of a young tree until it falls. Vividly documented in color (both at middle distance and as a series of close-ups that show the artist's bleeding mouth), the recorded action is given a visceral charge that also characterizes *IAI* (2000), a 90-second video by **gansomaeda** (Gaku Tsutaya and Go Watanabe). Distilled from a one-hour promotional tape produced by Zennihon-Shizandorenmei, a group of traditional Japanese swordsmen, the work is comprised of brief takes documenting costumed

practitioners furiously slicing an upright bamboo post as part of their training. **gansomaeda's** editing formally restates Chiappa's attack of the tree in radically different cultural terms.

Annika von Hausswloff's large-scale C-Print *Mom and Dad Are Making Out* (1999) and **Erwin Wurm's** *One-minute Sculptures* (1997-99) embody the spirit of much of the work included in "freeStanding." An example of this artist's highly stylized approach toward the anonymous figure, von Hausswloff's photograph documents what appears to be an intimate, gymnastic pose. Two bodies, one carrying the other, semi-clothed, their backsides to the camera, create the rigid form of the letter X. The tension between the vulnerability of their exposure and the confidence of the imposed geometry is palpable. Wurm is a veteran performer of "non-events" documented on film or video. His *One-minute Sculptures* are snapshot-like records that likewise capture improvisatory (if not innocently precarious) predicaments between figures and objects, sustaining them indefinitely as images. Hybrids of photography, performance, and sculpture, these works are defined by a wired immediacy that actively captivates the viewer.

The plausible, the courageous, and the outcast witnessed in public settings also present themselves as subjects. **Emily Thompson's** *What Happened to the General?* (2000) is the opening panel to series of nine large-scale photo-collages. The work depicts an aerial view of a landscape populated with miniature cutouts of photographs of equestrian statuary. Rendering these individual public sculptures into traditional battle formations, Thompson plays at restoring for these figures (mostly from Philadelphia, including Emmanuel Frémiet's *Joan of Arc*, and Frederic Remington's *Cowboy*) a sense of the epic locations that were the sites of their original heroic actions.

Two-person collaborative team **Type A's** *Outstanding* (2000) shows artists Andrew Bordwin and Adam Ames dressed as Wall Street businessmen frantically shaking hands non-stop for 45 minutes on a busy street, oblivious to everything around them. This extended parody of mutual self-absorption and male mirroring represents a form of exaggerated posturing also exhibited in **Gillian Wearing's** *Dancing in Peckham* (1994). Emblematic of the way this British artist succeeds in liberating socially prescribed personae, this 15-minute video depicts a young woman dancing happily in place by herself in a sunlit shopping mall. The ambient sounds of passers by that comprise the audio track suggest the possibility that she is moving ironically to piped-in Muzak. Ultimately however, she is animated and set apart by music only she can hear. Both Type A and Wearing use video's capacity for duration and stasis to demonstrate how performance elicits and maintains forms of "private" space in open urban settings.

A similar, self-reflexive dynamic activates the drawings of **Lucy Pullen** and **Matthew Monahan**. Pullen's large-scale ball-point pen drawing on silver paper mounted on plywood depicts a tangle of tendrils rising from the floor on which the work rests. Evoking the enigmatic presence of matter in suspension, these string-like forms, drawn freehand and weaving over and under each other like a Celtic meander untied, are essentially lines about lines in a drawing about drawing. Matthew Monahan's imposing 12-foot high *Red Pharoah* (2000) suggests a medieval knight crossed with an alien superhero, but in actuality refers only to itself. The perfect symmetry of the figure's network of lines is the direct result of Monahan's transfer technique—a physical and highly performative process in and of itself. This ordered complexity sustains an intimacy with the viewer that is echoed in the

elaborate silhouette of **Ida May Sydnor's** pen and ink tree. A signature image for the artist from a series she calls *Survivor* (1994), it bears in its branches the subtle shape a large bird, suggesting that this lone tree is infused with an animal spirit.

Works by **Martin Creed** and **Evan Holloway** can be interpreted as examples of sculptural performance enacted by and within the viewer. Holloway's *Reverse Strung Piano* (2000) is a two-part work consisting of a drawing showing the interior of a grand piano strung backwards and a recording (made with the assistance of a computer) of ten short works by Frederic Chopin as if performed on the inverted keyboard. Listening to the performance, the viewer is given access to a hypothetical sculpture made of sound. Creed's *Work No. 160*, (2000) is a prototypical piece by this artist who, since the mid 1990s, has cultivated prankster-like interventions in public spaces. Using doorstops, balloons, masking tape, ceramic tiles, neon signs, blue-tack, etc., he creates "object situations" that generate a benign but heightened apprehension of the everyday. *Work 160* consists of the gallery lights going on and off every thirty seconds for the entire run of the exhibition. This piece creates an unprecedented situation that demands a reaction, especially during the evening when viewers are stilled by darkness every half-minute. Like a strobe in slow motion, it transforms spectators into performative figures and attentive audience at once.

The works in "freeStanding" are active, familiar, and unnerving. Each conveys a sense of being caught or captured in a state of dynamic tension that never leaves the viewer unengaged. The impulse behind the exhibition is, in part, to establish a context in which the figurative becomes a process analogous to living itself. The subject matter is intimate and immanent, arousing feelings that are personal, domestic, and private, as well as brave, and even animal-like. It is as much about us as creatures as we could ever admit.

"freeStanding" was curated by Yane Calovski (Skopje, Macedonia) and Richard Torchia. Calovski is an artist currently based in Philadelphia; Torchia is director of the Beaver College Art Gallery.

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freeStanding

Checklist

Height precedes width precedes depth.

Christopher Chiappa

Eat Tree, 2000

C-Print mounted on Plexiglas (12 parts)
25 1/2" x 57 3/4"

Courtesy the artist and Fredericks Freiser
Gallery, New York

Martin Creed

Work #160, 1996

the lights going on and off
30 seconds on and 30 seconds off
electrical timer; dimensions variable
Collection Kenneth L. Freed, Boston

gansomaeda

IAI, 2000

video

90 seconds

Courtesy the artists

Annika von Hausswolff

Mom and Dad are Making Out

1999

C-Print

54" x 42"

Collection of Philip Goldentyer, Washington DC

Evan Holloway

Reverse Strung Piano, 2000

compact disc, ink on paper (52" x 51")

Courtesy the artist and Marc Foxx Gallery, Los
Angeles

Matthew Monahan

Red Pharaoh, 2000

crayon transfer on paper

12' x 42"

Courtesy the artist and Gallery Fons Welters,
Amsterdam

Martha Morgan

Tower, 1998

sugar cubes, acrylic

24" x 9 5/8" diameter

Courtesy the artist

Lucy Pullen

Untitled (Endless Drawing), 2001

ballpoint pen on paper mounted to luan

72" x 66" x 1.25"

Courtesy the artist

Lara Schnitger

Now That You're Dead, 2000

fabric, and wood

80" x 105" x 76"

Courtesy Anton Kern Gallery, New York

Ida May Sydnor

Untitled (from the series Survivor), 1994

ink on rag mat

14" x 10"

Private collection, Philadelphia

Emily Thompson

What Happened to the General?

2000

cut C-Prints, glue

30" x 45"

Courtesy the artist

Torbjörn Vejvi

Untitled (Turtleneck), 2000

wood and cotton

52" x 18" x 11"

Courtesy the artist and Richard Telles Gallery,
Los Angeles

Type A

Outstanding, 2000

videotape

45 minutes

Courtesy Ten in One Gallery, New York

Gillian Wearing

Dancing in Peckham, 1994

Color videotape transferred to laser disc

25 minutes

Courtesy Gorney Bravin + Lee, New York and
Maureen Paley/Interim Art, London

Erwin Wurm

One-Minute Sculpture, 1997-99

Color photograph

18" x 12"

One-Minute Sculpture, 1997-99

Color photograph

18" x 12"

Courtesy the artist and Jack Hanley Gallery, San
Francisco