

boy toys

CHRISTOPHER BROWN IF YOU COME
TOBIAS COLE THROUGH THIS DOOR
DONALD RAY DAVIS, JR. YOU WILL BE KILLED
JASON FORREST —Richard Roth
SCOTT GILLIAM
JEFFREY GOLL October 30
GREGORY GREEN December 19, 1998
JOE PERAGINE
THOMAS TULIS Organized by
BINGJIAN ZHANG Teresa Bramlette

*Video by Survival Research
Laboratories and The
Flying Robot competition
organized by Georgia
Institute of Technology
professor Robert Michelson*

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his mark. We're not just talking about a pin stripe down the side or the addition of a chrome tail pipe; this man has made a piece of sculpture, which Forrest, with all due respect, has documented for our amusement.

Forrest's fetishized representation of the American icon of freedom and power—the car—is complemented by the simple and straightforward paintings of used trucks by Tobias Cole. The pick-up truck ranks right up there with motorcycles and '57 Chevies as preferred property of MEN—stereotypical rugged outer-wear-wearing men, like cowboys and farmers and sculptors; guys who push and pull heavy things, use tools a lot and value independence. Cole taps all of this "uncritical devotion" in his small paintings of relatively unassuming old trucks, each of which is based on a small ad in *Truck Trader*.

Boats are another typical boy toy and there are two sculptors in this show that build and sail boats. Donald Ray Davis' boat is enconced in our exoskeleton and upon completion, will be a fully operable scowhouse. The notion of building, by hand, a craft that will carry you over a body of water is ripe with allusion. From Noah and his Ark to the many existing images of man pitted against the sea, the fragility of an individual being propelled by currents stronger than him—or herself has been the stuff of many a morality tale, and the heart of countless tests of courage. The sailor, like the cowboy, goes up against Nature virtually alone, surrounded by vast stretches of threatening emptiness. The boat is a place of safety, a semi-controllable unit within an uncontrollable waterscape.

Scott Gilliam's installation, in part, based on his recent sailing experiences. Roboized red Flyer wagons glide over a platform pictured with aerial Landsat

photographs take from space. In his statement Gilliam talks about being "lost," like his machines on their increasingly defined and revealed surface. If anthropomorphized, it is easy to project that the toys are "frantic" in their travels. We can begin to see a narrative of human/humanoid in a world armed with the power of new technology but faced with the timeless forces of Nature. No longer a romantic daydreamer, Gilliam has spent long, hot, terrifying days on a boat in an ocean. The foe has been made very real.

The isolation of mankind is at the basis of Jeffrey Goll's work. Feeling alone and afraid, Man has consistently reached out to create connections and understand the world. Systems of belief can establish order, but the imposition of one set of rules over another has long been a source for war and its resulting chaos. Goll's interest is in the nature of faith and he theorizes within a community

of objects—a tableau of sculptural parts.

Joe Peragine is the giant in his creation. His sandbox is full of ants; big black ants and little red ones, a much easier world to master and yet equally full of challenge. These guys battle over the same issues we do; land, food, survival. Despite their size and seemingly tiny gains and losses, their interchange is comparable to both our personal and our global wars. Replacing toy soldiers with army ants, Peragine playfully reinforces a desire to control—to be a minor God—and consequently, the complete absurdity of this ultimate power position.

Gregory Green creates artworks that directly consider acts of violence, and the current accessibility to information and technology that enables the choice of violence to become a vehicle for social and political change. His installation recreates a home lab, perhaps in your suburban

SELECTED DEFINITIONS

Boy 1(c) a male person not felt to be mature
loom object of uncritical devotion

Machine 1(a) archaic a constructed thing whether material or immaterial
e(1) an assemblage of parts that transmit (or modify) forces, motion and energy one to another in a predetermined manner

Stereotype 2(a) something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; esp.: a standardized mental picture held in common by members of a group and representing an over-simplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgment

Toy 1(a) amorous dalliance: flirting
1(b) pastime, sport
2(c) trinket, bauble

Boy Toys is about boys and their toys. It is about machines and power, redirection and personal imprint; customization and action. Women have been left out of *Boy Toys* literally, in terms of representation in the exhibition, and also quite figuratively. The most direct references to a male preoccupation with the female form in the gallery can be found in Jason Forrest's doll sculpture, a nymphet placed neatly on a plank/shelf that is just high enough to give us a peek of her panties, and in Richard Roth's installation of collected militaristic and survival-oriented ephemera. The lack of recognition of a woman's role or a feminine perspective is intentional. *Boy Toys* reflects only a male point of view, giving us the opportunity to isolate certain stereotypes; acknowledging extremes, absurdities and soft underbellies. The intent is to use these clichés as a springboard for discussion.

In the body of work presented in this show, Thomas Tulis documents VFW halls, military bases and monuments, lit dramatically and artificially through a method of Tulis'

own creation. This eerie light emphasizes the prop effect of, for instance, a tank parked on the grassy knoll of a quiet southern community. We, like the passers-by of this site, see a prepared set that reminds everyone who it is that occupies this space. The aging equipment reflects another time, an earlier effort; symbols of defense and protection in a land largely unthreatened by episodes of war. These machines that were built for destruction and bravado display, are now muted and benign. They serve to recall memories, and to honor, locate and signify.

Jason Forrest's large-scale photograph is another example of a thing more symbolic than real. The image is of a customized car so magnificently tricked out as to have become a completely different object. The vehicle shines to high heaven, reflecting the viewer and everything else that is near, in a deep, repeated pattern. The look of this car has been reinvented to such a degree as to call its function as a conveyance into question. The artist, and in this case I'm referring to the man who created this deluxe car, has left

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neighbor's basement, where carefully and thoroughly researched (but unnamed) pipe, book and suitcase bombs are ostensibly made. Like Richard Roth, Green is both impressed and appalled by the proliferation of this material, and the ease by which such a solution could be made manifest.

Christopher Brown takes a lighter sort of teenage-boy look at violence. Influenced by video games, cartoons and a revival of gothic-inspired ghoulishness, Brown works with fellow puppeteers to produce macabre little plays wherein big-eyed heroes go mad and others lose limbs. The horror is dampened by the medium, where backstage manipulation is constantly being revealed. The man behind the man, the one pulling the strings, is visible. While there is a long tradition of violence in puppetry arts (witness Punch's many victims) the form is still one most commonly thought of as children-friendly. Like cartoons, during which

small boys and girls giggle and laugh while watching the "bad" coyote getting blown to pieces, or Tweedie's success in pummeling the cat once again, puppets seem to get away with a lot of mayhem and questionable behavior.

The videos by Survival Research Laboratories and Robert Michelson's "Flying Robot" competition similarly express a kind of exhilaration associated with thrill-seeking danger. In "Mt. Science" mode, the "Flying Robot" teams making launchable machines and the California-based collective, SRL, pull out all the stops. They produce loud, aggressive, functional looniness. Like boys throwing rocks at the windows of an abandoned building, making bottle rockets in the backyard or racing hot rods down a country road, the impulse here is strictly of the mischievous variety, mixed ever-so-upliftingly, with curiosity and genuine fun.

Bingjian Zhang's installation is significantly more

subtle in character. In a move not unlike work by artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (who borrowed strategies from Richard Smithson's much earlier work, and presented piles of candy or stacks of prints), Zhang offers the viewer a freebie. The image on the print is of a Chinese eunuch of the Qing dynasty. These are altered men, rendered unthreatening by virtue of having their testes removed; simultaneously privileged and punished, honored and neutered. The prints are presented on an absurdly overblown and unnecessary forklift. The ridiculousness of this vehicle, the strength and power of which remains untapped, underlies Zhang's criticism (and respect) for this ancient Chinese regime, as well as offering poignant commentary on notions of a man.

The definitions that opened this short essay were selected from a much larger group of possibilities, and skewed in such a way as to suggest a particular point of view. The work in *Boy Toys*, however,

evidences a wider range of opinion, from playful to deadly serious. I would like to thank the artists, many of whom have put in long hours to realize their remarkable projects. I am also grateful to all of those who helped in this process, particularly Candice Bennett, Scott Ingram, George Long and Melanie Spinks. Our intern, Ginny Kollarik, assembled the data for this catalogue and has been a wacky and wonderful addition to our staff this fall. I am always thankful for the Center's mix of humor and support, and would like to acknowledge our Interim Director, Sophia Lyman, who has dedicated herself to the Sisyphean labors of our current transitional phase. Finally, I would like to welcome Helena Reckitt, our new Education Director. We look forward to programs that will enhance what we do in the Gallery as well as broaden, increase and excite the audience for contemporary art and ideas.

—Teresa Bramlette