

ROBIN RHODE
COLUMBUS, OH

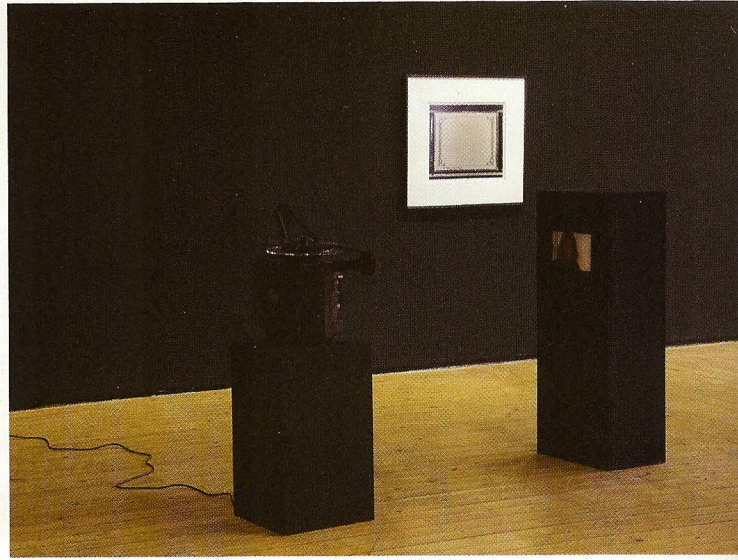
As you enter Robin Rhode's exhibition *Catch Air* you come upon a car that, stripped of its wheels, rests on bricks [Wexner Center for the Arts; April 2—July 26, 2009]. Or rather, you encounter a drawing of a station wagon, circa 1970, stripped of any saleable parts and supported by two piles of real bricks. Rhode is known for his performative drawings in urban spaces, which he documents in photographs that are subsequently exhibited in art spaces. Sporting various forms of urban dress, Rhode interacts with the objects that he draws with chalk and charcoal on the outside walls and empty pavements of public urban spaces. Installed on the white wall of an ultra-contemporary building, *Untitled, Car on Bricks*, 2009, is oddly jarring—an iconic image stripped of its urban context. Loosely drawn in black charcoal, the marks that make this image become an indexical reminder of the artist's performance—as well as a reminder that this is not a piece of urban detritus, but an artwork created specifically for the gallery context. It also suggests the urban context's centrality to Rhode's work. Ultimately, the photographic images displayed in the gallery—although well-produced—are always only partial reconstructions of performances that activate urban spaces across the axis of race, identity, class, and ethnicity.

Catch Air is a risky exhibition insofar as it requires visitors to fill in the gaps between the photographic record of Rhode's actions and the actions themselves. It is also Catharina Manchanda's first curatorial project at the Wexner, leading the institution in a new direction by embracing work that is primarily conceptual, photographic, and performative—her areas of expertise. Rhode, who presently resides in Berlin, grew up in Cape Town and Johannesburg. In his earliest work, he made drawings in prominent public places such as the walls of the House of Parliament—*Park Bench*, 2000—and an oil-stained pavement—*He Got Game*, 2000. In the latter piece, Rhode—or perhaps his surrogate—plays a horizontal game of one-man basketball, posing on the pavement in the act of running, jumping, vaulting, and

ultimately flying to make a basket. *Catch Air*, 2003, from which the exhibition derives its title, is a similarly themed skateboard fantasy, in which Rhode performs fantastic, gravity-defying feats.

Rhode's "memories" of apartheid are second-generation recollections garnered from his parents and others who experienced it first-hand. Operating in the territory that Marianne Hirsch has termed "postmemory," Rhode sets up a tension between the two-dimensional objects that he draws, the interaction of his three-dimensional body with these objects, and the two-dimensional photographic or videographic documentation of that interaction. It is as though Rhode were re-drawing the memory of the space back onto the space. In *Untitled: Dream House*, 2005, for example, he references a New Year's Eve tradition that takes place in Johannesburg's Hillbrow neighborhood—one of the most dangerous places in the city, if not all of South Africa. On New Year's Eve, Hillbrow becomes even more dangerous as people throw old furniture out of the window to make way for the new, potentially harming those unlucky enough to have it fall on their heads. In this series of photographs, however, Rhode transforms the frightening spectacle of falling objects into an imaginary rain of household goods, caught by the artist as they float towards the earth.

—Jennie Klein



GERARD BYRNE
DUBLIN, IRELAND

Gerard Byrne's intellectually labyrinthine *One year, six months, two weeks and four days ago* draws our attention to the history of artworks and the ways in which their presentation, context, and interpretation change over time [Green On Red Gallery; March 26—April 25, 2009]. Rife with counterpoint, the startlingly cool exhibition intersperses a film installation and three disparate series of exquisite black-and-white photographs. Combining images of newsstands, historical paintings, tourist shots of stuffed birds in a museum and totem poles in a park, and the re-assembly of a Robert Smithson sculpture, the exhibition is initially surprising and somewhat confusing. Coupled with the irregular placement of images around the gallery, the black color of all surfaces supporting images contributes to this predicament. The conspicuousness of these features, which typically go unnoticed in/as part of the background, complicate the reading process. The inherent complexity of the presentation leaves us struggling to find a way into the work.

The titles and dates of the pieces offer one point of access, for all contrast dates relating to the subject with those of the works' production. The film *'68 Mica & Glass (a Demonstration on Camera by Workers from the State Museum)*, 2008, makes us aware of a forty-year time span, whereas differences ranging from 318 to 417 years inform the photographs of historical paintings. By contrast, the titles of the newsstand images—one of which doubles as the exhibition's title—mark the period between the date of execution and the exhibition's opening. The rubric *1984 and Beyond*, 2005—, adds another twist. Shared by six images, it refers to a magazine article originally written in the 1960s. Together, the titles encourage us to do more than a few minor mental calculations. They point out how we think about time, how we quantify it, how it influences our imagination and relates specific past and future moments to our present.

Mixing high art references and popular culture, the works themselves bring related issues to the fore. In those employing museum pieces, Byrne offers perspectives typically available only to museum professionals.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Robin Rhode**, Robin Rhode in front of *Untitled, Car on Bricks*, 2009, mixed media, installation at the Wexner Center for the Arts in conjunction with the exhibition *Catch Air*: Robin Rhode (courtesy of the artist and Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York; photo: Cory Piehowicz; © Robin Rhode); **Gerard Byrne**, installation view of *One year, six months, two weeks and four days ago* at Green On Red Gallery (courtesy of the artist and the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin)

We see the sculpture as a collection of elements, and conservators whose faces suggest an intense encounter with Smithson's concerns. The images of the backs of paintings show that only one bears inscriptions and possesses an original stretcher. The other paintings' lined canvases and new stretchers indicate the obscuring or loss of historical and technological information. The large scale of the newsstand images engages our bodies as well as our minds. Sparked by curiosity and force of habit, we cannot but stop and peruse the eclectic panorama of magazine covers. This eclecticism carries over into the travel photographs. Views of Chicago's Marina City, retro fashion shoes, and totem poles have a dated quality that contradicts both title and date. Together, the images present a jumbled verity. They exhibit a clinical character in the way that they document objects as well as particular photographic purposes and traits.

Ultimately, the exhibition presents itself as an installation. In addition to unifying the various series, the black walls absorb the photographs' frames, pushing the images forward and emphasizing the visual rhythm that plays across the walls. The overall installation speaks of presence and absence, past and future, and the cycling of artwork in and out of exhibitions. Its halting abruptness encourages us to look closely, cross-reference, and then look again. Like the mirror that reroutes the film to the face of an empty plinth instead of the expected wall, the work keeps deflecting our attention, carrying us through changes in context, concept, and scale. It stands as a *concordia discordantium*, a harmonization of opposing traits. In *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel states, "The fact is that Kafka's stories, nourished by Kafka's reading experience, offer and take away, at the same time, the illusion of understanding; they undermine, as it were, the craft of Kafka the writer in order to satisfy Kafka the reader." Byrne's remarkable installation leaves a similar impression.

—John Gayer