



## IAN BURNS DUBLIN

Intelligence and wry wit pervade Ian Burns' *Don't try this at home* [Mother's Tankstation; September 3—October 11, 2008]. Improvised out of objects found in home goods stores and held together by a healthy quantity of nuts and bolts, his exuberant sculptural constructions exude an energetic playfulness. Incorporating light, surveillance cameras, and assorted moving elements, they also generate live video from astonishingly unusual movie sets. The multifaceted experiences engendered by media interplay engage us visually and conceptually by forcing us to discern what we are actually seeing.

Three of Burns' assemblages evoke Dadaesque experiments. *Spirit*, 2008, for example, includes plastic pails, a trowel, spirit levels, a broom, a grow light, an umbrella, the base of a shower stall, a rotating cut-glass bowl, and a spongy green floor. Inspiring delight and confusion, it recalls a house improvised in a crazy tree. On its far side, a video monitor displays a barren landscape with a blue-pink rainbow. The wind racing across this space can be heard on its speakers, conveying a type of low-budget-television artificiality. I imagine Teletubbies rolling down the slopes of this cheeky Caspar David Friedrich. But what does this romantic view of emptiness have to do with the sculpture? It takes a moment to realize that they are one and the same: a miniature camera gives us a new experience of the object. Caught between object and image, we can only move from one to the other. Still, the sense of disjuncture remains, no matter our understanding of the work's construction.

Similar strategies inform *The Blank Slate*, 2008, and *Snowshoe*, 2008. *The Blank Slate* combines a toy model of Air Force One, a child's drawing easel, and a step stool in an arrested state of collapse. It also displays video footage of a close-up of the plane engine seemingly zipping through the sky. *Snowshoe* combines white plastic cutting boards and a plastic bag. In addition, the drama of an arctic landscape fills the screen, its atmos-

pheric qualities created with an electric fan and light projected through a rotating piece of bubble wrap.

*A poor excuse*, 2008, the other piece on view, differs insofar as it is not self-contained. Distributed throughout the gallery, the tripartite installation ridicules the processes of film production and presentation by means of its impoverished production values. It also jogs our assumptions by mixing aspects of reality with fiction. Part one recreates a scene from the film *American Beauty* by way of a semi-circular barrier of fans that animates leaves and a shopping bag. In part two, Barbie and Ken view this video footage, but the soundtrack accompanying the installation comes live from the street, easily heard through the gallery's front door. The third part places us in the cinema. Here, the projection shows us the backs of the dolls' heads as they watch the movie, but the sound emanates from the set just around the corner.

*Don't try this at home* operates on many levels. The chaotic and colorful work inspires child-like excitement and incites us to disregard the title's dictate. Recalling an adventure playground, it urges us to explore all its nooks and crannies and discover its secrets. Endearingly irreverent, it mocks big budget movies and evokes their vacuity. Its CCTV scenarios subvert cinema's temporality through their indefinite persistence. In all this, the work indirectly references the paintings of Giuseppe Arcimboldo and Michael Snow's video sculpture *De La*, 1969-1971. Burns' gimmicks never seem gimmicky. Fundamentally epistemological, his work asks us to verify our perceptions. This is its most important contribution.

—John Gayer

## ART ON PAPER 2008 GREENSBORO, NC

For the 40th *Art on Paper* exhibition curator Xandra Eden has put together such varied work that almost every one of the seventy-five pieces on display—drawings, paintings, cutouts, collages, 3-D—requires a slightly different sensibility [Weatherspoon Museum of Art; October 19, 2008—January 25, 2009]. Despite some expected simplicities, much of the biennial is subtle and complex. But for me, at least, the show raises an obvious question—is there something about art on paper that distinguishes it from work on other surfaces? Sometimes. Elliott Hundley's striking assemblage *The Body of Polydorus*, 2008, enlists a host of materials, including paper. Other artists have employed other surfaces—even steel and aluminum—for similar work.

Paper is, however, almost inevitable in Michael Klauke's ironic *Mallock's Revenge* (*Portrait of Tom Phillips*), 2008, where ink and graphite form streams of tiny letters that in turn create the portrait. The title, of course, refers to Tom Phillips' superb treated book, *A HUMUMENT*, that plucks words and phrases out of W. H. Mallock's late Victorian novel *A Human Document* to construct a new tale within the novel as world. Klauke's lines return us to Mallock's original.

Will Yackulic's *Mantic Reversal*, 2008, was simply produced by typing asterisks and periods to create long parallel lines across a page. A thin wash of watercolor turns these rigid lines into flowing land and sky; a black gouache sun hangs, opaquely, in the upper half.

Some of the show's most inventive pieces were conjured by altering standard paper forms such as a business envelope and a pink doily. *Thermidor*, 2008, one of Dylan Graham's brilliant hand-cut paper cutouts, can be quite deceptive: seen from a slight distance, the interior of the oblong doily shape edged by carefully crafted blossoms seems to contain a number of romantic figures. A closer view reveals the unmistakably savage outlines of the French guillotine, complete with bleeding heads.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Ian Burns, *A poor excuse*, 2008, 10-12 fans, leaves, plastic bag, painted wall, two two-stage live-feed videos, projector, dolls, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist and Mother's Tankstation, Dublin); Gianna Commito, *Untitled*, 2008, watercolor and casein on paper, 27 x 22 inches (courtesy of the artist)