

# UNCERTAIN STATES OF AMERICA

*American Art in the 3rd Millennium*



## ARTISTS:

Allora & Calzadilla  
Edgar Arceneaux/Rodney McMillian  
Devendra Banhart  
Frank Benson  
Jennifer Bornstein  
Mike Bouchet  
Matthew Brannon  
Anthony Burdin  
Paul Chan  
Sean Dack  
Trisha Donnelly  
Jim Drain  
Piero Golia  
Hannah Greely  
Taft Green  
Guyton\Walker  
Karl Haendel  
Christian Holstad  
Shane Huffman  
Jiae Hwang  
Matthew Day Jackson  
Matt Johnson  
Miranda July  
Nate Lowman  
Daria Martin  
Matt McCormick  
Ohad Meromi  
Kori Newkirk  
Seth Price  
Adam Putnam  
Cristina Lei Rodriguez  
Matthew Ronay  
Mika Rottenberg  
Aïda Ruilova  
Paul Sietsema  
Josh Smith  
Mika Tajima  
TM Sisters  
Jordan Wolfson  
Mario Ybarra Jr.  
Aaron Young

## CONTENTS

### FOREWORD

Gunnar B. Kvaran 9

### INTRODUCTION

Daniel Birnbaum, Gunnar B. Kvaran, Hans Ulrich Obrist 11

### PARTICIPATING ARTISTS 16

Allora & Calzadilla · Edgar Arceneaux/Rodney McMillian ·  
Devendra Banhart · Frank Benson · Jennifer Bornstein ·  
Mike Bouchet · Matthew Brannon · Anthony Burdin · Paul Chan ·  
Sean Dack · Trisha Donnelly · Jim Drain · Piero Golia ·  
Hannah Greely · Taft Green · Guyton\Walker · Karl Haendel ·  
Christian Holstad · Shane Huffman · Jiae Hwang · Matthew Day  
Jackson · Matt Johnson · Miranda July · Nate Lowman ·  
Daria Martin · Matt McCormick · Ohad Meromi · Kori Newkirk ·  
Seth Price · Adam Putnam · Cristina Lei Rodriguez ·  
Matthew Ronay · Mika Rottenberg · Aïda Ruilova · Paul Sietsema ·  
Josh Smith · Mika Tajima · TM Sisters · Jordan Wolfson ·  
Mario Ybarra Jr. · Aaron Young

### ARTICLES

Bettina Funcke: ATMOSPHERE? 123  
John Kelsey: UNCLAIMED BAGS WILL BE DESTROYED 129  
Gean Moreno: POSTCARDS FROM PARADISE 139  
Frances Stark: AT THE RIM OF THE FUCKING PARADIGM 145  
Jan Tumlrir: ABOUT PLACE: ED RUSCHA, BAS JAN ADER AND  
THE "LOS ANGELES EXPERIENCE" 149  
Elisa Turner: CHRONICLE ON MIAMI 2000-2005 159

### SPECIAL PROJECTS

BROOKLYN RAIL—Phong Bui 169  
E-FLUX VIDEO RENTAL—Anton Vidokle/Julieta Aranda 171  
McSWEENEY—Dave Eggers 172  
NORTH DRIVE PRESS—Matt Keegan 178  
QUIET INDUSTRIES—Brian Sholis 180  
WHITEWALLS—Anthony Elms 194

LIST OF WORKS 198

## FOREWORD

Over the past few years, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art has focused on contemporary American art. The museum has added to its collection important works from the last couple of decades by outstanding American artists. We have also organized several exhibitions including works of some of these artists.

It seemed logical, therefore, to move on and see what the emerging generation of American artists was doing, and present a sample of "American art in the third millennium". As it would clearly be an enormously ambitious project, we wanted the best possible team of curators. And we were lucky enough to procure the services of the internationally experienced curators, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Daniel Birnbaum. Coming from the outside, but intimately knowledgeable of the American art scene, it could only add breadth to the curatorial approach and allow for a different kind of survey of current American art.

We wanted from the beginning to show young, emerging artists who represented a new "vision" in American contemporary art. We visited a number of cities in the USA and compiled nearly 1000 files on young American artists. And we were surprised by the level of diversity, complexity and richness. All over the country, it seems, young artists are engaging with an infinite variety of materials, techniques and concepts.

To do credit to this horn of plenty, an exhibition centered on a particular theme or idiom was obviously out of the question. We decided to go for a multistructured exhibition with enough space for multimedia installations, sculptures (exhibition within the exhibition), videos, performances, lectures (as artworks), not to forget the catalogue, (a work of art in its own right). In other words, an instance of every significant art form pursued by the new generation of American artists.

In this fragmented vision of young US artists (nearly all of them born after 1970) the spectator will find a highly narrative art, conscious of its art historical context, expressing on many different levels a clear social and political commitment, without losing sight of the importance of esthetics and innovation.

This kind of exhibition would be simply unfeasible without good connections in "the art world": gallerists and curators, critics and collectors, alert to art and art's conditions in America right now. Getting close to this young generation is about getting information, visiting studios, listening to everything and looking everywhere. I want to thank Hans Ulrich Obrist and Daniel Birnbaum for their great

work throughout this ambitious project. And on behalf of the curators I would like to thank people from all over America for supplying information and guiding us towards this new phenomenon in contemporary American art. Last but not least, we have to thank the artists themselves, for kindly submitting personal résumés. In one way or another, they will shortly be representing American art at the beginning of the third millennium.

Gunnar B. Kvaran,

Director

## UNCERTAIN STATES OF AMERICA

### AMERICAN ART IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Q: What are the United States of America?

Maurizio Cattelan: In a way the United States don't exist; they are just a mirage. Which is both exciting and terribly frightening.

Q: Do you like it here?

Maurizio Cattelan: That's like asking yourself: do you like water or oxygen? You might hate them, but—for better or for worse—you cannot live without them.

In early 2005, a postcard with this miniature interview announced a show we knew almost nothing about. With the rather general idea of finding out what preoccupies artists emerging in the US today, without relying too heavily on sources only in the most predictable cities (New York and L.A.), we set out on a long journey that took us to many places where we had never been before. Whilst crisscrossing the US for a year—visiting studios, galleries, alternative art spaces, and museums—we gathered the most diverse, even contradictory, impressions of a multifaceted culture and innumerable artists' dossiers that we brought back to Europe for closer scrutiny. The exhibition *Uncertain States of America*, the tangible result of this endeavor, presents but a small fraction of the challenging and sometimes disturbing works that we came across during this intense period of research. The level of ambition and sincerity of the artists we encountered made our exploration a rewarding undertaking. Clearly we want this exhibition to reflect the variety of expressions and the heterogeneity of the artistic landscape, but in the end the intensity and indisputable quality of the works remain our key criteria.

Is there such a thing as a new vision or a common language, perhaps even a new movement that can be discerned in the works of this generation of artists, all of them in their 20s or 30s? Considering the wide range of techniques and issues dealt with it would seem logical instead to emphasize the plurality of style. And yet the territory we try to chart, obviously more characterized by diversity than unity, displays artistic characteristics (a way of telling weird and open-ended stories, new modes of merging techniques, a specific tone we haven't heard before...) that we hope to see reflected in the polyphonic structure of the exhibition. Actually, the show is not one but many: a series of small, one-person shows of artists working in a variety of techniques, a program of films and videos by a large number of different artists, a display of sculptural works juxtaposed in one "garden," a series of performances happening inside as well as outside of the museum, and a presenta-

tion of text-related works and printed materials in the bookshop area. Our show is a multiplicity masquerading as a unity: inside the exhibition are other exhibitions.

Large-scale shows tend to be very much like continents (rock solid and imposing), says poet Edouard Glissant, who suggests another more productive metaphor: the archipelago (which is welcoming and sheltering). The essential heterogeneity of such a model no doubt better mirrors the multi-centered US art world of today. Long-gone is the time when the tastemakers of NYC ruled supreme. An irreducible plurality of languages comes out of many cities and there is no one dominating aesthetic, style, or mode of production. These are the Uncertain States of America where nothing is fully possible to predict and where surprise is always around the corner.\* (In a now legendary intellectual exchange, Diaghilev challenged Cocteau to surprise him. Perhaps his "étonnez moi!" should be seen not only as the prescription of great art but also as a challenge for makers of exhibition to constantly question what we expect from displays of art. Our show will have several chapters, and we anticipate it to grow in ways we still know little about. Like all collective endeavors it is a complex system with feedback loops: an organism or "learning system" that will gain a certain life of its own and might surprise everyone involved.)

What is new? Since the emergence of Pop in the 1960s we have witnessed a veritable orgy of repetition, appropriation, and revival, and the rhythm of these artistic returns has become increasingly rapid. At the same time, the geography of the art world has been expanding apace. Can today's samplings and repetitions, which often involve geographic and cultural displacements, be interpreted as critical reassessments of previous aesthetic models or has contemporary art finally succumbed to the omnivorous machinery driving the inexorable recycling of fashion and style? No doubt the pop sensibility is strongly felt in works coming out of most cities and one sign of this legacy is a recent tradition of the self-confidently flat. A certain entrepreneurial tendency is often a sign not of commercialism per se, but of an artistic practice concerned not only with the production of objects but with the social context, the very theater in which art meets audience. Sometimes artists' interest in the market and in the desires manifested in the world of commodities and advertisement cannot so easily be defined in black-and-white terms of criticality or complicity. No doubt there is a strong will to produce politically relevant art across the nation – we at least came across many examples of socially engaged projects that reference moments of protest, political critique, and subversion from previous decades. There is political rage in the Uncertain States of America, even a sense of rebellion.

Many of these artists catapult a European viewer back to ideas that appear familiar. Thus the notion of a foreign perspective, a view from the outside, evaporates once one gets deeper into the artistic material. There obviously is no such thing: in so many ways we are already implicated. References to art from other parts of the world, historical and recent, abound. To get a grasp on the recurring interest in formal structures which surfaces in rather surprising contexts today we are forced back into the labyrinthine genealogies of formalism. And in the highly

developed technological environment of today, the sense of the surreal gains new power. Often innocent forms and figures seem to slide into each other, creating strings of “sense” that lead nowhere and atmospheres that invite us to move in and out of dreams. At the very center of many of these works is an experience of enigma. Something, it seems, always remains unsaid.

The Uncertain States of America are not entirely American – influences come from everywhere. In a period where the official political culture of the US is viewed with great skepticism on the other side of the Atlantic, it seems important to remind ourselves of this complexity. The Uncertain States of America are not only uncertain, they are many.

Daniel Birnbaum Gunnar B. Kvaran Hans Ulrich Obrist

\* We want to acknowledge the inspiration of Stefano Boeri and Multiplicity, who in 2000 organized USE—*Uncertain States of Europe*, an exhibition on the transformations of urban environments in Europe and on the notion of uncertainty.

**JIAE HWANG**

Born 1981 in Seoul, Korea  
Lives and works in Miami, FL

**SMALLEST PLANET OF MY OWN**

as I woke up this morning  
I was delighted to find  
my new diet plan has finally paid off

I had always thought that the world was flat as a pancake  
but now I know it's shaped like a jelly bean

I finally get to keep a dolphin as a pet  
I am flying down the beach with ice cream UFOs

people tell lies all the time  
but this is true

I knew it was only a matter of time  
everything I touched came after me

and before I knew  
I was the smallest planet of my own

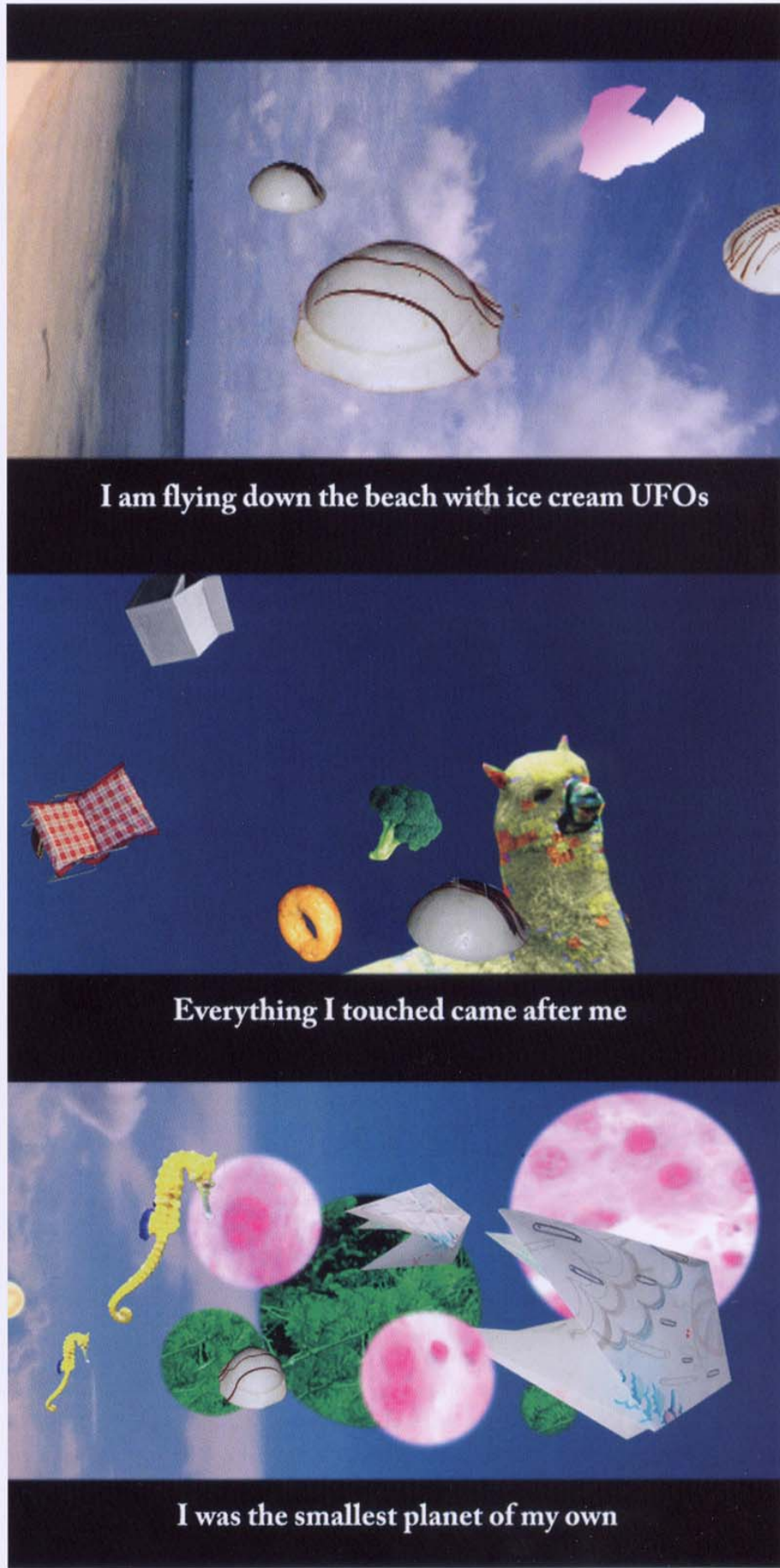
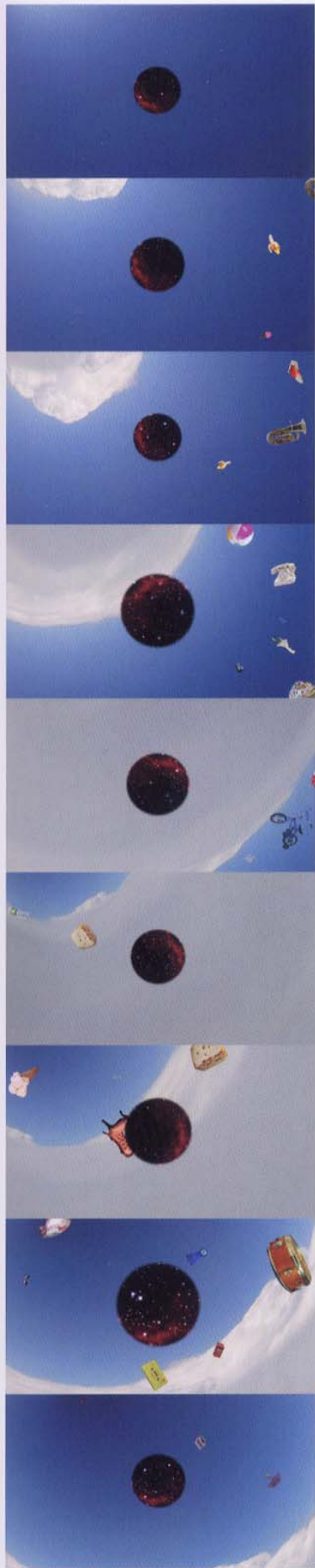
Jiae Hwang

Hwang's artistic vision is derived from her extreme alienation as a child growing up in a small, strange town where rockets and shuttles were shot into space. Her desperate search for a place to call home caused her to seek refuge for shelter and protection in another dimension, and forced her to flee earth and create a small planet of her own. Infused with desire and nostalgia for that 'no place', as Hwang calls her planet, she sings and lures us into her world like the mythological Siren.

In Hwang's art, there is a haunting quality of immense tranquility, which is mathematically controlled by her own sense of space and time. Protected by solitude, her hiding place is a complex temple-like structure based on the art of origami that she inhabits imperceptibly among us.



1. I was the Smallest Planet of my Own (Labyrinth), 2005 2. I was the Smallest Planet of my Own (Story tell), 2004



**UNCERTAIN STATES OF AMERICA**  
**American Art in the 3rd Millennium**

**Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo 08.10 – 11.12.2005**

*Curators:* Daniel Birnbaum, Gunnar B. Kvaran, Hans Ulrich Obrist

*Exhibition coordination:* Grete Årbu

*Video programme coordination:* Hanne Beate Ueland

*Crew:* Rune Andreassen, Kyrre Bjørkås, Audun Erikstad, Cai Jerner, Kai Mikalsen, Roger Pettersen, Berit Wilhelmsen

*Editors:* Daniel Birnbaum, Gunnar B. Kvaran, Hans Ulrich Obrist

*Ass. editors:* Marit Woltmann, Grete Årbu

*Design:* Matthew Brannon, Ulf Carlsson

*Photos:* Courtesies: Andrea Rosen Gallery, NY (Matthew Ronay); Canada Gallery, New York (Devendra Banhart); Cynthia Vargas (Mario Ybarra); Fredric Snitzer Gallery (Jiae Hwang); Fredrik Nilsen (Taft Green); Projectile, New York (Kori Newkirk); Regen Projects, Los Angeles (Paul Sietsema); Taxter and Spengemann, New York (Frank Benson)

This exhibition, to be presented in a variety of ways—either in its entirety or in partial form—will be travelling to a range of venues, including:

**Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris**

**Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY**

**Reykjavik Art Museum, Reykjavik**

We want to acknowledge the inspiration of Stefano Boeri and Multiplicity, who in 2000 organized *USE—Uncertain States of Europe*, an exhibition on the transformations of urban environments in Europe and on the notion of uncertainty.

*Scanning:* Digitalpress AS

*Printed:* Litografia AS

*Binding:* Lundeby & Co Bokbinderi AS

*Typeface:* Hoefler Text and Knockout

*Paper:* Maxi Silk, 150g and Lessebo Bok, 120g

*Edition:* 2.000

**ISBN 82-91430-45-4**

**Cat. No. 51**

*Education/mobile telephone information:* Hanne Beate Ueland

*Reception/Shop:* Ann-Christin Oveland

*We thank the following lenders:* The artists; Atelier Cardenas Bellanger, Paris; Collection Haven Perez; Collection of Craig Robins, Miami Beach; Collection of Gilles Frédéric Larroque, Paris; Collection of Luc Bellier, Paris; David Kordansky and Daniel Reich Gallery, New York; Fine Arts Unternehmen, Zug, Switzerland; Fredric Snitzer Gallery, Miami; Galerie Kamm, Berlin; Greenberg Van Doren Gallery and Salon 94, New York; Greene Naftali Gallery, New York; Josef Dalle Nogare Collection, Italy; Harris Lieberman, New York; Hauser & Wirth Collection, Switzerland; Lisson Gallery, London and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; maccarone inc, New York; Neue Galerie Graz am LM Joanneum, Austria; Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York; Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York; Projectile, New York; Reena Spaulings Gallery, New York; Regen Projects, Los Angeles; Rocket Projects, Miami; Sandroni Rey Gallery, Los Angeles; Skestos-Gabriele Gallery; Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects; Taxter & Spengemann Gallery, New York; Vincent Como

Thanks to neutral for the production of the video blog; [www.uncertainstates.tv](http://www.uncertainstates.tv)



ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEET FOR MODERNE KUNST  
 ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

©Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art.

All rights reserved

©Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst. Det må ikke kopieres fra denne publikasjonen i strid med åndsverkloven og fotografiloven eller i strid med avtale inngått med Kopinor, interesseorgan for rettighetshavere til åndsverk.

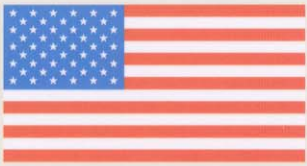
Dronningens gt. 4. PB 1158 Sentrum, N-0107 Oslo

Tel.: +47 22 93 60 60 Fax: +47 22 93 60 65 [info@fearnleys.no](mailto:info@fearnleys.no) [www.afmuseet.no](http://www.afmuseet.no)

The Museum is generously supported by the Foundation Thomas Fearnley, Heddy and Nils Astrup, and Astrup Fearnley A/S.

**EXHIBITION TRAVELS TO:**

**Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris;  
Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College,  
Annandale-on-Hudson, NY;  
Reykjavik Art Museum**



**ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEET FOR MODERNE KUNST  
ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

ISBN 82-91430-45-4



9 788291 430454