



Cantastoria

JUN 5 – SEPT 15, 2012

from Italian for “history singer” or “sung story” and is known by many other names around the world. It is a theatrical form where a performer tells or sings a story while gesturing to a series of images. These images can be painted, printed or drawn on any sort of material.

INTRODUCTION

Situated between Homer, Twitter, and the singing telegram, *Cantastoria* is an exploration of how contemporary artists communicate histories and cultures using languages, messengers, and witnesses as creative material. This exhibition explores the notion of the Cantastoria as a metaphor across cultures and specifically within contemporary art.

Historically, Cantastoria, which means “history singer” or “sung story” in Italian, were prominent in preliterate culture as vehicles for transmitting news, heritage, and history. Their information was conveyed theatrically in a town square through song and pictograms.

This exhibition’s theme navigates the basic quest for kinship between peoples and the methods by which we hold on to our histories. It explores the museum’s primary function as a storyteller of culture while the artworks poetically decode our diaristic instincts and desires.

Revisiting conventional formats of history painting and narrative-driven compositions, Cantastoria presents artworks that communicate

information through languages, song, storytelling, and lyricism. It sources origins and relationships with news media while touching on languages born out of cultural specificities of Utah itself or contemporary activism onto parallel and bygone eras such as the former USSR. Other artists reconnect us with dead and dying languages that are no longer understood as well as putting us in contact with those languages beyond our Earth. It is a way to look at how we transmit information, reminisce about languages of communication that are lost and obsolete, while exploring new pathways of connection that are emerging around us.

– Aaron Moulton, Senior Curator of Exhibitions

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Ignasi Aballi (Spain) • Aram Bartholl (Germany) • Adam Bateman (USA) • Beehive Design Collective (USA) • Aleksandra Domanovic (Slovenia) • Omer Fast (Israel) • Jakup Ferri (Kosovo) • Janos Fodor (Hungary) • Carey Ann Francis (USA) • Rainer Ganahl (Austria) • Andy Graydon (USA) • Pablo Helguera (Mexico) • Bob Moss (USA) • Lucia Nimcova (Slovakia) • Lisa Oppenheim (USA) • REP Group (Ukraine) • Ignacio Uriarte (Spain)

CONTRIBUTORS FOR CAPTIONS

Matt Coleman (MC) • Laura Hurtado (LH) • Becca Maksym (BM) • Aaron Moulton (AM)



REP Group

Mediators, 2006 – ongoing.

Videos, Durations vary. Courtesy the artists.

Mediators are recordings of performances done throughout Eastern Europe and refer to traditional folk singers who perform religious or traditional tales using the lira, a type of hurdy-gurdy. In one example, REP Group invited a blind cantastoria to sing about well-known events in contemporary art. Through a broken game of telephone, factual errors saturate the cantastoria’s story and represent a failure of language. The cantastoria tells an imperfect history and the act of combining a traditional folkloric medium with moments in contemporary art emphasizes a disconnect in language, culture, and history. (MC)



Ignacio Uriarte

The History of the Typewriter Recited by Michael Winslow, 2009.

HD Video, 20 minutes. Courtesy Nogueras Blanchard, Barcelona.

Poorump...click...click...click...poorrr...r.r. r ump...click. promp. ...! FroMt! Ignacio Uriarte’s *The History of the Typewriter Recited by Michael Winslow* is a video that documents Michael Winslow (Sgt. Larvelle Jones from *Police Academy*) mimicking the sound of famous typewriter models. Such sounds, however, are far from arbitrary. In fact, what Winslow recites is the sound the typewriter makes while spelling out the sentence, *The History of the Typewriter Recited by Michael Winslow*. Comical and poetic, the history sung makes reference to both beat poetry and bebop in its abstraction but also reminds of how the sights and sounds of our everyday space are continually altered by our intimate relationship with technology. (LH)



Lucia Nimcova

Exercise, 2007 and *Unofficial*, 2008.

Mixed media, Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

Focusing on the artist’s birthplace of Humenne, Slovakia, these two works document the ideological program called “Normalization” that was used to standardize the politics and society of Czechoslovakia during the period between 1969 and 1987. Nimcova combines official archives and pictures made by amateur photographers with her own images in order to reflect on the daily lives that were shaped by communist ideals of social uniformity and cultural complacency. *Exercise* captures moments of nostalgia, as Nimcova films people from her hometown who playfully demonstrate the exercise regiments that were once part of their daily routines. Rather than don lycra pants and white tennis shoes, the people in Nimcova’s video sport their aprons, business suits, and casual attire, revealing the ways in which exercise was scheduled as a unified momentary break, and not as an extended activity. *Unofficial* is a serial array of hundreds of old photographs that were part of the “official” Slovakian photographer’s “unofficial” archive. Nimcova recovered hundreds of these photographs and embellished them with different colors and doodles that highlight nascent individualism as acts of dissent. (BM)



Bob Moss

The Golden Key (Deseret Alphabet), 2010.

Pyrography on ried gourds, Dimensions variable. Courtesy Robert E. and Cleo R. Moss.

Folk artist and musician Bob Moss’ work champions the use of pyrography by using the Deseret alphabet as an artistic material and burning its characters and designs into misshapen pieces of wood or other found material. The alphabet was created in the mid-19th century at the University of Deseret (now the University of Utah) to offer a more phonetic transliteration of English, but never completely took off. The defunct script transforms Earth’s dominant tongue to a near alien resonance when seen here scarred into gourds, leather, and beehive formations. (AM)



Adam Bateman

Installation View, Kimball Art Center, Park City, 2007.

Courtesy the artist.

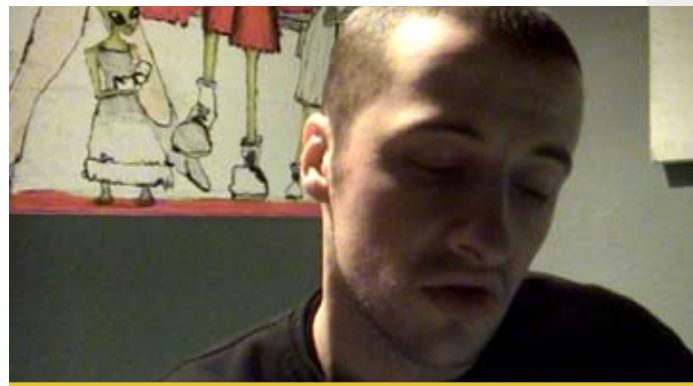
This towering sculpture from artist Adam Bateman suggests a monument to Gutenberg’s printing press and a eulogy to the obsolescence of books within 21st Century culture. Units of information become bricks in a tower of Babel, an amount totaling to 55,000 pounds. Additionally, Bateman’s sculpture responds to the architectural memory of the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, recalling the partition walls of the previous exhibition and echoes the 130-degree angle in the museum’s wall nearby. (AM)



Aleksandra Domanovic
19:30, 2010.

2-channel projection, 10 minutes. Courtesy the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin.

Aleksandra Domanovic's *19:30* (2010) is part video, part ongoing archival project. The Slovenian artist connects nightly news identification blips, known in the industry as "idents", to the arrival of techno music culture after the breakup of Yugoslavia. During the Yugoslav Wars, citizens of each region would bracingly tune in to the daily news to find out if they would be the next casualties of war. For many, the idents and their music became emblematic of the trauma of the period. In *19:30*, the idents run alongside found and original footage of the former Yugoslavia as the video evolves into an electronic music experience. Reconciling the trauma of war and the freedom that techno culture represents for the youth, Domanovic's video demonstrates the evolving transmission of information and the way it transforms culture. (MC)



Jakup Ferri
An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist, 2004.
Video, 6 minutes. Courtesy the artist.

An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist records Kosovar artist Jakup Ferri's struggle to articulate himself in a foreign tongue. Such stumblings attest to the problems and exclusions within the global village, where English dominates. Painfully tongue-tied, Ferri's video is both a defeating personal pronouncement and a troublesome indictment against the pervasiveness of a single language. His work quotes fellow Serbian artist's, Mladen Stilinovic, crudely made protest banner, similarly titled, *An Artist who Cannot speak English is No Artist*. (LH)



Andy Graydon
Still, Revenant, Bootleg, The Intentional Object, Space Release no.3, or Untitled, 2012.
Sound installation, 3 months of recordings played on 4-channel speakers with microphone. Courtesy LMAK Projects, Los Angeles.

Rarely does a viewer experience an exhibition more than once over its duration and never is that entire duration fully understood or appreciated as a measure of time or existence. Andy Graydon's sound piece *Still, Revenant, Bootleg, The Intentional Object, Space Release no.3, or Untitled* is a reference to American composer Alvin Lucier's soundwork *I Am Sitting in a Room* from 1969. Lucier simultaneously recorded and played the eponymous sentence continuously and the room's acoustics dissolve it into a reverberating and crackly white noise. For *Cantastoria*, four speakers transmit recordings from a gallery in Berlin. Recorded in early 2012, the piece documents the opening, clicks of a slide projector, occasional chatter, and the exhibition's closing. Together the signals connect to create a sonic architecture relocating the Berlin gallery, the time, the place and the life it had to present-day Salt Lake City. The recording lasts three months and is played on top of a live recording of the exhibition *Cantastoria*. (AM)



Janos Fodor
Brick, 2012.
Acrylic cube, 6 x 6 x 2 inches. Courtesy Kisterem, Budapest.

Brick is an acrylic cube presenting a famous readout from a radio telescope known as the "Wow! Signal." Thought to be of an extraterrestrial origin, and within the context of this exhibition, this signal is thought to be a unique and yet illegible moment of contact with other beings. *Brick* asks the question, "If aliens did contact Earth, what if we couldn't find a way to understand them?" (AM)



REP Group
Patriotism, 2007 - ongoing.
Black vinyl, Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artists.

Established shortly after the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine (2004-2005), during which the civilian population decried and revolted because of the illegitimate presidential election, REP (Revolutionary Experimental Space) Group is a collection of young artists seeking to establish an experimental Ukrainian culture in the contemporary art world. Like the pictograms at Newspaper Rock in Southern Utah, *Patriotism* introduces a new form of language and story-telling using an intuitive system of symbols. Often dealing with social issues, REP creates installations that are relevant to the public through the creation of visual stories that resonate in public memory. Iconographically reminiscent of Soviet-based socialistic propaganda, the Ukrainian collective's visual language tackles issues with humor, irony, and a sense of subversion. (MC)



Beehive Design Collective
The True Cost of Coal, 2008.
Pen and ink reproduced on recycled polymer fabric; 16 x 4 feet. Courtesy the artists.

The Beehive Design Collective's illustration *The True Cost of Coal* narrates the environmental effects of mountaintop removal coal mining in the Appalachian Mountains and its potential widespread ecological impact. Loosely headquartered in Maine with members scattered throughout America, the Beehive Design Collective is representative of a modern-day cantastoria in the form of social activism. With the mission to educate the public on issues ranging from environmentalism to the free trade movement, the collective utilizes highly metaphorical and intricate illustrations, performances, presentations, and workshops as they travel across North America. (MC)



Lucia Nimcova
Double Coding, 2008.
2-channel video on monitors. Courtesy the artist.

Censorship was an integral aspect to communist life—a system of codes that dictated rules and standards in often obscure ways. In *Double Coding*, Nimcova has stitched together fragments of nine Slovak films that were banned, yet there is no legitimate reason why these movies filmed between 1968 and 1989 were censored. The carefully selected moments demonstrate a double-coded world in which the logic of censorship is difficult to understand because of untold rules of proper versus improper behavior. These moments seem like innocent and benign acts, yet somehow they threatened "official" life, thus Nimcova uses her own double-coding system to express how censorship impacted the cultural landscape of Slovakian communities. (BM)



Janos Fodor
Amendment, 2011.
Plaster, 10 x 4 inches. Courtesy Kisterem, Budapest.

Hungarian artist Janos Fodor's cylinder entitled *Amendment* is a facsimile of the famous Cyrus Cylinder, an ancient historic document in the collection of the British Museum that justifies the legacy of Cyrus the Great. It documents his lineage as a king and was deemed "the world's first charter of human rights." For *Amendment* Fodor took the cylinder as an extension of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights created after World War II and added an amendment related to the "Right to Refuse to Kill". It is written here in the science-fictional language of Klingon. Its hybrid status as a modified artifact resembles a missing link in the history of civilization. (AM)



Rainer Ganahl
News Paintings, 2004-ongoing.
 Acrylic on unstretched canvas, 88 x 64 inches. Courtesy Elaine Levy Gallery, Brussels.

Rainer Ganahl is a New York-based artist who critiques systems of knowledge and information by reproducing internet news pages through outside mediators. These freeze-frames draw attention to the formal organization of news pages and the different interpretations that result from other people's readings and perceptions. Taken from *The New York Times*, these news pages were outsourced and reproduced with acrylic paint on large pieces of canvas, capturing not only the words of the article, but also the advertisements and links that frame the central editorial. By duplicating the endlessly changing news pages found on the internet, Ganahl consequently facilitates an archive of updated history paintings. (BM)



Rainer Ganahl
Please Teach Me Chinese, 2004 - ongoing.
 Drawings, photographs, video and performance; Dimensions variable. Courtesy Elaine Levy Gallery, Brussels.

The Austrian artist Rainer Ganahl uses language and learning much like a painter uses oil and canvas. *Please Teach Me Chinese* is a performative project where the artist invites someone from the community to teach him Chinese. This process, documented through video but also the artist's doodles and note-taking, often occurs with certain basic social exchanges, such as personal and cultural storytelling within the specialization of that tongue. The videotapes themselves represent an obsessive archive of documentation that indexes, visually, the essence of a foreign language. (AM)



Omer Fast
CNN Concatenated, 2002.
 Video, 18 minutes. Courtesy Arratia Beer, Berlin.

Omer Fast's short films examine our relationship to contemporary media through the lens of news networks. *CNN Concatenated* reveals how the news acts as a nonfiction drama that continually coerces viewers to question history. Fast began this project in the wake of 9/11; a symbolic moment when the birth of the breaking news ticker became a twenty-four hour lifeline for information. The different segments of the video create a haunting rhythm, as different words spoken by popular CNN news anchors are seamed together in sentences that target the viewer. In this way, Fast does not merely criticize television; rather the artist inverts our expectations of news authenticity, which inevitably encourages the audience to reevaluate how society creates and recites history through current events. (BM)



Lisa Oppenheim
Man holding large camera photographing a cataclysmic event, possibly a volcano erupting, 1908/2012.
 Unique black and white photograph, 20 x 24 inches. Courtesy Harris Lieberman Gallery, New York.

When photographs were first invented, many believed that the camera could capture the soul of a person and photographs contain actual physical fragment of one's being. While now dismissed in contemporary society, Lisa Oppenheim's photographs reference the spirit photography's history. The solarized images are not simple abstract point and shoot images of smoke from famous fires. Rather, created by exposing fire and smoke in the developing lab, Oppenheim melds subject with medium. Each image, like spirit photography, embodies the history, memory and physicality of the fire its represents. (LH)



Aram Bartholl
Dead Drops, 2010- ongoing.
 USB data sticks. Courtesy the artist.

Physical spaces become the receptacle and distributor of digital information in Aram Bartholl's *Dead Drops*. Traditional dead drops, like hollowed out books or highly engineered devices made in the labs of secret service agencies, are covert and inconspicuous vessels created for the transference of illegal or subversive objects or information. Bartholl brings the dead drop to the twenty-first century by embedding USB drives into walls as conspicuously as possible. Recognizing the value we place upon our digital files, Bartholl's *Dead Drops* create an anonymous and offline network where others may bring their laptops to upload and download digital files. Transforming buildings into USB thumb drives, there have been multiple *Dead Drops* installed in the museum and throughout the city. (MC)



Ignasi Aballi
Inventory, 2007.
 Wallpaper, 20 x 18 feet. Courtesy Galería Estrany de la Mota, Madrid.

There are almost 7,000 languages in the world today, each representing distinct cultures. Languages not only reflect specific histories of the people who speak it but also reveal what it allows those people to say. And yet, while the pervasiveness of the few have dominated the global, Ignasi Aballi's *Inventory* visually renders English, Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, visually insignificant and small. So small in fact, that it makes the viewer, as a witness to such an expansive index of the vastness and variety of the world's languages, almost speechless. (LH)



Carey Ann Francis
Rat Was Running, 2011.
 Oil paint, cattle marker, tarpaper; 24 x 16 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Carey Ann Francis was raised in the economically deprived areas of Austin and Houston, Texas. She paints with oil and acrylic and uses thrown away objects, such as scraps from burned down drug houses, as her canvases. Through this process, Francis creates complex and chilling scenes of drug abuse, violence, and poverty. In addition to her painted work, Francis also recites spoken word. Vocally expressing her stories and experiences is an important component to Francis' work, as her lyrics are another method of telling the stories depicted in her paintings. Viewers can listen and take in the dynamic messages of Francis's work. This combination of song and object provides a humbling experience, as Francis's words and paintings reveal how memories of life in the hood, while haunting, still offer a source of inspiration. (BM)



Pablo Helguera
Archive of Dead and Dying Languages, 2005.
 Wax phonograph cylinders, 5 x 2.5 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Before written language, histories were sung so they could be remembered and preserved. Such is the sentiment of Mexican artist Pablo Helguera's collection of Edison wax phonograph cylinders, called *Archive of Dead and Dying Languages*, each containing a recording of a poem, song, or joke that typifies and captures the beauty of the endangered word. Yet, the fragility of the recording method, itself outmoded, emphasizes the silence that follows after languages fall out of use and become extinct. What remains, is not a lasting preservation but rather, ghostly echoes of human speech. (LH)

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Cantastoria

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All of the books for Adam Bateman's piece are on loan from Worldwide Book Drive, a social venture committed to improving literacy rates throughout the world. At the conclusion of the exhibit, the books will be returned and either donated or recycled. Book collection boxes will be available at the exhibit. Please bring your used books to the museum to contribute to Worldwide Book Drive's efforts. To date, the company has donated over 2.3 million books internationally and domestically. For more information about Worldwide Book Drive, please visit www.worldwidebookdrive.com.