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pastforward

The 25th Anniversary Exhibition

July 31 - August 29, 2009

Featuring: Ellen Babcock, Jeremiah Barber, Philip Grant Davidson, Ryan Hendon, Raymie Iadevaia, Marielle Jakobsons, JP Kelly, Daniel Konhauser, Darrin Martin & Torsten Zenas Burns, Aaron Rosenstreich, Victoria Wagner, Andrew Wingler, and Megan & Blade Wynne.

25th anniversary

1984-2009

For twenty-five years, **The Lab** has presented some of the most innovative and experimental interdisciplinary art in the Bay Area. The organization has fostered local, national, and international artists, and served as a springboard for many to reach further career heights. In celebration of this milestone, The Lab issued an open call for entries, inviting emerging artists to respond to the work of past exhibiting artists, including Scott Arford (2002), Lauren Davies (2001, 2006, 2009), Paul DiMarinis (1988), Taraneh Hemami (1995, 2008), Lynn Hershman Leeson (1986, 1987, 1995), Barry McGee (1996), Orlan (1993), Tony Oursler (2001), Trevor Paglen (2005), Rigo (1994, 1996), and Rex Ray (1994).

Pastforward, The 25th Anniversary Exhibition, recognizes the influence of these selected, seminal artists from its extensive archive. Comprised of accomplished individuals whose work spans a range of artistic forms and concepts, these artists represent the arenas that The Lab continues to serve; their diverse career paths reflect the possibilities that The Lab hopes to illuminate for artists yet to come.

Trevor Paglen is an Oakland based artist, writer, and experimental geographer whose work deliberately blurs the lines between social science, contemporary art, and myriad other disciplines to provide fresh tools to interpret the world. Paglen's visual work has been exhibited at numerous venues nationally and abroad, and has been featured in publications including the New York Times, Wired, and Artforum. Paglen has received many grants and commissions, and was recently selected as a recipient of the 2008 award from the Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art (SECA). A frequent concern of Paglen's work is the pervasiveness of military operations and their covert shadow sides, evidenced in particular in his three books. As Paglen asserts in *Blank Spots on the Map: The Dark Geography of the Pentagon's Secret World* (2009), "Our own history, in large part, has become a state secret."

JP Kelly responds to Trevor Paglen with *D.U. (Depleted Uranium)*, a video installation aiming to inform audiences about the policies around the usage and spread of a highly toxic substance employed by the military. The piece is inspired by a desire to bring to light the fact that although purported to be safe, once ingested, particles of D.U. can cause chromosome damage and other health problems. Kelly confronts the status quo of the official stories held by the military, the government, and the media, hoping to lay bare darker realities and encourage a more critical engagement with current events.

Rigo 23 is a Portuguese muralist, painter, and political artist residing in San Francisco. Although he is especially known in the San Francisco Bay Area community for having painted a number of large scale *ONE WAY* sign murals (1995 - 1998), much of Rigo 23's work addresses world politics, as well as political prisoners from the Black Panthers of the Angola Three to Leonard Peltier of the American Indian movement. A vibrant contributor to the local arts community, Rigo 23 is one of the founding members of the Clarion Alley Mural Project collective, and also teaches occasionally at the San Francisco Art Institute. On the international scene, he has designed several installations as part of the 2006 Liverpool Biennial.

Aaron Rosenstreich responds to Rigo 23 in a photographic series entitled *Ocular Landscape*, in which he presents a circular view of constructed landscapes in the San Francisco Bay Area. The images of abandonment and reclamation of urban space represent larger themes of cyclical change. Rosenstreich was inspired by the subversive, political, and monolithic interactions with San Francisco found in Rigo 23's *ONE WAY* sign murals, and the way they play with the definitions of what is natural and what is manmade by highlighting their junctions. Following Rigo 23, Rosenstreich explores the creation and destruction cycles of the urban landscape.

Lauren Davies is a San Francisco artist who has shown extensively in the Bay Area, has been written about in numerous publications including Artweek and the San Francisco Chronicle, and whose work is held publicly in institutions including the Oakland Museum of California. The overarching theme of Davies' work relates to humanity's strained relationship to the natural world, evidenced in part by a preoccupation with scientific processes involving the counting of elements such as the number of spots on a leopard or how many icebergs are in the Arctic Ocean. Davies treats these themes with a dark sense of humor and brings a "do-it-yourself" approach to construction. Her many and various projects combine labor-intensive studio processes with unusual materials.

Ellen Babcock responds to Lauren Davies with a sculptural installation that addresses Davies' engagement with representations of the natural world. Based upon Babcock's visit to a tiny museum in Twillingate, Newfoundland – a visit Davies herself had made prior to Babcock – the sculpture teases out the differences between the two artists' approaches to the tropes of natural history display. Encountering a stuffed polar bear in the museum, Davies responded with a gently mocking mixture of humor and pathos meant to remind us of the absurdity of the way taxonomies simplify and freeze the fluid mysteries of life. Babcock, on the other hand, found the quasi-encounter visceral and beautiful. While she sees Davies as opening up a space for the Real in an iconoclastic rejection of the traditions of natural display, Babcock looks for vestiges of the Real in the moment of encounter when disbelief is suspended.

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Megan and Blade Wynne respond to Lauren Davies with the installation *L'enfant Sauvage*. In particular, the Wynnes are interested in Davies' project entitled *Dominion* (2007), in which she investigates the attempt to replicate nature for display in museums. Davies, the Wynnes believe, conceptualizes a sharp divide between man and nature, and presents the idea of man versus animal. *L'enfant Sauvage* addresses this divide by investigating the study of "feral children." The Wynnes show how studies of feral children represent the desire to come into contact with our "missing link" and tie into Romantic notions of nature as a purer state than civilization. They also explore the rich irony of how such studies, treating their subjects as freak show abominations, reveal a beast-like nature in humanity.

Lynn Hershman Leeson is an award-winning artist and prize-winning filmmaker based in San Francisco. Having held Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Davis and currently residing as Chair of the Film Department at the San Francisco Art Institute, Hershman has and continues to shape the practice of new generations of artists in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her entire working archive from 1966 to 2002 was acquired by Stanford University Libraries in 2004, furthering her ties to artists and scholars in the greater Bay Area. Hershman's work is touched by a drive towards innovation across and within genres, particularly in the realm of technology. As an early pioneer of interactivity and works for the Internet, Hershman would eventually conceive a sophisticated artificial intelligence in the form of Agent Ruby, based on a character from her film *Teknolust* (2002). Agent Ruby exemplifies Hershman's work not only through its cutting edge technology, but also by creating an encounter with that technology which forces us to ask, as do many of her interactive pieces, what it is we really desire from technology.

Daniel Konhauser responds to Lynn Hershman Leeson with *Public Phone Booth*, an interactive sound installation. Using Hershman's interactive pieces *Lorna* (1979 - 1983) and *Room of One's Own* (1990 - 1993) as a touchstone, Konhauser focuses on those pieces' concerns with voyeurism and surveillance and the question of public vs. private. He also points to a heraldic statement made by Hershman before the pervasive use of cell phones, in which she commented: "In the future people won't know what privacy is." *Public Phone Booth* addresses the ubiquity of cell phone use, along with other contemporary phenomena which seem to blur the public/private distinction and normalize exhibitionism, such as reality television and social media. A live feed of audience cell phone conversations is mixed with field recordings of public cell phone activity to create a sonic landscape of colliding words and perspectives.

Tony Oursler is a multimedia and installation artist living in New York City who has ties to the music and art worlds in California. Oursler is known for his handmade fractured-narrative video tapes involving elaborate sound tracks, painted sets, stop-action animation and optical special effects created by the artist. Blurring the boundaries between the organic and the artificial, Oursler's work forges stunning new presentations and methods arrived at by experimentation. One such experiment involved removing the moving image from video monitors using reflections in water, mirrors, and glass. This is also indicative of his ongoing interest in the ephemeral history of the virtual image, which he interprets in subjects as varied as the camera obscura as it relates to early man and the relationship between mass media and certain personality disorders. Besides The Lab, Oursler has shown at Paule Anglim in San Francisco and is a member of the musical group Poetics, with fellow California Institute of the Arts alumni Mike Kelley and John Miller.

Jeremiah Barber responds to Tony Oursler in a performance, recorded on HD video for gallery purposes, entitled *Portrait of My Father Illuminated by Pounding Dry Ground*. Barber has long been entranced by the eerie hovering forms that Oursler tucks into corners or drops onto the floor, and shares with him a love for the metaphoric aspects of projection, its ghostliness, and its self-regarding emptiness. Taking these as the foundational concepts for *Portrait of My Father Illuminated by Pounding Dry Ground*, Barber projects a visage of his father that only materializes onto dust, which must be beaten repeatedly from the ground in a ritualistic component of the performance. The projected image moves with the dust cloud and is affected by its contours, thus never fully seeming to become real. Barber here is, like Oursler, reaching to the ephemeral space between worlds where nothing is certain.

Barry McGee is a San Francisco Bay Area painter and graffiti artist also known variously as Ray Fong and Twist, the latter two used as graffiti tags. Associated with the Mission School (more broadly "Urban Rustic" or "New Folk") and the Bay Area graffiti art scene of the 1990s, a constant focus for McGee was depicting a persistently downbeat version of the urban experience, occasionally injected with a wry humor. His paintings, along with those of others associated with that time, place iconic central figures among abstracted backgrounds of drips, patterns and color fields. This style, one strain of the retroactively-coined Mission School movement, became highly recognizable, as well as influential to later generations of artists, also crossing over into marketing and other media such as alternative comics. McGee himself views his graffiti as the way he touched an even larger, more diverse audience than he reached through his paintings.

Andrew Wingler responds to Barry McGee in a series of photographs presented in found frames. The photographs deal with the effects of the dotcom and real estate boom in San Francisco, in particular those related to the usage of public space. With displacement and eviction rife and retail space at a high, music and art events found underground spaces in which to flourish, and demonstrations against the replacement of long-standing venues with upscale fare became common social activities. Wingler creates his series to honor these specific efforts towards reclaiming public space, but also as a love song to such efforts in general. These are efforts he sees as an inspiration central to Barry McGee's painting and graffiti art.

Rex Ray is a San Francisco based artist whose collages, paintings and design work have been exhibited at numerous galleries and museums, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, among others. In both his fine art and design work, Ray's characteristic style is unique yet also very influential, having inspired many Bay Area artists to create glossy resin panels utilizing abstract shapes and patterns, as well as a host of homages to and knock-offs of his popular rugs. His graphic design work has also made a significant impact, containing iconic posters for such artists as Björk and Beck and vibrant music packaging for travel compilations.

Raymie Iadevaia responds to Rex Ray by addressing the canonical approach to his work, which focuses on its decorative qualities and formal construction. Iadevaia aims to complicate this enshrined interpretation by deconstructing Ray's work. Creating a visual pun of homophones fluorescent and florescent, Iadevaia produces a tension between the typical notions of beauty that flowers often represent and the aesthetic challenge of garishly colored materials. Through a method of patterning, gaffer tape, stickers, and labels create forms on canvas that follow a logic of the decorative while exaggerating it to the edge of definition and highlighting its potential absurdity. Flowers clipped from botanical magazines twist Ray's formal constructions to a breaking point, poisoning the work in a state of excessive color and uncertain beauty, demonstrating the nature of decoration taken to extremes.

Paul DeMarinis is a San Francisco Bay Area multimedia artist who performs nationally and internationally, who also creates sound and computer installations and interactive electronic inventions. The bulk of his work involves speech processed and synthesized by computers, and has variously used optics and computers to make new sounds by scanning old phonograph records with lasers, tapped the interaction of body and electricity to make music, and examined the myths of electricity in communication. DeMarinis teaches art at Stanford University, passing along his curiosity about the aesthetic and philosophical possibilities of technology and his inventive approach to bringing together timeless or antique technologies with those that are emerging.

Phillip Grant Davidson responds to Paul DeMarinis in a series of silver gelatin prints which treats imaging processes as surrogates for human vision, believing the limits thereof can be traced in this way. In this series Davidson exploits fundamental aspects of photography, such as time compression and chemical transformation. The photographic lights in one print are used as both source and subject, revealing an ethereal environment which in lived space is a blinding luminosity. The inherently built nature of mechanical sight complicates our potential hopes for photographic truth, a fact in which Davidson grounds his work, encouraging the viewer to reassess and remain aware of the systems that deliver and shape our cognitive impressions. While taking a much different approach, Davidson shares with DeMarinis an interest in humanity's relationship to its machinery, and how natural processes such as speech or sight become retroactively shaped by those technologies originally adopted as their surrogates.

Taraneh Hemami is an award-winning artist who has exhibited regularly at national and international venues. Born in Iran and immigrating to the United States, Hemami conceives her work as the visual and conceptual language with which she records, translates and interprets her hybrid existence, creating personal as well as collective archives that transform cultural memory into the material world. Combining influences from Persian art, architecture, and poetry, her multidisciplinary works explore the complex cultural politics of exile. Through her exhibitions, numerous artist residencies, and community projects, Hemami has engaged a number of participants and collaborators, creating opportunity for creative exchange and furthering a dialogue around themes of displacement, preservation, and memory.

Victoria Wagner responds to Taraneh Hemami by picking up the thread of displacement in a large-scale installation. Having discovered in her own work a retracing of her connection to the Sierra Nevada of her youth from which she has been displaced, Wagner envisioned using a mountain motif to also address Hemami's dual sense of existence – the feeling of being neither here nor there. Drawn and built terrain is meant to resemble on the one side the Iranian plateau, and on the other the foothills of the Sierra Nevada in Northern California. Between the two "ranges" are lines modulating in color and a treated recording of Hemami. Wagner's goal is not to seek out differences in perspective between Hemami's country of origin and the one she now inhabits, but rather is to explore the space between two places.

Orlan is a French artist who divides her time between Los Angeles, New York, and Paris. Although most famous for her provocative work with plastic surgery in the early to mid nineties, her oeuvre begins in the sixties and is still evolving today. Among other innovations, Orlan launched the first online magazine of contemporary art, *Art-Accès-Revue*, on France's precursor to the Internet, the Minitel. Beginning in 1990 Orlan's most well-known work, *The Reincarnation of Saint-Orlan*, involves a series of plastic surgeries which morph the artist to resemble historical paintings and sculptures, and which have been broadcast in art institutions throughout the world. Orlan's goal in these surgeries is to acquire the ideal of beauty as suggested by the men who paint women, injecting into art historical dialogue a meta statement about the politics of representation and its relationship to biology and the self.

Torsten Zenas Burns and Darrin Martin respond to Orlan in *Beyond a Carnal Love*, a single-channel video created through a series of role playing workshops that enacted a romance between four characters based upon two obscure Marvel superheroes and two internationally renowned art personalities – one of whom is Orlan. Originally appearing in their earlier video *What If?*, each of the four characters deals with a different aspect of the body in relationship to technology, representation, and carnality. *Beyond a Carnal Love* focuses on the mating rituals of the re-imagined Orlan, addressing the complexity of issues in Orlan's work while resituating them in a current dialogue concerning state sanctioned intimate relations.

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Ryan Hendon responds to Trevor Paglen in a photographic series by drawing on a similar set of concerns regarding the presence and effect of the military. In contrast to Paglen, however, whose work pertains to the hidden or addresses the classified, Hendon captures the specter of the military by depicting remnant objects as they continue to survive, as apparitions, in everyday life. *Turret Foundations* depicts a military setting that is no longer active and has entered society under new pretexts. Overgrown with plants and transformed into ethereal still lifes, the turrets serve a dual role as spectacle and signifier.

Scott Arford, a leading figure in new media arts, has produced numerous and award-winning works for sound and video. Arford explores perceptual qualities of the audio and visual realms to create immersive, synaesthetic environments where it is possible to hear images and see sounds. In 1995 Arford founded 7hz, a prominent San Francisco venue for noise and experimental music that currently operates as a studio and workspace. 7hz has hosted performances for many of the world's most challenging sound and media artists, and continues to be a space where new combinations of image, sound, and experience are realized. Both at the helm of 7hz and as an instructor at the California College of Arts in Oakland, Arford has helped shape the rich San Francisco Bay Area experimental music scene.

Marielle V. Jakobsons responds to a 2002 piece by Arford entitled *TV-IV*, in which special microphones pick up the sound of two television picture tubes, creating a feedback loop by sending it back as a video signal. Jakobsons' own piece, entitled *String TV*, similarly incorporates audio-video feedback loops, in this case employing a "self-sounding" stringed instrument built by the artist herself as the audio source. Additionally, Jakobsons involves the audience as participants, providing magnets which shift the feedback to create fluctuations, pulsations, and overtones. Conceiving *String TV* as a "breathing" system, Jakobsons combines random programming with ambient interactive elements in order that the frequencies of vibration constantly evolve and no two moments sound exactly the same. In this as in her other work, Jakobsons highlights the interrelationship between motion, sensation, and space.