

PECK SCHOOL OF
THE ARTS
Institute of Visual ArtsUNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
UWMILWAUKEENEW PROJECTS/EMERGING ARTISTS
August 25-October 1, 2006Nate PAGE
Shana McCAW/Brent BUDSBERGOpening reception: August 25, 6:00-9:00 pm
Gallery talk with Nicholas Frank begins at 6:30 pmInova/Vogel
Vogel Hall, 3253 N. Downer Ave.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211Hours: Wednesday-Sunday, 12 noon-5 pm
(August 26-September 3 by appointment only)

arts.uwm.edu/inova

ALTERED STATEMENTS

by Nicholas Frank

Who hasn't done drugs? Come on, you know who you are. My hand's certainly up. I had some beers at a cookout yesterday. I wouldn't call malt beverage exactly mind-altering, but actually I'd be wrong. Same goes for aspirin. A headache can alter a mood, so eliminating the ache can alter the mind's image of a bad day. We humans strive for illuminative vision, whether through drugs or other, potentially less harmful pursuits like watching movies or looking at art. Like drugs, art is a practice of alteration, meant to achieve new ways of seeing.

Nate Page, Shana McCaw and Brent Budsberg came up as art students in the pop conceptual-dominated '90s (think Cindy Sherman, Charles Ray, David Hammons, Robert Gober, Damien Hirst). Like many of these artists, they alter known things into less knowable things. They take common objects and make them bigger or smaller, taller or longer, or simply collect too much of them, without changing the essential nature of the object. This is interventional, rather than generative, art practice, and it tends to depend on acute cleverness.

A quick, deftly handled visual pun, the extended cord in Page's *Payphone* delivers an immediate thrill of recognition to the attentive viewer (cheap long distance). But whether that initial layer of wit can slip past the defenses of the art-hardened spectator depends on what effects last beyond the initial vision. A tricky thing about drugs is they can feel so good you want them all the time, despite the suspicion that overuse will destroy their better effects. Too much aspirin dissolves the stomach lining, too much whisky kills the liver, cocaine's high weakens against rising tolerance. As a delivery system, cleverness is both fleet and banal, and a risky play. Its effects can evaporate in an instant, reducing the object that initially sparks interest to a hollow cipher for "art." But in the era of ubiquitous cell phones, Page's cagey model resonates: Woe to the people who can't afford a cell phone, or even a landline, and who still rely on nearly extinct public payphones. Page's tactic is that of an ironic Luddite, but his position is sympathetic.

High cleverness and high seriousness go hand in hand, and canny comedy is the coating of the potentially bitter pills some artists ask us to swallow. Even the anti-art, anti-reason dadaists created powerful sense in their ardent opposition to the senseless brutality of World War I. McCaw/Budsberg's extended meditation on bygone farmsteading is quaint for its miniaturity, clever for its manipulation of non-existent gallery space, and admirable for its craft and conceptual thoroughness. As curator Bruce Knackert points out, additional resonance is revealed by the proximity of the piece to Page's Hummer-sized tricycle in

the gallery one floor beneath, its exaggeration stopped only by the physical limits imposed by the walls. There isn't room for either of us in this world, the works seem to say. Page's barely-bounded *Tricycle* and McCaw/Budsberg's fading *Farmstead* ask us to look through the gallery walls, a feat generally achievable only through the use of mind-altering substances, and to do so not only for the purpose of seeing what's not there, but also to look differently at what is. This is perhaps a most basic formulation of art's effects, but work like Page's boils the process of art/audience interaction down to essences, nothing abstract, overly personal or obtuse about it. You recognize what it is immediately, have a laugh and move on, but hopefully not so quickly as to miss what's really going on.

McCaw and Budsberg ask viewers to participate in their vision of a mythic, lost American landscape. *Farmstead's* faux-idyll seems unironical, but can we legitimately pine for the myths of an era that never really existed? What specters of history are buried beneath the topsoil? Family farms once dominated the Wisconsin landscape, to be sure, and in some areas still do, but at what cost to the original inhabitants, or to an environment subjected to "the worst mistake in the history of the human race," as Jared Diamond (quoted in John Livingston's *Rogue Primate*, 1994) calls agriculture? McCaw/Budsberg's light touch welcomes multiple readings from viewers.

The truth about illicit drugs is they can open minds. The horrible truth is that they also close minds, usually quickly and sometimes inexorably, as abusers trade expansiveness for a shriveling world of limited possibilities and dark delusions. Philip K. Dick mined this tragic territory in *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), a novel recently made into a feature film. Drug-addicted protagonist Robert Arctor wonders whether a single self can be relied upon to see itself as it is, stuck with only a private, distorted lens: "... I can't any longer these days see into myself. I see only murk. Murk outside; murk inside," he mumbles to himself. Artists who manipulate familiar objects give us a foothold on a shared vision of reality, helping to mediate the distortions of the new.

Nicholas Frank is an artist, writer and independent curator. He directed the Hermetic Gallery in Milwaukee from 1994 through 2001, and he continues to engage artists and the public in dialogue through workshops, critiques, symposia, lectures and other public events.



Nate PAGE

Artist Statement

My work—drawings, sculptures and site-specific interventions—employs a gendered, autobiographical perspective and mimics the strategies of male oriented institutions of power in order to raise questions about the role of these institutions in the formation of ideologies, individuality and the illusion of unlimited choice. Using methods and concepts derived from the practice of drawing, I modify the forms and artifacts of commercial recreation and leisure in order to expose expectations, shift the implied rules and generate new meanings for these objects and activities. By challenging the expected course of consumption, I reveal the cultural ideals embedded in common commercial objects and in the intellectual patterns found in cultural activities.

About the Artist

Nate Page was born in Wisconsin in 1976 and has lived in New York City for several years. He graduated from the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design in 2000 and will receive his MFA from CalArts in 2008. He has also studied at the Warsaw Academy of Art in Poland, AICAD's New York Studio Program, Hotel Pupik in Schratzenberg, Austria, and The Cooper Union in New York City. From 2001-2004 Page co-directed Rust Spot, a Milwaukee-based experimental artist collaborative. His work has been shown at Jen Bekman Gallery in New York City, O'Artoteca in Milan, Italy, Lothringer Dreizehn Space for Contemporary Art in Munich, Germany, No Name Exhibitions @ The Soap Factory, Minneapolis, Art Chicago (courtesy of Hotcakes Gallery), and the John Michael Kohler Center for the Arts in Sheboygan. Exhibitions in 2006 include a solo show at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota and a two-person show at O'Artoteca.

Credits

Curator: Bruce Knackert
Editor: Polly Morris
Design: Craig Kroeger



Shana McCAW/Brent BUDSBERG

Artist Statement

In the early 1800's, the city of Milwaukee was no more than a collection of small farming settlements. The site where Inova now stands was, most likely, a field or homestead. Over the decades, the city has slowly swallowed these agrarian communities. Little evidence of the rural life of small farmsteads remains; urban and suburban development continues to engulf the few remaining farms at a disturbing rate.

In *Farmstead* we are asked to exist in two places at once: a quiet country farm overlaps a university gallery; farm buildings are cut in two where gallery walls intrude. This convergence creates a juxtaposition between two lives: one slow, attuned to the changing of the seasons, and shaped by common sense and physical labor; the other fast, artificial, stimulating, and filled with the promise of professional and material success. More and more farmers' children are choosing the university over the family farm, and most of us are already well removed from the time when someone in our family made the leap from farm to city, forever changing the course of our history. Over time, the accretion of these individual choices has led to a significant loss of rural cultures as well as nostalgia for a mythic shared rural past.

Conflict between past and present is implied in *Farmstead*. Buildings silhouetted against bare gallery walls cast ominous shadows across the floor. The grayish-white structures have a ghostly, fading presence. Lined hardwood floors become the unsown acreage surrounding the farm. The light in the farmhouse bedroom window is the only evidence of life...the last remaining inhabitant who will, perhaps, soon sell the family farm and move to town.

Farmstead is an homage to a rural past that was built on an intimacy with nature and a partnership with the land. As we pursue an abstract notion of the future and are seduced by convenience and an ideal of prosperity, we sacrifice the practical knowledge learned while working a farm and the possibility of a symbiotic relationship with the earth.

About the Artists

Brent Budsberg is an artist and woodworker who has lived in Milwaukee since 1998. He has exhibited widely as a sculptor and installation artist. He has also curated several shows including *The Wearable Sculpture Fashion Show* and Student Exhibitions at Inova. Budsberg holds a BFA from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Shana McCaw received her MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1999. Since then she has taught at several Milwaukee area colleges, most recently at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. McCaw has exhibited her work both locally and nationally and has written art criticism for *Art Papers* and *Street Cave International*.

Together, Budsberg and McCaw have created numerous performances and installations. They are due to install a site-specific work at the Soap Factory in Minneapolis in 2007, where they also worked as a curatorial team for the 2005 exhibition, *Gigantic*. Another upcoming collaborative project, a *WhiteBoxPainters* exhibition in Calgary, Canada, will open in September 2006.

The Institute of Visual Arts

Since 1996, the Institute of Visual Arts (Inova) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Peck School of the Arts has established an international reputation as a contemporary art research center. Inova engages the general and university publics with contemporary art from around the world through exhibitions and programs. The Institute is recognized for the high quality of its programs and for the opportunity it offers artists to experiment in the creation of new work.

Wm. Robert Bucker, Dean of the Peck School of the Arts
Bruce Knackert, Director of the Institute of Visual Arts