



IN EXILE FROM THE LAND OF REASON ATLANTA

"This is still a dangerous world," President George W. Bush once warned. "It's a world of madmen and uncertainty and potential mental losses." If you get the feeling that you've become a stranger in your own country, that the nation is in fact peopled by madmen, plagued by uncertainty, and led by politicians who are afflicted with "mental loss"—whatever that is—then take this small consolation: you are not alone. Curated by Linda Armstrong, *In Exile From the Land of Reason* features works outside of the mainstream of contemporary American political life [Eyedrum, January 13—February 16, 2007]. Like émigrés whose remove enables them to see their homelands with greater clarity, the six participating artists document an America on the brink of madness.

These artists' critiques target the Bush era's domestic and foreign War on Terror™ as well as the militarism, paranoia, ethnocentrism, and racism that have become its legacy. Joe Peragine's giant inflatable armored tank anchors the dialogue in Eyedrum's front gallery, setting the tone for the show. His vinyl *Breathing Tank*, 2005, inhales and exhales through an electric blower, hiding an oil portrait of another tank behind it. Both works humorously critique the politicized language that obscures military personnel's cramped conditions through references to machinery—tanks, choppers, and humvees.

Kerry Moore's *Untitled (Bomb)*, 2005, and Julia A. Fenton's *Untitled (Lady)*, 2006, play with scale and satire, turning their audiences into Swiftian adventurers in Brobdingnag and Lilliput. An ominous monster resides in Moore's doll-sized two-story house frame: a replica of "Fat Man," Nagasaki's destroyer, precariously held in place with chain. Moore's work evokes Damoclesian paranoia, domestic anxiety, and Homeland Insecurity.

Fenton presents a waist-high, Barbie-pink sculpture of a 1950s glamour girl vogueing in a provocatively coy pose. A multitude of tiny pink plastic army men make up her body and hair, continuing their miniature assault on

the ground below as they form stalagmites of troop formations amidst the candy valentines, babies, and other sweetnesses providing ground cover. This candy-colored siege whimsically literalizes feminism's formulation of the body as battleground.

Colonial Towers, 2006, Bill Fisher and Richard Lou's Twin Towers of phallic-patriarchal hegemony, lies between the military machismo of Peragine's tank and the domestic femininity of Moore and Fenton's pieces. Two vertical square-box columns are divided into moving horizontal parts labeled with politically-charged text—such as liberator, insurgent, occupation, and other—and plastered with images of people of different ethnicities, ages, and genders. The mix-and-match effect transforms the towers into adult educational toys, viscerally demonstrating how easy—fun, and pernicious—it is to play with stereotypes.

Fisher's *Bussama Series*, 2006, morphs Bush and Osama bin Ladin's faces over the course of twenty-three graduated screenprints. If this conceit initially seems simplistic, Fisher's technique manages to separate it from the bumpersticker propaganda of Robbie Conal or Mear One. An array of explanatory texts, photographs, charts, and the inevitable website accompany the images and carry out Fisher's conversion of the pseudo-science of eugenics into "Seritypes," a process by which genetic samples of donors of all ethnicities are combined and blended with the serigraphic inks to create the Bush/Osama twin portraits. Fisher fights the mad fire of mumbo-jumbo racism with the fire of his own satirical loopy science, inserting his work in a continuum that stretches from Jonathan Swift's Laputans through Critical Art Ensemble's boffins.

In *Undocumented Migrant on the Cross Adored by Donors*, 2006, Richard Lou re-visions El Greco through the prism of American race-baiting. An unnamed worker is depicted, Christ-like, on a piñata. He is flanked by Bush, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue, and CNN's financial pundit Lou Dobbs, three shrewd men who have, Lou suggests, personally profited by fueling their constituents' fears by scapegoating "illegals."

Todd Woodlan's *Nostalgic Warfare*, 2005, provides a grim coda to the show. A dozen lifecast plaster figures kneel in a circle, contemplating the cool fire of four projectors that beam day-glo-colored clips of the notoriously unhelpful, cheerfully animated 1950s Civil Defense film *Duck and Cover*—"when you see the bright flash ... Duck and Cover!"—remixed with found footage of atomic tests. Woodlan's somber setting and ritualistic tableau strip off the layers of irony, camp, and nostalgia that we've built around these horrifying images to repress their existential horror. Woodlan puts the MAD back in Mutually Assured Destruction.

What does the future hold for those who see themselves as living among the insane? Will America's virtual exiles ever feel at home again? Well, as President Bush has explained, "You never know what your history is going to be like until long after you're gone."

—Phil Oppenheim