

iCI announces the premiere of the traveling exhibition

The Storyteller

A traveling exhibition that explores how contemporary artists use the story form as a means of comprehending and conveying political and social events

Curated by Claire Gilman and Margaret Sundell

Organized and circulated by iCI (Independent Curators International), New York

Touring October 2009 – March 2012

iCI is pleased to announce the tour of **The Storyteller**, an exhibition that focuses on artists who use the story form in contemporary art as a means of comprehending and conveying political and social events. Significantly, unlike their postmodern predecessors, the artists in **The Storyteller** neither take the idea of documentary truth as an object of their critique nor



Jeremy Deller and Mike Figgis, *The Battle of Orgreave*, 2002

do they abandon fact for fabrication. Rather, they enable individuals (whether themselves, their subjects or their audience) to construct the story of their unique participation in historical processes, thereby presenting these events in a new and unexpected light.

The Storyteller, curated by Claire Gilman and Margaret Sundell, and organized by iCI (Independent Curators International) will premiere at the Salina Art Center, Salina, Kansas on October 22, 2009 where it will remain in view

through January 3, 2010. The exhibition will then travel to the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Gallery at Parsons The New School for Design, New York, New York on January 29, 2010 through April 9, 2010 and to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada on May 8, 2010 through August 29, 2010. Additional venues will be announced.

Responding to the rapid, often violent transformations of the 21st century, contemporary artists have displayed a growing desire to activate art's documentary capacity, its ability to bear witness to events in the world. All of the works in **The Storyteller** revolve around situations that are either in the process of unfolding or that continue to impact the lives of the artists or protagonists. However, in each case, these events are re-imagined and thereby re-experienced through the artist's personal encounter or the character's narration.

For the artists in the exhibition, the story functions neither as a purely imagined narrative nor as a piece of verifiable information. Rather, it is a document of a different sort, one whose focus is less empirical accuracy than the reality of events as they are encountered, experienced and delivered by a thinking, receiving subject and an active listener. The story is at once temporal and personal, public and communal. It persists through the listener's interpretive process and through each subsequent retelling.

The Storyteller includes an international group of artists working in video, photography, drawing, mixed media and installation: all media that have lent themselves to a documentary approach. Although the featured artists have enjoyed a degree of critical attention, none has yet received serious consideration for the role that storytelling plays in his or her work. In some cases, the artist's "story" takes the form of a drama based on real events: Jeremy Deller and Mike Figgis's film reenacts a 1984 clash between striking miners and police in Thatcherite England; Ryan Gander revisits the construction of Trelick Tower, London's infamous blighted urban housing project, in a children's book and accompanying sculptural installation; and the collective, Missing Books, imagines the final minutes in the life of Argentine dissident Rodolfo Walsh, a well-respected fiction writer.



Emanuel Licha, *War Tourist in the Suburbs of Paris*, (one of five episodes of the project *War Tourist*), 2004-08

In other cases, the stories function less as reconstructions of the past than investigations into the relationship between past and present: Liisa Roberts's multi-layered filmic narrative focuses on the 2002 restoration of Alvar Aalto's municipal library in the formerly Finnish, now Russian city of Vyborg; Omer Fast's video features testimony from movie extras about their experiences filming Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*; and Hito Steyerl's video featuring a Bosnian artist attempts to reconstruct a lost newsreel depicting literacy classes offered to Muslim women under Tito.

A third group appeals to diverse literary genres: for example, Cao Fei's fairytale-like video portrays workers in a Guangdong Province factory; Joachim Koester's photo essay documents Immanuel Kant's daily walks through his native city of Kaliningrad; Adrian Paci's video of his three year-old daughter recounts a folkloric tale that incorporates present-day international conflict; and Mounir Fatmi has created a sculptural assemblage of post 9/11 literature.



Adrian Paci, *Albanian Stories*, 1997

Finally, Lamia Joreige, Steve Mumford and Michael Rakowitz initiate a dialogue with active participants in contemporary political situations that their projects then serve to narrate: Joreige's video portraits feature personal experiences of the Lebanese war told via a memorable object; Mumford's intimate drawings of war-torn Baghdad pair scenes of on-duty soldiers with images of the local artists

and shop-owners he befriended while living there; and Rakowitz revives his grandfather's import/export business to Iraq in an extended project that includes a recreation of his store as well as documentation of stories shared by visitors. In all cases, the artists in the exhibition adopt the story's use of commonly shared lore to unite individual experience with communal histories.

About the guest curators:

Claire Gilman (Ph.D., Columbia University) is an independent curator and writer living in New York. From 2003-2006, she was Janice H. Levin Curatorial Assistant at the Museum of Modern Art where she worked on *Edvard Munch: The Modern Life of the Soul* (2006) and Greater New York 2005. Before that, she curated *Arte Povera: Selections from the Sonnabend Collection* (2001) at Columbia University's Wallach Art Gallery. Gilman currently teaches at The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and is writing a book on post-war Italian art.

Margaret Sundell (Ph.D., Columbia University) is a former art editor at *Time Out New York*, and her writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, and *Documents*. Sundell has taught art history and critical theory at Columbia University, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and Parsons The New School for Design. She is currently director of the Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program.

Participating Artists:

Cao Fei
Jeremy Deller and Mike Figgis
Omer Fast
Mounir Fatmi
Ryan Gander
Lamia Joreige Joachim Koester
Missing Books (Maria Barnas,
Maxine Kopsa, Germaine Kruijff)
Steve Mumford
Adrian Paci
Michael Rakowitz
Liisa Roberts
Hito Steyerl



Steve Mumford, *13A3 John, a contractor, giving a firearms class to Iraqi police in Khalis, July, 2004*

Exhibition Itinerary:

Salina Art Center

Salina, Kansas

October 22, 2009 – January 3, 2010

Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Gallery

Parsons The New School for Design

New York, NY

January 29 - April 9, 2010

Art Gallery of Ontario

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

May 8 – August 29, 2010

Exhibition Credit Line:

The Storyteller is a traveling exhibition organized and circulated by iCI (Independent Curators International), New York. Guest curators for the exhibition are Claire Gilman and Margaret Sundell. The exhibition, tour, and catalogue are made possible, in part, by a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation; iCI Benefactors Agnes Gund, Gerrit and Sydnie Lansing, and Barbara and John Robinson; the iCI Partners and iCI Advocates.

About iCI

iCI (Independent Curators International) produces exhibitions, events, publications, and training opportunities for diverse audiences around the world. A catalyst for independent thinking, iCI connects emerging and established curators, artists, and institutions, to forge international networks and generate new forms of collaboration. Working across disciplines and historical precedents, the organization is a hub that provides access to the people, ideas, and practices that are key to current developments in the field, inspiring fresh ways of seeing and contextualizing contemporary art.

For additional information or visual materials, contact Chelsea Haines at 212-254-8200 ext. 26, haines@ici-exhibitions.org. Visit iCI's web site: www.ici-exhibitions.org