

This curatorial statement accompanies the exhibition *Decisive Moments, Uncertain Times*  
October 20 to November 19, 2011

**Gallery TPW** gallerytpw.ca

## Curatorial Statement

**Kim Simon**

*Decisive Moments, Uncertain Times* is a proposal within an ongoing curatorial dialogue between myself, as curator of Gallery TPW, and Jean-Paul Kelly, as programmer of Trinity Square Video. The exhibition responds to Kelly's challenge to consider the "decisive moment" in contemporary visual arts. If we consider the origins of the decisive moment in photography as the holistic narrative carried within a single image, this purist notion of image making -- that set of perfect conditions in situ, in camera, in one's eye -- is no longer viable, for perhaps obvious reasons. One is the constantly changing and digitized state of production. The other is the changing condition of circulation and reception in an image-centric world: a world where we seemingly have greater access to more kinds of images than ever before, while the processes of editing, selection, archiving and distribution are also more complex and manipulated than ever before; a world in which a quick view of an image is often standing as information and knowledge; and a world where we as individuals each have our own vast image repertoires against which we develop meaning.

Framed by these conditions for contemporary image reception ...*Uncertain Times* revises the decisive moment and renders it as the un-resolvable narrative, a moment of anxious reading where one is faced with struggling to come to sense. My specific interest for the *Decisive Moments* project looks at figurative works that clearly embody difficult or troubling narratives. The hope being that seeing such images in the slow-looking space of the gallery will feedback on our experience of the barrage of difficult images we come to through mass and social media. Although (in the right hands) the goal of showing images of suffering and violence is to help oppose the conditions that created it, the ethical conundrum in looking at such imagery is that while we might be acknowledging an individual or situation through witness, there is also potential that our gaze becomes somehow shameful if individuals represented are exposed to extended humiliation through an image. Through different conceptual and formal methodologies, each of the works in the exhibition is a meditation on what it is to regard the pain of others.

All the works in the exhibition appear to have some basis in lived moments or make reference to "the real" -- whether they are documentary photos, conceptual projects responding to historical material, or performance based video. A modest exhibition in scale, presented in ...*Uncertain Times* are just a few of the artists practices and images that have haunted me in the last few years. This haunting takes the form of perceptual and ethical puzzles. The challenge in these particular works resides in their imbrication of a contextual disassociation (where the specificity of narrative lay outside the frame of what is visible) with the fact that these images have an affective impact that highlights the possibilities for sustained engagement. What is of interest then is the slip and the friction between what can consciously be understood or known from an image, and what affect an image provokes. The arousal of affect is pre-linguistic, but is most often also an anxious moment of trying to name it, as we attempt to follow affect with thought. Of course these ways of perceiving cannot be separated, and it is this very perceptual and sensorial loop arising from the images exhibited at TPW that interests me. The work in *Decisive Moments, Uncertain Times* hovers in that space of tension between thinking through what a troubling image is about and the sensation of what it does.

## Notes on the Work:

An image by **John Moore** captures the assassination in 2007 of former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. A blurred action scene with shadowy figures, smoke and fire, without its news-narrative counterpart the image floats and could be anywhere/anytime. An aesthetic and affecting abstraction, the image also holds fast to the classic concept of photojournalism -- evidence that the maker of the image was there.

**Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin's** *People in Trouble Laughing Pushed to the Ground* (2010) is a small portion of the artists' response to the Belfast Exposed Archive. The archive contains over 14,000 black-and-white contact sheets, documenting the prolonged and violent ethno-political turbulence known as "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland. Chronicling protests, funerals and

acts of terrorism as well as everyday moments, photographs in the archive were taken by both professional photojournalists and amateur photographers, Belfast Exposed was founded in 1983 as a response to concern over the careful control of images depicting British military activity during the Troubles. Viewed and organized by many different people, often when an image in the archive was ordered, approved or selected, a colour dot sticker was placed on the surface of the contact sheet as a marker. Each of the circular photographs in Chanarin and Broomberg's series reveals the area beneath one of the circular stickers. The image fragments thus expose the part of each image that was obscured from view the moment it was selected, composed by the random gestures of archivists, editors and others who have viewed and marked the archive.





**Ken Gonzales-Day's** *Erased Lynching* series (2004-2006) developed out of his research into the history of lynching in the American West. A history that reveals that in California in particular, the majority of lynchings were perpetrated against people from Latino cultures. Derived from appropriated historical lynching postcards and other archival material, in Gonzales-Day's images the lynch victim and ropes have been removed. The erasure is intended as a conceptual gesture to redirect our present-day attention, away from the lifeless body of the lynch victim, towards the mechanisms of lynching itself: the crowd, the spectacle, the photographer, and the photograph as keepsake.

**Paolo Canevari's** video *Bouncing Skull* (2007) holds a single frame while the action enters and exits the image. It begins with a shot reminiscent of ubiquitous media images of war-torn urban ruins, a still moment eyeing bombed out buildings and a muddy nearby field, where a skull sits perfectly centre frame. Enter a young boy, who without a thought picks up the skull and begins using it to play a solo game of soccer. After about ten minutes the boy stops playing, places the skull back where he found it, and exits the frame. Void of context within the film itself we are given only the meta-narrative that juxtaposes that first shock upon seeing the skull turned from icon of violence into play object, and through a sense of prolonged duration, a completely mundane scene is born. The artists notes on the work tell us that it was shot in the former Serbian Army Head Quarters in Belgrade, which was bombed in 1999 by NATO.

**Jannicke Laker's** video work captures staged situations created by the artist, placing people in situations that ultimately highlight power dynamics. Such dynamics extend from the actors she employs to her audiences, whose gaze upon her scenes often completes the work. In *Running Woman* (2006) we are faced with watching a heavy set, older woman frantically running on a dark road, trying to keep her pace. She is exhausted and her face is bloodied. We have no information about what she is running from or to. We have only our gut reaction to watching this suffering, a reaction that likely involves some recall from our individual image experiences to try to make sense of the scene. The work has no dialogue and holds a single constant frame on one continuous action. As a looping video, the suffering of *Running Woman* is endlessly protracted. The impact of the scene seems to shift dependent on how long one sits with her. Over time *Running Woman* might be read as shocking and difficult in one moment, yet melodramatic and constructed in another.



**Adam Broomberg** and **Oliver Chanarin** live and work in London, UK. Their latest book *War Primer 2* is published by MACK (2011) and interrogates the nature of images of conflict that have proliferated since 9/11. They have exhibited widely and produced seven monographs. Broomberg and Chanarin are Visiting Fellows at the University of the Arts London. Recent exhibition venues include Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne; Townhouse Gallery, Cairo; Musee de l'Elysee, Lausanne, Switzerland; Paradise Row, London; the National Portrait Gallery, London; Aperture Foundation, New York, among others.

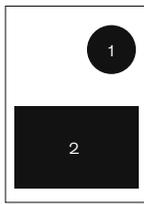
**Paolo Canevari** lives and works in both Rome and New York. His practice includes sculpture, installation, drawing, performance and video. Canevari's work has exhibited internationally, including at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland; XIII Quadriennale di Roma, Palazzo della Esposizioni, Rome, Italy; Centre for Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand; and the 2004 Liverpool Biennial, U.K.

**Ken Gonzales-Day** lives and works in Los Angeles. His interdisciplinary projects consider the history of photography, the construction of race, and the limits of representational systems ranging from the lynching photograph to museum display. His book *Lynching in the West: 1850-1935* was published in 2006. His PAC Prize artist's book *PROFILED* was published in 2011. Gonzales-Day is Chair of the Art Department and a Professor at Scripps College. Select exhibitions include Fred Torres Collaborations, New York; Tufts University, Medford, MA; UCSD Art Gallery, La Jolla, CA; Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles; SPACE, Portland; LAXART, Los Angeles; CUE Art Foundation, New York; Pomona College Museum of Art, Claremont, CA; and White Columns, New York.

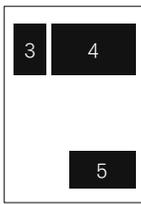
Norwegian video artist **Jannicke Laker** lives and works in Berlin. Laker's practice explores the treatment of taboos such as shame, guilt, immodesty and mental illness. Laker has exhibited at Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin; DUMBO, NYC; Stenersen Museum, Oslo; The Whitney Museum, New York; and the Modern Museum, Stockholm.

American photojournalist **John Moore** joined the Associated Press in 1991 where he worked for more than fourteen years. Moore joined Getty Images in 2005 and has since worked throughout South Asia and the Middle East. He has extensively covered the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moore has won top photography awards from the Overseas Press Club, The Society of Professional Journalists, World Press Photo and shared the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Photography for coverage of the war in Iraq.

#### Image Credits for Preceding Pages



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1. Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *People in Trouble Laughing Pushed to the Ground*, Fibre prints, 2010.
2. John Moore, *Assassination of Benazir Bhutto*, 2007.
3. Ken Gonzales-Day, *Erased Lynching series: Erased Postcards*, Lightjet prints mounted on cardstock, 2004-2006.
4. Paolo Canevari, still from *Bouncing Skull*, video, 2007.
5. Jannicke Laker, still from *Running Woman*, HD video, 2006.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm



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