The Soap Factory Presents:
**PAY ATTENTION:
GM08**

MEMORY/REENACTMENT/RECORD····

To some, there's comfort in the notion that 'history repeats itself'. If historical events can be thought of as a set of similarly recurring episodes, then history is a resource that can be drawn from for the experience and knowledge necessary to stem imminent wars, natural disasters, and cultural upheaval. Instead of being unprepared by the future, we're able to predict it. This way of thinking about history does a few things. In terms of how history is written or visualized, it creates a series of events that succeed each other while creating *affinities* to what has already happened. More problematically, the trouble with 'history repeats itself' is that it creates, through repetition, too tidy an equivalence across events that are actually very different. We can be more interested in creating a likeness rather than appreciating the nuances of what has happened that make every event unique.

When it comes to recalling personal histories, there is just as much, if not more, at stake. We contribute our internalized memories and external experiences so much to who we perceive ourselves to be; they are always on the verge of being lost. We might even say that in order to keep from losing our memories, and with them our identity, we remember events as we'd prefer them to be rather than as they really were, if that is even possible. In repeating the events related to the first day of school, the funeral for a loved one, and a failed relationship over and over in our mind, each of these is narrated and re-narrated by affect as well as the events as we remember them. So, while there is a very distinct fear of forgetting, there is also something added to and created when we attempt to recall a succession of events as they occurred.

To the artists in this section, all of whom are interested in past events, works by writers and film directors, and news media, history is a resource full of inaccuracies. Through their use of high-tech reenactment, images culled from the internet, and staged events, they critique history and documents in such a way that asks us to reconsider them as imperfect records and critique our assumptions of how the past is narrated.

Jan Estep's *Trail Map to Wittgenstein's Hut* takes up her interest in history and visual documentation. Estep's map is a record of her trip to the woods of western Norway in search of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's writing refuge. While the project pays particular attention to his philosophy of language in relation to his larger body of work, the resulting take-away trail guide, part pilgrimage and part recorded performance, is a personal cartography that makes a claim to provide you with directions to a specific location. Yet Estep's project is not just an adventurer's log about arriving at a specific location in the wilderness.
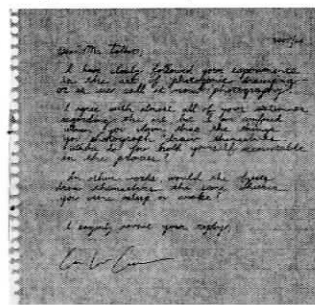
Rather, instead of leading you towards a preserved landmark, the map ends at the site where the hut once stood. All that is left are the remains of the foundation and, as her accompanying photos show, the ruin is overrun with fecund moss and trees, and is slowly disappearing into the landscape. The hut isn't a protected monument and as time goes by, it will become more and more entwined with the natural sur-

roundings then disappear. Before it slips further and further from view and from memory, Estep's documentation of the site have captured how both nature and building are discernible but inseparable, and that any project about memory must also make room for loss.

Eric Carroll's photograms, large scale lo-fi photographs, are printed on blueprint paper without developing chemicals, a lens, or shutter. They are mono-chromatic contraries to the monumental over-produced color images that many photographers are printing these days. Carroll's work is more interested in subtracting the camera machinery and photographic fussiness to push the limits of what photography can accomplish as an imaging-making device and its ability to record events. For a recent project at Augsburg College, *All Buildings Dream in Blueprints (Student Art Show)*, 2008, Carroll covered the gallery wall with photosensitive blueprint paper and quickly rehung the immediately preceding exhibition. Then, exposing the gallery to light, the framed paintings and drawings slowly burned their imprints into the paper. What's left is a strange remnant that only records the spectral outline of each work in the exhibition. He isn't overly concerned with the details of how each painting or drawing actually looked; Carroll's photogram records the work in the Student Art Show at the level of lingering presences as they were (re)installed, without the specific details that would make it easier for us to recognize them.

For *Pay Attention: GM08*, Carroll continued with a similar technique where he created a photogram of his band's rehearsal studio. While the work is not a record of another artwork in the same way that *All Buildings…* is, it is analogous to other types of records produced in studios, such as CDs, vinyl LPs, and mix tapes. Each of these compresses time-lapsed information into a physical object. Carroll's photogram, as it is installed on the wall, compresses the three dimensions of the studio and the delayed photogram exposure time into the flatness of the blueprint paper. This compression of time, space, and information into one location means that something must be omitted and that whatever record is left behind, photogram

Dear Mr. Talbot, 2008

or otherwise, it represents only a portion of the studio space. Instead of comparing the representation (photogram) to the actual place (studio), one can look at the gap between the two as the creative additions and subtractions of information upon which every artistic representation is contingent.

Tectonic Industries' video installation *The possibility of successfully navigating an asteroid field is approximately three thousand, seven hundred and twenty to one* (2008) focuses on the tenuousness of memory and recollection. On each of the 12 monitors, we watch as a volunteer walks in front of the camera, makes their best attempt to recall the entirety of the original *Star Wars* trilogy in the space of an hour, then walks away. Because the project is focused on each participant's recollections, we don't see the special effects, characters, and the individual scenes that have come to mythologize the film. The longer we watch, we become keenly aware of the tenuousness of words to recreate, in this case, the details and nuances of the *Star Wars* trilogy. While our memory is one of our most precious resources, something we're

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BY **CHRIS ATKINS**

both willing to share and keep completely private, it's also an inaccurate record of events and experiences. Memory is full of embellishments and imperfections, and when asked to recall a piece of it, we do what we see here: *perform* a recollection rather than the event itself. After all, the act of memory occurs in the present instead of the past.

Pete McLarnan's *Death Wish* suite of videos are spare yet cinematographically accurate recreations from the 1974 film directed by Michael Winner. Filmed alone against a white curtained sound stage, we watch McLarnan as Charles Bronson as Peter Kersey repeat short scenes from the film. Without the *mis en scene* that contributes to *Death Wish's* urban anxiety and climate of fear, McLarnan focuses on scenes where Kersey finds himself in kill-or-be-killed showdowns, and how these become moments of transformation. After his wife and daughter are murdered, he goes from family-man pacifist to vengeful vigilante. But when he goes out in the evenings packing a pistol, he seems surprised by the trouble that always finds him.

Many reenactments are invested in mythologizing the past as well as accurately recreating events. And just as often, homages and memorials to previous artists or artworks show us just how heavy a burden history and 'influence' can be for an artist, that you should make sure to account for your precedents. In McLarnan's videos, there doesn't seem to be either, or perhaps it is equally both; they don't fall back on elegiac tributes to answer our collective 'Why *Death Wish*'? By obscuring whether there is an artistic or cinematic debt McLarnan owes to Bronson or Winner, we can ask broader questions on how his Kersey achieves 'self actualization by way of the gun' and his vigilante justice.

Work in progress

In his most recent project, McLarnan continues to elaborate on the theme of reenactment, this time on the events surrounding a street fight as they occurred in his hometown of Moorehead, Minneosta. Ramping up the production value and scale of the project, and including a cast of 20+ volunteers, McLarnan has restaged the decade-old rumble in the thick Northern woods. This piece pulls double-duty as both a documentary of events and as a sort of memorial. Public monuments often take the form of bronze marbleized erections plopped onto a green space. And with war memorials especially, civically mandated memory relies on inscribed names of the dead and dates of an event to carry and contain all that there is to remember. Everyone and everything is accounted for. Looked at another way, we're just as likely to forget what happened as we are to remember. Like Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), McLarnan's piece looks at what happens when historical events aren't remembered with static event-markers and are, instead, reenacted through body-to-body interaction. Both projects deal with, among many other issues, the premise that violence is a social phenomena and that, through performance, it can be better understood as living history rather than a physical monument.

The Stolen Identity Project (2006-7), a photo essay and publication by Andrew Schroeder, is a thought-provoking reenactment. After his PIN was stolen and bank accounts emptied, Schroeder used the subsequent trail of ATM and restaurant receipts to trace the steps of the identity thieves as they traveled through Bulgaria and Macedonia. With a curious sense of fascination, Schroeder physically traced their movements and sought 'to reunite my conceptual, digital self with my actual, physical identity.'

It's one thing to reenact scenes from a movie or an historical event. It's something quite different to document an event from your own past, especially where something, though ephemeral, was taken from you. Once he was informed by his bank that his account information was stolen, Schroeder became acutely aware of a unique cultural phenomena; each of us has a virtual identity separate from our physical selves, and it is vulnerable. While the damage to this 'virtual self' was mitigated by the bank, Schroeder's project makes something out of what happened. By making the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of those who wanted to remain hidden, photographing their steps with featureless captions

during his travels, he has turned the theft of his identity into a productive event in the form of a photo essay and publication. Yet, with the absence of people in each shot, Schroeder is always too late to catch up to his conceptual self. We see, as he follows the trail further and further, how identity isn't always formed through a set of personal and internalized memories and experiences, but is also constructed by banks and phone companies using external technologies and virtual identities that can be cleaved and appropriated from our physical selves.

Kirsten Peterson culls images from internet news coverage and video sites, and aestheticizes documentary coverage of natural and ecological disasters. She has worked with photo reproductions screen printed onto matte Duralar sheets, and recently delved into video. With an infinite range of images at her disposal, Peterson's interest in this visual material began shortly after the tsunami disaster that struck southeast Asia and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. While there are many more, such as the WTC disaster, these are only the most recent events where she has focused on the images of urban destruction and architecture falling into ruin.

The works in Peterson's *Infrastructure* series are no longer reproductions from the mediated scenes of natural disasters and the environments where so much was lost. Not wanting to further narrate events that have already been saturated with media coverage, she begins with videos of building models assembled for shaking table tests. In each there is an uneasy and quiet remove from the scientific study of earthquakes by hard-hat clipboard toting engineers creating carefully controlled disaster re-enactments. Peterson works to describe the need for empirical knowledge about earthquakes but also shows the attendant indifference towards what actually happens during disastrous events. In other words, we see a simulated disaster not 'a disaster'. Where are the remains of buildings, people, and communities that have been destroyed, swept away, and are no longer there? Retaining the pixilation of the images in her mark-making, she reminds us that her screenprints are based on found and appropriated footage. More importantly, we find that the grain of the image is like our own ability to remember disastrous events; video is a high-definition record, yet it is actually a constructed image and a fallible memory technology.

Some artists deal with history through a direct conversation with Art History while others creatively cite their influences. The artists that I've discussed here have gone deeper in asking questions about the narration and recollection of historical events.
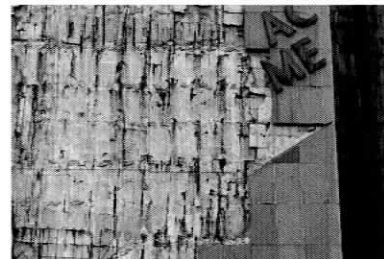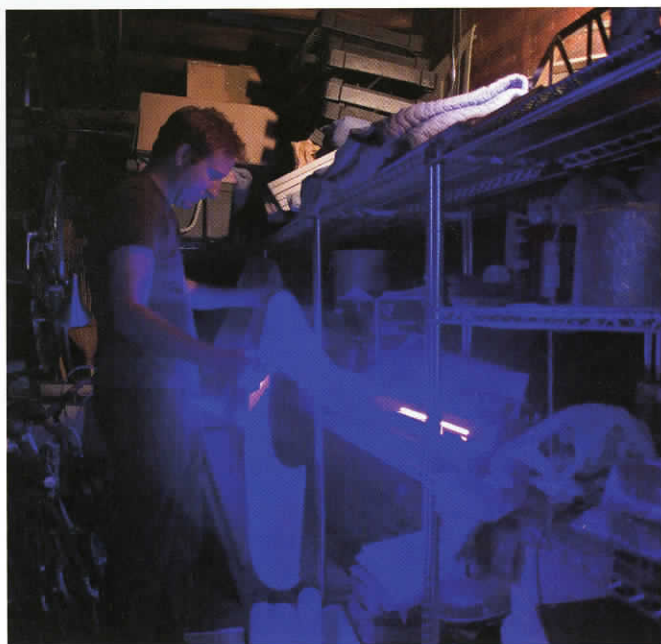
Eric William Carroll

Eric William Carroll received his BA in Philosophy at Coe College in 2002 and his MFA in photography from the University of Minnesota in 2006 on a graduate school fellowship. Art historian Arthur Danto referred to Carroll's thesis show One Year of Taking Pictures as "...the most diabolical work I've ever seen."
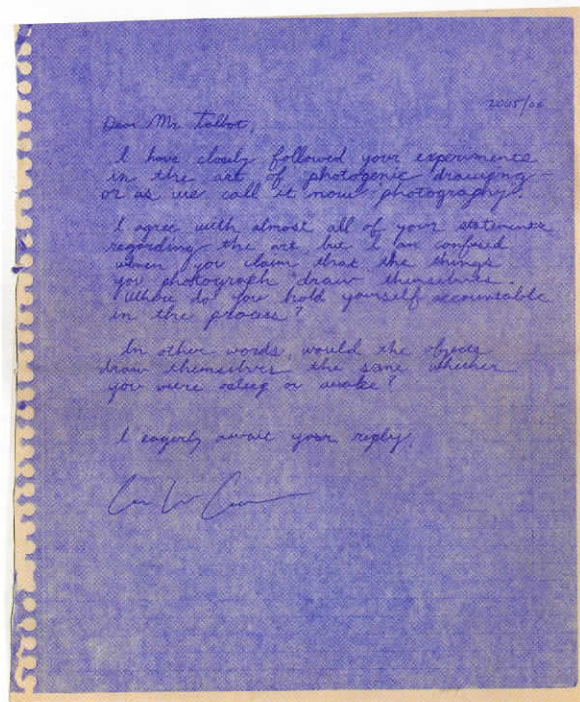
http://www.ericwilliamcarroll.com

For one year Carroll played bass in a hardcore band, a sub-genre of punk music that eschews melody and harmony in exchange for lightning-fast tempos and deafening volumes. Inspired by the do-it-yourself attitude, he used his unique position as insider/outsider, though he doesn't listen to nor particularly enjoy hardcore music, to create a document of the quieter moments found in this culture. He's created a diazotype photogram of a typical basement venue, a self-published zine/photobook, and a 7" record, all of which highlight the quiet conversations, inside jokes, and comfortable silences that are necessary for a scene centered on sonic destruction.
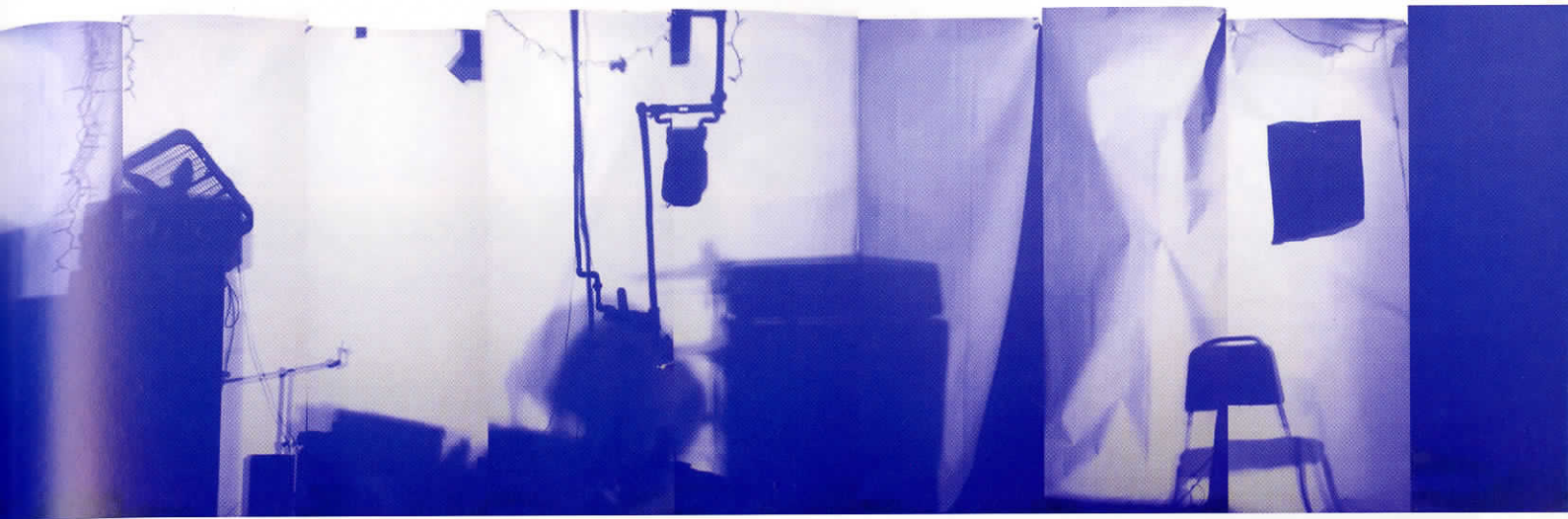
The Alamo House, diazotype, 2008

Dear Mr. Talbot, diazotype, 2008

I am infatuated with how we experience light and sound on a day-to-day basis. It is this fascination that drives my artistic research and experimentation with photography, music, and movies. I approach each project putting the content first and form second. That said, I find myself repeatedly coming back to obsolete technology. I've found that when outdated forms are stripped of their practical purpose, they become vehicles for metaphor and interpretation. I like my work to be thought of as quiet songs, best heard on headphones, blending with the rest of the world around you.