

Ken Okiishi: A Model Childhood

13 January 2018 - 9 February 2019

PV: 12 January 2019, 12pm - 6pm



Image: Ken Okiishi, *A Model Childhood*, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-2001, 2018

A Model Childhood is a meditation on the artist's place of birth, the USA, as much as the concept of home itself, that place where one literally, inescapably comes from. For some people from migration backgrounds, a place of birth, in each generation, is insistently demarcated as a place that is not a home.

Against the backdrop of the emergent political orders in the USA, Europe and the UK, *A Model Childhood* brings four generations of migration and immigration histories into contact in the present (from the 1880s floating world of merchant-class Japan in tropical-melancholy Hawaii to Trump's neo-fascist-style experiments in globalization-denial).

Performing a breakdown in historical/psychological chronology and logic that has emerged as a method of analysis on the left as it reacts to the seemingly impossible paradigm shifts enacted by the far right, Okiishi searches for "trans-historical patterns of xenophobia and racism," "intersectional identity" and "intergenerational trauma"—but, as he has consistently approached the live-processing demanded of the contemporary artist, he both over- and under-performs what is required of him. Do you hail the call of interpellation, or do you run away screaming? Or do you do both at the same time?

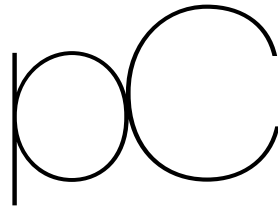
Works in the exhibition include:

– *A Model Childhood, Honolulu, Hawaii, circa 1940*. A photograph, blown up to billboard size, of the artist's father's first Boys' Day celebration in 1940 in Honolulu, Hawaii, featuring 50 dolls modelling the life of a warrior. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor the next year, the artist's grandfather threw all of the family's relics from Japan into the ocean.

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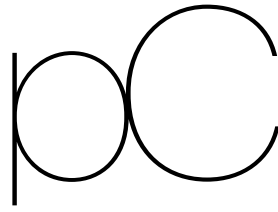
The artists' grandparents, who were born in Hawaii at the beginning of the 20th century, and had lived a rather free-wheeling continuation of the "floating world" as it developed in new terrains, were suddenly confronted with a demand to rationalize their identities as overtly patriotic "loyal" Americans—to play-act an entirely contingent identity based on what is expected.

– A "family history video for insurance purposes," made by the artist's mother, starring the artist's father (who is pictured as a baby in the 1940 photograph from Honolulu, Hawaii). This video documents every object in the Okiishi household circa 2009.

– *A Model Childhood, the mainland (Ames, Iowa), circa 1978-2001*. The entire contents of the artist's childhood, saved in plastic storage bins and cardboard boxes in the Okiishi basement, 2940 Monroe Drive, Ames, Iowa. Driven to Los Angeles in May 2018 by the artist, through a dust storm in Nebraska, the mountains of Colorado and the deserts of Utah, with a stop at the site of the Topaz "relocation camp" (the euphemism used for prison/concentrations camps of American citizen children and their parents of Japanese extraction during WWII). The tradition of pilgrimage to "camp" is not common among Americans of Japanese descent. No one really talks about traumatic history; these things disappear. Okiishi generated a point-cloud scan, by a company specializing in forensic models of crime scenes, of his childhood home's ever-expanding auto-archive: a basement that invests all objects that have passed through his parents' home with the obsessive potential importance of key-strokes recorded on an NSA data server.

– Photographs taken from the car while driving these childhood objects across the USA—thinking about everything that is crashing in the present moment. The modes of American (USA) landscape and road-trip photography are recoded via an eye that no longer sees the ideological function of those modes of image production as related to "expanse" and "freedom." American vernacular architecture starts to look like prison architecture, the endless landscape crumbles in infrastructural disarray, the sun becomes a void.

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Felix Bernstein & Gabe Rubin: Folie à Deux

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Folie à Deux

Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin

Folie à Deux explores the melodramatic partnership of madness & queerness in drag & transgender performance in two films. Bernstein and Rubin re-vamp Madame de Sade as “Madame de Void” —the vanity of the void in waiting. Trapped between de Sade’s 120 Days of Sodom & de Void’s 101 Dogs of Gomorrah and unable to endure waiting on the stage long enough to convert waiting into weight—they hang off the ledge of compulsory ridiculous hysterical critique.

I. Madame de Void: A Melodrama (43 min.)

A narrative telling of fashion designer Madame de Void’s unexpected love for her pup, Blot, as she grooms him for fur. Bernstein plays Madame & Rubin plays Blot.

II. Folie à Deux: A Duodrama (1 hr. 57 min.)

An audio-play that features Blot (Rubin) & Madame (Bernstein) in a dialectical tangle with harp, percussion, & piano. Featuring the voices & instruments of Jim Fletcher, Ken Jacobs, Black-Eyed Susan, Jill Kroesen, Richard Foreman, Amy Sillman, Michael Evans, & David Grubbs.

Theater precedes essence but essence is always in transit. In the 19th century genre, genus, and gender transitioned from the monodrama (one voice) of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s 1770 scène lyrique “Pygmalion” (recitative dialogue with music as intermittent illustration) to the modern form of melodrama (continuous music and sentiment in synchronous motion), which yoked pantomime, dialogue, and action-music. By the end of the 20th-century ridiculous and kinetic theaters had exploded melodrama into indeterminate, de-skilled bits. Our impossible folly is an ode to incongruent forms—early duodrama, late melodrama, and poetic anti-theater.

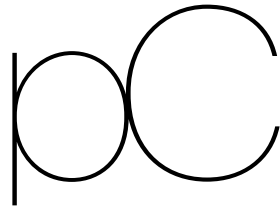
Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin have presented film, music, and theater at MOCA Los Angeles, Issue Project Room, Anthology Film Archives, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. At the Whitney, they staged and performed Bernstein’s libretto Bieber Bathos Elegy in 2016 and Mayo Thompson’s Victorine (with Art & Language) for the 2012 Whitney Biennial.

Also at the Whitney, Rubin performed in Jill Kroesen’s Collecting Injustices and Bernstein in Andrew Lampert’s Synonym for Untitled. Bernstein is the author of the poetry collection, Burn Book (Nightboat), and

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a book of essays, *Notes on Post-Conceptual Poetry* (Insert Blanc Press). His writing has been featured in *Art in America*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Spike Arts Magazine*, *Bomb*, *Bookforum* and *Texte Zur Kunst*. Rubin's films have been screened at the Brooklyn Film Festival, MIX Queer Experimental Film Festival. He performed in Shelley Hirsch's *Book-Bark-Tree-Line* for Blank Forms in 2017 and was recently featured in Soraya Zaman's trans-masculine photo series, *American Boys* (Daylight Books).

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