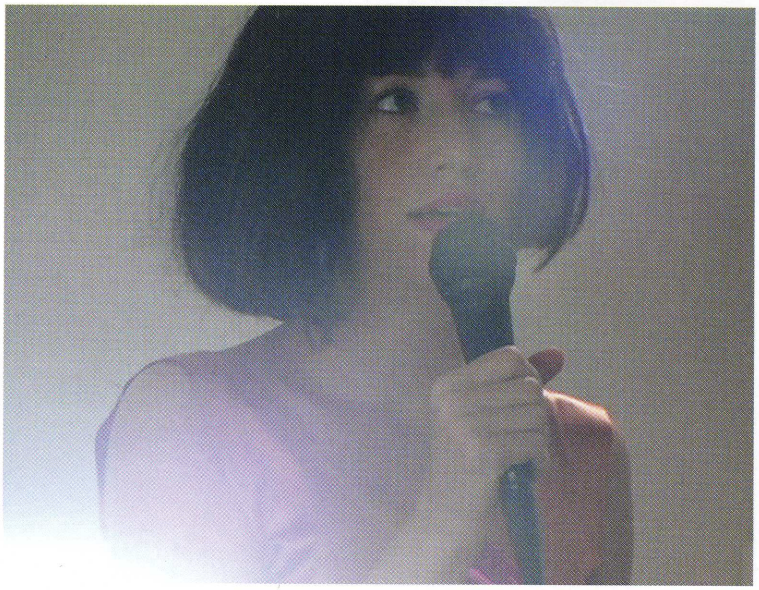


ment ("Another big-ass painting"), he detours into well-argued and earnest attack on one of Philadelphia's sacred cows, William Penn's ostensibly fair treatment of indigenous populations. In Youngman's view, West's monumental depiction of kindly Quakers offering gifts to idealized Native American figures supports a racist discourse that justifies European colonization. There is no fair way, Musson reminds us, to take over another person's country.

Musson's other interventions include a pair of "acquisitions"—paintings by one Jameson Ernst, a purportedly undiscovered black Abstract Expressionist. A sly wall text tells us that Ernst's Cedar Tavern colleagues Rothko, Pollock, and de Kooning nicknamed him "the Janitor" because he was mistaken for the bar's custodian. Musson completes the set up with two garish paintings attributed to Ernst and a comparison to Bob Thompson, a black artist who really was discovered late in life by museums. The joke falls squarely on a museum-going public looking for absolution from its ignorance of African American culture.

While they may take the wind from the sails of the museum, Youngman's vulgarities hardly recommend hip-hop culture to viewers. For example, his take on John Singer Sargent's *Portrait of Mr. & Mrs. John White Field*, 1882, makes short work of compassion and decency. He assures the viewer that the white-haired couple's tender clasped-hand gesture is simply due to frailty: "Come on, now, you know that old people basically got the balance of a half-finished Jenga game in a hurricane." His conclusion is narrow in its tired, youth- and sex-obsessed preoccupation: "Go out when you're young and your sex organs is working at optimal capacity."

Musson's street intellectual is free to express what we see but don't say. While beautifully painted, *The Gross Clinic* really is full of hubris about modern medical technology. The academy's many depictions of antebellum history are dull and pedantic. There's something racist about William Penn handing the Lenape Indians a bolt of cloth in exchange for their land. Mr. and Mrs. White Field do look prehistoric. And yes, hip-hop culture can be shallow and barbaric. By juxtaposing knee-jerk response and thoughtful reaction, Musson reminds us that truth is complex, and that it rarely reveals itself to those who are trying to be polite.

—Edward Epstein

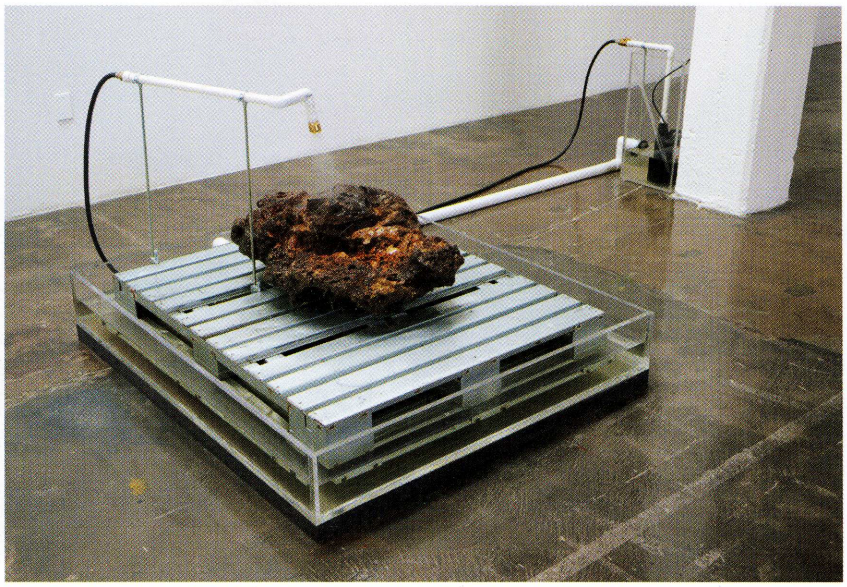
TELLING TALES
RICHMOND, VA

The videos on view in *Telling Tales* reveal a sophisticated understanding of narrative devices: dialogue, point of view (positionality), setting, events, time, and narration [1708 Gallery; January 6—February 4, 2012]. They also probe how these storytelling elements can be and have been exploited in film, fiction, and popular culture. The videos all prioritize postmodern subjectivity's familiar tropes of quotation, allusion, and self-consciousness. They show a capacity to evoke both expansive and intimate narratives. *Telling Tales* offers the satisfaction—and instruction—of a series of smart stories well told.

Sara Pomerance's series *Everything is Under Control* is a collection of minimalist flash fictions: anti-tales in which nothing much happens and a great deal is implied. Middle-class domestic environments are the stage for dialogue restricted to the repetition of such predictable statements as "It's good to see you" and "How's the weather?" More meaningful words become suffocating, communicating the isolating banality of family life. In *Relax at Home*, 2006, an elderly man at a breakfast table is foregrounded by objects whose scale diminishes him as dramatically as the patronizing voice of a woman off screen. While he sits silently, sad eyes conveying his trapped thoughts, she repeats such phrases as "You're in your own house and you love it, so ... we're happy." Through clever framing, non sequitur, heavy dialogue, stark light, and mundane setting and action, Pomerance invokes an excruciating awareness of the unspoken.

Sweetly titled, the videos in Lydia Moyer's ongoing project *Paradise*, begun in 2006, are sited in places where violence has torn people from their lives, homes, and families: Jonestown; Wounded Knee; New Orleans' Ninth Ward; Centralia, Pennsylvania, site of a long-burning underground fire; and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, site of the shooting of Amish school children. Like Alain Resnais' 1955 documentary *Night and Fog*, Moyer alternates footage of these tragic, now largely deserted locations with images of events that took place there.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Jennifer Sullivan**, still from *Adult Movie*, 2011, video, 25 minutes (courtesy of the artist); **Lydia Moyer**, still from *Black Damp*, 2010, single-channel video, 10:03 minutes (courtesy of the artist)



However, unlike Resnais, who included graphic footage of the horrors of the Holocaust, Moyer mostly resists using images of violence, preferring the poignant juxtaposition of quieter images of the past with her own footage. For example, in *Hyacinth*, 2008, still photos of the People's Temple's compound in Jonestown, Guyana, are interspersed with the sounds and images of the now-deserted fields where the commune once existed. Moyer's voice-over examines the tragedies and her attempt to locate them both physically and in her comprehension. A patch of shimmering light appears and disappears in strategic locations on the screen in each of her stories. While this flickering orb could be a benign presence, it also seems to summon Spalding Gray's image in *Swimming to Cambodia*, 1987, of "an invisible cloud of evil that circles the Earth and lands at random." Moyer's somber narration mitigates this possibility somewhat, creating a sense of the sparkling cloud as a visitation of compassion or visible grief.

A combination of *bildungsroman*, parody, and fictional memoir, Jennifer Sullivan's *Adult Movie*, 2011, and *One-Week Walden*, 2006, deploy a kind of plot-driven discourse. Yet her parametric style of sequencing and allusion creates a kaleidoscopic, loopy, high-low tension between art and labor, creativity and money, genius and mediocrity, and education and status in the art world and other social systems. Like a send-up of Somerset Maugham's 1915 novel *Of Human Bondage*, *Adult Movie* follows the protagonist from childhood dreams—of being a stripper like "ugly duckling" Gypsy Rose Lee—to a debt-ridden period after she receives her MFA and is a resident at Skowhegan, working briefly as a stripper. *Adult Movie* layers obsession with self-realization—and the impossibility of its realization—in a kind of tragicomic burlesque. With an ambiguous blending of fiction and nonfiction, the film's protagonist, wearing signature bad wigs, appropriates Cindy Sherman, enacts iconic odalisques, and ends in repeated takes of a recreation of the last scene in Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket*, 1959—an unsubtle but ingenious duplication of futile desires.

Keren Cytter, an internationally recognized Israeli artist who lives and works in Berlin, also has a multifaceted practice as a filmmaker and novelist. She makes skilled use of discontinuous narrative, alienation, linked but intentionally baffling props and setting, direct and oblique reference, and exposition. In *Konstruktion*, 2010, the interaction between coolly detached men and women takes place in various urban locations. The central conundrums appear to be the inability to "write about real people"—or perhaps the silliness of the attempt—and the incapacity to have authentic interactions and to "be" a "real" person. *Four Seasons*, 2009, involves a man and a woman who are either neighbors or live-in lovers. It takes place in an apartment building with a spiral staircase, a white-tiled bathroom where blood often flows, a room with a bed and a sparsely decorated Christmas tree, and a turntable playing Ferrante & Teicher. The action jumps between the couple's encounters as strangers and intimates. Interspersed throughout these scenes are expository segments describing architecture's psychological effects. Ultimately, everything goes up in smoke—first in steam from the bath and candle flame and then from flames that dance along the revolving vinyl album, the bed, and the Christmas tree—while snowflakes at times swirl through the air. In the end—"the end"—the stories in *Telling Tales* all tend toward the ineffable fragment, the inaccessible and transient contemporary tale that coalesces, flickers, and dissolves.

—Dinah Ryan

JEFF WILLIAMS
SAN ANTONIO

The culmination of a residency at Artpace, *Jeff Williams: There is Not Anything Which Returns to Nothing* brings together sculpture, architecture, and photography to interrogate the relationships between object and image [November 17, 2011—January 8, 2012]. Williams does so with particular attention to materiality and abstraction, and their relationships to time

Sculpture often begins with fact. You have stone, clay, metal, and so on. The question is how to transform them into an image. An image can be understood in multiple ways. There is the illusion of the material becoming a representation of something else. A lump of clay can become a head or a bust: it is then simultaneously an image of a head and the sum of its material parts. We might also consider the power of the pedestal to produce the image of sculpture—the pedestal declares that a set of materials literally rises above the everyday. It tells us that we are looking at an image of something and not the thing itself. For abstract sculpture, or artworks that use found materials, this is especially important.

Finally, sculpture has a relationship to images through the use of two-dimensional media like photography, digital imaging, and drawing. These images can be used to sketch or design a sculptural idea before it becomes a reality or to document an object.

Jeff Williams: There is Not Anything Which Returns to Nothing includes three photographs of objects, a video, and two large sculptures. The sculpture *Conservation Foundation (Cibolo Creek Fossil)*, 2011, consists of a boulder-sized fossil of plant matter, which sits on a steel pallet while water is pumped from a Plexiglas basin and sprayed on top of its surface. The fossil comes from the hill country of San Antonio, which thousands of years ago was made up of tide pools. The muddied ocher tones of the fossil stand in direct contrast to the cold metal rigidity of the pallet, while the misting water begins a process of erosion that recalls the material history of the rock.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Jeff Williams**, *Tension and Compression (Evans Rd. Quarry/Alamo Cement Co.)*, 2011, cast concrete, #4 rebar, steel, all thread, and hardware, 104 x 120 x 120 inches; **Jeff Williams**, *Conservation Fountain (Cibolo Creek Fossil)*, 2011, fossil, steel palate, Plexiglas, foam, PVC pipe, hardware, and submersible pump, 30 x 120 x 48 inches (photos: Todd Johnson)