THE CURATOR!AL !NCUBATOR, V.5 WHAT'S UP DOC? V!DEO AND AN!MAT!ON
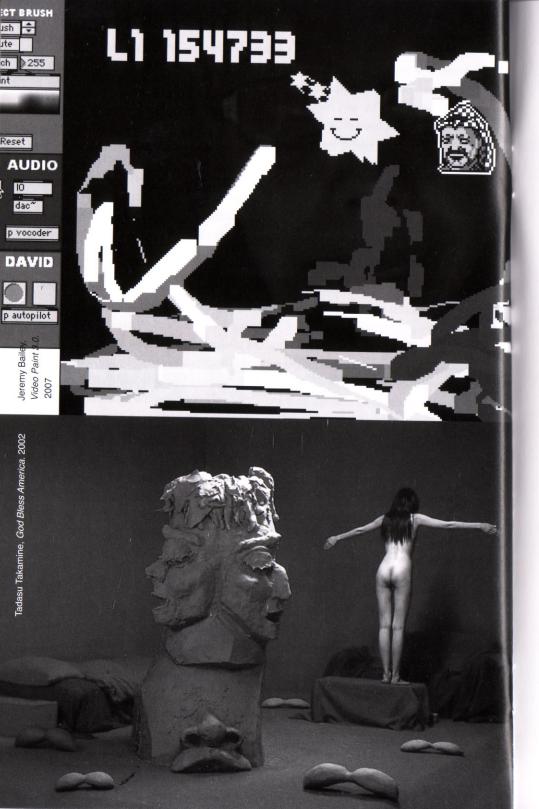
Animator Statement
Gabby Moser

Video animation is traditionally a medium where the artistic process remains unseen. The final product—an artifact of the artist's creative labour and strategic moments of self-censorship—seems to obscure the contradictory forces of the creative process. The end result: a seamless animation that appears removed from the hand and body of the artist. A recent movement in animation opposing this tradition sees artists intentionally including their body and animated representations of themselves in the production and presentation of their animations. In these cases, the artist performs as the animator: a hybrid creator-performer-persona that defines the parameters of the animated world and then inserts their physical body into this new paradigm. These videos make moments of self-censorship transparent, challenging the conventions of seamless animation and making their works decidedly "seamed."

Employing a variety of anachronistic and antiquated methods, the artists in this program emphasize the expressive limitations of video animation and paradoxically use these very limitations to make statements that would not otherwise be made. Just as analog video is an anachronistic but powerful medium that artists continue to use today, the variety of antiquated animation methods explored by the animators in this program display a renewed interest in the way obsolete techniques might offer new opportunities in video animation. Opportunities to come to terms with the strange and disembodying power of the world of animation by physically interacting with it and to use the animated world as a microcosm where issues of creative insecurity, self-censorship and agency can be explored.

The interactions that take place between animators and their animated creations are often fraught with conflict or physical struggle. Often the animator, in a Frankensteinian turn of events, becomes victim to her own animated creation. In Daniel Barrow's *Artist Statement* (2007), the artist—who is best known for re-invigorating another antiquated technology, the overhead projector—uses an obsolete computer system to create and participate in his animated world. The effect is the creation of a strange, parallel universe in which an exaggerated version of the artist (perhaps an ironic take on the hero-worship that sometimes surrounds Barrow's poignant live performances?) seems liberated from the constraints of self-censorship and openly expresses his doubts, insecurities and desires in a way that the 'real' Barrow of the world outside the animation never would.

While Barrow's voice narrates the video, it is often difficult to discern whether the animated persona or the 'real' artist, outside the animation, is speaking. When the narrator remarks, "I always knew that one day I would risk public humiliation to

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say certain things, by being this gratuitously honest," we cannot distinguish where the animated persona ends and the 'real' person begins. The moment of revelation in *Artist Statement* is not the moment of discovering *which* Barrow is speaking, but the moment the viewer realizes that Barrow is, to borrow from Sergei Eisenstein's description of Mickey Mouse, "identically and simultaneously object and human:"[1] both animated persona and 'real' person at the same time. Barrow's gratuitous honesty is only possible when the apparent distance between creator and creation collapses, laying bare the messy battle between two vital dimensions of the creative process: the aim of sincere expression and the tendency towards self-censorship.

Issues of expression and self-censorship also inform Tadasu Takamine's *God Bless America* (2002). By using the limitations of stop-motion animation, Takamine establishes parameters for himself that make the *impossible*, possible. He puts a tangible face and voice to the normally insidious forces of dominant American culture while establishing a world where he has agency over this embodied force. In this endurance piece that leaves no room for self-censorship, Takamine's sculpted associations take on the quality of automatic writing, combining the serious with the ridiculous: a cowboy morphs into a rocket, which becomes a Picasso face, which is transformed into George W. Bush, which shifts into a deranged monkey. In this case, the animation does not speak on behalf of Takamine, but rather stands as a proxy-foe, whom Takamine can impulsively and sometimes violently retaliate against.

Art historian Alan Cholodenko argues that animation always involves a kind of violence tied to the uncanny: the experience of simultaneous delight and fright that we feel when "what gave us fright when we were children [returns] to give us fright again when we thought we were over it now that we were adults."[2] While Takamine's video exhibits a subdued creative violence towards the animated character, Zeesy Powers' *The Beast* (2005) takes this violence of the uncanny to a new level. The artist experiences simultaneous delight and fright at seeing her reflection transformed into the 'monster under the bed'—a monster that subsequently turns on her creator. The beast's actions are pre-recorded while Powers' movements are performed live. Each performance is a new and in the end, unrealizable attempt to reconcile the animator with the beast, for Powers cannot escape the demise she has scripted. But what is the point of continuously re-staging this scripted conflict between different versions of oneself? Perhaps, just as the animated Barrow and the 'real' Barrow are inseparable and interdependent, the beast and the animator in Powers' video represent different but vital aspects of the same creative personality. Aspects that are in constant conflict with one another in all animation: the cautious animator and the violently expressive animated beast.

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Finally, just as Barrow has become a master at manipulating obsolete techniques, Jeremy Bailey's *Video Paint 3.0* (2007) employs a computer-generated animation program that is the artistic equivalent of kindergarten finger-painting to examine issues of creative self-censorship and strategic role-playing. The mess of lines and colour that build up on the video screen would be nonsensical without the improvised narration that Bailey provides in the assumed persona of an earnest Bob Ross-inspired painter-inventor. Bailey's persona is pitted against a programmed bomb that periodically threatens to destroy his most recent creation. But, much like the beast, the bomb's behaviour is deliberate and predetermined by the artist. Just as Barrow's narration serves as a self-censoring balance to his gratuitously honest animated counterpart, Bailey's bomb is a form of creative self-sabotage. It is an object that harnesses the strange powers of the animated world to point out the artist's even stranger, ambivalent and sometimes hostile relationship with the creative process. For Bailey, as for the other artists in this program, the power that the world of the animation holds over the animator lies in its ability to draw out our most human traits.

The critic Sean Cubitt argues that "we can no longer speak of the author as the originator of the cartoon: instead we are confronted by the animator, no longer a subject of the social world, but an exile seeking asylum in the machine world from all demands external to the world itself."[3] Although the strange and foreign world of the animation may appear separate from the 'real' social world, offering an alternate space for 'gratuitous honesty,' these videos show that such a distinction is impossible. From Daniel Barrow's frank expressions of desire and self-censorship, to Tadasu Takamine's free association re-shaping of American culture, to Zeesy Powers' battle with her monstrous reflection, to Jeremy Bailey's absurd expression machine, these artists show that the social world of the animator always infiltrates the machine world of the animation: that whenever an animation speaks, it is actually making the animator's statement.

Endnotes

1 Sergei Eisenstein in Keith Broadfoot and Rex Butler, "The Illusion of Illusion," *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation*, Alan Cholodenko, ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 263-298, 274.

2 Alan Cholodenko, "Introduction," *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation*, Alan Cholodenko, ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 9-36, 27.

3 Sean Cubitt in Steve Reinke, "The World is a Cartoon: Stray Notes on Animation," *The Sharpest Point: animation at the end of cinema*, Toronto: YYZ Books, 2005, 9-26, 16.

PROGRAMME

Daniel Barrow, *Artist Statement* (2007), 5:20

In this narrated video, Barrow uses a Commodore computer - an 8-bit home computer released in 1982 - to illustrate a version of himself creating a "live animation" in front of an audience with the same computer equipment. The result is an animation-within-an-animation where Barrow says he is "gratuitously honest" and personal about his insecurities and aspirations as an artist.

Tadasu Takamine, *God Bless America* (2002), 8:45

Takamine and his lovely assistant shared a room with a huge clay face for eighteen consecutive days. Before the eye of the camera, they ate, slept, read, fucked and made continuous changes to the face, animating it to synchronize with a scratchy, halting recording of that American patriotic classic "God Bless America."

Zeesy Powers, *The Beast* (2005), 4:49

Originally executed as a projected performance piece, a silhouetted Powers meets a replica of herself in an idyllic landscape and then watches as it transforms into a beastly character. The artist and her doppelganger try to co-exist in the landscape together but ultimately face off in a violent struggle resulting in the artist's death.

Jeremy Bailey, *Video Paint 3.0* (2007), 20:38

Video Paint 3.0 is a software program designed by Jeremy Bailey that allows you to paint anywhere, anytime. In this video Bailey follows up on his "hugely successful performance software environment" of Video Paint 2.0 by walking the viewer through several of the new features in the program while telling a captivating story using the software. "The artist would like to note that Video Paint 3.0 is ideally exhibited as a live performance." (Vtape catalogue)