

B-LIST

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Meredith Allen • Joe Amrhein
Mike Ballou • Michael Buckland
Beth Campbell • Fritz Chesnut
Jennifer Dalton • Charley Friedman
Michelle Hines • Christopher Johnson
Guy Richards Smit • Michael Smith
Standard & Poor • Joshua Stern

Curated by David Kramer and John Massier

INTRODUCTION

In the far-flung future, David Kramer will tell everyone how he backed me into a corner. Having told him I was interested in developing a Brooklyn-specific show and that we should curate it together, David sends me an email a couple of days later: "Hi John. I've been spreading the rumor around Williamsburg, that you are curating a show of Brooklyn artists for Hallwalls, called *Out Of Fashion*. As I suspected, everybody I spoke to is desperate to be part of it. David"

That much is true, though I was already entrenched in the idea. The working title *Out of Fashion* didn't make it to the end, but neither did all our other working titles: *This Side of Paradise*, *Anxious In Brooklyn*, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, *In a Perfect World* or *Model Citizens*. What did last were the impulses David and I shared to investigate the different textures of success/failure in a Brooklyn context.

Additionally, my curatorial interests were many, including maintaining Hallwalls' own long relationship to the New York scene, but also surveying the Brooklyn landscape at a time that might be called Post-Hype. Brooklyn has passed the apex of media attention that gets directed at any "fresh, new scene" that can be written about as a burgeoning arena of frothing ideas and hot young stars-to-be. No longer the New Scene On The Block, Brooklyn continues to be a real hotbed of real activity, not just a passing flavor du jour but a concentrated and vital community of people making things. And making things happen.

That this occurs perennially in the shadow of a much bigger and richer art-beast across the East River creates the arena for *B-LIST*, a designation that is both truth and fiction. It would be unfair to suggest that all artists in Brooklyn leer toward Chelsea with tongues cravenly panting. But there is a different version of success there and Brooklyn artists are not likely to snub that success, if it comes a-callin'.

None of which denies the fertility—and continued growth—of Brooklyn's own "indigenous" scene, its palpable community. But it does provide a context within which to present these diverse works, all hovering somewhere around the constellations of Angst and Desire. Some directly and personally, some more obliquely, but all the works in *B-LIST* contain some measure of these sentiments, often simultaneously. Desire is the only thing that propels us through time and into the future. Angst is the thing that threatens to cripple that forward impulse. It wasn't difficult to locate this aspiration, anxiety, and self-deprecating doubt in Brooklyn. But here is where the true-enough parameters of the exhibition reveal their own fiction: it may have been easy to locate this simultaneity of success and failure not because it is the condition that defines Brooklyn, but because it is a condition that defines something much more broadly human.

Wherever you go, there you are. And there's usually a seemingly greener and more abundant pasture just across the river. Speaking with Beth Campbell recently, she jokingly emphasized "I'm not a theme show!" And she's not. None of the artists here are. And they're no *B-LIST*. When I read the list of artists to Meredith Allen, she interrupted me halfway through: "Hey, that's an A-list!"

My thanks to everyone on our A-List, all of whom were generous and enthusiastic from the get-go. No one balked at the "b-list" designation. They saw our tongues in cheek and they "got" it. Thanks as well to David Kramer, whom I've known for several years and with whom I share a deep-seated appreciation of pathos—not only for his curatorial insights into the Brooklyn scene, but for opting at the outset not to be an artist who curates himself into an exhibition, regardless of how apt the fit may be. My special thanks also to Susan Mitchell for tolerating a regular house-guest and Martin Mitchell Kramer, who gave up his room.

While most of *B-LIST* is culled directly from the studio, I would also like to extend Hallwalls' thanks to Donald S. Rosenfeld Jr., who generously loaned his Beth Campbell drawings for this exhibition.

And for their generosity in contributing to the production of this catalogue, Hallwalls gratefully acknowledges the support of the Brooklyn galleries Pierogi 2000 (Joe Amrhein, Director), Roebing Hall (Joel Beck, Christian Viveros-Fauné, Directors) and Plus Ultra (Joshua A. Stern, Ed Winkleman, Directors). They're a big part of making the Brooklyn scene—and this catalogue—happen.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator
Hallwalls

left: Mike Ballou, *I'll Never Do That Again*, 1997/98, 8mm still

Here's the funny thing about Brooklyn.

My family is from Brooklyn. My parents were reared in Brooklyn. They spent their whole lives trying to succeed at the American Dream and put Brooklyn in their rear view mirror. They had spent their own childhoods being reminded by my grandparents that Brooklyn was the place they had to leave. And to get back to the funny part, Brooklyn is the place where I decided to go to art school, to the horror and disbelief of my overworked parents. They worked hard their entire lives trying to do what was best for their children, and one of them decided to throw it all away and go to Pratt. They could not contain their disappointment.

For me, Brooklyn was perfect. It's gritty icons like the Dodgers and Coney Island captured my immediate attention and there was the sense that I had entered uncharted territory—a frontier of no laws, plenty of free parking, and only minutes from Manhattan. When I first moved there during the mid eighties, when crack was rampant and the New York art market was bloated with fancy painters and personalities, Brooklyn was the perfect seam to climb into and begin to carving a niche, as I dove into my work and figured out who the hell I was going to be as an artist. A high-flying gallery scene and claims to new bohemia status were unfathomable ideas. I came for the cheap rent.

That was a long time ago and the scene in Brooklyn has appeared to have zenithed and receded for now. All bets are off for what future heights Williamsburg will hit. But to get back to the heart of it, the artists in *B-LIST* have all found Brooklyn and have all, it seems, recognized it as the place to carve out their own niches while they hack out their work and wait for the Artworld's attentive gaze. What connects all of these artists is the shared position of willful outsider, looking in. Consciously or not, there is a collective belief that a big party is going on across the river and they are crashing. Some crash and flaunt the ballsy nerve that got them through the front door; others hide out by the bar and suck down the free drinks and make sidebar comments to those within earshot. But there is the prevalent sense that the party started without them, is in full-swing, and they are a few beers behind the curve.

In the 1980s, Hal Foster proposed two basic positions for contemporary artists. They could either join the fashionable trend or they could make work that rejected fashion. The irony of the latter, according to Foster, was that those who succeeded in forging their own paths, and thus destroying fashion, would soon find themselves at the center of fashion. It seems to me when surveying the field in Brooklyn, that artists have taken this theory and put it on their sleeves. For many of these artists, the idea was not only to step outside of fashion with their work, but to situate their own hopelessly-out-of-fashion selves centrally in their work. This strategy seems to have worked wonders, as Brooklyn has emerged as a vibrant art community, and the sexy zip code of the New York Artworld.

Champion/senior artist of this sorryassed position is Michael Smith. In Smith's entire oeuvre of video work, the steady theme is that he is a colossal failure and is taking it on the chin for all of us. Smith has made videos about themes ranging from failed businesses to art colonies that seem to be nothing more than tax shelters for the rich. In one of the videos included here, *Do It!*, we find the artist pondering his languishing art career. In considering a pile of group show invitations, he decides he would have looked pretty good in many of these shows and he sees his quick fix: organize a group show in which everyone is more famous than you! Curatorial premises and content are never even considered. His selected artists for his group show cuts right to the chase: DUCHAMP, NAJMANN, BOURGEOIS...MICHAEL SMITH. Smith's incisive parody

perfectly addresses every "emerging" artist's inner fear that the fix is in and there is no hope to gain entry.

As a kid I had contests with myself, all the time. I would hold my breath for as long as possible. Focusing my thoughts on my ability to hold my breath for a really long time would, I thought, somehow save my life from demise by drowning or gas chamber. But it never occurred to me, until I saw Charley Friedman's One Hour Smile video, that the ability to smile continuously might have some life-saving qualities. Charley is smiling, I believe, to mask his pain and frustration. Part of the gag here is that Friedman's smile doesn't mask anything. By the end of the piece, nothing looks more painful than a one-hour smile. Maybe Friedman is trying to tell us, don't let on that it hurts. If they know that they're hurting you, they'll keep coming until you're finally dead.

It's this type of hunter/hunted thinking that is somewhere at the bottom of Joshua Stern's scenic diorama photos. Borrowing scene structure from classic B-movies, his wooden-dowelled actors are often outfitted with torches (wooden matches) and are often pissed off. One can't help but look at these large b&w prints and at least entertain the idea that it's the artist that everyone is chasing. The anxiety in this situation is intensified by the lively and mannered poses Stern uses to animate his inanimate minions. Interestingly, Stern is also a partner in the fine Williamsburg gallery, Plus-Ultra. A veteran of the artworld, and more than one of the trends du jour, Stern understands the Brooklyn Art Scene. When surveying the landscape, he notes that the irony of Brooklyn is if you rise to the top of the Scene, "you get to leave, and go to Manhattan."

Mike Ballou runs a gallery in Brooklyn, too. Four Walls is one of Williamsburg's oldest galleries. Yet when you ask Ballou about it, he down plays all his efforts in the face of the more "real" galleries that the "kids" have going on around the neighborhood. Ballou's videos are like watching rediscovered silent films. They feel ageless, but are not dated. In one of his films, *Let Them Do It*, we see a man arrive with a suitcase, from which he pulls out two handpuppets. From this point on, the puppets take over, and using power tools and wood, they proceed to build a shelf. When the shelf is finished, the puppets are returned to the suitcase and the suitcase is neatly placed back on the shelf. The end. The Chaplinesque scene fades away, and we are left reminded of every artist who has used their talents to sheet rock the walls of every gallery and apartment in this town. Like the sad walk into the sunset, there is that feeling that nothing lasts, all is fleeting. Job's over. Put your tools away. Go home.

Artists have been relegated to their "stupid day jobs" for years. Some curse their plight. Others revel in the nightmare, and cull it for materials to take back to their studios. Standard & Poor are a collaborative duo of artists David Henry Brown Jr. and Dominic McGill. In their *Carpet Rollers* project, we find the artists as quintessential outsiders, but outsiders who revel in the role in order to redirect the gag. In the work, Standard & Poor are documented outside of New York's posh hotels and old money social clubs, with tuxedos, a roll of red carpet, and a business card. They have been commissioned to roll out the red carpet for an unsuspecting guest. But the duo doesn't know whom they're waiting for. They claim they're waiting for a signal from a limo driver, and this is enough to keep the paparazzi, the security and the tourists milling in anticipation. It is hilarious set-up that hammers home the idea of the outsiders as the real insiders.

Artists are always conflicted by the temptations of glitz. The idea of artists as members of high society is often the model of the gossip columns and Hollywood movies. But there is this other version or the artist, the dour cold water loft and the strong smell of poverty. Of course once Hollywood gets it's

hands on this, the story always ends in opulence. For some artists in this show, it seems that they've tired of waiting to see how their own story will turn out. For Guy Richards Smit, he seems to have scripted his own endings. In his videos and watercolors, Smit will often make himself out to be the leading man, or the hero. Only for Smit, there is always the feeling that he's like the fox in the hen house. He is often being serviced by beautiful girls, or stroked by art patrons, while reminding us that he really doesn't deserve any of this.

Meredith Allen's photos are probably the polar opposite of Smit's work. They arise from an almost childlike purity. When I look at Allen's photos, I imagine a small child at the beach, holding up their outstretched arm towards their mother, showing off a shell found in the tide pool. Allen takes her photos of popsicles on hot summer afternoons. She throws the popsicles into a cooler on the back of her bicycle, and goes for a ride. When she finds the perfect spot in the landscape, Allen stops and takes out the popsicle, and shoots a picture. The picture is a fusion of ideas. A pop icon thrown into a gorgeous landscape; and it's melting. The sagging icon becomes a reminder that things are okay. But not perfect.

Jennifer Dalton doesn't waste time concerning herself with whether she's happy or not. Her work is often a pragmatist's dream. Dalton makes lists and keeps files. She has spent over a year collating the photos published in the *New Yorker*, making piles of the girls and the boys, and subdividing these piles into dozens of categories, and devising her own standards to critique and highlight stark gender inequalities. Her work in this exhibition, *The Appraisal*, is another example of her obsession with filing. Dalton invited the curators of Christie's Auction House to appraise the totality of her possessions. Part of the point was to provide a concise, multi-layered look into the measure of Dalton's "success" to this point in her life and career. All of her dreams and desires and aspirations are fine, friends and loves and experiences not withstanding. Dalton craves the bottom line and it is poetically dispiriting to see that artist and appraisers differ in their respective evaluations, to the tune of \$30,000. As if to confirm the work of the appraisers, Dalton offers some of her personal loot on eBay, just to see what the market will bear. This labor-intensive, somewhat demoralizing project also makes a point. Artists are under-employed, over-educated, and have nothing. It is a bittersweet take on the practice, but pursued with humor and self-deprecation.

Joe Amrhein is also amassing collections of things, and turning this into his work. Arguably on the A-list of the Brooklyn art scene, Joe is the founder of Pierogi 2000 Gallery, the hub for the Williamsburg artist. As the gallery has grown in reputation and stature, Joe has collected the press clippings of the talking head critics from the very best journals. And then, editing like a hardened surgeon, Amrhein cuts away the meat and makes signage works with these tangents, layering them and combining them to emphasize the overweening absurdity of art criticism. I mean, for every artist out there, the thing that we all seem to crave as much as anything is the blessing of *The New York Times'* art writers. But Amrhein takes this scripture and tosses it back at the tastemakers. In essence, Amrhein is telling the critics who have fallen all over themselves trying to be the first to understand the latest and newest developments, "You don't really get it, do you?"

Christopher Johnson is also examining the establishment. Although with Johnson, this may be the establishment of bad taste. Johnson is a painter of things that we recognize as bad, or at least low-brow. Hugh Hefner and his bunnies. Glam Rockers in full regalia. Beautiful and painterly landscapes that include, hidden in plain site nondescript buildings housing titty bars and adult bookstores. Johnson is a terrific painter, who possesses the technical prowess

to paint anything he wants. And he wants to paint these things. I think it is fair to say that Johnson is not painting these things because they are vulgar. On the contrary, Johnson is painting these things because he cannot stop looking at them. Like staring at a car wreck, American culture directs our gaze to the seamier side of things only to beat back our temptations with puritanical judgments. Johnson seems to be questioning with every brushstroke why, if these things are so awful, do they feel so good?

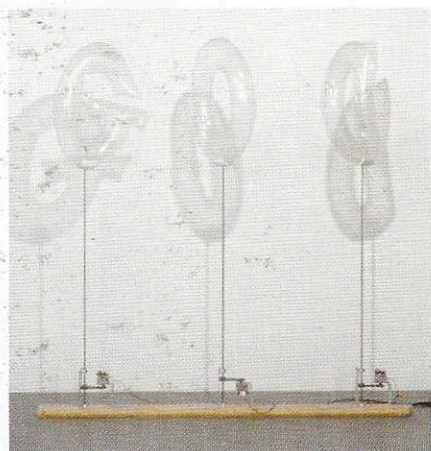
Michael Buckland is also mining the clichés. In his funny video and photograph in which he's buried his head in the sands of Coney Island, what is most compelling is how long it takes. Buckland's head is underground for an eternity, while his body is prostrated in fear on the beach. It is the perfect foil to Michelle Hines' video of the money booth, *Complete & Utter*. Shot in a TV game show styled glass booth, the work shows Brooklyn strangers in euphoric bliss, trying to grab at the dollars blowing in a circular motion inside the booth. The motion is slowed, unlike Buckland's video which is shot in real time, and with Hines' piece, there is bliss on the faces of her "contestants" as their moneylust engenders a religious-like fervor that is both intense and ebullient. Buckland's video, *A Little Trip to Heaven*, might also be called *Complete & Utter*, but where Hines is depicting unfettered joy (even if it's based entirely in greed), Buckland is depicting unfettered anxiety. And where Hines uses real Brooklynites to authentically capture raw desire, Buckland uses Coney Island and its allusion to arcade life to underscore a sense of desire and uncertainty.

Fritz Chesnut paints pictures of a similar crowd, standing outside of the arcade and gawking. Chesnut paints photorealist images of the crowds outside of Total Request Live and The Today Show, craning to see and be seen by celebrity guests. The crowds are grotesque in their wanting. These people are begging for it. There is a purity to this desire and Chesnut's painterly style crystallizes this purity. These people want so badly. Nothing else in the world matters. They are deep in the pain of longing. Yet, the source of the subjects are photos that Chesnut has taken himself, forcing himself deep into the crush of desire to capture the image, step back, and remark upon it.

Beth Campbell is not sure what she wants. In her drawings, Campbell shows a tormented soul always stuck on the fence. Her drawings humorously dissect her every decision: If only I had gone to live in Berlin instead of Brooklyn, my life would be so different now. The drawings trace her alternate-universe decisions down their humorous and semi-tragic roads. It begs the bigger questions of life for all of us—all the roads not taken—and plays them all out before our eyes. There is no real satisfaction in the end of the story. Only a neverending set of "what-if's."

What brings all of these artists together in *B-LIST* amounts to what might be considered a Brooklyn movement, the outsiders stumbling into the role of insiders. And the artists in this "movement" seem to have embraced this theoretical model. Obviously, there are many other artists making every conceivable kind of art form in the borough, but the B-LISTers do function within a broad, common category. And they may be the most genuine of Brooklyn artists, too. They are the salt of the earth in their practices. The galleries and the artists who hunkered down in Williamsburg and in Dumbo and the rest of Brooklyn, did so with the intention of making art and art exhibitions for art's sake. And so what developed is what developed in places like Soho in the 70's and the East Village in the 80's. All of the work in each of those eras were peppered with their own flavor. The art of the Brooklyn seems comfortably flavored with the sweet smell of beer and cigarettes.

David Kramer



Charley Friedman

top: *Mom(99)*, photograph, 40" x 30," bottom right: *One Hour Smile*, 1997, video, RT: 60 min., one continuous take
bottom left: *Untitled*, 1999, custom inflated letters, 96" x 96" x 12"

MEREDITH ALLEN is a visual artist living in and working in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Since 1999, she has been spending her summers photographing melting ice pop characters against the idyllic Eastern Long Island landscape. She has photographed and made art of what she sees around her. She has had solo exhibitions in Paris, New York and Kansas City and has been included in group shows in New York, California, and Europe. Reviews in *The New York Times*, *Daily News*, *The New Yorker*, *Art Issues*, *Art on Paper*, and *wburg.com*. Her work has been published in *Creative Review*, *art press*, *Pierogi Press*, *charley 01*, and the front cover of the summer 2002 issue of *Gastronomica*. She is in the collection of The Brooklyn Museum of Art, The Wichita Art Museum, The New York Public Library and many private collections, and in 2001, received the Aaron Siskind Foundation Individual Photographer's Fellowship grant.

After working as an artist in California (San Francisco and Los Angeles), JOE AMRHEIN moved to Brooklyn, NY in 1989 where he has continued his art practice. Recent exhibitions include the Ronald Feldman Gallery, NYC (*American Dream*), Joseph Hellman Gallery, NYC (*Overt Operation*), POST, LA (*Artifact (Quote)*), Bernard Jordan Gallery, Paris (*Sublime-in-Reverse*), Leytonstone Center for Contemporary Art, UK, and Roebing Hall, Brooklyn (*Critical Mass*). In 1994 Amrhein founded the gallery, Pierogi, in a small Brooklyn space that had been his studio. Today the gallery resides in a larger space next door to the original location. JOE AMRHEIN can be contacted at joe@pierogizoo.com.

DAVID HENRY BROWN JR. (STANDARD & POOR) is NY based conceptual artist represented by Daniel Silverstein Gallery. His earlier collaborative work was executed under the pseudonym Standard and Poor which includes Carpet Rollers Red Carpet Service. His solo projects include *Alex Von Furstenburg* (2000) and *Madame Tussad's Wax Museum* (2001). He is currently using fashion as a social sculpture in order to market clothing which is wearable discontent.

MIKE BALLOU was born in Swbusy, Iowa in 1952 and received his BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. He has been exhibiting in various group and solo exhibitions in the united States and internationally since 1983 including: Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn (1987, 1999), Laurence Miller Gallery, NY (1989), Spaces, Cleveland (1991), P.S. 1, NY (1992), White Columns, NY (1993), David Zwirner Gallery, NY (1993, 1995, 1998), Pierogi 2000, Brooklyn (1994,, 1995, 1997), Akademie auf Zeit, Munich (1994), Four Walls, Brooklyn (1995), The Kitchen, NY (1995, 1998), Ronald Feldman Gallery, NY (1995), Herslebsgate, Oslo (1996), Denver Art Museum (1996), Jack Tilton Gallery, NY (1996), Royal College of Art, London (1997), Art Club Berlin (1997, 1999), Exit Art, NY (1998), The Knitting Factory, NY (1998), Arizona State University Art Museum (1998), Museumsakademie, Berlin (1998), Blohard Gallery, Philadelphia (1999), Postmasters Gallery, NY (1999), Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart (2000), Voorkamer, Belgium (2000), and Malmö, Sweden. Mike Ballou lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Mike Ballou is represented by Xavier Hufkens, Brussels.

Since a very young age MICHAEL BUCKLAND has tried to be as much like the people he saw on television as he possibly could, eventually leading him to become an artist. He has shown his work and performed in various venues in North America and Europe as well as Asia. He currently live in Brooklyn, NY, enjoying the affection of many. iloveyou@earthlink.net

BETH CAMPBELL is a New York based artist originally from Dwight, Illinois. Campbell earned her MFA in 1997 from Ohio University and has attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Campbell works with drawing, painting, audio, installation, video and photography exploring the self-conscious positioning of the self. She has had two solo shows at Roebing Hall Gallery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn and one solo show at Sandroni Rey Gallery in Los Angeles. Campbell has participated in various museum shows including the Greater New York show at PS1 Contemporary Art Center in 2000, *Hello My Name Is....* at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh in 2002, *Brooklyn!* At Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, Palm Beach, Florida in 2001. She has been included in many group shows throughout the city including White Columns, Joseph Helman, RARE, Socrates Sculpture Park, Public Art Fund at Metrotech. She has work included in the Altoids Curiously Strong Collection and the growing collection at Bloomberg Radio and News. Her awards have included the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Art Grant and a Fellowship from Socrates Sculpture Park. Campbell's work has been reviewed in various publications including *The New York Times*, *Village Voice*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *Art in America*, *Art Index*. Beth Campbell is represented by Roebing Hall: campbeth@hotmail.com

FRITZ CHESNUT was born in Santa Fé, New Mexico in 1973 and was raised in Santa Barbara, California. He received his BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz (1995) and his MFA at Rutgers University (1997). His first solo exhibition, *Starstruck*, was presented at Bellwether Gallery (2002). His work has also been included in exhibitions at White Columns, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, Arena Gallery and Momenta Art (New York). His work has been reviewed by *The New York Times* and *Time Out NY*, and has been featured in *Harpers Magazine*, *Spin Magazine* and *Jane Magazine*. Chesnut lives and works in New York City. www.fritzchesnut.com fritz@fritzchesnut.com

JENNIFER DALTON received BA in Fine Art from UCLA in 1990 and an MFA in Painting from Pratt Institute in 1997. Her most recent solo exhibition was *A Task No One Assigned*, at Plus Ultra Gallery in Brooklyn, New York, in 2002. She has spent time in residence at the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, and the Millay Colony for the Arts, and she is a 2002 recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. www.jenniferdalton.com, and jen@jenniferdalton.com

CHARLEY FRIEDMAN received his Masters of Fine Art from The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston before moving to Brooklyn NY in 1997. He has exhibited and performed in New York City at PS1, White Columns, Exit Art, Jack Tilton Gallery, Ten In One Gallery, Momenta Art. He attended The Skowhegan School of Art in 1995, as well as The MacDowell Colony, The Bemis Center for Contemporary Art and most recently The Eastern Frontier Society. Humor is the paramount catalyst in Friedman's work because it is the most accessible and malleable resource to filter and examine a life. It is also the only narrative he can perceive in the first person. For his sculpture/performance at Exit Art, *Review* magazine said it was "The single most consistently disquieting performance /object I have ever seen." charleylrahc@yahoo.com



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