



McCallum & Tarry, *Studies for The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, 2008, Installation view, oil on linen and toner on silk

Post Memory

A Collection of Makeshift Monuments

Curated by Yaelle Amir

Post Memory features several recent projects commemorating historical events and individuals that have gradually faded from society's immediate consciousness. In general reference to the scholarly term post-memory, this exhibition presents various outcomes of remembrance through a mediated history. Inspired by elements of their cultural heritage, place of origin, political climate, biography, or occupation—the participating artists have drawn primarily upon the past to illuminate the present. American fatalities of the Vietnam War, displaced Native Americans, US Military casualties of the Iraq war, members of the Civil Rights movement, and abandoned remains of patients of an Oregon mental hospital, are some of the issues that have served as their motivation to create spaces for dialogue and introspection.

With only vicarious experiences to cull from, the artists adopt the exhaustive methods and sense of obligation inherent to historians in keeping formative narratives current and accessible. In employing unconventional approaches to the act of memorializing, such as performance, intervention and mapping, they redefine the ways in which one can pay tribute. Ambitious and

poignant, the resulting works highlight the fundamentals of our culture—reclaiming them from distortion at the hands of partisan agendas, and the relentless deterioration of memory.

In his series *One Week's Dead* (2008), **Binh Danh** recast portraits of American soldiers who died while serving in Vietnam. First published in *LIFE Magazine* on June 27, 1969 in the article "Faces of the American Dead: One Week's Dead," these 242 images made the effects of the Vietnam war all the more tangible to those back home. Over 35 years later, Danh revisits these portraits in order to explore his own history as a Vietnamese-American – raised by parents that seldom discussed the war – and grasp the consequences of a war removed from day-to-day reality, much like the current wars being waged in Iraq and Afghanistan. Employing what he has termed a chlorophyll printing process, Danh photographs each portrait, and affixes the negative to a leaf or fresh grass. He then exposes it to sunlight in order to create an imprint of the image upon the foliage, and embalms it in resin. By "capturing" these images within flora, Danh draws a symbolic connection to the natural terrain upon which these in-



Left : **Joseph DeLappe**, still from *dead-in-iraq*, 2008, Projected Video
 Right : **David Maisel**, *Library of Dust* (2363), 2005, C-Print



dividuals lost their lives. In the course of understanding and negotiating his own history, he has created a platform where multiple generations can revisit the immense human loss that has since shaped America's national identity.

Launched by the Department of Defense as a recruiting tool, the online game America's Army aims to afford teenagers a sense of what it is like to be a soldier in the United States military. Since 2006, **Joseph DeLappe** has been logging onto the game under the moniker *dead-in-iraq*, and rather than engaging in virtual battle, he utilizes its instant messaging feature to enter the name, age, service branch, and date upon which an American soldier was killed in Iraq since 2003. As of February 2009, DeLappe has logged 4,002 names of the 4,242 casualties to date, and will continue to do so until the war has ended. This action effectively interferes with the military's objective to champion the life of an American soldier as fun and playful, and military service as such that bears no consequences. The players' reactions thus vary from pure puzzlement to blunt outrage, ultimately culminating in DeLappe's expulsion from the game. He has devised this performative action as a dynamic, living memorial to the fatalities, which has the crucial ability to remain current and relevant as long as necessary. In the sculptural component of this work (2009), DeLappe has extracted a three-dimensional, life-size rendering of his dead avatar, thus offering a tangible reference to the potential outcome of combat. By performing an intervention in the ultimate escapist setting—DeLappe obliges America's Army participants to re-engage with reality, and consider their own responsibility to remember and mourn the fallen.

In his extensive series *Library of Dust* (2005), **David**

Maisel photographs individual copper canisters that contain the ashes of patients from a state-run psychiatric hospital in Oregon. Numbered from 001 to 5,121, the irregular canisters hold the remains of those who died between 1883 and the 1970s, and were left unclaimed by their families. Each monumental photograph displays an object with a unique surface, which resulted from mineral corrosion caused by the interaction between the copper and the individual remains. Eerily beautiful, the vibrant hues and etched surfaces form a singular reflection of the individual contained within. In producing captivating images of the sole remainder of these individuals' lives, Maisel recovers them from obscurity and pays them final tribute.

The diptych *Dawn* (*Anna Zerissa Morse Thurston, born February 6, 1841, Surry, Maine*) and *Dusk* (*Anna Zerissa Morse Thurston, died April 11, 1886, Oakland, California*) (2008) serves as a monument to the life of a pioneer woman, Anna Thurston, who is remembered simply as a wife, mother, and quilter. **Anna Von Mertens** came across a trousseau quilt Thurston made between the ages of 11 and 17, leading her to explore this woman's history. Being a quilter herself, Von Mertens saw fit to commemorate Thurston's life through the very medium that enabled her memory to live on. In these embroidered works, she employs a computer program to calculate the star rotation pattern at dawn or dusk on a specific day in history. To her, these particular points in the day serve as time passages, at which there is a clear break between the past and the future. In the diptych, the start of Thurston's life is marked with the star pattern visible on her birthday, as they fade out at dawn to mark a new beginning. Its ending takes form in the rotation evident at dusk on the day she passed away, at the moment when the stars vividly reappear. Von Mertens' date



Left : **Benjamin Tiven**, still from *The Implication Arrow: A Cenotaph for Simone and André Weil*, 2007-2008, Video
 Right : **Emily Prince**, from *It Won't Last Forever*, 2007, Embroidery

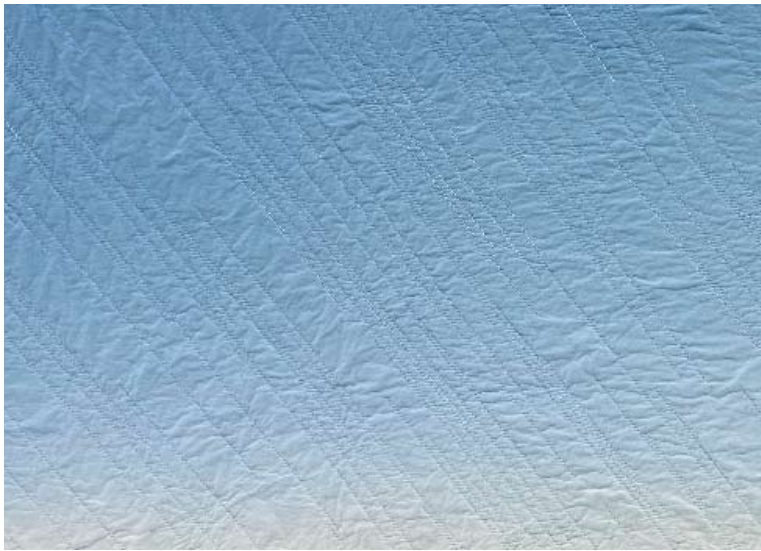
and time selection imbues these monumental abstractions with pertinent hopefulness—demonstrating the persistence of memory at the hands of the diligent.

Benjamin Tiven's video installation *The Implication Arrow: A Cenotaph for Simone and André Weil* (2007-2008) pays homage to the life of two siblings of French-Jewish heritage born in the early 20th century. Borne of a tireless journey, this work aims to present the influence the Weils had on Tiven himself and culture in general. The work displays quotations from the remaining vestiges of the siblings' lives; André was regarded as a young prodigy, who co-founded the mathematics collective Nicolas Bourbaki in 1935, and later became one of the preeminent mathematicians of the 20th century. Simone was an intensely spiritual, left wing social activist who became known for her philosophical writings on political engagement and the discovery of a path to God through self-denial. The Implication Arrow's composition embodies the element that impelled Tiven to begin this complex research expedition – a sketch for an Isaac Newton memorial proposal by Etienne Louis Boullée from 1784. Composed of a two-sided screen, the work displays an interpretation of the Boullée sketch on one side, while on the other is a video projection of images and sounds relating to various anecdotes of the Weils' lives. Through Tiven's careful editing, the video relays segments of an interview with André's lifelong friend Henri Cartan, and images of the Simone Weil memorial classroom, the last standing Boullée building, and the town where André served time in prison. The structure as a whole evokes that of adjacent prison cells—an element crucial to both André and Simone's oeuvres. Highly insightful and evocative, this installation functions as a monument to the life and ideas of the Weil siblings, whose intellectual contributions

have left indelible marks on our society to this day.

Emily Prince's installation *It Won't Last Forever* (2007/2009) traces her personal process of coming to terms with the fundamental effects the US government policies have had on Native American culture. Having studied the Manifest Destiny doctrine only from the US perspective in the course of her formal schooling, Prince had little visual or textual references to Native American tribes, geography or customs, and the inexorable attempts at disbanding them. Once she recognized this crucial gap in her knowledge, she sought to educate herself and work through the painful facts of her country's governance. Mirroring her own path of discovery, the work functions as a personal library, which highlights Native American historical literature. Embroidered portraits of five tribal leaders – whose images are often deliberately omitted from traditional American history books – hang as a meditative backdrop to the research materials that Prince used to re-educate herself. Rather than creating a simple monument to Native American culture from her removed perspective, Prince puts forth the voices initially excluded from her own knowledge of historical records. She thus goes about memorializing an episode in history in an unconventional way—documenting her learning process, instead of the subject itself.

Bradley McCallum and Jacqueline Tarry's installation *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (2008-2009) pays tribute to the protestors who participated in the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956. Led by Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., this event is one of the seminal actions of the civil rights movement, leading to the desegregation of public transportation in Alabama. The project is comprised of numerous individual portraits of 104 arrested boycotters, based on mug shots



Left: **Anna Von Mertens**, detail *Dusk* (Anna Zerissa Morse Thurston, died April 11, 1886, Oakland, California), 2008, hand-dyed, hand-stitched cotton
 Right: **Binh Danh**, *Jimmy W. Phipps* from *Soldiers from the Life: One week's Dead* series, 2008, Chlorophyll print on grass & resin

the duo discovered in the Montgomery City Archives. Each work is composed of two overlapping renderings that engender a dialogue between painting and photography. The first layer represents the individual in the manner of traditional portraiture painting, with its soft and luminous lighting, and focus on the intrinsic gestures and gaze. In the second, the original black and white mug shot hovers above on translucent silk, as the Birmingham police Prisoner ID number serves as a focal point. The individuals convey a sense of determination that reverberates throughout the entire project, thus reflecting the true nature of their cause and action. Quiet yet candid, the work permits one to relive this decisive event, and pay respect to those who have enabled us to partake in a more just society.

Each of the projects in **Post Memory** expands the traditional notion of a monument, as they present a subtle and personal reflection on the commemorated subject, while also alluding to its social implications. In drawing attention to those who have been silenced by time, these artists offer a unique and crucial perspective on the formation of our individual narratives and collective memory.

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323 West 39th Street 2nd Floor New York NY 10018
 tel 212.563.5855 x151, www.efa1.org
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