

## Lost and Found: Elisheva Biernoff and Floris Schönfeld February 22–April 27, 2014

**L**ost and Found presents work by Elisheva Biernoff and Floris Schönfeld, two Bay Area-based artists who share a fascination with the overlooked and the unfamiliar. Through a range of media culled from and inspired by archival materials, the artists place themselves in the role of explorers, researchers, and archaeologists to recount alternative histories. Their works provide a vehicle to contemplate the relationship between man and nature and question how we see and interpret the world around us. Together, the artists infuse wonder to the unknown, explore the relationship between the uncanny and the authentic, and invite discovery.

Elisheva Biernoff's delicate work *House of Cards*, 2012–2013, depicts various artistic and historical accomplishments rendered as trompe l'oeil playing cards. Their precarious arrangement as a familiar childhood card castle, while elevating the subjects on display, simultaneously comments on risk, fragility, and the tenuous nature of the things we create. In other works, Biernoff uses found vintage photographs as source material for intricate photo-realistic paintings, often presented as pairs united by commonalities in her subjects' natural surroundings. Their loose similarities, such as the household greenery in the work *Indoor Plants*, 2012, conjure possible narratives betwixt and between the random images, inviting one's imagination to place the subjects depicted in any number of plausible relationships.

Through a suite of double-sided paintings on thin plywood, Biernoff's series *Last Postcards*, 2009–2011, imagines the last communications of famous lost explorers who vanished during their journeys into the natural world. Biernoff conducts careful research into her subjects' lives along with a close examination of each cultural moment—from printing processes to what kind of stamps may have been used—to create the most convincing rendering possible. The works become epic relics, passing as authentic at first glance

while offering subtle hints to what is real and what is fabricated upon closer examination.

Biernoff's fictional landscape *They Were Here*, 2009, a large-scale, painted mural based on vintage scenic wallpapers, creates a seemingly utopian island—a visual mash up of different moments in time and place—and a final destination for the explorers her works investigate. Looking more closely, we see hints of a not-so-perfect locale. A capsized ship, an exploding volcano, extinct plant life, and fallen birds act as *memento mori* for this otherwise idyllic backdrop. The accompanying viewfinder suggests that it will provide a more detailed look at the scene, but instead one encounters a stereoscopic mirage of a vacant sea.

Floris Schönfeld's multifaceted installation takes the form of an evolving archive that centers on a critical phase of his ongoing project—the retelling of the historically dubious Damagomi Group. This entity,

a loosely affiliated team of spiritualists and academics who explored direct communication with the natural world, was allegedly active in Northern California from the early 1930s through the late 1970s. *The Secret Life of Plants*, a book by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird published in 1973, popularized such controversial research surrounding the idea that plants are thinking, emotional beings.<sup>1</sup> Combining science, experimentation, and new age mysticism to support these claims, the book provides an important touchstone for Schönfeld's project through its weaving of mythic and factual elements that illustrate the tensions at play in New Age theory. (continued on other side)

Elisheva Biernoff, *House of Cards*, 2012–2013. Courtesy of the artist.



Floris Schönfeld, *The Damagomi Reconstructions; Lab Experiment #1* (detail), 2013. Courtesy of the artist.



Schönfeld attempts to reconstruct the lost story of the Damagomi Group through reenactments of experiments and rituals that the group supposedly conducted to discover the universal language of nature. Manifesting as installations within the gallery space, Schönfeld's varied reenactments involve the interface of living matter and analogue audio synthesis in tandem with an array of textual and sculptural artifacts relating to their history and inspiration. With display tactics similar to that of a natural history or science museum, the elements presented are designed to shift, change, and activate over the course of the exhibition, allowing viewers and invited collaborators to take part in the process of investigation. Additionally, a new voice-over component—a central aspect to Schönfeld's installation for di Rosa—narrates a brief history of the group through each of its distinct phases, and serves as an audio guide to aid in parsing the objects on display.

Both Biernoff and Schönfeld create a scaffolding of uncertain temporalities in which their works act as portals to reconsider past, present and future. As the French philosopher Jacques Derrida has noted, the Greek etymology of "archive" suggests both "commandment" and "commencement,"<sup>2</sup> implying that the seemingly fixed realm of fact—that which is known, documented, and thought to be true—is also a starting point; a slippery, mutable medium open to inquiry and interpretation. As such, these historical records have presented an opportunity for contemporary artists to explore the process of history making, in which authenticity is in constant question. Similarly, *Lost and Found* offers a formal accumulation of objects and ideas, at once unusual and familiar, to challenge our conceptions of reality and prompt us to become speculative readers of the histories that shape us.

—Amy Owen, Curator

#### Endnotes:

1. Ongoing research into such studies suggests that plant communication could have vital real world application, thereby elevating the status of these activities from widely dismissed to urgently relevant. See Michael Pollan, "The Intelligent Plant," *The New Yorker* (December 23, 2013).
2. Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," in *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, Summer 1995), 9. See also the exhibition of the same name curated by Okwui Enwezor which has explored the archival impulse in contemporary art through film and photography.

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## About the Artists:

**Elishva Biernoff** (b. 1980) has studied at Slade School of Fine Art in London, Yale University, and California College of the Arts in San Francisco. She has been included in numerous group and solo exhibitions in the Bay Area including shows at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, Triple Base Gallery, Root Division, Eli Ridgway, and Headlands Center for the Arts. Biernoff's work is included in the collection of the Kadist Art Foundation and the Richard L. Nelson Gallery at the University of California, Davis. She lives and works in San Francisco.

**Floris Schönfeld** (b. 1982) received his BA in Time Based Arts from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam, and his MFA from the California College of the Arts in San Francisco. Schönfeld's work has been shown at film festivals and institutions throughout the world including the Amsterdam Film Biennale; Centre Pompidou, Paris; International Film Festival Rotterdam; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Kassel Documentary Film and Video Festival, Germany; and Kadist Art Foundation. Schönfeld is currently a Graduate Fellow at the Headlands Center for the Arts. He lives and works in San Francisco and London.

## Exhibition Checklist:

*In the listing of dimensions, height precedes width precedes depth.*

### Elisheva Biernoff

*Last Postcard: Amelia Earhart, 2009*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.5 x 5.5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Robert Harshorn Shimshak and Marion Brenner

*Last Postcard: Bas Jan Ader, 2009*

Acrylic on plywood  
4.25 x 6 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Kadist Art Foundation

*Last Postcard: Dominick Arduin, 2009*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.5 x 5.5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Robert Harshorn Shimshak and Marion Brenner

*Last Postcard: Everett Ruess, 2009*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.5 x 5.5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Kadist Art Foundation

*Last Postcard: Michael Rockefeller, 2009*

Acrylic on plywood  
4.25 x 6.5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Robert Harshorn Shimshak and Marion Brenner

*Last Postcard: Percy Fawcett, 2009*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.5 x 5.5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Kadist Art Foundation

*They Were Here, 2009*

Acrylic latex on birch plywood (painting); acrylic latex and spray enamel on plywood and MDF (binoculars)

96 x 192 in. (painting);

67 x 24 x 24 in. (binoculars)

Courtesy of the artist and Kadist Art Foundation

*Last Postcard: Eduard Toll, 2010*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.5 x 5.5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Mike Dyar/Eat Art

*Last Postcard: Christian Velten, 2011*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.5 x 5.5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Robin Wright and Ian Reeves

*Last Letter: George Bass, 2011*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.25 x 5.75 in.

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Mike Dyar/Eat Art

*Indoor Plants, 2012*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.5 x 5.5 in. each

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Giles Cassles and Julie Casemore

*Wash Out, 2012*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.5 x 3.5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Mike Dyar/Eat Art

*House of Cards, 2012–2013*

Fifteen acrylic plywood paintings  
10.25 x 6.25 x 2.25 in.

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Joachim and Nancy Hellman Bechtle

*Feeding Deer, 2013*

Acrylic on plywood  
3.5 x 2.5 in.

Courtesy of the artist and the collection of Mike Dyar/Eat Art

### Floris Schönfeld

*A Brief History of the Damagomi, 2013*

Audio recording

20 minutes loop

Courtesy of the artist

Voice over: Melynda Sims

Script editing: Anthony Discenza

Production assistance: Sarah Bernat

*Damagomi Archive art. # 3a;*

*Matsa'apla reciever set, 2013*

Mixed media

4 ft. x 3 ft. x 10 in.

Courtesy of the artist

*Damagomi Archive art. # 3b;*

*Matsa'apla bells, 2013*

Cast bronze

6 x 4 x 3 in.

Courtesy of the artist

*Damagomi Archive art. # 3c;*

*M-Radiation maps, 2013*

Ink on paper

1 x 3 ft. (framed)

Courtesy of the artist

*Damagomi Archive art. # 3d;*

*Test site maps (2), 2013*

Ink on paper

3 x 2.5 ft. (framed)

Courtesy of the artist

*The Damagomi Reconstructions Field*

*Experiment #2; Mobile M-Radiation*

*Sensor, 2013*

Mixed media

4.5 x 3 x 4.5 ft.

Courtesy of the artist

*The Damagomi Reconstructions*

*Lab Experiment #1; Plan / Machine*

*Interface, 2013*

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

*Documents from the Archive, 2013*

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

## Acknowledgments:

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