

# Tongue- in- Cheek

May 9-July 19, 2015

**T**he comic impulse has long infused art, from the visual humor found on ancient Greek vases to the farcical approaches of artists involved with Dada, Surrealism, and Fluxus. In the Bay Area, comedy and art paired prominently in the 1960s with the advent of the Funk movement. With work spanning a range of media including painting, ceramics, and multi-media sculpture, Funk artists such as Peter Saul, Robert Arneson, and William T. Wiley combatted the seriousness of the east coast arts establishment by infusing their works with jest, which in turn imparted an immediacy with viewers.

*Tongue-in-Cheek* takes this approach as a point of departure and explores the continuing legacy of humor and absurdity in Bay Area art through the lens of a new generation of artists. In an increasingly fraught social and political context—both locally and abroad—many artists have turned to the language of comedy to reflect upon and illuminate the follies of daily life. This exhibition includes a selection of works in diverse media by emerging and established regional artists who employ multiple approaches to the theme, ranging from art-related satire to visual sight gags. Teetering between playful and dark, the works reveal more substantive questions about the human condition, the world around us, and the art world itself.

Several artists in the exhibition use visual satire as a tool to uncover anxiety and power dynamics generated both within and outside of the art world:

Inspired by the history of female comedians such as Gilda Radner and Carol Burnett, **Tammy Rae Carland's** photographs and sculptures explore the pressures of performance and being an artist through the language of stand-up comedy. In her installation *Funny Face, I Love You*, porcelain cast sculptures of a microphone, stool, and bottle of water convey the fragility and

**Tammy Rae Carland**

**Jonn Herschend**

**Bessma Khalaf**

**Jennie Ottinger**

**Kate Rhoades**

**Chris Sollars**

**Lindsey White**

**Wonderment  
Consortium**

pathos intrinsic to the acts of vulnerability for which they serve as tools. Her photographs of empty stages—*Double Spot* and *Smoke Screen*—allude to the notion of a nervous performer failing to emerge from the curtains while their vacant spaces also impart the ongoing marginalization of female artists and performers. Carland's work speaks not only to common stressors artists experience in their daily lives but also to the struggle of overlooked subjects to be seen and heard.

With sharp wit and self-effacing humor, **Kate Rhoades** teases various constructs of the art world. *Required Skimming*, an ongoing series of video vignettes, attempts to unpack revered theoretical texts through comedic videos that act as visual CliffsNotes. Similarly, her audio project *Theory Reader*, with the tagline "art theory texts read aloud (badly)," provides a books-on-tape approach to writings the artist has found impenetrable, read aloud by Rhoades herself. Her cheerful voice, stumbles and all, creates an approachable portal for challenging content. Rhoades's simple but powerful gestures humbly mock how we are trained to conceptualize, interpret, and decode art.

**Jennie Ottinger** delves into the dark underbelly of humanity through loosely rendered, candy-colored paintings that are equal parts cute and ominous. In works such as *Meeting in the Woods* and *Trustfall Demonstration*, the artist confronts the exclusivity and uniformity of social groups, and their uncanny ability to influence children and adults alike. From scenes of Girl Scout camping trips to sorority chapter meetings, Ottinger's work undermines the happy-go-lucky myth

of our younger years to reveal the anxiety and self-loathing that often comes with youth. Ottinger's eerie, unpolished execution hints that there may be more going on beneath the surface of her compositions than meets the eye, exposing our ongoing need for inclusion and acceptance.

Other artists in the exhibition employ physical humor to challenge conventional perceptions by presenting the unexpected:

**Lindsey White** utilizes magic and comedy tropes to question truth versus illusion. In her ongoing collaboration with Los Angeles-based comedian Ron Lynch, White explores the physical nature of being a performer and the artifice of entertainment. Her latest installations and photographs capture Lynch as his alternate persona—the bootleg magician Mesmerizo. In *The Hypnotist*, he is caught in the act of attempting to hypnotize a glass of water, the puddle a referent to its potential altered state. In *Mesmerizo*, Lynch is seen hilariously testing the capabilities of a plastic bag. Through both we see an attempt to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary through pathetic gestures that bring the audience in on the joke. White's work illuminates shared struggles of artists and comedians where pulling a rabbit out of a hat is perhaps not so distant from making a work of art.

**Bessma Khalaf** creates powerful social statements by way of ludicrous gestures and subtle visual comedic effects. In her videos *Mount Diablo* and *In the Woods*, Khalaf places herself in juxtaposition to the vastness of the landscape. With a mixture of futility and endurance, sharp, sudden acts of violence evoke both damage and regeneration, much like war or a natural disaster. In a time when environmental concerns threaten our region, Khalaf's work challenges the man versus nature dichotomy in which humanity's imprint on the land typically reigns. These performances for the camera serve as foils to one another, ultimately illuminating a version of our time and place in which nature wins.

**Chris Sollars** illuminates the complexities of public space and the urban landscape through playful interventions and performance. In his film *The Swimmer*, Sollars adapts the 1964 John Cheever short story of the same name by epically endeavoring to swim his way across the city of San Francisco from Bay to Ocean—by way of fountains, ponds, and pools. Sollars embeds himself as urban spectacle, weaving his way through city streets in a Speedo, with his soaked, nearly naked body going virtually unnoticed by fellow pedestrians. Cheever's story

acts as a metaphor for swimming through life blindly before realizing the things of value—relationships, family—have all but disappeared. Overlaid on the rapidly shifting economic landscape of San Francisco, Sollars's rendition wryly satirizes the displacement of neighborhoods and artists forced to other shores.

The double-take, a comic tool that highlights absurdity within the commonplace, is yet another tactic utilized by artists in this exhibition:

**Jonn Herschend** mines and manipulates recognizable corporate and educational communications tools like text-based PowerPoint presentations to explore truth and confusion in the everyday. In his new work *Five Proposals for Sight Gags*, Herschend inverts the elements of a generic office space—a filing cabinet, projector, and collapsible projection screen—to act as a comedy stage. Through a PowerPoint-turned-screenplay, the artist builds an ongoing narrative that draws attention to the ridiculous side of serious business and, through text alone, ultimately prompts the creation of “the film” in the mind of the viewer.

Similarly, **Wonderment Consortium**, a collaborative team made up of artists **Packard Jennings**, **Steuart Pittman**, and **Scott Vermeire**, upend traditional notions of the mundane through ironic portrayals of events hosts. Past work has included on-air parodies of rural live radio auctions, where the artists supplant valuable goods with thrift store-sourced minutia and transform their worth with painstaking, endless descriptions. At di Rosa, the trio will present a site-specific performance that engages the audience on a journey through the collection with a comedic take on the standard docent tour. Wonderment Consortium's work alludes to the rift between the real world and the art world and the value placed on objects therein.

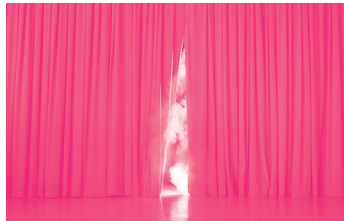
Rene di Rosa once remarked, “I suppose it's OK to stand in front of a picture and weep, but I think my collection makes the point that it's OK to laugh, too.” Like the humorous works that pervade di Rosa's collection, *Tongue-in-Cheek* engenders a sense of accessibility and functions as a means of critical engagement, rather than simply as entertainment. Humor in art is often disparaged for its simplistic take on complex circumstances, yet these works argue the opposite. By confronting the troubling aspects of contemporary life through the liberating and accessible act of laughter, we are able to more deeply examine the nuances of culture in a way that goes beyond a mere punch line.

—Amy Owen, Curator

## Exhibition Checklist:

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

### TAMMY RAE CARLAND



*Double Spot*, 2013  
Chromogenic print  
37½ x 50 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery

*Funny Face, I Love You*, 2010  
Ceramic cast and hand-built objects  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery

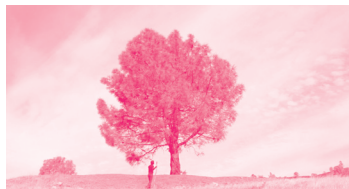
*Smoke Screen*, 2013  
Chromogenic print  
37½ x 50 in.  
Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery

### JOHN HERSCHEND



*Five Proposals for Sight Gags*, 2015  
Office equipment and mixed media  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist

### BESSMA KHALAF



*In the Woods*, 2014  
Single-channel video with sound, looping  
37 sec.  
Courtesy of the artist

*Mount Diablo*, 2014  
Single-channel video, looping  
5 min., 30 sec.  
Courtesy of the artist

### JENNIE OTTINGER



*Meeting in the Woods*, 2013  
Oil on panel  
36 x 24 in.  
Courtesy of the artist and Johansson Projects

*Trustfall Demonstration*, 2013  
Oil on panel  
36 x 48 in.  
Courtesy of the artist and Johansson Projects

*Welcoming Committee*, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 40 in.  
Courtesy of the artist and Johansson Projects

### KATE RHOADES



*Required Skimming*, 2014  
Single-channel video with sound, looping  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist

*Theory Reader*, 2015  
Computer and sound  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist

### CHRIS SOLLARS



*The Swimmer*, 2013  
Single-channel video with sound  
18 min.  
Courtesy of the artist

*Wet Blanket*, 2015  
Photo, fleece blanket, and water  
50 x 60 in.  
Courtesy of the artist

### LINDSEY WHITE



*The Hypnotist*, 2014  
C-print, Plexiglas, and digital sound  
24 x 30 in.  
Courtesy of the artist

*Mesmerizo*, 2014  
12 C-prints  
8 x 10 in., each  
Courtesy of the artist

### WONDERMENT CONSORTIUM



*Harmony Tour Group*, a division of  
*MinCorp*, July 11, 2015  
Site-specific performance at di Rosa

*Free-Form Open Mic*, June 20, 2015  
Site-specific performance at di Rosa

*Note: Checklist as of date of publication.  
Some changes may occur.*

## Acknowledgments:

This exhibition is supported by donors to the Fresh Art Fund. Additional support is provided by the di Rosa Collectors Council and our members.