

UPFOR

PAIN TERO FLIGHT

January 20 – February 27, 2016

Maria Bamford

Ray Anthony Barrett

Scott Marvel Cassidy

Jeremy Couillard and Jordan Rathus

Rachel Lord

Jillian Mayer

Ralph Pugay

co-curated with Alicia Eler

This pamphlet is a guide for the group exhibition *Pain Tero Flight*, on view at Upfor in Portland, Oregon from January 20 through February 27, 2016.

All photographs by Mario Gallucci, courtesy the artists. Typeset in Berthold Akzidenz Grottesque.

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IGNORING WITH PURPOSE **by Theo Downes-Le Guin**

With his death in 2012, Thomas Kinkade's ability to bedevil the contemporary art world was greatly diminished. For many years prior, however, Kinkade regularly questioned the conventions of contemporary art to considerable populist effect. For the most part he was ignored by art historians, curators, collectors and contemporary artists. And while he is perhaps best known for making a lot of money from his art, he did so outside of the contemporary art market, bypassing conventional gallery and auction channels.

Much of the art world's ignoring of Kinkade is genuine. Just as Kinkade has ardent collectors and supporters, most in the art world are simply indifferent to him, or don't connect over matters of technique, religious content or commercialism. For those of us who have a taste for institutional critique Kinkade is not so ignorable. He's a good foil for discussions of how contemporary art is valorized and distributed, and how artists and artworks relate (or don't relate) to the world they exist in. I accept that people might not *want* to evaluate Kinkade; but the idea that we *can't and shouldn't* evaluate him in art historical, critical or artistic terms, makes me want to do just that.

To that end, artists in this exhibition were invited to respond to any aspect of Kinkade—the artworks, the man, the business, the public proclamations, the art world response—and in any way they wished, including (thanks to Maria Bamford) comedic poetry.

I don't know how art history will remember Thomas Kinkade. My guess is that he will be remembered by some art historians as a regional landscape painter. Others will focus on his “business art” or technical innovations in mass reproduction. And some will write him out of art history entirely. But I think the most interesting exploration of Kinkade may come not from art historians, but (at a much later date) from archaeologists. This is the profession that will have to unearth and interpret the mugs, calendars, inspirational books and framed prints, and decide whether those artifacts were part of our material culture or artistic culture, or whether those cultures, in our era, were even separable.

THE MCDONALD'S OF ART

by Alicia Eler

Thomas Kinkade is a commercial artist whose creations are entirely mainstream, easily experienced and consumed by anyone attracted to “the light.” Kinkade was shunned by the art world because of the rural idealism, Christianity and Romanticism inherent in his paintings. Rather than get angry, he decided to get even, and so he made his own art market rather than subscribe to the existing model. Even though he is the embodiment of art-turned-pure-capitalism, he still comes up as a topic of conversation in the fine art world today. We still aren't sure how to discuss or name him — and maybe that's okay.

Thomas Kinkade was the inspiration for the exhibition *Pain Tero Flight*, co-curated by me and Upfor Gallery. We feature artworks by comedian Maria Bamford, artists Ray Anthony Barrett, Scott Marvel Cassidy, Rachel Lord, Jillian Mayer, Ralph Pugay, and (working collaboratively) Jeremy Couillard and Jordan Rathus. We decided to tackle, albeit with hesitation, some of the questions that Kinkade asked of anyone who categorizes his art as kitsch, mainstream, or lowbrow while also recognizing that he's the most financially successful artist in the world.

Kinkade referred to himself as the Painter of Light™, a clever marketing ploy on his part. Rather than wait for that title to be bestowed upon him, as happened with the British Romantic painter J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), Kinkade decided to name himself. He reversed the model of the art world, creating his own financially viable business, his own history and mythology rather than be a part of the art world and the canon of art history. Perhaps this is why art historians refer to Kinkade very differently from artists who participate in and are accepted by the art world.

Kinkade's output, as curator Linda Weintraub writes in her book *In the Making: Creative Options for Contemporary Art*, is nothing like a fine artist's studio practice. He franchised 300 Thomas Kinkade Galleries rather than obtain gallery representation. In part because of this, Weintraub argues that he didn't make art so much as he made product. “Kinkade is measurable according to standards set by

industry and commerce, not art...,” writes Weintraub. “The avant-garde dismisses Kinkade as sentimental, irrelevant to the serious world of art . . . he prefers the ‘homey’ to the sublime, the past to the present, the rural to the urban, the sensual to the intellectual, and the cheerful to the sorrowful.”

Kinkade would never classify his art as kitsch—that would be demeaning. Instead, he preferred to imagine himself as a God-like character, once saying, “I own the hearts of people.” What Kinkade owns is not the hearts of people, but a fantasy of the world as he sees it—a dream world that resembles Santa’s Village on the North Pole or Disneyland. It’s an illusion so familiar because it’s an advertisement for what late capitalism promises — a lie so normalized it starts to feel true. But is that such a terrible illusion for any artist who wants to be known for their visual work and financially successful? What if Thomas Kinkade didn’t “sell out” so much as he “sold in”?

On a strictly economic level, Kinkade set up a great business model for himself and his creative practice. In his later life, he spent much of his time in the studio, isolating himself from the business side so that he could create a handful of paintings a year. The model he established for the Thomas Kinkade Galleries isn’t unlike that of Jeff Koons or Mark Grotjahn. They mostly direct production, hiring assistants to create their artworks, which go for high prices at auction and within the gallery system. The main difference between Kinkade and artists like Koons or Grotjahn, however, is the markets in which their works are sold. Kinkade’s output doesn’t work within the art market, but that doesn’t mean it can’t touch those who see it — even if the sentiment is entirely sentimental.





MARIA BAMFORD



Untitled

2015

Single channel digital video,
running time 0:01:54,
dimensions variable

THE WORK

In Maria Bamford's comedic story song about going to therapy with her husband, Scott Marvel Cassidy (also in this exhibition), she brings her irreverent perspective to a Thomas Kinkade painting. Through their journey in therapy, Scott and Maria both noticed that they keep forgetting their phones and the building code that they need to get into see the therapist, testing each others' patience, as couples do. Once inside the therapist's office, Maria notices a Kinkade painting, and pauses to recite some thoughts about its cultural relevance. He may be the "Painter of Light" and people make fun of him, she says, but his paintings are soothing to some. It seems that there's no better place to experience a Kinkade than in this moment, as the tension is heightening between Scott and Maria. They're not the only couple that has set foot into this office and witnessed the Kinkade, a representation of some strange idyllic world that doesn't exist in our world. Maria's observation in this moment suggests that if we look at the painting itself, beyond its purely capitalist motives, it actually is soothing because it is not trying, and never will try, to be anything aside from what it is. (by her friend Alicia Eler)

THE ARTIST

Maria Bamford (b. 1970, Port Hueneme) is a comedian, writer and actress best-known for her portrayals of her dysfunctional family and self-deprecating jokes about depression and anxiety. Named one of the 50 Funniest People by Rolling Stone, notable appearances include two *Comedy Central Presents* specials and *Netflix's Comedians of Comedy: The Movie*.

RAY ANTHONY BARRETT



WHITE Lite
2015
oil on linen
36 x 48 inches

THE WORK

WHITE Lite, a conceptual, post-minimal, pop, monochrome painting, in many ways represents everything Thomas Kinkade, the “Painter of Light”, loathed about contemporary art. And yet, the piece formally functions as an homage—taking inspiration from the recently departed artist’s trademark moniker. That is, the retinal experience of the work is completely contingent on the interplay between light, the luminescent idiosyncrasies of oil paint, and the brushstrokes of the painter—of white lite brite. (The artist)

THE ARTIST

Ray Anthony Barrett (b. 1980, Kansas City) mines literal meaning from vernacular language to make drawings, paintings, installations and interventions that interrogate the semiotics of representation. His work has been featured in exhibitions nationally and internationally, including Dak’Art, the Dakar Biennial in 2010. Barrett lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

SCOTT MARVEL CASSIDY



Tracey in Backyard
2015
oil on canvas
13.5 x 17.25 inches



LA Landscape
2013
oil on canvas
4 x 3.5 feet

THE WORK

In Scott Marvel Cassidy's paintings, drawings and sculpture, it's often times impossible to separate reality from a dreamlike state, or to differentiate the manufacture of a domesticity with the actual domestic life. Focused on intersecting themes of memory, the immediate physical environment, and the quandaries of referring to painting as purely "representational," Cassidy's painting, drawing and sculpture edge into territories of the uncanny and, at times, wormhole into the past. (Alicia Eler, from "Dreaming of the Real")

THE ARTIST

Scott Marvel Cassidy (b. 1963, Philadelphia) lives and works in Los Angeles, where the paintings he contributed to this exhibition are set. Cassidy studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and has exhibited widely in the Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and New York.

JEREMY COUILLARD AND JORDAN RATHUS



I love you, you smell like gasoline

2016

single-channel digital video

running time 0:20:00

edition of 5 +2 AP

THE WORK

Taste

{Les Parapluies de Cherbourg}

Plymouth, MI

Techno-hypnagogic landscape

Sentimental (house by a river)

Cheesy and incorrect use of light

{Melodrama}

A bridge

American landscape vs. Digital landscape

Christianity vs. Cyberpunk

Wilcox

Yeah that looks good

(The artists)

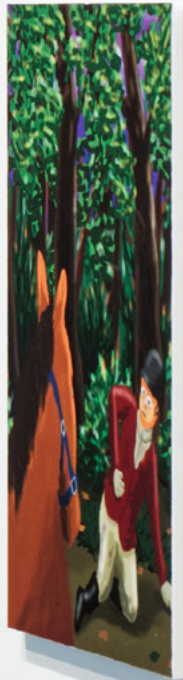
THE ARTISTS

Jeremy Couillard (b. 1980, Livonia) lives and works in New York.

Couillard makes 3D animations, kinetic sculpture, 3D and 2D prints, paintings and installations. He has a BA from Michigan State University and MFA from Columbia University. He is a New Media professor in Queens.

Jordan Rathus (b. 1983, Princeton) recontextualizes storytelling formats like narrative film and reality television to humorously and critically examine our collective contributions to pop culture. Rathus holds an MFA from Columbia University and BFA from New York University.





THOMAS KINKADE



Main Street Courthouse
1995

framed, matted print
signed by artist
25.5 x 34.5 inches framed

THE WORK

Main Street, a place we, as children, would go to on Saturdays aboard bicycles that nearly flew as we pedaled down the dusty city streets towards our destination. (The artist)

THE ARTIST

William Thomas Kinkade III (b. 1958, Sacramento, d. 2012) was an American painter known for his pastoral and idyllic subjects, which continue to be widely reproduced and licensed via The Thomas Kinkade Company under his trademark "Painter of Light."

RACHEL LORD



Acona Jar (with Big Bubbles)
2013
digital print, acrylic on paper
28.75 x 26.75 inches framed



Xia Pot (with Busted Chuck)
2013
digital print, gouache on paper
28.75 x 26.75 inches framed

THE WORK

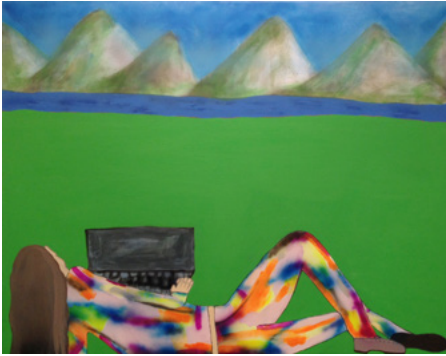
Angry Birds Paintings are always comprised of two layers of cultural appropriation. Often Kinkade's work incorporates text taken from sources like the Bible and the Pledge of Allegiance, and from these associations he gains much. His "God Bless America" series exemplifies this: reproductions of paintings of patriotic American architecture (like the Statue of Liberty, and the Capitol Building) on porcelain dishes with arcing text like "Liberty And Justice For All" and "United We Stand."

The Angry Birds Pots employ a similar schematic with a different "American architecture" as their base. Here I took a found object, a framed print of an appropriated image of a Xia Pot, from "The Silverman Museum" found at my Grandma's house. I hacked into the frame, and painted on top, nearly obscuring the original image with a thrown Angry Bird. The conversation and compositions bear a striking resemblance. (The artist)

THE ARTIST

Rachel Lord (b. 1986, Washington, DC) lives and works in Los Angeles. Working in series, she explores the connection between consciousness, confusion, and contemporary myth-making. Her Angry Birds Paintings use cultural appropriation in the context of kitsch and the sublime to illustrate the condition of the Western mind. Lord holds a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design.

JILLIAN MAYER



Beautiful Landscape #1
2016
acrylic on canvas
48 x 60 inches

THE WORK

Beautiful Landscape #1 is a reflection on the outdoors, beauty, leisure, and access, while considering Kinkade's visual content in regards to his marketability. Kinkade often purposefully excluded human figures in his paintings while imagining extreme beautifully scenic environments. Here, I bring a person to the painting. In an imagined scenic environment, I create a self-portrait with my back towards the viewer, fully engaged with a laptop (echoing my real life practices), laying upon a bed of chroma green-screen grass. (The artist)

THE ARTIST

Jillian Mayer (b. 1986, Fort Lauderdale) makes work that explores how technology affects our identities, lives and experiences. Through videos, online experiences, photography, telephone numbers, performance, sculpture, painting and installation, her work investigates the tension between physical and digital iterations of identity and existence. Her work shows nationally and internationally at galleries, museums, and film festivals. She is also part of the Borscht Corp, an open-source collaborative dedicated to telling Miami stories. Mayer lives in South Florida.

RALPH PUGAY



Oh Brother!

Dog Park

Sweat

Mirror

Jaron Lanier College Days

each digital drawing:

2016

archival pigment prints on paper

editions of 5 + 2 AP

9 x 12 inches

THE WORK

If there is anything that Thomas Kinkadee and I have in common, it would be our love for images and ideas that imbue a certain type of sentimentality—the type that can remind us of the good old days, our family's love, and somehow, also, our love for a Venti Frappuccino. We see these tropes everywhere. We see them in our art, our movies, our politics, even in our ads for herpes medications. This set of five digital prints is inspired by the types of sentimental imagery that encourage us to mask our own feelings of ambivalence—images made with an iPad, whose hard aluminum casing and bright LCD display serve as a warm companion during those cold and lonely nights. (The artist)

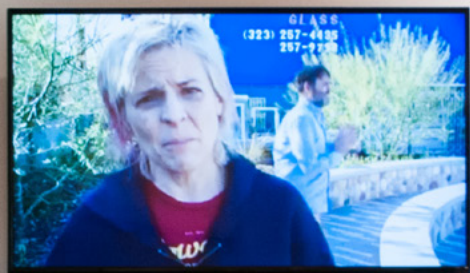
THE ARTIST

Ralph Pugay (b. 1983, Cavite, Phillipines) creates narrative artworks that juxtapose cultural norms and ideas, in ways simultaneously playful and unsettling. Pugay holds an MFA from Portland State University, was a Skowhegan Resident in 2013 and the 2014 Seattle Art Museum Betty Bowen Award winner. Recent solo exhibitions were held at the Seattle Art Museum, Upfor (Portland), Vox Populi (Philadelphia) and FAB Gallery at Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond).









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