



Montserrat College of Art Gallery

“CAUGHT”

March 4 - April 6, 2002



Bruce Bemis
Charles Cohen
Amir Zaki

CURATED BY LAURA DONALDSON

AMIR ZAKI

In an effort to “create something passionate from something mundane and dispassionate”, Amir Zaki subverts the banality of the Los Angeles suburban iconography by crawling up onto rooftops at night and letting his large format camera record what we only imagine we already know. In these photographs, which are a cross between an Edward Hopper painting and a still from a science fiction film noir, lush vegetation mixes with the texture of coarse-grained roofing tiles, and the prosaic elements of domestic life assume a before unknown significance.

Because he shoots at night with only available light, Zaki is unable to use his camera's viewfinder to frame a picture in the usual way until he gets the image into his computer. Once there he is able to zoom in or crop as he sees fit. The scales of the works vary according to the scale needed to render what detail he considers necessary. If he is uninterested in a particular part of an image that he is otherwise happy with, instead of blowing it up even larger to excise the unwanted area, Zaki has taken to an unconventional method of cropping that makes it startlingly clear that something has been removed. For example, the corner of 2338-2 has been sliced off at an angle like a limb amputated by a very skilled surgeon, the wound left neatly exposed.




Amir Zaki, 10532-2

What is most striking about Zaki's work is his distinct use of vantage point to make one aware of the act of looking. Shooting from the top of one-story buildings, we are outside and above, but not too far removed.

While there is an eerie absence, leaving only the suggestion of life in the green glow that beckons just beyond the asphalt rooftop in 2338-2 or the starkly illuminated windows of 10532-2, Zaki keeps us grounded in his attention to detail. In 10844-5, a front porch illuminated by a small spill of light hovers at the top of the picture plain like an oasis, while towards the bottom fuchsia pink flower petals seem to rest just under the surface of the murky night air. This layering of color, shape, and depth of field adds to the sense of quiet unease.



Amir Zaki, 2338-2



This show is about the act of looking, and the transformative power of a unique point of view. Freeze-framing the ephemera of everyday life, holding time still even when in motion, these artists closely examine what would otherwise pass unnoticed and tweak our assumptions about the everyday. There is a sense of theatricality in these works, of vignettes set-up and recorded for our perusal. The fact is that these images are caught rather than manufactured. Although we all recognize what we are seeing – people staring into space, suburban backyards, trees blowing in the wind – these mundane moments become truly extraordinary in the hands of these artists. They capture what is hidden in plain sight, make what is common seem intimate and bring a touch of the surreal to what would otherwise be ordinary.

The first time I saw work by each of these artists, I was held, nailed to the floor, transfixed, and bewitched. With each of them, I only had to see one piece to fall hard. Geographically they span the country; artistically they belong to an exclusive club – smart, sublime, original. Their work inspired the idea for this exhibition. I am deeply grateful for their trust and faith, and for letting me see this inspiration realized.

Laura Donaldson

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST



Bruce Bemis, *Reframe Refrain* (Detail)



Charles Cohen, *Man in Hat*

Acting Gallery Director: Laura Donaldson
Gallery Assistant: Jen Arbour

All photography courtesy of the artists.

Cover, top: Charles Cohen, *Nasdaq*;
middle: Amir Zaki, *333-2*;
bottom: Bruce Bemis, *Reframe Refrain* (Detail)

Overleaf: Amir Zaki, *10844-5*

Brochure designed by
ChebaccoDesign&Communications, LLC

Amir Zaki's work courtesy of Roberts and
Tilton Gallery, Los Angeles and James Harris
Gallery, Seattle



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All programs are free,
open to the public
and barrier free.

Bruce Bemis

b. 1954, Suffield, CT
Resides: Gloucester, MA
Studio: Boston, MA
1997 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, MA
1978 Bachelor of Arts, Windham College, Putney, VT

Reframe Refrain Film installation, 2002, dimensions variable
16 mm projectors, found film footage, mud puddle water on glass

Amir Zaki

b. 1974, Southern California
Residence and studio: Los Angeles, CA
1999 Masters of Fine Arts, University of California, Los Angeles
1996 Bachelor of Arts, University of California, Riverside

The following works are from the series,
Various Recordings of Ambient Noise (From at Least Ten Feet Above Ground)
and
A Long Dark Look at Common Roofing Materials and Their Surroundings
and
What Cats Might See

10844-5 laser direct type C photograph, 19" x 18.75", 2001
10532-5 laser direct type C photograph, 31.75" x 31.5", 2001
1010-1 laser direct type C photograph, 32.75" x 27.5", 2001
10532-2 laser direct type C photograph, 27.5" x 27", 2001
2338-2 laser direct type C photograph, 25.75" x 31.5", 2001
333-2 laser direct type C photograph, 22.75" x 29.5", 2001
5918-5 laser direct type C photograph, 22" x 23.5", 2001

Charles Cohen

b. 1968, New York, NY
Residence and studio: New York, NY
1997-99 Core Fellowship Program, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
1995 Masters of Fine Arts, Rhode Island College of Design, Providence, RI
1990 Bachelor of Arts, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

The following works are from the series,
Heroic Sculpture

Nasdaq type C color photograph, 30" x 37.5", 2002
Gap type C color photograph, 30" x 37.5", 2002
Tourist type C color photograph, 20" x 24", 2001
Girls type C color photograph, 20" x 24", 2001
Dreamcast type C color photograph, 20" x 24", 2001
Man in Hat type C color photograph, 20" x 24", 2001
Time Traveler type C color photograph, 20" x 24", 2001