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Storied Telling

Humboldt Magnussen, Ella Dawn McGeough, Alexis Boyle and Brette Gabel

Curated by Amber Landgraaf

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The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.

- Walter Benjamin, The Storyteller

There is nothing I like better than a good story told correctly. The telling of the story matters. The ways in which ideas and moments are lovingly strung together, woven intricately into a bigger picture. I crave stories messy with details – I want to live with the details, keep them close, to treasure the way that details can make a story whole. The exhibition *Storied Telling* explores the idea of the storyteller, shifting the role of narrator from the artist to the object and back again. As a curator I am fascinated by the ways that telling about a work functions as a story. What are the stories that we tell? When Francis Alÿs describes why he develops his artworks around the idea of a story or fable he explains, “If the story is right, if it hits a nerve, it can propagate like a rumour. Stories can pass through a place without the need to settle. They have a life of their own.” And it is this life, the ways that stories are transmitted, how they move and change, take on the details of the teller and the listener, and the ways that they are active and activate that *Storied Telling* explores. These artists — Humboldt Magnussen, Ella Dawn McGeough, Alexis Boyle and Brette Gabel — are storytellers. They are mythmakers, capturers of dreams, movers of mountains, and authors of entire worlds. At the same time, while the artists are the tellers of these stories, the works themselves take on an active role in the story’s transmission, shifting effortlessly between performative and static objects.

The tent from Alexis Boyle’s performance *Moving Mountains*, found here collapsed on the floor, becomes activated, a living mountain, with the presence of the artist’s body. In *Moving Mountains* two people walk the tent across both a natural and urban landscape. The idea of a moving mountain brings to mind a majestic and terrifying picture, a rumbling shifting of the earth, a magical impossible moment. However, Boyle’s performance subverts this majesty, bringing humour to the work as the two figures in the tent move across the screen with stilted, hopping movements. Back in the gallery, without the performer’s presence, the tent, along with the two videos, exists as a document. The objects indicate a potential for movement, and in this way, attention is drawn to the absence of the two bodies that made up the mountain.

Similarly, Ella Dawn McGeough’s jacket, *An Average Sunset (Pegasus)*, becomes active

through absence. The position of the jacket, hung on the back of a chair with arms extended, references the idea of an absent human body wearing the jacket. The stunning aesthetic of the jacket draws the viewer's attention and desire, where people want to be that body wearing the jacket. At the same time, during the run of the exhibition the jacket will be going "on tour." In its absence, posters will publicize the jacket's alternative location. Mimicking the aesthetics of late 70s/early 80s metal tour posters, the jacket becomes an active object, traveling through different locations. Our desire for the jacket becomes a desire to follow where it goes: like band groupies, we go where it does, longing for the chance to bask in its presence.

Brette Gabel's *Nightmare Quilts* start with the telling of a story. Gabel invites friends and strangers to tell her about their nightmares and then she transforms that description into quilt patterns. The beauty of the materiality of the quilts, the skill with which they are made, and the practice of quilt making itself – the long rich history of quilting patterns carrying stories through both patterns and materials chosen – belie the content of the stories told: our nightmares, those subconscious fears given form while we sleep. The coziness of a handmade quilt, the tactility and softness invites curling up with the quilt and revisiting those nightmares, a playful request of the dreamer to sleep with their fears. Included in the show, *Stitches*, *Shark Attack*, and *The Hag*, creepily tell of nightmares about doctors performing procedures on themselves, swimming in shark infested water, and the common feeling of dreaming that you've woken up but can't move because an invisible demon is sitting on your chest holding you down.

Finally, Humbolt Magnussen has created an entire world, which his works, *Hunty Helmet*, *Stealing of the Voice Beard*, and a dinner party performance (taking place during the opening reception) revolve around. In this world, questions of identity and voice are personified through intricate characters with entire rich histories — small bits of which are revealed through each telling. *Hunty Helmet* is a wearable mask representing the character Hunty, who was put on trial for stealing the Chrysanthemumalo's voice beard — the same crime that is illustrated in *Stealing of the Voice Beard*. At the same time, Magnussen brings this fantastical space into the real world through interactive performances, involving elaborate costumes and explanations of the rich history of the world that he has created. In this world, the Chrysanthemumalo has been missing for months. If you have any information about the Chrysanthemumalo's whereabouts, please let us know.

These objects, they tell a story. They have a life of their own. Maybe if we listen closely, they will tell it to us.

-Amber Landgraff