

Biographies

Habib Albi is interested in the process of salvaging one's individuality/humanity from the numerous consuming dispositions of our socio-political environment, and also in exploring how dramatic and visual poetry illuminate the relationship between psyche and society. He grew up in Egypt, Oklahoma and Ohio, and has studied and worked in the field of education. He is the producer of the plays *Jihad to be There* and *Dreaming of Being a Coward*, and the work-in-progress [circumnavigating the Great Lakes by land and writing] which explores geography as an axis of identity.

Lee Henderson is a media-based artist from Saskatchewan. He has studied art in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Germany, and with talented professionals including Maria Vedder, Brian Eno, and Ellen Bromberg. Since completing his MFA in Intermedia, he has been furthering his time- and lens-based artistic practice while teaching in the Departments of Visual Art and Computer Science at the University of Regina, and exhibiting in Canada, Germany, the UK and the US. His photographs, installations, videos and performances revolve around investigations of impermanence, philosophy, and the mortality of individuals and systems.

Born in Gary, Indiana, **Narcel G. Reedus** is a writer, director, independent filmmaker and media artist. He has won national awards for his dramatic short films including *Race Juice* and *The Fight* and was awarded a Peabody for his writing. His films have screened at the Lincoln Center in New York, on PBS and internationally in Rotterdam, Bermuda, Milan and Berlin. Narcel earned his MFA in Film and Media Arts from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is currently negotiating development deals with two of his independent feature scripts.

Amin Rehman is a Toronto based visual artist whose work explores politicized cultural interactions, communal narratives, linguistic forces and aggressive globalization. His art practice comprises works on paper, canvas, and board, as well as wall-hung installations. Amin has exhibited locally as well as internationally in Sydney, Melbourne, Tehran, and England. Amin's extensive and multidisciplinary art education includes a degree in design from the National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan (1982), curatorial studies from the University of Manchester, U.K. (1988) and a Smithsonian Internship in Washington D.C in 1988.

Stephen Fakiyesi is a Nigerian born Toronto based artist, an independent curator and marketing manager for the Etobicoke based marketing firm The Samurai Group. He received a BA in Art and Art History from the joint University of Toronto Mississauga/Sheridan College art program in 1994, and a MFA from the University of California Los Angeles in 2003. Fakiyesi has exhibited at numerous venues including SOF Arthouse, Mercer Union, AGO, LACMA and ACME Gallery. His work deals with issues of identity and spirituality.

front: **Narcel Reedus**, *Ezekial's Dream*, Video Projection



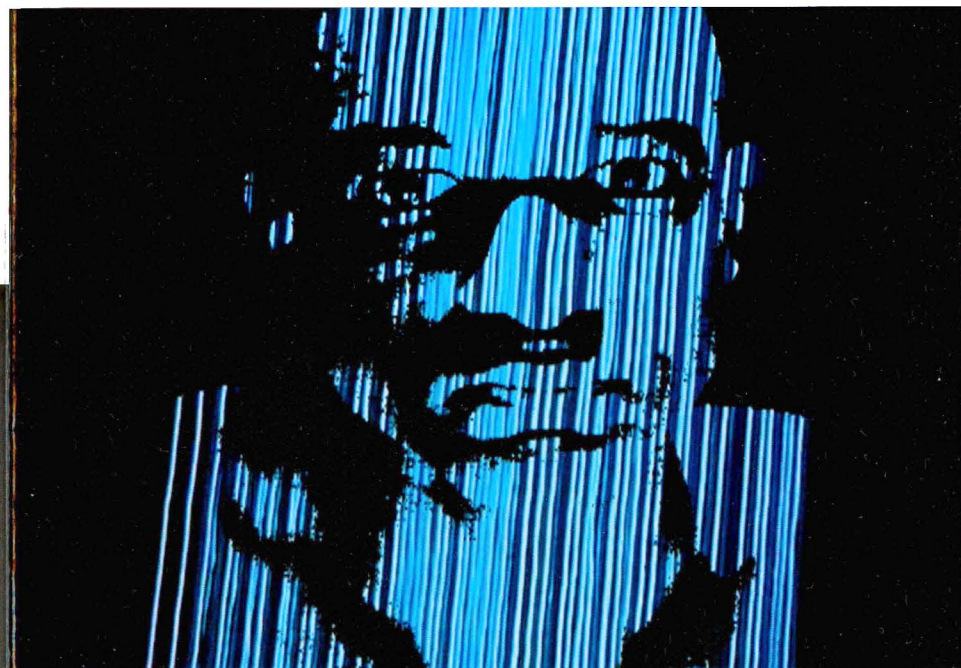
May 1st - May 29th, 2009

"That one!" exhibition catalogue
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That one!

Habib Albi
Lee Henderson
Narcel Reedus
Amin Rehman

Curated by Stephen Fakiyesi



Opening Reception Friday May 1st, 7-9pm

Performances Friday May 1, starting at 7 pm

7 - 9 – Lee Henderson, *Lines*

7:40 - 8:40 – Habib Albi, *Habib Albi is... Not a Man*

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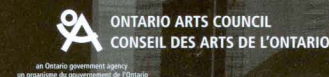
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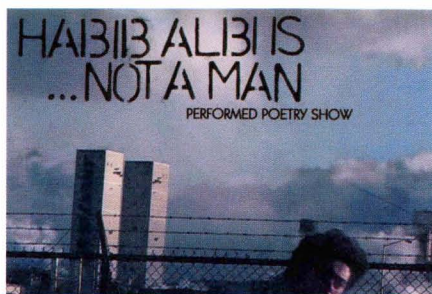
That one!

As male artists from diverse backgrounds, Lee Henderson, Habib Albi, Amin Rehman, and Narcel Reedus are each grappling with the organic unfolding of an evolution that began in the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement. Their working out of identity underscores a shift in the current sociopolitical climate, signified in large part by the Obama presidency.

This exhibition explores the legacy of systemic racism, inherited sense of guilt for past injustices as well as the effects of globalization and racial stereotyping on the lives and psyches of men of African, Arab, and South Asian descent.

As Canadians, we have a cultural tendency to be apologetic. We apologize in all sorts of circumstances, not as an admission of guilt -- often none is needed -- nor as a commitment to resolve the offence, particularly when they are mere minor social mishaps.

In *Lines*, a performance piece by Saskatchewan artist Lee Henderson, our individual and national commitment to resolve bigger and more important historical inadequacies is brought into question. In this piece, the artist, a white Canadian, repeatedly writes "I am very sorry for all of the attempted genocide and assimilation" on a chalkboard with a bingo dauber and red ink.



Habib Albi, *Habib Albi is... Not a Man*, Performance

Created as a response to First Nations artist Dana Claxton's video *I Wanna Know Why*, the performance purposely blurs the boundaries between sincerity and irony, pointing to the reality that the social and cultural disparity faced by many First Nations people cannot be bridged by apologetic gestures or the passing of government policy, although such acts may indeed be a necessary first step.

The Dallas-based artist Narcel Reedus, an African American, points to a cultural amnesia or a polarization when describing the various response audiences would have to his

video projection *Ezekiel's Dream*. The video is based on the real-life account of Charles Stuart, a white Boston man who on October 23, 1989, reported that his pregnant wife had been murdered by a gun-wielding black assailant. *Ezekiel's Dream* explores the psychological aftermath of racial profiling on an imaginary black male suspect named Ezekiel. As it turns out, Stuart himself was the actual murderer.

In the video, we do not actually witness the crime nor do we see Ezekiel's dream. Instead, we witness Ezekiel via a digital loop as he is dreaming: witnessing, in the artist's words "how the horror of being falsely accused ravishes the body and damages the psyche."

The Stuart incident is perhaps not as isolated as we'd like to believe, especially considering the race riots that erupted in 1992 in Los Angeles -- sparked by the acquittal of four police officers in the videotaped beating of a black man, Rodney King, and leaving 53 people of various races dead -- or the more recent October 2008 mugging hoax by Ashley Todd, a volunteer for John McCain's presidential campaign, who claimed she had been assaulted by a six-foot-four black man who cut a reverse letter B into her cheek conveniently telling her "you are going to be a Barack supporter."



Lee Henderson, *Lines*, Performance

What is often lost in these cases is not so much the innocence of the falsely accused -- both Willie Bennet and Rodney King, the alleged attacker and beating victim in the Boston and Los Angeles episodes, were career criminals -- but any long-term commitment to address deeper systemic issues such as racial profiling, inadequate housing conditions, disproportionately high black student drop-out rates, and low visible minority representation in positions of authority, all of which and more contribute to inflamed racial tensions in major cities across North America.

Habib Albi is... Not a Man is a nuanced and richly layered performance piece by artist Habib Albi (the artist's stage name) that uses recorded speech and spoken word, theatrical props, and 10 to 13 poems staged around an overhead projector to give full expression to one Arab American's post-9/11 experience.

Beginning with a video of the "twin Budweiser towers" in Detroit and eerily underscored by an Osama bin Laden speech, the series of monologues moves quickly between a politicized Arab American identity: the artist plays the minority working in a gas station and speaks in a heavy Arab accent about "finding autobiography within social commentary and vice versa."



Amin Rehman, *Black Holes*, Vinyl text adhesive

And yet for the Egypt-born Albi, the absurdity of the situation is that he is every bit a Midwesterner, raised not in Egypt but in Ohio, with its laidback, beer-guzzling, car-cruising culture, speaking perfect English.

So here is the rub: Can he belong without giving up being fully himself and can he be fully himself and still belong?

In the series *Power Tools and Black Holes*, it is language itself that Amin Rehman uses "as formal device and conveyor of message." The Pakistani-Toronto based

painter incorporates text into images of large cargo ships that were once part of the Canadian, U.S., and European landscapes and now lay dormant in South Asian ship-breaking yards. It's a lucrative global business for international brokers, but one that often comes at an even higher cost to the environment, releasing hazardous wastes such as PCBs, asbestos, lead, and oil into water and soil, as well as devastating the health of workers in developing nations -- labourers who often see the shipyards as the only means of escaping abject poverty.

In *Black Holes*, Rehman uses phrases pulled from newspaper headlines and prepared as vinyl text adhesives to deconstruct the language used by the media to cover the war in Iraq. With a very accessible pop-art sensibility, Rehman's text calls attention to "the United State's role as a self-mandated occupying power" and brings to fore a "language of aggression" served up by the media for public consumption.

One particular phrase used in Rehman's installation stands out in the context of this exhibition: the words "that one." These words recall the racially tinged assertion of failed presidential candidate McCain, when he pointed at Obama during a debate, declined to make eye contact, and referred to him as "that one." This reminds us that words are not only spoken but have the ability to speak us. Better yet, some words -- like "Yes, we can," Obama's campaign slogan -- have the ability to inspire us to believe that we can choose not to be as divided as our politics and identities may suggest. Bringing to mind the words of Martin Luther King, "We are interdependent... and therefore whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

- Stephen Fakiyesi, Curator