

THE THING Quarterly

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ARTGUIDE | DIARY | PICKS | NEWS | IN PRINT | FILM | 500 WORDS | VIDEO | PREVIEWS | TALKBACK | A & E | BOOKFORUM | 中文版

500 WORDS

RECENT | ARCHIVE

Sturtevant talks about her exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville
Daniel McDonald talks about his work in the Whitney Biennial
Jennifer Kroot discusses camp and her recent film about the Kuchar Brothers
Florian Hecker speaks about his exhibition at the Chisenhale Gallery
Matt Keegan discusses *North Drive Press*
Harrell Fletcher talks about his recent projects

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NEWS | DIARY | PICKS

Newest Reviews

Giuseppe Stampone
Ann Preston
Beate Gütschow
Darren Bader
Rachel Whiteread
Eva Kotátková
Anish Kapoor
Sterling Ruby
"Auto-Kinol!"
Denise Green
Matthew Barney
"The Graphic Unconscious"
Miwa Yanagi
"Gallery, Galerie, Galleria"
Jeremy Kost

Daniel McDonald

02.22.10



Left: Daniel McDonald, *The Crossing (Passengers Must Play Toll in Order to Disembark: Michael Jackson, Charon, and Uncle Sam)* (work in progress), 2010, mixed media, dimensions variable. Right: Daniel McDonald, *The Monkey's Paw*, 2005, brass, glass, sable, plastic, satin, monkey paw, 1959 book by Edward Gorey, dimensions variable.

The New York-based artist Daniel McDonald is a former director of the legendary American Fine Arts gallery in New York and a founding member of the collective Art Club 2000. McDonald is participating in the 2010 Whitney Biennial, which opens on February 25, and will also have a solo exhibition at Broadway 1602 until April 10. He discusses both below.

WHEN YOU'RE ASKED to be in a Whitney Biennial, a whole series of thoughts go through your head. One is: "What are the expectations surrounding the Whitney?" Sometimes artists make the mistake of producing pieces that are too overblown, glitzy, or gratuitously political. There are lots of traps you can fall into. I decided to look at those impulses myself and go with them.

My work is titled *The Crossing (Passengers Must Play Toll In Order to Disembark: Michael Jackson, Charon, and Uncle Sam)*. It's a kind of memorial tableau that takes place on a model Egyptian boat. It includes an action figure of Michael Jackson in the zombie costume from *Thriller*. The miniature Michael is coming onto the boat, holding a jumbo three-inch penny that he's handing to Charon, the mythical ferryman who transports souls to the afterlife. Uncle Sam is passed out in the back of the boat, clinging to a champagne bottle, and totally drained of life, while Michael approaches with a single tear in his eye. He looks like he needs rest or maybe he is anxious to pay and get to the other side, as Uncle Sam grins maniacally, doomed to limbo until he can pay the toll.

In a way, the piece responds to the Biennial and the expectations that the show will speak to what happened in the past year or be some kind of crystal ball for the future. Michael, the Egyptian boat, and the Whitney can all represent immortality. Michael is an emblematic hero, who works as a kind of stand-in for American entertainment culture. It relates to Charon because for some people the Biennial seems to function as a kind of passageway for artists.

I'm also having a show in the project room of Broadway 1602 called "Questionable Beliefs." It will be a continuously evolving sculptural situation, hopefully with performance events and screenings. The normal entrance from the main gallery to the project space will be blocked off by stacked art crates, and visitors will have to enter the show through a pocket door in the gallery's back office. When you push open the door, you enter the show and it's like you're an art object coming out of a crate. The show will be changing the whole time, as if the devil curated an altar or stage in a forgotten storeroom with totems and art objects from the recent economic-bubble period and Hollywood films. It's a room of haunted objects, with toys, lights, and sounds. It could be imagined as an institutional critique show, but made by an acolyte of Jack Smith on acid.

— As told to John Arthur Peetz

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