

POSTMASTERS

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for immediate release:

may 25 - july 8, 2006

"SCARECROW"

curated by David Hunt

*opening reception: Thursday, May 25, 6 - 8 pm
(Duron Jackson performance at 7.30 pm)*

Sarah Bednarek

Jane Benson

Jesse Bercowetz & Matt Bua

Jan Bunnig

David Kennedy Cutler

Dana Frankfort

Daniel Gordon

David Herbert

Duron Jackson

Rashid Johnson

Chris Larson

Postmasters Gallery is pleased to present "Scarecrow," a group exhibition curated by David Hunt. The exhibition will open on May 25 and will be on view until July 8. The opening reception scheduled for Thursday, May 25, between 6 and 8 pm will include a performance by Duron Jackson beginning at 7.30 pm.

For more than 3,000 years farmers have been using scarecrows to protect their crops from hungry birds. The Greeks carved wooden scarecrows to look like Priapus, the son of the god Dionysus and the goddess Aphrodite. Priapus, who was quite ugly, played in the vineyards scaring the birds away and protecting the grapes for a good harvest. As farmers picked up on this, they carved wooden statues in the likeness of Priapus, painted the figures purple, and put a club in one hand to make the statue more menacing and a sickle in the other for a good harvest.

Japanese farmers began to make scarecrows to protect their rice fields at the same time that the Greeks were using wooden statues. They would hang old rags, meat, and fish bones from bamboo poles in their fields and set them on fire creating a stench that drove both birds and wild dogs away. Soon they dressed human scarecrows in a raincoat made of thin reeds and a round straw hat with a peaked crown. Bows and arrows were added to make them appear more threatening.

In Medieval Britain, boys as young as 9 were known as "bird scarers" or "bird shoosers," patrolling the wheat fields with bags of stones to throw at pesky crows and starlings. When the Great Plague of 1348 killed half the population of Britain, landowners resorted to stuffing sacks with straw, carving ghoulish faces in turnips or gourds and mounting them on poles. Children who survived the plague were responsible for covering 3 acres themselves and so carried clappers reminiscent of modern castanets to startle the birds into flight.

In the American Southwest, Zuni children in the late 1800s had contests to see who could come up ^(over)

with the most unusual scarecrow. This ritual persists to this day in regional scarecrow festivals held annually. The Zunis would hang rags, pieces of dog and coyote skins, and the shoulder blades of animals on clotheslines suspended from cedar poles. Western European immigrants who moved to the United States in the 1800s also brought with them a variety of scarecrows. In Pennsylvania, German farmers built human looking scarecrows called a "bootzamon" or boogeyman. His body was a wooden cross and his head was a broom or mop top or a cloth bundle stuffed with straw. The bootzamon wore old overalls, a long-sleeved shirt or coat, a worn woolen or straw hat, and a large red handkerchief around his neck. It is this depiction of the scarecrow that carries over into popular culture in such classics as the Wizard of OZ and prairie gothic splatter-fests like Jeepers Creepers.

After World War II, scarecrows were replaced by DDT crop dusting and automated whirligigs that spun -in the air like mini windmills. Yet the tradition of the scarecrow, if only on Halloween, persists to this day.

It is the intent of "Scarecrow," which features 11 artists working in all media, to address a rising strain of sentimental poetry geared to the current overheated art market. Picturesque landscapes, tidy domestic scenes, soft-focus figures in louche poses, and infantile nostalgia is nowhere in evidence. Instead, the work assembled in "Scarecrow" is loud, menacing, sometimes abrasive, occasionally grandiose and operatic, but rarely—if at all—comforting. Desperate times, in other words, require desperate measures. Though not solely figurative in the manner of a true scarecrow, each artist provides work that is grimly confrontational rather than ecstatically transporting.

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Postmasters Gallery, located in Chelsea at 459 West 19th Street (corner of 10th Avenue), is open Tuesday through Saturday to 11 - 6 pm. Please contact Magdalena Sawon at 212-727-3323 with any questions or image requests.

www.postmastersart.com **e-mail: postmasters@thing.net**