

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer and Kevin McCoy live and work in Brooklyn, New York. They have been artistic collaborators since 1990. Their joint projects have been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, P.S.1, Postmasters Gallery, the New Museum in New York City, and other venues. Born in Sacramento, California in 1968, Jennifer McCoy received a B.A. from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York in 1990. Born in Seattle, Washington in 1968, Kevin McCoy received a B.A. from Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington in 1989. Each received an M.F.A. in 1994 in Electronic Arts from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York.

COVER:  
*Every Anvil*, 2001

BACK COVER:  
*Princess Painting (dark)*, 2008

INSIDE:  
Installation view of *High Seas*, 2007  
University Art Museum, University at Albany

LEFT (CLOCKWISE):  
*Big Box*, 2007; Joelle Nadeau and Meredith Schwab working on *Princess Painting (dark)*; *High Seas*, 2007; *Double Fantasy 3 (dream jobs)*, 2006; *Big Box (detail)*, 2007

PHOTOGRAPHY:  
Zheng Hu  
Jennifer and Kevin McCoy  
Ryan Parr

#### EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

*Princess Painting (light)*, 2008  
Enamel on aluminum  
45 x 60 inches  
Courtesy of the artists and Postmasters Gallery, New York  
Executed by Joelle Nadeau and Meredith Schwab, M.F.A. degree candidates, Art Department, University at Albany

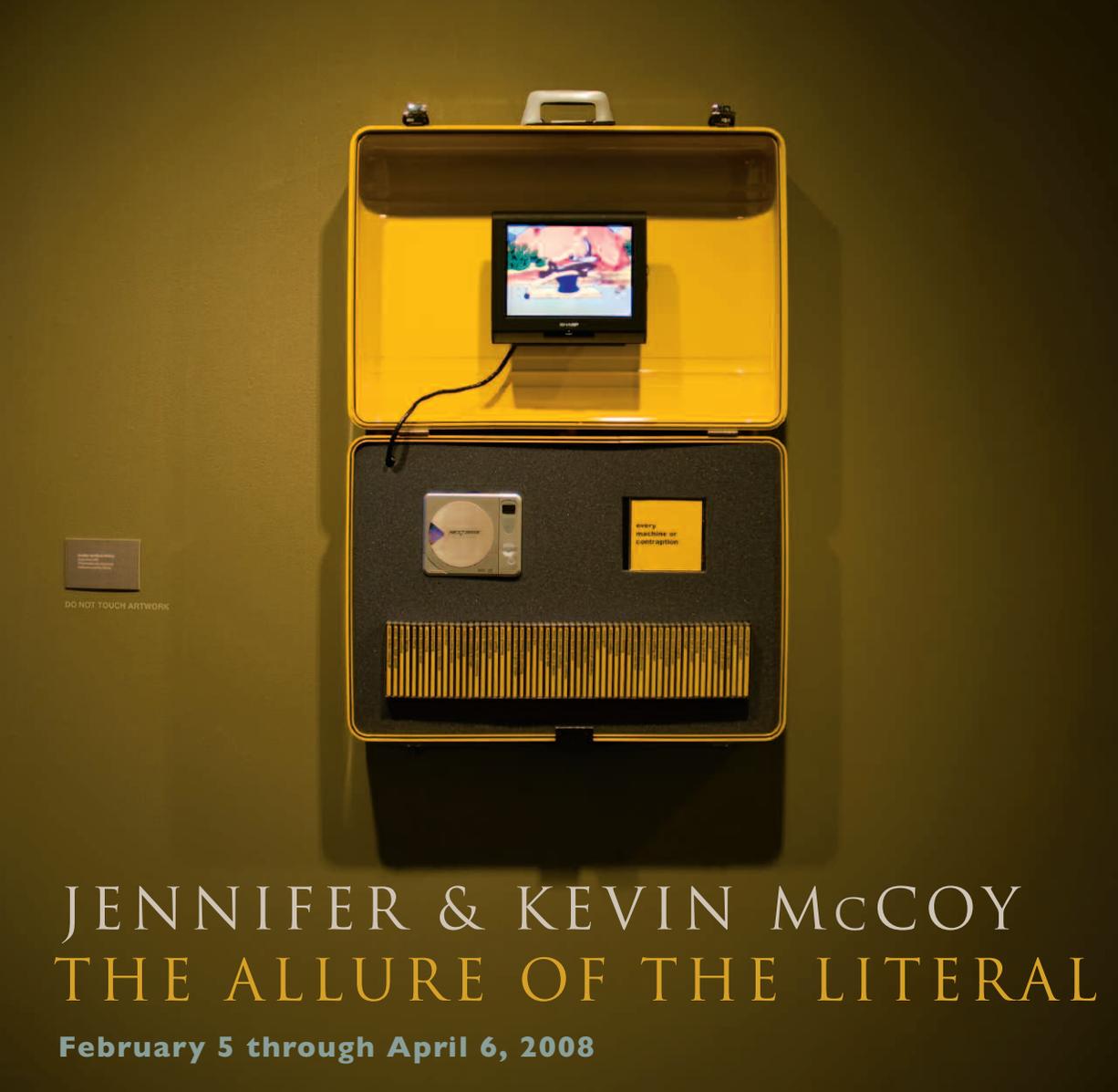
*Princess Painting (dark)*, 2008  
Enamel on aluminum  
45 x 60 inches  
Courtesy of the artists and Postmasters Gallery, New York  
Executed by Joelle Nadeau and Meredith Schwab, M.F.A. degree candidates, Art Department, University at Albany

*Big Box*, 2007  
Mixed media sculpture with camera and motors  
50 x 50 x 30 inches  
Courtesy of the artists and Postmasters Gallery, New York

*High Seas*, 2007  
Mixed media sculpture with motor, camera, and live video output  
Dimensions variable  
Collection of 21C Museum Foundation, Louisville, Kentucky, 21Cmuseum.org

*Double Fantasy 3 (dream jobs)*, 2006  
Mixed media video installation  
Dimensions variable  
Collection of 21C Museum Foundation, Louisville, Kentucky, 21Cmuseum.org

*Every Anvil*, 2001  
Mixed media with electronics  
43 ¾ x 29 ¼ x 5 ¼ inches  
Collection of Jeffrey Dachis



JENNIFER & KEVIN MCCOY  
THE ALLURE OF THE LITERAL  
February 5 through April 6, 2008



## Jennifer & Kevin McCoy in conversation with Jane Harris

January 2008

**Jane Harris:** In most of your installations, you utilize simple, nondigital technology to create your moving images: single cameras moving along motorized tracks, miniature models with hand-built scenes, light bulbs placed strategically here and there, etc. You even expose viewers to these mechanical “set-ups,” which are as entrancing as the filmic narratives they construct. It makes me think of that pivotal scene in the *Wizard of Oz* where Toto opens the curtains to reveal the Wizard, a mere mortal, whose illusion is power, and whose power is illusion. But while one of your main goals is the demystification of spectacle in our culture—those visual extravaganzas of television, advertising, and film we’ve all become addicted to—critics often define you as “new media” artists. Why do you think that’s so?

**Jennifer and Kevin McCoy:** We think we get lumped into new media because we are often inventing new forms for our work. If these forms have a technological component, then the new media descriptor seems to follow. The “new forms” thing is tricky. The invention really has to come out of the work itself as a necessary component to the ideas and materials at hand. When considering technology, one can easily come up with “solutions” in search of problems, or be swayed by the raft of consumer-driven products circulating the globe. These are distractions and rarely lead to important insights about the artwork. We try to pay attention to the world as it is today and look closely at ourselves and our place in that world. We wouldn’t say that our goal is the demystification of spectacle, because that supposes that there is some clear, outside vantage point we can begin from, or hope to move to. Our goal is more like a “remythification” of that world of appearances that is right in front of our eyes, hence the title of the show here in Albany: “The Allure of the Literal.”

**Yes, that makes sense as your work is as much a reconstruction of popular media as it is a deconstruction. What other common misconceptions attend your work?**

Well, people will think what they think. That said, part of our strategy is to create open spaces within the work—psychological and literal—where people can insert their own image, their own past, their own experiences. So in a way we’re asking for misconceptions in that we want viewers to creatively reinterpret our work.

**Speaking of the past, *The Allure of the Literal* features both old and new works. One of the former, *Double Fantasy 3 (dream jobs)* (2006), is part of an ongoing series in which you reconstruct childhood memories in vignettes categorized by specific themes: play, sex, religion, career, etc. In *Double Fantasy 3*, you take on pubescent fantasies of the future—Jenn envisioning herself as the wife of a diplomat, and Kevin becoming a scientist. There’s a uniquely intimate quality to these works that marries the personal to larger cultural themes—namely, the role of memory, gender, class, etc., in the formation of identity. Nostalgia seems to be the binding factor in this marriage. Is this an accurate read?**

In a way. Nostalgia implies an out-of-reach past. And while we are certainly thinking about the past in this work, it is only an attempt to capture what the future looked like from the vantage point of childhood. So it becomes nostalgic in the way that Epcot is—a fantasy or parallel future that exists only in the imagination, and can never have a concrete existence.

**True, but this is the nature of nostalgia, no? The yearning for something that was never real to begin with.**

Right. But as you mention, the kind of genre study—where we examine how cultural norms shape and limit individual hopes and dreams—is also at the heart of this series. And producing art is always a present-tense activity such that the active reframing of those childhood visions in our studio is not only an occasion to both recall and restore these moments from the past, but to subvert and transform them as well. With all of our autobiographic work there is a question of truth and accuracy: are we remem-

bering correctly? Do we change facts of the past to answer to the needs of the present? And the format we create to tackle these questions—a handful of scenes made of toys and miniatures filmed in the moment—is so full of holes, ellipses, and shortcuts it only amplifies these issues further.

**As would the collaborative aspects of your work, I imagine. What’s it like to work as a couple?**

We’ve been working together for a long time. Doing so embodies core values that we hold: pluralism, dialog, collaboration, and a desire to break down boundaries between art time and home time, to integrate the various facets of our lives as much as possible. We like dismantling traditional hierarchies, and want to support rather than compete with one another professionally. If the process of two (or more) people creating a single artistic practice seems mysterious to people, it’s because people often believe that there must be a single individual, removed from all influence, behind every artwork, which just isn’t true.

**As the parents of two small girls, the sparkly, fairytale world of Barbie, My Little Pony, and Cinderella has no doubt infiltrated your lives. Indeed, your most recent work, *Princess Paintings* (2008), is based on two select frames from Disney’s 1950 film, *Cinderella*, that you deconstruct and rearrange according to color, highlighting the background scenery in the process. Can you talk more about how this relates to the *Every* series, where the two of you went manually frame by frame through episodes of classic cartoons, archiving every example of violence you found according to specific scenes.**

Certainly the act of making an archive is an attempt, however futile, to manage and understand the subject at hand. In these painted works, we examined individual frames in an attempt to get behind the allure of the Cinderella character. The figures and objects are stripped of everything but their color and form, yet still retain a “fantasy style” that, for three year olds and others, communicates beyond narrative. In this way, like many of our projects, these works perform analysis. In a project called *Horror Chase* (2002), for example, we reenacted a short scene from Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead 2* (1987) and used a computer to

stutter and loop the images in order to suspend the narrative. The result was a new anti-narrative, in which character and plot are removed, yet comedy and drama still function. With *Princess Paintings*, we invited student artists to execute the works, turning our layered digital compositions into paintings, and investing the final images with a new element of drama. We’ve long been fascinated with the real work of cinema, the hyper-unionized and specialized skill sets that define every aspect of production, and the multiple collaborators that assign meaning to the work through this step-by-step process. By using outsourced talent to execute these works in a paint-by-numbers fashion, we refer back to the film’s original production process—the work of the cell animators.

**So, in essence, you are repurposing the technical and historical process (animation is rarely done by hand these days) to reanimate the work again, but to what end?**

Mostly to conduct the experiment of translating a time-based fan experience into a glossy art object. Will it be a fan object? Is the story of Cinderella inscribed on the objects in the frame or does it fall apart when you reshuffle the objects? Does it become something beyond the Disney version? Are the Disney stories based on style or narrative?

**One could pose the same questions about a lot of contemporary art today.**

Absolutely. Which makes this exhibition all the more significant as it arrives at an interesting juncture in our work. We feel that art today is in process of redefining itself vis-à-vis the popular spectacles you mention, moving more and more into the terrain usually occupied by blockbuster films and public events. As artists who use spectacle and the popular imagination as content, but engage a deliberately low-tech approach, our contribution to this critical dialogue will hopefully become more significant over time. ■

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Jane Harris is a New York based critic who contributes to various publications including the *Village Voice*, *TimeOut New York*, *artnet.com*, and *Surface*, among others. She teaches art history at the School of Visual Arts, in New York City, and is currently at work on a book, *After: The Role of the Copy in Western Art*.