

## Omer Fast



Cato's interview lasts only minutes. He sits down and we just stare at each other. I ask him what it's like to travel in time. I ask him if it's better to live in books or in costumes. I ask him if he's seen Groundhog Day. I ask him about his time in the Air Force, about the experiments they did, making him watch every episode of The Jeffersons while strapped into a supersonic airplane flying backwards in a circular tunnel under Mount Rushmore. I ask him which book is more autistic: The Invisible Man or The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat. I ask him if he ever mistook his visitors for inquisitors and, if so, how many spoke Spanglish as a first language. I ask him if he knows Columbus discovered Fort Lauderdale on the same day Jews were expelled from La Mancha. (I don't tell him that Columbus was a double agent working for both the Inquisition and the Mossad.) I ask him if Virginia has any windmills. I ask him if Colonial Williamsburg has a Bedford Avenue. I ask him if he can remember a time before the Indians and Puerto Ricans disappeared and the place was overrun by tourists and jets. I ask him which is more credible: Will Smith's portrayal of Muhammad Ali or Adam Smith's principle of the invisible hand. I ask him if he believes what he sees. I ask him if he sees what he believes. I ask him which animal lives longer: the butterfly or the bee. I ask him what is a still life. I ask him to quit staring at me. I ask him if he has any questions. I ask him to answer me. I ask him to be quiet. I ask him to leave. I ask him to come back.

**Omer Fast**

*Godville Portraits, 2006*

Pigment print on arches paper

Edition of 50

42 x 59,4 cm

OF.GP.006.01



As soon as he walks in, George Wythe announces he's got Strabismus. I ask him what he means and he tells me he's cross-eyed. A moment passes with no reaction, so George continues: "I've actually got Intermittent Strabismus. It's more noticeable when I'm sick or in stress." I look up from the viewfinder. George is wearing knee-length leggings, a pair of breeches, a black waistcoat, a dotted shirt that flares out at the neck and a hat. His right eye is looking directly at me. His left eye looks to the right. I nod for George to sit down and discreetly switch off the camera. Our mock interview starts. George pretends to be a signer of the declaration of independence and I pretend to be interviewing him for the camera. We're both practiced and talk effortlessly. Near the end, I ask if he's OK with a few personal questions. He says sure and leans back. "What's it like to have Strabismus?" George smiles and I quickly add, "I mean, what do you see when you're cross-eyed?" There is reason to be embarrassed but George seems to take it in stride. "In most cases, the brain simply learns to ignore input from the turned eye." He takes off his hat. "My case is rare though; I'm able to see clearly both straight ahead and to the side at the same time." Without turning, George snaps his wrist and flings the hat sideways. It glides across the room and lands on a hook which is almost behind him. "It's difficult when you're young," he continues. "But being cross-eyed has some clear evolutionary advantages." There's a pause. George gets up to retrieve his hat. Before he returns, I quickly restart the camera. "Can you repeat that?" I ask. "There might have been a glitch in the footage." George sits down again. "Sure." He says and takes off his hat. "In most cases, the brain disregards input from the bad eye." He snaps his wrist and the hat flies directly at me. It lands at my feet, just in front of the camera. "My case is rare though." George smiles. "I disregard nothing."

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## Omer Fast

Godville, 2005

“I was looking for a place that could simultaneously connect some pretty disparate interests I have: historical representation and time travel, theme parks and suburbs, war and the media, split personalities and hybrids, tourism and tourists, performance and acting, America and Americana. I started by contacting reenactment groups. These are people who meet on a regular basis in order to rehearse or perform a historical event, usually a battle of some sort, according to historical record and in period dress. I was hoping to join them as an unofficial observer or to participate as a war (reenactment) photographer. After a period of correspondence, followed by visits and meetings in several locations, Colonial Williamsburg generously agreed to my project proposal with few conditions. I spent a wonderful two weeks on-location, interviewing ten re-enactors and spending lots of time in the museum and in the surrounding area. The project that came out, Godville, is a fifty-minute long video. It begins in the past and in-character but deliberately jumps to the present (2004) and into the reenactors’ real lives – sometimes making it hard to keep track of which of the interviewees’ multiple personalities is talking or which century is being discussed. A suite of often hand-drawn illustrated short stories followed. It tells the story of a town whose residents are unmoored and floating somewhere in America, between the past and the present, between reenactment, fiction and life. I wrote these stories very quickly and spent lots of time drawing each portrait. I was originally accepted to graduate school as a painter and this is one of the few projects I made after my studies that turned into a two-dimensional work.”

- Artist Statement -