Catherine Sullivan: Triangle of Need, a multi-channel video installation in three components by this Chicago-based artist in collaboration with Los Angeles based composer Sean Griffin, Minneapolis based choreographer Dylan Skybrook, and Lagos, Nigeria based actor and film maker Kunle Afolayan. Catherine Sullivan's Triangle of Need is co-commissioned by A Foundation, Liverpool; Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, Miami; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. A Foundation’s commission is supported by The Henry Moore Foundation and Arts Council England. Vizcaya Museum and Gardens’ Contemporary Arts Project is supported by The Danielson Foundation. Catherine Sullivan’s artist residency at the Walker Art Center was made possible by generous support from Nimoy Foundation. Additional support is provided by Cisneros Foundation, Miami; Galerie Catherine Bastide, Brussels; and Metro Pictures Gallery, New York. The installation premieres at the Walker Art Center before presentations in Liverpool (October 2007) and Miami (December 2007), and New York (March, 2007). The configuration of the installation will change for each venue. The Walker installation is conceived in three multi-channel components.

(My thoughts)

By and large, the didactic nature of the storyline in a clear abstract style told in a distinct Grotowski style of writing makes the script an interesting piece. The script, in its abstract form, studies the conflicts that normally spring up amongst men in their quest to outrun each other while trying to solve a common problem, as represented by the trio of Mmes Geithoorn, Niagara and Decazeville. It also brings to fore, the greed of man and his conniving ways of siphoning money from his fellow human, as portrayed in the characters of Harold Bowen and Patrick Obi. Finally, amidst other subtle treatment, it explores the much needed resistance of man against inhuman behavioral nature of man against man as exemplified by the dignified characters of the Orphans even in their subdued degenerated characters.
The first two components transpose monolithic and mundane details of several imagined narratives into two locations. The first is the former estate of American industrialist James Deering, Vice President and heir to the American agricultural trust, International Harvester. Built in the 1910's on the bay of Biscayne in Miami, Florida, the interior and exterior décor of the estate, now known as Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, spans some four hundred years of stylistic chronology -- Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo and Neo-classic. It proposes a transient sense of time and is regarded by the artist in the work as a “primal scene” in the evolution of concentrated wealth in America. The second location is a turn of the century apartment building in the city of Chicago, the home of Deering’s factory. Notions of evolution, categorization, discontinuation and the 19th century imagination, are pretenses for “vestigial narratives”, one involving a wealthy industrialist trying to force the last remaining members of a unique hominid species to reproduce, the second, a series of reconstructions of scenes from the catalogue of Pathescope Films, the company from which James Deering ordered silent film reels for screening at Vizcaya.

Details are depicted from a position, which attempts to agitate relevance from these settings, in this case toward the infusion of two disparate economic pathologies. The same is true for the language of the third narrative, another wealthy facade, the text from fraudulent e-mails originating in Nigeria, seeking assistance in securing large sums of money. The two components are collaborations with Nigerian actor/director Kunle Afolyan, who will direct various scenes from Sullivan's script, Minneapolis based dancer/choreographer Dylan Skybrook, and Los Angeles based composer Sean Griffin.

Griffin’s musical and interdisciplinary works are positioned at the intersection of sound, performance, and theater. For Triangle of Need, he uses reconstructions of the vocal tracts to interpret and create a complex, performative language called Mousterian. This language is based on combined and disparate theories of Neanderthal speech capabilities, and explores the pathologically cultural acts of European science which held their most disturbing presumptions about the primitive in the colonial era, the era also of Vizcaya.

Griffin is creating an original score for the project through collaborations with musical archaeologist Susan Rawcliffe, Moog synthesizer specialist Hans Fjellestad, and pianist/musicologist Andrew Infanti. This wide-ranging work (scored for 11 instruments) combines scientific reconstructions of prehistoric flutes, early analog electronics, early 20th century American parlor music, with sacred music by 17th century composer Joachim Neander whom after, Neanderthals are named.

Skybrook and Sullivan have focused their rendering of three of the characters in Triangle of Need in terms of the iconography of the Neanderthal as well as on forms of disfigurement and prefigurement in the modern era, many of which deal with notions of overcoming a "social face". Skybrook's approach to the movement was to work with anatomical facts and historical representations and to use them as metaphors evocative of a particular imagination; one, which he says, would view the Neanderthal skull as funhouse-mirror version of our own. Skybrook has worked to create movement which might inspire the same dizzying feeling brought about by viewing something that seems both human and not has been attracting and repelling people since the first fossils were found in the mid-nineteenth century. He has invited two dancers, Kristin Van Loon, and Justin Jones to participate. All three hail from Minneapolis.

The third component in the installation, engages in all spheres of the project on an ideological and formal level. Figure skater Rohene Ward is shown in a series of combination spins forming a fleeting and tentative figure. These scenes are presented with footage of festive events at Vizcaya including photo sessions on the occasion of Quinceañera, a young woman's fifteenth birthday. The classically romantic symmetry created between the skater's romantic costume and gowns of the young women is given both to the imagination of Vizcaya and to another disfiguring element -- both scenes are partially shot in discontinued film stocks, one in particular, reveals a palate associated with a modern and familiar era which has recently passed.
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ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE CATHERINE SULLIVAN TO PREMIERE MULTICHANNEL VIDEO INSTALLATION AT WALKER ART CENTER AUGUST 23–NOVEMBER 18

TRIANGLE OF NEED EXAMINES WEALTH AND EVOLUTION

Minneapolis, July 27, 2007—What do the Neanderthals have in common with an early 20th-century American industrialist? What are the connections between Nigerian cinema and a sprawling mansion comprising four centuries of architectural styles? These are some of the elements—physical and conceptual—that make up Catherine Sullivan’s new film project, making its world premiere August 23–November 18 in the Walker Art Center exhibition Catherine Sullivan: Triangle of Need. In the multichannel video installation Triangle of Need, Sullivan orchestrates complex sets of ideas and participants to weave a nuanced story about evolution, class, wealth and poverty, and the inequalities and injustices in our global economy. The work will subsequently be presented in Liverpool (October 2007), Miami (December 2007), and additional venues through 2008. The Minneapolis presentation is organized by Walker visual arts curator Doryun Chong.

A 2007 artist-in-residence at the Walker, Sullivan was trained in both visual and performing arts, and the works she creates are truly hybrid, freely crossing boundaries and mixing disciplines. She has explored different theatrical and performative conventions, from the popular stage play and musical to the historical drama, from postmodern dance to Fluxus performance. In Triangle of Need, these intersections are abundantly evident.

The story in Sullivan’s video installation unfolds in two main locations: Vizcaya Museum and Gardens in Miami and a nondescript apartment in “an American city.” Vizcaya was the former estate of American industrialist James Deering, vice president and heir to the agricultural trust International Harvester. He built Vizcaya in the 1910s on the Bay of Biscayne, and the interior and exterior decors of the estate span architectural history, from Renaissance to baroque rococo to neoclassical, as if generations of a family lived there continuously. If Miami was the locus of Deering’s historical fantasies and architectures of leisure, Chicago, the home of his factory, was the location of his industrial production and labor mobilization. And in these two starkly contrasting sites, Sullivan situates what she calls “vestigial narratives,” one involving a wealthy industrialist trying to force the last remaining members of a hominid species to reproduce, and the second, a series of reconstructions of scenes from the catalogue of Pathescope Films, the company from which Deering ordered silent film reels for screening at Vizcaya.

During Sullivan’s Minneapolis residency, she partnered with local choreographer Dylan Skybrook and two dancers to develop specific movements of the imagined species, which were based on research on Neanderthal physiognomy. Furthering the exploration of the body’s ability to extend beyond its erect orientation and bipedal movement, Sullivan also engaged Minneapolis figure skater Rohene Ward, with whom she designed and filmed a series of spins. Concurrently, Sean
Griffin, a Los Angeles–based composer and the artist’s frequent collaborator, invented a complex, performative language called Mousterian taken from theories of Neanderthal speech. For this work, he also created an original score for 11 instruments, combining scientific reconstructions of various sources (prehistoric flutes, early analog electronics) with early 20th-century American parlor music and sacred music by 17th-century composer Joachim Neander, after whom the Neanderthal is named.

Also collaborating on the project is Nigerian actor/director Kunle Afolayan, who provides a counterpoint to Sullivan’s direction and style with his commercially based practice. Sullivan’s and Afolayan’s footage of the same script is intercut and interspersed, creating a structure that questions its own operation. Indeed, Sullivan describes her approach as “agitating the content from within” the cinematic structure she has set up. Triangle of Need—her most ambitious project to date—promises to give viewers a series of immersive and stimulating image and sound environments. But at the same time, this complex technique of narration is, to borrow the artist’s words again, a willfully “imperfect apparatus” for understanding the world and its historical and social contingencies.

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