

GALLERY 400

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I THINK WE'RE READY TO GO TO THE NEXT SEQUENCE:

THE LEGACY OF HALFLIFERS

May 3–June 15, 2013

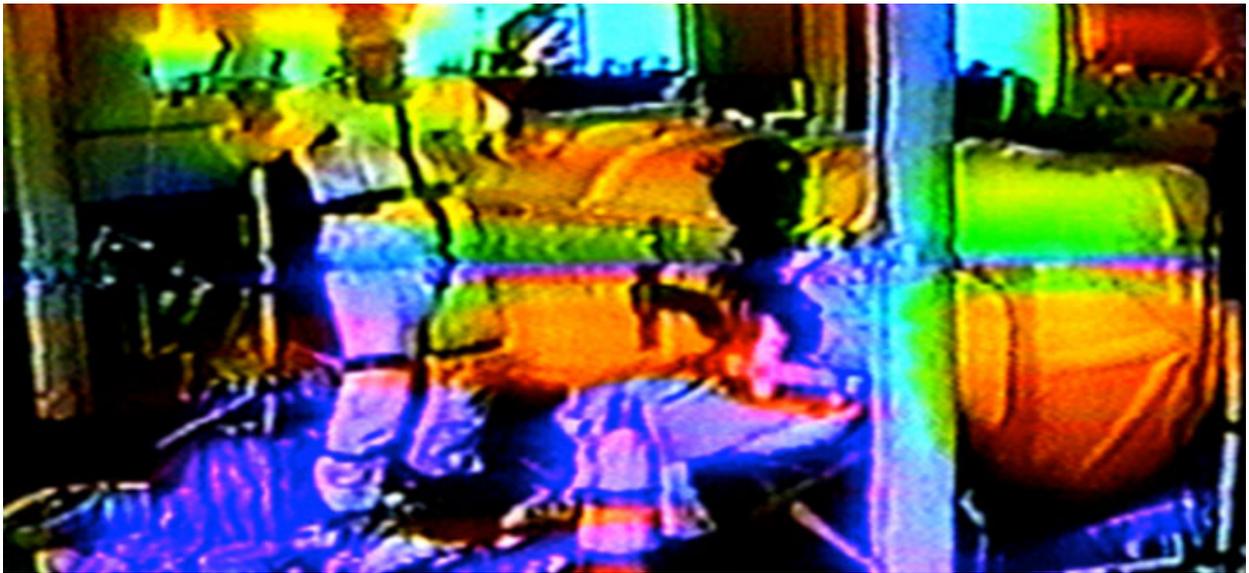


Image: HALFLIFERS (Torsten Zenas Burns and Anthony Discenza), *I.S.L.A.N.D.S. #0.0 Operation Big Combo*, 1998–2011, video, 12:00 min. (still)

May 3, 2013—Chicago, IL—Featuring artists **23E Laboratories**, **Jason Robert Bell**, **James Fotopoulos**, **Kari Gatzke**, **HALFLIFERS**, **Lauren Marsden**, **Jennifer and Kevin McCoy**, **Bjørn Melhus**, **Shana Moulton**, **Caspar Stracke** and **MASTERS OF TIME AND SPACE**, and **Jennet Thomas**, *I THINK WE'RE READY TO GO TO THE NEXT SEQUENCE: THE LEGACY OF HALFLIFERS* covers more than two decades of work and moves beyond the retrospective format to re-examine, interpret, and pay homage to the extensive body of performative video work that the HALFLIFERS (the

collaborative team of Torsten Zenas Burns and Anthony Discenza) have produced since the early 1990s. Employing a lo-fi aesthetic that amplifies the qualities of videotape and forms of its playback, Burns and Discenza perform as characters inspired by genres of speculative fiction, producing a sincere absurdity that reflects on the issues of anxiety and identity in our rapidly changing technological age. Included in the exhibition are the HALFLIFERS' re-edit of the collaborative's entire video history into a new forty-five minute loop and an alternative self-portrait that catalogs key materials, sources, influences, and other touchstones in a new book entitled *THE LAST KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF THE HALFLIFERS*.

Accompanying the HALFLIFERS' works are sculptures, videos, drawings, installations, photographs, and paintings by a number of artists who have affinities with the collaborative and who produced new works inspired by the HALFLIFERS' oeuvre. By subjecting themselves to the reinterpretations and responses of others, HALFLIFERS question their present relevancy while, at the same time, continue to be relevant through their very willingness to adapt.

Expanding on the centrality of speculative fiction in HALFLIFERS' work, some of the artists in the exhibition touch on the often tandem themes of alternative realities and calamitous events. German artist **Bjørn Melhus** pays homage to the way that HALFLIFERS embody a grotesquely distorted response to media and society within their work. Melhus's *SUDDEN DESTRUCTION* reveals the artist—who appears to be only half alive—disguised as a psychic medium delivering an apocalyptic message comprised of quotes from self-proclaimed evangelist prophets. **Jennet Thomas** exhibits *I AM YOUR ERROR MESSAGE*, a video-anchored installation incorporating an urgent and disturbing communication that comes from, as the artist puts it, “somewhere between your brain and the almighty information cloud.” The message indicates that something is terribly wrong and immediate action is needed for salvation.

The unique worldview that is foundational to the work of HALFLIFERS inspires many of the works within the exhibition. **Kari Gatzke**'s paintings explore the malleable role of objects in the HALFLIFERS' world, and how their functionality simultaneously informs and is informed by the cultural and psychological backdrop they inhabit. For the work in the exhibition, Gatzke will create a series of paintings based on imagery from office and supply catalogs. Gatzke is interested in how the identities of these objects are loosened once removed from their source material. Responding both to HALFLIFERS' use of speculative fiction and the special life of objects in their work, **Lauren Marsden**'s photographic series, *The Sightings*, documents a small swarm of photographers—“the paparazzi”—as they navigate between city ditches and Safeway aisles, discovering and capturing an assortment of discarded and forgotten “monuments” in the world around them. **Shana Moulton**'s new video piece, *Swisspering Pines*, a reference to her ongoing video series *Whispering Pines*, is framed by the act of applying and removing makeup. As the makeup is removed with a product called Swisspers, the body is, in effect, carved away. Through this act, Moulton investigates Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR), defined as the

physical sensation of pleasurable tingling that begins on the scalp and moves throughout the body. Moulton describes the relationship between ASMR and carving away the body to reveal spiritual essence as intimately connected to HALFLIFERS' notions of play therapy and psychic surgery.

23E Laboratories, an international collaborative network, creates a research office in which they accumulate information from their global research team, who is tasked with uncovering the connections between the world of the HALFLIFERS and our own. The findings are presented in connecting evidence webs, not unlike those seen in crime dramas. Synthesized, layered, and connected, the multiple findings create a master web of connections that possibly reveal an underlying pattern. **Jason Robert Bell** presents *White Feathered Tarot*, a full tarot card deck inspired by HALFLIFERS. On the evening of Thursday, June 13, Bell will perform what he describes as a "multi-mystical" tarot reading with the deck for volunteers from the audience.

Finally, a number of artists have chosen to pay homage to specific elements of HALFLIFERS' work and history. **Jennifer and Kevin McCoy** have immortalized the HALFLIFERS in a special tribute to the HALFLIFERS' 2004 video *After-Lifers*. German-born artist **Caspar Stracke** uses scripted variations on HALFLIFERS' conversations to inform a dialogue between analog and video/digital aesthetics. **James Fotopoulos'** contribution centers on *The Unknown Collaboration*, his ongoing partnership with Torsten Zenas Burns. The collaborators' unmade film, featuring, among other things, androids, aliens, Leonard Nimoy, and iguana sex, serves as the backdrop for Fotopoulos's *So Be It (And It 'Twas)*, in which the sculptures, drawings, and script from the unrealized film collaboration with Burns are reworked into the current iteration.

Related Programs:

**Screening of *SCHOOL OF CHANGE, REDUX* by Jennet Thomas
Friday, May 3, 4:45pm**

Jennet Thomas' *SCHOOL OF CHANGE* is a sci-fi musical set in an alternate reality that satirically reflects our current epoch. Once through the rabbit hole, audience members will witness the life of the kidnapped New Girl as she is forced to endure the tribulations of confinement in strange and peculiar academic surroundings. The film's playful strangeness delights in disruptive editing rhythms, choreographed movements, unusual special effects, and songs, colliding in the everyday location of the artist's former school, with an extraordinarily skewed logic.

**Opening Reception
Friday, May 3, 5-8pm**

***I AM YOUR ERROR MESSAGE [Activated by Live Performance]* by Jennet Thomas
Friday, May 3, 7pm**

In conjunction with the opening reception of *I THINK WE'RE READY TO GO TO THE NEXT SEQUENCE: THE LEGACY OF HALFLIFERS*, Jennet Thomas performs her newly created, HALFLIFERS inspired, *I AM YOUR ERROR MESSAGE*.

Something is terribly wrong. That message has been received and you know that some sort of action is required for salvation but you have questions, and fears. Receive answers to your inquiries and learn how to save yourself at Gallery 400 on May 3 at 7pm.

***E-DOGZ: Zombie Apocalypse Refuge Center* by Eric May and Rimas Simaitis
Monday, May 13, 6pm**

When the zombie apocalypse goes down, we'll all have to think on our toes—watching our backs as we hit the roads, escaping the ravenous army of undead relentlessly pursuing our cranial tissues. The living will have to eat, too, and the mobile kitchen of E-Dogz will be a beacon of nourishment in these end days. Chef Eric "E-Dog" May has teamed up with Rimas Simaitis to equip the food trailer to travel land and sea, feeding the people in these dire times. The zombie plague actually began generations ago, conjured through black magic by Voodoo priests on island nations during the glory days of the high seas. To honor the zombie resistance of yore, *E-Dogz: Zombie Apocalypse Refuge Center* will host a tiki party to ward off zombies and serve up doomsday cuisine and circuses. This event may feature, but will not be limited to: Spam nigiri, entomophagy, flaming cocktails, and coconut short wave radios.

***Loophole Limbo, video screening curated by Abina Manning*
Wednesday, May 29, 7pm**

Inspired by the actions and tropes of the HALFLIFERS' extensive body of work on video, *Loophole Limbo* delves deep into the archives of the Video Data Bank collection in order to expose, interrogate, and investigate the performative in artists' video. Featuring work produced across every decade of video's relatively short history, the investigation reveals that artists' video is obsessed, alienated, and downright strange . . .

Featuring work by Dara Birnbaum, Vito Acconci, AnneMcGuire, Tom Rubnitz, Laurie Jo Reynolds and Bjørn Melhus. Sponsored by Video Data Bank

***The White Feathered Octopus Tarot Card Reading* by Jason Robert Bell and
Zombies, Identified, a lecture/performance by George Pfau
Thursday, June 13, 7pm**

George Pfau will present a slideshow of diagrams, film stills, videos, and animations, drawing focus toward the zombie as a learning tool about identity and the ephemeral aspects of being human. Pfau treats the zombie as a window into the in-between, rather than as a sub-human "other" used to promote negative stereotypes. This project stems from Pfau's essay entitled "Feverish Homeless Cannibal," which is being published in the forthcoming book, *Zombies in the Academy*.

Jason Robert Bell, Mystical Rebel Outlaw Baddasss, whose Advance Thothic Practice in Theatomix will one day rule the world, is seeking volunteers to participate in a "multi-mystical" tarot card reading during the closing of Gallery 400's exhibition, *I THINK WE'RE READY TO GO TO THE NEXT SEQUENCE: THE LEGACY OF HALFLIFERS*. Bell is seeking 12 individuals, one born under each sign of the zodiac, to bring their energies together and contribute to a tarot card reading utilizing Bell's newly created White Feathered Octopus Tarot Cards.

Tours:

Gallery 400 offers guided tours for groups of all ages. Tours are free of charge but require reservation. Please complete our online form (accessible on our website at gallery400.uic.edu/visit/tours) to schedule a tour of *I THINK WE'RE READY TO GO TO THE NEXT SEQUENCE: THE LEGACY OF HALFLIFERS*. For more information, or to discuss the specific needs and interests of your group, please contact us at 312 996 6114 or gallery400@uic.edu.

I THINK WE'RE READY TO GO TO THE NEXT SEQUENCE: THE LEGACY OF HALFLIFERS is supported by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; the College of Architecture and the Arts, University of Illinois at Chicago; and a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

Founded in 1983, Gallery 400 is one of the nation's most vibrant university galleries, showcasing work at the leading edge of contemporary art, architecture, and design. The Gallery's program of exhibitions, lectures, film and video screenings, and performances features interdisciplinary and experimental practices. Operating within the College of Architecture and the Arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Gallery 400 endeavors to make the arts and its practitioners accessible to a broad spectrum of the public and to cultivate a variety of cultural and intellectual perspectives. Gallery 400 is recognized for its support of the creation of new work, the diversity of its programs and participants, and the development of experimental models for multidisciplinary exhibition.