

For the Love of Country

Justin Richel

Directed by Victoria Preston

Guest Curator: Sarah Schuster

August 31 – October 31, 2007 (Fri, Sat, Sun, 14.00 – 18.00 or by appointment)

Private View August 30 2007 19.00 – 21.00



Black Abe



Liar Liar Wig on Fire



Mmmmountain

Wings Projects Art Space presents *For the Love of Country*, the first European solo show of American painter, Justin Richel, which explores American history, infused with a highly contemporary message.

The *History* series centres around America's early presidents, primarily George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Dispensing with the reverence usually accorded such figures, Richel portrays Washington in a variety of compromising positions. Taking his moniker as "Father of the Nation" as a literal option, we follow the President as he goes about inseminating the architectural icons of colonial America. He paints Lincoln, in his most recognizable format as the face of the \$5 bill, but in this case the face has become that of a black man. In doing so he alludes to Lincoln's most famous act, abolishing slavery, but also asks us to acknowledge that in spite of the passage of some 150 years, America has yet to elect a black president.

Richel forgoes the portrayal of well-known figures in his *Big Wigs* series, allowing his formal and stylistic choices to communicate the importance of the subjects. He uses the qualities and symbols of historical portraiture, acknowledging the role of the wig as an indicator of social and political status in early America, but going one step further to mock, and thus deconstruct, this icon. We see these men and their wigs invaded by bees, used as a nest by various birds, sculpted into architectural forms, entwined within an elaborately carved chair, or dangerously enflamed. Whatever malady threatens their wigs, these gentleman never break pose, completely unconcerned with the potential dangers. Though the portraits are humorous, there is a degree of menace in the idea that these men wilfully ignore all that happens around them, concerned only with the construction of their own images, and perhaps, their place in history.

Sweets are a series of abundant confectionary dreams. Temptation calls us in the form of tornadoes of swirling doughnuts, tsunamis of gumdrops and frostings, cornices constructed of perfectly formed pastries, and every kind of cake and cookie clamouring over one another to reach the top of the sticky mountain. But as the child in us prepares to plunge into all this gooey goodness, the adult-self begins to recoil, imagining the resulting indigestion should we succumb to our temptation to feast. Indulging every immediate craving isn't necessarily best for us in the long term and "conspicuous consumption" comes to mind, in a society where success is measured largely by one's relative ability to consume.

The power of Richel's work is that it forms a rich dialogue, and yet his subjects are never presented as closed-ended. Whilst his ideas are specific, he is careful to leave a generous depth of space for viewers to explore and develop their own interpretations of the work, resulting in paintings that can be viewed again and again, always offering some fresh new insight.

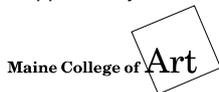
Justin Richel was born in New Jersey in 1979, and resides in Maine, USA. He holds a BFA in Painting from Maine College of Art, and studied the technique of Icon Panting at the Franciscan Monastery, Kennebunk, Maine. He held his first solo exhibition at the Hudson D. Walker Gallery, Provincetown, Massachusetts. Selected group exhibitions include: *Biennial*, (2007) Portland Museum of Art, *Mr. President*, Albany University Museum, Albany, New York, *Don't Know Much About History*, (2006) Artspace, New Haven, Connecticut, *From Baja to Bar Harbour, Transnational Contemporary Art*, ICA Portland, Maine, *Biennial Juried Exhibition*, (2004) Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, Maine, *Portraits: A Group Show*, and *Small Works*, Highland Artworks Gallery, Portland, Maine, *Exquisite Corpses Today*, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine, *MECA Alumni Show*, (2003) Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, Maine and *Domestic Revival: Victoria Mansion Seen Through the Eyes of Contemporary Artists*, (2001) Portland, Maine. He holds the People's Heritage Savings Bank Endowed Scholarship and The Harvey Flaws Memorial Endowed Scholarship. Richel has recently completed a second year fellowship at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center in Massachusetts.

Sarah Schuster is an independent curator working in London. A fully illustrated exhibition guide will be published.

Funded in part by a grant from the Maine Arts Commission, an independent state agency supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.



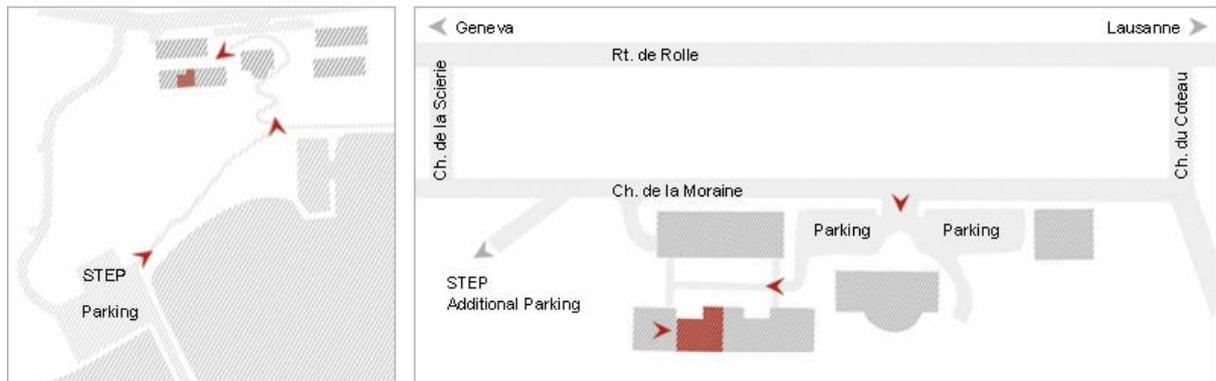
Supported by Maine College of Art, Portland, Maine



Wings Projects Art Space is a not-for-profit gallery. It puts on exhibitions by international contemporary artists and invites young curators to produce shows. Visitors are always welcome.

For press images and further information, contact Victoria Preston, +41 21 806 3819 or info@wingsprojects.com

Directions



From Lausanne : Exit motorway at Morges Ouest
 Follow signs to St. Prex
 Cross two roundabouts
 Continue straight and turn left at traffic lights into Ch. du Coteau
 Turn right into Ch. de la Moraine

From Geneva : Exit motorway at Aubonne
 Follow signs to Allaman/St. Prex
 Cross roundabouts on Rte. de Rolle
 Turn right at the entrance to St. Prex (blue sign) on to Ch. de la Scierie
 Turn left at the end on to Ch. de Buchillon
 After 300m it becomes Ch. de la Moraine

Parking : Visitor parking in front of the villa, additional parking at STEP