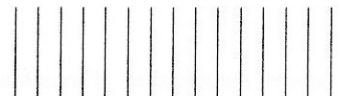




Or Gallery
103.480 Smithe Street
Vancouver BC V6B 5E4
T 604 683.7395
F 604 683.7302
<http://www.orgallery.org>

The Or Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the BC Gaming Commission, the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council, the City of Vancouver and all our members and volunteers. Special thanks to Patrick Painter Editions.



Why I'm So Unhappy through March 25, 2006

Bas Jan Ader, Victor Albarracín, Debra Baxter, Marianne Bos, Jeff Tutt
Elkin Calderón, Dana Claxton, Derek Brunen, Wilson Díaz, Khan Lee
Simón Hernández, Anna Sew Hoy, Jonathan Middleton, Kelly Lycan
Tomás Giraldo, Hadley + Maxwell, James Nizam, Juan Mejía
Gabriel Sierra, Althea Thauberger, Francisco Toquica
Giovanni Vargas, Rolando Vargas, and Neil Wedman.



Why I'm So Unhappy

A different version of this exhibition had originally been planned to take place in Bogotá, Colombia as a sort of humorous, and yet sincere, affirmation of the unhappy quality of life in that city, but more importantly, the sense of fatalism that arises out of decades of conflict and underdevelopment. When the circumstances of everyday living are characterized by failure, frustration and a lingering (if not immediate) sense of tragedy, always expecting the worst to happen (and doing so with a casual laugh or a shrug) seems to be a useful method of coping.

But unhappiness clearly has many different manifestations irrespective of historical or material circumstances. The resolution of basic needs seems always to bring with it the creation of false ones and then enough dissatisfaction or boredom to produce more unhappiness. North American cultural optimism promises a happy ending, but it is usually contingent upon values associated with productivity, competition, and consumption. Too much rain can also make a person extremely unhappy.

The trope of the melancholic artist comes from a long tradition of association between creativity and unhappiness. In its most intimate, and unmediated emotional form, unhappiness can have disastrous results as a point of departure for making art. A notable exception is Bas Jan Ader's *I'm Too Sad to Tell You*, a work that is so self-indulgently sad that it is ambiguous. His emotional outbursts must be set

against the backdrop of an entire body of work that foregrounds failure's redemptive qualities.

It is also useful to think about unhappiness as part of a Western tradition of cultural pessimism that has predicated the practice of art upon its power of negation, or refusal of a dominant system of values. These values may be in constant flux but what is preserved is the idea of what is an essentially antagonistic definition of cultural production. Art is unhappy because it is critical and expresses a sense of discontent with the ways things are, even as it constantly adapts itself to economic or social systems from which it is presumably excluded. The recognition of this contradiction is cause for more unhappiness.

This exhibition presents new and existing unhappy works by a diverse group of emerging, mid career, and established artists from Canada, the U.S., Colombia, and Holland. "Why I'm So Unhappy" is the title of a song by Jimmy Tamborello who records under the name of Dntel.

In conjunction with the exhibition, on Thursday, March 9, at 8pm the Music Appreciation Society will present the saddest music in the world...ever. Panelists TBA, \$5



Video Reel:

Rolando Vargas (Bogotá): *Agonía (Agony)* is an animated history of ambiguous anecdotes involving a group of former classmates. It is unclear what happened and who was to blame but the tone is explicitly tragic and morbid.

Wilson Díaz (Cali): *Baño en el cañito (Bathing in a small stream)*. This video voyeuristically captures a group of young members of the guerilla group FARC bathing in a stream—an image that is charged both with homoerotic desire and a sense of intimacy and empathy far removed from the media imagery that typically depicts such individuals in violent, alienating terms.

Elkin Calderón (London) is among a group of Colombian artists whose visual repertoire appropriates elements from 'low culture' and seeks to redeem the impoverished aesthetics of precariousness. *Dodgy Song* bears testimony to the fact that even in the first world, life can be very dodgy.

Simón Hernández (Bogotá): In *Coqueta* the artist screens an 8mm film reel of his parents' wedding through a super 8 projector. The resulting projection is technically flawed, emphasizing a sense of loss, of something that occurred but which nobody remembers. Made public this memoir is mediated and fetishized and no longer has much personal relevance.

Derek Brunen (Vancouver): *Duke*. Suffering from severe panic attacks around the time he shot this video, Derek identified with Duke's hypersensitivity to the urban landscape. He appeared to experience too much, uncannily expressing something of Derek's own disorientation and intense urgency. Duke was a great friend to many. This video is dedicated to his memory.

Marianne Bos (Vancouver): *Failed Delivery*. A seemingly simple act of delivering a sculpture goes awry. A lone artist moves through the city in his self-induced bubble, and things start to come undone. Small tragedies surround us, but the way we choose to cope or accept, makes all the difference.



Works:

Jonathan Middleton (Vancouver): *Headache* is a series of photographs depicting the artist perched on the front stairs of a house, one hand holding a cigarette while the other is held to his head, presumably to stem the flow of blood visibly pouring from the area. Nearby friends exhibit only mild concern, which in addition to the understated title, leads one to conclude that the blood might be imagined or otherwise hyperbolic. (1999), three C-prints, 11x16"

James Nizam (Vancouver): *Flower Bed* Works consists of the artist's proposal solicited by the curator of this exhibition framed and hung alongside the curator's letter of rejection. 2006

Jeff Tutt (Vancouver): *What Makes a Man Start Fires*, 2006 is cut from this memory: watching a young man that you loved drink away his ambitions who, in an awkward transition into manhood, was unable to cope in any affirmative way with his newly framed fear of the obtuse distinction between figure and ground. Internalized protest is a lonely and unhappy dance. Acrylic and latex enamel on canvas. 44 in. sq.

Anna Sew Hoy (Los Angeles): *Black Hole II*, 2004 is part of a series of inkblot drawings that are two-dimensional analogues to the artist's found log sculptures. The process of making the drawings is passive and follows the movement of the ink's absorption by the paper.

Gabriel Sierra (Bogotá): *Ghosts for Sale* plays with the idea of superstition and the fatalism of foregoing individual responsibility in favor of a supernatural idea of destiny. Hand sewn cloth hung on storage objects. 2006

Althea Thauberger (Vancouver): *Oh Canada*, 2001. A young woman (the artist herself dressed up in conservative attire) sings the national anthem hesitantly and sadly, alluding to the sort of soft nationalism and uncertain identity that exists in Canada. Video 2001.

Francisco Toquica (Bogotá): *Missing* is a series of drawings based on childhood toys that appear in family photographs but were later lost causing him great amounts of grief as a child. *I Still Love Her But My Paranoia Destroys Everything* are drawings traced from photographs of the artist and his girlfriend, made after an attack of jealousy that almost ended the relationship. 2006

Giovanni Vargas (Bogotá): *Apuntes sobre una historia de Chapinero* (*Notes on a History of Chapinero*) is a series of photographs reproduced on newsprint documenting the ubiquitous red brick buildings that have slowly and steadily relieved entire sectors of Bogotá of any claims to architectural memory. 2004-5

Neil Wedman (Vancouver): *Rodeo Clown* (watercolor 2006) and *Study for Head of Rodeo Clown* (oil on linen 2006). Both of these pieces are studies for a large format painting that may or may not be produced sometime in the near or distant future.

Bas Jan Ader (Holland): *I'm Too Sad To Tell You*, 1971 is a silent film of the artist weeping for the camera. Born in Holland in 1942, Bas Jan Ader arrived to Los Angeles in 1962 where he had a short, but influential career as an artist and academic. He disappeared at sea in 1975 while attempting to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a small sailboat. Mary Sue Ader-Andersen - Bas Jan Ader Estate, courtesy Patrick Painter Editions

Víctor Albarracín (Bogotá): *I'm So Unhappy Because of You* is a plagiarized version of Bas Jan Ader. 200 posters were printed for this exhibition, the majority of them are being put up on the street around the city.

Debra Baxter (Seattle): *You Make Me Want To Stop Trying* is a piece made in response to exhaustion and sadness. Powerful words inscribed in the delicate snow, whispering their trajectory of resignation. inkjet print, 2.25 x 1.5 in. 2006

Dana Claxton (Vancouver): *Tatanka Wanbli Chekpa Wicincala*, C Prints 2006 (part of a series). A relationship to the natural and super worlds are considered in this work. These are buffalo eagle twin girls who walk in a sacred manner. The buffalo is a trusted relative and the eagle a source of power. In Lakota culture there are many songs and dances that are about Tatanka and Wanbli.

Tomás Giraldo (Bogotá): *Untitled*. The practice of stringing shoes from utility wires is a global phenomenon that has

generated a wide range of urban legends: some say it is used to indicate that drugs are sold in the vicinity, others believe that it commemorates a murder, and then there are those who write it off an act of vandalism by bored neighborhood kids. Shoe size and model variable. 2006

Hadley + Maxwell (Vancouver): *The Workers. For Example: (Clockwise from left) Dolores McCann, cake decorator; Kamaren Hensen, preparator; Julie Weller, picture framer; Tyrone Bennett Bradley, architect; Erik Nilsson, IT professional; Sydney Pearson, florist; Pauli Murray, writer*. Watercolor 2006

Khan Lee (Vancouver): *Bye, Bye*. A tower of cassettes bids farewell to archaic storage media that has lost its place in the world due to the rapid advancement of technology. Sculpture, 2006

Kelly Lycan (Vancouver): *Last Day of August 1997*. The tissue she used after the death of Princess Diana. 40" x 55" digital type C print 2006

Juan Mejía (Bogotá): *Ejercicios solipsistas (discos rayados)* [Solipsistic exercises (scratched records)] is a series of drawings with white out on old records from the artist's extensive music collection. Every generation seems to lay claim to a set of objects that visualizes its nostalgia: these are records from Juan's adolescence.

