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james benning  
decoding the passed  
(after black hawk, pettway, mondrian,  
traylor, ramírez, darger, howard,  
yoakum, hawkins, and tolliver)

march 8 - april 12, 2014

exhibition opening  
march 7, 6 - 9 pm

We are pleased to announce James Benning's (b. 1942) third solo exhibition at the gallery, which will include new works by the artist and will be on view from March 8 to April 12.

Since the late 1970s, James Benning has created groundbreaking films while also exploring the lives and works of so-called "outsider artists." In 2005, as part of his ongoing research, Benning began to craft hand-painted replicas of works by these artists. These were then installed in recreations of the self-made cabins of American author Henry David Thoreau and "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski, which Benning constructed on his own property in California's Sierra Nevada mountains. From this first spatial juxtaposition, Benning developed a wide-ranging and complex discourse that was extensively documented in his book *(FC) Two Cabins by JB* (2011), edited by Julie Ault. At the heart of this publication are photographs showing both cabins, the paintings housed within them as well as the artist monographs that first introduced the paintings to a broader public. In addition, there are biographies written by Benning of various individuals related to the project which, together with the images and other textual contributions present a fascinating synthesis of Benning's process of examining, empathizing and reconstructing. A follow-up of sorts to Benning's large-scale two-channel film installation *Two Cabins* (2011) - shown at neugerriemschneider in early 2012 - and *Stemple Pass* - premiered at last year's Berlinale - this exhibition marks the continuation of Benning's focus on pivotal though not necessarily widely celebrated figures from American cultural history.

Woven throughout the exhibition is Benning's conflation of the life and history of Ted Kaczynski and Henry David Thoreau with the outsider artists Black Hawk, Bill Traylor, Martín Ramírez, Henry Darger, Jesse Howard, Joseph Yoakum, William Hawkins, and Moses Tolliver. Hung across from eight photographs of catalogs containing these outsider artists' works is a silkscreen print featuring a passage by Thoreau that has been copied in Benning's own handwriting. These specific catalog pages are opened to the pages showing the works that Benning copied and hung in his mountain cabin replicas. Installed in the main gallery space are eight new replica paintings by Benning of works by these artists, accompanied by a floor-to-ceiling graphite wall drawing of an enlarged page from Kaczynski's journal. A numerical cipher that provides the key to decoding Kaczynski's encrypted journal entries, the page comes from the months leading up to Kaczynski's arrest.

Expanding this engagement with works by largely unknown artists, Benning has created a three-part installation especially for this exhibition featuring his reproduction of a 1941 quilt made by Missouri Pettway (1903-1981), composed from the clothes of her late husband. Benning's recreation is supplemented by his biography of Pettway and the story of her family, whose ancestors lived as slaves on a cotton plantation in the Gee's Bend region of Alabama. In order to protect themselves from the cold, the workers would collect fabric scraps from which they knit quilts. Benning connects his homages to Pettway with a stained glass work derived from a painting by Piet Mondrian, revealing striking formal similarities between two otherwise disparate worlds.

We are also glad to announce that the Kunsthaus Graz is dedicating a comprehensive solo exhibition to James Benning. Curated by Peter Pakesch, the exhibition, *Decoding Fear*, opens on March 6 and runs until May 18. Also focusing on Benning's work around replicas, Kaczynski, and Thoreau, the presentation will show for the first time the paintings that Benning hung in his cabin replicas, copied from the originals shown in the monograph photographs that will be presented in Berlin. In addition, further pioneering films, installations, pictorial and textual works by Benning will be on view as part of the exhibition. Parallel to his exhibitions in Berlin and Graz, Benning will have a film screening and will also give an artist's talk at the Kunsthaus Bregenz on March 9 at 6 pm as a part of this year's KUB Arena programming, curated by Scott Cameron Weaver. Furthermore, James Benning will be welcomed as a guest speaker on April 14 at the San Francisco Art Institute to coincide with the screening of two of his film works.

For further information as well as visual material, please contact Jan Salewski:  
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