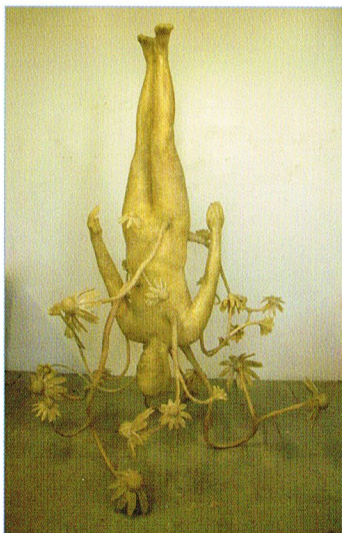


# And the fair Moon rejoices

## contemporary visionaries in the wake of Blake

Often unruly forces of nature and imagination bear great resemblance to each other: each acts as an unseen agent causing beauty to bloom as well inciting ruin and decay, and each works in ways that are spectacular as well as in ways that are banal, ordinary – snow falls, problems are solved, apples rot, an idea forms. These forces find themselves tangled and intertwined in *And the fair Moon rejoices: contemporary visionaries in the wake of Blake*, organized by Randi Hopkins and Emily Isenberg and presented in the Mills Gallery at the Boston Center for the Arts from June 26-August 16, 2009. The exhibition features work by six artists who fuse the mundane with the metaphysical, and draw connections between the creative act and something beyond the tangible: Larry Bamburg, Tory Fair, Sharon Harper, Tania Kitchell, Justine Kurland, and Cristina Lei Rodriguez.

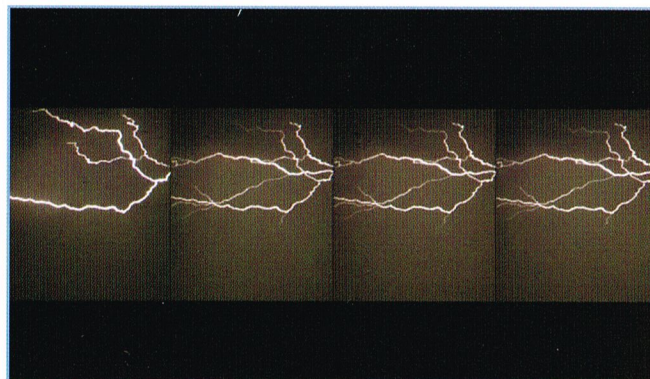
William Blake, visionary English poet, painter and printmaker (1757-1827), endorsed the imagination as real, a dynamic, palpable force that acts on our natural and political world. Rendering this unseen force visible and palpable, yet retaining its inherently fantastical spirit, sculptor **Tory Fair** casts her own figure in everyday positions that are for her the source of greatest inspiration, such as driving or sleeping. The human body, a sturdy and undeniably rugged form, is supported by a bed of nurturing stems and flowers, creating a physical link between the self and the ideas



Tory Fair, *Witling*, 2008, cast rubber, 60" x 72" x 60"

that emanate from it. These blossoming, hybrid forms embody our rootedness, and our desire to branch out; caught somewhere in between, they render visible a state of anticipation and potential.

In photographer and filmmaker **Sharon Harper**'s video of a lightning storm, what is unseen to the eye but



Sharon Harper, multi-channel video still, 2009

known deeply in the body is captured on film, fingers of lightning, fearful flashes – natural phenomena that has become a metaphor for inspiration and insight – a "bolt from the blue". This quick gesture of sharp light demonstrates nature's wiles in the human condition. Harper captures and multiplies the hypnotic electrical flash, fanning it out so that her own hand is unmistakably inserted into the action.

Not exactly the mysterious workings of Nature herself, but rather the mechanics necessary to suggest the palpable presence of something alive are at the heart of sculptor **Larry Bamburg**'s installations. In Bamburg's kinetic constructions, fully visible processes utilizing ordinary (if incongruous) materials invite viewers

to literally create "nature" by means of a leap of faith. For example, Bamburg has used a swirling cosmos of beads, scraps of paper and a dead cricket, hung from monofilament and propelled by a ceiling fan, to conjure what viewers might experience as a flock of birds or swarm of insects.

Actual bits of flora are layered with glitter, rhinestones, tinsel, paint, and chain mesh in the work of sculptor **Cristina Lei Rodriguez**, whose obvious pleasure in pushing the organic to OUTDO itself, to build on its natu-



Cristina Lei Rodriguez, *Crowned*, 2008, Mixed Media, 48" x 39" x 39"

ral power and attitude by melding with a human vision of adornment, is colored by a dark, almost Gothic sense of foreboding, a shadowy awareness that decay and loss of control do not lie far beneath the surface of the high-gloss, mystical appearance. In this way, she melds the worldly with the unworldly. She has described her own work as "collapsing the beautiful with the monstrous." The ephemeral as well as the uncontainable qualities inherent in living things live large in Rodriguez' work, even in the small wall pieces.



Tania Kitchell, *Air No. 4*, 2004, Lambda print, Edition of 5, 30.5" x 40.5"

Photographer and sculptor **Tania Kitchell** is obsessed by the weather. Her work documents a very personal relationship with the environment and climate, specifically the harshness of the winter and her perception and relationship with it, through photographs and rigorously kept weather entries. In her photographs, Kitchell examines how her body and the environment impact each other simultaneously by showing

remnants of these interactions; the artist's breath made visible by the cold, the snow formed by her hand, the traces of her footsteps. As a way of documenting the passing of time as well as an affirmation to consider each day, Kitchell cre-

ates a sense that nothing is constant and that change is inevitable.

Photographer **Justine Kurland** has been described as "walking a tight-rope stretched between the mythical and the everyday, [allowing] her images to be pulled sometimes completely toward myth, while maintaining a slender relationship with the regular practices of 'nature as spirituality.'" Her staged images of figures, often located in settings that recall the utopian vision of the American wilderness established by 19th century landscape photographers and painters, examine the



Justine Kurland, *Flowers*, 2004, C-print, Edition of 5, 25" x 29 1/2" frame

fantasy of going "back to nature" and the beauty and also the absurdity of envisioning ourselves as one with nature. In Kurland's fantastical and mysterious narratives, the many paradoxes of our relationship with nature, as we cultivate it and romanticize it, sustain ourselves from it and are ourselves part of it, provide a window into the imagination's subjective relationship with the exterior world.

To be sure, these artists would not label themselves as "visionaries" – their concerns are more grounded in the everyday than that word implies – and they are certainly less confident prophetic. But in their examination of the mysterious connections between man and nature, experience and perception, and growth and its ominous and foreboding counterbalance of destruction, we see an extension of Blake's poetic commitment to unifying the body and the soul, and to multiplying the complexity of our vision.

–Randi Hopkins and Emily Isenberg  
Curators