

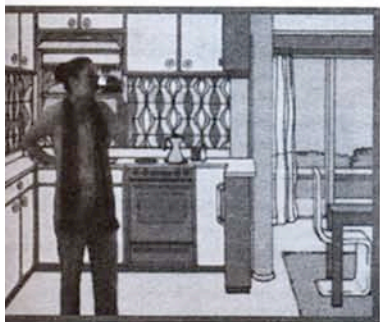


use her own image to explore conflicting desires for recognition and invisibility. A diminutive female figure, clad all in red, apprehensively eyes a flight of red stairs in *The Recipient of the Pathological Badge*.

Clutching a red purse, her jet-black hair hangs straight down; her face holds traces of makeup, red lipstick and rouge. In another striking work, *Mental Giant*, the figure stands beneath a coat rack, the coat obscuring

her entire figure. A grouping of stretcher bars sits beneath a beautifully lit window, the soft light falling on the creamy brown fabric of the coat. Sturdy legs are tucked into wading boots. *Black* shrouds the figure in gray garments, while *White* coats the figure in rich lather, a few strands of dark hair escaping from her bath.

*Make You Notice* presented images that surprise, delight or sadden, depending on our mood and background. While the "f" word is tactfully avoided, the issues raised by the artists clearly relate to the pesky topic of women's rights. The whole issue of "feminist art" and how it is viewed invariably raises many compli-



sa Anne Auerbach, *Independent Women*, 2007, ink-jet print, 2" x 6-1/2". above: Jennifer Wofford, *Walking with Coffee*, video still, at the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery.

cated questions. Is it somehow "ghettoizing" to categorize the work of an artist in this way, as though their vision and convictions are separate from those of humanity at large? Every March we find shows filled with feminist art, on the heels of African-American artists in February.

Do these artists share burdens of self-consciousness, anxiety and other-ness? Yes and no. Gilmore and Auerbach use their gender as a tool, seeming to challenge any perception of females as the weaker sex. Swanson and Wofford present images of women who are less secure, razor-sharp and self-aware, yet unable to fully take charge of their lives.

The humor of the latter engages us and makes us sympathetic, as does the pathos and bite of the former. While the grouping may seem, in a certain way, to be strange bedfellows, all of the works are certainly memorable, speaking of struggle, conflict and bittersweet desire.

—Barbara Morris

*Make You Notice* closed May 24 at the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery.

Barbara Morris is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

## David Buckingham at MMGalleries

America's pie-in-the-sky mentality is endangered these days; our decadent fantasies of endless material abundance are dissipating like volatile hydrocarbons on blistering asphalt. Many artists, too, are now less inclined to indulge in the ivory-tower theorizing of yore—bred of imperialist entitlement and intellectual boredom—that was just as unrealistic as the mainstream's want-it-all-now worldview. Contemporary art, which recently asserted that nothing was real but culture, now reflects a new, corrective humility toward nature, so long taken for granted as mere food and fuel for our jaunt to technoutopia; the blue-green world, no longer a mere simulacrum, is now seen as vital to our survival, and being reality-based is now *le dernier cri*. In these interesting times, David Buckingham's elegant and provocative wall sculptures—replicas and icons from recent mass culture immaculately fabricated from scavenged industrial junk—take on sociopolitical meaning that belies their zippy pop imagery and cheerful (albeit sunbaked) palette.

Buckingham, who wrote ad copy for years before becoming an artist, is fascinated by the media's endless stream of messages; he finds beauty in the commercial culture even as he deplors its manipulative machinations (paradoxically, he's an avowed anti-gun gun nut). Working in an industrial part of downtown Los Angeles, he makes forays into various graveyards of metal junk in industrial neighborhoods and the nearby desert searching for "55-gallon barrels, wheelbarrows, tool boxes, road signs, tractor parts, car doors, gas cans, etc. ... old, battered, colorful metal things that

have a story to tell." These carcasses he dissects, like Melville's whale flensers and Burtynsky's ship deconstructionists, hauling the remains back to his studio to transform them, using plasma cutters, grinders and acetylene torches, into metal assemblages, mementos of a Boomtown America distressed by reality: commercial signage (executed in vintage fonts), Lichtensteinian cartoon explosions with sound effects, famous dialogue from edgy movies made into apparent gigantic metal stencils. And, conflating various Warholian themes, huge celebrity/movie guns, wall-hung like trophy kills, and, but for being as gaily colored as Playskool toys, otherwise proportionate and realistic: i.e., anatomically accurate, are roscoes for gigantic childish gunmen.

*How to Talk Dirty and Influence People* takes its name from comedian Lenny Bruce's autobiography (which poked fun at Dale Carnegie's earnest best-seller *How to Win Friends and Influence People* from 1936, long before self-help became hip). A Bruce fan, Buckingham demonstrates his own irreverent and sometimes politically incorrect independence with his word pieces: *Lisp* spells out "Homothexual" in large letters, while three of the multiword pieces memorialize movie quotations in marquee-like panels: "ENGLISH MOTHERFUCKER" and "I'M GONNA GET MEDIEVAL" derive from *Pulp Fiction*, and "ME SO HORNY" derives from *Full Metal Jacket* (and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*). Other pieces refer to pop music: *Starfucker* to the Rolling Stones song, and the color studies here, arrays of gridded circles, like shopworn op art Vasarelies, to Wilson Pickett (*In the Midnight Hour*), Sonic Youth (*Teen Age Riot*), the darkwave band *Breathless* (*Breathless*), and the Sex Pistols (*God Save the Queen*). And finally, Buckingham refers to the forces of coercion and compulsion so far removed from pop culture hedonism: *Broken Police Line* is a maze of



David Buckingham, *Barney Fife II*, 2008, cut, welded found metal, 36" x 79" x 8", at MMGalleries, San Francisco.

stuttering verbal fragments that go everywhere and nowhere; *Holy Trinity* reveals Almighty Allah as our god (as cartoonist Lloyd Dangle indicated during the prewar Islamophobia-mongering); and *Valerie Solanas vs. Andy Warhol, Barney Fife II* and *BLAM!* depict, respectively, the gun that shot the Pope of Pop, the sidearm wielded by Don Knotts's bungling sitcom character, and a war-comics blast—all reflections of America's Peculiar Institution, our slavery to violence. The artist, a movie buff who lives in a problematic part of downtown LA, says, "The gun is a national icon, as American as apple pie

# Reviews

and adultery.”

The curator Peter Frank wrote of Buckingham's work: “The artist's craft eases the jab of the artist's vision, but makes sure that the syringe still goes in deep.” Art can indeed redeem the intolerable. These beautifully made works seduce and amuse, but still radiate the deep conviction that fuels such a grueling working process, despite Buckingham's equable acceptance of all viewers' interpretations. Ambrose Bierce once defined painting as coating an object's surface in order to protect it from the elements and expose it to critics. Buckingham paints nothing (although he is a fine colorist, judging by his juxtapositions), yet he exposes a great deal, unceremoniously and unsanctimoniously, about the dark side of what the president once called “our sacred way of life.”

—DeWitt Cheng

*David Buckingham: How to Talk Dirty and Influence People* closed May 3 at MMGalleries, San Francisco.

DeWitt Cheng is a freelance writer based in San Francisco.

## ‘Past is an image we form in the present’ at SF Camerawork

**D**o snapshots from the past exert power over those living in the present? You know the ones: yellowing, mundane images of decades gone before. Family members gathered for a special event, or no event at all. They're a narrative of earlier lives, relationships made and broken, children born, birthdays, pets, graduations or a Popsicle eaten on a summer's day. Precious to the sentimental, junk to the more cynical, these visual records remain fixed in time, telling us about legacies both physical and emotional. That is,

viewer's ability to tell fact from fiction.

Pijnappel, a Berlin-based artist, commandeered old Super-8 footage shot by his grandfather and father, edited it, and re-assembled it into a new plot. Jumping haphazardly between cityscapes of Paris, Rio and Amsterdam, Pijnappel's grainy nine-minute film seemingly chronicled his family's journey from Europe to South America and back again. The cuts



were choppy, the assemblage of moments willy-nilly, and Pijnappel narrated the tale of war, loss and recovery in voiceover. But his words didn't always match up with what viewers see. One was left to wonder: Is he making the whole thing up? Or is it a cavalier re-telling of family myth and legend?

Fellow artist Steketee also unabashedly toys with the past—and she lets everyone know it. For this project, she took her family's photo albums, and literally cut and pasted people from different generations, or from estranged parts of the clan, right into the snapshots. Sometimes these inserted folks didn't match the scale of everyone else, maybe they're seen from a different perspective, or sometimes they're clearly from another era. Whatever her method—Photoshop?—the results come across as seamless, which was all the more disarming and funny. Picture a family album full of magical thinking: Dead uncles cavort with nephews they never met, and divorced parents appear together at all the important moments. It's a way of fixing the past, mending what didn't work out and averting tragedy.



Above: Melanie Willhi *Box Under the Bed* Pijnappel, still from at SF Camerawork

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*Past is a sent: Pablo Pi, Melanie Willhi*

Camerawork, San F

Christine Brenn based in San Franc

## Chris Kitz Scott Rich Contempc

**I**n his accor show Mart both togra twent eth c tury Parisian stree and mid-century tural critic Walter Benjamin's comments on Charles Baudelaire's characterizations of the emerging chaos at shock of urban life. However, Lister d not directly menti