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Photograph by Martin Schoeller for TIME



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Photograph by Martin Schoeller for TIME

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Dream girl Zoe Kazan, page 100

Art

True Lies. A new show explores art in the age of Stephen Colbert

By Richard Lacayo

WHEN HE ROLLED OUT THE WORD *TRUTHINESS* IN 2005, Stephen Colbert applied it first to things like the slippery justifications offered by the Bush Administration for the invasion of Iraq. But in a world of reality TV, staged photo ops and any marriage involving Kim Kardashian, *truthiness* turned out to offer a way to think about all kinds of things. It was a term as widely useful as *authenticity*. Maybe more so.

This is the idea behind "More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness," a sly new exhibition at Site Santa Fe through Jan. 6. The premise of the show—the brainchild of Elizabeth Armstrong, curator of contemporary art at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, where the show moves next March—is that a lot of new art is fascinated by the same spreading condition that Colbert put his finger on: the increasingly seductive plausibility of dubious "facts." To get the idea, just look at Korean artist Seung Woo Back's *RWor-oor*, part of a photo series he did at a South Korean theme park crammed with scaled-down versions of famous places. In Back's picture, replicas of historic sailing vessels float just off the coast from a surreal herd of Manhattan landmarks, while the skyline of Seoul stretches out unexpectedly in the distance. You assume this visual mosh pit must be digitally altered. Not so. In a world where reality and illusion blend ever more easily, who needs Photoshop?

For *Phantom Truck*, the Madrid-born, Chicago-based artist Inigo Mangano-Ovalle took his cues from Colin Powell's famous presentation before the U.N. of purported evidence of Saddam Hussein's secret weapons program, wherein Powell described in detail mobile weapons laboratories that never turned up once the Iraq war got under way. Working from Powell's descriptions, Mangano-Ovalle produced a life-size version of one of those imaginary vehicles. His truck sits in a pitch dark gallery, so you sense it first only from the sinister industrial hum it emits. Then your eyes adjust, and it emerges from the darkness—a bad dream slowly materializing, but a fantasy all the same.

Phantom Truck is a reminder that art has always operated in the service of truthiness. It has always lent credibility—what you might call the prestige of the visible—to unverifiable beliefs. If you don't buy the biblical account of creation, for instance, the whole ceiling of the Sistine Chapel can look

like an epic example of truthiness run amok. And art has always trafficked in illusions. A whole subset of 19th century American painting dealt in trompe l'oeil pictures of photos and small objects tacked to a wall. In this show, Houston-based artist Dario Robleto builds on that tradition with realistic objects that carry an unexpected message in their materials. *The Melancholic Refuses to Surrender* is one of them, a pair of boxing gloves that turns out to be an oblique meditation on African-American history—once you know that they're made partly from men's broken hand bones and a melted vinyl recording of a Lead Belly song about the black boxing champ Jack Johnson being barred from the *Titanic*.

"More Real?" wouldn't be true to the spirit of Colbert if it didn't admit that while truthiness can be an ominous development, it can also be a lot of fun. When New Yorker Joel Lederer photographs landscapes created online by visitors to Second Life, a virtual-reality website, it's plain he likes the wiki-world he finds there. Meanwhile, it's hard to keep a straight face in front of Zoe Beloff's *Dreamland: The Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society and Its Circle, 1926–1972*. A mad installation of architectural drawings, comic-book pages, old film footage and dubious historical artifacts, it offers the story of Albert Grass. The exhibit tells us that

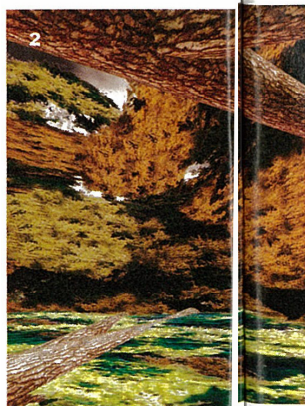
Grass was so inspired by Sigmund Freud's 1909 visit to Coney Island—a visit that really happened—that he drew up elaborate but unrealized plans for Dreamland. The amusement park was designed to walk visitors through the Freudian explanation of dreams via fun-filled pavilions devoted to things like repression and the unconscious, all connected by a Train of Thought. Over time Grass purportedly attracted a circle of amateur Freudians who made home movies to help them analyze their dreams.

Those films look suspiciously as if Beloff, a Scot now based in New York City, cobbled them together from footage discovered at flea markets. Other than Freud, did any of these characters exist? Not a chance—Beloff's installation is a brilliantly funny fiction. It speaks to a paradox that Oscar Wilde identified in "The Decay of Lying" and that Colbert, America's greatest performance artist, has built a career on. Art lies. That's one of the things it does best. And if it does it right, it points to some kind of truth every time. ■

"MORE REAL? ART IN THE AGE OF TRUTHINESS"
Site Santa Fe, through Jan. 6; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, March 3–June 9

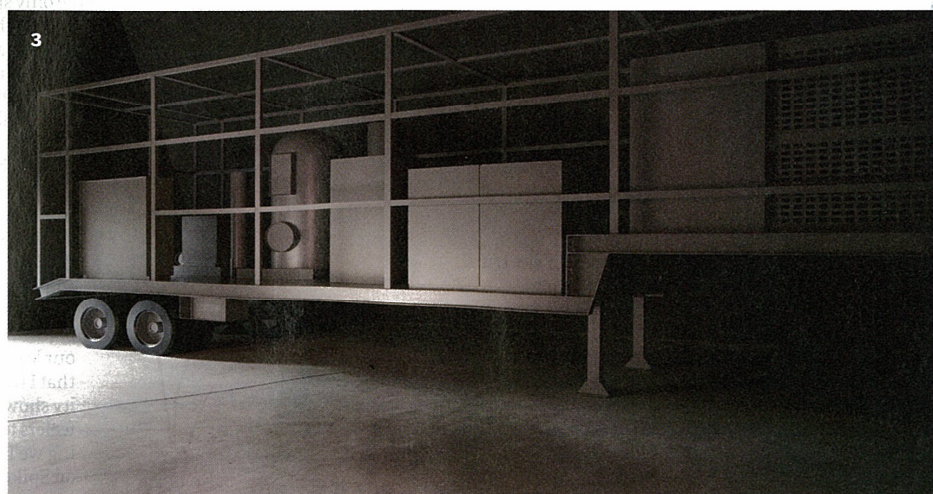


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1 RW01-001 (2004) is from a series of photos Seung Woo Back made at a theme park in South Korea filled with replicas of famous locales
2 Joel Lederer's 200805262351 (2009) is a photo of a landscape created on the virtual-reality website Second Life
3 Phantom Truck (2007) by Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle is a life-size model of a mobile weapons lab that never materialized in Iraq



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