

## WE ALL LIE

### More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness

SITE Santa Fe

Santa Fe, New Mexico

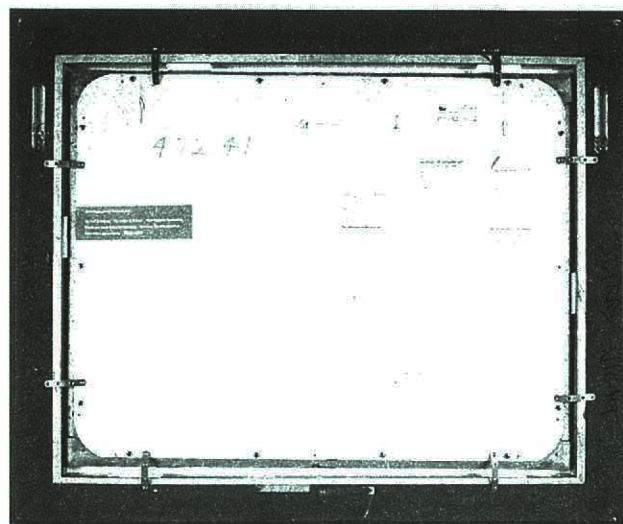
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A televised rerun of Stephen Colbert's brilliant revival of the rarified, and, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, nineteenth-century word "truthiness" occupies a portion of wall in SITE Santa Fe's installation of "More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness." Across from Colbert's looped broadcast are the Yes Men's very special editions of the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*. These exclusive 2008 newspapers, displayed in a street vending machine, headline respectively that the "Iraq War Ends" and "We're Screwed. What you're not being told: Official City report predicts massive climate catastrophes, public health care disasters." Along with the work of twenty-seven other artists, wishful or woeful fictions parlay believable lies, remade readymades, half-truths, almost-truths, dead ends, deceptions, illusions, fantasies, and incongruities into a dialogue about, as curator Elizabeth Armstrong suggests in her essay, "On the Border of the Real,"<sup>1</sup> contemporary art that dips into our murky distinctions between fact and fiction, reality and make-believe.

The presentation of lies is as complex and problematic as the presentation of truths. Neither is easily grasped nor readily identified. Their mutual dependency and the ease of shuffling

#### Above

*Verso (Starry Night)* (2008) by Vik Muniz; © Vik Muniz; courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.



between them advances boundless anxiety and gamesmanship. At times, as Inigo Manglano-Ovalle's full-scale *Phantom Truck* (2007) reminds us, these games can involve tens of thousands of human lives. In 2003, Colin Powell presented to the United Nations a digitally fabricated faux Iraqi mobile laboratory for producing bioweapons: a fiction that was used to justify the United States's invasion of Iraq. Manglano-Ovalle's apparition of Powell's lie looms as a dim specter in an unlit gallery. It is now primarily an artifact of Bush-league truthiness.

*Homo sapiens* is a heady species. It embraces complexity, problem solving, and discourse. "More Real?" suggests that we indulge this disposition: suspend certainty, accept variability, and embrace skepticism. Sounds like science. The more engaging artworks in the exhibition arrive at a crossroads of related intellectual and visual or sensual experimentation. Eve Sussman and the Rufus Corporation's monumental and rich video, *89 Seconds at Alcázar* (2004), is projected life-sized and invents a moving feast from *Las*

become increasingly apparent in contemporary art as well as in daily life."<sup>1</sup> Maybe, but unlikely. We humans have long (and I mean for millennia, not centuries) had techniques and tools to refabricate realities with varying degrees of authenticity. Electricity and digital technologies are powerful tools, but debates about existence still seem profoundly connected to a pre-microprocessor past.

Armstrong's zealous enthusiasm for an ontological shift rumbles with truthiness. As Leandro Erlich, creator of the *Stuck Elevator* (2011)—a *trompe l'oeil* sculpture that reveals its ambivalence the closer you get—noted, "reality is as fake and constructed as the art; it's a fiction. Although it's the fiction that we all agree to live in."<sup>2</sup> Earth was, indeed, once considered flat and many wanderers slid off one side into oblivion, few surviving as they retreated from the brink. Now that the earth is a sphere, far fewer fall off its edge. We love to indulge our knowledge as enthusiastically as our lack of wisdom. Mark Dion's installation, "Waiting for the

Extraordinary" (2011), frustratingly discloses the bureaucratic follies of academic indulgences in that knowledge quest and exercise of wisdom.

"More Real?" revels in thoughtfulness for initiated iconoclasts. It engages systematic thinking and finds its richest voice in language and text. And perhaps not unexpectedly, the catalog, *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, is more stimulating than the exhibition.<sup>3</sup>

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NOTES 1. Elizabeth Armstrong, "On the Border of the Real," in *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (New York: Prestel, 2012), 26–75. 2. *Ibid.*, 256. Originally appeared as a quote by Bertrand Lavie in Pascale Cavelier, "Name Games: The Art of Bertrand Lavie," *Artforum* 36 (March 1997): 71. 3. Mark Terry, "From the Real to the More Real: A Brief Historical and Philosophical Sketch of Hyperreality and Its Roots in Realism, Impressionism, Surrealism, Pop Art, and Postmodernism," in Armstrong, *More Real?*, 86–99. 4. *Ibid.*, 31. 5. *Ibid.*, 240. From Leandro Erlich, in an October 29, 2008, interview with Paul Laster for Artforum, posted on the artist's website, [www.leandroerlich.com/exhibitions.php](http://www.leandroerlich.com/exhibitions.php). 6. "More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness" will be on view at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, March 13–June 9, 2013.