

JOEY FAUERSO

WIDE OPEN WIDE



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

OCTOBER 5 - NOVEMBER 11, 2006

AUSTIN, TEXAS

JOEY FAUERSO
MIND WIDE OPEN

For those viewers familiar with her paintings of friends and family members, Joey Fauerso's current exhibition at Women & Their Work might come as something of a surprise. The paintings are still present, and like her previous forays into the medium, they revel in the lush materiality of pigment and the expressive possibilities of color. As before, they also generate a productive friction between abstraction and representation, flatness and illusionism. The assertive strokes that comprise each of the 300-odd portraits of her subject, Tommy McCutcheon, for instance, declare their own, independent identities or, alternately, resolve into poignant, sometimes humorous character studies that together transcribe the subtle adjustments to her subject's face and form over the course of a circumscribed period of time.

At Women & Their Work, however, the paintings that we have come to identify with Fauerso have been joined by a digital animation, only her fourth to date. The introduction of video technology might suggest that the artist's practice has undergone a seismic shift, but this is not the case. In fact, Fauerso correlates the animation and the paintings at the genetic as well as the conceptual level. The artist's symbiosis of paint and technology also exemplifies the underlying structure of her philosophical project. This project informs each of the works on view, which together constitute an intuitive yet sustained meditation on one of the most urgent questions to have occupied scientists, philosophers, and religious thinkers over the

centuries: the nature of human consciousness or, rather, the nature of its relationship to the larger spatio-temporal universe that individuals inhabit. For Fauerso, this relationship is characterized by continuity, reciprocity, and unanimity above all.

Fauerso first began to experiment with new media art at the Roswell Artist in Residence program this past year. Not unlike Shahzia Sikander, she sought to animate her paintings through the use of digital technology. In so doing, Fauerso not only added a temporal element to her work, she was able to attenuate the philosophical implications of her practice as a whole, a point to which I will return in a moment. The animation on view here, *Wide Open Wide* (2005-2006), was born of a series of chain reactions triggered by the artist's fusion of disparate media. Fauerso began as she has done in the past: she first asked her sitter, Tommy, to act out a particular task (in this case, to scream), and she recorded his response to this directive with a video camera. She translated frames from the video into 334 oil and acrylic paintings, which she then scanned into a computer, along with video

footage of a roll of wallpaper representing a wooded landscape and two series of watercolors, one depicting the night sky, the other birds. Fauerso combined these now digitized images to create the animation, *Wide Open Wide*.

Because the animation is displayed alongside the three groups of paintings, the works coalesce into a sort of family tree, one whose constituent parts wear their consanguinity on their sleeves. Exhibiting the animation and the paintings in this manner also renders transparent the (painstaking, multifaceted) process by which they were produced. Fauerso's candor with regard to the creative operations underlying the works on view extends to her paintings of Tommy. Here she transcribed from the original video footage not just his scream, but the expressions that preceded and followed it as well. These shift from involuntary to deliberate and then back again depending on Tommy's awareness of (his self-consciousness before) the camera. We are even privy to a large number of paintings that depict the final seconds of the footage, in which Tommy rises from the chair in which he was seated. His head

bows and then leaves the frame, only to be replaced by his naked torso and arm as he departs the visual field altogether. While scanning the paintings, therefore, we witness the entire temporal and narrative arc of Tommy's outburst, which is revealed in the end to be less an existential or metaphysical drama than it is the performance of one.

But what of the philosophical message subtending Fauerso's work? First, it is necessary to return to



Video Still from *Wide Open Wide*, projected animation and installation, 2005-2006.

her paintings of birds and stars, which were inspired by her experiences of the sky-scape and nature-scape around Roswell. What compelled the artist to sketch them so frequently was the manner in which each embodied the principle of unity within diversity. As Fauerso recalls, she was not only struck by the “democratic meeting of earth and sky” in Roswell, she was similarly mesmerized by the physics of flocking birds, especially those that swarmed the skies over the Bitter Lakes Wildlife Refuge.¹ These birds, she remembers, moved with so much physical intelligence that at times they seemed to coalesce into a single entity. And this brings us, finally, to the animation, which expresses with even greater clarity Fauerso’s personal cosmology.

Wide Open Wide is comprised of three vignettes that flow seamlessly, organically, from one to the next, without resolving into a linear narrative. The video begins with Fauerso’s paintings of the night sky around Roswell. Their cropped edges create the sensation that we are gazing at the stars through a telescope or a portal of some kind (a portal whose shape echoes that of an open mouth). The birds enter the screen next. Flying in relative unison, with changes in the speed or direction of one bird triggering similar adjustments in his companions, they appear to sweep through a strangely insubstantial landscape. Tommy makes his appearance in the final vignette. Seated in front of (or perhaps within) the same faded gray landscape, he gradually turns his attention to the camera, at which point his performance commences. What he performs, however, is no mere scream. Instead, he enacts the very nature of his relationship to the world around him, a relationship distinguished by its porosity and continuity. As Tommy’s eyes close, his mouth opens to reveal a vast celestial field that gradually extends out beyond his head to consume the space formerly occupied by the landscape. The

effect is powerful. Thanks to Fauerso’s adroit editing, Tommy appears to both contain and be contained by this miniature galaxy, just as the galaxy appears to exist inside, behind, and around him simultaneously.

In her quest to imagine a spatio-temporal complex in which the relative positions of inside and outside are reversed, in which the normally static conditions of interiority and exteriority are animated, Fauerso found inspiration in a story from the Bhagavad Gita. The subject is Krishna, who, after being scolded by Yasodhara for stealing some ghee, begins to cry. Gazing into her foster son’s open mouth, Yasodhara finds cradled there “the whole Earth, the solar system, and the entire Universe.”² Tommy’s mouth also functions as a sort of gateway onto realms both spiritual and cosmological (the artist has described it as “a tear in the body to the soul”³). Indeed, for Fauerso, the mouth is the connective tissue that links (literally as well as symbolically) the body, with all of its myriad desires and demands, to the soul and the mind—broadly speaking, to self-consciousness.

This is another crucial element to Fauerso’s philosophical position, one that reflects her overall concern with giving visual form to the principles of synthesis, continuity, and cohesion. That this position is quixotic is without doubt, especially when we consider the issues raised by Fauerso’s work from a socio-political, as opposed to a strictly spiritual or metaphysical, perspective. Indeed, given the myriad ways in which globalized capitalism maintains individuals in a state of arrested self-development and severely curtails public space and access to unrestricted collective discourse, many activists and philosophers would argue that a great deal of work remains to be done if we are to realize the sort of subjective and objective

synchronicity with the world that Fauerso imagines here. At the same time, however, much of the beauty of her project lies precisely in its character as a utopia—that is, as a place or condition we desire, but have not yet attained.

By way of an epilogue, I would like to quote a passage from one of my favorite books by the philosopher Roland Barthes. I have cited this same excerpt before, in relation to Dario Robleto’s work, but my decision to return to it is not meant to be gratuitous or self-indulgent. As it happens, Barthes sketches the parameters of a utopia similar to Fauerso’s in that both are mediated by that multivalent organ, the human mouth. “According to the Lero-Gourhan hypothesis,” Barthes writes, “it was when [man shifted] to upright posture [that he] found himself free to invent language and love: this is perhaps the anthropological birth of a concomitant double perversion: speech and kissing. By this accounting, the freer men have been (with their mouths), the more they have spoken and embraced; and logically, when progress will have rid men of every manual task, they will then do nothing but discourse and make love!”⁴ One can only hope.

Kelly Baum
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¹ Wendy Atwell, “A Conversation with Joey Fauerso,” www.glasstire.com/FeaturesDetail.asp?id=157. Posted July 2006.

² “A Conversation with Joey Fauerso.”

³ Telephone conversation with the author, September 2, 2006.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 141.

JOEY FAUERSO

Born 1976, San Antonio, TX

Resides in San Antonio, TX

EDUCATION

- 2001 University of Wisconsin-Madison, M.F.A.
2000 University of Wisconsin-Madison, M.A. in Art
1998 University of Iowa-Iowa City, B.F.A.
1996 Universidad Nacional, Heredia, Costa Rica

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 *Wide Open Wide*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
If I'm Thinking I'm Probably Feeling, Roswell Museum of Art, Roswell, NM
Western Exhibitions, Chicago, IL
- 2004 *In the Old Days When a Young Man Was a Strong Man*, Finesilver Gallery, San Antonio, TX
- 2003 *Artists Looking At Art*, McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX
- 2001 *Better Luck Next Time*, (MFA show) Commonwealth Gallery, Madison, WI

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 *The Sirens' Song*, Arthouse, Austin, TX
- 2006 *Beast*, Finesilver Gallery, Houston, TX
Drawing Inside/Out, Lawndale, Houston, TX
New American Talent, Arthouse, Austin, TX
- 2005 *Pulse Contemporary Art Fair*, Miami, FL
New Texas Painting, DiverseWorks, Houston, TX
Blue Star 20, Curated by Tony Jones, Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, TX
Amarillo Biennial 600: Drawing, Curated by James Elaine, Amarillo Museum of Art, Amarillo, TX
Maco International Art Fair, Mexico City, represented by arcaute arte contemporaneo
- 2004 *Los Americanos*, arcaute artes contemporaneo, Monterey, Mexico
A Timeless Montage of Being and Conflict, curated by Gabriela Trench, Parson's University, Paris, France
The Golden Style of Being, Bamboo Lane, Los Angeles, CA
- 2003 *All Over and At Once*, curated by Lane Relyea, The Pond, Chicago, IL
CAM Exhibition, curated by Terri Sultan, Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, TX
The Company We Keep, Inman Gallery, Houston, TX
Art Chicago, represented by Finesilver Gallery, San Antonio, TX
Come Forward- New Emerging Art in Texas, curated by Lane Relyea and Suzanne Weaver, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
San Francisco International Art Exhibition, represented by Michael Martin Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2002 *Drawing in San Antonio: Works by Contemporary Area Artists*, curated by Lyle Williams, McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX
3, Parchman Stremmel Galleries, San Antonio, TX
- 2001 *Tis' The Reason*, The Michael Martin Gallery, San Francisco, CA

GRANTS/AWARDS/RESIDENCIES

- 2005 *Golden Foundation Individual Artist Grant*
ArtPace Travel Grant
Dallas Museum of Art Kimbrough Fund Grant
Roswell Artist in Residence
Ucross Foundation Residency
- 2000 *Tempkin Award*, The University of Wisconsin Art Department



Video Still from *Wide Open Wide*,
projected animation and installation, 2005-2006.

- 1998 *Vilas Award*, The University of Wisconsin Art Department
University of Wisconsin Academic (WARF) Fellowship
- 1995 *The Schumacher Scholarship*, The University of Iowa Art Dept.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2006 Wendy Atwell, "A conversation with Joey Fauerso", Glasstire, July 21
Jeanne Claire Van Ryzin, "Arts: Diverse Show of 'New American Talent'", Austin American Statesman, June 29
MaLin Wilson Powell, "If I'm Thinking I'm Probably Feeling", catalog essay
- 2005 Kelly Klaasmeyer, "Capsule Review", Houston Press, June 29
Fran Colpitt, *Exhibition Review*, ArtUS, Jan/Feb
Anjali Gupta, *Exhibition Review*, ArtPapers, Jan/Feb
Emily Spicer, "Courting the Muse", San Antonio Express News, Jan 9
- 2004 Carol Kino, "A Timeless Montage of Being and Conflict", catalog essay
Christopher French, "Paris Review", Glasstire
New American Painting, featured artist
- 2003 Michael Workman, "All Over and At Once", Flash Art, November-December
Wendy Atwell, "A Face -off With Portraiture, Joey Fauerso Deepens the Genre", Artlies
Anjali Gupta, "The Art of Living", San Antonio Current, July 24-30
Terri Sultan, "Blue Star 18" Exhibition Catalog
Dan Goddard, "Blue Star's SA Art Poetic", San Antonio Express News, August 17
Dan Goddard, "Birds of a Feather", San Antonio Express News, August 17
Kelly Klaasmeyer, "Body Art", Houston Press, July 24-30
Rainey Knudson, "Visual Art in Texas", Glasstire
Suzanne Weaver and Lane Relyea, "Come Forward, New Emerging Art in Texas", exhibition catalog
- 2002 "pleaseandthankyou" (image), Perla Magazine
- 2001 Michael Velliquette, "Self-Conscious and Saucy", 16 Beaver Group Inc.



This Panel: *Wide Open Wide*, 25 8 1/2" x 11" oil and acrylic paintings, detail from larger installation of 324 paintings.

Cover Panel: Video Still from *Wide Open Wide*, projected animation and installation, 2005-2006.



Open(4), part of *Wide Open Wide*, 2005-2006, watercolor on paper. 45" x 42".

WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 28th anniversary. It presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,780 artists in 241 visual art exhibitions, 102 music, dance, and theater events, 13 film festivals, 19 literary readings, and 296 work-shops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant

in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 2,500 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



WOMEN & THEIR WORK
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