

CHRISTIE BLIZARD

When I Was 16, I Saw the White Buffalo



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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Part 2, Inside Inside Pre-Syntax. Detail of installation, tape & black light.

Cover Panel: *Part 2, Inside Inside Pre-Syntax.* Detail of installation, tape & black light.

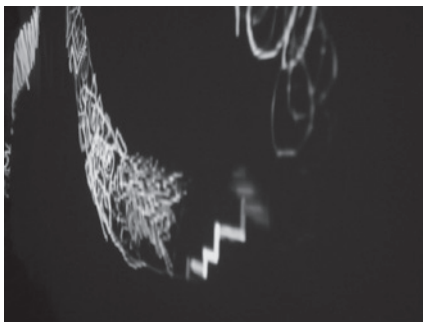
Christie Blizard

When I Was 16, I Saw the White Buffalo
Sources and Spaces of Creativity in the
Work of Christie Blizard

Reason is always a region carved out of the irrational—not sheltered from the irrational at all, but traversed by it and only defined by a particular kind of relationship among irrational factors. Underneath all reason lies delirium, and drift.
Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands*.

When I Was 16, I Saw the White Buffalo references a seminal experience from Christie Blizard's youth when the artist encountered the white buffalo during a school field trip.

The rare animal, aptly named Miracle, was born August 20, 1994 near Janesville, Wisconsin. To Native Americans, Miracle was a manifestation of *White Buffalo Woman*, the holy figure of legend who brought order to the Sioux by teaching them how to pray and how to live in peace. Coincidentally, two years prior to Miracle's birth, the town of Janesville erected the world's largest Peace Pole (52 feet), a symbol of hope and peace, and a response to the town's earlier Klan-related activities. While the white buffalo and the Peace Pole are both tangible aspects of the real world, perhaps their most profound meanings are to be found elsewhere:



Part 2, Inside Inside Pre-Syntax. Detail, *Driftwood*
River video of digitally drawn animation, paint,
plastic, tape and black lights.

what they mean to us resides in the realm of memory and in how we value and honor their function as symbolic gateways to a yet to be realized future.

When I Was 16, I Saw the White Buffalo is about memory, potential, artistic practice, and the location of creativity. Blizard invites the viewer to traverse a decidedly conceptual space and, in the course of the journey, to recognize and engage in the mapping of her process. Two rooms offer alternative insights into this process: one, an ersatz replica of the artist's home studio, the site of manual creativity; the other, a more abstract arena that represents dreams and the site of cerebral creativity. This juxtaposition of alternate spaces seemingly posits two divergent paths toward an understanding of creativity.

While the artist's studio offers the recognizable trappings that we associate with domesticity, a comfortable (and singular) reading of the space is not easily found. We have no guide and Blizard has removed herself from the space—though not entirely. Remnants of her bodily presence are markedly palpable in the form of disheveled blankets and sheets, carelessly discarded, on a mattress situated in the center of the room. *Is there a piece of furniture more personal than an unmade bed?* Sleeping there during the show's installation, and on and off throughout the work's duration creates the pattern of bedding changes, a constant reminder of Blizard's presence and non-presence. But a bed is not just a site for the body. It is also the place of dreams and, as such, this artist's bed becomes a metaphor for the artist herself as well as for her aspirations. Body and soul.

Objects placed in the room revolve around the bed as though tied to it by invisible umbilical cords. The visitor takes on the role of a voyeur or, perhaps, a flâneur, who examines and experiences, from a safe



Part 1, Living Room Inside. Detail installation view, *Hanging Spectrograms*, cut color paper, paint samples, and glue, *Buddha Head* and *Rainbow*, mixed media, *Bob Dylan Drawing*, graphite and spray paint on paper.

distance, those products and mechanisms of human creativity presented against white walls.

Painted and sculptural works and video are interrupted by markers of Blizard's home: a fireplace, a window, light switches and outlets, all faithfully reproduced in hung fabric prints. Despite our familiarity with home interiors, as well as the artist's placement of the objects into neat groupings, Blizard deliberately undermines any overarching meta-narrative. The windows and fireplace are not real; they are, like everything else in the room, implicit in their function rather than declarative. The placement of objects—here, painted strips of paper, there, a group of didgeridoos—seems random and a linear connection between one discrete grouping and another cannot be ascertained. The objects are to be assessed on their own merit: they are isolated artifacts of the artist's creative process.

Rather than a syntactically linear narrative, Blizard offers, instead, a juxtapositioning of opposites injected with a sense of irony. Technology and ancient iconography are played off against each other as videos and a light pegboard occupy the same space as teepee poles and mute didgeridoos. Near the fireplace, a keyboard, propped up against

the wall, offers only the promise of its use. Its doppelgänger, a keyboard reproduced in a twinkling array of lights, seemingly has an agency of its own, but it is an agency of sight rather than of sound. The windows, fireplace, switches and outlets are photographic replicas and, though accurate in dimension and placement, they do not function; they only represent. Functionality here has been relegated to memory and imagination.

Sound, primal and distorted, is present in the form of video. In *Roar*, Blizard heavily pixelates a man and slows his utterances to such an extent that his voice takes on the characteristic of a growl. The projected digital animation is contained within a large circular form with a centralized lion head made from handmade paper. In another video *White Buffalo Nursing*, the artist has overlain sketched images of a buffalo calf nursing. As one image replaces another, the lines of pentimenti remain, invoking the gentle process of nursing while attesting to the inability of a single image to capture the complexities of memory. The sound, low and solemn, combines the ancient reverberations of a didgeridoo and electronically produced sounds evoking wind.

Embedded within many of the room's objects is memory—but it is memory in its most breathy and internalized state. Earlier works have been disassembled and are not recreated in their finalized forms here. The ribbons of banded color, displayed in parallel strips against the gallery wall, are from spectrograms, visualized recordings derived from various sources—from Icelandic winds to the voice of Ricky Gervais. The striped poles leaning against the wall also reference earlier works—in Houston and in Reykjavik—where they functioned as armatures for teepees, indigenous pasts supplanted by urban overlays. The didgeridoos, used on Fortune Teller's Mountain in Skagaströnd, Iceland (2010), while once proclaiming the ability of sound to traverse

ancient Icelandic expanses, now have become mementos of a time and place. Each disassembled object is embedded with its own memory of usage. However, each also carries within it seeds that may germinate into new and different artworks.

Dreaming of islands—whether with joy or in fear, it doesn't matter—is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone—or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew.

Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands*.

The second room of the installation, titled, *Inside Inside Pre-Syntax*, presents us with a dreamscape, the space from which dreams and creativity emerge. As in the case of the first room, the visual reference is from the artist's past. The serpentine path of symbols on the walls and screen come from a Google Earth image of the Driftwood River, a waterway located behind the Blizard's childhood home in Columbus, Indiana. According to the artist, its proximity was tied to her creativity via "frequently recurring, very psychologically-charged dreams." Along the gallery walls, green chevrons seem to march toward a projection surface. There, they connect to each side of the video, an abstracted river, its shape echoed in the taped designs located on the gallery's floor.

For the artist, this gallery is intended to be an in-between space, a space in which language has not yet found its structure. It is pre-syntax. In this proto-linguistic world, the chevrons can be understood as the primordial matter out of which will emerge the building blocks of meaning. Within the video, the severe logic of lines gives way as chevrons morph into biomorphic and geometric shapes. Within the parameters of the imagined banks, forms collide, combining for an instant, and then move on, as if in a dream. The inversion of sound, (from jazz musician, Sun Ra, slowed down and played backwards), mirrors the randomness of the

visual activities played out upon the screen. The auditory and visual forms are pre-syntactic, defying meaning that we might wish to attribute to them. As such, this dark room can be understood as experiential and reflective of Blizard's interest in *neti neti*, a Hindu process in which it is understood that to begin to grasp the nature of the Divine, one must transcend words and the importance that we ascribe to them.

In both rooms of the installation, Blizard presents us with process and pieces. These are generative spaces. While the media through which she expresses herself varies widely—painting, sculpture, video, sound—there remains a resolute consistency in the themes conveyed by the artist. These are not two divergent paths. Both rooms of this installation pay homage to creativity and its potential and both are thematically related to sources of inspiration: in this space, the river continues its journey past Blizard's bedroom.

Dr. Constance Cortez is a professor at Texas Tech University where she teaches and writes about modern and contemporary art.



Part 1, Living Room Inside. Detail installation view, *Large Tubes*, acetate, acrylic, tape, l.e.d. lights and *White Buffalo Nursing*, DVD of hand drawn animation.

CHRISTIE BLIZARD

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 Women & Their Work, *When I Was 16, I Saw the White Buffalo*, solo exhibition, Austin, TX
- 2011 Lawndale Art Center, *From the Tipi Project*, solo exhibition, Houston, TX
Austin Public Spaces, *The Give Away Project, The Texas Biennial*, invited by curator, Virginia Rutledge, Austin, TX
Slocumb Galleries at East Tennessee State University, *Intervals Now*, solo exhibition, Johnson City, TN
Artspace Gallery at Plant Zero, *From the Sound Wave Project*, solo exhibition, Richmond, VA
Co-Lab Projects, *The River and Meditation Experiment*, solo exhibition, Austin, TX
621 Gallery, *The Give Away Project*, solo exhibition, Tallahassee, FL
NOMA Gallery, The VideoHole, *New Works*, invited by Marcella Faustini, San Francisco, CA
- 2010 Woman Made Gallery, *From the Center Now!*, curated by Lucy Lippard, Chicago, IL
School of Visual Arts, *Abstract Intentions*, curated by David Gibson and Keren Moscovich, New York, NY
- 2009 Tacoma Contemporary Urban Installation Project, *I Want to Start Living Like a Mystic*, solo exhibition, Tacoma, WA
- 2008 Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, *22nd International Juried Show*, curated by Carter Foster of the Whitney Museum of Art, Summit, NJ
Berkeley Art Center and works & conversations Magazine, *International Small Film Festival*, Curated by Richard Whittaker, Berkeley, CA
Manifest Gallery, *Art and Design on Film*, International Film Competition curated by Manifest's film research team, Cincinnati, OH

SELECTED FELLOWSHIPS, RESIDENCIES AND PUBLICATIONS

- 2011 MacDowell Colony Fellowship, Peterborough, New Hampshire
SIM Artist in Residency Program, Reykjavik, Iceland
Volume 96, West Edition, *New American Paintings*, curated by Cassandra Coblenz, Associate Curator of the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Open Studio Press, Boston, MA
- 2010 CentralTrak Artist Residency Program, University of Texas at Dallas
Nes Artist Residency, Skagaströnd, Iceland

EDUCATION

- 2007-08 Continuing Education Program, Painting and Mixed Media, School of Visual Arts Summer Residency, New York, NY
- 2005 M.F.A., Painting and Drawing, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
- 2003 Santa Reparata International School of Art, Summer Program, Florence, Italy
- 2001 B.F.A., Painting, Highest Distinction, (summa cum laude) Herron School of Art and Design, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN

SELECTED VISITING ARTIST LECTURES

- 2011 Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN
- 2005 Atlanta College of Art and Design, Atlanta, GA



When I was 16, I Saw the White Buffalo. Edition 1/1, digital photo of billboard on IH 84.



Part 1, Living Room Inside. Detail installation view, with *Casio Lite-Brite*, cardboard & lights, *Lion Head*, hand made paper, water color paper, acrylic, latex, and *Roar*, DVD of digitally drawn animation.

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 34th anniversary. Presenting 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 1,863 artists in 275 visual art exhibitions, 118 music, dance and theater events, 14 film festivals, 23 literary readings and 477 workshops in programming that reflects the broad 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 950 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 and
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