

PRESS RELEASE



Brian Tolle, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, 2008
Dolls, Astro turf, plywood, and platinum silicon rubber
40 X 69 X 54 inches
Collection of Ruth and Bil Ehrlich



Oded Hirsch, *Totchka*, 2010
Video still, 13:20 minutes; color; sound

Bordering Utopia: Sculptures by Brian Tolle

Oded Hirsch: Three Videos

October 6 – December 12, 2015

Artist's Reception

Homecoming Welcome Wine Tasting

Friday, October 9, 5 - 7 pm

Exhibition Tours: Saturday, October 10, 11 AM and 1 PM

The University Art Museum is pleased to announce the opening of two new exhibitions:

Bordering Utopia: Sculptures by Brian Tolle and ***Oded Hirsch: Three Videos***. The exhibitions open on Tuesday, October 6, 2015 with a public opening reception on Homecoming Weekend to be held on Friday, October 9 from 5 – 7 pm.

Bordering Utopia: Sculptures by Brian Tolle is the first exhibition to bring together Tolle's earliest sculptural work from the 1990s with more recent work. While his sculptures take on the appearance of familiar objects, at closer examination, this very familiarity challenges our perceptual foundations. Under Tolle's deft execution, a wooden beam or stone wall looks authentic down to its smallest knot or groove, but is actually made from hand carved Styrofoam. His unabashedly fake surfaces are like Potemkin villages—they may feel real, but the promise of the façade is a ploy. In Tolle's world nothing is solid or secure. It only looks that way.

Throughout his career, Tolle has maintained an interest in the history of American utopian quests. The earliest work in ***Bordering Utopia*** is based on Colonial American structures including Tolle's signature hand-carved Styrofoam beams and frames. In a series of carved window frames that contain light boxes, Tolle presents photographic views taken from inside a

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Colonial house at Old Bethpage Village on Long Island. *Witch Catcher* (1998), an 11-foot stacked brick chimney, also carved from Styrofoam, is distorted and twisted to suggest the power of an unknown psychic force that thrusts it upward. Here as in all of Tolle's work, the conceptual context in which he presents replicated historical fragments is designed to trigger associations between past and present aspirational yearnings.

At the center of the exhibition, two enormous chimney-forms, hand carved from Styrofoam and painted to look like stacked and grouted rocks, wander slowly across the museum floor, never touching. *Alice and Job* (2000) are a pair of 16-foot robotic, computer controlled sculptures that Tolle created in commemoration of the Llano del Rio Colony (1914-17). Once, the largest Socialist experiment in the United States, Llano del Rio is now an abandoned site on the southern edge of the Mojave Desert. At its height, the colony boasted a population of 1,200 mainly European immigrants and trade-workers. Led by two influential figures in early-twentieth century Socialism: Job Harriman, a labor lawyer and Eugene V. Debs's vice presidential nominee, and Alice Austin, a suffragist and self-trained architect, the colony lasted four years. Its aspirations of becoming a full-blown city were foiled by a combination of elements, among them internal strife and the loss of water rights. All that remains today are the ruins of two large chimneys. Tolle envisions his *Alice and Job* as dislocated emblems of a place that once aspired to be more than the sum of its parts.

Tolle's *Levittown* (2009) is based on another planned living community. Built between 1947 and 1951, Levittown became the model of American suburban life in the years following the Second World War. Tolle's *Levittown* sculptures are all cast from a silicon mold based on the original Levittown house. The molds are flexible in form, meticulously crafted, and bear all the architectural details of the original houses. Draped over emblematic objects of 1950s mass production such as a *Radio Flyer* wagon, a shopping cart, a hair dryer, or a reclining armchair, the house forms take on the contours of the objects, while partially concealing them. Each sculpture embodies a separate narrative that points up the two opposing and irreconcilable forces that have always driven American aspirations: the lure of conformity and the pursuit of individuality.

Spanning over twenty-five years of Tolle's career, *Bordering Utopia* stakes out new territory in his exploration of the aspirational goals of American visionaries and ordinary citizens. Tolle avows that these goals, while not always successful or inclusive, continue to shape our national character.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Tolle received his B.A. in Political Science from the University at Albany in 1986. Perhaps best known for his *Irish Hunger Memorial*, a public commission for Battery Park City, New York, he credits the skills needed to realize a public project of this complexity to the experiences in negotiation that he learned as a Political Science student and to his two-year internship at the New York State Assembly. He has a B.F.A. from Parsons the New School for Design, NY, and an M.F.A. from Yale University, New Haven, CT. His major public works include *Irish Hunger Memorial*, Battery Park City, New York (2002); and other projects in Wales, Los Angeles, and Miami Beach (2010). He is currently working on public projects in Brooklyn, Calgary, and Columbus, OH. His work has been exhibited in the *Whitney Biennial* (2002); the *Liverpool Biennial* at the Tate Modern (2006); at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2006); the Queens Museum of Art, New York (2001); the *Havana Biennial*, Cuba (2009); among other

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institutions. He is the recipient of awards from the Irish American Historical Society, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, and the Design Commission of the City of New York.

Oded Hirsch: *Three Videos* (Nancy Hyatt Liddle Gallery)

In a series of mesmerizing videos, Israeli artist, Oded Hirsch brings together multi-generational workers from Kibbutz Afikim (where he was born and raised) to perform a series of cumbersome actions. In *Tochka* (2010) he directs the group to build a wooden bridge that leads nowhere. In *50 Blue* (2009) a young man pushes an older man in a wheel chair up and down rugged terrain to the edge of the Sea of Galilee. In *Habaita (Home)* (2010) a group of unidentified individuals on a boat stare resolutely at a distant shore, while the boat remains stationary. Despite often anti-climactic results, Hirsch's videos convey an urgency and unnerving focus. His performers never speak. "Talking is a distraction," says Hirsch. Instead the emphasis on process and ritual points up how deeply the Utopian history of the kibbutz rests in the collective actions and intuitive connections of its members.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Oded Hirsch was born in 1976 in Kibbutz Afikim, Jordan Valley, Israel. He lives and works in Queens, New York. Selected solo exhibitions include *Contingency Plan* at the Museum of Art in Ein Harod, Israel (2015); *The Lift* at the Liverpool Biennial in United Kingdom (2012); *Nothing New* at Thierry Goldberg Gallery in New York (2012); *Chelsea Project* at EDS Galeria in Mexico City, Mexico (2010). Selected group exhibitions and film festivals include the Artists Film International at Whitechapel Gallery in London, United Kingdom (2015); *Artists Film International* at the Ballroom Marfa in Marfa Texas (2015); *Artists Film International* at GAMEC in Bergamo, Italy (2015); *And the Winners Are* at the Tel Aviv Museum in Tel Aviv, Israel (2015); *Artists Film International* at the Istanbul Modern in Istanbul, Turkey (2015); Moving Image Art Fair in New York City (2014); *Recent Acquisitions*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem (2013); and *The Workers* at MassMoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts (2011). Hirsch received an Israel Ministry of Culture Grant in 2014, The Council for Arts and Culture grant in 2014 and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in 2012. He received an M.F.A. from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York.

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Brian Tolle, *Witch Catcher*, 1997, acrylic, hand-carved Styrofoam and mixed media, 133 x 78 x 78 inches. Collection of The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York. Gift of Private Collection.

Brian Tolle, *Common Consent*, 1998, mixed media, dimensions variable

Brian Tolle, *Jerusalem Ave.*, 2009, platinum silicon rubber, plastic nativity set, metal shopping cart, 60 X 40 X 28 inches. Courtesy of the artist and CRG gallery

Oded Hirsch, *50 Blue*, 2009, video still, 12:30 minutes; color; sound

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Upcoming Exhibitions:

February 2 – April 2, 2016

Race, Love, and Labor: New Work from the Center for Photography at Woodstock's Artist-in-Residency Program

Featuring photography, artist books, and video by twenty artists who probe the complexities of contemporary life through intimate revelations and with unflinching candor. Curated by Sarah Lewis, Assistant Professor, Departments of History of Art and Architecture and African and African American Studies, Harvard University.

Keltie Ferris: Body Prints and Paintings

Built up in layers of spray gun washes and palette knife zips, these fresh and original large-scale abstractions reference textiles, graffiti, and modernist painting through a pixilated haze of neon, dark night tones, and tempered pastels. The body prints are an extension of this layered approach to image-making.

Gerard & Kelly

Collaborative dance artists Gerard & Kelly will present performance documentation that charts their prevailing concerns surrounding history, memory and the present tense of performance. Screened as a single-channel video projection, these "documents" underscore the artists' inquiry into the relationships between performers and spectators, language and movement, intimacy and public space.

For more information, call (518) 442-4035 or visit our website at www.albany.edu/museum

Museum Hours: Tuesday 10 am – 8 pm; Wednesday through Friday, 10 am – 5 pm; Saturday noon – 4 pm. Expanded Homecoming Weekend Hours: Saturday, October 10 and Sunday, October 11, 11 am – 4 pm. Closed Thanksgiving weekend.

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