



Little People (Astronaut), 2005
Color Polaroid, 30 x 24 inches.
Courtesy of the artist and Taxter & Spengemann, New York.

parts shop, *Spill* uses the decaying and ruined image of an exhausted man to evoke the uncontrollable and entropic proliferation of images and objects in post-industrial society. Together, the images reiterate the themes running throughout the exhibition—entropy, catastrophe, broken machines, appropriated photographs, familiar but uncomfortable situations, art historical references (this time, Andy Warhol's car crashes), alcoholic haze, disfigured portraiture, scale-shifts, anonymity, and defiant armies-of-one. These two blown-up photographs illustrate Bacher's uncanny ability to make the normal look foreign.

Throughout her forty-year career, Lutz Bacher has preserved her independence by keeping one foot always in the margins. As a result, her life has remained a semi-secret that even Google fails to pin down. Instead, she constructs fractured and conflicting identities—an art of breakdowns and interferences. Like a shape-shifting living organism, *Spill* resembles the mind of an artist at work.

LUTZ BACHER

(born in the USA. Lives and works in Berkeley, California)

In recent years, Bacher's group exhibitions have included *Photography on Photography* (2008) and *Closed Circuit* (2007) at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; *Grey Flags* (2006) at SculptureCenter, New York and CAPC musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux; and *Defamation of Character* (2006) at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; *American Tableaux* (2002) at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and *Bitstreams* (2001) at the Whitney Museum, New York. In 2009, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, a MoMA affiliate, is scheduled to present *My Secret Life*, a 40-year survey exhibition of her work.

Cover image:

Spill, 2007

Black and white photograph with unknown substance, 50 x 83 inches.
Courtesy of the artist and Taxter & Spengemann, New York



Support for *Lutz Bacher: Spill* is generously provided by The Nimoy Foundation. *General support* for the Contemporary's exhibitions program is generously provided by the Whitaker Foundation; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; William E. Weiss Foundation; Regional Arts Commission; Missouri Arts Council, a state agency; Arts and Education Council; Nancy Reynolds and Dwyer Brown; and members of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.



1 — Main Galleries

Lutz Bacher

Spill

For her first major museum exhibition, Lutz Bacher takes over the Main Galleries of the Contemporary. Since the 1970s, Bacher has worked in Berkeley, California, searching for the noises that disfigure contemporary culture and isolating the alien images that make up our shared landscape.

Rooted in a tradition of appropriation, Bacher sifts through joke books, illustrations, pulp fiction, advertisements, self-help manuals, pornography, interviews, trade shows displays, and abandoned photographs. She takes what we think we already know and throws it right back at us. Although these images seem familiar at first, they slowly become much less so, as traces of perversion, idiosyncrasy, and sexual ambiguity intervene.

Spill maps out the artist's most current artistic territory and outlines her interest in the stained leftovers of a utopian revolutionary

spirit. The exhibition's centerpiece is *Our Beloved Revolutionary Sweetheart*, an installation that encompasses all of the works in the main gallery. A rotating display of older works and the accompanying publication, *Smoke (Gets in Your Eyes)*, also emphasize the artist's erratic gestures, juxtaposed references, comic punch-lines, and sudden gear-shifts.

The exhibition begins with a dead-end: *Reflex Yellow* (2008) is a ramp that turns back onto itself and leads nowhere. Resembling a distorted (St. Louis) arch, it forms an interactive viewing platform for the main gallery. Along with cardboard cut-outs of *Deep Space Nine* space-travelers greeting us as fellow visitors, the monumental text work *Please* (2008) also fits into Bacher's peculiar way of showing us around: phrases lifted from a tourist's translation guide form another type of way-finding that looks familiar, somewhat helpful, a bit degraded, and yet undoubtedly alien.

A multi-channel video installation dominates the main gallery. Its central anthropomorphic character, Spud, is an archaic

animation that morphs through life-cycles—from birth to walking upright—in the midst of an evolving environment of pixilated landscapes and bursts of sounds. *Detour* (2008) provides the backdrop for a rotating display of past works: the wheat-pasted photocopies point to the pathos of Situationist leader Guy Debord, accentuating his grandiose personality and his fiery utopian promise. However, diluted in grainy black-and-white, he is only a ghost of an amputated revolution.

The older works provide glimpses—although interrupted, provisional, and partial—of the artist's overall practice. *The Lee Harvey Oswald Interview* (1976) is an assemblage of documents about the (presumed) sole gunman; *Jokes* (1985-1988) present a series of well-known faces lifted from a joke book; she hires a painter for *Playboys* (1991-93), based on the Vargas illustrations from the 1950s and 1960s; for *Gap* (2003-06), she steals actual Gap ads; *Little People* (2005), large-scale Polaroids, are half-toy and half-monster; and *Bien Hoa* (2007) are found photographs, presumably taken by an American

soldier in Vietnam, and recall an old war that feels eerily like the current one. Each work contains a portrait, and yet all we get are blank stares. Re-presenting photographs or paintings made by someone else, Bacher herself is also only partially present.

Inspired by Anheuser-Busch, a century-old brewery headquartered in St. Louis, Bacher builds a monument with excessive cases of Budweiser beer for *Club Bud* (2008). Nearby is *Be Kind to the Horses* (2008), a mechanical wagon train that uses awkward pre-animation technology to invoke St. Louis's celebrated pre-industrial past. The presence of art history lingers as well: while quoting renegade artist Cady Noland's many Budweiser sculptures, Bacher also plays the recording of Bruce Nauman's *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room* (1968) in the outdoor courtyard.

Spill (2008) is also the title of a back-lit transparency in the lobby, and along with *Crash* (2008), a 12 by 32-foot photograph of crashed cars visible from the street outside, they serve as the exhibition's two emblematic images. Depicting a worker sweeping up trash in a car-



Jane Fonda (Jokes), 1988
Distressed black-and-white photograph mounted on aluminum
31 x 38 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Taxter & Spengemann, New York.