

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

23 MAY – 26 JULY 2009
A DESPOT IN FLORA'S GARDEN
ROSA BARBA
HANS SCHABUS
MICHAEL STEVENSON
ARMANDO ANDRADE TUDELA

Simon Preston Gallery is pleased to present the group exhibition *A Despot in Flora's Garden*, which opens to the public on Saturday, May 23, and runs until Sunday, July 31, 2009. Curated by Jasper Sharp, the exhibition brings together projects by four artists - Armando Andrade Tudela, Rosa Barba, Hans Schabus and Michael Stevenson - that engage with and consciously undermine the methods and strategies developed in man's study of natural history.

Mapping, planning, journeying, exploring, discovering, collecting, comparing, preserving, reconstructing: for hundreds of years they have served as means to understand and make sense of the world around us. Sometimes deeply serious in intention (the continuing survival of mankind) but courageously amateurish in approach, the logic and conventions by which those means are governed have largely been honoured and respected. Appropriated by the four artists, they too are now exposed to abuse and manipulation. As a consequence, the authenticity and historical significance of the group's contributions are immediately called into question, and in attempting to make sense of them we risk ending up in a place more uncertain than that in which we began.

Hans Schabus produced *Log Book of Ballast* in 2006 at the invitation of the Liverpool Biennial. An exploration of the movement of material, it retraces a relatively unknown journey made by many thousands of stones from the English city used as ballast on slave ships that sailed to ports on America's east coast. Abandoned there and later used in the building of houses and roads, they constitute a silent but physical reminder of this chapter in history. Reversing the colonial journey, Schabus travelled to Savannah, Georgia, to retrieve as many of the stones as he could carry and return them by ship to the place from which they had first come - to be forgotten once again. Maps, drawings and other objects which were made or collected along the way - and which became the basis for a book, given out for free during the Biennial to passengers on the famous ferry that crosses the River Mersey (at the bottom of which the stones now lie) - are exhibited here for the first time. Hans Schabus (b.1970) represented Austria at the 2005 Venice Biennale, and has had solo exhibitions at SITE Santa Fe, the Secession, Vienna, the Barbican, London, and Kunsthau Bregenz.

Camion (Truck), a single-screen slide projection made in 2004 by **Armando Andrade Tudela**, also takes the form of an artist's book. During road trips along the Carretera Central, Panamericana Sur, Panamericana Norte and Lima Metropolitana highways, Tudela photographically documented the hand-painted, mural-sized designs with which many Peruvian truck owners customize the exterior of their vehicles. The designs, which

collectively represent a distinctive everyday vernacular, are configured from related modernist forms such as post-war graphic design, 'il brutalismo' and standard road signs. The anthology of photographic images that Tudela amassed, in the tradition of late nineteenth-century photographers dispatched by European museums to record the markings and behaviour of indigenous peoples, is part of a broader, ongoing typographical project by the artist. Intriguingly, however, *Camion* never achieves the sense of order that taxonomy, as a practice of classification, is intended to impose. Instead we remain mired in some sort of visual confusion. As Mark Godfrey has asked: "when we see these images in the context of an art book or gallery, how does our understanding differ from the encounter of an ordinary Peruvian driver who follows the vehicles without a camera?" Armando Andrade Tudela (b.1975) has had recent solo exhibitions at Ikon, Birmingham, the Frankfurter Kunstverein, and LAX, Los Angeles, and was an invited artist in residence at the 2006 São Paulo Bienal.

Waiting Grounds (2007) is a 16mm film installation by artist **Rosa Barba** that was shot in the Mojave Desert in the Western United States. Around the time of the Second World War this vast area became a testing site, primarily for military purposes. As a consequence, the landscape is littered with evidence of both our future (vast solar energy and windmill parks) and our past (trailer parks, heaps of scrap metal, and the largest aeroplane graveyard in the world). *Waiting Grounds* documents the voyage of a group of people through a series of abandoned locations. Their dialogue, and their questions regarding the function of the architectural remains, alternate with images of those locations, which are never shown in full light, and never clearly visible. As the viewer, we too find ourselves moving between different states: the physical and the void, regression, stasis and advancement, and perhaps most apparently, reality and fiction. Film works by Rosa Barba (b.1972) have recently been shown at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam, and Palazzo Grassi, Venice, and her web-based project *Vertiginous Mapping* can be seen on the site of the Dia Art Foundation.

Michael Stevenson began the project *The Smiles Are Not Smiles* in 2005. It is based on real events surrounding the opening and inaugural exhibition of a commercial art gallery in Tehran in October 1978 amidst the dramatic collapse of monarchy and the rise of revolution. The gallery lasted just days. The only artwork that was shown there, itself exemplary of the general confusion, was a stacked, freestanding wall of gold-plated bricks. Stevenson's project examines the aspirations of this brief but rapid expansion of the local art market and its underpinnings via the relationship between two commodities: gold and oil. As with other works by Stevenson, the investigation can be seen as a microcosm for wider spheres of interest. The story acts not as an historical account but as an allegorical double, and a model for wider enquiry. All that remains of this commercial enterprise today are the invitation graphics (unwittingly announcing the beginning of the revolution), the partially-defaced sign at the former address, and one viewer's first-hand description: "it shone like a shattered chain in the Persian sunlight having no beginning and no end." Michael Stevenson (b.1964) represented New Zealand at the 2003 Venice Biennale, and has had recent solo exhibitions at the Kröller Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Arnolfini, Bristol, and the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco.

The gallery is located at 301 Broome Street between Forsyth and Eldridge Streets. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Sunday from 11am to 6m. The nearest subway stops are Grand Street on the B/D lines and Delancey Street on the F/J/M/Z lines. For more information please contact office@simonprestongallery.com or call the gallery on 212- 431-1105.

