

TopSpin
Artists of Western New York and Beyond

Gary Sczerbaniewicz: High Strangeness
January 25 - May 3, 2015

Opening reception, with artist talk at 3:00 p.m., Sunday, January 25, 2:00-4:00 p.m.



garysczerbaniewicz

SDI-1: Sage Control (Flash Detail), 2014

Conspiracy-theory thinking has had varying degrees of prominence throughout history. Roughly defined; a conspiracy theory is a belief that powerful, covert organizations are responsible for clandestinely orchestrating certain circumstances or events. Through the works featured in *High Strangeness*, Gary Sczerbaniewicz presents a series of periscopic vignettes reflecting his own personal and artistic psychological insights into cognitive dissonance.

Artistically, what drives you to create work reflecting philosophies that you refer to as "psycho-geographical," "geopolitical paranoia," and "apocalyptic imminence?"

It is difficult to say exactly what drives the work – it is part compulsion, part self-archaeology, but mostly I think, a desperate need to articulate specific yet intangible qualities of specific yet intangible spatial arrangements – an almost phenomenological approach ala Bachelard with a heavy dose of the Freudian Uncanny and a piquant blend of

finish things off.

The analogy of a mental cartography is an old yet relevant one present in my work. My use of the term psycho-geography refers to a type of mental mapping – of a constantly changing terrain, upon which

I liken this form of spatial understanding to the concept of the 'Memory Palace' in which myriad suites contain spaces within spaces—each housing some hybrid form of psychological material.

The works for this exhibition entitled *S.even D.iminutive I.ncursions* can be seen as a grouping of psychic crawl-spaces. They are loosely woven together under the aegis: 'High Strangeness' – a phrase popular in contemporary ufology (one of several strains of research which inform these works), used to describe the bizarre nature of the various species of phenomena prevalent in that field of study. The title plays with the acronym SDI for the Reagan-Era Military/Scientific Project known as Strategic Defense Initiative (or Star Wars as dubbed in the press). This program (S.D.I.) and its conceptual underpinnings represented the apex of Cold War ideology. This geopolitical atmosphere of paranoia and apocalyptic imminence was palpable in the daily life of my adolescence – yielding a sense of a yen toward the sublime.

I think the term cognitive dissonance is quite apt—as many of the spaces I depict have undergone some form of tectonic, catastrophic, or paradigm-shifting event—which has rendered their original design little more than stage setting. This confrontation between 'realities' fascinates me; like that awkward space when one happens upon a freshly occurred accident where entities scratch their heads in utter disbelief at what has just transpired.

A well-known and clearly controversial website, theconspiracyzone.com, states "We are what we think. It is what our mind does and what we dwell on that makes us who we are." How does this relate to you and the context of your work?

There is a quality of what are called 'conspiracy theories' which I find compelling and deeply applicable to Postmodern art-making – they exist

We KNOW from our reading of history that much of its contents (nearly universally accepted as truths) are the versions that have been transcribed within a certain politico/religious/ nationalistic/ ethnic/gendered paradigm – later to be excavated and redefined by members of another group—most likely one not included in the official version. This is what contemporary art is for me – a re-imagining of the official sanctioned versions of reality by a new and unusual hybrid form.

Noted conspiracy historian and author Jeff Guinn once wrote, "Belief is frequently a matter of convenience rather than the result of objectively weighing evidence." With respect to your works featured in *High Strangeness*; how do you respond?

For me this notion of conspiracy theory carries I would opt rather to frame these scenarios as excavations of My concern first and foremost is with the fabrication of specific types of 'uncanny' architectural spaces. Freud, in his 1919 essay defines this aesthetic quality as "...the term 'uncanny' (unheimlich) applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away and has come into the open."

As a child I used to love to 'hunt' fossils in a large rock debris field behind our neighborhood. On one of these quests I recall I think this is the quality of the conspiracy theory that really carries a powerful conceptual punch for me – that of revealing a concealed and hyper organized network of hitherto unknown scale and complexity existing beneath a benign, mundane façade.

Through the creation of your periscopic vignettes; you, in your own words, "transfer to the psyche of the respective viewer spatial scenarios embedded with psychological stimuli." Accomplishing this is not an easy task. What do you want visitors to *High Strangeness* to leave with?

Ideally the viewer might leave this work with several lingering enigmas of odd spatial scenarios, which may trigger a sense of emotion or an imagined memory, possibly I wanted to approach the making of these vignettes with the weird hyper-real ocular detail of a Northern Renaissance painting like the Ghent Altarpiece. After being Because these works are framed within scorched periscopes, the viewer must access them through intimate close ports—an experience that may trigger this notion of the theatre of the mind continually playing out

Michael Beam, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections
Interview with the artist conducted in December 2014.



Artist Statement

My practice involves an insatiable fascination with interior and often, uncanny architectural spaces such as tunnels, mineshafts, catacombs, sewers, fallout shelters, basements and myriad other forms of Subterranea.

This compulsion leads me to fabricate confined space environments which include- scale shifts (using architectural models as elements) as well as full-sized structures in which the viewer is invited to physically enter and explore. I enjoy the dialogue created by these scale differences and by utilizing both interior and exterior spaces to create a coherent conceptual framework.



I also seek to disorient the viewer in an attempt to break the staid and often detached, passive and familiar approach to consuming artworks. I believe that it is only in this hermetic space where authentic communication between artist and viewer occurs. To this end, I employ tactics of individual viewer experience-such as compelling a single spectator to crawl, crouch, lay or adopt an atypical posture as they explore the confines and sensory stimuli of the piece.

I am currently investigating the concept of cognitive dissonance as communicated through the medium of architectural space. I am drawn to create works in which some unknown traumatic event—often sudden and violent—has rendered a space inert—transforming it from its original intended function into some form of hybrid and liminal zone. Here, there is a rich metaphorical equivalent for the ongoing survival mechanism active within many of us, for coping with the tectonic shifts of our contemporary reality—one that is continually in flux.



From top: (detail) *SDI-3: The Navidson Record*, 2014; *SDI Periscope*, 2014; *SDI Periscope w/ Artist/Flash*, 2014; (detail) *SDI-2: Lt. Col. Philip J. Corso United States Army (Ref.)*, 2014.

Gary Sczerbaniewicz (Born 1967, New Hartford, NY) was recipient of the Jacob Kassay Master of Fine Arts Award (2013) and was a 2010 member of the New York Foundation on the Arts–Mark Program. He has recently completed a two-month residency at Sculpture Space in Utica, NY, where much of the installation entitled Tom Ridge was created. Sczerbaniewicz has recently joined the roster of talented artists represented by the BT&C Gallery in Buffalo, NY. Gary currently lives and works in Buffalo, NY.

Education

2013 Master of Fine Arts, Visual Studies Program, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

1995 Bachelor of Fine Arts with a concentration in Mixed Media Sculpture, New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, NY

1989 2D/3D Foundations, Munson-Williams Proctor Institute School of Art, Utica, NY

Selected Exhibitions

Solo exhibitions are indicated with an asterisk.

2014
75 x 12 Curated from the Flat Files, BT&C Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Displacement: Barge Prototype, Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY
Guest Artist, Back To The Future, Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto, ON
Tom Ridge An Immersive Installation, Vox Populi Gallery, Philadelphia, PA*
2013
Beneath Suspicion-MFA Thesis Solo Exhibition, Big Orbit Gallery, Buffalo, NY*

2012
Drag Bar, 1st Year MFA Group Exhibition, Center for the Arts Gallery, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY
Echo Focus Artist, Echo Art Fair, Larkin Center of Commerce, Buffalo, NY
2011
Buffalo on The Bowery, Charles Bank Gallery, New York, NY
Mark-Making—Artists of NYFA Mark '10 Buffalo, two site-specific installations, Artspace, Buffalo, NY

Minimally Invasive, drawings and installation fragments, C.G. Jung Center, Buffalo, NY*
Echo Art Fair, Central Terminal, Buffalo, NY
2010
Colorless—Black & White Works from the Gerald Mead Collection, Villa Maria College, Buffalo, NY
La-Bas (Down There), Sugar City, Buffalo, NY*
2009
Immersive Installation, Peepshow, Dnipro Ukrainian Center, Buffalo, NY

2008
Karma Kab Boa, Members Exhibition, Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Buffalo, NY
Artists & Models 2008, video installation, Central Terminal, Buffalo, NY
2001
The Great Fear, installations and works on paper, Luminous Gallery, Buffalo, NY*

Related Professional Experience

2014
Adjunct Instructor, Sculpture, State University of New York, Buffalo State College, NY

2013
Adjunct Instructor, Sculpture, Department of Visual Studies, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Residencies

2013
Sculpture Space, Utica, NY

Awards and Honors

2013
Jacob Kassay Master of Fine Arts Fellowship, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY
Dean's Fellowship, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

2012
Best in Show, Big Orbit Gallery Solo Exhibition Award, Big Orbit—a CEPA Gallery Project Space, Big Orbit Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Dean's Fellowship, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Student Award Nomination, International Sculpture Center, Hamilton, NJ
Fellowship Nomination, Dedalus Foundation, New York, NY
2011
Dean's Fellowship, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

2010
Recipient of the New York Foundation for the Arts, Special Opportunity Stipend, New York, NY
Member, New York Foundation for the Arts, MARK Program, New York, NY

Exhibition Checklist

All are mixed media, 12x12½x14¾ inches, unless otherwise noted.

SDI-1: *Sage Control* from the Installation *S.even D.iminutive I.ncursions*, 2014.
SDI-2: *Lt. Col. Philip J. Corso United States Army (Ret.)* from the Installation *S.even D.iminutive I.ncursions*, 2014.

SDI-3: *The Davidson Record* from the Installation *S.even D.iminutive I.ncursions*, 2014.
SDI-4: *Khufu (For Ilya Kabakov)* from the Installation *S.even D.iminutive I.ncursions*, 2014.

SDI-5: *Travis Walton* from the Installation *S.even D.iminutive I.ncursions*, 2014.
SDI-6: *The Working Group* from the Installation *S.even D.iminutive I.ncursions*, 2014.
SDI-7: *Swamp Gas/ Weather Balloon (For Budd Hopkins)*

from the Installation *S.even D.iminutive I.ncursions*, 2014.
Models in Periscope: 56h x 20½w x 28 inches each. Periscope materials: charred Russian birch, rubber visor, wood framing and electrical elements.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the following individuals who have greatly assisted me in the making of this work: Reinhard Reitzenstein and Chris Siano—for their generosity in allowing me to utilize the excellent sculpture labs during fabrication of much of this work; Gordon Pellegrinetti for his energetic, photographic expertise and assistance!; Mark Snyder—commrade, confidant, counselor in the trenches; Michael Beam and the Castellani Art Museum for allowing this work to be shown in this amazing and storied space; the following individuals for their continued support: Anna Kaplan & BT&C Gallery, Gerald Mead, Stella Sczerbaniewicz, Gary Nickard—teacher, scholar, mentor; and my parents Leo & Lorraine Sczerbaniewicz for their loving support. Fellow researchers of High Strangeness: Richard Dolan, Leslie Kean, Karla Turner, Ph.D., Linda Moulton Howe, Steven M. Greer, M.D., John Mack, M.D., Whitley Streiber, Edgar Mitchell, D.E. Ayckroyd, Larry Warren, Peter Robbins and David M. Jacobs, Ph.D.

Gary Sczerbaniewicz is represented by BT&C Gallery, Buffalo, NY.

Dedicated to the memory of Budd Hopkins-Fellow Artist/ Researcher

TopSpin

Artists of the Buffalo/Niagara Region

The museum's Tops Gallery—dedicated to the exhibition of work by local and regional artists—presents the TopSpin series. TopSpin features a broad range of visual expressions, varied in media as well as message, and focuses mainly on new and emerging artists.

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