

VANESSA RENWICK

March 26 – July 17, 2016

NEXT LEVEL FUCKED UP

APEX





Alfred Hamilton's Uncle Sam Billboard, Interstate 5 (I-5), near Exit 72 in Chehalis, Wa., Dec. 2015, video still *NEXT LEVEL FUCKED UP*, 2016

APEX: VANESSA RENWICK

NEXT LEVEL FUCKED UP

A multi-channel video and sound installation conveying the artist's view of the crumbling world we live in is the central element of Vanessa Renwick's piece, created specifically for this APEX exhibition. Alternately cacophonous and soothing, the work combines images of global catastrophes with biting, guided-tour-type commentaries on Portlanders' disgusted responses to recent regional development. A stacked mountain of monitors mixes video clips of typhoons, fires, and melting glaciers with images taken from metropolitan Portland, the entirety juxtaposed against a wall projection of Oregon's Painted Hills. Renwick reminds us that our current ecological and urban follies rest in the arms of beautifully eroded ancient hills and majestic mountains and that time goes on, no matter what we do to screw up the world.

An installation artist, filmmaker, and writer, Renwick's work is always political, cause-oriented, establishment challenging, and often uncomfortably abrasive. Her topics range from wolves

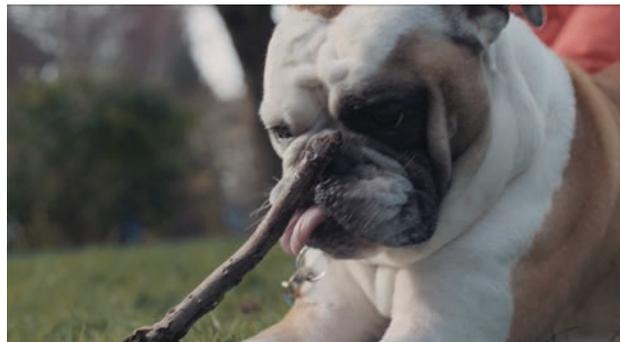
working hard to capture a meal to the implosion of the Trojan nuclear plant to the loss of an iconic African American record store. Her work is personal, honest, and rough around the edges. It is intentionally not beautiful and often opportunistic. She typically uses found materials, such as the refrigerators in *Hunting Requires Optimism*, 2003. The television monitors in *NEXT LEVEL FUCKED UP* were scrounged from a friend's warehouse sale; stacked in a mountain shape when she first saw them, they thus catalyzed the evolution of this APEX installation. Living on the financial edge, as artists too often do, Renwick has become adept at making work from what she can find, including imagery appropriated from the Internet and second hand electronic equipment. She frequently collaborates with numerous artist and musician friends, who contribute to both her films and installations.

Renwick's APEX installation invites personal engagement.

It is necessary to spend time with her work to fully understand it. Like watching a favorite TV show, one must pay attention to both the narrative and the visuals to appreciate the meaning. The cumulative effect of the collage of sound, image, and story takes time and consideration to fully experience and grasp. Minutes-long video interviews are juxtaposed with single images that reoccur at different intervals, providing surprising relationships between story and image. Similarly, the sound is complex and densely layered, often forcing concentration on a single track in order to sift through the bombardment of noise, music, and voice. Renwick uses this visual and aural excess to suggest, with wry irony, how you should consider various man-made environmental mishaps. From the stylistic breeding of dogs that results in their inability to give birth normally, to the gentrification of affordable neighborhoods and the resulting displacement of those with limited economic means, Renwick's work delivers an opinionated editorial on what



RUN FOREST RUN, Hawthorne Blvd, Portland, Or. Dec. 2015, photo



Penelope, video still, NEXT LEVEL FUCKED UP, 2016

she and her collaborators perceive as being “fucked up”.

Renwick intends to “gross you out” and, surprisingly, it is often the normal, everyday moments in the videos that do the best job of it. Watching dogs defecate and owners clean up after them and then discard the poop bags in place becomes more disgusting than burning oil trains with masses of polluting smoke invading the atmosphere. Perhaps it is the result of seeing ubiquitous televised ecological catastrophes from the distance of our couches that glazes Renwick's appropriated disasters with a patina of unreality. By forcing us to watch a discrete daily occurrence, the artist points out the importance of paying attention to small moral injustices as well as large. She prods a response from her audience to remind us that we have a right (and perhaps an obligation) to respond in protest against injustices both minor and major, using moments from our privileged, quotidian American experience to do so.

Creating an immersive environment for her installation heightens its overall effect. The strategy has evolved from the artist's film making background—she is a highly accomplished, award winning filmmaker. Every convention she employs becomes part of a stage set. Viewers enter the gallery through theater curtains. Fabric printed with doggie poop bags adorns artist-designed, hand fabricated bean-bag chairs placed for the viewer's repose. Rugs heighten the intimate atmosphere and also absorb some of the sound. The chairs are positioned in front of a pyramid-like stacked mountain of monitors, posed to evoke the iconic Mt. Hood, which, along with other signature bits of Oregon's environment, appears periodically in the videos. By providing comfortable places for her viewers to sit, Renwick, the activist, invites viewers to become part of her show. She further inserts us into her installation by putting mirror film on several monitors that do not display videos; in fact, our participation is not optional. The room is washed with red light that envelops the installation as a whole; red gels cover the gallery lights and red polyester film with a small paper cut out plane dragging a banner bearing the exhibition title, *NEXT LEVEL FUCKED UP*, floats across the slanted studio windows. Red becomes a unifying theme; it is a



Forest Park poop bags, photo

color of warning, denoting a dangerous time, one of bloody wars, global warming, forest fires, and police car lights. The color fills the walls, unifies the installation, and amplifies the work's theatricality.

Renwick makes a statement focused upon the inevitability of cyclical environmental change through eons and eons of time. Her arrangement of repeatedly looping images reminds us that oceans

rise and fall, ice melts, palms replace firs, and that whatever the cause, change happens. She repeatedly questions whether change for financial profit is change for the better. From local to global and immediate to timeless, displaying both fear and hope, Renwick's aptly titled installation blatantly addresses the artist's reaction to our current state of affairs. She takes the personal—her view of the world, love of animals, deep concern for the environment—both wild and urban, experience in film-making—mixes in the banal and the every-day, and melds the whole into a raucous multi-layered parable for our times. Channeling Francisco Goya and Hieronymus Bosch, she is alternately hysterical and deadly serious, disgusted, angry, and joyous. *NEXT LEVEL FUCKED UP* deploys a funky aesthetic approach to transmit a picture of a fragile world.

— Bonnie Laing-Malcolmson

The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art



Painted Hills and Saul Bellow, 2014

NEXT LEVEL FUJ

BIOGRAPHY

Self-educated, Renwick has been a working artist for over thirty five years. She has produced twenty-one installation pieces and has had numerous film and video screenings in locations around the world. Her work has received many awards including: Regional Arts & Culture Council Project Grant, Portland, Oregon; Regional Arts & Culture Council Professional Development Grant, Portland, Oregon; Bonnie Bronson Fellowship, Portland, Oregon; The Delicious Medicine Award, 41st NW Filmmakers' Festival, Portland, Oregon; Ford Family Foundation Grant, Roseburg, Oregon; Flaherty Professional Development Fellowship; DIY of All-Time Award from Judge Mike Plante, NW Filmmakers' Festival, Portland, Oregon; Ford Family Foundation Golden Spot Award, Roseburg, Oregon; the Jim Demulling Speak Out Award for Best Social Awareness Documentary, Humboldt Film Festival, California; Betty Bowen Award Finalist, Seattle Art Museum; Judges Award at the Northwest Film and Video Festival from Michael Almeryda, Portland, Oregon; Gus Van Sant Award for Best Experimental Film, Ann Arbor Film Festival, Michigan; Judges Award at the Northwest Film and Video Festival from James Benning, Portland, Oregon; first place, Peripheral Produce Championship Invitational, Best Documentary Video, Microcinefest, Baltimore, Maryland. She has screened work in hundreds of venues nationally and internationally including: The Museum of Modern Art, Light Industry, The Wexner Center for the Arts, Art Basel, The Museum of Jurassic Technology, Centre Pompidou, Bread and Puppet Theater, and True/False Film Festival. Renwick's work has been collected by public and private institutions including: The Center for Land Use Interpretation, Stanford University, California; Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts; University of Illinois at Chicago, Illinois; University of British Columbia, Vancouver; Reed College Library, Portland, Oregon; Marfa Public Library, Texas; Multnomah County Library, Portland, Oregon; Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington; Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon, Eugene; Portland Art Museum, Oregon. She is represented by PDX Contemporary, Portland Oregon.



Earth Balance, photo

APEX

An ongoing series of exhibitions featuring emerging and established artists living in the Northwest. Presenting contemporary art in the context of the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Center for Northwest Art, this program continues the Museum's 120-year commitment to exhibiting, collecting, and celebrating the art of the region. APEX is supported in part by The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Endowments for Northwest Art, The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, and the Exhibition Series Sponsors.

CKED UP

Lucy Rockwell
Kyle von Hoetendorff
Rob Bardell
Moe Bowstern
George Wilson
Pete Peterson and Zena Kisoki
Dianne Bocci
Kohel Haver
Jim DeStaebler
Aaron Heuberger
Elisabeth MacMichael
Libby Werbel

This piece would not exist without the generous help of all of these good people, and dogs. I am perhaps forgetting someone in this list, and for that, I apologize. — Vanessa Renwick

Corey Arnold
Colleen Plumb
Dwayne Hedstrom
Sam Coomes
Marisa Anderson
Michael Hurley
Tres Shannon
Mike Palmieri
Mark Eifert
Eric Edwards
Morgan Hobart
Tim Scotten
Ben Purdy
Bill Boese
Alec Dunn
Adam Dowis
Natalie Barela

Scott Becker
Al Solheim
Davia Merced
Laura Heit
Ian Madin
Emily Silvis
Micah Shmelzer
Kevin Hillery
Tom Cramer
Cathie Stimac
Katie Weinstien
Saul Bellow
Paul Vasquez
Toodle, Penelope, Midge, Ridley, Pog and Katie
Salty's Pet Supply
decorativefilm.com
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PDX Contemporary Art
and
the elephants

