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PERSONAL

Rodney Graham's recent exhibition, "Getting It Together in the Country," continues his ongoing exploration of the role of gentleman adventurer and the conventions and constructs of narrative cinema, historical situations and cultural icons. The exhibition includes a modest photographic series (begun over twenty years ago) as well as more recent grand-scale filmic works.

Aerodynamic Forms in Space, a series of photographs taken in 1977 but first printed in 1996, clearly exemplifies Graham's waggish sense of humour and rigorous analysis of objects. Here, plastic and balsam-wood model gliders are configured into shapes that, in combination with strategic lighting, cast shadows reminiscent of Futurist abstraction and allude to the early 20th-century's obsession with flight. What at first glance seems pure abstraction is actually a photograph of a toy airplane.

Graham presents himself as the central subject in *Ramblin' Man*, a nine-minute projected film-loop in which he takes on the role of the cowboy. The film begins and ends with the same shot of the sun behind the mountains, which functions as both sunrise and sunset. He travels on horseback through mountain meadows and streams, accompanied by the hyper-real sounds of his horse, crickets and birds. Eventually, he comes to rest by a stream, where he strums his guitar and softly sings a melancholy ballad explaining how he became a ramblin' man. Graham calls to mind the cowboy philosopher in André Breton's Situationist comic, *The Return of the Durruti Column*, in which he adds talk balloons, which express situationist ideas about reification and drifting, to filmstrip images of cowboys. Here, Graham's original song speaks directly to the alienated drift and the solace in the encounter with nature that are inherent in the picaresque. When the song is over he mounts his horse and returns into the landscape from whence he emerged.

In two large photographs titled *Fishing on a Jetty*, Graham assumes the debonair Cary Grant's role of former jewel thief, John Robie, from Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief*. Hitchcock's plot is loaded with inter-related disguises – a complex loop of impersonations that finally baits and catches the true thief. As in the film, our hero here poses as a fisherman. But in Graham's work the film's rear-screen projection of the French Riviera is replaced by a digitally inserted image of Vancouver's West End, and a second photograph adds the end of the fishing rod, which cuts diagonally across the sky, the line taut and angled as though something has been caught. Accompanying the large photo work is *Can of Worms*, a small backlit photo of a rusty old can – the bait can from *Fishing On a Jetty*. Here, taken out of its context as prop – part of a disguise – it becomes emblematic – what you need to catch a thief – and a literal cliché.

Identity here is stylistic quotation. Reworking and repeating narrative fragments, whether mimicking the trope of the wanderer or playing the romantic hero, Graham's presence in the work as intellectual artist is foremost for the viewer. There is only so far a ramblin' man can go in this confined, repetitive structure. Detournement, diversion, distortion, appropriation, theft, subversion: Rodney Graham is not what he seems.

Kathy Slade

