



## THE STORYTELLER

**The Storyteller** is an exhibition that focuses on artists who use the story form in contemporary art as a means of comprehending and conveying political and social events. Significantly, unlike their postmodern predecessors, the artists in *The Storyteller* neither take the idea of documentary truth as an object of their critique nor do they abandon fact for fabrication. Rather, they enable individuals (whether themselves, their subjects or their audience) to construct the story of their unique participation in historical processes, thereby presenting these events in a new and unexpected light.

*The Storyteller* is a traveling exhibition organized and circulated by Independent Curators International (ICI), New York. Guest curators for the exhibition are Claire Gilman and Margaret Sundell. The exhibition, tour, and catalogue are made possible, in part, by a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation; ICI Benefactors Agnes Gund, Gerrit and Sydnie Lansing, and Barbara and John Robinson; the ICI Partners and ICI Advocates.

### Suggested Education Materials

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Independent Curators International (ICI) proposes these recommendations for programming you may wish to offer during your presentation of *The Storyteller*. All are intended as guidelines to supplement the exhibition that may be reworked to suit the particular interests of your audiences. Inside you will find suggestions for the following:

#### 1) Activities for Young Adults

##### **NOTE: Viewing Video as a Group**

Video and new media figure prominently in *The Storyteller*. When viewing a video collectively, it is helpful to ask students one or two preparatory questions or ideas to consider, such as “who are the characters in this story?” or “where might this be taking place?” After the viewing ask your students to gather outside of a screening room or a short distance away from a gallery projection. Invite them to first summarize what they noticed and experienced. This is an important exercise, encouraging younger students to exercise skills in articulation and summation while allowing for older students and visitors to compare their different impressions. Next, return to the preparatory question if it has not already been answered in the collective summary. Other questions posed might include, “Did your experience of the film change the longer you looked at it? Why or why not?”, “What choices did the artist make?”, or “Is any information missing? What else would you want to know?” Deepen the discussion by asking follow-up questions about shared observations and by inviting your group to reflect on how the work relates to others they have already discussed in the exhibition, or how it relates to the concepts you have set out to explore in the tour.

### Young Adults

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#### Recommended for Young Adults Ages 11 – 18

All of the works in *The Storyteller* are inspired by actual events and lived experiences. None of the artists, however, have chosen to pursue their subjects in a strictly documentary or purely factual

form. Instead, they explore different facets of the story form as a means of creatively and imaginatively re-engaging with real-life situations.

Along with the suggested introductory questions accompanying each sample lesson below, an initial discussion regarding the story form may be helpful. What are the components of a story? How can a storyteller make a story especially interesting? What roles might stories play in personal, family, and national histories? Following up on this last question, why do we tell stories?

### **1. War: Whose Point of View?**

Introductory Questions:

How might you define the phrase, “point of view” or “different perspectives?” What do these phrases mean when applied to art, such as painting or photography?

Steve Mumford

*Iraq, 2003-05*

Choose two images drawn from noticeably different perspectives by Mumford. Ask your group to compare the two. From what vantage point is each image drawn from? Can they imagine where Mumford was positioned, and does he seem to be part of or separated from the scene? How do these drawings tell a story without text? Discuss the title of the works; how does this information add to the story? From whose point of view is the story being told? To whom is it possibly being told?

Lamia Joreige

*Objects of War, 2006*

Prepare your group by asking them to consider who is telling the story in the video. After giving them several minutes to experience the work, ask them to provide a summary and respond to the question. What kind of story is being told? What does it seem to be about? Who are the main characters? Share the title and some information about the work. Ask them to compare this work with the drawings they discussed by Mumford. What differences do they notice between the two artists approaches to storytelling? How do they present different views?

Emanuel Licha

*War Tourist in the Suburbs of Paris, 2004-08*

Again, prepare your group for the video with a preliminary question. After the group summary, ask them to compare Licha’s video with Joreige’s *Objects of War*. Inform them that the protagonist in the video, the tour guide, is not the artist himself. Does that change their interpretations? Why or why not?

Concluding thoughts:

What is the role of the artist as storyteller in all three works? Even though they present different points of view, what commonalities do all three works share?

### **2. The Story of Objects**

(easily adapted for young children ages 5 and up)

Introductory Questions:

Think of a favorite item of yours. What makes it meaningful? What story or stories can you share about it?

Lamia Joreige

*Objects of War, 2006*

Prepare your group by asking them to consider what role an object or objects play in the video. After giving them several minutes to experience the work, ask them to provide a summary and respond to the question. Who seems to be telling the story? What might the story be about?

Begun in 1999, Joreige's project features testimonials on the Lebanese civil war, a twenty-five year period which profoundly shaped the artist's own life. Share the title and some information about the work. How do the objects help people featured in the video to tell a story? How might the testimonials help Joreige come to terms with her own experiences?

Mounir Fatmi

*Save Manhattan 02, 2005*

After giving your group some time to observe the work, ask them to describe what they see. What objects has Fatmi used to create this sculpture? For students too young to know VHS tapes, ask them to first try to figure out their function. Ask your group to think of other types of now obsolete technological objects with which they may have grown up or from history. If they have not already associated the sculpture with a skyline, ask them to step back and observe it as a whole. Ask how the title of the piece relates to what they see. What kinds of stories might be told by the tapes? Invite them to consider why the artist chose these particular objects to construct the skyline.

Ryan Gander

*As Time Elapsed, 2005*

Invite your group members to describe the work. Ask them to consider how, like Fatmi's *Save Manhattan 02*, the stack of books might resemble a building. Read sections of the book aloud to your group or ask for volunteers to read different parts. What does the story seem to be about? Who are the main characters? Where does it take place? What seems to be the relationship between the story and the sculpture?

Michael Rakowitz

*Return, 2006 and ongoing*

Ask your group, preferably in pairs, to look closely at the objects and text included in the installation. After a few minutes, ask them to report back. What role do the dates seem to play in the piece? How are they used to tell a story? Remind your group of their initial recollections of meaningful objects at the start of the tour and share some information about why dates are meaningful to Rakowitz and his Brooklyn store project from 2006.

Conclusion:

In summary, what different objects were used to tell stories in the works seen and discussed in tour? What are the different ways these artists have chosen to tell stories through objects (video, sculpture, writing, and performance)? How do these stories relate to the personal lives of some of these artists?

### **3. Fairytales of Truth and Fiction**

(easily adapted for young children ages 5 and up)

Introductory Questions:

What kind of story is a fairytale? What are some of your favorite fairytales or children's books and why? Can they recall darker or slightly scary fairytales?

Ryan Gander

*As Time Elapsed, 2005*

Invite your group members to describe the work. Read sections of the book aloud to your group, or ask for volunteers to read different parts. What does the story seem to be about? Who are the main characters? Where does it take place? What seems to be the relationship between the story and the sculpture? Share some information with your group regarding Trellick Tower and Ernő Goldfinger. What are the similarities and differences between this story and familiar children's books? What might be some reasons why the artist decided to write about history this way?

Adrian Paci  
*Albanian Stories*, 1997

Invite your group to watch several minutes of the video (because it is only 7 minutes in length, you may want them to watch the video in its entirety) and ask them to consider who is telling the story and what it may be about. After regrouping, ask them to recount their observations. What is different about this piece and Gander's? What kinds of questions does the work provoke? Ask them whether or not their ideas changed knowing the child speaking is the artist's daughter. What does the fairytale she tells seem to be about? Share information about Paci's past and departure from Albania. How does this information relate to their understanding of the video and the story told?

Cao Fei  
*Whose Utopia*, 2006

Depending on the timing of this three-part video, you may want to briefly inform your group of how Fei asked workers in a Guangdong Province light-bulb factory to imagine and act out their dream job. If you have caught the video at the beginning, be sure to allow time for some viewing of its second or third parts. After they have spent some time watching *Whose Utopia*, ask your group to gather to discuss their impressions. Who are the characters? What are their ideal occupations? What does the place they are working at look like? How does the music play a role in the stories being told? Share the title with your group, and depending on their age, ask them to define "utopia" or explain its meaning. Ask them to reflect on the meaning of the title in relation to their interpretations of the work. Let them know about another project by Fei, RMB City (see "Online Resources"), which is a virtual world she has created in Second Life. China Tracy, Fei's avatar, has also created a utopian vision: in her case a city. As an extended project, invite your group members to write or sketch their own utopian occupation or world.

Conclusion:  
How do all three works combine both truth and fiction in imaginative ways?

#### **4. History Retold**

Introductory Questions:

How can an event (an argument between friends, a political election, etc.) be witnessed and understood in different ways by different people?

Jeremy Deller and Mike Figgis  
*The Battle of Orgreave*, 2002

Ask your group to spend a few minutes watching the *Battle of Orgreave*, and ask them to think about what might be happening. As a group, piece together everyone's interpretations. Explain how the film is both a reconstruction and documentation of a historical moment and later reflections of its participants. In 1984, the British National Union of Mineworkers went on a yearlong strike, and its most heated and violent moment occurred between miners and police on June 18 near a plant at Orgreave in South Yorkshire. Taking place under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party rule, this politically fraught event resulted in the further weakening of British trade unions. The resulting deep

social and political divisions may have been exasperated by the role of news media, which tended to favor the Conservatives (for more information and film clips, refer to “Online Resources”).

Both ex-miners and ex-policemen participated in the film, along with amateur historical reenactment groups. After sharing information about the work with your group, ask them to consider reasons for revisiting a conflict like this one. What are some reasons why Deller and Figgis might want to investigate and retell this story? In the reconstruction of the event, some miners and policemen assumed reverse roles. Why might the artists have chosen to allow for this character switch?

Omer Fast

*Spielberg's List*, 2005

Omer Fast's *Spielberg's List* requires some time to view. As they watch the work, ask your group to consider its format and choices the artist made. After summarizing their observations about the work, provide some information about the film and some of the background behind Fast's decisions. What is surprising or creative about how Fast has approached and formatted this subject? In what ways can *Spielberg's List*, like *Battle of Orgreave*, also be considered a historical reconstruction? What might be some pros and cons of films, such as *Schindler's List* (1993), which take on such difficult, historical subjects?

Adrian Paci

*Albanian Stories*, 1997

Invite your group to watch several minutes of the video and ask them to consider who is telling the story and what it may be about. After regrouping, ask them to recount their observations. How does Paci's video differ from the other two works? What kinds of questions does it provoke? Share information about Paci's past and departure from Albania. How does Paci use his daughter's storytelling to revisit his own personal and national history?

Missing Books (Maria Barnas, Maxine Kopsa, Gemraine Kruij)

*Un Oscuro Dia de Justicia* (A Dark Day of Justice), 2005

*In the Last 20 Minutes*, 2005

Begin by first looking at the pallet stacked with copies of Rodolfo Walsh's 1973 novel, *Un Oscuro Dia de Justicia*. Share some information regarding Walsh, his disappearance, and Missing Books' mission to republish books. Ask your group what an “artists' collective” might mean. Armed with this background information, ask them to watch several minutes of *In the Last 20 Minutes*. What happens in the film? From whose perspective is it presented? Like the first two videos in this tour, how is this work also a historical reenactment? After discussing this imaginative retracing of Walsh's final moments, ask them to consider how the video might relate to republication of the books. What might be the value in resurrecting lost stories, of people and by people, to history?

Conclusion:

How do all four works use aspects of storytelling to revisit and better understand history?