

CENTRAL FINE

HUNTER OSKING | BOY HEAVEN

AUGUST 7TH - SEPTEMBER 1ST

Hunter Osking's debut solo exhibition, *Boy Heaven*, is an overlapping cinematic tale of hubris, pathos and alienation. Simulating the internet's cacophony of information, Acts I, II and III play simultaneously in a multi-channel installation, accompanied by a single photograph authored by and depicting Osking's subjects. Shot on a Sony VX2100, handy-cam and smartphone, the photograph and videos are replete with digital artifacts such as blur, shake and pixelation. Through scripted improvisations the unrefined elements give *Boy Heaven* its authentic affect, suspending disbelief and achieving an uncanny realism.

Chronologically the first act of *Boy Heaven*, *Boy Heaven Episode 1.01* depicts a group of friends striving to create the next version of *Jackass*—pulling stunts ranging from juvenile to hazardous, ultimately culminating with the video's central character, Travis, fatally jumping across a river on his dirt bike. Osking merges real life with art in the style of John Cassavetes, casting himself and his real life friends into caricatures of themselves and acquaintances: Brett Sidman's real life inclination for death defying dirt bike stunts inspired his character, Travis Purvis, who's invented last name is the actual surname of cast member Dylan Purvis, who plays Dylan, A.K.A. The Cookie Monster. Osking's character is also an appropriation of himself: the implied camera man; he is both the fictional and real life auteur. Osking emulates Cassavetes' celebrated coarse depiction of humanity; Travis pantses his girlfriend and calls her a bitch after pie-ing her in the face. Cookie Monster jokingly points a BB gun at his dog and eventually uploads the footage of Travis's death to LiveLeak. The crassness is interpolated with moments of comradeship and comedy, giving way to a compelling realism.

In keeping with Cassavetes' method, *Live Leak* is a photo taken by Dylan Purvis on a night ride in his hometown of Newberry, FL. The location of the photo is just minutes up the river from where Travis crashes his dirt bike in *Boy Heaven*. The image both reflects the candid and juvenile energy of *Boy Heaven Episode 1.01*, while also alluding to Travis' forthcoming death; an overexposed Brett, who plays Travis, renders the image into a biblical depiction of rapture. Act II of *Boy Heaven*, *Crime Scene Holographic* depicts a balletic sweeping view of the aftermath of the dirt bike crash. Fragmentary glimpses of gore are illuminated by the presumed photographer's flash, spawning a temporal division, ever-presently reminding viewers that Travis both will and has died. It is a specter haunting the viewer, and a parallel to the LiveLeak video that haunts Hunter.

In the third and central act, Hunter vlogs his attempt to reunite the gang and memorialize Travis on his birthday, just 8 months after his death. Named after a website dedicated to disarmingly heart wrenching eulogies for lost pets, *Rainbow Bridge* is a testament to the unexpected pathos one can find in the frays of the internet. As Hunter's meandering spiel turns inward, his vlog grows more and more devastating. His juvenile anecdotes of "getting dome" and "all the crazy shit Travis did" are attempts to distance himself from the brink of his mournful state. Yet as he attempts to connect with his friends and repeatedly fails, the chipper facade begins to crack, climaxing at Travis's ex girlfriend Leah's house: Hunter is left to wander around alone, repeatedly calling out to his friends to no response, evoking in viewers the primal state of being abandoned as a child.

Hunter's descent into solitude mirrors the relationship between spectacle and participant. As the leaked video is abstracted and degraded at accelerating velocities, the spectacle overtakes him with an overwhelming grief, compounded by the loss of his friend and the responsibility he feels for having authored the footage, Hunter proverbially stands "too close to the fire." It is only after he stops vlogging that we learn he and his friends do connect in a night of watching Travis videos.

In all of the darkness there is a sense of hope - speaking to his Youtube audience at the scene of the accident, Hunter condemns Cookie Monster for the leaked video, and correctly asserts that it distorts the event, that there is more to human life than what the spectacle presents us. In a moment of inspired passion he claims that when he saw Travis's crash in real life he "didn't see a man that just hit the jump and died" he "saw a man who was having fun" he "saw a man who just did the biggest jump of his goddamn life. Let's keep the party going."

Text by Betty McGhee

1 Osking's improvisational style was inspired by directors Mike Leigh and Sean Baker

2 Levich, Jacob. "John Cassavetes: An American Maverick." *Cinéaste* 20, no. 2 (1993): 51. "He chose instead to create a cinema of *gaucherie*, relentlessly baiting viewers by depicting human beings not at their worst—that would have been easy—but at their coarsest...His style, in art as in life, was always confrontational, passionate, and rude;"

3 LiveLeak was a British website best known for hosting submitted footage of extreme violence and gore. The website came to prominence in 2007 following the filming and leaking of the execution of Saddam Hussein.

4 Osking's self-caricature owes credit to director Paul Schrader's recurring depiction of loneliness.

5 Debord, Guy. 1992. *Society of the Spectacle*. London, England: Rebel Press, London. In his seminal text, Guy Debord identifies the spectacle as "a social relation among people, mediated by images," stating "The alienation of the spectator to the ...contemplated object is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires...This is why the spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere."

6. Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image" *E-Flux Issue #10* (November 2009)

7. Benjamin, Walter. 2008. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Translated by J. A. Underwood. Penguin Great Ideas. Harlow, England: Penguin Books. "In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art-its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence-and nothing else-that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject."

Boy Heaven Credits

Directed by Hunter Osking

Written by Hunter Osking & Betty McGhee

Produced by Betty McGhee, Brett Sidman, & Dylan Purvis

Live Leak photo taken by Dylan Purvis

Performed by Hunter Osking, Brett Sidman, Paul Baker, Dylan Purvis, Dakota the Dog, Betty McGhee, Cole Zelznak, Buster the Dog & Puppy the Dog

Production Design by Brett Sidman, Dylan Purvis, Sienna Takabe, & Lucy Gaehring

Photography Print by Gladly Alroy

Photography Consulting by Roe Ethridge

Installation by Eric Voorhis & Sannidhi Shukla

Special Thanks to Diego Singh