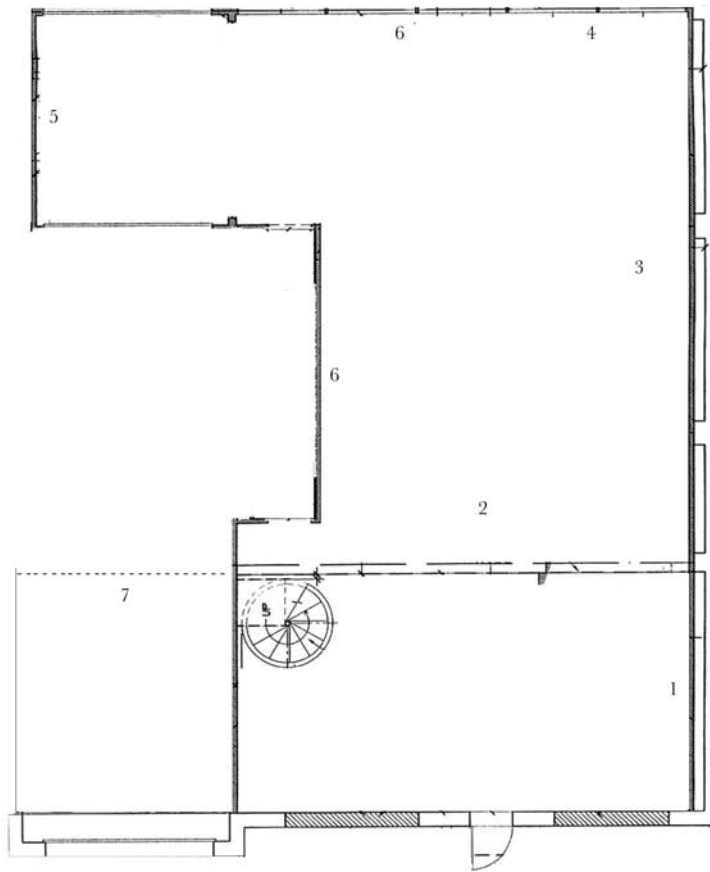


WHITE FLAG PROJECTS

Tommy Hartung & Uri Aran

January 19 – February 18, 2012



1- Uri Aran
The Donut Gang, 2009
Color video with sound, 7 minutes 40 seconds
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

2- Tommy Hartung
A Short History of the Canon, 2007
Color video with sound, 5 minutes 9 seconds
Courtesy the artist and On Stellar Rays, New York

3- Tommy Hartung
Vehicle, 2011
Plexiglass and plastic mold, 42 x 16 x 14.5 inches
Courtesy the artist and On Stellar Rays, New York

4- Uri Aran
Untitled, 2012
35mm color slide loop and projector
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

5- Tommy Hartung
Anna, 2011
Color HD video with sound, 20 minutes 17 seconds
Courtesy the artist and On Stellar Rays, New York

6- Uri Aran
Untitled Drawings (for The Ascent of Man), 2009
Various sizes, various media, seven drawings
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

7- Tommy Hartung
Stay Golden Ponyboy, 2009
Color video with sound, 3 minutes 14 seconds
Courtesy the artist and On Stellar Rays, New York

Façade- Tommy Hartung
Jeremiah, 2011
UV ink on vinyl, 154 x 154 inches
Courtesy the artist and On Stellar Rays, New York



Tommy Hartung & Uri Aran in Conversation

Recorded in Brooklyn, New York

Sunday December 4, 2011

Moderated by Matthew Strauss

Matthew Strauss: I know you met in the MFA program at Columbia- how many years ago was that?

Uri Aran: Since 2005.

MS: And you both have contributed to one another's work without ever really identifying it as a collaboration. Maybe you both can start by discussing how you conceive of your work with one another, and how you distinguish between these ideas of collaboration and exchange.

UA: We never set out to collaborate for the purpose of producing anything specific. We only collaborated once on an exhibition. Mostly, though, what we do is like a mutual commission: for instance, Tommy will have me do something figurative after listening to his work and watching some of his footage. It's about trusting someone to produce something for your work individually. So I wouldn't call it a collaboration, but a collaborative effort. We are not an entity that works together and produces work— you can definitely see whose hand produces what, if you know our work. In the long run, it's mostly a friendship and a conversation that's happening. In that sense, there's a lot of enthusiasm and criticism and conversation that's been going on for a long while. And that's more like how I define a friendship.

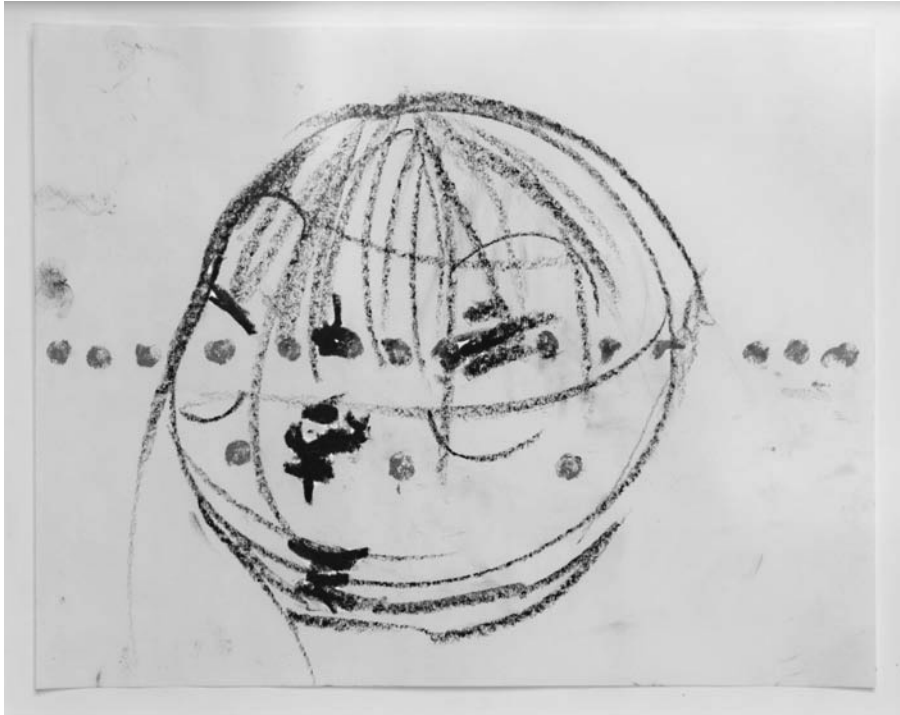
Tommy Hartung: It's complete trust. Before I met him, his cousin told me about this video he applied to graduate school with, which was something involving the release of pigeons — right?

UA: Yeah, I did release a bunch of pigeons in that piece.

TH: Not that we're animal artists, but I've always been drawn to work that involves animals.

UA: Both of us do make work that revolves around animals in some way. I would say that the way you use live things is mostly symbolic — religious, almost. In my work they serve as a problem— either with language, a relationship, or human desire. They're a sad element, or a tool for manipulation.

TH: When you incorporate another living thing in your work — whether it's another person or an animal — there's some third thing that develops that's outside my responsibilities, or anyone else's responsibility.



UA: And in your case, I think it's about experimentation. Animals seem to have the most problematic, affected, visible, and immediate response for you.

TH: Using them does come out of an urge to put something in front of the camera and see what happens.

UA: Also, there's a difference between using a dog and using a frog, see what I mean?

TH: Right.

UA: I made a video in which I'm holding a heart, a white mouse, and cheese – an equation. It's a video I would never show; Tommy shot it for me. I just held stuff, but it almost read like text; you know, "mice love cheese." Tommy encouraged me to do it and said he'd help me shoot it. While I was editing, he had different formal suggestions. Though initially unconvinced, I later realized what I could learn from being open to his approach.

TH: We often don't agree on things.

UA: Yeah, we disagree a lot. Music is one of the things we disagree about, though I gave you a lot of music in school. Actually, we both like classical music.

MS: Tommy, mentioning placing animals or other actors into the films made me wonder if there's something similar that happens when you introduce another artist's participation into what you're making?

TH: Yeah, I think so. I think that any interaction – like doing a show with someone – is a way of seeing your work differently. Or, like Uri was saying, I might say something about his process, and he might disagree with it, but...

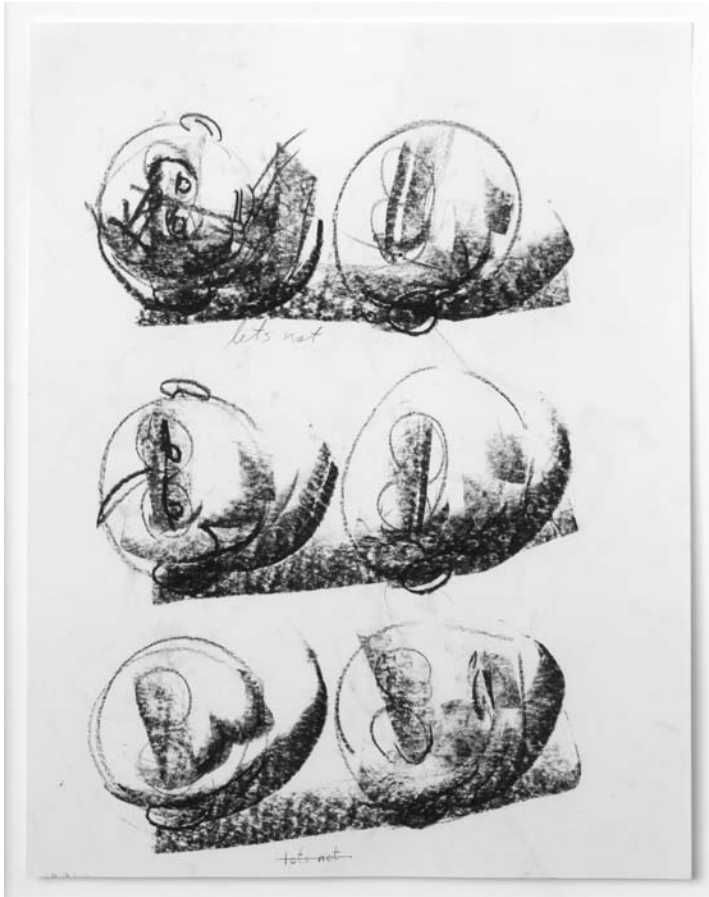
UA: I think that both of us have very individual practices. In terms of how things are divided, the way we work is not always directly aligned. Tommy is a lot more organized. We're both a mess, but he has a better understanding of his own methodology. The studio is very important to us.

TH: As soon as someone steps into my studio, it's a kind of problem. It's why I have a hard time having an intern. How can I not look at that intern as functioning in my work somehow? How do I keep them as someone who's just an extra pair of hands? It's something I don't do very well.

MS: That's a significant contrast, because in a lot of Uri's videos, the other person is very obviously there. They're in front of the camera, they're participating in the film. Tommy, how often have there been actors in your work? The stop-motion and found footage stands out most in my mind...

TH: There've been people – like at the end of the Edward Holmes piece. I had an actor pretend to have sex with this sculpture.

UA: I would actually say that aspect is less pronounced in your last video (*Anna*, 2011), Tommy, because the last video only has dummies for people. The new piece was, in a way, more similar to what I do than your other work. Not similar visually but in that it communicated more of a presence behind the camera. It made you aware of the fact that someone was forcing things to happen in a manipulative way – which, in turn, made you self-aware as both a viewer and an artist. It's a connection in terms of you actually being the most present human in it, even though I would also say that it's the most weird, or most removed, from warmth. It's a hard video. It's also more politically relevant – not in terms of politics with a capital "p" but in terms of social interaction and literary implications. It's more connected to the world. In terms of Tommy, it's less about Tommy's experiments and more like the world we're dealing with in an idiosyncratic, literature-oriented, and romantic way. It has more pop references, but in general it's more cinematic – not because it looks more cinematic, but because it has more cinematic quotations in a self-aware and intelligent way.



MS: Maybe we can speak a little bit about cinema. Traditions of cinema, or at least the ideas that surround cinema, seem to figure very prominently in the films each of you make.

UA: Both of us feel strongly about cinema in very different ways. Neither of us can completely avoid cinema – we’re both fascinated by it – but we have very different ideas about cinema. There are some things I just can’t watch.

MS: What can’t you watch?

UA: *Transformers*.

MS: Uh huh- so you can’t watch crap?

UA: No, I don’t think they’re crap. No, it’s very important that I don’t think of them as crap. I just can’t watch it.

TH: I think *Transformers* is crap, but I can watch it. In fact, I love watching it.

UA: I mean, some of it is done very well, and some of it isn’t.

MS: Ok. How would you guys tend to articulate your approaches to the scoring of your films?

UA: I think we have different approaches to music. Tommy is very much done with his film before he begins integrating music into it. In his films, there is discord between what is being said and the music. At the same time, there’s a strong rhythmic connection between what is being said and the music. But when I work on a video, I edit the music throughout the making of it. Things are being said back and forth between the images, the text, and the music; you’re drawn into something because of the music. Tommy’s process is similar to that in a sense. Some of Tommy’s pieces are more “romantic.”

TH: Yeah, I think that we both pay attention to cinematic formalism, and I think that we both try to be critical without being cynical. As with anything, you can get sort of lost in the moment but still pull out of it and be self-aware of your romanticism. I think we’re both really interested in that transition between being sentimental and being rational.

UA: I recognize that a border between us is very identifiable. I would say Tommy has a religious approach to icons and to music. A lot of what he portrays is larger-than-life, and a lot of his iconography looks religious, like quotations from art history. And even the contemporary music that Tommy chooses includes contemporary icons like Michael Jackson, and so on. And if you try to dissect his work like an art historian – in terms of, say, how the light comes from the upper left and shines onto his sculptures and divine music plays, blah blah blah – I suppose you could say that I do similar things, but I always chop the head off.

TH: The religious or spiritual representations in my work are related to how people want to believe in something when they’re watching a moving image. I like shaping and holding onto that desire to believe in something.

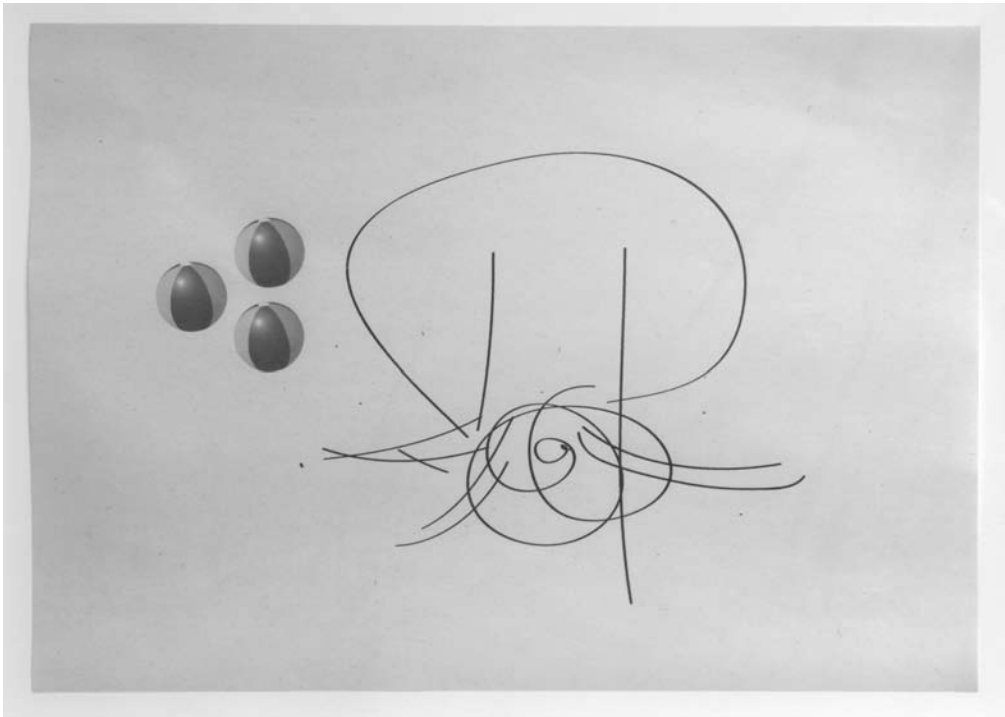
UA: Whereas my approach is how sad it is that people want to believe in something. And how sad it is that I want to believe in something.

TH: I’m not trying to provide any religious explanations.

UA: Of course.

TH: But I do rely on spiritual imagery and atmosphere, because any moving image is about belief.

MS: Let’s talk about this idea of your work being involved in a religious position.



UA: I'm not trying to frame his work in the Church.

MS: Isn't it that you both approach ideas of profundity? Tommy, your films tend to have a fairly strong sense of their own gravity and majesty. And your films, Uri, have a very different kind of intimacy.

UA: Formally, very basically speaking, Tommy shoots super high-res and with a good camera.

TH: Even when I do something lo-fi...

UA: ...it looks good.

TH: I focus on light. And manipulating light. For me it's not just the object or subject in my frame, it's the light. The light builds up everything and completes it.

UA: I don't shoot hi-res.

TH: I think your work is also more fundamentally two-dimensional, even if it's video.

UA: In terms of the artistic tradition from which it's coming, the emphasis is on V-I-D-E-O. It feels more like video than film to me.

TH: I decided to make video after being obsessed with early social-realist films from the Soviet Union, like Eisenstein's.

UA: I also think there are big differences in our technical skills.

TH: No, I don't like that distinction. I would describe it more as just a difference of interests. Uri's not interested in shooting something over and over and over again to get the light to look a certain way in a single shot.

MS: So Tommy, you're more interested in repetition for an end purpose, and Uri, you're more interested in repetition as an end in itself?

UA: Well, I expose repetition. Tommy's films are ultimately linear, but as a result of a tedious, repetitive process. Neither of us produce work quickly. We can, by fluke – but our work tends to take a long time to make. We don't produce ten movies a year. It's more like we're lucky if we make two.

TH: In some of the scenes in my new piece, it looks like it's filmed with a Handicam, but I rehearsed the motion of those shots. I like doing that. I like panning around a bunch of times and picking out the shot I like the best. In some ways I approach it more as a "filmmaker" proper in the way that I look at objects and subjects. I rely on the probability that if I do something enough times, one of them will be the one that I want.

UA: Me too, but...

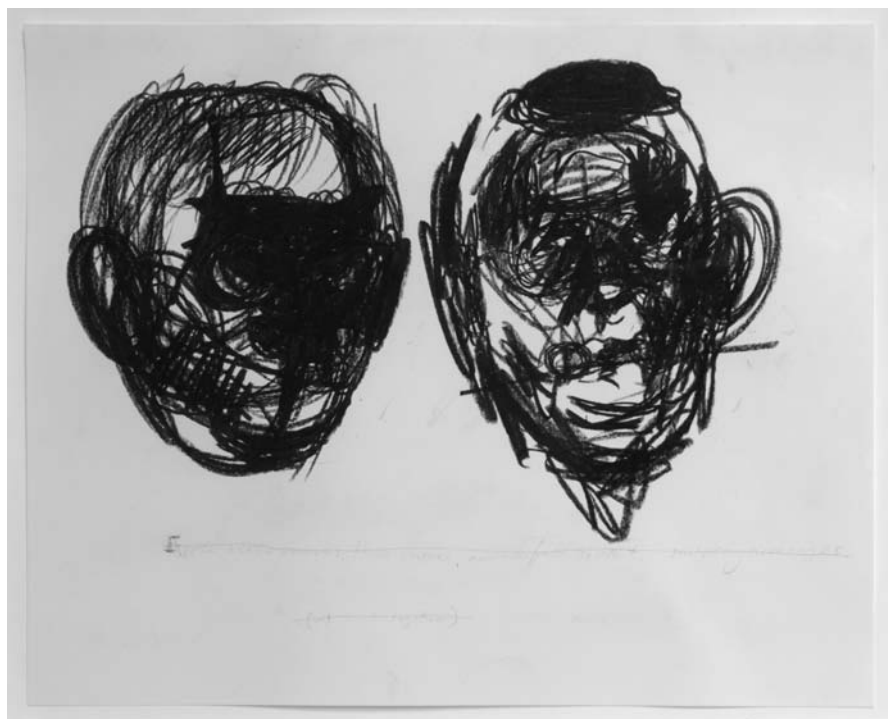
TH: ...but you rely on probability as a language.

MS: Let's talk about the objects. You both exhibit a lot of objects that could be considered sculpture along with your films. How do you see that aspect of your work, not only in terms of exhibits you've already done but also in terms of this upcoming exhibition? How do you see the relationship between your films and your objects?

TH: I think our work has a lot to do with looking at objects and telling stories with objects.

UA: There is a need to mix stuff together.

MS: But the stuff is not props; it's sculpture?



UA: Tommy builds a lot of stuff for his films. In my pieces, I would have to say that it is all part of the same equation. The title, the video, the materials, the base. Actually, I feel there is little division between materials in both of our work. You can't ignore the objects, and you can't ignore the video component.

TH: In my work, the sculptures are in the video, and that is the best way to view the objects: in the environment of the video. I want to control the way you look at the objects by having total control over the way the light looks on the objects, and the way they are being shown. The way Uri shows his objects is different; Uri, you don't really film your objects – it's totally inverse, right?

UA: It is different.

MS: I'm certain I've seen both of your sculptures in exhibitions without the support the films and visa versa –

UA: Absolutely. I think we both make work that exists only as video or only as sculpture, and also as inter-related entities. So all three kinds of art-making are happening.

MS: Is that something that is present upon the conceptualization of a project or is that something that develops as you understand what is ultimately coming to be?

UA: That I can't say for sure. We're really just developing ourselves as artists right now, so we're still putting together our A,B,Cs, you know?

MS: That's when things are probably most interesting.

TH: I think there's another difference between us: I condense an entire body of work into one movie. But if you go to one of Uri's exhibits, there are many different things going on.

UA: I feel that with Tommy there is a decision to produce a single, specific project.

TH: And when Uri starts putting objects in space for an exhibition, that's his editing process.

UA: I would say that for me, installation-wise, there's a lot less specificity in terms of knowing what the thing will end up as or knowing what I want exactly. I feel like there's more vision in Tommy's pieces in terms of the subject.

TH: Yeah, I'm really interested in building a box and only working in that box. There's typically a theme, or a kind of a theme, and even if nothing really works with that theme, I'll force it to work. I'd rather force something to work than go outside that box.

UA: For me it's like, "Oh I don't have a theme, I don't have a theme ... wait there's the theme." I am trying to pick up rocks all the time to see what's under them. Tommy is picking up rocks all the time, too, but he says, "That's what I want."

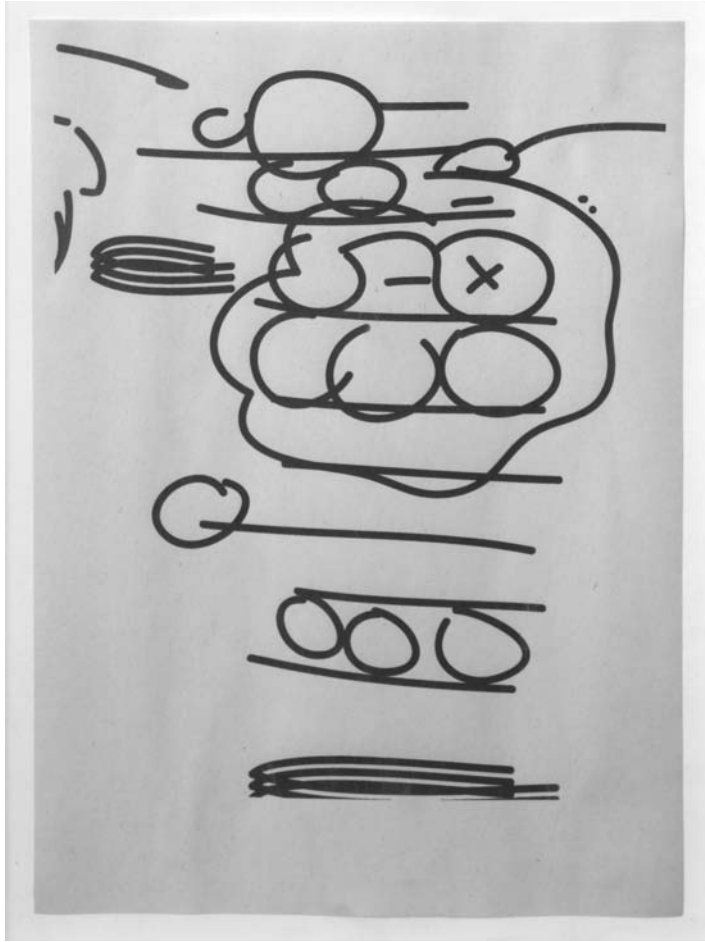
MS: Right. I think I see exactly what you mean. For you Uri, it's a matter of finding your structure?

UA: My looking for a structure becomes structural.

TH: Those moments he was talking about when he just sets up the camera and something happens, when he turns over a rock and finds something – I have those same instances in my work, but I force a theme on them.

UA: I think that Tommy is a more disciplined person than I am. We're both super-neurotic. Tommy has a better work ethic.

TH: I think I'm less disciplined, so I impose discipline on myself. I can't not have a theme or a general starting point to work from.



MS: Tommy has a show up now, and you have a major show opening just before the one at White Flag. You're both on the cusp of getting more public awareness of your work. How are you going to approach the White Flag show in terms of what you present and how you relate the works to one another?

UA: It makes for an interesting conversation – it makes one and one five rather than two. We're lucky to have individual practices that we can bring into this conversation. Some of the drawings I exhibit with Tommy's work don't feel as effective outside the context of his videos.

TH: But there are actually people I collaborate with in a more clear-cut way. For instance, I have this friend, Sam Clagnaz, who's a really great artist; he and I have shared a studio since undergrad – all through undergrad and then two years out when he went to Yale and I went to Columbia.

UA: He's a great artist. The funny thing is that Sam's videos are more similar to my videos than to Tommy's. So it's interesting that they're friends.

TH: I think that Uri and I would be horrible studio-mates.

UA: Yes, I would be very annoyed.

TH: We would irritate one another. With Sam and I, we hardly argue, while most of Uri and my conversations are arguments. I think that our art diverges in such a way that something really interesting happens.

UA: I think there's a lot in common in terms of our approach to sentimentality – resisting it while also incorporating it. We're also very harsh.

TH: Harsh? What do you mean?

UA: We're very critical. Think about our conversations: we're very critical people. But, at the same time, we're very sentimental. There's a certain sadness to it all.

MS: Earlier you mentioned a drawing that you wouldn't want to exhibit in the context of your own work, but you thought it was something that really worked with a piece of Tommy's. That's interesting to me because of a conversation we had a few weeks ago about the difference between an exchange and a collaboration.

UA: I think that what we do is both an exchange and a collaboration. I really don't think that distinction is particularly interesting – they're just words. I think it's just one of the many different reasons for making things – it's just another reason!

TH: So you're saying that we're making something totally different? I don't understand.

MS: You're saying you're not interested in semantic differences?

UA: Exactly. I don't think we're one entity, I don't think we want to be one entity, and I don't think we're trying to be one entity. I don't think we even care what it's called. It's just interesting for us to see our work together and also to have a conversation, and to see how, or if, things really change because of our separate practices.

TH: Going back to that drawing. I asked Uri to make a drawing of my character for *The Ascent of Man* (2009). So he gives up a certain amount of ego or responsibility in agreeing to do it, because it's a request that's similar to a commission. Vice versa, if he asks me to shoot something, I'm going into Uri's world. He's not asking an undergrad or an intern, he's asking me to do it. There's a difference in that, and I think it's an interesting difference.

MS: You trust one another.

UA: No, but I say, "Tommy, this is what I want you to do."

TH: Right.

UA: Or Tommy will tell me, "Make a few drawings, I want to choose." Then I come back, re-adjust, and we choose again. It's ultimately very specific, what fits or does not fit with my or his art.

TH: But you could ask any number of video artists to come to your studio to film a performance ...

UA: They're going to try and make art instead of doing what I want them to do. Tommy, I know, will come up with good ideas. He really helps my vision.

MS: That's a trust issue.

TH: There are a lot of artists I could go to for a drawing.

UA: What's really good, too, is that I feel comfortable saying to Tommy, "That's a horrible idea," or "No, next." The friendship we have is very productive because I don't have to say anything more than "No" when I'm not interested. If I don't agree with Tommy, I can say as much and I don't feel like I stomped on his heart. At the same time, he'll make really good suggestions for my work. There is a lot in terms of exchange. We even talk to each other via Skype.

MS: How often do you guys Skype?

UA: It depends – sometimes it could be once a day, sometimes twice; sometimes it could be three times a month. But we have communicated constantly since graduate school. As a result, we've been very present in one another's studios. Through Skype, we share screen shots, see videos together, or just hold objects up to the screen. In one way it's a collaboration, but in another it's simply a friendship.

TH: I think that when most people sit down and decide to do a collaborative piece, they have an end product in mind. I don't think we've ever sat down and created a specific plan for what we're doing together.

UA: At Columbia we were not only living together, but we were in each other's studios all the time.

TH: Uri always had an endless supply of cigarettes.

UA: We've continued the conversation ever since. We always have parallel studio processes. Because we always talk. That's why it's productive and collaborative. And I'm not talking about other examples of collaboration, because there have been many great collaborations. Some of my favorite artists are duos. I just think that our collaboration is about having parallel studio processes.

TH: Or parallel universes.

UA: Exactly?

About the Artists

Tommy Hartung's (b. 1979) most recent one-person exhibition took place with *On Stellar Rays*, New York in November, 2011. Hartung's work has also been included in exhibitions and screenings with Espacio Minimo, Madrid; Murray Street, London; Lehman Maupin Gallery, New York; 8 Seymour Place, London; Fundacion Patiño, Santa Cruz, Bolivia; Artissima 14, Turin, Italy; White Box Gallery, New York; Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York; Moti Hasson Gallery, New York; and Max Protetch Gallery, New York, as well as being included in *Greater New York 2010* at MoMA/PS1, New York. His film *The Ascent of Man*, which was exhibited at White Flag Projects in the group exhibition *Impossible Vacation* in January, 2011, was recently acquired by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Hartung earned his M.F.A. at Columbia University, New York. He lives and works in Queens, New York.

Uri Aran's (b. 1977) one-person exhibition *by foot, by car, by bus* is on view through February 25, 2012 at Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York. His other solo exhibitions include *Mother's Tankstation*, Dublin; and *Rivington Arms*, New York. Aran's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including MoMA/PS1, New York; Sculpture Center, New York; Galleria Zero, Milan; Jewish Museum of Belgium, Belgium; Esther Schipper, Berlin; West Street Gallery, New York; Taxter & Spengemann, New York; PERFORMA, New York; Ritter/Zamet, London; LA><ART, Los Angeles; The New Museum, New York; Guild & Greyskul, New York; and 41 Wooster, New York. Uri Aran earned his M.F.A. at Columbia University in 2007. He lives and works in New York.

White Flag Projects

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Installations Manager

H. Lindsay Donahue
Events Coordinator

Liz Prentice, Edo Rosenblith, and Stephanie Trimboli
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Tommy Hartung & Uri Aran has been made possible with support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the White Flag Projects Board of Directors, and our members. Opening reception sponsored in part by Schlafly Beer. Special thanks to Bruce Burton.

The untitled drawings (checklist 6) which illustrate this publication were produced by Uri Aran for inclusion in Tommy Hartung's video *The Ascent of Man*, 2009. Aran's drawings are reproduced courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York.

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