

“And why do you have such a horse,  
Gunslinger? I asked. Don’t move  
he replied  
the sun rests deliberately  
on the rim of the sierra.”

—Edward Dorn, *Gunslinger*, *Book I*, 1968

*An Idle Visitation* takes its title from an enigmatic 114-line narrative poem written by Edward Dorn (b. 1929, Villa Grove, IL; d. 1999, Denver, CO) in 1966. Associated with the Black Mountain poets—a group of teachers, students, and contributors to Black Mountain College publications whose work is broadly characterized by open field composition and an approach to line driven by natural measures of utterance—Dorn resided in Santa Fe in the late 1950s through early 1960s, occupying a home on Camino Sin Nombre, where his visitors included Robert Creeley, Kenneth Irby, and Charles Olson. Less than a decade later, he would begin work on “An Idle Visitation,” which evolved into his four-volume meta-Western, *Gunslinger* (pubd. 1974) – recognized as “one of the fine poems of the decade” (Charles Stein) and heralded since as “one of the masterpieces of contemporary poetry” (Marjorie Perloff).

The resultant poem is structured around a demigod-cowboy, the poet-narrator, a madam of a saloon, and a talking horse named Claude Levi-Strauss, all of whom traverse the Southwest in search of Howard Hughes. Dorn’s text connects his political present to myths of the American frontier, a fantasy of lawless progress and prototypical individualism, and the consequent anti-epic slung on the saddles of parodic Western types audits the mythology of place and the figure of the semi-nomadic wanderer as protocols in the midst of dismantlement by the decentralization implicit in broadly networked capital. Undoing certainties about site and subject, Dorn’s imaginary dismantles its lyric form’s habitual crystallization of singular selfhood resident in the first-person mode – relaying the poem’s politically engaged skepticism towards the seductions of alienated labor as a basis of libidinal investment and self-constitution within then-nascent regimes of neoliberal enterprise. In contrast, and all the while trussing the text’s satire of the dubious coherences of Manifest Destiny, the atomization of the poem’s characters into multiple personae in altered states of consciousness engenders an agonistic relationality where the social body of the group supersedes, and potentially perforates, received notions of the individual. The narrative’s carrot-on-a-stick – Howard “Robart” Hughes – is at once ubiquitous and never found.

*Gunslinger* is distinguished by the hauntedness of a reconstructed Old West colloquial (a striking mélange of puns, homonyms, syllogisms, archaisms, argots, paragrams and other semantic intensifiers) in tandem with the tropes of Western cinema (lingering captures of desolate landscapes, screen-narrative vocalization, and similar servants of thetic unity that subordinate space to the sight and speech of a monotypic authority) applied analogously to then-concurrent Pop Art tactics of detournement. Donald Wesling wrote that *Gunslinger* “tends to resist description,” observing that the poem “is ‘about’ how and why we spend money and words in this ‘cosmological’ place; about . . . surreal imagery, personifications, the texture of jokes, the paradoxical aspects of thinking.”

This exhibition engages with these determinations of Dorn’s poetics through the work of ten artists including Darren Bader, Steve Bishop, N. Dash, Elizabeth Jaeger, Yanyan Huang, Rose Marcus, Mary Mito, K.r.m. Mooney, Carlos Reyes, and Eric Veit in a temporary venue organized by AND NOW (Dallas), Hester (New York) and Tomorrow (New York) from August 6–September 4, 2016 at Plaza Mercado, 112 W. San Francisco Street # 107-108A, Santa Fe, NM 87501. An opening reception will be held Saturday, August 6, from 5 to 7pm. Exhibition hours are Thursday through Saturday, 11am to 5pm, and by appointment.

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