

# CONNER CONTEMPORARY ART

April 22, 2010

Janet Biggs: *Nobody Rides for Free*

Mary Coble: *Source*

May 15 – July 3, 2010

Conner Contemporary Art is pleased to announce two concurrent solo exhibitions featuring new video and photographs by Janet Biggs (New York, NY) and performance and video by Mary Coble (Washington, DC). *Nobody Rides for Free* is Biggs' first solo exhibition with the gallery; *Source* marks Mary Coble's third exhibition with the gallery.

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## JANET BIGGS:

In new video and photographs, Biggs delves into the desire to explore remote lands. To create this work, the artist embarked on an expedition in the high Arctic, traveling aboard an ice-class, 2-masted schooner, built in 1910. During the voyage, Biggs filmed *Fade to White*, focusing on a crew member as he navigated the ship through iceberg filled seas, and paddled a kayak past glacier walls and polar bears.

As she photographed the explorer, Biggs tested her own will and endurance. The visual tension of her uncompromising imagery bespeaks their mutual struggle to maintain balance and purpose. Yet, the video also reveals the use of extensive rigging, exposing the myth of the solitary white male explorer. Biggs explains, "The desire to hold onto the notion of the 'great white north' as a blank space awaiting interpretation only reinforces the idea of the colonial polar hero. The 'virgin' north has now been mapped, surveyed, and mined, but increased knowledge has not replaced endless fantasies of discovery."

Loss and change are implicit in the video's title, *Fade to White*, which refers to an editing technique used to evoke death or transcendence. Biggs integrated her Arctic imagery with sound and video footage of counter tenor John Kelly, whose age, androgyny, and mournful voice parallel the vanishing Arctic landscape and signal the waning of male dominance.

*Vanishing Point*, the artist's recent video, featuring biker Leslie Porterfield and the Harlem Addicts Rehabilitation Center Choir, will be on view in the media room.

Forthcoming exhibitions include The Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC (November 2010) and the Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL (survey, traveling, spring 2011).

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## MARY COBLE:

In *Source*, Coble presents three new videos, mixed media work, and a live endurance performance (to occur in the gallery courtyard during the exhibition opening). In all of these pieces, Coble addresses themes of purification and renewal in actions focused on the element of water. In her videos, the artist explores subjective states of uncertainty and futility. In her performance, she will raise social awareness about water quality and availability in the local and global communities. The exhibition

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demonstrates the depth and dimension of Coble's art, which ranges from personal introspection to experience shared through public interaction.

Coble's videos: *Stand*, *Fall*, and *Swim* document the artist's endurance-based activities in a secluded lake. Working in an introspective mode, she explores what making work means to her personally, confronting challenges and opening up to discoveries that arise with that making. Her lone pursuits convey apprehension and doubt associated with uncertain journeys. These videos are Coble's most Romantic works to date, as their natural setting, and her struggle against the elements, recall 19th-century landscape painting.

Endurance is a consistent methodological factor in Coble's videos as well as her live gallery performance. In each work, she also embraces water as a medium. The natural setting for her videos underscores the importance of the environment to the global water supply. The performance demonstrates that the abundance of water in DC doesn't insure its quality. In the videos, water visibly affects Coble outwardly, as she makes an inward journey. Her performance calls attention to the internal effects of water quality. Whereas the videos reveal the artist's self-examination, the performance takes its departure from her experience as a member of a larger community, and propels her outward into that community. To gather her material, the artist went door-to-door, collecting water samples from residences in all of DC's 8 wards (over 127 neighborhoods). Coble crossed demographic boundaries to emphasize that water quality has differential effects across populations. The artist's actions at the gallery will create a communal source of clean water, a condition which has historically given rise to gathering places.

Coble's work is in the collection of The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC.

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There will be an opening night reception, Saturday, May 15th from 6 to 8pm. Artists in attendance. Mary Coble's performance will begin at 2pm on Saturday, May 15<sup>th</sup> and culminate during the opening reception (6-8pm).

Additional information may be found at: <http://www.connercontemporary.com/>.  
For further information or images, please contact the gallery @ 202-588-8750 or [info@connercontemporary.com](mailto:info@connercontemporary.com).

Conner Contemporary Art is located at 1358 Florida Avenue, NE –Washington, DC 20002.  
Gallery hours are Tuesday - Saturday 10-5pm