



I
come
from
a
serious
place

James Johnson | *I come from a serious place*

curated by Cody VanderKaay | Oakland University Art Gallery | october 20 – november 18, 2012



Some Rooms – Part I (Yours)

2008 | 220 x 96 x 241 inches
framed two-way mirror, vanity lights, archival inkjet prints,
fluorescent lights, wood, fabric, thimble, nightlights, foamcore,
extension cords, table, computer, software, powerstrips, home
automation devices, tape, zipties, chair

I come from a serious place

James Johnson's artwork encourages the viewer to construct and examine personalized narratives of identity, impulse, ownership and self-determination. With motives likened to that of a magician, he is continually revealing and concealing his method of operation. In spite of these clever manipulations, the behind-the-scenes accoutrements invert newly formed notions and undo guises.

The title piece of the exhibition, *I come from a serious place*, is a mesmerizing form with a meaningful statement that preys on the mind's conscious and unconscious capacity to read words. Undeniably beacon-like, it is a point of departure, contextualization and connectivity between artworks, summoning viewers to revive the memory of their own "serious place."

The camera is a truth machine that can extend vision, interpret situations that are invisible to the naked eye, capture transitory gestures, and reveal subjective states, it can also construct the very reality it claims to report.

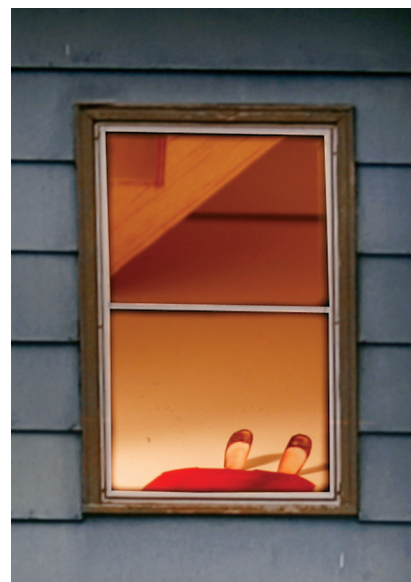
~ Dziga Vertov, 20th century Soviet film director

The large-scale photographic installation, titled *Some Rooms*, offers viewers a visual experience that is at once strangely artificial yet convincingly real. First and foremost, it is composed of the viewer's reflection, photographs of pre-existing architectural facades and domestic interiors, artist-rendered drawings of the same subject, and lastly, sculptural armatures and scrim. Tunneling (visually, physically and conceptually) into and through this manifest illusory matter reveals the interconnected imagery and objects responsible for the artwork's duplicitous form. However, at no point is the work mistaken for a dioramic device with statically peered worlds. Paradoxically, this fictional visage changes with the viewer in real-time; the highly polished mirror offers a self-against-self picture of the environment and inhabitants.

The work titled *Old Money* consists of \$10,000 on display within a Plexiglas vitrine flush with the wall. A thin yellow line frames the box to rapidly channel the viewer's gaze to the currency resting slightly off camber, producing impulses that transport the viewer's imagination to moments of stability or squander.

Embodied in this exhibition is the artist's inspired ability to take notice of the world around him and a hope that viewers will do the same. His objects and images further reflect a propensity for contemporary artists to develop a practice that is experiential and multivalent. Departing from, or just arriving to, a serious place requires reflection, and perhaps viewers may ask themselves: is this context of place indeterminate — neither past nor future — and will I engage with the present moment?

— Cody VanderKaay – october 2012



Research

2011 | 144 x 6 x 36 inches
carpet, wood, cutting mat, paint, gold,
spotlight, book, praying mantis, tape,
vanity fixture, LED lamps



The Moon

2011 | 40 x 24 x 36 inches
concrete, pellet gun pellets,
argon lamp, power supply,
fluorescent lamp, foam core, glass,
tape, wood, spotlight, mercury,
insulation, gold



Old Money

2011 | 14 x 14 x 15 inches

U.S. currency, acrylic, glass, wood, lamps



Town

2011 | 5 x 9 x 1 inches

wood, paint, acrylic, spotlight, view



I come from a serious place

James Johnson wants to ask you, the viewer, the following questions about contemporary art:

What does it mean to be an artist at this particular moment in history? *I come from a serious place* is a collection of efforts that attempt to explore some of the questions that inform this position, including:

What does it mean to have a studio practice?

What does it mean to make images and objects now?

What is the significance of the things that an artist says about his/her work?
How is the work itself affected by the way in which these statements are made?

If an artist includes him/herself or his/her activities in an artwork,
is the work necessarily a performance?

What role do other artists' ideas, works and activities play
in the making and reception of one's own work?

What is an artist's work about? Why are form, content, subject matter,
syntax and material important considerations?

What are the unintended consequences of presenting work in a particular context?
How does an artist deal with these consequences once they've arisen?

How is the production of art paid for?

What are the economics of being an artist?

14K Sentences on Conceptual Art

2009 | 14¾ x 12½ inches
framed silkscreen print on 14 karat gold



Box

2008 | 11½ x 16 x 20½ inches

corrugated box, foamcore, archival inkjet prints, fluorescent lights, wood



Goldbrick

2012 | 8½ x 11 inches
plywood, paint

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James Johnson (born Syracuse, N.Y., 1976) received an M.F.A. from the Rochester Institute of Technology in 2002 and a B.F.A. from Marywood University in 1999. Johnson has received several significant recognitions for his work, including a 2011 Independence Foundation Fellowship in the Arts and a nomination for the 2010 Pew Fellowship in the Arts. He was an Acquisition Finalist for the West Prize in 2009 and has been awarded two Pennsylvania Council of the Arts Fellowships in Sculpture/Installation (2007 and 2009). Johnson completed a residency at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in 2007. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including shows at Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia; the Contemporary Museum, Baltimore; No Soul For Sale — A Festival of Independents at X-Initiative, New York City; SPACE Gallery, The West Collection's booth at NEXT art fair, Repetti, New York City; ThreeWalls, Chicago; and No Soul For Sale — A Festival of Independents, with Vox Populi at Tate Modern in London. Johnson lives and works in Philadelphia and is an assistant professor of Photography & Digital Arts at Moore College of Art and Design.

cargocollective.com/jamesjohnson.

cover **I come from a serious place**
2009/2012 | 12 x 20 inches
glass, argon gas, power supply

back cover **Town**
2011 | 5 x 9 x 1 inches
wood, paint, acrylic, spotlight, view



Curated by Cody VanderKaay

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