

Phil COLLINS

when slaves love each other, it's not love

April 23- June 20, 2009

for immediate release

Gallery one

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery is very pleased to present *when slaves love each other, it's not love*, an exhibition by Phil Collins. Comprised of a video installation, a large-scale slide projection and new photography, this will be the artist's second solo exhibition at the gallery.

Collins' work examines the act of image making itself, eliciting the complex and ambiguous relationship between the camera and its subjects. Basing his practice on a close engagement with place and community, Collins has addressed issues of ethnicity, gender, and political and linguistic identity through participatory events often organized in regions of social upheaval. In producing these projects, which have ranged from castings to a dance-a-thon to press conferences, Collins appropriates aspects of the documentary tradition and fuses them with elements of popular culture to create tender, affectionate, and often melancholic descriptions of humanity. The videos and photographs that result from these performative situations are not static portraits in the traditional sense; instead they are elements of a larger aesthetic and conceptual investigation—one in which the transferences between the artist, his subject and the viewer are consciously blurred.

In his new body of work, Collins expands on these themes by using the format of telenovela. Commissioned in 2008 by the Aspen Art Museum as part of the Jane and Marc Nathanson Distinguished Artist in Residency Program to create a work that would engage a larger audience, Collins focused on the Latino and immigrant populations, a sizable percentage of which hail from northwestern Mexico. In Aspen itself this community figures mainly as a non-resident low-qualified work force, dispersed through a ring of satellite towns from which it commutes daily. Refuting the preconceived glamorous image of the city, Collins proceeded to make a work that would be culturally significant for this specific population.

The telenovela is one of the most popular cultural products of Latin America. It is a format that exploits the world market through the articulation and preservation of cultural difference, and at the same time serves as a powerful tool of self-representation and the resignification of the continent's colonial legacy. Shot in México City on 16mm film, Collins' *soy mi madre* was constructed as telenovela, its running time the standard episode length. The script was indirectly inspired by Jean Genet's *The Maids*, a violent exploration of the intricate power dynamic that exists between unequals. Revolving around ideas of role-play and performance, masks and mirrors, symbols and rituals, *The Maids* posits social identities as volatile and unbalanced—a notion which *soy mi madre* also takes as its point of origin.

Filmed with some of Mexico's leading television stars, and including the contribution of the acclaimed production designer Salvador Parra (*Volver, Before Night Falls*), *soy mi madre* is a study in the aesthetics and politics of melodrama. Having grown up on the social-realist tradition of British soap, Collins is drawn to melodrama for, in his own words, "its disruptive potential to address, within a highly predicated framework, some of the pains and dilemmas of the private sphere." With its distinct cinematic qualities and use of professional actors, *soy mi madre* appears a significant departure from Collins' usual methods. Yet his motivation remains the same: our need to reflect upon the pressing concerns of the current political debate. His film can thus be seen as an oblique comment on questions of race, class and social politics in the United States.

Continuing the participatory aspect of his practice, *free fotolab* is an itinerant service and photographic archive on which Collins has been working for the last five years. He invites the inhabitants of a city in which the project takes place to submit undeveloped rolls of 35mm film which are processed and developed for free, on the understanding that they relinquish the universal rights to the artist, so he may select and present any of the images as his own work. This is the first time that the project is shown in a gallery setting, combining images collected in places as disparate as Milton Keynes, St. Gallen, Belgrade, Eindhoven and Banja Luka. *free fotolab* is an homage to 35mm film in the face of its inescapable demise in the digital era. Its presentation on a carousel slide projector is central to the work's conceptual premise. Itself an increasingly obsolete technology, for Collins it captures a number of traits—the passing of time, the secret lives of images, the flicker of memory—which are intrinsically connected to the physicality of photographic film, its fragility and, with transparencies, to the luminosity of a slideshow. Enlarged to a monumental scale, which accentuates their unexpected visual and formal eloquence, these anonymous images turn into a captivating tribute to ordinary lives and their all too easily forgotten moments of beauty and wonder.

A selection of new photography brings together pictures culled from different sources—from found images to discarded, abandoned or forgotten elements of Collins' previous works—loosely grouped in an installation which in the context of the exhibition functions as a triangulation point, opening out, mentally as much as physically, towards the other two spaces. Steeped in the eroticism of the camera and motifs of doubling and longing, these photographs reinforce the questions of authorship, intimacy, exploitation and exaltation that *free fotolab* proposes. At the same time, articulating from another angle the dynamics of the mediated gaze brought to the fore in *soy mi madre*, they venture further into the terrain of shared desire which Collins' varied practice repeatedly stages.

Born in Great Britain and currently based in Glasgow and Berlin, Collins' recent solo exhibitions include Aspen Art Museum (2008), Dallas Museum of Art (2007), National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2007), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2006), and Tate Britain, London (2006-07). Recent group exhibitions include *Life on Mars*, 55th Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; *Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality and the Moving Image*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington; and *Double Agent*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (all in 2008). Collins was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2006, and is one of the recipients of the DAAD Scholarship in Visual Art for 2008/2009.

A major solo exhibition of Collins' work is currently on view at Tramway in Glasgow (17 April – 31 May, 2009). His work can also be seen in *Acting Out: New Social Experiments in Video* at ICA/Boston (until 18 October 2009), and in forthcoming group exhibitions at Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney and the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt.

For further information please feel free to contact the gallery at mail@tanyabonakdargallery.com or 212-414-4144.