

OKTP

EDGAR ARCENEUX

11.01.2009

Edgar Arceneux is well known for his videos as well as his exquisitely detailed drawings. His ongoing project "Drawings of Removal" (1999-present) references specific locations from a visit with his father to his hometown of Beaumont Texas. Making the trip with his father, 40 years after he had moved away, was significant for Arceneux. His father reminisced about houses, buildings, parks and trees which no longer existed. This memory of location inspired a series of drawings which were installed using 3-4 layers of large sheets of paper that draped

from floor to ceiling. Gaps between drawings suggested breaks between experience and memory.

Arceneux's prints reference both place and time. In the piece "1968", Arceneux presents an unresolved combination of objects. The infamous image of Martin Luther King's assassination and a faint drawing of the USS Enterprise from the popular television show Star Trek. The juxtaposition generates a proliferating set of possible causalities in the ingrained narrative structure of science fiction and political history. Arceneux's new prints suggest the expansion of time. The idyl-

lically rendered Watts towers jump from past associations to the present and to the future.

Arceneux is the Director of the Watts House Project (WHP), an ongoing collaborative artwork in the shape of a neighborhood redevelopment centered around the historic Watts Towers in Watts, California. WHP engages art and architecture as a catalyst for expanding and enhancing community. The neighborhood surrounding the Watts Towers presents a stark contrast to the well-maintained aesthetics of this national monument, and currently the residents have limited means



**Beyond the Great Eclipse:
Newsweek the Riots in Color, 2009**
Direct to plate photogravure and aquatint;
Paper size: 25" x 17.5"; Edition of 20



**Beyond the Great Eclipse:
Burn Baby Burn, 2009**
Direct to plate photogravure and aquatint;
Paper size: 25" x 17.5"; Edition of 20



**Beyond the Great Eclipse:
1000 Riot, 2009**
Direct to plate photogravure and aquatint;
Paper size: 25" x 17.5"; Edition of 20



**Beyond the Great Eclipse:
Impossible Perspective Full
Spectrum One, 2009**

Direct to plate aquatint edition variéé with chine collé gampi; Paper size: 25" x 17.5"; Edition of 20

to capitalize socially or economically on this cultural currency. WHP operates with the understanding that social and economic challenges are tied to basic ecological problems and aims to develop an incremental, nuanced and sustainable model that marries ecological concerns and practice with social and cultural remedies. By creating a physical and social infrastructure for creativity, WHP will catalyze artistic production and community pride of place, forming partnerships that can lead to real solutions, hope, and change.

—Kenneth Caldwell

Q: What are we looking at here?

A: I am calling this series, "Beyond the Great Eclipse," which is that moment in the history of Watts that obscures all of its past, its present, and its future. This perspective is literally from the underside of the Watts Towers and then the adjacent houses along 107th Street.

Q: Are the houses on their sides?

A: On their backs, they are rotating around. I imagined them as a kind of helix-like spiral—moving outwards. But also radiating from that one point of the towers. In



**Beyond the Great Eclipse:
Impossible Perspective Full
Spectrum Two, 2009**

Direct to plate aquatint edition variéé with chine collé gampi; Paper size: 25" x 17.5"; Edition of 20

each one of these prints, there are three levels to experience.

Q: Let's start with [title of the one that has the Jeep on the cover].

A: First you see the towers and the buildings on top. Then you have the label here, which makes it into a magazine cover. Then you have the actual image itself, which is behind it.

Q: How did you arrive at these images?

A: We have an architect who created these for me digitally, so he made drawings of all the structures. We did the drawings for mapping out the development, but once you have these things, you can pretty much do whatever you want with them. This was a way for us to produce different perspectives.

Q: Do these forms represent the actual placement of the towers?

A: Yes. When I started imagining this project, I felt like they were kind of moving in outer space. We are playing around with different color arrangements, which will change slightly with each print.



**Beyond the Great Eclipse:
Impossible Perspective Full
Spectrum Three, 2009**

Direct to plate aquatint edition variéé with chine collé gampi; Paper size: 25" x 17.5"; Edition of 20

Q: Tell us a little more about what you're trying to accomplish in Watts.

A: It's an ongoing collaborative artwork in the shape of the neighborhood redevelopment. This mission of the project is in two parts. The first one we call the beautification phase, which is the transformation of the interiors and exteriors, front yards and back yards, of all 20 properties that are there on East 107th Street. The way in which that works is through collaboration between artists, architects, and residents themselves. There are 20 artists, 20 architects, 20 homes. We hope to do four per year; we are moving on to our third one right now. The second part is the creation of the artists-in-residency program.

Q: So the houses that are pictured here, how were they chosen or identified?

A: It's sort of a triangulation of parts that makes a project like this work. One was the location in relationship to the Watts Towers, so being near a historical monument lends the neighborhood a special sort of quality. The second thing is the infrastructure that the Watts Towers Art Center brings, because it's directly across the street. It is managed by the Los Ange-



Edgar Arceneaux working in the Paulson Press studio.

(right) **1968 (detail), 2005**

Softground aquatint etching with roulette; Paper size: 36" x 44"; Edition of 30

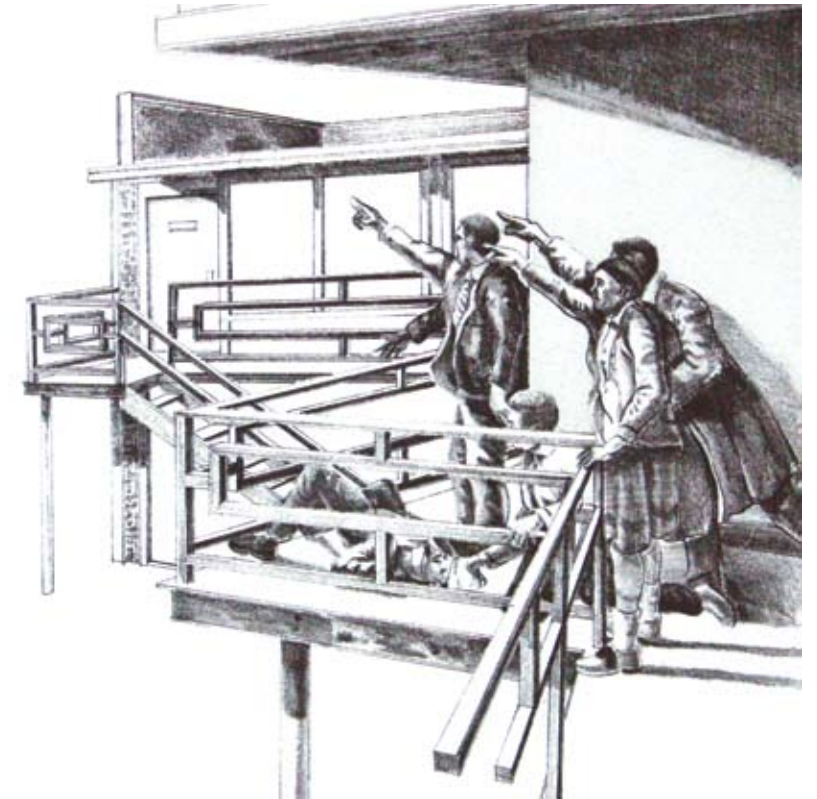
les Department of Cultural Affairs, so there is the possibility for that partnership. Then the third thing, and probably the most important, is that you have to have at least one family in the neighborhood who believes in the project, and that would be really proactive about wanting to see changes happen here.

Q: How do you synthesize all these different endeavors?

A: They are all made by the same person. They are connected that way. There are threads that run through everything that I've done content-wise. It's the art historian's job to figure it out. The subjects that I deal with in Watts are the same subjects that I'm interested in the drawings and the installations that I make. It's just that the approaches are different.

Q: Can you elaborate?

A: The overarching theme of all of my projects tends to be epistemologically based. I am not necessarily wondering what we know, but how we come to know it. What are our limits and what are our abilities? I am asking questions about the foundations of how we think about things and how we understand things and then



trying to reorient your position to see relationships differently. My approach to the Watts House Project is the same thing, except now I'm looking at social unbalances, dynamics within a social system.

It's almost like the studio is the laboratory and then the Watts House Project is the field.

Q: You begin with this one place, the Watts neighborhood, and then all this energy spreads outwards.

A: It has become a beacon for the people who live there. When it was first made, people didn't really appreciate it. Simon Rodia didn't care what people thought. He just wanted to make something big. What we're trying to do is something that is formed collectively, as opposed to being created by one individual.

Q: What do you find in printmaking that you don't get in other forms—say, drawing, painting, video?

A: The variation and permutations are the most attractive. I mean, once you set what the image is going to be, you have a certain limit in which you're able to make changes and alterations.

Like a landscape, these forms are kind of moving out of the picture. There is a lot of play that's possible here. But I don't really find play so valuable unless it's within a certain sort of rule-set—because that way you can gauge the progress.

Q: You are bringing so many influences to bear on each project.

A: These interdisciplinary approaches have become more heightened because of the Internet. Technology is changing the way in which we communicate with each other, but also how we unite in space and how we unite in partnerships. The shift in production to being able to broadcast your own content, to be able to produce culture as opposed to being consumers, is significant.

A lot of these things have had an effect on people being able to imagine other possibilities of how they can create. ✱



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