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## Press release

### Robin Rhode | The Storyteller | c|g+ Arch 49

29th September – 11th November 2006, Tuesday to Saturday, 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.  
Vernissage: Thursday, 28th September 2006, 6 p.m.

We are delighted to announce our first solo exhibition of Robin Rhode's work at c|g+.

Robin Rhode tells stories from the streets. Deploying a restricted range of means, such as a stick of chalk or a can of spray paint, he goes out into the streets, uses the public space as a stage on which to act out his performance interventions, tapping into the subcultural vernacular and visual logic of graffiti or stencils. This is more than just a pose for Rhode. It is certainly the personal background of the artist, who was born in Cape Town, South Africa and grew up in Johannesburg, that leads him to conceive the street as the arena in which history is actually played out and in which stories unfold. The combination of graffiti and performance, recorded in photo series or short video films, and uniting ephemeral drawings and the physical presence of the artist's own body, releases an imaginative force, serving to visualise that which is absent.

In "Park Bench" (2000) for example Rhode sketched a bench in chalk on the wall of the House of Parliament in Cape Town, in other words, a place that just a few years ago was a no-go area for anyone who was not white. Rhode hangs around in front of the chalk bench, clad in a black hoody and other sweatshirt-style clothing, referencing both the dress code of juvenile troublemakers and the international fashion style of pop culture. This curious occupation of a two-dimensional drawing, which in turn occupies the House of Parliament, recalls South Africa's recent past, in which the racism permeating daily life divided benches (and so much else) into ethnically segregated areas.

Robin Rhode ponders the situations and sites in which he finds himself. In this context youth and pop culture are a universal language, which the artist introduces as an element on display, parallel to references to art history. Whether one thinks of the sketches of halfpipes, skateboards, street basketball and car theft or of the allusions to Duchamp's "Urinoir" ("Leak") – there is a great deal that looks strange or even amusing at first glance, such as the oversized ghetto-blaster Rhode rapidly sketches in "Master Blaster". Underpinning this, however, the actual narratives are to be found: questions of identity, dislocation, of cultural possibilities and conflicts.

Drawing lies right at the core of Rhode's works, which are generally rapidly executed and hint at the subject-matter depicted with just a few reduced shapes. The artist's corporeality strains against the pictoriality of the drawing, and in the process introduces a sculptural touch, whilst also endowing the hybrid artwork with an ambivalent status as an image. The representation comprises the conjunction of two different levels of reality; real bodies and drawn representations, brought together in photos or films in fictional scenes. Rhode thus accentuates the status of the elements merged as signifiers.

“The Storyteller (2006)” is Robin Rhode’s most recent film project, developed with support from FRAC Champagne-Ardenne and in conjunction with French dancer Jean-Baptiste André, cellist Didier Petit and the composer Christian Sébille. In contrast with his previous works, “The Storyteller” displays a much more obviously composed style and employs more lavish means.

As so often in Rhode’s videos, “The Storyteller” also involves an interaction between a real person and a drawing. In the process, it transpires that the tree, executed in charcoal on a white wall in a neutral interior, enjoys its very own independent existence. The animated drawing on the wall and the real dancer, André, come together in a compelling pas de deux. The accompanying music played on the cello sets the rhythms of the movements, and the sequence of events culminates in the tree’s complete metamorphosis, with Jean-Baptiste André playing on its wild entangled branches as if they were the strings of a cello. Music and action blend entirely, becoming one in this performative act.

The 13 minutes of this absurd dance, in which the tree and dancer progress together through various stages, reflect the complex relations between humans and nature. Rhode develops a visual language to express this, intermingling various layers of reality, which nonetheless exist as distinct juxtaposed tiers. The corporeality of the dancer interacts with the depiction of a tree on the wall. Combined in the medium of film, the scenario unfolds as a profoundly convincing narration. Rhode’s works are permeated by this mode of handling simple means, tools he deploys to breath life into the world of the imagination.

Robin Rhode, born in 1976 in Cape Town, South Africa, lives and works in Berlin.

#### Prizes and grants

- 2005 Ars Viva 05/06 Award (Identität), Berlin, Germany
- 2003 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA  
The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Boston, USA
- 2001 Karl Hofer Gesellschaft (HDK- Berlin)  
Gasworks Gallery, London, UK
- 2000 South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

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