

for immediate release...

## robert bills contemporary presents

*visual narration: contemporary forms of storytelling*

aliza lelah – hao ni – karissa lang

june third to july fifth, twenty eleven

reception on june third from six to nine in the evening

Robert Bills Contemporary presents a group exhibition of three artists with contemporary perspectives on the historical theme of visual narration, realized within three completely different media. Narratives have formed the content of canonized artwork from the marble friezes of antiquity to the history paintings of the Neoclassical period, however these examples represent only one history of the art form. All three artists featured are in dialogue with a variety of histories of narration and media, including the folk tradition of textiles and quilting, the snap-shot photograph, the narrative plot-line, and the physical traces of human presence and memory. The exhibition *visual narration: contemporary forms of storytelling* expands on the definition of the narrative as subject-matter to include contemporary forms of personal, artistic, physical and media histories as storytelling.

Aliza Lelah is a painter that works with recycled fabrics in order to create a more physical connection to the depicted memories. Her painterly technique is visible even though the material is cut and layered instead of applied with a brush. Her unique, emotive portraits are in dialogue with three different histories of storytelling: the painted portrait, the photographic snap-shot, and the folk tradition of quilting. Though she now works with textiles, her portraits evoke an equally strong painterly and photography presence. While she relies on black and white photographs for inspiration, all of the color is her own invention. Her pieces are a stunning combination of material history, painterly gesture, textile crafting, and haunting photographic aesthetics. When hung on the blank white wall, the portraits become animated, transforming the flat plane into an environment.

Hao Ni presents a form of narrative that is both circular and structural in nature. In contrast to the common form of the human narrative as a linear path, Ni represents storylines as cycles, as they are in nature. He relies on an aesthetic of ruination to conjure an emotional response from the viewer, often evoking nostalgia and loss with his time-worn landscapes. His haunting structures tell stories of invented memories that inhabit the spaces like ghosts. In their state of abandonment and isolation, the landscapes and structures communicate imaginary past narratives with imprinted physical traces of time and wear. The absence of the actors only makes the landscape's longing for their presence all the more visible. Ni's practice is in direct dialogue with the history of the descriptive narrative form of the diorama. Using these materials as sculpture, Ni is able to construct these scenes along with the imaginary past they remember.

Karissa Lang is a writer, photographer, and conceptual artist. Her series of manipulated photographs *I was here* represents snap-shots of hazy memories from her own childhood in which she is the absent protagonist. Lang replaces the index of her physical body with some of the classic obscuring aesthetics of the photographic medium, namely, over-exposure and darkness. The eerie glow emanating from her face represents an inward movement associated with time-travel, as pieces of memories are reconstructed with her true sense of identity missing at the core. In other areas, her body is blacked out into a type of flattened silhouette, another indication of the gap that separates these family records from her physical body and memory.