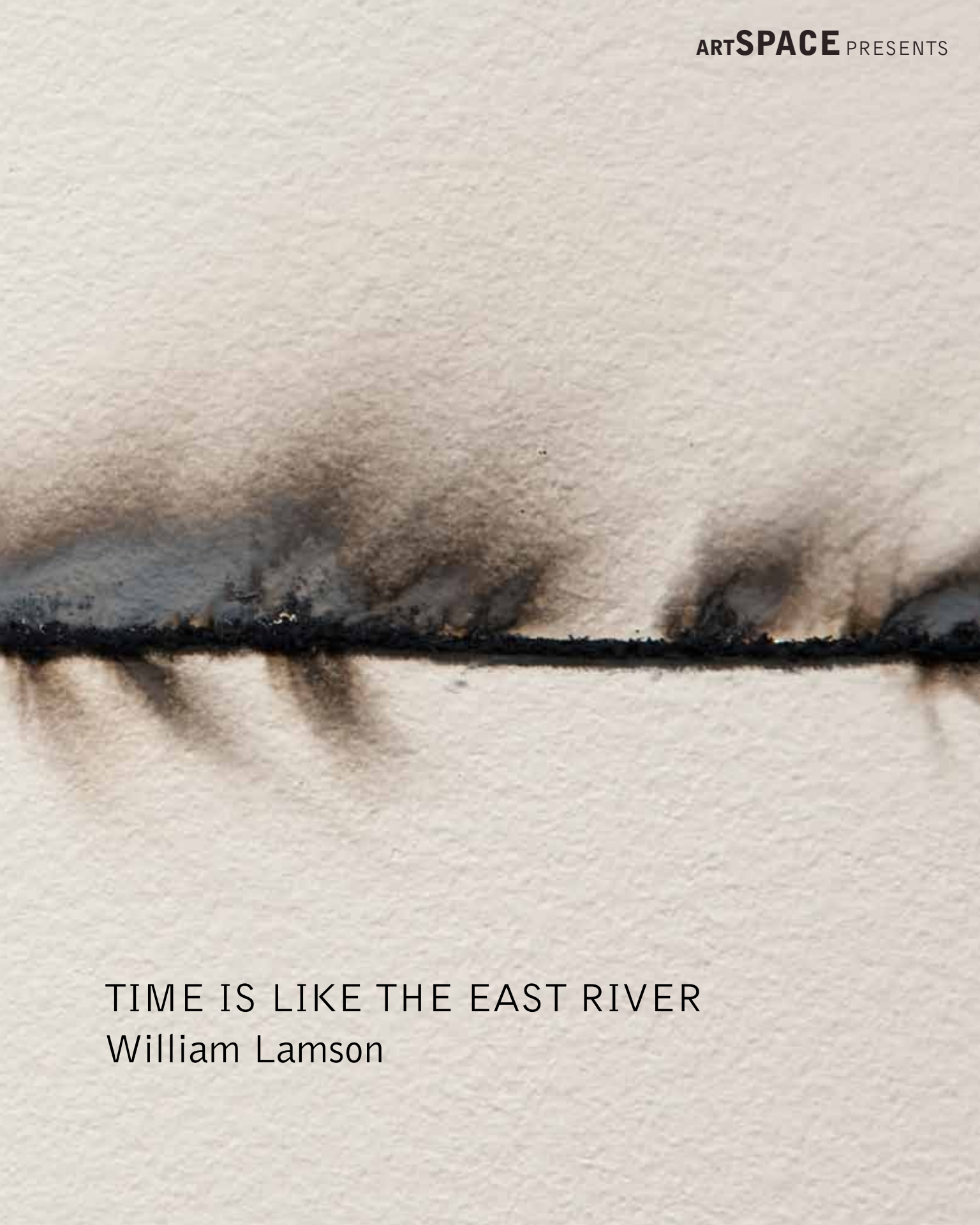


ARTSPACE PRESENTS



TIME IS LIKE THE EAST RIVER  
William Lamson





TIME IS LIKE THE EAST RIVER  
William Lamson

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*PLAY/PAUSE*, 2009  
Bows, arrows, video tape, steel, TV, VCR



(above)

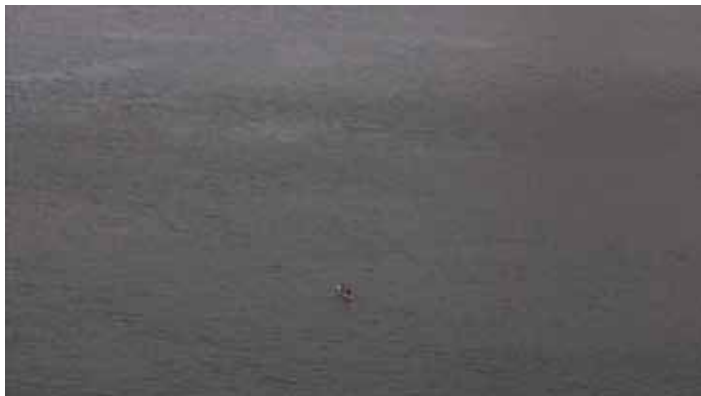
Production Photograph

(right)

*Time is Like the East River*, 2009

High-definition video

3:37 minutes





*Untitled*, 2009  
Digital chromogenic print  
40 x 27 inches

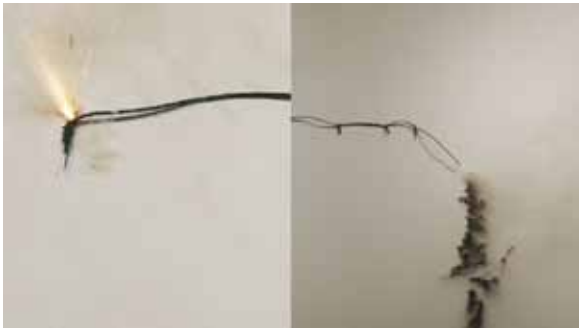
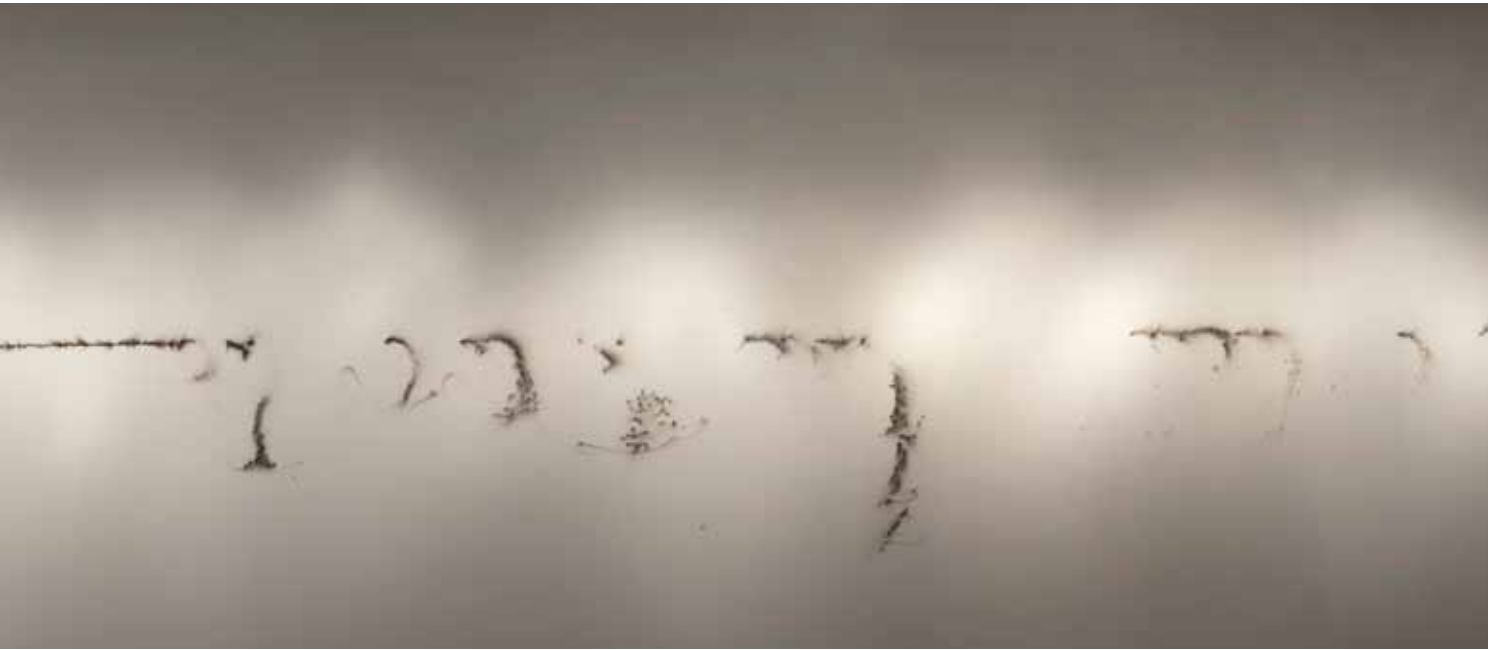




*Untitled*, 2009  
Digital chromogenic print  
40 x 27 inches



*Timeline*, 2009  
Firecrackers, fuse  
40 feet



The clock is programmed to the currents in the East River. The clock hands move forward and backward, accelerating and decelerating with the tidal currents and stopping for fifteen minutes at slack tide.



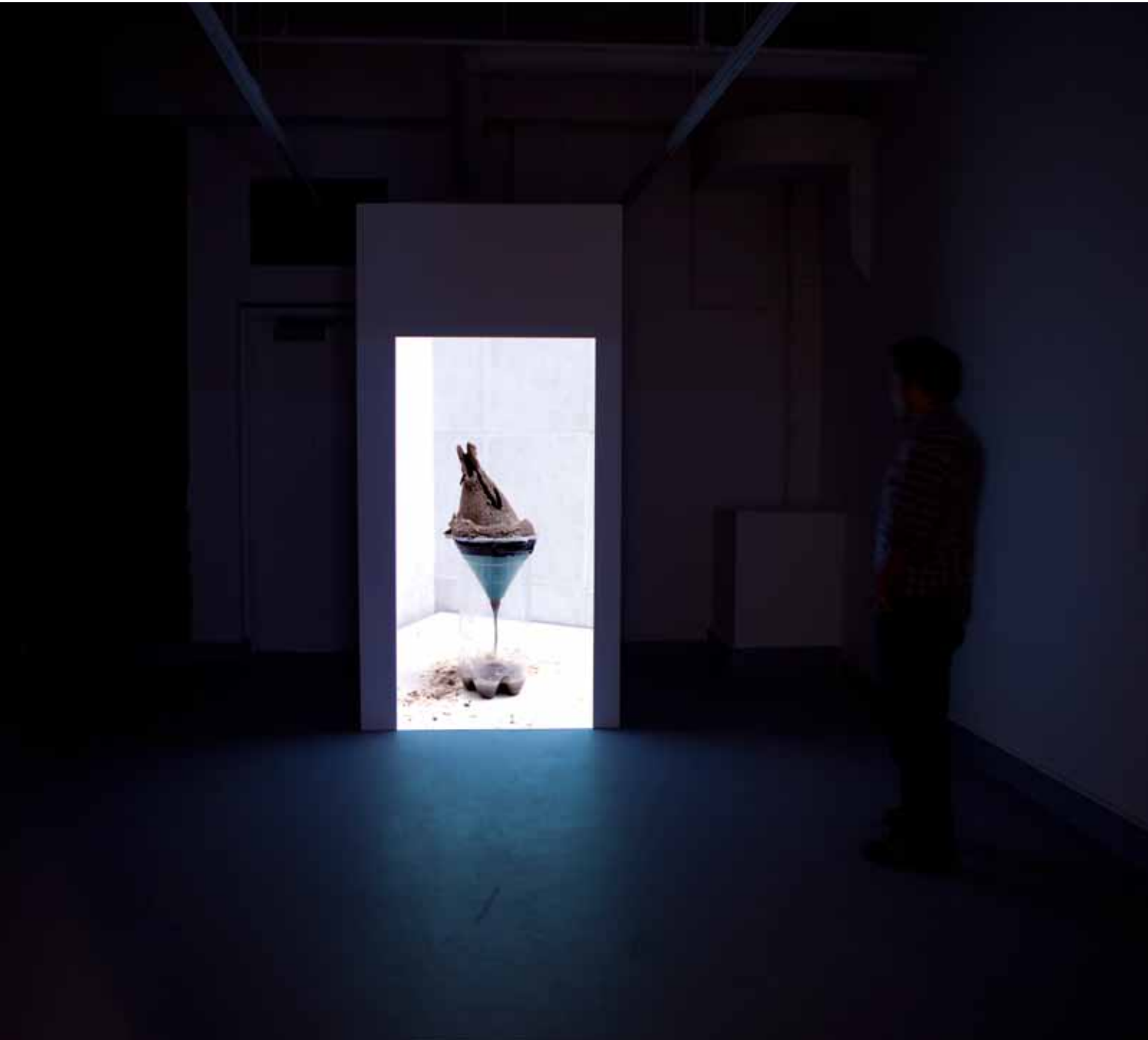




(above)  
*Canoe Drawing*, 2009  
Inkjet photograph  
9 x 11 inches

(right)  
*Canoe Drawing*, 2009 (detail)  
Pen on paper  
75 x 35 inches





*Drip (So Are The Days of Our Lives)*, 2009  
High-definition video  
27 minutes





## INTRODUCTION

Leslie Shaffer, Executive Director

*Time is Like the East River* marks a first for Artspace. It marks the first time we have given the entire gallery space over to one artist; it is also the largest exhibition to date of William Lamson's work. Innovative and ambitious are only two of the many apt descriptors for Lamson. In this exhibition alone, he produced three site-specific installations—including a brilliantly conceived public artwork—that convey a sense of urgency, risk, imagination, and a deep passion for pushing physical and conceptual boundaries of place, space, and time.

Lamson is an exploratory artist who has an uncanny facility for creating profound works from small gestures. In *Time is Like the East River*, he uses



the time-based mediums of video, photography, and performance to question the nature of time as a material, form of measurement and symbol of transformation. His ethereal drawings, created through uncontrollable forces, are paradoxical objects: they ask us to consider our own mortality while denying the presence of a human hand.

There are moments in Lamson's work where his probing of time appears as a singular, personal quest; yet this impression is just window-dressing for an artist wrestling with larger ideas about individual and the communal space. Using time as his subject, his exhibition reveals conversations with and about time as a communal experience—one that is both relevant and obsolete. As engaged viewers, we affirm our reliance on and infatuation with the latest technology; gadgets or software that shave seconds off any and all tasks. Simultaneously, in our over-paced society, we mourn the simplicity of the past; a time when our world was much, much slower. This struggle embraces further discussion, and the platform of conceptual art could not be more appropriate.

Employing "modernized artifacts," like the medieval-style cart, Lamson's work informs this conversation and brings together a community of viewers. In each installation—the gorgeous wall drawing made with firecrackers and fuses, or the perfectly polished half canoe, the clock that keeps a different time or an over-sized basketball court—he shows us a place where art and the community are "reconciled at a place of intersection."

Artspace is proud to present *Time is Like the East River* and this accompanying catalogue. We are grateful to the City of New Haven for our continued use of The Lot, our public park space, and to our funders and the many volunteers without whom this exhibition would not have happened.



*Long Shot*, 2009  
Pallet wood, rebar, twine  
96 x 72x 45 inches

**William Lamson in conversation with Liza Statton**  
December 2009

**LIZA STATTON:** In this exhibition, you explore time as a subject, a physical material, and a form of measurement. It is literally stretched, arrested, fragmented and dissolved, and ultimately, translated into visible forms throughout many of the works presented in this show. Can you speak about the different means of rendering time in this exhibition?

**WILLIAM LAMSON:** Each work in the show explores time somewhat differently, though much of my thinking on this subject stems from my video, *Time is Like the East River*. While the title references the longstanding comparison of the passage of time to the flow of a river, because of tidal currents the East River actually accelerates and decelerates, stopping three times a day when it changes directions. In the video, I use this moment of pause—called slack tide—as an opportunity to perform an action that is not possible at any other moment in the tidal cycle. Two boats, each made from two halves of a single canoe, meet in the middle of the river without being pulled up or down stream and then connect to form a single canoe again.



**LS:** Why the East River?

**WL:** Well, the simple answer is that it's the closest river to me. I have lived less than a mile from the East River in Brooklyn for nine years, I cross it via subway almost daily, yet I still had no idea that it changed directions until quite recently. This discovery was a revelation to me, and I wanted to interact with it in a way that exposed these forces and allowed me to connect my actions as an artist today to the history of this site and the people who used to navigate this river.

**LS:** You mean Native Americans?

**WL:** Right. The Lenape tribe inhabited the area that is now Manhattan, and used dugout canoes to get around. I really like the idea of navigating the same physical space that they used to occupy in an aluminum canoe, which is itself a modernized artifact.

**LS:** Can you elaborate on this term, modernized artifact?

**WL:** In the case of the canoe, it is an object that has been appropriated from indigenous cultures without much design change and has been "modernized" through both its materials and its manufacturing process. Grumman began manufacturing aluminum canoes in the 1950s in factories that had been making airplanes for WWII. Although these canoes look quite dated now, since most new ones are made out of lighter synthetic materials, to me they represent an optimistic belief in the potential of mass production and industrial fabrication to make perfect, shiny things, a point of view which is also an artifact of its time.

**LS:** Bows and arrows are also modernized artifacts that have appeared repeatedly in your work. You use this medieval weaponry in other works such as your intervention *Hunt and Gather* (2007), and again in *Actions* (2008) where you first developed the technique of shooting arrows tied to video tape to draw lines in space, like your installation *PLAY/PAUSE*.

*Hunt and Gather*, 2008

2-Channel high-definition video

15 minutes

**WL:** That's true, and in these works I used a fiberglass recurve bow that has become virtually obsolete as high-tech compound bows are now the standard. However, in *PLAY/PAUSE* I am using archery to deal with time in a different way than I used the canoe in *Time is Like the East River*. In this piece, I treat time as discrete units, represented by lengths of blank videotape. To make this installation, I shot two arrows in opposite directions to stretch a piece of videotape between the gallery walls. The result is a minimalist installation of black lines that interrupt the gallery space. I like the idea that my actions and the force I exert in drawing the two bows has the effect of stretching these units of time. This tension placed on the videotape is similar to what happens inside a VCR when it is put on pause. The advance and reverse gears stop while the play heads remain engaged, slightly increasing the tension placed on the videotape.

**LS:** Do you consider the medium of video itself a modernized artifact?

**WL:** I don't, and although I can imagine the term being used to describe a VHS camcorder or a VCR, in that context it would really refer to technological obsolescence, which is actually the opposite of how I use the term.

**LS:** A friend commented to me that some of your works act as visual models that "mimic the epic on a modest scale." Is this how you see these works?

**WL:** In some works, yes. The video *Drip (So are the Days of our Lives)* (2009) functions most like a conventional model. Geologic time is represented through entropic transformation by means of a plastic bottle, sand, and a leaky showerhead. For the video, I placed a conical form made of compacted sand on a funnel that sits atop an empty water bottle. The water dripping from the showerhead slowly transforms this solid sculptural mass into a pile of wet sand. After twenty-seven minutes, the sand has totally collapsed and the action ends.

**LS:** So, *Drip* acts as a kind of sendup on a traditional timekeeping process?

**WL:** Yes. My homemade version eliminates the utility of a traditional hourglass. Time only flows in one

direction and the process cannot be restarted. And, while the pace of the video feels glacial, as a representation of a geologic action, it is equivalent to watching thousands of years of erosion in fast-forward.

**LS:** It's interesting you mention erosion, since your *Automatic Drawings* are made through the forces of nature, rather than your own hand. The wall drawing *Timeline* has a similar premise. You tied fuses to firecrackers embedded in the gallery wall and then allowed the burning fuses and exploding firecrackers to create new marks. *PLAY/PAUSE* can also be seen as a line drawing in space. Do you see these drawings as artifacts of your performance or something else?

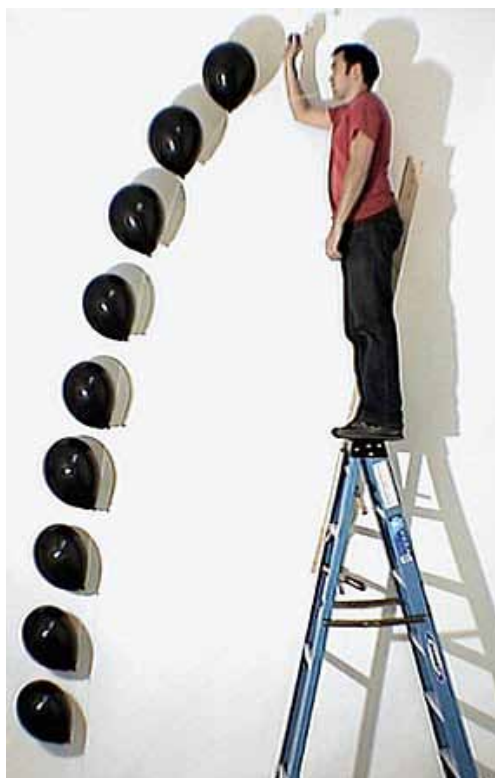
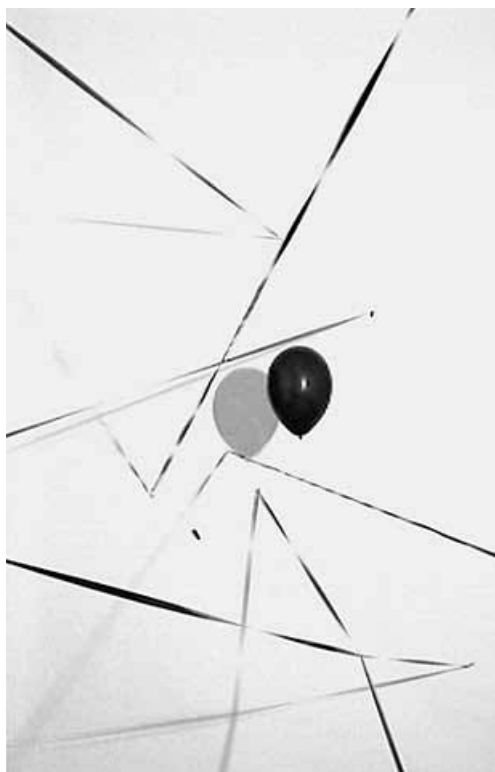
**WL:** I see these drawing as records of events. The marks made on paper or on the wall happen as a result of a series of actions that I initiate, but which I can't fully control. Even the trajectory of the arrows that I aim at the wall are affected by the video tape connecting them to each other, and as a result are less predictable.

**LS:** *Timeline* falls under the purview of an *Automatic* drawing, but the materials you use and the method in which they are employed to create this drawing are quite specific.

**WL:** Right. I used firecrackers and fuses as materials for this piece because they both signify, and are themselves, singular moments and lengths of time. By creating a horizontal line of these materials across the gallery wall and then burning them from both ends, I am creating a simultaneous series of events that meet at the very moment in which they are extinguished. At this point, the past actions and the moments we anticipate converge.

**LS:** *Timeline* then might also be considered a model of syncretic time, wherein the present you depict represents a sort of reconciliation between the past and the future. In this sense, your performance on the *East River*, as it relates to recalling its history, also represents this concept. I wonder about this notion of syncretic time and your use of modernized artifacts. Do you see them as relating?

**WL:** They definitely relate. And I think a broader concept of syncretism, a reconciliation of opposites,



*Actions*, 2007-2008  
24:17 minute video

may be a more useful way to think about this work than the idea of syncretic time specifically. Force, direction and time are all present in these works, and each binary is reconciled at a place of intersection be it a physical or metaphorical point of convergence.

**LS:** Firecrackers and other explosive materials have been used by artists like Roman Signer and Cai Guo-Qiang to name a few, wherein ideas of spectacle and sublime are played out. Do you see *Timeline* as conversant with these themes or distinct from them?

**WL:** *Timeline* relates to the work of both of these artists, but my use of materials and the intention behind it is quite different. In this work, I used off the shelf firecrackers because they are the opposite of spectacle. They are the smallest explosions you can make, short of manufacturing your own fireworks. In contrast, Cai has worked for years with these materials for the purpose of creating spectacular and sublime works of art. He is a virtuoso and his work is intended to amaze. Signer uses these materials as elemental forces, allowing the work to exist as an entropic process or its effects. In this sense, *Timeline* is quite similar. However its intention and its structure builds to a point that is notable for its lack of effect, the silent moment in which the fuses meet and are extinguished.

**LS:** The body as material and site of confrontation also harkens the art of the late 1960s and 70's, and is a recurring theme in your work. Many of your photographs and videos present you as the performer or prop, often eliding the subject/object distinction that the camera usually defines for us. Though not exhibited in this exhibition, your 2008 series *Actions* illustrates this point. The idea for *PLAY/PAUSE*, in fact, comes from this series. Can you say more about this work?

**WL:** *Actions* allowed me to use my body as a versatile medium. I could be a performer who has to do something like throw a dart through a curving line of 11 balloons, or I could use my body as a dead weight, a pendulum, that swings through the frame to pop balloons. I think that this juxtaposition, between actions that I initiate and have some control over, and ones in which I allow other forces to act on me, represents the two extremes of my work.

**LS:** In conjunction with this exhibition you created *Long Shot*, a public art piece in the form of a makeshift basketball court in a municipal pocket park in New Haven. Your version of the court however, took on decidedly new proportions—the backboards and hoops were approximately twice the size of a standard backboard and were mounted to 25-foot tall telephone poles. Playing your version of the game was incredibly hard. What do you want participants to take away from this?

**WL:** In *Long Shot*, I wanted to challenge a viewer's perception of their own abilities by changing the standards of a familiar game. The physical experience of trying to throw a basketball though a twenty-foot hoop is humbling. Almost no one succeeds on the first try, forcing viewers to try harder in each successive attempt. This puts viewers in a vulnerable position, opening them to the possibility of trying their hardest and still not being able to succeed. To me, this experience is one that recalls a moment in childhood when I was barely strong enough to throw a basketball though a standard 10-foot hoop. I want viewers to have a similar experience.

**LS:** Yes, this work is intentionally frustrating. What's so interesting about the experience is that everyone knows this game so well. You expect to get the ball into the hoop, because you know how to do this, but this simple task becomes Herculean. In a way, this work engenders the kind of unbridled curiosity we experience in childhood, when we start to form concrete notions of success and failure, and become conditioned to the world. Do you think this is accurate?

**WL:** I think it is. As we age, our identities are linked to what we can do and what we are good at doing. As a result I find that it often requires a lot of will power to engage in activities that I am not good at. Changing the rules of the game is way of resetting our expectations, allowing us to try things that we otherwise might not do.

**LS:** For me, your work often juxtaposes two kinds of visions that are particularly strong—the mundane and the monumental. Does this kind of seeing—for lack of a better term—ever drive you mad?

**WL:** Thankfully, no. Well, at least not yet.



*Long Shot*, Opening day, Sept 13, 2009.



*Long Shot*, Opening day, Sept 13, 2009.



## WILLIAM LAMSON

1977 Born in Arlington, Virginia.  
Resides in Brooklyn, New York.

## EDUCATION

2003 - 2006 Bard College, MFA.  
1996 - 2000 Dartmouth College, BA.

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

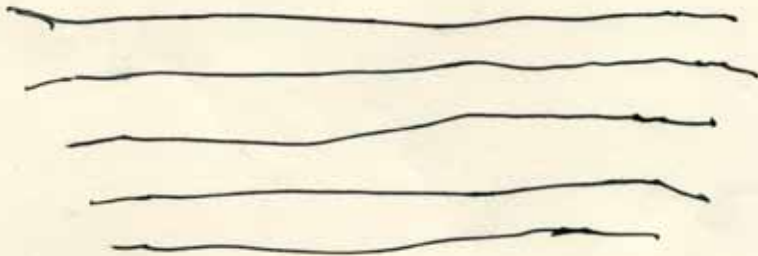
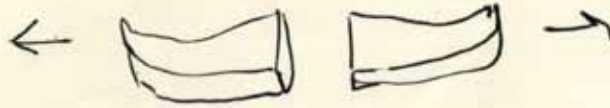
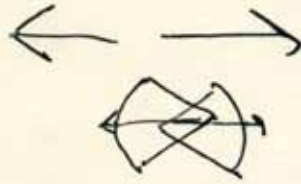
2010 *William Lamson, Selected Works.* Kunsthalle Erfurt, Germany.  
2009 *Time is Like the East River,* Artspace. New Haven, CT.  
*Automatic,* Artspace. Walker Gallery. Dallas, TX.  
*Work and Trade.* Pierogi. Brooklyn, NY.  
*Selected Videos,* Nieuwe Vide, Harleem, The Netherlands.  
2008 *Actions,* Franklin Art Works, Minneapolis, MN.  
*Actions,* Marty Walker Gallery. Dallas, TX.  
*Experiment.* Robischon Gallery. Denver, CO  
2007 *Sublunar,* Pierogi. Leipzig, Germany.

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2009 *Artist as Performer,* Houston Center For Photography. Houston TX.  
*Destroy Everything You Touch.* Espai d'Art. Grandia, Spain.  
*I Like Winners: Sports and Selfhood.* Sheppard Fine Art Gallery, University of Nevada. Reno.  
2008 *Space+Earth+Wo/men.* ACC Weimar, Weimar, Germany.  
*Tension/Release.* Caren Golden Fine Art. New York, NY.  
*New American Talent: 23.* Arthouse. Austin, Texas.  
*Primary.* Kendal College of Art and Design. Grand Rapids, MI.  
*Art on the Edge,* Museum of Fine Arts. Santa Fe, NM.  
2007 *Exposure,* Rotunda Gallery. Brooklyn, NY.  
*Shadow Show,* Real Art Ways. Hartford, CT.  
*Float,* Socrates Sculpture Park. Long Island City, NY.  
*The Whole Sea Is Storming,* Pierogi. Leipzig, Germany.  
*Orpheus Selection: In Search of Darkness,* P.S.1. Long Island City, NY.  
*Easy Rider,* Yancey Richardson Gallery. New York, NY.  
*Natural Selection,* Pierogi. Brooklyn, NY.  
2006 *Factitious,* Pierogi. Leipzig, Germany.  
*Looking Back at Ground Zero,* Brooklyn Museum. Brooklyn, NY.  
*Think Twice,* Young American Photography, TH Inside. Milan. Italy.

RESIDENCY MacDowell Fellowship, June 2009.

COLLECTIONS Dallas Museum of Art  
Brooklyn Museum  
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West Collection  
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### ***TIME IS LIKE THE EAST RIVER***

November 12 - December 19, 2009

Artspace Commission

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