

CATHARINE CLARK GALLERY

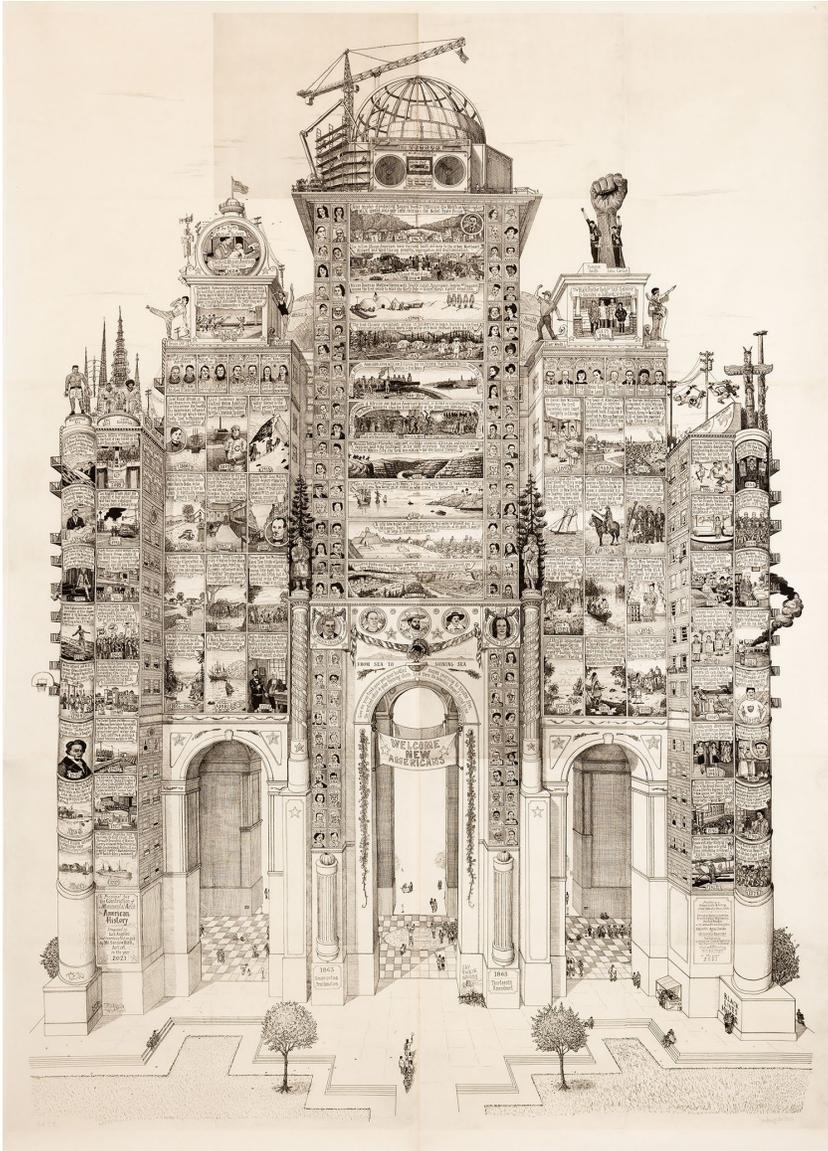


Above: Sandow Birk, *Cristobal Colon and Pedro Alonzo Nino Landing in the Bahamas (Oct. 12, 1492)*, 2022. Acrylic on canvas; 43 x 54 inches.

The eight paintings tell a familiar American origin story of white men overcoming obstacles, dominating the land, and conquering adversaries with religious fervor, culminating with the Declaration of Independence's signing to create a new nation. Birk, however, asks: "what if these eight paintings depicted other moments of our history? What if those depictions were self-reflective, or depicted people of color or women? How would we then reshape our shared understanding of ourselves, and our understanding of what it means to be an American?"

By reimagining these history paintings, Birk seeks to correct the record, so that the story of Christopher Columbus's landing at Guanahani, for example, now features Pedro Alonso Niño, the African-born captain of the *Santa Maria* who was brought to Spain as a slave. As Columbus's crew disembark on Indigenous Taino land, they immediately begin dumping trash on the shore while dogs defecate at their feet. A Taino man lays dead from smallpox in the foreground, foreshadowing the pandemic that killed Guanahani's Indigenous population following contact with Spanish colonizers. Cruise ships approach in the background while a jet ski floats behind Columbus, a humorous but dark implication that modern tourism is a form of neo-colonialism.

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Above: Sandow Birk, *White Out: A Monumental Arch to American History*, 2021.

Birk's timeline begins with the Indigenous Hopewell tribes of the Great Plains region circa 800 BCE and carries into our contemporary moment in which critical conversations around race and inclusion are more vital than ever. At 102 x 72 inches, *White Out* is Birk's largest gravure to date, and this monumental scale reflects the work's truly expansive chronology. In revisiting the imagined architecture of Albrecht Durer's epic woodcut, *The Triumphal Arch of Maximilian* (1515) – the source inspiration for Birk's now iconic *Monument to the Constitution of the United States* (2011 – 2012) – *White Out* asks us to reconsider our shared "foundational" history as one built, formed, and shaped by people of color.

Another painting depicts the Detroit Sit-Down Strike of 1936 at factories owned by General Motors, an event that sparked the labor movement in the United States, leading to transformational workplace reforms such as the five-day work week and paid vacation. In Birk's composition, auto workers in 1930s-period newsboy caps and suspenders struggle against uniformed soldiers, while Starbucks workers hand out coffees in the background, sheltering Amazon couriers as they carry packages out of the factory, referencing recent efforts by workers at both companies to unionize against oppressive and unfair corporate policies. Through this anachronistic mash-up, Birk frames the struggles for fair labor practices in both history and our contemporary moment with vivid urgency.

The exhibition also features the debut of Birk's *White Out: A Monumental Arch to American History* (2021), the latest gravure in the "Imaginary Monuments" series, co-published by Catharine Clark Gallery and Mullowney Printing. *White Out* imagines a "remix" of American history that exclusively depicts the achievements of BIPOC individuals and communities.

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Above: Bill Jacobson, *Interim Couple #1173*, 1994. Silver gelatin print mounted to museum board. Image: 7 x 9 inches; Sheet: 16 x 20 inches.

In the Viewing Room, the gallery presents *Into the Loving Nowhere*, a special exhibition of photographs by Bill Jacobson. Though seemingly formal and abstract, Jacobson's work reflects on his experience of living through the HIV/AIDS crisis, and his experience of loss and precarity in that moment. Jacobson writes that "I received my MFA during the early years of HIV/AIDS in San Francisco. Watching my friends become ill and die, I was unable to make photographs for nearly seven years. Instead, I spent my time collecting thousands of old photographs from flea markets, antique stores, and my own family albums. Many of these were diffused or faded, which paralleled my internal experience. When I started taking photographs again in 1989, these found images inspired extended bodies of work created over the next fourteen years."

By defocusing his photographic images, Jacobson shifts the point of reference away from what/who is in front of the camera to what sits on the periphery or in the recesses of both eye and mind. Both dreamlike and hazy, they suggest what we remember rather than what we see. The act of defocusing inherently eliminates information, implying not only a lack of detail, but also loss in the deepest meaning of the word. Jacobson notes that "the *Interim Couples* in the exhibition, dating back to the mid-1990s, were a direct response to the end of my first long term relationship. The *Untitled* color works, by comparison, were created after a 1999 trip to India, in which I became interested in both color and how we recall the movement of bodies, including our own, through urban environments."

Contemporaneous with his presentation at the gallery, the Tenderloin Museum presents Bill Jacobson's solo museum exhibition *American Trip, 1975*, featuring a never before exhibited selection of Jacobson's early work. The images, made in San Francisco's Tenderloin at a pivotal moment in the neighborhood's history, are infused with dreamlike splendor and beguiling candor.

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Above: Baye & Asa, still from *Second Seed*, 2022.

In the Media Room, the gallery is honored to present a special encore presentation of *Second Seed* (2022) by Baye & Asa (Amadi Washington and Sam Pratt). Originally screened by BOXBLUR in collaboration with the San Francisco Dance Film Festival, *Second Seed* is an ongoing body of work (live performance, lecture, discussion, and film) responding to D.W. Griffith's 1915 silent film *The Birth of a Nation*, based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman*. Filmmakers Baye & Asa note that "Griffith's film is an assertion of White supremacy, and a veneration of the KKK. It's a call to arms against the changing social/racial structure of America. Our film confronts the myth of Griffith's 'helpless white minority,' and the cult of white-victimhood's enduring impact on American polity. *Second Seed* is our collision with this American artifact."

Join us for an opening reception on Saturday, September 17 from 11am – 2pm. Artist talks with Sandow Birk and Bill Jacobson begin at 12pm.