



JOSH AZZARELLA

MARK MOORE GALLERY | *STATEMENTS*

"What's left are hauntingly emptied-out landscapes and interiors in which absence has an almost palpable presence."

—*The New Yorker*, March 2010

JOSH AZZARELLA STATEMENTS

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Mark Moore Gallery: *Statements* introduces a featured gallery artist through images and candid interview. From noteworthy early examples to present bodies, the works featured in *Statements* act as an overview of the varying practices and movements implemented by a given artist in tandem with their thoughts and interpretations.

Josh Azzarella (b. 1978, Ohio) creates videos and photographs that explore the power of context in the authorship of memory, oftentimes utilizing seminal moments in pop culture and news media to create accessible confrontations with historiography. By illuminating the individual encounter with communal experiences, Azzarella evaluates the perception of realness – which can ultimately be rooted in both the fantastic as much as the pragmatic.

Azzarella was the recipient of the 2006 Emerging Artist Award and related solo exhibition from The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (CT). He has previously shown at the California Museum of Photography (CA), University Art Museum, Long Beach (CA), Vancouver Art Gallery (Canada), Kavi Gupta Gallery (IL), Academie der Kunste (Berlin), Sean Kelly Gallery (NY), Catharine Clark Gallery (CA) and DCKT Gallery (NY). His work is included in the permanent collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (CA), The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (CA), and Western Bridge (WA). He lives and works in Easton, PA.



Above: Still from *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)*, 2011-2013
Single-channel HD video, 92:00 minutes

UNTITLED #160 (BALCOMBE) PROJECT STATEMENT

In Azzarella's newest project, F.W. Murnau's 1922 German Expressionist classic "Nosferatu" undergoes a comprehensive transformation. Adapted from Bram Stoker's Gothic novel "Dracula (1897)," Nosferatu is considered a silent masterpiece of psychological terror. Over the course of two years, the artist has painstakingly erased all evidence of the characters - including their reflections and shadows - from the original footage, along with the film's infamous soundtrack and expository intertitles. Azzarella has re-built the vacant space left by his extractions pixel by pixel, constructing an alternative rendition of the film that exemplifies his mastery of digital construction through perfectly accurate imitation and craft. Added to each panorama is a reconstructed version adapted from the original Erdmann score and ambient noises that reflect the atmosphere of the original film.

The outcome is an uncanny 90-minute portrayal of the original classic that identically matches Murnau's lighting, film quality, and resolution, but abolishes its pioneering storyline and figures. Despite the absence of these key elements, the film's eerie and dark nature is seemingly amplified through Azzarella's manipulations—doors open mysteriously, curtains sway, and dawn breaks to ominous music, heightening the tension of implied action. The viewer watches each scene with the feeling of anticipation, the desire to see something spectacular occur without the gratification. With Count Orlok absent, the Gothic architecture and gloomy backdrops assume a characterization of their own, unsettled in much the same way as the viewer—waiting for the film's antagonist to emerge yet unable to coax him into existence. Viewing the video, one gets a sense of how existential characters, Vladimir and Estragon must have felt as they waited for Godot.



JOSH AZZARELLA

Interview by: Marielos Zeka, Mark Moore Gallery

By manipulating and reconstructing both still and moving images, what comment do you hope to make about one's perception of reality?

The point of origin for all of the work is the impulse of wanting to see the modifications for myself. I'm interested in trying to understand aspects of the original in a new way: content or technical achievements, the more significant ideas surrounding its place in history, and the way it has shaped what has come after. At first, I just want to become part of the event – to have a primary relationship with the reality that was recorded. Then I think my viewer experiences the same thing when they view the work.

With the extensive use of editing software, the validity and nature of "original" images has become a point of contention. I think it is safe to say most individuals do not look at photography as the undisputed indexical document of reality it once was. How does your work confirm or challenge this notion?

I think this idea currently exists in a very strange place. While most no longer consider a photograph an indisputable document, we still use them with regularity to prove statements, arguments, guilt, or innocence. My work furthers the idea that there is

Q&A

no indexical document or thing, be it a photograph, video, writing, or statement. The pieces accept and move beyond this initial "all images can be manipulated" idea and find a hole - a meditative space - inside the event. Once the narrative is removed or altered, there is a contemplative place exposed. The energy left behind by the event becomes more palpable and can be more strongly felt.

Can you elaborate on the steps you take to create a video work? What does the process entail? What technologies are used within that process?

The process I use depends on the piece I'm making. For *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)* (2011-2013), I separated the original film into just over 165,000 stills, and retouched each one. Reconstructing the image after the action or person is removed also requires various processes. Sometimes it requires scavenging from elsewhere in the original, filming on location to replace something in the original, or completely reconstructing an object or scene using 3D imaging. Image degradation, film grain, texture, and light all have to be simulated or else the additions, subtractions, and reconstructions are instantly recognizable.

After the process is complete, the stills are put back into a

sequencer for playback. I check for continuity and when issues are identified, I can rework a single frame or an entire section.

The inclusion of sound is still relatively new to me – *Untitled #160* is only my fifth work with sound - and the first time I included audio, I constructed the Foley sound mix entirely on my own. Previously, with *Untitled #100 (Fantasia)* (2007-2009) and *Untitled #105 (SDFD)* (2009-2011), I worked with a sound studio to construct the sound. With this work, I spent about eighteen months finding and recording the ambient sound that was needed and mixing it myself.

In the past you have worked with iconic materials such as Michael Jackson's *Thriller* music video. Your newest project alters the cinematic masterpiece, *Nosferatu*. Is there a particular reason why you chose this film?

It wasn't one particular aspect of the film that attracted me, but a myriad of things. *Nosferatu* exists in an interesting place for me; it's a milestone of early modern-day cinema, which aligns itself to my interest in how an image or event shapes and affects what comes after it. I was also attracted to the challenge of imagining and adding Foley sound to a film that had no original recorded sound. Further, its back-story is rife with controversy, court rulings, and the destruction of almost all of the original prints.

As is traditional with your work, *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)* features the removal of all the characters from *Nosferatu*, leaving only the backdrops present. By highlighting the environment of the film and removing the narrative, how do

you feel you are altering the subject of the film?

I find myself interested in the idea of creating something new through elimination, distilling a thing down to what may be its essential elements. This relates to my interest in absence and anticipation - investigating the space that was once taken up and occupied by another person, thing, or action. What aspects of a place affect a thing? Could this film have been made elsewhere and have the same qualities?

The viewer may find the scenes in *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)* familiar or unfamiliar depending on if they have seen the original *Nosferatu* or not. How do you think absence functions within your work when the viewer has no previous experience with the action of a scene?

This is an idea I have been working with since the early 2000s - even after my modifications, does power from the original energy still exist and come through in some form? There is an interest in whether the viewer can feel energy from what is not there.

For those that do recognize the event, sometimes the anticipation that the event is about to occur makes the viewer's response more urgent and uncomfortable than when watching the same familiar footage.

For those who don't, I'm curious whether the energy that remains can have power over them – whether the traces of an event make them nervous, anxious, or emotional.

Most of the original accompanying score of *Nosferatu* by Hans Erdmann was lost, and so the soundtrack to the film has been a point of adaptation and subjectivity. You have removed the cinematic orchestration and replaced it with your interpretation of the ambient noise from that setting. In what way is your soundtrack a comment on the lack of original point-of-reference for the sounds of the film?

The loss of the original score certainly disturbs the work's intended form, and arguably renders it incomplete. There have been several reconstructions of the score based upon Erdmann's notes, and they have been performed and released in recent years. I'm utilizing one of these reconstructed scores as a minimal accompaniment to the new ambient sound that I have created. In the work the score is placed quietly in the rear speakers, and at times isn't audible at all with the newly added ambient sound. As expected, I've modified several moments in the reconstructed score to fit what is needed in the work.

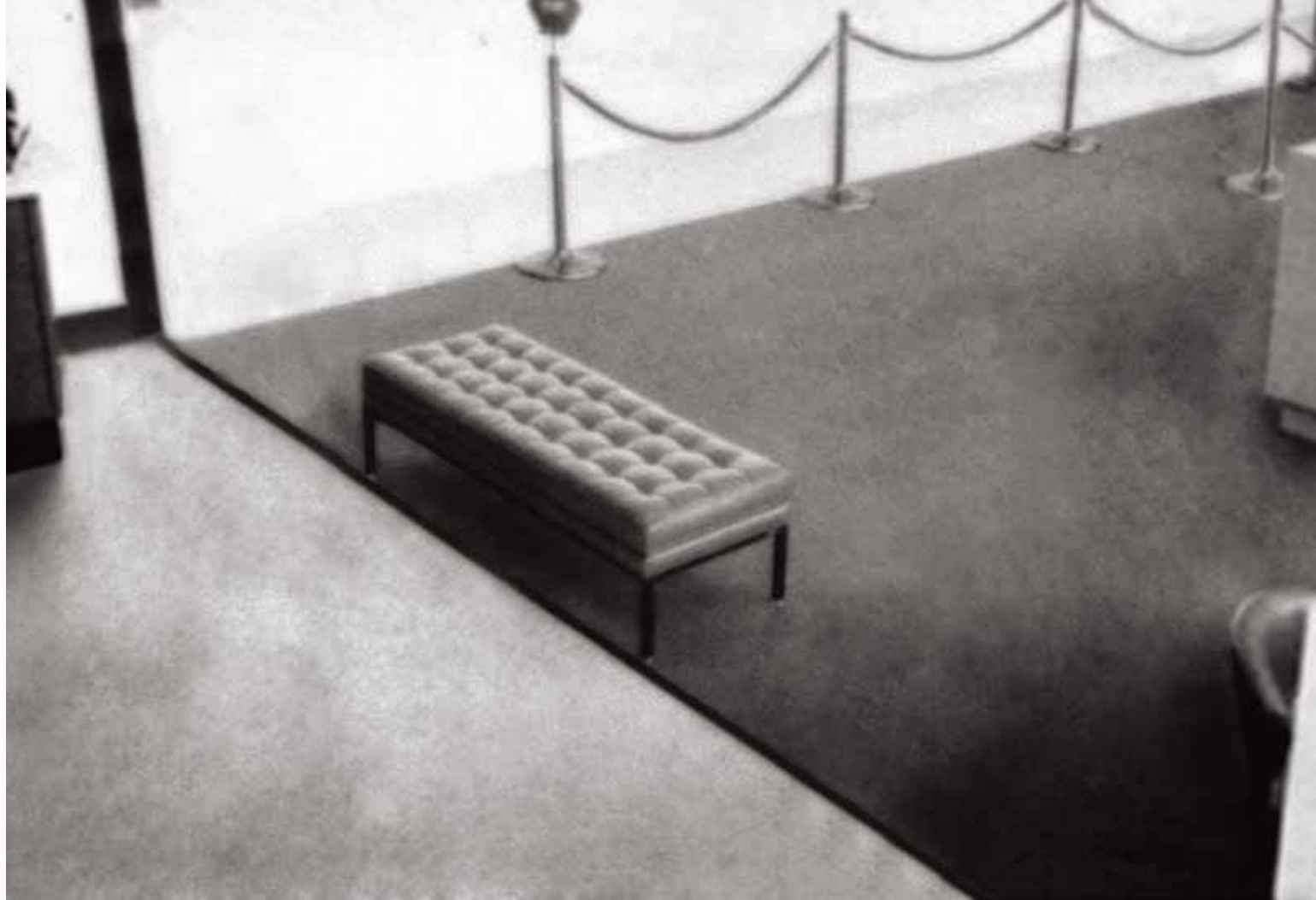
What will your next project entail? Will you continue to work in photography and videography?

I'm currently completing two shorter video works; one based on two scenes from *North by Northwest*, and another based on a scene from the *The Wizard of Oz*. Additionally, I'm considering several more feature length films to modify in the future.



Page 4: *Untitled #101d (SYNW)*, 2009
Cibachrome, 19 3/4 x 35 inches

Above: Still from *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)*, 2011-2013
Single-channel HD video, 92:00 min



Above: Still from *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)*, 2011-2013
Single-channel HD video, 92:00 minutes

Right: Still from *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)*, 2011-2013
Single-channel HD video, 92:00 minutes (detail)

Opposite Page: *Untitled #17 (Hibernia)*, 2006
Archival digital c-print, 28 x 38 inches





"Continuing his practice of modification and removal, the piece [*Untitled #105 (SFDF)*] (2009-2011) marks Azzarella's first time behind the camera, reflecting a new directorial direction perhaps. Collapsing fact and fiction, the piece questions notions of authenticity and fantasy."

—Sasha Lee, *Daily Serving*, May 2011

Right: Still from *Untitled #105 (SFDF)*, 2009-2011
Three HD videos, middle frame, 7:55 minutes

Opposite Page: Still from *Untitled #105 (SFDF)*,
2009-2011
Three HD videos, right frame, 7:35 minutes





Page 12 & 13: Stills from *Untitled #105 (SDF)*, 2009-2011, 3 High-definition videos, 3:05 minutes, 7:55 minutes, 7:35 minutes (installation shot)



"By illuminating the individual encounter with communal experiences, Azzarella evaluates the perception of realness—which can ultimately be rooted in both the fantastic as much as the pragmatic."

—*Eyes In*, May 2013

Left: *Untitled #112*, 2010
Digital silver gelatin print, 15 x 12 inches

Opposite Page: *Untitled #57 (Pruss)*, 2009
Silver gelatin print, 28 x 38 inches





Above: Still from *Untitled #27 (Unknown Rebel)*,
2006
Video, 1:11 minutes

Right: *Untitled #51 (L=kSV²C₁)*, 2009
Silver gelatin print, 25 x 38 inches (detail)

Opposite Page: Still from *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)*,
2011-2013
Single-channel HD video, 92:00 minutes





**“What Azzarella’s
interventionist act does is
abstract an image so familiar to
us that we can no longer
recognize it.”**

–*The Girl Who Knew Too Much*,
May 2012

Left: Still from *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)*, 2011-2013
Single-channel HD video, 92:00 minutes

Opposite Page: *Untitled #13 (AHSF)*, 2006
C-print, 20 x 30 inches





Left: *Untitled #83* (Maggie Atwater), 2009
Digital silver gelatin print, 38 x 28 inches

Above: *Untitled #120*, 2010
Digital silver gelatin print, 13 x 18 inches

Opposite Page: Still from *Untitled #160* (Balcombe),
2011-2013
Single-channel HD video, 92:00 minutes

STATEMENTS



BIO

JOSH AZZARELLA

Born 1978, Ohio
Lives and works in Easton, PA

Education

- 2004 MFA, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
2002 BFA, Concentration in Photography and Printmaking, Meyers School of Art, University of Akron

Solo Exhibitions

- 2013 *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)*, Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City, CA
2011 *Josh Azzarella Works: 2004-2011*, Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City, CA
2010 DCKT Contemporary, New York, NY
Untitled #100 (Fantasia), Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
2009 *Untitled #100 (Fantasia)*, DCKT Contemporary, New York, NY
Untitled #100 (Fantasia), Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago, IL
2008 DCKT Contemporary, New York, NY
Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago, IL
Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, VA
2007 Lawrimore Project, Seattle WA
2006 *2006 Emerging Artist Award Exhibition*, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT
Lisa Boyle Gallery, Chicago, IL
2002 Millworks Gallery, Akron OH
2001 Myers School of Art, University of Akron, Akron, OH

Group Exhibitions

- 2013 *Collapse*, Visual Arts Center, Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS
Art Seen, Nitehawk Cinema, Brooklyn, NY
Beautiful Fileds: Memphis Social, Marshall Art, Memphis, TN
2012 *The Day On Fire: Apocalypse in Contemporary Art*, Slocumb Galleries, East Tennessee State University, TN
Vis a Vis, Curated by Caryn Coleman, The House of Yes, Brooklyn, NY
Video screening: outdoor nightly in the Urban Garden at the James Hotel, NY
Render: New Construction in Video Art, California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside, CA
Split Moment, University Art Museum, Cal State Long Beach, Long Beach, CA
2011 *Documentary Fiction*, Central Utah Arts Center, Ephraim, UT
Re-framing Terrorism, Richard F. Brush Art Gallery at St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY
Loft in the Red Zone, Broadway Gallery, New York, NY
Open, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
2010 *As I Do: A Selection of Works from the Faculty of Arts, Culture & Media*, Rutgers-Newark, The State University of New Jersey, Newark, NJ
CUE: Artists' Videos, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
<METADATAPHILE>: *The Collapse of Visual Information*, Cal State Fullerton Main Art Gallery, Fullerton, CA
Never Can Say Goodbye, No Longer Empty, at former Tower

- Street & Broadway, New York, NY
Fear of Flying, Christopher West Presents, Indianapolis, IN
Partisan, Art Chicago, IL
The Popular Reaction to September 11: A Cultural Laboratory, Golden Age, Chicago, IL
2009 *Ultrasonic IV: Fresh Perspectives*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
Embedded Art: Art in the Name of Security, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Germany
Paradox Now!, Arlington Arts Center, Arlington, VA
2008 *Cancelled, Erased, and Removed*, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, NY
Say Good-bye to..., Clifford Art Gallery, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY
Speaking to the Unspeakable, Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Freedom of Expression: Art in an Age of Uncertainty, University Art Gallery, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA
The Terrible Twos: A Lawrimore Project Biennial, Lawrimore Project, Seattle, WA
Decline, *The Heder Contemporary Art*, Tel Aviv, Israel
2007-10 *A New Reality: Black-and-White Photography in Contemporary Art*, Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, NJ; Walsh Art Gallery Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT; Stedman Art Gallery, Rutgers University, Camden, NJ; Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA
2007 *Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival*, Groningen, Netherlands
Crash. Pause. Rewind., Missoula Art Museum, Missoula, MT
2006 *Home: Living With Contemporary Art*, Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, Indianapolis, IN
Some Things ..., Lisa Boyle Gallery, Chicago, IL
Coming Home, Emily Davis Gallery, Myers School of Art, University of Akron, Akron, OH
Crash. Pause. Rewind., Western Bridge, Seattle, WA

- 2005 *Disputed Territories*, City Without Walls Gallery, Newark, NJ
1st Year Out, Temple University, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, PA
AtoD, Gallery 1f, Brooklyn, NY
Spring Video Show, 7hz, San Francisco, CA
New Jersey Fine Art Annual, Montclair Museum of Art, Montclair, Montclair, NJ
Athens Video Art Festival, Athens, Greece
Digital Visions, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
2004 *The Odds*, City Without Walls Gallery, Newark NJ
Dimensions, Shane House Gallery, Tucson AZ
New Screen Broadcasting, FL
1800 Frames, City Without Walls gallery, Newark NJ
First Look, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, NY
Seton Hall University/City Without Walls gallery, Newark NJ
Mason Gross School of the Arts, New Brunswick, NJ
Members Show, City Without Walls gallery, Newark NJ
2003 *Graduate Student/Faculty Group Exhibition*, Mason Gross School of the Arts, New Brunswick, NJ
2002 *1st Year Graduate Group Exhibition*, Mason Gross School of the Arts, New Brunswick, NJ
Nor Jea Galleries, Akron, OH
2001 Fuel Studios, Cuyahoga Falls, OH
2000 *Juried Student Show*, Myers School of Art, University of Akron, Akron, OH
Members Exhibition, Spaces Gallery, Cleveland, OH

Public Collections

JP Morgan Chase Art Collection, New York, NY
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
The Margulies Collection, Miami, FL
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA
Western Bridge, Seattle, WA



Untitled #160 (Balcombe) specifics:

Completed in 2013

Total running time 92 minutes

Single channel HD Video

5.1 Surround Sound

Edition 5 + 1 AP

Front cover:

Still from *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)*, 2011-2013

Single-channel HD video, 92:00 minutes

Back cover:

Still from *Untitled #160 (Balcombe)*, 2011-2013

Single-channel HD video, 92:00 minutes

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