

# KIANGA ELLIS PROJECTS

April 22, 2012

## PRESS RELEASE

KIANGA ELLIS PROJECTS  
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Peter Daverington, *Liberty*, 2012  
oil on canvas, 42 x 32 inches

## Under The Influence:

*The Art of Power & Persuasion*

Wednesday, May 16 – Sunday, May 20, 2012

**Opening Reception:**

**Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>**

**6:00 – 9:00 pm**

Kianga Ellis Projects is pleased to announce an exhibition featuring painting, photographic sculpture, drawing, performance and moving image by:

**Peter Daverington**

**Nikita Gale**

**Federico Solmi**

**Charmaine Wheatley**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the State, Christian church and advertising appropriated the visual language of artists to consequential and far-reaching effect. *Under The Influence: The Art of Power & Persuasion* investigates this history. The artworks in the exhibition re-appropriate

confiscated aesthetics and methods of presentation to both expose and make use of tactics by which art has been exploited for political, religious and commercial ends.

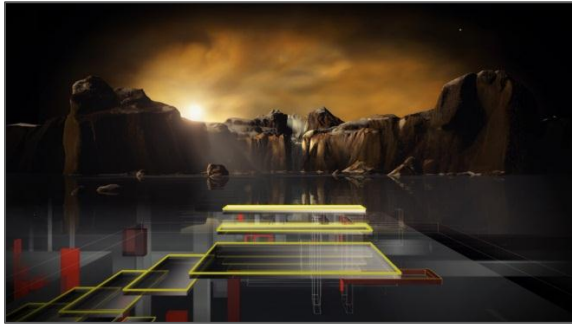
Viewers are challenged to ask difficult questions about how the public is influenced by the powerful in society. The artists' provocations nevertheless reflect great sensitivity to the universal experience of inner conflict aroused by their messages. As such, their art should not be misunderstood as cynical, detached critique. No; their sense of humor reveals something else. These artists count themselves among the seduced.

*"The problem is not the incapacity of art to become truly political; the problem is that today's political sphere became already aestheticized. When art becomes political it has to make an unpleasant discovery, that politics already became art. That politics already situated itself in the aesthetic field."*

- Boris Groys

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Peter Daverington, *Arcadia*, 2012, video still  
8:54 min - loop single channel HD video

**Peter Daverington** was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1974, and currently lives and works in New York. In his paintings and new moving image work, *Arcadia*, digital demarcations of space collide with romantic landscapes expressing a deep desire to reconcile the technology-dependent modern life with hope in the possibility of Transcendence. Preoccupied with the history and progress of painting over the centuries, Daverington's recent interest in art's relationship to politics began with the discovery of this portrait of the late North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il hovering over a painted mountain vista.



Kim Jong Il found image from [ottoswarroom.blogspot.com](http://ottoswarroom.blogspot.com)

His newest work on view in the exhibition uses the bold and graphic language of political posters, neon signage in combination with

Hudson River School landscapes, text in various languages and recognizable symbols from art history. Ultimately, this conflation of nations, iconic imagery and art historical references reflects the artist's opposition to nationalism and attitudes of religious supremacy.

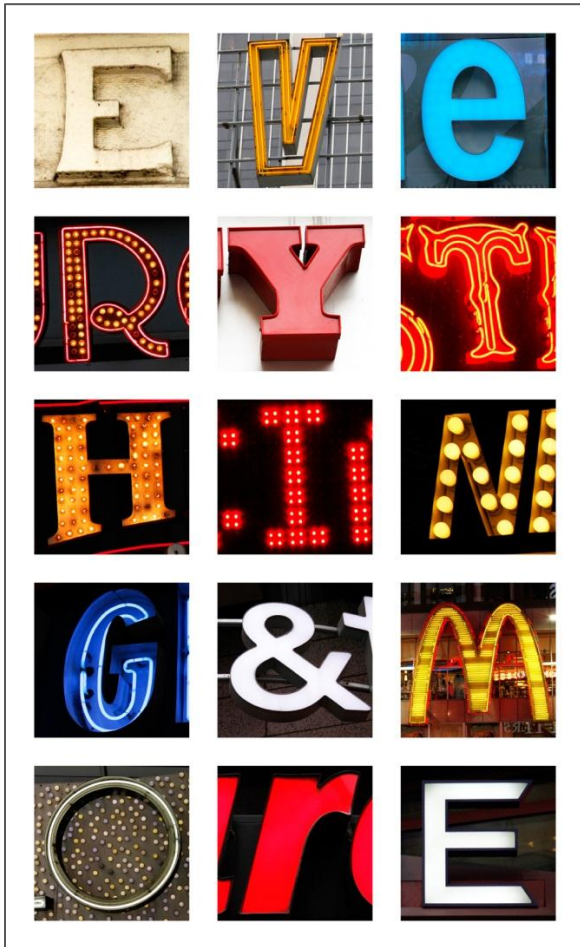
The first in a series of 12 large-scale paintings, *Dear Leader (God's Country)*, 2012, is dominated by a red five-point star, an ideogram featured ubiquitously in the former Soviet Union. The official White House portrait of U.S. President Barack Obama hovers in the center of the star encircled by gold leaf. The portrait evokes Renaissance-era halos placed around the heads of saints in religious painting. A bucolic (or possibly foreboding) *Sunset in Yosemite Valley*, 1868, by Albert Bierstadt forms the lower background of the painting while cupids armed with an M16 and Bazooka playfully occupy the top portion. Recognizing the important role Hudson River School painting played in promoting the economic interests of newly formed U.S. railroad magnates in the late 1800s, its appropriation here nods to a little known cozy relationship between art and commerce. The words "God's Country" appear in Russian at the base of the star mocking the political rhetoric begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century American era of Manifest Destiny and continuing today.



1964 Chinese propaganda poster reads  
"Get out of Africa, American imperialism"

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Nikita Gale, *Everything & More*, 2011  
photographic sculpture, 120 x 72 inches

**Nikita Gale** was born in Alaska, United States in 1983, and currently lives and works in Atlanta. Her work seeks to humanize the roles of "spectator" and "consumer" within a system based on the consumption of symbols and materials. Advertising and memory are recurring themes which Gale explores through the mediums of photography, text-based work and painting. Through the use of found and original imagery, she generates tableaux where the symbol and the symbolized exist simultaneously within one space. In her work, we are presented with the idea that there is not necessarily a barrier between states of euphemism and caricature, but rather a

threshold where the repeated application of one can result in the creation of the other.

*Everything & More* is a series of unique sculptures featuring photographs shot during a 24-hour up-all-night excursion around Manhattan during Gale's 2011 residency at Center for Photography at Woodstock in Woodstock, New York. Lettering from signage in Times Square is rearranged to reveal slogans of consumer desire. At 10 x 6 feet, the title work of the series commands attention within a gallery space, dominating the viewer bodily in a manner similar to that of the work's subject in the public realm. This relationship between the seductive power of advertising and the public's belief in its promises is worth considering deeply at a time when the Associated Press reports that "Chinese teen sells kidney to buy iPad, iPhone" (April 7, 2010).



iPhone

# KIANGA ELLIS PROJECTS



Federico Solmi, *The Evil Empire*, 2008  
4:13 min - video, installation view of Hell scene

**Federico Solmi** was born in Bologna, Italy, in 1973, and currently lives and works in New York. His exhibitions, which often combine articulate installations composed of different media such as video, drawings, mechanical sculptures, and paintings, use bright primary colors to portray a dystopian vision of our present-day society. Irreverent, surrealistic, and sexually explicit, the videos are satires about the evil and vices that affect contemporary society and mankind.

Solmi uses images culled from the video-game industry, pop culture, and the Internet, and collages them with a historical influence to produce original artworks that have a familiar aesthetic, but tell an unusual story. The universe that he likes to represent is the exaltation of a present that is crumbling apart. It is also a criticism of a system that approves and trusts without questioning the fragile foundation on which our culture and post-modernist society is based.

Solmi's controversial video, *The Evil Empire*, 2008, and related paintings will be on view in the exhibition. The hand-drawn animated film, made between the years 2007-2008, takes place in the heart of Vatic-anal City, in the year 2046. Surrounded by the glorious frescoes and

wealth of his St. Peter Basilica apartment, a fictional Pope is portrayed as a young man struggling with an addiction to pornography, like ordinary men who cannot avoid the temptations of contemporary society. Pope Urban LXIX has embraced the ways of the 21st century, fulfilling all of his vices to no end. At the end of the video, Pope Urban LXIX is sent on a journey through hell where he pays for all of his sins.

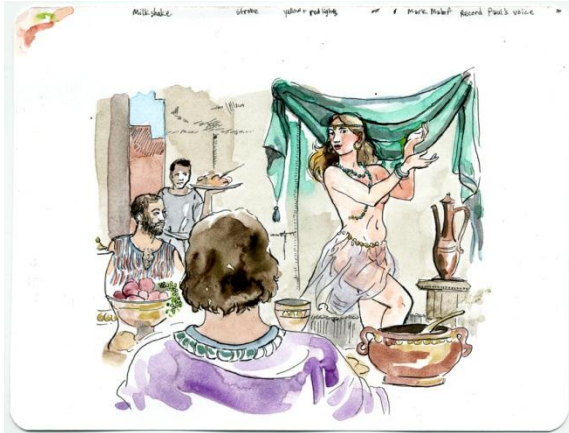
*The Evil Empire* was made in collaboration with Solmi's longtime collaborator, New Zealand-born 3D artist Russell Lowe. Lowe writes:

*The final act in The Evil Empire video (2008) is called "Hell." Hell was filmed entirely within a modification of "Garry's Mod" which is itself a modification of the popular Half Life 2 (HL2) "first person shooter" computer game....[T]he modifications include animated textures (every surface within our version of Hell is "skinned" with multiple hand drawings that have been traced over decompiled and modified game textures), world geometry (the walls, floors, ceilings, and stairs of Hell itself), weapon modding (the Pope's baseball cap), and character modding (the Pope's penis and mitre). The characters in Hell are either Non Player Characters (NPCs) which are controlled by the sophisticated Artificial Intelligence within the HL2 engine, or actual Players which are controlled by real people within a networked environment.*



Federico Solmi, *The Evil Empire*, 2008, video still

# KIANGA ELLIS PROJECTS



Charmaine Wheatley, *dance milkshake*, 2011  
watercolor and ink on paper, 4-1/2 x 5-1/4 inches

**Charmaine Wheatley** was born in Nova Scotia, Canada and currently lives and works in New York. Through performance and drawing, everyday human interaction is made extraordinary by Wheatley's poignant and humorous storytelling ability. Her intimate portraits of ordinary people unfold in graphic novel/comic book format and are published in limited edition artist books. Her performances are frequently staged in public settings where only a small group of invited spectators know an artwork is underway. Wheatley bravely assumes a physically and emotionally vulnerable position to confront the misogyny underpinning various social interactions.

Undertaking a new Bible-based series of works, like the "*What Does Jesus Think of Lapdancing?*" project, is a shift away from the lives of others and represents a focused interior search by means of artwork that directly confronts her personal history.

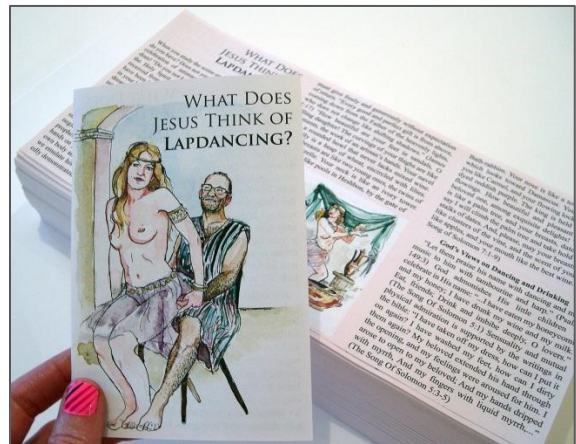


"Chick Tract" on idol worship. What's Wrong With This?  
©2005 by Jack T. Chick LLC

The related performance and distribution of pamphlets recalls the life's work of American writer and publisher Jack Chick (b.1924) who used the comic book format to cloak his teachings in a popular aesthetic. Chick's publishing company claims to have sold over 750 million "Chick Tracts" and other paraphernalia designed to promote Protestant evangelism from a Christian fundamentalist point of view.

Wheatley's own "gospel tracts" are pamphlets illustrated with her watercolor drawings and which pose challenging questions about Bible passages and teachings. The tracts are given to audience members during and after performances in the way tracts are handed out in public or door-to-door by enthusiastic evangelistic Christians.

The artist will perform "*What Does Jesus Think of Lapdancing?*" beginning at 6:30pm during the opening reception for the exhibition (Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>).



Charmaine Wheatley, *What Does Jesus Think of Lapdancing?*,  
2011 – ongoing, performance