CORRESPONDENCE: IN RELATION TO GOYA

Joseph Peragine

October 11, 2007 – February 3, 2008

Organized to complement Goya’s Mastery in Prints, the exhibition series Correspondence: In Relation to Goya showcases contemporary artwork that — in risk-taking originality, clarity of vision, and passionate quality — resonates with Goya’s legacy.

UAMA is pleased to present selections from Joseph Peragine’s Hell on Wheels, a body of work that addresses the mechanics of armed force, the spectacle of modern warfare and the media representation of contemporary military engagement.

One aspect of the project derives from Peragine’s fascination with the Sherman tank, and is based on a trip he made to the beachheads of Normandy — sites of fierce World War II combat, where tanks are now installed as memorials. In watercolor sketches, formal painted “portraits,” diagrammatic drawings, and wittily ironic sculpture, the work considers the disastrous design flaws inherent in a war machine promoted as impermeable and infallible. (The title of the project refers to the 2nd Armored Division, under General George S. Patton, who boasted of his troops as “hell on wheels.”)

Another aspect includes animations and related stills, inspired by the events of 9/11 and subsequent U.S. military engagement. These pieces refer to Peragine’s earlier preoccupations; previously, he was best known for large-scale oils that involved a rabbit figure — rendered variously in lush old master treatments and pop cartoon styles. Here, the artist uses rabbit
ears as a mode of absurdist relief to democratize his “characters” (political, military, and otherwise). In many ways, this tactic is reminiscent of illustrator Art Spiegelman’s, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (1973), represented a Holocaust story of Jews and Nazis through mice and cats, respectively.

The animations articulate the artist’s response to the televisual spectacle of war and terror, as a nearly ubiquitous aspect of contemporary culture. In 1970, Ken Baines wrote presciently of this mediation, already in evidence: “The dead on both sides in Vietnam — efficiently slaughtered by technology — have told their tales at firesides wherever the invention of television has carried them. That paradox, and what it means, that mixing of news and entertainment, morality and sensation, is a key one for the contemporary world and the quality of our lives in it.”* Peragine’s deftly powerful shorts suggest the complex ways in which we “see” and come to understand the world through the framing devices of television.

Dr. Lisa Fischman, Chief Curator

*The University of Arizona Museum of Art, October 2007*

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**Image Credits**

All work by Joseph Peragine, courtesy the artist and Solomon Projects, Atlanta.

Front top: *Untitled (Large Utah Beach)*, 2006 (oil on canvas, 77 x 90 inches). Front bottom: *Corrugated Tank*, 2004 (cardboard and glue, 28 x 48 x 24 inches). Back: *Untitled* (still from *Pass the Ammunition*), 2004-05 (Iris print on canvas with resin, 8 3/4 x 12 inches).