

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Robert Boyd
Xanadu
April 9 - May 14, 2006
Press Preview: Sunday, April 9, 6-7pm
Opening Reception: Sunday, April 9, 7-9pm

From April 9 - May 14, 2006 PARTICIPANT INC will premiere, in its entirety, *Xanadu*, a four-channel video installation by Robert Boyd. The individual video works that form *Xanadu* probe society's self-destructive impulse while parodying various elements of popular culture such as cartoons, pop music, documentaries, and news media. Culled from hundreds of hours of archival footage including that of Doomsday cults, iconic political figures, and global fundamentalist movements, *Xanadu* tweaks, condenses, and re-frames modern events into seconds-long image bites, representing a history of apocalyptic thought as a series of MTV-style music videos within a setting reminiscent of a discotheque.

Having peaked in the late '70s at a high point of Carter-era optimism, disco was formed from an amalgam of black, Latin, and gay subcultures. Vilified at the time for its seeming promotion of male effeminacy (i.e. homosexuality), its embrace of a proactive female sexuality, and its racial non-distinction, disco, in its voracious capacity to sample and reshape excerpts from multiple musical genres, had the ability to reduce "everything to its surfaces [...] so that the profound and the inane have an equal opportunity to stimulate." (Tom Smucker, "Disco: a soundtrack for communal ecstasy," *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll*: 561-572, 1992) Boyd, a gay man having grown up during the Reagan years in a Fundamentalist Christian household, exploits the duality that disco provides and combines it with the organizational structure of disco's visual reincarnation—the music video—to dramatize recent social and political events.

The choice of disco reverses the classic '70s punk vs. disco dichotomy, in which the harbingers of "no future" were clearly the self-disenfranchised punks. In Boyd's construction, supported by extreme and often violent footage meticulously gathered over the course of several years, we see a current worldview in which mass annihilation and the Apocalypse are solidly in the hands of those empowered by their people. His choice of dance music suggests a volatile segue from the "feel good" generation of the late '70s to the current "feel bad" generation of the '00s. Taken as a whole, the *Xanadu* videos insinuate that humanity is not apathetic about its own demise, but on the contrary, is furtively engineering it through a form of collective self-destruction. By placing together the familiar and the fringe, legitimate and notorious figures, Boyd's particular brand of unsettling mimicry acts as a displacement of meaning, much like his prior works *The Virgin Collection* and *Deathstars*, for example, but this time dealing with issues of patriotism, nationalism, and fundamentalism in relation to Apocalyptic ideologies.

Introducing the theme of the "Apocalypse," Boyd's video *Heaven's Little Helper* (2005) begins with an excerpt from *Masada*, a 1981 mini-series about the Zealots, a sect of Jews who defended their right to be free from an oppressive Roman regime through an act of mass-suicide. Fast-forwarding into "family" footage of seemingly wholesome hippies and children dancing in natural settings, Boyd marks the end of sunny popular culture in the U.S. with iconic images of the Manson Family. Continuing in this vein, the video incorporates archival footage of some of the most infamous Doomsday-cult gurus and their devout disciples of the past four decades including the Hello Kitty-flanked Shoko Asahara of Aum Shinrikyo, author of the sarin gas attacks on Tokyo subways, which introduced a new brand of fear into Japanese society; the Reverend Jim Jones of the People's Temple; Marshall Applewhite of Heaven's Gate; and David Koresh of the Branch Davidians.

Patriot Act (2004), takes a global historical sampling of iconic leaders of the Left and Right since World War II to stage a secular milieu of "followers," insinuating that genocide can take place only through collective effort. The speed

of the video accelerates as images of parades and victory celebrations rapidly devolve into images of war and genocide, leading to the video's cataclysmic end. Edited between views of numbed and orderly masses, startling images of violence and death, both iconic and suppressed, are deployed. Caught in the blur are images of the men whom have redefined the political landscape of the world from some of the most pivotal moments in history. Ultimately, *Patriot Act* is about the men who lead the people who adore them—without question, without fail, time and again throughout the course of history.

Judgment Day (2006) chronicles the rise of fundamentalist religions around the globe, including audio and video excerpts from Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell of the Christian Right in the U.S.; Ian Paisley of Northern Ireland; Muslim Fundamentalists, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama Bin Laden, and Ayatollah Khomeini; Daniella Weiss and Eliezer Waldman of Israel's Gush Elinum; and Hindu Nationalists Bal Thackeray and L.K. Advani. The video depicts their desperate, increasingly violent, and sometimes successful attempts at establishing theocracies. Further leveling the terrains of religious and political extremism, *Judgment Day* blurs the already indistinct lines between civil necessity and fanaticism, and the shattering consequences thereof. The video also contains the only original footage in the exhibition, an excerpt from the artist's own video of the World Trade Center collapse. Culminating in the horrific events of September 11, 2001, Boyd's video contextualizes this act of terrorism through the lens of a tragic trajectory of fundamentalism.

The series' finale, *Xanadu* (2006), is a three-channel video that begins with George W. Bush's post-9/11 address to the nation, in which he declares the end of the "feel good" era and the beginning of a new one. This era, the artist suggests, is *Xanadu*—a conglomerate of our fears, paranoia, and prejudices—an envisioned Apocalypse in the process of being actualized.

Serving as both the prologue and epilogue for *Xanadu*, Boyd's *Exit Strategy* (2005) features Rapture-ready prophets such as Charles Manson, Brenda McCann of Manson's Family, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Shoko Asahara, and Luc Jouret of Order of the Solar Temple. Addressing topics such as death, suicide, the President, and the dire state of the world as they perceived it, the video contains audio and video excerpts from some of their final hours, including Jim Jones' suicide sermon at Jonestown, David Koresh's 911 call with the FBI, and Marshall Applewhite's farewell video, among other tragic and telling moments.

Robert Boyd's solo exhibitions and installations include *Recent Video Works* at 00130 Gallery, Helsinki (2005); *The Virgin Collection* at Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn, NY (2002); *Transcendental Landscape* at Smart Project Space, Amsterdam (2001); *Deathstars* at the Islip Art Museum, Islip, NY (1999); and *Momenta Art*, Brooklyn, NY (1996). He has been included in numerous group exhibitions at venues such as Palacio del Bellas Artes, Mexico City (2006); Elga Wimmer PPC, NYC (2005); Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin (2004); White Box, NYC (2004); Galerie Chez Valentin, Paris (2002); Gale Gates et al., Brooklyn (2001); and ABC No Rio (1992). His work has been reviewed in publications such as *Art In America*, *The New York Times*, and *Time Out New York*, among others. In 2004 he was awarded a New York Foundation for the Arts Artists Fellowship in Photography.

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PARTICIPANT INC is located at 95 Rivington Street, between Ludlow and Orchard Streets on the Lower East Side.
Gallery hours: Wed-Sun, noon-7pm. www.participantinc.org