

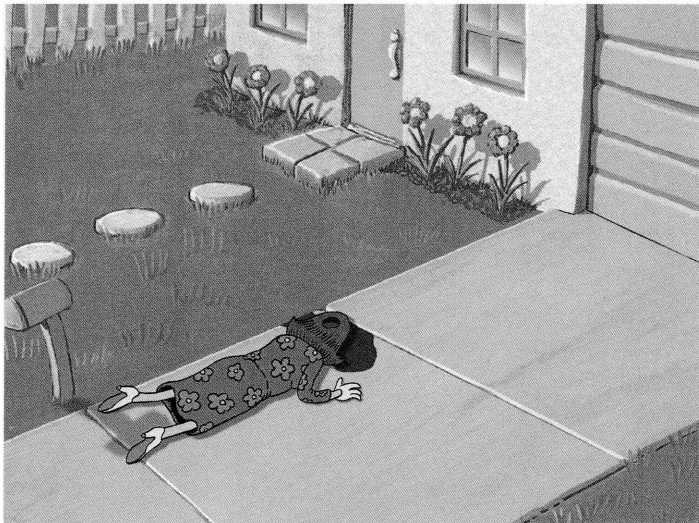
J o n   H a d d o c k  
**C A R T O O N   V I O L E N C E**

2004 january 16 through february 18  
clough-hanson gallery, rhodes college, memphis, tn

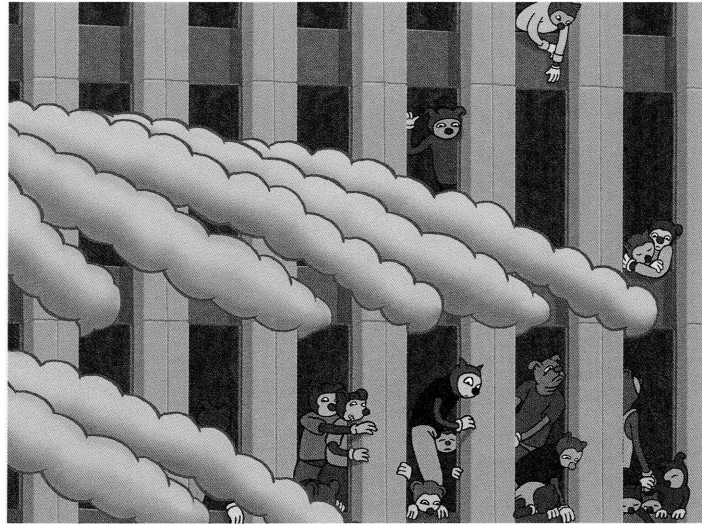
The following interview is taken from e-mails in the months that led to the exhibition.

**Hamlett Dobbins:** Let's start with the issue of the ownership of your images: In an article in the *Phoenix New Times*, Kathleen Vanesian<sup>1</sup> discusses issues of ownership in the images, both in the literal copyrighting of these images and the way in which they are so often seen or used to illustrate a point in history—to name a few examples, the napalmed children in Vietnam, the Birmingham protesters being sprayed with fire hoses, or the WTC victims gathered at the windows trying to get air. These images have become a shorthand way to encapsulate that particular day or that particular time in history. It seems like your work functions as a way for you to re-build those moments, to become a part of them yourself and have us re-look at them in a fresh way. To what extent is ownership and infiltrating or subverting that ownership an issue in your work?

**Jon Haddock:** I like the idea that our culture is a big conversation, that everything we know about the world and



*Terriane*, C-print on gatorboard, 30" x 40" 2003



*Untitled*, C-print on gatorboard, 30" x 40" 2003

each other is wrapped up in it, even in places where you might not expect it to be. As kids we listen and watch, and hopefully our brains sort it out into a coherent model. I think most of us take this stuff for granted; maybe what I am saying that is a little different is that I think the media images or experiences are as powerful an influence as the events we actually experience. I'm not sure if this is a result of growing up in places that were somewhat impoverished in the way of actual experience, but I suspect not.

I am trying to figure out why I think and feel the things I do. In particular, I am trying to understand the things I share with other members of this culture. In re-rendering these moments I am trying to hold them up and examine them and say, "Look: this is in there too. That's where this feeling comes from."

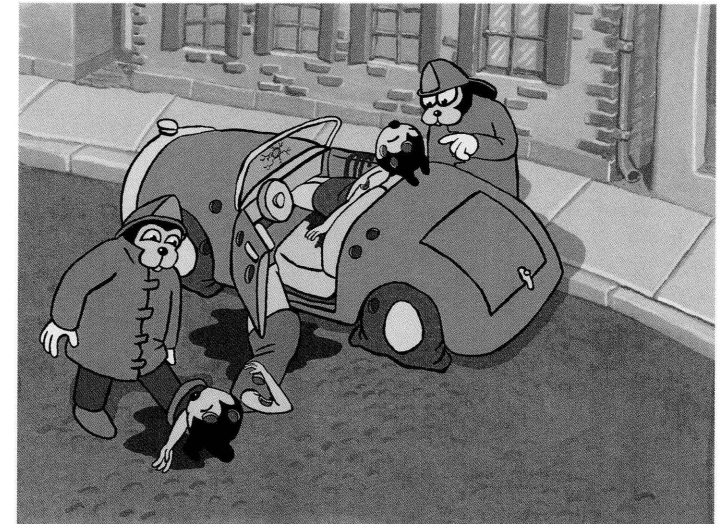
Politically, I am concerned about the commodification of information. I think we need to have access to the things that shape us. I think that once something becomes a part of the culture it should quickly become part of the public domain.

**HD:** It seems that you're working with several different levels of "public domain." Your earlier work dealt with more recognizable images, whereas now you're working with cases or incidents that are not as well known, such as the images in *Cartoon Violence*. For me, the more obscure crime scenes are much more disturbing because they don't have the distance that a well known case like say, the Nicole Brown-Simpson and Ron Goldman case, would have. I would imagine negotiating the territory of the lower profile cases and private losses can be tricky. Is that a reaction against or a move away from the more notorious scenes you were working with in the past?

**JH:** I did want to include a wider range of events, rather than just a "greatest hits." I think I'm trying to get at the idea of these things being constant and ubiquitous. In this series, my focus is more directly on our memory of the events, rather than the events themselves. On one hand, I think I'm trying to suggest that the traumatizing events of recent history are nothing new, and that the sooner we integrate them the better off we'll be. On the other hand I'm repeating my mantra that violence is the major contributor to our culture.



*Suicide Bomber*, C-print on gatorboard, 30" x 40" 2003



*Stephanie and Ukea*, C-print on gatorboard, 30" x 40" 2003

I agree the images are scarier and more brutal, and potentially more offensive than the last work closely related to this topic. I think this is a reflection of the trauma of 911 and our country's response to it. I'm fighting a tendency to reject conversation, to stop caring so much about other people—to give in to yelling.

All of which makes it somewhat challenging to make work about communication and shared experience. I am feeling overwhelmed by this stuff, and I want the work to reflect that. I'm shooting for something that is right on the edge of rage and despair—the loss of control, the end of reason.

Hopefully CV will hit that feeling, because I really want my next work to be about finding a way back.

**HD:** In a way you function differently than what people would consider a traditional studio artist, a role that comes with a history of secrecy and aloneness. You seem to subvert the image of the single artist working away in the dank, stinky studio. A great deal of what you do is out in the open



on the web: you have a blog<sup>2</sup> that you update regularly which features sections where visitors to the site can read what you're thinking about and comment on the things you're doing. It seems like the whitelead.com site is a great way to subvert the "tendency to reject conversation." How important has the public aspect of your studio practice been in terms of the way you work?

**JH:** It seems more public than it is. I put the stuff up and sometimes people write, but it is generally either "keep up the good work" or "you are an awful person". I try not to let either of those sentiments influence what I am doing. I try to make my work audience-focused, but it still winds up being a very internal process.

My natural tendency is to isolate and immerse myself in my own ideas. If I struggle as hard as I can to speak clearly to others, it hopefully creates the right tension. That balance between the private and the public worlds is hard to achieve, but I think it is essential for good art. You need the weirdness of the inner world to give it passion and the coolness of the outer world to make a vehicle that can be felt and understood by others. If you go too far one way it winds up soulless, too far the other and it becomes incomprehensible.

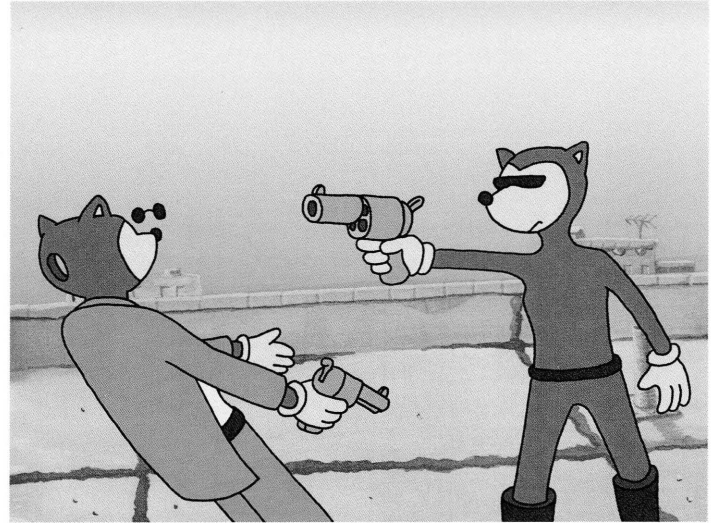
—Hamlett Dobbins is the Director of Rhodes College's Clough-Hanson Gallery.

<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Vanesian's article "New Paper Views" appeared in the online version of *Phoenix New Times*, October 19, 2000.

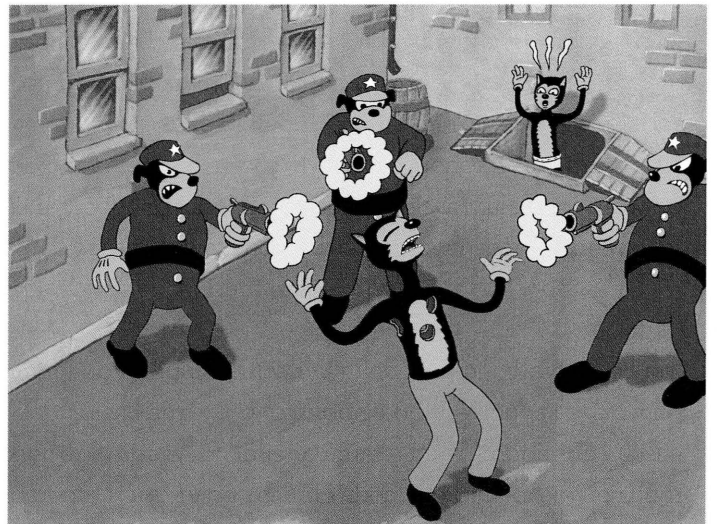
<sup>2</sup> "Blog" is short for "Web log" which is an online journal.

Cover: *Thug Life*, C-print on gatorboard, 30" x 40" 2003

all images courtesy whitelead.com and howard house, seattle



Dodge This, C-print on gatorboard, 30" x 40" 2003



Bobby Hutton, C-print on gatorboard, 30" x 40" 2003

**RHODES**