

# JON KESSLER *KESSLER'S CIRCUS*

**MARCH 7 – APRIL 4, 2009**  
**76 GRAND STREET**

*Kessler's Circus* places the viewer inside the American war machine. An army tent pitched inside the gallery houses mechanical sculptures and barracks stacked with video monitors. The work depicts the American military-industrial complex as a macabre circus, traveling from country to country, importing nothing and exporting atrocities under the veil of democracy. Rather than simply presenting a mediated spectacle, Kessler indicts the audience in the violence.

Surrounded by hand made mechanisms and surveillance cameras, the viewer becomes part of the machine. There is an induced sense of vertigo and a surge of paranoia, as the viewer's own faces appear in the video feed. Entering *Kessler's Circus*, one is immersed in an undefined state, conflating machine and spectacle with entertainment and horror.

*Kessler's Circus* updates and politicizes the experience of *Calder's Circus*. Following the tradition of performative mechanized sculpture, Kessler creates a playful format for his exploration of our modern war experience. The mischievous nature of Kessler's hand belies a dark violence that is at once captivating and frightening. The business of death as mediated spectacle exposes anxieties and complacencies concerning surveillance, propaganda, and our ravenous consumption of celebrity.

The novelist Siri Hustvedt writes that

Jon Kessler's work turns the world inside out. Entering his installation, the viewer cannot keep a safe distance from the spectacle of war. They cannot turn away, trapped within an infernal machinery of projection, reflection, and ultimately, hallucination. To enter the work is to enter the body of a mechanized monster, at once familiar and alien, whose internal organs have been exposed by a gaping wound.

Known for large-scale kinetic sculptures and video installations, Kessler has been mining our mass media's infatuation with disaster, war, and titillation since the 1980s. A recent development in Kessler's oeuvre is the introduction of two-dimensional works into his installations. Portraits made from magazines, pigment and paper pulp, and photographs manipulated without a camera surround the circus. The show itself can be seen as a portrait of America, gazing into a distorted mirror exposing the country's dark side.

Jon Kessler was born in Yonkers, New York in 1957. He received a BFA from SUNY Purchase and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program. His first New York exhibition was at Artist's Space in 1983. *Global Village Idiot* was presented at Deitch Projects in 2004. His work *The Palace at 4 AM* was presented at P.S.1/MoMA in 2005 and traveled to the Sammlung Falckenburg, Hamburg, and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark. Kessler is a Professor in the Division of Visual Arts at Columbia University and plays guitar with the X-Patsys, the band he formed with the actress Barbara Sukowa and the artist Robert Longo.

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