

FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION

Contact: Adam Kubota, Press & Marketing Coordinator

860-685-2806 • [akubota@wesleyan.edu](mailto:akubota@wesleyan.edu)

Images available on request

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY'S EZRA AND CECILE ZILKHA GALLERY  
PRESENTS ROBERT BOYD'S *XANADU*

---

Video installation probes society's self-destructive impulses through a series of MTV-style music videos set to dance tracks.

**Robert Boyd: *Xanadu***

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University

283 Washington Terrace

Saturday, January 27–Sunday, March 4, 2007 Hours: Tuesday--Sunday, noon–4pm; Friday, noon–8pm

Reception with gallery talk: Friday, January 26, 5–7pm

**(Middletown, Conn., December 12, 2006)**—Culled from hundreds of hours of archival footage including that of doomsday cults, iconic political figures and global fundamentalist movements, Robert Boyd's *Xanadu* probes society's self-destructive impulse while parodying various elements of popular culture such as documentaries, news media, cartoons and pop music. Consisting of a synchronized 4-channel video installation, *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. Set to saccharin dance tracks, the piece takes its title from the 1980 American pop musical starring Olivia Newton-John.

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.

*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. Caught in the blur are images of the men who 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—from the U.S. to Afghanistan, from India to Iran to Israel—and depicts the desperate, increasingly violent and sometimes successful attempts by their leaders at establishing theocracies. 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.  
**(continued)**

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' culmination, *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.

Taken together, the videos that comprise *Xanadu* address issues of patriotism, nationalism and fundamentalism in relation to apocalyptic ideologies. Do sweet dreams of suicide cults, mass annihilation, genocide and the Apocalypse all become part of a self-fulfilling prophecy? The *Xanadu* videos suggest that humanity is not apathetic about its own demise, but on the contrary, it secretly desires it.

**Robert Boyd** is an interdisciplinary installation artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. His work often explores the volatile intersection of politics and religion, examining its precarious influence over popular culture. His 4-channel video installation *Xanadu*, which premiered at Participant, Inc in New York in 2006, has been exhibited at PKM Gallery, Beijing, China, 2006; The Hospital, London, England, 2006; and Context Galleries, Derry, Ireland, 2007. His other installations and solo exhibitions include *Recent Video Works*, 00130Gallery, Helsinki, Finland, 2005; *The Virgin Collection*, Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn, NY, 2002; *Transcendental Landscape*, Smart Project Space, Amsterdam, 2001; and *Deathstars*, Islip Art Museum, Islip, NY, 1999. He has also been included in numerous group shows in this country and abroad. He was awarded a Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant in 2006 and an Artists Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts in 2004.

The video installation is curated by Zilkha's curator of exhibitions, Nina Felshin.

The Center for the Arts is an 11-building complex on the Wesleyan campus that houses the departments of art and art history, music, theater and dance as well as film studies events and classes. The CFA includes the 400-seat Theater, the 260-seat Cinema, World Music Hall (a non-Western performance space), the 414-seat Crowell Concert Hall and the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery.

Admission to *Xanadu* is free and open to the public. For more information or directions, call 860-685-3355 or visit [www.wesleyan.edu/cfa](http://www.wesleyan.edu/cfa).

# # #