

Isa Newby Gagarin – *Beru*

April 4th – May 30th, 2009

This April and May, Midway presents a solo exhibition of new work by the Minneapolis-based artist Isa Newby Gagarin. Gagarin's exhibition is titled *Beru*, after the name affectionately given to the British-born Beryl Markham by local Murani people in *West With the Night* (1942), wherein the author tells the story of her childhood as a young British girl growing up in West Africa, and eventually becoming a successful pilot. This exhibition is the first major presentation of Gagarin's work following her recent graduation from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

In *Beru*, Gagarin presents a series of artist books, found images on stretched blue fabric, video, and works on paper. Like many of her previous projects, this new collage-based work crosses and blurs genres. Using National Geographic magazine photographs from the just-recent past, the artist treats these images as open material, incorporating sound, kinetics, and sculptural concerns into this traditionally two-dimensionally based practice. Yet for Gagarin, collage is enacted in a minimal enterprise; one that has little interest in generating new pictures through the acts of cutting and pasting. Instead, she subtly and playfully isolates and intervenes in images through strategies of doubling, division, transference, and accumulation.

The implications of these reductive staging processes are highlighted in seven large-format books that occupy a central position within the exhibition. Shown on lectern-like displays, these books comprise a series of drawings and collaged images, presented within a broadsheet format, which provide for multiple readings and consideration. A book of black and white xeroxes of rainbows sits adjacent to one that presents graphite drawings of African hunting hand signals, while in another, torn images from the pages of National Geographic are overlaid with temporary tattoos of a tiger. Here, like much of the other work within the exhibition, the images that Gagarin has chosen to focus on are a form of documentary photography that is in our collective consciousness and has been the subject of much debate and analysis in recent decades. In the essay *In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)*, Martha Rosler describes a twofold process of documentary photography: the original "instrumental" moment, and the more "aesthetic-historical" perspective that occurs later, when dangers arise as nostalgia creates an unsure footing through the passage of time and a lack of historical context. Yet rather than presenting these images solely for critique, Gagarin's images regain a certain level of integrity and autonomy; she animates the narrative and lived potential of these highly charged images through reclamation and reevaluation.

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Isa Newby Gagarin was born in Guam and grew up in Texas, Alaska, and Hawai'i. She graduated with a BFA in Painting from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 2008. Her practice is centered around visual art, but she also works collaboratively in curation and musical ventures. In 2007 and 2008, she and artist Michael Mott operated SELTZER, an apartment gallery/project space.

Regular gallery hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 11am to 5pm