



**DAVID FORD**  
KANSAS CITY, MO

*Little Boy and Fat Man, 2009*, a sprawling array of facsimiles of the atomic bomb. The awe-inspiring implements and tunnel, making them hover at each other shimmer with the potential of collective memory, and bestow comfort, intimate past that could have been. The piece is more blunt, but packs less of a punch. In ten lead, both titled *August 6th*, aerial views of Hiroshima and Nagasaki imply that both cultures were similar at the event of that day. While the historical gravitas in each panel, the action is forced—moral decimation actual, after all.

endless array of technological—much of the show was created by Jackson with MIT—Jackson plays with allows his ideas and associations in *The Mythology of Linearity, 2008*, positioned on the gallery floor in a *Die Dipper*. The skulls are each in a tetrahedron. The variable are endless, all remarking on to harness the natural world in a to preclude purpose. Or rather, the purposelessness, leaving one both tied, yet somehow wiser.

—Garland Fielder

Self-taught, Kansas City-based artist David Ford looks at deflated images of American power in his solo exhibition *Relax* [Dolphin Gallery; November 20, 2009–January 9, 2010]. On opening night, Ford implicated viewers in American reality: he hired undocumented construction workers to build short cinderblock walls while a mariachi band played and Latino immigrants served tacos. By participating, viewers fed into U.S. complacency about hiring and exploiting cheap Latino migrant labor. Setting the stage with performance is typical of Ford, whose last piece, *I Love This Country, 2008*, happened at Kansas City's Mercy Seat Tattoo Gallery on the night of Barack Obama's election. As a cage fight announcer called out state-by-state poll results, exotic dancers stripped for a man in a wheelchair.

Performance is Ford's strongest medium. But the twenty-six sculptures, photographs, and paintings in the two rooms of this exhibition make up an impressive body of work that endures long after the performance ends. Ford takes on his country's roots in *Relax, 2009*, a small painting where the title is spraypainted above a Regency-style carriage pulled by white horses, and *Negotiation, 2009*, a simple painting of two colonial men standing on the lawn of an eighteenth-century Virginia governor's home. In *Cowboys Die, 2009*, Ford appropriates and defaces a vintage drawing depicting the Old West inside a gold antebellum frame with "Cowboys Die" scrawled across the image in black paint. In this, he reflects on the demise of the mythologized American Wild West, and the end of the "shoot 'em dead" cowboymentality that drove the Bush Administration. He brands his name—Ford—on his paintings by appropriating the Ford Motors logo, and sometimes the actual Ford Motors hood ornament, making a sarcastic comment about his identification with corporate identity.

Although Ford's paintings and acrylics-on-paper prove the most aesthetically and conceptually stimulating, his mixed-media sculptures bring a physicality to the show. In *Bouquet, 2009*, an assortment of broken

model-airplane parts hangs from the ceiling. Ford wraps white chain—a rough, industrial-feeling material used throughout this exhibition—around the planes, letting the excess dangle to the floor. Both saccharine and crass, this piece calls to mind the litany of 2009 American airplane crashes, yet the flowerlike sculpture suggests romantic images typically associated with first dates and Valentine's Day. In another sculpture, *Perception, 2009*, Ford plays with post-9/11 America's perception of Islam and the Middle East. He cuts a small mosque dome into a gallery wall that connects the two-room exhibition, and then installs a Persian rug underneath the dome, about five inches above the floor. In order to see through, viewers must crouch on their knees, imitating the position of prayer in Islam.

Big business and an aggressive attitude have defined perceptions of this country—my country, as Ford calls it—for decades. But the Wild West has crumbled, and Ford Motors—a symbol of American corporate power—has suffered greatly during the recession, along with the economy. Barack Obama signals a shift in American culture. In Ford's acrylic-on-paper diptych, *Shine, Shine, 2009*, the titular words appear across the side of a limousine, reflecting on South Africa's perception of Obama and the United States. South African kitchen tablecloths are covered with images of Obama and their nickname for him, "Shine, Shine."

As fear turns toward Obama-inspired hope, Ford asks: should we be afraid of the changing American image, or should we embrace this new American face? Ford's work suggests an open-endedness that is both reassuring and unsettling, turning viewers' attention back toward their own interpretation of the disfigured, yet triumphant, American cultural landscape.

—Alicia Eler