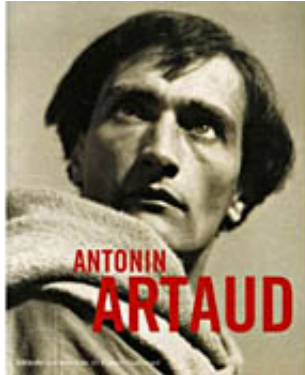


Print Article



Cover from a book of Antonin Artaud's selected writings



Terry Allen
Ghost Ship
 2010
 L.A. Louver Gallery



Terry Allen
Ghost Ship (detail)
 2010
 L.A. Louver Gallery

Terry Allen: FROM SEA TO DARKER SEA by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Terry Allen was still a student in 1968 when he went to Lawrence Ferlinghetti's storied City Lights bookstore in San Francisco. He saw an anthology of **Antonin Artaud's** writing with the gaunt face of the author on the cover. He told Ferlinghetti, "I don't have any money but I have to have this book." Ferlinghetti replied nonchalantly, "take the fucker."

Of such a small gesture comes some big art. Half a century later, Artaud is the consummate subject of Allen's exhibition, "Ghost Ship Rodez: The Momo Chronicles," currently on view at L.A. Louver Gallery in Los Angeles. Conceived in 2005 as a theater piece for Les Substances Laboratoire Internationale in Lyon, Allen fictionalized a tormented period in the life of Artaud, the actor, addict, author and inventor whose "theater of cruelty" would shock and startle blasé audiences for decades to come.

As the story goes, Artaud obtained a walking stick that he was convinced had belonged to Jesus Christ before being passed on to Saint George. In 1937, Artaud decided to return this holy relic to Ireland, where he believed it had originated. Before his good deed could be accomplished, he wound up in a brawl with the Dublin police, who deported him back to France. Artaud became hysterical and was put in a straitjacket and chained to a cot in the hold of the Rodez, the ship transporting him from Ireland to France. For 17 days, Artaud suffered violent withdrawal from the various opiates he took to minimize his chronic headaches.

This is the heady material that Allen drew upon for his operatic exhibition, which is the physical manifestation of a radio play that is available on a CD. In a darkened gallery, Allen's Rodez is *The Ghost Ship*, a rusted metal cot with wooden timbers brandishing large, paper sails. Black-and-white films of Artaud's actual performances in movies, including one as the character Marat in Abel Gance's *Napoleon*, are projected onto the sails. The ship sails over a sea of opened books.

A second sculpture, *MOMO Lo Mismo*, references the Balinese marionette theater that captivated Artaud. Half a dozen flat screens suspended by black cords bear the fragmented face of Jo Harvey Allen, the artist's wife, who is the principal performer in his work. (Married almost 49 years, both are from Lubbock, and now live in Santa Fe.) Wearing white face make-up, a red wig and red lipstick, she sings and speaks the text written by Allen that evokes the hallucinatory terror and confusion that Artaud might have experienced.

An adjacent gallery is devoted to Allen's *The Momo Chronicles*, a series of drawings with collaged elements. Artaud notoriously referred to himself as a "momo," or madman, and Allen loosely explores the period that Artaud spent in Mexico, taking peyote with the Tarahumara Indians, before his fateful trip to Ireland. Beautifully rendered birds, maps and faces are interspersed narratives written by Allen and printed with a black press-on type. A primitive violin and a bow are attached to two of the drawings. At mid-point, one drawing bears a stuffed white rat holding an announcement for "interlude."

Allen's empathy for the brilliant but tormented Artaud shines forth as he follows him through sanatoriums and electroshock therapy that lead up to his death in 1948. It leaves little doubt that Ferlinghetti's trust in Allen as a young artist was well-placed.

Saint Terry Allen refuses to be confined by disciplines. For anyone unfamiliar with Allen's overlapping talents as artist, songwriter, musician, auteur and dramatist, the University of Texas, Austin, just released a handsome book, *Terry Allen*, which includes essays by fellow Texan Dave Hickey, who has known the artist and written about his work for decades, as well as by Michael Ventura and the late Marcia Tucker.

Terry Allen, "Ghost Ship Rodez: The Momo Chronicles," Mar. 10-Apr. 16, 2011, L.A. Louver Gallery, 45 North Venice Boulevard, Venice, Ca. 90291

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Terry Allen
MOMO Lo Mismo
L.A. Louver Gallery



Terry Allen
Momo Chronicle III: Teatro of the 4-eyed Man; Scene III, Ship/Book
2009
L.A. Louver Gallery



Terry Allen
Momo Chronicle II: Angels; Face1 set
2009
L.A. Louver Gallery



Terry Allen
Momo Chronicle II: Angels; Pelican/Fantomas/Buzzard set
2009

L.A. Louver Gallery



Terry Allen

Momo Chronicle II: Angels; Interlude/Birds set
2009

L.A. Louver Gallery



Terry Allen

Headache

2006

L.A. Louver Gallery



Terry Allen

Momo Chronicle IV: Rodez, Volver; Rodez face 2009

L.A. Louver Gallery