



Justin Richel, *The Void*, gouache and egg tempera on paper, 2005.

Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art/Portland, ME www.mecu.edu

**FROM BAJA TO BAR HARBOR:
TRANSNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ART**

This exhibition has the feeling of a project whose inspiration didn't find the perspiration it needed to bring it into cohesion. The result is a project that feels less like a trip across the nation—either as a physical territory or an imagined community—and more like a skip from one coast to the other in order to summer in Maine. The works by the show's artists are dynamic, however, despite a lack of substance in the relationships between them.

Michele O'Mara's 2002 remake of the 1983 film *Valley Girl* is, like, a masterpiece. It's shot in low-quality video and punctuated by sloppy edits and jumpy cuts, and O'Mara's friends play the original actors. It's clear the original version is such a part of their heritage that it is impossible to render it faithfully.

Fellow Californian Julio Cesar Morales's installation meshes high-tech ethnography with eighteenth-century interior décor. His close studies of the pushcart vendors working the U.S.-Mexico border depict a place in which everything is for sale, up for grabs, in process and in transit, pausing just long enough for the transaction of goods, bodies, fluids.

The kind of transnational encounters that Morales's work depicts takes shape in sonic form in Sam Van Aken's *Oh My God*, a wall of stereo speakers playing hundreds of utterances of "Oh my God!," taken from a wide range of sources. Inspired by Van Aken's experience of media coverage of 9/11, it creates an effect that is unexpectedly chilling.

Justin Richel also draws on the eighteenth-century gentleman's portrait to examine the weave of honor and duplicity in the history of the American experiment and its "founding fathers." In his painting *Liar, Liar, Wig on Fire*, one distinguished fellow, shown in profile, sits serenely whilst inhaling tendrils of smoke from his burning, powdered bouffant wig. *Chris Thompson*