



*DumbSun – detail exhibition view 1, 2014, video monitor headphones, replica of electric chair, TV monitor, two 8x10 framed written correspondence of Herman Poole Blount during forced labor camp by the Civilian Public Service during WWII, 28 5x7 framed silk-screen portraits, vinyl record, wood stand, light, slide projector with slides of Walt Disney's trip to Latin America and U.S. WWII Good Neighbor propaganda posters, dimension variable.*

*DumbSun* is an installation exploring the relationship between Disney's *Dumbo* (1940) and jazz musician Herman Poole Blount aka Sun Ra. The show collided two eras (40's and 80's) along with two pop cultural icons to organize of a counter-intelligence system of erudite referents to a speculative and fictional symbolic organization of the body, labor, alterity and circuits of knowledge production in popular culture and counterculture. This exhibition became a rich surreal dance with sonic, visual, and archival histories. The show includes sculptures, meticulously made reproductions of lost artifacts, forged letters on paper of the era, various documents enacting a performative site for a cultural phantasmagoria of an alternate history.

The exhibition featured a live theatrical score to various Sun Ra Films from late Los Angeles based musician Ras G and a series of film screenings related to my research including, *Dumbo* Walt Disney Production, (1941), *Walt & El Grupo* by Theodore Thomas (2008), *The Cry of Jazz* (1959) by Edward Bland, and *Space is the Place* (1974) by John Coney.



*DumbSun – detail exhibition view 2, 2014, 2 projected videos, sound, steel, rope, body harness, speaker, reproduced ephemeral on paper, dimension variable.*

Pink Elephants on Parade is a delirious scene from Disney's *Dumbo* and in the gallery it is synched to Sun Ra and his Arkestra 1988 version. Hal Willner commissioned Ra to perform this song for the album *Stay Awake Various Interpretations of Music from Vintage Disney Films*. Having never seen *Dumbo*, Sun Ra immediately watched the film and felt an affinity with the main character due to his own embodied life experiences and beginnings as Herman Poole Blount and an outcast in the jazz community.

A large steel sculpture, *Faceless Labor* (2014) is seen in the background, which is a replica of a WWII lifting device that was originally used to lower soldiers into the ground to retrieve undetonated bombs. Inside the body harness is a large speaker playing *Song Of The Roustabouts* by Frank E. Churchill & Ned Washington. This song is heard during a scene in *Dumbo* where faceless brown and black men are erecting a circus tent. While *Dumbo* was in production Walt Disney was commissioned by President Franklin Roosevelt under the "Good Neighbor Policy" to promote healthy relations with various South American countries.

The song and the animated scene symbolically represents the animators grievances towards Walt Disney, resulting in a large animators strike which made *Dumbo* the shortest animated film ever Walt ever released. The protest ephemera was reproduced next to the large sculpture for gallery viewers.



*Topsy at Coney Island (without a trumpet or a groan) - still, 2014, replica of electric chair, leather, wood, metal, copper, electrical cord, TV monitor and sound, dimensions variable.*

This performative sculpture layers various histories exploring the relationship between pop-culture, surrealistic imaginaries of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States death penalty, and Walt Disney's Dumbo. This electric chair is a facsimile of the Louisiana electric chair also known as Gruesome Gertie. The video shown juxtaposes Topsy the Elephants electrocution titled "Electrocuting an Elephant" which Thomas Edison's company filmed and a surrealist sequence from Pink Elephants on Parade showing two animated elephants playing with lighting. The audio is Dumbo's *When I See an Elephant Fly* performed by Cliff Edwards and Hall Johnson Choir.

**\*Warning this video contains scenes that some viewers may find disturbing.  
Viewer discretion advised**

[Video Link](#)



*Topsy's Revenge (Space is the Place Backwards). – still, 2014, video 3:57 min.*

A sequence slowed and reversed from Sun Ra's film *Space is the Place* (1974). This video registers a magic like power actualizing Sun Ra's musical affect while connecting his odd relationship to elephants, specifically Disney's *Dumbo* (1941) and Coney Island's *Topsy the Elephant*, with subtle ties to Fluxus artist Annea Lockwood's "Piano Burning", 1968.

Ra was quoted as playing the dark side of the cosmos and this video symbolizes the psychological pain he embodied. Ra's pain is transferred from inside himself to his piano with a sonic outburst (Sun Ra suffered from cryptorchidism, a chronic testicular hernia his whole life). The slowed down sonic result mimics a elephant heard in a stampede, roaring and trumpeting. The title of the video stems from an old newspaper clipping "Topsy's Revenge" when Luna Park burned down in 1944, which is the same location a female Asian elephant was electrocuted at Coney Island, New York, in January 1903 by Thomas Edison. Sun Ra would later play a famous concert with John Cage in the exact same location in 1986 Instead of this video people are not leaving they axre returning to their seats, which confronts the viewer with the perplexity and cacophony of haunting.

[Video Link](#)



*Transmogrification– still, 2014, video 6.04 min, music by Hal Willner, track 7- Alamo Hellfire album: Whoops I'm An Indian.*

This is a slowed down sequence from Disney's Dumbo. The music is from Hal Willner's album called Whoops I'm an Indian. The track is Alamo Hellfire. This video is about making musical connections through Hal Wilner, Disney's Dumbo and Sun Ra. This transformation in the video has an affinity with why Sun Ra loved this film. His own transformation from Sunny Blount into Sun Ra is similar to this scene in Pink Elephants on Parade. The song Alamo Hellfire makes direct connection with Luna Park's burning down which locals labeled Topsy's Revenge, which Sun Ra and John Cage would later play a live concert at that exact location in 1987. That music album is entitled John Cage Meets Sun Ra.

[Video Link](#)






*Faceless Labor, 2014, replica of WWII shear legs, steel, rope, pulley, body harness, speaker, iPod, extension cord, dimension variable.*

Faceless Labor is a sonic sculpture comprised of steel, rope, a body harness and speaker resembling a tipi like structure, which was recreated from a WWII photograph. "Shear-legs", an A-frame like structure was used during WWII to lower soldiers into the ground and is currently used on construction sites. In Faceless Labor an audio speaker becomes the substitute for bodily presence playing a 1941 song entitled Song of the Roustabouts. This song is actually played during the circus tent construction scene in Dumbo. The scene shows faceless workers and circus animals carrying steel poles and using metal hammers. Viewers can hear the lyrics echo "When other folks have gone to bed, we slave until we're almost dead" while looking at facsimile protest documents from Walt Disney's 1940's animators strike adjacently hung on the wall. This created an uncanny ventriloquist effect conspiring to see how invisible the animators felt in relation to Walt Disney's fame.

[SONG](#)

Strike News Service SCREENS CARTOON GUILD 1642 N. GLENDALE BLVD. HOLLYWOOD, CALIF. 6/18



Five million American Federation of Labor members are being asked not to patronize Walt Disney cartoons until Disney comes to an agreement with his 475 striking cartoonists.

In its third week the strike against the Disney studio entered a nationwide phase when the Los Angeles Central Labor Council declared that attempts at mediation had failed and so officially placed Disney products on the AFL unfair list.

Members of 16 craft unions that have joined the cartoonists on strike participated in a mass demonstration of 1500 pickets outside the Disney gates. Other sympathetic guilds, including the actors, writers, publicists, art designers, and office employees, were represented. John Garfield, film star, joined the picket line after pleading financial support from the Screen Actors Guild.

Efforts at mediation between Disney and his striking employees were made almost daily in the strike's third week. Consistently Disney refused to discuss anything but his insistence that a secret election be held to determine whether the Screen Cartoon Guild represented a majority of his artists.

Art Bobbitt, chairman of the Disney unit of cartoonists, suggested that Disney need only await the pickets before his studio to learn where the majority of his artists were.

"The strike was called after the guild had been prepared for an election and had been turned down by the studio; had five times asked a crosscheck of its membership with Disney's payroll and been refused. Since then Disney had discharged some of his best men because they were in the guild and had been engaging art school students as strikebreakers. So the strikers feel he is now suggesting an election as a bid for public sympathy."

First detailed proposals on Disney's part were made to the guild June 16 through the mediation of Harold V. Smith, IATSE leader. He offered a part-paid shop, a qualified "reinstatement" of artists,

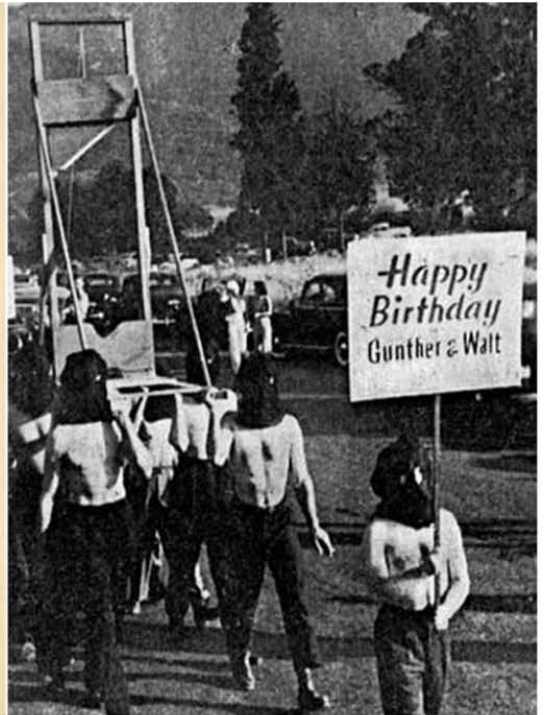
# DISNEY ARTISTS STILL ON STRIKE DESPITE RUMORS



**THE STRIKE IS STILL ON!  
THE BOYCOTT IS STILL ON!!**

DESPITE SPONSORED PUBLICITY TO THE CONTRARY... THE SCREEN CARTOON GUILD WILL, UPON SETTLEMENT OF THE STRIKE MAKE PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS TO THAT EFFECT.

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Faceless Labor, 2014, dimension variable, re-printed protest signs from Walt Disney's animators strike, dimension variable.



*The Original Dumbo Story, 2014, dimension variable, replica of first roll-a-book Dumbo, owl, robin and crown feathers.*





*The Original Dumbo Story, 2014, dimension variable, replica a of first roll-a-book Dumbo*

Dumbo the Flying Elephant began as a story written by Helen Alberson and Harold Pearl for Roll-a-Book Publisher, Inc. The product of this partnership remains elusive to this day. No known copies exist. Right before the couple's divorce, Walt Disney bought the story's copyright and set out to make Dumbo, Disney's "make or break movie." Two characters were noticeably altered from the original Pink Elephants on Parade sequence - the owl from which Dumbo derives his aerial ability, from a shaman named "The Wise One" to a psychiatrist, "Dr. I Hoot", and his best friend, Red Robin, who later became Timothy Mouse.

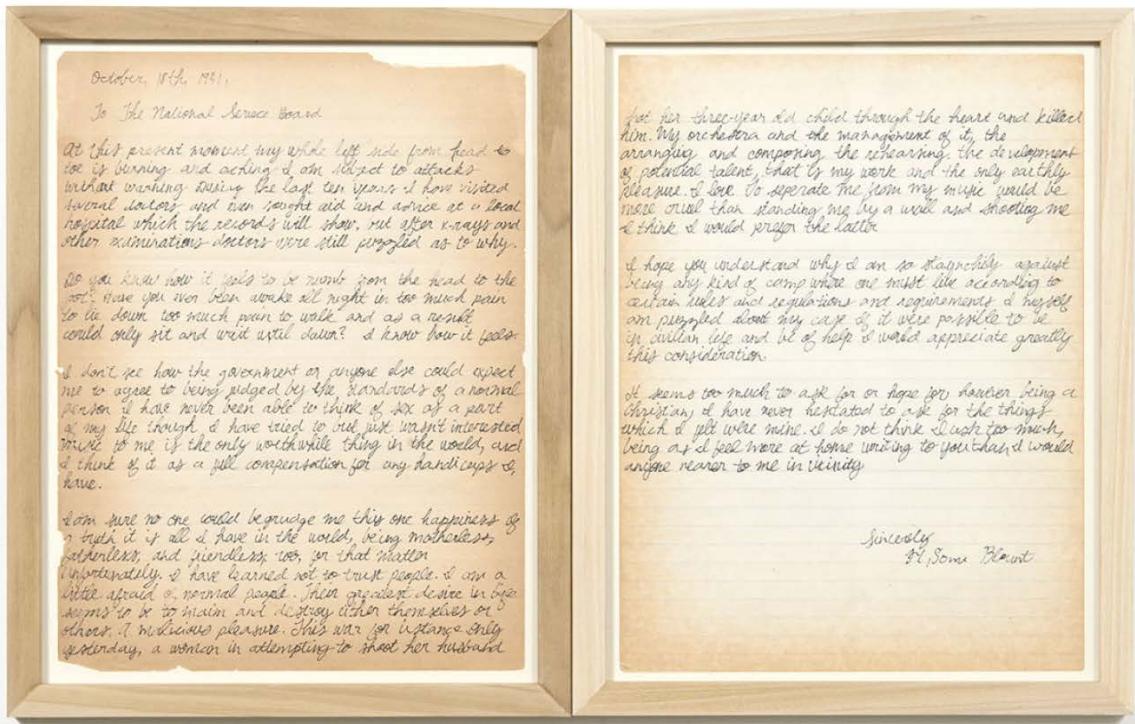
While Dumbo was in production Walt Disney was commissioned by President Franklin Roosevelt under the "Good Neighbor Policy" to promote healthy relations with various South American countries. Walt and a team of artist traveled to Brazil, Peru, Argentina, and Chile. However, he left his newly purchased Burbank studios in the midst of an animators strike making Dumbo the shortest animated feature in Disney's catalogue due to the budgets cuts made during its production. While Walt Disney was in South American, SunRa was in a prison camp for being a conscientious objector during WWII. Sun Ra's letters revealed his suicide attempts and self-mutilation due to not being able to make music. Herman Poole Blount was able to create his persona SunRa as most of his belonging including birth certificate and identification documents were burned in a studio fire in Chicago.



*Herman Poole Blount – Sun Ra – installation view, 2014, 28 5" x 7 " silk screen prints, dimension variable.*



*Herman Poole Blount – Sun Ra – installation detail, 2014, 28 5" x 7 " silk screen prints, dimension variable.*



Sun Ra's Suicide Letters 2 – installation detail, 2014, 28 8 1/2" x 10 "ink on paper from 1950's, dimensions variable.