

# CRG | Robert Buck: Kahpenakwu

January 12 - February 18, 2011

Opening reception: Thursday, January 12, 6-8PM



For his second show at CRG Gallery, Robert Buck (who previously showed under the name Robert Beck) exhibits sculptures, assemblages, paintings, and drawings inspired by the deserts of the American southwest -- *Kahpenakwu*, or "west" in the Comanche language. In his desert sojourns, Buck finds source material in the natural environs (lechuguilla seed pods, devil's head cactus areoles, yucca dagger leaves) and the detritus of American consumerism (rusted sheet metal, a wooden shipping palette, soda cans bleached by the sun). With this found desert material, the artist incorporates construction materials used in off-the-grid structures, including cinder blocks, concrete pavers, and metal fence poles.

In *Through the Night That*, an American flag, dyed pitch black and affixed to a metal pole, stands in a roll of barbed wire. The black flag is graphically reminiscent of a star spangled night sky, while the spiked, tangled physicality of the barbed wire itself echoes desert flora, notably ocotillo plant stalks. Buck finds the tranquility of nature at odds with the artificial and heavily enforced boundaries imposed by the border.

Contending with the "other" permeates Buck's work. In a new series of drawings in which the artist redrafts drawings by American Indians – "savages" after his earlier drawings by "children" – the source material includes drawings by a Kiowa Native American named Silver Horn. Buck redraws Big Horn's depictions of torture and conflict, highlighting not only the Kiowa tribe's encounter with otherness, in the *White Man*, but also the sense that identity and intent are determined historically and contextually.

Language informs much of Buck's work. In his "By Any Other Name" and "Second Hand" painting series, he appropriates signatures from sign-in books from his previous gallery shows. The "Second Hand" series is comprised of thrift store paintings, across which the artist enlarges a signature, and then signs it "R. Buck." With this action, the artist questions the notion of authorship, while blurring the line between the painting's original artist, gallery observer, and himself. Both series utilize the grid, as a kind of foundation or screen, either as a means to transcribe a signature to a canvas, or as a digitally printed background – specifically the "transparency" layer found in Adobe Photoshop.

The artist employs smoked Plexiglas as a stand-in for gorilla glass—the reflective surface of hand-held Apple products, like iPhones and iPads. In the same way that the Photoshop grid is apperceived as a limit, the murky Plexiglas functions as a marker of our times—before and, ultimately, after Apple. It also serves as a pane through which we encounter images, like the Navajo buck, gleaned from the internet (like all of the images in show) in *El Camino Real*, or the dismembered victims of a Mexican cartel in *An Eye For An Eye For An Eye For An Eye For An Eye For An Eye For An Eye*. Alongside the natural elements, the lustrous material highlights that what appears literally in reach and immediate may be in truth remote and transitory.

*Exhibition notes written by Cyrus Saint Amand Poliakoff.*



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**Transportation:** C and E trains to 8th Ave at 23rd St / M23 Bus to 10th Ave and 23rd St