




Leaves of Crab Grass



A child said, *What is the grass?* fetching it to me
with full hands;
How could I answer the child ? I do not know what
it is, any more than he.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of
graves....

These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and
lands—they are not original with me,
If they are not yours as much as mine, they are
nothing, or next to nothing,
If they do not enclose everything, they are next to
nothing,
If they are not the riddle and the untying of the
riddle, they are nothing,
If they are not just as close as they are distant, they
are nothing.

This is the grass that grows wherever the land is
and the water is,
This is the common air that bathes the globe.

This is the breath for America, because it is my
breath,
This is for laws, songs, behavior,
This is the tasteless water of Souls—this is the true
sustenance.

Walt Whitman, from *Leaves of Grass*, 1855

Leaves of Crab Grass

**CHRISTOPH DRAEGER/REYNOLD REYNOLDS/GARY BRESLIN
CORBAN GALLAGHER
RAINER GANAHL
ALFRED GUZZETTI
JAN HANKINS
CECELIA KANE
HEIDI SCHLATTER**

September 16 to October 28, 2005

curatorial selections by

Diane Barber (DiverseWorks, Houston), Chris Campbell (Ruby Green, Nashville),
Eric Heist (Momenta, Brooklyn), John Massier (Hallwalls), Joanna Raczynska (Hallwalls)

You've Got Dissent!

LEAVES OF CRAB GRASS is an exhibition that collects various post 9/11 responses of artists from across the country to their evolving (or devolving) world. The underlying question—which various curators were invited to consider when selecting the works—was the current state of dissent: in what forms and to what degree of intensity it is currently manifest. It should not be surprising that artists keep dissent alive, maintaining an inquisitive position toward the facts the world feeds us. When addressing topical circumstances, political or social, someone has to remain reluctant to believe the hype.

Which is not to suggest any conspiracy-mongering among the works collected here. But it is to suggest something about the way in which events and time torque perspective. When I first saw *The Last News* in a video lounge at Gale Gates Gallery in 2002, I recall people—liberal, free-thinking art-loving people—who were amazingly hostile toward the piece. They found it “in bad taste.” In actuality, the piece adopts bad taste as one of its organizing principles, congealing it with paranoia and an astute depiction of an over-indulgent media into a rapid descent into hell. That Draeger/Reynolds/Breslin have used clips from recent and easily-recognized disaster films does not diminish its impact. Those special effects sequences no longer seem gratuitous. By the time Guy Smit's newscaster is left alone and apoplectic at the world collapsing around him, the work's satiric position on the media ebbs and it's far from funny. We recognize his quivering dread.

In *America Rising*, Heidi Schlatter does not use actors or fictional clips, but the effect is equally disarming. Schlatter's compilation of selected post 9/11 television clips reads like a swelling inventory of unchecked jingoism, that heady mixture of myopic passion and overwrought sentimentality. There is no room for reasoned questioning here, no place for dissent. Eric Heist may be right that the apex of the piece is Dan Rather weeping on David Letterman—not because Rather shouldn't be as affected as anyone else by the severity of recent events, but because, in combination with his other pronouncements (“...wherever he [the President] wants me to line up, just tell me where...”), it seems to symbolize the mainstream news media's capitulation at the moment when what we really needed was their critical, calming eye.

There is a solid range of dissenting responses throughout these works. Corban Gallagher's propaganda portraits of the President, Vice President, and Defense Secretary as a troika of Orwellian neo-cons are illustrated in a style that is purposefully bold and intimidating. At the other end, nothing could be more

understated than Rainer Ganahl's subtly-powerful postcard pieces, in which cards with obviously fake stamps (“Al Qaeda,” “Old Europe,” “War on Terror”) made it through the mail. Cecelia Kane's daily inventory of news headlines draw our attention from the macro back down to the micro, focusing a specified awareness to stories that have long since coagulated into one long horrific blur. Jan Hankins' shrieking war profiteer atop a burning Hummer is rendered in a palette as garish and intense as its subject matter. Alfred Guzzetti's eloquent combination of war footage with a dark, eerily-calm forest taps into a primal sensation of a deep and nameless anxiety that lies behind much of what propels these works.

Some may see it all as just so much artistic spin, but then “spinning” is precisely what we rely on artists to do. If there is any overt political position among these works, it may be the politics of trepidation—not the fear of terrorism or weapons of mass destruction, but the fear that the world we inhabit has veered toward the nonsensical, where up really is down and there seems to be no good explanation for the shift. Artists, like many others, are not yet willing to concede that point, yet cannot deny the prevalent sensation that we are inside the looking glass, peering out.

— John Massier, *Visual Arts Curator, Hallwalls*

When Corban Gallagher joined the United States Army in 2000, he was in it for the travel. The world was a very different place back then and like many enlistees, Gallagher saw military service as an opportunity to see the world.

Shortly after 9/11, Gallagher and his unit were stationed in Korea and the troops were talking a lot about the possibility of being sent to Afghanistan. The men in his unit were preparing for that prospect when, in late 2001, rumors began to circulate suggesting that Gallagher's unit would instead be going to Iraq, a sovereign nation posing no immediate threat to the United States, and never linked to the attacks of 9/11.

Gallagher was part of a mobile artillery unit, a unit that would undoubtedly see heavy fighting once deployed. The notion of preemptive war didn't sit well with him and he unsuccessfully requested a discharge from service. In 2002, while still in Korea, Gallagher forged military documents, commandeered a military Hummer and took it for a joyride—a stunt he hoped would get him kicked out of the army. He subsequently went A.W.O.L. but then returned to Korea to turn himself in. He was officially discharged from the Army after serving three months in a Korean jail.

For Corban Gallagher, George Orwell's *1984* has particular resonance in George Bush's America. Contemporary manifestations of Big Brother, the ever-changing enemy and never-ending war, revisionist history, thought crimes and newspeak seem to be playing out on a world stage. The propaganda machines are in full

swing and they are unrelenting. Equally confrontational and unrelenting, Corban Gallagher's paintings operate using a kind of Orwell meets Russian propaganda poster vibe. Striking in scale and execution, Gallagher's *Orwell Industries* positions Rumsfeld, Bush and Cheney as arrogant imperialists who have put Orwellian political ideologies into practice. A translation of the Russian text on the paintings reads: War is Peace, Ignorance is Strength, Freedom is Slavery. In post 9/11 America, it doesn't take much of a leap of the imagination to consider the idea that Big Brother may indeed be watching.

— Diane Barber, Visual Arts Director, *DiverseWorks*

In the period of several months preceding the exhibition at Momenta, Rainer Ganahl sent over 100 postcards to the gallery. The artist made his own stamps which he used to post the cards. Containing phrases like, "Al Qaeda" and "Afghanistan", these stamps passed undetected by the US postal service and most arrived at the gallery. With the Twin Towers printed on the image side and slogans like, "Freedom Fries" and "Why Do They Hate Us" on the other, this project questions the political aftermath of the September 11th attacks while undermining the very systems that represent security.

— Eric Heist, Director, *Momenta*

In a recent after-screening Q&A, Alfred Guzzetti expressed his frustration and anger at US's illegal war in Iraq. Like everyone else, the filmmaker has witnessed the devastation paraded as victory on every news channel, read the permissive, laudatory remarks that pass as journalism and felt understandably helpless. *Night Vision* is Guzzetti's response and call for clarity in the face of the US government's ceaseless insanity.

Guzzetti delivers TV footage into the fold of a lush deciduous forest at dusk, where the dark green of the trees slowly turns into the distinctive green glare that is night vision on observational gear, military apparatuses, and surveillance cameras. He personalizes the impersonal "reportage" that is used as evidence of US victory, distilling images from that diluted maelstrom.

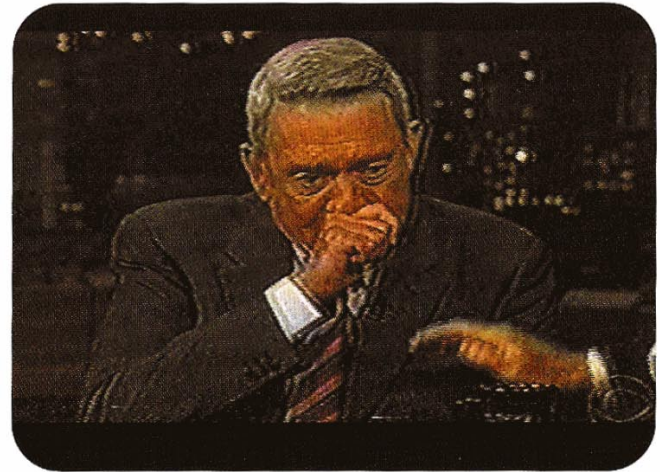
Night Vision invites us to question the Media's implications, its insidious arrogance, its safe and manipulative stance. The military might that the US is so proud of using "over there" (away from these shores, out in the desert, into the "mysterious" foreign land of the middle east that is channeled into living rooms) gets thrown into the center of a dimming wood in *Night Vision*. There is no safe haven in this piece. Elegantly paced with the mono drone of the soundtrack, we are asked to contemplate those images we have seen spat at us on TV, in peace.

— Joanna Raczyńska, Media Director, *Hallwalls*

Jan Hankins' *Mourning After* was first exhibited on September 11th, 2004. His solo show at Ruby Green was entitled, "Bummer, like whatever". These satirical paintings addressed the rampant hypocrisy, greed and corruption of George W. Bush's administration as well as our over-dependence on oil. Hankins uses the Hummer vehicle as a symbol of "war for oil". In this painting flowers fall on the bodies piling up while a victorious war profiteer relishes the moment.

— Chris Campbell, Director, *Ruby Green*

Since the Iraq war began in March 2003, Cecelia Kane has been painting a news story almost daily on stuffed white gloves. The gloves depict the headline, the date the story appeared and her interpretation of the violence, killings and occasional human-interest story. All of the characters are clownish whether they are victims or perpetrators. The artist uses gloves because fingers count, and this is a counting, time-based installation piece of unfolding, chronological events. Hands also act for good or

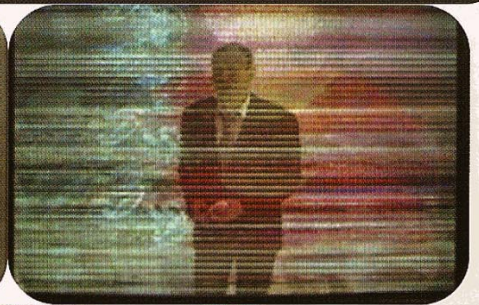
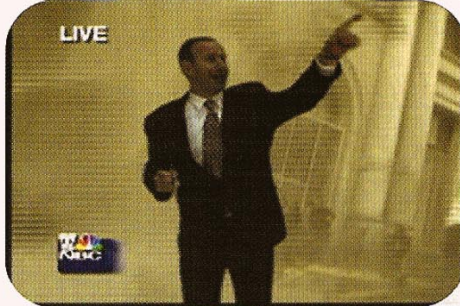
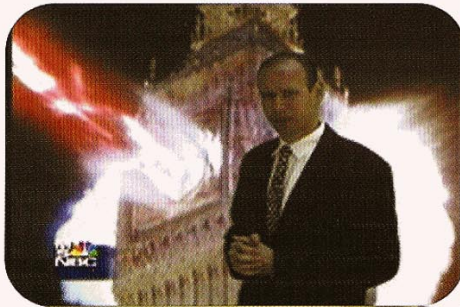


evil, construction or destruction, help or hurt. Lined up chronologically on a wall, the stuffed hands with red tips begin to resemble little bodies—each with a story to tell. This piece was shown in May of 2005 at Ruby Green.

— Chris Campbell, Director, *Ruby Green*

Heidi Schlatter did a video titled *America Rising*, excerpts from the media response to 9/11. Dan Rather crying on Letterman is a high point.

— Eric Heist, Director, *Momenta*



CHRISTOPH DRAEGER/REYNOLD REYNOLDS/GARY BRESLIN
The Last News, 2002
video, rt: 17 min.

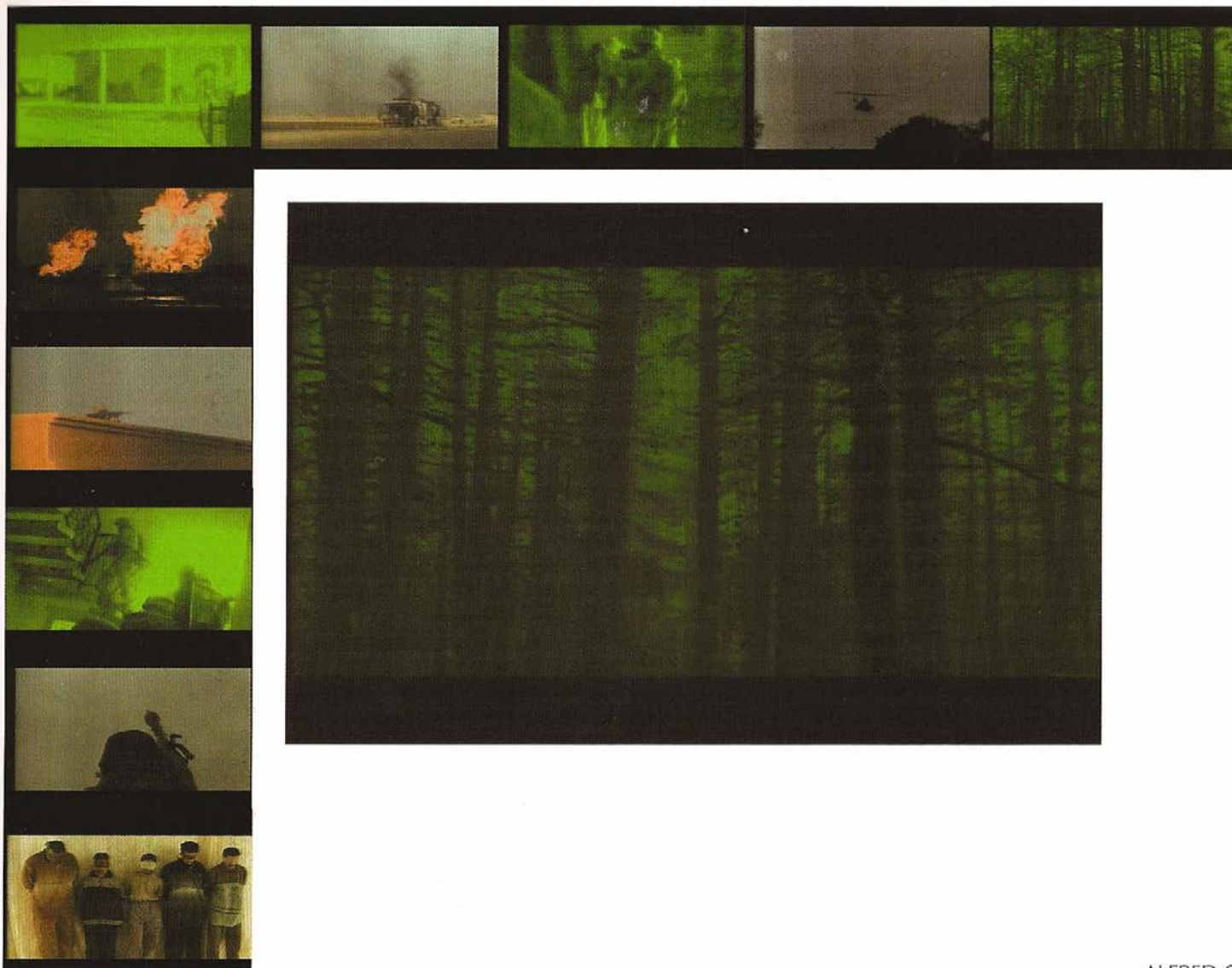




CORBAN GALLAGHER
Orwell Industries, 2005
acrylic on canvas, 66 x 150 in.



RAINER GANAHL
use a bicycle, momenta art, 2004
7/12 postcards



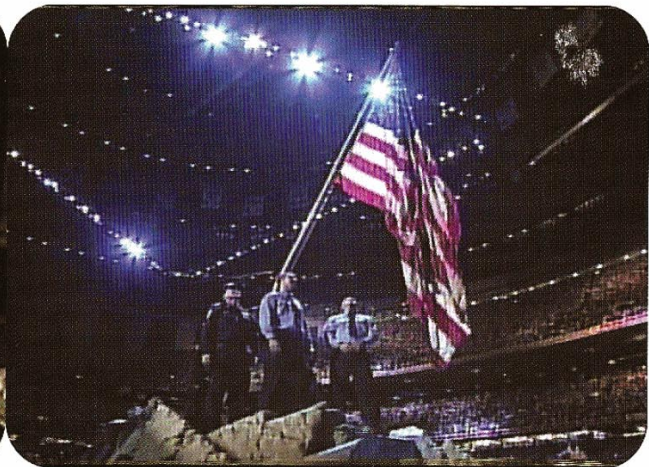
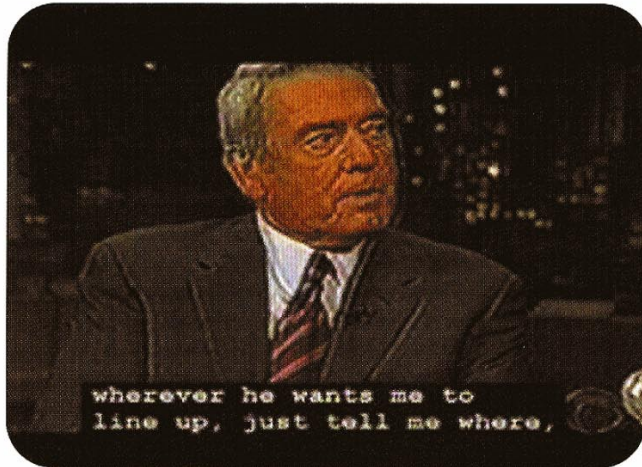
ALFRED GUZZETTI
Night Vision, 2005
video, rt: 2:21 min.



JAN HANKINS
Mourning After, 2004
oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in.



CECELIA KANE
Hand to Hand, 2004–present
acrylic and marker
on cotton gloves
dimensions variable



HEIDI SCHLATTER
America Rising, 2002
video, rt: 17 min.

Artists' Biographies

GARY BRESLIN, director and visual artist working in both the commercial and art fields, founded PanOptic in 1997 and has directed the company's projects ever since. Gary's work ranges from high-profile television commercials to music videos to internationally acclaimed short films and video art. Commercial clients include Coca Cola, Motorola, Sprite, ESPN, Pepsi Smash, Reebok, Nike, Ikea, MTV, Microsoft Windows, and Xbox. In February 2005, Gary was awarded Best Hip Hop/R&B Video at the Japanese Video Music Awards for his Nitro video "Still Shinnin'". His art projects and short films have taken him around the world to festivals and gallery showings from Spain to Croatia to Brazil. Gary is currently co-writing a feature screenplay titled Panarctic with writer Andrew Corless, and is also in pre-production on his first feature film *Constructio Infernalis*. Breslin lives and works in New York City.

CHRISTOPH DRAEGER works with scenes of catastrophe and disaster to both plumb the banal and the genuinely affecting from mediated images from which most people are increasingly abstracted. Born in Switzerland, Christoph studied art at the Ecole Nat. Supérieure des Arts Visuels de la Cambre, Brussels and the School of Visual Arts Luzern. He lives and works in New York City. Christoph Draeger has recently exhibited his work in "Greater New York" at P.S.1, Contemporary Art Center, Kunstwerke KW Berlin, Kunsthaus Graz and the New Britain Museum of Contemporary Art. He has had solo exhibitions at, among other venues, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, Musée d'Art Contemporaine, Toulouse and the Kunsthalle Fri-Art, Freiburg.

CORBAN GALLAGHER was born in Lubbock, Texas in 1979. He studied illustration at the Ringling School of Art from 1998-2000 before enlisting in the U.S. Army. He was discharged from the military in 2002 and is currently studying Education at Houston Community College. His work has been shown in Texas and Florida.

RAINER GANAHL attended the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, New York, in 1990-1991 and is a Master of Philosophy and History, University of Innsbruck. Recent exhibitions include The Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University Museum, New York, Museum of Modern Art, MUMOK, Vienna, Baumgartner Gallery, New York and Market Value, Cuchifritos, New York.

ALFRED GUZZETTI has made documentary and experimental films and tapes. His feature-length *Family Portrait* *Sittings* was shown at the Berlin, Edinburgh, and Sundance Film Festivals. *Beginning Pieces* won the Grand Prize at the 1987 USA Film Festival, while an earlier short, *Air*, took first prize in the experimental category at the 1972 Chicago

Film Festival. Guzzetti collaborated with Susan Meiselas and Richard Rogers on *Living at Risk: The Story of a Nicaraguan Family* (1985) and the feature-length *Pictures from a Revolution* (1991), which premiered at the New York Film Festival and received two prizes at the Leipzig International Festival. Since 1993 he has been at work on a cycle of small-format videotapes, the most recent of which are *The Tower of Industrial Life*, included in the 2002 Whitney Biennial, and *History of the Sea*, which premiered at the New York Video Festival in July, 2004. He is the author of the book *Two or Three Things I Know about Her: Analysis of a Film by Godard* (Harvard University Press, 1981), and is the Osgood Hooker Professor of Visual Arts at Harvard University.

JAN HANKINS is a Memphis resident. He has shown widely throughout the south as well as in New Jersey and New York.

CECELIA KANE is a multi-media artist working in video, performance, installation, painting, photography, costuming, puppetry and sculpture. She is a former Studio Artist at The Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, a curator, producer and community service artist with a Masters of Fine Arts degree in drawing and painting. Most recently her artwork has been focused on the war in the Middle East and the nature of good and evil.

REYNOLD REYNOLDS has created four films and three videos since 1995, often in conjunction with his own gallery installations. Among his awards are prizes from the South by Southwest Film Festival and Ireland's Cork Film Festival for *Seven Days 'Til Sunday* (1998), and an honorable mention from The Sundance Film Festival for *The Drowning Room* (2000). His video and installation works have been presented in Havana, London, Berlin, Seattle, and New York.

HEIDI SCHLATTER's work has been exhibited in numerous venues in the US and Europe including: Schroeder Romero Gallery, PS 1, Momenta Art and Wallspace Gallery in NYC, the Kunstbunker in Nurnberg Germany, Kunstlerhaus Boswil and the Daros Collection in Switzerland. She has received grants from NYFA & the Pollack-Krasner Foundation among others. She lives and works in NYC.

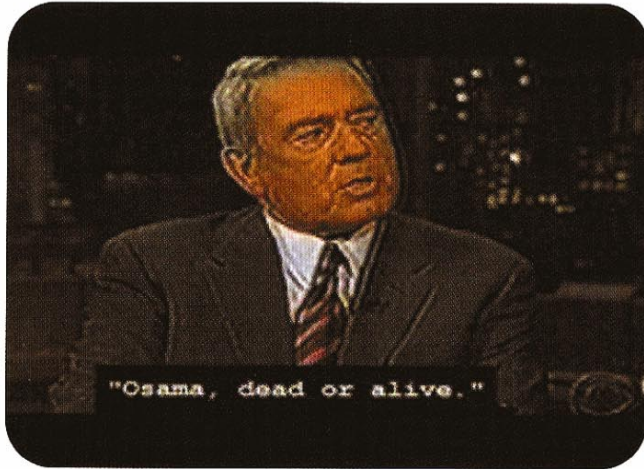
LEAVES OF CRAB GRASS

September 16 to October 31, 2005

@ 700 Main Street, street level, Buffalo, NY 14202

(temporary venue generously provided by Harold Kopp/EMI Building)

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Christoph Draeger is represented by Roebing Hall, NY.

Rainer Ganahl is represented by Baumgartner Gallery, NY.

Heidi Schlatter's work is available at Schroeder Romero Gallery, Brooklyn

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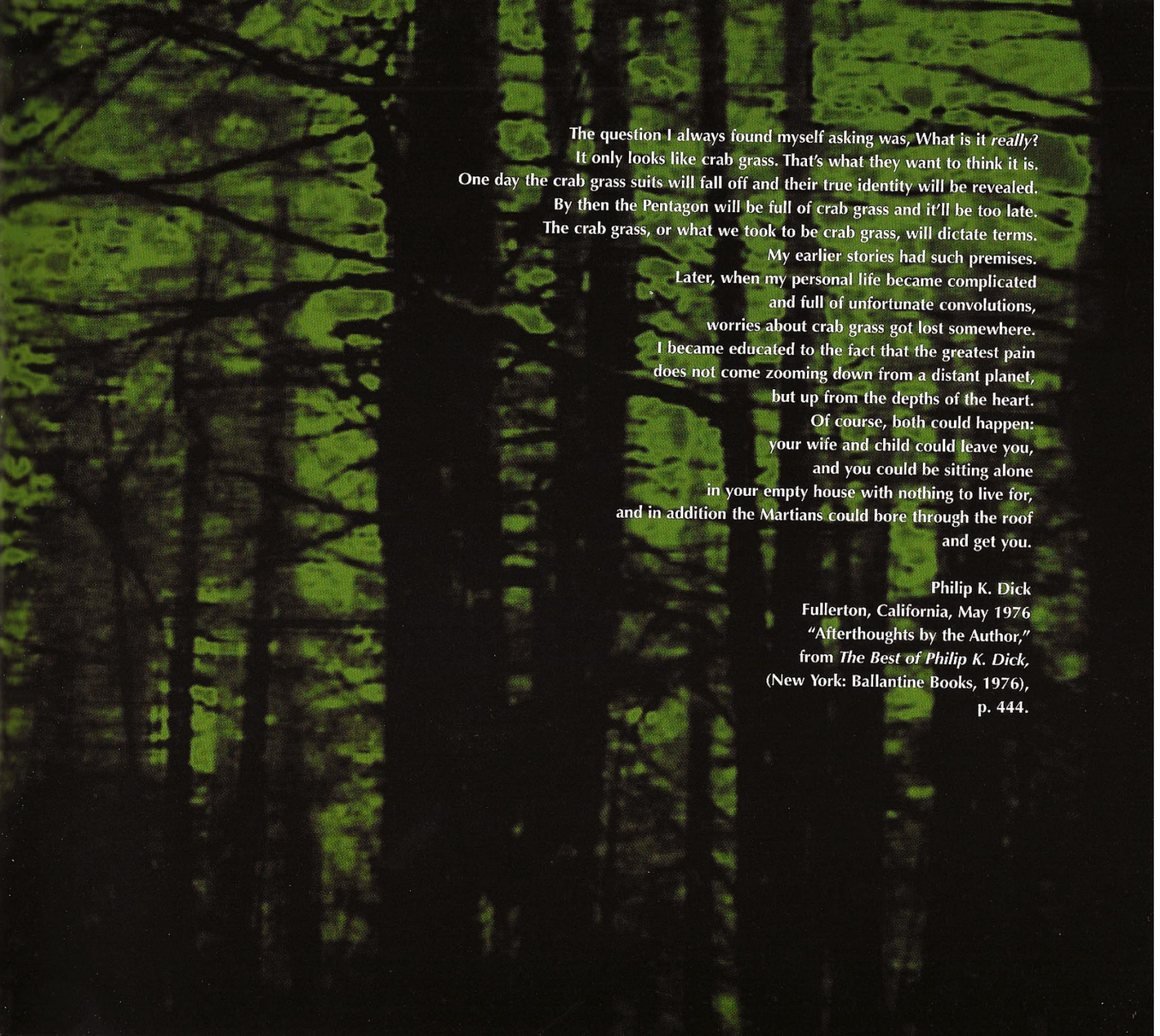
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The question I always found myself asking was, What is it *really*?
It only looks like crab grass. That's what they want to think it is.
One day the crab grass suits will fall off and their true identity will be revealed.
By then the Pentagon will be full of crab grass and it'll be too late.
The crab grass, or what we took to be crab grass, will dictate terms.

My earlier stories had such premises.
Later, when my personal life became complicated
and full of unfortunate convolutions,
worries about crab grass got lost somewhere.
I became educated to the fact that the greatest pain
does not come zooming down from a distant planet,
but up from the depths of the heart.

Of course, both could happen:
your wife and child could leave you,
and you could be sitting alone
in your empty house with nothing to live for,
and in addition the Martians could bore through the roof
and get you.

Philip K. Dick
Fullerton, California, May 1976
"Afterthoughts by the Author,"
from *The Best of Philip K. Dick*,
(New York: Ballantine Books, 1976),
p. 444.



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