

**Lisi Raskin**

***Launch on Tactical Warning***

**Essay by Lucie Fontaine**

The hollowed-out dearth in our understanding of a post-nuclear state formally resembles a darkened crawl-space beneath the stairs, an empty cardboard box left in the living room, the backseat of a van—where the most intimate, evocative, empathic fantasies are made. The work of Lisi Raskin collapses the field between stories built to articulate the monumental unknowability of the instant in which we cease to have experiences and the landscapes of "actual" base stations, launch pads, watchtowers—fortresses of classified information made available to our collective imaginations only through pulp movie memories and diminutive illustrations sanctioned by outdated textbooks. Such images, reproduced by our mind's eye in comfortably faded Technicolor, provide a structure or name for the greatest erasure—offering (limited) relief from the total fear it commands. That the truth, then, amounts to little more than our fictions, suggests the synonymous nature of being fenced in and being kept out. Raskin's re- or pre-constructions of ante-, mid-, and post-chambers are nerve centers sucked dry of frenzied activity; but inherent within the cold and still simplicity of painted instruments and their cut-paper read-outs is a warmth—an uncomplicated affection for the uncannily personal disasters we fabricate for our own use.

Raskin's installations and environments are surrounded by an aura of paranoia and terror. At the same time, something paradoxical is at work: Raskin continuously engages a bittersweet impression that melds play and obscurity, accessibility and control, establishing a series of situations where the viewer can decide between perceiving the dark side of reality or perhaps more conveniently masking sincerity for the glory of sublimation. While Raskin has connected her oeuvre to such authors as Jean Genet and George Orwell (an apt addition would be Michel Foucault's theorization of the so-called "Society of Control"), she operates a kind of displacement: her playful perfection is no more than a ruse waiting to be unveiled.

As art production since pre-history can be interpreted as performance, Raskin's pieces are performative in many ways. In order to achieve her immersive and simultaneously disruptive installations, Raskin is working the matter by erecting walls, cutting and painting wood, tearing paper, gluing, and folding. It is noisy: nails are hammered, holes are drilled, and instructions are shouted from a ladder down to a little army of helpers. Walking into Raskin's installations feels like stumbling across the scene of a crime, or an empty stage: something has just happened here, or something extraordinary is about to take place. These spaces, like three-dimensional film stills or cuts in time, articulate a present moment or fraction of a larger narrative. There is a clear cinematic consciousness throughout Raskin's work; the artist's fascination (or obsession) with the nuclear meltdown was mainly triggered by the Hollywood feature film *Silkwood* or the made-for-television movie *The Day After*, both from 1983.

In Raskin's early video *The Escape Pod* (2002), you, the protagonist, through night vision affected first person perspective, assess what appears to be a critical situation. Supplies are limited and you must put unfamiliar tools to use. You are completely alone. A freezer baggie labeled "WAY OUT" is held in front of the camera; but its sheer futility is no match for your pure, unadulterated desperation and hard-wired capacity for hope.

Recalling the histrionics of childhood productions staged in domestic surroundings with recognizable household props, a grown-up viewer is reminded of the palpable authenticity of the anticipation and utter panic these materials once roused and represented. If viewers project their own methods of forensic nostalgia onto the traces of Raskin's interiors, then the new abstract collages and calculatedly intuitive scapes are laboratorial test sites for an even more refined exploration. Unlike *Project Estrange* (2007) or *Mobile Observation (Transmitting and Receiving) Station* (2008), these works are a direct visual outcome of what's occurring here and now, rather than a search for source or effect. For this reason they are not authored by Raskin, but rather by Herr Doktor Wolfgang Hauptman II.

It is the creation and performance of Hauptman that subverts the conventional distinctions between art/life, male/female, and fact/fiction in the most radical of ways. Like many aspects of Raskin's practice, Hauptman is a product of both playful, unruly desire and meticulous strategy. The slightly nutty, close to

genius scientist, replete with a German accent, was conceived to lend more authority to the tall tale of a heat-loving fungus that could turn radioactivity into a non-toxic biomass. Almost surprised by her success in passing as a German male, Raskin remained in drag for an entire year. After Raskin had her first accomplishments outside of art school and established her own authority, Hauptman became dispensable and disappeared. Now, after six years, he has returned to allow Raskin to expand the possibilities of her artistic practice.

For the installation *Launch on Tactical Warning*, Hauptman has produced a body of abstract paintings and collages. Abstraction, as the outdated genre of “art for art’s sake,” is an unexpected direction for a critically-minded, narratively concerned artist, but the persona of Hauptman enables the investigation of this difficult territory. Hauptman has emerged as a trickster figure in Raskin’s practice, who makes possible through storytelling, metamorphosis, and distraction, the pursuit of any form of transgression.