

Robyn O'Neil WE, THE MASSES

These final hours embrace at last; This is our ending, this is our past.

About the artist

Robyn O'Neil (b. Omaha, Nebraska, 1977) studied British Art and Architecture at Kings College, London (1997), and received a BFA from Texas A&M University, Commerce (2000). O'Neil received a University Fellowship for Graduate Studies, Fine Art, at the University of Illinois Chicago (2001).

Major solo exhibitions include those at the Des Moines Art Center and the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (2001), which traveled to the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, and the Frye Art Museum, Seattle, Washington. Other selected solo exhibitions include those at Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, the Susan Inglett Gallery, New York (both in 2017), and the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX (2016). Selected group exhibitions include those at The American Folk Art Museum, New York (2008); the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (2007); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2005), and the Whitney Biennial, New York (2004).

O'Neil is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including the Hunting Prize (2009) and a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant (2008). Represented by the Susan Inglett Gallery, New York, O'Neil also hosts the poetry and literature podcast ME READING STUFF. She lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

Born in Nebraska, the Los Angeles-based artist Robyn O'Neil calls herself a "maker of worlds." Her wry, sincere humor infuses the artist's well-known apocalyptic and anxiety-ridden drawings. Ten years of which form the basis for her award-winning short film, WE, THE MASSES (2011). After attending Werner Herzog's Rogue Film School where she met Irish director Eoghan Kidney, the two teamed up to bring O'Neil's drawings to life in this thirteen-minute, stop motion animation.

Using her familiar archetype for humanity—sweatsuit-wearing men encountering opposition in nature or self-destructing in Bosch-like tableaux—the film explores futility, hope, and self-inflicted wounds as it swings from the foibles of humanity to the epic effects of weather and the natural world. Prescient yet eerily relevant, WE, THE MASSES tackles both public alienation and the unconscious anxiety of our social and political era.

The film begins with foreboding grey clouds. Wind roars and snow falls as a man drops out of the sky. A series of fruitless actions ensue as the vast landscape becomes a backdrop to the kicking of a dying horse, the lemming-like behavior of an encampment of similarly attired men, and a tsunami that engulfs the camp. The phrase "These final hours embrace at last; This is our ending, this is our past" appears followed by a rope descending from the sky—a reference to Winslow Homer's 1884 painting The Lifeline.

While seemingly a linear narrative, a resolution never arrives because, as the artist states, "Endings can be inconclusive, but yet are still called 'endings.' They are also starting points; things must end so that something else will happen."

Kitty McManus Zurko

CWAM Director/Curator

Please note that WE, THE MASSES starts on the quarter hour.

Running Time:
13:00 minutes
with a 2:00 minute
pause between
screenings.

Supported by a grant from the Irish Film Board, WE, THE MASSES is presented at the CWAM courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett Gallery, New York. O'Neil's recently published book, Robyn O'Neil: 20 Years of Drawing (2017) is available through Archon Projects.