

## Events:

**Friday, May 3, 4:45pm**

Screening of *SCHOOL OF CHANGE, REDUX*  
by Jennet Thomas

**Friday, May 3, 7:00pm**

*I AM YOUR ERROR MESSAGE* [Activated by Live  
Performance] by Jennet Thomas

**Monday, May 13, 6:00pm**

*E-Dogz: Zombie Apocalypse Refuge Center*  
by Eric May and Rimas Simaitis

**Wednesday, May 29, 7:00pm**

*Loophole Limbo*, video screening  
curated by Abina Manning

**Thursday, June 13, 7:00pm**

*The White Feathered Octopus Tarot Card Reading*  
by Jason Robert Bell  
*Zombies, identified*, a lecture/performance  
by George Pfau

For more information on these and other events,  
please visit [gallery400.uic.edu/events](http://gallery400.uic.edu/events)

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# ***I THINK WE'RE READY TO GO TO THE NEXT SEQUENCE: THE LEGACY OF HALFLIFERS***

HALFLIFERS

May 3 – June 22, 2013

Artists:

23E Laboratories, Jason Robert Bell,  
James Fotopoulos, Kari Gatzke, HALFLIFERS,  
Lauren Marsden, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy,  
Bjørn Melhus, Shana Moulton, Caspar Stracke  
and MASTERS OF TIME AND SPACE, and  
Jennet Thomas

**GALLERY 400**

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Tues–Fri 10–6, Sat 12–6

Covering more than two decades of work, *I THINK WE'RE READY TO GO TO THE NEXT SEQUENCE* moves beyond the retrospective format to re-examine, interpret, and pay homage to the extensive body of performative videos that HALFLIFERS—the collaborative team of Torsten Zenas Burns and Anthony Discenza—has produced since the early 1990s. Burns (Holyoke, MA, b. 1968) and Discenza (San Francisco, b. 1967) took the name HALFLIFERS from the Philip K. Dick novel *Ubik*, in which Dick uses the term “half-life” to refer to an alternate reality that dead characters experience while in a state of cryogenic suspension. This condition of a phantom reality has been integral to HALFLIFERS’ ongoing explorations, in which speculative fiction operates as a sublimated present, imbued heavily with the psychological weight therein.<sup>1</sup>

Employing a lo-fi aesthetic that amplifies the qualities of videotape and forms of its playback, Burns and Discenza perform as characters inspired by genres of speculative fiction, producing a sincere absurdity that reflects on the issues of anxiety and identity in our rapidly changing technological age. Included in the exhibition are HALFLIFERS’ re-edit of the collaborative’s entire video history into a new forty-five-minute loop and an alternative self-portrait that catalogs key materials, sources, influences, and other touchstones in a new book entitled *THE LAST KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF THE HALFLIFERS*.

Accompanying the work of HALFLIFERS in this exploded retrospective are sculptures, videos, drawings, installations, photographs, and paintings by a number of artists who have affinities with the collaborative. Each of the artists created new work that mines HALFLIFERS’ oeuvre in a variety of ways. Expanding on the centrality of speculative fiction in HALFLIFERS’ practice, some works touch on the tandem themes of alternative realities and calamitous events. Several artists draw inspiration from the unique worldview that is foundational to HALFLIFERS’ work, while others pay homage to particular, iconic elements and objects in HALFLIFERS’ work and history.

<sup>1</sup> Speculative fiction is a term that encompasses the more fantastic genres of fiction, including—but not limited to—science fiction, fantasy, horror, and supernatural, utopian, and dystopian fiction.

**23E Laboratories** is the creation of 23E Studios—an international arts collaborative with approximately eighty-five members. The group, founded in 2007, creates feature-length films, installations, and artworks that are largely responsive to the site and context of the project. In this exhibition, the collaborative functions under the auspices of a research laboratory, whose members accumulated information in the guise of a global research team. Given a finite amount of data, their team worked to uncover the connections between the world of HALFLIFERS and our own. Synthesized, layered, and connected, the findings are presented in evidence webs, not unlike those seen in crime dramas. The information creates a master web of connections that possibly reveals an underlying pattern, illuminating who, or what, HALFLIFERS is, was, or will be.

**Jason Robert Bell** (New York, b. 1972) produces work in a variety of media, from cartooning to sculpture, painting to performance, addressing mystical elements within the contemporary and the future. His art deals with fantasy versus reality, often constructing new figurative iconographies. In this exhibition, Bell presents *The White Feathered Octopus Tarot Deck*, a full tarot card deck whose title is taken from a novel the artist wrote during a painkiller-laden three-month recovery from a medical injury. The stream-of-consciousness book oscillates between autobiographies, fictions, and nightmares. Much like Bell’s novel, and in reference to HALFLIFERS’ video practice, the tarot deck was produced in an improvisational manner. Including portraits of figures from the HALFLIFERS’ orbit alongside mythical creatures, the cards will be activated in a “multi-mystical” tarot reading on the evening of Thursday, June 13.

**James Fotopoulos** (Brooklyn, b.1976) is primarily a

filmmaker, but also works in a variety of media, including music, design, and drawing. Because of his multi-disciplinary approach, Fotopoulos frequently collaborates with other artists, filmmakers, and musicians in his work. His contribution to the exhibition centers on *The Unknown Collaboration*, his ongoing partnership with Torsten Zenas Burns. Burns' and Fotopoulos' unmade film, featuring, among other things, androids, aliens, Leonard Nimoy, and iguana sex, serves as the backdrop for Fotopoulos' *So Be It (And It 'Twas)*, which incorporates the sculptures, drawings, and script from the unrealized work.

**Kari Gatzke** (Holyoke, MA, b. 1969) creates paintings that

are inspired by imagery from home, office, and store fixture supply catalogs. The artist investigates how merchandise is uniformly presented page after page, sending the mind into a world of abstraction and prompting one to ask, "What are these things?" The artist re-scales and re-presents select catalog items in shallow, frontal fields, sometimes in a trompe l'oeil fashion and at other times with highly defined, air-brushed surfaces. The paintings in the exhibition explore the malleable role of objects in the HALFLIFERS' world, and how the functionality of those objects simultaneously informs and is informed by the cultural and psychological backdrop they inhabit. These works examine how the identities of the objects open up once removed from their source material.

**Lauren Marsden** (Guelph, Ontario, b. 1982) produces

work that investigates themes of place and time, using performance to express the tensions of such binaries as past and future, fact and fantasy. The artist heightens these tensions by including unusual and misplaced characters and the reproduction of public speeches and media images. These devices create points of anxiety within her work, while infusing it with elements of awkwardness and rebellion. Responding both to HALFLIFERS' use of speculative fiction and the unique status of objects in the collaborative's work, Marsden's photographic series, *The Sightings*, documents a small swarm of photographers as they navigate between city ditches and Safeway aisles discovering and capturing an assortment of discarded objects and forgotten "monuments" in the world around them.

**Jennifer and Kevin McCoy** (Brooklyn, b. 1968 and 1967)

are multimedia artists who examine the genres and conventions of filmmaking, memory, and language. In order to focus on these structures, they often reexamine classic works of science fiction or television, creating sculptural objects, video projections, or live events from their findings. The McCoys have immortalized HALFLIFERS as zombie character piñata heads from the HALFLIFERS' *Afterlifers* videos from 2004. In the gallery, the zombie heads mingle with piñata self-portraits of Jennifer and Kevin in possible confrontation or collusion.

**Bjørn Melhus** (Berlin, b. 1966) attempts to interpret and redefine the relationship between mass media and viewer-ship through his videos. Using a variety of representational devices, Melhus creates deadpan depictions of well-known figures, topics, and mass-media strategies. Infusing humor and absurdity into his videos, the artist elicits a variety of emotions, from joy to fear. In the exhibition, Melhus pays homage to the way HALFLIFERS embodies a grotesquely distorted response to media and society within its work. *SUDDEN DESTRUCTION* reveals the artist disguised as a psychic medium who appears to be only half alive, and yet delivers an apocalyptic message comprising quotes taken from self-proclaimed evangelist prophets.

**Shana Moulton** (Brooklyn, b. 1976) creates video and performance works infused with unsettling humor and Pop sensibility. Her evocative, oblique narratives reveal an everyday world that is both mundane and surreal. Inhabiting a domestic sphere just slightly askew, her protagonist initiates relationships with objects and consumer products that are at once banal and uncanny. Moulton's new video, *Swisspering Pines*, a reference to her ongoing video series *Whispering Pines*, is framed by the act of applying and removing makeup. As the makeup is removed with a product called Swisspers, the body is, in effect, carved away. Through this act, Moulton explores Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR), defined as the physical sensation of pleasurable tingling that begins on the scalp and moves throughout the body. Moulton describes the relationship between ASMR and carving away the body to reveal spiritual essence as intimately connected to HALFLIFERS' notions of play therapy and psychic surgery.

**Caspar Stracke** (New York and Helsinki, b. 1967) is an interdisciplinary artist and filmmaker whose work considers themes of architecture, urbanism, media archaeology, and various social aspects of cinema. In *Press, Pulldown, Crunch*, Stracke relied on scripted variations of HALFLIFERS' conversations to inform the activities performed in the video and to serve as a platform for a dialogue between analog and digital aesthetics. Stracke's collaboration with his students (the MASTERS OF TIME AND SPACE, based at the Kuvataideakatemia in Helsinki) is evocative of HALFLIFERS' work with students, as well as each other. In the same way that HALFLIFERS creates videos without a storyboard, responding, instead, to props and signals, Stracke has created a similarly improvisational collaboration with his students.

**Jennet Thomas** (London, b. 1963) makes videos, performances, and installations that rely on speculative, experimental writing. Her work appropriates various media genres, including the news, film, and children's drama. Calling into question what we collectively consider meaningful, Thomas' work is often absurd and also disturbingly entertaining. *I AM YOUR ERROR MESSAGE* incorporates an urgent and unsettling communication that comes from an alternate dimension or, as the artist puts it, "somewhere between your brain and the almighty information cloud." This message alerts you that something is terribly wrong and immediate action is needed for salvation. A strange man is sent on a dangerous journey in order to stop the error sequence. You are saved, but are you still human?