

**Kahn and Selesnick, *Eisbergfreistadt*  
October 27 – December 8, 2007**

Irvine Contemporary is pleased to present Nicholas Kahn & Richard Selesnick's current project, *Eisbergfreistadt*, a new series of photographs, paintings, and installation objects. *Eisbergfreistadt* is the artists' second solo exhibition at Irvine Contemporary, following on their acclaimed *Apollo Prophecies* series and Aperture Press book. Opening reception with the artists, Saturday, October 27, 6-8 PM.



Nicholas Kahn & Richard Selesnick, *Cardgame*, 2007 (Detail). Photographic print. From *Eisbergfreistadt*.

With *Eisbergfreistadt* ("Iceberg Free State"), Kahn and Selesnick take their signature approach for combining documentary realism, speculative fictional narrative, and satire to a new level of technical achievement and contemporary relevance. Composed in a narrative sequence, the project documents the creation and dissolution of an imaginary principality, *Eisbergfreistadt*, which is inspired by a speculative "actual incident" occurring in 1923 during the German Weimar Republic, when a mammoth iceberg ran aground in the Baltic port of Lubeck. With the iceberg towering over the town and terrifying the populace, many thought that the iceberg caps were melting and the apocalypse was coming. This event inspired gloomy cafe songs, pulp fiction, utopian and dystopian fantasies, and even a deck of playing cards.

A new short-lived utopian society was created on the iceberg, and manifestos were published and citizenship laws drafted declaring the state's new ideals. The moment occasioned a burst of new artistic activity in graphic design and utopian painting. Many bank notes (*Notgeld*, "emergency money") and inflationary currencies were issued for the *Eisbergfreistadt*. The newly printed bank notes became so common and worthless that people reused them for other purposes and even burned them in place of firewood.



Nicholas Kahn & Richard Selesnick, *Bear Parade*, 2007 (Detail). Photographic print. From *Eisbergfreistadt*.

The exhibition includes installation objects from *Eisbergfreistadt*, stacks of bank notes, paintings on paper, and a series of utopian paintings inspired by Wenzel Hablik, a painter

and bank note designer from the era. Viewers are invited to recover the complete narrative of the lost world captured in the exhibition.

For Kahn and Selesnick, the literally dissolved Eisbergfreistadt is an ironic and prophetic image of global warming and hyperinflation. The artists appropriate Weimar utopianism, hyperinflation, and looming fascism as analogues for the conditions of our day. They challenge us to see what can happen at moments of crisis and panic, when the natural, political, and economic worlds seem to be colliding without resolution. At such a moment, we can sense that the future could go either way, descending into false utopias, fear, and fascism, or re-emerging into a world of recognition where change and hope are possible. Kahn and Selesnick take us into this fully realized imagined moment with their engaging irony, satire, and humor.

### **About the Photographs**

Kahn and Selesnick's panoramic photographs are composed of multiple camera shots in actual locations, which are then seamlessly montaged to create photographic narrative tableaux. Combining painterly compositional style with hyperreal photography, Kahn and Selesnick's images take camera work to the limits of the possible and without computer generated imagery. They work like art directors on a film shoot: everything begins as shots in a sequence, building a narrative, image by image, to be composed into a final photographic image. Their totally convincing photo-documentary worlds are achieved by continually restaging themselves and friendly collaborators in realistic costumes in actual physical locations: the narrative world is built up from the adventure of making and performing the shots.

### **First Exhibition of Mars Glider**

The exhibition also includes "Mars Glider," the first image from Kahn and Selesnick's new project on Mars, which was created following the artists' NASA commission.



Nicholas Kahn & Richard Selesnick, *Mars Glider*, 2007 (Detail). Photographic print.

### **About the Artists**

Nicholas Kahn and Richard Selesnick, born in New York City and London, respectively, have been collaborating since 1986, and now live and work in Ireland and New York. They have exhibited internationally, and their work is included in many notable collections, including: The Smithsonian Institution; The Washington Convention Center, Washington, DC; The Addison Gallery of American Art; The Brooklyn Museum; The Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University; The Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and The Philadelphia Museum of Art, as well as many private and corporate collections. They recently completed a commissioned photographic project for NASA on the exploration of Mars. Their photographic projects, including *City of Salt*, *Scotland Futurebog*, and *The Apollo Prophecies*, have been published by the Aperture Press (New York). A catalogue for *The Apollo Prophecies* has also been published by Irvine Contemporary.