

## CHECKLIST

### All works by Duke Riley

**Cher Ami**, 2000  
mosaic on wood panel  
48-1/4 x 42 x 1 in.  
From the collection of Jim and Irene Karp

**The Fifty Pigeon Camera Harness' Deployed in the 2013 Smuggling Operation**, 2013  
embroidered fabric, bra straps  
36 x 30 x 4 in.  
Courtesy of the artist and Magnan Metz Gallery, New York, NY

**The Fifty Pigeon Cigar Harness' Deployed in the 2013 Smuggling Operation**, 2013  
embroidered fabric, bra straps  
36 x 30 x 4 in.  
Courtesy of the artist and Magnan Metz Gallery, New York, NY

**The Filmmakers**, 2013  
Key West reclaimed roof tin, gouache  
dimensions variable, each tin  
approximately 14 x 9-1/4 in.  
Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, OH

**First Mission: Cohiba Carried by Joseph Hague for Duke Riley**, 2013  
Cohiba cigar on walnut laminate, resin  
8 x 6 x 2-1/2 in.  
Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, OH

**First Mission: Cohiba Carried by Pablo Escobar for Duke Riley**, 2013  
Cohiba cigar on walnut laminate, resin  
8 x 6 x 2-1/2 in.  
Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, OH

**Fly by Night**, 2012  
ink on canary paper  
27 x 32-1/2 in.  
Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, OH

**Fly By Night 1-6**, 2016  
UV laminated C-print mounted on anodized aluminum  
71-1/2 x 106-1/2 in. each  
(Photo Documentation by Randy Harris)  
Courtesy of the artist

**Forget Me Not**, 2013  
found seashells and wood  
50 x 50 in.  
Courtesy of the artist and Magnan Metz Gallery, New York, NY

**Fuck Yeah! Red Blinking Light**, 2012-2013  
steel base with glass display case housing several objects  
36-1/4 x 84 x 28-1/2 in.  
Collection of Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, 21c Museum Hotel

**Is that a Cohiba in your Pocket or are You Just Happy to See Me?**, 2013  
ink on canary paper  
5-1/4 x 5-3/8 in.  
Collection of John and Jamie Vigg, Ocean, NJ

**Pigeon Loft**, 2012-2013  
reclaimed wood, roofing and construction materials  
168 x 120 x 72 in.  
Collection of Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, 21c Museum Hotel

**The Smugglers**, 2013  
Key West reclaimed roof tin, gouache.  
dimensions variable, each tin  
approximately 14 x 9-1/4 in.  
Collection of Jon Friedland, New York, NY

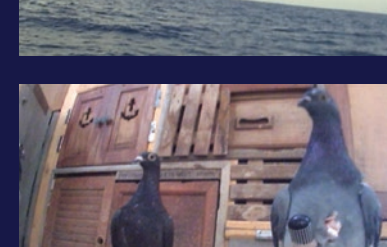
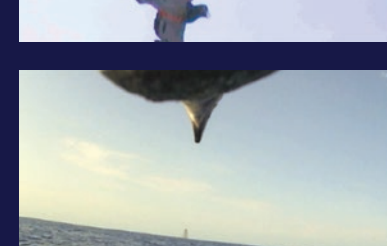
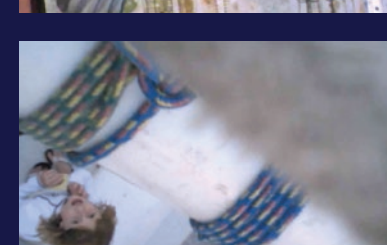
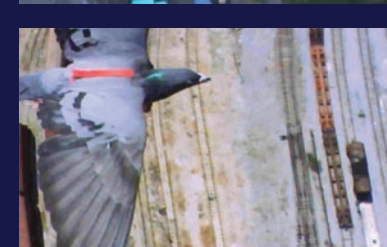
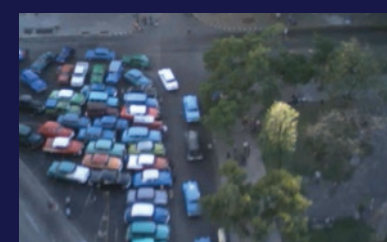
**Study for To Have**, 2013  
ink on canary paper  
11-1/4 x 11-1/4 in.  
Collection of Kristen Accola, New York, NY

**Study for And Have Not**, 2013  
ink on canary paper  
11-1/8 x 11-1/8 in.  
Private Collection

**Trading with the Enemy**, 2012-2013  
three channel video, 6:46 min.  
Edition of 5, 1 AP  
Courtesy of the artist and Magnan Metz Gallery, New York, NY

**Untitled**, 2001  
composite tiles on wood board  
60-1/2 x 50-5/8 in.  
Courtesy of the artist and Magnan Metz Gallery, New York, NY

**Where the Feds Look**, 2013  
found seashells and wood  
50 x 50 in.  
Courtesy of the artist



Duke Riley, video stills from *Trading with the Enemy*, 2012-2013

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Duke Riley: Flights of Fancy* would not have been possible without the vital contributions of the dedicated faculty and staff of the USF Institute for Research in Art. The talented team of Robert Aiosa, Emily Burch-Aiosa, Amy Allison, Shannon Annis, Madeline Baker, Alyssa Cordero, Mark Fredricks, Peter Foe, Ian Foe, Don Fuller, Ashley Jablonski, Eric Jonas, Vincent Kral, Will Lytch, Tony Palms, Tom Pruitt, Noel Smith, Andrea Tamborello, Randall West and David Waterman have all provided support for the many components of organizing this exhibition including grant and patron funding, contracts, artwork loans, exhibition design and installation, documentation, travel and event planning, marketing and promotion, publication design, educational programs and community engagement as well as so much more. Interns Madeline Hammer, Jing Lui, Alex Odom and Scott Pierce also assisted with exhibition preparations, and Marlena Antonucci provided support for the educational tours of the exhibition.

I have been exceptionally fortunate to have the opportunity to learn and work with such inspiring and incredible women in leadership roles at the Institute for Research in Art. I am especially grateful to Director Margaret Miller for her enthusiastic support of Duke Riley's work and this exhibition and Deputy Director Alexa Favata for her consistent encouragement and trustworthy guidance.

I am greatly appreciative of Duke Riley's project manager Kitty Joe Saint-Marie for her critical assistance and constant communication in planning the exhibition and associated activities and events. Alberto Magnan and Dara Metz, of Magnan Metz Gallery, and their staff were especially helpful with loans of Riley's work for the exhibition. I am also grateful to 21c Museum's Director and Chief Curator Alice Gray Stites who graciously loaned major works from Riley's *Trading With the Enemy*, anchoring the exhibition's curatorial structure. Additional lenders of works from that project and others expanded the context of Riley's oeuvre with pigeons more fully: Kristen Accola; Jon Friedland; Jim and Irene Karp; Ron and Ann Pizzuti of the Pizzuti Collection; and Jamie and John Vigg.

Thank you to the Arts Council of Hillsborough County, Board of County Commissioners and their staff for providing significant funding for the exhibition. I appreciate the patrons of the USFCAM Art for Community Engagement (ACE) fund for their contributions to promote educational and community engagement initiatives associated with the exhibition: Allison and Robby Adams; the Frank E. Duckwall Foundation; Francesca and Richard Forsyth; the Gobiuff Foundation; Courtney and Jason Kuhn; Linda Saul-Sena and Mark Sena;



Duke Riley, *The Fifty Pigeon Cigar Harness' Deployed in the 2013 Smuggling Operation*, 2013. (detail)

Sharmila and Vivek Seth; and Stanton Storer. ACE funds supported the production of a free exhibition poster created by Duke Riley specifically for *Flights of Fancy*.

Erio Alvarez of Alvarez Lofts cared for and provided his pigeons to populate Riley's *Pigeon Loft* for the duration of the exhibition and graciously offered to share his vast knowledge of pigeon fancying with the students and community as part of our Art Thursday educational program. William Dent and Andrea Slate provided critical guidance for navigating the University's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee policies and approval process for utilizing live animals in a research space. Thank you all for your extraordinary input and efforts to help USFCAM realize this unique exhibition.

I am especially thankful to Duke Riley for sharing his artistic practice and creative explorations within the fascinating world of pigeons with our institution, community and region. *Flights of Fancy* provides an exciting opportunity to engage new audiences with contemporary art and performative action in public space and I am delighted to debut new work generated from Riley's most recent project, *Fly By Night*, produced with New York-based public art agency Creative Time. It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with such an incredible consortium to bring Duke Riley's work to USF and the Tampa Bay region.

—  
Sarah Howard  
Curator of Public Art and Social Practice  
USF Institute for Research in Art



Duke Riley, *Fly By Night*, photo by Tod Seelie, courtesy of Creative Time.

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Cover: Duke Riley, *Fly By Night* 2 2016

## DUKE RILEY: FLIGHTS OF FANCY

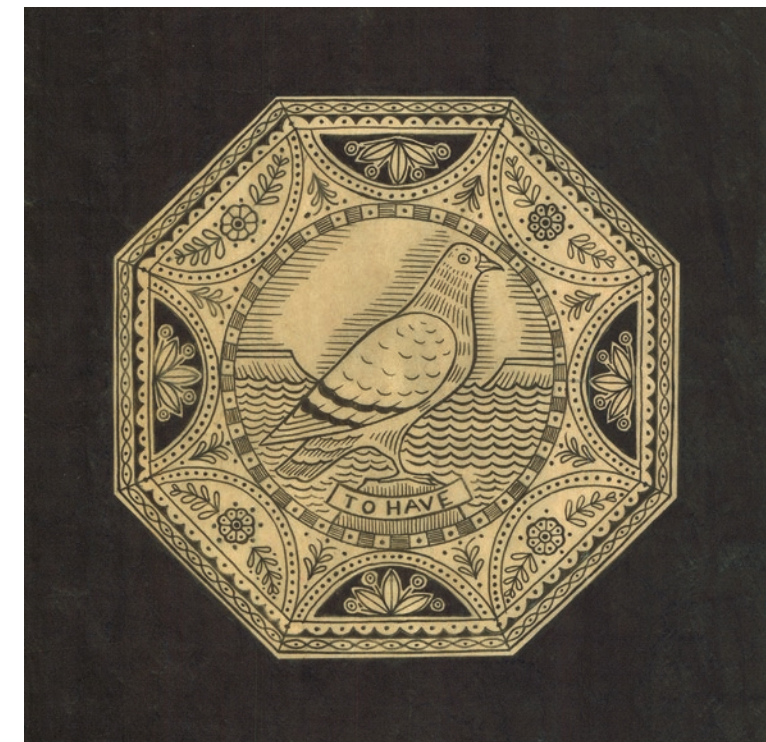
January 13 – March 4, 2017 | USF Contemporary Art Museum

## FOREWORD

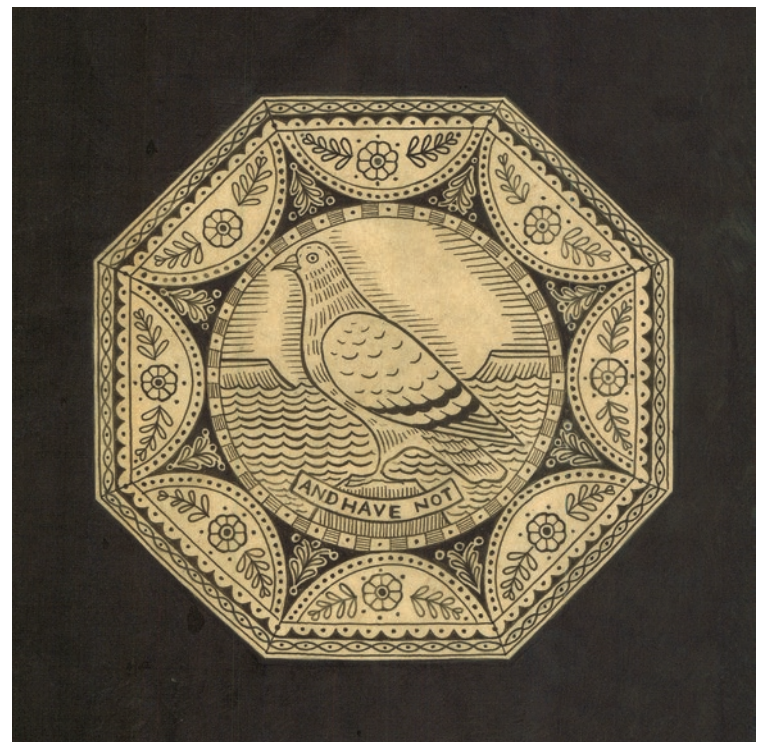
Duke Riley creates allegorical narratives with immersive and interactive projects that inspire viewers to consider a range of ideas and issues that affect today's culture and quality of life. *Flights of Fancy*, curated by Sarah Howard, Curator of Public Art and Social Practice at the USF Contemporary Art Museum, explores two of Riley's projects: *Trading with the Enemy* and *Fly By Night* were contingent on site and history, and both utilized pigeons as performers.

Academic museums are well situated to harness interdisciplinary thinkers in the research of socially engaged art's potential to generate political discussion, inspire public debate and shift perceptions. In recent years, the USF Contemporary Art Museum has extended its exhibition and educational programming to include community-based projects like *The Music Box: Tampa Bay*, which transformed a park in Tampa's Sulphur Springs neighborhood into a musical village and performance space. This project, also organized by Sarah Howard, brought the New Orleans Airlift collaborative to Tampa to create an immersive environment that offered opportunities for participation from diverse community groups and performance artists from many different disciplines. Just as *The Music Box: Tampa Bay* had a second life as the

Duke Riley, *Study for To Have*, 2013.



Duke Riley, *Study for And Have Not*, 2013.



## FLIGHTS OF FANCY

"Flights of Fancy" refers to a fantastic notion, a literal soaring of the imagination that is impractical and unrealistic to execute. Brooklyn-based artist Duke Riley is known for transforming outlandish and ambitious concepts into reality through immersive and experiential projects within the public realm. Often working above the law and below the radar in abandoned or neglected spaces within the nautical landscape, Riley organizes and stages revolutionary engagements and interventions in and around New York City and other urban waterways. Spotlighting contemporary social issues through a historical lens, Riley shifts and subverts the viewer's perspective through creative investigations and playful explorations, inviting us to question our perceptions of the natural world and our role within it. *Duke Riley: Flights of Fancy* unites works from two challenging projects incorporating homing pigeons in the public sphere, *Trading With The Enemy* (2013) and *Fly By Night* (2016). Riley's artistic practice expands on obscure historical events and embellishes facts to elevate reimagined acts into legendary affairs. He sheds light on contemporary social concerns of documented histories and national objectives, highlighting freedom, liberty, patriotism and the politics of public and civic space. Reframing the public experiences of Riley's work into the gallery space, *Flights of Fancy* seeks to shift the viewer's perspective and understanding of the themes within his work and acknowledge the deep resonances that illuminate Tampa's local history and culture.

*Trading With the Enemy* was inspired by the practice of ship captains who used carrier pigeons to communicate safe passage or distress when crossing the Straits of Florida prior to the US embargo. Specifically referencing the US Trading With The Enemy Act of 1917, banning trade with countries hostile to the US, the project questions the effectiveness of the US trade embargo on Cuba and also that of the Department of Homeland Security and US Customs and Border Protections. Millions of dollars are spent annually on surveillance devices and high-speed vessels to monitor the air and water around the US territorial borders with Cuba, which despite no hostile actions, is the only country that remains restricted under the act. The State of Florida and Key West have a long history of trade, both sanctioned and illicit, with Cuba and Havana. In this spirit, Riley spent four years planning and eight months training 50 pigeons to fly the 100-mile journey over the Florida Straits from Havana to Key West. Pigeons cannot be detected by surveillance balloons, nor can they be prosecuted for smuggling goods. Half of the pigeons were outfitted carrying contraband Cuban Cohiba cigars; the other half were equipped with lightweight video cameras, documenting the flight from their birds' eye perspective. Respectively called *The Smugglers* and *The Filmmakers*, each pigeon wore a handmade embroidered harness bearing the name of a known smuggler or an infamous film director who had run-ins with the law. Of the 50 pigeons initially groomed to make the flight, eleven successfully completed the journey to the loft in Key West.

Translating the experience of performative investigations from a public arena and reframing it for the institutional gallery space, Riley works in the style of a field naturalist, making observations, collecting data and conducting research in the field of inquiry, displaying the specimens and resulting observations in diorama-type environments. The installation of *Trading With the Enemy* includes objects from the production of the project including the *Pigeon Loft* from Key West populated with live pigeons, smuggled Cuban Cohiba cigars, a three channel video documenting the journey across the Florida Straits, portraits of each of *The Smugglers* and *The Filmmakers* painted on reclaimed Key West tin roof shingles recording the fate of each bird, and the collection of customized harnesses used to carry the contraband and cameras during the flight missions. Inspired by maritime folk art, Riley's drawing style and pictorial strategy reference a seafaring tattoo aesthetic and historical scrimshaw illustration. Employing the antiquated shell craft, two sailor valentines, *Forget Me Not* and *Where the Feds Look*, bear mottos of sentiment and warning revealing the systems of surveillance and authority omnipresent in public space. Prototypes, research materials and ephemera from the project reinforce Riley's investment in nautical culture and the intense effort of complex collaboration with the pigeons.

CAM's West Gallery displays large-scale, time-lapse photographs captured during the heralded public performances of *Fly By Night* (2016), when Riley and his team orchestrated a series of evening illuminated flights of a flock of about 2,000 pigeons outfitted with tiny LED ankle bands. Reminiscent of diagrams of global airline flight paths, trade routes or migratory patterns the images record the glowing movement of the birds as they glide, twirl, swirl and swoop through the twilight over the New York City skyline as moving constellations, brilliant gestures against the indigo sky. Produced by New York-based public art agency Creative Time, *Fly By Night* was Riley's gift to the city and his largest public artwork to date, attended by thousands of visitors. Integrating historical components, the project was located in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, a former shipbuilding yard and site of the US Navy's largest pigeon coop. Riley's massive flock of pigeons were housed and trained from a custom built loft on the former US Navy ship *Baylander*, docked in the East River.

Both *Trading With the Enemy* and *Fly By Night* combine the waning activity of pigeon keeping integrated with maritime culture, pushing Riley's practice from the space where the land meets the sea into the sky and beyond. Exploring marginal zones and probing the boundaries of autonomy and tolerance, Riley engages waterfront districts where the urban landscape used to function at the service of the tides, mariners and nautical industries and enterprise, but now serves as a backdrop for cruise ship terminals, real estate development and the resulting gentrification.



Duke Riley, installation of *Pigeon Loft*, 2012–2013.

Informed by historical context, Duke's work transgresses in a quest for independence and freedom, existing outside of prescribed social boundaries. Working in and around the New York City waterways since the late 1990s, Riley has dodged and been captured by the Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security while staging interventions in the nautical landscape. For *Belmont Island SMEAC* (2004) during the Republican National Convention, Riley planted a flag on an uninhabited island in the East River, under the shadow of the UN, declaring it a sovereign nation; the Coast Guard questioned and released him. In 2007, Riley organized a temporary pub and boxing event, *The Dead Horse Inn*, a reimagining of the Prohibition-era village of speakeasies that existed on an island alongside what is now the Belt Parkway in Brooklyn; police showed up and ran the participants off, although they returned to continue the revelry. Most famously, Riley received international exposure for *After the Battle of Brooklyn* (2007) when he commanded a custom crafted wooden submarine toward the *Queen Mary 2* ocean liner docked in the New York Harbor, reenacting the attempted Revolutionary-era attack on a British battleship by a similarly designed submarine. Riley was captured and arrested within yards of the cruise ship; his vessel was confiscated.

The two projects paired in this exhibition examine the complexities of working in the public sphere, both within and outside of the law, and probe how pigeons exist between the human and natural worlds, beyond the limitations and jurisdiction of regulated public space, trade policies and national territorial boundaries.

Expanding the pigeons' roles from companions, navigators and messengers to smugglers, filmmakers, spies, performers and stars, Riley demonstrates the incredible capacity of this most revered and reviled bird. As monogamous creatures that mate for life, pigeons have a remarkable ability to adapt for survival, an innate sense of orientation and navigation and the ability for recognition. The ancient and global species has been domesticated since the beginning of mankind and has consistently served humans as a source of food, fertilizer, companionship, a symbol of hope and peace across diverse religions and cultures, as sport and at war. Pigeons act as ambassadors between the human and natural world, a bridge between the earth and the cosmos and are represented across physical and cultural boundaries around the globe.

Fascinated by pigeons since his youth, when he nursed one back to health and it kept coming back, Riley relates to the species as

his "spirit animal." Pigeons have been a constant influence, inspiration and cause, securing iconic status in Riley's arsenal of imagery, appearing in tattoos, drawings, prints, mosaics and paintings, dating back decades. Two mosaics included in the exhibition demonstrate Riley's early devotion to the feathered creatures. *Cher Ami* (2000) pays homage to the homing pigeon that valiantly saved the lives of almost 200 soldiers during World War I, accomplishing her flight, through enemy fire, even after being shot down, taking a bullet in the chest and the eye and having one of her legs almost shot off. *Cher Ami*'s leg had to be amputated by the medics who worked to save her life, as depicted in Riley's mosaic. Heralded as a hero of the war, *Cher Ami* received many awards and accolades for her valiant service and upon her death was taxidermied and acquired by the Smithsonian Institution.

The Tampa Bay region is known as a haven for pirates, smugglers and the Mafia. Shaped by the cigar industry, immigration and trade with the island nation, the socio-political landscape of Tampa, and specifically Ybor City and West Tampa, continues to be intertwined with Cuban culture. Also home to the largest pigeon racing community in the US, the region provides a unique cultural backdrop for *Flights of Fancy*, as it weaves education and celebration of the attributes of pigeons into the ongoing questions about the future of relations between US and Cuba, which remain isolated yet connected. In addition, both *Fly By Night* and *Trading With the Enemy* highlight the culture of pigeon keeping, which is fading due to the financial and physical requirements of the activity and a lack of interest from younger generations. Just north of Tampa, where there is affordable real estate and mild weather year round, the town of Spring Hill is home to the largest pigeon racing community in the nation with some of the fiercest competition in the country.

By blending historical fact and fancy, the winged messengers in Riley's oeuvre act as bridges between the human and natural worlds, beacons that shift our perspective and guide our gaze beyond the horizon to the sky. Perhaps they can direct us to a space of interconnectedness, illuminating a world where dreams and flights of fancy can be found and realized.

— Sarah Howard  
Curator of Public Art and Social Practice  
USF Institute for Research in Art

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Duke Riley (b. 1972, Boston, MA) is based in Brooklyn, New York. Riley received a BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA from Pratt Institute. Working as a fine artist and tattooist, Riley stages performances, installations, and videos that interweave historical and contemporary events with elements of fiction and myth to create allegorical histories. Fascinated by maritime history and the cultures found in the nautical landscape, his re-imagined narratives comment on a range of issues from the cultural impact of over development and gentrification of waterfront communities to contradictions within political ideologies as well as commerce and the role of the artist in society and at war. Riley has had solo exhibitions at Magnan Metz Gallery, New York City; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland; the Queens Museum of Art, Queens, NY; and the Havana Biennial, among other venues. He has received numerous awards, residencies and commissions, including The Percent for Art Commission, a Creative Time Global Residency in Africa, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant, and the MTA Arts For Transit commission. In 2016, Riley realized his most ambitious public work and largest project to date, *Fly By Night*, produced by Creative Time and was recognized with a Village Voice Lifetime Achievement Award for Elevating the Prestige of Pigeons in the Public Consciousness.

Duke Riley, Roman Polanski detail from *The Filmmakers*, and "Pappillon" detail *The Smugglers*, 2013

