

Sergio Goes

Sao Paulo, Brazil 1964 – 2008, Honolulu, Hawai'i

exhibited in *Biennial VII*

left to right

Nothing Happens Sometimes, 2005

Grace Under Pressure, 2008

archival pigment prints

Cloud, from the Soul of the Whole series, 1994

toned gelatin silver print

we live in succession,

in division, in parts, in particles.

meantime within man is the soul of the whole;

the wise silence; the universal beauty;

to which every part and particle

is equally related; the eternal one.

and this deep power in which we exist,

and whose beatitude is all accessible to us,

is not only self sufficing and perfect in every hour,

but the act of seeing and the thing seen,

the seer and the spectacle

the subject and object,

are ONE.

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1803 – 1882)

Courtesy of Andrea Torres and the estate of the artist

SERGIO GOES

*Born in 1964 in São Paulo, Brazil
Lives and works in Honolulu, O'ahu*

The Great American Road Trip might be seen as a modern reincarnation of one of the founding myths of American history and culture—that relentless quest to travel until you run out of land, to “go west,” to span a country whose boundaries, east and west, are oceans, to explore a nation that is also a continent. The road trip not only recapitulates the history of pioneering exploration and colonial conquest, it also addresses many aspects of national character: extraordinary diversity of terrain, regional particularities of custom and behavior, admixtures of strangeness and familiarity, all brought under the big tent of “being American.”

Where Americans, born and bred, might embrace this narrative and this practice with untroubled enthusiasm and affection, others bring to it a different perspective—more complex, more critical. We have been richly informed, for example, by the early 19th century commentary of Alexis de Tocqueville, a citizen of France, whose commentaries, based on travels in the United States, resulted in *Democracy in America*, published in two volumes in 1835 and 1840, which remains one of the critical mirrors of the concept of civil society. More recently, we have come to understand ourselves through the work of

the artist-photographer Robert Frank, Swiss by nationality, who made several road trips in the mid-1950s, culminating in the publication of *The Americans*, a photo essay initially derided but subsequently considered a seminal work in modern photography.

It is in this context that Brazilian-born photographer and film-maker Sergio Goes works. Goes' father was head of an advertising agency in Brazil, through which the young Goes had access to a photo lab as a result of an interest in the medium developed in his mid-teens. He completed his studies for the MBA in São Paulo and first came to the United States in 1987. After a brief period of study at UCLA in marketing and advertising, Goes came to Hawai'i in 1988 for a vacation and, like so many others, found himself permanently transplanted.

His early and avocational interest in photography became the source of more concentrated personal, then commercial, work; Goes moved from advertising to documentary photography, increasingly interested in telling stories through images. This led to an interest in film-making, which Goes initially explored in smaller formats. He also worked for a number of

years in a commercial lab as a photographic printer, learning the refinements of the trade.

Goes chose to leave the islands for New York city in 1997, interested in further exploration of the media to which he had grown increasingly committed. In New York, he again worked in a commercial lab (printing for other artists, including Richard Avedon) while pursuing his own work. During this period, Goes met a struggling but upcoming rapper named Tiz (Tislam Miller) living in the public housing projects of Brooklyn's East New York. Editing nearly two years of filming, Goes produced the award-winning feature-length film *Black Picket Fence*, a documentary that chronicles the struggle for success of this young African-American rapper, still tied to earlier connections with drug culture. The film evokes a sense of both the American dream and American tragedy.

Goes revealed his strength in enabling his subjects to work through the medium of film to speak with extraordinary candor about the rough contours of their lives. This capacity to use film and photography as a revelatory but transparent medium continues to be an essential aspect of Goes' work. Since returning to the islands, Goes has, with business partner Chris

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GOES (continued)

Kahunahana, been the force behind the Cinema Paradise Film Festival, providing an important venue for independently produced films.

In the fall of 2001, the lives of Goes and his young family, like those of so many others, were profoundly transformed by the bombings of the twin towers of the World Trade Center, a turning point in national history that produced a sea-change in the collective psyche. He soon made a decision to return to Hawai'i, setting in motion a journey begun in late 2001 that culminated in *God Bless America: ATM Inside*. While Goes' wife, then pregnant with their son, flew back to the islands, Goes joined forces with the Texas writer Greg Young, who helped develop an itinerary of key stops, mostly through southern states, along the route from east coast to west.

In a journey that took 10 weeks to cover 9000 miles and produced 65 hours of footage along with numerous still images and a series of narrative e-mails, Goes and Young traveled across the U.S. continent, using secondary roads, backtracking on occasion, interested in gathering a portrait of the country and in creat-

ing a personal diary. That material sat on the shelf for two years, until Goes realized that, although his journey had been set in motion by the events of September 11, 2001, the record of that journey had more fundamentally to do with the lives of people he had encountered on his cross-country road trip. The broad-brush agenda of an anxious nation was thus juxtaposed with the rich detail, poignant and humorous in turn, of the individual lives that provided points of intersection on the journey. As Goes noted in a message sent at the beginning of his journey in November 2001, "There in front of us is the road and somehow the road doesn't change but everything else does—the trees, the air and the accents in the voices...In each person we meet the stories jump from them without the asking—so rich is every moment."

A sign outside a motel provided the title for Goes' documentary of his journey, alluding to the oddly juxtaposed anchors—God and Mammon, religion and commerce—of American culture. The current installation, creating a visual corridor through which the viewer may travel, distills some of the many images gathered along the way—fellow travelers and truck-

ers along the highways that form the circulatory system of the nation, interiors of rest-stops, residents of communities from Tennessee to California, American portraits from Viet Nam vets to native Americans, and glimpses of the landscape that emerges, day and night, as the still and implacable bedrock of a country ever on the move.

No single image can capture the fullness of the American experience, and every visual narrative is informed by a particular perspective. Goes continues to refine his interest in human stories, nurtured by the cultivation of a sense of trust, even if only for a passing moment, that allows him to move, camera in hand, beyond intrusiveness to intimacy. The visual narrative that emerged from his own road trip adds a new layer of resonant meaning to an ongoing mythic journey. Near the end of his own journey, in February 2002, Goes again wrote in his e-diary, "A very intense experience suddenly comes to an end, yet somehow the shadows of the road still give us dreams of those we met...The ride is never over, just starting again, and again."