
THE BOX

November 1–30, 2013

Peter Garfield

The Reverse Circumference of Zero (2013)



Image courtesy of the artist

The Reverse Circumference of Zero examines ideas of time, mortality, history, and memory. The artist stands in for John F. Kennedy on the autopsy table in an open exploration of a historical moment whose ripple effect spread throughout the world and into time. The reverberations of the piece deepen with the knowledge that he is the great-great-grandson of another assassinated president, James A. Garfield. Produced with support from the Wexner Center's Film/Video Studio, the project makes its world premiere on the 50th anniversary of JFK's assassination. In an email interview between Jennifer Lange, Curator of the Film/Video Studio Program, Peter Garfield explains its genesis.

JL: The assassination of President John F. Kennedy is one of the most famous events in American history. And the subsequent autopsy and investigation are still the source of speculation and disagreement to this day. I think all Americans feel a very personal connection to this story but yours is particularly so. Can you tell us a bit about the idea for this piece and its evolution?

PG: This work was borne more out of a compulsion than an idea, with the ideas coming later, out of necessity, as I tried to find some form that could translate something that was beyond me. As my father struggled in the late stages of Alzheimer's disease, I began to see in my mind photographic images that I had come across in an underground magazine, maybe 20 years before, of JFK at Parkland Hospital. They were gruesome and very disturbing, yet riveting. I tried to

ignore them but they persisted for over a year before I decided that they had to be "exorcised" creatively.

Somehow, I was reliving an event of which I had no personal memory, having experienced it only indirectly through my elders and through years of media saturation. It likewise led me to start reliving an unresolved trauma in my own family, the assassination of President James Garfield, my great-great-grandfather. As a young boy, my father's grandfather was with the president when he was shot. My father had known an eyewitness to the tragedy back in 1881 yet no oral history was passed down to him. The depth of the trauma had prevented anyone from speaking of it. And now my last link to this history was fading. I had to find some way to transfigure this loss.

JL: Your work in photography and video uses subtle strategies of artifice to question the veracity of the image. In The Reverse Circumference of Zero, the artifice is foregrounded in the form of a second screen that acts like surveillance footage. How do you see the two images in dialogue?

PG: I guess the close-up color image is a manifestation of my compulsion, the animation or reanimation of a perceived collective memory. The shot from above, of the oval track and the film crew, represents my processing of that—an attempt to detach from and objectify something painful. The dolly rotates counterclockwise, representing my wish to take back time to find answers, change history, make things better.

JL: What are you working on now?

As part of a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, I'm currently working on a research a project tentatively titled *Mourning and Transcendence from the Great Plains to the Sea of Tranquility*. I like the title, but I don't know yet where it's going.

Peter Garfield is an interdisciplinary artist working primarily in photography, video, sculpture and drawing. A graduate of Dartmouth College and the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris, he is now based in Brooklyn, NY. He was a 2009 finalist for the Prix de Rome is a current recipient of the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship. For more information visit petergarfield.net

Peter Garfield

The Reverse Circumference of Zero (2013)
9 mins., HD video

Wexner Center for the Arts

The Ohio State University