

GREGG PERKINS: SUNSHINE CITY

FEBRUARY 3 – MAY 20, 2018

Lee Malone Gallery

CHECKLIST

E.G. BARNHILL (American, 1894-1987)
THE SUNSHINE CITY from *Florida Landscapes*, c. 1930
Postcard
Gift of Dr. Robert and Chitraneé Drapkin

GREGG PERKINS (American, b. 1969)
SUNSHINE CITY, 2018
Digital print
Courtesy of the Artist

FIRST AND FIRST, 2018
HD video; 7 minute duration
Courtesy of the Artist

A DESCRIPTION WITHOUT PLACE, 2018
IOS mobile application
Courtesy of the Artist



The MFA Spotlight series
focuses on contemporary
art by artists with ties to the
Tampa Bay Area



GREGG PERKINS: SUNSHINE CITY



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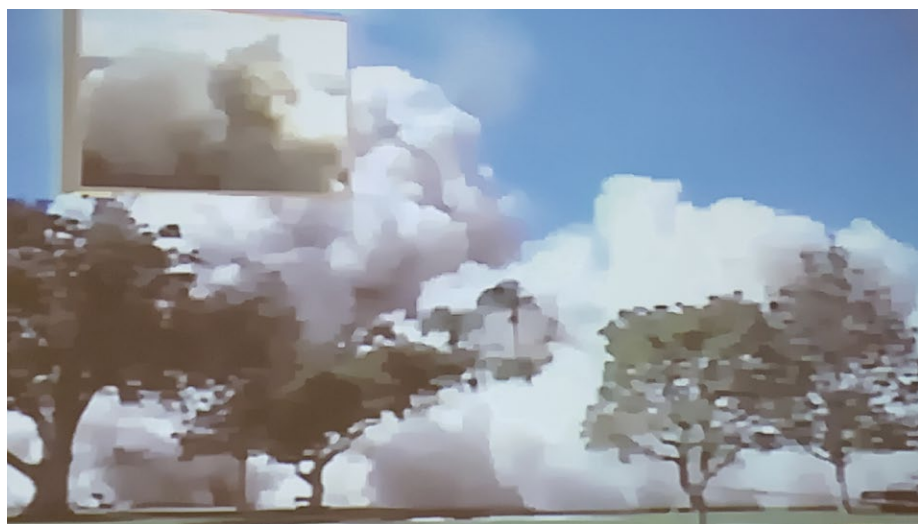
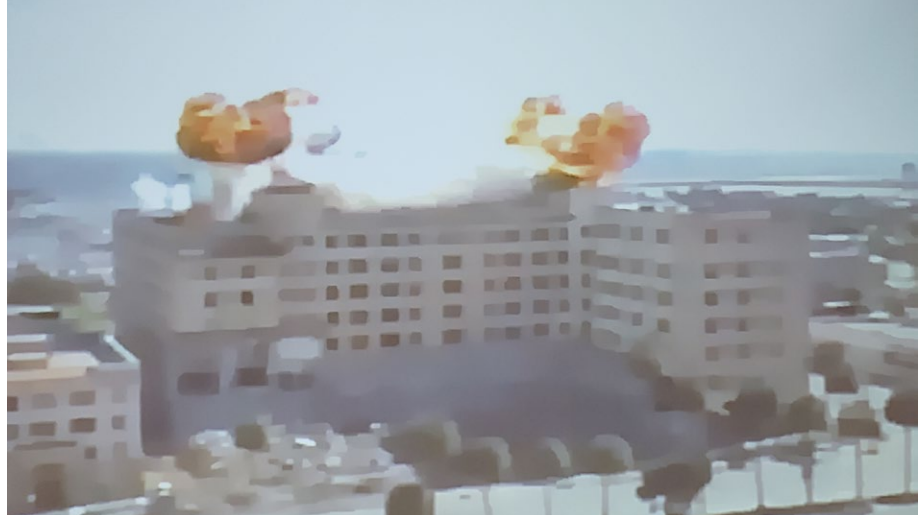
GREGG PERKINS

earned his BA in philosophy and an MFA in painting from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He taught studio art and art history at the University of Wisconsin, and was guest faculty in the graduate painting division at The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. Currently he is Chair and Associate Professor of Film, Animation and New Media at The University of Tampa. Perkins's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, most recently at the North Carolina Museum of Art.

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Cover: Gregg Perkins, *Sunshine City*, 2018, Digital Print, Courtesy of the Artist

Right: Gregg Perkins, *First and First* [video stills], 2018, HD Video, Courtesy of the Artist



Rooted in and inspired by historical research, the digital artwork of multidisciplinary artist Gregg Perkins (American, b. 1969) addresses not only the slippages between past and present, but also the representation of historical fact. Perkins mines data in a multitude of forms, and attempts to recreate the past using technologies of today. Throughout these attempts, however, is an undertone of futility – Perkins is well aware of what he deems the boundaries of reconstruction: the “wedge between historical accuracy, and the limits of what can be known.”¹

For his Spotlight exhibition, Perkins took inspiration from a 1930s postcard titled *Sunshine City* by E.G. Barnhill (1894–1987), an American photographer known for his atmospheric, hand-painting technique. The postcard depicts the skyline of St. Petersburg from the vantage point of Vinoy Park, with the now-demolished Soreno Hotel standing at center. Perkins recreated and enlarged that photographic scene using a present-day view and digital technologies that mimic Barnhill's vivid hand-painted elements. The updated version reflects the rapid development the city of St. Petersburg is undergoing, epitomized by the seemingly omnipresent towering cranes.



E.G. Barnhill
The Sunshine City from Florida Landscapes, c. 1930
Postcard
Gift of Dr. Robert and Chitranee Drapkin

In the video *First and First* (2018) Perkins further explores the history of the Soreno Hotel, appropriating imagery from its 1992 demolition to create a painterly, theatrical (in fact, some footage was used for the action movie *Lethal Weapon III*) depiction of the destruction. The video opens with design motifs taken from the Hotel's interior design, coupled with a subtle soundtrack referencing Federico Fellini's 1963 film *8 ½*, the plot of which revolves around an unfinished film. The theme of the unfinished, or never-ending, is perhaps summarized in Perkins's idea of the city as a palimpsest: “a layering of architecture and histories in different time signatures, expanding and contracting.”²

These layers are tricky to map. Numerous writers have toyed with the idea of creating a map at a 1:1 scale, testing the very limits of representation.³ At what point do the original and its representation merge? Using blueprints and

Unity 3D modeling software, Perkins has designed a mobile application that allows visitors to explore the Soreno Hotel's original floor plan on an iPad. Titled *A Description Without Place*, this first-person player application references a 1945 poem by Wallace Stevens...“because everything we say / Of the past is description without place, a cast / Of the imagination, made in sound.” Perkins is fascinated by the merging of fact and fiction, and of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière's idea that “the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought.”⁴ Much of our experience of reality is shaped by our description of it.

This is not the first time that Perkins has taken on an ambitious mapping project. His 2014 exhibition *First There is a Mountain* at Atelier Bleu Acier focused on Walter Mittelholzer (1894–1937), a Swiss aviator, explorer, and pioneering aerial photographer. Specifically, Perkins was inspired by Mittelholzer's photographs of Mont Blanc, taken with a bulky 4 x 5 camera. These aerial photographs allowed for the reproduction of views that had until then been impossible to see.⁵ Perkins worked with NASA imagery to recreate the mountain's topography in video form, allowing for digital exploration of its terrain. This desire to recreate and map the natural world is matched in *Sunshine City* by a desire to do the same with the rapidly changing cityscape.

Writer and futurist theorist Alex Steffen has addressed the 1:1 map and considered its relevance to cities today. He suggests that the idea is rather moot at this point, considering our technological developments – the map is there, but dematerialized. As technology continues to seep into our daily lives, Steffen suggests the following for considering the changing city: “Go to a street you know well, and find the oldest picture of it you can. Look at it as you walk down that street, and try to think of all the ways your thoughts, actions and interactions are being informed by access to understandings of that street and its context that would have been unlikely, if not impossible, twenty years ago.”⁶ With *Sunshine City*, Perkins brings these thoughts to the forefront, and allows for varied explorations of St. Petersburg's many layers.

– Katherine Pill, Curator of Contemporary Art,
Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg

¹ Interview with Gregg Perkins, 24 January 2018, St. Petersburg, FL.

² Ibid.

³ See Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, New York: Macmillan and Co., 1894; Umberto Eco, “On the Impossibility of Drawing a Map of the Empire on a Scale of 1 to 1,” *How to Travel with a Salmon and Other Essays*, New York: Mariner Books, 1995; Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitude in Science,” *Los Anales de Buenos Aires*, año 1, no. 3, 1946.

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London: Bloomsbury, 2004, 35.

⁵ Jane Simon, “Gregg Perkins: First There is a Mountain,” 2014. Tampa: Bleu Acier, exhibition brochure.

⁶ Alex Steffen, “A few rough thoughts on the 1:1 map that is your city,” 14 March 2013, http://www.alexsteffen.com/a_few_rough_thoughts_on_the_1_1_map_that_is_your_city