

Heather Woodbury's Upcoming *As the Globe Warms* and LACE's *American Realism*

By Steven Leigh Morris
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In the summer of 2010, in a doughnut shop off Sunset Boulevard in Echo Park, had you gazed across the street you might have seen through the glass windows of storefront art gallery Echo Curio the impish Heather Woodbury bouncing around in front of an audience of about 30 sitting on folding chairs. She clutched a microphone and her body language was animated. Upon closer inspection, you'd have seen a tripod holding a video camera in one corner, which is not that unusual in any performance venue — capturing the show for archival or grant purposes. However, Woodbury's half-hour performance was just one episode in a series called *As the Globe Warms*. The 33 episodes, which she performed at Echo Curio, Bootleg and Workspace between 2010 and 2011, are available in 30-minute versions on Woodbury's website, heatherwoodbury.com.

The fictional town of Vane Springs, Nev., forms the centerpiece for *As the Globe Warms*, which follows the efforts of outsider frog specialist Reed Winston Ferris to save the endangered Butterscotch Frog, while trying to salvage the long-distance relationship with his girlfriend, who's writing a book about anarchist Emma Goldman.

Woodbury is performing a distillation of that series at REDCAT this coming weekend, as part of the venue's New Original Works Series. (Other performers on the bill are performance artist Emily Mast and actor Melanie Rios Glaser.)

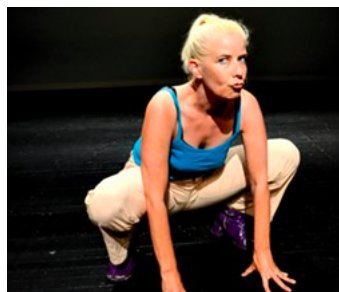


PHOTO COURTESY OF HEATHER WOODBURY
Heather Woodbury

Location Info

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Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE)

6522 Hollywood Blvd.,
Los Angeles
HOLLYWOOD
☎ 323-957-1777
www.welcometolace.org

REDCAT: Roy & Edna Disney/CalArts Theater

631 W. Second St.,
Los Angeles
DOWNTOWN
☎ 213-237-2800
www.redcat.org

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Let's face it — you don't need to go crazy this week (that's what Halloween weekend is for!). But that

So how is *As the Globe Warms* any different from a TV series, or the soap opera genre suggested in the winking title? The epic saga and cornucopia of characters are all presented by one performer, in what Woodbury calls a "public development process" of a performance novel, a theater-literature genre that has become Woodbury's calling card.

In September 1994, Woodbury answered the dare of a friend to write a show a week for an entire year. The result was her 100-character epic serial in eight installments, entitled *What Ever*, which followed 10 characters across America as they interacted with the other 90.

That's the epic scale of Woodbury's imagination in a game of building on what's gone before to keep a story going.

Woodbury points to Charles Dickens as an early source of inspiration. He wrote in serial form, read excerpts out loud in the back of a London pub and continually modified his plots based on feedback.

In 2001, Woodbury received both an NEA/TCG Playwrights Fellowship and a development grant from the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays for a work that obviously had Dickens in mind and was eventually performed by several actors, *A Tale of Two Cities*. The two cities were New York and L.A., and the plot concerned a gallery of characters whose lives were affected by the move of the Brooklyn Dodgers from the East Coast to the West. Woodbury co-premiered the work at UCLA and New York's Performance Space 122 in 2006, landing both the *L.A. Weekly's* Solo Performance Award and an Obie.

Besides the fact that Woodbury is performing solo works of theater, the other obvious difference between her serials and network soap operas lies in the production values. *As the Globe Warms* "seems to attract young people online," Woodbury says. They have no problem with "the single-camera shots seen on a computer. They don't care about the low production values on their cellphones. They start revolutions, in fact. And then the literary people, they're aural, so the low production values don't bother them."

The epic sprang from the summer of 2008, when Woodbury was campaigning for Barack Obama in L.A. and Las Vegas. "Obama needed to win in Nevada. My mother had just died and that was the first and only thing I felt like doing, in grieving for my mom. She was a good person and a person who was civically engaged."

Woodbury's tribute involved "knocking on the doors of people who lived in these working-class,



doesn't mean you have to sit on your couch crafting your costume and sneaking candy all week. Get out there! With so many great events happening this week, you don't...

October 24, 2014

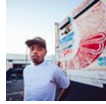
Long Beach Rapper Boogie Tells Us to Get Our Thirstiness Under Control

The thirst is too real and close to ignore. Open up any social media app and squint at the surfel of selfies and excessive stunting on haters; no one is absolved from scrutiny. Long Beach's Boogie understands these online addictions and lust for likes all too well. "Twitter turned lying..."

October 1, 2014

BuskerFest

@ East Village Arts District
September 6, 2014



This Long Beach Festival Has a Great Gimmick

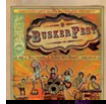
Long Beach is overflowing with talented musicians. The city's haunts are crammed with rockers and DJs, not to mention Cambodian rappers. But it has relatively few music venues. That helps explain the popularity of the annual (and free) Summer and Music series, which hosts a plethora of outdoor shows...

September 3, 2014

Tijuana Panthers Are Poised to Break Through

MDM Studios is located near Glendale, between a gentleman's club and a power plant. At first, it seems like an odd place for garage group Tijuana Panthers to be rehearsing. After all, three dudes who regularly surf near weather-beaten rocks and lush palm trees don't usually come this close to Skid...

August 21, 2014



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the women wandered offstage, the men returned, recycling both the music and the text in staging variations, making it clear that the three-hour show was being performed in "loops," during which the audience was invited to come and go, or visit the live-streaming version down the block.

On the outdoor patio of Space 15 Twenty, the brick storefronts encased bustling shoppers. There was almost nobody in the folding chairs facing the screen, during which the haunting melody of "The Red Rose and Briar" being broadcast through the shops and eatery made the point, deep in the bones, of the precipice we live on, between living well and the anguish of our history.

NEW ORIGINAL WORKS FESTIVAL | Presented by REDCAT, 631 W. Second St., dwntwn. | Thurs.-Sat., 8:30 p.m.; through Aug. 11 | (213) 237-2800 | redcat.org

AMERICAN REALISM | Conceived and directed by Katherine Brook, text arranged by Liza Birkenmeier | Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 6522 Hollywood Blvd., and Space 15 Twenty, 1520 N. Cahuenga Blvd., Hlywd. | Closed | lace.org

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closed housing complexes. And waking up people at 2 p.m., people who worked in the casino all night. I started to think about a very sophisticated urban person being out in these defunct housing areas."

Woodbury says she got smitten with an atmosphere. "I start with passionate ideas and images," she explains. "Then I move in to characters."

"I don't start with people speaking philosophical ideas — that's for my journal. It's really like I'll be musing on these political, philosophical issues, and some place or texture or voice will be evocative to me, and I'll just follow that, and those themes will get teased out, but it has to be in the texture of real life, or imagined in real life."

Realism, Woodbury adds, is self-deception. "It's a lie to make a play about our psychological or sociological reality. That's not performing the function of theater. That's not giving back to people what their lives really are." Theater's task, Woodbury says, is to "give people back the texture of their lives — when people were living in forests, yeah, they were imitating animals, making music like animals, because that was the texture of their reality. And so now, the texture of our lives has to do with machines, technology — that's actually what we hear, that's our aural and visual experience. If you just keep telling stories about people's marriages and adultery, no matter how apt that is, it just doesn't seem like telling the truth."

Woodbury's point was driven home in Katherine Brook's *American Realism* (with text arranged by Liza Birkenmeier), performed last week simultaneously in two venues: The live rendition was at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions while a live-streamed version could be seen about three blocks away at Space 15 Twenty, on Cahuenga, beamed onto a large screen in a patio area between chic clothing stores and Umami Burger.

Inside the white-walled LACE gallery, a group of young men (Cory Antiel, Ben Ferguson, Nick Marcucci, Stephen Tonti and Daniel Weshler) in sandals and shorts munched on popcorn and pizza in an enclosed Astroturf rectangle depicting a tawdry corporate workspace — a couple of steel desks and chairs, a microwave oven for the popcorn, blinds suspended from two parallel beams overhead (set by Josh Smith). They sang (beautifully) a capella (choral arrangements by Smith) an array of traditional Celtic and Dust Bowl-era American folk tunes while strewing popcorn and the detritus of their pizza on the Astroturf. They wandered off into a back room, to be replaced by female janitors (Nanc Allen, Birkenmeier, Erica Bitton, Graziela Damien) who cleaned up after the men while drifting into text extracted from *Voices From the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection*.

The sense of hardship on the so-called Okies' trek from Oklahoma to California, as well as conditions in a migratory work camp, was almost as visceral as the musical theme from Scottish ballad "The Red Rose and the Briar" sung by both groups repeatedly so that it wouldn't let go. When