

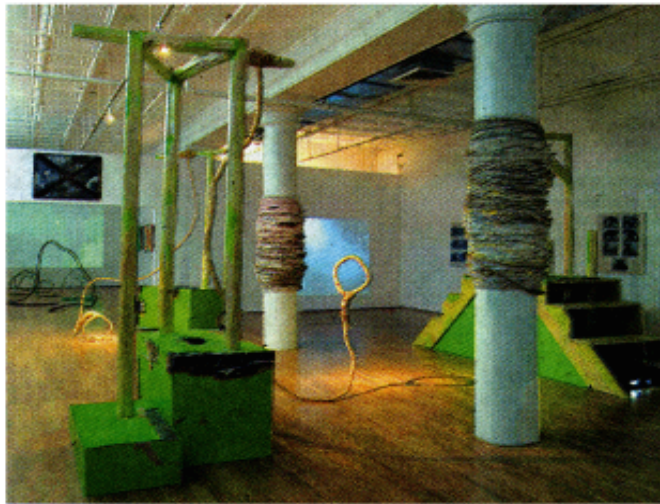
Holland Cotter, "Stephen G. Rhodes," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2007, E37

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FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2007

WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS LEISURE

The New York Times



Adam Reich

Stephen G. Rhodes's installation "Recurrency" is at Guild & Greyshkul.

Stephen G. Rhodes

Recurrency

Guild & Greyshkul
28 Wooster Street, SoHo
Through Feb. 10

It's great when someone gets ambitiously complicated and makes it work, as the young Los Angeles-based artist Stephen G. Rhodes does in his first solo show. Formally, he juggles video, sculpture, photographs and drawings, and hooks them up in a circling narrative that ricochets from 19th-century fiction to B films to Hurricane Katrina.

The main event is a double-screen video based on Ambrose Bierce's macabre short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." Set during the Civil War, the story revolves around a hanging that is aborted when the rope breaks. The prisoner escapes and makes it back home to his wife, at which point Bierce yanks us back to the gallows: the rope, it turns out, didn't break, after all; the escape was the man's dying fantasy.

Mr. Rhodes, who grew up in Louisiana, saw a film based on the story repeatedly in grade school; has replayed it in his mind often since; and now does so in his art. In the videos we see a gallows trapdoor open, and a body plummet into water. A man with a noose around his neck races

through a forest. The trailing rope takes on a life of its own, slithering around trees and over rocks, stretching out endlessly.

A plantation house appears, and suddenly we are back at the opening scene, watching the trapdoor open again, and the sequence starts anew, like an unstoppable narrative in a panic dream. Objects from the dream are scattered through the gallery: a wooden gallows; stiffened lengths of rope rearing like serpents.

On the back wall another video plays, this one a sped-up, scrambled version of a Cecil B. DeMille potboiler, "The Buccaneer," about the 1815 naval siege of New Orleans. History — or an absurdist pop-culture version of it — flashes before our eyes. Dark collages on the walls mix images of the Louisiana bayous, Disney World and post-Katrina destruction; large X's spray-painted over each collage recall the identifying marks made by officials on houses after the storm.

Mr. Rhodes's looping play of history, fiction and recent reality is memorably atmospheric. That he has ingeniously enlisted so many mediums in its cause makes the mechanics of eternal recurrence seem particularly tangled and insidious.

HOLLAND COTTER