

Buckingham Film Makes Maiden Voyage

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Courtesy Creative Time

Matthew Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck – Everything has a Name" (2003) is screening on a water taxi on the Hudson River this week.

NEW YORK—On Friday evening, some 30 people stood on Manhattan's Pier 45 and scanned the Hudson River for a water taxi, despite a threat of rain. Rather than a ride to New Jersey, however, the crowd was waiting for a bright yellow craft converted into a floating screening room by artist **Matthew Buckingham** for his project *Muhheakantuck – Everything Has a Name* (2003). The work includes a fuchsia-tinted 16mm film of a single helicopter shot following the Hudson riverbank, accompanied by the artist's narrated musings on early encounters between Dutch explorers and Native Americans living along the river. Screening it on a water taxi cruising through the harbor — on a loop to the Statue of Liberty and back — is the artist's attempt to critique familiar ideas about the iconic city and reframe the viewer's present-day experience of it according to an uncommon reading of colonial history.

The work was originally screened five years ago as a part of a multi-artist exhibition titled "Watershed: The Hudson Valley Art Project." But Buckingham had always intended for the work to be shown on the water — on a ferry making its way from town to town along the river, in his original conception — and the public art organization **Creative Time** has helped Buckingham realize that goal. Its maiden voyage also fortuitously came the same weekend as the **Armory Show**, a move that not only drew an international, art-minded audience but also helped tie the history narrated in the work to contemporary New York.

Sipping hot cider, the group filed onto the water taxi once it docked. As the boat lurched out into the river and Buckingham's film began, the moving aerial shot coupled with the lilting boat to make for some queasy moments. While the viewers got their sea legs, Buckingham's voiceover discussed the compulsion to seek out and name the unknown and considered the European exploration of the river through frequently footnoted details. He notes, for

example, that when Henry Hudson first encountered Native Americans, they spoke French and were already familiar with the European fur trade, and he goes on to emphasize the corporate, rather than national, interest behind Hudson's voyage; after all, his ship flew the flag of the Dutch East India Company, the voiceover reminds the audience.

"I wanted to emphasize New York as an economic city," says Buckingham of the project. When the Dutch met the Native Americans, he adds, they saw their forms of commerce already in action, and the film emphasizes "the colonization of that exchange."

The murmurs of the audience on the project's opening evening had a polyglot dissonance common to most events taking place during the week of the Armory Show, and many in the audience spoke about the festival of commerce going on several piers uptown. But if Buckingham intended this screening of a project about colonization and trade as a direct critique of the art fairs, the artist, standing in the back of the floating theater, offered only an impish, "I don't mind the contrast."

Critique or not, the project screens six more times after the fairs are over (at 7 and 8 p.m. on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, April 4–6). Buckingham will also give an artist talk at **New York University** on April 1, and an exhibition of two of his works is currently on view at Manhattan's **Murray Guy** gallery through April 19.