



**REVIEW:**  
William Lamson  
***Actions***

[Marty Walker Gallery](#)  
2135 Farrington Street, Dallas  
(214) 749-0066 [www.martywalkergallery.com](http://www.martywalkergallery.com)

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I first saw the video work of Brooklyn artist William Lamson in the project room at Marty Walker Gallery last February in a piece called ***Emerge***. In it, brightly colored balloons popped to the surface of a vast, flat body of water and floated smoothly across it, guided mysteriously by some invisible hand. The balloons would then be released and go floating up into the air and off-screen to who knows where. I remember the pace of the video -- the shock of a balloon emerging, the slow and steady guiding of it across the water, the wavering way each floated into the air and away -- as being dramatically perfect. So it was with great delight that I recently went to see Mr. Lamson's work again at Marty Walker in a solo show called ***Actions***. (Lamson's *Interventions* photograph, right)



The main gallery features the headlining piece, ***Actions***, a twenty-four minute video broken into thirty-three separate events. In each, Mr. Lamson sets up a scene that will play out against a white wall, with the characters being the artist, and black balloons. Because the balloons in these scenarios are black, the playful quality of them is traded in for more somber and sometimes menacing ones, the balloons often acting the part of adversary in Mr. Lamson's nutty-professor schemes. In ***Actions*** the artist has found a way to illustrate a myriad of human emotions and conflicts by using balloons and his actions with them as metaphor to great poetic effect. In one action the scene opens with a lone BB gun lying on the floor. A black balloon drifts down toward the ground. Just then, Mr. Lamson literally rolls onto the scene, grabs the gun, and begins to shoot blanks at the balloon, each empty shot blowing the balloon away some minor distance. Over and over the artist tries to shoot the balloon, to no avail. At last he gives up, exhausted, the balloon getting away. It's a clever exercise in futility. In another, Mr. Lamson wears a helmet covered in pins and holds a bunch of helium balloons by a string while bouncing on a pogo stick. With each bounce he aims to pop a balloon, not stopping until they all have been popped. Again, he stumbles off-screen exhausted, though this time not frustrated. It's a fable about successful work, and it foils the angst that played out in the BB gun scene. It's incredibly satisfying to watch, not to mention wholly hilarious. Many of the actions he catalogues are equally funny, though the machinations with which he sometimes battles the balloons reveal the macabre, often the bedfellow of whimsy.

A stark white winter landscape is the setting for Mr. Lamson's video ***Tundra***. In it pairs of balloons tethered to each other by a long black ribbon, one full of helium and the other of air, and hover onto the scene like some monolithic creatures, the blackness of them huge against the whiteness of the snow. Each set of balloons takes on its own persona, and the viewer can't help but be pulled into the simple narrative played out through the actions of emergence, movement, and departure. As in *Emerge*, these figures enter the scene and move and exit at a pace that is patient and contemplative. It leaves you with a sense of sadness that's close to longing.

Mr. Lamson is of course not the first to discover the animation that balloons take on by their buoyant nature. Something about the head-shaped and inflated, vulnerable anatomy of a balloon makes them seem uncannily alive, insistently playful, and incredibly fragile. But Mr. Lamson has plunged even deeper into a balloon's identity, and subsequently into ours, with an ingenuity that seems without limits.

**by Lucia Simek, September 2008**