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3 exhibits at Atlanta Center for Contemporary Art

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By Catherine Fox
For the AJC

The Atlanta Contemporary Art Center is running on all pistons this season. Its lecture series is a must-do, and the current trio of exhibitions is well worth a visit. Artistic director Stuart Horodner has created three different experiences in medium, tone and aesthetic, all of which represent strong currents in contemporary practice.

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Laura Poitras, a justly award-decorated filmmaker, deals with the personal and political fallout of 9/11 terrorist attacks and its toxic cycle of suffering and revenge. The protagonists of "The Oath" -- her profound 2010 documentary, screened last month -- are two brothers-in-law, who had worked for al-Qaida. The film toggles between the crafty, conflicted former operative who lives free in Yemen and the Guantanamo trial of the other, who, as Osama bin Laden's chauffeur, was little more than a flunky. Poitras captures the complexities and

contradictions of the "reformed" terrorist and a flawed U.S. policy, both of which have moments of redemption.

For the video projection "O' Say Can You See?" -- her first gallery piece -- the New York-based artist returns to the literal and figurative Ground Zero of our current relationship with the Middle East, using her footage, in slowed motion, of people witnessing the 9/11 attack. To see the tears well up in a young boy's eyes or the quiet despair and grief on a man's face is to relive that moment with an intensity one might not expect of a vicarious experience nine years later. It is paired with two video interviews with former Guantanamo prisoners, who recount the torture they endured.

Mia Feuer's bright blue sculptures, which hover perilously above the viewer, evoke the premonitions of apocalypse rife in contemporary art today. Constructed of the flotsam of our post-industrial society -- pieces of girders, fragments of stairs, charred-looking chunks of wood -- they appear to have been objects broken up and in the midst of being carried off by some monster hurricane. One closely resembles a bridge whose central span has been wiped out.

The sense of industrial collapse brings to mind Atlantan Mark Wentzel's "Morale Hazard," an obit for the car industry in which a junked Red Mustang was suspended in the same gallery. But Feuer throws in a bit of whimsy and "Wizard of Oz" stagecraft as well. Miniature violins can be seen amid the wreckage, as well as a canoe and a life-sized pair of donkeys.

Jaimie Warren, a performance artist who stars in most of her photos, celebrates outrageousness

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and excess. The Facebook-y photos reflect our age of cellphone self-documentation – as in “Here I am with my head in a dinosaur’s mouth” or “I’m half naked at a party.” For my part, they have the same short shelf life.

Steve Aishman shares Warren’s interest in the snapshot aesthetic, evident in the series taken of various friends holding his son. His “Throwing Fast Food” series might seem a comment on Americans’ dietary habits, or a riff on the still-life genre. Perhaps the Silly Putty pieces wink at abstract sculpture.

But mostly, the Atlanta artist and SCAD professor parks at the intersection of the quotidian and the absurd, which has precedents in Austrian artist Erwin Wurm, John Baldessari and William Wegman. The photos are only modestly amusing, however, at least to me. See for yourself.

Catherine Fox is chief art critic of www.ArtsCriticATL.com

Exhibit reviews

Laura Poitras: “O’ Say Can You See?” Mia Feuer: “The Bridge.” “Steve Aishman and Jaimie Warren: Recent Photographs.”

Through Dec. 12. \$5; \$3, students, seniors; free for members, children under 12 and on Thursdays. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays; until 8 p.m. Thursdays; noon-5 p.m. Sundays. The Atlanta Contemporary Art Center. 535 Means St. 404-688-1970, www.thecontemporary.org

The Bottom Line: Get yourself to The Contemporary to see its three high-impact exhibitions before they close Dec. 12.

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