

Lumen Travo gallery presents

**Dennis Adams**  
*Double Feature*

From march 23rd to april 18th

Lumen Travo gallery  
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*You know the old story of the chameleon. Put him on green, he turns green. Put him on black, he turns black. But if you put him on plaid he explodes.*

—Jean Seberg

**LUMEN TRAVO GALLERY** is exhibiting four new works by **DENNIS ADAMS** that center on the tragic and layered figure of American actress Jean Seberg as a vessel for reimagining history.

**DOUBLE FEATURE** is a series of composite “stills” collaged from individual frames grabbed from Jean-Luc Godard’s *Breathless* (1959) and Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1965). In these constructed images Jean Seberg, the co-star of *Breathless*, has been displaced from her celebrated stroll along the Champs-Élysées in Paris, where she hawked the *New York Herald Tribune* with Jean-Paul Belmondo at her side, and relocated in Algiers during Algeria’s struggle for independence from French rule, where she walks the city’s war-torn streets.

The streets are those depicted in *The Battle of Algiers*. Seberg’s cropped hair and her *Herald Tribune* T-shirt, along with the newspapers and little white handbag she carries, mark her iconic identity as she walks out of *Breathless* and into the demonstrations, checkpoints, and skirmishes of the Algerian Revolution. Her scene as news vendor, which was for Godard little more than a device to establish her American identity and to set up the flirtation with Belmondo, is recontextualized as an index to the unfolding historical events we find her passing through. Seberg is recast as an allegorical figure walking the fault line between the roles of messenger bearing the news and frontline witness to its making.

Seberg’s role in *Breathless* will always be identified with the *New York Herald Tribune*, the famed English-language paper produced and distributed in Paris, later renamed the *International Herald Tribune*. The T-shirt with the newspaper’s logo that Seberg wore as she strolled down the Champs-Élysées was a common sight in Paris during the 1950s and 60s, when it was worn by the young English-speaking women the *Herald Tribune* employed to sell papers on the streets.

While both *Breathless* and *The Battle of Algiers* depict the same historical window of time, and even share some of the era’s cinema vérité, handheld camera aesthetic, they could not be more incompatible in their narrative pacing and political stance. Seberg and Belmondo wander aimlessly through Paris, attentive only to their tenuous

relationship and the momentary circumstances of their lives, while the cast of characters in Algiers, on both sides of the conflict, tests the absolute limits of violence in a battle to defend opposing ideals.

Released in 1966 and initially banned in France, *The Battle of Algiers* commemorates the Algerian uprising against French colonial rule, a struggle that lasted from 1954 to 1962. Considered one of the most influential films in the history of political cinema, it revolutionized the genre with its quasi-documentary style and use of former insurgents to reenact historical events. While Pontecorvo is clearly sympathetic to the Algerians' struggle, he rejects the bare-knuckle propaganda style of Soviet masters Vsevolod Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein in favor of a more even handed depiction of both sides of the conflict. This has the effect of amplifying the viewers' ethical tension and also points to why the film has become a global cinematic primer for both insurgents and state police. Since its release, liberation groups have viewed *The Battle of Algiers* as a manifesto of revolutionary strategy, including the Black Panthers and the IRA, both of whom adapted its techniques in their training manuals. After September 11 the film became essential viewing for both jihadists and US government and military personnel. Its depictions of resistance through violent guerilla tactics, as well as of state-sponsored torture has proved to be prophetic in the context of the current war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Released in 1960, *Breathless* is Godard's first full-length feature and a manifesto of New Wave cinema. The story is set in Paris and revolves around the relationship between a petty gangster, played by Belmondo, and an American student, played by Seberg. Referencing Hollywood genres at every turn, Godard throws his young stars into a fast-forward relationship spliced together by an unpredictable collage of aggressive jump-cuts and nonchalant super-long takes. Conventions of narrative cinema take a back seat as the film unleashes a radical new aesthetic joined at the hip to the portrayal of an unprecedented youthful recklessness.

**BLACK BELMONDO** is a reworking of the last shot from Godard's *Breathless*, where Jean Seberg traces the outline of her lips with her thumb. Seberg's gesture was appropriated from Jean-Paul Belmondo who has just died from gunshot wounds in front of her on the streets of Paris. Belmondo himself, had appropriated the gesture from Humphrey Bogart in one of Godard's playful references to Hollywood cinema. Adams extends the evolution of this borrowed gesture by transforming it into a make-up application of traditional Black Face, suggesting a link to Seberg's real life identification with the Black Panthers.

**CURTAIN CALL** is a reworking of a single shot from Godard's *Breathless* that shows Jean Seberg opening a set of curtains and lifting her skirt up to throw it outside over the window sill. Adams inserts an inscription in graffiti on the outside wall under the window that Seberg's billowing skirt partially conceals as it falls. It reads: "*ILS VOIENT NOS FEMMES ON VOIT PAS LES LEURS.*" This racial slur was a street expression used by Pied Noirs during Algeria's War of Independence. On the one hand, Adams collapses two distinct scenes from French History, linked only by their shared time period, and on the other hand, he creates a playful fictional role for Seberg, suggestive of her real-life political intrigues.

**BLACKFACE** is a reprinting of 30 declassified documents from Jean Seberg's FBI file at their original size on mirrors. The contents of these documents uncover the FBI's monitoring of Seberg's political, financial and sexual involvement with the Black Panthers and the smear campaign that FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover generated with the news media to destroy her. These documents are graphically layered with both the FBI's deletion markings of censored information and the reproduction scars generated from their serial photocopying as they were passed between government agencies. In reprinting the documents on mirrors, Adams compounds their graphic layering with the viewer's reflection.

**JEAN SEBERG** was born and raised in Marshalltown, Iowa. She was only seventeen in 1955 when she was chosen from thousands of hopeful young actresses by director Otto Preminger to star as Joan of Arc in his film of George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. In Seberg's next film, *Bonjour Tristesse*, also directed by Preminger, her role as a spoiled pixyish adolescent vacationing with her playboy father on the French Riviera inspired a young Godard to cast her opposite Belmondo in *Breathless*, which would become a New Wave sensation. In total Seberg made thirty-four films, which also included *The Mouse That Roared*, *Lilith*, *Paint Your Wagon*, and *Airport*. In the late 60s and early 70s, Seberg's political empathy and sexual relationship with Hakim Jamal, a charismatic player in the Black Power movement, as well as her financial support of the Black Panther Party led the FBI to monitor her activities and smear her reputation in the media. She never fully recovered from the scandal and over the next several years became increasingly dependent on alcohol and prescription drugs. On September 9, 1979, Jean Seberg was found dead in her parked car in a Paris suburb. The autopsy revealed she had overdosed on barbiturates and alcohol. After a lengthy investigation her death was ruled a suicide by the Paris police.

**DENNIS ADAMS** is internationally recognized for his urban interventions and museum installations that reveal historical and political undercurrents in public space and architecture. Over the last twenty five years, he has produced over fifty urban projects in cities worldwide. His work has been the subject of numerous one-person exhibitions in museums and galleries throughout North America and Europe, and is in major public collections including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp; the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; and the Fotomuseum Winterthur, Zurich. Adams has recently completed public projects for the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion in Barcelona, the Staten Island Ferry Terminal in New York and Minneapolis Community and Technical College. He is currently working on a commission for the Champlain Port of Entry Station between the US and Canadian border and will participate in 2009 Bordeaux Biennial.