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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Sanford Biggers

February 9 - March 15, 2008

Opening Reception: Saturday February 9, 6-8pm

D'Amelio Terras is pleased to present an exhibition of Sanford Biggers: an installation composed of a single channel video projection titled *Cheshire* and a sculpture of a broad smiling mouth will be on view in the front room gallery. The video "*Cheshire*" was first exhibited in "*Blossom*," a three part solo exhibition at Grand Arts in Kansas city in September 2007 where it was projected outdoor on an exterior wall of a theater in downtown Kansas city. Located within a gallery space, the combination of video and sculpture functions as a theatrical installation developing themes of African American representation in pictures, which has been central to Sanford Biggers' multi media practice. The theatricality of the installation continues his performance commissioned by Performa 07 "*The Somethin' Suite*", in which a short section of the video appeared while a live performance of the song *Strange Fruit* by the performer Imani Uzuri in geisha make-up took place. This unusual performance of the famous Billie Holiday piece is now part of the soundtrack of "*Cheshire*" at mid point in the video.

The 13'40" long single-channel projection shows different professional black men dressed in work uniform climbing or trying to climb a tree. One after another, they approach a tree of their choice in different locations (California and Germany) - the camera zooms in and out their action until, if they succeed, the climber reaches a comfortable position in the tree. The paradox between the outdoor setting and the uncanny action of an adult in professional clothes climbing a tree gives a surreal atmosphere: the men do not act based on a director's script, they simply execute the task of climbing the tree without other apparent motive than a self imposed challenge. The title "*Cheshire*" references the cat in *Alice in Wonderland*. Sanford Biggers notes that the enigmatic animal "disappears while spewing riddles or koans (Buddhist paradoxical utterances) until only his bodiless grin remains. He is as invisible as the professional Black man is in the mass media today - but I am also thinking about Black men hanging out in trees, as opposed to being hung from them."¹

The sculpture, similarly titled "*Cheshire*," functions as an outrageous/shop street sign. A broad smile with big red lips and teeth so shiny that they are made of working light bulbs.



¹ The artist in conversation with Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, quoted from her essay in the brochure for the Grand Arts exhibition "*Blossom*" (September 7 - October 20, 2007) http://www.grandarts.cpm/exhibits/Sanford_Biggers.html

Beyond the floating smile of the Cheshire cat, this image makes reference to the "raced" body, racial stereotypes organized around a set of symbols profoundly anchored in white discourse as if the white observer was presuming to speak for all without the slightest mention of his or her own "raced" identity. It evokes overtly racist images such as the early advertising of Banania chocolate and Darkie toothpaste, but also the complex fact that several black performers from early minstrelsy to current hip-hop have embraced and exploited racial stereotypes as a tacit acceptance to benefit from the social and financial ascension that entertainment offers to African Americans.

Sanford Biggers, originally from Los Angeles, lives and works in New York and Richmond, VA where he teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University. Group exhibitions include Black President (a tribute to Fela Kuti) at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, Black Belt and Freestyle both at the Studio Museum in Harlem, the 2002 Whitney Biennial. Most recently his work was included in Illuminations, a group video exhibition at the Tate Modern in London. He has had solo exhibitions among others at Grand Arts, Kansas City, Mary Goldman Gallery, Los Angeles, the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, Matrix/Univ. of Berkeley Museum, Berkeley and Zamek Ujadowski, Warsaw.

For more information about the show: <http://www.damelioterras.com>
For press and visuals requests please contact Trina at 212.352.9460 or at trina@damelioterras.com.

D'Amelio Terras represents Adam Adach, Massimo Bartolini, Delia Brown, Jedediah Caesar, Tony Feher, Roland Flexner, Joanne Greenbaum, Matt Keegan, John Morris, Rei Naito, Noguchi Rika, Cornelia Parker, Dario Robleto, Heather Rowe, Sam Samore, Karin Sander, Noah Sheldon, and Sara VanDerBeek.