

In Smog and Thunder

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

Los Angeles, CA - Eclectic DVD and Smart Art Press are pleased to announce the home viewing release of *In Smog and Thunder: The Great War of the Californias* for North American distribution on DVD. It will be officially released on January 6, 2004.

"Hilarious...A dead-on send-up of historical documentary a la Ken Burns."
-- Jack Fischer, *San Jose Mercury News*

This devastatingly funny satire makes serious fun of traditional war documentaries, while taking aim at America's pop culture society. In telling the saga of a fictitious Civil War between Los Angeles and San Francisco (Smogtown vs. Fogtown), the film lampoons the worldwide clash between Elitist New Age Bohemians and the Sitcom-Mongering Hordes of Hollywood.

California was teetering on the edge of doom. Animosity between Los Angeles and San Francisco had grown out of control. War was looming in the hearts of men and women from Petaluma to Pacoima. Then, in early May, General Juan Gomez de los Angeles led his Southern troops in a surprise attack against the Bay Area. Once the Battle of San Francisco began, there was no turning back . . .

In Smog and Thunder was a hit at the highly regarded Slamdance Film Festival in 2003 and has shown at ten other film festivals nationwide.

In Smog and Thunder is based on 120 satirical paintings by acclaimed Southern California artist and surfer, Sandow Birk. Raised on the beaches of Orange County, Sandow Birk is a product of California culture. Birk's *In Smog and Thunder* art exhibit broke attendance records the Laguna Art Museum. The audio tour that he and Paul Zaloom created for the exhibit was the catalyst for the film's screenplay. Birk was a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts International Travel Grant to Mexico City in 1995, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1996, and he was a Fulbright Fellow to Rio de Janeiro in 1997. In 1999, he was awarded a Getty Fellowship for painting. The *LA Times* said, "Birk's half-terrifying, half-absurd scenarios are eerie reminders of Southern California's ongoing flirtation with apocalypse."

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Claudine Isé, a curator at the UCLA/Armand Hammer Museum, wrote about the project, "Although viewers know from the get-go that this account of the Great War cannot be accurate, the conflicts portrayed . . . reflect many of the material and social realities that confront Californians today." And, as such issues as immigration and over development descend upon America's Heartland, the political hot-button issues that California faces are popping up across the country.

Called "one of the most original and talented political satirists working in the theater" by the *New York Times*, Paul Zaloom (narrator and co-writer) is a puppeteer and performance artist. Since 1992, Zaloom also has appeared on the Emmy-winning educational TV show *Beakman's World* as Beakman, a hit among children and a cult favorite among many adults. He has been awarded four National Endowment for the Arts grants as well as an OBIE, an American Theater Wing design award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

The Executive Producer is Tom Patchett, who created the TV shows *ALF* and *Buffalo Bill*. Earlier in his career he won Emmys writing *The Bob Newhart Show*.

"One California", the song that plays over the end credits, was written by Mark McAdam and performed by his parody hard rock/rap band The Jimmy Men. McAdam led a great Los Angeles "Junk Rock" band called Sumack, who released many records in the 1990s. His first solo record, *Boy Wonder*, was released in July 2002.

The film also has a cameo by Huell Howser. Howser hosts the seminal Southern California public television show, *California's Gold* (among others). Over the last decade he's become an icon with his "golly" attitude and genuine interest in California's landmarks. When the film plays in Southern California, the house comes down during his scene.

DVD extras include, alternative takes and outtakes, movie trailers, TV interviews with the filmmakers, Sandow Birk's original museum audio tour, a gallery of the battle paintings and propaganda posters.

Produced and directed by Sean Meredith. Narrated by Paul Zaloom. Written by Sandow Birk and Paul Zaloom.

For more information, press kits, etc. please contact Sean Meredith at (818) 545-1577 or email sean@cutterfilms.com.

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In Smog and Thunder

SYNOPSIS

California was teetering on the edge of doom. Animosity between Los Angeles and San Francisco had grown out of control. War was looming in the hearts of men and women from Petaluma to Pacoima. Then, in early May, General Juan Gomez de los Angeles led his Southern troops in an offensive against the Bay Area. Once the Battle of San Francisco began there was no turning back . . .

This devastatingly funny satire makes serious fun of traditional war documentaries, while taking aim at America's logo-crazed pop culture. In telling the saga of a fictitious Civil War between Los Angeles and San Francisco (Smogtown Vs. Fogtown), the film lampoons the worldwide clash between Elitist New Age Bohemians and the Sitcom-Mongering Hordes of Hollywood.

IN SMOG AND THUNDER tells its story through the humble words of the soldiers and citizens who lived through it: infantry privates, civilian yuppies, traffic reporters, colonels, generals, and gardeners. This grand procession makes you wish there were more wars.

In Smog and Thunder

BIOGRAPHIES

SEAN MEREDITH DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, EDITOR

Mr. Meredith juggles filmmaking, video editing, and being a vintage dishware expert. He has been making movies for eleven years. His films have won numerous awards and have been shown across the country and in Europe. He has edited broadcast documentaries, many short films, and an independent feature. He's currently developing a feature project called *The Landlady*.

SANDOW BIRK CO-WRITER, PAINTER

Raised on the beaches of Southern California and currently living and working in Los Angeles, Sandow Birk is a product of California culture. Birk, who is well traveled and a graduate of the Otis-Parson's Art Institute, has dealt with Los Angeles in its entirety. His work has been shown extensively throughout the U.S. He was a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts International Travel Grant to Mexico City in 1995, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1996, and he was a Fulbright Fellow to Rio de Janeiro in 1997. In 1999 he was awarded a Getty Fellowship for painting. Sandow's epic, pseudo-historical series, "The Great War of the Californias," in which Los Angeles and San Francisco wage all-out war for control of the Golden State, was featured at the Laguna Art Museum in 2000 and traveled to the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art in the San Francisco Area in the summer of 2002.

PAUL ZALOOM CO-WRITER, NARRATOR

Called "one of the most original and talented political satirists working in the theater" by the New York Times, Paul Zaloom is a puppeteer and performance artist who has written, designed, and performed ten highly idiosyncratic solo spectacles, including *Fruit of Zaloom*, *Sick But True*, and his latest, *Velvetville*. Since 1992, Zaloom also has appeared on the Emmy-winning educational TV show *Beakman's World* as Beakman, the amusing and inquisitive scientist who answers viewers' questions about science, nature, and the world around us. Zaloom has performed his work at many venues in forty states, from the Kennedy Center to King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, as well as touring Europe on nine occasions. He has been awarded four National Endowment for the Arts grants as well as an OBIE, an American Theater Wing design award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

BIOGRAPHIES (continued)

MAJOR GENERAL JUAN GOMEZ DE LOS ANGELES

Growing up near Elysian Park, Juan Gomez de los Angeles dreamed of playing baseball for the Dodgers, but his pitching arm got him no further than varsity baseball at Marshall High School. Gomez had become a site manager for a small construction company before he was summoned by a higher calling. Major General Juan Gomez de los Angeles had only been the Supreme Commander of the Southern Army for six months before he led his troops into its offensive against the North, which he held no love for. In his teens Gomez lost his virginity in an unsatisfying manner in San Francisco at a Grateful Dead concert and had despised the city ever since.

COMMANDER REBECCA JORDAN

Rebecca Jordan left her childhood home in Fresno to fulfil her dreams in Hollywood. By the time the game show on which she worked as a scantily clad letter turner was canceled, she was through with dreams, so she hopped on her Aprilia motorcycle and headed north. The experience she gained driving all over L.A. to auditions proved to be a helpful tool when she led her Northern troops on the largest mobile assault in California's history. Although she was feared for her ruthlessness, she always maintained her professionalism and kept her cool.

GENERAL FELIX HERNANDEZ

Known forever more as the hero of the Sepulveda Pass, General Felix Hernandez cut off the berserking Fog Town troops' attempt to descend the 405 Freeway and overtake LAX. Hernandez, a fierce defender of a unified Los Angeles and an amateur equestrian, met his fate from a sniper's bullet, but not before giving the orders that would turn the tide of the war.

NORTHERN BRIGADIER GENERAL SUSAN HWANG

Despite enormous casualties under heavy bombardment, Northern Brigadier General Hwang's regiment thwarted Southern attempts to the left flank of the forces defending Union Square in San Francisco. Hwang cut her chops during the war in Afghanistan, but she modestly states: "My objective was to defend the Bay from any possible cancellations [of San Francisco Giant's baseball games]."

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CREDITS

Produced and Directed by	Sean Meredith
Written by	Sadow Birk and Paul Zaloom
Featuring Artworks by	Sadow Birk
Creative Director	Paul Zaloom
Edited by	Sean Meredith
Associate Producer	Greg Escalante
Executive Producer	Tom Patchett
Narrated by	Paul Zaloom

CAST

Historian	Mark Ritts
Homeless Veteran	Gary Eisenberg
Getty Secretary	Meagan Fay
Monument Caretaker	Ransom Mayfield
Dog Walker	Alicia Meredith

and Huell Howser as himself

VOICES

Jessica Summers	Laura Krafft
Susan Hwang	Kit Pongetti
Josie Antonio Valenzuela	Vanessa Bergonzoli
The Dad	Greg Escalante
Jane Thomas	Alicia Meredith
David Goldberg	Paul Zaloom
Steven Hoyt	Mark McAdam
Ensign Todd	Sean Forrester
Maria Elena Mariscal	Vanessa Bergonzoli
Arnold Ebner	Noah Rosenstein

VOICES (continued)

Brenda Bounty	Kit Pongetti
Raymond Clotts	Sean Meredith
Douglas Cregan	Alexander Hofbauer
Traffic Reporter	Paul Zaloom
Bradley Keister	Ben Livingston
Deborah Powell	Elyse Pignolet
Jesus Guerrera	Maria Elena Hernandez
Timothy Lewis	Sadow Birk
Mohammed Zaman	Steve Irvin
Quincy Salerno	Cesar Delgadillo
Quincy's English Translator	Mark McAdam

Audio Production and Mixing Mark McAdam

Theme Music Composed
and Performed by Gary Eisenberg

Original Music by Mark McAdam and Alex Raugust

"One California"

Performed by The Jimmy Men
Written and Produced by McAdam
©2002 Superhead Songs

Camera Work by Sadow Birk
 Sean Meredith
 Laurie Steelink

INTERIORS VIDEO CREW

Cinematographer	John C. Newby, A.S.C.
Camera Operator	Laurie Steelink
Script Supervisor	Alicia Meredith
Key Grip	Erica Fox

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PRODUCTION NOTES

In 1996, Southern California artist, Sandow Birk, was invited to have an exhibit in San Francisco at Catherine Clark Gallery. "I spent a month living with a friend up there, painting and hanging out," Birk recalled. "And everywhere I went, people would hassle me for being from Los Angeles. I'd be sitting in a bar and people would ask where I was from and then they go off on me: 'It's so horrible,' and 'How can you live there?' At first it was kind of comical, but it became annoying. And that's how I started having this idea about a fake war." Birk imagined San Francisco's worst nightmare: an invasion by Los Angeles.

Over the next six years, Birk created over 100 artworks in the series. The paintings developed into a wonderful critique and send up of 19th century romantic period history paintings. He saw all the overly dignified and majestically painted portraits of generals and battle scenes of the past as ripe for the picking.

As the body of work grew he exhibited the paintings in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Then, in 2000, he mounted the entire series at the Laguna Art Museum in Laguna Beach, California. Throughout the exhibition he spoofed the nature of museums. There were explanatory wall texts, large models of battleships, dioramas, and an audio tour.

How far could this project go? Birk had skewered historical war paintings, propaganda art, and the historical pomposity of museums. The logical extension for him and his audio tour co-conspirator, Paul Zaloom, was to make a mockumentary. The Ken Burns' Civil War series was now in their cross hairs.

By late 2001, a script was near completion and Sean Meredith was now on board with Birk and Zaloom. Longtime television writer and producer, Tom Patchett, also was part of the team as the Executive Producer and provided the funding needed to make the project.

The script was finished in January and casting was quickly under way. The biggest part was already filled: the narrator. The voice of Paul Zaloom as the narrator is the backbone of the film. The next shoes to fill were that of the historian. Zaloom was able to wrangle his colleague, Mark Ritts, who worked with him on "Beakman's World". Ritts had the natural look and presence of an historian. Next, Sean Meredith got Meagan Fay to play the part of the Getty Museum secretary. Then, there were over twenty-five voices to cast. Looking far and wide, the filmmakers got many comedic actors to fill roles.

As they began recording voices and shooting scenes, Birk, Meredith, and Zaloom began to

plan the music. Gary Eisenberg, a local Los Angeles trumpet player, stepped in to record many classic war tunes and composed the powerful theme song of the film. Many pieces of music were composed for the film by Alex Raugust and by Mark McAdam. McAdam also wrote, performed, and produced a song for the end credits. McAdam was asked record a send-up of all the horrible songs that the big film companies put in the end credits that have no relation to the film. He came up with a bombastic anthem reminiscent of the self-important band Rage Against The Machine.

By May of 2002, Sean Meredith was immersed in digitally creating all the scenes of the film from images of Birk's paintings. Using compositing software and high-resolution scans of the paintings, Meredith programmed all the moves and effects to transform Birk's paintings into motion pictures.

In the spirit of fairness, Birk, Meredith, and Zaloom wished to include an interview with a 'neutral' California figure. Huell Howser, the host of the popular TV series 'California's Gold' was thus enlisted to do a cameo as himself. They filmed a scene taken right out of Howser's play book. He is shown visiting a bronze memorial of the card table where Northern and Southern California met to sign the peace treaty.

The film is 46 minutes and 20 seconds long. The film's live scenes were shot with miniDV. The motion graphics and effects were rendered using Adobe After Effects. The editing was done with a Final Cut Pro system. The audio was recorded, mixed, and mastered using a ProTools system.

The filmmakers are now working with Pop Twist Entertainment to sell broadcast and home video rights. It continues to screen at film festivals. Festival screenings to date include: Festival of Festivals 2002 (Award: Best Digital Feature), Slamdance 2003, Sedona Int. Film Fest. 2003, Newport Beach Film Fest. 2003, Ashland Independent Film Fest 2003, and Santa Cruz Film Fest. 2003.

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DETAILED SUMMARY OF FILM (BLOW BY BLOW)

The film presents itself as a documentary on a recent war between the two great California cities, Los Angeles and San Francisco, telling the story through the use of somber narration, melancholy music, and myriad still images based on maps, paintings, drawings and propaganda posters. It includes live interviews with surviving combatants and historians, and voice over testimonies by citizens, family members, and soldiers' letters home. Narrator: "A bitter, sad, and tragic affair, the Great War of the Californias was a result of many events, actions, and personalities, all rolled into the giant burrito of history."

CHAPTER ONE: THE POWDER KEG IGNITES Various personalities are introduced who will lead the principal armies. The governments of both cities negotiate alliances with other cities and gear up propaganda machines. An historian sits at his desk discussing the many causes of the war itself, from water disputes to cultural differences between Northern and Southern California to immigration rights, racial issues, etc.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BATTLE OF SAN FRANCISCO

The Los Angeles Army, under several generals, marches up the state and invades San Francisco with a surprise attack from the both the sea and land. San Franciscan troops retreat across the city and defend various key positions, most of which are significant landmarks such as the Golden Gate Bridge and Chinatown. A homeless veteran is interviewed about his experiences in the attack. The battle rages through the streets, pitting stereotypes of each city against each other, from surfers to lesbians to Hispanic maids. Finally, the Los Angeles Army retreats, leaving a devastated San Francisco smoldering in its wake.

CHAPTER THREE: SAN FRANCISCO FIGHTS BACK:

Wounded morally as well as physically, San Francisco rebuilds. It ups military spending, recommissions a large navy, and sets sail southward for Los Angeles. Letters from sailors tell of conditions on the ships at sea and the pain of being away. Civilians tell of the hard times and depravities at home. The San Francisco Navy surprises the Los Angeles Navy at sea and a battle ensues, in which Los Angeles suffers great losses. The San Francisco Army attacks Los Angeles in force . . . Fighting for key landmarks is intense, especially at

the Getty Museum of Art which sits overlooking a freeway pass from the Valley. The San Fernando Valley, recently seceded from Los Angeles, is laid to waste.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TIDE TURNS

The southland smog and the confusing freeway system take a toll on the San Francisco troops. They gradually become disorganized. There are many small scenes about Southern California's lifestyles and industries, and its reaction to war in its streets. Fierce battles rage through various parts of the city as traffic reports describe the inconveniences of war related traffic problems. Los Angeles troops manage to hold the Getty position but fighting across the city rages and all seems lost. Soldiers' testimonies are heard about the heat of the battle and seeing comrades fall beside them. As all seems lost for Los Angeles, a surge of reinforcements comes charging in from Tijuana, consisting of an army responding to a call for help from their Mexican friends in Los Angeles. The tide is turned and the North retreats as shouts of joy go up along the lines.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SEASON IS CANCELED

As the war ends, artists respond by painting several metaphorical paintings. The new California legislature votes to abolish the border with Mexico in gratitude to its assistance. Washington D.C. is disgusted that the war has ended with California intact, and eventually the state becomes a nation, united once again, and governed from Sacramento. We hear melancholy testimonials from surviving generals who feel that no one has won such a devastating war. In a final cameo, a mock-clip from the PBS television series "California's Gold" hosted by Huell Howser is played as Howser interviews a historian as they stand before a bronze statue commemorating the peace accords. Theme music swells into the end credits and the bombastically overdone song "One California" plays over credits.