

Stephanie Hutin
Artist's Statement

Drawing on my dual background in performance and animation, my work explores the threshold at which a production or process comes to life. In 2006, I founded The New School for Post-Animative Thought as a way of thinking about animation as a concept – ‘to bring to life’ – and applying it to performance and constraint-based work in other media. I am interested in processes of making that achieve a ‘reality effect’, or produce something that ‘passes’ as a particular form – whether that form is a character, a rock band, a radio show, or a film.

I produced Kendall Lakes (2006) – a film about two girls from another planet who live in a Miami suburb – by giving a description of the basic plot to the pre-adolescent sisters who starred in it, and letting them play around in front of the camera. Kendall Lakes is a performative exploration of what minimally constitutes filmmaking, as much as it is a final product: there was no complete script, direction, rehearsals, or re-takes; at the same time, the film is not just candid camera or improvisation. The nine-minute sequence explores the liminal spaces between childhood and adolescence, and domesticity and the alien. Formally, it teeters between children playing versus acting, and between a home video and an art film.

Similarly, the art-punk-rock group, Jennifer Leopard (J Lep) that I created with three fellow (non-musician) artists in 2007, is a performance of a band. I strive to produce work that people can appreciate for its success and failure simultaneously. In other words, we want the audience to recognize J Lep as a self-aware performance by amateurs, but also to enjoy the show. We have played at various locations around Los Angeles, including The Silent Movie Theatre, the Echo Park Film Centre, and REDCAT, and have a solid fan base.

My fascination with forms extends to questions of identity and character. My persona as the lead singers of J Lep is an adult version of one of the main characters in Kendall Lakes: Carmen has grown from an odd, alienated child into an aggressive woman who is still acting out her non-conformity. A recent collaboration, Call With Questions, is an ongoing performance of a radio talk show. It also provides a space for my co-hosts and I – and our audience members, who frequently use questions as the excuse for unsolicited character performances – to try out different personas. My work explores the threshold between familiar (or real) and mythic (or over-determined) personality constructions and their social formation, and considers what it means to act as a character outside a circumscribed frame.

I believe my work has particular relevance in Los Angeles, where there is so much industry based around creative production and performance. I aim to question the value placed on professionalization and high-cost high-tech production, and instead to make the idea of animating, in its broad sense, less laborious and more accessible and fun.