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EYEBALL Media Arts Webzine

[LA] Narrowcast: Reframing Global Video 1986/2008

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In *Narrowcast*, five early video art works from the 80's are paired with five contemporary video works. The works presented in the show are loosely categorized under the themes of embroidered narratives, autobiographical confessionals, re-staged histories, documentary and reportage, and trance and ritual. Co-curator Ciara Ennis describes the show as "not a historical survey but a choice of ten specific artworks from two different era that resonate with each other in their theme". Five early works from the 80's and one piece from 1979 chosen from the LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions's) seminal 1986 video exhibition, *Resolution: A Critique of Video Art*, and five contemporary works were chosen in relationship to these early works and their themes.

The overarching connector of all ten works in *Narrowcast* is their powerful narratives. It ranges from the slacker narrative by Michael Smith, "Secret Horror, 1980", a prophetic music video made one year before MTV, an autobiographic confessional in Lyn Blumenthal's "Doublecross, 1985", to a reenactment of specific history such as in Regina José's "Quien puede borrar las Huellas (Who Can Remove the Traces), 2003" where she reenacts the bloody history of Guatemala. Though it is not a survey show, the diversity of perspectives and voices in *Narrowcast* give the viewer an in-depth cross section of the video art then and now.



Artur Zmijewski_Game of Tag (2000)_Single-channel digital video_10;3:50 minutes_Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich Installation shot Pitzer Art Galleries, Pitzer College Photo by Max King Cap



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However the big impact of the show comes from two large video projection pieces dealing with political narratives, past and present. In Artur Zmijewski's "Game of Tag, 1999", a group of naked adults of all ages play a game of Tag in an abandoned Polish gas chamber. From the awkward entrance to the chamber to the giddy playful game playing, the players transform from people who are uncomfortably aware of the history of the chamber and their nakedness to imbeciles who momentarily forget their environment and play a silly game. Is it a metaphor for our collective ability to forget easily or a comment on the human resilience to find creativity in any situation?

The juxtaposition of the unlikely environment with a children's game is jarring. Mark Boulos's two-channel video installation, "All that is Solid Melts into Air, 2008", presents two distinct worlds that are linked by global economics. One screen portrays frenzied oil traders at the Chicago Stock Exchange with their chanting and ritualized gestures. On the opposite wall, Niger Delta rebels speak about their battle against the Nigerian state plundering their oil and natural resources in alliance with multi-national corporations. The rebels speak of their war god Egbisu and god of thunder and rain, and appear in disguise of masks and hoods decorated with beads and shells. The power of this piece comes from these warriors directly speaking to the viewer. They, in their powerless situation, chose to take a path of guerrilla fighter as a way to empower themselves. Listening to their talk of invincibility, immortality and the promise to fight on generation after generation, the viewer is watching the war god personified. Thus the pairing of these rebels and the oil traders become a pairing of two rituals, two war dances, completely foreign to each other in form but interlinked with each other by the endless thirst for oil by the West.



Mark Boulos_All that is Solid Melts into Air (2008)_ Two-channel digital video installation_ 14:20 minutes_ Funded by Arts Council England, London with the support of Film London Artists'Moving Image Network Courtesy of the artist

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The co-curators for the exhibit are Ciara Ennis, curator/director of Pitzer Galleries and MingYuen S. Ma, associate professor at the Pitzer College.

Kyungmi Shin is installation artist and curator living and working in Los Angeles, CA. Her solo Installation "Rich" will travel to Sweeney Gallery, UC Riverside in late January, and "Babel: Chaos of Melancholy" will be presented in Nichols Gallery, Pitzer Galleries in May. She is curating "Building Paradise" that opens in March at 7+Fig Art Space in Los Angeles.

Review by Kyungmi Shin



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