

Closed Circuit

Curated by Teresa Smith

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Closed Circuit brings together the video installations and single channel works of five artists who have broadened the possibilities of art-making through the video medium. While the works in this exhibition were produced within the past few years, they all engage the historical legacy of video, reaching back to the late 1960's and early 1970's when artists and social activists declared video a cultural and aesthetic praxis. In 1967-68, Sony introduced the first mobile video production unit, the portapak, prompting experimentation by artists eager to try out this new technology. Video's initial practitioners were often artists who had worked extensively in other mediums. Nam June Paik, for example, considered by many to be the first video artist, was a Fluxus member who sought in video a means to expand his performance-based work. Other artists were interested in how video might extend the phenomenological investigations of Minimalism and site-specific sculpture. Yet others wished to explore the subjectivity of the artist and/or expectations of the audience by examining the construction of narrative and documentary. And finally many saw video as an opportunity to "talk back" to television in order to redress the power relationships between the producers and receivers of mass media.

Clearly much has changed since video's beginnings in the 1960's: most recently, technology and media culture have become a ubiquitous part of our cultural landscape, constituting something analogous to a language in which we must be fluent if we are to negotiate the tides of contemporary life. The artists in *Closed Circuit* draw upon this lexicon while testing new possibilities for its diction.

Anthony Discenza's work is based on a technique the artist developed for appropriating television imagery as part of a political critique of the artificial, consumer-driven culture such imagery fosters. *Untitled Sequence .06* (1999) was created through hours of channel-surfing the artist recorded and then processed digitally in order to condense a vast amount visual and audio information into an experience at once schizophrenic and mesmerizing. Discenza's method recalls the work of artists such as Dara Birnbaum who used montage to alter footage taped off commercial television in order to reveal its ideological underpinnings. Like this earlier work, Discenza's piece operates through a defamiliarization of such imagery, a "making strange" designed to activate the viewer's critical awareness. Discenza writes, "through the compression/decay of the electronic signal which transmits them, images are drained of all meaning save that of

sensory information...a densely scrambled, post-space of visual detritus."

Amy Jenkins's *Pitch and Roll* (1998) is a four-channel video installation that deals with the turbulent and conflicting emotions of adolescence, based on the artist's recollections of her own coming of age. Jenkins work focuses on memory and the psychological and emotional perception of intimate spaces. In *Pitch and Roll*, we read Jenkin's 13-year-old diary in which she confides her reluctance to bid farewell to her swingset, which represents the last stages of childhood, and records her frank observations about her first kiss. Jenkins captures the liminality of this time--as well as the emotional upheaval it usually entails--by creating a space which mimics physically the psychological "pitch and roll" of being a teenager. The dizzying motion of a backyard filmed from a swing-set, and the close-up view of someone's open mouth and probing tongue, induce a sense of nausea which viscerally communicates the excitement and angst of growing up.

Stacey Lancaster's videos, *present/abominable* (1998) from the *You Can't Get There from Here* series, and *The Sissy Spacek Film Festival* (1999) and *Untitled One* (1999) from the *Trailer* series are drawn from two sets of ongoing works which address her current concerns with site. Lancaster is interested in the problem of place, defined as both an objective and subjective reality, and her work examines the architectural, historical, and social conditions which structure a given site, as well as its less tangible aspects. Lancaster understands place as more than just a physical location, but rather as an intersection of economic, cultural, and psychological factors which shape one's personal experience of geography. Lancaster's videos invest the landscape with narrative and sensual potential, facilitating, as she writes, "an accommodation between 'site' and everything that is not so conveniently defined, between drama and modest activity and between here and over there."

Chris Sollars uses the medium of video to document his droll performances which walk the line between the everyday and the very strange. Like early video performances by artists such as Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, and Chris Burden, Sollars explores artistic subjectivity and the boundaries between public and private, using his own body as a medium for his art. Sollars directly engages these historical precedents, foregrounding the fact that the video camera does not merely record, but alters, social interactions. Sollars uses video not only as a means of documentation but as a way to create unusual situations in otherwise mundane locations, or to make seemingly banal acts transgressive: he variously shaves with an axe, kisses a public sculpture, and washes trash. Three of Sollars videos, *World Cup* (1998), *Landscapes* (1998), and *Cityscapes* (1999) deal with soccer, a sport the artist has used as a metaphor for his art in general: "The space is open to possibilities. How many will come to play or watch? How long will it go? How hard will people play? Will players fight? Will they get along? Anyone on the field becomes involved. Even those watching are in some way participating."