

## ART REVIEW

## Cinema à la Warhol, With Cowboys Stillness and Glamour

By HOLLAND COTTER

A high point of the current Whitney Biennial is its lively film and video program. Organized by the curator Chrissie Iles, it accounts for nearly half of the show, and one of its artists, the filmmaker Irit Batsry, has received this year's Bucksbaum award.

As it happens, film and video are also plentiful in New York galleries these days. The quality is up and down; that's the way it always is with new art. But quantity alone confirms that film-based work is in robust health, particularly as digital technology expands its formal possibilities and carries it, via the Internet, far beyond institutional walls. Several young American film and video artists currently have solo shows in New York City, mostly in Chelsea but also beyond.

## T. J. Wilcox

T. J. Wilcox is showing two digital video pieces at Metro Pictures. In the past, Mr. Wilcox used hand-editing, layering and coloring to give his films the textural density of paintings, a labor-intensive approach taken by some of this year's Biennial artists, including Zoe Beloff, Glen Fogel, Brian Frye and Bruce McClure. He then projected the results onto small screens, as if to emulate the psychological intimacy of the medium, to create a kind of theater of the interior, a dream-cinema.

By contrast, "Midnite Movie" at Metro is conceived on a grand scale, perhaps inspired by its mock-operatic subject: the entire piece consists of shots of live amateur performances that routinely accompany screenings of that gender-tweaking cult war horse, "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." For such events, devotees dress up as the film's main characters and act out their roles in sync with the film. It's like a Goth version of karaoke, and total-immersion stuff to its fans. Mr. Wilcox immerses himself in it, too, cutting, morphing and choreographing his images until a clutzy ritual takes on a hallucinogenic glamour. In the end, though, the expanded scale diminishes the work's impact. It leaves the film looking visually diffuse, and though it only runs 12 minutes, too long.

His other Metro piece, "Ladies Room (20 Questions)," is also about

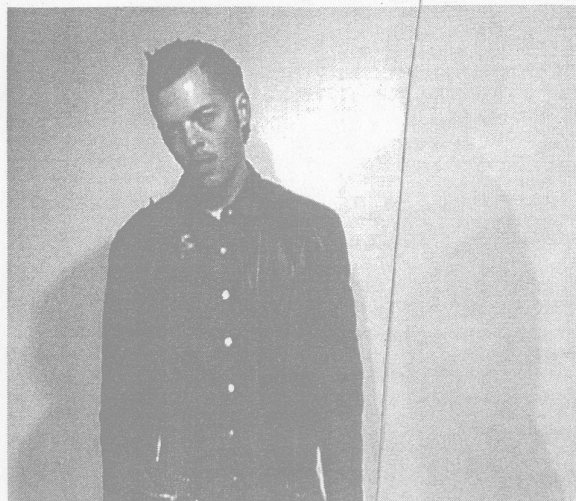


Time warp: A still from "Midnite Movie," a digital video by T. J. Wilcox showing a "Rocky Horror" fan.

people to sit in front of a camera and "just act natural" for their 15 minutes of celluloid fame. The results were sometimes entertaining, often boring and occasionally embarrassing. (Natural can be hard to do.) The same is true here.

For Mr. Hobart's video, four young men, ostensibly auditioning for a cowboy film, smoke, drink beer and answer off-camera questions about their lives. The camera records dopey stories, awkward silences, twitchy poses and a few minor revelations. (When one man, who was actually born in Texas, turns from talking about family life on the ranch to street hustlers in New York, he loses his twang.)

Warhol's screen tests were dry-runs for Superstardom, an existential condition. Mr. Hobart's are try-outs for a film he actually plans to make, described by the gallery as "less a western than an exploration of masculine sexual mythology."



and a child of West Coast surfer royalty. She first came to light in the East Village in the early 1980's as the founder and lead singer of the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black, an all-girl, pro-girl punk band. She is in every way out of the ordinary.

Her band performed at the opening, and the stage is part of the show, along with a display of sculptures, enigmatic costumes and pictures of the artist by the Los Angeles photographer Bruce La Bruce. The centerpiece, though, is an episodic video (Richard Metzger, Ned Ambler and Richard Kern contributed to it) that shows Ms. Pfahler performing onstage, ruminating about her life and undergoing an unusual form of elective surgery. The artist captured live here is one that Kembra Pfahler fans for good reason ardently admire, and in big-bucks Chelsea she looks more flagrantly resistant to mainstreaming than ever.

## Jonathan Calm

If video has primarily instrumental uses in Ms. Pfahler's show, it is put to complicated formal and political ends in the work of the young Brooklyn-based artist Jonathan Calm. In his first New York solo show, at Caren Golden Fine Art, Mr. Calm's subject is the Brooklyn neighborhood where he lives, one made up largely of low-income housing projects. He recreates their forms as abstract sculptures but also, and more interestingly, incorporates them into three-minute video pieces.

Mr. Calm shoots many of his images — of buildings, playgrounds, people on the street — from his apartment window, and sometimes he hires neighbors to pose for him. He digitally manipulates the results, adding animation and a sampled sound track. His work is, in fact, a form of visual sampling, with images blending into one another. A basketball net grows into a web that engulfs a child; a bulldozer shovels debris from a demolition as a computer-drawn house begins to erect itself on the site. The show finds Mr. Calm still in the process of sorting out ideas. But he is an ambitious artist doing imaginative things with still-experimental digital media, and this is a promising debut.

## New Arts Program

For a sense of what film and video artists outside New York are up to,

## All Around Town

The artists and New York City galleries in the review of video art.

**T. J. WILCOX**, Metro Pictures, 519 West 24th Street, Chelsea, (212) 206-7100. Through April 13.

**DANNY HOBART**, Gorney Bravin and Lee, 534 West 26th Street, Chelsea, (212) 352-8372. Through April 13.

**"VAPOR,"** Marianne Boesky Gallery, 535 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, (212) 680-9889. Through April 20.

**KEMBRA PFAHLER**, American Fine Arts Company at P.H.A.G., 530 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, (212) 941-0401. Through tomorrow.

**JONATHAN CALM**, Caren Golden Fine Art, 526 West 26th Street, Suite 215, Chelsea, (212) 727-8304. Through April 27.

**FOURTH NEW ARTS PROGRAM BIENNIAL VIDEO FESTIVAL 2001**, Paula Cooper Gallery, 534 West 21st Street, Chelsea, (212) 255-1105. Through April 20.

**CHRIS SOLLARS AND MADS LYNERUP**, Suite 106, Milburn Hotel 242 West 76th Street, Manhattan, (212) 362-1006. Through May 25.

**"EYESTALK,"** Smack Mellon Studios, 56 Water Street, Brooklyn, (718) 834-8761. Through April 14.

**"SUPERLOUNGE,"** GALE GATES et al., 37 Main Street, Brooklyn, (718) 522-4586. Through May 4.

long, Bruce Nauman's "Mapping My Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)" at Dia, a Warholian five hours. Or maybe move on to attractions elsewhere.

## At Other Galleries

One is uptown at Suite 106, a smart new gallery run by Irena Popiashvili and Marisa Newman in the Milburn Hotel on the Upper West Side. On view is a video titled "We Are Waiting" by Chris Sollars and Mads Lynerup, a sort of "Screen Tests" in reverse. In Mr. Hobart's film, gay men tease a macho ideal; in "We Are Waiting," two straight men, played by the San Francisco-based artists, gamely and, on the whole, convincingly try on the role of dial-up gay call-guys.

Finally, there are two film-and-video group shows in the waterfront district near Brooklyn Heights known as Dumbo (for Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass).