

ICA
THE INSTITUTE OF
CONTEMPORARY ART
955 BOYLSTON STREET
BOSTON
MASSACHUSETTS
02115
(617) 266-5132

CURRENTS

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Mediated Narratives



Joan Does Dynasty, 1986 photo: Julia Seltz

Television has the power to create myths, and many contemporary artists have made observations which inspire them to comment on the media and aggressively challenge the fantasies perpetuated by the industry. "Mediated Narratives" is an ongoing exhibition of single-channel videotapes that includes works which critically or ironically address the presence of media in society - its impact on cultural values and the individual's imagination. This component of the series (which will continue through the year introducing new work into the same scheduled hour) features two videotapes which extract images from televised sources and restructure them into new subversive narratives through a twisted and ironic configuration of spoken text and image. This portion of the program features Joan Does Dynasty (1986) conceived, written, produced and performed by Joan Braderman, co-directed by Braderman and Manuel DeLanda, and SHUT THE FUCK UP (1985) by the Toronto-based collective General Idea. (General Idea's Boutique for the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion is on view in the galleries, a part of the Endgame exhibition.)

In one emerging tradition in the avant-garde, artists infiltrate the media and appropriate images from the broadcast entertainment/information industry. By breaking apart a typical TV narrative sequence, the artist analyzes and isolates images which constitute a symbolic or iconographic meaning. This recent practice has introduced a wide range of stylistic techniques but few have matched the methods, bravery and humor of the two tapes featured in this section of "Mediated Narratives".

Joan Braderman introduces herself in Joan Does Dynasty as an . . . "American, like TV itself. I'm your local beatnik professor," she continues, "as opposed to anchor clone. An unabashed - well, a bit bashed - sixties throwback type doing stand-up theory as TV infiltrator, media counterspy and image cop." Additionally introducing the illusion of her own image into the sets and scenes of ABC's popular weeknight drama "Dynasty", the artist inserts her presence as narrator and critic, analyzing the plot structure and the morally suspect qualities of the fictionalized characters, placing herself into suspended moments recorded from the TV broadcast.

The effects of television are apparent in most aspects of contemporary life: in conversation, fashion trends, and ordinary behavior. TV, at once reflects and creates the values of society. Braderman asks a question for all of us: why do people "welcome this department store of dressed-to-kill aliens into their home every week?"

In this "Neo-pagan, Post-situationist, Socialist/Anarcho/Feminist exposé"² of the nation's favorite adult fable, the artist does much more than deconstruct and examine its ingredients. For Braderman TV represents a revolutionary tool. This work makes searing comment on the representation of the sexes in current media and, through her fiery repartee and quick wit, exposes the codes of corporate power, and various stratagems of seduction in order to question the implications and social value of "Dynasty" and similar programs.

Those who look at television and advertising from a critical perspective and see the media as a form of public art will applaud Braderman's attempt to subvert TV's autocratic tendencies and will also agree with Jorge Zontal, one of the three members of General Idea, when he exclaims SHUT THE FUCK UP - in a tape commissioned by Time Based Arts in Amsterdam for a series titled "Talking Back to the Media," and concludes saying the "the new emergent meaning and the old retiring meaning (are) engaged in a battle of wits on the borderline between content and context."³

In this new tape, General Idea bitterly criticizes the same media that has been source material for many of their brilliant projects (see "Modern Leisure" by David Joselit for a biographical outline of General Idea in the ICA's Endgame exhibition catalog). Through a stylized parody of the media - the news, docu-drama and personality profiles - the myth-making formula is stripped of its influence, viewed as ludicrous, and urged to be silent.

AA Bronson, Jorge Zontal and Felix Partz are the fictionalized identities of the artist members of General Idea. As an art-making association, the group exploits double entendre, pun and metaphor to explore and expose facets of high culture, playing with the ambiguity of language and image. In their work, artists have created and destroyed, through falsified documents and media hoax, fictionalized constructions of their own instigation. In this tape, they are concerned with the content of televised information and protest its so-called entertainment value. Typical of other developments throughout their career, the artists make vivid the humor inherent in media art conceits and seek to change the industry's conventional description of artists as a passive, yet cleverly deceitful, alienated cult of the imbecile.

Art journalism chooses to use war-time language and an excess of noun-modifiers to explain the intentions of the "front-line" artists in much contemporary criticism. Such rhetoric is pertinent when describing the success of these two videotapes in the artists' retaliation against dishonesty and misrepresentation. These artists

seize control of the media image to use it, with mediation, as a weapon against itself, working toward the inevitable defeat of its influence.

Bob Riley

1. Taken from the spoken text of "Joan Does Dynasty"
2. The Independent, "Inside Dynasty" by J. Braderman, September 1986
3. Quote taken from the spoken text of SHUT THE FUCK UP.

CHECKLIST

Joan Does Dynasty (1986)
31 minutes, color, sound
by Joan Braderman
co-directed by Manuel De Landa
Distributed by the artist

SHUT THE FUCK UP (1985)
14 minutes, color, sound
by General Idea
Distributed by Art Metropole, Toronto

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