

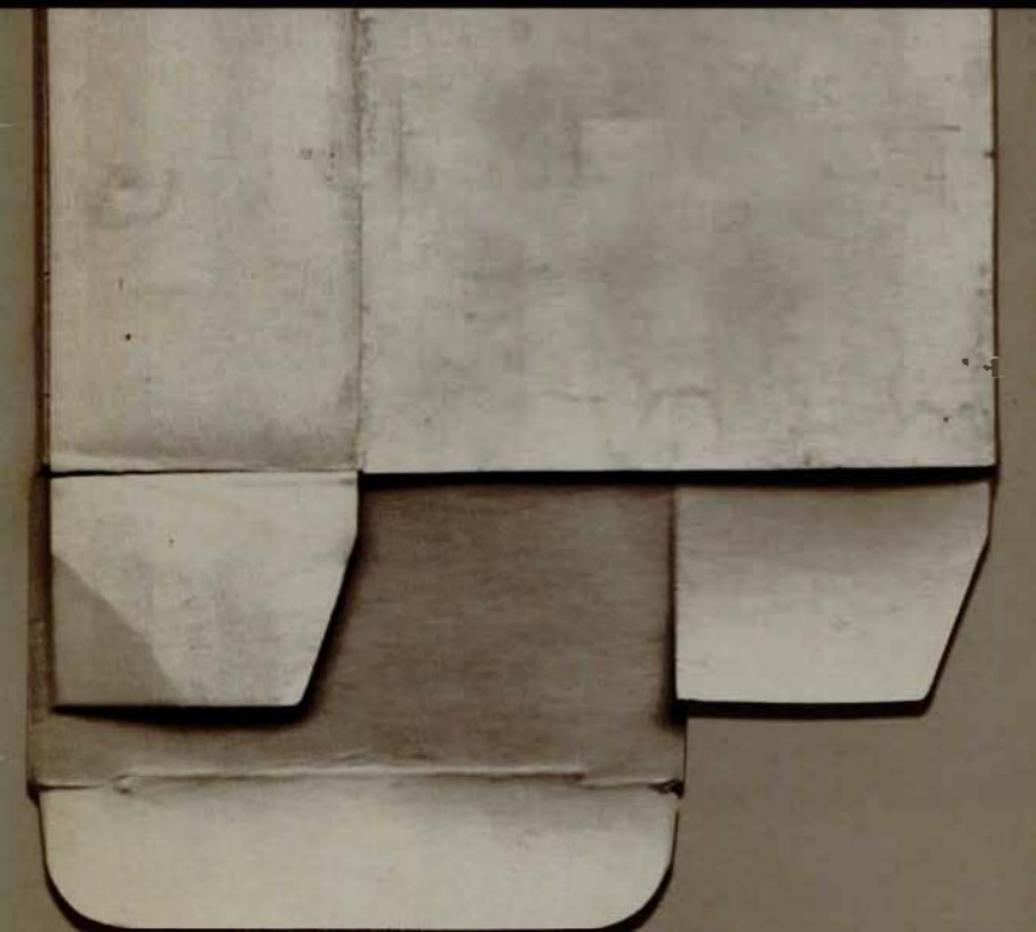
Vtape Presents

THE CURATORIAL INCUBATOR

A Fall Series: Wednesday evening video screenings of
work selected by emerging curators of media art.

Wednesday October 16 - December 4, 2002.

In the V tape Video Salon, 401 Richmond, Suite 452.



The
**Curatorial
Incubator**

Introduction

The Curatorial Incubator is the latest Vape project to encourage the exhibition and dissemination of works by emerging media artists and curators. **Incubator** participants met over the past summer to discuss (and often argue over) what is programming and what is curating. They had sessions with Dryden Goodwin (U.K. based artist-curator), Su Ditta (adjunct curator at The Oakville Galleries) and Anne Golden (festival programmer from Montreal) to look at video programmes and compare their strategies in selecting video art.

The eight young artist/curators then retired to their salons (figuratively speaking, of course) and made their choices. **The Curatorial Incubator** is the result of their concentration and their interests alone. Vtape extends thanks to all these young artist/curators for their focus and attention to detail. Each selection is completely unique, made for personal reasons that are made clear in the essays contained here.

After all the selections have been made, it is fascinating to see (or at least imagine) the parallels between the personal practice - whether in sculpture, in video, in film or in writing - of the curators, and the video they each selected. Each selection reveals a personal excavation of that which is troubling or entrancing, or just lurking, unanswered as of yet. Each curator went into the work they are presenting with an eye to answer the question: why am I showing this to you tonight. And each has answered this question with grace and honesty.

Lisa Steele, Creative Director, Vtape

Shanan Kurtz
on the work of Sarah Abbott

Rug

I have some issues with video art.

Is there shame in coming clean about this? Any number of pieces can be understood and appreciated on a theoretical level, but true engagement is rare. Video often looks ugly or is too visually abstract. It is slow, or repetitive, or absent of any happening at all. It demands too much of the viewer. It is usually way too long.

Sarah Abbott's *Rug* is, more or less, an amalgamation of the above stereotypes. A camera placed on the floor seeks focus by blurring in and out for a lengthy 18 and a half minutes, while an audio track of a thunderstorm and people ostensibly making love plays over top. The artist herself has admitted that "people either love the tape or can't deal with it."

For all intents and purposes I should fall into the latter category - however, I don't. The fact is that, surprisingly, I like this piece, not despite but *because* of its reliance on all the elements I usually find so exasperating. The content and form of *Rug* are inextricably linked so as to negate any desire to alter its imagery, pacing, running length, or amount of viewer involvement. The ambiguity of the piece is augmented by its form and allows the sexual encounter to unfold.

In the preface of Anais Nin's 1969 collection of erotic fiction, "*Delta of Venus*," the author describes how she came to write stories for a man who seemed to derive pleasure only from specificities. He demanded clinical descriptions that were devoid of the emotional content Nin felt compelled to include. "Concentrate on sex. Leave out the poetry," the man advised.

Nin wasn't particularly taken with this response, and as evidenced by *Rug*, I might imagine Sarah Abbott to have a similar reaction. *Rug* functions as an erotic poem; its ambiguity serving to confound the explicit sexuality sequestered above. Its pace and subtlety are paramount in its functioning as a successful sexual exploration.

A subversion of the cinematic male gaze is achieved by presenting the subject matter in a genderless, though no less potent, manner, essentially leaving the particulars of the encounter to the viewer's imagination. The video's lack of distinguishing details places it in conflict with pomography, yet the decision to utilize video as a medium (the artist's body of work had, until that point, been in film) adeptly references that of the porn genre.

The voyeuristic element of pornography is intact in *Rug*, but the audience is forced to participate in an unusual voyeurism in which we don't actually see anything of an explicit or traditionally titillating nature. The fetishism and narcissism of video are touched upon by virtue of having turned the camera in on a private 'performance,' though this aspect is diminished by the absence of any particulars.

It is this deliberate lack of specificity that imbues the video with its sense of sexual power, and thus renders it an uncomfortable and provocative piece to watch. Without concrete visual imagery to latch onto, imaginations are left to grapple with the individual emotional viscera inherent but often ignored in sexual relationships. Dealing with the personal leads to vulnerability of the self.

This is not to imply that the physical and emotional are mutually exclusive, and *Rug* elicits a very corporeal response as well. The screen seems to pulsate in the attempt to focus, alternating between the arousal of possibly glimpsed bodies and the vertigo of a sea in motion. At various intervals it feels like the camera is breathing in time with the damp voices, and our own breathing becomes quickened.

The innate intimacy and immediacy of video is augmented by the fact that the encounter seems to occur in real time. The action is allowed the time to run its course, and is seemingly not cut or edited. The audience takes the time necessary to discover the pleasure in subtle shifts in colour and tonality, to absorb what is unfolding in front of them. Time becomes so protracted it seems to cease, yet the slightest change creates an anticipation in the viewer which firmly roots them in the present scene. Despite its length, *Rug* does not feel boring.

A revelation of the particular teases the viewer, but ultimately never exposes itself. We wait for the climax but it never really happens. I didn't find the video unsatisfying because of this; the ambiguities surrounding fulfillment are what make it successful. When sex "becomes explicit, mechanical, overdone... it becomes a bore,"ⁱ says Anais Nin. Beauty and passion can be conveyed through the use of unconventional means. It's more provocative when you can't quite put your finger on it.

Sometimes that kind of intangibility is more appropriately left to the imagination than attempting to be explained. Though the instinct may be to delve into academic discourse, to approach the video under the guise of exploring cultural or gender or formalist theories, it wouldn't be altogether honest. To do this would be to effectively "leave out the poetry," as Nin's patron had requested. I respond to the piece on a highly aesthetic and also emotional level. It was the one tape I watched that affected me; that in making the curatorial decision to show it, implicated me in the presentation of its eroticism. I feel a bit uncomfortable at the prospect of watching it in the company of my parents, or strangers. I kind of like that.

ⁱ Anais Nin, *Delta of Venus* (New York: Swallow Press, 1969). p. xii

ⁱⁱ Nin, p.xv

Patrick Borjal
on the work of asianpunkboy

asianpunkboy left private chat or is ignoring you

At once, the viewer is faced with an image of a boy suspended. A story is not about to slowly unfold. It is a webcam visual with a bedroom view.

can we meet in your hot ship bunker while I dock my feet up into the air
so you
can worship it real good,
cause I am sick of this city:
a city that hounds me...
tears me
and coerces me singularly...
slowly...
to participate in the mad romance
of its ruptured gridded insanity

hee hee, you are weird but that is cool

hey what size feet ya got by the way?

size 10, pretty big for an asian huh?!

(excerpt from *APB01*, a conversation with **bluefalcon man**)

The glare from the window tints the screen blue. A pink ribbon appears tied at the mouth against a white-papered wall.

"Pink is a colour that marks the highest degree of awesomeness or perfection," Matt says. "As when you say you are 'in the pink.' It is, as well, the colour of movies when the colour fades."*

The boy, arms up, is then repeatedly hit with a skateboard. He moans at varying volumes depending on the strike. Outside the window, cars pack a parking lot.

"Skaters by their very nature are urban guerillas: they make everyday use of the useless artifacts of the technological burden, and employ the handiwork of the government/corporate structure in a thousand ways that the original architects could never dream of."*

A fence encloses the buildings of an unnamed institution. The edge of a mountain is a backdrop. A yellow trash bin sits in the corner like an icon.



Confessions of a Mask

Authors operating under a pseudonym or an alias either conceal their origins or, in the case of a porn star or a Bond girl, explicitly and instantly suggest the essence of their actions and artistic practice. An Asian Punk Boy labeled work anonymously pillages through the urban environment, collecting remnants, while at the same time leaving behind the distinct marks of a pink Krylon vandal.

The APB bookworks combine the artists' own written, photographic, and sculptural contributions with snippets of work created by collaborators and admirers, as well as pieces from reluctant or unknowing participants. *APB01: The Empty City* contains a booklet filled with heated exchanges between **asianpunkboy** and various members of a gay.com chat room. In *APB 1.5 The Stolen Issue*, Asian Punk Boy furtively combines appropriated texts with pics of Internet porn into a pocket "style bible".

"Style is not superficial.
It is a philosophical project
of the deepest order."

is positioned beside the portrait of a naked boy resting on a multi-coloured knit blanket. An orgy in a white convertible is paired with

"We pioneered a new media category which is called lifestyle. Nobody else did it before, and we did it, and we intend to really dominate this area for a very long time to come."
(Martha Stewart)

For every order, *APB01* is delivered in a custom designed box with a fabric cover and each issue is self-published and made-to-order.

"Some people say it's as simple as stapling together a few photocopied pages of naked boys or disembodied vaginas and dropping it in the mail, but I don't think so. You have to be a keen propagandist, a dedicated pornographer, a shameless self-promoter, and an inveterate shape-changer to exist in this ambitious little cosmology."

Recorded on June 27, 2001, *Confessions of a Mask* is an APB video document described on www.asianpunkboy.com as "art". The taped performance, co-directed with and featuring artist Matt Aiken, involves a simple act of sadomasochism.

The video eschews slick filmic expression, maintaining the do-it-yourself aesthetic of amateur porn. The camera is set on a tripod and the shot is framed. A large window overlooks an industrious landscape. Two sizeable strips of white paper cover the adjacent wall.

Confessions of a Mask upholds the basic function of video, employing the device to easily capture a particular moment. The event is depicted without much of an introduction. APB delivers instant gratification. Wait just a split second and he appears suddenly, instrument in hand.

After a while, he steps back. And before it all ends, he looks to the camera and removes his shirt.

"say you were me
though you could see the view
you know we are equally damaged"*

The scene finishes with the pink ribbon cut, and tet fall in pieces. The video becomes another pretty APB package opened and untied.

FROM: "ASIANPUNKBOY." <asianpunkboy@hotmail.com>
TO: rikborj@hotmail.com
SUBJECT: Re: cut and paste (raw is good)
DATE: Fri, 16 Aug 2002 11:11:38 +0000

hey p.

please don't hate me. fuck. i piss forgot about sending the tape. sorry, sorry sorry. i guess it's too late?
really... i have been so busy let me know...

dearly, apB

The APB chronicles, including *APB1.3: 50 Secret Friends*, come affixed with a distinct imprint, readily identifiable. Self-branding seems logical in a consumerist arena that thrives on the ability to class and target-market. The APB trademark plays at the unavoidable naming in identity politics. Pre-classifying work amusingly facilitates easy consumption. Artists that use logos and overtly display an acute awareness of art market demands imply either compliance, or an assault on commerce (or both).

"In any case, it is not surprising that under capitalism, finding my penis may ultimately be a matter of dollars and cents."*

Surprisingly, friends and ex-lovers are always willing to strip off their clothes for a small amount of money or a minor favour in return. Label and sell. These meticulous assemblages of porno and poetry can be rosy and sublime. Steal and sample. yo!* Repeat and reproduce.

"That was alright."

"Yeah? It was good?"

"Yeah. I liked it. I liked it. That was cool. That was totally cool..."
"I like that I'm comfortable naked around boys."

"Really."

"I've never been naked around boys before, ever in my life... It's going good. A pretty good start."*

**stolen text in order of appearance: Gus Van Sant, Craig Stecyk, Bruce Mau, Bruce La Bruce, Blonde Redhead, Richard Fung, AsianPunkBoy, AsianPunkBoy + Matt Aiken*

block

block (blòk)

verb

blocked, block·ing, blocks verb, transitive

To indicate broadly without great detail; sketch: *block out a plan of action*.¹

"When I go out in this neighbourhood, like to go to the corner to get a coffee, I just throw whatever on and just go as I am - I never encounter anyone that I know."²

Strangely, I know exactly what Elizabeth Fearon means by 'whatever' and 'as I am' because I lived on that block, within that neighbourhood, 3 years ago. I had someone with me there - and we were locked in by the cheap rent. I came to learn through my experiences living on the block of Jarvis and Gerrard that the area immediately surrounding your home is paradoxically strange. Paradoxical because it is where you carry out your most necessary everyday actions - getting coffee, groceries, cigarettes, but it is dreadfully empty of context for the rest of your everyday life. You feel a constant sense of alienation and dislocation from what surrounds you even though you are familiar with every square inch... If you're not teaching or studying at Ryerson, chances are you are going about the rest of your everyday life elsewhere in the city unless, of course, you never leave home.

block (blòk) *noun*

Abbr. blk.

A large building divided into separate units, such as apartments.³

Elizabeth lives alone, in an apartment with a balcony in an apartment block on Jarvis Street.

Even though the apartment is on the block of Jarvis and Gerrard, her apartment is separate from the exposed and shared urban context that frames it, because she lives inside it with autonomy. Her apartment is also where she edits her videos.

In the apartment, Elizabeth is free to inhabit the space as it suits her every day life - she is the centre of its definition - even if it is exactly the same interior architectural plan as the apartment to the left and to the right of her. The objects and actions that affirm it is her rented space (family photos, personal belongings, her clothing, etc.) make manifest her desires and goals - it is where she enacts her personal daily rituals.



block (blòk) *noun*

Abbr. blk.

A mold or form on which an item is shaped or displayed: a *hat block* ⁴

Her apartment is also the original site of action in the video *Block*. Our first introduction into this space is a shot of the exterior of Elizabeth's freezer, although she soon steps into this establishing shot in order to enact the first moment; she opens the freezer door and takes out an innocuous ice cube tray.

block (blòk)

verb

Medicine. To interrupt the proper functioning of (a nervous, muscular, or other physiological process), especially by the use of anesthesia.⁵

What is not so innocuous is the forcible act of expectoration. Spitting. Elizabeth takes the tray to the sink and begins what seems at times a painful act, almost a personal ritual, but perhaps more of a necessary tactic. Once finished, we are taken back to the freezer, the evanescent "blocks" inside are almost ready, and Elizabeth must change into something more suitable for a walk around the block that perpetually surrounds her.

The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances.⁹

With two hands Elizabeth takes the now frozen tray from the freezer. She is wearing gloves. And a coat. She moves without ceremony to the door, and through. Dissolves characterize her movement outside. She presses the button for the elevator. Disappears into it. We watch the exterior door of her building in anticipation.

block (blòk) *noun*

Abbr. blk.

a. A usually rectangular section of a city or town bounded on each side by consecutive streets. b. A segment of a street bounded by consecutive cross streets and including its buildings and inhabitants.

Once on the street, situated on her block, the tactical play begins. And we will witness this via the medium of video, mediated by a technological frame, as Elizabeth takes us on a circuit of struggles to make the round of her block. There is an inevitable anonymity that comes with any movement around Jarvis and Gerrard, leading to a negation of the unique self in favour of the abstract urban self. Spitting on the street is so commonplace it goes unnoticed, and blends into that vague idea of city life. To purposefully re-situate this mundane act by translating into something else, a personal gesture and fragmented resistance, is a means of cutting through the block without leaving any permanent trace. The hard and resonant sounds of the banging of the tray on the concrete sidewalk to release the cubes are in stark contrast to the silence that accompanies Elizabeth as she situates these transient parts of herself on the street. The swell of colour, bringing Elizabeth's red coat into acute focus, acts as a momentary assertion of her unique presence in the otherwise even wash of black and white that defines the outside space. This also roots the viewer in the reality of video, and the proprietary language that video affords an artist. Both her actual, and edited, situation become vehicles for her tactical play, and speak to the everyday reality of an urban context, where we can all be agents of the intangible and the transient.

block (blòk)

verb

To run (trains) on a block system.⁹

As agent, Elizabeth does seek to provide us with a narrative that is resolved. Instead she inhabits the space of the block, tracing movements without leaving a mark, and engaging situations without hope of gain. Her blocks cannot change her block. Some of her cubes come to

a sudden and violent end, under the wheel of a car or in the path of streetcar. Others simply disappear through the lines of traffic or the ever-changing frame of the camera, content to accept the context of their existence and their role as players in Elizabeth's game of everyday life.

¹ Excerpted from *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* © 1996 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from INSO Corporation; further reproduction and distribution in accordance with the Copyright Law of the United States. All rights reserved.

² Elizabeth Fearon, Saturday, August 24th, 2002.

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⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), xix.

⁷ Excerpted from *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* © 1996 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from INSO Corporation; further reproduction and distribution in accordance with the Copyright Law of the United States. All rights reserved.

⁸ *ibid.*

Bedroom Dancing

Sara Gilmour's complete works are an uncatalogued collection of footage that has never before been viewed in public. The usual context for their presentation has always been private showings put on impromptu by this compulsive videaste for people crowded into her living room for a party or for close friends just hanging out. On these occasions their presentation is consistent: Sara plugs her camera into the VCR and fast-forwards through her pile of tapes cueing up the juicy bits (Sylvio being a popular favourite) to retrieve them from the larger stream of images. The works are being presented here in a transformed context as hermetic segments culled from their natural existence as a larger unabridged recording. These images have been brought to this forum in order to initiate a contemplation of the works in an unfamiliar environment - one that tests the tensions between the finished work and the amateur experiment. In effect, the programme seeks to transpose a casual private ritual into a one-time public event.

One of the central interests in presenting these works within an institutional art setting is to see how comfortably or uncomfortably they fit here. It can be said that video art in Canada has a very definite recorded history in which artist-run centres such as Vtape have figured importantly. Given that video through the course of its emergence as a particular practice has developed its own discipline-specific codes and vocabulary of critique, what does it mean to insert works by a recreational video diarist such as Sara Gilmour into such a context? One of the motivations of this exercise could be to expand our viewing sensibility to include the contemplation of the unpolished object. The rough presentation quality of these videos, evidence of their frequent playback, a bare-bones editing method, and a low-tech sound technique, give these tapes an allure that separates them from what we have come to expect from video art. However, these works speak to a feature intrinsic to video: a desire to witness the ordinary.

Video's ability to produce an instant record was what originally drew performance artists to the medium, allowing them to record their otherwise ephemeral actions. As an automatic mirror, video is a contemporary substitute for the written diary. Certainly, Sara Gilmour's video practice can be likened to the work of many other video-diarists in this respect. These recordings which Sara has been shooting over the years collect fantastic encounters, intimate portraits and absurd scenarios which together form a lexicon of her quotidian life. *Sylvio*, *Alien Penetration*, and *Happy Birthday* are fanciful works that are unapologetic in their looseness and pure enjoyment of play. These works take



pleasure in a mode of experimentation that can be said to belong exclusively to the domestic interior, that fruitful terrain which has been so well exploited by video-artists (see for instance Sadie Benning's early video early video diaries or Colin Campbell's *Woman From Malibu Series*).

What is it exactly about this domestic interior that presents such creative appeal? One answer may perhaps reside in the utopic possibility afforded by these sites as safe-havens from the scrutinizing eye popular culture casts on certain bodies and behaviours. The interior world as opposed to the exterior world is replete with possibility by virtue of its very invisibility. As the last unmonitored preserve of human existence, the home allows for limitless unseen private activities (a force that was invoked in the recent Trinity Square Video "Home Show" residency). And if it can be asserted that we are constantly under surveillance in public, the home seems to be the place where we turn the camera on ourselves, where we may enjoy the most agency in producing our own representations. It is this very freedom which is exploited in many of Sara Gilmour's videos producing works such as *Sylvia*, an improv lip-synch drag performance of George Michael's "Fast Love." The ascension to male rockstardom performed by this female subject is the apotheosis of being in the world. The imagined scenario of this public performance transcends a popular culture which with renewed enthusiasm criticizes the female body, releasing the body from these constraints in order to offer a utopic vision of a radically altered public culture.

Whimsy and extravagance enjoy free exercise in the absurd worlds unveiled across Sara Gilmour's videoscape where a gleeful irreverence reigns. In the pair of works *What a major that was!* and *Leaky Faucet* this playfulness extends into a critique of the loathsome world of underpaid service jobs. In these dramatizations of her summer job cleaning toilets in a public park she manages to produce an hilarious parody of the absurd conditions of her employment through a studied mimicry of the mannerisms of her sexist supervisor. *What a major that was!*, a training video on the intricacies of cleaning urinals, contains a segment in which all of the tools of the trade are enumerated in what could be dubbed a sped-up re-mix of Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen*. In these works and others, Sara Gilmour seem to exhibit an appreciation for the absurdity of the banal and to revel in inexplicable scenarios such as the one presented in *The Squirrel* (a conversation about the possibility of there being a squirrel trapped in the engine of a car). It is instances like these that make these videos so magnificent, captured because Sara would carry a camera everywhere seeking out moments like these within the course of everyday life.

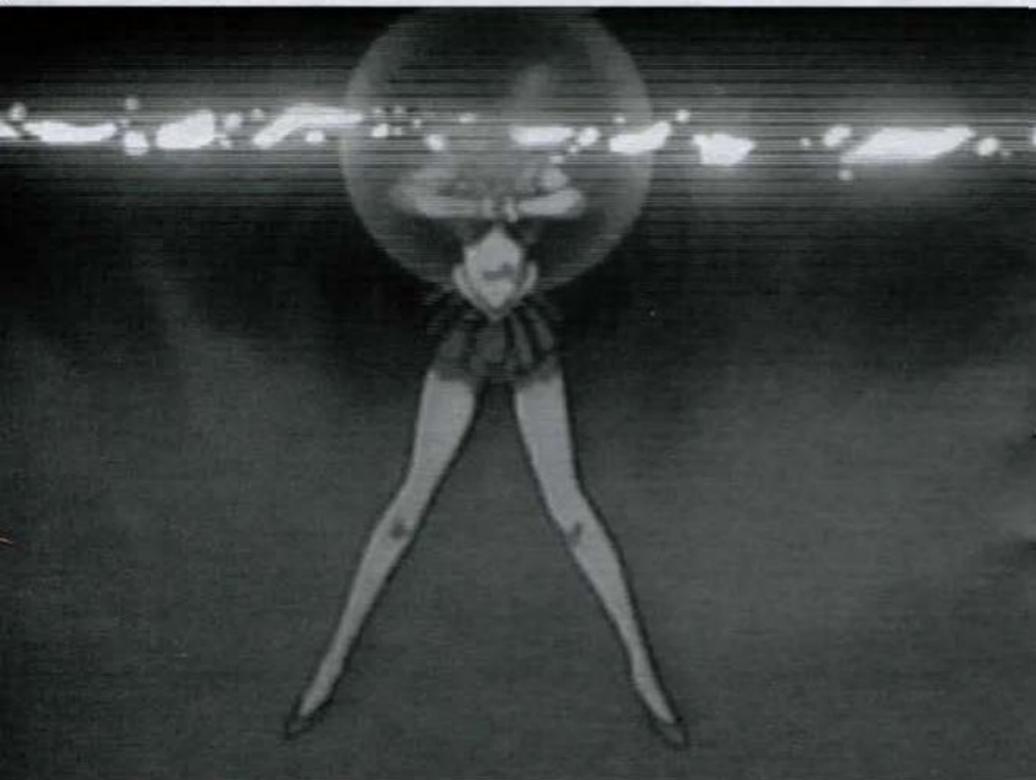
This programme presents highlights of this rare body of work which one hopes will continue to expand and grow into a personal archive of infinite breadth. Lest we might fear that we have left these personal works exposed, we can rest assured that there are still some images that Sara has kept for herself to shelter in sweet privacy.

Alissa Firth-Eagland
on the work of Jubal Brown and
Tasman Richardson

I.A.O.

While I love the sense of disorientation I felt the first time I saw this work, I hate how easy it is to misinterpret Jubal Brown and Tasman Richardson's newest piece, *I.A.O.*

I.A.O. is the apex of a process that began in 1996 in the Integrated Media Department of OCAD when Brown and Richardson developed the JAWA editing style. Richardson explains the JAWA editing style as "a violent reaction to the misuse of video as a literal, narrative, identity focused, and time-based medium". The result is a video style that in theory sounds interesting and crucial, but is intensely difficult to engage with, both physically, as ones eyes attempt to focus on the trigger-edited images, and emotionally, because of the imagery the artists have selected for the piece. The use of rapid edits and controversial imagery is typical of both Brown and Richardson in the past, but *I.A.O.* is much more poignant.



This shift occurs in two ways. First is Brown and Richardson's selection of appropriated footage - ranging from classic film noir to fetish pornography, from Christ to Buddha, and from pentagrams to other hermetic symbols. A cross-section of both organized structures and more informal social phenomena are represented - religion, law and high culture and low culture. This results in a disturbing combination of the emotionally charged, the seemingly harmless, the absolutely sacred, and the profane. The imagery is not simply broad ranging in meaning and significance, but functions in fact as a non-didactic seventeen-minute glimpse at some of the most terrifyingly real aspects of humanity. In the same tenth of a second, we are literally presented with sex and death. Not only is there no time to distinguish between the two, but the juxtaposition of the imagery operates as a hyperbole of contemporary media consumption. We are presented with Bin Laden and Wonder Bread within one minute on CNN and the swastika and Sailor Moon in *I.A.O.*

The better half of this Frankenstein marriage of image and edit is the audio. As with much of the other work produced by Brown and Richardson, what you see is what you hear. The audio with each image is left true to the original, creating a rhythmic beat structure, an almost musical effect. This, merged with the careful, selective repetition of footage, sends the viewer into a kind of hypnotic trance akin to the altered state reached during some forms of meditation. Brown and Richardson have constructed a truly beautiful and frightening work, where disorientation becomes the vehicle for clarity.

The key to *I.A.O.*'s seductiveness is the way in which image and edit are mingled. The viewer is attracted to the imagery, then becomes repelled by its pace and evocative nature, and finally internalizes it and accepts - I dare say, enjoys - the effect. While the images selected are the catalyst and momentum for this reactive succession as the video simultaneously describes and perpetuates a cycle of meaning, the editing is a representative record of this course. In other words, the video is a three-part chronicle of its own reception. Through this process of reception, reaction, internalization, the receiver is not so much indoctrinated as they are disarmed. Somewhere between the beginning and the end of *I.A.O.*, the accepted language of appearances evaporates and we are faced with a bleak but accurate picture of contemporary culture - and the effect is positively primal. *I.A.O.* questions the fundamental truths on which we base our existence by showing us a core sample of the human experience in the blink of an eye.

Brown's and Richardson's appropriated footage creates a horribly beautiful, beastly new image that crushes all meaning and flattens all preconceived notions of relevance. The seemingly blasphemous links they have made by combining images with inherent dissonance and internal conflicts resonate in a very contemporary way. Brown and Richardson have described the terrifying postmodern condition where image is everything and nothing.

But we are denied the time to engage with each image on an intimate level. Instead we relate to the images as a whole - a cycle with a beginning and end. The single frames and split-second clips of separate images become animated, but not in the traditional method of animation where frames morph visually from one object into another through the "trompe d'oeil" of combining nearly identical images. Rather, they have constructed an ideological animation where the shifts in perception that occur from the beginning to the end of the work are conceptual instead of narrative. *I.A.O.* exists primarily as a reception.

I.A.O. serves as a historical artifact for a past that has not yet occurred. On one hand, this work is a frightening exercise in excessive, exaggeratedly advanced cultural production. On the other, it reaches a grubby animal chord within a hyperclean, supersized, technologically plucked human body.

Chris Kennedy

on the work of Francisco Ruiz de Infante

Les Choses simples

It must be difficult to develop a symbolic order when the world itself is undergoing considerable disorder. Whether it is war or family troubles, these adult things creep into a child's utopia like nightmares. These disruptions flicker across the development of childhood understanding, complicating the already difficult attempts to comprehend the patterns and logic of this world. The child tries to adapt his own language into a descriptive tool for this world, even as the tensions on the exterior of his garden world disrupt his notions of beauty and peace.

In *Les Choses simples*, everything is shot in close-up. These close-ups resemble the way a child delineates his world by ordering the surrounding objects, by creating, naming and observing the habits of adults. However, the rumble of the soundtrack reveals that this intense concentration on things is also a way to distract oneself. The attentiveness to things up-close is a child's way of dealing with menace. The examinations of the leaves, the trees, the fruits help to forget the nightmares. The creation of a new language erases the strange language of gunfire and sirens that burst beyond the garden wall.

Francisco Ruiz de Infante explores the violence of adulthood through an iconography of nature. In order to comprehend the dangers that surround, he puts us in a garden. Archetypes teach us that the only gardens that exist are fallen. Still, there is a trust in nature as a constant even with the knowledge of its destruction. Through Ruiz's visual overlaying, the apple that burns becomes a seed for a tree, which is then chipped away at for its sap. This apple, the ultimate symbol of a fallen world, also contains the superimposed image of a home. It is this cycle of destruction and life in which we are ourselves embedded.

For Ruiz, it is apparent that the larger disorders of the adult world also manifest an ecological dimension. Even while nature as a garden offers protection from the ravages of the outside world, it is itself subjected to the direct effects of human intervention. Either it is damaged like the foliage that is uprooted in the first image of the video, or its energy is harnessed by human means as in the image of the showerhead, which stands in for the child's understanding of rain. Through the eyes of the child, the video explores the complexity of our role in shaping the world around us.

Images of hands visually represent the presence of humans throughout the video. As the child narrator points out, "the hand is an object of great precision." However, the child's constant positioning of himself as a stranger reveals the difficulty in assessing whether his hands are as active as he thinks. The hands in the video are those



of outsiders, only rearranging simple things in a manageable order while the larger chaotic environment continues unaffected. The young narrator initially asserts that, "the scars on my hands were worth the trouble", but this statement is complicated by being spoken by a child, who is potentially the most innocent and most powerless agent of change. Even with age, however, it is never quite clear whether those scars are a result of hard manual labour or wounds received in self-defense.

For it is not just the imagined utopia of childhood that is disrupted by the changing conditions of life. The child's actions are not so different from how we ourselves deal with war and other major challenges - the cocoons that we weave, the small gardens that we tear up and replant. The impotency that the child feels and covers by distraction is a common impotency and a common ignorance. The child is able to recognise certain things about the world quite clearly, but he also develops a very early sense of limits. Those limits carry on into adulthood.

Perhaps the most evocative image in *Les Choses simples* is the final image of the marathon runners. It both illustrates the difficulty of navigating a challenging world and contains the possible remedy to this vulnerability. The image begins with a small group of runners who are visually doubled and tripled until the screen fills with a large ghostly mass of people. The narration that accompanies the image resonates with the question of how much we influence the world and how much we are captured by it. The child narrator lists a few recent discoveries

he has made about the adult world. After summarising these observations, he declares his final discovery, "that pain is a complicated feeling and that solitude exists." The repetition of this phrase like a mantra over the image of the athletes reveals that solitude exists even in the multitude - perhaps it is even defined by the multitude. The revelation that this awkward sense of isolation is central to our feelings of impotency may lead to a greater understanding of the importance of challenging our social isolationism. The limits we discover as children are often limits that separate us from the multitude and cause us to burrow in our gardens, trying to make sense of it all, rather than recognising the common confusion just over the garden wall.

Bad Ideas For Paradise

When thinking about Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby's *Bad Ideas For Paradise*, the first thing that comes to mind is a quote from an article published in a contemporary visual art magazine published last autumn. I liked the blurb so much I cut it out and taped it to my fridge so that I can ponder this question every day as I have my morning coffee: "How Can You Think About Making Art At A Time Like This?" The quote specifically referred to the 9/11 horrors, yet can easily be applied to the broader context of the climate of po-mo culture. What place does thinking about art have in the world of Oprah and the Osbournes, of commodified punk rock sold in suburban malls, of a political arena that is as insane and/or inane as that of professional wrestling. Interpersonal relationships are sequestered and quarantined in a tangled web of internet porn sites and telephone dating services. Don't try to look for solutions or solace in the writings of others, because it will only lead to more frustration. It's as though Debord has us in a headlock while Baudrillard kicks us in the groin.

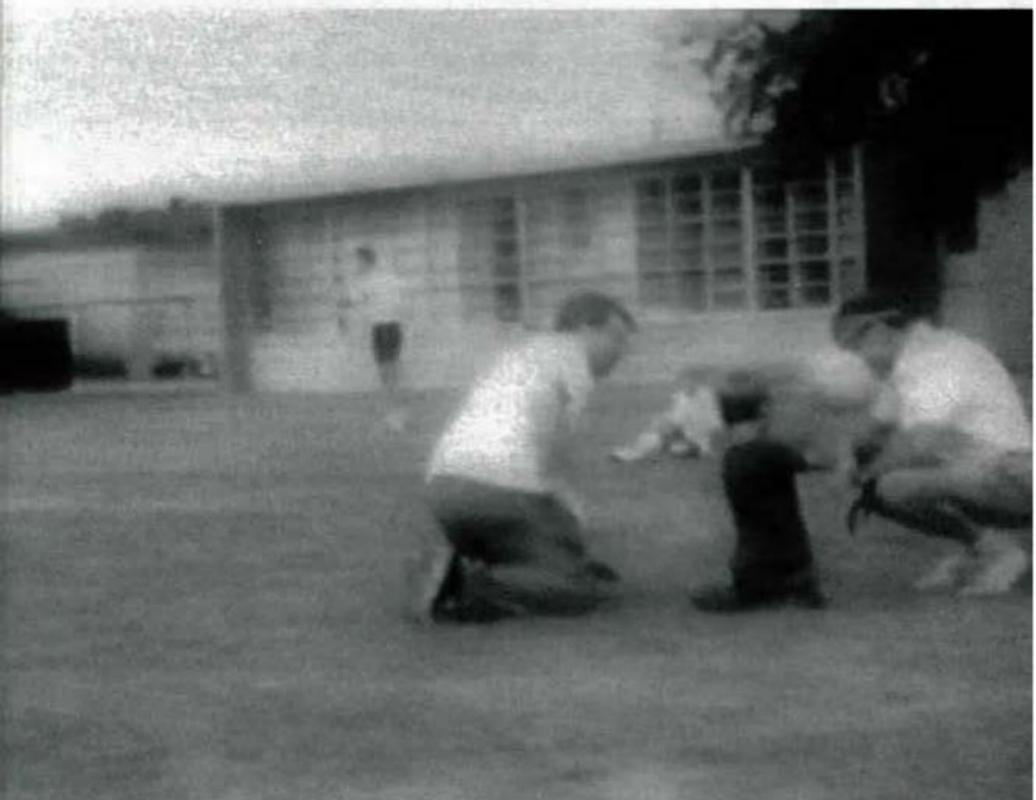
Question: what place does the heart and soul have in a world where Every desire is regulated through advertising and focus groups?
Answer:Uh oh...we're fucked.

This type of conclusion can easily lead to a volatile mental tempest of misery and anger. The individual seems impotent and alienated in this universe of hypocrisy. Lonely, bitter, disenfranchised, we wander through our days finding little comfort in the distractions of drug abuse, masturbation and the latest hot new releases from Blockbuster.

Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby have given us a tiny ray of hope, or, more accurately, a nugget of amusement. *Bad Ideas For Paradise* is a video that I selected to cheer myself up on a day when I was exceptionally hungover at the tail end of a rather substantial nervous breakdown. After watching it, I was exponentially more uplifted, cheerful and in a better overall frame of mind. I immediately declared, "This video is the perfect cure for hangovers and nervous breakdowns." The more I thought about it, however, the more I realized that this work doesn't cure anything. It offers no remedies for all that confuses and enrages us. All it does is tell it like it is.

Duke and Battersby seem to be following the simple truth that more flies are caught with honey than with vinegar. Rather than turning childhood traumas and misplaced dreams into a freakshow of horrors, they

treat uncomfortable issues with wit, sentimentality, irony, honesty and exquisite audio and visuals. This video tugs at the heartstrings without falling into the trap of being sappy or heavy handed. It is structured in short segments that each find their own way of commenting on various aspects of the human condition. (I would like to note how easily digestible this type of editing is, since we have been so preconditioned to it by way of Sesame Street and the rock video.) Even though the opinions expressed in the above mentioned segments are often poignant or even depressing, they are always treated with enough humor so as not to induce a yearning for suicide.



Images of a young boy being reprimanded during a soccer match accompany a reflection on the myth of the innocence of childhood: "I began my life wailing. Most of us do, and go on wailing and demanding, piling shameful act on shameful act until we ice the cake with something really awful..." Later on, hot pink text appears on the screen, stating that "the human capacity for fascination is the saddest thing on earth. Every fascination's like a seed containing all the genetic information required for the flowering of disinterest." The shark is used as a metaphor for power and strength provoking nothing more than fear, teenage boys on skateboards are used as a metaphor for the joy of experiencing "sensation without reserve". The triumphs and failures

the human spirit are given equal consideration throughout the piece as it teeters on the knife edge between laughter and tears.

In the end, we are left with one last thought that can act as a valuable mantra for easing the pain of bad trips and long lonely nights. "And for a moment I know that I am a fresh and seasoned person in this mostly fruitless orchard of the world." *Bad Ideas For Paradise* reminds us that the one thing that we can all relate to is our sense of isolation. We are by nature hypocritical, we are perpetually frustrated. Duke and Battersby tell us that maybe the world isn't really so crappy. No...wait! What they're really telling us is that the world is crap, But that's ok.

Carolyn Kane

on the work of Mirha-Soleil Ross

Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thoughts from an Unrepentant Whore

Mirha-Soleil Ross's performance piece, *Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thought From an Unrepentant Whore* (May 2002) is a seven-act production that destabilizes destructive stereotypes of transsexuals and sex-workers. *Yapping Out Loud* candidly demonstrates Mirha's ability to traverse between realms of the fictitious and the realistic. She does this by shifting in and out of monologues - from accounts of her personal experiences to humorous acts couched in campy aesthetics.

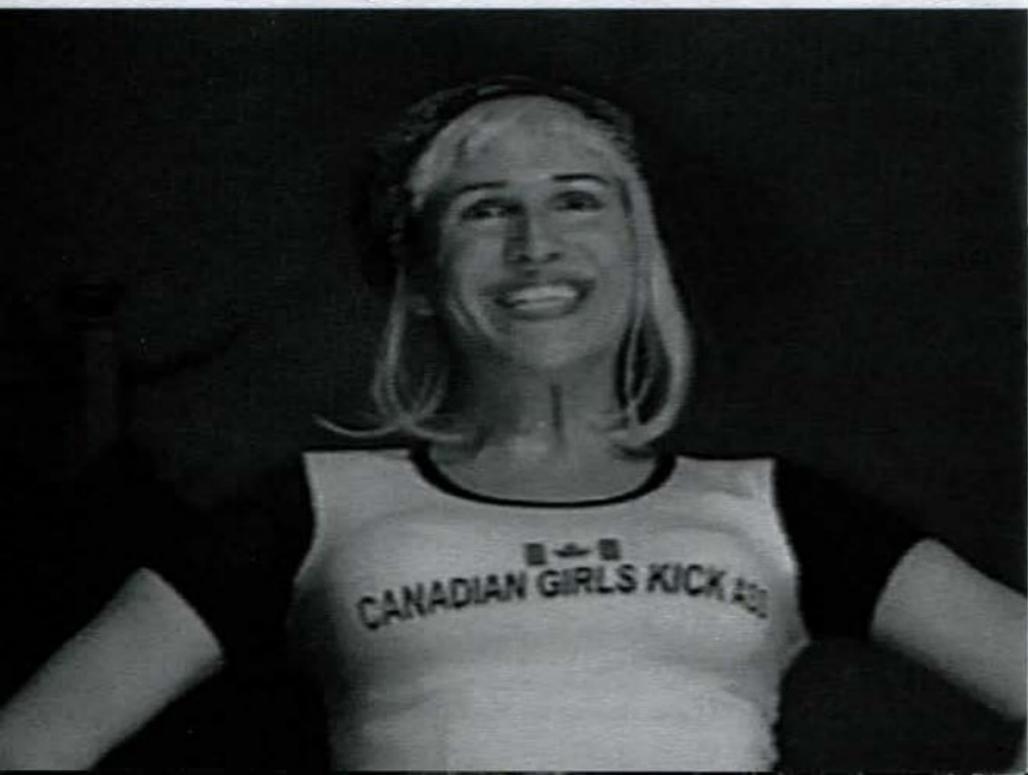
The entire piece is juxtaposed by the metaphor of the coyote. Historically, COYOTE ("Call Off Your Tired Ethics") is an organization founded by Margo St. James in 1973. COYOTE supports the rights of all sex workers of all genders and orientations: strippers, phone operators, prostitutes, porn actresses. COYOTE supports programs that prevent the scapegoating of sex workers for AIDS and other STDs, and that educate sex workers, their clients and the general public about safe sex. *Yapping Out Loud* sees the prostitute as the 'coyote', bringing the metaphor to life. Always addressing issues of prostitution, transsexuality, feminisms, and animals' rights activism through this metaphor, a didactic relationship evolves within the piece. The episodic presentation of *Yapping Out Loud* provides an alternative way of thinking through socialist feminist discourses, social justice activism, and anti-sex-worker prejudices while addressing the body and its relationship to culture through its performance art format.

Mirha begins Act I standing upright at the foot of the stage, assertive in her bravado. She stuns the audience into silence as she dishes up some rage pervading the stereotype of the whore. Yet it is clear her decision to perform as - and indeed embody - the whore persona has been a conscious one, as her garter belt, satin bra and red lipstick indicate. She hollers out: "Stop! Ground, Center, and Focus!" Is this a reminder to herself, an audience member may ask, or is it even more contagious - meant as an angry cry to those in attendance. (The room was packed wall to wall with fellow sex workers, queer and trans academics, art viewers and Mayworks attendees.) A cry to stop the discourses, the pejorative perceptions, harmful assumptions and judgments. In short, "shut up and listen".

The pace slows down in Act II and the audience relaxes a little and begins to laugh at Mirha's humorous anecdotes. As she sits down in an armchair, puts on a pair of slacks and removes her lipstick, she recounts some of the stories of her "journey towards prostitution and self-sufficiency". However, these stories aren't filled with tales of abuse and misfortune, rather they are intimate glances at Mirha's experiences growing up. No sooner does the audience ease into this casual atmosphere, than the act is swiftly ended and followed up by the insane and obnoxious character of Bridge-it Taylor.

In Act III, the pace accelerates to a frightening speed, roaring with buzz words like "victims", "misogyny" and "patriarchy". The socialist feminist Bridge-It Taylor, in high camp style, pulls three plastic dolls out of garbage bags. These dolls, she explains, represent the way all sex-workers have been abused, victimized and forced into the evil underbelly of prostitution. Taylor ends her speech by graciously thanking each doll - an acrid conclusion, as these rare and absurd accounts of victimized bodies are what she has built her entire theories on. This twisted ending allows a glimpse of the bitter reality that underlies Mirha's use of camp humor throughout the piece. By employing this camp aesthetic Mirha undermines negative stereotypes of transsexuals and sex workers. She shows how, in the name of feminism, Bridge-It Taylor's school of thought has actually been a destructive force. Taylor balks at notions of "choice" or "agency" in the lives of women. For her, all women are helpless victims who need to be saved.

Act IV moves back into a softer sentiment as Mirha recounts a list of her clients' names. In doing so, she is rewriting them into being - even though they are all "Johns", they are not all nameless and anonymous. "We can not forget John," she says as she sardonically pokes at the



audience's temperament, "because these [voices] may be the missing link in the prostitutes' rights movement".

Jolting the mood back into camp terrain, Mirha opens Act V as the out-of-control, sickenly, and socially immature TV host, Judie Cutie-Q. Judie is a medicated, overly obnoxious women's studies student who wears tight little t-shirts and a bandana wrapped around her platinum blond hair. Cutie-Q is a good girl. She redeems herself by helping society find ways to fight off, protect, and even kill 'lethal hookers'. As she warns us, "Prostitutes who display fearless and aggressive behavior need to be shot". Cutie-Q is here ridiculously chalked up in her campy accoutrements. While her profuse jumping may produce laughter, it is also a warning: a skipping rope is not only a skipping rope, it is a violent weapon.

The stage becomes dark and images of a prostitute being beaten are projected over Mirha's head as she crouches in a corner dressed in black as the Whore Hunter. Her voice becomes deep and slow and she begins to speak from the perspective of her predator. This predator, like Judie Cutie-Q and Bridge-It Taylor, feels justified in obliterating all prostitutes in the name of "safety for our children". However, his tactics are more severe - the metaphor is drawn between a hunter of coyotes, and a hunter of whores, and the frightening reality is that there seems to be no difference. The Whore Hunter is at home knowing that "every day, every minute, a whore is out there wearing the name of his bullet".

In the closing act (VII), Mirha stands upright in center stage. She speaks frankly, yet calmly about the way in which the murder of prostitutes reflects on the underlying misogyny in our society, situating herself within feminist discourse, yet also beyond it. She compels all "who work in the name of social justice, to reflect profoundly on the contempt and hatred that exists out there for the women who have sex for money, to the point where we can be verbally, physically, [and] sexually assaulted to many peoples' applause". A chilling closure as the audience recounts their laughter from the previous acts.

Biographies

Sarah Abbott is a film and video artist whose work has won awards and been screened internationally. Currently based in New York, Sarah is pursuing a Master of Fine Arts from Syracuse University and continues to enjoy letting her audience figure it out for themselves.

Matt Aiken is a Vancouver-based artist, ECIAD student, and member of the Helen Pitt Gallery. He is a frequent APB collaborator and muse.

AsianPunkBoy specializes in hand-made book works "filled with an infusion of gentle surfaces, dissident eruptions, haikus, mapped pictures, dirty illustrations, moist cum, decadent artificial words, love and all manners of faggy filth." His work has been featured in various magazines such as *Visionaire*, *Vice*, *Sleazenation*, and *Dazed and Confused*. A special drawing edition of *APB01* was exhibited as part of "Suggestive Line" (curated by Lee Plested + Scott Watson) at the Belkin Satellite Gallery, Vancouver. APB was recently listed in AA Bronson's Top 10 in the September 2002 edition of *Art Forum*. *Confessions of a Mask* is the only piece in video format.

Patrick Borjal is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto Visual Studies and Cinema Studies program. He demonstrates an interest in curatorial projects that explore race and representation using new idioms and uncommon methods. Patrick is also a founding member of the 640 480 video collective. The group has exhibited in various gallery and public spaces, including "Video Etch-A-Sketch", a site-specific work at Art System, and in an upcoming (2003) exhibition of video flipbooks at Sis Boom Bah.

Jubal Brown is a videomaker, performance artist, and organizer based in Toronto, has shown in England, Scotland, Holland, France, Belgium, Africa, Hungary, United States and Canada. Co-founder of JAWA Collective, champions of aggressive machine gun sex and death video style. Co-founder of the PO-PO seditious action team responsible for Toronto's legendary WASTELAND event series. Co-founder and Director of the ART SYSTEM Cultural Center in Toronto. Currently working with Tasman Richardson on the multimedia label FAMEFAME producing and promoting experimental electronic music and video and web art: <famefame.com> The video work of Jubal Brown is available through VTAPE and ARTCORE GALLERY.

Emelie Chhangur is a Toronto based sculpture/installation artist, theatre designer, curator and writer, and a recent graduate of the University of Toronto's Visual Studies Programme. Her commitment to an integrated and pro-active Visual Art practice has led her to develop a diverse portfolio, ranging from studio practice, to arts administration, writing and related media work, as well as curatorial work that facilitates her interdisciplinary approach. Her broad range of cultural production has involved projects with University of Toronto's Fine Arts Academic Journal (writer), Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts (Gallery Coordinator and Curatorial Assistant), CIUT 89.5's *Visual Voice* (producer and art critic), *V is for Video* - as juror for Images' Student Video Competition, The Power Plant, where she is currently the Curatorial Intern, the Art Gallery of Ontario's Educational department (Guest lecturer and curator), Hart House Theatre, The Helen Gardiner Phelan Theatre (set/costume design).

Elizabeth Fearon could be characterized as embodying her visual artwork and by consequence, making her art work embody her life. Since graduating from York University in 1995, Fearon has invested her energies into carving out a niche for herself as well as creating a platform for the discussion and dissemination of the work of others. She is a local writer (*Vie des Arts* 1999-02) and curator (Lifespan, Personal Grounds, the Rivoli and Queen Mother Café) and programs audio selections on CKLN where she is the on air host providing a live listener-based forum for the discussion of "art on air". Elizabeth's own work as a visual artist has taken many different forms and utilized a variety of media from video to cast resin sculpture, to photo booth photography and she has shown in a variety of galleries (Bus Gallery, The Red Head Gallery, Gallery 1313) as well as alternative spaces such as The 360, Trinity Bellwoods Park, CKLN, large vans, and Wegway Magazine. Elizabeth has just recently finished a Graduate Level Post Production Program from Humber College and looks forward to exhibiting her work at The New Gallery in Calgary in the Fall of 2003.

Alissa Firth-England uses video, performance, and curatorial practice to question the ironies and fallacies of the seduction of glamour. She is currently developing a curatorial thesis for her final year at the Ontario College of Art and Design.

Sarah Gilmour shoots videos compulsively.

Carolyn Kane programs film and video work for Pleasure Dome. Recent projects include: *The New Toronto Works Show* (March 2002), and *Kaleidoscopophilia* (July 2002)- a Pleasure Dome program exploring the politics of erotic viewing.

Chris Kennedy is a Toronto-based writer and programmer. He shoots super 8 when so inspired and seives on the Pleasure Dome programming collective.

Sharon Kurtz is a Toronto artist working primarily in sculpture and materially-based installation, as well as a curator and member of the 640 480 video collective. She is doing her best to keep an open mind about video.

Tasman Richardson is a videomaker, electronic composer, and graphic designer based in Toronto. To date he has had screenings and installations both nationally and internationally in Switzerland, Holland, Argentina, Egypt, Poland, the United States and Canada. He is also the founder of the Jawa collective (champions of aggressive machine gun sex and death video style), M.O.I net art pages, and the FameFame media label.

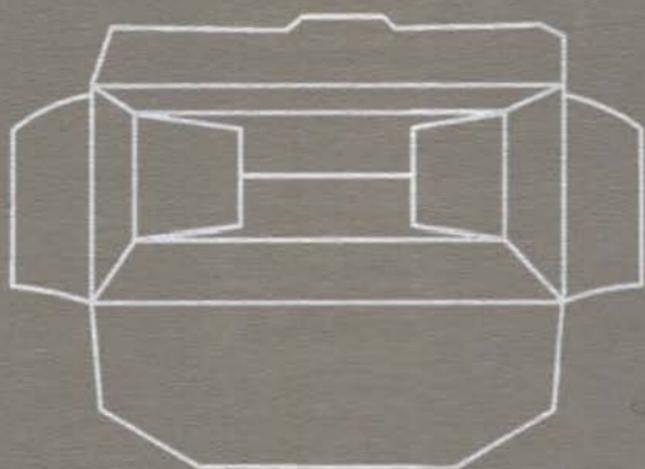
Sarah Robayo Sheridan is a Toronto-based designer and member of the Public Access Collective who has co-curated Being On Time (Toronto, 2001) and New Canadian Video (Cairo, 2002).

Mirha-Soleil Ross is a multi-disciplinary performance artist and cultural activist. Her work addresses issues of transsexuality, sex-work, feminisms, and animal rights activism.

Born in 1966 in the Basque country of Spain, **Francisco Ruiz de Infante** is a prolific video installation artist whose works explore the intersection between language, childhood and the natural environment.

Zoë Stonyk works primarily in performance and video, but also makes paintings, collages and stuffed animals. She recently graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design and now works at the Art System gallery. She is an angry romantic, frustrated and pissed off that the real world isn't more like her dreams.

Since June of 1994, **Emily Vey Duke** and **Cooper Battersby** have been collaborating on works including installation, printed matter, curation, sound and single channel video. Vey Duke has a degree in fine arts from the Nova Scotia College of Art and enjoys making art and writing. Battersby is a visual artist who's interests include graphic design and computer programming. Once upon a time, they lived in Vancouver, but they currently reside in Chicago.





Rug

Sarah Abbott

(00:18:50 minutes, 2000)

Wednesday, October 16, 2002

Shanan Kurtz presents Sarah Abbott

6:30 pm and 8:00 pm



Confessions Of A Mask

A video by AsianPunkBoy + Matt Aiken

(00:04:00 min, 2001)

Wednesday, October 23, 2002

Patrick Borjal presents AsianPunkBoy

6:30 pm and 8:00 pm



Block

By Elizabeth Fearon

(00:07:35 min)

Wednesday October 30, 2002

Emelie Chhangur presents Elizabeth Fearon

6:30 pm and 8:00 pm



Bedroom Dancing

A Selection from the Secret Videos of Sara Gilmour

Sylvio, 5:11 min

What a major that was!, 2:09 min

Alien Penetration, 1:30 min

The Squirrel, 5:05 min

Happy Birthday, 0:40 min

Leaky Faucet, 2:38 min

Ross, 4:00 min

Wednesday November 6, 2002

Sarah Robayo Sheridan presents Sarah Gilmour

6:30 pm and 8:00 pm



I.A.O.

Jubal Brown and Tasman Richardson
(00:17:00 min, 2002)

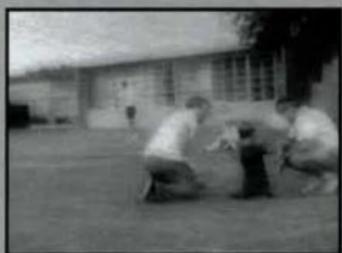
Wednesday, November 13, 2002
Alissa Firth-Eagland presents Jubal Brown
and Tasman Richardson
6:30 pm and 8:00 pm



Les Choses simples

Francisco Ruiz de Infante
(00:17:00 min, 1993)

Wednesday, November 20, 2002
Chris Kennedy presents Francisco Ruez de
Infante
6:30 pm and 8:00 pm



Bad Ideas For Paradise

Emily Vey Duke & Cooper Battersby
(00:20:00 min, 2002)

Wednesday, November 27, 2002
Zoë Stonyk presents Emily Vey Duke and
Cooper Battersby
6:30 pm and 8:00 pm



Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thoughts
from an Unrepentant Whole
Mirha-Soleil Ross
(01:14:00 min, 2002)

Wednesday, December 4, 2002
Carolyn Kane presents Mirha Sollel Ross
6:30 pm and 8:30 pm

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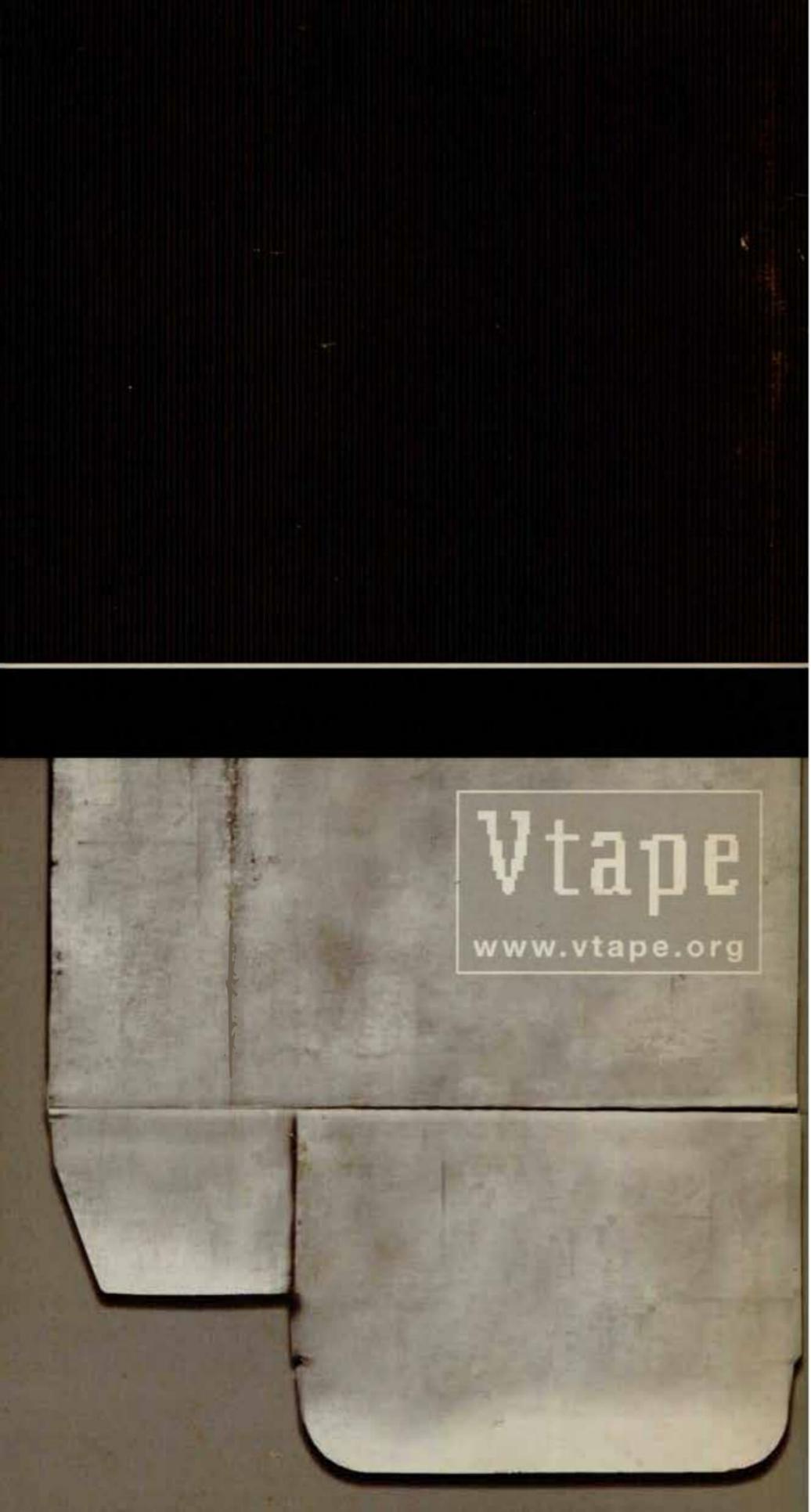
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