

## Hardware: On Recent Work by Hilary Lloyd

by Ian Wallace

June 2011

An attitude towards contemporary art that veers toward a formal approach to materials, one that would have seemed so old-fashioned a few decades ago, seems to be undergoing a certain resurgence, and particularly in the most immaterial media. Left to art historians are such grand narratives as Martha Rosler's image of the "culture industry versus the consciousness industry" of the late 80s. Instead, artists using video today are more concerned with formal questions of presentation—take *vwork.com* as an online curatorial project that acknowledges the visual echoes across media and time. In part, this notion of video's potentiality is indicative of a greater recognition of the unavoidable factor of form in contemporary art. Call it "idea art," intellectual, conceptual or minimal; but don't all of those titles, which purport to do away with *look* in favor of *idea*, summon up images of certain aesthetics? Young contemporary artists, having grown up seeing scores of performance pieces hanging in expensive frames in the Metropolitan and MoMA, and Google imaging Vito Acconci, are clearly thinking about *look* in a way that their predecessors didn't. They've either missed the message, or they're on to something.

Within this new formal framework, the question of the screen is one of the unavoidable snares of contemporary art, on par with the great debates about the "support" of modernist painting. This is especially true as YouTube becomes a force for certain democratic powers, an open venue for budding artists that is governed by frames, windows and the screen. There have been numerous recent exhibitions that have attempted to reconcile the image and its presentation—Cory Arcangel, for all the layers of screen that his work involves, has a slightly strained relationship to them at the Whitney (if the big failure of video games is that they try too hard to be cinema, then perhaps the failing of Arcangel's works is that they pretend *not* to be video games). Meanwhile Friedrich Petzel's recent showing of Seth Price's video work separates each piece into a phone-booth sized compartment where visitors are invited to control playback via traditional means (VCR buttons), approximating the YouTube format from whence the videos originated.

Hilary Lloyd allows the hardware of the screen itself to take a front-and-center position at Artists Space in New York, where her work is on view this summer. Lloyd, a finalist for the 2011 Turner prize, started out operating as a sort of mumblecore portraitist, meeting strangers in night clubs and bars and bringing them to her studio to tape them performing mundane activities. In more recent work, her focus has shifted away from looking at strangers and towards the very notion of looking.

Lloyd uses custom-built Uicol screens and mounts to display her videos and slide projections, allowing the metal rigs to occupy the exhibition space like futuristic totem poles. She treats the hardware as a sculptural medium: "I use Uicol because I can put it together however I want, to get whatever I want," she says. This also means, of course, that the works change quite a bit in different settings: In a solo exhibition at Raven Row in London last winter, the ultra-modernity of the rigs contrasted exquisitely with the white painted moldings and fireplaces of the gallery's converted townhouse. The current exhibition at Artists Space has a similar effect. Though some of the pieces seen at Raven Row are here as well, the presentation of each exhibition is specifically tailored to the space in which it appears, a process that begins with careful measurements of every surface in the gallery.

On display at Artists Space is a series of seven videos, each displayed on a large screen suspended either vertically or horizontally on parallel metal poles that cut through the gallery from floor to ceiling. The videos consist of short loops of what seem like clandestinely shot images—architectural details, the moon hanging beside a skyscraper, humorous whack-a-mole tableaux with the tops of buildings popping in and out of frames in a grid—all cinematic movements that Lloyd makes with her hands. “I use a video camera in the same way as I use a pencil or a pair of scissors,” Lloyd says. “I trick the camera a lot to get what I want. I wouldn’t, for example, edit the films; they either work or they don’t. I’m interested in the casualness of the films together with the rigidity of the installation.”

In effect, that “casualness,” however, is not so simple. The content of her videos themselves has also slowly edged towards the mechanical: some of the pieces in her current show at Artists Space suggest the bouncing DVD icon while others mechanize visual content by displaying side-by-side repetitions of the same video in slightly staggered timing. The visual content of her videos becomes mechanized by both its presentation and her treatment of visual information, which manages to evoke historical models while simultaneously brushing them aside: In *Shirt*, the black and white image on the screen evokes an Op Art pattern of circles and lines, but the piece’s title tells us that we are simply looking at a close-up on a piece of fabric. It is the densely pixelated screen’s large size and clarity that teases out such historicizing comparisons; there’s just enough of a hum from the camera that slight motion is perceptible, like the camera has been disturbed by its own operations.

It might be tempting to compare Lloyd’s work to fellow video-centric artists like Paul Chan; but whereas Chan’s work is consistently rooted, at least purportedly, in theory and narrative (like *Sade for Sade’s Sake* at Greene Naftali in 2009), what Lloyd offers is something slightly more delicate and, perhaps, even a little more honest. By embracing the materiality of her work, Lloyd has created a subversive version of video, one that expresses its own internal structures while also treating its ornate nature with whimsy. It is telling, then, that the focus of her work has shifted away from people and has become emptied of characters (the single glimpse of life we see at Artists Space is in *Thighs*, in which we see a solar flare take shape between a pair of legs in silhouette).

The fact that Lloyd seems somewhat uncomfortable talking about her work, then, is fitting. This is evidenced by the stifled conversation between Lloyd and fellow Brit Matthew Higgs as part of Artists Space’s programming around the show, and perhaps also explains the purposeful lack of documentation of the event. It suggests that she wants the work to speak for itself. And in the end, good art should.

Hilary Lloyd  
25 May—21 August 2011  
Artists Space  
38 Greene Street, Third Floor, New York