

Angie Eng, *Safety Belt*

This is the first solo outing in New York for Angie Eng, a twenty-seven-year old video installation artist who is also a founding member of the live video performance collective, The Pool. In the last year, the peripatetic Eng appeared in numerous group exhibitions in New York and Tokyo, performed at the Knitting Factory, Sound Lab, and The Clocktower, among other places, as a member of The Pool, and curated an exhibition titled *Fishheads* at the infamous Max Fish in New York City. She is also a visual arts educator in Chinatown.

For the Project Space exhibition, titled *Safety Belt*, Eng draws on a rich history of identity-oriented art that includes early 1970s performance and video art (Bruce Nauman's *Video Surveillance*, 1969-70, comes to mind, as well as Peter Campus's high tech projections involving audience silhouettes from around the same time) and Conceptualism's self-conscious confessional mode, both of which are being mined extensively by young artists in the '90s. Real time portraits of the audience have become an avant garde staple, often mediated through advanced technology, at least since minimalism.

In Eng's installation *Safety Belt*, a video projection of a crowd entering a tunnel is thrown up on one wall, and security mirrors are mounted on the opposite wall. When the viewer enters the room, a hidden camera tracks his or her movements and projects them, in real time, onto the crowd in the tunnel. In this way, the viewers view themselves...viewing themselves. As with Campus's video installation pieces from the early 1970s, and more recently in Diana Thater's dizzying, impressionistic video installations, the viewer, simply in the act of viewing, modulates and becomes a part of the work's appearance. It has become a special kind of genre that keys into larger investigations, ranging from the sociology of the art audience to philosophical notions of subjectivity.

In a smaller installation, titled *Pure Red*, a paper towel dispenser mounted on the distant wall of a darkened room glows from the light of the mini video monitor embedded in its front. Stained paper towels strewn on the floor seem to rustle in the projected light. On drawing closer to the dispenser, wading through the towels, the viewer finds a looped video that shows a red-gloved hand fondling a Colt .45 pistol. In this slow-hitting one-liner, Eng plays political, investigating notions of cleansing as both a form of purification and of massacre.

The tradition of video installation art is short, intermittent, and prone to too much undigested life and theory and not enough consciously synthesized art. That said, there is still plenty of it being made that is promising, by artists, like Eng, who have a considerable grasp of the power of the medium.