

FILM

CONNECT FOUR

Jason Anderson on “Artists Explore Screen Space” at the Power Plant

April 24, 2010



Left: Sharon Lockhart, *Podwórka*, 2009. Installation view at Gladstone Gallery, New York. Right: Ryan Trecartin, *P.opular S.ky (section ish)*, 2009, still from a color HD video, 40 minutes.

IT HARDLY SEEMS like a fair contest. Of the four artists whose recent works in film and video comprise the spring group exhibition—really four concurrent solo exhibitions—at Toronto’s Power Plant, three are represented by pieces of a generally measured and meditative nature.

The fourth, on the other hand, offers content that is brash, energetic, vulgar, and unabashedly tricked-out. The works, which resemble a mash-up of Matthew Barney’s “Cremaster” cycle, MTV’s *Jersey Shore*, and a meth-induced psychotic breakdown, are inevitably divisive among Power Plant patrons who may not be prepared for such an onslaught. Any guesses as to which artist dominates?

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Ryan Trecartin takes up a lot of space, both in terms of how much square-footage the Power Plant devotes to “Any Ever”—the first Canadian solo exhibition by the prolific Texan-born, Philadelphia-based video artist—and in terms of the brain-scrambling effects of the works themselves. For that reason, visitors might consider saving his work for last. They wouldn’t want to run out of the patience required for Joachim Koester’s “Hypnagogia”—a trio of silent black-and-white 16-mm film loops that point to the Danish artist’s interest in physical manifestations of altered states of mind—or Peter Campus’s “Reflections and Inflections,” which consists of one vintage interactive piece and one serene new landscape-based work by the American video-art pioneer. Likewise, it’d be a shame not to give full attention to Sharon Lockhart’s *Podwórka*, 2009, another of her single-take studies of people and their places; this time, she directs our gaze toward groups of Polish children who enliven a series of grim urban locales in Łódź.

But after some polite (and rewarding) contemplation, a foray into Trecartin’s multiverse can feel like assault and battery. Occupying a series of stylized environments that are thematically appropriate to the videos themselves (think: a dorm like the kind used by hopefuls on *America’s Next Top Model*), spectators can spend minutes or hours viewing loops of Trecartin’s four-part “Re’Search Wait’S” series or three-part “Trill-ogy Comp.”

Each episode runs anywhere from twenty-seven minutes to nearly an hour. They are all dense with overlapping storylines and characters, many of them played by Trecartin amid a

cast of friends, fellow artists, and teenagers who clearly relish the chance to utter lines like “Yes, I was raped by my dad’s career—totally my fault!” These sagas are too complex to synopsise but the commercialization and “brand integration” of every aspect of daily experience is one abiding theme in his dense, gleefully dystopic scenarios. What with the grotesque makeup and décor, the constant barrage of hyper-accelerated edits and zooms, and the shrill Chipmunks-style voices and house beats that comprise the sound design, the contents of “Any Ever” would just be exhausting if they weren’t so hilarious and ingenious.

If the powers that be at MTV had any sense, they’d put Trecartin in charge of programming right now. This has to be better than the next season of *The Hills*.

— Jason Anderson

“Artists Explore Screen Space: Works by Ryan Trecartin, Peter Campus, Sharon Lockhart, and Joachim Koester” is on view until May 24 at the Power Plant in Toronto.

ALL IMAGES

