

Slater Bradley

TEAM

In 1999, after noticing his doppelganger in passing at various clubs, artist Slater Bradley formally met Benjamin Brock. For seven years the two have gazed at each other through the opposite ends of various cameras, and the videos and photographs made by Bradley during this collaboration chart the myriad complexities of identity and identification. In his last New York show, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 2005, Bradley exhibited “The Doppelganger Trilogy”—a set of videos in which Brock plays Michael Jackson, Kurt Cobain, and Joy Division’s Ian Curtis. These works triangulate the relationship between artist and muse, inflecting Bradley’s explorations with the pull of celebrity. Pop-culture ardor (and the corrosive effect it can have on the objects of its affection) fuses with the minor-key melancholy that pervades much of Bradley’s early work, from photographs like *Nobody Sings on All-Soul’s Day*, 2001–2002, and *Polska*, 2002, to videos like *Radio Gra*, 2001. The trilogy was that rare blend: vital and rigorous.

My Conclusion / My Necessity, 2005–2006, the first video viewers encountered in Bradley’s latest exhibition, reprises these themes obliquely. A view of a grave in Paris’s Père Lachaise cemetery—marked by a reclining stone figure holding up and staring at his own death mask—initiates a haphazard tour of the grounds that takes in monuments denoting the resting places of Honoré de Balzac, Frédéric Chopin, and filmmaker Georges Méliès. After a minute and a half of silent reverie, an abrasive rock sound track by Unwound begins, and the camera lingers on a teenager who pays her respects to Oscar

Wilde by leaving the lipstick trace of a kiss on his mausoleum. (This act is a loose reiteration of a somewhat similar homage in the artist’s video *JFK Jr.*, 1999.) In a second room, *Dark Night of the Soul*, 2005–2006, documents Brock, wearing an astronaut suit, making a nocturnal round of the American Museum of Natural History to the accompaniment of Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata.” The scenario immediately evokes the scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey* in which the astronaut goes floating off into deep space. Brock carries a music box, which he offers to taxidermic specimens on display in various dioramas.

All this might sound like sentimental kitsch but, at its best, Bradley’s art stays on the right side of the line dividing affecting art from mere affectedness. Like T. J. Wilcox, Bradley can turn what seems like a case of arrested development—suggested by his focus on musical subcultures and obsessive fandom—into compelling drama.

The other four works in this exhibition—shot on various film stocks and on digital video—have a stylistic heterogeneity and a referential density that make them seem, at first glance, weighted with significance sufficient to offset an underwhelming first impression. But one wants more from art than puzzles to be solved, and here the possibility of gleaning anything more satisfying seemed inversely proportional to the artist’s tendency to quote other films or to fussily tweak the relationship between sound and image, as in the old-fashioned intertitles that reproduce the lyrics to the Michael Jackson song “Childhood” in *Intermission*, 2005.



Slater Bradley, *Dark Night of the Soul*, 2005–2006, still from a color video, 8 minutes 16 seconds.

Links between the works exist—the American Museum of Natural History features in the background of *Protector of the Kennel*, 2004–2006, for example—but these connections seem no more than hollow rewards for determined viewers, making the exhibition suitable for exegesis but unlikely to attract the exegete. It is impressive that Bradley is able to rope together references to *Singin’ in the Rain*, German silent-film director F. W. Murnau, and a thirteenth-century Latin hymn about the Judgment Day in the same exhibition; one only wishes that they had been tied together more securely.

—Brian Sholis