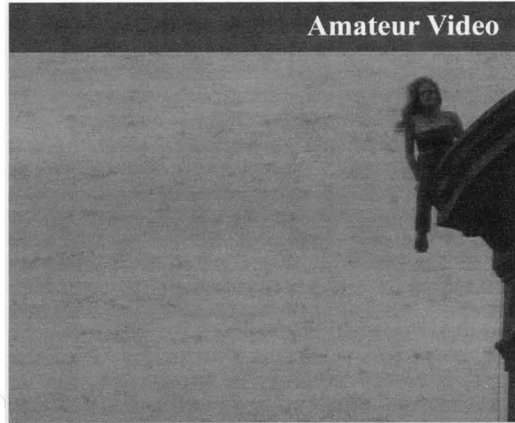


ARTFORUM



Slater Bradley, *Female Gargoyle*, 2000.
DVD projection, continuous loop, dimensions variable.

SLATER BRADLEY

TEAM / P. S. 1

The centerpiece of Slater Bradley's second solo show in New York was a trio of short videos simultaneously projected on three walls of Team's front room. *The Laurel Tree (Beach)*, 2000, features actress Chloë Sevigny standing on an empty stretch of sand solemnly intoning a passage from Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger*. The text—a lofty meditation on the sanctity of art and the sins of dilettantism—recounts a professional writer's profound embarrassment during a lieutenant's impromptu poetry recital at a dinner party. In *Female Gargoyle*, 2000, Mann's army officer—the average man who rises from anonymity to seize his moment in the spotlight, with potentially disastrous results—is embodied by a tattooed redhead. Beneath a band at the top of the frame that proclaims Bradley's tape to be an “amateur video,” the woman shows us her profile in the familiar pose of someone who is aware of being watched pretending to be alone. The next shot, taken from a much greater distance, reveals that she is perched on the ledge of a building, contemplating a fatal descent. Across the room, *JFK JR.*, 1999, filmed the day after the deaths of John F. Kennedy, Jr. and Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, surreptitiously followed a preteen girl waiting to add her flower to the growing memorial outside the couple's Tribeca loft. The video ends when the girl suddenly senses Bradley's presence and looks directly into the camera.

Although conceived independently and ranging in style from carefully crafted to off-the-cuff, Bradley's videos share an engagement with tragedy, celebrity, and public display. To this typically Warholian mix, the twenty-five-year-old artist adds an idiosyncratic interest in compassion and its capacity to transform our voyeuristic impulses into meaningful acts of commemoration. Viewed as an ensemble, the three works play off one another, establishing a polyphonic dialogue between varied instances of empathy, entitlement, and anguish. As separate pieces, however, they don't quite hold up, each exhibiting a higher degree of potential than

internal resolution. The same is true of Bradley's quirky *Inside a Times Square Burger King Where the Soundtrack is Being Played Backward*, 2000, showing at a project room in P.S. 1. The video documents a Burger King that Bradley discovered in Times Square, where the piped-in music is playing in reverse—a fact to which both customers and employees appear oddly oblivious. But instead of grappling with the issues raised by his own project—the rift between reality and representation, the underlying strangeness of our mass-produced environs—he seems content merely to evoke an adolescent uncanny familiar to anyone who has ever visited a twenty-four-hour fast-food joint after taking too many drugs.

The fourth video at Team exemplified another problem Bradley's future efforts will need to address—that perennial Pop-art pitfall in which the hierarchy of artist/celebrity and amateur/fan is reinforced by the effort to undermine it (Warhol's credo, “Everyone is a star,” comes immediately to mind). In *I Was Rooting for You (Butterfly Catcher at Home)*, 2000, Bradley equates a lepidopterologist's activity with his own art-making while reveling in the quaintness of the butterfly catcher's obsession. *The Laurel Tree* suffers from a similar ambiguity. With its high-minded sentiments, nifty digital solarization, and lush, orchestral sound track culled from Godard's *Contempt*, the piece has the feel of a mildly pretentious film-school assignment. In his guise as a self-conscious artiste, Bradley shares a greater affinity with Mann's would-be-poet lieutenant than with his successful author. As does Sevigny—a punkish, twenty-something girl ventriloquizing the persona of a literary Great White Male. From this vantage point, *Laurel Tree* appears as an ironic indictment of creative elitism, a rallying cry of “Anyone can be an artist.” But the fact remains that Bradley is showing his work in a Chelsea gallery and at P.S. 1, and Sevigny, no matter how cool and *jolie-laide*, is still a movie star.

—Margaret Sundell