

Art in Review



Metropolitan Museum of Art

A scene from a video by Maria Marshall showing her 2-year-old son smoking, at the Metropolitan Museum.

Closed Circuit

Video and New Media
at the Metropolitan

Metropolitan Museum of Art
1000 Fifth Avenue, at 82nd Street
Through April 29

After a seemingly endless dry stretch, the Met is addressing itself to new art again. A timely show organized by the artist Kara Walker from the permanent collection last year, and another by Gabriel Orozco scheduled for this spring, are clear signs of change. So, in a less dramatic way, is "Closed Circuit: Video and New Media at the Metropolitan."

The novelty of seeing this much video in a museum whose galleries are usually as still as a tomb is reason enough to visit the show, tucked away in two separate spaces in the 20th-century wing. But there are others. The eight pieces chosen by Douglas Eklund, an assistant curator in the department of photographs, will be familiar to anyone up on contemporary art, but they're also varied and odd enough to engage a larger audience.

Certain pieces, like Darren Almond's upside-down monorail trip and Maria Marshall's video of her 2-year-old son coolly puffing on a cigarette, are short, entertaining and

technically more complicated than they look. (Ms. Marshall's piece draws on special-effects technology used in Hollywood films.) Other work connects, directly or indirectly, with art elsewhere in the museum.

Ann Hamilton's close-up of a finger erasing and generating an alphabet suggests links to Chinese calligraphy and to Islamic objects with Arabic inscriptions. Jim Campbell's digital version of Eadweard Muybridge's stop-motion photographs would be an apt addition to the American wing. So would Wolfgang Staehle's sequence of pictures of a single spot on the Hudson River once painted by Thomas Cole and Frederic Church. Riffing on 19th-century American art's truth-to-nature verisimilitude, the sequence is 24 hours long and is projected in real time.

Real time was the essence of the original 1,200-hour video that Lutz Bacher shot with a surveillance camera at the Pat Hearn Gallery in Chelsea a decade ago. In the 40-minute version at the Met, Ms. Hearn, chatting with clients and friends and downing quick meals, is the star and the piece itself has become a document of art-world history since her death in 2000.

Omer Fast turns history on its head in a surrealist 2003 video on the making of "Schindler's List" 10 years after the fact. In interviews

with Polish extras in the film, the line between staged and actual Holocaust events seems to blur, as do images of death-camp sites and the still-standing film sets that have become tourist attractions. In Mr. Fast's brilliant work, the logic of memory is randomness.

And randomness becomes a mode of action in David Hammon's "Phat Free," a five-minute video of a dark-clothed man kicking an empty metal bucket through city streets at night. Dodging traffic and causing a racket, he's the kind of figure who might, in real life, evoke thoughts of "there goes the old neighborhood," but under the circumstances inspires a different idea: Here comes a new Met.

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