

# Flash Art

## John Routson

*Team Gallery*

Armed with a digital video camera, John Routson obsessively records films in the multiplexes that dot the suburban sprawl around his hometown of Baltimore, Maryland. Background noise, diminished acoustics, and inconsistent focusing distinguish them as his own. Among Routson's current oeuvre are pirated versions of *Jackass*, *The Hours*, *Chicago* and *Far from Heaven*. Most arresting is a bootleg of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 4* as imagined for television. Barney's parade of tap-dancing satyr, ambisexual fairy, and racecar driver is whittled down to a palatable 22 minutes, complete with the ABC logo inserted in the lower right-hand corner and tongue-in-cheek 'borrowed' commercial breaks that play on themes of consumption and glamour. In one ad, an Audi motors down 5th Avenue past the Guggenheim Museum, Barney's sponsor; in another, for the pharmaceutical drug Liptor, a middle-aged woman in evening dress falls prey to skyrocketing cholesterol levels, stumbling on a red carpet to the accompaniment of popping flashbulbs and seductive music. The widespread cultural practice of appropriation can be traced back to 1979 with hip-hop's first crossover commercial hit, the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" which incorporated the repeated bass break from Chic's "Good Times." Call it what you will — sleight-of-hand or sticky fingers — the enduring phenomenon of appropriation can be found today in all facets of contemporary culture; from music, to fashion, to allegations of cloned babies, to hijacked planes, to the duplicitous motivation of the Bush White House's cross-hairs on Iraq. —Charles G. Beyrer



JON ROUTSON, *Bootleg (8 Mile)*, 2002. Video still. Courtesy Team Gallery