

reviews



jon routson

MOCA DC  
Washington

While Matthew Barney's "Cremaster" cycle turned out to be a hit among art aficionados, it's hard to imagine it playing well in Peoria. The likelihood of a major television network—the channels that cater to middle America—premiering *Cremaster 4* during the prime time hour remains slim. But in his new work, Jon Routson imagines a world where ABC has done just that. In a brilliant hijacking of both the media and art worlds, the Baltimore-based artist chopped Barney's film to twenty-two minutes, roughly half its original length, divided it into segments and slapped an ABC logo in the bottom right hand corner. He also wedged commercials between those sections, just as a network would do. The first commercial break begins with an ad featuring the Audi TT driving by the Guggenheim's iconic Fifth Avenue flagship—a witty, barbed choice given the museum's postponement of Barney's retrospective. Following this, come ads for cholesterol drugs, films, pet medications, more cars, and so on—all lifted straight off the tube. Screened next to Barney's far-out "real" art, these hand-picked ads looked more spectacular and imaginative than when

seen in their original context. When Routson's program returned to the film, *Cremaster 4*, even with its tap-dancing satyr attended by ambisexual fairies, looked almost mundane. Routson's work raises important issues of piracy and copyright infringement, as well as intellectual and artistic property. Another untitled work contains four screened films, including *E.T.* and *Minority Report*, that he had taped with a handheld camera smuggled into the theater. His video documents his pirating performance; the viewers watch the evidence of his stunt. The bootleg films raise questions of artistic authorship—and legality—that seem particularly compelling these days. Nowhere was the issue more present than in the single photograph he showed. Shot straight-on under harsh fluorescents, it featured a fuzzy image of someone in a bunny suit. Taken during those Easter photo opportunities set up for kids in shopping malls, the photograph was paid for by the artist, but he didn't release the shutter himself. Yet again, Routson challenges us with questions of ownership in an era of sampling and easy reproduction.

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