

# ARTFORUM

MAY 2009

I N T E R N A T I O N A L



*Hollywood Sign Film's* elements forms a loose metonymic chain, producing an abstraction that is equal parts intoxicated memory and séancelike evocation—leading the viewer through a seductive, psychedelic portal. Here, representation, abstraction, and a little titular help collude to form a new object.

The three remaining projections in the exhibition hew to roughly the same formula, but in each case, West's postproduction application of materials was more vigorous than was the case with *Hollywood Sign Film*, nearly drowning the filmic action and producing something closer to pure abstraction. Though her work is far too playful and arresting to be a turgid critique of existentialist mythologies surrounding painters like Pollock, West's insistence on identifying her materials, processes, and inspirations stands in distinct counterpoint to the hermeticism of midcentury abstraction. More important, however, is the fact that these glimmering abstractions owe their great appeal and presence in the gallery not just to the hand of the artist, but in equal part to the chance alchemy of film, writ large in these digital projections.

—Christopher Bedford

## LONDON

### Lindsay Seers

MATT'S GALLERY

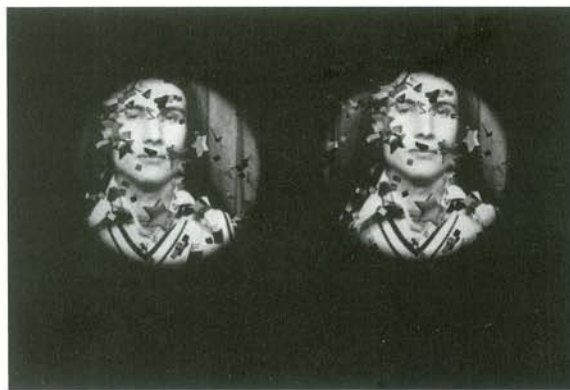
The third and final film in Lindsay Seers's elaborate installation, "It has to be this way," 2009, shows art critic Michael Newman intelligently critiquing the work itself, discussing the connection between memory and technology and thus memory's inherently prosthetic quality. It's very good stuff; so what's left for a reviewer to do? Viewers of the three DVD works that made up the exhibition could only conclude that Seers is so savvy about her art's theoretical underpinnings that she virtually hands us every critical or historical comment to be made about it; it feels intellectually self-conscious almost to the point of paranoia. The opening film, which introduces the complicated story of the artist's missing sister, Christine, is projected on two circular screens—like a pair of giant eyes endlessly and paranoically focused upon themselves.

Christine's is an engrossing tale; the first two films describe this enigmatic young woman's stormy love story with the narrator, "S.," their motorbike accident resulting in her loss of memory, and her identification thereafter with Queen Christine of Sweden (1626–1689). Abundant doubts about the story's veracity are planted, especially

the artist provides, they operate as rich, almost pungent metonymic devices: Pepper spray, for example, alludes to the presence of the authorities on the scene (pridefully noted in the title), while the holly-berry juice and silver dust are nods to the participants' preperformance "preparations." Just as the title's abundance of details identifying performers and processes overdetermines the subject of the video, so the stated subject is occluded and jumbled by the muddle of messy materials. Presented in a darkened space, the collective admixture of

since we know that narrator S. is an actor. Indeed, one hopes there is little truth to the story, as no one seems very interested in finding Christine. All vastly prefer to weave theoretically loaded complexities and notions of identity, memory, fact, and fiction around her. In one of Seers's subtler moves, two academics offer conflicting evidence to "prove" Queen Christine's involvement or disinterest in alchemy; science is apparently of no help in pinning down The Truth, the absent center of this epic. With every theoretical and explanatory thread tied off within the voice-overs, interviews, and accompanying book, we are left with little to do but sift through any overlooked minutiae (GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE LIBRARY stamped on the edge of a book, borrowed from London's theory-heavy art school) or assess it dumbly, like an ordinary moviegoer. Did I like the story? Did I enjoy the lush Baroque interiors? The film is certainly a stylish endeavor, with sumptuous palaces and water fountains contrasting with a shot of Matt's Gallery itself as a cluttered affair filled with cardboard boxes, cables, and cheap sofas.

When, in the exhibition's accompanying book by "M. Anthony Penwill"—that *has* to be fake—we discover that Matt's Gallery owner Robin Klassnik, of all people, is implicated in the story, the project begins to look increasingly like the complex, twelve-pointed, inward-looking alchemical star that we have seen throughout: It appears on the book's cover; in computer-generated form in the films; in the very



Lindsay Seers, *It has to be this way* (detail), 2009, mixed-media installation.

shape of the main installation space. The complicity of the players involved turns the work all the more upon itself. The show is like the art-world version of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*: They're *all* in on it—artist, critic, gallerist—leaving the viewer like a hapless stand-in for Hercule Poirot, trumped by any attempt to penetrate this thing. It seems as if the eyes in the first room were watching *me* all along, to see how I would escape this tangled construction. Who's paranoid now?

—Gilda Williams

### Ray Johnson

RAVEN ROW

A decade and a half after his death, Ray Johnson continues to occupy the marginal yet thoroughly involved position he held in life. The growing list of exhibitions and writings about his work serves to clarify rather than alter our understanding of the deliberate distance he maintained from the mechanisms of the art market, heightening our appreciation of the perspicacity with which he observed those workings.