

Keren Cytter, *Based on a True Story*, Oakville Galleries,
Oakville, April 14—June 10, 2012

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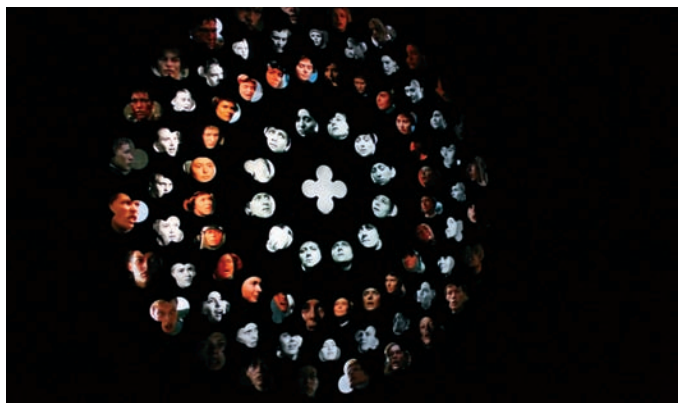
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Tasman Richardson, *Memorial*, 2011.
photo : courtesy of the artist

Tasman Richardson, *Necropolis*

**Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto,
February 4—April 1, 2012**

I enter Tasman Richardson's corridor of dissolving static and projection. After turning a corner the narrow walls drop away into an open yet still blackened room and I am struck. Filling the opposite wall a rosette window drawn with light—so defined it seems carved out of the darkness—blazes in Gothic splendour. Its trefoils frame footage of actresses playing Joan of Arc, their faces contorted in expressions of defiance. Slightly disoriented from the shifting light levels, the projection seems an apparition—a vision. Vacillating between these moments of revelation and dissolution *Necropolis* becomes a pilgrimage, its works the saintly relics.

The sense of mindful journeying experienced throughout *Necropolis*, a solo exhibition of Richardson's video work at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (MOCCA), pervades its design. Consisting of a narrow one-way path punctuated by six immersive installations, visitors travel up ramps and around corners, through slender halls and mirrored chambers. A sense of purpose compels our walking. Curator Rhonda Corvese describes *Necropolis*'s "superstructure" as a mapping that "channels visitors through stages of erosion, narcissism, acceleration, idolatry, self-doubt, and oblivion." *Memorial*, the Joan of Arc rosette window, functions as idolatry within this list—a fleetingly climactic experience of divination before we enter our dénouement.

The exhibition's closing work, *Pan*, achieves the final stage of oblivion. Here, fictions of science replace fictions of saints. A converging tunnel with backlit projections on either side, *Pan* engulfs visitors with clips from three overlaid films: *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Altered States*, and *Enter the Void*. The overlapping of these films produces a seemingly incomprehensible phantasm of space and infinity that registers somewhere between the psychedelic and the terrible. *Pan* thus retells our earlier moments of religious awe. Through science fiction we are offered a heaven for the twenty-first century.

The intense darkness and sensorial appeal of *Necropolis* echo MOCCA's earlier David Hoffos exhibit, *Scenes from the House Dream*, with some important emotive differences. While Hoffos's darkness evoked eerie suburban scenes and disarming quietude, Richardson's darkness points to the overwhelming expanse of outer space and exploration. Still, each mines our responses to darkness and the equal measures of hope and fear that these responses contain.

Corvese suggests that Richardson's work explores the "nature of video and its strong affiliations with death culture." The video clips are parsed from films that plumb the realms of disaster and oblivion, and the dark enclosure of the gallery evokes a catacomb. Yet, like the medieval pilgrimages the exhibition harkens to, it goes beyond demise into its obverse: salvation. Throughout our entire time spent tracing *Necropolis*'s recesses we are quite literally walking towards the light at the end of the tunnel. The works, in their revelatory flashes, pierce through the darkness and hint of some expansive, otherworldly experience. We taste death and redemption in the same breath.

[Caoimhe Morgan-Feir]



Exhibition view, *Keren Cytter: Based on a True Story*, Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens, Oakville, 2012.

photo : Toni Hafkenscheld, courtesy of Oakville Galleries, Oakville

Keren Cytter, *Based on a True Story*

Oakville Galleries, Oakville, April 14—June 10, 2012

Much like our waking recollections of dreams, the narratives that drive Keren Cytter's videos are cyclical and seductive, fantastical and frustratingly confusing. In *Based on a True Story*, the largest North American survey of the artist's work to date, curator Helena Reckitt brings together some of Cytter's most engaging works from the past five years of her already prolific career. Focusing on Cytter's strategy of blending outlandish stories and nonsensical dialogue that characterize contemporary pop culture—from bad TV movies and YouTube videos, to chat rooms and online product reviews—with the humour and pathos of absurdist theatre, the exhibition foregrounds the artist's investigation of "how our subjectivities can seem cobbled together from fictional scenes and images, as well as our own experiences."

In the Galleries' downtown Centennial Square space, several of Cytter's recent works purposefully blur the distinction between theatricality and realism. *Untitled*, originally produced for the 2009 Venice Biennale, is a sixteen-minute family drama that takes place entirely on a stage, in front of a small but exuberant crowd. Using professional and amateur actors, Cytter's drama circles back on itself, with the same dialogue and plot points reappearing to tell the (supposedly true) story of a boy who shoots his father's mistress. Though the script employs schmaltzy phrases from pop songs ("please, don't leave me this way") as dialogue and makes its own facture as a fiction obvious (at one point the director of the play appears to chastise an actor for improvising), there are also moments of tense familial conflict and quiet drama in Cytter's film that seem all too real. *Cross.Flowers.Rolox.* (2009) continues in this vein, using a trio of films and large-scale drawings in pencil and crayon to depict three urban myths that circulated online in 2009. Each is disturbing in its violent culmination—in one, a man leaps to his death from a window after an argument with a lover; in another, a woman is shot in the head—yet Cytter's dialogue makes these events seem banal, even expected outcomes of the deeply fraught interpersonal relationships she stages for the camera.

The second part of the exhibition, located in the Galleries' lakeside Gairloch Gardens venue, shows the breadth of Cytter's practice, incorporating one of her most well known pieces, 2007's *Der Spiegel*, alongside a new work, *Avalanche* (2011). While *Der Spiegel* is a short, looping narrative that unfolds within the confines of a single room, borrowing from the tradition of the Greek chorus to meditate on the pressures placed on aging women, *Avalanche* is a multi-chapter opus filmed across two countries that depicts the breakdown of a couple's relationship. Seen together, the two works attest to Cytter's astute engagement with the powerful ways that gender dynamics continue to structure cinematic narratives.

[Gabrielle Moser]