

LIZ RODDA

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*HEAT LOSS*



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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*Zoom Test*, 2016, found video, found audio, gallery view

Cover: *First Freedom*, 2016, found video, found audio, video still

LIZ RODDA  
*HEAT LOSS*

It will in the end, be admitted that everything, in effect, is an image and that the least object which has no symbolic role assigned to it is capable for standing for absolutely anything. The mind has a marvelous facility in seizing the slightest rapport that exists between two objects taken at random: and poets know that they can, without fear of deception, always say of one that it is like the other; indeed the only ranking of poets that one can establish, is based on the greater or lesser degree of freedom which they show in this respect.

In addition to a peach wall, and two prints (one on aluminum, the other on vinyl) there are three videos in Liz Rodda's show, *Heat Loss*, at *Women & Their Work*. Each stitches a video found on the Internet to an audio track from a different online source, and so each pairs moving images and sounds that no one else meant to go together. Walking into the show you'll see (more or less in order):

1. *First Freedom*: the video is an advertisement in which an Audi drives itself; there is no human body. In the audio, a woman speaks an affirmation:

I feel peaceful being alone, [...] I feel content being alone [...] I know when I enjoy being alone I give up the fear of being alone, I know when I give up the needing to cope with being alone, I cope with being alone.

The Audi ad does not last as long as the audio track and the video ends with a camera panning up a row of palmettos growing in front of a dune-colored cliff.

2. *Zoom Test*: someone took this video while testing their camera's zoom lens from a window several stories above ground level. The lens chances upon

a hooded man paging slowly through an erotic magazine of thin-hipped large-buttied ambiguously-raced women. A man reads aloud from spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti's *Freedom From the Known* (1969). The passage begins:

In all of our relationships, each one of us builds an image about the other and these two images have relationship. The actual relationship between two human beings or between many human beings completely ends when there is the formation of images.

3. *Turn Your Face Towards The Sun*: the video camera pans over pages of a modern-styled interior (it is a Design Within Reach catalogue). The paper's texture lends the images a grainy, sunny texture. In the audio a woman reads self-affirming quotes:

Hey guys, it's Ashley. I just wanted to make this video because in my last video I told you how I wanted to do a quote video. Not just a bunch of cute sayings but some positive affirmations. So that's what this video will be. [...] I know that a lot of times when I'm down, reading these quotes can be pretty powerful. And not even necessarily when I'm down but when I'm feeling unmotivated or ...

Taken abstractly, what we have here is Rodda's arrangements of bodies, their images and/or their absences, combined with quotes of self-helping thoughts about the same. Being alone, being paired, being quoted: these are functions of meaning through which Rodda paces her chosen Internet ephemera. All the originals are so banal as to be totally obscure; they are like the variables of algebra class (usually  $x$  and  $y$ ).

It isn't clear what  $y$  equals, nor should it be. But try to solve for  $x$  anyway.

Partly, this algebra-like stitching-together of fragments broken from other



*First Freedom*, 2016, found video, found audio, gallery view

contexts is the tactic *de resistance of the avant-garde*—it is collage, montage, the found object—at least insofar as philosopher Peter Bürger described it in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974). Published in English in 1984, it is a foundational work for most contemporary American art theory.

Bürger had it that Dadas and their successors, the Surrealists (the interwar *avant-garde*) aimed to destroy those boundaries placed between the artwork and the stuff of everyday life. No more museums or galleries. Rather an artwork's liberatory possibilities, its capacity to induce philosophical meditations and aesthetic pleasure, could and should be found and made in everyday life. It didn't need to be so expensive or so limited to a privileged few. The *avant-garde* failed in the attempt, Bürger explained; their found objects, first made for pennies, were later sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars. They'd been institutionally art-ified. Duchamp himself authorized a reissue of the 1917 urinal *Fountain* in the 1950s for New York's Sidney Janis Gallery. The original was probably thrown away like other unneeded toilets.

Where the *avant-garde* succeeded was in that it created a new type of work: collage (two-dimensional), montage (filmic), the found object (sculptural); all are visual allegories. When, as a famous example, Duchamp put that urinal upside down on a pedestal and signed it "R. Mutt," he ripped

a fragment out of the everyday. This fragment is now voided of its earlier meaning on account of its de-contextualization. The allegorist (in this example, Duchamp) rearranges it in a new work, a new context. But whatever new meaning the allegorist intends, this urinal—this metonymic fragment—always still indicates that it earlier had some other identity. And so the allegorical work's parts do not depend on the meaning of the whole nor does the whole work depend on the inclusion of any or all of its parts. The work consists of reality fragments or anecdotes, any of which might be removed without destroying the work. And accordingly, other anecdotes or reality fragments might be inserted (by imagination at least) by the viewer.

The powerful aspect of this work for Bürger was its effect on the audience. The nonorganic work requires by its fragmentary and arbitrary structure that viewers give up attempting to understand its meaning as a total organic object. The breaks and odd juxtapositions force us instead to meditate on the work's construction and its relationship to our everyday lives. Bürger was pulling from Walter Benjamin who pulled from Bertolt Brecht to describe the effect:

Let me give an example to show how Brecht, in his selection and treatment of gestures, simply uses the method of montage—which is so essential to radio and film—in such a way that it ceases to be a modish technique and becomes a human event. Picture to yourself a family row: the wife is just about to pick up a bronze statuette and hurl it at the daughter; the father is opening a window to call for help. At this moment a stranger enters. The process is interrupted; what becomes apparent in its place is the condition now exposed before the stranger's view: disturbed faces, open window, a devastated interior.

Perhaps some might find an offhand quality to these videos, just like a stranger entering a room during a fight. There is, after all, a tight simplicity to Rodda's combine of amateur video with amateur audio.

In fact Rodda spends months collecting video and audio. She uses a series of search terms designed to find the mundanely surreal: “zoom lens,” for example, results in thousands of YouTube videos of users demonstrating high-tech digital cameras. Rodda combed through hundreds of such videos before using the one that found a man perusing a soft porn magazine. It stood out.

These videos are all very ordinary and strange. They tell us some things about the world we live in, despite their extraordinary particularity, or perhaps because of it. Among other things, the driverless Audi and the woman affirming her solitude may prod us into meditating on what our society expects of machines, our fear of solitude, of not being with other bodies, or of how we turn machines into bodies or extensions of them.

Rodda saves these files to respective video and audio folders as she hunts through the Internet. Then she spends hours watching videos over and over again with different audio tracks. “Nothing works,” Rodda told me, “until it does.” The right audio has to make Rodda see the video afresh, to see “the condition now exposed before the stranger's view: disturbed faces, open window, a devastated interior.” That's a high order, given how many times Rodda has had to re-watch each video.

Rodda toned *Heat Loss* coolly. It's a spare show, deeply shadowed and mainly lit by video projections. The only ceiling lighting falls mainly on one wall, the right hand one as you walk in, which Rodda had painted in a blue-tinged peach. The color is a little grossly fleshy. I like that. Hung on the wall

is a metallic blue print; at the front of the exhibition is a vinyl sign. Both show a handprint on memory foam as the foam fills back out after somebody pressed their hand hard into its surface. These two prints give a sense of gradual loss of energy following active pressure.

Rodda made the three videos in 2016 before putting together this solo show at *Women & Their Work* a year later. The peach wall and the two hand prints are a second order of juxtaposition; they clue us into what the videos do. As the show's title indicates, it has something to do with heat and how it moves around.

Heat is thermal energy and *heat transfer* is the exchange of thermal energy between physical systems. So *heat loss* in its most official and exacting sense means the transfer of energy from an object to its surrounding environment. As far as I can tell, people use the term *heat loss* most often when it comes to bodies and buildings, when their ability to retain heat—or, conversely, lose it—comes under consideration.

Rodda's *Heat Loss* studies this process as it pertains to the Internet, the images it contains, and the human bodies that both look at online images and are looked at



*Print (blue)*, 2017, aluminum print



through them. Always it seems a question of how fast or slow the loss of heat happens, how to maintain balance (homeostasis). It is a dynamic, and so it works a little differently than Bürger's found object, even though it builds off those concepts.

Maybe the Internet is like a body, with impulses and desires and the potential to diffuse them elsewhere. As art historian Andy Campbell (who also, incidentally, taught in the art department at Texas State University) noted, the Internet is "a constellated corporate unconscious" of the information-industrial complex of governments and corporations; because this apparatus has focused on its own development and character, it is now its own body with its own unconscious:

4.0 Therefore, when I ask, "Does the Internet have a libido?" I mean the question literally. Taking into account the current thrust of technological innovation—toward an interconnected Internet of Things (electronics, objects, earth—and subscribing to Jung's definition of libido as general "psychic energy," not exclusively sexual in coloration, it is a cultural necessity to begin limning a psychological profile of the Internet (158).

4.1 Under these definitions, the Internet's libido is already extant and it already works on us.

4.1.1 Do you ever wonder why you feel guilt, self-loathing, exhaustion after encountering the Internet? Could it be that a transference has occurred? You have taken on the projections, the sublimations of the Internet's unconscious drives.

Ariel Evans is a writer, art historian, and sometimes curator who lives in Austin.

## LIZ RODDA

### SOLO & TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS/SCREENINGS

- 2017 *Heat Loss, Women & Their Work*, Austin, TX  
*Jumbovision*, live audio by Tara Bhattacharya Reed, Austin, TX
- 2016 *Liz Rodda*, Institute for American Art, Portland, ME  
*Two Kinds of Luck*, Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, VA  
*Turn Your Face Toward The Sun*, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX (w/Charlie Morris)
- 2015 *Total Body*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX  
*Impressions*, David Shelton Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2013 *Clockwise*, Crisp-Ellert Art Museum, St Augustine, FL
- 2011 *Tomorrows*, Brand 10 Art Space, Fort Worth, TX
- SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS/SCREENINGS
- 2017 *SET*, Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Colombia; Lugar a Dudas, Cali, Colombia
- 2016 *ERCATX*, Austin Film Society, Austin, TX; Desert Daze Festival, Joshua Tree, CA  
*SET*, NMASS Festival, Austin, TX; Artpace, Hudson (Show) Room, San Antonio, TX; Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Mexico City, MX
- 2015 *Surf Club*, Vox Populi, Philadelphia, PA  
*Streethlight*, Roman Susan, Chicago, IL  
*Super/Natural*, 1708 Gallery, Richmond, VA  
*Luminaria*, San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX
- 2014 *Festival of (In)Appropriation*, The Egyptian Theatre, Los Angeles, CA; Northwest Filmforum, Seattle, WA; Spectacle Theater, Brooklyn; Anthology Film Archives, NYC
- 2013 *Texas Biennial*, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX  
*N-Minutes Video Festival*, Shanghai, China

- 2012 *Optic Nerve 14*, curator: Bonnie Clearwater, The Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami; Big Screen Plaza, New York, NY; de la Cruz Collection  
Contemporary Art Space, Miami, FL  
*Kiss the Future*, Schwartz Gallery, London, UK  
*Interlife Crisis*, FICTILIS, Seattle, WA
- 2011 *Land Before Skype*, CS13, Cincinnati, OH  
*Space Reliant*, Illges Gallery, Columbus State University, Columbus, GA  
*How To: A Video Anthology*, curator: Ariel Evans, Big Medium, Austin, TX
- 2010 *Video\_Dumbo*, Dumbo Arts Center, Brooklyn, NY  
*MISC: Video & Performance*, NY Studio Gallery, New York, NY
- 2009 *Polymer: Contemporary Video Art*, Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, TN  
*Extremely Shorts*, curator: Bill Arning, Aurora Picture Show, Houston, TX  
*Without Borders VI*, Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, ME; University of Maine Museum of Art, Bangor, ME; Space Gallery, Portland, ME
- 2007 *Vanguard Video Festival*, Echo Park Film Center, Los Angeles, CA
- 2006 *Mix 18 New York Experimental Film Festival*, Anthology Film Archives, New York, NY
- SELECTED RESIDENCIES
- 2015 Fountainhead, Miami, FL
- 2014 Wassaic, Wassaic, NY
- 2013 Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT
- SELECTED LECTURES/PRESENTATIONS
- 2016 CalArts, Paul Brach Visiting Artist Lecture Series, Valencia, CA  
National Performance and Visual Artists Network, Austin, TX  
Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX
- 2015 Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX  
1708 Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2013 Crisp-Ellert Art Museum, St. Augustine, FL



*Turn Your Face Toward The Sun*, 2016, video, found audio, video still

## Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 39th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,892 artists in 305 visual art exhibitions, 124 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 28 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 602 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, the *New York Times*, *ArtForum*, and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Women & Their Work reaches over 650 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



women and  
their work

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OneTouchPoint  
GINNY'S



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