

CAULEEN SMITH

NTSC



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

OCTOBER 11 - NOVEMBER 17, 2007

AUSTIN, TEXAS

DO U DREAM IN BLACK
AND WHITE OR DO UI
DO IT IN COLOUR? (sic)

Cauleen Smith 'NTSC 1-5'

During the Great Depression, film icon Robert Mitchum was a rough and tumble boxcar hobo kind of guy. When he decided to start a family and go on the straight and narrow, he settled on a career in Hollywood – but only because he caught a nervous breakdown working a regular day-job as a machinist.

In 1955's *Night of the Hunter* – generally recognized as Mitchum's finest performance – Mitchum's ex-con, religious fanatic, serial killer Harry Powell pretends to be a jackleg preacher so his old cellmate's family will take him into their trust. His game is to find stolen money that he knows the cellmate hid in the house. Well, part of his game as the Powell character isn't just as a con-artist but a misogynistic Jesus freak who marries and kills women out of a belief that desire turns women into heathen temptresses. In the film's most famous scene, Powell uses his hands as props to mime the eternal struggle between love and hate, the letters having been seen earlier actually block-printed across his fingers. On the surface, the film seems to be about the corruption of innocence, but like Mitchum's own life, it begs to be read as an aggressive and oblique critique of the illusion of conformity and our illusions thereof.

The acronym NTSC (for National Television System Committee) has also become a euphemism for the technology created to standardize analog color television transmissions and videotape. The inexorable age of digital television, already well upon us, means that the hoary NTSC standard, (known to most by the familiar sight of those screen-filling color-bars that mark a non-broadcasting channel) will be phased out in 2009. Critics of the ancient system joked that it meant "Never The Same Color," a slap at the system's dysfunctionality and a likely unintended recognition of all the



Video still from *NTSC #2: CAN HE?*, 2007. Video.

colored things in the world television just never seems to get right. (The story of getting the NTSC formula right is itself a tale of corporate intrigue and skulduggery worthy of a John Le Carre novel.)

Cauleen Smith's video series *NTSC, 1-5*, like much of her work, is concerned with glitches in perception and expectation – the way things, stories, people refuse to scan, to play out as we expect them to. The works were created while Smith was doing a residency at the Skowhegan artist's colony. There she found herself out of her comfort zone as a pro-film stock narrative filmmaker, and suddenly forced to commit to working within the limitations of the colony's available video technology. On one hand, *NTSC* is a bold acknowledgement by Smith of video as an aesthetic compromise; on another it's a testament to her need to push herself and create thoughtful work regardless of what tools may be at hand. *NTSC*'s framing of TV screens and videotaped black and white film footage surrounded by Smith's paintings of grids and color bars in the series confronts the limited palette of representations broadcast TV

provides. It also denotes why the 16,000 colors the NTSC system allegedly allowed aren't versatile enough for anyone who feels their own imagination (and actual life) to be more engaging and colorful than whatever's on the telly. Smith constructs a box to examine the box and critique the lame choices it offers. Magic 8-Balls come to play a major role in her critical toolkit here.

The reductive binary powers of prophecy attributed to Magic 8-Ball toys almost demand to be read here as a metaphor for current simplistic American foreign policy in the post 9/11 era. In a time when we're asked to believe the US is in Iraq because God told the President, many citizens have felt political discourse to have slipped the bounds of rationality and entered the realm of the supernatural, beyond reproach or appeal. Smith compels us to understand that *Night of the Hunter*'s psycho-fundamentalist twisted logic around sin, sex, female bodies, and scripture-approved mass murder is as old as the Spanish Inquisition and as topical as Abu Ghraib.

In *Night of the Hunter*, Mitchum's Powell projects and represses his own thinly-veiled lust upon his victim-wives. The artist, using the film as backdrop and counterpoint, unveils a personal story of sexual misapprehension – a confessional tale about an almost one-night stand where too much beer transformed hot sexual expectations into abject exhaustion and body heat into bodily folly. We've all been there but Smith generously, unashamedly leaves us with an erotic image of transfiguration – during rough foreplay we're told her hand found her thrashing lust object's cock, calmed his physical frenzy, eliciting 3 soft whimpers that affirmed an earlier fantasy of herself as desired by this stranger. It's as neat and sublime a bit of intertextual mapping as Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, though Smith makes it clear that she'll take her sexual agency over the sexual frustration of the '50s Hollywood model any day. Having wrapped up her own constructions of desire and gender in a bow, Smith then proceeds to *NTSC*'s coda where she reprises two questions posed in earlier title sequences: "What's your favorite color?" and "Are you aware of social constructions in your life?" Now she asks them not for the spectator's pleasure but of her fellow Skowhegan-residency captives. Smith coyly adopts and trains a decoy, a white male child, to interrogate her compadres, a gesture which seems to both disarm the diverse group of folk approached and give them license to answer her loaded questions with as much levity, lasciviousness or gravitas as they like.

That Smith manages to obliquely address the dead wood of American identity politics with whimsy and parlor games rather than a visual protest rhetoric speaks volumes about her bent towards complicating and restructuring the surface of American selfhood – a playground now littered with so many mounds of cultural detritus that would have overwhelmed even as dedicated an American trash collector-connoisseur as Andy Warhol. In

NTSC, Smith recreates the game room/garbage heap of signifiers at play in the national psyche, understanding that our gossip and geopolitics have both become games of chance, investments in a global Vegas of random outcomes, structures built on a chaos theory that bolsters and refuses American exceptionalism in the same breath – a world where bad things, like media-bombing, can happen to anybody, American or not. The data-saturated level playing field we all live on now is one where the only winner can be the cash-machine ringing, ravenous scanners of our media servers – American culture's own ministries of disinformation, whose grasp of the national attention span for consensual hallucination is matched only by their hope to one-day commodify all human thought. Count Smith among those who refuse to allow the mainstreaming and mall-ification of our neural pathways to go unchallenged.

Gregory Stephen Tate

Greg Tate is a writer and musician who lives and thrives in Harlem. He is currently working on a book about the Godfather of Soul, James Brown. Tate also directs the 20-member conducted improvisation ensemble Burnt Sugar, The Arkestra Chamber. The group has released 15 albums on their own TRUGROID imprint since 1999.

CAULEEN SMITH

Lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

EDUCATION

- 1991 B.A., Cinema San Francisco State University San Francisco, CA
- 1998 M.F.A., University of California, Los Angeles Los Angeles, CA
- 2007 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine.

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

- Assistant Professor, Massachusetts College of Art, 2007 to present.
- Assistant Professor, University of Texas at Austin, 2002 to 2007.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2007 *NTSC*. Six channel DV installation with sculpture and drawing components.
- 2007 *The Fullness Of Time*. Work-In-Progress. Single channel experimental science-fiction narrative on DV tape. TRT: 40 minutes
- 2007 *NEBULAE* – Austin. 16mm film installation with sculptural component.
- 2007 *Right Hand Only Left Hand Lonely*. Two-channel video installation.
- 2006 *(Afro)Galactic Postcards from M94*. Three 20MB video podcasts plus interactive website and RSS feed and iTunes Subscription. Funded by a grant from the National Black Programming Consortium.
- 2006 *I Want To See My Skirt*. Multi-Channel Video with sculptural component. In Collaboration with poet, Aaron Van Jordan.
- 2006 *Marriage Is For White People*. Two Channel Video and 3D Installation
- 2006 *Cantata for Salamanders and Twelve Choirs*. In Collaboration with artist, Daniel Bozhkov. S-16 and Video Installation and monitor. Commissioned by Arthouse at the Jones Center. Austin, Texas. Curated by Regine Basha.
- 2006 *Dark Matter and The Post Card*. Video Experimental Narrative. DV Color Sound. 8 minutes, 2.5 minutes respectively Works-in-Progress.
- 2006 *The Carbonist School Study Hall*. Commissioned documentary featuring the founding members of The Carbonist School. DV. Color Sound. Limited collector edition of five. TRT:12 minutes



- 2005 *The Green Dress Series*. 6 Channel. 35mm. Color. Sound. Limited collector edition of fifty. TRT:14 minutes. On a continuous 6-channel loop.
- 2005 *Texas Prize Portraits*. Commissioned documentary featuring the four nominated artists. TRT: 27:00
- 2003 *Hollywould If She Could*. DV Narrative. 15 minutes. Shelved.
- 2001 *The Changing Same*. 9.5 minutes, 35mm experimental narrative color / Dolby sound
- 1998 *Drylongso*. 82 minutes 16mm narrative color / sound
- 1997 *White Suit*. 3.5 minutes 16mm experimental short color sound
- 1997 *Sapphire Tape #2*: VHS. Experimental Video. Five minutes. Shelved.

- 1995 *A Thousand Words*. 14 minutes 16mm experimental narrative color / sound. UCLA MFA. First Year Film. Shelved.
- 1993 *Sapphire Tape #1: The Message* half-inch video
- 1992/3 *Memory Poison Bones*. Multimedia Installation.
- 1992 *Chronicles of A Lying Spirit by Kelly Gabron* 5.5 minute 16mm experimental color/sound
- 1990 *Daily Rains* 12 minute 16 mm experimental documentary
- 1989 *Wall Doc*. 6 minute 1/2 inch experimental video

SCREENPLAYS

- 2006 *Easy Money*
Adapted from the Novel by Jennifer Siler. PipeDream Productions. New York, NY. Independent WGA certified.
- 2006 *Third Girl From The Left*. Adapted from a novel by Martha Southgate. Unproduced, optioned by Washington Square Films. New York, NY. Independent WGA certified.
- 2005 *The Revenant*
Adaptation of a comic book concept by Shannon Denton and Keith Giffen. Optioned by Exit Five Entertainment. New York, NY.
- 2005 *Five*. Unproduced, Optioned by Exit5Entertainment. New York, NY.
- 2001 *I Am Furious Black*. Unproduced, optioned by Cubic Entertainment. Los Angeles, CA.
- 2000 *The Cloud*. Unproduced, optioned by Blow Up Pictures. New York, NY.
- 1998 *Drylongso*. Produced.

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2007 Creative Capital Film/Video Grant
- 2007 Artmatters Foundation.
- 2006 National Black Programming Consortium. New Media Initiative.
- 2006 University of Texas Summer Research Grant.
- 2006 University of Texas Dean's Fellowship.
- 2005 University of Texas Office of Research Special Research Grant.
- 2005 Texas Filmmaker Production Fund Grant.
- 2005 Rockefeller Technical Support Grant.
- 2004 Tribeca All-Access Participant.
- 2002 Texas Exes Teacher of the Year.
- 2001 Participant. Sundance Institute Director's Lab. Participant.
- 2001 Participant. Sundance Institute Writer's Lab. Summer.
- 2001 Participant. Sundance Institute Writer's Lab. Winter.
- 2001 Urbanworld Film Festival. Best Feature Film.
- 2000 Winner. Independent Spirit Award. *Movado Someone To Watch*.
- 2000 Nomination. Independent Spirit Award. *Best Debut Performance*.
- 1999 Honorable Mention. *Best Feature Film*. Hamptons Film Festival.

- 1995/6 Graduate Student Support, Academic Affairs.
- 1994 Graduate Opportunity Fellowship, UCLA.
- 1994 Western States Regional Fellowships.
- 1994 National Black Programming Consortium Funding.
- 1994 American Film Institute Film and Videomaker Grant.
- 1994 Rockefeller Inter Cultural Media Arts Fellowship.
- 1992 Film Arts Foundation Personal Works Grant.

ARTIST TALKS AND GUEST LECTURES

- Modern Art Museum of Ft. Wort, Texas. 2007.
- California Institute of The Arts, 2007, 1996, 1995, 1994.
- University of Texas at Austin. Fall 2006.
- University of Texas at Austin. Fall 2005.
- Arthouse at the Jones Center. Austin, Texas. 2005.
- Texas A&M. 2003.
- Showbiz Expo, Los Angeles, CA, 1996.
- Scripps College, Pomona, CA, 1994.

CONSULTING

- 2002 Story Consultant. Project Title: *On The One*. Producers: Catalan Films.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

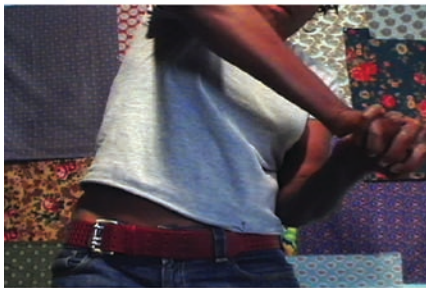
- 2008 LEF Foundation Selection Committee. Boston, MA.
- 2003/7 CinemaTexas Board Member.
- 2004/6 Sundance Writer's Lab Recommender.
- 2005 Austin Film Society "Exploratory Committee".
- 2004 SXSW Narrative Competition Selection Committee.
- 2000/4 Board Member. I.F.P. Los Angeles.
- 2003 SXSW Narrative Competition Juror.
- 2001/2 Sundance Institute Writer's Lab Selection Committee.
- 1993 Film Arts Foundation, San Francisco, CA. Grants Committee.
- 1992 Black Filmmakers Foundation, Oakland, CA. Grants Committee.

PUBLICATIONS

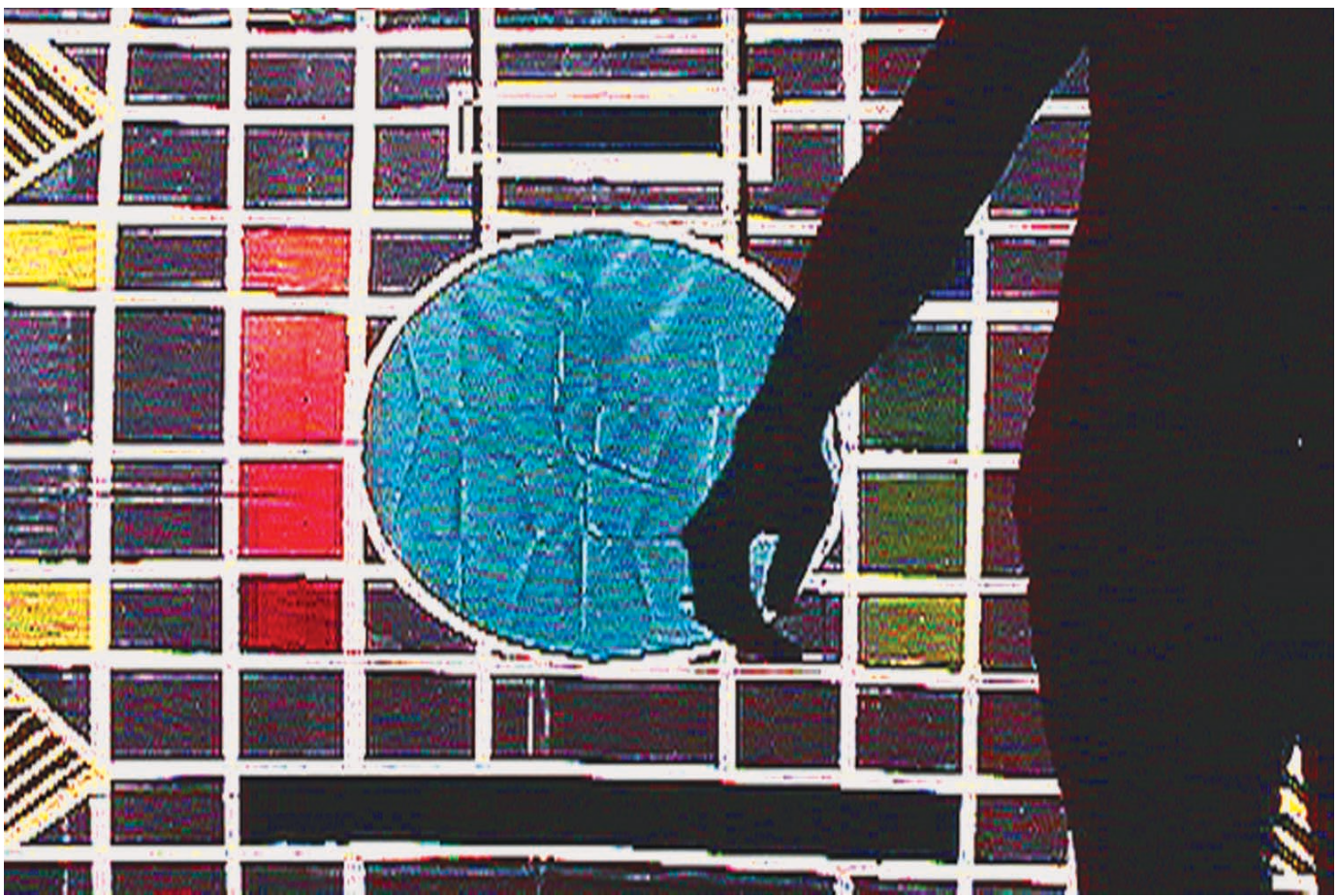
- Ongoing Column for mightbegood...
<http://www.fluentcollab.org/mbg/>
- The Carbonist School Manifesto. Cinque Hicks, Beatrice Thomas, Lanneau White, Cauleen Smith. Self-published. Distributed via blogosphere, alternative art galleries, and devoted fans. Referenced on the Afro-Futurist List-serve, and several other arts blogs.
- "Call Me Frank," might be good... Issue #73. July 14, 2006.
<http://www.fluentcollab.org/mbg/archives.php>
- "Counter Currents and the Joy Quotient," The Independent Film and Video Monthly. (August): 25-29. 2003
- "Wings Off Desire: A conversation with Kasi Lemmons," Filmmaker Magazine. Winter Issue: 35-38. 2001
- "Dogma," The Independent Film and Video Monthly. (February): 40. 1999



Bars for Days, 2007. Chalk, acrylic paint.



This Panel: Video stills from *NTSC #1: LOVE/HATE*, 2007. Video.
Cover Panel: *NTSC*, 2007. Installation view. Video. Photography by Robert Boland.



Video still from *NTSC #4: FEAR IS ONLY A DREAM*, 2007. Video.

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 29th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, 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 1,794 artists in 250 visual art exhibitions, 107 music, dance, and theater events, 13 film festivals, 20 literary readings, and 339 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, 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 2,500 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 & Their Work

1710 Lavaca St.
Austin, Texas 78701
(512) 477-1064

info@womenandtheirwork.org
www.womenandtheirwork.org

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