

**moving
images
are
still
images**

saturday july 29 2023

7p

**heavy manners library
los angeles, ca**

moving images are still images

Saturday, July 29 at 7p

Heavy Manners Library
curated by Greg Jenkins

performance by Mikaela Elson

reading by Fía Benitez

Osmose - 2022 - 11'

Laurence Favre

Sensory exploration of the forest and the tensions that inhabits it. A world of, gain and loss, growing and vanishing in cycles of life and death.

Assis - 2022 - 1'

Pierre Yves Clouin

On the treetops.

Om - 2022 - 14'

Yanbin Zhao

Inspired by Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, *Om* is a quasi visual diary retracing the quarantine experience of a Chinese stranded in California during the peak of the pandemic. Traveling between mutated domestic space and contaminated nature, the film explores the rupture in both the personal and the political, as well as meditates upon senses of displacement, paranoia, alienation, and collective trauma.

Swimming Lesson - 2021 - 6'

Vardit Goldner

A film in which I teach Bedouin girls to swim in a waterless "pool." *Swimming Lesson* aims to stimulate thought about the lack of swimming pools accessible to Bedouins in Israel, actually denying them swimming lessons and causing frequent cases of drowning in the sea.

Nobody Wants to Fix Things Anymore - 2023 - 5'

Joseph Wilcox

Nobody Wants to Fix Things Anymore is a short film about a lost man who finds a special rock. The narrative uses AI generated images and speech, surveillance photographs, and original video to weave together a story of the search for a kindred spirit.

A Collection of Eccentricities - 2020 - 18'

David Finkelstein

A poetic examination of the collector's impulse, and the need to map out one's sensibility.

Summerscents_20purrls_with_OACHAVEZ_ - 2021 - 11'

Sydney Bhavers

What's your least favorite scent that you still wear?

BOOB pt. 1 Otradek - 2022 - 4'

Max Harper

In the building that was once your family home, a room speaks.

You Won't Ever Get Me On That Plane - 2022 - 10'
Terry Silvester

A man carries a mannequin of Dennis Bergkamp with him everywhere, even in extreme places such as the top of a mountain, with the wind, the breath, the sound of the pebbles: everything is shot with a hand-held camera.

Scenic Jogging - 2010 - 2'
Jillian Mayer

Scenic Jogging features Mayer chasing projected images of typical screensavers such as idyllic meadows and mountainscapes. These images are embellished by design programs to be more attractive to appeal to our primal desire to be outside rather than in front of a computer or in ugly urban landscapes. Even if Mayer were to ever catch up to her object of desire, she will find it never existed in the first place, and she has been chasing the unattainable.

In the building that was once your family home, a room speaks.

on moving images are still images
by greg jenkins

and so, now, in 2023, there's a feeling that we're actually *in* the constant present. We'd be closer only if it were literally us, ourselves, in the content we consume (and, in the algorithmic sense, increasingly: it is).

(Note: there's a difference between living "in the constant present" and something like being "in the moment." When you're in the moment, you're *here* – the senses are on, time expands. When you're in the constant present, though, you're just *not there*. Time collapses.)

The constant present is bolstered by things like daily tedium, hyper-specialization, professionalization of play, predictive models, predatory advertising, "superior orders," institutional deference, and bureaucratic dogma. No matter how we feel about these things, we can't really resist them. That's history. Even if we *could*, we're greatly outpaced: today's resistance is tomorrow's data.

Really what we're after, then, is a fissure. A way to evade the constant present. A way to turn things on. In *moving images are still images*, the artists find that fissure with active and intentional absence. In fact, many of them physically construct absence – or at least the conditions that produce it – to open channels for poetry, romance, surprise, and critique... all whose salience has been eroded by the irresistibility of the constant present.

Quickly and incompletely: there is precedent for this type of work... work that engages absence as a concept. We've seen it in Art with David Hammons, Lee Lozano, Bas Jan Ader, and Tehching Hsieh; and in Film with Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Chantal Akerman, Tsai Ming-Liang, and Pedro Costa. There are more, of course. These names are familiar, and they are old. They also take a markedly different tack than some artists today who can be seen making a re-turn toward absence.

What distinguishes the two approaches to absence is naturalism. Though there are certainly exceptions, artists like Hammons, Lozano, and Costa trade in an absence that tells us, "something happened here, it just didn't happen now" or "something happened here, you just can't see what it is." In other words, naturally, once something's over (or withheld) it's absent. This is a staid and real absence, documentary-like in its presentation (see the realism of Hammons *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* documentation... Akerman's fixed frame in *Jeanne Dielman*...). Almost always, these works occur in the "natural world." They are typified by being Serious, structurally sound, conceptually precise, formal artworks.

In cinema, one aim of this type of work is to achieve some sort of transcendence. Paul Schrader wrote a whole book on it in 1972. More recently, Weerasethakul argued – albeit aspirationally – in favor of a cinema of nothing: no plot, no movement, no cuts, making cinema "closer to real life, in real time... [with] no fillers nor destination."

So, that's the aim of their absence. For the sake of this essay, we can call it "Old Absence." Old Absence wants the natural *nothing*, undisturbed by our presence.

There is a "New Absence" though, and it builds off the Old. Or, in fact, it builds in the wake of the Old. And this absence wants something.

Imagine a car speeding along a dusty road. Hollywood would make a movie about that car. Old Absence would make a movie about the dust that car left behind – slow, patient, formal. New Absence would do it a bit differently, though. New Absence would wait and, then, when the time is right, jump into the dust, playing and creating with it. In that way – using the world as a sort of readymade – New Absence tells us "something happened here, and it's actually still happening, and if you look at it *juuuuust* right, you can see it right here... and here... and right there... oh, and over there, too." Just like that, our imaginations make time a bit more elastic, a bit less constant present.

Each film in *moving images are still images* has elements of New Absence in it. Some engage with absence through a sort of reanimated inanimacy (Silvester's *You Won't Ever Get Me On That Plane*); some activate absence by physically, virtually, or sonically building worlds within our natural world (Meyer's *Scenic Jogging*, Goldner's *Swimming Lesson*, Harper's *DOGS pt. 1 Otradek*), or even by scavenging our natural world (Zhao's *Om*); and others completely manufacture spaces absent of almost all natural referents (Shavers' *Summerscents*, Wilcox's *Nobody Wants to Fix Things Anymore*, Finkelstein's *A Collection of Eccentricities*). No matter, each filmmaker takes a step into the absence to play, to imagine, to explore. Ultimately, it connects.

And it's a tragic impulse right from the start. In creating with/in absence, the maker tacitly acknowledges to themselves and to the audience that they are, in fact, in *nothing*. The jump, then, to create with that nothing is a gesture of optimism and hope, but also one that's prone to fail, prone to futility. What else can be done with nothing, especially when it's all gone? Much of that play, too, is "Unnatural" – it involves projections, manmade objects, artificial intelligence, mannequins, and ghosts. This "Unnatural" isn't so much uncanny as it is simply *removed* from the Natural. And it's not just one step removed either. It's two or even three steps removed from the Platonic ideal, creating at once a hyper-familiarity with and an overwhelming distance from the object we desire. This is the crux of romance, of tragedy, of empathy. It is very affective.

These films, and others, are important because they actively build within absence instead of passively observing it. In doing so, they tap into rich wells of sincerity and surprise in places where many other artists see (and regenerate) chaos, pessimism, and plain old "nothing."

moving images are still images is not a catalogue, or even an exemplary sample. There are others doing similar work, and through more mainstream channels. Most notably, Leós Carax's *Annette* (2021) is shot entirely and apparently on sound stages, and features a marionette doll as the main character. Lowery's *A Ghost Story* (2017), Anderson's *Asteroid City* (2023), and Weerasethakul's own *Memoria* (2021) also come to mind. There are elements from the *cinéma du look* movement in the '80s and '90s that mesh well with some of the ideas about New Absence, as does Coppola's *One From the Heart* (1981). These are all films that linger in the residue of inanimacy, that point to absence through construction.

For these works, and many others, and even us: nothing matters. But not in the nihilist sense, and not even in the observational sense. For us, nothing matters in the positive, affirmative, even desperate sense: "Nothing *does* matter!" Our entire lives we've been fed fed fed more more more – a surplus of everything – overbooked, overstimmed, overwrought. Nothing matters not because we've never known it, but because we've never had it to enjoy. The slight shift, then, comes into view: Old Absence (slow cinema) might've let us look at the world, but New Absence lets us live in it. The former created a point in space to notice nothing (we are external, separate... nothing is over there), the latter is an expansion of that point into a three-dimensional playground (we are inside of what isn't there).

In Spielberg's *Hook*, Peter Pan sits with the Lost Boys at a table full of seemingly empty plates, empty bowls, and empty glasses. Tinkerbell tells him to eat, to which Pan says, "Eat what? There's nothing here. Gandhi ate more than this." Everyone seems to see the food – and be eating it – except for Peter. It isn't until he's challenged by the Lost Boys, and flicks a spoonful of *nothing* at Rufio, that Peter can see the colorful feast in front of him. "You're doing it," one kid says to him. "Doing what?" asks Peter. Another boy replies: "Using your imagination..."

Maybe this is the secret ingredient that's laid bare in this pattern of New Absence. Imagination is on display. The films explode with it. This is how we evade the constant present.

g.j. / july 29 2023

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film:
pierre yves clouin
laurence favre
david finkelstein
vardit goldner
max harper
jillian mayer
sydney shavers
terry silvester
joseph wilcox
yanbin zhao

curated by greg
jenkins

reading + performance:
fia benitez
mikaela elson

saturday july 29
heavy manners
library

doors 7 / show 730

New Absence

NOITAGH

a screening + performance platform

film:

yanbin zhao
joseph wilcox
terry silvester
sydney shavers
jillian mayer
max harper
vardit goldner
david finkelstein
laurence favre
pierre yves clouin

performance + reading:

mikaela elson
fia benitez

curated by:
greg jenkins

thank you:
advik beni

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