

Issue #196

Hearty Welcomes and Humble Pleas

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Hybrid Forms  
AMOA-Arthouse, Austin  
Through September 16  
by Thao Votang

The word “hybrid” accurately describes the idea behind this exhibition as well as the media of the works selected. As AMOA-Arthouse works through its own internal transitions, its achievements and challenges are reflected in *Hybrid Forms*. The ten artists included in the exhibition utilize technology as a medium. While they can all be neatly categorized as new media artists, *Hybrid Forms* displays works that consider conceptual, sculptural and cultural ideas. The medium is “new,” but the ideas explored are timeless.

Nam June Paik’s *Zen for TV* acts as the inspiration for *Hybrid Forms*. This quiet work, which sits on a grey, one-inch tall pedestal in the middle of the gallery, represents new media’s emergence into the art world in the sixties. A single line breaks the black television screen. The juxtaposition of a simple line coupled with the silence from an

object that customarily pours a constant stream of noise and imagery is pleasantly complex. Paik's painterly manipulation of video to obscure the image and reveal another echoes the manipulation of light by a photographer.

Nearby, Kurt Mueller's interactive and proactive work *American Dream* feeds Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech through a karaoke machine. Even if you do not participate, watching the words silently move across the bottom of the screen and hearing the occasional outbursts of applause is captivating. Mueller's desire for human participation compliments Jim Campbell's two works across the room. *Portrait of a Portrait of Claude Shannon* and *Street Scene* both manipulate the human form into something simultaneously familiar and strange. Both works test the viewer's point of recognition of the human form by digitally abstracting features and shapes.

Like Mueller, Paul Pfeiffer's *Miss America* uses the viewer's social knowledge. Pfeiffer removes the human form from a video depicting a red carpet interview with Ms. America. The absence of a body leaves a crown bobbing in space. The arrangement of the equipment puts the viewer in the position of the camera person and focuses us on the movement of the crown as a conversational indicator. Our knowledge of social cues, i.e. head nods and tilts, fills the absence.

Having an opportunity to see Leo Villareal's *Horizon 24* was like making a date to see an old friend. I saw *Horizon 24* for the first time during *Drawn Toward Light* at the Blanton Museum of Art in 2009-2010<sup>1</sup>. As it was installed at the Blanton, I cherished sitting with the work in the room that was constructed for it. The silence of the parceled corner allowed me to listen to it (and only it) for extended periods of time. Unfortunately, as *Horizon 24* is installed in *Hybrid Forms*, street sounds and sounds from other works in the exhibit make it more difficult to enjoy the subtle noises created by Villareal.

The video room holds work by Diana Thater, Jason Salavon and Susie J. Lee. Thater's *fours suns videowall* displays the sun in four different colors. Through video, Thater gives the viewer an incredibly detailed view of the star's undulating surface. The opportunity to see an image of the sun in such detail highlights the difference between how we see the quotidian sun versus what can be achieved digitally. *Consummation* by Lee provides a similarly rhythmic image of burning string accompanied with a slow Bach prelude. With a title like *Consummation*, one can't help but think of sensuality and be gently lulled by the haltering classical music. When the music stops, the mechanical sounds of the projectors, DVD players and synchronizer in the room envelope the viewer. Salavon's *Catalogue of the Sun and Moon [sic]* screens the slow metamorphosis of furnishings over one hour and 44 minutes as a commentary on the sameness of present-day furniture. At the speed of the sun, the items of the room morph into different materials and move about the room. The video is projected onto a screen leaned against the wall and is supposed to mimic a painting leaning against the wall. At AMOA-Arthouse, this illusion is broken as the video falls off the top left corner of the screen and onto the wall. Poor installation of Salavon's work, the sound of interior

fans cooling the two projectors as well as the high frequency buzzing of machines in close proximity make the video room uncomfortable and claustrophobic.

*Hybrid Forms* undoubtedly includes important works from artists in varying stages of their career. It is gratifying that collectors, museums and foundations in Central Texas have acquired these works and enabled AMOA-Arthouse to display them. However, the presentation of the exhibit on the first floor of the Jones Center seems hasty. Salavon's work is not properly installed, wall labels had mistakes and no bench was provided for a video that is an hour and forty-four minutes long. As the museum reorganizes, I hope the curatorial staff will have the time and resources for more careful and considered installations.

- See more at: <http://www.fluentcollab.org/mbg/index.php/reviews/review/196/453#sthash.Ngqt4aCn.dpuf>

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1. [http://blantonmuseum.org/exhibitions/details/teresita\\_fernandez\\_blind\\_landscape/](http://blantonmuseum.org/exhibitions/details/teresita_fernandez_blind_landscape/)
  2. <http://salavon.com/work/CatalogueSunAndMoon/image/254/>