



THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME

3 ARTISTS FROM VANCOUVER, LOS ANGELES AND GUADALAJARA

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Vancouver
Artgallery

750 Hornby Street Vancouver BC V6Z 2H7 Canada
Tel 604 662 4700 www.vanartgallery.bc.ca





Kerry Tribe, *Here & Elsewhere*, 2002 (still)



Kerry Tribe, *Here & Elsewhere*, 2002 (installation view)

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME

ISABELLE PAUWELS, KERRY TRIBE AND GONZALO LEBRIJA

Location is a complex term, one that draws on our perception of the physical world, our psychological response to that perception and the formal struggle to represent the experience we've perceived. In the exhibition *The Distance Between You and Me* it serves as the thematic link between the works of three notable contemporary artists—Isabelle Pauwels, Kerry Tribe and Gonzalo Lebrija—loosely united by the geographical configuration of their locations, which form a line extending north-south along the west coast of North America from Vancouver through Los Angeles to Guadalajara. Shaped by the vagaries of geography, politics and personal history, this line, although relatively arbitrary, is also the representational context for the places each has chosen as subject.

The three artists in this exhibition are also linked by their use of photo-based media; the indexical nature of film, photographs and video makes them perfect choices for those who want to document their experience and establish evidence of their locatedness. The capturing of a trace of light on the surface of the film negative or video photoreceptors is a proof of sorts, an index that points to a position in time and space that we have occupied.

Isabelle Pauwels is a Vancouver-based artist whose video installations address the complexities of locatedness, the mechanics of its representation within time-based media and the fundamental structures of narrative. Using video, found film and photographs, she combines images taken in and around her family home in suburban Vancouver with home movies made by her grandfather during his family's time in the Belgian Congo. Pauwels offers this body of work as a meditation on location and, more importantly, on dislocation. The installation is comprised of two single channel videos, *June 30, 2009* and *W.E.S.T.E.R.N.*, 2010, together with a small group of digital prints, scanned images of historical photographs taken or collected by her grandfather who worked as a government inspector during the time leading up to the declaration of independence for the Republic of Congo on June 30, 1960. The videos begin with a sequence of disjunctive images, and a clatter of sound, an immediate and pre-emptory gesture to disorient the viewer, and to introduce the medium through which she will present her narrative. For Pauwels, narrative is a problem, rife with kitsch and cliché and in need of interruption and displacement. She is wary of images and stories, especially images as evocative and compelling as those captured by her grandfather: images of black men, women and children, an underclass who labour and serve, and an overclass of white people who administer

and enjoy the products of their labour. These images are seductive and compelling, we feel we know them even before we see them. They are so easily absorbed, our understanding is complete and our judgment swift. For Pauwels, narrative is better replaced by a polemic in which both the shape and the content of a narrative must be broken apart and re-presented. In this broken state, the terms of its argument must be visible and the actors and narrator exposed. Only then can we begin to see location for what it is: a narrative that binds us—through medium, memory, familial relations and social and political history—to a temporal and geographic place.

In her two-channel video installation *Here & Elsewhere*, 2002, Los Angeles-based Kerry Tribe presents a wonderfully disarming conversation between a father and young daughter. Their resolutely British accents seem oddly out of place in the arid Los Angeles landscape that appears and disappears throughout their conversation. By asking a series of complex, yet comprehensible questions, he prompts her to speak about time, space, memory and being. Her answers evoke an unanticipated melancholy, a sense of dislocation that cannot be entirely mended with critical thinking. In a swift chain of questions, the father raises fundamental doubts about our ability to understand the singularity of being in a world where what we know of time and space are frustratingly intangible and unstable concepts. "Does your existence depend on your body?" he asks, "So if you only have one physical body, then you only really exist once... But is your body changing all the time... If it's changing does that mean there is an old you and a new you?" The video is shot in their family home, the camera moves through the house, capturing the girl as she dozes, brushes her teeth, reads, snacks and creatively responds to her interlocutor. The format of the film owes a debt to the work of Jean-Luc Godard, the renowned French filmmaker whose influence has rippled through the contemporary art world for many decades. The basic conceit of Tribe's video is similar to a 1978 television series by Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, entitled *FRANCE/TOUR/DÉTOUR/DEUX/ENFANTS*. In it Godard and Miéville interviewed two children, asking them questions on every conceivable subject. Their responses are similarly disarming and disheartening, but they clearly come from another time and place. Like the line that runs from north to south—connecting Vancouver, Los Angeles and Guadalajara—here another line is formed from Tribe to Godard and Miéville, but this line folds back on itself, one video overlaying the other, further confounding our ideas of time and space, and the singularity of being in place.

The work of Gonzalo Lebrija, an artist based in Guadalajara, is presented as a four-projector 16mm film installation, with related photographs. Each film presents a magnificent landscape with a small figure, the artist himself, who enters the film frame and then runs away from the viewer as fast as he can. The light and topography substantially affect the figure's visibility as he recedes from vision. Lebrija's original conception for *The Distance Between You and Me*, a recent series shot in various locations in Mexico and southern California, began as a set of photographs taken with a medium format camera. Using the camera's timer Lebrija would decide on a location, press the shutter button and then run as fast as possible away from the camera. The resulting images are surprisingly varied: the figure may be instantly recognizable in the landscape, or a tiny spot on the horizon that blurs into the grain of the film. Using a similar strategy for the films, Lebrija sets the camera, starts the film, then runs into the distance. The film ends when he is no longer visible in the landscape. Depending on the terrain this can take anywhere from sixty seconds to four minutes. The film is looped so that once he has disappeared the performance begins again. It is a surprisingly unnerving image—at once mesmerizing and disturbing—as we are left to wonder if we are the cause of this retreat or if we should join him in abandoning our present location. The declaration of a "distance between you and me" may seem to suggest provocation, a gap that cannot be mended, but Lebrija also intends it to be an invitation to close the gap, to follow him into these sublime and fantastic landscapes. It is a performative gesture reminiscent of Yves Klein's leap into the void, a spontaneous action, offered as an expression of location that is at once transitory and timeless.

The line that joins these three artists is as tenuous as it is long. As we've seen in their work, the physical characteristics of location are only one aspect of its meaning. More often than not, a place only exists in relation to another; its juxtaposition gives it meaning and articulation. Location is a question, a narrative, a performative space and a line of flight. It is the distance between you and me, and all the memories, ideas, discourse, relations, people and places that fill the spaces between.

Bruce Grenville, senior curator



Gonzalo Lebrija, *The Distance Between You and Me*, 2009 (installation view)



Isabelle Pauwels, *June 30, 2009* (still)

IMAGE CREDITS

(From left to right)

Kerry Tribe
Here & Elsewhere, 2002 (still)
two-channel video projection
10 minutes, 30 seconds
Courtesy of the Artist and
1301PE Gallery, Los Angeles

Kerry Tribe
Here & Elsewhere, 2002
installation view at UCLA
New White Gallery, Los Angeles
two-channel video projection
10 minutes, 30 seconds
Courtesy of the Artist and
1301PE Gallery, Los Angeles
Photo: Brian Forrest

Gonzalo Lebrija
The Distance Between You and Me, 2009
installation view at
Mesler&Hug, Los Angeles
4-projector 16mm film installation
Courtesy of the Artist and
Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris
Photo: Joshua White

Isabelle Pauwels
June 30, 2009 (still)
single channel video installation
Courtesy of the Artist and
Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

(Centrefold) Isabelle Pauwels
June 30, 2009 (installation view)
single channel video installation
Courtesy of the Artist and
Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver
Photo: Rachel Topham,
Vancouver Art Gallery

(Front cover) Gonzalo Lebrija
The Distance Between You and Me 12, 2008
Lambda print
65.0 x 55.6 cm
Courtesy of the Artist and
Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris

A detailed list of works and artist biographies are available at:
http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_distance