

endeavors to make the viewer complicit with (or an extension of) the tormentor (and, in turn, the artist), and foreshadows a proliferation of intercutting that shreds temporal logic and at once splinters and compresses an already claustrophobic space of representation (the bedroom or hotel unit). Next, Kinski is shown lying in bed, her T-shirt no longer blood-stained—does this suggest temporal asynchrony, or that it's all a dream? At another moment, she is dragged across the room by the invisible force—is she possessed? Often the camera moves toward her, and she seems to be receiving invisible blows to the face and stomach. There is an economic, high-velocity, graphicness to the action: At one point, a knife severs her Achilles tendon; at another, she removes a knife from her abdomen, implying self-mutilation. She does fight back, punching at her phantom tormentor, spitting blood at the camera. But it's hopeless. Problematically, even as Ruilova may be seeking to unpack the sexualized violence of scopophilia intrinsic to normative filmic representations of women, she has adopted a traditionally male voyeuristic gaze, offering up just another femme fatale who can find no emancipation from this condition.

Prophouse, 2011—shown on the gallery's exterior and viewable only from the Bowery—is a trailer for a longer piece. A lone woman navigates a verdant forest, which we quickly realize is a stage set in a prop house. As the atmosphere becomes increasingly sinister and noirish, she aims a replica of a 45-mm automatic pistol at herself and at the camera. Finally, silhouetted by her own shadow, the woman sings "Me and My Shadow." This sequence is intercut with a shot of her holding a feathery pink boa, standing in front of a heart-shaped light; for a moment, the gloved hands of a man appear wrapped around her neck. This initial fragment of the work apparently aspires to the level of an allegory concerning the ideological-psychological constructedness of woman (as staged subject, imperiled by the representational web), but threatens to devolve into irredeemable campiness.

"Cinematic images of woman have been so consistently oppressive and repressive that the very idea of a feminist filmmaking practice seems an impossibility," film theorist Mary Ann Doane wrote in 1981. She then provocatively asserted that "the simple gesture of directing a camera toward a woman has become equivalent to a terrorist act." Yet Doane acknowledged that artistic strategies could deconstruct the feminine subject within the cinematic frame. It's clear that Ruilova's camera terrorizes her female subjects and sometimes her audience. Yet does the artist reproduce the sensationalistic, sadomasochistic, violent gaze of the cinematic apparatus to launch an attack upon these conventions, or do her films represent yet another contrived, postcritical practice?

—Joshua Decter

Keren Cytter

ZACH FEUER GALLERY

Keren Cytter's *Video Art Manual*, 2011, begins with the self-deluding slickness of an infomercial. From behind a glass-topped table in a generic office, a bearded man in a suit confidently addresses the viewer. He explains that new technologies enable the production of user-generated content, and that Cytter's video will "reveal the utopian anxieties of the common man." Midway through his portentous speech, the sound track switches from synched sound to a bad, hollow-sounding postproduction dub: His voice fails to match the movements of his mouth and becomes inexplicably loud and echoey. The man concludes his remarks by reassuringly patting a phone in the shape of a mallard duck-hunting decoy that rests on the table to his left.

Is Cytter's work a cipher wrapped in a farce—a "manual" that instructs the viewer by way of its own amateurish failure? It may seem



Keren Cytter, *Video Art Manual*, 2011, still from a color HD video, 14 minutes 42 seconds.

so at first, but the breakdown or interruption of cinematic tropes is a leitmotif of Cytter's nearly fifteen-minute work: The video addresses the long takes and voice-overs that foster narrative plausibility in both documentaries and sci-fi; the manipulation of diegetic time and space accomplished by techniques such as subtitling, the close-up, speeding-up the film, etc.; the production of affect in viewer's identifications with on-screen characters; and the political implications of video's appropriation of other works. The mallard-duck phone—a phone, it is explained later, that runs without electricity (it is landline) after a series of solar flares knocked out Earth's power grid—turns out to be a useful fantasy. Cytter hooks you right away with that seemingly random duck, using it as an absurdist displacement, a MacGuffin that catalyzes her layered exploration of communication technologies.

Cytter puts forward several loose plots and deconstructs them as quickly as they are introduced. One involves a stylish, white-haired woman named Anna van Rügen. Nodding to the use of Brechtian distancing effects to disrupt the fourth wall in Jean-Luc Godard's film *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*, Cytter is careful to point out that the actress playing this character is also named Anna van Rügen, and that she shares her character's emotional state. Speaking in German with English subtitles, Anna voices her anxieties about the impending solar flares; a voice-over by the bearded man explains that "she isn't really afraid of the solar sun theory"—she "is afraid of death, pain, and depression." Later, as the bearded man interviews an eager young job applicant, Anna is seen to be his secretary, and she has inexplicably fallen into a motionless trance. The job applicant later leads a team of performers in a comical synchronized dance routine with movements that recall those of the ever-ebullient Richard Simmons in *Sweatin' to the Oldies*, a few moments of which Cytter had earlier inserted into her piece. A white-walled studio is the set for yet another plot. This one involves a violent confrontation between a couple that results in the man shooting the woman with a handgun at point-blank range; during these scenes and others, captions and voice-over explain the ways in which camera work and acting techniques lend credence to or undermine the fiction of the drama. "The performer creates a strong, suggestive image," the voice-over asserts as the man embraces the woman's hand, "by reenacting a symbolic gesture in front of a camera."

With its tongue-in-cheek didacticism, mirthful non sequiturs, and a melodica sound track that's straight out of those earnest 1980s public-television tutorials, *Video Art Manual* gives a droll lesson about the ways in which video lulls viewers into patterns of passive spectatorship. Cytter has as much suspicion about the truth-value of the image and the seductions of narrative as any good student of postmodernism, but she still manages to tell a funny, wry, and visually dynamic story about how stories get made.

—Eva Díaz