

REVIEWS



JENNY PERLIN, STILL FROM *TRANSCRIPT*, 2006 • 16 MM FILM TRANSFERRED TO DVD, 11 MIN 25 SEC • COURTESY THE ARTIST, ANNET GELINK GALLERY, AMSTERDAM, AND GALERIE M+R FRICKE, BERLIN

JENNY PERLIN

THE KITCHEN

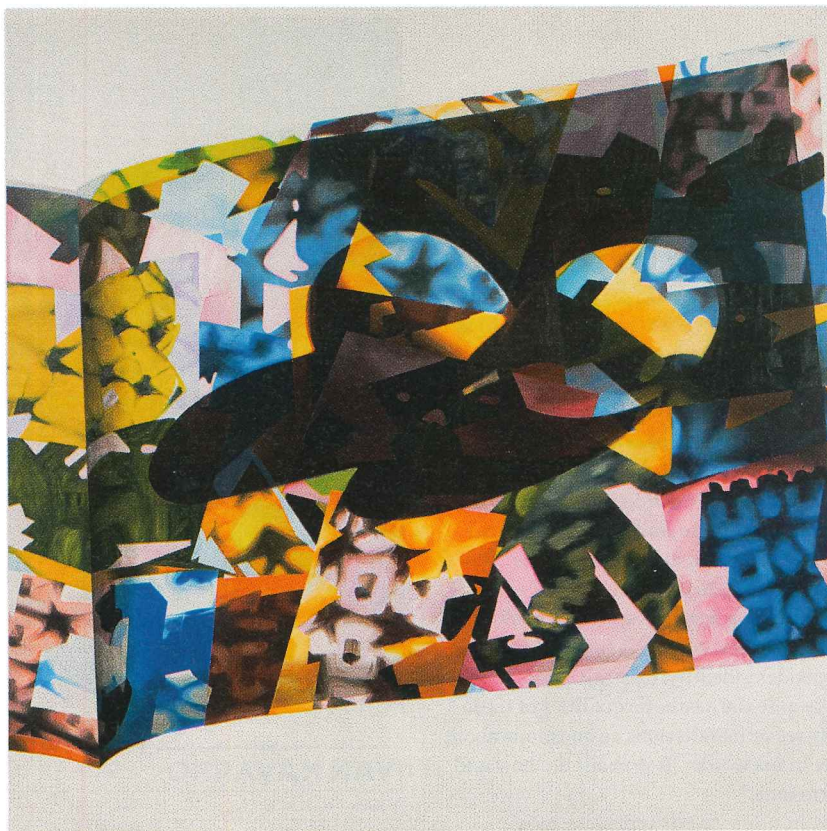
"If it's too bad to be true, it could be disinformation," Martha Rosler claimed in a 1985 video. Disinformation and its effects form the basis of Jenny Perlin's film *Transcript* (2006), which revisits a stunning example of cold war paranoia, one that resonates with the current political climate. While researching the Perlin Papers, an archive at Columbia University Law School containing 250,000 documents related to the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (all of which were forced to be made public by lawyer Marshall Perlin, a relative of the artist), Perlin came across the FBI records of the agent NY964-S, who spied on left-wingers suspected of being Reds. She then hired actors to recite lines from a transcript of a covert taping that took place in October 1953, four months after the execution the Rosenbergs. The actors remain unseen while the camera, much like NY964-S, lurks in the stairwell of a New York apartment building. The muffled conversation between two couples having dinner is both banal and tantalizing. Such words as "danger," "witness," "contacts," and "organization" suddenly seem loaded but are interspersed with jokey stories, requests for scotch on the rocks, and faint jazz. The uncertainty of the conversation, combined with the experience of attenuated time that Perlin develops with her slow, stalking camera work, creates a mood of expectant though unrequited revelation. Yet the sense of entrapment is unambiguous; regimes of surveillance gather secret evidence whose qualities of disinformation they alone can assess. —EVA DIAZ

LOS ANGELES

JOHN WILLIAMS

SISTER

Those familiar with the young Los Angeles-based artist John Williams's architectural and auditory intervention



JOHN WILLIAMS, *TWO EGGS (IWATA NAKAYAMA, "TWO EGGS," 1938)*, 2006 • OIL ON ALUMINUM, 48 X 48 IN • COURTESY SISTER GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

Bell Tower at the Sister gallery in 2005 may have been surprised by his recent show of three oil-on-aluminum paintings hung in the same space. Although the new works seemed more abstracted Pop than austere monumental sculpture, the two bodies of work are not unrelated. Williams's new paintings feature collagelike compositions that cull from art-historical and popular sources; for example, *Two Eggs* (*Iwata Nakayama, "Two Eggs," 1938*) (all works, 2006), presents the outlines of a slightly folded photo by modernist Japanese photographer Nakayama, within which layers of color and pattern drift between illusionistic shadow and depth. *Jaroslav Rossler* (*Jaroslav Rossler, "Self Portrait," 1929*) inserts the Czech artist's fish-eye self-portrait into fragments of pastel-hued fields and edges. Like the angular opening he cut in the gallery wall two years ago, Williams's recent paintings slice through material space to suggest the permeability of aesthetic and stylistic systems. —CATHERINE TAFT

MARK BRADFORD

LAXART

Mark Bradford is known for large-scale mixed-media works in which he engineers dynamic, sensual, and organic geometric abstractions out of papers, chemicals, and dyes indigenous to salons specializing in black hair. Not only an implicit critique of formalist tropes, Bradford's work also explores the cultural economy of South Central LA, his native neighborhood. *Volver*

(2006), a new exterior installation at LAXART, extends that spirit of hybridism to the vernacular of street advertising, incorporating scores of billboards and other paper-based urban detritus into a thickly layered, artificially aged, evocatively grotesque, illegible peeling palimpsest. An audio track loops Nina Simone's 1963 protest song "Mississippi Goddam," written in response to the murder of Medgar Evers and the civil rights march on Washington. Such excerpted lyrics as "This whole country's full of lies" are graffitied onto the mural, redirecting Simone's cynicism by contextualizing it as an indictment of mass marketing, aggressive capitalism, and cultural propaganda. —SHANA NYS DAMBROT

MARK BRADFORD, *VOLVER*, 2006, SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION • COURTESY LAXART, LOS ANGELES

