

Power, Corruption & Lies # 2

Film & Video in a Divisive Atmosphere

Frozen War (Hotel Diaries #1)

John Smith, 2001, 11 min, digital

Made over six years in the hotels of six different countries, *Hotel Diaries* charts the 'War on Terror' era of Bush and Blair through a series of video recordings that relate Smith's personal experiences while travelling to the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Israel/Palestine.

johnsmithfilms.com

In *Frozen War* he lends his voice to that of the silenced host, filling the dead air in an attempt to talk through his worries. In subsequent sections he builds on this task, voicing the pressing concern he felt in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 in the form of a simmering dislike for American and British foreign policy. Foregoing the objective composure of the news host, he refuses to explain, and thereby makes no pretence to control current events. Although he mentions a number of specific policies, he uses inference and anecdote to express his general dissatisfaction with contemporary politics. He neither attempts to give an historical account of these conflicts, nor proscribes their resolution. Instead, he uses video to vent the continued, personal frustration he feels in response to larger events over which he has little, if any, control.

— William Kaizen, 'Voice-off: John Smith's Moving Diaries,'
Moving Image Review & Art Journal, Volume 2, Number 1, 2013

Measures of Distance

Mona Hatoum, 1988, 16 min, digital

The video is concerned with the artist's separation from her Palestinian family and in particular, her relationship with her mother whose letters from Beirut are read aloud as the soundtrack to the tape. The personal and political are inextricably bound up in a narrative that explores identity and sexuality against a backdrop of traumatic social rupture, exile and displacement.

— 'Electric Eyes' Film and Video Umbrella touring programme
brochure, 1989

With *Measures of Distance* I made a conscious decision to delve into the personal – however complex, confused, and contradictory the material I was dealing with was. During a visit to Beirut in 1981, I had taken a dozen slides of my mother taking a shower. At the time, feminism had so problematized the issue of representation of women that images of women vacated the frame, they became absent. It was quite depressing. For a few years I agonized over whether I should use these images of my mother in my work. I didn't make the work in its final form until 1988, but in between I used the material in a performance. Anyway, once I made the work I found that it spoke of the complexities of exile, displacement, the sense of loss and separation caused by war. In other words, it contextualized the image, or this person, "my mother," within a social-political context.

— Mona Hatoum in 'Mona Hatoum Interview by Janine Antoni,'
Bomb Magazine, April 1998

Neither Here Nor There

Malcolm le Grice, 2001, 8 min, digital (3 scrn ver.)

I always thought of myself as being political, but not in the sense of making propaganda political films. Also my material images, usually found footage, are related to conflict. I think it is more about how the media represents conflict in the war than about war itself. I never know for sure why I'm doing something. But I didn't want to shoot it as if they were raw images – I actually had the camera often touching the screen of the television so the sounds and the images are coming from very close up. You wouldn't be able to do it on newer TVs. I was obviously anti what was going on, but was in no position to affect that, I couldn't intervene in that kind of political situation, so I could only reflect on it and show my own puzzlement about it, you know. I'm always puzzled about why these things happen and how they happen. What I have always tried to do with my films is not to have an opinion about something but change the way people see things.

— Malcolm Le Grice in 'From Material to Emotion and Beyond:
Malcolm Le Grice interviewed by Alberte Pagán,' 2020

Mouthwash

Reman Sadani, 2014, 18 min, digital

As ISIS insurgents seize control of the Iraqi city of Mosul in 2014, Reman finds herself holding a BlackBerry camera phone in the face of chaos. With no previous experience of filmmaking, her pixelated footage documents the early days of the occupation, and reflects something of the urgency of a freshly discovered love for film. Unable to rely on the confused public narratives, she chooses to narrate and make sense of the political events through her mother's memories of the city, and the daily WhatsApp voice notes that her cousins send from Mosul.

— Independent Iraqi Film Festival Programme, 2021

Electrical Gaza

Rosalind Nashashibi, 2015, 18 min, digital

I have tried to depict Gaza as an enchanted place because that is how I experienced it. I understood this a week after returning to the UK when I was watching an animated kids' movie. I realised that I could present Gaza through the language and eyes of childhood as an enchanted place, because it exists on a different plane of reality to everything that surrounds it, especially to us here in the UK. You cannot enter Gaza without complex dealings with different authority groups. Most of that process is hidden and opaque and the outcome insecure. To enter Gaza through Israel is to pass through a process that takes place in a brand-new-looking military facility where you are controlled and surveilled at every step by Israeli guards that you cannot see or touch. The place itself is deserted. Once entered, it is not clear how easily or when you will be allowed to leave Gaza. And this is all before experiencing the peculiar and wired stasis of Gaza and its layers of social protocol. So to go back to the question of victims – that's not how I experienced the place or the people. My experience was much more contradictory and layered, of a culture reflecting of and on itself, rather than in relation to the world outside.

— Rosalind Nashashibi interviewed by George Vasey, *Art Monthly*, Issue 39, November 2015

Dirty Pictures (Hotel Diaries #6)

John Smith, 2007, 15 min, digital

To the question of how one travels and collects images without objectifying, John Smith answers by shooting the generic in place of the exotic. In *Dirty Pictures*, an Englishman travels to Palestine but instead of showing us the long lines at the checkpoints, the military artillery on display or the unbearable poverty inflicted on the general population, he elects to shoot the familiar interior of two common hotel rooms. But nothing is ever entirely banal in the West Bank, or so it seems. As the wind from the window of his room hits the ceiling, the tiles start moving up and down. Off-camera, Smith explains that this newly renovated hotel reopened recently after being requisitioned by the Israeli army in 2000 at the start of the second Intifada because of its strategic location on top of a hill. The surreal movement of the tiles becomes a poetic reminder of the building's haunted past.

—Frédéric Moffet, curator's statement, "I don't want to tell you who I am," *Cinéma Parallèle*, Montreal, 2008

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