



SPECTACLE + ARTIFICE

NATASCHA NIEDERSTRASS

Natascha Niederstrass works in video, photography, sculpture and installation. Her work questions the perception we have of a reality that often escapes us. It is through the creation of different *mise-en-scènes* that she attempts to reveal the ambiguity of language, signs, and cultural codes that are too often disregarded due to their seeming familiarity.

Niederstrass has exhibited in solo and group shows, as well as at special events, including *Aquatic gala* («special projects» series at Articule Gallery), *Ouverture officielle d'un espace à venir* (Espace Vidéographe), *Paysage réinventé Percé* (organised by Champ Libre), *Les 17^{èmes} Rendez-vous du Cinéma Québécois* (La Cinémathèque québécoise), *Vidéo Lisboa: Visions underground* (Lisbon, Portugal), and *Le comité mélangueur II* (Marseille, France). She participated in *L'art qui fait boom!*, the second Triennial of Young Québécois Artists in Contemporary Art at Espace VOX, and has shown her work in a solo exhibition at Galerie Horace (Sherbrooke). In 2006, Niederstrass' project titled *The Final Girl* was exhibited at the Centre d'exposition en art actuel de Longueuil. In 2007, Fish Haus Studios invited her to participate in a group exhibition in Wichita, Kansas. Niederstrass holds a BFA in Visual Arts from Concordia University (1997) and an MFA in Visual Arts from York University (2001).

Inherent to the photographic discipline is the multiple, the supposition that a single photograph is one of many. This is a modern assumption attached to the invention of roll film which, since the 1880s, has enabled the capture of multiple frames in succession. A still photograph is a replica of non-static experience : what we see in the photograph is a direct contradiction to the lived event, which has movement and sound. In *Spectacle + Artifice*, the inclusion of Natascha Niederstrass' dyptich *Broken* (2007-2008) engages this duality.

Broken comprises two four-minute videos that are played simultaneously on wall-mounted monitors. The videos, each with its own soundtrack, inform and contradict the viewer's relationship to photographic media. Niederstrass implements formalist conventions to control the performance of her subjects. The videos are shot in a monochromatic palette, framed by the monitors, presented in two parts, and repeated in an infinite loop. The figures of a woman (on the left) and a man (on the right) are captured from the shoulders down, their identities obscured by the frame. Both are attired in semi-formal dress. They are caught in an unending cycle : the woman shatters plates on a concrete floor, then sweeps the shards with her feet into a pile on which she precariously stands; the man collects the broken pieces and attempts to rebuild the plates like a jigsaw puzzle. They act against one another but their pursuits are futile. Niederstrass not only conceives and directs the performance, but participates in it both literally (the female figure) and figuratively (as the artist). The meaning of the work rests within its contradictions. It is broken both in subject and construction.



Installation view. LEFT TO RIGHT Natascha Niederstrass, *Broken*, 2007-2008; Robyn Cumming, *The Moments Inbetween*, 2007, and *Many Shades of Pink*, 2006.