

ADRENALINE IS COMMONLY known as a hormone responsible for severe stimulation in times of fear or excitement, causing rapturous moments of euphoria and ecstasy. It is those moments that Los Angeles artist Trisha Donnelly is trying to catch and reenact in her untitled video from 1999. In the 4 1/2-minutes of the film, she portrays an energy that she has observed in the performances of rock bands. The artist describes it as an "overtaking force" that produces a trance-like state and forms an almost metaphysical intensity that is detached from the actual performances.

In the video we see the artist flying in and out of the image in slow motion, a movement that seems to correspond with the up and down of the performer's adrenaline level during a concert. This motion of appearance and disappearance occurs exactly 17 times during the film, each time with another strangely looking gesture. Those bizarre poses are in fact the ecstatic moments Donnelly is trying to catch. For a split-second the artist merges with those people whose gestures and poses she has studied carefully, trying to find exactly that moment of transcendence. The source for the different positions is never revealed. One does not know what they are or where they come from, and it is only the artist who tells me that we are in fact watching poses and gestures by musicians such as PP Arnold, Ronnie Spector, Joey Ramone or Ozzy Osbourne. Even though the video is made extremely simply, filmed with only one camera perspective and without artificial lightning, it has an incredible power. Donnelly is certainly appropriating the video music format, but it feels as if we are watching something that does not exist anymore. Like a document from an era long before contemporary music videos with over-choreographed performances. In contrast to the entirely self-conscious pop stars of today, Donnelly's film describes very personal and private conditions of fragility and loneliness. It is as if the public performance she mimics turns into a private moment of self-searching that reveals a true personal intimacy. As violent and aggressive as some of these performers appear on stage, during the moments the artist restages, they display a high vulnerability beyond any awareness of embarrassment.

Donnelly removes herself physically from the viewer by hiding behind her hair, escaping into a dreamlike state in which she is losing orientation and control. The blurred image of the film indicates the ephemerality of the moment. As a result, the work's extremely unreal and fragmentated character suggests the transitory nature of our lives and the somewhat illusory state of what we perceive as reality.

Jens Hoffmann

Jens Hoffmann is fascinated by the unequal relationship between the powerful images in Trisha Donnelly's film and the fragility her poses represent. The ephemerality of life in contrast to mankind's confidence of an enduring civilization constituted by what remains.

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Untitled, 1999. Video still.
Courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York.