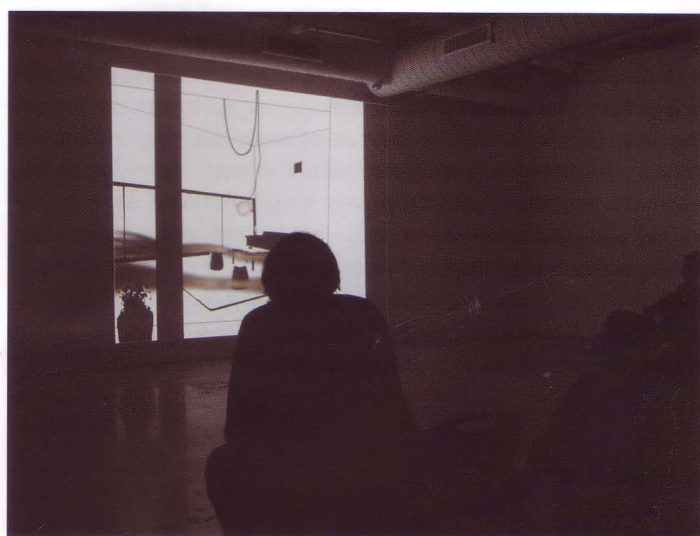
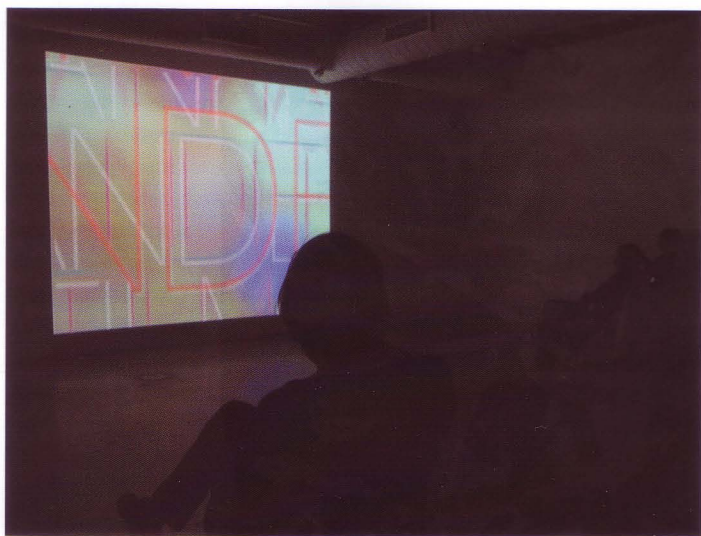


ART LIES

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FORT WORTH 68 Liam Gillick
Noah Simblist



L. Liam Gillick, *Anna Sanders*, 2003; digital video; 23 seconds; installation view, *Short Films by Liam Gillick*, Fort Worth Contemporary Arts; courtesy the artist and Corvi-Mora, London

R. *Briannnnnn & Ferryyyyyy* (with Philippe Parreno), 2005; digital animation; 28 minutes, 54 seconds; installation view, *Short Films by Liam Gillick*, Fort Worth Contemporary Arts; courtesy the artists and Air de Paris, Paris

Liam Gillick
Fort Worth Contemporary Arts

Liam Gillick is an important and interesting artist, but his recent exhibition at Fort Worth Contemporary Arts is not his best work. Then again, given that Gillick's work is a Gordian knot that makes one question the viability of things like discrete autonomous art objects and the very notion of aesthetic judgment, such a claim is hard to make without a long set of parenthetical remarks. Spanning about fifteen years of work, *Short Films by Liam Gillick* is an accumulation of the artist's tangential videographic investigations into architecture, urbanism, the histories of sport and other cultural phenomena. This "minor" exhibition begs several questions: How does this work relate to the minimal sculptures and text pieces for which Gillick is better known? What does it mean that he is identified with some works more than with others? And what, exactly, determines a major versus minor work? These inquiries are too big to answer here, but I can consider a few of the short films and some contradictions that they raise in relation to Gillick's greater practice.

Interspersed throughout the seven-video program—looped and projected as a single viewing screen—is a short, twenty-three-second spot for a Paris-based film company entitled *Anna Sanders* (2003). The company was founded in 1998 by the artists Charles de Meaux, Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno. The spot involves a pretty young woman on a city street walking away from the camera, then turning back and winking. Such identity spots, commonly seen at the beginning of movies, are regularly dismissed as mere branding, aesthetically and conceptually inconsequential to the film that follows. However, by interspersing this spot throughout the program and listing it as an artwork, Gillick draws attention to this

convention. He exaggerates it and subsequently destabilizes our expectations of how we watch film or video.

This destabilization is furthered in *Briannnnnn & Ferryyyyyy* (2004), a cartoon series in ten episodes, which the checklist informs us were "written while the artist was drunk." These episodes explore the following premise: what would happen to the classic cat-and-mouse chase in shows like Tom and Jerry if the mouse were killed in the very first episode. The result Gillick proposes is that conventions like opening and closing credits take much more time than the action itself, subsequently calling more attention to questions of intellectual property and copyright than the entertaining violence of a cat-and-mouse game. In each episode almost nothing happens. In one instance, the back of a silhouetted cat watches a short soft-focus montage of imagery that moves so fast that it is barely comprehensible; in another, short archival clips of the band New Order's concerts play. These "episodes" are so short and so oblique that the credits take over as the dominant content. Thoroughly playing with this convention, Gillick even credits artists who clearly were never a part of the production, such as Adrian Piper and the Guerrilla Girls, as well as other "figures" like *documenta 11*, free software, informal economy and democracy realized.

Like *Briannnnnn & Ferryyyyyy*, there are a few other videos that use digital animation to play out philosophical musings. The forty-second *Revised Milan House 1992* (2007) proposes a social center in Milan that draws inspiration from both Joy Division and AC/DC. Like much of Gillick's work, this mash-up collides two separate practices and a range of cultural

68 ART LIES NO. 66

associations. Mixing architecture and popular music, Gillick attempts to produce a new thing that is greater than the sum of its parts. However, unlike an architectural 3-D model that envisions a future concrete thing, Gillick's video model exists only as an abstract idea, never to be realized. Like the cartoon series, *Revised Milan House 1992* barely reads as a work in and of itself. Rather, both works are simply setups for intellectual gamesmanship.

The most explicit linkage between video and discourse on view is *We are Medi(eval)* (1994). In this video, the artist Angela Bulloch and a very young-looking Gillick dig a hole in Frankfurt, throw seeds across a park, get some medieval costume accessories from a local party store and sit down in a room to talk about what they just enacted. The action takes just a few minutes but the talking takes about fifteen. The artists' dialogue references everything from 1970s performative process art to the echoes of medieval heraldry in contemporary football. The relationship between the doing and the talking, however, is too casual to make the video more interesting than any other late-night conversation between two supremely intelligent but drunk friends.

The difference between these videos and Gillick's more engaging sculptural installations or text pieces is the difference between performance and spectacle. Gillick often confronts Michael Fried's criticism of Minimalism that it was too performative, that the objects emphasized the social space surrounding the work rather than materiality and form. Gillick turns Fried on his head by taking his critique as a compliment, using his own minimal objects to exaggerate the very aspects that Fried despised.

Most famously, Gillick's discussion platforms are meant to put sculpture to the same uses as architecture, to form and influence social space. But the videos take the performer away and make the viewer a passive spectator. All that the viewer is left with is a performance that is not clearly by or for anyone. The videos subsequently devolve into what Guy Debord called the alienating forces of spectacle.

Gillick did this show in conjunction with the honor of being this year's Cecil and Ida Green Honors Professor in the Department of Art & Art History at Texas Christian University, for which he was in residence for a week, meeting with students and giving a brilliant and comprehensive lecture of his work at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. Tellingly, he did not talk much about any of the work in the Fort Worth Contemporary Arts exhibition. Maybe it was because he knew that he had constructed it to be an interesting footnote to a much larger and more illustrious career.

Noah Simblist is a writer and artist based in Austin and Dallas.