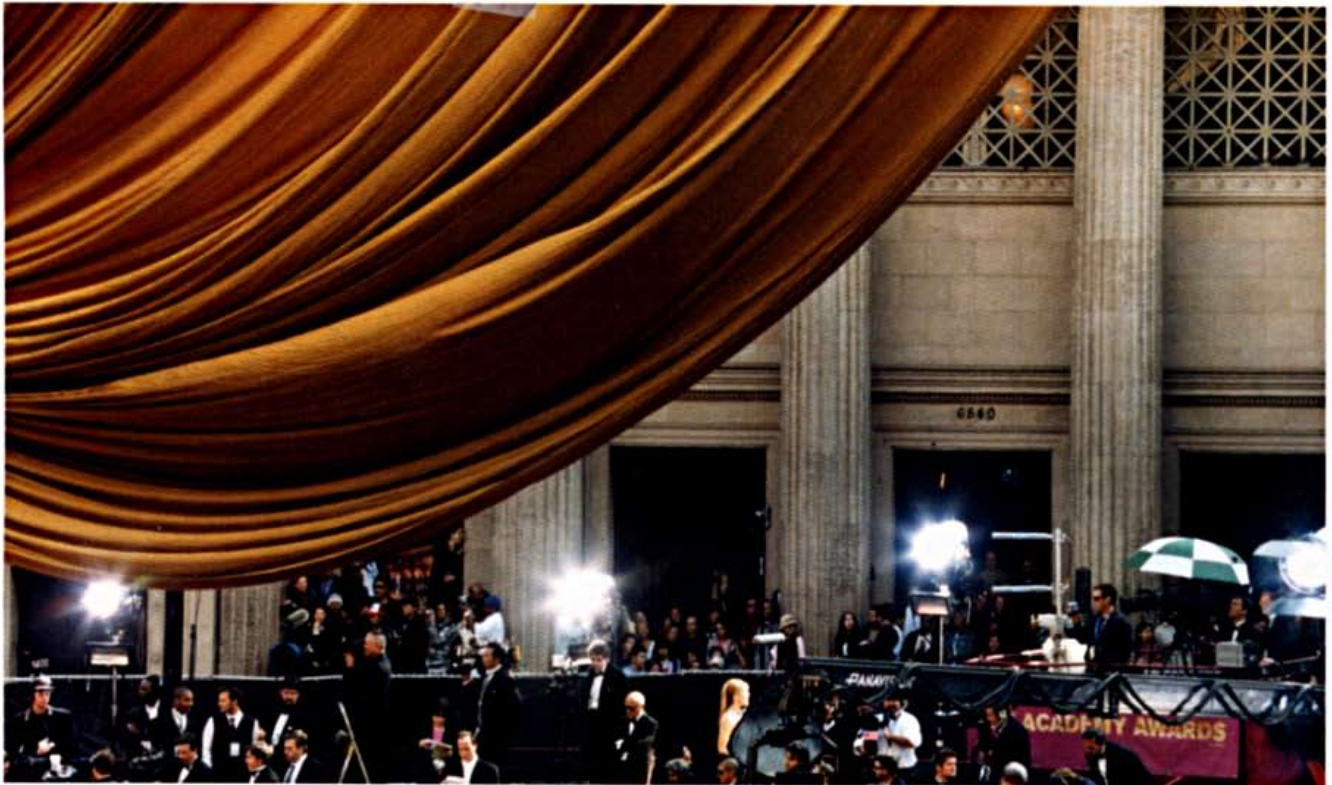


REPORTS

• SARAH MORRIS'S LOS ANGELES



THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

In February 2004, in the frenetic week leading up to the Academy Awards, artist and filmmaker Sarah Morris explored the iconic landscape of Tinseltown armed with a majestic 35mm CinemaScope camera, an outsider's eye and, among many fascinations, a deliberate curiosity surrounding the mental, physical and sociological manifestations of the architecture of cinematic power.

Less an ode to the dazzling eye-candy-fication of Hollywood than a loving semiotician's view of the mating and socialization patterns of our species (think Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* crossed with Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 3*), her fifth short film, *Los Angeles*, reveals a vast small town, a hermetic bubble of self-congratulatory adoration, glamorously adorned as the epicenter of exponential narcissism — glossy, surreal, blindingly unaware of its own secular idolatry. Morris's film emerges as a rare, wordless gathering of widescreen minutiae collected by a consummate cultural anthropologist.

Accompanied by grand Bernard Herrman-style electronic music — composed by Morris's husband, Turner Prize nominee Liam Gillick — *Los Angeles* combines images and collective subtextual fragments, creating surprising, often intentionally hilarious poetic conjunctions: Linger over monolithic structures such as the CAA building,

the film slips by mega-star Brad Pitt repeatedly punching himself in the face in a stunt rehearsal for Doug Liman's *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*; closes in on the relaxed brow of a woman receiving Botox injections; cruises on the stretched out sunny roadways alongside easy rider Dennis Hopper; slowly pans through the Kubrickian aisles of a pharmacy proudly displaying rows and rows of Xanax; happens upon director Brett Ratner changing clothes in the back seat of his car, assisted by his butler, never removing the cell phone from his ear. All the while, the paparazzi flash, the white teeth gleam, the cleavage bursts and the Oscar's red carpet unfurls to meet its all too human gods.

Morris, who is a longtime member of London's White Cube gallery — a cutting-edge boite which also represent the likes of the Chapman Brothers, Damien Hirst, Brian Eno and Sam Taylor-Wood — was born in England 37 years ago to an English father and an American mother. Raised in America for the most part, she studied semiotics at Brown University before entering into an artists program hosted by the Whitney Museum in 1989 (working the same year as an assistant to multimedia artist provocateur Jeff Koons). Mesmerized by the inherent power of cities, of the signs and structures of the media, advertising and indigenous architecture,

Morris began developing large-scale abstract paintings; Mondrian-tweaked, eye-warping graphic configurations that drew on iconic buildings (e.g. the Pentagon in Washington, the Revlon building in Manhattan, the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas) to catapult what would be normally be considered the random and everyday into sophisticated, individualized epiphanies.

Morris's previous self-produced films — set respectively in New York, Las Vegas, Washington and Miami — have all been interdisciplinary constructs incorporating photographs, painting and film. With *Los Angeles* she decided to extend the "exhibition" beyond the gallery by submitting the film into the Short Documentary category for Oscar consideration. The film has already screened theatrically in New York for a week, as per Academy doctrine, and will also play in Los Angeles this fall.

In pursuing this newest venue for *Los Angeles* — which defiantly intermingles art and narrative — Morris, much like many modern documentarians, once again brings to the light larger questions as to objective accountability of the "subjective" filmmaker. That being said, when entertainment is wielded to lead an account, especially when the subject is entertainment, this may be just the time to sit back and enjoy the show. — Shari Roman