

### Sarah Morris at Friedrich Petzel

With a high level of access made possible by her success in the worlds of art and film, video artist and painter Sarah Morris takes a CinemaScope 35mm camera to Hollywood for her fifth film, a 26-minute montage titled *Los Angeles*. Projected from a DVD in a theatrically darkened gallery, the film offers close-up glimpses of the well-known and the never-will-be in the frantic hours that culminated in Oscars night 2004. Here are the familiar staples of the L.A. movie: the silos of the Bonaventure Hotel, the glazed tile of a pass through the Second Street Tunnel. Before this backdrop are the stars, their minds and grooms, and agents of the media they serve.

Morris's narrative lies in her sequencing of a progression of brief narcissistic scenes heralded by a lensworthy close-up of China-red lips that establishes her subject as the vanity of glamour. It is followed by the film's self-referential shot, a telecine machine as it transfers film to video. Morris moves through the collectible architecture of a John Lautner house and offers a Gursky moment with a shot that

tracks evenly along minimalistic shelves of designer sunglasses. Next, the viewer is seduced by a profile shot of Dennis Hopper in sunglasses, baseball cap, goatee and cigar, behind the wheel of a car—his choice of set and activity for Morris's filming, according to gallery information. A pharmacist fills bottles with Xanax, a sign of industrywide angst. Diamonds labeled Harry Winston are there for the lending. A perfect creature relaxes into a space-age tanning cocoon, another into a Botox injection, a third into the bleaching of expensive teeth. A bare-breasted companion du jour shaves the famous face of Robert Evans—whom Morris also allowed to select his own scene.

From an eye pulled open wide for corrective surgery (a nod to *Un Chien Andalou*, perhaps), Morris cuts to ornate iron gates as they swing closed on the property of Dino De Laurentiis, who is seen dressed in sweats and seated like the Godfather in the baroque solitude of his mansion. In this orchestrated barrage of images, the players glance around, handlers nearby and at attention. One blonde greets another, eyes and mouths widen and wrinkles fan out as they air kiss. Away from it all, seated on the edge of a basketball court, Jack Nicholson watches some other action entirely, licking his lips like a reptile.

The film redefines the documentary as all image and quick cut, propelled by a driving track of techno, trance and ambient music by the multitasking artist Liam Gillick. Morris puts what she's after on display, in a psychological space that is a portrait of one slice of the city and, in its formalistic brio, an extension of her abstract, architectonic paintings.

—Edward Leffingwell

Sarah Morris: *Los Angeles*, 2004, DVD, approx. 26 minutes; at Friedrich Petzel

