

BEING IN PICTURES

ART

Dorit
Cypis'
film threat

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Maybe it's no secret that Dorit Cypis wants to be a filmmaker. Except for popcorn, her latest work, *Framing Memories I Never Had*, has almost everything associated with the movies: the darkened room, large projected images and a musical soundtrack. But standard cinema tends to produce an audience of voyeurs, and this work never let's that happen. While the installation is deceptively simple, the intricately choreographed program of slide-dissolves weaves an engrossing narrative space of memory, history, embodiment and identity.

Cypis' last Montreal show at the Musée d'art contemporain, *Le Corps vacant* (1991), employed a dazzling ensemble of technical gadgetry to produce a dream environment for a meditation on the body. Like the present show, a darkened room was the site (or sign) for a journey into psychic space. Photographs, mirrors, architectural fragments and body casts became the screens for spinning slide projectors programmed with digital dissolve units. While the moving spectral images tapped into various levels of unconscious material, it was the objects themselves that insisted on returning the focus back to the viewer – back to a visceral, fleshly experience. Still, it was difficult not to be swept up, speechless and wide-eyed, with the spectacle of it all – especially the wizardry of the projection stations in the middle of the room.

In fact, dark rooms with dazzling (but supposedly "invisible") projection gizmos have become something



Eyes on you

of a formula for 90s installations (consider Bill Viola or Gary Hill). It is worth considering this phenomenon from a critical point of view. Suffice to say here, these "black cubes" do nothing to address the pretense of neutrality associated with standard exhibition spaces: "white cubes." But not only does the "black cube" (like its polar opposite) claim neutrality (from history, from location), it also purports to stand in for the unconscious as an entity separate from politics, and separate from the concrete institutional space of the gallery itself.

Rather than a slick, exposed projection mechanism in the middle of the room, Cypis' black cube has a human-sized tower draped in brown fabric with three rectangular eye-holes: one for each projector. The whole affair is lit with two dim spotlights, and looks like a woman wearing a chador.

After the half-hour program of slide-dissolves had ended, I stood outside the room with a friend, and we shared preliminary reactions.

"The projection tower was in the way... it's right where I wanted to stand," she remarked with annoyance. I laughed and followed up sympathetically by declaring my problem with brown, and how improvised it all looked. I couldn't stop thinking about how "klunky" and "un-high tech" it seemed. Later, I told the artist about our aggravations and she agreed that it was "mundane." But she went on to say that it was intentionally disrupting and "anthropomorphic."

Of course, I guess I knew that. Nevertheless, I still felt a lingering sense of frustration. The desire to lose myself, (lose my body) and enter completely into the beautifully interwoven images and sounds was thwarted by this awkward thing in the centre. The virtuality of the slick slide-dissolve program required a machine to project it and, more important, a body to experience it. ■

Dorit Cypis, *Framing Memories I Never Had*, Galerie de l'UQAM, 1400 Berri #J-R120, Oct 16–Nov 28