

Catherine Sullivan

(Los Angeles, 1968)

Catherine Sullivan's art, which on a formal level is expressed through live performances, video and multichannel installations, is strongly linked to her early experiences as an actress. Her works are masterful stagings which hybridise the borders between the disciplines, drawing on a variety of sources which include art history, theatre, cinema and literature. Involving a wide range of professional figures, including actors and dancers, choreographers and composers, Sullivan explores and tears apart the convention lying at the basis of theatrical representation. Citation, re-enactment and the remixing of elements which in traditional recital occupy a specific place are the tools she uses to lead spectators far away from the narrative customs of theatre and cinema, in order to place their attention on the performance itself. What she is most interested in are the scenes with a high interpretative potential, thanks to which she expresses all the transformational skill of the actor in shifting from one role to another. In the video in the collection, *Little Hunt* (2002, which along with its contrasting element, *Big Hunt*, makes up the ambitious project *Five Economies*) we see a man and a woman on the two sides of a tennis court as they both dance, each following their own style, without interacting with one another if not through a number of scene objects, including a gun, a desk and a coffin.

The second work in the collection is the five-channel installation *The Chittendens* (2005), the result of a long collaboration with the musical composer Sean Griffin. Also without a real plot, the work develops from the reflections on the 'Theory of the Leisure Class' by the economist Thorstein Veblen, who at the end of the nineteenth century saw in the notion of private property the desire for the emulation of the wealth of others. Shot between a disused office in Chicago and a place on Lake Michigan ironically called Poverty Island, the video owes its name to an insurance agency that Sullivan came across by chance, and the outline of a lighthouse on its logo, the nautical emblem of safety and stability which the artist associates with the foundations of American economic culture. The peculiarity of the work does not however lie so much in this field of reflections as much as in the formal choices made by the artist. Sullivan distributed among sixteen actors fourteen parts or 'behaviours', each of which was interpreted according to a scheme that allows for a variation in its dramatic intensity, the gestural aspect and rhythm. The camera passes without a precise order from one environment to another, the actors recite in an isolated fashion, without establishing an empathetic relationship with one another, and the stereotypical costumes they wear have almost no link with the character on the scene. Lastly, a number of sequences were shot twice, first in black and white and then in colour but with different clothes, and so mounted with a fading effect which highlights the incongruences in the performances between the two.

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