

TBA Review: Brody Condon at The Works and the Cooley Gallery

Posted by [drow](#) September 10, 2009 14:59PM



A video still from Brody

Condon's "Without Sun."

The word "sublime" ranks among the most over- and misused terms in the contemporary art world, whipped out anytime the descriptors "cool," "big" or "wicked" feel inadequately lowbrow.

A gawky young man sports a t-shirt for the cheesy ska-punk band Sublime while yammering into a video camera in [Brody Condon's "Without Sun,"](#) currently on view at Washington High School as part of the [Time-Based Art Festival](#). The boy is tripping on LSD, as are all the featured players in ["Without Sun,"](#) a montage of YouTube home videos of people on acid.

Philosophers such as Kant, Schopenhauer and Hegel all fail to mention Hot Topic t-shirts and handycams in their treatises on the sublime, yet the metaphysical condition is in full play for the daytrippers in "Without Sun," who grapple with the invisible co-existence of overwhelming beauty and bewildering horror.

"I closed my eyes and there was, like, a big... design," the skinny adolescent says, holding his head in his hands as if to keep it from exploding. "Okayokayokayokayokayokay."

While neither condemning nor glorifying drug use, "Without Sun" would make any sane person steer clear of blotter acid for the rest of their lives. Condon presents us with grown men and women rolling mutely on their carpeted floors, drooling long ropes of saliva from their gaping mouths, and jerking their heads spastically in efforts to pinpoint their visual and aural hallucinations. These disturbing scenes pale in comparison to the psychological glimpses "Without Sun" affords us.

One young woman, whispering alone into a camera, struggles to verbalize her uncontrollable

thoughts. "She's in the back molass-," she begins, catching herself. "Not 'molasses.' She's in the back door," the woman confides, shortly before breaking down in tearful, abject terror. In another clip, a brunette teen flatly declares, "my body is starting to go," as her jaw drops heavily into her waiting hand. Elsewhere, a man sitting motionlessly on a couch makes the hushed announcement: "I realize this is not right."

Of course, the acid-eaters' fears, utterances and awkward movements appear ludicrous in the gallery setting, although their psychological and emotional experiences are clearly authentic. One of the inherent paradoxes of LSD use is that, while it generates previously unimaginable mental experiences, it cripples the user's ability to apply language to their thoughts -- hence the woman mistakenly calling the "back door" the "back molasses." If art, like language (and video technology), seeks to give form - whether in nouns, cave paintings or symphonies -- to formless, invisible impulses, "Without Sun" demonstrates how far short of the mark they often fall.

Last Sunday evening, Condon reframed his video piece as "Without Sun Modification," a live performance at [Reed College's Cooley Gallery](#). Portland choreographer Linda Austin and actor Russell Edge channeled Condon's video montage into a disquieting assemblage reenactment. Running through the entire transcript of "Without Sun" as if it were the thoughts and actions of a single person, Edge compressed the hallucinogenic ramblings of more than a dozen drug users into a manic and emphatic distress call. Austin, representing the physical body long detached from the mind's reality, wove the movements of the video trippers into a fitful series of erratic action. Tugging on her bottom lip, pawing tentatively at the air and tumbling forcefully to the ground, Austin's body appeared to yank and twist itself at the bidding of an absurd and malevolent inner force.

In the video version of "Without Sun" at Washington High, the unknowable distances of time and space buffer audiences from the psycho-mystical action onscreen. Our engagement with the drugged subjects is mercifully curtailed by the flat, pixelized form they assume in the darkened classroom. At the Cooley Gallery performances, where the scenario is redrawn and the human interaction is almost entirely unmediated, we lose the authenticity offered in the video. No form of communication, Condon seems to be saying, is equipped to convey the sublime complexities of our harrowing and mind-blowing private realities. Okayokayokayokay....

Brody Condon, "Without Sun," The Works @ Washington High School. Sept 4-13, daily noon-6:30 pm; Sept 17-Oct 18, Thurs-Fri noon-6:30 pm, Sat-Sun noon-4 pm. Free

And: Brody Condon, "Without Sun Modification," Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, 3203 SE Woodstock, Sun Sept 6, 6:30 pm, Free

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Comments

sourced says...

Great article. TBA and Portland artists certainly can't complain that they are lacking in appreciative and informed audiences.

Posted on 09/10/09 at 10:23PM

sethnehil says...

Actually, these folks are on the drug salvia divinorum, which produces a short but extremely intense disembodiment and confusion (or so I've heard).

Posted on 09/13/09 at 3:09PM

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