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Between Ideas of Hope

Stan Denniston elapses over a whole new horizon in show

By Janet Bellotto

It is very rare these days to walk into a gallery or exhibition space where a video projection is running and get sucked right in. However, if you happened to step through the doors of the Olga Korper gallery, Stan Denniston's from as far away as hope is no less than gripping. Aside, a gorgeous image of a newly paved highway hangs to the right of the installation. Take a peak in the back room and hope, 2003 C print, the image of a town highway sign "HOPE", is overwhelming.

from as far away is a 8x10.5 foot dual projection installed on two walls opposite each other. The five minute loop is a drive down a highway, particularly Hwy 278 in Nevada, with a clear vanishing point. The roadside is typical of the arid desert, the sky is a pale cerulean blue and mountains caress the road at the horizon. At one particular angle, one may feel caught up in the movement on the road. Otherwise the viewpoint seems stagnant, changing very slowly, possibly questioning if it does at all. As everyday life becomes increasingly more fast and furious, the possibility of ever getting to the mountains, or to pass through them is futile. The road ahead is never ending, and the horizon the car - although there are no visual signs - escapes from barely disappears.

It has been a couple of years that Denniston has been in full swing of realizing this idea. However it was a particular conversation that the artist had reminiscing about the Michelangelo Antonioni film The Passenger that started the journey, a brilliant film about frustrations and malaise of modern society.

Toronto artist Stan Denniston has been creating various fictions through his photographic works, which at times includes text in some format formulating the narrative links. There is always a road trip involved, and somehow he has managed to weave together his favourite past time with his career.

When looking at Denniston's various series the actual road, which can surely be noted in the Reminder series, slowly disappeared and filled the frame with

particular roadside objects or viewpoints, like the Civil Defence sirens in Stills. Denniston's focal point now opens to the moving image that seems quite still, until you turn around. While watching this video projection, focusing on some wooden post on the side of the road or a bush, and then turning to the back screen, the image passes in sync.

A dialogue begins between a man and woman that just drags one in deeper to the vanishing point and convincingly draws in the viewer to follow along. It is particularly here in this short script, cribbed from the Antonioni film, where references to making and the ficto-narrative are made. The female asks the male to turn around, and as the viewer follows this action the second projection begins. More than some of Denniston's previous works, the video becomes instantly interactive, and possibly a cinematic questioning. Female asks male what he sees, "A little boy and an old woman. They were arguing about which way to go." This comment was flung out from thin air, but potent if associating the references to life and death. However, the character then describes that he sees "Oh, a man in the shade, working at a typewriter." Beyond the script gender roles being reversed, the work builds further on illusion.

A truck goes by, and the notion to time passing is introduced, as the gaze tends to follow the motion through. This is the installation.

The pinnacle point of this piece is how time stands still and how it slowly creeps into the unnoticeably dismal space that surrounds this journey. It borders on alienation, and the zeitgeist that has sifted through after a year of war. The vague narrative and border of emptiness crafted into this work, especially for the film connoisseur, brings in Antonioni's own cinematic questions: "Whose point of view are we observing?", "What does it mean to have the camera and the action function as separate entities?" But ultimately, we can ask "Is freedom, and possibly hope, nothing more than an illusion?"

The video installation is impeccably crafted from title, image, mechanics and sound. The image of a bright sunny day, open sky, makes the frame that much more empty and isolated. Stan Denniston's installation evokes at all levels and has reinstated the notion of something not to be missed. from as far away as hope is stark, with a small beam of hope that time - whatever that may entail - can start all over again.

from as far away as hope runs until March 31 at olga korper gallery, 17 Morrow

Avenue. Visit www.olgakorpergallery.com.

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