

ACCOMPANYING TALKS & FILMS

DARA BIRNBAUM IN CONVERSATION

THUR 8 DEC, 5.30–6.30PM, FREE

Dara Birnbaum discusses her exhibition within the context of her wider practice with Stuart Comer, Curator of Film at Tate Modern.

DARA BIRNBAUM FILM SCREENING

WED 11 JAN, 7PM, £5/£3 CONC

Surveying her analysis of television through the 1980s, this selection presents some of Birnbaum's most well-known works. Editing and manipulating images from popular TV programmes, integrating special effects, text and music, Birnbaum constructed a distinctive video language which has influenced several generations of artists.

The programme includes:

Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman, 1978-79, 5'50"

Kiss the Girls: Make Them Cry, 1979, 6'50"

Pop-Pop Video:

General Hospital/Olympic Women Speed Skating, 1980, 6'

Kojak/Wang, 1980, 3'

Remy/Grand Central: Trains and Boats and Planes, 1980, 4'

Fire! Hendrix, 1982, 3'13"

Damnation of Faust Trilogy:

Evocation, 1983, 10'02"

Will-o'-the-Wisp, 1985, 5'46"

Charming Landscape, 1987, 6'30"

FILM SCREENING: EARLY VIDEO IN THE US

WED 25 JAN, 7PM, £5/£3 CONC

This screening focuses on early works by video artists who began to experiment with video as an art form in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These artists made performative films and TV intervention pieces which introduced a critique of television as a powerful new medium.

DARA BIRNBAUM

SOUTH LONDON GALLERY

EXHIBITION GUIDE

9 DEC 2011 – 12 FEB 2012

SLG

South London Gallery 65 Peckham Road, London SE5 8UH
020 7703 6120 mail@southlondongallery.org www.southlondongallery.org

The South London Gallery receives core funding from Arts Council England and Southwark Council and ongoing support from Helen Thorpe and Outset Contemporary Art Fund.

American artist Dara Birnbaum was one of the first to subvert

the language of television and is internationally recognised

for her pioneering video works made over the past three and

a half decades. For her South London Gallery exhibition she

presents the UK premiere of her recent work, *Arabesque*,

2011, a multi-channel video installation which reflects the

legacy of two piano compositions; one composed by Robert

Schumann for his wife Clara, the other composed by Clara

Schumann for her husband Robert. Spanning the SLG's

main exhibition space and first floor galleries, the show also

includes the seminal work, *Attack Piece*, 1975, Birnbaum's

first surviving installation, and a series of her single channel

works from the 1970s. A survey of Birnbaum's analysis

of television through the 1980s, including *Technology/*

Transformation: Wonder Woman, 1978-79, will also be

presented as a one-off screening on 11 January 2012.

Birnbaum's *Arabesque*, 2011, surveys and re-presents

multiple perspectives on Robert Schumann's *Arabesque Opus*

18, 1839, through a multi-screen video installation occupying

the SLG's main exhibition space. Still footage from the 1947

film *Song of Love*, a melodrama featuring *Arabesque*, is set

against Birnbaum's edit of a broad selection of performances

of the piece taken from YouTube clips and excerpts from Clara

Schumann's diary. In Birnbaum's words, "the more it becomes

is exposed to the *Arabesque* masterwork, the more it becomes

neutralized by the diverse range of musicians attempting to

reach for it".

In the course of her research Birnbaum became increasingly

interested in the relationship between Robert Schumann and

his wife Clara, an accomplished pianist and composer who

as well as for their eight children, supporting them through

her playing. For Birnbaum, the relatively obscure composition

by Clara Schumann entitled *Romanze I, Opus 11*, might be

argued to be of similar virtuosity to Robert Schumann's widely

acclaimed masterpiece. On YouTube, however, she could find

only one person playing Clara's composition, but more than

a hundred playing *Arabesque*, a fact that becomes symbolic

in her installation of the power struggle between men and

women, a prime concern which has informed her practice

for more than thirty years. On one screen the lone clip of a

woman playing Clara's composition alternates with subtitled

stills of Katharine Hepburn, widely regarded for having been

a particularly strong woman, playing Clara in *Song of Love*. On

the neighbouring three screens, in one instance interspersed

with extracts from Clara's diaries, YouTube clips of women

and girls are shown in a variety of contexts, shot from a

host of angles in varying quality of video, playing Robert's

composition with differing degrees of accomplishment.

Birnbaum's exploration of the relationship between the

camera, performer and viewer, as well as her questioning of

gender stereotypes and the exploitation of women's roles in

the media, is rooted in much earlier works, examples of which

are shown in the first floor galleries. In *Attack Piece* Birnbaum

is shown 'armed' with a still camera while

she is filmed by her mostly male collaborators (including

David Askevoid, Dan Graham and Ian Murray), who attempt to

invade her territory. By foregrounding the role of the camera

in this piece, Birnbaum heightens viewers' awareness of its

significance and impact, an approach explored in different

ways in the group of six video works, also from the mid-'70s,

shown in the adjacent gallery. Each one of these pieces

presents a different type of psychological self-portrait,

playing on the tension between the performative and the

psychological to powerful and at times disturbing effect.

Two videos from 1976, *Everything's Gonna Be Alright*

and *Liberty: A Dozen or So Views* continue Birnbaum's

experimentation with the formal structure between camera,

subject and viewer, but have a more overtly political emphasis

than the earlier works. In *Liberty: A Dozen or So Views*,

shots of passengers on the Staten Island Ferry answering

questions about their weight, height, eye colour and race

are meshed with footage of the Statue of Liberty filmed by

each interviewee from their own particular perspective.

Handing the camera over to the interviewees was perhaps

indicative of the direction Birnbaum went on to take in her

later appropriation of visual material from mass media

sources, *Everything's Gonna Be Alright* being the earliest

example of this. It paved the way for the direction of her

practice in subsequent years, being towards her pioneering

investigation into the cultural significance of pop culture and

mass media imagery.

With thanks to Marian Goodman Gallery, New York - Paris, and

Wilkinson Gallery.

LIST OF WORKS

MAIN GALLERY	
1. <i>Arabesque</i> , 2011	Four channel video installation, colour
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	Works from 1975
4. <i>Chaired Anxieties:</i>	Four channels of stereo
13' 6"	Sound
2. <i>Attack Piece</i> , 1975	Two channel video
Single channel video	installation, black & white
Works from 1975	7' 20"
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	Black & white, mono
5. <i>Addendum: Autism</i> , 1975	Single channel video
Works from 1975	Black & white, mono
8. <i>Bar (red)</i> , 1975	Single channel video
Works from 1975	Black & white, mono
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	Black & white, mono
9. <i>Everything's Gonna Be</i>	Single channel video
<i>Alright</i> , 1976	Black & white, mono
Works from 1976	10' 57"
10. <i>Liberty: A Dozen or So</i>	Single channel video
<i>Views</i> , 1976,	Black & white, mono
Black & white, mono	11' 30"
Works from 1975	Black & white
5' 15"	Single channel video
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	Works from 1975
3. <i>Chaired Anxieties:</i>	Two channels of stereo
6' 1"	slides mastered on Beta-SP
Single channel video	(Super 8 film and 35mm
Black & white	installation, black & white
Works from 1975	7' 40"
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	Sound
6. <i>Mirroring</i> , 1975	Two channels of stereo
Works from 1975	Black & white
10. <i>Liberty: A Dozen or So</i>	Single channel video
<i>Views</i> , 1976,	Black & white
Black & white, mono	6' 15"
Works from 1975	Single channel video
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	Works from 1975
7. <i>Control Piece</i> , 1975	Single channel video
Works from 1975	Black & white
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	5' 55"
Works from 1975	Single channel video
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	Black & white
Works from 1975	5' 55"
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	Black & white, mono
Works from 1975	13' 6"
From <i>Six Movements: Video</i>	Sound
Works from 1975	6' 30"

All works courtesy the artist and
 Marian Goodman Gallery,
 New York - Paris

