

Natacha Nisic : The Time of Movement

Natacha Nisic is a methodical artist. She likes catalogues and classifications. She likes putting gestures into boxes — provided, that is, one considers a video projector as a magical box from which motifs taken from day-to-day reality issue forth: gestures, plants, outlines, windows. Natacha Nisic's method of classification is not applied to a subject, theme or narrative. The artist does not tell stories; she makes inventories. Strangely, what she enumerates is an abstract, non-palpable matter. It is time. She shows the passage of time, the temporal void between two extremely simple gestures: a hand being rubbed against a window or over one's belly (flesh or object, always something opaque). She records such humdrum hand-movements, minimal gestures which we undertake without even thinking about what we are doing: scratching oneself, rubbing one's hands, throwing a ball. Things that escape our attention are thus arrested, captured, slowed down. Natacha Nisic's work as a video artist involves a highly controlled desire to suspend the worrisome flow of time, its obsessive repetitiveness. Starting from aimless gestures, she invents movements endowed with a mechanical rhythm, as repetitive as the chorus of the nursery rhymes we remember from childhood. Juggling, inscribing a mark in the sand with a stick — such movements are captured in their playful circularity. Natacha Nisic thus offers us an optical experience which is on the brink of slipping over into dizziness, so that the retinal exercise she imposes on us demands our closest attention.

In Natacha Nisic's recent works (exhibited at the Centre d'art at Auvers-sur-Oise in November 1996), the catalogue of gestures gives way to a series on plants and bodies in motion. The vegetable element, a pretext for a representation of nature, here becomes a minimal motif which is amplified, enlarged against a neutral background. The plant involved is always a meagre, little-loved one — like a thistle or a dandelion — which undergoes a process of disintegration in slow motion. One is thus con-

fronted by an experience of duration which one experiences live: slowly, the petals become detached and the flower loses its original consistency. The flow of time is circumscribed within a shaky, sober image. It is transformed into pure vibration and reminds us for a second of the contemplative attitude we may feel in front of a landscape.

But in this particular instance the field is only the field of vision, the experience of an object which the artist takes apart and decomposes with minute care. Like a scientist, Natacha Nisic explores and questions dissolution, the extreme fragility of things, the movement in which they are inescapably caught up. As the philosopher Gilles Deleuze points out, "In becoming, there is no past nor future, nor even a present. There is no history. What counts is the middle... [One must] proceed in a way which is more and more simple, more and more economical and sober".

Natacha Nisic goes straight to the point. The only projection which concerns her is the purely mechanical projection of the instruments which she uses to record, first on super-8mm. film, then on video, the twice filtered image of a movement, a loss. The rolling bodies which she has recently filmed are bound up with the same chance rhythms. They espouse the obsessive cylindrical movement of tubular structures (column, ball) and look as if they are being allowed to drop forever, as if they were in the process of unrolling an invisible carpet of infinite length.

In general, Natacha Nisic's installations are exhibited in places that have been deliberately chosen (a cellar, tent or corridor, an industrial or exhibition space). More often than not, she avoids the aseptic white walls of galleries. Natacha Nisic prepares the space and sets up her equipment; she makes a silent half-light visible. Is this to say that what contemporary video art transmits to us is a new form of meditation? Maybe so. People will make what they can of it. Natacha Nisic is a young artist, who is not yet thirty. She invents profane sanctuaries which reconcile us to what Mondrian or Kandinsky described as the spiritual dimension of art. There is one specific difference, however. Thanks to technology, she can both add a temporal dimension and recover figures — isolate them (as forms or motifs) in their ever so touching fragility.



Natacha Nisic
Catalogue of Gestures, 1996
Installation views