

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

Los Angeles Times

THEY'RE JUST TRYING TO PASS THE TIME

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"Marking Time," an elegantly cohesive exhibition of film and video at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, is aptly titled: Each of its 12 works approaches the issue of time as if with a pair of calipers, measuring out a particular stretch and exploring the intervening experience of duration. They're spare, concentrated works that speak to the essence of their media and leave a sharper sense of each passing moment.

The exhibition is a model of curatorial economy. It was organized by Glenn R. Phillips, a curator and research associate at the Getty Research Institute, to coincide with the institute's 2004--05 scholar year theme of "Duration." The show spans several countries and more than four decades without feeling fragmentary or overdrawn, thanks to a tight conceptual focus and disciplined selection of works.

These works are evenly divided between the 1970s (or 1980 in one case) and the last decade, though no explicit comparison is made and any conclusions are left to the viewer. Wall texts are similarly restrained.

In an understated feat of installation, all but one of the works appear in the same large room, and they come off the better for it, as it sets them in conversation with one another and allows the viewer to float freely among them.

The 1970s work, made in the first flush of video's popularity as a medium, is generally the strongest, characterized by a stimulating combination of conceptual clarity and visual potency. Particularly striking is Vito Acconci's 1971 "Watch": a black-and-white Super-8 film transferred to video in which we see a close-up shot of the artist's face watching the slow revolutions of a second hand on an off-screen clock.

Gordon Matta-Clark's 1973 "Clockshower," another film transferred to video, takes a more humorous approach to the same object, portraying the artist brushing his teeth and showering while clinging to the face of a clock tower in Manhattan.

Joan Jonas' mesmerizing "Organic Honey's Vertical Roll" lends a metronomic rhythm to the exhibition, presenting black-and-white video footage of a costumed female body as filmed on a television screen, fragmented by a continuous vertical roll and accompanied by a loud clanging noise every time the roll hits the bottom of the screen.

Allan Kaprow's "Then" and Terry Fox's "Children's Tapes," both from 1974, are slow and deliberate though playful works documenting miniature "happenings": an ice cube melting between a man's teeth, a candle dripping wax, water pouring into a bowl.

The most rigorous and haunting of the early works is Tehching Hsieh's "One Year Performance 1980--1981 (Time Piece)," in which the artist punched a standardized timecard in his studio once an hour, 24 hours a day for a year, documenting each occasion on a single frame of film, which he then strung together to form an eerie six-minute loop.

The recent works, though true to the theme of the show, are less consistent in quality. Several -- Jennifer Nelson's "Car Sunrise/Car Sunset," Burt Barr's "Slo-Mo," and Kimsooja's "A Laundry

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Woman -- Yamuna River, India" -- are essentially watered down versions of '70s-era concepts: spare and dry but simpler than the earlier works and lacking potency.

Lia Chaia's "Desenho-Corpo," in which the artist scribbles on her bare flesh continuously until the pen runs out of ink 51 minutes later, and Erwin Wurm's "One Minute Sculptures," an interactive installation that encourages the viewer to assume a variety of absurd positions (which the artist hilariously demonstrates on a video monitor), both stem from the '70s tradition as well but stand capably on their own.

The one truly contemporary-feeling work is also the show's most powerful: **Brock Enright's** "Coming of Age," a two-channel piece in which manipulated footage of the artist as a child, aping for the camera, plays on one monitor, while a close-up shot of the artist's adult face, gazing into the camera while clearly masturbating, plays on the other, directly facing. The former is violently frenetic, infused with an alternately humorous and unnerving pre-adolescent machismo, while the latter is thoughtful, melancholy, nostalgic. The loop between them speaks volumes.

Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 6522 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 957-1777, through May 8. Closed Monday and Tuesday.

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