

Interview about *Purse*,
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REEL NY season four

WNET STATION

Home : *Purse* : LISS PLATT AND KELLY DOLAK



Liss Platt's videos, films, photographs, and installations have been exhibited in the United States, Canada, and Europe, from the Whitney Museum in New York and the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival to the British Film Institute in London. She curates film and video programs and is involved in writing and editing for media publications, most recently *MAGNETIC MEDIA PRESERVATION SOURCE BOOK*, which she co-edited. She is an assistant professor of film/video at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University.

Kelly Dolak is a film/video artist whose work has been shown at the Toronto Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and at various screenings in New York City. She recently received her Master's of Fine Arts in film/video from Mason Gross School of the Arts.

Questionnaires were sent to each artist participating in REEL NEW YORK -- Season Four. Below are the artists' written responses.

Liss Platt and Kelly Dolak

Purse

What inspired you to make this piece?

We (Kelly and Liss) were sitting in the audience at a Visiting Artist presentation at Rutgers University (where Kelly was a grad student, and Liss is a faculty member), and one of the presenters (a woman) started asking if anyone had seen her purse. We looked at each other, both contemplating the lost purse, and quickly began talking about our relationship (or lack thereof) to purses. Within moments we had the beginnings of the piece.

Tell us a little about the process involved in making this work.

As a collaborative process, we just started bouncing ideas off each other, in terms of how we should interact with the purses and how the piece could move from a general feeling of the purses being foreign to us to a more intense experience, where the purses are actually threatening to us. We originally conceived of the piece as only the studio footage -- where we actually interact with the purses. This studio material already contained references to the films of Bunuel (specifically the striped purse that appears around our necks -- it comes straight out of *UN CHIEN ANDALOU*), but when we started working with this footage, we realized the piece needed more elements to make its point, and we could take the references much further. That's when we decided to shoot black and white film footage, and to make references to popular horror films, as well as extend the Bunuel references. We also knew we wanted a layered soundtrack, since the piece is, in effect, "silent." So once the piece was roughly cut, we brought in a sound designer (Mary Feaster) to create the soundtrack and original music. Working with Mary was very organic -- she would experiment and bring us music and sounds, and we would discuss what to try next. She made all the sound effects herself, and created all the "voices" for the purses, which we began to refer to as "pursonalities."



From PURSE.



From PURSE.

Do you have any interesting and/or amusing behind-the-scenes stories about the making of this particular work?

As for behind-the-scene stories, while there certainly were some disasters, we'd prefer to reminisce on a lighter note. We used the studio at Rutgers for the shoot, and so we poured hundreds of pounds of crushed stones onto the floor to create our "set." Summer school was in session, and since we shot over a couple of days, we left the stones and lighting in place. We came in a second day to find a bunch of introductory video students wearing wigs and doing a studio shoot -- with our rocks and lighting. We hadn't realized we'd created such a versatile set!

Is there a relationship between your work as a video/filmmaker and life in the New York metropolitan area?

Liss: For me, being in the New York metropolitan area has everything to do with my ability, in concrete terms, to be a film- and videomaker. It really is the independent media community, and the extraordinary peers I have within that community, that have enabled me to continue to make work. I came to New York much more of a photographer, but I wasn't interested (or up for) the gallery scene, and the independent media community offered an alternative -- a network of nonprofits and individuals committed to making work and getting shown. Sure there are film/video communities in other cities, but in New York there is a proliferation of communities and a flurry of activity you can't get anywhere else.

How has the burgeoning independent movement affected your life and work as a video/filmmaker?

Liss: "Independent movement" is a hard concept, for me, to wrap my brain around. I don't consider myself in the same "movement" as folks who get shown at Sundance or "independent filmmakers" who make feature films. There's lots of ways to be independent, and lots of different ways to find audiences, so I am never sure what "movement" people are talking about. There are still a limited number of venues for those of us who make single-channel experimental short works. These pieces are more difficult to package: they don't conform to the usual form or time-frame of TV, would not "make it" in a movie theater, and are not recognizable as "art works" like video installation because they require a different set of viewing conventions. This is one of the main reasons why REEL NEW YORK is so important -- it exposes the television public to works they would otherwise not be able to see, and supports the range of voices found within the vast "independent movement."