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# Martin Murphy

## *Modern Trance*

*November 19, 2011 – January 28, 2012*

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The following conversation is between Brooklyn based multi-media artist Martin Murphy and artist and independent curator Carlos Rigau. In it they discuss Murphy's video and sculptural work for *Modern Trance*, his second solo show at Dorsch Gallery, opening in November 2011.

**CR: Your recent work seems to have found an intersection between early structuralist videos and contemporary cinema.**

MM: Movies have always influenced my work, and I'm now getting more interested in chance and performance. I've been introducing physical interventions within the frame, and creating shots that depict evolving experiments. I'm both observing and altering as things happen in the videos. For me, it's a way of putting my hand back in the work and trying to create sites for physical response.

**I feel this strategy tinkers with the two approaches and comes up with some kind of new form.**

**Could you elaborate a little bit about that?** I think this combination has reintroduced narrative in a strange way. Right now I'm not working with actors, and I'm shooting lots of static shots that don't involve scripted stories. I'm shifting into appropriating footage and trying to find moments within media - from commercials, movies, or the Internet, just looking for content that triggers the right responses for the works. I'm trying to boil the footage down into aesthetic elements that excite, and then I'm inserting them back into filmed situations. It's a new process for me. My previous work experimented heavily with con-

structed narratives, and I'm now trying to turn narrative into a physical form - it can then be played with like any other material. I'm constantly discovering something new with this process, and it's completely changed my relationship to storytelling.

**When I first saw LA dreamer I noticed some of our friends didn't know how to get their heads around it. It's confusing as a traditional artwork, but it felt like the advertisements displayed before a film in a movie theater. It's delivered in a cinematic style like you're supposed to get your popcorn and drink and get ready for something.**

The content for that piece uses scenes from blockbusters, tv commercials, Internet videos, and it mixes these all together into an overwhelming flow of signifiers. I think this is why it promotes that response, it has a similar excitement you would find in big budget commercials, but it's also sort of an inversion of commercial branding. There's a predominant logo with the Diet Coke bottle, and it almost acts like a beacon until the stream of popular media completely engulfs it. I think it's what Coke would want. But this is a good example of the new series, and I think it's strange to some because it behaves unexpectedly. It smells like a movie, but it acts like a video experi-

ment, or some kind of filmed chemical reaction. It's like using popular media to investigate the process of its own attraction. I also think the structural setups put the new work in a different place; they're projected on freestanding screens, which establish spatial relationships between the videos and sculptures, and together they may read as a sequential statement or timeline. I feel the conditions of display are what make them theatrical, which is something I'm focusing on.

**Can you talk more about that?**

I've always been obsessed anytime a movie breaks the third wall, and it's interesting because it contradicts the strength of cinema. One thing films are great at is suspending reality, and with that you can dive into narrative, emotions, logic, and all the sorts of things the illusion affords, but I still think there's something amazing when this breaks down and you realize the moment you are in. This is something that happens with art all the time, but when you get into mainstream cinema, it's basically off limits.

**Like the time we saw Funny Games in Times Square.** Exactly, we should explain... Seeing a fight break out in a movie theater completely pulls you out of the film. It breaks the spell, and you suddenly realize the room

you're in, the time that's past, and the responses around you...

**All those things came apart in an interesting way in that moment, and the fight happened during the scene where the main character grabs the remote and rewinds the movie itself, another interesting layer. It felt more like an art experience than a cinematic experience.**

It did, and it relates to a similar experience that had a big impact on me. I saw a screening of *The Predator*, and in the middle of the movie they had a projector problem. The film caught on fire and the celluloid melted. It was amazing because it actually happened slowly, I started to see wavy distortions begin at the edges of the frame, and I thought I was hallucinating. The image then began to bubble and the movie melted down the screen. They busted out a fire extinguisher and gave us our money back. It was an amazing thing, and it involved a theatrical moment I see as being inaccessible to filmmakers, but something like this can be your starting point as an artist.

**Have you ever been interested in pursuing film work, and are these reasons why you chose art over film?** For a while I was interested in the possibility of getting into film, but you quickly see the limitations

because of the long-standing conventions. If you step outside these, you might be doing something cool, but you suddenly don't have a venue. As an artist you have venues for this, and more importantly you have the possibility of creating venues. Art was there for me.

**And cinema can still be seen in elements of your work.** The influence of film always comes back. I think growing up in the Midwest I connected to movies at a young age. It was a way to experience different cultures and outlooks, and I felt like it was my window into other worlds. Honestly, it has to do with escapism, which I don't see as a negative thing. Later the interest continued on a different level. I've always been jealous of filmmakers because of their sphere of influence. It's an amazing cultural phenomenon that millions of people can see something creative in such a short amount of time. But I think this is only possible because of the industry's commitment to their venue. I think it's something that really hasn't changed much since the early 20th Century, and I believe the real possibilities are now in the hands of artists. Film has found its way into the art world, and now I think the great challenge is how we can experiment with the tradition in order to create new venues

for the art experience.

**What is your opinion on the future of moving images?**

I think the most interesting possibilities deal with hybrids, similar to the experimentation that happened at the end of the 19th century. They tried so many different things, and I love how it was scientific in a way – no one knew what might work so they looked at viewer feedback and tried different approaches to installation and projection.

**There's the sense of mixing previously established theatrical forms, like plays and operas, along with illusions. Do you think the tradition has now exhausted itself?**

Well, I remember a quote from Louis Lumière (late 19th century) stating that moving images were an invention without a future, but this is obviously far from where we are now. I guess he saw what worked and quickly saw people get tired of it. Film editing then changed the game, and it spilled into everything. Both contemporary art and advertising are exploding because of the technology, and navigating the Internet is becoming more intertwined with moving images too. I think some of the most exciting approaches happening right now are in advertising.

This is something that influences me, seeing what is going on in popular media and translating it into new experiences. I think it has to do with finding the power behind different approaches to installation, and how what you are seeing relates to physical space.

**Like the McDonald's commercials during the NBA finals, the viewer sees a hand touch the screen to flip through the different ads. Later, at the Venice Biennial I saw Thomas Hirshhorn had appropriated this idea in one of his video installations.** It's an interesting approach that brings information back to the body, and plays with the perception of the third wall.

**You are currently working with sculptural ideas, how do you feel this relates to your process?** I think the sculptures relate to all the work I've been recently creating. They play with time in that they appear to be temporally homeless. Maybe something that reads as being preserved from the past or pulled from the future, but now in a permanent state of display. They're also full of indexical signs, which is something I've always been attracted to. A glowing aura, or running liquid stopped in its tracks; It's about depicting states of change, and the paradox of the before and after.

*Still Life (deep freeze)*

Phosphorescent Pigment, Resin,  
UV light  
22" x 16" x 22"

*Forecaster*

Video Projection, Resin,  
Aluminum, Polypropylene  
26" x 19" x 18"

*Water Stone*

Carved Alabaster, Resin,  
Phosphorescent Pigment, UV light  
20" x 14" x 16"

*Horror Painting*

Video Projection, MDF  
56" x 32" x 5"



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*Horror Painting*

Video Projection, MDF

56" x 32" x 5"

Detail appears on cover

*LA Dreamer*

Video Projection, Aluminum, Polypropylene

22" x 40" x 1.5"

Appears full size on reverse

Brochure/poster published in November 2011 to supplement the exhibition "*Modern Trance*" by Martin Murphy, at Dorsch Gallery November 19, 2011-January 28, 2012

Interview by Carlos Rigau and Martin Murphy.

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