

TAKING ART TO

THE VERGE



By Todd D. Smith

Taking art to the Verge

If you have driven past the Plains Art Museum recently, you no doubt have seen a large banner featuring a haunting image of a middle-aged woman staring back at you. The woman who adorns the façade is the subject of the video installation work titled *BuSpar*, part of the exhibition *The Verge: Janet Biggs*. This larger-than-life picture is just the tip of the iceberg of what awaits the visitor inside.

A new exhibition series, *The Verge* features the best and brightest emerging artists from the United States and the world. Over the next two years, the Museum's third floor William and Anna Jane Schlossman Gallery will serve as a laboratory for the work of artists chosen for their promise and talent. As the title implies, these artists are on the verge and the Museum is committed to assisting them with the next step.

Freedom

In this initial exhibition, the work of New York-based Janet Biggs is featured. Biggs' video works deal with the issue of freedom, power and control and the attempts that social institutions make to regulate personal freedoms. In *Glacier Approach* (1997), a long shot of a looming glacier is intermixed with young

female swimmers. The calm and elegance of the water is radically severed by the appearance of these swimmers. Interested in exploring the parameters of adolescent female sexuality, the artist uses the location of the frigid waters of Lapland to suggest the consequences of the momentary glimpse and the attempts to deny its power.

BuSpar (1999) refers to the drug of the same name used to treat anxiety disorder in humans and to tranquilize horses. The work features an arresting image of the artist's aunt, Anne, who suffers from autism, and an image of Pasha, a horse cantering around a central point. A trained equestrian, Biggs uses the metaphor of the tightly contained dressage horse as an apt parallel to the position of Anne within both the medical system and her own physical limitations. Yet, there is an underlying feeling of lost and undiagnosed freedom that Anne and Pasha share. Taken

together, these video installations emphasize the power of video to reveal the mechanisms of power and control within our society.

I have been a fan of Janet's

technology allows her to plumb the depths of her own personal relationship to the subjects of her video, while the scale of the video installation affords the viewer that same opportunity. Biggs was an ideal choice to unveil this new series.

Identity

If you had to summarize the main subject matter in art since the 1990s, it could be done in one word: identity. Everywhere you turn, artists are exploring all aspects of their identity—whether it is their gender, race, sexual orientation, class, or disability. In fact, artists have led society in the questioning of who fits where and on what terms.

One of the hotbeds for this examination was the arts scene in Miami, particularly as the city served as a complex melting pot for the Americas. As the second installment of its popular *The Verge* series, the work of Miami artist William Cordova will be highlighted. Cordova has been featured in group exhibitions in Miami, Chicago, Tel Aviv, and Rio de Janeiro.

In this, Cordova's first solo museum exhibition, the issue of identity begins with the artist examining the

THE VERGE

"Event"

Friday, September 14
8 PM - midnight, \$4
music by: David Sol,
Dj Koi, Low Key Fever
and Noel

Plains Art Museum
704 First Avenue North
Fargo, North Dakota
plainsart.org • 701.232.3821

work for some time now. When I first experienced her work *BuSpar* at Solomon Projects Gallery in Atlanta, I was awe-struck. Janet's use of

Continues on page 14

The Verge: Janet Biggs
Through September 30, 2001

William Cordova, Maybe I'm Amazed.
October 11, 2001 – January 6, 2002

The Verge: Brad Tucker
January 17, 2002 – April 21, 2002

