

Cakerwalk

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Janet Biggs

Anna Kustera, New York

Janet Biggs' two-part video installation *Water Training* takes full advantage of the multiple angles provided by the Anna Kustera gallery space. *Glacier Approach*, lurks in the rear left corner of the upper level. This video plays in my mind as clearly now as when I first saw it. A two-part video is projected beneath an overhang on the lower level. Shot in Norway, the video depicts glass-like water, the rail of a boat upon which the artist and video camera travel, and the looming glacier. The glacier's gradual approach is interrupted by split second frames of swimmers, similar to the video on the upper level. Swimming images grow more intense as the glacier grows closer. Finally, the conclusion of the video is an uncomfortable and clumsy pan across the icy peak.

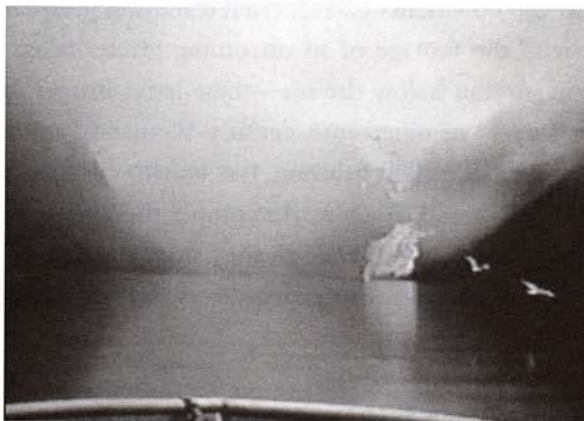
Standing before the clear, steady, image of the landscape put the views beneath the glacial mountains themselves. The video camera simultaneously puts us in Norway and keeps us at a technological remove. I felt both a longing to be in Norway and a respect for the technology that brought this image to New York.

Although the images have a similar theme, the upper and lower videos are quite different. The unease and ugliness of the upper videos are in stark contrast to the subtle and slow elegance of the glacier. The calm and depth of the water match the soothing hum of the motor, audible from the gallery speakers. Upstairs the struggling horse and flailing bodies are anything but calm and contemplative. Biggs completed the glacier video after her trip to Norway and two weeks prior to the opening, and seemed to me more more sophisticated than the horse and swimmers upstairs.

The upper video displays the violence of the sublime. A horse tethered in a pool is representative of human manipulation of nature for their own ends. The lower video accepts human fear of infinite nature. Although the swimmer interruptions leave a slight feeling of unease, the overall effect of the glacier video is of a contemplative harmony with nature. The humble appreciation of nature, (instead of faux-domination) is quite refreshing.

Video art has an incredible struggle for position in the face of television and MTV. Biggs' glacier video takes a brave and beautiful stance against, or despite, this formidable foe. It is a slow and patient ride to the glacier, interspersed only by the struggling swimmers. The climax is unsatisfying, puzzling, but great because of its human imperfection and acknowledgment of nature's superiority.

Aeron Bergman



Janet Biggs
Glacier Approach, 1997.
Video Still.