

# Getting in our space

New Contemporaries  
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*Diva*, the video installation by Fabienne Auteoud (1997) cuts glamour with the grotesque as though to realise the ambivalent connotations of that word. At once spoilt over-achiever and tragic icon, the diva becomes a literally fallen and falling figure grasping for and repelling dignity and identity; a dealer in the currencies of intimacy and extroversion.

As with *Curtain* and *Practice*, the other pieces Auteoud exhibits here, the voyeuristic and expectant gaze we so love to subject our celebrities (and artworks) to goes askew. The realm of lost dignities quickly slides into the uncomfortable terrain of the abject. Thematically somewhere between Cindy Sherman's vomiting and passed-out women and her glossy mass-media-emulating self portraits, these quasi-icons occupy the space of a desire gone wrong or effaced. Their discourse lingers between debasement and adulation, playing on our need for simultaneous objectification and identification.

Auteoud's fallen heroines make a complex comment on practices of looking and the politics of desire. Our longing for affinity with the star for the sake of our own dys-identity meets only a sad commentary on dissatisfaction.

disturbing repetition but unlike an entertainment it doesn't offer its pleasures cheaply. What is repeated is effort without success and practice without perfect. What becomes obvious is that there is no resolution to this drama.

The diva in this context is the perfect embodiment of a memorium to identity. We see her in an intimate way because she offers herself to us, we see her failing and falling. But she is an icon of glamour and success. We become aware of our own social schizophrenia.

If we identify with the diva in front of us we become uncomfortable with her brattishness. She is in our space. The sound of her singing or screaming coupled with the look of her flaunting it for us is overwhelming. We objectify her too. But the role of the diva as objectifiable icon is subverted and we begin to find her admissions and failings confusing.

This whole fake yelling, this desire to parade is courted thinly as all dressed up and nowhere to go. Intimacy is public. The icon is trash. Beauty is selfish.

The way this piece deals with the connection between looking and identity is the filmic equivalent of Kathy Acker's writing and Cindy Sherman's photographs. Whatever we are looking for is smeared over and repels us. The connection between ourselves and the piece in question is a type of revolt.

Essentially though, through fragmenting our expectations we come to find what we already know. Multiple and impossible identity is the mirror to culture and experience. The difficult combination of technique and trait we find in *Diva* is the pivotal aspect of its discourse. A novel whose disjunction annoys us may finally offer up the real guts of our cultural discourse. Unresolution is a fact.

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above Fabienne Auteoud, *Diva*, (still from video projection), 1997, courtesy of the artist and the Camden Arts Centre

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