

The Waiting Room

Curated by Instant Coffee

A Jin's Banana House video package : 28 March – 20 April

In a recent US version of the *Survivor* series screened on New Zealand television, the most likely person to succeed, Lex, who alternately manipulated, bullied and schemed his way into the top three, *didn't win*, and instead it became a race between the two nicest people on the whole show – Kim, who wanted to help AIDs victims in Africa, and Ethan, who wanted to teach underprivileged US kids to play soccer. Ethan eventually walked away with a cool million, thereby proving, if you want a moral to this tale, that sometimes it pays off if people actually like you.

Toronto based performance artist Jinhan Ko knows this as well as anyone. Deftly referencing both the language of standup comedy, and the role of the storyteller, Ko beguiles audiences with his particular brand of edgy charm, creating a false illusion of intimacy through the representation of apparently private, yet completely banal moments. In the video *Tell Me What You Wanna Hear*, Ko (operating under the exhibiting name Jin's Banana House) stares directly at the viewer, encouraging them continually with enthusiastic comments "that's amazing, wow, that's so fantastic". Projected far larger than life over the gallery wall, his head looks like the top of a giant bobbing Buddha, smiling down benevolently at the viewer. It makes you feel so good. But after continued viewing the positivity of his affirmations are rendered meaningless through repetition, reducing to something like the dull ache of a hangover after the Neurofen has just slid in.

Boredom and expectation emerge as common themes in Ko's practice, he uses these tropes as cunningly and knowingly as do the producers of reality TV and infomercials. The three video works included in *The Waiting Room* all drew on these means to engage, drawing you in well beyond the quick-flick-past-the-screen which is the most much video art demands of you. In another video a toaster burns in the foreground, whilst just out of range of the camera's eye we can hear the artist conducting everyday events, entering the room, talking on the phone with friends. Potentially juicy revelations somehow don't deliver because the names are unrecognizable, yet something about eavesdropping always gets me excited. The notion that something titillating is just around the corner keeps you there, pinned gaze to gaze to the screen, waiting.

Just as the simulation of reality in *Survivor* is enjoyable precisely because of it's over-manipulation of supposedly real events, Ko's work is pleasurable simply because we don't know how much of what we are seeing is real and how much created for the camera. He just seems so nice. When Ko's video works played at the Physics Room, I overheard several young girls say that he was really cute and they wished he was in town for the show. These works are charming but what is more they *know* they are charming, and the implied knowing wink is all part of the game. Sometimes it just pays to be nice.

Emma Bugden