

rear window

Emily Harris, Gala Kirke, Richard Lewer, with slide screenings from the collection of Russell Coveney

Photographer Russell Coveney has built an ever-growing archive that documents a decade of South Island live music sub-culture. By exhibiting a selection of slides drawn from this image bank of hundreds of live performances, a portrait of time and place was created. This pure documentary work screened alongside *rear window*, featuring work by Emily Harris, Gala Kirke and Richard Lewer, who each explore the process and power of image-making as document of reality and signifier of identity.

Our acceptance of the camera as an infallible tool and our reliance on visual information has given us a false comfort in the captured image and positioned it above other sources as a means of documentation, making it vital in the development and projection of identity. The famous subjects in Gala Kirke's series 'Celebrity Worship Syndrome' (acrylic on canvas portraits of female screen stars) are intimately aware of the power of image. Madonna exemplifies the ability to build an identity and an enterprise based largely on the careful control of her own image as it is projected into the public domain. Yet it is the very celebrities for whom success relies so greatly on perception who are most likely to lose power over their own image to the global media and paparazzi. The public's desire for knowledge of the intimacies of famous people seems to supersede any need for "truth" in their public presentation. This cultural obsession depends on our acceptance of a projected fantasy presented as reality (with a little persuasion from plastic surgery, air-brushed photographs, lip-synched concerts, false biographies). Kirke's portraits highlight this bizarre gap between the perceived or public identity and the hidden or private reality of the individual lives and characters portrayed.

Over the course of a year Emily Harris collected digital video footage of a group of adolescent boys, using methods of cinema verité and Dogme 95, in a manner which removed artistic and directorial control from the process of documentation. The completely unscripted teenage subjects of *Boys on Film* were afforded editorial input and right of approval, giving them group ownership of their projected image and therefore the ability to control, to an extent, the audience's perception of

them. *Boys on Film*, mundane yet quietly entertaining, provided a close-up on the development of individual and group identity in the formative moment of early adolescence.

Richard Lewer also explored identity from an unusual perspective, through a vast collection of drawings. Like Harris, Lewer often uses methods and materials that distance him from the content of his works. In preparing 'Goodnight' his approach to drawing was semi-automatic. Like an archivist, Lewer collected stories and characters from overheard emergency services call-outs made in Wanganui. While Harris aimed to reproduce events in real time with no subjective intervention, Lewer's work was unashamedly filtered, with overheard, half-imagined inhabitants of a comic book world exploded in large scale on the gallery walls. Yet the results of these two divergent approaches can both be described as forming, as Dylan Rainforth describes it, a 'kind of vignette or composite profile of not only a disconnected series of random events but something that alludes to the character' of their respective subjects.¹ Whether mimicking, interpreting or closely recording, each artist in *rear window* has attempted to point to another version of truth and identity, reminding us of the imperfection of images and perception.

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¹ Dylan Rainforth, 'Resident Evil – Richard Lewer in Wanganui, Auckland, Sydney and Beyond', *Art New Zealand* 113, Summer 2004-2005.

rear window. *Mads*, Gala Kirke . Photo: Rachel Brunton

