

COURTESY OF SOLOMON PROJECTS

ON THE RIGHT TRACK



An image from Janet Biggs' "Tracking Up" at Solomon Projects

Video artist Janet Biggs gaining wider exposure

BY LARISSA ERIN GREER

Six silent, moving pictures run in an infinite loop on the walls of Solomon Projects, with large headphones and cushy red Knoll stools beckoning visitors to sit down and share some face time with the screen.

The viewer may choose a screen flashing with violent, thrashing underwater images of a polar bear in attack mode, or a projection of an Olympic equestrian vaulter as he lifts and maneuvers himself through the air on the back of a moving horse.

These are two of the experiences on display in "Tracking Up," a collection of single-channel works by NYC-based video installation artist Janet Biggs, a post-feminist painter/sculptor who stepped over into video for reasons all her own.

"My intent is very different from that of a filmmaker, because short film has a certain kind of duration and a certain kind of expectation," says Biggs. "My past production has been steered more toward installation, where there's a kind of shared authorship with the viewer: They come in and they spend whatever time they want, they navigate it however they want, and they leave whenever they want."

Biggs uses ambient sound exclusively, with a narrative clinging to pure visual structure, rather than relying on dialogue to convey her point. Her current work centers on highly focused individuals in the top tier of some form of competition, from professional bagpipers and synchronized swimmers to young soldiers-in-training at the Citadel.

Biggs enjoys exploring the decisions people make, as well as what they're willing to do and what they're willing to strip away to reach their ultimate goal.

"I think of particular interest to me is

how people make decisions that so specifically define the rest of their lives," Biggs says. "I find that fascinating."

Biggs approaches video with the sensibilities of a painter. Textures come to life, with composition and color balance backing up the powerful visual activity within the expanse of the flat "smart" screens.

"It was completely idea-based," Biggs says of her transition from the brush to the pixel. "I made a slew of really bad paintings, and got to a point where I realized I had to develop my own voice. I was mimicking others, or looking to theorists for inspiration, and it wasn't ringing true to me."

Biggs' video work seems to be ringing true with others: She's been picked for an artist sponsorship with French fashion giant Hermes, in addition to having a single-channel piece on display at the Whitney Museum in New York City.

"Hermes was looking at my work for probably a couple of years," she says, "and the more we talked, the more I realized that they're an amazing company and that they're really interested in just artistic exploration."

Hermes paid for production of a five-channel video installation piece called "Beyond the Vertical," which went on display at its Madison Avenue location.

The company didn't even so much as place one single handbag in the windows during the installation: the spaces belonged completely to Biggs, who was allowed total creative control, as well as full legal rights to her work.

Some artists feel that taking on a commercial sponsorship would change their work, but Biggs understands that globalization and commercialization are part of being a working contemporary artist.

"I think for artists and designers, the labels don't even apply," she says. "There are corporations that understand the value of the visual image and don't want it so rigidly dictated by their product. They want to expand it. And I think that's fantastic." SP

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"TRACKING UP"
Solomon Projects
404-875-7100
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Through July 26