

WORLD SCULPTURE NEWS

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The splendidly subtle works in paper and wood that make up Chen Longbin's recent *Reading Sculptures* are a fastidious view of two cultures converging as well as a earnest cry of shame to the death of literate culture.

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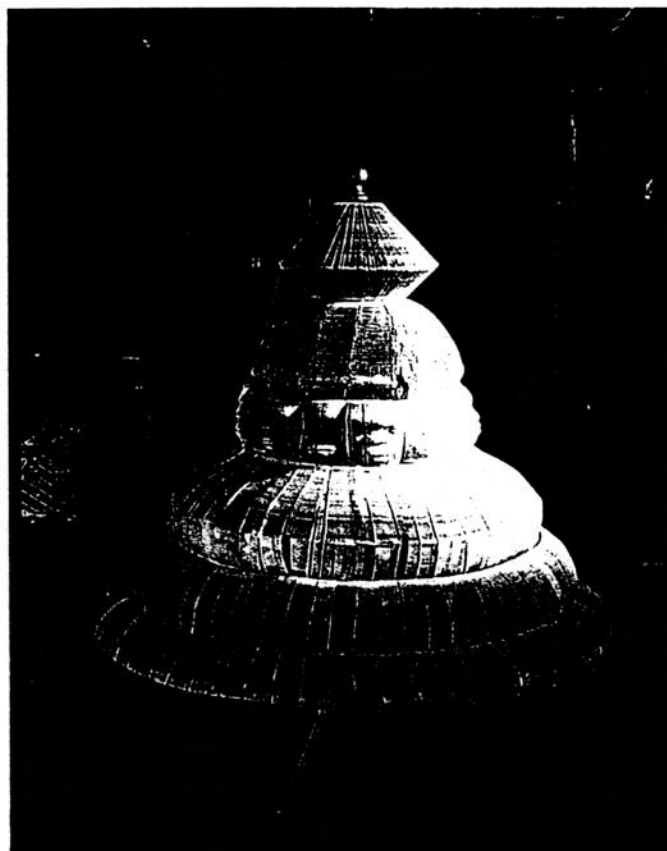
The art of Steve Dilworth may at times shock with its use of "material"—dead animals and bones—yet it is drawn from a strong feeling for the cycles of life as well as from the windswept landscape of the Isle of Harris, in north-west Scotland.

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Whether in the supermarket or on the subway, the surveillance camera (closed-circuit television—CCTV) has become a fact of life in many urban centers. On the one hand, some people say that this provides further evidence of the erosion of personal liberty; while, on the other hand, others declare that it is necessary to take steps to combat crime and acts of terrorism. For British video artist Susan Morris, along with many other British artists in the 1990s, this phenomenon has provided a useful new medium in which to allude to ideas of time, relationships, and power.



Susan Morris, *Window* (detail), 1997, video monitor, endless 45 minutes loop.



Chen Longbin, *Life Tower*, 1997, telephone directories, 160 x 160 x 30 cms.

33 THE UNITED STATES The Meeting Of Disciplines

Los Angeles artists Lynn Aldrich and Margaret Honda are helping to pave the way to a future in which science and art will come together to define a province of unfettered research into the phenomenal world. Both artists make singularly individual work yet it speaks to an unlimited audience.

38 THE UNITED STATES/FRANCE Taming Formidable Beasts

The work of Niki de Saint Phalle is decidedly contemporary yet it builds bridges to ancient myths and narratives. Here moral and spiritual worlds are explored through subtle attention to more mundane matters. At the same time, with humor Saint Phalle is intent on subduing the fears of the past that inhabit the present.

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Reviews from Canada, England, Holland, Singapore, Thailand, the United States.

Cover: Niki de Saint Phalle, *Gilgamesh*, 1991, painted polyester, 240 x 155 x 10 cms Copyright © 1998 Shubroto Chattopadhyay

The Morris Control Room

By Robert Preece

Whether in the supermarket or on the subway, the surveillance camera (closed-circuit television—CCTV) has become a fact of life in many urban centers. On the one hand, some people say that this provides further evidence of the erosion of personal liberty; while, on the other hand, others declare that it is necessary to take steps to combat crime and acts of terrorism. For British video artist Susan Morris, along with many other British artists in the 1990s, this phenomenon has provided a useful new medium in which to allude to ideas of time, relationships, and power.

Since 1989, Morris has given CCTV an aesthetic. Presenting video work that borders on beautiful, hypnotizing the viewer with her clinical voyeurism, and creating tensions that play between photography and video, and public and private life. Very active in London arts scene, she has participated in several group shows including the Whitechapel Open and a CD-ROM exhibition launched at the Institute of Contemporary Art, as well as a solo show at the Gallery Accident (since renamed Five Years).



Susan Morris, *Watching My Neighbors* (detail), 1998, four monitor video work, endless 30 minutes loop

Robert Preece: You seem really excited at your work being in a sculpture magazine. Why is that?

Susan Morris: Sculpture and photographic images are both spatial arts, and both can include the element of time. My video works are constructed using certain rules—such as edits every 15 seconds regardless of content—and I think this method is close to sculptural casting. In this sense, it imposes a shape, or template, which can then be repeated onto a finished object. This is, for example, analogous to the method and result in Richard Serra's factory work.

How did you first become interested in bringing surveillance into your work?

When I started to work with video in a particular way, as with *View of Walkways*, I began to notice that closed circuit television (CCTV) produced similar images. It's hard to avoid. CCTV surrounds me everywhere I go in London—supermarkets, train stations, car parks, and so on. Images on CCTV are recorded in real time at the moment the event takes place. However, we only look at them after the event and often when it is too late, i.e. to comic effect when bank robbers are seen to "get away with it" or, tragically, as the last sight of someone on their way to their death—as was the case with Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed.

I often find myself staring at the monitors and being hypnotized by the patterns they make and the rhythms they form. There is something melancholic about the fixation on something—a moment or person—which is always already lost...



Susan Morris, *Soundless* (detail), 1997, video projection, endless 3 hours loop.

How do you see your work as relating to CCTV?

When I make the work, I use similar methods as CCTV, such as filming "blind" to create a sequence of images. I edit together imagery from cameras that have been set up to film certain sites over time. This allows me to produce a record of a moment or moments. I then give it form.

However, although my work references CCTV, its starting point is actually something else; the use of video and its relationship to the photographic image to study an "event". I often film inanimate objects, such as spaces that people enter or architectural details which change as the light changes. This underlines my interest in the relationship between photography and video, movement and stillness. At times the works can be similar to looking

at photography, as my works can be experienced at a glance. They can also be looked at for a long time, like a contemplative moment.

With my most recent body of work I position the camera on a fixed viewpoint, to study spontaneity, change, and movement in the relationships between people, or between people and the built environment.

Meanwhile, lately I have been toying with interpreting through Freud my position as an agoraphobic—in the sense that I often film from inside buildings, through windows, onto a sight (or site) of fantasy in an architectural space outside. As the viewer, you see what I like to look at, although these are places that I may not want to enter.

Are you a voyeur?

(Pause) I suppose I might be a little bit of voyeur...

Aren't some of your works multi-layered, and sometimes very personal, which isn't always apparent to the viewer?

Yes, there are autobiographical elements in the work. Quite often it is me being filmed, or it will be a particular real relationship. With *Soundless*, you are watching what could be a relationship, beginning or ending. It could be a clandestine relationship or a friendship, but people don't have to know this. I'd like my personal side to be discreet.

Your work plays between photography and video, and occasionally plays between random and staged voyeurism. Recently, you've undergone a body of text-oriented work that address these issues as well, with ambiguity between

I talked louder...
..moved my chair to
make some noise...
I sat and watched as
my therapist fell asleep
Surely I had bored him

Susan Morris, *Text* (detail), 1997, randomly ordered data, computer monitor, endless 30 minutes loop.



Susan Morris, **View of Walkways** (detail), 1989, video projection, endless 25 minutes loop.

fiction and non-fiction. Do you see your work as encouraging much closer scrutiny to what we see and read in the media?

I'm interested in the way "events" are told within a moral framework, and I'm interested in how that has become so problematic, as the framework seems to be worn out.

Right and wrong and the truth of the event are getting more and more like fiction. So, there is no truth. The telling of the story has always got to be a construction.

Before, when we met a year ago, you were reluctant to talk about your work to a certain degree. Why was that?

My work can be quite difficult, yet pointing out things like how the cameras were used and how I made editing decisions does help. However, I like the works to simply be looked at and judged on face value, and I worry that additional information supplied to the viewer might interfere or even ruin the viewer's experience—which is unique to them.

Also, the more I claim for the work, the more ammunition critics can throw back at me. However, I wouldn't have it any other way.

So, how do you reconcile your artistic intention with interpretation of your work?

At its starting point, the

intention is always embedded in the work and rarely there at its end. Once the work is made, it is open to interpretation by anyone. Sometimes what people bring to the work is interesting, because they bring things that I may not have intended. This can be considered, or ignored, at the start of the next piece. In this sense, I am also a spectator of my own work.

Earlier this year, you showed a potentially controversial work depicting orgasms called *Between Two Deaths* at the Cambridge Darkroom Gallery. At that time, there was a press frenzy concerning the Birmingham police's seizure of an explicit Robert Mapplethorpe book from a local university library, and the university's defiant stance. You were very concerned about this...

Yes, I was. Some people thought the work was pornographic. I intended the work to

document the contradictions between close relationships and their inherent mutual distance, and formally to show a simple line drawing in motion.

Issues of censorship occasionally surface over what should and should not be seen by the general public, and over whether one thing or another is art or pornography. Unfortunately, sometimes the authorities make some hasty and ill-formed judgments, which is the case with the recent Mapplethorpe book incident.

By winning the Turner Prize, Gillian Wearing has given, to a certain degree, a face to a British video art. How do you think this affects other British artists like yourself nationally and internationally?

I think it is very good. Having video work recognized as an art form makes it easier for others in the field as it becomes a more acceptable art practice. The more that galleries and institutions support video work, the greater interest by artists in exploring it as a medium and it thus develops in its sophistication as an expressive tool. Yet, it's ironic because artists have been using video in their work for over 30 years.

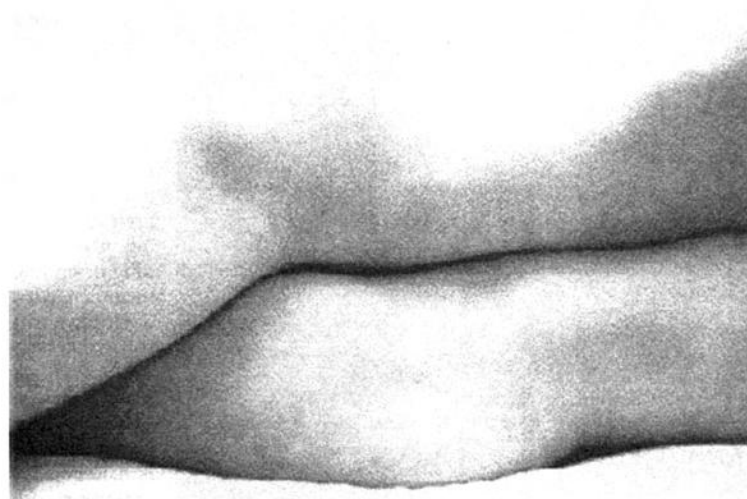
Unfortunately, equipment continues to be a major problem. For example, I had to lend my equipment to a gallery a few months ago, because they didn't have the right monitors to exhibit my work on!

Your work presents an aesthetic which borders on beautiful. With the significance of video surveillance in certain parts of British society, do you think your work, in essence, supports its usage?

My work is about time, technology, and structures of looking, so CCTV is an obvious point of reference, inspiration even, but the work does not consider the political, moral, and social dimensions of its use...

Yes, but this is your intention. Should this interpretation, as you previously said, be considered or ignored?

(Laughs) Perhaps the viewer—who will be bringing in their own voyeurism and paranoia—should decide. Δ



Susan Morris, **Between Two Deaths** (detail), 1998, video projection, endless 28 minutes loop.