

Art in America

MAY 2015

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Emily Wardill:
*When You Fall into
a Trance*, 2013,
video, 72 minutes; at
Carlier/Gebauer.

EMILY WARDILL

Carlier | Gebauer

From Hitchcock in *Rear Window* to Wenders in *Paris, Texas*, filmmakers seeking to make their medium reflect on the way film both attracts and deceives its audience have often begun by suggesting correspondences between viewer and character, in order to upset the equation between them. Typically, the screen is cast as a mirror/window/force field balancing and reflecting real and fictional worlds. In her 72-minute video projection *When You Fall into a Trance* (2013), Emily Wardill employs this structuralistic conceit and invents new lines of narrative stemming from it. The body/image equivalence, instead of merely being charged with short-circuiting filmic illusion, is a cue for new storylines, even ones as demanding of our uncritical emotional involvement as those of conventional melodrama.

When You Fall into a Trance is constructed around four characters and their relationships—a fairly standard Hollywood-style framework—but Wardill chops up and shuffles threads of narrative, and captures much of the imagery either partly underwater, or reflected in the glass tables and distorting mirrors with which her sets are populated. This effect is a visual analogue of a neurological condition that one of the film's characters, Simon, suffers from: an inability to control his movements unless looking at the limbs he is trying to move. This condition doubles as a metaphor for filmic illusion and its deceptive equivalence between our bodies and the illusion on the screen of a body with which we empathize.

Dominique, a neuroscientist in the aftermath of a divorce, is pursuing research through physiotherapeutic sessions with Simon. Much circumstantial information is imparted through the device of an “objective” voiceover, which tells us, for example, of the self-objectification Dominique experiences in the process of compiling a physical description for an online dating site: “It was as though she were becoming a *thing*.” We watch her sitting beside a mirror so we are able to see her in

juxtaposition with her reflection: an “image version” of what is, of course, already an image. Through such tableaux, Wardill intimates a structuralistic binary of object and figment. This passage cedes to footage—reiterated in various forms throughout the film—of Dominique's teenage daughter, Tony, performing synchronized acrobatics in a swimming pool with another girl. Wardill balances the camera on the water's surface so the swimmers' heads appear to separate from their submerged bodies, which stream into globulous liquefaction. Similarly, a couple having sex is filmed in a distorting mirror, so their entwined limbs are reduced to abstract shapes, exposed as image, not body.

Wardill's methods are distinctive not because they employ the structuralistic commonplace of disabusing viewers of their investment in filmic fiction, but because they proceed to convert that commonplace into psychological and physiological motifs: the schism between filmic and real worlds corresponding to a dissociation between mind and body, and between self and others.

This was the theme of a group exhibition titled “I hear your voice reflected in a glass and it sounds like it is inside of me” that Wardill curated in an adjacent room. The curves of the naked women in André Kertész's photographs *Distortion #91* and *Distortion #92* (both 1933) are sublimated into the interior they occupy through a camera's distorting filter. Table legs protrude from Markus Schinwald's canvas sacks (*Untitled [sacks]*, 2009) like broken human legs jutting out of a body bag: a visual Freudian slip by which table leg becomes human leg—the hidden transformational space of the sacks recalling the box between the protruding feet and head of a magician's assistant through which a saw will be run.

—Mark Prince