

TORONTO

Kelly Mark

JUSTINA M. BARNICKE GALLERY
AND BLACKWOOD GALLERY

The highlight of Kelly Mark's recent survey exhibition—curated by Barbara Fischer at two of the University of Toronto's main galleries—was *REM*, 2007, an installation reflecting the artist's long-standing preoccupations with television culture, repetitive labor, and wasted time. The work consisted of four makeshift living rooms kitted out like the sets of domestic sitcoms. Each space was furnished with a TV and other items referencing a range of class and cultural signifiers. These included a white shag rug, an expanse of Buren-esque striped carpeting, a banged-up coffee table, a glass ashtray apparently lifted from a seedy hotel bar, and a pair of nonfunctioning clocks—each set to 4:05—reminiscent of Félix González-Torres's *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1991.

Visitors to the show were required to choose a preferred interior in which to watch a two-hour mash-up of clips from film and television reruns recorded from a wide range of Canadian cable networks, including Diva, Lonestar, and SCREAM. The styling of the stations' on-screen logos emphasized the source material's dated content, and their use helped to forge an association with antisocial viewing habits. Mark converts the snippets of found imagery and dialogue into vignettes composed according to typologies and tropes of clichéd gesture and cinematic device. She focuses on actors pumping gas, climbing stairs, staring at the stars, yelling obscenities into a phone, or sunk in silent moments of indecision or despair.

A sequence from the work in which police interrogate a suspect was typical in its layering of periods and genres, mixing comedy with drama and vintage clips with more recent footage. In the course of another richly nuanced concoction of clips, one gradually recognized Mark's achievement of a medium-specific body of knowledge derived from countless hours of watching and manipulating content that has been heavily edited, and thus degraded, for television audiences according to the dictates of advertisers and censors. This knowledge often enables Mark to elicit from her trite source material surprising symbolic complexity and poetry, as in a sequence that delicately shifts from an extreme close-up of one of Jodie Foster's eyes to the celebrated shot of Marian Crane's lifeless gaze in *Psycho*'s shower scene.

Such close attention to editing assists in critically distancing the artist's project from the more casually strung-together montages familiar from, for example, entertainment industry award shows.

Mark's visual sophistication is less apparent in the drier, more ascetic works also on view, such as the video *A Man, A Woman*, 2007. Displayed on a black screen—one at a time in slow progression—are phrases describing tried-and-true char-

Kelly Mark, *REM*,
2007, color video,
2 hours 16 minutes
33 seconds.
Installation view.



acter types: an inept thief, a likeable drunkard, a professional killer, a mad scientist. While far less seductive in content and form than *REM*, this laconic recitation of a list—one of the artist's favorite conceptual procedures—still rewarded the patient viewer with insight into the endlessly repeated plot structures that nightly anesthetize the viewing public.

—Dan Adler