



ArtSeen

JAIME DAVIDOVICH *Re: PLAY*

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Jaime Davidovich's *Re: PLAY*, on view at MediaNoche through June 16, was a condensed, well-considered overview of the artist's video work from 1972 through 2011.

The dimly lit gallery space was dominated by a gentle but insistent drone emanating from one of Davidovich's pieces—presumably the single-channel texture study “Road” (1972), installed on a large monitor on the floor just inside the entrance. Like much of the work on display, “Road” is subtle and abstract, demanding patience from its viewer in order to reveal itself. One could argue that this brand of nuanced video art is less common today than in past decades, perhaps because artists now are rarely guaranteed the luxury of a viewer with an attention span outlasting the average television commercial.

The work that is abstruse and abstract is emphatically so, and manifestly painterly. Davidovich's recent video piece “Urban Landscape” (2010) appears to be made up of gently shifting organic forms, which are then are projected onto the dramatic, self-contained landscape of a large-scale monochrome canvas—its physical valleys and peaks further obscuring and manipulating the already vague grainy footage. Another piece, apparently a close-up of a bathtub's interior, was installed several feet within a dark, crowded storage closet, its tinkling but distinct soundtrack of water meeting a drain just barely perceptible. This is meant to be viewed from the wrong side of a half-closed door, creating a hilariously uncomfortable relationship between the viewer and the piece. Davidovich further confounds the viewer's expectation of spatial logic in several of the videos that were installed in a six-monitor grid on one wall of the gallery, most notably in “3 Mercer Street” (1975). This early video appears to be a continuous shot; the camera claustrophobically pans its way completely around a dingy, seemingly vacant room, lingering on features that gain import by virtue of their scarcity, until a man (the artist Stuart Sherman) appears in the shot, first setting up a table; later pulling objects from a bag, as the viewer must wait in agony for the camera to pan back to his location in the room; and, finally, rather impassively popping a balloon with a large pin. Payoff!



Jaime Davidovich, *The Live! Show*, 1982. Image courtesy of MediaNoche.

While Davidovich's texturally rich, discombobulating work feels secure within the video canon, perhaps even somewhat casually pioneering, it is the artist's playful relationship with television that resonates most intensely today as something both prescient and current. Several of Davidovich's works involve the methodical obscuration of a television monitor with electrical tape; in some sense, the use of television as canvas and object of the gaze renders it anthropomorphic. “Blue, red, yellow” (1974) consists of three monitors stacked atop each other, showing footage of a television monitor slowly being blanketed in a layer of blue, red, or yellow electrical tape, the artist's black-sleeved arm working rhythmically and unerringly to fully conceal the static being broadcast beneath. This theme plays out several times: For example, in one work Davidovich wholly blacks out a small, almost pathetic-looking television playing a talk show before abandoning the set and exiting the frame. Another example employs some digital effect to alter the look of the electrical tape, imparting it an eerie glow, while the rest of the footage (depicting a hand continuously applying successive tape layers) appears completely normal. Or as normal as the act of smoothing tape onto a television screen might appear, that is.

Davidovich's relationship to television, beyond the abstract, was explored more thoroughly in clips from "The Live! Show," which aired on Manhattan's public access networks in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A 1982 promo for "The Live! Show," in all its quasi-earnest, lo-fi glory, neatly creates a gentle precedent for the art world version of a very specific post-modern anti-humor, which the likes of "Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!" (2007 – 2010) or "Wonder Showzen" (2005 – 2006) have tidily woven into today's popular culture. Davidovich's humor obviously transcends his medium, resulting in a comment as potent today as one assumes it was in 1972—harnessing new media to capture what is "real" and "true" is an artistic act both vitally important and profoundly absurd.

Davidovich's use of tape was explored more extensively, with a full-wall installation and some smaller works, in *Taped Projects* (April 26 - May 26 at Henrique Faria Fine Art.)

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