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A&E » VISUAL ARTS

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Peter Horvath: Medium cool

Web artist's video works embrace cinema and photography

by Felicia Feaster

The work of Toronto-based artist Peter Horvath plays against the oft-used generalization that people go to the cinema to be entertained and go to art galleries to be enlightened. Horvath, who blends elements of conventional cinema and elements of video art, suggests the visual and sensual pleasures of cinema can coexist with a more analytical strain of art.

Watching Horvath put the finishing touches on his Atlanta exhibition of video art, *Transient Passages*, at the ACA Gallery of the Savannah College of Art and Design, it is clear the artist is very much in the work. He sports a devilish Van Dyke beard – he is, after all, one of the founding members of a secret Net art collective, [Hell.com](#) – and a cock's comb shock of hair. His work is equally compelling and sly.

Horvath says he is interested in cinema, but the sense of ambiguity, the disordered structure and formalist elements in his work distinguish his vision as that of an artist rather than a filmmaker. It's hard to imagine, but Horvath began taking photographs when he was just 6 years old – precociously conceptual photographs at that.

"I did a series of portraits of my friends and positioned them all the same; in my room, on my bed," he says. "It's a series, but I didn't know I was making a series. ... And then I did the same things with cars."

In some ways, his interests as an adult artist aren't that different: "It sort of relates in that I always wanted to document things."

Although Horvath's technology certainly has evolved, from an Instamatic to a Sony HD, his camera is still a constant companion.

"I'm an archivist," he says. "Everywhere I go I end up filming or photographing."

The copious, unplanned footage Horvath shoots in his travels found its way into "probably the most conceptual work that I've done," he says. "Triptych: Motion Stillness Resistance" is a video that uses a computer program to generate a random flow of images simultaneously on three separate panels. Skylines, political demonstrations, teenagers engaged in horseplay, a hula-hoop-shimmying performer, a woman's broken high-heel shoe give an impressionistic vision of the flux and parading, accidental marvels of city life.

Horvath's four video works on view at ACA/SCAD share something in common with the artists he admires: Bill Viola, Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger. Horvath's videos have a sense of grand drama; frenetic, contemporary anxiety; and an interest in the collision of the beautiful with the grave. His works in *Transient Passages* range from 2004 to 2007, but they all exhibit his principal identification as a Web artist who uses computer-based screens and frames to break up his images.



COMPUTER SAVVY: Artist Peter Horvath surfs the Web.

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Transient Passages: Peter Horvath

Through May 4. Tues.-Wed., Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thurs.-Fri., 10 a.m.-9:30 p.m.; Sun., noon-5 p.m. ACA Gallery of SCAD, 1280 Peachtree St. 404-815-9149. www.acagallery.org.

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His earliest work on view here, "Intervals," is deeply indebted to a computer aesthetic. Four different people appear as sidebar icons on a vast screen, each one popping up on a smaller screen to tell anecdotes about suicide or loss of innocence. The work is a surprising collision of the analytical, cold, fractured layout of the Web and intense human emotions.

Over time, Horvath's work has moved away from such overtly Web-influenced form and become more cinematic. In perhaps his most self-referential film work, "Tenderly Yours," Horvath enlisted the help of French New Wave director Francois Truffaut's daughter Joséphine, who Horvath met at a film festival. The work, a kind of valentine to the New Wave, is laden with cinematic references to director Truffaut, Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski and French cinema. But the work has a definite Web element, too, with its multiple windows and images that compete for our attention. Joséphine appears as the "star" of this video about film, flitting through city streets, posing and acting out the part of the ingenue. The work suggests how our notions of love, romance, feminine charm and caprice have been informed by the wistful, spirited heroines of the New Wave. And like much of Horvath's work, "Tenderly Yours" is dreamy, lyrical and romantic, and tinged with a backbeat of melancholy and romantic despair.

Transient Passages also marks the debut of Horvath's most recent work, the three-channel video installation "Boulevard." With its loosely narrative form, central heroine and lush soundtrack playing out in a dark room, the video work has the distinctly immersive, transportive quality of cinema and is a visible departure from Horvath's usual computer-centered aesthetic.

Played on three screens with booming sound and set off from the rest of the video pieces with thick, black curtains, this drama of sexual angst has shades of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* and the edge-of-the-earth angst of contemporary California Gothics such as *Magnolia* and *Crash*. The central figure is a by-turns haughty and vulnerable beauty, one of Horvath's reoccurring angst-laden women passing through the glamorous and tawdry landscape of Los Angeles' Laurel Canyon.

In his tight black suit vest worn over a T-shirt and self-possessed air, Horvath is very much like his work: cool, stylish, thoughtful, a spokesman in his own way for the fractured, confusing contemporary life he documents in his video work.

"Boulevard," Horvath says, is a reflection of the chaotic and disordered character of our contemporary sexual and interpersonal relationships, so often informed by our relationship to technology, the Web and movies. And very different from the kind of relationships that defined his parents' generation.

It's just clear that life is different now, he notes: "We don't have the staying power for anything."

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