

## Sexual Reproduction

Transvestites invade the films of Brian DePalma; a naked man reproduces Gustav Klimt and Siouxsie Sioux

by **Michael Fallon**

My recent, much-needed vacation at the Shady Acres Home for Frazzled Critics accorded me time to think upon the deeper aspects of art and man's modern condition. Consider as fruit of this respite my new hypothesis that there are two main source-springs for artistic inspiration. Make that three. One of them is the oozy inspiration of good criticism, which humble artists sprinkle like fertilizer over the scrub gardens of their own creations in the hope that something worthy will grow. The other two I'll modestly label the Freudian and the Jungian. Freud, the Viennese degenerate, reveled in the baser parts of the psyche--its fascination with sex and the body. Mannerly Jung of Switzerland, meanwhile, saw the psyche as a web affected by those internal factors and by external events and relationships; in a poetic moment, he called this external stuff "day residue." In the current exhibition at Midway Contemporary Art, visiting French artists Brice Dellsperger and Jean-Luc Verna seem to talk Jungian, but walk Freudian.



I think I'll have this sketch tattooed onto my forehead: Artist Jean-Luc Verna

Image: MIDWAY CONTEMPORARY ART

Both Dellsperger and Verna wax poetic about particularly modern sorts of day residue--that of cinema and the iconography of rock 'n' roll, respectively. Since 1995, Dellsperger has been working on a series of films called "Body Double," after the film by the self-aware American filmmaker Brian DePalma. What Dellsperger does, practically speaking, is simple enough to describe: The 32-year-old artist takes scenes from preexisting movies--moments he considers "transformative" ones for the characters--and reshoots them with his own actors over the original soundtrack. You can only imagine the antics that ensue.

In *Body Double X*, a refashioning of Andrzej Zulawski's 1973 film *L'important c'est d'aimer* that will be running at Midway, all the characters are played by a transvestite digitally superimposed multiple times into each scene. There are cues to help us keep the story straight--she wears different costumes and latex masks for different characters, and she lip-syncs the original voices. But in the end, the film is one great visual clusterfuck, figuratively speaking (and literally, too, in one orgy scene). In "Body Double 17" meanwhile, which also runs at Midway, two sisters play all the characters, male and female, and switch roles without warning.

A lot has been written over the past few years about the homoerotic subtext of Dellsperger's films. Both films here, for instance, have groovy girl-on, um, -girl sequences of varying explicitness. But the filmmaker seems to downplay that aspect of the work. "I want these to be like a dream-like memory of a movie," says Dellsperger, who looks a bit like a younger Rob Lowe (speaking of clusterfuck) and has appeared in many of his own films. "They are meant to show how your dreams are influenced by movies."

Dellsperger's production techniques highlight this sensibility. The duplicated actors, having been shot at separate times in front of a blue screen and choreographed to interact with themselves playing other characters, often float and wobble onscreen in odd ways. Figures waver in the midst of jerky camera pans. The whole comes across like a schizophrenic pastiche. Still, the films are also weirdly sexy in just the way of dreams.

Jean-Luc Verna both appears as the sole actor in *Body Double X* and as the naked subject of 14 of his own photographs. (He has also included 14 drawings on paper, and a site-specific spread of drawings on the gallery floor and walls.) But the 37-year-old Verna downplays the role of his

tattooed and pierced body in his work, and of any attendant gothic homoeroticism. As with Dellsperger, Verna says the work comes down to dry theory, not mere sexuality.

"My basic statement is like this move in ballet, where you have your legs spread all the way out," Verna says, demonstrating a grand jeté position. "One foot is in high culture. One foot is in rock 'n' roll. And the whole of human civilization is between my legs."

Verna's poses in his photographs are culled from two simultaneous sources--a specific image from art history that mirrors an image of a rock 'n' roller. So a pose from a painting by Max Klinger is also an image of David Bowie from the Ziggy Stardust era; a Gustav Klimt figure is Siouxsie Sioux. Jung would call these archetypes. Freud would probably just call them arousing.