

Cinema of simple props

Beautiful and repulsive, obscene and poetic Sharon Balaban's videos are entertaining. Some grimace, It is simple cinema: filmed at home, with minimal expenses – not counting ideas, imagination, and a sense of humor of course

The leading roles in these scenes can be the artist's hand, a piece of macaroni, or a dead bird. The stories are terse; it is rare for one of the several dozen movies shown on exhibit in Appendix2 to last for more than twenty seconds. All of them create a kaleidoscope in which fragments of the small, perverse, paranoia seasoned world of the Israeli artist flash by. This exhibit almost resembles YouTube. However, the word "almost" should be stressed. At first glance, Balaban's work brings to mind videos that abound in the internet: short, funny and/or disgusting, made by people at their own expense, at home, when they are bored or when they get an exceptionally hilarious idea. What is the difference? The devil is in the details. Sharon Balaban sublimates and refines this innocent saying to a level of complete mastery. Each of her movies is a small masterpiece, but they have the strongest effect when viewed in greater numbers. Contrary to the modernistic maxim "more is less;" in this case, the more, the better. Balaban's movies drive each other on in a synergetic way. One of them can be a good joke, but in a group, these movies are a specific world view, shown close-up by a carefully observed detail or fragment. It is a strange world, in which the boundaries between the inanimate and the living, as well as between the large and the small, are blurred. A part of a hand can be a whole body in these works - and it may be dancing to the rhythm of a George Michael song. Toothpaste can play the role of a brain squeezed from an old motorcycle helmet. A piece of macaroni can look (and move!) so that the bashful will blush, and the oversensitive will have problems with eating pasta for their primo piatto for a long time. Objectively, Balaban, a young Israeli artist, is not shockingly young (she was born in 1971), however, an allowance must be made for the very specific Israeli art scene,



where debuts are late, and apprenticeships are long. In her case, the maturity with which she realizes her somewhat anarchic and off artistic project only makes it better. Because the author is walking on thin ice. One misstep and she could fall into an abyss of the average jokes in which the internet abounds. Another step in the other direction, and she could lose her unpretentious lightness, which gives her work its wings. However Balaban maintains an ideal balance, pulls ideas like out of a hat, and each idea is a perfect fit. Each one is shown differently; the exhibit has a specific architecture, made from cardboard boxes, make-shift constructions, and various projection sizes. Certain videos are displayed in large format, making the Israeli's home video closer to the cinematographic format. Other works are presented on small projectors, still others inside cardboard boxes or at the end of long tunnels. As a result, the collection of Balaban's „moving pictures" cannot be viewed all at once, one after the other. Each film must be approached freshly: change your perspective, try to make your own move as if on a board of some crazy game. This simple method sharpens our concentration, and this is important, because



the artist demands the viewer's involvement. She doesn't provide us with a firework encrusted Hollywood spectacle, but with simple cinema - cinema based on one picture, operating on the simplest of props and resources, taken straight from every-day life. The rest depends on the viewer's imagination. It is thanks to this imagination, that we can see something completely different in a hand petting an iron: an image of a naked body engaged in highly suspicious erotic play with an object that is anything but sexy. This moving picture works on several levels simultaneously: there is something in it that is incredibly obscene, indecent, and uneasiness in its reception is underlined with unrest, because the grotesque of this scene has in it too much potential cruelty, to accept it as "just another joke." In this simple film, in which nothing extraordinary or scary happens, the little miracle of Sharon Balaban's art clearly reveals itself. This is an art of making something out of nothing; an American artist seems like a circus illusionist who can show us what we want to see, not that which is true.

This is the main attraction of this exhibit. In fact, Balaban only provides an impulse, activating the viewer. Her work is equally the work of a skillful author of home videos, as it is of our expectations, as well as conscious and unconscious thought associations. At first glance, the innocent game of filming short, funny movies teasing our sense of reality, changes into a surprisingly fulfilling performance, during which the viewer not only experiences a full range of emotions, but can also find out a few things about him or herself. It's another story if there are things that one might not want to know about oneself. On her part, the artist bids all those who wanted to visit her crazy home theater goodbye with a last video in which she politely, and perversely, thanks everybody for their attention. You are welcome - the pleasure, despite everything, is still entirely ours. Stach Szabłowski

HOME MADE VIDEO

Sharon Balaban
Appendix2 Gallery, Warsaw
until June 26