

DESIREE HOLMAN

Holman's work blurs the boundaries between fantasy and reality. Although her final artistic product is quasi-narrative, multichannel video installations, the long process that precedes her filming is just as important and integral to her entire practice, and becomes evident onscreen. She is a video artist but equally a sculptor whose work evokes the grand traditions of figurative art and portraiture. She creates stage sets, selects a cast, and begins a directorial process that allows her actors the freedom to embody their characters, leaving some of their interpretation, and ultimately what the video captures, to chance.

In *The Magic Window* (2007; pls. 7–9) Holman takes as her starting point two well-known sitcoms of the 1980s, *Roseanne* and *The Cosby Show*. Her selection of these shows was born of both personal history (this is the stuff of the artist's own childhood) and of collective culture (these programs are shared references for many Americans in the last quarter of the twentieth century). However, they are also significant for the sociocultural stereotypes they both reflect and upend. *The Cosby Show* is the story of a wealthy African American family, while *Roseanne* is a study of white, blue-collar life. To this end, deep-seated assumptions about race and class are subtly undone in Holman's conjoining of the two.

The resulting installation comprises three video projections arranged in a row. The outer two display brief, dialogue-free narratives (with the actors wearing the masks of their respective characters) that are recognizable to those who know each series' typical and simple story arcs: Bill Cosby and his son Theo play ball in the house, or Roseanne comes home from work and reclines on the couch. The center screen becomes the netherworld. In this space, the two televised realms collide as Holman's actors, still wearing their characters' distinctive masks, move into the blackness of video-land. They dance strangely together, their bodies outlined in the green glow of the artist's groundless digital fantasy.

In extracting these characters from the circumscribed space of their legible, onscreen narratives, Holman reminds us of the ways in which television acts on our cultural landscape. Though fictional, these figures are familiar and recognizable—their make-believe arena is an extension of our own cultural fantasies. As the characters move beyond the confines of one space, they invade another, perhaps symbolic of our own imagination, a landscape informed by the popular culture we readily consume.

Holman's quasi-lifelike masks are jarring, walking a delicate line between extraordinary replication and distorted mangling of the physiognomies of the television stars—as if perfect wax copies have been melted and stretched out of shape. These costumes also include intentional details that betray their making and artifice, such as the visible ties at the back of the masks that reveal the actors' own hair spilling out. With this overt rendering of both the structure of performance and the techniques of fabrication, Holman trains her eye on the effect of fantasy and play in our lives, a point that is further solidified with the drawings—based on her own video stills—that accompany each installation (pls. 6, 10–11). The nature of fantasy, both desirable and unsettling, is elucidated via the masking and costuming in the videos and becomes even more obvious in the drawings, where the masks are more sketchily rendered and the hollowness behind the eyeholes appears more shadowed and severe.

Holman's work is a meditation on identity. She highlights the performative nature of self that is learned and appropriated from fantasy. Equally so, she points to the layers of identity that may exist in each of us, particularly as we navigate the spaces of popular culture, imagination, and even stereotype. —AG