



KENNETH SHORR: *DON'T LOOK AT ME*, 2008, VIDEO, 7 MINUTES; *AT THE BRICK*.

himself is hunched over a very small canvas on a very small easel, earnestly intent on performing an alchemy of painting. It successfully conveys one of the ways most artists feel, at least those who still work in studios.

—Stephen Mueller

KENNETH SHORR THE BRICK

Kenneth Shorr, reclusive Tucson polymath—photographer, writer, and performance, book and video artist—should be better known. The Pierogi gallery in Brooklyn has shown his short videos in recent seasons, and a group of 10 videos, most completed this year, were screened under the collective title “Depraved Indifference” at the Brick theater during this Williamsburg venue’s June event, “The Film Festival: A Theater Festival.”

Shorr is best known for photographs he made in the early '80s: dense montages of found images with unsettlingly generic documentary subjects. Later he shot set-ups of sexually or historically suggestive found objects, printing his scenarios in a shadowy sepia to index the esthetics of mid-20th-century modernism. Over the years he has pared and distilled his practice until arriving at his preferred form: videos in which he alone appears, a talking head in a plain button-down shirt. Most of the videos are five minutes or less, and there is one that is only 10 seconds

long. In all of them, Shorr performs bleak, psychologically charged monologues partly written and memorized, and partly improvised.

In *Don't Look at Me*, Shorr holds a camera and directs imaginary characters to pose in the manner of the Abu Ghraib photographs, but this piece is unusual for touching on an identifiable current event. “That looks great with the hood,” he says, “I’m sending this one to Mom.” Watching him play the role of a shutter-happy and weirdly ingenuous MP, you find yourself cringing with your own potential culpability. Elsewhere, ambiguity of character, time and place is rigorously maintained. A couple of the scripts feature off-color jokes that Shorr delivers in stand-up-comedy style against an empty, brightly lit background, adopting the demeanor of a peculiar isolate who, unnervingly, keeps repeating the punch line (as in the one about a naked psychiatric patient with a pear on the end of his penis: “I’m fucking despair, I’m fucking despair”). In this, he could be seen as the human embodiment of a Richard Prince “Joke” painting.

In the very best of the videos, Shorr’s face is pressed close to the lens—a jowly mug, sometimes clean-shaven and other times grizzled in a thick beard, with light blue eyes that occasionally widen with incredulity. His relentlessly earnest delivery only heightens the sense that there’s a screw

loose somewhere. He speaks reasonably, so that it is hard to believe he is what his words indicate. Pervy social worker? an interrogator? a wife beater? *This* guy? As a son recounting the tale of his father’s abuse of his mother, he is bizarrely dissociated. Occasionally you laugh, but never without squeamishness. Shorr’s characters are trapped in the throes of obsessional neurosis, and whether creepily empathic or borderline paranoid, theirs are relentless internal voices, punitive as Kafka and surreal as Beckett. Indeed, the only dialogue in *Mr. Numbskull*, the 10-second video that ran more than once during the program as a kind of leitmotif, is taken from Beckett: “man thing that thinks stinks and shrinks.” It is as good a summary as any of the characters shaped in these mordant and disturbing works.

—Faye Hirsch

DIANNE BLELL CHARLES COWLES

“Desire for the Intimate Deity,” Dianne Blell’s vibrant cycle of miniaturist courtship imagery, arises from an appreciation of the form and erotic content of classical Hindu narratives that celebrate the love of the popular blue-skinned god, Krishna, and his adored milkmaid, Rada. Elaborating on the visual conventions of the traditional narrative, Blell constructs and paints architectural sets and landscape backdrops. Using a large-