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Annie Hall on the Wall: Remaking a Classic as Contemporary Art

April 13, 2012 by David B. Olsen

Fine art tends not to be funny. Of course there are many, many exceptions (basically, all of the examples that everyone immediately thought of upon reading that first sentence), but it's no stretch to say that galleries and museums only infrequently resonate with giggles and guffaws. Or at least we become suspicious of our own aesthetic pedigree when something in a putatively fine art setting *seems* funny, because maybe the piece is actually supposed to be, like, *serious* art and the artist is making a statement about apartheid or something. And there is nothing less enjoyable than trying to figure out whether or not you should laugh at something. The Clifton Benevento gallery in New York is currently holding an exhibition of five artists entitled "Hello? I Forgot My Mantra," of which the title is a reference to Jeff Goldblum's memorably random line of dialogue in *Annie Hall*. The show features painting, sculpture, and an unusual post-performance piece that involves the having-thrown of dice. To me, though, the most interesting work in the show is *Anhedonia*, a work of video art by Aleksandra Domanović that isolates the entire audio track from Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* and replaces the film's original scenes — you know, all the stuff that happens — with an elaborate montage of short clips of stock footage from the Getty Archive. As though the reverse premise of Woody Allen's re-dubbed *What's Up Tiger Lily?*, Domanović's piece uses all of the dialogue, diegetic sound, and music (of which there is surprisingly little, it turns out) of *Annie Hall* and supplants the familiar action of Alvy and Annie with generic bursts of video that are specifically cued to what is being said. For example, the phrase "how I feel..." is juxtaposed with a woman rubbing (i.e. feeling) her neck, and "...about life" becomes black-and-white video of spermatozoa wriggling toward an unfertilized egg.

Annie



Anhedonia is therefore akin to a 90-minute motion-rebus, a kinetically hieroglyphic account of everyday existence. It's worth recalling that *Anhedonia* was Woody Allen's original working title for *Annie Hall* during most of its production, and Domanović adopts it in this instance to evoke not only the generic and sterile quality

of the stock footage and photography that constitutes way more of what we see every day than we probably realize, but also the base boringness of how we tend to picture what life looks like.

With that being said, though, the piece — intended or otherwise — is really pretty hilarious. This is perhaps because what many of us have practically memorized in *Annie Hall* is subverted and supplanted by a Borges-level library of images that are wacky enough on their own, to say nothing of having been meticulously reconfigured to recreate Allen's original study of the absurdity of everything that we do.

And so in *Anhedonia*'s final seconds, Allen's famous joke about "needing the eggs" is replaced with actually *seeing* the eggs, which — both in the end and as the end — literally depicts the original film's conclusion about the delicate surface of the world we've constructed for ourselves.

The entirety of Domanović's oddly mesmerizing piece is available for view online, and you can read more about the show itself at Contemporary Art Daily.