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"Desiree Holman: TV Honey, Silverman Gallery." *Artillery* (January/February 2008)

Among anthropologists, ethnographers study a culture by participating in its daily customs, while theoretical academics observe their subjects from a measured distance. Likewise, some artists advocate objective remove from subject and audience, while others reject that as impossible, favoring intimate engagement with both. Desiree Holman walks a fine line between these poles, investing herself emotionally in her subjects but maintaining a meta-perspective on their actions. A contemporary Margaret Mead, she studies our own media-obsessed society.

Holman mines the implications of media saturation, setting up transgressive experiments to question human behaviors learned from TV. She combines art and film techniques, using drawing, sculpture, props and costumes, performance, installation and video in her work. Her 2005 installation *Troglodyte*, a narrative about humanoid chimpanzees, made her anthropological tactics explicit. In her latest project, *The Magic Window*, Holman again inhabits foreign bodies, this time in an attempt to physically manifest the mediated fantasies of her childhood.

*TV Honey* is one of a series of exhibitions at Silverman Gallery featuring new work by emerging artists, framed by canonical references that inform the younger artists' practices. Guest curator Lawrence Rinder flanks Holman's three-channel video and drawing installation with counterpoints, Joan Jonas' seminal *Vertical Roll* (1972) and Lynda Benglis' lesser-known *The Amazing Bow-Wow* (1976). The former video highlights the formal aspects of early television, juxtaposing jittery framing with impressions of the artist's own fragmented form. The latter video satirizes attachment, family and moral conventions, with the tone of a homemade soap opera. Both employ the languages of feminism and conceptual art, and both incorporate dancing into their fractured trajectories.

Holman's work draws on both these precedents. Appropriating conventions from the genre-defining sitcoms *Roseanne* and *The Cosby Show*, she indulges a faith in the closeness and teamwork that these TV families espoused. The characters in handmade masks appear familiar, but strangely artificial. Droopy, eyeless figures act out corny scenarios of conflict and resolution, ending with exuberant dancing en masse. Glowing green halos, suggesting a "green screen," surround and isolate the family members as they dance.

The mood of the work can be off-putting. The uncanny feeling never subsides, thwarting our surrender to the dream on offer. Holman balances this tension with still images of the dancers, delicately rendered in colored pencil. Here, the sagging flesh is infused with healthy color, the eyes are visible, and the dancers' exuberance manifests in continuous, swirling lines. The drawings emphasize the emotional investment driving the project, while the video forgoes that feeling in favor of a parodic, Paul McCarthy-esque vision of grotesque abandon.

This work asks difficult questions about the roles we play as children, spouses and parents. What becomes of us when we lose ourselves in fantasies created by others for mass consumption? Are we left with healthy or unhealthy expectations for our own real lives? As viewers, we might contemplate how we carry the promises of the TV with us as we navigate the uncertainties of real life. Or, we might simply turn on, tune in and drop out.