

# No United States

Shelly Silver, *1*, 3:00, 2001  
Peggy Ahwesh, *She Puppet*, 15:00, 2001  
Shelly Silver, *small lies, Big Truth*, 19:00, 1999  
Les Leveque, *Flight*, 7:00, 1998  
Brian Cassidy, Melanie Shatzky, *God Will Provide*, 8:25, 2007  
Takeshi Murata, *Monster Movie*, 4:00, 2005  
Paul Chan, *Now promise now threat*, 33:00, 2005  
Jenny Perlin, *Possible Models*, 10:45, 2004

It's easy enough to locate a country physically, but how to locate it aesthetically, politically, intellectually or emotionally? If you believe in polls, 36% of Americans are worried about global warming and 63% are absolutely certain of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. On a more quantifiable level, 85% of Americans don't own passports and 12.5% Americans are below the poverty line. Some of these trends are global – the assets of the richest 447 people on the planet equal the assets of the poorest 2.5 billion people, 52% of the world population.

When I started putting together this program, I knew there was no way to 'capture' a balanced or complete picture of the United States. Instead I chose videos based on the way they reverberated with and expanded on recent events, moods and histories, jamming personal with political, inside and outside, a surface agitation with a deeper frenzy. Rather than expressing unity, they each in fact point to various breakdowns, whether within the image itself, or in the realms of individual or collective belief.

One sees a fascination with surface and depth dissolution in Takeshi Murata's hypnotic **Monster Movie**, the reassuringly familiar scary footage dissolving into spatial mutations, now flat, now expansive, that introduce new levels of sensuality and insecurity. Les Leveque's **Flight** is a frame by frame re-editing of an American astronaut walking on the moon. Leveque transforms this act, typically seen as a moment of technological mastery and transcendence, into a maddening visual vacillation - a flickering frame by frame dance of hesitation and final descent. In Jenny Perlin's **Possible Models**, the repetition of various hand-drawn floor plans (as if to ask 'is this one right?') are mixed with hand-written stories of outsized malls in Minnesota and Dubai, and enormous ever-circulating cruise ships - a series of claustrophobic tales of capitalist dreams. The film periodically jumps and stutters in the gate implying a breakdown in the machine that's producing these utopian architectures from hell.

Repetition and permutation within virtual architecture also marks Peggy Ahwesh's **She Puppet**. Using footage exclusively from the video game Lara Croft Tomb Rader, Ahwesh subtracts the linear trajectory - the mission - leaving Croft to an existential exploration of the outer edges of the video game. Philosophical texts read by women accompany images of Croft dying over and over - the effect being an uncanny identification with this popular game heroine. Another kind of identification is at work in my own work, **small lies, Big Truth**, a radical

retelling of the Clinton/Lewinsky affair, a historic moment notable for an almost complete breakdown of civil rights and privacy, as well as a reconfiguring of power between the sexes. Lewinsky and Clinton's testimony is read by a chorus of voices of different ages and genders, rendering the familiar words ambiguous and strangely intimate. This work opens up a range of variations on and contexts for the quasi-universal and highly politicized themes of sexuality and love, power and control, privacy and intrusion.

In Melanie Shatzky and Brian Cassidy's **God Provides**, it is not the images, but the landscape itself which has been anarchically reassembled. Shot largely in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina, this film matches images of a disaster nearing biblical proportions with a group of citizens who aggressively turn to the Bible for support. Paul Chan's **Now Promise Now Threat**, shot in Omaha, Nebraska - literally the center of the United States - provides a less cohesive view. Various people from this 'red' state talk of their ambivalent relations to their country, religion and government, as an ominous weather report's predictions move from 'who knows?' to 'nervous' to 'totally fucked.'

Despite nervous reports from abroad as well as crowing pronouncements by the Bush administration referencing 'the American 'people' as one large, moveable object, there is no unity in the United States. The works in this show, instead point to various rifts and collapses; they provide a small window into this state of dissonance.

**Participating Artists:** Peggy Ahwesh, Paul Chan, Les Leveque, Takeshi Murata, Shelly Silver, Jenny Perlin, Brian Cassidy, Melanie Shatzky

**Curator:** Shelly Silver

Thanks to Electronic Arts Intermix, Video Data Bank and the artists.

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