

Partners

Alix Pearlstein



Alix Pearlstein, *Partners*, video still, 1998.
Courtesy Postmasters, New York.

It used to be that artists staged the popularly reproduced image, running through its various presentations and imitating its affects. In the late 90s, however, an increasing number of artists seem to actually *engage* that image, playing with its terrain, exploring its territory to show both its perceptual limits and our own. Alix Pearlstein's exhibition *Partners* is the latest in the line, and particularly in a 16-minute video where the artist seems to interact with still figures culled from the mass media.

Apparently actually standing beside the image of a baby, against a stark white ground, she intones a little flatly (though her lips never move at any time), "That's it...hold my hand." Sitting down across from a young fashion model, she says, "He's so sweet." Standing behind an older man who is contemplating a painting, she shares his concentration with a deliberate "Hmm."

In fact, Pearlstein placed these magazine images in monofilament immediately before the video camera lens, while she moved at a distance in the actual room. The operation, pointing to the medium's flattening of space, was cast into relief by five C-prints from a series *Parallel Play*. In these, a foregrounded magazine image is blurred,

but also somehow 3D, while the room is in focus but 2D—contrary to the video's effect, these two realms are left a world apart.

The flattening, in fact, recalls the old psychology experiment where two people of identical height stand for a photograph. In the image, one ends up seeming gigantic, the other tiny—an illusion generated as the duo stands against a backdrop where the ceiling tilts radically downward at one end. In her own neatly distilled way, Pearlstein makes the still-evolving architecture of the video medium similarly concrete.

—Tim Griffin