

Art in America

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View of Alix Pearlstein's four-channel video installation *After the Fall*, 2008, approx. 21 minutes; at the Kitchen.

Alix Pearlstein The Kitchen

Streaming across four big screens in the Kitchen's gallery space were the waxing and waning interactions of eight youngish performers locked in a circular pageant of hectic intrigue and confrontation. Alix Pearlstein's four-channel video installation *After the Fall*

was commissioned by, and shot at, the Kitchen, one of New York's oldest nonprofit "multi-media spaces"—a term they almost invented. In her new work, Pearlstein continues mining a neglected repository of signifiers of the human condition: encounter groups, acting class workshops and the theater. The tone of *After the Fall* is somber in comparison to her works of the '90s, which evoked sexy, stripped-down music videos.

Pearlstein's art now draws as heavily from the spatial investigations in film and video of Post-Minimal and Conceptual artists such as Dan Graham. His *Two Correlated Rotations* (1969), a two-screen projection of footage shot by a pair of spiraling cameramen filming each other, prefigures the camera movements of *After the Fall*. Pearlstein's single-channel *One Side of Two Women 2*, one of two other works on view at the Kitchen (all 2007-08), acknowledges a debt to Michael Snow's *Two Sides of Every Story* (1974). Snow projected two films on opposite sides of a suspended screen, marooning the shuttling viewer in a perpetual between, while Pearlstein's side-by-side screens show two elegant women strutting forward and back like runway models, lifting a black or white card at the moment when they align.

Like a growing number of artist-directors who provide unscripted, mise-en-scène instructions to performers—Willie Doherty is one—Pearlstein employs long anxious tracking shots that signal suspense. *ATF*'s eight performers are distinctive individuals, clothed in either exotic gold or shades of red, and equally divided into two coed cliques, or teams. Two unedited takes of approximately 10 minutes each are photographed by four cameras—they are visible in the video—placed at the peripheries of the gallery. The performers bicker, confer and make out, stalking both the gallery's center and, in turns, the audience. Intermittently they pick up a large white rectangle of what appears to be Sheetrock and push against it from opposite sides until one performer is felled beneath it, and later hauled off. The scenario recalls the many contact-improv dance moments staged at the Kitchen in the '70s. In *Goldrush*, the third work shown, a similar white rectangle symbolizes an object of desire—a blank, dangling carrot that induces savage behavior (tearing, biting, hoarding) in the cast, which includes the artist.

Spectacular multichannel installations destabilize their audiences, who must decide what exactly to watch and when, unlike their counterparts in the multiplex or theater. Victor Burgin observed that in cinema the pictures move while you stay still, while in galleries, you move through the stationary pictures. Pearlstein's *After the Fall* situates you in the vortex of drama, generating original images of its own while reversing the conditions of theater in the round.

—Tim Maul