

Mia Bailey: The Possibility of Sight
Artists' Statement

In my videos, I examine the ability of images to convey reality. My work deals with the unseen beneath the surface of the visual. With what we believe that we see; with what we in fact fail to see.

My video work evolved out of an interest in theatre, opera, and performance. After recording early performances on video, I began to exhibit the videos themselves. The video remains for me a tiny theatre, with a static spectator; I film with a fixed camera on a tripod. There is only one camera angle, one point of view. There is no second camera, no zooms or wide pans, no added after-effects. The sound is what is recorded during filming. The scenes are mostly uncut; each video shows one action or occurrence, taking place in real time. The videos form pairs or groups, where each scene takes place on a separate monitor.

Filming within this narrow, simplified framework is akin to creating a laboratory environment: removing images from their usual contexts, in order to examine them separately. In the videos I create a controlled, artificial setting, where the significance of each individual image becomes crucial.

The second important point is that I see the video images not as a representation of reality but as a creation of it. In line with Bill Viola, one of the video pioneers of the 1970's, I believe that the video artist must attempt to record not the images outside, but inside him or her self. The artist himself/herself is the laboratory from which the inner image emerges. And the work consists in closing the eyes and filming what occurs beneath the surface of outwardly recordable events.

The central theme of my work is the possibility of sight, both physical and metaphorical: when we look, can we see? This question extends for me from our apprehension of images in the media (with their claim to an objective visual truth), to the implications of ecstatic religious experience (with its claim to a subjective truth beneath what can be physically seen).

By extension, I am interested in the possibility of knowledge from within a subjective body: what of the world can we objectively know? To what extent are we trapped in our own history and culture? Can I actually see something if I don't yet know its name? In this sense I am as interested in the outer limits of sight as in the outer limits of language.