

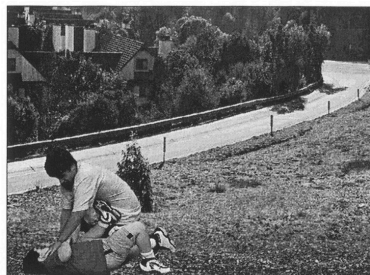
spectator; narrative film has been on the block. It is accused of enveloping viewers to such an extent that they have no agency. We've all felt the narrative pull – a dark theatre, a cushy seat, a giant screen and all of a sudden reality is gone. You've escaped into the film. It has been argued that this passive position conditions viewers to accept the dominant ideology that permeates Hollywood's soft-core propaganda. In Aslizadeh's *Sunday* there are no three acts, there is no happy ending. It is a loop with no beginning and no end... viewers remain cognizant of the gallery, of other viewers, of the lack of chairs... They can stay or they can leave, and either way they can be actively engaged. The only story here is that of the viewer...

Take 22

Matilda Aslizadeh's video piece *Sunday*, with its many filmic references, is "playing" at Artspeak on Carrall Street. Presented on the wall that acts as a screen, *Sunday* is a portrait of ten people at the beach. Unlike a narrative film however, *Sunday* has no defined ending. It not only loops, thereby negating the finality of a full linear stop, it presents no closing action. In fact, what action the vignettes hold is always cut before an emotional charge can develop within a single cycle. The grappling boys initially seem playful, but an amusing nature is abolished by repetition. Their tackling becomes antagonistic, just as the sunbathers' and lovers' caring caresses cycle into aggression as viewers watch them do exactly the same motion again and again. The gestures are reduced to postures through seriality; the characters solidify rather than dissolve unrest. Without conflict resolution, a sense of unity is never achieved in *Sunday*. A viewer cannot be comforted by the video because she will find no utopic closure or escapist charms. Confrontation becomes the only possible end to a contemporary anxiety, causing an all too familiar sense of alienation and emptiness to...

Take 17

Matilda Aslizadeh's newest video *Sunday* stacks up perspectives like pancakes. The duelling facets of multiple time and space frustrate a viewer's own location. Each set of figures, having been shot from the same full-front angle and then arranged across the screen, occupies its own



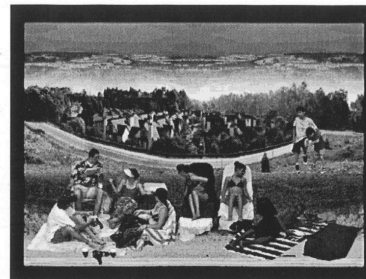
Sunday, Matilda Aslizadeh, video installation (detail), 2002.

"centre-stage" position. Standing before the video seeing four centers, viewers must accept that there is no single viewing position. This erasure of the singular perspective challenges notions of the production of the ideal viewer. As well, the decisive moment slips...

Take 0

Matilda Aslizadeh in her work *Sunday* presents viewers with a work that is linked to painting, photography and film but is none of these. She allows one to recognize the class position of her subjects, but prevents self-identification. One cannot even firmly occupy a viewing point, as perspectives stack one on top of another. Left with no way to enter *Sunday*, one can only witness an advertisement for emptiness. Our isolation and self-absorption may be a form of protection in a society busy with stimulation, but this one-dimensional mask is a troubling aspect of consumer culture. Who wants to live in the loop of a billboard? ...

Sharon Kahanoff and Bronwen Payerle
15/09/2003



Sunday, Matilda Aslizadeh, video installation, 2002.

Matilda Aslizadeh
Sunday

September 5 - October 11, 2003

Information about this exhibition is available on-line at www.artspeak.ca

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Artspeak is a member of the Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres (PAARC). Artspeak gratefully acknowledges the support of The Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver Foundation, The BC Gaming Commission, Heritage Canada, our volunteers and members.

POST SCRIP T

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15/09/03 Bronwen Payerle on
Matilda Aslizadeh

Sunday

Sunday's Bluff

Take 1

It is Sunday and people are at the beach. They have come to socialize and relax with friends, sunbathe, flirt and play. Their clothes are bright. The cooler is full of drinks. Sand gets on the blanket, and the sound of surf pounds the shore. They sit together high on the bluff, and viewers can look down on the whole city shimmering behind them in the atmospheric perspec... so high on the bluff, look down on the city? ... but ... we're supposed to be at the beach... where exactly are those waves coming from?...

Take 15

Matilda Aslizadeh's newest work *Sunday* reads as a contemporary "history painting" of leisure time. In the piece, projected video...

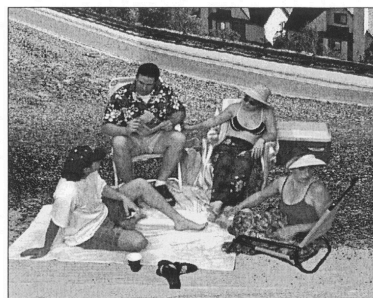
Take 8

During SWARM this year, Artspeak opened the show *Sunday*. Walking into the gallery, viewers were presented with an image that was projected onto a white rectangle in the middle of a pitch black wall. Signalling the cinematic apparatus, Matilda Aslizadeh has produced a video-film ... loop ... painting/photo/film...

Take 12

As a representation of humanity in our environment, Matilda Aslizadeh's work *Sunday* functions like a history painting. One approaches it holding the knowledge necessary to understand the signs: a Tommy Hilfiger blanket, a cellphone, Birkenstocks – all status symbols signifying western consumption. As in many history paintings, the ten "characters" themselves are not much more than props, outlining a portrait of the contemporary bourgeoisie.

If indeed one does recognize a class-conscious trajectory in *Sunday* and if one happens to recall George Seurat's *Sunday a La Grande Jatte*, then a link between the French pointalist and Aslizadeh becomes possible. Translated, "la grande jatte" means "the big platter", and so one finds leisure time served up for evaluation. For the viewer who sees a thematic echo linking *Sunday* and *La Grande Jatte*, the concept of mimesis is raised. The notion of the copy, particularly as it related to the



Sunday, Matilda Aslizadeh, video installation (detail), 2002.

emptying of meaning, has become an issue of mass-produced culture and *Sunday* uses repetition to address...

Take 13

The title of Aslizadeh's work *Sunday* calls to mind *Sunday a La Grande Jatte* by Georges Seurat. In his work, Seurat explored the social tensions that arose in early 20th C public spaces, and the emergence of people's isolation in these spaces despite an intended purpose of collective recreation. Examining an ailment specific to urban areas where space and privacy are at a premium, Aslizadeh's *Sunday* echoes Seurat's theme. She amplifies the sense of isolation that emanates from La Jatte's statuesque figures; for her Sunday characters don't just feel isolated, they are isolated – the actors were not all together in front of the camera during filming. The studio was not set up in the mise-en-scene one sees projected inside the white rectangle on the black wall. Instead, just as the California suburb and misty background hills are a composite matte, the people occupying the foreground "beach" have clearly been filmed in small groups at different times. Then, at yet a later date, through the use of blue screen effects, they were pasted into her fictitious landscape. The resulting computer graphic image reveals itself quickly in the impossible scenarios Aslizadeh allows to occur. The most obvious example is two rough-housing boys who touse right through another character's leg. But more subtle signs of this

process exist, particularly in the soundscape when it contradicts the image: For instance, the sound of rain and thunder on a sunny day; or, that unmistakable echo of sound recorded indoors, despite the beach scene.

These choices by the artist make a sense of isolation inevitable. How could one expect otherwise? Interaction between some characters never actually occurred! But then... Hollywood gets away with this all the time. Celebrity schedules often necessitate stand-ins – line readers cueing "real" actors who perform for the camera's monocular view. But as notions of truth...

Take 7

Slated biblically to be the day of rest, our cultural memory of Early American Sundays seems to be one imbued with a sense of stillness. Families went to church and sat quietly. Children were made to stay indoors, listening to Bible excerpts and looking at pictures. Wearing good clothes, it was neither comfortable nor prudent to climb trees, fix the plough or bake cookies. Gradually portraits reflected a relaxation of restrictions, as people began to use Sundays for the pursuit of happiness. There was the Sunday picnic, Sunday brunch, Sunday boating and of course, the Sunday drive. Once everyone had their portable Kodak Brownie camera, these events were captured forever; moments frozen in time – a stiff, posed homage to leisure.

Carrying on a tradition of depicting leisure that began with the Impressionists, Matilda Aslizadeh's new video work *Sunday* presents a contemporary Sunday, a day at the beach. In the piece, subjects have been arranged so they might enjoy the favourable ocean-view half of the picture plane. Facing viewers, they pose and preen and bake in the sun, exchanging small talk. Although the video does show movement, with the exception of two tumbling boys who provide constant yet threatening comic relief, the characters spend a lot of time just sitting still. In fact, like an iconographic beach snap shot, each character individually seems to undergo an actual "frozen moment" periodically throughout the work. But it would be difficult to call these still frames universal moments in the way that...

Take 4

Like Jeff Wall's references to historical painting Matilda Aslizadeh's new piece *Sunday* harkens back to the work of the premodern painters. Though entirely contemporary scenes are created, with a backbone of history they look grander and more dramatic than the everyday now. Likewise, *Sunday* borrows an aura handed down from history. Normal, yet beautified by virtue of placement on the screen, the figures command attention...

Take 31

Artspeak gallery was transformed again last week, this time into a kind of alternative cinema. Matilda Aslizadeh's show *Sunday* welcomed spectators to an embodiment of critique. The filmic conventions – empowering Hollywood – undisputedly the master of illusion – are used by Aslizadeh as tools of revelation. The film jargon to know here is "seamless editing." Images and sounds are customarily joined so that an entire lifetime can pass normally in 1 hour and 55 minutes. It's magic. And Hollywood dictates that the spell be cast across the world, spreading the sorcery of a dominant ideology. Walter Murch, one of Hollywood's big editors, wrote a small book entitled *In the Blink of An Eye*. It is a text whose name suggests how editing should be felt. But what Hollywood hides, Aslizadeh highlights. Her response to Murch's blink? Open your eyes! Extend the cut! Her seemingly arbitrary move to go to black while the sound continues, is a device that distances viewers from the video; it creates awareness of the cut, and the power of cutting.

But the subversions of film do not stop there. Like the licked surfaces of Renaissance paintings, Hollywood prescribes that nothing should reveal the "the man behind the curtain." Taking up a Modernist strategy, within the video itself, Aslizadeh purposely discloses the process of making it. Auditory clues reference technical equipment and the image is filled with signs of her presence; easily-recognized composited images, contradictory lighting, and still frame poses.

Also under scrutiny is the dogmatic convention of narrative structure. Since feminist film theorists in the 70s turned their attention from screen to