

LAURA PARNES *HOLLYWOOD INFERNO (episode one)*  
January 4 - January 31, 2003  
Opening Reception, Saturday, January 4, 2003

PARTICIPANT INC will present *Hollywood Inferno (episode one)*, a two-channel video installation by Laura Parnes (running time, 40 minutes). Following its theatrical premiere at MoMA's Video Viewpoints (2001) and screenings including the New York Underground Film Festival (2002), the piece will be presented in the exhibition format for which it was designed. Visitors will enter a space that incorporates elements of the production and two interrelated large-scale video projections. A video library of the artist's previous works will also be available to visitors.

For her first one-person exhibition (following a collaborative installation, *Heidi 2*, made with Sue de Beer), Parnes moves further into her interrogation of horror genres and the art world, with their sometimes overlapping cults of personality. Grappling with the danger of beauty without criticality, *Hollywood Inferno* takes the viewer through the alienating world of a teenager named Sandy, a modern-day Dante, and follows where her aspirations toward stardom lead her.

*Hollywood Inferno (episode one)* sets Dante's *Inferno* in suburban New Jersey, with a sleazy screenwriter as Virgil (Guy Richards Smit), the guide to the Hell of Sandy (Alissa Bennett). Sandy has a garage-band boyfriend (Kel O'Neill) and a naive younger sister (Nina Marie Gardner). She works in a fluorescent white candy store, where she eats obscenely red Tootsie-pops, constantly, for the surveillance camera in the corner. She descends into Hell on the escalator at the Mall.

In her tiny bedroom, Sandy paints her toenails while Virgil spies on people through a peephole. A voyeuristic point of view (established by filming for double projection) is the formal device that propels the subplot of suburban surveillance. Snooping on the kids next door supplies Virgil's best material. He speaks a language culled from the pages of *Penthouse* and *Artforum*. In addition to things overheard or read in magazines, the script is a collage of mediated communication, ranging from art theory to reality TV. Like the punk writings of Kathy Acker, the dialogue corrupts its original sources as a means of subverting dominant texts.

In the final scene, a mixture of Dave Hickey's ruminations on beauty and George Lucas' comments about *Star Wars* comprises the artistic diatribe of a "famous director." The director (Kel O'Neill) imitates Christopher Walken while wearing a mask cast directly from the actor Willem Dafoe's face. Parnes deploys visual and verbal quotations to create a disjointed world in which the effects of cultural oversaturation are magnified. Here, actual experience is suspect as fabrication. The notion of transgression loses its intentionality and becomes synonymous with the fashion that immediately mirrors it.

In Sandy's sparsely decorated yet claustrophobic wood-paneled bedroom hangs a poster that reads, "the great news." Endless waiting, pacing, and frequent monologues delivered to her sister occur in hermetic spaces that Virgil is quite eager to fracture. He provides viewpoints previously unavailable to Sandy. As he leads Sandy through this defamiliarized territory, populated by demonic Furbies, Columbine models, and fire-breathing teenagers, she becomes more and more seduced

by the pleasure of spectatorship. The scale of her world shifts, and so does her definition of beauty. Like Dante, she must learn to judge others while eluding judgement herself. This journey culminates in a dramatic scene of sisterly betrayal.

Laura Parnes lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She has screened and exhibited her work at ARTIUM, Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporaneo, Vitoria, Spain; Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art; LACE, Los Angeles; Pacific Film Archives, University of California, Berkeley; Thread Waxing Space, NY; Deitch Projects, NY; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY.

Parnes is currently working on her first feature film.

PARTICIPANT INC is located at 95 Rivington Street, between Ludlow and Orchard Streets in the Lower East Side. Gallery hours: Wednesday-Sunday, 12-7pm.

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