

Jeff Shore with Jon Fisher: Closed Circuit

Sala Diaz

Reviewed by John Ewing



Jeff Shore, *Closed Circuit*, 2002
Mixed media installation at Sala Diaz
Courtesy of the artist

The gallery is dark, but the box inside glows and hums. It's big, ten feet long, five feet wide and taller than an average man. It neatly pierces a wall to straddle two rooms. The sides of the box are lightweight, like canvas stretchers covered in opaque plastic, and on them one sees shadows of hanging forms the shape of small hams. The glowing increases as the internal illumination changes. The dim light bathes the walls and ceiling of the gallery in pale, alternating shades of pink and blue. Suddenly, the low tolling deep in the box is interrupted by the plinking sounds of an electronic keyboard and the whoosh of wind. The pendulous ham shadows quiver and sway, and in the bottom of the box a dark object rushes past.

No, this isn't a horror flick, or a "Sala Diaz Haunted House," though the first few notes of Jeff Shore and Jon Fisher's collaborative installation are delightfully spooky. *Closed Circuit*, the team's latest mechanical tour de force, is swathed in subterfuge. Access to its inner secrets is guarded doggedly, and then slowly pieced out in disorienting morsels that tantalize the senses. And the access is never

direct, but perpetually skewed by some cagey intermediary—a fish-eye peephole, a traveling video camera.

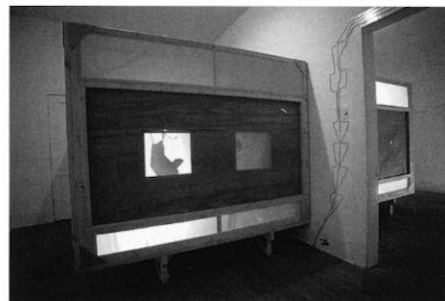
All this mystery heightens the experience. Offering an experience to the viewer (vs. a discrete *objet d'art* or pithy concept) seems to be the objective of *Closed Circuit*. However, the project does ask the viewer to reconcile external objects with big themes in order to grasp the unwieldy whole. The key is found in the "cockpit," a separate area installed in the gallery's back hallway.

Here, Shore and Fisher have created a foil-covered viewing booth for side-by-side

video monitors. A simple, lighted chair is available for visitors; sitting turns off the light and activates two fast-paced, slightly different video transmissions of what we instantly understand to be the inside of the box. At a fast clip, a toy train careens around the tight space. The subjective view (in real time) is provided by cameras mounted on both sides of the front of the train.

An endless tracking shot takes the viewer over checkered floor tile, under furniture, and through the heaps of wires and computer paraphernalia required to operate *Closed Circuit*. While these images are "broadcast," a self-altering composition of synthesized notes blares from the box, and the hams (weed whackers, actually) whirl and jiggle on their tethers. Rising from the chair puts everything in "sleep mode," returning the installation to its peculiar version of stasis.

Surveillance paranoia, the manipulation of information by corporate media, virtual technology and the increasingly elusive nature of consciousness are a few of the hot topics that seem to emanate from the installation. But,



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the whole thing is so open-ended, technologically complex and just plain quirky, that it refuses to fixate on anything pat. This artistic tomfoolery suggests another pair of collaborators, the Swiss duo Fischli & Weiss, whose enigmatic, illusionistic works ask big questions that are never fully answered—What is art? What are the parameters of the art experience? Argentine Leandro Erlich also comes to mind, but his illusions are polished materially and conceptually toward a more succinct point, albeit a surreal one.

A conversation with the artists revealed just how personal the piece really is, dispelling some of its mysteries. One side of the box is a half scale replica of the kitchen and studio furniture in the Houston home where Shore plans his projects and tinkers. The other half contains the computer equipment and synthesizer of Shore's childhood friend, the Chicago-based composer Jon Fisher, who also shares a passion for technical problem solving. According to Shore, the piece is a portrait of "two very neurotic brothers joined by two rooms, a toy train and a closed circuit."