

PRESS CLIPPING

TIME OUT

Lori Hersberger

How Can You Kill Me? (I'm
Already Dead)

February 15th, 2002



Lori Hersberger

How Can You Kill Me? (I'm Already Dead)

Swiss Institute

through Mar 9

Lori Hersberger says that he borrowed the title of his exhibition from lyrics written by an avant-garde country protest musician, a pronouncement bound to give anybody pause. (What does "avant-garde country protest music" sound like, exactly?) Yet, in the context of Hersberger's chaotic, cobbled aesthetic - and his stated desire to demonstrate that "cinema offers no safe haven" from the real world - the strange mixture of musical sources makes poetic sense. The gallery, dimmed to accommodate three floor-to-ceiling film projections, is a whirling centrifuge of brutal sadistic and ruefully cliché clips: Hersberger has harvested grand denouements from sources as disparate as spaghetti Westerns, Bruce Willis action flicks, and end-of-the-world epics. These images are linked only by their moments of utter calamity, and by the artist's short-shrift cuts to scenes that audiences usually wait through an entire movie to see.

Hersberger's editing technique highlights the visual and acoustic opulence of these sequences, which in turn emphasizes the materiality of film- and nearly renders the medium sculptural. For instance, just after an ill-fated cowboy takes a bullet in the chest, the celluloid stutters and pulls his lurching body back upright, only to repeat the painfully Sisyphean gesture, thereby dramatizing the idea of an ending while, weirdly lyrical. In another clip, the looped sound of a woman screaming "My dog's in there!" takes on a nonsensical ring. The words simply slip from meaning.

Hersberger also outfits the gallery with shattered mirrors, tinsel curtains, bales of musty straw and plenty of smashed Budweiser cans. While he calls this setup an updated Plato's cave, equipped with all the necessary ingredients for humankind to hunker down and avoid facing the light of reality, the installation feels like a schizophrenic drive-in. There is certainly no illusion of a "safe haven" here among the wreckage, but (and perhaps this is Hersberger's point) we're still happy to hang out and watch.



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