

black box
a space for new media

Mircea Cantor

September 17, 2007–December 9, 2007

Mircea Cantor (Romanian, b. Oradea, 1977; lives and works in Cluj Napoca, Romania, and Paris) often seems to find inspiration in the conceptual and performance works of artists like Alan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, and Andy Warhol. Cantor, who is co-founder of *Version*, a journal devoted to the interface of culture, sociology, music, philosophy, and natural sciences, resists restricting his art to a single style or medium. To date, his works have explored a wide range of topics and have included billboards, sculptural pieces, installations, and short films.

Deeparture, 2005, captures the movements of two wild animals dramatically out of their element—shown not in a forest, but in a gallery space. In this “civilized” setting, they coexist, albeit with some licking of chops and heavy breathing, nobly. The stark backdrop and silence link the creatures, while the camerawork heightens our awareness of the grace of their tentative movements and body language, their breathing patterns, and their mysterious eyes.

The sheer pleasure of watching them gives way to a temptation to project human interpretations onto their behavior, even though their moves and motivations, like the artist’s, can ultimately only be a matter of speculation. Has the artist re-imagined the notion of the biblical peaceable kingdom in which adversaries co-exist? Does this work have socio-political implications related to Cantor’s native Romania, emerging in the post-Soviet era as a “new animal”? The only hint the artist gives as to his intention is his revelation that he hopes the spelling of the film’s title will “encourage viewers to use the work as a departure point to look deeper into themselves.”

Animals were among the first subjects for art and have remained fundamental to our consideration of the way we interact with the natural world and of the instinctual parts of ourselves. *Deeparture* brings to mind several other recent videos by such artists as Francis Alÿs, Peter Freidl, and Douglas Gordon that feature wild animals in gallery settings. As humans encroach on natural habitats and animals invade developed areas, it should not be surprising to find them part of artistic inquiry and provocation. Perhaps in these artworks, they also act as stand-ins for the relationship between artists and the institutions that at times contain, restrain, and domesticate them—and us?

Kelly Gordon, Associate Curator

Support for the Black Box program is provided in part by Lawrence Cohen/ Ringler Associates.

Related Programs:

Meet the Artist: Mircea Cantor

Tuesday, October 2, 7 pm
Ring Auditorium

Mircea Cantor: Selected Films

Thursday, October 4, 11 am and 1 pm
Ring Auditorium

Beginning October 7, to download a free Podcast between exhibition curator Kelly Gordon and the artist, please visit www.hirshhorn.si.edu



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