



black box

Ori Gersht

December 22, 2008–April 12, 2009
lower level

Ori Gersht (b. 1967, Tel Aviv, Israel; lives and works in London) is noted for his series of large-scale photographs and arresting moving-image works. The artist's work encourages viewers to reflect on the power of natural beauty and how it is affected by human intervention. In *The Forest*, 2006, the camera pans a lush, primeval forest. Sound alternates with silence and suddenly a tree falls to the ground with a thunderous echo. The departure point for this work seems to be the well-known Zen koan "if a tree falls in a forest, and there is no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?" But other questions emerge: Who or what is causing these trees to fall? Is this a statement about nature and inevitability, about proverbially missing the forest for the trees, a commentary about deforestation, or a metaphor for loss? Or is it perhaps an exercise in anticipation?



Stills from Ori Gersht's *Big Bang II*, 2006, from the Hirshhorn's collection.

The Forest is soothing but also becomes increasingly mysterious. Shot deep in the Moskalova woods that span Poland and the Ukraine, this site has personal meaning for the artist. It was from the edge of this glen that his in-laws witnessed the execution of their fellow villagers before escaping into the forest, where they hid from the Nazis for two years.

This exhibition also includes two flat-screen works: *Pomegranate*, 2006, installed next to the entrance to the Black Box on the lower level, and *Big Bang II*, 2006, a recent acquisition on view on the third floor. These works reference traditional Spanish and Dutch still-life painting in which precise arrangements of foods, fruit, or flowers are shown at their peak, implying the inevitability of decay. These metaphors for the brevity of life are termed *vanitas*. Gersht updates the concept of *vanitas* by creating meditations on how violence in contemporary life is often random, anonymous, and unpredictable. He fast-forwards the impending threat of demise, however. His imagery does not decay by dissolving over time, it combusts and then, in the type of slow motion used to depict extreme violence

in feature films, recalls the time-lapse imagery of Harold Edgerton's scientific action photography. Triggering a visceral response, these films translate the experiences of the artist's fear-filled childhood in Israel into provocative statements that have global resonance.

Semiconductor

Through December 14

British duo Ruth Jarman and Joseph Gerhardt, aka Semiconductor, have collaborated since 1999 on various forms of what they call "digital noise and computer anarchy," including films, experimental DVDs, and multimedia performances. *Magnetic Movie*, 2007, an eye-dazzling "documentary" created during the artists' residency at the NASA Space Sciences Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley, is featured in the Black Box this fall. Jarman and Gerhardt will be at the Hirshhorn for a Meet the Artist talk and performance on November 6; see page 18 for details.

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