Video Magic

Rebecca Griffith

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

DOCUMENTATION OF THE ONE-PERSON EXHIBITION

DOCUMENTATION OF THE ONE-PERSON EXHIBITION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTERS OF FINE ARTS

SCHOOL OF ART

BY

REBECCA GRIFFITH

DEKALB, ILLINOIS
MAY 2018
The following work is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree at Northern Illinois University. The work was produced between June 2017 and April 2018. It was presented in an exhibition from April 16, 2018 through April 19, 2018 in the Graduate Gallery 214, Visual Arts Building, Northern Illinois University - DeKalb, Illinois.
List of Work

1. Now on Video Cassette, Iron and VHS clamshell, 8 inches x 4.5 inches x 3.5 inches, 2018
2. Rest, Stop, Pause, Film installation, 4 minuets, 2018
3. What’s Eating Gilbert Grape (1993), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 75 inches x 54 inches, 2017
4. Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1992), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 78 inches x 55 inches, 2018
5. Scream (1996), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 75 inches, 54 inches, 2018
6. Planes, Trains & Automobiles (1987), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 78 inches x 59 inches, 2018
7. Who Framed Roger Rabbit (1988), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 78 inches x 50 inches
8. VIDEO MAGIC, Argon neon sign, 4 inches x 36 inches, 2018
9. Moonstroked (1988), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 78 inches x 100 inches, 2018
10. Video Home System, Argon neon sign, 13 inches x 24 inches, 2018
This paper fulfills the requirements to fully document my One-Person solo
exhibition Video Magic: MFA Exhibition of fine art discussing care-taking,
memory, and nostalgia through installation, film, and material.

Artist Statement

I excavate material from VHS cassettes discussing the human body, the human nervous
system, nostalgia, and memory. My work examines the process of coping and caregiving
for a parent’s illness from a young age to adulthood. By quilting from VHS magnetic
tape, neon lights, installations, and videos; I recall a time of my life when my mother was
not suffering from multiple sclerosis, and was running a video store in the early 1990s.
My series, Video Magic, reflects upon the empathetic idea of what and how something
can be cared for, and how to extend the life of something; whether it be a person or a
VHS cassette.

Techniques and Process

Materiality is the heart of Video Magic. By puling inspiration from items of video store
culture of the 1990s, I use the magnetic film from VHS cassettes, CRT televisions, VCRs,
VHS clamshell cases, films from the 1980’s and 1990’s, television wall mounts, and neon signs. These materials function to create an environment revolving around care-taking, memory, and nostalgia and are metaphors for the human body, popular culture, and my personal narrative. I see the VHS cassette tape as a perfect correlation to the human nervous system. Inside the VHS cassette tape is a working channel of mechanics that holds the plot of the film, images, and sound in a magnetic tape. Over time and use the magnetic tape deteriorates and becomes ineffective, this process holds a strong metaphor to my mother’s illness of multiple sclerosis. Like the VHS, my mother’s body attacks its self and the myelin protecting her nerves; her nerves deteriorates and her body becomes ineffective. The VHS cassette’s materiality holds more connection than to my personal narrative. Video Magic discusses how memory and nostalgia are a means of comfort. I utilize how films become a comfort item - for example, when we the same movies over again when you are sick, sad, or lonely. Using this philosophy, the choices of the films that I make into quilts, the VHS cassette is transformed into a tangible item of comfort. The memory of the film is cut and rearranged, but not lost or forgotten. Similarly, the other items I have curated, CRT televisions, VCRs, TV mounts, and VHS clamshell cases, all possess that tangible idea of comfort. These items were fast growing, expensive, and in high demand, and now twenty years latter they are an archaic technology and an inconvenience to most homes. However once the item is memorialized in the gallery, these items become emotionally valuable again. These ready-made sculptures offers the viewer a chance to review their own experiences and bake in the 1990’s nostalgia. Neon signs are used to attract patrons to into a business. By using neon signs in Video Magic I
was able to mimic the idea of attraction into the gallery. The showy, blue lighting that is emitted from the signage creates a blanket that falls upon both the artwork and the viewer.

**Historical and Contemporary References**

Contemporary artist, Maggie Lee¹ makes works about her mother’s sudden death; Lee creates work through installation sculptures and a film titled, *Mommy* (2015). In an interview post-screening of *Mommy* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Lee describes her installations as “sculptures and alters” for each one of her family members. She also discusses how through the act of people visiting her mother’s sculpture she is telling her mother that she is “okay” and surviving as an artist, something her mother was concerned about. The gallery space offers her the availability for the viewer to pay tribute to her mother and family. Maggie Lee makes amazing and powerful work steaming from her personal narrative, and allows many access points for the viewer to make their own connections. By using popular culture and 1990’s nostalgia she connects to viewers of her childhood and any previous generation that interacted with the children from the 1980’s to the early 2000’s. Although illness and death take many shapes and forms, grieving and caring for a loved one can be shared with a wide audience. By making connections to Maggie Lee’s work I also allow multiple access points to *Video Magic* for my viewer.

offer popular culture and nostalgia from the material that I use for the many people that may not be familiar with multiple sclerosis, or the specific narrative of caring for my mother.

In 1993, Douglas Gordon created, *24 Hour Psycho*. Gordon slowed down the film to play at two frames a second, which made the duration of the film play for 24 hours rather than it’s intended rate. Gordon played with the technology of how films run (24 frames a second), as well as used appropriation of popular culture. The set of rules Douglas Gordon set for himself when working with film, and using the history and function of film, influenced the rules that I had set for myself in *Rest, Stop, Pause*. He uses how film runs at 24 frames a second as a pun, and transforms the number to act as a rule. His rules extend to how he appropriates the film *Psycho* (1960) by only manipulating the film by altering how it plays from the original intention, and not manipulating any of the imagery further than that process.

Nam June Paik creates installations and films that utilize CRT televisions and neon lights. He was influenced by the tracking of the televisions and used audience interaction and participation in his work. In *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, 1995, he blended television and neon light; both of these technologies are directed from the light and pattern that they emit. In *Video Magic* I curate patterns from

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static and tracking from the CRT televisions in *Rest, Stop, Pause*. These patterns are also mimicked in the cross hatching patterns in the six quilts.

**Philosophical and Aesthetic Concepts**

**Quilts**

There are 6 quilts in *Video Magic* that are made from VHS magnetic tape: *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), *Scream* (1996), *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* (1987), *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), *Moonstroked* (1988). The VHS magnetic tape is cut to fit the size of a VHS cassette and created into different values by cross-hatching and assembling them into the quilts. The scale and proportions of the overall quilts are dictated by the sizes of throw blankets and twin and queen-sized blankets. I adhere the pieces of the quilt together with clear adhesive tape in place of a sewing stitch. When I need to adjust the clear tape or the clear tape sticks to the magnetic tape, the magnetic coating is pulled off in the pattern of where the two tapes touched; putting my hand in the deterioration. Each quilt is made from a movie that I remember watching as a child, watching with my mother, or as being landmarks at the video store, *Video Magic*. Drawing other parallels to my personal narratives, my mother suffers from damage to her brain that makes her not understand easily when people talk to her, and she quickly gets over stimulated and her body shuts down. This is also takes form in the VHS
magnetic tape. When a VHS cassette is overplayed information is lost and the magnetic
tape deteriorates, making the cassette unable to play and the content becomes lost. The
six quilts neither practical nor functional with their thin black lines, loose weavings, and
voids of negative space. Yet they are designed as coverings to comfort and protect my
mother, myself, and my memory. As a caregiver, I feel always on my guard to protect my
mother, whether it be making her feel comfortable at home or protecting her from the
how she interacts with the public.

Film

Rest, Stop, Pause is the film installation in Video Magic, constructed from at 13inch CRT
television, a VRC, a tube television wall mount, and digital and analog manipulated film.
The CRT television and VCR were mounted at nine feet with the television mount, and
playing a looping film of an inventory of five second recordings. There were six
recordings of static that was interrupted by the CRT television’s own static while the
cassette was rewinding. I used both analog and digital techniques to make the film. These
decisions were both informed by the challenges of working with old technologies and the
ability to reinsert my perspective of today back into the piece. I digitally recorded the
different patterns of static off of the screen, manipulated them in Adobe After Effects, and
then converted the digital information to a VHS cassette tape. The television is looping
an inventory of static; static is an phenomenon of energy from everything in the world,
but acts as nothing. The function of static is as a placeholder for an event to happen;
change of channel, waiting for an input, of finding a signal. I have felt, my entire life, an
overwhelming sense of waiting, I have waited for my mother’s health to improve, or worsen. The patterns created from the signals trying to come in create beautiful formal studies that mimics the cross hatching patterns in the quilts. The height of the CRT television is uncomfortable to watch, and is very authoritative, resembling television in video store and hospitals. The sound of the different frequencies fill the gallery with a light annoyance that can be easily timed out. When the cassette is done, the function stops and makes a loud sound that draws the attention of the viewer back to the installation. This is a parallel to the events in life that can happen and change every aspect of life moving forward.

Sculpture

Care-taking take possession of a lot of the time, both stressful memories and pleasant memories. Now on Video Cassette reflects on more of the the light-hearted aspects of caregiving. It is a simple gesture of giving the VHS clamshell case a bed to rest on; the dark comedy of Video Magic. The sculpture further rests on a CRT television mount, an unnecessary device support support the weight of the sculpture.

Neons

I had neon signs fabricated for the exhibition, Video Magic. One reads “VIDEO MAGIC” and the other a VHS cassette tape of my design. I choose to have the neon signs fabricated in blue because of that was one of the colors that the sign was at the video store, Video Magic, and to mimic the blue light from CRT televisions before and after
you play a film. The intent of the blue light fills the gallery space as the CRT television light blankets the room. Neon Signs are historically flashy, Las Vegas has made a national attraction of their overdone use of the neon light, and even have a morgue for broken neon signs. The video store Video Magic was no exception to this rule. It had a generic neon sign that read “VIDEO STORE”, and the large letter on the pediment of the building that the staff could never remember to turn off at night. Video Magic was blocks away from my house and my older sister and I would walk there after school or after the baby sitter’s house. Those lights would give me that overwhelming sense of home; like when coming home from a trip, and the last five minutes of the trip you feel the safe in a geological blanket of comfort tucking you in. Even to this day, twenty years after the closing of the store, I still feel that way when I drive by that area.
VIDEO MAGIC
REBECCA GRIFFITH

MFA Thesis Exhibition
NIU Jack Arends Art Building
Gallery 214
April 16 - 20

Closing Reception:
Thursday, April 19
6 - 9 P.M.
Video Magic, installation view
Video Magic, installation view
Video Magic, installation view
Video Magic, installation view
*Video Magic*, installation view
Video Magic, installation view
Video Magic, installation view
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Now on Video Cassette, Iron and VHS clamshell, 8 inches x 4.5 inches x 3.5 inches, 2018
Now on Video Cassette, Iron and VHS clamshell, detail, 8 inches x 4.5 inches x 3.5 inches, 2018
Rest, Stop, Pause, Film installation, 4 minuets, 2018
What's Eating Gilbert Grape (1993), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape,
75 inches x 54 inches, 2017
What’s Eating Gilbert Grape (1993), detail, VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 75 inches x 54 inches, 2017
Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1992), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 78 inches x 55 inches, 2018
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Scream (1996), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape,
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Scream (1996), detail, VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 75 inches x 54 inches, 2018
Planes, Trains & Automobiles (1987), VHS magnetic tape and adhesive tape, 78 inches x 59 inches, 2018
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