

Partners
Alix Pearlstein
Postmasters Gallery
Jan. 9th - Feb. 6th
by Dilke Blair - 01/19/1999
[art]

"Partners" is a spare exhibition comprised of five color prints (with the umbrella title of "Parallel Play") and one 17 min. tape ("Partners") that plays asynchronously on two video monitors positioned at either end of the gallery. In the video Pearlstein interacts with dozens of individual flattened figures that look like a movie theater standees in a minimal white space. The partner can be anonymous, a recognizable celebrity (like Greg Norman, Calvin Klein, Kate Moss), a dog or cat. Each interaction is about 10 seconds in length and has Pearlstein mouthing short phrases that she overdubs in a silky stage voice: "Good boy, good boy, good boy (while petting a dog), We won, we won (to Greg Norman), Watch me, watch me, watch me (while mimicking a preening model)." The partner is actually a cut-out image from a magazine that dangles from a piece of monofilament in front of the video camera. Video flattens the space and allows Pearlstein, acting in the background and using a monitor as a mirror, to convince the viewer that the partner is life-size. There are enough visual clues to reveal the trick and there is something charming and ingenious about the low-tech technique that reminds one of early video art, before the desktop computer made electronic collage common. Beyond the technique lies irony, honesty and a compelling pathos. The plays evoke the loneliness and isolation behind the fabulousness of our mediated peopleshpere. Pearlstein reveals her (and our) desire for family, friends, romance and sex, competition and victory - she also makes obvious our tacit participation in the manipulations of those desires by consumer culture.

The five photo works are composed like the video but because of the camera's focal depth the cut-out is blurred while Pearlstein is in focus in a "real" background space. The irony of these beautiful and carefully composed pictures is that in the background Pearlstein strives to participate with the Platonic perfection of the blurred magazine reproduction.

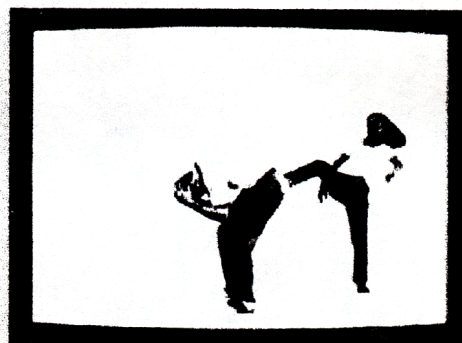
Contained within this small set of objects and images is a convincing and vivid interior world that encompasses fantasy, art, psychology and media by employing means that are formal, funny, sentimental, clever, sexy and dopey. Pearlstein's stylish and distant minimalism is also a loaded and hot humanism.

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Parallel Play, 1998, c-print



Partners, 1998, video still

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