

James Richards

Richards works with an archive of video footage that he scavenges and remixes.

James Richards is in the Upper Galleries from 4-11 August.

The presentation of film and video within art is often highly conventional: the short, looped, monitor-based video and the black box of the longer film projection. The practice of James Richards (born Cardiff, 1983, lives in London), which has the moving image at its core, transcends these constraints by accumulating imagery in a manner that resists completion. Rather, the material of video is treated as a resource for constant manipulation, and the 'work' emerges through the act of continual reconstitution.

Richards also shifts the form of presentation of his work, moving between formats associated with the public realm - the screening, or the live VJ mix - and the suggestively private and devotional form of the mixtape. This approach derives from the processes of archiving and of 'scratch' video. The practice of re-editing VHS footage gained prominence in the 1980s through artists such as George Barber and Gorilla Tapes, whose overtly politicised work was presented as inserts on TV channels, or as an accompaniment to nightclub performances by experimental bands such as Cabaret Voltaire. Re-mixing can explore the possibility of repetition and distortion, and can also respond to external factors such as the beat of music or the rhythm of a superimposed narrative. The archive is constituted by a wealth of media imagery, and can speak of multiple possibilities, but also of the obsessive impulse to collate.

Richards' interest lies in the possibility of the personal amidst this media morass, as well as in the scratch form as a means of layering previous intentions, narratives and recordings, and of returning images to the world. For the viewer the sources - which span the internet, appropriated video archives and original footage - are buried and obscure, but the continually reassembled sequences build on themes of desire and obsession, using the friction between the deconstructed image and

untouched footage. *Voice Hits and Near Misses Compilation* (2007) cuts from a montage of gay porn, theoretical texts and collaged hand gestures, to slowed sequences of hazing frat boys and unconscious children, trance-like loops of TV entertainer Michael Barrymore and night vision footage of a rave or protest. Coupled with prolonged silences and repetitious house music, the work touches on the formation of identity through communality, as well as on the vagaries of personal desire.

For his exhibition at the ICA, Richards presents a new video 'programme' shown on a display screen that heightens the conflict between video as a mass medium and as a bearer of transgressive messages. Shown alongside this work are a series of commemorative blankets, bearing photographic images and simple emblems. This latter group of works, *Untitled Merchandise (Lovers and Dealers)*(2007), depicts lovers and gallerists of the artist Keith Haring, the images cropped to edit out the presence of Haring himself. Commissioned from an American company that produces blankets for families of soldiers, the work is charged not only with the history of the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, but with private and marginal narratives of love and ambition. Richards uses the accumulation and reassembly of imagery as a devotional and elegiac process; the archetypes of the mixtape and of the souvenir create and demonstrate the obsession of the fan, the transformation of the mass archive into a personal one. He proposes an arena of subjectivity distinct from the one bounded by commerce and the media, and in so doing redefines processes of making and showing.

Richard Birkett (for ICA)

<http://ica.org.uk/17434.twl>