
THE BOX

August 1–31 2011

Phyllis Baldino

Absence is Present: *MayJuneJuly, 2011*



Image courtesy of the artist

As she herself acknowledges, Phyllis Baldino creates visual art that rarely acknowledges her personal life, and for that reason among others, her latest series, *Absence is Present*, is a provocative detour. Produced during a creative residency at the Centre d'art-Marnay Art Centre (CAMAC), a retreat about an hour from Paris, the *Absence is Present* video cycle is organized around the following occurrence: "As a result of open-heart surgery last year, I currently have a blind spot near the center of my vision. I had a 'mini-stroke' during surgery, and a small air bubble landed in my visual cortex, of all places.... (t)his new series is about perception more than anything else."

The second part of the title, *MayJuneJuly*, refers to the summer months during which she made consecutive journeys to Claude Monet's gardens in Giverny. (Another work in the *Absence is Present* series, *gone on gone*, 2010, was shot in the Botanical Garden in Marnay-sur-Seine, near CAMAC.) One of France's preeminent cultural heritage sites, Monet's gardens have become central to the narrative in which he would become Impressionism's supreme painter of nature. Cultivated from the middle-1880s to his death in 1926, Monet's gardens were restored and opened to the public in 1980 and draw tourists from around the world during the seven months each year they're operational.

Drawing directly from her summer visits to Giverny, Baldino's *MayJuneJuly* video triptych alternates two screens of solid color fields with one screen of hand-held live action imagery, all three shifting non-systemically among left, right, and center as the piece progresses. But random as the shifting might seem, various logics do prevail: for example, when there's imagery on the left, it's from May, when in the center, it's from June, and when on the right, it's from July. The changing color selections also adhere to subtle expressive decisions, such as having the color that displaces the live action imagery be identical to that of the flora of Baldino's garden footage.

Those formal decisions remain more deeply embedded in the structure of the piece than a single more pronounced visual intervention Baldino makes within her live imagery, and that's to simulate the "blind spot" her vision now experiences after her open-heart surgery. Post-produced as a special effect, Baldino visualizes it as a wispy astral presence, a drifting orb, moving deftly according to where she's directing her gaze (or, rather, the gaze of her camera lens). This clouded vision, trained on the living legacy of Monet, summons in turn a later moment in the painter's valorized narrative, when his eyesight had become deformed by cataracts, a "deformation" that would become literally applied in his glorious late works.

Informed and moved by the legacy of Monet though she is, Baldino is out to produce less a commentary on art history than an inquiry into how her visual capabilities have altered how she looks and sees. Among what she witnesses in abundance in Giverny are images of other people seeing, which for them takes the form of filming themselves and their friends, the default condition of tourist or cultural heritage sites whereby an attraction can't be said to have been experienced directly unless there's photographic documentation of it. Using only ambient sound—overheard conversations, mainly—Baldino renders Giverny as a bucolic enclave inevitably experienced via filters, whether it's an errancy of natural vision or the deflating lens of the camera. Her *MayJuneJuly* triptych does advance a light-handed commentary on the ways of the tourist, but it's made all the more remarkable by offering an exceptionally lyrical articulation of how the world as she now finds it has changed.

Phyllis Baldino (b. 1956) lives and works in Brooklyn. She received a BFA in sculpture from the Hartford Art School, CT. She's had one-person shows at the Contemporary Art Center (Cincinnati), Franklin Art Works (Minneapolis), Southern Exposure Gallery (San Francisco), and Sue Spaid Fine Art (Los Angeles), among others. Her work has been shown in museums, galleries, and exhibitions worldwide, including Teverina Fine Art (Cortona, Italy), Wiels (Brussels), P.S. 1/MoMA, Ke Center for the Contemporary Arts (Shanghai), and elsewhere. Her work is distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix. Visit phyllisbaldino.com for more information.

Absent is Present: MayJuneJuly was made with the support of the Wexner Center's Film/Video Studio Program.

Bill Horrigan, Curator at Large

Phyllis Baldino

Absence is Present: MayJuneJuly, 2011

(27 mins., 15 secs., video)

Wexner Center for the Arts

The Ohio State University

WWW.WEXARTS.ORG / (614) 292-3535