



RAY RAPP
NEW YORK

Like Eadweard Muybridge, Ray Rapp is interested in perception and movement. His recent exhibition featured a number of installations and video-sculptures that demonstrate his command of space, images, and technology [Black and White Gallery; November 21—December 20, 2008]. *I Spy*, 2008, begins with video recordings of the everyday actions of people performing such twenty-first century mundane tasks as shopping, exercising, dancing, and playing. He then assembles these scenarios into sculptural installations, presenting them on small, casing-free LCD screens. Colorful extension cords link the disassembled hardware. Splayed all over the gallery walls, floor, and ceiling, they transform the video-installation into a technological wall drawing.

I Spy's point of departure is the 1950s English children's game wherein players get points for identifying people and places in everyday life. While Rapp begins with the premise, "I spy a woman jogging..." he transforms the game into a creative display of accumulation. His imagery is often location-specific. Thus, for this presentation, he shot footage in and around his Brooklyn neighborhood. Using a technique derived from Rotoscoping, Rapp removes the background around the figures and replaces it with fields of bright color. He then reanimates the sequence of images, creating a flickering effect. The figures now move in front of a background of pulsating color. They are often silhouetted, and presented as flat bright colors with differing transparencies. As one movement sequences into the next action, Rapp allows colors to intersect, creating overlaps of color and shape.

In *daisyChain*, 2008, a lime green extension cord connects eight DVD players to steel electrical boxes, creating an oval that spans the gallery wall from floor to ceiling. Smaller LCD monitors are also plugged into the outlets and positioned in the space created by the extension cord, forming a second oval. The images float across each monitor, creating the illusion that they are moving from one to another while simultaneously moving clockwise and counterclockwise along the oval. The mesmerizing work cycles indefinitely. Like *daisyChain*, *spinners*, 2008, and *Greenfield*, 2008, move

from the wall into the gallery's physical space, which they deftly command. Not only is the black coiled extension cord connecting the DVD players in *spinners* an integral part of the work, but the conduit extends from the ceiling to the wall, making a track through which the wires travel. That track becomes a metal maze that invokes minimal sculpture. Each character in the animation—a generic worker—spins like a bicycle wheel, stops, and then spins again. The work's structure and location, which directs our movement, parallels this dizzying effect.

Rapp's work is also loaded with art historical references, and he uses technology to abstract the known and transform it into something new. *billDescendsStaircase*, 2008, is a case in point. While the references to Duchamp are obvious, Rapp also cites Muybridge's *Nude Descending the Staircase*, 1887, as his inspiration. In *billDescendsStaircase*, eight LCD monitors are configured as stairs moving out into the space from the gallery wall. Against a green background, *bill* moves from the top monitor to the bottom, as if walking down a set of stairs. The video was shot both from the front and the top, allowing two simultaneous views of the action. The figure is in suspended animation, forever moving down the stairs. Not only is *billDescendsStaircase* a visually compelling work, it is a technological feat needing a DVD controller to synchronize the image sequence.

In an installation such as *I Spy*, individual pieces play off each other and work together to enrich the experience. Rapp provides a key to the imagery in the print *peopleInMotion*, 2008. Here, individual frames from the forty-nine animations become a character index, tracing the disparate activities that are contained within his game. Spying a young girl acting, or a man in a suit, or even a crossing guard is less the point than understanding how Rapp has recontextualized their activities and turned mundane actions into stimulating visual experiences, creating an environment of technology and play.

—Jody Zellen