

Anna Jermolaewa at Johann Koenig.

From: Art in America | Date: 6/1/2003 | Author: Trainor, James

Anna Jermolaewa is not exactly gun-shy. In her two-screen video *Shooting* (2001)--one of four video loops in her first solo show at Johann Koenig--the artist is seen coolly aiming an automatic pistol in what looks like an underground firing range. Firearms and video seem somehow made for each other, and Jermolaewa is hardly the first artist to indulge in a bit of onscreen gunplay. In 1970, Chris Burden notoriously asked a friend to shoot him in the presence of both audience and video camera, and a year later, Marina Abramovic placed a gun, bullets, knives and other lethal implements on a table, daring passersby to use them on her.

But while her work has the spare, unedited directness of early '70s video art, Jermolaewa forgoes such masochism, setting her sights instead, quite literally, on her audience and the apparatus that records her actions. One monitor shows the artist--sporting modish protective ear and eyewear--staring down the barrel of a Glock 9mm pointed at the viewer. Another monitor, positioned perpendicular to the first, shows the doomed video camera. When she eventually squeezes off a round, her image instantly disappears in a swirl of TV snow--corroborated by the uninterrupted image on the second monitor-- since the camera has been terminally plugged with lead.

This focus on the dislocated point of view--we as an audience are both victim and witness--is not all that Jermolaewa shares with her '70s forebears. Like such video pioneers as Peter Campus, she also uses the medium to explore fundamental binary relationships. In another short and sweet loop, *On/Off* (1999), a reasonably erect penis shot in extreme close-up is seen entering the frame from the right and dutifully flipping a light switch on and off.

As in *Shooting*, the consummating act is partly observed and partly inferred, since the task-oriented phallus can only be viewed when the light is on, after having successfully nudged the switch into the "up" position. In its endless, Sisyphean cycle of penetration and withdrawal from the screen, the organ functions as the bluntest of tools, demonstrating with a comically mindless obedience the most basic oppositional dualities: on/off, up/down, in/out, seen/not seen.

Although the other two videos in Jermolaewa's quartet are not nearly as succinct or successful in communicating her obvious visual wit--one loop concerns a purring housecat while the other con templates the wheezing sounds produced by a rubber monkey hand puppet--one suspects that this young Russian-born artist living in Vienna has plenty of deadpan experiments yet to conduct.