

ARTFORUM

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Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn

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For their second New York show, Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn exhibited four videos, three dated 2008. This year's Whitney Biennial saw them widely praised as well, making for an annus pretty mirabilis. Industriousness is apparently their M.O. In key ways, it's also their subject. The duo continues to develop visions of citizenship and cooperation set in wastelands where concrete and curtain-wall, car batteries and plastic jugs remain, while the lifestyle of which such things are symptoms has collapsed. Far from marking nature/culture oppositions, civilization's random leftovers—power cables, shopping carts, seedpods, roadkill, pee—have been leveled into a new economy. Everything from bathing to watching television now transpires as communal labor. Thus the four works on view, while discrete, unfold as discontinuous linked narratives.

The centerpiece was *All Together Now*, 2008, shot in LA's swank Standard Hotel and along the sunstruck ditch that imprisons the Los Angeles River, with interludes in an underground laboratory and at the beach. Through these locations move three groups—teams, subspecies, or improvised families—each of which finds parallels in the other videos.

The lab in *All Together Now* is staffed by blue-hooded mutants. Busily they break down yard-sale furniture, monitor surveillance data, and operate what might be a water distillery. Faceless and speechless, they seem peaceable and organized, unlike the orange-garbed drones in *Masters of None*, 2006. The latter clan clings to domesticity. They live in a bungalow, and their hoods sport crude facial features drawn with Magic Marker. They play charades and gobble popcorn. But their rapport is problematic, and when they can't decipher one's charade (the frustrated mime is played by Kahn with the mantic-sexy desperation that is her specialty), she drops dead. They compost her.

Back in *All Together Now*, a cherubic toddler and a prepubescent girl silently build sand castles. Their quasi-counterparts appear, in *Nature Demo*, 2008, as Dodge and Kahn basically playing themselves (a departure for Dodge, who is usually filming); they, too, explore the riverbed, debating how to pitch camp. Like the children—except in possession of language, and therefore prone to bickering—they seem to be homeless but are dealing with it. Meanwhile the Standard Hotel squatters look out the window at desolate downtown, hot-wire appliances, and venture out to harvest weeds. One is a sylphlike boy. The others (Kahn with poets Eileen Myles and Amy Gerstler) are grossly sunburned, gnomish androgynes. They, too, work harmoniously and do not talk—whereas Lois, in *I See You Man*, 2008, does nothing but. She reprises Kahn's signature character, a circuits-fried free spirit who converses expansively, combatively, with an unseen cameraman (Dodge). She, too, is at the beach. "I think you're really strong, man!" she yells at Dodge-slash-us, her interlocutors. "I'm voting for you, man!" Through the chilly fog, she urges that "it's possible to actually purge yourself of crappy . . . electricity can pass through you . . . you gain psychic powers."

All this might be happening after apocalypse, certainly after empire. Maybe these neoferal foragers and metatribal urchins live so far off-grid that they populate a parallel reality. Dodge and Kahn explore what that family and culture might look like posthistory, postcommunication, postperformance, postgender, postself, postother. On the evidence of their characters, however, "post" in this sense doesn't mean that gender, self, etc. have disappeared—rather that they've morphed beyond recognition. The antidote to general implosion is game-over innocence. Civilization reboots on different terms.

—Frances Richard



Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, *All Together Now*, 2008, still from a color video, 26 minutes 34 seconds.