

ARTFORUM

Stanya Kahn

SUSANNE VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES PROJECTS

6006 Washington Boulevard

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Stanya Kahn's first solo exhibition at this gallery features three thirty- to forty-minute videos that smack of YouTube vernacular: handheld camera; on-camera mic; footage of friends, family, and little kids playing piano. Closer observation reveals masterful application of Eisensteinian editing, with meticulously choreographed sound tracks and threads of epistemological ruminations that indicate a philosophical conscientiousness that's often overlooked in conversations about Kahn's work. Each video canvasses the concerns and coping mechanisms of a contemporary subject who is forging her way through a world in crisis. Before you roll your eyes at the apparent pedantry of it all, consider that each work is peppered with slyly subversive jokes—about butts, blondes, and sex—as well as remarkable personal stories and an impressive stream of eclectic facts about animals, ecology, and health. Kahn's characters are contemporary flaneurs, and each is steadfast on a physical or linguistic *dérive* that takes the viewer through narratives of mortality, trauma, family, and the ethics of civic and ecological responsibility.



Stanya Kahn, *It's Cool, I'm Good*, 2010, still from a color video, 35 minutes 20 seconds.

In *Sandra*, 2009, Kahn's seventy-year-old mother matter-of-factly discusses her own funeral arrangements, her views on the (im) pertinence of religion and politics, her tenure as a shipyard worker, and the lowbrow criminal exploits of an ex. In *Kathy*, 2009, Kahn's close friend contemplates her own motherhood, a recent C-section, fantasies of her narcissistic mother's death, and the gut-wrenching tribulations of the victims whom she treats as a therapist. Kahn fuses the gritty realities of these two videos into an even grittier fiction in *It's Cool, I'm Good*, 2010. Here she physically embodies the elements of abjection and wisdom foretold by the women close to her. Bandaged and bloodied from an unnamed accident, a metaphor for the Sisyphean baggage we all carry with us, the artist ambles through the seductively apocalyptic landscapes of Southern California. She deftly uses humor and language to disarm, navigate, and give form to the yarns we construct to tackle the human condition.

— Micol Hebron

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