

HARRY DODGE AND STANYA KAHN



Harry (Harriet) Dodge: Born 1966 in San Francisco, California; lives in Los Angeles, California. **Stanya Kahn:** Born 1968 in San Francisco, California; lives in Los Angeles, California. A woman in a sundress takes a weed whacker to an overgrown lot; a gentle stoner meets a man with a camera in the desert as they both wait in vain for a rock concert shuttle that never comes; a voyeur lurking in a patch of shrubbery is surprised by a loquacious woman wearing a plastic Viking hat, carrying a wedge of foam-rubber cheese, and daubing an unexplained nosebleed. At first glance the films of Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn seem like lo-fi screwball sketches, thanks to their improvisational skills, Kahn's magnetic performances, and Dodge's keen directorial hand. Their characters have a wistful air and a penchant for stringing anecdotal non sequiturs into unexpectedly poignant narratives. Dodge, who directs and typically shoots the films, is more than a silent partner in the pair's enterprise. Dodge and Kahn imbue the camera's gaze with an improbably vivid sense of personality, at once baring the formal artifice of the cinematic process and translating what might otherwise read like soliloquies by Kahn into revealing dialogues. The more one watches the pair's pieces, the more their subver-

sions of not just the sketch form but also filmmaking itself—and the larger conceptual reasons for these deformations—make themselves apparent.

Dodge and Kahn employ video as a tool to dramatize the longing that underpins interpersonal expression (both functional and dysfunctional), the desire for contact and some sense of personal agency. What at first might seem like random decisions in the works—unorthodox choices for location, wardrobe, and editing—are carefully poised to produce scenarios that flirt with slapstick without diluting their characters' basic humanity. This balancing act is particularly vivid in the pair's *Can't Swallow It, Can't Spit It Out* (2006), which charts the relationship that develops between that logorrheic Valkyrie and her voyeur-cum-documentarian as the two move from confrontation to empathy during the course of an off-kilter *dérive* through Los Angeles. Wandering a largely depopulated city, the woman regales her newfound companion with tales that run from personal reminiscences to insane ramblings (more than a few begin "When I was in hell . . ."), occasionally pausing in their fruitless search for "action" to lament, "You should have been there for that!" By the end, both the cameraperson and the viewer know they have. J.K.

Stills from *Can't Swallow It, Can't Spit It Out*, 2006. Digital video, color, sound; 26 min. Collection of the artists

