

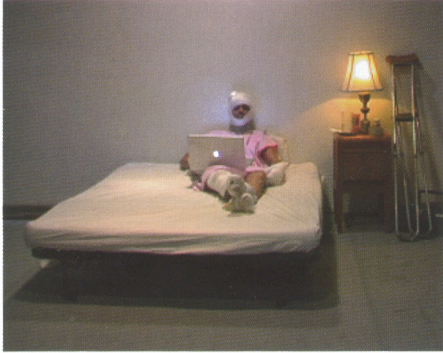
FlashArt

May - June 2010

REVIEWS

STANYA KAHN

SUSANNE VIELMETTER - LOS ANGELES



STANYA KAHN. "It's Cool, I'm Good", 2010. Color Video with Dolby 5.1 Surround Sound, 35 mins 20 secs. Courtesy Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Los Angeles.

Susanne Vielmetter's new gallery in Culver City — just a few blocks away from her previous location but now twice as big — can easily host more than one show at a time. The new space's second offering features two emblematic artists from L.A.: Karl Haendel and Stanya Kahn.

Stanya Kahn's work is imbued with the iconography of Los Angeles: the traits of

the city, its characters, streets, style and pace. Helicopters rumbling in the sky above the heads of family members, varied in their daily lives, immediately evokes the setting of the opening sequence of Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*. In Kahn's videos and in the 35-minute-long new piece *It's Cool, I'm Good* (2010), L.A.'s cinematographic trademarks — palm tree rows, ocean waves crashing on the beach, the sunset, freeways running into the desert or police helicopters flashing spotlights into backyards — are visual vessels in the territory of representation.

On this stage, the idea of trauma is played out: a goofy androgynous character — performed by the artist — is heavily injured for unknown reasons. She cruises the landscape in hospital gown and crutches, her head bandaged and her limbs in casts, speaking her thoughts loudly in a sort of one-way dialogue with a flimsy interlocutor. The two other videos — *Kathy* (2009) and *Sandra* (2009) — also address trauma.

Shot like a documentary movie, the narrative develops through the telling of life's difficult moments: Sandra, Kahn's mother,

recounts the memories of her life's misadventures. Her friend, Kathy, speaks of maternity-related traumatic events. They both give insights into their personal yet universal stories of struggle with sense of humor. Humor is the backbone of the three works: if in *Kathy* and *Sandra* humor is embedded in the charismatic personalities portrayed, in *It's Cool, I'm Good* it is a literary trope that, with jokes and tongue-in-cheek lines, addresses the comedy genre and the grotesque.

La Grande Bouffe, a satirical masterpiece of the grotesque, comes to mind together with the sense of the Theater of the Absurd's estrangement. "Push everything to a state of paroxysm [...]. Create a theater of violence: violently comic, violently dramatic," said Eugène Ionesco referring to the essence of his theater.

It's the mixture of paradox, grief, cynicism and irony that makes the works in this exhibition so poignant.

Sonia Campagnola