

Art in America

The World's Premier Art Magazine

Joanna Malinowska at Canada
Oct, 2006 by David Coggins



Still from *Part II*, 2005 of Joanna Malinowska's video series "In Search of the Miraculous, Continued..." 4 channel video installation

Joanna Malinowska's exhibition "In Search of the Miraculous, Continued ..." (a title borrowed from P.D. Ouspensky's 1949 primer on mysticism) was composed of four short videos on individual monitors. Malinowska's work does not overwhelm you in a dark room, but approaches modestly, from small screens. Images that are alternately mundane and fantastic tell stories that are wistful and funny.

Part I (2006) is the story of an obsession. A pretty woman gathers her overcoat, preparing for a big outing. Her plan, alluded to in sketchy storyboard images interspersed with live footage, involves a paper bag full of oranges. Striding down the streets of Manhattan, the woman is filmed from a low, surreptitious angle. When she approaches the object of her desire, the real-life pianist Piotr Anderszewski, he is leaving a rehearsal at Carnegie Hall. She walks right into him, her bag opens, and the oranges tumble onto 57th Street. As if on cue, Anderszewski (along with other pedestrians) stops to help her, completely unaware of the hidden cameras. It's a profound version of cinema verite, a real-time convergence of cunning and humanity. Desire, reality and improvisation meet in a moment of suspense and delight. The soundtrack of the scene, which barely lasts two minutes, is Anderszewski performing Bach. As the pianist has tellingly said in an interview, "Happiness doesn't come from setting something up, something you plan and achieve. Happiness comes from accidents."

Malinowska does not rely on elaborate narratives: she can create a simple indelible image. In Part II (2005), a stereo sits on a stool in the middle of the snowy Baffin Island in the Canadian arctic, to which distant spot the artist herself traveled (press material claims). It is powered by a small solar panel, and plays a recording by Glenn Gould, also of music by Bach. In making a trip her hero only dreamed of, Malinowska reveals the inherent worth of realizing things considered impossible. (Abandoned there, the stereo has been playing continuously, unless already destroyed by the elements.)

Part III (2006) transpires in a New York subway car. In an ode to John Cage's 4'33", a young Japanese woman enters the car in an elaborate gown and sits behind a miniature piano. As commuters stare at her, alternating between curiosity and indifference, she rides, without playing, for the exact duration of Cage's famous silence. It's an apt update to a performance that once seemingly had the last word.

Malinowska's videos are informed by a fascination with music and performance. Their celebration of private fantasies in the public realm is, in the end, ennobling. The improbable events unfold in real time, then evaporate into minor miracles.