

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

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Mary Lucier

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the online magazine of art and ideas

Meditative Continuity: New Video Works by Mary Lucier

by Hearne Pardee

Mary Lucier: New Installation Works at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.

March 7 to April 20, 2013

514 West 25 Street, between 10th and 11th avenues

New York City, 212-941-0012



Mary Lucier, *Wisconsin Arc*, 2009-2013, Single-channel video installation. Color. Sound. 26:00 (video still)

In "The Painter of Modern Life", Baudelaire envisions a painter of "the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains." He also condemns photography, which for him too easily gratifies the popular desire for images. But Baudelaire's words about the painter could well apply to video artist Mary Lucier, whose latest piece, *Wisconsin Arc*, combines constructions of light and contrapuntal movement with a sympathetic documentation of everyday life. In this highly formalized record of bourgeois recreation, comparable to Georges Seurat's *A*

Sunday on the Grande Jatte, Lucier engages both popular culture and high artistic ideals.

These new videos were made during two years of teaching in Milwaukee. The works unfold progressively in the gallery, beginning with a three-minute flat screen video at the entrance. Like the predella to an altarpiece, this loop, visible from the street, entices viewers with narrative scenes, leading into "Wisconsin Arc", the more ambitious projection in the inner gallery. There's indeed some sense of a chapel in that chamber, with benches before large images of Santiago Calatrava's Milwaukee Art Museum, whose monumental window onto Lake Michigan creates a cathedral-like space, with networks of reflected light.

Shot on a beach near the museum, the more documentary and informal "predella" video, entitled *Beauty and the Beast*, follows a Hmong family group filming one another on the shore, seemingly aware of Lucier's camera

on them: observing and being observed. Lucier implicitly acknowledges this fundamental condition of our public life, while the obvious fact of the family's ethnicity leaves open the question of what social divisions underlie the popular democracy of the beach. As viewers pass into the inner gallery and the more sophisticated recreational context of the art museum, the passage is hung with video stills printed on silk, suspended like prayer flags along the gallery wall. These exemplify the multiple potentials of digital images, including their commercial value. The passage might reference the museum shop with its omnipresent commodification of culture. Like the question of ethnic diversity, the issue of art's complicity in Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" is acknowledged but left open.

These undertones of contemporary media ethnography give way to a starkly formal image in the opening section of *Wisconsin Arc*, a close-up of a glass with ice cubes. Centered hugely in the frame, it creates a lens through which we view the distorted figures of passers-by on a distant walkway. The message implicit in this surrogate eye is the camera's authority, as it imposes itself on the visual process. Its active intervention is only extended in the editing of the next two sections.

If we think in musical terms, the middle section would be the scherzo, with its hyperactive pace, as amateur performers move through the space in front of Calatrava's giant window. Along with this intricately choreographed sequence come layered images of the beach and the lake, dissolving the architectural frame while introducing footage of the family from the "predella" video.



Mary Lucier, *Beauty and the Beast*, 2009-2013,
Single-channel video installation.
Color. Sound. 3:00 (installation view)

The final section is the longest, set to the leisurely pace of a group of walkers. Now down on the beach itself, the camera tracks a panoramic vista as it picks up and follows a man and two women who are carrying their own cameras. The man acknowledges Lucier with a glance before strolling on into what becomes a fugue of layered tracking shots. Sequences of the group overlap with one another and combine with other shots until the initial group re-emerges, approaching us again, and the procession repeats itself. By varying the opacity of the layers, and manipulating the speed of the projection, Lucier treats the people and landscape as visual elements in a larger composition.

Indeed, the sixteen-minute duration of this loop prolongs the simple pleasure of viewing and being viewed into a timeless, meditative continuity. Given our conditioned expectation of quick editing and punchy messages, it comes as a mild surprise each time the group reappears for yet another swing along the beach. For those who recognize the musical accompaniment – the intro to Jerry Butler's "For Your Precious Love" – the continuity extends into the past, into a primeval 'fifties realm, before the

invention of video art.

This attitude towards time distinguishes *Wisconsin Arc* from *Street*, a video by James Nares currently featured at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Nares has recorded passersby in New York in slowed motion and heightened detail, like Lucier, but where Nares emphasizes a sequential movement through space and time, Lucier layers her sequences to create a less linear, more forgiving temporal structure. Like the Soviet experimental filmmaker Dziga Vertov in "Man with a Movie Camera", which concludes on a human eye merged with a camera lens, she integrates time, space, people and technology.

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Mary Lucier

Johnson, Ken. "Art in Review – Mary Lucier: 'New Installation Works'." *The New York Times*, April 11, 2013.

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

Mary Lucier: 'New Installation Works'

By KEN JOHNSON

Published: April 11, 2013

Lennon, Weinberg

514 West 25th Street, Chelsea

Through April 20

Mary Lucier's video projection "Wisconsin Arc," the main attraction of her show, is a beguiling meditation on vision and on video itself as a mirror of perception and consciousness. The three-part 26-minute loop opens with a close-up of a glass of ice water through which you see a distant balustrade and a walkway where people go right and left. The water glass distorts the view, rendering people and the balustrade into curvy, almost abstract forms, and also reversing the field so that pedestrians moving leftward move rightward when seen through the glass. This is about seeing through lenses — of cameras and of eyes.

Part 2 focuses on an atrium in the Milwaukee Art Museum's Quadracci Pavilion, designed by Santiago Calatrava. An expansive window shaped like the upper half of a giant eye looks out onto Lake Michigan; blue sky reflecting on the room's shiny floor completes the window's semi-ocular shape. In blurry, watery silhouettes, people come and go, including jugglers, a unicyclist and, at one point, a lone dancer whose dark body fills in for the pupil of the virtual eye.

In the last and longest segment, three people strolling outdoors on the beach pass by. The camera pivots and follows them as they walk into the distance. Accompanied by the hypnotic sound of New Age-like music, this scene plays over and over in varying degrees of translucency. Thinner, ghostly layers mixed out of phase with more substantial ones hover in the air, like memories of the recent past haunting the present.

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Mary Lucier

“Goings on About Town: Art – Mary Lucier.” *The New Yorker*, March 2013.



THE NEW YORKER | ARTS & CULTURE | EVENTS

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

MARY LUCIER

A gallery in the Santiago Calatrava-designed Milwaukee Art Museum is the setting for a new installation by the pioneering video artist, whose abiding interests are landscape and light. Here, she also turns her attention to water and thresholds. The curvilinear room has a wall of tall windows that look out onto the shore of Lake Michigan. Footage of the dancers inside overlaps with that of people on the beach; all movements are seen in slow motion, which has the effect of making people appear to be acting for the camera, even when they are not, notably a trio out for a walk. The result is a meditation that dissolves the distinctions between interior and exterior, constructed and natural, watcher and watched. Through April 20.

Through April 20

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Mary Lucier

"The Lookout: A Weekly Guide to Shows You Won't Want to Miss." *Art in America*, March 28, 2013.

Art in America

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The Lookout: A Weekly Guide to Shows You Won't Want to Miss

by *aia staff* 03/28/13

With an ever-growing number of galleries scattered around New York, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Where to begin? Here at *A.i.A.*, we are always on the hunt for thought-provoking, clever and memorable shows that stand out in a crowded field. Below is a selection of current shows our team of editors can't stop talking about.



Mary Lucier at Lennon, Weinberg, through Apr. 20

At the heart of Mary Lucier's current show is the spellbinding 26-minute video *Wisconsin Arc* (2009-13). Nearly half of it is devoted to a looping, multiply layered slow-motion clip of three people walking along the shore of Lake Michigan on a gray day, set to a soundtrack based on a loop of a few seconds of a 1950s ballad. You won't want it to end.

"The Lookout" is compiled by *A.i.A.* associate editor Leigh Anne Miller.

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Mary Lucier

Larkin, Corina. "Art Seen – Mary Lucier: 'New Installation Works'." *The Brooklyn Rail*, May, 2013.



MARY LUCIER *New Installation Works*

by Corina Larkin

LENNON, WEINBERG | MARCH 7 – APRIL 20, 2013

Lucier's recent installation is a pared-down, elegant affair, which in its apparent simplicity belies a wealth of layered perceptions. Like Lucier's previous work, these pieces are specific to a place without being wholly documentary and yet still broach the universal. At the gallery entrance, the short video "Beauty and the Beast" (2009 – 13) sets a restrained tone for the installation. The playful interaction of a few young Hmong people walking along the beach, offset by a simple strip of wintry blue Lake Michigan, provokes our initial interest in these people, their relationships, and the space they inhabit.

Further along the narrow walls of the gallery hangs a set of delicate silk panels, which achieve a fluid, airy effect that reinforces the mood of the video. Printed on the white silk are video stills: a scene shot through a water glass full of ice cubes, the expansive arc of the Milwaukee Art Museum's Santiago Calatrava building, quietly joyous images of a teen girl and her friends walking along a windswept beach.

Then there is "Wisconsin Arc" (2012), a 26-minute video in three segments. Filming in the main hall of the Milwaukee Art Museum and at adjacent Bradford Beach, Lucier records these light- and life-filled environments from varying focal distances. The camera initially records through a glass of ice water, the ice in clear focus while in the blurry background a young person on crutches struggles along a pathway. Then comes a sped-up record of staged performances highlighting the physical interaction of various individuals with the museum's particular light and space. Framed by an arc of glass walls and bathed in cool winter light, one person practices an asana; another executes carefree loops on a unicycle.



Mary Lucier, "Wisconsin Arc," 2009-2013. Single-channel video installation, color, sound, 26:00 (video still).
Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.

One cannot help but consider the elemental human desire for expansive movement. The final and most powerful video segment is of three people walking the lakeside beach: a man and two women pass the camera, observing and acknowledging it before walking steadily on toward an unknown destination. Lucier has painstakingly matched the pace of their steps to the slow, insistent beat of the opening bars of Jerry Butler's "For Your Precious Love" (not New-Age music, as some may assume). What follows are multiple iterations of the same footage, not cut in a single repetitive loop but instead built up in layers, wherein the sequence always starts at a different point in time. The narrative slowly accrues and mutates, advancing the characters along the beach until they disappear into the distance. The initial impact of Lucier's not-quite-linear footage is puzzling, even repetitive. But patience is amply rewarded. If the viewer allows the mind to slow to the beating rhythm of footsteps, the work enables meditation on the unknowability of relationships and the passage of time. Who are these people? What is their journey? Is their journey the same as mine? A line from a Stanley Kunitz poem seems apt: "I have walked through many lives, some of them my own."

Moreover, we recognize in Lucier's imagery the universal appeal of a walk on the beach with other people. Who is not compelled by interaction with nature, the primal desire for light, open space, and bracing air? Who does not take note of the passage of time? And who does not, on occasion, try to stop and grasp time, to feel completely and totally alive for a few brief and fleeting moments?