

Cheryl Donegan at Oliver Kamm/5BE

With wit and a stylish economy of means, Cheryl Donegan explored identity, habit and desire in two short new wall-projected video loops at Oliver Kamm/5BE Gallery. Exhibited as they were in two adjacent small rooms with only a heavy fabric curtain separating them, there was some unintended sound overlap between the pieces, which contributed additional, subtle layers of ambiguity to each.

Both works are monologues and both make use of found materials. *Cheryl* presents a quick succession of stills of colorful, cheap toys, novelties and souvenirs, combined with a self-motivational audio testimonial, downloaded from an Internet Christian sales service and spoken by someone named, coincidentally, Cheryl. Cheryl speaks in a perky voice and a vaguely Southern accent as she exhorts and reassures herself with short statements like, "I love being Cheryl! I am a winner! I am excited about the business! I am fired up! I love talking to people! I always know what to say! I am confident in what I do! I am following God's principle of success!" It makes for a powerful, funny, and rather sinister combination of superficially benign words and images.

Old, *Temporary* consists of two segments of about equal duration using two different soundtracks. What we gradually realize we are hearing in the first is Yoko Ono speaking softly and confidently into a tape recorder, while the Beatles rehearse "Revolution" in the background. On screen a young woman, apparently Japanese, wanders with a portable tape recorder around a glitzy mall, sits down at a table, gets up and goes away. The hand-held camera is



Still from Cheryl Donegan's video *Old, Temporary*, 2005, approx. 8 minutes; at Oliver Kamm/5BE.

in constant motion, alternately observing the "Yoko Ono" character and recording her presumed point of view: of the escalators, a burbling fountain and, intermittently, a video monitor replaying some of the same images. The real Ono's whispered, halting voice speaks of trying to break away from an emotional reticence that inhibits intimacy with a lover: "Each time that I express my want for you to you I'm making a fantastic effort, because playing straight is so difficult, so embarrassing. That game of avoiding reality and just making it in a more casual, simple way—I mean, that game is—it's not a game, it's like a bad habit or something." The introspective nature of the monologue correlates with the closed world of the mall, with its self-perpetuating loops of circulating escalators and fountains, not to mention the sterile cycle of consumerism. Meanwhile, the Beatles sing, "You say you want a revolution. . . ." All these elements work together with simple and understated beauty.

In the second part of *Old*,

Temporary, the same woman is shown trying on clothes in a dressing room and at home, to a soundtrack of slow, dreamy music. These scenes are intercut with digitally enhanced multiple exposures of waving pink and white cosmos—flowers that are prettily "psychedelic," like the music. The camera eye moves up from a pile of clothes to, on the wall, a poster-size photograph of the smiling face of a woman, who may be the character we have been following. If so, this is the first time we have directly and frontally encountered her as an individual, and it is as though we are watching her clear-eyed observation of the repetitive, daily activities of her own life.

—Nathan Korman