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TOP TEN

JORDAN STRAFER



Jordan Strafer is a Brooklyn-based artist who works primarily in video. Her art has been featured in galleries and museums throughout the United States and Europe, including Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Red Tracy, Copenhagen; and Housing, New Museum, and SculptureCenter, all in New York. Between 2020 and 2021, she presented the web-based project *No Bag* for Participant Inc, New York. This year, Strafer staged her first solo exhibition, “PUNCHLINE,” at Participant Inc, centering on her 2022 film *PEAK HEAVEN LOVE FOREVER*.

1

CHARLES ATLAS To say that Atlas has made a significant contribution to film and video art would be an understatement. He never stops working, is no-nonsense, is as sharp as a knife and exceptionally stylish. His oeuvre is vast and diverse: He has collaborated with dance and performance legends such as Leigh Bowery, Michael Clark, and Merce Cunningham; created a seemingly infinite number of shorts, features, documentaries, and video installations; and is an award-winning set and costume designer. His work can be

narrative, abstract, formalist, camp—he’s an intuitive lover of beauty who has given us so many masterpieces.



Charles Atlas, *Mrs. Peanut Visits New York*, 1992–99, video, color, sound, 6 minutes 8 seconds.

2

DR. DORSEY ARMSTRONG, *THE BLACK DEATH: THE WORLD'S MOST DEVASTATING PLAGUE* (2016) In this twenty-four-part, three-camera lecture series from thegreat courses.com, Dr. Armstrong appears on a stage outfitted with funereal decor, engaging viewers on topics ranging from “The Epidemiology of the Plague” to “How the Black Death Transformed the World.” My favorite chapter from the program, number fourteen, is titled “Cultural Reactions from Flagellation to Hedonism,” where Dr. Armstrong discusses (as per the episode’s abstract) “choreomania—obsessive ritual dancing.”

3

THE PANIC-ATTACK-AT-THE-BABY-SHOWER SCENE IN TODD HAYNES'S *SAFE* (1995) *Safe* captures the isolation of being gaslighted and the horror of recognizing how truly intolerable society is. At one point in the movie, Carol White—chillingly played by Julianne Moore—attends a baby shower at a tony suburban residence in Southern California. The year is 1987, and the moneyed garishness of Carol's milieu is on full display, from extravagant flower arrangements in sparkling crystal vases and plush gray carpeting to singsongy ladies in pastel polyester-blend dresses and big perms. A low rumbling sound builds as the camera zooms in on Carol, sitting on an ottoman and holding someone else's child in her lap while shaking and hyperventilating. In this quiet but powerful moment, Moore's character embodies the unbearableness of the banal.



Todd Haynes, *Safe*, 1995, 35 mm, color, sound, 119 minutes. Carol White (Julianne Moore).

4

ELLEN CANTOR, *WITHIN HEAVEN AND HELL*, 1996 Because of this video, period sex will always make me think of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). This roughly fifteen-minute work—based on an ill-fated love affair Cantor had with a man she met in Europe—is entirely made up of scenes from Robert Wise’s *The Sound of Music* (1965) and the aforementioned classic of the slasher genre, directed by Tobe Hooper.



Two stills from Ellen Cantor’s *Within Heaven and Hell*, 1996, video, color, sound, 15 minutes 52 seconds.

5

ARISTILDE KIRBY, *DAISY & CATHERINE*² (AURIC PRESS, 2022) Taking in this work is like reading virus code—you have to let yourself become part computer, or alien, or Shakespeare-era teen to get it. Kirby’s writing is also quite visual, as it incorporates a variety of fonts, symbols, and formatting layouts. Her work is post-everything—a kind of tender, concrete love poetry with a unique and intense footnote structure.



Cover of Aristilde Kirby's *Daisy & Catherine*² (Auric Press, 2022).

6

SONIA “SUNNY” JACOBS In 1976, Jacobs and her husband, Jesse Tafero, were wrongfully convicted of murdering two law enforcement officers while resting in their car with their young daughter and son at a traffic stop off a Florida highway. Jacobs and Tafero were eventually sentenced to death. In 1990 Tafero suffered a brutal botched electric-chair execution, which was interrupted and retried three times because smoke and flames were coming out of his head—even after the first jolt, he was still moving and breathing. Jacobs spent more than fifteen years imprisoned on death row, but was finally exonerated in 1992. My parents worked as part of her legal team, and Jacobs and I stay in touch. Since then, she has remarried another person exonerated and freed from death row Peter Pringle, and

they live together on a farm in Ireland, where they run the Sunny Center Foundation for exonerees.



Sonia "Sunny" Jacobs, Tampa, FL, January 19, 2019. Photo: Christian Delfino/New York Times.

7

DR. EVERETT L. SHOSTROM, *THREE APPROACHES TO PSYCHOTHERAPY, I-III* (AKA THE "GLORIA" FILMS, 1965) These recordings, produced by Shostrom, capture three full-length psychotherapy sessions with "Gloria," a thirty-year-old woman. In the first film, titled *Client-Centered Therapy*, she talks to Dr. Carl Rogers; in the second, *Gestalt Therapy*, she meets with Dr. Frederick Perls; and in *Rational-Emotive Therapy*, the last film, she consults with Dr. Albert Ellis. These works were created to help train psychologists in a trio of

distinct psychotherapeutic approaches. The most shocking episode is Perls's: At one point, he repeatedly asks Gloria if she is a little girl, using the tactic to break her down.



Everett L. Shostrom, *Three Approaches to Psychotherapy I, Part 2: Gestalt Therapy with Frederick Perls, M.D., Ph.D.*, 1965, film transferred to digital video, color, sound, 31 minutes 58 seconds.

8

LUTZ BACHER'S ARCHIVE, THE BETTY CENTER, NEW YORK I had the pleasure of visiting this space, located on Manhattan's Upper East Side, and I was blown away—not only by the amount of material that was available, but also by how well organized (I thought) everything was. I particularly enjoyed paging through the binder that contained info on the artist's 1992 sculpture *Big Boy* and which had in-process photos of the work being created, various printed emails, notes, receipts, newspaper clippings, and ads for anatomically correct dolls—with armpit hair, assholes, separated toes, etc.—that are used to interview children in sexual abuse cases.



Screen capture of Lutz Bacher's archive footage *Modules*, 2017–19.

9

SLOWED-DOWN DISCO There is something about slowing down upbeat dance songs that generates a haunting sensuality. I often go to YouTube and test different tracks at half or three-quarter speed to get that woozy feeling. Some of my favorites pieces of music to warp are George McCrae's "You Can Have It All" (1974) and Donna Summer's "State of Independence" (1982) and "Lucky" (1979). Actually, the whole Summer album on which "Lucky" appears, *Bad Girls*, sounds incredible slowed down.



Donna Summer performing “Bad Girls” on ABC’s *The Donna Summer Special*, January 27, 1980. Photo: ABC/Wikicommons.

10

FIRST-EDITION THOTH TAROT DECK (LLEWELLYN PUBLICATIONS, 1969) This deck, a birthday gift from my father, is one of my most prized possessions. The Thoth cards were designed by Aleister Crowley and are illustrated with paintings by Lady Frieda Harris. According to actor Cherry Vanilla, a family friend, one should always use this particular deck for divination, specifically because the image on the Success card appears to have light shining from behind it.



Six of Disks Success card from the Thoth tarot deck (Llewellyn Publications, 1969).

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