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Free, 2002.

HELIDON GJERGJI

JAMES YOOD

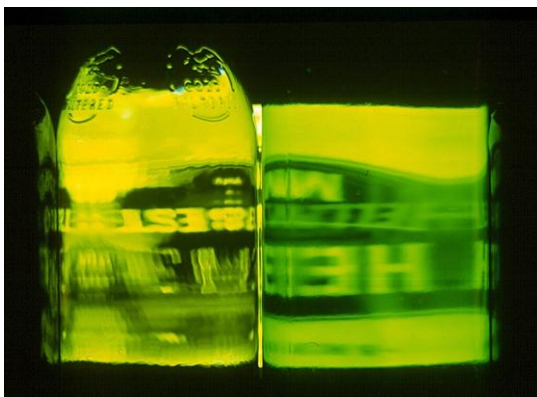
IF painting is colour arranged on a two-dimensional surface, then Helidon Gjergji is a painter. Gjergji makes paintings with televisions. He arranges a group of them, tuned to different stations, and then sets up an additional surface through or upon which we view their somewhat altered or abraded programming. Sometimes he will stretch a gauzy canvas an inch or two in front of the sets, or place rows of them across from sheets of highly reflective silver Mylar, which warp and weave their visual emanations into ceaseless wobbles. Or sometimes he'll reflect the screens in pools of water, or place a textual stencil over them -- anything that reorients and subverts, acknowledging both the formal hypnotic rhythmic sparkle of television and its now altered vestige of communicative relevance.

Gjergji's surfaces disrupt television's promise of stable narration or representation, and offer it as abstract and painterly, as a light show, as ceaseless kinetic pointillism; yet they are somehow still rooted in ubiquity. Almost any kind of set will do, old and battered or crisp and pristine, as long as it projects the restless orgy and visual cacophony of contemporary broadcasting. Gjergji turns televisions on, literally and figuratively, and makes them into integers of flickering abstraction, never-ending colour-field paintings that are always on and never over. (In several works, viewers can change channels if they wish). The accompanying hum of the audio component becomes a kind of soothing babble, and catching stray fragments of sound or even recognizing isolated bits of imagery (and this is harder than it might seem) becomes a shifting of elements that occasionally, and almost arbitrarily, coalesces into snippets of the known.

Everything on television is pretty much the same *because* it is on television. Gjergji grew up in Albania (he later moved to Italy to study art, and then on to more studies in the US, where he lives and works today) and television was for him a literal window on to worlds he could neither easily identify nor access. Instead of concentrating on what is in television, though, Gjergji focuses on what comes out of it; television as projector, as soporific strobe of surprising nuance, with a rich palette and ever-changing visual rhythms. But it would be wrong to reduce his effort to some formal examination of the photics of television. Implied in the assemblages is a dismantling of television: how soap operas and nature documentaries and talking heads and football matches and the war in Iraq and embracing lovers and commercials for hamburgers and the local news and urban comedies and all the rest are unified by their system of presentation – that it's all, well, television. There may be the appearance of an infinite choice, but there's only one system of delivery, and its own pacing and chromatic illumination is homogenous (Gjergji often, but not always, chooses dark spaces for his installations, with the monitors providing the sole source of light).

In his earlier work Gjergji would sometimes paint directly on to the screens, altering their slightly curved rectangularity into other blocky shapes, making them fragmentary if not abstract. In some recent works he's been employing text stencils, so words such as 'FREE' or 'SEXY' or 'HAWAII' are project through, energised by the changing screen beneath them, making text as malleable as image. Gjergji's art is a very attentive dislocation of the seemingly invisible structural dynamics of television, and it provides no small hint that the medium is the message.

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Physio – Tv, 2002.



Ceci est un miroir, 2001.