



David Hoffos - *The People in the Window*

This site-specific intervention in the CASA display window combines and develops some of the illusion techniques that I have been experimenting with for the past 20 years. Over the course of more than 40 installations my work has developed step-by-step from simple, stand-alone film/sculpture pieces into complex, immersive, multi-channel audio-visual environments.

One of the constant pre-conditions for my illusions has been that they happen in the dark (a stand-in for night); the site of fear and solitude, of mystery and dreams. As another pre-condition, my works can only be fully absorbed from within the illusion apparatus, where the ideal viewer – curious, ambulatory, disbelief suspended – experiences first the pleasure of the illusion and then the mechanics of the trick. This program of work implies a set of problems best suited to - and more easily resolved within - the controllable conditions of a darkened gallery space. Recently I have been challenged by the possibility and opportunity of exploring these problems in the more variable, less controllable, more permanent arena of public art.

The People in the Window is a three-channel silent video and mixed media installation, presenting a ghostly illusion of presence and movement in a darkened display window at CASA, Lethbridge's new community arts centre. A bank of three large LED television monitors, set in relief in the blacked-out interior of the display window, cycles through a series of life-sized video portraits. Those figures (represented by 167 non-actors) appear on the vertically-mounted monitors - dissolving one into the other in a randomized three-channel pattern that cycles through seemingly endless combinations of characters. The staggered monitors, set within the shallow stage of the window box, create a rudimentary three-dimensional tableau.

The video portraits were shot in July 2014 at the South Country Fair, Fort Macleod's long-running yearly music and arts festival. I purposely chose a location where people of all ages would be gathered to enjoy leisure time and share a cultural experience. Within this casual and friendly atmosphere I found a diverse group of participants that I hoped would suggest both a tight-knit "family" or sub-culture, and also a cross-section of their larger community. My gallery illusions often have a dark and unsettling presence, but with this group of sun-burned fun-seekers I was aiming for a lighter tone more appropriate to a public setting. The resulting three-dimensional montage of characters is out of place and out of time in the dark window.

Although the piece occupies a relatively small portion of CASA's west-facing facade, it is eye-catching from a distance and energizes the surrounding space with a mildly voyeuristic charge. While this life-sized illusion is viewable in a variety of lighting conditions, the effects are optimized between sunset and sunrise. *The People in the Window* is my first permanent public art project and - for Lethbridge's new community arts centre - could be a beacon for casual passers-by; an unexpected eruption of wonder into the everyday; and a ghostly, shifting, perpetual reminder of summers gone by.