



Soliloquy (Clint) is Candice Breitz's seven-minute deconstruction of *Dirty Harry*.

The essential Clint

Mercer Union show distills essence

Candice Breitz plays with image

PETER GODDARD
VISUAL ARTS CRITIC

At the Cannes Film Festival, the star of stars is Clint Eastwood, who walks the Croisette as if he owned the joint — which he does, in his own way.

Clint never talks, he whispers, *Dirty Harry*-like. He never explains why he does what he does, either as director or actor. He knows the fact that he, Clint Eastwood, does it, should be enough.

Candice Breitz knows it, too. The South African-born video artist now living in New York understands that a Clint Eastwood movie exists only because of Clint Eastwood — or the Eastwood character he's been perfecting pretty much since *Dirty Harry* made him a mega star in 1971.

Soliloquy (Clint), Breitz's seven-minute deconstruction of *Dirty Harry* at Mercer Union, includes only those bits where rogue San Francisco detective, "Dirty" Harry Callaghan, is talking. By excising such trifling interruptions as plot, other actors and San Francisco, Eastwood is left more or less talking to — and about — himself.

Actually, talking is not quite the thing that Eastwood/Callaghan does. "I know what you're thinking," Callaghan tells one bad guy, "Did he fire six shots or only five?" The sound is a lethal whisper. It starts at the back of Eastwood's throat, with each word spit out between clenched teeth. "You've got to ask yourself, 'Do I feel lucky?' Well, do you, punk?"

Soliloquy (Clint) — Breitz has given Jack Nicholson and Sharon Stone the same compressed-to-the-core treatment — cuts to the heart of movie-making technique. For all those action films he made, Eastwood's physicality is one of the less important aspects of many of his performances. Many other actors run, shoot and smooch better. What so distinctively shapes and carries an Eastwood narrative is in the way Eastwood modulates the "Eastwood" voice.

The *Dirty Harry* screenplay — John Milius did some un-credited work on it — is based on the exploits of the "Zodiac Killer," a real serial rapist-murderer, who terrified the Bay area in the '60s. Yet in Breitz's reduction, the reference points aren't missed at all. There's something awful out there — we feel it in Harry's voice and squinty eyes — and something awful has to be done to end it.

For years, many artists — Fastwürms, say — have ravaged commercial filmmaking to hoist Hollywood on its own petard. Yet there are just as many overtly in love with Hollywood. They gut it to see what makes it tick. Only last year, Matthew Suib investigated the trigger-happy western in the *Cocked* show at Mercer Union.

Toronto artist Kristan Horton — his inventive show, "Time Removal Machine" with its Easter Island statues-from-space in the Mercer Union's front gallery — is probably Toronto's most film-addicted artist. His *Dr. Strangelove*, *Dr. Strangelove* series last year consisted of movie still-like photographs based on simple domestic objects used to recreate several of director Stanley Kubrick's scenes. The dominant kitschiness of it all only made the images more wonderful. They opened our eyes to how willing we are to be hoodwinked by Hollywood's gimcrack inventions.

There's the same vibe with Horton's sculpture, *Rolo* — what could be a frame grab of several toy mini-Sphinxes indulging in some tag-team wrestling — or *Bediba*, a little, black humanoid figure that looks like it was modelled on stop-motion photography from camera pioneer, Eadweard Muybridge.

Horton is scarily talented. For one thing, everything he does seems so easy. *Bediba*, which references *Alien*, is made of foam and moulded clay, but has the finish and heft of soapstone carving.

It's the basic stuff of consumer culture that's at the root of Horton's inspiration, too. Yet his work always connects with some deeper resonances while making startling connections.

Bediba points to the fact that when it comes to moviemaking's most grotesque monsters, our root stems directly from our blind love of Hollywood kitsch, not its artistry. What's frighten-

ing about a Hollywood monster is not its supposed reality. What's frightening is our knowledge that we allow these silly, kitschy things — even a 17-metre-tall, car-stomping kitschy thing — to make us tremble.

Childhood is not far away from Horton's work, which helps explain the power it has over us.

Luis Jacob — who has an installation, *Habitat* at the Art Gallery of Ontario — is also showing at Mercer Union with a new video, *Mirror Ball*, offered in a "peephole" space. The video is pretty, it doesn't last long and it sure beats having to rent *Saturday Night Fever* for the mirror ball moment.

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Just the facts

What: Candice Breitz, Kristan Horton and Luis Jacob at Mercer Union
Where: Mercer Union, 37 Lisgar St.
When: To Dec. 10, Tue-Sat, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.