

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

## ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

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### Summer of video rolls on

At Citygarden and the St. Louis Art Museum, examples of our most popular art form show that shorter usually is better.

BY DAVID BONETTI

Citygarden seems to be an unqualified success. I suspect even more of a success than the Gateway Foundation, its creators, expected.

It always seems packed with people: children frolicking in the water, joggers sweatily jogging through, lovers smooching in the shadow of a tree, groups of strolling adults.

People even seem to look at — and interact with - the 23 works of sculpture on the site.

One of the distinctive features of the park is a video screen that displays an ever-looping video program. The current program of nine short videos, curated by Contemporary Art Museum curator Laura Fried, lasts a little over 57 minutes.

Fried chose engaging, mostly silent works that make a good introduction to the preeminent art medium of our time for a public that might still think that painting rules.

This has been a great summer for St. Louisans interested in learning more about video, thanks to shows at the Contemporary Art Museum (the haunt-



Still from 'Descent' (2000), a video by Catherine Yass

ing, recently closed Chantal Akerman exhibition), at the Kemper Art Museum (the recently closed exhibition of taped artist interviews by Rirkrit Tiravanija) and at the St. Louis Art Museum (the current installation of video star Doug Aitken).

The ongoing video program at Citygarden and a new video installation by Catherine Yass at SLAM, guarantee that the

#### CITYGARDEN VIDEO PROGRAM

**Where** • Citygarden, between Eighth and 10th streets, and Market and Chestnut streets

**When** • 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., through Sept. 30

**How much** • Free

**More info** • [citygardenstl.org](http://citygardenstl.org)

#### CATHERINE YASS: 'DESCENT'

**Where** • St. Louis Art Museum

**When** • 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays; until 9 p.m. Fridays. Through Oct. 25

**How much** • Free

**More info** • 314-721-0072 or [www.slam.org](http://www.slam.org)

summer of video will continue into cooler months.

The Citygarden program is heavy on humor and the absurdity of everyday life: in one, a guitar symphony played by pigeons pecking for food; in another, a tugboat going around in circles.

The slapstick humor of Wood and Harrison's "3 Legged," a video of two men tied together at the leg dodging tennis balls lobbed at them by a machine, is infectious. The spirit of Buster Keaton hovers over this little experiment in nonsense. At just less than four minutes, it is the perfect length for the joke.

Brevity also proves to be the soul of wit in Euan MacDonald's "Three Trucks," in which three "good humor" trucks congregate, their uncoordinated jingles playing together their rinky-dink tunes, an update of Charles Ives' evocation of the sound of overlapping marching bands. Just over two minutes long, it makes its point and gets off the screen.

In the two-minute "Cinopolis," Alex Hubbard shows that it's possible to make an abstract painting in less time than it takes to check your e-mail. Of course, the camera has been speeded up, and the frenetic painter, also reminiscent of a silent-movie comic, uses balloons, pillow feathers and paint as his materials.

Extended length is the enemy of a couple of works here, most flagrantly Laurent Grasso's 12-minute video and animation "Psychokinesis." Grasso would have you imagine that a large black boulder with the indentations and protuberances of a face is levitating into the blue sky. Great. But he repeats the action three times, when once would have been enough.

Sometimes a video requires time to make its point. In "Anything...," Kate Gilmore creates a 12-minute video based on a task: You set yourself a task and then complete it — end of performance.

In Gilmore's case, she seems to be trapped on the ground and aspiring to be someplace higher. She reaches skyward toward the camera positioned above her. No good. So she builds herself a tower out of odds and ends of furniture, which she ties together with a pink rope. She climbs higher, but still no good. Her goal remains out of reach. The charming work — Gilmore has a sunny disposition — is an easy allegory of aspiration and doggedness.

#### **CATHERINE YASS**

At the St. Louis Art Museum, the eight minutes Catherine Yass takes to tell her story is totally justified. It is a foggy day in London town, and Yass slowly lowers a video camera to the ground from a crane erected over a construction site in Lon-

don's Canary Wharf development, Margaret Thatcher's exercise in American-style capitalism.

The camera's descent parallels a skyscraper under construction that occupies a landscape heavily populated with other high-rises.

Yass makes a single intervention that turns her work magical. She plays her tape upside down, so that the viewer isn't sure what's going on. It opens with what appears to be something landing in the fog. In fact, it is the unfinished top of the building, and the landing apparatus is the upward thrusting construction steel.

At first, as the camera moves, it seems to be a tall machine alone in a foggy world. Gradually, the lights of other buildings begin to cut through the fog. Before the camera reaches bottom, it abruptly cuts off.

The slow motion of the camera, the density of the development and the vaporous environment combine to create a sense of dystopia. This is the world of corporate finance, the places that have caused so much pain in people's lives in recent years.

Maybe your first fanciful impression might have been right, that the building is a mammoth infernal machine. William Blake's dark satanic mills have been replaced by Thatcher's dark satanic office buildings.