

Keren Cytter: Thierry Goldberg

[Art in America, May, 2009](#) by [Brian Boucher](#)

Two short video works by Keren Cytter recently on view in New York both feature, typically for this artist, bare interiors and non-actors from whom she draws performances that strike a delicate balance between professional and amateur. In her second New York solo, the young Israeli artist, who lives in Berlin, extended her study of cinematic conventions and how they mediate individual identities.

The show's title, "Les Ruissellements du Diable" (The Devil's Streams), comes from Julio Cortazar's story "Blow-Up," on which the 10-minute title work is based (both videos 2008). It's the same story that inspired Antonioni's film; Cytter's interpretation couldn't be more different. The story's first line is read in voiceover partway through: "It'll never be known how this has to be told, in the first person or in the second, using the third person plural or by continually inventing modes that serve no purpose." Cytter demonstrates this subject confusion through the interchanging identities of a sexy French man and woman who, it is revealed, are imagining each other.

As the video begins, she appears on television, describing a man watching her from the sofa. He masturbates while watching. Even in this, the ultimate solitary activity, his identity dissolves into hers, as the video alternates between his cock and her ecstatic face; she has taken his place on the couch (and smokes while she's jerking off). In a bathroom/darkroom, they each enlarge a photograph of a wintry park, and then meet, nervously, on a bench there, where they narrate their own meeting as it happens, and she rights a bottle of water that he spills. He later realizes that only the photograph (which shows the now empty bench) is real; she, back on screen, reports that she does not exist. The comical incongruity of the Chinese string music on the soundtrack heightens the mood of unreality.

Where *Les Ruissellements* is sexy and tender, the 7-minute, looped *G For Murder* is chilling and darkly funny. Despite its title, it bears scant resemblance to Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder*, in which a jealous husband's perfect plan to murder his cheating wife is twice foiled. In Cytter's video, a man becomes obsessed with his pregnant neighbor and enters her home to kill her, watched by two young men who recall the preppy sociopaths from Michael Haneke's recent film *Funny Games*. According to press materials, these sadists represent the man's conscience; if so, the woman is screwed. Like *A Clockwork Orange*'s Beethoven-loving droogs, the two thugs constantly start and stop a recording of a Chopin piano piece, while brutalizing the man and woman in alternation and chatting among themselves. At one point they bicker over who has the better lines.

The dialogue, which is dubbed slightly out of synch, is subtitled in Japanese, and parts of the story are told via Japanese text, adding a layer of absurdity. Opaque talk, delivered deadpan, abounds: Thug A: "What's she doing here?" Thug B: "She's not doing here." The characters in Cytter's world seem to exist only to play out scenes from movies they remember vaguely and piecemeal. Her vision is so convincing that the viewer gets the deliciously uneasy feeling of being no better off than they are.