

# frieze

## Keren Cytter

The film *Four Seasons* (2009), which forms part of the exhibition 'Domestics' by Berlin-based, Israeli artist Keren Cytter, opens with a neo-noir celebration of late-Hitchcock-meets-1980s-kitsch: a record plays dramatic music by Ferrante & Teicher; thick fake blood drips onto white tiles; snow whirls through the apartment and a lone woman climbs a dark, smoky staircase. Artist Lucy Stein plays the female lead as a wayward Hollywood beauty, clothed in a leopard print dress, teamed with a pink jumper, red lips pouting nonchalantly. 'Excuse me, my name is Lucy, I'm living next door, second floor. I wanted to complain about the music, its stopped now but ...'. Lucy is confronted by a tall naked man, rising out of the bath as bubbles float across his upper thighs. Softcore porn enthusiasts might feel momentarily at home as this scene unfolds, but rather than a fast-track to the act of love, confused, the man starts calling for a woman named Stella.

As the film unravels, conflicting narratives are revealed, switching between the stories of Stella, a tragic tale of heart-break and domestic murder, echoing Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), and Lucy. A voice-over describes the building using its architectural elements as metaphors for human behaviour. Climaxing with a series of spontaneously combusting objects – birthday cake, Christmas tree, record player – *Four Seasons* is a homage to all that is fake, showcasing visual clichés, lo-fi special effects and deadpan delivery. Yet, somehow, Cytter creates a sense of poignancy rather than of cynicism.

Also on display are red ink drawings of a skull and camera and plans of the building *Four Seasons* is set in, accompanied by a text that reads: 'A presentation of images and text which are not related to one another can create a narrative in the viewer's mind.' *Four Seasons* is not purely a deconstruction of the mise-en-scene, a comic pastiche or a cinematic critique. Rather, it forms a complex exploration of perception and memory; layers of language and image create a hierarchy of interpretation that is reliant upon collective and personal cultural signifiers. This is evident in the film *Peacocks* (2009), also displayed along with several diagrammatic drawings. A series of five fragmented chapters explores the memory of a failed sexual relationship through cycles of word play, photographs and poetic cliché, fixating on the physical display of a male character: 'It's your cock, she wants to see your cock. I want you to beg. I want you to cry. I wish you were dead.'

Cytter's work emphasizes only multiple fragmented moments of feeling. As the man in *Four Seasons* explains to Stella, 'I loved you then and I love you.' Stella replies '... you pushed me. Head hit the floor so hard and my skull cracked wide open [...] You broke my back. My knees. My heart.' Clearly he wasn't in love with Stella at that point. Cytter flouts her style clashes – home-movie Hitchcock, lo-fi Hollywood glamour, soap-opera Samuel Beckett, soft-core feminism – manipulating these cultural tools with results that range from the banal to the sublime, from the embarrassingly comic to the vulgarly surreal.

**Kathy Noble**

**About this review**

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By *Kathy Noble*



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