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Break It Down is a presentation of five videos by artists Manuel Saiz, Rachel Scott, and Lyntje Vorsteveld. Collectively, their works use popular music and dance to playfully critique notions of celebrity. The videos use aspects of vulnerability, humility and introspection as vehicles for celebrating the pathetic and strange - characteristics that are often rejected by contemporary culture.

The works in **Break It Down** offer an alternative to the booty, bling and bravado that is prevalent not only on TV and in cinema, but also in my local club or karaoke bar. Lyrics and choreography embrace sexual prowess, wealth and super hero invincibility. While these are not new occurrences in music and dance, they nonetheless continue to shimmy their way into my consciousness and affect the way I think about music's capacity to inspire, entertain and inform.

There is much to be admired in the power of celebrity, the eye-candy offerings of amped up music videos, and the ability for tunes to transform you or me into a dynamo in 3 minutes, 24 seconds. But how can these modes of communication be manipulated to tell a different story? How can a new visual language or aesthetic be explored through the acceptance of weakness rather than the hailing of power?

The videos in this exhibition clear a little room for the far-from-cool parts of life; the instances of embarrassment, irrepressible honesty, and downright pathos we all come to experience. The videos, although different in their tone - some funny, others more sombre - use popular music or dance as a springboard for expressing the not-so-celebrity aspects of life, in all of their significance and awkward allure.

Barbara Hobot, Curator in residence, RENDER

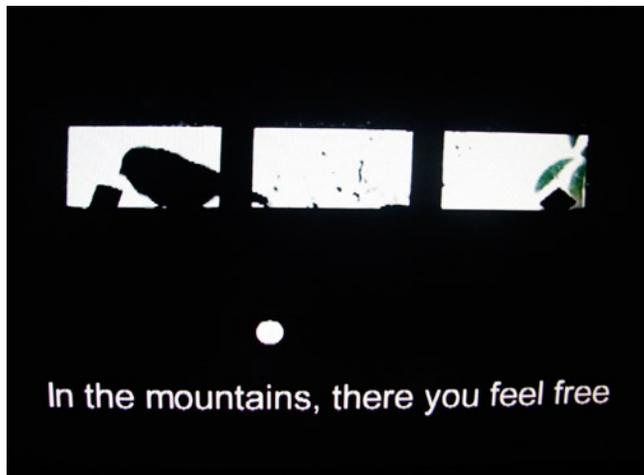
MANUEL SAIZ

The Burial of the Dead (Karaoke Remix), 1999

digital video transferred to dvd , 5:21 minutes. Courtesy of Vtape.

Burial of the Dead (Karaoke Remix) , invites viewers to read along with T.S. Eliot as he orates an excerpt from his 1922 poem, *The Waste Land*.

Words scroll along the bottom of the screen while a karaoke-style bouncing ball guides us through the script. The poem is sombre and sobering, illustrating Eliot' s drab impression of post-WWI society. At first glance, the poem seems out-of-date in its content and use of language, yet Saiz positions the contemporary individual within the landscape of the poem by engaging the viewer on a pop level. The artist's use of a common social tech tool (the bouncing ball) is a clever, current and humorous way of encouraging ironic self-expression, while adding yet another voice to the many perspectives Eliot portrays. This karaoke rendition of the poem also playfully realizes one of the text's primary concerns: the death of high culture by pop culture.



Video still from Manuel Saiz, *The Burial of the Dead (Karaoke Remix)*, 1999. © Manuel Saiz.

Parallel Paradises: Japan, 2007

digital video transferred to dvd, 4:19 minutes. Courtesy of Vtape.

In *Parallel Paradises: Japan*, Saiz explores the social implications of the popular Japanese synchronized dance craze called the Para Para. Performed en masse and to techno-pop music by youth all across the Asian continent, the Para Para is typically enacted in large urban centres and night clubs. Each song has a set of prescribed movements that participants must practice and memorize before finally performing the dance in unison. In contrast, Saiz's piece includes just two dancers in a forest with no musical soundtrack accompanying their movements. With only the sound of the wind stirring branches, and sure feet crushing leaves under each step, the focus is no longer on the assimilating dance craze, but rather on the individual dancers. Without the safety in numbers and



Video still from Manuel Saiz, *Parallel Paradieses: Japan*, 2007. © Manuel Saiz

the comfort of comradeship, the dancers appear vulnerable and silly. Yet beyond this vulnerability is a courage found in their ability to stand alone, contrary to the expectations of not only the Para Para, but perhaps other constructs of social conformity.

Manuel Saiz is a Spanish born, London based artist who has been exhibiting sculptures, photographic prints and videos since the 1980s. His video productions have been shown in many art film and video festivals, such as *Impakt*, Utrecht; *VideoLisboa*, Lisbon; *Videoex*, Zurich; *Int. Kurz Film Festival*, Hamburg; and *Transmediale*, Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include *Private Party*, Keep Out, Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, 2009; *Buffer*, Matadero, Madrid, 2008; *Parallel Universes*, Galeria Moriarty, Madrid, 2008 and *Parallel Paradieses*, Laing Gallery, Newcastle, 2007. Other recent projects include *videoDictionary* and *Art Summer University*, Tate Modern, 2007. Saiz's work, *Specialized Technicians Required: Being Luis Porcar*, received first prize in the main competition of the *Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur*, 2006.

Manuel Saiz is represented by Galeria Moriarty, Madrid and Montevideo, Amsterdam. More information can be found at www.saiz.co.uk.

RACHEL SCOTT

Hot Not, 2006

digital video transferred to dvd, 3:18 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.

Hot Not is a self-critical piece featuring the artist as protagonist in her own version of *Don't Cha* by the seductive pop music group, the Pussycat Dolls. The artist starts off by dancing to the song in a familiar boasting position, but soon feels self-conscious as she catches her reflection. An awkward self-assessment ensues, serving as a bitter contrast to the hyped-up confidence portrayed through the song's lyrics. By showing the viewer an honest scrutiny free from pretense, Scott offers a glimpse at not her physical, but psychological state - a fresh perspective missing from our expectations of celebrity and our perception of what it means to be a confident female.



Video still from Rachel Scott, *Hot Not*, 2006. © Rachel Scott.

I'm waiting for my real life to begin,
2005

digital video transferred to dvd, 4:51 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.

I'm waiting for my real life to begin poses the artist in a humiliating scenario as she exercises with Gwen Stefani's 2004 hit *What You Waiting For?* blaring in her headphones. Although the song is barely audible, Scott manages to breathlessly sing along to the chorus, "Whatcha waiting, whatcha waiting, whatcha waiting for? ...", and quietly joins in to the words, "Tick tock, tick tock ...". The song's lyrics put emphasis on individual strength and a go get 'em attitude, while the artist on a stationary bike alludes to a going-nowhere-fast predicament. Her surroundings are bleak: a garage turned artist's studio that is shared with her father who clearly would like his garage back. His presence in the video is an interruption, an intrusion, while also offering more insight into Scott's living situation. She appears stuck, unable to move forward both literally and metaphorically, the lyrics serving as a mocking condescension. *I'm waiting for my real life to begin* speaks of the social pressure to succeed while acknowledging the unrealistic expectations put on individuals to grow, improve and achieve at a constant rate often suggested by popular culture.

Rachel Scott is a multi-disciplinary Australian artist, who graduated from the Sydney College of the Arts with a Master of Visual Arts in 2005. Since then she has been active in the emerging artist community in Sydney: as an editor for the independent contemporary art journal *runway*, working professionally as a lecturer in the painting department at the Sydney College of the Arts, and contributing to the running of artist-run galleries and curatorial projects. In 2007, Scott was the recipient of the Fauvette Loureiro Travelling Artist Scholarship. Her selected solo exhibitions include *(Don't) beat yourself up about it*, MOP, Sydney 2007; *Strip for me*, Peloton, Sydney, 2007; *Walk the Line*, James Dorahy Project Space, NSW, 2006. Selected group exhibitions include *Face to Face: Portraiture in a digital age*, Newcastle Regional Gallery, NSW, 2008; *between you and me*, Firstdraft Gallery, NSW, 2007; *Panoramas of the Imagination, Videobrasil*, Sao Paulo, 2007; *d/Art/07*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 2007. Her work was featured in the *Art Life* television series on the ABC, a three part documentary on Australian contemporary visual art, and in the *Australian Art Collector* magazine's 'Undiscovered' section (2007).

Video still from Rachel Scott, *I'm waiting for my real life to begin*, 2005. © Rachel Scott.





Video still from Lyntje Vorsteveld, *Senior Soldier*, 2008 © Lyntje Vorsteveld.

LYNTJE VORSTEVELD

Senior Soldier, 2008

3:37 minute digital video. Courtesy of the artist.

Senior Soldier offers an unexpected performance set to the popular rap song, *Crank That* by Soulja Boy Tellem. The piece takes place in a fitness studio where a dancer of an upper-middle age faithfully mimics the choreography assigned to the song as seen in the music video. The song's explicitly sexual, and at times offensive, lyrics pose no threat to our performer, who demonstrates a vulnerability through his openness to dance for an anonymous audience. Misconceptions assigned to aging are addressed in a disarmingly stark style. The perception that an older generation could not possibly enjoy or be in tune with contemporary music, dance, slang, and other current trends is questioned and challenged in Vorsteveld's piece.

Lyntje Vorsteveld is a student at the University of Waterloo, Ontario. Her piece, *Senior Soldier*, was created for a Fine Arts studio course led by assistant professor and artist, Lois Andison. Students were asked to create a performance video based on the research and lectures conducted in class.

BREAK IT DOWN

Videos by Manuel Saiz, Rachel Scott, Lyntje Vorsteveld

February 24 - March 21, 2009

RENDER / University of Waterloo

Cover image: still from Manuel Saiz, *Parallel Paradises: Japan*, 2007. Courtesy of Vtape. © Manuel Saiz. Text copyright of Barbara Hobot

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