

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

As Long As It Lasts, From 9 Screens

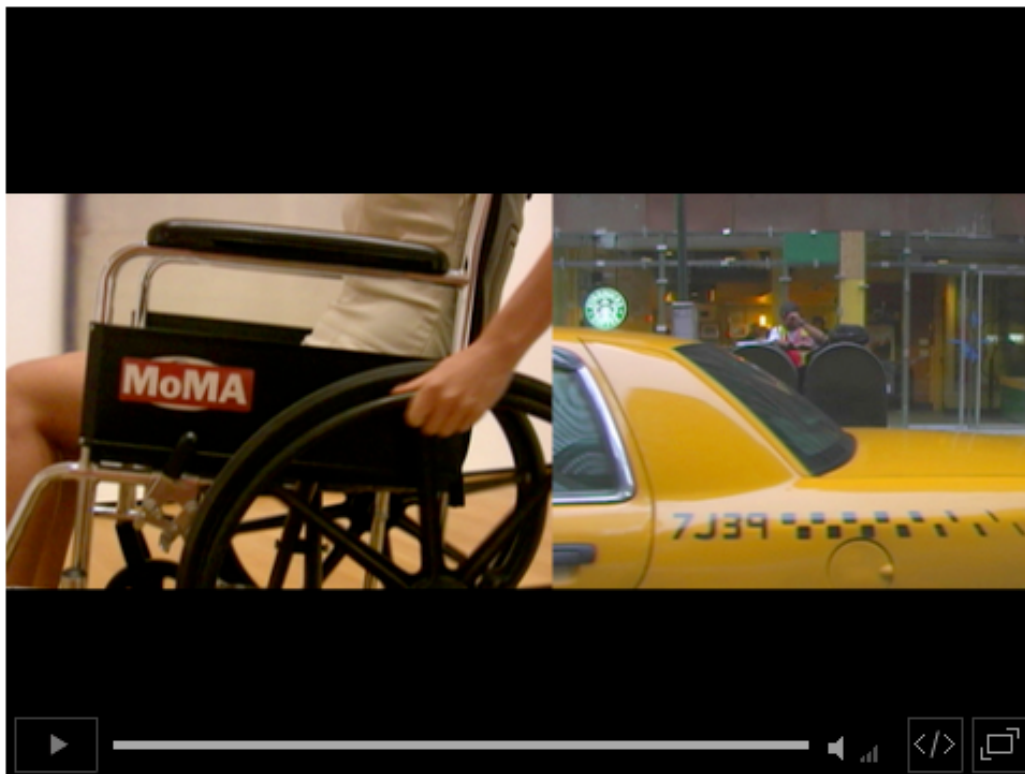
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Museum of Modern Art

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New York



Intrigued by Nicolas Guagnini's involvement with defunct Orchard Gallery's conceptual, non-commercial group exhibitions, performances, and lectures, in Spring 2008 the Museum of Modern Art's Kathy Halbreich invited Guagnini to study and critique MoMA's institutional culture for several months. His curatorial project "9 Screens" redresses some of his concerns: the museum's dearth of programming for young, local artists, the long gestation time for its exhibitions, and a lack of alternative sites for display, among others. Identifying an ancillary site on the wall behind the museum's ticket desk, Guagnini and MoMA commissioned locals Alejandro Cesarco, Union Gaucha Productions (which he co-founded), Bernadette Corporation, [John Pilson](#), and Fia Backström to produce videos that commandeer the site's single, horizontal row of nine video screens. Typically

presenting information about ticket prices and membership deals, "9 Screens" rather utilizes the monitors for multichannel videos, presenting one video by each of the aforementioned artists for a period of three to four weeks each.

Set on a loop, with each shot introduced in the far left monitor before sequentially making its way to the right, Union Gaucha Productions's 220-minute silent digital video *As Long as it Lasts* (2010) switches between two unfolding sequences every few minutes. The first comprises a tracking shot of Madison Avenue from a car's passenger-side seat, beginning at 23rd Street and ending at the Grand Concourse in the Bronx. Travelling north on Madison Avenue from one neighborhood to the next, it bears witness to a shifting city landscape of corporate headquarters, Starbucks, bodegas, but primarily Section 8 housing projects. The array of storefronts, projects, and tenements demonstrates socioeconomic incongruity otherwise invisible in the museum's white cube, while the uniform language of yellow taxis and ads sentimentalizes that incongruity.

The video's second sequence stars a handful of local critics, curators, and artists enacting atypical social situations in the museum's spaces. Transposing loosely choreographed *Days of Our Lives* soap opera melodrama into MoMA's revered painting and sculpture galleries, artist Leigh Ledare and curator-critic Sarina Basta (to name two) portray an attractive if volatile duo. They limply walk or run between galleries; pause in front of Barnett Newman's wide swath of red, *Vir Heroicus Sublimi* (1950-1951), or the pulsating cruciform intersections of Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-1943); and variously slap and cuddle each other while Basta barely suppresses an impulse to laugh. The museum's brand of serious modernism is further emasculated when Mike Smith's "Baby Ikki" shows up in an oversize diaper, standing in stark relief against a Jackson Pollock drip painting. Binkie in mouth, scalloped bonnet donned, he points at the flatness of Pollock's picture plane as if he's going to tinkle on its self-criticality.

Such humorous gestures engage MoMA's permanent collection, and thus the modernist canon, to delightfully funny effect. But though the press release claims that "the result is, among other things, a critical and celebratory vision of the Museum collection the ticket buyers are about to encounter," the video is more celebratory than critical. Transposing slapdash theatrics into the permanent collection that do little to alter or reframe it, *As Long as it Lasts* opts to play with, rather than bite, the hand that feeds it.