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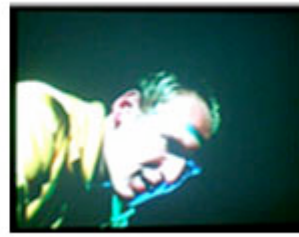
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Pick Up Stick

Video Tussle at Punch

BY [JEN GRAVES](#)



Video stills from Meiro Koizumi's *Art of Awakening*, at Punch Gallery

The following is what transpires in the outstanding nine minutes of Meiro Koizumi's 2005 video *Art of Awakening*. There's a dotted line on the ground spanning across the mouth of a suburban garage to a worktable on one side. On the worktable sits a plump creature made of white plastic bags with cardboard feet dangling over the side. A man enters the frame, and a male voice behind the camera asks him, "Do you want to feel the Freedom of Spirit?" The man does.

The voice instructs him to pick up a long red stick and poke the creature, repeatedly. Three visitors come along and receive the same instruction. Thrown into this scenario, their differing reactions, spliced together, form the action of the video. Their behind-the-camera "leader" gives them no other advice or assistance.

One man is skeptical and self-conscious. After a few minutes, he becomes hysterical, alternating laughing and joking with begging for knowledge in desperate cries of "What? What?" Another man believes he is, indeed, experiencing the Freedom of Spirit. His face assumes the contorted positions of spiritual conversion, all the while sweating profusely. When the men's faces appear in close-up, divorced from the stick and the creature and simply moving frantically and repetitively, they look like they're doing something besides innocently poking a plump plastic creature. Then again, when the camera shows them

innocently poking the plump plastic creature, after a little while, that starts to look less innocent, too.

It is a rare and lovely thing when a work of art elicits urgent laughter in unison with intense disturbance while touching upon topics from sex to pedagogy to religion to puppetry to engineering (inexplicably, the men are wearing silver headbands).

Yoko Ott curated *Tussle in Shorthand*, a show of video work at Punch Gallery that also includes Shawn Patrick Landis's new work, *Two Brothers of the Same Tree*. On one projection, the artist walks out onto a plank and saws it until he falls, hanging himself (by the shirt). In the ensuing moments, he struggles, then rests and dangles, then struggles again, as if he's trying to determine what to do. He finally ratchets the hanging device to cut himself loose. When he falls and disappears at the bottom of the image, he reappears on a facing projection across the room, floating down in a fantasy ending. But I'm more interested when he's up there, trying to figure things out.

For *F.T.A.R.x6*, Hugh Walton repeatedly throws himself against a wall as a human typewriter key; the result is tedious.

Raul Ortega Ayala's struggle is with an office chair. Using formal beauty as his tactic, he captures a man in a black tailored suit hog-tying a white plastic chair. A plane of light straight out of Dutch painting falls into the empty white room. I can't bring myself to care much about the man's struggle, but I like the view. ★