

Vishal Jugdeo

Practice

Video, sculpture, installation, performance,
text, sound



Thought Composition with Model of the World, 2010 — cat. no. 82

Interview with Chloë Flores

CF: There is an obvious performative element in your work, but with it comes a strong aversion to prescribed roles. Why the aversion, and how does that play out in the performance?

VJ: Any time I assign roles in the work, I consider them as provisional and transmutable. The aversion that you mention has to do with my resistance to thinking about relations in the world as fixed and unfree to transform. I engage performativity as a way of unsettling the order of things, embracing the inherent unpredictability and potential volatility of live situations. What attracts me to performance—and I think of most social activity as performance—is the fact that performers are in a continual process of reacting to the “alchemy in the air” at any given moment, whether they act spontaneously or with calculation. In the videos that I’ve exhibited recently, such as *Violent Broadcast* (2010), one way of thinking about the work is as a kind of sublimated power play, in which performers are cast in relation to one another both as characters in a fiction and in terms of positions of domination and submission. When I send the actors the scripts, sometimes only hours before filming, I don’t provide information about the context or setting, just the words they have to say. And when they arrive at the shoot, they have to shape their performances around the situation that has been set up. As we film subsequent scenes, I change the sets, transposing new kinds of realities onto the work. The actors then have to interpret their roles on the fly according to the rules of decorum and rituals of power implied by the new situation, rather than as part of some larger narrative arc. I think that’s why it’s often difficult to pin down an exact sense of “character” in the work, because processes of identification are forever in a state of flux.

CF: Since the props are seemingly static objects, are they also implicated in this state of flux? If not, what roles do the props play?

VJ: I think of the props in the videos as overloaded vessels of signification that occupy leading rather than supporting roles. Objects are treated as physical manifestations of psychological or philosophical meanings. Their pivotal placement in the scenarios, especially as the dialogues touch on vast and complex ideas like injustice or intolerance, signals the dichotomy between the tangible reality of the characters’ surroundings and a certain intangibility of the social order. When objects make their way into the installations, they seem to want to bear the weight of significance; they beg of a viewer, *please take me seriously, consider me something other than what I appear to be . . .*

CF: Or “reappear to be,” since objects from earlier works make guest appearances in other works . . .

VJ: That’s true. In some ways the practice encloses a hidden symbolic order, and I quite consciously cultivate a system of codes that operate only within the work. In part it’s an attraction to private acts of communication, like the little ritualistic signals that lovers make for each other. I often adopt micro-gestures from other artists only temporarily, knowing that only they would be able to read them in the work. I’m interested in how those private forms of

communication extend to the cultural or at least sub-cultural level. It’s only through repetition that rituals or symbols become reinforced, and so the use and reuse of certain objects, images, and faces from project to project follow that logic. It’s a personal cosmology of signs that is offered to the attentive viewer.

CF: And it all comes together in the installations. What can you tell us about these stage sets/installations?

VJ: Earlier on in my practice I discovered an impulse to create enclosures or containments, which I would build in the studio out of wall flats, carpeting, and whatever materials and objects were available. I would literally sit inside them to come up with ideas for artworks. I was influenced quite strongly by the phenomenological and psychological effects of Bruce Nauman’s corridors and Dan Graham’s time-delay chambers, so I started to place video cameras inside, which turned the constructions into seemingly live film sets. I exhibited the pieces as sculptural works, and I consider that series to be quite foundational to my practice. The staging of familiar architecture that began in those works spawned a methodology that I continue to use, in which each work begins as a very simple idea about a type of space.

CF: I recently read an article about your work in which the idea of a collapse between the object and the subject was posited. Would you agree? If so, is this aspect integral to your work, and how do you see this collapse taking place?

VJ: I think what you’re talking about is my tendency to personify and anthropomorphize objects in the work, while simultaneously flattening or objectifying the subjects or characters. Yes, I’d agree with that observation. I do that. I’m not entirely sure why. I think sometimes we have artistic impulses that are not yet completed thoughts, even though they might get there someday. For the time being, I would guess that it has something to do with my interest in object-relations theory, which is a school of psychoanalytic thought that is all about the interpersonal. As I understand it, it proposed that all personal relationships are relationships to objects. I see artistic work as a practice of working through aspects of psychic life, in relation to material things and processes, and so naturally there is a collision of ideas around subjectivity and objectivity, however that manifests itself in the finished work. ■

Born 1979 in Regina, Canada; lives and works in Los Angeles. Jugoedo graduated from Simon Fraser University, Vancouver (BFA, 2003), and the University of California, Los Angeles (MFA, 2007), and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2005. He has exhibited widely, with solo shows at LA><ART, Los Angeles; the Western Front, Vancouver; and Helen Pitt Gallery Artist Run Centre, Vancouver.





Above

***Violent Broadcast*, 2010**

HD video projection on custom screen, color, sound

Video: 8:00 min., 63 × 112 in. (160 × 284.5 cm) screen

Performers Cynthia Bond, Mark Espinoza, and William Wright;

director of photography: AJ Wedding

Courtesy of the artist

Stills and installation view, Las Cienegas Projects, Los Angeles

Opposite

Stills from ***Thought Composition with Model of the World***,
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