

## COLA Essay, Cindy Bernard

Edouard Manet was notorious in his time for modeling the subjects and figures of his paintings on classical masters, but presenting them in the context of contemporary realism. His *Olympia* offers a prime example. In this painting Manet takes Titian's *Venus de Urbina* as his model, but unlike Titian, Manet paints his Venus as a "fallen woman," in an act as much of veneration as it is a violation of his predecessors. Now, in the age of mechanical reproduction, it is interesting to see how this practice is updated in the work of Los Angeles artist Cindy Bernard.

Bernard, in her photo series *Ask the Dust* (1989 –1992), ventured, like a photographic claim jumper, to discover and photograph the exact locations of 21 well known scenes from films spanning the years 1954 to 1974. The photographs maintain exact fidelity to the aspect ratio, camera position and color film stock of the original, but these new images, like the paintings by Manet, update and revise our perception of the originals in subtle ways.

By presenting these movie landscapes devoid of their human drama, Bernard invites the viewer to take part in the narrative of these films, insert themselves into the foreground of these images, and into the drama that should be occurring on screen. Bernard's photo series leaves the viewer asking to what extent is *all* reality seen through the lens of a camera, to what extents are we directed by the memory of films we have seen.

Concurrent with Bernard's artistic production is her long-standing commitment to using art as a tool to instigate social exchange. This is evident in various projects including *sound.* a performance series which brings experimental music to unconventional venues; SASSAS, a support and presenting organization that serves as a catalyst for the creation, presentation, and recognition of experimental art and sound practices, and *soundCommons*, a website built to provide a collaborative forum for sound artists. And by photographing the *sound.* series, Bernard has found a way to integrate her artistic practice into her commitment to art advocacy.

Bernard has made the *sound.* photographs from composites of multiple transparencies, digitally manipulated to highlight attentiveness during and socialization before and after the concert. The photographs borrow the proportion and subject matter of Manet's painting *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* effectively doing to Manet what Manet did to his predecessors. In Manet's painting, a park full of spectators, gathered for a concert is seen from the point of view of the musicians. Bernard's photographs, in contrast, encompass the event as a whole, depicting the performer, audience, and setting in equal degree, as if from the point of view of the producer who would see all these elements as part of a larger whole. Thus these photographs, by capture a heightened scenario that falls somewhere between the documentary and the ideal.

With Bernard's COLA grant she plans to produce a series of photographs of bandshells, which she sees as an architectural sign of the public commons.. Bernard's choice of this subject continues the explorations she began with the photographs from the "*sound.*" series and testified to in SASSAS and *soundCommons*: her desire to promote or portray productive exchanges between performers and their audiences.

–Gabriel Cifarelli