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Transformation in the Land of Enchantment **Works by Isabell Spengler**

**Co-presentation with
FEMINIST ART GALLERY (FAG)**

The work of German artist Isabell Spengler forces a merging of realms, the fantastic and the ordinary. Sometimes it is the characters that are the aliens in our world, navigating urban and pastoral landscapes with their colourful eccentricities; other times it is the environment, bubbling with personality where there should be none. The creatures of *Permanent Residents* adapt to the mundane, their evolved bodies mirroring the chores and errands they perform: a balloon inflates as a vacuum inhales, disco balls spin with the wash cycle. Excitement hides in plain sight, it belongs. The serene *Lantouy* glimpses a secluded grotto where the water breathes bubbles and whispers magic. It is nature from another planet, yet familiar enough, and welcoming.

An interesting counterpoint to *Permanent Residents*, *Psychic Tequila Tarot* explores the space between self and other, and its collapse. In her yacht-sized, trinket-filled car, Leila, a sparkle-lipped nomad in full arcane regalia, cruises around offering passers-by her unique brand of fortune-telling services. Appealing to the spirits (both metaphysical and liquid varieties), she presents her clients with a mirror in place of an answer; she becomes what they want her to be. Critical of Leila's precarious immersion in the public realm, Isis secludes herself in a white, light-filled room of interactive, intuitive screens, delighting in the sole company of an especially frisky canine.



Program:

Permanent Residents, 2005, 9:32

The film *Permanent Residents* combines extreme costume design with a documentary staging of everyday events in the contemporary urban space of Los Angeles.

In compositionally polished framings, an imaginary world unfolds before the viewer, a space in which motifs of popular culture, myths and social fictions reverberate, painterly textures corresponding to each costume and environment.

The combination of an extremely futuristic look on the side of the protagonists and mundane everyday tasks such as cleaning, vacuuming or shopping produces a radical joke that subversively infiltrates the acceptance of the appearance and activities of daily life, already assumed to be accepted.

LINT LENT LAND, 2009, 9:00

The film consists of eight sequences composed of 12 still photos each. Each photo stands for five seconds. The photos show models of landscapes made of artificial materials: wrapping paper, sparklers, kitty litter and such. Perceived as a whole, the photographic image gives the illusion of a natural environment, but when viewed in detail, this illusion crumbles and the synthetic nature of the arrangement becomes apparent. As in the picture, the sound shifts between the illusion of space and an abstract, musical reading. Recognizable sounds of nature (recordings of insects, wind, water and fire) are heavily edited, cut up, repeated, looped, pitched and transposed. The title can be read as a sentence or as a reflection of the film's time structure.

The Natural Life of Mermaids, with Nancy De Holl, Alice Könitz, Jennifer Sindon (Holiday Movies Initiative), 2004, 10:26

Told from the perspective of a nature park ranger, the voice-over has us learn details about the local fish stock and possible presence of mermaids at Lake Havasu, a popular spring break destination for water sports in Arizona.

This introduction is followed by a physical appropriation of the mermaid myth by (through?) the filmmakers, staging themselves as sea creatures. Moving freely through various genres—from National Geographic report to melodrama and music video—the film tells a unique version of its story.

Lantouy, with Daniel Adams, 2006, 6:47

"With *Lantouy* the young German video artist Isabell Spengler pursues a work revolving around the magic perception of the real. The film creates a purely sensuous experience, a place in which the veiled and the unveiled rejoin. The stagnant waters of the Gouffre de Lantouy in the Departement Lot in Southern France form under the gaze of Isabell Spengler a theater of moving matter, in kind of a delicate iridescent explosion." —François Bonenfant, La Cinémathèque Française, Paris, 2007

Transformation in the Land of Enchantment, with Alice Könitz & Corinna Schnitt (ADFA), 2003, 5:37

On vacation in Texas three women find themselves mysteriously transformed. After crossing the Rio Grande, they make contact with the local cowboys.

"*Transformation in the Land of Enchantment*, a Könitz, Schnitt, Spengler collaboration, ... follows the three women (they star in their own film) on a journey into a backwoods Texas trailer park where they are courted by its seedy denizens. Shot on soundless Super-8, the dialogue has been dubbed in by the artists in a hilarious approximation of down-home dialect." —Eric Bluhm, artUS magazine, March–April 2006

Psychic Tequila Tarot, 1998, 24:00

The film *Psychic Tequila Tarot*, which is based on an interactive live performance of the same name, illustrates the problem of conformity and works the philosophy of human will into a radical parable: feminine wish fulfillment as talent and sickness.

Taking the form of an episodic road movie, the fictive autobiography of the self-proclaimed fortune-teller Leila unfolds. Having escaped her all too liberal parental home, Leila—performed by Spengler herself—tries to fill her inner emptiness by projecting the wishes and problems of other people onto herself.

On a trip through California, she invites complete strangers to a free tequila tarot card reading in her car, using her identification with the Other as stranger to find a way to her self, or equally to flee from her self.

This leads to a symbiotic relationship of mutual exploitation. Leila's excessive spiritual as well as corporal devotion opens up the possibility of having her customers' repressed wishes and impulses reflected, while she herself gains an increasingly compressed identity by fulfilling and personifying these wishes. In flashbacks of stories from her childhood, Leila provides a glimpse into the development of her complex ideology.

Isabell Spengler, born in Berlin, studied experimental film at the Universität der Künste in Berlin and at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia. She was a recipient of a DAAD grant and a Eastman Kodak stipend. She currently teaches film at the Universität der Künste in Berlin. Her work, including film, video installation and photography, has recently been exhibited at the Los Angeles Film Forum; Cirrus gallery, Los Angeles; Cerealart, Philadelphia; Taxter & Spengemann, New York; KunstWerke Berlin e.V. - Institute for Contemporary Art; Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin (Berlinale 2007); and at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany. She is represented by arsenal experimental (Berlin) and Vtape (Toronto).