



**CURTIS MITCHELL**  
CLEVELAND

Our shadows, our identities, wane across the bright wall of contemporary culture—the “spectacle” of late capitalist production. But at any time and forever we dance between fires, singed by seduction and death, like extras stumbling through the psycho-geography of a big-budget film set.

Over the past several years, Curtis Mitchell has been setting up visual dialogues in *Personas*, an ongoing series of video installations. In these works, looped video clips from canonical films like *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Godfather* converse with large c-prints laid on gallery floors. At times, an actual object relating to the onscreen images completes Mitchell's circuits of identification, stirring the three-dimensional into an image, crystalizing traces of the self found in shards of well-known images as they break against the discontinuities of lived time and space.

Here, in The Sculpture Center's large self-enclosed gallery, Mitchell presents further variations on these themes with some striking changes [November 7—December 20, 2008]. Projectors placed on the floor in opposite corners fill the room's east and west walls with complementary, archetypal scenes culled from *Pulp Fiction* and *The Godfather*. These are alternately blocked and revealed by what Mitchell calls “monochromes,” bands of solid color pulsing arrhythmically up from the floor and down from the ceiling, palpating the imagery with an uneasy, blinking movement. At times the whole scene is obliterated, but at no point are any faces visible, keeping the celebrity appeal of the material at a certain distance. We recognize Mia and Vincent as they perform their iconic twist around the red-dot center of a dance floor painted to represent a giant vintage RPM vinyl platter. Repeated, however, the clip distills into gestures, approach and retreat, and the winding up of passion's tight springs—a primal scene of courtship. Familiarity gradually spins out, replaced by the shadows of viewers as they move between the projectors, adding a third layer of ambiguous presence to the headless dance and the fibrillation of the monochrome.



**JENNIFER VANDERPOOL**  
CULVER CITY, CA

The second, slower, funereal movement of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*—which Richard Wagner famously nicknamed “The Apotheosis of the Dance”—plays continuously, lending its ponderous gravity to Mitchell's flickering, Plato's cave-like construction. The other wall of the gallery affords quick glimpses of tall tomato plants, a man's white shirt, and a child's overalls, tumbled anxiously together. Here the monochrome is pale green, flapping like an awning in a summer breeze over a brief scene found near the end of *The Godfather*. Don Corleone is dying of a heart attack as he plays with his grandson. Again, we see no faces. No movement even identifies the specific action. The short clip's jerky camera motions convey the onset of decay amid overripe humidity, suggesting the fluid outlines of identity at the beginning and end of life—as opposed to the self-absorption and sexual role-playing of the *Pulp Fiction* scene. In the exhibition as in real life, perhaps, viewers can access only one of these back-to-back perspectives on eros and thanatos at a time.

In the installation, the shadows of visitors move like ranks of midgets and giants against the movie scenes, while the monochromes reflect on their actual feet and faces in the no-man's land between the films. If Mitchell's work here represents a Debordian “détournement,” seizing and redirecting brand names peeled from ubiquitous mass culture, it is also a tribute to the power of its constitutive scenes.

—Douglas Max Utter

The “nostalgia for paradise,” a yearning that Mircea Eliade assigns to both dreams and art, frequently finds its topoi in the garden: the Judeo-Christian Eden; the Chinese Isles inhabited by the Immortals; Roman paintings, such as the impressionistic scene of fruit-trees encircling a room in Livia's villa at Prima Porta; medieval cloister walks; Muslim gardens organically around a central fountain; Monet's compound at Giverny, which conflates Norman and Japanese traditions.

Jennifer Vanderpool's installation *Hysterical Paradise* (2008), provides a contemporary addendum to the August lineage (Bandini Art; November 1—December 2008). A multisensory extravaganza, her fantastical party-hued indoor landscape features patches of “grass,” a fountain, “vines” trailing from the ceiling, mini-towers, a trellis, and a picket fence. What's more, these “vignettes” are punctuated by seven DVD animations that oscillate between imaginary configurations of images of actual waterfalls, mountains, birds, butterflies. The work's exuberant surreality also owes much to Vanderpool's deft play on the uneven shape of the former electrical plant and its slanting floor, which are both subliminally disorienting.

Its pedigree as an idyllic site notwithstanding, Vanderpool's twenty-first-century gardenscape insinuates a darker side. Ingeniously constructed from the detritus of contemporary consumerism—tape, fishing line, discarded pantyhose, Bubble Wrap, Starbucks cup holders, plastic bags, and other odds and ends—the apparently joyous installation adumbrates the peril of reckless consumption. But the artist also couples societal castoffs with permanent mementos—ribbons, trinkets purchased at earlier exhibitions, even her grandmother's old costume jewelry. This potpourri of discards and treasures thus functions as a kind of “conceptual compost heap”—the artist's term—which germinates, if you will, a provocative fantasy.

Spray-painted with splotches of Kandinsky's colors and stenciled with blossoms, plastic tarp o

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Curtis Mitchell, *Pulp*, 2008, video projection, excerpt from Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist); Jennifer Vanderpool, *Hysterical Paradise*, 2008, multimedia installation, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist)