

Art in America

April 2001

Slater Bradley: Still from *JFK Jr.*, 1999, DVD projection; at Team.



Slater Bradley at Team

For his second solo show, titled "Charlatan," 25-year-old Slater Bradley presented four video projections. In one, *The Laurel Tree (Beach)*, 2000, a young woman (the actress Chloë Sevigny) stands on a beach reciting a passage about the dangers of artistic dilettantism from Thomas Mann's story "Tonio Kroeger," as ominous dark clouds gather behind her. A dramatic, moody score (lifted from Jean-Luc Godard's film *Contempt*) plays in the background, highlighting the austere text. It's an effective, beautifully shot piece of footage, even though you have to get over an "isn't-that-Chloë?" moment, which detracts from the impact of Mann's damning words about suffering for one's art.

In another work, *JFK Jr.* (1999), Bradley seems to be expressing disdain for hero worship by surreptitiously videotaping a young girl in the act of placing flowers at an impromptu shrine for John F. Kennedy, Jr. After Kennedy's death, the Tribeca loft building where he lived became a pilgrimage site for thousands who only knew him through the media. At the end of Bradley's voyeuristic video, the girl turns around in surprise to discover that a camera has been following her every move.

Female Gargoyle (2000)

appears to record a real-life suicide situation. We see a close-up shot of a woman's profile. A few moments later the camera pulls back to reveal she's seated on the corner precipice of a tenement building, dangling her leg precariously off the ledge as a light wind blows her reddish hair around her face. Despite the drama of the situation, one notices details such as how the woman's halter top exposes a tattoo on one arm. Running across the top of the video is a caption reading "Amateur Video," obviously meant to evoke that staple of the six-o'clock news: dramatic footage

supplied by a passerby. The fourth piece was a video titled *I Was Rooting For You (Butterfly Catcher At Home)*, 2000, that focused on the collecting habits of an amateur lepidopterist.

These (faux?) vérité videos have been smartly edited to around three minutes each. They last long enough to draw you in, then fade out before you lose interest. Their success lies in the tension they create between a sense of reality and artifice (something they share with the craftily edited fare of "reality-based" TV). In "Charlatan," Bradley examines our widespread acceptance of mass-media manipulation with a compelling combination of cynicism and sensitivity.

—Max Henry