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VISHAL JUGDEO: SURPLUS ROOM

LAXART, LOS ANGELES

10 MAY - 21 JUNE



Vishal Jugdeo's solo debut video installation at LAXART consists of ten vignettes, at times just a voice track playing in darkness and sometimes a full production onscreen. In the video, two men occupy an apartment which is also an artist's studio – the two go about their routines, make art, get together to talk about it, miss each other's intentions and often entirely fail to communicate. The sets and props (now sitting in the viewing room), the dialogue, narratives and camerawork, are doubled, looped and folded into each other as the video progresses. The hybrid style of filmmaking exists somewhere between a soap opera, an absurdist theatre production, an installation of relational aesthetics and a reflection on sculpture.

Jugdeo's presentation has many historical and contemporary precedents. On one hand the work brings to mind Pierre Huyghe's dissection of Hollywood filming methods or Mike Kelley's demented Broadway with its buried trauma, amateur acting and awkward turns of emotion. However, Jugdeo's closest relative is probably the playwright Eugène Ionesco. The dialogue is good absurdist writing with a David Lynch sense of kitschy horror. At one point, standing next to a large lump of wet clay, a character dramatically says, "I am not the one that brought this mess into the living room!" only to hear from his roommate, "I'm not the one who decided this was a living room."

The block of clay is one of many references to artmaking, specifically sculpture. The characters in the film are constantly creating and breaking the definitions of their objects and their surroundings; an open window, for example, is revealed as merely a closet. Two scenes (one shown upside down) involve what may be a gun lumped inside a pink blob. One character says that the object's primary goal is "communication", but that it is also an "aesthetic" object. Loose concepts like aesthetics and place are constantly

placed at odds with the idea of successful communication and logic.

As with a previous solo show by Jugdeo, revealingly called *Video About Sculpture* (at the Western Front, Vancouver, 2005), what seems to be at stake in the video is the assignment of meaning to objects in real time. Objects gain meaning and lose it, and at times a voiceover (presumably the director of the video) instructs the characters – and potentially the viewer, who has all the props there in the viewing room – to grab the objects and act out the scenario. The absurdity creates a disjoint between the uncertain or undefined and universals. "Hurry up and mean something" is said in desperation at one point.

Perhaps what Jugdeo is suggesting is that sculpture, both in its installation and often video manifestations, is a comic enterprise, namely Ionesco's version of comedy. Ionesco thought that the comic is inescapable because it is outside concepts like hope and despair – ideas that require, in his mind, a certain amount of definition. The comic is incapable of possessing this certainty. Jugdeo seems to have this in mind for sculpture; that it is perpetually protean, risking meaning but never achieving it.

Ed Schad

Surplus Room (video still), 2008, sculptural installation with high-definition video projection and 3-channel audio, 8 min, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and LAXART, Los Angeles