

The Green Gallery East presents *Lift: Part 2*, a work by David Robbins

Imagine a work of communication that abjures any hierarchy of media. Instead of a vertical ordering of media or contexts—traditionally, art “above,” entertainment “below”—we encounter a work that exists in multiple, competing, contrasting cultural forms simultaneously. Is such a work, which incorporates art but positions it as one communication form in an expanded field of forms each with its use, to be considered an “artwork” or something else?

David Robbins activates these and related questions in an exhibition that inaugurates The Green Gallery’s new space on Milwaukee’s east side. From January 31 through March 7, three realist paintings of key images from *Lift*, Robbins’ thirty-minute video portrait of personal trainer Joshua Van Schaick, will be displayed at Green Gallery East. The only paintings made from the video, this trio of canvases, executed by assistants, forms a unique, chained identity. Integrated with the paintings is a new video that uses excerpts from a 2006 conversation between Robbins and the trainer to explore whether Van Schaick might himself be considered an artist. A brochure expanding on this question, with a text authored by Robbins, is available gratis to gallery visitors.

During the exhibition *Lift* will be broadcast twice on commercial television, February 14 and 28, on Milwaukee’s WVTM18. Robbins thus transposes a single work into two keys—gallery exhibition and broadcast media. Competing ends of the communication spectrum—television, oil paint—are juxtaposed. “Mass” and “refined” economies, “entertainment” and “art” venues are contrasted while privileging neither.

The strategy extends discoveries Robbins made with his well-known *Ice Cream Social* (1993-2008). “There,” he explains, “I explored different forms—performance, installation, TV pilot, novella, etc—in stages, over many years. *Lift: Part 2* also uses an expanded exhibition model, but with an important difference. I’m now presenting the same work in contradictory forms at the same time. For me it’s the next step.” Additionally, structure and theme now parallel each other, with the expanded exhibition model, which by its nature challenges the definition of “an artwork,” joined to subject matter which challenges our definition of “an artist.”



Lift (2007) is a video portrait of a young man who transformed himself from a hot-tempered, violent adolescent into a compassionate and philosophical personal trainer. Praised by commentators as “a new kind of monument” and “a lovely character study,” *Lift* was published in a DVD edition of 1000. Following the artist’s intentions, copies were distributed to high-school athletic programs and donated to contemporary art museums across the United States—an unprecedented pairing.

Where *Lift* exemplifies Robbins’ notion of High Entertainment, a concept of media that combines entertainment’s accessibility with art’s traditional emphasis on form-discovery, the paintings tap classical concerns. The paintings lend gravity to depictions of a recent social phenomenon—the personal trainer, a symbol of our striving for health and beauty. The trainer, as a social role, focuses our yearning for perfectibility, the myriad problematics of self-image, the desire for self-transformation, the fleeting nature of physical beauty... In these canvases the trainer is shown as meditative, self-conscious, moody... What theater of the mind/body relationship is represented in such images? Is this trainer contemplating ways to enhance the unique energy of each individual? Is he perhaps emburdened by his clients’

need of him? Does compassion vie with a disdain for the vulnerability they've revealed? And what does it mean to bring this agent into art? By creating paintings that showcase this symbol of our hopes for ourselves, is Robbins celebrating or questioning our belief that art, which gives our minds and spirits a workout as nothing else quite can, will train us in a more elevated life?

One of the first artists to investigate the art world's entrance into the culture industry, through his objects, images, installations, and writings, and his introduction of such "non-art" concepts as Concrete Comedy and High Entertainment, David Robbins has been an international influence on contemporary artists for twenty years. Emerging in New York during the 1980s, Robbins pioneered an unflinchingly contemporary attitude that positioned art as another form of entertainment, a line of thought he has since advanced in more than three dozen solo exhibitions with wit, independent spirit, and conceptual rigor. Best known for his works *Talent* (1986), which is included in dozens of private and public collections, and *The Ice Cream Social* (1993-2008), which enjoyed a retrospective treatment at the Musee d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris, Mr. Robbins is also the author of several influential books, most recently *The Velvet Grind: Selected Essays, Interviews, Satires (1983-2005)*, published in 2006 by JRP/Ringier Kunstverlag, Zurich. He has lectured at many leading universities, among them UCLA, MIT, Columbia University, the Art Institute of Chicago, Goldsmith's College, London, and L'ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris. *Lift: Part 2* is Robbins' first exhibition of new works since 2005.

Green Gallery East is located at:

1500 N Farwell Ave
Milwaukee, WI 53202
USA

open to the public:

Thursday & Friday 4-8pm
Saturday & Sunday 2-6pm

online:

www.thegreengallery.biz

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