

DIRECTING COMES NATURALLY TO TERESA O'CONNOR. WHETHER CREATING AN INSTALLATION AS AN ARTIST OR WORKING AS A CURATOR FOR AN EXHIBITION, SHE IS COMFORTABLE ORCHESTRATING THE "BIG PICTURE."

O'Connor utilizes the elements of theater and cinema, producing work that explores and problematizes traditional narrative structures. Skeptical of what passes as "real" on television and other media, she says, "We think we know more about culture through visuals than we actually do," and her experiments with video are an attempt to reveal the artificial as well as the authentic.

In *Bang*, two cowboys on separate television screens participate in a gunfight, scoring points for each death in the style of a video game. The images are choreographed to create a "double-video," where one piece is comprised of two distinct visuals. This work explores the power dynamics of masculinity, the Western genre being one where women are largely excluded or their authority diminished. Like some cultural theorists, O'Connor understands gender as being performative, but she resists labels like "feminist." For her, such categorizations are reductive and ultimately serve to avoid a real engagement with the issues at hand.

Unlike previous pieces where she directed actors, O'Connor currently finds herself both in front of and behind the camera. She plays various characters, assuming male and female identities alike. These characters are linked to her past—everyone from brief acquaintances to family members—but O'Connor maintains they are also archetypes that many viewers can recognize and as such are additionally "very much of the present." "I always see myself as outside of these characters," she says, "and I know that I have connections with parts of all of them, but they're all based on histories of people, conglomerates of people from my past."



The work chronicles the lives of four singers: a forty-something male, a female lounge act and a brother-and-sister duo. Additionally, O'Connor plays the female artist who documents the singers and a type of talk show host who interviews her. The finished product, titled *A Ghost Story*, will ultimately involve several movie elements that play simultaneously on different screens, echoing and building on her earlier work. The soundtrack will include the music of



local band *Sharks and Sailors*, as well as original songs from other area musicians.

O'Connor remarks that her interest in performance has been influenced by the French artist Brice Dellsperger, but watching drag shows when she worked in the night club industry inspired her as well. Questioning gender (its aspects and possibilities) has been a reoccurring theme in her art. She has little tolerance for critics who describe her method as a kind of multiple personality syndrome.

O'Connor claims that female artists who play with gender and identity are typically typecast as exploring the personal psyche, while male artists who do the same are thought of as enacting many different roles, personal and otherwise. She bucks against these arbitrary distinctions: "Historically, there's nothing unusual about dressing as other characters."

O'Connor's work will be on display at the Plush Gallery from May 27th to June 24th in Dallas; she is also the curator of Word!, showing May 19th through June 3rd at the Fotofest Building.

