

ARTFORUM

New York

Neil Goldberg

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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Neil Goldberg says that he aims to capture New York's "neutral" moments in his videos and photographs: everyday events that are "blank," "empty," and consequently "available for projection." His subjects vary from the closely cropped, despondent faces of workers visiting a typically insipid *Salad Bar*, 2006, during lunchtime in midtown, to the even more bewildered expressions of those *Surfacing*, 2010–11, from the subway. Remarkably emotive, the depictions of mostly banal and repetitive incidents in this show—the first exhibition of contemporary video at the Museum of the City of New York—invite us to examine where the stress falls. For instance, in 1993's *She's a Talker*, some eighty gay men employ the title phrase to tell us about their cats, each in two-second snapshots while grooming their friendly feline companions. It may seem like the most cheerful piece on view until one learns from a gallery handout that Goldberg made the work in response to the AIDS-related deaths of his friends.



Neil Goldberg, *Ten Minutes with X02180-A*, 2006, still from a color video, 10 minutes.

Collapsing contrasts between the personal, political, private, and public, Goldberg's varied output is a hymn to the people of New York, who perhaps understand the need for emptiness more than most. The neutral that he embraces at times recalls the one Roland Barthes described in a series of landmark lectures at the Collège de France in 1978—"twinklings" that unravel binary oppositions and can't be categorized (to grossly summarize). It's a lovely and fitting encapsulation of the effervescent yet tentative gestures of people in Coney Island *Describing the Cyclone*, 1998, as well as the flashes of nearly pained contentment on the faces of visitors to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, as they take a moment to whiff an especially charming lilac bush in *Ten Minutes with X02180-A*, 2006.

— Lauren O'Neill-Butler