

ARTFORUM

Critics' Picks

Janet Biggs

MINT MUSEUM UPTOWN AT LEVINE CENTER FOR THE ARTS
500 South Tryon Street
November 5–May 29



Janet Biggs, *Vanishing Point*, 2009, still from a HD video, 10 minutes 32 seconds.

After all the confused pomo ramblings and posturings of the 1980s and '90s, it comes as something of a relief that a number of artists in the millennial years have gone back to classic existential themes. Chief among them is Janet Biggs, whose work documents individuals obsessed with attaining extreme states of being, mainly through athletic pursuits. Deceptively simple, her videos mostly alternate this documentary footage with shots of musicians performing the music heard as the sound track. In *Vanishing Point*, 2009, Leslie Porterfield, the world record holder for motorbike speed, races away as the Addicts Rehabilitation Center Gospel Choir sings work partly composed by Biggs herself. *Duet*, 2010, switches between a young violinist and singer performing an aria from the opera *Lakmé* and footage of the pit crews changing tires on NASCAR vehicles in the middle of a race—particularly apt for the exhibition's home city of Charlotte, North Carolina, perhaps better known as a center for race cars, banking, and commerce than for the arts. And though we don't see the musicians in the otherworldly *Airs Above the Ground*, 2007, their contribution forms an integral part in this collaboration with fourteen-year-old underwater dancer Deanna Mary de Simone, featured in the video.

Of the four works featured in the exhibition, my favorite is *Fade to White*, 2010, which positions the journeying of an Arctic kayaker against a Baroque aria sung by countertenor John Kelly. Both men are depicted alone: the former outdoors in a snowy terrain, the latter in a white studio, his voice projecting his counterpart's inner isolation. Of course, we can't know anything about this melancholy explorer, who he is, what he has lost—only that he is alone in the icy desolation; he has put himself there for a reason that remains private, personal.

— Travis Jeppesen