



Arzabe at Cult by appointment, but hurry

Posted on Monday, April 21 at 2:24pm | By Kenneth Baker



A frame from Miguel Arzabe's projected digital video "Reject Algorithms: Key" (2014)

Limits on space aside, I can't really explain why this review didn't make it into print last Saturday, but the blog gives it a second (though fast-expiring) life. Here goes:

Miguel Arzabe: **Reject Algorithms**: paintings, objects and projected video. By appointment through Wednesday. Cult, 3191 Mission St., S.F. (415) 800-6604, www.cultexhibitions.com.

If the word "gifted" makes any critical sense in the hugger mugger of today's art world, then Miguel Arzabe merits it.

His small show at Cult brings into focus an artist of intense but more than merely egotistic ambition.

During a recent residency at Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, Arzabe found himself assigned a former dance studio as work space. He took that as a prompting to integrate his work as a painter with the video and performance aspects of his output.

His exhibition animates the remnants and record of the thinking and actions he carried on at Montalvo. He shot video of himself making the paintings that hang and lean on the gallery walls. A besmirched drop cloth from his work space also hangs here, as if to corroborate some documentary aspects of the projected video. Arzabe also recreated two dance studio props — wheeled frames stretched with silver Mylar, they function as rippled mirrors.

Documentary was only the beginning of the forethought and editing Arzabe put into his 12-minute palimpsest of a looped video.

He used a green screen and chroma key compositing to create effects of one video stream video interweaving with another. He inserted himself as performer — at times wearing a green body stocking that rendered him invisible to the camera — and jumbled close ups and long shots.

The effect frustrates description because it unspools visually on several levels at once.

The artist's work space and its paraphernalia as subjects go back to the 17th century. They got rejuvenated by Bruce Nauman in the late 60s when, alone in his studio, he put himself through seemingly arbitrary paces on camera, to the point of his own and the viewer's exhaustion.

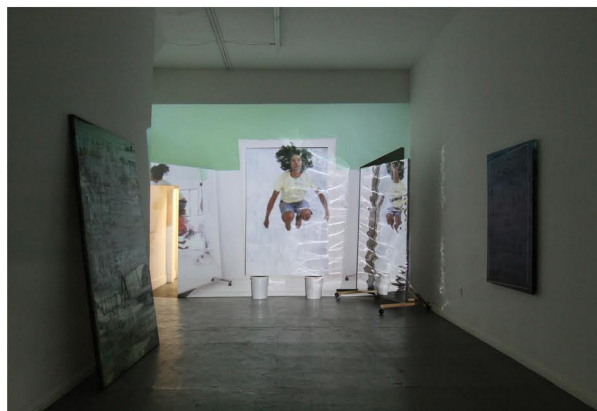
Nauman also reanimated the idea of artwork as a residue of performance that had energized artists from Jackson Pollock to the Gutai group in Japan in the early 1950s and beyond.

Arzabe draws all these and more allusive threads together into a raggedy but visually arresting fabric.

Then the gallery lights go on, the video projection, apart from its tool-noise soundtrack, fades almost completely, and Arzabe's paintings show themselves in several cases to be enviably solid.

The visitor then recognizes Arzabe's video and performance activities as efforts to give abstract painting another life, or discover one hidden, by our neglect, within it.

Only when the lights go down again may visitors notice that Arzabe has made a camera obscura of the room by covering the south-facing street door with green paper and cutting in it a horizontal hole the size and shape of an iPhone. (Think again of the title **Reject the Algorithms**.) The aperture streams on the adjacent wall a blurry but ever-changing picture of Mission Street.



A view of Miguel Arzabe's video "Reject Algorithm: Key" as projected at Cult.