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MY BARBARIAN

11/13/09
[PARTICIPANT INC.](#)
 by sarah valdez



NEW YORK “He’s in. What’s next?” “Looking down at your hands and seeing monsters.” So goes a nonsensical exchange in the video *The Night Epi\$ode Pilot: Purgatorial Curatorial* between artists Malik Gaines, playing a blind chief curator who works in the “sightless context” of sound and sculpture, and Jade Gordon, in the role of a “nightmare curator” who says she plans to wear a suicide bomb to an opening. Projected on a large screen, the piece is one of seven looped segments that constitute the installation “The Night Epi\$ode” (2009). This topical, beautifully produced New York debut by the Los Angeles-based trio My Barbarian sustained a campy sensibility throughout but no overarching plotline. The videos operate in the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd, famously catalyzed by the traumas of World War II. My Barbarian’s trademark lunacy, however, touches on—and provides some wanted relief from—contemporary anxieties over issues such as the recent economic collapse, unemployment, Internet dating, environmental sustainability, healthcare and gay marriage.

Purgatorial Curatorial spoofs—without getting so close to home that any particular person might get his or her hackles up—the praxis of the art world’s select pool of deciders. In this vignette, My Barbarian’s third member, Alejandro Segade, who has a vertical black stripe painted on one eyelid, plays a “curator of interdimensional practices.” The three have an earnest discussion about insane exhibition possibilities that bear just enough resemblance to certain contemporary art to be funny but not enough to constitute a critique: a Japanese duo who once destroyed a whole town, and a woman artist who wrapped herself in marijuana, set herself on fire and got high off of her own burning flesh. “We must get the budget from the education department!” one curator exclaims. Loosely based on Sartre’s *No Exit* and played on a theater-scale screen, *Purgatorial Curatorial* presides over an installation of old televisions on plinths, where other wacky stories unfold.

All members of My Barbarian periodically burst into song, and they do it well. In the segment *Veronika Phoenix*—which like the others is looped on a TV and preceded by opening credits—Gordon wanders outdoors with blood dripping down her face and her throat slit, wearing a diaphanous white dress, singing about a Prius and an SUV. In the hilarious *Yoga Matt*, Segade (playing a character named Matt) takes a yoga class taught by Gordon, who here has lip, brow and nose rings. After the yoga releases noxious toxins and causes oozing boils to overtake his body, a witch doctor (Gaines) shows up wearing pants decorated with Obama’s visage to cure Segade. At a time when right-wing Tea Party protestors proffer blatantly racist portrayals of Obama as a witch doctor, it’s quite nice to see My Barbarian making the association seem as silly as it is.

Photo: My Barbarian: *The Night Epi\$ose Pilot: Purgatorial Curatorial*, 2009, single-channel video, 15 minutes; at Participant Inc.

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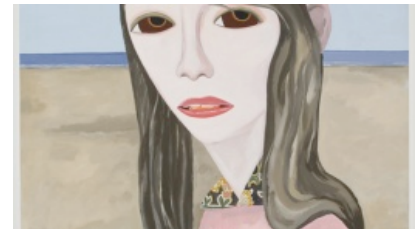
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[Brian Calvin, Alta California, 2009](#)

Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Anton Kern Gallery, New York.

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