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“Kathryn Cornelius: The Feeling of What Happens” at Curator’s Office Through June 26

By Maura Judkis on June 18, 2010



Kathryn Cornelius is ready for her close-up—and not just because she appears in many of her films. The famous line uttered by aged starlet Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard* is one of 26 movie quotations that form the piecemeal trailer for Cornelius’ fictional film *Home Again, Home Again*. Juxtaposed with each other and recited by Cornelius’ family, the quotations take on new meaning—especially when rearranged and set to happy and sad music for comedy and tragedy versions of the movie. But Cornelius’ films are actually studies in duality unto themselves: Each is tragicomic, a deft blend of sadness, anger, and familial love, employing Hollywood conventions but also turning them upside down. The artist appears twice with her sister; the tension between them is palpable in the two parts of *How We Learn to Love*. In the first film, the two women play a schoolyard clapping game, except instead of simply following the rhythm, they try to smack each other. In the second, they sit on a bench stroking each other’s hair, but then try to pull and tangle it. The films that follow are similarly sweet and sour. Cornelius hits her stride with *Or, Death Speaks to Us*, a series of three films featuring an unwavering shot of a still-life—a faucet, a sock on the floor, two apples on the countertop. Words across the screen draw the viewer into an narrative spelled out in the style of a screenplay: “Camera cuts to close-up of her eyes, desperate, determined,” it says of the tragic Sara, while consigning Heather to a worse, but more comedic, fate.

THE EXHIBITION IS ON VIEW NOON TO 6 P.M. WEDNESDAY TO SATURDAY TO JUNE 26 AT CURATOR’S OFFICE, 1515 14TH ST. NW. FREE. (202) 387-1008.

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