



Using Your Illusions

The video art realm of Peter Sarkisian

In all transparency, I don't have enough pages to write about video artist Peter Sarkisian. Son of painter and former UO professor Paul Sarkisian, Peter's confrontational video work is an attempt to combat television itself.

"TV is information, you turn it on and it feeds you information. It's not an experience," says Sarkisian as he sits next to me at the dinner table of Jill Hartz, executive director of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, where Sarkisian's video works will be showcased Saturday, May 21. "My work isn't about information, it is about the experiential."

Now, that last bit can sound a tad too art-school for some people, and in truth, Sarkisian is an alum of Cal Arts (arguably the West Coast's most prestigious avant-garde art school) and was also the director of AFI (American Film Institute) — these are two academies that drip with prestige and, at times, elitism. But there is something ferociously pedestrian about what Sarkisian is doing and what he means when he talks about the lack of experiential quality in television. He is attacking the very common so-called reality of the everyday TV screen. And he can break down his assault, frame by frame — though he isn't a big fan of frames.

"With information, we learn, but we don't really grow. Experience is what causes us to grow," Sarkisian explains "I'm trying to run video on a collision course with the viewer, and I do this by creating a perceptual trap, a gap between what they

(the viewer) think they see, and what they are seeing. And the first thing I do is take away the contour of frame."

Imagine a cube about the size of a small office desk sitting in a gallery. Then imagine this object engulfed and transformed by a video projection that looks as if the cube contains a mother and her child, whose playful interactions are then sped up and stopped at intervals that eventually make the two bodies appear indistinguishable.

Sound trippy? Think about experiencing a pale of water that truly looks like it is boiling over (as a result of Sarkisian's video projection) when, in "reality," it's just a pale placed in front of you. Or a lone car door, transformed through videography to have a driver and an ongoing scene reminiscent of the Grand Theft Auto videogame series happening inside a car cabin that doesn't physically exist.

These are just a few of the pieces that will be on display at the Schnitzer. "I'm using illusion to spark questions. I don't like giving answers, I like giving questions" Sarkisian says. His video work could be considered incredibly entertaining, but it is much more than that. It is provocative, thoughtful and impressive. My only regret this week is not having more space to write about it. Your regret would be missing this show. I assure you, it beats anything you're going to watch on TV this weekend. **CW**

Peter Sarkisian's video work show opens 6 pm Saturday, May 21, at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum. The opening and reception are free.

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ARTIST TALK: Saturday, May 21, 2 p.m.



Peter Sarkisian (American, b. 1965), *Foreground Reversal*, 2007, vacuum-formed thermal plastic, video projection, 26 x 15 x 5 inches, courtesy of the artist

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