

September 12, 2008 – January 4, 2009

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*Lulu* (stills), 2007  
Single-channel video. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.

have gamed on decadent morbidity and dark economies of desire. In the dreamlike sequence of *life like*—which, along with *Lulu* offers a more extended and ethereal narrative—the camera shuttles between the interior of Rollin’s apartment and the exterior locations from his films. Revisiting these sites, blending new footage with Rollin’s old scenes, Ruilova traverses the private and filmic spaces of Rollin’s dark world. Here, in these charged works, featuring ghoulish heroes, caged spaces, and countdowns without end, Ruilova centers on a macabre expression of the contemporary Gothic.

AÏDA RUILOVA

Born in 1974 in Wheeling, West Virginia. Lives and works in New York

Ruilova’s work has been featured in numerous international film festivals and museum exhibitions—including the 2004 *Whitney Biennial* and the 50th *Venice Biennale*—as well as in exhibitions at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City; White Columns, New York; and the Moore Space, Miami. In 2006, Ruilova was shortlisted for the Guggenheim Hugo Boss Prize.

*Aïda Ruilova: The Singles 1999 - Now* was co-organized by the Aspen Art Museum and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

Cover image:

*life like* (still), 2006

Single-channel video.

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.

*Support* for the exhibition catalogue is generously provided by Toby Devan Lewis; Galerie Guido W. Baudach, Berlin; and Salon 94, New York. *General support* for the Contemporary’s exhibition program is generously provided by the Whitaker Foundation; the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; William E. Weiss Foundation; Regional Arts Commission; Arts and Education Council; Missouri Arts Council, a state agency; Nancy Reynolds and Dwyer Brown; and members of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.



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# Aida Ruilova

The Singles: 1999 – Now

New York-based artist Aida Ruilova's videos combine classical cinematic devices with a distinctively low-tech sensibility, quick cuts and rhythmic, jarring soundtracks to create works that exist in the space between sound and image. One of a young generation of artists who employs media in innovative ways with a do-it-yourself aesthetic, Ruilova draws upon contexts—like cinema, music, and popular culture—that exist outside the art world. For her first solo museum exhibition, she presents a comprehensive survey of her single-channel video work, in a choreographed installation that becomes something altogether new.

Largely characterized by dark, confined interiors and lone protagonists suspended in chronic states of psychic distress, Ruilova's videos reveal an attention, in fairly equal

measure, to structures of music, performance, and film. A founder and one-time member of the experimental band Alva, Ruilova is keenly aware of the place of sound in her pieces, where single, screeching vocals and repeated one-liners (often marking each work's title) are cut and compounded into slashing, percussive pulses. Slicing and resculpting each layer of agonized expression and desperate whimper—and in steadfast refusal of any satisfied resolution—Ruilova presents a dissonant composition of contained hysterias. In this symphony of moving image and sound, a perpetually sustained crescendo of suspense inevitably creeps into our own physical space.

The hysterical impulse remains a central motif in these works, where Ruilova often captures her unstrung characters in chronic fits of frenzy and torment, and heightens the effect with an electrified assemblage of clipped shots. In *Oh no* (1999-2000), *You're pretty* (1999), *Beat & Perv* (1999), *Hey* (1999), and *no no* (2004), Ruilova emphasizes the compressed atmosphere within each frame, further constricted by the work's elliptical structure.

Here, the viewer is brought in to the arrangement, at once accomplice to the caged terror behind the monitor's screen, and contained within the physical frame of Ruilova's synchronized display. As she remarks on the capacity for both the montage technique and her installation to captivate the viewer: "Fractions of a second add up to something, making just a second feel like an eternity when I edit... I like to show these works in lit rooms in a sort of reversal of space and projection. The on-and-off quality to the works and blinking of the images become as fleeting as a light turning on and off. I like to think of these single-channel short-format videos functioning as 'in one eye and out the other' all at the same time."

While mirrored images and repeated clips offer a low-tech solution to synchronized movement and sound, Ruilova's abrupt and fractured editing, coupled with the uneven beat, resists a steady tempo and uniform, linear composition. Ruilova's actors, chanting compulsively between irregular beats—a twisted take on the music video genre—offer a

dark approach to their percussive performances. The narrow stairwell and stone basement, with peeling paint and rickety banisters, also operate as main characters. These confined sites, in which her actors are posed in various stages of arrest or captivity, offer little space for escape from the closed frame.

These structures, however, all work to amplify what is a ruling vision in Ruilova's work—a fascination for the macabre. Looking to the Soviet vanguard films of Sergei Eisenstein, Andrei Tarkovsky, Roger Corman B-movies, and her horror-genre mentor Jean Rollin—Ruilova relies on the central role played by interior space as a psychic construct, transformed in her videos as unstable sites of fear or foreboding. While these derelict stairwells and dank cellars might heighten the sense of the captive frame, so, too, do they offer an otherworldly realm, where claustrophobic private space bodes a more sinister nightmare. For many of these early works, Ruilova centers in on her personal fascination with the French horror director Rollin, whose erotic vampire films, for three decades,



*Almost* (stills), 2002

Single-channel video. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.