

The Inner Sleeve

This month's artwork chosen by **Marina Rosenfeld**



Joan Jonas *Vertical Roll*

Black and white video 19 mins, 1972

In Joan Jonas's *Vertical Roll*, a young woman, the artist, is seen wedged and fractioned into image after black and white image, crowding and transgressing the strange interior space of the young art medium – video. The normally smooth functioning of the machine is disrupted and glitching. The year is 1972. The TV has been detuned or is untuned: it does not produce the illusion of analogue movement or unfettered access to what it shows, and it does not hold the body inside it. Broken up by heavy black bars that usually hover outside of the viewing space but now aggressively roll through it, the artist's face or torso or legs drop interminably downwards as she jumps, turns, faces and finally peers into what still feels like an undefined space peculiar to the medium of video – somewhere beyond the viewer's capacity to scan or visualise, neither *in here* nor *in there*.

The tape begins with a brief silence, or rather, with the noisy background silence of old media (impossible for me to say what that sounded like in 1972 – did people realise how loud the hiss and hum of videotape was?). After an interval, a crack is heard and its source is briefly seen: a spoon wielded like

a drum stick. Jonas loudly beats the spoon against something or other for the rest of the 19 minute video, making an insistent beat that goes in and out of phase with the rolling disruption of the image.

Countering this almost synchronisation, though, the sound of the spoon cannot help belonging to a different sensual register. A trace of room resonance, which shifts upwards dramatically after several minutes, indicates that at least two different rooms are in play. The sound could be the desperate tapping of a trapped person wanting to be found, or a kind of sonar signal one might use to map or sound an unknown architecture. The repeated note could even be driving the machine's malfunctioning, sabotaging it from within (the sound is coming from inside the house!). In a brilliant grammatical ellipsis, Jonas stages an unresolvable encounter between containers – body, TV, screen – that is instantiated by repetition: a kind of mediation as rhythm.

The camera, the videotape, the monitor, maybe even her own body – Jonas meets these machines where they are, in their inertness, their noise, their comedy – above all, in their imperviousness to their own violence. The artist bookends *Vertical Roll* with shots of her face gazing sideways, first inside the action and later in front of it. She seems to don a

series of costumes but they are ultimately done away with by the forward march of time in the piece: there are clothes and sometimes there is nudity. What difference does it make? The self is not an arrival but a starting point, something obvious, not the point (the glamorous remoteness of the 60s – of Warhol and Antonioni – is perhaps corny by 1972, and gives way here to a less pretentious kind of dress-up and make-believe).

Jonas's always ambivalent entanglement with generic or given forms – devices, mirrors, garments – was foundational for me. I discovered a schematic and abstracted approach to the relations between self and things that I could not or would not find in music. Like Jonas, I found that precise gestures in the machine world, say the dragging of a needle across a record, mediated effectively between material and immaterial registers while giving the body its due. In *Vertical Roll*, she seems to me to suggest, among other things, that the electronics that populate our world – the loudspeakers and screens – constitute a new marketplace and will propagate with the momentum of a drum beat. We will remake ourselves in fragments inside them. □ Marina Rosenfeld's *Partials* runs at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York until 4 December. *Teenage Lontano* is released by Room40