

Justin Serulneck: On the Nature of Killing Time

By Eve Wood

Justin Serulneck is obsessed with time -- not its obvious imposed linearity, but more specifically how each of us individually chooses to navigate within such an artificial framework. The idea of “killing” time literally means “to do something that is not very interesting while you are waiting for something more interesting to come along,” and in this cycle of ten minute video segments utilizing 4K editing format and combining digital photographs with audio recorded as the actions are taking place, Serulneck amplifies not only our perception of how time passes, but also how a literal physical space can be constructed/and or deconstructed alternately within the framework of our daily lives.

Working mainly with friends and colleagues in the Claremont/Pomona area who appear in the video scenarios Serulneck has constructed, the artist explores a deeper more psychologically engaged space within the picture plane wherein the viewer begins to question how each of us individually negotiates the passing of time, and are these negotiations careless or productive, frivolous or necessary, a product of our culture or the fallout of personal choice? The concept of “what is” is purely unreliable as the “is” is always shifting and cannot be quantified, so what we are left with in essence is a fundamental choice as to how we fill the time we are given. Leisure is the compulsion of American culture, but we are equally as consumed with overachievement, and Serulneck asks us, and himself in kind, to consider how we frame our lives within the manufactured structure that is time, with choices as varied as going fishing or hanging out drinking a beer while playing video games. Each of these has ramifications, and at every turn Serulneck lays bare our varied options.

The concept of “leisure” is more often than not a construction, embedded into the fabric of our modern culture. In Killing Time #7 for example, three men fish at a “man made” lake in Irvine, CA that has been artificially stocked with fish let go into

the water for the sole purpose of being caught and consumed. The whole process is strangely reminiscent of a kind of “Westworld” scenario where leisure is controlled and monitored on every level. In Serulneck’s video work the three men sit lakeside, and as their movements drag and pull through space and time, we hear their conversations which are light and strangely at odds with the tension created in the visual imagery being generated. This kind of disparity between the visual images and the accompanying audio further heightens the sense of drama being played out within the frame of the image. Their bodies seem discordant with their intentions, creating an atmosphere that is quietly unsettling.

Ultimately, Serulneck’s work is self-reflexive as the artist, through the process of assembling and disassembling these images, manipulating them toward a particular visual narrative, reimagines his own relationship to time. By examining the choices other people make and how those choices impact their lives, Serulneck extends the visual dialogue to include himself in the equation. These strangely poetic narratives feel eternal as though the people who populate these spaces speak for all of us at some point in our lives, struggling, albeit sometimes unknowingly, to fill our time as best we can.