

# New Haven Independent

## Query Authority

BY TESS WHEELWRIGHT | JUNE 5, 2006 2:38 PM

Saturday's rain didn't stop some 20 video-art lovers from making it to New Haven's coolest gallery for the opening of "Query," a three-monitor screening of the "amusingly misinformed videos of Tyler Coburn."

Duckers inside the doors of Grand Projects on Lyon Street found the garage-turned-gallery converted again: this month, into a strange kind of movie house. Two recent video pieces by NYC and New Haven-based artist Tyler Coburn played on loop on two pedestal-top TVs against the back wall, and a third was projected large on another wall. It wasn't so much an installation, explained Coburn, contrasting the simple gallery set-up with what it might have been if he'd had a couple more projectors. But the three pieces did work together, he said, promising "communication across monitors."

Or *miscommunication*. The ambitiously-staged videos seemed to be spoofs on informational TV programs: mock-educational, but plagued by "irresponsible narration and misinformation," as the artist's statement warned. In each, super-serious narrator voices painstakingly explained something over the action" an historical era, an experience abroad, a regional ritual," but there was always something *fishy* about what they were saying: "There's a total uncomfortable-ness and awkwardness" about them, observed Grand Projects founder Johanna Bresnick, that makes you doubt what you're being told.

The title piece "Query" pretends to be like an educational program on the Renaissance, with stereotypical figures of the age wearing full period costume as they march through dramatic video-game space, and a solemn lecturer explaining them in turn. But the facts we get are bungled, over-simplified, or just loopy. At one moment (pictured at the top of this story), we're supposed to have followed a connection "offered deadpan by Coburn, who plays the narrator as well as all the other characters in the video" between the cultural renewal of the Renaissance ("rebirth") and a literal return to a mother's womb.

With the voice offering this far-fetched "education" always unsettlingly familiar, "Query"'s project to shake our confidence in these sources of knowledge starts to work on a viewer: *Hey yeah! How **could** those PBS guys really have **known** all that?*

"Video Letter: London" kept in the vein of a suspicious disconnect between speaker and what was spoken, as pokerfaced British actors explained life in that land while pulling on first tights then knickers, or climbing into a laundry bin on top of the dresser.

Josh Safran, a New Haven regular to Grand Projects, called it a "peculiarly intellectualized version" of "that kind of Monty Python absurdism to which we're all heir." He "liked the sensibility."

For Len Zimmerman, it was a little too absurd. He had better luck relating to "Query" (pictured). "It's clever, but it's not my thing," he said of "Video Letter," confessing also that he'd have hoped for some more explicitly political, anti-war art from Coburn's generation.

Thank the last piece, "Village Festival," for inspiring the Bratwurst and pumpernickel on offer at Saturday's opening. Bresnick themed her "Austrian-German smorgasbord" in line with this video "pseudo-set in the Tirol region of Austria" said Coburn. This "ethnographic study" featured another mock-authority, spelling out the ritual meaning of the enthusiastic dance being performed in front of a cut-out school-play-esque background -- before devolving mischievously into crackly nonsense (remember Wayne of Wayne's world at the take-out window?), complete with phonetic nonsense subtitles.

Save conceptual queries for the artist. Grand Projects' Johanna Bresnick's hooked on the work for the way it looks. Bresnick saw a video of Coburn's at City-wide Open Studios and thought it was "fantastic," technically right on par with grad work (even though Coburn just finished at Yale College). She was especially glad to give Coburn a show because "there's not much chance for video-artists to show multiple works in New Haven."

Visitors like Peter Edwards (left) seemed to think they'd gotten their wet walk's worth. Edwards is always interested to see how a new artist will use the unique space of Grand Projects. Coburn's use? "Interesting," he said.

*See for yourself Sundays 1-5 or by appointment through June, at 61 Lyon Street, [info@grandprojects.com](mailto:info@grandprojects.com).*