Now You Perceive It, Now You Think You Do

WASHINGTON — The revelation that part of a fireworks display seen during television coverage of the Beijing Olympics was in fact a trick of digital editing is the latest news media moment to make a noble of "reality." The special effects were inserted, seemingly, on a torrent of bulletins; they made a challenge to prove what actually happened.

The metaphorical riddle surrounding the Beijing fireworks is underscored by "Realtime," the second part of "The Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality and the Moving Image." The show, an exhaustive survey of film and video art, is in the final weeks of its run at the Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn Museum. (Part I, "Dreams," which concluded in May, focused on cinema’s cooky tendencies.) "Realtime," organized by the Hirshhorn curators Anne Ellegood and Kristen Hileman, showcases 19 artists who find fictions lurking behind every window, door and screen.

One tracktor, heavily cited in a catalog essay by Ms. Hileman, is Peter Weir’s film ‘The Truman Show’ (1999). In it, an insurance clerk (Jim Carrey) discovers that his entire life is being staged and directed for a television audience. Many of the works in the exhibition riff on the premise of "Truman," but rarely do they improve on the movie.

In "Lonely Planet" (2006) the German artist Julian Rosefeldt portrays a hippie-ish Western backpacker on a trip through India. As he moves through a series of cliched sequences, such as frenetic Bollywood-inspired dance number, the camera continually pulls back to reveal spotlight, dressing rooms and other filmmaking necessities. "Lonely Planet" advances the unsettling idea that all tourism is fiction.


Tinkering with reality in "The Cinema Effect: Above, part of Mungo Thomson’s ‘New York, New York, New York,’ far left, an impersonator of the artist Kerry Tribe in ‘Double,’ near left, a Northern Irish lad auditions to play his ‘type’ in Ian Charlesworth’s ‘John.’

Now You Think You Do

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