

Art in America

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AMY GRANAT

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Eschewing direct film manipulation for in-camera editing, Amy Granat's "The Sheltering Sky" shares a proclivity for literary narrative with her Drew Heitzler collaboration *T.S.O.Y.W.* (2007). Combining her manipulation of aperture, lighting, and scene length with a loose narrative of American melancholia, *T.S.O.Y.W.* documented the protagonist Werther (from Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*) as he set off on a motorcycle road trip to Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* and Joshua Tree National Park. The film concluded with Werther disappearing into the distance; to artist Trinie Dalton, it was a "romanticized death" in the isolated desert landscape.

"The Sheltering Sky" inhabits an analogous psychic terrain, and departs from Paul Bowles's 1949 novel of the same name. The installation chronicles a married couple and their friend as they wander the Saharan region of a politically destabilized North Africa. Eroded by the desert's foreign, desolate landscape, their civil relationships turn destructive as fidelity and friendship give way to sexual betrayal and sickness.

Granat filmed a group of friends and colleagues to create an installation of four videos and three digital projections in The Kitchen's front gallery, and six photograms and a video triptych in the back. Culled from over eight hours of 16-mm film, the videos are divested of dialog, script, and musical accompaniment, replacing much of the novel's literary narrative for one limited by 16-mm in-camera effects: superimposition, differing film stocks, shooting into the sun and other lighting effects and editing. The photograms and video triptych in The Kitchen's back galleries point to a similar medium-specificity. The video triptych *Prostitute redo (at Matt's)* recycles damaged film from "The Sheltering Sky," while each of the photograms layer 16-mm film stock and transparencies to affect indexical, site-specific abstractions of criss-crossing light and shadow.

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With footage of blowing sand, blurry outlines of sleeping figures, and an endless, flat landscape punctuated by reed-like telephone poles, the single-channel video *S. Sky (V-2)* (all videos, 2010) is projected simultaneously on either end of The Kitchen's front gallery (with a one and a half minute delay). Projected on a third wall, *Character Study-Flora* features a woman in bed, talking, drinking, reading, and engaging in other mostly solitary activities. Four television monitors, stacked side-by-side several feet into the gallery, rotate sequences from *Character Study-Jake* and *Character Study-Drew*. Grainy footage of small groups of men talking and walking, offset against slow-moving clouds and a wide sky, are shown in each screen. Weighted by non-action, non-sites, and a landscape of existential subjection, the vignettes of intimate undoing share with *T.S.O.Y.W.* a contemporary wartime metaphor.

In a statement for her first solo exhibition of scratched and chemical-bathed film, Granat wrote that her "films are movies made...from the attack and scratch of their own emulsion. In nature we see it all around us. At the same time something is being created, something is being destroyed." Over- and under-exposed, marked by flashes of white light, and erupting in bursts of unnatural color, the filmic manipulations in "The Sheltering Sky" render Granat's footage of abject landscapes and social scenarios antique, aged, and time-worn-a nostalgic conceit illustrative of Leo Bersani's timeless dictum that evil is not "projected on an alien other, but rather...an intractable murderousness constitutive of the human itself."