

Cauleen Smith's NTSC

by Ivan Lozano
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I highly recommend swinging by *Women and Their Work* to check out Cauleen Smith's NTSC, but give yourself time to do it. It's a dense show that requires attention to really appreciate it. Despite, or perhaps because of, her background in film, Smith has most Texas artists beat when it comes to putting together shows with serious meat on their bones. Take notes people.

Cauleen Smith has been a very important person in my life for the past three or four years. First, as my professor at UT Austin's film school, then as a board member for Cinematexas (R.I.P.), the experimental film and video festival I programmed. Her way of thinking about art has been very influential to my way of thinking about it, both in my own work and in others' work. I don't want to embarrass her too much but she's been a sort of mentor figure to me.

Sadly, she doesn't live in Austin anymore, having traded the summer heat, breakfast tacos and Lone Star lifestyle for a much colder and less spicy Boston one. Now she teaches at Mass Art, a school much more in line with her way of doing things than the hodgepodge bureaucratic "Indiewood" nightmare the film school at UT is turning into (disclaimer: I have lots of beef with that program, so take my comments about it with a giant mound of salt).

I know her work and artistic preferences pretty well. I know she hates video about as much as she loves film. So I was quite pleasantly shocked by the contents of her show at *Women And Their Work*, NTSC. For those of you who aren't hip with video jargon, NTSC (which stands for "National Television System Committee") is the highly flawed video system in use in all of America that is derisively referred to as "Never The Same Color" by its rightful detractors. Cauleen Smith made a (mostly) video show!!! After a bit of reflection, I understood that even though she's not using film here, her impetus is the same: an unabashedly experimental stance towards the possibilities of a medium. That might be one of Smith's best traits, her fearlessness when it comes to taking risks.

The show is a coherent collection of loosely related elements that can be boiled down to a key theme: contesting the status quo's power to trap us in detrimental constructs, through discussions of the idea of color (in its many definitions). This theme plays out in her investigations into the cult following of the magnificent (and magnificently misogynistic) 1995 film *The Night Of The Hunter* by Charles Laughton, into video as a medium (and NTSC color bars as its synecdoche), 8-balls as a metaphor (for black men and for the willingness with which we suspend skepticism) and prison architecture's parallels with the morphology of virus particles.