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## Walk On By by Valeska Soares and Invisible Cities by Jonas Dahlberg

*December 20th, 2006*



### Walk On By by Valeska Soares

Once upon a time I had the idea of installing mirrors in my glasses. As the theory went, I could more quickly examine the people around me and perhaps catch fleeting glances of envy, hatred, or maybe just amusement. Valeska Soares' Walk on By consists of two clear plastic park benches and two video screens displaying sometimes solid and sometimes ephemeral characters upon them. What makes the work interesting is the tension she builds through voyeurism, like my old imaginary self and it's glasses, her work breeds a certain paranoia of missing out on something. Her characters aren't quite normal park sitters, in fact they often take on a peculiar magic realist tone, one young woman fills her bench with small paper notes and then watches as a fan slowly blows them onto the hill where she collects them in a methodical and almost amused manor. The other screen plays a boy trying to fix his radio controlled car. Each character never comes close to enacting a conscious story, often their actions are minor incidents that come to nothing, but each bench is interesting enough to draw your attention at the same time, creating a heightened voyeurism in which you are consciously having to split your attention between the actions of at your back and in front of you. By interspersing small inversions of typical actions with a sense of the sublime, Soares creates an environment where the on looker is essentially expecting, but not always experiencing the intended narrative (nothing new here, but she uses the split effect well) and the feeling that arises is one of

amused confusion, a decision to move from one screen to the next can sometimes lead to a better story or merely the mundane, but each segment only lasts a certain time (most are small enough that a glance away means you've missed something), but you end up caught in this principle of the mundane and the surreal to the point that the work begins to take over, in the end Soares characters probably have deeper psychological meaning I'm missing (one gets the feeling her inversions of the typical are probably coming from somewhere controlled and intended rather than rampant creativity), but Walk On By harnesses confusion and heightens an already familiar experience making you aware of just how precarious the visual narratives of our everyday lives really are.



### Jonas Dahlberg Invisible Cities

Before you enter Invisible Cities, Jonas Dahlberg spends a good amount of time priming you for the experience. The walls are full of city names and you quickly catch on to the fact that these names are minor metropolises spread all over the world. His actual work though consists of a camera somehow precariously mounted in such a manor that it slowly flies through a city making a bobbing motion that suggests flight. The camera's perspective is always off the ground, and the screen's size ensures that every tilt and bob is felt as you slowly transverse a city that Mr. Dahlberg has obfuscated. What makes it all work is not only the anonymousness of the city (it's houses seem somewhat cheap for the U.S. but perhaps belong to the developing world or rural Europe), but that Jonas makes it apparent just how uniform the urban environment has become, his camera is so controlled at times the picture is so abstract that you have to wonder if in reality you're flying a through a model and it's this mixing of doubt between the designed microworlds of the drawing board and the universalness of the city in question that makes the work tick. It's perfectly possible that this city in question is in part Jonas' own models and a real city somewhere out there. Additionally the metropolis is completely empty, no human being or even dog walks by, the city is sterile and were it not for cars it would appear to be completely unhabitated. If you sit around long enough eventually some advertising and other things pop up which the director seems to have tried to cut out of, but for the most part Invisible Cities feels like an epistle from the subconscious, it's deserted city a commentary on our own inability to imagine the lives of others elsewhere, Mr. Dahlberg has stripped a city of it's identity and revealed a basic form a certian tract of alienation in every urban environment.

p.s. both artists are the Taipei Beinnal i.e. Dirty Yoga at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum

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