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Before They Were Winners: TVTV in New York

by *kevin mcgary* 02/19/10

There are people who make a living of critiquing spectacle, who pump unspectacular phenomena with predictable criticisms of their meanings, consequences, or perceived lacks thereof. Virtually immune to this practice is the life of the Academy Awards, the pure spectacle that falls to earth in the form of kaleidoscopic critique: the most superficial, the most banal, and, perhaps the most interesting, impressions and speculations by the honored stars themselves. However it's usually only the less interesting, over-choreographed red carpet interviews and acceptance speeches that are seen and heard, rather than the shrewd, juicy obsessing that must go on in private.



On Monday, February 22, at 6:30 PM—the occasion of this winter's Hollywood award season—Electronic Arts Intermix presents pulls from their vast, media-critical vault of artist's films and videos two works that put the lens on the spectacle of the (vintage) award show. The screening, Award Shows, is anchored by the defunct San Francisco-based media collective TVTV's tape, *TVTV Looks at the Oscars* (1976, 59 min.), which strings a long chain of conversational aphorisms about the business and experience of celebrity.

That former members of the guerilla documentary "commune" would go on to become producer Michael Shamberg, actor Bill Murray, and other influential figures from commercial filmmaking helps to explain how the formative example of video art is shot in so many cushy, intimate, insider situations. The accounts therein are often witty, occasionally dark, and altogether absorbing. While shopping for gowns and tiaras before her special night, Lily Tomlin confides, "The real quandary I have is whether or not to go in this dress with a fox or a mink cape, or full clown make-up..." In the back seat of Lee Grant and Goldie Hawn's limo on the way to the show, Grant recalls that in her first, surreal impression of Hollywood people, "to me they were like somebody you saw on a menu..." Later, again reflecting, this time on her Best Supporting Actress win, Grant intones that rather than a sense of triumph she feels "the end of an era" when she sees herself take the stage in the recording of that night. Tomlin also watches herself on screen, non-diagetically, appearing in the video's only scripted role as the Calumet City, Illinois resident Judy Beasley, who watches the Oscars every year with her cat.

Preceding TVTV's video is a film made by the not-at-all defunct grandfather of experimental cinema, Jonas Mekas, *Award Presentation to Andy Warhol* (1964, 12 min.). Choosing not to accept *Film Culture* magazine's Independent Film award in person, Warhol instead allowed Mekas (*Film Culture's* editor at the time) to present the award at The Factory with a number of Superstars gathered, and to present a movie of the event to the public gathered for the live ceremony. Warhol's typical circumvention of convention certainly adds element of reflexivity and perpetuity to significance of his award for filmmaking, but perhaps it also alludes to a comment made by Spielberg recorded by TVTV, regarding the commercial backlash he diagnosed as the reason for *Jaws'* Best Director snub: "everybody loves a winner, but nobody loves a *winner*."


AWARD SHOWS TAKES PLACE FEBRUARY 22, 2010, AT 6:30 PM. ELECTRONIC ARTS INTERMIX IS LOCATED AT 535 WEST 22 STREET, 5TH FLOOR, NEW YORK. RSVP AT INFO@EAI.ORG.

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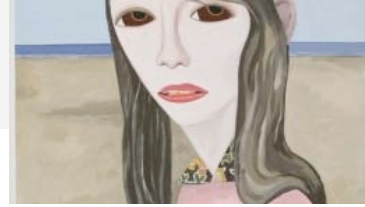
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[Brian Calvin, Alta California, 2009](#)

Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Anton Kern Gallery, New York.

Currently at Anton Kern Gallery, Brian Calvin exhibits new portraits of young, sl

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