

## BRICE DELLSPERGER

NOEL DANIEL

top and below:  
Brice Dellsperger,  
*Body Double X*,  
1998-2000, still  
images of actor Jean-  
Luc Verna, projection  
from DVcam source.  
Courtesy: Team Gallery,  
New York

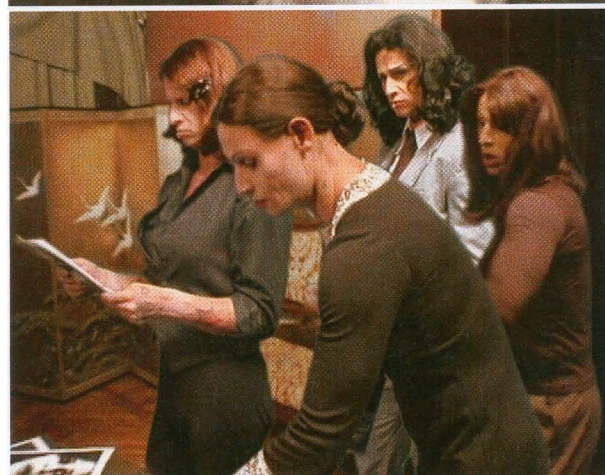
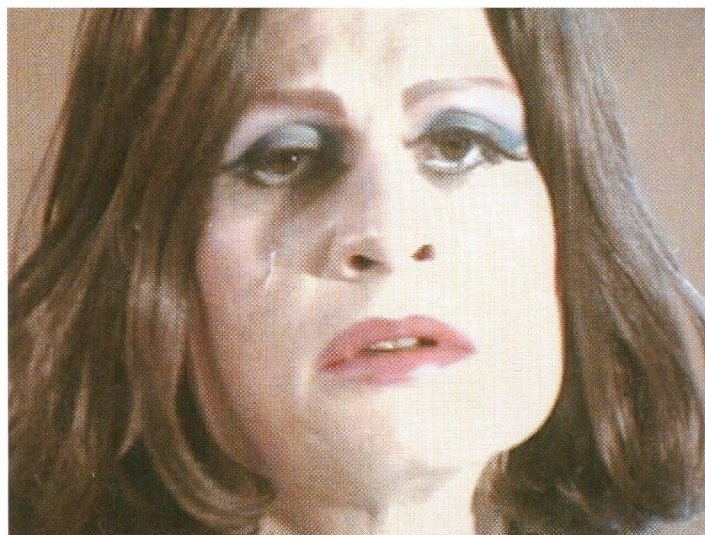
Brice Dellsperger's first exhibition in America at New York's Team Gallery featured three of the thirty year-old Frenchman's gender-bending video adaptations of classic psycho-sexual thrillers. In French with English subtitles, the video pieces, *Body Double X* (2000), *Body Double 15* (2001), and *Body Double 17* (1998-2000), are part of a larger series (sixteen shorts and one feature-length video since 1995) that takes its name from Brian de Palma's 1984 kitsch thriller *extraordinaire*, *Body Double*. For Dellsperger, the title 'body double' refers to the way he uses a single actor to play opposite him/herself on screen.

Following in the footsteps of Ermin Wurm's video puns, Dellsperger's videos are designed to fool the viewer on the one hand, and on the other hand are technically contrived not to succeed at it. Transvestitism plays a major part in this: male actors impersonate female characters and vice versa, and the actors, regardless of their sex, dress in drag for both the male and female roles. Dellsperger uses blue-screen to montage the performances together, and this yields a fragmented final edit that complements the bifurcated performances.

French mime and fellow actor Jean-Luc Verna portrays this conceit to exhilarating effect in the centrepiece of Team Gallery's exhibition, *Body Double X*, Dellsperger's feature-length remake of Andrej Zulawski's 1975 film *L'Important c'est d'aimer* about the tormented life of a porn actress. With Verna on screen playing numerous characters simultaneously, we watch as he loves, hates, embraces, kisses, caresses, shouts at, humiliates, and beats the living daylights out of himself in what is essentially a highly inventive video monologue of self-love and self-loathing against the backdrop of gender swapping. Dellsperger's clunky and athletic blue-screen editing technique is fundamental to the success of this parody. The floors shift beneath the actor's feet and the walls wobble in and out of synchronicity as the drama and the role confusion unfold.

Dellsperger's cross-dressing *mise en abîme* is pushed to a new level in his most recent and most technically ambitious short entitled *Body Double 17* (2001), based on David Lynch's 1992 flop sequel to *Twin Peaks*, *Fire Walk with Me*. In this piece, two remarkably similar looking sisters play dozens of parts, as in a scene in a brothel where one sister plays the crew of strippers while the other plays the onlookers at the bar. Having two near-twins play all the characters in this video exponentially amplifies the role confusion achieved by one actor in Dellsperger's earlier work.

Conceptually, Dellsperger's most important piece in Team's exhibition is *Body Double 15*, a ten-minute remake of the famous pick-up scene in MoMA from Brian de



Palma's 1980 horror film *Dressed to Kill*. Dellsperger casts himself as both the woman and the man, and as a provocative twist, dresses in the same woman's clothes for both parts. The only difference between the two characters is how they act: when playing the man, Dellsperger behaves in exaggerated manly fashion and when playing the woman, acts correspondingly feminine.

In this piece, Dellsperger is not only an impersonator on screen but an impostor in the art world. The video re-enactment here is Dellsperger's Trojan Horse: once inside the museum, he lets loose a performance of hilarious and subversive proportions, and in so doing, thrusts the two 'difficult' art forms, performance and video art, in amongst the museum's silent, rarefied galleries. The elaborate spoof goes beyond the parody of gender to a parody of the museum's silent, secluded interiors and the work held therein.

Seen separately, the videos could seem at risk of succumbing to the very clichés in which they indulge. Seen together, however, they create a whole that shows Dellsperger's technically self-mocking video adaptations to be highly original explorations of the way we come to identify certain behaviour as masculine or feminine.

BRICE DELLSPERGER was at Team Gallery, New York,  
14 February – 16 March 2002.  
[www.teamgallery.com](http://www.teamgallery.com)

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