

# Art & Design

Intimacies at Gallery 400 | September 28, 2011 | By Lauren Weinberg



Laurel Nakadate, *Exorcism in January*, 2009.

Halfway through this exhibition, I wanted to take a shower—with bleach. The videos and photographs in *Intimacies* bring us uncomfortably close to taboo subjects, including child molestation in Laurel Nakadate's *Good Morning Sunshine* (2009) and incest in Leigh Ledare's *Shoulder*, *The Gift*, *The Model* (2006).

Curated by artist John Neff and Gallery 400 director Lorelei Stewart, the show also creates a creepy equivalence between intimacy and control. That link exists for a reason. According to the exhibition statement, the show's six artists consider the camera "an active agent in the creation of social events," not just a recording device. Most of the situations we see exist only because of the camera. Before Ledare records his mother, Tina, sobbing onto his shoulder and holding him like a lover, the two casually chat about sci-fi and fantasy films, and Tina keeps asking if it's time "to start."

Even as viewers witness scenes that seem private, one wonders how much is constructed. In Nakadate's video *Exorcism in January* (2009), the artist visits a middle-aged man who asks her to help him exorcise his "bad spirits." While Nakadate's skimpy outfits add sexual tension to the piece, the man doesn't treat her like a sex object—but his interest in her isn't paternal, either. We never discover the nature of their relationship, nor how much of their conversation is spontaneous. If none of it is, does that make what Nakadate wants to show us less real?

Photographs by Sally Mann and Carrie Mae Weems—touchstones for *Intimacies*—remind us how different their concerns look in the hands of a new generation of artists, such as Desirée Holman, whose *Heterotopias* (2011) tackles the paradoxical nature of intimacy in the Internet age. As nine actors, dressed as imaginary characters from role-playing games, morph into animated versions of their avatars and dance together, the video becomes a joyful coda to a difficult show.