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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week



A scene from Dara Friedman's "Mother Drum" video installation at Gavin Brown's Enterprise.
Dara Friedman, Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York and Rome

DARA FRIEDMAN

Through April 22. Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 429 West 127th Street, Manhattan; 212-627-5258, gavinbrown.biz.

Structural and documentary films were historically at different ends of the filmmaking spectrum, with one focusing on formal and conceptual concerns, and the other on social realities and conditions. The two practices are fused, however, in Dara Friedman's "Mother Drum" at Gavin Brown's gallery in Harlem.

The formal, structural characteristics of the work are evident in the film's projection onto three screens, with solid blocks of (mostly) primary color alternating with filmed images. The documentary aspect is in the capturing of Native American drum circles and dancers, elements inspired by the amateur archaeologist Ishmael Bermudez, who says he found Native American ruins on his property in Miami.

What Ms. Friedman attempts in joining these two practices is more than creating a nifty hybrid object. Despite good, often altruistic intentions, documentarians have been accused of speaking for, or in the place of, various peoples. When the drummers and dancers perform specifically for her camera, the people presented here become more like participants than traditional subjects.

The erasure of artist-versus-subject is not complete. But that is also a function of the art world in which we operate (and of much deeper historical forces, like colonialism). This is addressed in a portion of the show's news release written by Shuel-let-quaQ:olosoet (a.k.a. Cynthia Jim), who is also seen on film. She describes how the Mother Drum "resonates a vibration of unseen strands that link our past, present and future" and carries "vibrations of life waiting to heal those who need it." It is this energy that Ms. Friedman is trying to capture.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER