



# DARA FRIEDMAN

ART (OF RELATION)

Gean Moreno

**GEAN MORENO:** *How did you begin to work in art spaces?*

**Dara Friedman:** I was invited to organize a film festival at Thread Waxing Space. Instead, I proposed an exhibition of film installations. It was called *Celluloid Cave*. This is where the transition came for me. I was aware that great experimental film was being made, and no one was really seeing it. I realized that for these films to be seen they needed to take up space. I was following Virginia Woolf's feminist tenet of "a room of one's own." The cinema is a brilliant place for a film, but there is a safe distance between the image and the viewer.

It's a well-rehearsed relationship — everyone knows they are supposed to sit and behave — it's really polite, like English small talk.

**GM:** *Do you leave the projectors out in the open to disrupt this well-rehearsed relationship?*

**DF:** They're just there. It's an inclusive tendency. Everyone should come to the party. If you invite someone to dinner, their parents and kids should come too, and even the alcoholic aunt and the chocolate addicted uncle. It makes for a funnier party. So, that is why the machines are in the room, be-

cause otherwise they'd be "in the closet," literally and figuratively.

**GM:** *This "unveiling" of the projectors is part of the structuralist approach to film that you've continued. Let's talk about the use of sound as a disruptive element.*

**DF:** What really turned me on to a structuralist approach to film was looking at each component of a film as an important entity in and of itself. And then, going through the process of putting them together so that the whole is the sum of the parts. I began looking at sound as an independent thing. The sounds I use are neither speech



Total, 1997. Film stills. Opposite: Romance, 2001. Installation view. Courtesy Gavin Brown, New York.



Chrissy, Mette, Kristan, 2001. Video stills.

nor music — which is what films normally use. But they are real sounds. They normally crop up in an irregular way. By irregular, I mean that there is no rhythm you can replicate. They exist to grab your attention, to place you in a state of excitement. It's as if you're driving along and, all of a sudden, someone swerves in front of you, you have to make a quick jerky adjustment, tires squeal, horns honk, your hands grip the wheel tighter, your eyes open a bit wider, you're awake. You're still driving, and nothing much has really changed, except your awareness of what's going on around you. It is heightened. You've entered another realm of awareness. Getting you there is what I'm trying to do with what you call disruptive sounds.

**GM:** *The fragmented narratives in your films are rarely commented on. How do you understand these to function?*

**DF:** There are certain situations or images that, for some reason, you care about very much. My narratives are the essences, perhaps poetic, of actions or situations. Instead of seeing the entire story, my "fragmented narratives" cut to the chase, enter at the climax, distill a situation to its essence, fast-forward to the important bit. They get you to the part you really care about, without build-up or denouement. But something else happens. You get to a turning point, a decisive moment, where you really feel something. The narrative is boiled down or paired away to its crucial point. In our lives, we have personal landmarks: events that occurred, strong feelings, something

someone said, the birth of a child, a death, a marriage — the events that play over and over in our minds, that mean so much to us. Even mundane landmarks like what it felt like when you quit your job, the night you were the disco queen, when you accidentally stepped on a duckling and killed it. These are the things we care about and don't forget. The narratives are a reflection of this.

**GM:** *Just as your film installations set up dialogue between your work and that of, say, Liisa Roberts or Tacita Dean, your narratives bring you closer to artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija or Jim Lambie, who are interested in mundane social situations and their everyday milieus. How do you see your relationship to the latter artists?*

**DF:** Well, the greatest art is the art of relating, and in the end I think that's what I'm really after. I mean, you have a love of filmmaking, but films are a means to an end. The end is social interaction, and if you can accomplish that, like Rirkrit Tiravanija or Jim Lambie, then you're making great art. Beyond the art of rational numbers and conceptual thinking is the art of relating to people everyday, in this lifetime. I don't know that I am particularly good at it, but it's what I'm after.

**GM:** *Will you ever work with straight film again?*

**DF:** There are many reasons not to work with straight film. But, I hope I do. I have huge problems with plot and dialogue. People in my films never know what is

going to happen next and they don't really say anything. But they do a lot and feel a lot. A straight narrative in which no one knows what is going to happen next is difficult, but why not. The first question that arises when you are going to make a film, even before "What do you want to make a film of?" is "What money are you going to make it with?" For me, that's not an interesting question. Once you get over it, you can start. When money is involved, you need a script. No one will fund you if they don't know what you are going to do with their money. But I don't believe that a script, even a good one, makes for a good movie. They work in different languages. I think that part of the excitement in a film is not knowing what is going to come next. ■

*Gean Moreno is a critic and a writer based in Miami.*

**Dara Friedman** was born in Bad Kreuznach (Germany) in 1968. She lives and works in Miami.

Selected solo exhibitions: 2002: MoCA, Los Angeles; Kunstmuseum, Thun (Switzerland); Massimo Minini, Brescia (Italy); 2001: Site Santa Fe, New Mexico; Miami Art Museum, Miami; 2000: Gavin Brown, New York; Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson; 1998: MCA, Chicago; 1992: London Film-maker's Cooperative.

Selected groupshows: 2001: "Making Art in Miami;" Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami; "Zero Gravity," Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome; "The Americans," Barbican Centre, London; 2000: Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum, New York; "Making Time;" Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, Lake Worth, Florida; "Black Box," California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland; 1999: "Heads Up;" MoCA, Miami; "Leftover Festivities;" Nature Morte, New Delhi; 1998: "Independing Loop;" Swiss Institute, New York; "Miami Arts Project," Miami International Airport and cable television; 1997: "Celluloid cave," Thread Waxing Space, New York.