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Tony Oursler, Peak

Michael Wilson

Oursler offers a miniaturized mediation on our techno insanity.

"I can't look at that...unplug that thing! Turn it off!" The voice, a frantic holler reproduced whisper-quiet, is that of a naked woman trapped inside a darkened space. Clambering around in search of an exit, she pursues a disjointed conversation with some unseen other: "Hey, leave him alone! You are replying on something hidden. I can't recognize that."

In Tony Oursler's Black Box, this unnamed protagonist's image is projected, at minute scale onto a fist-size resin cube perched on one prong of a forked steel armature (the other side holds the cell-phone-size video projector). The reduced volume and scale force curious viewers to lean in close as they strain to see what's happening. Then, without warning, an image of the artist appears, twitching and spinning in dizzying fast-forward before dissolving as the whole cycle reboots.

Viewers familiar with Oursler's oeuvre will recognize the breed of anxiety around which Black Box and its seven companions in "Peak" revolve: This artist's reliably fucked-up characters have been haranguing gallerygoers for decades now, Oursler's warped images haunting a variety of objects and surfaces, from rag dolls to museum exteriors. "Peak" combines that patented psychological tension—as uncanny as anything in a David Lynch movie—with an oblique investigation into our evolving relationship with technology. Oursler conceives of the show's grungy mixed-media screens, with all their nooks and crannies, as analogs to the Internet: We may be very clever, he argues, but such technical innovations ultimately house the same old neuroses.