

THE GIRL WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

WRITING ON
CONTEMPORARY ART AND
HORROR FILM

Josh Azzarella: duration, the familiar, and the cinematic

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JOSH AZZARELLA IS AN artist whose moving image works are the result of manipulating known films within popular culture to create an entirely isolated experience. For instance, his breathtakingly immersive *Untitled #105 (SFDF)* (2009-2011) three-channel installation presses pause on three singular moments within the landscape of *King Kong*. The work becomes the place where the viewer remains in a perpetual period of waiting for the “monster” to arrive; he never does.



This tension of not-seeing but still knowing expands in Azzarella’s film modification of *The Wizard of Oz*, *Untitled #125 (Hickory)* (2009-2011). Admittedly an obsession of his, the familiarity of *The Wizard of Oz* that is embedded in American culture is profound. From its infamously troublesome production (rumors of suicide, anyone?) to its glorious introduction to technicolor to its popularity through annual television airing, the story of a young girl with dreams who travels to far only to find that what’s important is the love of home is part of America’s narrative. Throughout the world people have seen this film; it’s a universal point of reference.

(*SFDF*) (2009-2011), *Untitled #125 (Hickory)* makes the familiar obscure. While we cannot detect any development or movement when watching, we are made aware that it is from a 6 1/2 minute excerpt from *The Wizard of Oz*; encompassing the moment from when the tornado hits until Dorothy emerges into technicolor Oz and meets Glenda the Good Witch. The reason why we cannot see what we know is there is because Azzarella has stretched out cinematic space and time so that this film, his film, is 7200 minutes, approximately the same time of Dorothy’s stay in Oz. Isolating the film to be entirely represented by a single character’s experience, Dorothy, he says:

This work extends a moment of transformative transition (Dorothy’s journey to Oz) to envelop the entire time of her experience. Just as dreams which realistically occur in flashes of seconds in our brains can seem like hours or days, so Dorothy’s hours of unconsciousness take on a five day journey of transformation in Oz.

What Azzarella’s interventionist act does is abstract an image so familiar to us that we can no longer recognize it. The naked eye cannot detect movement. The film becomes unwatchable. And why is this important? Because durational films based on popular cinema (also think of Ivan Zulueta’s *Frank Stein* and *King Kong* in the early 1970s along with Douglas Gordon’s *24 hour Psycho* and *Five Year Drive By* in the 1990s) force audiences to re-consider ways of seeing. They challenge what we think we know about narrative structure by inverting the movies we know and love as they morph into something new to critique, consider, and debate. These lives of these films actually lives on in these works as both a love letter to the story and provocation regarding the fallacy found in cinema. These artists films reveal and remind us that we see onscreen is never really real.

Watch *Untitled #125 (Hickory)* Part 1 (preview) here: <http://vimeo.com/32951541>

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