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Slater Bradley: *The Abandonments*

by Geoffrey Cruickshank-Hagenbuckle and Miyuki Tsushima

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How many home movies do we need of some wide-eyed wannabe's pilgrimage to Jim Morrison's *Père Lachaise grave*? In *The Abandonments*, six new, regrettable, fortunately forgettable, video shorts looking like unclaimed footage flooding a tourists' fast photo developer's bin, Slater Bradley brings his butter knife to a gunfight.

Less *wunderkind* than gutless wonder, with past shows clocked at MoMA, the Whitney, Guggenheim, and Palais de Tokyo, at 31, these days, Bradley is nearly a mid-career artist. Time to pony up and deliver, not barely show promise.

"I watched the worst one all the way through. I thought that that one at least might be interesting."
(Overheard at the opening.)

What is it about the young, who always think that their "first time," is the first time that ever was? The title piece "The Abandonments," Bradley's facile, fatuous "projection from a video source," too easily pleased with amateurishly maneuvering one turd-shaped cloud to "Singing in the Rain" across a louring Roosevelt Island sky—ejaculates prematurely, as if the first ever CGI! Flaubert, in 19th century Paris, was kind enough to consider this merely *une sottise*. A century later, Deleuze plain called it stupid.

In 2001, Slater Bradley photographed Chloe Sevigny, the Velveeta underground's vacant signifier. Big whoop. Now Bradley knocks off tap dance skits from Kubrick, and Harmony Korine. In "Protector of the Kennel," a vaguely Victorian forest dandy without smarts or spark enough to ever light my fire, mimics farmhand Paris Hilton's pop T.V. hit *The Simple Life*, accompanied by Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

Fluff. Kid stuff. Taking low to no risks, this chicken shit's so equivocal it can't be evaluated. Success does not mean we didn't fail because we never tried.



Still of "The Abandonments" (2005–2006), projection from a digital source. Courtesy of Team Gallery

Anemic cinema. Current concerns over cultural turns from language to image disturb me far less than the anemia of that image. (After all, we still have Text Messaging.) Given the glut of weak-kneed geeks tweaking screens, perhaps we should revamp the Stoic philosophers' famous first question and now ask: Why do these puerile pictures exist, instead of nothing? The whole scope of *The Abandonments*' reason to be brings to mind only the postscript to *Alias*, each episode of that primetime spy vs. spy series, which signs off with a smug blip-quip, "Boink! I made this!"

Laboriousness too is an objection. "For The Dark Night of The Soul" (whoo!) Bradley shoots a moon man blundering around in his bubblegum bonnet after-hours through New York's Museum of Natural History, lost not so much in zero gravity as he is in that flat affect common to post-partum moms on prescription mood stabilizers. Is there no end to these relentless, unrepentant throwback acne'n'*Boys' Life* motifs? *Star Wars*; field trips; fan club posters of The Doors?

Poser. Hoser. Although the single salient motive for promoting young artists of such dubious merit to star status is financial speculation on their future output, most are one-trick ponies. This dog can't even hunt.

Sadly Bradley, launched on his own cumbersome mission, plays out his losing hand while lacking the discernment just to fold his cards and scrap the works.

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