

Course #: DDA-645-01 Digital Imaging Studio

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## **The Extraordinary, Glimpsed in the Ordinary**

When a person observes their lives more closely and in a more detailed way, "art" hidden in the world that is unseen to the wider public could be surprisingly discovered in daily life routines. After reading Danto's and Heidegger's articles during this semester, I have started to wonder about this interesting question of when a thing or an object becomes a symbol of art and a work of art. I believed that inspiration comes to artists from everywhere, from life and nature. This research paper examines the art hidden in our daily routines. And the artist I would like to research about is Neil Goldberg. The first time I heard about the artist was in an elective course in Fine Art department called "Lens, Sculpture and Performance." At the time I knew so little about visual art. However, his works of art inspired everyone in the classroom, including me, and it was striking to find out the reasons behind these reactions. Goldberg found inspiration in his daily commute, and he then filmed or photographed them. The reason why people can strongly relate to his art pieces is because the photographs and videos are about daily life, which people all experience. In addition, people are also drawn into and surprised by the existing but unnoticed neutral scenes which are often neglected. Even if the fact that the phenomenal is ordinary to the public human being, the artist extracts these tiny small reactions from human in ordinary places, and give viewers a different and inspiring perspective of looking

at things.

Neil Goldberg is a multimedia contemporary artist who uses video, photography, and sculpture to focus on the ordinariness of daily urban life, but presents it in



a poetic and inspiring way. He was born 1963 in Queens, New York and grew up in Long Island. In 1986, he graduated from Brown University with a degree in history and computer science. And he now lives and works in New York and as a professor at Yale University. According to Columbia University's Sharon Marcus, his works of art "alert us to the perplexity of being alive in a body in a particular place and time."

At this moment during my art practice, I am currently working on an art project that is dealing with viewing ordinary landscapes. When people are looking at landscape scenes for a long period of time, the perception of looking will shift differently from what we normally see. Therefore I am trying to find a way to address this point in an unexpected way to show the viewing process, and shift the viewers' ways of perceiving the world and thus intrigue them. Correspondingly, the artist Mr. Goldberg is attracted by the moments or natures that are in some sense blank, neutral, empty, and thus available for the viewer's projection.

His video "Surfacing" for example, when he was filming these footages during his daily commute taking New York's subway, he was fascinated by the phenomenal of people orienting themselves as they emerge from the subway entrance steps into the agitation of

the street. This is an ordinary act that for thousands of New Yorkers do every day; however, in Goldberg's precise vision, he observes the certain facial expression, a consistent look on those people's face which drawn him into filming this video. These people all look



like they are searching, vulnerable, confused, and disorientated. For me, the video is very inspiring and relatable, because I have the same feeling when taking the subway even though I haven't ever noticed this could be so fascinating to the world. For him personally, when he was filming these footages, he was undergoing a hard time because the death of his father. He later realized the reason why he noticed and was attracted by these people's facial expressions and why it connected to his sadness at that specific time. For the artist, filming this project is not only about showing to the public. In my opinion, it is an

unconscious way of knowing, finding, and introspecting himself as well. He stated that the project is not about showing grief; it is open to viewer's own interpretations.



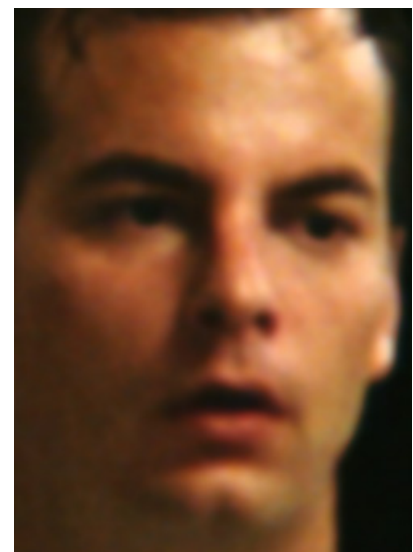
Furthermore, a lot of his videos and photographs were filmed and taken based on New Yorkers' lives in relation to subway system. For instance, "Wind Tunnel (2012)", a single channel video installation was filmed in a subway platform. The subway platform has a

unique climate which the temperature, the density, the smell, the wind patterns, and the light sources are all significantly different



than above ground. Whoever takes the subway knows and experiences the moment when a train coming towards us and running passed by our faces. By capturing the blast of wind intensively blowing through the hair of the passengers and the movement of their eyes in slow motion, Goldberg has the power to direct viewers' attention to the seemingly trivial moments that are usually experienced only fleetingly or overlooked. In addition his other video "Missing the Train (2002-2006)", a series of photographs, is also revealing the ordinary events happened in the subway platform.

Living in New York for almost a year, I can certainly relate to the thrill when people race down subway station stairs, only to be confronted with the closing doors of a departing



car. In this project, he targeted the people who just missed a train, and filmed the terrible disappointment and regret showing on their faces. This project is originally filmed in video, but he ultimately decided on the pivotal moment frozen in time, because he thinks that the dramatic tension in the image is all concentrated in a snapshot time frame. The images he selected from the video frames surprisingly gave an old oil painting effects. On the other hand, other two pieces of video mentioned above need time based video to reveal the graduating effects to show the transition of changing expressions.

Honestly, growing up in Taiwan with different culture and background, at first when I came to the big city, I was shocked and quite disappointed about the overall environment in New York, like the mess on the street and the stink in the subway. However, through these three pieces of works of art, he magnified some tiny interesting events or expressions on human beings that are often being ignored, and shifted viewer's attention by transforming New York's dirty and depressing subway space. Thus he changes people's experiences toward the New York City subway, which becomes somehow dreamy, delicate, and poetic. According to Goldberg, "I like to think of the moments as being overlooked by the people involved but existing for the pleasure of the city itself. Maybe no one is noticing these people as they emerge from the subway or the little trapezoids of beautiful sky, but somehow the city itself is watching." After watching Goldberg's video through his unique observation and interpretation of the characteristics from both the big city itself and the individual living in New York, viewers can also wander between the interplay of the

ordinary and the extraordinary things. It is fascinated to think of the changes that they can enjoy the new appearance of this poetic, humanity, and meaningful city in their imagination during everyday life.

## Works Cited

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