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MILLS

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 18, 2011

Mills College Art Museum Announces Exhibition of New Work by Los Angeles-based Artist Frances Stark

Oakland, CA—August 18, 2011. The Mills College Art Museum is pleased to present *Frances Stark: the whole of all the parts as well as the parts of all the parts*, an exhibition featuring multiple video works in a performative installation by Los Angeles-based artist Frances Stark. Curated by Sandra Percival, the exhibition will be on view September 15 through December 11, 2011. The opening reception will take place on September 15 from 6:00–8:00 pm.

Stark's exhibition explores the space between text, drawing, PowerPoint, musical score, film, random video chats, animation, installation, and live performance in an eight-part video installation that unfolds one part at a time. *The whole of all the parts as well as the parts of all the parts* evokes a cinematic experience in an exhibition, it is not a film, but it is like a film. Orchestrated and directed through the exhibition and space of the gallery, one screen after the other, requires time; upon completion, the gallery is illuminated, revealing another side of the story. Brazenly emerging from the delusion of her desired metamorphosis, Stark contemplates the impossible fact of being herself at the same time that she is herself. *The whole of all the parts as well as the parts of all the parts* is indeed still in parts, moving toward a final stage and finale that will take place at Performa in New York in November.



The performative impulse in Stark's work has been evolving in a series of works and performances since her exhibition *Torment of Follies* (2008) at the Secession, Vienna, where her installation was compared to the musical interpretation of a libretto in opera. Texts drawn from *Ferdynand*, the 1937 novel by the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz, reappear in Stark's live performance *I've Had It! And I've Also Had It!* at the Aspen Opera House (2010) which was accompanied by two string trios simultaneously playing Haydn's divertimento *Das Echo* and Lady Gaga's hit-parade song *Telephone* played backwards—later revised and rearranged in her performance *I've had it and a half!* At the Hammer Museum, UCLA (2011). Stark's conception is also about reception—the separation between the artist herself and the form of the work, and the conversation she holds with the audience, return again to herself. In evolving and manifold ways, Stark's work explores the different spaces of language, writing, and working; and of herself, her body, and being an artist in today's world.

Frances Stark is a Los Angeles-based artist and writer with an MFA from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA. She is currently Assistant Professor at the University of Southern California. Solo exhibitions of her work have been presented at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge; Portikus, Frankfurt; Secession, Vienna; Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands; UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and Kunstverein, Munich. Her work has also been shown in the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham; Aspen Art Museum, CO; Tate Modern, London; De Appel, Amsterdam; New Langton Arts, San Francisco; Kunsthalle, Basel; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the Institute for Contemporary Art, London. Stark's exhibition at MCAM coincides with her participation in the Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, and, in New York, Performa 11.

Curator, Sandra Percival, is the director of YU, a new contemporary art center in Portland, OR. *Frances Stark: the whole of all the parts as well as the parts of all the parts* is supported by the Joan Danforth Art Museum Endowment and the Susan L. Mills Gallery Fund.

Image: Frances Stark, *I've Had It! And I've Also Had It!*, Aspen Opera House, 2010.

Public Programs (please visit mcam.mills.edu for updated details):

Opening Reception

Thursday, September 15, 2011, 6:00-8:00 pm,
Art Museum

Frances Stark: Artist Lecture

Wednesday, December 7, 2011, 7:00 pm
Danforth Lecture Hall, Art Building

About the Mills College Art Museum

Founded in 1925, The Mills College Art Museum is a forum for exploring art and ideas and a laboratory for contemporary art practices. Through innovative exhibitions, programs, and collections, the museum engages and inspires the intellectual and creative life of the Mills community as well as the diverse audiences of the Bay Area and beyond. The Mills College Art Museum is located at 5000 MacArthur Boulevard, Oakland, CA 94613. Museum hours are Tuesday-Sunday 11:00–4:00 pm and Wednesday 11:00–7:30 pm. Admission is free for all exhibitions and programs unless noted. For more information, visit mcam.mills.edu

About Mills College

Nestled in the foothills of Oakland, California, Mills College is a nationally renowned, independent liberal arts college offering a dynamic progressive education that fosters leadership, social responsibility, and creativity to approximately 950 undergraduate women and 550 graduate women and men. The College ranks as one of the *Best 376 Colleges* in the country and one of the greenest colleges in the nation by The Princeton Review. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Mills one of the top-tier regional universities in the country and second among colleges and universities in the West in its "Great Schools, Great Prices" category. For more information, visit www.mills.edu.

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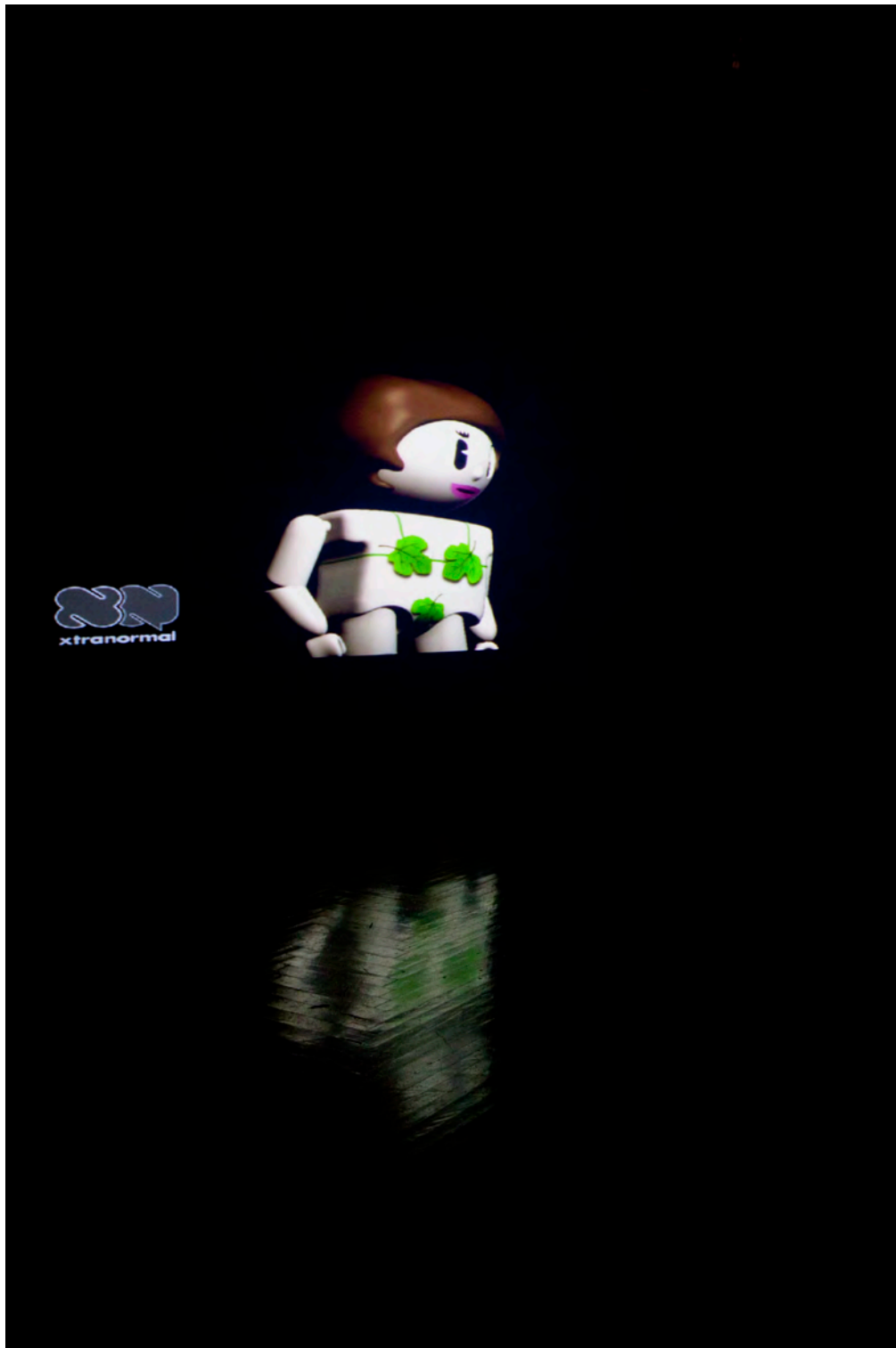
Frances Stark

the whole of all the parts as well as the parts of all the parts

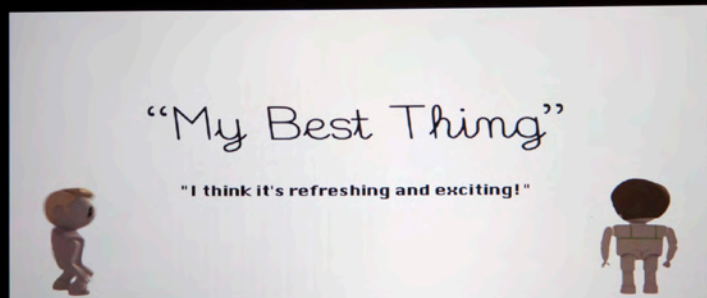
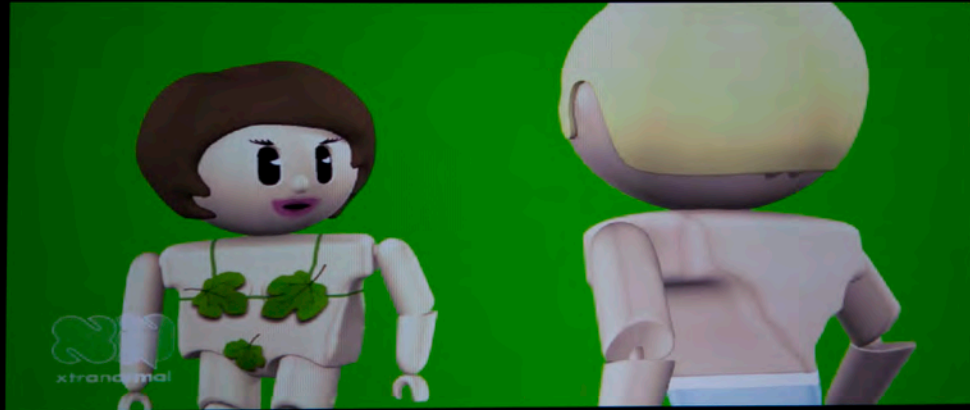
September 15 – December 11, 2011

Mills College Art Museum | mcam.mills.edu

INSTALLATION IMAGES (by Phil Bond)









OCTOBER 26, 2011, 3:21 PM

Artifacts | Frances Stark's Best Thing

By *LINDA YABLONSKY*

Nadya Wasytko, courtesy of the artistThe artist Frances Stark, at right, with Skerrit Bwoy, from “Put a Song in Your Thing,” a work in progress to be performed at the Abrons Art Center on Nov. 4.

Some people like to talk during sex. Others get their kicks by talking about it. And then there are those who would rather just watch.

The Los Angeles artist [Frances Stark](#) has something for everyone in “[My Best Thing](#),” a compulsively watchable, feature-length digital animation now playing at [MoMA P.S. 1](#) that goes well beyond the whisper of sweet nothings. Clad either in fig leaves or briefs, the wide-eyed, stock C.G.I. dolls on screen re-enact the flirtations that Stark, 44, carried on with two 20-something Italian men whom she met at different times last year while taking random strolls through a video sex chat site.

Though they often talk dirty, the characters’ spoken and texted exchanges constantly digress into other channels of their very different lives, taking the film deep into the heart of intimate human relationships. Nietzsche, Fellini, Glenn Gould, Picasso, political protest and the suicides of writers like David Foster Wallace all become part of each pair’s ardent, LOL–infused “post-coital” banter, as do their families, careers and Stark’s responsibilities as both the mother of an 8-year-old boy and a professor at the University of Southern California.

“Show me more,” says Marcello, her first suitor, once the two have repaired to the privacy of Skype. “Wow,” he says, though in his accent it comes out as, “Whoa.”

“I’m old,” she replies. “So you have to be forgiving.”

“Heh-heh,” he says. “I like mature women.”

And so it goes, as the minimal small talk and virtual fondling escalate over 10 episodes into a poignant, funny and revealing narrative of desire and self-doubt. Though the computer-generated voices lack emotion, the figures’ flashing eyes, pregnant pauses and twisting dance movements convey a remarkable depth of feeling.

Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown’s EnterpriseA scene from the Frances Stark video “[My Best Thing](#).” Stark is a writer as well as a visual artist, and much of her work to date involves a struggle for words as well as meaning. “Why is it I always want to explain to you everything?” Stark asks Marcello, occasionally resorting to Google’s translator to make sure she understands him, while he apologizes for his awkward English. But the two speak volumes through their bodies.

“I got fascinated by feeling so intensely for people I didn’t know,” Stark said in a Skype conversation the other day. “I was never into Internet sex, but because it’s a form of seduction that took place through typing and interacting visually, I got hooked.”

So do many viewers of “My Best Thing” — to my mind, Stark’s best thing yet. In an early episode, she tells her young suitor that she is in “a heavy dancehall phase,” and shows him a music video of the high-speed, violently sexual Jamaican dance style called daggery. Her obsession with it led to “Put a Song in Your Thing,” a live show that Stark will stage next week in New York as a commission from the Performa 11 biennial of performance art.

Skerrit Bwoy, a “hype man” and D.J. for the dancehall band Major Lazer distinguished by his yellow mohawk, will join her onstage with a “BigBox” sound system rigged by the British artist Mark Leckey, who won the Turner Prize in 2008. Mostly, though, the show will take place on a screen, where Stark’s Skype chats will again appear, along with projections from her current show at the Mills College Art Museum. This time, the performers will read the texts aloud as lyrics for the dozen songs in the show, which Stark says brings it close to a silent movie experience. “It’s a way of throwing my voice,” she said. “I’m there, but not really.”

One tune is a piano piece composed by her second Italian discovery in “My Best Thing.” Stark made the video as her contribution to the current Venice Biennale, a decision played out in the course of the piece, when she asks Marcello, a filmmaker, to collaborate with her on the project. “I was willing to do whatever it took to get him here,” Stark said. “We had an interesting story, and I wanted to tell it but didn’t know how.”

At that point, she discovered Xtranormal.com, a Web site supplying animators with characters, voices and music, and went to work, despite Marcello’s subsequent disappearance after he was badly beaten in a Roman political protest. Her biggest problem then was what to tell her boyfriend, Stuart Bailey, who is one half of Dexter Sinister, a design and publishing collaborative. “I told him that Chat Roulette had become part of my thinking,” she said. “But I don’t think it’s his favorite thing in the world.”

Frances Stark’s “My Best Thing” is on view through January 2012 at MoMA P.S. 1, 22-25 Jackson Avenue, Long Island City. She will perform “Put a Song in Your Thing” on Nov. 4 at the Abrons Art Center, 466 Grand Street. “The Whole of All the Parts as Well as the Parts of All the Parts” continues through Dec. 11 at Mills College Art Museum, 5000 MacArthur Boulevard, Oakland, Calif.

ART REVIEW

Video Artists Stark and Herschend Embrace Humor, Unbearably Long Titles, and PowerPoint

By [Jeremiah Barber](#) | Nov 27, 2011

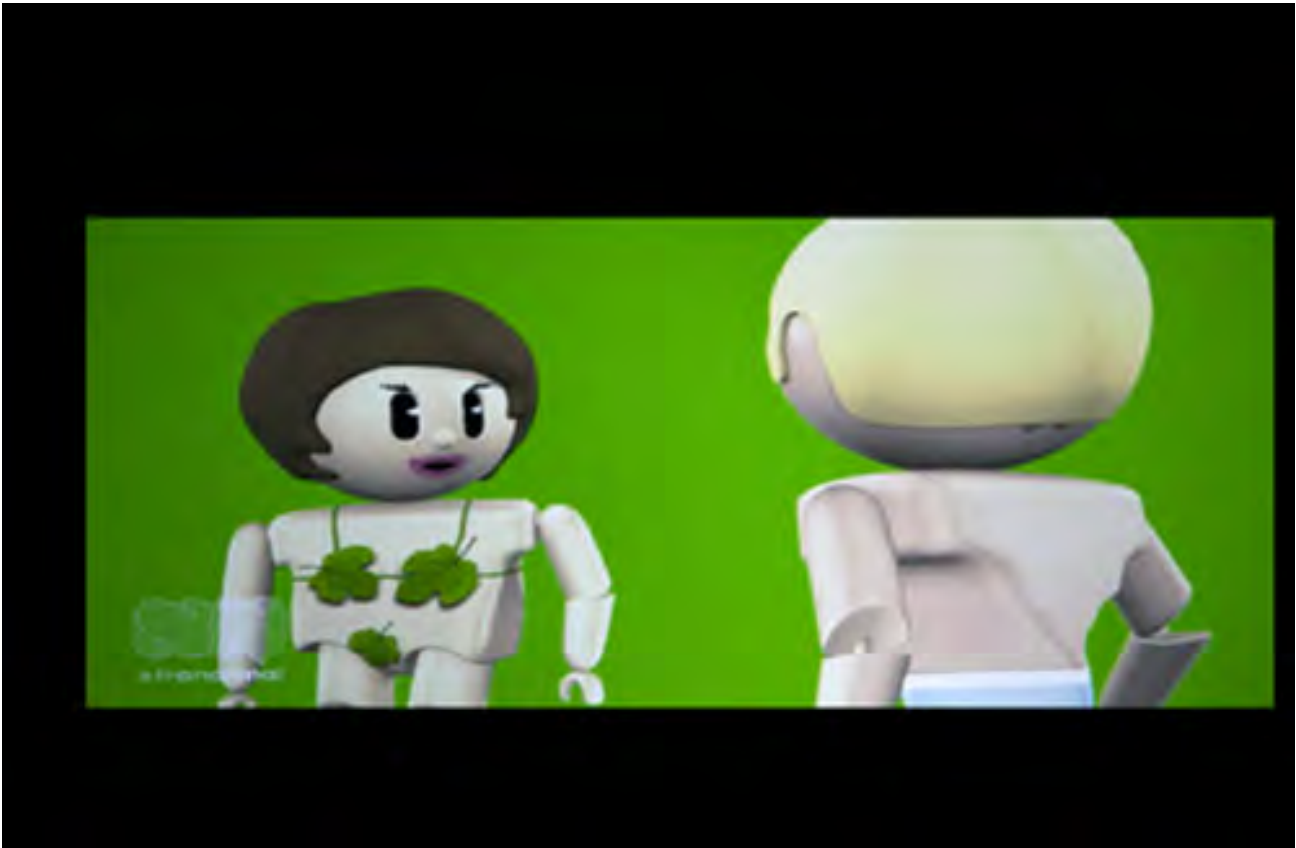


Jonh Herschend, *Pastoral 5*, 2011.

What if, after all the sweat, love and tears expended on your artistic production, your viewer is distracted during your brilliant climax by something as innocent as a fly? This is the parable that opens Frances Stark's new hour-long, eight channel-video projection, **The Whole of All the Parts as Well As the Parts of All the Parts**. In the [handful of seconds](#) that the artist has to catch our attention can we possibly comprehend the intricacy of the work behind the work?

The answer is almost surely not, considering that few of us can look at a car, a refrigerator, a cabinet, or the fly that distracted us in the first place, and understand the perfect harmony of its seamless construction.

Stark's **The Whole of All the Parts...** is a bombastic and magnetic romp through music, sound, light, and space installed at the Mills College Art Museum. It can be painful to sit/stand/pace through, because the eight projections are staggered like dominoes with only one playing at a time. The rest of the hangar-sized museum is pitch dark and as soon as one video ends, a giant blinking arrow cajoles you forward to your only option-- towards the next projection, deeper into the maze.



Frances Stark, *The Whole of All the Parts...*, 2011.

Several of the videos open with Stark lecturing to a nearly empty opera hall, but the speech has been edited out, leaving only the beating patterns of her *ums* and *ahs* as she searches for words we never hear. Additional images are sparse and include an animated Lego-Eve with leaves on her privates and the scene from Fellini's *8 1/2* when La Saraghina, the dark haired and buxom prostitute, dances before cheering young boys. Stark appears in her own work only in fragments, as a disembodied voice behind a chat message, a cartoonishly animated figure, a digital voice reading her intricate words.



Francesca Stark, *The Whole of All the Parts...*, 2011.

This is Stark's first major multi-channel video installation. Many of the videos are bright white with thin lines of text blinking in the center, metered to the music of Haydn, S-Cat, and Lady Gaga. The strongest narrative emerges from a sex chat between an artist and a wealthy Italian architect. They tease each other along through the ambiguous medium of minimalist text. Each ultimately boasts that the other is "only a number," one digit in a long line of sex partners. The fact that they are both using each other renders them impotent. The artist asks the architect to watch her film, explaining "this is the really brilliant part about Fellini's *8 1/2* (sic) / it is so much about masturbation, that is why it is in my film." By then we've seen the [Fellini *Saraghina* bit](#), and the narrative folds in on itself. The artist's film becomes the one we are currently watching, and the rumba of *La Saraghina* is a reflection of Stark's earlier comparison of the artist to the prostitute ("the pressure to perform / resembles the pressure put / on sex workers to / always get it on.")



Frances Stark, *The Whole of All the Parts...*, 2011.

If Frances Stark is quoting Fellini, Jonn Herschend might be quoting [Jerry Seinfeld](#). Like Stark's video, Herschend's **The Book You Said I Never Returned, plus three to five pastorals** is an intricately constructed meta-narrative, albeit with humor as its course. Herschend leads his characters to stumble around the narrative of a missing book while revealing their own greed, self-interest, and ineptitude.



Jonn Herschend, *The Book You Said I Never Returned...*, 2011.

The story is told through an array of media, from printed text to video, PowerPoint, photograph, and installation. The gallery, Steven Wolf Fine Arts, is decorated with the Ikea-detritus of a run-of-the-mill office. A cubicle boxes out the center, and the walls are scattered with greenery, taupe-colored furniture, and fuzzy abstract paintings. A flash-lit photograph hangs on the far wall depicting the earmarked book. On the desk of the cubicle a smaller framed photograph (*Frame Device*, 2011) presents the entire installation *in situ*. In the photo you can see a photo on the desk, an infinite feedback loop. (I spent a full minute staring and trying to figure out if this was physically possible. Steven Wolf tried to assist: "The photo within the photo is that photo without that photo." Hmm.)

The installation is cloaked in irony. The paintings are produced by Herschend and are officially for sale, but only as part of the installation itself ("Price on request"), their value indistinguishable from that of the surge protector and filing cabinet. Lit by fluorescent lights, one painting is partially blocked by a pull-down projection screen that glows with a PowerPoint projection of black text on white background.

In the PowerPoints Herschend hits his stride. They begin in a distant, bulleted, third-person corporate voice ("A catalogue of the forest office"), but the emotional state of the person behind the presentation gradually takes over ("Oh, Lisa, we will start again"), their professionalism hijacked by pettiness.

Many of the references within **The Book You Said...** remain unclear until one reads a free take-away printed story. There the love triangle of characters is explicit, as is their role within a second video (*Pastoral 5*, 2011) and their plans to escape to an idyllic "forest office" on the lot behind their building ("we could run an extension cord through the men's bathroom").

Stark and Herschend are both strong writers. Treat yourself to some meta-narrative.

The Whole of All the Parts as Well As the Parts of All the Parts runs through December 11, 2011 at Mills College Art Museum. Stark will give a lecture there on December 7 at 7pm. For [more information](#) visit mcam.mills.edu.

The Book You Said I Never Returned, plus three to five pastorals runs through December 22, 2011 at Steven Wolf Fine Arts. For [more information](#) visit stevenwolffinearts.com.

RESOURCES

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3.6 / Aliens vs. Venetians

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the whole of all the parts as well as the part of all the parts

FRANCES STARK

SEP 16 - DEC 11

MILLS COLLEGE ART MUSEUM

by *Jessica Brier*

The whole of all the parts as well as the part of all the parts is a solo project by Los Angeles–based artist Frances Stark curated by Sandra Percival of the contemporary art space YU in Portland. It is a cinematic installation that explores the layered meanings of performance and technology, the creative process, and the mediation of personal and artistic experience.

It consists of a single installation that is divided into eight video segments, totaling fifty-three minutes in length, with a distinct beginning, middle, and end. The museum is divided accordingly into eight smaller galleries, with the walls acting as projection screens and partitions. The piece begins every hour, on the hour; lights go down, and the first video is projected onto the wall closest to the museum entrance. At the end of the first segment, a giant arrow flashes on the screen, pointing visitors to the next gallery where another video immediately begins. Stark choreographs our movement through the space, and the piece progresses like this until viewers have traveled to the far end of the museum. Some rooms have benches and others don't, so even the position of viewers at rest is predetermined.

The videos combine text, music, a clip from Fellini's *8 ½*, and video footage of an experimental opera Stark performed at the Aspen Opera House in 2010. Aside from this footage, the only figures that appear are computer-generated: one male and one female figure created in the program Xtranormal, clad in white briefs and Adam and Eve–style leaves respectively. The characters are never named, though we come to understand the woman as Stark herself. She uses the avatars' not-quite-human voices to heighten our sense of technology-mediated humanity—an idea that permeates the piece and holds it all together.

The problem of authorship also serves as a thread through Stark's work. She layers other people's music on top of her own words, filtering them through a computer program made by someone else. In one of the most entertaining moments of the piece, the audio morphs into a kind of stream-of-text musical set to an upbeat, rhythmic soundtrack, and a line appears on screen that echoes this longing for originality, as if the piece itself yearns to be authentic: "Oh to be as sound as a song not simply flat and half as long."

Much of *the whole of all the parts* ruminates on the difficulty of being an artist—the internal pressures inherent in the act of creation, the impossibility of originality, the anxiety of writer's block, and the particular stress of being a "professional" artist. The computerized voiceover that introduces the first video primes us with some stream-of-consciousness agonizing of this ilk. Stark worries that she may be "losing the ability to write." This feels a bit like the introductory sentence of a short story in its first draft, one that provides essential momentum but is likely to get lopped

off in the revision stage.



The whole of all the parts and the parts of all the parts, 2011; installation view, Mills College Art Museum, 2011. Courtesy of the Artist and Mills College Art Museum. Photo: Phil Bond.



The whole of all the parts and the parts of all the parts, 2011; installation view, Mills College Art Museum, 2011. Courtesy of the Artist and Mills College Art Museum. Photo: Phil Bond.

And maybe this was the point, for Stark: to combine both the finished and messy bits of a work, the whole of all the parts *and* the parts of all the parts, even those that seem redundant or preliminary. This is one way to expose the circuitous process of making art. The computer-voice declares, “I cannot tell anyone how all these parts and parts of parts will add up.”

By far the most engrossing parts of the piece occurred in the latter half, featuring flirtatious online chat sessions between an anonymous man and woman. These conversations are not only the source of the work’s central narrative, comprising a compelling drama that unfolds over time, but also the synthesis of its most poignant ideas that are obliquely hinted at elsewhere. Their words pop up on screen in turn and distinguished by two different fonts. Over time, it becomes clear that the woman is Stark, and the man is an Italian architect whom she has never met in person.

In one conversation, Stark compares being an artist to being a sex worker; there is always a “pressure to get it on.” Stark is able to express her own fears and innermost thoughts about art, sex, and intimacy to (and through) this stranger. At another point, the Italian suggests that they should never meet in person because they are too alike. For both of them, “nothing is enough.” This phrase stuck with me, resonating like some kind of Zen proverb. Does it imply that they are never satisfied? Or that the most minimal human contact—next to nothing—is, itself, enough?

The relationship between Stark and the architect is interesting on two levels. There is an obvious strangeness to knowing someone across the world only through instant messaging, creating the illusion of closeness through the remove of technology. But more interesting is that this medium allows viewers, as voyeuristic audience, to witness an intimate exchange in a way that wouldn't be possible through any other means. I came to understand the Internet as an ironic enabler of intimacy, both for Stark and her mystery man, and for viewers as their audience.

When the lights come up, the question of how all the parts, and parts of parts, add up (or don't) lingers. Experiencing the work is perhaps reflective of the process of its making: it is disjointed and disorganized, leaving many threads unstitched. The wall text informs us that *the whole of all the parts...* was punctuated with a "finale" at Performa 11 in New York this November. Part of the opera created for the Aspen Opera House was also revised and given another life as a performance titled *I've had it and a half!* at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles earlier this year. Understanding the way Stark recycles, revises, and extends the life of her work is crucial to her process as an artist: for her, art is by definition always unfinished, always reflecting back on itself and finding new life. This is a messy process. But for all its conceptual loose ends, Stark's work feels genuine precisely because it is messy. She is always working through these questions: How do we make anything original? Why make art at all? How is experience translated through space, time, and medium? What constitutes performance? These questions lead to more questions, which, like the life of her work, simultaneously reach back into the past and forward into the future.

THE WHOLE OF ALL THE PARTS AS WELL AS THE PART OF ALL THE PARTS IS ON VIEW AT THE [MILLS COLLEGE ART MUSEUM](#), IN OAKLAND, THROUGH DECEMBER 11, 2011.