

“Sometimes it takes an artist to know an artist...”

From November 25 to January 27, artist and writer David Robbins (Whitefish Bay, USA, 1957 live and works in Milwaukee, Wisconsin) presents *The Lift Trilogy* (2006-2011), his second exhibition in Naples since 1995. Comprising three videos along with related paintings and sculpture, the exhibition explores the evolution of Robbins’ complex interactions with personal trainer Joshua Van Schaick. Each of the three videos is integrated into a unique installation, delivering its own, self-contained pleasures, while together the three form a chain of revelations that establish a narrative arc and the exhibition whole.

Using as subject matter a recent social phenomenon--the personal trainer, emblem of our determined striving for physical health and beauty—*The Lift Trilogy* opens out onto questions about art and artist. In the social role of the personal trainer we can locate our own yearning for perfection, the tensions that attach to self-image, the perennial desire for self-transformation, and the fleeting nature of physical beauty. As much as a personal trainer addresses the mechanics of the body, then, he also plays a symbolic role in the mind. Thus could Robbins transpose a context of emphatic physicality--gym, weights, exercise, the figure--into a conceptual key, one that runs throughout the *Trilogy*. Evaluating Van Schaick’s own, decidedly soulful approach to training challenged Robbins to reach beyond mere ideas, however, for while any personal trainer might be credited with the attributes described above, Van Schaick seems to treat personal training as his *medium*, exploring and developing his approach to it in a manner similar to the way an artist explores and invents his art. In place of paint or clay, Van Schaick’s material is human interaction. Adopting a wholistic approach to training, in his professional capacity he works to shape his clients’ physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

*The Lift Trilogy* developed from a video initially undertaken by Robbins to convey a sense of what it is like to train with Van Schaick. The resulting video, *Lift* (2006/2011), a portrait of a young man who transformed himself from a hot-tempered, violent adolescent into a compassionate and philosophical personal trainer, has been praised as “a new kind of monument” and is now included in several museum collections. In the course of the project, the pair’s multi-tiered roles— artist and model, director and subject, client and trainer—deepened and overlapped, with Van Schaick becoming muse to the artist Robbins, who gradually came to perceive Van Schaick as himself a kind of instinctive conceptual artist.

According to Robbins, *The Lift Trilogy* manifestation at Raucci/Santamaria presents “an artist using the exhibition format to argue that someone else is an artist” – an approach in pointed contrast to the prevailing conception, carried over from modernism, that an exhibition directly indexes an artist’s

“self-expression.” Offered instead is art that celebrates and promotes another’s achievement. *The Lift Trilogy* exhibition charts the course of the project and attendant discoveries. In so doing it confronts our definition of “artist.” Who is an artist? How do we define art? Is “art” restricted to the art context? A brochure expanding on these questions, with an English-language text authored by Robbins, will be available to gallery visitors.

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