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## Installation captures live performance art

By Kurt Shaw  
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The simple instructions read: "Go to a good-sized wood with two shopping bags full of toilet paper rolls -- and throw the rolls up into the treetops so the woods become festooned with toilet paper streamers. Some should go from tree to tree."

These were once written by performance artist Al Hansen (1927-95), an early member of the Fluxus art group, as an instruction for a performance art piece that people could perform themselves.

In Hilary Harp and Suzie Silver's video construction "Untitled Landscape (for Hansen)," performers Janine Biunno, Christine Cato, Mark Cato, Vince Gillen and Clare Parrry happily agree.

The work is one of 10 video view-boxes from Harp and Silver's latest series "Untitled Landscapes" on view at Pittsburgh Filmmakers' gallery. Those and a projected video installation make up the exhibition "The Happiest Day."

In both projects, the videos are of recent, original performances staged by the artists and a few willing cohorts. But the performances are not entirely their own. Instead, Harp and Silver have gleefully rummaged through art history's attic, searching for historical images of performance artworks from the 1960s and '70s to use as starting points for their own pieces.

"All of the pieces are based on black-and-white photo documentations of pieces that we saw," says Silver, who explains that the only exception was Hansen's instructions, which exists basically as a

### Photo Gallery

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["Untitled Landscape \(for Acconci\)"](#)

University Art Gallery

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["Beach Dolphin"](#)

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### Details

#### 'The Happiest Day'

**What:** An installation by Pittsburgh artists Hilary Harp and Suzie Silver.

**When:** Through Feb. 13. Hours: Noon to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays.

**Admission:** Free.

**Where:** Pittsburgh Filmmakers, 477 Melwood Avenue, North Oakland.

**Details:** (412) 681-5449 or [pqhfilmmakers.org](http://pqhfilmmakers.org).

#### Related event

**What:** Harp and Silver present works by local artists. Animations by Luke Meeken & Andrew Negrey, and Jacob Ciocci. Films by Tom and Jacob Burckhardt. Plus a surprise live event.

conceptual piece.

The performances, which are loosely based on works by some of the most influential performance artists of the day such as Vito Acconci, Herman Nitsch and Carolee Schneemann, are displayed on 5 1/2-inch LCD screens inside miniature theatrical landscapes constructed in 2-foot by 2-foot. boxes.

Reminiscent of dioramas, Harp says of the Victorian styled shadow box landscapes, "Each of the pieces is like an homage to a particular performance art piece."

For example, in "Untitled Landscape (for Meret Oppenheim)," a cast of characters eats food around a buffet table of which the centerpiece is a naked woman. In "Untitled Landscape (for Schneeman)," five nymphs cavort in a crystal cave.

The latter is based on the 1968 piece "Illinois Central/kinetic theatre" by the aforementioned Schneemann. Schneemann's piece **originally** was intended as an anti-Vietnam war performance piece which combined film and live action at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. But in **Harp and Silver's** version, there is a bit of buffoonery afoot since the nymphs are basically girls dressed up in nude costumes, with the addition of ridiculous smiles on their faces.

Silver says of their version: "It very loosely follows the script of Schneemann's piece." She says the nymphs were actually inspired by a painting of nymphs by Francois Boucher (1703-70).

"We just thought it was a such a great image," Silver says of Boucher's nymphs. "We just thought if we could place Boucher with Carol Lee Schneeman that it would be kind of funny."

It is, but as Silver says, "She would probably not like that, really."

Like in that piece, both Harp and Silver acknowledge that there is an element of kitsch in each of their works and that goes double for the piece "Untitled Landscape (for Nitsch)," which Silver describes as "Herman Nitsch as a kids TV show."

Perhaps central Europe's most unusual artist, the Austrian born Nitsch is known for his "Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries," a series of nearly 100 performances completed between 1962 and '98, in which he combined fake crucifixion with the disemboweling of lambs and other animals.

In Harp and Silver's homage three men gleefully pull fake entrails from a stuffed animal lashed to a tree, then dance around the entrails in a circle.

**When:** 2 p.m. Feb. 5.

**Admission:** Free. Intended for age 9 and older.

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Harp and Silver say the primitive, almost pagan, quality found in that piece is what ties all of the works together.

"What we found when looking at a lot of the work from the '60s and '70s was that they seemed to, whether consciously or unconsciously, be sort of also coming out of some primitive urge," Silver says, "so we wanted the pieces to appear romantic, in an idyllic sort of way. As if looking at a more primitive time as an ideal time to exist."

In an adjacent space, the projected installation, "The Happiest Day," runs in a continuous loop. Comprised of several of the same performances found in the video boxes, the piece reads like a Victorian version of a video game as it moves from one video vignette to another, linked together by 19th-century inspired illustrations and animations.

"The video actually came out of the boxes," Harp says. "We made the boxes first and then thought wouldn't it be great to put them all together into a continuous single-channel work."

Although much of the work seems like inside jokes for art cognoscenti, each piece is wholly entertaining -- making for an enjoyable, if rather disjointed, experience.

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