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Live review, photo gallery, set list
3:53pm

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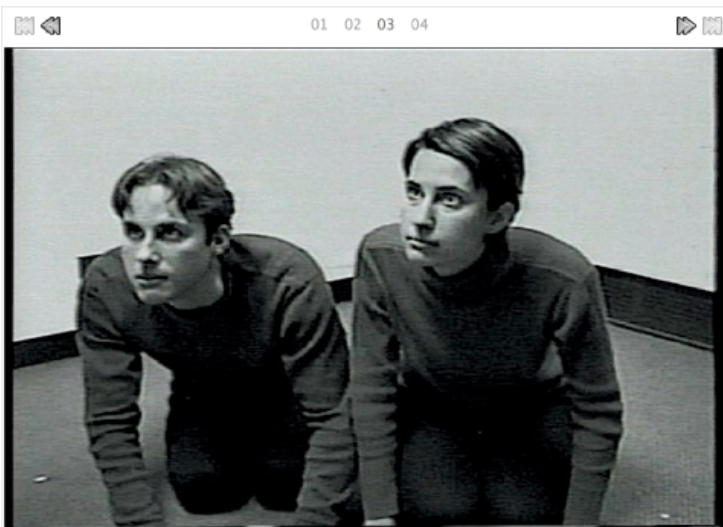
TOC Poll

We want to know what you think. Click here to answer this week's poll question.

Art & Design

Pet flicks

Scott Wolniak selects some "Suitable Video" for Western Exhibitions. By Lauren Weinberg



Clockwise from top left, Stills from Marc Schwartzberg, *Shooter*; Nudd, *Worm Death*, 2000; Conaway, *Two Dogs and a Ball*, 2001; and Stoltmann, *I Spill My Guts Everyday for Nothing*, 2002.

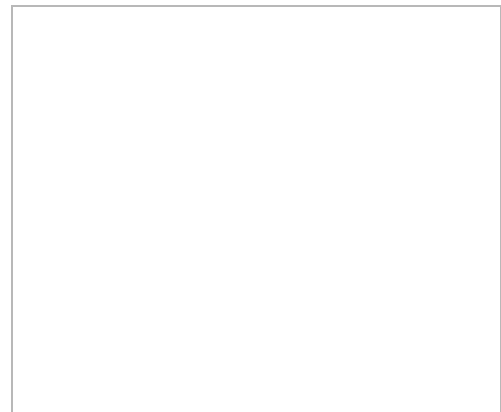
When Suitable's roof collapsed under the weight of snow in December 2000, the gallery's co-directors Scott Wolniak and Derek Fansler weren't too fazed. Insurance paid for the single sculpture they'd left there after a recent show. "That represented our first sale," Wolniak recalls over coffee at Ukrainian Village's Cafe Ballou.

Suitable closed in 2004 after a five-year run in Wolniak's Humboldt Park garage. Last summer, the 38-year-old artist presented three works from the gallery in "Artists Run Chicago," the Hyde Park Art Center's retrospective of local artist-run exhibition spaces. Inspired by a screening he organized for the HPAC, Wolniak also curated a compilation of 13 videos shown at Suitable or created by its artists at the time. That survey, "Suitable Video," is on view at Western Exhibitions in the West Loop through February 6.

Wolniak had recently graduated from SAIC and, like Fansler, was working as an art handler when the two friends decided to start their own gallery in 1999. "The commercial gallery scene seemed very limited at that time," the Naperville native says. "A lot of the people I [knew] were making interesting work, but it was like, where are you going to show? My wife and I had purchased a two-flat, and we thought the garage could easily be converted into a really nice exhibition space."

In 2010, most artist-run galleries in Chicago occupy their proprietors' apartments—a much rarer phenomenon a decade ago. Wolniak appreciates the "energy" in these spaces, but he and Fansler preferred the neutrality of the garage, which they spruced up with drywall and proper lighting. Opening receptions spilled into Wolniak's yard. Though Suitable offered little protection from the elements, some artists turned the weather to their advantage, as Chicago artist John Neff did in the 2000 show "Cold Conceptualism."

"It snowed for about three days before the opening," Wolniak says. "We were able to house all of the beer in the snow. A snowball fight broke out. And the experience of all these art patrons standing around in the freezing cold, drinking beer, at the time seemed really



Art & Design blog

All Tomorrow's Art Parties, Jan 8–10
1/8/10

As the first big wave of 2010 art parties hits, we round up new shows omitted from TOC's print edition.

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different. You think of Chicago sports fans doing that, but not so much the art community.”

Wolniak and Fansler both attended UIC’s M.F.A. program, where they met many of the artists whose work they showed at Suitable. UIC alums provide some of the most daring pieces in “Suitable Video,” such as Kirsten Stoltmann’s *I Spill My Guts Everyday for Nothing*. (Aided by prosthetics, she really does—all over her kitchen floor.) The show also offers romance (Miller and Shellabarger’s *In/Out*, in which the husband-and-husband team stand so close to each other their steaming breath mingles) and humor (Sarah Conaway’s precise reenactment, with her twin brother, of William Wegman’s 1974 Weimaraner video *Dog Duet*). Other contributors include Julia Hechtman, Sterling Ruby and Siebren Versteeg.

Suitable’s local focus was unique. “We didn’t strive to bring in people from out of town,” Wolniak explains. “There weren’t enough spaces [in Chicago], so we weren’t interested in helping people from New York and L.A.... We wanted it to function as a springboard, a venue to present what an artist could do.”

Wolniak has produced a DVD based on the show that Western Exhibitions will sell in an edition of 100. Wolniak, who teaches video and drawing at the University of Chicago, plans to continue curating DVDs of emerging artists’ work under the Suitable Video umbrella, with the same relaxed approach that, at Suitable, yielded intellectually rigorous, critically acclaimed shows. “We weren’t doing tons of homework or research,” he says. “We were just looking for good work.”

[Western Exhibitions hosts a reception for “Suitable Video” January 30.](#)

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