

BRIAN BRESS

CHERRY AND MARTIN

BY JODY ZELLEN

THE PERFORMANCE WORKS OF BILL VIOLA COME TO MIND IN the transformations of Brian Bress. It is a curious progression to go from static framed images to moving images framed as if they were the same. Bress also evokes Robert Wilson's *Voom* portraits of 2007. In "Under Performing" Brian Bress picks up where Viola and Wilson left off, creating video images that incorporate limited action and which feature costumed and masked figures evoking episodes of *The Twilight Zone*.

In Bress' newest video portraits he utilizes painted backdrops and a fixed camera position to explore foreground/background relationships. His previous photographic pieces featured elaborate scenes staged for the camera with costumed actors (usually friends), fashioned 2D props and masks that reference both primitive as well as cubist artworks. In moving from the photographic to the video image his sets have become more minimal, allowing him to explore how the costumed actor relates to, and moves within the fabricated stage.

Seven of the eight video portraits are flat screen monitors hung on the wall surrounded by custom-made brightly painted frames. The shortest piece, *Beadman (Parker)* (all works 2012), features a man covered from head to toe in a suit of multi-sized and colored beads. This figure, shot against a black background, jumps up and down slowly spinning 360 degrees. Nothing else happens. The intrigue is in the costume and its ambiguity. Similarly in the 24-minute loop *Relatives (Devin, John, Jason, Lewis)*, four figures bob in mock water. Posed within a crudely painted set and backdrop that simulates breaking waves, the four actors' bodies slowly rise and fall with the tide. Each has an awkwardly shaped flat mask that is a fragment of a precisely painted abstraction. The work is a dynamic collage of painted elements that blurs the boundaries between painting and video, three dimensionality and illusion. Bress is interested in the 'play' of this fabricated space where what is 'live' has less life than what is painted.

Each of Bress' costumes as well as his backdrops is a sculpture or a painting. Using geometric dissolves as well as vertical and horizontal swipes Bress edits the footage to allow the actor to interact with himself, as in *Fancy Dress Ball (Brian)*, a 16-minute loop. The background—a reference to Matisse's cut-outs and Lichtenstein's dot paintings—is graphic, colorful and bold. Covered in a canvas suit painted to align with parts of the backdrop, the actor dances in front of the image allowing the three-dimensional parts to intersect and present the illusion of flatness.

Bress' video portraits are less cluttered than his photographic works, yet because of the added dimension of time they are just as dense. The works derive their strength from the intersection between action and setting. They make reference to art and art history, but are not heavy handed. Bress' context is the medium: collage, video, painting, sculpture and photography, his content the implied narratives that come from fusing disparate mediums and blurring boundaries between them.

Brian Bress, *Relatives (Devin, John, Jason, Lewis)*, 2012

