

Art in Review

Candice Breitz

'Him + Her'

Yvon Lambert

550 West 21st Street, Chelsea
Through March 21

The novelty of the Hollywood movie video montage faded a while ago, but Candice Breitz's pair of installations, "Him (1968-2008)" and "Her (1978-2008)," revives the genre with a surprising, archetypal urgency.

Each installation consists of seven big, flat-screen monitors symmetrically arranged on one wall. On the "Her" side play brief scenes of Meryl Streep acting in "Kramer vs. Kramer," "Sophie's Choice" and many other well-known films. Blacked-out backgrounds create a vivid focus on the actress and her chameleon-like emotional expression. The same image may appear on different screens, along with images from other movies.

Repetition produces a rhythmic effect. During the 23-minute duration, a succession of themes arises: love, marriage, children, death and similar concerns are reflected in speeches by various characters. A stereotypically feminine sensibility emerges, as almost every character defines herself within a web of intimate relationships.

On the "Him" side, Jack Nicholson gets the same treatment. But what surfaces from samples of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," "The Shining" and other films is less about relationships and more about maintaining individual integrity and agency. Where loss of another person is the main trauma on Ms. Streep's side, going crazy and losing one's grip is the main anxiety on Mr. Nicholson side.

Ms. Breitz's project is intensely entertaining. It also cannily exposes subliminal patterns of gender differentiation relentlessly projected by the moviemaking industry. Do films affirm sexism or do they reflect real differences between men and women? If Hollywood is to be believed, men truly are from Mars, and women from Venus.

KEN JOHNSON



CANDICE BREITZ/YVON LAMBERT

"Him (1968-2008)," part of Candice Breitz's installation at Yvon Lambert, which features a montage of Jack Nicholson.