

# THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

*Thinking Inside the Box* features the video installations of Montreal-based artist Christopher Flower. Flower's video installations explore interactivity and incorporate installation with the mechanical processes and spatial complexities of kinetic sculpture.

Using both digital and analog technologies, Flower links DIY/hack invention with new media practices. An opening reception with the artist in attendance will be held at 7pm on Saturday the 17th of January, 2009. Come out to celebrate the start of our new year of exciting programming.

Instead of ignoring the box that contains video content, Christopher Flower takes this frame that limits the image as the subject of the work presented in Modern Fuel's latest exhibition. *Thinking Inside the Box* includes formal meditations that re-imagine traditional modes and genres of representation, such as the still life imagery referenced in *Spinning LCD Still Life* (2007). Flower's work is perhaps best typified by his *Box Video* series (2002 – 2007) which references formalism, abstraction, conceptualism, and cinema, and showcases an illusionism exposed through the use of lowly everyday materials like rocks, plastic cups, bagels, googly eyes, light bulbs, cat toys, eggs, and beer. Flower's interactive video installations engage his viewers in limitless games, bounded only by a box wherein the motivation for participating stems from a desire to play for the sake of playing and creating one's own rules.

Image: Christopher Flower, *Spinning LCD Still Life*, 2007.

## Thinking Inside the Box Photos

**Christopher Flower** draws from a variety of sources in his practice: conceptual art, illusionism, do-it-yourself invention, and the everyday. Recent exhibitions include: YYZ Artists' Outlet (Toronto, ON), Eyelevel Gallery (Halifax, NS), Durham Art Gallery (Durham, ON) Gallery 101 (Ottawa, ON), and Video Pool (Winnipeg, MB). Flower gratefully thanks the Canada Council for the Arts for their generous support.

## Essay by Catherine Toews

### **PUSH ALL THE BUTTONS**

The four-sided screen on which video content flickers is rarely as important as the content itself. In the intense, ingenious, and often interactive multimedia works of Montréal-based artist Christopher Flower, the tools are the artwork and the artwork is a tool in its own creation. Automation and unpredictability co-exist in this buzzing and humming world where the viewer is asked to simultaneously accept and surrender control. Everything is planned, but anything could happen. So go ahead and push all the buttons.

*Box Video* is an ongoing body of work that playfully melds the ordinary and the absurd. Everyday objects including soap, knives, meat, and cat toys are brought to life using an animation technique that must be blisteringly simple, but is somehow impossible to pin down. In one sequence, a banana and a brick dance around on top of a black garbage bag. Although the effect is slapstick at first, the mood quickly turns sinister as the world's most innocent banana is beaten to a pulp. In another sequence, a group of beer bottles seemingly self-destruct in a violent blast of shattering glass.

If the forces at work in *Box Video* are mysterious, all is revealed with Flower's interactive works, where the onus is placed entirely on what he refers to as the "viewer/player." Using the components provided in *Aquarium Cam* (an

aquarium with a camera submerged inside and a game-pad), the viewer/player is given a chance to direct the action. By pushing the buttons on the game-pad, the viewer/players can control the nearly limitless movement of the camera and monitor their progress, which is projected on a screen nearby. Though the subject matter is more sedate than most video games, it is hard to feel truly relaxed and in control as the master and commander of a world so fluid.

This fluidity is present in even the most highly mechanized of Flower's works. The disorienting *Spinning Camera* consists of a wall-mounted camera and a control grip with a button that causes the camera to rotate at a rate of 400 rpm. A wall-mounted display screen documents the information being recorded by the camera. Standing before the camera, the viewer/player is invited to capture their image and then destroy it. At the push of a button, the camera whirs, which causes the viewer/player's onscreen image to blur to the point of incomprehension.

Flower's unique ability to blur the edges of our perception is most beautifully represented in *Spinning LCD Still Life*. As in *Spinning Camera*, the work relies on rotation, but this time it is the screen itself that rotates, as simple static images glimmer and buzz on a spinning LCD monitor. At once dizzying and serene, Flower utilizes the comforting television glow to produce a work that echoes with familiarity. But no matter how many times we've stood or sat in front of a television, it has never looked quite like this before.

It is this mix of tradition and innovation that makes Flower's work so engaging, and so entrancing. Although his work hints at influences including Ken Feingold, Nam June Paik, and Bruce Nauman, Flower explores distinctly new territory, respecting the box while thinking far outside of it.

**Catherine Toews** is an artist, writer and graphic designer. Born and bred on the Canadian prairies, she now calls Kingston home.