

PARIS

Shana Moulton

GALERIE CRÈVECOEUR

The latest chapter in Shana Moulton's ongoing video and performance saga "Whispering Pines," 2002–, is *Act One from Whispering Pines 10*, 2016, a nine-minute video based on an opera she developed and performed with composer/vocalist Nick Hallett. In the live version, which premiered at the Kitchen in New York in 2010, Moulton's alter ego Cynthia, a hypochondriac introvert with a wild imagination, mimes and dances in front of projections of mountains, forests, and her wacky home, which is decorated with a Himalayan rock-salt lamp, a yoga mat, a crystal pyramid, and other assorted New Age tchotchkes, self-help gizmos, and pharmacy sundries, and plenty of pastel-patterned fabrics. In the video, Cynthia is confined to a virtual world. And although Moulton's endearingly awkward live slapstick is missed (as are the live vocals), a flat, digitally enhanced environment suits Cynthia's agoraphobia and delirium just fine. Using special effects and animation techniques, Moulton has optimized the opera for digital consumption, channeling Robert Ashley's 1980s made-for-TV opera, *Perfect Lives*.

Like all the "Whispering Pines" episodes, *Act One from Whispering Pines 10* is a tale of self-improvement and spiritual enlightenment rife with pop-culture references and props. Waking one morning with a bloated stomach, apparently caused by Busby Berkeley dancers in her intestines, Cynthia looks to a different choreographer for relief and puts a Lester Horton–technique warm-up video on the TV. While Cynthia dutifully, if clumsily, imitates dance moves on her yoga mat, Hallett's score kicks in with a solo by soprano Daisy Press, after which the protagonist is transported from her living room to a mountaintop, where she gives birth to the moon. Back home (and presumably still feeling swollen), Cynthia prepares a soothing bath of Eno fruit salt while Press sings variations on the name of the antacid brand over and over in a meditative aria. Next, dried and dressed in her favorite pastel housedress, Cynthia follows a yellow bird, flown free from an M. C. Escher poster, through a butterfly-decorated hearth. The triumphant final scene—inspired by activist Julia "Butterfly" Hill, who climbed an ancient California redwood in 1997 and lived there for 738 days to protest logging—shows Cynthia exiting a small door to scale a giant sequoia.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, Cynthia's neuroses, fantasies, and self-help accoutrements crept subtly beyond the screen to confront the viewer in real space. In the installation *Feed the Soul*, 2016, a larger-than-life wall projection of Cynthia's heavily made-up face was intersected by a stepped plinth, onto which a parade of affirmation-emblazoned charms was projected. Words and phrases such as THINK POSITIVE, FITNESS, and ENJOY NATURE climbed the ziggurat-like structure toward the golden headdress atop Cynthia's quizzical brow. Also combining two- and three-dimensional elements, *Life as an INFJ*, 2015–16, used a video projection as the backdrop for an arrangement of lamps, statuettes, vases, and crystals. In the video, a life-size Cynthia—the viewer's proxy and, according to the title, an example of the rarest Myers-Briggs personality type: introverted, intuitive, feeling, judging—writhed inside a wicker shelf displaying the same miscellaneous objects presented on the gallery floor. Meanwhile, to her left, a nightmarish shower of human organs and limbs rained down. Miraculously, each virtual body part dropped perfectly into a shadow cast by one of the actual decorative objects. Like her live performances, Moulton's latest multimedia installations cleverly weave together physical and digital elements in order to communicate a disorienting fluidity between reality and fantasy.

—Mara Hoberman

