

SAN FRANCISCO

EVE SUSSMAN / ANNE-MARIE

COPESTAKE

TART CONTEMPORARY

Three simple works make up "The Insider: Eve Sussman & Anne-Marie Copestake" at Tart Contemporary. Sussman's single contribution, *Serving the Milk* (2004) is a small segment of her acclaimed *89 Seconds at Alcázar* (2004), a film that uses actors and elaborate costumes to recreate the moments surrounding the instant captured in Velázquez' masterpiece *Las Meninas* (1656). The piece at Tart is a 30-second clip from the original 12-minute video, closely cropped and slowed down to make a 15-minute loop. Presented on a medium-size flat monitor, it features the famous *Infanta*, the painting's central figure, arrested while gazing out to the viewer. Across an expanse of velvety black shadow, her attending nanny's profile enters from the left, offering her a crimson pitcher of milk.

Paring such a luxuriant work down to such atomic terms has unexpected consequences. In its full length, the video is a narrative that was born of a painting. In *Serving the Milk* it's returned, full circle, to static pictorial space, with all the qualities it acquired as a video in tow. The result is a work that exists as neither picture nor story; it bounces between the two, a thread that stitches them together. Ultimately, the work's significance is questionable (a collectable object produced to fund the artist's next project?), but the deliberate and specific space it has defined for itself is certainly worth considering.

There's also no doubt as to the earnestness of Anne-Marie Copestake's video *Untitled* (2000), projected opposite Sussman's piece. Phrase by phrase, black text materializes on a white field. It describes a process of self-erasure, not unlike moving out of an apartment ("I filled in holes left by nails. I painted over stains"), but inflected with a sense of loss ("I washed my bed. I burned my sheets"). When the text is terse and physical it's bare-boned poetics, but when it veers to the metaphysical it loses its footing, encroaching on territory mastered by poets and novelists.



EVE SUSSMAN, *Serving the Milk*, 2004. DVD on LCD flatscreen, 25 x 41 cm. Courtesy of Roebling Hall, New York.

The videos are punctuated by Copestake's drawing *Blessed/Shafted* (2004), a modest affair of printed text on newsprint trimmed with gold paint. A paragraph in the upper-left quadrant, printed sideways, dictates a heavenly existence where everything goes your way. On the lower right and turned the other way is, of course, the opposite scenario, where life is cursed. Craning our neck 180 degrees, we find a bit of ourselves in either story; we're left level-headed, in the middle, pondering our own bittersweet story.

Abraham Orden