

SLICED

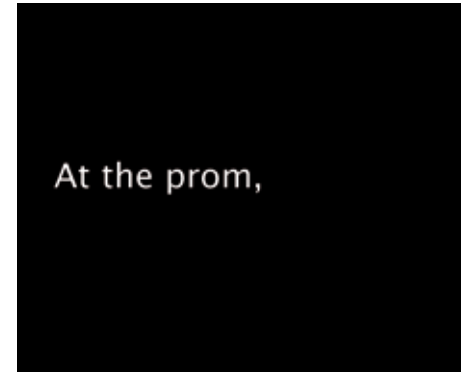
BREAD



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Grant **Stevens**



Words, rhyme and meaning are putty in the hands of Grant Stevens. Like a sculptor of textual fabric, Stevens takes pictures, words and speech and twists them into a shifting field of double entendres, wordplays and sound grabs. His stuff is the cliché of modern life, the slogans and sound bytes that constantly surround us and which are repeated so often that they lose any meaning that they might have had.

Often played out as white text on a black background, these monochromatic moments are set to a saccharine soundtrack or spoken text. The words or phrases are familiar to us yet become somehow sinister, like the way Muzak in an elevator hides the fact that you are sharing a confined space with strangers.

By juxtaposing what we read with what we hear, works such as *Like Two Ships* (2005) and *Why the Long Face* (2005) toy with our perception and even our patience – it's like seeing a printed page slightly off register or the experience of

motion sickness. Stevens plays with the senses and in particular the expectation that image and sound are inherently linked. Watch it for too long and you'll go crazy; it's video art that f***s with your mind.

Stevens is interested in narrative, or to be more precise the idea of a compacted narrative. His text-based videos often tell a condensed story, either describing the plot of a Hollywood film or relating snippets of more banal everyday events. He subverts the dominance of visual culture through describing in words what could be happening on the screen in front of us. In *The Switch* (2006), we read a word-by-word description of a film where the plot lines of a schlock horror and a teen romance are fused together. Set against a soundtrack of sweet music, *The Switch* creates a perverse mixed-up narrative which distorts the two plot lines into a three-minute, vacuum-packed, action-filled genre-buster. It is a filtered narrative where we encounter a story entertainingly reduced to its bare essentials.

In his image-based work, Stevens is also interested in the absurdities and repetitions of popular culture. Here, playful and engrossing cinematic moments are captured in constant replay. In *Danger Zone* (2003), an encounter between Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis is exorcised from *Top Gun* to become an awkward 'conversation' where the words just don't get out. There is the anticipation of a revelation or confession – but it is never delivered. Constantly looped at the point before each character is about to speak, the experience of this eternal non-sentence takes the viewer on a journey from drama to slapstick to a point of hypnotic acceptance.

Stevens uses iconic or uncomfortable movie moments and expands these as a study in repetition. He is interested in the anti-climax, or the subversion of the cinematic denouement. His use of video as a medium is skilful and precise. He understands the use of time and duration in video and nothing is either too short or too long.

Stevens' work is not so much about a resolution of narrative, rather he is interested in the telling and the probing of possible sub-texts. Nothing is of course as it seems, and Stevens digs beneath the surface of cultural assumption to reveal hidden and sublime tensions, desires and expectations.

Julianne Pierce
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Above left:
Danger Zone, 2003, digital video, 19.5 sec, infinite loop

Above:
The Switch, 2006, digital video, 3 min 14 sec, infinite loop

Cover:
Like Two Ships, 2005, digital video, 2 min 53 sec, infinite loop