

John Gillies

Andrew Frost

A sailing vessel hoves into view, white sails billowing in the darkness. Images appear on the sails, projections of microscopic surfaces, rocks, patterns, pages of the Bible. Children laughing and electronic noises can be heard on the soundtrack. So begins John Gillies's *Armada* (1994-1998), a video/sound installation. Gillies's work since the 1980s has explored the dynamic relationships between sound, music and image, producing exquisitely realized and sumptuously ambiguous immersive experiences.

Gillies has made numerous stand-alone video works, installations and live video mixes. His work *De Quincey Tapes* (2001), for example, is a piece that incorporates live performance elements in the form of dancing bodies, multiple projections and layered faces. The feel of the work is improvisatory, with a loose organic flow to the narrative. Gillies' *Shiver (VJ Mix)* (2005) documents a live, improvised music and video mixing performance for dancers choreographed by Tess de Quincey. With strobing wipes of dancers with fans and dressed in fake fur the video advances the artists interests in ambiguous but thematically unified collage narratives.

Other works by Gillies courts more traditional narrative montage territory. *Divide* (2006) is a two screen piece that unhurriedly describes the journey of a group of men travelling across a pastoral landscape. On one screen we see a man carrying a lamb across craggy ground. On the other screen, a group of men, perhaps a gang of convicts, are seen making their way through bush and forest, encountering rough terrain, a Chinese dancer in the night and the death of one of the party.

Fractured across two screens, *Divide* manages a unique narrative cohesion, expanding cinematic language as the audience encounters separate parts of the story on different screens. *Road Movie (Part 1)* (2008) is a more contained experience on one screen but has the same slow building narrative of *Divide*. In *Road Movie (Part 1)* a driver makes his way through a traffic jam, eventually arriving on the outskirts of a city in darkness. He drives the car into a hole, then begins to bury it. The loop begins again.

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Andrew Frost is an art critic, writer and broadcaster. His articles have been published in a wide variety of Australian and international art magazines. In 2007 ABC1 screened the three-part series *The Art Life*, and a second series in 2009, which Frost wrote and presented. He is the author of the monograph *The Boys* [Currency Press].