



The Renaissance Society
at The University of Chicago

Darren Almond

May 6 - June 20, 1999

**The Renaissance Society
at The University of Chicago**
5811 South Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60637
Phone: (773)702-8670
<http://www.renaissancesociety.org>

Museum Hours:
Tuesday- Friday: 10 am - 5 pm
Saturday, Sunday: 12 - 5 pm
Closed Mondays

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Time and Life

Zeno of Elea was a 5th century BC, Greek philosopher who formulated a series of paradoxes many of which went unsolved well beyond his lifetime. His second paradox is perhaps his most famous for it challenged the existence of change. Zeno conjectured that change between instances could never add up to a quantifiable difference if time were frozen into a series of static instances in which the quantity of change at each instance is zero. Zeno's second paradox could not be explained until the 17th century with the invention of calculus, the mathematics of infinity, infinitesimals, and limits. In calculus, change is designated by Delta which denotes the quantity of difference, how much something has changed. But how much change has occurred is not the same as how change occurs. Delta accounts for before and after but not during. How change occurs requires that there be a measure of comparison, the most immediate and intuitive of these being time. Mathematically speaking time is not change. They happen to be independent variables linked by a ratio — change over the change in time ($\Delta x / \Delta t$). Zeno's freeze frame paradox centers around the moment when Δx and Δt are both at zero. Zeno then assumed the ratio to be zero. This is not the case. Zero divided by zero is not zero. It is an irrational number. Although Δx and Δt are variables that independently can go to zero, their ratio is always finite which is another way of saying that when time and change are linked they are bound by limits. If this is true mathematically then it is twice as true metaphysically. To say that time and change are linked through limits is the same as saying life is the limit. Seasons, anniversaries, buildings, scars. Trees, memories, cities, bodies. For the living, everything is one big clock.

Were British artist Darren Almond assigned a belief system, it would probably be a cross between Existentialism and Deism, an 18th century rationalist belief that God, after setting the universe running like a clock, abandoned it, exerting no influence over life and other natural phenomena. Summing up his work is difficult. He is a sculptor and a video artist whose work by all outward appearances, even when grouped according to medium, remains incredibly disparate. What distinguishes it as a body of work, however, is his fascination with time. As for Almond's investigation into the subject, his work neither aspires towards the purity of math nor the poetry of metaphysics but instead towards the existentialist mechanics of man-made time. It hardly

matters if time is systematically differentiated into seconds, minutes, hours and days, or subjectively undifferentiated as in the process of waiting or forgetting. Almond's subjects, be they as monumental as the Holocaust or ineffable as boredom, all fall before the clock's indifference whether the clock is as small as one found on a hotel nightstand or as large as the one we call history. According to Almond's work time is the ultimate institution whether it is captured through a video-portrait of an inverted, floating train as in *Schwebebahn*, his 1995 video that shares a formal kinship with the 1924 cubist/surrealist film classic *Ballet Mecanique*; the sculptural works he has done using digital clocks and ceiling fans; or his real-time, live-feed videos — *A Real Time Piece*, 1998, which is set in his vacated studio and H.M.P. Pentonville, 1997, whose setting is an empty penitentiary cell.

For his exhibition at The Society, Almond will present a group of videos and sculptures from the past few years. The exhibition will also feature the debut of *Traction*, a new video work starring the artist's parents. The title is a play on the two meanings of the word, to grip and to suspend one's limbs following an injury. The video features an interview the artist conducts with his father while his mother listens in a separate setting. *When was the first time you saw your own blood?* This frightening question begins a recounting of Almond Senior's injuries acquired through both work and play, reflections that recall Sartre's famous statement from *Being and Nothingness* that the body is not so much the place of being as it is the alienated property of being. Through a thick, northern English, working-class brogue, Almond Senior's body becomes a geography, each scar the site of an event. *Traction* is ultimately a mixture of tender mercies and hard knocks as tales involving breaks, fractures and missing teeth are transmitted from father to son while a mother listens at times astonished and at times amused. Although Almond Senior's sounds like a hard life, *Traction* does little to undermine the life-as-game metaphor. The final impression is that it just happens to be one along the lines of a very harsh rugby match. After listening to Almond Senior it is not a question of whether there are winners and losers against the game-clock of life, but whether there are days when one ought to count oneself amongst the players or instead consider oneself the ball.

Opening Reception

Sunday, May 9

from 4 to 7pm featuring a talk with
the artist from 5 to 6pm in Cobb Hall 307
directly below the gallery

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RELATED EVENTS

Concert

WILHELM BRUCK AND THEODOR ROSS

Friday May 7, 8:00pm

For the past twenty years, this classical guitar duo has performed works by some of the most noted late twentieth century composers. Their interpretations have become definitive. Their program for this evening is entitled AUGENOHR (Ears 'N' Eyes) and will consist of three key guitar works. Giacinto Scelsi's KO-THA Three dances of Shiva (1967); Helmut Lachenmann's Salut For Caudwell (1977) Music for two guitars; and Mauricio Kagel's ACUSTICA (1970) for live-electronic sounds and experimental soundscapes. Bruck and Ross have performed throughout Europe where their concerts have achieved legendary stature.

This concert will take place in the gallery.
\$10, \$8 students and members

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ABOVE

Bad Timing, 1998

Perpsex, infra-red, sound stores
and electric motor
12 1/4 x 16 1/4 x 7 3/4 inches